那辆靠墙的老自行车

那辆老自行车一直靠在我家老屋的墙边，横梁很低，三年级的我从横梁下面钻过去，刚好到车座的高度。车是爸爸上初中时爷爷买的，黑漆剥落了，露出底下的铁锈，车铃哑了，按下去只闷闷地响一声。

三年级下学期，班里同学都会骑车了，放学一路骑回家，铃按得震天响。我求爸爸也教我。爸爸没买新车，把那辆老车推出去，蹲在院子里拆了半个钟头的脚踏，链条也卸了，说先学滑。他把车座调到最低，我的脚掌刚好能踩实地面。

练习在巷子底。那里有一小片空地，平时没人走，地上落着槐花的白点点。爸爸让我两只脚蹬地往前滑，滑起来身子直，眼睛看巷子口，别看脚。我先不敢，车一歪就跳下来。滑了十几个来回，我才敢在滑的时候把两只脚收起来一寸。就一寸，落地的时候车还往前多走了两步。

装上脚踏那天我摔了。巷子底有个砖堆，我绕它的时候轮子蹭上砖角，连人带车歪进旁边的沙土里。手掌蹭破了，沙子嵌在红印子里。我坐在沙土里看爸爸。爸爸站在三步外，没伸手，说，坐在地上灰要沾身，起来。我自己爬起来，先扶车，再拍沙子，回去接着蹬。

真正学会是在一个傍晚。爸爸在后面扶着后座跑，我骑得飞快，风把巷子两边的槐花吹得往后倒。骑到巷子口我回头，爸爸站在原地，两只手在裤子上擦，不扶了。我捏闸跳下来喊，你什么时候松的手。爸爸说不记得了，你自己骑了二十多米。

后来我骑走了那辆车，又换过新车，旧车一直靠墙。去年回去，车还在，横梁上我手扶过的地方磨得发亮。墙边的槐树又高了一圈，树下的白点点还是每年落一地。我蹲下去按了按那个哑铃，它还是只闷闷地响一声。可是三年级的那个傍晚，巷子口的风，我到现在都记得。

The Old Bicycle Leaning Against the Wall

That old bicycle still leans against the wall of our old house. Its crossbar is low; third-grade me could duck under it and come exactly to the height of the seat. Grandpa bought it when Dad was in middle school. The black paint has flaked off to show rust underneath, and the bell is mute — press it and it gives one muffled grunt.

In the second term of third grade, the whole class could ride, bicycling home in a pack, bells ringing their ears off. I begged Dad to teach me too. He did not buy a new bike. He wheeled the old one out, squatting in the yard half an hour taking off the pedals, then the chain, saying I would learn to glide first. He lowered the seat to its limit so my whole soles could flat on the ground.

We practiced at the bottom of the lane, a small empty patch nobody crossed, dotted with fallen white locust blossoms. Dad had me push along on both feet: glide upright, eyes on the lane mouth, not on your feet. At first I dared not; the bike tilted and I jumped off. After a dozen round trips I finally dared lift both feet an

inch while gliding. Just an inch — and on landing the bike still ran two steps ahead.

The day he refitted the pedals, I fell. There was a brick pile at the lane's end; my wheel grazed a brick corner and man and bike toppled into the sand beside it. My palms scraped, grit set into the red marks. I sat in the sand and looked at Dad. He stood three steps off, hand not reaching out, and said: sitting down only gathers dust on you — get up. I got up, lifted the bike first, patted off the sand, and went back to pedaling.

I truly learned one evening. Dad ran behind holding the back seat; I flew, wind blowing the locust blossoms along both walls backward. At the lane mouth I turned around — Dad stood in place, wiping his hands on his trousers, no longer holding. I squeezed the brake, jumped off, and shouted: when did you let go? He said he couldn't remember; you rode twenty-some meters by yourself.

Later I outgrew that bike, then got a new one, and the old one kept leaning on the wall. When I went back last year it was still there, the crossbar polished bright where my hand gripped. The locust tree by the wall had grown another ring taller, and its white blossoms still carpet the ground each spring. I crouched and pressed the mute bell: still one muffled grunt. But that evening in third grade, the wind at the lane mouth — I remember it to this day.