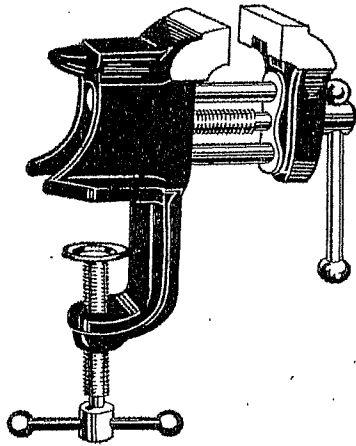


What I didn't realize until that moment was that I was the only little girl like me in the whole wide world.

On August 11, I turned twelve years old. We had my favourite spaghetti and meat balls for dinner and an ice cream cake from Dairy Queen with Woody the Woodpecker on it stuttering happy birthday in translucent blue icing.

On August 12, serial killer Clifford Olson was arrested outside of Nanaimo, a short car ride from our front door. He had just picked up two female hitchhikers in a rented car.



SMALL BENCH VISE

The vise is used to hold metal parts while they are bent, drilled, filed, sawed, etc.

## A DARK BLUE BIKE

The summer right before I started grade seven I got a new bike. A blue ten-speed with curled handlebars wrapped in white plastic tape and hand brakes. My old bike had been a purple one-speed with a sparkly banana seat. I had never loved it.

My dad drove us back with my brand new bike in the back of his old red Ford truck. Once we got home, he lifted it out of the back of the truck easily with one arm and set it down on the driveway. Then he lifted the back tire up off the ground and spun it with two fingers. It made a very pleasing clicking noise.

"You sure you know how to work the gears on this thing?" He was squinting at me, a smoldering cigarette dangling in one corner of his mouth. "It's a bit more complicated than your old one, you know. Way easier for the chain to fall off on these ones, too."

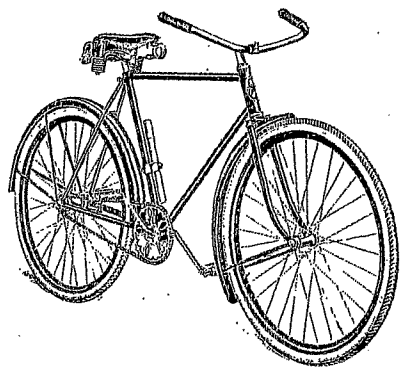
"Jenny Bailey lets me ride hers all the time," I lied. She would barely let any of us even look at her new bike.

He shrugged and watched me clamber onto the bike seat and coast down our driveway.

I pedaled slowly in too high of a gear along our street and ended up having to dismount and push the bike up the hill in the middle of Twelfth Avenue. But speeding down the other side was no problem, my short hair blowing back away from my face and the wind pulling tears out of the corners of my eyes. I pedaled as hard as I could from the bottom of the hill all the way to the turn-off onto Hickory Street at the top of Mountainview Drive.

I experimented with one gearshift, and then the other, and

heard the gears grinding near my back tire. The bike shuddered and the mechanism that I would soon discover was called the derailleur skipped back and forth to accommodate my inexperienced shifting. I pedaled with my head bent, eyes down, watching the chain slide



from one sprocket to another and back, starting to see how everything worked.

Next thing I knew I was blinking my eyes and trying to get them to focus. Everything was upside down and spinning, and my mouth tasted like dirty pennies. I stared straight ahead, trying to understand what my eyes were telling me I was look-

ing at. A curb. A black truck tire. A bumper with a muddy licence plate bolted to it. Blood. My blood.

Blood all over my shirt, pumping still out of my nose and onto the dusty road under me. I sat up and put my head back, pinched the bridge of my nose like they taught us to do in softball when you caught a line drive with your face.

I had apparently pedaled my bike straight into a parked truck, and its back canopy window was a maze of cracks. I wasn't sure if those cracks were from the crown of my pounding head or not, but I wasn't going to stick around to find out.

I stood my new bike up and brushed the dirt and gravel off of my jeans and hopped on, standing up on the pedals so I could race away as fast as I could.

But my bike chain had fallen off, and my front rim was bent enough to bring upon a serious wobble, and when I pedaled hard

the lack of resistance sent me sailing over my own scraped handlebars and I bit the pavement again, this time palms and chin first. A dog started to bark from behind the living room window of the house that the damaged truck was parked in front of.

I cried all the way home, pushing my broken bike and choking on tears and blood and dirt and snot. My dad was in the front yard, dragging the sprinkler across the grass, another smoke dangling. Or maybe it was the same cigarette? I had been gone a total of about seven minutes.

I thought he would be mad about my damaged bike, but he didn't say a thing about that. He just smiled with one side of his mouth and asked if I was missing any teeth.

"No," I said, touching each one of them with my bloody tongue. I had stopped crying as soon as I saw him. Crying made him nervous for some reason. He tolerated it from my little sister, but not so much from me.

He held my chin between his greasy thumb and forefinger, and squinted down his nose at me, turning my face to the right, and then the left.

"Go clean yourself up before your mom gets home from her night school," he said. "Spray that stain cleaner stuff on that shirt and put it all in the washer right now. I can fix your bike."

If we were a hugging kind of family I would have hugged him, but we weren't, so it didn't cross my mind.