罐子里的毛毛虫

清晨我在园子里拔草，见甘蓝叶上趴着一条绿毛毛虫，正啃叶子，啃出一个圆洞。我捡起小树枝想把它弹走，爷爷喊：别动，让我看看。

爷爷蹲下，端详了一会儿，说：这是菜粉蝶的娃，长大是蝴蝶，白的，就在园子上空飞。我说：可它啃咱们的甘蓝！爷爷说：它饿了要吃，咱们的菜也想留，那就想一个两全的办法。

爷爷找出一个玻璃罐，把毛毛虫请进罐里，又把它趴着的那棵甘蓝苗带土挪进旧花盆，转到后坡拔了几片野芥菜叶放进去。他说：它的饭换成野芥菜，跟甘蓝是一家，它认得，也爱吃。园子保住了，它也不挨饿。

打那以后我每天给它添野芥菜叶。它吃得慢，叶子上的洞一天比一天小。它的粪是绿的小颗粒，落在罐底，像撒了一把碎茶。它越长越粗，背上的毛看着也软了。我给它起了个名，叫小绿，跟爷爷汇报它每天吃了几个洞。爷爷说：它吃饱了会自己找地方变蛹，你不用替它操心。

一周后它不吃不动，爬到罐口边上，身子缩成一个小疙瘩。我慌了，跑去喊爷爷。爷爷看了一眼，说：它吐丝把自己箍住了，这叫蛹。别碰它，等。

又过了十来天，疙瘩裂开一道缝，湿漉漉的蝴蝶爬出来，翅膀皱皱的，挂在罐口晾。晾干了，翅膀一张一合，从窗口飞出去，在院里绕了一圈，往后坡去了。我追到门口看，它落在一片野芥菜上。

爷爷说：园子里的虫，能想活路的就不白杀。你喂了它半个月，它把命还成一只蝴蝶，还给你在坡上散籽，往后坡上的菜粉蝶更多。这是劳动里的账，人算得公道，虫也记得。

那年园里甘蓝的洞不多。再看见白蝴蝶飞进园子，我就想：它说不定在咱家罐子里住过。

The Caterpillar in the Jar

Early morning I was pulling grass in the garden when I saw a green caterpillar on a cabbage leaf, gnawing a round hole in it. I picked up a small twig to flick it away, and Grandpa called: do not move, let me look.

Grandpa squatted, studied it a while, and said: this is the young of the cabbage white butterfly; when it grows it becomes a butterfly, a white one, flying over this very garden. I said: but it is gnawing our cabbages! Grandpa said: it is hungry and must eat, and we want our vegetables kept; then let us think of a way that saves both.

Grandpa found a glass jar and asked the caterpillar into it, then moved the seedling it had been sitting on, with its soil, into an old flowerpot, and went to the hillside to pull a few wild mustard leaves for it. He said: its food becomes wild mustard, which is of the same family as cabbage; it knows the taste and likes it. The garden is saved, and the insect goes hungry nowhere.

From then on I added wild mustard leaves every day. It ate slowly, and the holes in the leaves grew smaller day by day. Its droppings were small green grains on the bottom of the jar, like a handful of broken tea scattered there. It grew thicker, and the hairs on its back looked softer. I gave it a name, Little Green, and reported to Grandpa each day how many holes it had eaten. Grandpa said: when it is full it will find a place to turn into a pupa by itself; there is no need to worry for it.

After a week it stopped eating and moving, climbed to the rim of the jar, and shrank its body into a small lump. I panicked and ran for Grandpa. He glanced and said: it has spun thread around itself; this is called a pupa. Do not touch it. Wait.

Some ten days later the lump split a seam, and a wet butterfly crawled out, its wings wrinkled, hanging on the rim to dry. When dry, the wings opened and closed, and it flew out of the window, circled once in the yard, and went toward the hillside. I chased to the gate and saw it land on a wild mustard plant.

Grandpa said: of the insects in a garden, if a way to let them live can be thought of, we do not kill for nothing. You fed it half a month; it pays its life back as a butterfly, and scatters its young on the hill for you, so more cabbage whites will live on the slope. This is the accounting of labor: if people keep it fair, insects remember too.

That year the cabbages had few holes. And whenever a white butterfly flew into the garden, I thought: perhaps it once lived in our jar.