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.