跟在后面跑的人

六年级的秋天，我爸那辆二八大杠终于轮到我骑。车座太高，我跨上去脚尖才够到地，像骑在一头犟驴上。班里会骑的同学都放学走了，就剩阿牛没走，他自告奋勇在后头帮我扶后座。

我们练在河边的土路上。阿牛一手攥着后座架，一手拎着书包，跟着车跑。他喘气的声音就在我耳朵后面，一下一下的。有一段路我骑得特别顺，风从耳朵边上刮过去，我以为他还扶着，就壮着胆子拐了个弯，回头一看，人没了。他早就松手了，站在几十米外冲我挥胳膊。我一慌，车把一歪，连人带车栽进路边的草垛里。草垛软，我没摔疼，就是车压在身上。阿牛跑过来扒草垛，两个人在草堆里笑得上气不接下气。

后来我们换着练，他扶我，我扶他。阿牛胆子大，摔了也不恼，膝盖破了拿袖子一抹，说明天就好了。有一回他骑得太快，刹车捏死，整个人从车把上翻过去，下巴磕破了皮，血珠子渗出来。我吓坏了，他拿舌头舔了一下嘴角，说没事，就是车把上多了点红漆。我这才知道那是他蹭破的皮，不是漆。

那年冬天路冻得硬，我们比谁骑得稳，比的是从村口老槐树到桥洞那一段，谁脚不沾地。我输了，因为半路看见一条狗，腿一软踩了地。阿牛赢了也不得意，就绕着我转圈，冲我喊：你怕什么狗啊，狗又不会骑车。

六年级下学期，阿牛跟他爸去了外地。走之前他找到我，把那辆跟他一起学车的旧车指给我：我妈说留给你了，你骑。车旧，链子却上着油，车把上缠着他妈缝的一圈布条，防滑。我想说点什么，憋了半天，只说了一句：你啥时候回来。他想了想说：等我回来，你要是不会骑花式，我教你。

那辆车我骑到现在。每次骑上去，我总忍不住回头看一眼，后头空空的，没有人攥着后座架跟着跑。可风一吹，耳朵后头像又响起一下一下的喘气声。阿牛，你回来那天，我骑一段给你看，管它算不算花式，反正我脚不沾地，从老槐树一直骑到桥洞。

The Person Who Ran Behind Me

In the autumn of sixth grade, it was finally my turn on the old heavy bicycle of my father. The seat was too high; when I swung a leg over, only my toes touched the ground, as if I were sitting on a stubborn mule. The classmates who could ride had all gone home after school. Only Ah Niu stayed, and he volunteered to hold the rear rack for me.

We practiced on the dirt road by the river. Ah Niu gripped the rear rack with one hand and carried his schoolbag in the other, running alongside the bike. His breathing sounded right behind my ears, one breath after another. For one stretch I rode so smoothly, the wind brushing past my ears. I thought he was still holding on, so I gathered courage and turned a corner. When I looked back, he was gone. He had let go long ago and stood dozens of meters away, waving his arms at me. I panicked,

the handlebars wobbled, and I fell with the bike into a straw stack by the road. The stack was soft, so I was not hurt; only the bike lay on top of me. Ah Niu ran over and dug me out, and the two of us laughed in the straw until we could not breathe.

After that we took turns: he held for me, I held for him. Ah Niu was bold and never angry after a fall. When his knee scraped open, he wiped it with his sleeve and said it would heal by tomorrow. Once he rode too fast and squeezed the brake shut, flipping over the handlebars, his chin scraped and beading with blood. I was frightened, but he licked the corner of his mouth and said it was nothing, just a bit of red paint added to the handlebars. Only then did I understand it was his skin, not paint.

That winter the road froze hard, and we raced to see who could ride steadier, from the old locust tree at the village entrance to the bridge tunnel, whoever kept both feet off the ground. I lost, because a dog appeared halfway and my legs went soft and stomped the ground. Ah Niu won without bragging; he just circled around me and shouted: why fear a dog, a dog cannot ride a bike.

In the spring term of sixth grade, Ah Niu moved away with his father. Before leaving he found me and pointed to the old bike he had learned on: my mother says it is yours now, you ride it. The bike was old, but its chain was oiled, and its handlebars were wrapped with a ring of cloth sewn by his mother, to stop the hands slipping. I wanted to say something, but after a long struggle I only asked: when will you come back. He thought a while and said: when I return, if you cannot ride any tricks, I will teach you.

I still ride that bike today. Every time I get on, I cannot help looking back. Behind me is empty; nobody grips the rear rack and runs along. But when the wind blows, it seems one breath after another sounds again behind my ears. Ah Niu, on the day you come back, I will ride a stretch for you, trick or not, with my feet never touching the ground, all the way from the old locust tree to the bridge tunnel.