旧货市场里的焊疤

旧货市场在河坝后面，礼拜天清早开集，摆到晌午就散。摊位挨着摊位，卖收音机的、卖暖水瓶的、卖一捆一捆旧电线按斤拆铜的。我在最里头那排看见一辆老式单车，黑漆掉了大半，露出底下的铁锈色，后轮上方焊过两块铁片，焊点鼓着，像两块疤。

摊主是个瘦老头，坐在小马扎上抽烟。我蹲下去看那焊口，手艺很老，铁片裁得方方正正，四角都磨圆了再焊上去。老头说，这车收来十几年了，没人要，链条还是原厂的，沉是沉，骑不坏。

我认得这种焊法。我们家属院门口修车的孙师傅就这么补后叉：先找一块废内胎皮垫着，铁片四角磨圆，焊完拿锉刀把鼓包锉平一半，留一半，他说留着是记号，下次哪儿再裂，一看就知道是他补过的地方。

我小时候那辆学车用的车，就是孙师傅给补过后叉的。那是舅舅借来的一辆旧车，车座最高也压不到我的腰。学车就在河坝底下的空地上，河风把沙子一层一层推着走。舅舅扶着后座跑，跑得比他年纪该有的样子快。

有一回我听见后头没脚步声了，回头一看，他站在十几步开外，两只手插在腰上。我那一慌，车一歪，膝盖磕在沙地上，破了。我没哭，爬起来把车扶正。舅舅也不扶，只说，再来，眼睛看河对岸，别看脚底下。

就是在河坝底下学会的。学会那个傍晚，我骑得不快，链子哗啦哗啦地响，舅舅跟在后面走，一路没说话，回家路上他一直笑，笑到进院门才收住。那辆车后来生了锈，舅舅把它卖了，说是卖给收旧货的。

十几年过去，河坝还在，坝底下的空地划了停车位。孙师傅的修车摊早没了，听说回了老家。我站在摊前问那辆车多少钱。老头伸出一根指头，又补一句，不便宜，沉。我说，沉的好，沉的压得住道。

老头把车立起来递给我。我跨上去在市场的土路上试了两圈，车把沉，刹车也沉，捏下去整辆车都跟着慢下来，不像现在的车，一捏就停，停得冒失。骑旧车得像哄着一个脾气老的人，你得慢慢来，他才肯走。

我到底没买那辆车。我蹬着它回到摊前，跟老头说，我买它也没地方放。老头说，那你问它做啥。我说不出口：我就是想再看看孙师傅那种焊法，再看一眼，就知道这世上真有过那样补过的东西，也有过那样扶着我跑的人。

如今我出门骑的是轻便车，折叠的，锁都是密码的。可我记得的分量全是沉的：二八杠压过减速带的手心，河坝底下那辆借来的旧车，还有舅舅插着腰站在十几步外的那双手。沉的东西压得住道，人也一样。

The Weld Scars at the Flea Market

The flea market sat behind the river embankment. It opened on Sunday mornings and

was cleared away by noon. Stalls pressed against stalls: radios, thermos flasks, bundles of old wire sold by weight for the copper inside. In the back row I saw an old-fashioned bicycle, its black paint flaked off over most of the frame, rust-brown showing through, with two iron patches welded above the rear wheel, the welds bulging like two scars.

The seller was a skinny old man smoking on a small stool. I crouched to look at the welds. The work was of the old school: the iron patches cut square, all four corners rounded before welding. The old man said this bicycle had been collected over a decade ago and nobody wanted it; the chain was still original; heavy, yes, but it would not break.

I recognized this welding style. Master Sun, the repairman at the gate of our family compound, patched rear forks exactly like this: first a scrap of inner tube as a pad, the corners of the iron patch rounded, then after welding he filed half of the bulge flat and left half, he said, as a mark, so that next time something cracked, one glance showed it was his repair.

The bicycle I learned on as a child had its rear fork patched by Master Sun. It was an old bicycle borrowed from my uncle, with the seat raised to its highest and still below my waist. I learned on the open ground under the embankment, where the river wind pushed the sand along in layers. My uncle held the rear seat and ran, faster than a man of his age should.

Once I heard no footsteps behind me, and when I looked back he was standing fifteen paces away with both hands on his hips. In that panic the bicycle tipped and my knee struck the sand and scraped open. I did not cry. I got up and straightened the bicycle. My uncle did not help me up either; he only said: again, keep your eyes on the far bank, not on your feet.

That was where I learned to ride. On the evening I finally managed it, I rode slowly, the chain clattering, and my uncle walked behind me the whole way without a word; he kept smiling all the way home and only stopped smiling when we passed through the courtyard gate. Years later the bicycle rusted through, and my uncle sold it, he said, to the old-collections dealer.

Decades have passed. The embankment is still there, and the open ground beneath it has been painted into parking spaces. the repair stall of Master Sun is long gone; I heard he moved back to his hometown. I stood at the stall and asked the old man how much for the bicycle. He held up one finger, then added: not cheap, it is heavy. I said: heavy is good, heavy holds the road.

The old man stood the bicycle up and handed it to me. I swung over and tested it twice on the dirt lane of the market. The handlebar was heavy, the brakes were heavy;

squeeze them and the whole bicycle slowed down along with you, unlike modern bicycles that stop the instant you touch them, stopping so abruptly it feels rude. Riding an old bicycle is like coaxing an old-tempered person: only if you take it slowly will it agree to go.

In the end I did not buy it. I pedaled it back to the stall and told the old man I would have nowhere to keep it. He said: then why ask about it. I could not answer: I only wanted to look once more at the welding style of Master Sun, look once more and know that things patched that way really existed in this world, and so did the people who ran while holding me up.

Nowadays I ride a light folding bicycle with a combination lock. But every weight I remember is heavy: the palms jolted by a twenty-eight-inch tire crossing a speed bump, the borrowed old bicycle under the embankment, and the hands of my uncle standing fifteen paces away with arms crossed. Heavy things hold the road — and so do people.