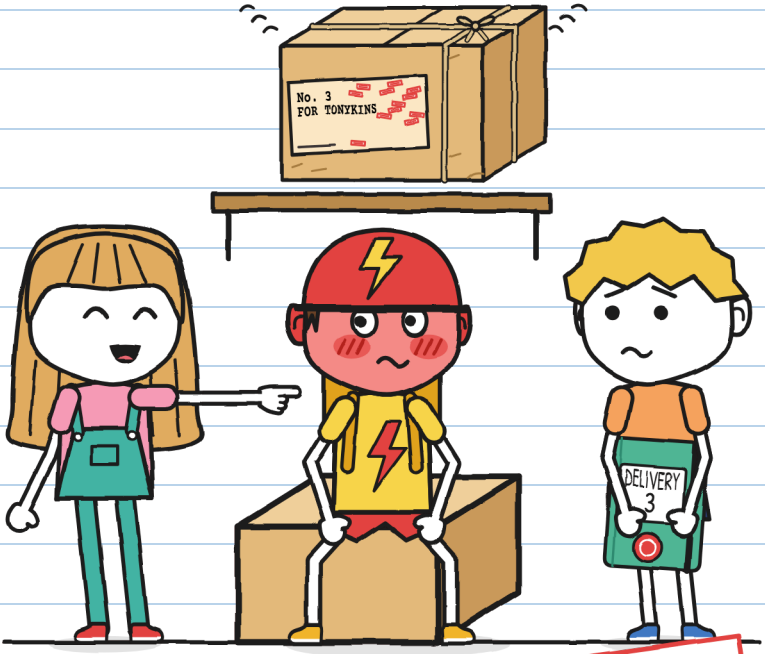
IMPOSSIBLE DELIVERIES · 3

Return to Sender, Please

Lui Eriksson



(Gus's notebook)

SIZE L
Advanced Level · 11+

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Return to Sender, Please

Text and illustrations: Lui Eriksson

SIZE L · Advanced level · 11+

US English version: LinguAula

First edition: 2026

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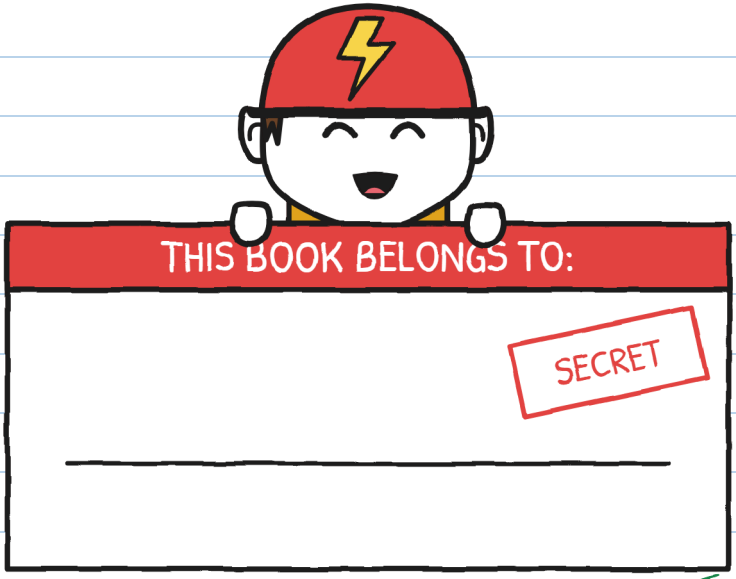
Free to photocopy, for class and for home.

Third book. Earlier: "This Package Bites" and "Do Not Open Before Thunder."

LinguAula

Work through every chapter at linguaula.com

No courier was harmed here. Red-faced, yes. —J.



And I read it first. –J.

If you find it, return it. Please.

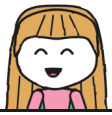


This stamp marks what only happens in the story: real packages don't fly back. With a real bike, page 76 rules. –J.

WHO'S WHO



Gus. Saturday courier. Draws things nobody asked for. This notebook is his.



Julie. Writes in green and signs J. Always knows how to help. That's the problem.



Tony. Rides for LIGHTNING. Ten minutes or it's free. Turns red in parts.



Mara. Owner of Impossible Deliveries. Wears a witch's hat. Knows more than she says.



Zoe. From LIGHTNING. The fastest. Gives out nicknames.



Bruno. From LIGHTNING. Got a puncture once. Two years ago.



Package No. 3. Rings when it's moved. The label only has a name on it.

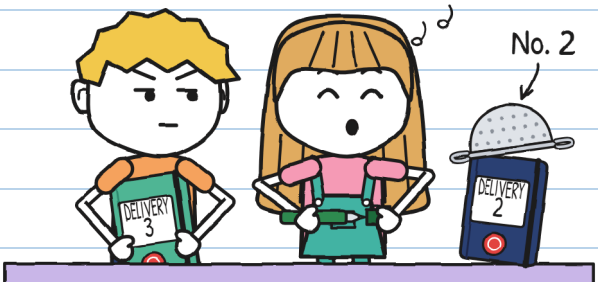


R. Sends the packages nobody can deliver. Nobody says R.'s name.

DELIVERY NOTEBOOK 3
by Gus

SECRET.

"Secret" means I read it first. And I don't tell anyone. –J.



Notebook 2 ran out on me in a single storm. This one is green, and it has the shop's stamp as well. I was going to christen it. Julie christened it.

Christened it to help you. You're welcome. –J.

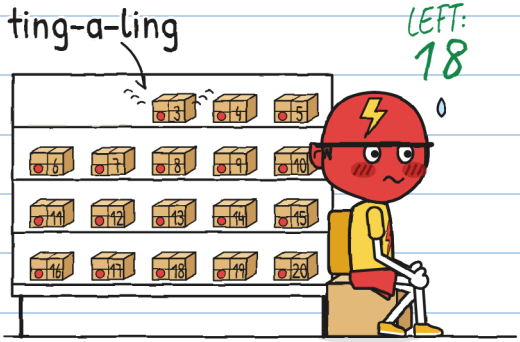
I hadn't asked for help. With Julie, that doesn't matter.

CHAPTER 1

Ting-a-ling

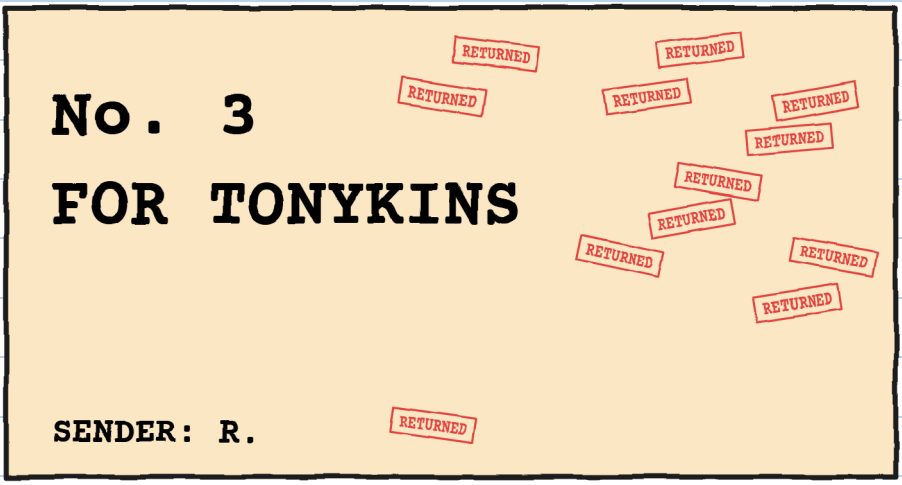
In Mara's shop there's a shelf with the packages nobody has managed to deliver. There were twenty. Julie and I have delivered two: a dragon egg and some seeds that ran. Eighteen are left.

On the night of the storm, when we were about to go home, one of them rang.
Ting-a-ling.



It was No. 3. Tony, who delivers for LIGHTNING in ten minutes or it's free, turned the color of his helmet.

The returns are packages that always come back: unless whoever receives them signs the label in ink that doesn't come off, they fly back to their shelf at dawn. One person sends them all: R.



Julie started to read the label:
"For To..."
And she closed her mouth. Julie never stops halfway through a word. I looked at Tony and understood why.

I read half of it. The other half I swallowed. —J.

Some people turn red all at once. Not Tony: Tony turns red in parts. I wrote it down.

TONY'S REDOMETER



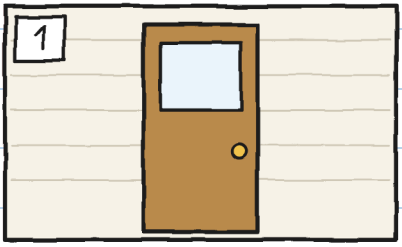
"That package can wait," said Tony, very quickly. "It's been waiting for years, hasn't it? So one more day. Or ten. LIGHTNING is in no hurry."
It was the first time I had ever heard LIGHTNING say that.

That night: 4. I would have written it down in red. I only have green. —J.

"Nothing gets opened tonight," said Mara. "And nobody touches the shelf without permission."
Nobody touched it. And then it rang again.
Ting-a-ling.
"It was the door!" said Julie.

When I don't understand something, I make a list.

TING-A-LING SUSPECTS



the door



Tony's bike



the rubber frog



No. 3

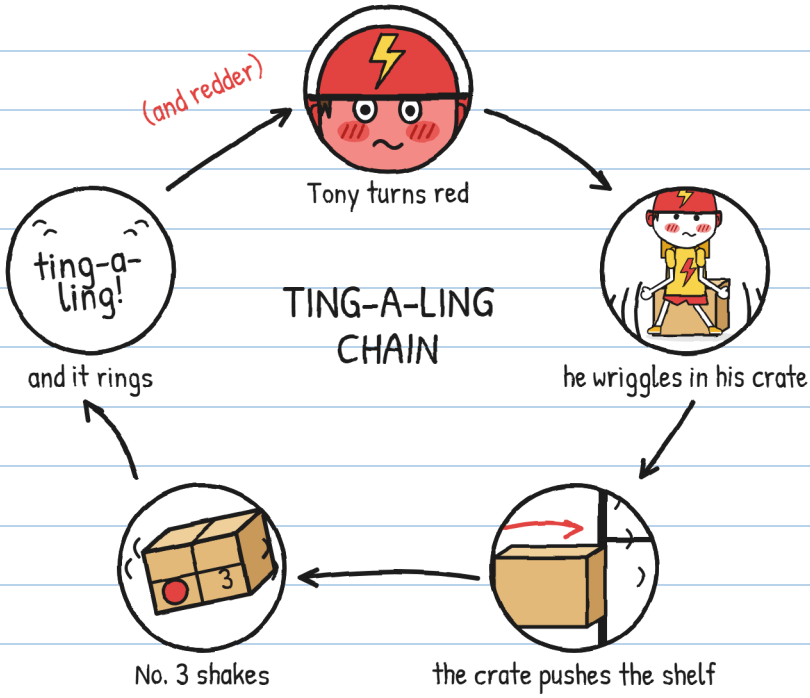
The frog is innocent. I know her. —J.

I went out onto the sidewalk to check. It had stopped raining.
I opened and closed the door: eeek. I rang Tony's bike bell: BRRRING! I squeezed the frog: squeak.



Inside, Julie was wagging her finger at me: no. It was none of them.
I went back in. Tony wriggled in his crate.
Ting-a-ling.

I crouched down. Tony's crate was leaning against the leg of the shelf.



It wasn't magic. It was Tony.
Inside No. 3 there's something that rings when it's moved.

Like me. –J.

Tony decided to keep still. It lasted this long:

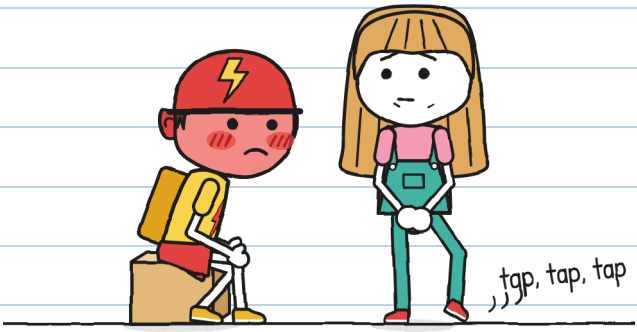


It was only a question. Questions don't push shelves. —J.

This one did.

"It was me," said Tony, looking down at his sneakers. "When I was little."
He said it so quietly that the frog heard it better than I did.

Julie opened her mouth. I could see the questions lining up. Then she looked at Tony, who was still looking down at his sneakers, and closed it.

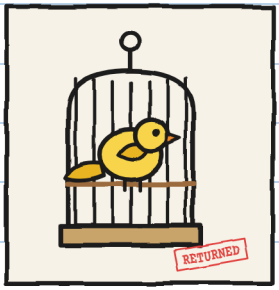


"I won't ask anymore," she said.
It cost her. You could tell by her foot.

Questions I didn't ask: nine. I've written them down. —J.

"And why have you never taken it to him?" I asked Mara.
"Twelve times I've taken it. Look at the label: no street, no house number, no surname. I tried every Tonykins I could find."

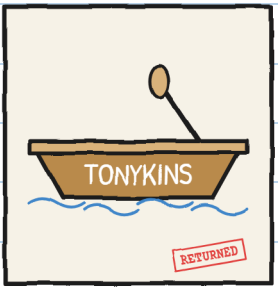
MARA'S TONYKINS



1. A canary.
(Stepped on the label. No good.)



2. Don Antonio, 71 years old.
("I wish.")



3. A boat on the canal.
(It has no hands.)

"What about Tony?" asked Julie.
"The last time I tried, I didn't know him yet," said Mara, and looked at him. "And nobody told me what they called him when he was little."

Mara pulled a purple cloth from under the counter and covered No. 3, the way you cover a parrot's cage so it will sleep. Then she moved Tony's crate two handspans away from the shelf.

"There. Now you can move as much as you like."



Tony could have left. His bike was at the door: in ten minutes he would have been at the other end of the neighborhood.

He sat down again.

I don't know why. I'm writing it down anyway. And since his crate has no backrest, I've drawn him one.

Nobody asked you for a backrest. —J.

At closing time, Tony stayed behind, buckling his helmet.
"Mara. Tomorrow I'll come and talk about that. But in private."
"These two belong to the shop."
Tony looked at us.
"These two, fine. But nobody from LIGHTNING."



The ting-a-ling had an owner now. What we didn't know was whether the owner wanted it.

I already know how to help him. —J.

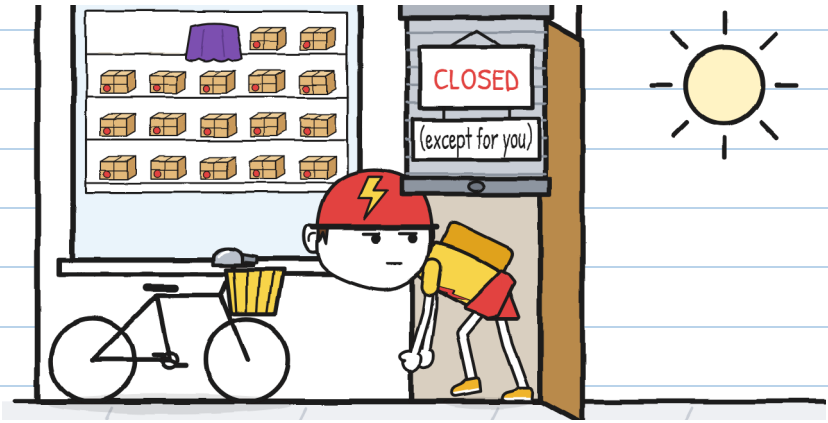
That's what worries me.

CHAPTER 2

I Didn't Say Yes

On Sundays the shop doesn't open. Mara left the shutter halfway up and hung a sign: CLOSED (except for you).

Tony arrived at eleven. Before going in, he looked one way along the street and then the other, like when you're about to cross. Nobody from LIGHTNING was coming.



We got there at half past ten. Just in case. —J.

Mara put No. 3 on the counter, took off the cloth and spoke as if she were reading a sign:
"Package number three. For Tonykins. Is that you?"
"It was."
"Good enough. Do you want it?"

Tony looked at the box. The box said nothing.
"I didn't say yes."
"You didn't say no, either."
"I said that I didn't say yes."



Three sentences to avoid signing. I counted them. —J.

Tony grabbed the box the way you grab a pot that's scorching hot. He weighed it. He turned it over. He held it up to his ear and shook it a tiny bit.
Ting-a-ling.
He let go of it fast.

"What if he takes it home?" said Julie. "If the package sleeps at the house of whoever receives it, it's already delivered. It's only logical."
"The return stamp doesn't work by logic," said Mara. "It works by ink."

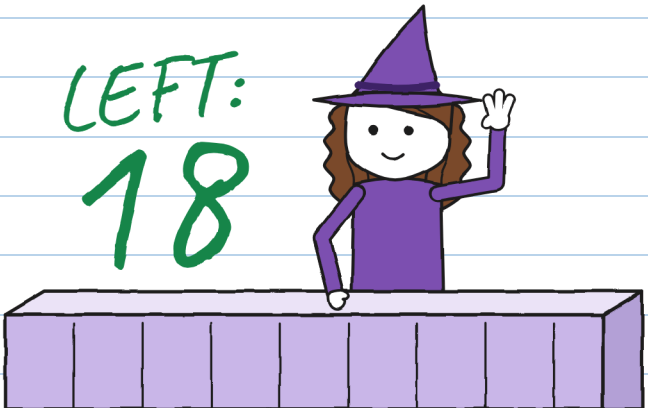
DOES IT COUNT AS DELIVERY?		
	Looking at it	NO
	Grabbing it	NO
	Taking it home	NO
	Signing the label in ink that doesn't come off	YES

The stamp and I don't think alike. —J.

"This delivery is yours," Mara told Julie and me, "like the thunder one. With three conditions."
She counted them off on her fingers:

1. You two don't open the box. And the label stays stuck on.
2. No. 3 leaves the shop only when Tony asks for it.
3. Whoever receives it signs, if they want to. If they don't, the package comes back at dawn, and nothing has happened here.

"And if he never wants to?" asked Julie.
"Then never."



"Never" isn't a delivery deadline. —J.

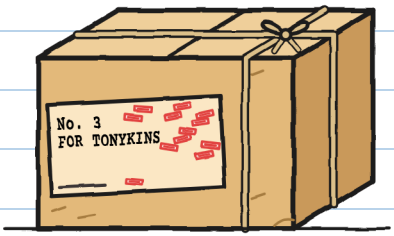
Tony was quiet for a long time. Julie timed it: four minutes. For LIGHTNING, almost half a delivery.

"I'll take it," he said at last. "Closed. To think about. For now."
"Are you asking for it?" asked Mara.
"I'm asking for it."

I wrote down how it left, so that nobody could say otherwise:

DEPARTURE FORM

- [x] Box: closed
- [x] Label: stuck on
- [x] Asked for by: Tony
- [ ] Signature: not yet



Outside, Tony put No. 3 in his bike basket. As he let go of it, it rang: ting-a-ling.

He stood looking at the handlebars, where he keeps the LIGHTNING bell, as if he had just remembered something.
"What?" asked Julie.
"Nothing."
He walked off, pushing his bike. Tony never walks.



That "nothing" was a "something." We have to help him. —J.

From the door I saw two LIGHTNING bikes stopped at the corner.
"Tony! What have you got in your basket?" shouted a girl with a braid down to her waist.
"A delivery."
"Who for?"
"For a customer."

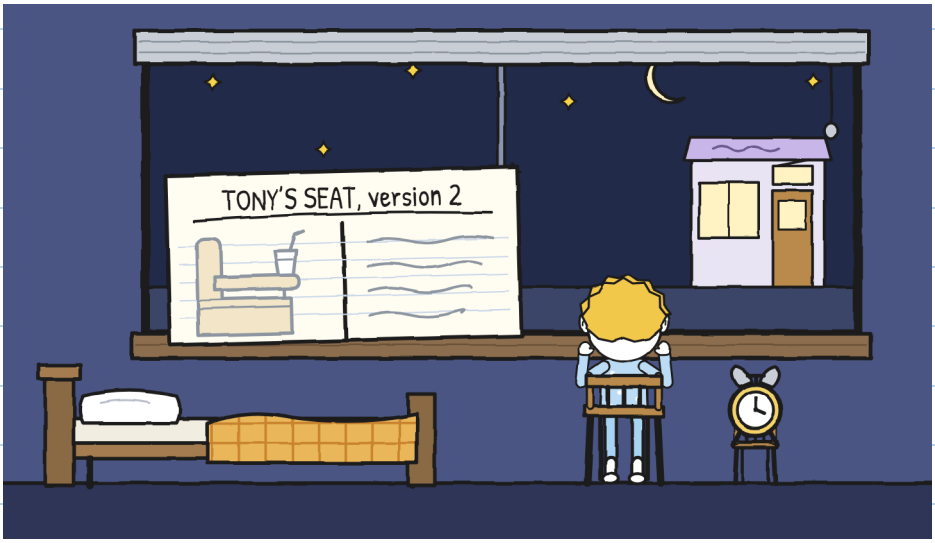
He didn't lie. But before answering, he turned the box so that the label faced him.



Now I understand "nobody from LIGHTNING." —J.

That night I left my bedroom shade up. I live across the street from the shop: if No. 3 came back, I was going to see it.

"Gus?" said my mom from the hallway. "Why are you awake?"
"I'm watching a package."
"Oh. Well. But watch it with your pajamas on."



I wanted to keep watch too. My window looks onto a yard. —J.

At dawn it was heard before it was seen.

Ting-a-ling, ting-a-ling, ting-a-ling.

It came over the rooftops, unhurried, sounding like the ice cream truck. Three windows lit up. A dog barked. No. 3 slipped in through the little window above the door, the one Mara leaves open for that.

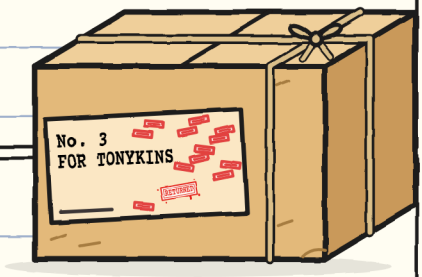


After school we went to the shop. No. 3 was on its shelf. It had one more stamp: thirteen.

RETURNS OF NO. 3

No. 13 Monday, at dawn ringing

we heard it: my mom, half the neighborhood, the dog at number 4 and me



"It's not a punishment," said Mara. "It's the rule. Nobody has signed: it comes back."

Thirteen stamps. At this rate you won't be able to see the box. —J.

Tony came at twenty past five, after his route. He didn't ask whether it had come back: he had heard it go over his house.

I didn't see this. He told me himself:

WHAT TONY TOLD ME



"I left it on the doormat. All night."
"And why didn't you take it inside?" asked Julie.
"There are enough people at home who call me that already."

"One signature would have fixed everything," said Julie when Tony left. "One. It takes two seconds. I've timed it with mine."

I opened the notebook and wrote with a pen, pressing hard, so that the green couldn't cover it:



I've read it. I don't agree. For now. –J.

I have another idea. Don't look at me like that. –J.

CHAPTER 3

Autographs

On Tuesday, coming out of school, I found a table on the sidewalk in front of the shop. It had a yellow tablecloth that reached the floor, a sign in Julie's writing and, in the middle, a lump under the tablecloth.



"It's a lectern," said Julie. "To make signing more comfortable. I'm putting together an autograph collection."

"Since when do you collect autographs?"

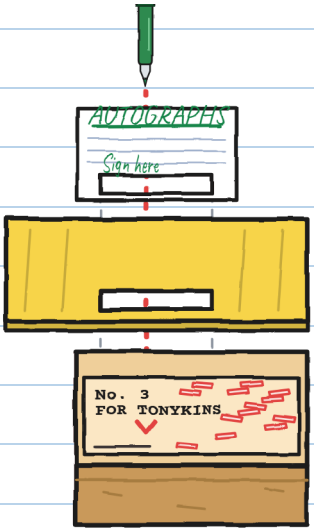
"Since yesterday."

On top of the lectern there was a lined sheet. At the bottom, a box. Or so it seemed: it was a little window cut out with scissors. The tablecloth had another one just like it, right underneath.
I lifted a corner. The lectern was No. 3, lying flat, with its label facing up.

HOW IT WORKS

1. The sheet, with its little window.

2. The tablecloth, with its hole.

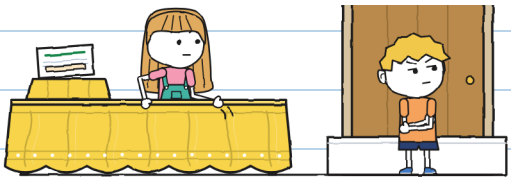


3. The label of No. 3, on the part that's blank.
4. Whoever signs in the little window... signs the label.

"With my marker," whispered Julie, delighted. "Ink that doesn't come off. Tomorrow it won't come back, and he won't even know until we show him. Surprise!"

"Tony hasn't asked for it to leave the shop," I said.
"Condition two."
"He'll thank us."
"And Mara?"
"She was on the phone. I told her it's an autograph table. And it is."
"And the lectern?"
"She hasn't asked me about that."

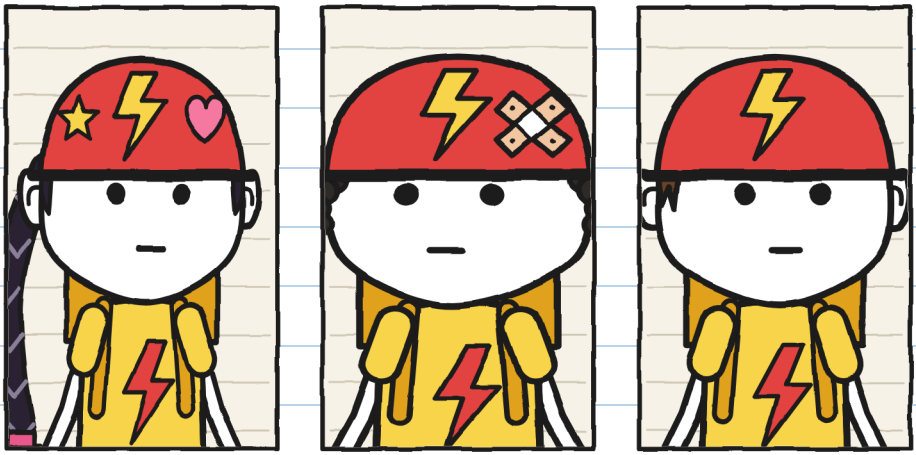
I reminded her of Flora and the eighth seed: Julie hadn't let Flora sign too early.
"It's not the same. That was a half-finished delivery. This is a shortcut."
"Then you do it. I won't."



He sat on the step. Very dignified. He didn't help at all. —J.

LIGHTNING comes down our street at ten past five. There are three of them, in a line.

LIGHTNING STAFF CARDS



ZOE, "Rocket":
the fastest.
Gives out nicknames.

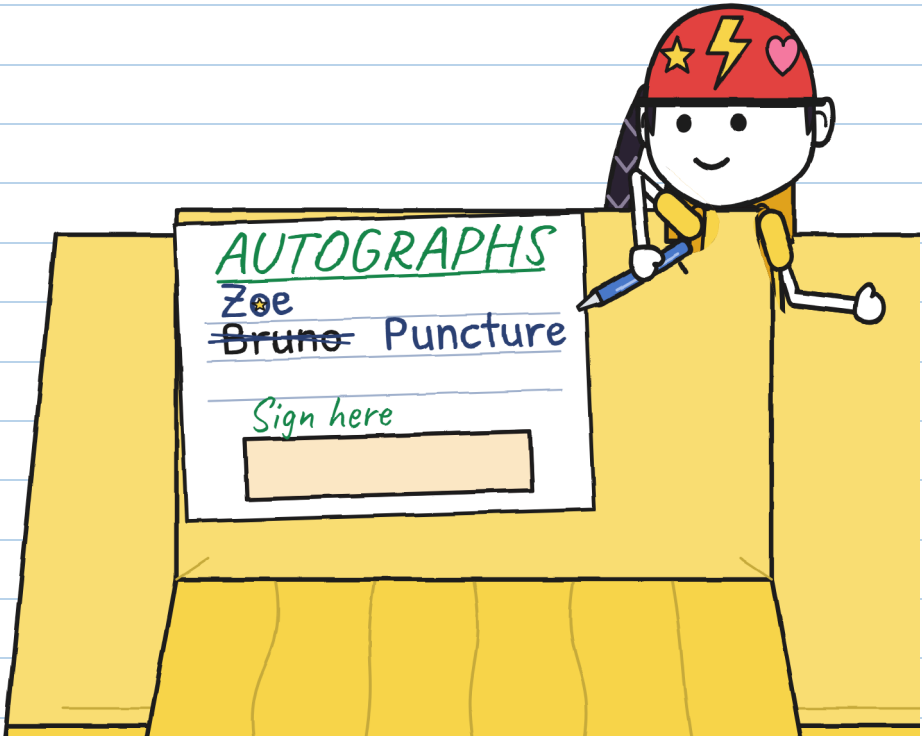
BRUNO, "Puncture":
got a puncture once.
Two years ago.

TONY:
no nickname.
Not yet.

"Autographs? Ours?" said Zoe. She braked and got off her bike.

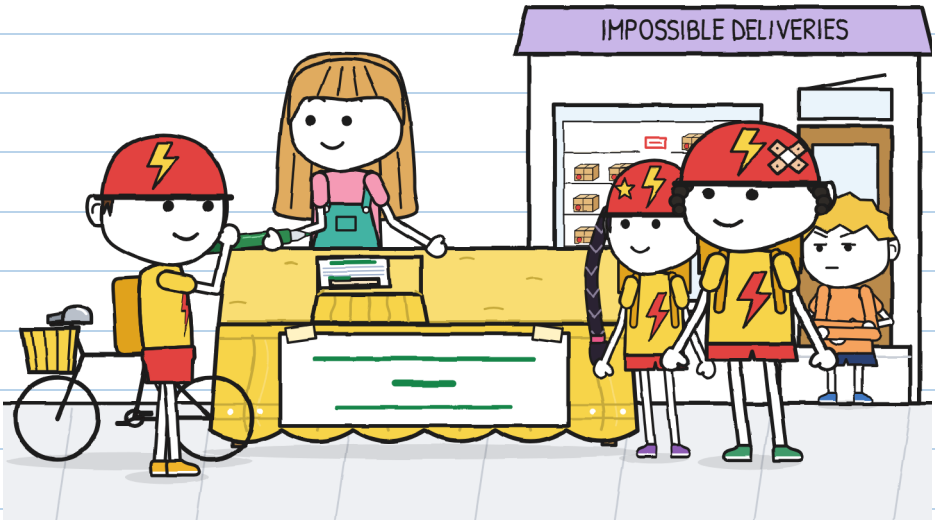
Nobody had ever asked them for an autograph. That's why it works. —J.

Zoe signed first, with a star in the o. Bruno wrote "Bruno." Zoe crossed it out and put "Puncture." "At LIGHTNING, nicknames stick," Bruno explained, without getting mad. "I got a puncture once."



Tony hadn't gotten off his bike. He was looking at the table the same way he had looked at No. 3 on Sunday.

"Your turn, Tony," said Julie. "Down here, in the box.
It's the place of honor."
And she gave him her green marker.
Nobody had ever asked Tony for an autograph before.
He got off his bike and stood up straight.



I watched it all from the step, my mouth full of "it's none of my business."

I stood up.

"Tony, wai..."

I was too late. Tony yanked the lectern toward him to sign and, under the tablecloth, something spoke before I did:



Tony lifted the tablecloth.

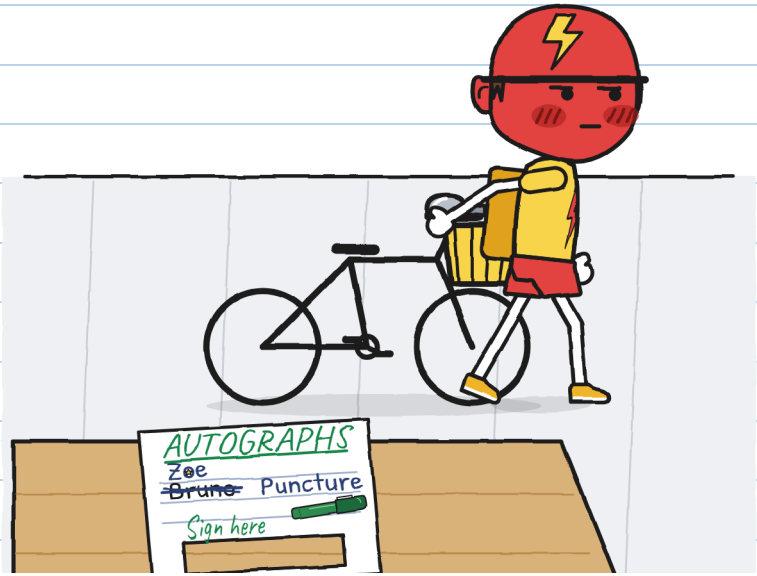


"For To-ny-kins," read Zoe, slowly, as if reading out a prize.

"Tonykins?" said Bruno, and laughed.

Zoe didn't laugh. Zoe was thinking.

Tony didn't shout. He put the cap back on the marker, slowly, and left it on the sheet. Unsigned.
"LIGHTNING doesn't sign traps."
He took hold of his bike by the handlebars and walked off. Nobody went after him.



He was the color of his helmet. But it wasn't the red of embarrassment. It was a different one.

The redometer has no number for that one. —J.

Mara came out with the purple cloth. She didn't ask who had done it: she looked at the gap on the shelf, looked at the table and looked at Julie.
She covered No. 3 and picked it up in her arms.
"This package hasn't been delivered," she told Zoe and Bruno. "And what the label says is up to Tony."



They left without ringing their bells.

I helped Julie clear up: the tablecloth, the sign, the sheet with two signatures and a hole. I didn't say "I told you so." I didn't say "it doesn't matter" either, because it did.

"You didn't do anything," she said.

"I warned him late. I could have said it sooner. Or called Mara."

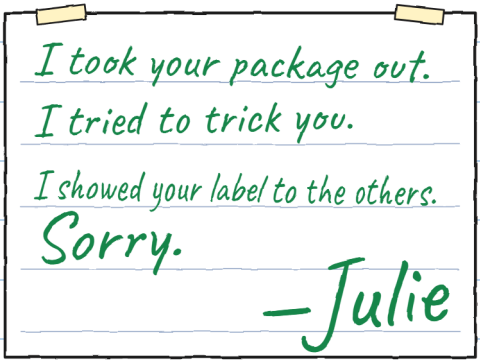


Then Julie went in and told Mara by herself, leaving nothing out: the little window, the tablecloth, the shelf, the phone.

"Tony," said Mara, "you'll tell him yourself."

On Wednesday Tony went by at ten past five and didn't slow down. At twenty past five he went by again. The third time, Julie was standing in the middle of the sidewalk with a piece of paper.

THE APOLOGY



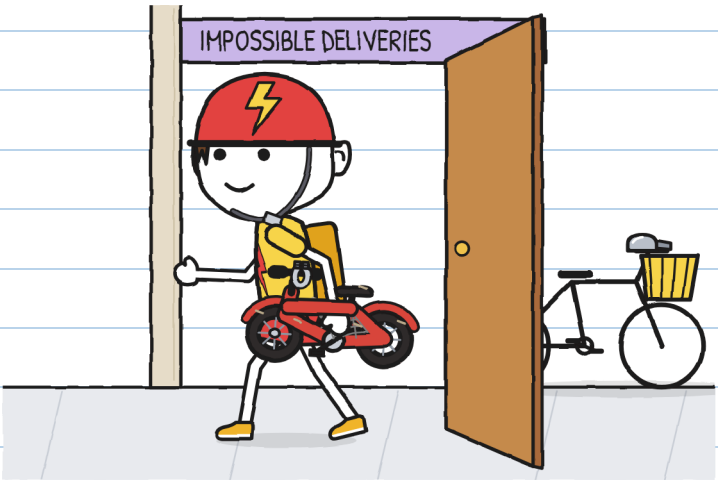
Tony read it without getting off his bike.
"Okay. I've read it."
"Do you forgive me?"
"I said I've read it."
That afternoon, in the shop, Tony's crate stayed empty.

I signed with my whole name. It was the least I could do. –J.

CHAPTER 4

A Small Bike

On Thursday Tony walked into the shop without looking either way along the street. He had a bike under his arm.



It wasn't his current one. Or it was: it was his from before.

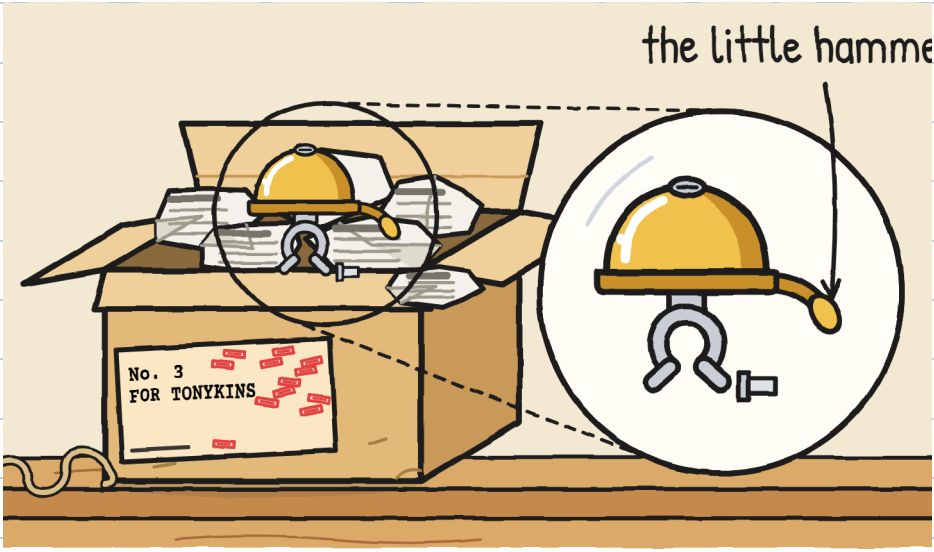
"Since Sunday I've had a ting-a-ling in my head," he said. "I think I know what it's from. I want to see if I remember properly."

"I want to open it. But not here. Somewhere with no shop window."
Mara took us to the back room.
"Opening it to look isn't signing," she said. "Without a signature, it comes back at dawn."



"Can I stay?" asked Julie. She asked.
Tony took a while.
"If you don't touch anything."
"Neither the box nor the subject."

Tony untied the string. Inside there was newspaper, so old that it fell apart by itself. And in the paper...

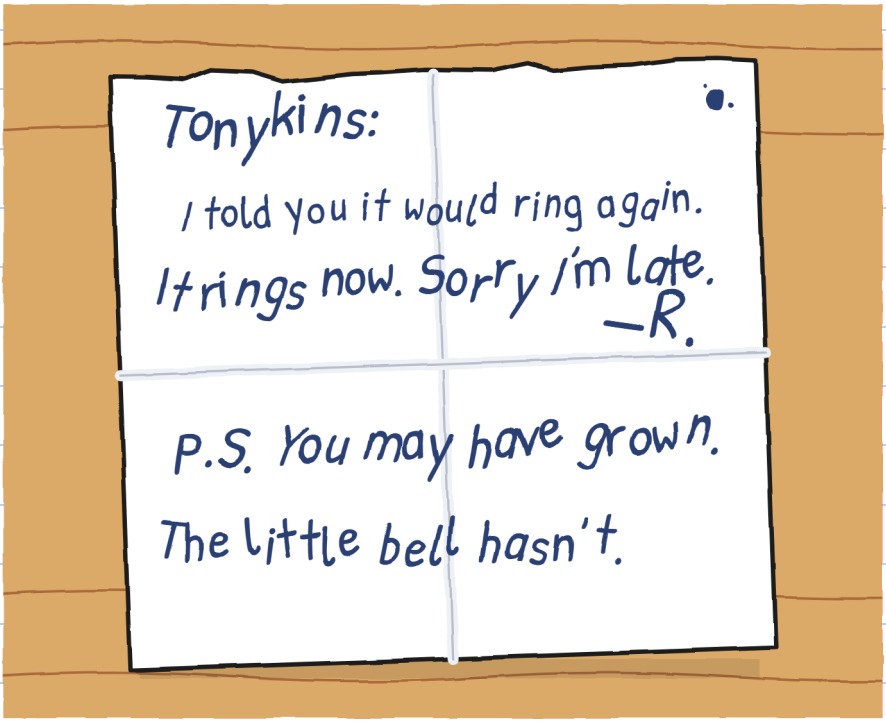


A little bike bell. Small, golden, with a little hammer on a spring: all it takes is a shake to make it ring.

No. 1 bit. No. 2 ran. No. 3 just rings.

No dragon, no legs. A little bell. I like it. —J.

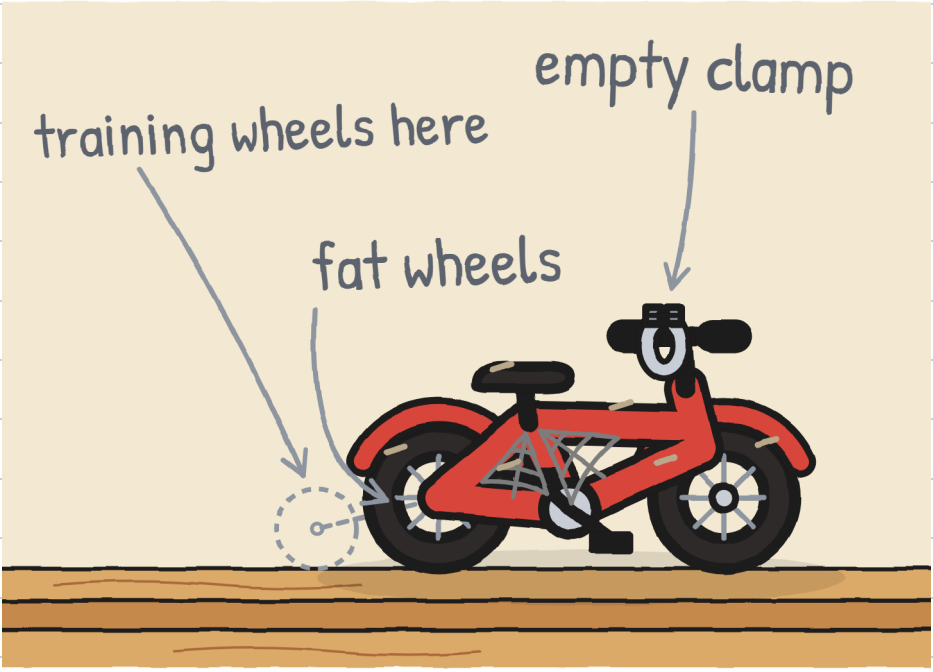
Underneath there was a note folded in four.



Tony read it twice.
"What awful handwriting," he said. And nothing else, for ages.

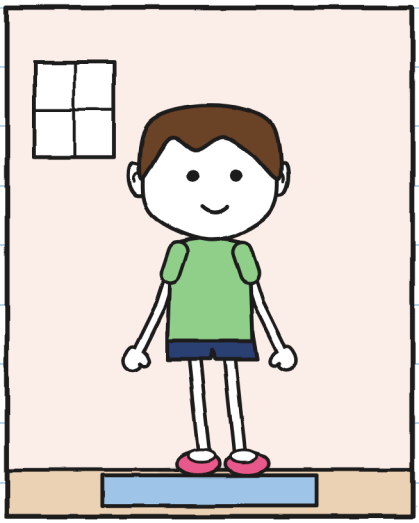
R. delivers late. Flora said so. She didn't say HOW late. —J.

Then Tony put the small bike on the table.

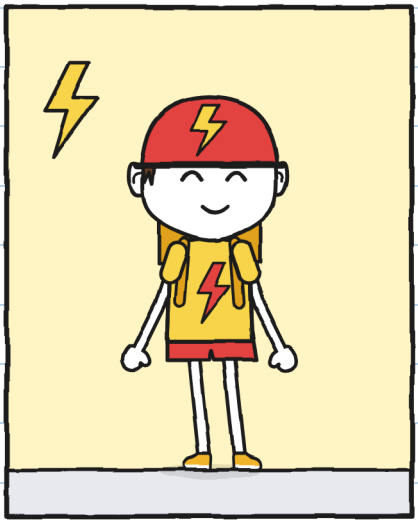


"It was mine. It had this little bell on it. One day it stopped ringing: it went clack. Someone said to me: 'Give it here, Tonykins, and I'll fix it and bring it back.'" "Who?" slipped out of Julie, and she covered her mouth. "I can't remember the face. I remember the little bell. And that I waited a long time."

"At home they still call me Tonykins," said Tony. "Not at LIGHTNING. At LIGHTNING I'm Tony: I wrote it myself on my staff card on the first day."
"And what's wrong with Tonykins?" I asked.
"Nothing. Until Zoe says it. At LIGHTNING nicknames stick. Look at Bruno."



AT HOME: Tonykins



AT LIGHTNING: Tony

"Bruno has called me Tonykins six times since Tuesday," Tony added.
Julie made herself small in her corner.

"Do you still fit?" asked Julie. She couldn't help it.
Mara put the bike down on the floor. Tony sat on it.



He fit. More or less.
Mara made a noise that in anyone else would have been a laugh. Tony laughed too. I hadn't seen him laugh since Saturday.

Redometer: 0. I'm writing it down because that counts too. —J.

"There's already a bell on your bike now," I said. "The LIGHTNING one. You don't have to put this one on it. You can keep it. Or let it go back."
"I know," said Tony. But he looked at me as if nobody had ever said it to him before.

Julie spent eleven minutes quiet, listening, with her marker put away.



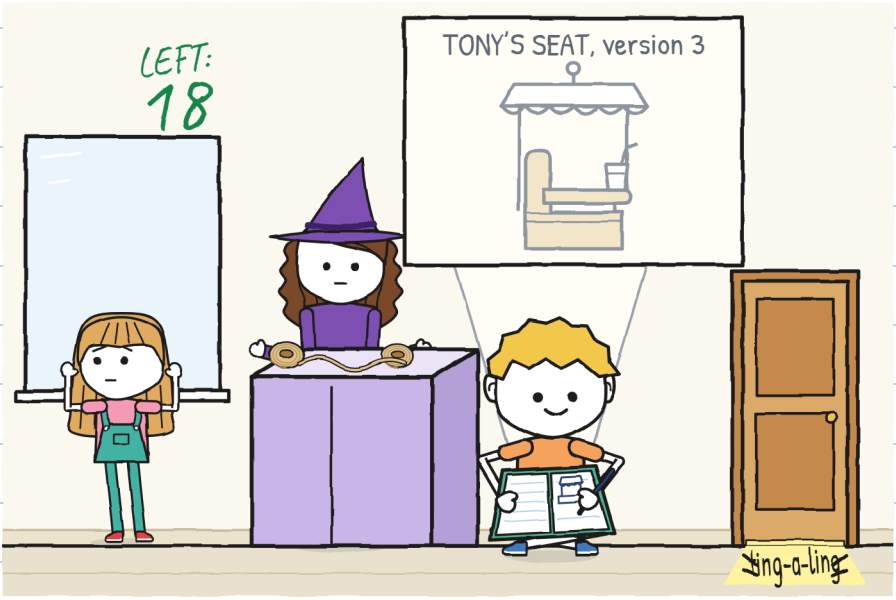


11 min

Eleven minutes. My tongue fell asleep. —J.

"I want to try it on my own," said Tony.
The three of us went out. Tony closed the back-room door.

Julie went to the far end of the shop, so as not to listen. I, so as not to listen, drew: Tony's seat now has a canopy. I heard it anyway.



Ting-a-ling.
It was the same ting-a-ling as on Saturday. Then another. And then none, for a long time.

When he came out, he had the little bell in one hand and the box under his arm.

"I'm taking it until tomorrow. Unsigned."

"Then it comes back at dawn," said Mara.

"Let it. I want to know what it's like to have it for a night."

"What if he leaves the little bell outside the box?" I asked.

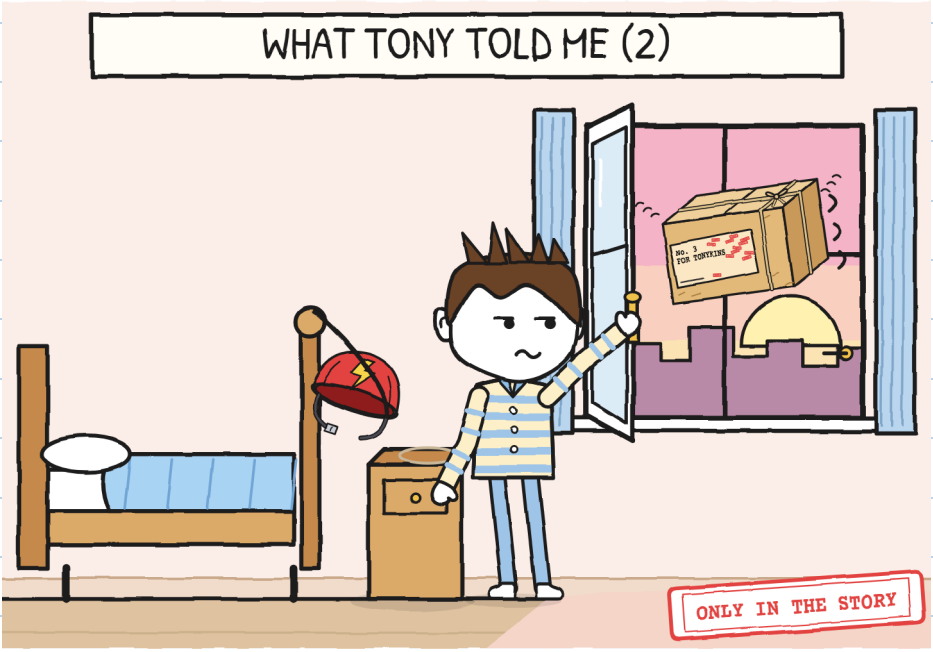
"I've never tried it," said Mara. "And I'm not about to try it at seven in the morning."

Tony put it all away inside.



It's fourteen hours until tomorrow. I intend to count them. —J.

On Friday my street rang out again: ting-a-ling, ting-a-ling, ting-a-ling. Return No. 14.
I didn't see what came before. Tony told me:



"This time it didn't sleep on the doormat. It slept on my nightstand. At dawn it started knocking against the glass, and I opened the window."

He opened the window for a package.
How polite. —J.

I drew Tony's two bikes side by side. On the one he has now, I put the little bell, which looks really good. Julie stuck a little note on top of it.



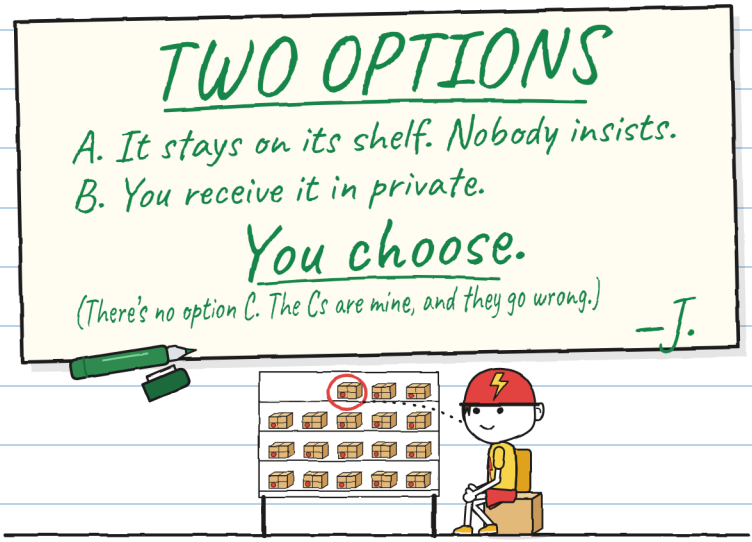
She was right. It annoys me a bit.

CHAPTER 5

In Private

On Friday afternoon No. 3 was on its shelf, with fourteen stamps. Tony, in his crate, was watching it from a distance.

Julie had been preparing something for two days. I feared the worst.
It was a sheet with two options.



Tony read the sheet. Then he looked at Mara.

"If I sign, who finds out?"

"I do. And my logbook, which never leaves this drawer."

"And LIGHTNING?"

"I won't be telling LIGHTNING. A logbook isn't a sign."



The sign has numbers. The names stay in the drawer. —J.

Tony got up from his crate.

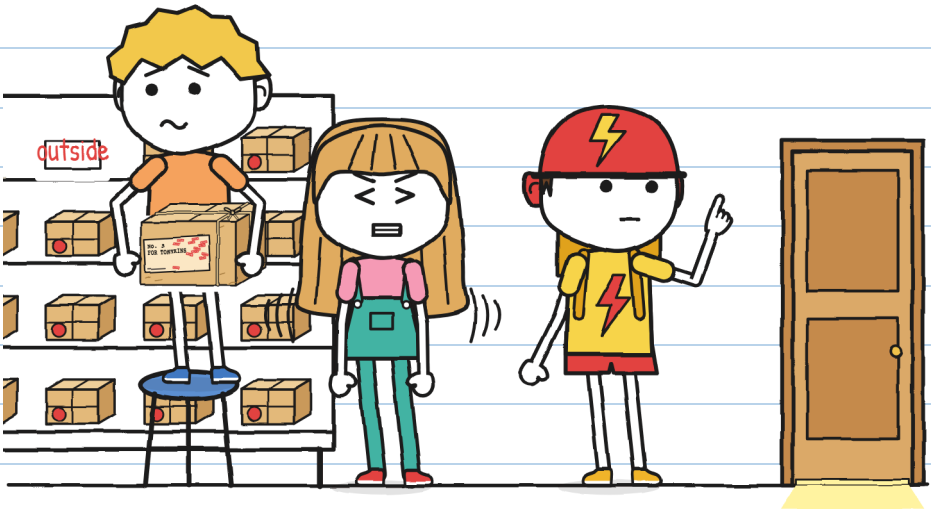
"B."

Julie didn't jump. I watched her not jump.

"In the back room," Tony went on. "And I want you there. You two."

"Me too?" asked Julie.

"You're the one who most wants me to sign. I'd rather have you in front of me."



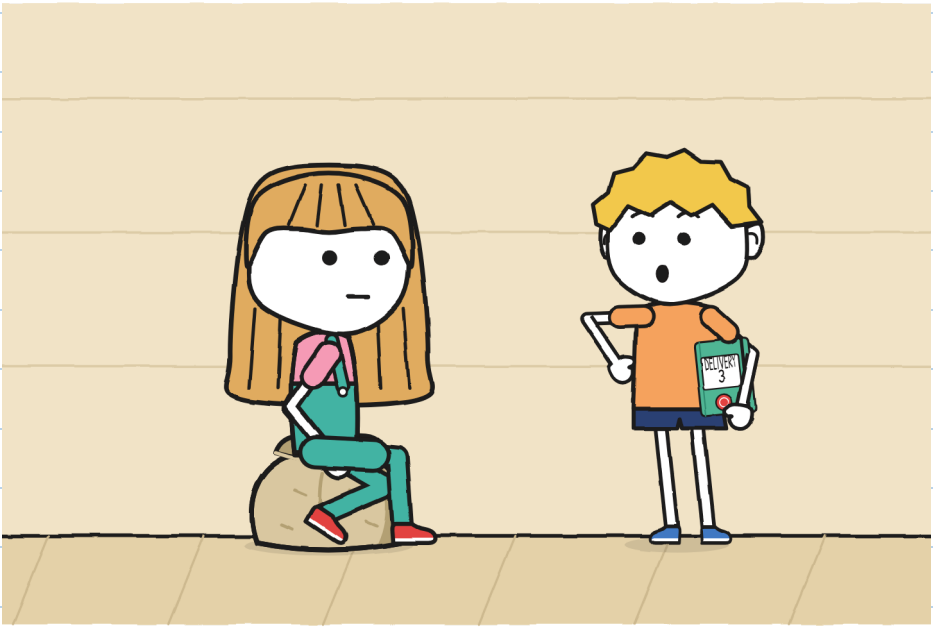
In the back room, Tony took out the little bell and the note again. He looked at them slowly, like someone counting his change.

"Before I sign, I look at what I'm signing," he said, without looking at anyone.

Julie turned the color of her T-shirt.



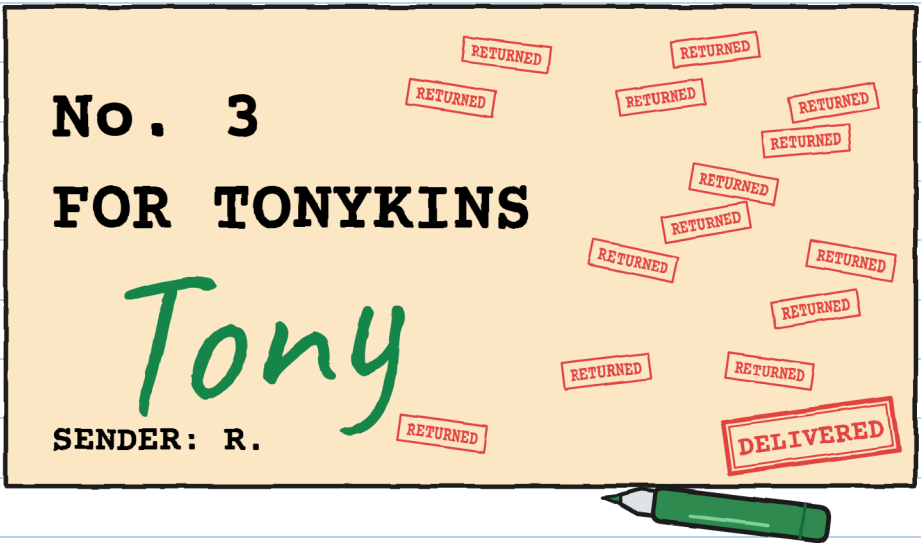
Julie handed him her green marker and sat down on a sack in the corner.
"What are you doing?" I asked.
"I'm sitting on my hands. So I don't help."



I closed the notebook and put it under my arm.

Afterward he wrote it all down. —J.

Tony took the cap off the marker and signed.



On the label it said "Tonykins." On the signature, "Tony."

"Is that all right?" he asked Mara. "It's not the same name."

"Whoever receives it signs," said Mara. "And you've received it."

Mara wrote the delivery in her book. Julie already had the blue stool in her hand. She put it down on the floor.
"Can I change the sign?" she asked. She asked Tony, not Mara.
Tony looked at the sign.
"It only has a number on it."
"Only."
"Okay."



I asked first. For the record. –J.

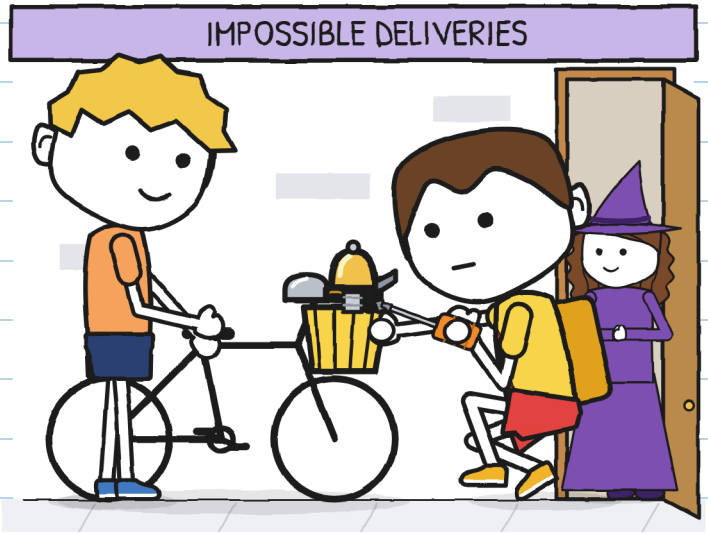
Tony went out onto the sidewalk, leaned his bike against the wall and took a screwdriver out of his backpack.

"Are you going to put it on?" I asked.

"Yes."

"And the LIGHTNING bell?"

"That one belongs to LIGHTNING. This one is mine."



He put it on himself. I only held the bike, and only because he asked me. Then he tapped the little hammer with one finger.

Ting-a-ling.

At ten past five LIGHTNING went by. Bruno braked.

"What's that ringing?"

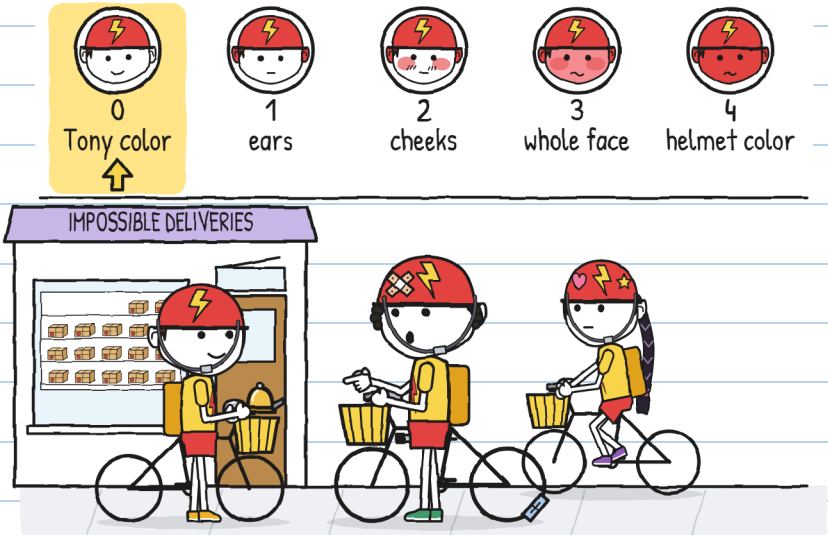
"A little bell."

"Where did it come from?"

"It was mine."

"From when you were Tonykins?"

I looked at Tony's face. Nothing. Not even his ears.



"From when they called me that. Now I'm called Tony.

And what are you called?"

"Punc..." Bruno broke off. "Bruno."

"Exactly, Bruno."

Bruno lifted his head. At LIGHTNING nobody had called him Bruno for two years.

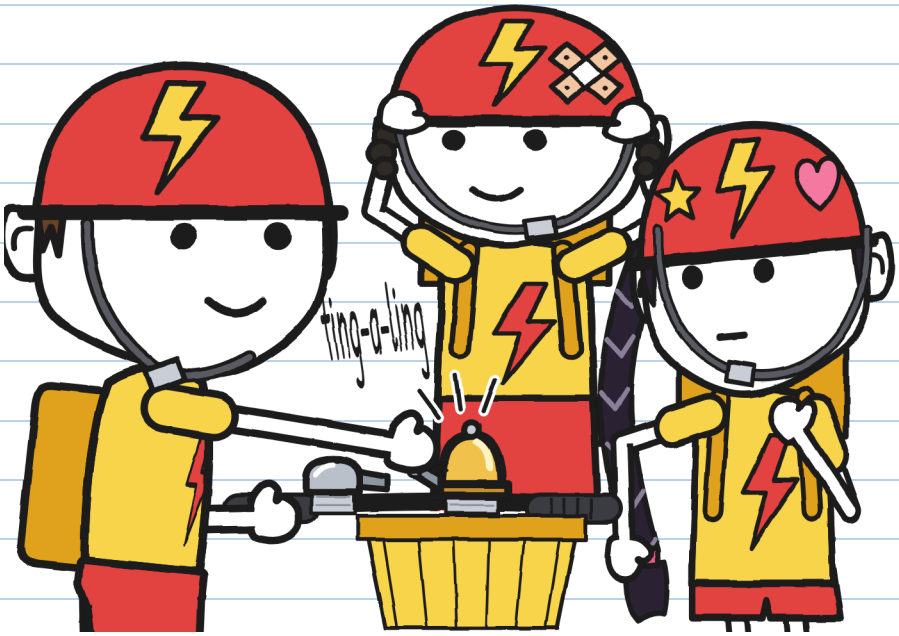
Zoe opened her mouth.

Tony tapped the little hammer. Once.

Ting-a-ling.

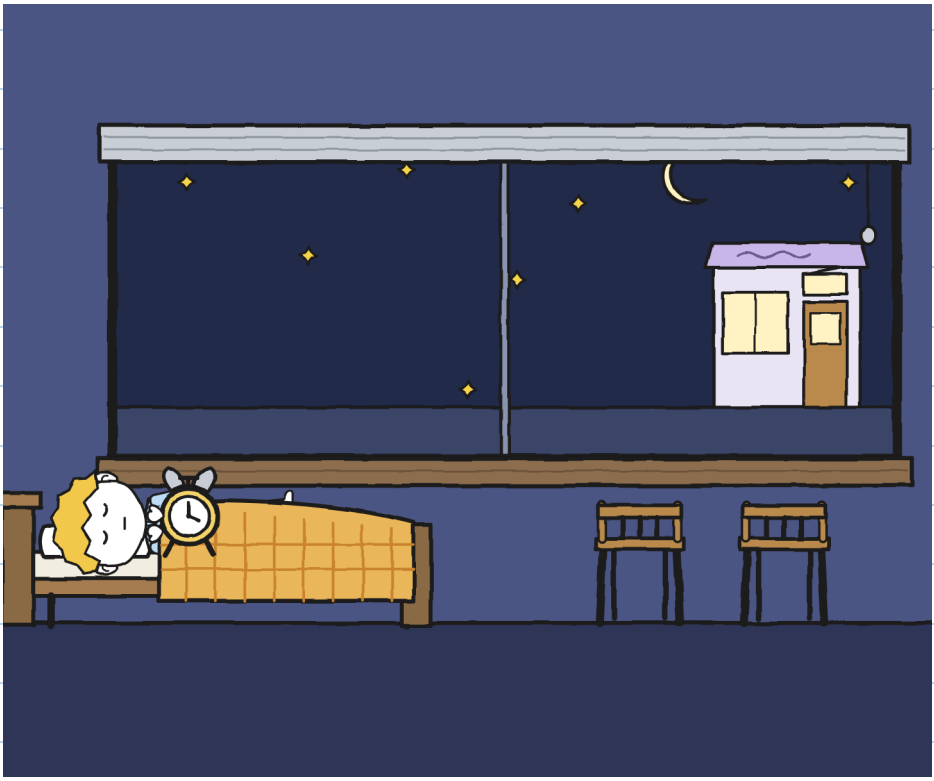
Zoe closed her mouth. She thought it over.

"It sounds good," she said. "We're late, Tony."



He said "Tony." Without adding anything. —J.

That night I left the shade up again.
"Watching again?" asked my mom.
"Tonight I'm watching to make sure nothing happens."
"I'm very good at that. Go to sleep."



I fell asleep with the marker uncapped. I've got a green pillow. —J.

Dawn broke.

Nothing rang.

Not a ting-a-ling, not a window, not the dog at number 4.

It's the nicest silence I've ever heard on my street.

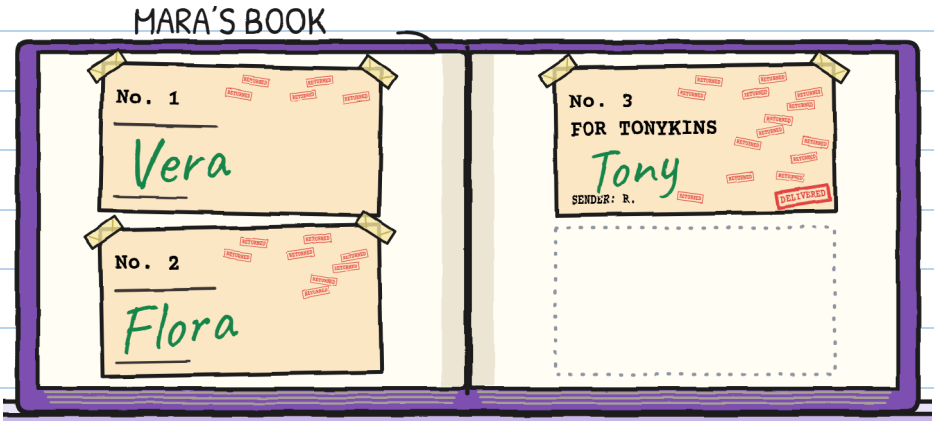


CHAPTER 6

For Now

On Saturday, at ten, I drew the shelf: seventeen packages and three gaps.

Mara stuck the label in her book, with the other two.



An egg, some seeds and a little bell. All three arrived late. All three arrived.

The third one was signed by Tony. This time all I did was pass him the marker. —J.

Tony sat down in his crate and wriggled around. This time he didn't look at the shelf.

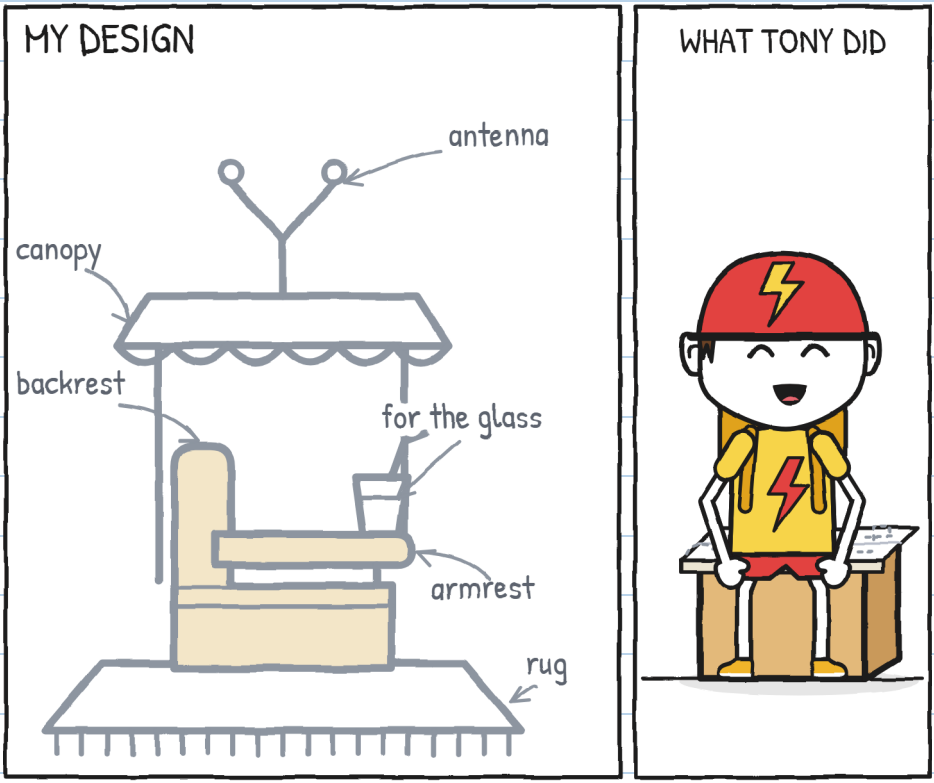
"The crate is still 'for now,'" said Mara.

"For now, it'll do," said Tony.



"For now" can last for years. Ask No. 3. —J.

I showed Tony my design for his seat. It had taken me all week.



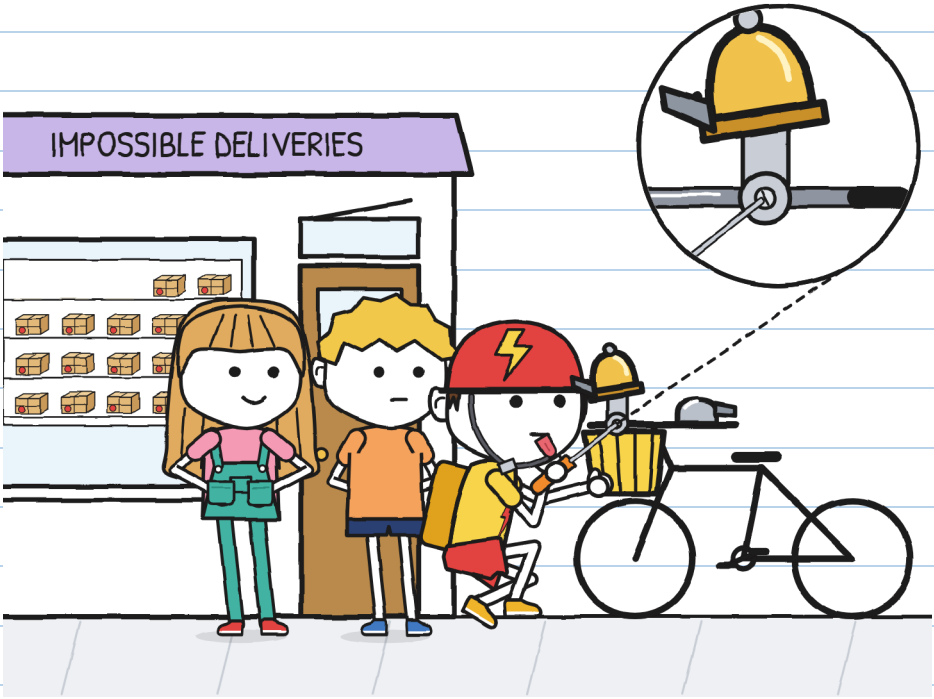
"Can I have it?" he said.
He folded it in four, put it on top of the crate and sat down.

Outside, the little bell had gone crooked on the handlebars.

"I'll hold it while you tighten," I said.

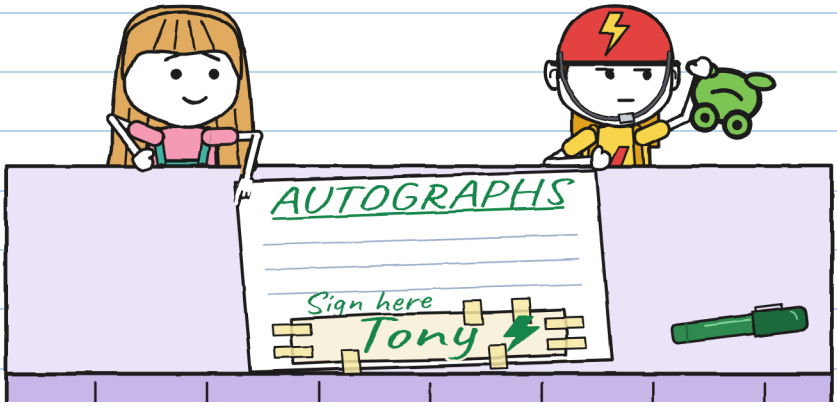
"I can do it."

He did it himself. I watched that screw. It seemed to have a hundred turns.



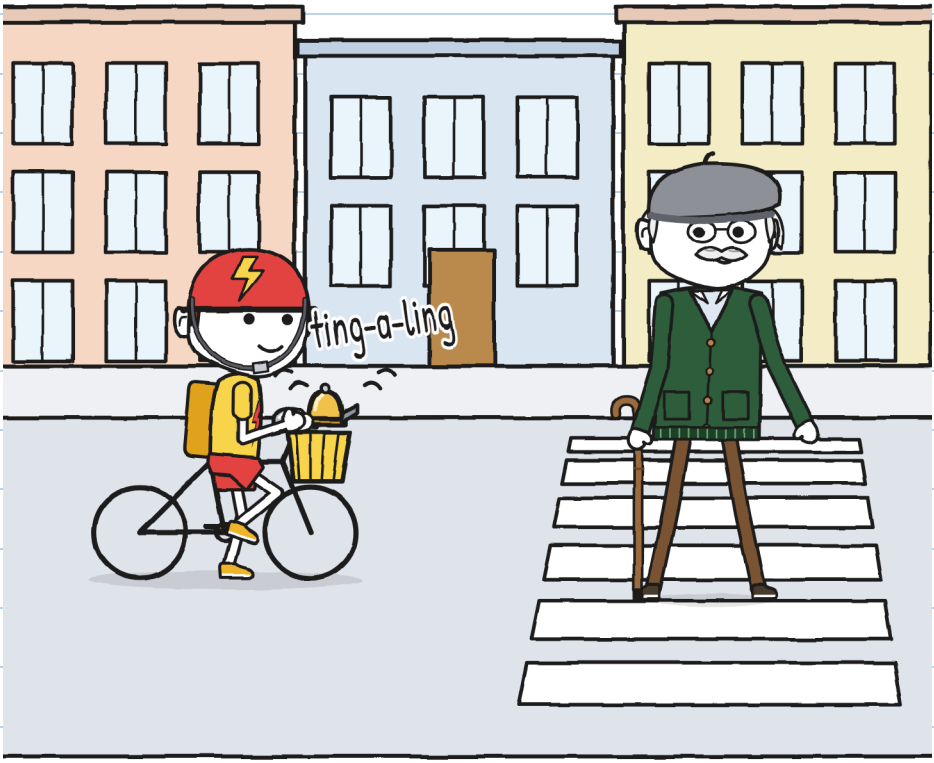
Julie took out the autograph sheet. She had covered the little window with a paper patch and plenty of tape.

"It's the one from the trap," she told Mara, before she could ask. "I've fixed it."
Then she set it down in front of Tony.
"Will you sign an autograph for me? A real one. With nothing underneath."
Tony looked under the sheet. He looked under the counter. He turned the frog over.
"Okay."



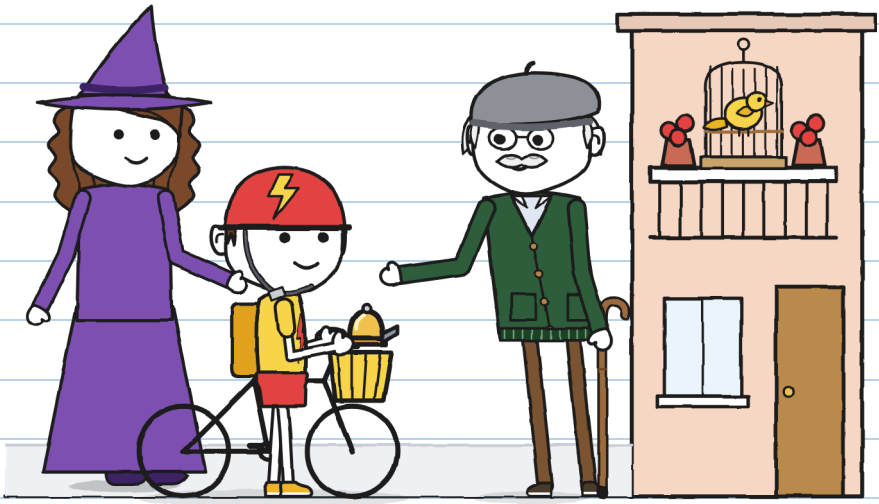
I deserve that. –J.

At noon Tony went out on a delivery. A man in a beret was crossing the street slowly, with his cane.
Tony braked. He waited. And he rang the little bell just once, so the man would know he was there.
Ting-a-ling.

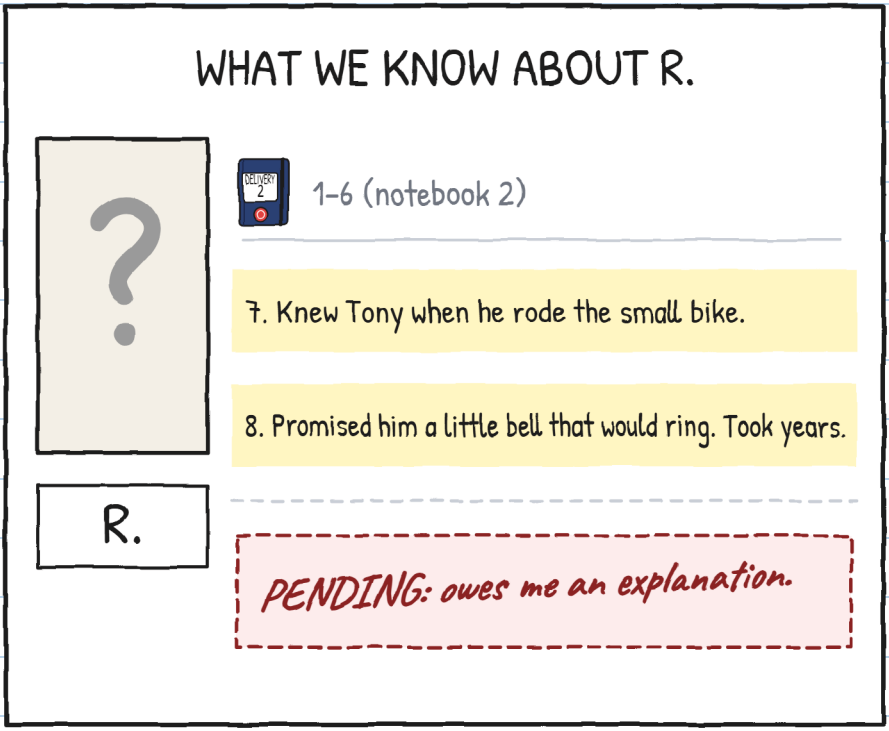


The man raised his cane to say hello and went on at his own pace.

"That's Don Antonio," said Mara. "Tonykins number two on my list."
"Is that little bell new?" asked the man, now on our sidewalk.
"It's old," said Tony. "It was mine. From when they called me Tonykins."
"It's been sixty years since anybody called me that. If you like, I'll trade with you: you, Don Antonio; me, Tonykins."
Tony thought about it.
"Not for now."



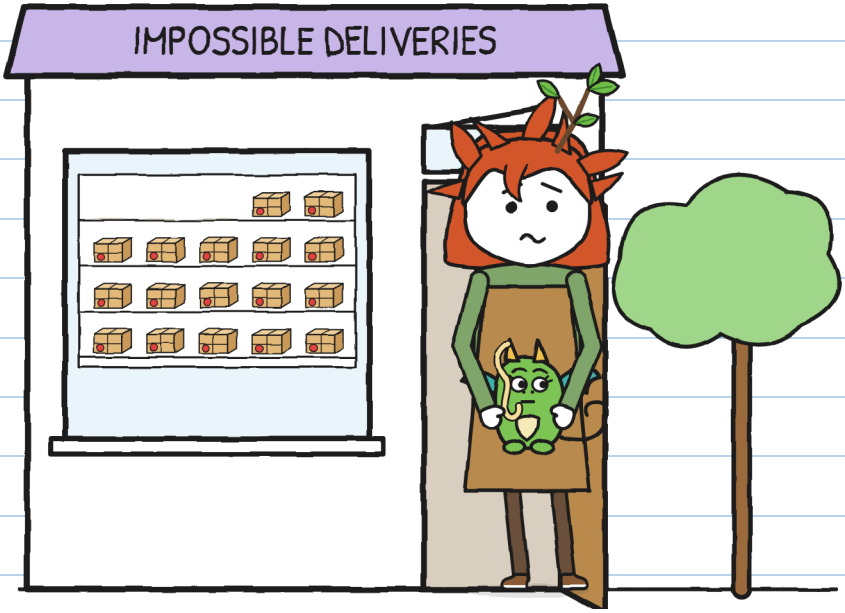
I took out the file on R., which had six clues. I added two. Tony asked me for my pen and wrote underneath, in his own handwriting.



"And aren't you going to say thank you?" asked Julie. "The thanks and the complaint. Both. When I know who to say them to."

At one Vera came in, with Crumb in her arms and a twig in her hair.

"I've come to ask for help. Crumb can take off now. Now she needs a safe place to land." She paused. "Yesterday she chose my soup."



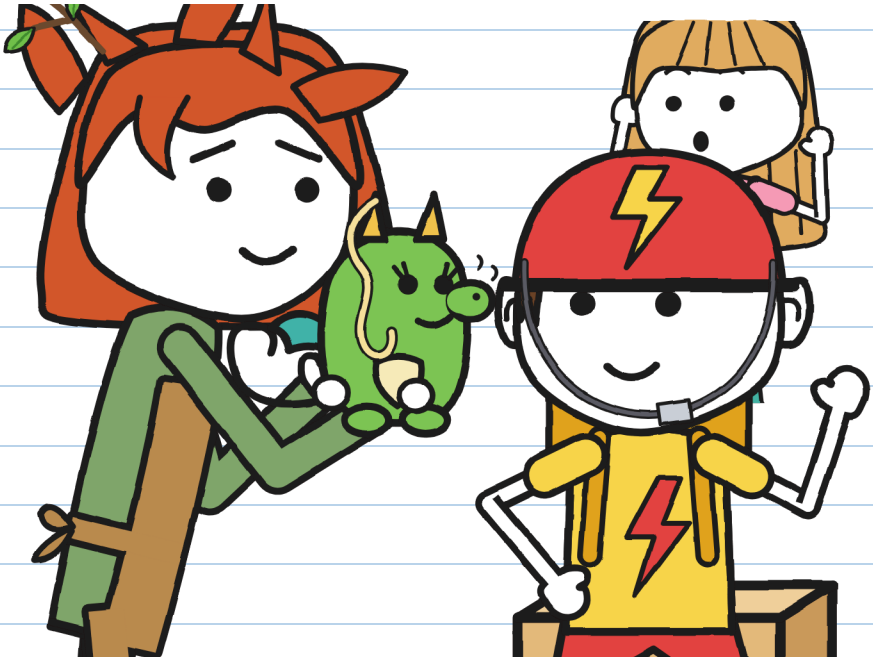
Crumb looked at me and put on my "it wasn't me" face.

Yours, exactly. With a noodle. —J.

"Do you need someone fast?" asked Tony from his crate.

"I need someone who knows how to wait," said Vera.

"I know how to do that too. Since this week."



I can wait too. Is it time yet? –J.

DELIVERY NO. 3. How long each one took:

	LIGHTNING: ten minutes.
	R.: years.
	Tony: six days.
	Julie, listening: eleven minutes (record).

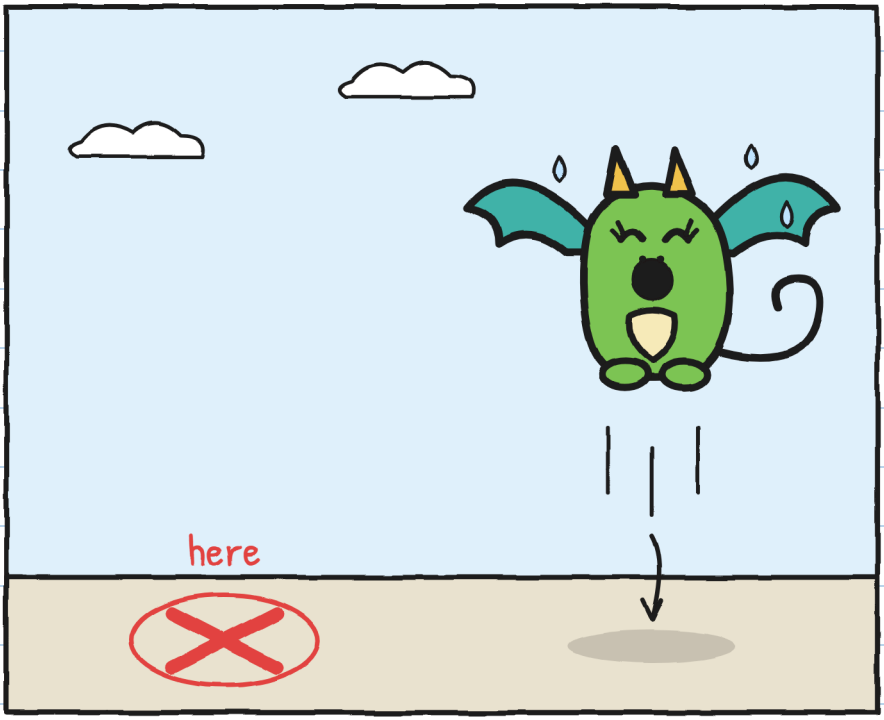


Tony went off on his route. From the street came a ting-a-ling. And another.
This time he was the one ringing the little bell.

I still ring on my own. I'm working on it. —J.

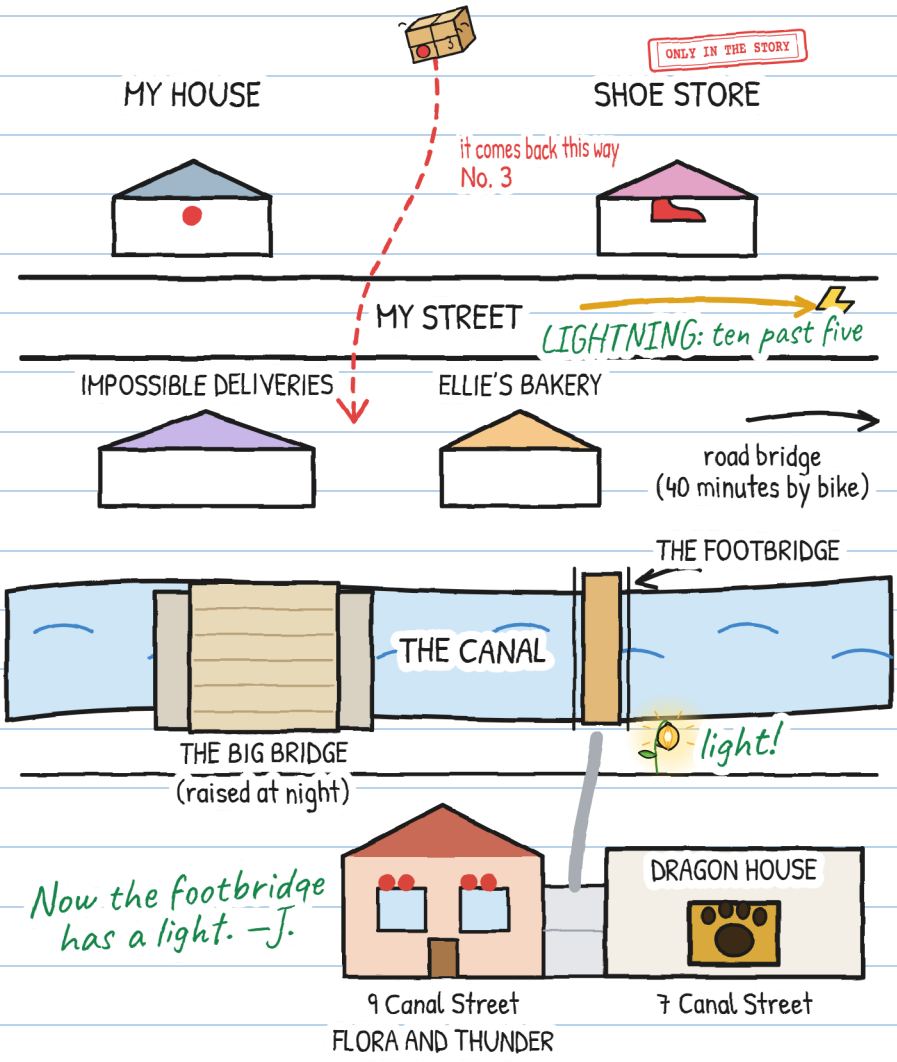
IMPOSSIBLE DELIVERIES · 4

(coming soon)



Where does a dragon hatchling who copies you land? –J.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD (version 3)



AND WHAT ARE YOU CALLED?

Tony used to be called Tonykins. Now he chooses what he's called. And you?

I like being called...

You can also call me...

I'd rather you didn't call me...

I'm Julie. "J." only when I sign. –J.

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SIZE XS · A1
Mara almost laughed. Tony laughed too. I hadn't seen him laugh since Saturday.

SIZE S · A2
Mara made a noise, almost a laugh. Tony laughed too. I hadn't seen him laugh since Saturday.

SIZE M · B1
Mara made a noise like a laugh. Tony laughed too. I hadn't seen him laugh since Saturday.

SIZE L · B2
Mara made a noise that in anyone else would have been a laugh. Tony laughed too. I hadn't seen him laugh since Saturday.

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The CEFR levels are a rough guide for learners of English.

One size each. Same ting-a-ling. —J.

FOR FAMILIES AND TEACHERS

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A REAL BIKE: WHAT TO DO

1. Always wear a helmet, properly fastened. Even for going "just next door."
2. Be seen and be heard: lights, bright clothes and a bell. The bell warns; it doesn't give orders.
3. Keep both hands on the handlebars. If something distracts you, stop in a safe place.
4. The sidewalk belongs to people on foot: there, walk your bike. Before crossing, stop and look.

The ONLY IN THE STORY stamp marks what happens in the story, and not in the street.

BEFORE YOU GO OUT, CHECK YOUR BIKE

