

Fall

Fall was best for bike rides. Anyone could tell you- just ask Bradley, the smartest kid in fourth grade. I actually did once (which is how I know): “Bradley, when is best for riding bikes?” He leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms, frowned pensively as he adjusted his glasses.

“Fall. Fall is best. Leaves crunch under the front tire, there’s no ice to slip on, and because it’s cold sometimes there aren’t as many people on the sidewalks. AND if you crash you’re probably wearing a jacket so you don’t get scraped up.” He nodded, sagely. “Summer is next-best. Less chance of rain like in the spring, no mud to clean off the spokes. So it’s fall, and then summer. Then spring, *then* winter.” After he said that, Mrs. Hennessy made us stop talking and go back to our seats so we could start class.

I was thinking about that conversation and Bradley today as I whizzed down Main. It had been five weeks and four days since the accident and his mom had said that anytime we wanted to come visit, just call ahead. He had good days and bad. Sometimes it was like nothing had even happened, and we would play cards on his cowboy bedsheets and laugh until his big sister Natalie pounded on the wall and told us to shut up.

Other times it was scary. I’d come into his room and the shades would be down, and instead of sitting up in bed and having his comic books scattered all over the place he’d be lying on his side, facing the wall. I never really knew what to say but we’d read Mad Magazine or I’d make a puzzle and tell him what Robert ate for lunch or what Mr. Carlton, the janitor, found on the playground that morning.

I didn’t really know what nerve damage was, but it sounded bad. Bradley was always saying that Natalie was “getting on his nerves” but I don’t think that was what his mom was talking about when she explained to our class what had happened to him. She stood at the front of the classroom and let us know that Bradley would be out for fall and winter and hopefully be back by spring. She wore a yellow dress and didn’t cry until she was leaving the room.

I stopped by the gas station and bought a bag of M&Ms with whatever loose change I had in my pocket. It was hard to pedal and eat at the same time, so I pulled off the road and straddled my bike. Had a handful of candy (the green ones tasted best, Bradley and I agreed) and watched the breeze shake the tops of the trees. A dog barked a few streets over and a train whistled *mournfully* (the word of the day) down by the tracks. Something about the way the sun caused the leaves to turn gold as it set made me sad. It wouldn’t be long until fall was over but I wanted it to last as long as possible.