

OI!

**STICK
BOY!**



To Tanvi Kant, a chuisle mo chroí.

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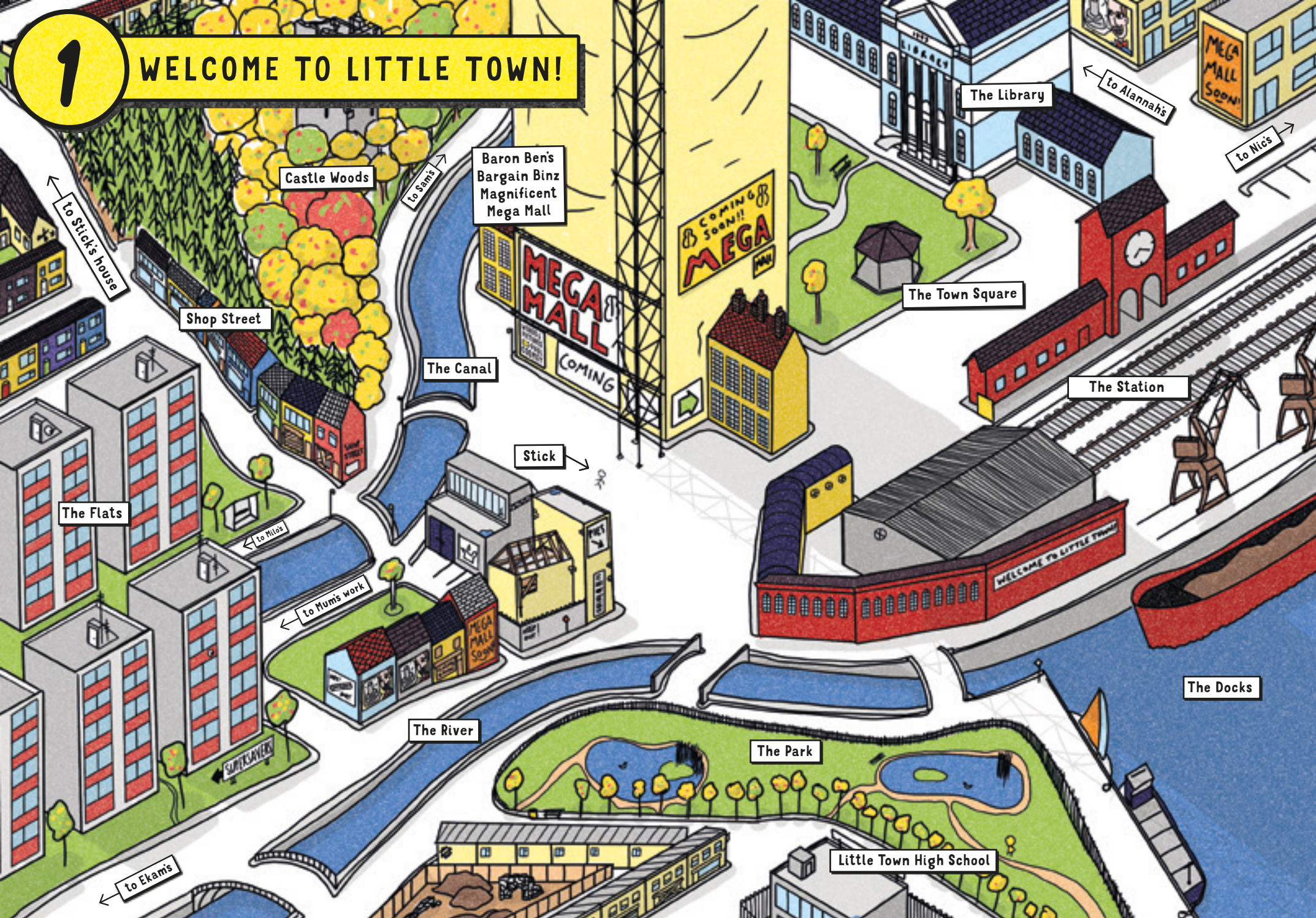
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LITTLE TIGER
LONDON

1 WELCOME TO LITTLE TOWN!



1

WELCOME TO LITTLE TOWN!

to Stick's house

Castle Woods

to Sams

Baron Ben's
Bargain Binz
Magnificent
Mega Mall

MEGA MALL
COMING

COMING SOON!!
MEGA MALL

The Library

to Alannah's

MEGA MALL SOON!

to Nics

Shop Street

The Canal

The Town Square

The Station

Stick

The Flats

to Milos

to Mums work

WELCOME TO LITTLE TOWN!

The Docks

The River

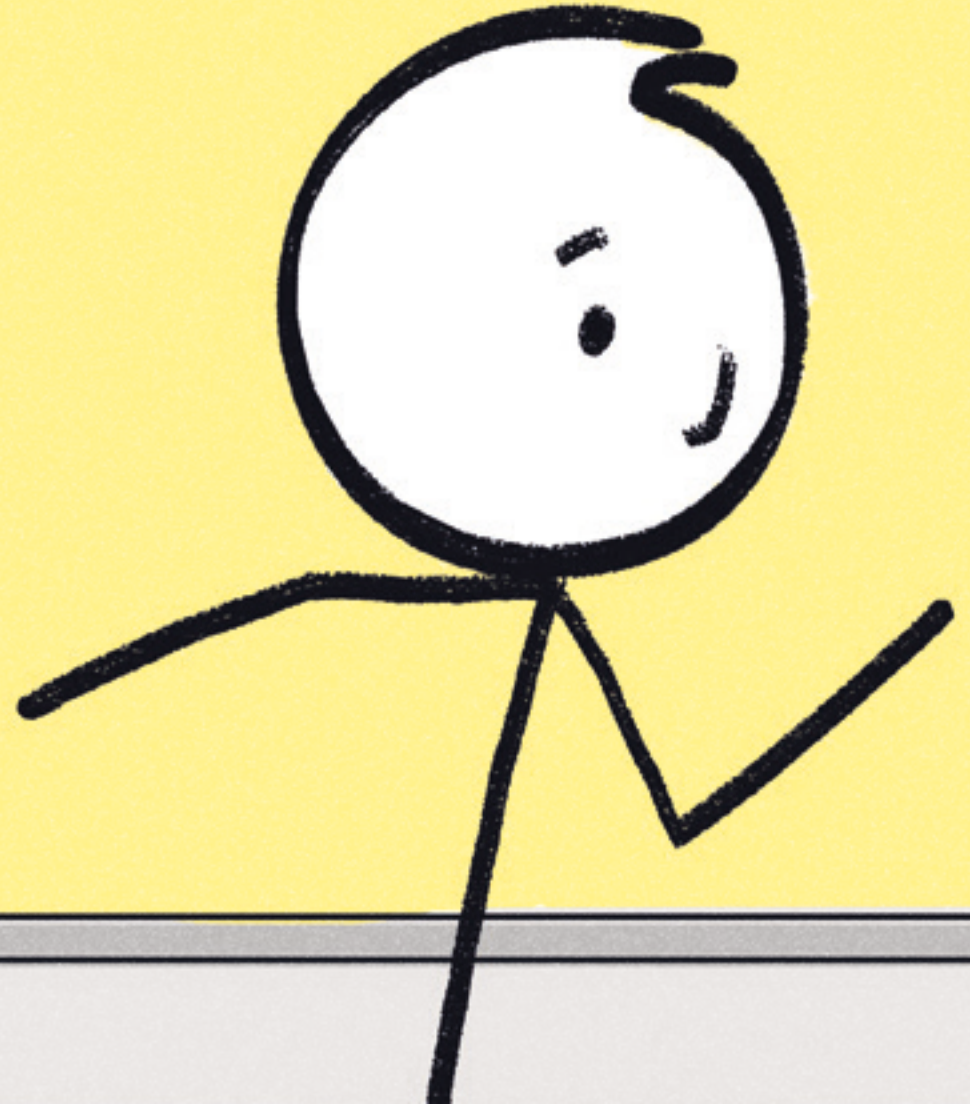
The Park

Little Town High School

to Ekam's

This is Stick Boy, running as fast as he can.
And who is that shouting at him?

**STICKEDDY
STICKEDDY
STICKEDDY
STIIIIIIIIICK
BOOOOY!**



Ah, that'd be Sam.

Sam looks like a big bully. Sam IS a big bully. Sam is, in fact, the second biggest bully in the whole school.

TROUBLE

SAM

BULLY #2



OTHER FACTS ABOUT SAM:

SAM DISLIKES:

- Deodorant
- Cats
- Dogs
- Hats
- Skateboards
- Your shoes
- Fun

SAM LIKES:

- Shouting
- Being a school bully
- And ... er, that's about it.



So here we are in the little town of Little Town, and Sam is chasing Stick Boy.

This is not good. It's Stick's second day at a new school in a new town. This time was supposed to be different. He was supposed to leave his old problems behind (again) and start somewhere new (again). A familiar feeling grows in his belly – dark, heavy, swirling dread.

He needs a place to hide, fast.

He sprints around a corner ...

spots a handy signpost ...

and slips behind it.

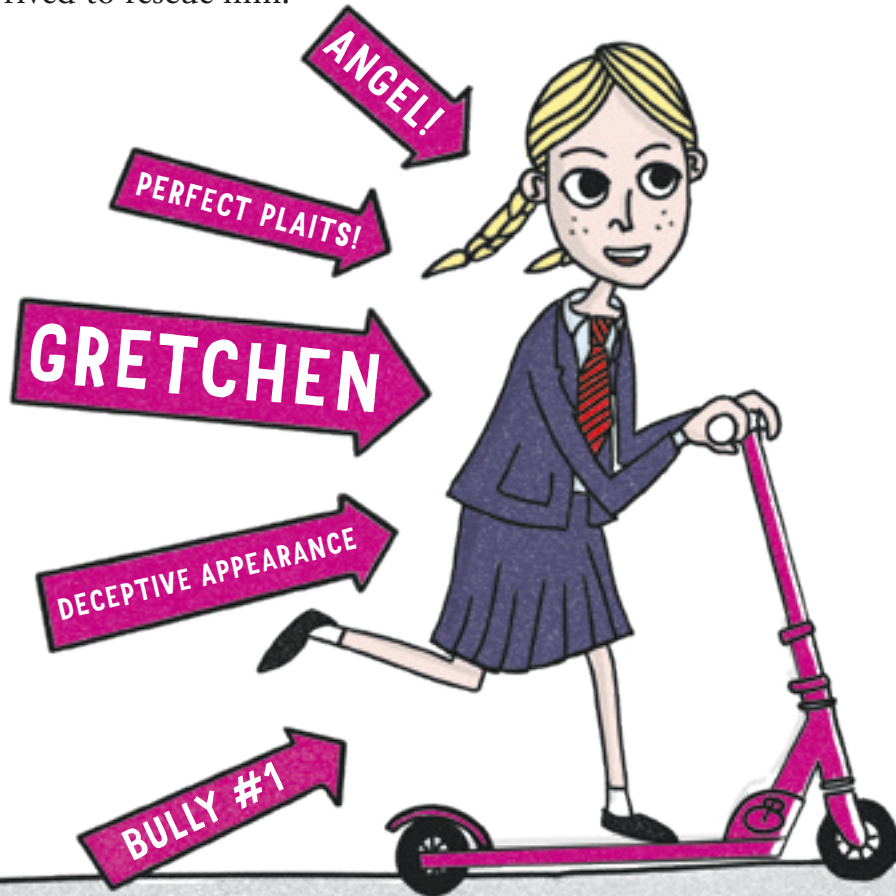
Sam pounds past then screeches to a halt. She looks left and right, up and down, her head swivelling around like a meerkat at a disco.

Stick stands still. He holds his breath. Has he managed to escape?

Hopefully.

Wait, who's this?

Hurrah! "Stick is *saved!*" I hear you cry. An angel has arrived to rescue him!



"Hello, Sam," the angel says with a sneer.

Oh. This doesn't look promising.

"Er, hello, Gretchen."

"Have you forgotten our little arrangement?"

"Er, no, Gretchen."

"Err, *noo, Gretchen,*" mimics Gretchen.

"Well, it would appear you have. *I* am in charge of acquiring new victims and *you* handle repeat clients. Why were *you* chasing the new boy?"

"Er, I don't know, Gretchen."

"What do you mean, you don't know?"

Gretchen laughs. "Did you think you'd show some initiative? Were you trying to *impress* me?"

"No, I, yes, er—"

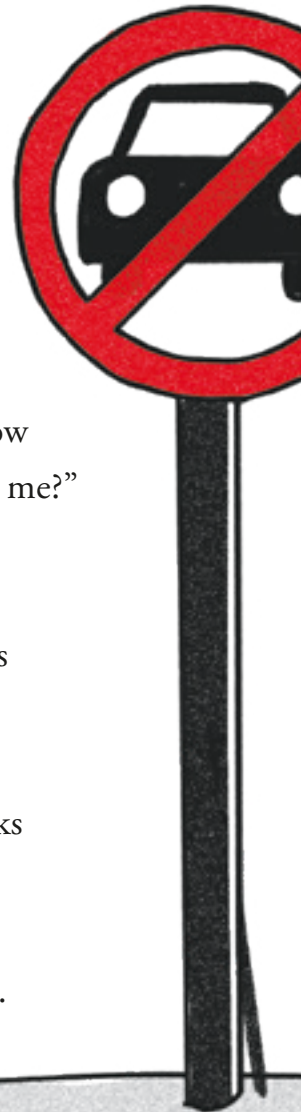
"Zip it. We're wasting time. Now, this new boy looks a bit like a big lollipop, does he not?"

"Er, yes?"

"And what else in our vicinity, Sam, looks like a big lollipop?"

"Er ... that signpost?"

"Yes, Sam, *that signpost.*" Gretchen sighs.



Stick already knows the game is up. He steps out. Sam makes a lunge for him, but Gretchen stops her.

“Not so fast, Sam. I’ll handle this.” She steps towards Stick.

“Well, hellooo there! How do you do, dear fellow?”

This is not what Stick was expecting.

“I-I’m doing all right, thank you,” he says in a quiet voice.

“Dear fellow, the correct response to the enquiry of ‘How do you do?’ is in fact ‘*How do you do?*’”

“What?” says Stick.

“Don’t you mean *pardon?*” Gretchen tuts again. “I’m afraid we’ve got ourselves off to rather a bumpy beginning here. Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Gretchen and this is my associate, Sam. Sam and I *rule the school*. What, may I ask, is your name, you perfectly peculiar-looking person?”

“Stick.”

“I *do* beg your pardon?”

“My name is Stick. Stick Boy.”

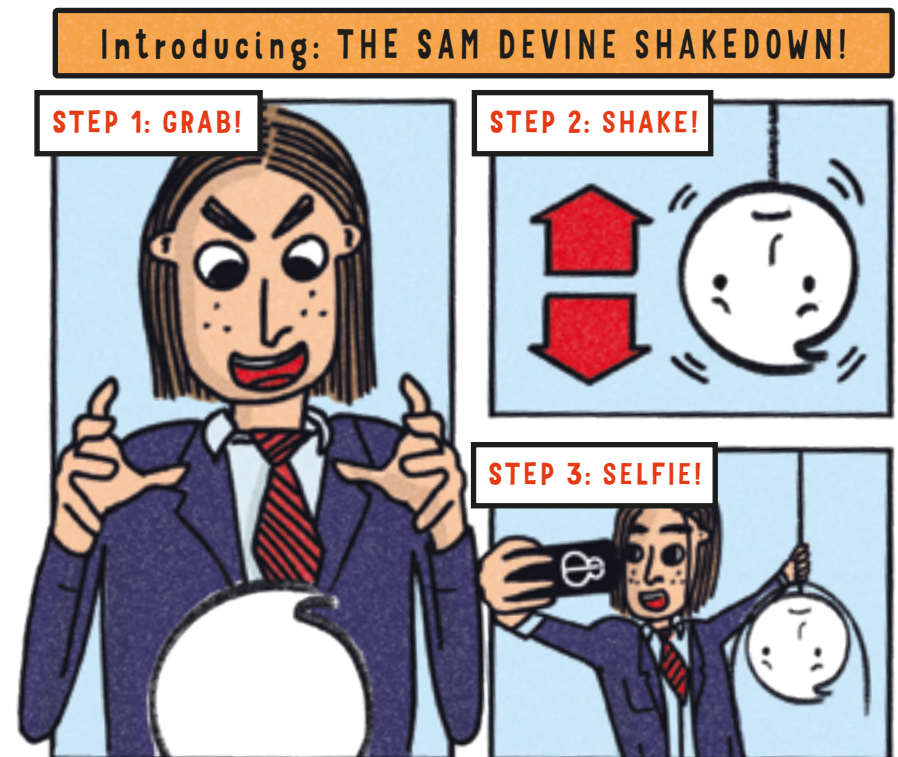
“How perfectly preposterous. Nobody is called Stick.”

“I am,” says Stick.

Stick looks at the ground. He’s been through this

before. His family have moved three times in as many years. You might think it’s because Stick is picked on wherever he goes, but it’s *actually* because Stick’s mum has a super top-secret job in a super top-secret government agency. At least that’s what Stick thinks. His big sister, Bella, reckons they move because the branches of Supersavers Superdiscount Superstores, where Mum works, keep closing down.

“Stick, Mick, Rick, whatever,” says Gretchen. “Sam, shake him down.”



Gretchen glowers. “Enough grinning! Let’s see what we have here.”

Everything that was in Stick’s pockets now lies scattered on the ground.

Yes, pockets. Some things can’t be explained easily. Stick watches, upside-down, as Gretchen pokes at:

- One black marker, fat
- One shoelace, red
- One button, blue
- Two dice, yellow with black dots
- One silver key ring, with the following attached:
 - A shiny new locker key for locker number 6161 at Little Town High School
 - A new membership card for Little Town Library
 - A Supersavers Superdiscount Superstore Kidsaver Loyalty Card
 - A front door key to number 25 Foxhollow Drive
 - An “I Love NY” key ring from the time Grandma Boy and Grandad Boy went to New York
 - A souvenir bottle opener in the shape of a flip-flop from Lanzarote, the absolute furthest-away place that Stick has ever been, and where he wishes he was right now.



Gretchen sneers. “Ugh. Sam, dispose of these *trinkets*.”

Sam drops Stick into a puddle and scoops up his belongings. She spots a very high wall topped with some particularly nasty-looking spikes. She’s about to throw everything over the wall when—

“*STOP!*” shrieks Gretchen. “Hand me those dice. I do believe I may find a use for them.”

Then, like a champion bowler, Sam runs, grunts, swings her arm over her head and chucks Stick’s keys and cards and everything else high into the air and over the wall.

“That’s going to look *ace* on Vidwire,” Sam says.

Gretchen smirks. “If, of course, it had been recorded.”

“You didn’t—?”

“Well, you didn’t *ask* anyone to record it, did you? Silly old Sam.”

Sam looks hurt but Stick doesn’t see. He’s sitting on his bum in the puddle, staring down at his reflection in the grimy water.

“Ta-ta then, Stick Boy!” And with that, Gretchen scoots off down the hill towards school, Sam thumping along behind.





Stick Boy sits.

And sits.

His throat feels tight. His eyes feel hot and prickly.

His tears plop into the puddle and swirl like ink in the grey water.

He had hoped it would be different this time. A school without the old problems. A new start.

In the surface of the puddle, Stick sees the reflection of a boy.

No, not *himself*. Another boy.

“Hello,” says the boy.

“Hello,” says Stick.

The boy looks about his age, with messy brown hair, brown eyes and a big smile. He has a football under his arm. He’s holding out a hand to Stick.

In it are:

- One shoelace, red
- One button, blue

“Are these yours?” he asks.

“Yes,” says Stick.

“I’ll help you up,” says the boy, putting down the football and pulling Stick to his feet. “You’re heavier than you look. I’m Ekam.”

“I’m Stick.”



“Cool name.”

“Thanks. I didn’t pick it, my mum and dad did. Aren’t you in our school?”

“Yeah, it’s my second day,” Stick says.

“Sorry about your keys and stuff. Sam’s got a pretty good throw.”

“Did you see where she threw them?”

Ekam nods towards the high wall. He hands Stick the button and the shoelace. “These fell before they reached the wall. I think the wind caught them.”

“Thanks.”

“Are you not worried about your stuff?”

“Not really.” Stick looks up at the spikes on top of the wall. “This isn’t the first time.”

It’s not even the second time. Or the third.

“Do you still have your locker key?”

“No, but I have a little trick for that.” Stick smiles.