

The Gospel of Wheelie

for what feels like a minute
& limitless, your BMX mimics
a unicycle, the street a wide rope,
& the next thing you know

you're pedaling midair, balancing
an act to keep your front wheel
afloat, from pavement, praying
a foot doesn't slip, your palms

grip the handlebars like a split
rein, praying a disciple witnesses
your frame's ebbing levade
fail to fade, witnesses your legs

churning, propelling your face,
determined, down a city block,
past a basketball goal you played
H-O-R-S-E, past the church

you never attended, this wheelie
equivalent to the dual miracle:
spiritual strength & endurance,
your quads & hams burning

like a hog cranked over a pit
of flames, & though your chain
is taut, you doubt, & the instant
you quit believing, you sink.

Washington Parish Free Fair

Franklinton, Louisiana

For some reason, this was our yearly trip
across Lake Ponchartrain. Our class's whiff
of livestock, alligator on a stick, sugar cane,
fried frog legs & fresh-squeezed lemonade.

& for some reason, I thought it a good idea
to volunteer for the hypnosis fodder.
To take the main stage with five others
in front of hundreds & hundreds of eyes

I didn't know, as some white guy in a cape
& tie showcased his power. He told us to sit
& we sat. He strolled by whispering
instructions & we all went along with it:

*Ok. Whenever I say "bab rah gab doh"
e³ wave my wand, make like you're sleeping.
Ok? e³ whenever I say "doh gab rah bab,"
make like you're waking up from a long nap.*

Even now I wonder if audience members
perched on foldout chairs or plunked under
gangly trees could see me faking. Wonder
what would've happened had I stirred

before he told us to, instead of going along
with the whole ruse. What I would've done
had I known there were folks in the audience
who owned robes & hoods. Folks I'd stood

beside or passed chucking darts at balloons
& shooting moving targets. By sunset
the hoax was over, & it was time to get
back on the bus. My classmates swooned

& cheered & even the girl who never
liked me held my arm, happy I wasn't sawed
in two or transformed into a talking sow.
Even better, that I wasn't made to disappear.



Christopher Woods, *Shack by the Trees*, photograph