

Desert Trek

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CHAPTER 1

Friends

Travis stopped his Honda and took off his sunglasses. There was dirt all over his jacket. He looked at his watch. It was two o'clock. Ramón and Will would be here soon. Travis looked down at his dirt bike. He had saved his money for over a year for this bike. It wasn't new, but it was all his. His parents hadn't wanted him to buy one, but he had wanted it so much. Finally, they had agreed to let him have one. And he had been so careful. He had only been caught once driving too fast in ten months of riding. That had meant giving up the bike for a whole month. After Travis went to driver's school, the judge said he could ride again, as long as he didn't ride too fast. No more speeding on the city streets, Travis decided. There were too many police around.

The roar of dirt bike engines made him look up. Here came Ramón and Will. Ramón was first to get there. He rode his bike close

to Travis and stopped hard, throwing dust up around their faces. Will was right behind Ramón. They were both yelling at each other as usual.

“I beat you that time!” yelled Ramón.

“You were just lucky!” shouted Will. “If I didn’t get stuck in the bushes back there, you and that Yamaha would have lost.”

“In your dreams,” said Ramón. “Those bushes were going faster than your bike!”

“Any time you’re ready, I’ll show you whose bike is faster,” Will shot back. “Any time, any place.”

“Take it easy!” said Travis. “You two are always fighting. Don’t you ever stop?”

“He thinks he’s such a great rider,” said Ramón loudly. “Ever since he got that Kawasaki, all he wants to do is race.”

“Yeah, and I can beat both of you,” answered Will.

“OK! OK! Do you want to fight or ride? Come on,” said Travis, starting his bike. “Let’s climb some hills.”

Ramón and Will put their bikes into gear. Their wheels threw clouds of loose dirt behind them. Then they sped up the hill behind Travis. They rode for an hour before stopping, covered in dirt and mud.

“You know,” Travis said. “That was fun,

but I'd like to really see what our bikes can do."

"What do you mean?" Ramón asked.

"Do you want to race or something?" Will asked.

"Race, race, race! Don't you ever think of anything else?" Ramón asked.

"Sure, I think about girls, too," answered Will with a smile. "Bikes and girls."

"I hope you have better luck with the girls than you do with your bike," Ramón replied with a laugh.

"Hey, man, what's wrong with my bike?" Will yelled. He got off the Kawasaki and started toward Ramón.

"Stop!" Travis yelled. "You two want to see who has the best bike? Let's really test them then."

"How?" asked Will and Ramón at the same time.

"Well," said Travis, "I thought we should try to cross Death Valley on our dirt bikes. Then we would know who has the best bike."

Both boys were quiet for a short time. It was Ramón who spoke first. "Death Valley? No way! It gets over 120 degrees out there during the day. And there's no cell phone service out there. What if something happens?"

"What's the matter?" asked Travis. "You little babies afraid your bikes won't make it?"

“I know my bike could make it,” said Ramón.

“Your bike won’t make it ten miles!” Will shouted at Ramón. He turned to Travis. “When do you want to go?”

“How about Tuesday?” asked Travis. “That will give us two days to get ready.”

“Fine with me,” said Ramón. “I’ll tell my dad tonight.”

“OK by me,” said Will. “My mom will probably say no at first, but I can talk her into anything.”

“Nice!” Travis said. “Then we’ll go. Now we have to decide what to take with us.”

“No problem,” Ramón answered. “We each need a sleeping bag and some warm clothes. The desert gets cold at night.”

“I’ll bring pots to cook with,” said Will. “I’m a growing boy and need lots of food!” The boys all laughed.

“I think we should take some tools with us, too, to fix Will’s bike,” Ramón added.

“Hey!” Will yelled, but his friends just laughed.

“Right!” Travis replied. “And I have a pretty good first-aid kit. We might need it.”

“I’ll bring a map, too,” Will added. “Unless one of you has a GPS on his bike? I don’t want to get lost out there in the desert.”

“And I don’t think a GPS would be much use off-road,” Ramón said. He added, “Also, we should all carry lots of water, in case water from the creeks isn’t safe to drink.”

“I have extra water bottles from a camping trip,” Travis agreed. “OK, I think we’ve talked about everything. Just make sure you each bring what we talked about. Make sure your bikes don’t tip over with all of it!”

“Cool! I almost wish we could leave right now,” said Ramón.

“Me, too!” Will added.

“Good!” said Travis. “We’ll all meet at Gil’s gas station Tuesday morning at seven.”

They all agreed on the time and the place to meet. They would ask their parents tonight about their trip. They put their dirt bikes into gear and started down the hill.

“This trip is going to rock!” yelled Will. He and his friends sped away through clouds of dust.

CHAPTER 2

The Trip

Travis arrived early at Gil's gas station. The morning was cool. He had his leather jacket on. He would change his clothes when it got hot. He pulled off his helmet and looked at his watch. It was ten minutes to seven. Will and Ramón would be here soon.

Travis thought about his friends. They were a lot of fun, even if they did fight all of the time. They had been friends for the last few years. They were all different, but they liked riding together.

Sometimes Travis wished he had as much freedom as Ramón and Will. Ramón lived with his dad, who worked a lot. His mother lived out of state somewhere, so Ramón was on his own most of the time. Will's father had been killed in a car crash. Will lived with his mother and kid sister.

The three friends spent a lot of time at each other's houses. Travis sometimes wished

his parents would let him do more things, but was glad to have both of them around. When he had a problem, there was usually someone to talk to. This time, his father had liked the idea of the Death Valley trip. His mom had been against it. But Travis's dad had talked her into letting Travis go. His dad had even called Will's mom to try to help Will go on the trip. Finally, Travis's mom helped plan the route. She also made sure the boys had all the food and tools they needed for the trip.

Travis was thinking about all of this when Will rode up on his bike. It was two minutes to seven. "Where's the Yamaha Kid?" he yelled over the roar of his engine.

"He'll be here soon," answered Travis. "You got everything you need?"

"Sure," said Will. "Water, food, sleeping bag, first-aid kit, cell phone, and a change of clothes."

"Good," said Travis. "We can't count on making any calls while we're out there, but you never know. I have a map of our whole route. It has trails marked on it and everything. We'll leave as soon as Ramón gets here."

Both boys looked up as they heard the sound of Ramón's bike. He turned right off of Fourth Street. Then he slowed to a stop in front of them.

“You two ready?” asked Ramón.

“Ready as we’ll ever be,” answered Will.
“Let’s go!”

Travis and Will pulled on their helmets. Then they put their bikes into gear and twisted the throttles. The engines roared as they started to move. The three young riders pulled out and headed for the desert.

It was six o’clock when they stopped for the night. The first day had been fun, but not too much happened. They had stopped for lunch and gas at a small town near the desert. The dirt bikes were working well. They had stopped again at three to gas up and check the map.

Each rider carried an extra can of gas on his bike. They knew they might need it. They all agreed that it was better to be safe than sorry.

All three riders were happy to stop for the night. Riding could be fun, but it was hard work, too. Their legs hurt after sitting all day on their dirt bikes. It felt good to stretch out again. They cooked canned chili, and Ramón ate two oranges. “My mouth is dry, but I’m tired of just drinking water,” he explained. His friends didn’t bring any oranges, so they each drank a bottle of water. When the chili was ready, the boys ate fast. Right after dinner, they rolled out their sleeping bags and went to sleep.



CHAPTER 3

The First Problem

“Hey! Are you two going to sleep all day?” yelled Will.

Travis and Ramón opened their eyes. Will was standing by a small fire with a cup in his hand. The sun was just coming up over the mountains.

“I don’t know what hurts more, my back or legs,” Travis said.

“I hurt all over,” said Ramón.

“Come on, you two. The coffee’s hot and I brought some breakfast.”

The three friends ate their breakfast and talked about the day’s ride. Then they put out the fire and rolled up their sleeping bags. Each rider put his gear away on his bike and got ready to go. Then they took off across the desert. Dust, dirt, and rocks flew up behind them.

They had been on the trail for about three hours. Suddenly Ramón’s bike stopped moving. Travis and Will saw Ramón stop.

They turned and went back.

“Hey, what’s wrong?” asked Will.

“Oh, it’s that chain again,” said Ramón. “It just broke on me.”

“Not again!” said Will. “Why didn’t you put a new one on before we left?”

“Hey, I didn’t know it was going to break!” Ramón yelled.

“Whatever,” said Travis. “We can fix it up, no problem.”

Ramón, Travis, and Will went to work on the chain. In about thirty minutes, Ramón’s bike was ready to go again.

“Hey,” said Travis. “Let’s climb that hill over there to see how your chain’s working.”

“Sure, let’s go,” answered Ramón.

They all took off. Will raced to the front. Ramón and Travis went right behind him. Dust and sand were flying as they reached the top of the hill. Will got there first. Travis was second and Ramón trailed behind.

“Slow down, there!” Will said to Ramón. Laughing, he added, “You could almost catch my grandmother at that speed!”

“Shut up, Will!” said Ramón.

“Really, Ramón, is it running better?” Travis asked.

“No,” answered Ramón. “The chain still feels weak.”

“That’s what you get for riding such an old bike,” said Travis with a smile. “You should have a good bike like mine.”

“It’ll be OK once I get it fixed,” said Ramón. “Don’t worry about me.”

“I don’t know,” Will said. “Maybe we should call this trip off. If your bike is in trouble, maybe we should head back.”

“No way, Will!” Ramón said. “I came on this trip to have fun. I’m not going to head back now. My bike will be just fine. I’ll fix the chain better.”

“Are you sure?” Travis asked. “Maybe Will is right. Maybe we should head back home. There’s no way I’m carrying you home on my bike.”

“It’s fine, don’t worry,” Ramón said. “Come on, let’s do some riding. I can keep up with you two.”

The three riders drove their dirt bikes around the area for about an hour. They tried small hill climbs and made some jumps. Ramón put his bike through some tests. He wanted to show Travis and Will that his dirt bike was OK. Travis and Will watched Ramón ride. They knew he wouldn’t stop. Ramón would do his best to keep up with his friends.

Ramón stopped his bike a few times and worked on the chain. After a few changes, his

dirt bike was working fine again. He made one last run up a small hill. His bike climbed the hill. Will and Travis watched him from the bottom. When he got to the top, he yelled “No problem!” and they went up the hill after him.

“So the chain is OK now?” asked Will.

“Just like new,” answered Ramón. “The chain is tight. I don’t know what was wrong, but I’m pretty sure it’s fixed. We don’t have to cut the trip short.”

Just then, Travis looked over the other side of the hill. “Hey, what’s that down there?” he said.

“Where?” asked Will.

“Over there,” said Travis, “to the east.”

“I don’t know,” said Ramón. “It looks like a camper van up on a jack.”

“Let’s take a look,” said Will. “Maybe we can help.”