

The Cicada's Song · *Ai Qing*

There is a myna bird living in a big tree. Every day it sings in a sweet voice.

On an early summer morning when the myna is about to sing, a shrill drone begins to split the air. Looking about, the myna discovers a cicada stuck to the highest branch of its tree. Ceaselessly the cicada makes a vibrating thread of Zs like a siren. The myna hops up on the branch beside it and says: "Hello, what are you crying about in the early morning?" The cicada stops its crying. When it recognizes the myna bird, it says with a laugh: "Oh, it's you, my fellow singer. Well, I'm singing." The myna asks: "What are you singing? The song makes me sad. Something sad has happened?" The cicada replies: "You are strong in expressing yourself, but your ability to understand is poor. I am singing a song about the morning. When I see the lovely clouds of the morning, I'm overwhelmed and sing." The myna nods, and with increased seriousness the cicada begins to produce its endless buzz by vibrating its wings. Seeing that there is no point in trying to stop the cicada's song, the myna flies off to another tree to begin its singing.

At noon the myna returns to the big tree. It hears the cicada still singing. The continuous Z has grown louder. The myna laughs and asks: "What are you singing about now? The clouds of morning have been gone for quite some time." The cicada answers: "The sunshine depresses me. I sing about the heat." The myna says: "That's not a bad idea. When the people hear your song, the heat can make them feel no worse." Mistaking these words for a tribute, the cicada sings with greater dedication. The myna flies away.

Evening comes and the myna flies back to its tree. The cicada is singing still.

The myna says: "The heat is gone now."

The cicada answers: "I see a marvelous picture as the sun goes down in the hills. I am too excited, so I sing a song of farewell to the sun." It renews its singing. It seems that the cicada is worried that its song will not be heard by the sun, as the sun has reached the other side of the hills.

The myna says, "You work very hard." The cicada says: "I haven't yet sung my heart out. My fellow singer, if you'd care to listen, I can sing a night song about the moon climbing up the sky." The myna says: "Won't that be too much for you?" The cicada says: "Singing is the only thing that can make me happy."

“You’ve been singing all day without a break,” the myna says. “What can all this singing mean?” “I have many songs,” the cicada says. “As the weather changes, the song changes too.” The myna says: “However, no matter whether it is morning, noon, or evening, what I hear you singing always sounds the same.” The cicada replies: “My song is different whenever my mood changes.”

The myna says: “Probably you lack the training necessary for expressing emotions.” “No,” says the cicada; “people say I can express different feelings with the same song.” “Perhaps you don’t have the talent an artist needs,” the myna says. “Art can’t be made without talent.”

The cicada says: “I was born with a good voice. For a whole day I can sing, and never lose the tune.” The myna says: “Frankly speaking, when I listen to your song, I grow bored. The reason is that it is simply monotonous. No matter how true the tune, if it is never modified, it grows boring. I’m haunted by your endless song. Tomorrow I’m going to move away.”

The cicada says: “I’m sorry to hear it.” He begins again his melody of the continuous “Z-z-z-z-z.”

The moon is rising.