

The Bicycle

by Scarlet Crystal

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Thomas Parker was a clever boy. He applied himself in school when he so desired and often helped his father repair the car. It was an old one that broke down constantly; Thomas' mother once declared that if the car didn't break down before a month had passed, it would be "a genuine miracle."

Thomas liked to think of himself as a modern boy. Being ten years old, he thought himself impeccably wise beyond his years and didn't care who knew it. His father never told him off, and perhaps that is why Thomas came about the bicycle in the first place.

It wasn't a remarkable moment, but a memorable one. Thomas' father was in great need of a new fender for his car, so he took his son along to the junk yard to pick one up. They never did find what they came for, but the bicycle in its stead. It was fairly old as far as they could tell, but not in the least bit rusted or bent. The paint was almost entirely scratched off and the seat was missing. Four spokes were absent on the back wheel and the front tire was flat.

When Thomas looked at the bicycle, he saw only the image in his mind of a clean, progressive racing bike. With no more than two attempts, he persuaded his father to let him keep it, promising to fix it up properly.

Thomas' mother was not as enthusiastic to see her son's latest project. It was a piece of junk, a waste of money and effort. It would be the only thing to which he'd devote his time "till God knows when." Thomas' father shrugged, mumbling something about "teaching the boy responsibility."

Mrs. Parker was not delusional. No less than two days after the bicycle was acquired, Thomas stood before his parents, asking for money. He held his fingers behind his back as he always did, crossing them fervently. His parents agreed on something for once: that they could not afford to give Thomas money as easily as that.

Mr. and Mrs. Parker surveyed their young son. He had his father's light hair and blue eyes, but his mother's stocky figure and straight nose. They knew that he was more intelligent than the average boy, but feared the worst in this case.

"Before we know it, he'll spend all of our savings," his mother chattered angrily. Mr. Parker muttered something about "costly" and "difficult." Thomas shook his head. It was time he got himself some funds of his own.

That June, he walked the streets of his small town, watching his neighbors closely to devise a plan to get work. He was only ten years old, and he knew that paper delivery boys were usually hired around twelve. He wondered and wandered. What to do?

Thomas was not the easiest person to converse with. Similarly, he did not have many friends to converse with. There was one, however. His name was Bernard Moncton, and his father owned a large summer house in Florida as well as a generously sized one seven blocks away from the Town Hall.

Bernard was tall and thin, with slim, pointed features. If Thomas paid attention to such things, he might have said his friend looked much like a younger version of his father, complete with dark red hair and a few freckles. He was the sort of boy who read books and enjoyed being present when nice guests came over. Following his father's example, he often used words such as "capital" or "profligate" or "colossal." He was also three years Thomas' senior, gaining some respect in the ten-year-old's mind.

Thomas brought his second best model plane as a bargaining tool. When he rang, the crisp man at the door ushered him upstairs. The house smelled the same way it always did: of lemonade and fresh new sheets. Bernard greeted him genially in his fashion and told Thomas to sit in the nearest chair.

The two boys often collaborated in their ventures, as Bernard might say. His father knew all about business, and at thirteen he liked to think of himself as a young businessman. Thomas explained that he was "terribly stuck" and in need of money to build "a modern vehicle," his bicycle.

Bernard listened thoughtfully. His father allowed him a certain amount of cash to spend on his own things. Bernard seemed a bit doubtful, but readily agreed to pay for all expenses when presented with Thomas' model plane.

A smug look occupied Thomas' face for the rest of the day.

He began work on the bicycle as soon as possible, beginning with the wheels. Spokes were not sold individually (to his knowledge), so he ordered himself a pair of new wheels. Two, he explained to Bernard, because "they must balance and match, or it will all be for nothing." Bernard thought this very reasonable and paid for the transaction.

The front tire was still flat, with a hole the size of a dime in it to boot. Thomas surveyed the bicycle briefly before deciding that a pair of new tires was in order as well. Bernard didn't bother to ask why both were needed; he knew all about balance and so on.

Once the wheels were repaired, Thomas purchased a new seat for his bottom to sit upon. The latest model arrived shortly. Bernard was pleased and told his father that business was "coming along satisfactorily."

The bicycle was beginning to resemble its desired look, but the color was horribly wrong. Only a few streaks of dirty paint remained; they were mostly coated in a dry peach color. Thomas scraped it all off and sent for a bucket or so of fresh yellow paint. Bernard nodded smartly and applauded his friend's achievements.

To most eyes, the bicycle looked complete. Almost new, in fact. However, Thomas saw fault. The handle bars needed padding to protect his hands. Two black covers arrived that fit over the handles perfectly. Bernard didn't object, though he wondered if the expense were completely necessary.

Nearly a month and a half passed between the time Thomas found his bicycle and the day it stood, completely finished and ready. Bernard excused himself early from his father's golf match and met Thomas on the top of the hill. The bike gleamed in the sunlight, a prize waiting to be won.

Thomas and Bernard both agreed that, as the manufacturer of the bicycle, Thomas ought to ride it first. A smug smile on his face, Thomas assumed the position atop the cushioned seat and hollered to Bernard to give him a push.

Bernard said something about "speed" and "the accuracy of steering," but pushed his friend in the direction of the slope anyway.

Bernard's father was not pleased when his son came home, very much abashed. He'd never gotten the chance to sit on the bicycle he'd paid for; it was too bent and twisted to be ridden ever again.

And as for Thomas, he felt very much harassed and banished the bicycle back to the junk yard, swearing never to look at one again.