

The Bicycle



To ride on two circles. Twin circles forked by twin triangles.

It's geometric, graceful, an elegant machine: the bicycle. A meeting of hands and bars, of seat and seat, of feet and pedals. Function dancing with form. And every surface curved, as with violins.

It cannot move, cannot even stand upright without a person. It needs a soul to animate it, to balance - and off you go, two as one. Toward a memory of childhood summer, a wobbly grind toward poise. And to roll downhill in later life is to ride headlong into a nursery rhyme.

Its wheels are delicate, spindled, like silk spinning wheels. And all of this balances on a fearful symmetry of metal and rubber with pedals like stirrups and a seat called a saddle.

It is, in fact, a shadow of the horse. The bicycle's forerunner rolled out of the nineteenth century when an oat shortage left German towns horseless, and a clever inventor propelled a wooden two-wheeler by shuffling his feet along streets.

And lifetimes later, each time we head out, we dance with violins.

— Michael McCarthy