

The Bicycle

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The cul-de-sac, silenced by the sun's piercing rays which slapped the pavement and sent all the children indoors for a spell, beckoned my parents to bring me outside and take advantage of some friendly privacy. My father, clad in an old t-shirt, yanked open the garage door; my mother stood in the doorway directly behind me, encouraging me to go forward into the driveway. Shutting the door behind us, she joined my father in that junk-filled habitat of paraphernalia, and together they emerged with my new bike.

It wasn't quite the shiny new bike I imagined in my head. Instead, the peeling electric blue paint—the painted purple flowers had faded years ago—the clashing deep teal bell, and the comforting thick tires were robbed of the training wheels which kept it all together, which had made it my bike.

My mom led the handlebars into my little fingers. This was something new—something foreign. I didn't like it. Nonetheless, my father standing at the end of the driveway, arms folded loosely across his chest, and my mother whispering

coaxing, fantastical words in my ear made this new challenge appear to be a necessity. And who was I to not comply?

I swung my leg over the machine, sweat dripping down my forehead and squirming its way between my fingers and thighs. I felt my mother's hand against the back of the little blue seat. With only one foot rooted firmly in the ground, I turned to face her—her eyes were two perfectly polished spheres of plastic. The grin across her face disagreed with the strength of her hand: the only thing maintaining my present stature.

Eyes glued to my father's figure, elongated by the looming shadow generated by the sun, I picked up my feet and stuck them on the pedals. My mom pushed and ran and released. My fingers trembled on the thick bars; the tire below me followed aimlessly. The world turned sideways as gravity took hold of both body and bike. The blazing concrete cut into the raw flesh on my knees.

"Again."

"This was my time.
I had to grow up."

Just as before, my mother's firm hands pushed me forward into the open driveway. Still, the handles quivered, and the tires trembled beneath them. This time I could make out the narrow squint of my father's eyes. My torso tried to find its center, and my little bike gave up trying altogether. Prepared this time, I released the handlebars and braced myself for the pavement's gritty impact. It was unforgiving. My hands carried the dirt and quick-drying blood back to my mother with my bike.

"Again."

Streams of defeat rose behind my gentle face and coated my little round eyes. A frustrated sort of determination welled inside me and flowed through my twitching muscles. I imagined the fun I would have riding up and down the neighborhood hills with my friends. I longed to race my parents, the grown-ups. This was my time. I had to grow up.

Six more attempts left me in anguish. My mother's words, firm and tenacious, grew louder and more definite. "Again." She pushed before any word could escape

my pitiful mouth. My feet pressed hard against the plastic pedals; I guided my bike's front wheel beside a slender crack down the center of the driveway. My knuckles, red and white, gripped the bars, forcing them to adhere to my command. The sun beat down on my head, and I heard the distant cheers of locusts. In a flash, my bike ran into the palms of my father, who stopped the bike and nearly jolted me from its seat. His thick brows lifted slightly—not much, but slightly.

He trotted to join my mother near the garage. They embraced and my mother squealed and waved at me, who stood in a faraway land. The concrete driveway's reign had ended. They re-entered the house, leaving the door wide open. I heard my mother's shrill voice on the phone with grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends. She shared my victory story with them.

Exhausted, I relinquished my faded electric blue bike and sat down in the yard. I bent my darkened knees into my chest and wrapped my sore arms around them. I felt smaller, safer. My eyes glistened in the calm air. At last, the tears came.

