

The Bicycle Mechanic

by Foster Trecost

The hour reflected those pleasant moments when evening hunger can be satiated by anticipation alone, before the pangs became demanding. The sound of children had diminished as they were called to dinner, leaving only rustled leaves to keep me company.

Solitude hurried me along, but my home offered no more companionship than the empty street, so I slowed my pace. I continued at a stroll when a familiar sound pierced my memory. A few more steps brought me to a young boy, sat upon the ground. At his side lay an old, blue Schwinn, borrowed from an earlier time. Perhaps it was my loneliness that cleared the way for recollection, my mind so eager for companionship that in the absence of people, it would grab hold to a memory.

His hands were stained with grease from the chain, which had popped from the sprocket, and his shirt was stained with grease from his hands; I watched for a moment, remembered, and knelt next to him.

"Looks like trouble," I said.

He pulled with all he had, but from the way he went at it, I knew the chain would break before he got it back on track. "Chain popped off," he said, surrender in his voice.

"You got it under control?"

He looked up and the streetlamp reflected in his eyes, which matched his voice and completed the story. Just a young boy, he could not have known the memories he stirred. I reached to help. "If you get it started," I said, "like so, then all you have to do is turn the crank, like this." In a few seconds, he was ready to go. "Think you can do that next time?"

He nodded.

"If it gives you more trouble, I live on the corner. Stop by anytime." He stared with an admiration not yet learned to express with words. In his face, I read a story from my childhood, written in a magical time when bikes weren't ridden, but rather flown.

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Then he left, late for dinner, I'm sure. I watched him until I could no longer see, and then kept looking, even after he was gone. The breeze steadied and I turned toward home, but gave a last glance. I hadn't recognized him, but age and hour told me he must live close.

I built a fire and made dinner. After I cleaned my plate, I cleaned up and went to a closet packed with the relics of my past. I opened a box and rummaged through until I found what I was looking for and took it back to the den. The fire had died down, so I stoked it back to life, and then stoked childhood memories. In my hands was an old photograph: me on my bike. I nested deep in my chair and allowed memories of more than half-century to live as new. I traveled back to a simple time, a time when everywhere I went, I went atop a blue Schwinn.

I smiled and I kept myself company, lonely no more.

