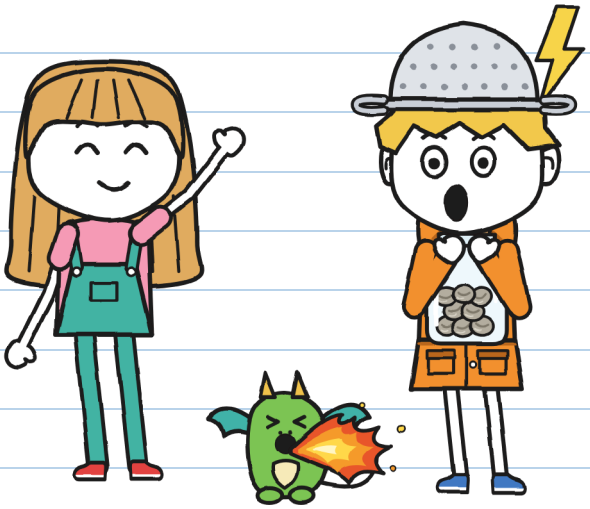
IMPOSSIBLE DELIVERIES · 2

Do Not Open Before Thunder

Lui Eriksson



(Gus's notebook)

SIZE S
Starter Level · 7+

IMPOSSIBLE DELIVERIES · 2
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 hurt in 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! 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.

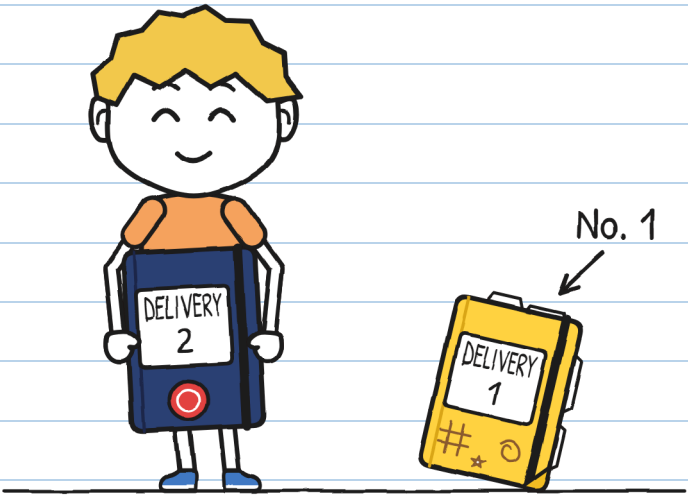


R. Sends the packages nobody can deliver. Nobody says R.'s name.

DELIVERY NOTEBOOK 2
by Gus

OFFICIAL.

"Official": I read it first. Officially. —J.



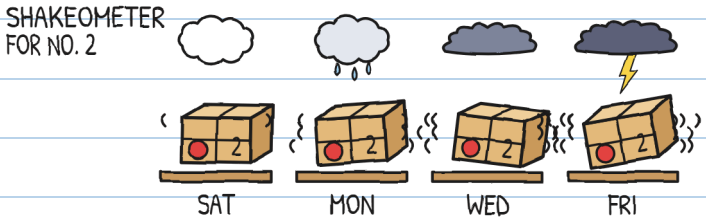
Notebook 1 is full. Mara gave me this one. She owns the shop. It has the shop's stamp on the cover. She says an official notebook is not for drawing. We'll see.

CHAPTER 1

Storm Chaser

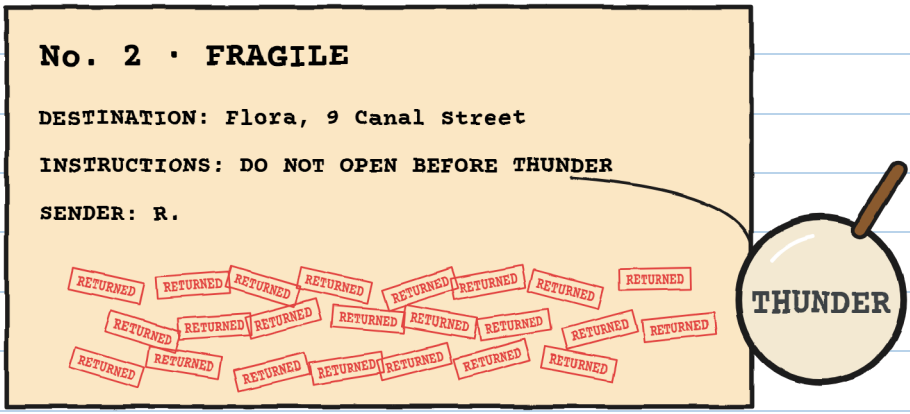
In Mara's shop there's a package that shakes. A little more every day.
I'm not going to touch it.
The last one Julie and I delivered was an egg. Now she's called Crumb. She has wings and copies everything I do.

In the shop across the street from my house, there are nineteen returns. One is in a big hurry.



It's not fear: a storm is coming. On Saturday, at six in the evening. I checked the forecast six times. —J.

A return always comes back. The person who gets it has to sign the label. The ink must not 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 with No. 2. Tony was there too. On Saturdays the three of us are punished, because we delivered No. 1 without permission. We help in the shop.

"You're going to deliver this one," said Mara. "This afternoon."

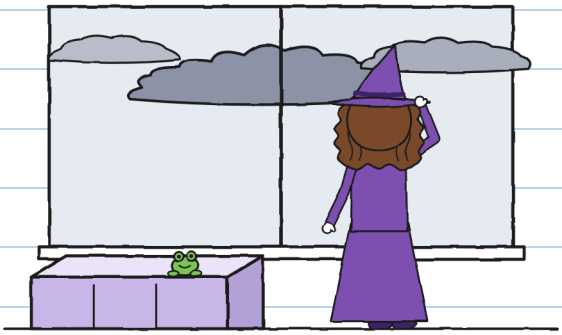


Julie jumped very high. She almost touched the LEFT: 19 sign.

Mara gave us three conditions. She counted them on her fingers:

1. You leave at five, before the storm. You stay at Flora's until it passes.
2. Your families know. Flora knows too.
3. The rule on the label: don't open before thunder. Thunder overhead counts. Faraway thunder doesn't.

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

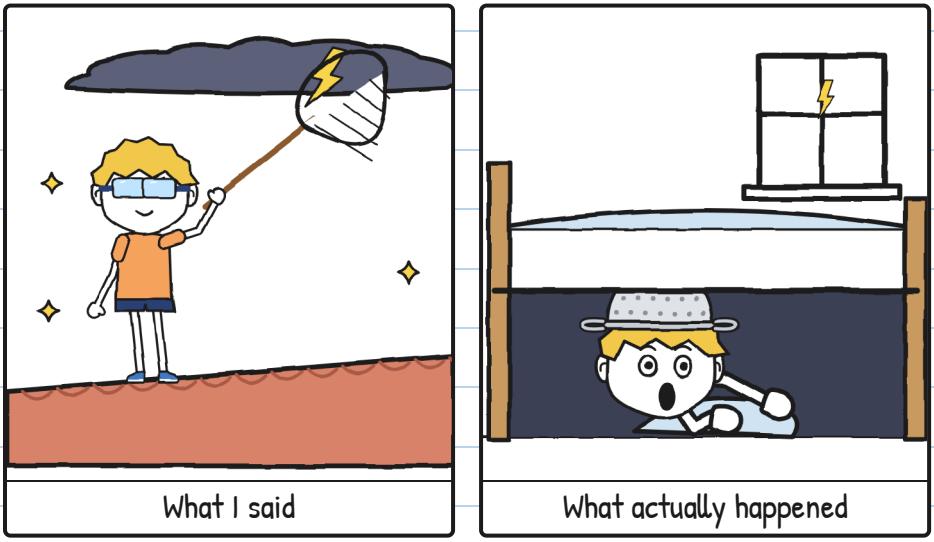


What things? –J.

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

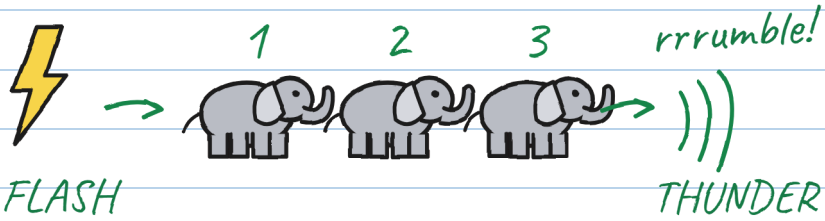
I said the usual thing:

"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.

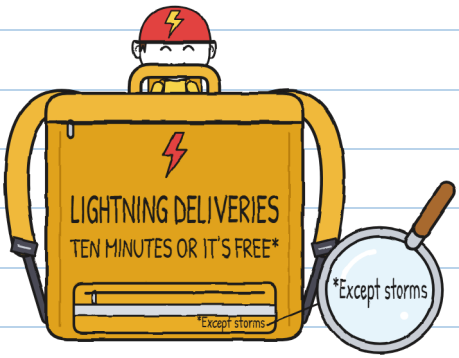
More elephants: that lightning struck farther away.

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

What you know scares you less. –J.

I didn't need it: 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 showed us the fine print on his backpack.
"There isn't a storm yet," said Julie.
Tony looked again. It said nothing about "yet."

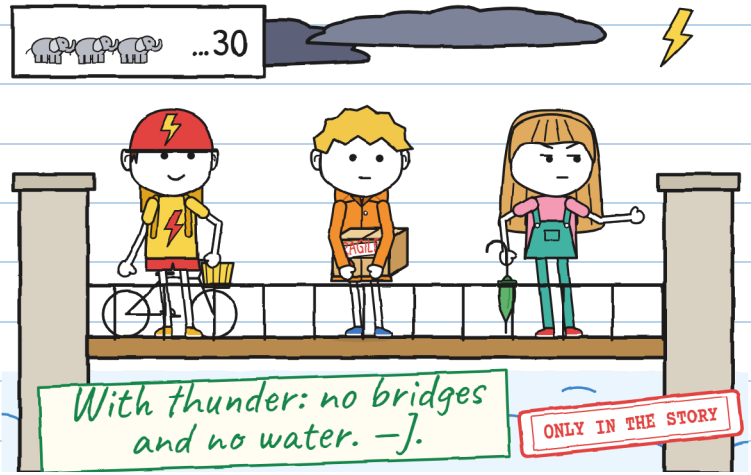


The fine print was too small. –J.

And he came with us.
At five I went across to my house for my raincoat.
"Wear the orange one," said Mom from the door.
"Are you sure? You, when it thunders..."
"BYE, MOM!"

"You, when it thunders..." WHAT? –J.

We crossed the Big Bridge. At night they raise it for the boats. The sky was getting blacker. In the middle, Julie waved at the water. Very seriously. She and the canal are not friends.



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

Rrrumble.

"That lightning was about ten kilometers away," she said. "The forecast says the storm comes 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 sounds at the same time as the flash: zero elephants. But you can hear it now: take cover!"
We ran to Canal Street. I pretended I heard nothing.

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



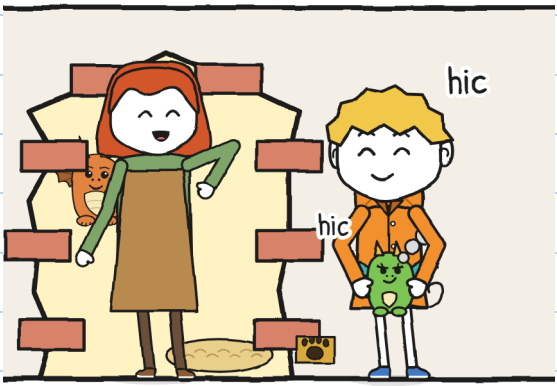
It started when I was little. Only with thunder. Each clap gives me hiccups, one every three seconds. With the storm overhead, I can't stop. It's not fear. My body does it without asking.

It's called being scared. –J.

Vera was waiting for us at her door, 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 gave her to me. "She copies everything you do, Gus. Even what you feel. If she gets scared, don't pull her: she holds on. When the storm is over, knock three times on the yard wall and I'll come."

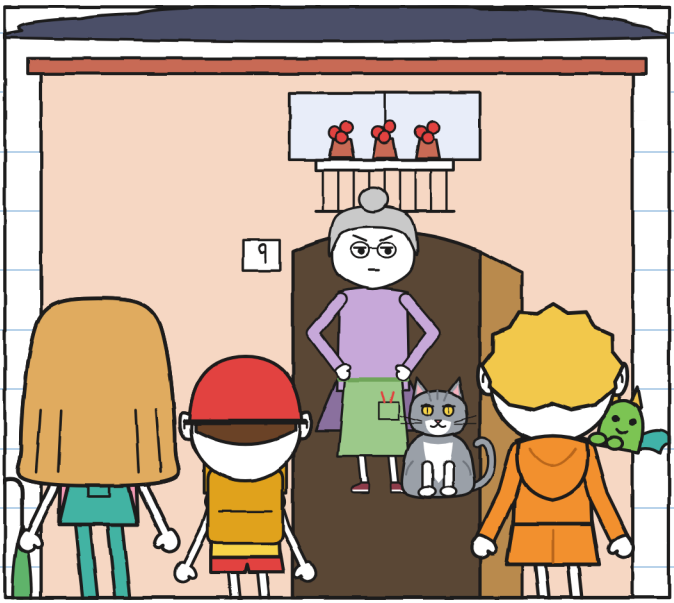
"I don't feel anything," I said. "I love storms."



Far away, it thundered. I hiccuped. Crumb hiccuped. Smoke came out of her nose.

"Inside, now!" said Vera.

Flora's house is the one with geraniums. Two Saturdays ago, she watched us from that balcony. We were looking for the door of the Dragon House. It looks like a wall.



Flora opened the door. We didn't even have time to knock. She looked at the box. She looked at the sky. She looked at Crumb.
"Vera's hatchling. Don't let her burn my ferns," she said. "Come in, rain's coming. I'm warning you: I don't sign for stones."

CHAPTER 2

Thunder!

Flora's kitchen is full of plants. At the back, a glass door goes into the greenhouse. The back door has a cat door. It goes to the yard. Tony put his bike in the hall, out of the rain.

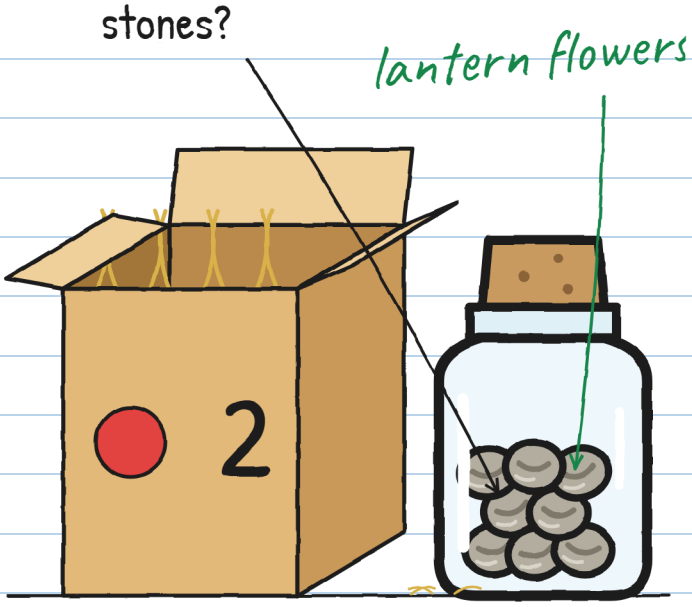


On the greenhouse glass there were painted raindrops. They went up, not down.
"R.'s enchanted glass," said Flora. "It lets rain in when I want. Lightning, never."

Flora put the box on the table. She opened it without asking. Inside was a glass jar. It had eight little gray balls.

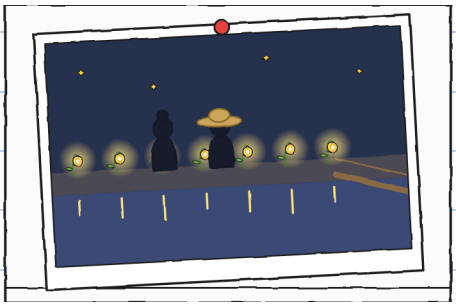
"It says not to open before thunder!" shouted Julie.

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



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

Flora showed us an old photo. It was the canal path at night. There were little lights on the bank.



"They're plants," said Flora. "They keep the light of lightning and glow all night."
"And R. planted them?"
"R. brought the seeds awake. I put in the soil. I never saw one asleep."
"And the lantern flowers?"
"They went out. R. stopped coming. And now R. sends this."

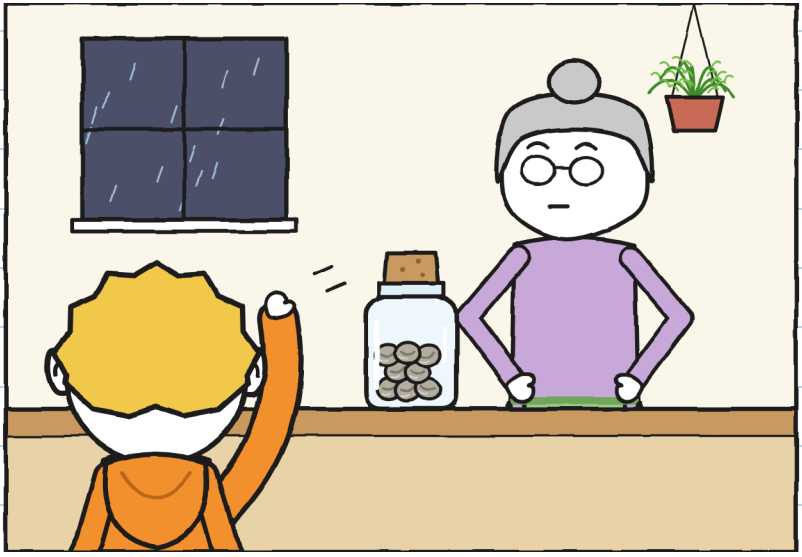
That's why the canal is dark. And why the footbridge, a plank across it, is scary.

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

"R. always delivers," said Flora. "Late, but delivers. Not with this. Twenty-three times they brought me this jar. Twenty-three times, stones."

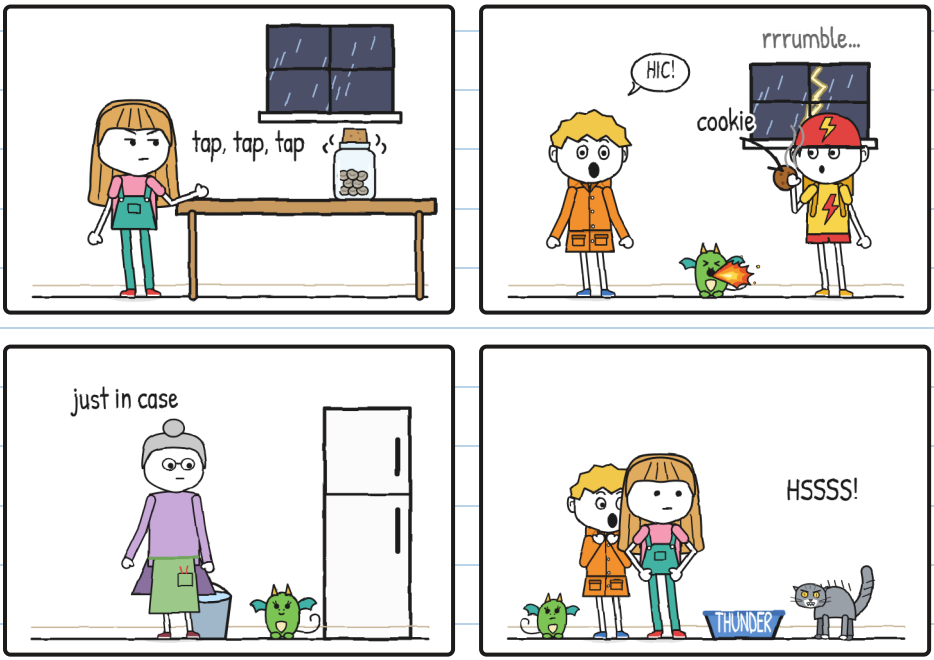
I thought about the label. I knew it by heart: DO NOT OPEN BEFORE THUNDER.
"Did you ever wait for thunder to open it?" I asked.

Flora looked at me as if my question was silly.
"I don't wait for anybody," she said. "Not even for thunder."



Flora's cat is called Thunder. His name is on his bowl. He is gray like a cloud. And he purrs like thunder.

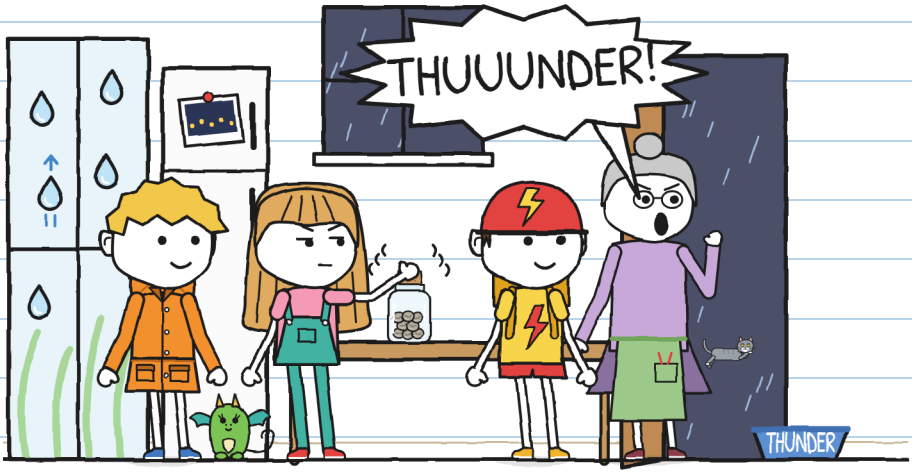
We waited for the storm in the kitchen. Many small things happened:



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

The jar went ting, ting. Louder and louder.
Julie was counting: "Twelve elephants."
Then: "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 very fast."
Then Crumb made another little flame. Thunder shot out through the cat door, into the yard. Flora opened the back door and shouted:
"THUUUNDER!"



And Julie opened the jar.



"That was thunder!" she said.

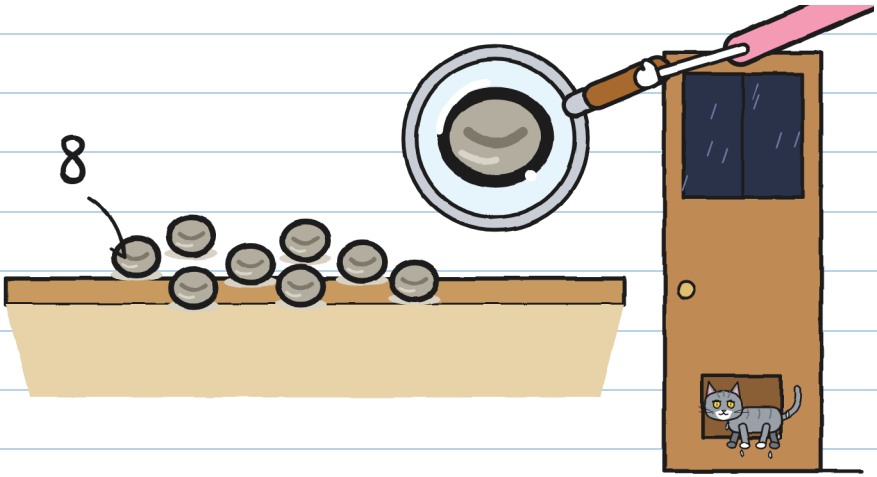
It didn't thunder. Flora shouted. Thunder is the cat.

I heard "THUNDER!" It was 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 went quiet. Inside were only eight little gray balls. Cold and still. Julie put them on the table. She looked at them with her magnifying glass.
"They have a little line," she said. "Like a closed eye."



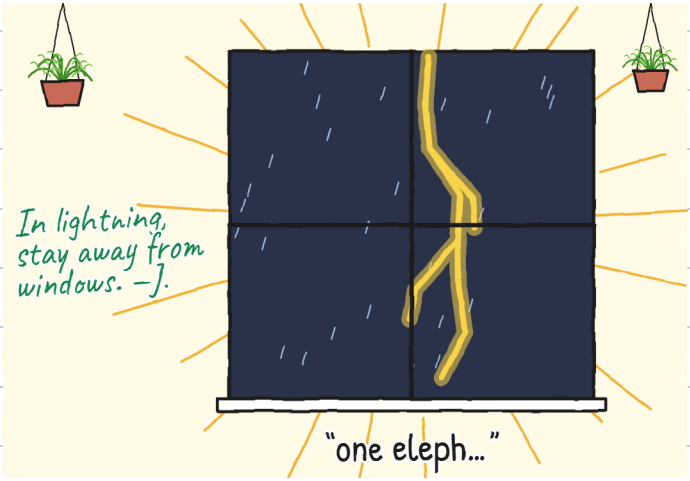
Thunder came back through the cat door, soaked. Flora closed the door.
"Stones. As always," she said. And she looked at Julie.

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 thunder wakes them. A loud one, the kind that shakes the windows."

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

Outside it was almost night. It was six in the evening.
Flash. Julie began to count:

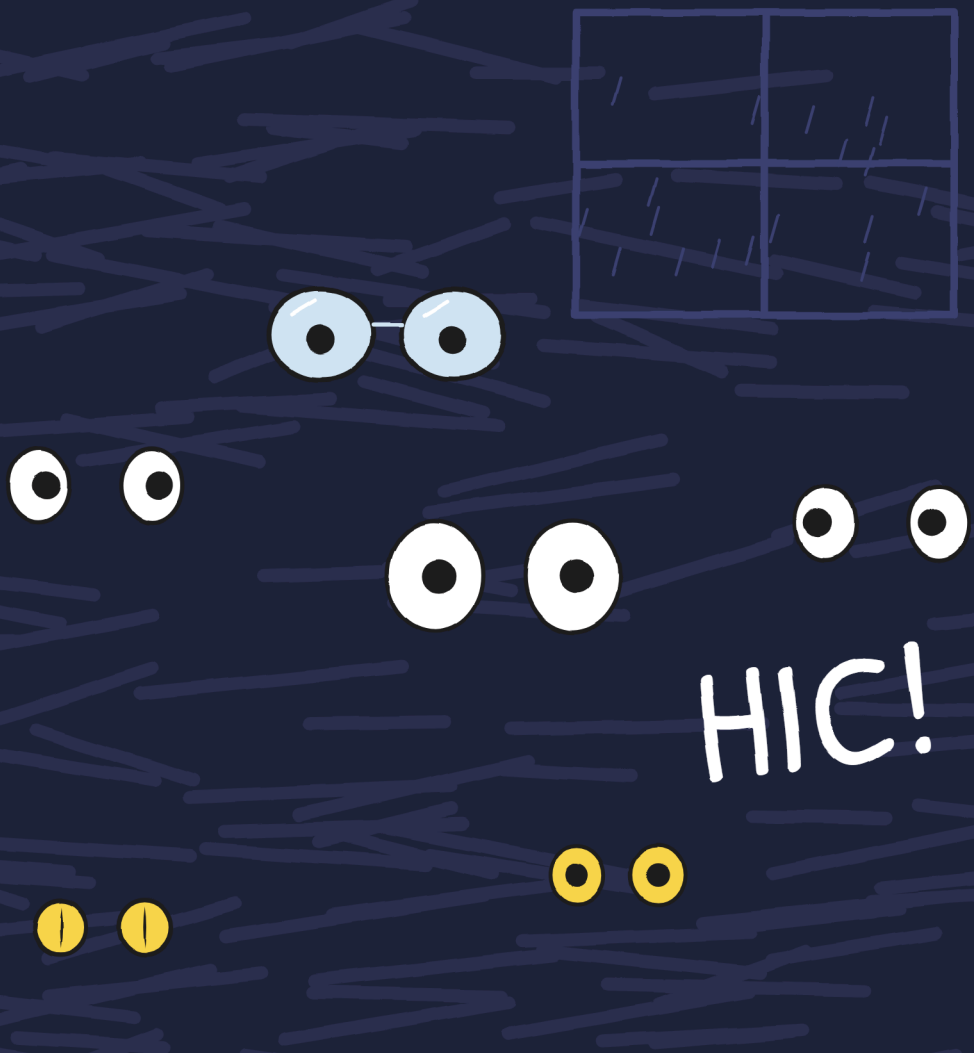


And the real one came.



Thunder and lightning at the same time: the storm was overhead. The table, the glasses and the windows shook.

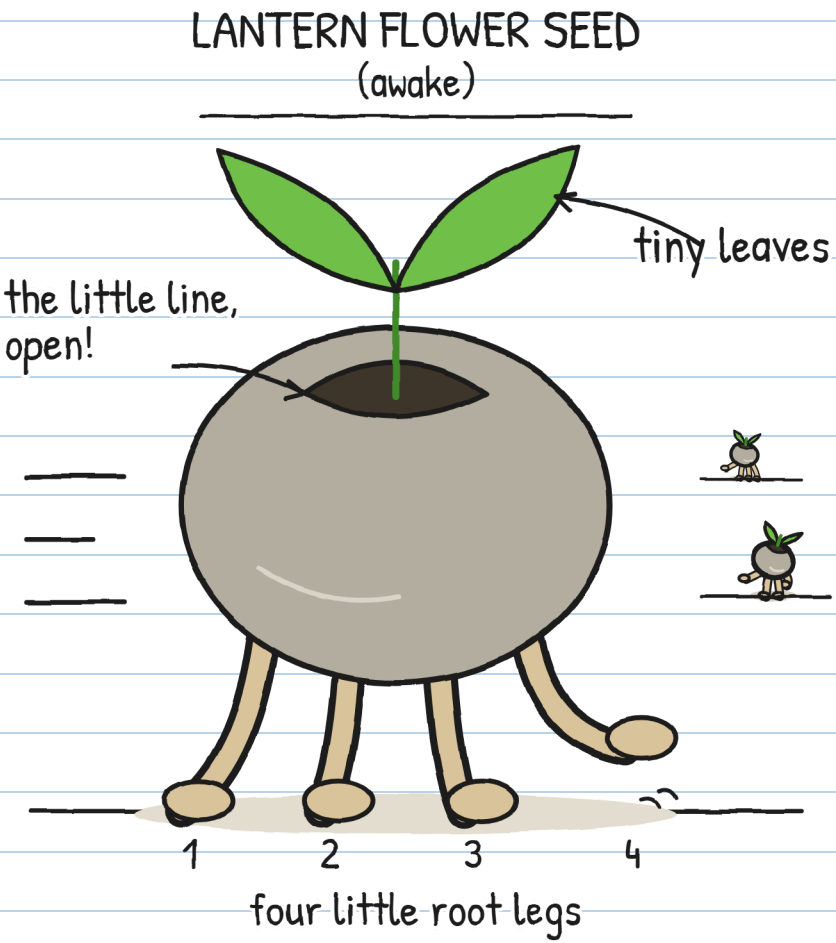
And the lights went out.



I hiccuped. Crumb hiccuped: a flame burst. For one second we saw 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 we heard tiny rain: tip, tip, tip. Another flash: the seeds were farther away. And still. Very still. As if nothing happened.

They ran fast. But every flash stopped them. And there were many. I watched them from under the table. I put on Flora's colander: at home, when it thunders, I wear one.



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

Flora pointed her flashlight at a seed. The seed stopped.
She pointed it at another. The first one ran off.

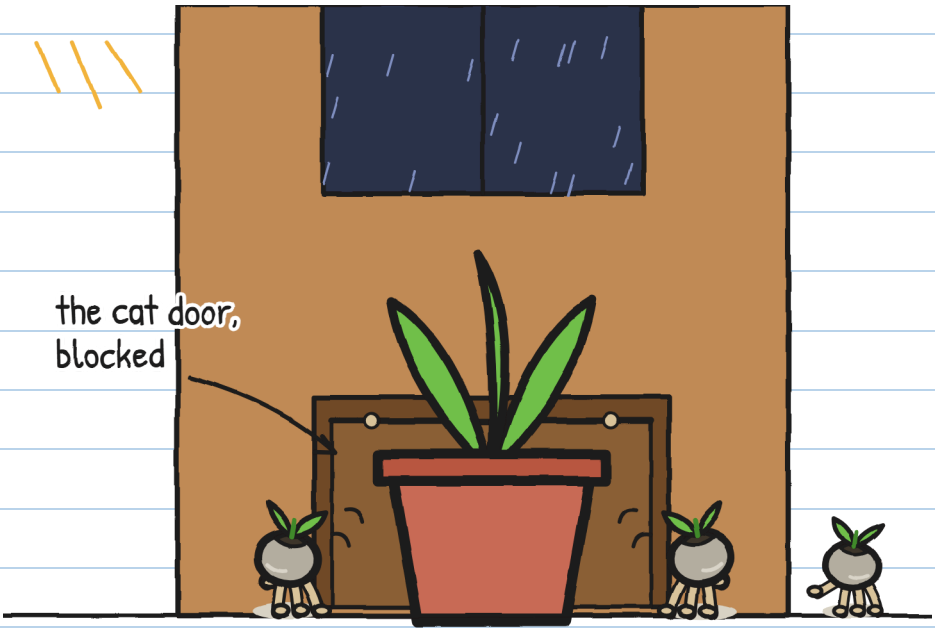
"They're seeds! They're awake!" shouted Flora.



She moved the light. Now the second one ran.
"We need another flashlight," I said.
"Then think of something else. I only have this one."

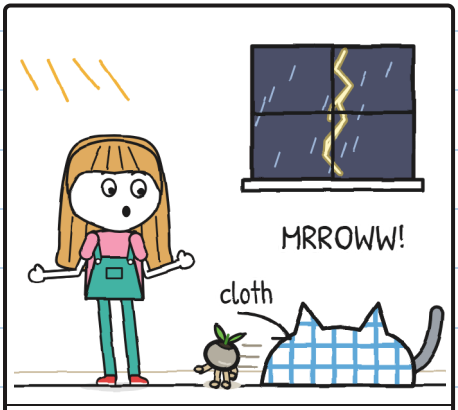
In the light, still. In the dark, running. One flashlight wasn't enough for all of them.

They were all going to the cat door. Flora blocked it with a huge plant pot.
"They want storm-wet soil," she said. "Here there's only tap-water soil. And outside there's almost no soil. If they get out, the rain will wash them into the canal."



But now they were all over the kitchen, in the dark. And a kitchen has a hundred hiding places.

We tried everything:



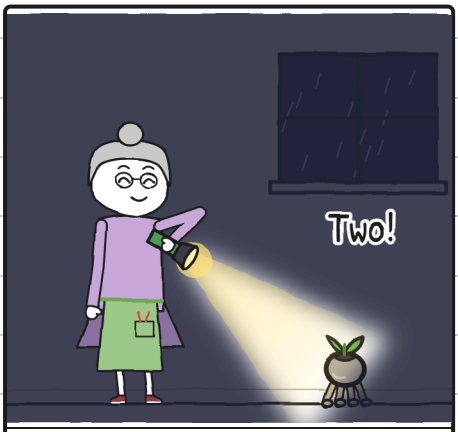
Julie, with a cloth: caught Thunder.



Tony, with his hands: Thunder caught him.



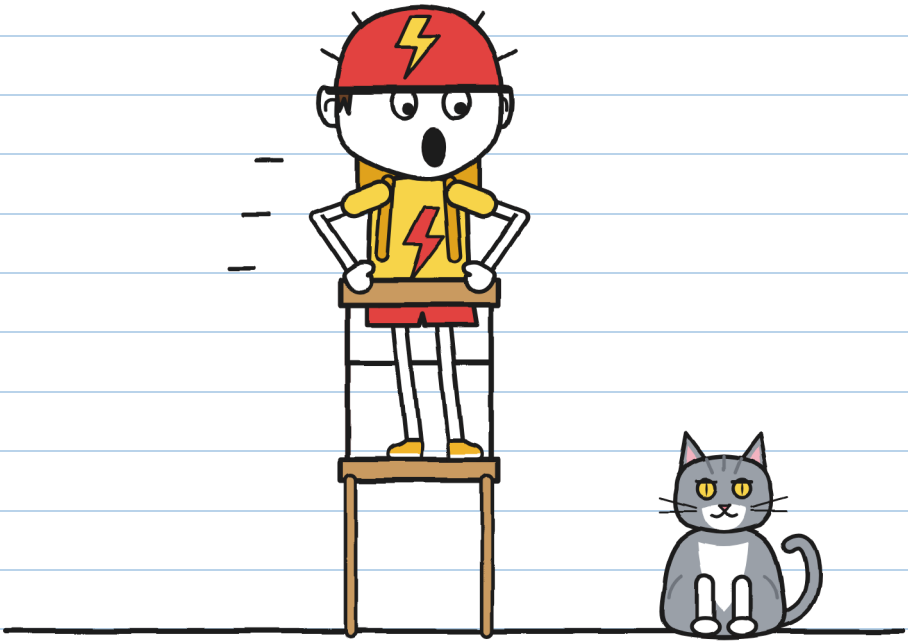
Crumb, with her flame: one!



Flora, with the flashlight: two!

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

Tony isn't afraid of storms. He's afraid of cats.

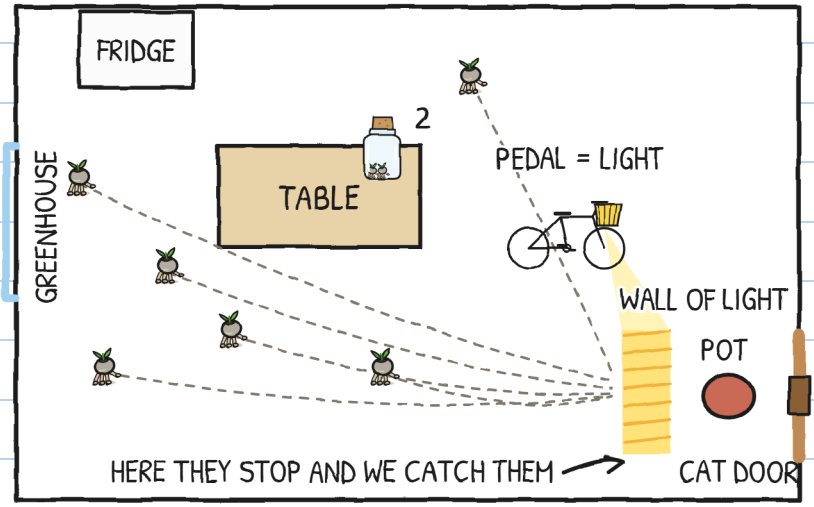


"It's not a cat!" Julie told him. "It's Thunder!"
"WORSE!"

Two scares, one name. —J.

I was still under the table, wearing the colander. From there I saw something: the seeds always went back to the cat door. The pot was blocking it. They pushed.

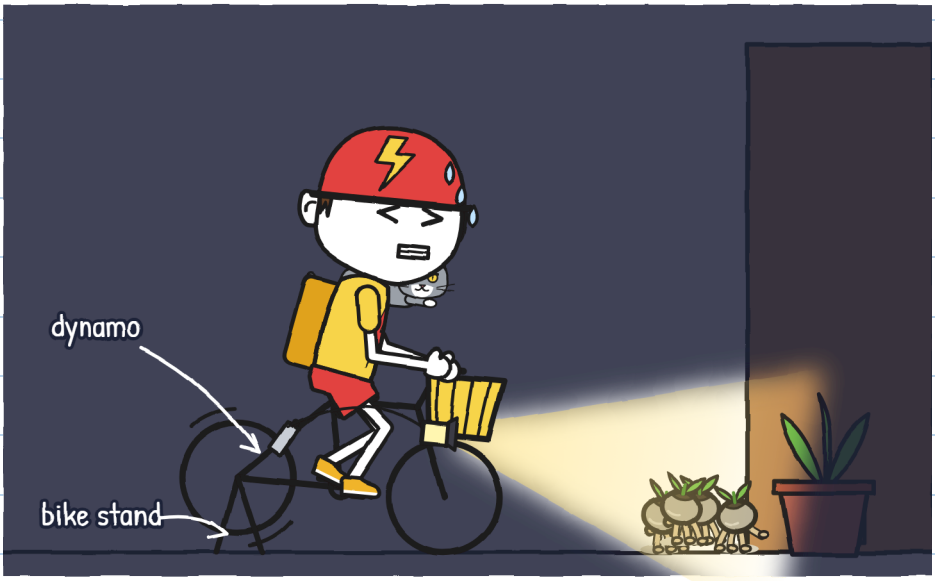
All of them. To the same place.
I drew a plan.



"Tony, does your light come on when you pedal?"
"Of course."
"Then today you're going to deliver light."

We put the bike on its stand. The light pointed at the cat door. A LIGHTNING bike has a dynamo: if the wheel turns, there's light. And Tony pedaled.

He pedaled like never before. Especially when Thunder climbed on him.



At last LIGHTNING is good for something. —J.

The seeds reached the light and stopped. We caught them one by one. Into the jar. Three. Four.

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



Six.

Flora put the cork in the jar. Now none could escape. Then she crouched down to help us. And Thunder jumped on the table and knocked it over.



Tony caught it in the air.
"LIGHTNING," he said. "In one second or it's free."

But he stopped pedaling. The light went out. And Thunder ran to the cat door.

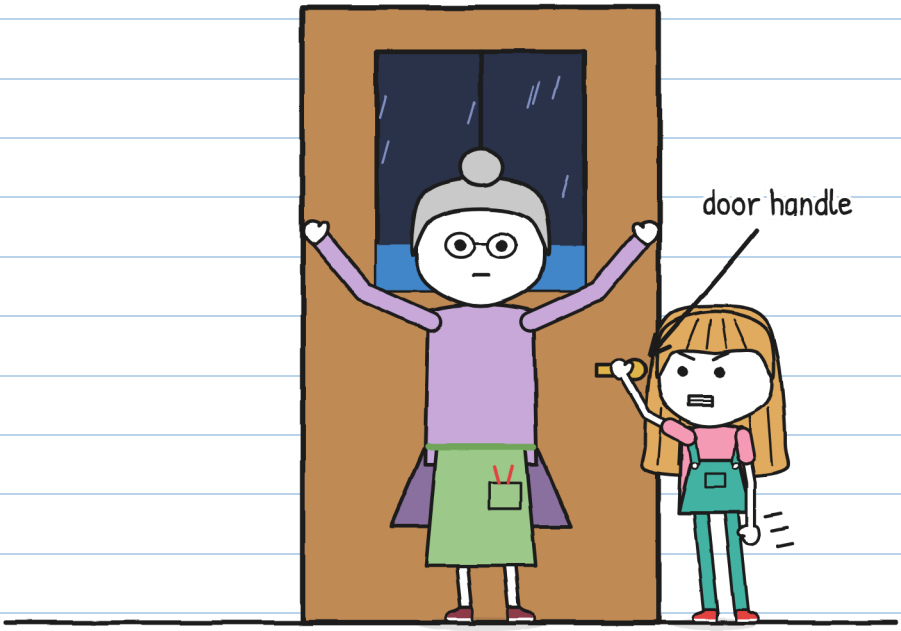
In the dark: tip, tip, tip. Thunder shoved the pot: scrape. And the cat door went clack.

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



The eighth one went out through the cat door.

"I'm going after it!" said Julie, with her hand on the door handle.
"Nobody goes out with lightning around," said Flora, in front of the door. She said it very seriously.



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."

"Now let's plant them," said Flora. "Before the storm goes. In the dark."
"In there?" asked Julie.
Flora pointed at the raindrops going up the glass.
"The enchantment is still on. The lightning stays outside."



Then she looked at Crumb.
"In the dark."

Crumb looked at me. And hiccuped.

CHAPTER 4

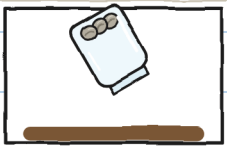
Hic

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

HOW TO PLANT A LANTERN FLOWER

1. 

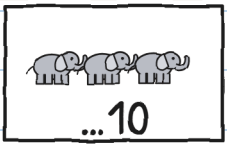
Storm-wet soil.
(Tap-water soil doesn't count.)

2. 

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

3. 

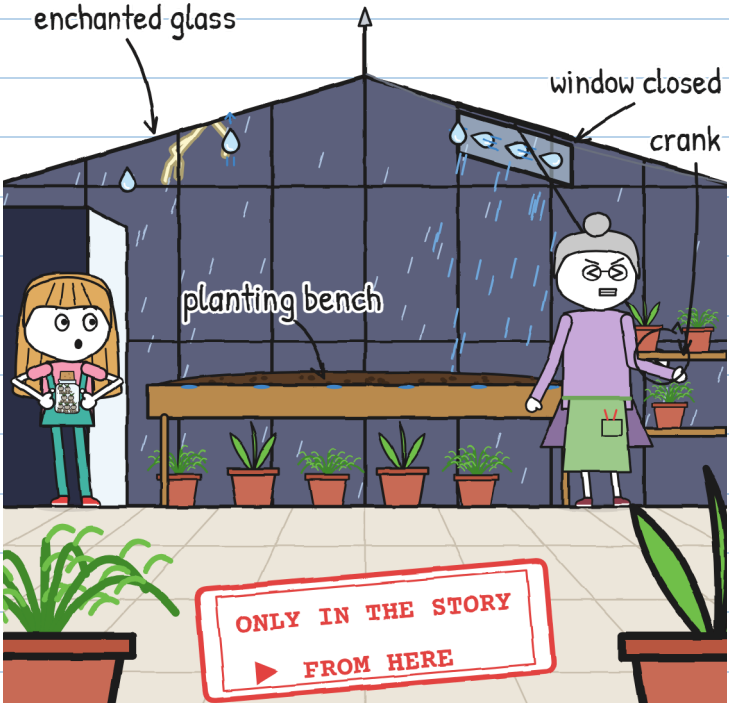
All in the dark: they go into the soil by themselves.
(If you bury them yourself, they won't sprout.)

4. 

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

Wake them: zero elephants. Plant them: up to ten. Eleven: back to sleep. —J.

Flora turned a crank. The window didn't open. The painted raindrops began to go down.
The real rain went through the glass and fell on the planting bench: a long table full of soil.
"All of it on the bench. Not one drop on the floor," Flora told the rain.

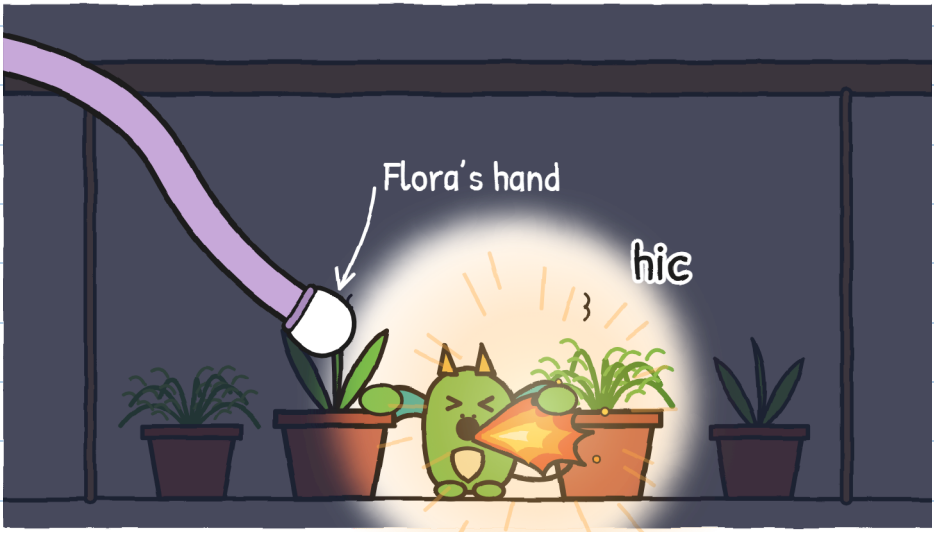


This glass only exists in the story. In a real storm, no greenhouses (page 76). —J.

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

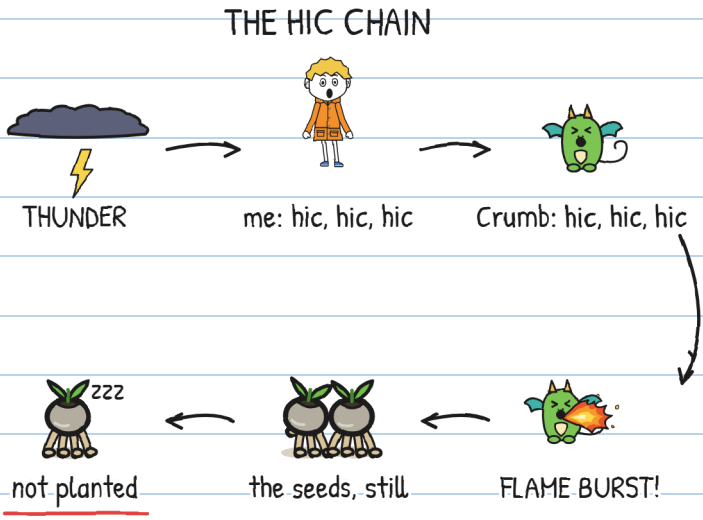
But Crumb was already inside. She slipped between Flora's feet. Nobody saw her. She was under the bench, among the plant pots.

Flora pulled her gently. Crumb held on to the pots with all four paws. Vera warned us.



Each hiccup of mine in the kitchen lit up Crumb in the greenhouse.

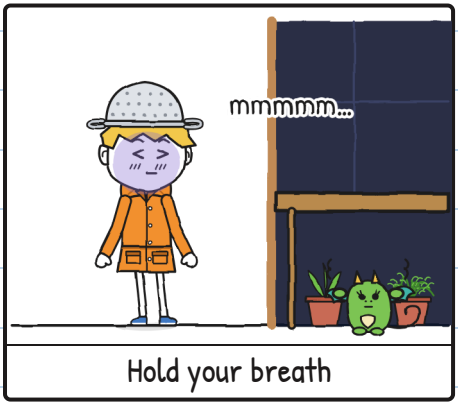
I drew it so I could understand it:



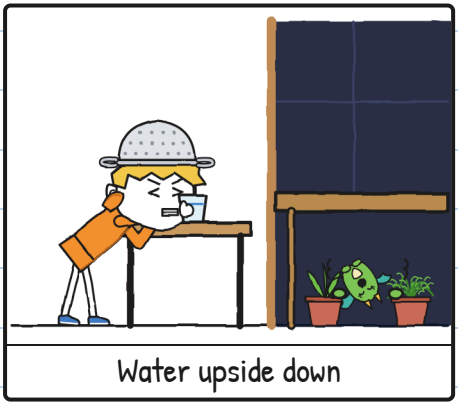
In the kitchen, the hiccups helped: flame burst, still seed, caught seed. In the greenhouse, no. A flame burst every three seconds. It was never dark long enough for the seeds to plant themselves.

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

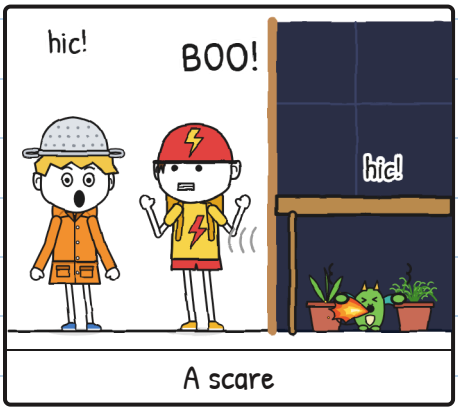
We tried all the cures for hiccups:



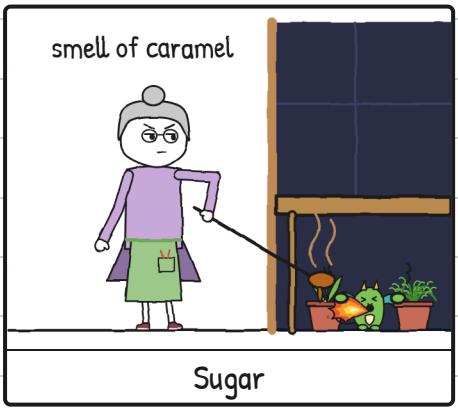
Hold your breath



Water upside down



A scare



Sugar

Crumb copied them all. Without letting go of her pots.

Cures: zero. Hiccups: many. –J.

"Four elephants. Five."
The thunder sounded.
"That lightning was farther away," said Julie.

The seven seeds went around in the jar. I kept hiccuping.



"And if we get to eleven?" I asked.
Julie looked at the seeds.
"Stones again."
Then she looked at me.

"Crumb copies your fear," said Julie.
"Then she can copy something else," I said. And I hiccuped.
"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. I had a plan to hide it. 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.

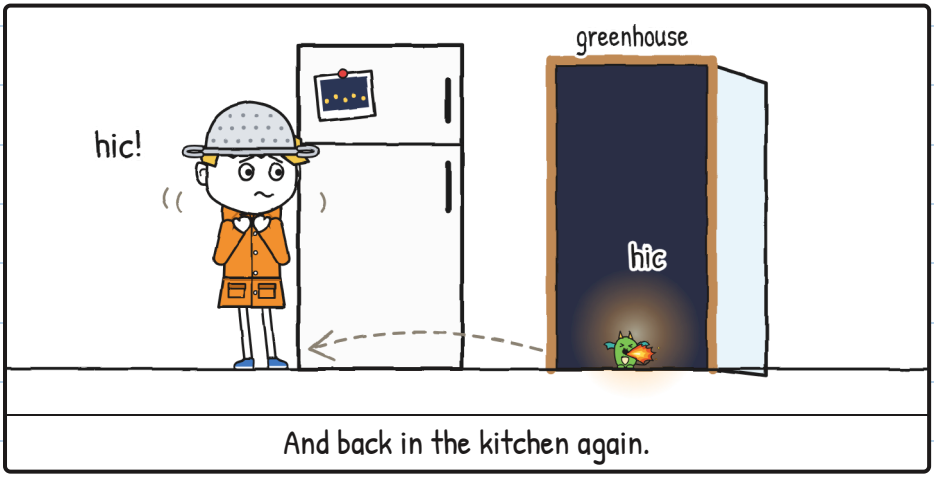
I tried. I really did.



One foot in.



A thunderclap.



And back in the kitchen again.

The greenhouse is where thunder is loudest. In the whole neighborhood.

From the door I looked up through the glass roof. Between two flashes I saw them, high above the roof. Vera's dragons, flying in the storm. They fly when nobody looks up. That's why Vera didn't come with us. In a storm, she stays to watch them.



They weren't hiccuping.

"Come on, storm chaser," said Tony.

I waited for the joke. 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 lightning. Fear? Sometimes it can. —J.

Inside, the rain sounded like a thousand fingers on the glass. I crawled under the bench. Crumb was there, in a ball. She was 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. Julie was at the door. I was under the bench, with Crumb shaking against my raincoat.

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



I counted the six elephants. The fear was still there.

Twice I said I loved storms. It didn't work.
Crumb looked at me.
I tried telling the truth.

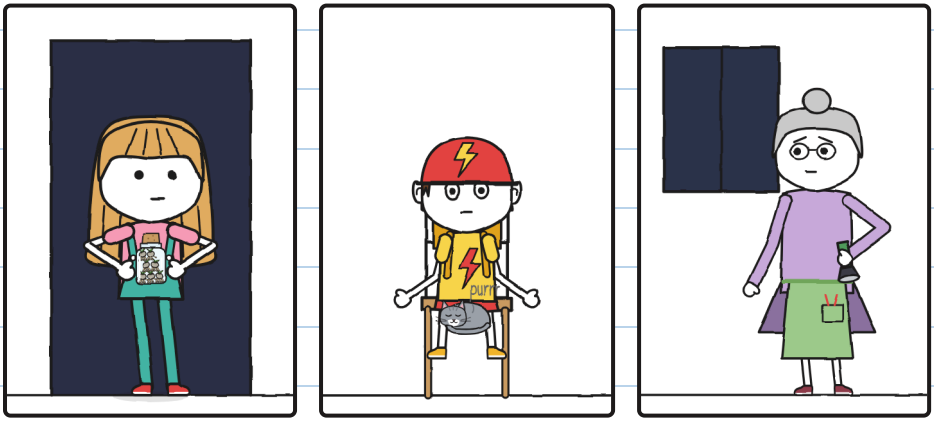


"I'm scared of thunder."

"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. Thunder was sleeping on his knees. Tony didn't dare to move.

"And I'm scared of waiting for something that doesn't come," said Flora. "That's why I always opened the jar right away."



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

Nobody laughed. It was still raining. But under the bench I wasn't alone.

I breathed slowly. Crumb breathed slowly.

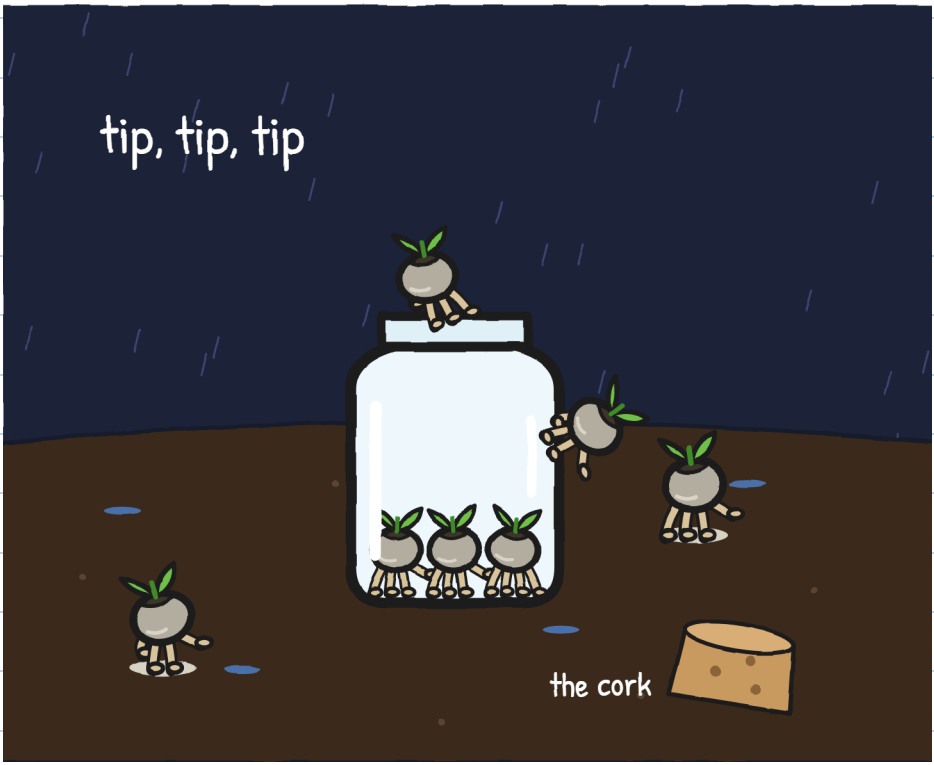


Flash. We counted together up to nine. Rrrumble.

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

"Now!" whispered Flora.

Julie tiptoed in, in the dark. She left the open jar on the wet soil. And she went back to the door without a sound.

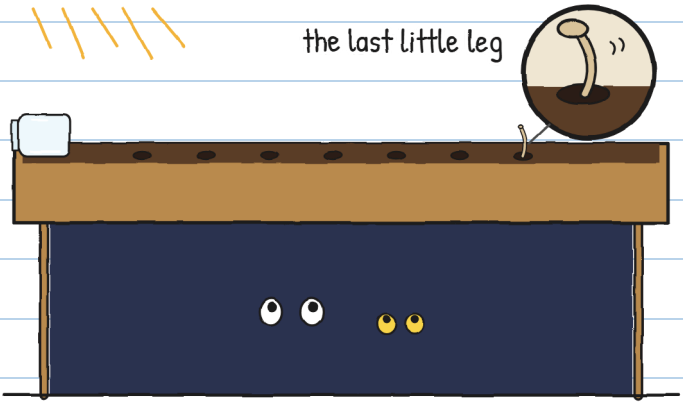


Tip, tip, tip. In the dark, something was coming out of the jar.

Flash, far away. We counted with our lips only, up to ten. Rrrumble.

Ten: the last number that counted.

With the next flash we saw it:



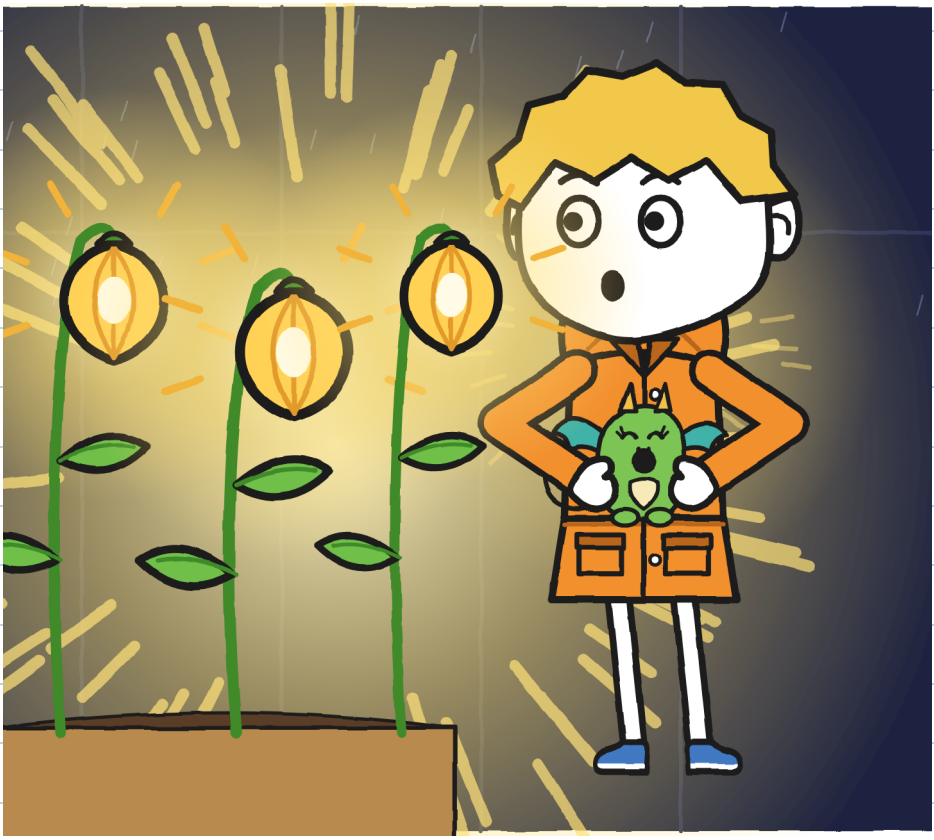
The jar was empty. In the soil, seven tiny holes. In the last one, a little leg was still sticking out.

Then, a while of nothing. Just us, in the dark, looking at the bench.

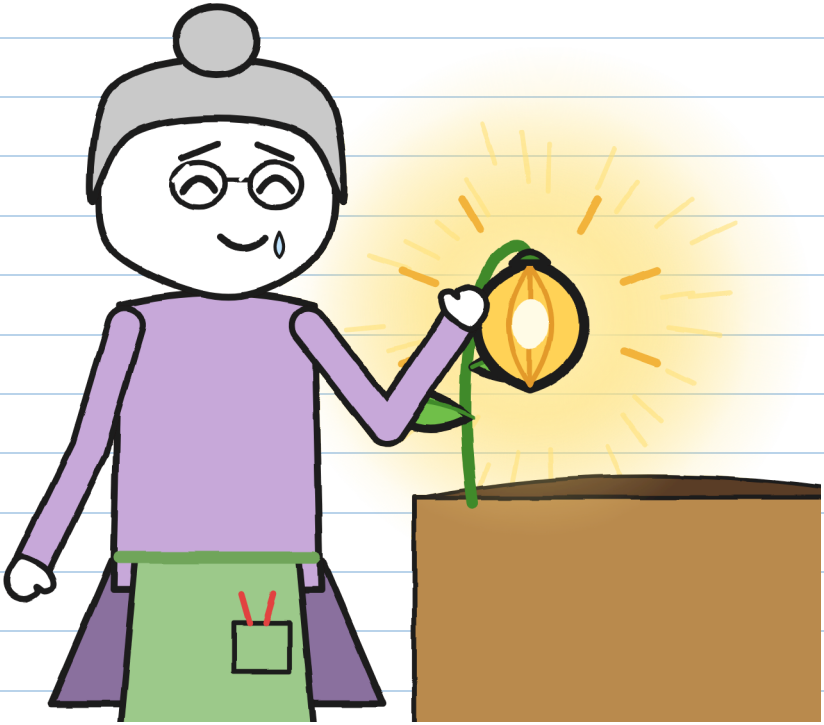
And then the first one lit up.


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

Crumb didn't hiccup. She looked at the lantern flowers with her mouth open. Just like me.
She wasn't copying my fear anymore. She was copying this.



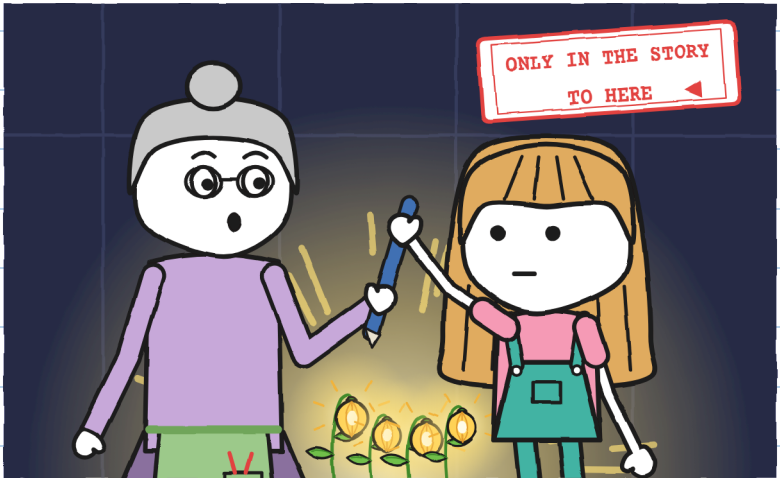
Flora was quiet for a long time. Then she touched a lantern flower with her fingertip. Slowly. Like someone touching something she waited for a long time.
"That's how the path was," she said.



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

Flora stopped the rain with the crank.
Then she took out a pen.
At last she was going to sign.
Julie stopped the pen with two fingers.

"Not yet."
She looked at the seven lantern flowers.
"One is missing. I opened the jar too early. We have to find it."
Then she went to the kitchen. She peeled the label off the box. She put it in her overalls pocket.



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. Julie had no more flashes to count. Then we waited half an hour more, from the last thunder. It wasn't raining. The storm was gone.



And the eighth one was out there. Somewhere in the dark. With no soil in time, it goes back to sleep. One more stone. And without a signature, at dawn No. 2 goes back to its shelf.

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

Flora looked at the night. Then she knocked three times on the yard wall. Like Vera said. It's the wall of the Dragon House.



"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. Only her head showed.

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



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

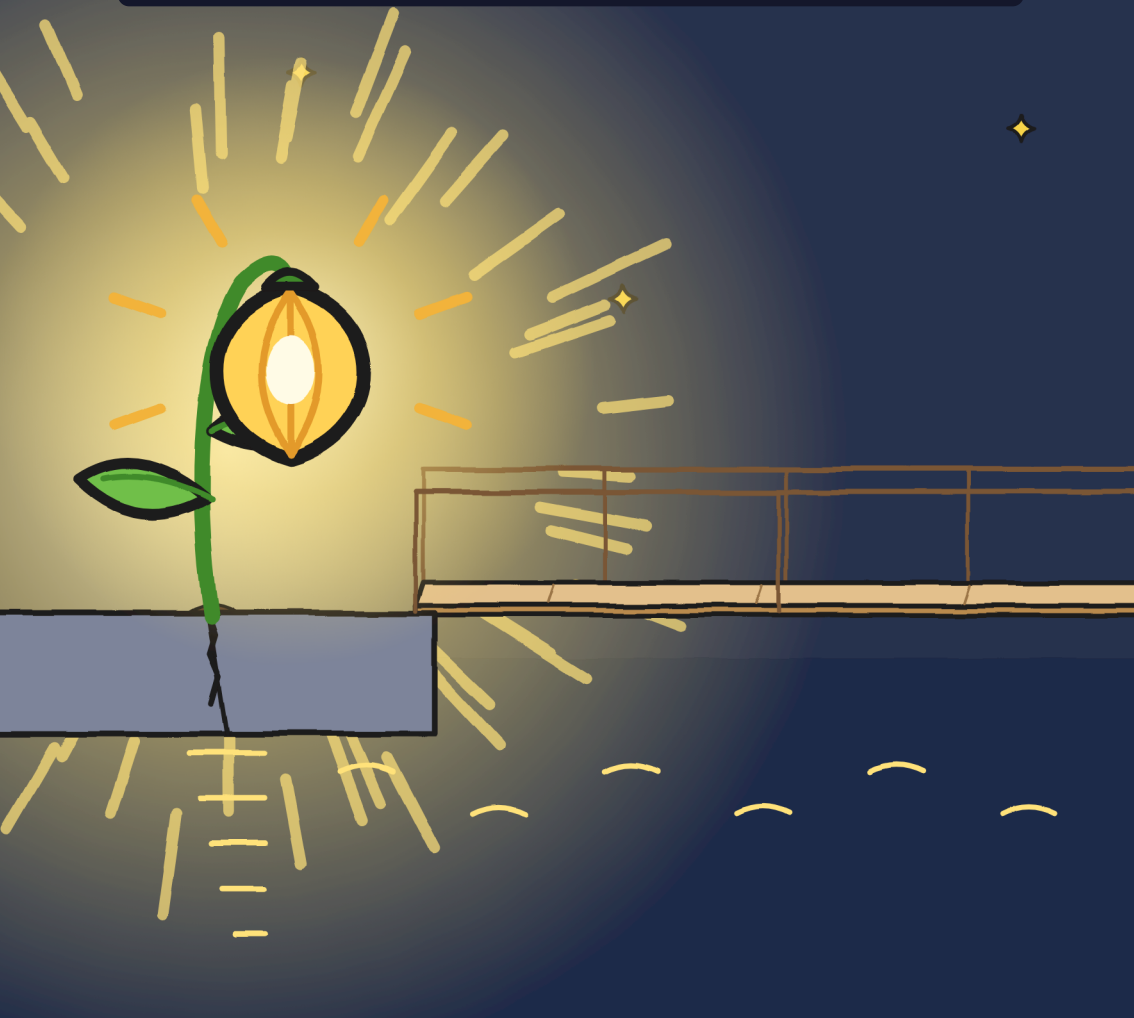
The lantern light made the wet stones shine.
Then I thought: a tiny lantern flower could be shining and we couldn't see it.
"Wait. Turn off the lights."
Tony stopped the bike. Vera turned down the flame. Flora turned off the flashlight.

We stood still.
At the end of the path there was a tiny light.



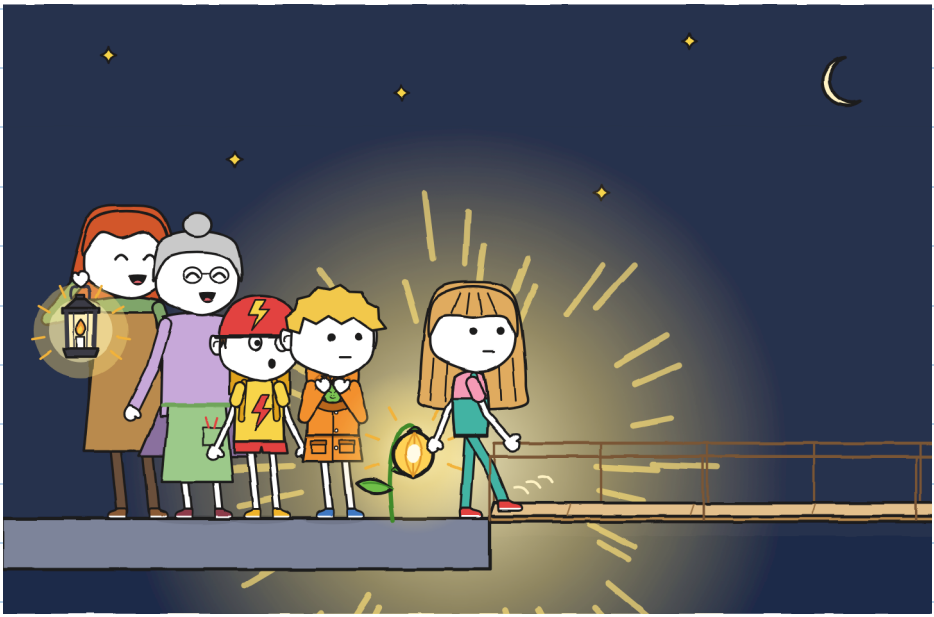
At the foot of the footbridge.

I think the rain swept it down the little path to the canal path. It stayed in a crack between two stones, with a little wet soil. Right at the foot of the footbridge. It planted itself there. 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. Just a wooden plank.

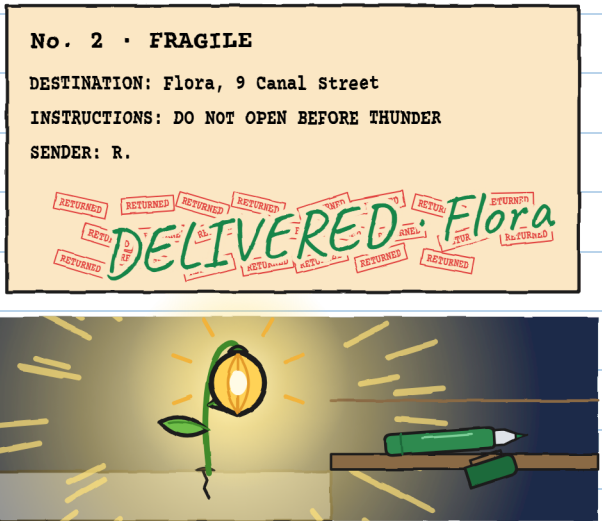
She put one foot on the footbridge. Just one. Then she took it off.



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. That ink doesn't come off. Flora signed right there, by the light of the eighth one. And she gave the marker back.



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

Vera left Crumb in her nest. She drove us to the shop in her van, with Tony's bike in the back. We went by the road bridge: at night, the Big Bridge goes up for the boats. 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.

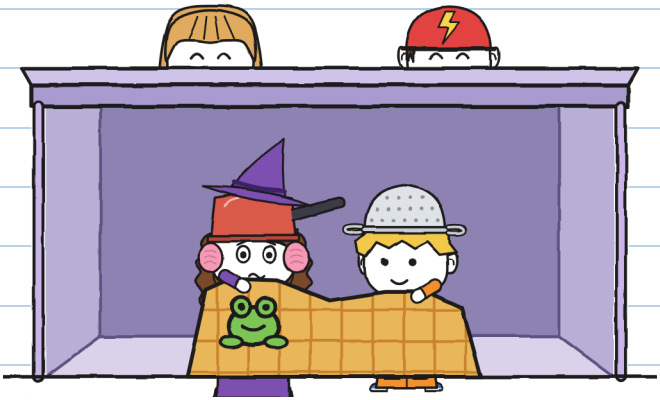


"Has it passed yet?" asked Mara.
"A good while ago," said Julie.

A blanket. Earmuffs. A saucepan for a helmet.
Twenty-three deliveries. None in a storm.
Now I understood.

I gave her Flora's message. Mara pulled the saucepan down to her eyebrows.

"I'm scared of thunder too," I told her.
She 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. With Julie's marker, he wrote two more words on his backpack: "and cats."



Now the fine print tells the truth. —J.

I've fixed my plan. For thunder:

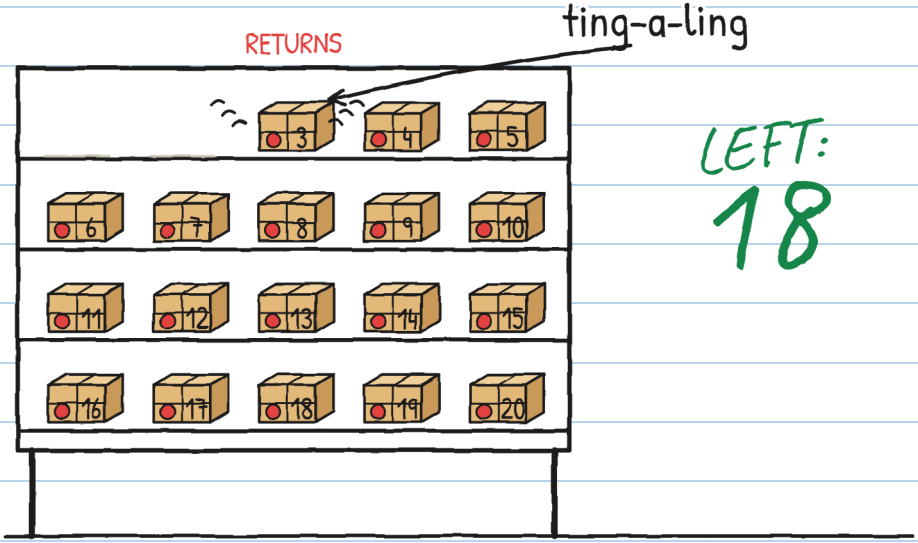
1. Count elephants.
2. With someone.
3. If I hiccup, it doesn't matter.

LEFT:

~~19~~ 18



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

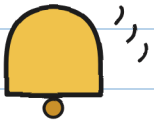


That night, before we went home, a return rang: ting-a-ling. Like a little bell. No. 3.

The label said:

No. 3

FOR TONYKINS

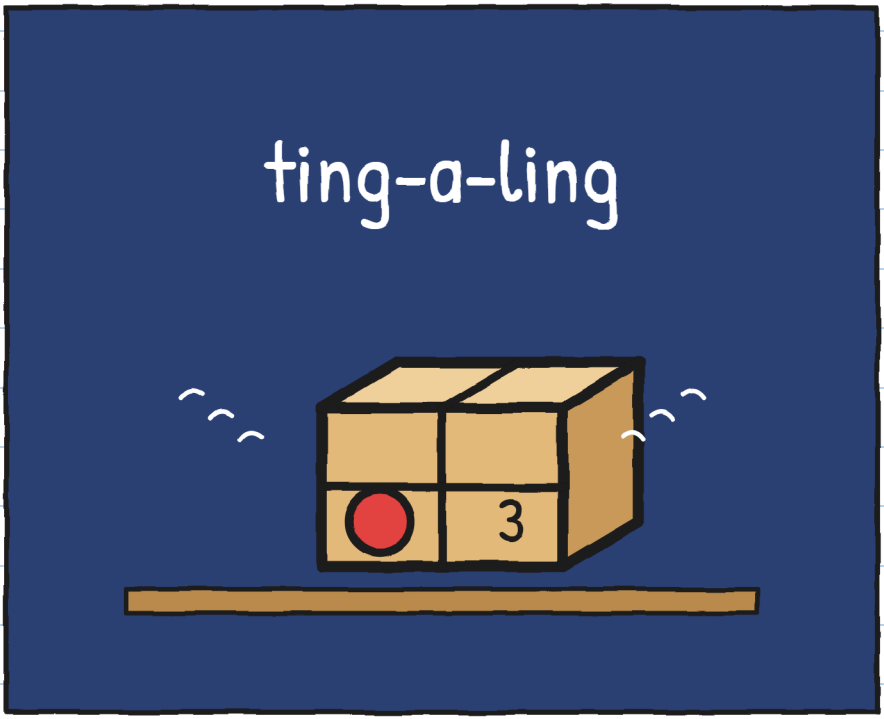


Tony turned the color of his helmet.



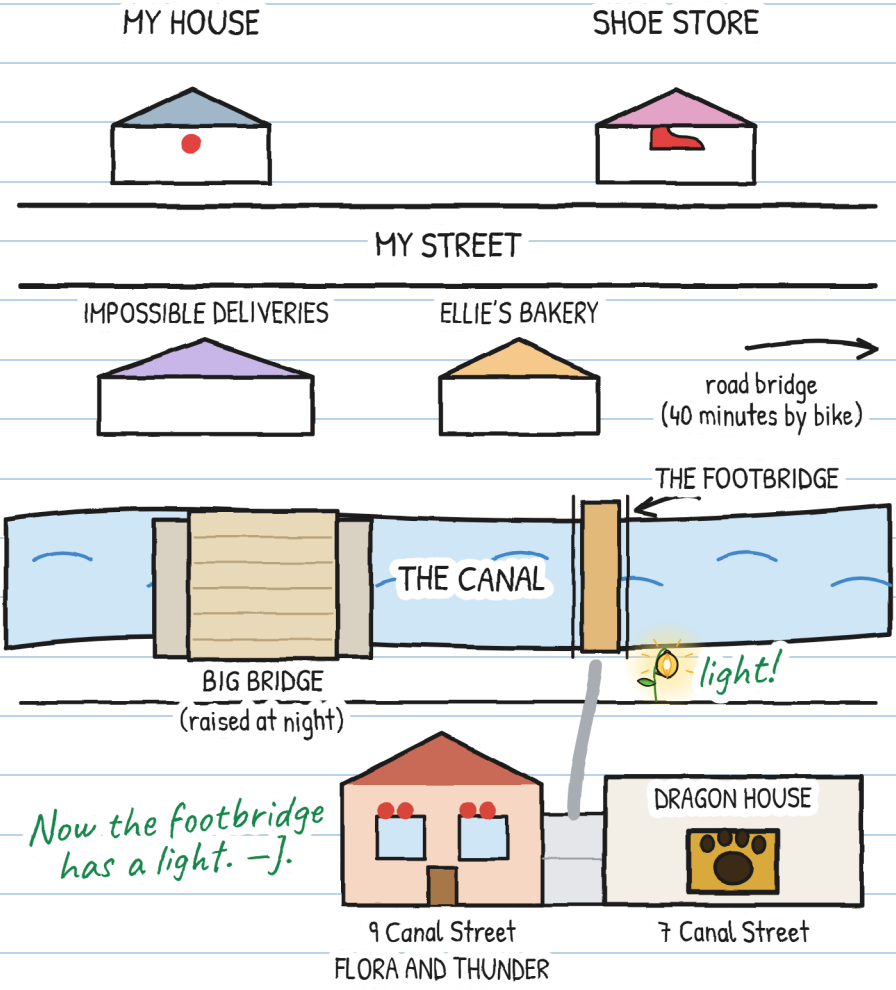
IMPOSSIBLE DELIVERIES · 3

(coming soon)



Who sends packages to Tony? —J.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD (version 2)



I have a file on R. Clues 1 and 2 are from notebook 1. I wrote 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