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.

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