

RED BIKE

A play

By Caridad Svich

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RED BIKE: So, it's like this: you're eleven years old, you live in a small town and the times are dark, as they say. But you have a bike, a bike you love, a bike that makes you dream about a world bigger than the one you live in. One day you take a ride through the outer edges of your town and something goes awry. Let's call it an accident. Let's say it causes you to see the world anew. Or maybe it just causes you to see the world for what it truly is.

RED BIKE Cast and text breakdown:

A play for one or two performers. But may also be staged three or more.

NOTE: This version of the text is scored for two actors identified as A and M (after the performers Aaron Anthony and Maddy Hill who first read this version)

The performer(s) may be any gender and age (from late teens and above). Casting, however, must be inclusive and reflective of the world.

The speaker in the text is a child of eleven years of age and simultaneously their adult self. No attempt should be made to make the performer "appear" to be a child in affect or clothing. We know how to play pretend. Get on with it.

All of the text in the play is spoken, except for stage directions in parentheses.

This play is divided into 50 discrete frames or chapters, each of which could be seen as a micro shift in the play's universe.

In other words, it is possible that after each chapter, there is an extended breath, a suspension, or a silence.

Or perhaps

A movement sequence

Or a dance break

Or just being with the audience in light

Sharing the space for a moment,

Before the next section begins.

1

M: You want it.

A: You dreamt about it.

M & A: You have it.

A: The red bike
You saw it in the window
It smiled at you

M: You knew it
You two were meant to be

M: 'Cause this is not just any bike

A: This is the RED BIKE

M: The one that when you go down the street, everyone will see you

A: Everyone will stop, and say, heeeey, red bike

M: Envy

A: That's right

M: You will inspire envy

M: You know about this
Because you've been learning about envy for a long time
Even though you're only eleven
Envy is in your bones

A: It's the cool sneaks and the amazing car and the kick-ass tech device
Your parents talk about things like this
Only they use different words

M: Your parents talk about the things they want
The things they're told they must want to be good citizens, to be good people
Your parents work hard
They have ten jobs but they say they have two
They pretend they're happy
But they're anxious

A: You see them
They rub their temples
They hide their smiles
They put the bread away in the bread basket

M & A: And don't dunk it in the eggs

M: Even though they want to

A: Even though it's yummy to eat eggs sunny side up

M: Or over easy, as my dad says
And dunk, dunk, dunk the bread
And slop up the gooey yellow mess

A: They know better
They watch their cholesterol

M: They watch their clocks

A: They watch the news
And get red in the face

M: And let their anger go to their shoes

A: To their stomach

M: To their knees
Shoulders
Neck

A: They say we're fine
They say

M: go on now
Go for a ride
See ya later
Make sure you lock up the bike if you stop somewhere

A: They say these things
Because they know what these things mean

M: They say these things
Because the news is bad

A: And chaotic and depressing and confusing
And makes them feel like they don't know anything
About how the world works

M: And how they're going to pay their bills next month

A: My parents wish they didn't have bills
They wished they owned things
Real things
That last

2

M: Like that Guy in the center of town
That owns all those buildings and the airport and the park
And the water supply
And other things too
Invisible things
Like stocks and derivatives and securities

I heard him once
He was talking on the phone
Really loud
Near the luxury condo he built

The luxury condo with the FOR LEASE sign
The luxury condo that's been empty for months
But people say is all bought up
All bought up by other people in other countries in other cities

Who are these people?

Will we ever get to meet them?

3

A: I don't know half of our neighbors

This town is moving so fast

It's like lightning

That's what my dad says

I wish I knew what he meant

M: Like, how can earth and rock and concrete and brick and steel and glass

Move

Like

Lightning?

A: But I believe him

'cause he knows things

He has five jobs when he says he has two

And he's been working his whole life

Gets up at 5 AM

Goes to the warehouse

You know it

You've seen it

M: It's just up the road

A: It's HUGE.

It's the WAAAAAREHOUSE

It's where the ol' corn field used to be

Or maybe it was wheat?

4

M: Back in the day,

A: the Ol' Guy says

When we're on the bus

M: Back in the day this all here was growing

A: I'm, like, okay

M: Back in the day, we made things,

A: the ol' guy says

And he gets a catch in his throat

And I think he's gonna cry

And get all meepy

Like in one of those stupid movies or something

But he doesn't

He just says,

M: 'way of things

Just the way things are now

5

M: My dad's been working in that warehouse
Ever since I can remember
He moves boxes around
Orders that come in
Stuff that gets shipped out
He says the warehouse is full of stuff from floor to ceiling
Piles of stuff that all sorts of people want
And need to get NOW

All that stuff?

He says,

A: yeah

M: That's a hella lotta stuff

He says,

A: yeah

And they're building another warehouse a couple miles down

M: Filled with more stuff to ship out?

He says,

A: yeah

M: I'm, like, hell

What we gonna do with all that stuff?

A: Make people happy

6

M: When people ask me what my dad does

And what my mom does

I say, they make people happy

I figure it's as good an answer as any

People don't really want to know about some warehouse

Or some store or some clinic or some school

Where people do basic things

Everyday impossible things

'cause it just makes them think about stuff

A: Like, how they're gonna pay their bills

And how the insurance keeps going up

And how everyone says everything is fine

But they can't get their breakfast sandwich

At that place anymore, 'cause it got shut down

And when the hell is something else gonna open up there?

Man, that place has been empty for, like, ever

I hear them

I know

Like, when I'm on my bike

I'm, like, a radar
Or a drone or something

7

M: I see them sometimes
The drones

Dude says

A: they're planes

M: But I'm, like, no way, man, they're drones
Can't you tell?
What movies you been watching?
Drones everywhere, man
Watching us
Keeping our secrets
Making a mess of everything over there
Seen the news?

A: No. I don't watch the news. Nothing to do with me

M: You jokin', right, Dude?

A: Listen, I don't got time for this

M: And we stop watching the sky
And I get back on my bike

And dude heads down the road
To the ol' dollar store that's a two-dollar store now

I think dude's messed up

The news got something to do with something
'cause why else would it make everyone like a fuse?

8

A: The FOR LEASE sign
Is gleaming
The guy's wearing a suit

It was hot
Not like today
But still hot
And I thought he must be sweating like a pig in that suit

Like that cartoon on Saturday morning
The one with the guy with the gun
And the stupid animals running around looking for food

M: *Stocks and derivatives and securities*

A: It's like he was chanting
Like he was praying to some god
'cause he kept looking up at the sky

I thought that's the guy
That's the guy that owns half of this town
That's the guy that cut down all of the trees

He looked at me
Red bike
I could see it on his face
He wanted it too

M: *Red bike, red bike, red-*

A: I turned the corner
He went back to looking at the sky

M: *Stocks and derivatives and securities*

A: That guy is smart
He has a vision
Everyone says so
A vision of the world

9

M: I have visions too
But I don't tell anybody
'cause people don't wanna hear from some kid

They're, like, go on now

A: Go for a ride

M: See ya later

I wish I could tell them

I wish I could tell them what I see

But it's hot

And I'm sweaty

And the air is murder

And I'm thinking that if I don't get to that hill over there I'm meat

'cause the hill is where you get the best ride

The hill is where you see the whole city

10

M: I am so sweaty

I shouldn't have worn these clothes

I'm so stupid sometimes

My legs are giving out, too

I am so not cut out for a marathon

A: I dream about it sometimes

Like, if I were on the tour de France n shit

I know you need a whole lotta money n sponsorship n stuff

And, like, they're all on dope

M: But still...
Riding through those hills
Up those curves
Winding up and down those roads
In the rain
In the sun
Past the trees and the dog shit
Man oh man, wouldn't it just be...

11

A: Dreams and visions are two different things

M: I know

A: The ol' guy on the bus told me

He said his great-great-something or other
Went on this vision quest
Totally for real

Went out to where that abandoned silo is now
Way, way out, out past the warehouse and the Waffle Stop

Went out there with no food, no nothing
Freaky-ass cold at night
And prayed
For his family and his friends and who knows what else

Cried like a baby just born
Eyes like rain
For days and days
And nights and more days

Got sick, too
Got all kinds of everything
Bugs biting
Earth creaking
Waffle Stop sign blinking through the core of night
Thought: this is death
This is where I meet you, my friend

And then outta nowhere
Some kind of animal
Come outta shadow and light
Looking like it'd seen better days
Like it had lived the past of another animal
And had come back in a new shape

Stood near the silo
Eyes like fire
Song in its throat
Something about smallness and rage n chaos in the belly

Animal stared
Night fell like seven moons
Freaky as hell

But the ol' guy's great-great something or other

Stayed
With the animal
Through the night
And another day

Until there was no sound
Just light
And an amazing kinda wonder

Like the weight of the world
Was dancing with them
Like in some disco or something
Thump, thump, thump
Dancing its heaviness through the body
Animal beams

Great-great something or other laughs
Rain down both their faces
They can't stop dancing
Can't stop moving
Voice calls out from somewhere, hey, you, where'd you get that joy?

And then nothing
Like the silo is just the silo

And the Waffle Stop sign is making that kinda buzzy sound
That neon sometimes makes

And it's just cold
And here

12

M: The hill's not that far
I can see it now
My legs are starting to find themselves again
Still hot, though
Why is it so hot this time of year?
Shouldn't be this way

Dad says it was never like this when he was a kid
Mom says she don't remember
Everybody's screwed up about the weather these days
Even dude says spring is gone

A: The news is killing us,

M: someone says
Drone flies past

I just want to be a good person
Hell, I got a red bike
The same red bike I stared at through the window
Same red bike my parents said I had to wait for
'Til that check come in
And that other check come in
And that lottery ticket give us five dollars extra

And I know, I know it's made in some other country far away
But what the hell am I supposed to do?
Like, they don't make it here anymore
That company shut down years ago
Somebody gotta make red bikes somewhere
So kids like me can dream

13

A: On the hill now
Man, it is something, right?

M: The whole town is looking at me

A: Hey all. Look here. See.

M: Envy
Sometimes it feels good

A: Sometimes you wanna revel in it

M: Look at me

A: Look at me

M & A: Look. At. Me.

*(And maybe something physically astonishing occurs. An act of daring and
ecstatic joy.)*

14

A: Something sticks

On the ground

Greasy

I am moving

Fast

Hella fast

Down this hill

Brake. Come on. Brake.

M: I've been down this hill a million times.

What the hell is going on?

A: Brake. Come on. Brake.

M: The hill is taking me

A: This is wrong

This is doom

M: I'll never make the tour de France now

I'll be like that biker in the Olympics

The one who went careening off the road

Crash splat

And lay there crying like a pup

Knees and legs and arms smashed to shit

Pity

I will inspire pity

Not envy

What is the world coming to?

A: Brake. Come on. Brake.

It's gonna be all pain now

Get ready for the inevitable, friend

It's just you and the hill and the red bike

Going

Hell

Knows

Where

15

M: What's that?

Bird? Squirrel? Rabbit?

Am I gonna be a murderer now?

Move outta the way of the way, animal

A: I'm holding onto the handlebars as if life

M: MOVE OUT

Mirage

Am seeing things now

A: Breath races
Heart pumps
Three hundred billion seconds per minute
Thump thump thump
Like at a bad disco or something

M: I'm thinking about my math homework

I'm thinking about Dude
And how I promised I'd help out with their band

I'm thinking 'bout the grass that needs mowin'
And the dirty laundry I stuffed in the back of the closet
And how I told mom and dad I'd be home before dark

The world is gonna eat me aliiiiive

16

A: Panic
Panic is the worst
Panic is not a superhero move

M: And we're superheroes, right?
What'd Dude and I swear to each other back in school?
We are superheroes

A: Just stay calm

Focused

Alert

In the zone

Be in the zone

Zen

M: What's Zen?

How do I get Zen?

A: Heart pumps like a mad fist

Beads of sweat on my forehead nose lips

This is not looking good

I'm gonna die

I'm gonna die on this stupid hill

17

M: Wait

This can't be the end

I just started

I'm just a kid

I got my whole life

I've been through plenty of shit before

I've been through hella stuff

A: Like, when I fell in the backyard

On that steel thing

And got all those stitches

That took weeks of healing

And it was nice, right?

M: It was ice cream and staying in bed

And being sick from school

And people visiting and calling

And asking about ME all the time

I was a star

A: I was a superstar

M: It was great

I am a superstar

What the hell am I worried about?

This is just a road

This is just a bike moving way too fast

A: So what? I can handle it

I can handle anything

18

M: My mom handles six jobs even though she says she has two

And she still has time to be a mom

And do things

And ask me how I'm doing

Sometimes she even gives me a kiss on the forehead

And just looks at me

Like I'm the most special person in the whole world

She does all that

When I know she cries sometimes

I've seen her

That time in the dollar store

She was crying in aisle nine

Next to the laundry detergent and the toilet cleaner

She didn't see me

I had a bag of skittles in my hand

Wanted to ask her if we could...

But when I saw her

I just

Shoved the skittles back onto the shelf in aisle five

Later, in the car, on the way home

I touched the back of her neck

Like, it's okay, mom

Whatever it is, it'll be okay

She didn't say nothing

But she smiled

And put music on

Something really stupid on the radio
All those heartbreak songs
Mom loves them
She started singing at the top of her lungs
Roll the window down
Make some

M & A: NOIIIIISE

(And the kid sings about the last chorus and 15-30 seconds of the “say that you’ll love me” section of the pop song “Unbreak my Heart” by Toni Braxton, full out, as if singing along to the radio until they are interrupted by a rush of.)

19

A: Air’s like a tunnel
Like it don’t even exist now
I’m just flesh and wheels

Even the road’s gone

M: Must be someone laughing somewhere
Isn’t that what Dude says their people say?
When shit goes down, someone must be laughing somewhere

A: I’m like a cartoon
The one where the animal is on the scooter
Hits a rock in the road
And flips up into the air

A gazillion times
Head wobbling
Teeth chattering
Body parts moving every which way
Boing boing boing
Look at that thing go

Animal starts dreaming of the ol' days
Back when life was easy as pie
Sit in a hammock
Rock to some sweet music
Kick up your feet
And think of the future

20

M: When I was five I made a list
Of everything I wanted to be

Superstar pirate astronaut helicopter

(A repeats the same list under M's text, as underscore)

ice cream maker diver climber builder ninja warrior movie-maker Oscar winner Nobel
winner Olympics winner scientist inventor history teacher philosopher poet shaman
singer leader fire-breather lion beast unicorn¹

My parents said lists make us wish for the impossible

They're unrealistic

STOP MAKING LISTS

¹ This list could be longer. It is encouraged in rehearsal to ask the performers and members of creative team to add to this list from their own childhood perspectives. It is also possible to ask the audience to contribute to the list, if the staging allows for organic interaction. In the UK version of this text, actor A repeated sections of the list under

But I didn't listen

A: Superstar pirate astronaut helicopter ice cream maker diver climber builder ninja
warrior movie-maker Oscar winner Nobel winner Olympics winner scientist inventor
history teacher philosopher poet shaman singer leader fire-breather lion beast unicorn

M: I'd seen mom and dad make lists
And not just for groceries n shit
But for next year and the year after that

All kinds of dreaming

'Bout taking trips
And buying a house
And owning things

One list was just appliances
Another list was cities

Are we moving? I ask
They don't say
But I can see them thinking

A: Whole lotta towns we could be in

M: I make a face

A: Don't look at us like that, kid
We know some things 'bout things

M: I say, yeah
But in my heart I know better

21

A: I've seen them come back from all those wars
And they sure looked like they needed a big-time list
A new list to start their lives
Or make them up again

And I thought if I ever gotta go to some war
Fight for hell knows what

Stocks and derivatives and securities

I'd sure as hell make me a list
'cause even if there's no future
Even if they're just five people left in your town
You gotta make things mean something
Hell yeah

22

M: Ol' guy says people back in his town
Back in the middle of the middle of the country
They're all old
Like, real old
And they're all men, too
Old, old guys sitting in some town

Watching it die

I ask ol' guy on the bus, what do they do?

He says they talk about the old days

Talk about how they didn't do nothing for their town

But let everybody go

All the young ones couldn't wait to leave

So, they said go on now

Go for a ride

See ya later

Except they didn't come back

'cause there was nothing to come back to

And pretty soon it was just them

Buy the bread and milk at the lil' store

Eat pizza at the diner on Saturdays

Drink at the bar for hours and a day

Watch their loved ones die

Bury them in the lil cemetery

And wait

Wait

Until they're gone

And the whole town

Vanishes

Right along with them

What was the name of that town?

A: Hamburger.

M: I say to ol' guy, are you shitting me?

That town's called Hamburger?

Ol' guy says

A: watch your language

How old are you anyway, kid?

M: Eleven

A: Eleven's too young for curse words

M: Who made them rules?

A: People

M: What people gotta do with words? Aren't words just words?

Ol' guy says his ol' town is dead and he don't wanna talk about it no more

Hamburger

I got a mind to look up that town and call his bluff

But I can see ol' guy thinking

His brow creases

Gets a far-away look in his eyes

He left his town, too, you see

He was one of the young ones

And now he's old

And he's here

And I bet he's thinking one day

One day this town is gonna die

And is he gonna watch it happen?

Gets all angry for a second

And says

A: That guy, that guy who's bought half this town

He's gonna ruin it for all of us

No trees anymore

Just condos

Steel and glass

Where are we gonna live?

Where are we gonna go?

M: Hamburger.

He makes a face

23

M: But then

We start laughing

Both of us

A: Silly kid laughing

M: Baby laughing

M: Giggling hiccupping roaring
Like we both ate

M & A: the best hamburger in our lives

M: All juicy and melt-y and smelling like fire n onions n hickory smoke
And we're tellin' the whole world about it on some commercial somewhere

A: I LOVE THIS PLACE

M: I LOVE WHERE I AM

A: I'M GONNA SAVE THIS TOWN
FROM ALL OF THE

M & A: STEEL AND GLASS AND BULL-SHIT

M: BRING BACK THE TREES

A: PLANT SOME SEEDS

M: KEEP YOUR FAITH IN THIS TOWN

A: I'm thinking with talk like this
Man oh man, we could run for some office somewhere

M & A: We could be SUPERSTARS

24

M: So, I've basically stopped looking at the road
I'm letting the bike do what it does

If my superhero powers don't kick in
Then I'm facing the biggest most spectacular crash
In this town's history

Make the evening news
Make the headlines
Go viral

Maybe I'll get a book made out of my life

A: Or a movie

M: Or a series

A: Or a video

M: Or a song

Three minutes of a song can change a person's life
Isn't that what they say?

I'll be that person
The one in the song

A: THE KID WITH THE RED BIKE

M: People will pray to me
Send flowers to me
Light candles in my name
Forever young

25

A: Man, this shit is messed up
Like, we all wanna be famous
But not like that
Not for some accident

M: Hell, they'll just say I was stupid for even going down this hill
And forget all about me

I'll be like that curse in that story

A: Don't mention the kid with the red bike
They're bad news
Bad juju

26

M: Breeze

Faint as anything

A: But it feels good

M: Like hope

27

A: I wanna call somebody
But I got nothing on me
It's just me and the bike

How I'm still on this thing
Is like a miracle

Should've crashed by now
Should be on the road pavement grass
Splitting my nose lips knees

If I were the ol' guy
I'd say

M: this got something to do with the gods

A: If I were Dude
I'd say

M: this got something to do with my natural superhero moves

A: If I were my mom and dad
I'd say I am

M: GROUNDED

A: for weeks

A: Not that my mom and dad don't believe in miracles
But they're more practical than that

Like, they go to church and talk to people
And make nice on Sundays
But they've seen too much of the world
To believe in grace

I mean, you can ask 'em
But I'd bet you anything they'd say no
Before they'd give you the party line
They're honest like that

28

M: Sometimes
Sometimes
I think about the gods
Way up there
And the ones down below too

And all of the mess they get themselves in

Like, way bigger messes than us

And it's like, envy, you know

Monster envy

Like, deep

'cause I'd like to hang out with them

And stir things up

Just to see if I could

Just to see if I'd last

29

A: Some gods die slow deaths

Before they become super gods

Like that guy who got chained to a rock

He was a god, right?

And he totally got the shit kicked out of him

If it wasn't for that kid that got sent to that island

To ask him all of those questions bout fire n stuff

He woulda never made it to super god

I mean, I don't think I'm a super god

But it'd be fun, right?

To walk round all proud
Thinking I got some connection to things
Thinking I got some lineage

30

M: Ol' guy used that word once: lineage
It made me smile
'cause I could see how it made him look up and out

I said, man, that's a big ass word

He looks at me,

A: you cursin' again?

M: I was, like, just words

A: What have your people been teaching you?

M: Stuff

A: What kinda stuff?

M: Stuff bout stuff

M: Ol' guy got all serious
And said lineage was not something to make a mockery of
'cause it's our bloodlines and the songs we got inside

And the fires too
And the little aches we pretend not to notice
Except when we feel them late at night
And our chest is just about bustin' outta itself
He said

A: lineage tells us who we are

M: n who we could be too
'cause maybe somewhere in our line
There was someone that never did what they set out to do
But they dreamt about it
And their dreaming got inside you when you were born

So that when you're on the road
Clinging to the handlebars like life
You think the tour de France is possible
Is something you were made for

31

A: So are the dreams you got
'Bout someday owning a house

Not a big house
Just enough to not have to worry 'bout rent all the time
And payin' everybody everything every month
And seein' how you're gonna stretch things til Tuesday, like my dad says

You could even maybe get a nice outfit
Just to walk round and feel good 'bout things

And maybe get that little elephant mom likes so much
From that antique store down in that village we went to once

And eat ice cream made with jasmine and roses
And feel all peaceful
Like the world's a good place
N you're doing good by it

And maybe sing a little song too
'cause it's nice to sing sometimes

(sung, very simply, almost to self)

I am here
I am here
Look out, world. I am here

(Back to...)

M: Breeze comes at you
As you speed down the hill

A: Happy
Like, for real, happy

M: You remember that time you went to that famous theme park
That everyone swore was the happiest place ever

It made you anxious
And it made your mom and dad n everyone else crazy anxious

You felt so empty when you walked outta there
Like someone had dug a hole in your heart
And all this misery was just oozing outta you

And you wanted to shout
All of your sadness
Into the sky

And you thought I HATE THIS PLACE
I hate someone tellin me I gotta be happy all the time
I hate feelin like I can't buy all the stuff I want

While that stupid lady with the white hair and the killer boots
Spent five hundred dollars on that ONE THING

'cause she could
'cause it made her feel more important than everyone else
In the whole entire store

And how you want to shout at her
CALL HER OUT

And tell her she was the stupidest person in the world

'cause her stuck-up-ness was just shit

And it was so gonna catch up with her someday

When she was lookin outta her luxury condo

At the plaza with no trees

Feeling all alone

'cause that ONE THING

That ONE THING couldn't save her life

33²

A: The gods pray for us,

M: Dude says

A: The gods are in us,

M: ol' guy says

A: We are gods,

M: I say

A: But we forgot where we came from

One day

² This chapter is optional (i.e. may or may not be played in performance.)

Our memories will come back to us
And we'll stand as tall as that lady
Even if all we have are our little things
Made of plastic and fake china and cracked wood

34

M: I'm feeling dizzy now
Arms tense
Legs spent
Stomach fulla cheese and soda

I forgot to eat right
I just walked out the door
Goin for a ride
Didn't know anything was gonna happen

Drone hovers

Hey, drone, help me out here
Do something for the world

Drone keeps flying

Headin over there, I bet
To where the real godforsaken mess is

I don't even wanna think about it
'cause the news?

The stuff over there?

Man oh man, it's like the stuff over here times a hundred

Mom and dad think I don't see the pictures

When they put the news on

They think I got my mind on toys n shit

But I see

35

A: Like, that kid³ sitting on that piece of cardboard

Next to the grocery store

They're always sitting there

In their black clothes

N stinky hair

Moving their head up n down

Making sounds their mouth

Like they're wailing or pleading

Or just asking the light in the sky to send them peace

Nobody says anything

We all act like the kid's not there

Cuz the kid's always there

Always

M: A fixture,

A: someone says

³ The gender of this other kid is intentionally ambiguous, hence the use of "their."

M: We got tired of trying to help
Don't want it anyway
Lazy
Don't wanna look for a job

A: The kid makes sounds
Moves their head up and down
Anxious
Crazy anxious
Making signs in the air

I wanna give the kid a dollar

Mom says,

M: Get inside,
Get in the car
NOW

A: We drive away

Kid keeps moving their head up and down
Why can't I give them a dollar?

M: That kid will just spend it on drugs

A: With a dollar?

M: Be quiet now.

A: We ride in silence

I'm thinking of the kid n their stinky hair
And how they looked so young
We could be kin

M: Be quiet now

A: Who's to say?
Maybe somewhere down the line
We're blood or-

M: Be QUIET

A: I slam the door to my room when we get home
The dollar burns in my pocket
Next time, next time I'm gonna give
Don't care what anybody says

36

M: The air sings a song of reason
I'm feeling strangely hopeful
Maybe this is what happens when a person's crossed the divide

A: My body feels as light as air
My head is full of dreams
I'm thinking maybe tonight we will win the lottery
How cool would that be?

Not having to think anymore
'Bout what we need and what we're gonna do
Cuz we'll have everything

37

M: Like the Guy
The one who owns half this town

A: People say he's evil

M: People call him all sorts of names

And yeah, he killed the trees
And yeah, he's don't really care 'bout us
And yeah,

A: he's a big monster

M: But I saw him once
On the other side of town
Far, far away from his luxury condo
He was sitting in some little restaurant
All alone
Totally not the kind of place you'd expect him to be

Cuz this place was, like, little
Ten tables at most
With plastic placemats and plastic glasses

And day-old bread in the bread basket

He was eating a HUGE cake of a thing

I was, like, what the hell is that?

A: Quiche

M: a voice said

It was all yellow with bits of green and a weird crusty kind of edge

And it looked like it had been sitting in the freezer for a hella long time

He was wearing his suit

But it wasn't pressed

His face was puffy

His eyes were red

He kept looking at his phone

But not doing anything with it

Just looking

Staring

Picking at his quiche

He ordered a soda

HUGE soda

He slurped

Made noises

Looked at the phone

Asked the server for the time

I was, like, what'd he need it for?

He knows the time

It's on his phone

But he asked anyway

A: He wanted to hear someone's voice

Wanted someone to have the right answer when he asked a question

38

M: I was sitting in the corner

I'd stopped in for a soda

Don't usually come by this part of town

Cuz everything here's slow and dull and smells of gasoline

Ol' guy says

A: there was a factory here once that made cars

M: I'm, like, uh-huh

Ol' guy says

A: this part of town used to be happening

M: He uses that word "happening"

Like it got some special meaning

He laughs

Makes a gesture with his hands

Revels in his secret

I'd been riding past my usual time

I'd been trying to set a record

Not in some book

Just for myself

I figured if I was gonna be in the tour de France someday

I had to start training now

That day my goal had been two hundred miles

I know

I know

They usually do 2200 miles over 23 days

My goal was

A: unrealistic

M: I know

I know, OKAY?

But if you don't set a goal, what's the point?

I'd put in about hundred miles

Between the flats and the hills

I was thirsty

When the restaurant

Mom and dad had taken me there once
Way, way back
Maybe when I was five
They said it was kinda down home but real good
N we could totally get something authentic there

Didn't know what they meant by authentic
Cuz food is food, right?

But they said, this place has real food
Like in the ol' days
Nothing fancy but it will fill you up

The tables are fake wood
And full of stains that won't go away

The chairs make you slide
Like, they got something on 'em

The floor is dark n unsteady
Swear you feel you're gonna fall down
If you don't look where you're going
I'm not sure about this place
But mom and dad say, it's good, you'll see
Besides, we drove all this way, didn't we?

They got chicken pot pies and mashed potatoes

I got an omelet that tasted like beans
Big tall sodas and cold cups of coffee

40

A: I am full,

M: the Guy said
As he finished the last bite of his quiche

I was downing my soda
Like I'd raced 'cross the Pyrenees

Guy was looking at his phone
He sees me

A: *Red bike, red bike*

M: And then he starts crying
Flat out bawling like a child
I'm thinking, if he wants my bike so bad

But no
Cuz he turns his phone over
Puts his head in his hands
And keeps crying
There's hardly anyone in the little restaurant
The server pretends to pay him no mind

A: People do things like this all the time in places like these,

M: I hear someone say
It's coming from the front
The cash register

Person behind it looks all of ten
But they're way older than that

They have fake braids and a funny smile
And they're standing behind the register
Like it's a fort

A: "People do things like that all the time"

M: I wanna smack them

I'm not violent
I'm not prone, as they say
But sometimes this kinda feeling comes over me
And it makes me wanna do things
Really bad things

Don't you see this guy's crying?

A: I bet he's cheating on somebody,

M: person says
And gives a customer their change

I walk over to the cash register

Stare at the person

They look startled

I pull at their fake, store-bought, stupid, dangling braid

Person slaps my hand

Guy stops crying

Looks at us

Looks at me

41

A: Jump on the bike

Start pedaling as fast as my legs will let

Hear his voice in my brain

M: *Red bike, red bike, red bike*⁴

A: I am flying

No way is he

No hella way is he gonna take this bike away from me

My mom and dad paid good money for this bike

It is mine

All mine

What's he want with it anyway?

He owns half the town already

⁴ This could be amplified.

Greedy sonofabitch

Go cry in someone else's quiche

LEAVE ME THE HELL ALONE

VO: Red bike, red bike, red bike

A: His voice won't let up

I am racing

Pushing against myself

Flats and hills

Curves and rivulets

I'm steering like one of them Olympic dudes

Total gold medal shit

Past the warehouse

Past the Waffle Stop

Past the silo

I am an animal now

Made of skin and bone

Air and light

My body is one with the bike

M: Red, red, red

A: I am singing a chord of happiness

I'm bleeding joy

Look out, world

M & A: LOOK OUT

42

A: Something greasy

Losing control

The sky's in my face

The ground is nowhere to be found

I am in some kinda cloud

Legs moving

But I can't feel anything

Arms tensin up

Veins and muscle

The Waffle Stop sign is far away now

The silo is a postcard from long ago

I see a feather floating outta the corner of my eye

It's the color of sadness

Color of motion

Flecks of blue, grey and aquamarine

I'm sinking into my chest

Falling into a dream

M: *Red, red, red*

A: The Guy's face is covered in leaves

He moves like a monster

He is a monster

How'd he get here?

Why's he following me?

I try to pedal with all of my might

But I can't feel my feet

Red, red, red

M: I'm like one of those kids on the news

From that place far, far away

Weighed down by a desire for forgiveness

A: My lips are smarting, cracking from the heat

My teeth are numb

My cheeks are drowning in tears

I'm beyond a cartoon on TV

I'm beyond everything

M: I think of mom and dad

Waiting for me

I think of Dude and their two-dollar dreams

I think of ol' Guy and how he also talks about winning the lottery

I see numbers on a card

Could this be how we make something out of our lives?

A: The monster rustles

The air is thick

M: I think about how everyone's in a hurry these days

How nobody says I'm sorry

How people don't know how to talk to one other

How everybody's robbed of sleep

A: The monster stares

His eyes are gone

Just sockets now

Just the burning ash of leaves

M: *Red, red, red*

A: He has something in his hand

Can't make it out

Something shiny

Points it at me

Laughs

But it sounds like a cry

Like someone in the worst kinda pain ever

M: *Red, red, red*

43

A: I'm dreaming of a house

Way out in the country
The house is made of all sorts of things
Patched together from years of living
I walk into it
Except I have no feet

I float

My torso is the body of the bike
My arms hang at my sides

He won't find me here
This place is far, far away
Years from now
Beyond his imagining

The house lifts me into its arms
Cradles me like a child
It smells of old paint and moss and summers by the sea

I want to touch its walls
But it whispers something

I fall asleep

44

M: My mom works in the clinic part time
People speak to her in broken languages

They ask her to make things better, please

They have coins in their pockets
And dig dollars out from the soles of their shoes
They say if you tell us we're okay
If you put it down in ink
We can get a job
A better job
One that will get us one step closer to the lottery

My mom asks them to fill out forms
She has the patience of ten gods
She listens to them
And holds her breath

And doesn't let on to anyone
That she has the same dreams they do

This land is not mine
This land is not yours
This land is just land

45

A: The monster breathes

M: *Red, red*

A: He looks inside the house

Through the window out front

There's the stench of old water

Coming from the backyard

There's the sound of an old party

Moving through the trees

M: (*simply*) This used to be a theater once,

A: a voice sings

M: (*sings, simply*) This used to be parlor

This used to be a ballroom

A: The monster wheezes

Crumpling his body against the front of the house

He lets the shiny thing fall from his hands

He's not run this far this fast in a long time

He misses the sky

He misses the things he knows

M: *Stooooocks and derivatives and securities*

A: His voice is like a green stem

As he lets out another cry

And bangs his fists against the door of the house

I think to open it

But the house won't let me

The house has got me by the arms

And it won't let go

He says

M: the future has no time for voices from the past

Especially voices

That wheeze and needle and cry

A: I struggle in the house's arms

I've never been one for shelter

M: I long for the road

And the hill

The rivulets and the winding curves

And the way flats become hills become flats again

I tell the house that if the monster wants to see me

I'm ready for him

Even if I can't tear down the sign that says FOR LEASE

A: The house caresses my steel torso

It kisses my aluminum arms

It rests its hands on my bones threaded with carbon fiber

M: Go on now,

A: it says

M: Go for a ride
See ya later

46

A: There's a part of the road that smells like fire
I warm to it
Like the breath of the ancients

The shiny thing sticks in the mud
As the monster wheezes
His last days

M: *Red, red*

A: I feel blessed
Strange

M: In the old books that people read once long ago
It was said monsters ate through the better part of you
So that you could find the rest of your way

A: Drone hovers
I let the fire lick my tongue

M & A: Red, red

A: The city sleeps in a yellow haze
Blue shutters snap against the faint breeze

The silo glows in the distance

Steel aluminum carbon fiber

Courses through my veins

Legs feel the weight of tomorrow

Arms feel the shudder of yesterday

The shiny thing barely glints

As the monster reaches for it

A parade of laughter

A litany of red

M: It's a fork,

A: he says

M or VO: It's nothing but a fork

Is this what you're running from, kid?

A: The Guy is standing

Suit pressed

His hand a phone

The fork dangles from his pocket

I was a eating a quiche, he says to the air

I catch him smiling

Wondering if I'll give him a smile back

M: Hot

A: Yes

M: Way it is here

Way it always is in summer

A: I have half a mind to turn back

But I can't find my feet

I left them back at the house

Guy keeps staring

The fork dangles on the edge of his right pocket

M: Who says I'm running?

A: Sorry?

M: I'm not running from anybody

A: You're a funny kid

M: You're not getting my bike

A: And then he raises his arms

Like a monster genuine bonafide

Tall, tall up to the sky

The fork in his right hand

Gleaming of quiche

From when he bit on it last

He looks like he's coming toward me
But he's not moving his legs
He's planted on the ground
His shoes dusty from the road and the heat

M: Did you steal that fork?
Are you a thief?

A: His arms get longer, higher into the sky
Cracking through the heavens

M: They'll make you pay for it

A: He laughs
Loud, big and rumbly
Like a perfect cartoon monster

Except the laugh
Got another note inside
That rings hollow, sad and strange

I stand my ground
Even without feet

M: Are you a thief?

A: His laugh becomes an ocean
Steel and glass and cascades of numbers
Pour from it

He moves toward me
For real this time

M: Are you?

A: *Red, red, red*

M: I think now is the time to pull out my superhero moves
Now is the time to turn into a beast
Or something with a cape

But I am frozen
My superhero signals aren't firing anything to my brain

A: Guy aims the fork at the universe
Like he's about to give a proclamation

M: I AM WHAT YOU MADE ME

A: And with these words
With these simple words
The fork comes down
Straight
Into my heart

His laughter enters my body
His outsized arms engulf me

M: I AM WHAT YOU MADE ME

47

M: I think of our town

Our little town

Stuck in the middle of nowhere

Poised for majesty

A: There were fields and fields of corn and wheat

M: The Ol' Guy said

A: And now there are just warehouses full of stuff

What are we gonna do?

What are we gonna do with all that stuff?

M: The bus ambles down the road

A road that's not even a highway

I try to imagine the corn

I try to imagine the wheat

I pretend I'm in some movie

Camera sweeping through vast fields of glory

Nature electric in its bloom

But my imagination fails me

As the bus squawks and hisses to a stop

N ol' guy says,

A: We're running low on gas
Gotta fill up

M: I sit in the bus
Waiting
Thinking about nothing and everything

I was born into this
Why's ol' guy blamin me?

A: Pure sad,
M: he says

A: Things that happen now are pure sad

M: What's he want from me?
I can't fix sadness
Hell, I'm no good with corn and wheat

I need stuff
We all do
Don't we?

My dad needs that job
If that warehouse weren't there,
We'd be starving

'cause it's that job, that job that keeps us going
'cause the other nine jobs he's got don't add up to one

Ol' Guy's dreaming
Bout some past that's never comin' back

A: Pure sad,

M: he mutters

A: Ground wouldn't remember how to grow corn and wheat
All it knows now is concrete
Steel and glass

48

A: My arteries smell of eggs and broccoli
The fork wedges into the membrane of my heart
The monster laughs
As I sputter onto the baking heat of the road

M: *I am what you made me*

A: I see him walk over to my bike

M: *Red, red*

A: He lifts it gingerly onto his arms
Light as a feather

He cries a solemn cry
That sounds as if he is praying

M: Chaos reieieieieigns

A: As he hurls it down the hill
Down to the edge of the city
Past the trees
And the fields
And the small houses clinging to the earth

Crash

The bike hits a massive wall
A splatter of red limbs
Against grey concrete
Wheels, gears, spokes
Scatter their remains
Onto an ocean of gravel

The sound is small
Gentle, almost
An innocent crash

As the monster walks away
And I struggle to breathe

49

M: In the dictionary
A bike is described as a human-powered
Pedal-driven

Single-track vehicle
Having two wheels
Attached to a frame,
One behind the other
Its motion depends on us
Where we go? It follows

But what happens when we don't know where we're going?
What happens when all we can think of is the bike?

A: When I was six I wanted to be a helicopter
I wanted to hover
Like a drone
Over the earth
And be able to swoop down and see things up close

I wanted to rescue people
And fly in combat
Like I'd seen in the movies
I wanted to do good

M: My mom and dad said human beings can't be helicopters
And that I should delete that idea from my list of dreams

A: Be realistic,

M: they said

A: Think of practical things

M: So, I thought of all of the things
I saw people do in this town

Like, mow the lawn
Do drugs
Crash parties
Smoke weed
Go to church

A: Marry
Have babies
Get into fist fights

M: Go to jail
Go to the movies
Watch TV
Watch their screens

A: Watch football
Watch baseball
Watch basketball
Watch wrestling
Watch anything
Watch everything

M: Cuss at their children
Wail at their grandparents
Cry over commercials

A: Beat each other up
to be first in line at a shopping spree

Sit on the lawn
Watch the fireworks
Pray

M & A (*simply*): This land is not mine
This land is not yours
This land is just land

A: And then
Shoot a gun into the air

For fun
For kicks
For love
For hate
For nothing

M: For nothing

Just to shoot
Just to be
Say I am here
I was here
Someone made me

A: And then roar
Like animals

Cry

Like babies

M: Think of the past

Of the rain

Of the days when

People loved each other

And didn't think about things

Like stuff

A: Stuff they needed

M: 'cause someone said

If they didn't have

If they didn't need

They were nothing

A: Nothing

Without their stuff

M: And no one

No one

Wants to be nothing

A: NO ONE

NO ONE

WANTS TO BE NOTHING

M: So we became our stuff

And we thought nothing of it
Because it was chaos
And it tasted good

Sweet
Like candy
Like skittles and rocks and jelly beans
And our teeth rotted
And our mouths stayed open
And our bellies grew
And our tongues licked the edges of everything

Even when we prayed
Even when we said grace

Until we forgot
We forgot what it is that we wanted
We forgot that the only thing we were here for

Is to learn how to live
And learn how to die

50

A: The neon sign buzzes in my ear

My mouth is on the edge of the road
Next to the Waffle Stop

M: Bad turn,

A: someone says

M: You took a bad turn on the road

A: I reach for the fork stuck in my heart
But there is nothing
Except for a tiny gash
I reach to one side to get up
My feet are aching
What time is...?

I can barely make out the words
Everything is slow and blurry

M: Supper,

A: someone says

M: You comin' in for a waffle?
You got kin?

A: I look at the faded blue streaks dancing in the sky
I think if I don't get home,
Mom and dad will be worried sick all night

I'm all right.

M: You sure?

A: I start walking

The sun has gone down

The heat has faded

My clothes are sticky, smelly,

N stained with gravel and dirt

I think: I need to get my moves back

Or I am never gonna make the tour de France

When a voice says

M: This your bike?

A: I see it

Over there

Leaning sideways

Against the faded stem

Of the Waffle Stop sign

M: Red bike

A: It stares at me the same way it did once

From behind the store window

This yours?

M: I think of Ol' Guy working the late shift on the bus
I think of Dude making their little songs on the drums
I think of how this town may be shit
But it's all we got

And how sometimes
Sometimes
I like feeling like a superstar

Even though I know I'm just a kid
And by the time I'm twelve
My dreams are hella gonna change
And by the time I'm the same age as Ol' Guy
 If I get there
I'll have seen so much of the world
I'll wonder how it is one can hold all of that inside
Without making some serious NOISE

A: Voice says again,

M: This your bike?

A: ...Yes.

M: And I

A: ride away

M: Into the night.

