

Fiction

GLORIA LOST

CA Priest



It never truly rains in Seattle. Most months, it's cloudy and dark like a constant shadow.

The air is thick with droplets and they settle on your clothing like visiting bugs. There is a drizzle coating everything. In the 90s, we wore flannels and heavy jeans and stocking caps and our grandfathers' coats because we lived with perpetual sprinkles and walked through constant puddles. We escaped inside to concerts and art openings and poetry readings and open mics. We carried around soaked journals and the bottom of our second-hand corduroys were always damp.

I lived near the University of Washington in a tiny little apartment three stories into the wet sky. I was going to college as fast as I could to save money. I worked 30 hours a week at a sad, left-over pet supply store in a shopping mall transforming into a future I didn't recognize. I took classes at the university and two different community colleges. Any given day, I crossed back and forth on foot or on a muggy green Metro bus.

I made \$300 a month; my rent was \$450. I didn't own a car. Everything in my apartment was from the Goodwill or from a charitable family member or friend. I ate Top Ramen and canned soups. I drank Rainier beer if I was lucky or enormous boxes of cheap red wine that dyed my lips and mouth a deep, low violet.

A few months after my birthday, my distant father asked me what I wanted. What I needed was a way to get around – a bicycle. We headed up one dank fall day to a now defunct used bike shop on the Ave. There, I got my hands on a grey, Giant mountain bike with scratches all over it and a twisted front wheel, but it was mine. It was glorious.

It was heavy and slow and as used as a used item could be, but I shot up and down northeast Seattle every day – to work by 6 a.m., out to my first class at the university, back to work by lunch time, and then, up to North Seattle Community College for afternoon classes, and finally, pitstop at home to reheat some Campbell's Chunky New England Clam Chowder, and an evening course at Seattle Central. At night, when I soared towards home down the long hill of 24th Ave East, the city's shops and cafes and bars sparkled with latent drops and the outlines of big conifers hid the yawning cloud breaks.

One morning, I sleepily trudged out to my trusty transport and she was gone. I kept it on a third-story balcony high above the nighttime sounds and sirens. I thought it was safe.

Her name was Gloria. I etched her name into her flank. I talked to her when I rode. She was more part of my life than anything else. I searched alleyways and parks and bike shops. I had to work, to go to school, but everything was sad and dark and wet. The rain felt heavy as I walked. The drops seemed magnified through the bus windows. At night, I wondered where Gloria had gone and why she had been taken.

A friend of mine and I were walking on a Sunday up to Olympic Pizza and Pasta in Roosevelt for a late, hung-over breakfast of feta omelets and lean ground lamb over the best hashbrowns in the entire world when I spotted her leaning against a pillar under the University Bridge. I ran to her, made sure it was my dear Gloria, and I was off with her.

I brought her home and cleaned her up. She seemed fine – maybe a few new dings or scratches, but otherwise, she was the Gloria I remembered.

I was back soaring through Seattle's car heavy roads and thoroughfares. There were no bike lanes back then, and drivers bullied cyclists. People threw things at me, honked at me, swerved towards me, took turns right in front of me, and revved their engines behind me, but I didn't care. Gloria and I were agile. There was no traffic for us, she could go anywhere.

About a year later, I was riding one gloomy afternoon towards college for a late class when an aging gentleman turned right into me. I had been atop my trusty transport and suddenly, I was not. I hit the pavement hard and slid into the curb headfirst.

When I came to, I was lying in the dooryard of an old bar with drunk patrons trying to get me to sip beer. I had deep, dark blood coming out of my head. My helmet was cracked. I had wounds on my legs, arms, shoulders, and back.

The police were there, talking with the driver. An ambulance arrived and I was checked over by paramedics. I was interviewed by two serious, annoyed officers. I got a ticket for leaving the scene of an accident because the bar patrons had dragged me out of the street – the driver received nothing.

As I limped all patched up around the area, I couldn't find my bike. She was gone again.

I searched, but I never saw her. I put a 'boy seeks girl' ad in *The Stranger* after a few weeks and received a message. For \$200, I could have my bike back. I took a friend and intended to get my Gloria back no matter how. When we showed up on a sad, desolate street in SoDo, the man with my bike was living out of a tent, clearly with a drug problem.

I gave him a hundred dollars and she was back with me again. From there, Gloria and I moved across the country twice, and rode all over the US and Pacific Northwest for more than a decade. But then she was failing...

One cold winter night I walked her down to the University bridge and leaned her against the pillar. I said my goodbyes. I sometimes think about her. I picture her with another college kid who needs her. I picture her racing down Roosevelt or Eastlake or the Ave. Her new rider is smiling.

CA Priest is a writer from Seattle, Washington. He's been published in numerous literary magazines and websites, including *ZYZZYVA*, *The Paris Review*, *Modern Nomad*, *Places*, *The Oyster Boy Review*, *The Moon Reader*, *Sequestrum*, *The Paris/Atlantic*, *Espionage*, *BOMB*, and others.