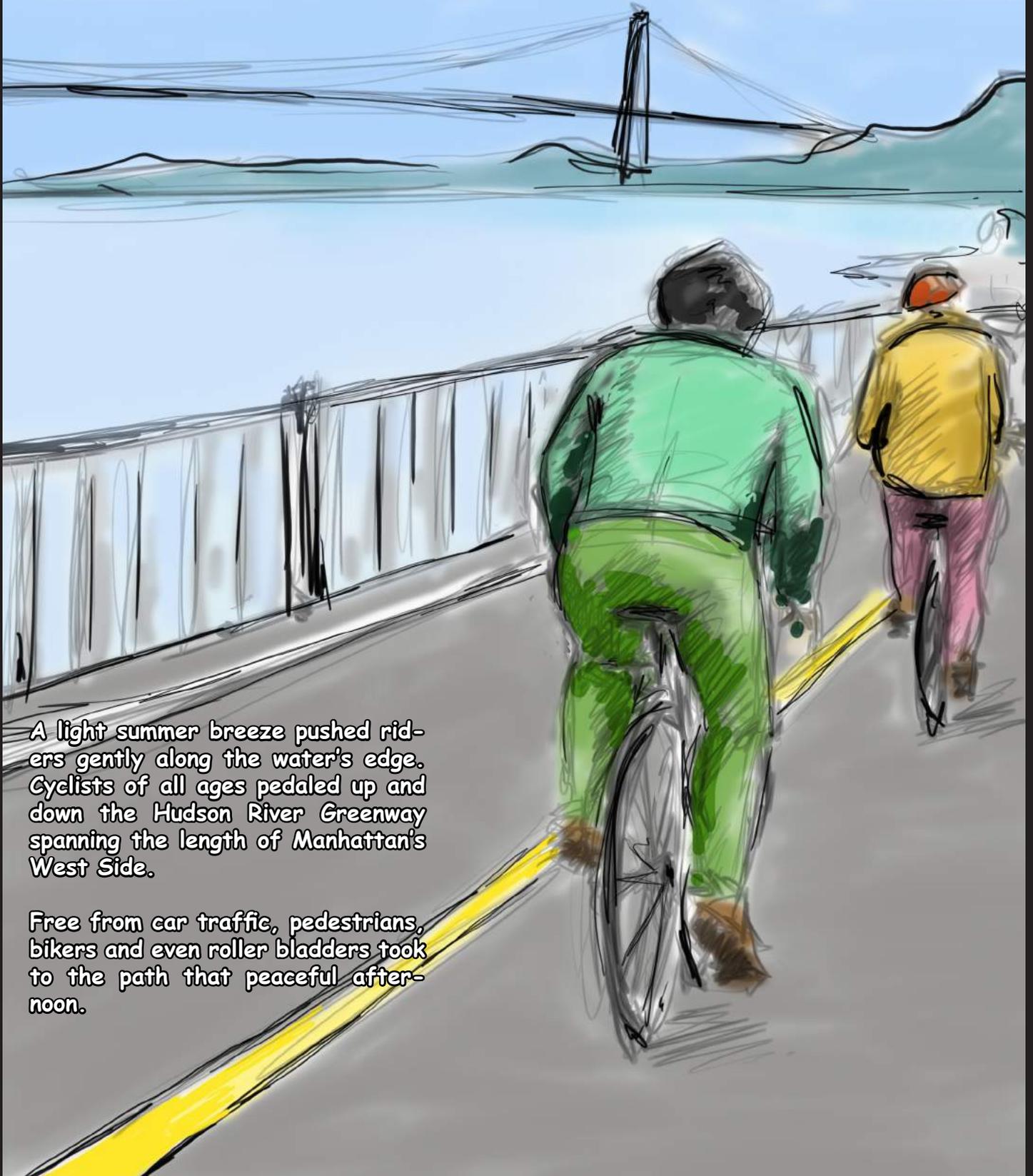


THE ERAILLEUR

Part I: Emergence

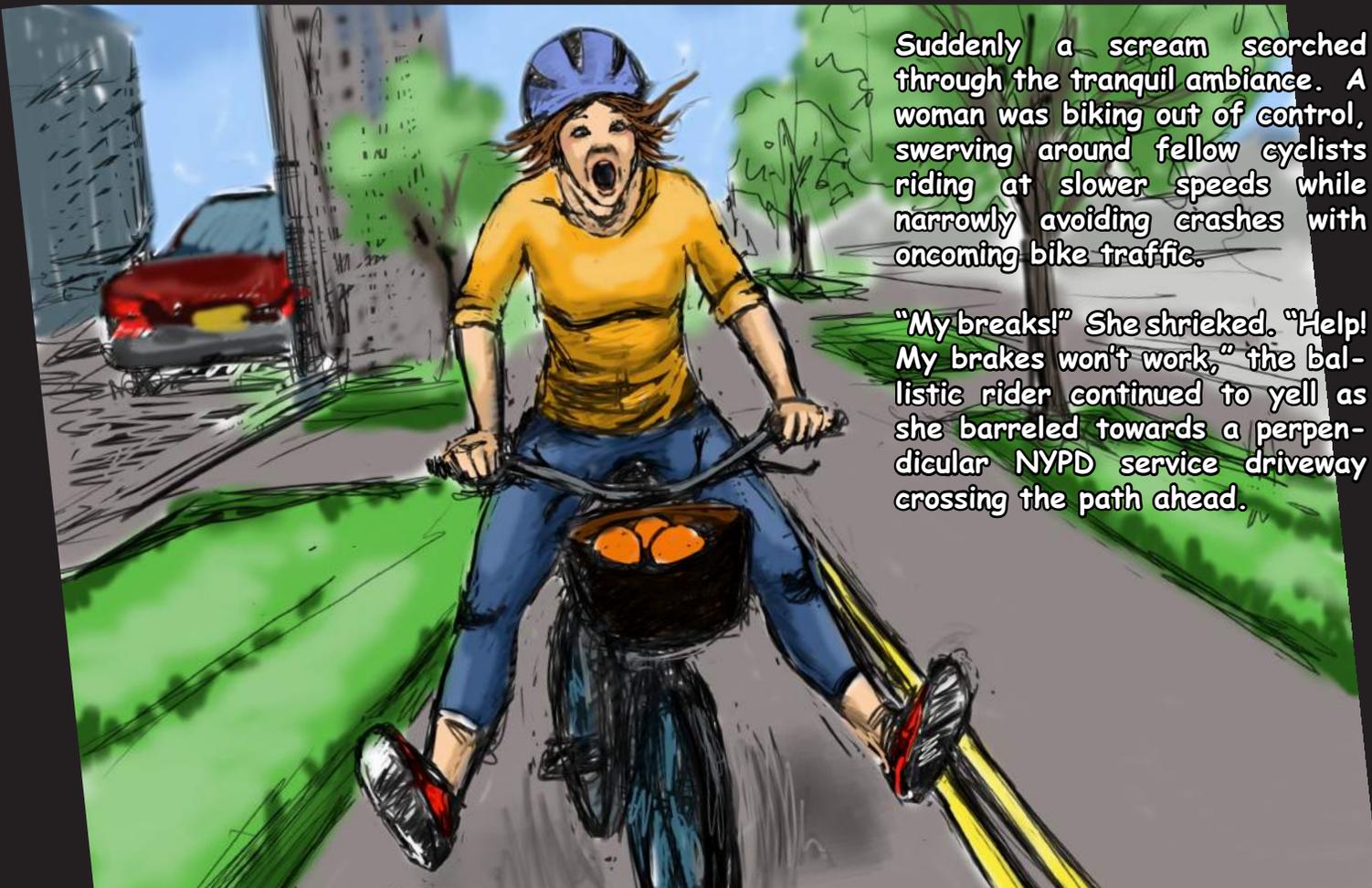


It was the perfect day for a bike ride...



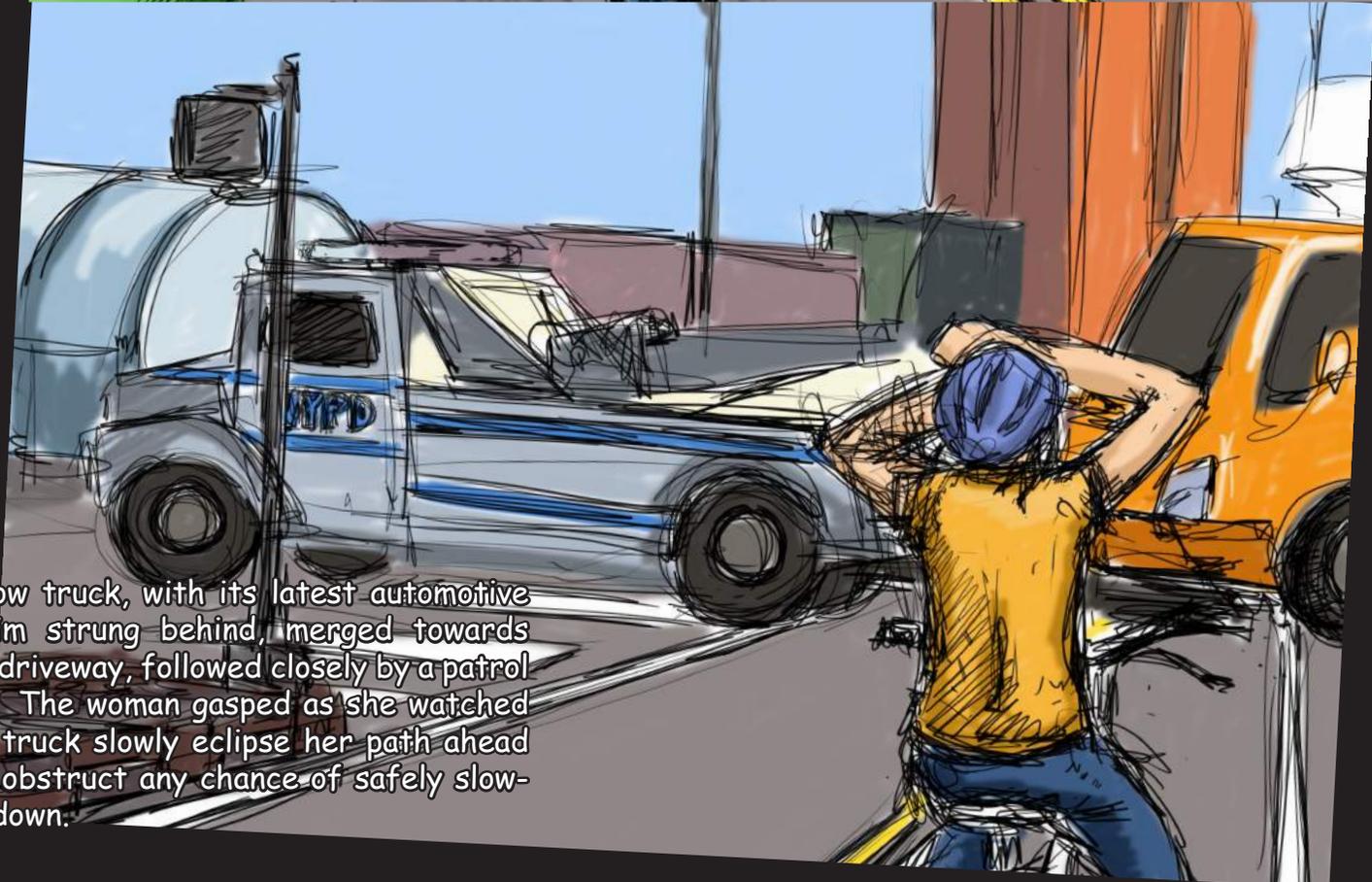
A light summer breeze pushed riders gently along the water's edge. Cyclists of all ages pedaled up and down the Hudson River Greenway spanning the length of Manhattan's West Side.

Free from car traffic, pedestrians, bikers and even roller bladders took to the path that peaceful afternoon.



Suddenly a scream scorched through the tranquil ambiance. A woman was biking out of control, swerving around fellow cyclists riding at slower speeds while narrowly avoiding crashes with oncoming bike traffic.

"My breaks!" She shrieked. "Help! My brakes won't work," the ballistic rider continued to yell as she barreled towards a perpendicular NYPD service driveway crossing the path ahead.



A tow truck, with its latest automotive victim strung behind, merged towards the driveway, followed closely by a patrol car. The woman gasped as she watched the truck slowly eclipse her path ahead and obstruct any chance of safely slowing down.

Several yards behind her, a streak of black, gray and red whizzed down the greenway in pursuit, determinately weaving in between other bikers with expert precision and speed.



Surrendering to her helplessness, the brakeless biker screamed once more as she threw her arms up to protect her face and braced for impact with the truck.



Out of nowhere a silver sprocket with a thick welded chain trailing behind whipped through the air from behind her and coiled around her seat post.

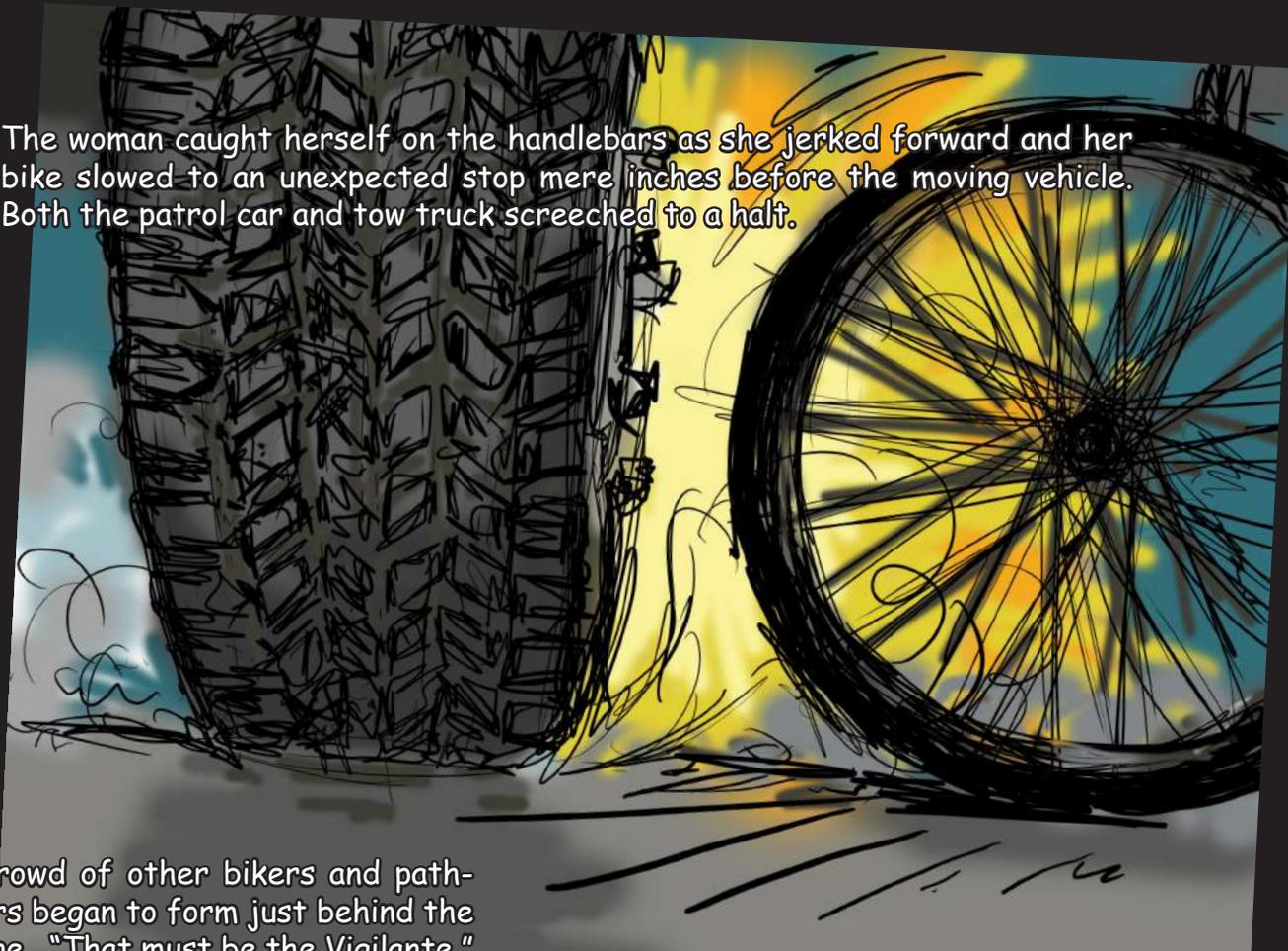


At the other end, a masked bike rider in a plain dark T-shirt and bike shorts with an underlayer of full-length, skin-tight arm and leg warmers pulled the elongated chain taught, and quickly clipped it to a bracket on his bike frame. The rider's identity was obscured by a slim helmet, tinted sunglasses and a red handkerchief over his mouth.



Returning his right hand to the handlebars, the masked biker squeezed both brake levers, engaging the brake arms and clamping his disc rotor on the bike's axles.

The woman caught herself on the handlebars as she jerked forward and her bike slowed to an unexpected stop mere inches before the moving vehicle. Both the patrol car and tow truck screeched to a halt.



A crowd of other bikers and pathgoers began to form just behind the scene. "That must be the Vigilante," one gasped as others reached for their phones.



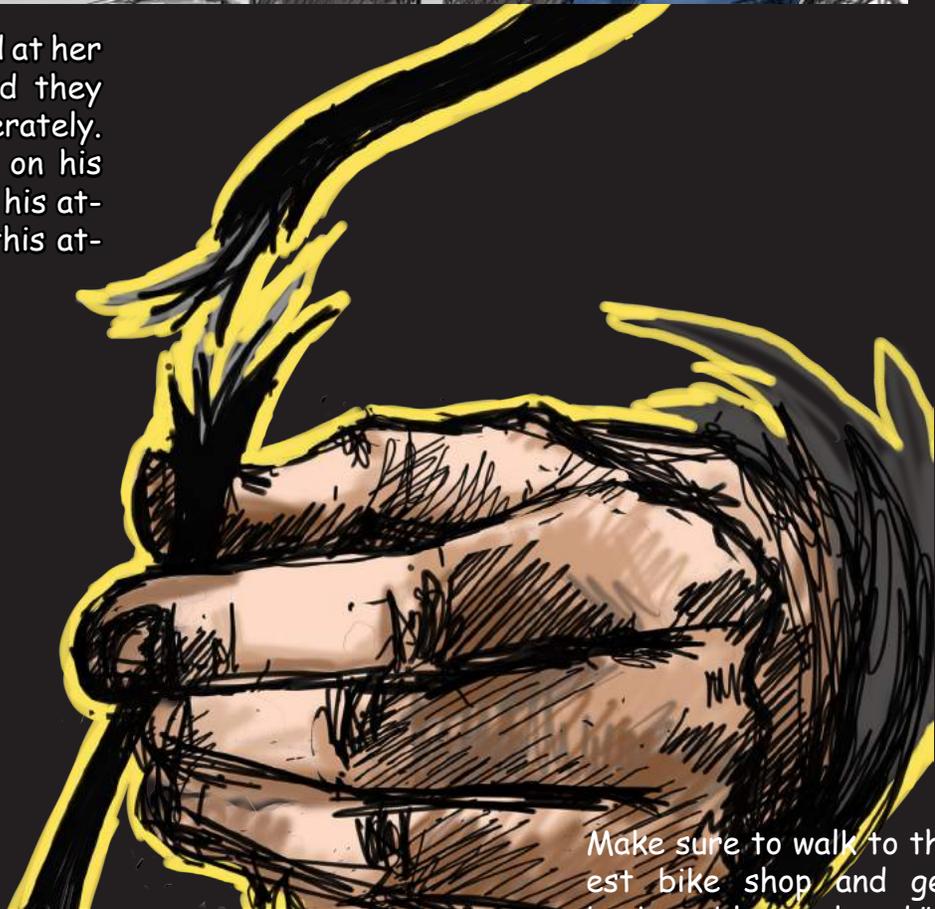
The masked rider removed the chain from his frame, as he dismounted and lowered his kickstand.

With a flick of his wrist, the other end of his chain released the woman's bike and returned to his side. He then slung it across his chest over one shoulder as he approached the stunned victim and placed his hand on her back. "Are you alright miss?" He asked in a deep voice, lowering the handkerchief from his mouth.



"I think so... I don't know what happened though... I just started riding and... and my brakes wouldn't work when I tried to stop!"

The masked figure glanced at her brake cables and realized they had been severed... deliberately. A slight grimace formed on his face, before he returned his attention to the victim of this attack.



Make sure to walk to the nearest bike shop and get your brake cables replaced."

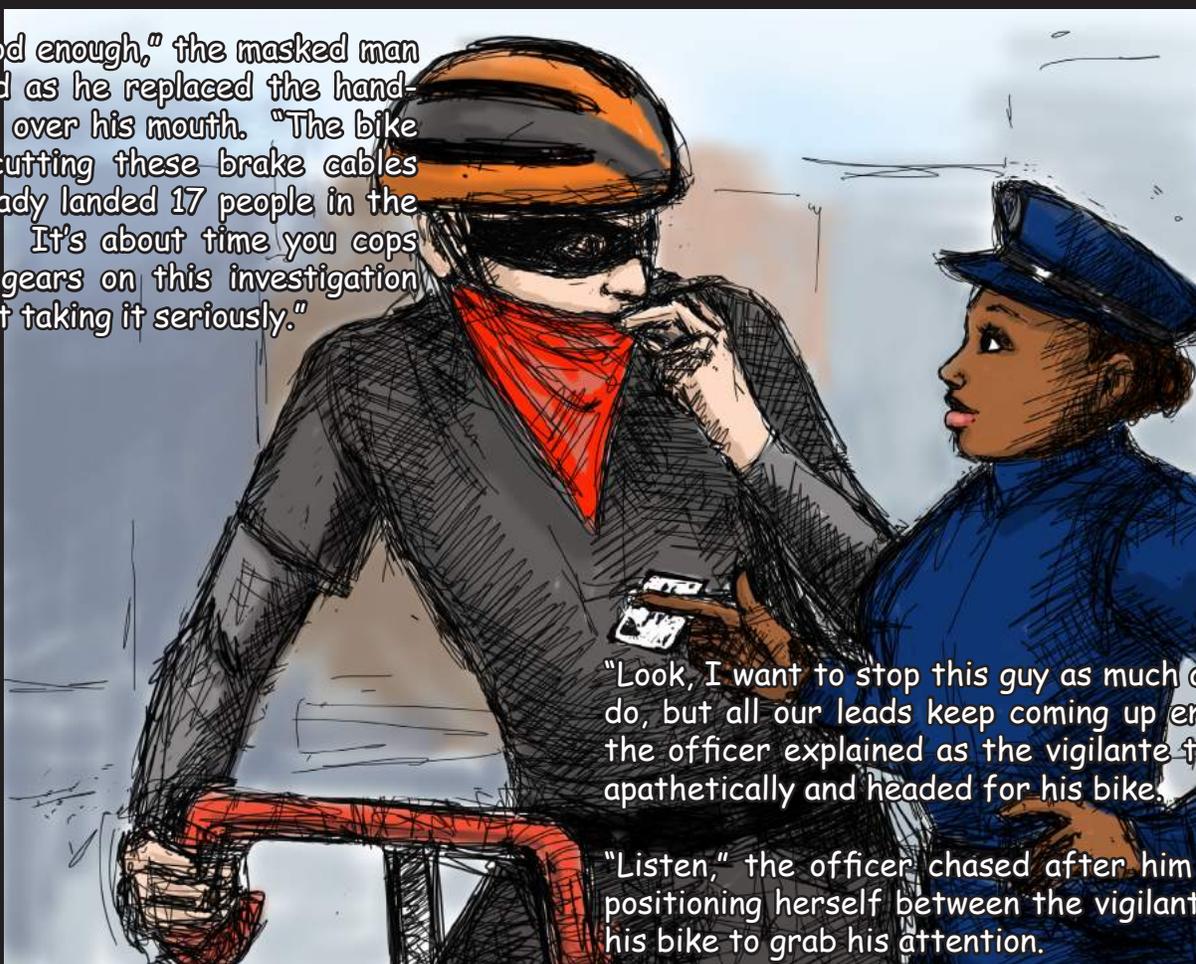
"Who are you?" the woman asked after nodding in agreement.

"Just someone who wants to keep the streets safe." With that he turned, nodding to a nearby police officer standing by her car door and continued towards his bike.



"Hey, hang on a second." The officer jogged over to catch up. "That was good work back there."

"Not good enough," the masked man grumbled as he replaced the handkerchief over his mouth. "The bike bandit cutting these brake cables has already landed 17 people in the hospital. It's about time you cops shifted gears on this investigation and start taking it seriously."



"Look, I want to stop this guy as much as you do, but all our leads keep coming up empty," the officer explained as the vigilante turned apathetically and headed for his bike.

"Listen," the officer chased after him again positioning herself between the vigilante and his bike to grab his attention.

"I know you're out there everyday, and we both want the same thing. If you see anything, my name is Sgt. Dana Anderson, and I want you to give me a call," she said, handing the masked figure an NYPD business card. "And what do I call you?" He asked.



"You don't; I call you." The masked Vigilante grinned, before mounting his bike and disappearing down the greenway.

TO BE CONTINUED...

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ILLUSTRATOR



Anna Shukeylo is a New York-based painter and professor of fine arts. Working with a variety of surfaces and materials, Anna maintains her private studio practice in between long rides on her folding bike.

(They're also married)