

"I'm starving," Gordy said.

"You just had dinner," Hiro ~~called~~ ~~shouted~~ from behind them.

She sounded out of breath, like she was having trouble keeping up.

Gordy made a face like he thought Hiro was crazy. "Ah, that was over an hour ago. I've burned it off." He pointed at Frank'n Stein's. "Monster shake. Fries. You in?"

~~Right now~~ ~~all~~ ~~All~~ Cooper wanted to do was drop ~~the~~ ~~his~~ bike, kick back on the grass somewhere, and stay there for about for about three months, until he turned fourteen would be ~~just~~ about right.

But the thought of downing a smooth Monster shake sounded really good. ~~Cooper~~ ~~He~~ checked the sky. The sun was down but they had a little time before it was fully dark. Just not *enough* time. "We'll both get brain freeze if we have to gulp it down that quick."

Gordy nodded. "Tomorrow. Right after school."

"Coop," Hiro ~~called from behind him~~ ~~said~~. "Slow up a little."

Cooper coasted, and Gordy shot ahead.

Hiro pulled up alongside, taking Gordy's place. Her long black braid jerked and bucked down the middle of her back ~~like it was~~ ~~as if it were~~ alive and trying to break free. "This was a stupid idea."

"Biking to WalMart, or promising we'd be back before dark?"

Hiro ~~managed~~ a weak smile. "Both. We've *got* to take a break. Five minutes."

They were close enough to home now. ~~He~~ ~~Cooper~~ worked his phone out of his pocket and checked the time.

"Besides, Lunk is really falling behind again. I don't know why he doesn't get a bigger bike." ~~Hiro~~ ~~said~~.

Comment [FB2]: *Call* isn't a means of speech. *Said* is almost always better because it's transparent to the reader. Use *yelled* and *shouted* sparingly.

Comment [FB3]: Delete the paragraph break because we're still in Hiro's point of focus. Better yet, use this, since "having trouble keeping up" tells us she's behind: "You just had dinner." Hiro sounded out of breath, like she was having trouble keeping up.

Comment [FB4]: Obvious. When else would it be?

Comment [FB5]: CMOS wants a comma before the conjunction in lists

Comment [FB6]: *Just* is usually a throw-away word. I'd use *just right* or *about right*.

Comment [FB7]: The next paragraph is still in Cooper's focus, so I don't think we have a strong reason for a paragraph break.

Comment [FB8]: Do a search for all leading spaces in paragraphs and delete them. That happens in Word at times.

Comment [FB9]: There's that *called* word again. Twice on the same page. It's a burdensome attribution, not as efficient as *said*. "From behind him" is obvious.

Comment [FB10]: Cec Murphey pet peeve. For the most part, reserve *like* for nouns.

Comment [FB11]: Okay, but we don't *manage* things, we *do* them. We can let it pass this time, but don't be surprised if I don't want to change the next one. Despite our aversion to adverbs, "Hiro smiled weakly" is better.

Comment [FB12]: No antecedent. Cooper or Gordy.

Comment [FB13]: Who is speaking, Cooper? Hiro? Gordy? We've followed three people with a page and a half of biking, and now somebody else is in the group? That's jarring. Or maybe "Lunk" is a nickname for Hiro. No, that can't be right because Lunk is a guy. Confusing, but I believe adding "Hiro said" makes it all okay.

Cooper checked over his shoulder. Lunk still hadn't crossed the street ~~yet~~, even though he ~~pedaled~~ ~~was pedaling~~ his BMX bike like crazy. Lunk stood a full head taller than Cooper, yet rode the smallest bike ~~of the four of them~~. He even had some height on Gordy—and definitely some weight over him, too. He'd clearly outgrown the bike, years before. ~~It seemed obvious~~ ~~Obviously~~, Lunk couldn't afford a new one. Not that he ever complained. Cooper wouldn't mind swapping bikes with him in exchange for a few inches of height.

If only it were that easy.

Anyway, Hiro was right. “Gordy,” he ~~called~~ ~~said~~. “Let's stop at Kimball Hill Park.”

Gordy gave a thumbs up, cut through the parking lot in front of the post office, and stopped on the grass just past the park entrance. Cooper and Hiro followed a short distance behind him.

Cooper hit the brakes, skidded to a stop, and ~~dismounted~~ ~~got off~~.

“Listen, Gordy.” Hiro stopped and swung her leg over the seat, moaning slightly ~~as she did~~. “Next time you want us to join you for a little run to WalMart—my answer is no. Not unless we've got more time.”

Gordy snickered. “Your short legs tired?”

“Not too tired to kick you, if you make another crack about my height.”

“Height?” Gordy looked confused. “What height?”

Cooper clapped his cousin on the back. “You're living on the edge, Gordy.”

Comment [FB14]: Redundant with *still*.

Comment [FB15]: Obvious.

Comment [FB16]: CMOS says this comma isn't necessary. I'd leave it out.

Comment [FB17]: Must have a comma to avoid confusion, I read “bike years” as an adjective-noun and then wanted to know “before what?”

Comment [FB18]: Some editors don't like introductory adverbs, and I try to avoid them, but the adverb is better than beginning a sentence with the indefinite “it” and “seemed,” which is obvious in Coop's POV.

Comment [FB19]: Another *called*, which is not a good alternative to *said*.

Comment [FB20]: Would Coop say “dismounted.” That word feels strange for his character.

Comment [FB21]: Obvious

Hiro smiled and poked her finger at him. “You will *pay* for that, Gordon Digby.

As soon as my legs stop cramping, you’re in for a little Hiro-schmeero.” She karate-chopped the air.

Gordy took a step closer as if ~~hoping she’d~~ daring her to try.

Lunk wheeled up and fishtailed to a stop. Sweat trickled down his forehead and around his flushed cheeks. Dark ~~shards~~ strands of hair stuck to his forehead and partially blocked his vision. “Taking a break?” He stood there, chest heaving, ~~like he was~~ as if he were ready to collapse.

“Gordy needed a rest,” Hiro said. “We got tired of him whining.”

“Gordy? Tired? Right.” Lunk dropped his bike and lay down on the grass—flat on his back.

Exactly what Cooper wanted to do—but if he did he’d never want to get up.

They’d be late for sure.

“Check that out,” Cooper pointed at ~~a the~~ silver minivan driving through the parking lot. “There’s a backpack on the roof.”

Hiro and Gordy turned at the same time ~~like~~ as if they’d rehearsed it. Lunk reacted a second later, like he was following their lead and still trying to fit into the group. He propped himself up on his elbows.

Gordy still straddled his bike. “Oops.” He lowered his voice—apparently trying to imitate the driver. “Did I leave my backpack on the roof while I loaded the car?” He snickered. “What a bozo.”

“And now he’s going to lose it,” Hiro said.

Lunk fanned his sweat-soaked t-shirt. “I give it ten seconds. Nine. Eight.”

Comment [FB22]: I thought this was a better visual. Maybe not.

Comment [FB23]: I don’t believe this fits the definition of a *shard*, which I visualize as a broken piece, usually of pottery or glass.

Comment [FB24]: We have a tab character followed by a space. Both characters should be deleted. Do a search and replace all spaces followed by a paragraph character with just a paragraph character. Repeat that until none are found. Then do the same with the tab character followed by a paragraph character. Also do a search and replace two spaces with one space. There are at least 97 of those. A manuscript should only have single spaces.

Comment [FB25]: Some paragraphs are formatted with Word’s hanging indent. This one and others use the tab key. They should all be formatted with the hanging indent. Do a Word search and replace the tab character with nothing.

Comment [FB26]: I’d use the grammatically correct choice here, but leave the “like” in the sentence following.

Comment [FB27]: One of many two-space occurrences.