

Bicycle Arpeggios

For almost a year now I have been trying to write this poem about the bicycles at dusk, a clattering gamelan's rhythm of give and take at the lake's edge, those stripped bikes converted into instruments—the bell and tock of pedals, the clicking gears as one rider yielded to the next, leg bones converting energy into mechanical song. And some would ride their bicycle as fast as they could go, and others drag out the broken chords. You would have understood this music as I could only listen. How beautiful and complicated humans are.

I mean to say that you are. I don't know you at all so how is it that I feel as if I've always known? Each time I mean to study you, to learn everything about you as I would learn a bicycle or a poem, but when I am with you I am overcome, and can only absorb you like water. I might recall a fragment—the olive skin of your hands, your scuffed shoes. But then I can't even remember what clothes you wore, your wrists, the colour of your eyes. So I need to see you again, and again, although I know you are not meant for me, to study every beautiful and complicated part.

And as you were not there to see it (how could I not have known that you existed on this earth?) I would like to include in this poem for you, how, when it became very dark, tiny hot air balloons were released here and there around the lake. They floated up over the bicycle gamelan and the black lake water and the stilt walkers and the gypsy band, higher and higher until they could no longer be seen anymore, until they were extinguished by the beautiful night.

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