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Bike Bike Bike

Willard Hanson

Carrying a rose in my back pocket, I snuck through the bike shop guarded by the 50-year-old-looking manager who stood valiantly behind the counter. With a receding hairline that was graying and a face that had worn on him, I knew he wouldn't care. The employee at the flower shop didn't, so why should this old man? I had my mission, and he had his. He was just trying to ready his retirement through bikes and useless accessories. After crawling through different aisles, I finally found a bike in my size. It looked cheap and flimsy, but I didn't need much.

I yanked the bike off the rack in a hurry to make less commotion, but in turn all the bikes on the shelf toppled over creating the ruckus of a circus, alerting the manager. I quickly took off on the bike towards the back door. As I passed one of the isles I made eye contact with the manager and gave him a grin. Stupid old man. As I made it to the back door, I heard him yell, "Ohh yeah, I've been waiting for this!" I scoffed, no way the cops would catch me.

I biked on the walkway alongside the adjacent stores when I heard a large slam come from the door of the bike shop as it ricocheted off its hinges. I twisted my head and saw utter horror: a middle-aged man riding an absolute beast of a mountain bike chasing me with the determination of a juiced-up Lance Armstrong. I jolted my head back in front of me and pedaled briskly. *Bike bike bike bike bike bike* was all I told myself.

Ahead of me was a large group of teenagers my age. It was the first day of summer break, and every kid and his cousin were hitting the mall to celebrate. I took a deep breath and secured the rose deeper into my pocket. I dodged and weaved, scurrying through the crowd. Behind me I heard the manager struggle to perform the same miracle. Whereas he had strength and experience, I had the reflexes. And youth.

Skid marks indented the ground as I grinded to a halt in front of the crosswalk at the intersection. The signal light across the street glowed in the form of a valiant red hand. I glanced behind me and exhaled. I bought myself some time, thank God.

I continuously scanned the road left and right for the next 30 seconds which felt like 30 hours. No cars, no nothing. Sweating and adrenaline pumping, I resisted the urge to cross the street while staring at the red signal. In the distance behind me, I heard the sound of rubber rolling against the scorching sidewalk at incredible frequency and the unintelligible sounds of an

angry old man. I muttered *c'mon c'mon c'mon c'mon c'mon* while pressing the crosswalk button and staring ahead. The red hand then was replaced with the welcoming white walking symbol of traffic law, and I blasted across the street.

As I left the crosswalk and entered a neighborhood, I began to gather up as much speed as I could to prepare for the hill forming up the street. At the base of the hill I started to power through the incline with all my might. As I reached the top half of the hill, I was standing on my bike, using my full weight to push the pedals.

Faded behind me I heard, "Get back here!"

The slope became too much, so I hopped off my bike and started to run with it beside me. By now my shirt was drenched in heroic sweat. I heard an increasing sound of metal clattering behind me before it resolved with a solid *click* followed by an increase in pace—I resultantly began to sprint faster towards the top of the hill.

"Get back here with that bike you punk!" This time I heard him clearly.

At the apex of the hill I jumped back on the bike, pedaled forward, and started coasting down the sharp descent. Water flew from my eyes and the price tag on the bike fluttered vigorously as I barreled through the wind. With steady hands and an immovable grip on the road, I was in control.

Through the wind I had my eyes locked on the curve at the bottom of the hill where the road leveled out. As I approached the curve, I glanced behind me and saw the manager's rear wheel as he took a right onto a branching street. I knew he'd give up. As I approached the curve, I loosened my shoulders, took a deep breath, and swung to the right. My bike made a near 45-degree angle with the ground as I completed the turn. I was like Superman cornering a building to save Lois Lane.

The road straightened out and in the distance I could see the house. It was on the street across the wooden bridge that traversed the neighborhood creek. The edges of the road began creeping in as the road was ending before the bridge. I heard faded sounds of some sort of battle cry in the distance but could barely notice it through the breeze.

Then like a bat out of hell the manager charged at me from the intercepting road to my right and skidded to a sudden halt in front of me. I swung left to dodge, but the movement was too quick, and I lost control. With a will of its own, the bike steered off the road down into the creek below the bridge.

After a hard landing, I brushed the dirt off my knees and stood my bike back up. I hopped back on and started to gain some speed again. Through mud, mush, and muck my wheels turned with perseverance. The old man and his bike stuck the landing not too far behind me. As I crossed the small stream, water soaked my lower jeans. I was getting cold, but with the bridge above me to my right, I knew I was on track again.

The manager's bike started splitting the stream not too far behind me; he was catching up. I looked ahead of me and saw my last obstacle: another hill. It was steeper than the one on the street. In addition to that, the ground on the hill was practically all mud. I pedaled as strongly as I could to prepare for the hill. The bike slid off balance a couple times, but I regained myself quickly.

At the hill I pedaled and pedaled while the hill got steeper and steeper. Similar to before, towards the top I started to stand up to put my full weight on the pedals. However, just as I straightened my legs, the bike slipped from under me and tumbled down the hill. As I landed on my feet and palms on the hill, I glanced behind me to see the manager swiftly dodge the falling bike and continue his advance up the hill. My feet and bare hands tore into the mud as I desperately fought to reach the top.

With one last pull, I reached the top and took off in a sprint. Thankfully I could still feel the rose in my back pocket. Hopefully it wasn't covered in mud. I certainly didn't have the time to check. Ahead of me was the house about a hundred feet away. I ran with whatever energy I had left. I was so close. I ran past the mailbox and had the doorbell in my sights. About halfway through the lawn, the manager skidded to a halt to my left and grabbed me by my shirt collar.

"I've got you now you dirty brat!" Sadness swarmed my face as my eyes met his. It was over.

"David?" I heard a sweet voice say. I turned and saw the girl of my dreams. At the half-opened door she stood. The manager looked at her then back at me and slowly loosened his grip.

I looked at her and couldn't help but chuckle at my situation. My knees, arms, and chest smothered in mud: I wasn't exactly presentable. "Hey Yulia. Here, I have something for you." I reached into my back pocket and took out the maroon rose—a little bent at the stem but still perfectly clean. Thank goodness.

"Aww, thank you! Is that your dad?" she said pointing to my pursuer.

“Nah,” I responded. “Just a family friend. Nice ol’ fella.” No matter what I said, I knew I was doomed.

The manager looked to David and thought back to his teen years. Back to a simpler time when the world had nothing but opportunities, and when first loves felt like they could last forever. Back when he thought God sprouted flowers from the Earth just for boys like him to give to their valentines. Who was he to ruin this cherished time for someone else?

The manager cleared his throat, “Yeah uh... just escorting this little guy over here.” Surprised, I looked at him, and he winked at me. He reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out some slips of paper. “In fact, here are some coupons for my bike shop downtown. Give some to your family and stop by sometime.” He handed them to Yulia.

She thanked the man and started walking back to the door. For a moment I thought I came all this way for nothing.

“Wait!” I said. She turned to me. “Would you like to go on a date... sometime?”

With cheery eyes and a wide smile, and a rose in one hand and coupons in the other, she ran towards me and warmed me with a hug. “Sure!” She proceeded to walk back to her door with her shirt coated in mud. “Let’s meet here this time next week. Next time, find a better biking path. One with less mud. Bye!” she said and closed her front door.

I looked at the manager then down solemnly. “Look, I’m really sorry about your shop. I heard at school today that she’s moving away for the summer. I didn’t hear when so I got here as fast as I could. I don’t see any moving vans, so I guess she isn’t leaving for another month or so.”

The manager looked at me for a few seconds then patted me on the back. “You’re a good kid,” he said.

“Thanks, I can help fix up the bike shop if you want.”

He chuckled, “You bet your ass you’re fixing it up! That hasn’t changed. All is forgiven though, and you’re welcome to come by the shop any time after you’re done. Nothin’ like hard labor to make up for your mistakes as I always say.”

Relieved, I laughed. The manager patted me on the back again and walked me back into town safely.