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.