

To Alex, who inspired me to return with him to my childhood lands of infinite dreams, visions and quests, friendships and heroes. Let's always return, and someday if you're as lucky as I have been, you'll bring your own son back there with you to write your own adventures together.

Acknowledgements

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My incredible daughters Madeleine and Chloe, who inspire me every day to keep finding other universes to visit with them.

Thank you to my love, Anaïs, who sustains me, nourishes me, and guides me every day. I'll meet you in my dreams too.

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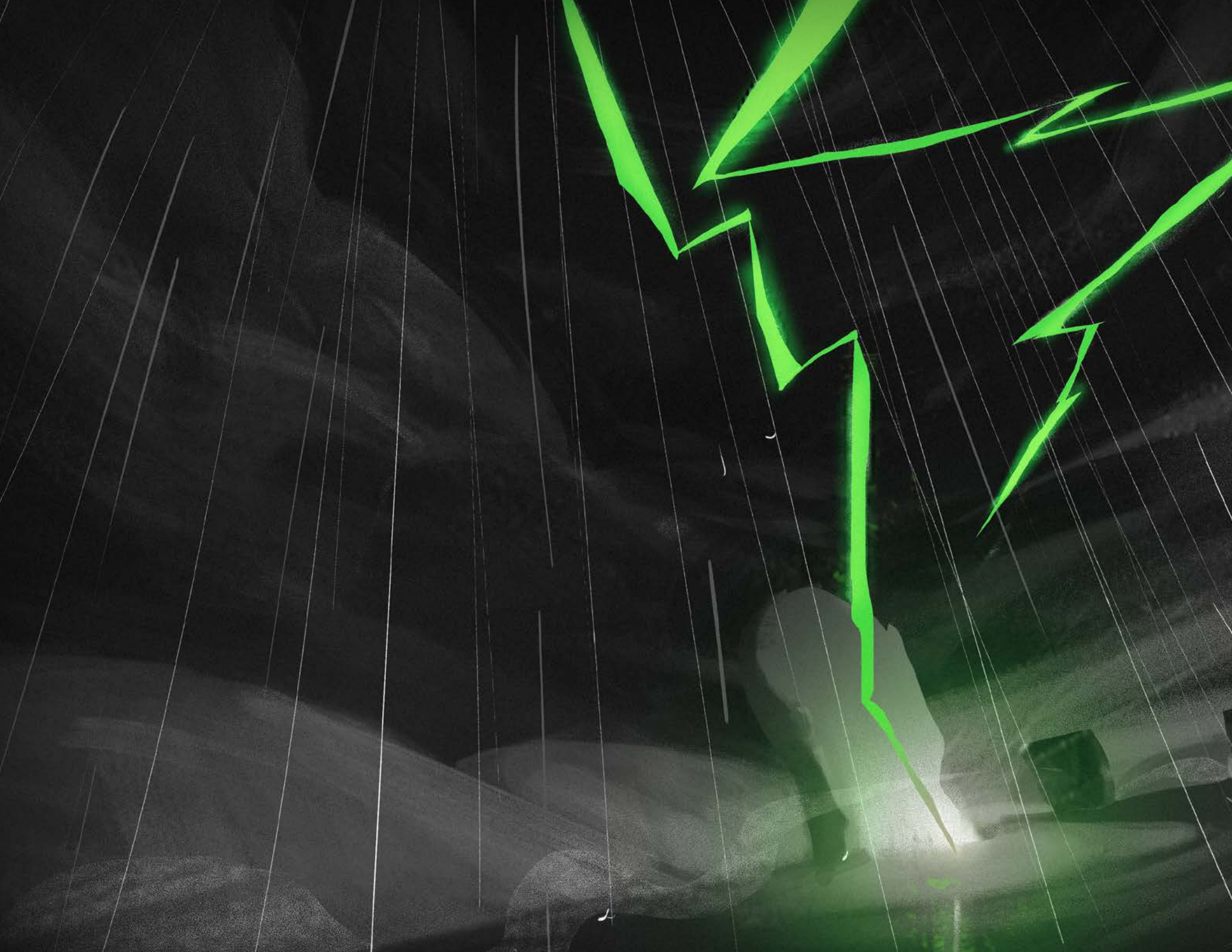
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FRANKENWALNUT

By Don & Alex Hicks
Illustrated by Kat Rasmussen



The background is a dark, monochromatic scene, possibly a night view of a town or a church. A prominent feature is a tall, dark steeple on the left side, topped with a cross. The scene is filled with fine, white, diagonal lines that create a sense of rain or falling ash. In the top left corner, there is a bright, glowing green light streak that curves downwards. The overall mood is somber and mysterious.

Part One

THE BEGINNING



It was a dark and stormy night in the little village of Walnuttia.

As the rain came down, flashes of light and sound lit up the night sky. The nuts of Walnuttia were all asleep in their shells.

Just outside of Walnuttia, an old, lonely cemetery lay under the storm. Nothing moved, and nothing lived there.

They say that lightning never strikes twice, but on this strange and scary night, lightning struck ...

NOT ONCE,
NOT TWICE,

BUT THRICE..

... leaving a charred black patch of dirt by a grave.

The dirt began to move.

First there was a hand.

Then there was another hand.

Then there was an arm.

Then there was another arm.

Finally, a roasted, salted shell began to push up out of the dirt.

Though no one was around to see, except for you and me, this is how he came to be

FRANKENW





A whimsical illustration of a character with glasses and a mouse in a forest. The character is a dark, bean-like figure with large, round glasses, thin arms and legs, and dark shoes. It is standing in a grassy field with a mouse on its back. The background features large, stylized trees and a soft, hazy atmosphere. The text "Part Two" is centered above the main title.

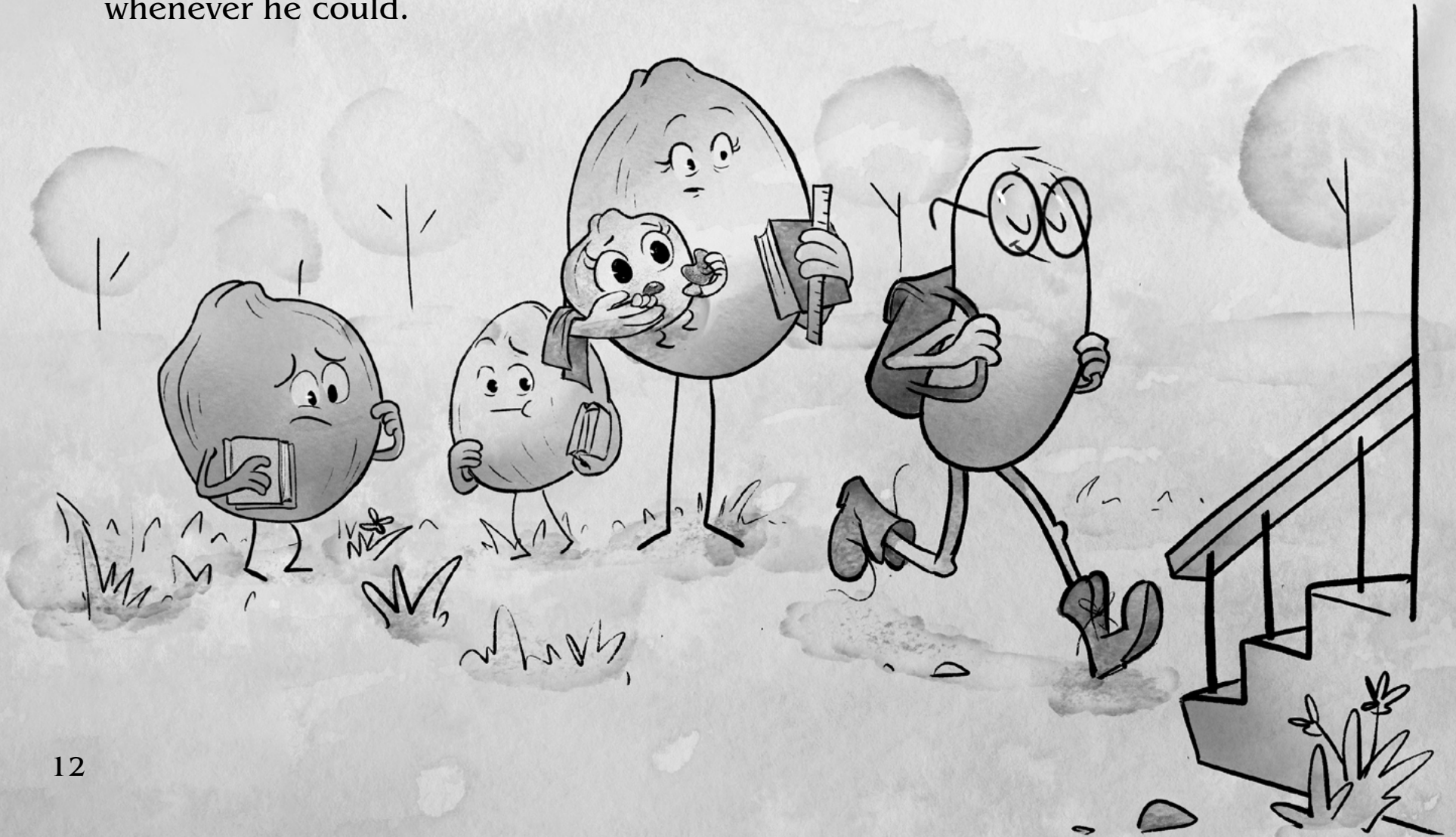
Part Two

A FRIENDSHIP IS BORN

It's not easy being different.

It's REALLY not easy to be the only cashew in a whole school filled with walnuts.

But Cassius Cashew was a good nut. He was brave, smart, loyal, and friendly. He always tried to see the good part of a nut, and he always tried to help others whenever he could.



Even so, his walnut classmates always gave Cassius a hard time. Sometimes, walnuts can be very mean to someone who is different. On this particular day, for no particular reason, four particular nuts decided to be extra mean to young Cassius Cashew.

They teased Cassius, and pushed him down right onto the ground. Standing over Cassius, the four mean walnuts didn't hear the sound until it was already close behind them. "MMMMMMMMM!"





When the walnuts turned around, they took one look at what was making the noise, and froze in their mean and nutty tracks. It was FRANKENWALNUT!

It took only two seconds for the nuts to turn and run. They bolted so fast they nearly ran right out of their shells. They wouldn't be bothering Cassius Cashew again, that's for sure.

"Thanks for the help, good buddy! Those silly guys just got carried away, I don't think they wanted to hurt me," said Cassius.

"I guess everybody goes a little nuts sometimes. But I sure am glad to meet you!"

"MMMMMMMM," said Frankenwalnut.

And in that moment, a true friendship was born.



Walnutia was located in a small, green valley, surrounded by beautiful rolling hills and a deep ravine with a wide, white, wild river running and foaming at its bottom. Walnutia was filled with farmers, good and simple nuts, caring for their cows, chickens, pigs, and sheep, peacefully tending their crops, and raising their little nuts to grow up right.

On the edge of Walnutia, where the hills began, stood a stone castle with an ancient tower, so old that half of it had collapsed. The nuts of Walnutia called it the Crumbly Castle, and most avoided it because it just looked plain creepy.

For Cassius and Frankenwalnut, the Crumbly Castle was their playground, a place to explore, play, hang out, and just be by themselves.

School, surrounded by other nuts, filled their days, which were sometimes good, and harder on others, but good or bad, the duo looked forward to their time at the Crumbly Castle, their secret after school hideaway.

But on one particularly bad Tuesday, everything changed - and Cassius never saw it coming.

