

THE THINGS I HAVE FOUND

LOST THINGS AND THEIR STORIES

KING FOR A DAY

a story by Richard Sleboe

FOUND IN: SEDONA, ARIZONA

34°51'36.2"N 111°47'43.8"W

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a photographic project by Robert Götzfried and friends

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It is my birthday, and I am in heaven. My parents have given me my first proper bicycle. It is a racy ten-speed with drop handlebars and skinny tires. Best of all, it is silver, the color of robots, guns, and spaceships. A bike fit for a king. After enduring years of ridicule for riding my grandma's clunky trike, I will now rule the Garden District. I hug my mom, and then I'm out the door and on the bike.

"Take it easy," my dad yells, but I have no time to waste. I am late for school.

I barrel down Napoleon and turn left onto St. Charles, ignoring the streetlight. I feel invincible. But down the road, Mr. Fisher is dangling his giant ring of keys as the last few kids file into the schoolhouse. Any second now, he will lock up. If I don't make it in time, I will face a full afternoon of detention. I cannot let that happen. Not today, on my first day as king of the road. I try to shift up, but I'm already in the highest gear. I pedal like a madman. I even pass the streetcar, drawing puzzled looks from drowsy riders. Almost there now. But then the right-hand pedal hits the curb, propelling me out of the saddle and into the shrubs, where the seniors dump their cigarettes. The bike lands on the tracks, right in front of the streetcar. The streetcar is a mighty beast. It does the kind of damage that cannot be undone. It sucks my brand-new bike into its undercarriage and drags it away, towards Canal.

Mr. Fisher pulls me from the shrubs and helps me to my feet.

"Are you alright?"

"I think so."

I have grazed my elbow pretty badly, but don't think I have broken any bones. I bend down to pull up my socks. That's when I spot the pedal on the sidewalk. I pick it up. The plastic is partly scraped away on one side, exposing the axle bearing inside. I hand it to Mr. Fisher.

"Don't you want to hang on to it?"

"What good is a pedal without a bike?"

He shrugs and puts it in his pocket. The school door is still open. I step inside.