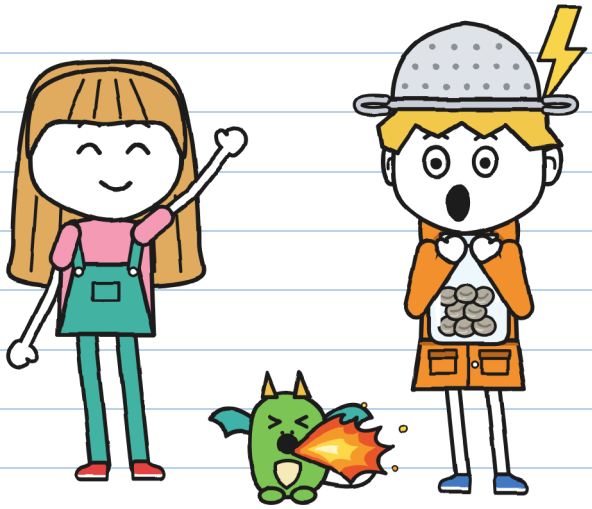
IMPOSSIBLE DELIVERIES · 2

Do Not Open Before Thunder

Lui Eriksson



(Gus's notebook)

SIZE L
Advanced level · 11+

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Do Not Open Before Thunder

Text and illustrations: Lui Eriksson

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US English version: LinguAula

First edition: 2026

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Free to photocopy, for class and for home.

Second book in the series. The first: "This Package Bites."

LinguAula

Work through every chapter at linguaula.com

No thunder was harmed in the writing of this book. —J.



And nobody else. —J.

If you find it, don't open it before thunder.



This stamp marks what only happens in the story: don't you do it. If it lasts several pages, it says FROM HERE and TO HERE. In a real storm, page 76 is in charge. —J.

WHO'S WHO



Gus. Saturday courier. Storm chaser (more or less). This notebook is his.



Julie. Counts the seconds between the lightning and the thunder. Writes in green and signs J.



Crumb. Dragon hatchling. Copies everything Gus does. Everything.



Tony. Rides for LIGHTNING. Ten minutes or it's free.



Flora. The gardener at 9 Canal Street. Doesn't sign for stones.



Vera. Looks after dragons at the Dragon House, next door to Flora's. Crumb lives with her.



Mara. Owner of Impossible Deliveries. Wears a witch's hat. Knows more than she says.

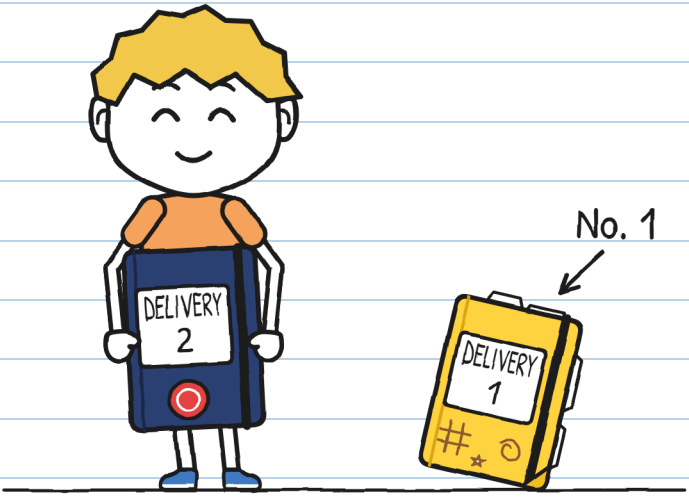


R. Sends the packages nobody can deliver. Nobody says R.'s name.

DELIVERY NOTEBOOK 2
by Gus

OFFICIAL.

"Official" means I read it first. Officially. –J.



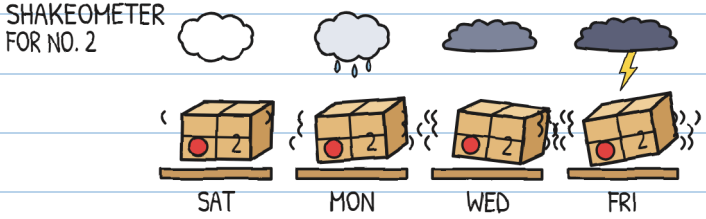
Notebook 1 has run out: it's full. Mara, who owns the shop, gave me this one, with the shop's stamp on the cover. She says official notebooks aren't for doodling in. We'll see.

CHAPTER 1

Storm Chaser

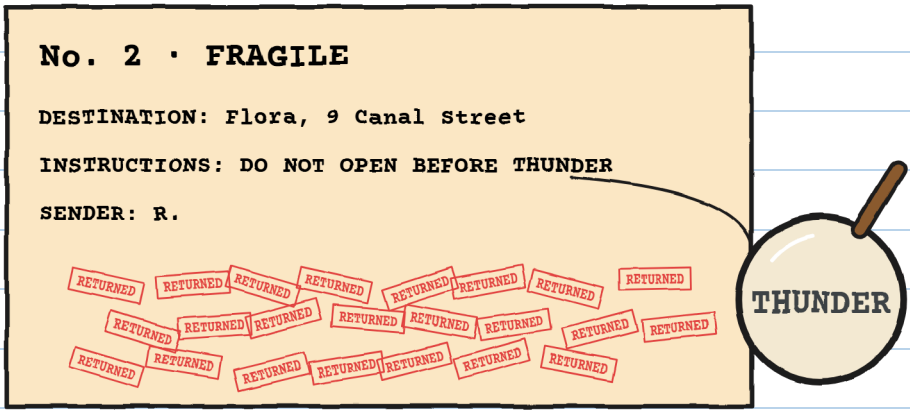
In Mara's shop there's a package that shakes. It has been at it since last Saturday, a little more every day. I have decided not to touch it.
The last one Julie and I delivered was an egg; now it's a hatchling called Crumb who copies everything I do.

In the shop across the street from my house, nineteen returns are left. And one of them seems to have gotten tired of waiting.



It isn't shaking with fear: it's shaking because a storm is coming. On Saturday, at six in the evening. I've checked the forecast six times. —J.

The returns are packages that always come back: unless whoever receives them signs the label in ink that doesn't come off (like Julie's green marker), they fly back to their shelf at dawn. One person sends them all: R.



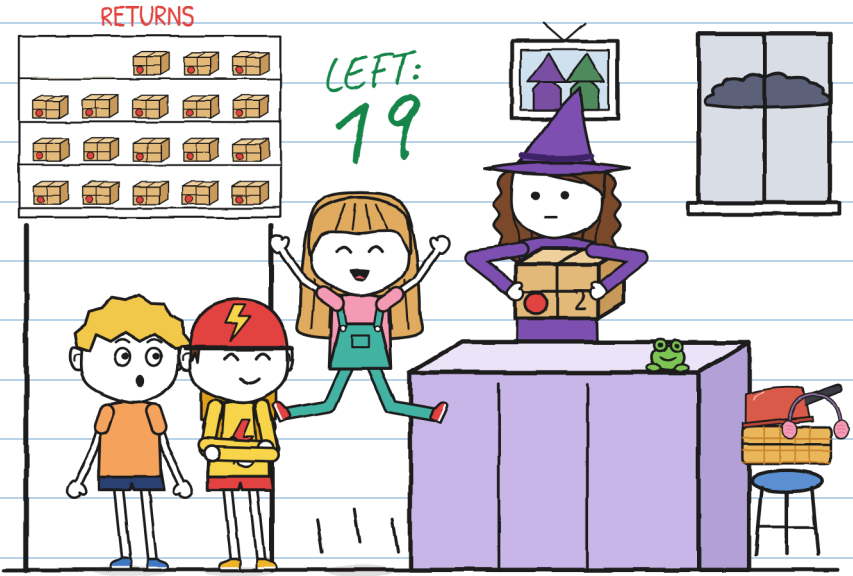
No. 2 had twenty-three RETURNED stamps on it.

Twenty-three. I counted them twice. —J.

"I've taken it myself twenty-three times," said Mara. "Not once in a storm."

On Saturday, at ten, Mara was waiting for us at the counter with No. 2 in her hands. Tony was there too: on Saturdays the three of us are stuck in the shop serving our punishment for delivering No. 1 without permission.

"This one," said Mara, "you three will deliver. This afternoon."

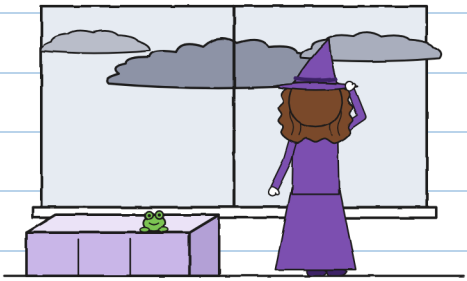


Julie jumped so high that she almost touched the sign that said LEFT: 19.

Mara laid down three conditions, counting them off on her fingers:

1. You leave at five, before the storm arrives, and you stay at Flora's until it has passed.
2. Your families already know, and so does Flora.
3. The rule is the one on the label: it doesn't open before thunder. And it has to be the thunder overhead: faraway ones don't count.

"Aren't you coming?" asked Julie.
"I have things to do here," said Mara, and looked through the shop window at the sky, which was turning gray.



What things? –J.

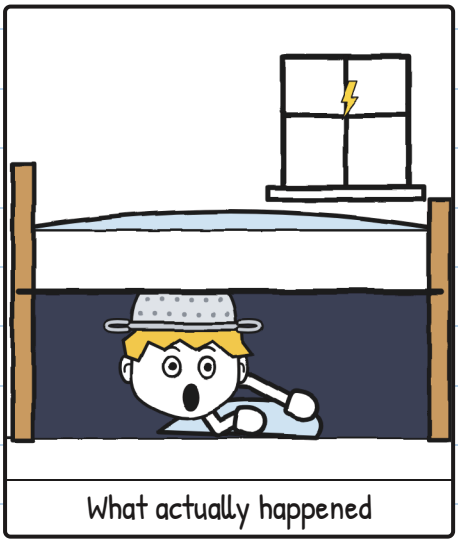
Then Julie looked at me.
"Do you like storms?"

And I said what you say when someone looks at you like that:

"I love them. In my old neighborhood I was a professional storm chaser."



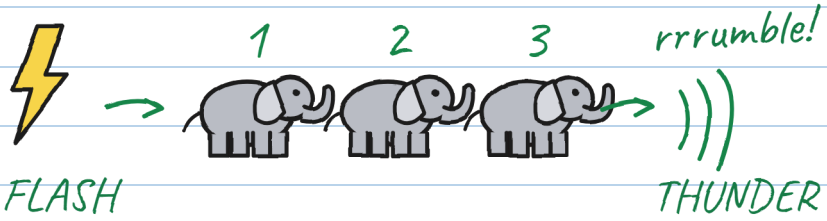
What I said



What actually happened

Professional. From under the bed. —J.

Julie taught me how to count a storm. In my notebook, without asking, as usual:



one elephant, two elephants, three elephants...

1 elephant = 1 second

3 elephants = 1 kilometer (more or less)

0 elephants = OVERHEAD!

↖ That's the thunder on the label.
The faraway ones don't open the package.

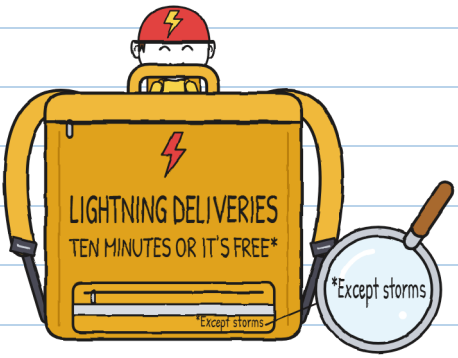
More elephants: that lightning struck farther away.

If you hear thunder, even far away: take cover!

What you know scares you less. —J.

I didn't need to count anything, because I love storms. But I wrote it down anyway, just in case.

Tony read the label over my shoulder and showed us the fine print on his backpack.
"LIGHTNING doesn't deliver in storms."
"There isn't a storm yet," Julie pointed out.
Tony went over the fine print again. It said nothing about "yet." And he came with us.

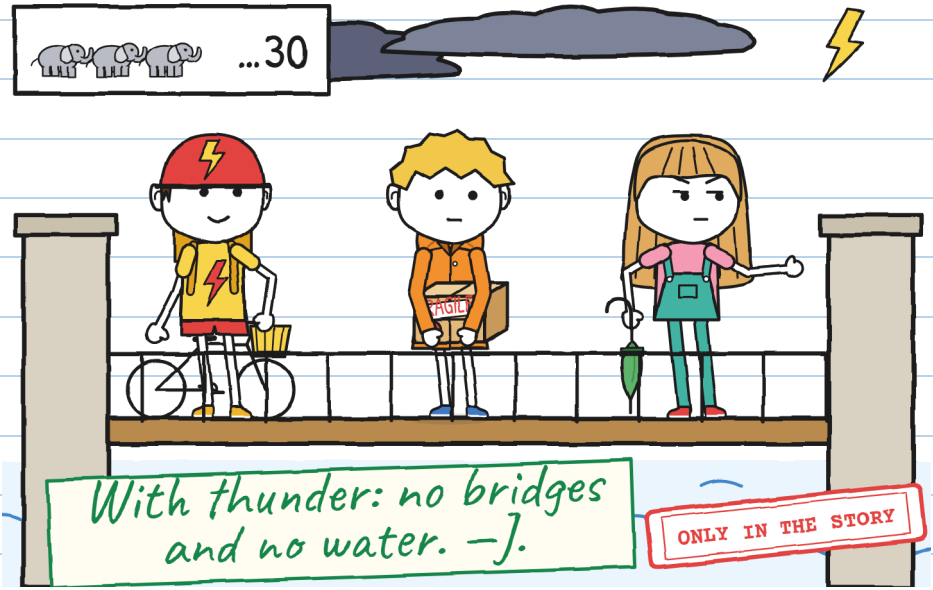


Fine print, big excuse. —J.

At five I popped over to my house for my raincoat.
"Wear the orange one," said Mom from the door. "Sure you want to go? You, when it thunders..."
"BYE, MOM!"

"You, when it thunders..." WHAT? —J.

We crossed the Big Bridge, which they raise at night so the boats can pass, under a sky growing blacker by the minute. Halfway over, Julie waved solemnly at the water: she and the canal don't get along.



Far away, the sky lit up. Julie counted thirty elephants before she heard anything.

Rrrumble.

"That lightning struck about ten kilometers away," she said. "The forecast says the storm arrives at six."

"That was thunder!" said Tony. "Can we open it now?"

"That one doesn't open the package," said Julie. "The one on the label is the one that sounds at the same time as the flash: zero elephants. But you can hear it now, and that's enough: take cover!"
We ran all the way to Canal Street. I pretended I hadn't heard any thunder.

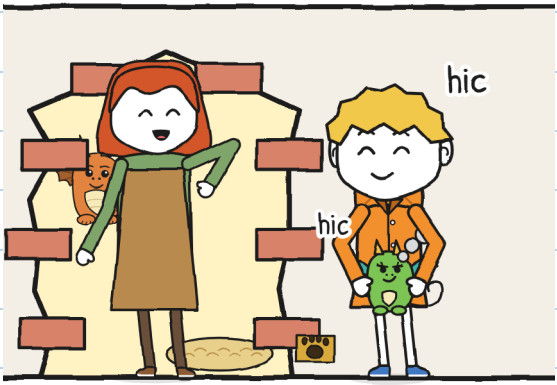
"Was that a hiccup?" asked Julie.
"No," I said. "Hic!"



It's happened since I was little, but only with thunder: every clap sets off hiccups, one every three seconds, and with the storm overhead I can't stop. It isn't fear. My body does it without consulting me.

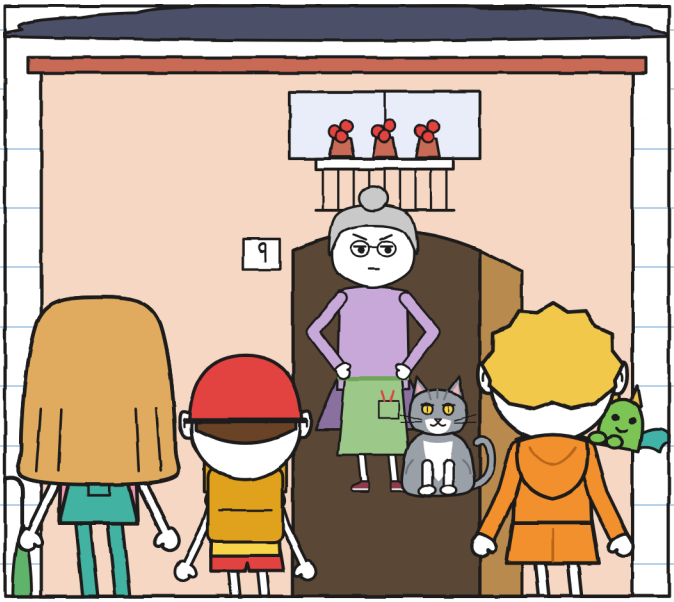
It's called being scared. —J.

Vera was already waiting at the door of the Dragon House, right next to Flora's, with Crumb in her arms: on Saturdays, Crumb goes for a walk with me.
"Only as far as Flora's: it's her first storm," said Vera, and handed her over into my arms. "She copies everything you do, Gus. Everything you feel, too. If she gets scared, don't pull her: she holds on. When the storm has passed, three knocks on the yard wall and I'll come and get her."
"I don't feel anything," I said. "I love storms."



Far off, it thundered. I hiccuped. Crumb hiccuped, and smoke came out of her nose.
"Inside, now," said Vera.

Flora's house is the one with the geraniums: the balcony where a lady watched us two Saturdays ago, when we were looking for the door of the Dragon House. That door looks like a wall.



Flora opened the door before we could knock. She looked at the box. She looked at the sky. She looked at Crumb.

"Vera's hatchling. Don't let her scorch my ferns," she said. "Come in, rain's coming. But I'm warning you: I don't sign for stones."

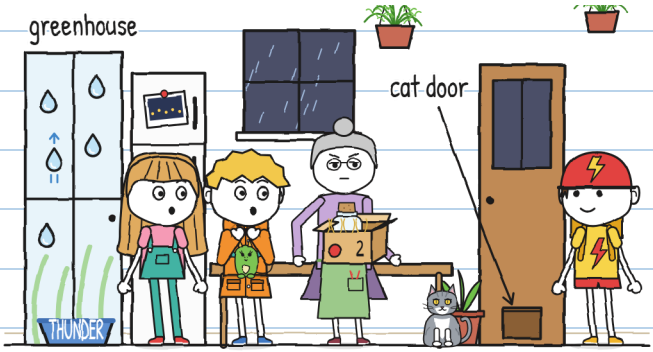
CHAPTER 2

Thunder!

Flora's kitchen is full of plants: on the table, on the floor, hanging from the ceiling. At the far end, a glass door leads into a greenhouse, and the back door, with its cat door, to the yard. Tony put his bike in the hallway, out of the rain.

On the greenhouse glass there were painted raindrops. One crept up to the frame. The next overtook it.

"R.'s enchanted glass," said Flora. "It lets the rain through when I want. Lightning, never."

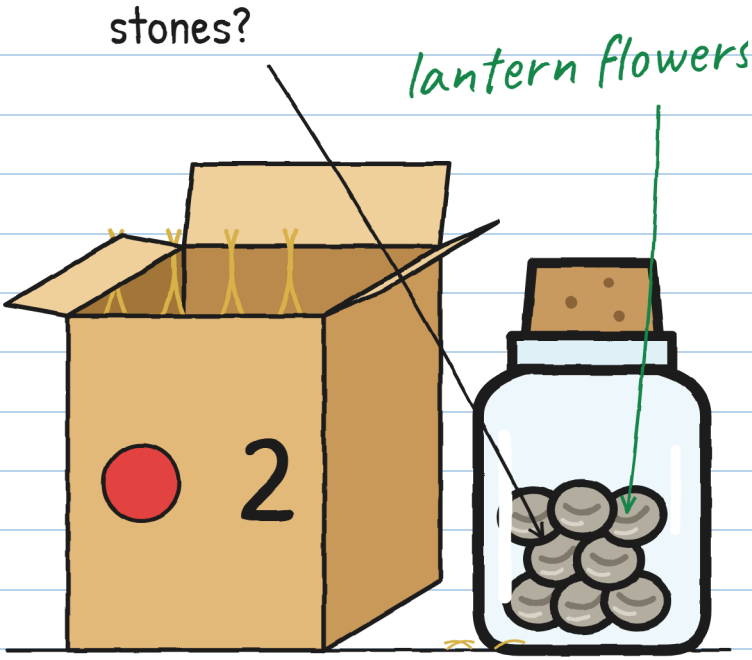


I looked at the box. So R. could deliver some things.

Flora put the box on the table and opened it without asking. Inside, nestled in straw, was a glass jar with eight little gray balls in it.

"It says not to open it before thunder!" shouted Julie.

"I've opened the box, not the jar," said Flora. "I already know what's inside: R. promised me lantern flowers, and sends me stones."



"What's a lantern flower?" I asked.

Flora peeled an old photo off the fridge: the canal path at night, with a row of tiny lights along the bank.



"They're plants that store up the light of lightning," said Flora. "At night, they give it back."
"And R. planted them?"
"R. brought the seeds already awake; I supplied the soil. I never saw one asleep."
"And the lantern flowers?"
"They went out, one by one. R. stopped coming. Now R. sends this."

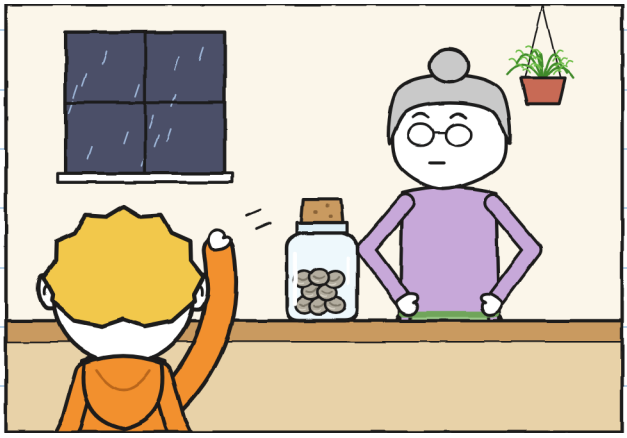
That's why the canal is so dark at night. That's why the footbridge, that plank across it, is so scary.

Was. Very, for me: I crossed it in the dark. —J.

"R. always delivers," said Flora. "Late, but delivers. Not this time: twenty-three times they've brought me this jar, and twenty-three times, stones."

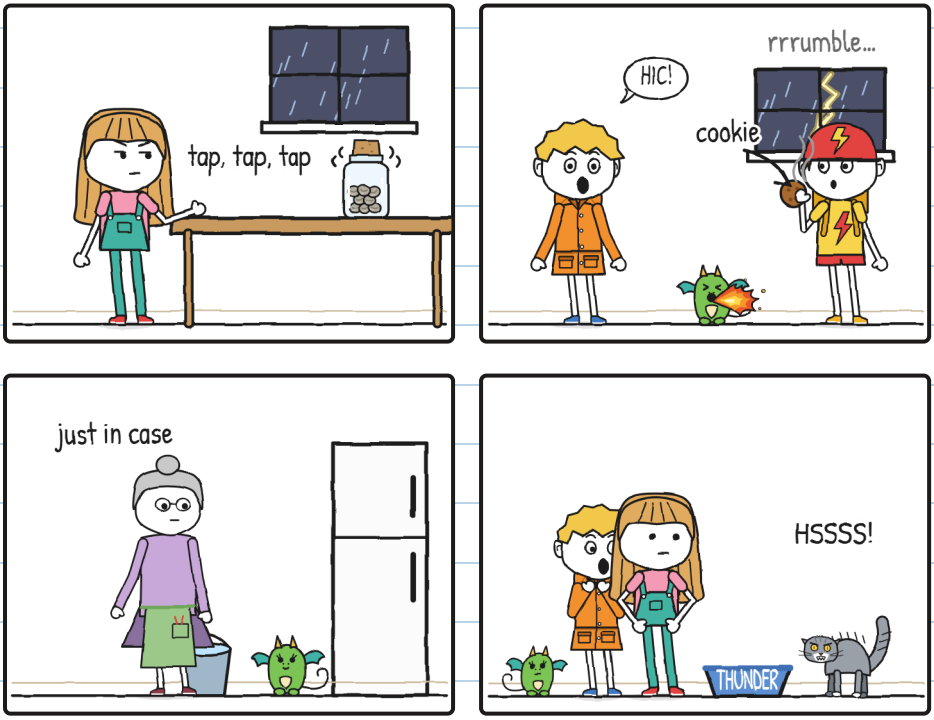
I thought about the label. I knew it by heart, instructions included.
"And did you ever wait for the thunder before opening it?" I asked.

Flora looked at me as if I had asked her whether water was wet.
"I don't wait for anybody," she said. "Not even for thunder."



Flora's cat is called Thunder: his name is written on his bowl. He is gray as a cloud and purrs like real thunder.

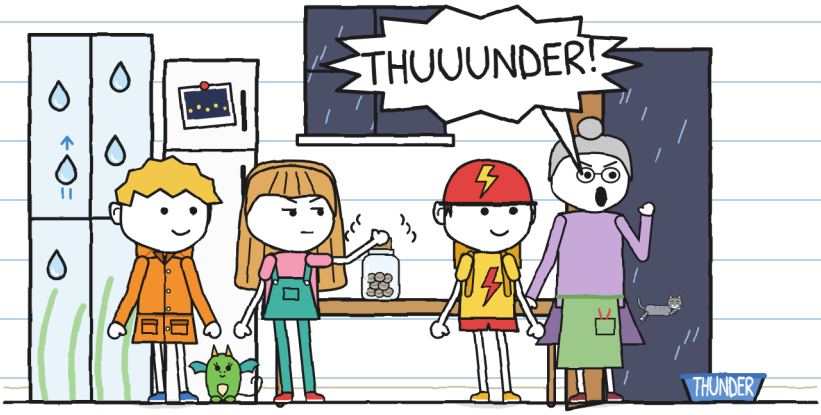
While we waited for the storm, everything happened in the kitchen and nothing happened:



The worst thing about thunder is waiting for it. –].

The jar tinkled on the table, louder and louder. Julie counted under her breath: "Twelve elephants." "Nine." Under the table, her foot was keeping a count of its own.

"You're going to wear a hole in the floor," I said.
"I'm counting."
"Well, tell your foot. It's ahead of you."
Then Crumb made another little flame, and Thunder shot out through the cat door into the yard. Flora opened the back door and yelled for him from the doorstep:
"THUUUNDER!"



And Julie opened the jar.



"That was thunder!" she said.

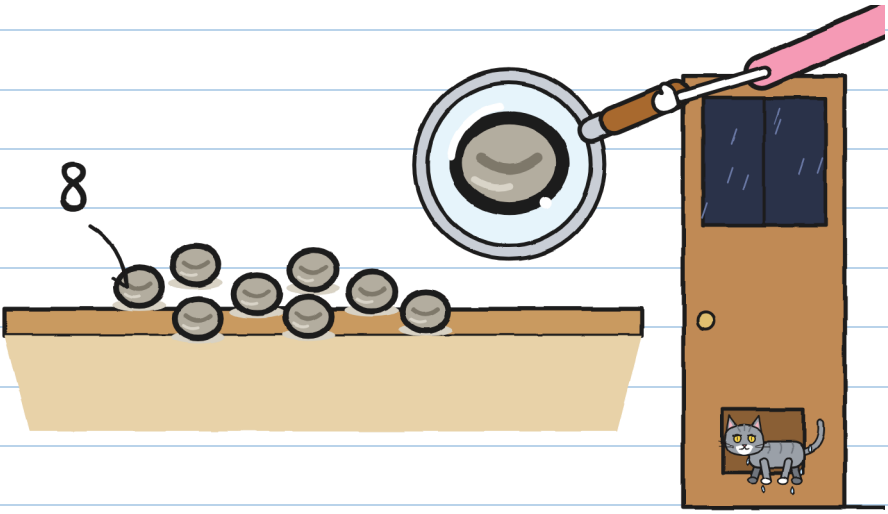
It hadn't thundered. Flora had shouted. Thunder is the cat.

I heard "THUNDER!"—which was exactly what I was waiting for. Nobody told me it was a cat. —J.

I wrote it on page 17.

I read that page later. —J.

Once it was open, the jar stopped tinkling. Inside were only eight little gray balls, cold and still. Julie tipped them onto the table to look at them with her magnifying glass.
"They have a little line," she said. "Like a closed eye."



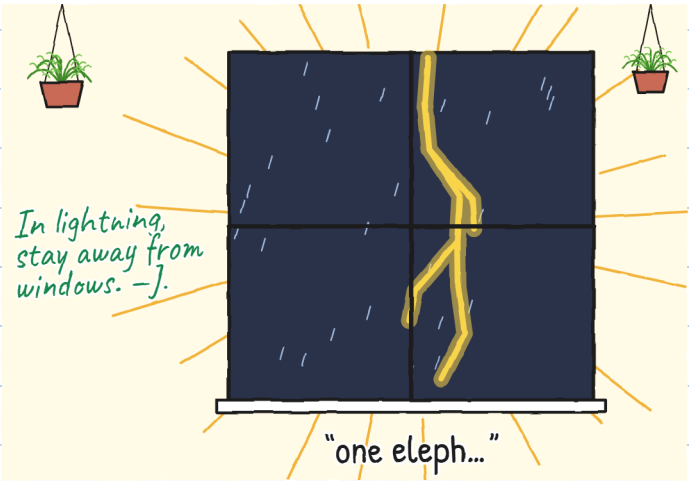
Thunder came back on his own through the cat door, soaked, and Flora shut the door.
"Stones. As always," she said, and looked at Julie.

Julie turned the color of her T-shirt.

"They're asleep," I said. "They're not stones: they're seeds. That's why it says 'Do not open before thunder.' Maybe a thunderclap will wake them. A really big one, the kind that rattles the windows."

Flora said nothing for a moment. Then she said:
"If they're seeds, let them prove it."

Outside it was almost night already, though it was only six.
Flash. Julie began to count:

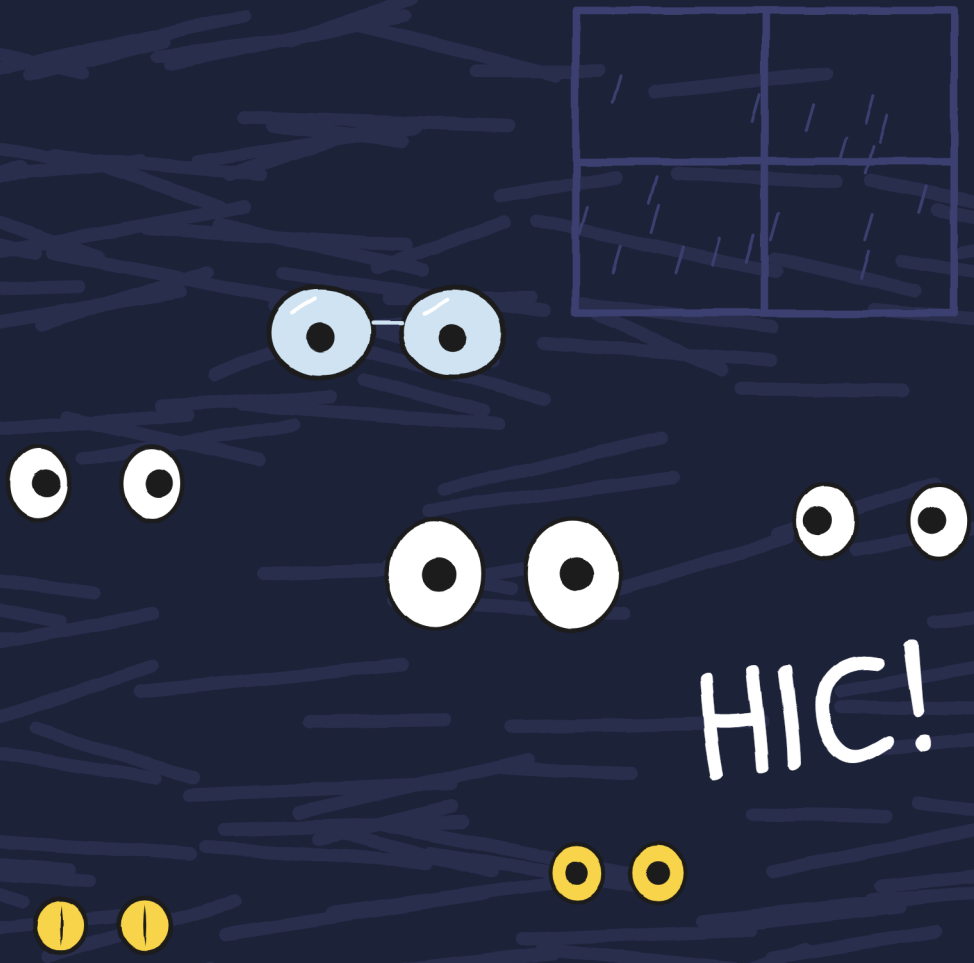


And then the real one came.



The thunder arrived at the same moment as the lightning: the storm was right overhead. The table, the glasses and the windowpanes shook.

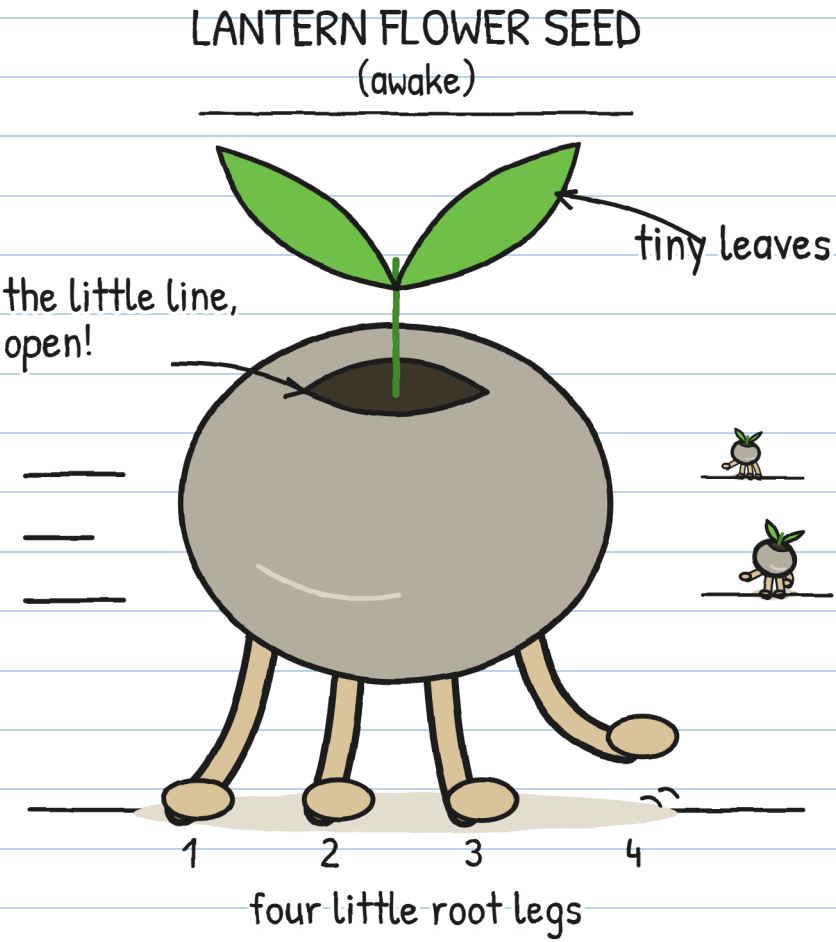
And the lights went out.



I hiccuped. Crumb hiccuped, and a flame burst shot out of her. For one second you could see the whole kitchen.

The table was empty.





The stones had legs.

And they were in a hurry. —J.

CHAPTER 3

They Move When You Don't Look

In the dark there was a sound like tiny rain: tip, tip, tip. When it flashed again, the seeds were farther away. And still. Very still. As if they hadn't done a thing.

They ran fast, but every flash stopped them, and there were plenty of flashes. I watched them from under the table. I had put on Flora's colander, which had been hanging from a nail: at home, when it thunders, I put one on.



It's Red Light, Green Light. With seeds. —J.

Flora shone her flashlight on one seed. The seed froze to the spot. When she pointed it at another, the first took its chance to escape.

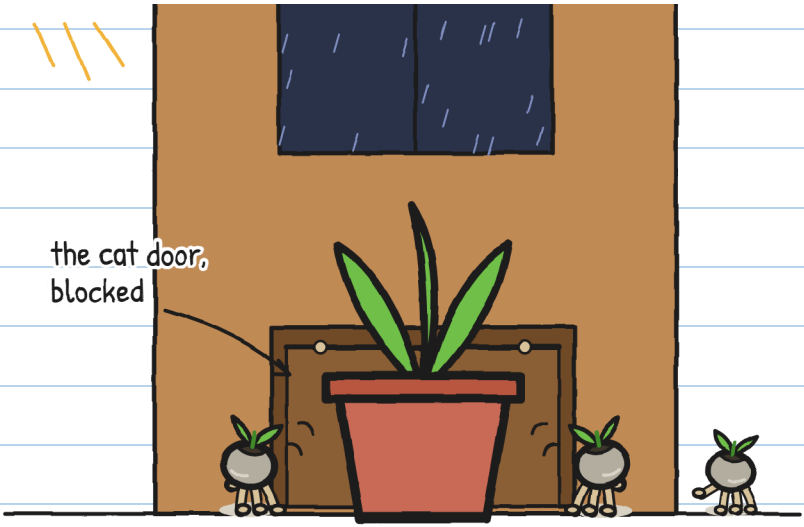
"They're seeds! They're awake!" shouted Flora.



For the first time she seemed delighted that something was running around her kitchen.
"We need another flashlight," I said.
"Then start thinking of another solution. I only have this one."

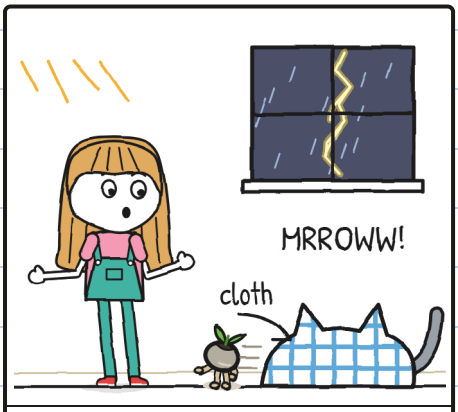
Eight seeds and one flashlight. The second seed got away too.

They were all heading for the cat door.
"They're looking for storm-wet soil," said Flora, and put an enormous plant pot in front of it. "All I have in the house is soil watered from the tap, in the greenhouse too, and that's no good to them. Outside there's hardly any: paving stones, a little path and the canal. If they get out, the rain will wash them into the water."



The cat door was blocked. But now the seeds were all over the kitchen, in the dark, and a kitchen has a hundred places to hide.

We tried everything:



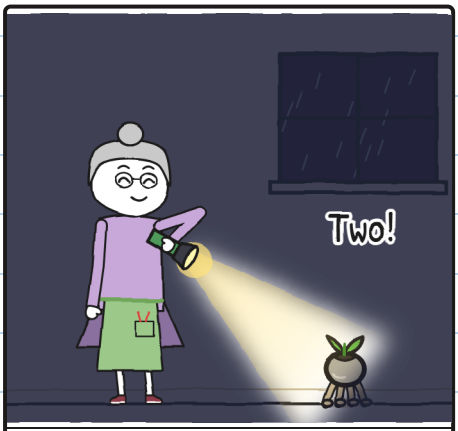
Julie, with a cloth: caught Thunder.



Tony, with his hands: Thunder caught him.



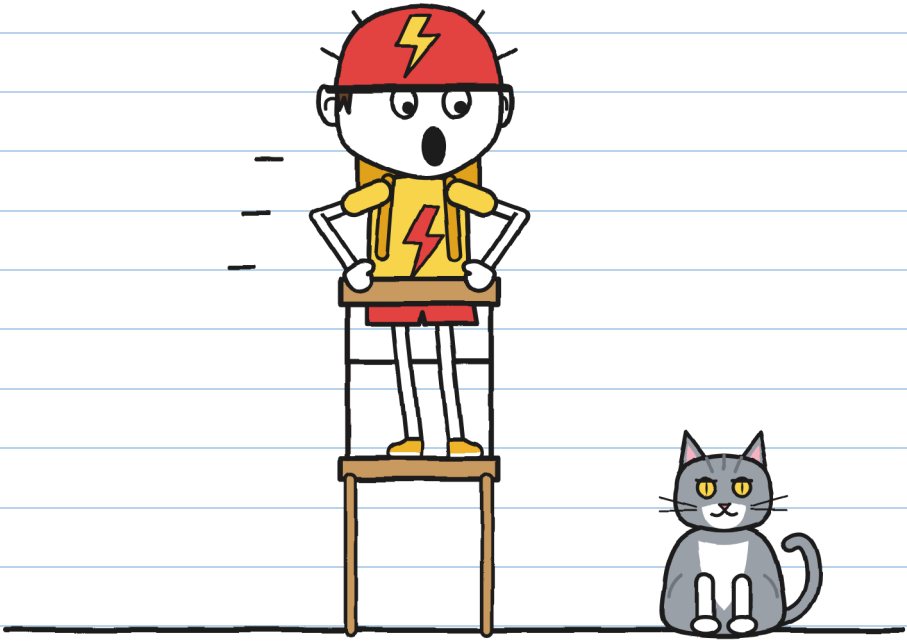
Crumb, with her flame: one!



Flora, with the flashlight: two!

Thunder was chasing them too. He can see almost in the dark. We can't.

Tony isn't afraid of storms. Tony is afraid of cats.

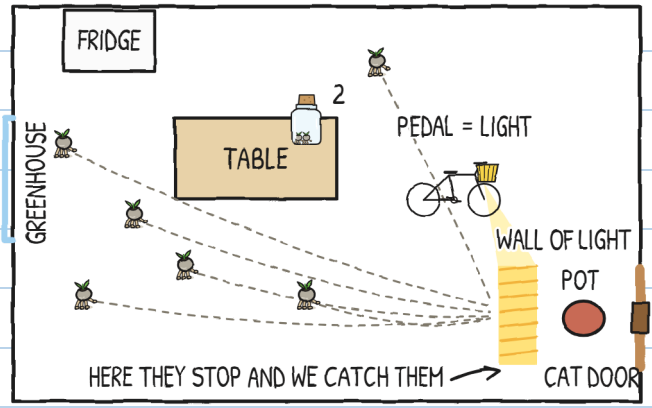


"It's not a cat!" Julie told him. "It's Thunder!"
"WORSE!"

Two scares, one name. —J.

I was still under the table, wearing the colander. With every flash I could see the whole floor, and I noticed something: the seeds wandered around the kitchen, but they always went back to push at the pot by the cat door.

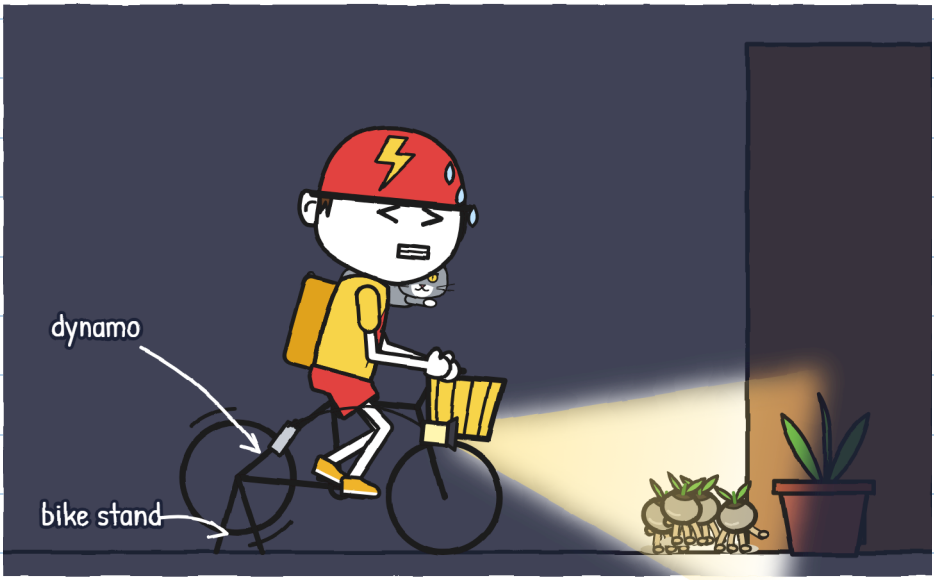
We didn't have to chase them. We knew where they would go.



I drew a floor plan.
"Tony, does your bike light come on when you pedal?"
"Of course."
"Then today you're going to deliver light."

We put the bike on its stand, with the light pointing at the cat door. The LIGHTNING dynamo is pressed against the back wheel: if it turns, there's light. And Tony pedaled.

He pedaled as he had never pedaled before. Especially when Thunder climbed on top of him.



At last LIGHTNING is good for something. —J.

The seeds reached the light and stood still, on tiptoe, like someone caught red-handed. We popped them into the jar one by one. Three. Four.

Thunder caught another in his mouth, and Flora took it from him with two fingers.
"Five!" she said.



Six.

Flora put the cork in the jar so that none could escape, and crouched down to help us. Then Thunder jumped onto the table and knocked it over.



Tony caught it in mid-air, before it touched the floor. "LIGHTNING," he said. "In one second or it's free."

But he had stopped pedaling, and the light went out. And nobody can stop Thunder: he shot off toward the cat door.

In the dark: tip, tip, tip. Thunder shoved the pot: scrape. And the cat door went clack.

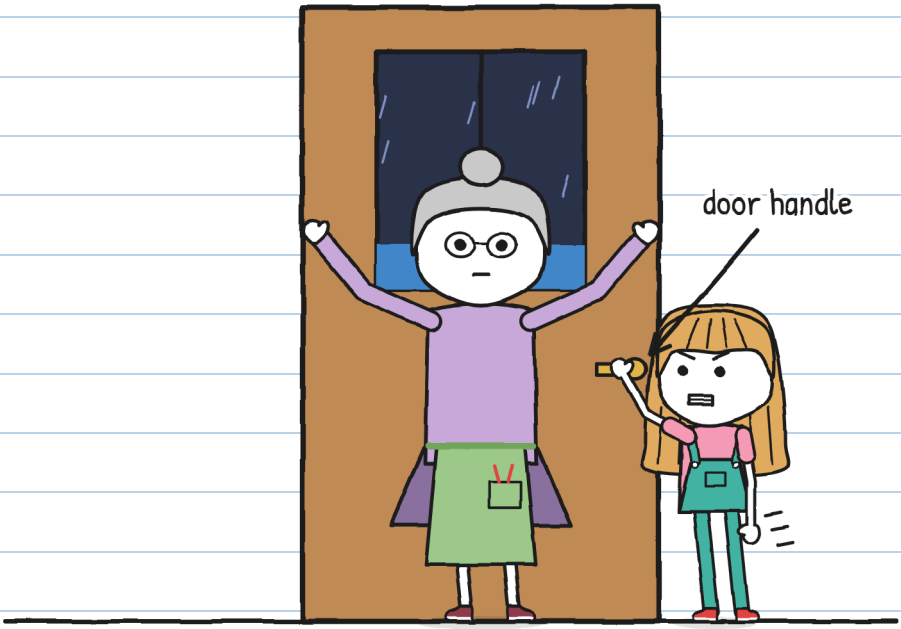
When it flashed again, a single seed remained on the floor, and Julie caught it. Seven.



The eighth one had gone out through the cat door.

"I'm going after it!" said Julie, her hand already on the door handle.

"With lightning around, nobody leaves this house," said Flora, planting herself in front of the door. She was in no mood for arguments.



Julie didn't argue. But she didn't let go of the door handle either.

After a while, the cat door went clack. It was Thunder, soaked. Without the eighth one.

"Flash... one elephant, two elephants."
Rrrumble.
"Two," Julie counted. "It's still very close."

"All right, now let's plant them," said Flora. "Before the storm goes. And in the dark."
"With lightning around?" asked Julie.
Flora checked the raindrops climbing up the glass.
"The enchantment is still on. The lightning stays outside. We stay inside."



Then she said "In the dark" again, looking at Crumb.

Crumb looked at me. And hiccuped.

CHAPTER 4

Hic

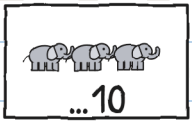
Flora explained how to plant a lantern flower, the way R. had taught her. I wrote it down in my official-notebook handwriting:

HOW TO PLANT A LANTERN FLOWER

1. 
Storm-wet soil.
(Tap-water soil doesn't count.)

2. 
Open the jar over the soil.
(If you open it earlier, they escape.)

3. 
All in the dark: they go into the soil by themselves.
(If you bury them yourself, they won't sprout.)

4. 

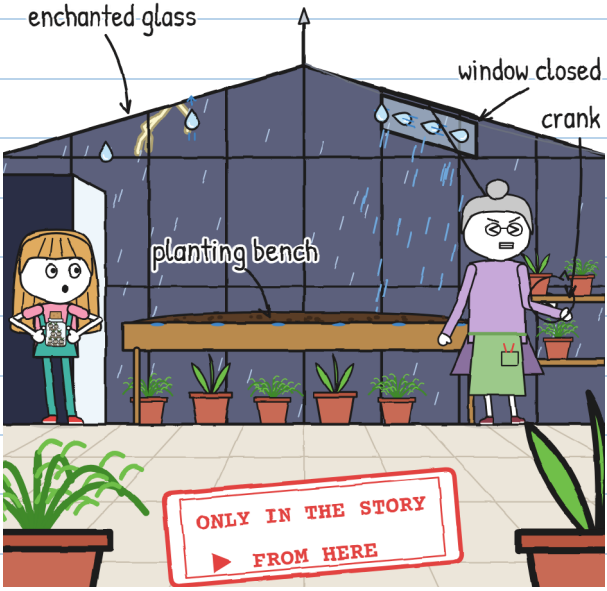
Before the storm goes away:
with more than ten elephants,
no more planting until the next storm.

To wake them: zero elephants. To plant them: up to ten. Eleven: back to sleep. —J.

Flora turned the crank in the ceiling. The window didn't open: instead, the painted raindrops stopped climbing and began to run down the glass.

The rain passed through as if the glass weren't there and fell onto the planting bench, a long table full of soil.

"All of it onto the bench. Not one drop on the floor," Flora ordered the rain.

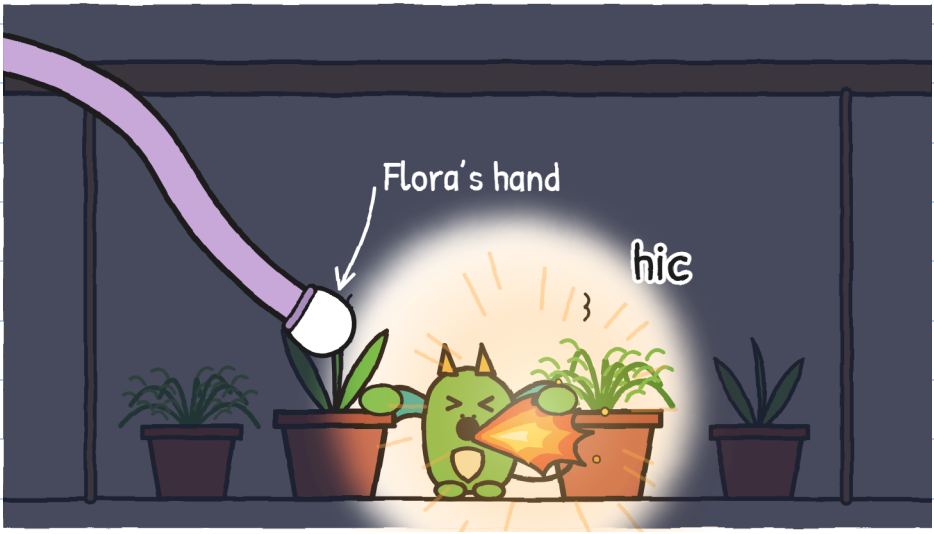


This glass only exists in the story. In a real storm, no greenhouses (page 76). —J.

"Storm-wet soil," she said. "Now, everything in the dark."

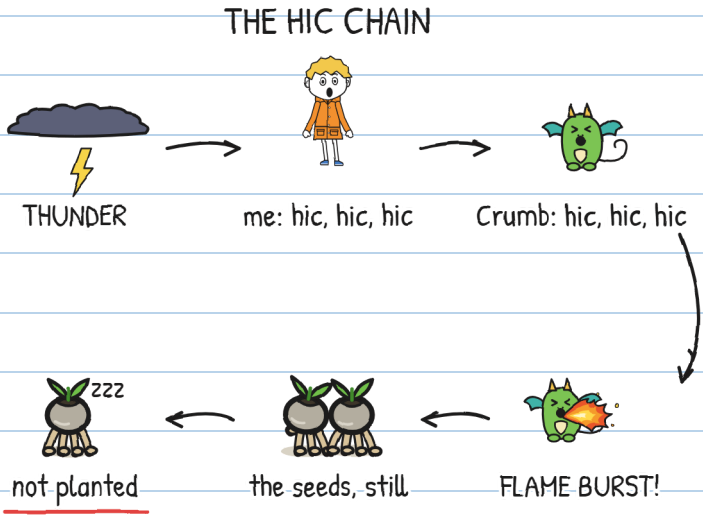
But Crumb was already inside: she had slipped between Flora's feet when the door opened, without anyone seeing. She was under the bench, among the plant pots.

Flora tugged at her gently. Crumb clung to the pots with all four paws. Vera had warned us.



And every time I hiccuped in the kitchen, Crumb lit up in the greenhouse.

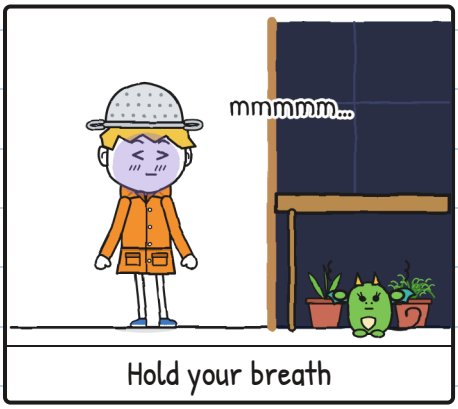
I drew it so I could understand it:



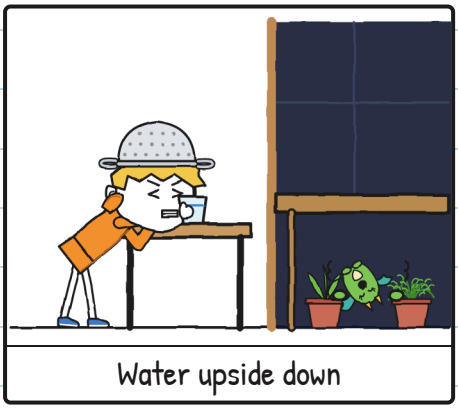
In the kitchen, the hiccups helped us: a flame burst, a frozen seed, a caught seed. In the greenhouse they sank us: with a flame burst every three seconds, it was never dark for as long as the seeds need to get into the soil.

The chain has to be broken. The easiest link is you. With love. –J.

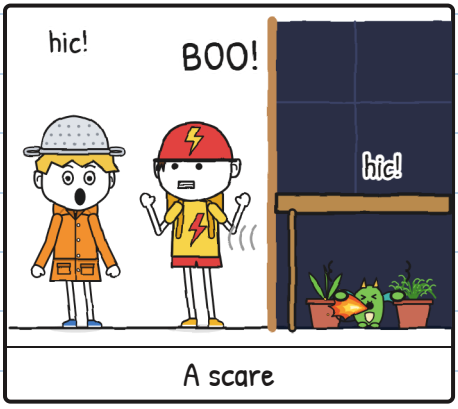
We tried every cure for hiccups:



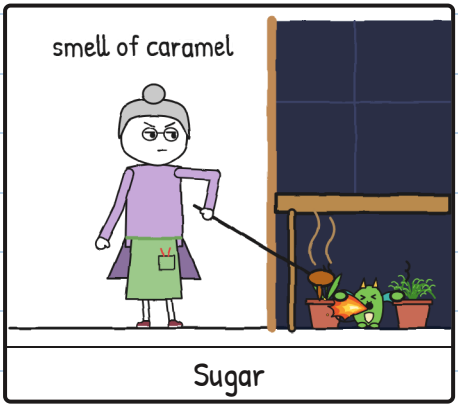
Hold your breath



Water upside down



A scare



Sugar

Crumb copied every one of them, one by one, without letting go of her pots.

Cures: zero. Hiccups: many. —J.

"Four elephants. Five."
The thunder sounded. Julie said that this lightning had struck farther away.

The seven seeds went around and around inside the jar, looking for a way out. I kept on hiccuping.



"And what if we get to eleven?" I asked.
Julie looked at the tiny legs pressed against the glass.
"Stones again."
Then she looked at me.

"Crumb is copying your fear," said Julie.
"She could copy something else," I said.
I hiccuped, and a flame burst lit up under the bench.
Crumb didn't seem willing to change her mind.
"What if we take her out to the kitchen?" I asked.
"She holds on. You've seen it."
Julie lowered her voice.
"First, stay with her."

I didn't have a cure for fear. I had a plan to keep it from showing, and it had stopped working:

My plan so nobody notices that I'm scared of thunder:

1. Say I love them.
2. ~~Don't hiccup.~~ hic hic hic hic hic
3. ???

And number 3? —J.

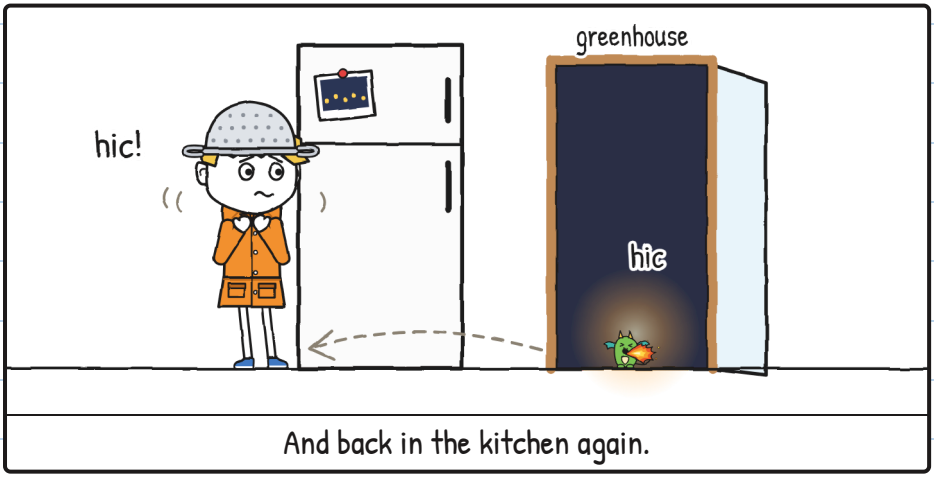
I tried. I really did.



One foot in.



A thunderclap.



And back in the kitchen again.

The greenhouse is where thunder sounds loudest in the whole neighborhood.

From the door I looked up through the glass roof. And between one flash and the next, I saw them, high above the rooftop: Vera's dragons, flying inside the storm. They go out flying when nobody is looking up. That's why Vera didn't come with us: in a storm she stays to keep an eye on them.



They weren't hiccuping.

"Come on, storm chaser," said Tony.

I waited for him to laugh. He didn't.

I took off the colander and gave it to Flora, who held it by the handles as if it were a real helmet.



And I went in.

A colander can't stop a lightning bolt. Fear, sometimes it can. —J.

Inside, the rain sounded like a thousand fingers drumming at once. I crawled under the bench. Crumb was there, curled up in a ball, shaking just like me.



RRRUMBLE! I hiccuped. Crumb hiccuped. The flame burst lit us both up.

We were two storm chasers under a planting bench.

Then, from the door, Julie spoke softly, without laughing:



"Count on me."

CHAPTER 5

Count on Me

And we counted. She from the door and I from under the bench, with Crumb shaking against my raincoat.

Flash.
"One elephant. Two elephants. Three. Four. Five. Six."
Rrrumble.
"Six: about two kilometers," said Julie. "That lightning struck farther away. We stay under cover."



I had counted the six elephants and the fear was still with me.

Saying twice that I loved storms hadn't worked. Crumb didn't copy what I said: she copied what was happening to me.
She looked at me. This time I didn't look for an excuse.

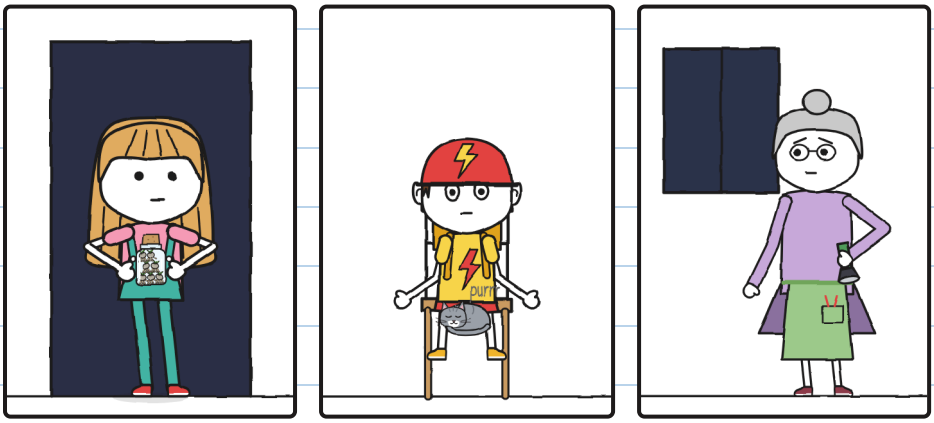


"I'm scared of thunder."

"I know," said Julie. "You drew it this morning, on page 6. I was waiting for you to say it."

"I'm scared of cats," said Tony, who had Thunder asleep on his knees and didn't dare to move.

"And I'm scared of waiting for something that never comes," said Flora. "That's why the other times, I opened the jar as soon as it arrived."



And I'm scared of footbridges. You already knew that. —J.

Nobody laughed. It was raining just as hard, but under the bench I wasn't alone anymore.

I breathed slowly. Crumb breathed slowly.

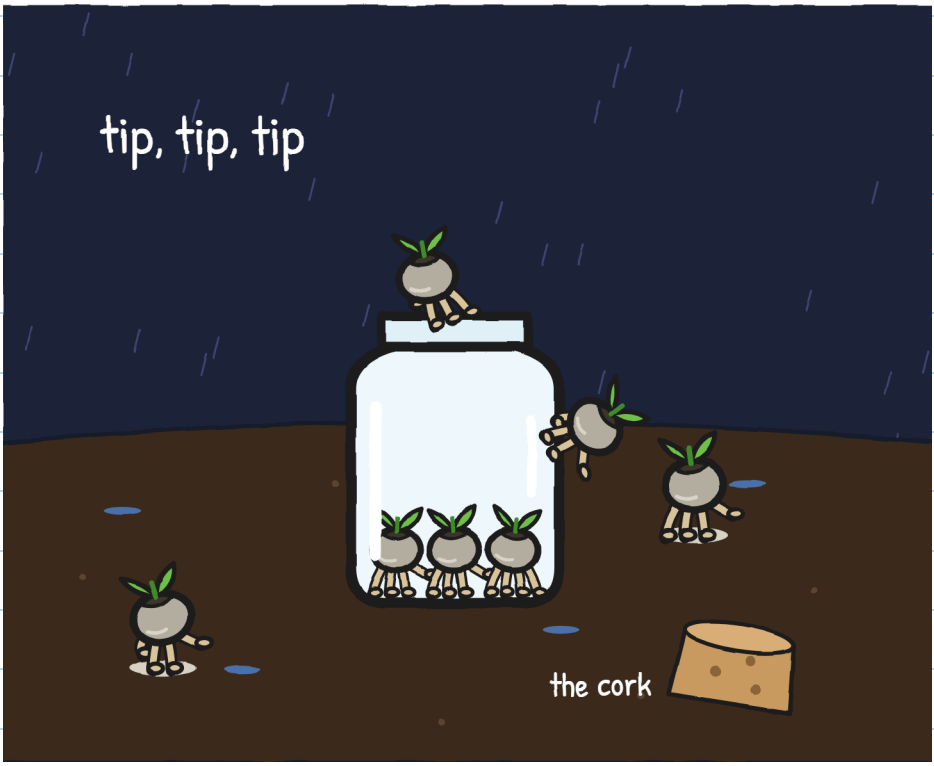


Flash. We counted together up to nine. Rrrumble.

And I didn't hiccup. Not with that thunder, and not with the next one.

"Now!" whispered Flora.

Julie tiptoed in, in the dark, set the jar on top of the wet soil and uncorked it. Then she went back to the door without a sound.

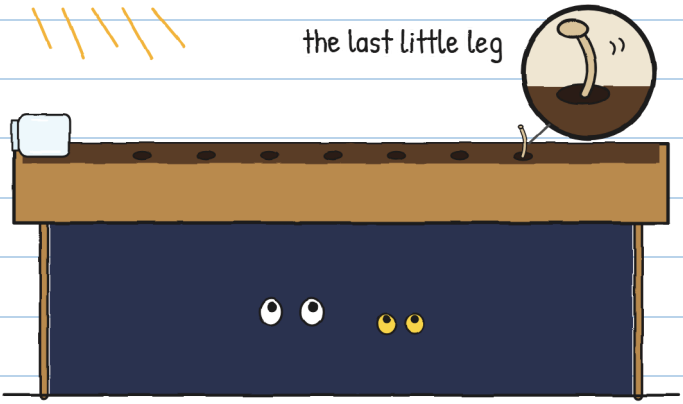


Tip, tip, tip. In the dark, something was coming out of the jar.

Flash, far away. We counted without voices, just with our lips, up to ten elephants. Rrrumble.

Ten: the last number that counted.

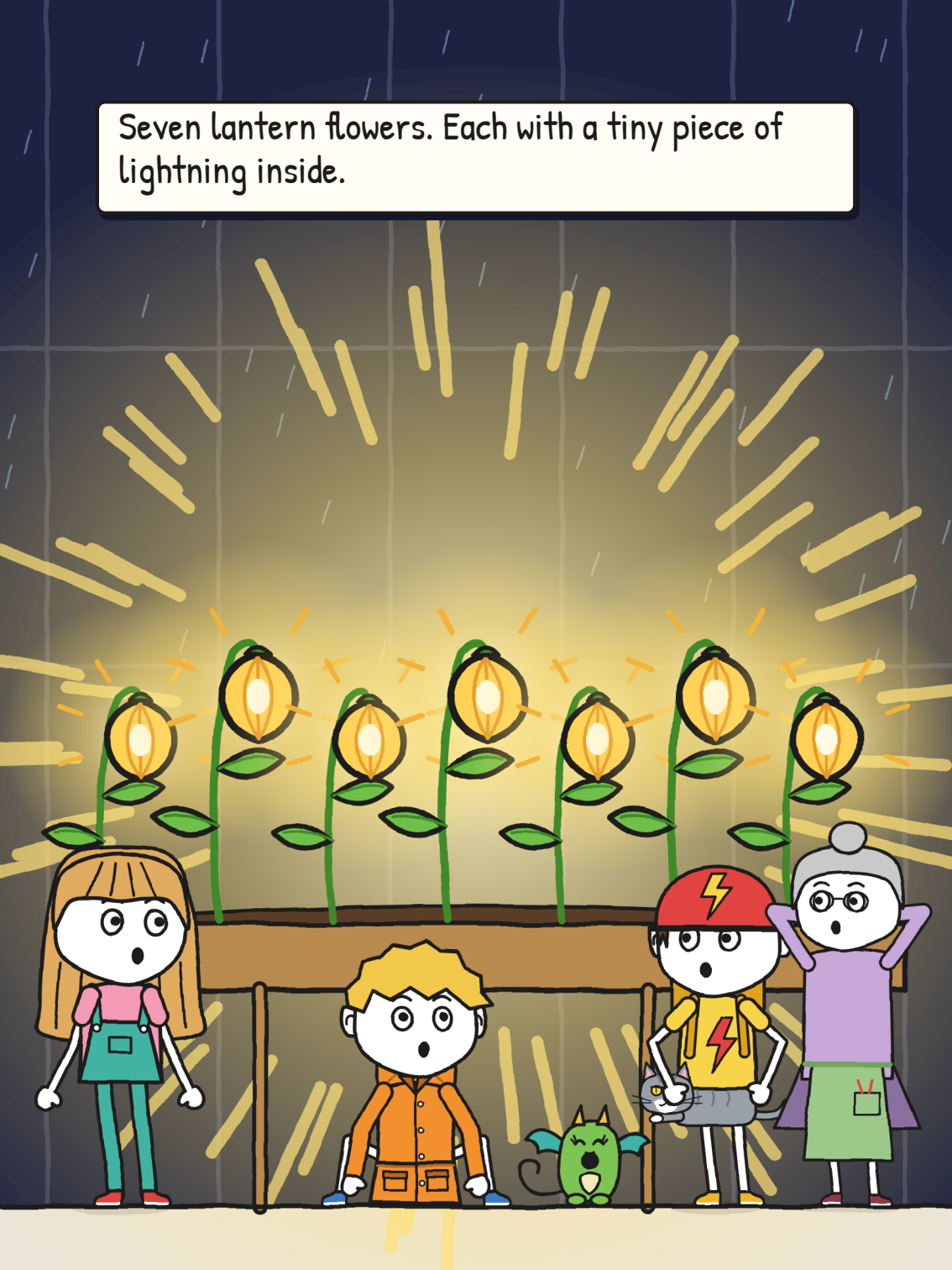
With the next flash we saw it:



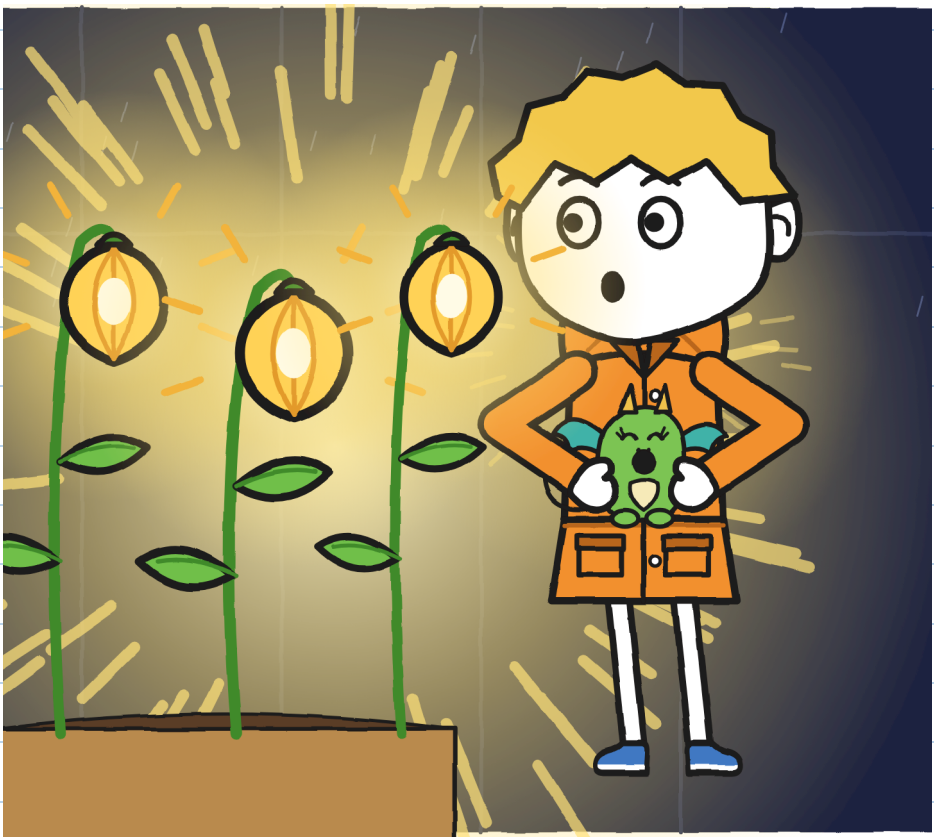
The jar was empty. In the soil, seven tiny holes; in the last, a little leg still poked out.

Then, a while of nothing. Just us, in the dark, staring at a bench full of soil.

And then the first one lit up.

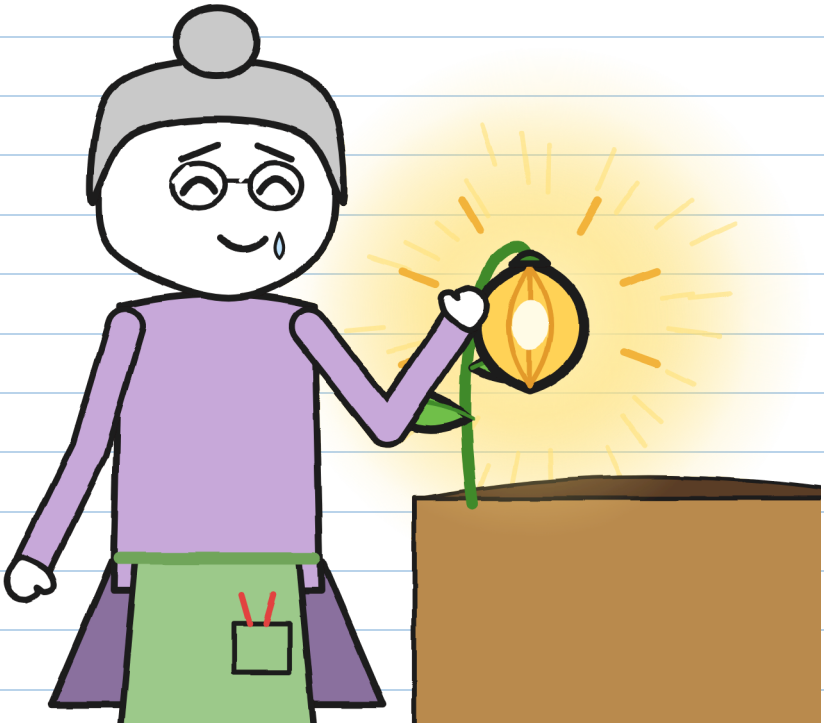

Seven lantern flowers. Each with a tiny piece of lightning inside.

Crumb didn't hiccup. She was gazing at the lantern flowers with her mouth open, just like me, and I understood that she was no longer copying my fear. She was copying this.



Flora said nothing for a long time. Then she touched one of the lantern flowers with her fingertip, slowly, like someone touching something she has waited a long time for.

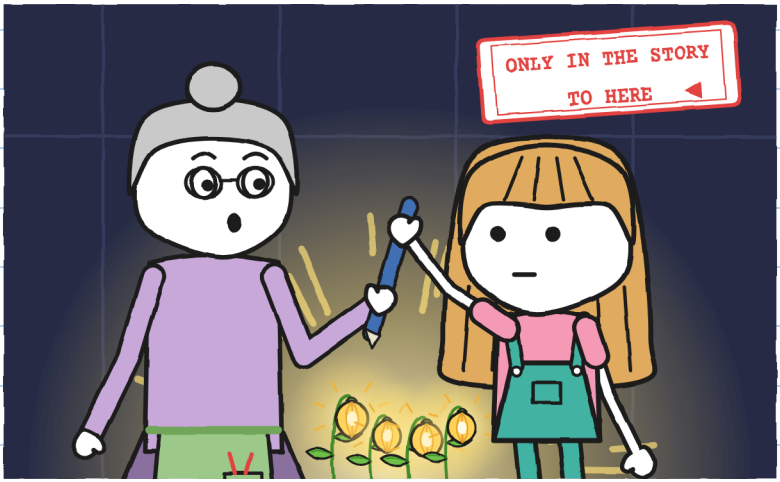
"That's how the path used to be," she said.



I touched one too. So did Crumb. It was warm, like a stone in the sun.

Flora stopped the rain by turning the crank and took out a pen to sign.
At last.
Julie stopped the pen with two fingers.
"Not yet."
She stood looking at the seven lantern flowers.

"The eighth one is missing. I opened the jar too early. We have to find it."
Then she went to the kitchen, peeled the label off the box and put it in the pocket of her overalls.



If it's delivered, it's delivered whole. —J.

We all went back to the kitchen.
"The yard stays shut," said Flora. "We aren't going out yet."
We waited until Julie ran out of flashes to count, and then half an hour more, counted from the last thunder. It had stopped raining. The storm had gone.



And the eighth one was out there somewhere, in the dark. If it hadn't found soil in time, it would be asleep again: one more stone. And without Flora's signature, at dawn No. 2 would fly back to its shelf.

"Let's go and look for it," said Julie.

Flora looked out at the night. Then she knocked three times on the yard wall, which is the wall of the Dragon House, as Vera had said.



"This time," she said, "you're not going alone."

CHAPTER 6

The Eighth One

We set off with Flora and Vera, a lantern and a bike. Julie carried the empty jar and the label in the pocket of her overalls; I carried Crumb inside my raincoat. She poked her head out right where my chin was.

We searched the yard, the little path, the edge of the canal.



Nothing. If the eighth one had fallen asleep, it could be any one of those wet stones.

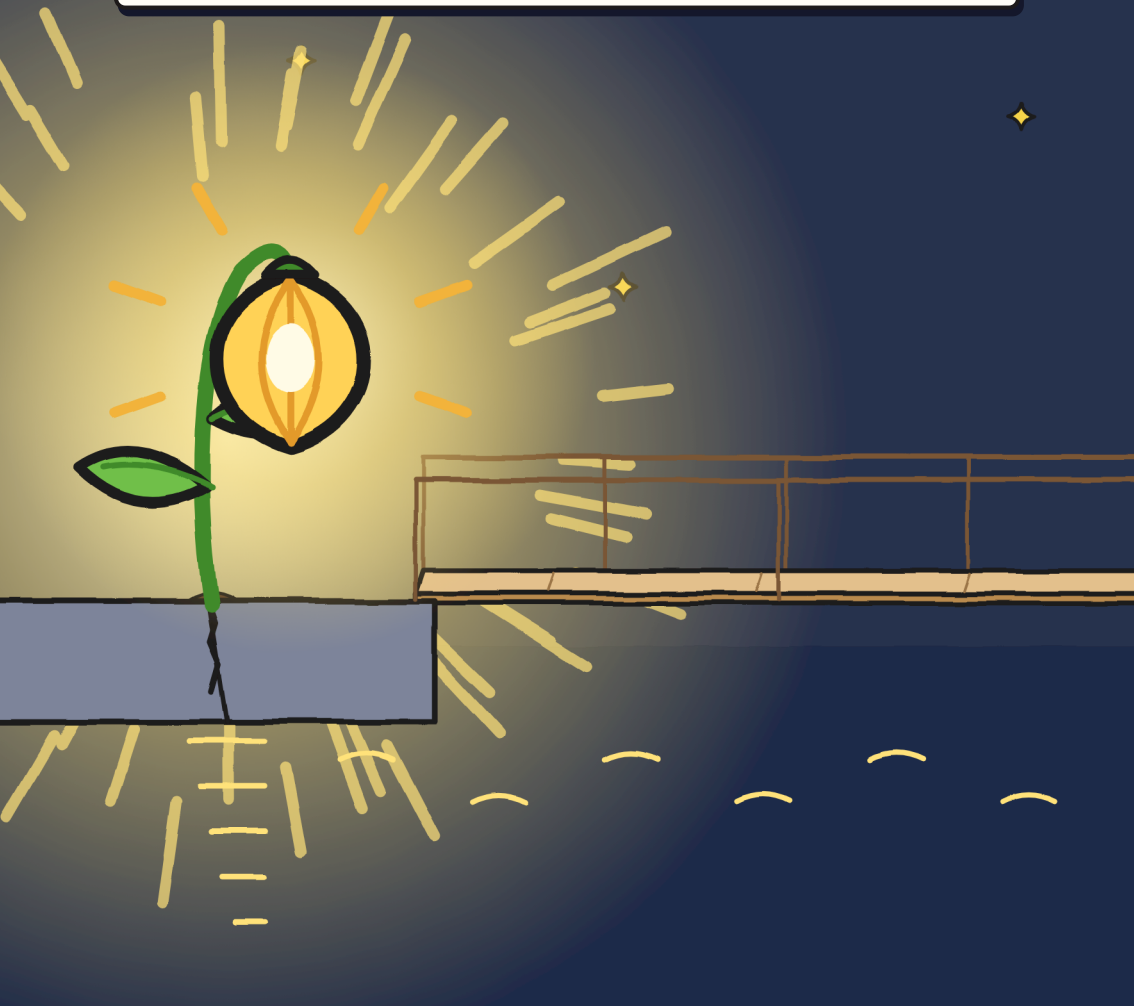
The lantern sent glints flashing off the wet stones. So many of them that it was hard to see between them. Then it came to me: a newly sprouted lantern flower would shine only a little. We were looking for a tiny light with our three lights on: they were swallowing it. "Wait. Turn everything off."

Tony stopped the bike, Vera turned down the flame of the lantern and Flora turned off her flashlight.
We stood still. In the darkness, at the far end of the path, a tiny light appeared.



At the foot of the footbridge.

I think the rain carried the eighth one down the little path and out onto the canal path, and that it lodged in a crack between two stones, with a finger's depth of wet soil, right where the footbridge begins. There it planted itself. From far away, a tiny light. Up close, it lit up everything.



Julie stood looking at the footbridge for a long time. In the light it looked different: shorter, wider, more wood than water.

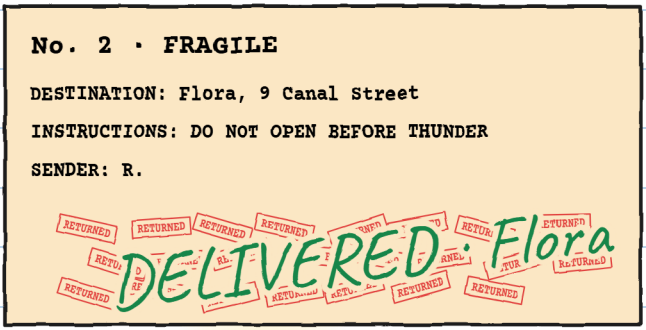
She put one foot on the footbridge. Just one. Then she took it off.

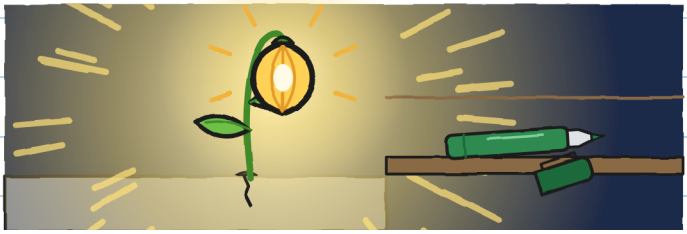


From far away it doesn't scare me anymore. Up close, hardly at all. –J.

"That one stays here," said Flora. "It's chosen its spot."

Julie gave her the label and her green marker, because by now we knew which ink doesn't come off. Flora signed on the spot, by the light of the eighth one, and gave the marker back.





As we said goodbye at her door, Flora gave me her colander:
"Keep it. For the next storm. And tell Mara it was about time."

Vera put Crumb back in her nest and drove us to the shop in her van, with Tony's bike in the back, via the road bridge: at night, the Big Bridge is raised so the boats can pass. She dropped us at the shop door and went back to her dragons.

The shop was dark. Mara wasn't at the counter.

She was underneath.



"Has it passed yet?" asked Mara.
"A good while ago," said Julie.

A blanket, earmuffs and a saucepan for a helmet.
Twenty-three deliveries, none of them in a storm.

Now I understood the "things to do here."
I gave her Flora's message. Mara pulled the saucepan down to her eyebrows.

"I'm scared of thunder too," I told her.
Mara lifted the blanket without saying anything.



I got under the counter with her. We fit in.

Mara set a delivery crate upside down for Tony, next to the stools.
"Your seat. For now," she said.

Tony sat down and, with Julie's marker, added two words to the fine print on his backpack: "and cats."



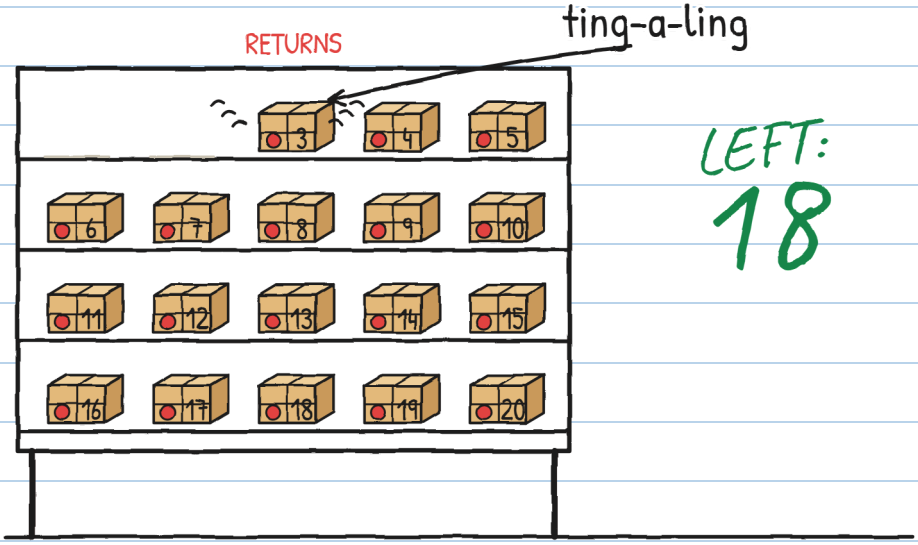
Now the fine print tells the truth. —J.

I've fixed my plan. For thunder:

1. Count elephants.
2. With someone.
3. If I hiccup, it doesn't matter.



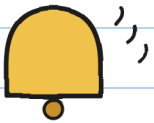
And don't say you're a chaser of anything. —J.



That night, before we went home, one of the returns rang: ting-a-ling. Like a little bell. No. 3.

The label said:

No. 3
FOR TONYKINS

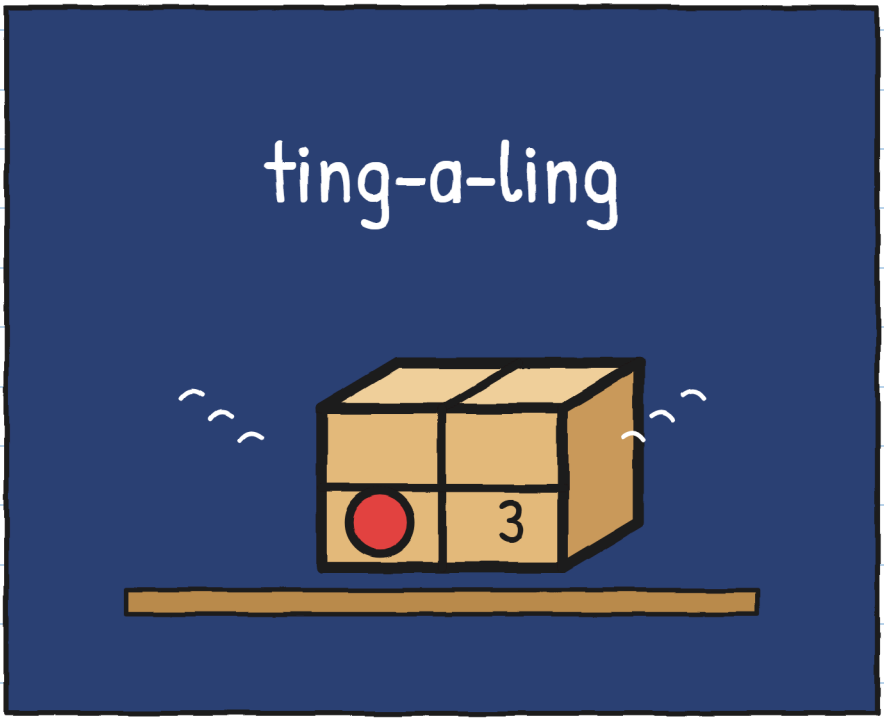




Tony turned the color of his helmet.

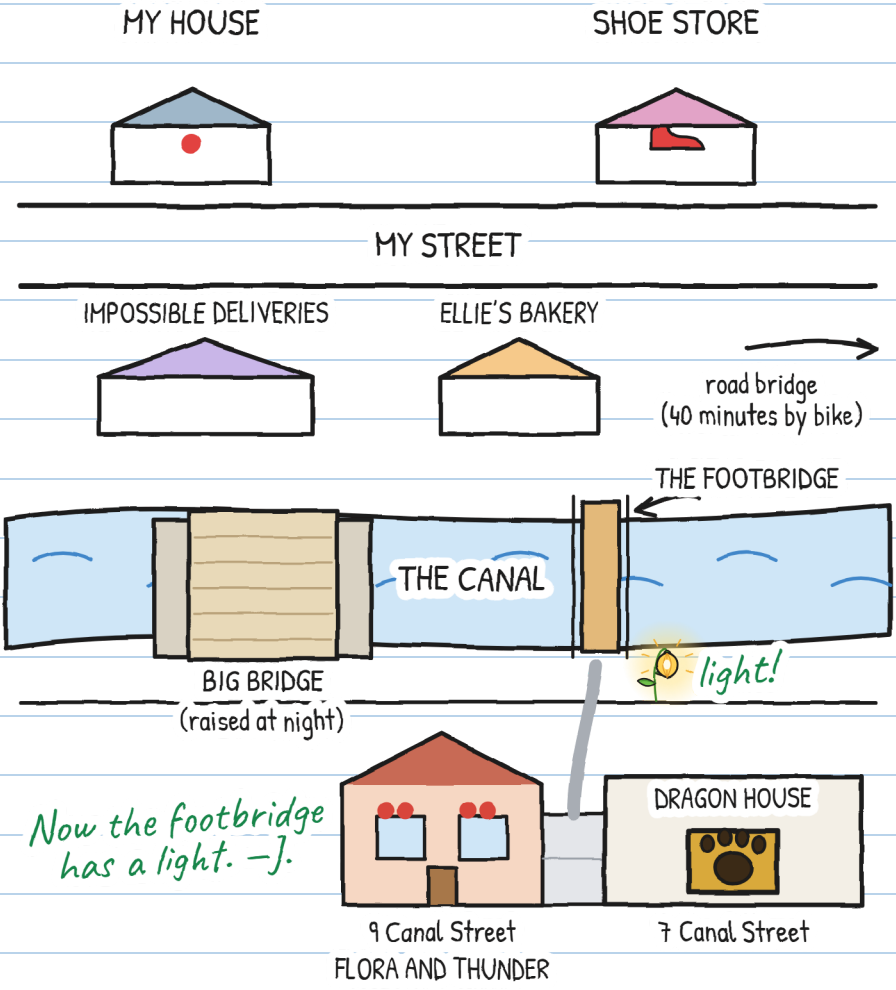
IMPOSSIBLE DELIVERIES · 3

(coming soon)



Who sends packages to Tony? –J.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD (version 2)



I have a file on R. The first two clues are from notebook 1. I wrote down the new ones:

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT R.



R.

1. Has awful handwriting (Mara).
2. Vera turned white when she read the initial.
3. Planted lantern flowers with Flora, long ago.
4. Late, but delivers.
5. Made Flora's enchanted glass.

6. Nobody says R.'s name. That's a clue too. –J.

And you? Who do you think R. is?

I think R. is...

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JULIE CATCHES SEED NUMBER SEVEN.

SIZE XS · A1
One seed was left on the floor. Julie caught it. Seven.

SIZE S · A2
Another flash: only one seed was left on the floor. Julie caught it. Seven.

SIZE M · B1
At the next flash only one seed was left, and Julie caught it. Seven.

SIZE L · B2
When it flashed again, a single seed remained on the floor, and Julie caught it. Seven.

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The CEFR levels are a rough guide for learners of English.

Everyone in their own size. Same storm. —J.

FOR FAMILIES AND TEACHERS

Work through every chapter at linguaula.com

A REAL STORM: WHAT TO DO

1. If you hear thunder, even far away, go indoors: lightning can already reach you.
2. Inside, with an adult, away from windows, doors and glass. No greenhouses, bridges, trees or water.
3. Don't go out until half an hour after the last thunder.
4. Counting elephants tells you whether lightning struck near or far, and helps you calm down. It can't tell you when to go outside.

COUNT YOUR STORM

From inside the house: count elephants between the flash and the thunder.

Flash	Elephants	Kilometers (1 per 3, roughly)	Is it closer or farther away?
1	15	5	–
2	9	3	closer