三十岁学骑车

我爸学骑自行车的时候，三十岁。这件事我妈笑了二十年，我爸从来不恼。

那年我爸的厂子搬到河对岸，上下班走一个小时。厂里和别的厂合并，分下来一批旧自行车，我爸领了一辆。他把车推回家，我妈问：你会骑吗。我爸没吭声，晚上就把车推到了巷子外头。

我妈领着我站在窗口看。我爸上车用的是老式骑法，腿从横梁底下穿过去。他贴着墙根蹬，车靠着墙，人靠着车，蹬出去半条街才摔。摔了他赶紧用手撑起来，先四下看一圈，见没人，才松了口气。我妈把我拉回屋，说：你爸跟做贼似的。

我爸练了整整一个星期，每天傍晚去。第七天，他从巷口一路骑到了河边的桥上。骑回来时衬衫全湿透了，脸上憋着一股笑，憋不住，嘴角翘起来又压下去。我妈端出面条说吃面，他吃了整整两碗，晚上蹲在院里给车链条上油，上了半宿。

从那以后我爸骑车过河上班。每天早上出门，他在我窗下按一声车铃，那一声就是我们家的闹钟。下雨天他披雨衣蹬车，路上的泥水溅一裤腿，他也不管，进了厂门再擦。

有一回我坐他后座，他去河对岸的集市买鱼。他的背又宽又稳，蹬车一点不晃。我问他：爸，你学骑车的时候摔过吗。他想了想说：摔过。我问摔了几回，他说记不清了，可疼还记得。我那时小，听不懂这句话。

我爸走了五年了。那辆旧车早当废铁卖了，只剩车铃留在我手里。我把铃收在抽屉里，平时不碰。上回收拾东西不小心按响了一下，声音有点哑，不算脆。我在书桌前坐了很久。那一声铃声，是我们家的闹钟，每天早上按一次，按了十几年。

Learning to Ride at Thirty

When my father learned to ride a bicycle, he was thirty. My mother laughed about it for twenty years, and he never minded.

That year the factory moved to the far side of the river, an hour on foot each way. It merged with another factory and a batch of old bicycles came down to share; my father took one. He pushed it home, and my mother asked: can you ride. He said nothing, and that evening wheeled it out beyond the lane.

Mother and I watched from the window. He mounted the old way, swinging his leg under the crossbar. He pedaled along the wall, the bike leaning on the wall, he leaning on the bike, and fell only after half a street. Up he sprang, first scanning around, and seeing nobody, let out a breath. Mother pulled me back inside and said: your father behaves like a thief.

He practiced for a full week, every evening. On the seventh day he rode from the lane mouth all the way to the bridge over the river. Riding back, his shirt soaked through, a smile fighting its way onto his face, pressed down and rising again.

Mother brought out noodles and told him to eat; he ate two bowls, then squatted in the yard oiling the chain half the night.

From then on he rode across the river to work. Every morning as he left, he pressed the bell once under my window; that single ring was our household alarm clock. On rainy days he pedaled in a rain cape, mud water spattering his trouser legs, and he did not care, wiping it off only after passing the factory gate.

Once I sat on the rear rack while he bought fish at the market across the river. His back was broad and steady, the pedaling never rocking. I asked: Dad, did you fall when you were learning. He thought a moment and said: I fell. I asked how many times, and he said he could not count them, but he still remembered the pain. I was small then; I did not understand that sentence.

My father has been gone five years. The old bike was sold for scrap long ago; only its bell remains in my hands. I keep it in a drawer and seldom touch it. Last time, tidying up, I pressed it by accident, and the sound came out a little hoarse, not bright. I sat at my desk for a long while. That single ring was our household alarm clock, pressed once every morning, for more than ten years.