



A VERY SHRED GIRLS CHRISTMAS



STRONG GIRL
PUBLISHING

by Molly Hurford



Twas the day before Christmas and the Shred Girls were riding

Sneaking in one last shred before Santa's sleigh came gliding.

*Ali was mountain biking, shredding through the woods
Chasing her brothers, who are really fast dudes*

*Lindsay was practicing her jumps in the park
Working with bigger ramps, it was getting quite hard*

*Jen was sneaking in a spin on her bike
Having begged out of the family's long hike*

*They were all happy to pedal, but one thing was gone
They weren't riding together, and that felt kind of wrong.*

Christmas Eve

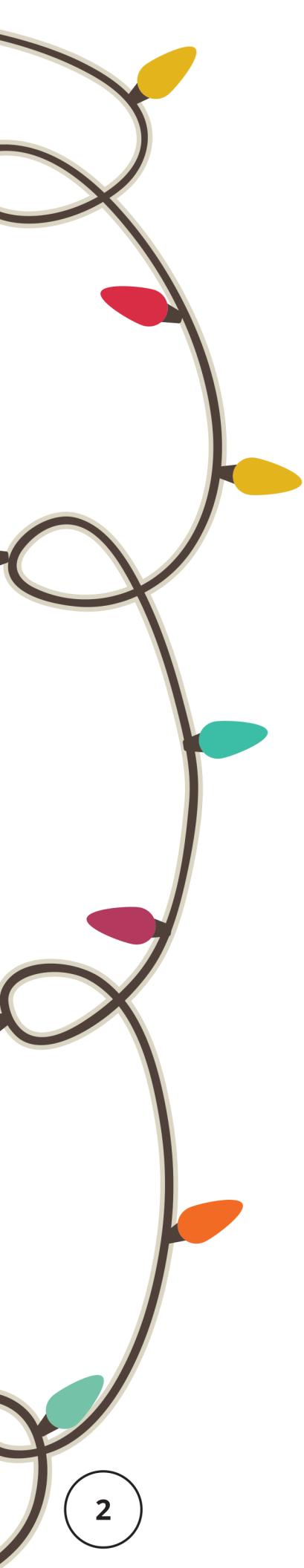
ALI

"Wait for me!" Ali yelled as her older brothers Steven and Leo rolled down the driveway on their mountain bikes. Ali frantically tried to pull on her helmet and ended up with a mouthful of hair instead. And the helmet was backwards.

It was one of those days.

At the end of the driveway, the guys turned to the right, heading for the trails as Ali finally got her helmet attached properly and hopped on her bike, blazing down the driveway to chase them down. Huffing and puffing was not part of the gameplay this early in the ride, and Ali was angry: her brothers promised that today, Christmas Eve, they would ride with her and take her on some of the new trails by the house. But as usual, they weren't really sticking to the plan.

Luckily, they also weren't in too much of a hurry, so by the time Ali got to the start of the trail, she was able to see them taking the first right-hand turn in the trees. She pedaled even harder, focusing on feeling light over her bike as she hit the first couple of bumps on the trail, and she swooped through the first corner so smoothly that she was tempted to look to see if anyone was riding behind her and would have noticed. (No such luck.)



She really wished that she was back at Joyride riding around the park with Lindsay and Jen—they never would have pedaled away without her. “But they’re not here right now,” Ali told herself firmly. “And you can show Steven and Leo that you can keep up.” As far as pep talks go, it wasn’t great, but it did the trick, and 30 seconds later, Ali found herself right behind Steven as they hit a very twisty section of trail that she had never been on.

In front of them, Leo executed some fancy tiny hops and wheelies to get his bike around some of the more narrow turns, while Ali found herself tapping the ground with her foot and maneuvering the bike around the turns like that. Steven was doing the same though, so Ali knew it must be a really hard section—and since Leo was the top pro in the house (a fact that he mentioned pretty frequently), Ali was used to having Leo show her up on the trails.

Thankfully, the tight twisty section didn’t last too long and they popped out into some wide open space—well, there weren’t trees, at least. Then, Ali looked down: A rock garden. She groaned, but very quietly. Rock gardens were the hardest thing for her to handle on the mountain bike.

“Get out of the saddle and try to use that pumping and bunnyhopping you learned from Phoebe,” Steven says to her as she pauses at the start of the scary section. Ali took a deep breath.

“I’ve got this,” she said out loud.

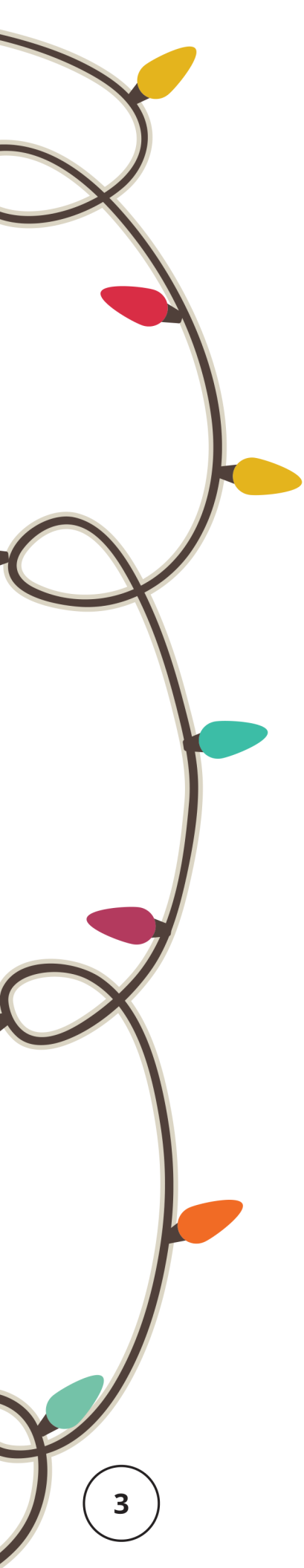
“You’ve got this,” echoed Steven. “Your bike can handle it, and so can you.”

“Come on, Ali!” Leo yelled from the end of the rocks, about 20 feet down the trail. “I’m filming this!”

Ali started pedaling towards the rocks. “Don’t avoid them,” Steven yelled as she hesitated slightly. “Try to gently go over them.”

It was tempting to try to turn to the right and sneak around the first one, because it looked huge. (It was probably only six inches high but it felt like a boulder, facing it on her mountain bike.)

Ali gently leaned her weight back and unweighted the front wheel. It rolled over smoothly, and as it crested the top of the rock she pushed her weight forward and down to give her back wheel a boost over.



"I did it!" she shouted.

She cleared another one.

"Great work!" Steven said, encouragingly.

"Almost there!" Leo added.

She cleared three more rocks before catching her pedal on a sharper tricky one halfway through as she slowed down and had to try to pedal over it. She didn't fall though—it was close, but she managed to put a foot down and turn her front wheel so it just thunked down on the ground instead of falling over.

"Good save!" Steven said. "You'll get it next time."

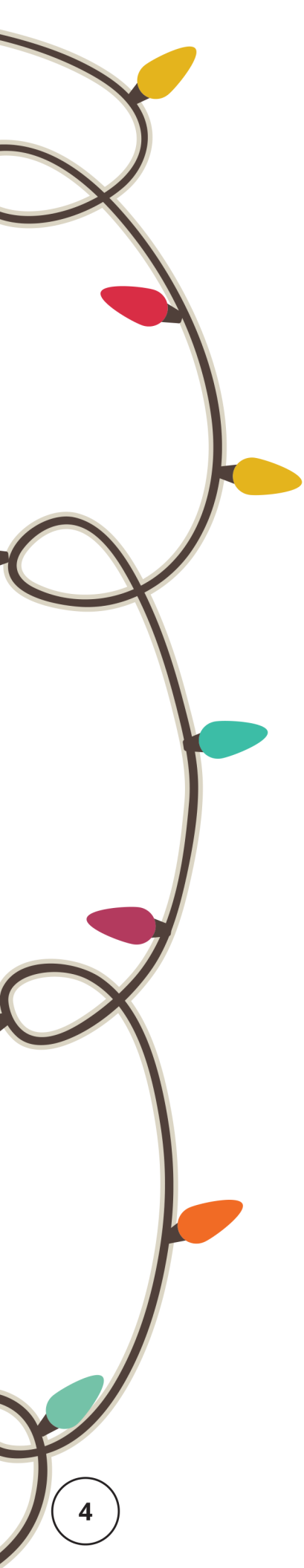
Ali knew what that meant: It was time to session the section. That meant it was time to re-do it a few times, until she (hopefully) learned how to get over at least this one more rock. Steven and Leo looked at her expectantly, and she turned her bike to wheel it back to the start.

"Ugh, do we have to?" Ali asked. She was feeling more than a little bummed out, and honestly, those rocks seemed impossibly sharp and pointy.

"You're doing great," Leo said. "Just try to get a little bit more oomph when you push the bike forward over this one next time, but don't try to deal over it since you'll bash your pedal on the rock."

Ali nodded. This time, she paused for a moment to remember the jumping competition with Jen and Lindsay. She'd had a great set of jumps on both of her turns, and she ended up doing really well in the competition. And sure, mountain biking wasn't quite the same, but what if she looked at the rocks like they were whoops on a pump track?

Suddenly, the rock garden looked a lot less complicated: She could count eight 'whoops' she would have to clear. "That's the same number as the jump line at Joyride," she reminded herself. "It's all about keeping momentum."



One more deep breath, and she was off, pedaling a little faster towards the rocks. She sailed over the first one, actually feeling her rear wheel go higher over the rock, like she was flying. Quickly, she shifted her weight again so that the front wheel went over the second rock, then the rear wheel again. And instead of letting her bike slow down or pulling on the breaks, she urged it forward as she pushed forward and into the ground. The pump track technique worked: Before she even realized what had happened, she was hitting the brakes not because she was nervous, but because she had gotten through the entire rock garden.

“That was fantastic!” Leo said, sounding a little more shocked than Ali thought he needed to. “Where did you learn to do that?”

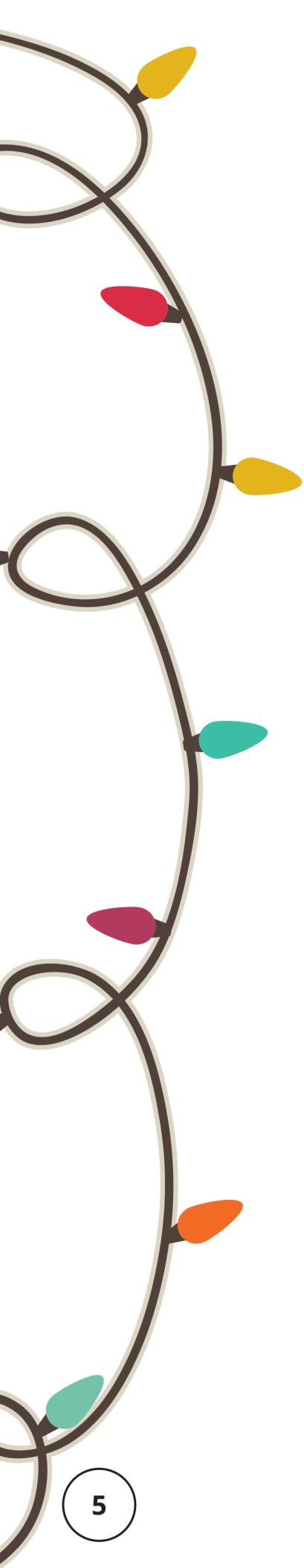
“From the Shred Girls, of course,” Ali said, smugly. And with that, she started pedaling again, this time taking the lead in front of her brothers as they shouted at her to wait up.

LINDSAY

The Joyride bike park was terrifying. Not because Lindsay was struggling with the jumps. She wasn't... at least, not that much. It was just that there were so many people around! Normally, after school was pretty quiet in the park and Lindsay could practice even before the park opened on weekends since her cousin and coach Phoebe worked there. But today, Christmas Eve, it was like a circus, but a lot louder and more colorful.

Still, Joyride was her favorite place to be, and getting to spend the full day with no school, a backpack of comic books to read during breaks between riding sessions, and a few people in the park she knew and liked was not a bad way to spend the day.

There was also pizza for lunch that her mom had preordered for her and Phoebe, so there was that to look forward to. Phoebe's schedule for today's sessions was tougher than usual though: Pump track practice in the morning, then a jump line progression, a pause for some planks and yoga stretching in the staff break room that Lindsay was allowed to hang out in, then a few runs into the



foam pit, a tiny bit more pump track practice, and then finally, a long lunch break for some reading and hopefully some pepperoni, though Phoebe was more likely to put broccoli on the pie instead of Lindsay's favorite toppings. (Still, pizza was pizza.)

The yoga session helped Lindsay reset a little, because honestly, the noise and the waits in line were really starting to get on her nerves. Even though the meditation part at the end of any yoga session was the most annoying part for her usually, when she ran through the video Phoebe sent her, she found the last minute of silence in savasana lying quietly on her mat and breathing deeply was actually really helpful.

But as she stood in line waiting for her turn to practice jumping into the foam pit, launching her bike off a ramp into a pile of foam blocks, she still felt more claustrophobic than usual, despite the fact that the park was the size of 10 huge warehouses stacked together.

"There are so many girls in the park today," a guy ahead of her sneered. He was massive—Hulk-level proportions, and a few years older than Lindsay. She was pretty sure she saw him making fun of some of the smaller guys on the jump line earlier that day and already didn't really like him.

"Yeah, it's annoying," she heard the guy standing behind her in line said, and a couple of the other guys in line laughed. Dave, her kind of boyfriend, was standing off to the side at the end of the foam pit, camera in hand. Lindsay looked at him, trying to send a superhero-level telepathic message of "should I pick a fight with these guys?"

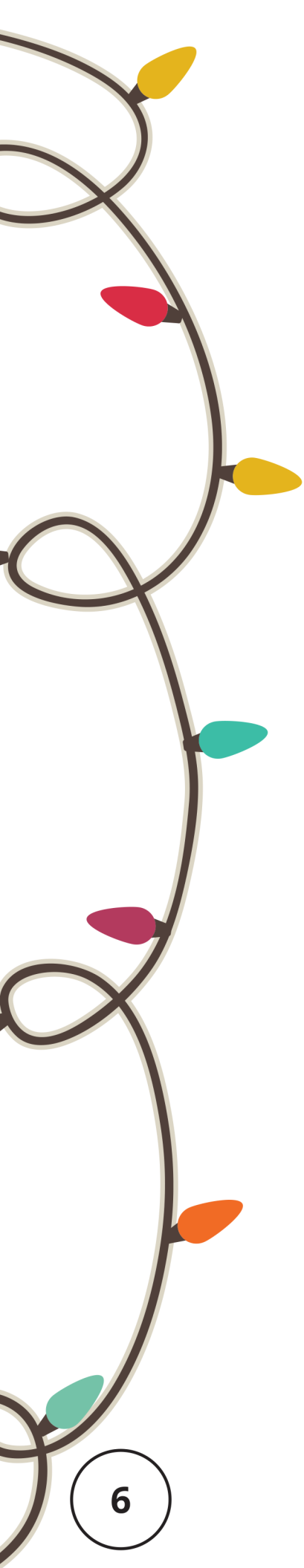
Maybe her superpowers were finally kicking in, or Dave just knew how to read her moods, because he violently shook his head, and mouthed, "Ignore them," back to her.

"Ignore them," Lindsay muttered. "What if I show them instead?"

Again, like her thoughts were transmitting loud and clear, Dave started shaking his head again.

She saw him say something to Matt, the park owner who was walking by. Matt stopped, and also shook his head.

"I'm doing it," Lindsay mouthed back.



Not since she was chasing down Sam, the villain from the last summer who'd stolen the golden bike frame competition prize, had she tried this trick. And sure, she hadn't repeated it since then because frankly, it was a scary trick the first time and she still wasn't entirely sure how she did it.

Since that day when she chased him into the foam pit, launching off the ramp and doing a superman-styled jump with both legs flared out to the side as her bike seamlessly flicked out to the right as her body went left, then came back under her so that she rode into the foam pit, she'd never so much as attempted the same trick.

Honestly, she still dreamt about it a lot though.

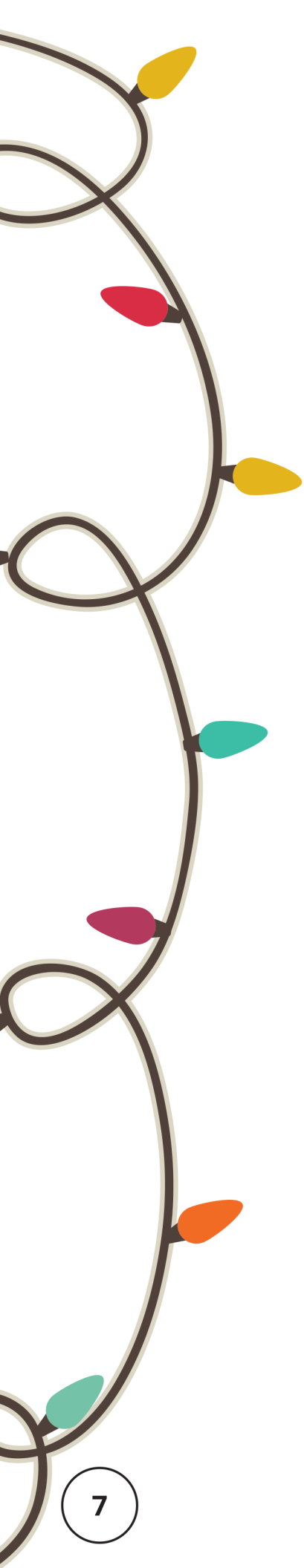
The guy ahead of her rolled down the ramp and hit the foam pit with an unimpressive amount of air. He stood up and put both arms above his head. "That was SICK!" he yelled. Then, he looked at her. "Good luck," he said sarcastically as he heaved himself out of the foam pit and onto the ledge.

Something in Lindsay snapped a little. Her face turned bright red and her heart sped up, beating faster and angrier. And then, she smiled—a little sharky, and if the big lug in front of her had looked closer, he would have been terrified. She'd practiced her intimidation face in the mirror—Wonder Woman attitude with a hint of Batman's scariness.

With Matt and Dave both slightly covering their eyes (though Lindsay could see that Dave was still holding his phone up to record what happened), she steadied herself over the bike. "For the Shred Girls," she muttered to herself, before pushing off with her right foot and taking three firm pedal strokes to hit the ramp with some speed.

The ground rushed towards her and she practically flew over the flat section before hitting the ramp up up up into the foam pit. She did fly then, getting propelled eight feet in the air up and over the foam.

Time slowed to a crawl and Lindsay felt unstoppable, and utterly calm. Her feet left the pedals. They swung left, then all the way over to right, and then, her feet reconnected with the pedals just in time to hit the foam.



She barely had time to pop her head up before she heard Dave and Mark cheering. "That was AWESOME," Dave shouted. "Lindsay, when did you learn to do that on both sides?"

She hoisted herself out of the foam pit and onto the ledge. "I didn't," she admitted sheepishly. "I was just so angry."

The big guy who went before her walked over, towered at least a foot over her. "I owe you an apology," he said, looking sheepish. "Got any pointers for me?"

"One," Lindsay said. "Never assume girls can't ride bikes."

And with that, she rolled over to Dave. "Ready for another lap of the pump track?" she asked.

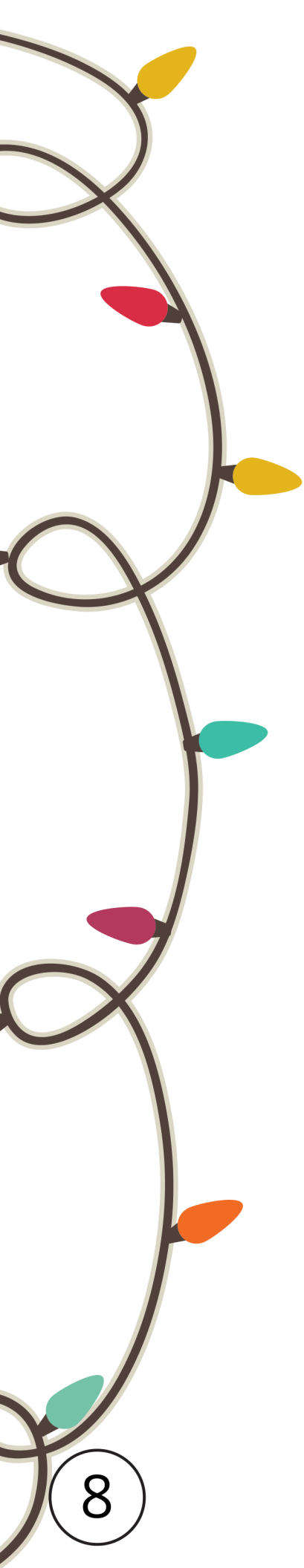
"You're my hero," Dave said earnestly.

"That's the whole point," Lindsay replied. "I just wish I had my whole team with me to really show these guys what Shred Girls can do."

JEN

In Hawaii, Jen should have been having the time of her life with her mom and dad—after all, the island vacation was a big part of her Christmas present, and they even let her bring her road bike so she could train again. And last year, when she had the time to ride for miles around the hotel loop by herself, or just following her dad on some of the longer climbs up mountains in the area, she has a great time. She could push and push and do tons of training so that when the spring race season came, she'd be the fittest one in town and crush the competition at races.

But something felt wrong this trip. Instead of happily spinning in circles thinking about all the different ways she could hold up her arms in celebration of a win this summer, Jen was thinking about having all-you-can-eat enchilada night with Lindsay and Ali and watching a movie together, or the time Phoebe made them all do planks until they could barely hold them without collapsing (Ali did dramatically collapse, actually, but it was funnier than it sounds). Most of all, she was thinking about how much she missed riding with friends like Ali and Lindsay.



Pedaling solo suddenly felt almost... boring. Even her favorite visualization of her winning national championships and crossing the line with her hands in the air (she really needed to work on no-handed pedaling!) wasn't making her feel excited.

She was so stuck in her own thoughts as she pedaled around the mile-loop behind her hotel where her dad told her to do her laps that she didn't even notice him riding up behind her until he was totally caught up. She almost ran into him, she was so startled.

"You look like you're thinking deep thoughts," he said, grinning. She smiled back—her dad was the one who got her her first bike and took her on her first ride... and signed her up for her first race. Sure, he also told her she had to take a break from racing after she threw that temper tantrum last summer and she really was mad at him for that, but after talking about it with Ali and Lindsay over the summer, it kind of made sense. Her dad, really, was kind of her best friend (along with the Shred Girls, of course).

"I was just thinking that I wish my friends were around to ride with," Jen admitted.

"I'm really glad you met those girls," her dad replied. "It's great that you miss them."

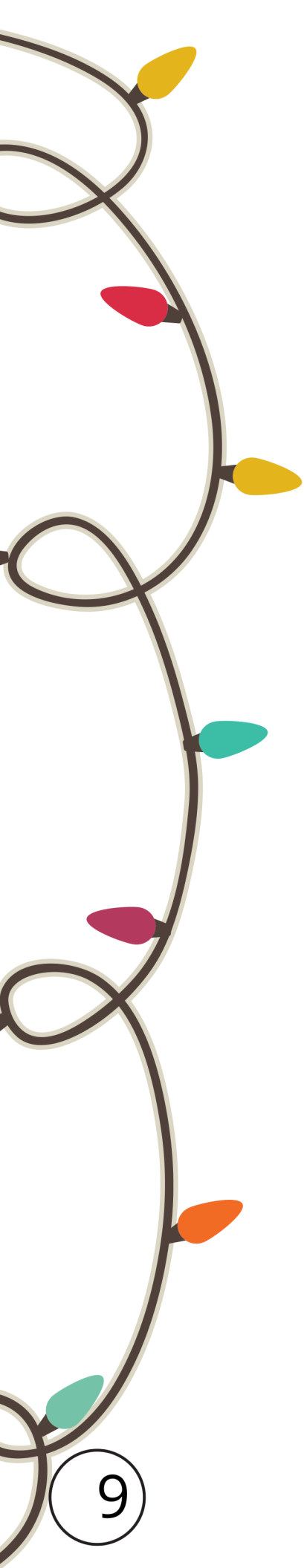
"No it's not," Jen burst out. "It's horrible! I can't even focus on winning!"

"Honey, that's great!" her dad said gently. "It's good that your friends make you think that spending time with them is more fun than winning any one bike race."

Jen sniffed a little. "Oh yeah? How?"

"Well, remember the last race you did at home that didn't go so well?"

Jen nods, remembering accidentally thinking she had won a race only to get out-sprinted at the line by another girl. So, so, so embarrassing, and even more embarrassing was how mad she got at the finish. She actually knocked her bike over. In fact, looking down, she can still see the scratch in its otherwise perfect paint job from where it clattered to the ground.



"I bet you that if you had been racing with your friends in the field, it would have been a lot easier to get over losing a race, if you'd had them at the finish line with you, right?"

Jen thought about it. If she'd finished second and had been that humiliated, but Ali and Lindsay had rolled in behind her, or had been there watching, how would she have reacted? Ali would have told her that it stunk that she got beat, but still high fives her, no matter how she finished. Lindsay, Jen knew, would have instantly been there to hug her and tell her that it was alright and that second place was still awesome.

And Phoebe, the Shred Girls coach and Lindsay's cousin, would have been there and told her that she did a great job of handling herself with dignity if she had smiled and congratulated the other girl—Phoebe wouldn't put up with a finish line temper tantrum, that's for sure!

"I guess it would have been better," Jen admits.

"I'm so glad you made friends with the Shred Girls," her dad says. "Now, race you home!" he says as he takes off heading for the hotel.

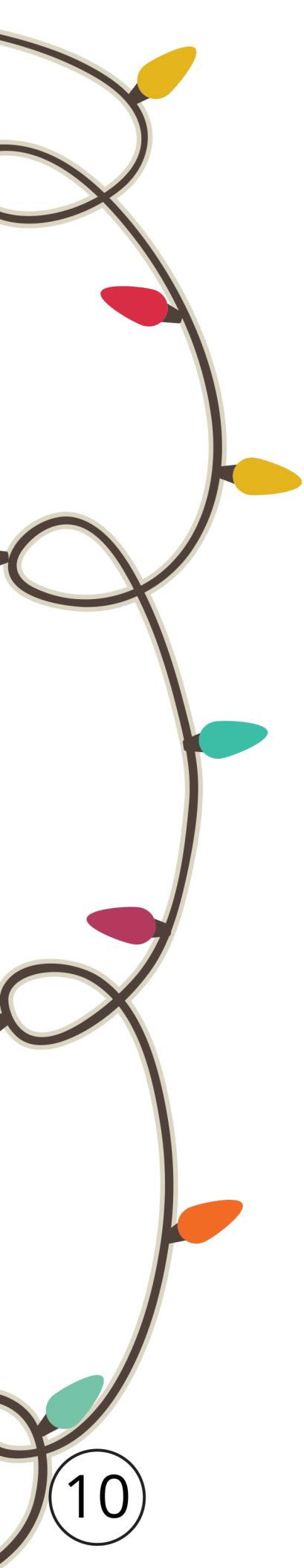
"No fair!" Jen shouts, as she stands up on her pedals to get more speed as she chases him down, laughing the rest of the way. It doesn't even make her mad that they tie for the finish.

The hotel has a big Christmas Eve dinner for the guests that evening, and Jen's in a much better mood when she sits down with her mom and dad at the table in her favorite purple maxi dress that matches the purple streak in her hair perfectly.

But when the dinner is served and there's fried ice cream for dessert, her mind goes instantly back to making sundaes with Ali and Lindsay (and adding way too much chocolate syrup) and she wishes they were here. "Maybe next year, we can have Christmas at home and have Ali and Lindsay visit for a few days instead?" she says to her parents.

"But won't you miss getting to train on your bike somewhere warm in December?" her mom asks.

"I'd rather be with my friends," Jen says, and her dad smiles and gives her a thumbs up.



"You'll see them soon, I promise," he says.

And as she climbed into bed later that night, Jen looked up at the ceiling and whispered, "For Christmas, I wish the Shred Girls were here."

Miles and miles away, as she turned out her light, Ali grabbed her phone to add a final note to her daily training app: 'For Christmas, I wish Lindsay and Jen replaced my brothers.'

And just before she went to bed, Lindsay added one more thing to her Superhero Training Log: 'For Christmas, I wish I had my friends around.'

Christmas Morning

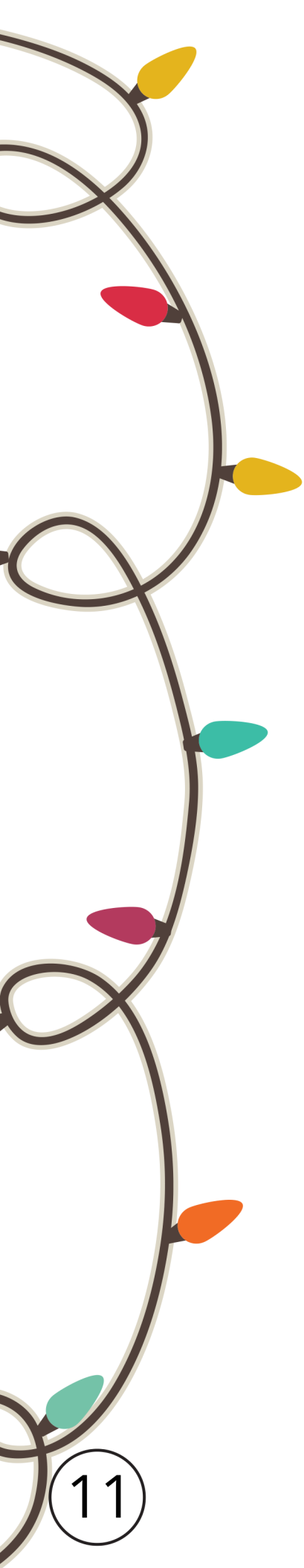
When Lindsay woke up on Christmas morning, she sprang out of bed—and almost tripped over the box that was waiting right next to her prized BMX bike. It was labeled 'from Santa, to The Shred Girls.' She tore off the wrapping paper, not feeling the least bit guilty that she wasn't waiting for her parents to wake up. After all, Santa left it in her room, just for her.

In the box, there was an iPad—her own iPad, actually—with a sticky note that said 'open Skype at 8AM.' It was nestled on top of another small box, that was wrapped with a post-it that read 'Open me at 8:05.'

"Freaky," Lindsay muttered to herself, and briefly debated if this was some kind of evil, villainous plot. She couldn't figure out how her turning on an iPad could possibly cause an evil genius to take over the world, though, so she turned on the screen and hit Skype to open it. An unfamiliar number popped up calling her almost immediately.

"Weird and weirder," she said, and hit Accept. Her video popped on, and for a second, she was afraid to even look. What if a supervillain actually had taken her family ransom? But instead of shrieks for help, she was greeted with shrieks of joy coming out of the screen.

It was Ali and Jen! Not together—two smaller windows popped up with each of them on screen, both in their pajamas.



Ali's red hair was sticking up in all directions, and her red flannel pajamas looked cozy. Perfect for a Christmas in the mountains at home. Jen, on the other hand, somehow managed to look like a fashionista, as always, in a red tank top and red and green streaks of hair throughout her blond braid.

"It's you!" Lindsay shouted. "Merry Christmas!! I missed you!"

"I missed you too," Jen shouts back, her face breaking out in a huge grin.

"Me too!" said Ali, looking over her shoulder. "I was wishing for the Shred Girls for Christmas instead of my brothers, and it worked!"

"At least you have your brothers," Jen sighed. "I was riding by myself yesterday. Well, by myself until my dad came to hang out with me. But it's not quite the same."

"I know what you mean," Lindsay said. "I was at Joyride yesterday and it's much more fun to show what girls can do on bikes when we're all there together."

"But you still managed to show that guy up," Ali said. Lindsay looked surprised.

"Dave posted it on his Instagram," Jen said, rolling her eyes. "So cheesy."

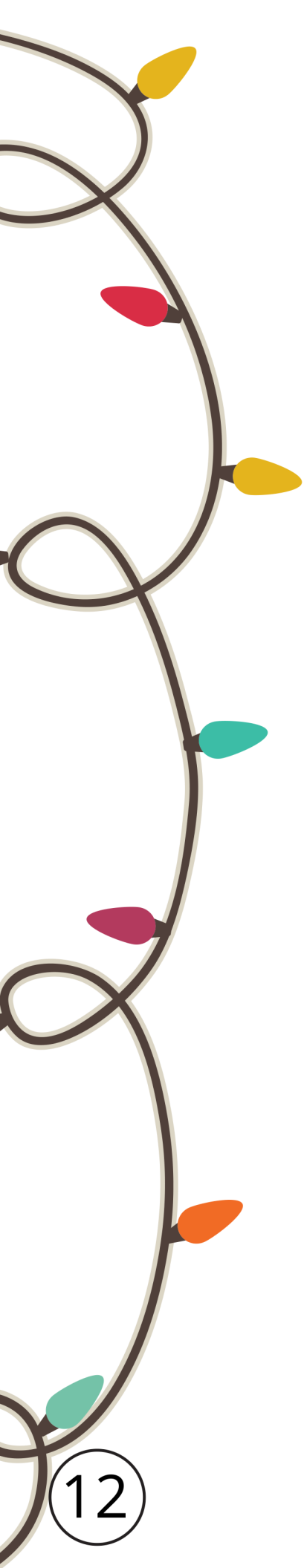
"But so cool!" Ali added.

"That too," Jen admitted, laughing a little.

"I can't wait for our next adventure though," Lindsay said. "I feel like it's been years since I've seen you and I've learned so many new tricks!"

"Same here," Jen said. "Once I got home and dad got me a mountain bike, I finally figured out how to do a bunnyhop! It's a lot less scary with bigger tires than it was trying to do one on my road bike," she added.

"We should have a backyard bike practice with our phones together someday!" Ali suggested. "We could set up our cameras like this and show each other our new tricks, so it's kind of like we're practicing together."



"That's a genius idea!" Lindsay said, and Jen nodded along too.

"Hey—I just realized something. Did you get boxes to open, too?" Jen asked.

Ali and Jen nodded, and both held them up.

"Well, we know they aren't bikes," Ali said. "But it looks like they're all the same."

"OK, let's open them. On the count of three," says Lindsay. "One."

"Two," says Ali.

"Three!" shouts Jen, and they all tear into the boxes.

Jen neatly started to pick the tape on hers to open it on the seams, while Ali tugged the paper off with a loud ripping noise. Lindsay was somewhere in between, and managed to pull the very tightly wound ribbon off the fastest. They held three small jewelry boxes.

"I don't need jewelry, I need a new bike chain!" Lindsay said, looking almost disappointed. But when the three opened their boxes, she instantly broke into a big smile.

Three matching bracelets engraved with SHRED GIRLS on the plaque glistened in boxes, and there was a tiny note wound up underneath it. "Shred Girls are always together, no matter where they are," Ali read.

"I love it," Jen said, already fastening hers on.

"It's true," Lindsay said. "I was just thinking how much I missed you two, but every time I ride, I'm always thinking about what Jen would do, or what advice Ali would give me."

"I kind of forgot about that," Jen admitted, looking at her bracelet and back at the screen. "But I won't forget it again."

"Me too," Ali said. "In fact, I was thinking about that just yesterday—Steven was trying to teach me how to handle a rock garden and I couldn't get it, but then when I thought about what I would do on a pump track with you both, I could clear all the rocks!"

"But Ali, Lindsay—if you two didn't plan this surprise for us, who do you think did set it up?" Ali asked.

"Santa?" said Lindsay, a little nervously—she didn't want to sound like a big baby, but who else would have made this happen?

Jen nods. "That's definitely one explanation."

"I think it was Santa," said Lindsay stubbornly. "And I think that it means that we're a great team—like the Justice League!"

"I get to be Wonder Woman," laughs Jen.

"Of course you do," says Ali, but laughs as well.

"I can't wait to practice with you both again soon," Lindsay said. "But I can hear mom and dad downstairs, so I should probably go."

"I'm pretty sure if I don't get downstairs, Leo's going to steal my presents," Ali added.

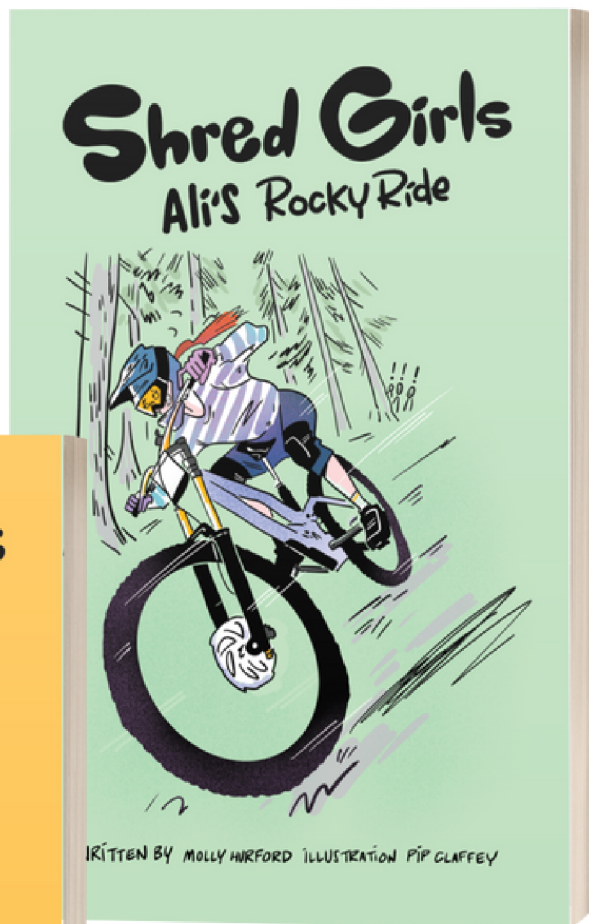
"Let's talk again soon, though," Jen said. "Hands in?"

Giggling, the girls all aimed their hands at the camera screen, then counted, "One, two, three..."

"SHRED GIRLS!"



**HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM LINDSAY, ALI, JEN
(+ MOLLY)**



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