

# david's triumph

[ BRAD WATSON ]



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# cramp

S top!”

David jammed on his brakes. His front wheel clipped Tony’s rear tyre and then, before he knew it, he’d shot past and was skidding in the loose gravel on the verge of the road. With his shoes still clipped into his pedals, he lost control of his bike and toppled sideways.

*Idiot!* David fumed. He pushed the bike away, rolled over and forced himself to his feet. His new riding gloves were torn and blood oozed from a graze on his knee. Fearing the worst, he pulled his bike upright, checking for damage.

“I’m sorry,” Tony cried. “I’ve got a cramp!”

David ignored him. To his dismay, there was a long scratch on his carbon fibre forks, the black handlebar tape was ripped and the chain was jammed. “Tell someone who cares, Chubs! How many times do I have to tell you not to stop suddenly?”

“Ahhhh! It’s killing me!”

Sai eased to a stop, his olive skin glistening with sweat. “Just massage it, bro,” he said, squinting at Tony’s leg.

“I can’t!”

“Try bending your leg then.”

“It’s too sore! David! What should I do?”

“Alright, I’m coming.” David leaned his bike against a power pole, avoiding the faded wreath of plastic flowers and the white cross at its base. Cursing, he backtracked and squatted beside Tony.

*I bet he’s exaggerating,* he thought. *He always does! I’m so tired of his whingeing!*

To David’s surprise, a thick knot of muscle had bunched up one third of the way above Tony’s knee. It left a gruesome, hollow space over which the skin stretched tautly.

“I know what you need, Chubs.” Sai winked at David.

“What?”

“Just close your eyes. Trust me.”

Tony blinked. The sun was directly behind Sai, and the combination of glare and long hair made it impossible to see the expression on his face.

Sai came closer, stooping over his stricken friend. “That must hurt,” he said.

Tony groaned, squeezing his eyes shut. “It’s like . . . a hot knife . . . is twisting in my leg!”

Instead of helping, Sai grinned at David and took a sleek, silver phone out of his riding jersey. Careful not to alert Tony, he zoomed in for the best shot.

Tony’s eyes snapped open at the sound of the fake shutter noise. “What was that?” he asked suspiciously.

“Awww, come on!” Sai complained. “It’s blurry, Chubs! How do you expect me to get a good shot if you keep moving around?” Ignoring Tony’s cries of pain, Sai refocused and clicked again.

“Please!” Tony was begging now. “The muscle . . . it’s tearing!”

“Just relax.” Sai reluctantly tucked the phone into the rear pocket of his jersey. “As I said, you’ve gotta massage it, bro. Like this.” Sai demonstrated a squeezing motion with his hands.

Tony pressed against his leg as Sai instructed. When the tenseness subsided, he sighed with relief. Then, to his dismay, the cramp came back with a vengeance. “It won’t go,” he cried, slumping back onto the gravel. “Please! Massage it for me!”

“No way!” Sai protested. “I’m not rubbing your leg!”

Tony whimpered, his eyes begging David for assistance.

“Alright. Alright!” David knew that if he did not help Tony, his friend would not be able to complete the ride. And that meant a long walk or waiting with him until someone came to pick them up. Reluctantly, he knelt down. “Don’t tell anyone about this, Chubs, OK?”

“Just . . . hurry!”

Tony’s leg was slick with sweat. David pressed the palm of his hand on the pale skin, pressing against the contorted muscle.

“Is that helping?”

Tony responded with a howl. David changed position, pressing at the muscle from a different angle.

“Ahhhh!” Tony yelled.

With a final twitch, the cramp subsided. Then David heard the phone click again.

“That’s a good one,” Sai commented, admiring his handiwork.

“You’d better delete that,” David warned.

“What?” Sai asked. “The picture or the video?”

“Both,” David growled.

Despite the gravel digging into his skin, Tony rolled onto one side and bent his leg, careful not to let the cramp return. “You’re such a mongrel!” he said, scowling at Sai.

Sai laughed, shading the screen. He had no phone reception, so uploading the photos would have to wait.

“Help me up, would you?” Tony reached tiredly for David’s outstretched hand. Using him as a counter-weight, he pulled himself to his feet and stretched his leg again.

“You OK?” David asked.

“Yeah. I will be when Sai deletes those photos.”

“Think you can walk?”

Tony took two small steps. The plastic cleats that locked his riding shoes to his pedals scrunched uneasily in the loose gravel. “I don’t know. It feels like it’s going to cramp up again. Maybe we should wait here for a while.”

“You’ll be fine,” David said with all the reassurance he could muster. He bent down to recover Tony’s bike and wheeled it toward the power pole.

David was about to comment on the cross when the silence was shattered by a convoy of motorbikes approaching from behind. The sound of their modified exhaust systems was deafening. Then, as suddenly as they had come, the gleaming Harleys were gone, and the skull and crossbones of the biker’s jackets faded into the haze.

“Awesome,” Sai said admiringly.

“Yeah,” David agreed. “Imagine turning up at school on one of those.”

Tony nodded his agreement. Leaning against the power pole, he used his spare hand to stretch his leg some more.

“Hey Chubs, are you ready to go?” Sai asked.

Tony shook his head. Above him, the power lines crackled. “I . . . I don’t think I can go on.”

David examined his bike again, trying to hide his frustration. The long scratch grew worse the more he studied it and the thought of waiting on the desolate stretch of road at the scene of a long-forgotten accident was depressing. Eventually he pointed to the memorial at Tony's feet. "We should go, Chubs. I think something bad happened right where you're standing."

"What?" Tony stumbled backwards, eyes fixed on the cross.

"Yeah, I think someone might have died here. Must have been a car accident."

Shards of glass at the base of the splintered pole shimmered in the sunlight. It wasn't the thought that someone had died that bothered David. It was the way the memorial had been neglected and forgotten. *Like, whoever did this stopped caring.*

"I'm not staying here," Sai protested. "This place is freaking me out!" He lifted the rear wheel of his bike off the ground and turned the crank with one hand. The black tyre spun faster with each turn, the spokes whirring through the air. When he dropped the spinning tyre onto the ground, it flicked up a spray of gravel. A small cloud of dust hung in the still, afternoon air.

"Alright then. That's decided." David got on his bike before Tony could disagree. "Cathos isn't far away, Chubs. Dad said he'd pick us up from the surf club."

"But . . ."

"You'll make it easily! Anyway, it's downhill all the way to the beach. Come on."

Without waiting for a reply, David and Sai eased onto the road. "How far did we ride today?" Sai asked. "My speedo's not working."

David checked the bike computer on his handlebars. "We just did 92 kilometres. And we've got two hours to kill before Dad comes to pick us up."

"It feels like we rode 192 kilometres!" Tony complained, catching up. "I'm going to cramp again. I can feel it."

"Bro," Sai urged, "stop talking and pedal with your other leg."

Relieved to be on their way, David clicked through his gears until he found the right one. Gathering momentum, he scrolled through the menu on his bike computer. He grinned as he realised he had ridden 1749 kilometres since installing the computer less than a month ago. Surfing and mountain-bike riding were still his favourite past-times, but slowly he was becoming addicted to the highs that came after long, gruelling rides on the road.

They were almost at Catherine Hill Bay when Sai signalled for them to stop. "Hey," he said, waving toward a dirt track that angled into the bush on the other side of the road. "James said there's an awesome place to jump into the sea down there. Did you guys bring your boardies?"

"Yep," David replied. At the track's entrance, a rusted boom gate was padlocked shut. A faded metal sign read, "Keep out. Trespassers will be prosecuted." Beyond it, the road narrowed, revealing a small patch of ocean that glittered through the green foliage.

"Do you guys want to check it out?" Sai asked.

"For sure!"

"OK." Tony paused. "But where will we leave our bikes? They might get stolen."

David shrugged. "I don't know. But they'd probably just take mine. It's worth the most."

"That's true," Sai agreed. Then, mimicking David he said, "Mine's so awesome. Hey everybody, I've done 3000 kilometres in three months. It's because I don't have a girlfriend anymore, so I've . . ."

"Hey," David swung a punch at Sai and missed. "I still have a girlfriend."

"No, you don't." Sai leapt over the gate. Then he carefully lifted his bike over, before resting it back on the track. "When a girl says she needs time out, it always means it's over."

"Definitely," Tony agreed.

“Whatever.” David grinned. “The fact is that I’m the only one here that’s had a real girlfriend. Not like you, Sai. Going out with Jodi Mitchell for two days doesn’t count!”

“Aw, come on. It was heaps longer,” Sai protested.

Tony laughed, passing his bike over. “No, it wasn’t. And Jo doesn’t count either, David.”

“What do you mean she doesn’t count? We’ve been going out for ages.”

“Yeah. But she won’t even let you kiss her.”

“That’s right,” Sai agreed. He took his helmet off and clipped the straps around the handlebars. “And she has contacts. She’s got no idea how ugly you are!”

Tony laughed. “Anyway,” he continued, “the good news is that there are heaps of girls around with eyesight problems. It’s only a matter of time before you meet another one, David.”

David shook his head with mock anger. Taking Sai’s lead, he slipped off his riding helmet, then followed with his shoes. The path ahead was rough and he didn’t want to wear out his cleats.

“Hey. I’ve got it.” Instead of waiting for David or Tony, Sai started walking down the gravel track.

“Got what?”

“You two don’t ever have to worry about girls again.”

“Why?” Tony asked, addressing Sai’s back.

“Because you’re a perfect couple! And I’ve got the picture to prove it. Ha! Ha!” Sai patted the phone in the back pocket of his jersey and continued walking.

*Jerk!* David shook his head, reminding himself to steal the phone and delete the photo as soon as he could. “Expect it when you’re least expecting it,” he threatened, staring coolly in Sai’s direction. “Sooner or later, you are going down, my friend! Big time!”

“Yeah yeah, whatever you say.” Sai increased the distance between them. “I’ll believe it when I see it.”

David waited for Tony, wishing his friend would hurry. It had been light banter, the sort he enjoyed, but it had also hurt. He’s right, David thought, remembering the way Jo had said she wanted time to think about their relationship. *It is probably over. She’s so complicated!*

# death wish

S wiggling the last of the water from his bottle, David lifted his bike onto his shoulder and started down the eroded track. Sharp stones pressed into his feet.

“Ouch!” Tony yelled. “My feet are killing me.”

“That’s good,” David replied. “At least you’ll forget about your cramp for a while.”

Tony shuffled along for several more metres, groaning with every step. Though he experimented with pushing his bike, he slowly fell behind. “Wait up, guys!” he yelled.

“We should just leave him,” Sai complained, stepping into the shade of a wattle tree. The branches were covered with yellow, scented flowers.

“Yeah,” David agreed, nose crinkling, “we should take off and let him panic. He’s so slow with everything!”

“I can’t believe he made you crash.”

“Me either.”

“What are you guys talking about?” Tony asked as he caught up.

“Nothing,” Sai said, stepping back onto the track. Ignoring Tony, he began to walk away.

“Hang on a bit,” Tony pleaded. “Why don’t the stones hurt your feet? I don’t get it.”

Sai grinned. “Maybe it’s because I’m just tougher than you.”

“Yeah, right.”

David saw his opportunity and took it. “It’s because of his Asian ancestors,” he said to Tony. “You know, all that running through the Cambodian jungle and stuff. He was probably born with tough feet.”

“Get lost.” Reference to his heritage always annoyed Sai.

“Maybe he doesn’t feel the pain because he has a small brain.” Tony paused before adding, “He isn’t as smart as us.”

“That’s more like it.” David laughed. “Confucius say, ‘No brain, no pain.’”

“Hey,” Sai objected. “That’s racist and stupid. If you knew anything at all, you’d know that Confucius was Chinese.”

“Same thing.” David winked at Tony.

“No. It isn’t.” Sai would have protested more had they not emerged from the thick undergrowth. Immediately in front of them, the bush gave way to knee-high grass. Beyond that, the undulating headland ended abruptly in a series of cliffs and ledges. At their base was a craggy stretch of wave-swept rocks.

Sai’s eyes roamed south to a beach and he whistled approvingly. A wave peaked up and broke in both directions, leaving behind a small but perfect A-frame of white foam. “I am soooo going to come back here for a surf,” he declared.

“Me too,” David agreed. “This place is choice.”

“Look!” Tony was pointing in the other direction, toward a small horseshoe inlet carved out of the headland. Something in his voice made the other two turn immediately.

Although the sight was fleeting, what David saw made his eyes widen. “That’s sick! Let’s

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