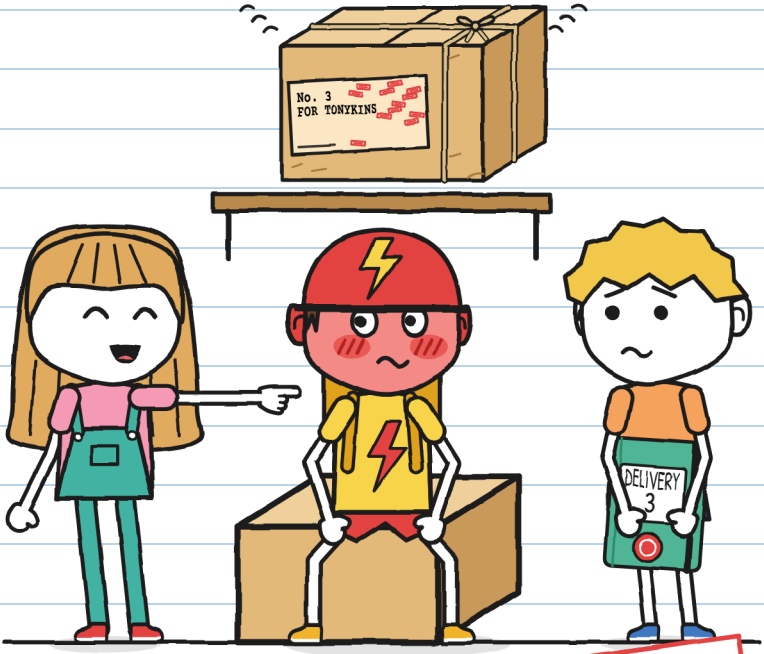
IMPOSSIBLE DELIVERIES · 3

Return to Sender, Please

Lui Eriksson



(Gus's notebook)

SIZE M
Intermediate level · 9+

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Return to Sender, Please

Text and illustrations: Lui Eriksson

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US English version: LinguAula

First edition: 2026

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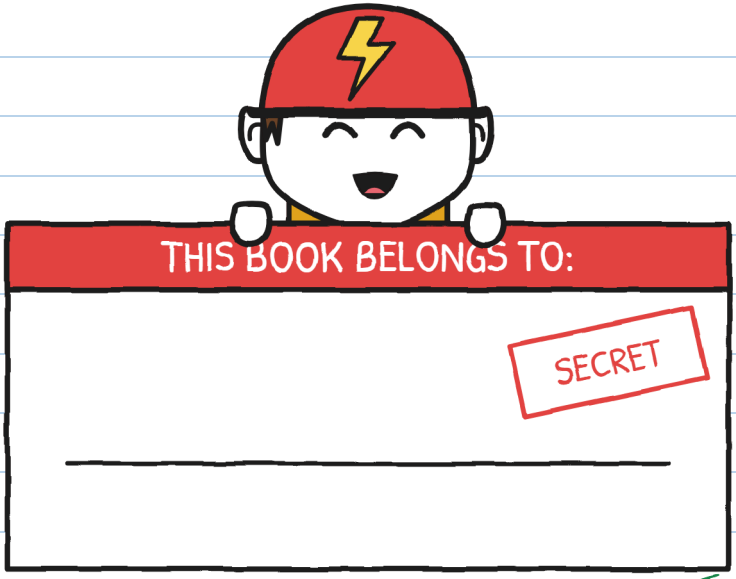
Free to photocopy, for class and for home.

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.

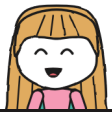


This stamp marks what only happens in the story: real packages don't fly back. With a real bike, page 76 rules. –J.

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.

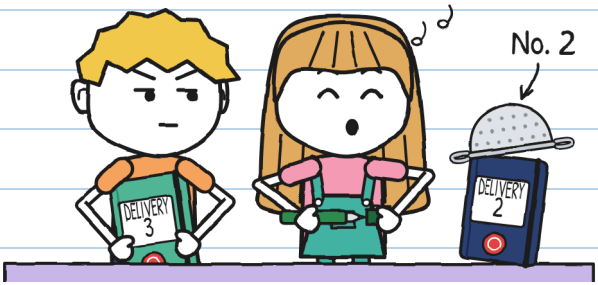


R. Sends the packages nobody can deliver. Nobody says R.'s name.

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.

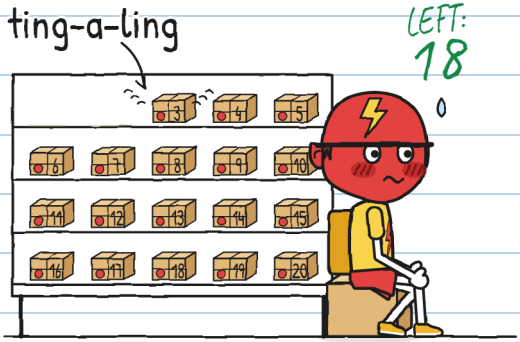
I didn't ask for help. With Julie, it doesn't matter.

CHAPTER 1

Ting-a-ling

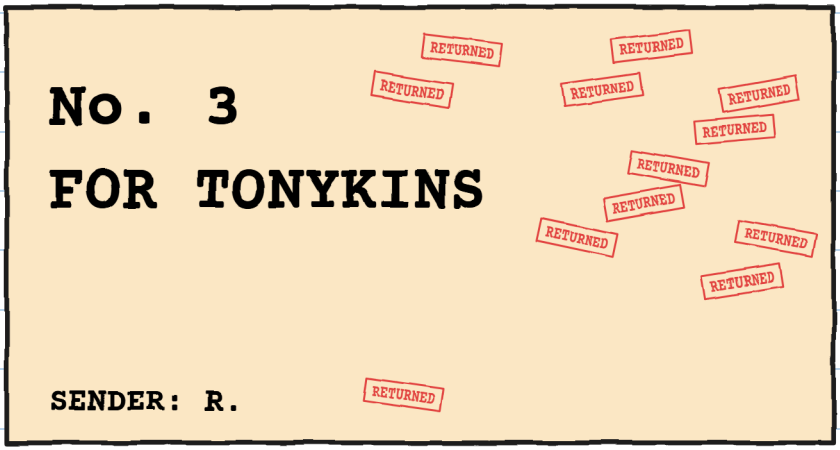
In Mara's shop there are packages that nobody has been able to deliver. They're on a shelf. There were twenty. Julie and I have delivered two: a dragon egg and some seeds that ran. Eighteen are left.

On the night of the storm, when we were about to go home, one of the packages 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 fly back to their shelf at dawn if nobody signs. Only the signature of whoever receives the package counts: on the label, in ink that doesn't come off. R. is the sender: the person who sends them.



Julie started to read the label:
"For To..."
And she closed her mouth. Julie never stops halfway through a word. I looked at Tony: he was starting to turn red.

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



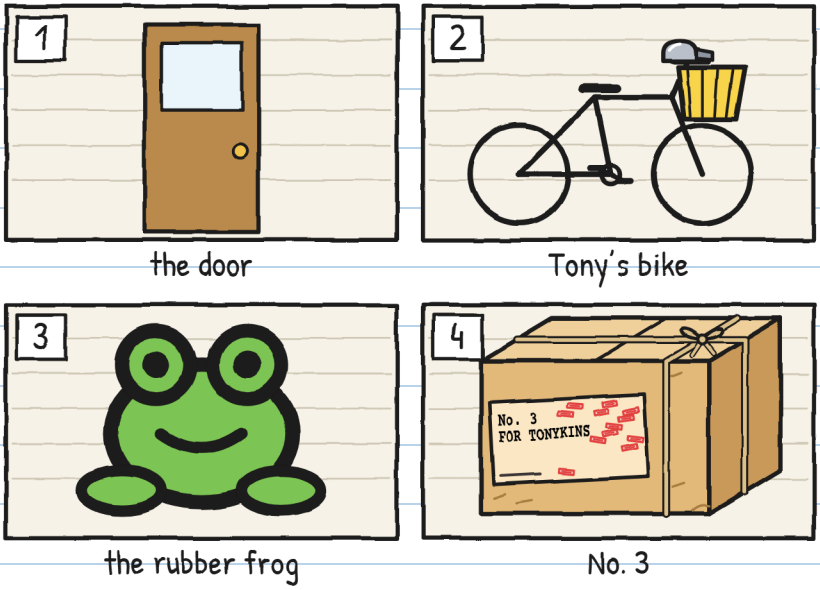
"That package can wait," said Tony, very quickly. "It's been waiting for years, hasn't it? So one more day. Or ten. LIGHTNING is in no hurry."
It was the first time I'd heard anyone from LIGHTNING say that.

That night: 4. I'd write 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. The ting-a-ling 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



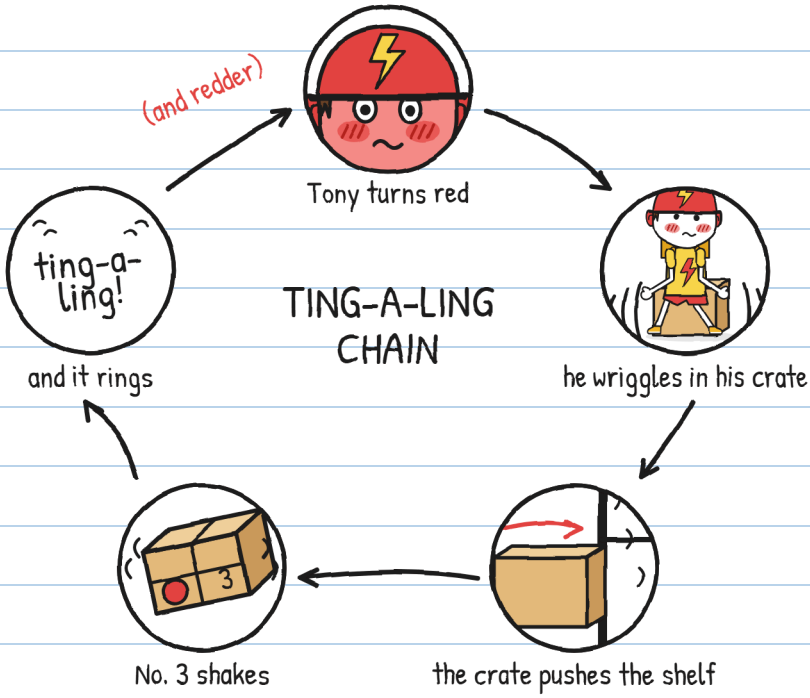
The frog is innocent. I know her. —J.

I went out onto the sidewalk to test the sounds. 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: no. None of them sounded the same.
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.
Something inside No. 3 rings when the package moves.

Like me. –J.

Tony decided to keep still. It lasted this long:

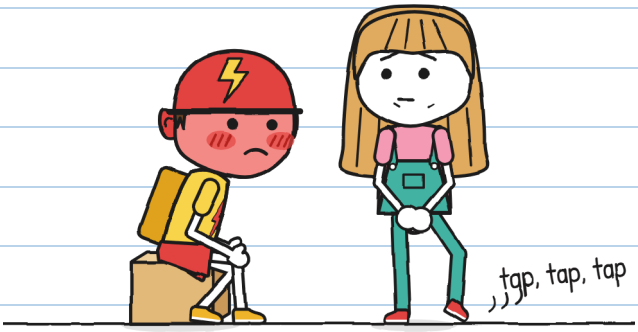


It was only a question. Questions don't push shelves. —J.

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. She wanted to ask lots of questions. She looked at Tony, who was still looking at his sneakers. And she closed it.

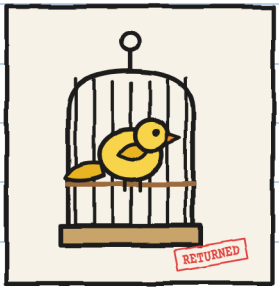


"I won't ask anymore," said Julie.
It was hard for her. You could tell by her foot.

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

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

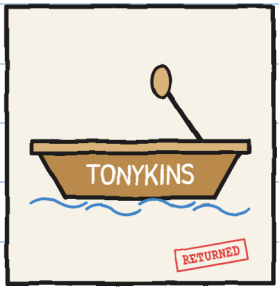
MARA'S TONYKINS



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 to deliver it, I didn't know Tony yet," said Mara, and looked at him. "And nobody told me what they called him when he was little."

Mara took a purple cloth from under the counter. She covered No. 3 like a parrot's cage at bedtime. 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. He had his bike at the door. In ten minutes he could have been on the other side of the neighborhood.

He sat down again.

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

Nobody asked you for a backrest. —J.

When the shop closed, Tony stayed behind, fastening 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: Tony. We still had to find out whether he wanted the package.

I already know how to help him. —J.

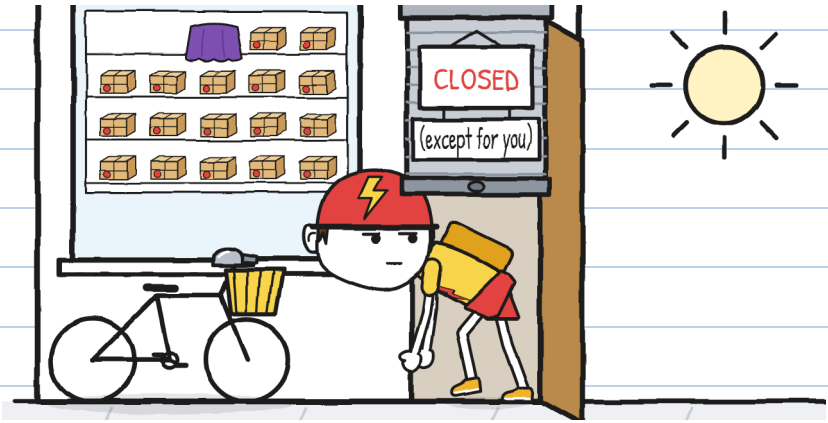
That's what worries me.

CHAPTER 2

I Didn't Say Yes

On Sundays the shop doesn't open. Mara left the shutter half up and put up 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. She took off the cloth.
She spoke like someone reading a sign:
"Package number three. For Tonykins. Is that you?"
"It was."
"Good enough. Do you want it?"

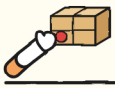
Tony looked at the box. The box said nothing.
"I didn't say yes."
"You didn't say no, either."
"I said that I didn't say yes."



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 Tony's house, it's delivered. It's only logical."
"The return stamp doesn't work by logic," said Mara. "It works by ink."

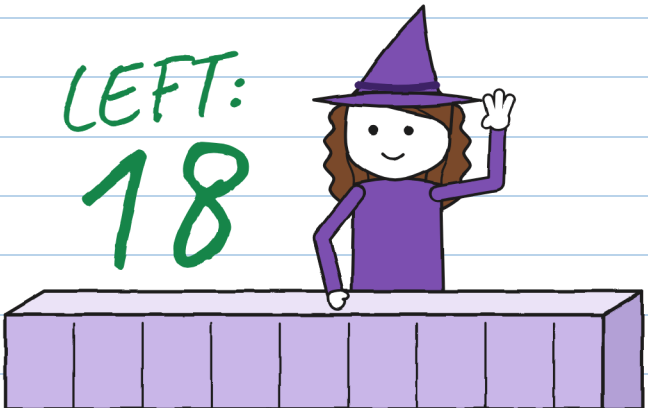
DOES IT COUNT AS DELIVERY?		
	Looking at it	NO
	Grabbing it	NO
	Taking it home	NO
	Signing the label in ink that doesn't come off	YES

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

"Julie, Gus: this delivery is yours," said Mara. "Like the thunder one. With three conditions."
She counted them on her fingers:

1. You two don't open the box. The label stays stuck on.
2. No. 3 only leaves the shop if Tony asks for it.
3. Whoever receives it signs, if they want to. Without a signature, the package comes back at dawn. Nothing has happened here.

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



"Never" is not a delivery date. –J.

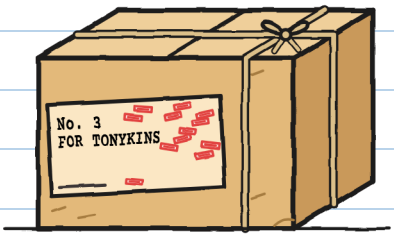
Tony was silent for a good while. Julie timed it: four minutes. For LIGHTNING, almost half a delivery.

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

I wrote down how No. 3 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. He seemed to remember something.
"What?" asked Julie.
"Nothing."
Tony walked off, pushing his bike. Tony never walks anywhere.



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."

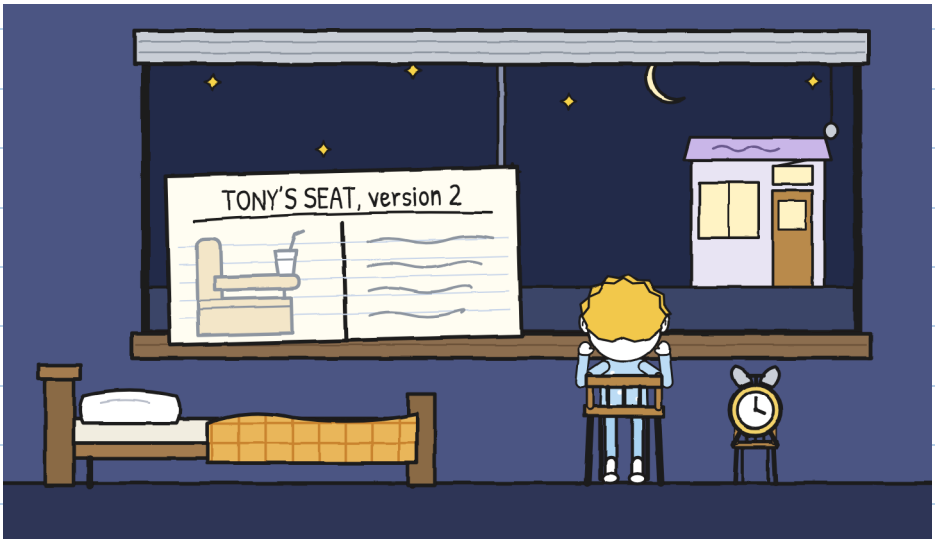
He didn't lie. Before answering, he turned the box so the label faced him. LIGHTNING couldn't read it.



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."

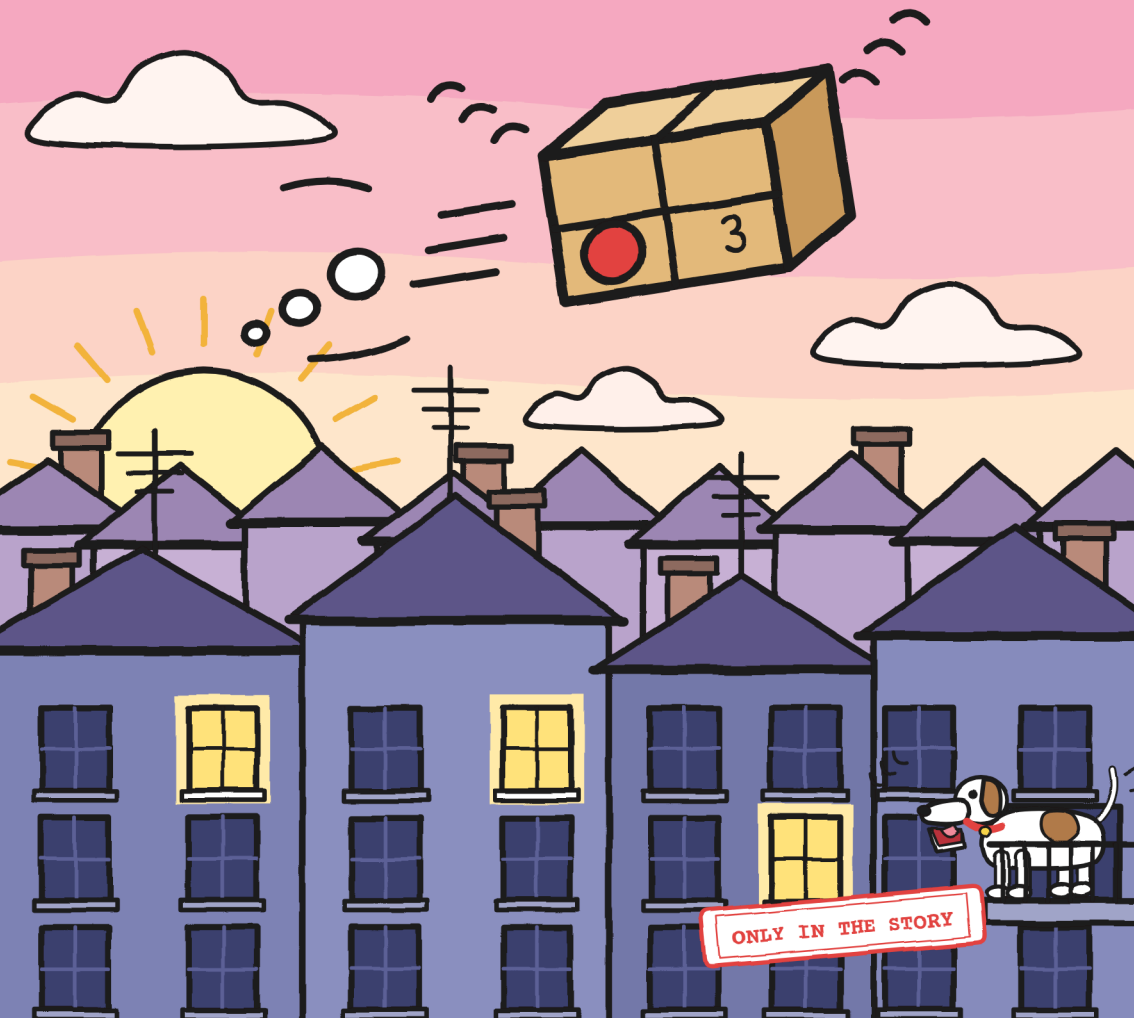


I wanted to keep watch too. My window looks onto a yard. —J.

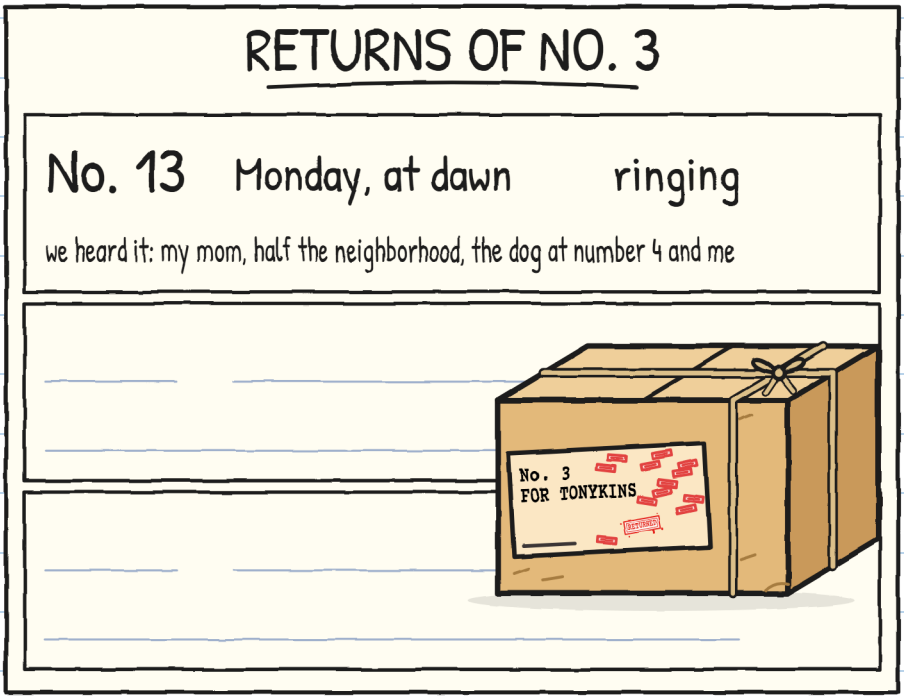
At dawn, No. 3 was heard before it was seen.

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

It came over the rooftops, in no hurry, sounding like the ice cream truck. Three windows lit up. A dog barked. No. 3 went 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.



"It's not a punishment," said Mara. "It's the rule. Nobody has signed, so 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 about No. 3 coming back. That morning 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."

"A signature would fix everything," said Julie when Tony left. "Just one. It takes two seconds. I've timed it with mine."

I opened the notebook. "The green isn't going to cover my sentence," I thought. I wrote with a pen, pressing hard:



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, as school ended, there was a table on the sidewalk in front of the shop. It had a yellow tablecloth down to the floor and a sign in Julie's writing. In the middle was a lump, covered by the tablecloth.



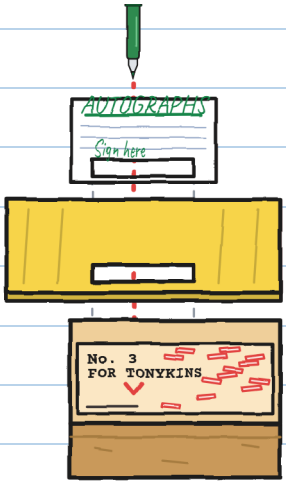
"It's a lectern: a stand so you can sign more comfortably," said Julie. "I collect autographs."
"Since when do you collect autographs?"
"Since yesterday."

On the lectern there was a lined sheet. At the bottom, a little window cut out with scissors. The tablecloth had another one, right underneath.
I lifted a corner of the tablecloth. The lectern was No. 3, lying down. The little windows showed its label, facing up.

HOW IT WORKS

1. The sheet, with its little window.

2. The tablecloth, with its hole.



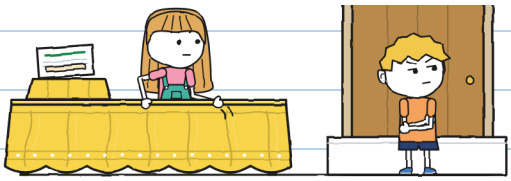
3. The label of No. 3, on the part that's blank.

4. Whoever signs in the little window... signs the label.

"With my marker," whispered Julie, delighted. "Ink that doesn't come off. Tomorrow No. 3 won't come back. Tony will find out when we show him the package. Surprise!"

"Tony hasn't asked for No. 3 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."

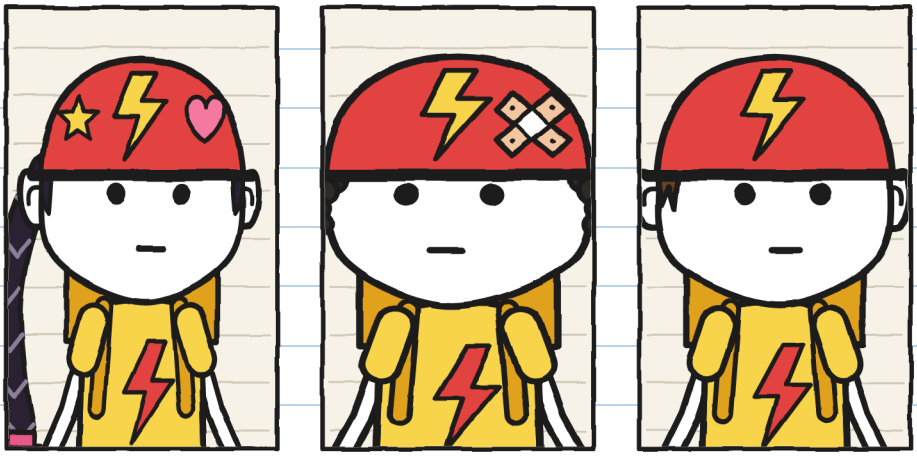
I reminded her of Flora and the eighth seed: Julie hadn't let Flora sign too early.
"It's not the same. That delivery was half done. This is a shortcut: a shorter way."
"Then you do it. I won't."



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.

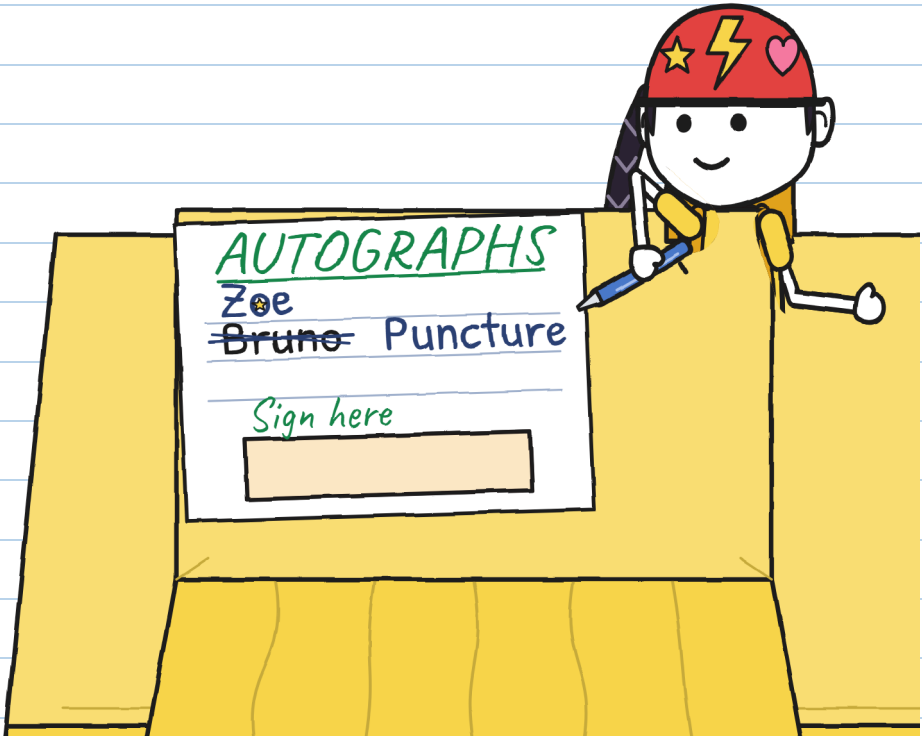
BRUNO, "Puncture":
got a puncture once.
Two years ago.

TONY:
no nickname.
Not yet.

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

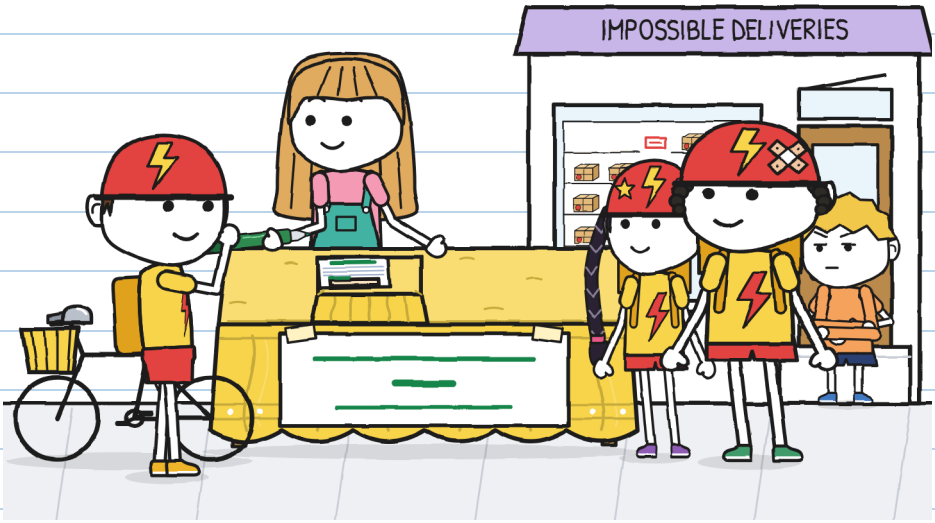
Nobody has ever asked them for an autograph. That's why it works. —J.

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 was still on 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.
It was the first time anyone had asked Tony for an autograph. He got off his bike and stood up straight.



I saw everything from the step. "It's none of my business," I thought. And I kept quiet.

I stood up.

"Tony, wai..."

I was too late. Tony yanked the lectern closer to sign, and under the tablecloth something rang before my warning did:



Tony lifted the tablecloth.

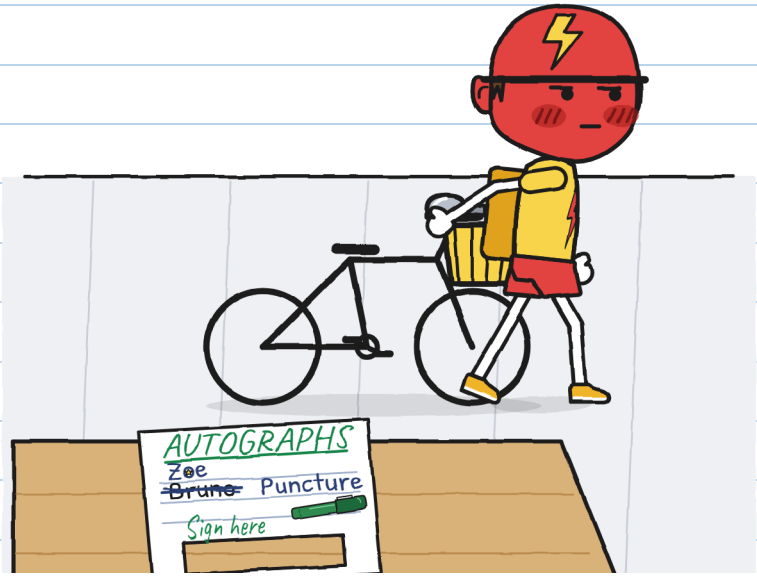


"For To-ny-kins," read Zoe, slowly, as if reading out a prize.

"Tonykins?" said Bruno, and laughed.

Zoe didn't laugh. Zoe was thinking.

Tony didn't shout. He put the cap 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 anger red.

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

Mara came out with the purple cloth. She didn't ask who had taken the package out: 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 matter.

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

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

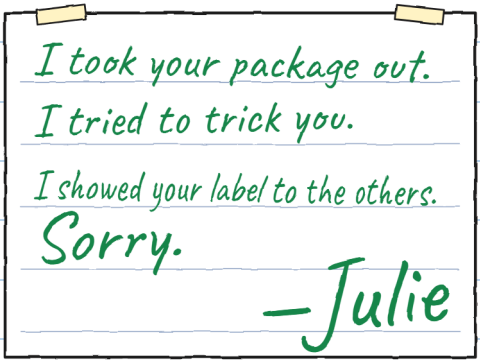


Then Julie went in and, without any help, told Mara everything: the little window, the tablecloth, the shelf, the phone.

"Tony," said Mara, "you tell him."

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



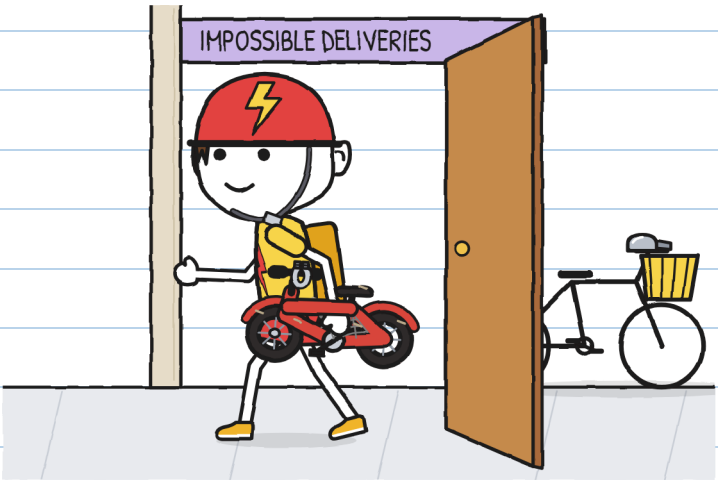
Tony read the paper without getting off his bike.
"Okay. I've read it."
"Do you forgive me?"
"I said I've read it."
That afternoon Tony didn't come to the shop. His crate stayed empty.

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 bike. Or it was: the one from when he was little.

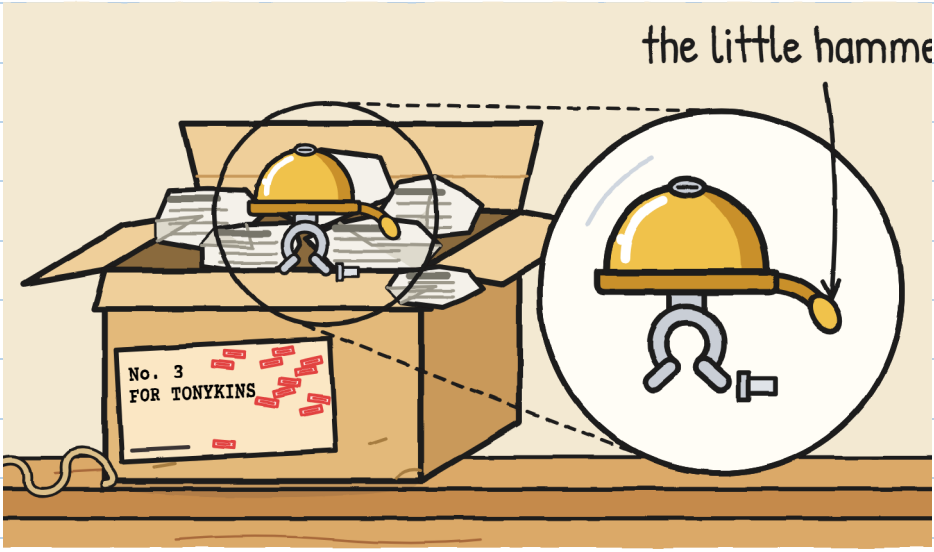
"Since Sunday I've had a ting-a-ling in my head," said Tony. "I think I recognize the sound. I want to see if I remember it right."

"I want to open the package. Not here. Somewhere without a shop window."
Mara took us to the back room, the room behind the shop.
"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...

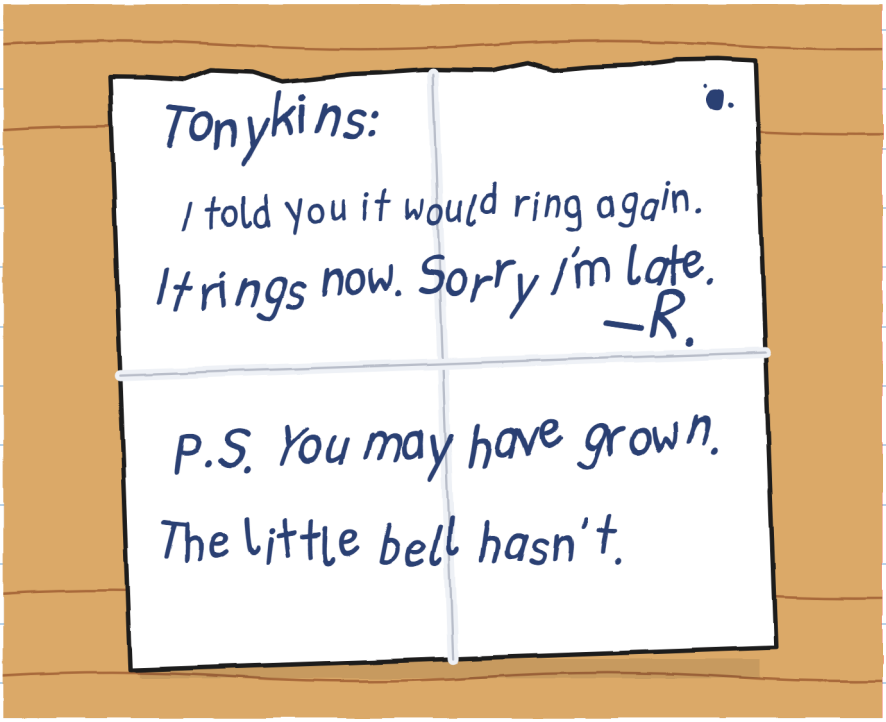


A little bike bell. Small, golden, with a little hammer on a spring: all it takes is a shake to make it ring.

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

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

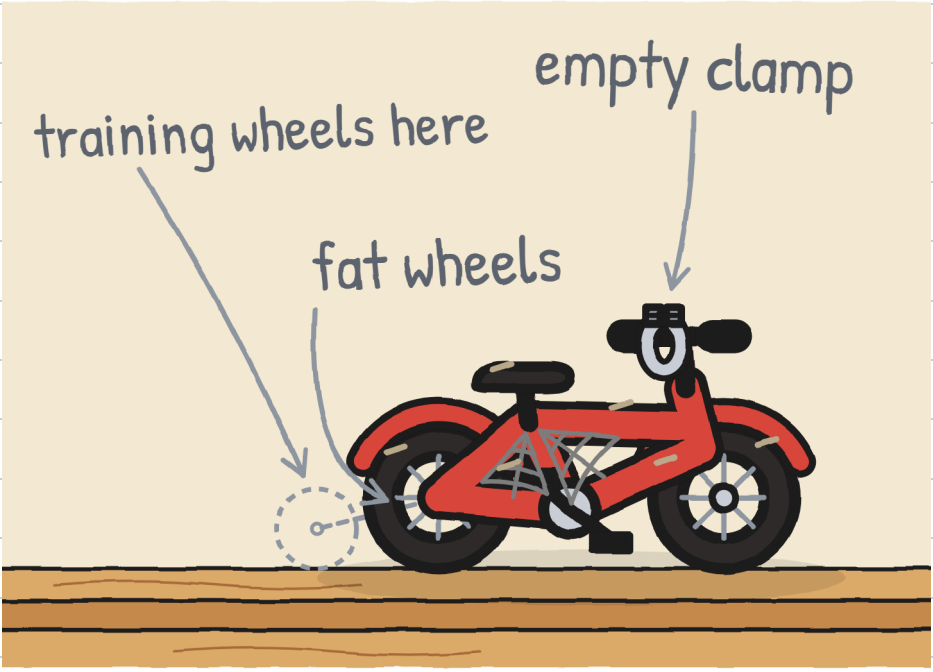
Underneath there was a note folded in four.



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.

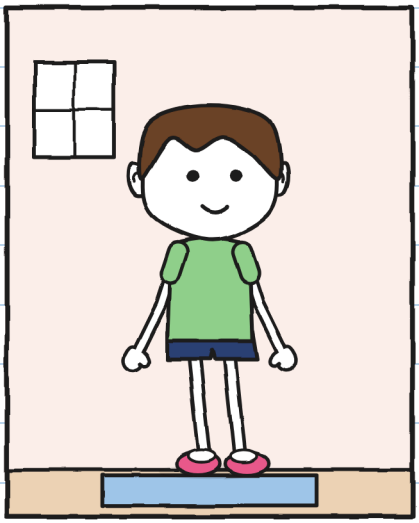


"It was mine. It had this little bell on it, held by the clamp. One day the little bell stopped ringing: clack. Someone said: 'Give it to me, Tonykins. I'll fix it and give it back.'"

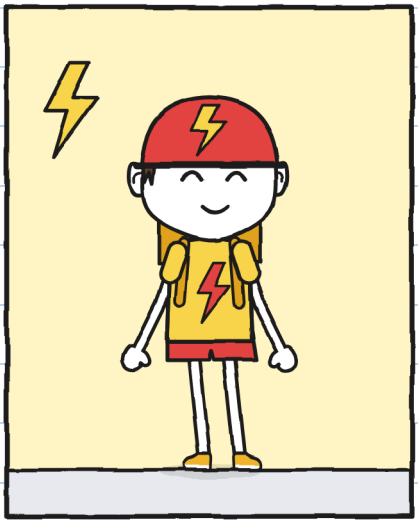
"Who?" Julie blurted out, and covered her mouth.

"I don'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 shrank into 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 like 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 little bell on it. You can keep it. Or let it go back."
"I know," said Tony. But he looked at me. As if he was hearing it for the first time.

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



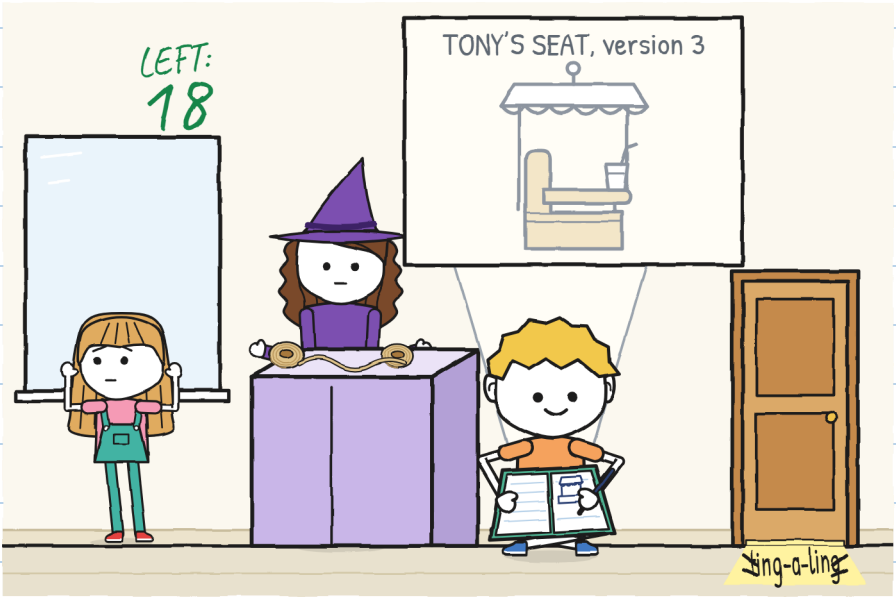


11 min

Eleven minutes. My tongue fell asleep. —J.

"I want to try it by myself," said Tony.
Mara, Julie and I went out. Tony closed the door of the back room.

Julie went to the other side of the shop so as not to listen. To avoid listening, I drew: Tony's seat now has a canopy, a cloth roof. I heard it anyway.



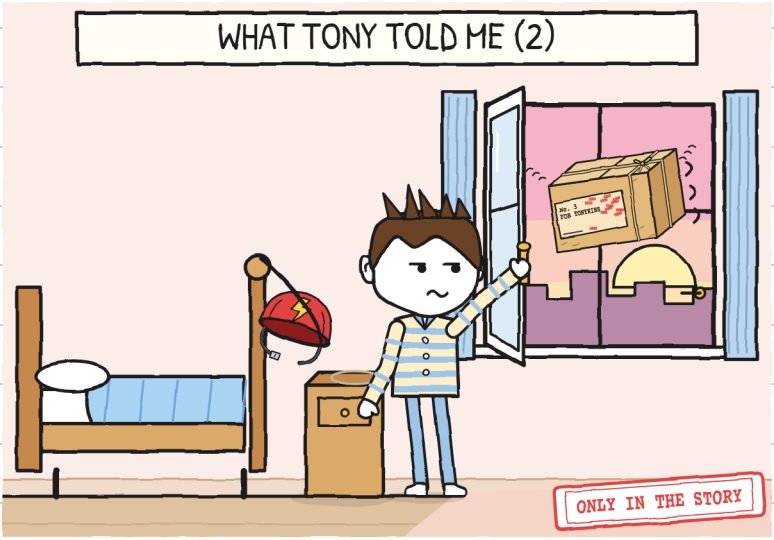
Ting-a-ling.
It was the same ting-a-ling as on Saturday. Then another. And then none, for a long time.

When Tony 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 Tony 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 the little bell and the note back inside the box.



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

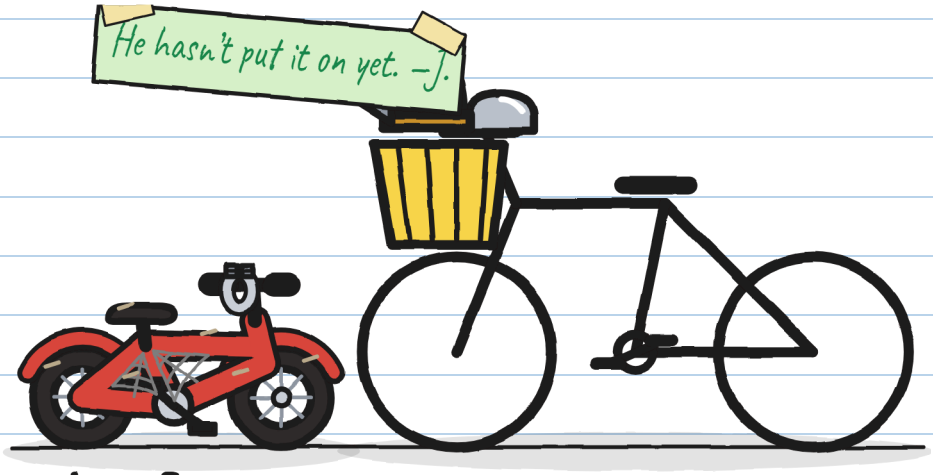
On Friday my street rang again: ting-a-ling, ting-a-ling, ting-a-ling. Return No. 14.
I didn't see what happened the night before. Tony told me:



"This time No. 3 didn't sleep on the doormat. It slept on my nightstand. At dawn it started banging on the glass, and I opened the window for it."

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

I drew Tony's two bikes together. I added the little bell to his bike now. It looks really good.
Julie stuck a note over the drawn little bell.



before now

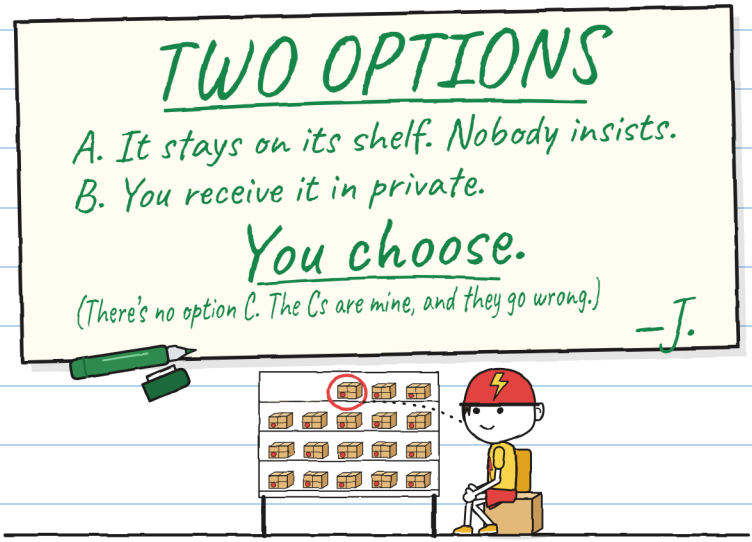
She was right. It annoys me a bit.

CHAPTER 5

In Private

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

Julie had spent two days preparing something. I feared another mess.
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, the one for deliveries. It doesn't leave this drawer."
"And LIGHTNING?"
"I won't tell LIGHTNING. A logbook isn't a sign."



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

Tony got up from his crate.

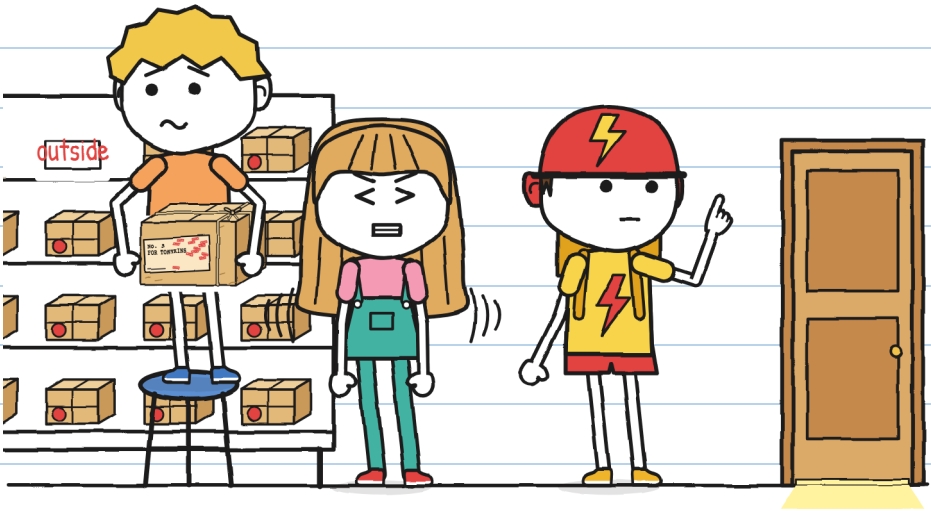
"B."

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 want me to sign more than anyone. I'd rather have you in front of me."



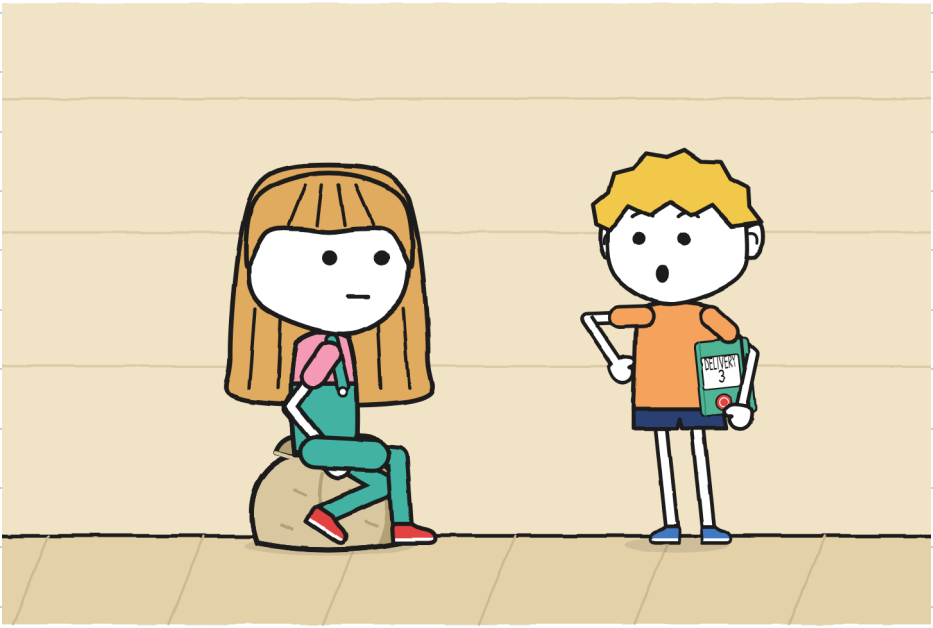
In the back room, Tony took out the little bell and the note again. He looked at them slowly, very carefully. "Before I sign, I look at what I'm signing," he said, without looking at anyone.
Julie turned the color of her T-shirt.



Julie gave Tony her green marker. She sat on a sack in the corner.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

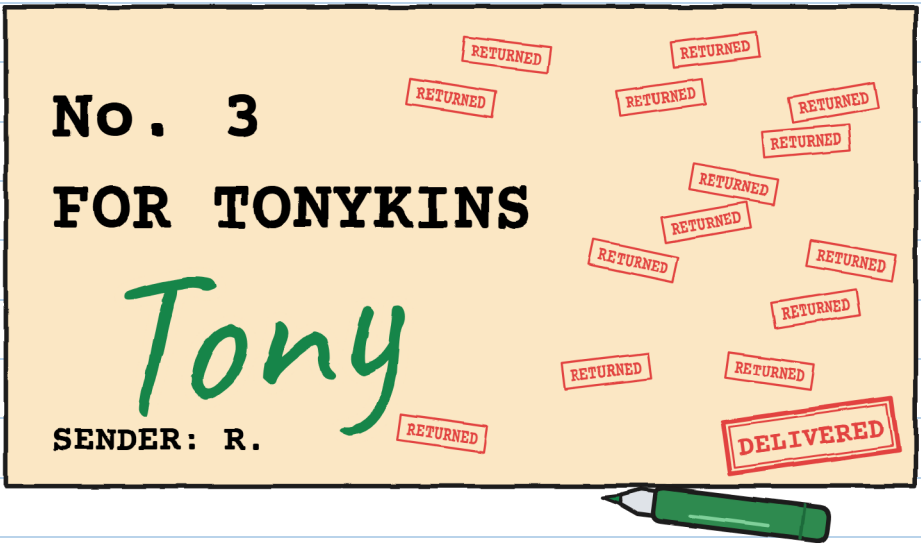
"I'm sitting on my hands. So I don't help."



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.

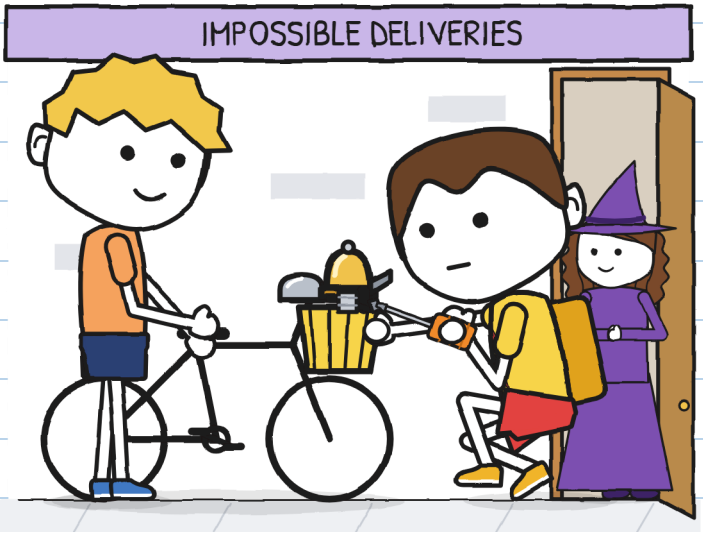
Tony went out onto the sidewalk. He leaned his bike against the wall. He took a screwdriver out of his backpack.

"Are you going to put the little bell on?" I asked.

"Yes."

"And the LIGHTNING bell?"

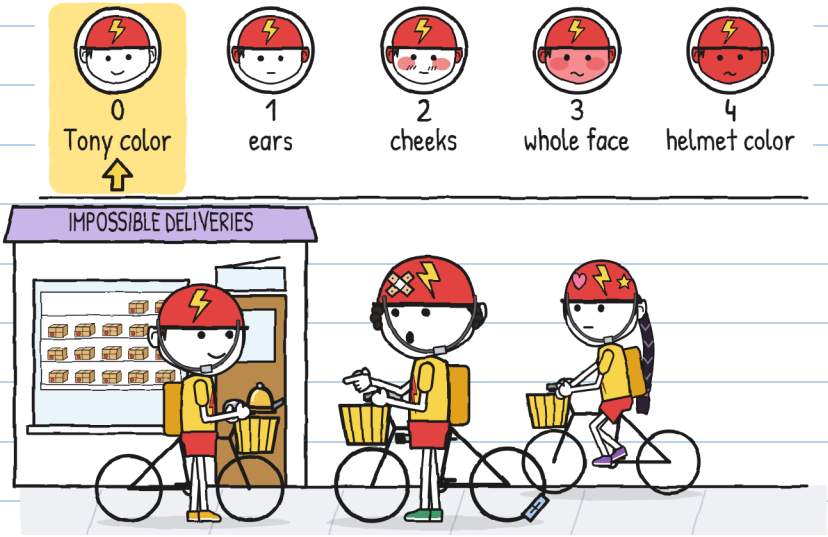
"That one belongs to LIGHTNING. This one is mine."



Tony put the little bell on. I only held the bike. And only because he asked me. Tony 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 red. 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.

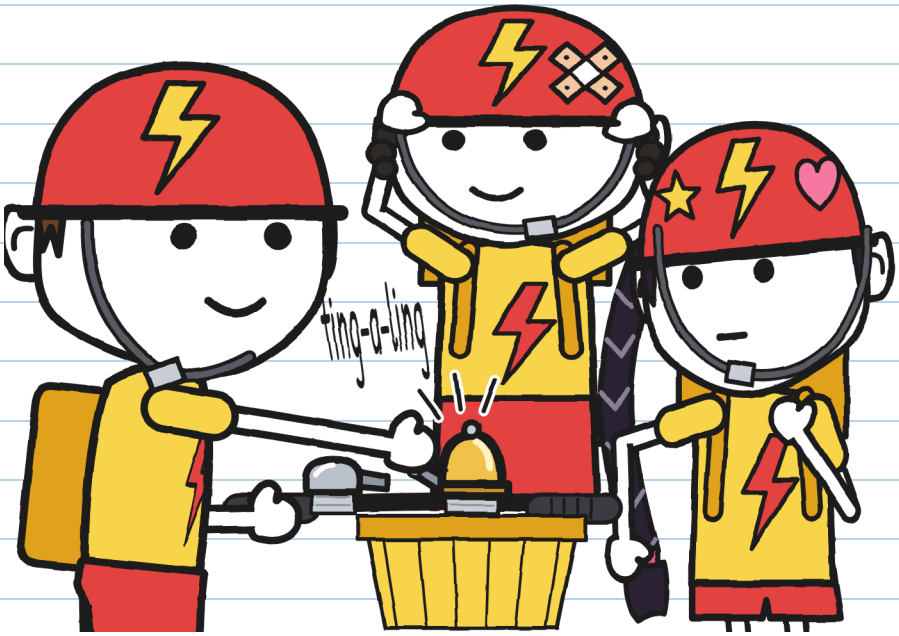
Zoe opened her mouth.

Tony tapped the little hammer. Once.

Ting-a-ling.

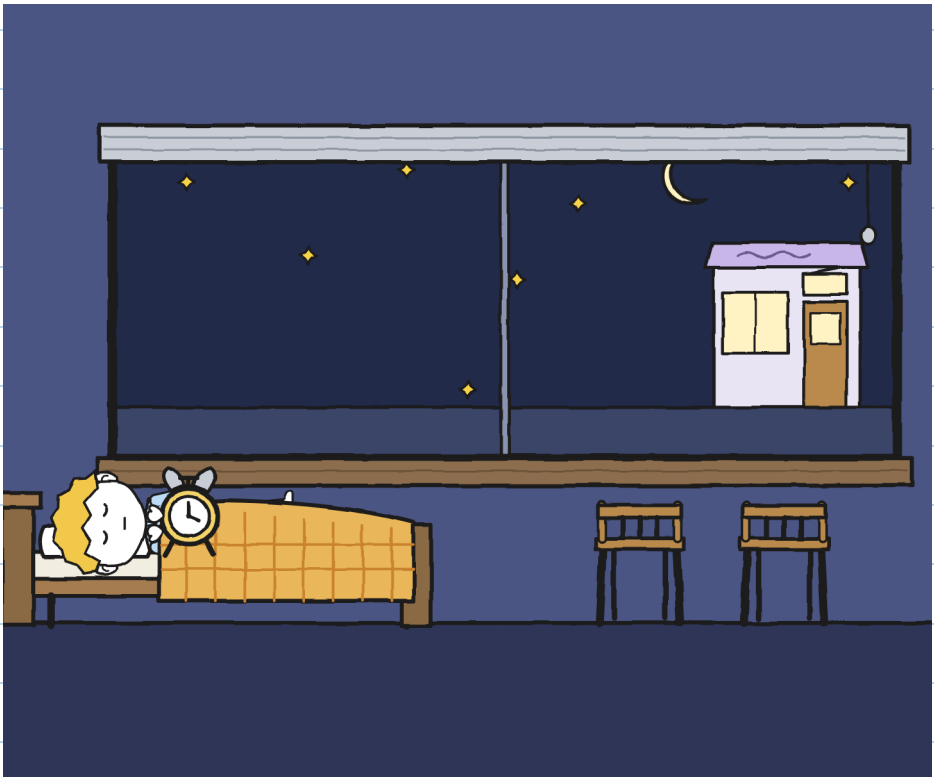
Zoe closed her mouth. She thought it over.

"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.

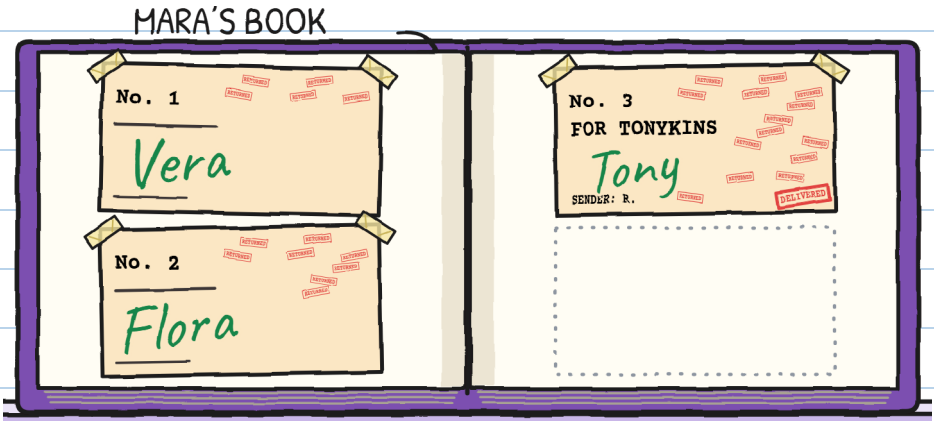


CHAPTER 6

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.

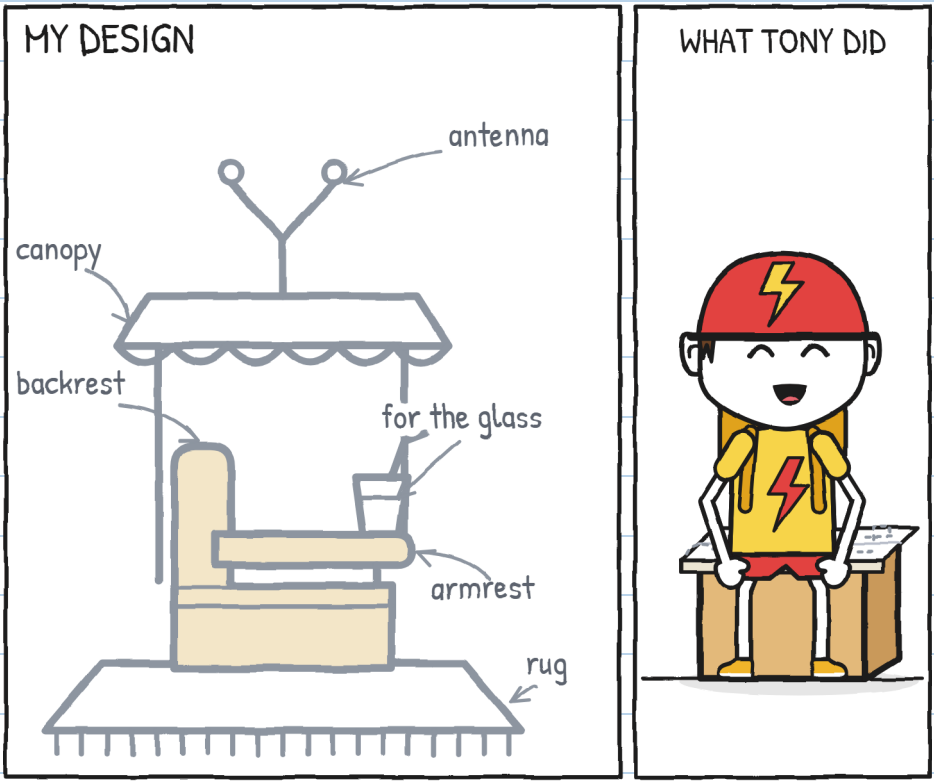
"The seat is still 'for now,'" said Mara.

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



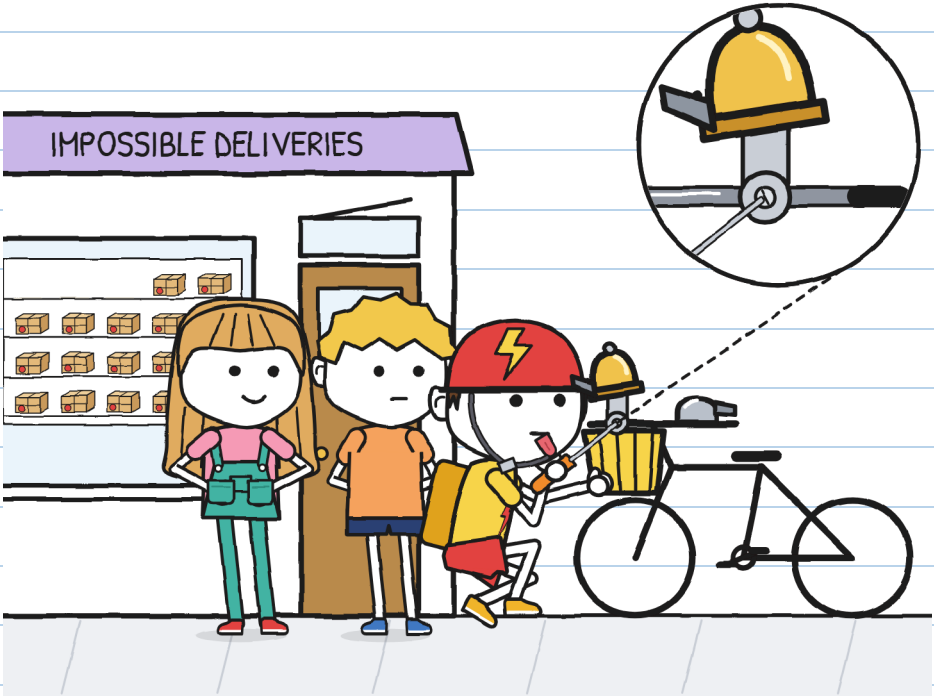
"For now" can last for years. Ask No. 3. —J.

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



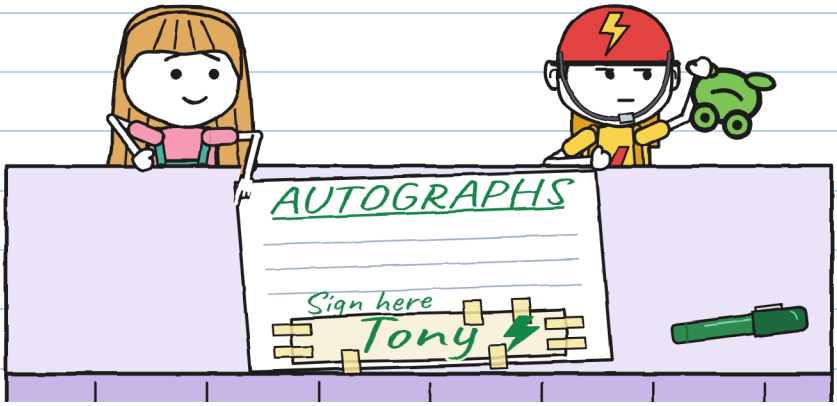
"Can I have it?" he said.
He folded the drawing in four, put it on the crate and sat down.

Outside, the little bell was 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.



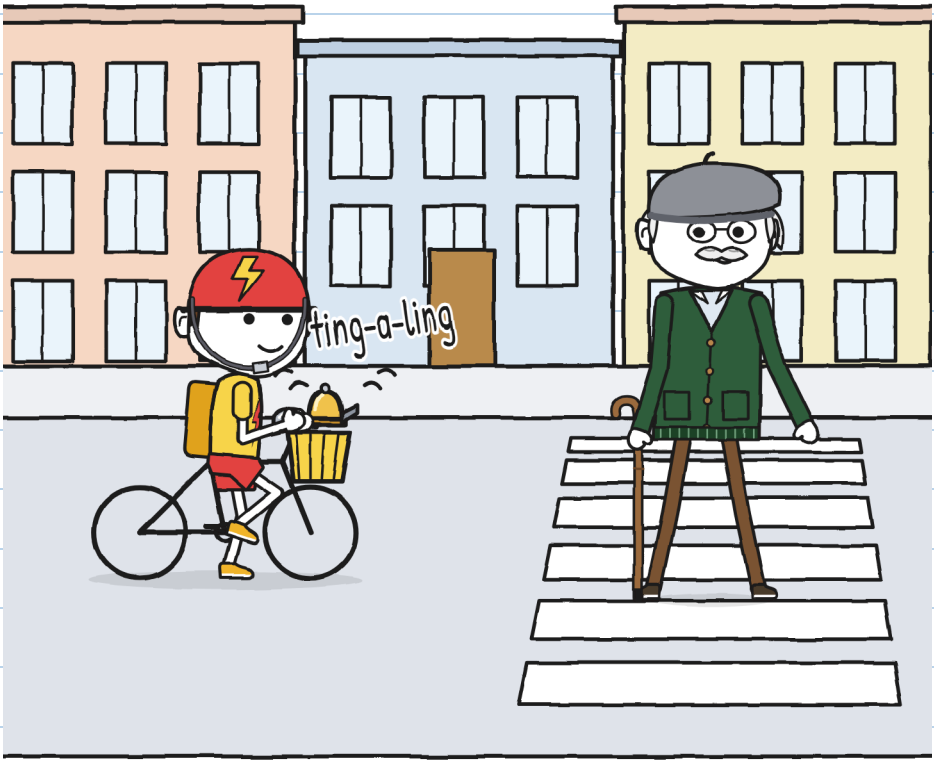
Julie took out the autograph sheet. The little window was covered with a paper patch and lots of tape.

"It's the one from the trap," she told Mara, without waiting for her question. "I've fixed it."
Then she put the sheet 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."



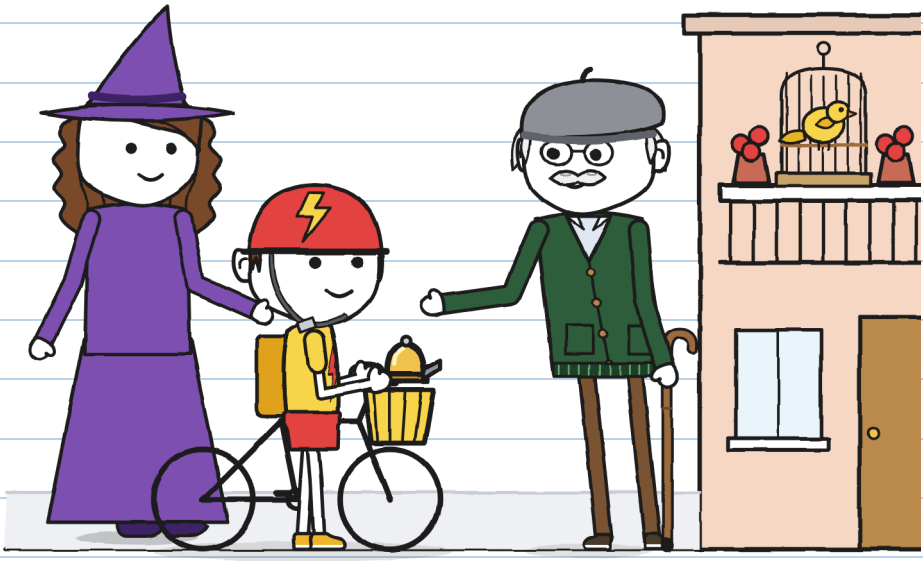
I deserve that. –J.

At noon, Tony went out on a delivery. A man in a beret was crossing slowly, with his cane.
Tony braked. He waited. He rang the little bell just once. As if saying: "I'm here."
Ting-a-ling.

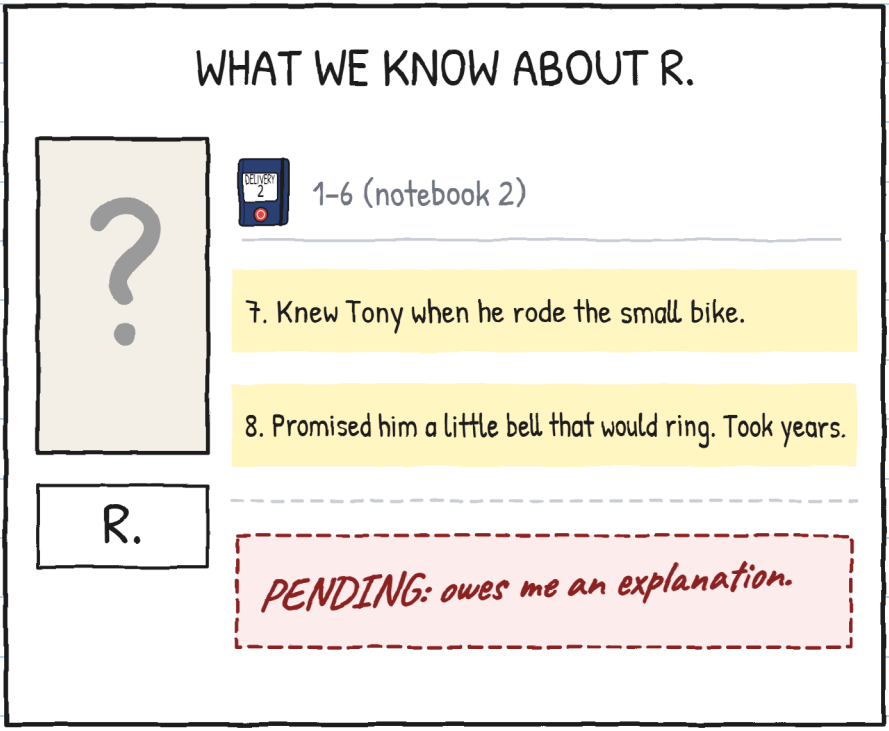


The man raised his cane to say hello and went on at his own pace.

"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."
"Nobody has called me Tonykins for sixty years. If you like, let's trade: you, Don Antonio; me, Tonykins."
Tony thought about it.
"Not for now."



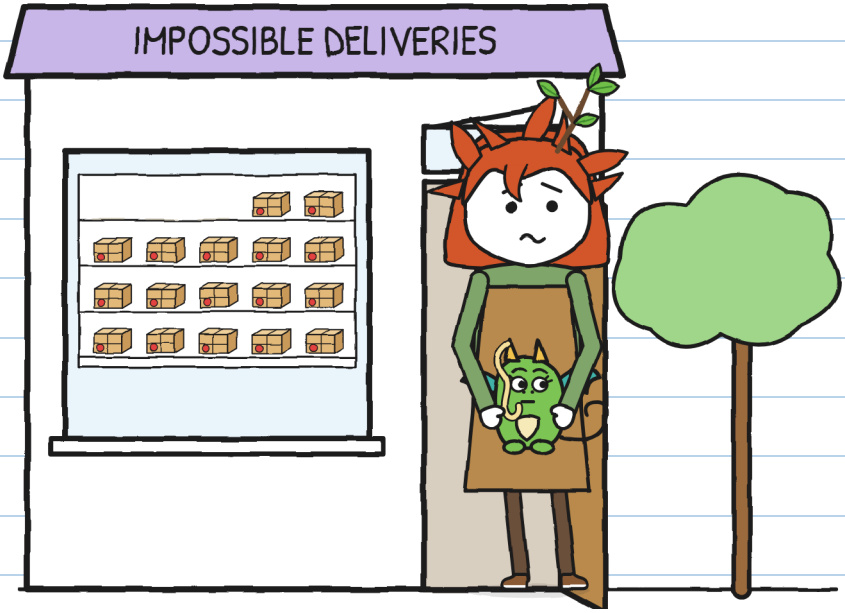
I took out the file on R. It already had six clues in it. I added two. Tony asked me for my pen and wrote underneath, in his own handwriting.



"And aren't you going to thank R.?" asked Julie.
"The thanks and the complaint. Both. When I find out who R. is."

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."



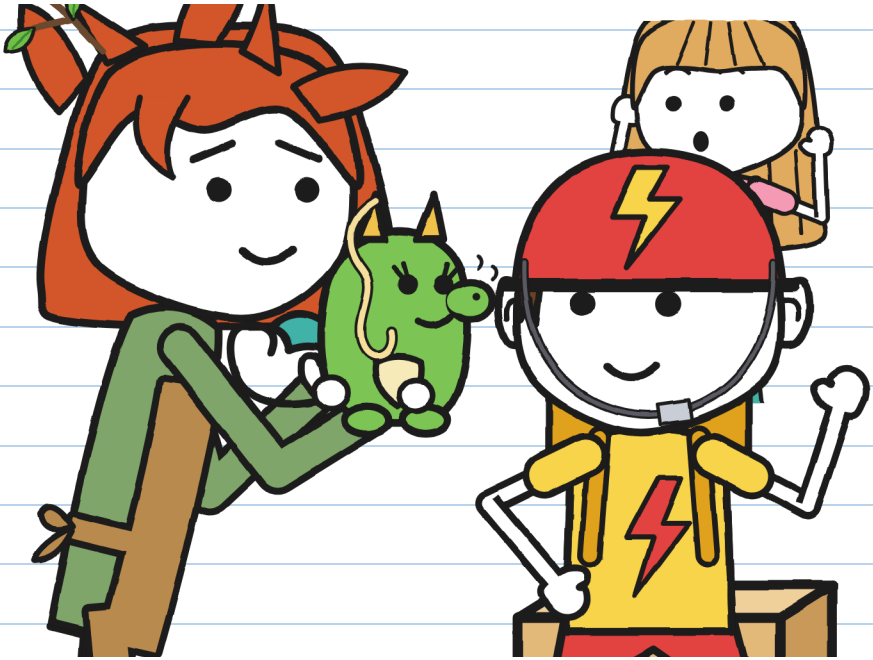
Crumb looked at me and put on my "it wasn't me" face.

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).

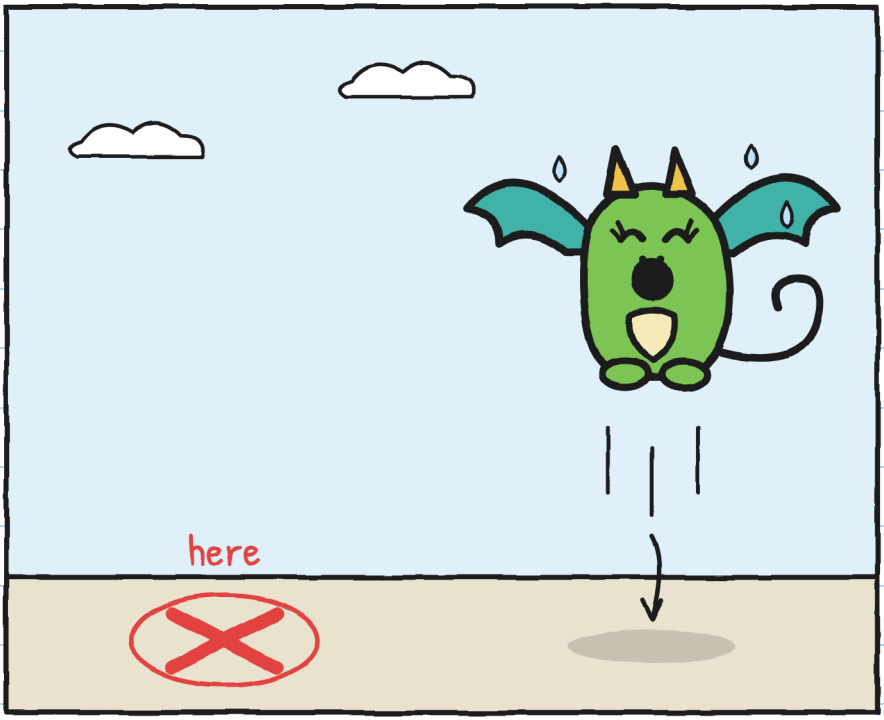


Tony went off on a delivery. A ting-a-ling sounded in the street. And another.
This time he was the one ringing the little bell.

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

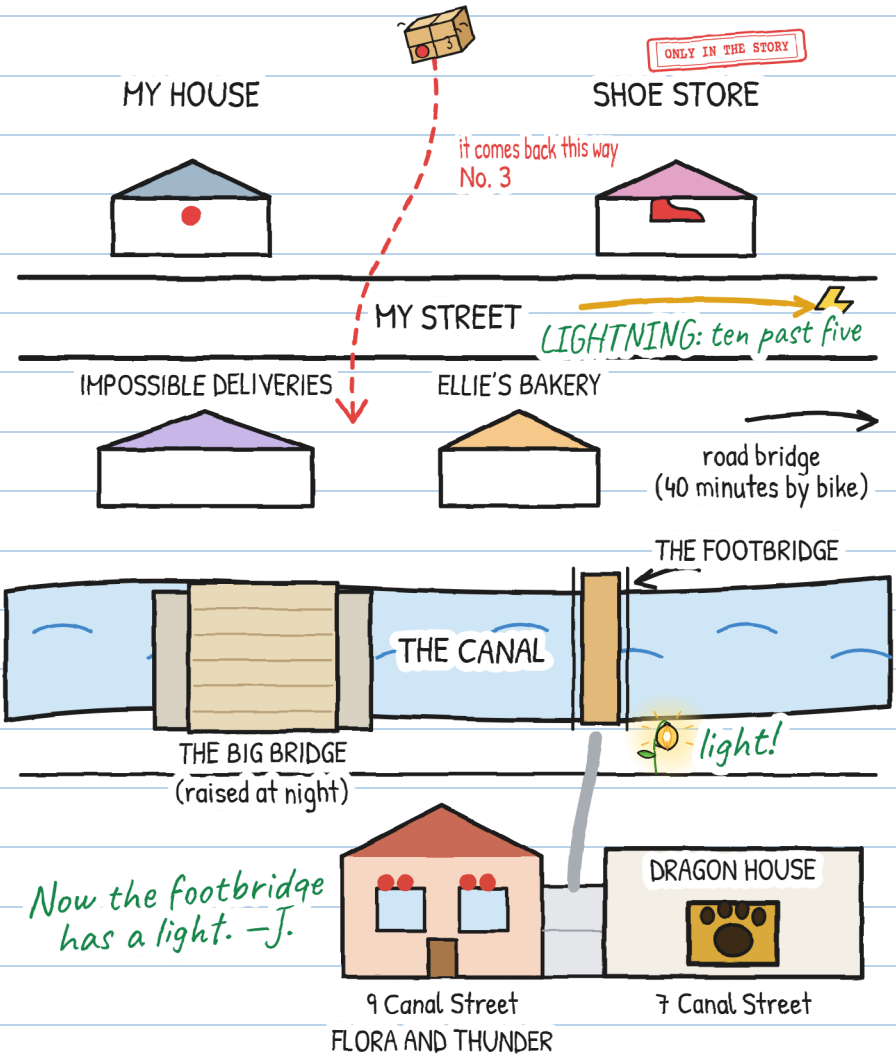
IMPOSSIBLE DELIVERIES · 4

(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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MARA AND TONY LAUGH. CAN YOU SEE THE RED BIKE?

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

