

Excerpt from MY LUCKY FACE

I've often thought if not for my Flying Pigeon, I would surely have gone mad. Sure, it wasn't the most fashionable brand anymore, sturdy with thick steel pipes when light and sleek was in style, black instead of bright pink or red like the lucky money envelopes only children used to covet. These things mattered so much, it seemed—color, style, brands, auspicious names like Forever or Phoenix, even an Eagle or a cheap Swan were better than the Pigeon in some people's eyes. Small people.

But my bike was strong, durable. My stalwart ally, when the silence of my apartment became too much to bear, the walls too close, even for me, so strong usually.

We'd ridden enough miles to have crossed the country by now, if such a thing were possible by bicycle. Perhaps a foreigner will do it one of these days. There was always one of them in the news accomplishing yet another strange first—first to skateboard on the Great Wall, first to kayak on the Yellow River, first to hang glide off Mount Tai. Why not ride across China on a bicycle? If you had the time.

I had plenty of good times with my Pigeon. I didn't mean to complain. During my engagement, as I rode side by side with Shao Hong at midnight, steering with one hand, holding his hand with the other, my black Pigeon truly flew through the night air. During my pregnancy, the two of us mastered the potholes together, slowly. We fixed a special child's seat on the crossbar, perfect for my son, and before he left for school, I used to take him on long rides through my city, pointing out the sights.

But lately, in the last few years of my marriage, it seemed I depended on my Pigeon more and more often to get me through the rough times, the sad and lonely times, when I took to riding at night, when I should have been at home. I'd roll through the cool streets, part of the stream of night riders. There were lovers, lonely students, workers

racing each other home or perhaps to a job, foreigners, sometimes whole families on one bike—the father pumping away, the wife on the back package rack, child on a seat rigged before the handlebars, and I felt very alone, calm. I could think.

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