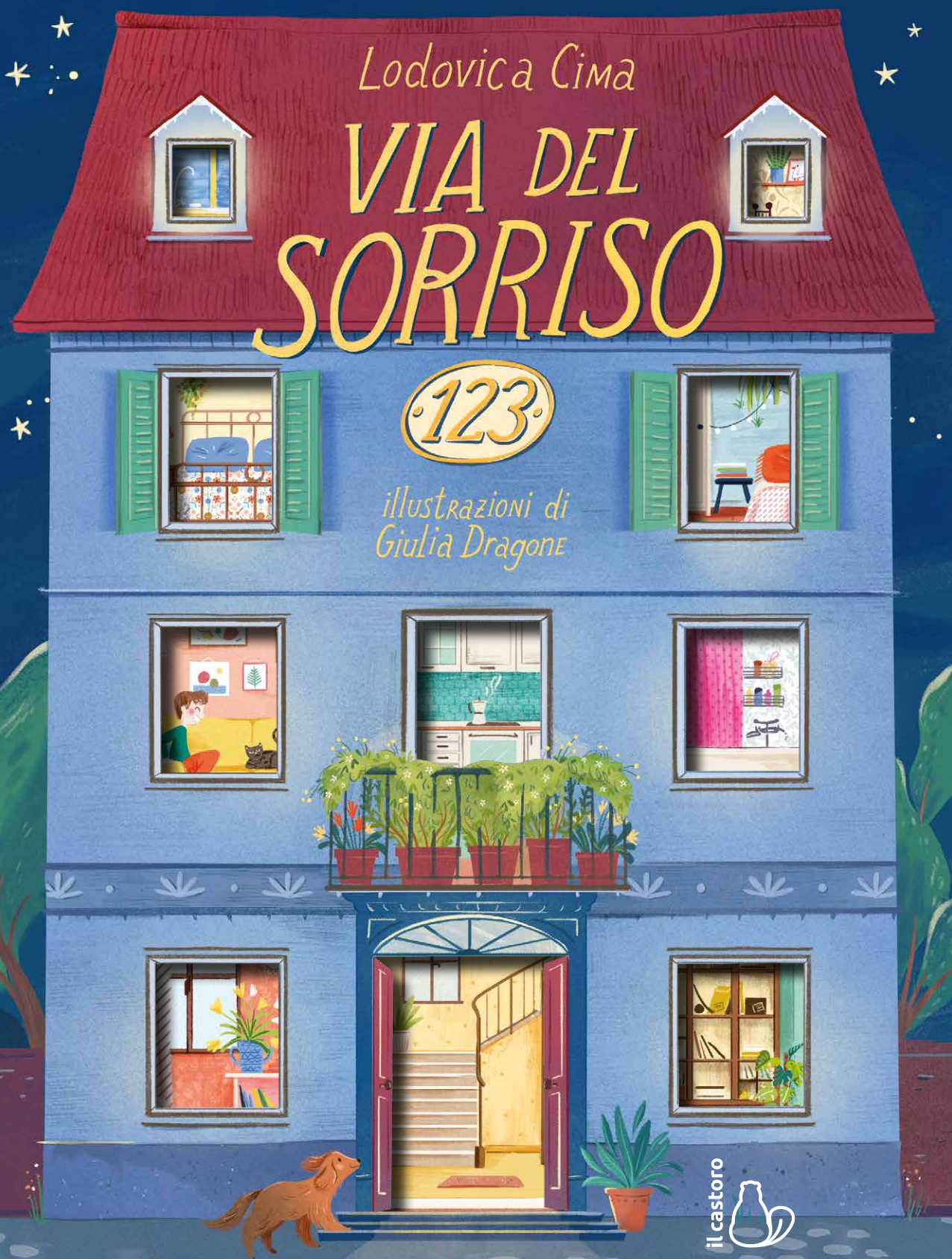


Lodovica Cima

VIA DEL SORRISO

123

illustrazioni di
Giulia Dragone



il castoro





Lodovica Cima



SMILE STREET

illustrations by Giulia Dragone



Lodovica Cima
123 Smile Street

illustrations by Giulia Dragone

English Working Translation by Amber Faith Cassese

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viale Andrea Doria 7, 20124 Milano
www.editriceilcastoro.it
info@editriceilcastoro.it



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JANUARY

GUARDIAN ANGEL

Peter is seven years old and is a very curious boy.

He lives on Smile Street, in a big building he adores, especially because he knows so many people who live there. Almost every day, he bumps into the caretaker for the apartment complex.

When they see each other in the lobby, stairwell, or lift, they don't just greet each other, but chat. But mostly they laugh and joke around. Perhaps it's because the building is on Smile Street?

Today, Peter hears a sound from the stairwell so he peeks out his door and sees Angel ringing the buzzer of the flat facing his. He is fully armed with pliers, hammers, screwdrivers, and tubes.

"Does he have to catch a wild animal?" Thought Peter right away. Peter has almost completely memorized his big book of animals and hopes to meet them all, one by one, and get to know them better.

He rushes out onto the landing, as nimble as a cat, and sidles up to Poldo, Angel's dog. Within





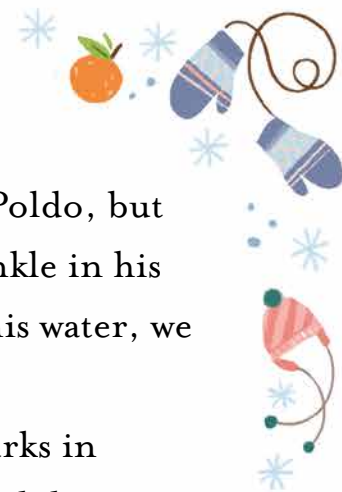
seconds, he's in Mr Morris's flat alongside them.

"There's a pipe leaking and there's water everywhere!" exclaims the owner, extremely agitated.

"Don't worry, Mr Morris, I'll get you fixed right up," Angel says, smiling as always, calming him down.

"Where's the water?" Murmurs Peter, until they get to the kitchen and their feet are suddenly sopping wet.

Angel realizes he's tagged along and says, "Well look who we have here! Now that you're here,

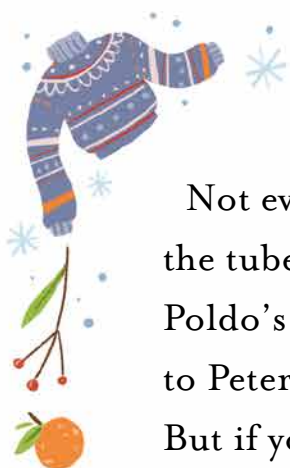


you can give me a hand. Take care of Poldo, but be careful, he can't swim!" With a twinkle in his eye, he says, "Watch out, because in this water, we might find a hammerhead shark!"

Peter's eyes widen as he looks for sharks in the water. He still doesn't know that fish hate kitchens – especially ovens, preferring rivers, lakes, and seas. He'll find out soon enough.

Mr Morris grins at the shark tale, and just for a second, he forgets the disaster in his kitchen. Poldo laps up water, here and there. Perhaps he's trying to help dry things up? Slurp, slurp, slurp.





Not even a half hour later, Angel repairs the tube and cleans the floor – naturally, with Poldo’s help. As he puts his tools away, he turns to Peter: “No sharks in the water in this house. But if you come see me soon with your book, we will find out where hammerhead sharks live,” shaking his hefty and weathered hammer.

Peter nods his head, politely says goodbye, and goes home.

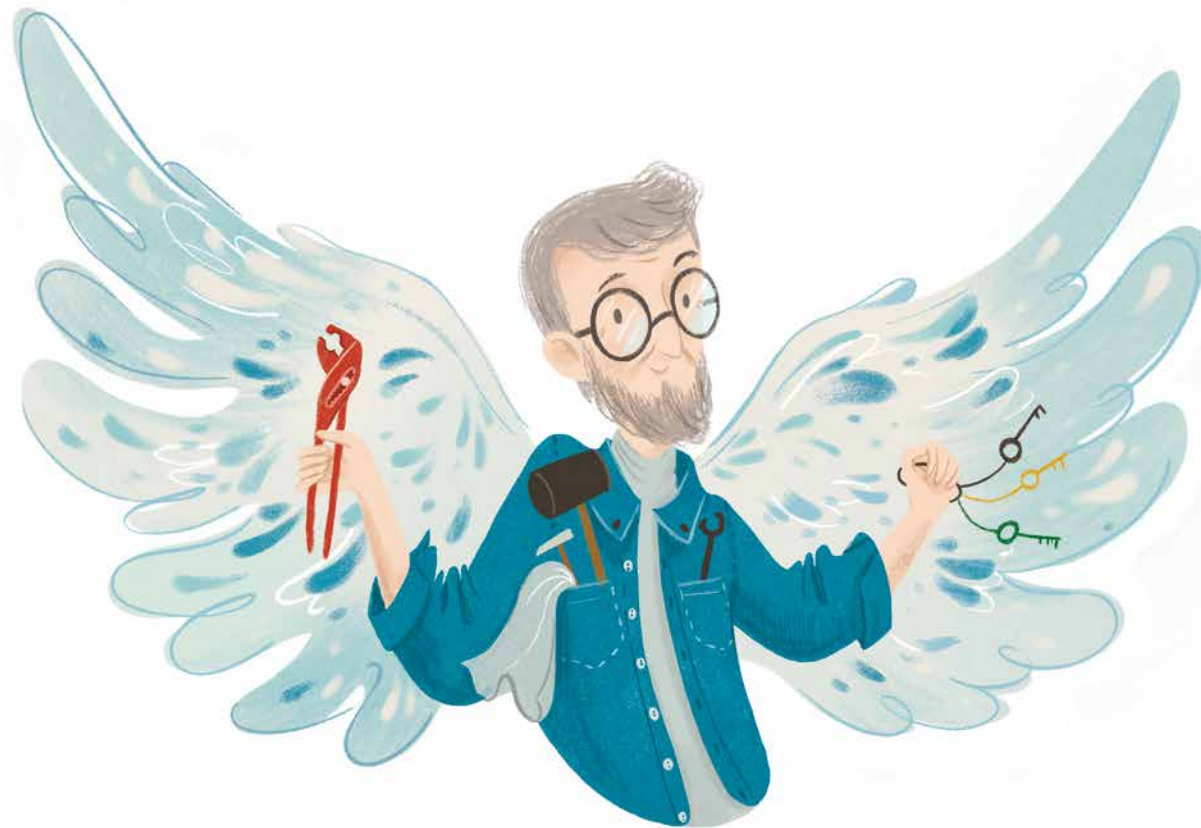
Once in his room, he gets his big book of animals and ponders: “If Angel knows about hammerhead sharks, who knows how many other animals he knows about.... Brilliant! I can’t wait to go see him again.”

Angel lives alone in a flat next to the reception desk of 123 Smile Street with his dog Poldo. He says he doesn’t have time to be lonely because he has so much to do. He is the caretaker and custodian of the building complex but everyone calls him their Guardian Angel. Who knows why?

“Angel, please come check....”

“Angel, please call the elevator for me.”

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“Angel, please fix the fan.”

That’s why: Angel knows how to do everything. And he knows a lot of stories about animals. When Peter goes down to reception to find him, he brings his big book with him.

Angel studies the pictures alongside him and begins, “You must know, young Peter, that the leopard is the fastest animal! It even runs faster than the bus that passes in front of our house!”

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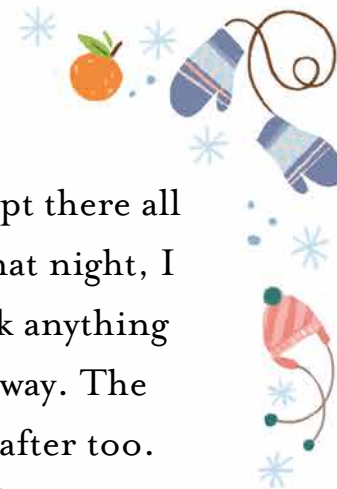
"And who's the acrobat of the sea? The dolphin! It jumps in and out of the water like a true gymnast."

Angel turns the page and finds the hammerhead shark: "Look, it has a mouth like a normal shark with three rows of teeth, but it says here it eats seaweed salad too! All animals are unique in their own way!"

Peter eagerly listens, but when the dog rests its paw on the book, he asks, "And what's unique about Poldo? What made you choose him?"

"That's another story, my dear Peter, because he actually chose me. One night, he came to my door

~ 16 ~



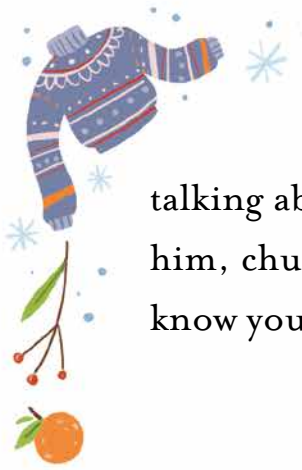
and curled up on my doormat. He slept there all night, as if he were waiting for me. That night, I realized he was here, but I didn't think anything of it, convinced he'd go on his merry way. The next day he was still there and the day after too. On the third day, I realized he wanted to move in and we've been inseparable ever since."

"Brilliant!" Exclaims Peter as he pets Poldo, who wags his tail. He knows instantly they are



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talking about him. Peter, at that point, hugs him, chuffed, "Yes Poldo, don't worry, now I know you're truly a unique dog!"



WHERE'S POLDO?



Today, Angel is going in and out of his door, pacing back and forth, as if he doesn't know how to stop.

Peter passes by with Marina, his babysitter. They bought a giant bag of oranges that is so bulky, Peter has to help Marina carry it home.

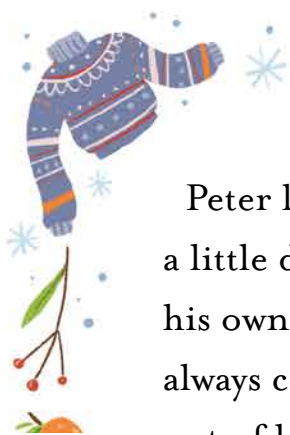
One handle each, as they slowly tread along. But with all that yanking, the bag breaks and the oranges fall out, rolling down the lobby floor. One rolls far away. Peter runs after it, stopping it right as it rolls up to the reception desk.

"Hi Angel, lucky I got it! Otherwise, Poldo might have eaten it...." Starts Peter.

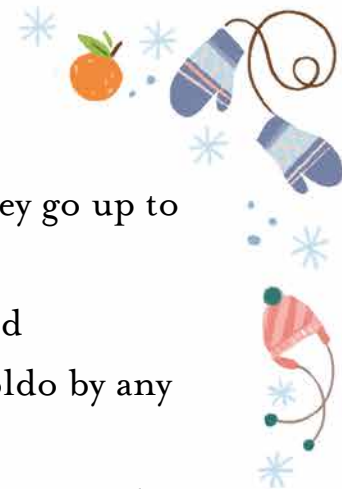
"Speaking of Poldo, I can't find him! I've been looking for him for an hour but it seems he's completely disappeared!" Says Angel, and you can tell he's frantic.

Peter frets now too, offering, "Let me help you find him. We can help look for Poldo, right, Marina?"

The babysitter starts towards them with the bag in her arms and says she will take it home and come help.



Peter looks around, thinking, "Where could a little dog like Poldo go?" At once, he answers his own question, "To Ms Agnes's place! She's always cooking and such delicious aromas drift out of her flat! Perhaps Poldo went looking for a nibble...."



Peter takes Angel by the hand and they go up to the first floor.

He rings Ms Agnes's doorbell, "Good morning, Ms Agnes, have you seen Poldo by any chance?"

Peter is sure the dog followed his nose. But the woman responds, "No, I'm sorry. I haven't seen him at all today."

Angel sighs and is about to turn back to the reception desk when Marina rushes up the stairs, exclaiming, "Did you check the basement? Maybe he followed a cat that followed a mouse!"

Peter has never seen a mouse, but he's seen tons of cats in his neighbourhood – there are so many! He wastes no time and rushes down the stairs leading to the basement.

"Come on! Let's go see!" He shouts to the others, because in reality, he's a bit frightened to go down there alone. It's so dark!

Angel accompanies him and together they call out for Poldo. But there's no trace of the dog. As they return to reception, they are all feeling low.





But then Marina has an idea, “Angel, come have some fresh-squeezed orange juice at our place and we’ll figure something out.”

Angel hesitates, but then says, “Oh sure, just five minutes! Why not?” He puts up a sign that says ‘*BE RIGHT BACK*’ on the desk.

Peters smells the fragrance of oranges in the flat. As they drink their juice, Peter stares out the window, with his nose pressed against the glass. Someone or something is moving out there.

“Hey, look!” He exclaims gleefully. He sees a little girl playing with Poldo on the rug of her living room!

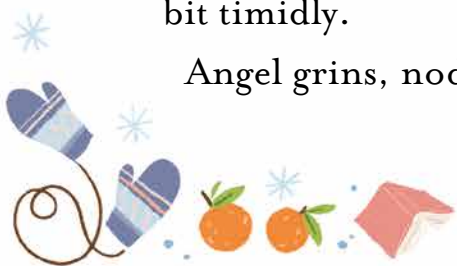
“It’s Sofia, the Martin family’s youngest,” says Angel.

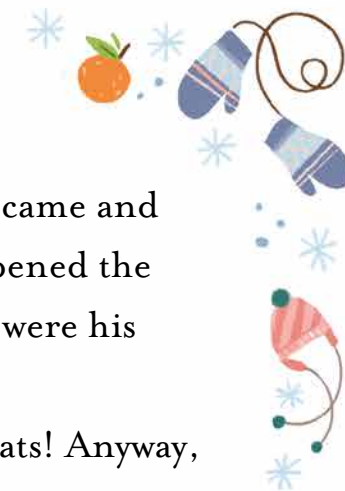
“I don’t know her, but that house always seemed empty....” Peter promptly says.

Angel explains that the Martin family just moved here as he sets off to retrieve Poldo.

“Can I come with you?” Asks Peter, though a bit timidly.

Angel grins, nods, and takes him by the hand.





In less than a minute, they arrive at the Martins' door, who live in the next building over.

They ring the bell and Sofia answers. Poldo comes to the door with her, jumping about.

"Here's where you've been hiding! Now come straight home, please...." Angel scolds him. "Why did you take someone else's dog?" Peter quickly blurts out, looking at Sofia, who's almost as tall as he is, straight in the eyes.

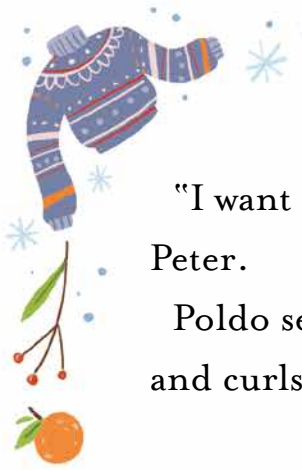
The girl smiles, pauses, and answers,

"Actually, I didn't. He's the one who came and slept on our doormat. And when I opened the door, he squeezed right by me as if it were his house...."

"This dog has a weakness for doormats! Anyway, it's clear he likes you!" Says Angel.

"Let's make a deal: You can play with Poldo whenever you want. But you have to make sure to always tell me where you are."





"I want to make that deal too...." Interrupts Peter.

Poldo seems to agree, because he wags his tail and curls up at Sofia and Peter's feet.



SEEDS FOR EVERYONE

Angel, the caretaker/guardian angel, is mopping the stairs of the building when he sees Peter and Sofia, his favourite residents, come home from school. Today Kiran and her little brother Jay from the fourth floor are with them. They are like a mini litter of cubs with a mama bear and a babysitter rounding up behind them. Every afternoon they stop to chat with him for a while.

"Hello, kids! How wonderful to see you come home together!" Angel cheerfully greets them.

"Hi Angel, today we can't stop and talk because

we have too much to do.

Tomorrow we are going on a special outing," Peter, the chatterbox begins.

Soon, with the help of Sofia and Kiran, Angel learns that the kids will go for a walk in the countryside and visit a farm.

The next morning, the kids walk single file passed the reception desk in hiking boots and hats, carrying mini backpacks.

Peter's mum leads them to her car, informing Angel, "We'll be back soon, safe and sound!"

Angel cheerfully waves, but Poldo circles his feet, apparently whimpering





because he must stay home. So, the mum looks back, whispers something to Angel, and takes Poldo.

The dog jumps into the back of the car as if he were plunging into a sea of sausages. He was over the moon!

The day at the farm is exhilarating and begins with a visit to the stalls. Sofia is the only one brave enough to milk a cow, while all the others taste the fresh milk. Mmmm, it's delicious!

Poldo learns he is crazy about chickens! He



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follows one with rust-coloured feathers and a red crest. But while he is professing his love, she responds by pecking him on the nose.

Peter takes a spin on a tractor while Kiran pets rabbits and Jay scampers through the garden.



In spring, the garden is bare and seeds are planted. But the gardener gives each visitor a bag of seeds and shows them how to plant them: make

a hole by digging with your

fingers; plant the seeds, and cover

everything up with soil before you start watering. Jay begins, ultra-focussed, and the others follow suit.

After, Jay takes the watering can and waters the soil and his feet. Predictably, his friends do the same and, in the end, they all have wet feet.



Times flies by and its suddenly

~ 33 ~





time to go home. Even Poldo is tired of running around.

The children say goodbye to the animals and the farmers, setting a date to come see the fruits of their labour in a couple of months.


"But are we sure that after so much time we will really see tomatoes, lettuce, and courgettes?" Asks Peter as he gets in the car.

"Of course!" That's how it works. Nature works on its own timeline," responds his mum, smiling as she drives home. Sofia and Kiran sing a song



and Jay falls asleep. Peter, lost in his thoughts, says to his mum, "That stinks! Do we really have to wait?"

This time, his mum doesn't respond. But when they get home and take Poldo back to Angel, she exclaims, "Here we are, and with a little surprise! I thought we could bring some of the seeds back that the kids planted at the farm today. What do you think about planting them in a vase in the courtyard to see if we can have a tomato plant here too?"



Peter's face finally lights up, "Brilliant! That way, we can check on it every day to see what happens and time will pass faster!"

Angel takes the bag of seeds and goes to a vase. Peter and Sofia dig holes with their fingers and Kiran covers them up with soil as Jay brings the watering can.

"Now we have a garden at home! All we have to do is wait and see if something good pops up," says Peter's mum.

"If Angel checks on them every day, I'm sure it will be a success," proudly comments Peter.

"Yes, because Angel knows how to do everything!" Adds Sofia.

"Even hard things like gardening," adds Kiran, as Jay claps his hands, satisfied.



APRIL



A HUNT FOR...?

Today, Angel doesn't seem to hear anything. Has he suddenly gone hard of hearing? Sofia knocks and knocks on the glass door of the reception office to no avail. Only Poldo seems to acknowledge her. But dogs can't talk and they especially can't open doors. Sofia is about to give up and go back upstairs to her flat where she hears someone calling out to her. It's Peter, her neighbour.

"Hi, what're you doing? Want to come play?" He enthusiastically invites her.

"Hmm, okay, but I have to do my homework first," responds Sofia, who is the practical one and a good student too.

"Okay, but come back soon, so we can do a treasure hunt," adds Peter. He doesn't even consider doing homework.

After not even half an hour, Sofia comes to Angel's flat and finds Peter, who is looking for Angel. Sofia sidles up next to him as he knocks on the door again, "I've called for him many times, but he can't hear me! He's become hard of hearing. I think we need to take him to the doctor!" Peter is almost shouting when Angel finally opens the door.

"No doctors and I'm not hard of hearing. It's that I lost the keys to my cabinet! It's a huge problem."

The kids know Angel locks a mysterious cabinet where he keeps his treasures:





brooms, soaps, tools, and who knows what else....

"Oh, we'll help you find them!" Says Sofia.

"I'm brilliant at finding things because I always lose everything," jumps in Peter.

"And you find them?" Sofia asks inquisitively.

"Yes, if someone helps me!" He says, smirking.

"Come on, let's keep moving," snaps Sofia.

"Angel, where did you see them last?"

"In my pocket, naturally, along with my handkerchief."

But Angel's pockets are empty so Peter opens

the drawers of the credenza. Sofia looks under the newspaper on the easy chair and in the vase holding a succulent plant. Peter even opens the fridge. Absolutely nothing.

"But where on earth could they be?" He mutters.

"In Poldo's cot?" Sofia questions him.

"I already looked. Nope." Angel snorts.

Peter is disappointed. He wanted to do a real treasure hunt with Sofia. But this one is really tough.

"You said they were in your pocket, right?" Sofia asks again.





"He said they were in his pocket with his hankie," adds Peter, who has given up and has plopped down on the floor, petting Poldo.

"Right, the hankie! Was it dirty? What colour was it?" Asks Sofia, as if she were a detective.

"Yes, it was pretty dirty. Blue," says Angel, sitting on his easy chair.

Sofia runs to the bathroom, opens the laundry basket, and digs all the way down to the bottom. She finds the blue hankie...and the keys too!

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"Good job! How'd you do it! Are you a magician?" Peter bursts out, in awe.

"No, nothing really, I just thought that Angel might have put the dirty hankie in the wash and accidentally put his keys in there too!"

"Really fantastic! You two deserve a prize! I don't know how I could've found them without your help."

Angela gets up and goes straight to the mysterious cabinet.

He opens it with his precious key and...

"Who knows what's in the mysterious cabinet," asks Peter under his breath.

"Yes, who knows," adds Sofia.

Angel rifles around, but the kids can't see anything until he turns around, beaming.

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“Here! My favourite pudding. Now do you see why I was so worried? I was worried I wouldn’t be able finish it! Now that it’s all sorted, let’s celebrate the newfound key and each have a slice right now!”

“Yeah! Woohoo!” Exclaim the children, surprised and pleased.

As soon as Peter tastes the cake, Sofia says,
“See? It was a hunt with a scrummy treasure!”
It couldn’t have gone better.

