



The doorbell ding-dongs, waking me up. Pixie barks. I hear a rush of tyres, and then the front door bangs. Weird. It's really late. But I can hear Mum and Dad talking softly so I relax and drop back to sleep.

I hear crying. At least I think I do. Maybe I'm dreaming?

I come back up through the layers of sleep like a massive bounce-up on the trampoline. It feels like I'm actually moving and I sit up as I wake.

I turn on my bedside lamp – the orange one Dad bought me that clips to the headboard

of my bed. I can still hear the crying and I'm definitely not dreaming now.

I reverse-flip so my head is at the door-end of my bed, the door I have luckily left open a smidge. I can hear voices, and even catch a word here and there.

But then Harry presses his intercom buzzer and I can't hear anything else.

The problem with the intercom is that Harry designed it and he has the master box – of course. In *his* room. And if he's buzzing me, the buzzing will only stop if I hit my RECEIVE button, or if he stops pressing, which of course he *never* does. So I can't ignore it. I can't ignore him. And the sound's so rude and ... *buzzy*. Sometimes I press RECEIVE and don't speak, just to stop the noise.

To make it worse, Harry designed the intercom so I don't have a buzzer function on *my* unit, just the poxy RECEIVE button. As usual, *he* has all the power. Older brothers deal in power.

'Floppy, what's going on?' Harry's voice crackles through the intercom.

'Shhh. I don't know. I'm trying to listen. And that's not my name. Poppy starts with a P – or do you need help with your spelling?'

Bzzzzzzz, he presses.

'Stop doing that and I'll be able to hear!'

Bzzz bzzz bzzz, he presses, and then shuts up for a bit.

I hear more talking from the lounge room. Voices I don't recognise.

And all the while, and not in any dream, the really sad sound of a small child crying.



I do the special knock on the wall I share
with Harry. It means I want him to buzz me.
Because, of course, I can't buzz him.

Bzzzzz.

'I'm going out there to see what's going on,' I
whisper into the box.

'Okay,' he says. 'Report back pronto!'

'Okay!'

I swing open my door to just before The
Squeak, and squeeze through the gap. I ghost
across the corridor and stay low against the wall
while I creep towards the lounge room.

There's Mum and Dad – and a policeman

and policewoman! THE POLICE. IN OUR LOUNGE
ROOM!! And a kid. A little kid, bawling its eyes
out. Not a baby, but not a proper child, either. It
has black wispy hair and looks like a chubby elf.
Mum is sitting on the floor next to it, going *shh
shh shhhh*, over and over. And I hear Dad say,
'There was a knock on the screen door, about
9.45, then I heard a car drive off – really fast. It
burnt rubber. I opened the door and there she
was, just there on the doorstep, crying.'

'Poor little thing,' Mum croons, then goes
back to her *shh shh shhhhs*.

Dad keeps talking. 'I was expecting to see
old Mrs Mackay from next door – she often has
trouble closing the blinds, you know, or turning
off her oil heater, and she comes over to ask for
help.

'I certainly wasn't expecting to find ... well,
she was ... very distressed,' he says, shaking his
head.

'And she had this green blanket,' Mum says,

holding it up. 'And this note was pinned to it.'

'And that was all that was with her?' the policeman asks. 'Nothing else? No bag of clothes or anything?'

'No,' Dad says, 'just what she's wearing – the Wondersuit thing – with the blanket around her, and the note pinned to it.'

The policeman looks at the note again and reads it out loud, '*Please look after ...* Hmmmm, how do you pronounce this: *M-E-I*? Is it *My*? *Mee*?'

'I think you'd pronounce it *May*,' the policewoman says, and bends down to the child. 'Hello,' she smiles gently. 'I'm Jan. What's your name?'

'Mei!' the child wails, eyes wide, and then calls, 'Mama, mama, *mama!*'

'Okay, well that's a start,' the policewoman says, turning to the others.

'Where do you live, Mei?' she continues. 'Where's your house? Can you show us?'

'*Mama!*' Mei just cries even harder.

I feel sick seeing this. How scary would it be to be in someone else's lounge room at eleven o'clock on a Monday night without your mum anywhere nearby? I'd be scared, and I'm ten! Where *is* her mum?

The policeman says, 'We'll have to call in Family Services.'

The policewoman nods. 'I'll take a photo of her and email it over to Missing Persons, in case somebody's already registered her as missing.'

She swipes her phone into camera mode and squats down. She smiles again and says, 'Mei?' and the flash goes off, adding to the weirdness of this whole thing. Not exactly happy snaps time.

Mei is clutching her green blanket and crying loudly.

'I'll put the kettle on,' Mum says going out, and then she returns to the room, to Mei. 'Would you like some milk, love? Some warm milk?'

'Mama,' comes the sobbing reply.
'Milk?' Mum says, holding up the milk
carton and shaking it a little.
Mei cries so hard it hurts to watch.



I war-crawl back along the corridor, getting
carpet burns on my elbows as I go. *Notepad!* I
instruct my memory.

Once safe inside my room again, I make
sure the door stays wedged open a crack so I
can hear what's going on. I'm so glad Harry's
not buzzing, because I want a chance to write a
few things down in my notebook. I have lots of
notebooks. I love them. All stationery, I love.

I go through a couple of karate moves while
I'm thinking. It helps me focus. It's sort of like
concentrating through moving. I like karate

a lot. After a moment I fall onto the bed to scribble down some thoughts.



Then I lie still on my bed, straining to hear as much as possible.



I can hear the sounds of teaspoons in mugs, like the *ding ding ding* of the triangle when we do music with Mrs Stone. She's a hippie and the triangle is in everything we play, even in hip-hop.

In the lounge, they've stopped talking.

Harry buzzes rudely.

'Shhhh!' I hiss into the intercom. 'They'll hear you!'

'What's going on, Flop? Your reports are insufficiently frequent. I need an update – now!'

I don't reply.

'Flops? It sounds like R2-D2 is in the lounge – what is that?'