

Well, since that was not to be, she would get along on her way with just a glance at the plum tree, for time was precious. There it stood, its darkened shadow under the midday sun hugging it closely, the dew now dried upon its frail, wide-open blossoms, a white petal, as she looked, drifting idly down through the bright, luminous air. Was it but a tree, she wondered, remembering the madness it had engendered, the buying of the tea set so like itself, the quick framing of lies; recalling the way it had become Hawley, the awe with which the little girls had gazed upon it. Somewhere, she dimly thought, she had heard that spirits dwelt in trees, once mortals on this earth, then trunks and branches, leaves and blossoms, yet still able to exert strange power. Perhaps, indeed, some mysterious force or essence hidden in that white mist of bloom was prompting her, when, like Angelina, she might be lying flat on her bed, to pedal her bicycle as far as she could pedal it up the long hill toward those grim buildings on its crest.

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Her front wheel became jittery far sooner than usual as she pedaled up the hill. The calves of her legs early cried out to her to free them. She felt herself more than a little out of breath as, dismounting, she pushed her bicycle