自行车冲进了菜地

暑假第一件大事，是学会骑自行车。那辆车是表哥的，链条哗啦哗啦响，座垫晒得烫屁股。表哥说他在后面扶着，让我只管蹬。我蹬了半条巷子，风从耳朵边过去，心里想的就是一个字：飞。

拐过碾坊，路宽了。我喊：表哥你觉没觉得我骑得稳！后面没人应。我回头一看，表哥站在十几步开外，两只手叉着腰，笑得直不起腰。他早就松手了。我一慌，车把立刻跟着慌，往左一歪，我往右一扭，车头反而笔直地朝着路边的菜地去了。那一片西红柿架长得正好，架子之间的缝，像一个专门等我的门。

车真的进门了。前轮压断一根竹竿，哗啦，整架西红柿朝两边弯腰。我捏死刹车，前轮在泥里犁出一条沟，车停住了，我的下巴磕在车把上，整个人挂在上面，像一件晾在衣架上的衣服。最要命的是我右手边，一颗熟透的西红柿在我掌心里破了，温热的汁从指缝里往外冒。我保持着挂着的姿势，一动不敢动。

表哥追进来，先不是扶我，是先笑，笑到一半踩倒一棵茄子，笑声戛然而止。我们俩把车抬出来，链条掉了，脚踏板歪了。西红柿地里一排脚印，竹竿断头朝天戳着。表哥说：完了，看地的是刘大爷。话音没落，地头就传来一声吆喝：哪个伢儿！我们一人抓起车，往回骑的骑、推的推，刘大爷追出半里地，鞋都跑掉一只，最后他自己也笑场了，叉着腰站在路中间喘。

回家我等着挨训。结果爸爸检查完我的下巴，只问了一句：会骑了没有。我说会了，就是不会拐弯。爸爸点点头：会骑就行，拐弯的事，菜地已经教会你了。那天晚饭，奶奶做了一盘西红柿炒蛋，是刘大爷送来的，说是压坏的不能放。我吃着自家孙子赔回来的西红柿，味道的确比平时甜。

车在院子里修了三天，表哥借了工具，把脚踏板掰直，链条重新挂上。车架上留下一道被竹竿刮出的白印，表哥说别漆了，留着。后来我骑车再没进过任何一片地，可每年夏天路过西红柿架，我都要慢下来看一眼。掌心好像又碰到那颗温热的、破开的西红柿，耳朵边又响起刘大爷那声吆喝，和半条巷子的风。

The Bicycle That Charged into the Vegetable Patch

The first big event of summer vacation was learning to ride a bicycle. The bike belonged to my cousin; its chain clattered, and the seat was hot enough to sting in the sun. My cousin said he would hold it from behind and I should just pedal. I pedaled half an alley, wind sliding past my ears, and the only word in my head was: fly.

After the turn by the mill, the road widened. I shouted: cousin, do you feel how steady I am! Nobody answered behind me. I looked back, and my cousin stood fifteen steps away, hands on his hips, laughing so hard he could not straighten up. He had

let go long ago. I panicked, and the handlebars panicked with me, tipping left; I twisted right, and the front wheel ended up pointing straight at the vegetable patch by the road. That row of tomato trellises stood at exactly the right height, and the gap between the frames looked like a door waiting just for me.

The bike really walked through the door. The front wheel snapped a bamboo pole, and with a crash the whole row of tomatoes bent to both sides. I squeezed the brake to death; the front wheel plowed a furrow in the mud and stopped. My chin knocked the handlebar, and I hung there on the bike like a shirt on a hanger. Worst of all, on my right hand a fully ripe tomato burst in my palm, warm juice oozing between my fingers. I stayed hanging there, not daring to move.

My cousin ran in, and instead of helping me he laughed first; halfway through the laugh he stepped on an eggplant plant, and the laugh stopped dead. We carried the bike out: chain off, pedal bent. The tomato patch held a row of footprints, broken bamboo tips poking at the sky. My cousin said: it is over, this is Old Man Lius patch. Before he finished, a shout came from the head of the field: which brat! We grabbed the bike and fled, one riding, one pushing. Old Man Liu chased half a mile, lost one shoe, and finally burst out laughing himself, standing in the middle of the road with hands on hips, out of breath.

At home I waited to be scolded. Dad examined my chin and asked only one question: can you ride now. I said yes, except I cannot turn. Dad nodded: riding is enough; turning, the vegetable patch already taught you. That evening, Grandma cooked a plate of scrambled eggs with tomatoes, sent over by Old Man Liu, saying the bruised ones would not keep. I ate the tomatoes my own family had paid back for, and they really did taste sweeter than usual.

The bike took three days to fix in our yard. My cousin borrowed tools, straightened the pedal, and rehung the chain. A white scratch from the bamboo pole stayed on the frame; my cousin said do not paint over it, keep it. After that I never rode into any patch again, but every summer when I pass a tomato trellis I slow down for a look. My palm seems to touch that warm, burst tomato again, and Old Man Lius shout comes back over my ear, with the wind of half an alley.

知了没捉着，网兜先下了水

暑假的午后，蝉叫得整条巷子都在晃。小满举着网兜站在树底下，仰头看了十分钟，相中了一只大黑蝉。那蝉停在柳树最细的一根枝上，翅膀油亮，叫得理直气壮。小满回头冲我比了个手势：别出声。他踮起脚，把网兜往那根枝上送，一寸，又一寸。

网兜离蝉只有半尺了，蝉还在叫。我屏住气，连蝉的声音都听不见了，只听见自己的心跳。小满的手再往上送最后一寸，网口罩到蝉头顶的那一瞬，他脚底那片青苔滑了。他整个人往侧面一歪，胳膊本能地一甩，网兜脱手飞出去，在空中翻了个跟头，噗通一声，先蝉一步下了池塘。

蝉被那一声响惊动，慢悠悠地换了根树枝，背对着我们，继续叫，叫得比刚才还响。小满站在树根上，保持着举网的姿势没缓过来，半天说出一句：它是不是在笑我。

捞网兜成了下午的正事。网兜带着一根长竹柄，柄还露在岸边，我们俩蹲下去拽，拽不动，像是挂住了水底什么东西。小满脱了鞋卷起裤腿下去，脚一进水就嘶一声，石头缝里的水凉得咬人。他一步一挪走到网兜跟前，先捞的不是网，是一片大荷叶，扣在他自己头上。他顶着荷叶愣了两秒，我在岸上笑得坐下去。

网兜终于捞上来，兜底兜着两条指头长的小鱼和一撮水草。小满把鱼养在罐头瓶里，网兜晾在院墙上。蝉还在柳树上叫，一声比一声长，好像下午那件事没有发生过。小满重新举着网兜回到树下，冲我摆手：这次不踩树根了。

第二回他绕到柳树背面，从低枝一级一级往上爬，爬到一半，手够着网兜往蝉那边探。蝉这回离得更近，近到能看清它翅膀上细细的纹路。网口刚要扣，蝉忽然不叫了，翅膀一展，贴着网兜边沿飞走，绕着小满的头飞了一圈，落在更高的地方，重新开始叫。小满趴在树上，手还举着，回头看我，脸上的表情说不上是懊恼还是服气：它让了我一圈。

傍晚，我们收了网兜回家。罐头瓶里的两条小鱼放回了池塘，网兜靠在门后。蝉声从巷子口一直铺到家门口。我心想，捉蝉这件事，捉不着好像也不亏：一个跟头翻进池塘的网兜，一片扣在头上的荷叶，一只让了我一圈的蝉，这些都比一只装进袋子的蝉值钱。

夜里蝉不叫了，巷子安静下来。我把下午的事在心里又过了一遍，过到网兜翻跟头那一下，还是忍不住笑。暑假才刚开始，这样的下午，后面还多着呢。

No Cicada Caught, but the Net Went Swimming First

On a summer afternoon, the cicadas sang so loudly the whole alley seemed to tremble. Xiaoman stood under the tree holding a dip net, chin tilted up, watching for ten minutes before he set his heart on one big black cicada. The insect sat on the thinnest branch of the willow, wings glossy, singing as if it owned the afternoon. Xiaoman turned and signaled to me: not a sound. He rose on his toes and pushed the net toward that branch, inch by inch.

The net was half a foot from the cicada, which kept singing. I held my breath and could no longer hear even the cicada, only my own heart. Xiaoman pushed the last inch up. The instant the net covered the head of the cicada, the patch of moss under his foot slipped. His whole body tilted sideways, his arm swung by instinct, the net flew out of his hand, turned a somersault in the air, and with a splash went into the pond one step ahead of the cicada.

The cicada was startled by that sound, moved unhurriedly to another branch, turned its back to us, and kept singing, louder than before. Xiaoman stood on the tree root still holding the pose of raising the net, frozen a long while before he said one sentence: is it laughing at me.

Fishing the net out became the real business of the afternoon. The net had a long bamboo handle, and the end of the handle still stuck out near the bank. We squatted down and pulled, but it would not move, as if something at the bottom of the water had caught it. Xiaoman took off his shoes, rolled up his trouser legs, and stepped in. The moment his feet touched the water he hissed through his teeth, the water between the stones was cold enough to bite. He moved step by step to the net, and the first thing he lifted was not the net but a big lotus leaf, which he set on his own head. He stood there under the leaf, dazed for two seconds, and I laughed so hard I sat down on the bank.

The net came out at last. In its bottom were two finger-length fish and a handful of waterweed. Xiaoman kept the fish in a glass jar and hung the net on the yard wall to dry. The cicada went on singing in the willow, one call longer than the next, as if nothing had happened that afternoon. Xiaoman took the net back under the tree and waved at me: this time I will not step on the tree root.

For the second try he went around to the far side of the willow and climbed from branch to branch, and halfway up he reached the net toward the cicada. This time the insect was closer, close enough to see the fine lines on its wings. Just as the mouth of the net was about to close, the cicada stopped singing, spread its wings, slipped away along the edge of the net, circled once around Xiaomans head, landed higher up, and began to sing again. Xiaoman lay flat on the tree with his arm still raised, and looked back at me with a face half annoyed and half admiring: it gave me a lap.

At dusk we packed up the net and walked home. The two fish in the jar went back into the pond, and the net leaned behind the door. The sound of cicadas spread from the mouth of the alley all the way to our gate. I thought to myself that not catching the cicada was no loss: a net that turned a somersault into the pond, a lotus leaf on someones head, a cicada that gave me a lap, all of these are worth more than one cicada shut in a bag.

At night the cicadas fell silent and the alley grew quiet. I went over the afternoon once more in my mind, and at the part where the net turned its somersault I still could not help laughing. Summer vacation had only just begun, and afternoons like this were still waiting ahead.

游泳班里的狗刨毕业生

暑假第一天，我妈把我送到游泳池门口，千叮万嘱别把水喝进肚子。我换了泳衣站在池边，往下看了一眼，池水蓝得发深，一层一层的水波从池底晃上来，我的腿就有点软。教练吹哨点名，别的孩子扑通扑通往下跳，我扶着梯子，一级一级往下挪，挪到一半又停住，手把铁梯攥得发白。

头二十天我跟一块橘色浮板形影不离。抱着它蹬腿，抱着它划手，洗澡都要把它夹在胳膊底下。教练说松手试试，我嘴上应着，手比脑子诚实，一沾水就又抱了上去。浮板边缘被我攥出两排浅浅的牙印一样的指痕。

出糗是在第二十天。教练让我练换气，头埋进水里吐泡泡，抬起来吸气。我数着数，一二三抬头，嘴刚张开，一口水正好从鼻尖灌进去。那一呛从鼻子一直酸到眼眶，我扶着池边咳，咳得弯下腰，池边一圈孩子都回头看。有个女生小声说，他脸红得像煮熟的大虾。我从池边走到台阶，一路上觉得全池的水都在看我。

转机来自一个不教游泳的人。他四十来岁，每天下班来泡水，仰躺在水面上看报纸——报纸搁在肚子上，一页一页翻，人纹丝不动。那天我坐在台阶上生闷气，他游过来，说小家伙你怕的不是水，是脚不着地。他让我在浅水区蹲下去抱自己的膝盖，让水漫到下巴，就停在那儿数数。我头一回发现，水漫到下巴也不会怎样，耳朵里嗡嗡的，像隔着一层毛玻璃听世界。练了七八回，我敢把后脑勺泡进水面了。

结班那天测游泳，二十米。别人排着队游蛙泳，胳膊腿摆得规规矩矩。轮到我，我深吸一口气蹬出去，游的是没人教过的狗刨：两只手轮着扒水，腿在底下乱蹬，脑袋一点一点从水里拱出来。姿势难看，速度倒不慢，中途没停，一口气扒到了对岸。手扒上池沿那一下，岸上的我妈在人群里鼓掌，拍得比谁都响。

回家的公交车上，我靠着窗，手指泡得发白，皱皱的一层皮，指甲缝里还有游泳池消毒水的味道。车上人挤，没人注意一个浑身湿头发的小孩在偷笑。二十米，跟人家五十米的标准比不了，可暑假第一天那个扶梯子不敢下的我，跟今天这个扒到对岸的我，中间隔着一整个夏天。

后来我常想起那个把报纸搁在肚子上看的大叔。不知道他叫什么，也没再遇见过。我只记得他走之前丢下一句话：水这东西，你越怕它，它越淹你。我觉得这话比游泳班所有的口令都管用。

A Graduate of Doggy Paddle from Swimming Class

On the first day of summer vacation, my mother walked me to the gate of the swimming pool and told me a hundred times not to drink the water. I changed into my swimsuit and stood at the edge, looked down once, and my legs went weak: the water was a deep kind of blue, wave upon wave rising from the bottom of the pool and swaying up to my face. The coach blew the whistle and called names. Other children jumped in one after another with splashes. I held the ladder and moved down one rung at a time, stopped halfway, my hands gripping the iron until they turned white.

For the first twenty days I was inseparable from an orange kickboard. I kicked holding it, stroked holding it, and tucked it under my arm even when taking a shower. When the coach said let go and try, my mouth answered yes but my hands were more honest than my head: the moment I touched the water I hugged it back. The edge of the board wore two rows of shallow finger marks from my grip.

The embarrassment came on the twentieth day. The coach had me practice breathing: bury my face in the water and blow bubbles, lift up to breathe. I counted, one two three, lifted my head, and a mouthful of water poured in right through my nostrils. The sting ran from my nose all the way up behind my eyes. I coughed holding the pool edge, bent double, and children all around turned to look. A girl whispered that his face was red like a boiled shrimp. I walked from the pool edge to the steps feeling as if all the water in the pool was watching me.

The turn came from someone who never taught swimming. He was forty-ish and came to soak in the water after work every day, lying on his back reading a newspaper — the paper resting on his belly, page turning page, his body not moving at all. That day I sat on the steps sulking, and he swam over and said: little guy, what you fear is not the water, it is your feet not touching the ground. He had me squat in the shallow end, hug my knees, and let the water rise to my chin, then just stay there counting. For the first time I noticed that water at chin level does nothing to you; my ears buzzed as if hearing the world through frosted glass. After seven or eight rounds I dared to soak the back of my head under the surface.

On the last day we were tested on twenty meters. Others lined up and swam breaststroke, arms and legs in neat order. When my turn came, I took a deep breath and pushed off, and what I swam was a doggy paddle nobody had taught: two hands raking the water alternately, legs kicking in a hurry underneath, head bobbing out of the water bit by bit. The form was ugly, the speed was not slow, and I never stopped on the way — one breath, raked all the way to the far wall. The instant my hands caught the pool edge, my mother was clapping in the crowd on the bank, louder than anyone.

On the bus home I leaned by the window, my fingers soaked white, the skin wrinkled in folds, the smell of pool disinfectant still in the cracks of my nails. The bus was crowded, and no one noticed a soaking-wet child secretly smiling. Twenty meters cannot compare with other peoples fifty, but between the me of the first day who could not let go of the ladder and the me of today who raked to the far wall lies a whole summer.

I often think of the man who read with a newspaper on his belly. I never learned his name and never met him again. I only remember the sentence he dropped before leaving: the more you fear water, the more it drowns you. I think that line works

better than every command the swimming class ever gave.