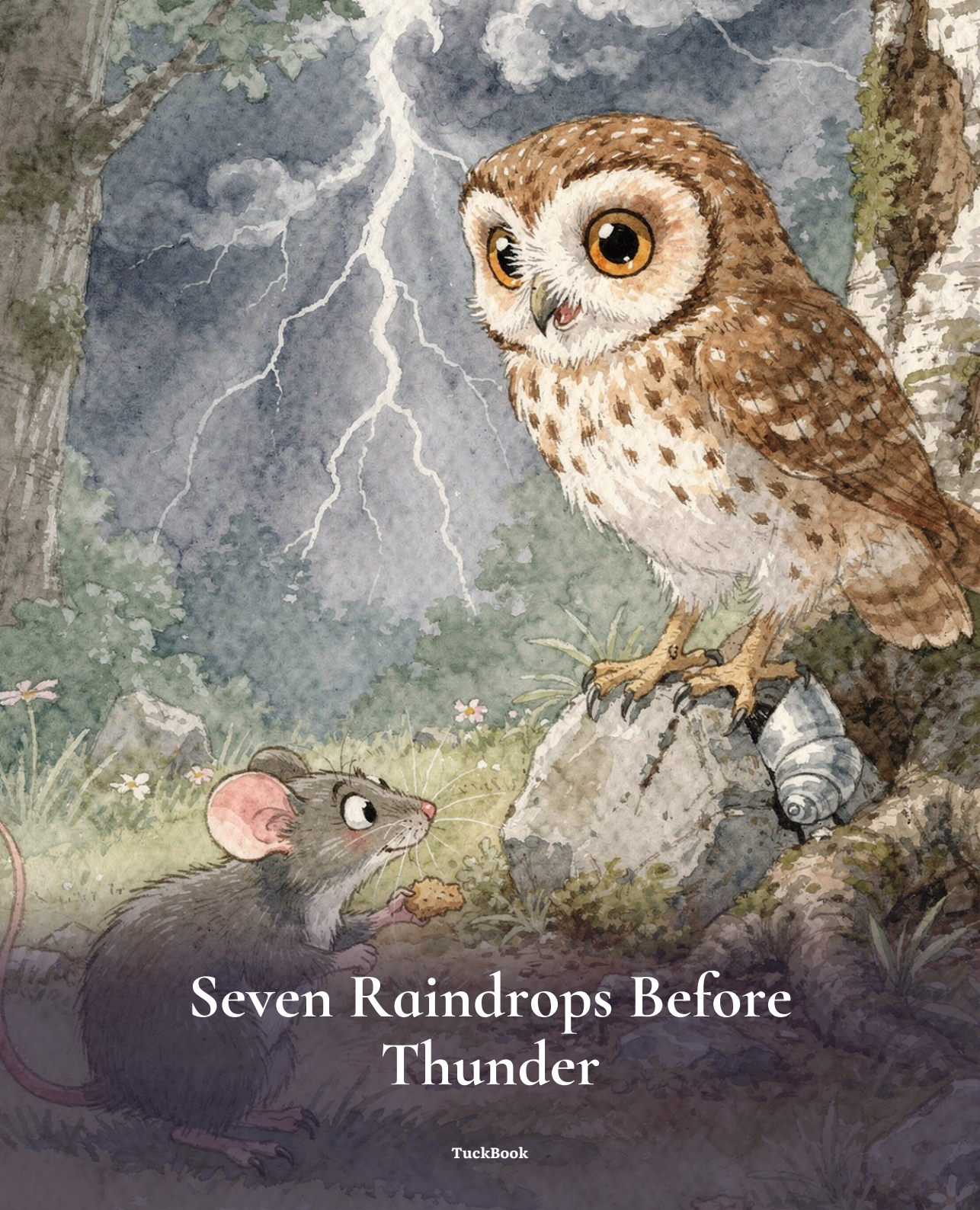




Seven Raindrops Before Thunder

On the first thunderstorm of summer, Juniper Owl was tugging a silver snail shell out of a crack in a stone when the sky flashed white above the forest clearing. Pip Mouse, who had been carrying a crumb home to his tiny nest beneath an old beech root, squeaked so hard that the crumb flew from his paws. Then came a huge, rolling BOOM. Pip spun toward the dark ferns. "I have to get away from it!"

Juniper fluttered down in front of him, her speckled wings wide but gentle. Pip was a very small mouse, and his whiskers were trembling so quickly they looked like grass in a hurry. Fat drops of summer rain began pattering on the beech leaves. "Away where?" Juniper asked. "Your nest is right there."

"Somewhere farther! Somewhere darker!" cried Pip. Another flash zigzagged behind the treetops. He darted past his nest entrance and toward a hollow between two roots. It looked deep and dark, but rain was already dripping into it from above. A beetle in a shiny green coat was trying to push a soggy mushroom cap out of the doorway. Pip skidded to a stop. "Sorry," he muttered, and ran back out just as the next rumble growled overhead.

The rain grew busier. It bounced from pebbles, slid down bark, and made little jumping crowns in the mud. Pip dashed toward a pile of fallen sticks beside the clearing. "I can hide under those!" But the sticks clicked and shifted beneath his paws, and a stream of rainwater hurried through the pile as if it owned the place. Juniper landed on the nearest twig. "That is not a very dry idea," she said.

Pip crouched, wet-nosed and miserable. "The boom keeps chasing me." Juniper listened. Far away, a flash flickered. She watched Pip squeeze his eyes shut. One quiet moment passed. Then another. Only after that came the rumble, softer this time, rolling through the trees like a giant turning over in bed.

"It does not chase," Juniper said. "Look. The lightning flashes first. Thunder comes after." Pip opened one eye. "How much after?" Juniper peered up at the clouds. "Let us find out." She pointed with one wing toward a broad burdock leaf beside Pip's nest. Its stem was thick as a twig, and its round green roof leaned low over a dry patch of moss. "That looks like a proper waiting place."

Together they hurried the three mouse-steps from the nest entrance to the leaf. Juniper pressed one wing against the drooping edge so the rain ran off in a shining curtain. Pip tucked himself beside her warm feathers. The little shelter smelled of wet earth, burdock, and the crumb Pip had dropped, which had somehow washed up beside the moss. Pip pulled it close, though he did not feel much like eating.

A flash lit every raindrop for one bright blink. Pip grabbed a feather tip. Juniper did not say, “Do not be scared,” because the boom was certainly big enough to be scared of. Instead she whispered, “Take one slow breath with me. Then we will count raindrops until the thunder arrives.” Pip listened hard. The rain tapped the leaf above them.





Plip, said one raindrop from the leaf's edge.
"One," breathed Pip. Plip. "Two." Plip. "Three." He
swallowed, but he kept listening. Plip. "Four." Plip.
"Five." The forest held still between the rain sounds.
Plip. "Six." Then one round drop gathered
at the very tip of the leaf, wobbling like a glass
marble before it fell. "Seven," said Pip.

BOOOOM rolled across the clearing. Pip jumped, but he did not run. “Seven raindrops!” he said, almost surprised. Juniper nodded. “Seven raindrops came first.” A fiercer flash followed, bright enough to show the pale underside of every leaf. Pip’s paws twitched toward the dark ferns. He could bolt. The rain was thicker now, and the shadows beyond the burdock leaf looked very far away.

But Pip looked at his nest door, close beneath the beech root. He looked at Juniper holding up the leaf roof. Then he chose to scoot nearer to her instead of racing away. “Again,” he said. They breathed in while the lightning faded. This time Pip counted the drops without squeezing his eyes shut. The thunder came, deep and grumbly, and Pip pressed one paw to the moss. “There you are,” he told it. “You always come after.”



The storm did not vanish at once. It wandered around the forest for a while, muttering beyond the trees. Yet each time it flashed, Pip and Juniper had their little patch beneath the broad leaf, their breaths, and the drops to listen for. Slowly the rain stopped bouncing and began to whisper. A last silver thread slipped from the leaf tip. Pip nibbled his rescued crumb.

At last, the clouds loosened enough for a peach-colored stripe to appear behind the beech branches. Pip stepped out and sniffed the clean, shining clearing. His nest was dry and waiting, exactly where it had been.

“The thunder is still enormous,” he said. “But it fits farther away when you are sitting beside me.”

Juniper folded her wings and smiled. Pip carried half his crumb into his tiny nest and pushed the other half toward her. Beneath the broad leaf, seven raindrops clung in a row along the edge, sparkling quietly before they fell.



Good night.

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After the story

WHAT THIS STORY IS ABOUT

When a summer storm frightens Pip Mouse, Juniper Owl helps him discover that lightning always comes before thunder. Together beneath a burdock leaf, they find a brave way to wait for the boom.

TALK ABOUT IT AFTER READING

After reading, ask which moment felt the warmest or bravest today.

AND TOMORROW...

The next morning, Pip finds a silver snail shell outside his nest that seems to be humming a very small song.

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A watercolor illustration of a large green burdock leaf with a prominent vein structure. To the right, a pink, segmented worm-like creature is partially visible. At the bottom, a small brown object, possibly a seed or a piece of wood, is shown with a small puddle of water and ripples around it.

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8 minutes of reading

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