

MEET THE



Austin
Jackson

Age: 11 (getting taller every day)

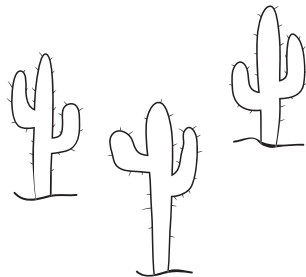
Best School Subject: science

Favorite Food: pancakes with grape jelly

Most Embarrassing Secret: sleeps with a teddy bear

Best Quality: honesty

CHARACTERS



Slice

Age: 12 (big for his age)

Favorite Movie: *Big*

Future Plans: create a BMX clothing line

Secret Wish: to have an older brother and a younger sister

Best Quality: endurance

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NIGHTMARE

I'm going fast. Maybe too fast. I tap the brake. Lean into the corner. My foot scrapes the dirt. Somehow I stay upright. Out of the turn I pump my legs again. Only one rider is ahead of me. It's Slice. I recognize his red mountain bike. The red stripes on his helmet. If I can beat him, I'll win.



I get closer. Rocks fly from his tires. One

last hill and dip. Then the finish line. My legs burn. My lungs ache.

Now I'm even with Slice. I glance over. He looks back at me and scowls. *Yeah, it's me, I feel like saying. You're about to lose to little Austin Jackson.*

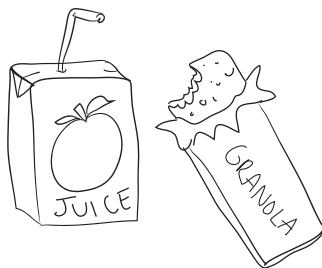
We're on the last hill. He speeds up. So do I. I reach the top ahead of him. All at once my back tire jumps. The next second, I'm flying off my bike, screaming.



I sit up in my sleeping bag, panting. My pj's are wet with sweat. The tent is quiet. I must not have yelled. Or Mom and Dad

would be hovering. Asking if I'm okay. I'm sick of these nightmares. My accident happened over a year ago. But it still feels like yesterday.

I unzip my bag. Throw on my clothes. Open the tent flap. Step outside. The sun is just coming up. It turns the sky orange. Lightens the nearby hills. I rub my arms. Even with my hoodie, I'm freezing. The desert is so cold at night. And then hot during the day. Weird.



From the cooler I grab a juice box. Down it in a few gulps. I scarf a granola bar. My brothers' bikes lean against the van. My