

# RACECOURSE ORANGES



Stuart Broderick

*This is a book about sex,  
alcohol, marijuana and murder.  
It is set to a backdrop of cross-  
country mountain bike racing.*

## **Racecourse Oranges**

By Stuart Broderick

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## ***Chapter 11***

### ***Racecourse Oranges***

"TAKE YOUR MARK... FOOTIE IN... FIVE... FOUR... THREE... TWO... ONE. BANG!"

Vincent jumped off the line, got an immediate lead, then veered to the left. He looked over at the pack and saw he was currently off the back. A bunch of the guys had floundered in the mud and were dismounted and pushing their bikes through the goop. Reaching he defunct parking lot, he shifted into the big ring and shot by the crowd. He rolled his right wrist forward and pushed his Grip Shift into the highest gear of his rear cluster. As he stood up and grabbed the bar ends, he accelerated until he spun out to his maximum RPM. He rounded the first turn into the access road and was way out in the lead, but he'd overplayed his hand and had blown up. His legs were burning, and he gasped for breath he coughed out a lung oyster and yacked up a little vomit that he spat out before washing his throat down with flat Coke. He downshifted the rear gear but stayed in the big ring as he mashed slowly at the pedals, trying to get his wind back. There was a small group of followers that were a ways behind. He dropped into an aerodynamic tuck and poured on the coals, making them pay to chase him down before he backed off and let them by so he could sit in their slipstream and recover. As he approached the end of the access road, he pushed to the front of the group, forcing them to stay in the big ring or get dropped. Right before the base of the ascent, he popped out of his pedals and leapt off the bike. He shouldered the Cannondale and sprinted through the salal bush that lined the course, leaving everyone behind. He remounted on the downward side of the knoll and accelerated away. He heard the

guys at the front stall. The rest of the pack had dropped into their granny gear and bunched up at the base of the hill, waiting to get up the climb while he was still in the big ring. Within a few pedal strokes he was gone. The only things he heard were the swishing of his tires on the wet trail and the rush of wind in his ears. He worked his gears up and down with the undulations, trying to keep from gassing out again. Up ahead was a surprisingly difficult descending radius off camber turn that he'd named Big and Nasty. It was a sweeping right hander that was muddy and loose. It got narrower as it tightened. The outside edge dropped steeply away and was bordered by a blackberry thicket that spelled disaster. The smart thing to do was downshift into the middle ring, brake hard and pivot, but that would sap too much momentum. Elizabeth had ordered him to win this race and win he would. He sat up to catch his breath, lowered and weighted his outside pedal and pushed forward leaning on his inside hand. Low profile race tires squirmed and slipped, and he dared not touch the brakes with both wheels sliding. Mud spewed up from his front wheel as he sawed at the bars, trying in vain to pull to the right. As the turn tightened, he was forced to keep the front end from washing out by counter steering into the turn. Thorny blackberry vines bit into his left calf as he fought to pull further to the right. He shifted his weight even more to the right as the blackberries reached out at him, but he had to be careful not to overcompensate and low side. The off-camber edge sucked him to the left and drew him towards a race ending crash as he cranked as hard as he could to stay out of the blackberries. At the last moment, he leveled his pedals, grabbed the saddle between his thighs and sprang upwards, first yanking on the bars, then pulling up on his pedals getting both wheels off the ground. His rear wheel touched down first, and he crossed up the front as he bunny hopped to the right and out of the blackberries. Coming out of a feets-up two wheeled drift he stomped

the pedals, still in a huge gear with plenty of momentum. Seemingly far too early in a long race, he stood up and sprinted for all he was worth. Deep in oxygen debt and on the verge of hallucination, his legs were on fire as he hit the singletrack. That didn't bother him at all because he'd managed to open enough of a gap so no one could see him from behind and mark his pace. Ahead the course became tight and twisty. He had ridden back and forth on it at least a dozen times the previous weekend, so he relaxed and trudged along in the middle ring for momentum. He'd memorized every turn, root, and bump so he could flow through on the perfect line and scurry down the trail without working too hard. He downshifted for a slight climb and prepared to dismount again. The area ahead was full of slippery roots and wheel swallowing holes, so he shouldered his bike and ran through, rather than pick his way along and possibly crash. He hadn't yet caught up to any of the group that started ten minutes earlier and he was all alone on the course as the aid station loomed ahead. He sat up for a handoff and to get his heart rate back under control and looked around. Someone's little sister was handing out orange slices, but Vincent resisted the urge to grab one. There was an older lady with cups of water and further ahead, a guy with Downs Syndrome manned a huge bowl of banana halves. He was robustly built, with a steady hand and delicate fingers. "There's a good luck charm if ever I've seen one," Vincent told himself as he nabbed the banana and stuffed it in his mouth. He surged off through a slightly downhill section holding right on the verge of gassing out again. He couldn't risk going anerobic anymore, but he needed to preserve his lead. This faster, more open section was the main reason for his narrow tires, and he spun out in his tallest gear at a wicked fast pace that he'd never consider, unless he knew exactly what was waiting for him around the next corner. By the end of the first lap, he was picking off guys from the twenty to thirty-four age group that had started ten minutes ahead. The start-finish area

was grassy and open. Cowbells clanged and the PA was rocking the Grateful Dead. He took the opportunity to choke down a power bar and guzzle some flat Coca Cola from his camelback as he raced down the double track. The steep chute ahead had no one on it, so he dropped into the granny ring and scratched his way up the sharp ascent.

He pushed to his limit to chase a group that was moving along nicely. They were making good time, but still easy enough so he could sit in and marshal his energy as the race was barely one third through. There was a pileup on the big sweeping right hander, so he shifted into the middle ring and unclipped his right foot. He nailed the brakes, stomped his cleat into the mud and threw the Cannondale around the corner. Back on the pedals, he bashed his way through the pack with some timely elbows and a healthy hip bump or three. He was ok with squandering a pile of momentum, because he'd just put a whole bunch more riders behind him. The rain picked up as he launched a big charge down the access road towards the tight singletrack, passing another two guys. He knew at this point that he'd put enough riders between himself and his pursuers so that victory was at hand unless he crashed hard or totally crapped out on the final lap. The mud became a brown spray, flying up from the wheels of the pack as he pedaled along. His glasses got splattered and started fogging, so he slipped them in his jersey pocket. The singletrack section was slow and crowded as he'd figured. This gave him a chance to trudge along to get his breathing and heart rate back under control. There was a stop and go ahead, someone had crashed in the roots. Off the bike again, he reveled in the opportunity to use his many seasons of cyclocross experience to get by another pack of riders. As he left the trail section and neared the aid station, he could smell that someone was slicing oranges. Their sweet perfume permeated the air as he rode by. His face was sticky from Coca Cola, and he had mud

in his right eye. Low and behold, the banana guy had Dixie cups of water. With another flawless handoff and not spilling a drop, Vincent washed his eye out and took a gulp. Exiting the aid station of the course was rolling trails with a slight downhill and ample areas to pass without expending too much energy. The open area ahead allowed him to tap out in the big ring and get by another guy. He entered the start and finish area all alone on the course and "Vincent Fitzgerald number 203" was announced over the PA. The Claxon of the big brass bell rang out as he crossed the line and started out on the final lap. The first turn had degraded into a slippery quagmire, and he didn't dare take any more chances, so he eased around it. His front wheel slipped out and he barely got a foot down in time to save a crash. He bogged down in the soft loam and had to come out of the saddle to get going again.

Even though he could feel his legs giving out, he began lapping the stragglers from his own group. He hit the steep pitch in the middle gear and dismounted halfway up. This time he walked slowly up the embankment, unable to pedal or run over it. As he approached the big right hander, the racers ahead were bunched up in a tight group. There was only one good line through the big turn ahead and he owned it with a bit of handlebar banging. As he raced down the access road, he backed off and left a big gap between himself and the riders ahead so he could push a mediocre gear and still make decent time in the tight stuff. His relentless practice in the difficult section the week before had paid off in spades. As he slowed in the rooted section, his hamstring cramped up and a tree jumped out into the trail and slammed him in the shoulder. Dizzy from the crash and knowing he'd go down again if he remounted too quickly, he picked his bike up and limped through the roots and ruts before hopping back on. At the entrance of the aid station, the banana guy had orange quarters. "To hell with it, I've



earned this one today." He told himself as he took the handoff and winked at his good luck charm. He stuffed it in his mouth, bit off the flesh and spat the rind into the ferns. It was delicious, far sweeter yet tarter than he remembered. The juice ran down his throat and off his chin. The tang of citrus filled his sinuses, giving him a huge rush of excitement. His legs were suddenly rejuvenated, and he sprinted off towards the finish. As he hit maximum speed in the fast section, he broke the cardinal rule of cross-country racing and looked back over his shoulder. There was no one there. He looked again and the trail behind was still empty. Just to be safe, he kept it in the big ring but downshifted into the middle of his rear cluster. As he crossed the finish line all alone, the PA called out his name as the winner and the tag was ripped off his number. Vincent looked up proudly as it was stapled to the top of the board.

"There you go Elizabeth!" he yelled.

The guy with the stapler turned and looked at him. "My name's not Elizabeth," he replied.

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