

david's triumph

[BRAD WATSON]



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Contents

[david's triumph](#)

[cramp](#)

[death wish](#)

[leap of faith](#)

[Cathos](#)

[showdown](#)

[saved](#)

[Valentine's Day](#)

[storm front](#)

[Boron](#)

[fight](#)

[sick bay](#)

[confession](#)

[the avengers](#)

[the party](#)

[punctured](#)

[legend](#)

[black hole](#)

[Thunder Canyon](#)

[testimony](#)

[accident](#)

[recovery](#)

[Mothers' Day](#)

[baptism](#)

[last day](#)

[routine](#)

the test

race day

crash

finish line

balloons

cramp

Stop!”

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

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