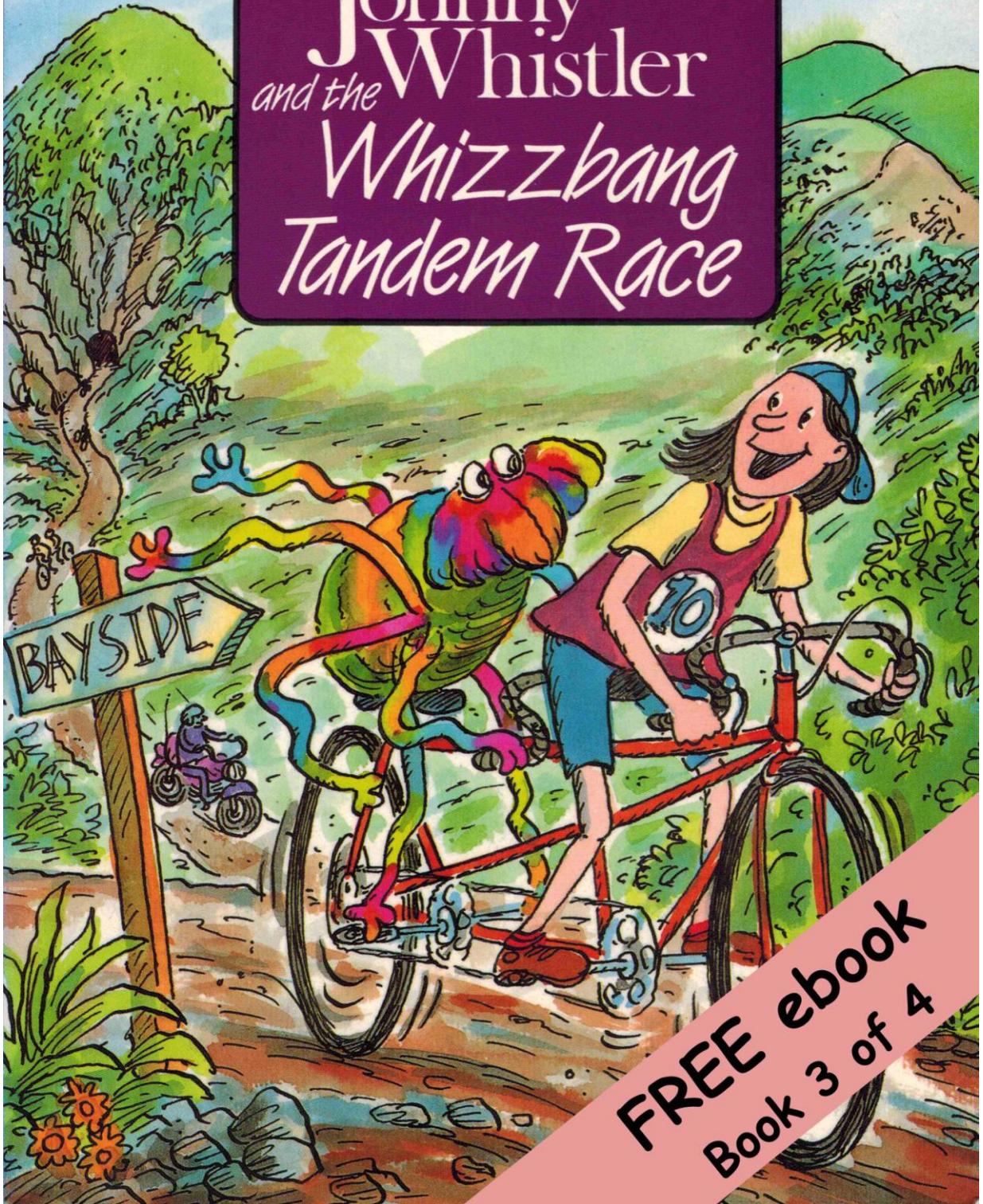




Tom Bradley

Johnny
and the Whistler
*Whizzbang
Tandem Race*



FREE ebook
Book 3 of 4

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Cover artwork © Trevor Pye 1993

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ISBN 978-0-9951223-8-3

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What the critics said about the ‘Johnny Whistler’ series

- “*Wacky fun and larger-than-life adventures*” (Quote Unquote)
- “*... light entertainment with flair ... fast pace and ongoing action. These books are fun*” (Otago Daily Times)
- “*The best idea would be to buy the first of four titles ... upon observance of reader rapture, spring for the series*” (Nelson Evening Mail)

What this story is about

(Third book in the Johnny Whistler series)

Johnny’s old enemy, Bayside’s ex-mayor, Herbert Hatfield, is plotting again. This time he plans to sponsor a big tandem race to publicise his new cycle factory, but keep all the prize money for himself.

He’s imported two cheating villains to help him do it. And he’ll succeed, too, if Johnny, Bouncer, Debbie and three giant, rubbery, hard-peddalling spiders can’t find some tandems to ride.

The twists and turns of this Johnny Whistler adventure are as wild and winding as the race over Mountain Road, where no one knows what’s around the next corner.

Chapter One

Johnny Whistler clutched his throat, let out a strangled cry, and flung himself out of the kitchen chair.

'Help! I've been poisoned!' he gurgled as he rolled around on the floor, his long arms and legs going in all directions.

'Great performance, little brother,' said Debbie Whistler. 'You should try that on stage. Busking on your back.'

'Help, help!' cried Johnny, getting louder by the second.

'Forget that last idea,' said Debbie. 'If you busked on your back, the bass drum would get in the way.'

Johnny stopped and jumped to his feet. 'Thanks a lot. You've just poisoned me with your baking and you don't care.'

'Of course I care,' said Debbie. 'I've scored your performance 6 out of 10. Started well, good technique falling out of the chair, but the thrashing around on the floor needs work.'

'Will you two be quiet? You'll wake the neighbours. Some lucky people around here sleep in on Saturday morning.'

Their mother, Kate Whistler came into the room, stepping around three giant spiders to get to the table. 'We need a bigger house.'

She sat down and looked at the plate in front of her. 'Oh, muffins for breakfast. What a nice surprise.'

'Nice is the wrong word, Mum,' said Johnny.

Kate picked one up and examined it. 'They're big enough.'

'Big?' said Johnny coming back to the table. 'This town could have built the Entertainment Centre on them.'

Kate took a nibble and pulled a face. 'What did you put in them, Debs?'

'The usual,' said Debbie. 'Flour, two cups of bran, two eggs, a cup of baking powder...'

'A *cup* of baking powder?' Kate Whistler dropped the muffin back on the plate. 'Why did you use a whole cup?'

'I found the recipe in a magazine.'

'Sue the magazine, Debs,' said Johnny. 'You want to be a lawyer. Demand a million dollars in damages.'

'I got the magazine from Mum's salon.'

'Better not sue Mum,' said Johnny. 'She'll stop your allowance.'

Kate interrupted them. 'I've never seen a recipe that needed a cup of baking powder.'

'I had to guess some of it,' said Debbie. 'Someone had ripped out half the page.'

Johnny jumped up from the table again and, grabbing the phone, pretended to dial a

number.

'Hello, operator,' he said. 'Send an ambulance to Mayor Whistler's house, and bring a stomach pump. Hurry!'

'Anyone would think I really was trying to poison you,' Debbie protested.

'You were,' said Johnny.

'No, I wasn't.'

'Have you tasted those muffins, sis?' Johnny asked.

'Well... not exactly.'

'Try one,' said Kate.

'Alright, I will,' and, as her mother and brother watched, Debbie lifted a muffin to her lips. 'There, it's not so bad.'

'Now put it in your mouth,' said Johnny.

Debbie took a bite. 'They could be better.'

'They could also be edible, but they're not,' said Johnny.

He picked up a muffin and offered it to the spiders. 'See. They're smart. They won't touch them.'

'What do rubber spiders know about baking?' asked Debbie.

'Nothing,' said Johnny. 'But they know everything about poison.'

'Stop using that word.'

'That's the only word for it,' said Johnny. 'Grade "A" poison.'

'I've had enough of your insults, little brother. I refuse to just sit here and take them.'

'Stand up, then,' said Johnny.

'Mum,' Debbie complained, 'this isn't fair.'

Kate smiled. 'You're the one who wants to be a lawyer. Defend yourself.'

'After I've heard the prosecution's case.'

'It's simple,' said Johnny. 'In this very room are three experts on poison. Rainbow, Sunshine and Sky all swallowed Hatfield's poisonous cocktail... and survived.'

Herbert Hatfield, the former mayor of Bayside had been caught dumping toxic waste at sea. Johnny and his best friend, Bouncer, had found the evidence - two leaking drums washed up on the rocks at Needle point.

'And we all know,' said Johnny, 'the effects of that poison. How it turned three small, harmless beach spiders into what they are today.'

'Yes,' said Debbie. 'Your backing group.'

'Your Honour..,' said Johnny.

'I'm only your mother, Johnny,' said Kate. 'Not a judge.'

'And you're a great mother.'

Kate grinned. 'Flattery won't work on me, Debbie.'

'Your Honour,' said Johnny, 'The spiders know Debbie's muffins are even more deadly than Hatfield's chemicals. That's why they won't eat them.'

'Maybe they don't like bran,' said Kate.

'It's not the roughage I'm talking about when I say those muffins are lethal,' said Johnny. 'That's the clear testimony of my three spider witnesses.'

'Very convenient, little brother,' said Debbie, 'seeing as you're the only one who can understand them.'

'They're with me on this,' said Johnny, turning to his mother. 'Debbie Whistler should be jailed for life.'

'How about until she cleans up her room?' suggested Kate.

'Mum,' said Debbie, 'you're supposed to be impartial.'

'And your room is supposed to be tidy.'

'Order in the court,' said Johnny, banging his fist on the kitchen table.

'That's my job,' said Kate. She looked at Debbie. 'Anything to say?'

'Yes,' said Debbie, jumping up.

'I thought so,' said her mother.

Debbie started. 'The defence will show...'

'That you two should watch less TV,' said Kate. 'I hereby schedule a retrial.'

'When?' demanded Debbie.

'Next year,' said Kate. 'When you've had more chance to practise your baking.'

'She's not practising on me,' said Johnny.

'No,' said Kate, 'you'll be too busy doing your homework, young man.'

'I've done it.'

'How much?'

'Most of it,' said Johnny.

'Make sure you do the rest this weekend. Do you have a show tonight?'

'Two of them,' said Johnny.

'As your mother, I wish you were home more often at nights, but as mayor I also realise Bayside needs all the tourist dollars it can get.'

'Tomorrow's Sunday. I can sleep in,' said Johnny.

Kate's eyes went dreamy. 'It must be wonderful to be able to sleep in. I can't remember the last time I did. With two jobs, I've always got too much to do.'

Kate got up from the table. 'Enough of that. Down to business. How about you two washing the dishes while I finish getting ready?'

'Mayoral duties?' asked Debbie, who'd worked on her mother's election campaign when

Hatfield was tossed out.

'Later,' said Kate. 'This morning, I'm doing a couple of perms.'

Kate Whistler owned 'Kate's Kuts' hairdressing salon on Beach Road, right next to the harbour.

She looked closely at her son. 'You're looking a bit scruffy again, Johnny. Want to pop down for a trim?'

'No way,' said Johnny, jumping up from the table and running for cover as he always did when his mother talked about cutting his hair.

'But I'm a good hairdresser.'

'The best,' said Johnny.

'You could be a walking advertisement for me. What do you think, Debbie?'

'A walking advertisement,' repeated Debbie. 'Yes, I can see it now. We could paint a slogan on Johnny's bass drum. "Johnny Whistler is sponsored by Kate's Kuts, Bayside's hairdresser to the stars".'

'That wouldn't all fit on the drum,' said Johnny. 'Too long.'

'So is your hair,' said his mother.

'My hair's okay.'

'For once I think I have to agree with little brother,' Debbie told their mother. 'Long hair's part of his showbiz image. As Johnny's manager, I'd advise him not to get it cut.'

'You're not my manager,' said Johnny.

Kate interrupted. 'I don't care who's in charge, as long as those dishes get done.'

Debbie frowned. 'Saturday's for having fun. Not working.'

'I used to think that, too, Debbie, when I was 14,' said Kate. 'You two can at least do your chores. Have your fun when you've finished. What are you planning today, anyway?'

'Fishing,' said Debbie. 'We're meeting Bouncer in the square then going around to the wharf.'

'Good luck,' said Kate. 'If you catch any fish, you can cook them for dinner.'

Johnny grinned. 'And if the fish aren't biting, we'll drop Debbie's bran muffins into the harbour. Then we can just scoop up the fish as they swim to the surface and surrender.'

Chapter Two

'Hey, Johnny! Debbie! Come over here and look at this!'

Bouncer's whole body vibrated when he yelled. It made his glasses bob up and down on the end of his nose. It also frightened any seagulls scavenging for food.

Johnny let out a whistle and the spiders fell into line behind him as he ran across the square.

The spiders obeyed Johnny's signals like sheep dogs with a shepherd. And, although they'd once frightened the townspeople, the friendly and famous colourful trio were now big favourites in the town.

Johnny stopped alongside Bouncer. They were both 12, but Johnny was a full head taller than his friend.

'What's this?' asked Johnny.

Pinned to the town notice board was a new poster.

Debbie caught up a few seconds later. 'With a voice like yours, Bouncer, you should be out at sea. A ship wouldn't need a foghorn with you on board.'

'It's a great voice,' said Johnny.

'Tell that to the seagulls,' said Debbie.

Bouncer pointed to the poster. 'What's a tandem?'

'You don't have to be a genius to know that,' said Debbie.

'I'm not a genius,' said Bouncer, 'and I don't know.'

Debbie explained. 'A tandem is two people working together.'

'Like us, Bouncer,' said Johnny. 'A team.'

Bouncer helped Johnny with his busking act in the town's entertainment centre. Johnny made the music while Bouncer was the compere.

'What about the spiders?' asked Bouncer. 'Are they a tandem?'

Johnny thought about it. 'They are a team, but they're not a tandem.'

'Why not?'

'It's obvious,' answered Debbie, 'There are three of them.'

Bouncer frowned. Maths troubled him.

Johnny came to his rescue. 'A tandem is a double act. Two partners working together.'

'That's right, Bouncer,' said Debbie. 'But some double acts are a disaster. Like little brother and his brain.'

'Or big sister and her muffins,' said Johnny.

'With most people one and one makes two,' Debbie said to Bouncer. 'Johnny and his brain only make one and a half.'

Johnny had stopped listening. He was too busy studying the poster.

'Hey,' he said, 'this is advertising a tandem *race*.' He saw his friend's puzzled look.

'A tandem's also a bike, Bouncer,' he explained. 'Built for two riders.'

'Isn't that a bit of a squeeze?'

'It's got two seats and an extra big frame.'

'Talking of extra big,' said Debbie, 'look at the size of that prize. It could pay for me to go through law school.'

'Did someone mention money?'

It was Murphy, one of the regular bus drivers who brought tourists through town.

'A lot of money,' said Debbie.

Murphy grinned as he saw for himself how generous the prize was. 'What I could do with all that money,' he said. 'And I've just thought of a really great idea.

Did I ever tell you...?'

Murphy was a man of many ideas. Not many of them worked.

'Tell me, Mr Murphy,' said Johnny, changing the subject because even Murphy's bad ideas took a long time to explain. 'Have you ever been in a cycle race?'

'Been in one?' said Murphy 'I was a champion cyclist. When I was in the army...'

That was the other subject to avoid. Murphy's army career.

As the bus driver spoke, his bright red hair bobbed up and down on top of his head like a rooster's comb.

Johnny looked at his watch. 'Sorry to interrupt, Mr Murphy, but isn't your bus about to leave?'

'Why yes,' said Murphy, 'and thank you for reminding me.'

He took one more look at the poster. 'See you on race day.'

'Should we?' said Johnny, as Murphy walked away.

'Should we what?' asked Debbie.

'Enter the race.'

'No,' said Debbie. 'It'll probably be for adults.'

The tandem race was to be held in Bayside in three weeks' time and was sponsored by the Whizzbang Cycle Company.

'Whizzbang Cycle Company?' said Johnny. 'Never heard of them.'

Bouncer looked at the address. 'Hey, this is where the old Bayside Cycles factory used to be. I thought they'd closed down.'

'Must be open again,' said Johnny. 'I wonder who the new owner is?'

'What a bargain,' said Herbert Hatfield, walking around the old cycle factory. 'I'm going to do well out of this.'

'It'll take a bit of work to get this place shipshape,' said Arnold White, the new factory manager.

'Not *shipshape*, Arnold, *bike* shape.'

'I prefer ships to bikes.' Arnold's last job had been as engineer on Hatfield's factory ship, the *Rose Marie*.

'Well, I don't,' said Hatfield. The *Rose Marie* had dumped the toxic waste that had got him into so much trouble.

'What are we going to do with all this old stock?' asked Arnold.

At one end of the factory, dozens of rusting tandems were stored on racks.

'All taken care of,' said Hatfield. 'To launch the new name, Whizzbang Cycles is sponsoring a tandem race. It will put these old machines to good use, and get me a lot of cheap publicity once people see these posters which are going up all around town.'

As he spoke, he pulled one from his briefcase and spread it on a table.

Arnold looked at the prize. 'How can it be cheap publicity with the prize you're giving away?'

'Who said anything about giving it away?'

'But someone will win all that money.'

'Don't worry about it, Arnold. You just get the tandems ready on time.'

'What do you want me to do with them?'

'Nothing fancy,' said Hatfield. 'Just give them a quick coat of paint and put some Whizzbang stickers on them.'

'How many tandems are here?'

'There are ninety-six in these racks.'

'That's a lot of bikes,' said Arnold.

'The more the merrier,' said Hatfield. 'It'll make for a spectacular start.'

'They may start,' said Arnold, 'but I don't think many of these old clunkers will finish any sort of race.'

He gestured at a pile of junk in the corner next to the tandems.

'What about all these extra bits and pieces?' Arnold asked. 'Broken frames. Seats. I could probably build two or three more.'

'Don't bother. You won't have time.'

'What's to stop people using their own bikes?'

Hatfield pulled an entry form from his pocket.

'They can only ride official Whizzbang tandems,' he explained, 'which we'll provide. It's all here. "Rule One. The prize will be awarded to the first team to finish on a Whizzbang tandem".'

Arnold studied the form. 'There seem to be a lot of rules.'

'I had Jennings from the Gazette help me draw them up.'

'I thought you didn't like Mr Jennings?'

'I don't,' said Hatfield, 'but I need to have all the local media involved.'

Jennings was the long-time editor and now the new owner of the town's newspaper, the Bayside Gazette.'

'I've appointed him the race judge,' said Hatfield. 'Everyone seems to think Jennings is honest.'

'That's because he is honest,' said Arnold.

Jennings had stood up to Hatfield and printed stories about the dumping at sea.

Hatfield scowled. 'I wouldn't have sold him the Gazette if I hadn't needed the money to clean up my factories.'

His scowl deepened. 'It's all the fault of that rotten Johnny Whistler. I haven't forgotten. His day will come.'

'Well,' said Arnold, changing the subject, 'at least if we're providing the tandems, all the riders will start equal. Those old things weigh a tonne. And the gears are really basic.'

He looked more closely at the poster. 'This must be a printing mistake.'

'I can't see any mistake,' said Hatfield.

'Here,' said Arnold, pointing with his finger. 'Where it says the race is over Mountain Road.'

'That's not a mistake, Arnold.'

'Who's idea was that?'

'What's wrong with Mountain Road?'

'Nothing,' said Arnold, 'if you're a mountain goat.'

Mountain Road was well named. It had been built by the gold miners who'd first settled Bayside. These days it was only used by hikers and trail bikers.

'I think it's a perfect route for the race,' said Hatfield. 'The road starts and finishes in town, and the whole race will be over in one day.'

'More like a week,' said Arnold. 'No one will be going very fast on these old machines.'

'That reminds me,' said Hatfield. 'There's one other bike that needs some work.'

He led Arnold to a different part of the factory where another tandem stood, wrapped in a dust cover.

With a flourish, Hatfield pulled the cover off. 'This is tandem number 97.'

Arnold was impressed. 'Where did you get this from?'

'That's my secret.'

'This is brand new.'

'Correct,' said Hatfield.

Arnold examined it closely. 'It's really something.' He lifted the tandem off the ground. 'As

light as a feather. It weighs a fraction of those other bikes.'

He spun a pedal and tried the gears. 'Look at the super gearing. It's a mountain bike built for two.'

Arnold looked at Hatfield. 'You're not planning to let someone ride this in the race, are you, Mr Hatfield?'

'Why not?'

'Why not?' repeated Arnold. 'The other riders won't stand a chance. It won't be fair.'

Hatfield held up his hand. 'That's enough, Arnold. Your job is to make this new tandem look old and clunky, like all the others.'

'What do you suggest?'

'Use your imagination, Arnold. Scuff up the frame, then paint it the same colour as the other tandems. And put an old cover over the new seats.'

'What about the fancy trims?'

'Take them off,' said Hatfield, 'then disguise any obvious hi-tech bits with lots of tape and Whizzbang stickers. Can you do it?'

'I'm an engineer, Mr Hatfield. I can do anything with metal. But the race is only three weeks away. It'll be a fulltime job just getting these old machines ready.'

'That's why I've hired Charlie and Sam to help you.'

They'd been crew members on the old *Rose Marie*. Like Arnold, they'd kept quiet about the dumping at sea.

'I'm returning a favour,' said Hatfield.

'Charlie's a bit old, isn't he?'

'No older than that traitor, Grout,' said Hatfield, spitting out the name.

Herbert Grout, former captain of the *Rose Marie*, had turned against Hatfield and told Bayside the truth about how Hatfield had dumped toxic waste at sea.

'Do you want Charlie and Sam to help me with this super-bike?' Arnold asked.

'No,' said Hatfield. 'That's top secret. Only you and I can know about it.'

'But Charlie and Sam kept their mouths shut last time.'

'The people of Bayside wouldn't forgive me if there was another scandal,' said Hatfield.

'A lot of them haven't forgiven you for the *first* one,' said Arnold.

He looked at the new machine. 'If I can't work on this while Charlie and Sam are here, when am I supposed to do it?'

'At night, after they've gone. This is very important, Arnold. You could say your job depends on it. Understand?'

'Yes, Mr Hatfield, I understand.'

Chapter Three

'Hi, gang.' Freddy Hart, the new sports editor of Bayside FM, slid his outsized motorcycle to a spectacular halt and turned off the engine.

'Has Murphy seen it yet?' asked Johnny.

'Seen what?' said Freddy.

'Your new motorcycle. It's a monster. I'll bet you could fit more people on the back than Murphy could fit in his bus.'

'You may be right,' said Freddy, pulling off his helmet, and pushing his goggles up onto his forehead. 'Any bites?'

Johnny, Debbie, and Bouncer had been fishing off the end of Bayside's wharf all morning. Bouncer held up their catch for Freddy to see. 'One old boot and two bits of driftwood.'

Freddy nodded to where Rainbow, Sunshine and Sky lay in the sun. 'Probably frightening all the fish away.'

'Things are getting desperate,' said Johnny. 'The next step is to use Debbie's bran muffins.'

Debbie dug her brother in the ribs. 'I'll murder you,' she hissed.

Johnny dug her back. 'That's what you were trying to do to me this morning.'

'What's this about muffins?' asked Freddy, rocking the motorcycle back onto its stand. 'I love a nice tasty bran muffin.'

'Then you've come to the wrong place,' said Johnny. 'Debbie's muffins taste awful.'

Freddy brushed a thick layer of dust off his clothes.

'It's unbelievably dusty up on Mountain Road at the moment,' he told them, 'especially riding along that old dry river bed.'

'Yellow River,' said Debbie.

'Is that what they call it? Yellow, as in mud, or yellow as in...?'

He was pointing at Sunshine who was bright yellow.

'No, yellow as in gold,' said Bouncer. 'Although they never found much.'

Bayside had started life as a coastal gold mining town.

'Have you ridden any of the side trails between here and the river?' Johnny asked Freddy.

'I didn't know there were any. Tell me, what happened to the water?'

'It goes into the town's reservoir,' said Johnny. 'It's diverted by a small dam up in the bush.'

'Have any of you ever been up Mountain Road?' asked Freddy.

'Not all the way up,' said Debbie.

'Johnny and I hiked over it last year on a school trip,' said Bouncer.

'The old miners who built that road must have been tough,' said Freddy. 'Imagine digging that tunnel through Cloudy Peak with a pick and shovel? And that old swing bridge over Miner's

Gorge gives me the creeps.'

'It's going to make for an interesting race,' said Johnny. 'Are you going to enter?'

'Can't,' said Freddy. 'I'm covering the race for the radio station, but a couple of my friends are definite starters. Dean and Linda Maxwell. They're doctors. Both very fit and sporty, so they should have a good chance of winning.'

Freddy grinned. 'And if they do win, they're going to give the money to the children's hospital where they work.'

'We'll cheer them on,' said Debbie.

'Thanks,' said Freddy, 'It'll be hard. Hatfield couldn't have picked a tougher route. I think I'll use my motorcycle to do the race reports.'

'What about the radio car?' asked Bouncer.

'It would never get up there,' said Freddy.

'Hire a helicopter,' said Bouncer.

Freddy laughed. 'Hatfield hire a helicopter? You must be joking.'

Herbert Hatfield owned Bayside FM.

'He's too mean for that,' said Freddy. 'Watches every cent.'

'Which makes me suspicious,' said Johnny. 'Why is Bayside's resident Scrooge offering such a big prize?'

'I see what you mean,' said Freddy. 'Just as well the Gazette is involved. Jennings will keep him honest.'

'Impossible,' said Johnny.

'Have you ever seen a tandem race?' Debbie asked Freddy.

'No,' he replied, 'although I've reported plenty of regular cycle races. I hope it's not as messy as the last one I did.'

'What happened?' asked Johnny.

'Last year's Grand Tour. There was a huge scandal. Two of the professional riders were caught cheating. They'd been under suspicion for a while, and this time they not only got caught, they got banned.'

'I hope nothing like that happens here,' said Johnny.

'Don't worry,' said Freddy. 'What could go wrong?'

'I'm telling you, it's foolproof,' said Herbert Hatfield.

One of the men sitting opposite him in the motel room wasn't so sure. 'Nothing's foolproof.'

'This is,' insisted Hatfield.

'That's what we thought before the last Grand Tour.'

'I read about the problems you had,' said Hatfield. 'Too bad you got caught. And banned. I

sympathise. I've had a few problems myself. That's why I'm hiring you.'

'Is that why we're meeting out of town?'

'It's better this way,' Hatfield explained. 'No one knows me here. If you'd come to Bayside, someone might have seen us together. That would have spoiled the whole thing. Tell me again. What name are you going to use?'

'Black,' said the man. 'I'm now Barry Black.'

Hatfield turned to the other man in the room. And you're going to race as...?'

'White,' said the second man. 'Jack White.'

'Black and White,' repeated Hatfield. 'Very original.'

'Names aren't important,' said Jack, 'as long as we get paid.' He stroked his bushy beard as he spoke.

'And we do want to get paid,' said Barry from behind the tinted glasses that hid a lot of his face.

'You'll get paid,' said Hatfield. 'You can't lose on the tandem I've got for you.'

'Why go to all this trouble?' asked Barry. 'If you don't want to pay out the prize money, you could have offered less and run a more modest race, fair and square.'

Hatfield rubbed his hands. 'It's more than the money. I told you, I've had a few problems.'

'Were you caught cheating, too?'

'I don't consider it cheating. What's a bit of toxic waste in a whole ocean?'

'Trouble, by the sound of it,' said Jack.

'The town didn't understand,' said Hatfield. 'They still don't. Which is where the race comes in.'

'I get it,' said Barry. 'A comeback.'

'Exactly. One day I'm going to be mayor again. I intend to get my own back on that Johnny Whistler kid and his mother.'

'Johnny Whistler?' said Barry. 'I've read about him. He does some sort of musical act with giant spiders.'

'That's the brat.'

'I don't understand,' said Jack. 'How will the race help?'

Hatfield smiled. 'It's good publicity for Bayside. People are coming from all over, which makes me look good. If I play my cards right, everyone will soon forget all that other business.'

'So, you don't care about the prize money,' said Jack.

'I didn't say that,' said Hatfield. 'I always care about money. That's why I'm hiring you two to win the race. That way I'll not only be a hero to the townspeople, the oh-so-generous prize will go straight back into my pocket.'

'Except for our fee,' said Barry.

'Except for your fee.'

'Smart,' said Barry.

'Which is what I want you two to be,' said Hatfield. 'Smart. The race is on a Sunday. Arrive in Bayside on Friday night, no earlier, and check into the hotel. I'll make sure there's a room booked in your names.'

'Friday should give us enough time to check out the race route before the big day,' said Barry. 'I don't like surprises.'

'Just don't talk to anybody,' said Hatfield, 'and don't get into any trouble.'

'Trouble?' asked Barry. 'Can you imagine us getting into trouble?'

'Yes,' said Hatfield. 'That's why I'm telling you both to keep your mouths shut.'

Chapter Four

Most evenings Victor Grout, former skipper of the *Rose Marie*, and now caretaker of Bayside's Entertainment Centre, passed the newly-named Whizzbang Cycle factory as he walked home.

For the last few weeks, the lights had been on till very late.

Tonight, Thursday, whoever was working had quit a few minutes early and Grout almost collided with the figure leaving the darkened factory.

'Arnold?' asked Grout, peering into the darkness.

'Skipper? Is that you?'

'Who do you think it is, Arnold? The ghost of the *Rose Marie*?'

Arnold's nervous laughter carried through the darkness. 'Don't even joke about it, Skipper.'

Arnold had been the engineer, and Grout the captain, when the *Rose Marie* sank. They owed their lives to Johnny and the spiders who'd come to their rescue.

Grout lit his pipe. It glowed in the dark. 'Why are you working so late?'

'Can't tell you, Skipper. It's more than my job's worth. But I've finally finished.'

'Not like being at sea, is it Arnold? Do you miss it?'

'A lot.' said Arnold. 'Do you?'

'Yes, but I've got a good job down at the centre. At my age, I mustn't grumble.'

'You're lucky you're not still working for Hatfield.'

Grout, who'd finally turned against his former boss and helped Johnny expose the scandal, bit on his pipe. 'I wouldn't work for that old pirate again if he paid me a million dollars.'

'I don't have a choice,' said Arnold. 'Jobs are hard to come by. And someone's got to get those tandems ready. The race is on Sunday.'

'I heard Sam and Charlie were working here now, helping get the bikes ready.'

'There was a lot to do,' said Arnold.

'At night? On your own?'

'I can't talk about it, Skipper. I'm sworn to secrecy.'

'What's so secret about fixing up some old tandems?'

'Not the old ones,' said Arnold. 'The new one I'm...'

Arnold stopped. 'I think I've said too much. I've got to go. Nice to see you again, Skipper.'

With that Arnold turned and hurried into the darkness.

Grout stood for a moment, chewing on the end of his pipe. Arnold was obviously working on something top secret.

But what?

The next night, Friday, Johnny and the Spiders played to two full houses. An extra show

had been necessary to cater for the crowds who'd started to arrive in town for the Sunday tandem race.

Johnny was taking off his makeup when there was a knock on his dressing room door.

It was Freddy. 'Loved the show. I arrived late so I only caught the end of it.'

'Pull up a chair if you can find one,' said Johnny.

Freddy had to climb over the spiders to find somewhere to sit. 'Isn't this room a bit small for all of you?'

'That's what Mum keeps saying about the house.'

'You'll never guess who I saw in town tonight.'

'Is this a trick question?' replied Johnny, wiping off the last of the makeup and throwing the tissues in the waste bin.

'Remember that cycle race I told you about? The Grand Tour?'

Johnny started combing his hair. 'Where the two riders were disqualified for cheating?'

'Right,' said Freddy. 'They're here in Bayside.'

Johnny's comb stopped in mid stroke. 'What were they doing?'

'Buying hamburgers,' said Freddy. 'I'd slipped out for a late night snack. There were two people ahead of me. A fellow with a bushy beard and another with tinted glasses. I knew I'd seen them somewhere, but I couldn't remember where. After they'd got their burgers, I followed them. They're staying at the hotel.'

'Are you sure it's them?' said Johnny.

'The beard and the glasses fooled me for a while, but then the names came back. Barry Sullivan and Jack Harrison. I checked at the hotel desk. They're booked in under the names of Barry Black and Jack White.'

'They must be here for the tandem race,' said Johnny. 'We'll tell Mr Jennings. He'll stop them.'

'It's not that easy,' said Freddy, pulling out a copy of the rules. 'There's nothing in here to prevent them racing. I've checked. They can use any names they like as long as they ride an official Whizzbang tandem, and don't use drugs or chemicals to boost their performance.'

'But they were banned,' said Johnny.

'Not for using drugs,' said Freddy. 'Anyway, that ban doesn't apply to public races like this. Even if we exposed them, it wouldn't make any difference.'

'Hatfield!' said Johnny.

'You think I should tell Hatfield?'

'No, I think Hatfield knows already. Think about it, Freddy. Hatfield organises a big race, offers a huge prize, then suddenly two cycling cheats turn up in town.'

'But why blame Hatfield?'

'Wait here. I'll be right back.'

Within a couple of minutes, Johnny was back with Grout.

'Captain,' said Johnny, 'tell Freddy what you told me about your chat with Arnold last night.'

Freddy listened in silence until Grout had finished.

'I can see what you're thinking, Johnny,' said Freddy. 'But we need more proof.'

Johnny picked up the phone and handed it to Grout. 'Our two cheats don't know your voice, Captain. Ring them at the hotel.'

'What'll I say?'

Johnny grinned. 'Tell them you're calling on behalf of Herbert Hatfield. Tell them there could be a last minute change of plan.'

Grout's cheeks were glowing red as he slammed down the phone at the end of the conversation.

'In all my years at sea, I've never heard such bad language,' said Grout.

'What did they say?' asked Johnny.

'They said they didn't care if Hatfield changed his plans as long as they got their money.'

'I've heard enough,' said Freddy. 'The race has got to be called off.'

'Don't do that,' said Johnny.

'But the sponsor has rigged it.'

'If the race is cancelled, your doctor friends can't win that money for the children's hospital.'

'They can't win anyway,' said Freddy. 'Hatfield's seen to that.'

'If only it wasn't an adult race,' said Johnny, thinking aloud.

'It's not,' said Freddy.

'Debbie said it was.'

'That's why those two cheats can enter. It's open to anyone and everyone.'

'Then I'll enter,' said Johnny. 'And Debbie and Bouncer.'

'I think you've left it too late,' said Freddy.

Johnny held out his hand. 'Let me have another look at those rules.'

At nine o'clock the next morning, Saturday, Herbert Hatfield was in his office when there was a knock on the door.

Mr Jennings, the editor and owner of the Bayside Gazette, entered.

'I've checked and double checked these entry forms and the rules,' said Jennings.

'Everything is in order for tomorrow morning at nine.'

'Excellent,' said Hatfield. 'It's all going very...'

The intercom on his office desk buzzed. 'There's someone here to see you, Mr Hatfield.'

'I'm busy.'

'The caller says it's important,' came the reply.

'Who is it?'

'Johnny Whistler.'

With a look of thunder, Hatfield leapt up from behind his desk. He pushed past Jennings and strode through into the front office where Johnny was waiting.

'I'd like to enter the race,' said Johnny.

'You're too late, boy, I'm pleased to say,' said Hatfield, glaring at his old enemy. 'The race is full.'

'Then I'll be a reserve.'

'We don't have reserves,' said Hatfield. 'Go away.'

'Hold on a moment,' said Jennings, joining them. 'There's nothing in the rules to stop Johnny entering.'

He turned to Johnny. 'It does seem a waste of time, though. There are no spare tandems for you to ride.'

'I'd still like to enter,' said Johnny.

Jennings handed Johnny an entry form.

Hatfield snatched it away. 'He's too young.'

'I'm 12,' said Johnny.

'You have to be 15,' said Hatfield.

'No, he doesn't.' Jennings snatched the entry form out of Hatfield's hand and gave it back to Johnny. 'There's no rule about an age limit.'

'Well, there should be,' said Hatfield, trying to snatch the form back. 'Put one in.'

Jennings held tight to the piece of paper. 'You can't change the rules at this late stage. If Johnny wants to enter, he can.'

'Who's going to be your partner, boy?' asked Hatfield as Johnny filled in the form. 'That friend of yours with the big mouth? What's his name? Bumper?'

'Bouncer. His name's Bouncer.'

'It doesn't matter who rides with you,' Jennings told Johnny. 'We only need your name on the entry form. You can ride with any partner you like.'

At that moment, Debbie arrived. 'I want to enter the race as well.'

'Don't tell me,' said Hatfield. '*You* want to be a reserve as well.'

Debbie gave Hatfield her biggest smile. Jennings handed her a form. As she started to fill it out, Bouncer arrived.

Hatfield groaned. 'No show without Blomper.'

'Bouncer, sir.'

'Another reserve?' asked Hatfield.

'Fine by me,' said Bouncer.

When the three friends had finished filling out their forms, Jennings gathered up the papers and placed them with the others, but at the bottom of the stack.

'As long as you all realise,' he said, 'that although you've entered, there are no tandems left. We've had no cancellations or withdrawals, so there's very little chance of any of you riding in tomorrow's race.'

'We understand,' they all answered.

Hatfield watched them leave the office. 'Why are those kids smiling? I hate it when they smile like that.'

'I'm the coach,' said Debbie.

'No, you're not,' said Johnny.

'I'm with Johnny on this,' said Bouncer.

It was late Saturday afternoon and the three of them had found a quiet road.

Debbie looked disgusted. 'How can we be ready to ride in the race tomorrow if we don't have a practice?'

It can't be a real practice,' said Bouncer. 'These are regular bikes with only one seat.'

'We can pretend,' said Debbie.

'Good idea, Debs. Bouncer and I can pretend you're not nagging us.'

Debbie looked down her nose at him. 'You'll laugh on the other side of your face when I win tomorrow. If you don't want my help, just say so.'

Johnny and Bouncer exchanged glances.

'So!' they both yelled together.

'You two won't be laughing if we can't get any tandems to ride.'

'Captain Grout is working on it,' said Johnny. 'He's calling in some favours.'

'Why don't we start with a few lengths of the street?' suggested Bouncer. 'Up to the green letterbox and back again. Ten times.'

'Alright,' said Johnny. 'You be the starter.'

'Ready, set, go!' yelled Bouncer in his biggest voice and they were off.

Johnny leapt straight into the lead. Taller and stronger than the other two, he had the coordination of a natural athlete. He needed it for his busking act in which he played several instruments at once.

By the end of the mini-circuit, Johnny was a clear winner, a full lap ahead of Debbie and two laps ahead of Bouncer.

'Sorry, Debs,' said Johnny, 'but you'll have to go faster than that tomorrow if you're going to win.'

'I'm keeping something back for the big day,' she said, puffing.

'Make sure it's not a bran muffin,' said Johnny.

'Hey, that was fun,' he told the others. 'Let's do it again.'

'You do it,' said Bouncer, puffing. 'I'll time you.'

'And I'll study your cycling technique,' said Debbie. 'That way I can tell you what you're doing wrong.'

'What am I doing wrong?'

'I'll think of something,' said Debbie.

That evening, the dinner conversation at the Whistler's centred on the next day's tandem race.

'If you all wanted to enter the race, why did you leave it to the last minute?' asked Kate.

'Pass me the potatoes, please.'

'Debbie said it was for adults,' Johnny explained, passing the plate.

'They usually are,' said Debbie. 'How was I supposed to know?'

'You could have tried reading the poster properly,' said Johnny.

Kate smiled. 'He's got a point, Debs. Good lawyers always read the small print. By the way, did either of you see the story about the race in the Gazette today?'

'Haven't got time to read the paper, Mum,' said Johnny. 'Only the entertainment page.'

'The story was very entertaining,' said his mother. 'It had a picture of Hatfield and a story about how the race is getting Bayside so much good publicity.'

'I saw it, Mum,' said Debbie. 'Do you remember the last time that slug, Hatfield, had his ugly mug on the front page?'

'Debbie, please. Mind your manners.'

They all remembered it. A soaking wet Herbert Hatfield had been thrown into the harbour by angry townspeople, and then pulled out by Johnny and the spiders.

'He'll never forgive me,' said Johnny.

'He's not the forgiving sort,' said Kate. 'By the way, what are you both planning for tonight?'

'Debbie's coming to watch my late show.'

'Then we've been invited over to Bouncer's for the night,' added Debbie.

Kate looked puzzled. 'Why would you want to sleep over at Bouncer's house, Debs?'

'Ah...' said Debbie, trying to think of a good reason.

Johnny saved her. 'We're doing it for you, Mum.'

'Me?' said Kate.

'Debbie and I know how you never get a chance to sleep in. By staying at Bouncer's, the three of us can get an early start and you can stay in bed a bit longer.'

'Done,' said Kate. 'As long as I'm there by nine to start the race. But why do you want to get up early if you haven't got any tandems to ride?'

'We might get lucky,' said Johnny.

'It sounds as though you need more than luck. You need a fairy godmother with a magic wand.'

'You mean, like a modern day Cinderella?' asked Debbie.

'Anything's possible,' said Johnny, looking at his sister. 'We already have a pumpkin.'

Chapter Five

It was nearly midnight when Arnold opened the side door of Whizzbang Cycles to let in Johnny, Debbie, Bouncer, Grout, and the spiders.

'This could cost me my job, Skipper.'

Debbie turned to her brother. 'And this could get us grounded for a week.'

Captain Grout looked at his former engineer and shrugged. 'Why should Hatfield complain? You just did better than expected getting the tandems ready.'

Arnold had always felt guilty about not supporting his old ship's captain in tackling Hatfield when the scandal broke over the dumping at sea.

'I owe you this one, Skipper.'

Arnold also remembered being towed to safety after the ship sank.

'I guess I owe you, too, Johnny.'

'After tonight, we'll be all square,' said Johnny.

'You are kidding, aren't you?' asked Debbie, looking at the heap of junk on the floor.

'No, I'm not,' said Arnold.

'Here's a pedal,' said Bouncer, sifting through the junk.

'And here's a seat,' said Grout, picking it up.

Johnny picked up a length of metal. 'And a piece of frame, I think. Are you sure you can do it?'

Arnold smiled. 'It may look like junk to you, but I'm sure there are enough bits and pieces lying around to do the job. We'll have to work through the night, but it's possible. I'm always bragging I can do anything with metal. Now's my chance to prove it.'

'Why don't we just sabotage the super-bike?' asked Debbie.

Arnold had finally told them why he'd been working so late most nights.

'Too late,' said Arnold. 'Once I'd finished disguising it, Hatfield took it home for safekeeping.'

'I still think we should protest,' said Bouncer.

'This way's better,' said Johnny. 'Let's win the money for the hospital and teach Hatfield a lesson at the same time.'

'An expensive lesson,' said Grout.

'For us as well if Mum finds out where we are tonight.' Johnny turned to his friend. 'What did you tell your mum, Bouncer?'

'That I was staying with you.'

'Great alibi,' said Debbie, 'as long as our mothers never compare notes.'

'Let's get going,' said Arnold, 'there's a lot to be done.'

'Can the spiders help?' asked Johnny.

'Definitely. As we used to say at sea, all hands to the pump.'

'How about 24 legs?'

'Even better,' said Arnold. 'Let's start by sorting everything out. We'll build what we can from what we've got, then scavenge around if we need anything else.'

Three hours later, with everyone helping, they had three partly-built tandems.

'We definitely need more bits,' said Arnold. 'Everybody spread out and have a good look.'

Ten minutes later, they were still short of parts to finish the rebuilt tandems.

'What about *our* bikes?' Johnny suggested. 'They're parked outside.'

'Wheel them in,' said Arnold.

'My mum's going to kill me,' said Bouncer as Arnold stripped his bike down for parts.

'You're not the only one,' said Debbie, as Arnold started on hers.

'Don't worry,' said Arnold. 'When the race is over, I'll put your bikes back together again, good as new.'

Unfortunately, by the time he'd finished raiding Johnny's bike for spares, Arnold was looking worried again. 'I need more metal for the frames.'

'What are you going to do?' asked Johnny.

Arnold looked at the three bikes he'd just stripped. 'I could always cut one of these up.'

'Sort of *re-cycle* it,' suggested Grout, 'if you'll excuse the bad joke.'

Johnny turned to Arnold. 'Borrowing bits and pieces from our bikes is one thing, but you can't chop them up.'

'I suppose not,' said Arnold.

Johnny looked up at the unlined ceiling of the old factory. 'What's up there?'

'Just those big beams holding up the roof,' said Arnold.

'I wonder if there's any interesting stuff stored up there?' said Johnny.

'But how would we check?' said Arnold. He looked around. 'There's no ladder long enough. It's too high.'

'For a spider, nothing's too high,' said Johnny.

On a whistled command, Sky scuttled across and Johnny climbed onto his back.

With another whistle, Sky started to climb the wall of the factory.

Like the ceiling, the walls were unlined and the exposed wooden framework provided the giant rubber spider with a solid foothold.

'Hold on tight. Don't fall,' called Arnold, as Sky and Johnny reached the top of the wall and proceeded to walk backwards and forwards over the exposed beams in the ceiling.

'Don't worry about them,' said Debbie. 'These two have had plenty of practice. They did a high-wire act in Aunt Elsie's circus.'

Arnold was amazed. 'Johnny rode a giant spider across a circus tightrope?'

'You sound just like Aunt Elsie,' said Debbie. 'Before she saw it for herself.'

At that moment Johnny let out a cry. 'I've found something. Look out below, here it comes.'

Next second, several lengths of metal tubing hit the ground.

'Good enough,' said Arnold examining the find. 'Not perfect, but okay.'

'Better than cutting up our bikes,' said Bouncer.

Two hours later, with everyone helping, the three tandems were complete.

'They don't look very pretty,' said Grout, wiping the sweat from his eyes.

'Like a mad smorgasbord,' said Debbie.

'What's a mad smorgasbord?' asked Bouncer.

'Something Frankenstein would ride,' said Johnny.

'They'll look better with a bit of paint and a few stickers,' said Arnold. 'When we've finished, I'll hide them out the back so Hatfield won't see them.'

He looked at his watch. 'We can just make it if we hurry.'

'Will these bikes handle the pace?' asked Johnny.

'What pace are you talking about?' said Arnold. 'You'll be pushing them up the hills. I'm sorry they haven't got any gears.'

'Why didn't you just borrow the gears from our bikes?' asked Bouncer.

'Wrong size,' said Arnold. 'I can do most things with metal, but I can't work miracles. At least not in one night.'

'You've worked miracles already, Arnold,' said Grout.

'And we won't need gears,' said Johnny. 'We've got something better.'

At 8.20am, only 40 minutes before the race started, some very tired and paint-splattered figures slipped out the side door of Whizzbang Cycles.

Chapter Six

When Herbert Hatfield arrived at 8.30am, he was surprised to find his factory manager was already there.

'You look exhausted, Arnold.'

'I've been up all night. A few last minute adjustments.'

'Good man,' said Hatfield.

He'd brought back the super-bike he'd been hiding and, after checking it had Jack's and Barry's name and number 97 on it, placed it in the rack with the others.

'After this race is over, Arnold, there could be a bonus for you.'

'A bonus?'

'Yes,' said Hatfield. 'I might *give* you one of these old tandems. A souvenir of a job well done.'

'Very generous,' said Arnold.

At that moment, Charlie and Sam arrived.

'Let's open the doors,' said Hatfield. 'The contestants will be here at any minute.'

Over the next 15 minutes, the riders in the Whizzbang Tandem Race collected their tandems.

As Barry and Jack arrived, Hatfield rushed up to greet them.

'So nice to meet you,' he cried in a loud voice, extending his hand to Barry. 'Welcome to Bayside. My name's Herbert Hatfield.'

'We know that...' began Jack until Barry dug him in the ribs.

'Pretend, dummy,' hissed Barry from behind his dark glasses. 'We've never met this man or even seen him before. Got it?'

'The only thing I've got,' said Jack, 'is sore ribs.'

Hatfield made a great show of taking the two riders over to their tandem.

'Oh,' he said in a loud voice. 'I see your number is 97. Here's your machine here. They've all been given out on a random basis. Everyone starts equal.'

Jack looked puzzled. 'But you said you'd built us a...'

This time, Barry kicked him in the shins.

'Ouch,' said Jack, doubling over.

Barry leaned down and hissed in his face, 'Just shut your mouth and save your breath for the race.'

Turning back to Hatfield, Barry played along and said loudly, 'It's a pretty battered looking tandem, Mr Hatfield. I can see what you mean about you not playing favourites.'

Arnold had done a good job. The high tech tandem looked no better than any other tandem in the race, and a lot worse than most.

Last to arrive was Murphy. 'Sorry, Mr Hatfield, my bus was late getting into town. The tourists insisted on some extra stops to take photos. When I win this race, I'm going to spend my share of the money on...'

'Later, Murphy,' said his riding partner, Mr Sneddon, from the sports shop. 'Let's win it before we spend it.'

'You've got as good a chance as any,' said Hatfield.

'Better than most,' said Murphy. 'Why, when I was in the army...'

Hatfield turned away and raised his voice for everyone to hear. 'Once you've got your machines, please assemble across the road near the starting line. And may the best team win.'

'We will,' muttered Barry to Jack as they climbed onto their machine and set off around the block to get the feel of their super-bike before the start.

'Rides well,' said Jack as they started off.

'Only tandem *mountain* bike in the race,' replied Barry, 'Our secret weapon. The rest of the field will eat our dust.'

Ten minutes before race time, Hatfield was standing with Jennings on the start line next to the Whizzbang Cycle factory when Johnny, Debbie and Bouncer approached.

They'd changed into racing costumes of hats, t-shirts and shorts.

'Excuse us, Mr Hatfield,' said Johnny, 'we've come to collect our tandems.'

'Go away,' said Hatfield. 'Can't you see the race is about to start?'

'That's why we're here,' said Johnny. 'Now, if we can just have our...'

'Are you stupid, boy, or what?'

Jennings interrupted. 'I explained this yesterday, Johnny. There are no spare bikes.'

'Do you mind if we go and look for ourselves?' asked Debbie.

Hatfield forced a smile. 'Why should I mind?'

'What if we find something?' asked Johnny.

'If you can find any tandems in that factory, you're welcome to them.'

Kate Whistler had now arrived. As mayor of Bayside, she was the official race starter.

Hatfield scowled at her. 'You wait till the next election. I'll be back.'

'You?' said Kate. 'Make a comeback? It'll take more than a bike race to make this town forget what you did.'

'When I want something, I get it,' said Hatfield.

'Not the mayoralty. Never again.'

'Don't get in my way, woman. You or those brats of yours.'

'You'll never run this town again,' said Kate.

'We'll see.'

'Over my dead body.'

'Anything's possible,' said Hatfield.

Jennings stepped between them. 'I thought we were here to start a tandem race, not to have a political debate. Let's concentrate on the event.'

A sea of riders and tandems confronted Kate as she stood on the temporary platform.

Jennings handed her a small flag. 'Raise this in the air, then a "Ready, Steady, Go" and drop the flag. That's the signal.'

'Is everyone ready?' asked Kate over the loudspeaker.

'Of course they're ready,' Hatfield hissed. 'Start the race.'

Over by the factory, Johnny saw things were about to begin without them.

'Bouncer,' he called. 'Ask them to wait.'

Bouncer cupped both hands to his mouth.

'Stoooppp!!!' he yelled.

Everyone stopped.

'What was that?' demanded Hatfield. 'Sounded like a foghorn.'

'With glasses,' said Kate. She waved as Johnny, Debbie and Bouncer elbowed their way through to the start line - pushing tandems.

Hatfield's jaw dropped so far it almost caught in his tie. 'Where...? What...? How...? Arnold! Get over here!'

'But I thought you'd be pleased, Mr Hatfield,' said Arnold, speaking up so everyone could hear. 'You did say the more the merrier.'

'Where did those other tandems come from?'

'I built them. Overnight. Out of that pile of old junk.'

'But why?'

'We only had 97 tandems, Mr Hatfield. I thought 100 sounded more impressive.'

Kate turned to Hatfield, and said loudly, 'You're lucky to have such a hard-working factory manager.'

She turned to the microphone and addressed the crowd. 'I think Arnold has worked wonders to get all these tandems ready in time, even working through the night to make sure the race is a success. That deserves a big round of applause.'

As the riders and the crowd started to clap, Jennings was already thinking of the story he could write.

'Excellent,' he told Hatfield. 'Someone showing initiative. Just what we need in Bayside. Don't you think so, Mr Hatfield?'

Yes,' said Hatfield grudgingly, 'quite right. Well done, Arnold.'

'I just wish I'd had more spare parts to work with,' said Arnold. 'Then I could have put gears on them.'

It took a second or two for Hatfield to realise what Arnold had said.

'You mean those three tandems don't have any gears at all?'

'Nothing would fit,' said Arnold.

Hatfield started to laugh. 'Then I wish our three last-minute entrants all the luck in the world. Mountain Road without gears should be quite a ride.'

He turned to Johnny. 'I hope your partners have strong legs.'

'They do, Mr Hatfield.' Johnny threw back his head, whistled, and from out of the crowd came the spiders.

As everyone watched, Rainbow hopped up on the tandem behind Johnny, Sunshine climbed onto Debbie's machine, and Sky slid up onto the seat behind Bouncer.

'Protest!' yelled Hatfield.

Jennings, the race judge, was standing right beside him. 'You don't have to yell. I can hear you. What are you protesting about?'

'Those spiders. Don't tell me the race rules permit spiders to ride.'

'You're right. The rules *don't* permit spiders to race.'

Hatfield started to look happier.

It didn't last as Mr Jennings continued, 'but neither do the race rules *prohibit* spiders from racing. It's perfectly legal. I'm the judge and I say they can ride.'

He turned to Kate. 'Hold the start will you. I want to get a picture of the spiders on their tandems for tomorrow's front page.'

As Jennings readied his camera, Kate walked over to the three latecomers.

'Johnny,' she muttered to him, under her breath, 'I know you like to wear your hair long, but when did you start streaking it.'

Johnny touched the paint-smearred locks sticking out from under his cap. 'It's trendy, Mum.'

'Have you been playing with my hair dye?'

'Relax, Mum,' said Debbie. 'There's a simple explanation. We'll tell you later.'

'All three of you look exhausted,' said Kate. 'It's the last time I let you two stay over at Bouncer's. I'm going to have a chat with his mum. By the look of it, none of you got any sleep.'

Johnny, Debbie and Bouncer exchanged worried glances.

'And another thing,' continued Kate. 'As I arrived, I saw three stripped-down cycle frames over near the factory. They looked familiar. I suppose there's a simple explanation for that as well?'

'Nothing you'd want to hear now, Mum,' said Johnny.

'You are going to have a lot to tell me after this race,' said Kate as she headed back to the start line.

While this was going on, Hatfield slipped off the platform and worked his way around to

where Jack and Barry were waiting to start.

'There's been a change of plans,' Hatfield whispered to the two cyclists.

'So we heard on Friday night. We're still waiting for details.'

Hatfield looked puzzled as he didn't know about Grout's phone call.

'Stop talking in riddles,' Hatfield said. 'Just listen. Having these spiders in the race has changed everything. I've seen them in action. They could win.'

'Without gears?'

'They're incredibly strong,' said Hatfield. 'That Whistler brat got the best of me once. I won't let it happen again. He can't be allowed to win this race. Do whatever you have to do to stop him.'

'Anything?' asked Barry.

'Anything,' said Hatfield.

'Ready!' Kate's voice, amplified by the loudspeakers, boomed over their heads.

'That sort of winning costs more,' said Barry.

'Steady!' boomed Kate.

'Twice as much,' Barry told Hatfield.

Hatfield ground his teeth together. 'Okay, okay, I don't have any choice. It's a deal.'

'Go!' boomed Kate, dropping the flag as she said it.

The Whizzbang Tandem Race was under way.

Chapter Seven

Freddy was there on the spot for his first live report.

'It's a beautiful day in Bayside and the sun is shining. There's a huge crowd here to watch the start as Mayor Whistler drops the starter's flag to get the Whizzbang Tandem Race off to a flying start. What a thriller this should be. One hundred machines battling the full length of Mountain Road. Up to Yellow River, across the top through Cloudy Peak, over the old bridge at Miner's Gorge, and down the final stretch back to town.'

Freddy took a big breath. Already, there's an early sensation with three late entries. And, as I watch, it's one of those late entries, Johnny Whistler and Rainbow who go into an early lead as the field heads out of town. Right behind them, is Debbie Whistler and Sunshine, followed closely by Bouncer Scott and Sky. Barry Black and Jack White are several lengths behind, followed by Dean and Linda Maxwell. Further back are Murphy and Sneddon, with the rest of the field spread out all the way back to the start line.'

Freddy took another big breath. 'So it's the three spider tandems in front and look at them go. If they keep that pace up, they'll be unstoppable. I'll be following the action throughout the day so stay tuned for more live action. This is Freddy Hart reporting from the Bayside FM motorcycle.'

By the time Barry and Jack rounded the first bend and started to climb up into the hills, they were still lying fourth.

'Where are those kids?' choked Jack, who was sitting behind Barry on the tandem. 'I thought they were supposed to be eating *our* dust. I can't see a thing.'

'They're up ahead. Keep pedalling. Once we get around the next bend, we'll take that side trail.'

Having been professional cyclists, Barry and Jack both knew the importance of checking out the circuit before the event. On their first day in town, they'd hired trail bikes and ridden the length of Mountain Road.

They'd also explored the side trails on the climb to Yellow River, working out a shortcut for just such an emergency.

A few metres round the bend, Barry spun the handlebars and he and Jack plunged into the bush.

'Couldn't we just pedal faster and beat them that way?' asked Jack as he and Barry lifted the lightweight tandem onto their shoulders and started climbing the steep shortcut they'd found.

'You saw the way they shot into the lead. We wouldn't stand a chance. Anyway, this is more fun. You know my motto - why win honestly if you can win by cheating?'

'No wonder you got banned,' said Jack.

'So did you. Now stop talking and save your breath.'

After 40 minutes of hard climbing, they came out of the bush at Yellow River.

'Perfect,' said Barry, checking his watch. 'Even at the speed they're going, Whistler and his friends won't be here for a while. We've got just enough time.'

Johnny looked across at Debbie.

'Who's behind us?' he asked.

'Can't see,' said Debbie. 'There's a big yellow wall blocking my view.'

'My wall's blue,' said Bouncer.

All three spiders were like big rubbery walls, overflowing the rear tandem seats.

'Hard to see anything with this dust,' said Johnny. 'This is the driest part of the course. It should get better once we cross Yellow River.'

'That part should be easy,' said Debbie. 'Freddy says the river bed is bone dry and hard as a rock.'

Jack was of the same opinion. 'How are we going to stop them riding across that dry bed? A raging river might do it, but where are we going to find one of those?'

'I've got the next best thing,' said Barry.

Above them, a small dam diverted the water that had once made Yellow River a real mountain stream. The dam was very old and parts of it were starting to crumble.

Barry led his partner up the slope to the dam. 'Grab a rock and break some of this wall away.'

Using rocks as hammers, the two cyclists attacked the fragile dam wall, smashing holes in it.

Within minutes, water was again flowing towards the old river bed.

'Come on,' cried Barry, dropping a rock and running for the tandem. 'Let's get across before it's too wet.'

From the safety of the other side, the two cyclists watched as a shallow stream of water spread out over the old river bed.

'Big deal,' said Jack. 'That's not going to stop them. The water's only ankle deep. They'll ride right through it.'

'Want to bet?' said Barry. 'Let's find somewhere to hide so we can watch the fun.'

Within minutes, Johnny, Debbie and Bouncer pedalled into view, well ahead of the rest of the field.

'Thank goodness for spider power,' yelled Johnny, pedalling furiously.

Without the spiders, the gearless tandems wouldn't have got up the hills at all.

'The river bed looks different,' yelled Debbie, as they approached. 'Why is it shining?'

'Who cares,' yelled Bouncer. 'This is fun. Race you across. Come on, Sky. Charge!'

Johnny suddenly realised what was wrong. 'There's water in the river! Bouncer, stop!'

Bouncer adjusted his glasses, but kept on pedalling.

'I can see it,' he cried. 'It's only shallow,' he yelled. 'I won't even get my shoes wet. Last one across is a...'

He didn't finish the sentence. As his tandem hit the water, the machine suddenly spun out of control, sending Bouncer and Sky flying.

'Bouncer!' yelled Johnny, jumping off his tandem and running into the shallow river to get to his friend.

He'd taken only two paces when his feet shot out from under him and he landed flat on his back.

Debbie paused at the river bank, not wanting to suffer the same fate. 'Get up, Johnny.'

'I'm trying,' he said, struggling to climb to his feet. 'The river bed's slippery. It's like an ice rink.'

He floundered across to where Bouncer sat in the middle of the stream, holding his leg.

'I think I've broken my ankle, Johnny, and I've lost my glasses as well.'

'Don't move, Bouncer.' Johnny fished around in the water and found his friend's glasses. Sky sat quietly in the stream, watching them.

By now the other riders had begun to arrive at the river bank. They all stopped when they saw what had happened to Bouncer.

'He needs help,' yelled Johnny, from the middle of the stream. 'It's his ankle. It could be broken.'

He tried to stand up, but quickly sat down again as his feet shot out from under him.

'Don't move him. I'm a doctor.' One of the riders pushed forward and stepped into the stream. 'Wait there.'

'We haven't got any choice,' said Johnny. 'Careful, the clay bottom is slippery. Watch your step or you'll...'

The warning was too late. Before he'd taken more than a few steps, the newcomer was flat on his back.

Slipping and sliding, he slithered over to where Johnny and Bouncer sat.

Kneeling in the shallow water, he started to examine Bouncer.

'By the way,' he said, 'I'm Dean Maxwell. Freddy Hart's friend.'

'I'm Bou... Ow!' Bouncer's eyes watered as Dean's fingers pressed into the skin around his foot.

'Almost done. Sorry, I missed the name. Was it Bow Wow?'

'No, it's Bouncer. This is my friend, Johnny.'

'We've heard all about you,' said Johnny. 'You and your wife are both doctors with the children's hospital.'

'Linda's back there on the river bank,' said Dean, 'if you can call this a river.'

He finished his examination. 'Good news and bad news, Bouncer.'

'I'll take the good news first.'

'I don't think it's broken,' said Dean.

'What's the bad news?'

'You're out of the race.' Dean turned to Johnny. 'How do we get your friend out of this outsized puddle?'

'We might need a tow.'

Johnny whistled Bouncer's blue partner alongside and, as the three of them each grabbed a giant leg, Sky dragged them back to the river bank.

'I could do with a spare leg myself,' said Bouncer as Dean and Linda strapped up his ankle.

'There's nothing wrong with this one,' said Dean.

Linda agreed. 'A bit of rest and it'll be as good as new.'

Bouncer looked at her. His face was grim. 'When my ankle heals, will I be able to dance?'

'Of course,' said Linda.

'Good,' said Bouncer, with a grin. 'I couldn't before.'

Debbie had joined them and was looking over Linda's shoulder. 'Is that bandage tight enough?'

'Excuse my big sister,' said Johnny. 'She's an expert on everything.'

'Maybe Debbie could tell us how to cross the river,' said Dean.

Murphy, as always, had a plan. He stepped into the river.

'See, the water is softening the river bottom. Not so slippery anymore. The army always taught me...'

That was as far as he got, before his feet shot out from under him and he went face first into the water.

Mr Sneddon thought it was a huge joke. 'What else did the army teach you?'

Not to be beaten, Murphy tried again. And, although he fell twice, he was soon on the other bank.

He looked back across the water and waved.

'Come on, Sneddon. Don't just stand there. Get our bike across. As we said in the army. On the double!'

Encouraged by Murphy's success, most of the other teams started to carefully pick their way across.

A few, however, decided not to bother, adding to the 10 tandems that had already broken down.

'I'm not going to risk my neck for any amount of money,' grumbled one rider, turning his machine and heading back to town.

'Nor me,' said another.

'This was supposed to be a tandem race,' said a third rider, 'not an obstacle course.'

Johnny looked at Dean and Linda. 'You'd better go otherwise you'll be left behind.'

As the doctors left, Freddy roared up on his motorcycle. 'What's the hold up?'

Johnny explained.

'That's odd,' said Freddy. 'I was up here the other day and it was as dry as a bone. There hasn't been any rain. Where's all the water come from?'

Johnny pointed. 'The old dam's sprung a leak.'

'Several leaks, by the look of it.'

Debbie was watching the other riders disappear into the distance. 'If we're going to stay in this race, *we'd* better get across as well.'

'We can't leave Bouncer,' said Johnny.

'He could ride on the back of my motorcycle,' said Freddy. 'You're always joking this thing could carry more passengers than Murphy's bus.'

'Can we take Sky as well?' asked Bouncer.

'We can try, Bouncer, but it'll be a squeeze.'

They watched as Johnny and Rainbow and Debbie and Sunshine waded across the river with their tandems and set out after the rest of the field.

'Now,' said Freddy. 'Hold on. It's our turn to cross the river.'

Bouncer shut his eyes as Freddy gunned the motor and the big machine, with Sky hanging off the back, rumbled across the river sending a spray of yellow water in all directions.

Freddy stopped on the other bank. 'Time for my next radio report.'

'Can I help?' asked Bouncer.

'Why not?' said Freddy. 'You're an eye witness to what's been happening. This could be the start of a new career for you. From show-biz compere to radio sports-jock.'

From the back of Freddy's motorcycle, Bouncer made his radio debut.

'This is Freddy Hart reporting on the Whizzbang Tandem Race. And what a race it's turning out to be. With me is Bouncer Scott. Tell us, Bouncer, in your own words, what happened here at Yellow River?'

'Thank you, Freddy,' said Bouncer, as he explained about the dam leaking, his accident

and the rescue.

'Thanks, Bouncer. And that's left Johnny and Debbie Whistler chasing the rest of the field on the way to Cloudy Peak. Just ahead of them is the husband and wife doctor team of Dean and Linda Maxwell...'

Bouncer interrupted. 'They were the ones who strapped up my ankle when I fell off in the river. They're really nice. Linda said that I...'

'Thank you, Bouncer,' said Freddy, cutting in, 'but let's stick to the race. How many are left?'

Bouncer's eyes glazed over at the maths question.

'Ah... 10 teams dropped out on the hill climb up from the town, and about 20 more pulled out at the river. So although one hundred tandems started the race, the field is now down to... ah... a 100, minus 10, minus 20... ah?'

'By my reckoning, that leaves 70 tandems,' said Freddy.

'Same answer I get,' said Bouncer.

'And that's the end of our report,' said Freddy. 'We'll have another update when the field reaches Cloudy Peak. This is Freddy Hart, with Bouncer Scott, reporting to you from the back of the Bayside FM motorcycle.'

Chapter Eight

When Barry and Jack saw Murphy cross the river, they'd jumped on their tandem and set off at full speed.

'Great idea,' said Jack. 'I don't think.'

'I misjudged it,' said Barry. 'I thought that river bottom would stay slippery for much longer.'

'At least we got one of them.'

'Yep. One kid down, two to go.'

'I wish there were more shortcuts,' said Jack, pedalling furiously.

'Well, there aren't,' said his partner, 'so the next time we try and stop those kids we'd better get it right. If we don't, they'll pass us and we'll lose the race.'

'And our bonus,' said Jack.

'Have you seen our two professional cheaters lately?' Johnny asked Debbie as they chased the rest of the bunch towards Cloudy Peak.

'No, come to think of it. I don't even remember seeing them at the river.'

'That's odd. They were right behind us at the start.'

'Maybe they've dropped out,' she said. 'Perhaps their fancy machine has broken down.'

'Don't count on it, Debbie. If they're not behind us, they might be in front.'

'Everyone else is,' said Debbie, easing off on the pedals.

'And they'll stay there if you don't learn to pedal and think at the same time,' said Johnny. 'Don't make Sunshine do all the work.'

She started pedalling again. 'You've been up here before. What happens at Cloudy Peak?'

'We go through a tunnel,' said Johnny.

'A tunnel!' she cried. 'I hate tunnels.'

'It's not a very long tunnel, but it's quicker than trying to climb over the very top of the mountain.'

'I'd rather climb,' said Debbie.

'You haven't seen the top of the mountain.'

'Impressive,' said Barry, as he and Jack neared the tunnel.

They were both puffing heavily. The race so far had been exhausting, even for former professional cyclists with a hi-tech super-bike.

Barry hit the brakes and brought them to a halt at the tunnel entrance.

'Do we really have to ride through this again?' asked Jack.

'It's the only route.' They'd ridden through the tunnel on Friday when they explored the course. 'What are you scared of?'

'That tunnel's full of spiders.'

Barry started to laugh. 'They won't hurt you, you bearded idiot. The only spiders we have to worry about are behind us, riding tandems.'

'What's the plan?'

'We ride through to the other side and then block the exit.'

'Sounds like hard work,' said Jack.

'Not if you use your brains.'

'So far the only thing I've had to use are muscles. This is a tough race.'

'But the end is in sight,' said Barry, turning the front wheel of the tandem towards the tunnel.

'Now, Jack, watch out for all the creepy-crawly spiders hanging off the roof. Just waiting to fall on your head and get caught in your beard, and...'

'Shut up,' said Jack, 'and let's get this over with.'

A few minutes later, Barry and Jack were perched high up on the slope above the tunnel exit.

'I didn't enter this race to move rocks,' Jack grumbled.

'Stop complaining. We only have to work a couple of these big boulders loose, and that'll start an avalanche. Happens all the time in the mountains. Now heave!'

As the cyclists watched, the big rock they'd prised loose started tumbling down the hill, loosening another, which fell against a third.

Within seconds, dozens of boulders were crashing down towards the tunnel exit. By the time the dust cleared, the tunnel exit was sealed up tight.'

'What was that noise?' Debbie asked Johnny as they cycled side by side.

'Sounded like an avalanche.'

'Too close for comfort.'

As they approached the tunnel, they could see the rest of the field had stopped.

They braked to a halt beside Dean and Linda.

'It's very strange,' Murphy was saying.

'What's strange?' asked Johnny, stepping forward and peering into the darkness.

Then he realised. 'There should be a light at the end.'

'It must be blocked,' said Dean. 'Probably that avalanche we heard. I'll check it out.'

'I'll go with you,' said Linda.

'Me, too,' said Johnny.

'Count me in,' said Murphy.

'Count me out,' said Debbie. 'I'll stay here and wait for you.'

At that moment, the Bayside FM motorcycle screeched to a halt beside them.

Dean borrowed the flashlight from its emergency kit and led the others into the darkness.

'Look at all these spiders hanging off the roof,' said Johnny.

'Hey,' he called back to Rainbow, Sunshine and Sky who were following him, 'come and say hello to your little cousins.'

'What a mess,' said Murphy as the beam from the flashlight lit up the pile of rocks blocking the tunnel exit.

Dean turned off the flashlight.

'Why did you do that?' demanded Murphy. 'It's pitch black. I can't see a thing.'

'That's the point,' said Dean, switching the flashlight back on. 'There's no light at all peeking through from the other side. That means the rock wall is solid.'

'We could try to move it,' said Linda.

'I wouldn't fancy our chances,' said Dean. 'It would take forever.'

'Can we go around the mountain?' she asked, 'or over it?'

'That would take forever as well,' said Johnny. 'That's why the miners built this tunnel as a shortcut.'

'What bad luck,' said Murphy. 'I suppose the race will have to be called off.'

'Unless someone got through before the avalanche,' said Johnny. 'No one's seen Barry Black or Jack White for most of the race. I wouldn't be surprised if they were on the other side of that exit.'

'Perfectly placed,' said Dean, 'to ride into Bayside and pick up the prize.'

'Well, I'm not giving up,' said Johnny.

'Nor am I,' said Murphy.

'Nor are we,' said Dean.

'We could do with a bulldozer,' said Linda.

'Several bulldozers,' said Murphy. 'Did I ever tell you about the time I was in the army and we dug this enormous tunnel?'

'Another time, Mr Murphy,' said Johnny. 'Go back and get more volunteers to help us move these rocks.'

'More?' said Murphy. 'How many have we got already?'

Johnny pointed to the spiders. 'I'm volunteering these three for a start.'

Murphy gave an approving nod. 'Just like in the army.'

When Jack first heard the noise coming from the tunnel, he couldn't work out what it was.

Having sealed up the only exit, both riders felt they had the race won. Tired from the cycling and the rock moving, they'd stretched out in the sun for a rest before pedalling into

Bayside to collect their reward.

'Can you hear something?' Jack sat up and scratched his beard.

'Only you talking,' said Barry. 'I'm going to take a nap. Wake me in 10 minutes.'

Jack was sure the noise was coming from the tunnel. He went closer and placed his ear against the rocks.

He could definitely hear something that sounded like squeaks and whistles and raised voices.

'Get off my toe, little brother,' yelled Debbie. 'This is a dumb idea. Why did I let you talk me into this?'

'Stop squealing,' replied Johnny. 'You sound like a spider. If we want to win, we have to do some of the work.'

'But I hate tunnels.'

'None of us are enjoying this,' said Linda, struggling with a boulder.

'We need more light,' said Debbie. 'I can't see.'

The flashlight batteries were starting to fade and Dean was using it in short bursts.

'So much for volunteers,' said Murphy.

At least half the remaining field had quit on the spot and turned back when they heard about the blockage in the tunnel.

'If I win,' said Murphy, 'I've got a good mind not to give any of the money to my so-called partner.'

Mr Sneddon, like most of those who'd remained, had refused to come into the tunnel and help.

'Thank goodness for the spiders,' said Johnny.

On the other side of the rock wall, Jack suddenly felt the rocks start to vibrate.

He ran over to where Barry was trying to sleep and shook him.

'They're trying to dig their way out of the tunnel.'

Barry stirred, but stayed where he was. 'Did you wake me up to tell me that? Of course they'll try. But they'll soon give up. What are they going to dig with?'

As Jack watched, the answer came as he saw one of the biggest rocks move as something poked through a gap.

He grabbed Barry and shook him violently. 'Get up, get up. They're coming. They're coming.'

Barry lifted his head and stared through his tinted glasses at the rock wall where two enormous spider legs were now wrapped around the big rock, forcing it over to one side.

Barry was now wide awake. He and Jack grabbed their tandem and jumped on board.

'We've got to beat them to the swing bridge,' yelled Barry. 'It's our only hope.'

Chapter Nine

When they finally burst out of the tunnel, Johnny and Rainbow and Debbie and Sunshine were first away and had soon built up a big lead on the rest of the field.

'We can't stop for anything now, Debs,' Johnny shouted.

Debbie looked down at her pedals. 'One of these seems a bit wobbly.'

'No time for that,' cried Johnny. 'On to Miner's Gorge.'

Crossing the swing bridge over Miner's Gorge was a frightening experience at the best of times. The gorge dropped straight down, broken only by a series of ledges which jutted out.

Barry and Jack got there first, but only just. As they arrived, they sprang off their seats and stepped onto the bridge, pushing the tandem.

'Why don't we just keep going and sprint for town?' asked Jack.

'They'd overtake us before we got there. We have to slow them down.'

'Not lugging more boulders,' Jack protested.

'No,' said Barry, 'a bit of carpentry.'

The bridge was suspended across the gully with wooden slats on top of thick lengths of steel cable. It was a narrow bridge, built for pedestrians.

Barry and Jack were just over halfway across when they spotted their pursuers.

'It's them alright. I just saw them,' cried Jack, as Johnny and Debbie disappeared around a bend in the distance.

Leaning the tandem against the side railing, Barry started to tear at the wooden flooring of the bridge.

'Don't just stand there watching,' he told Jack. 'Help me pull up these planks. It'll stop them for sure.'

In a frenzy, the two cyclists threw themselves into their work and quickly ripped up a bunch of planks, sending them spinning into the gorge below.

'That should be enough,' cried Jack, as he spotted Johnny leading Debbie down the final hill to the bridge.

'A couple more,' yelled Barry. 'Let's make sure.'

Jack started to protest but, before he could say a word, Barry bent down again and started tugging at another plank.

Unfortunately some of the old planks were rotten, like the one Barry was tugging, which suddenly snapped.

Jack had just enough time to throw himself backwards to safety, but his partner wasn't so lucky.

As Barry started to fall, he grabbed, desperately, for something to hold onto.

His hand found the frame of their tandem and, for a few seconds, it looked as though it

would be enough to stop him. It wasn't.

As Jack stared in horror, Barry and the tandem disappeared through the hole in the bridge.

As Johnny rode up, he spotted the waving figure.

'That's Jack,' he called to Debbie who was close behind. 'It looks like trouble.'

'Where's his partner in crime?' she called back.

They soon found out.

Jumping off his tandem, Johnny started out along the narrow bridge. He saw Jack's frantic signal to stop at the same moment he saw the gaping hole in front of him.

'What happened?' Johnny called across the gap.

Jack pointed down through the hole which separated them. His breath was coming in short bursts.

'Barry,' he cried. 'And the bike. Down there.'

Dropping to his knees, Johnny crept nearer the hole and reaching the edge, he peered down into the gorge.

Below the bridge, on one of the narrow ledges that jugged out, was Barry, lying very still.

'Can you hear me down there?' Johnny called to the cyclist. Barry didn't move.

Debbie crept up and looked down. 'What do we do?'

'If he's injured, we'll have to get expert help. Where are Dean and Linda?'

Debbie looked back along the road. 'A long way back, I think. They'll take ages to get here.'

As they watched, Barry stirred.

'Stay still,' yelled Johnny. 'If you fall off that ledge, you're history. We're waiting for help. Are you okay?'

Barry sat up and looked around him. As he glimpsed the gorge floor below, his voice dropped to a loud whisper. 'I'm alright. But get me out of here.'

Sitting up was the wrong thing to do. Without warning, the ledge began to pull away from the gorge wall.

As Barry screamed, Johnny whistled at Rainbow. 'Down there! Fetch!'

In seconds, the brightly coloured spider had leapt the railings, scrambled along the frame of the bridge and was heading straight down the gorge wall.

'This is like being back on the cliffs at Needle Point,' said Debbie.

'Except there's further to fall.'

As they watched, and Rainbow neared his target, the split between the ledge and the gorge wall grew wider as Barry turned deathly white.

'Hurry,' cried Barry in an even smaller voice, not wanting to do anything that would send him plunging to the gorge floor below. 'Please.'

Rainbow was now directly above Barry as Johnny shouted and whistled new instructions. 'Stretch down with one leg, Rainbow. Barry, reach up and grab it. That's it. Almost there.' Even as Barry wrapped his two hands around the multi-coloured leg, the ledge gave way. 'Help!' he screamed.

As Johnny and Debbie watched, the ledge crashed down into the gorge below, but Barry held tight to the spider's leg.

'Hang on, Barry,' called Johnny. 'Now Rainbow, reverse up the cliff. Gently, gently. Keep going.'

Step by step, the spider hauled Barry up the cliff and back onto the bridge where Jack was waiting.

'You could have been killed,' said Jack. 'If it wasn't for Johnny, you might have...'

'Won the race already,' Barry whispered, still lying where Rainbow had dropped him. 'And we still can. Just do as I tell you.'

As Jack watched, Barry started to moan and groan.

'What's wrong with him?' Johnny called across the gap.

'What's wrong with you?' Jack hissed to his partner.

'My heart. Tell the kid I have heart problems. I need my pills.'

'He needs his pills,' yelled Jack.

'Where are they?' called Johnny.

'With the tandem,' said Jack, repeating what Barry had just told him. 'In one of the saddlebags.'

The tandem had fallen further than its rider and was now lying in a heap at the very bottom of the gorge.

'I wonder why he's racing if he has a heart problem?' said Debbie, as they watched Sunshine climb down the cliff and retrieve the tandem.

'So much for the super-bike,' said Johnny. 'It's broken in half.'

A few minutes later, Sunshine dropped the mangled remains of the tandem on the bridge beside the two cyclists.

'What a mess,' said Jack. 'It's un-rideable.'

'Shut up,' whispered Barry, still lying flat on his back. 'Pretend to give me a pill.'

As Johnny and Debbie watched from their side of the bridge, Jack made a great show of finding something in one of the tandem's saddlebags and giving it to his partner.

'I hope it helps,' said Debbie.

The answer came as Barry let out a loud groan and started rolling around on the ground.

'What's wrong?' said Jack, anxiously kneeling beside his partner.

'Nothing, fungus face,' hissed Barry. 'I'm pretending. Tell those kids I need a doctor.'

'This is serious,' Johnny told Debbie. He called across to the cyclists. 'There are two doctors in the race. Stay there, we're going back to get them.'

With that Johnny and Debbie jumped on their tandems and, with their spider partners on board, pedalled back in the direction of Cloudy Peak.

As they disappeared into the distance, Barry leapt to his feet. 'Grab half of that tandem, Jack, and follow me. There's a race to be won and a bonus to be collected.'

Chapter Ten

'There they are,' yelled Johnny to Debbie as Dean and Linda came into view pedalling towards them.

'I see them,' yelled Debbie, but that was all she had time to say as one of her pedals broke and went spinning off. As it did, she lurched forward and threw the tandem off balance.

With a yell, Debbie, Sunshine and the tandem ran off the road, over a bank and down into the bush.

Johnny was off his tandem in a flash and leapt into the bush where his sister lay in a pile of dead leaves which had cushioned her fall.

She lifted her head as he approached. 'Don't say a word, little brother or it'll be your last.'

Sunshine was unharmed, but Johnny looked at the tandem they'd been riding. The old machine had come out worst in its collision with a tree.

'Well done, Debs, this looks exactly like the pile of junk Arnold started with. More recycling.'

As they all gathered back on the road, Johnny explained to Dean and Linda everything that had happened, including Barry's heart problem.

'It doesn't sound good,' said Linda, 'We have to hurry.'

'We have a minor problem,' said Debbie. 'My machine's a write-off. That means we're a tandem short.'

'We'll double up,' said Johnny. 'Or in this case, triple up.'

While Johnny and Rainbow took the two seats on one tandem, Debbie rode on top of the front handlebars.

Dean and Sunshine did the same on the second tandem, with Linda as the handlebar passenger.

'Pity Mr Jennings isn't here with his camera,' said Johnny. 'What a picture this would make.'

The moment Miner's Gorge came into view, it was obvious something was wrong.

'Where did they go?' asked Johnny, braking to a halt. 'Barry was lying on the other side of the bridge when we left and Jack was with him.'

'Let's see if they answer us,' said Dean.

They all called across the gully. Nothing.

'You've been tricked, little brother,' said Debbie.

'We've *all* been tricked,' said Johnny. 'I'll bet they're laughing all the way to the finish line.'

'If they can laugh while they're running,' said Debbie.

'Running?' asked Linda.

'Carrying their bike,' Debbie explained. 'It's in bits.'

'But that may still give us a chance,' said Johnny. 'They probably think they've got it won.'

Let's surprise them.'

'Let's get across the hole in the bridge first,' said Debbie.

As she spoke, Freddy and Bouncer arrived on the motorcycle, with Sky still riding pillion. Johnny brought them up to date.

'How will you get across?' asked Freddy.

'Mr Murphy would love this one,' said Johnny.

On a whistled command, Sunshine crept forward into the gap, holding onto the steel ropes on both sides of the bridge.

'See, a big new rubbery plank to walk on.'

Now Sky crawled over the top of his giant friend and into the remaining gap, adding a second rubbery plank to the decking.

'Those spiders are full of tricks,' said Dean.

'No home should be without one,' said Johnny.

Freddy gunned his motorcycle.

'You can come with us, Debbie,' he said and she jumped on behind Bouncer.

'Ready?' Freddy asked.

'Ready, Freddy,' said Bouncer as the Bayside FM motorcycle drove straight across the backs of the two spiders.

'What about the spiders, Johnny?' said Debbie as the others came over the rubbery bridge.

'I'll leave Sunshine and Sky here. That way the rest of the riders can get across the bridge.'

'I can hear them coming now,' said Dean as he and Linda climbed on board their own tandem.

Johnny turned to his sister and waved. 'See you at the prize giving party.'

'Should I bake some muffins?' yelled Debbie from the pillion seat as Freddy's motorcycle took off for town.

'No thanks, Debs,' Johnny shouted back. 'They've not giving any booby prizes.'

The last stage of the Whizzbang Tandem Race, from Miner's Gorge to Bayside, was the shortest leg of the race.

'Don't stop,' said Barry, jogging at a steady pace.

'This wasn't supposed to be a running race,' protested Jack.

'It is now,' cried Barry, wearing half a tandem around his neck.

Jack wore the other half. 'How much further?'

'A few more bends, then it's all downhill to the finish.'

As they ran, Jack heard the sound of a motorcycle. 'Hey, Barry, there's someone coming

up fast behind us.'

Barry heard it, too. 'Impossible. No one can cross the bridge.'

As he spoke, the sound grew louder.

'It sounds like a motorcycle,' cried Jack.

'Who on earth...?' said Barry, but then got a reply as Freddy, Bouncer and Debbie roared past, covering them in dust.

The two cyclists stopped.

'How did they get across the bridge?' asked Jack.

'The biggest question is who else made it?'

They both came to the same conclusion at the same moment.

'Johnny Whistler!'

'Quick,' cried Barry. 'Run. Run as fast as you can.'

Behind them, Johnny's and Rainbow's legs were working like pistons and the old tandem shuddered at the high speed.

Although Dean and Linda had left the bridge at the same time, they were now several lengths behind.

Suddenly, Johnny heard a crack and his tandem sagged in the middle. He glanced down.

The old frame was breaking up. The pounding of the race had taken its toll.

He heard a second crack and felt the frame sag even more.

If it sagged any further, it would fall to bits.

'Rainbow!' Johnny yelled.

At Johnny's command, several of Rainbow's legs reached out and grasped both ends of the frame while the rest of his spider legs kept pedalling.

'Hold tight. Not much further to go. We've got to catch them soon.'

As Barry and Jack hit the final slope down towards the town, they were both running faster than they'd ever run in their lives.

'Not far, Jack. Hang on.'

'I don't think I can make it,' gasped Jack, stumbling as he said it.

'Yes, you can,' yelled Barry, grabbing his partner's arm and steadying him. 'Think of the bonus.'

As they rounded the corner at the bottom of the slope, they could see the finish line in the distance and hear the crowd cheering.

'We've made it,' yelled Barry. 'Less than 800 metres to go.'

At the finish line, the temporary platform and loudspeaker system had been moved into position.

Freddy had parked his motorcycle alongside and run two microphone leads up on stage for

him and Bouncer who was now perched on a stool.

'It looks like it's all over,' said Freddy, starting the broadcast. 'You can hear the crowd cheering as the front runners, Barry Black and Jack White come into view.'

'Yes,' said Bouncer, 'front runners is a good description. Look at their legs move. Think how fast they'd be going if they still had a bike...'

'Here come the winners,' yelled Hatfield from the platform as he spotted Barry and Jack. Kate Whistler, who was also on the platform turned and whispered to Debbie, 'where's Johnny?'

Debbie shrugged her shoulders. 'He was all set to go when we left the bridge. He's out there somewhere, but I think he's going to be too late.'

As Johnny and Rainbow neared the bottom of the final slope and rounded the bend, Johnny saw Barry and Jack in front of him.

'Let's go, Rainbow!' he yelled. 'One final effort.'

As he spoke, the tandem gave another lurch and sagged again.

'Rainbow,' he yelled, '*all* your legs.'

As instructed, the giant spider took his legs off the pedals and threw all eight of them into holding the tandem together.

Johnny now had to provide all the pedal power. With just his own legs.

'It's Johnny!' Bouncer told the radio audience, almost falling off his stool with excitement. 'Yes, folks, Johnny Whistler and Rainbow are now into the final stretch.'

The crowd was almost hysterical.

'It's anybody's race,' said Freddy, 'with only 400 metres to go. But Barry and Jack are desperately holding onto their lead.'

'That's right,' said Bouncer. 'The same way Rainbow is desperately holding onto that tandem.'

'Come on, Johnny,' Kate screamed.

'What a sensational finish,' cried Freddy. 'It's Barry Black and Jack White just ahead of Johnny Whistler and Rainbow. This race has been a battle from start to finish and now it'll all be decided in the last few hundred metres...'

'Less than 200 hundred to go,' said Bouncer, 'and it's Black and White in the lead as they race down the home stretch.'

'And here come Dean and Linda Maxwell,' said Freddy, happy to see his friends still in the race. 'A great effort, but the best they can do is third.'

'It's still Black and White,' said Bouncer, 'running shoulder-to-shoulder for all they're worth, just in front by a pair of sunglasses and a beard. Rainbow is desperately trying to keep the Whistler tandem together, leaving all the pedalling to Johnny. But Johnny's pulling out all the

stops. Fifty metres to go and he's catching them. Go, Johnny, go! They're neck and neck as they sprint for the line...'

On the tandem, Johnny took a deep breath. 'For the children's hospital,' he yelled and called on his last reserves of energy.

Bouncer was now yelling at the top of his voice.

'Johnny's making a final lunge for the line. Will he do it or won't he? Yes, no, yes, no, yes!'

With a blur of pedals, Johnny and Rainbow crossed the line, a tyre's width ahead of Barry and Jack.

They'd won!

Chapter Eleven

That night Kate Whistler looked out over the heads of the crowd in the Entertainment Centre and saw that it was full.

'As Mayor of Bayside, I'd like to welcome you all here for this after-race function. First, the presentation of the winners' cheque. I now invite up on stage, Herbert Hatfield, owner of Whizzbang Cycles.'

As Hatfield climbed up the stairs to the platform, Johnny turned to Debbie.

'What's Hatfield got to look happy about? He's going to lose his money.'

'Serves him right,' said Bouncer, now on crutches. 'Why don't we expose him anyway?'

'The three of us know what happened,' said Johnny, 'but could we prove it?'

'Might be difficult,' said Debbie. 'This should be punishment enough for an old scrooge like Hatfield. And on top of the prize, he still has to pay off his two cycling gorillas.'

'Citizens of Bayside,' began the ex-mayor of the town, 'I'm sure you'll agree, the Whizzbang Tandem Race has been one of the most exciting events this town has ever seen.'

'Biggest thing since those spiders arrived,' came Mr Sneddon's voice from the rear of the hall.

'Something else to thank you for, Hatfield,' yelled Murphy.

The heckling was good natured and Hatfield looked pleased.

He continued, 'Firstly, I'd like to thank all the contestants who entered, and who raced in the spirit of the event. It was a wonderful display of fair play and good sportsmanship.'

'Outstanding,' Johnny whispered to Bouncer, mimicking Hatfield's syrupy tone of voice.

'He must have been watching some other race,' suggested Bouncer.

'He's only stalling,' said Debbie. 'He doesn't want to hand over the winners' cheque.'

Even as she said it, Hatfield, who was still smiling, pulled an envelope from his jacket pocket.

'It's time now to bring the winners on stage, to receive this wonderfully generous prize.'

As the crowd clapped, Johnny jumped up from his seat in the audience and, whistling loudly, headed for the stage.

On cue, Rainbow, who'd been waiting at the back of the hall, scuttled down the aisle and up the stairs to join him.

Hatfield stepped back from the microphone.

In the audience, Debbie whispered to Bouncer. 'Hatfield can't stand being in the same room as Johnny or the spiders. Why is he looking so pleased with himself? I hate it when he smiles like that.'

Johnny stepped up to the microphone and began his carefully rehearsed acceptance speech.

'On behalf on my trusty partner, Rainbow, I'd like to thank you all for your support, but I'm not keeping the prize money. I'm giving the cheque to Dean and Linda Maxwell for the children's hospital.'

The applause was so loud it took almost a minute before Hatfield, who'd pushed Johnny away from the microphone, could make himself heard.

'I'm afraid there's been some mistake!' He had to say it three times before it was quiet enough for him to continue. A hush settled over the hall.

'What mistake?' demanded Kate.

'Johnny, and this rubber monstrosity, are not the winners,' replied Hatfield.

'But they were first across the line.'

'Correct, Mayor Whistler. They *were* the first to finish.'

'Then we won,' said Johnny.

'Wrong,' said Hatfield.

Johnny stood his ground. 'We obeyed the rules.'

'Ah, yes, the rules,' said Hatfield, raising his voice and facing the audience so every word could be heard. 'As I said earlier, most of the contestants raced in the spirit of the race. Most of them, that is, except Johnny Whistler and Rainbow. I'm calling on the race judge to disqualify them.'

A shockwave went through the crowd.

'Explain yourself, Hatfield,' demanded Kate. 'Are you saying my Johnny broke the rules? Which one?'

Hatfield pulled out a copy of the entry form. 'The one that says – "No contestants shall use drugs or chemicals to boost their performance".'

Kate had turned white. 'Are you accusing my son of taking drugs?'

'No, I'm accusing his partner.'

'Rainbow?' said Johnny. 'You're accusing Rainbow of taking drugs?'

'Not drugs in the normal sense,' said Hatfield, 'but everyone can see that Rainbow is no ordinary spider. And the whole town knows he got to be like that by swallowing chemicals.'

'*Your* chemicals!' yelled Debbie from the audience.

'She's right, Hatfield,' called Mr Sneddon. 'Chemicals dumped from *your* ship!'

'Let's not live in the past,' replied Hatfield, anxious not to let things get out of hand. 'Regardless of where they came from, the chemicals Rainbow swallowed boosted his performance. Which means he broke the rules.'

'Then the rules are at fault,' yelled Murphy. Many in the hall agreed.

As the noise grew and people in the audience started to take sides in the argument, Jennings, who was sitting in the front row, hurried up on stage.

'There's nothing wrong with the rules,' he told the audience. 'However, this is most unusual. I'm not a lawyer, but...'

Debbie jumped up from her seat. 'I could give a legal opinion.'

Kate glared at her daughter. 'Sit down, Debs. We've got enough trouble as it is.'

'We certainly have,' said Jennings. 'And, as the official race judge, I have to be fair. I've considered Mr Hatfield's protest and he does have a point. If Rainbow hadn't swallowed those chemicals, he'd still be too tiny to ride a tandem. It's a difficult decision, but the rules are the rules and I have to stand by them. I can't say I'm happy about it, but...'

The hall was deadly quiet.

'I hereby disqualify Johnny and Rainbow,' said Jennings. 'The race is awarded to the second place getters, Barry Black and Jack White.'

The crowd erupted. People were standing up and shouting and it took Kate several minutes to restore order.

As the noise died down, Johnny raced back down to the audience and went into a huddle with Debbie and Bouncer.

'That was a dirty trick,' said Bouncer.

Johnny was fuming. 'He's not going to get away with this.'

'The worst trick in a whole string of dirty tricks,' said Debbie. 'We'll just have to try and expose him.'

Barry and Jack now stood on stage with Herbert Hatfield who held the envelope in his hand. 'It gives me very great pleasure to present this winners' cheque to two outstanding competitors...'

'Protest!' yelled Johnny, leaping into the air.

'And me!' yelled Debbie.

'Sit down, both of you,' ordered Kate. 'You lost the race, Johnny. The judge's decision is final.'

'Not until he hears our protest,' said Johnny beating Debbie up the steps onto the stage.

'You heard Jennings, boy,' said Hatfield. 'You're out and Barry and Jack are in.'

'What happened at Yellow River?' demanded Johnny. 'I'd like to hear these two "outstanding competitors" explain how that river flooded?'

'Your guess is as good as mine,' answered Barry from behind his dark glasses. 'That old dam started to give way as we arrived. We just got across in time.'

'How did you get in front of us? You were behind us at the start,' said Debbie.

'We overtook you in all that dust,' said Barry.

'We lost that one, Debs,' Johnny whispered. 'Let me try again.'

He turned back to the two cyclists. 'How come you didn't get caught by that avalanche?'

'We only missed it by a few seconds,' said Barry. 'We tried to unblock the tunnel for you from our side, but the rocks were too big to move.'

He turned to his partner. 'That's right, isn't it, Jack?'

'Ah... yes. We decided to ride on into town and get help.'

'And win the race,' Debbie whispered to Johnny. 'These two are as slippery as that river bottom.'

Johnny continued. 'I don't suppose you two had anything to do with the damage to the bridge?'

Barry almost smiled. 'What are you suggesting? That we tore a hole in it so I could fall through.'

'What about your heart problem?' demanded Debbie.

Now Barry was grinning. 'Heart problem? What heart problem? The only problem I have is that I'm too *kind* hearted. People say I've got a heart of gold.'

'So has a hardboiled egg,' said Johnny.

Jennings shook his head. 'I haven't heard anything yet to make me change my mind.'

'And you won't from these two kids,' said Hatfield. 'Barry and Jack won fair and square. You Whistler kids get off this stage and let me get on with the prize giving.'

'I never want to see another tandem again,' said Debbie as she and Johnny headed back to their seats.

Bouncer nodded as they arrived. 'Me neither. I'm sticking to my trusty old one seater.'

Johnny's eyes suddenly lit up. 'Bullseye!'

'Bullseye?' said his friend. 'I'm Bouncer.'

'I mean you *hit* the bullseye, Bouncer. Normal bikes have only one seat. Tandems have two.'

'Even I know that,' said Bouncer.

'But does Hatfield,' said Johnny. On stage, Barry's hand was out to receive the cheque. 'Stop them, Bouncer.'

'Proooteest!!!' Bouncer yelled so loud the Entertainment Centre almost shook.

'Johnny, I've had just about enough...' began Kate as her son again bounded up the stairs.

'I can prove Barry and Jack didn't win, Mum.'

'If this is a joke, I'm going to ground you for a month.'

'Let me handle it,' said Jennings. 'What is it this time, Johnny?'

'A final question for our two cyclists. About their super-bike.'

'What super-bike?' replied Barry, shrugging his shoulders. He turned to Jack. 'Did we ride any super-bike?'

'Ah... no,' said Jack. 'Not that I can remember.'

'Perhaps Mr Jennings should examine it,' said Johnny.

'That won't do any good, boy,' said Hatfield. 'Barry and Jack's machine was mangled in that fall down Miner's Gorge. It's in bits. No more than a pile of junk.'

'Just as I thought,' said Johnny. 'Now, let's get back to the rules.'

Jennings held out an entry form for Johnny to read.

'Rule one,' Johnny read aloud. "'The prize will be awarded to the first team to finish on a *Whizzbang tandem*".'

'That's what they were riding,' said Jennings.

'They weren't riding it,' said Johnny. 'They *carried* it across.'

'Good point,' said Jennings.

'This is outrageous,' cried Hatfield.

'And that's not all,' said Johnny. 'By the time they finished, it wasn't even a tandem.'

Hatfield started spluttering. 'What do you mean...?'

'In your own words,' said Johnny, 'that bike was in bits.'

'I hadn't thought of that,' said Jennings.

Johnny pointed to the two cyclists. 'Barry and Jack may have started out with a tandem, but, in Mr Hatfield's own words, by the time they got to the finish line it was a pile of junk.'

'But... but...'

Jennings held up his hand. 'No buts, Mr Hatfield. You said it. It was a pile of junk. Johnny's protest is upheld. Barry and Jack are also disqualified.'

With all the noise in the hall, no one noticed the heated argument between Hatfield and the two cyclists.

'What about our money?' hissed Barry.

'And our bonus?' demanded Jack.

Hatfield's face was bright red. 'You dummies. You were supposed to win that race, not make me look a fool.'

'You don't need any help from us,' said Barry. 'Just give us our money and we'll be on the first bus out of town.'

'Don't expect to get paid when you didn't complete your part of the bargain.'

Barry waved his fist under Hatfield's nose. 'And don't expect to get away with trying to cheat us out of what's ours.'

At the sight of the fist, Hatfield turned and ran for the nearest exit, with the cyclists close behind.

Johnny saw what was happening and let out a piercing whistle. In a matter of seconds, Hatfield was surrounded by a solid rubber wall.

The evening was reaching a peak. It was Bayside's favourite busker at his best.

Johnny was the hero of the moment and the crowd was right behind him.

As always, he wore his favourite old busking costume of patched jeans, paint-splashed sneakers, and a jacket so big he had to roll up the sleeves. And on his head was his battered top hat.

Slowly he built the momentum, pumping his elbows to beat the drum on his back. Knocking his knees together to work the cymbals. Playing up a storm on his bright red and silver accordion. His right hand picking out the tune on the keys, while the left hand worked the buttons that formed the chords.

'He's in great form tonight,' said Kate, sitting in the audience and clapping along.

'It's been a good day,' said Debbie, sitting next to her. 'Justice was done.'

Kate nodded. 'Mr Jennings made the right decision in giving the prize to Dean and Linda. After all they were the first to finish under their own steam, without spider power or dirty tricks.'

As the music continued, Johnny nodded to Bouncer who was waiting in the wings.

His friend knew what to do, even if tonight it was a little different.

Bouncer hobbled on stage on his crutches and, balancing on his good leg, grabbed the microphone.

'Welcome please, Johnny's support act - the Spiders, with a very special guest!'

Now, as Johnny whistled, out of the wings burst Sunshine, Rainbow and Sky... dragging Herbert Hatfield behind them.

Hatfield's face was bright red. 'This is outrageous. I've been kidnapped. I'll...'

Before Hatfield could protest further, Johnny whistled again and Rainbow, Sunshine and Sky grabbed the former mayor.

Linking their legs with his, they launched into a spectacular high kicking routine.

Hatfield, who only ever lifted his feet high enough to put on his socks, was hoisted into the air.

'Smile,' hissed Johnny. 'We're protecting you.'

'I don't need any more protection,' wheezed Hatfield. 'Those cycling thugs have finally gone.'

Barry and Jack had left town as soon as they got their money. It had cost Hatfield a double bonus to keep them quiet.

'You'll need protection from the whole town if the truth about this race ever gets out.'

'You have no proof...,' Hatfield spluttered between leg raises.

'No proof, but still a lot of questions,' said Johnny. 'Maybe I should try and persuade Mr Jennings from the Gazette to investigate?'

'No,' wheezed Hatfield, 'no, no, no.'

'Then no more sneaky schemes,' demanded Johnny. 'Promise?'

Hatfield tried to nod, but his head just wobbled from side to side as if it might fall off.

'Poor old Hatfield's puffing,' said Kate, sitting in the audience with Debbie and laughing uncontrollably. 'He needs more exercise.'

'I know just the thing,' said Debbie.

'What?' said Kate.

'Cycling!'

On stage, Bouncer grabbed the microphone. 'Let's rock and roll!'

'Oh, no!' cried Hatfield.

'Only another half hour to go,' Johnny yelled at Hatfield. 'Mind you, if they keep screaming for more, we might have to do a second show. What do you think?'

Hatfield's red and unhappy face gave Johnny all the answer he needed.

The End