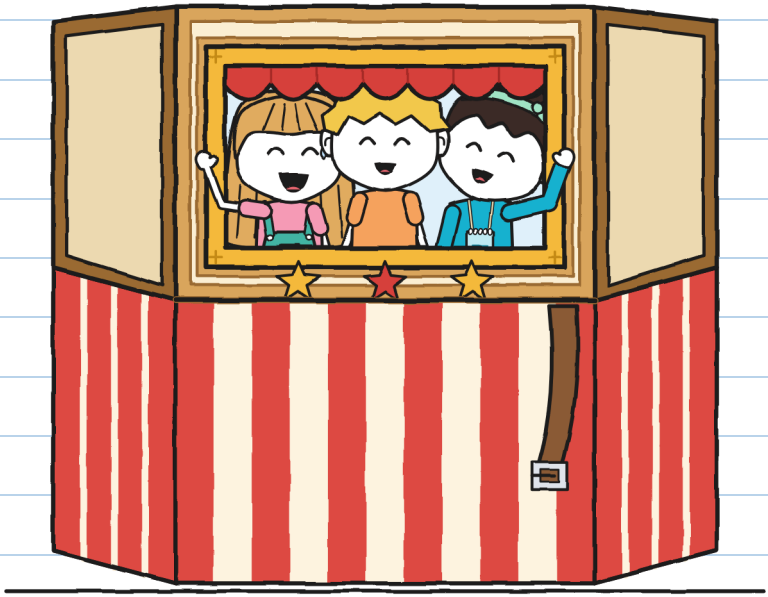
IMPOSSIBLE DELIVERIES · 6

A Spot for Three

LinguAula



(Gus's notebook)

SIZE L
Advanced level · 11+

IMPOSSIBLE DELIVERIES · 6

A Spot for Three

Text and illustrations: LinguAula

SIZE L · Advanced level · 11+

English version: LinguAula

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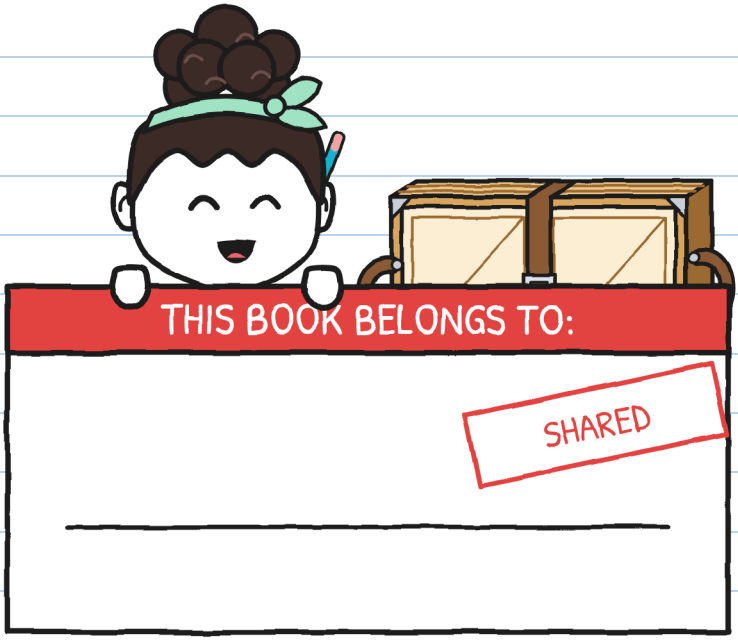
Free to photocopy, for class and for home.

Sixth book in the series. Earlier: "This Package Bites", "Do Not Open Before Thunder", "Return to Sender, Please", "Not Here, Crumb!" and "A Cake for Two".

LinguAula

Work through every chapter at linguaula.com

Three carry it. I've chosen a handle. —J.



Shared. We fit. –J.

If you find it, return it folded.

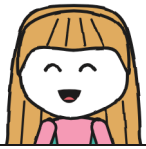
ONLY IN THE STORY

This stamp marks what only happens in the story: real dragons don't exist and packages don't fly back. For a real transfer, see page 76. –J.

WHO'S WHO



Gus. Measures in centimetres. This week he counts something else too.



Julie. Knows the way. Explaining it is another matter.



Noa. Julie's friend from way back. Measures in steps: she always has them on.



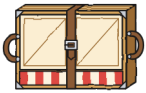
Irene. Runs the theatre workshop. She doesn't say which way: she says "stop".



Tony. From LIGHTNING and the shop. Times things and gives no opinions. Nearly.



Mara. Lends the package. She doesn't let go of the box.



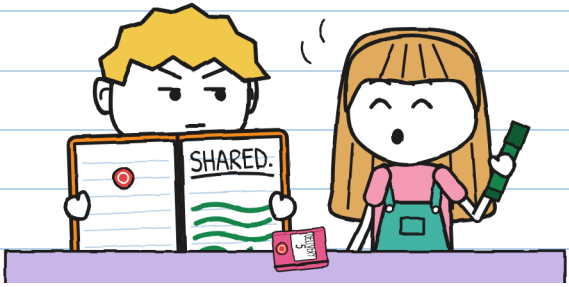
No. 6. A theatre that fits in a box. If nobody holds the strap, it opens wherever it likes.



R. Sender. This time R. left a line in an inventory.

DELIVERY NOTEBOOK 6
by Gus

SHARED.



Notebook 5 ended with two needles on one dial. This one is orange, like a tangerine, and it has the shop's stamp too.

On the first page I wrote a single word and left half the page free, just in case. It didn't stay free for even a minute.

I shared the first page with my handwriting. —J.

CHAPTER 1

Why Does It Take Three?

On Monday, coming out of school, Julie was waiting at the counter with an envelope. It wasn't green or blue. It was turquoise, and sealed.

"The postman brought it. It says 'To the Impossible Deliveries shop'. I've been not opening it for a while."
"How long?"
"Twenty-eight minutes," said Tony from his crate, watch in hand. "Neighbourhood record."

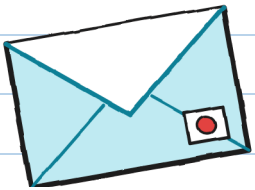


It wasn't mine. Envelopes that aren't mine weigh three times as much. –J.

Mara opened it with a fingernail.

I'm Irene, in charge of the theatre workshop at the community centre.
While updating the inventory I found a line:
"Folding little theatre: pending receipt."
Do you have it?
The neighbourhood rally is on Saturday the 31st.
If the little theatre arrives folded at our yard,
carried by a team of three, I'll sign for it on the spot.
Noa's team has a spot for three and, for now, only she is on it.

Julie: it's me! I do theatre now.
Bring someone who knows about packages. –Noa

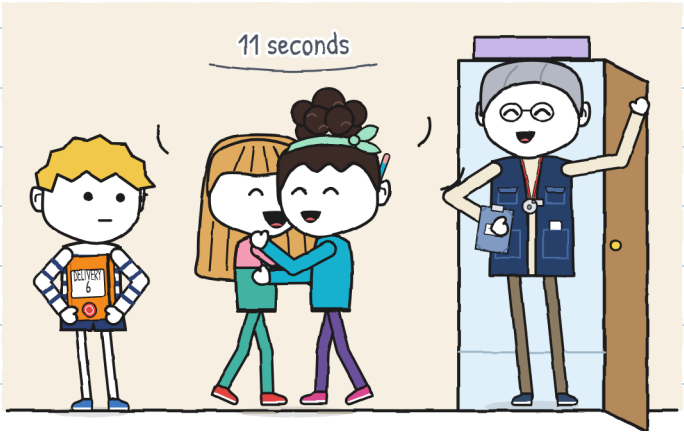


"Someone who knows about packages." That was me. I liked the "packages" part. The "someone" part, less so.

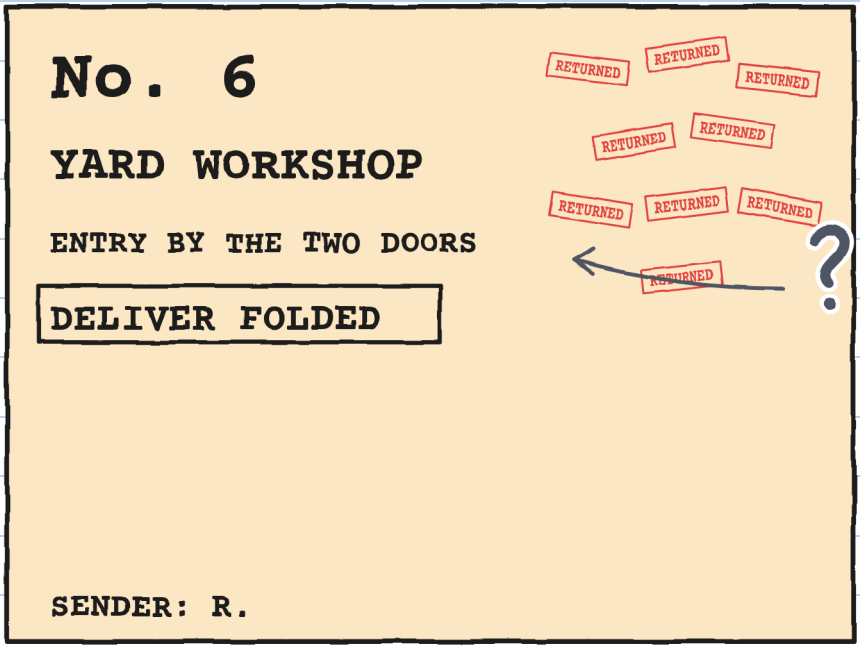
At five, the two of them arrived. Irene had a folder, a gilet full of pockets and a whistle hanging round her neck. Noa had a notebook hanging from a string and a turquoise pencil behind her ear.

Julie and she hugged for so long that I had time to measure it: eleven seconds. I stayed to one side, with my notebook. A notebook is good for that too: for having something in your hands.

"This is Gus," said Julie. "He knows about packages."
"Hello, Gus who knows about packages," said Noa. And she wrote my name in her notebook.



Mara climbed on the blue stool and took No. 6 down from its shelf. A box like all the others.



"Nine stamps," said Julie.
"'The two doors,'" read Noa. "What two doors?"

Irene didn't know. Neither did Mara. I wrote it down with a question mark.

"I took it nine times," said Mara. "On Mondays the sewing group opened up. On Wednesdays, the choir. On Fridays, the chess club. 'The workshop? Not here.' Nobody signed for a workshop."
"The theatre rehearses in the yard," said Irene. "And in the yard there's no bell."

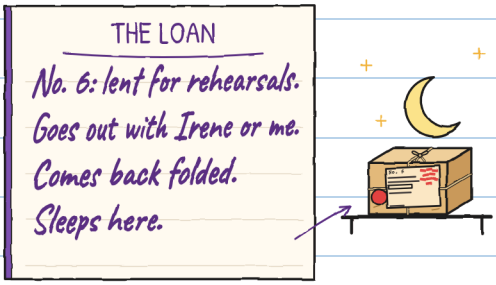
She opened the folder and showed Mara a sheet with the centre's stamp.

"It's in the register now: 'Theatre workshop. In charge: Irene.' Somebody signs for a workshop now."



"Now that there's someone to sign, why doesn't Mara take it in her box, like Ellie's stand?" asked Julie.
"I took it in its box nine times," said Mara. "Now the conditions are set by whoever receives it."
"A folding little theatre is for taking to squares," said Irene. "I need to see that my kids can manage it in the street. If they can't, it doesn't work for me. And I don't sign what doesn't work for me."

"I've heard that before in a bakery," said Mara. And she wrote her conditions in the logbook. The label stays on the box, and the box stays with Mara.

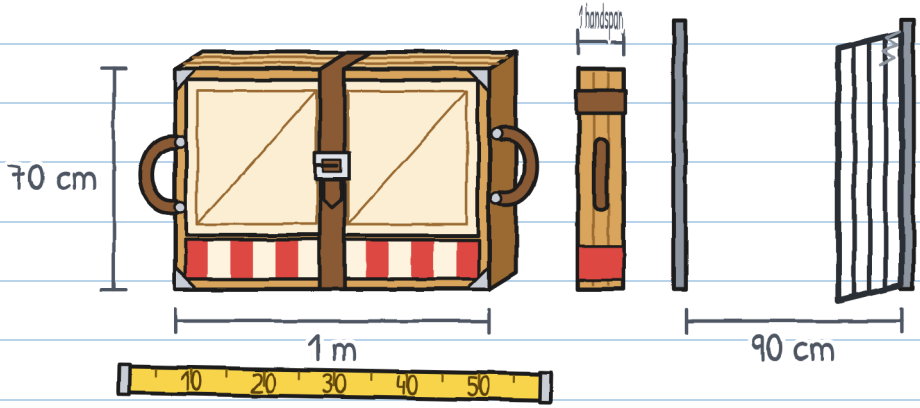


If it sleeps on its shelf, at dawn it has nowhere to go back to. It stays at nine stamps. I asked. —J.

On Tuesday we went to the community centre yard. You go in from the pavement through an iron gate that closes by itself.

Mara put the box on the ground and undid the lid. Coming out, the little theatre grew, like Ellie's stand. I don't get scared any more: I take out my tape.

MEASUREMENTS OF NO. 6

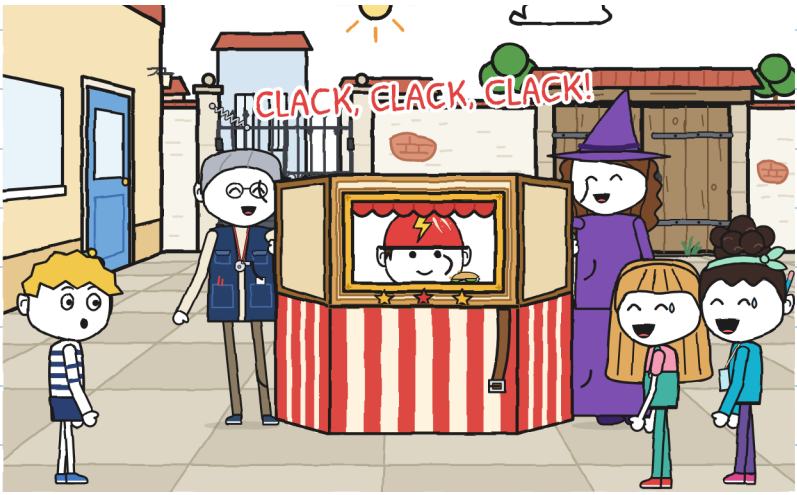


On its edge, it fitted through the gate. That was the easy part.

Before anything else, Irene wanted to check it was all there. She undid the strap and turned the bundle. The panels opened by themselves, from their own weight: clack, clack, clack. A stage with three walls, a short curtain and a framed window in the back panel.

Through the window you could see Tony, passing by with a sandwich. His mouth was full. He couldn't say hello.

"It's all there," said Irene. "Workshop rule: hands on the handles. Never on the hinges. And on turns, somebody holds the strap."



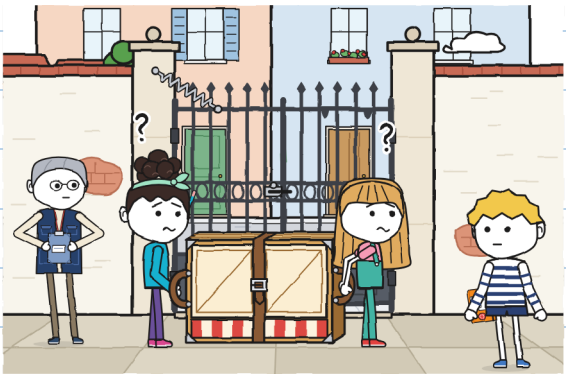
Irene and Mara folded it and fastened the strap.

"We'll try it," said Julie. Noa was already at the other handle.

They counted to three and lifted it. They could. They did a lap of the yard. They reached the gate. The gate was shut.

Julie looked at it. Noa looked at it. They had four hands and all four were busy.

I was two metres away, with both of mine free and a notebook.



I held the gate with my back. They went through. Irene wrote something in her folder.

That afternoon I invented this notebook's gadget.

THE THREE-GAUGE

who does what on each leg

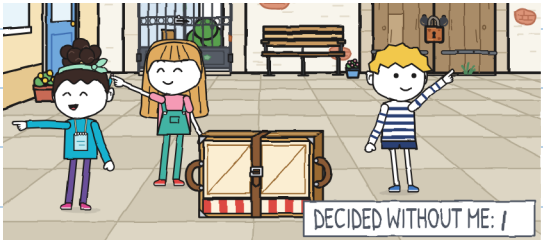
	CARRY 	GUIDE 	CLEAR THE WAY 
yard, first try	Julie and Noa	Julie and Noa	
yard, second try	Julie and Noa	Julie and Noa	Gus

Two names repeated and one box empty: it doesn't pass. With every box filled, it does.

And I noted down something else, smaller: "A gate can be held by a stone too."

We still had to work out the label.
"The two doors are the two halves of the gate,"
said Julie.
"Both have to be opened," said Noa.
"First we could measure the wall from outside," I said.
We all pointed at once: Julie at the gate, Noa at the workshop room, me at the street.
"Later," they both said.

I went alone. I walked round the wall and found something. When I came back, they were laughing about something from before I came. I opened my mouth.
"It's decided, Gus," said Julie. "It's the two halves."
I closed my mouth. And the notebook.



I saw that tally mark two days later. It was mine. –J.

CHAPTER 2

Who Knows the Way?

On Wednesday it was time for the first journey: from the shop to the yard, along the street. When I arrived, the gauge was already filled in. In green.

"You and Noa carry," said Julie. "I'll guide, because I know the way. And since I'm in front, I clear the way."
"We thought of it on the way here," said Noa.

Green doesn't come off. Second tally mark.

THE THREE-GAUGE

	CARRY	GUIDE	CLEAR THE WAY
yard, first try	Julie and Noa	Julie and Noa	
yard, second try	Julie and Noa	Julie and Noa	Gus
shop → yard	*Gus and Noa*	*Julie*	*Julie*

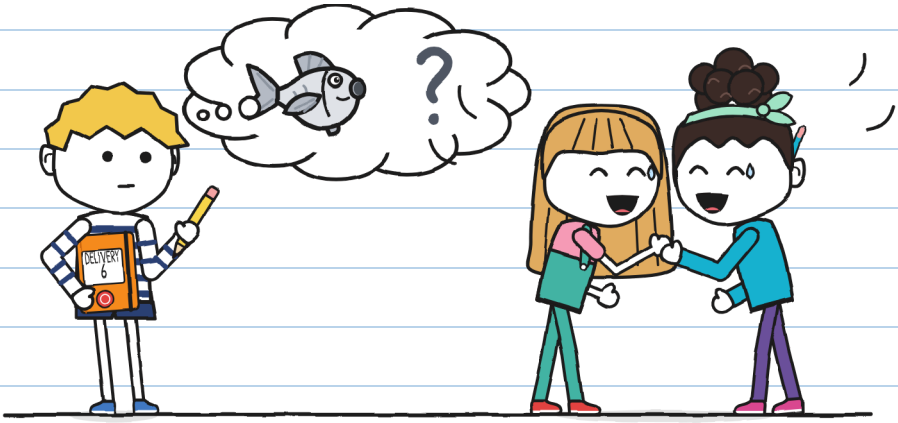
DECIDED WITHOUT ME: 11

"Before we set off we could make a plan," I said. "With the turns numbered."
"We don't need a plan," said Julie. "It's straight on to the limping fish."

Noa started laughing. So did Julie.

"What fish?"
"The limping fish is the limping fish," said Noa.
"It's a long story," said Julie.
"And a very good one," said Noa.

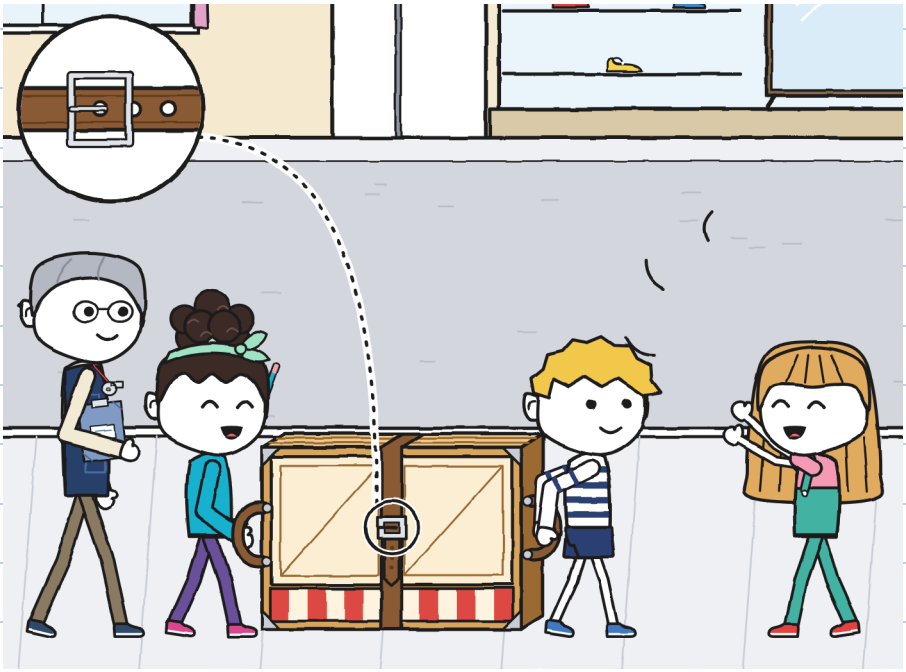
They didn't tell it to me. Third tally mark.



Mara took the little theatre out of its box at the shop door. Noa fastened the strap on the first hole.

"That way it comes undone sooner when we arrive."

I went in front and Noa behind. In front you can see the street. Behind you can only see little theatre. Irene came last, with the folder and the whistle. She didn't say which way. She said "stop" when there was a kerb.

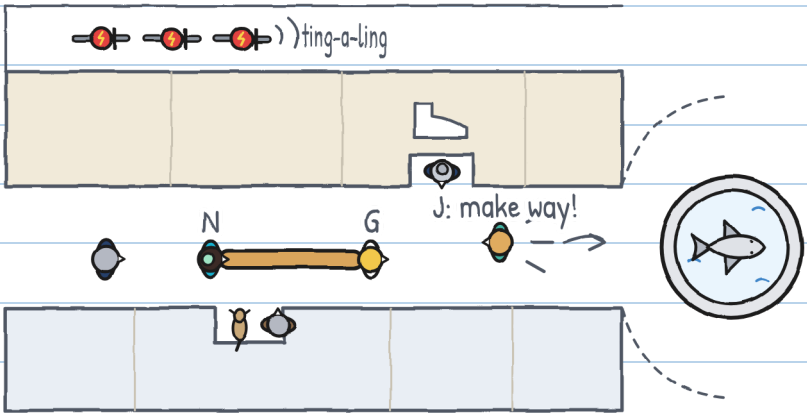


Julie was very good at clearing the way.

"Make way, there's a theatre coming through!"

The shoe shop lady came to her door to see it. A man with a dog waited in a street door. Far away, on the other side of the neighbourhood, a little bell rang. Ting-a-ling.

"LIGHTNING is practising its test," said Noa. "They're on bikes, with an envelope. We're on foot, with this."
"You don't run with this," said Irene.

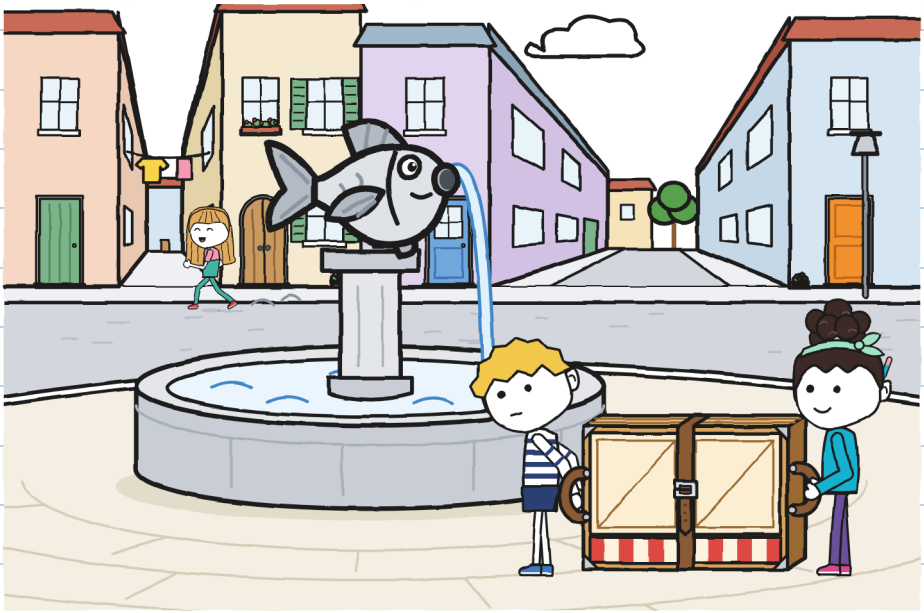


We reached the little square with the fountain. Julie turned round, shouted the direction and ran off towards the centre, to start holding the gate.

"Up to the limping fish and turn!"

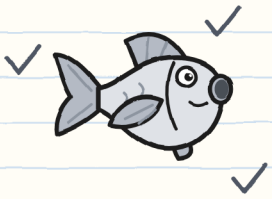
And she was gone.

In the middle of the fountain there's a stone fish. I looked at it closely. From my side it had all its fins.

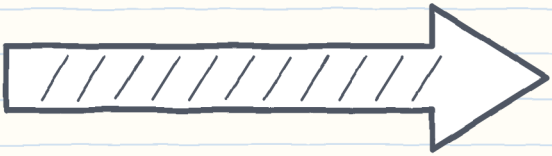


I thought fast, which isn't my thing.

Fountain fish: fins in view, all of them.
It isn't limping.
There must be another fish.



Turn: which way?
Left, narrow street.
Right, wide street.
A little theatre goes better down the wide one.

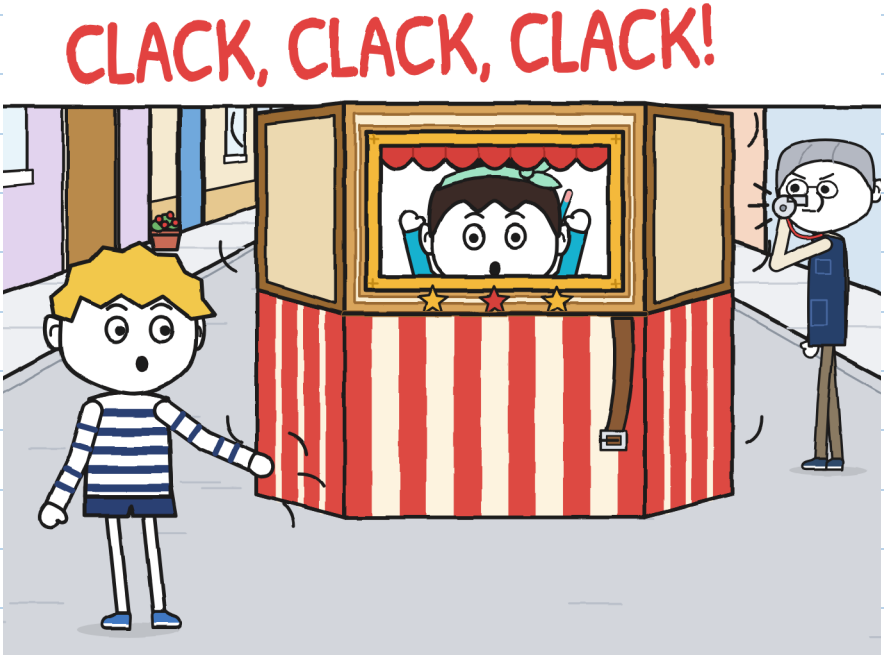


"Do I turn now?" I asked over my shoulder.
"At the limping fish!" said Noa from behind the little theatre.

I kept looking for another fish. There wasn't one. I turned right.

Nobody said "turn". Nobody held the strap. On the first hole, the buckle doesn't hold much.
Clack. Clack. Clack.

The panels opened slowly, one after another, all round Noa. Irene blew the whistle. When the noise stopped, in the middle of the street there was a theatre. And inside the theatre, Noa.
"Hello," she said through the window.

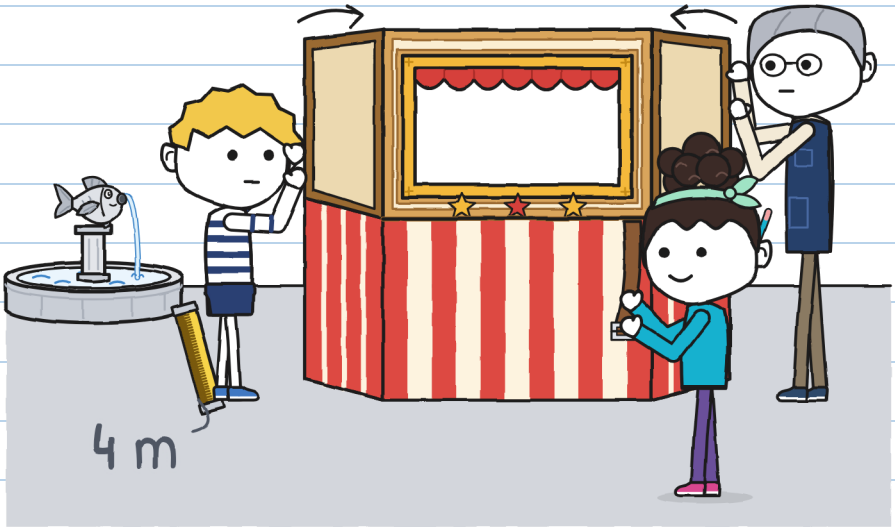


Irene looked at Noa's hands. Then at mine. They were all in one piece: the panels weigh little and open slowly.

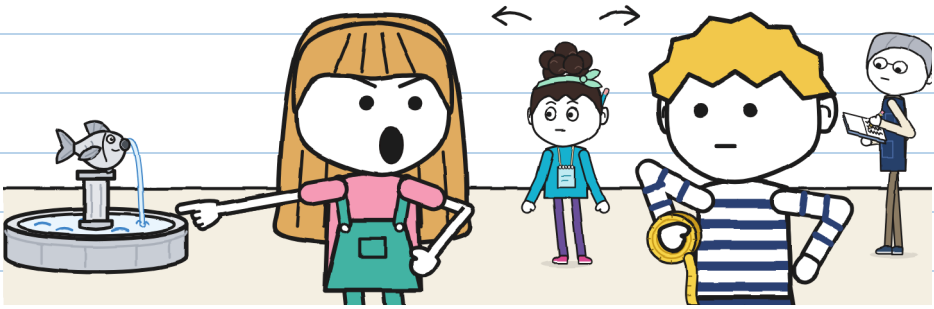
"Who was guiding?" she asked.

Nobody answered. The one who was guiding was holding a gate, two streets away.

Irene and I folded it, with our hands on the side rails. Meanwhile I measured: from my foot to the fountain, four metres.



Julie came running back.
"But it was at the limping fish!"
"Which limping fish?"
"That one!" She pointed at the fountain. "On the left. Like always."
"'Always' is before I got here."
Julie turned to Irene.
"It's just that Gus got lost."
I hadn't got lost. I knew exactly where I was: four metres from the fountain. I'd just measured it.
They decided that without me too. Fourth tally mark.



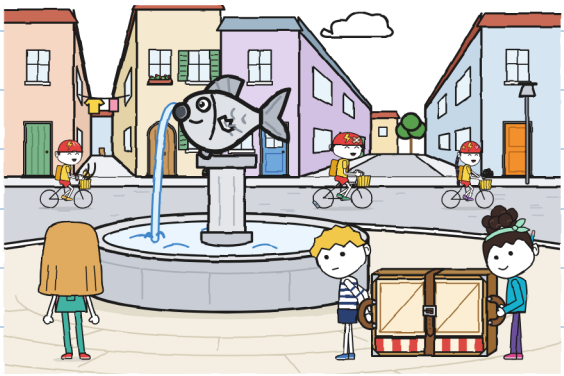
I said it out loud and in front of people. I know. —J.

They showed me the other side of the fish. It's missing a fin, the left one. To see it you have to know it isn't there.

We repeated the turn. The first time I said "turn" too soon. The second, too late. The third came out right, but nobody was talking.

Then LIGHTNING came along the road: Zoe, Bruno and Tony, in a line, with their hands on the handlebars. Ting-a-ling at the corner. They went round the fountain without braking and without touching.

"Station one, first time," said Tony as he passed.



We reached the yard when it was almost night. Mara put the little theatre in its box and took it back to the shop.

I noted down the day's events in the gauge. All three boxes had a name and, even so, a theatre had opened in the street. The gauge was missing something. I didn't know what.

THE THREE-GAUGE

	CARRY	GUIDE	CLEAR THE WAY	
shop → yard	Gus and Noa	Julie	Julie	
shop → fountain	Gus and Noa	Julie	Julie	it opened · repeated 3 times

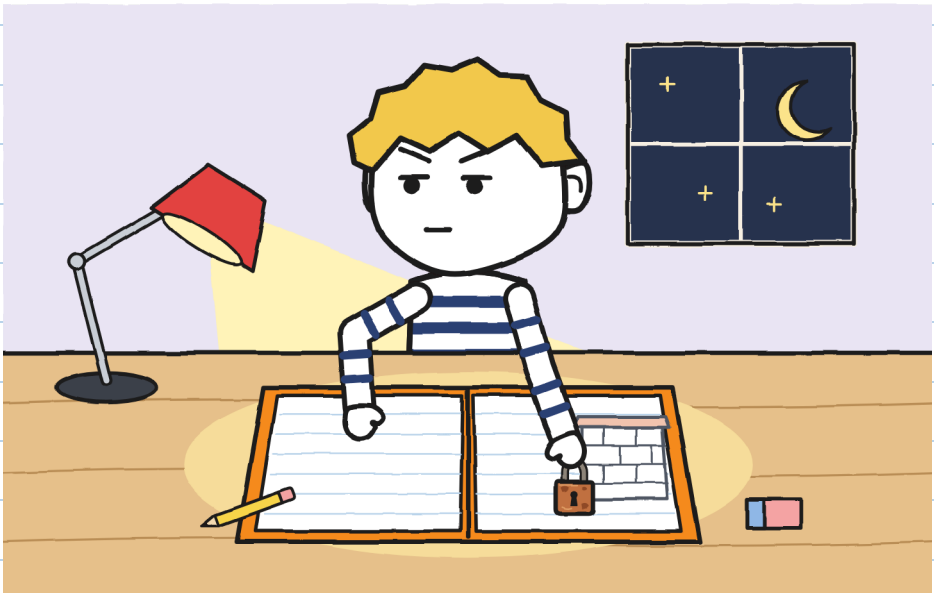
?

My name is in that row twice. And I wasn't in either of them. —J.

At home I drew, on the last page, what I'd found on Tuesday behind the yard wall. I covered it with my hand even though I was alone.

I thought: "Tomorrow they'll get it wrong again. Then I'll bring it out."

It seemed a good plan. It even had a time.



I read this page on Thursday. I didn't like it. Nor did I like mine from Wednesday. —J.

CHAPTER 3

Is Gus's Plan Any Good?

That night I made the whole plan. The yard seen from above, the wall measured, the gate, the fountain, the three legs. And, on the back, Tuesday's thing.

It turned out a very good plan. I folded it in four and kept it inside the notebook.



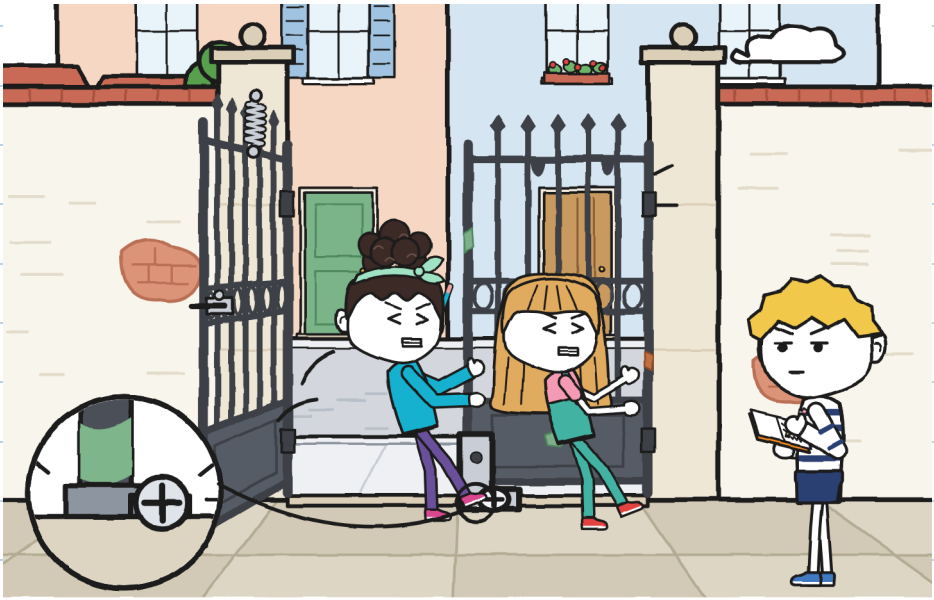
On Thursday, in the shop, Noa was counting.
"From the door to the kerb, six steps. From the kerb to the lamp post, eleven."
"That's measured with a tape," I said.
"I measure in steps. I always have them on."

I measured one step for her: fifty-eight centimetres. She wrote it in her notebook. I wrote it in mine. Julie watched us like someone seeing two clocks showing the same time.
I thought Noa would be another Julie. She isn't.
Noa counts.



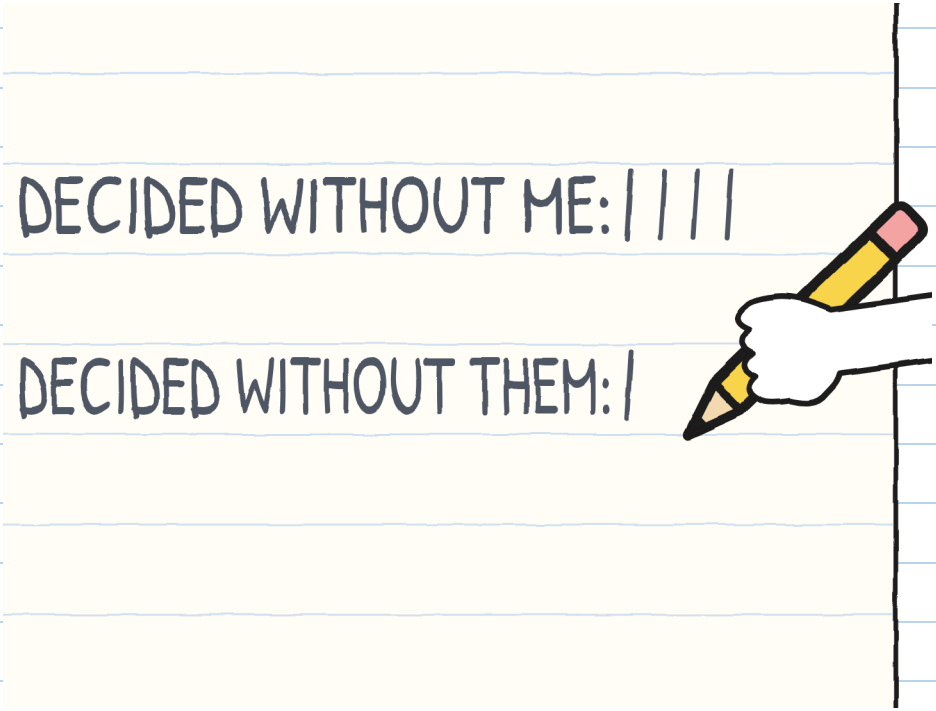
We went to the yard with Irene. Julie and Noa wanted to try their idea: opening both halves of the gate.
The first half opens and closes by itself. The second didn't open. It has paint on top of paint, and a screw in the ground.

"Then the label is wrong," said Julie.
"Definitely," said Noa.
They decided it in two seconds. I took out my pencil for the tally mark. It would have been the fifth.



I didn't make it.

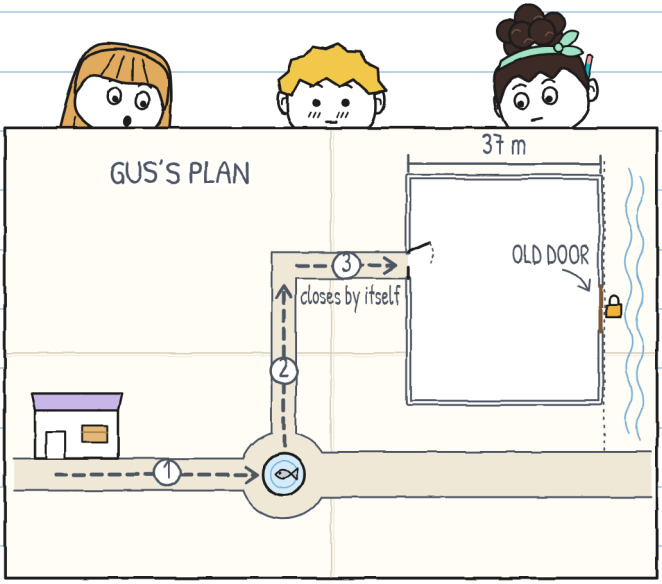
I looked at the row of tally marks. One was missing. On Tuesday, behind the yard wall, I too had decided something without asking anyone: to keep quiet.



"The label isn't wrong," I said. It came out louder than I meant. "The yard has another door. It's round the back, in the canal alley. It's old and has a padlock. I found it on Tuesday."

I took out the plan and unfolded it on top of the little theatre.

"On Tuesday?" said Julie.
"On Tuesday. I kept it back so I could be right later."



Nobody said anything for a while. I measured it: it was long.
"OK," said Noa. And she copied the door onto her map.
Julie didn't say "OK". She was moving one foot.
"That would have been really useful yesterday."
"I know."

There's no corner in the yard. I didn't look for one either. I stayed where I was, with the plan open.



I didn't say "OK" because it wasn't true yet. –J.

The three of us went to see it, with Irene. Noa counted the wall: sixty-four steps. I already had it: thirty-seven metres. It came out the same.

The old door is made of wood, with two halves, as wide as a giant's bed. The padlock has more rust than padlock.

"It's been shut for years," said Irene. "I've always seen it like that."



Irene looked in the centre's register until she reached a yellow sheet.

"Here it is. When this door was in use, you got into the yard in two ways: through the gate or through here. They called it 'the two-door yard'. And of all the groups, only the theatre rehearses in the yard."

"So the label isn't a riddle," said Noa.

"It's an address," I said.

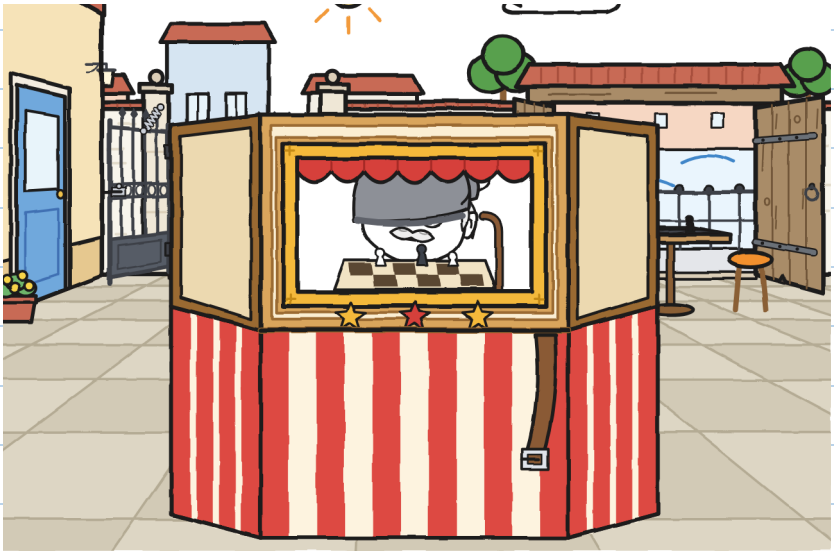
"Yard workshop. Entry by the two doors." It was written correctly. It was just old.



Mara said later that she'd seen that padlock nine times. She thought a shut door didn't count any more. —J.

The key was in the folder, in an envelope: "Old door. Do not lose." Irene opened the padlock. The door made a noise like a ship.

Inside, in the yard, the chess players had put the tables out in the sun. Irene opened the little theatre in the middle, to see how much room it left between the two doors. It left plenty.
Through the little theatre's window you could see Don Antonio, with his beret over his eyes. He was thinking about a move. He was snoring a little.



"On Saturday I'll open both," said Irene. "Bikes come in by the old one, from the canal alley. Loads on foot, by the gate, from the pavement. That way they don't cross."

"But the old one is wider," said Julie. "And it doesn't close by itself."

"And the gate is yours. If the workshop takes the little theatre to a square, there will be worse doors."

Julie opened her mouth. She looked at Noa. She looked at me.

"What do you say?"

It was the first time all week. I noted it down with the date.



I said the gate, but rehearsed first. Noa said the same. Julie said OK, and this time it was half true.

Afterwards we fixed the gauge. It had three boxes and none of them worked for yesterday's thing or for mine.

THE THREE-GAUGE (WITH FOUR)

	CARRY 	GUIDE 	CLEAR THE WAY 	WARN 
yard, second try	Julie and Noa	Julie and Noa	Gus	Gus, no
shop → fountain	Gus and Noa	Julie	Julie	*nobody*

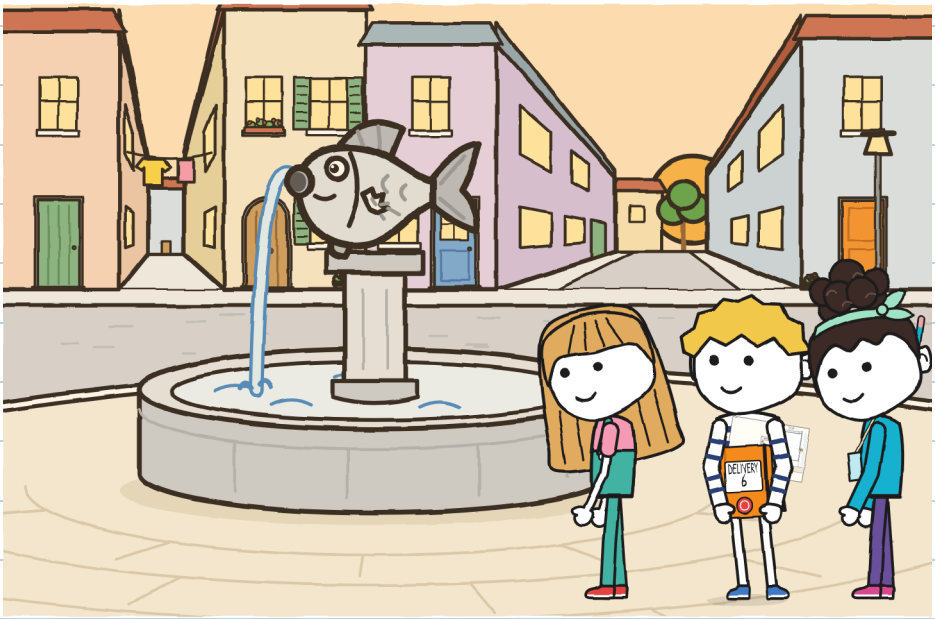


The three-gauge has four boxes. I'm not complaining. The fourth is the one I find hardest. —J.

We went back by the fountain. I stopped in front of the fish, on its limping side.

"Will you tell me the story?"
"It's long," said Julie.
"On Saturday," said Noa. "If we get there."

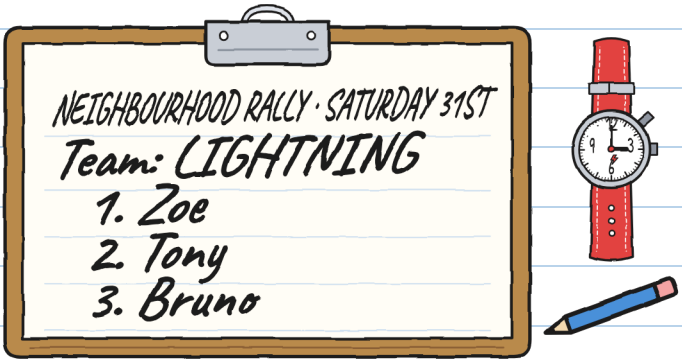
It wasn't a no. I put the plan in the notebook, this time unfolded, with half the plan sticking out.



CHAPTER 4

Can Anyone Lead?

On Friday Tony came to the shop with his watch, a pencil and LIGHTNING's entry form.



"Zoe wrote it," he said. "Bruno dictated: 'Bruno, with a B.'"

"And Zoe?"

"Bruno wrote it. With a B."

Then he sat on his crate and set his watch to zero. "Today I time. I don't give opinions. I note down what has to be repeated."

Noa's idea: relays. Three legs, and a different person guides on each. My idea: guiding and clearing the way should be the same person, the one who's free, because the other two can only see little theatre. Julie's idea: start now.

"Who guides the first one?"
We all pointed at once. Each of us pointed at someone else.

Tony wrote it down. Irene waited at the door, with her folder, giving no opinions either.



Before lifting the little theatre, Julie said:
"One thing. On Wednesday I gave a direction that only Noa understood and then said you'd got lost."
She said nothing more. She didn't need to: it was all there.

"OK," I said. I learnt it from Noa.
"Which side is the fish missing its fin on?" I asked.
"The left one, as you arrive. At the fountain, turn left. I'll warn you five steps before."
"Now that is a direction."



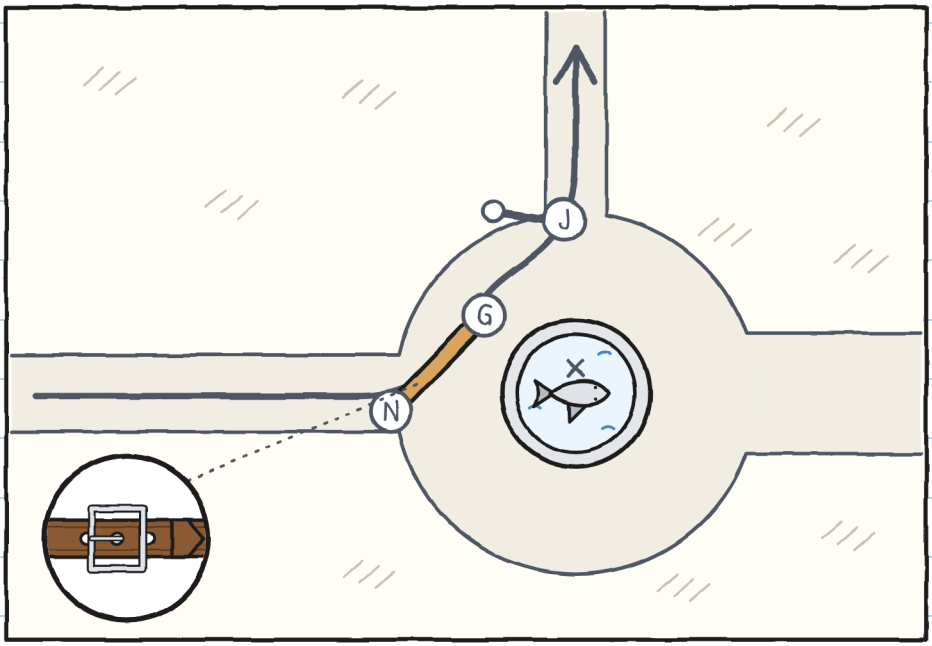
Both feet still. Check it in the drawing. —J.

Leg one. Noa fastened the strap on the second hole.

"Five steps... Turn left!"
"Strap!" said Noa. And she held it.

We turned round the limping fish as if we'd always done it. No clack.

"Leg one: six minutes," said Tony. "Repeated: nothing."

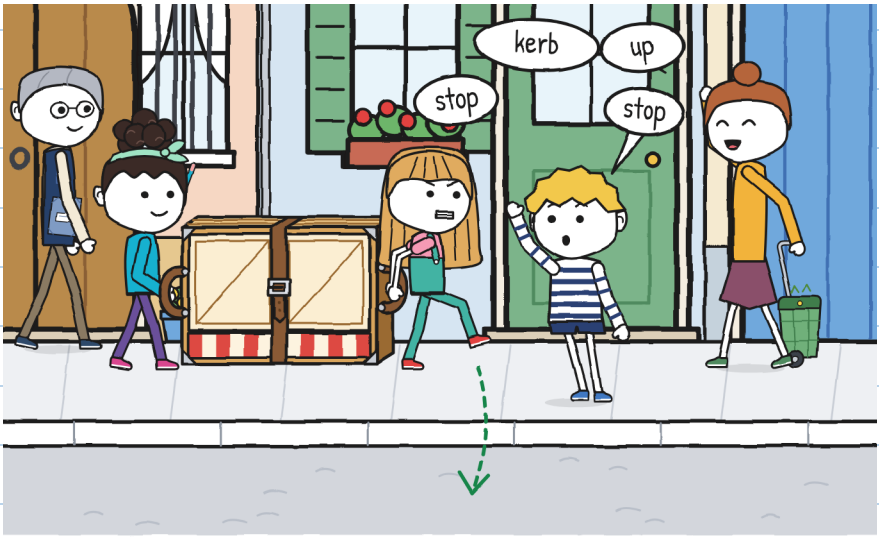


Leg two, from the fountain to the corner. Julie and Noa carried. I guided.

This is how I guide:

"Three steps. Stop. Kerb. Up. Two steps. Stop. A lady. Good afternoon. The lady goes by. Four steps."

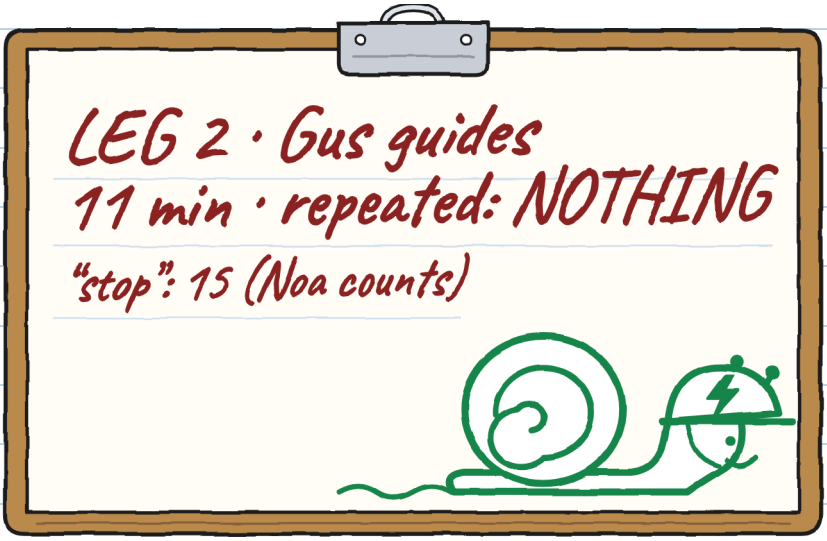
Julie went in front, at her handle, without a peep. Her foot kept going by itself towards the short way. She kept bringing it back to my way.



"Leg two: eleven minutes," said Tony. "It's the slowest I've ever timed in my life. Repeated: nothing."

It was the first time I'd ever led anything and it didn't have to be repeated.

"You said 'stop' fourteen times," said Julie.
"I counted them," said Noa. "Fifteen."
"Six were unnecessary," said Julie. "But I did them all."



I didn't argue about any of them. My teeth hurt from clenching. —J.

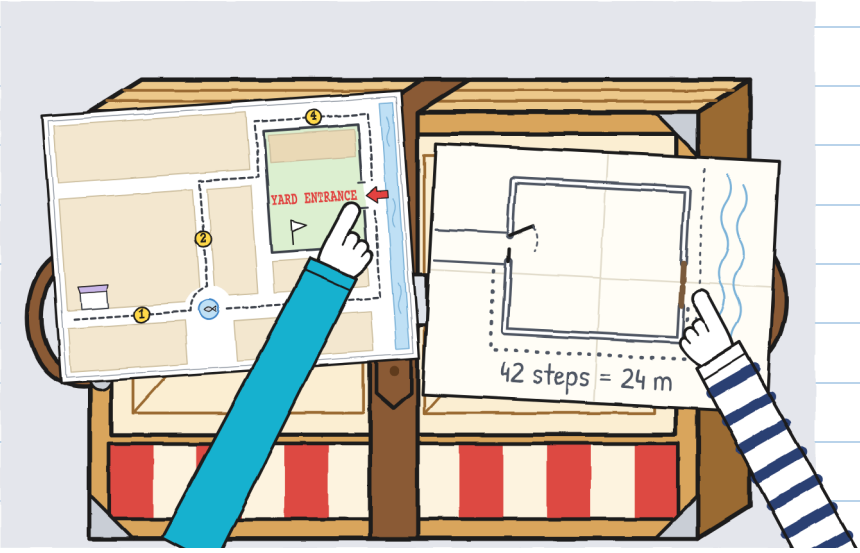
Leg three, from the corner to the yard. Julie and I carried. Noa guided, with the rally map Irene had handed out to every team.

After twenty steps she stopped, where the canal alley begins.
"It doesn't add up."
"What doesn't?"
"The map takes us in this way. All the way to the old door. And we go in through the gate, which is on the other side."



We put the little theatre on the ground. First you put it down; then you argue.
I laid my plan next to her map. On the rally map there was only one entrance drawn, and it wasn't the gate: it was the old door.
"It's an old map," I said. "From when you came in that way."

From there to the gate it was forty-two Noa steps. Or twenty-four metres of mine. With her step and my tape you can measure the whole neighbourhood.



"Do we tell Irene?" asked Julie.
"And the other teams," said Noa. "Otherwise everyone on foot will go into the alley. With the bikes."
I said nothing. I agreed.

Irene corrected the maps, one by one, with a red marker. Tony looked at his.
"LIGHTNING was going to go in the way the map said."
"You go in that way," said Irene. "For bikes, the map was right. By chance."



We went back to the corner and repeated leg three, now as far as the gate. Julie and I carried, and Noa guided, cleared the way and warned, all at once:

"Stop! Holding the gate! Go!"

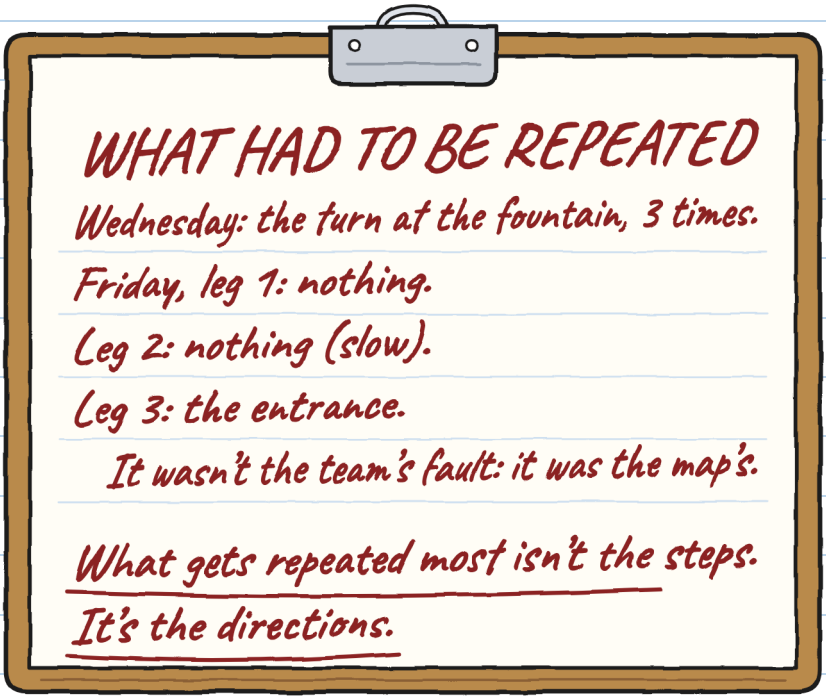
We went through. I filled in the gauge.

	CARRY 	GUIDE 	CLEAR THE WAY 	WARN 
corner → yard	Gus and Julie	Noa	Noa	Noa: "the map is wrong"

First row with every box filled. And the fourth, the warning one, had been filled by Noa.

The gate is heavy. She held it with her back, like you on Tuesday. I'm noting it down, because you weren't going to. —J.

Tony showed us his sheet.



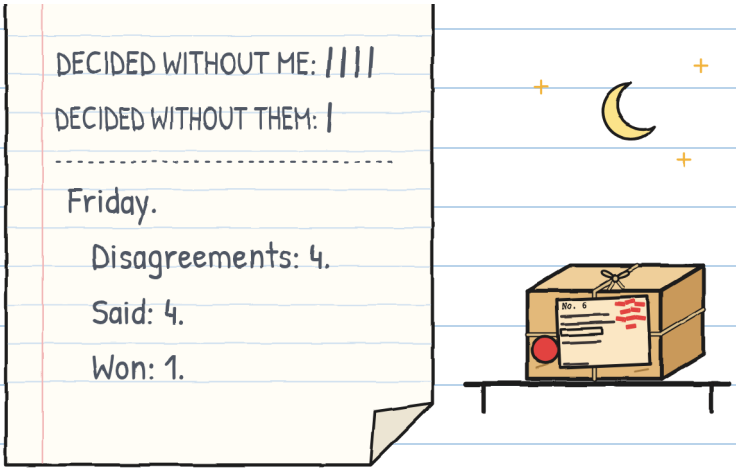
"That last bit is an opinion," said Julie.
"It's a fact," said Tony. "At LIGHTNING, a direction given wrong gets paid for twice: on the way there and on the way back."

He put on his helmet and went off to practise his own thing. Ting-a-ling.

That night, in the shop, Mara put the little theatre away in its box. Noa looked at the buckle.

"Tomorrow, on the third hole. Even if it takes longer to come undone."

I opened the notebook at the corner of the tally marks. Today I hadn't made any. I counted four disagreements. I said all four out loud. I won one.

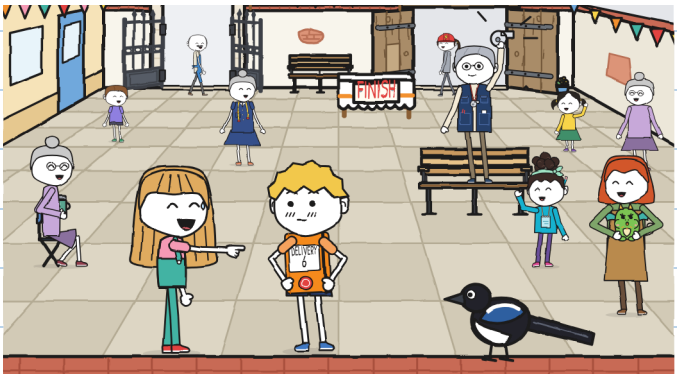


The one you won was putting the little theatre on the ground before arguing. I'll give you that one. —J.

CHAPTER 5

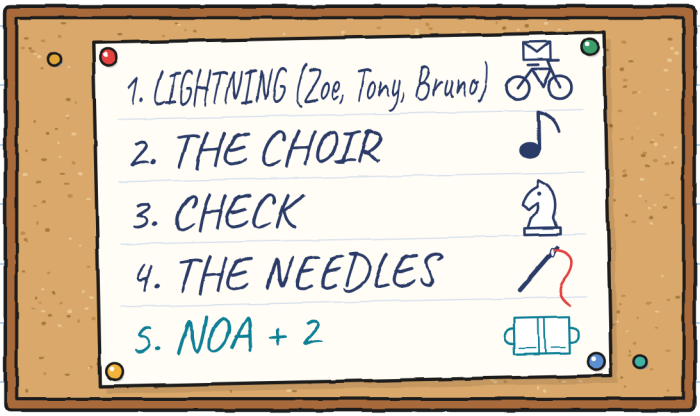
Does It Matter Who Arrives First?

On Saturday I put on my orange Saturday T-shirt.
"You match the notebook," said Julie.
At eleven, the yard had both doors open for the first time in many years, and people coming in through both. Irene, with her whistle, explained the rules: "Each team brings its load here, passing through every station. You don't run with a load. Whoever runs repeats the leg. And whoever doesn't repeat gains time."



There were five teams on the list. LIGHTNING carried an envelope, by bike. The choir, a lectern. The chess club, a giant board. The sewing group, a tailor's dummy with no head.

Ours had been written down by Noa on Monday, before she met me:



"We're 'Noa + 2'," I told Julie.
"I'm the 2," she said. "You'll be the plus."

Each team set out from the door where its load slept. We were given our start by Don Antonio, who lives nearby and doesn't run.

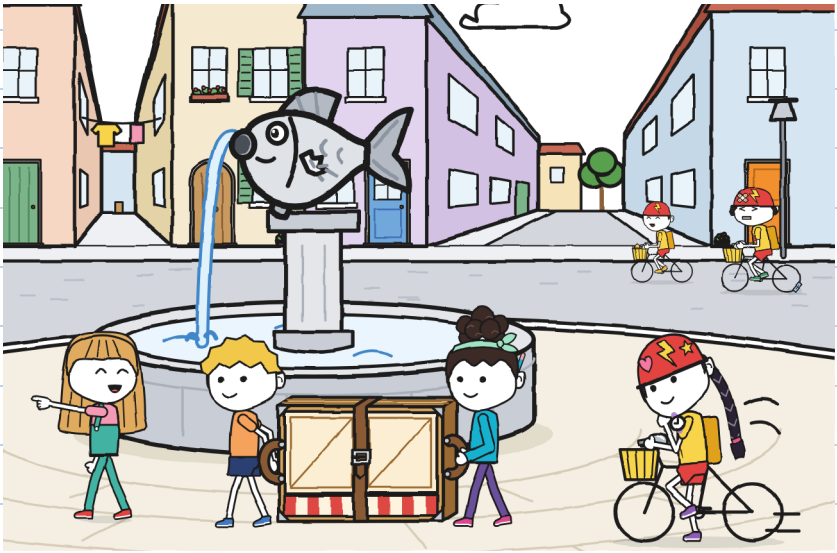
Mara brought out the little theatre. Noa fastened the strap quickly and we lifted it. Clack: a panel opened a handspan.

"Down," I said.

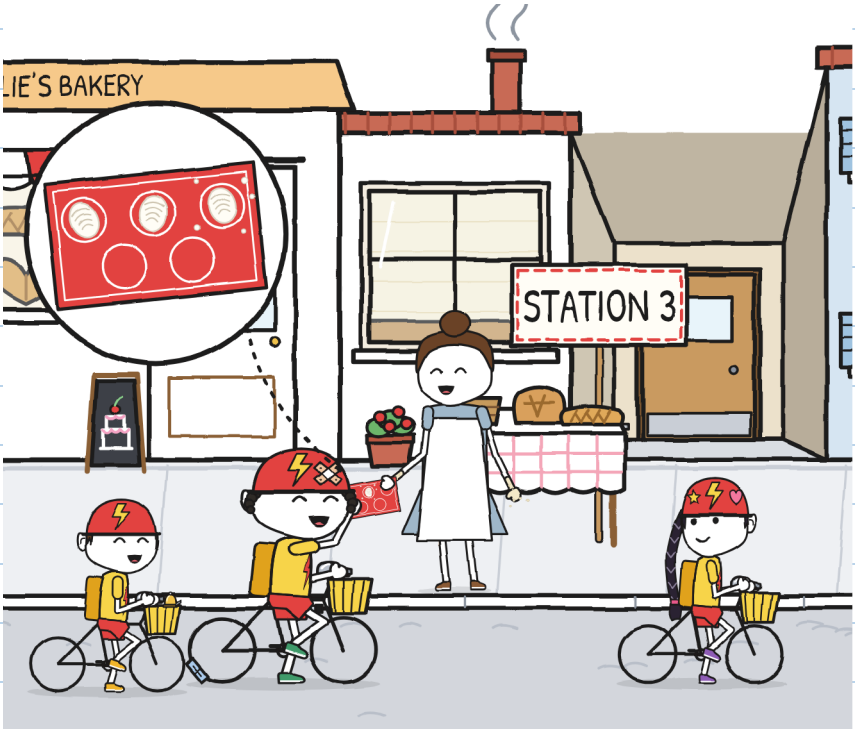
Nobody argued. The second time, Noa fastened it slowly, on the third hole, and tugged twice to test it. Don Antonio lowered his beret, which served as a flag. "Calmly," he said, "is how you get there."



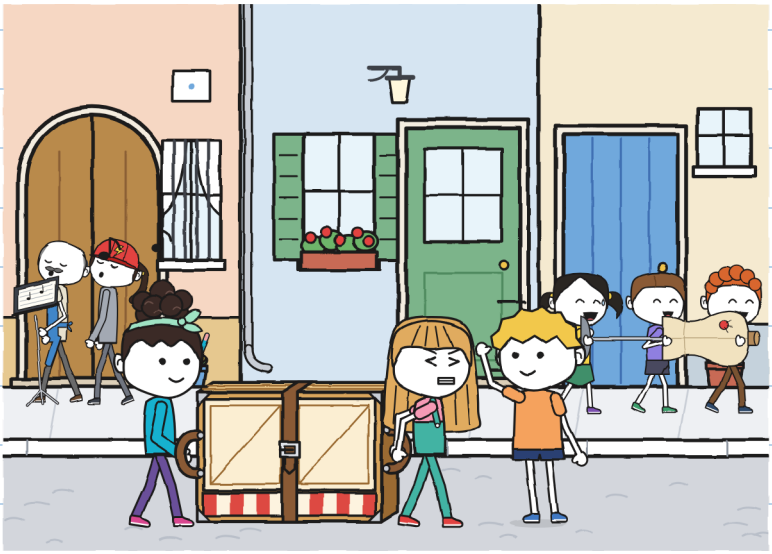
Leg one. Julie guided.
"Five steps... Turn left!"
"Strap!"
We were turning slowly round the limping fish, taking up the whole corner, when Zoe arrived on her bike. She was ahead of everyone. She braked and put a foot on the ground.
"You go ahead. You don't run with that."
She waited until we were out of the bend. Then she left. We were ahead of her for twenty seconds. She timed it herself.



At each station they stamped a card. At the bakery it was Ellie, who stamped with a thumb covered in flour. LIGHTNING passed us three times, each time down a different street. Tony had both hands on the handlebars and rang his little bell at the corners. Bruno carried the envelope. Zoe went in front and waited for them at every station, without touching the card until all three were there.



On leg two the choir overtook us with their lectern.
Running. Irene's whistle sounded and the choir went back to the fountain, singing softly.
The chess club overtook us. Even the dummy overtook us.
Julie didn't run. Well: one foot got away from her. She brought it back.
"Does it matter who arrives first?" she asked.
"The label doesn't say 'first'," said Noa. "It says 'folded'."
"Kerb," I said.



Leg three. Noa guided as far as the gate. We put the little theatre on the ground there.

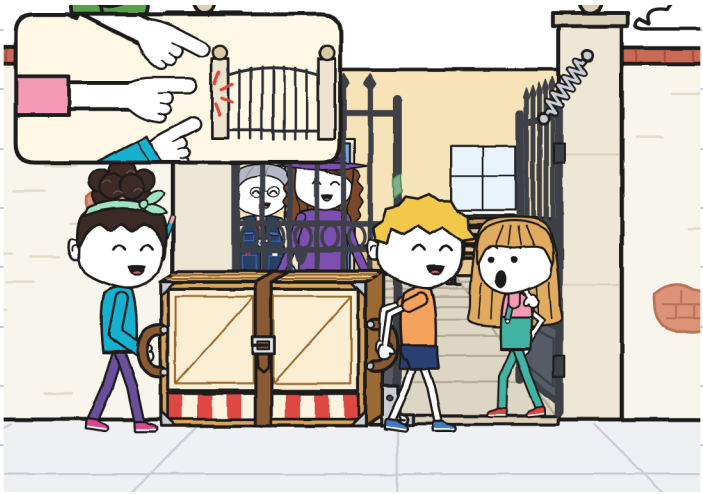
"Who opens?" asked Julie. And she waited for the answer.

We all pointed at once. All three at the same place: Noa pointed at the gate, Julie pointed at the gate and I pointed at the gate. Then we laughed, because that's no way to decide who.

"You," said Noa and I. Noa went to her handle. Julie held it with her back and both hands.

"Stop! Holding the gate! Go!"

We went through. Folded. In one piece.

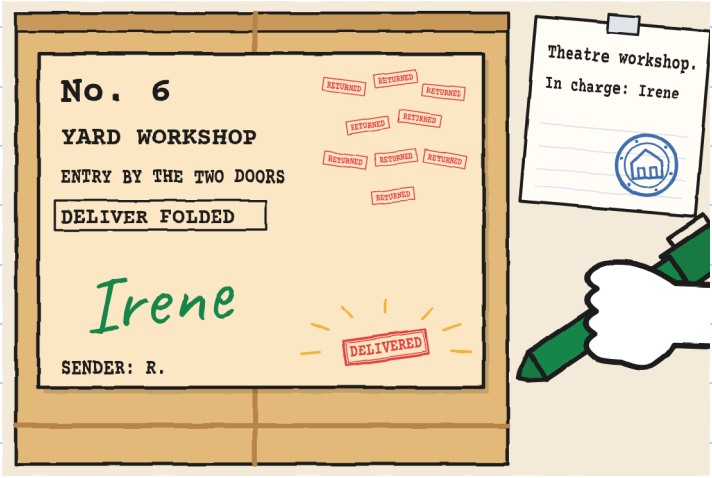


"Forty-one minutes," said Irene.

LIGHTNING had taken fourteen. All three were sitting on the ground, next to the bikes, without a drop of sweat.

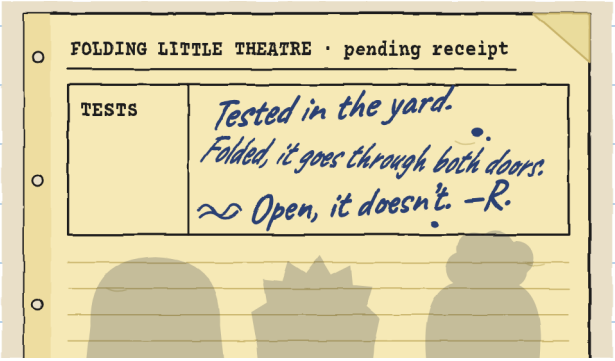
Mara came with the box under her arm. Irene looked at the little theatre on the ground in her yard, folded, with the strap in its place. She opened the folder and showed Mara the sheet from the register. Julie gave her the green marker.

"It works for me," said Irene. And she signed the label.



The word DELIVERED appeared on the label. Nobody had written it.

Irene opened the inventory to note down the little theatre. There was no need: it already had its page, and the page had an old line, in very bad handwriting.



"It's from before I ran the workshop," said Irene. "I don't know who it is."

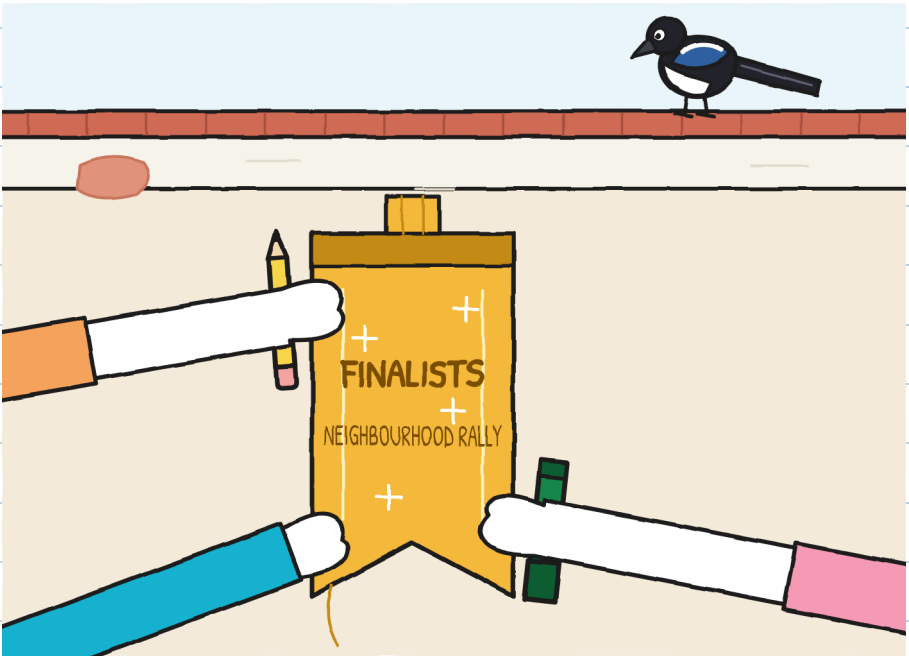
"Neither do we," said Julie. "But we're finding things out."

R. had been in that yard and tested the little theatre before sending it. This time R. measured both doors: the gate and the old one.

Ellie's door. The two in the yard. R. measures doors. I'm keeping it for the card. –J.

LIGHTNING won, without repeating a single leg. The prize was a loaf from Ellie with a 1 in flour. Zoe broke it into three pieces. Bruno's was just as big as hers.

To the teams that arrived with the load in one piece, Irene gave a ribbon.



"A finalist is the one who comes last," said Julie.
"It's the one who gets to the final," said Noa.
"We got to the final last," I said. "It works for both."

"Since it's here," said Irene, "we'll have to try it out."
Irene and Mara opened it between them. We stood behind. We had two minutes to make up a play. Noa handed out the parts. First she asked:
"Who wants to say very little?"
I raised my hand.
Crumb broke away from Vera, flew a metre and landed on top of a panel, with her tail dangling in front of the window. She was the show and it hadn't even started.



The play was called "The Package That Wouldn't Go In". Julie played Mara, with a paper cone for a hat. Noa played all the doors. I played the package, leaning out of the window.

"The workshop?" Noa would say. "Here, sewing."

"RETURNED," I would say.

I said it nine times. The audience counted. The tenth time, Noa opened her arms, and I said the other word. To bow, all three of us leaned out of the window. We fitted. Squeezed in.



A spot isn't divided into pieces. You squeeze up. —J.

CHAPTER 6

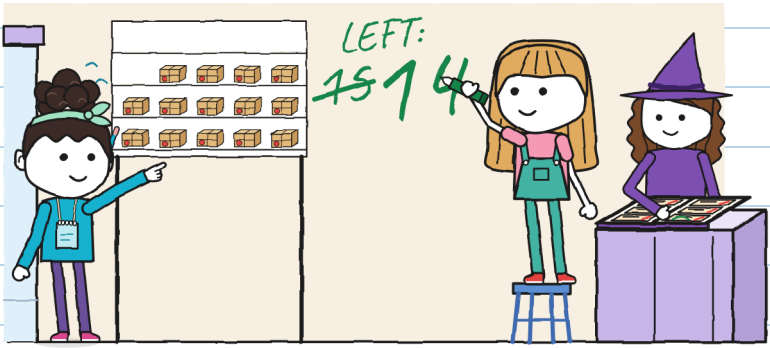
What Remains When the Test Is Over?

In the afternoon we went back to the shop with the label. Noa came too. Julie looked at the sign. Then she looked at Mara.

"Can I?"

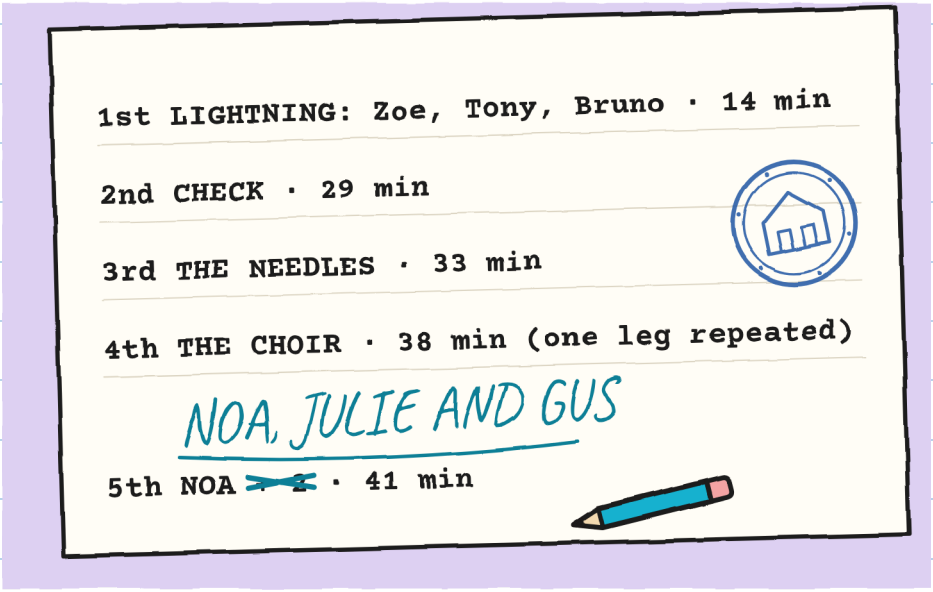
"It's your sign."

Julie crossed out the 15 and wrote, big, 14. Mara stuck the label in her book, with the other five.



Noa counted them in a whisper. She got fourteen. She can count. —J.

Tony brought the results table, for me to note down in the notebook.



I looked at it twice. "Bruno" was whole, not crossed out and with nothing over it.

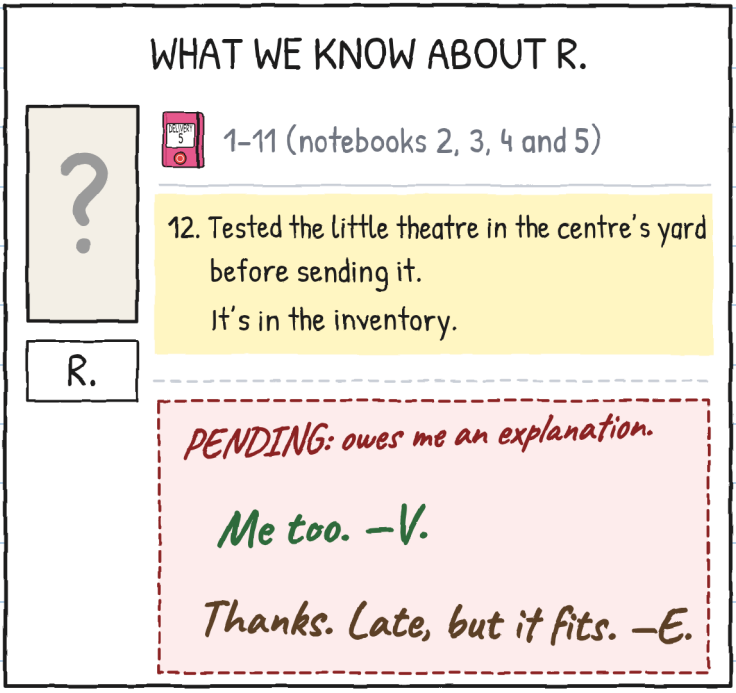
Noa fixed our team's line with her turquoise pencil, without anyone asking.
"On Monday I didn't know what you two were called," she said. "Well. What Gus was called."

I took out R.'s card. It had eleven clues. I added one. Tony read it. He also read his own bit, further down. He crossed nothing out.

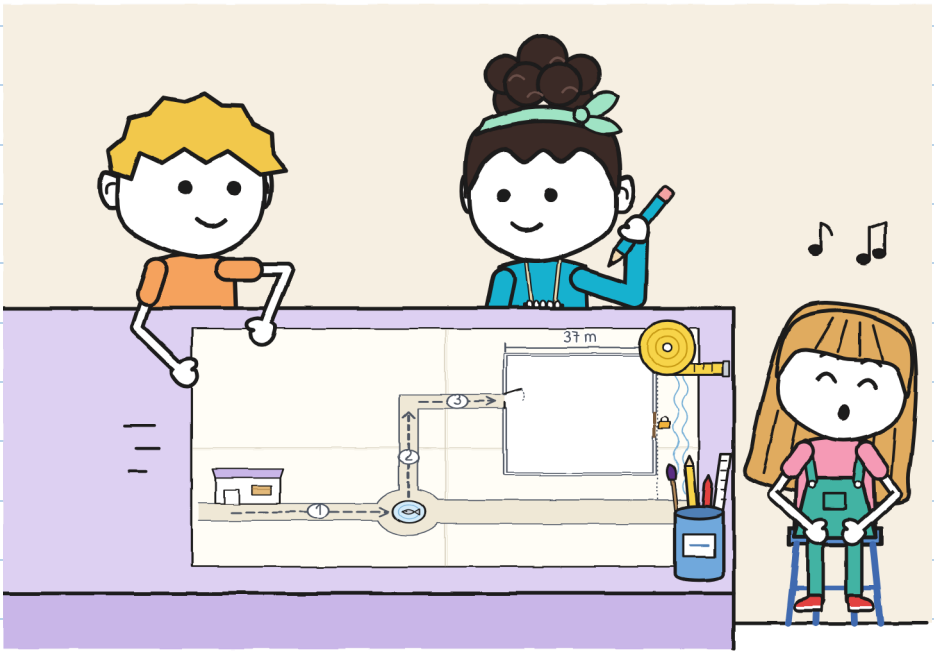
"R. tested the little theatre," he said. "My little bell, R. didn't test."

"We don't know that," said Julie.

"There's no line about my little bell in any inventory," said Tony. And that was true too.

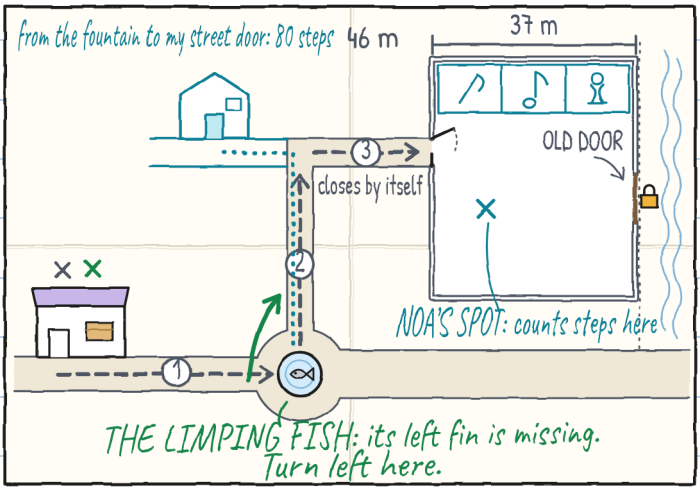


Then I spread the plan out on the counter. Well: it wasn't folded any more.
"It's missing your part," I told Noa. "What's beyond the fountain. Of those streets I only know the metres."
Noa looked at Julie. Julie looked at the ceiling, which is her way of staying out of it.
"Can I draw on it?"
"That's why I'm showing it to you."
She took the pencil from behind her ear.



Noa added her street, the inside of the centre and the distances, in steps. I put the metres next to them. Julie couldn't hold back any longer and wrote the label for the fountain.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN (BY THE THREE OF US)



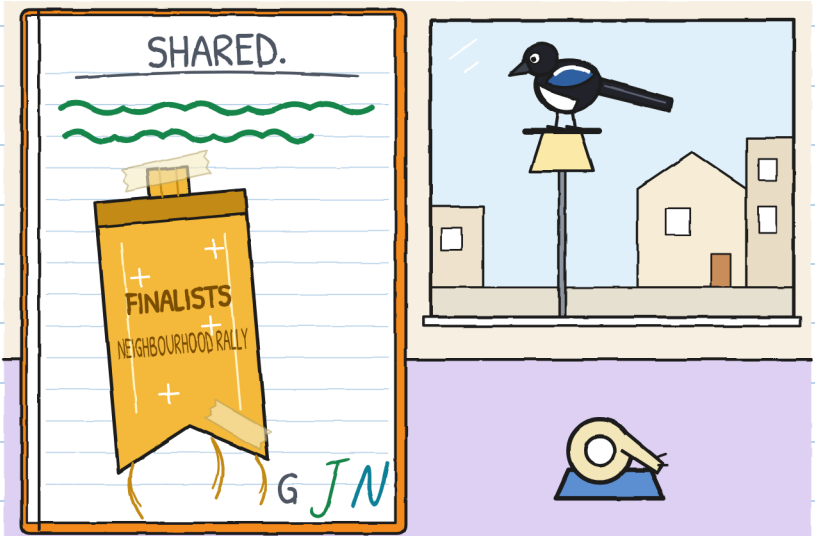
And while they were drawing, they told me the story of the limping fish. It's long. It's not as good as they say. But now I know it.

It's brilliant. It's just that we told it badly: we talked over each other. –J.

Julie had the ribbon tied round her wrist. Three threads had already come loose.

"If I keep it, by Monday it'll be a fringe," she said. "Shall we keep it in the notebook?"

We stuck it on the first page, under SHARED, with a piece of sticky tape at each end. I drew it with its loose threads. If it falls apart, it falls apart: I'm not going to draw it newer than it is.



My notebook doesn't close as well as yours. That's why. –J.

Noa turned the pages backwards, with permission, and reached the corner of the tally marks.

"What's this?"

"A count I was keeping wrong."

"And this other one?" She read aloud: "'A gate can be held by a stone too.'"

"I thought of that on Tuesday."

"A stone doesn't say 'kerb'," said Noa. "Or 'stop' fifteen times."

I didn't rub out the tally marks. It's in pencil, so I could, but I didn't want to.



Don't rub them out. They're a bit mine. —J.

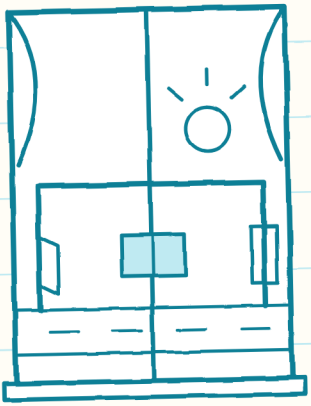
On Sunday, at dawn, Noa kept watch, since she lives opposite the centre. At nine she brought a note to the shop. She came counting steps.

7:38: the little theatre, in the workshop, folded.

7:44: dawn breaks. It isn't moving.

7:50: still there. Steps it has taken: zero. –Noa



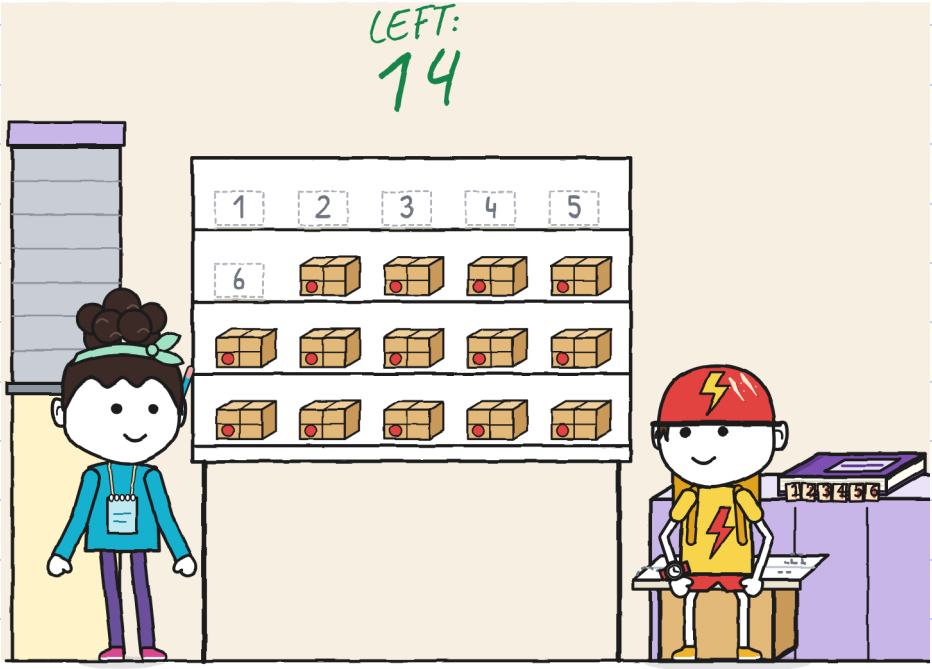


She keeps better watch than I do, counts better than I do and doesn't bake. Two out of three. –J.

Mara raised the shutter halfway to let us in, and I drew the shelf: fourteen packages and six gaps. The sign didn't need touching.

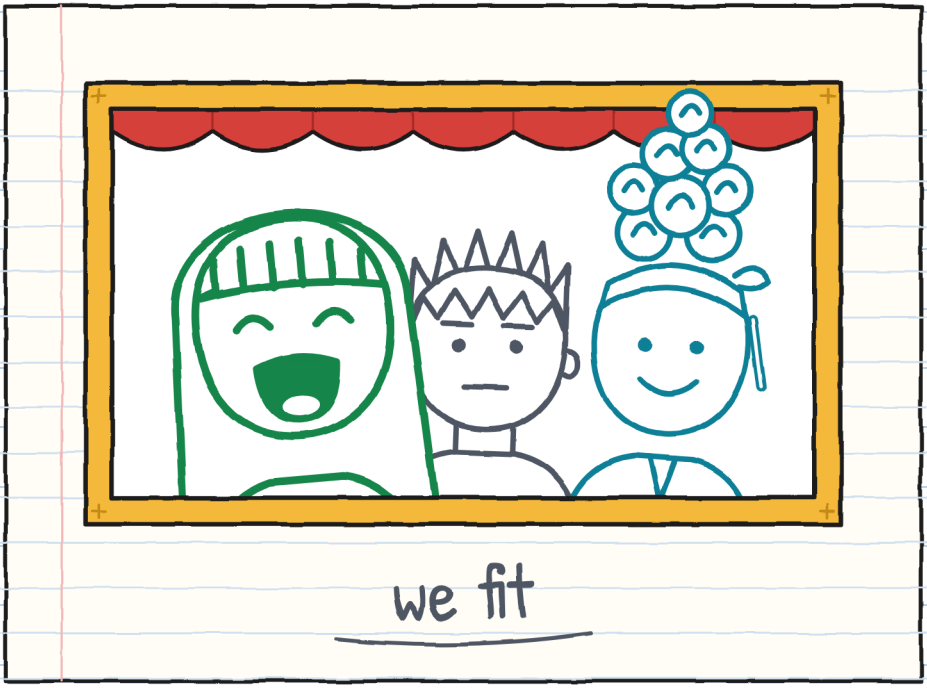
"Six," said Mara. And she closed her book.

Tony was on his crate, with his helmet on, even though it was Sunday. Noa stood by the door. Nobody told her to sit down or to leave. She came because she wanted to, and on Monday she has rehearsal.



To finish the notebook I drew the little theatre's window, empty.

Each of us drew ourselves inside. Me, in pencil. Julie, in green. Noa, in turquoise. Noa asked permission before drawing in my notebook. Julie didn't.



Shared is shared. It says so on the first page. –J.

DELIVERY NO. 6. Leg by leg:

	LEG	WHO CARRIED	WHO GUIDED	WHAT HAD TO BE REPEATED
	Shop → limping fish fountain	Gus and Noa	Julie	the turn at the fountain (three times)
	Fountain → corner	Julie and Noa	Gus	nothing (but slowly)
	Corner → yard	Gus and Julie	Noa	the entrance: the map was old
	On Saturday	all three	all three, in turns	the strap (second time, on the third hole)
	Before us	Mara, alone	nobody	nine trips
	R.	?	?	we don't know

	CARRY 	GUIDE 	CLEAR THE WAY 	WARN 
1	Gus and Noa	*Julie*	*Julie*	*Julie*
2	Julie and Noa	Gus	Gus	Gus
3	Gus and Julie	*Noa*	*Noa*	*Noa*

Three boxes. Well, four. Three names.
None empty. –J.

IMPOSSIBLE DELIVERIES · 7

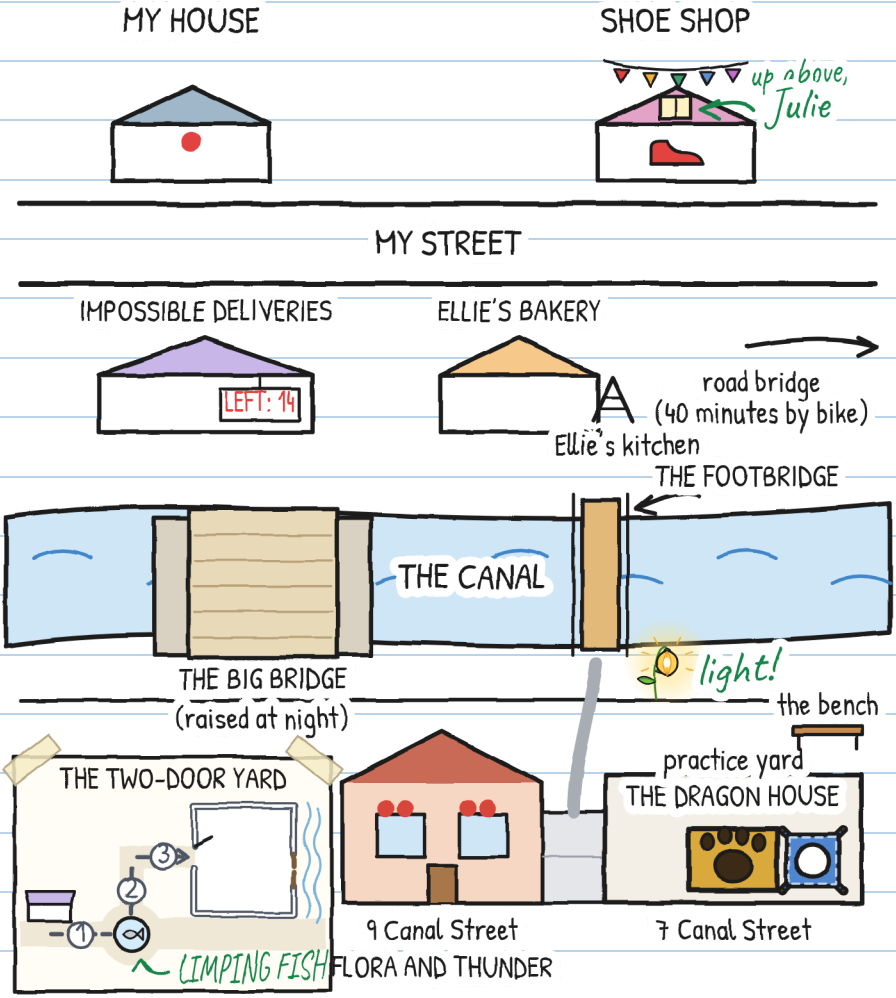
(coming soon)



This time the label asked for an hour when I'm already in my pyjamas.

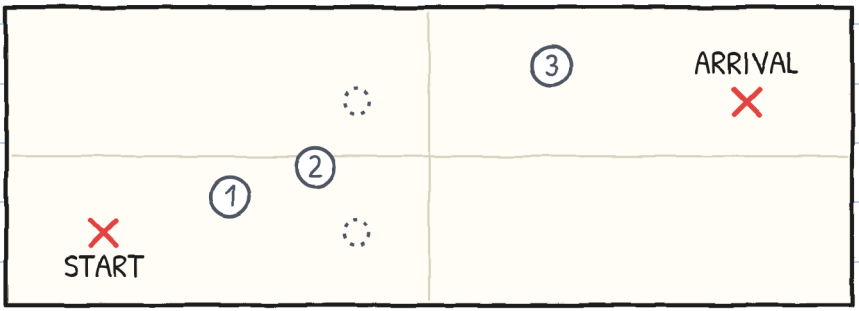
Who's awake when everyone else closes? Apart from me. —J.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD (version 6)



YOUR JOURNEY

Who carries? Who guides? Who clears the way?
Who warns?



THE THREE-GAUGE

	CARRY	GUIDE	CLEAR THE WAY	WARN
leg 1				
leg 2				
leg 3				

If the same name always comes up in one box, change it. —J.

ONE STORY, SIX SIZES

There are six sizes, for ages 3 to 16, and more than 20 languages. XXS, XS, S, M and L have the same pages and the same drawings. XL is a novel. Only the way it's told changes.

SIZE XXS · PRE-A1
GUS WROTE A WORD AND LEFT ROOM. CAN YOU SEE THE WORD "SHARED"?

SIZE XS · A1
I wrote one word. I left half a page free. It didn't stay free for even a minute.

SIZE S · A2
On the first page I wrote one word. I left half the page free, just in case. It wasn't free for even a minute.

SIZE M · B1
On the first page I wrote a single word. I left half the page free, just in case. It didn't stay free for even a minute.

SIZE L · B2
On the first page I wrote a single word and left half the page free, just in case. It didn't stay free for even a minute.

SIZE XL · B2-C1
Illustrated novel · 13+

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

Each in their own size. The same little theatre. —J.

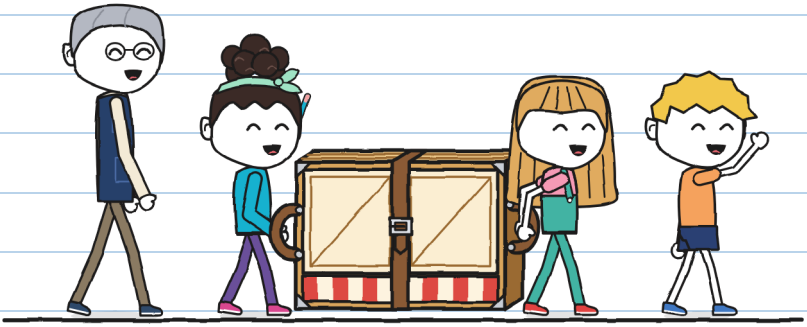
FOR FAMILIES AND TEACHERS

Work through every chapter at linguaula.com

A REAL TRANSFER: WHAT TO DO

1. Before setting off, look at the whole route.
2. One person goes free: opens doors and warns.
3. Hands on the handles. Away from hinges and fastenings.
4. You don't run or race with a load.
5. If anyone says "stop", everyone stops.
6. First put it on the ground; then argue.
7. Anything big is opened and folded by two people, with a grown-up.

The ONLY IN THE STORY stamp marks what can happen in a story, but not in a real transfer.



And if you know something about the way, say it beforehand. –J.