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Wheels of Memory

by Richard Lewis

Remembering is a chair that is hard to sit still in, along the twisting backroads of my mind.

It was years ago but I remember it like yesterday, leaning into the still, sunlit morning, waiting for the boy to breathe life back into me, my wheels itching to spin again, after long months gathering dust in the cycle store. Though not brand new, I cleaned up well and stood, bursting with pride, immaculate paintwork shining red, my wheels, polished chrome.

The twelve-year-old was excited to see me, an unexpected birthday gift. It was one of those precious moments you never forget, we just connected and soon became inseparable. He climbed onto the saddle, hands gripping handle bars, feet pressing pedals and we were off, finally on the move again.

Wheeled into the bright day, I felt myself coming to life. Frame straining against twisting turns, sloping down the backroads, past redbrick and slate, jealous windows glairing as we sailed by, billowing sheets waved from washing lines, held fast like great sails that clung to masts of ships going nowhere.

On we flew, faster now, along Chantry Lane with its rusty railings, standing like soldiers on parade. Down station Hill, steep as a mountain slope, I dared you not to break, just keep the faith and let me carry you safely down. So under the bridge we went, swinging hard, skidding right onto Ash Path that clings to the river; kicking up dust, stones leaping from beneath my wheels.

We were flowing like the water itself, a river rolling on forever. At one, there was no tomorrow, just the moment. Cogs and chain links shifting, pedals and bearings working, just me and the boy and the wonder of motion.

Just to keep going, that was the thing. Stay in one place and we were lost, marking time, flittering away the hours that pass, never to come again. So we kept moving, like the hand of time itself, knowing that before long the boy would be grown and move on to other things, other loves, other wheels.

On to those gas guzzling, noise rattling hulks, that hurtle along, spewing fumes in their wake. Swerving past, blasting horns and giving us a fright, as if we had no right. It seemed they wanted to drive us off the road and send us hurtling into roadside banks and ditches.

All we wanted was to ride, ride on, ride along the ribbon lanes and woodland trails.

How I remember those fleeting carefree days.