

Bicycling to Barbara

Volume 2 of Loving Exercise



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- This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to any person, place or thing is strictly coincidental.
- This story contains graphic descriptions of male-female sex.

Chapter One

“How can I get to work without spending a fortune on parking or hours on the bus?” That was the dilemma Ryan Woods knew he faced when he accepted a junior architect position at Bradbury & Bain, a mid-town firm.

A parking pass at the nearest covered lot a block away was not a perk provided to someone in his lowly position. That meant Ryan had the option of parking more than a mile away at the cheapest lot around, one with a waiting list for available spaces, riding the bus or taking his chances with parking meters and hefty fines for being late.

The local cops made a lot of money with parking fines and stories in the papers were constantly going off about how much the added money meant. Add in a towing company whose drivers waited like hungry sharks for a red tag signifying “tow this thing” and you had a street parking scene that was anything but friendly, Ryan knew.

Living more than six miles away also meant walking wasn’t a viable option. In addition to the time—he estimated about two ours each way—he would be worn out and sweaty when he arrived. Ryan knew he was left him with one financially viable option: the bus.

But even riding the bus became problematic. Ryan began riding the local system to work, having to change lines twice and taking from 90 minutes to two hours for the ride each way. As he gazed out the windows, Ryan saw people on two wheels zipping past his bus as it waited its turn in a traffic logjam. The cyclists were wearing a variety of outfits from colorful singlets and shorts to suits and ties, all with foam helmets on their heads.

Ryan was envious at how effortless and fast the riders seemed, especially compared to the diesel fumes-spewing behemoth he was riding in.

“If only I had a racing bike,” Ryan dreamed. “I could zip past these buses and not have to deal with parking hassles, meters or pissed off cops.”

Owning a mountain bike, though, meant Ryan wouldn’t be going as fast as the racers on their slim, expensive frames and tires. Then again, front suspension and a comfortable seat meant ruts, potholes and speed bumps wouldn’t affect the state of his ride either. “I might now go as fast, but my mountain bike means I could travel in comfort,” he thought.

After two weeks of bus commuting, cycling suddenly became a preferred method of commuting. Ryan noted two problems: storing his bike at work and cooling off after the exercise. “While biking to work is far faster, less expensive and healthier—he patted his growing middle—and a lot better than the other alternatives, I desperately need a place to clean up and cool down before that can become a reality.”

Ryan began looking into health clubs along his route or not too far from it. The problem was that each and every one of them within a four block radius of Bradbury & Bain catered to the well-heeled executive. The clubs had monthly membership fees rivaling or exceeding what Ryan knew he would pay to park his car.

Bradbury & Bain, which specialized in commercial architecture, was located in an old four-story brick building. The ground floor featured a boutique specializing in women’s sportswear. The second floor was Bradbury & Bain’s business office with personnel, accounting, marketing and the like. The partners had fourth floor offices with

windows out on the city and whatever scenic views there were. Meanwhile, the junior group of grunts, like Ryan, worked in cubicles on the third floor.

However, Ryan was also sure he had seen access to a basement, one that if his memory was correct, was kept locked. That meant it wasn't used for offices and maybe just storage. If he could get basement access and a key, Ryan was sure he could stash his bike there during work hours.

"OK, that's one problem that while not solved, at least has a potential solution," Ryan thought. "Now what about a shower? Without that, parking my bike alone will not cut it. I need both a safe place to stash my ride and a spot to cut the grease, grime and road crud I know I'll pick up on my way into the office."

Ryan's access to Bradbury & Bain was via a covered—but not enclosed—stairway at one end of the building. An older hotel occupied the first three floors at the other end of the block and went up an additional seven stories giving it ten stories of grandeur to the four for his firm and the retail boutique that shared a wall.

"Does the hotel have an employee shower?" he wondered. "And would I be able to use it if one exists?"

While most of the two buildings were effectively miles apart, there was an exception. A hallway, wide smoked glass doors and a reception area joined the hotel and architectural firm on the second floor. Clients and partners entered through the hotel. Employees of Ryan's lowly stature walked up the outside stairs to the third floor.

Even getting up the stairs was far from simple. A metal security door with electronic deadbolt access meant a keycard was needed to enter the stairway. A security camera overhead watched everyone who came and went while an override allowed the guards to lock people in or out at their whim.

Adding in card readers on each floor meant that only people who worked on that floor could get in or out of it, limiting Ryan to the stairway and third floor. Getting to the second or fourth floors meant obtaining a special pass, one with a short—as in minutes—duration. And even those passes were issued sparingly for special occasions.

Taking all of that into consideration, Ryan realized the stairway wasn't wide enough—nor secure enough in his opinion—to store a bike. There was no way Ryan was going to shlep a bike up and down three steep flights of stairs each day, not that he had enough room in his cubicle for a bike, his desk, chair and computer anyway. He also doubted like hell that his boss or the company partners would even consider letting him lock a bike in the stairway. It was far too narrow for that, Ryan knew.

Ryan mentioned his desire to start cycling into work and the problems he was having to his boss one day when he dragged his tired carcass in after yet another long, boring and spectacularly unproductive bus ride.

She suggested he rethink the basement. "Try the basement," Manuela Ramos suggested. "I haven't been down there in years so I don't know what it's like in there, but you will probably have plenty of room to store a bike."

Ramos dug through her desk drawers for a minute and came out with an old brass deadbolt key. "Give it a shot," she said. "If it works out I'll let you make a copy of the key."

After work that day, Ryan headed into the stairwell, coming to a dead-bolted door on the ground floor. The key fit, though it was more than a little rusty, and sticky, from years of neglect and infrequent use.

Opening that door led to a series of concrete and brick steps descending into the darkness. Ryan flipped a power switch at the top of the steps only to see a brief flash as a light bulb burned out.

He carefully felt his way down the steps to the basement. A light switch there exposed a bare bulb hanging from the open bottom of the floor above. The bulb, while covered in years of dust, still worked well enough for Ryan to look around.

He saw power lines, pipes and ventilation ducts screwed to the ceiling or hanging overhead, overhead being a good 10 feet or more from the floor. The basement was also covered in dirt, dust, spider webs and a huge assortment of trash and litter, much of it smelling like an old sewer.

The good news was the half of the basement Ryan stood in was empty. The other half was divided into smaller rooms with flimsy screen doors, some with ancient locks on them. Looking through the screens, Ryan saw that most of them were empty, though some contained odds and ends of unused or broken office furniture.

One section near the steps appeared to have been designed as a janitor's area. It had a sink and a faucet that still worked. This was where the one working electric light was kept. Ryan even spotted an old toilet in one corner, though he doubted it worked or that it was even connected to the sewer.

"Eureka," he said to the empty room. "I not only have a place to stash my bike but with a bit of work, I can make this a place where I can change."

The next day Ryan thanked Ramos for suggesting the basement. He said it would work just fine, so long as he could make some major upgrades to a good chunk of it.

"So long as it's done on your own time and at your expense, I don't see why there would be a problem," Ramos said. Ryan saw his boss as an attractive, newly singled 40-something Latina who he knew was driven to succeed.

"I don't want you putting in an apartment or running a business out of it. I'll want to see it your plans and drawings, plus make sure everything you down there meets or exceeds the toughest building codes. And if I like what I see in terms of your plans, I'll give you permission to start. We own the part of the basement that doesn't have the storage stuff in it so giving you regular access is not a problem."

Ryan explained that he wanted to put in a bathroom complete, with a stall shower, so he could ride his bike to work and clean up before going upstairs. "That will be just fine," Ramos said, reminding Ryan, "but I still want to see your plans first."

That Saturday morning saw Ryan drive back to the office dressed in jeans and a grungy T-shirt. He made several trips from his car parked on the nearly deserted street to the basement. He brought down cleaning supplies, light bulbs and a measuring tape plus his laptop.

After removing most of the junk and using chlorine bleach to kill the mold, spores and bacteria, plus an insecticide to wipe out the cockroaches, spiders, ants and other multi-legged critters, Ryan got down to work.

Calling up his drawing program, Ryan used his measuring tape to create a wireframe view of the room as it currently existed, bare brick and concrete walls, commercial sink for cleaning mops, toilet and all. While using every square inch was tempting, Ryan knew as the room got bigger, more materials would be needed and the higher the price tag would climb.

A commercial plumbing supply website provided the measurement for several stall showers. Because Manuela wanted the room to conform to building codes, Ryan knew the shower would have to be big enough to accommodate a person in a wheelchair. That meant finding one meeting Americans with Disabilities Access (ADA) requirements. How a handicapped person would get down into the basement wasn't an issue since that would require an elevator or ramp, and that was far beyond even Ryan's ability to design or build. "Getting a wheelchair down into the basement would take either an elevator or an act of God, maybe both," Ryan thought.

Ryan kept looking and found a premade shower stall lacking a door that was wide enough to work for his needs while narrow enough, at least in its box, to fit through the door into the basement.

Ryan added a dual-flush toilet with one setting for liquid waste and a second, more powerful setting for solids. Since Bradbury & Bain promoted green building, he figured this was a good, though pricey, addition to the design. This particular toilet was also a little taller than normal making it, like the shower, compatible with the ADA requirements.

Using his online research to add the dimensions of a typical bathroom sink, vanity and mirror to everything, he came up an expensive remodeling project, but one that would fit the expansive room available. Even the prices for inexpensive versions of everything were between, "you've got to be kidding" and "how can I afford this without robbing the Federal Reserve Bank?"

He then examined the current pipe, electrical and heating, ventilation and air conditioning pipes, conduits and ducts attached to or suspended from the basement's ceiling. Ryan determined what he would need to reroute, what he would need to add and what could be used without modification. Those measurements also went into his drawing with different colored lines representing each utility or power line.

One pain in the ass task was going to be relocating the drain from roughly a corner of his undefined "room" where the janitor's sink currently stood to where the shower would stand. Given the concrete floor, that was going to require renting a jackhammer and working during a time when the retail store above was empty, Ryan knew. Tearing up the floor during a weekend day would make enough racket that the cops might get called but even worse, so would his employer.

Adding the new toilet was also going to be a stinky job, literally. Fumes from the sewer line would permeate the room, and the floors above, until the new toilet was firmly locked to its wax ring and bolted securely to the floor, Ryan knew from experience. He'd helped install toilets in remodeling projects before and knew the odors were both smelly and potentially dangerous.

Ryan knew he would need to do his jackhammering and plumbing chores on a Saturday or Sunday night after the boutique above was closed. Even so, he would need to let the boutique owners and staff know there would be some vibration—a lot of vibration—coming from downstairs.

The stench from exposing the sewer line and connecting it to the toilet and drain would also be horrific though neither task would take more than one or two hours at most, possibly less. "I just don't know if there is a way to confine the odors," he thought. "Maybe I can rig up a fan to blow the air outside onto the street. That might work," he thought, making yet another note on his laptop.

With all of the infrastructure measurements safely into his laptop, along with costs, a floorplan and basic design, it was time to tweak it. He modified one wall to accommodate lockers for dressing and storage, a closet for hanging clothes and a storage cabinet for cleaning supplies.

Drawings and measurements done, it was time for Ryan to call it a night.

Sunday saw Ryan check-in with the boutique upstairs. He found the owners were doing some remodeling of their own in about two weeks, causing the shop to close for a few days. They asked if he could wait until then to do his own work, which Ryan quickly agreed to.

Ryan explained that he would need permits to go with everything else he was doing so the boutique manager told Ryan to talk to the chief architect, one Manuela Ramos, about piggybacking his project in their permit. "Tell her I said it was OK to use our permit, which I think covers the entire building, or at least our floor. I'm pretty sure we are redoing our bathrooms, too, so adding your plumbing stuff shouldn't be an issue," the pert 30-something blonde said.

"Now if Manuela gives me the green light, and lets me use the boutique's permits, I can get started," Ryan thought.