二十岁那年的哑铃旧车

我二十一岁才学会骑自行车。这事在我们家说了很多年，每次说，我姐都笑，笑完补一句：山里出来的娃，不会骑才正常。我们村到公社那条路全是石头，自行车进去出不来，我整个小学都没见过几辆。

中考那年我考进了县城的中学。开学第一个月，同学们骑车上下学，铃一按就过去了，我走路，单程四十分钟。同宿舍的春霞看不下去，把她家那辆旧单车借给我，让我周末学。

那是一辆很旧的单车，挡泥板缺了后半截，车座里头的弹簧顶出来一小截，坐上去硌，车铃按下去是哑的。春霞说这车是她爸淘汰下来的，沉，但稳，适合生手。

学车在学校后面的土路上。那条路通后山，坡长，边上有人开的小块菜地。春霞在后头扶着后座架，我蹬，她跑。头一个下午，她扶了我几十回，我歪了几十回，菜地里拔草的老汉直往这边看。

我摔得不算重，膝盖和手肘蹭破了皮。丢人的是有一回车往菜地里去，我宁肯摔也没敢压那畦苗。春霞说，你怕车倒，就永远骑不会。我说我不是怕车倒，我是怕后头没人扶。

春霞想了个办法。她说她扶，跑到一半松手，让我自己蹬，蹬出去就算数。头两回我回头看了，她站在原地冲我摆手。再上去那回我没回头，蹬出去半条坡，风从耳朵边上过，我才反应过来：车是自己走的。

学会那个傍晚，我在坡顶上坐了很久。不是高兴，是想哭。春霞过来问我哭什么，我说不出个所以然。二十一年里别人都会而我不会的事，我头一回觉得，它真的可以只是不会，然后会。

后来我骑得很顺了，周末骑车回二十里外的村。缺半截的挡泥板甩泥点子，甩我一裤腿，弹簧硌得我换着姿势坐。那两年我骑坏了那辆车的内胎，补了四回，春霞她爸一分钱没收我的。

毕业那年春天，车在校门口让人骑走了，没偷头，车筐里还放着春霞的围巾。春霞没骂，只说，旧车嘛，谁都需要它。好像它完成了一件事，就该走。

前年我教我女儿学车，她七岁，车是带辅助轮的轻车，摔了也不狠。我扶着后座跑，跑着跑着忽然想起春霞松手的那个坡，想起自己二十岁那回没回头。我女儿骑出去以后回头喊妈妈，我冲她摆手，跟当年春霞一个样。

我如今出门还是很少骑车，地铁和公交快得多。可我这辈子记得最牢的一辆车，是辆挡泥板缺一截、铃是哑的旧单车。它让我知道，有些东西学得晚，不是缺陷，只是每个人有自己的坡。我女儿七岁就会的事我二十岁才会，可我骑出去那天，风跟她那天的风是一样的。

The Dull-Belled Old Bicycle of My Twentieth Year

I did not learn to ride a bicycle until I was twenty-one. Our family talked about it for years; every time, my elder sister laughed and then added: a child from the mountains — it is normal not to ride. The road from our village to the township was

all stone; a bicycle could go in and not come out. Through all of primary school I had seen only a few bicycles.

The year of the entrance exam I got into a middle school in the county seat. In the first month, my classmates rode bicycles to and from school, pressing the bell as they went by; I walked, forty minutes each way. My roommate Chunxia could not stand watching it, and lent me the old bicycle of her family, telling me to learn on weekends.

It was a very old bicycle: the rear half of its mudguard was missing, the spring inside the seat poked out a small tip and bruised you, and its bell made a muffled, mute sound when pressed. Chunxia said it was the bicycle her father had retired from use — heavy, but steady, fit for a beginner.

I learned on the dirt road behind the school. That road led to the back mountain, long in slope, with small vegetable plots opened along its edge. Chunxia held the rear rack while I pedaled and she ran. On that first afternoon she steadied me dozens of times and I wobbled dozens of times, and the old man weeding in the plots kept looking over at us.

My falls were not serious — scraped knees and elbows. The shameful part was once when the bicycle headed into the vegetable plot, and I chose to fall rather than run over that row of seedlings. Chunxia said: if you fear the bicycle tipping, you will never learn. I said: I do not fear the tipping; I fear there being no one behind me holding on.

Chunxia thought of a method. She would hold on, let go halfway while running, and let me pedal on my own — if I rode out, it counted. The first two times I looked back, and she was standing where she had been, waving at me. On the next try I did not look back. I pedaled out along half the slope, the wind passing along my ears, and only then did it strike me: the bicycle was going by itself.

On that evening when I finally learned, I sat a long time at the top of the slope. It was not joy; it was that I wanted to cry. Chunxia came over and asked what I was crying about, and I could not explain. Among all the things other people could do and I could not, in twenty-one years, this was the first time I felt that not-knowing could really just be not-knowing — and then knowing.

After that I rode smoothly, cycling home on weekends to the village twenty li away. The half-missing mudguard flung mud spots all down one leg of my trousers, and the spring made me shift sitting positions constantly. In those two years I wore out inner tubes on that bicycle, patched it four times, and the father of Chunxia never took a single cent from me.

In the spring of graduation year, the bicycle was ridden away from the school

gate — no lock cut, and the scarf of Chunxia was still in its basket. Chunxia did not scold anyone; she only said: it was an old bicycle, everyone needed one at some point. As if once it had finished its one job, it was due to go.

The year before last I taught my own daughter to ride. She is seven, on a light bicycle with training wheels, and her falls are gentle. I held the rear seat and ran, and running, I suddenly remembered that slope where Chunxia let go, and my own twentieth year when I did not look back. After my daughter rode out she turned and called for me; I waved at her, exactly the way Chunxia once waved.

I still rarely ride out these days; the metro and buses are far faster. But the bicycle I remember most firmly in this life had half a mudguard missing and a mute bell. It taught me that learning something late is not a flaw — everyone has their own slope. What my daughter can do at seven I could only do at twenty, yet on the day I rode out, the wind was the same wind as hers.

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