车后座上的爸爸

我学会骑车那天，爸爸的手在裤子上擦了两下。后来我才知道，那两天他的膝盖一直疼，蹲下去起身都要扶桌子，没跟我说。扶车跟跑的活儿是他抢着干的，我妈本来要去，他说你扶不稳。

老自行车是爸爸自己那辆，脚踏拆了给我滑巷子。他蹲在院子里卸链条，扳手倒了三次，最后拿牙咬着钳子拧。车座调到最低，他站起来腰响了一声。巷子底那片空地落着槐花白点，他站在三步外，让我眼睛看巷子口，别看脚。我滑了十几个来回，他就在巷子口站了十几个来回。他后来跟我妈说，那孩子车一歪就跳下来，跳得比猫快，他心跟着跳。

装脚踏那天我摔进沙土，手掌蹭破，沙子嵌进红印子。我坐在沙土里看他。他站在三步外没伸手，说，坐在地上灰要沾身，起来。晚上他给我手掌挑沙子，拿针挑一根吹一根，挑完拿布条缠上。缠完他说了一句，明天接着练。第二天他的膝盖更疼了，我还是不知道。

学会是在一个傍晚。他扶着后座跟着跑，我骑得飞快，风把巷子两边的槐花吹得往后倒。跑到巷子口，他松了手，站在原地，两只手在裤子上擦。我回头喊，你什么时候松的手。他说不记得了。其实他记得。他回家跟我妈说，二十多米前就松了，那孩子自己没发现，越骑越稳，他在后面看着，不敢喊。

再后来我长高了，换了新车，老车靠墙。有一年我下坡捏死前闸，车前轮抱死，我从车把上翻出去摔在路肩上。爸爸推着去修车铺，师傅拿大钳子掰车架，他在旁边看着，一句话没说。回家路上他推着那辆歪了的车，我跟着走。他忽然说，下坡别捏死前闸。我说你怎么不早说。他说，那天你在沙土里看我，我要伸手扶你，你就永远坐在沙土里等。

去年回老家，那辆老车还靠在墙边，横梁上我手扶过的地方磨得发亮。我蹲下按了按哑铃，闷闷一声。我爸从屋里出来，膝盖还是不好，起身扶了扶门框。我扶他出来，让他坐车上，我骑，推他到槐树底下。他坐后座上没说一句话。车过巷口，风过来，槐花白点点落了他一肩。

My Father on the Back of the Bike

The day I learned to ride, my father wiped his hands twice on his trousers. Only later did I learn his knee had ached all those two days; he had to brace on the table to stand up from a squat, and never told me. He fought my mother for the job of holding the seat and running alongside — she offered, and he said she couldn't hold steady.

The old bike was his own. He took the pedals off so I could glide the lane, squatting in the yard to strip the chain, dropping the wrench three times, finally gripping the pliers with his teeth to twist. He set the seat to its lowest, and when he stood up his back cracked. The empty patch at the lane's end lay under white locust blossoms. He stood three steps off and told me eyes on the lane mouth, not on my feet. I glided a dozen round trips; he stood at the lane mouth a dozen round trips. He later told Mom that whenever the bike tilted I jumped off faster than a

cat, and his heart jumped with me.

The day he refitted the pedals I fell into the sand, palms scraped, grit set in the red marks. I sat in the sand and looked at him. Three steps off, he did not reach out. Sitting down only gathers dust, he said — get up. That night he picked the grit from my palms with a needle, blowing away each speck as it came out, then wrapped my hands in cloth strips. When he finished he said one line: practice again tomorrow. His knee hurt worse the next day, and I still did not know.

I learned one evening. He ran holding the back seat; I flew, wind blowing the locust blossoms along both walls backward. At the lane mouth he let go and stood in place, wiping his hands on his trousers. I turned and shouted: when did you let go? He said he couldn't remember. He did remember. He told Mom at home that he had let go more than twenty meters back, and the boy rode surer and surer without noticing, while he watched from behind, afraid to call out.

Then I grew taller, got a new bike, and the old one leaned on the wall. One year I locked the front brake downhill; the wheel seized and I pitched over the handlebar onto the road shoulder. Dad pushed the bike to the repair shop. As the mechanic bent the frame with big pliers, he stood watching, saying nothing. On the way home, pushing that crooked bike, he suddenly said: never lock the front brake downhill. I said why didn't you say so sooner. He said: that day in the sand you looked up at me — if I had reached for you, you would have sat in the sand forever, waiting.

When I went back to the old house last year, the old bike still leaned by the wall, its crossbar polished bright where my hand gripped. I crouched and pressed the mute bell: one muffled grunt. My father came out of the house; his knee still bad, he steadied himself on the doorframe rising. I helped him out and had him sit on the seat; I rode, carrying him to the locust tree. He sat on the back without a word. Past the lane mouth the wind came, and white locust blossoms settled on his shoulder.

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