

*by Derek Morrison*



Fine time for a  
puncture

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image.

*Gods, they smiled  
As plans you told  
Group cycle ride  
Despite the cold.*

*Out in countryside  
Rain like spear  
Bad day for puncture  
Mused he at rear.*

*The assassin thorn  
Lay in silent wait  
Its pointed dagger  
Was someone's fate.*

*Heavens pouring down  
Prayers for release  
Coffee stop pending  
So pace increase.*

*The waiting assassin  
Struck the blow  
He at the rear*

*Didn't even know.*

*Speed fell away  
Group unaware  
Pedaled onwards  
Dry to share.*

*A slowing pace  
Insufficient heat  
Magnified loss  
Once on feet.*

*Shelter priority  
Fix can wait  
Primary risk  
Hypothermia state.*

*Leaden hands  
Fingers blue.  
Inn gave respite  
Hot drinks too.*

*Repair was painful  
Fix was slow  
Fingers seized  
Felt like toe.*

*Coffee stop  
One was gone  
Post rain and coffee  
Search party spawn.*

*But happy ending  
After transient fear  
From my being*

*He at the rear.*

*Gods, they smile  
As plans you tell  
So plan for breakdown  
In weather hell.*

[To listen to this verse select below]

<http://www.cyberstanza.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Deflation.mp3>

### Commentary

It was only a ride from Bath to Thornbury through the lanes but it was cold, and it became very wet for a time. The poem accurately reflects what it was like being at the rear in a downpour, thinking how awful it would be to get a puncture and within seconds actually to get one. We were on the outskirts of Thornbury when it happened but it was still a long way to Coffee #1 in the town centre and the heat was leaking from my body by the second. The rain and the wind noise left me watching my companions head into the distance. I was dressed for winter with some five layers on but that made no difference as the moment I stopped cycling my heat production became insufficient for the conditions. Finding the cause and replacing the tube would have been impossible in that cold and rain and so shelter became essential. Fortunately, an inn was preparing for their lunchtime influx and let me in and use their external canopy when I was up to the repair.

Even if my companions had heard me that would have simply exposed them to the same risks and consequences as myself, i.e. if you cycle the highways and byways you have to be self-sufficient and self-reliant.

There is an increased likelihood of getting a puncture in wet weather for two main reasons. Firstly, rain can wash sharp debris, e.g. thorns, glass, stones, from the edges further into the carriageway. Secondly, water is sticky and so helps glue said debris onto your tyre on the initial wheel revolution, and then keeps it there for you to press into the tyre body on the next and subsequent revolutions. Add to that autumn and winter hedge cutting by farmers ensuring blackthorn is scattered like shotgun pellets over the lanes and the conditions are

optimised for a puncture at a really bad time.

There are a few generic messages here for solo and group winter riders. In the absence of having the luxury of a permanent “sweep-up” wagon following riders on an outing, if you get a puncture in bad weather conditions any cyclist can get in real trouble real fast. I now carry a big bin bag in my saddle wedge for emergency cover, but a space blanket might not be such a bad idea. Traveling light and projecting a “lean and mean” image is perhaps ok for the warm summer months, but not in the winter. And what if the breakdown wasn’t fixable on the road? What if there was no mobile phone signal? Even with a phone signal have you got a “phone a friend” contact or, alternative, insurance cover that could pick you (and your cycle) up? In the UK, [Cycleguard Rescue](#) is available via British Cycling. But shelter sometimes needs to be the first priority and that can mean repressing British reserve and stoicism and, in the absence of any alternative, asking for it if necessary.

Of course it goes without saying that a decent set of puncture resistant tyres is essential – but I had the puncture described in the verse above on the first outing of my pair of [Continental Grand Prix 4 Season](#) tyres. Puncture resistance, however, does not mean puncture immunity; seasoned cyclists will know that blackthorn can penetrate a bullet proof vest – allegedly. I also carry two replacement tubes at all times as well as a set patches for those three + puncture days (it has happened). Finally, it’s wise to give your tyres a quick brush down and wipe before the next ride because that will enable you to prevent punctures by inspecting for foreign bodies that have partially penetrated a tyre and will eventually work their way through the carcass on your subsequent rides. Look carefully, as sometimes the smallest speck on the surface of the tyre is actually the only visible part of a much larger iceberg (thorn, glass, stone) that is actually well embedded in the tyre.