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How To Ride A Bike

I learned how to ride a bike on a quiet, tree lined street in the suburbs of [City], called [Suburb] when I was eight years old. The road was called [Drive], because of the suburban Mount Everest like slope that the street dipped down into right before it rounded the corner of the block. It was probably not the best place to teach a second grader the laws of gravity. Nevertheless, my father rested one hand on my back, the other on the seat of my purple trek bike, and ran cautiously behind me and I peddled up and down the flat portion of the drive. The buckle on my helmet pinched my cold, rosy cheek, and I nervously lifted one hand from the handlebars and adjusted the Velcro strap as the bike wobbled back and forth, only remaining upright because of the support of my father's hand holding tight to the back of the bike.

There comes a time in every father's life when he has to let his daughter go. Usually it comes around 18, when he packs up her life in cardboard boxes and sends her off to college, or sometime in her 20's, when, with tears in his eyes, he walks her down the aisle in her white dress. My father chose this moment, when I was eight, and about to reach the crest of what I believed to be the highest peak in [State].

There was a second, right before the gray asphalt of the suburban street disappeared into cloudless blue autumn sky, that I realized that my training wheels,

had in fact, not trained me for anything. The absence of those two extra wheels that had for so long safely anchored me to the ground created an instability that no amount of coaching could have prepared me for. The last thing I remember as I tumbled head over handlebars down the hill was the sound of my father's voice, *just coast*, he yelled; his booming words quickly lost in a sea of panic and fear.

The next thing that I remember is sitting on the floor of my parent's bedroom. How I got from the pile of wreckage at the bottom of that hill, and back to my house, I can't remember. Some sort of post-traumatic stress disorder has completely erased this small segment of my childhood. My imagination has filled in these absent moments in my memory, and I see myself, battered and bruised, bent but not broken, limping helplessly up [Drive] towards the safe haven of my suburban home. In this recreation of events, my father is absent. He has deserted me, left me to make my way back alone.

I sat with the entire contents of our first aid cabinet surrounding me, cotton balls and thick white gauze creating some sort of faux winter wonderland scene in the middle of my parent's bedroom floor, adding bandage after bandage to my already mummified body. I had convinced myself that the number of bandages that I could stick to wounded body was directly proportional to the amount of sympathy that my mother would have for me when she returned home and saw what my father had done to her youngest daughter.

My hands were sticky with a combination of Neosporin and salty tears. My eyes stung from hours of crying, and my throat was so dry that the only words I could manage to form were angry ones, warning my father that he should probably

just leave because he had already done enough damage for one life time. Once I had sufficiently covered every surface of my body in a thick layer of CVS products, I crawled into my parent's king sized bed and sunk into a sea of down pillows and duvet. I tried to make myself look as pathetic as possible in an attempt to win sympathy from my mother, at the same time and making my father feel like the worst father in the world. I lay there, on my back, arms and legs outstretched, and wept.

They say that everything is clear in hindsight.

My eight-year-old self had never been so angry, never been so sure of anything in her in life before. This tumble I took down the suburban [City] street was the most traumatic accident I would ever experience. This was the worst pain humanly possible. My father, by simply removing his familiar hand from the small of my back, had sent me down the mountainous pavement slope to my imminent death, and for this, I was sure that I hated him.

After eleven years, when the world seems like it is ending, when I am sure that things can't get any worse, when I am tumbling head over handle bars, I think about learning how to ride a bike. I think about the cool November air, about those light pink scrapes that blanketed my arms and legs, about the small, but deep cut that ran along side my right eye, the one from which I still have a scar. I think about crying myself to sleep in my parent's bed. *And I think about how my eight-year-old self had never been so sure of anything in her in life before.*

