开大车的姥爷

我学骑车是跟姥爷学的。姥爷开了三十年大货车，跑长途，退休那年回家，手里忽然空了，没方向盘可摸了。我六岁生日，他不知从哪推回来一辆小车，车把上系了根红布条。

姥爷教我，满嘴是开大车的词。他管车把叫方向盘，管脚蹬叫油门，管捏闸叫带闸。他说你甭管它晃，大车上了高速也晃，手要松，眼睛放远，看远处，别盯脚底下轮子。我那时小，听不懂高速是什么，只记住了眼睛放远。

摔是在坡底下摔的。小区后头有个缓坡，姥爷不让上坡，说下坡才练人。我下坡带闸，车一抖，我慌了，闸捏死，人从车把上翻出去，下巴磕在马路牙子上，破了皮，血渗出来。我坐在地上等着扶，姥爷不扶，蹲在旁边说：大车翻了司机也不能哭，先检查人，再检查车。我抹了把脸，自己起来，把车扶正，检查了一遍，车把歪了一点点。

姥爷从兜里掏出扳手，把车把拧正，拧完拍拍我的手：记着，摔了不可怕，摔了不知道为啥摔才可怕。你为啥摔，闸捏太死。下次带一点，松一点。我下次真带一点了，车抖但不翻，像骑在一匹闹脾气的小马上。

第七天傍晚，我从坡顶一路滑到坡底，脚没沾地。姥爷在坡底背着手站着，夕阳照着他。他说了句：行了，出徒了。然后从兜里摸出一把水果糖给我，那糖他兜里揣了好几天，糖纸都焐得发软。

姥爷走的那年我上初中。整理他遗物，在他抽屉里发现一个笔记本，前头记的是油钱、过路费，最后一页画着一辆自行车，歪歪扭扭，旁边写着一行字：小车比大车难，娃摔了没哭，好娃。我把那个本子留下了。

如今我开车很多年，上高速真不晃，眼睛放远成了习惯。每次从后视镜里看见后座打盹的孩子，我就想起坡底那个背着手的人。姥爷，你画的那辆小车，我后来骑了很多年，一次也没再翻过。

Grandpa Who Drove Big Trucks

I learned to ride from my grandpa. He drove heavy trucks for thirty years on long routes. The year he retired he came home with empty hands, no steering wheel left to hold. On my sixth birthday he wheeled a small bike in from somewhere, a red cloth strip tied to its handlebars.

He taught me using the language of a truck driver. He called the handlebars the steering wheel, the pedals the throttle, and braking easing onto the brake. He said do not mind the wobble; even a big truck wobbles on the expressway. Keep your hands loose and your eyes far ahead, look far, never stare at the wheel under your feet. I was small then and did not know what an expressway was, but I kept one line: eyes far ahead.

The fall happened at the bottom of a slope. Behind our compound lay a gentle hill. Grandpa forbade riding uphill; only downhill trains a person. Going down I eased the brake, the bike shuddered, I panicked and clamped it shut, and flipped over the handlebars, my chin hitting the curb, skin broken, blood seeping. I sat waiting to be lifted. He did not lift me. He squatted beside me and said: when a truck overturns the driver cannot cry either; check the person first, then the vehicle. I wiped my face, got up myself, righted the bike, and checked it over. The handlebars had bent a hair.

He took a wrench from his pocket and twisted the bars straight, then patted my hand: remember, falling is not frightening; falling without knowing why is frightening. Why did you fall? You clamped the brake shut. Next time ease it, just a little. Next time I did ease it, and the bike shook but did not flip, like riding a sulking little horse.

On the seventh evening I slid from the top of the slope to the bottom without touching my feet down. Grandpa stood at the bottom with his hands behind his back, the setting sun on him. He said one line: all right, you have graduated. Then he fished out a handful of fruit candies from his pocket; they had been in there for days, the wrappers gone soft from his body heat.

The year grandpa died I was in middle school. Sorting his belongings I found a notebook in his drawer. Its early pages recorded fuel money and tolls; the last page held a drawing of a bicycle, crooked and clumsy, with one line beside it: the small bike is harder than the big truck, and the boy fell without crying, good boy. I kept that notebook.

I have driven for many years now, and on the expressway it truly does not wobble; eyes far ahead has become a habit. Every time I see a child dozing on the back seat through the rear mirror, I think of the man standing at the foot of the slope with hands behind his back. Grandpa, that little bike you drew, I have ridden it for many years since, and never once flipped again.