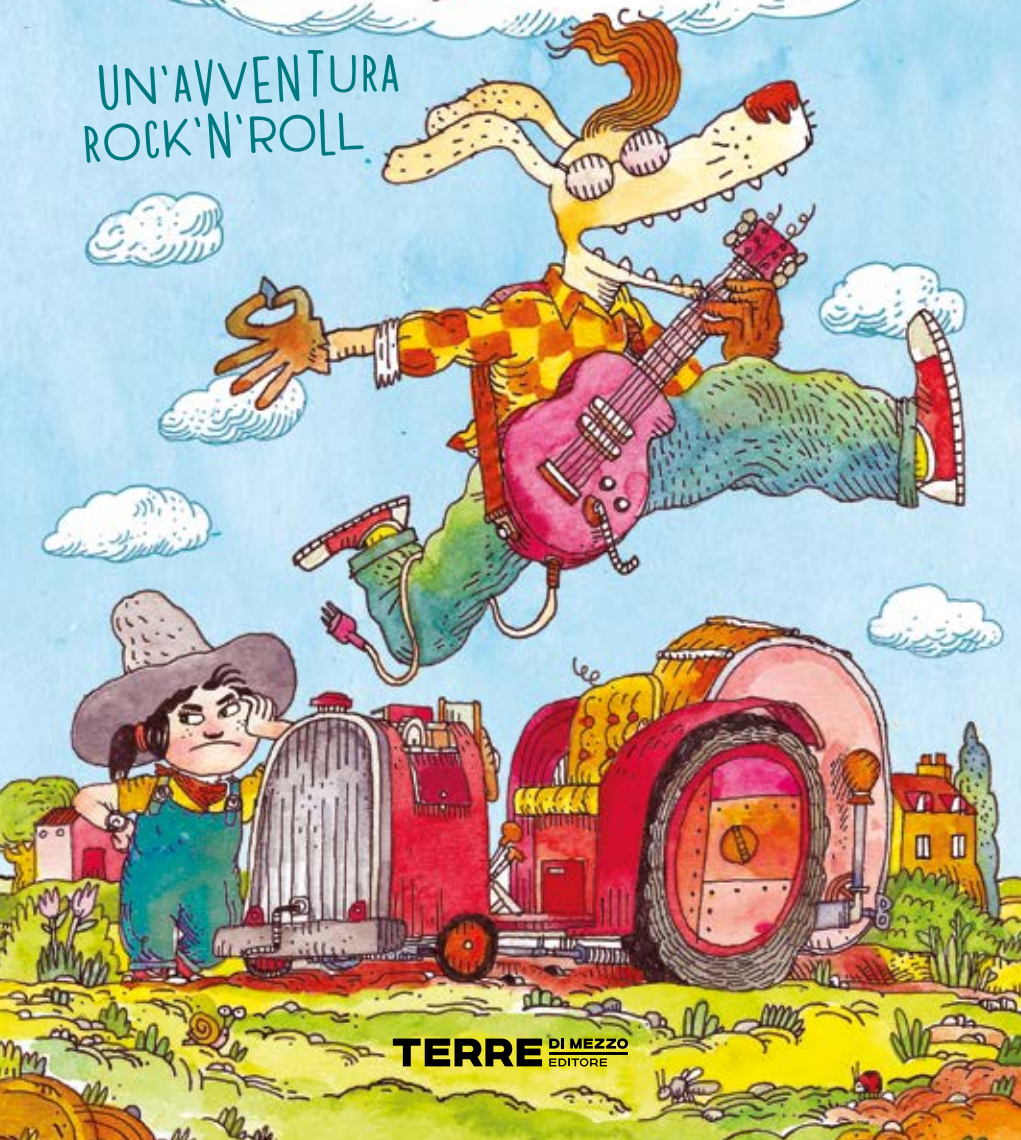


FEDERICO APPEL

CARLOTTA & LO ZIO ELETTRICO

UN'AVVENTURA
ROCK'N'ROLL



TERRE DI MEZZO
EDITORE







© 2021 Cart'Armata edizioni Srl
Terre di mezzo Editore
via Calatafimi 10, 20122 Milano
Tel. 02-83.24.24.26
e-mail editore@terre.it
terre.it/acchiappastorie.it

Direzione editoriale:
Miriam Giovanzana

Coordinamento editoriale:
Davide Musso

Colori di Federico Appel e Teresa Scala

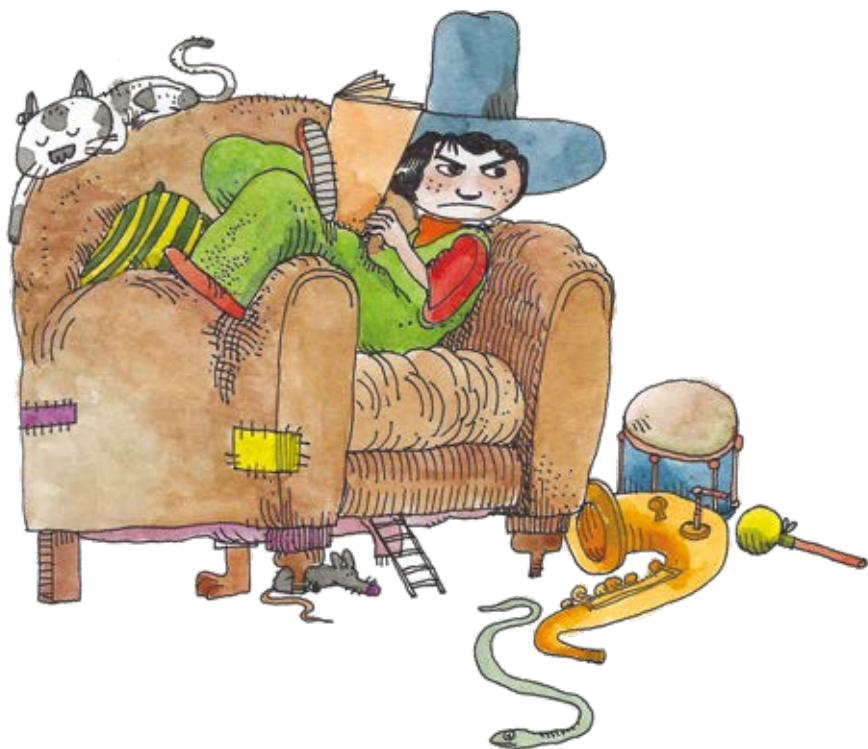
Prima edizione: marzo 2021
Stampa: Grafiche AZ Srl
San Martino Buon Albergo (Vr)

Questo prodotto è composto
da materiale che proviene da foreste
ben gestite certificate FSC®, da materiali
riciclati e da altre fonti controllate.



[Carlotta and the Electric Uncle]

FEDERICO APPEL
**CARLOTTA &
LO ZIO ELETTRICO**
UN'AVVENTURA ROCK'N'ROLL





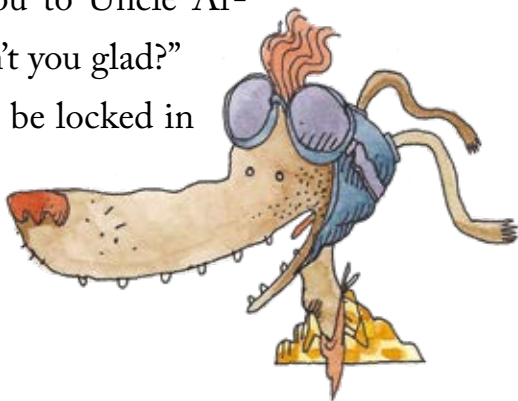
★ UNCLE ARTHUR'S CROSSED PATHS

This guy right here is my Uncle Arthur, that is my father's brother. I'm well acquainted with my uncle, because anytime my parents are sent on a trip – and it happens so often they may as well be undercover secret agents – they leave me with him.

“Where are we going, Mum?”

“We're taking you to Uncle Arthur's, darling! Aren't you glad?”

“Glad? I'd rather be locked in a cupboard with bread, water and some crossword puzzles...”



“But you know Dad and I have to work.”

“Is that why you’ve packed your bathing suits and flippers?”

“You must be mistaken.”

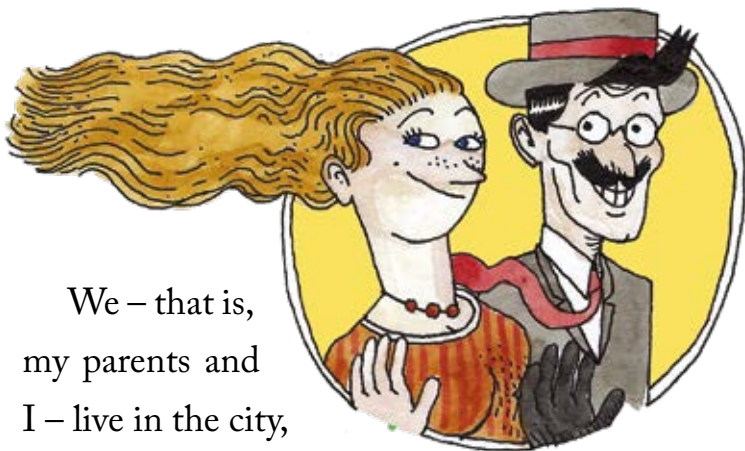
“I’m not even sure what your job is.”

“Oh, honey, it’s just grown-up stuff...”

“Anyway, it’s odd that these business trips mostly come up in the summer, when school’s out...”

“Enough! We’re taking you to Uncle Arthur’s and we expect you to be on your best behaviour!”





We – that is,
my parents and
I – live in the city,
in a neat, comforta-
ble flat on the third floor of an ordinary build-
ing. Uncle Arthur lives out in the country, in a
farmhouse full of mysterious rooms crammed
with objects from who knows where.

I found Dwight Stonebreaker's original hat
in one of those dusty, empty rooms. It's mine
now, and I wear it whenever I'm staying with
my uncle, to protect myself from the trouble
that always rains down on us.

Although I'm not so sure it works: Dwight
Stonebreaker survived a duel with the Trump
brothers in Rattlesnake Canyon and a danger-
ous bank robbery at the San Pedro Bank with
his trusty hat, but it didn't save him from the



vase of geraniums that accidentally fell off the balcony of the fair Rosalinda – who wasn't even his sweetheart!

Anyway, I always expect the worst whenever I stay at Uncle Arthur's. It's like a game of Monopoly where I keep drawing Chance cards filled with accidents, taxes, collapsed houses and natural disasters.

Because my uncle's not the type to think things over quietly. He's always coming up with bizarre ideas, abstruse projects, daring deeds to be performed right now.

And Uncle Arthur really needs me for each and every deed. Because, amongst so many other things, he's shy – so shy that he even has trouble buying a bus ticket! So he needs me to do all the stuff he avoids with the excuse of his shyness, like making phone calls to strangers, speaking with the mechanic about spare parts or asking for directions at a crossroads.

And after all, what's a story without a crossroads? It takes us straight into the dragon's lair, or forces us to take long and unexpected trips, or leads us to discover things we didn't really want to discover. A story without a crossroads isn't a story at all, or else it's a very boring one. After all, the crossword puzzles I enjoy so much connect words – crocodile, Dumas père, green cormorant – that would otherwise never have met.

Uncle Arthur, who's shyer than a little mouse hiding in a house, is so afraid that no one will understand him ... that I'm the only one who does. Because Uncle Arthur never explains himself: all he does is play music ... he just plays and plays, and then plays some more. He plays every instrument he can get his hands on, and when he's not playing, he's thinking about music and how to mix sounds and noises and electricity.

But Uncle Arthur is silent and awkward in front of strangers, clasping his hat in his hands, crossing his legs and blushing bright red as a tomato, whenever a woman looks or smiles at him.

Uncle Arthur never complains when Mum and Dad abandon me in this out-of-the-way place to go off who knows where. Sometimes he can't wait for me to get here. As if I were all he needed to kick off a new adventure, as if I were the missing gear to start his engine. Or the electricity to turn on his guitar.



Behind Uncle Arthur's big house is the old barn. Now it's full of amplifiers, cables, wrenches and other tools. Plus the old musical instruments that Uncle Arthur has modified one by one. All he needs is a little electricity to turn a broken-down instrument into a strange, fiendish object. As soon as he plugs his guitar in and plays a couple of notes, he starts jumping up and down, his hair ruffled and his arms churning like a swimmer at the pool.

"Niece, you have no idea what miracles electricity can work!"

"Sure I do. Alessandro Volta even managed to make a dead frog move. I bet the frog wasn't too happy."

“Alessandro who? I don’t know him, but just listen to this old oil can play!”

“Uncle Arthur, have you noticed that every living creature, except for us, has run away from this barn as fast as it could? Any idea why?”

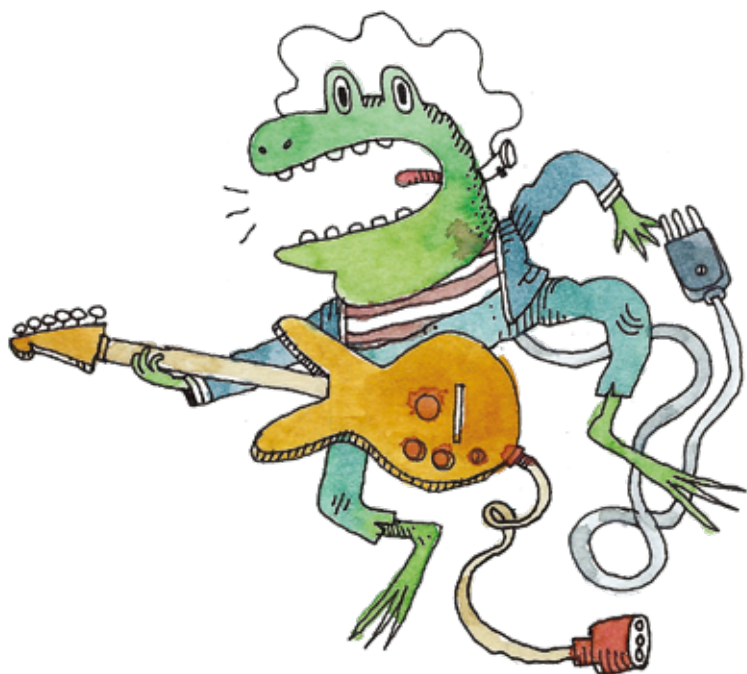
“Carlotta, you sound like an old woman! Just listen to the valves of the new amp I built out of a lawnmower tank. They’re sizzling!”

It’s impossible to talk to my uncle when he’s playing or trying out one of his instruments.

I mean, you can talk to him, but only if you’re not trying to be smart. Impossible for me, as I have the highest IQ in the family! The only thing I like about staying at Uncle Arthur’s is that sometimes



the neighbour on the other side of the hill invites me over to eat the raspberries she grows. When they're ripe, of course.







A KEY TO NOWHERE

This time, however, I showed up at Uncle Arthur's prepared ...for the worst. And for some ripe raspberries as a consolation prize. Plus, it's summer, it's hot, and there are mosquitos everywhere.

As Uncle Arthur and I watch my parents' car drive off into the horizon in a cloud of dust, just like in a comic strip, I brace myself for what's coming. I can see a silly grin spreading over his face and his big toes pressing against his shoes, as if they can't wait to burst free and dance the foxtrot.

"Carlotta, you'll never guess what's happened to me."

I knew it.

Before I have the chance to retort with something less than nice, Uncle Arthur pulls something out of his pocket. It looks like a tiny key – you know, the ones you'd use to lock your secret diary with its melancholy stories of un-

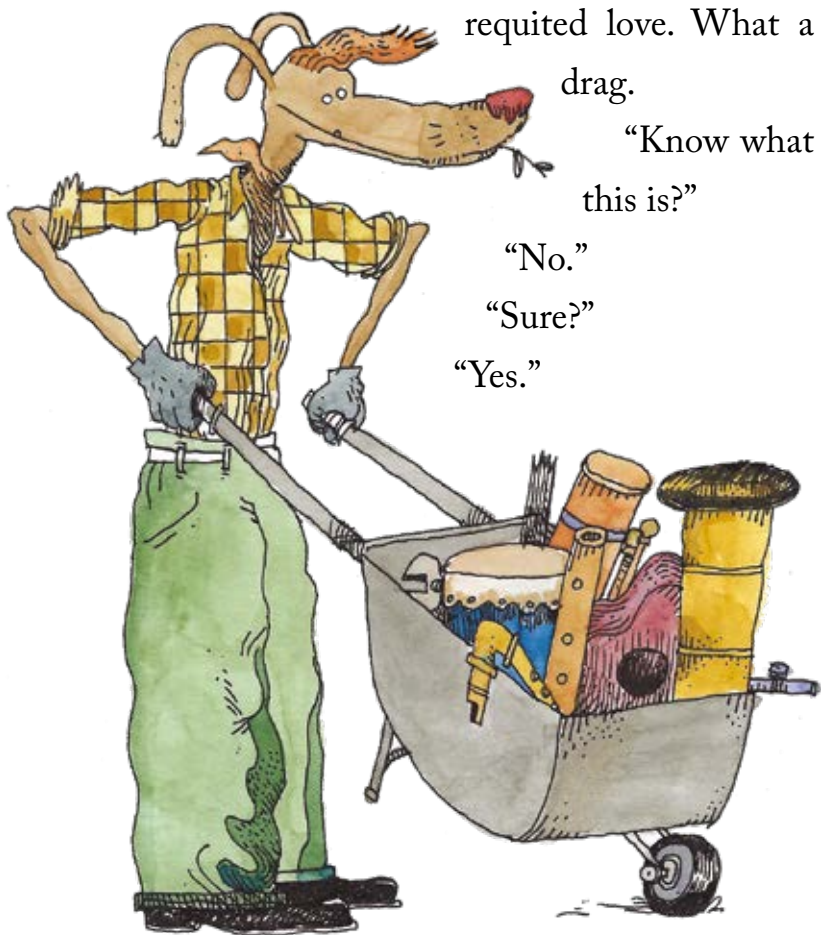
requited love. What a drag.

“Know what this is?”

“No.”

“Sure?”

“Yes.”

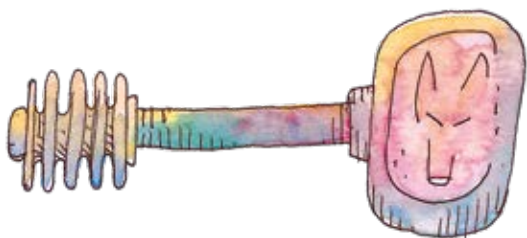


“Don’t you want to guess?”

“No.”

Uncle Arthur likes to build anticipation when he reveals his discoveries, and I can’t stand it.

“I found it when I was working in the fruit orchard out back. It comes from one of Big Mama Wolf’s guitars. Look!”



The marks, almost scratches, on the key do look like the drawing of a wolf – sort of. I make a sceptical face.

And Uncle Arthur, who apparently couldn’t wait to rattle off a bizarre story about some unknown musicians, says: “I’ll bet you’ve never even heard of Big Mama Wolf.”

“Never.”

“Don’t your parents teach you anything?”

“No, they drive off and leave me here with you. Where I learn loads of stuff.”

“That’s right!”

Uncle Arthur almost never gets a joke.

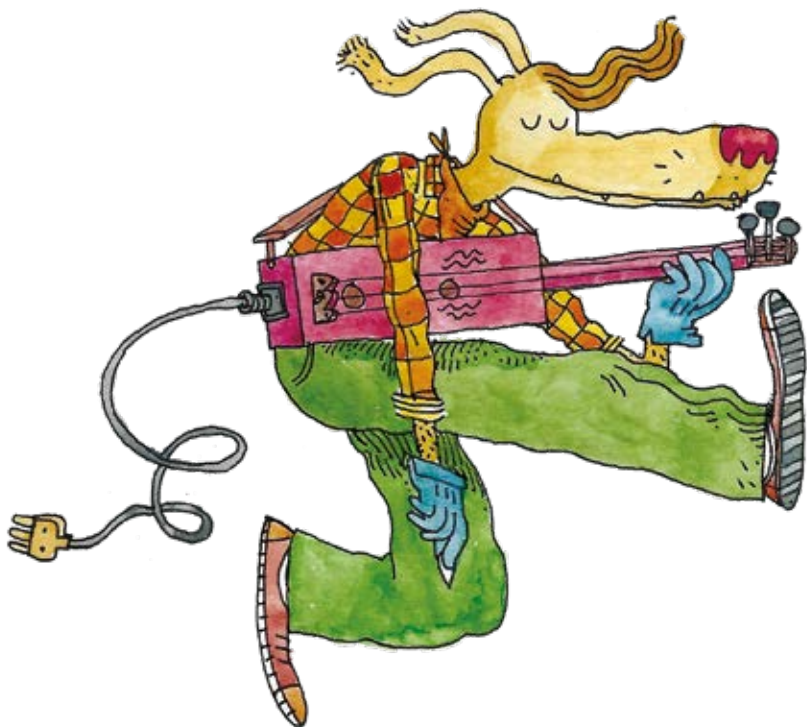
“Big Mama Wolf was an amazing guitar player! She was born to a family of farmhands



in the Southern United States, between Mississippi and Louisiana. At the age of five, home alone while her parents were at work, she built her very first guitar using an aluminium pot, a broom handle and some cooking twine. As she got older, she built several more guitars using fruit crates, shoelaces, rusty car parts, old shoes, hats and who knows what else. Meanwhile, Big Mama, whose name was Elizabeth and who grew from a frail little girl into a rather imposing woman, learned to play the guitar amazingly well, and her voice... Hearing her sing is like being on a ship in the middle of a storm, and she's the storm that rocks you and rattles you and..."

"Ok, but what does that have to do with us?"

"Big Mama soon started holding concerts, making records and travelling on either side of the ocean. Then, after the war, loads of new singers – the ones who sang rock 'n' roll – sprang up to instant success. And they all owed something to Big Mama Wolf: either the way she played



the guitar, or some of her moves on stage, or even some identical song pieces. And so, while Elvis Presley ended up on TV and kids everywhere began sporting a pompadour like his, Big Mama Wolf fell into oblivion, bit by bit. Until all traces of her vanished, except for the odd song on the radio, broadcast by a far-sighted DJ. No one knows what happened to her. But this little key here gives us a lead.”

“A key should open doors, not provide leads.

And I haven't heard you mention any doors."

"Big Mama Wolf never played a guitar she hadn't built herself. Nor did she ever let someone else play one of her guitars. So this key tells us that Big Mama Wolf herself was here. I even went to the library to do some research, but I didn't find anything. No accounts of theft or anything else."

Great. When Uncle Arthur comes up empty-handed, that's when trouble begins. Because that's when he usually goes for his tractor.



“Just let me get the tractor and we’ll be off!”

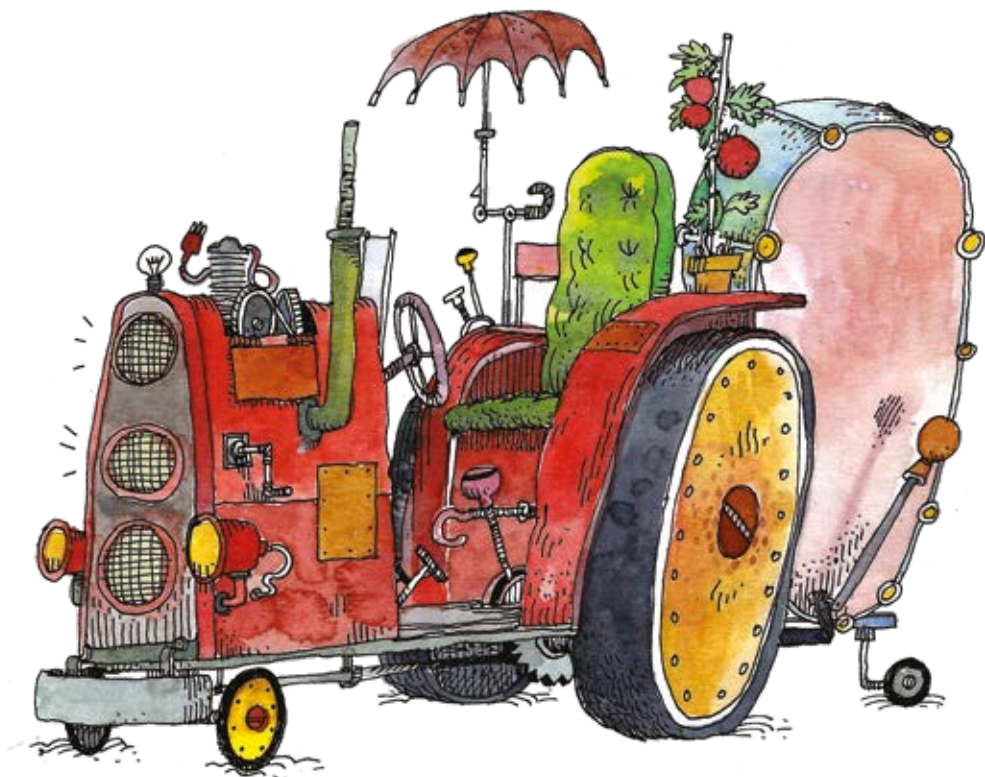
I knew it.

“Off to where? And why do we need the tractor? Can’t we go places on the bus, on foot or by bicycle like normal people?”



“But the tractor’s faster, since we can cut through the fields. Are you ready? Have you got your tooth-brush? Let me tie my shoes and we’ll be off.”

Travelling by tractor (and such a wreck of a tractor!): what an awful way to end a chapter.





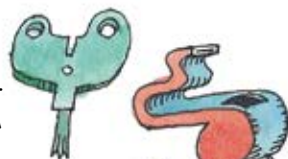
Quando i genitori la affidano
allo zio Arturo per l'estate,
Carlotta non si immagina certo
il tremendo rompicapo che sta
per scombussoare le sue vacanze!



Lo zio più stralunato che esista
la trascina in un viaggio on the road
a bordo del suo trattore.
Obiettivo: ritrovare tutti i pezzi
della chitarra di Big Mama Wolf,
la più grande musicista di tutti i tempi.



Pochi indizi, incontri decisamente
fuori dal comune, amori strampalati...
Ma lo zio avrà raccontato a Carlotta
tutta la verità? Perché gli interessa
così tanto quella vecchia chitarra?



terre.it

ISBN 978-88-6189-668-0



9 788861 896680

12,00 EURO