

# Blossom Lane



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Tom was feeling happy. Fleur – his friend who lived on Blue Island – had at last come to see him in Merlin City. She had arrived just yesterday morning. Today the weather was grey and chilly. There was none of the warm sunshine she was used to at home!

“I never imagined your town was like this” said Fleur. “It’s so smelly!” She had tied an orange handkerchief around her face because she didn’t like the traffic fumes.

Tom frowned.

“I’m sorry”, he said. “This part of town is called Hassle Street. There are always lots of cars here...”



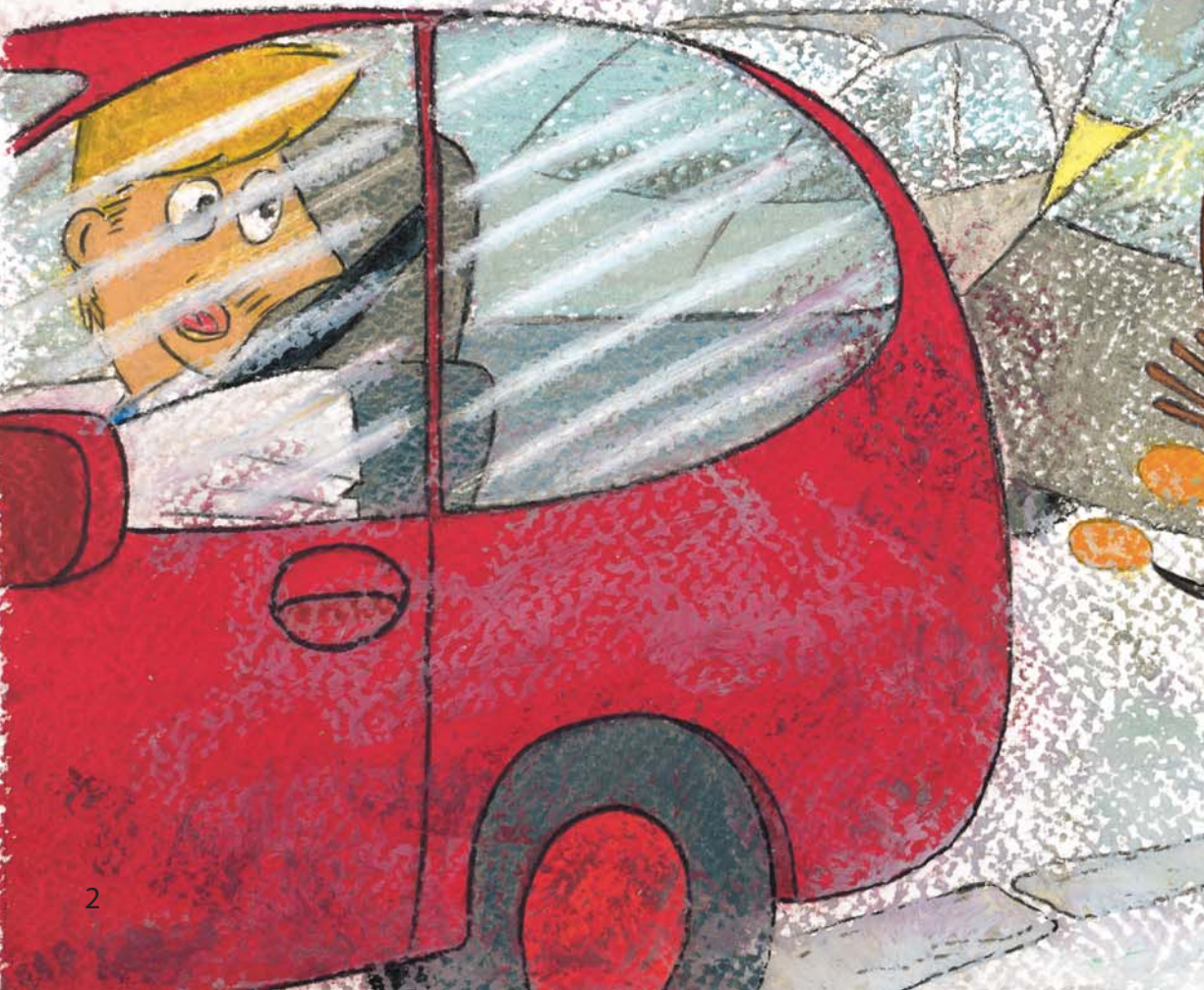


In the middle of Hassle Street there was a huge traffic jam. Drivers were getting in each other's way and hooting impatiently. Toot tooooo! Beep beeeep! Honk honk honk! Fleur put her hands over her ears. She had never heard such a racket! Then she noticed there was a park on the opposite side of the street and standing just behind the railings was Lila the fox.

"Look, Tom! There's Lila with her cubs! Let's go and see them!" said Fleur, and she began to cross the street.

Tom grabbed her hand.

"Stop!" he said. "It's dangerous to cross here. We must use the pedestrian crossing!"





Just at that moment, there was a loud screech of tyres and a red sports car pulled out of the queue. It was Mr. Race, the most impatient driver of all. He was trying to pass everyone else by driving along the pavement! The car's wing hit Fleur's arm and the wing mirror tore her sleeve. Fleur was knocked off her feet and fell to the pavement with a bump.





Tom could see that Fleur was injured. Her shoulder was bleeding, making a red stain on her white dress. She lay there, with her eyes closed. Mr. Race got out of his car. He looked very worried.

"Oh, what have I done!" he said. "Shall I call an ambulance?"

"It wouldn't get through the traffic" said Tom. He bent down and stroked Fleur's cheek. She opened her eyes.

"It's all right", said Tom. "I'll get help".

Lila and her cubs came running up.

"Lila" said Tom, "go and find Mrs. Davies, the nurse at the medical centre. It's just across the park. I'll fetch our friend Mr. Dixon from the police station on the corner".





Mr. Race had his head in his hands. He kept saying  
"What have I done? What have I done?"

Fleur tried to get up, but Tom stopped her.

"Best not to move", he said. "Just stay there".


The four fox cubs nuzzled Fleur's head, as if they  
wanted to make themselves into a soft pillow for  
her. Tom squeezed Fleur's hand. "Don't worry",  
he said, "the nurse is coming".











Meanwhile, the traffic jam in Hassle Street was getting worse and the cars kept on hooting. Some drivers had opened their windows and were shouting at each other.

“Hey, what’s going on?” “Get out of my way!” “I’m going to be late!” Mr. Race just stood there repeating “What have I done? Oh, what have I done?”

It was all completely useless and it made Tom angry.


“Fleur”, he said, “I can’t leave you here on your own. Someone must go to the police station for me!”

Straight away, Goldy, the biggest of Lila’s cubs, jumped up and licked Tom’s hand.

“I understand!” said Tom, with a smile. “You want to fetch Mr. Dixon? Right then, off you go!” Goldy set off as fast as his legs could carry him.

Fleur made a little moaning noise.

“Does it hurt very much?” asked Tom anxiously.



Fleur put on a brave face and shook her head. But Tom could see that the red stain on her dress was spreading. He folded Fleur’s handkerchief and held it firmly against the wound in her shoulder.



It wasn't long before Mr. Dixon the policeman arrived, with Goldy trotting along by his side.

"Now then, what's all this?" he asked – and Tom explained. Mr. Dixon said he would talk to Mr. Race after sorting out the traffic jam.

One of the drivers was revving his engine. Vroom! Vroom! Vrooom! Mr. Dixon went over to him and said:

"Calm down sir! Revving your engine won't help. It will just cause more air pollution and make the climate heat up even faster. I'm sure you wouldn't want to make a bad problem even worse..."

Then he started clearing the jam by directing the traffic.





Mr. Race was sitting in his car, still shaking his head and saying "What have I done? Oh, what have I done?!" It was getting on Tom's nerves. He called out to Mr. Race:

"Instead of sitting there moaning, why don't you go and explain to those drivers that air pollution is making our planet heat up!"





"You're right," said Mr. Race. "I need to do something useful".

He went over to a blue car which was also going vroom vroom vrooom. The driver was Lucy's mum, and Lucy was in the car with her.

"Look here", said Mr. Race, "Do you realize that every time you rev your engine like that you're just creating more exhaust fumes and making global warming worse? It's no good being impatient!"





Tom couldn't help smiling at that. Then Lucy got out of the car, carrying her cello. She was very cross.

"Well I'm going to walk to my music lesson!" she said. It's quicker anyway, and better for the environment. What's the point of driving somewhere if you can walk there?"

The cars behind her started hooting again. Lucy turned and shouted at them:

"What are you hooting at? The traffic? But you're the traffic! You're hooting at yourselves, you bunch of dodos!"





Carrying her cello, Lucy began walking towards the music school. Her mum called out to her:

“Come back, Lucy! Get into the car!”

“No!” answered Lucy. “That’s the last time I’m going to the music school by car! It’s not far from our house and, anyway, all my friends walk there. It’s more fun: we can chat on the way. Besides, walking is good for you!”

So Lucy walked on, with a very determined look on her face.







Just then, Lila came back with Mrs Davies, the nurse – and who should be with them but the Mayor of Merlin City! Mrs. Davies knelt down next to Fleur and gently unbuttoned the torn and stained dress. The Mayor looked on anxiously and Fleur held Tom’s hand very tightly.





Mrs. Davies smiled.

"It's not a deep cut, my pet. I'll disinfect it and put on a bandage, and in a few days you'll be as right as rain".

"Phew!" said the Mayor. "That's a relief! Miss Fleur, I am truly sorry you've had such a bad experience on your first visit to our city".

Tom stood up and looked across to where Mr. Dixon was still trying to sort out the traffic jam.

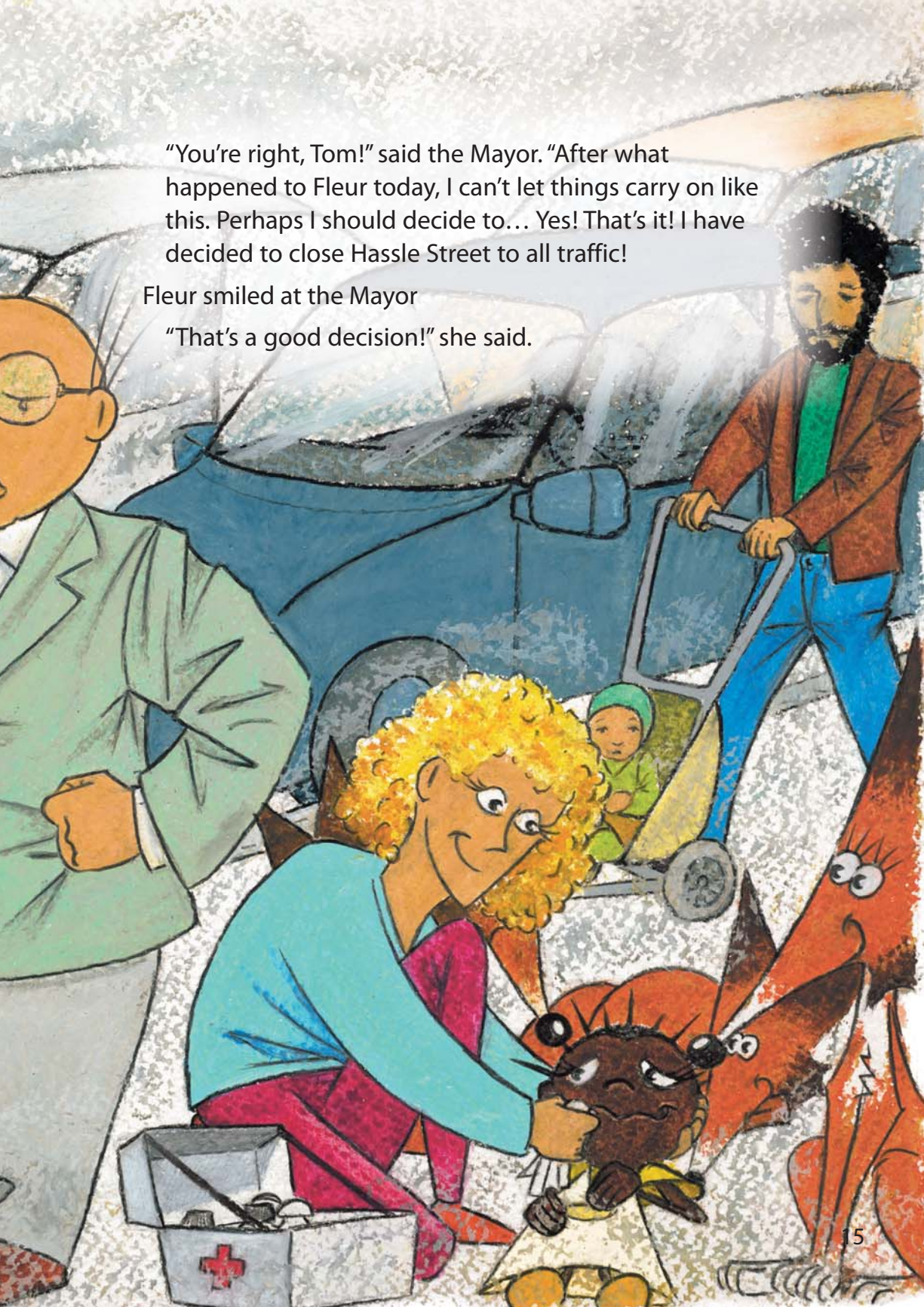
"We've got to do something about Hassle Street, Mr. Mayor," said Tom. "It's much too noisy, too dangerous, too polluted, too..."



"You're right, Tom!" said the Mayor. "After what happened to Fleur today, I can't let things carry on like this. Perhaps I should decide to... Yes! That's it! I have decided to close Hassle Street to all traffic!"

Fleur smiled at the Mayor

"That's a good decision!" she said.





The Mayor wasted no time in keeping his promise and within a short time Hassle Street was completely transformed. One fine day the Mayor invited everyone to a special opening ceremony and he stood up to make a speech.

"My fellow citizens," he said: "Today I have the pleasure of inaugurating a new pedestrian precinct in Merlin City". (The Mayor liked using long words!) "Of course, we all need cars and other road vehicles. But we also need quiet, safe, traffic-free places where the air is clean and where we can shop and meet our friends without any... hassle. Places like this!"

"So today I want to thank two people..."



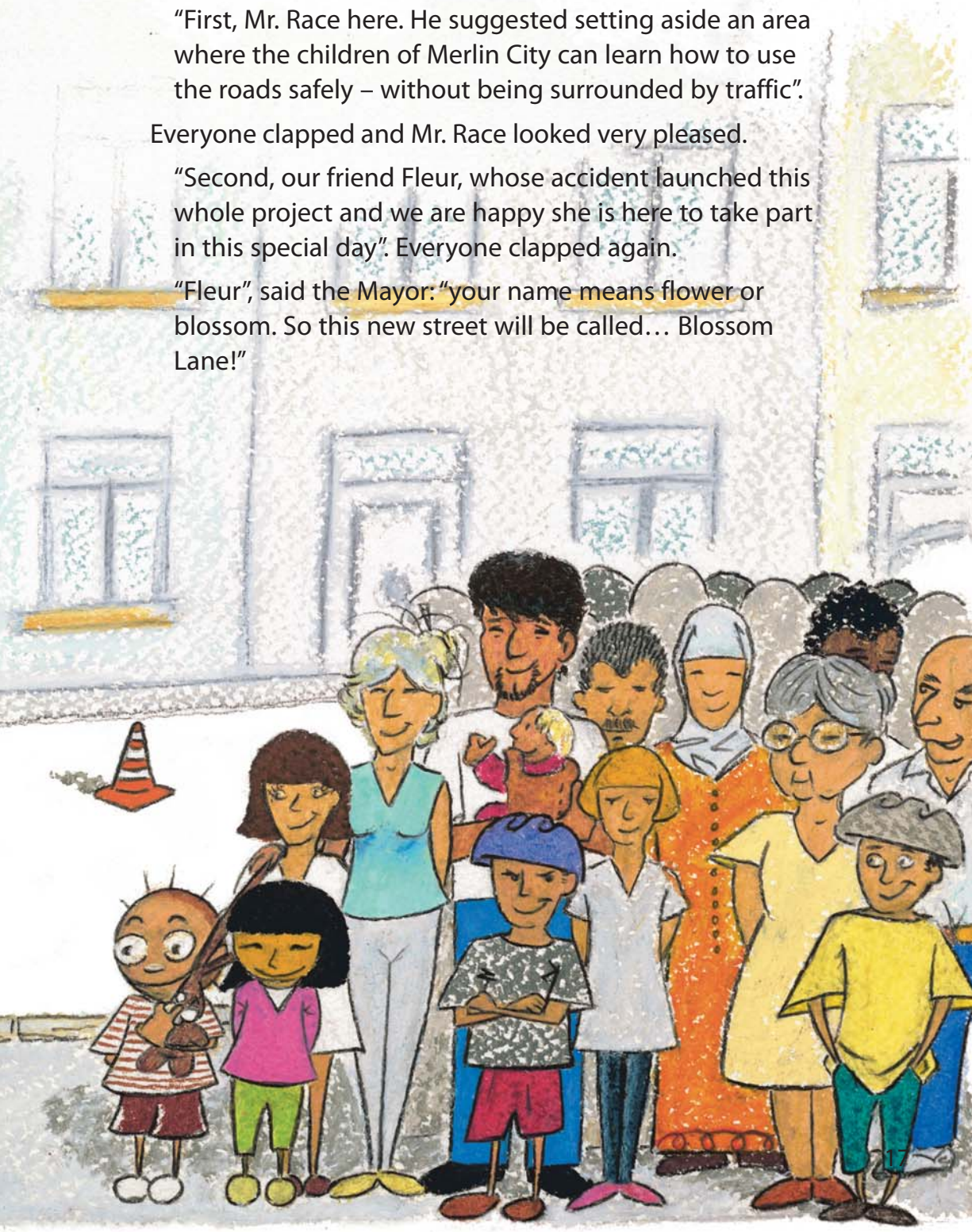


"First, Mr. Race here. He suggested setting aside an area where the children of Merlin City can learn how to use the roads safely – without being surrounded by traffic".

Everyone clapped and Mr. Race looked very pleased.

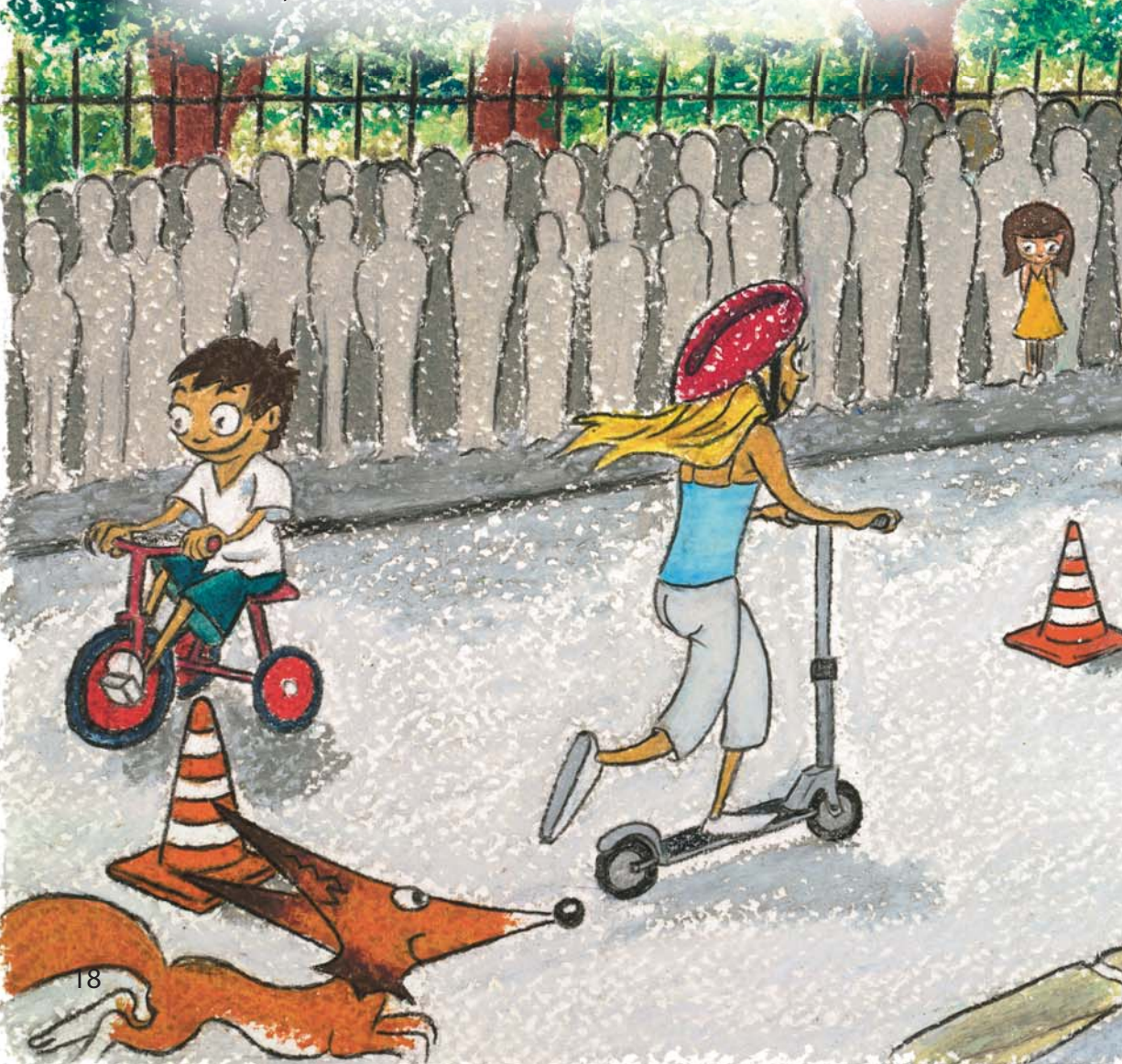
"Second, our friend Fleur, whose accident launched this whole project and we are happy she is here to take part in this special day". Everyone clapped again.

"Fleur", said the Mayor: "your name means flower or blossom. So this new street will be called... Blossom Lane!"





The people clapped and cheered loudly. Then the Mayor asked everyone to be quiet and listen. A sweet, soft sound began. The sound of a lovely tune played on a cello. It was Lucy! How beautifully she played! What a great idea to ask her to perform at the opening ceremony! Nearby, some children were already practising riding their bikes and tricycles and scooters around the road safety circuit. And who do you think was watching them with a big smile? Mr. Race, of course.

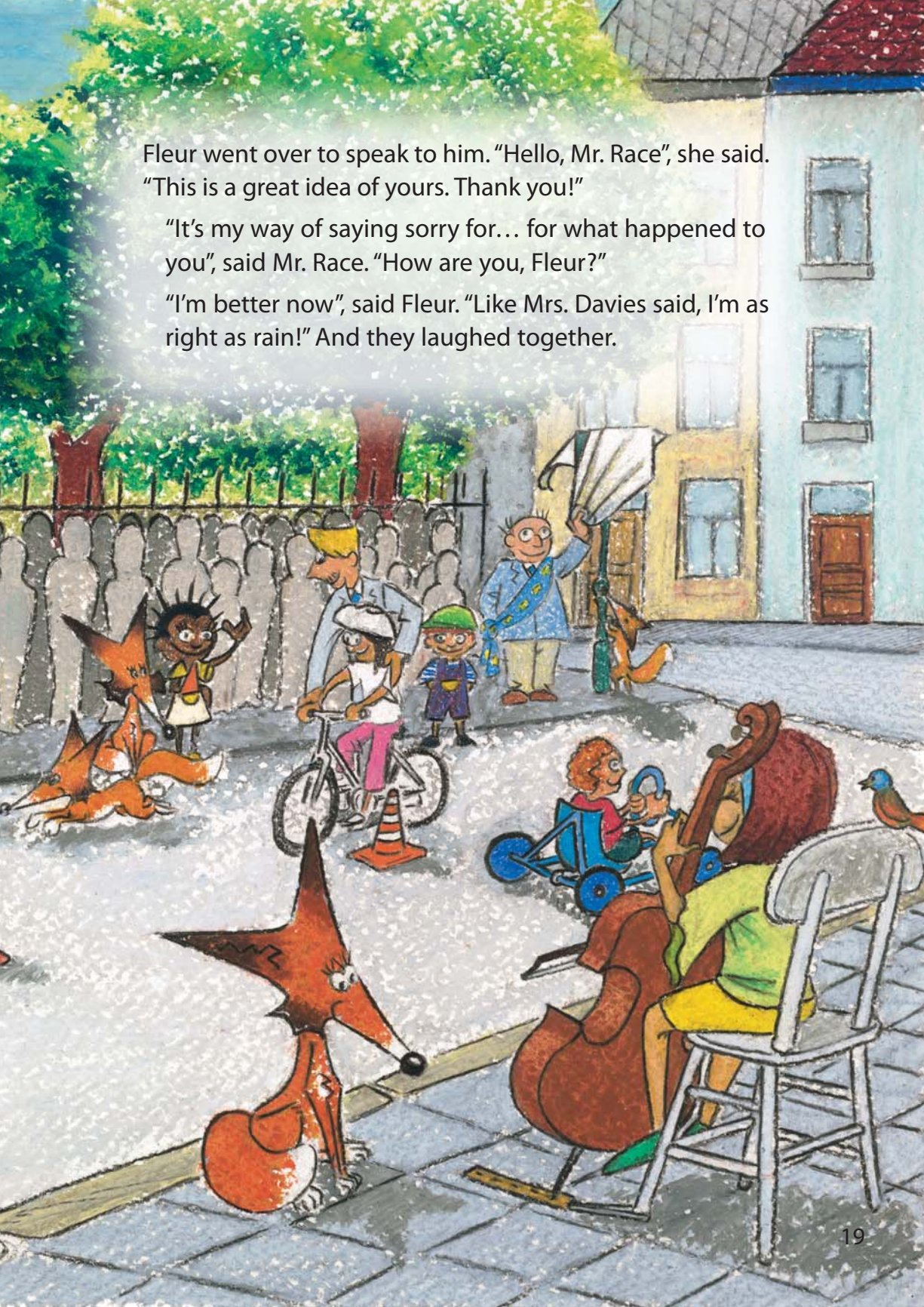




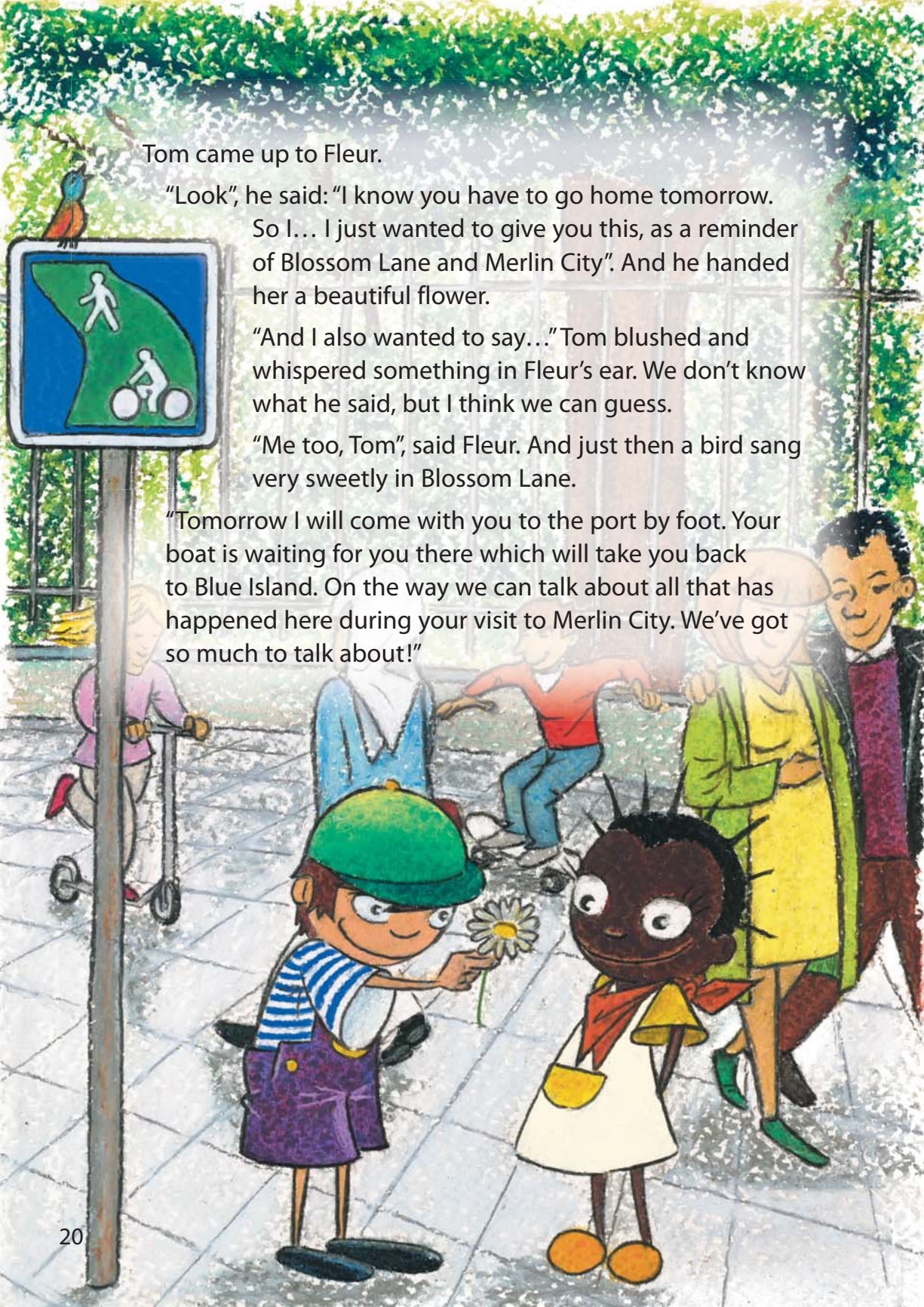
Fleur went over to speak to him. "Hello, Mr. Race", she said. "This is a great idea of yours. Thank you!"

"It's my way of saying sorry for... for what happened to you", said Mr. Race. "How are you, Fleur?"

"I'm better now", said Fleur. "Like Mrs. Davies said, I'm as right as rain!" And they laughed together.







Tom came up to Fleur.

"Look", he said: "I know you have to go home tomorrow. So I... I just wanted to give you this, as a reminder of Blossom Lane and Merlin City". And he handed her a beautiful flower.

"And I also wanted to say..." Tom blushed and whispered something in Fleur's ear. We don't know what he said, but I think we can guess.

"Me too, Tom", said Fleur. And just then a bird sang very sweetly in Blossom Lane.

"Tomorrow I will come with you to the port by foot. Your boat is waiting for you there which will take you back to Blue Island. On the way we can talk about all that has happened here during your visit to Merlin City. We've got so much to talk about!"



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