

◆ TIM RELF ◆

Scrambler

I'm sure his name was Daniel Taylor, just as I'm certain
he wasn't wearing a helmet when he folded at the feet
of a girl about his age—thirteen or so. I have in mind

he was blond and the motorbike was blue
and the horse was brown and the sun was shining,
that it was one of those days the yellow-and-black caterpillars

came out. Colours stamped on my brain—a scene forged
on waste ground which hits me from time to time—the reason I shake
near horses. *Unthinkable*, I say, remembering the crowd gathering,

jostling to spot the stretchered shape—blood
where blond should be.

A boy.

But what if he wasn't thirteen or so? What if he wasn't blond?
What if the motorbike wasn't blue and the horse wasn't brown
and the caterpillars weren't yellow-and-black or didn't come out

because the sun wasn't shining? What if the twisted thing
I still see lying in that burnt-up dust and dirt wasn't
called Daniel Taylor? Or was, but wasn't dying?

Imagine if he, *my* Daniel Taylor, were one of the men I unearth
with a glance at Google today—if he'd ridden on, past, thrown fast
into a future unfettered by tangled metal and leather or the mangled

machinery of memory. Imagine if the child looking on then wasn't looking
over his shoulder now, waiting for the fleshy thud, the horse's scream,
the stalled engine, ticking and cooling in the sun.