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opening extract from

Weird Street: The Curse of Captain Cross-eye

written by

Margaret Ryan

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For Angus and Granny Elspeth with love

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The problem: My old bike. I am growing too big for it, but we can't afford a new one as Dad is off work with a broken leg.

The brainwave: Ask Mr Maini at the corner shop if he has a paper round so I can save up for some new wheels.

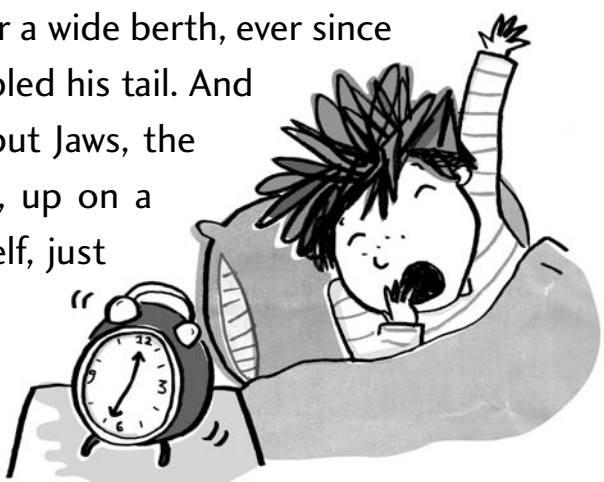
The dilemma: There is *a paper round, but it takes in Weir Street and I've heard that the people who live there are* weird.

The hero: Me, of course. Jonny Smith. I'm not scared – it's only a paper round. And just how weird can the people in Weir Street be…?

Chapter One



It was the first day of my new job, and I was up really early. Well, not as early as Mum and Dad and Ellie. Ellie's my little sister. Little sisters should be cute, right? Not Ellie. If she's not yelling, she's eating. Everything in sight. Noggin, our cat, gives her a wide berth, ever since she nibbled his tail. And Mum's put Jaws, the goldfish, up on a high shelf, just in case.



I got to the breakfast table just in time to find Ellie with her fingers in the jam and her beady eyes on my toast. She stretched out a sticky, plump hand…

"Leave!" I said, the way I speak to Brutus. That's our dog. I snatched my toast from under her greedy little gaze and headed for the door.

"Good luck, Jonny," called Mum from the kitchen.

"And don't be late for school," shouted Dad, scratching the itchy bits inside his plaster with a knitting needle. He's a community policeman and hates being off work.

"Don't worry, I won't," I called, already half-out the door. "Miss Dodds'll kill me if I'm late again," I muttered to myself.

Miss Dodds knows every excuse under the sun, and won't accept any of them. I know. I've tried often enough. She's got

this special kind of teacher's eye that can staple your tongue to your cheek with just one look. And she thinks my head is full of nothing but football.

I ran out to the shed, grabbed my bike, and pedalled off to the corner shop.

Mr Maini was standing behind the counter with a large orange bag full of newspapers.



"Good morning, Jonny," he smiled. "You're in good time. Look, I've marked on the numbers for you. Be careful to deliver each paper to the right house. The numbers in Weir Street can be a bit … weird."

"I've heard the people can be a bit weird, too," I said. "That's why everybody calls it *Weird* Street, and the paperboys don't last."

"People are people," shrugged Mr Maini, and said no more.

That worried me. What *was* it about Weird Street?

I slung the heavy bag over my shoulder and got on my bike. It was harder to cycle carrying the papers and my knees kept banging on the handlebars. I managed to miss most of the traffic, though, by scooting along back alleyways, then freewheeling down Barr Avenue till I met the junction with Weird Street.

That's when the trouble began…

For a start, Weird Street is a steep hill and pedalling up it was a real struggle. For another thing, I nearly fell off my bike several times as I turned my head to look at all the strange houses. Houses are houses, right? Windows, walls, the occasional door. Not in Weird Street. In Weird Street all the houses are different.

My first stop was at house number 34 and a half. It is set right back into the hill. It has bottle-bottom windows and an old oak door covered in iron studs. The garden is full of junk, while on the flat roof there are dozens of neatly planted rows of potatoes. You don't expect to see vegetables where chimneys should be!

A chimney was all I *could* see of the next house. I propped my bike up against its high hedge, opened the squeaky gate and crept through the shoulder-high grass.

It was quiet and eerie with only the odd, soft rustling. Could there be wild animals lurking there? I caught a flick of what looked like a tiger's tail, so I threw the paper in the direction of the house and left, sharpish.

Fortunately, I didn't see anything unusual on the next few deliveries and I was feeling happier as I pedalled further up the hill to number 57. Its garden was very neat and tidy, with every plant standing to attention. Everything looked quite ordinary, if you didn't count the stone Viking warrior fiercely guarding the water butt. I breathed a sigh of relief and popped the paper through the gleaming brass letter box. Yikes, it snapped back and nearly took my fingers off!

The worst was reserved for number 13. Unlucky for some. Number 13 had a crazy, dancing parrot looking out of the window,

and a one-eared cat sitting on the doorstep. But no letter box.



So I knocked on the door.

Silence.

I knocked again.

More silence. Then the clump of heavy boots sounded along the hallway. It was scary. Finally, a little porthole window in the front door opened and a loud voice boomed out.

"WHO GOES THERE? FRIEND OR FOE?"