

Suddenly a standing woman turns in front of me
I swerve my bike, steering away, but to no avail —
a red blood stripe surges up my lower leg,
its smooth skin cover somehow severed in collision
(later we find my fender is the sharp, broken cause).

Strange pain tingles along my pedal-pushing shin;
my heart twists — like these handlebars —, tells me, Stop!
I cry out, my motion arrested. All cycling, circling, ceases.
No walking, racing, swimming world accessible now.
Inwardly, I howl. Thus ... how it happened, yet —

O free-wheeling sender of life and death ... why?
Horror that my body can be so swiftly sliced apart,
that this long scarlet gash instantly exposes mortality.
Disbelief that this slim, tanned limb — my own! — once closed,
finds its function torn open, limited, in such violation.

I lie, hurt, held in the loving lap of another woman.
Holding my calf myself, I press the garish sides
of this gaping wound together, purse my lips
together, so they will not shout out, Heavens!
How could you not see me, bystander?
How could you leave me, father, mother, brother;
husband, friend, sister, Great Mystery?

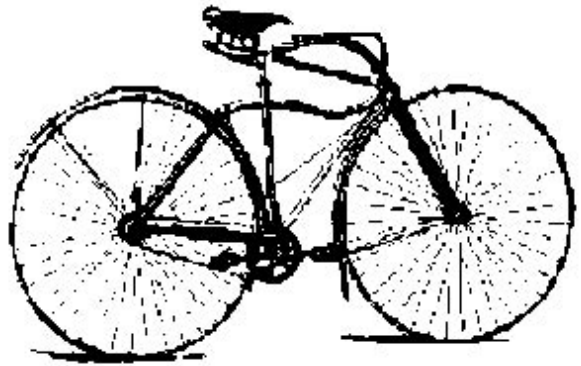
An ambulance arrives, skilled medics firmly
bind my split flesh, call this huge cut an “effusion”;
their strong arms take me up, assure my care,
though they fail as family. My leg throbs.
We leave my bicycle, false robber, behind.

Where is God? Here? There?
These red-stained trousers, a linen flag, locate fragility amid
whirling thoughts, strange brokenness. Who companions me now?
My confusion settles, and I am rolled into Emergency,
oddly wheeled towards wholeness again.

The urgency of spilt blood, spinning mind, diminishes
as a doctor slowly sews sixteen uniting sutures.
My suffering shifts, gears down ... O healing Spirit,
while I am stilled, lift up my grief, uphold this laceration;
may those who have been cut away yet be with me,
stitched into my soul.

Footnote: Caroline Parry adds this additional information about her poem, “The woman in the poem who turned in front of me was Mary McClure; the woman who held me was Betty Page; Sue Hill took me to the hospital; then, Carol Dixon collected us and delivered me home!”

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BICYCLE ACCIDENT AFTER MANY DEATHS 8/04

BY
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