

VELOCITY

I was riding my bike
on a road in Georgia. Weeds
and ditches, trees, me and solitude,

the heat. I was 16, in love
with speed, long hair trailing behind
like a visible wind.

I was happy. I was 16.
Then two men in a truck.
We all know what wind means:

Free. Two men and me.
The sun was sinking. I was 16.
The one in the passenger seat

reached out to grab
the wind. No use
describing the jerk of

my head, the scream.
I was 16. I lived.
No use describing the force

of a hand linked to a truck,
two drinking men, what
“back roads Georgia” means.

All of us were traveling, near equal
velocity, back when I still loved danger,
speed. Downhill. Back

when I understood “free.”
If this were a math problem,
it would read, *A girl*

on a bike travels at 20 mph.

*Two men in a truck
moving at a slightly faster speed*

pull up. One grabs her hair.

What will the outcome be?

I was 16. Innocent enough to love

solitude, danger, speed.

On a rural road in Georgia,
I liked to be hot and fast and

free. A bike the color
of the sun. I was happy
as a peach. The man tugged

at the wind. And then the crumple
that was me, the gravel
pitting my pure heat. I was 16,

had been learning, slowly,
to love my solitude, a fire
inside. And then, so suddenly,

the wind in his hands,
bloody and brown, the holes
in my skin. The force of a knowledge

dark as speed, hard
as free. The answer: I
lived. I was 16.