二手车铺的老头

三年级暑假，我爸说给我买辆车。新车贵，他领我去了巷子尾的二手车铺。铺子是个老头开的，屋里车挨车，挤得像树林，墙上挂满零件，车铃、脚蹬、瓦片，一串串吊着，风从门缝钻进来，就叮叮当当响。

老头问我：多高。我报了个数。他连眼皮都没抬，从车林里抽出一辆红色的，往我跟前一横：试试。车旧，可链条上着油，轮胎气足，一捏就知道是伺候过的车。

我在铺子里蹬了整整两圈，车头扭，老头在旁边看着，忽然开口：腰别塌，手放松，你越攥越歪。我爸都只会喊看前头，老头这话我头一回听，照着试，车居然直了。

挑车的时候老头做了件事，让我记了很多年。他把车倒过来，转后轮，耳朵凑近听，转了三回，说：这辆轴承有响，换一辆。我爸说就这辆吧挺新的，老头摇头：轴承有响就是快坏了，卖你亏心。他真又抽出一辆，价钱一样。

买车那天他给车打了气，拿抹布把每根管擦了一遍，又把车铃拧了拧，铃声音亮。他蹲在门口收钱，数了两遍，说：回去教孩子，别捏死闸，前闸一捏死就栽。我爸点头，像听师傅训话。

那辆红车我骑了六年，链条换过两次，别的原装。上初中那年车小了，我推去还想着卖给谁，忽然想起巷子尾那间铺子，跑去一看，卷帘门拉着，贴了张出租告示。我在门口站了一会儿，风从隔壁门缝钻过来，墙上那串零件早没了，一声也不响。

后来我买过三辆新车，一辆比一辆贵，可没有一辆，是被人转过轴承、听过响、再决定卖不卖给我的。老头要还在，我该骑过去按一声铃，让他听听，这辆车我伺候得还行。

The Old Man at the Second-hand Bike Shop

In the summer vacation of third grade, my father said he would buy me a bicycle. New ones were expensive, so he took me to the second-hand bike shop at the end of the lane. An old man ran it. Bikes stood shoulder to shoulder inside, crowded like a grove; the walls hung with parts, bells, pedals, fenders, strung in clusters, and when wind slipped through the door crack they jingled.

The old man asked me: how tall. I gave a number. Without lifting his eyelids he drew a red bike out of the bike grove and set it before me: try it. The bike was old, but its chain wore oil and its tires stood firm under a squeeze, the mark of a cared-for machine.

I pedaled two laps inside the shop, the front wheel wobbling. The old man watched and suddenly spoke: do not slump your back, relax your hands; the tighter you grip, the more it wanders. My father only ever shouted look ahead. This was a first I had never heard. I tried it as told, and the bike went straight.

One thing he did while choosing stays with me to this day. He turned the bike upside down, spun the rear wheel, and pressed his ear close to listen. He spun it three times, then said: this bearing rattles, take another. My father said this one looks fine, let us take it. The old man shook his head: a rattling bearing means it is nearly dead; selling it to you would sting my conscience. He truly drew out another, at the same price.

The day of purchase he pumped the tires, wiped every tube with a rag, and twisted the bell tight until it rang clear. He squatted at the door counting the money twice, then said: go home and teach the child, never clamp the front brake shut; one hard squeeze and he will pitch over. My father nodded like an apprentice taking instruction.

I rode that red bike for six years. The chain was replaced twice; everything else stayed original. When I entered middle school the bike had grown small, and I pushed it out meaning to sell it, when I thought of the shop at the lane end. I ran there: the roller shutter was down with a to-let notice pasted on it. I stood at the door a while. Wind came through a crack in the door of the neighbor; the strings of parts on the wall were long gone, and nothing jingled anymore.

I have bought three new bikes since, each dearer than the last, yet not one of them was ever decided on by someone who spun its bearing and listened for a rattle before agreeing to sell. If the old man were still there, I would ride up and ring his bell once, and let him hear that I have cared for this bike fairly well.

班里最后一个会骑的人

四年级那年，班里四十七个人，会骑车的四十六个。就剩我一个，女生，住校，周末也不骑车回家。这话传开以后，我在班里成了个稀罕物，谁赢了比赛都要绕到我窗前喊一嗓子。

教我的是同桌林小满。她家开豆腐坊，每天凌晨起来磨豆腐，骑一辆后座宽大的旧车，车筐里常年一股卤水味。她说：周末我教你，我们坊后头有院子，没人。

那个周六早上我跟着她去了。院子堆着泡豆的水缸，她把车擦了一遍才让我上。她扶后座的姿势跟别人不一样，她不攥架子，把手伸进我后衣领里拽着，说这样摔了能把你提起来。我信了，壮着胆子蹬，车一歪她真把我从车上一提，我半个身子悬着，吓出一身汗，她笑得直不起腰。

练到中午，我在院子里能骑整圈了。林小满松手站在缸边，忽然说：你会了你会了，你听，链条都不响了。我停下来，她指着车链：你紧张的时候蹬得重，链子哗啦哗啦，放松就不响。我这才知道，原来车会替人说话。

周日她又加了一项：她坐后座。她说她沉，压着车稳，让我练带人。我载着她绕院子，她的

卤水味罩着我，两个人都笑。骑到第五圈她说可以了，下周起你骑车回家，别再走路。

从那个夏天起，我周末骑车往返，十二里土路。后来考上市里中学，路变成二十六里，我也骑。再后来上了大学、进了城，我很少骑车了，可每次路过豆腐坊，鼻子总要动一下。

前年春节同学聚会，林小满家豆腐坊传给她弟弟了，她进城上班。她问我还在骑吗，我说骑。她点点头，说了句怪话：你记不记得，你头一回学会那天，链条不响了。我说记得。她笑：那是我们俩都听得见的一句话。

The Last One in Class Who Could Ride

In fourth grade, of the forty-seven students in my class, forty-six could ride. Only one could not: me, a girl, boarding at school, never biking home on weekends. Once this got around, I became a rarity; whoever won a race detoured past my window to shout about it.

The one who taught me was my deskmate, Lin Xiaoman. Her family ran a tofu workshop; she rose before dawn to grind beans, riding an old bike with a wide rear seat whose basket forever smelled of brine. She said: I will teach you on the weekend, behind our workshop there is a yard, nobody around.

That Saturday morning I followed her there. The yard held vats of soaking beans. She wiped the bike down before letting me on. Her way of holding was unlike others: she did not grip the rack but reached her hand into my back collar and held it there, saying that way she could lift me clear if I fell. I believed her and pedaled with courage. The moment the bike tilted she really hoisted me off it, my upper body hanging in the air. I broke out in a sweat of fright while she doubled over laughing.

By noon I could ride full laps in the yard. Lin Xiaoman let go and stood by the vat, then suddenly said: you have it, you have it, listen, the chain has stopped clattering. I stopped. She pointed at the chain: when you are nervous you stomp hard and it clatters; relax and it goes quiet. Only then did I learn that a bicycle speaks for its rider.

On Sunday she added a lesson: she sat on the rear seat. She said she was heavy, which steadies the bike, and I should practice carrying a person. I circled the yard with her aboard, her brine smell wrapping around me, both of us laughing. After five laps she said it was enough, and from next week I should bike home instead of walking.

From that summer I biked home every weekend, twelve li of dirt road. Later I entered the city high school and the road became twenty-six li, and I still biked. Through university and into the city I ride less now, yet every time I pass a tofu

workshop my nose still twitches.

At the Spring Festival class reunion the year before last, the workshop had passed to her brother and she worked in the city. She asked if I still ride. I said yes. She nodded and said something strange: remember the day you first learned, when the chain went quiet. I said I remembered. She smiled: that was a sentence only the two of us could hear.

送馒头的夏天

五年级暑假，我爸的馒头铺忙不过来，让我学骑车送馒头。别的孩子学车是为了玩，我学车是为了上工。这就是为什么我学得快——不上学就没馒头吃，这话是我爸说的，说得平平常常，我听着却记牢了。

车是铺里那辆旧的，后座两边焊了两个铁架，架着两只柳条筐，筐里码馒头，一层报纸一层。第一趟我爸跟在我旁边走，不扶车，就看着。他说：慢骑，筐里是饭，摔一跤，人家一天的早饭就没了。我头一回知道车把上握着的不是玩，是别人家的早饭。

摔是在第三天摔的。下坡想捏闸，捏重了，前轮一死，我翻过车把，人和车砸进筐里。馒头滚了一地，有几个滚进了水沟。我蹲下去捡，手抖，把能吃的和不能吃的分开。不能吃的我数了数，整整十一个。我爸追上来，先看人，再看馒头，说：沟里的别捡了，回去我补上。那天我赔了十一个馒头，从我零花钱里，一个五分。

从那以后我爸给我定了三条：下坡先减速再捏闸；过坑要站蹬，不能坐死；到门口先按一声铃，别喊，喊哑了嗓子误事。这三条我用了三十年，后来我骑电动车、骑山地车，过的还是这三条。

暑假结束，我送完了整个夏天，认得半条街的人。买馒头的大婶会在车筐里放两个煮鸡蛋，说是谢我雨天也送。开学后周六我还送，一直送到上初中，铺子不干了为止。

馒头铺关那天，我爸把车擦了，推到杂物间。我上高中再没碰过它。前几年老屋翻修，杂物间清空，那辆车当废铁卖了，一百二十块。我爸收钱的时候愣了一下，说：这车送过多少万个馒头了。

我后来吃过很多地方的馒头，没有一家有那个味儿。有一年冬天加班到半夜，路边有个早点摊刚出笼，白汽冒起来老高。我站在摊前买了两个，边走边吃，吃到第二个，眼泪不知怎么就下来了。筐里的馒头一层报纸一层，我送过整个夏天。

The Summer of Delivering Steamed Buns

During the summer vacation of fifth grade, my father, who ran a steamed bun shop, had me learn to ride and deliver buns. Other children learned to ride for play; I learned for work. That is why I learned fast. No riding, no buns to eat. My father said it plainly, and I held onto it.

The bike was the old one from the shop, with two iron frames welded to each side of the rear seat, holding two willow baskets stacked with buns, a sheet of newspaper between each layer. On the first trip my father walked beside me, not holding the bike, just watching. He said: ride slowly; the baskets hold the meal of families, and one fall wipes out the breakfast of a family. For the first time I understood that what my hands gripped was not a toy but the breakfast of some family.

The fall came on the third day. Going downhill I squeezed the brake, squeezed too hard, the front wheel locked, and I pitched over the handlebars, body and bike crashing into the baskets. Buns rolled everywhere; several rolled into the ditch. I squatted to gather them, hands shaking, sorting edible from ruined. The ruined ones I counted: eleven. My father caught up, checked me first, then the buns, and said: leave the ones in the ditch, I will make up the loss at home. That day I paid for eleven buns out of my pocket money, five cents each.

After that my father set three rules: slow down before braking downhill; stand on the pedals over potholes, never sit dead in the saddle; ring once at the door instead of shouting, since a hoarse voice wastes time. I have lived by these three for thirty years. On electric bikes and mountain bikes since, I still ride by them.

When the vacation ended I had delivered the whole summer and knew half the street. The auntie who bought buns would leave two boiled eggs in my basket, saying thanks for delivering even on rainy days. After school started I still delivered on Saturdays, all the way through middle school, until the shop closed for good.

The day the shop shut, my father wiped the bike and pushed it into the storage room. In high school I never touched it again. A few years back, when the old house was renovated, the storage room was cleared and the bike sold for scrap, one hundred twenty yuan. My father paused when taking the money and said: that bike delivered how many tens of thousands of buns.

Since then I have eaten buns in many places; none taste like those. One winter year I worked overtime past midnight, and by the road a breakfast stall had just opened its steamer, white steam rising high. I stood there and bought two, eating as I walked. On the second one, somehow my tears came down. In the baskets, buns under layer after layer of newspaper, I delivered a whole summer.