蝉声里的链条声

多年以后我才明白，那个夏天最响的不是蝉，是链条。

蝉是从傍晚开始叫的。太阳一落到房后，梧桐树上的蝉就接力似的，一声接一声，把整条巷子叫得又稠又厚。我们家的院子在巷子中段，蝉声落进来，落在井台的水渍上，落在那辆立着的自行车上。

车是白天的，练是傍晚的。白天太毒，柏油路晒得发软，脚踩上去黏鞋底。爸爸收工回来，天边的云还烧着半边，他洗了手，把车扶正，说，走。

他扶着后座，我在前面蹬。巷子两边的墙把傍晚的风拢成一条，从背后推我的背。蝉在头顶叫，叫得越凶，我蹬得越快，好像快一点就能甩开什么。

甩不开的是摔。有一回压到井台的边，膝盖磕在石条上。蝉声停了一拍——其实没停，是我耳朵里空了一拍。爸爸蹲下来，卷起我的裤腿看，他的背对着西边的天，把那半边的光都挡住了。

那是我第一次注意到他的背。工装的后背有一块洗不掉的深色，汗湿了又干，干了又湿，盐渍出一圈白边。他蹲着的时候，背弓起来，像一截压弯了的扁担。

歇了不到一支烟的工夫，他把车提起来，说接着练。蝉又叫密了。我跨上去，他扶着，我们沿着巷子往深处去，路灯一盏一盏亮起来，把两个人的影子拉长，又叠在一起。

他松手是在哪一盏灯底下，我记不清了。只记得有一盏灯，我的影子单独在地上晃，晃着晃着就直了。他在后面小跑，脚步声混在蝉声里，由近到远，又由远追近。

学会那晚，我骑到巷口又骑回来。蝉声从四面八方涌过来，梧桐叶子在灯影里翻出银背。爸爸站在院门口，没鼓掌，也没喊，他点着一根烟，背对着门口的光，看车灯照过来的那一线。

烟头一明一灭。他的背在门框里立着，不知什么时候，那背没有白天蹲下时看着那么宽了。

后来我去了很远的地方上学，夏天听见蝉，别人听见的是热，我听见的是链条声，是蝉声缝里夹着的脚步声。有一年暑假回去，巷子拆了半边，梧桐还在，蝉还在叫。爸爸从车棚里推出一辆旧车，链条早锈死了，他说，你如今骑车，我反而不敢看了。

我知道他不敢看的是什么。他见过我摔在井台边的那一晚，也见过一盏灯底下影子单独晃起来的那一晚。蝉不懂这些，蝉只管叫，把每一个夏天都叫成那个夏天的样子。

车轮碾过的那个夏天没有回来过。可每年蝉一开口，它就整个回来了：傍晚的风、井台的水渍、工装后背的白盐边，还有门框里那个看车灯照过来的背影。

The Sound of the Chain Inside the Cicada Song

It was only years later that I understood: the loudest thing in that summer was

not the cicadas but the chain.

The cicadas began at dusk. The moment the sun dropped behind the rooftops, the cicadas in the plane trees took up the call one after another, until the whole lane grew thick and heavy with sound. Our courtyard sat in the middle of the lane, and the cicada song fell into it — onto the water stains at the well, onto the bicycle standing there.

The bicycle belonged to the daytime, but we practiced at dusk. The middle of the day was too fierce; the asphalt softened in the sun and stuck to your shoes. When my father came home from work, half the sky still burning with cloud, he washed his hands, straightened the bicycle, and said, let us go.

He held the back of the seat while I pedaled ahead. The walls on both sides of the lane gathered the evening wind into a single stream that pushed my back from behind. The cicadas screamed overhead, and the fiercer they screamed, the faster I pedaled, as if going faster could shake off something.

What could not be shaken off was falling. Once I clipped the edge of the well and my knee struck the stone slab. The cicada song paused for a beat — it had not actually stopped; it was my ears that went empty for a beat. My father crouched and rolled up my trouser leg to look, his back turned to the western sky, blocking off all its light.

That was the first time I noticed his back. There was a dark patch on the back of his work jacket that no washing removed — sweat wet it and dried it, wet it and dried it, until a white rim of salt bloomed around it. Crouching, his back arched like a carrying pole bent under a load.

He rested less than the time it takes to smoke one cigarette, then lifted the bicycle and said, keep going. The cicadas had thickened again. I swung over the seat, he held on, and we rode deeper into the lane while the streetlamps came on one by one, stretching our two shadows long and then folding them together.

I cannot remember under which lamp he let go. I only remember one lamp under which my shadow wobbled on the ground alone — wobbling, wobbling, and then going straight. He was jogging behind me, his footsteps mixed into the cicada song, near, then far, then catching up again.

The evening I finally learned, I rode to the mouth of the lane and back. The cicada song surged in from all directions, and the plane tree leaves turned over silver backs in the lamplight. My father stood at the courtyard gate, neither clapping nor calling out. He lit a cigarette, his back to the light of the doorway, watching the thin line of my headlamp coming toward him.

www.vv99.net

The tip of the cigarette brightened and dimmed. His back stood framed in the doorway, and at some point it no longer looked as broad as it had when he crouched in the daylight.

Later I went far away to study. In summer, when others hear cicadas they hear the heat; I hear the chain, and footsteps stitched into the cicada song. One summer I went home and found half the lane demolished, though the plane tree remained and the cicadas still sang. My father wheeled an old bicycle out of the shed, its chain long rusted solid, and said that now when you ride, I am the one who dares not watch.

I knew what he dared not watch. He had seen me fall at the edge of the well, and he had seen a shadow wobble straight alone under a lamp. Cicadas understand none of this. They only sing, calling every summer back into the shape of that summer.

The summer the wheels rolled over never came back. But every year the moment the cicadas open their mouths, it returns entire: the evening wind, the water stains at the well, the white salt rim on the back of the work jacket, and the back in the doorway watching my headlamp approach.

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 summer knows the road back.

眼睛往前，别捏死闸

我们那条巷子，夏天是被蝉叫醒的，也是被蝉哄睡的。清晨一声，傍晚一片，夜里它们累了，就剩零星几嗓，像谁在很远的地方咳嗽。

蝉最凶的时候是学车那年八月。梧桐的叶子被晒得打了卷，蝉不管，趴在叶背上一个劲地叫，叫得空气都发颤。傍晚暑气一退，蝉声反而更密，密得像有人把整条巷子的声音都搅在了一起。

爸爸就是在那个声音里教我骑车的。他话少，扶车也只说几个字：眼睛往前。别捏死闸。身子别僵。蝉声太大，他喊这几个字都得费力气，所以我听得格外清楚，后来每个字都长在了身上。

头些天是他扶。后来他半扶半松。再后来，有一回我骑完一整条巷子回头，看见他站在井台边，背对着我，正弯腰系鞋带。他根本就没扶。

我冲回去喊他，他直起身，把背手在裤腿上蹭了蹭，说，我系我的鞋带，你骑你的车。说完

他转身往家走，走在前面，背在路灯底下晃。那个背不算好看，工装空落落的，肩一边高一边低，是常年扛东西扛斜的。

我推着车跟在他后面。蝉在头顶一路陪着，从井台陪到院门口。他的影子在前头一长一短，我踩着他的影子走，踩了一路。

那天夜里我躺在凉席上，蝉还在叫。我翻来覆去地想他那个背影，想他什么时候松的手，想他系鞋带的手是不是在抖。想着想着就睡着了，梦里我又骑了一遍那条巷子，蝉声让开一条路，两头都是他。

后来我骑车去了镇上读中学，周末骑回来，巷子口的蝉一听见链条声就炸开，像列队迎接。爸爸不站在巷口了，他站在院门口，一听见动静就转身进灶房，端出饭来。他不说骑得好，只说今天回来得早。

再后来巷子装了路灯，梧桐砍了一半，蝉一年比一年少。爸爸老了，背真的驼了，弯腰系鞋带要扶住膝盖才能起来。我扶过他一次，他躲开，自己慢慢站直，说，这腰还不如自行车好使。

今年夏天回去，我在巷子里骑了一圈旧车。蝉从残存的梧桐上应了一声，只应了一声。骑到井台边我停下来，井填了，井台的石条还在，边上一道旧磕痕，是我那年摔上去的。

我在那道磕痕边上坐了一会儿。蝉声稀稀拉拉，风还是傍晚的风。我知道有些东西散了就是散了，可它们散在声音里——蝉一叫，那个扶着车的、背手蹭裤腿的、肩一边高一边低的背影，就又站在井台边上了。

Eyes Forward, Do Not Clamp the Brake

Our lane was woken by cicadas in summer and lulled to sleep by them too. One cry at dawn, a whole sheet at dusk, and at night when they tired, only a few scattered throats remained, like someone coughing far away.

The fiercest cicadas came the August I learned to ride. The plane tree leaves curled in the heat, but the cicadas paid no mind; flat on the undersides of the leaves they screamed until the air itself trembled. When the heat retreated at dusk their song only thickened, so dense it seemed someone had stirred all the sounds of the lane into one pot.

It was inside that sound that my father taught me to ride. He was a man of few words, and holding the bicycle he said only a handful of them: eyes forward. Do not clamp the brake. Do not stiffen up. The cicadas were so loud that he had to force those words out, so I heard each one with special clarity, and later every one of them grew into my bones.

For the first days he held on. Then he half-held, half-let-go. Then one time I rode the whole length of the lane and turned around to see him standing by the well,

his back to me, bending down to tie his shoelace. He had not been holding at all.

I pedaled back and called to him. He straightened up, wiped the backs of his hands on his trouser legs, and said, I was tying my shoe, you were riding your bicycle. Then he turned and walked home ahead of me, his back swinging under the streetlamp. That back was not a handsome sight — the work jacket hung loose on it, one shoulder higher than the other from years of carrying loads askew.

I walked behind him pushing the bicycle. The cicadas accompanied us overhead all the way from the well to the courtyard gate. His shadow stretched and shortened in front of me, and I stepped on it the whole way home.

That night I lay on the cool mat while the cicadas still sang. I turned the image of his receding back over and over in my mind — when exactly he had let go, whether the hands tying that shoelace had been shaking. Somewhere in the turning I fell asleep, and in the dream I rode that lane again, the cicada song parting to make a road, and at both ends of it stood my father.

Later I rode a bicycle to the town middle school, and on weekends I rode home. The cicadas at the lane mouth would erupt at the sound of my chain, like a formed guard of honor. My father no longer stood at the lane mouth; he stood at the courtyard gate, and at the first sound he would turn and go into the kitchen and bring out the meal. He never said I rode well. He only said you came home early today.

Later still, the lane got streetlamps, half the plane trees were cut down, and the cicadas thinned year by year. My father grew old, and his back truly hunched; to bend down and tie a shoelace he had to brace a hand on his knee to rise again. I tried to help him up once; he dodged my hand, straightened slowly by himself, and said this waist of mine works worse than a bicycle.

This summer when I went back, I rode the old bicycle one lap through the lane. The cicadas on the surviving plane tree answered once — only once. I stopped at the well. The well had been filled in, but its stone curb remained, and along its edge was an old scrape mark, made the year I fell onto it.

I sat by that scrape for a while. The cicada song was sparse now, but the wind was still the evening wind. I know some things scatter and are gone for good, but they scatter into sound — the moment a cicada sings, the back that held the bicycle, that wiped itself on trouser legs, whose shoulders sat one high and one low, is standing by the well again.