护腕与三米

女儿七岁生日的前一天，我带她去了一趟车行，又去了一趟体育用品店。体育用品店的老板推荐一整套护具，护腕、护肘、护膝，全要，说孩子摔起来不含糊。我挑了护腕和护膝，护肘没要。头盔是女儿自己抱住的，粉色的，不肯放。老板说头盔不能买大，大了晃，真摔的时候护不住，他帮我们把旋钮拧到两根手指刚好塞不进去。

学车就在我们小区的广场上。车是表哥家孩子淘汰下来的，辅助轮拆了，车座压到最低，女儿坐上去，脚尖刚好点着地。她先没哭，只问了一句，会倒吗。我说会倒，倒就是学。

我全程弯腰扶着后座架。扶了半个下午，腰就直不起来了。广场上有个遛鸟的老头看了一会儿，说，你这样扶，等于你在骑。他教我手别碰车，去抓孩子后领，轻轻抓着，人往哪边歪，往另一边带一带就行。我换了法子，女儿说，这个好，我感觉得到你，你又没管我。

女儿的进步是按米数的。头一个下午，两米。再一个下午，五米。我站在广场那头喊，再来三米，她就蹬出三米停下来，我隔着整个广场喊好。散步的人都回头看我。

她问我，你怎么一直不松手。我说，松过好几回了，你不知道哪回松的。她想了想，说，那你再松一回。

学会那个下午，她绕着广场骑了一圈，风把裙角吹起来。她停在我跟前，一直说，我会了我会了。我说，我看见了。我的手还往前伸着，虚虚地抓着一个后领的形状。

护腕后来收起来了，上面一道磕痕都没有。护膝磨穿了一小块，就是摔在广场砖上的那一下。女儿现在上五年级，自己骑车上学，粉色头盔还挂在门后的钩子上，每次出门自己戴上，自己把旋钮拧两下。

大人总说要夸孩子，要会说话。我不太会说，那个下午用到的话，拢共就是好和再来三米。可女儿都记得。有一回写作文，她写她的第一辆车，写的全是那三米。

The Wrist Guard and Three Meters

The day before the seventh birthday of my daughter, I took her first to a bicycle shop and then to a sporting-goods store. The shopkeeper recommended a full set of protectors — wrists, elbows, knees, all of them — saying children fall hard. I chose the wrist guards and the knee pads and skipped the elbow ones. The helmet my daughter hugged to herself and refused to put back: pink. The shopkeeper said a helmet must not be bought large, because a loose one wobbles and protects nothing in a real fall, and he turned the dial for us until two fingers just failed to fit in.

We learned on the plaza of our residential compound. The bicycle was one handed down from a child of my cousin, training wheels removed, seat pushed to its lowest, so that my daughter sat with her toes just touching the ground. She did not cry at first; she only asked one question: will it fall? I said: it will fall, and falling

is the learning.

I bent over holding the rear rack the whole time, and by late afternoon my back could not straighten. An old man walking his caged bird watched for a while and said: holding like that means you are the one riding. He taught me to keep my hands off the bicycle and instead lightly grip the collar at the back of her neck — if she leaned one way, just guide her gently the other way. I switched methods, and my daughter said: this is better, I can feel you, but you are not controlling me.

Her progress was measured in meters. The first afternoon: two meters. The next afternoon: five. I stood at the far end of the plaza and shouted, three more meters, and she pedaled out three meters and stopped, and I shouted good from across the whole plaza. People out for a walk turned to look at me.

She asked me why I never let go. I said: I have let go many times, you just do not know which times. She thought about it and said: then let go one more time.

On the afternoon she finally rode, she made one lap of the plaza, the wind lifting the hem of her skirt. She stopped in front of me and kept saying: I can do it, I can do it. I said: I saw. My hand was still stretched forward, faintly gripping the shape of a collar.

The wrist guards were put away afterward, without a single scuff on them. One knee pad had worn through a small patch — that was the fall on the paving bricks of the plaza. My daughter is now in fifth grade and cycles to school by herself; the pink helmet still hangs on the hook behind the door, and every time she goes out she puts it on herself and twists the dial twice.

Adults always say one should praise children, should know what to say. I am not good at talking. The words I used that afternoon amounted to little more than good and three more meters. But my daughter remembers them all. Once, writing a composition about her first bicycle, what she wrote about was entirely those three meters.

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