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Watching the Tour of California

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WATCHING THE TOUR OF CALIFORNIA

RICK MAGEE

I recognize the hill where the crash happens
flattened by the helicopter camera perspective.
From above, it looks like a pebble dropped in water
with the golden leader's jersey hitting the asphalt
and other riders rippling away to safety
in a rainbow of team kits
just past the right hand curve
and next to the little turn out
where birders and photographers park
to get their blue herons or coastal sunsets.

I used to have to get off my bike
to walk that hill, pushing my
Free Spirit—red, white, and blue
with ape hanger handlebars,
the glittery banana seat,
and the oogah horn I got for my birthday.
Mom and Dad disguised our carless poverty
with family bike rides
to the park, and oh,
let's just stop at the store on the way.

One day as we neared that hill
Dad dropped back to ride
beside me, grinning.
“I’ll bet you a quarter,” he said
“you can’t ride up that hill without stopping.”
I yelled in triumph as I crested the top
and only realized years later
his clever reverse psychology.

He handed over the quarter
and I contemplated the riches
25¢ could purchase:

A Hershey bar I wouldn’t have to share.
(Though I probably would.)
Cylindrical double scoops of Thrifty ice cream.
(Mint chip and chocolate.)
A super bouncy ball from the vending machine.
(Maybe I’d get lucky and get the swirly one.)

Or—I could add it to the 3 nickels and a dime
in my little leather change purse
and get a Snoopy paperback
the next time Mrs. McCabe
hands out the Scholastic book order form.

WATCHING THE TOUR OF CALIFORNIA

I still ride, though now
I'm on black carbon
and fancy Italian wheels.
But I continue mentally rewarding myself
with 25¢ on the toughest hills,
and those 20 bucks I once won
in a criterium feels paltry in comparison.
On today's ride I saw a quarter on the road.
I stopped to pick it up
but it was one of those newer state quarters,
eliminating even the tiniest chance
it was the same coin my dad gave me.

