墙角里的旧自行车

今天收拾老屋，在墙角碰倒了一辆自行车。车倒下去的声音很闷，惊得院子里的蝉齐齐哑了一瞬，又一层一层续上。

我扶着车站起来，手心蹭了一层灰。车把歪着，刹车皮硬得像老树皮，车座弹簧的一头戳出来，顶着我的掌心。就是这辆车。

院子里的梧桐今年格外多蝉。空壳还挂在树干上，一捏，脆得掉渣。小时候不觉得蝉多，只觉得傍晚来得慢。太阳落到房后要用很久，蝉就等在那段时间里，一开嗓，整条巷子都是它们的。

那年夏天也是傍晚学车。我在这辆车前学会的平衡，是在这个院子里绕出来的。先绕梧桐，再绕井台，后来绕整个院子。爸爸站在哪儿我都看得见，他一站定，背对着西晒的墙，影子斜斜地铺过来，铺到我的脚边。

他的背宽。这是小时候的看法。他背我去看过电影，背过一袋五十斤的面粉上五楼，背弓着，脖子往前探，像一只扛重物的老牛。我趴在那个背上，觉得天塌下来也有他顶着。

学车那些傍晚，那个背一直在车后头。摔了，它蹲下来；稳了，它直起来小跑。蝉把傍晚叫得发烫，他的汗把工装后背洇出一圈白边，我坐在后座上扶着他的腰，指头能摸到那块布硬硬的盐渍。

学会以后，我再没坐过后座。他也不再扶车。有一回我骑得飞快，从巷口冲回家，刹住车回头，看见他还站在巷口的老槐树底下，背对着我，望着别处，好像根本没看。后来我妈说，你爸那几天天天去巷口站着，看你骑过去，再走回来。

车在墙角立了很多年。我上中学换了新车，大学回来它就在杂物间，再后来搬进老屋墙角。链条锈死，铃铛哑了，谁也没扔。我爸说留着吧，占不了地方。

蝉还在叫。我推着这辆锈车在院子里支起来，试着蹬了一圈。链条不动，脚踏板空转，车晃了两下，我用脚撑住了。四十年过去，平衡还在腿上，扶车的人却不在了。

我把车擦了一遍，擦不掉锈，就把车把扶正，让它重新立稳在墙角。蝉声从梧桐那边一阵一阵涌过来，像很多年前的傍晚，整条巷子都在给一辆车让路。

有些东西锈在角落里，不是没用了。它立在那儿，夏天就认得回来的路。

The Old Bicycle in the Corner of the Wall

Today while clearing out the old house, I knocked over a bicycle in the corner of the wall. It fell with a dull thud that startled the cicadas in the courtyard into one instant of silence, after which their song layered back up, layer by layer.

I straightened up holding the frame, my palm coated in dust. The handlebar was bent, the brake pads hard as old bark, and one end of the seat spring poked out and pressed into my palm. This was the bicycle.

This year the courtyard plane tree holds an unusual number of cicadas. Their empty shells still hang on the trunk; squeeze one and it crumbles to flakes. As a child I never thought there were many cicadas — only that evening came slowly. The sun took a long time to sink behind the rooftops, and the cicadas waited inside that stretch of time, and once they opened their throats, the whole lane belonged to them.

I learned balance on that bicycle one such summer, circling it around this courtyard. First around the plane tree, then around the well, then around the whole courtyard. Wherever my father stood, I could see him. Once he planted himself, his back to the west-facing wall, his shadow slanted across the ground to my feet.

His back was broad. That was the verdict of a child. He carried me to the movies on it, carried a fifty-jin sack of flour up five flights of stairs, back bowed, neck reaching forward, like an old ox under a heavy load. Flat on that back, I felt that even if the sky fell, he would hold it up.

On those evenings of practice, that back was always behind the bicycle. When I fell, it crouched down; when I steadied, it straightened and jogged. The cicadas made the evening hot with their noise, and his sweat ringed the back of his jacket with white salt. Sitting on the rear seat holding his waist, my fingers could feel the stiff salt stains in the cloth.

After I learned, I never sat on the rear seat again, and he never held the bicycle again. Once I rode home fast, charging from the mouth of the lane, and when I braked and looked back, he was still standing under the old locust tree at the lane mouth, his back to me, looking elsewhere, as if he had not watched at all. Years later my mother told me that for days he had stood at the lane mouth every day, watching me ride past, then walking home.

The bicycle stood in corners for years. I got a new one in middle school; when I came back for university it was in the storage room, and later it moved into the corner of this old house. The chain rusted solid, the bell went mute, and nobody threw it away. My father said, keep it, it takes up no room.

The cicadas are still singing. I propped the rusted bicycle up in the courtyard and tried one lap. The chain would not move; the pedals spun empty; the bicycle wobbled twice and my foot caught it. Forty years on, the balance is still in my legs, but the one who held the seat is gone.

I wiped the bicycle down. The rust would not come off, so I straightened the handlebar and let it stand upright in the corner again. The cicada song surged in wave after wave from the plane tree, like an evening many years ago when the whole lane was making way for a bicycle.

Some things rust in a corner not because they are useless. They stand there, and

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summer knows the road back.