

Sophie and the golden worms

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“You *have* to eat something, Linda.” Sophie’s father looked Linda in her eyes and frowned. Linda was sitting at the dinner table, together with Sophie and Sophie’s father. She had been playing absently with her fries for a while.

“I wish I could *do* something,” she sighed. “I feel so useless!” Slowly she put one of her fries in her mouth. “And I don’t feel hungry at all,” she said softly.

Sophie wrapped an arm around Linda and kissed her on her cheek. “Come on girl!” she said. Linda blushed.

“Your father will get better soon, I bet you!” said Sophie’s father.

“I sure hope so,” said Linda.

Sophie felt sorry for Linda. Things were not right with Linda’s father, and therefore Linda now lived with Sophie and her father for a while. Linda’s mother had brought Linda that morning. Sophie thought it was great that Linda came to visit her for a while, but soon she found out that Linda didn’t feel much like playing. She often just sat there, doing nothing. Sometimes she said nothing for hours. That was not like Linda at all. Sophie wished she knew how to cheer her up.

“Maybe you’d better leave her alone for a while,” Sophie’s father had told Sophie. “Linda has to get used to us. And she often thinks of her parents, of course.”

Sophie looked at Linda again. “Maybe you’d like to have some dessert then?” she asked. Linda nodded yes; she would like that. Sophie and her father quickly emptied their plates, and while Sophie cleared the table, her father started cleaning strawberries.

“How much whipped cream do you want?” asked Sophie. “This much?” She held her arms wide to indicate an enormous blob of whipped cream. Linda smiled.

“Yes, that’s enough,” she said.

Sophie grinned and put a large blob of cream on Linda’s strawberries.

After dinner Linda, Sophie, and her father sat around the table for a while longer to chat. Linda pulled her cell phone from her pocket. Sophie looked with envy at the phone. Her father hadn’t allowed her to have a phone yet. Luckily it would be her birthday soon! She really wanted to have a cell phone. That would be so neat! Finally she wouldn’t have to ask to use the phone again, and she would be able to send text messages whenever she wanted! She already knew precisely what phone she wanted, and in what color. She could hardly wait until her birthday.

Linda pressed a few buttons on her phone and read the screen with care. She smiled. “My mother sends her regards and wishes me lots of fun,” she said.

“I think you should call your parents tonight to tell them how you are,” Sophie’s father said.

“But... what if I get my father on the line? What should I tell him then?” Linda asked, looking a bit awkward.

“You don’t have to say anything. Just let him tell his story.”

Linda looked at Sophie’s father inquisitively.

“And if he doesn’t want to say anything you just tell him what you did today.”

“I’m a bit scared.” Linda said.

“It is a bit scary,” Sophie’s father answered. “But I know for sure that your father would love for you to call him.”

Linda frowned at her phone and sighed. “Well, I guess I shall call him then.”

“We will do the dishes, won’t we Sophie?” said Sophie’s father, whilst tickling Sophie in her side with his finger. Sophie grinned and tickled her father back.

“Tomorrow it will be your turn Linda,” she said, and stood up to gather the things from the table.

During the following weeks, Sophie and Linda had to get used to each other a bit. They had been very good friends and saw each other almost every day. But living together proved to be something else entirely, and the girls had some problems every now and then. When Linda wanted to be alone, which happened often, she went and sat in her room. If Sophie came to Linda’s room, Linda often sent her away. Sophie didn’t understand that very well, and she did not like it at all. All she wanted to do was cheer Linda up! Why then did Linda send her away? Sophie’s father eventually invoked the rule that the girls were not to disturb each other while they were in their own rooms.

“And that also means no sending of messages to each other,” he said sternly, and he winked at Linda.

Sophie became angry. “I don’t even have a phone. How am I supposed to send SMS’s then?” she yelled.

Linda grinned and smiled at Sophie’s father, and then at Sophie. Sophie crossed her arms over her chest and looked back angrily.

“Oooo what a dark look you can make!” laughed Linda.

“When was your birthday again?” asked Sophie’s father. “Two months from now, wasn’t it?” Again he winked to Linda. Sophie didn’t notice it.

“Two weeks, as you perfectly well know!” Sophie hung her head and pouted. How could Dad forget when her birthday was?

“Well, I will have to buy presents soon,” said her father. “What was it you wanted again?”

Sophie looked into her father’s twinkling eyes. She felt herself go red, and her eyes flared. Her father started laughing. “We are only teasing you!”

Sophie could not laugh at her father’s and Linda’s jokes. She was so nervous. She could hardly wait until her birthday. Finally she would get her cell phone! O, how she hoped her father would buy the right one! She had written down which one she wanted to have in detail, but you never knew with her father. Sophie hoped she could return the phone if it wasn’t the right one.

A few days later, the rain stopped and the sun came out. Spring was finally there, and Sophie and Linda could be found kicking a ball in the garden. Suddenly Sophie said: “Hey, look, there is a footprint here in the ground!”

Linda came running to her and kneeled. “You’re right. Where did that come from?”

Sophie looked around. “There must be more footprints.”

“Or the person who made it walked on the edge of the grass and misstepped here,” said Linda. “The footprint is parallel to the grass, see?”

“Yes... It can be from my father, or from you or me. It has to be, because at night and when no one is home we always lock both doors to the garden.”

“Are your shoes that big? And when was the last time you were in the garden?”

“Last week I think.”

“We had a lot of rain last week. The footprint should have washed away long ago. No, it must have been made today.”

“And it must have been made by a grown-up. Maybe the maid has been in the garden today?” said Sophie.

Linda grinned. “Missus Von Reed,” she giggled.

“Yes, Missus Won Reeceeeeeeeeed,” grinned Sophie. “I bet not even Dad knows what her first name is.”

“But she is nice.”

“Luckily, yes. If she wasn’t I would have come to live with you a long time ago,” laughed Sophie. Linda also laughed.

“Come, let’s ask her,” said Linda, and she pulled Sophie with her into the house.

Mrs. Van Reede had not been in the garden for a few days. “I never have to be in the garden,” she said. “Especially not when it rains. I usually only clean the house.”

Sophie nodded slowly. Indeed, she could not have walked there. The print was also much bigger than her feet. The girls talked a bit more about the footprint, but because they had no idea where it came from they forgot about it soon.

A few days later it was Saturday. Sophie’s father was hard at work, and Sophie didn’t know what to do. Linda was not there. Every weekend she spent a day at her parents’ house, and Sophie was not allowed to call her then or to visit her. Therefore she sauntered through the garden a bit, feeling bored. She looked at the house. Her father had designed the house himself. Sophie didn’t like the outside of the house very much, but on the inside the house was very nice. She gazed at the wall behind which she knew was the living room. “Strange,” she thought, “how a wall can be totally different on both sides. On this side of the wall it’s quite hot, and there is grass, and on the other side it’s nice and cool and there is carpet.”

“Hey, what is that?” Sophie said suddenly. She peered through a shrub that was planted against the wall. There was something yellow on the wall there. Sophie pushed some of the branches of the shrub away, and found a yellow cross that had been painted on the wall. She had never noticed it before. “Look,” she thought, “someone has broken off this branch and stepped on the little blue flowers there!” She became a bit anxious. She suddenly remembered the footprint Linda and she found a few days ago. Could that be have been made by the same person who put the cross here? They had found the footprint on the other side of the garden. “But people can walk,” Sophie remembered. She looked for footprints in the mud but didn’t find any. Then she ran inside to show Dad what she had found. Dad was curious and followed her into the garden. He knelt near the bush behind which the cross was drawn on the wall.

“You’re right. Who would do such a thing?”

“It isn’t some joke from Linda and you, is it?” Sophie asked.

“No, it really isn’t,” Dad said. “I will call the police because I don’t like this at all.”

Later that evening Linda came back from her parents. Sophie told her enthusiastically about what she had discovered, and showed her the cross and

the trampled flowers.

“My father has called the police.”

“Yes, I would do that too if people started drawing crosses on my house,” said Linda. She looked around. “Did you check the rest of the house to see if there are more crosses?”

Sophie nodded. “Yes. Before my father called the police we searched the whole house. This is the only cross.”

Linda shook her head. “Very strange,” she said. “Are you coming inside? It’s getting late, and I’m thirsty.”

In the following days, Linda and Sophie walked around the house every afternoon to see if more crosses would appear, but they didn’t find anything out of the ordinary. When, on a bad day, the weather changed and it started raining again, they stopped searching. After a week they had forgotten about the crosses. That was also because Sophie’s birthday was getting closer! Linda and Sophie’s father had been mumbling to each other for a few days already. Sophie did not like it at all. Every time she came towards them they stopped talking, and when Sophie asked: “What’s up?” they would smile and just say: “Oh, nothing.” Or they made up some bad excuse. Sophie would get angry then, and lock herself up in her room to sulk. Linda began to feel sorry for her and ran after Sophie.

“You must understand that we can’t tell you what we are doing,” she said. “Or your birthday will be no surprise anymore.”

“My birthday is no surprise. You can look it up on the calendar in the toilet,” smirked Sophie. “It’s just that you are constantly murmuring to each other! Do you have something going on?!”

Linda wrinkled her face. “Me and your dad? What do you think!”

“O, good,” laughed Sophie. “Come, we have to go to school.”

Finally it was Sophie’s birthday. Sophie had slept poorly all night, and she woke up early. The sun was shining brightly and the birds sang in the trees. It was a beautiful morning.

Sophie and her father had the tradition that when it was someone’s birthday, he or she got breakfast in bed. Sophie looked at her clock. It was only six o’clock. “I still have to wait a long time,” she thought. She ran to the toilet and then went back to bed. She got out her book and began reading. The book was very funny, about a little boy who was looking for a house, driving around in his bright red little fire engine. He had arrived at a very strange flat, which had a small room in a small tower on top of it. The room was still free, and the little boy decided to go and live there. He soon found out that a lot of strange creatures lived in and around the flat. There was a horse that was so long he needed wheels under his belly, otherwise his belly would scrape over the floor when he walked. There was also a family that always made a lot of noise. They stamped their feet so hard when they walked, they had their whole flat covered in mattresses in order to not disturb the neighbors too much. And there was a very strange bird, with hairs instead of feathers.

Sophie yawned. “What kind of bird could that be?” she asked herself. “And isn’t the little boy far too young to live on his own?” She read on...

Sophie woke up because someone was shaking her arm. “Hey, sleepyhead!” she heard someone say. “You druled over your whole book!” Sophie turned around and looked into Linda’s laughing face. “It’s your birthday today girly! Congratulations!” Linda kissed Sophie on both cheeks. Sophie looked around, a bit drowsy and still sleepy. Her father was standing behind Linda with a big tray full of bread and tea. A small bunch of flowers was also on the tray, neatly stuck in a little vase. Sophie’s father gave Linda the tray and sat on the edge of Sophie’s bed.

“Well girl. You’re getting old!”

Sophie grinned and playfully punched his arm. “I’m not old! You’re old!”

“Oh come on. If you were a mouse you would have been dead a long time.” Sophie’s father hugged Sophie and kissed her forehead. “Congratulations girl! I’m proud of you!”

Sophie kissed her father back and hugged him too. “I am also proud of you Dad,” she said.

Linda had put the tray on Sophie’s desk and watched Sophie and her father hugging each other. “Have you had enough clinging? I’m hungry!” she yelled.

Sophie and her father laughed at Linda. Sophie’s father jumped up from the bed and grabbed Linda by her waist. Linda tried to get away but he was too fast and strong for her. He forced her to sit on Sophie’s bed, and while Linda screamed loudly, he and Sophie kissed her twice on both cheeks.

“Bah! Eeerchh!” shivered Linda. She dried her cheeks with Sophie’s bedlinen.

“Hey! My bed!” Sophie protested.

“That’s what you get for torturing me,” grinned Linda.

Meanwhile, Sophie’s father had put the bread on plates. “Here guys,” he said, and gave a plate to Sophie and Linda.

“Shall we give the gifts first?” asked Linda.

“No, gifts on an empty stomach is very bad for your health,” said Sophie’s father.

After breakfast it was time to give Sophie her presents. Linda went first. She gave Sophie a small thin package, carefully wrapped, with a flower stuck to it with a piece of sticky tape.

“Did you pluck that from the garden?” asked Sophie.

Linda nodded yes. “Cute, no?”

Sophie carefully unwrapped the paper, and put the flower in her teacup, in which still was a little bit of tea. “It will stay fresh now,” she said. “Ooo, it’s a card to charge my phone with! That’s sweet of you.”

“Try it,” laughed Linda.

“But I don’t have a phone yet!”

“Eeuh, maybe this can help you,” Sophie’s father said. He gave Sophie a new gift. Curious, Sophie took it from her father and unwrapped it carefully.

“Books!” Sophie did not know if she had to look happy or disappointed. Her father had given her two books of her favorite author. “I haven’t read those yet, thank you!” she said.

“She looks a bit disappointed,” grinned Linda.

“Yes, she doesn’t seem as happy with the books as we thought she would be, does she?” asked Sophie’s father. “She’s not what you would call dancing with joy.”

Sophie took the card she got from Linda and fanned herself with it, trying to look disinterested.

“I have here another little gift,” said her father. “It’s small, and it’s very possible it doesn’t interest you. I thought you might like it.” He gave her yet another little gift.

Sophie opened it carefully, and a big grin appeared on her face. “I knew it! You were teasing me so much!” Quickly she opened the box that was inside the wrapping and looked inside. “Ooo, it’s a pink phone! Those are very hard to get!”

“You’ll have to thank Linda for helping me. We walked through every street in town to get you a pink phone,” Sophie’s father said.

Sophie gave him a big, sloppy kiss. She also wanted to kiss Linda, but Linda jumped out of her reach just in time.

“It’s OK, I see that you are very happy!” Linda said.

Sophie had been playing with her new phone all morning, and Linda was quite bored with Sophie’s phone now. “I want to do something nice!” she said.

“Yes Sophie, we have to go somewhere. Tomorrow Linda has to go to her parents and you will have all day to play with your phone,” Sophie’s father said.

“Yeah, sorry,” Sophie said. “It’s just so beautiful! My own phone!” She put the phone on the table, next to her father’s and Linda’s phone. “Where shall we go?”

“I have never been to the castle at the edge of the city center,” said Linda.

“O yes, that is fun!” Sophie shouted. “Can we go there Dad? Maybe it’s haunted!”

“Of course, that seems like fun to me too. There is also a big garden and a maze I believe.”

Sophie was very happy with her new phone. She called Linda for everything. Linda was glad when the money she had given Sophie to charge her phone was gone, and Sophie had to pay for her calls and SMS’s herself. Suddenly Sophie called her a lot less.

Because there was also a camera on the phone, Sophie made pictures of everything. Her father liked some of the pictures a lot.

“I should have given you a photcamera instead of a phone, Sophie,” he said. “You really have an eye for composition and detail.” Sophie blushed with pride.

In the weekend after Sophie’s birthday Linda came home from her parents. Sophie saw her coming through the door in the garden wall, holing her bike. Linda skipped to the shed, and a while later she stood panting in the kitchen.

“My father was a lot happier today!” she said gleefully. “We walked through the city together, just him and me, and we had a great time!”

“Hey, that’s great!” Sophie said. “Can you go and live with your parents again now?”

“We haven’t talked about that yet. I rather wait until he has been well for a longer time. I really couldn’t stand his depressive moods!”

Sophie nodded her head. She could remember the times when Linda stood crying in the doorway all too well. “I’m sure my father doesn’t mind if you stay longer. He likes having you around a lot,” she said.

“Great!” said Linda. “You both are very sweet, you know that?”
“You can do the vacuuming tomorrow,” grinned Sophie.

A few days later the sun was out again. Sophie and Linda came home from school. They found Mrs. Van Reede waiting for them, much to Sophie’s surprise. Normally she would have been gone long before Sophie came home from school.

“Good afternoon Mrs. Van Reede,” she said.

“Good afternoon children,” Mrs. Van Reede answered. She had a serious look on her face.

“What’s the matter?” Sophie asked.

“This afternoon I was mowing the grass, and I found one of those yellow crosses like the one you have found earlier again.”

Sophie swallowed. She didn’t like that at all. There were still unknown people walking around in the garden!

“Can you show us the cross?” she asked.

“Sure. Follow me.” Mrs. Van Reede took the girls to a place where the lawn was bordered by the wall of the house. She pointed to a yellow cross that was painted on the wall at the same height as the cross Sophie and Linda had found.

“You didn’t draw it there just before you went to school this morning, did you?” Mrs. Van Reede asked.

Linda and Sophie shook their heads. “I don’t like this at all,” said Sophie.

“Me neither,” said Linda. “What should we do now?”

“You must wait until your father is home Sophie,” said Mrs. Van Reede. “He will have to decide what to do.”

“Yes,” said Sophie. “That will be best, I guess.”

“We can have a look around in the garden to see if we find other things,” Linda said.

“That’s OK, but don’t you forget to trim the edges of the lawn Sophie,” said Mrs. Van Reede. “You promised your father, remember?”

Sophie made a dark face. “Luckily I don’t have to cook as well tonight,” she said, and walked to the shed to get the grass trimmer. Mrs. Van Reede followed her to get her bike so she could go home. Sophie let her get the bike before she got out the grass trimmer.

“Goodbye!” Sophie said, while Mrs Van Reede climbed on her bike. Linda opened the door in the wall so Mrs. Van Reede could get out.

“Don’t do anything rash!” Mrs. Van Reede shouted, while she turned the corner to the path on the other side of the wall.

“No, we won’t,” grinned Linda as she closed the door and locked it.

Meanwhile, Sophie had started trimming the grass on the edges of the lawn with the grass trimmer. The job went fairly quickly thanks to the machine. But still she hated trimming the grass. The machine was heavy and made a lot of noise.

While Sophie was working Linda sat down with her back against the wall on a spot Sophie had just trimmed. She watched Sophie’s toiling with interest. The sun shone on her face. Sophie saw her sitting there and smiled. She could see that Linda was very tired. She still worried a lot about her father, and she often slept badly during the night. Sophie would have liked Linda to sweep up the grass that was cut off by the machine, but she decided to leave Linda alone.

Soon she saw that Linda had fallen asleep. She worked on as fast and quiet as she could. The work was heavy and hot, and eventually Sophie had to sit down for a while. She put the machine on the grass and went to the kitchen to make two glasses of lemonade with ice. She put one glass next to Linda, who was still asleep, and sat down a little way away from Linda on the grass. She took a sip of lemonade and admired her work. Not bad, she found. The lawn looked beautiful again. She just had a small bit to go before she was ready.

“Hey,” Sophie thought suddenly. “A cat must have sat there because the plants are all flattened.”

She slowly drank out her glass, put it next to Linda’s glass on the ground, and went on with her work. She looked surprised when she got to the plants that were flattened. She put the machine down and walked a little way into the shrubbery. There, between the flattened plants, was a long pole, stuck in the ground. A small plank had been hammered on top of the pole. The plank pointed to the house. “What /textslis this?!” Sophie thought. She got a bit scared. People had been working in her garden on something, and she didn’t quite understand what was going on. She stood behind the pole so she could look along the length of the plank. The plank pointed directly to the yellow cross Mrs. Van Reede had found earlier that day. Now Sophie understood even less. “If they already had the plank, why did they still need to paint the cross on the wall?” she asked herself.

Meanwhile, Linda had woken up. “Hey Sophie!” she called, “What are you doing there?”

Sophie gestured for Linda to come over and pointed to the pole with the plank attached to it. “That’s weird,” said Linda. “Did you look near the other cross already?”

Sophie looked into Linda’s eyes. “That’s a good idea,” she said. Together the girls walked to the place on the wall where they had found the first cross.

“Let’s see,” said Linda inquisitively. “Here is the cross. So if I stand with my back to the wall like this, I should be able to see roughly where they have put a pole.” She stood with her back to the wall and peered in front of her.

“And? Have you found anything yet?” asked Sophie.

“No, but what if you go and look in the shrubbery there?” Linda pointed to the shrubs right in front of her. Hesitantly, Sophie walked towards them.

“There are no flattened plants here at all!” she shouted.

“That’s not really necessary,” said Linda slowly. She thought for a while. “Maybe they walked around the bushes, near the wall.” She walked towards Sophie.

Sophie had crawled around a big bush and looked around. She didn’t find any traces of people here. There were a lot of weeds though. “I’ll search on this side, and you will do the other side, there, OK?” she asked Linda when she had appeared.

“What a lot of weeds,” said Linda. “Don’t you need a gardener or something?”

“We don’t use the garden often,” said Sophie. “I will start looking now!”

The girls spent some time searching for traces of people and poles sticking out of the ground. And indeed, after a while Sophie found a pole with a plank attached to it! The pole had fallen over and was leaning against a tree. That was why Sophie didn’t see it at first. The plank didn’t point at the house anymore

now. “No problem,” said Linda. She put the pole upright again and pointed the plank towards the yellow cross on the wall.

“And now?” asked Sophie.

Linda stared in front of her with a thoughtful look on her face. “Well... If you draw a line from this plank to the cross, and you also draw a line from the other plank to the other cross, then the lines will cross each other somewhere in the house, am I right?”

“I don’t understand,” said Sophie.

“I’ll explain. Look!” said Linda. She kneeled on the ground and drew with her finger in the dirt. “This is the house, see? Here is the kitchen, and there the living room. And here,” she drew a cross in the ground, “here are the two crosses we found. You see?”

Sophie nodded.

“And the planks, they are somewhere like here, and here.” Again Linda drew two crosses on the ground.

“If I now draw a line through this plank and this cross, and I also draw a line through the other cross and the other plank, like so...” Linda drew the two lines in the dirt, “then the cross each other here.”

“But that’s in the living room!” Sophie said. She looked shocked. “What do they expect to find there?”

Linda didn’t know either. “We have to tell your father,” she said. “He will have to decide what to do.”

It was already half past five when Sophie’s father called. “I’m sorry I am coming home so late,” he said. “I’m almost there. I got us all some good Chinese food!”

“Mmm, I like that!” Sophie nudged Linda. “We have Chinese tonight!”

“Tell him about the planks!” Linda whispered.

“O, yes, Dad? We found another cross today and two planks and if you draw lines through them they end up in the living room!” Sophie shouted enthusiastically.

“What did you say? I don’t understand,” Dad said.

“We found two planks in the garden, and Mrs. Van Reede found another cross on the wall, and if you draw a line through them you get to the living room!” Sophie danced with excitement.

“I don’t understand any of that. But I am coming home now. Could you put the plates on the table? And I would like a cold beer. See you soon, sweetie!” Dad said, and he hung up.

“What did he say?” Linda asked curiously.

“He doesn’t understand. And we have to lay the table because he will be home soon. And he wants beer.”

Linda looked at the ground. “Beer,” she mumbled. She bit her lip.

“What’s wrong? Why are you suddenly so sad?” Sophie asked. She threw a concerned glance at Linda.

Linda avoided Sophie’s glance. “Nothing,” she said. She turned around and stalked to the kitchen. Sophie followed her. She was a bit worried.

“There is something wrong,” she said.

Linda sniffed. “My father drank far too much beer,” she said. She wiped a few tears away with her fists.

“Sorry,” Sophie said. She trotted around Linda a bit. She didn’t know exactly what she should do. “You sit down, I will lay the table,” she said.

“No, it’s OK,” Linda said. She opened a cupboard and took out three plates.

“But your father is a lot better now, isn’t he?” asked Sophie.

Linda sighed. “Yes he is, luckily. It was hard though. He always was so sad! He just sat there in his chair. And we didn’t know what to do about it.”

“Does it perhaps have to do with your sister being out of the house now?” asked Sophie. Linda’s sister had moved out and lived on her own in another city now.

Linda gave Sophie a surprised look. “I never really thought about that. It is possible. My father and my sister get along quite well. She comes around often, luckily. I also miss her. The house is much more silent now.”

“She is always happy it seems.”

“Yes, it really looks like she is! But hey, my father is a lot better and I think he will get over this. I should not think about what happened too much.”

“And meanwhile, you are here and I like that very much!” said Sophie. She wrapped an arm around Linda. “I’d like you to stay here always!”

Linda smiled and wriggled loose from Sophie’s grip. “I will go back to my parents one day, I’m sorry Sophie!” she said, and walked back to the kitchen to get the cutlery.

While Sophie and Linda were busy laying the table, Sophie’s father came home. Sophie ran towards him. “Dad, we found another cross!”

“Yes dear, you told me already.”

“And also two poles with planks attached to them!”

Sophie’s father put the two bags with Chinese food on the table and sighed. “Sophie,” he said, and he stroked her through her hair, “I understand you want to tell me everything, but I am tired, it’s late, and I’m hungry. Shall we first eat, and then talk about what you found? You can then show me everything.”

Sophie looked at her feet disappointedly. “OK...” she said. She didn’t like it that Dad was not so curious about the planks and the yellow cross. Were adults never curious? She walked to the scullery to get a bottle of beer, while her father unpacked the Chinese food.

During dinner Sophie and Linda told Sophie’s father about their adventures. At first they both tried to tell their version of the story at the same time. They made so much noise that Sophie’s father put his hands in the air in despair, and called out:

“Ladies, ladies, please! I am an old man, and I can’t listen to two people at the same time. So, Linda, you start talking to me, and Sophie, can you bring me another bottle of beer?”

“But I slept when Sophie discovered the pole with the plank,” said Linda. “And you shouldn’t drink so much beer. My father also did that in the past.”

Sophie’s father gave Linda a shocked look. “I’m so sorry Linda, I didn’t realize... I won’t drink any beer when you are around, if you prefer.”

A big smile illuminated Linda’s face. “Yes,” she said, and jumped from her chair. “What would you like to drink now?”

“A glass of water please.”

While Linda poured the glass, Sophie told her father what she had found out today. Linda added to Sophie’s story the things Sophie forgot or hadn’t noticed. When the girls were finished, Sophie’s father said: “It is indeed very

strange, but I don't think the police can do much with this story. Last time they also didn't want to do anything, and of course not much has changed."

"Don't you want to see the poles?" asked Linda.

"After we've finished eating."

A little while later the two girls led Sophie's father through the garden. He examined the poles carefully, but he also could not make anything of them. "Those planks indeed point to the living room," he said, "but I really don't understand why they put them here like this. And what do we have in the living room that other people would want? I really can't imagine why someone would want to go through all this trouble."

"Maybe we have to stand guard?" Linda asked. "I can do the first shift tonight!"

"No way little girl," Sophie's father grinned. "You go to bed on time just like every normal day."

Linda looked disappointed. "What about Sophie?" she asked. Sophie's face wrinkled. She didn't really feel like standing guard at night and looking for creepy men crawling around in the garden.

"Sophie also goes to bed on time," said Sophie's father. "But I will see if I can buy a surveillance camera."

Nothing happened for a few days. Until, on a Friday night, Linda suddenly called. She had visited her parents and should be back at half past seven. It was already ten to nine now, and Sophie and Dad were a bit worried about her. Eagerly, Sophie picked up the phone.

"Quick, come to the back door in the garden wall!" she heard Linda whisper. "Someone is breaking in!"

With the telephone stuck to her ear, Sophie pulled Dad out of his chair. "Come, quick, someone is breaking in!" she said. Together they walked to the dining room. And indeed, there was a strange man walking around in the garden! Sophie's heart missed a beat. She became frightened.

"I see him," she whispered to Linda.

"I locked the door in the wall again," whispered Linda back. "He can't get out now."

Sophie grinned. "Linda has locked the door again," she whispered to Dad.

"I will go and give him a piece of my mind," said Dad. He looked very angry.

"Will you be careful?" Sophie asked in a shrill, scared voice. Dad didn't hear her. He was already opening the door to the garden. He ran to the man, who was busily walking around with a small device in his hand. Sophie stood and watched in the doorway. She didn't dare go outside. The man did not look dangerous. He was tall and slim and had a neatly trimmed beard and glasses. Still, Sophie didn't trust him and therefore she stayed out of his way.

"What are you doing in my garden?" Dad shouted to the man. The man jumped with fright and dropped the device he was holding. He quickly picked it up again and ran to the door through which he had come into the garden. Of course the door was locked. The man thrust his hand into his pocket, but Dad had reached him already. Dad pulled the man's shoulder so the man had no choice but to turn around. He looked around frightenedly and tried to pull himself loose, but Dad had a firm grip on his shoulder. Then, suddenly, the man hit Dad hard in the face! Sophie shrieked of shock, and felt herself turning red

with rage. She saw her father letting go of the man and stumbling backwards. While Dad was feeling his painful cheek, the man ran to the other door in the wall. Sophie ran towards him, but her dad yelled: "Sophie, no!" She stopped running and saw how the man pulled the door open with a few powerful jerks, and escaped.

Sophie ran towards her father. He had sat down on the ground and was still feeling his painful cheek. "Does it hurt Dad?" Sophie asked worriedly.

"What happened?" she heard Linda say in the telephone.

"That man hit Dad in the face!" Sophie yelled excitedly. "He escaped through the other door!"

"I'm on my way," said Linda, and she hung up. Sophie put her telephone down in the grass. She looked at her father. She felt awful about what had happened to him. A knot tightened in her stomach. She pulled his hand away. His cheek was all red. Sophie crept close to him and put her arms around him. Dad bit his lip, and Sophie started crying.

After a while the crying stopped. Dad kissed Sophie on her forehead. "It will be OK girl," he whispered in her ear. Sophie sat back up again and looked around her.

"Shouldn't we put ice on your cheek? Maybe it won't swell so much then," she asked.

"That is a good idea."

Sophie got on her feet. "I will get you some," she said. It was a beautiful night so Dad stayed in the grass where he was. Just when Sophie wanted to step into the kitchen she heard Linda shout:

"Look what I find here!"

Sophie and her father ran towards Linda, who sat at the edge of the grass with a small black laptop in front of her. When Sophie and her father had reached her she said:

"The thief must have left it here."

"I suppose so. What would he need that for?" Sophie's father said. "Let's take it inside before they come back to fetch it."

Linda looked up at him. "Does it hurt a lot?" she asked with a concerned look in her face.

"A bit, yes," Sophie's father said.

"It's turning blue," Linda said. "I would put some ice on it soon if I were you."

A little while later the two girls sat together with Sophie's father behind the laptop at the kitchen table. Sophie's father held a dripping face cloth containing a few icecubes in his right hand, which he pushed against his cheek. Linda sat behind the computer. All three of them were very curious to what they would find on the computer.

"Maybe we can find what that man is looking for on that laptop," Sophie's father had said.

"When I found the thing, this map was open," Linda said. "Shall I just click on something?"

"What!?" Sophie shouted, amazed. "That map is called 'Golden worms Park Lane 12!' That's where we live!"

Everyone was silent for a while. Then Sophie's father said: "It looks like he is working on a big project. Look at how many files there are!"

“What are golden worms?” asked Linda.

Sophie shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know.”

“I also never heard of them,” her father said.

“Hey, look, here is a file named ‘History’,” Sophie said. “Shall we have a look?”

Linda clicked on the file. Soon after there was a big document displayed on the screen, which the two girls and Sophie’s father read eagerly:

At an auction I became the owner of a collection of glassware from the monastery that once had stood on the Park Lane. Most of the glassware contained the usual chemicals like nitric acid, sulfuric acid, and ammonia. There was also a glass bottle, closed with a glass stopper which was impossible for me to remove. The bottle seemed to contain only long, golden yellow coloured hairs, like those of a Golden Retriever, but thinner and more shiny. My curiosity was peaked. The amount of hairs seemed to me to be far too big than necessary for the determination of, for instance, an illness. Hairs are also not often used in medical sciences. The monks in the monastery were not known for their outstanding knowledge in any field of science. The collection of glasswork that had come into my possession had most likely belonged to a hobbyist.

After a little detective work I finally was able to lay my hands on the notes the monk who owned the glasswork had made. The notes are a bit hard to read and to follow, but I was able to distill the following important conclusions:

The hairs belonged to a young Golden Worm, which was bred by the monk. The monk had discovered that he could lure golden worms with a mixture of acorns and moles. Ground and mixed together they form a sort of pâté, with which the monk lured a male and a female golden worm, which he held in a specially made big container, made in bricks and filled with earth. After the monk had taken care of the worms for 50 years, the female crawled to the surface of the earth and gave birth to several young. The young worms pulled their mother’s hair out with their teeth and ate them. A lovely odour spread through the cellar in which the golden worms were held. The mother died soon after. The young floundered like fish on dry land. In this way they spread, and most of them fell over the edge of the container. The monk could just grab one, before all young had disappeared in the earthen floor of the cellar. They were quick diggers. Some of the hairs of the young had stuck to the hands of the monk. They were covered in a thick, oil-like fluid. When he wanted to wash them off, he discovered that the delicious scent came from either the hairs or the fluid. The monk shaved all the hairs off the young golden worm, which died several days later.

My own research tells me that the hairs of one golden worm are enough to make an essence for approximately 500 ml of perfume.

For a thriving business, more is needed: at least one and a half litres of perfume each year. Therefore I need more golden worms. However, golden worms are very hard to find since they live deep in the ground. Luck has it that it is now exactly 50 years ago that the monk discovered the lovely smell of the young golden worms. This means the chance that one or more females that escaped 50 years ago will come back now is quite high. The females always come back to the place where they were born to give birth to their young. At the place where the monastery was is now the big house on Parklaan 12. To avoid having to deal with the city council and animal activists I will try to catch the golden worms unnoticed by anyone, with the help of a friend.

Linda was the first who finished reading. She waited impatiently until Sophie and her father had finished too.

“What a strange story,” she said.

“I don’t believe a word of it,” Sophie’s father said. “Who in the world has ever heard of golden worms?”

“Since when do you know anything about animals Dad?” said Sophie.

“Let’s look it up on the internet!” said Linda.

After a quick search on the internet they had found out that golden worms did indeed exist. Linda, who was quite good at finding information on the ‘net, could find almost nothing else about the animals. There were no pictures, not even drawings of them to be found. Sophie’s father yawned and leaned backwards in his chair.

“I think I’ve had enough for today,” he said. “It’s half past ten already. You two have to go to bed!”

Of course Sophie and Linda protested with all their might! “But that man can come back any moment! What will you do then?” asked Sophie.

“I will put new locks in both the doors, I promise. And tonight, the man will just have to stay away.”

“What do we do now?” asked Linda when the two girls sat together in Sophie’s room to talk before they went to sleep. “They will surely come back!”

Sophie stared in front of her, lost in thought. “I feel so awful about that man hitting my father so hard,” she said softly. “And I don’t think only new locks in the doors will help keep him away. If they want they can easily climb over the wall.”

“What if we call the police?”

“Hm,” said Sophie. “I don’t think anyone will believe our story.”

“We have the laptop,” said Linda.

“That’s true. But my father doesn’t want to call them. He has called them before, and they said they couldn’t do anything about it at the moment.”

“Ridiculous,” said Linda. “I’ll go to sleep now, I’m exhausted.”

“Good night!” said Sophie, and Linda disappeared to her own room.

That night Sophie lay in her bed, tossing and turning. Again and again she saw the man hitting her father. Eventually she got up and walked to her father’s bedroom. There was light shining under the door. Sophie knocked at

the door and waited until her father said: “Yes?” She slipped through the door and into the room. She didn’t want to wake up Linda.

“You can’t sleep either, can you?” Dad asked.

“I feel so awful about that man hitting you!” said Sophie, and she burst into tears. Dad tried to comfort her. He kissed her on her cheek and hugged her.

“I also feel bad about it,” he said. “But it almost doesn’t hurt anymore.

“Your cheek is still all red and blue,” said Sophie worriedly. She slipped under the covers next to Dad. She kissed him tenderly on his hurting cheek.

“Auw!” said Dad, wincing. “You’d better not do that again, Sophie.”

“What are we going to do now? Will you call the police?”

“I will certainly report this,” Dad said. “But first I will replace the doors in the wall tomorrow, together with Joe¹. I called Joe, and he agreed to help me tomorrow. I think we will be busy the whole day.”

“You think *Joe* will be busy the whole day,” grinned Sophie.

Dad laughed and nudged Sophie’s side. “Smartypants,” he said.

The next day Sophie and her father were up early. Yawning, they sat at the breakfast table, while Linda was still fast asleep upstairs. Just when they were eating their last mouthfull, Joe rang the doorbell. Dad stood up and opened the door for him.

“Marten!” Sophie heard him say cheerfully, “Did you finally decide to secure your house a bit?”

Dad mumbled something Sophie could not understand.

“OK, you’re right, maybe it’s not funny to make jokes about it. Your cheek has indeed gone all blue,” said Joe, while he walked into the room. “O, hi Sophie! How are you?” He kissed Sophie on her cheek. Meanwhile, Kees tried to crawl upon her lap.

“Hi Joe, hi Kees,” said Sophie. “We’re getting there.”

“You’re always up to something aren’t you?” said Joe. “First that magician, and now this!”

“And don’t forget that weird little dog with that note in its mouth!” laughed Dad.

Joe took a chair and sat down at the table. “I would like a sandwich too, if I may,” he said. “And you will have to explain to me what exactly happened yesterday, because your father and I only talked for a very short time yesterday evening.”

While Joe ate two sandwiches and drank a glass of milk, Sophie and Dad told him the whole story. Linda also joined them and filled in some details here and there. When they were ready Sophie’s father said:

“But we still don’t know what golden worms are, exactly.”

Joe emptied his glass of milk and said: “I have seen one once.”

“Really?” Sophie asked. She could hardly believe her ears.

“Yes. It was in a cargo of sand in the hold of a ship I was a cook on once. I remember it well. It was a very strange creature. Very big, almost two meters long. Of course we wanted to catch it. It looked like a snake but it was much thicker and no one of us had ever heard of a snake with hairs.”

“Dit it really have yellow hairs?” Sophie asked.

¹Joe was a friend of Sophie’s father. He lived in the same city as Sophie and had a restaurant. See the story about *Sophie and the secret box*.

“Well, yellow... A little bit like a golden retriever but thinner, like Kees’ hairs, but really straight and smooth. The hairs made the animal hard to grab. It slipped right through your arms.”

“Can you make a drawing?”

“Well,” said Sophie’s father, “Joe and I have to get working, or we will not be finished in time. So let’s do the drawing tonight, OK?”

“Pity,” said Linda, “Just now it gets interesting.”

“I’m sorry ladies, but this is now more important. I also have to call the police today, so we have a lot to do.”

“Can we help you with anything?” asked Sophie.

“Yes,” said Joe. “You can take Kees for a walk. He will like that, I’m sure.”

“And clear the table, and make some sandwiches for us at lunchtime,” said Sophie’s father.

Sophie started clearing the table. Joe helped her, and a few minutes later everyone was outside on the grass.

“OK Marten,” said Joe, “How about you measure up the door openings in the wall, and I take a look at those crosses and poles.”

“Great!” said Sophie’s father. He disappeared to his study and came back a few moments later with a notebook and pencil, with which he disappeared into the shed.

“OK ladies, show me those crosses,” said Joe. The girls grabbed him by his arms and took him to one of the yellow crosses on the wall of the house. Joe sat on his haunches to get a better look.

“I wonder if the height of the cross on the wall has anything to do with whatever it is these guys are looking for,” said Joe.

“The poles are much higher,” said Sophie.

“Show me those too if you like.”

The girls took Joe to one of the poles. It stood there just like Sophie and Linda had found it. Joe walked around it, and Kees also came looking. He sniffed the pole for a while and then sat down. Joe kneeled down and began to ruffle the ground a little way away from the pole.

“There has been dug here, do you see that?” he asked.

Kees sniffed the little hole Joe had made and began digging enthusiastically.

“Deeper Kees,” said Joe, and Kees attacked the hole with much vigour. The clumps of mud whirled around. Every now and then he stopped to sniff the hole he had made. After a while his claws slipped on a hard surface.

“Ho,” said Joe. “I’ll take over from here.” He groped around in the dirt for a while and then said: “There is a little box or something here.”

Carefully, he dug around the little pastic box that was hidden in the ground, and eventually he pulled it out. He put it next to the hole on the ground.

“What is that?” asked Sophie. “Dad, look!” she shouted excitedly, “We found a black thingy in the ground!”

Curious, Sophie’s father put his tools on the grass and walked towards them.

“There are lights on it, look!” said Linda.

Indeed there were three litte lights on the box. One of them blinked in a steady, slow tempo.

“I have an idea,” said Sophie’s father suddenly. “I bet that man from yesterday can make contact with these things using his laptop.”

Sophie looked sceptical. “And when he has contact, what then?”

“Well, eeuuhh...” Her father stroke his chin and looked puzzled. “I don’t have the faintest idea,” he said eventually.

“I’ll get the laptop!” said Linda, and she ran towards the house. A little later she came back with the laptop in her hands. Sophie’s father put the laptop in the grass and fiddled with it for a long time. His brow was furrowed and his forehead wrinkled. Joe sauntered around him and the girls for a while. You could see on his face that he would much rather get on with fixing the doors in the garden wall than wait for Sophie’s father to find out what the boxes were for. Eventually he picked up Sophie’s father’s tools, and started measuring.

When Joe was ready Sophie’s father was still fiddling with the laptop. Suddenly his face cleared up.

“I think I got it,” he said.

Sophie, Linda and Joe peered at the screen, which showed a map of the house with the garden around it. There wasn’t much more interesting to see.

“It surely is fantastic Marten, but we really have to get on with those doors, or we will never finish in time,” said Joe.

“You’re right, but I think this is what we were looking for. I only have to find out how it works.”

“You can do that later, OK?”

With a sigh, Sophie’s father closed the laptop and stood up. “You’re right, we have to go and buy stuff before the shops are closed.” He walked behind Joe towards the house. “See you later girls!” he yelled, and gone were he and Joe.

“What shall we do now?” Linda asked Sophie.

“Play with Kees of course!” said Sophie. “Kees! Do you want to play with the ball?” She got up from the grass and walked to the shed. Kees ran towards her, wagging his tail.

Sophie and Kees played with the ball for a long time. Sophie would throw the ball away, and Kees had to fetch it again. Sophie tried to make the game harder for Kees by throwing the ball in the bushes, but Kees found it every time. He came walking back to Sophie with a look on his face that seemed to say: “Look at how good I am!” Linda just had to laugh at the faces Kees made. Linda and Sophie threw the ball back and forth for a while, until Kees got tired and laid down panting in the grass.

“I will get a bowl of water for him,” Sophie said. “I can wash my hands then too.”

“Yes, that ball gets dirty doesn’t it?” said Linda. She walked with Sophie to the kitchen and washed her hands. Sophie carried a bowl of water outside and put it in front of Kees. He immediately began slobbering up the water.

“Oh Kees! When will you learn to drink neatly?” asked Sophie. “You’re splashing water everywhere!” She watched Kees drink his water for a while and then turned around and looked for Linda. She found her sitting in the grass with the thieves’ laptop in front of her.

“Hey, you can’t do that!” Sophie yelled. She ran towards Linda.

“I won’t break anything,” said Linda. “I just want to know what this program does.”

“You have to put it back!” Sophie sounded tense. “My father will be mad when he finds out!”

Linda wasn’t impressed. She peered at the laptop’s screen. “Look, there is a little cross here,” she said.

“A cross? Where?” Curious, Sophie bent over the screen.

“Look, there.” Linda pointed at the cross on the map on the screen.

Sophie looked around her and then turned her attention back to the screen. “Isn’t that where we are sitting now?” she asked.

Linda thought for a while. “Yes, you’re right. Apparently the cross shows where the laptop is.”

“What happens when you walk around with it?” asked Sophie. Linda took the laptop in her hands and walked away, following the wall of the house.

“Yes, the cross moves. Wait, I’ll make a turn here... Yes, it shows where the laptop is.”

“But that’s just GPS,” Sophie said, sounding like a know-it-all.

“GPS?”

“Yes, you can see where you are with that. My father has it in his car.”

Linda sighed and looked disappointed. “So it’s nothing special?”

Sophie shook her head and laid down on her back in the grass. “What a fantastic weather, don’t you think?” She closed her eyes.

“Mmm mm m,” mumbled Linda. Meanwhile, Kees had walked towards the girls and started licking Sophie in the face.

“Hey!” Sophie yelled. Laughing, she pushed the little dog away from her. Kees jumped around her and over her, and Sophie lifted him in the air with both her hands, while she stamped the ground with her feet. Kees wriggled and wagged his tail, and Sophie had to let go of him pretty soon. Kees was quite heavy, she thought. Kees ran to his little ball. Sophie jumped up and ran towards him, but she was too late. Kees had already got the ball in his mouth.

“Give it to me Kees!” Sophie yelled while running towards him. Kees dropped the ball, and Sophie kicked it hard. Kees shot away like an arrow, following the ball.

“Hey, look!” Linda said suddenly. Sophie didn’t hear her; she was too busy running after Kees. Kees was so much faster than Sophie! Here he came already with the ball. Somewhere in the middle of the garden Sophie and Kees met. Kees dropped the ball in the grass and looked up expectantly at Sophie. His tail was wagging like crazy. Sophie kicked the ball as hard as she could to the other side of the garden. Kees ran after it, while Sophie stayed where she was and looked after him. Suddenly Sophie felt Linda grab her hand.

“Sophie, look!” said Linda. “The cross shows where Kees is!”

Surprised, Sophie looked at the screen. Indeed, the little cross moved slowly across the screen towards the place where Sophie and Linda were standing, while Kees sauntered towards them.

Sophie and Linda looked each other in the eyes. “Did that guy put a transmitter on Kees?” asked Linda.

“I don’t know. Or do you think Joe and that man know each other?”

“No, impossible. Then Joe would never have gone and fixed the doors with your dad,” said Linda.

Sophie knelt on the grass next to Kees, and felt his collar.

“There’s only his token with his name on it,” she said.

“I don’t understand a thing of this,” said Linda. She sat down on the grass next to Sophie and Kees, and tickled Kees behind his ears.

“We will have to ask my father later,” said Sophie. “Would you like some lemonade?”

“I’d love to!” said Linda. She turned around so she could sit with her back to the wall of the house and put the laptop in her lap.

Sophie went to the kitchen to get the lemonade. She was a bit afraid that Dad would be very angry with Linda for taking the laptop. Linda was a bit insolent sometimes, she found. But on the other hand, they had made a discovery on the laptop! Maybe Dad would like that. It saved him work, so he could take care of the doors properly.

Sophie filled two large glasses with lemonade and ice and went back outside, where Linda was waiting eagerly for her.

“Sophie!” she shouted. “I’ve got it!”

“Really?” said Sophie. She decided not to walk faster to not spill the lemonade.

“When you walked away to get the lemonade, the cross showed where you were!” Linda said. She added excitedly: “So it doesn’t have to do anything with Kees!”

Sophie looked scared. “So it can tell from each of us whether we’re in the garden or not.”

“Yes, and where, too.”

“That’s strange,” said Sophie.

The girls stared in their glasses. Sophie was thinking. She could make heads nor tails of it. How could the laptop know where she was? And why was there only one cross all the time? There were three people in the garden, if you counted Kees as a person.

“Maybe it only shows where someone walks, and not where he or she is,” she said eventually.

“Yes, but then it shouldn’t show a cross now,” said Linda. “We’ve been sitting here for a while now.”

Sophie thought hard. “Maybe it’s forgotten to take the cross away?”

“Or...” said Linda, while she pricked in the grass with her finger, “Or it looks for something quite different than people or animals.”

“How do you mean?” asked Sophie.

“I don’t know. But when you walk, you are doing something. And...”

“Yes, no wonder you’re doing something when you walk,” said Sophie. “Else you won’t go forward, yes?” She giggled because of the joke, but it looked like Linda hadn’t even heard her.

“Maybe the laptop looks for that ‘something.’”

“With those little boxes you mean?” asked Sophie.

“Yes, it must be something like that.”

“Wait, I’ll walk around a bit.” Sophie jumped to her feet and walked a little distance away from Linda.

“Does the cross move?” she asked.

“Yes!” shouted Linda. Her eyes gleamed. Sophie could see that Linda was having a lot of fun.

“And what if you start walking?”

Linda carefully picked up the laptop and stood up. She then walked towards Sophie.

“No,” shouted Sophie, “Walk the other way, otherwise it might get confused!”

Linda turned around and walked away, in the meantime looking at the screen as much as she could without walking into things.

“You’re right Sophie! It now shows where I walk!”

“OK, so it shows where someone is moving.”

“But how does it know?” asked Linda. “Can you walk a bit more please?”

Sophie obediently walked away from Linda a bit more. She knelt next to Kees, who was resting in the shade, and scratched his ears.

“Yes, the cross now jumped to you.”

Sophie took Kees’ bone and tried to make Kees run after it. She threw the bone high in the air. Kees followed it with his eyes until it landed with a thud somewhere in the bushes, somewhere in between Sophie and Linda.

“Hey, now it shows where the bone fell!” Linda shouted enthusiastically.

“Really? I don’t get it anymore,” said Sophie. “I’m going inside; it’s getting too warm outside for me.” It was almost noon, and the sun stood high in the sky. Sophie picked up the two glasses and went inside. Kees and Linda followed her shortly after.

“I still want to know what it measures,” said Linda. “Look, if I walk around here in the house, it doesn’t see me, see? The cross stays there by the door.”

Sophie looked at the screen. “Yes,” she said.

“OK, so it sees you walk around in the garden, and it sees that you drop something heavy in the bushes. So it doesn’t look for people or animals walking around, but it just looks for things hitting the ground.”

Sophie stamped her foot on the kitchen floor. “Does it see this?” she asked.

Linda peered at the screen. “No.”

“Wait, I have an idea,” said Sophie. She moved two kitchen chairs out of the way, made a short sprint and jumped out of the kitchen door into the garden. “And? What does it say?” she asked when she turned around to face Linda.

“Yes! The cross also got bigger!” Linda yelled, beaming with enthusiasm.

“That’s because I landed so hard,” said Sophie. “The ground shook!”

“The ground shook...” said Linda, deep in thoughts.

“Yes, that’s what I said,” said Sophie, as she came back into the kitchen.

“That must be it!” It measures vibrations in the ground, and it shows where they came from!” Linda beamed at Sophie.

“Yes, that must be it,” Sophie said.

“Great, we solved it!” Linda yelled.

Sophie sat down on a kitchen chair and asked: “For what would that man need that?” She went to the counter top and made two new glasses of lemonade.

“To see where the golden worms crawl, of course,” Linda said.

“Well, then it’s good that he lost the laptop,” said Sophie. “I hope he will never come back.”

Linda nodded. “Me too.” She closed the laptop and put it back in the cupboard where Sophie’s father had put it. “I am going to do some homework.”

“OK, I’ll take Kees for a walk then. I’ll wake you when we have lunch,” grinned Sophie.

Joe and Sophie’s father had almost finished making the new doors by late afternoon. They were tired and let themselves fall into the terrace chairs. Sophie brought them both a big glass of beer, and started cooking for them. Linda walked into the kitchen a short while later.

“Hi! What are you making?” she asked.

“Pasta.”

“Yummie! Can I help?”

“No, I’m almost ready. It’s very easy to make.”

Linda got herself a glass of lemonade and walked outside. She came back when Sophie was busy finishing up dinner.

“They only talk about the past. Boring! All that talk about people I don’t know at all,” said Linda.

“Yes, they do that all the time. And they tell each other the same stories all the time. I don’t understand that they don’t get tired of themselves,” said Sophie. “But Linda, while you’re here, can you make the table outside? Then I will come later with the pasta.”

“OK.” Linda took cutlery and a tablecloth and ran outside. “I’m hungry!” she yelled.

During dinner Linda told in great detail how she and Sophie had found out what the strange boxes in the ground were for. Sophie’s father was not angry; he was very curious and asked numerous questions.

“They seem to have prepared themselves thoroughly, and they must be quite sure the golden worms will appear here some day soon,” he said.

“Maybe they have already detected them somewhere,” said Joe.

“O, Mr. Von Dyk, you know what golden worms look like, right? That is what you said this morning,” asked Linda.

“Yes, I promised to draw them!” Joe remembered.

“Could you do that now?” asked Sophie.

“I think so,” said Joe. Sophie’s father fetched some paper and a pen, and Joe made this drawing:



“Huuu!” said Linda, flinching. “What a scary creature.”

“Yes, they look very weird,” said Joe. “Mostly because they have no eyes and very strange teeth. I’m not very good with a pen, but the drawing looks quite similar to the real animal, if I say so myself. I now remember having seen another one, in a field in Portugal where a farmer was plowing his field.”

“He had unearthed the worm?” Sophie asked.

“Yes. It was smaller than the one that was on the ship. It was still a young one. It was hurt and it was bleeding a bit. The farmer put it in a wooden box and told me he would eat it later.”

Linda made a face. “Eat it?” she said, horrified.

“Yes, allegedly they taste very good. I never had them so I don’t know. Anyway, the young golden worm also had the long golden hairs like the one in the ship, only a bit darker. And it was very strong. The farmer and I had to carry it together and still we had troubles getting it in the box. The beast was all muscles! Oh yes, and it defecated clean earth!”

Linda and Sophie giggled. “No such talks at dinner Joe,” laughed Sophie’s father.

“I’ll never do it again, I promise. Oh yes, the farmer told me he was glad to have found a golden worm. They keep the earth open so the plants grow better. They are usually too deep to eat the plants farmers grow, but because they make these big tunnels the ground doesn’t get soaked by the rain.”

“I think it’s a very strange creature,” said Sophie.

“Are they rodents?” asked Linda.

“That I don’t know, but it sure has big front teeth,” said Joe. “And it has very strange molars in the back of its mouth. Very thick and coarse. And it has a flat tail, like a beaver, see? Only with hairs instead of scales. But Marten, what’s wrong? You look so pensive.”

Sophie’s father sat staring at the drawing Joe had made. “I don’t really want an animal like that in the house,” he said. “Are they dangerous?”

Joe shrugged. “They can’t move very well above ground, so you can easily jump aside if you meet one in the living room. But for the rest, I wouldn’t know. They only come above ground to give birth, and many animals are of course a bit aggressive in that situation...” He looked at Sophie’s father and laughed at his worried face. “I really have no idea man, I’m just saying things! I wouldn’t worry too much if I were you. How much chance do you think they have of getting into the house?”

Sophie’s father was not convinced. I know, but still... I don’t like this at all. He can give birth somewhere else for all I care.”

“It’s a ‘she’,” said Linda. “The females give birth.”

“Oh, yes you’re right. The thing is, Sophie is so old now, I had already forgotten how she came into the world.” Sophie’s father nudged Sophie. “Hey, old woman!” he grinned.

Sophie laughed and jumped upon her father. She tickled him until they fell over, together with the chair, and hit the table on which the plates were still sitting. Linda could just save one of them. “Careful!” she yelled.

“Yes Dad, be careful for a change!” laughed Sophie.

The next day nothing much happened. Sophie’s father fixed the doors in the wall together with Joe. He proudly showed the result to Sophie.

“Look at my handywork! I did it all myself!” he said laughing.

“I believe Joe also did a lot of work,” said Sophie. “It’s not fair to say you did it all yourself.”

“Well,” said Joe, “Your father is a good do-it-yourselfer I must admit. I helped him to get it all finished in time, but he really did a lot of stuff on his own.”

“You see?” said Sophie’s father. “You may be proud of your old man every once in a while, you know!”

Sophie’s father gave the two girls both a new key for the doors, and sat down in the garden with Joe to drink beer. A little while later Sophie joined the two men with a glass of lemonade. Linda had gone inside ‘to do some homework,’ but Sophie knew Linda couldn’t stand watching people drink beer very well. Her father had drunk a lot of beer in his depressive period, and she didn’t want to be remembered of that. “Linda is probably just reading or watching TV,” Sophie thought.

“I hope the scary men stay away now,” she said.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if they had another laptop and keep an eye on things with it,” her father said. “Just you wait: if they detect a golden worm they will climb over the wall.”

Sophie looked at her father with big round eyes. “Would they really do that?” she said.

“I think so. We will have to keep looking for strange things on that laptop.”

Sophie was scared. She looked from her father to Joe and back. “But if they come again, what do we do? I don’t want them to hit you again!” Tears welled up in her eyes.

Joe ruffled her hair affectionately. “Are you really that scared of them?” he asked gently.

Sophie nodded and bit her lip.

“You shouldn’t be. It’s not good for you.”

“He was so mean, hurting Dad like that!” cried Sophie.

Joe looked at his friend Marten. “That indeed wasn’t fun. We have to prevent that somehow.”

“Do you have an idea?” asked Sophie’s father.

“Well, I thought: maybe you have another sleeping room left? I’m always home late, you are always up early. I can keep an eye on things when you are sleeping, if you let Kees and me be your guests for a week or two. If I’m asleep Kees can still wake us up if he hears something.”

Sophie smiled happily. “O, yes, can he Dad?” She looked at her father expectantly. Her father looked doubtful.

“I think it’s a good idea, but where will Joe sleep? We haven’t got a spare room, because Linda is already here.”

“He can sleep in my room!” said Sophie.

“Yes, and where would you sleep then?”

“In Linda’s room. On the futon!” Sophie’s eyes shone with enthusiasm. She was very happy that Joe wanted to visit her and Dad for a while to protect them.

“Yes, that may be a good idea,” Dad had to admit. “Will you call Linda, because she also has to know Joe will be sleeping here for a while.”

Sophie danced towards the house and came back a while later, followed by Linda. Linda thought it was a marvellous idea to let Joe take care of the burglars. “But can Sophie still do her homework in her own room?” she asked. The girls had tried to do their homework together at first, but that turned out to be a total disaster.

“Yes, no problem,” said Joe. “I’m in the restaurant around that time anyway. I will try to keep your room tidy Sophie.”

The four people congratulated each other with the new deal. Joe stayed for another glass of lemonade, and and went home soon after. He still had to work that evening. The girls played a game with Sophie's father before they went to bed.

That night Sophie and Linda slept together in the guest room for the first time. They had a lot of fun together! They talked and talked, until Sophie's father knocked on the door and called out: "Now go to sleep ladies, it's after eleven o'clock!" Startled by his voice, Linda turned around.

"Nighty night!" she whispered.

"Yes, sleep well!" said Sophie. "I'm really very tired," she thought, and fell asleep soon after.

The next day was a school day again, and soon both Sophie and Linda had the feeling as if nothing special had happened during the weekend. But that was not true: every evening Linda, Sophie and Sophie's father checked the laptop to find out if it had seen strange things in the garden.

"Until now we only see people walking in the alley behind the garden," Linda said one day. "It's boring. When will these golden worms appear?"

"Maybe they lost the way?" Sophie asked, with hope in her voice.

"Yes, or they have been cooked!" joked her father.

"But if those men come again, you will call the police, won't you Dad?" asked Sophie tensely.

Her father ruffled her hair and kissed her on the head. "Of course I will. They won't hit me again if I can help it."

During the first days that Joe slept in Sophie's room, Linda, Sophie and Sophie's father had to get used to him a bit. He came home every night around two o'clock in the morning, and was greeted every time by loud and happy barks and yelps from Kees. Everybody in the house was awake then. Soon they decided to let Kees sleep in the scullery so he didn't wake everybody when Joe came home.

The next Saturday Linda came back from a day at her parents. Her father was much better, and she was very happy.

"He was so full of joy! And my sister was there, too. We had so much fun!" Linda told Sophie and her father. "We've been to the zoo, and we looked at the birds for a very long time. My father has always loved birds."

Sophie knew that. Linda's father had two green parakeets, of which he was very proud. One of them could say a few words. He always said "Hello!" when Sophie came in. She liked that very much.

"That's good to hear Linda!" said Sophie's father. He stroked Linda's hair. Linda didn't like that and took a few steps away from him.

"And for your father too! Will you go back home now?" asked Sophie.

"We haven't talked about that at all," said Linda. "I'm sorry..."

"That is no problem at all," said Sophie's father. "I think it's good if you stay a few weeks more so your father can fully recover and look for a job again."

"Oh, yes! He would like to, but my mother thinks it's too early yet."

"Well, you stay here with us then," said Sophie. Sophie liked having Linda in the house a lot. She was like a sister to her. If Sophie had anything to say about it, Linda would stay for a long time at her place.

That evening Sophie fell asleep soon after she had gone to bed. She dreamt that she was visiting Linda at her parent's house. Linda's father sat in the living room, talking at length about his green parakeets. He knew a lot about the birds, and explained in detail how the mother bird cares for her young ones. Sophie wasn't interested at all, and sat looking about her, thinking about other things than parakeets. Suddenly Linda's father said: "This is the second time I see you stare out of the window Sophie. Pay attention, will you?" He looked very angry and banged the table hard with his flat hand. 'BAM!!' it sounded.

Sophie awoke with a jolt. Her heart was beating. "Linda's father isn't going to become like that, I hope!" she thought. She looked around and rubbed her eyes. Linda was laying in the bed next to her, fast asleep. Sophie looked at Linda's long, dark blond hair for a long time. Linda looked beautiful laying there, with her hair in an untidy tangle around her head, and her serene face in the middle of it.

"Poor Linda," thought Sophie. "It must be hard to have a father like that."

Sophie thought she was very lucky with her father. He worked very hard, but he took good care of her, and they got along really well. Sophie felt herself slowly gliding back to sleep, but suddenly she was wide awake again. She heard strange noises downstairs! It sounded like someone was shuffling through the hall. Sophie held her breath and kept listening. "It must be Joe," she thought. "No, that's impossible, he must have come home a long time ago." She looked at the clock. It was past five already, and it was already getting light outside. Joe never came home this late. Carefully, so not to wake Linda, Sophie crept out of bed and tiptoed out of the room. She softly knocked on her father's door and listened for a while. Downstairs she still heard the shuffling sound, but also a strange moaning. Her father was certainly asleep because he didn't react to her knocking. Sophie slowly opened the bedroom door, went inside and pulled her father's shoulder.

"Dad, wake up!" she whispered,

After a while Dad started to move. He turned around, rubbed his eyes and looked at Sophie blearily. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"There is someone downstairs!"

Dad woke up instantly. "The laptop!" he whispered, and sat upright in bed. "Wait, let's go downstairs."

Sophie waited until Dad had put on his dressing gown and followed him downstairs. She was a bit afraid though.

"Hey look," whispered Dad, "the mat is askew!"

Indeed, the mat looked as if it had been dragged from its place near the front door. Sophie tried to straighten it. "Somebody opened the hatch!" she whispered. "That's weird!" The hatch, which gave access to the crawl space underneath the floor of the house, was also askew and didn't lie in the opening where it belonged anymore. While Sophie pushed the hatch back in place, Dad walked on to the living room.

"Look here," Sophie thought. "Here is a little tuft of hair. Has Kees been here today?" She pulled the tuft off the edge of the mat and examined it carefully. The hairs were yellow, and quite straight. Sophie almost certainly knew Kees did not have hairs like that. Suddenly she startled. Her father whispered from the living room:

"Sophie, come here, quick!"

Sophie walked quickly to the living room. There Dad stood looking at something in the kitchen. Sophie walked towards him. She grabbed his arm tightly when she saw what he was looking at.

“The golden worm!” she whispered. Her voice trembled with fear. She had never really believed that there would be golden worms crawling through the house. Of course it had come through the hatch in front of the front door!

The golden worm was tremendously big. It was lying curled up on the kitchen floor, and it must be as long as Sophie and Linda together. It was also very thick; almost as thick as the trash bin Dad had in his work room. It lied there very still, and sometimes it made a moaning sound. Its large head with very large orange incisors in it lay still on its curled-up body. It didn’t look as dangerous as Sophie had imagined. She pitied the beast a bit now. It looked like it was in trouble.

While Sophie and her father were standing looking at the golden worm, Joe suddenly came running down the stairs. He quickly walked into the living room. Sophie opened her mouth to tell him about the golden worm, but Joe held his finger in front of his lips. He walked into the kitchen, took one short look at the golden worm, and slowly opened the door to the scullery.

“There are two people in the garden,” he whispered.

Sophie’s eyes opened wide. “What will you do?” she whispered back.

“Put them in the scullery until the police is here.”

“Do I have to help you?” asked Sophie’s father with a fearful look in his eyes.

“No, I can handle them on my own. And I have Kees with me. I’ll be OK.”

Joe carefully opened the door to the scullery further, and slid inside. “Wake up, sleepyhead,” Sophie heard him say. Then Joe came through the door with Kees on his shoulder. Kees started to bark and kick enthusiastically when he saw the golden worm. The worm was startled by the noise Kees made. Its head went up in the air, and it beat the kitchen cupboard with its tail. “BANG!” it sounded.

“Silence!” said Joe, and Kees immediately stopped barking. His tail kept wagging enthusiastically though. Joe carefully opened the door to the garden and walked out. Dad wanted to follow him, but Sophie called him back.

“Don’t go away!” she said. She was scared. Joe quickly closed the door. Sophie wanted to open the curtains to see what happened, but Dad stopped her.

“Don’t do that, they will see us!” he said.

Sophie nodded. Her father was right. She tried to peek through a slit in the curtain, but she couldn’t see anything.

Again Sophie and Dad heard footsteps on the stairs, and a little while later a sleepy looking Linda came walking into the room in her dressing gown. “What is happening here?” she asked, while she rubbed the sleep out of her eyes.

“There are two men in the garden. Joe is trying to catch them!” said Sophie.

“And we have a golden worm in the kitchen,” said Sophie’s father.

Linda walked into the kitchen. She started back when she saw the golden worm.

“It won’t go after you,” said Sophie’s father. Linda looked at the worm with big round eyes. She then walked back to Sophie, and tried to look through the small slit in the curtain. Holding their breath, the two girls waited for Joe to come back.

“I hope Joe can really handle those two men,” thought Sophie. “And I hope they won’t hurt Kees!”

Suddenly they heard Joe yell very hard. Sophie couldn’t make out what he was yelling, but it did not sound very friendly. Right after Kees began barking loudly, and Sophie heard more people yelling. The yelling came closer.

“Hey! Calm down or I’ll pinch harder!” Sophie and Linda heard Joe shout. Linda sat down on a chair. She looked around with big eyes full of fear. A little while later Joe called:

“Marten, please open the door!”

Sophie’s father opened the door, and Joe pushed a tall thin man inside. “Hold him for me, will you?” he said. Sophie’s father knew nothing better to do than to grab the man by both his wrists and to pull him further into the room. When the man was out of the doorway, Joe pushed another man inside. Joe kept a strong hold of the man and immediately locked him up in the scullery. He quickly locked the door. In the meantime, the man Sophie’s father held tried to pull himself free, and to kick Sophie’s father against the shins. Sophie saw him try another kick, ran towards him and kicked him hard against his knee.

“Auww!!” yelled the man, and he fell on the floor.

“You hit my father!” Sophie said to him. Her eyes spat fire.

The man looked up at Sophie’s father, who was watching him and Sophie with a grave look on his face. Sophie saw a twinkling in his eye too.

“I’m sorry,” said the man to Sophie’s father. “I was so afraid I didn’t know what I was doing anymore.”

“Then you shouldn’t go and walk around in someone else’s garden,” said Joe. He walked to the telephone. “I’m going to call the police.”

While Joe was calling the police Sophie turned around and walked to the kitchen, where the golden worm still was on the floor, totally curled up. Its head was back on its body, and it just layed there. Sophie looked at the strange face, without eyes but with the enormous orange teeth. The teeth were so large the golden worm couldn’t close its mouth properly. It had thick lips, covered with short hairs that were a bit lighter than the hairs on the rest of its body. Sophie lifted the tuft of hair she still had in her hand in the air, and compared it to the hairs on the golden worm’s body. Indeed, the tuft of hair had come from the golden worm.

Joe had finished his call and came to stand in the kitchen too. “What a beast!” he said. “I have never seen one so big.”

Kees sat next to Joe on the floor and looked intermittently at the golden worm and at his boss. His tail slowly moved back and forth. It looked like he thought: “What on earth am I supposed to do with this?”

The golden worm lifted its head in the air and moaned softly. “It’s totally exhausted,” said Sophie’s father.

“She,” said Linda. “It’s a ‘she.’”

Kees dribbled towards the golden worm and sniffed its soft hairs.

“Come here Kees,” said Joe. “Don’t come too close; who knows what it will do.” Kees went and sat next to his boss. He gazed at the golden worm, which lifted its head and moaned again.

The burglar, whom Joe had put on a chair earlier, came closer now. Nobody thought of telling him to sit down again. Everybody was too fascinated by the golden worm. The worm began to tremble now, and her body began to uncurl slowly. She moved her head from left to right again. BAM! She hit a kitchen

cupboard again. Sophie and Linda jumped back in fright. Linda screamed and didn't dare come closer anymore.

At that moment the doorbell rang. "That will be the police," said Joe. Linda, who found the golden worm very scary by now, ran to the front door, relieved to be away from the beast for a while. She came back with two policemen, who walked into the kitchen and stood there gaping at the golden worm.

"What is happening here!" one of the policemen stuttered, "And what kind of an animal is that!?"

"Is it really an animal?" asked the other policeman. He stretched his arm to touch the golden worm. The worm moaned again and opened its mouth wide. The smell of damp earth filled the kitchen. The policeman pulled his hand back quickly.

"Drat, that beast is real!" he said. "Where does it come from?"

Sophie's father explained what had happened.

"Ah, we already thought we'd recognized someone, haven't we Gerald?" One of the policemen walked towards the burglar and slapped his shoulder jovially. "Were you trying to steal that animal?" he said, while pointing at the golden worm. "That may have been a bit too much of a handful, or not?"

"He really wants to have the young," said Sophie to the policeman. "And he hit my father!"

"Did he do that? That's not good. That is not your style Gerald!"

Gerald looked at his feet and mumbled a bit.

"If I were you I would keep quiet Gerald. You may regret what you say later on," said the policeman.

Suddenly everyone was looking at the golden worm again. She had raised her head high and opened her mouth as far as she could. Her weird, orange teeth pointed outwards. She looked like a monster from a scary movie. A long thread of mucus hung from her mouth and stuck to the kitchen floor. Sophie could hardly believe it was a real animal that was soiling their kitchen. It looked so weird! The golden worm had uncurled her body almost completely now and filled half the kitchen. She sighed deeply and let her head fall slowly back to the floor. After that things suddenly went very quickly. While the two policemen, Joe, Sophie's father, Sophie, Linda, Kees and burglar Gerald were watching, the young golden worms were born one by one. They slipped out of their mother, wriggling, and suddenly the kitchen floor was full with five wet, small, slippery golden worms. They had the same hairs as their mother, only softer and almost white instead of dark yellow.

When all the young were born their mother laid still on the floor. Her head was tilted to one side, and her cheeks had fallen in. "She is dead!" whispered Linda, who stood looking at her from a distance.

"Look there!" pointed Sophie. The young worms, which had dried a bit now, started to move. They slapped their flat tails on the kitchen floor, and slowly crawled towards their mother. Joe nudged Sophie.

"Didn't you have a camera?" he asked.

Sophie was startled. Why hadn't she thought about that? "O, how stupid of me! But if I go and fetch it now I might miss something!" she said.

"I'll go," said Linda, and she ran away. "Bomberdebom!" did her feet on the stairs. After a few moments she came back with both Sophie's and her own cell phone. She gave Sophie her phone and started to take pictures with her own phone.

The young worms had by now reached their mother and started pulling her hair with their long teeth.

“Will they eat their mother now?” one of the policemen asked, confused.

“Only her hairs,” said Gerald.

“Those are the weirdest animals I have ever seen,” sighed the other policeman.

Everybody stared breathlessly at the sight of the young worms pulling the hairs from their mother and eating them. The kitchen filled with a heavy, sweet scent that smelled like honey.

“This is what I did it all for,” said Gerald. “Lovely perfume.” He let his head hang down and stared at the floor.

After the young golden worms had eaten all of their mother’s hair the two girls and five men stood in the kitchen looking at each other. “What should we do with those young golden worms?” Joe asked himself.

“They will soon start jumping and soiling the whole kitchen!” Linda grimaced.

Sophie’s father looked startled. “O yes, I had forgotten about that. We will have to get them in the garden as soon as possible and hope they will dig themselves in. Let’s see, how shall I pick one up...” He mumbled something Sophie couldn’t understand and walked towards one of the golden worms. The young had curled their bodies in spirals and laid quietly on the kitchen floor.

“It looks like they are sleeping,” said Sophie.

“A good moment to grab them,” said Joe.

Sophie’s father grabbed a golden worm tightly just behind its head. It immediately began wriggling and slapping its tail ferociously. “Hoy!” shouted Sophie’s father. He almost lost his balance but could just grab the counter top with his other hand. He grabbed the tail of the golden worm and was now holding the wildly thrashing animal in both hands. “Please open the door for me Sophie!” he said. Sophie quickly opened the door and her father stumbled outside. After a few seconds Joe followed with another golden worm. Sophie and Linda walked into the garden, curious to see what would happen. The sun had come up, and it was not very cold outside. Joe and Sophie’s father dropped the golden worms in the bushes at the edge of the lawn and quickly walked back to fetch another pair of worms. Sophie and Linda stayed behind to watch. The two golden worms crawled back and forth a bit and sniffed up the air with strange sounds. Then they pushed their heads in the mud. Linda had to laugh: both worms now had a black ring around their mouth, as if they had a beard and a moustache! While Joe and Sophie’s father put two other worms on the ground, the first two worms dug themselves in, wriggling their bodies and butting their heads in the ground. Soon there was nothing more to be seen than a big hole in the ground and a few disordered plants. Joe quickly fetched the last golden worm and watched with interest how it bored itself into the ground.

“OK, they’re safe,” he said.

Joe and the girls walked back to the kitchen, where the two policemen were waiting. The other burglar, a big man with a nice suite and an impeccable small black beard, was sitting on a kitchen chair. Sophie saw that his hands were cuffed behind his back. That made her a bit scared, and she quickly sat down on the chair next to her father’s.

“Gerald, Andy, I think it’s time for you to give an explanation,” said one of the policemen.

Gerald sighed. “Yeah well,” he said, “it’s not like we can do anything with those golden worms anymore now.”

One of the policemen took a recorder out of his pocket and pushed a few buttons. The other policeman pulled a small notebook from his breast pocket and started writing.

Gerald told the whole story. How he obtained a glass jar full of hairs at an auction. How he found out that you could make a perfume out of the hairs. And how he found Andy. Andy knew everything there is to know about electronic equipment and soon had the two little plastic boxes made. Together they buried them in the ground in the garden when no-one was in the house.

“But how did you know that the golden worms would come here?” asked Sophie’s father.

“Because the monastery had stood here. Since we couldn’t enter the living room easily Andy had thought of burying the plastic boxes, as you call them, next to some poles in the ground. We could then draw lines from the poles to the point where we thought the golden worm had the most likely chance to get above the ground. We marked the lines with the crosses on the walls. We then had three points, and the software in the computer could then calculate where the vibrations in the ground came from. In that way we could see where the golden worm was.”

“Until you nicked our laptop,” grumbled Andy.

“You can tell that to the judge,” said the policeman with the notebook. “Go on, Gerald.”

Gerald continued his story. He told the policemen how angry Andy had been when Gerald had fled the garden without taking the laptop with him. And how they continued their work with another laptop, although that had become harder now they couldn’t easily enter the garden anymore. And how excited they had been when the golden worm finally appeared on the laptop’s screen.

“But we looked every day and we didn’t see anything!” said Linda.

Andy smiled a mean little smile. “Then you should have looked better girlie,” he said. “We saw it clearly.”

“OK, and then you went sitting and waiting in the garden and you were captured by a small man and a small doggie,” the policeman with the notebook said.

“It’s a mean little monster,” growled Andy. He shot an angry glance at Kees, who was lying in a corner, sleeping. Joe smiled but didn’t say anything.

“I think this will suffice for a first explanation,” the policeman with the recorder said.

“Gone is my perfume factory. Do you know how much this all has cost?” asked Gerald.

“No. But we will take you to the police station now. The girls look really tired. Mr. Vermeer, our colleagues will visit you around eleven o’clock to report the offence, if that’s all right with you. We would like to hear your story too.”

Sophie’s father looked at his watch. “That’s OK, then we can still sleep in a bit.” He pointed to the little golden worms’ mother, who was still lying in the kitchen.

“What should I do with that?” he asked.

“O, wait, I’ll arrange something,” said one of the policemen. He picked up his telephone and called someone. Ten minutes later a big truck stopped in front of the house. The two policemen and two big strong men that came out of the truck picked up the golden worm and put it in the back of the truck. Sophie’s father signed a piece of paper and off the two men went.

“What will they do with her?” asked Linda.

“They will... bury it!” said Sophie’s father.

“No,” said the policeman who had arranged for the truck. “They will bring it to the police station as evidence. We will ask an expert to examine it, and maybe it will be brought to the University later for research. We can also use it in a press conference about this case. It doesn’t happen every day that a golden worm is found.”

“I had never seen one before,” said Sophie’s father. Sophie and Linda nodded in agreement.

The two policemen said goodbye and took Gerald and Andy with them to the police station. Sophie walked around the garden for a bit. The weather was nice and it started to become warm already. She walked to the place where the golden worms had dug themselves into the ground and examined the big holes the animals had left.

“We haven’t checked if there were any females,” she said.

“And how do you think you would have done that?” asked Joe. “They all looked the same to me.”

Sophie also didn’t know how to spot the difference between male and female golden worms. “Oh well,” she said, “they’re gone now anyway.” She went to the terrace and sat on a chair with her face in the sun. She closed her eyes. Now she felt how tired she was. She listened to Joe and her father, who were talking to each other. Soon she drifted off to sleep.

She woke up in her bed in the guest room. Linda layed next to her, looking at her. “What?” asked Sophie. She yawned and stretched her body. “What are you looking at?”

“Hey, you can sleep girl! I have been sitting here waiting for you to wake up for an hour!” said Linda.

Sophie sat up and rubbed the sleep from her eyes. “What time is it?”

“It’s ten o’clock already! You have been snoring for almost four hours Sophie. The policemen will be here soon to report the offence, and we must also be there, according to your father.”

Slowly, Sophie crawled out of bed. “Well, I guess I will take a shower,” she said.

An hour later, there were again two policemen at the front door. Sophie’s father welcomed them in, and a while later the two girls were telling the policemen everything they had experienced in the past weeks. They showed them the crosses on the walls, the poles and the little plastic boxes. They gave them the laptop Linda had found lying in the grass. They also showed them all the pictures they took of the golden worms. The policemen were very interested in them, and Sophie’s father burned all the pictures on a DVD and gave it to the policemen. When nobody knew anything to tell anymore the policemen left.

“Pfew, what an adventure!” sighed Linda. She lied back in her chair and closed her eyes.

“You could say that,” said Sophie’s father. “But you have behaved yourselves very bravely, I must say. Without you, it might not have turned out so well!”

The two girls beamed with pride. Sophie’s father bent over to Sophie and whispered in her ear: “I was secretly very proud of you when you kicked that man!”

Sophie had to laugh. She wrapped her arms around her father’s neck and whispered back: “I’m proud of you too!” She kissed him on his ear. “Not on your cheek; that hurts,” she whispered.

“Hey, that tickles!” said her father. “But ladies, I have a serious issue to discuss with you.”

Sophie and Linda looked at him with wide open eyes. They wondered what was wrong.

“Thanks to all this business with the golden worms I haven’t been able to shop for groceries yesterday. And I have nothing to eat for tonight...”

Sophie smiled broadly. “Chinese!” she yelled. Linda joined her:

“Chinese! Chinese! Chinese!”

Sophie’s father put his fingers in his ears and smiled. “First, however, we have to clean the kitchen!” he shouted.