那个晒软路面的夏日午后

那年暑假的午后，整条巷子都被太阳晒得发白。蝉在槐树上一声接一声地叫，叫得人心里发慌。表哥把那辆蓝色自行车靠在院墙上，跟我说，今天必须学会。我围着车走了两圈，车座被晒得烫手，我摸了一下赶紧缩回来。表哥用车座后头那面试着扶我，让我先练蹬半圈。脚蹬子被晒得发烫，我穿着凉鞋，脚底板踩上去，热和疼一起从脚心窜上来。

真正上车是在午后两点多。巷子空着，只有我们的影子躺在地上。表哥在后面扶着后座，我蹬起来，车轮碾过晒软的路面，发出黏黏的声响。骑出十几米，前面有个下坡，我一慌，把车把往右死掰，车头没过来，整辆车斜着往路边的排水沟去。我跳了车，人是站住了，膝盖磕在马路牙子上，裤子磨破一个洞，皮翻开一小片，血珠立刻渗出来，混着灰。我扶着墙慢慢坐下，午后的太阳照在腿上，杀得生疼。

表哥蹲下来看我的膝盖，说今天到这儿吧，回去上药。我坐在墙根，看着那辆靠在墙边的蓝车。车把上还挂着我手心攥出来的汗印，车链子晒得发亮。我想起巷子里别的孩子都是这个夏天学会的，想起上周我还站在井台边看他们骑车过。我把裤子上的灰拍了，站起来，说，上车。表哥愣了一下，没劝，把车扶正。我跨上去，膝盖那块破皮扯着疼，我咬着牙把脚放上脚蹬子。

第二次上车之后，我不再盯着前轮，眼睛看向巷子尽头那棵槐树。车还是晃，晃到我愿意等它自己回来，不跟它抢。又摔了一次，摔在草地上，膝盖另一侧蹭红了，没破。太阳偏西的时候，我从巷子这头骑到了那头，全程没落脚。蝉还在叫，风从槐树那边过来，是热的，可我满身是汗地骑过去，觉得那风比什么都凉快。表哥站在巷子尽头，没鼓掌，只说，明天从井台骑到村口。我说好。

后来我明白，学会骑车那天最要紧的，不是骑通的那个来回，是膝盖流着血、我坐在墙根看着那辆蓝车、然后站起来说上车的那几秒。坚持不是喊出来的，是那一秒里，自己把车扶正的。

The Summer Afternoon That Softened the Road

On that afternoon in summer the whole lane lay bleached white under the sun. Cicadas cried one after another in the locust tree, restless and loud. My cousin leaned the blue bicycle against the courtyard wall and told me that today I had to learn it. I walked twice around the bike. The seat was too hot to touch, and I pulled my hand back at once. He held me up by the part behind the seat and had me practice half turns of the pedals. The pedals had been baking; I wore sandals, and the heat and the pain ran up from my soles together.

I truly got on after two in the afternoon. The lane was empty except for our shadows lying on the ground. My cousin held the rear seat while I pedaled, the wheel pressing sticky sounds out of the sun-softened road. Ten meters ahead the road sloped down. In a panic I wrenched the handlebars right, they did not come back, and the whole bike slid toward the drain ditch. I jumped off. I stayed on my feet, but my knee struck the curb, my trousers tore a hole, a patch of skin opened, beads of blood

came out at once mixed with dust. I sat down by the wall, and the afternoon sun on my leg stung badly.

My cousin crouched to look at my knee and said we would stop for today and go put medicine on it. I sat by the wall roots and looked at the blue bike leaning against the wall. My palm prints of sweat still hung on the handlebars, and the chain glittered in the sun. I remembered that the other children of the lane had all learned in this summer, and that last week I had still stood by the well platform watching them ride past. I patted the dust off my trousers, stood up, and said, put me on again. My cousin froze for a moment, did not argue, and righted the bike. I climbed on. The scraped skin of my knee pulled with pain, and I set my teeth and put my feet on the pedals.

The second time on the bike I stopped staring at the front wheel and looked toward the locust tree at the end of the lane. The bike still swayed, but I was willing to wait for it to come back by itself instead of fighting it. I fell once more, in the grass, rubbing the other side of my knee red without breaking it. When the sun leaned west, I rode from one end of the lane to the other without putting a foot down. The cicadas were still crying, and the wind came over from the locust tree, hot, yet riding through it sweat-soaked I felt it cooler than anything. My cousin stood at the end of the lane, did not clap, and only said that tomorrow I would ride from the well platform to the village gate. I said all right.

Later I understood that what mattered most on the day I learned was not the round trip I finished, but those seconds when my knee was bleeding, I sat by the wall looking at the blue bike, then stood up and said, put me on again. Perseverance is not shouted. It is the second in which you right the bike yourself.