

Say where you are, but don't use words.

Where am I?

I am in the Heartland, flyover country, a flyover heart.

I am an invisible city. I am magically real, realistically magical. I have my tall parts, catching light, and my secret watchful alleys. A traveler has seen me from afar and wishes he could approach and lay a tired, dusty hand on my magnificent gates; walk my streets; hear my afternoon bells.

Italo Calvino wrote fables about one city, and gathered them into a book, "Invisible Cities." He imagines the Venetian Marco Polo in the court of Kublai Khan. Polo can't speak the language of Kublai Khan, so he describes his travels by leaping about, waving his arms, making faces and noises. He takes objects out of his sack and presents them to symbolize the essence of the city he has seen.

There are fifty-six cities described in the book, and Calvino – or is it Marco Polo, that liar -- gives all of the cities feminine names, as if each one is a different love affair.

A city is a love affair, come to think of it -- sometimes happy, sometimes unhappy, often both at once.

If love is a state of consciousness, then so is a city. I burn to travel the world, stuff my mouth and skin with cities, allow them to change me like emotions, epiphanies.

But Calvino's cities are one city. So where I am right now may be a starting point, or it may be a continent of cities, mapped in blocks of memories.

I will tell you where I am right now.

I will show you a bicycle, to represent the city of Moonlit Bong. In Moonlit Bong, streetlamps have been outlawed, and signs are painted, not lit. This is to allow the sky above the city to display its unusual properties. Longtime dwellers in Moonlit Bong speculate that it may be the trees, exhaling a vapor they draw up in the water that runs through the layer of stone under the city, that causes the sky to do what it does.

What it does, is gather the dreams and wishes of the residents of Moonlit Bong, the daydreams and fantasies, and project them around the firmament. On overcast days, the images have solidity, almost a smell; on clear days the scenes are thinly colored and roam on top of each other in layers, like film slides held up to the sun in a handful.

The people of Moonlit Bong dutifully go to work in their offices and workshops and stores, where they cannot see the sky. They go cheerfully, because after their work is done they have their bicycles. There are no automobiles in Moonlit Bong. Everyone rides bicycles, to have their faces open to the sky. To ride a bicycle is as close as an ordinary person can come to flying. At night, because there are no streetlamps, cyclists wear small lamps on their heads, and turn on the lamps on their bicycles. In this

way, the vivid scenes from the residents' imagined lives flare and surge against the darkness, above firefly clouds of bicycle riders.

There is a secret society in Moonlit Bong, that nearly everyone belongs to, but doesn't know it. These people, in closed garages and hidden journals, design wings for their bicycles, so that one day they will take flight and join the images, up where the dreams are.

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