空地、砖头和一把芹菜

小区南门外有一片空地，原先停满了车，后来车挪走了，露出水泥地，裂缝里钻出几根狗尾巴草。爸爸把那辆红色的小自行车搬到空地中间，说就这儿，练。

我坐上去，脚只够得着地。车把比我想的要沉，往左拧一下，整个车身都跟着晃。爸爸站在后头扶着，我蹬了三圈，听见他的鞋底在水泥地上蹭蹭地响。风起来了一点，我胆子也大了一点，喊爸爸松手。他松了。车头立刻开始画歪歪扭扭的线，越画越大，最后直直冲向路边那堆砖头。我捏死刹车，车没停住，人先飞了出去，手掌和膝盖都蹭破了，膝盖那块渗出血珠。

空地边上坐着几个老太太，有人哎哟了一声。我的眼泪比疼先到，哗地就下来了，越擦越多，索性坐在地上哭。自行车倒在我旁边，前轮还在慢慢转。我觉得整片空地的眼睛都在看我，连那几根狗尾巴草都在看我。

妈妈是从单元门那边过来的，手里还拎着择了一半的芹菜。她没扶我，先蹲下来看我的膝盖，用拇指轻轻把血珠边上的灰拨掉，说，疼就哭，哭完接着练。她把车扶起来，车把正了，推到我跟前，说车没摔坏，你也没摔坏，怕的是你以后看见砖头就绕着走。我把眼泪抹在手背上，重新坐了上去。

后来的两圈妈妈站在空地中间看我，爸爸只跟在半步后头。第二圈过半的时候我忽然发现，爸爸的手离后座有一尺远，一直没碰上来。我没喊，也没停，脚下反而踩得更匀。最后一圈我骑得又直又稳，风把芹菜的味道从妈妈那边送过来，混着水泥地被晒了一天的味道。回家路上妈妈推着车，我走在旁边，膝盖一屈一屈地疼，可我一直仰着头。

那片空地后来重新停满了车。可我总记得那天的水泥地、转不停的前轮、还有妈妈手里那把没择完的芹菜。

The Lot, the Bricks, and a Bunch of Celery

South of our housing complex there was an open lot. It used to be packed with parked cars; later the cars moved away and revealed the concrete, with a few foxtail grasses pushing up through the cracks. Dad carried that little red bicycle to the middle of the lot and said: right here, we practice.

I sat on it; my feet could barely reach the ground. The handlebar was heavier than I expected. One twist to the left and the whole frame swayed with it. Dad stood behind holding on. I pedaled three rounds and heard the soles of his shoes scuffing on the concrete. A little wind came up, and my courage came up with it. I shouted at Dad to let go. He did. The front wheel at once began drawing crooked lines, wider and wider, until it headed straight for the pile of bricks by the curb. I squeezed the brake hard. The bike did not stop; I flew off first. My palm and my knee both scraped open, and beads of blood rose on the knee.

A few old ladies sat at the edge of the lot, and one cried out. My tears arrived before the pain did and came down in a flood; the more I wiped, the more there were, so I just sat on the ground and cried. The bicycle lay beside me, its front wheel still turning slowly. I felt that every eye on the lot was looking at me, even those few foxtail grasses.

Mom came over from the building entrance, still carrying the celery she had been cleaning, only half done. She did not lift me up. She squatted first to look at my knee, used her thumb to brush the dust away from the edge of the blood beads, and said: if it hurts, cry; when you are done crying, keep practicing. She stood the bike up, straightened the handlebar, and pushed it in front of me. The bike is not broken, she said, and neither are you. What matters is whether you will detour around bricks for the rest of your life. I wiped my tears onto the back of my hand and sat back on the seat.

For the next two rounds Mom stood in the middle of the lot watching me, and Dad only followed half a step behind. Past the halfway point of the second round I suddenly noticed that his hand was a foot away from the seat and had not touched it once. I did not call out, and I did not stop; my feet only pressed more evenly. On the last round I rode straight and steady, and the wind carried the smell of celery over from Mom, mixed with the smell of concrete baked all day by the sun. On the way home Mom pushed the bike and I walked beside her, my knee aching every time it bent, but my chin stayed up.

That lot later filled up with parked cars again. But I always remember the concrete that day, the front wheel that would not stop turning, and the unfinished bunch of celery carried in the hand of my mother.

数过的十一圈

我学骑车是在暑假，小区中间那块空地上。空地不大，一圈骑下来大约四十步，刚好够一辆车慌。空地边上栽着一排冬青，骑歪了胳膊就扫在叶子上。那辆白车是我表哥淘汰下来的，车梁上贴着一张撕了一半的贴纸。

头一天我只敢让爸爸扶着后座骑，两只手把车把攥出汗。爸爸站在身后，只说两句：眼看前，脚踩地。傍晚空地上有人跳扇子舞，音响咿咿呀呀的，我绕着那块水泥地走了六圈，一圈都没离他那只手。第二天爸爸的手不知什么时候没了，我多骑了半圈才发现，一慌，车把压向路边，整个人摔进空地边上的泥地里。那天热，摔下去的时候听见噗的一声，膝盖磕在硬土上，疼得又实又钝。我先是愣着，随后眼泪自己滚下来，越滚越急，拦不住。泥糊在裤腿上，袖子上也是，我坐在泥里哭得抽抽的，心想我再也不骑了。

妈妈从凉亭那边小跑过来，裙子下摆沾了土。她从口袋里掏出一包纸巾，先擦我脸上的泥，再擦手，擦完把脏纸攥在自己手里。她没说不许哭，也没说别哭了。她把车从泥里提起来，用纸巾把车座上的泥擦掉，然后蹲着看我，说你今天要是想回去就回去，明天咱们再来。她说这话的时候语气平平的，像在说明天要下雨。

我哭完了，自己从泥地里站起来，跨上车。妈妈站在空地中间，双手抱着，不扶。那一圈我骑得极慢，脚好几次悬在半空找地。骑到一半，车身忽然自己稳了，我脚下反而忘了踩。妈妈在对面拍了一下手，就一下。

收工时我的膝盖青了一块，裤子上全是干掉的泥印。回家妈妈给我冲膝盖，水凉，我嘶了一声，她手停了一下，没停住，接着冲。第二天傍晚我们真的又来了，空地还是那块空地，我绕着它骑了十一圈，数过的。

Eleven Laps, and I Counted Them

I learned to ride during summer vacation, on the open lot in the middle of our housing complex. The lot was not big, about forty steps around, exactly enough room for one panicked bicycle. Along its edge stood a row of holly; ride crooked and your arm swept through the leaves. The white bike was the one my cousin had given up on, with a half-torn sticker still on its crossbar.

On the first day I only dared ride with Dad holding the seat behind me, both hands sweating on the bar. Dad stood behind me and said only two things: eyes forward, feet ready for the ground. In the evening some people on the lot were dancing with fans, the speaker warbling, and I walked the bike around that concrete patch six times, never once leaving his hand. On the second day his hand vanished at some point without my noticing, and I managed half a lap more before I realized it. In my panic the bar leaned toward the curb and I toppled into the dirt at the edge of the lot. It was hot that day. When I fell I heard a soft thud, and my knee struck the hard ground with a pain that was both solid and dull. First I sat stunned, then the tears rolled down by themselves, faster and faster, impossible to stop. Mud smeared my trouser legs and my sleeves. I sat in the mud crying in hiccups, deciding I would never ride again.

Mom came jogging over from the pavilion, the hem of her skirt dusted with dirt. She took a packet of tissues from her pocket and wiped the mud off my face first, then my hands, and kept the dirty tissues balled in her own fist. She did not say crying is forbidden, and she did not say stop crying. She lifted the bike out of the mud, used a tissue to wipe the seat clean, then squatted and looked at me. If you want to go home today, go home, she said. Tomorrow we come back. Her voice was as flat as if she were announcing rain for tomorrow.

When I finished crying, I stood up out of the mud by myself and swung a leg over the bike. Mom stood in the middle of the lot with her arms folded, not holding anything. That lap I rode extremely slowly, my feet hovering several times, hunting for the ground. Halfway around, the frame suddenly steadied itself, and my feet forgot to push. Mom clapped once across from me, only once.

By the time we quit, my knee had a bruise and my trousers were printed with dried mud. At home Mom rinsed my knee under cold water. I hissed at the chill, her hand paused for a moment, then did not stop, and kept rinsing. The next evening we really came back. The lot was the same lot. I rode eleven laps around it. I counted.

别在围裙上的锅铲

我们楼下的空地上，那阵子天天有个男孩在学车。车是绿色的，比他半个人还高，他爸爸把车座降到最低，他的脚还是只能踮着地。

我放学常绕到空地上玩，其实主要是看他们。男孩骑得凶，车头一会儿蹭着路牙，一会儿又甩向花坛，他爸爸跟在后面跑，公文包都没来得及放下。有一回他骑快了，前轮压上一片碎砖，车往右一歪，他往左跳，两头都没救成，人和车一起摔在空地的边沿上。那一声摔得又响又实。男孩坐在地上，先是看看自己的手，再看看围过来的人，然后嘴一瘪，哭出了声，哭得整片空地都听得见。

他妈妈是从楼道里出来的，围裙都没解，手里还拿着锅铲。她走过来，蹲在男孩跟前，没先看车，先看他的膝盖。裤腿磨破了，她拿围裙角去擦，擦不动，就回家端了半盆温水下来，蹲在那儿给他擦腿。擦完她把锅铲别在围裙带上，扶起那辆绿车，说，车立起来了，你也起来。男孩抽噎着不起来，她也不催，就蹲在旁边等。过了能有半分钟，男孩自己抓着车把站起来了。

再骑的时候他妈妈站在空地当中，两只手插在围裙兜里。男孩绕着圈骑，骑得歪，但一圈比一圈少歪。他爸爸蹲在路边系鞋带，系了半天没系完。天擦黑的时候男孩骑得已经像模像样，绕着空地一圈接一圈，车链子在暮色里咔哒咔哒地响，他妈妈端着空盆站在单元门口，看一辆车绕一块空地。

后来那片空地铺了沥青，再没见过绿车。听说男孩上初中了，骑得比谁都快。可我记得他坐在地上哭的那一场，也记得他妈妈蹲在泥边擦腿的样子，和那把别在围裙带上的锅铲。

The Spatula Tucked in the Apron

On the open lot below our building, for a stretch of days there was always a boy learning to ride. His bike was green and taller than half of him. His father dropped

the seat to its lowest, and the feet of the boy could still only touch the ground on their toes.

After school I often detoured through the lot to play, though mostly I went to watch them. The boy rode wildly. The front wheel grazed the curb one moment and swung toward the flower bed the next, while his father jogged behind, briefcase still in hand, never setting it down. Once he rode too fast, the front wheel ran over a shard of brick, the bike tipped right, he jumped left, saved neither, and man and bike crashed together on the rim of the lot. That fall landed loud and solid. The boy sat on the ground, looked at his own hands first, then at the people gathering, then his mouth crumpled and he cried out, cried loud enough for the whole lot to hear.

His mother came out of the stairwell with her apron still on, a spatula in her hand. She walked over and squatted in front of him. She looked at his knee before she looked at the bike. The trouser leg was scraped through. She tried to wipe it with the corner of her apron, could not, went home, and came back with a half-basin of warm water, squatting there to wash his leg. When she finished she tucked the spatula into her apron strap, lifted the green bike upright, and said: the bike is standing up, so you stand up too. The boy sobbed and stayed down. She did not hurry him; she just squatted beside him and waited. After perhaps half a minute, he grabbed the handlebar and got up by himself.

When he rode again, his mother stood in the middle of the lot with both hands in her apron pockets. The boy rode in crooked circles, but each circle a little straighter than the last. His father crouched by the curb tying his shoes and never finished tying them. By dusk the boy was riding like someone who knew how, lap after lap around the lot, the chain clicking through the gathering dark, while his mother stood at the building entrance holding the empty basin, watching one bicycle circle one open space.

Later the lot was paved with asphalt, and the green bike was never seen there again. People say the boy is in middle school now and rides faster than anyone. But I remember the fit of crying he had sitting on the ground, and his mother squatting at the edge of the dirt washing his leg, and that spatula tucked into her apron strap.