

I read it first. Then we'll see. —J.

If you find it, return it. Not here: to its owner.

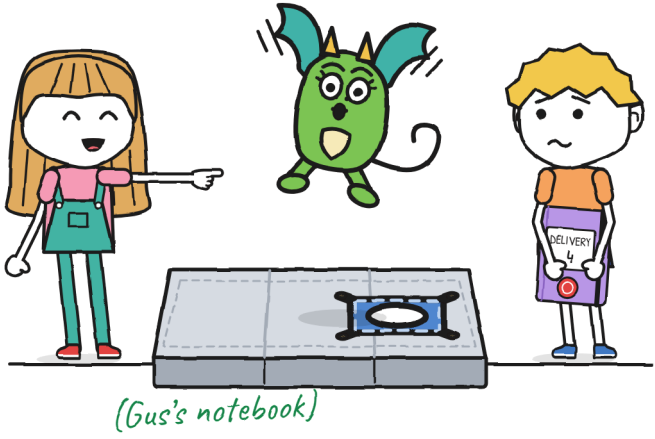


This stamp marks what only happens in the story: real dragons don't exist and packages don't fly back. To play in a real yard, see the last page. —J.

IMPOSSIBLE DELIVERIES · 4

Not Here, Crumb!

Lui Eriksson



SIZE XL · Illustrated novel · 13+

IMPOSSIBLE DELIVERIES · 4

Not Here, Crumb!

Fourth book in the series. Earlier: “This Package Bites,” “Do Not Open Before Thunder” and “Return to Sender, Please.”

Text and illustrations: Lui Eriksson

US English version: LinguAula

SIZE XL · Illustrated novel · 13+

First edition: 2026

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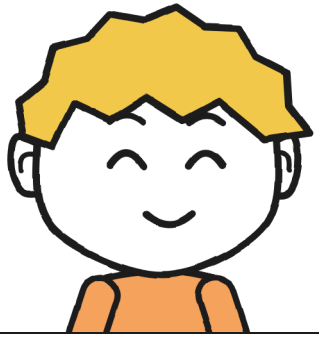
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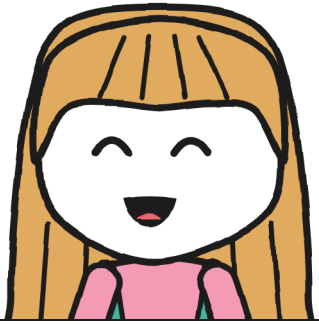
Work through every chapter at linguaula.com

No dragon was harmed in the writing of this book. One helmet, a little. —J.

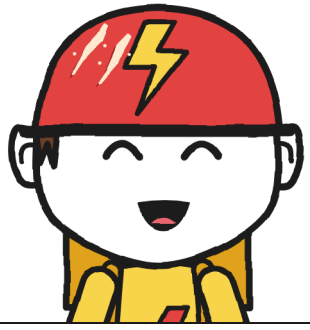
WHO'S WHO



Gus. Saturday courier. This notebook is his. He wants Crumb to come to him.



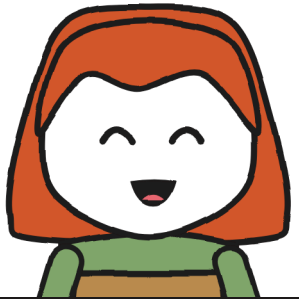
Julie. Writes in green and signs J. Always has a better idea. Even when nobody asks.



Tony. Delivers for LIGHTNING, in ten minutes or it's free. Since this week, he knows how to wait too.



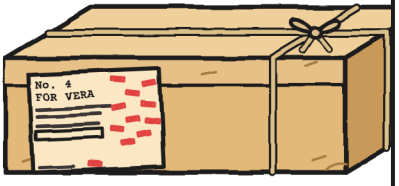
Mara. Owner of Impossible Deliveries. Wears a witch's hat. Knows more than she says.



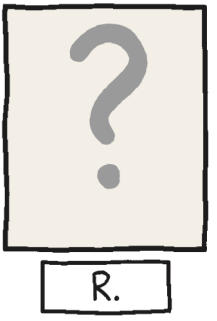
Vera. Looks after the dragons at the Dragon House. Sets the conditions.



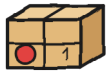
Crumb. A dragon hatchling. She can take off now. Coming down is the hard part.



Package No. 4. Flat and wide. The label says: OPEN ON THE FLOOR.



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



CHAPTER 1

Four Corners

From the sidewalk came a ting-a-ling, and then another, each one further off. Tony was heading out on his delivery with the bell firmly on his handlebars, and nobody in the shop said a word until it faded away.

Then Mara put a notebook down on the counter, next to the stamp, and looked the other way. That is her way of handing over a notebook.

It was lilac. A lilac very nearly the color of Mara's hat, which struck me as a hint; but Mara doesn't answer hints and I don't ask, so we get along fine. Notebook 3, the green one, had ended with a little bell: on the last page there was a table, a green note and not a single free line. I closed it and left it on the counter as carefully as you put away a coat that no longer fits you and that you have no intention of giving away.

The new one had the shop's stamp in one corner and was empty from end to end. An empty notebook has one advantage: I

haven't put my foot in it on any of its pages yet. That lasts until the first word.

Number 2 I titled OFFICIAL; number 3, SECRET. The same thing happened both times: the moment I wrote the word, Julie read it like an invitation. For this one I looked for a word with no cracks in it, the kind that shuts like a box. I tried it out in pencil on a loose sheet, tongue sticking out, and when it came out straight I got ready to go over it in pen.

Julie was standing next to me, the green marker uncapped in one hand and the other hand raised, as if she were in class. You could see how much she wanted to, right down to her elbow.

She had christened notebook 3 while I was off getting an eraser, and she'd said "you're welcome" before I'd said "thank you." With an uncapped marker half a meter from a blank page, the same thing should have happened again.

It didn't. I wrote the title very slowly, much more slowly than necessary, to see how long she would hold out. She held out. When I finished, I put the period on it, which with a word like that is compulsory.

FINAL.

"Done?" she asked.

"Done."

I handed her the notebook. She wrote standing up, fast, in that handwriting of hers that always looks as if it's late for somewhere:

"Final" means I read it first. Then we'll see. —J.

I read it twice. "Final" means no changes allowed; "then we'll see" allows every one of them. It's a sentence with the door shut and one foot in the gap. What the note doesn't say is that she waited. I'll put that down myself.



The usual, in case someone other than her ever reads this. The shop is called Impossible Deliveries and belongs to Mara, who is a witch, wears a purple hat and has a stamp that gives off sparks, smelling like a candle just blown out, whenever it comes down. On the shelf on the left she keeps the returns: packages nobody has managed to deliver, all of them sent by R. If whoever receives one doesn't sign the label in ink that doesn't come off, at dawn the package flies back to its shelf. There were twenty. Julie and I have delivered three: a dragon egg, some seeds that ran, and a little bell. On the wall, in green, it says LEFT: 17.

The egg was Crumb. Crumb can take off now. What she can't do is work out where to come down.

Yesterday she came down in Vera's soup.

Vera had come to ask for help and Tony had offered it, but first he had a delivery. So she told us while we waited, standing

by the counter, with Crumb in her arms and the crooked twig in her hair, and she told it the way you read out a bill. It was midday. The table was laid—a deep bowl of noodle soup, a spoon, the checkered tablecloth—and she was lifting the first spoonful when Crumb came out of her nest, crossed the kitchen with her wings open and a look of knowing exactly where she was going, and came down. On all four paws. Inside the bowl.

Vera was left with the spoon in mid-air, which is where a spoon is left when it has stopped being of any use.

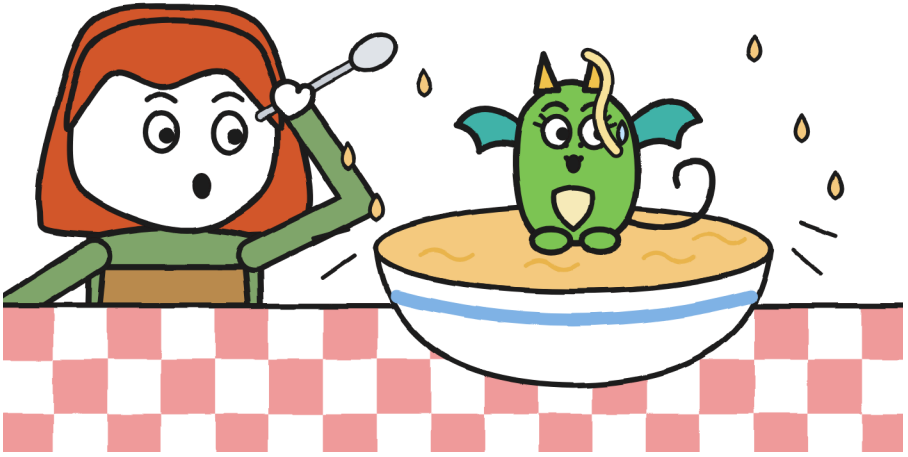
"It was lukewarm," she said, and that was the only thing she said.

Crumb was still wearing a noodle on one horn, like a medal for something nobody wants to win, and she was looking at me with a face I recognized at once, because it's mine: the "it wasn't me" face. She copied it from me on the first day and brings it out whenever she needs it. I do it very well.

I drew it the way it was told to me, without adjectives.

Noodle soup. With dragon. —J.

VERA'S SOUP (yesterday)



Tony was back in nine and a half minutes, which at LIGHTNING means arriving with half a minute to spare and anywhere else means having run. He left his bike at the door, came in without taking his helmet off and sat on his crate, where he sits "for now."

"I already know how to wait," he said. "But I didn't need to start today."

Somebody had once made him wait at a door. He didn't say so; the helmet strap said it for him, pulled tighter than it needed to be.

Then Mara, without climbing onto any stool—she simply arrives—took a package down from the top shelf and put it on the counter.

"Vera. This is yours."

She didn't say "this is for you," she said "this is yours." It weighs differently.

It was a flat, wide box, about the size of a baking sheet. On the shelf, where it had been, there was a rectangle without dust: the fourth gap, next to the usual three. Vera came over with Crumb in her arms. Tony stretched his neck as far as his helmet would let him.

The label on No. 4 says a lot more than the one on Tonykins's, which didn't even have a street. This one even comes with instructions.

All around it, eleven RETURNED stamps, red and crooked, like the footprints of a bird in a hurry. I counted them. Julie had already counted them.

Vera read it with her finger, line by line, stopping at each one like a commuter train. At the R., her finger stopped altogether. And there it stayed, with nothing happening, like a train that halts between two stations while nobody says why.

"Eleven times?" asked Julie.

"Eleven," said Mara. "Nine of them, 7 Canal Street was a wall."



"And why didn't we bring it with the egg?" asked Julie. It was exactly what I was thinking: same owner, same street, same shelf.

"It came later," said Mara. "I took it twice, when Crumb was already sleeping in her nest."

"And twice the wall opened," said Vera. "Both times I said 'not yet.' Crumb wasn't flying. An arrival kit for someone who doesn't take off is an ornament."

The wall opened twice. The one that didn't open was Vera.

"And today?" asked Mara.

"Yesterday Crumb chose my soup."

She said it without looking at anyone, in the flat voice of someone giving an address she has been repeating to herself all morning.



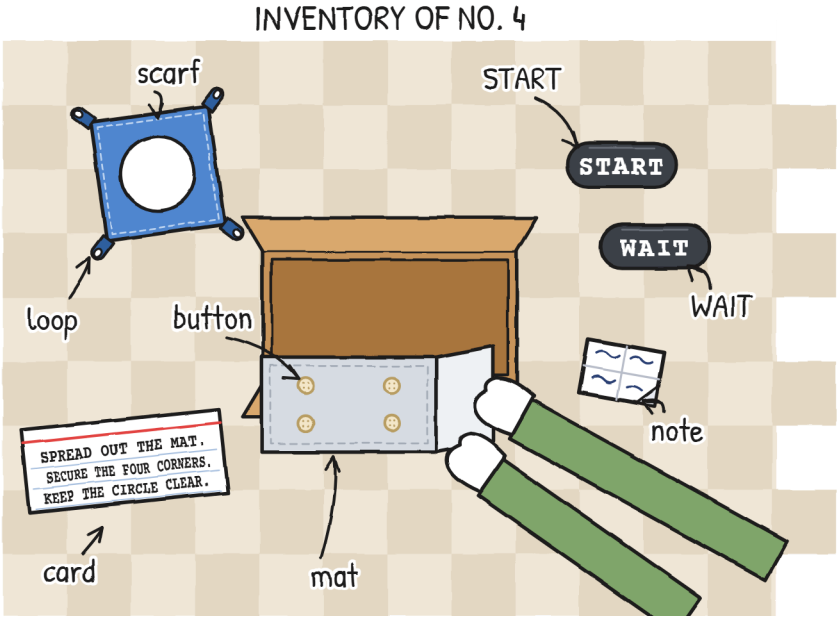
"Opening it or trying it out isn't receiving it," said Mara, looking at the three of us, who are the ones who need to hear the rules twice. "If Vera doesn't sign the label in ink that doesn't come off, it goes back at dawn."

"I know," said Vera. "I just want to see if it works."

The label said OPEN ON THE FLOOR, so Vera knelt on the shop floor and opened it right there. Tony had gotten up from his crate without noticing and crouched beside her. He counted the pieces out loud, touching each one with a finger, like someone loading a van. It was the first time I'd heard him count anything that wasn't minutes.

"A mat, gray, in three pieces, folded like an accordion. A scarf, blue, with a white circle in the middle and a loop on every corner. Two rubber marks: START and WAIT. A card." He straightened up. "Five things. And a note."

When she opened the first fold of the mat, four sewn-on buttons appeared, round and serious, the kind you find on a grandpa's overcoat. Julie joined each button to its loop with her finger, in the air. Nobody had asked her to.



The card had three lines, typed on a typewriter:

1. SPREAD OUT THE MAT.
2. SECURE THE FOUR CORNERS.
3. KEEP THE CIRCLE CLEAR.

The first two told you to do something. The third I liked without knowing why: it was the only one that asked you to do nothing.

The note was shorter. Vera unfolded it, read it and folded it back into four, pressing the creases with her thumbnail. She didn't read it aloud.

"For the yard," she said.

And she put it away inside the box. I couldn't tell whether she was saying it to the note, to the box or to us.

I could see Julie's questions lining up in her mouth; the first one already had its coat on. I could see her foot, too: tap, tap, tap against the shop floor, at a rhythm you could have marched to. She asked nothing. It was the loudest silence I've ever heard in that shop.

Questions I didn't ask: six. I'm improving. —J.



Mara set her usual conditions without counting them on her fingers, because by now we know them: the kit leaves with Vera, comes back inside its box, and the label stays on, not even by a corner. Then she stood in the doorway, arms folded and the little window above her open, and watched us go along the sidewalk: Vera with the box under one arm and Crumb in the other; Tony walking beside his bike; Julie, with her questions still in her mouth; and me, with the lilac notebook pressed to my chest.

On Canal Street, in front of number 7, Crumb climbed down from Vera's arms and rested her paw on the brass plate, at ground level.

The wall opened. The bricks along the edge moved aside one by one, without breaking, like guests getting up from the table to let you through.

Tony took a step back with his bike. He'd seen it open once before, but at night, when all you can see of a wall that opens is a golden light. By day it's more impressive: you can see everything. You can see the laundry on the line, the kitchen door, a tree in a pot with little yellow balls on it and, in a nest in the corner, a blue dragon sleeping with a snore like a kettle.

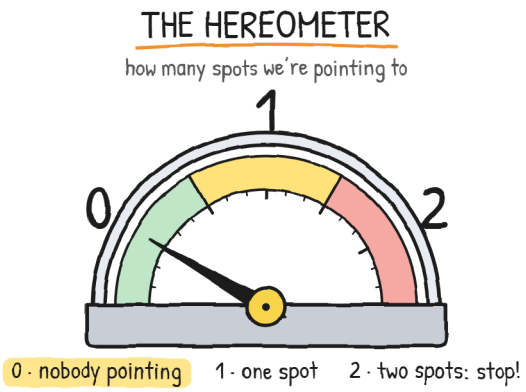
Vera put the box down on the floor of the yard and lined the three of us up.

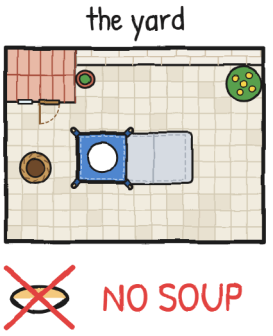
"My conditions," she said, counting them on her fingers. "One: we practice only with me watching. Two: there's only one arrival spot. Three: when I say 'enough,' it's enough."

I wrote it down. And underneath, because I can't hear a condition without wanting to measure it, I drew a gadget. It's the third of my career: the shakeometer from No. 2, the redometer from No. 3, and this one. I called it the HEREOMETER, "how many spots we're pointing to," and gave it a needle and three numbers.

I left the needle on 0. In the corner of the plan of the yard I drew a bowl of soup with a cross through it and labeled it NO SOUP. You never know.

A machine for counting up to two. Very nice. —J.







We spread the mat out in the middle of the yard, the three gray sections one behind the other, with the sound of an accordion waking up. Julie put the scarf on top and fastened two loops.

"Done."

She said it with that "done" of hers that means "and nobody correct me."

"Look at the edge," said Vera.

She didn't say "you're missing two" or "read the card." She said "look at the edge," which is an order with the door left open. A little air blew past and the loose corner of the scarf lifted, like an ear. Julie fastened the other two without a word.

Julie saying nothing is news.

I was going to do it. The wind got there first. —J.

Then I wanted to help.

I stood in the white circle, both sneakers planted firmly, like someone climbing onto a pedestal.

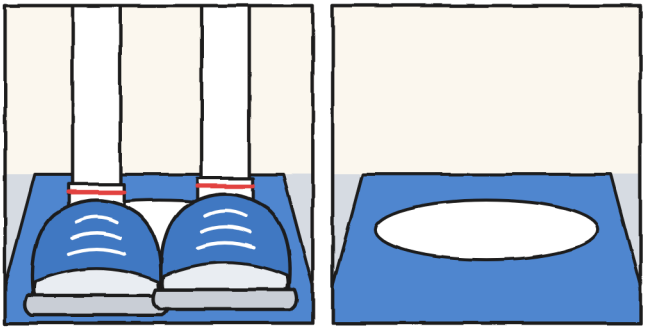
"Crumb, here. Here!"

Crumb came walking over, very pleased, with that rolling walk of hers, as if she were going to a birthday party, and sat down on my sneaker. Something rose up inside me, like when the phone rings at home and they ask for you.

"You're showing her your sneakers," said Vera.

I looked at them. White, with blue stripes, the sole worn down on one side. And for the first time I saw them as Crumb must have seen them: from below, enormous, covering everything.

I stepped out of the circle. Crumb looked at the empty circle. She sniffed it. She went in and sat down in the middle.



1. What Crumb saw

2. What she saw next

Vera put Crumb on the START mark, at one end of the mat, one meter twenty from the center of the circle. She put the rest of us behind the WAIT mark, a little further off than I would have liked.

Behind a WAIT mark there is nothing to be done with your hands. I tried pockets, behind my back, crossed. I ended up clutching the lilac notebook like a life preserver.

"One small jump. Just one."

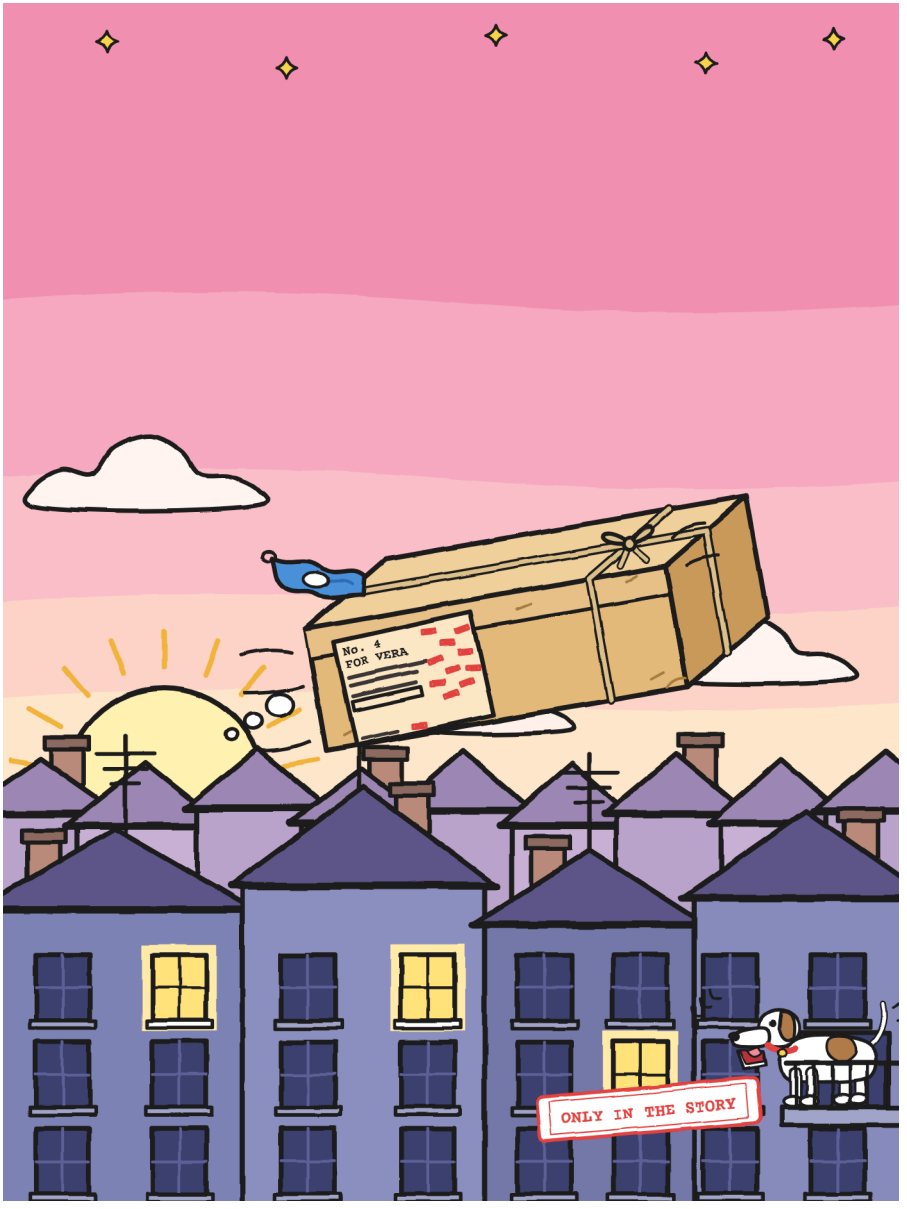
Crumb crouched. She beat her wings, rose a handspan and, two seconds later, came down with all four paws inside the circle.

"Enough. For today, enough."

It took two seconds and I felt it in my knees. Nobody applauded in the yard. Vera has an "enough" that switches off even applause.

I wrote down: "She came to me." The word "me" came out with a very pretty little tail on it. Then Julie unfastened the four loops and lifted the scarf to fold it. Crumb turned her head and followed it with her eyes.

You were behind the mark. She went to the circle. —J.


No. 4
FOR VERA
ONLY IN THE STORY

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.

One size each. Same circle. —J.

FOR FAMILIES AND TEACHERS

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