

Calm. Until you open it. –J.

If you find it, return it. No surprises: to its owner.

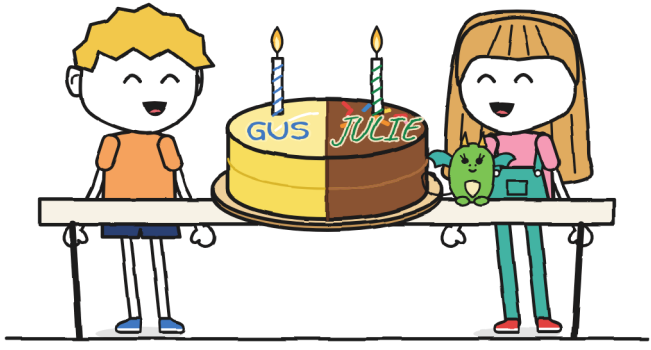


This stamp marks what only happens in the story: real dragons don't exist and packages don't fly back. For a real party, see the last page. –J.

IMPOSSIBLE DELIVERIES · 5

A Cake for Two

LinguAula



(Gus's notebook)

SIZE XL · Illustrated novel · 13+

IMPOSSIBLE DELIVERIES · 5

A Cake for Two

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

Text and illustrations: LinguAula

English version: LinguAula

SIZE XL · Illustrated novel · 13+

First edition: 2026

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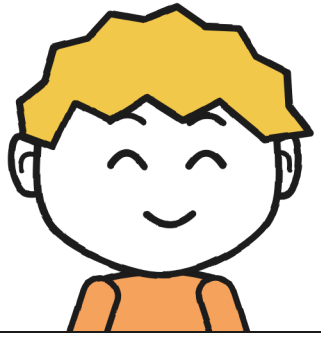
Free to photocopy, for class and for home.

Typefaces: Andika, Patrick Hand, Caveat and Courier Prime (SIL OFL licence).

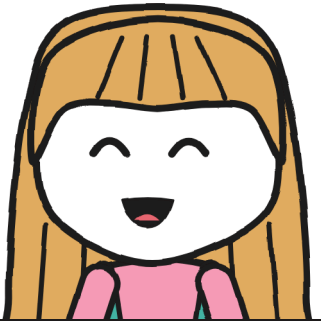
Work through every chapter at linguaula.com

No cake was harmed in the writing of this book. Cut in two, yes. —J.

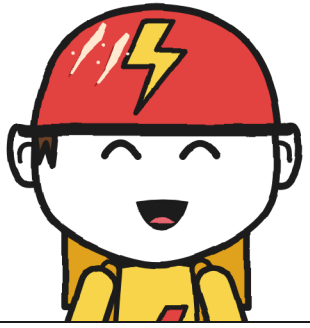
WHO'S WHO



Gus. Saturday courier. This notebook is his. He likes calm afternoons.



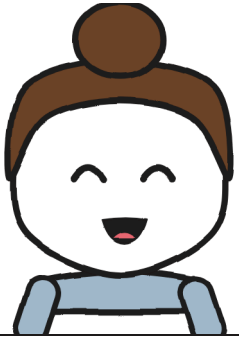
Julie. Writes in green and signs J. She likes parties with music. And surprises.



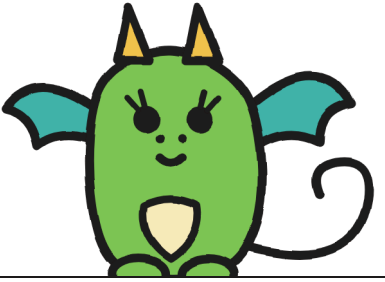
Tony. Delivers for LIGHTNING, in ten minutes or it's free. What he doesn't deliver is tricks.



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



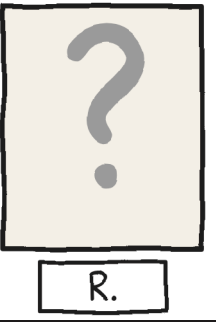
Ellie. The neighbourhood baker. She has one oven and two hands.



Crumb. A dragon hatchling. Lives with Vera. She likes candles. Too much.



Package No. 5. Outside, just like all the others. The label says: ASSEMBLE WHERE IT FITS.



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



CHAPTER 1

Two Invitations

Notebook 4 ended with a sleeping slipper, and I can't think of a better ending for a notebook. Number 5 is pink. Strawberry pink, like the icing on cakes, with the shop's stamp in one corner. Mara left it on the counter on Saturday morning without a word and started lining up the ink bottles with an attention they didn't need. It's her way of not looking.

All week I had been trying out words for the first page. Number 2 I titled OFFICIAL; number 3, SECRET; number 4, FINAL. I must have a weakness for words with locks. This time I didn't have to look: it came to me by itself, the way something comes when you've been wanting it for days without noticing.

At the top I wrote DELIVERY NOTEBOOK 5 · by Gus, which is what you write. Underneath, slowly, with a freshly sharpened pencil, a single word:

CALM.

No exclamation mark. A calm exclamation would be a contradiction, and I'm careful with contradictions.

Julie was on the other side of the counter, leaning over, with her head tilted like a parrot listening to the radio. She didn't ask me for the notebook. She didn't need to: she reads upside down just as fast as the right way up, and with a good deal more cheek.

"Calm," she said, to the word, not to me.

She took out the green marker, which was already writing faintly, pulled the notebook towards her with one finger and left me underneath:

"Calm" is what you write when you don't know what's coming. —J.

I read it three times looking for the point where she was wrong. I didn't find it, and it worried me less than it should have.

For anyone who gets to this notebook without having read the others: the shop is called Impossible Deliveries and it belongs to Mara, who is a witch, wears a purple hat and has a stamp that throws off sparks, smelling of 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 four: a dragon egg, some seeds that ran, a little bell and an arrival kit. On the wall, in green, it says LEFT: 16.

Yesterday, Friday the 16th, was my birthday. I celebrated at home, with my mum: lemon sponge, two cups and nobody sang. It was perfect.

The singing needs explaining, because in my house it isn't an oversight, it's an agreement. My mum had asked me the day before, with the bread knife in her hand: "Shall I sing or not?" I said not. She nodded like someone signing, and she kept her word. She cut the sponge into four equal parts, two for then and two for later, and for a good while the only sounds were a teaspoon against a cup, the fridge and, very far away, a bus. The best thing about the afternoon was that you could hear the bus.

I'll tell you about Julie's present later. It deserves its own place.

To log the birthday properly, that night I invented a gadget. It's the fourth of my career, after the shakeometer, the redometer and the hereometer: a dial with its needle, like a watch's, and five marks. Zero, silence. One, teaspoons. Two, chat. Three, songs. Four, trumpet. I titled it THE NOISEOMETER, "how much noise a party makes", put the needle on 1 and underneath drew a small cup, which was mine.

Julie turned the page without asking permission, looked at the dial, looked at the cup and wrote with the faint marker:

A birthday at 1 isn't a birthday. It's teatime. –J.



She capped the marker, rested her elbows on the counter and said, like someone reading out the agenda:

"Wednesday the 21st is mine. And we promised to celebrate them together."

"After the 21st," I said.

"Saturday the 24th. At five."

"At five."

We both wrote it down. I did it in pencil, in the pink notebook; she did it in green, in her little pad, which she covered with her whole arm, the way you cover an exam. I covered mine with my

elbow. At the back, Mara stamped a paper and sparks flew with their smell of a candle just blown out, and neither of us looked up, even though sparks can be smelt. We ended up each at one end of the counter, side-on and half turned away, two people writing the same date as if each of us were the owner of it.

Neither of us said anything else. Now it seems odd to me that two people who have just agreed should cover what they write. Then it seemed to me that you write better with your elbow in its place.

I already knew what the party was going to be like. So did Julie.

This is what I knew.

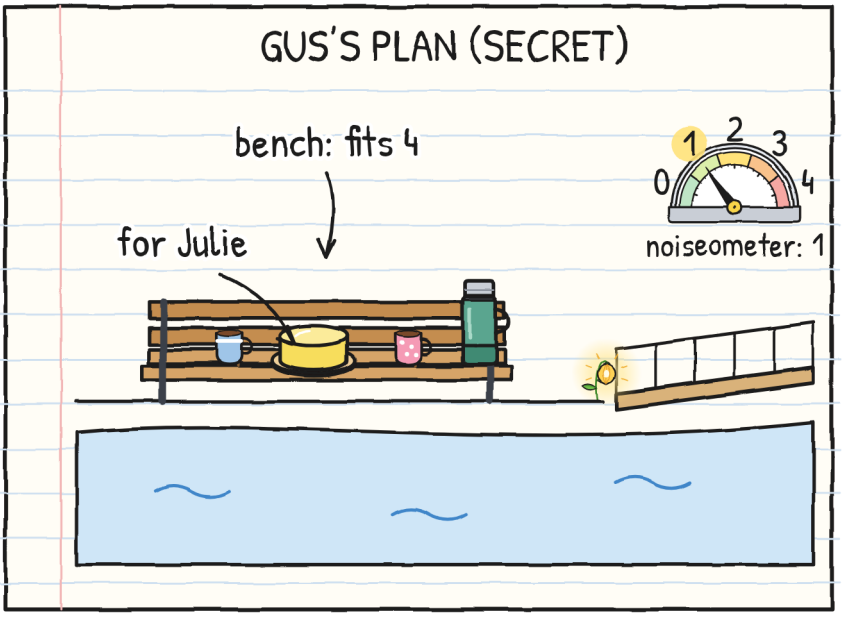
Julie needs a calm afternoon. She's always running, timing things and asking questions, and when she finally keeps still you can tell by her foot, which is still going somewhere else. A teatime on the footbridge bench, by the canal, with no noise, with a flask and a small cake, would do her good. I know that bench. It has a loose slat that rocks if you sit on the end, and it's the only one in the neighbourhood from which you can't see a single shop. I go there when I need nothing to happen.

It would be a surprise. She wouldn't have to prepare anything. Just come. It seemed to me the best present possible: one that creates no work.

I could have asked her. I thought about it, standing by the counter with my pencil in the air: "Julie, would you like an

afternoon with no rush?" But a question has an answer, and the answer can be no. A plan doesn't answer back: it stays on the paper, still, waiting, which is what almost everything I draw does best.

I drew it that same morning, on the next sheet: the bench, the little street lamp at the foot of the footbridge, a cake, two cups and the flask. On the way to the shop I had measured the bench. It fits four. At the top I put GUS'S PLAN (SECRET), in case there was any doubt about who the secret was.



Julie's plan I didn't find out about until the following Friday. The page that comes next I didn't write: she wrote it, afterwards, in

my notebook, and I left it where she put it, right next to mine. It's where it has to be.

This is what I knew: Gus needs a proper party, with music, even if he doesn't know it. If I ask him, he'll say no. So I won't ask him. –J.

She drew the bunting one flag at a time, with a patience I had never seen in her.



At midday Tony came back from a delivery. He left his bike at the door, came in without taking off his helmet and sat on his crate, where he sits "for now". Since the morning I had been carrying four blue envelopes, written in pencil in my best handwriting, resting my hand on the edge so as not to smudge, and Julie was

at the back rummaging in a drawer of sticky tape. I reckoned I had ten seconds.

"Here." I handed him the four envelopes. "One is for you. The others are for Mara, Vera and Flora. It's a surprise for Julie. Don't tell her."

"A surprise I can keep," said Tony.

He said it in the voice he uses for "received". He put the envelopes in his backpack without looking at them, and I thought: what luck, a courier who doesn't read what he delivers.

What happened next Tony told me on Friday, with the time, because at LIGHTNING the time is half the story. I had already gone for lunch when Julie came up to his crate with a wad of green envelopes held together with a rubber band. There were nine. Tony counted them twice.

"One is for you. The others are for Mara, Vera, Flora, Ellie, Don Antonio, Zoe, Bruno and the shoe shop lady. It's a surprise for Gus. Don't tell him."

"A surprise I can keep."

The same sentence with the same face. That must be what tells a courier from a liar: the courier doesn't change the message depending on who asks. This time, though, he opened both of his, the blue one and the green one, one after the other, the way you check a delivery note. They said the same thing: SATURDAY 24, AT FIVE. After the time came the place, and there each one said their own.

He told me without adjectives. It's his way of being kind.

In the afternoon I went to Ellie's bakery to order a cake. It smelt of warm crust and of something sweet I couldn't name. As I went in, with the bell on the door still swinging, I heard the kitchen door close, at the back: a dull thud, the kind you give with your hip. I thought I saw a scrap of green dungarees.

I thought they were someone else's dungarees. Green dungarees are common; it's a practical colour.

They were mine. Ellie got me out through the kitchen. —J.

"A small lemon cake," I told Ellie. "With nothing on top. For Saturday the 24th, at five, on the footbridge bench. It's a surprise for Julie."

It was the second time I had said that sentence in a single day, and it was already sounding like a slogan.

Ellie wrote it on a sheet in her round handwriting and pinned it to the cork board of orders. There was already another sheet there, turned face down.

"Saturday the 24th at five? I already have another cake at that time. For somewhere else."

"Whose?"

"It's a secret. Like yours."

I stood on tiptoe, which is what I do when I need to see something that isn't mine to see and which has never worked for me. I thought it would be for somebody else. Lots of people have birthdays in October. I thought it quietly, to hear how it sounded, and it sounded fine: a month has thirty-one days, and the neighbourhood is big.

"I'll keep your secret," said Ellie, wiping her hands on her apron. "And the other one's, theirs. But I have one oven and two hands. On Saturday at five, both hands go to one place."

"And the other cake?"

"That's for you lot to decide, the ones who ordered them. I make cakes. Parties, I don't."

I wrote down: "Ellie: one oven, two hands, one place." The numbers I understood perfectly. The "you lot" I let go by, the way you let a bus go by that isn't going to your part of town.

Ellie told me the next day. I didn't get the "you lot" either. —J.



When I got back to the shop, Tony had emptied his backpack onto the counter and was sorting the envelopes by colour: the green ones on one side, the blue ones on the other, with the care you give to what you're about to deliver. When he finished, he counted them again. Then once more.

"Gus, have you talked to Julie about the party?"

"No. It's a surprise."

"Right," said Tony. "At LIGHTNING, a package with two addresses doesn't leave the shop."

"Which two addresses?"

"I can't tell you that. I've been asked not to."

LIGHTNING has rules for everything, and every time Tony quotes one I take it as read even if it's new to me. This one was. I wrote it down without understanding it, in the corner of the plan sheet, which is where the things that don't fit anywhere go.

Tony put one invitation of each colour in his backpack pocket.

"These two are mine," he said. "I'll deliver the rest on Monday."

Then Mara, who reaches every shelf without a stool out of sheer authority, had to climb onto the blue stool this time to bring down, with both hands, from the top shelf, the box of No. 5: just like all the ones on the shelf, no bigger and no smaller. Inside, something wooden went crack. On the shelf there was left a clean rectangle, the usual size, which added itself to the four gaps; the sign on the wall went on saying LEFT: 16.

"Ellie's coming at five," said Mara. "At last."

Two envelopes in one pocket. Neither knew anything about the other. The envelopes, I mean. —J.

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. The same cake. —J.

FOR FAMILIES AND TEACHERS

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