

Wind rushes through my hair. I'm zooming down the asphalt hill at an alarming angle and loving every adrenaline-packed second.

I plateau and lose speed, righting the shopping cart. Squeals pierce the twilight behind me as the girls come down together. I change position to see the boys doubled over in laughter at the top of the hill as the girls sail past me. Their stop isn't as smooth as mine, but they remain upright.

I shift again, wincing at the sore grid the basket has imprinted in my palms and shins.

We don't even have to say anything--the girls climb out of their baskets, still gasping with laughter, and I do the same. And we race back up the hill to do it again, pushing the baskets this time.

We do it again and again, and every time it's just as thrilling and new.

The last time, I push up the hill, but can't make progress. I pump my feet faster, confused, straining my muscles. I go nowhere.

I shout at the girls, but they ignore me. Or don't hear me. And worst of all, they don't wait.

Once the girls reach the top, they park the cart and walk off, arms linked with the boys.

Desperation claws at me as they leave. My voice quits working, it grows darker. My feet stick in the quicksand of cement beneath my sneakers.

Panic overwhelms.

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I awake saturated in sweat. There are no friends. No more hill to have fun on. All that remains of my nightmare is me and my shopping cart. I pull my backpack closer to me and watch as girls and boys walk by on the sidewalk.

None of them look at me, let alone stop. Despite what they think, I'm not sick, I'm not begging, and I didn't choose this lifestyle.

While a home would be wonderful, I've managed to make it without a job to earn one. At this point, all I need to survive is compassion and a friend.