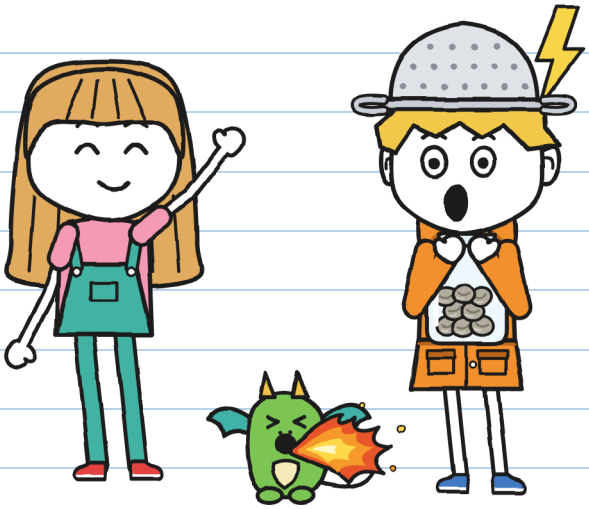
IMPOSSIBLE DELIVERIES · 2

Do Not Open Before Thunder

Lui Eriksson



(Gus's notebook)

SIZE M
Intermediate level · 9+

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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 do it yourself. 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.

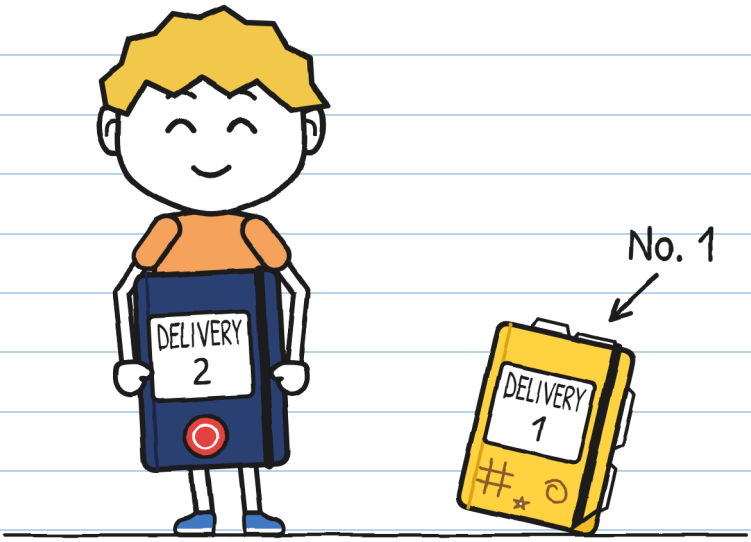


R. Sends the packages nobody can deliver. Nobody says R.'s name.

DELIVERY NOTEBOOK 2
by Gus

OFFICIAL.

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



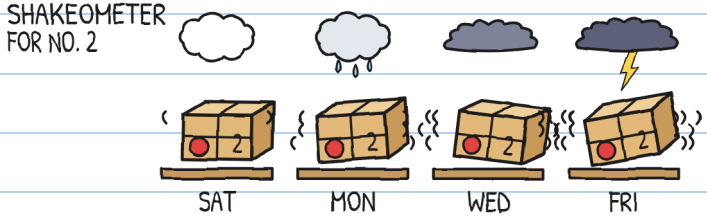
Notebook 1 ran out: it's full. Mara, who owns the shop, gave me this one, with her stamp on the cover. She says official notebooks aren't for drawing in. We'll see.

CHAPTER 1

Storm Chaser

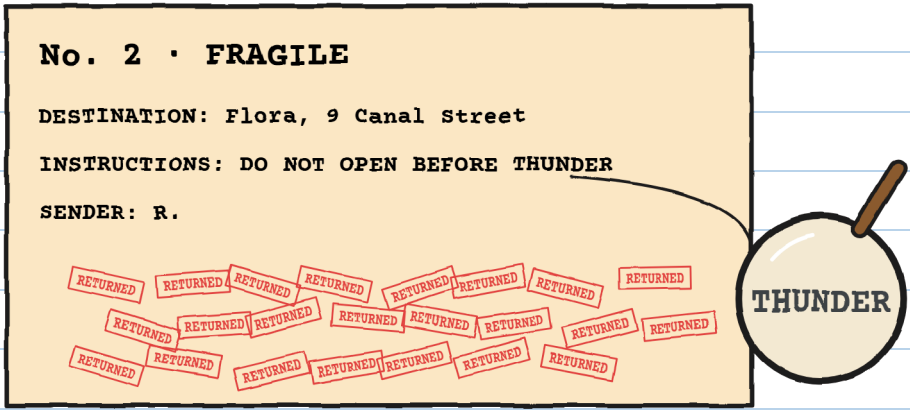
In Mara's shop there's a package that shakes. Since last Saturday, a little more every day.
I'm not going to touch it.
The last one Julie and I delivered was an egg. Now it's Crumb, a hatchling who copies everything I do.

In the shop across the street from my house, there are nineteen returns left. The one that shakes is in more of a hurry than the others.



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

Whoever receives a return has to sign the label in ink that doesn't come off, like Julie's green marker. If not, it flies back to its shelf at dawn. One person sends them all: R.



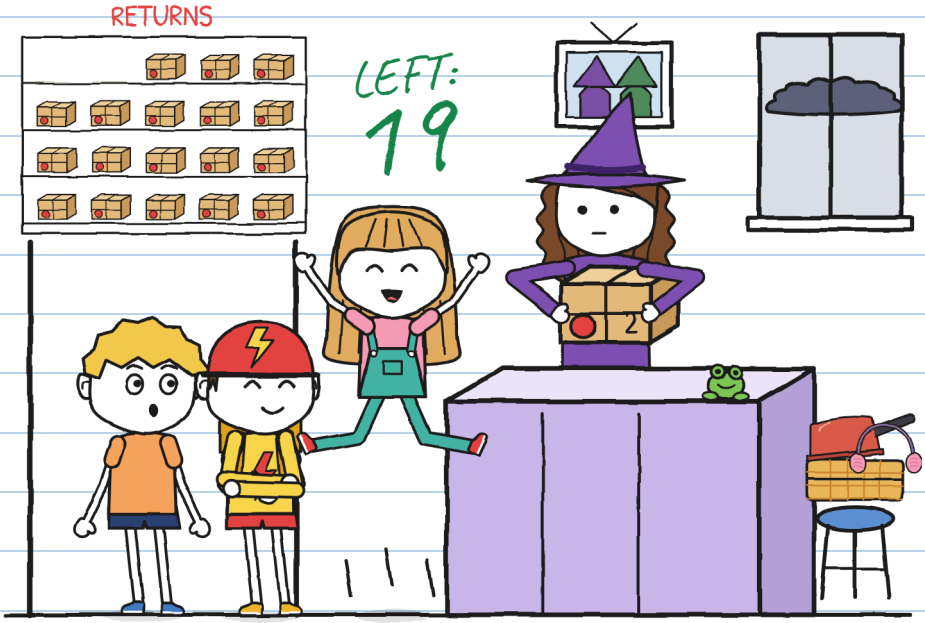
No. 2 had twenty-three RETURNED stamps on it.

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. Tony was there: on Saturdays the three of us are punished in the shop for delivering No. 1 without permission.

"This one," said Mara, "you're delivering. This afternoon."

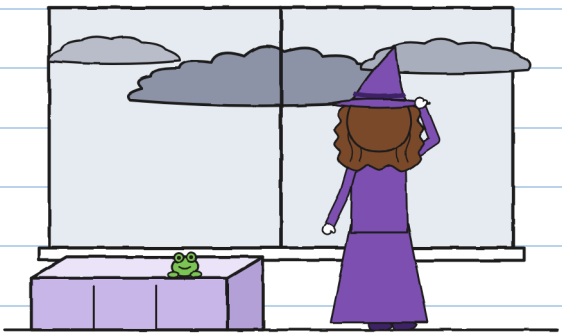


Julie jumped so high that she almost touched the LEFT: 19 sign.

Mara set three conditions and counted them on her fingers:

1. You leave at five, before the storm, and you stay with Flora until it passes.
2. Your families and Flora already know.
3. The rule is the one on the label: don't open before thunder. And the thunder overhead counts, not the faraway ones.

"Aren't you coming?" asked Julie.
"I have things to do here," said Mara, and looked out of the window: the sky was turning gray.

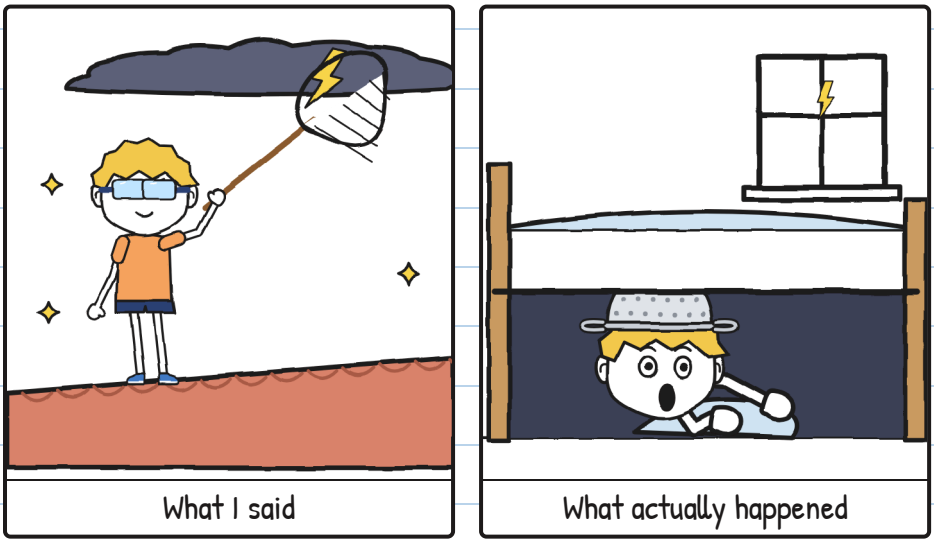


What things? –J.

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

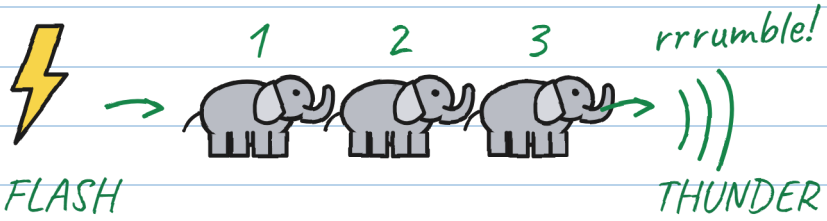
And I said what you say when someone looks at you like that:

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



Professional. From under the bed. —J.

Julie showed me how to count storms in my notebook, without asking, as always:



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.

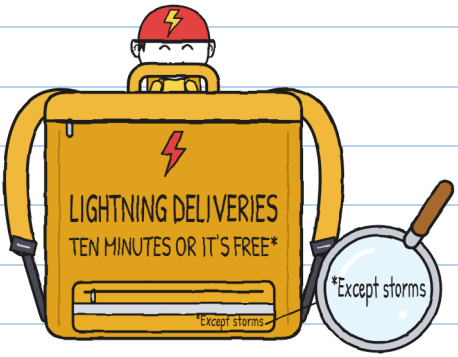
More elephants: that lightning struck farther away.

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

What you know scares you less. –J.

I didn't need to count them: I love storms. But I wrote it down, just in case.

Tony read the label over my shoulder.
"LIGHTNING doesn't deliver in storms."
He pointed at the fine print on his backpack.
"There isn't a storm yet," said Julie.
Tony read it again. It said nothing about "yet."

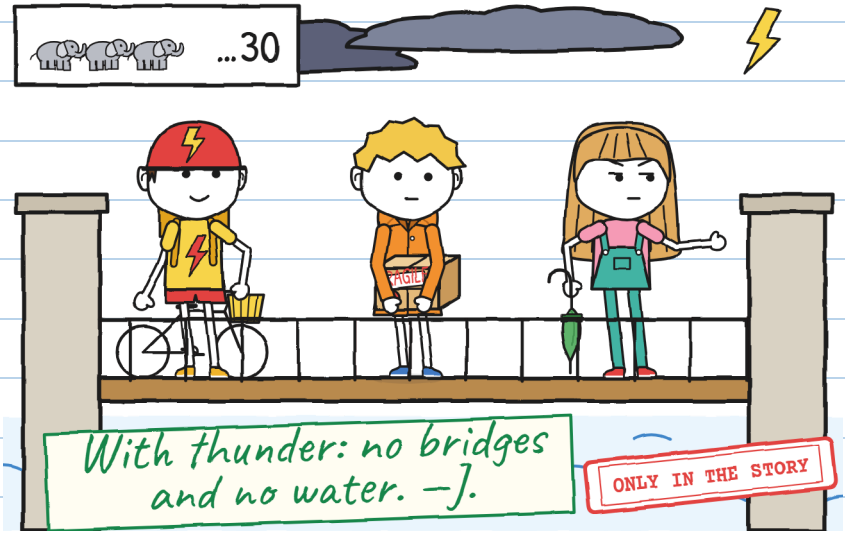


The fine print was too small. –J.

And he came with us.
At five I went home to get my raincoat.
"Put the orange one on," said my mom. "Are you sure you want to go? You, when it thunders..."
"BYE, MOM!"

"You, when it thunders..." WHAT? –J.

We crossed the Big Bridge under a very black sky. At night they raise it for the boats. In the middle, Julie waved at the water, looking very serious: she and the canal don't get along.



Far away, the sky lit up. Julie counted thirty elephants until the thunder.

Rrrumble.

"About ten kilometers to that lightning," she said. "According to the forecast, the storm will arrive around six."

"That was thunder!" said Tony. "Do 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 to Canal Street. I pretended to be deaf.

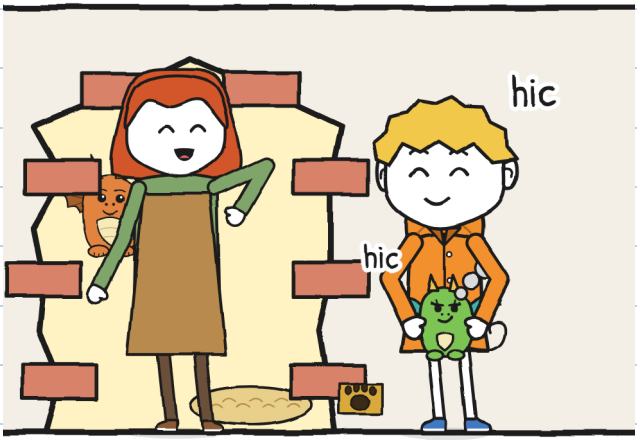
"Was that a hiccup?" asked Julie.
"No," I said. "Hic!"



It's happened to me since I was little, but only with thunder: with every thunderclap, a run of hiccups, one every three seconds. With the storm overhead I can't stop. It isn't fear: my body does it without asking me.

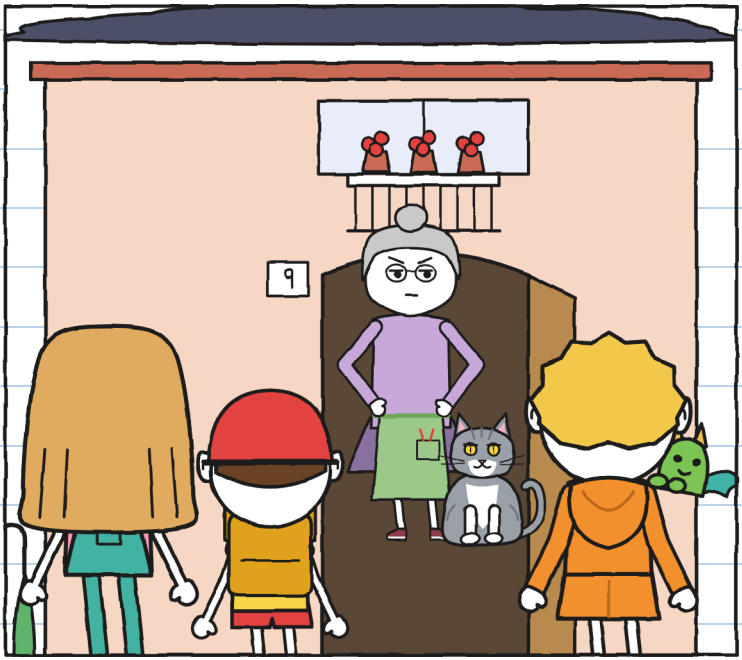
It's called being scared. —J.

Vera, who looks after the dragons, was waiting for us at her door, next to Flora's, with Crumb in her arms: on Saturdays, Crumb goes for a walk with me.
"Today, only as far as Flora's: it's her first storm," said Vera, and handed her to me. "She copies everything you do, and everything you feel. 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 for her."
"I don't feel anything," I said. "I love storms."



Far away, it thundered. I hiccuped. Crumb hiccuped and blew smoke from her nose.
"Inside, now," said Vera.

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

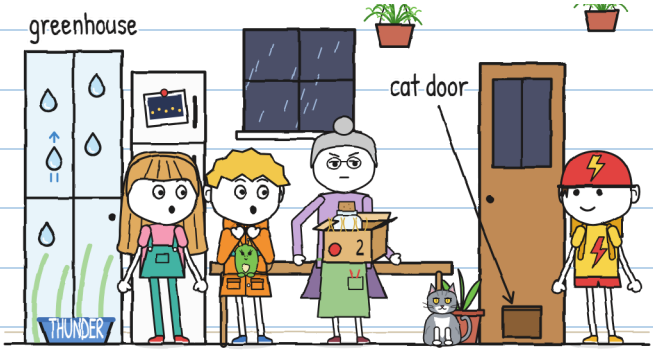


Flora opened the door before we knocked and looked at the box, the sky and Crumb.
"Vera's hatchling. Don't let her burn my ferns," she said. "Come in, rain's coming. And I'm warning you: I don't sign for stones."

CHAPTER 2

Thunder!

Flora's kitchen is full of plants, even hanging from the ceiling. At the far end, a glass door opens into the greenhouse, and the back door, with a cat door, into the yard. Tony put his bike in the hall, out of the rain.
On the glass door there were painted raindrops. One started to climb up the glass.

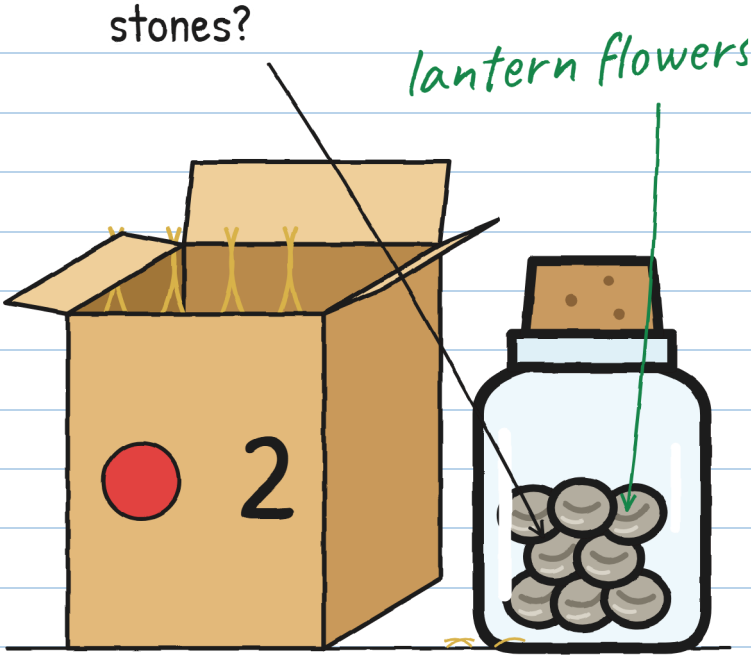


"It's R.'s enchanted glass," said Flora. "It lets rain through when I want. Never lightning."
The raindrop kept climbing. I decided not to ask where it was going.

Flora put the box on the table and opened it without asking: inside there was straw and a glass jar with eight little gray balls.

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

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



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

Flora took an old photo off the fridge: the canal path at night, with little lights along the bank.



"They're plants," explained Flora. "They store the light of lightning and glow all night."
"Did R. plant them?"
"R. brought the seeds awake. I provided the soil. I never saw one asleep."
"And the lantern flowers?"
"They went out. R. stopped coming. And now R. sends this."

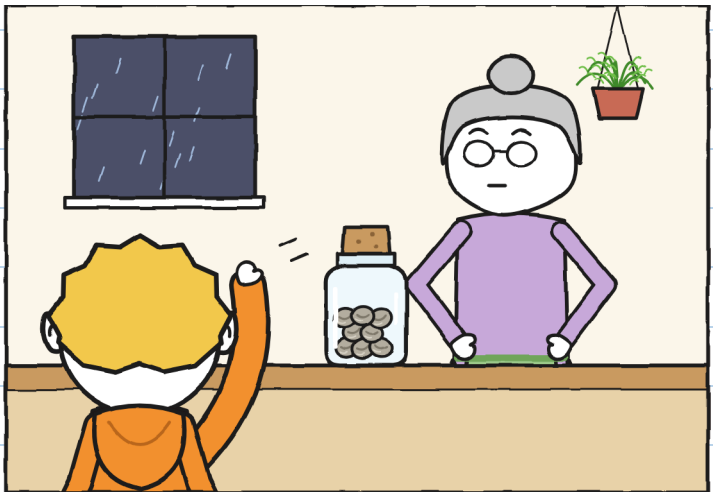
That's why the canal is dark at night, and why the footbridge, the plank across it, is so scary.

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

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

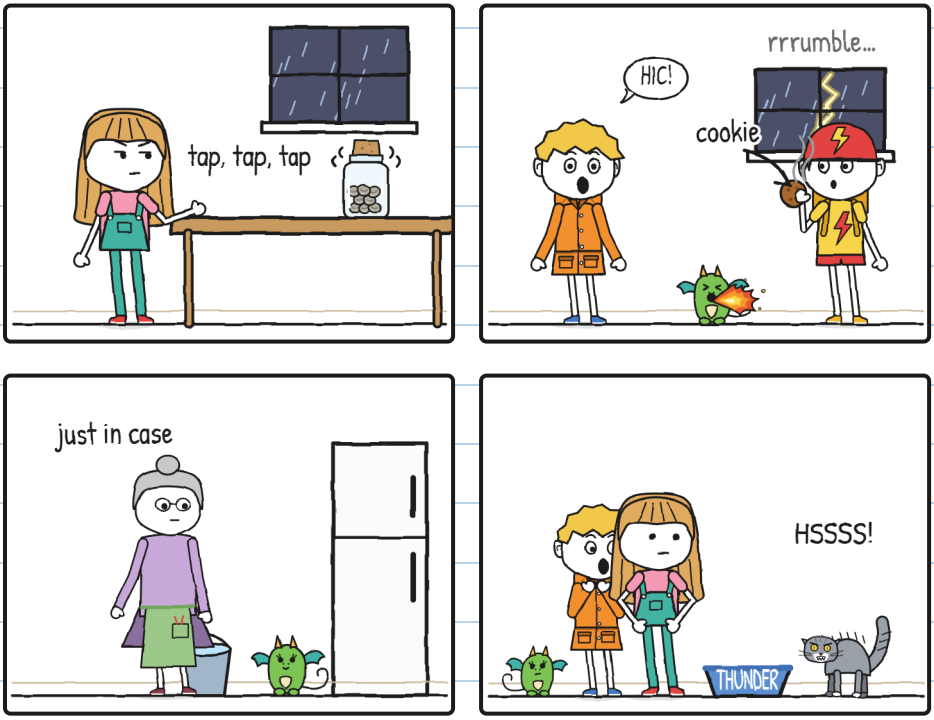
I thought about the label. I knew it by heart.
"And did you ever wait for thunder before opening it?" I asked.

Flora looked at me as if I'd asked her whether water is 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's gray and purrs like real thunder.

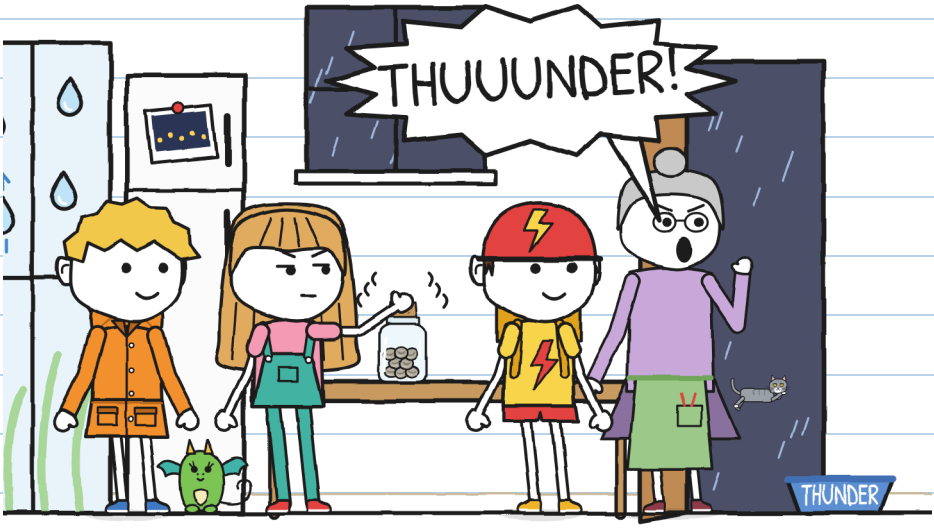
While we waited, everything happened in the kitchen and nothing happened:



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

The jar tinkled louder and louder. Julie counted quietly:
"Twelve elephants." "Nine."
Her foot was jumping under the table.

"You're going to make a hole in the floor," I said.
"I'm counting."
"Well, your foot counts faster than you."
Then Crumb made another little flame, and Thunder shot out through the cat door into the yard. Flora opened the back door and shouted for him:
"THUUUNDER!"



And Julie opened the jar.



"That was thunder!" she said.

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

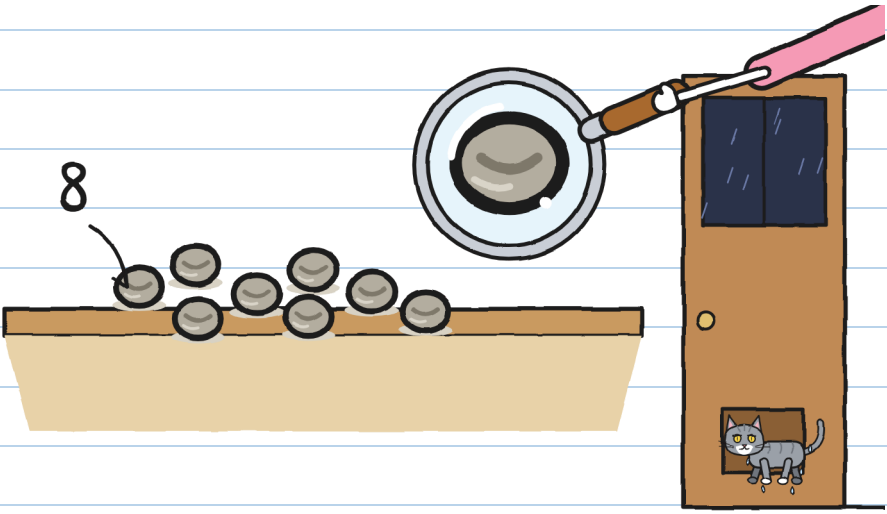
I heard "THUNDER!"—just what I was waiting for. Nobody told me it was a cat. —J.

I wrote it on page 17.

I read that page later. —J.

When it was open, the jar stopped tinkling. Inside there were eight little gray balls, cold and still. Julie tipped them onto the table and looked at them with her magnifying glass.

"They have a little line," she said. "Like a closed eye."



Thunder came back through the cat door, soaked, and Flora closed the door.

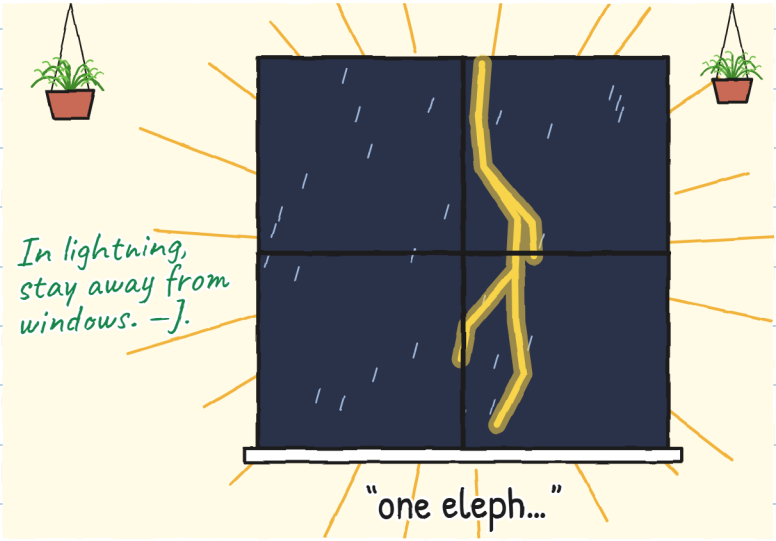
"Stones. As always," she said, and looked at Julie.

Julie turned the color of her T-shirt.

"They're asleep," I said. "They're seeds, not stones, and that's why it says 'do not open before thunder.' Maybe a big thunderclap, one that shakes the windows, will wake them."

Flora said nothing for a while.
"If they're seeds, let them prove it."

Outside it was almost night, and it was only six.
Flash. Julie started to count:

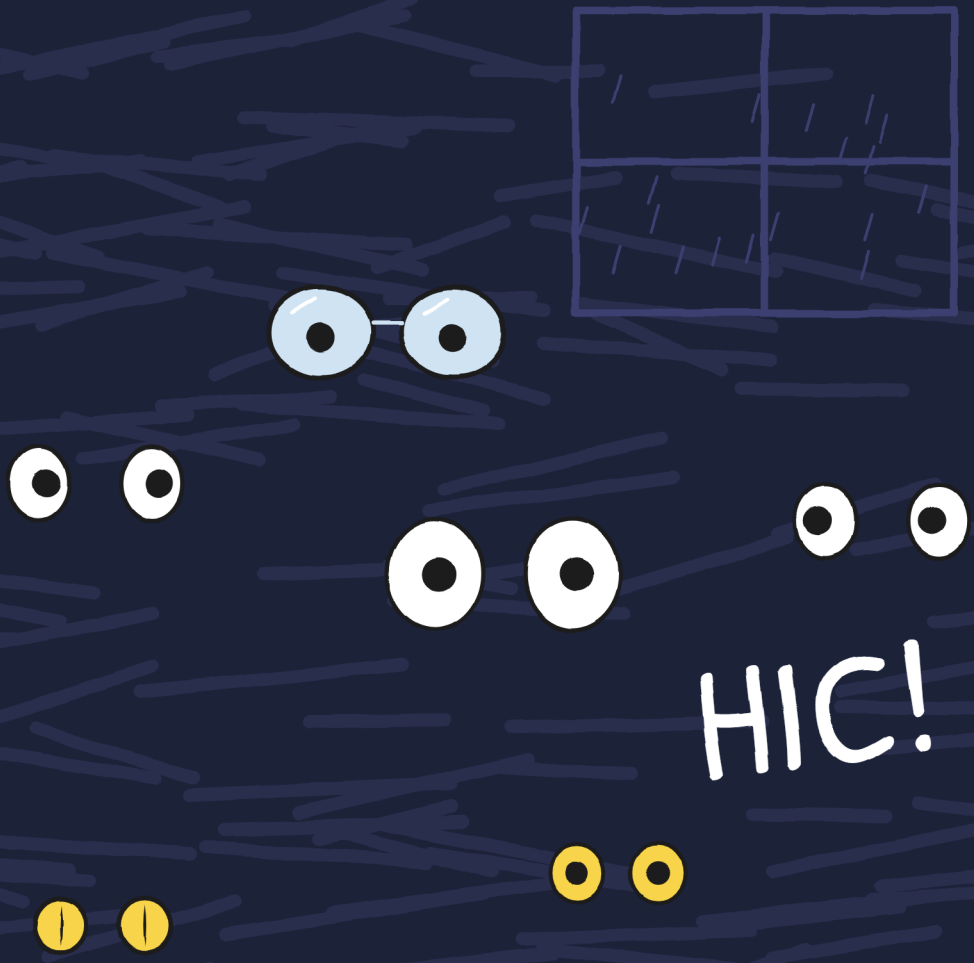


And then the real one came.



The thunder came with the flash: the storm was overhead. The table, the glasses and the windows shook.

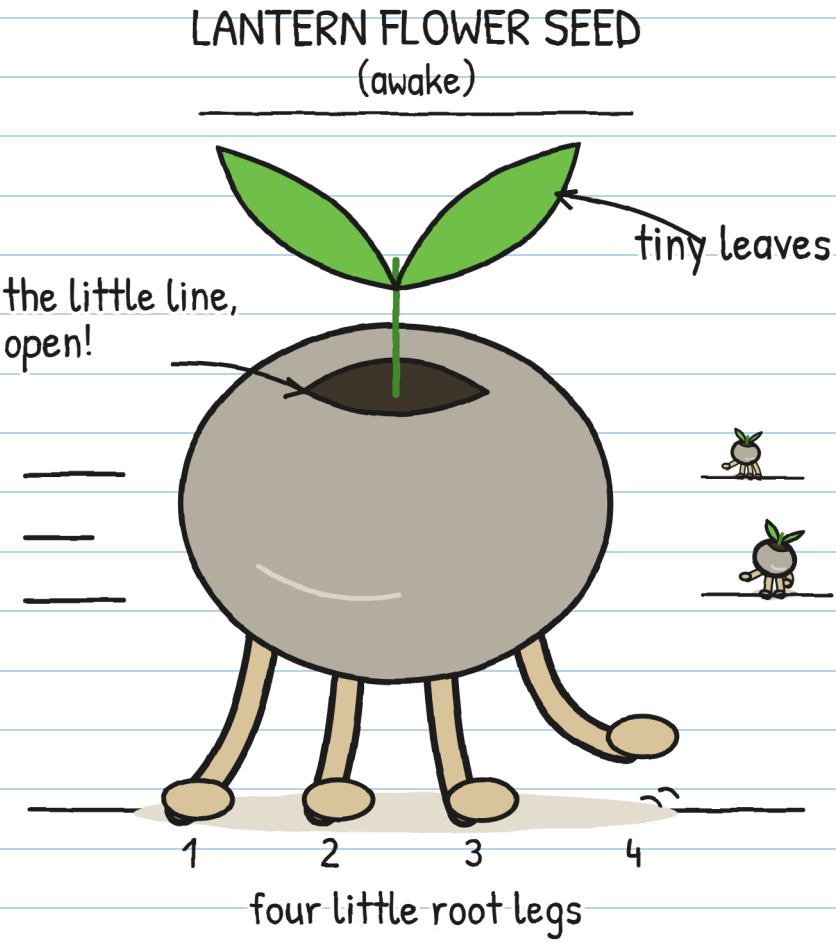
And the lights went out.



I hiccuped. Crumb hiccuped, and her flame burst lit up the kitchen for a second.

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 we heard something like tiny rain: tip, tip, tip. At the next flash, the seeds were farther away, and still, very still, as if nothing had happened.

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



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

Flora pointed her flashlight at a seed, and it froze. She pointed it at another one and the first one ran off.

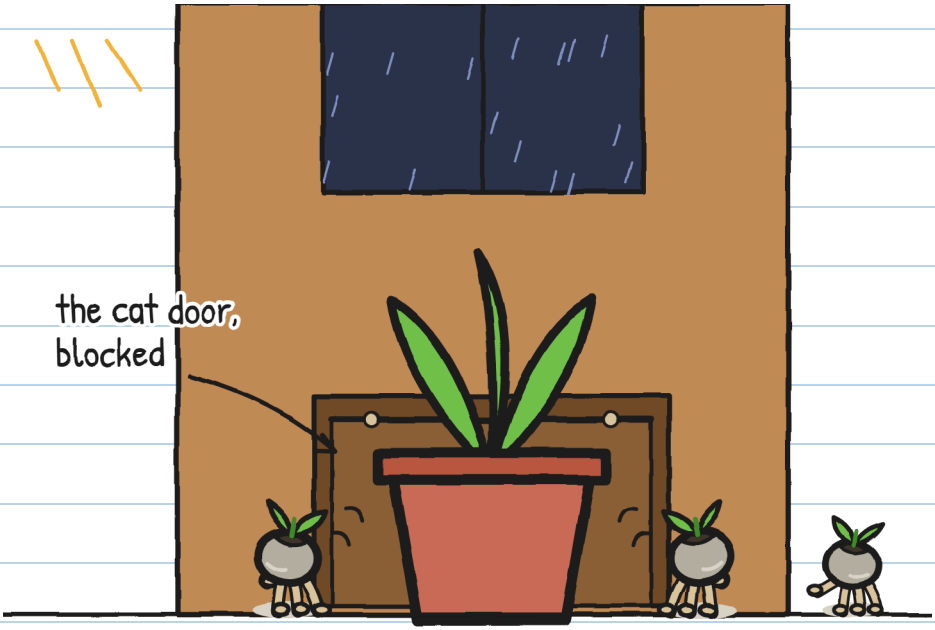
"They're seeds! They're awake!" shouted Flora.



The second one escaped as soon as Flora moved the light away.
"We need another flashlight," I said.
"Then think of something else. I only have this one."

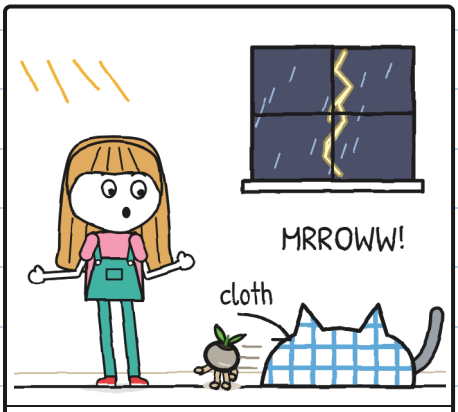
Eight seeds and one flashlight. The numbers didn't add up.

They were all heading for the cat door.
"They're looking for storm-wet soil," said Flora, and put a huge plant pot in front of it. "At home there's only soil watered from the tap. And outside there's almost none: 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, which has a hundred hiding places.

We tried everything:



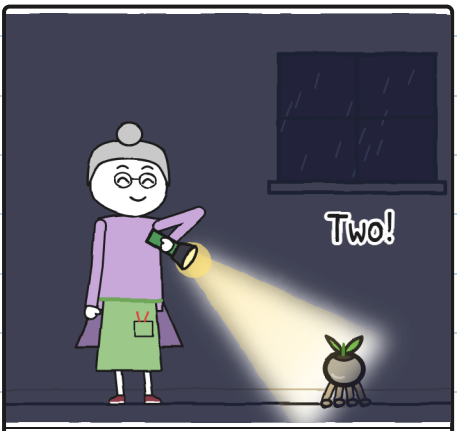
Julie, with a cloth: caught Thunder.



Tony, with his hands: Thunder caught him.



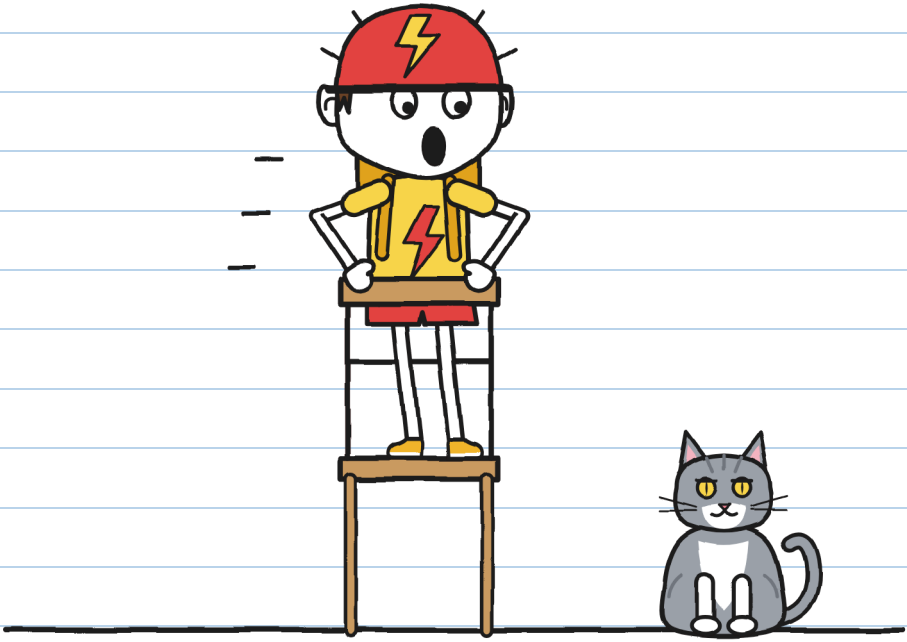
Crumb, with her flame: one!



Flora, with the flashlight: two!

Thunder was chasing them too: he can see well in the near dark; we can't.

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

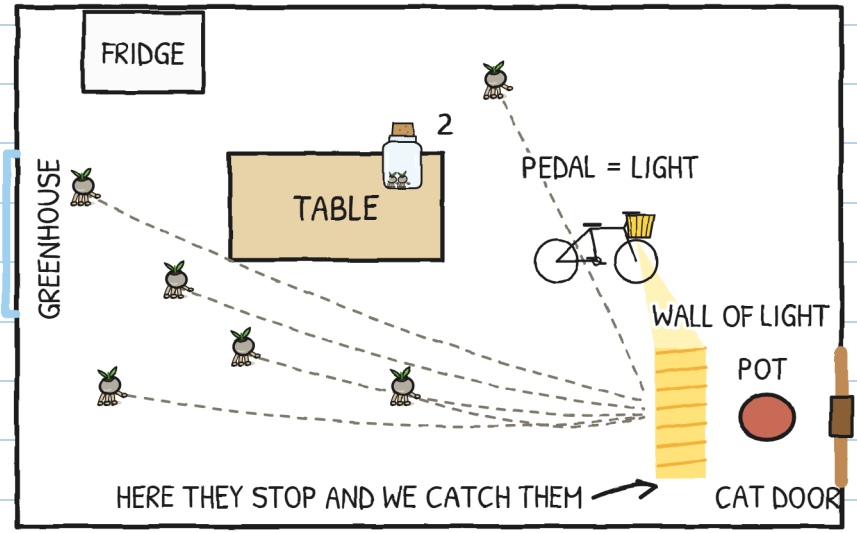


"It's not a cat!" said Julie. "It's Thunder!"
"WORSE!"

Two scares, one name. —J.

I was still under the table, wearing the colander. From there I could see the whole floor every time it flashed.

The seeds scattered, but they always ended up back at the cat door. Pushing the same plant pot.



I drew a floor plan.

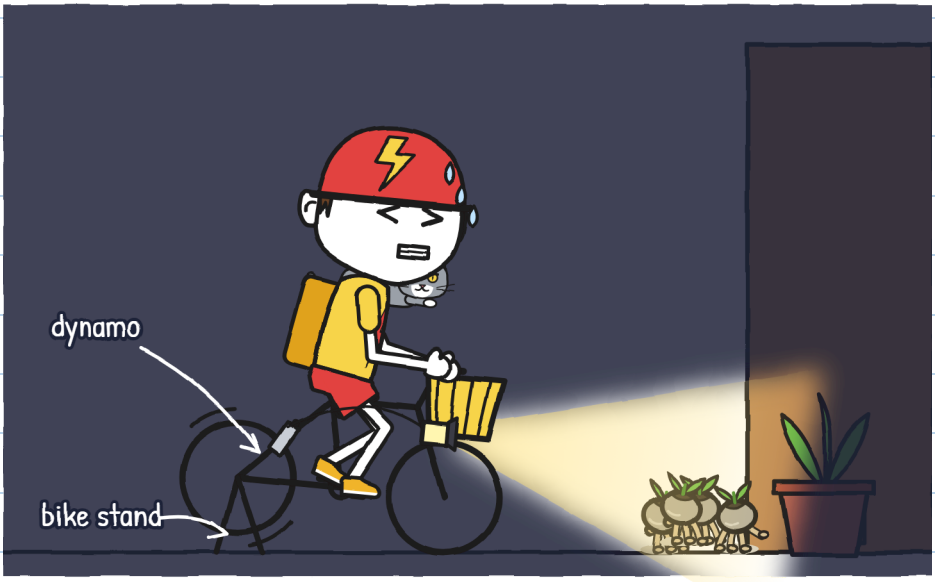
"Tony, does your bike light come on when you pedal?"

"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 on the back wheel: if it turns, there's light. And Tony pedaled.

He pedaled like never before, especially when Thunder climbed on top of him.



At last LIGHTNING is good for something. —J.

The seeds reached the light and stopped, and we caught them one by one to put them in the jar. Three. Four.

Thunder caught another one in his mouth and Flora took it away with two fingers.
"Five!" she said.



Six.

Flora corked the jar so 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.
"LIGHTNING," he said. "In one second or it's free."

But he wasn't pedaling anymore, and the light went out. And nobody can stop Thunder: he shot off toward the cat door.

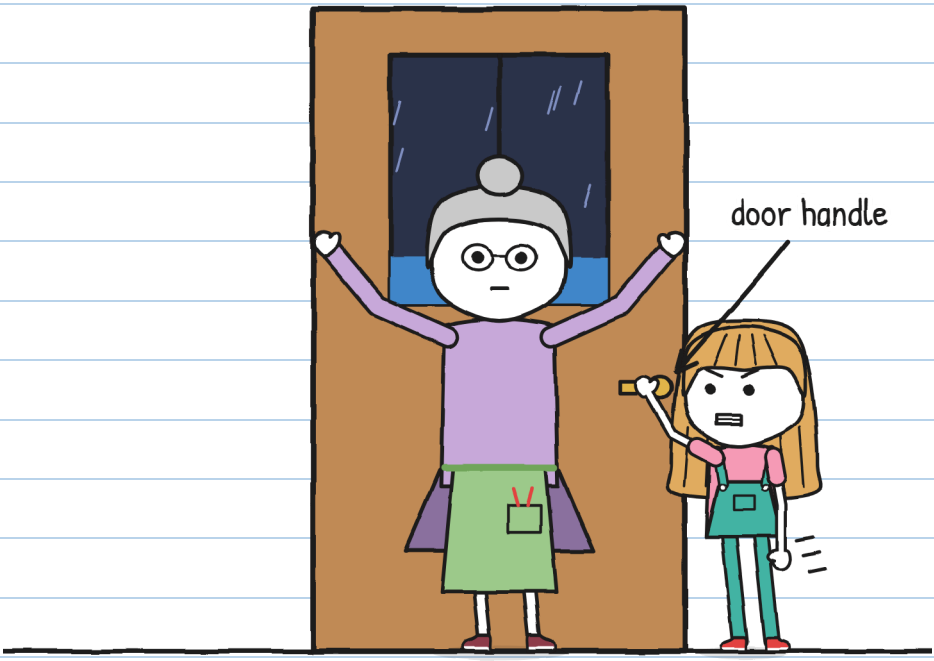
In the dark: tip, tip, tip. Thunder shoved the pot, scrape, and the cat door went clack.

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



The eighth one had gone out through the cat door.

"I'm going after it!" said Julie, holding the door handle.
"Nobody goes out with lightning around," said Flora, and stood in front of the door. She was not in the mood for arguments.



Julie didn't argue, but she didn't let go of the door handle.
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."

"Then let's plant them," said Flora, "before the storm goes. And in the dark."
"In the greenhouse?" asked Julie.
Flora pointed at the raindrops climbing up the glass.
"The enchantment is still on. The lightning can't come in here."



She repeated "In the dark," looking at Crumb.

Crumb looked at me. And hiccuped.

CHAPTER 4

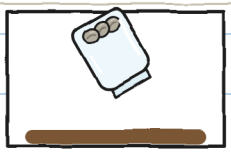
Hic

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

HOW TO PLANT A LANTERN FLOWER

1. 

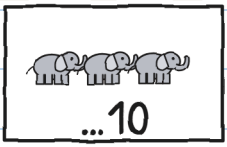
   Storm-wet soil.
   (Tap-water soil doesn't count.)

2. 

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

3. 

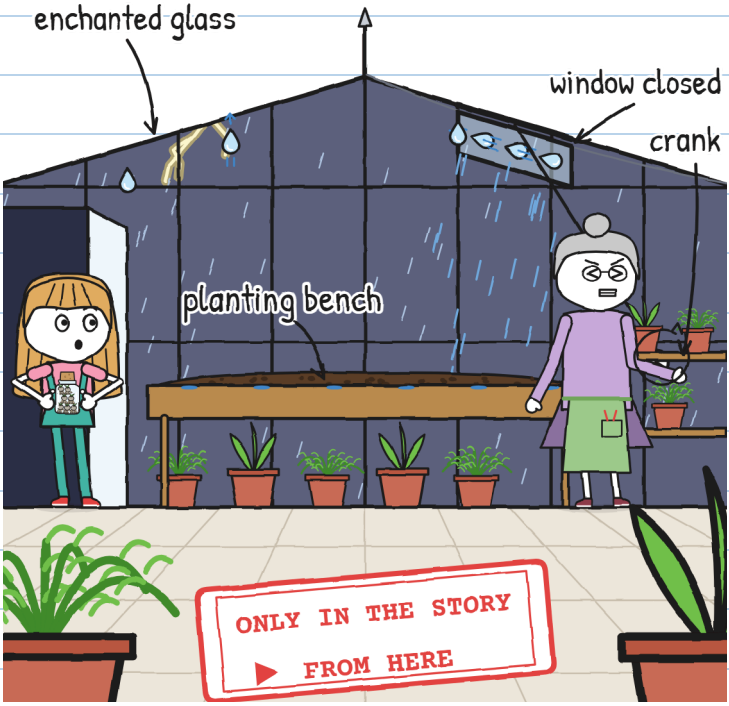
   All in the dark: they go into the soil by themselves.
   (If you bury them yourself, they won't sprout.)

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 of the window in the ceiling. It didn't open, but the painted raindrops started to run down and the real rain passed through the glass.
It 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.

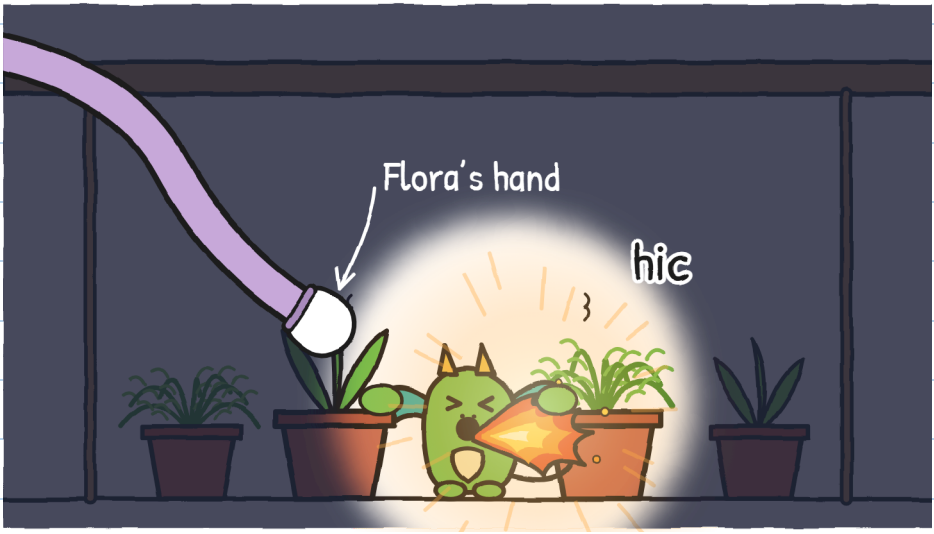


This glass only exists in the story. In a real storm, no greenhouses (page 76). –J.

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

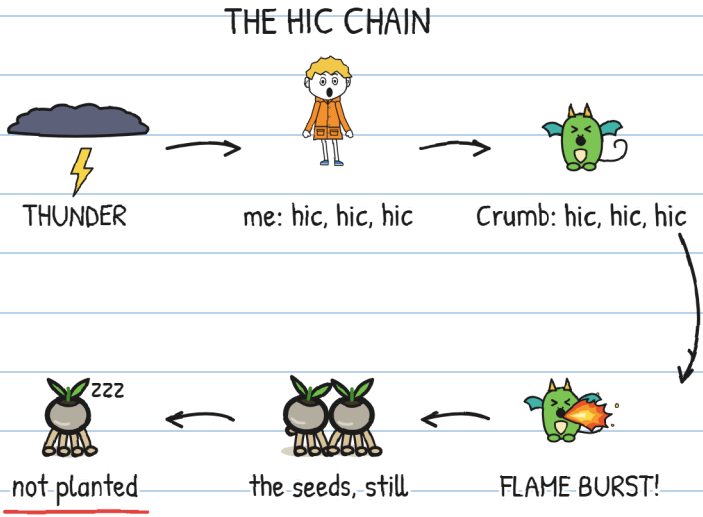
But Crumb was already inside: she had slipped between Flora's feet without anyone seeing. She was under the bench, among the plant pots.

Flora pulled her gently. Crumb held on to the pots with all four paws. Vera had said she would.



And with each hiccup of mine in the kitchen, Crumb lit up in the greenhouse.

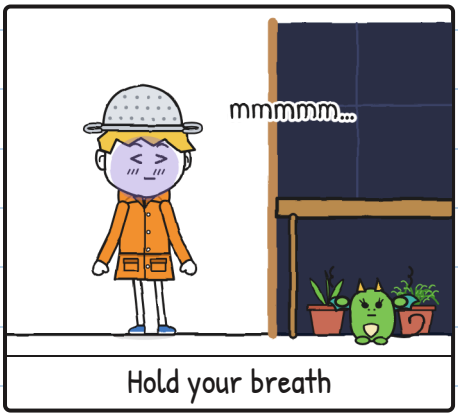
I drew it so I could understand it:



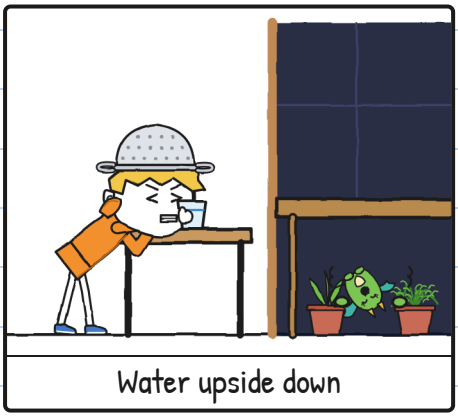
In the kitchen, the hiccups helped: flame burst, frozen seed, caught seed. In the greenhouse, they didn't: with a flame burst every three seconds, there was never the stretch of darkness the seeds need to plant themselves.

We have to break the chain. The easiest part to break is you. With love. —J.

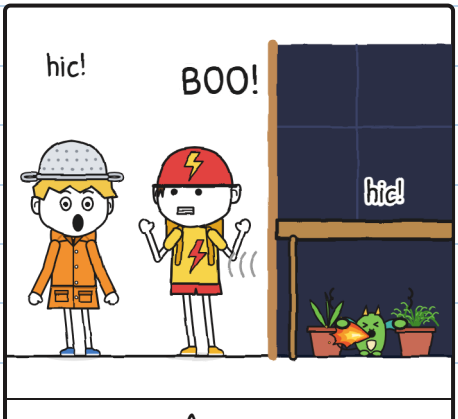
We tried everything against hiccups:



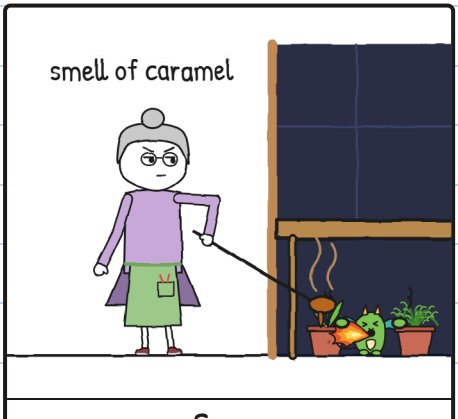
Hold your breath



Water upside down



A scare



Sugar

Crumb copied them all without letting go of her pots.

Cures: zero. Hiccups: many. —J.

Julie counted: "Four elephants." "Five."
The thunder sounded.
"That lightning struck farther away."

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



"And if we get to eleven?" I asked.
"Stones again."
Julie stopped looking at the jar and looked at me.

"Crumb copies your fear," said Julie.
"Then let her copy something else," I said.
I hiccuped. In the greenhouse another flame burst appeared.
"What if we take her out?" I asked.
"She holds on. You've seen it."
Julie lowered her voice.
"First, stay with her."

I had no cure for fear, only a plan to keep it from showing, and it didn't work anymore:

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.

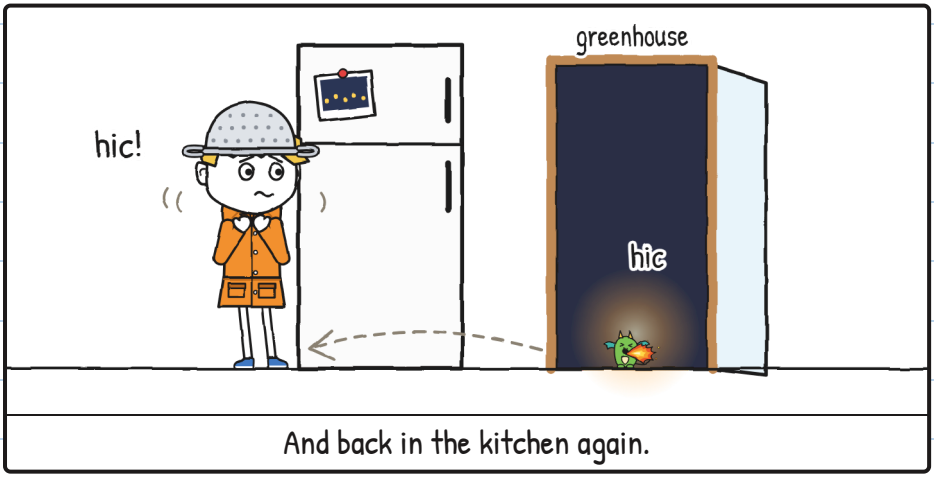
I tried. I really did.



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. Between two flashes I saw them, high above the rooftop: Vera's dragons, flying in the storm. They go flying when nobody is looking up. That's why Vera hadn't come with us: in a storm she stays at home, keeping an eye on them.



They weren't hiccuping.

"Come on, storm chaser," said Tony.

I waited for the joke that would come next. It didn't come.

I took off the colander and gave it to Flora. She held it like a real helmet.



And I went in.

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

The rain sounded like a thousand fingers on the glass. I crawled under the bench, and Crumb was there, curled up in a ball, shaking like me.



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

We were two storm chasers under a planting bench.

From the door, Julie spoke softly, without laughing:



"Count on me."

CHAPTER 5

Count on Me

We counted: she at the door, I under the bench, and Crumb shaking against me.

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. The fear was still there.
Saying I loved storms hadn't helped. Neither had clenching my teeth to stop the hiccups.

Crumb looked at me. I tried what was left.

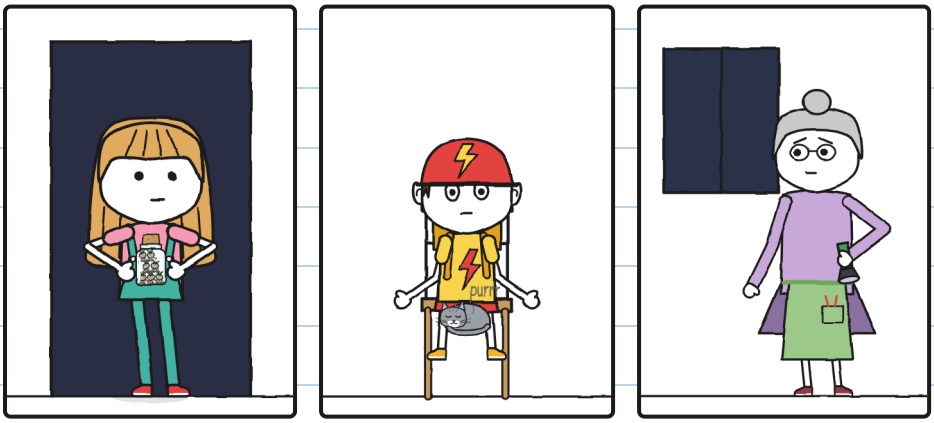


"I'm scared of thunder."

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

"For me, it's cats," said Tony, with Thunder asleep on top of him, not daring to move.

"For me, it's waiting for something that doesn't come," 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 rained just as hard, but under the bench I wasn't alone anymore.

I breathed slowly. So did Crumb.

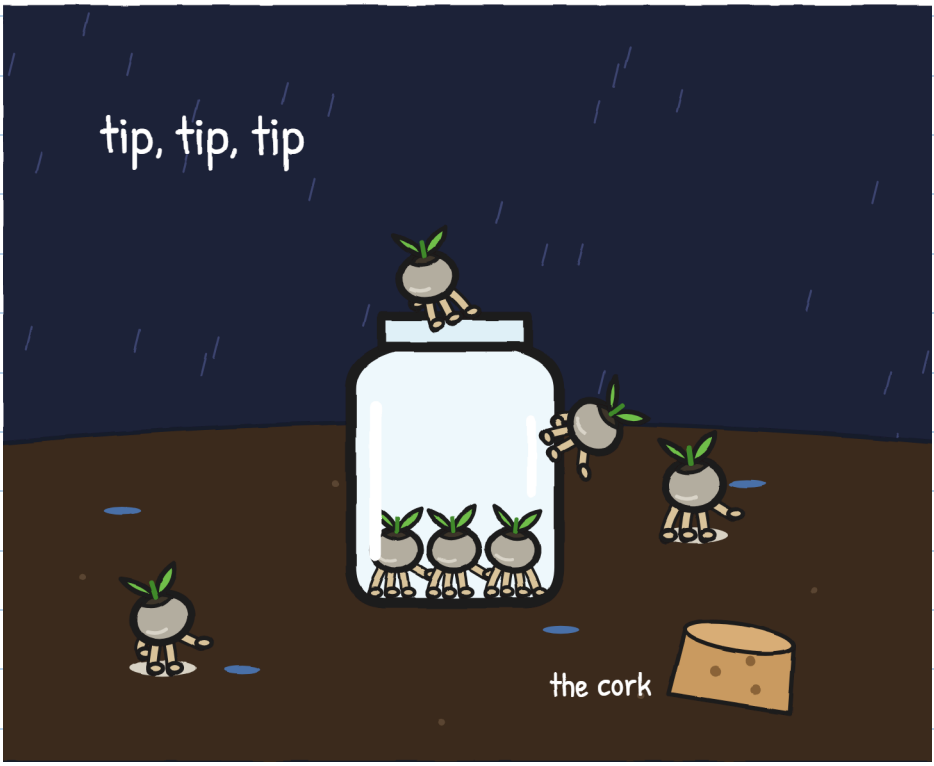


Flash. We counted together up to nine. Rrrumble.

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

"Now!" whispered Flora.

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

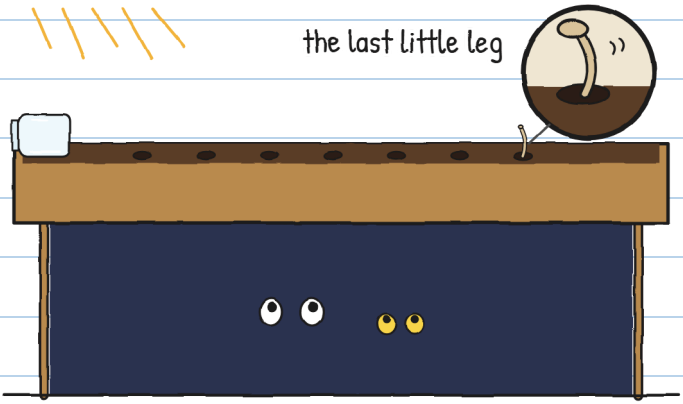


Tip, tip, tip. In the dark, something was coming out of the jar.

Flash, far away. We counted silently up to ten elephants. Rrrumble.

Ten: the last number that counted.

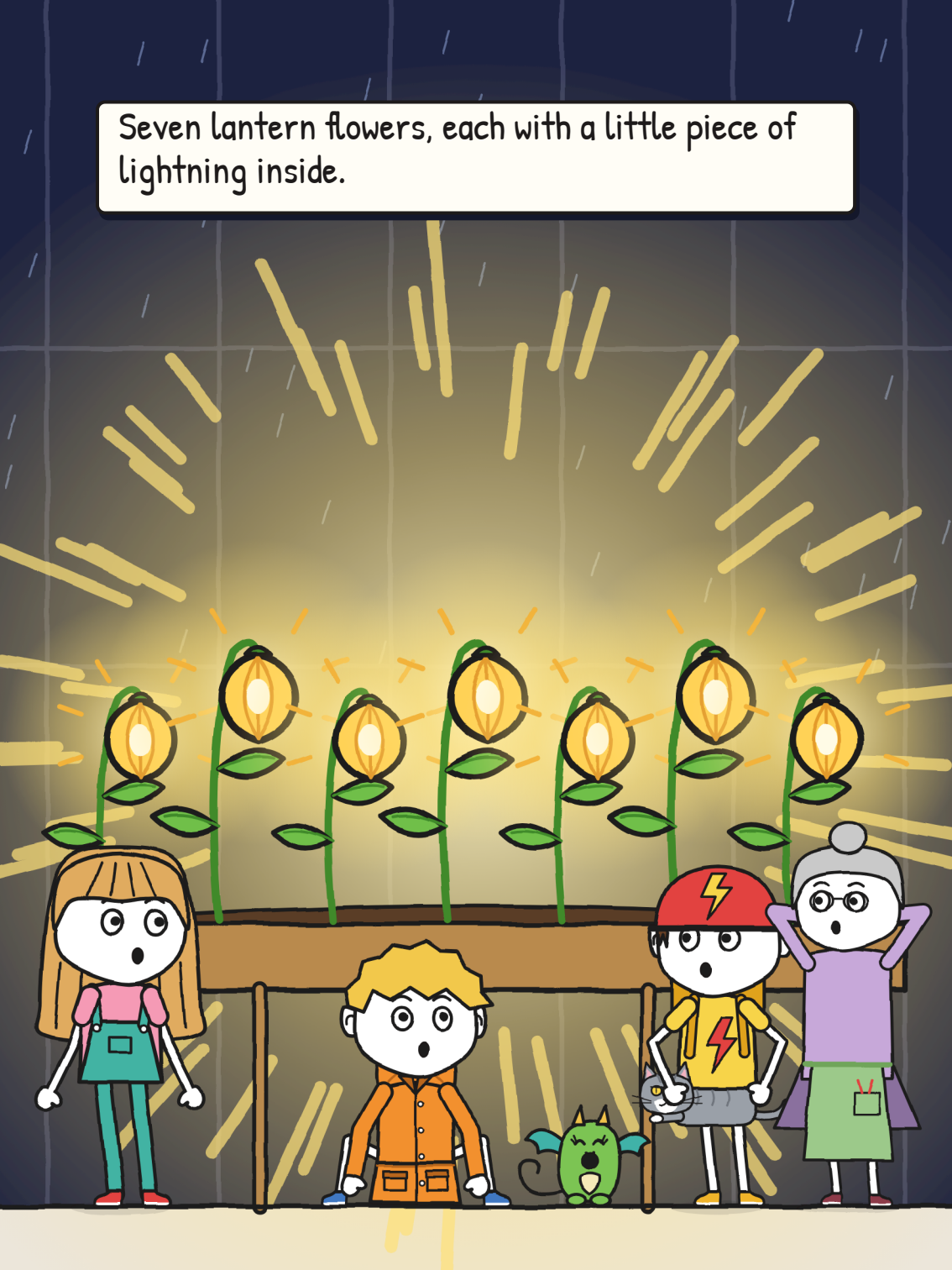
At the next flash we saw it:



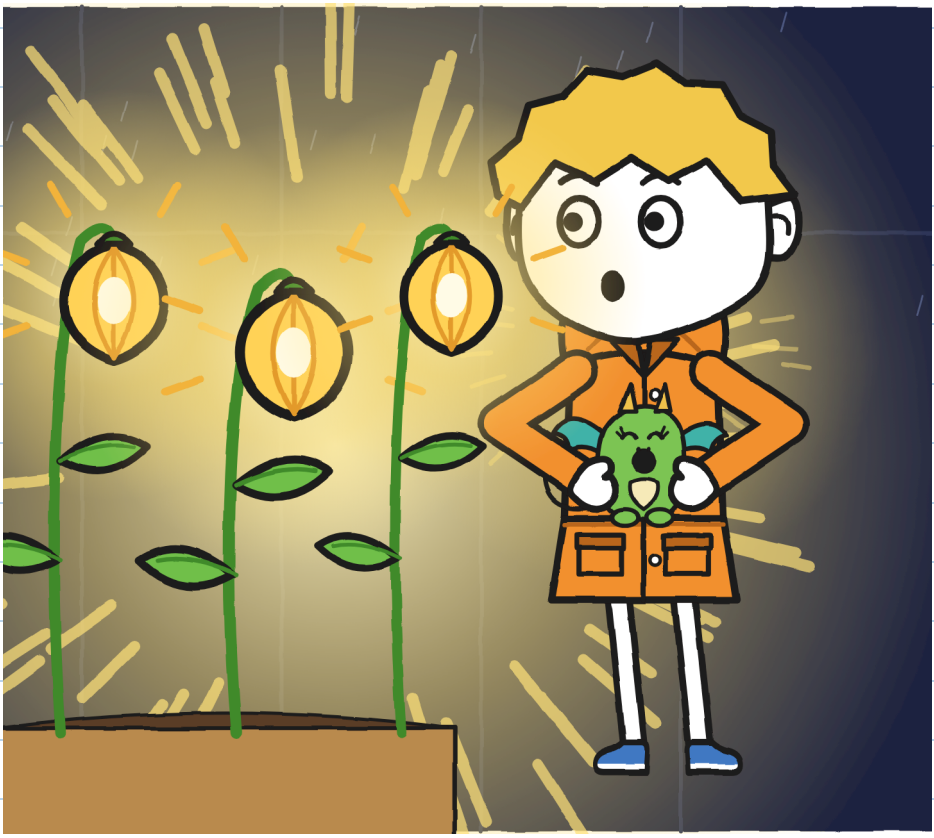
The jar was empty. In the soil, seven tiny holes, and in the last one a little leg was still sticking out.

Then, a while of nothing: us, in the dark, looking at the soil.

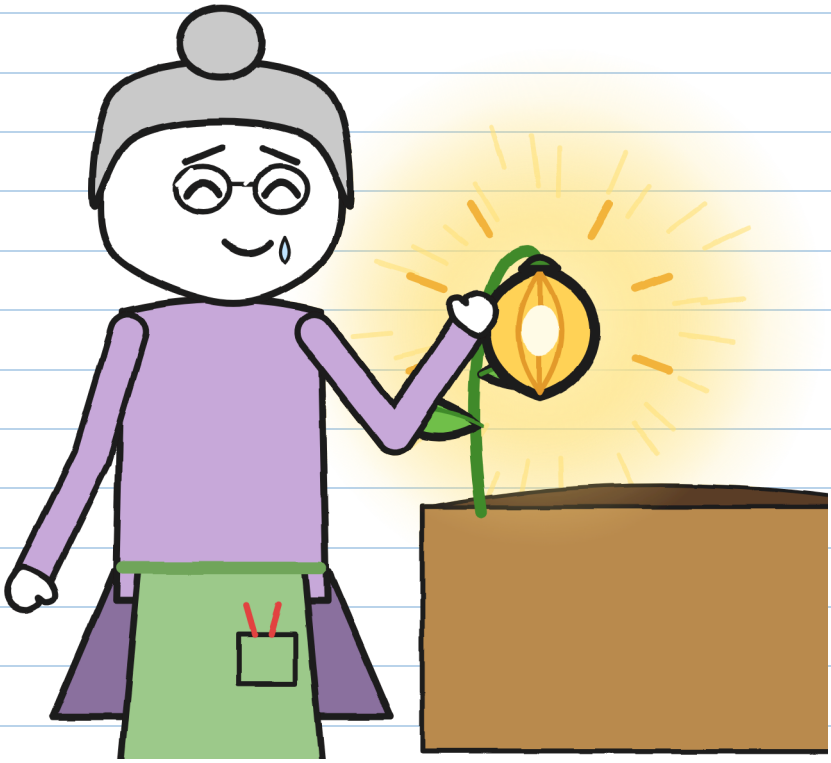
And then the first one lit up.


Seven lantern flowers, each with a little piece of lightning inside.

Crumb didn't hiccup. She was staring at the lantern flowers with her mouth open, just like me. She wasn't copying my fear anymore: she was copying this.



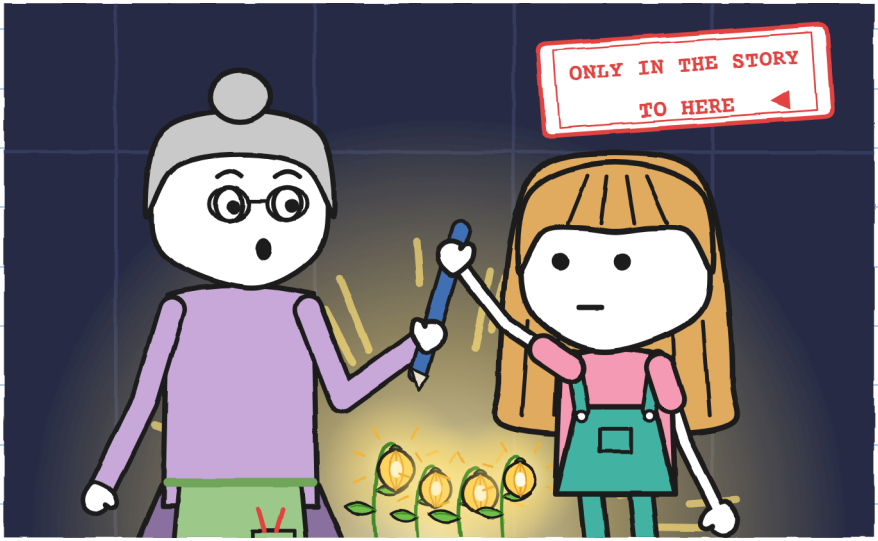
Flora said nothing for a long time, and then touched a lantern flower with one finger, slowly, like someone touching something they have waited a long time for. "That's how the path was," she said.



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

Flora turned the crank to stop the rain. Then she took out a pen.
At last she was going to sign.
Julie stopped the pen with two fingers.
"Not yet. The eighth one is missing."

She looked at the seven lantern flowers.
"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 her overalls.



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

We went back to the kitchen.

"The yard stays closed," said Flora. "We're not going out yet."

We waited until Julie ran out of flashes to count, and then another half an hour, from the last thunder. It had stopped raining: the storm had gone.



And the eighth one was outside, somewhere in the dark. Without soil in time, it would be asleep again: one more stone. And without a signature, at dawn No. 2 would go back to its shelf.

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

Flora looked at the night and 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 went out with Flora and Vera, a lantern and a bike. Julie carried the empty jar and the label; I carried Crumb inside my raincoat, with her head sticking out.

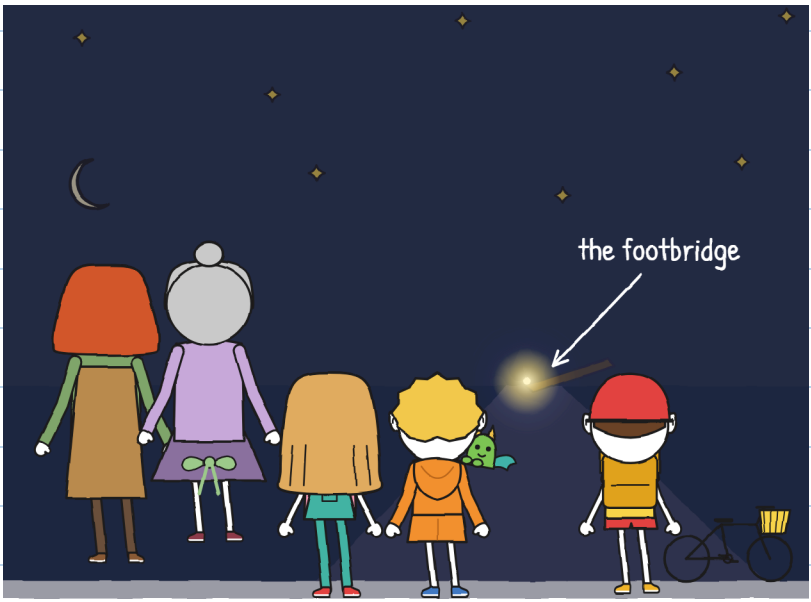
We searched the yard, the little path and the edge of the canal.



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

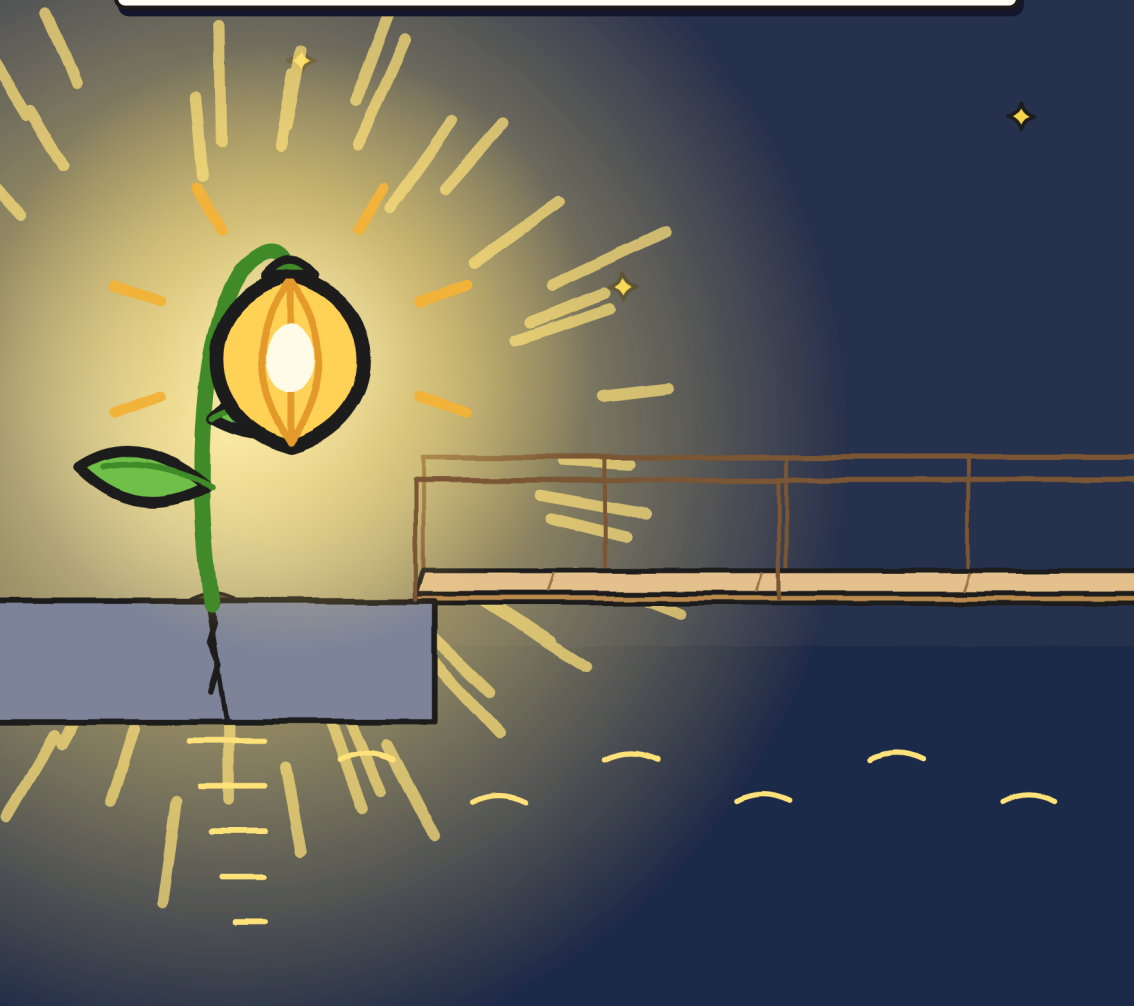
The lantern made the wet stones shine.
Then it came to me: a newly sprouted lantern flower would shine only a little. Our lights might be hiding it.
"Wait. Turn everything off."

Tony stopped the bike, Vera turned down the flame and Flora turned off the flashlight.



We stood still.
At the far end of the path a tiny light appeared. It was 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 stayed 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 looked at the footbridge for a long time: in the light it looked different, shorter, wider, more wood than water.

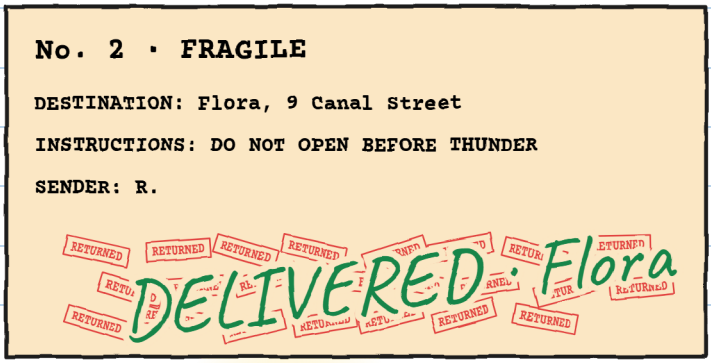
She put one foot on the footbridge. Just one. Then she took it off.

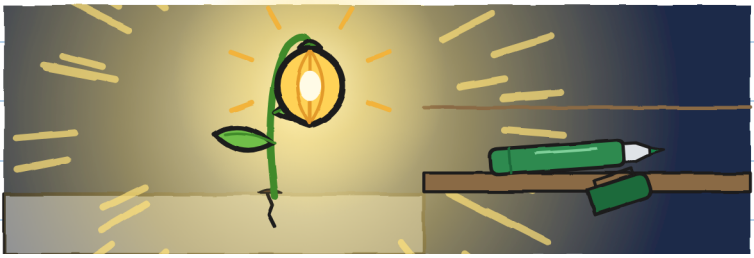


From far away it doesn't scare me anymore. Up close, hardly at all. –J.

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

Julie gave her the label and her green marker, the one with ink that doesn't come off. Flora signed by the light of the eighth one and gave it back.





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

Vera put Crumb in her nest and drove us in the van, with the bike in the back, via the road bridge: at night, the Big Bridge is raised for the boats. She left 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.

Mara had a blanket, earmuffs and a saucepan for a helmet.

Twenty-three deliveries. None in a storm. Now I understood.
I gave her Flora's message and she pulled the saucepan down to her eyebrows.

"I'm scared of thunder too," I said.
Mara lifted the blanket.



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

Mara put a 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: "and cats."



Now the fine print tells the truth. —J.

My plan for thunder, fixed:

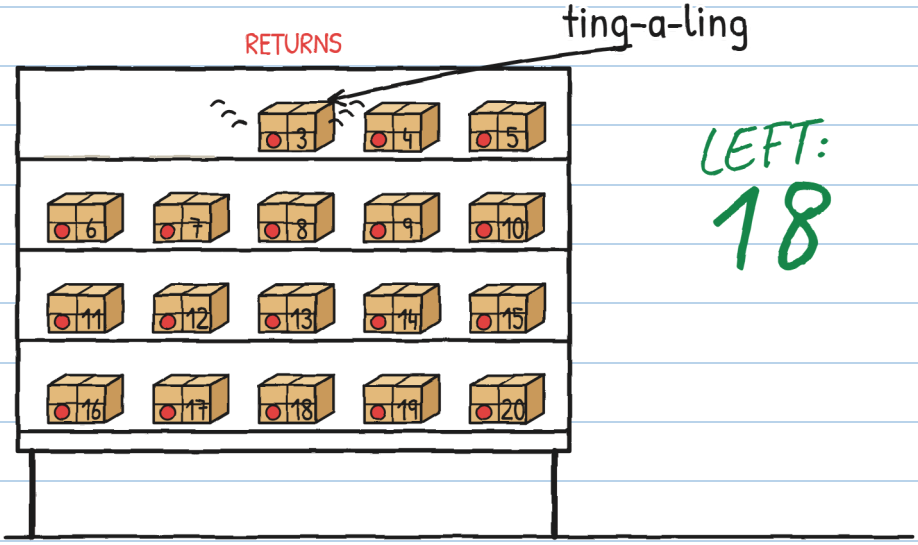
1. Count elephants.
2. With someone.
3. If I hiccup, it doesn't matter.

LEFT:

~~19~~ 18



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

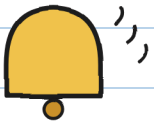


That night, before we left, one of the returns rang: ting-a-ling, like a little bell. No. 3.

The label said:

No. 3

FOR TONYKINS

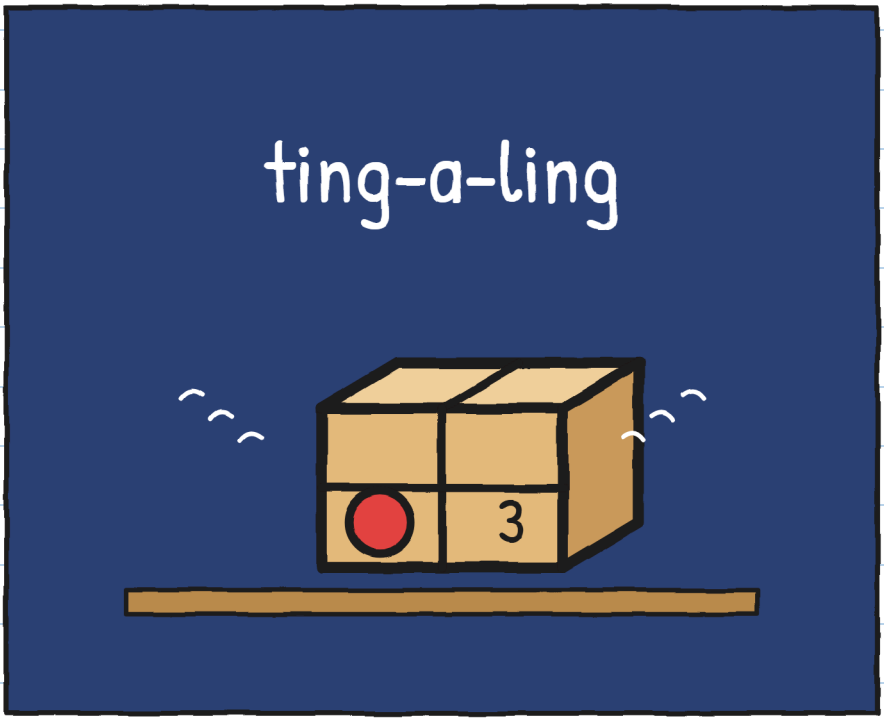




Tony turned the color of his helmet.

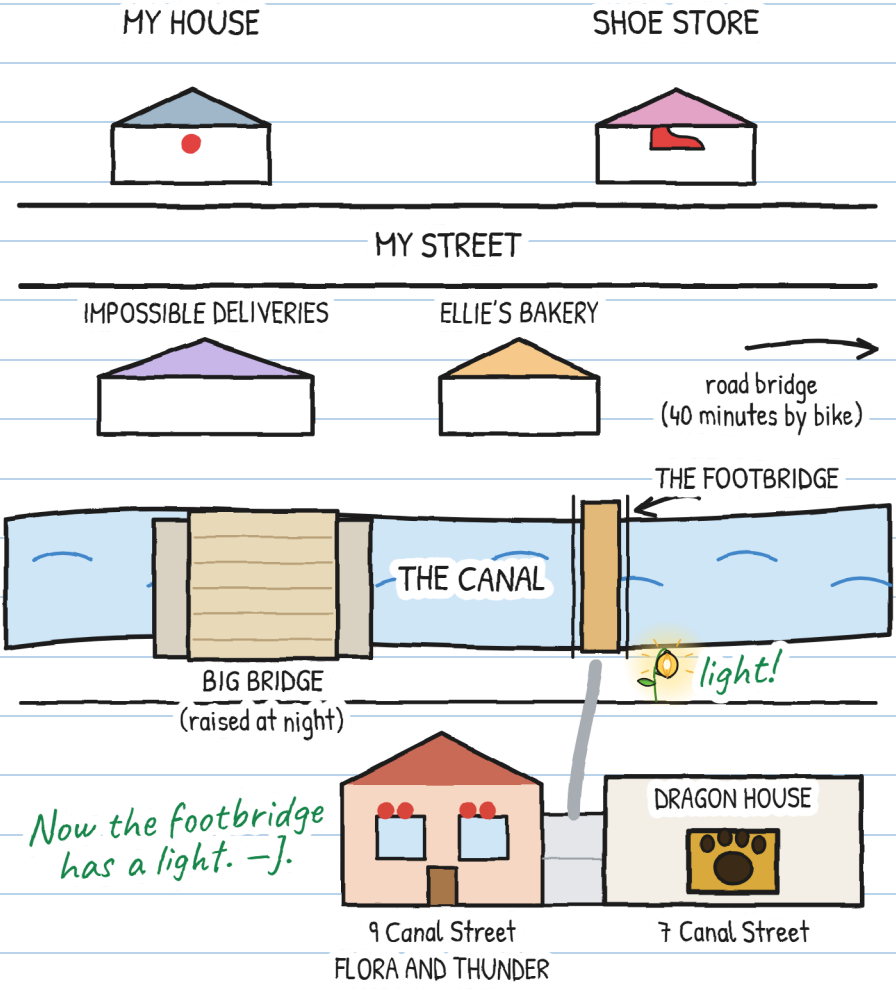
IMPOSSIBLE DELIVERIES · 3

(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...

ONE STORY, SIX SIZES

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SIZE XXS · PRE-A1
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.

SIZE XL · B2-C1
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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