二八杠与坡底的人

家里那辆旧单车是二八杠，黑色的，横梁又高又粗，骑上去得从底下掏腿过去。爸爸那代人一人一辆，凤凰或者永久，车铃一按，整栋宿舍楼都听得见。

我上小学四年级那年，个子刚够到车座。掏腿过去的时候，裤脚得先掖进袜子，不然卷进链条，一截布就绞烂了。这是学车前就学会的事。

学车是在家属院的坡道上。爸爸不扶，只站在坡底。他说这车沉，摔不坏，摔了也疼得慢。他让我从坡上往下溜，不用蹬，顺着坡把车把稳住就行。

头几回，车把跟着一边倒，我抱着车坐在坡上，人车叠在一起，谁也不重，就是起不来。爸爸在坡底下不动，喊，先下车，把车扶正，再掏腿。每次都这一套。

溜到第十几回，我能在坡上直着下来了。爸爸又说，那蹬两下试试。下坡的风托着车，我蹬了两下，链条哗啦一响，那个响法跟现在变速车不一样，是铁的、整的、实心的响。

学会那天我没告诉任何人，自己绕着家属院骑了一圈。二八杠压过减速带，车把震得手心发麻。路过传达室，看门的老李头说，哟，会骑了。我装没听见，蹬得更快，耳朵却支棱着。

那辆车后来又骑了很多年。后座带过我姐，前梁带过我妈赶集买的白菜，车筐里装过蜂窝煤。链条上过无数次油，焊过两次后叉，焊点鼓起来，像两块疤。

我上高中那年搬了家，新家有车棚，旧单车立在最里头。新自行车一辆一辆买，二八杠就一年一年靠墙。毕业工作以后回去看过它两回，它还在，轮胎瘪着，辐条断了两根。

前年爸爸打电话说，老李头没了，传达室拆了，那辆二八杠也让收废品的蹬走了，八斤铁，按斤称的。他说这话的时候在笑，笑完停了一会儿，说，你小时候就骑它。

我也停了一会儿。我想起的不是学会那天的风，是坡底下那个不动的人。他站在坡底，看我摔了十几回，一次也没上来扶，一次也没喊错那三句话：先下车，把车扶正，再掏腿。

如今街上全是轻的、小的、能折叠的车，谁也不用掏腿了。可我这辈子骑过的最沉的一辆车，压过减速带会震到手心，链条响得像一整块铁在唱歌。它按斤称出去的那天，我爸在电话里沉默的那一会儿，比那辆车的链条声还响。

The Twenty-Eight-Inch Bicycle and the Man at the Bottom of the Slope

The old bicycle at home was a twenty-eight-inch model for men: black, with a crossbar so high and thick that you had to swing your leg under it to get on. Every man in the generation of my father owned one — Phoenix or Forever brand — and one press of the bell could be heard through the whole dormitory building.

The year I entered fourth grade, my height barely reached the seat. When swinging

under the bar, you had to tuck your trouser cuffs into your socks first, or they would catch in the chain and a strip of cloth would be shredded to rags. That was a lesson learned even before learning to ride.

I learned on the slope inside the family compound. My father did not hold the bicycle; he only stood at the bottom of the slope. He said this bicycle is heavy, it will not crush you, and when it falls it hurts slowly. He told me to coast down from the top without pedaling, just keeping the handlebar steady with the slope running under me.

For the first several tries the handlebar tipped to one side, and I sat on the slope hugging the bicycle, man and machine piled together, neither one heavy, just impossible to get up from. My father stayed put at the bottom and called out: get off first, straighten the bicycle, then swing your leg under again. The same sequence every time.

Around the fifteenth coast, I came down the slope straight. My father said, now try pedaling twice. The downhill wind carried the bicycle; I pedaled twice, and the chain roared once. That sound was nothing like a modern geared bicycle — it was the sound of iron, whole and solid.

The day I finally learned, I told no one. I rode one lap around the compound by myself. The twenty-eight-inch tires thumped over the speed bump, and the handlebar jolted my palms numb. Passing the gatehouse, Old Li the caretaker said, oh, you can ride now. I pretended not to hear and pedaled faster, but my ears stood wide open.

That bicycle was ridden for many years after. The rear seat carried my sister; the top tube carried the cabbage my mother bought at the market; the front basket carried honeycomb briquettes. Its chain was oiled countless times, and its rear forks were welded twice, the welds bulging like two scars.

The year I entered high school we moved, and the new place had a shed where the old bicycle stood at the very back. New bicycles were bought one after another, and the twenty-eight-inch model leaned further against the wall each year. After graduation and work I visited it twice; it was still there, tires flat, two spokes broken.

The year before last my father phoned to say that Old Li had died, the gatehouse had been demolished, and the old twenty-eight-inch bicycle had been taken away by the scrap collector — eight jin of iron, sold by weight. He was laughing as he said it, then paused after the laugh and said: you rode that bicycle when you were little.

I paused too. What came back to me was not the wind of the day I learned, but the man who stood still at the bottom of the slope. He stood there and watched me fall a dozen times, never once coming up to hold the bicycle, never once getting those three

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instructions wrong: get off first, straighten the bicycle, then swing your leg under.

Now the streets are full of bicycles that are light, small, foldable, and nobody swings under a crossbar anymore. But the heaviest bicycle I ever rode thumped my palms numb over speed bumps, and its chain rang like a single slab of iron singing. The day it was sold by weight, the pause my father made on the phone was louder than that chain.