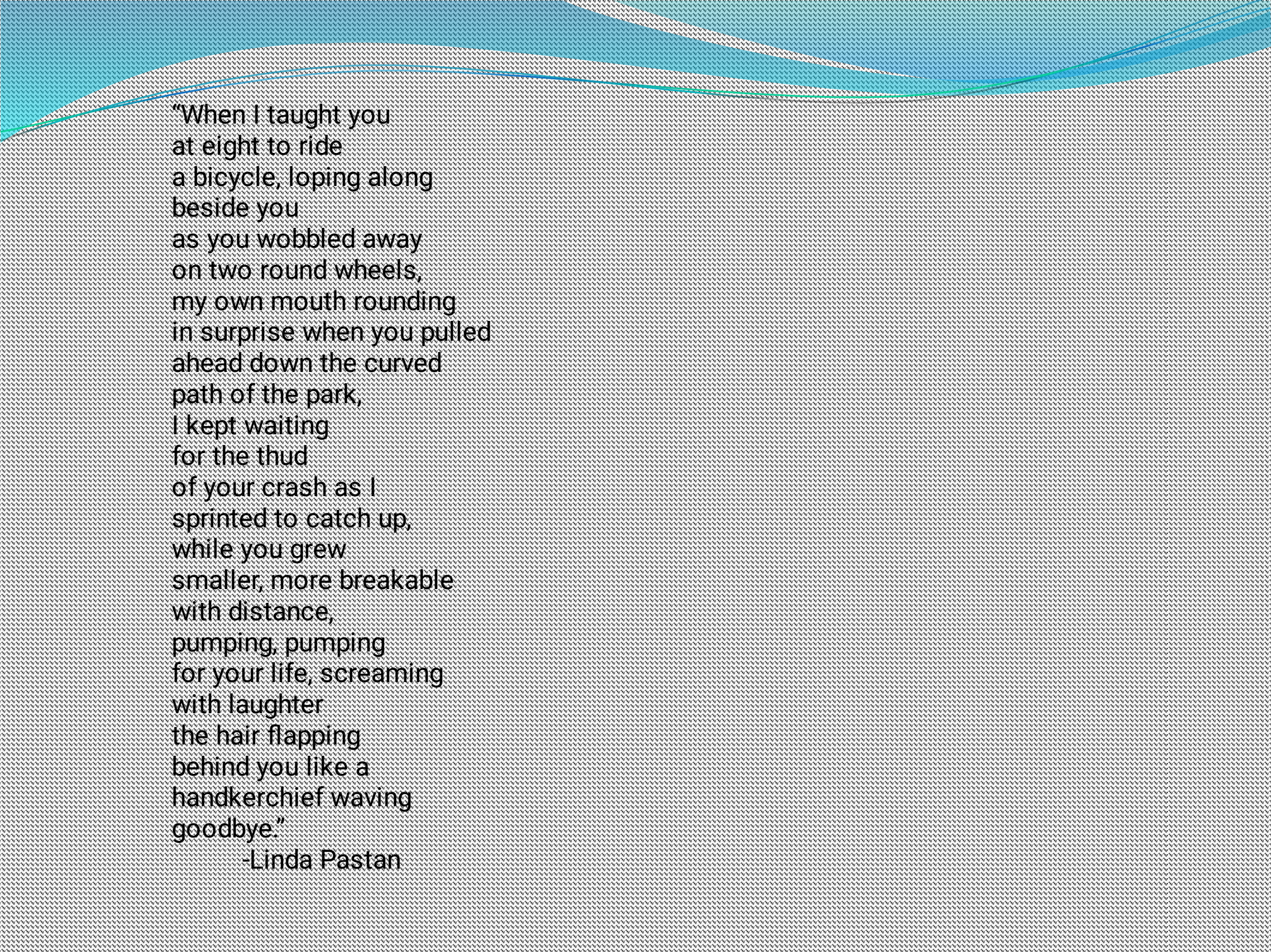


# “To a Daughter Leaving Home”

By Linda Pastan



"When I taught you  
at eight to ride  
a bicycle, loping along  
beside you  
as you wobbled away  
on two round wheels,  
my own mouth rounding  
in surprise when you pulled  
ahead down the curved  
path of the park,  
I kept waiting  
for the thud  
of your crash as I  
sprinted to catch up,  
while you grew  
smaller, more breakable  
with distance,  
pumping, pumping  
for your life, screaming  
with laughter  
the hair flapping  
behind you like a  
handkerchief waving  
goodbye."

-Linda Pastan

# Analysis

## ● Lines 1-10

- speaker recalls the moment as she ran along side her daughter, teaching her to ride a bike
  - symbolizes how the speaker raised her young girl, sticking by her through all the “wobbles” of life
  - excitement when the girl begins to ride on her own

## ● Lines 11-17

- daughter rides further and further away on the bike
  - speaker grows more worried about her as she experiences new things in life, waiting to save her the moment something goes wrong

## ● Lines 18-24

- speaker watches as daughter squeals with freedom and glee
  - realization that her daughter has grown up, and the speaker is not needed to help anymore

# Diction

- simple words and sentences
- instability imagery
  - “wobbled” (lack of control)(5)
  - “thud” (11)
  - “crashed” (12)
  - “breakable” (15)
    - symbolizes the speaker’s fear for her daughter’s departure, trying to protect her from what will go wrong
    - symbolizes the daughter’s vulnerability as she leaves the safety of her home



## ● Syntax

- line ends are broken; sounds similar to choking back tears as one speaks
- choppy lines create a more realistic and deeper meaning
- has a more emotional and dramatic effect as opposed to the poem being written in prose
  - abrupt endings in lines show speaker's deep thought as she recalls this moment
  - also creates the natural pauses people take when telling stories of events from the past

# Tone

## ● Emotion

### ● Anxiety

- "I kept waiting for the thud" (9-10)
- "sprinted to catch up" (14)
  - The speaker is anxious for her daughter, as any caring parent would be

### ● Excitement

- "my own mouth rounding, in surprise" (7)
- "with laughter" (20)
  - speaker is happy her daughter can ride on her own

### ● Sadness

- "like a handkerchief waving goodbye" (22-24)
  - speaker says goodbye to her daughter, sad moment
  - does not see a wave of a hand, but a wave of a handkerchief that is used to dry her tears

## ● Surprise

- broken line ends create a suspense at the end of each line
  - "I sprinted to catch up  
while you grew,  
smaller, more breakable"
    - "while you grew" seems like it implies as the girl grew older, but the next line is surprise because it contradicts that idea, saying she is "smaller, more breakable"
  - "pumping pumping  
for your life, screaming  
with laughter"
    - "for your life, screaming" suggests the daughter is panicking; similar to someone running for their life screaming in horror
    - "with laughter" is a surprise because this positive emotion was not expected to follow a description that sounded so terrible

# Analysis

- **Surprise (contd.)**

- the use of surprise expresses the speaker's mixed feelings as her daughter grows up



# Analysis

## ● Use of Prepositions

- gradual transition of prepositions parallels the life of the young girl as she grows up
  - "loping along, **beside** you" (3-4)
    - the daughter rides along next to the speaker, relying on her guidance to teach her and protection to keep her safe
  - "when you pulled **ahead**" (9)
    - the girl now rides ahead of her mother, not too far. She begins to explore on her own
  - "**with** distance"
    - the girl is now further away, and the speaker realizes her daughter has mastered the task of bike riding, meaning she is now independent
  - "hair flapping **behind** you" (21-22)
    - the speaker is behind her daughter now, and can only see her hair as she rides off into the distance
    - moment of realization that her daughter has grown up and she is no longer needed

# Evaluation

- This poem is considered great poetry because of its ability to amaze its readers with the subject at hand:
  - the thrill of growing up; holding mommy's hand one moment and leaving the house the next
  - the tender emotions of a mother who is so proud of what her daughter has become.
    - appreciate youth and innocence, as they will end far too soon
    - appreciate family, as you will go your separate ways before you know it