

## A Right to the Road – Chava Alexandra

I am an American and I am a cyclist. I ride to commute and I ride for the pleasure and thrill of riding. I love cycling. I love the feel of the wind, the rush of the ground beneath my pedaling feet, the pumping of my heart as my legs move up and down. Yet, when I must ride on the road, getting doored really sucks, as does swerving around pedestrians who use our bike lanes as sidewalks and delivery truck drivers who go cart-first around their cargo holders. Being hit by a truck or a car isn't great either, I tell you from experience. Of course, a fair number of cyclists are not free of blame, as some weave in and out of traffic and run lights. In 2012, 726 cyclists were killed and another 49,000 were injured in collisions with motor vehicles ("Traffic Safety Facts, 2012 Data", NHTSA). Life is a risk in-and-of-itself, we needn't make it more so.

Government, you have given us bike lanes, bike paths, and, in some places, our own traffic lights. It is nice to be recognized as part of our thriving transportation community, but, please, protect the great infrastructure that you've built. Protect me. Enforce the rules of the road and the bike lanes for all vehicles. Stop pedestrians who use our lanes the same way you would stop cars that drive on the sidewalk; ticket cars that park in our bike lanes the same way you would ticket cars that park illegally elsewhere – It doesn't matter if the driver is there, I have to swerve into traffic whether he's sitting behind the wheel or has stepped out to buy a coffee. (NYC Traffic Regulations, section 4-08(e) and 4-12(p), state that a motor vehicle cannot park/idle or drive in a bike lane. It's your law.) Please, group us with the rest of the traffic, in protection and in reprimand.

Drivers, quit trying to overtake me in an intersection. Bikers are often hit by drivers who think speeding up to turn in front of us will be faster than if you continued at your normal pre-turning speed. If you have to speed up to pass a cyclist, don't. Pay attention when you're driving, don't text or fiddle with the radio. I'm still moving even when you look away for a moment. Make eye contact with me, that way I know if you are planning to drive through your stop sign, even when I have the right-of-way.

Fellow Cyclists, we're not driving cars and we're not the only people who have a right to the road. I hate cars cutting me off as much as you do, but I abide by the rules set forth for on-road vehicles, such as stopping at red lights and obeying speed limits. You are required by law to obey the rules of the road. If you want to be treated as equals in riding space, start acting like equals. Those of you who run red lights give a bad name to us true commuter cyclists. In city parks, where the speed limit for cars and bikes is no greater than 25mph, going 40mph is as much against the law as is a car parking in the bike lanes.

Remember, we want them to share the road, so *share* it. And quit taking one-way streets the wrong way.

Society, your asthma, gasoline dependency, and obesity problems are a growing issue. We are lagging far behind our European neighbors in green-transportation alternatives, we are unhealthy and lazy, we are destroying the land we have been building for our future. Encourage alternatives to motor vehicle transportation – we're not only good for traffic congestion, we are environmentally friendly and healthy, too – but only if you make it a safe alternative will the movement be able to ride on, to survive, to thrive.

Read on my friends and you shall know  
Of a Cyclist's ride not long ago.  
On the 11th of August in two thousand ten  
Hardly a one will ride again  
Who'll carry the banner to and fro.

She said to her bike, "If the Autos cruise  
By Lane or High on the streets tonight  
Flash your bike light ahead in a narrow ruse,  
Near the North Street High as a warning light,  
Red if by Lane and white if by High  
And I on the opposite street will ride,  
Ready to race and pass every car,  
Through all of campus, the river, and bars,  
For the cyclists to be up and to spar."

Then she said, "Ride safe!" and with oiled  
cranks,  
Silently rode 'long the river banks,  
Just as the moon rose over the road,

Where driving fast in the moonlight showed  
The Semi-truck, Auto beast-like-tank;  
A phantom car, with its hood and grate  
Across the road like a prison gate,  
A huge dark clone that was grown by far  
By its own reflection in the tar.

Meanwhile, her bike, through alley and street,  
Cycles and cycles, with silent gears,  
'til in the silence around it, it hears  
The roar of an engine along the road  
And the screaming screech of the rubber tires,  
Racing down High Street so uncontrolled.  
So it rode to the corner of the North Street High,  
By the sidewalk filled with walking feet,  
Where its light would shine across the street,  
And startled the walkers all walking by  
On their innocent wanderings that 'round it  
strolled

Oblivious to all that would unfold.  
By the uneven sidewalk, long and cracked,  
Facing forward and never back,  
Where it paused to listen and look down  
A moment on the bikes of the town,  
And the headlights gone on the eerie black.  
  
Gathered on barstools sat the drunk  
In their midnight swooning's off the wagon,  
Inhaling fire like the breath of a dragon  
And keeling over, completely skunked.  
The weary tender, as he poured,  
Incredibly thirsty and growing bored  
And finally crying, "One last call"  
As he longed to drink the alcohol.  
  
Meanwhile, impatient to mount and ride,  
Helmet fastened and head inside,  
She paced in a vest, shined and chic.  
Now oiled, the gears would glide,  
Each cog of the chainring nice and sleek.  
Grown to cycle, tightened cleat,  
Well-worn with duct tape, her cushioned seat;  
She watched the corner with eager stare

The darkened sidewalk growing bare,  
As the pedals all pedaled by  
And stumbling drunkards gave muffled cry.  
And Oi! as she stares, on the corner in the night  
Through the darkness the flash of a light!  
She mounts the seat post, the cleat she clicks,  
She notes the color, the flashing of white!  
She starts to pedal, off the ground she kicks!  
  
The ticking of bike chains through the street,  
A gleam off a headlight, the smell of her tire,  
And all around her a breathing of fire,  
She rode through the city to gather her fleet.  
This was it! 'Twas here, with reflectors shining  
bright,  
The fate of a movement was riding that bike!  
She dripped with the sweat that poured from the  
hype,  
Burning the asphalt as her rubber made heat.  
  
She has left the corner and reached the soy,  
Where children would frolic, filled with joy,  
Where the tractors ride the earth until it settles,  
Where the farmers farm 'fore morning light,  
The scarecrows watching through the night

Now is heard the ticking of her pedals.  
  
It was dark on the street,  
No moon was seen above,  
She saw by bike light several feet  
And glowed in headlights by reflection  
And felt that her vest would give protection  
From the beasts that a cyclist is most frightened  
of.  
  
The lamps were out  
When she reached the town  
Along her route,  
She turned the corner as she braked  
Where the traffic light was tall and dim,  
Gazing down, its light was grim,  
As though it'd already begun to ache  
For the fallen cyclists it would look upon.  
  
It neared dawn by the sky  
As she reached the river, near the boat.  
She'd begun to feel the sacred high  
That a cyclist feels when a cyclist rides,  
As though river meeting the ocean tides;  
– Try to keep the dream afloat –

And one had lubed up gear and chain,  
Who, on this route, would meet collision,  
Never to mount and ride again,  
So rests the fate of a rider, fragile, on a car's  
decision.  
  
You know the rest. In the news you will read  
How the drivers were driving with soaring  
speeds–  
How the cyclists mounted reflecting lights  
And stuck to the bike lanes day and night,  
Riding with drivers who, behind their wheels,  
Would never know how collision feels,  
When truck meets biker on the ground,  
The skidding of tires all around.  
  
So through the night rode the Cyclist fast,  
So through night went her cry to attention  
That it was time for an intervention,  
Hoping that this night would be the last.  
A sound from the darkness, a tap on the pane,  
That it is time to make a change!  
For, borne on a night ride that wouldn't end  
Was a message to fix and to amend  
The desire to keep both cycle and car

And instead to ride them on different par,  
Go, enforce the white lines that were drawn!  
And on will ride the Peloton.