

# Flat on Your Face

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Illustrations by Sergio Bleda

9-11 year-olds



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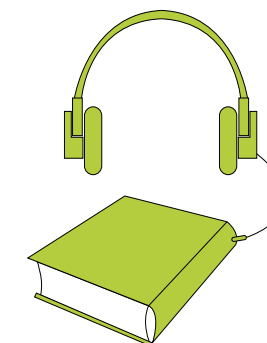
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He had only just started to talk when his mother made an announcement that would change everything. Until then, his house, his room, everything and everyone around him belonged to his kingdom. But then she arrived, Pilar, and Peter had to see how his castle walls were replaced by a murky moat where he no longer felt safe.

His kingdom had become a kind of island, encroached upon by mud where he could no longer control who would burst in, splashing everything, breaking things, leaving behind a smell of dribble and curdled milk, even wee and poo! Who was it who said babies smell nice?

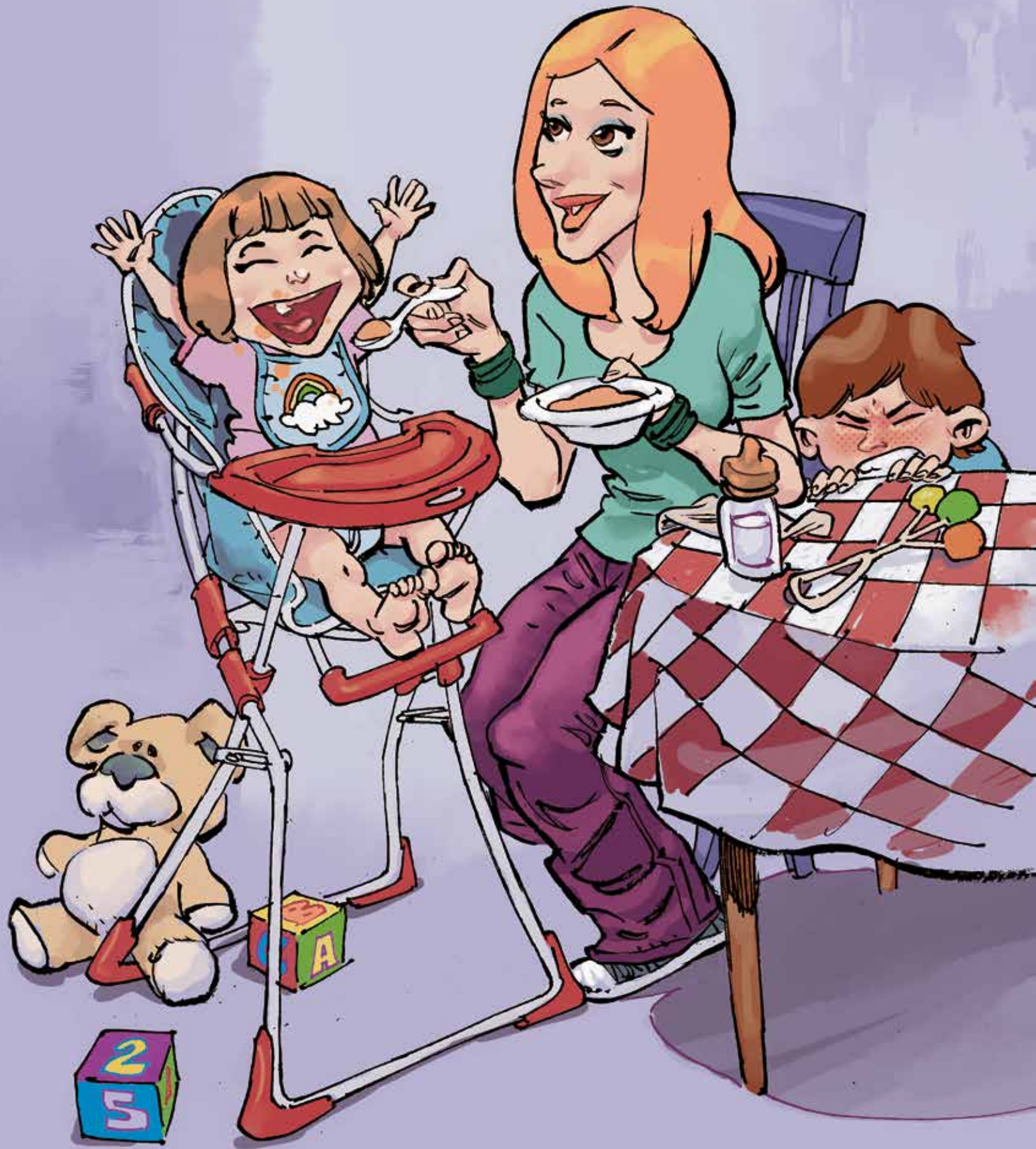
Peter had also lost control over who could leave his island, since if it were up to him, that “nuisance” that acted on impulse and far beyond any realm of reason, that never stopped crying for everything and never left him alone, not even when he went to his room for some peace and quiet, that monster in nappies would have been expelled from the stronghold that was his kingdom, as soon as she arrived.

“What are you doing here, pipsqueak? I’ve told you before not to touch my things. Go to your room!”

But instead of leaving when Peter asked her “nicely”, she would just start crying so that one of their parents would appear immediately and tell him to let his sister in. And not just that. He also had to look after her and play with her. Play! Had they gone crazy, or what? How could he play with that weapon of mass destruction? Did they expect him to give her his toys so that should could break them in bits one by one? But Pilar didn’t know how to do anything!

He really did get the feeling that that girl had made his parents and his former adult “subjects” fall under a kind of spell that made them soft in the head. It was like in the fable when the Pied Piper charmed the rats with his music and led them away to their deaths in the river... Pretty much the same thing. That miniature witch had driven all the adults to that muddy moat that now surrounded his former kingdom, and had left them wallowing there: “suckers”, and taken in by the sound of her gurgling noises.





Now that Peter was beginning to learn about more important things in life as the days went by, and the fact that he was learning quickly, meant that nobody paid much attention to his achievements. But any stupid old thing his sister did left them all gaping in astonishment.

“Peter, come and see what your sister is saying”.

“Saying!, he thought whilst looking at his mother dumbfounded.

“Come and see how my baby girl says ‘Peter’”. Peeeeeeter. Peeeeeeter... Peter! Peeeee... Peeeee... Peeeeeeter.

And his mother could spend hour after hour like that... day after day... and then some more. Until at last, one summer morning she managed it. Or at least that's what his mother said, because Peter never thought that the noise coming out of Pilar's mouth sounded anything like his name.

“Peter my darling, Pili just said your name. Come! Run!” she said, standing him in front of his sister. What's your brother called? He's called Pee...

“Pee” she managed to struggle out.

“Wonderful!” said his mother clapping her hands. “Did you see that?” “She said your name.”

“She said “pee” Mum”, replied the boy with an angry look on his face.

“Pee”, his sister repeated, with a satisfied look on her face, expecting him to clap or congratulate her in some way.

“It's ‘Peter’, not ‘Pee’” he shouted, clearly irate.

“Pee” she shouted again.

Peter felt his cheeks getting hotter and hotter and despite his mother telling him his sister was still only small, and couldn't pronounce the “t” properly, he just thought how embarrassed he would be in the park when his sister started calling him “Pee” and all the other children laughed.

“Pee” She went on and on, waiting for some praise from her brother, “Pee!”. “Pee!” “Pee!”

The boy ran out and on reaching his room began sobbing in a corner and decided to plan his revenge. Shortly after, Pilar arrived, and when she saw him looking sad, said:

“Ea, ea, ea,...”



“Leave me alone” shouted Peter climbing onto his bed to get further away from her, and where she couldn’t reach him.

At dinner time, his father asked him to pick up the paper napkin his sister had dropped on the floor and he was so furious about having to get off his chair to pick up something his sister had dropped, that he decided to put his plan into action.

“Here you are Pimi”, said Peter in a slightly strange tone of voice “your napkin”.

“Don’t you mean ‘Pili’”? said his father.

“No, Pimi” he replied.

“But her name’s Pili, short for Pilar.”

“No, it's Pimi, short for Pimientos. She calls me Pee, doesn't she? Well I'm going to call her Pimientos. Pimientos!” He said, addressing his sister, who apparently found it hilarious because she burst out laughing. Pimientos!” he said again before as Pilar had another fit of laughter.

“I’ll explain later” his mother said to his father, while shaking her head.

Peter looked at Pimientos and thought about how much his sister had grown since that day when his revenge had backfired on him, instead of Pilar, Pili for her friends and Pimi for her best friends, getting angry, that nickname had stuck like glue. She didn't even mind when Peter, intentionally shouted out her name when they were in the park. She knew he was trying to annoy her, and sometimes even humoured him. Then she remembered what her parents had told her about the origin of that nickname, and would bring out that name, only now it was followed by ‘face’...

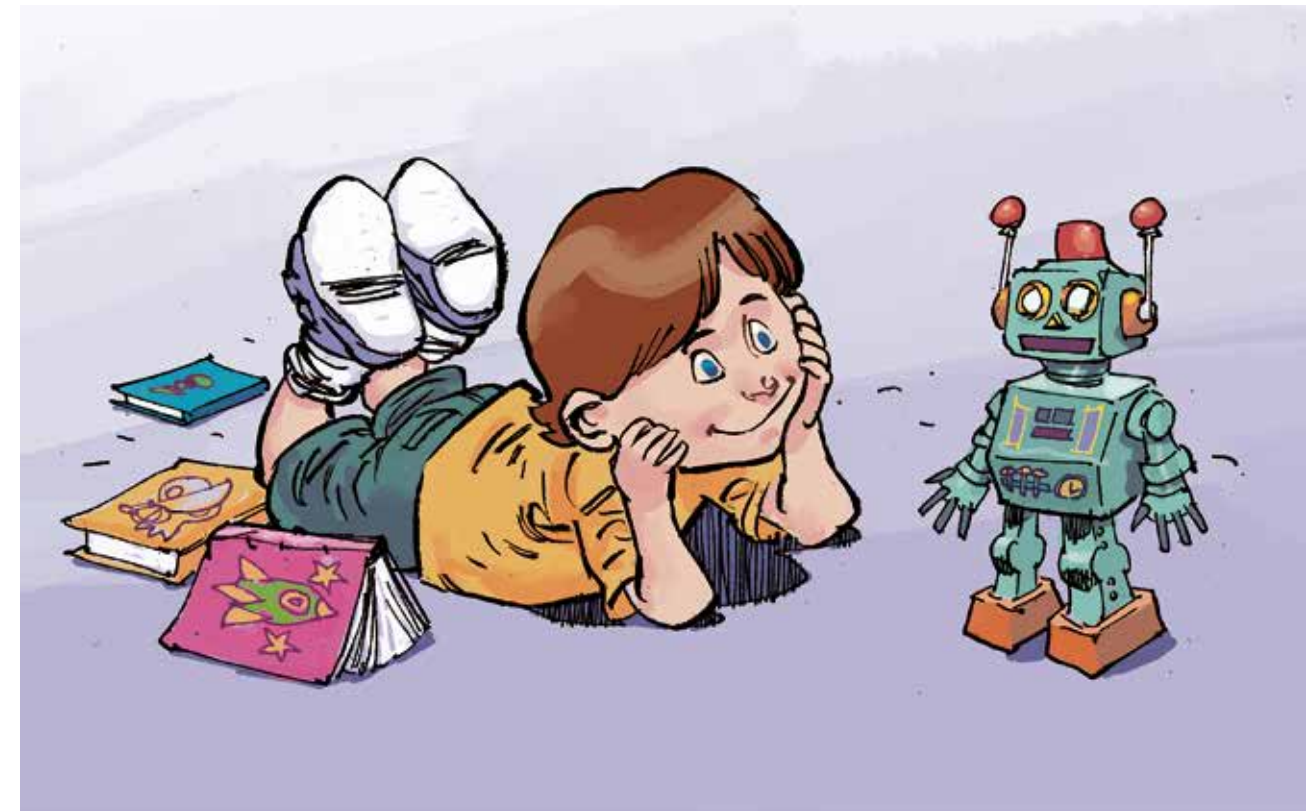
“What do you want pee face?” she retorted from the safety of her circle of friends, all of them sitting on the sand laughing at Pee... Sorry, Peter.

Of course, his sister was a liability, and always embarrassed him. But worst of all, she was always copying what he did. If he ate an ice-cream, she would want one too. If he wanted to watch TV quietly, two seconds later she would be sitting at his side asking:

“What are you watching?”

“A film”

“What's it about?”



“It's just started...”

“Who’s that?”

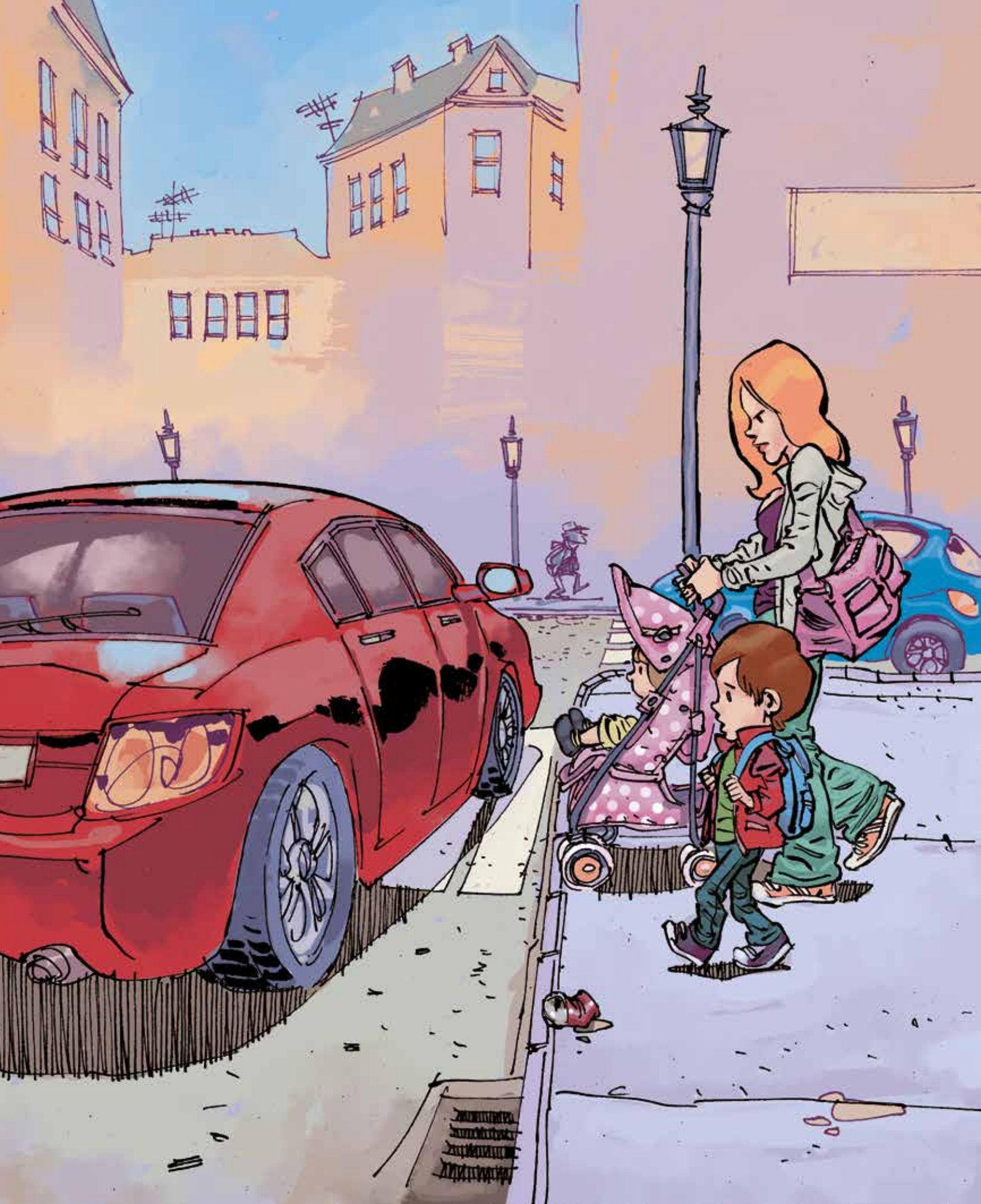
“Someone”

“Is he a goody or a baddy?”

And so on and so forth until he changed channel to watch a girly programme and he would go to his room to read. That happened ever since Pimientos could talk and she started to drive him crazy with all those ‘why this, why the other’ and copying him. It was like he had a parrot on his shoulder all the time. There was therefore nothing left for him to do than to get into reading, which was the only activity, apart from his homework, which his mother made his sister respect, since, according to her, all humanity’s knowledge and things invented, were in books.

Pee...(sorry) Peter loved adventure books, stories about monsters and outer space. When he was young, Rüdiger was played the starring role in all his fantasies. Saying Rudy was his favourite toy was cutting it short, in fact he was his best friend. It





was a Christmas present, when he was “a bit too old for toys”, or so his father said, and therefore, despite having asked for it, he didn’t really expect to get it from his Father “Christmas”. But to his surprise, there it was under the tree the next morning.

Peter loved it so much that everyone else in the family, including his mother, felt something for it, when they saw Peter so caught up in his space adventures, she would look at his father out of the corner of her eye reminding him of how much he had complained the day before the robot came into their lives.

“Too old..” she mumbled, shaking her head while she looked at her husband.

For Mum, Rüdiger was not just a toy, as she was able to appreciate the relationships children had with their toys. But she also saw some kind of support for her son's education, something like an ally, since the robot included some lessons on being a “model citizen”.

“What is a model citizen?” Peter asked the first days when all he would do was listen to everything that had been saved in Rüdiger's memory.

“A citizen who sets an example to others” replied his father.

“And what is setting an example?” Peter asked after pondering the matter for a while.

“A citizen who behaves properly for others to see”, settled the matter his father,

“Who shows an example?”

“Who shows examples of what you should do to be a good citizen”.

“Citizen?”

“Yes. Citizen, a person who lives in the city”.

“So, grandma and grandpa aren't citizens then? Because they live in a village..?”

“Good citizens are people who conduct themselves properly around a city, town or village”, came his mother's voice from Pilar's bedroom.

“Conduct, Mum?” Peter said while approaching enemy terrain. “Like an orchestra?”

“No”, she said trying not to laugh. Let me see, I’ll try and find another word... It's a person who does things properly when out and about, doing everything Rudy says: crossing the streets on the pedestrian crossings, not spitting chewing gum on the floor... That's how to be a ‘model citizen’. In other words, someone who everyone else wants to be like because they do the right things.”

“What things?”



“Uugh!” groaned his mother, and Peter knew that the explanation had reached its end. Whatever Rudy says.

So Peter went back to his room, sat in front of the robot and spent a long time listening to everything he said. He listened to it so many times that he learnt it all off by heart, and even though everything made sense when he was sitting on the floor in front of the toy, when he went out into the street to see how people “conducted” themselves (not an orchestra), everything was just chaos.

He supposed that he, being a person and citizen, was a pedestrian and should walk on the pavement, but there were streets where there were cars parked on the pavements and they couldn't get past when they were pushing the pram with little Pilar or the shopping trolley. At first he supposed that his parents and sister were no longer pedestrians because they had the pram or shopping trolley, and that was why they had to go onto the road. But with Rüdiger's explanations and the “praise” his mother gave the owners of those cars, he reached the conclusion that it was the others who didn't know the rules properly.

Nevertheless, when he asked his father how they had managed to get a driving licence without knowing the rules, his father said that was impossible, and Peter couldn't understand why the drivers put pedestrians in danger if they knew the rules, making them citizens at risk.

It was something he just couldn't get his head around. “Why do so many people break the rules?” After a lot of asking and observing, he realised that it was like the expression his mother used so much about a dog chasing its tail... If pedestrians couldn't get past on the pavement, they had to walk on the road. If there is nowhere for cars to park, they park on the pavement. If people didn't buy so many cars and there was a balance between the number of people and the number of parking places for cars, everything and everybody would have their own place on the street. But to do that, people would have to share their vehicles with other families, just like he had seen in some films when people go to work. But that only happened in New York, because in Madrid everyone wants their own car, and obviously, in a city where you have to build upwards to fit everyone in, there just couldn't be enough parking space for everyone. If we were dealing with bicycles or motorcycles, it would be a different matter. But cars!



Those were Peter's thoughts years later when he was travelling with his parents on the bus, looking out of the window to see the way cars were cramming all the lanes in Alcalá Street.

“Can't you see why we should use public transport?” his mother said to Pimientos.

“Why, Mum?”

“Because that is what happens when everyone drives a car to the same place. There are traffic jams.”

“We're stuck too” replied Peter.

“Yes, but if everyone else travelled like us, we wouldn't be.”

“We would be crammed up just the same, only we'd be crammed inside the bus”.

“If everyone took the bus, there would be one every five minutes”, dreamed his mother.

“Why don't they ban cars?” asked Peter, who was beginning to realise that a “model citizen” was something like Superman. In other words, an ideal.



“At least we don’t have to look for somewhere to park”, said his father, with nobody being able to refute it.

However, the thing that most caught his attention as time went by, was not the fact that people just ignored the rules, it was his parents, who had made him wait for so long in the scorching sun until the little man turned green and making him wait until the next time if the man was flashing before it turned red, and then sometimes dragged him across when it was on red or told him to hurry when the green man started flashing, before even reaching the crossing in case they arrived late somewhere. When he asked them why they did it, they told him they were in a hurry, as if there were no other solution and so it was OK to break the Highway Code. So Peter repeated:

“But is that good or bad?”

The answer was obvious: it was bad and children should never do it. Which is why, as he grew up and started to feel more like an adult, he began to do just that and break other rules that he saw his parents do. The problem was that the way Peter saw himself, now he was eleven years old, and as much an adult he considered himself, was not real. The way he saw his little sister was real however, particularly when she wanted to do the same things as him, and he had to tell her off, ignoring the fact that she was just doing the same things he did when his parents weren’t there to control him, and she, at just nine years old believed she was old enough to do them.

It's funny just how clearly we see things when other people do them, and just how blind we are to reality when we do them ourselves. We are unable to see them until we fall flat on our faces.

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As is true in most relationships between friends in life, the relationship between Peter and Rüdiger went through several different stages. After learning how he ‘should’ do things in the street, without questioning what his friend was telling him, he started to switch the sound off and use his own voice in his imaginary adventures on Planet Zebra, where the rules were obeyed without question. One of the most important





rules was one that his real life neighbours most broke: no gossiping on the pavement preventing others from getting past. On Planet Zebra, this crime was sentenced with ten years prison and ten pinches on the cheeks every day. What he couldn't understand was how how neighbours got away with it scot-free on Planet Earth.

Another of the rules that were broken and never entailed any consequences on Earth was one that was very disturbing for others, it was ignoring the rules concerning dogs. Every day he passed the same people with their huge dogs off the leash, leaving dung all over the place. Once, one of those dogs jumped up at Pimientos and knocked her down, and even though the girl wasn't his favourite thing in life, Peter got very angry with the owner and told him the dog should be on a leash in the street, to which the owner retorted:

“Ah, shut-up child”. and just carried on his way.

Peter felt like shouting names at him, but was a little afraid to. What's more, he remembered that he had to treat his elders with respect, and then wondered if elders had to treat their youngers with respect. Obviously not, because the owner of the dog did insult him, and of all the people who saw the incident, nobody said anything. That's why he had considered banning dogs on Planet Zebra. But the thing is he actually liked dogs, and so decided he would ban the dogs' owners. But then he started thinking about his aunt Paloma and her dog Isidro, and that both of them always obeyed the rules. So finally, he decided he would keep the same rules as those on Earth, only that nobody who broke the rules would get away with it. In these cases the dogs would be given to other families who would know how to look after them and the owner could not have another dog until after ten years of community service cleaning up dog poo from the streets and chewing gum from under tables and benches in parks.

That anecdote would stay with Pimientos, who, from the ground could see how her brother stuck up for her against that thug who was twice his age and size, and couldn't help but think her brother was a kind of superhero who would always make her feel safe. He even helped her get back up! Although when she thanked him, Peter said it was nothing and that he couldn't stand that man anyway. She, however, knew the truth, however much he picked on her, she was still his darling little sister. And that's why, after listening to Peter's sermon on the way home about what was right and what was wrong, what Rudy said and what people did, Pimientos decided to





ensconce herself with the robot to learn more about the subject so that Peter would admire her behaviour.

Then the time came when the two friends grew apart, and the summer came when Peter was ten and he and Pimientos went to spend the month of August with their grandparents in their village. There he had to see how the rest of the gang rode their bikes into the hills or down to the pond, while he had to walk, arriving fifteen minutes later and what was worse, having to take Pimientos along with him. "Will that girl never learn to leave me alone?"

Pimientos, on the other hand, was only too pleased to follow in his footsteps, and since he couldn't ride a bike, he had to walk everywhere. If it hadn't been for her, he would have had to go everywhere on his own. But he wasn't as kind to her, and even got angry because she was missing her favourite series, and tried to persuade her that she didn't have to tag along and should stay at home to watch it. She, however, was only too pleased to do him that favour, and keep him company. At last she was being useful to her brother, who looked after her so carefully! She would have missed a thousand episodes just to spend some time talking about the things Peter was interested in.

On the way to the pond, for example, she would ask him:

"Why aren't there any zebra crossings here? What would Rudy tell us to do?"

"When there are no zebra crossings, we have to go to a corner and cross in a straight line as quickly as possible but without running.

"Why on corners?"

"Because on corners, cars usually go slower in case another car is coming, and they have to be more careful. Anyway, Pimi, even when there is a zebra crossing or a traffic light, you should always look both ways before crossing."

"I know, first left, then right, although sometimes I get it wrong."

"Not only that. The other day I saw you step off the curb and wait on the road for a car to pass before crossing behind it, running like mad."

"I was in a rush..."

"It doesn't matter, you shouldn't do it:"

"Everyone else does."

"Not us."

"Mum and Dad do when they're late."

"Yeah, but they're adults, and so it doesn't count."

"OK, I'll wait on the pavement."

"That's right. And don't step off the pavement until the cars have stopped to let you cross."

"And what if I stop and no cars are coming?"

"Well, you can cross... But don't make a mad dash for it."

"I won't run... but Mum always says she brings us to the village so we can run around like real kids."

"That's right", Peter couldn't help laughing "but I suppose she meant places like the hills or round the pond."

"Peter?"

"What?"

"Do you want me to teach you how to ride a bike?"

"No."

"I don't know why you're so afraid. It's really easy."

"Shut-up. I'm not afraid. And don't say that again."

Pimientos knew he was afraid really, but she didn't say anything else because she knew Peter was a bit embarrassed. She didn't want the rest of the gang to know there was a wonderful bike in their grandparents' house, with an adjustable seat that you could raise or lower, because Peter had told them they didn't have a bike. That's why she didn't ride it either, despite the fact that her friends rode round the village square in the mornings on their bikes.

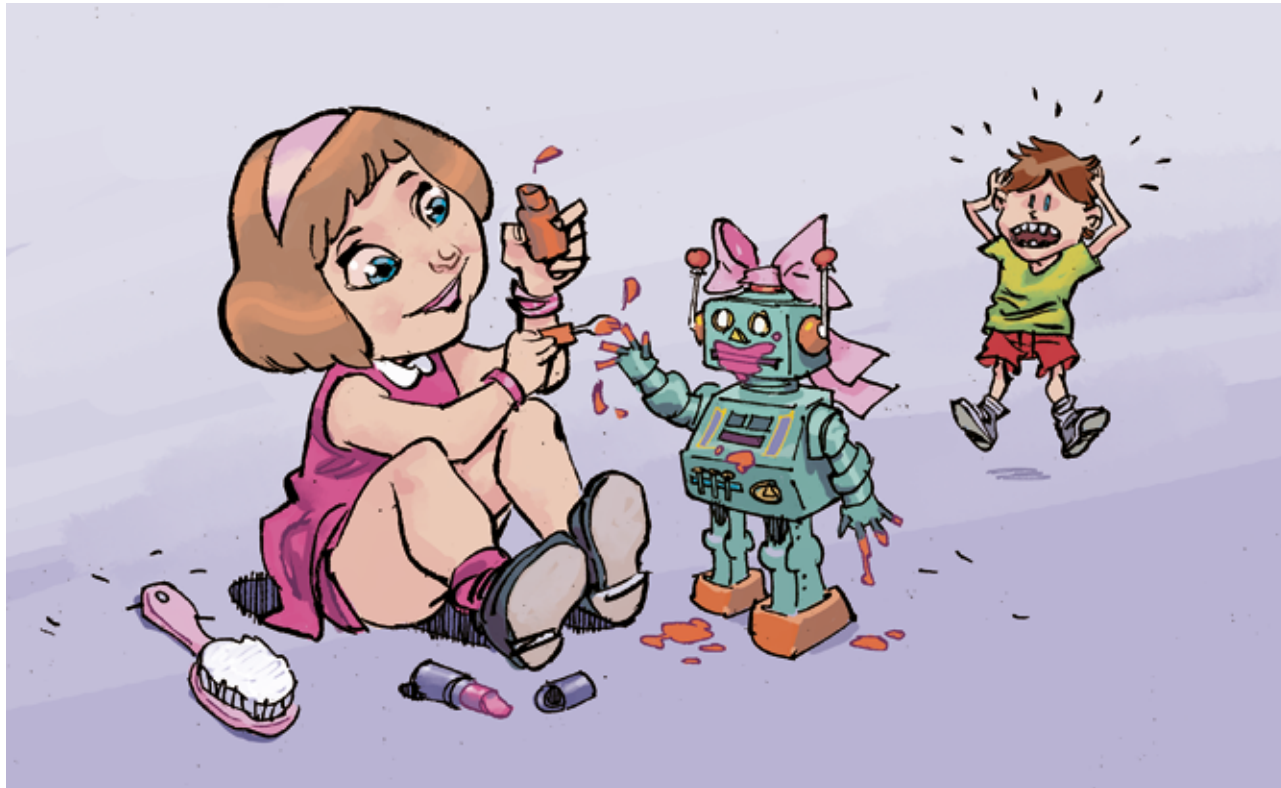
Peter knew he shouldn't take it out on Pimi, but he couldn't let her say anything, and although he trusted her, he didn't want to admit that he was afraid in front of his little sister. It was enough that she could ride a bike and he couldn't, and it would be even worse if it was she who had to teach him. Had she said it on purpose?

"I know." "I said it just in case", added Pimientos, almost apologising.

"Leave me alone" retorted Peter, leaving his sister behind while he was mumbling away. I'll learn to ride a bike next year, just so I don't have to walk with you.

And that is exactly what happened, he went to his best friend Rüdiger for help. Learning to ride a bike on a piece of wasteland is one thing, but riding around the





streets of Madrid is quite another, even in the cycle lane and just from home to the park.

He asked his parents to bring his bike from the village to home, and instead of going to the park he pushed his bike along the pavement until he reached Retiro park, blending in with the crowd, and then joined in with other children learning to ride bikes under the guidance of their parents in Paseo de Coches. So, at ten years old, he managed to ride a bike on his own. Afterwards, the new challenge was to learn how to “conduct” himself, making good use of the verb, at crossroads, bicycle lanes parallel to the road or mixed lanes on the pavement, pedestrians walking in them, loose dogs, and their poo, balls, bicycles in both directions, overtaking and obstacles such as roadworks and uneven surfaces. Who better than Rüdiger to help him with all that, hidden in a basket ET style. The next summer he would be able to show off in front of his friends in the village and get away from his sister, who would be the only one without a bike and would have to stay at home.

That made Pimi very sad, since she missed the walks with her brother. But he didn't get all the glory either, the hills did not have the risks of the city, but they weren't paved either. So, before the end of the first week the bicycle was broken and so was Peter's leg.

That hot, boring summer for everyone marked a before and after in Peter's friendship with Rudy, since, although he recovered well and got a new bike, Peter was no longer interested in the rules, and the age for playing with robots had reached its end. Even so, the day he realised that Pimientos had gradually been making friends with the robot, in the most subtle way, he cried foul. At first Peter didn't really give much importance to riding his new bike with the gang in the park, and finding out that his best friend had had his nails painted pink. But when he did sit up and complain, his mother and father had already agreed to give him a dose of his own medicine, to make him feel ashamed of “still wanting to be little” for some things, and despite his eyes welling up they made him give in to his sister... yet again!

Peter was so angry at how unfair this situation was sometimes, that he didn't even realise he was being vindictive, and in an act of rebelliousness, he started to do the opposite of everything that Rudy, the new princess robot, had taught him before it had been adorned with bubble-gum pink nails.

So he started not really caring when his friends threw crisp packets on the floor or spat out chewing gum, and gradually started to do the same things himself, with the approval of the brasher members of the group, those who would have been sentenced to cleaning the streets on Planet Zebra. Later on, he started getting involved in group mischief, putting themselves in danger. And not just themselves, also other drivers who had to brake suddenly on more than one occasion, and pedestrians who were patiently waiting their turn, with at least one of them pushing older people and causing them to lose their balance. Another time, a small child, following the group, crossed the road running when the light was about to change, frightening his mother to death; the bus driver who had to swerve towards the pavement, the passengers on the bus who stumbled into each other and the old people the bus nearly ran over... In a blink of the eye they had caused mayhem, frightening everyone around them, whilst the youngsters ran off just in case someone caught them. Later on, in the park, all of them laughed that laughter that only children have to try and forget they've done something they should be ashamed of, each of them sticking up for the others, hiding behind each other in the anonymous bravado of the pack.





Peter was laughing too, louder than the rest, because he was more ashamed than the rest, thinking about the fright his mother would have had, of himself even, if that child had been Pimientos. He wasn't quite sure why he was feeling the way he was, when he thought about that tiresome girl who had stolen everything away from him, but the truth of the matter is that he felt terrible when imagining it could have been her.

Neither did he notice that his sister, always alert to his behaviour, started to copy his insolent, reckless behaviour, since the last time Pimi tried to talk to him about the subject he used to be so passionate about, Peter told her that nothing "her princess robot" had taught him, had ever been of any use.

"I'd have been better off if I'd just ignored it all. Can't you see that nobody takes any notice of the rules? The only thing you get is people calling you names."

"Don't say that to your sister", intervened his mother. "Do you want her to do the same as you, and have an accident? "Can't you see you're an example for her?"

"And what about you?", replied the boy, "Don't you cross the road when the light's red when you're in a hurry?"

"Well, I suppose I do when there are no cars coming... Anyway, I'm a grown-up and you shouldn't compare yourself to me."

"I'm not a little child either", he replied.

"Me neither", added Pimientos.

"You keep quiet, Pimi", he said.

"No. You keep quiet and go to your room", said his mother to settle the matter.

Instead of doing what he had been told, Peter got up from the table and ran out of the house slamming the door, so that everyone, even the people on Planet Zebra would know he was furious. Pimientos ran to look out of the window and saw Peter go out of the gate, running along the pavement until he reached the crossing on the corner opposite the park. Instead of going straight on and crossing over the zebra crossing, Peter turned and crossed at the traffic light, in a diagonal line from one corner to the other, with a truck driver angrily sounding his horn at him after braking sharply. When he got to the park he took his anger out by repeatedly kicking a waste paper bin, and such was his luck that a policeman saw him and told him off. Peter ran away until he was out of sight of both Pimientos and the policeman.



“What's the matter Pimi?” asked her mother seeing her standing concerned at the window. “Don't take any notice of your brother, he's at that age when nobody can understand him.”

“I understand him” replied Pimientos, before shutting herself in her room.

No more was said of the matter until a few days later when the family were walking past the “scene of the crime”, and Peter noticed the bin was no longer there when his father was going to throw an ice lolly wrapper he was eating in it.

“That's odd! Didn't there use to be a bin here?”

Peter looked down rather sheepishly.

“There was before. But someone kicked it in until it fell over and broke” Pimientos explained.

“And didn't anyone say anything?” asked their father.

“Yes”, the girl went on, “a policeman told the boy off and he ran away.”

Peter didn't know what to say with Pimientos searching his face in a type of complicity that he really didn't want to have with her. That cheek and that type of bond she was seeking - Pimi! That sweet and sickly Pimi, left him defenceless. She, on the other hand, was hoping for something in exchange for keeping his secret: a wink of the eye, a “thanks for not telling”... Anything! But no, Peter looked down again and never even mentioned it. So, one boring Sunday morning, when she saw his brother take the keys, she decided to do something about it.

“I'm going to the park” her brother shouted from the front door.

“Me too” she shouted back.

“No. I'm not going with you.”

“Aren't you. Really?” In that case I'd best go and talk to Mum and Dad about a certain waste paper bin...”

“OK, OK... But go and play on the other side then.”

That morning turned out to be very revealing for Pimientos, since from her seat on the bench keeping the right distance away from her brother, she could see how he had become a rude, loud-mouthed thug, who swore a lot and spat sunflower seed





shells and spit on the floor, and laughed at the passers-by. He even laughed at her when one of his friends said he'd brought his little lapdog along.

They looked daggers at each other across the park, and they both knew something awful was going to happen. And so it was. On the way home, both of them were dying to speak their minds, and after a rather tense silence, it was Pimi who started.

"Since when have you been a thug?"

"And what about you?", "Since when have you been a smartass?"

"I've always been one, the thing is you've always been too stupid to realise."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. In fact, I've been covering up for you all my life... When you couldn't ride a bike and said we didn't have one, I didn't ride it to cover for you. When you said you were going to the park and Mum asked why we could never see you, I never told her you were going somewhere else because you were ashamed that someone would see you learning to ride a bike when you were ten-years-old, and not letting your parents or little sister teach you. And what about all those afternoons when I missed my favourite programme to go with you? Thanks to me, you didn't have to go alone."

"And you're so clever, are you? So how come you never realised you just cramped my style? Ever since you came into my life the only thing you've done is steal my things, get everyone else's attention, never be wrong... Always wanting to be my shadow... When are you going to realise? All I wanted was to be with my friends."

"Is that so? Well I never saw them waiting for you. It was me who spent the summers with you, not your 'friends'. I'll tell you one thing, neither them nor the gang in the park are friends if you have to be as stupid as they are for them to accept you. You're not like that. I liked you the way you were before."

"I don't care what you think. You're just a little pipsqueak."

"No more than you are:"

Pimientos ran diagonally across the road, just as she had seen her brother do before, who in turn ran behind her fearing the worst as he saw a car coming. Fortunately, after the well-deserved verbal abuse the driver gave her, Peter saw she was safe and sound on the pavement, although trembling from the near miss and tears pouring down her cheeks.

Controlling his initial instinct to run after her, he crossed the road properly, after a seemingly eternal wait for the lights to change, and when he finally reached her, he could no longer control his feelings and hugged her tightly without saying a word.

"Never do that again" he said afterwards.

"Don't lecture me" she replied "I've seen you do it too. You think you know better than Mum and Dad when they tell you what you should do, but you're just the same. You think you're grown up, but you're just a kid, like me. You think you're better than everyone, and the worst thing is, I used to think you were", after which Pimientos turned on her heel and marched off home sobbing, like when she was little. "Didn't you say you hated me anyway?"

And it was then that Peter saw something clearly, and it was that he didn't hate her at all; in fact he loved her and wanted to protect her from all things bad, so that she could carry on being just like she was then.

That day changed everything for Peter. Well actually, that conversation didn't have any immediate consequences. Peter didn't become the most loving brother in the world, nor did he leave his gang of thugs. Neither did he pretend to be a "model citizen". Not that same day, at least. It happened gradually, starting by apologising to Pimientos, and spending the next Sunday peeling up chewing gum and picking up wrappers around the park, along with her as a result of an Inter-Planetary Sentence. The truth is they didn't annoy each other, in fact they had a wonderful time together.

Their mother also apologised for setting a bad example, which in itself was a lesson for the children. However, what really made Peter find his place in the world, trying to become the person he really wanted to be, was realising just how much his sister looked up to him, and the involuntary power he had over her, for who he should be a "model citizen" as Rudy would say, finally understanding the true meaning of those words.

**THE END**

**Laura Gómez** Lama, born in Madrid, has centred her career on writing for education. She has worked in the media, although she spent her university days talking about classic films on the radio. The magic of the media and the power words have on the imagination not only inspire her, they mesmerise her, until she finds herself “living” in other worlds.

She is very interested in children's and young people's literature, seeing it as “an ally in transferring the knowledge and experience of adults to children. Adults who for a short time get off their high horses and sit down and talk to the youngsters as equals, telling them: that is what I have learnt, the rest is up to you”.

She currently coordinates the magazine “Escuela Infantil”.

**Sergio Bleda**, born in Albacete, has been a comic artist and professional illustrator for twenty years. His work has been published in several European countries and the United States.

He started work as an illustrator and scriptwriter in 1991. He leapt to fame with “El Baile del Vampiro” [The Dance of the Vampire], a series published by Planeta DeAgostini in its “Laberinto” line, and was nominated for the Revelation Author Award at the “Saló Internacional del Comic de Barcelona” in 1998. This series and the trilogy “La Conjura de Cada Miércoles” [The Wednesday Conspiracy], recently re-released in the United States by the American publishers Dark Horse.

He currently lives in Valencia and works as a scriptwriter and illustrator for national and international publishers.