

THE BICYCLE



William was afraid of it because the wheels turned by themselves. It had hung in the barn longer than he had been alive, long enough for his grandfather to forget about it and the child-hood joy it had brought him. William first saw it one summer day when he was sent out looking for his grandpa. He found the old man in the barn, bent over a thick wooden workbench, digging through a plastic jug of nuts and bolts. His Grandpa straightened up with a tired grunt.

"What are you looking for, Grandpa?"

"I Never really know." He brushed past William and pulled open a cabinet drawer. William poked his head in beside him to see, but the drawer flew shut.

"How do you know when you find it?"

His Grandfather laughed. "I always know it when I see it."

"Grandma made lunch."

"And there it is," Grandpa said. "That's what I was looking for. Lunch."

William followed his Grandpa to the exit and that is when he saw it. It hung directly

over the doorway in the darkest shadow of the barn. Still, it was clearly, an antique-of-a-bike, colored gray with age. It swayed subtly in the draft made when his Grandpa passed beneath, its front tire rotating slowly as if it were trying to creep down to the barn floor.

The old man stopped, just outside the door. He took a deep breath. "For a second I though I smelled Springtime," he said. He drew a second breath. "It's the freshest air you'll get." Then he walked toward the house.

The old bike held William captive. The barn's stagnate air filled his nose and the taste of the bike's dust-coated mettle crept into his mouth. He wrenched his face and for a moment resolved not to pass beneath it. Realizing no other way, he held a breath and darted out into the cleaner air, easily beating his grandfather to the house.

The table was too small for all three of them but they crowded around it anyway, hooked together at the elbows.

"Grandpa?"

The old man made a sound that could have been an answer.

"Whose bike is that in the barn?"

"There's a bike?"

Grandma swallowed a piece of her sandwich. "That place has more junk than a rail yard."

"I didn't know there was a bike," Grandpa said as his gaze drifted up and to the left, searching for a memory. He had to shake himself free just to take another bite. "I suppose it belonged to me," he finally said.

After lunch, William followed his grand-

pa back to the barn because the old man wanted to see the bike for himself. The sun was higher and as a result the opening of the barn door had grown darker. His grandfather walked in and nearly disappeared, except for his bright orange mesh cap. He took the cap off, scratched his white head and looked left and right.

William came in, looking up. He could see the flat, shredded tires, close enough to touch, if he jumped. He craned his head up and back as he past beneath it, then twisted around to face it. It looked more eerie in the sharper shadow of the



afternoon. "Right there." He pointed.

Grandpa caught on and turned around. He stared at it for a long time, rubbing his forehead as if massaging an achy memory. "Yup, it's mine," he admitted with a slight lull of breath. "I wasn't much older than you the last time I rode it. I don't know how it got up there."

"You rode on that?" William asked. The old man laughed, but William wasn't trying to be funny. He shuddered at the thought of his grandpa on a haunted bike.

"It not mine anymore," he said.

"It's not anymore?"

"Old men don't ride bikes. It's yours now." He gave William a gentle slap on the back.

The deep shadows of the barn hid the terrified look on William's face and the fear left him mute long enough for the old man to leave him standing there alone. The black rusty wheel made a slow quarter turn. William heard the spokes creak. He lunged out of the barn, past the old man for the second time that day. A strange sensation chased him, like stretching fingers touching him gently between the shoulder blades. He arched his back away as he ran. Haunted. It was a ghost bike. He was safe, for now. But behind him his grandpa ambled hopelessly.

The next day, William found his grandpa in the barn again. That is where he always went when he was looking for something but didn't know what it was. William walked in and to his horror, he saw that his fear had come true; the bike had crawled its way off the wall. It was flipped over on to its seat and handle bars, in the middle of the dirty barn floor.

His Grandpa knelt awkwardly beside it spraying the crank and chain with an aerosol can and pumping the peddle with his other arm. He looked up at William with an excited, fake-toothed smile. The wheel spun its empty tread making a horrible thumping sound.

Keeping one eye on the bike, William made his way around the barn, climbed a wood ladder to the loft and laid long ways on a stack of rough lumber to watch from a safe distance.

Billy did not like the way his Grandpa was acting. He watched in worried fear as he continued all day with his work. He had no trouble finding what he looked for now. He crossed the barn, pinpointing this tool and that tool, steal wool, spray paint.

A chill traveled down William's spine every time his grandpa's gaze drifted from the bike as if listening to a far away voice.

In the same manor, he drifted back to his work, always with renewed energy.

Grandpa removed the wheels and scrubbed them with the steel wool. He stopped every few minutes to clinch the pain out of his bare hands and stretch his fingers. When he did, William heard the sound of his popping knuckles, and it was like the metal bones of the bicycle forming itself into a new disguise.

The seat and handlebars were stripped off and the frame was hung from a metal hook at the workbench. Grandpa spray-painted it red and white, the only colors he found in the barn. When he was done, he stood back and stared at it, literally watching the paint dry. William could not stand to watch, He climbed down from his place and left the barn, walking right past his Grandpa with out disturbing his deep gaze.

Grandpa was like the ghost bike now. William was sure that if he were on the wall above the door he would remain there, greying and dusting over, a part or another occasionally swinging back and forth in a current of air.



Billy slept restlessly. He dreamt of the bike. Not the clean red and white one that his grandpa painted but the rusty gray one. It stood upright on its shredded tires in Grandpa's spot at the kitchen table. It

swiveled its handle bars as if looking sharply at William. Then it moved away from the table, more dragging its wheels than than rolling them and pushed itself through the door, letting the tension spring slam it shut again. William followed until it had passed through the dark opening of the barn door. That is where William stopped, fearing to pass, fearing what might be hanging there right above the door. He woke with a racing heart.

Only his Grandma was at the breakfast table in the morning. William skipped his breakfast and went out to the barn where he found his grandpa, already at work on the bike. He had gathered his tools and was assembling the pieces. He had not bothered to wash the paint off his hands from the day before, so when he took hold of the different parts, William did not know where the metal ended and his Grandpa began.

At some point, maybe early that morning, or late last night, he must have gone out to a store, because the bike had new treads. These were shiny and black without cracks or shreds. When his Grandpa placed them on the over turned bike and gave the pedals a whirl, they spun with a clean rushing sound, like a fast, unblocked wind. The sound of speed.

It was done. All there was to do was flip it over.

Grandpa wrapped his hands on to the handlebars. His eyes closed. A small smile grew on his face. He held whatever feeling he was having for a moment then pushed the bike, out of the barn into the light of the morning.

"William!" He called toward the house. He was surprised to see William come from the barn behind him. He wheeled the bike around then pushed the kickstand down with his foot and stepped back to let it stand on its own.

"Well, are you going to get on?"

William circled the thing suspiciously. He had never seen it outside the shadows of the barn. It looked completely different. If he had not seen his Grandpa working so hard on it, he would never recognize it. But he had seen, he watched it all, and he knew that underneath the phony facade was a ghost bike, no good for riding, only good for hanging in old barns and haunting dreams.

"I don't want to," he said, barely audible.

Grandpa stepped closer "What?"

"It's haunted."

The old man gave a fast chuckle but cut it off when he realized William was being serious. Acting as natural as he could, the old man rolled the bike away, leaned it against the side of the barn, and left it there against the dark planks, then he walked to the house, his colorful hands swinging at his sides.

Grandpa resorted to the kitchen table, pushed William's untouched breakfast out of the way and pulled a news paper across to himself- strictly habit. He had no intention of reading it. He crumpled it in his hands, then pinned it to the table with his elbows.

William came in and passed directly to his room, feeling terrible. He did not know why he was so troubled by the bike. He was not so young as to truly believe in haunted bikes, and after watching his grandpa work so hard, he wanted to please him, to be grateful. He didn't know why. He just could not.

Ooooo. A low, eerie sound made its way to William's room. A ghost? William thought. He stood to listen harder. Hooooooo. Along with the ghostly sound he heard his Grandma yelling something. He darted down to see what was wrong.

William ran through the house, through the kitchen and outside into the morning sun. There he saw that it was not a haunting cry, but a joyful wail from his grandpa.

"Whooo Hooo!" Grandpa wobbled by on the bike. It was too small for him, and he was going just fast enough to stay upright. His hat and suspenders where gone. His teeth were out, and he whooped and hollered with high-pitched joy. Billy could see the shinny pink of his gums.



Grandpa turned the bike around and came by again. "Woo hoo. Look at me," he shouted, "I'm fifteen, fourteen. No, thirteen. Woo hooooooo!"

"Get off that bike you crazy fool," Grandma shouted. She flapped a hand towel at him but he had already peddled by and turned around for another pass. Coasting by he stuck his legs out and let the peddles spin freely.

"Hey, Willy, do I look ten?"

"Stop that." Grandma demanded. "You'll break every crazy bone in your body. Grandpa wasn't listening. He found his peddles, held the bike straight and continued down the road.

"Grandpa, where are you going?" William waved his arms over his head, but his

grandpa grew smaller and further away.

"Where's he going, grandma?"

"Crazy, that's where he's going. The old man thinks he can find youth on a bike." With a sigh, she turned and headed inside. William waited for a few minutes then he too headed in.

When you're an old man, your childhood is far away, and William's grandpa did not return until the afternoon. They heard the door open and they came to see Grandpa hobble into the house bent at the waist. He was somber and quiet, and slightly embarrassed. He walked with a limp of weak legs.



"Did you find it?" William asked.

Grandpa pressed his palms into his back trying to stand up straight. No answer, just a sheepish grin. With his teeth out he looked like a baby, a new born baby.

Wherever he had taken the bike, the ghosts had not followed him back, and during that summer, the bike came lived beneath William. No longer did he think of it like the old bike he first saw above the barn door. Now, the red and white bike raced the roads by day and only leaned against the porch at night to rest. Mornings came quick and from there, childhood was not far at all. You could easily get there on a bicycle. And it was fast.

William nearly out grew the bike while sitting on it, and eventually he lifted it, him-

self, over his head and hung it back in its place above the barn door. It's tires were still full and shiny at the time, its frame clean and fresh. He passed beneath his childhood, daily, realizing it would be a long, long time before it haunted anyone again.

THE END

THANK YOU. It means a lot to me when you simply read my work. I encourage you to let me know if you've enjoyed it.

I also wanted to remind you that my site has samples of all of my books, so you can see if you would like any of those too.