松手那半只手

暑假的头一个礼拜，大刘把他表哥的旧车推到了打谷场。车太高，我俩一人试了一下，都只够着半个脚掌。大刘说，没关系，先练推车。

于是我们推着车绕场子。七月的太阳把晒场的水泥地烤得发白，车把烫手，得攥着校服袖子拧。推了四五圈，大刘忽然跨上去，让我在后头拽着后座跑。我拽着，他蹬，车在麦秸垛之间歪歪斜斜地走。他喊，松手。我说我不敢。他喊，你先松一半。

打谷场上白天晒麦子，晚上就空了，只有我们俩和一圈车辙。场边拴着一头黄牛，尾巴甩一下，扫掉一片影子。远处有人喊吃饭，喊的是别人家孩子。大刘他表哥那辆车原先给他表弟学，表弟学了一半迷上了弹弓，车就闲下来，让大刘借了来。车座上垫着一块旧棉布，绑的是自行车内胎剪的皮筋，坐上去软，还有一股胶皮味。

我就松了半只手，指尖还搭在座垫边上。车晃了两下，居然没倒。大刘蹬过麦秸垛，又绕回来，脸晒得通红，汗把刘海粘在额头上。他说，成了，你松手。这回我把整只手收了回来，站在原地，看他自己骑了半圈。车往左偏，他用脚点了一下地，稳住，又骑回来。

后来轮到我。大刘拽着后座跟在我后头跑，跑得上气不接下气，还嫌我蹬得慢。骑到第三圈，我听见后头没声了，回头一看，他坐在麦秸垛上喝水，瓶子举起来朝我晃了晃。我心里一慌，脚底下就乱，车一头扎进场边的草里，人跳了出去，膝盖没伤，手掌蹭破了一层皮。

收场的时候，我俩坐在场边的石碾上。大刘掰了半块西瓜给我，说下礼拜教你捏闸掉头。我啃着西瓜看那辆车靠在麦秸垛上，车座被太阳晒得鼓起来一块。回家路上我想，其实最记得的不是学会那一下，是松手那半只手——指尖还搭着，像答应了一件事。

The Half-Released Hand

The first week of summer vacation, Da Liu wheeled his cousin old bike onto the threshing ground. It stood too tall; we each tried it once, and both could only reach half a sole on the ground. Da Liu said, no problem, we practice pushing first.

So we pushed the bike around the field. The July sun baked the concrete pale, and the handlebars burned the hands, so we gripped them through our shirt sleeves. After four or five laps, Da Liu suddenly swung a leg over and told me to run behind holding the seat. I held, he pedaled, and the bike weaved crooked between the straw stacks. He shouted, let go. I said I dare not. He shouted, let go halfway first.

The threshing ground dried wheat by day and stood empty by night, with only the two of us and a ring of tire tracks. A yellow ox was tied at the edge, its tail flicking away swaths of shadow. Somewhere far off someone called a child to supper, but it was somebody else child. The cousin had meant the bike for his own little brother, who gave up halfway for a slingshot, leaving the bike idle for Da Liu to borrow. An old cotton pad sat on the seat, bound with bands cut from an inner tube;

it felt soft, with a rubbery smell.

I released half my hand, fingertips still resting on the seat edge. The bike wobbled twice and somehow stayed up. Da Liu pedaled past the straw stack and circled back, face sunburned red, sweat gluing his bangs to his forehead. He said, made it, let go. This time I pulled my whole hand back and stood where I was, watching him ride half a lap alone. The bike drifted left; he tapped the ground with one foot, steadied it, and rode back.

Then it was my turn. Da Liu ran behind me with a hand on the seat, out of breath, still complaining I pedaled too slow. On the third lap I heard nothing behind me, looked back, and he sat on a straw stack drinking, waving the bottle at me. My heart jerked, my feet went confused, and the bike dove into the grass at the field edge. I hopped clear; my knee was fine, my palm scraped off a layer of skin.

At closing time we sat on the stone roller by the field. Da Liu broke a watermelon in half and gave me one, saying next week he would teach me to brake and turn around. I ate the melon watching that bike lean against the straw stack, its seat bulging up in the sun. On the way home I thought: what I remember most is not the moment I learned, but that half-released hand — fingertips still touching, like a promise made.

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