

The Bridge

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04.10.2005

Click, click. The spokes of the wheels turned slowly as Damien pulled his bicycle out of the woodshed. They creaked as if they didn't want to be taken out for a ride. The frame of the bike was dusty and parts were starting to rust. The last time he rode it, it was practically brand new. It didn't matter now. No matter how much the bike resisted his mind was set. Spring was here and Damien was ready.

"Hello old friend," he whispered as he looked at the red bike while closing the door to the woodshed. "Let's see if we both still got it."

Damien carried his foot over and slipped on top. It felt natural, he could almost feel the speed again. He slowly made his way through the grass of his backyard to the chain-link gate. After it was opened he passed through the small exit and closed the door behind him. Stopping, he looked down and gripped the handlebars. His grip grew tighter and then more gentle. Damien exhaled and pushed off.

The bike softly rolled down the old driveway and turned right, into the street. Damien simply smiled as the first brush of wind met his face and caressed his long, dark hair. "Yes," he thought to himself, "I remember this..."

Turning left, he gave the petals a whirl and lightly zoomed down the main street of his neighborhood. Taking another left he came upon the first hill, which was greeted by an even bigger smile from Damien's soul. He released the handlebars but quickly grabbed onto them again. The bike was unresponsive. "No, no, not quite ready for that yet. In unison we soar but working against each other we plummet to the ground." He grinned and glanced down at his red ride again before taking a third left.

Damien had completely forgotten about his music. Fumbling in his pocket for his CD player he pressed play. As the first rhythms entered his ears, something clicked on inside of him. The spokes turned faster. He pedalled a little bit harder. His whole demeanor had changed. The arrogant indulgence burned through him. Damien remembered this feeling; the whole world was his to ride through.

He made a right and took a glance towards the bus stop on the left. A bus was approaching in the distance. "Alright, let's have some fun," he thought to himself.

He knew he had to work quickly up the next small patch of road to get on the steepest, curving hill for miles. Gritting his teeth just a bit, he pushed harder. The pedals were whizzing at their usual speed now, usual in Damien's sense of speed. twenty miles per hour for everyone else. He looked back around. The bus was starting at the bottom of the hill. He came to the crest and a haughty grin painted itself onto him. "Let's go!"

Faster, faster. The wind whispered a cool hello with burgeoning intensity. The sound was more music to his ears. His wheels turning quickly, throwing up pebbles and breaking small branches in the road. The wind was howling now. He looked down at his feet and he just saw a blur. Passing a car he yelled in pleasure. Damien could feel the bus approaching and let it all loose.

Picking up on the final small patch before the huge curve he ducked down low and cautiously ripped his hands of the bars. He soared. Ripping through the pavement he was a bird with wheels. Not a single hair was in his face. The air was gripping cold. It's transparent hands were wrapping themselves around Damien's loose arms, tugging at his

shirt, making the hairs on his legs stand up. The gust was almost too much. He could barely see.

Just as he was making the turn in the big curve, the bus passed him. It had gained all that speed too, without even trying. "Bastard." He chuckled. The final downhill stretch had started as Damien came over the bridge that intersected a creek. He could feel himself slowing down. Instead of focusing on the decreasing thrill and speed, he looked off to the side into the woods. The trees were still bare, recovering from winter. However, the creek was flowing and Damien was welcoming spring and summer with open arms at over thirty miles per hour.

He came to the bottom of the next big hill and pulled up right next to the bus. He looked over and to his vibrant, youthful disappointment no one even noticed the race. No one save a little blond kid with an astonished look on his face. The big, blue eyes of the toddler pleased Damien and not for the sake of any feeling of superiority. He was just glad someone noticed. He waived to the child and rolled on.

The time flowed by. The trees, buildings, intersections, and cars all become somewhat of a blur. Occasionally Damien stopped to look around and take a breather. A winter without his red companion made him slower than the hot days of last summer. Nevertheless, He'd be back up to speed before June even graced his face. He soaked in the simple sights and kept rolling on and on, with only his destination in mind.

Eventually, his favorite part of the trip came into view. The bridge towered over as the road heaved up and took everything in immediate view with it. It rose high and rose rapidly, who knew what might lie on the other side? Would the same world still be there? "I guess I'll see when I get to the top," Damien thought to himself. He pushed on.

The ride up was brutal. The cold months had made his muscles lazy. He walked a lot but he took the bus more. No time to stop now, he was determined and already a third of the way up the hill. This rise would not be left unconquered. He had to make it.

Knives worked their way up through his quadriceps. His blood burned. Fatigue was setting in. Damien was halfway there. "C'mon, c'mon only that much more to go," he grunted at himself. The sweat was trickling down his forehead in buckets. The droplets showered his grimacing expression as if they were being squeezed out of him. Damien opened his mouth in pain yet no sound escaped. He could still see some of the road ahead. The sweat was in his eyes now, salty, stinging, telling him to stop. Legs on fire, exhaustion tugging like gravity, and a voice inside was pleading for a break. He closed his eyes and rolled to a stop. He was there; he had made it.

For a brief moment there was silence. Damien felt a delicious breeze brush over his face. Then all the natural sounds of the street softly exploded into his ears. Cars whizzed by, a plane flew overhead, the bridge shook as a truck passed over it, and things felt calm. Maybe it was the fulfillment of achieving that old run, maybe it was the soft skies, or maybe it was just one of those perfect moments where all of the meaningless commotion of the plain world clicked in unison just like all the spokes of a bicycle wheel. But the wheels were still now. Damien looked around and realized that only he could hear the magical silence of the moment. Before he knew it, all the pain in his legs was gone.

Damien gripped the chain link fence next to him. It separated him from the small, lonely road that filled the gap beneath the bridge. It lay between two old, abandoned buildings and hardly had any visitors. The trees along the road seemed to never change. Occasionally a car would pass by, probably someone who took a wrong turn and

temporarily got away from the loud mess of society. Damien laughed, they probably didn't even appreciate the momentary escape. Right now, the street was empty as usual, but that felt right.

He took a deep breath and looked at the sky. He didn't even have to, he already knew it was just as at peace as he was. It was that time just before anyone could look up and say, "oh look at the pretty sunset." It was a moment when the sky did what it usually did, watch over the entire planet and all the confused little creatures running around on it. And so he stood there. His view was nothing compared to that of the sun and clouds but he could still appreciate it. Damien could feel the journey that just went through him. He valued the patches of concrete, the traffic lights, and how the people in the buses and the cars moved faster, but he moved better. Damien pushed himself of his own accord, he ruled the pedals, and he could steer into the sky if he wanted to. That was the difference. That was speed. That was life. He smiled in understanding and turned the bike around. Click, click. Damien pushed off and started his journey back.