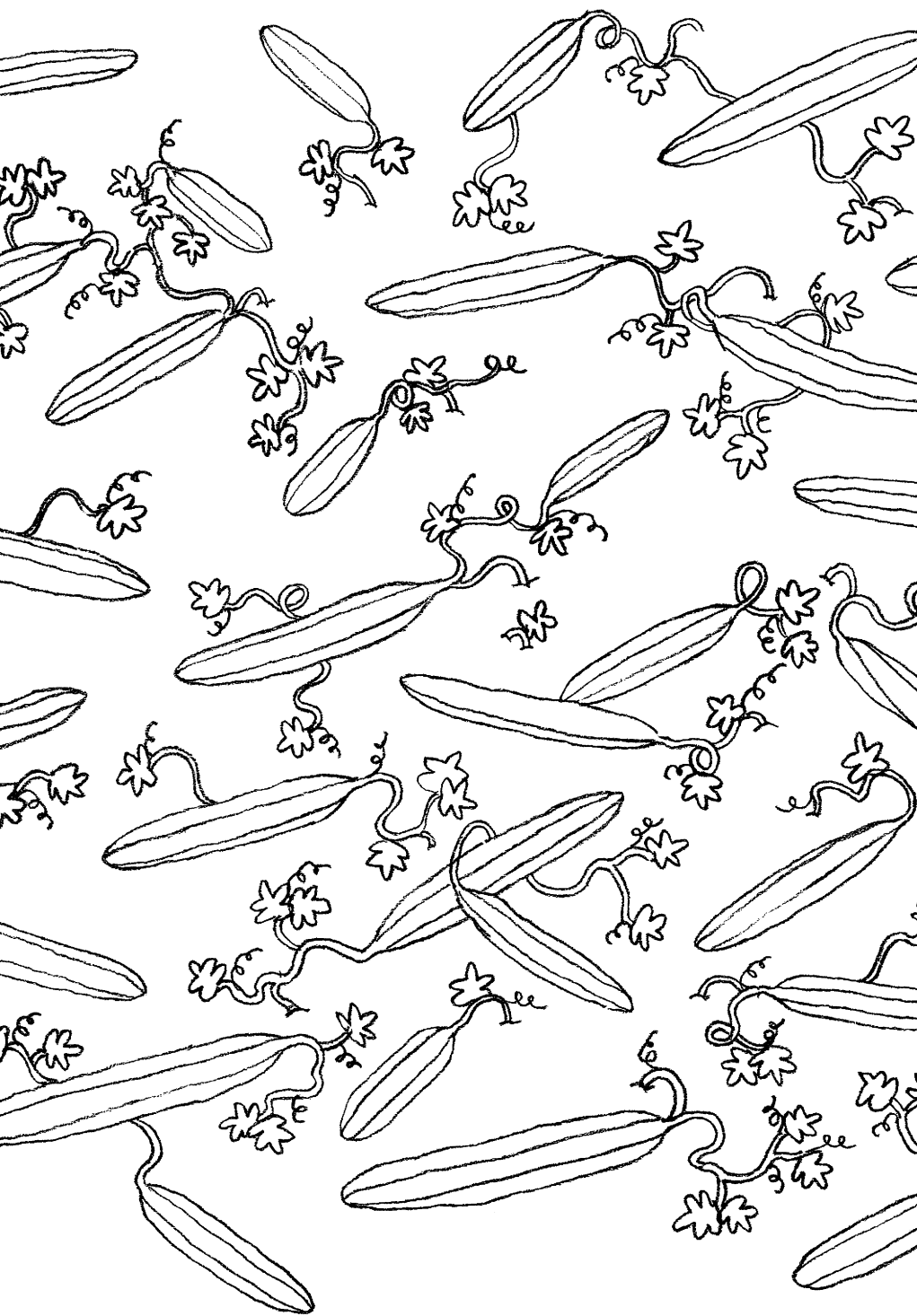
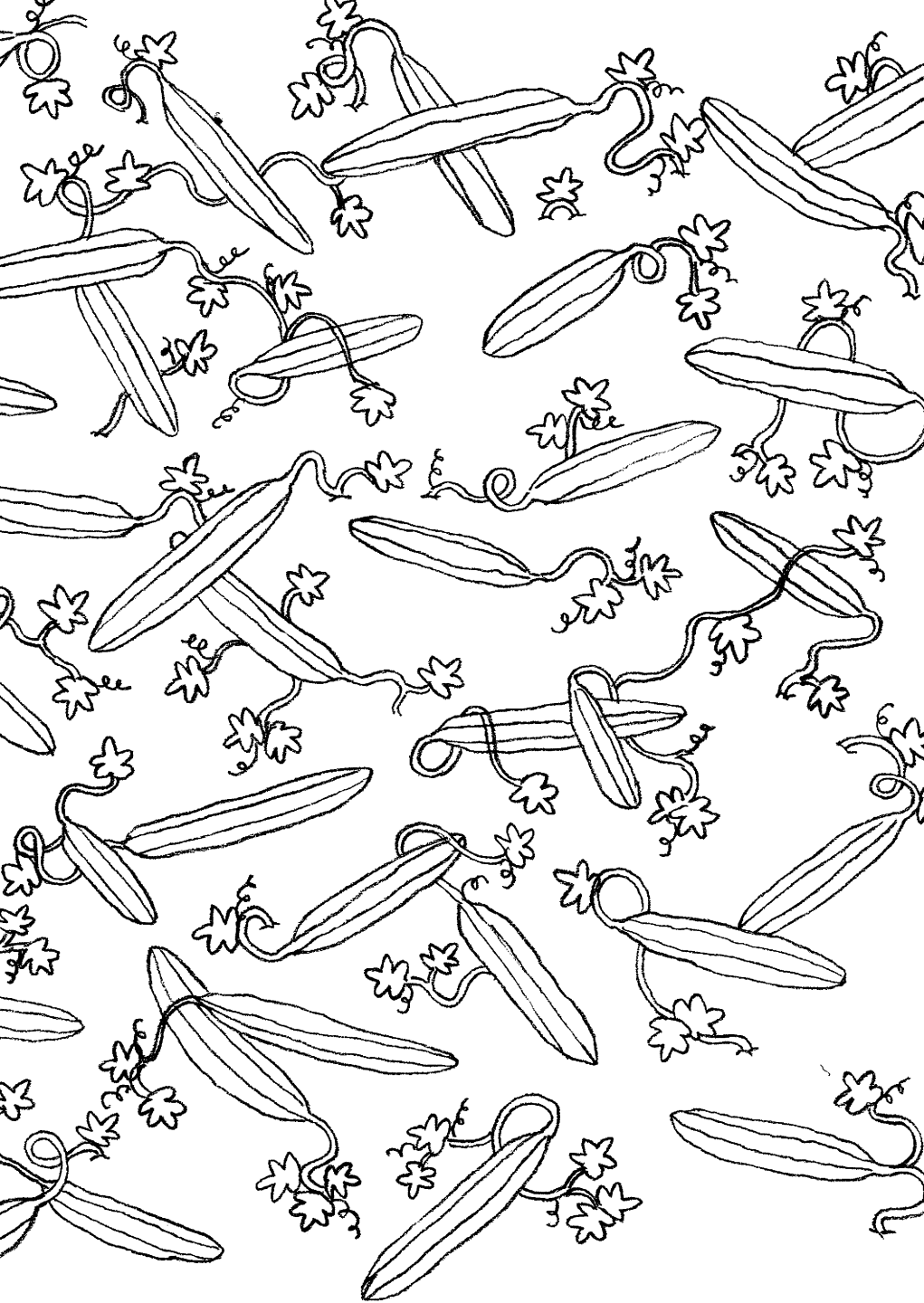


Michael Morpurgo was 2003–2005 Children’s Laureate, has written over one hundred books and is the winner of numerous awards, including the Whitbread Children’s Book Award, the Blue Peter Book Award, the Smarties Book Prize and the Red House Children’s Book Award. His books are translated and read around the world and his hugely popular novel *War Horse*, already a critically acclaimed stage play, is now also a blockbuster film. Michael and his wife, Clare, founded the charity Farms for City Children and live in Devon.





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Chapter One



Last summer I was a hero. Not for long. Just long enough to grow a giant cucumber, a cucumber fit for a queen.



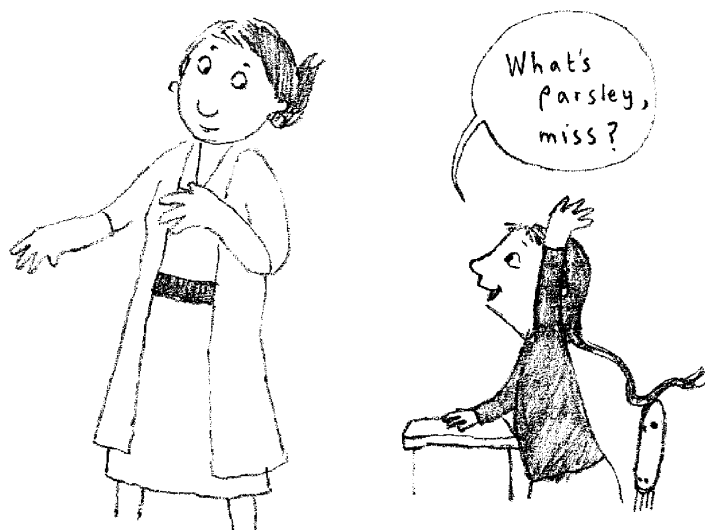
The whole thing began one morning when Mrs Mapleton came into class all bright-eyed and bubbly with excitement.

“I had the most brilliant idea last night, children,” she said. “In the bath.” She’s always having brilliant ideas in her bath.

“I’ve been wracking my brain for weeks to find something we could all do to celebrate the Queen’s Jubilee. Guess what? We’re going to dig our very own school vegetable garden! We’ll call it the Queen’s Jubilee Garden.



We're going to grow our own vegetables, children – carrots, potatoes, onions, parsley.”

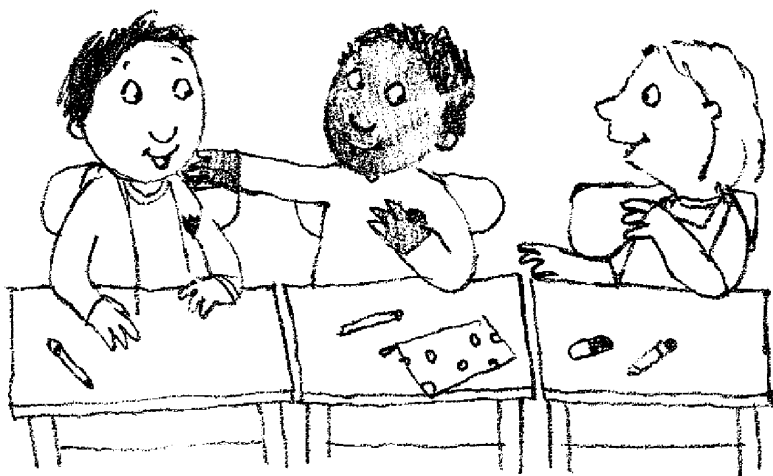


“What’s parsley, miss?” asked Mandy Sharp, who loves asking questions.

Mrs Mapleton ignored her. “And cucumbers,” she went on. “We’re going to grow cucumbers too.

Maybe we'll send one to the Queen so that she can make lots of cucumber sandwiches. Well, what do you think of that, children?"

To be honest, none of us was that keen at first. I think it was the word "dig" that worried us. But Mrs Mapleton had enough enthusiasm for all of us, and very soon we were all really looking forward to it.



So there we were that same afternoon digging over the patch of wasteland between the playing fields and the hedge, Mrs Mapleton urging us on.



“The sooner we get this done,”
she told us, “the sooner we can get
the horse manure dug in – horse
manure’s by far the best for
vegetables, children.





Then we can get our seeds planted out, and before you know it – *lickety-split* – we’ll have our first vegetables. The first cucumber goes to the hardest worker.”

I like cucumbers, so I dug a little harder. I soon discovered that digging was a lot more fun than I'd ever imagined it could be, because I began finding all sorts of really interesting things.



The longest, fattest, wriggliest worm
I had ever seen,



a tomato sauce bottle,



a giant beetle with nasty evil-
looking pincers,



bits and pieces of blue and white
china



and even a shoe —



well, a sort of sandal with one
strap and a rusty buckle.

Every time I found something, I'd run over to show it to Mrs Mapleton. But I soon discovered that she wasn't nearly as interested in my treasures as I thought she'd be. I asked her if my sandal might be a Roman one, if my blue and white china was from Tudor times – we'd just been doing the Tudors.



“Who knows, Peter? Maybe you could make up one of your lovely stories about it. You’re such a dreamer,” she laughed. “But now is not the time for dreaming. Now is the time for digging. We’re trying to grow a cucumber for the Queen, remember? Back to your digging now, there’s a good boy.”

