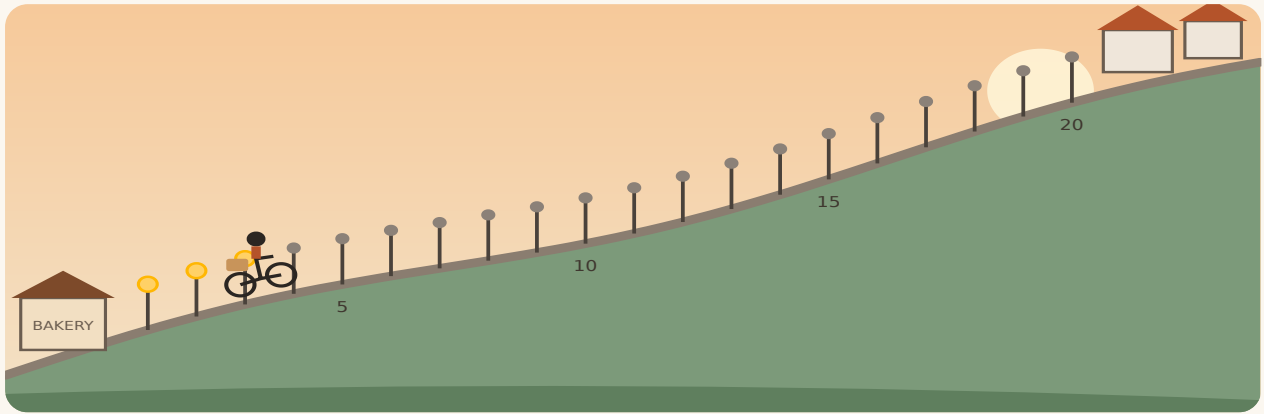


GRIT

Magic Snippers demo · magicscraper.app



ONE

Four hundred metres, straight up

The bakery stood at the bottom of Harrow Hill, and the village of Cliffend stood at the top, and between them ran a road so steep that the post van took it in first gear. Every morning for nineteen years, Mara's father had carried the bread up that road on his bicycle: two wicker baskets, sixty loaves, twenty lamp posts from the bridge to the green.

Then, in October, he slipped on the bakery steps and broke his ankle in two places.

"The Okafors will drive down for theirs," he said from the sofa, his foot on a cushion. "The others can do without for a few weeks."

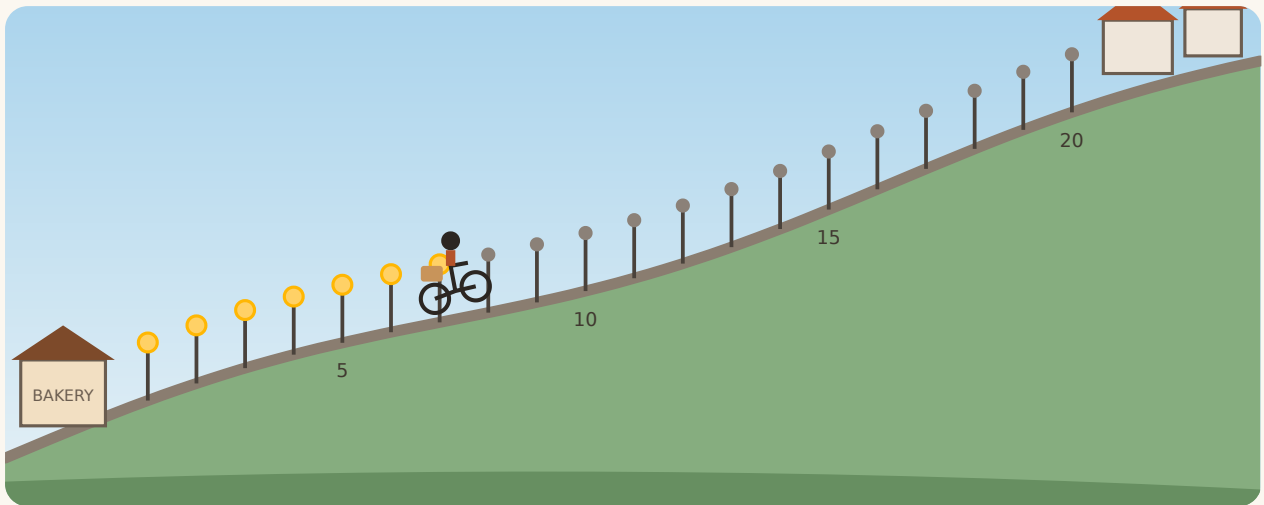
"No they can't," said Mara, who was fourteen and had never ridden further up Harrow Hill than the second lamp post. She said it before she had thought about it, which is how most promises are made.

At half past five the next morning she loaded the baskets, wobbled across the bridge, and pushed down on the pedals. At lamp post three her legs turned to water. She got off and walked. By the time she reached the green the sun was up, the loaves were cold, and Mrs Okafor was standing at her gate in a dressing gown.

Mara waited to be told off. Instead Mrs Okafor took two loaves, looked at her red face, and said only: "*Tomorrow, then.*"

TWO

Tomorrow, then



Mara did not get stronger overnight. Nobody does. What she got, on the second morning, was a pencil and the back page of her maths book.

She decided she would not try to ride the whole hill. That was impossible, and thinking about impossible things only made her legs heavier. She would ride to one more lamp post than the day before, and then she would get off and walk without feeling bad about it. That was the whole plan.

Tue · lamp post 3
Wed · lamp post 4
Thu · lamp post 4 (headwind)
Fri · lamp post 5
Sat · lamp post 7 !!

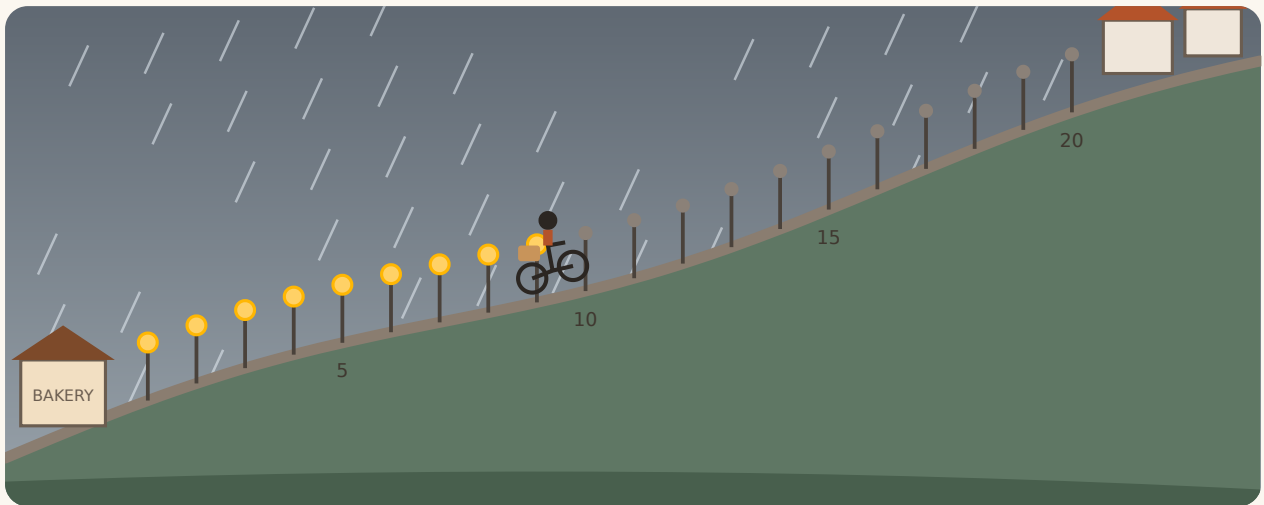
Some days the number went up. Some days it stayed where it was. Once, after a night of bad sleep, it went down, and she wrote it down anyway, because a notebook that only records the good days is just a story you tell yourself.

She learned small things nobody had told her. That it was easier to stand on the pedals for the steep bit by the chapel and sit for the long drag after it. That breathing out on the push helped. That if she looked at the top of the hill she wanted to stop, and if she looked at the next lamp post she usually didn't.

Mrs Okafor's bread arrived a little warmer every week. She never said anything about it. She just started leaving the gate open.

THREE

The bad week



In November the weather turned. Rain came sideways off the sea, the road ran with water, and on the Tuesday the chain slipped at lamp post nine and Mara went down hard on her knee. Eleven loaves rolled into the ditch. She sat in the rain and cried, which was allowed, and then she picked up the dry ones and walked the rest of the way.

On Wednesday she fell again, more gently. On Thursday she didn't fall, but she didn't get past lamp post six either, and on Friday she stood at the bakery door in the dark and could not make herself go out.

Her father hobbled into the kitchen on his crutches and looked at her soaking coat on the hook and her notebook on the table, open at a column of numbers that had stopped going up.

"I'm not good at this," Mara said. "I keep falling off."

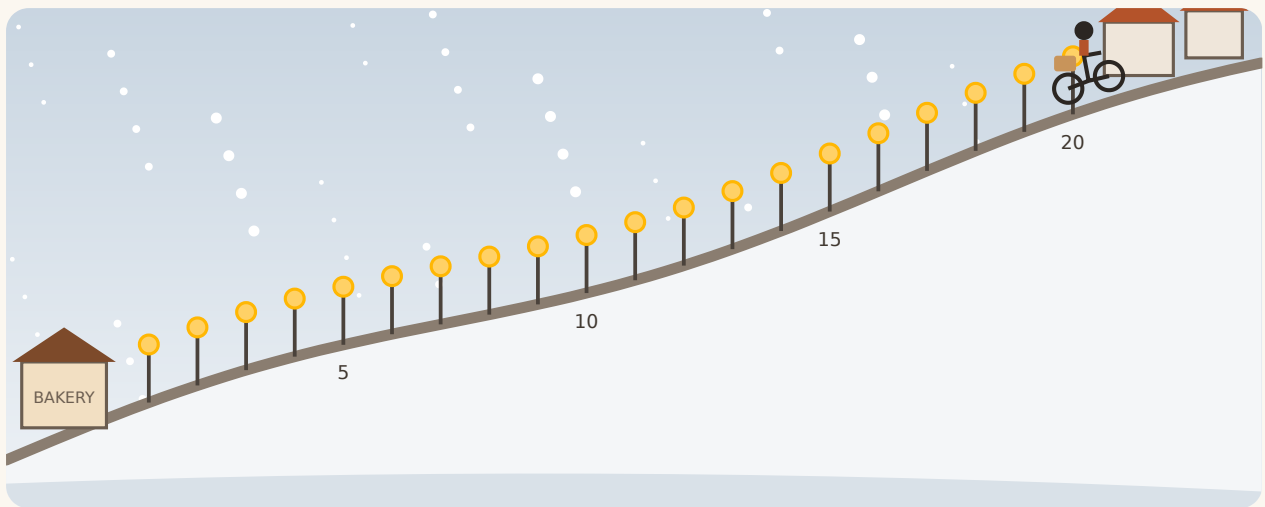
"I fell off that hill more times than you've had birthdays," he said. "Grit isn't not falling off. Anyone can not fall off if they never get on. Grit is what you do the next morning."

He held the door open. Outside it was still raining.

She went. She got to lamp post six again, and walked the rest, and wrote it down. It was the most important six in the whole book, though she didn't know that yet.

FOUR

Lamp post twenty



December was cold and dry, and the numbers started moving again: eleven, twelve, twelve, fourteen. Mara's legs had stopped shaking on the stairs at school. She could feel the hill now in a way she couldn't before, every change in the slope, the place where the camber tipped her towards the wall, the flat bit by the post box where she could breathe.

On the morning of the first snow she nearly stayed in bed. The road would be slippery. It would be stupid to try for anything. She told herself she would ride to fifteen and get off, and she said it out loud so she would believe it.

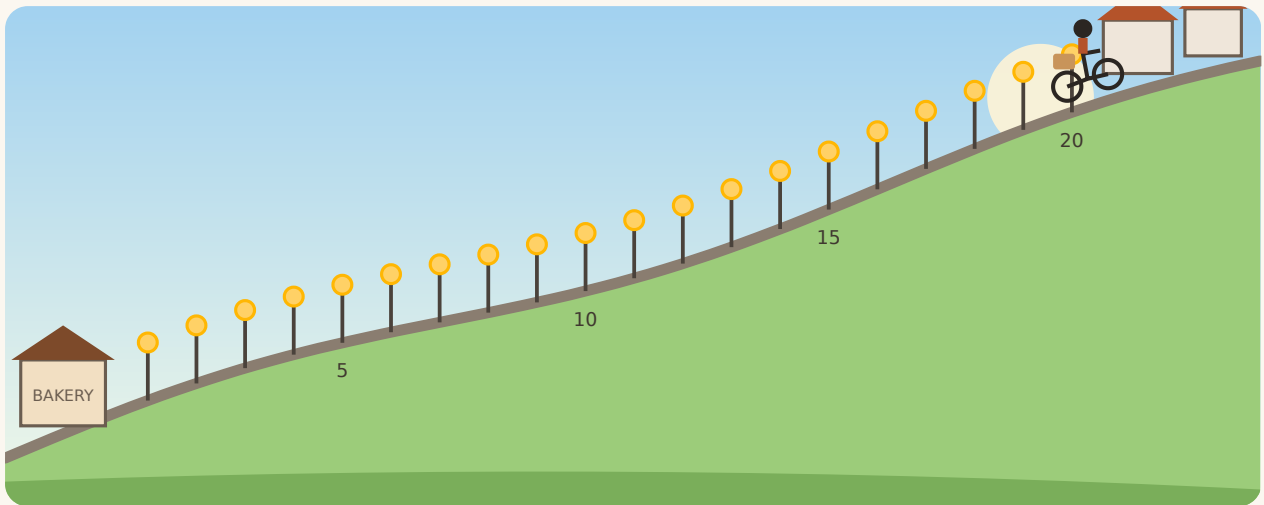
At fifteen she was still breathing. At seventeen she stopped counting. The chapel went past, and the post box, and the long drag, and her lungs burned and her thighs burned and she looked at nothing but the next lamp post, and then the next, and then there were no more lamp posts. There was only the green, white and silent, and Mrs Okafor at her gate in the same old dressing gown, holding two mugs of tea.

"I saw you from the bridge," she said. "I didn't want to put you off."

Mara couldn't speak. She got the notebook out with shaking hands and wrote, in letters that went off the line: **20. All the way.**

FIVE

What grit is



Her father's ankle mended by February, but by then the round was Mara's, and he didn't ask for it back. In the spring she rode Harrow Hill every morning without thinking about it, the way you stop thinking about stairs. Some days she even raced the post van, and lost, and laughed.

In April a boy from the farm cottages, Theo, small for nine, watched her coast down the hill and asked how she did it. He had a bike with one gear and a dream about the summer fun run, which went up Harrow Hill and finished on the green.

Mara thought about telling him to train hard, or to never give up, or any of the other things people put on posters. But none of that was what had happened. What had happened was smaller and slower and much less impressive, and it had worked.

So she tore the back page out of her old maths book and gave it to him: the whole column of numbers, the threes and fours, the headwinds and the bad week, the six she was proudest of, the twenty at the bottom.

"Don't try to get to the top," she said. "Get to one more lamp post than yesterday. Write it down even when it's worse. Then do it again tomorrow."

Theo looked at the paper for a long time. "That's it?"

"That's it," said Mara. "That's all grit is. *Tomorrow, then.*"

THE END