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The Little Bicycle

by Christina Buchanan

This is about a bicycle. Not an ordinary bicycle, this one had no wheels. She had handlebars, a saddle, pedals, even gears, but instead of wheels she had little bars for feet.

“Were you always like that?” asked the old mountain bike, with whom she shared a corner of the garage.

“Yes, I suppose so,” she admitted, puzzled.

“But how do you manage on the open road?”

“I don’t go on the open road,” said the little bicycle, “I go on the carpet, when Laura’s watching television.”

“Carpet! Television!” The old mountain bike gave a snort which turned into a wheeze as more air escaped from his almost flat tyres. “You’ve never been on the open road? Never felt the wind in your spokes? Oh, I forget, you don’t have any spokes, do you?” He cackled callously.

The little bicycle sighed. Not because she’d never felt the wind in her spokes, but because Laura didn’t love her any more. Once upon a time they had cycled together every day. Now here she was in the garage, among all the cobwebs and old leaves.

The garage door rattled open and Laura’s father came in.

“Here it is, Laura, you don’t mind, do you? I said they could borrow it for the week. It’s for a good cause, remember how the Macmillan nurses helped Grandad?”

The little bicycle felt herself suddenly being lifted through the air, swaying giddily in the bright daylight. If this is what the open road felt like, she wanted nothing more to do with it.

They wedged her into the back of the car, and after a short journey, she found herself at the front of a big store, with huge shiny glass doors. All around were green and white balloons and bunting. Somebody was tying a big green balloon to her handlebars.

“Shall I go first?” asked a young girl, about the same age as Laura, and for the first time in ages the little bicycle felt her pedals turning.

All day long people came in and stopped to admire the little bicycle with the green balloon. They put money in the bucket beside her. All kinds of people wanted to ride her, young and old, fit and not so fit. At the end of the day, when everyone had gone home and the security guards were locking up, she felt absolutely exhausted.

“We’ve got six more days of this,” said the bucket. He had been taken away and emptied, and now he was back at her side. “It’s alright for me, I’ve just got to collect the money, but you’ve got to do a thousand miles.”

“A thousand miles!” The little bicycle was shocked. There were ninety-eight miles on her clock, she had never felt so tired.

“Haven’t you read the signs?” said the bucket. “If you do a thousand miles this week, the store will match the takings with a cheque for Macmillan.”

“What’s Macmillan?” the little bicycle yawned, and the bucket, who liked nothing better than talking about how important his work was, launched into a lengthy explanation, until she felt herself drifting off to sleep.

It had been a wonderful six days. As they closed the store on Friday night the little bicycle realised that, in spite of her tiredness, she had never had such a good time.

“We finish at eleven o’clock tomorrow morning,” said the bucket. “Then I’m off somewhere new. Have you done your thousand miles?”

“No, only seven hundred and fifty-four,” said the little bicycle, rather disappointed.

“Well, you’ll never do it now,” said the bucket.

“It’s not too late,” said the little bicycle suddenly. “If I cycle all night, by myself, I can put more miles on the clock!”

“You’ll never manage,” said the bucket.

“I can give it my best shot.”

The store was filled with shadows as the little bicycle pedalled on. There was nothing she wanted more than to sleep, but this was much more important.

“How many miles now?” asked the bucket, who was trying to keep her spirits up with tales of his past fund-raising events.

“Eight hundred and three.” It was going to be a long night.

Beyond the big glass doors dawn was breaking. Every cog ached with exhaustion. Nine hundred and sixty, seventy, eighty ... the security guards were unlocking the doors. The little bicycle knew she must stop now, or be caught out, as people arrived in the store.

“Hey look!” cried one of the shop assistants, “only nineteen miles to go!”

Suddenly people were all around, wanting to do their bit to help reach the target. Fifteen miles left, ten, five. The little bicycle cycled valiantly on, promising herself that when this was over she would sleep for a year, back among the cobwebs and leaves in the garage.

Somebody was coming through the door, somebody familiar, Laura was putting a pound in the bucket. The little bicycle felt familiar hands on her handlebars. “Hello you,” whispered Laura.

Four miles, three, two...

At ten fifty-five a huge cheer went round the store and minutes later the store manager appeared, waving a cheque to show that the ink was still drying.

“We did it!” said the bucket, and although the little bicycle felt he hadn’t really contributed very much, she was too generous to say so.

“Dad,” said Laura as they loaded the little bicycle back into the car, “I think I’ll have the bike back in my bedroom again, would that be OK?”

