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THE BERMUDIAN

Sunlight blazes through the casuarinas, firing between the profusion of green foliage and explosions of pink, peach, yellow and white hibiscus as I race past. My thighs burn and flash between the window of my arms and handlebar. The frame is a brilliant white arrangement of welded steel flying over a smooth baking blur of grey.

I become aware of the insistent call of some part of my brain that has been quietly swearing at me to make use of that chocolate and glucose tucked away so carefully in the foil in my back pockets - but it is not yet eleven. I have been out only twenty minutes and already my body demands. I duck my head to my shoulder and wipe my eyes free of sweat.

My quarry is within range - barely fifty metres ahead, banking unsteadily through the graceful chicane curves of Warwick's South Shore. My left arm swings down to meet the toestraps and gives it a swift tug as it passes. I barely sense the relief of black work-

TACTICAL THINKING



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ing steadily in this landscape of light. Patches of pastel punctuate the hillside with the regular statement of shelter. The shimmering ache of the melting white roofs is everywhere!

I hold the energy of the curves and crest the rise with power. I am immediately conscious of the line of sun spreading across the waves with me. Splinters of light pierce my eyes from the sea quietly mauling the reefs beyond the glaring strip of sand below me.

My eyes are locked on the bright red numbers of a small plate of metal steadily growing larger in front of me.

Gradually, the "burr" of the tiny motor ahead filters through my consciousness and with that sensation I realise the exertion of my own controlled breathing and the constant wind of the spokes knives through the heavy, humid air. A kiskadee bursts across the road in a flurry of feathers and yellow, screaming abuse at the tourists. They swerve violently, and I feel the slick metal of the brake handles.

Orange blossoms! The shock of that sweet scent jolts my mind. The tang of the ocean breeze hones my will. My lips taste of salt, and the skin of my cheeks is brought taut by the fine drying spray. I notice the faint excitement of a more exotic scent as I close with the moped.

I am six inches from the license plate of a little blue Peugeot moped. That moped moves along at a fair clip with four of the

eyes and attempt a smile. She stares, uncertain of my lascivious grimace, a hesitant smile on her lips, then leans forward, cupping her mouth as she yells to her friend. They both glance back, excited, and the moped weaves violently. I gesticulate forward in a bored fashion - it would be infinitely preferable to draft them on tarmac. Spanish bayonets, casuarina, prickly pear and Bermuda cedar tend to inhibit movement somewhat.

The graceful arcing splendour of the girl's shorts change curve and form as she twists. I suppose, to look at me. My mind is fixed on the tactics of the tarmac, firmly committed to my training, rigidly disciplined to the task at hand ... but I am nevertheless able to note and file the aesthetics of my surroundings. Her shape becomes more pronounced as she twists again, and leans forward to talk to her friend.

The grade changes as we follow the road through the sharp sweep before Warwick Camp. I lock myself into the frame and accelerate up the hill. We are extensions of each other. The immediate environment shrinks to that moped and myself. I know this road intimately - every curve and bump, every last rut and undulation remaining from the Public Works Department's latest tender attention to our helpless byways.

The pitch of the motor changes. I glance up - the moped is fractionally pulling away. The girl on the back turns to sipper in challenge. The lure of the test is irresistible.

I shift up, and my legs pick up the more solid cadence. To feel the new push, the near total commitment of volume in my thighs, is sensual. A luxurious glow of warmth from deep in the muscle charges my readiness. The heart of the challenge sparks a sweet searing in my chest. It radiates from my core like a wave, to brush my brain and fingertips, charging every nerve in my body.

I drop my hands to the bars and brace my arms against the wind. My teeth grit a single purpose. The view narrows and I forget colour on the periphery. I crouch lower and push once, twice ... the commitment becomes solid - I explode off the seat.

Sharp exhalations punctuate the growing cadence. My body flares, but it is forgotten. The welding is fused to my intent, my arms locking us upright, all movement concentrated in the vertical flight of my thighs. I am outside myself, my being focused before me in that tunnel of mind.

We pass them, going uphill. The burning grows as I maintain the cadence, defying the grade. I hear nothing as they shriek and yell. By degrees the clamour fades. I still do not hear them. I see only the crest of the hill, a flowing line from which the yellow ribbon races. It seems odd, this unreeling slowly in the distance, growing in acceleration into the blur beneath. I watch that line, and bare my teeth.

A moment of lassitude spears my concentration. Tired! The solidity is now pain. My face is a mask. I draw in deeply and squeeze the bars. My mind explodes in fury - I hiss

with the compression of this ultimacy. I sprint upon sprint and lash the bicycle from side to side. My mind pulls us behind it. Will fuses with pain as we battle upwards.

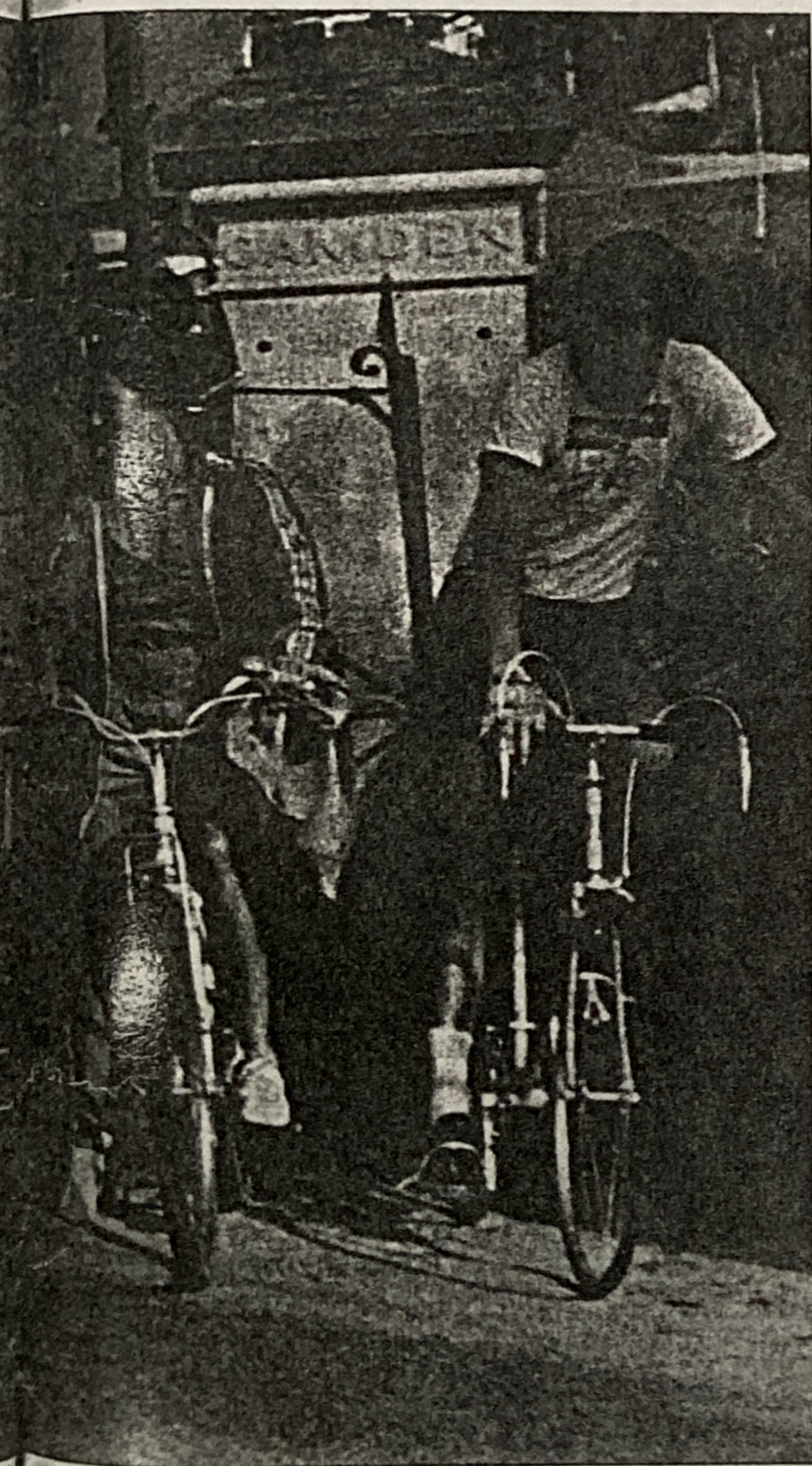
My mind is stronger than my body. I believe in the power of my will steeped in the confidence of my subconscious. There is far more to me than I perceive. BURNING! Norman Vincent Peale should bloody well try racing! I am an extension of my being - I am more than myself ... my surroundings are part of me ... I feel like a flying version of that cement mixer wheezing and banging away at that building site over there ... I feel the energy of this matter and draw on it.

With a flash, the crest of the hill. The line explodes into a road and winds gently off down into the distance around the hill. I force a few extra metres of exertion, then collapse to gasp and allow the pedals to carry themselves. I drop my head and let it hang between my shoulders.

I move first my right, then my left hands with effort to brace myself on the brake covers. Under the stained blacked leather of my ragged cycling gloves, the web between my thumb and forefinger is my support. My fingers I let remain in that half-tension of rest, pulsing gently as the blood boils through my system. The screaming in my body subsides and I take up the slack in the cadence, barely touching it with my toes.

The sun sparkles on the deep aquamarine of the sea fading off into the horizon, melding with the electric blue of the sky. The hibiscus at the side of the road nods in the breeze and waves its large pink flowers at me. I ride with the curve, and an old Bermuda house hoves into view. The sun has bleached the most recent effort at painting to that indeterminate, typically Bermudian peach/pink hue. As I pass, the lapslated, white-washed roof ripples applause, and the jalousied windows wink with languid enthusiasm. A solid, staunch arrangement of old tradition points to the sky, as if to say, in chimney language, "See?". I always liked The Reefs - it was Dad's favourite renovation. I give it a friendly salute in return.

As my pulse settles, I begin to press the cadence. The girls doppler by in a flurry of noise and shrieking, arms and legs akimbo. They probably can't hear the waves. I smile gently with only faint regret. The foliage chuckles with a sussuration of variegated green, the water murmurs distantly with heavy mirth and a luxury of turquoise, and the girls thighs - in mute rage - blaze bright red. The sun, I think, has already claimed them. ■



most attractive calves I have yet seen today. I wipe my eyes again and shift down to spin faster. Flip-flops. Will they not outlaw such things of moped? Only tourists wear flip-flops. Useless except for hygiene in public showers.

"Cool Bro' ..." I jerk my head up in acknowledgement of a passing cyclist.

The girl on the back twists round in shock as she notices me. I blink the sweat from my

