

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, the last page is in charge. —J.

IMPOSSIBLE DELIVERIES · 2

Do Not Open Before Thunder

Lui Eriksson



SIZE XL · Illustrated novel · 13+

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Do Not Open Before Thunder

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

Text and illustrations: Lui Eriksson

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



CHAPTER 1

Storm Chaser

In the shop across the street there's a package that shakes.

Last Saturday it moved just once. Since then it hasn't stopped: a fine, steady trembling, like a small dog's in the vet's waiting room. It's been like that for seven days. A little more each day.

And I have a new notebook.

I used up Notebook 1. Mara, who owns Impossible Deliveries, gave me this one: blue cover, and the shop's red stamp in one corner. On the first page I wrote the title, with a new word in it:

DELIVERY NOTEBOOK 2 · by Gus. OFFICIAL.

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

Mara says official notebooks aren't for doodling in. We'll see: this one already has a drawing in it.

What you need to know about the other notebook: two Saturdays ago, Julie (the one with the green notes) and I delivered, at night, across a footbridge and without a single

grown-up, an egg that nobody had managed to deliver in years. Now it's Crumb, a dragon hatchling who copies everything I do. Mara, the witch who runs the shop, punished us: every Saturday there, at ten. I'm the new kid in the neighborhood, and almost everything I own is still in boxes.

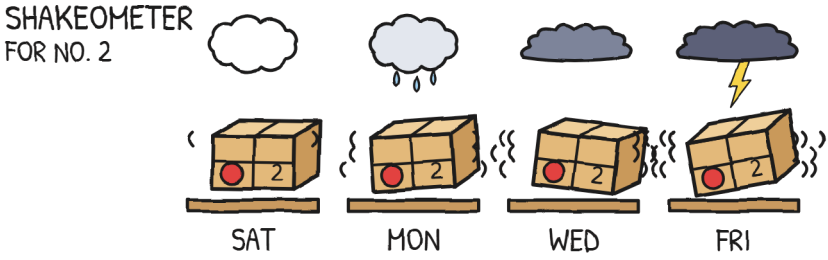
The one that shakes is No. 2. It's on the returns shelf, with a label I know by heart: I've read it every afternoon this week, standing there without touching it, while Mara pretended not to see me:

- No. 2 · FRAGILE.
- DESTINATION: Flora, 9 Canal Street.
- INSTRUCTIONS: DO NOT OPEN BEFORE THUNDER.
- SENDER: R.

All around it, twenty-three RETURNED stamps. I counted them twice, in case one had fallen off.

A return is a package nobody has managed to deliver: if whoever receives it doesn't sign for it in ink that doesn't come off, at dawn it flies back to its shelf, in a line, like ducks. Nineteen are left: it says so on the wall, in green, in Julie's handwriting, and what Julie writes in green doesn't come off. They're all sent by the same person, R., and the only thing anyone knows about R. is the terrible handwriting.

Every afternoon I wrote down how much it shook and what the weather was like: that's how the SHAKEOMETER FOR NO. 2 came about. On Friday, the cloud had a lightning bolt inside it.



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.

I read the note twice. The second time, only the part about six o'clock.



On Saturday, at ten, Mara (purple hat, a stamp that gives off sparks smelling of a candle just blown out) was waiting for us behind the counter with No. 2 in her hands. Not on the shelf: in her hands. Next to the stamp the rubber frog was still sitting, mine since it stopped being anybody's. And Tony, the LIGHTNING courier, was standing there with his helmet on: Saturdays are his punishment too, and Tony serves his punishments the way he delivers, on time and without taking anything off.

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

Mara ran her thumb over the label. I looked at the shop window, getting grayer and grayer: today's trip wasn't going to be the same.

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

Julie jumped so high that she almost touched the sign that said LEFT: 19, and she was talking again before she landed. I didn't jump: I was left holding two words, "this afternoon," and a time, six o'clock, that weighed more than the package.



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.

I recognized the trick: they were almost the rules from Vera's talking-to (Vera, Crumb's owner), only said beforehand instead of afterward. Mara hadn't been at the talking-to and had found out all the same: in this neighborhood, talking-tos get there before the packages do.

"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.

At the end of the counter lay a folded blanket, a pair of ski earmuffs and a saucepan. I saw all of it. I kept my eyes on the package.

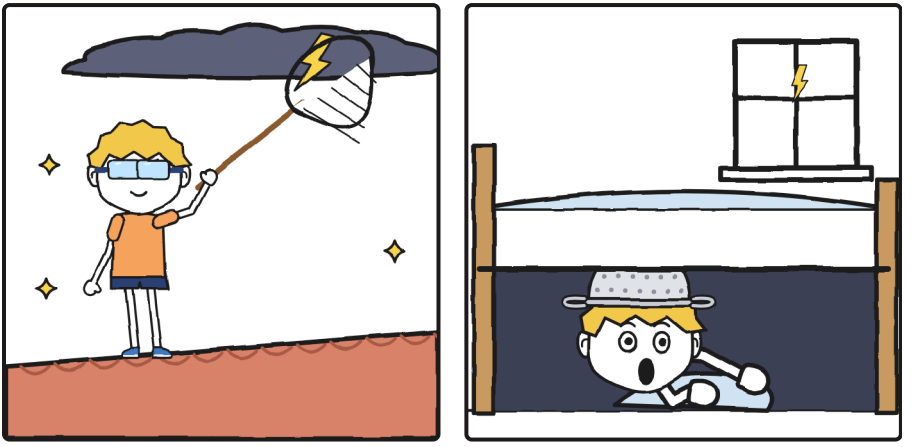
Then Julie looked at me.

"Do you like storms?"

She asked it looking me straight in the face. I could have told the truth. I said this:

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

In the other notebook, a lie took a day and a night to come back. In this one I decided to save it the journey: I drew the lie that very morning and, in the panel next to it, the truth.

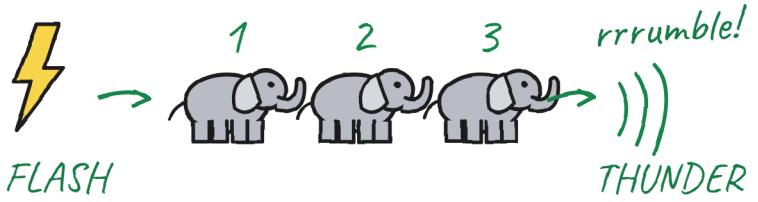


The colander was the one from our kitchen, steel, with two handles. It didn’t stop lightning. For me, having something over my head helped. Now it was in some moving box, next to the scissors my mom had been hunting for all week.

Julie taught me how to count a storm, in my notebook, without asking permission, and in green.

You count from the flash to the thunder, in elephants: “one elephant” lasts about a second, and every three make a kilometer. That tells you, more or less, how far away that lightning struck; where the next one will strike, it doesn’t. What

the count doesn't tell you either is when it's safe to go out, and that, according to Julie, is another rule, with no drawing: half an hour after the last thunder.



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!

I tried it under my breath and out came speedy elephants, the useless kind. 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, the way he reads everything that isn't his.

"LIGHTNING doesn't deliver in storms," he said, and showed us the fine print on his yellow backpack: LIGHTNING DELIVERIES · TEN MINUTES OR IT'S FREE and, through Julie's magnifying glass, an asterisk: *Except storms.

"There isn't a storm yet," said Julie.

Tony went over the fine print again in case it said anything about "yet." It said nothing.

So Tony came with us. He counts elephants all in one go—"onetwothree!"—as if they were a single delivery. According to Tony, every storm is one kilometer away. I don't know whether it's bravery or a shortage of elephants.



At five I went over to my house for my raincoat; Julie waited for me in the entrance hall. My mom was waiting at the door of the apartment with the raincoat dangling from her hand. She has a theory about orange: that you can see it from far away. I've never known where she plans to be looking from.

"Wear the orange one," she said. "Are you sure you want to go? You, when it thunders..."

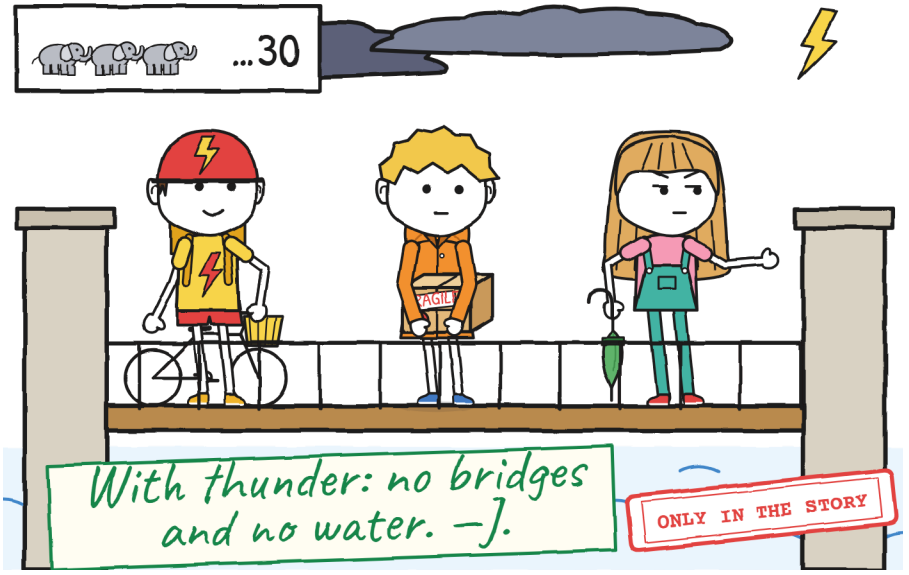
"BYE, MOM!"

I went down the stairs two at a time. I'd figured out that, with the echo in the entrance hall, half of whatever my mom said would get lost on the way. It didn't. Julie was downstairs.

"You, when it thunders..." WHAT? –J.

We crossed the Big Bridge under a sky growing blacker by the minute. At night they raise it so the boats can pass; by day everybody crosses it, and at that hour it was only us and a man in a hurry going the other way, which is the right way to be going when a storm's coming. I carried No. 2 in both hands, very upright. Tony pushed his bike: it's the slowest I've ever seen LIGHTNING go without being lost.

Halfway across, Julie gave the water her curt wave: short, unsmiling, the way you greet someone you don't like. She's done it since the night of the footbridge. I think that's the deal: she greets the water and the water lets her through.



Far away, the sky lit up.

It was a flicker behind the clouds, soundless, like someone turning the light on and off in a room you're not in. Julie stopped dead and counted elephants under her breath with her eyes closed. She counted thirty before she heard anything. I counted along with her, inside my head, with my speedy elephants, and got forty-two.

Rrrumble.

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

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

"That one doesn't count for opening the package," said Julie, without opening her eyes. "It's ten kilometers away; the one on the label is the one overhead: zero elephants. But you can hear it now: take cover! Run!"

I ran all the way to Canal Street, pretending I hadn't heard anything. Neither the rrrumble nor the bit about six o'clock.

"Was that a hiccup?" asked Julie, without slowing down.

"No," I said. "Hic!"

Tony doubled over the handlebars and laughed so much that the bike veered off to one side. Julie didn't laugh. She narrowed her eyes, the way she does when she's reading something that isn't written down.



One thunderclap, one hiccup: it's been happening since I was little. If the storm is far away, it stops at one; if it's overhead, another one comes, and another, every three seconds, until the storm goes. It isn't fear. It's something my body does without consulting me, like growing or sneezing, and, like growing, you can't stop it by putting on a blank face. I know, because I've tried every face.

It's called being scared. –J.

On Canal Street, Vera, the one with the red hair, was already waiting for us at the door of the Dragon House, right next to Flora's, with Crumb in her arms. As soon as Crumb saw me, she

put on my face: she always does, looks at me for a second, checks which face I'm wearing and puts it on.

I left No. 2 in the basket of Tony's bike and opened my arms.

"It's her first storm," said Vera, and handed her over into my arms. "She copies everything you do, Gus. Everything you feel, too. And if she gets scared, don't pull her: she holds on. When it has passed, three knocks on Flora's yard wall and I'll come and get her."

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

I said it with my chest puffed out, and Crumb, in my arms, puffed hers out in just the same way, neck stretched: the very picture of someone who loves storms, in two sizes. Vera looked at the pair of us, one on top of the other with the same face, and said nothing. Vera saves things up for when they're needed.

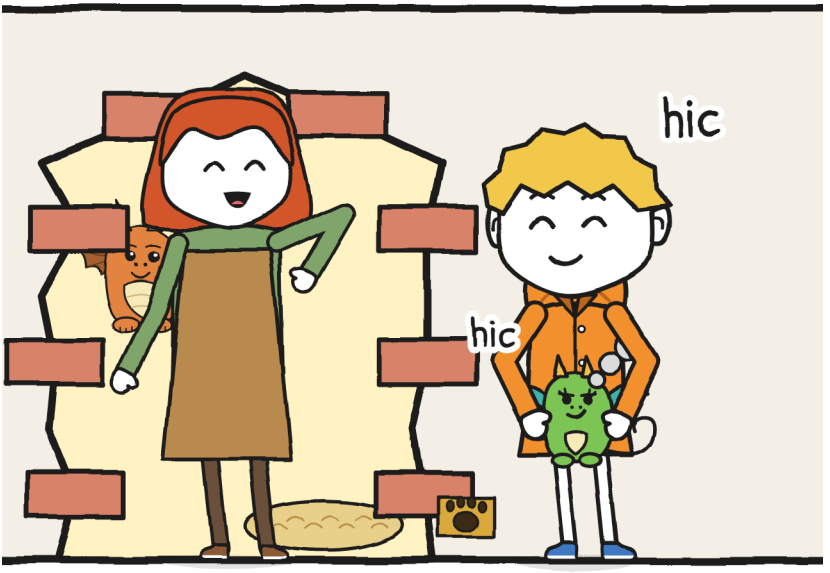
Far off, it thundered. I hiccuped. Crumb hiccuped, and smoke came out of her nose.

"Inside, now," Vera cut in, and pushed us toward Flora's door.

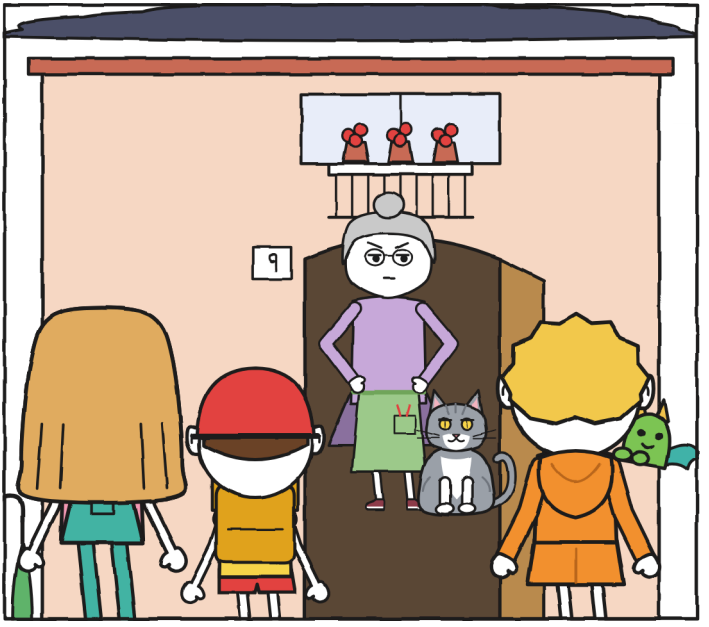
Flora's is the house with the geraniums, the ones on the balcony from which a lady watched us two Saturdays ago, her watering can stopped in mid-air.

She opened the door before we could knock: a lady with a gray bun and glasses, in a green gardener's apron full of pockets and, between her feet, a gray cat with a white chest who looked at us as if we were a package that wasn't meant for him. She looked at

the box. She looked at the sky. She looked at Crumb. In that order, giving each the same amount of time, which wasn't much.



"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."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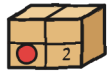


CHAPTER 2

Thunder!

Flora's kitchen is full of plants: on the table, on the floor, hanging from the ceiling. Between them they leave a few narrow aisles that you have to know how to walk along. The ferns, the ones Crumb wasn't supposed to scorch, were exactly at the height of her nose.

At the far end, a glass door leads into a greenhouse; the back door, wooden, with a pane of glass at the top and a cat door at the bottom, leads out to the yard. Through the glass you could see the rain starting on the paving stones. It smelled of wet earth, a smell I knew from parks and not from kitchens.

On the greenhouse glass there were painted raindrops. One began to climb. Another overtook it.

"R.'s enchanted glass," said Flora. "It lets the rain through when I want. Lightning, never. The noise always gets through; can't be helped."

I saved that for the file on R.: R. knew how to make enchanted glass, and after twenty-three attempts still hadn't managed to deliver one jar.

On the fridge, a magnet held up a photo. And from a nail by the sink, between a frying pan and a bunch of dried herbs, hung a steel colander with two handles. I spotted it as I came in, before the plants: you notice right away the thing you've spent a week looking for in the wrong boxes.

Tony wheeled the bike into the hallway, out of the rain, and stayed next to it, in the kitchen doorway, with half his body inside: that's how Tony enters places that aren't his. The cat passed between his legs, and Tony moved aside much farther than he needed to, to let him pass. I thought he just didn't want anyone brushing against his bike.

Flora put the box on the table, shoved two plant pots aside with her elbow and opened it without asking. Without asking and without reading the label: she knew where the cardboard gives on a box she has opened many times. Inside, nestled in straw, was a glass jar with a cork stopper, and in the jar, eight little gray balls.

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

Julie jabbed a finger at the label. Mara's third condition had lasted exactly as long as it takes a lady to lift a flap.

"Today 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."

It sounded like an old complaint, the kind you no longer say so that someone will hear it, but because it's time to say it. I looked at the jar. The little balls were gray and smooth, like small walnuts, and they lay as still as only stones lie still. I couldn't have said that they weren't. In the notebook, next to the jar, I drew an arrow: "stones?" Someone added another, in green: "lantern flowers?"

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

The ones I knew were made of paper, colored, and hung on a string between two balconies for block parties; they lasted until the first rain. But it didn't seem likely to me that anybody would mail stones with a stamp on them, either.

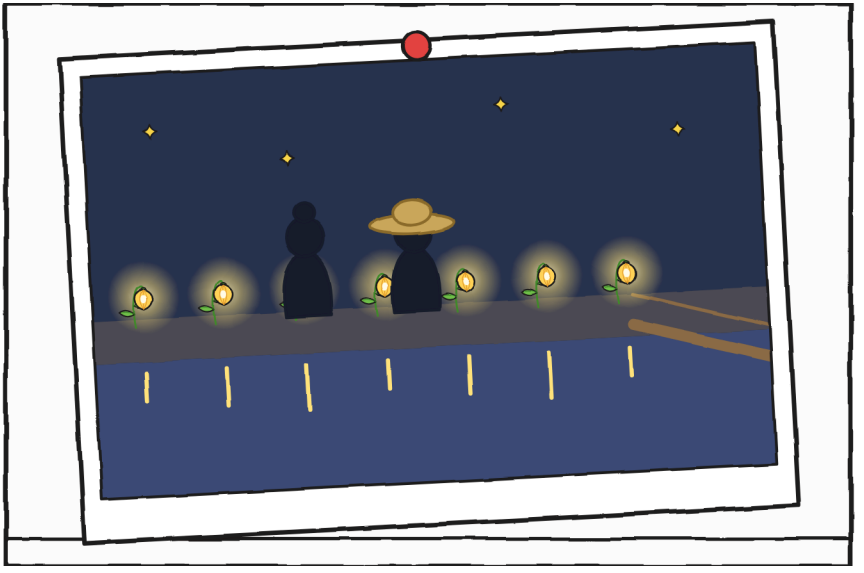
"At LIGHTNING, stones are charged by the pound," said Tony from the doorway.

Nobody paid any attention. Neither did he.

Flora went to the fridge, took the photo down from under its magnet and laid it on the table in front of us, next to the jar.

It was an old photo: the canal path at night, with a row of low, round little lights along the bank, one behind the other, all the way to where the footbridge begins. They weren't streetlights: they came up out of the ground, as if someone had sown lightbulbs. In the foreground, with their backs to the camera,

two people were planting something: one had a bun; beside her, a straw hat so big that you couldn't see whoever was underneath. I didn't ask about the hat. Flora said nothing about the hat. Between the two silences there was room for a whole person.



"Plants that store up the light of lightning and glow all night long," said Flora. "R. used to bring the seeds, already awake, on stormy nights; I supplied the soil. I never saw one asleep. The lantern flowers went out, one by one, and R. stopped coming. Now R. sends this jar."

Flora put the photo back on the fridge. It hung crooked. She straightened it with one finger and stayed there a moment longer.

That was why the canal was so dark. The lights of the footbridge had gone out and nobody had ever turned them on again. That's why it's so scary.

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

Julie wrote that note without taking her eyes off the photo on the fridge. The footbridge is the plank across the canal that we crossed two Saturdays ago, with her going backward and me telling her where to step.

"R. always delivers," said Flora. "Late, but delivers. This time, R. has gotten it wrong."

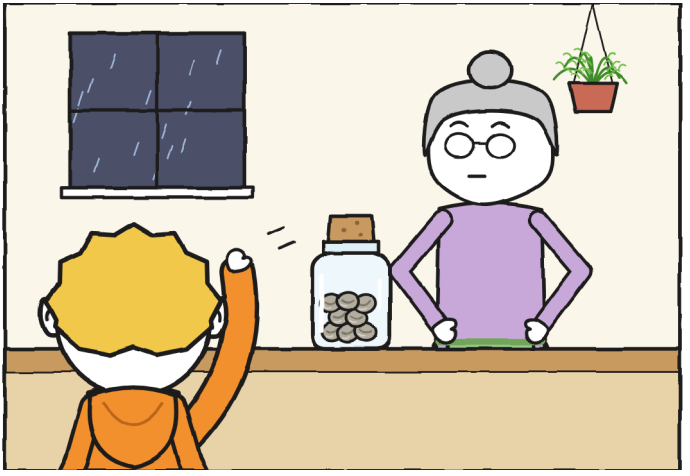
I wrote both sentences down on a separate sheet, the one for lists that keep growing: WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT R., with a portrait that is a question mark. It had two lines, both from notebook 1: the awful handwriting, according to Mara, and Vera's face when she read the initial. With the one about the glass, that evening it gained three more, and the portrait stayed the same.

"And have you ever opened it after a thunderclap?" I asked.

Flora looked at me over the top of her glasses. I lowered my hand, which for some reason I had raised to ask.

"I don't wait for anybody," she said. "Not even for thunder."

Julie nodded without realizing. I noticed, and kept quiet.





Flora's cat is called Thunder. It says so on his blue bowl, in white letters, next to the cat door, and I copied it into the notebook, with a drawing of the bowl and in capitals, because it matters later: THUNDER. I write down the names of everything that might scare me; I learned that from a package that turned out to have teeth. He is gray as a rain cloud, with a white chest and yellow eyes, and when he lies down by the fridge he purrs so low and so steadily that he sounds like thunder from far away, the kind that doesn't give me hiccups yet.

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

Julie drummed her fingers on the table, tap, tap, tap, next to the jar, with the rhythm of someone who has checked the forecast six times and now just wants it to start. Flora opened a

tin of cookies and left it in the middle without saying "help yourselves"; it was understood. Tony, who hadn't taken his helmet off even for that, was biting into one when it thundered, far away, a rrrumble that hardly counted as one. I hiccuped. Crumb hiccuped, and a short little flame went past in front of Tony's cookie and left it golden. Tony looked at it, sniffed it and ate it anyway.

Flora, saying nothing, brought over a bucket of water she'd had ready and put it on the floor next to Crumb. And Thunder, who until then had pretended we didn't exist, saw Crumb, bristled all along his back and planted himself in front of her with his tail puffed up. Crumb hid behind my feet. Without realizing it, I hid behind Julie. We ended up in a line: a cat, a hatchling, a boy and a girl with her fingers on the table, who didn't move.

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

The storm was getting closer. You could tell by the window, which was turning the color of a blackboard, and you could tell by the jar: the little balls, which until then had been as still as stones, began to tinkle against the glass, a thin little ting that at first I thought was the rain and then didn't. Louder and louder. As if inside the jar they were counting too. Stones don't count. I thought it and didn't say it: Flora had already looked at me over her glasses once.

Julie counted under her breath, with every flash: "Twelve elephants." "Nine." The numbers were going down. And each time they went down, her foot moved more under the table,

tapping the floor to the beat of nothing. I could see it from where I was. I told her she was going to wear a hole in the floor; she said she was counting. Nobody can tell Julie she has a foot.

Then Crumb made another little flame, a tiny one, with no hiccup, out of pure nerves, and Thunder, who was a handspan away, shot out through the cat door, into the yard, into the rain, with a noise like a lid: clack. Flora yanked the back door open and called him from the doorstep at the top of her voice, which is a lot of voice:

"THUUUNDER!"



If anyone asks me, Julie's hand was already on the cork before the shout. Nobody has asked me.

And Julie opened the jar.

POP!

It was a small, round sound, a cork sound, and it could be heard perfectly because in the kitchen, for half a second, nothing else could be heard. Julie held up the cork with the face of someone who has followed a rule to the letter.

"That was thunder!" she said.

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

I hiccuped, by the way. Not because it had thundered: because somebody had shouted "thunder" two yards from me, and my body can't tell the difference. Crumb hiccuped with a little flame, and Tony covered his ears with both hands, too late.

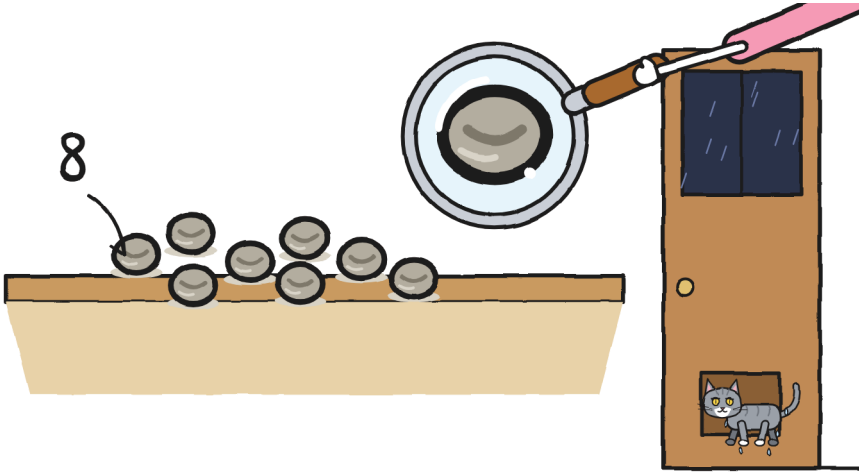
I had written down the bit about the cat a while before, next to the drawing of the bowl, in its white letters, so that it would be clear.

I read that page later. —J.

Inside the jar there were only eight little gray balls, cold and still. Nothing lit up, nothing jumped, nothing went ting. Julie, who isn't one to give up at the first attempt, tipped them carefully onto the table and took the magnifying glass out of the pocket of her overalls. I counted them with my finger: eight. It's what I do when I don't know what to do. Count.

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

I looked through the magnifying glass, on loan. Each little ball had a very fine, curved line. It looked like an eyelid.



Thunder came back on his own through the cat door, soaked, his fur plastered down and half his size, and shook himself right over Crumb's bucket, which was already full. Flora shut the back door, dried her hands on her apron and looked at the table.

"They're stones," she said. "And somebody has opened the jar before thunder."

She didn't look at Julie as she said it. She didn't need to. Julie turned the color of her T-shirt, pink, and put the magnifying glass back in her pocket very slowly, as if putting it away slowly were a way of not having opened anything.

I don't know much about plants. I once had a lentil on cotton balls and it didn't survive the move. But Flora had said "I never saw one asleep," and I couldn't stop thinking about those little closed lines.

"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."

A sleeping seed is a stone with plans.

Flora sat down, for the first time since we'd arrived. She looked at the little balls. Then she said:

"If they're seeds, let them prove it."

Outside it was almost night already. It was six o'clock. The time Julie had checked six times.

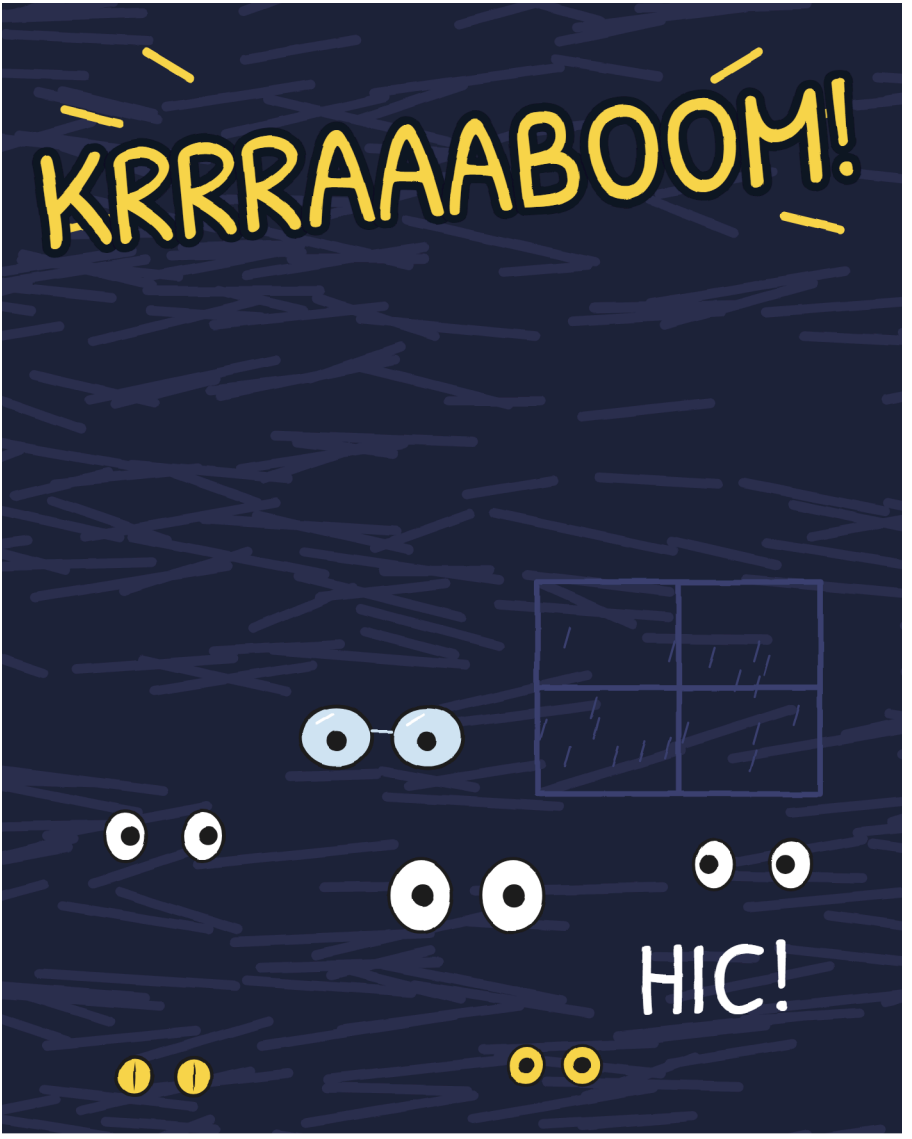


The flash turned everything white.

There was no warning. One moment earlier the kitchen was a kitchen, with its plants and its fridge and its wet cat, and the next it was a black-and-white drawing of a kitchen: every leaf cut out, each of us with a shadow stuck to the wall, the window turned into a sheet of light. Julie opened her mouth to count and only had time to say "one eleph..."

And then the real one came.

The thunder arrived at the same moment as the flash: the storm was right overhead. It wasn't a noise; it was a shove. The table, the glasses and the windowpanes shook, and something shook inside me that doesn't appear on the elephant chart. Zero elephants. Overhead.



And the lights went out.

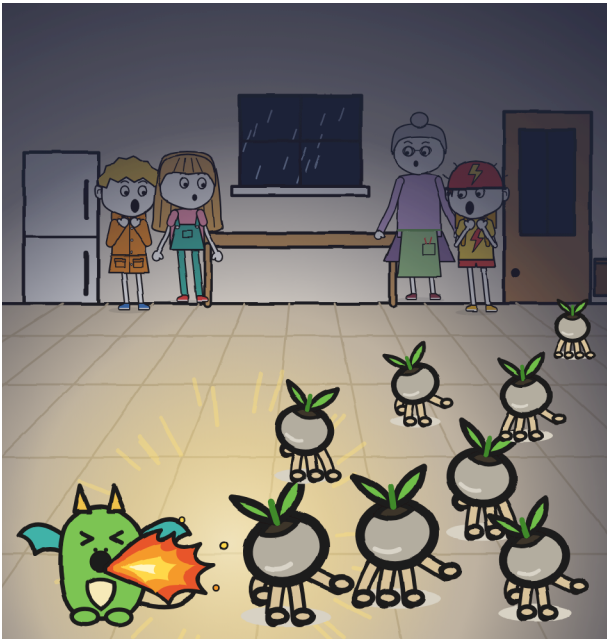
They went out completely, with that click of a fridge that stops humming, and the kitchen was left black as the bottom of a closed box. The only things there were eyes: mine, which I could feel were open too wide, everybody else's, and two yellow ones right by my boots. Nobody said anything. You could hear the rain on the glass and, very low down, a small, quick breathing that kept time with mine.

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.



CHAPTER 3

They Move When You Don't Look

In the dark you could hear a tiny rain: tip, tip, tip. The rain outside fell. This one ran across the floor.

Flash.

The seeds were farther away. Still, with their four little legs and their two leaves. One had left a leg in the air. It had the same face I put on when Mom asks who's touched something.

Dark again: tip, tip, tip.

I hiccuped. Crumb hiccuped. Her flame burst caught three seeds mid-step. The others kept running.

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



Flora turned on her flashlight. She shone it on one seed and left it rooted to the spot. She shone it on another. The first one got away.

"They're seeds! They're awake!"

She had forgotten to put on her angry voice.

"That's what I said," I muttered.

"Then help me keep them from leaving."

Julie crouched down. She still had the cork in one hand. She tucked it into her overalls and held the other hand open in front of a seed.

She missed by a finger's width.

With the next flash we saw where they were heading: all of them to the cat door.

Flora dragged an enormous plant pot over and blocked their way.

"They're looking for storm-wet soil. In here there's only tap-water soil. Outside there's hardly any soil at all: there are paving stones, a little path and the canal. If they get out, the rain will wash them into the water."

I looked through the glass. A seed with four legs like thread would last out there about as long as a bit of paper in a puddle.

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:

under the fridge, behind the bucket, among the pots, inside the watering can and under the table, which was where I was, wearing Flora's colander. At home, when it thunders, I put one on; this one had been hanging from a nail by the sink, and my hands had taken it down all by themselves.

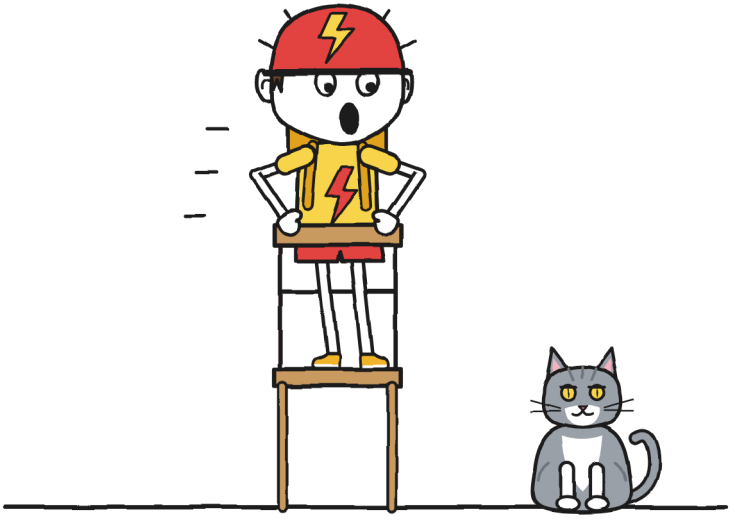
We tried everything:

1. Julie threw a cloth over a seed, flung herself on top of it, lifted the cloth and underneath there was... Thunder. MRROWW! He came out from under the cloth the way cats come out of everywhere: deeply offended, and with good reason.
2. Tony chased one on all fours under the chairs, and Thunder, who doesn't know what a courier is, jumped on his back and stayed there, delighted with the ride. SHOO!
3. I, under the table, hiccuped. Crumb hiccuped, and her flame burst froze a seed two handspans from Julie's hand, and Julie caught it. "One!"
4. Flora pinned another with her flashlight and picked it up as calmly as you pick a plum off the ground. "Two!"

Thunder was chasing them too. He can see almost in the dark. We can't. While the rest of us bumped into chairs and said sorry to each other as we groped around, Thunder passed through the middle without touching anything, and you could tell he was playing in a different league.

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

We found out when Thunder climbed down off his back and Tony, instead of breathing a sigh of relief, climbed onto a chair and stood there, stiff, with his helmet on and his feet as far from the floor as his legs allowed. Thunder sat down underneath, quite calm, and started looking him over like a store window.



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

"WORSE!"

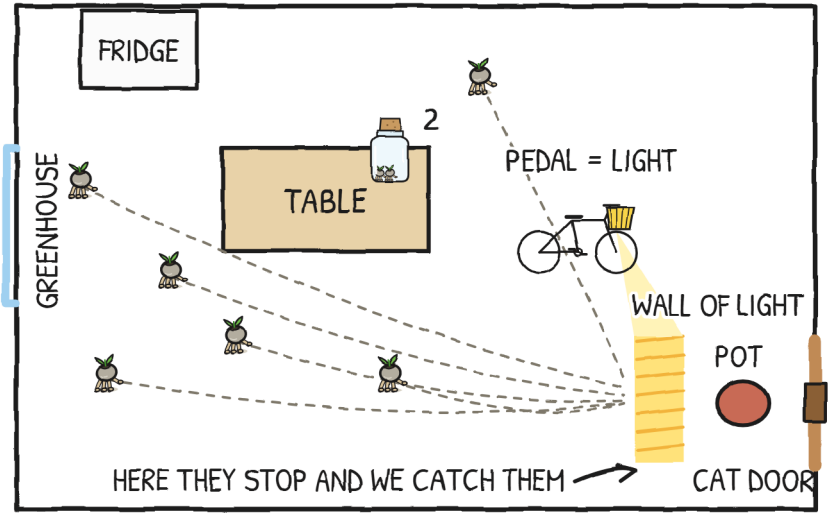
I'm writing this without laughing, because I have no right to. Tony had his fear standing on a chair, where everybody could see it. Mine was under a table, wearing a colander.

Professional. From under the table. —J.

From down there, with every flash, I could see the whole floor. The seeds wandered among the chairs, but they always went back to push at the pot by the cat door. They didn't push hard. They never stopped pushing.

So I drew a floor plan.

I drew it flash by flash, one line per flash, with the notebook propped on my knee: the only way I know of thinking fast. A floor plan like that has crooked lines, but the arrows all go to the same place, and that was what mattered. In front of the cat door I put a WALL OF LIGHT and, next to it, a bike: PEDAL = LIGHT.



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

"Of course."

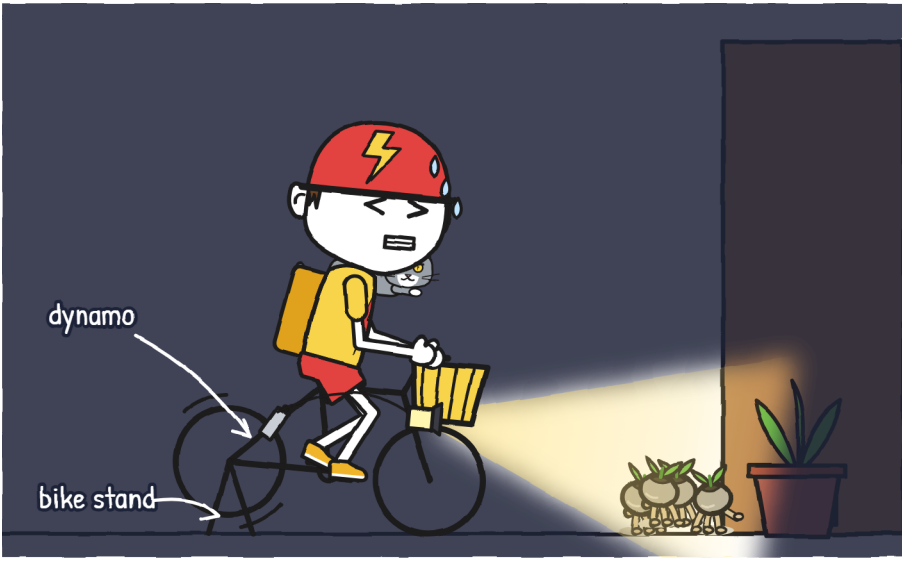
"Then today you're going to deliver light."

Flora lit up the floor plan. Julie peered out from under the tablecloth. Tony climbed down from the chair: for his bike, he'd climb down from anywhere.

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.

You have to see it to understand it, which is why I drew it.



A bike going nowhere, pedaled by someone who would have liked to be very far away. The light came out of the bike light, first yellow and wobbly and then white and straight, and planted itself

in front of the cat door like a wall. It was my WALL OF LIGHT, in real life, with beads of sweat.

The seeds reached the light and stood still, and we caught them one by one and dropped them into the jar. Three. Four.

I came out from under the table and got down on all fours beside Julie, at the edge of the light. The seeds stepped on the line and stopped. They weighed little more than a marble. You had to close your fingers fast: as soon as the shadow reached them, they'd try again.

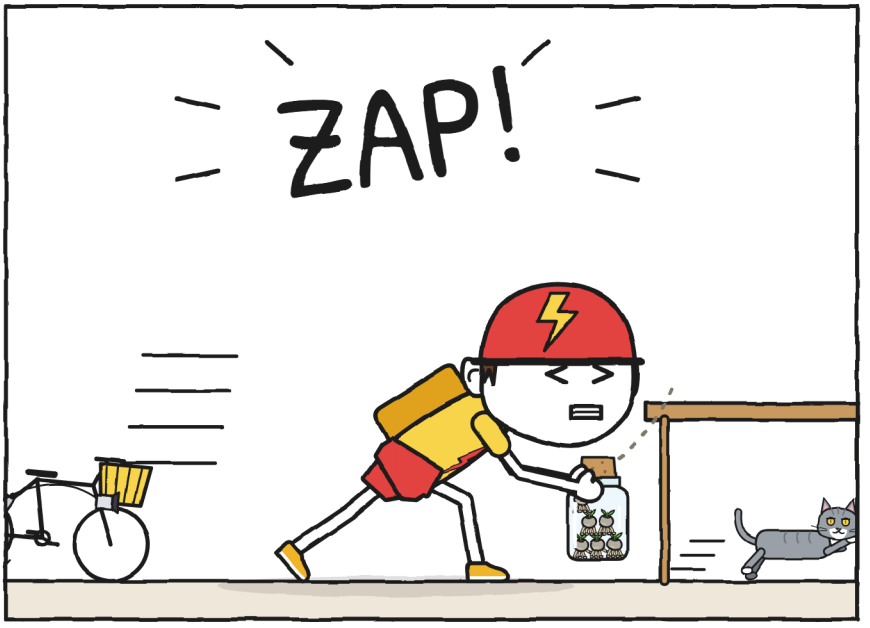
Thunder caught another in his mouth, and Flora took it from him with two fingers.

"Five!" she said.

Six.

Julie took the cork out of her overalls and Flora put it in the jar, pushed in tight so that the six wouldn't get any ideas. Then she crouched down to help us. Then Thunder leapt onto the table and knocked the jar over.

I saw it fall out of the corner of my eye, very slowly: the jar, with its cork, turning one full somersault in the air. And I saw Tony let go of the pedals, launch himself off the bike stretched out like a goalie and close both hands a handspan from the floor. ZAP!



“LIGHTNING,” he said, lying on the tiles with the jar held high. “In one second or it’s free.”

It was the fastest delivery I’ve ever seen in my life. I admit it here, in the notebook, because out loud it didn’t come out: what came out was a hiccup.

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. Then, scrape: the pot, shoved aside by a cat who wanted out and got out. Clack: the cat door. And behind him, very fast, another tip, tip, tip, which wasn’t Thunder.

When it flashed again, a single seed remained on the floor, and Julie caught it. Flora uncorked the jar just enough for the seed to go in and pushed the cork back in tight. Seven.



In that same flash I saw, through the glass of the door, the paved yard shining in the rain, the little path and, in the middle of the little path, a tiny, tiny seed, stopped mid-step, its little leaves bent by the water. Then it was night again. And with the next flash, there was nothing on the path.

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," Flora said, and that was that. She was in no mood for arguments.



Flora planted herself in front of the door, her back to the glass, her arms spread wide. Julie looked over her shoulder: the little path, the canal, the rain. She clenched her jaw.

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 for the second time, his fur plastered down and a face as if he had never moved a plant pot in his life. He was alone. Without the eighth one. Flora pushed the pot back against the cat door

with her foot, just in case, and he went to sit under the table, as if the storm were our business.

Nobody spoke for a while; only I did, and what I said was hic. Outside, the sky lit up again.

"Flash... one elephant, two elephants."

Rrrumble.

"Two," Julie counted. "It's still very close."

She said it with her hand on the door handle, looking at the door, not at us. Two elephants is less than a kilometer. Until an hour earlier, that would have been the worst news of the night, for me; now it was the second worst.

"All right, now let's plant them," said Flora. "Before the storm goes. And in the dark."

"With lightning around?" asked Julie, without letting go of the door handle.

Flora pointed at the raindrops climbing up the greenhouse glass.

"The enchantment is still on. The lightning stays outside. We stay inside."

We looked at the jar. Inside there were seven seeds, some with their little legs pressed against the glass, as if they were measuring it, and on the glass the reflection of every flash trembled. Seven out of eight. I, who count things, held on to the

number: it isn't eight, but it isn't zero either, and that night it seemed to me that with seven you could get started.

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

And Crumb, looking at me, hiccuped.



CHAPTER 4

Hic

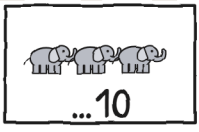
Flora explained how to plant a lantern flower, exactly as R. had taught her, and I wrote it down pressing hard with the marker: four steps, and the one that mattered most was the last, the deadline.

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.

Up to ten elephants, they're awake. From eleven, back to sleep. —J.

Two deadlines, then: ten elephants for the seeds; half an hour after the last thunder for us.

Flora lit the notebook while I wrote. She recited the steps from memory. I didn't ask anything more about R.

Between step 2 and step 3 I hiccuped twice. Crumb, two flame bursts, and the kitchen lit up twice like a camera flash. Nobody said anything; by then, Crumb and I were the house's lighting. Thunder, under the table, listened as if the steps were meant for him.



Flora opened the glass door of the greenhouse and went in first. Crumb was stuck to my boots. Or so I thought.

The greenhouse is attached to the kitchen. It's long and narrow, with shelves of plant pots along the walls and, in the middle, the planting bench, a long table full of soil, with more pots underneath. By day it must be a green, quiet place. At night, in a storm, the whole roof turned white with every flash.

In the roof there's a window that never opens. Flora turned its crank: the window stayed shut, but the painted raindrops stopped climbing and began to run down the glass. Then the real rain went through it and fell onto the soil of the bench.

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

At once it smelled of freshly watered soil.

This glass only exists in the story. In a real storm, no greenhouses. Check the last page. —J.

"Storm-wet soil," said Flora. "Now, everything in the dark. And quickly."



Julie had stayed at the door with the jar between her hands. She had swapped the door handle for the jar, and she was gripping it just as hard.

Then came the sound of plant pots bumping together, and under the bench, at the far end, there appeared two yellow eyes, two trembling wings and, every three seconds, a little flame. Hic. Crumb was already inside: she had slipped in between Flora's feet when she opened the door.

Flora tugged at her gently. Crumb clung to the pots with all four paws.

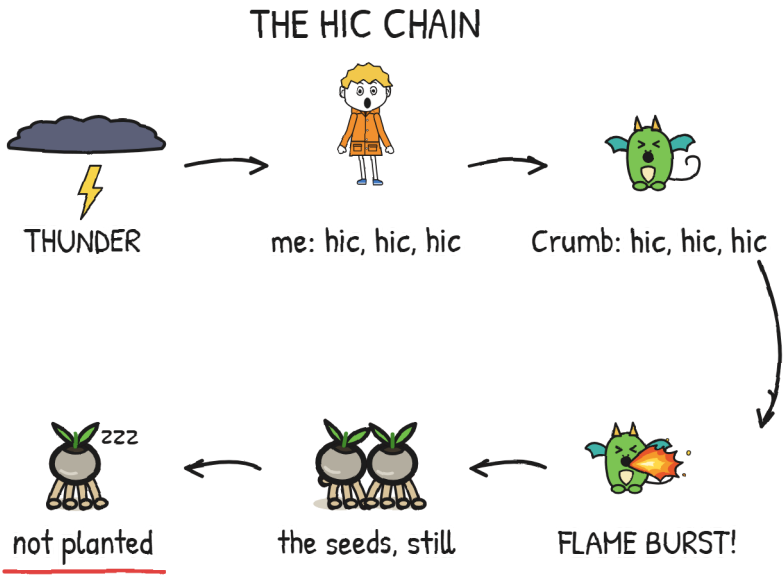
A dragon hatchling clinging to two plant pots suddenly weighs what two plant pots weigh, and Flora, who pulls up weeds without asking their permission, let go and stayed there on her knees, looking at her.

Vera warned us. I heard her. You were puffing your chest out. —J.

And every time I hiccuped in the kitchen, in the greenhouse Crumb lit up: on the other side of the door, the pots were lit from underneath. Hic: glow. Hic: glow. Like the light in a fridge, except that I was the door, and I didn't know how to shut.

In the kitchen, the hiccups helped: flame burst, still seed, caught seed. Here they kept us from planting them. With a flame burst every three seconds it was never dark for long enough. Between the thunder and Crumb, with a colander on, there was me.

I drew it to understand it.

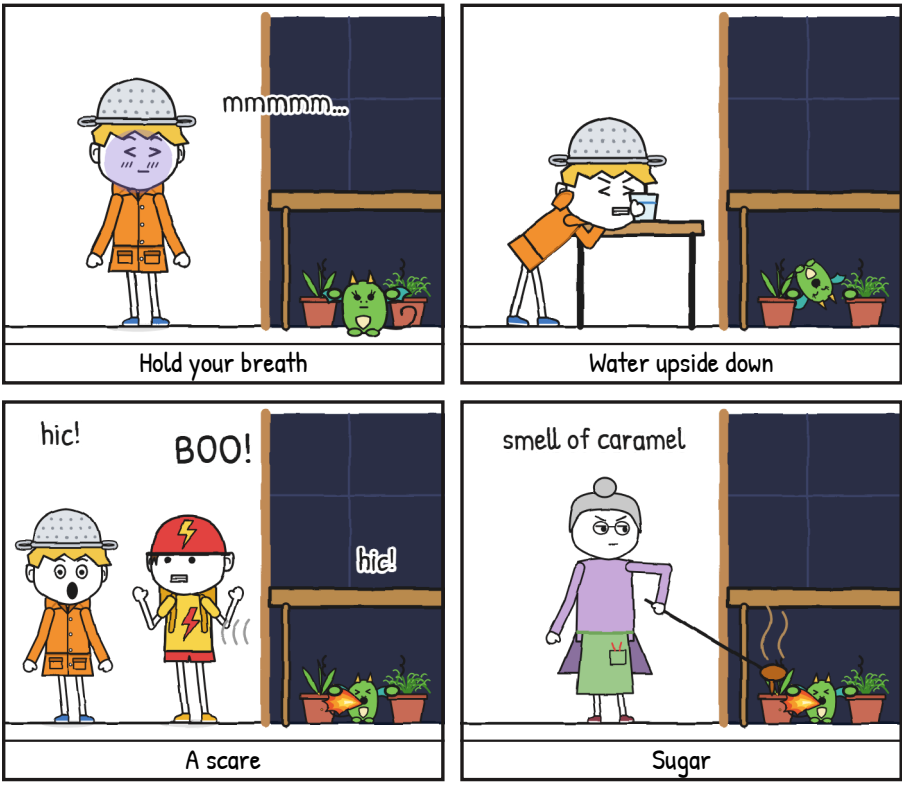


The chain has to be broken. The easiest link is you. With love. —J.

We tried every cure for hiccups, with Crumb as assistant: she copied the cure and, as a bonus, the hiccup.

Holding your breath: I turned purple and she turned greener. Drinking water upside down: I ended up with water up my nose. The scare was Tony's department: he yelled "BOO!" without warning, and I got the scare, I hiccuped anyway, and Crumb's flame burst scorched the lightning bolt on his helmet. The last was a spoonful of sugar, Flora's idea: Crumb's turned to caramel

before it reached her mouth, and the greenhouse smelled like a carnival for a good while.





"Four elephants. Five."

The thunder sounded. I gritted my teeth. Hic.

"That lightning struck farther away," said Julie.

The seven seeds went around and around inside the jar. They couldn't find the way out and I couldn't find a way to shut up.

"Up to ten," I said. "We can still do it."

At the next flash, Tony began to count fast.

"That doesn't count," said Julie.

He shut his mouth. Flora waited with her flashlight off. She didn't tell me to hurry up. That was almost worse.

"Crumb is copying your fear," said Julie.

"Then she can copy something else," I said.

Hic. Flame burst.

"What if we take her out to the kitchen?" I asked.

"She holds on. You've seen it."

I looked at the greenhouse door. It seemed much farther away than before.

Julie lowered her voice.

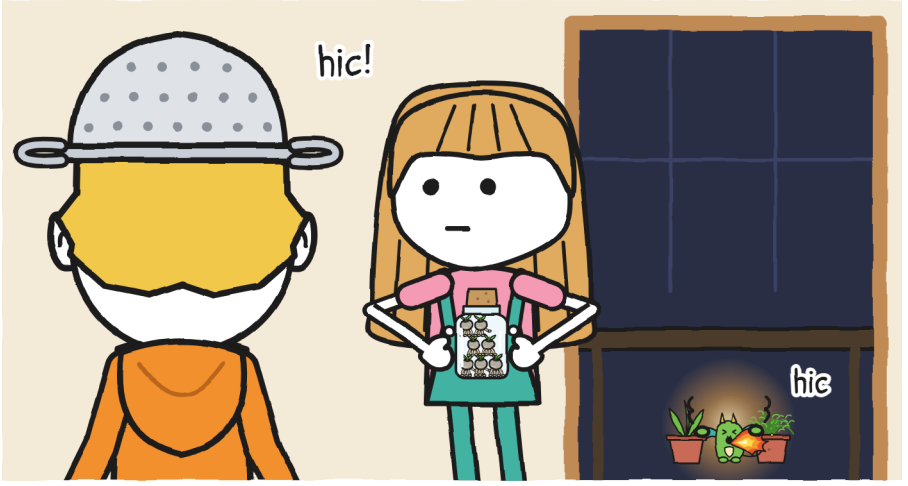
"First, stay with her."

I had a plan. The trouble was that it was no use for this.

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

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

I crossed out number 2 that night, hiccup by hiccup, until you couldn't read it. Number 1 was still standing, but nobody believed it anymore, not even me.



And number 3? –J.

I tried. I really did.

I went up to the threshold. Julie moved aside with the jar to make room for me. Nobody pushed me.

I put one foot inside the greenhouse, very determined, with the colander on and one hand on the door frame. The foot went in fine. It went in the way a foot goes into a swimming pool in May: the foot, yes; the rest, we'll see.

A flash whitened the whole roof. I counted without meaning to: five elephants.

RRRUMBLE!

The enchanted glass didn't stop the noise. The whole roof sounded like a drum. HIC! Under the bench: HIC!, and a flame burst.

The next thing I know is that I was back in the kitchen, pressed against the fridge, with the colander down to my eyebrows. I don't remember walking. My feet, like my hands, have habits of their own.

I stayed against the fridge, with cold hands and my heart in my ears. Two fingers from my head was the photo of the path: a row of little lights that, for the moment, I was snuffing out with hiccups.



From the door I looked up through the glass roof. And between one flash and the next, I saw them: Vera's dragons, flying inside the storm.

There were four. Three, enormous, blue, orange and violet, crossing between the lightning bolts as if the bolts were the lights on a runway; and, among them, a fourth, red, smaller. They flew high above the rooftop, inside the storm, where it thunders most, and they showed no sign of hurry. A flash drew them whole, white, with every scale; then it went out, and you could tell they were still there because the rain on the roof broke into shadows.

That was why Vera hadn't come with us: in a storm they go out flying, and she stays at home, keeping an eye on them until they're back. I looked at the dragons and then at the bench. One day Crumb would fly with them. That night she was curled up in a ball among the pots, copying me.



They weren't hiccuping.

"Come on, storm chaser," said Tony.

I waited for the joke. It didn't come. Tony put a hand on my shoulder.

I took off the colander and gave it to Flora.

Flora held it by the handles like a real helmet. I ran a hand through my flattened hair. My head felt just as heavy.

And I went in.

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.

It smelled of wet soil. I crouched beside her and hugged my knees. I shook from the belly; she, from the wings. Between the two of us we made the plant pots vibrate.

I tried to count. “One elephant, hic, two eleph..., hic.” The hics got in between the elephants. I lost count.

I thought about getting out. My legs had already started.

Crumb gripped the plant pots with all four paws.

I stayed.

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

She had my exact face. With scales.

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, squatting, 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."

This time I knew the thunder had arrived at six. Without counting, it would have been just one more thunderclap. Counting had given me something to do while I waited.

Crumb was still shaking against my raincoat.

I had already tried the colander. And the water. And leaving the greenhouse. And going back in again.



“I’m scared of thunder.”

I said it toward the plant pots. Julie heard me anyway.

“I know. You drew it this morning, when you said you were a storm chaser. I was waiting for you.”

Julie had already told me that Crumb was copying my fear. I had looked for something else to fix: the hiccups, the plant pots, the door.

This time I didn’t say “but.”

I didn’t thank her out loud. I’m leaving my thanks here.

Read. You’re welcome. —J.

"I'm scared of cats," said Tony.

Thunder was asleep on his knees. Tony didn't move his hands.

"And I'm scared of waiting for something that never comes," said Flora. "That's why I used to open the jar right away."

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

Nobody laughed.

Outside it was still raining just as hard. Crumb was still against my raincoat. Under the bench I wasn't alone anymore.

I breathed slowly, like on the footbridge. In. Out. Crumb breathed with me. When she stopped shaking, my hands loosened a little too.



Flash. We counted together up to nine. Rrrumble. Tony, from the chair, said "onetwothree" under his breath and stopped at three, where he always stops. Thunder didn't even wake up.

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

I waited for the hiccup and it didn't come. Crumb tilted her head. For the first time all night, the greenhouse was dark for as long as it needed to be.

"Now!" whispered Flora.

Julie tiptoed in, in the dark. From under the bench, crouching, I heard her sneakers go past in front of me, slowly, one in front of the other, as if the greenhouse floor were a footbridge. She set the jar on top of the wet soil and uncorked it. The cork made a small pop, the kind that says sorry; nothing like the POP! in the kitchen. Then she went back to the door without a sound, without running, with her foot still.

This time I opened the jar on time. For the record. —J.

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

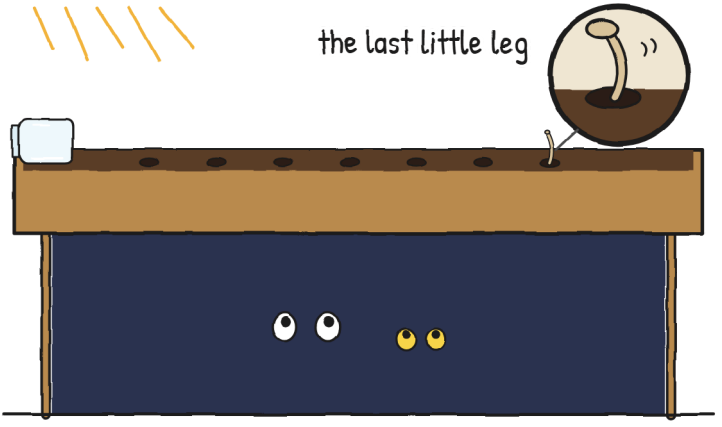
You couldn't see anything: you could hear it. Seven tiny sounds made by root legs, climbing down the glass and stepping onto the wet soil, one tip for each, a little slower than the rain. I think it's the smallest sound I've ever heard, and I've never listened to anything so carefully, not even the shell of Crumb's egg cracking two Saturdays ago.

Flash, far away. We counted without voices, only with our lips, Julie at the door and I under the bench: one elephant, two, three... seven elephants, eight, nine, ten... Rrrumble.

Ten. One more elephant and the seven would have gone to sleep on the soil until the next storm. Ten was the last number that counted.

With the next flash we saw it:

The jar was empty, lying on its side at one end of the bench. In the soil there were seven tiny holes in a row, like the holes of a flute, and in the last one a little root leg was still poking out, just finishing going in: the last one.



Then it was dark again, and with the next flash the little leg was gone.

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

Flora had her hands clasped in front of her mouth. Tony wasn't moving, because of the cat. Julie, for once, wasn't either. Crumb and I were breathing at the same time.

And then the first one lit up.

It was a tiny light in the middle of the bench, green and gold, the size of a candle flame, and it came out of the soil. It grew. It climbed a thin stem, the way juice climbs up a straw, and at the top opened a round, closed flower of thin paper, with the light inside. Then the second one lit up. Then I couldn't count them in order anymore, because the rest came on almost all at once, like the streetlights along a road when night falls.

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

It wasn't the light of a flash. A flash turns the whole greenhouse white for no time at all and leaves you worse off than before. This light was yellow, with a touch of green, and it stayed: a flash that had stopped, one that had learned to wait. It lit just enough: the soil, the stems, the faces. Flora, with her hands on her head. Julie, with her mouth open and nothing inside it to say. Tony, with Thunder in his arms, not knowing how the cat had gotten there. And Crumb and I, just out from under the bench. Crumb was gazing with her mouth open, just like me. She wasn't copying my fear anymore. She was copying this.



Far, far away, it thundered again. Julie counted out of habit, under her breath, and lost the number along the way.

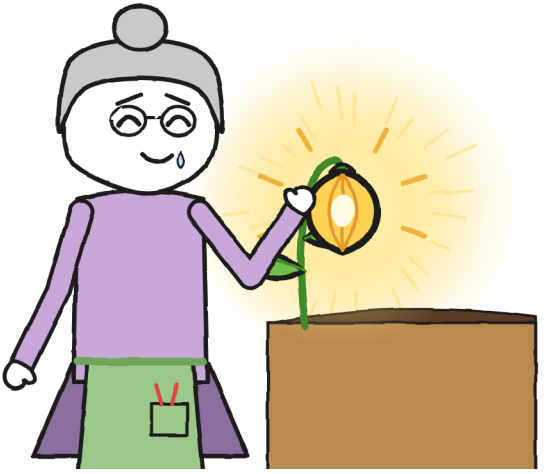
Flora said nothing for a long time. Then she touched one of the flowers with a fingertip, slowly, the way you touch something that has been waiting for you for a long time.

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

She said it to the flower. In the photo on the fridge there was a light like that one, and another, and another, all the way to the footbridge.

Flora's glasses fogged up. I'm not going to write that she cried. I'm drawing it, which isn't the same thing: Flora isn't the crying type; she's the watering type.

I touched one too. So did Crumb, with one paw, very carefully. It was warm, like the sun stone in Crumb's nest, which keeps the day's heat. This one kept something else, and kept it just as well. Flora's ferns, by the way, were still in one piece.

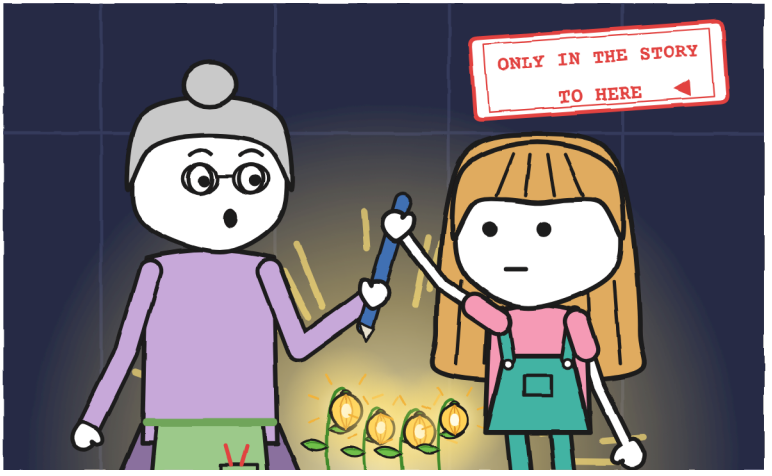


Flora turned the crank. The painted raindrops climbed again and it stopped raining on the bench. Then, right there among the lantern flowers, she took out a pen to sign.

It was blue. I didn't even have time to check whether it came off or not, because Julie already had her hand on top of it.

"Not yet," said Julie, stopping her hand. "One is missing. The eighth one. It got away because of me: I opened the jar too early."

Julie had been waiting for that signature all day. She had just stopped it with two fingers.



Flora was left with the pen in the air. Then she put it away.

"All right," she said.

We went back to the kitchen one at a time, with the seven lantern flowers lit up behind the glass. Once in the kitchen, Flora planted herself in front of us:

"The yard stays shut. We aren't going out yet."

Nobody argued.

Julie peeled the label off the box, slowly, so as not to tear it, and tucked it into the pocket of her overalls, like someone pocketing a key.

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

We waited in the kitchen until Julie ran out of flashes to count.

Twelve elephants. Sixteen. Twenty-one, and a thunder that was no longer thunder but the sound of furniture being dragged two floors up. Then the sky lit up one last time behind the clouds, and Julie counted until she ran out of elephants and nothing came. The rain stopped on the window. The storm had gone. Even so, Flora kept us inside for another half hour, counted from the last thunder. It was Julie's rule, and this time it was her turn to follow it, with her teeth clenched.

Flora opened the back door. The yard was wet and still, with the paving stones shining, and between the clouds there were stars, a few, the kind that come out to see what happened. Julie stood on the doorstep, and I stood beside her.

The eighth one was still out there. From Flora's house you couldn't see the footbridge: the wall along the canal path hid it. If it hadn't found soil in time, it would be just one more stone by now. I thought about the rain running down toward the canal and stopped looking at the water.

And there was the usual deadline: without Flora's signature, at dawn No. 2 would fly back to its shelf. We had until the sun came up.

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

Julie had her hand on the door handle again. Now the door was open.



Flora looked at the night for a long while. Then she knocked three times on the yard wall, the wall of the Dragon House, as Vera had said. Knock, knock, knock. With her knuckles, in no hurry.

Above the wall, on the other side, the light of a lantern came on.

“This time,” she said, “you’re not going alone.”



CHAPTER 6

The Eighth One

We set off with two grown-ups, a lantern and a bike. First, Flora called my house and Julie's: "I'll return them tonight, and they won't be on their own."

It was the first outing of my life that came with a list:

- Vera, with her lantern.
- Flora, with the flashlight.
- Tony, with the bike, pushing it so that the dynamo would give light.
- Julie, with the empty jar and the label in the pocket of her overalls.
- And me, with Crumb inside my raincoat and her head poking out.

Vera came down the street a minute after the knocks, her red hair damp and her lantern held high. She took her place in front of us without asking who had lost what.

Crumb and I weren't shaking anymore.

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

Flora checked the paving stones with her flashlight. Tony went along the curb pushing his bike. Julie touched the stones of the canal path in case one was warm. Crumb and I looked under every bush. Nothing.

A sleeping seed, at night, is just one more stone. And a canal path has an awful lot of stones: I found that out that night, on my knees, next to Julie. Every one of them looked like a sleeping seed. None of them was.

Tony searched the way he delivers: the whole canal path in ten minutes, there and back, and then again.

The light of the lantern filled the wet stones with glints. Then I thought of it: 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.

"Turn everything off!" I said.

Nobody asked why. Tony braked dead, and the bike light went out (LIGHTNING never stops). Vera turned the flame of the lantern down until it was nothing. Flora turned off her flashlight. For a moment there wasn't a single light on the whole canal path.

And in the darkness, at the far end of the path, a tiny light could be seen.

It was at the foot of the footbridge.

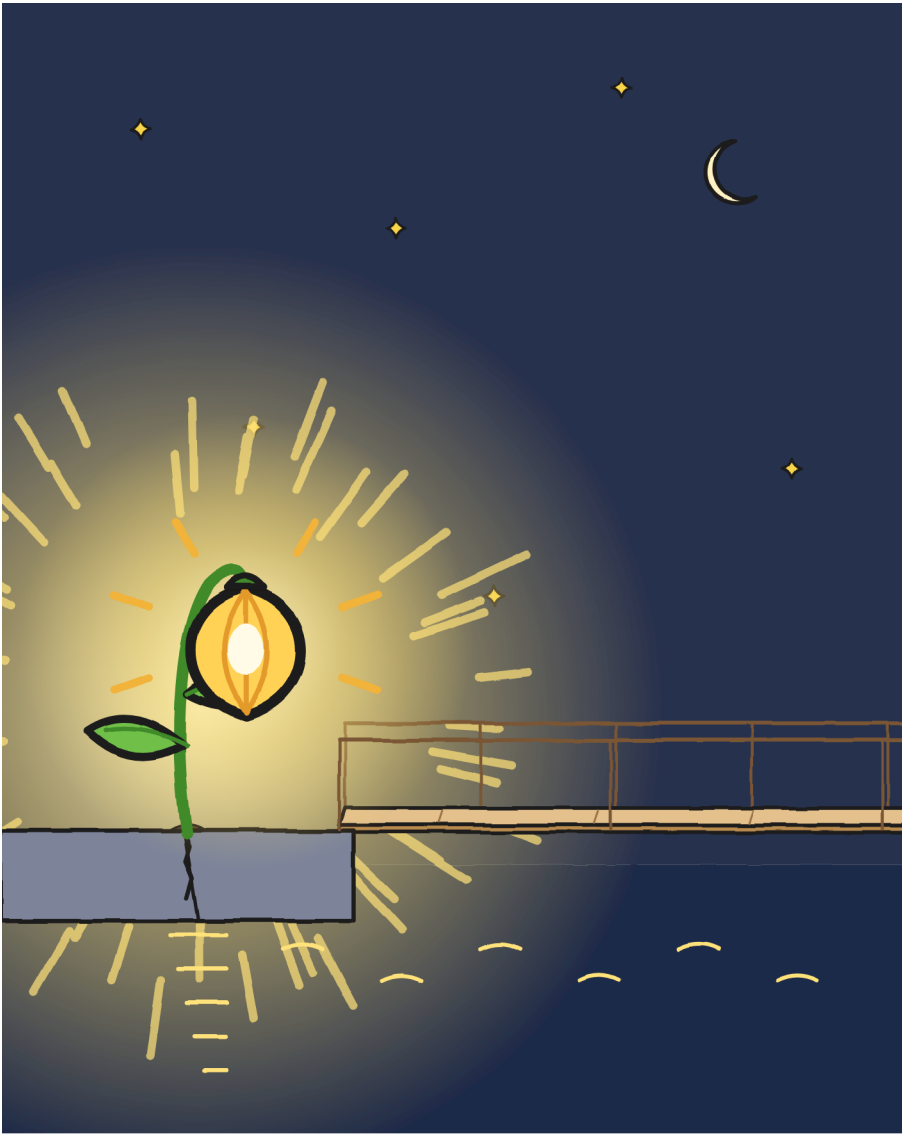


Julie set off toward it. The rest of us followed.

The rain had swept it down the little path to the canal path, and it had lodged in a crack between two stones, one of those where there's always a finger's depth of soil and a weed nobody planted. There it had planted itself. From far away, a tiny light. Up close, it lit up everything.

Its stem was bent and its light was the same as the seven in the greenhouse. It lit up the start of the footbridge and a bit of water.

Julie looked at the footbridge. In the light it looked different: shorter, wider, more wood than water. This time you could see where it ended.



She put one foot on the plank. Just one. Then she took it off. It wasn't a step, it was a test, but the foot stayed there for a

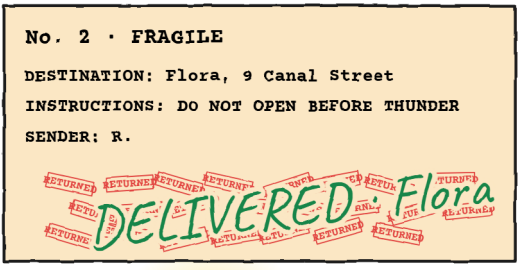
moment, firmly planted, with the light of the eighth one beneath it, and nobody said anything. I didn't say "step": this time she could see the way.

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 took out the label and her green marker. Flora rested it on the edge of the footbridge and signed by the light of the eighth one.

Over the twenty-three RETURNED stamps there was written, in green: DELIVERED · Flora.







As we said goodbye, at her door, Flora gave me her colander.

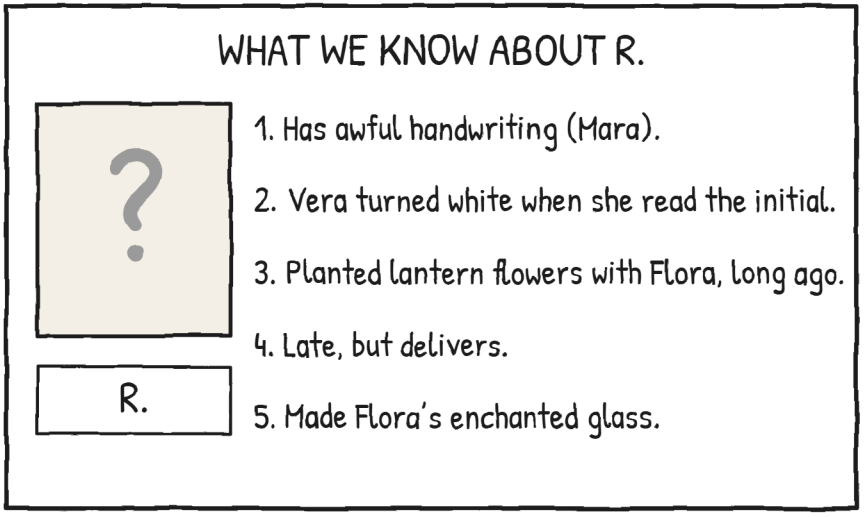
"Keep it. For the next storm."

Then she added:

"Tell Mara it was about time."

She held it out to me by the handles, like a real helmet. She didn't say "if there's another storm": she said "the next one," the way you say next Saturday. It now hangs from the handle of my bedroom window, above the boxes, which are still closed. It's the first thing in that room that didn't come in a box.

I couldn't ask anything about the message: Flora shut the door before I had time. The file on R. ended up like this:



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

Vera put Crumb in her nest, asleep before they got there, on top of my striped sweater, which has been there for two Saturdays and by now smells more like her than like me. "Her first storm," she said, and tucked her in up to the chin. She slept with her mouth slightly open, just like me, according to my mom. She won't remember the storm. That's what she has this notebook for.

Then she drove us to the shop in her van, with Tony's bike lying down in the back, via the road bridge: the Big Bridge was already raised. Julie sat by the window on the canal side and looked at the water head-on for the whole length of the bridge: she was looking for something. And it could be seen. Right at the far end, at the foot of the footbridge, tiny, there was a light. One. In a canal that had gone years without any.

The shop was dark. Not just with the lights off: completely dark, even the sign; what little could be seen came from the streetlight. Vera dropped us at the door and went back to her dragons, who, she said, take a while to get to sleep after a storm. Mara wasn't at the counter.

She was underneath.

The three of us peered over the counter, Julie, Tony and I, in a row, chins resting on the wood, and down there, in the hollow, was Mara: wrapped in a blanket up to her neck, wearing the earmuffs and with a saucepan on her head, and the hat on top of the saucepan, because Mara doesn't take off her hat even for

this. She was hugging the rubber frog. My frog. The one that belonged to nobody. Now I know what Mara wanted it for.

"Has it passed yet?" she asked.

I knew that voice. It was mine when I spoke from under the bed.

"A good while ago," said Julie.

Mara stayed where she was: blanket, earmuffs and saucepan.

She had taken the package twenty-three times. Not once in a storm.

That morning she'd had it all ready at the end of the counter: the blanket, the earmuffs, the saucepan. I had seen it, and I had kept my eyes on the package.

"Things to do here." Yeah, right. —J.

I gave her Flora's message.

Mara didn't ask which Flora, or what was about time, or about time for what. She pulled the saucepan down to her eyebrows, the closest you can get to blushing with a saucepan on, and underneath it I thought I saw one of the smiles she doesn't use anymore, the one from the old photo of the two young witches, the one with the sticker, that hangs behind the counter. Mara and Flora know each other, and not just from twenty-three deliveries. I don't know from where; it goes on the list of questions for another Saturday, which is already on its second page.

"I'm scared of thunder too," I told her.

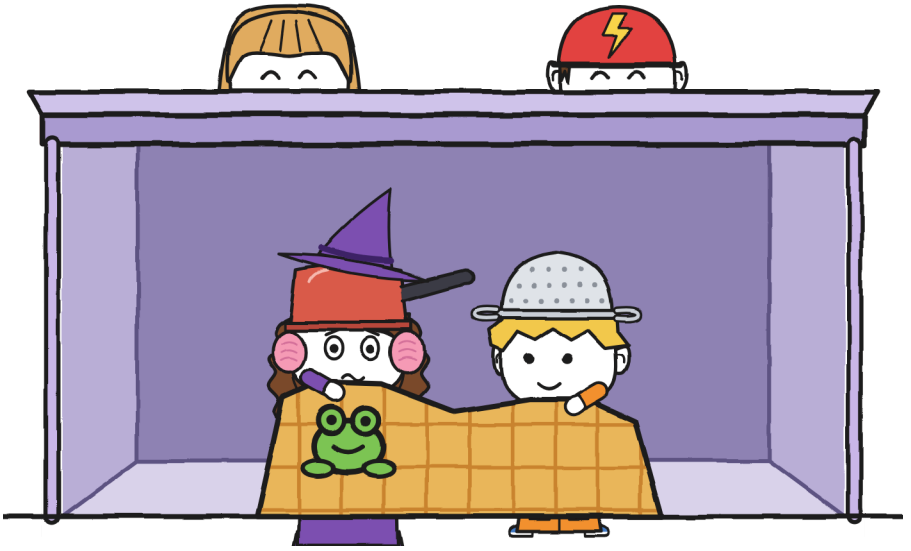
The first time, under the bench, it had taken me a whole storm. The second time it came out by itself, like a hiccup.

Mara said nothing. She lifted the blanket.

I put on the colander, which I hadn't let go of since Flora's door. That was what it had been given to me for. And I got under the counter with her.

We fit in.

Mara had the saucepan; I had the colander. She was still hugging the frog. Julie and Tony were peering over the counter. Neither of them laughed.



We stayed like that until Mara got over it, or until my foot went to sleep, which comes to the same thing. When she came out, she turned on the light, and Julie put the label on the counter, next to the stamp: twenty-three RETURNED and, on top, DELIVERED · Flora. Mara read it without touching it, for a long time, the way she had read the one for No. 1. Then she looked at the end of the counter, where there was no blanket now, and went to get a crate.

She set a delivery crate upside down for Tony, next to the stools.

"For now," she said.

"For now," coming from Mara, could last quite a while.

Tony sat down. The crate was so low that his knees nearly touched his chin. He stayed.

Julie handed him the green marker.

On his backpack, after "except storms," Tony added two words:

"and cats."

Now the fine print tells the truth. —J.

Then Julie climbed onto my blue stool, the one nearest the wall, crossed out the 19 on the sign and wrote an 18 next to it, bigger, looking forward to crossing that one out too.





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.

We were closing up when a little bell rang.

Ting-a-ling.

It didn't come from the door. It came from the returns shelf: No. 3, next to the two gaps.

I went over to read the label.

No. 3 · FOR TONYKINS.

Tony turned the color of his helmet.



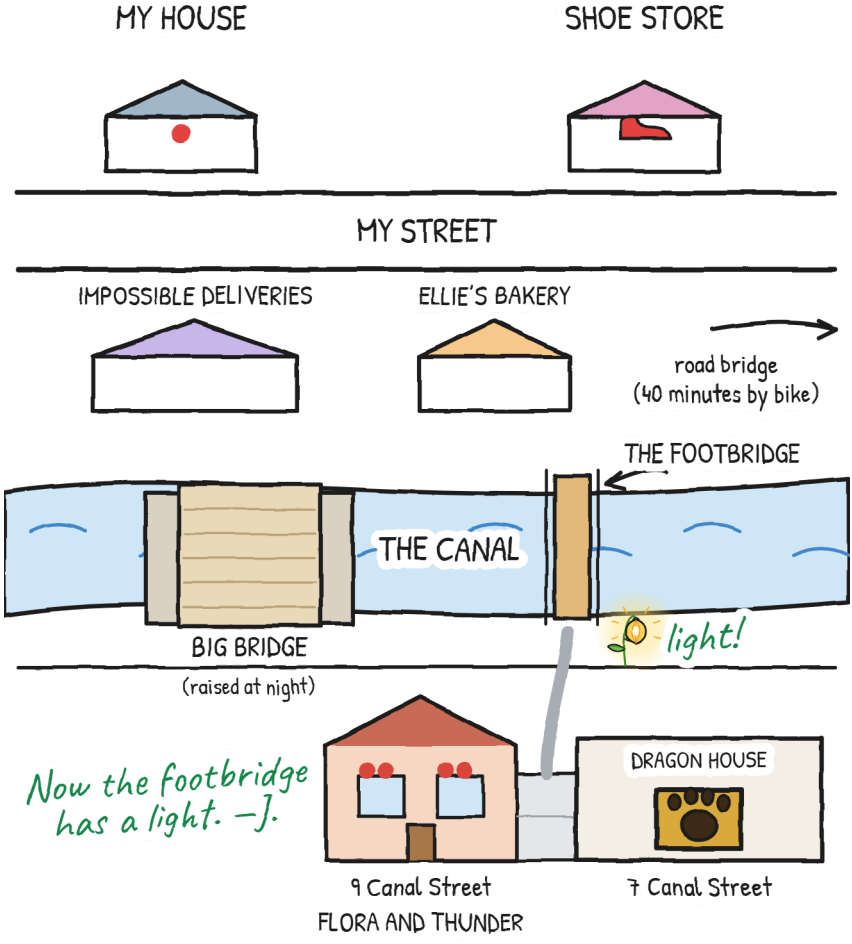


Who sends packages to Tony? –J.

IMPOSSIBLE DELIVERIES · 3

(coming soon)

THE NEIGHBORHOOD (version 2)



ONE STORY, SIX SIZES

This book comes in six sizes, for ages 3 to 16, and in more than 20 languages. XXS, XS, S, M and L tell the story page by page, with the same drawings and more and more nuance. XL is the novel: the same story, with room for everything Gus thinks and doesn't say.

CEFR levels as a rough guide: XXS, pre-A1 · XS, A1 · S, A2 · M, B1 · L, B2 · XL, B2–C1.

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

FOR FAMILIES AND TEACHERS

Work through every chapter at linguaula.com (with the size L activities)

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

Does thunder give you hiccups? Count elephants. And count with someone. –J.