花园里学骑车的老头

小区花园里有个学骑车的老头，六十多岁，头发全白了，是物业老周。

起初没人注意他。傍晚六点半，他把一辆女式旧车从车棚推出来，绕花坛练推车，一圈，两圈。有孩子骑滑板车从他身边冲过去，他扶着车把让开，让完了接着推自己的圈。有人认出来他是物业的老周，都愣：老周还会骑车？老周不接话，抿着嘴蹬。

他学得很慢。上车要扶两次，蹬起来身子往后坠，像坐在拖拉机上。有一回在直路上晃晃悠悠骑了二十米，围观的几个老太太鼓掌，他难为情，脚一软，车停在原地，人跨在车上笑，露出一口磨短了的牙。

练车的时辰也怪，不早不晚，偏赶六点半到七点，正是花园人最多的时候。有年轻人要帮他扶，他摆手，说腿脚不利索的是车，不是他。有小孩骑平衡车绕着他转，他也不恼，骑他的圈。物业的同事劝他，明天还得值班修水泵。他说，修水泵的腿，得再学会蹬车，两不误。说完照旧绕花坛，第六圈，第七圈，白头发在路灯底下一晃一晃。

后来大家才知道缘由。老周的老伴去年走了，生前在河对岸的菜市场摆摊，他每天蹬三轮送她。摊子如今不摆了，河对岸没人等他，他忽然发现自己不会骑两轮。儿子从外地寄来这辆旧车，附一张纸条：爸，学着骑，有空我回来带你骑。纸条他揣了一个月，边角都软了。

立秋那天傍晚，老周骑过了花坛，骑过了车棚，从花园这头骑到那头，全程没停。几个老太太又鼓掌，这回他没难为情，骑到尽头捏了闸，单脚点地，朝大家点点头。第二天起，他傍晚骑车绕小区一圈，车筐里放着一把小葱，是从早市买回来的。

再后来，有孩子想学骑车，家长喊老周。他扶着后座跟在后头跑，喊出来的话就三句：看前头，别停，我在。跟谁学的他不知道，那三句说得又稳又熟。

The Old Man Learning to Ride in the Garden

In the neighborhood garden there was an old man learning to ride, past sixty, hair fully white. He was Old Zhou from property management.

At first nobody noticed. Every evening at six thirty he wheeled an old women frame bike out of the shed and pushed laps around the flower bed, one lap, two. Kids on scooters shot past him; he steadied the bars, stepped aside, then went on pushing his own laps. Those who recognized him were stunned: Old Zhou can ride? He did not answer them, pressed his lips together, and pedaled.

He learned slowly. Mounting needed two tries to steady himself, and riding he leaned back as if sitting on a tractor. Once, wobbling down the straight path for twenty meters, the watching grandmothers applauded, and he got embarrassed; his foot buckled, the bike stopped in place, and he sat astride it laughing, showing teeth worn short.

His hours were odd too: never early, never late, always six thirty to seven, the busiest hour in the garden. Young people offered to hold the bike; he waved them off, saying the stiff legs belonged to the bike, not to him. Kids on balance bikes circled him; he did not mind and rode his laps. A colleague from property management warned him he was on duty the next morning to fix the water pump. He said: the legs that fix pumps must also learn to pedal. Both, no excuses. Then he circled the flower bed as always, lap six, lap seven, his white hair swinging under the streetlamp.

Only later did people learn the reason. His wife passed last year. While she lived she ran a stall at the market across the river, and he pedaled the tricycle to take her every day. The stall is gone now; nobody across the river waits for him, and he suddenly found he could not ride two wheels. His son, far away, mailed him this old bike with a note: Dad, learn to ride. When I come back I will ride with you. He kept the note in his pocket for a month, its corners gone soft.

On the evening of the Start of Autumn, Old Zhou rode past the flower bed, past the shed, from one end of the garden to the other without stopping. The grandmothers applauded again; this time he was not embarrassed. He reached the end, squeezed the brakes, set one foot down, and nodded to everyone. From the next day he rode one lap around the neighborhood each evening, a bunch of scallions in the basket, bought at the morning market.

Later, when a child wanted to learn, the parents called Old Zhou. He ran behind with a hand on the seat, and all he said came in three lines: eyes forward, keep pedaling, I am here. Who taught him those words, nobody knows, but he said them steady and fluent.

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