

BRAKE!

A SHORT STORY



Ryan M. Oliver

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BRAKE!

B rake!

I rose that morning from my twin-sized bunk bed as a new boy. A big boy. A big boy who was getting a new ride. For today, I would ascend the ranks of childhood. Maturing, hitting a milestone in my development. Today I would finally upgrade my bike to fit my needs, nay, my sharpened skills. I had at last graduated from a little tyke's bicycle, training wheels and all, to a two-wheeled transporter worthy of my prowess. A bike I could be proud of in my newfound maturity of eight years. No longer would I travel the sprawling neighborhood on a childish mount. No! I would ride among the big kids. Weaving in and out of cul-de-sacs, parks, and other magnificent lands still yet to be discovered. With my new bicycle, I would become the adventurer I was destined to be! But first, the store!

Don't worry, I won't bore you with the uneventful hours spent shopping. Instead, I'll rush to the good part. The maiden voyage of my glorious foot-powered hog. A polished two-wheeled beauty, with a gleaming chain and hardened plastic pedals. This baby would do the

work of a thousand footsteps in seconds. Equal to about .1 horsepower, it would carry my curious soul anywhere my young heart desired. Magellan ain't got nothing on me, baby! I could only begin to imagine the sights we would see as a phenomenal, well-oiled team, Egypt, Paris, the gas station down the road! The world was my oyster, and I planned on gathering all the pearls the world was willing to shell out.

At my side, joining me, was my older brother, Ryan. What a tool! He claimed to be excited for me, but I knew the truth. He wanted to be me. Jealousy is never a good look on anyone, and my brother was ugly with it. That's okay. I still loved him...Or so my mother tells me. She who buys my steed decides my needs. That's my motto. Respect and above all else, cuteness are the keys to happiness...Not to mention free stuff.

Anyway, as soon as my fresh new ride and I were home in the driveway, I decided to take it for a quick spin. I wanted to enjoy that new bike smell while I could. The mean streets and asphalt had a way of stripping that sweet odor in the first few dozen miles. I mounted the padded seat, bracing my youthful bottom, then leaned on the sturdy frame. A moment later, I glided effortlessly down the driveway, coming to a complete stop by dragging my feet across concrete and gravel. For those sweet few seconds overlooking our neighborhood from the top of our hill, I was the happiest boy in the whole world. Until...

"Hey, Chris!" hollered Ryan, "Race you to the stop sign!"

I should have savored the moment. Stopped and smelled the rubber tires off-gassing beneath me, instead I answered with, "Yeah!" What a fool I was. Not even three seconds into owning my brand-new mount, and I wanted to race with it. Would a warrior go into battle with an untested weapon? I say nay. But there I was, ignoring logic all on the

chance to possibly beat and humiliate my pompous brother at a race... high risk, high reward. Sounds like something Evil Knievel would say.

Regardless, the race was on, and I was already behind. Dashing to his bike with the grace of a puma, Ryan mounted his steed like a refined horseback rider in a snooty equestrian club. Reminded me of an uppity college kid who plays polo, while wearing a polo with an image of other people playing polo. Marco! Just kidding. You said Polo, didn't you? Where was I? Oh, yes! The maiden voyage. I could see the finish line. The stop sign was at the bottom of the hill, with Ryan already ten seconds in front of me. If I wanted a chance at victory, I had to move!

Straddling the bike, I seized the molded rubber grips of my handlebars and let gravity take me away. Like a small snowball rolling down the side of a mountain, I picked up speed. Momentum swiftly increased. My relative velocity rose, like a chart displaying exponential notation. Fast and furious! But instead of "Family" being the motivator to win. "Family" was thy enemy! So, it's kind of the same thing. Leaning forward into the slope, I sped up at an exponential rate. No longer was my older brother a fuzzy splotch in my line of sight, but rather a stunned and confused human concerned for my well-being. Which befuddled my little brain.

The look eventually compelled the same feeling in my chest as our eyes met in that moment. But not before allowing the elated emotion of passing him, earning an impending W to fill me up. The feeling dashed away faster than I was traveling down the hill. Like a runaway semi-truck, I glided with the ease of a peregrine falcon falling from the sky, or a rocket entering the Earth's atmosphere. From a distance, I probably appeared to be a little comet, burning up in the night sky. *I wish I may, I wish I might. How I wish not to die tonight.*

“Brake!” hollered Ryan from the rear, “Brake! Brake!” Fear lined each screamed syllable.

Instead of a well-thought-out retort of, “I know what I’m doing, big brother! You’re not the boss of me,” I countered with an inaudible, “AHHHHHHHHHHH!” Something similar you may hear from a skydiver realizing, after the leap of faith, that his parachute was still safely in the plane while careening to his untimely death.

“Brake!” Ryan squawked again from behind me.

Newsflash, big brother! I KNOW that I NEED to use brakes. In fact, my entire body knew! I was vibrating with concern. If I were a little dog, I would have piddled all over the floor. My fight or flight response was lit with napalm and fireworks. I just (nervous cough) couldn’t figure out how to use the damned things! As the eldest child, he SHOULD have known to teach me how to use my new brakes before challenging me to race! A quick lesson on bicycles. When children are new to these contraptions, brake pedals are the primary system in which kiddos bring their little vehicles to a halt...Well, I literally had just been promoted to hand brakes...Does everybody see the problem now? Good. Where was I? Ah, yes! Riding a death cycle down a steep hill, where I was about to die and leave a cute corpse.

Merely seconds passed, and already it felt like I had time warped miles from my brother’s shouts of advice. Well, instinct and an unhelpful death grip of fear caused me to begin backpedaling into oblivion. While completely ignoring the hand brakes, still smiling up at me, unused and enthusiastic. From the rear, I could hear faint cries of Ryan yelling, “Brake!” While in front, I could see nothing but impending doom in the form of a sharp turn, my neighbors’ driveway, and the large rocks lining the end of his property. You don’t need to be a psychic to tell me my future...

Another blink, and one impossible turn later, I found myself charging over the gravel driveway, t-boning the lined stones with enough force to rival that of a WWE folding chair. Next, as I flipped upside down, time slowed to a steady second-to-second play-by-play. For what felt like minutes, I recall arguing with my bike. Pushing and shoving it away, not understanding why it wouldn't detach from my small frame. In our short time together, it had become glued to me like a clingy ex-girlfriend before Valentine's Day.

At last, the Slow-Mo ceased, and so did I by coming to a complete and painful stop. Finishing my flip, flying ass over tea kettle, then sliding another half a driveway further, discovering myself now sandwiched between pointy gravel and my overly affectionate bicycle. Still atop me like those animals in nature documentaries after their *own* wrestling match.

The world had stopped. Silence surrounded me for what felt like decades. Moments later, Ryan arrived to congratulate me on my victory. But first, he came to my aid by pulling the bike off me, which had intermingled my shoelaces in its gears. I really got into my new ride, one may say. The next sobering moment, after smugly rubbing the loss in my brother's face, was openly weeping like a two-year-old and screaming for mama. Not my best moment, I'll admit. But I was victorious! And bleeding...But victorious! And pinned under what was a brand-new bike. Now a ruined, mangled mess...but victorious! Perhaps being second in this case would have been the better outcome...Nah! I can't think like that. I was a winner through and through. No one could take that away from me.

However, winning, in this case, also involved a painful escorted hobble up the hill, into my home, followed by hours of my mother picking rocks, wood, and other unpleasant debris out of my arm. Afterwards, it resembled a scoured piece of wood rather than a usable

appendage. But to point out the most important point, pointedly. I was victorious! So, to sum it all up with a bit of advice from someone who's been there. Before you start something that has the potential of going off the rails. First, always learn how to use the brakes.