

## Charity's Bicycle

Saturday, July 7, 1974, 10:43 p.m.

Around 8 tonight I took Charity's bike for a ride up the high hill in Thornden Park to the water tower. Breathing deeply, feeling energy. The sky was crystal, the sun, an explosion. Too early for the sunset, I rested atop the hill feeling the sun, seeing its gold patches on the foliage. On the bike, I readied myself for the spin home - yes, to coast down that long hill - when new arrivees pulled up.

One car was a dark wagon with about six people in it - mostly older - though there was a man perhaps just shy of thirty and a girl not much older than I am. I made to ride past them when one of their faces, smiling much too widely - approached me.

"I haven't ridden a bike in a long time. Mind if I try yours?"

I was reticent. This, after all, wasn't my bike. "Well, O.K., as long as you don't take it far."

"I won't. I'm with a group. I can't go far. Just around the circle."

I sat on a curb as he circled a few times. I watched the old woman in her delight at her view. I looked at the view some more. The under-thirty man said, "He's got your bike?"

"Yes."

"You want it back?"

"I'm in no hurry."

A woman with deep red hair also with the group said, "Do you mind if I ask you about your hat?" (A Bat Masterson-type topper that probably belongs to Doug)

"Not at all."

"Why do you wear it?"

"I just found it. I don't always wear a hat."

"A lot of people are doing things like that now to be different."

"I'm not doing it to be different or alike or anything. It just seemed right for now."

The under-thirty was telling the girl, "He's gone off with his bike down the road. I'll see if I can catch him in the car."

The girl told me she knew there might be a problem "when Bruce asked for the bike, but I didn't want to create a hassle."

"I'd rather have a hassle than a stolen bike. But, I'm sure he didn't steal it."

One of the group piped up, "Don't be so sure."

And, I said, "Well, I guess you know him better than I do."

I asked the people if he was a friend of theirs and got nebulous, "Well kinda"s.

"Do you know where he lives?"

"We sure do."

Now the girl saw fit to speak to me. "Let me take you away for a minute." But, we only took two steps from the group. Still well within earshot, she said, "We're from \_\_\_\_\_ Mental Hospital. I am a staff member. These are all patients. The guy with your bike is a patient. The man in the car is anothe staff member." (No wonder the car had a large #19 on its side)

"I had a feeling it was something like this."

"Don't worry. Even if we can't get your bike back now, it will probably be returned by tonight. You see, Bruce thinks its funny to take advantage of strangers.

"It's not funny," she explained as if she had to establish her position and her sanity in my eyes, "but he thinks it is. He has this thing against society."

"I'm not society."

"Well, don't worry."

"I'm not worried. Things like this happen to me all the time. Hardly a week goes by when something weird doesn't happen." I decided not to mention my police episode in this company. They liked my "Where is Lee Harvey Oswald now that we really need him"

button too well - at least Goona did.

The under-thirty staff man returned - couldn't find Bruce.

The girl: "I'll give you a ride home and take your number and give you the address of the hospital.

"O.K."

Her name is Natalie. Mine is Steve. The redhead is Goona, "That's not her real name. We just call her that," from Iceland. The old woman in the front seat is Mary.

Goona says, "I'm glad to know that crazy things happen to you every week. That happened to me too. And I thought..." here she paused and made the old circular motion with the index finger about the ear gesture "...I thought I'd flipped."

Driving toward my place, we spot Bruce on bike a few blocks ahead. We catch up, honk. "Bruce, he wants his bike back. He's right here." She must have been somewhat of a novice at this game - she didn't show too much confidence all along. Bruce got off the bike saying he had tried to pick up a copy of some Christian book, but Father Charles wasn't in. (Father Charles was the name of the guy whose convent I helped John paint) I told Bruce I knew Father Charles and to say "hi" to him for me.

He told me he tried to stop the bike by peddling backward (this doesn't work on an English racer) just as I noticed the fender rubbing the front wheel.

"You mean you hit something with this to stop?"

"Yes."

"Natalie, I'll probably be able to fix this. But, if not, what's your address?"

"616 Madison," said Bruce. "Is that it?" She nodded.

I bent the fender back into shape and left to visit Graham the bass player at 426 Westcott.