外婆家的河堤

四年级的暑假，我在乡下外婆家过。乡下村子全是土路，家家孩子都有自行车，就我站在边上看。外婆把表哥那辆旧车往我手里一推：学，在姥姥家还能学不会骑车。

练车的地点是外婆定的，村外的河堤。堤路平，两边是草和杨树。外婆搬个小板凳坐在堤口看我，日头大，她提着水壶，我每骑过去一趟，她就喊一声喝口水。我不想喝，她也喊，我只好停下灌一大口。

表哥是教练，他的招数只有一样：扶着后座跑。跑了半天他蹲到杨树荫里不肯动，说他累了。我只能自己练，车扭得像喝醉了。摔了我也不哭，外婆在，我不能哭。

第三天外婆做了件让我难为情的事。她回家抱出一床旧棉被，叠成三层，捆在车后座上，绳子勒得紧紧的。她说往后仰摔就不疼。我红着脸不肯骑，外婆拍了拍那床被子：骑。我上去一试，座子一下高出一截，软软的，像坐在一个刚出锅的大馒头上面。

第五天，我从河堤一路骑回村口，外婆竟在村口等我，也不知道她怎么得到的信儿。她拉着我的手看手心，看了两遍，说：行，去，给你姥爷看看。姥爷在屋里刨木头做小板凳，头都没抬，只说骑一圈场院。我绕着场院骑了一圈，姥爷这才抬起头，说了两个字：不错。姥爷一年到头夸不了三回人。

临走前一天，我骑车到外婆家接她。她送我到门口，往车筐里塞了一布袋绿豆糕，压了又压。回去的路上车一颠，我怕把糕颠碎，腰绷得直直的，那段路我骑得比什么时候都稳。

前年河堤铺了水泥，外婆的老屋也拆了。我回去在堤上站了一会儿，杨树还在，风一吹叶子哗啦响，像有人坐在堤口的小板凳上，冲我喊：喝口水。

The River Embankment at My Grandmothers Home

In the summer vacation of fourth grade, I stayed at my grandmothers place in the countryside. The village roads were all dirt, and every child in every family had a bicycle except me, standing aside to watch. Grandma pushed the old bike of my cousin into my hands: learn, at your grandmothers house you cannot fail to learn riding.

Grandma chose the practice place: the river embankment outside the village. The road on the dike was flat, grass and poplars on both sides. She carried a small stool and sat at the dike mouth watching me. The sun was strong, she carried a water kettle, and every time I rode past she shouted: have a drink of water. I did not want to, but she kept shouting, so I stopped and gulped a big mouthful.

My cousin was the coach, and he had only one trick: running while holding the rear rack. After half a day he squatted in the poplar shade and refused to move, saying he was tired. I had to practice alone, the bike twisting like a drunk. When I fell I did not cry; Grandma was there, and I could not cry.

On the third day Grandma did something embarrassing. She went home and carried out an old cotton quilt, folded it three layers deep, and tied it tight with rope over the rear seat. She said falling backward would not hurt now. I blushed and refused to ride. Grandma patted the quilt: ride. I got on and tried; the seat stood a whole notch higher, soft, like sitting on a huge steamed bun just out of the pot.

On the fifth day I rode from the dike all the way back to the village entrance, and Grandma was waiting there; I never learned how she heard. She took my hand and studied my palm twice, then said: good, go, show your grandpa. Grandpa was indoors planing wood for a stool and did not even lift his head, only said: ride one lap around the threshing yard. I circled the yard once, and only then did he raise his head and say two words: not bad. Grandpa manages fewer than three praises a year.

The day before I left, I rode to the house of Grandma to fetch her. She saw me off at the gate and stuffed a cloth bag of mung bean cakes into the bike basket, pressing it down again and again. On the way home the bike jolted; afraid of crushing the cakes, I held my back perfectly straight, and on that stretch I rode steadier than ever.

The year before last the dike was paved with cement, and the old house of Grandma was torn down. When I went back I stood on the dike for a while. The poplars were still there, and when the wind blew the leaves rustled, as if someone sat on the little stool at the dike mouth, calling to me: have a drink of water.