

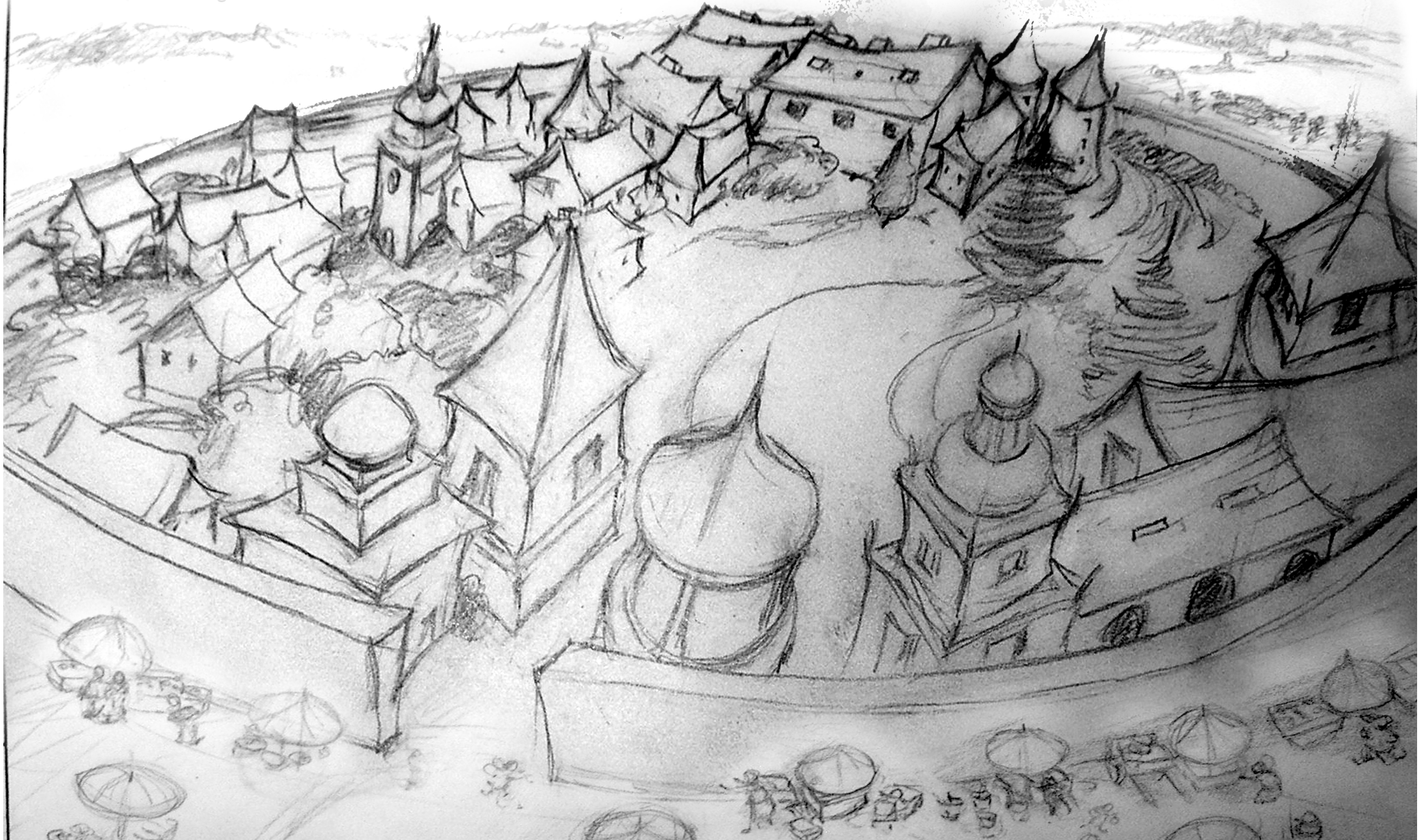
Looking for Blueberries

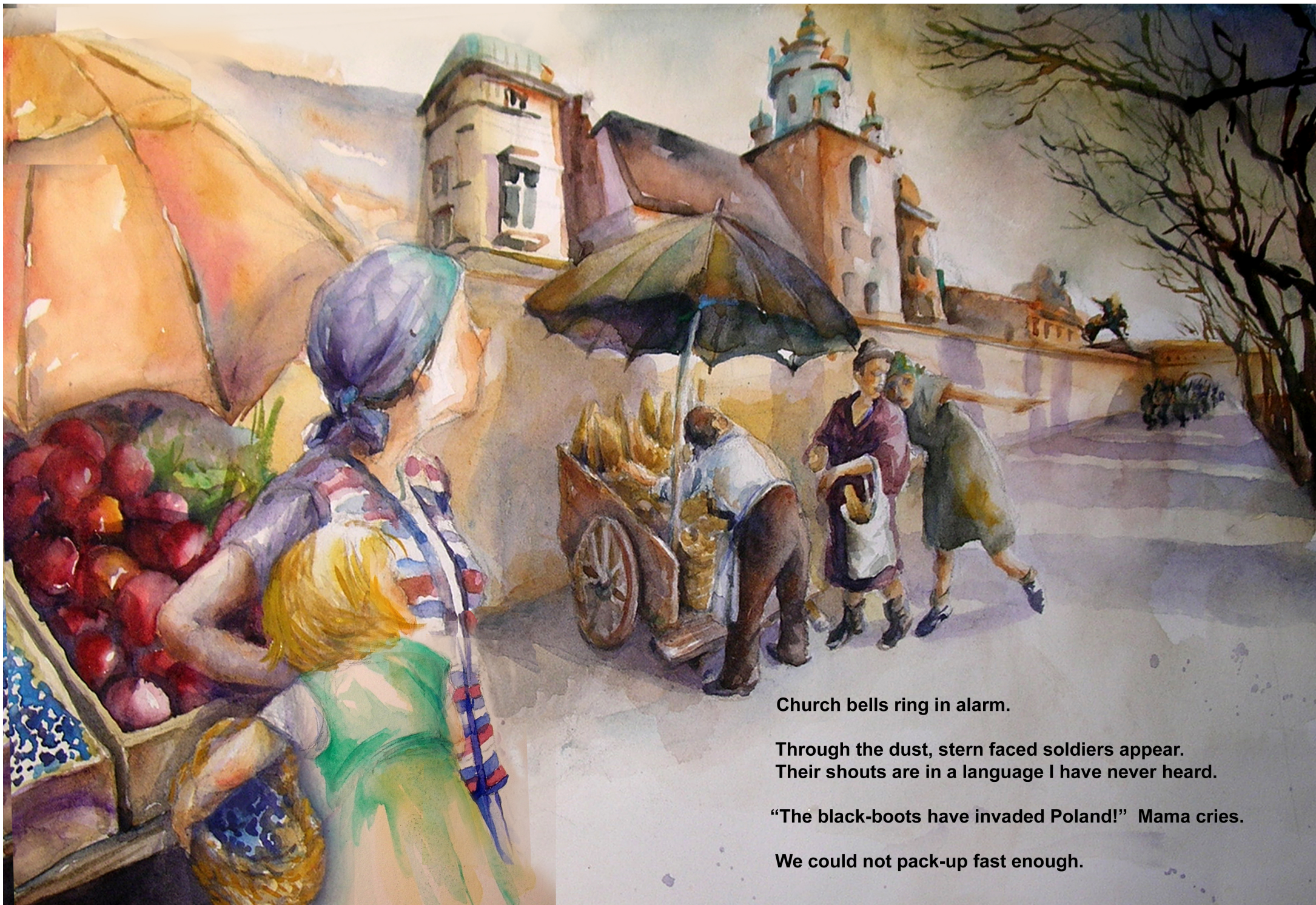


Written & Illustrated by Gina Capaldi

In Krakow, we sell sweet blueberries at the foot of an ancient castle.

But, there is a gloom in the air.





Church bells ring in alarm.

**Through the dust, stern faced soldiers appear.
Their shouts are in a language I have never heard.**

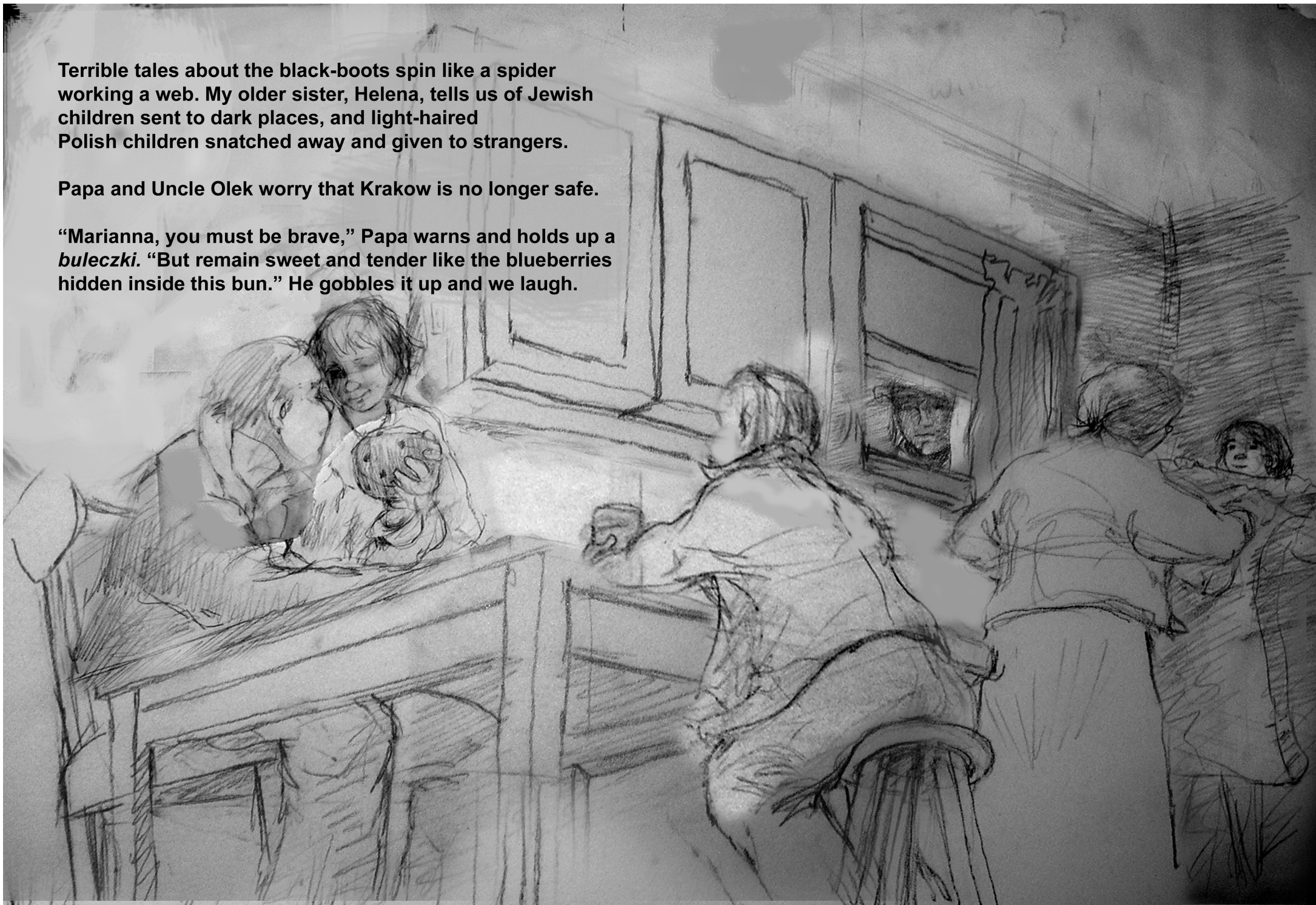
“The black-boots have invaded Poland!” Mama cries.

We could not pack-up fast enough.

Terrible tales about the black-boots spin like a spider working a web. My older sister, Helena, tells us of Jewish children sent to dark places, and light-haired Polish children snatched away and given to strangers.

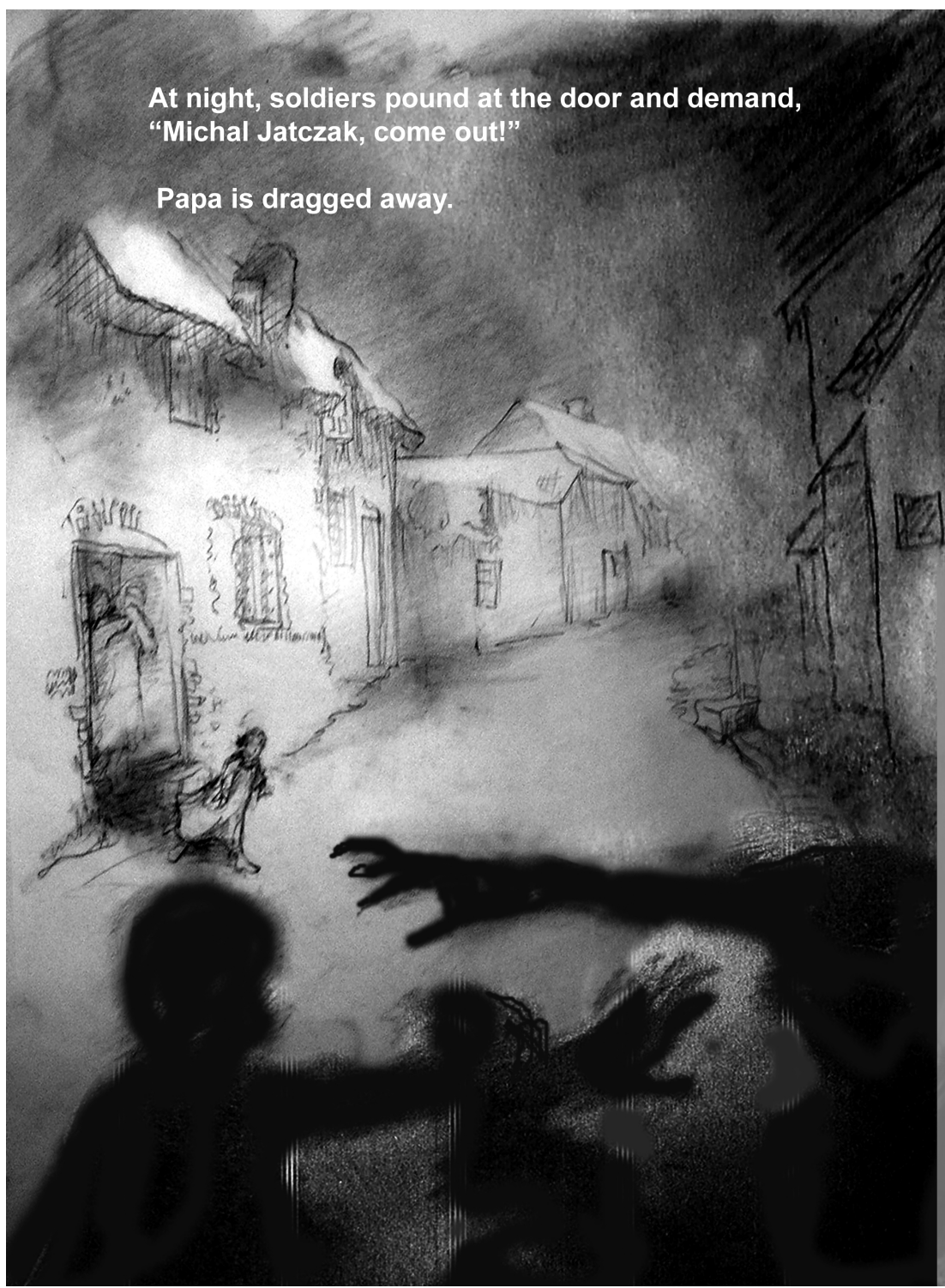
Papa and Uncle Olek worry that Krakow is no longer safe.

“Marianna, you must be brave,” Papa warns and holds up a *buleczki*. “But remain sweet and tender like the blueberries hidden inside this bun.” He gobbles it up and we laugh.



At night, soldiers pound at the door and demand,
"Michal Jatzak, come out!"

Papa is dragged away.



There is no time to fill my pillow with tears.
We slink away like thieves to Uncle Olek's

My uncle leads us to a forgotten bread oven.

I gasp and Mama wraps her arms around me. Uncle Olek reassures me that we will be safe.

Helena will not hide like a scared rabbit and will fight for Poland instead. She slips into the shadows before Mama can talk her out of it.

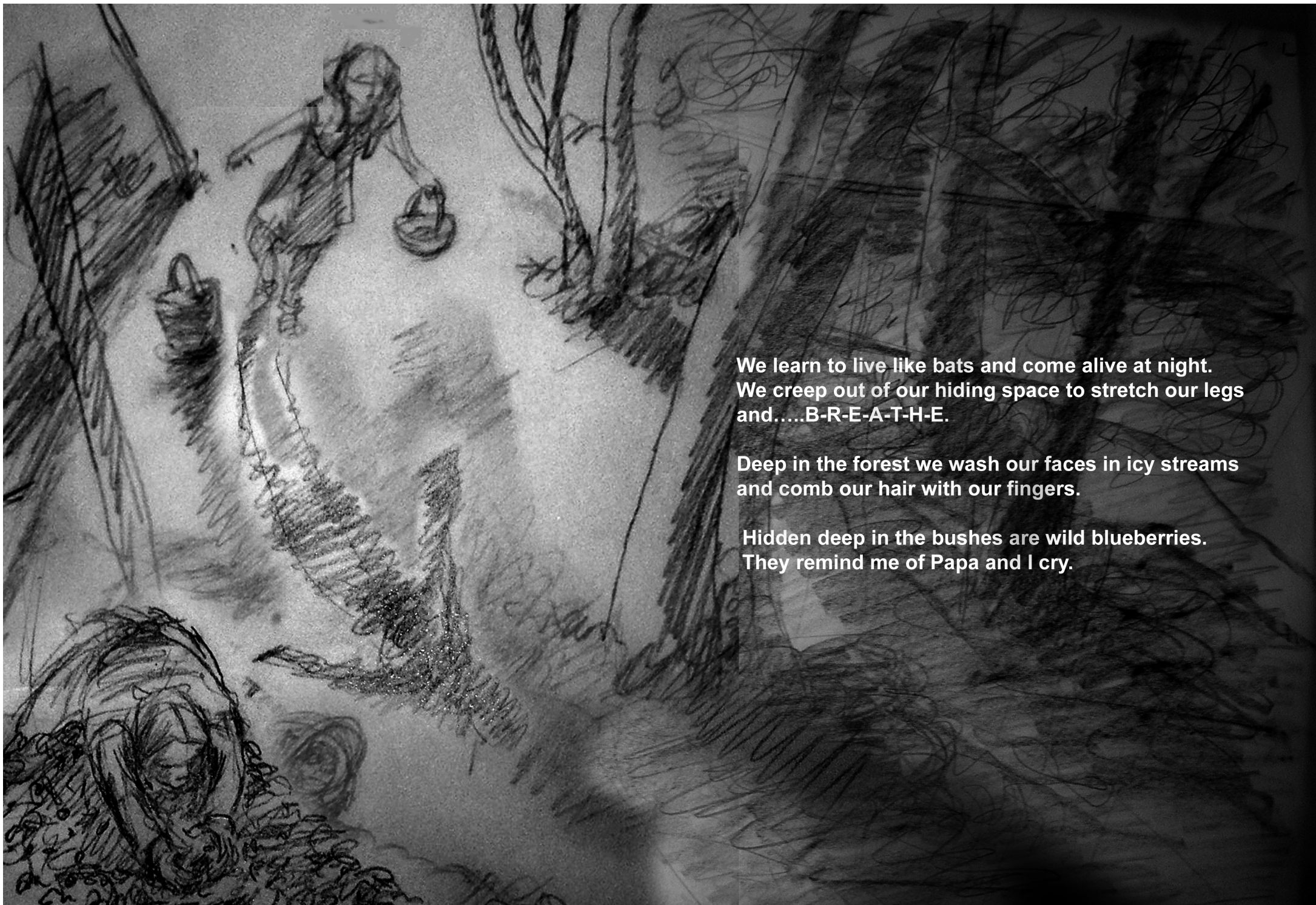
I cannot stop shaking and hot tears roll down my cheeks.

We crawl inside the oven and the smells of burnt wood linger.

Mama strokes my hair and whispers, "I love you."

I sleep and dream of being someone else. Somewhere else.

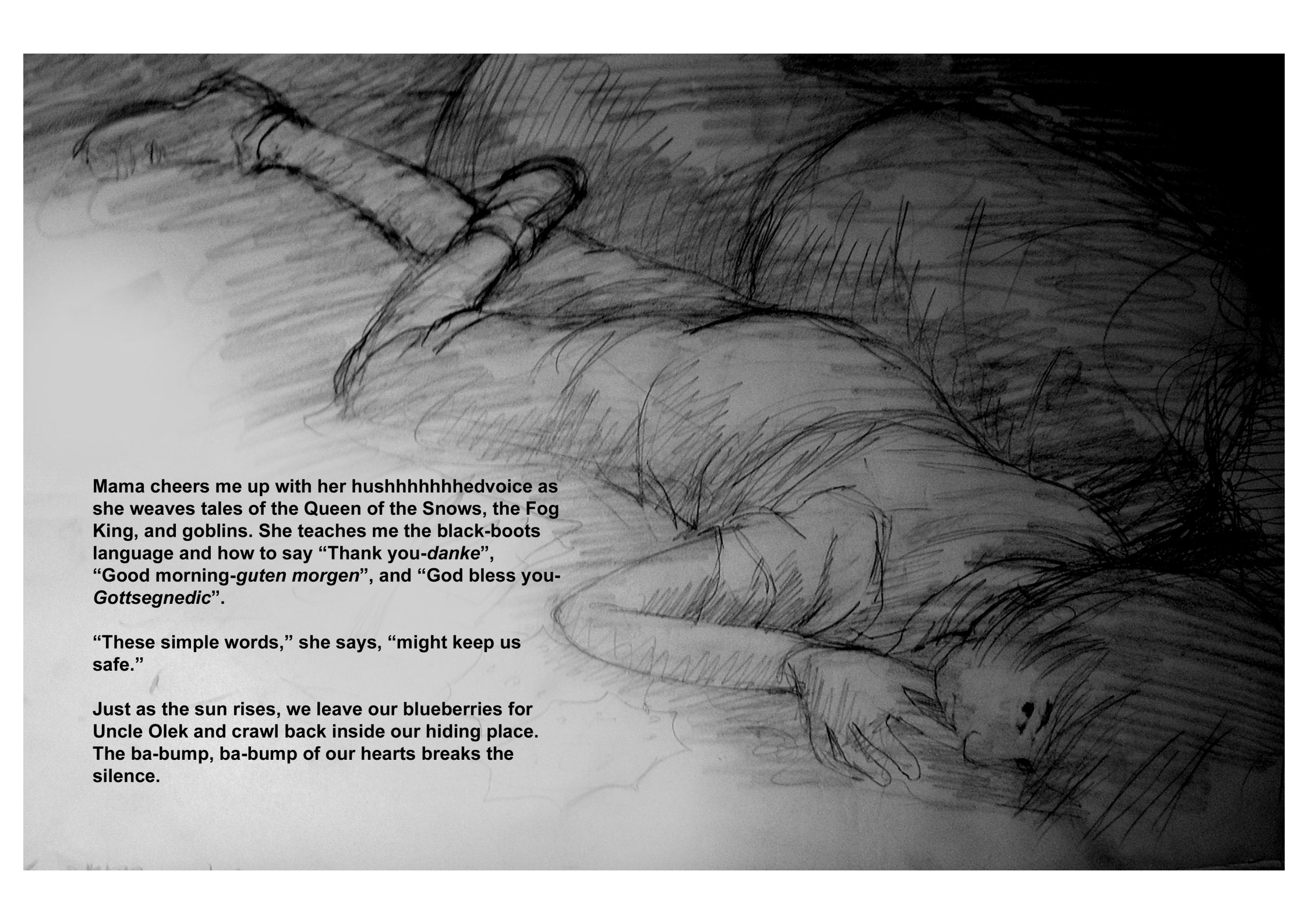




We learn to live like bats and come alive at night.
We creep out of our hiding space to stretch our legs
and.....B-R-E-A-T-H-E.

Deep in the forest we wash our faces in icy streams
and comb our hair with our fingers.

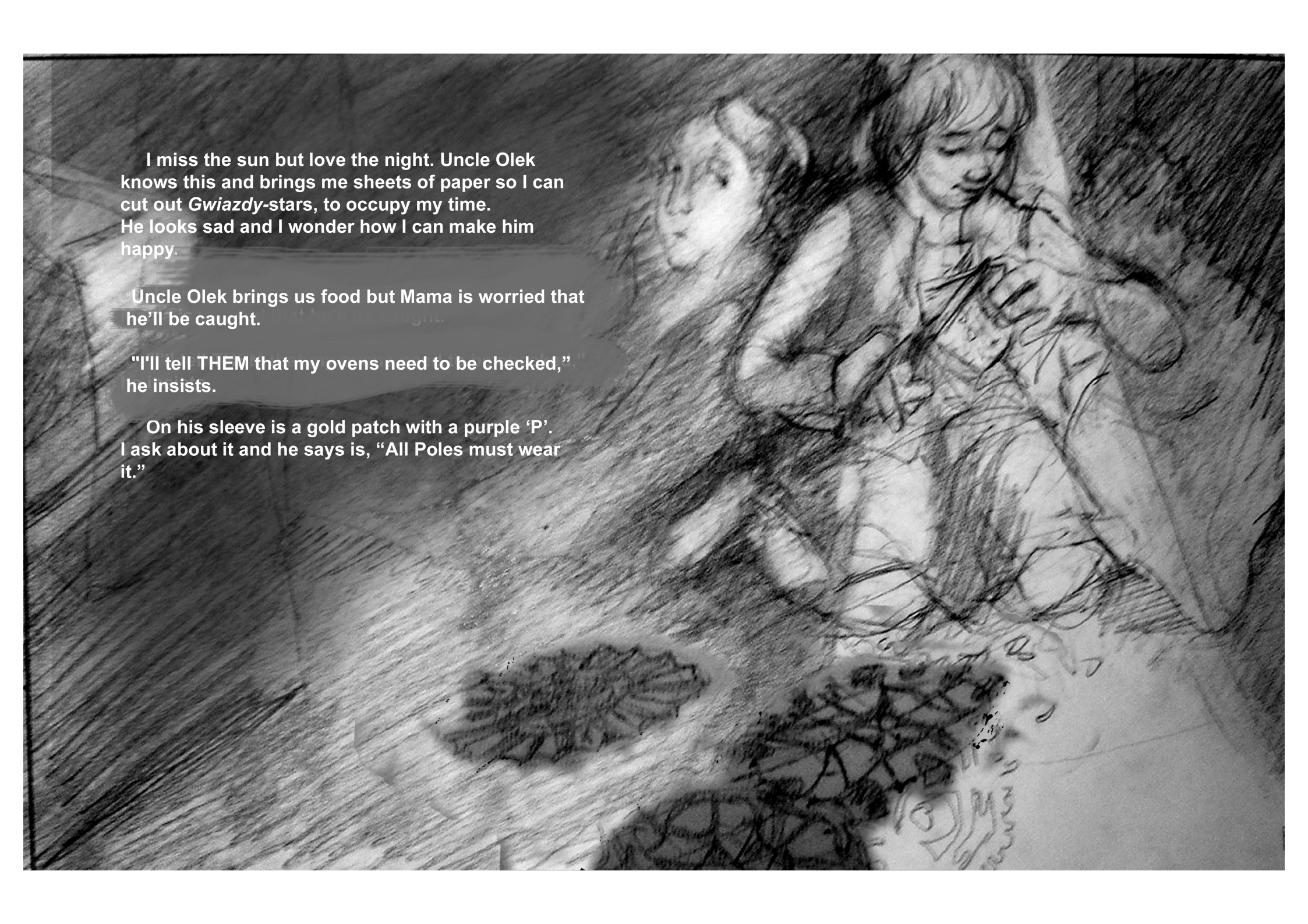
Hidden deep in the bushes are wild blueberries.
They remind me of Papa and I cry.



Mama cheers me up with her hushhhhhhhedvoice as she weaves tales of the Queen of the Snows, the Fog King, and goblins. She teaches me the black-boots language and how to say “Thank you-*danke*”, “Good morning-*guten morgen*”, and “God bless you-*Gottsegnedic*”.

“These simple words,” she says, “might keep us safe.”

Just as the sun rises, we leave our blueberries for Uncle Olek and crawl back inside our hiding place. The ba-bump, ba-bump of our hearts breaks the silence.



I miss the sun but love the night. Uncle Olek knows this and brings me sheets of paper so I can cut out *Gwiazdy*-stars, to occupy my time. He looks sad and I wonder how I can make him happy.

Uncle Olek brings us food but Mama is worried that he'll be caught.

"I'll tell THEM that my ovens need to be checked," he insists.

On his sleeve is a gold patch with a purple 'P'. I ask about it and he says is, "All Poles must wear it."



Polish winters are as cruel as the black-boots.

Helena and her new friends appear like ghosts through the fog and tell us about their secret missions as 'Freedom Fighters'.

She asks me to help in some small way
"Is it dangerous?" I ask.

"Yes."

My heart skips. I remember my promise to Papa and agree.

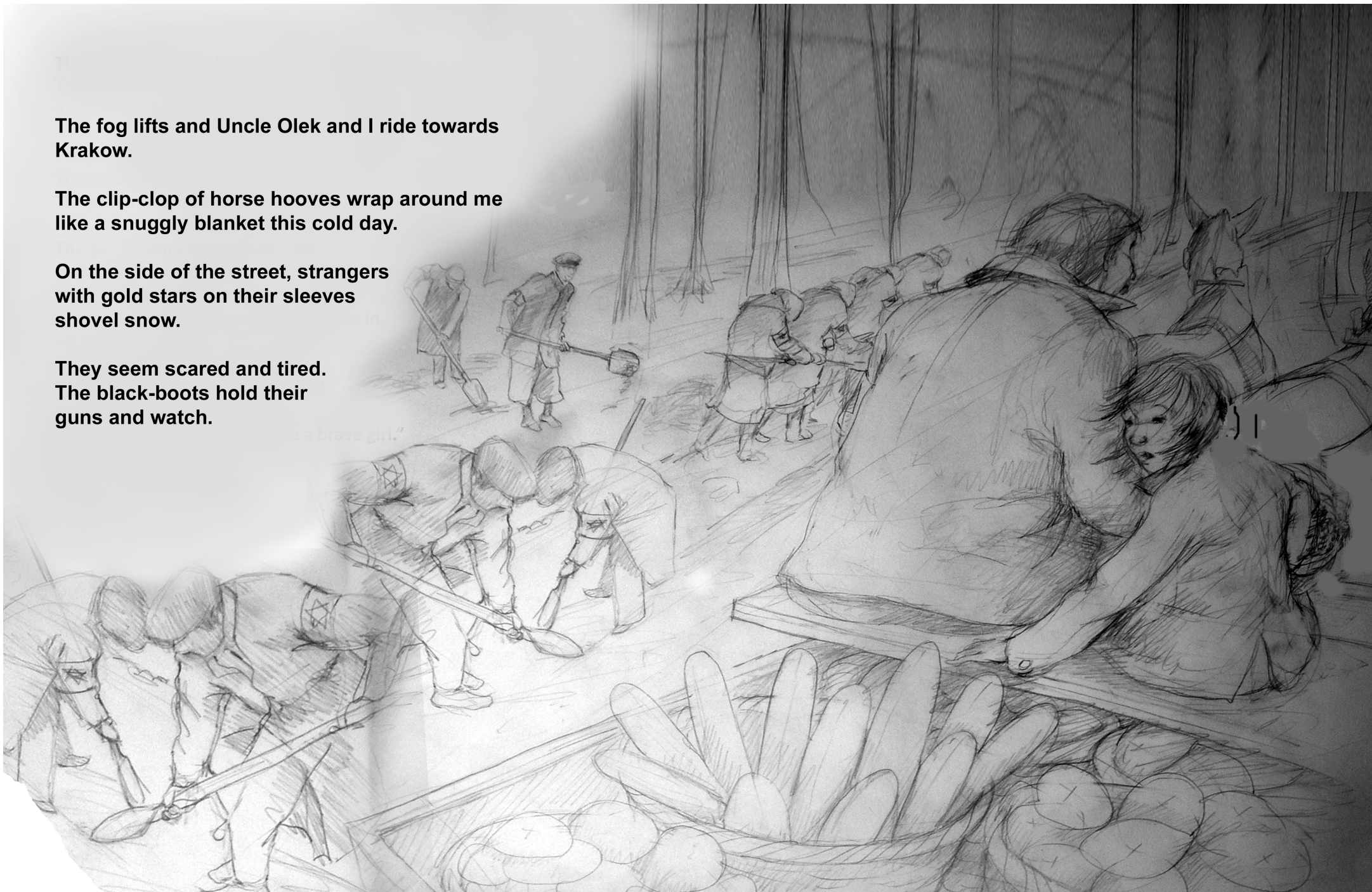
Helena slips a secret message deep inside my blueberry basket. This makes me feel grown up but Mama is troubled. "I'll be okay" I promise.

The fog lifts and Uncle Olek and I ride towards Krakow.

The clip-clop of horse hooves wrap around me like a snuggly blanket this cold day.

On the side of the street, strangers with gold stars on their sleeves shovel snow.

They seem scared and tired. The black-boots hold their guns and watch.





**One stops us.
Snarls.**

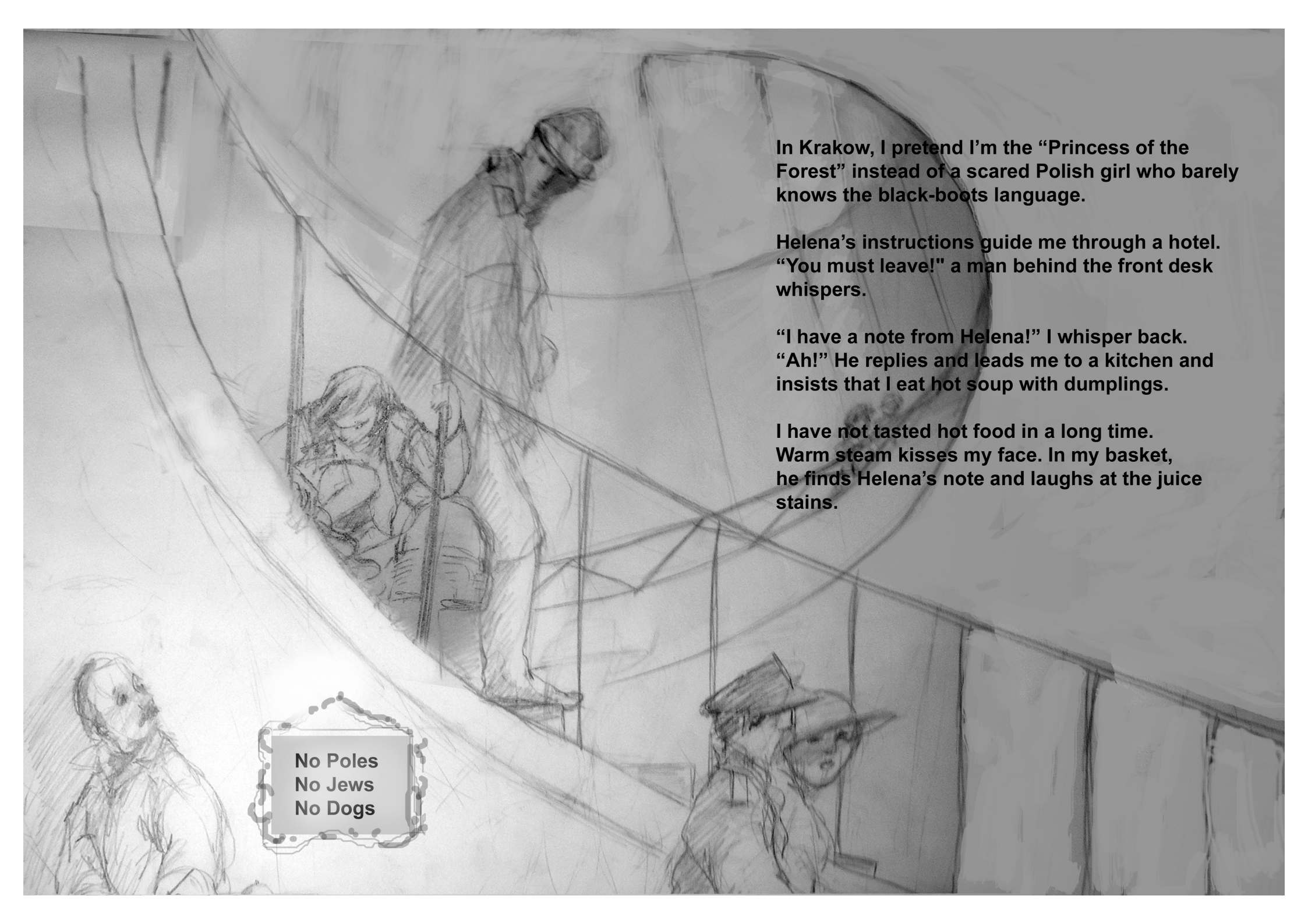
**An icy chill slides down my back and I fumble for
blueberries to place in his hands.**

**My stomach flutters. My heart pounds in my ears
like a loud drum and I am sure he can hear it, too!**

***"Gutenmorgen,"* I say.**

**His cold stare melts and we are allowed to pass.
"You are a brave girl," Uncle Olek whispers.**

I do not feel brave on the inside.



In Krakow, I pretend I'm the "Princess of the Forest" instead of a scared Polish girl who barely knows the black-boots language.

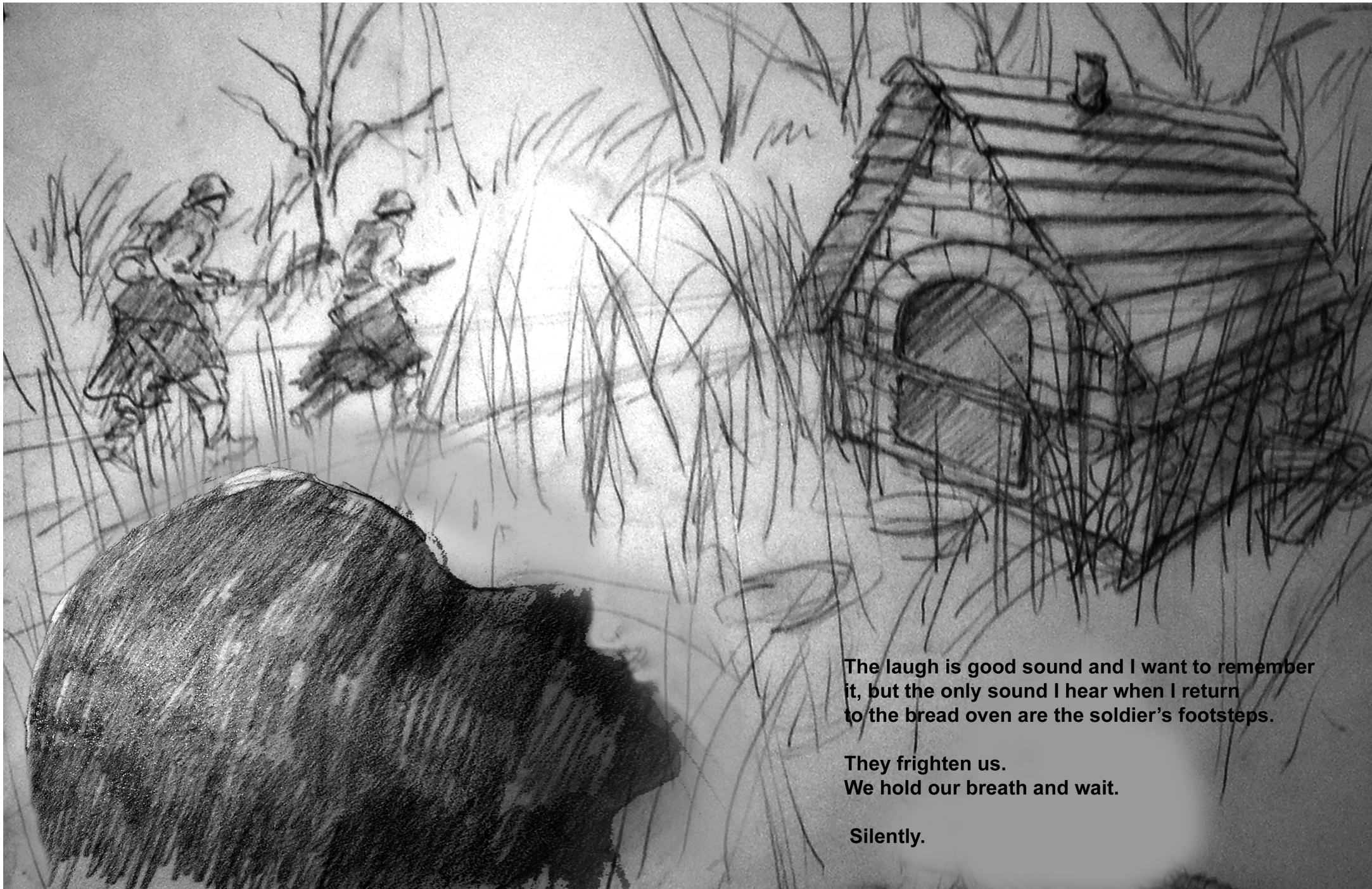
Helena's instructions guide me through a hotel. "You must leave!" a man behind the front desk whispers.

"I have a note from Helena!" I whisper back. "Ah!" He replies and leads me to a kitchen and insists that I eat hot soup with dumplings.

I have not tasted hot food in a long time. Warm steam kisses my face. In my basket, he finds Helena's note and laughs at the juice stains.



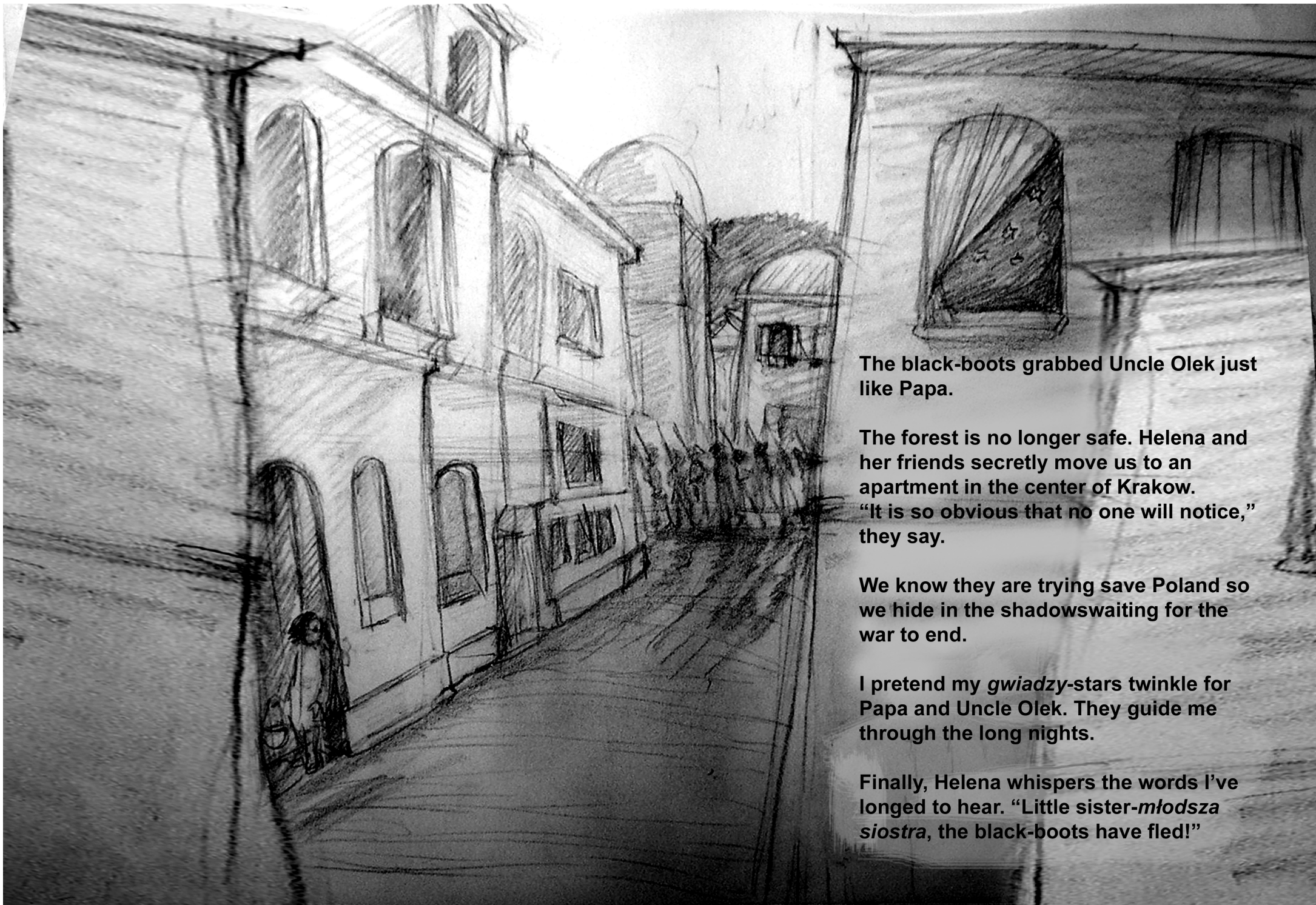
No Poles
No Jews
No Dogs



The laugh is good sound and I want to remember it, but the only sound I hear when I return to the bread oven are the soldier's footsteps.

**They frighten us.
We hold our breath and wait.**

Silently.



The black-boots grabbed Uncle Olek just like Papa.

The forest is no longer safe. Helena and her friends secretly move us to an apartment in the center of Krakow. "It is so obvious that no one will notice," they say.

We know they are trying save Poland so we hide in the shadows waiting for the war to end.

I pretend my *gwiazdy*-stars twinkle for Papa and Uncle Olek. They guide me through the long nights.

Finally, Helena whispers the words I've longed to hear. "Little sister-*młodsza siostra*, the black-boots have fled!"

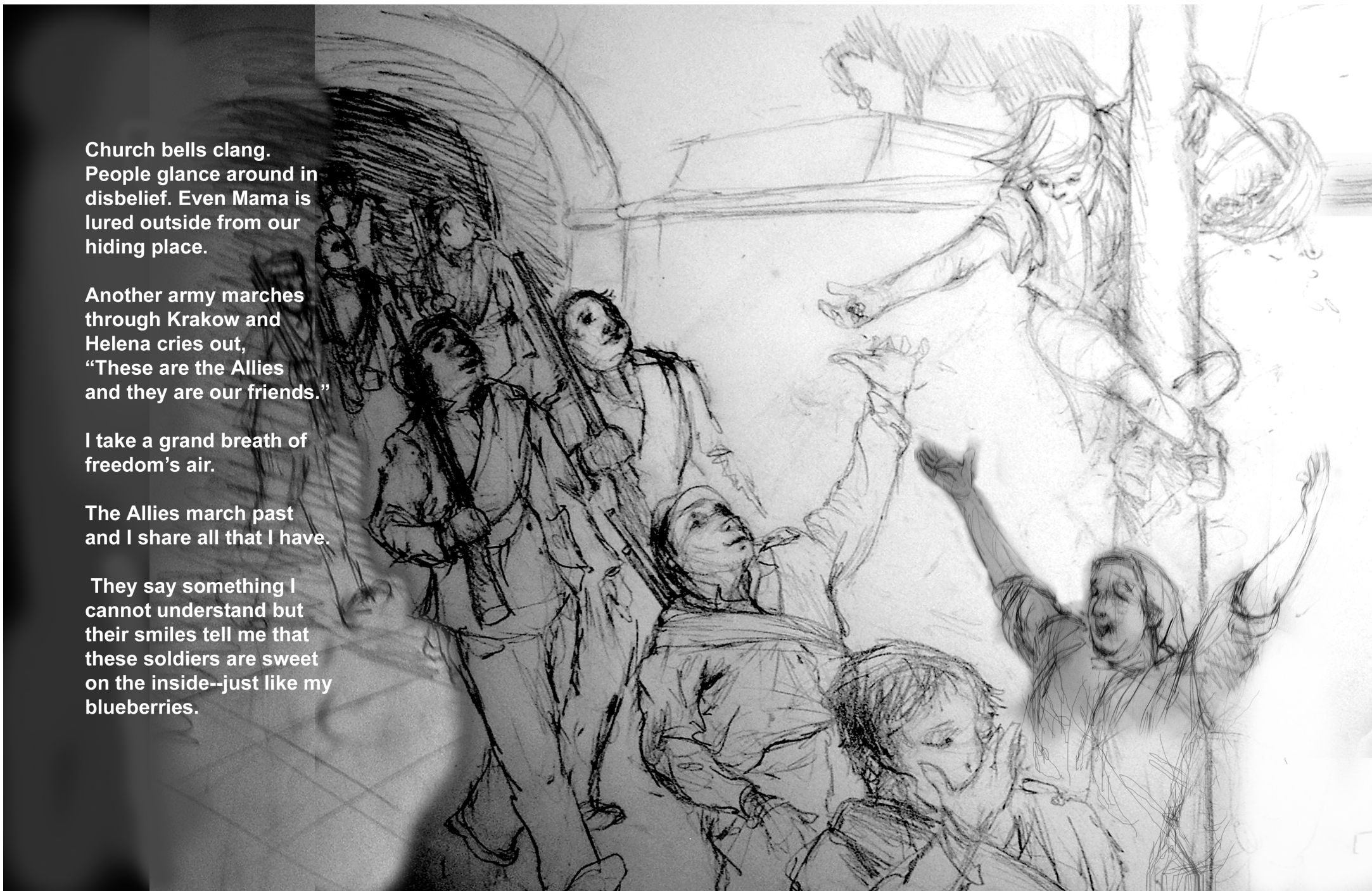
Church bells clang.
People glance around in
disbelief. Even Mama is
lured outside from our
hiding place.

Another army marches
through Krakow and
Helena cries out,
“These are the Allies
and they are our friends.”

I take a grand breath of
freedom’s air.

The Allies march past
and I share all that I have.

They say something I
cannot understand but
their smiles tell me that
these soldiers are sweet
on the inside--just like my
blueberries.



A Note from the Author

Looking for Blueberries is inspired, in part, by the childhood memories of Marianna Jatczak, a brave, young survivor of the Nazi invasion in Poland during World War II. Her story was explained to me by Marianna's daughter nearly 80 years after the events happened. While many details have been lost, the substance of this story represents the thousands of accounts from those who witnessed the horrors of war and the systematic destruction of a people by the Nazi's during World War II.

Historical Note

When the Nazi (black-boots) invaded Poland in 1939, they intended to make its people culturally, economically, politically, and socially German. The SS (German paramilitary organization more aggressive than the German Army) did this by first removing Polish farmers to make way for ethnic Germans. Then, they closed elementary schools where the Polish language was taught. Streets and cities were renamed and tens of thousands of Polish businesses, from industrial firms to small shops, were seized and given to the new German owners. Signs posted in public places warned: "Entrance forbidden for Poles, Jews, and dogs."

The forced resettlement from their homes affected two million Poles. Those able to work were sent to Germany as slave laborers, old people and children were resettled in so-called "retire villages," which were concentration camps, while anyone deemed "inferior" or "unreliable" was deported to the death camp, *Auschwitz*.

By the end of 1940, the SS had expelled 325,000 people. This was called the *Zamosc Expulsion*. During this period, the Germans seized nearly 4500 children from their parents to be racially screened for possible adoption by German parents in the SS Lebensborn "Fount of Life" program. These children were given German names, forbidden to speak Polish and reeducated in SS or other Nazi institutions. Many died of hunger or disease and most never saw their parents again.



Children who were rejected as unsuitable for 'Germanization' because they did not measure up to racial criteria for establishing "Aryan" ancestry were sent to orphanages or killed, some by phenol injection at *Auschwitz*.

Germany used Poles as forced laborers who had to wear the identifying purple "P's" sewn outside their clothing. They were subjected to curfews and banned from public transport.

Treatment of the Polish factory workers or farm hands varied depending on the individual employer, but as a rule, they were compelled to work longer hours for lower wages than Western Europeans, and in many cities, they were forced to live in barracks behind barbed wire.

Some were lucky enough to flee the Nazi's and formed resistance groups. Out of the harshness came great individual strength and those in the resistance groups helped change their country's fate.