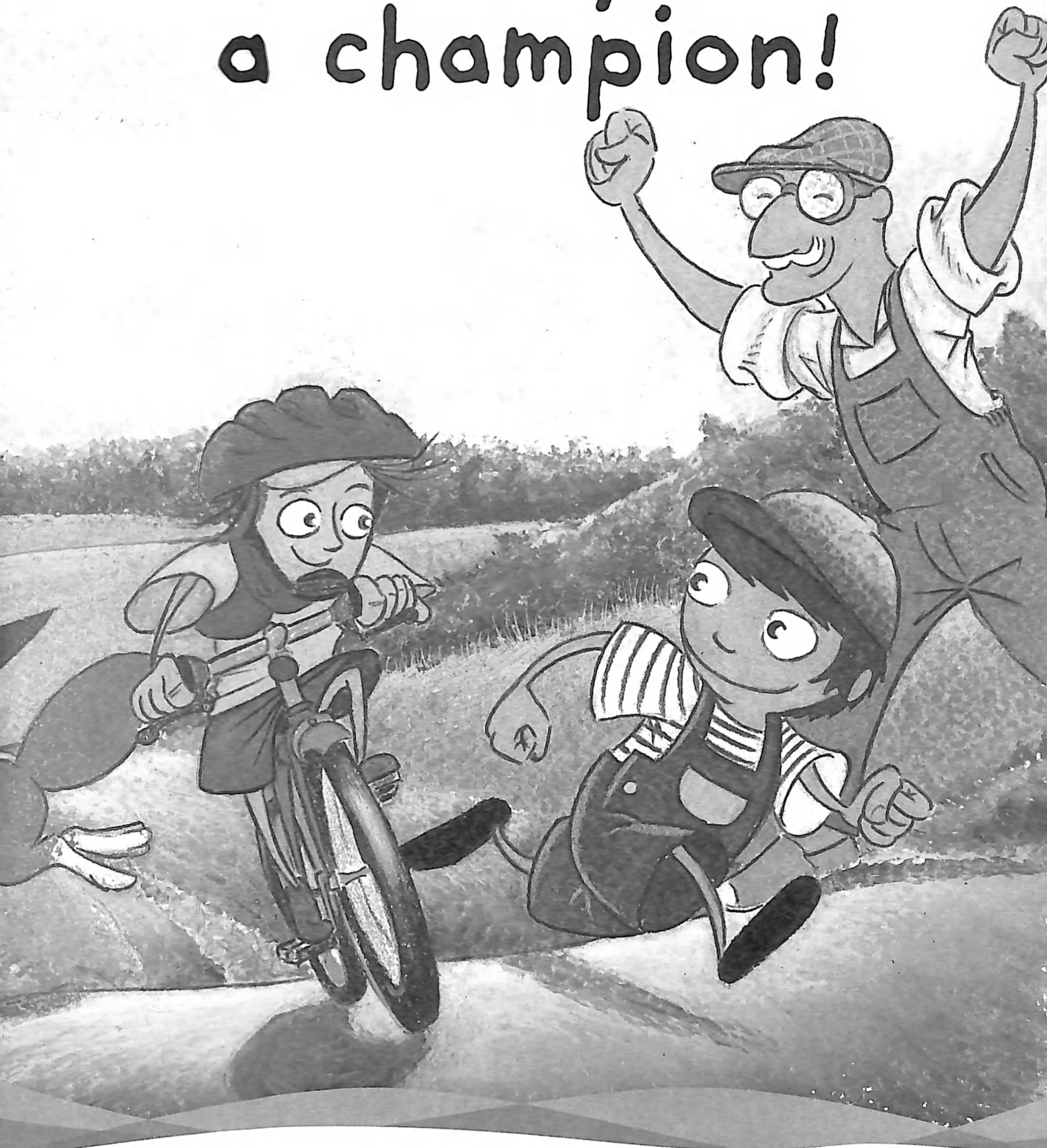


S.UE(DL)
F(271)

Benny's a champion!



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It was a fine spring day and the butterflies were out enjoying the sunshine. Tom and his friend Lila the fox were feeling happy too. They were chasing around together in their favourite part of Merlin City. From Fairweather Street they turned the corner into Blossom Lane. At the end of the lane they came to Southwind Road, and Miss Pippin's bicycle shop!

Miss Pippin was busy arranging shiny new bikes in her shop window.

"Hello Tom", she said. "You're in a good mood today! Why's that?"

"My cousin Benny wants to buy a new bike," said Tom, "and he's asked me to help him choose one. So we'll come and see you soon."

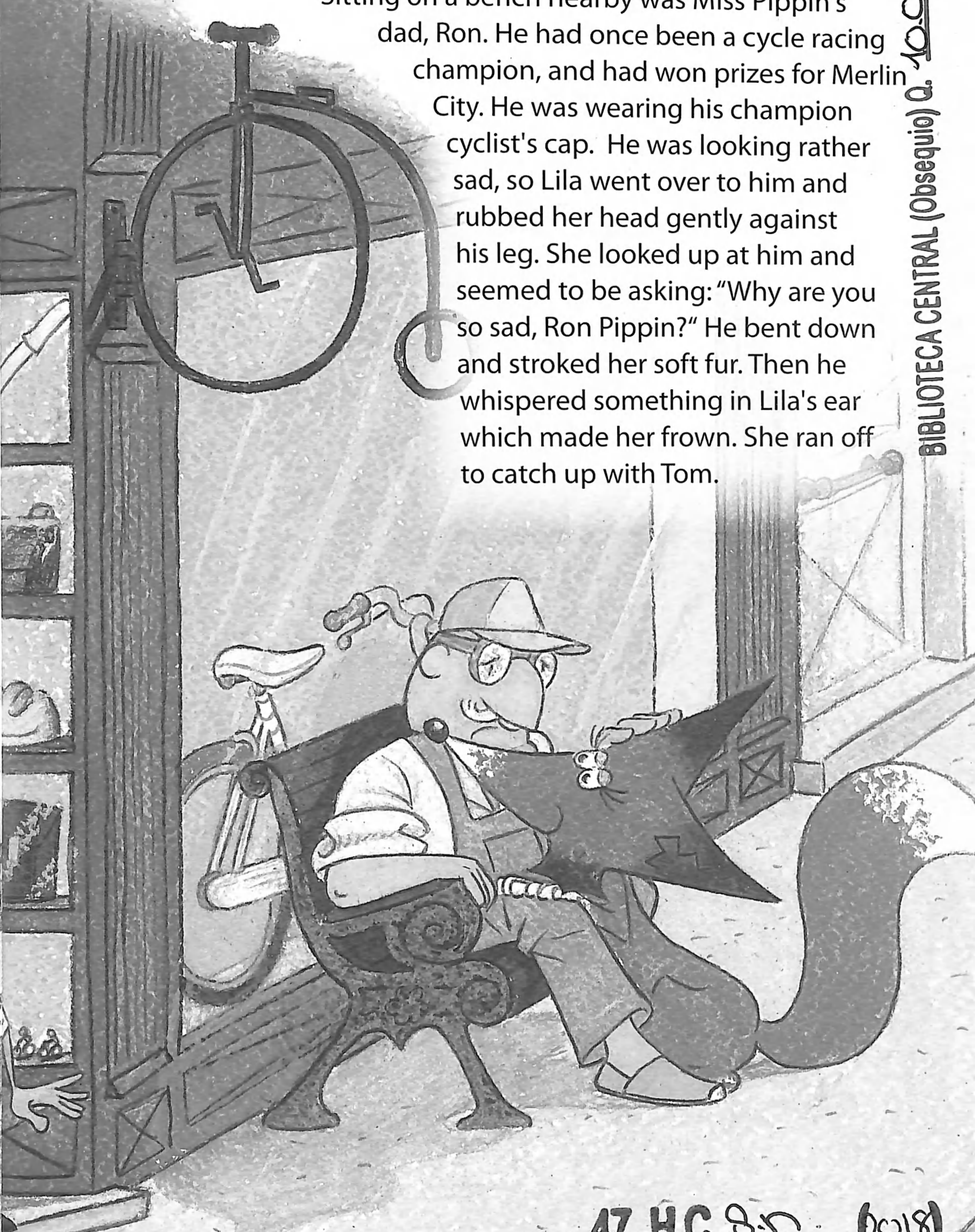
"Whenever you like, Tom", said Miss Pippin. "I've got some great new models to show you!"



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Sitting on a bench nearby was Miss Pippin's dad, Ron. He had once been a cycle racing champion, and had won prizes for Merlin City. He was wearing his champion cyclist's cap. He was looking rather sad, so Lila went over to him and rubbed her head gently against his leg. She looked up at him and seemed to be asking: "Why are you so sad, Ron Pippin?" He bent down and stroked her soft fur. Then he whispered something in Lila's ear which made her frown. She ran off to catch up with Tom.

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When they reached Benny's house, Tom noticed that Lila was looking anxious. He wondered why. Then Benny opened the door.

"So you're here at last!" he said.

"I've been waiting for you!"

Benny showed Tom a colourful catalogue with photos of all the latest bikes. He pointed to one of them.

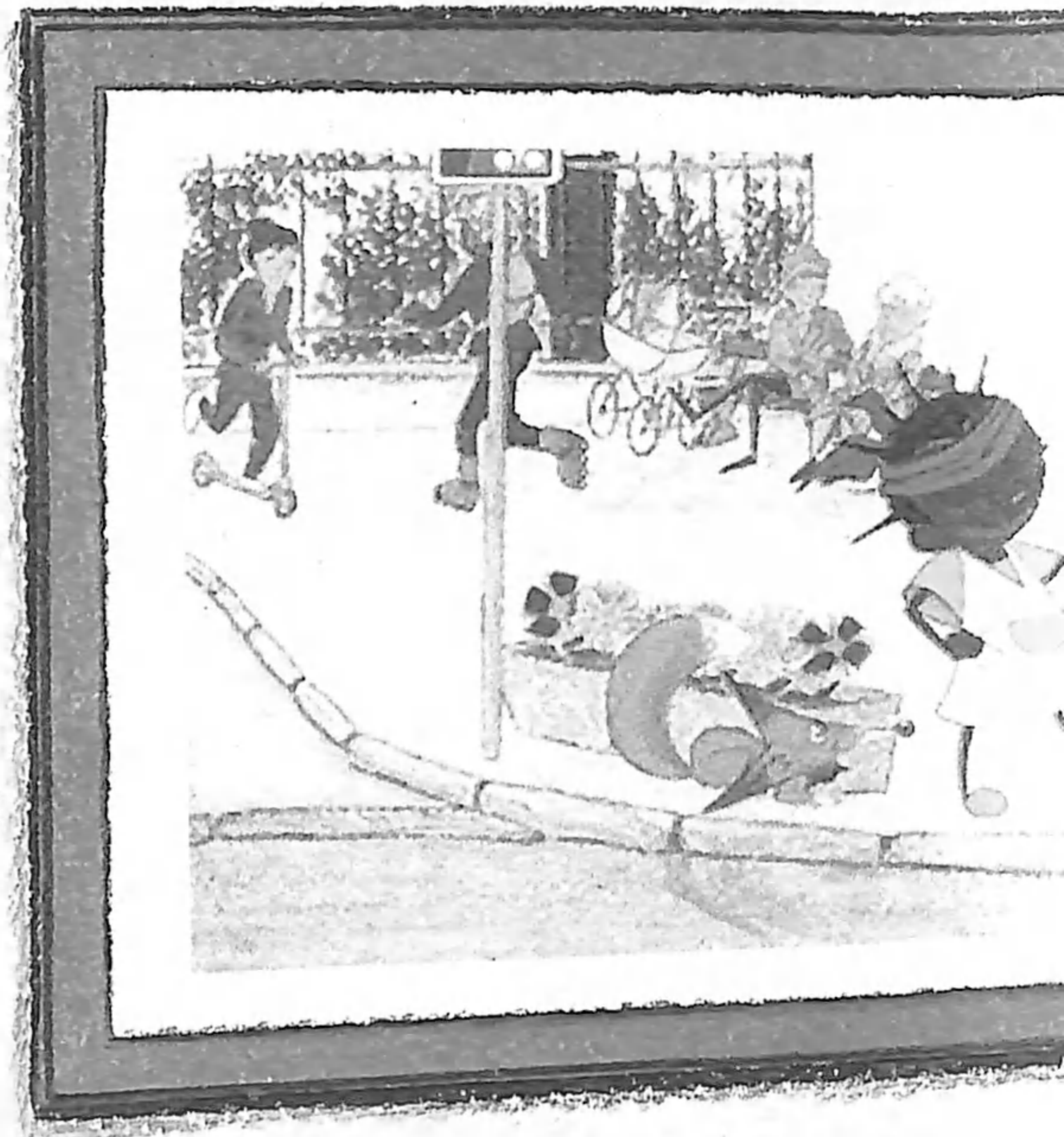
"Just look at this one, Tom", he said.

"Isn't it cool? I'd love to buy it!"

Benny rattled the coins in his piggy-bank.

"I've got all my savings here", he said. "I hope that's enough!"

"Let's go and find out", smiled Tom.





Benny stuffed the catalogue and his piggy-bank into his ruck-sack.

"Right, let's go!" he said. "Race you to the shop!"

The two boys started running down the garden path towards the road.

But Lila yelped and started circling around. She seemed to be calling them back. She sniffed the air, then started scuffling around in the long grass near an old cart. What was she up to? Tom watched her, puzzled.



Lila stopped near some bushes. She yapped excitedly. Tom could tell she had found something important.

"Come back, Benny!" he called out. "Lila wants to show us something!"

Tom went over to her. When he saw what was lying there under the bushes, his eyes opened wide with surprise. He turned to his cousin, who had just arrived.

"Who do these belong to?" asked Tom.

"Oh, they're just... old bikes", answered Benny. "They've got flat tyres and the chains have gone rusty. Never mind them. Let's go and buy my new bike!"

"Hang on", said Tom. "Why don't you fix up the ones you've already got? There's nothing wrong with them. They're good bikes!"



Just then, Benny's dad arrived. He put his hand on Tom's shoulder.

"Look, Tom" he said, "you can't go on using old stuff. You have to buy new things! If people don't buy new bikes, Miss Pippin will go out of business!"

Tom shook his head.

"I've got an idea", he said. "Let's put the bikes on this cart and take them to Miss Pippin. She might be able to do something with them"

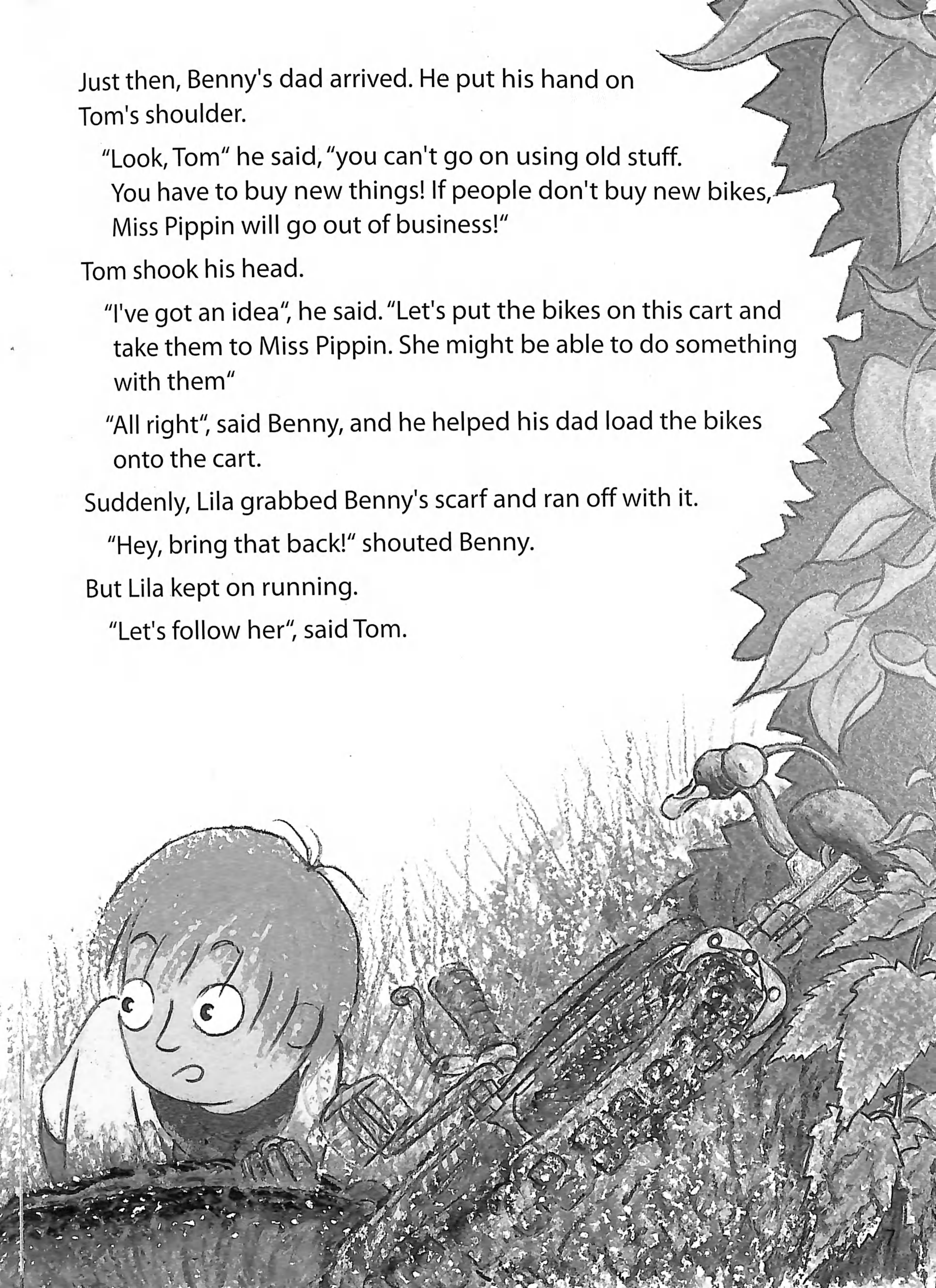
"All right", said Benny, and he helped his dad load the bikes onto the cart.

Suddenly, Lila grabbed Benny's scarf and ran off with it.

"Hey, bring that back!" shouted Benny.

But Lila kept on running.

"Let's follow her", said Tom.



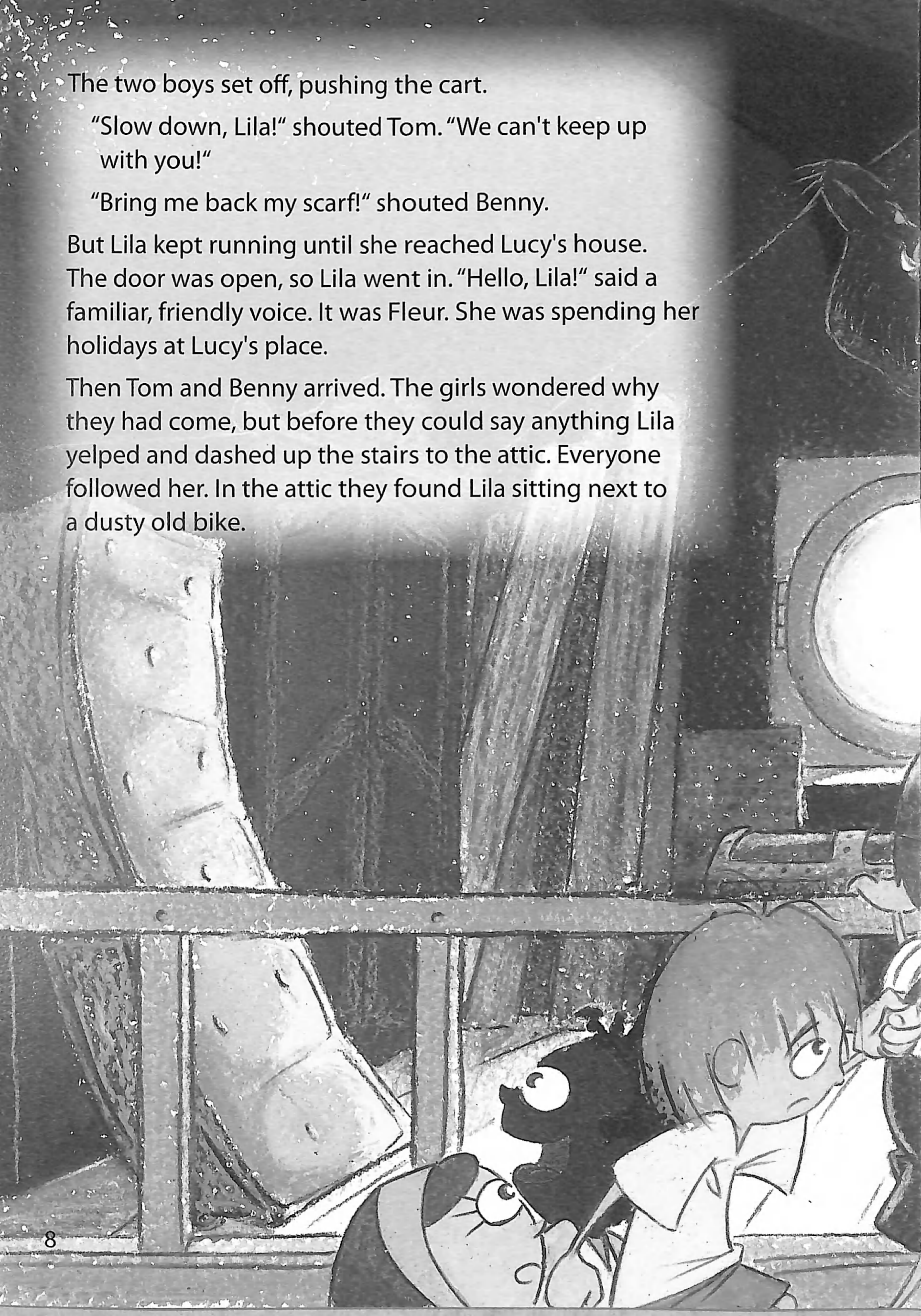
The two boys set off, pushing the cart.

"Slow down, Lila!" shouted Tom. "We can't keep up with you!"

"Bring me back my scarf!" shouted Benny.

But Lila kept running until she reached Lucy's house. The door was open, so Lila went in. "Hello, Lila!" said a familiar, friendly voice. It was Fleur. She was spending her holidays at Lucy's place.

Then Tom and Benny arrived. The girls wondered why they had come, but before they could say anything Lila yelped and dashed up the stairs to the attic. Everyone followed her. In the attic they found Lila sitting next to a dusty old bike.



"That's my mum's bicycle", said Lucy. "One of the wheels is bent".
Tom smiled.

"I think Lila wants us to take it to Miss Pippin, like the others"
he said.

Benny got his scarf back from Lila and struggled down the stairs
with the old bike.

"Goodness, it's heavy!" he puffed.

Tom helped him put the bike on the cart.

"I wonder", said Tom. "When Lucy's mum bought the bike,
did she think about what to do with it when it got old?"

Benny scratched his head.

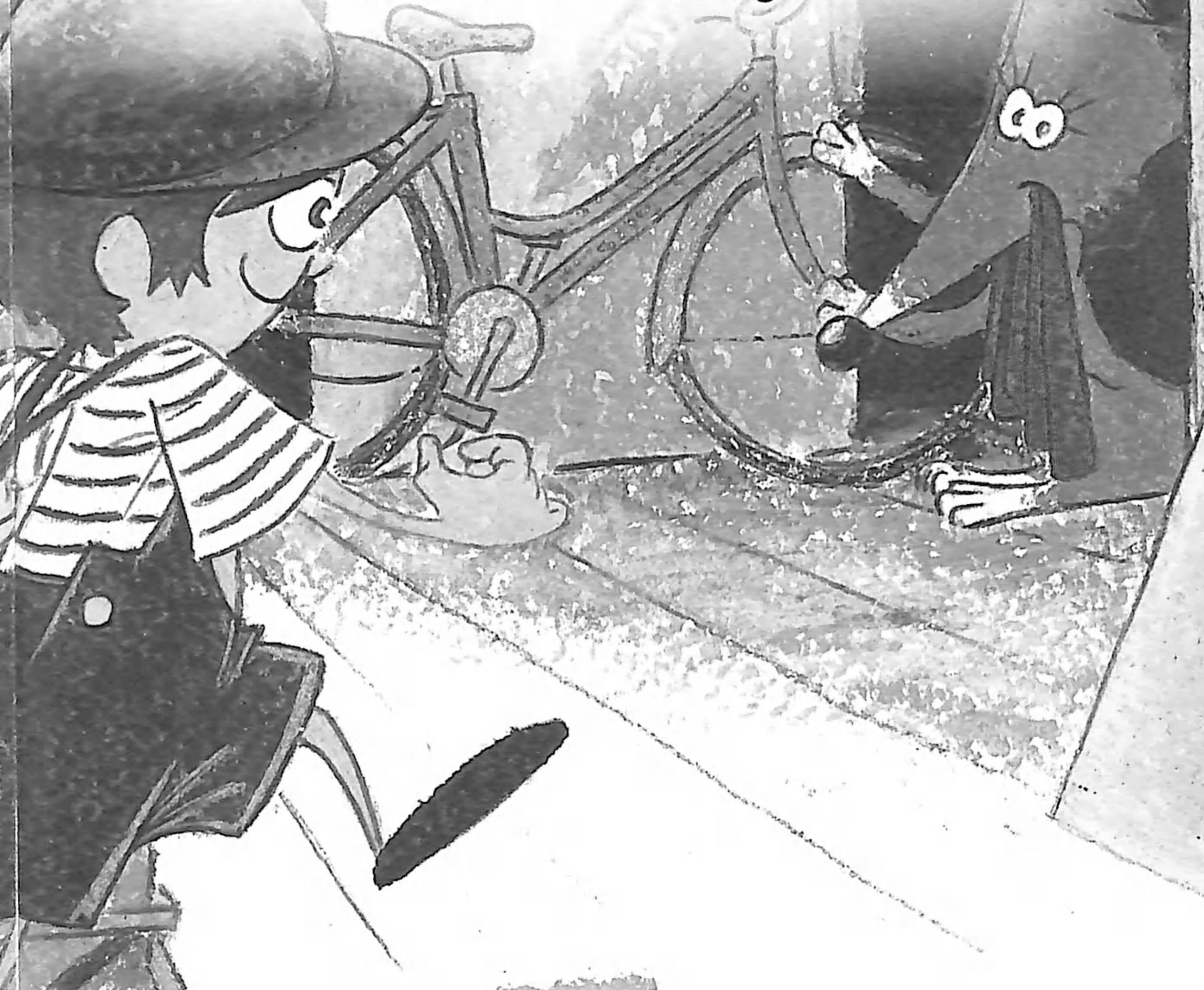
"Probably not", he said. "Anyway, I've never thought about
that before".

Just then, Lila tugged at Fleur's dress.

"Careful!" said Fleur. "Don't tear my dress, please!"

But Lila kept tugging.

"She wants us to follow her again" said Tom.



Lila ran along a path that led out of the city, past gardens and allotments where people grew fruit and vegetables. It wasn't easy for Benny to push the cart along the narrow path. He puffed and panted.

"You're doing fine, Benny!" said Lucy. "You're really strong!"

Benny smiled at her.

"I know where Lila's taking us", said Tom suddenly. "She's heading for the farm where the old lady lives!"

When they reached the farm, Lila rushed up to the hen house, scattering the chickens in all directions. Then she went inside. Tom heard her scrambling over something that went "bling, blang blong!" When he looked in, there was Lila sitting proudly on the saddle of yet another old bike.



The old lady came hurrying up to see what was going on.

"Help! There's a fox in my hen house!" she said. Then she recognized Lila and Tom.

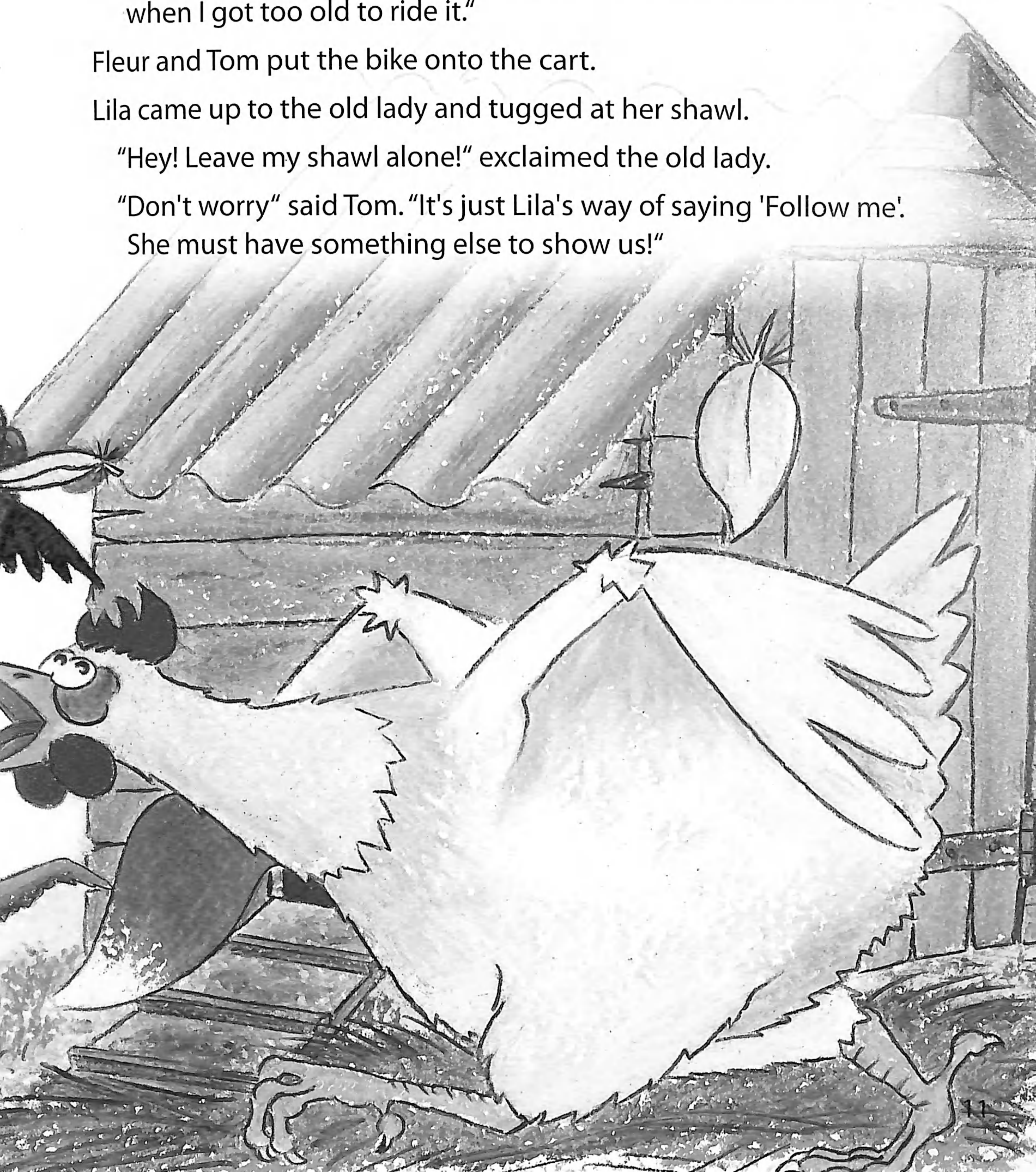
"Is it my old bike that you're after?" she asked. "You're welcome to take it. I only put it here because I couldn't think what to do with it when I got too old to ride it."

Fleur and Tom put the bike onto the cart.

Lila came up to the old lady and tugged at her shawl.

"Hey! Leave my shawl alone!" exclaimed the old lady.

"Don't worry" said Tom. "It's just Lila's way of saying 'Follow me'. She must have something else to show us!"



Lila ran along the river bank to the little bridge, with her four friends following.

Benny was getting quite out of breath pushing the cart, so Tom helped him.

"I wonder where Lila's taking us this time?" said Fleur.

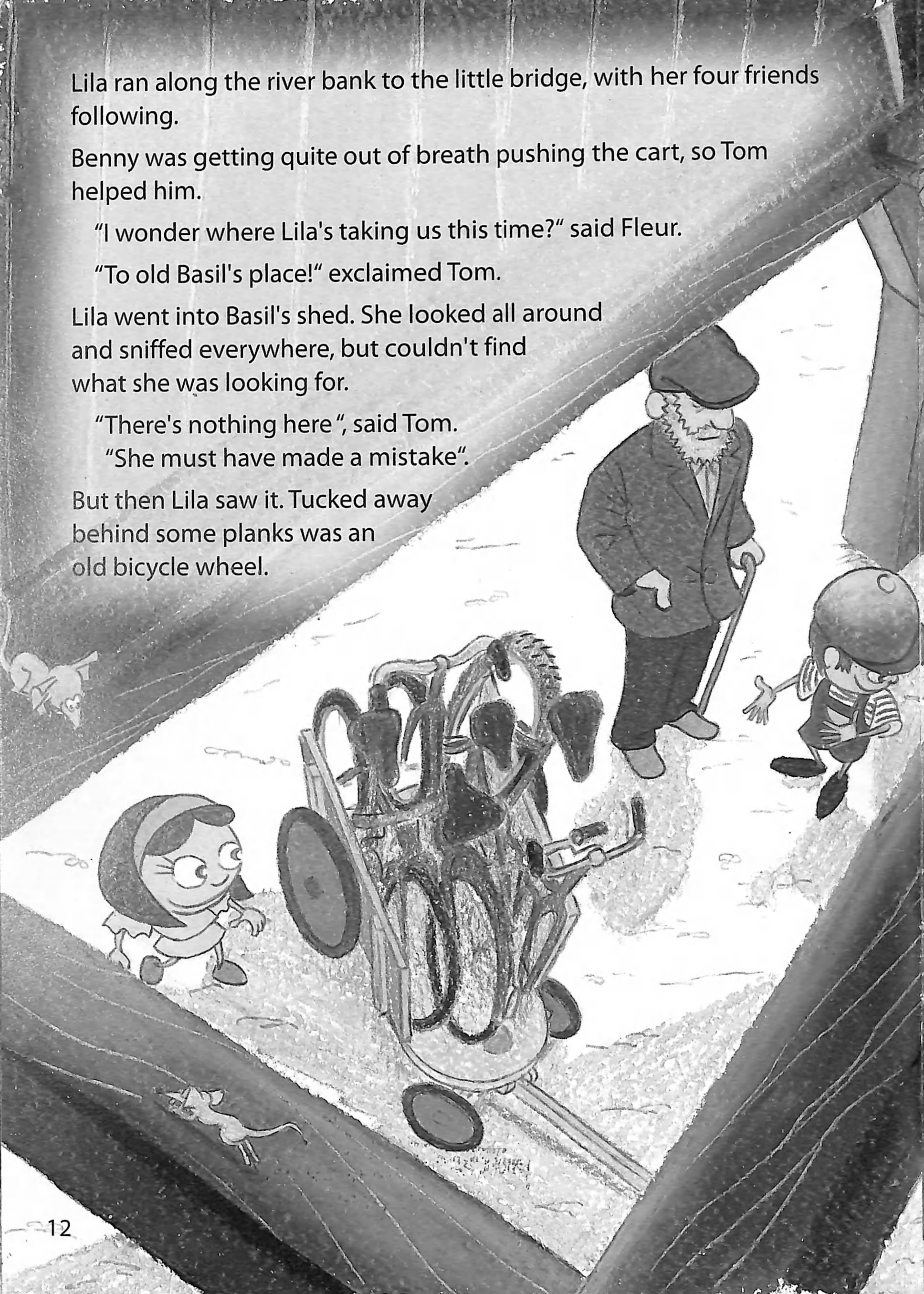
"To old Basil's place!" exclaimed Tom.

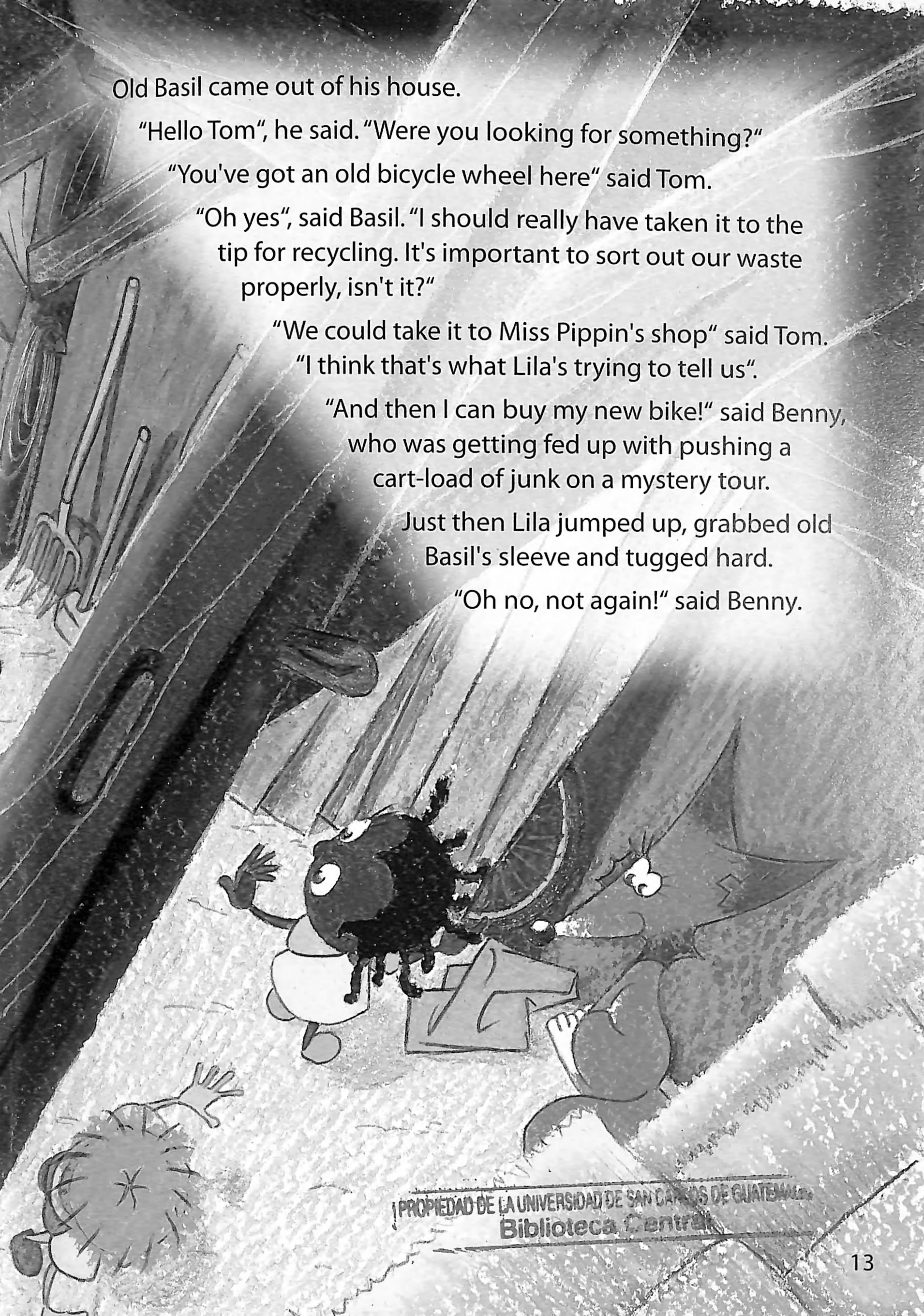
Lila went into Basil's shed. She looked all around and sniffed everywhere, but couldn't find what she was looking for.

"There's nothing here", said Tom.

"She must have made a mistake".

But then Lila saw it. Tucked away behind some planks was an old bicycle wheel.





Old Basil came out of his house.

"Hello Tom", he said. "Were you looking for something?"

"You've got an old bicycle wheel here" said Tom.

"Oh yes", said Basil. "I should really have taken it to the tip for recycling. It's important to sort out our waste properly, isn't it?"

"We could take it to Miss Pippin's shop" said Tom.

"I think that's what Lila's trying to tell us".

"And then I can buy my new bike!" said Benny, who was getting fed up with pushing a cart-load of junk on a mystery tour.

Just then Lila jumped up, grabbed old Basil's sleeve and tugged hard.

"Oh no, not again!" said Benny.

Off went Lila, and the four friends followed her. The cart felt heavier than ever.

"Let us girls have a go at pushing", said Fleur. But the boys said "No, we can manage" – and they pushed even harder to show how strong they were.

"We're nearly at Southwind Road!" said Tom.

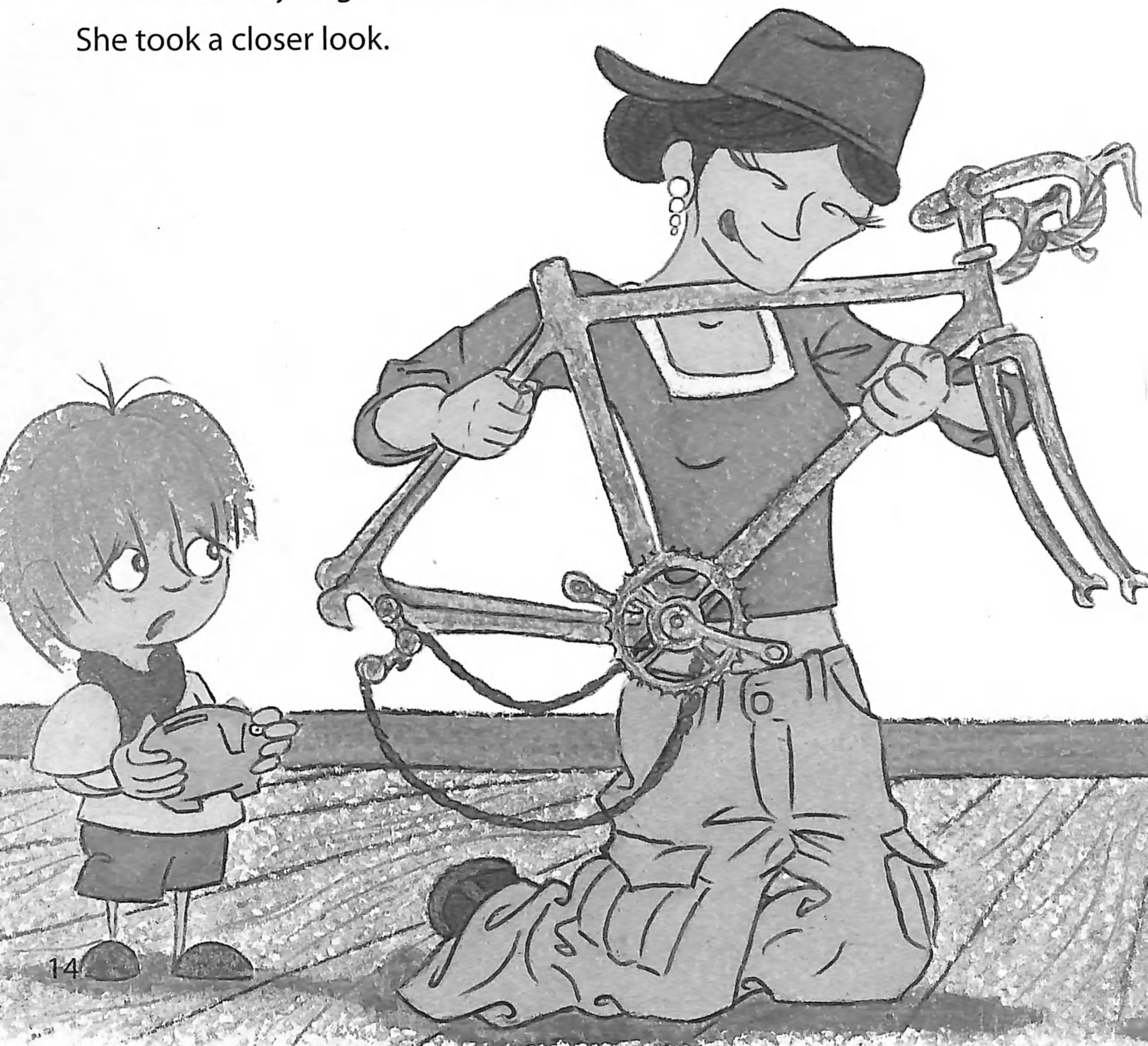
"There's Miss Pippin's shop!" said Benny, with a sigh of relief.

"At last!"

They parked the cart in front of the shop. Miss Pippin came out, looking puzzled.

"What have you got there?" she asked. "Scrap metal?"

She took a closer look.



“Well, well!” she said. “This looks just like the bicycle my dad gave me when I was a girl! It was the best present I ever had, and I've been in love with bikes ever since!”

Meanwhile Lila had gone over to where Miss Pippin's dad, Ron, was sitting with his head in his hands. She nudged him with her wet nose and he looked up.

“What is it, my little friend?” asked Ron Pippin.

Then he noticed the cart. He jumped up and came over to inspect it.



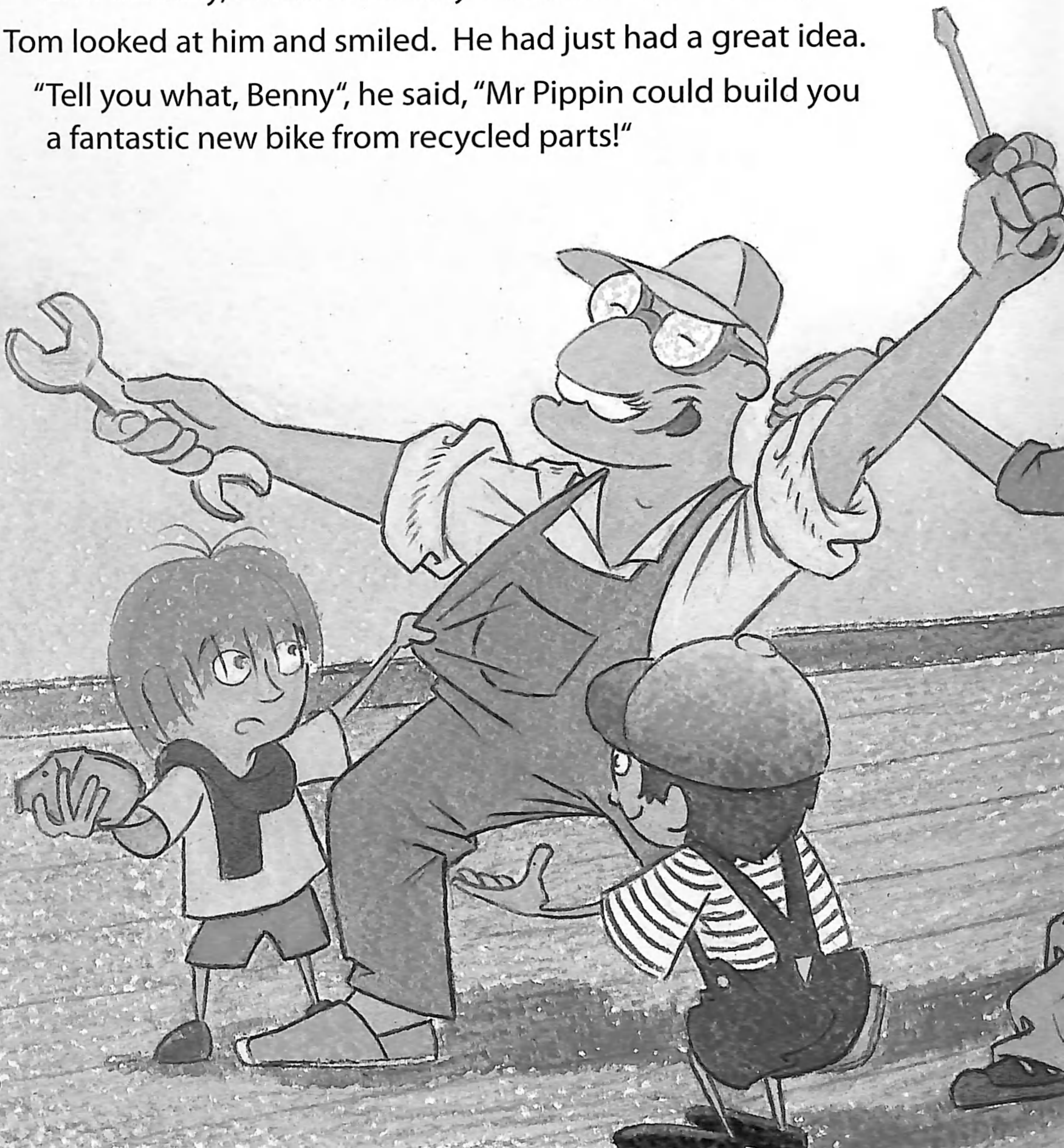
When he saw the old bikes, a big smile spread across Ron Pippin's face.

"Where did you find these, Tom?" he asked. "These are great bikes! With a bit of fixing they could be as good as new!"

He rolled up his sleeves. "Come on!" he said to his daughter. "Let's get out the oil and the spanners. Fetch the puncture repair kit! We're going to mend these machines! Just like when I was young! Thank you, kids! You've made my day!"

"Er... actually, I've come to buy a new bike", said Benny. Tom looked at him and smiled. He had just had a great idea.

"Tell you what, Benny", he said, "Mr Pippin could build you a fantastic new bike from recycled parts!"

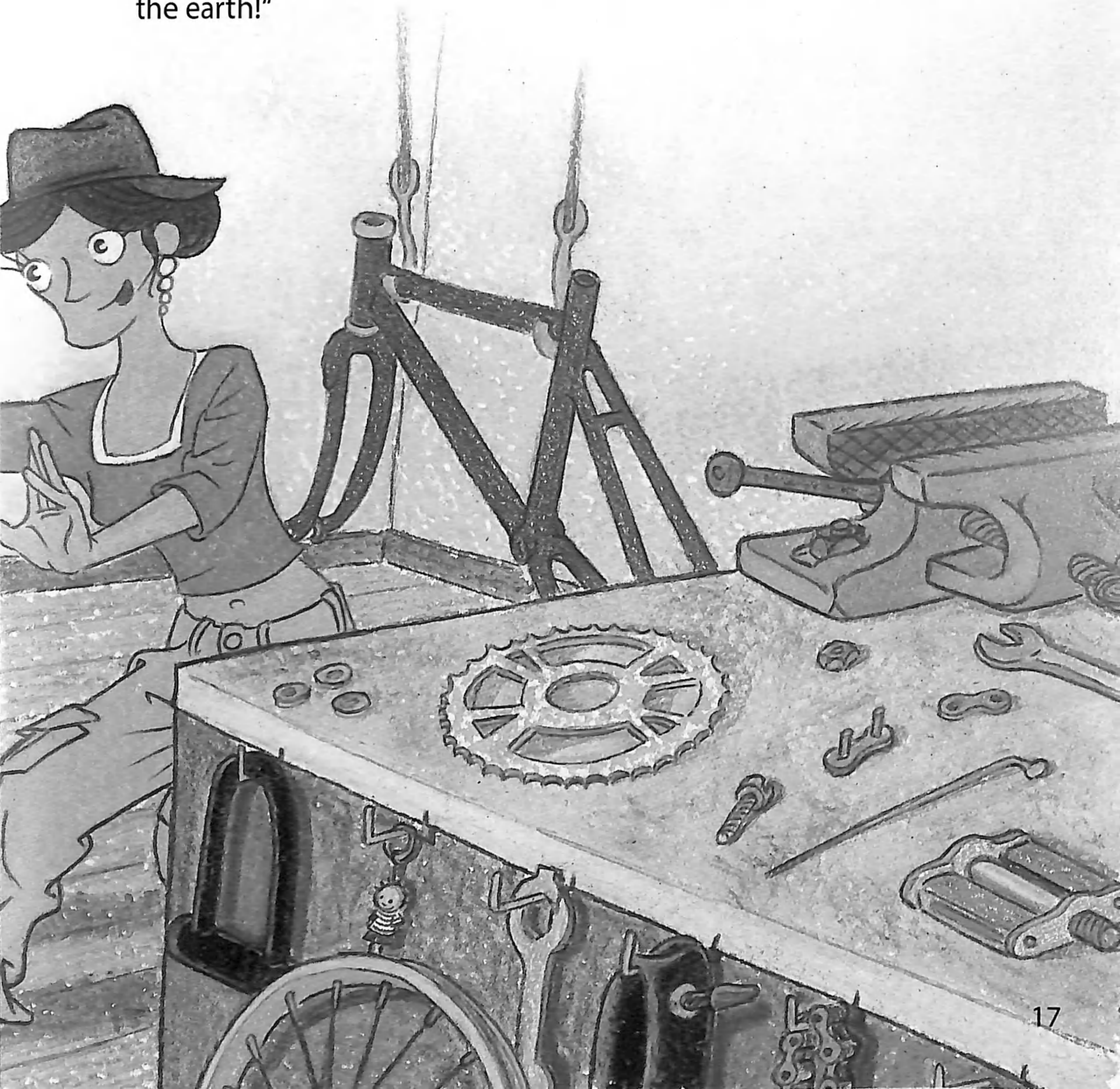


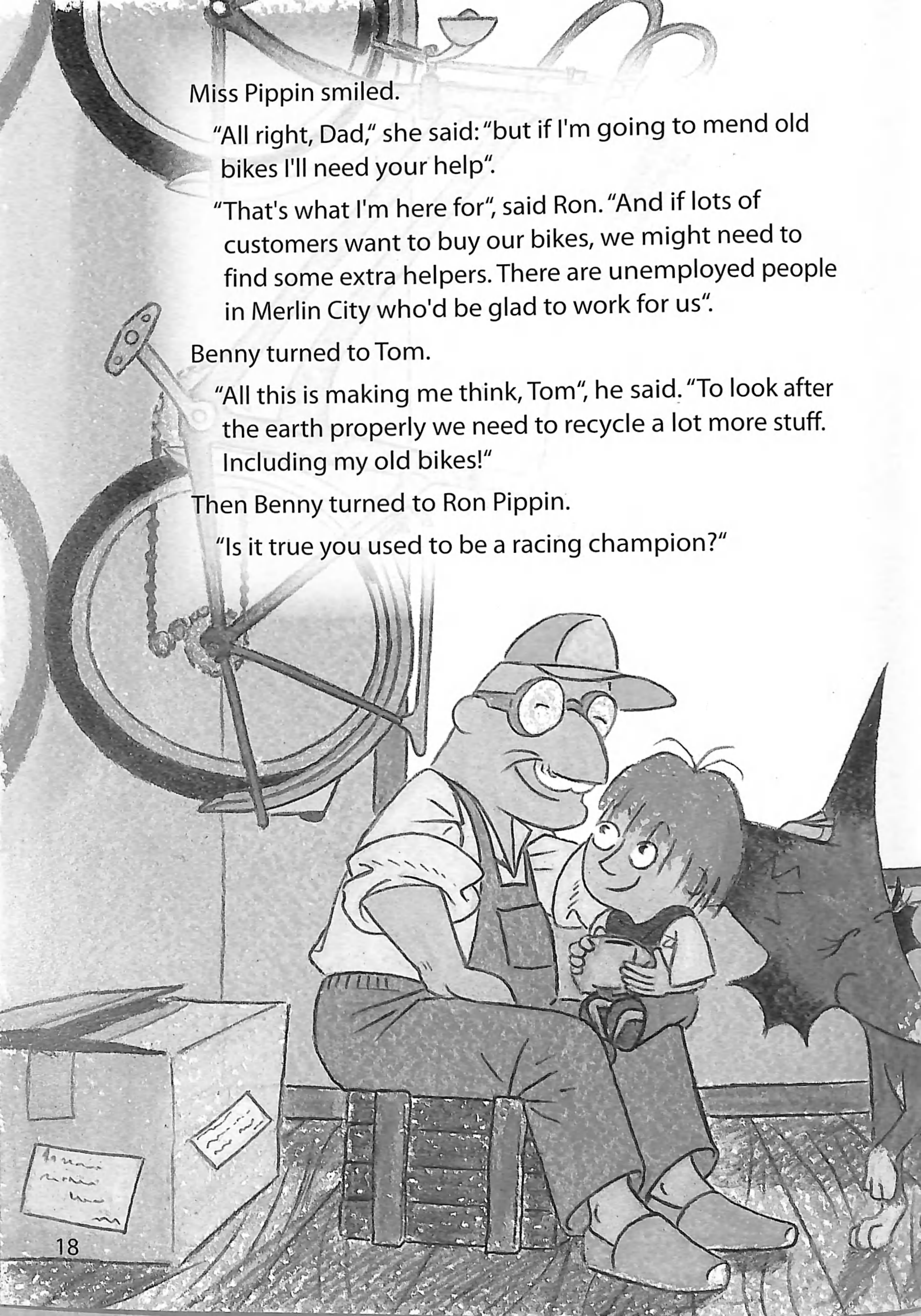
"But Dad, you need to rest!" said Miss Pippin.

"Me, rest?" said Ron. "No way! I've made up my mind. From now on we're not just selling new bicycles. We're going to sell our talent too! Our talent for fixing up used bikes!"

"Are you serious?" exclaimed Miss Pippin.

"Absolutely!" answered Ron. "Selling brand new things is all very fine but making them takes lots of electricity and metal and oil... It uses up the earth's precious resources. When kids buy brand new bikes, do they ever think about that? We need to look after the earth!"





Miss Pippin smiled.

"All right, Dad," she said: "but if I'm going to mend old bikes I'll need your help".

"That's what I'm here for", said Ron. "And if lots of customers want to buy our bikes, we might need to find some extra helpers. There are unemployed people in Merlin City who'd be glad to work for us".

Benny turned to Tom.

"All this is making me think, Tom", he said. "To look after the earth properly we need to recycle a lot more stuff. Including my old bikes!"

Then Benny turned to Ron Pippin.

"Is it true you used to be a racing champion?"

"I was the fastest cyclist in Merlin City! My bike wasn't the latest model, but it was the best maintained! I knew exactly where to oil it and what pressure the tyres should be at".

Benny looked admiringly at Ron.

"Could you take my old bikes and use them to build me a really good new one?" he asked.

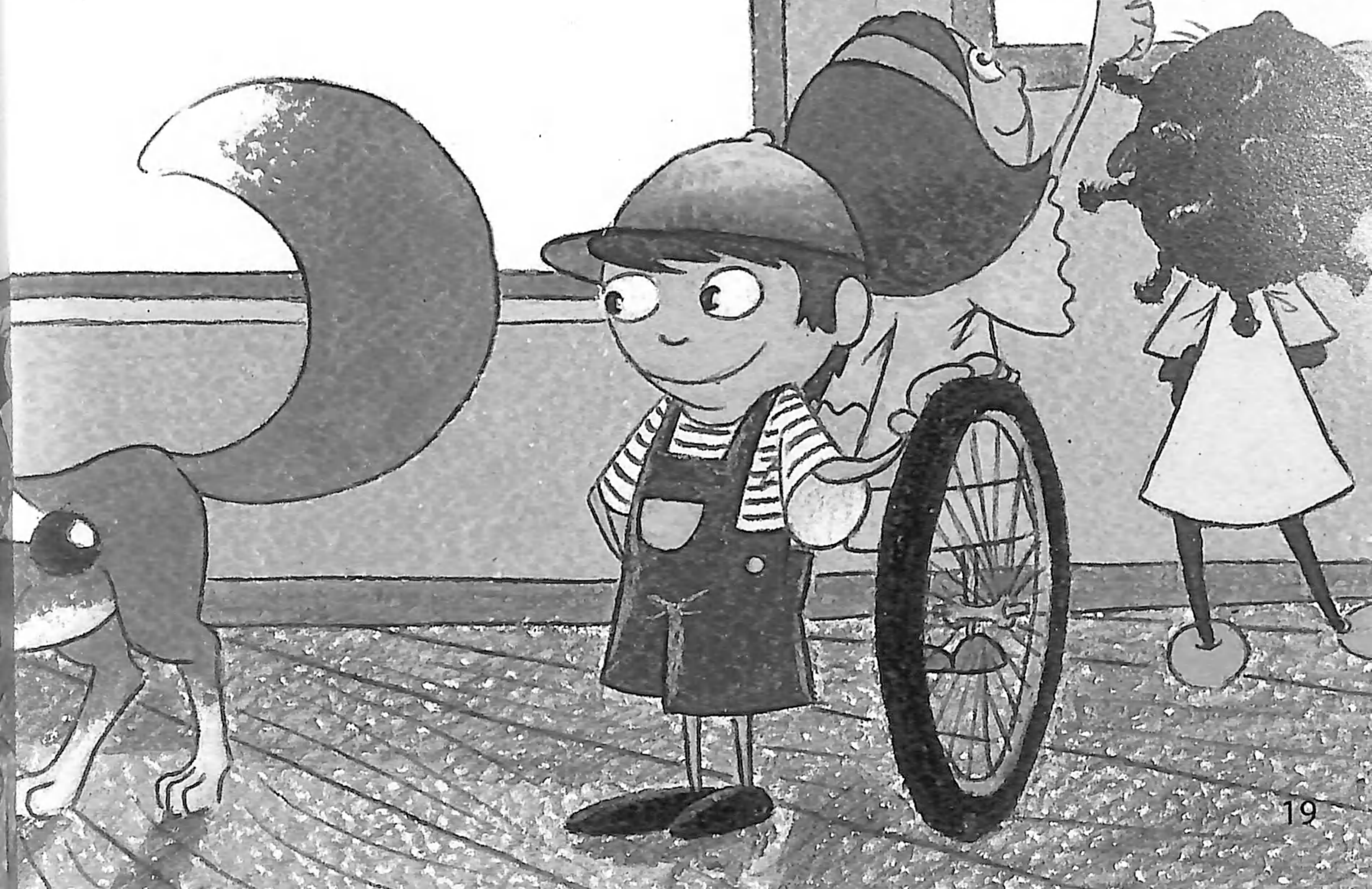
Ron looked hard at Benny.

"You want a real champion's bike?" he asked.

"Oh, yes please!" said Benny, excitedly.

"I could pay you from my savings".

Ron took a look at Benny's piggy-bank.



"Benny," he said, "I can build you a great bike for much less than the cost of a new one."

"Really?" said Benny.

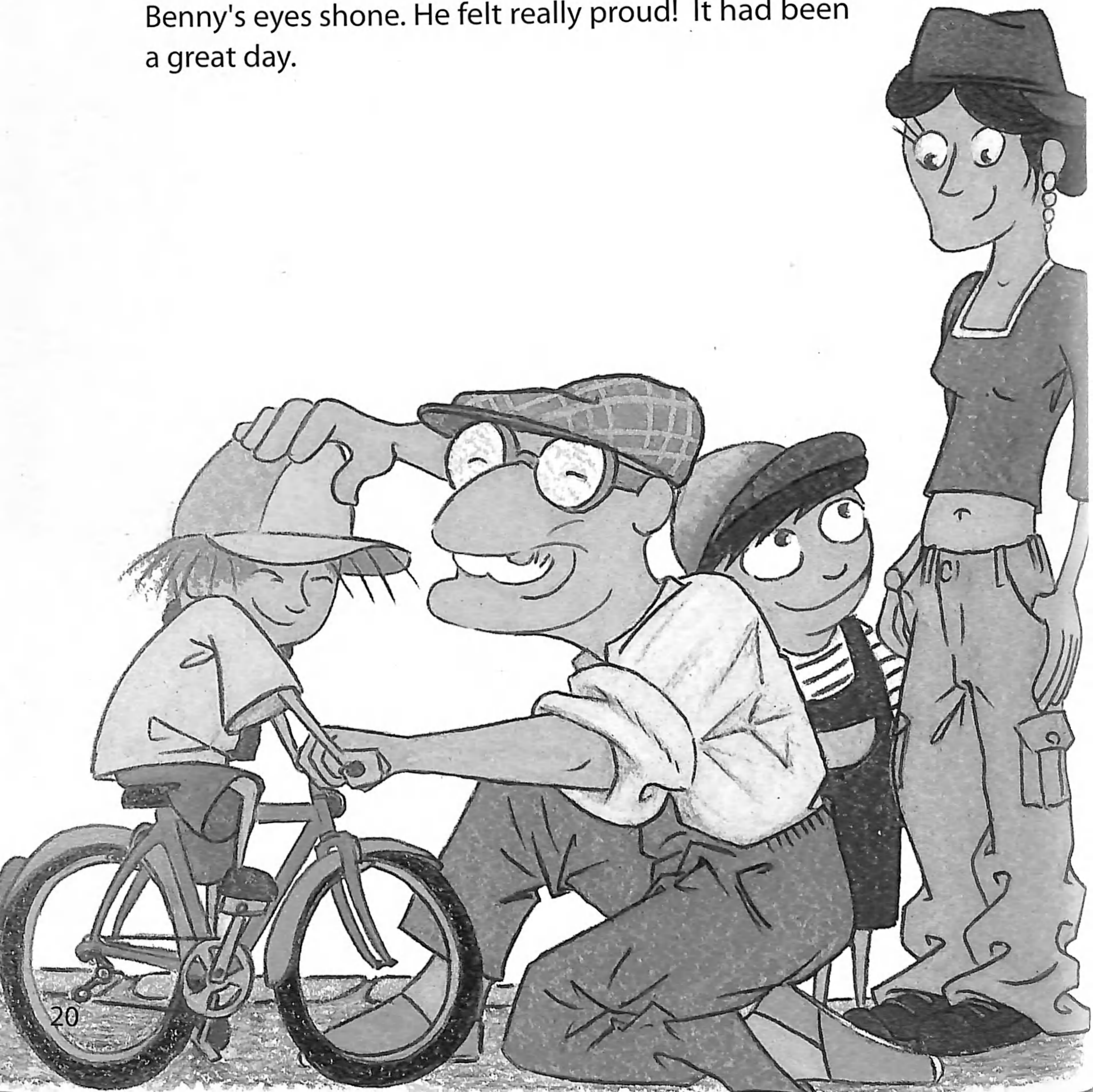
"Yes", said Ron. "And it would give me great pleasure".

Ron smiled. He suddenly looked years younger.

He took his champion's cap off and put it on Benny's head.

"Happiness is priceless, Benny", he said, "and you have just made me very happy. You're a real champion!"

Benny's eyes shone. He felt really proud! It had been a great day.



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