

ROLL OF THUNDER



It's a dark and stormy night all right.

I was in my bed,
minding my own business,
when an earsplitting*

kaboom! of
thunder

catapulted
me halfway

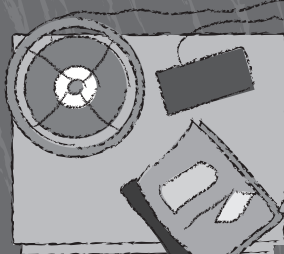
across
the room.

Seriously, one

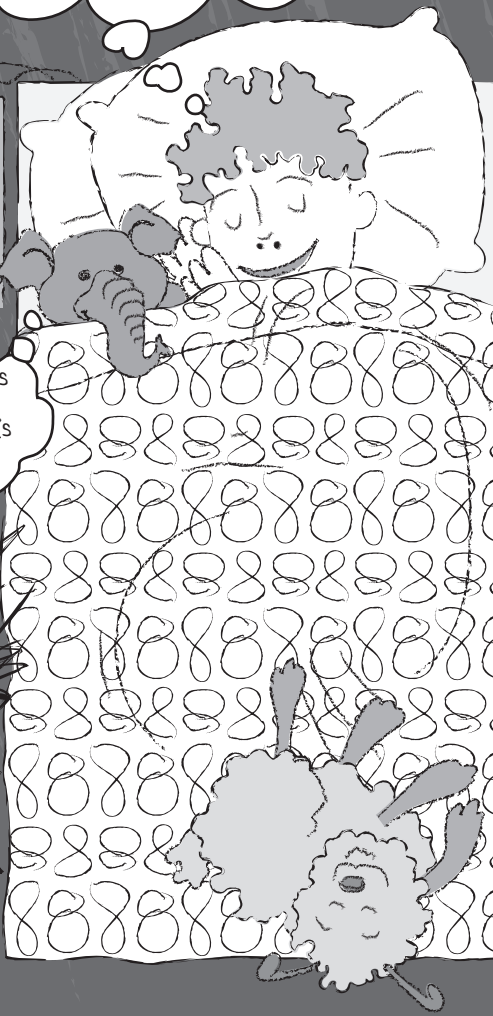
second I was

dead asleep...

AHHH. ALL SAFE AND
TUCKED IN FOR THE NIGHT.



HE ONLY SLEEPS
WITH ME
WHEN THERE'S
THUNDER.



and the next I was on the floor, rolled up in my covers like a human burrito!

As I lay there burritofied, lightning flickered and thunder growled. I could

hear the splatting rain and the moaning wind and the clacking tree branches as they extended* their long, twisted claws to tap at my window. Max was

trembling at my feet.

Good thing it's not almost Halloween or this would be super eerie,* I thought.

AHHHHHHH!
TRAPPED IN MY
OWN SECURITY
BLANKET!

AND YOU
THOUGHT THAT
OTHER KID
WAS WIMPY...

Do I look
SCARED
TO YOU?



Wait a second! I remembered. It's October! Halloween is just 18 days away! So I speedily unrolled myself and grabbed Max, to calm him down.

Lightning flashed again, and I tiptoed over to my window to look outside. Pitch blackness and soaking-wet raininess. Another pop of lightning... and I saw him. A mysterious figure with a black umbrella. He was standing in the middle of the street, and he was looking up at me!



I ducked down and hyperventilated for a couple seconds. When I peeked back over the windowsill, the street was empty.

Whoa. That was creeeepy. Who was that person, and what was he doing outside in the middle of the night in the middle of a thunderstorm?

Welp, I can't fall back asleep now, so I might as well read a chapter or two. My school library lady hooked me up with the comic book version of *A Wrinkle in Time*, which is an old story about these kids with scientist parents. The kids get woken up in the middle of the night by a thunderstorm (Hey! Just like me!) and decide to eat liverwurst-and-cream-cheese sandwiches.

Hm. I don't know what liverwurst is, but I just realized I'm so hungry I could eat a horse. Plus, food has a way of calming me. And downstairs, in the kitchen, there's a fresh batch of chocolate éclairs* Dad made that are calling my name...



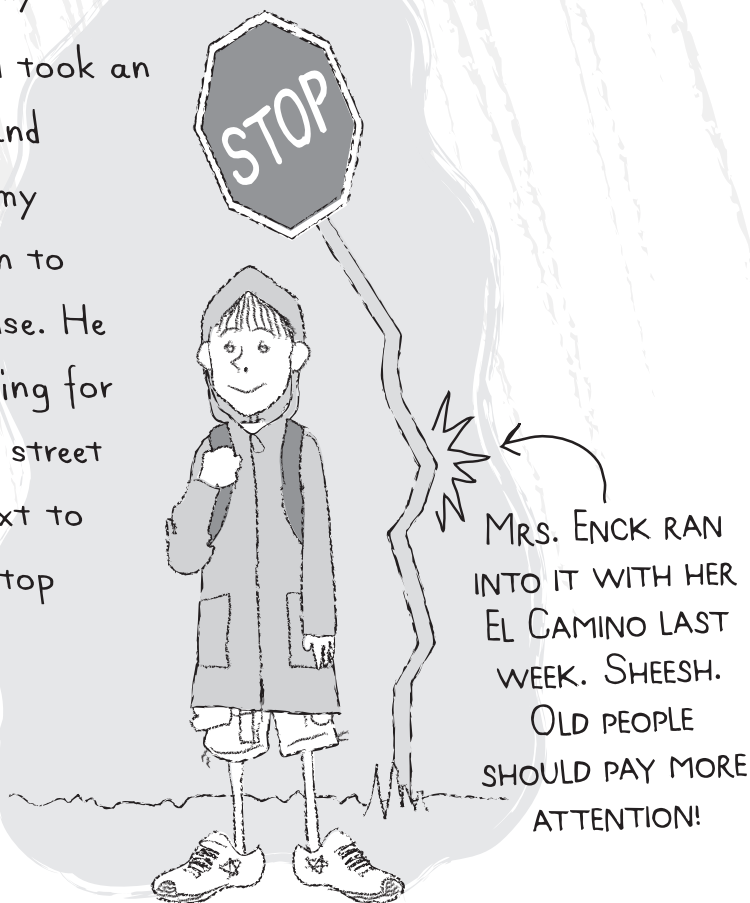
RAINDROPS KEEP FALLIN' ON MY HEAD

What mother would make her kid walk to school in a downpour? I'll give you one guess.

"But it's raining!" I argued.

"That's what umbrellas are for," she pointed out helpfully.

So I took an umbrella and grumbled my way down to Jack's house. He was waiting for me at the street corner, next to the bent stop sign.



“¿Qué onda?” yelled Jack, who has annoyingly been trying to teach me Spanish ever since he got assigned to be my partner in Spanish class.

Jack is bilingual. His mom’s family is from Mexico, and they speak Spanish and English together in a word casserole that makes me a little queasy. Why is Spanish so impossible to comprehend?!

“Uh...it’s raining,” I said, guessing at what Jack was trying to say. “And I’m exhausted* because that thunder demolished my sleep last night.”

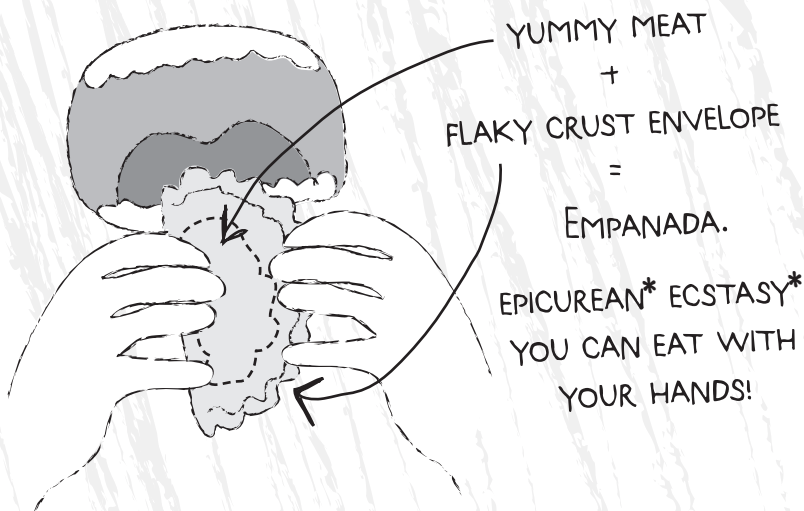
“I know!” said Jack. “It woke up everyone in my house too—even my *abuelo*.”

Abuelo. What did that mean again? Tree? “The thunder woke up your tree?” I was close enough to Jack by now that I could see him roll his eyes.

“*Abuelo* means grandpa, doofus,” he said. “He just got here from Mexico yesterday. He’s staying with my mom and me for a while.”



“Ooh, does that mean your mom will make *empanadas*?*” Mrs. Lopez cooks all sorts of delectable stuff whenever her big family gets together.



“Yuck. Probably,” groaned Jack, who barely eats anything. Have you noticed how skinny that kid is? His ankles are the size of my pinkie. Jack doesn’t even like to talk about food, not even delicious meat pies, so he changed the subject by asking, “What are you gonna be for Halloween?”

"I dunno. Reaper." The Grim Reaper is obviously the greatest costume ever because all you need is a black robe with a hood. Pick up a plastic axe dealie and boom, you're the Reaper. Jack, he's usually a skeleton. Not a big stretch.

"We should be something cool this year," he said.

"Like?"

"Like...elves or dwarves or something." Jack's been all about fantasy ever since he started playing Dungeons & Dragons with Tommy Geller last summer. "Plus, I don't think my skeleton costume fits me anymore."

"Hey!" I just remembered. "Speaking of skeletons, I saw some creepy person standing in the street during the storm last night! I mean, who's crazy enough to go out in the pouring rain unless they're forced to by their mothers?"



Just then, a blob of shocking pink whizzed by.
“Hello, Aldoooooooooo!” it called.

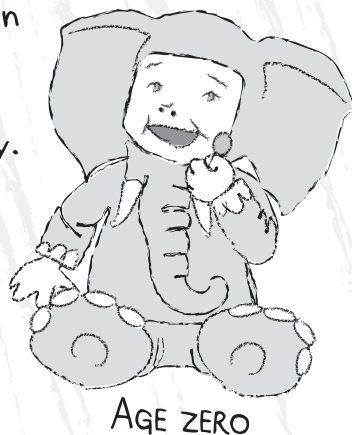


It was my grandma, Goosy. She's for sure
crazy enough to go out in a rainstorm even when
she doesn't have to.

WHAT AM I GONNA BE?

After dinner, Mom was looking at old Halloween pictures on her laptop. Man, when you're little, your parents sure can get a lot of mileage out of one tiny piece of candy.

Apparently
I'd wear
anything
if they just
gave me a
Dum-Dum.



But maybe Jack's right. Maybe we should come up with better costumes this year. After all, Halloween is my second-favorite holiday. And it would be cool to be a zombie or a sumo wrestler or a ninja chef or something.

When I asked my brother, Timothy, what he was going to be for Halloween, he said high schoolers are too old to trick-or-treat.

"Pffftt," I said. "I'm getting a sackful of free candy every October 31st until I'm ancient. They'll have to pry the bag from my cold, dead hands."

"Charming, bro."

AS SOON AS I WAS OLD ENOUGH TO KNOW BETTER, I STARTED USING A PILLOWCASE FOR TRICK-OR-TREATING INSTEAD OF THAT DIMINUTIVE PUMPKIN BUCKET THEY TRICKED ME INTO USING WHEN I WAS LITTLE.

Boo-hoo

THAT'S RIGHT. HIT THE ROAD, JACK.



Hey, instead of a ninja, maybe I could be a luchador wrestler like in that movie I saw on TV last weekend called *Nacho Libre*!



Hm. Not sure if shirtless is my best look.

Or whoa, I could be a plate of nachos!



Note to self: Invent edible* costumes.