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.