

## **Components**

**900 words**

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I flunked out of college the spring semester and had to move back in with my parents.

I didn't mind it. I took my sister's old room this time, it was bigger and had a sliding door onto the patio. When I got up--typically around noon--the sun was pouring in and you could smell the honeysuckle strong.

A couple neighbors politely asked what happened. I told them straight that I didn't go to class enough. That I didn't want to be an architect or accountant or teacher or biologist. They said what do you want to be and I said a radio DJ.

One person said in that case try the state college, they still have a broadcast journalism department he thinks. I said good idea, but of course I didn't want to be that either, that was a stock answer.

I wanted to ride a bicycle around the world. There was a YouTube couple doing that, they'd been gone two years and were currently in Japan. They had to ride in the rain sometimes but I didn't see anything else bad

about it.

I asked the guy in the bike store, older guy with a European accent who looked like he once raced. He said I better try it around here first, make sure it's a fit.

Yeah he had a point. On my way home I notice a garage door open around the corner, two decent looking bikes leaning up. I take a little walk back down there, seems reasonably quiet, I straddle the bigger one, not a bad fit, so what the heck I ride away.

I could probably leave it alone and there'd be no issue but might as well repaint the thing, and I watched a couple videos on how to remove the components from the frame, and I could get into this, maybe work in a bike store someday.

I hung the frame in the backyard while I sanded and primed and spraypainted it--a simple classy candy-red--and I put everything back together. The headset, stem, brakes, shifters, derailleurs and crankset all went smooth. Little trouble with the bottom bracket lining up but it got there and she was good to go.

We had a few mountains between us and Santa Cruz, the bike fanatics rode up there on the weekends, and I supposed that would be a good test--but it seemed simpler to ride around the neighborhood.

So I'd start off after dinner, make a right out of the driveway and see what we got.

There wasn't much through traffic. Five blocks down you had the option to head toward Panda Express and the bowling alley and the high school or--what I did--stay in the development and loop it back in a big circle.

It was fun to snoop around, try to imagine people's lives. There was one couple always arguing, you couldn't see them but you could hear it through the screen door. There was a beat-up Toyota pickup in the driveway with high, ribbed tires.

They seemed to be arguing about money but maybe it was other topics. Neither one gave an inch.

On a Tuesday afternoon I rang the bell. The woman was dressed nice with makeup. She was probably 50. Maybe 60. I said sorry to bother you but I live down the street and my bike got stolen, and would she know anything about it.

She looked at me sideways and said aren't you Kevin? I said yeah?

She said I'm sorry about your bike, what did it look like.

I stopped by again on Thursday. She said well you might as well come in, how about a cappuccino, they

have a machine.

There are pictures of grown kids and grandkid babies. One of her and a man at Grand Canyon. Why do you guys argue so much, I ask.

She said the arguing started during Covid when they were cooped up, that when they were free again they were in the habit, and she knows my mom. Young people need to find yourself she said, that it's part of the axis.

I said I want to go to Japan. I said you'd think they have no space over there but it's open in the north, little towns and countryside and they warn you about brown bears. I said that sounds like bullshit, blaming it on Covid.

How bout a cheese Danish? she said. She told me she never made it to Asia but she backpacked through Europe one summer.

*Then* what'd you do?

What would I take back?

Wasn't going there but okay.

I met a girl in Amsterdam, she said, she was from Savannah, she kept writing me to join her.

A gay thing?

No, it would have been a fresh start. I stopped writing

her back. I moved to Vallejo and worked at an I-Hop, she said, a bunch of highway patrolmen ate there and she married one.

I said I see how that can work, you're kinda pinned, especially at the counter. I said my roommate from before I flunked out, he worked summers as a tour guide at the fort in Fort Wayne.

That's Indiana?

Think so. I said I'm getting ready to ride to Santa Cruz but I'm a little scared.

Of the traffic? she said.

That and not making it, I said.

So don't tell anyone, she said. How about a sandwich?