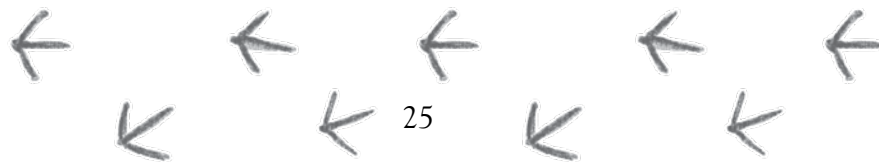'But how did he get hold of it?'

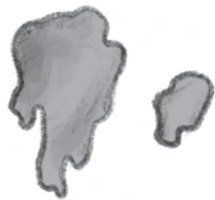As they turned the corner Alex balled her fists. 'That is exactly what I'm going to find out!'

Chapter Two

They arrived at the new art gallery. When Sunil was last there it was a costume shop and before that a milkshake café but now there was sleek black and white lettering that read 'M. Shaykes: Gallery'.

Alex went over to the window. 'Blimey. That's a Picasso!'

In the window was a picture of a woman which reminded Sunil a bit of his own attempts to draw himself. It wasn't very realistic. Both her eyes were on the same side of her face.[1]

'What is it?'

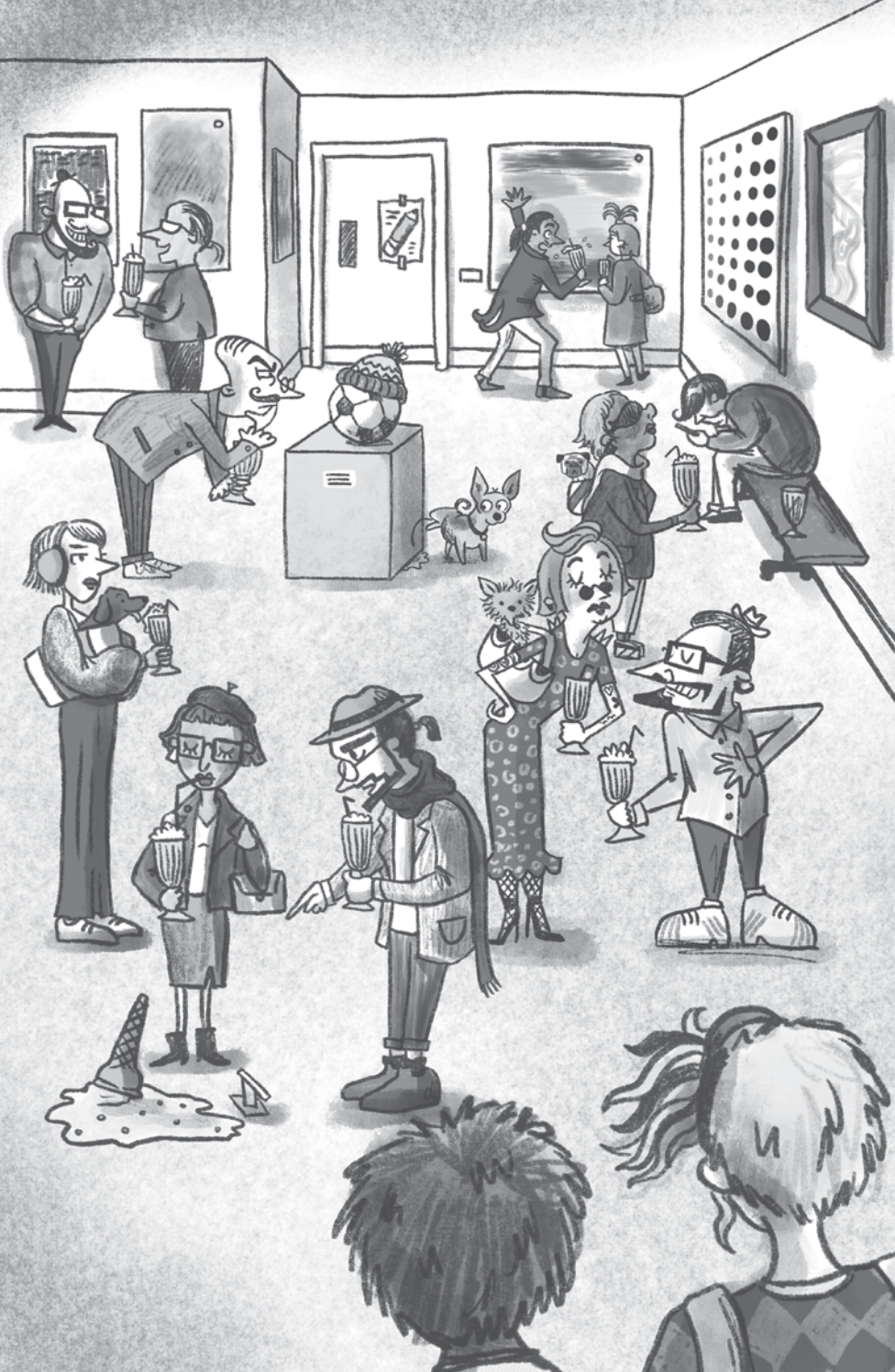'It's Picasso's girlfriend,' Alex said.

'Did she have green skin?' asked Sunil.

'No.'

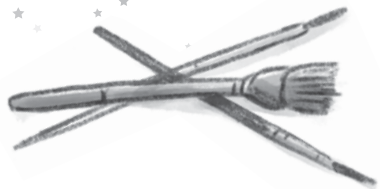Sunil frowned. 'Is that why he painted her crying? Is she upset that he made her look ugly?'

Alex laughed. 'If I remember rightly this painting isn't about her, it's about the civil war that was going on in Spain. She's crying about it. Where did he get that?! It must be worth a fortune!'

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1. Picasso wanted to paint things in a new way by using shapes, showing different angles and colours at once, and making pictures that looked interesting instead of just like real life. He thought it was more human to see things from multiple sides at once than to just to see one thing at a time.

Sunil followed Alex into the gallery. The walls of the old milkshake emporium had been whitewashed, but Sunil could see the original bright colours were still visible around the edges. It was crowded. Strangely dressed women held small dogs while men with geometric facial hair pointed at the paintings on the walls. They were all wearing chunky glasses, sipping milkshakes and talking.

Wiki the kiwi was scuttling around their feet, sniffing intently. He had been trained by Mr Shaykes to sniff out interesting objects. Mr Shaykes needed interesting objects to feed into his Interesting Machine. The Boring Machine used boredom to send people back in time; the Interesting Machine used interesting things to make milkshakes.

Wiki **peeped** and ran over to Sunil and Alex, who were obviously the most interesting people in the room.
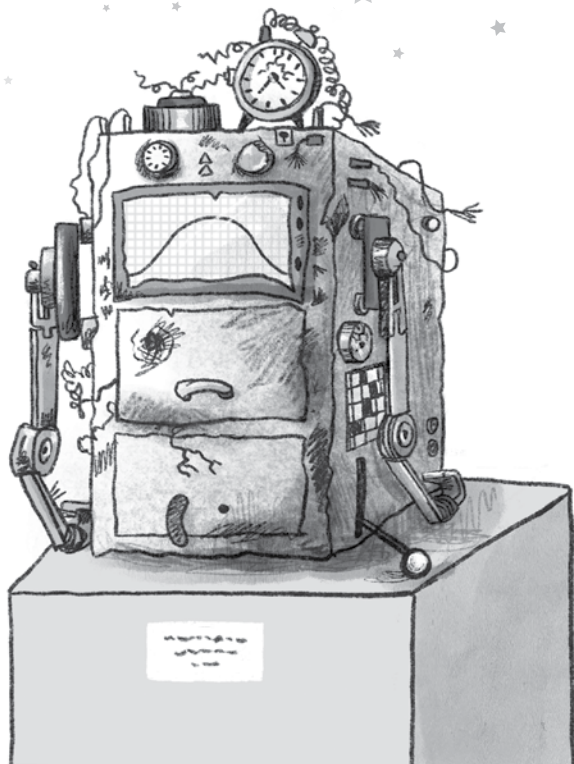
'Hello Wiki,' Sunil said, bending over to scratch the kiwi's neck. 'Is no one paying you any attention?'

All the adults were looking at the pictures and not at Wiki. He was used to being made a fuss of by visitors. He seemed a bit needy.

Sunil and Wiki followed Alex to the back corner of the gallery. Sure enough, there was the Boring Machine on a small plinth.
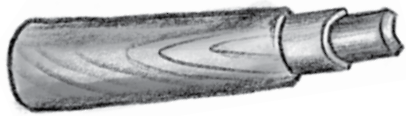
It looked **dreadful**. Its screen was grey and misty and its buttons were all faded. It also had a pair of rusted arms Sunil hadn't seen before.

'Such a… curious piece,' a lady with very red lipstick was saying to her friend. She had a slight sneer on her face. 'Shall we go now?'

'It's obviously commentary on the degradation of the old office structures,' a man with a hexagonal beard was saying. He yawned loudly. 'It hasn't got a sticker on it, so I presume it is still for sale…'[2]

2. Artists sell their art in galleries. These are a bit like mini museums except all the art is for sale. When a painting or sculpture is sold, the gallery owner puts a sticker next to it to let everyone know it is no longer for sale. Art is also sold directly by artists and by collectors and in auctions.
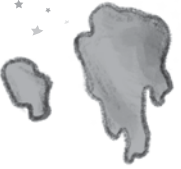
'I'm afraid not,' Mr Shaykes suddenly appeared.

'Oh well,' the man said, pulling his friend's arm. 'Come on, I'm bored.'

They both wandered back into the main space.

'What have you done to BM?!' Alex demanded, poking Mr Shaykes in the chest.

'Calm down. You're scaring the customers,' Mr Shaykes said.

Alex started pressing the Boring Machine's controls.

'**Hey**! I didn't give you permission to touch it!' Mr Shaykes growled.

'Its top drawer is rusted up! I can't even open it. And its lights aren't coming on! I'm taking it back,' Alex exclaimed angrily.

'You can't,' Mr Shaykes took out a letter from his jacket pocket and held it in front of Alex's nose.

'I have the provenance of all of this art in my hand. It says quite clearly that I am the owner.'
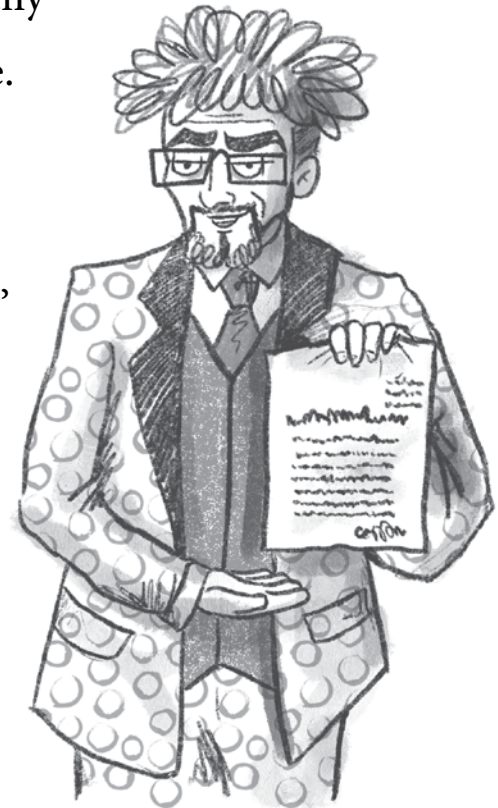
'BM isn't art!' Alex ranted. 'Where did you find it?'

'I bought an old warehouse that had been sealed for decades.' Mr Shaykes smiled. 'The machine was inside… along with all these artworks. It is mine now. Tell me, can you fix it?'
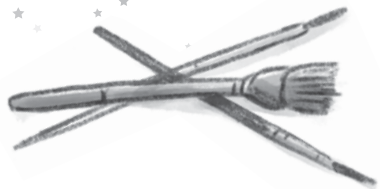
'I don't know what's wrong with it.' Alex tried to power it up.

It sparked violently. 'Sunil, press this button while I loosen up these bolts.'

Sunil pressed it and the Boring Machine gradually cranked into life.

Its voice sounded quite faint. 'Nǐ hǎo.'

'English please,' Alex said.

'English selected.' The Boring Machine lit up, a puff of smoke coming from its speaker.

'Hurry up,' Mr Shaykes said impatiently.

'Where did you go, BM?' Alex said, gently patting the Boring Machine. 'I was so worried. Why didn't you come back?'

'I couldn't find my way back to you,' it said softly. 'So after jumping around in time a lot, I found a warehouse and waited for the time to pass.'

'No wonder you look so old and rusty!' Alex yawned. Her eyes seemed to glaze over.

Mr Shaykes yawned too. 'Shall we go and do something else now?'

'I don't understand. Why didn't BM's timeline bring it home?' asked Sunil.

Every time Sunil had travelled back in time, his timeline would eventually pull him back to the present by tugging his belly button when he got too excited.

'Because your timeline uses the Boring Machine's location to bring you back to when you left. But BM wasn't in the present anymore for it to latch on to,' she sighed. 'Oh well… let's go.'

'What?!' Sunil blurted. 'What do you mean let's go? Aren't you going to fix it?'

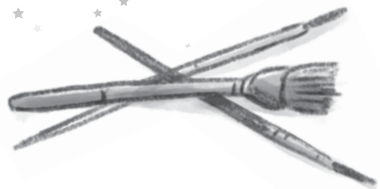'We can do that later,' Alex said, wandering over to a painting.

Mr Shaykes followed her.

Sunil didn't understand. Alex had totally lost interest in her most precious possession. Something wasn't right.

Wiki *peeped*.

Wiki was trying to get into the Boring Machine's top drawer. The machine had two drawers. The top one was where you put boring objects to fuel its boredom circuits.

Nothing interesting was ever in there, so Sunil was confused as to why the bird wanted to open it. The bottom drawer was where you put objects for the BM to follow into the past. The top drawer was rusted shut, but Sunil could still open the bottom drawer. Inside were a few scraps of paper, paintbrushes, pencil sharpenings…

'What happened to you, BM?' Sunil asked.

'I lost my teddy,' the Boring Machine said softly.

'Your teddy?' Sunil repeated.

'He's a white soft toy dog that does backflips. He has a little red collar.'

'Why do you have a toy dog?' Sunil asked.

'Alex gave me arms so I could grab my own handles and transport myself back in time.

As I had arms, she said I needed something to hug,' the Boring Machine explained. 'A robot like me.'

Sunil smiled. Alex was thoughtful like that.

'I'm sure we can get you another soft toy, BM,' he said reassuringly.

'No! I need him back!' the Boring Machine wailed. 'Or everyone will die.'
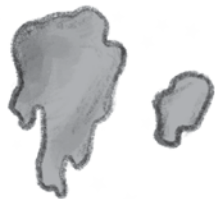
Sunil did a **double-take**. 'What?!'

'Not for one hour, seven minutes and thirty-four seconds,' it said. 'I need my teddy.'

'Why?'

'I turned myself off to delay the explosion. But now I'm switched back on, I can't stop the countdown. Not unless I get him back.'

'Countdown?!' Sunil repeated. 'What are you talking about?'

'I'm upset about losing my teddy so I sprang a leak,' the Boring Machine said. 'Boredom is leaking from my storage tank. Like when you get upset your face leaks.'

'You're… crying?' asked Sunil.

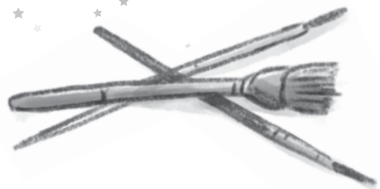'I'm crying boredom, not tears,' the Boring Machine said sadly. 'It is why the grown-ups couldn't stand to be around me for very long. They were getting bored.'

'Why isn't it affecting me?' Sunil asked.

'Because you're a kid. You're used to being bored. You're always told what to do and made to do lessons you don't like at school. You have a higher tolerance,' the Boring Machine explained. 'Grown-ups

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are weak. They cannot
cope with new types
of boredom. Like the
boredom I'm leaking.
That will gradually
get stronger until I
explode.'

'You're going to **explode**?!'
Sunil repeated.

'I want my teddy.
That's why I'm leaking.'

'So if you get your toy dog back
you'll stop crying? Sorry, I mean

leaking?' Sunil asked.

'Yes,' the Boring Machine said
softly, sniffing.

'And that will stop the
explosion?' Sunil clarified.

'Yeah,' the Boring Machine
said, and then its voice got all high,
'but that's impossible!'

'What sort of explosion are we
talking about? Like a firework or…'

'All the boredom I
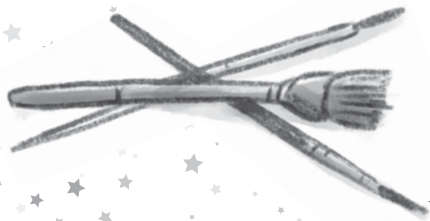contain will escape
all at once,' the Boring

Machine said. 'There will be a massive time-quake. Everyone in a ten-mile radius will die. Of boredom.'

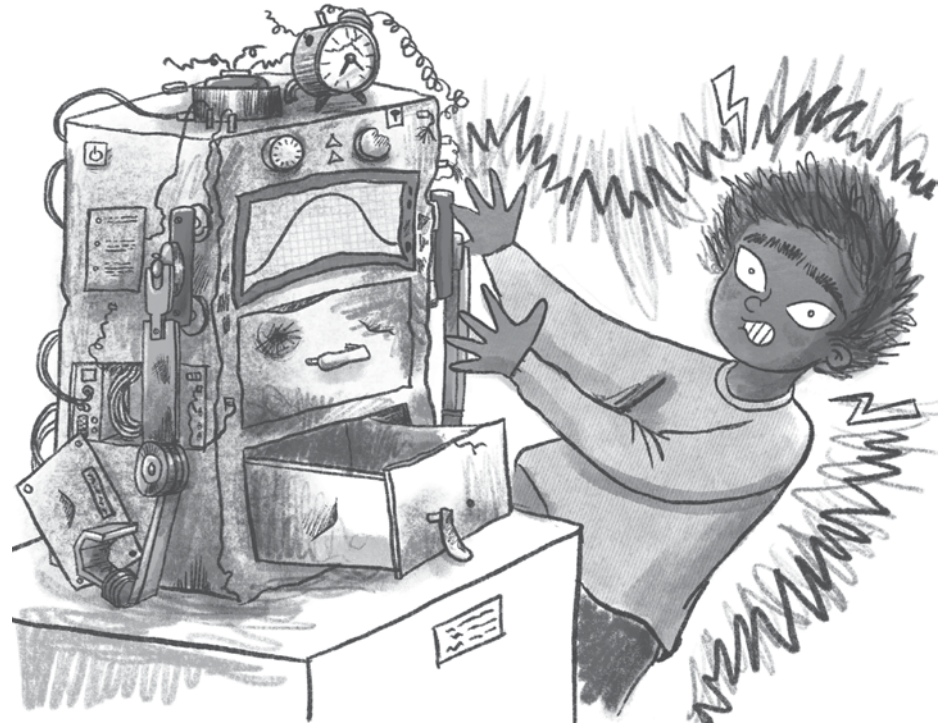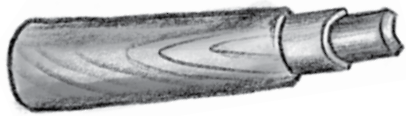'You can't die of boredom. Can you?'

'Well, we're about to find out.'

Chills ran up Sunil's spine. 'But… isn't there another way I could cheer you up?'

'Like what?'

'Well when I'm upset, Mum gives me a hug…' Sunil went towards the Boring Machine and attempted to hug the big metal box. A jolt of electricity went through him, throwing him to the floor. '**Ow**!'

'Sorry,' the Boring Machine mumbled. 'I just want my teddy back.'

Sunil stood up, glaring at the machine. 'If you love it **so much** why did you leave it behind somewhere?'

At this, the Boring Machine *whirred* and Sunil felt a hit of the boredom leaking out of it. It felt like sitting in assembly while the teachers did the announcements. But worse.
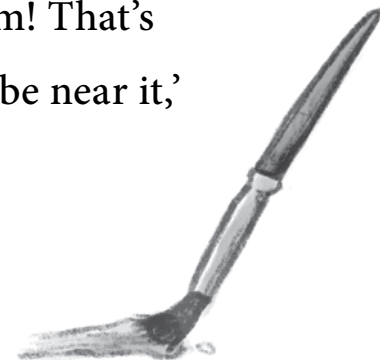
'I don't know!' the Boring Machine wailed. 'I just want my t-t-teddy back.'
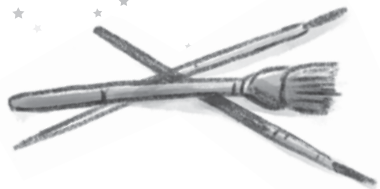
Sunil couldn't bear the feeling of tedium anymore. He had to get away from the machine as it cried for its teddy.

He ran over to Alex. 'Alex! BM is going to **explode**!'

'Hmm?' Alex looked down at Sunil.

'It's leaking boredom! That's why you can't stand to be near it,'

Sunil explained, pulling her by the wrist back over to the Boring Machine. 'It thinks it will explode and cause a time-quake.'

Alex walked calmly back to the Boring Machine. 'It shouldn't be leaking, I gave it a toy to comfort it if it got lonely.'

'`I lost my teddy`,' the Boring Machine said.

Alex's face went from confident to **horrified**.

'`I was excited to finally be able to time travel`,' the Boring Machine explained. '`I jumped to different places at random. At some point I realised I had lost him.`'

'How long do you have?' Alex asked frantically.

'`About an hour`,' the Boring Machine said.

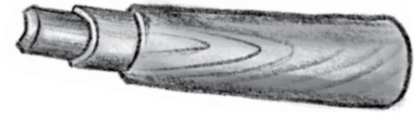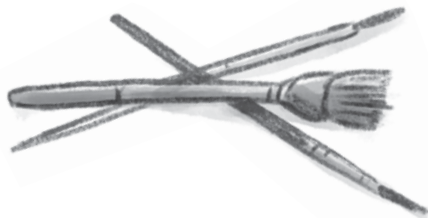'Where did you lose it?' Alex asked, yawning as the Boring

Machine continued to leak.

'I spent a lot of
time around artists'
studios. There's
nothing more boring
than watching paint
dry,' the Boring Machine
explained. 'I must have
left him behind in one.'

Alex tried to focus. 'So it could
be anywhere?!'

Sunil pointed at the pictures
around them in the gallery.

'Why did BM end up in a
warehouse with these?'

'They kept giving
them to me,' the Boring
Machine said. 'I put them in
storage.'

'We've got to visit these artists,
find your toy dog, and stop the
explosion!' Alex said.

Sunil ran to the walls, picking
up paintings which were small
enough to fit into the Boring
Machine's object drawer. The people

made disapproving tutting sounds as he quickly collected a random assortment and shoved them into the Boring Machine's bottom drawer. Meanwhile Alex was trying to programme the rusty machine

and explain to an outraged Mr Shaykes what was going on, while Wiki sniffed at her.

'**No** you don't!' Mr Shaykes walked over. 'This is **MY** time machine and **MY** very expensive art! You can't just take it.'

'Wait! Mr Shaykes, was there a teddy, a little white dog in the storage unit you found BM in?' asked Alex.

'Definitely no teddy. I put everything in that unit on display…'

He grabbed Alex by the wrist. 'And you aren't stealing any of it!'

'Mr Shaykes, if we don't go right now, we will all die!' Alex said.

Mr Shaykes looked sceptical. 'A likely story.'

The Boring Machine powered up. It sounded hopeful and had stopped leaking boredom for the moment. '`Please take hold of the handles`.'

Sunil, Alex, Wiki and the Boring Machine's long robot arm reached for the handles, and

Mr Shaykes quickly grabbed them too. **Pop**! In an instant they were flipped backwards in time.

The gallery visitors looked aghast at the empty walls Sunil had snatched the paintings from.

'I say,' a man with a particularly angular moustache said. 'I'd bought that one.'