

Shadowhouse

Steve
Rasnic
Tem

SHADOWHOUSE My Father's Heart

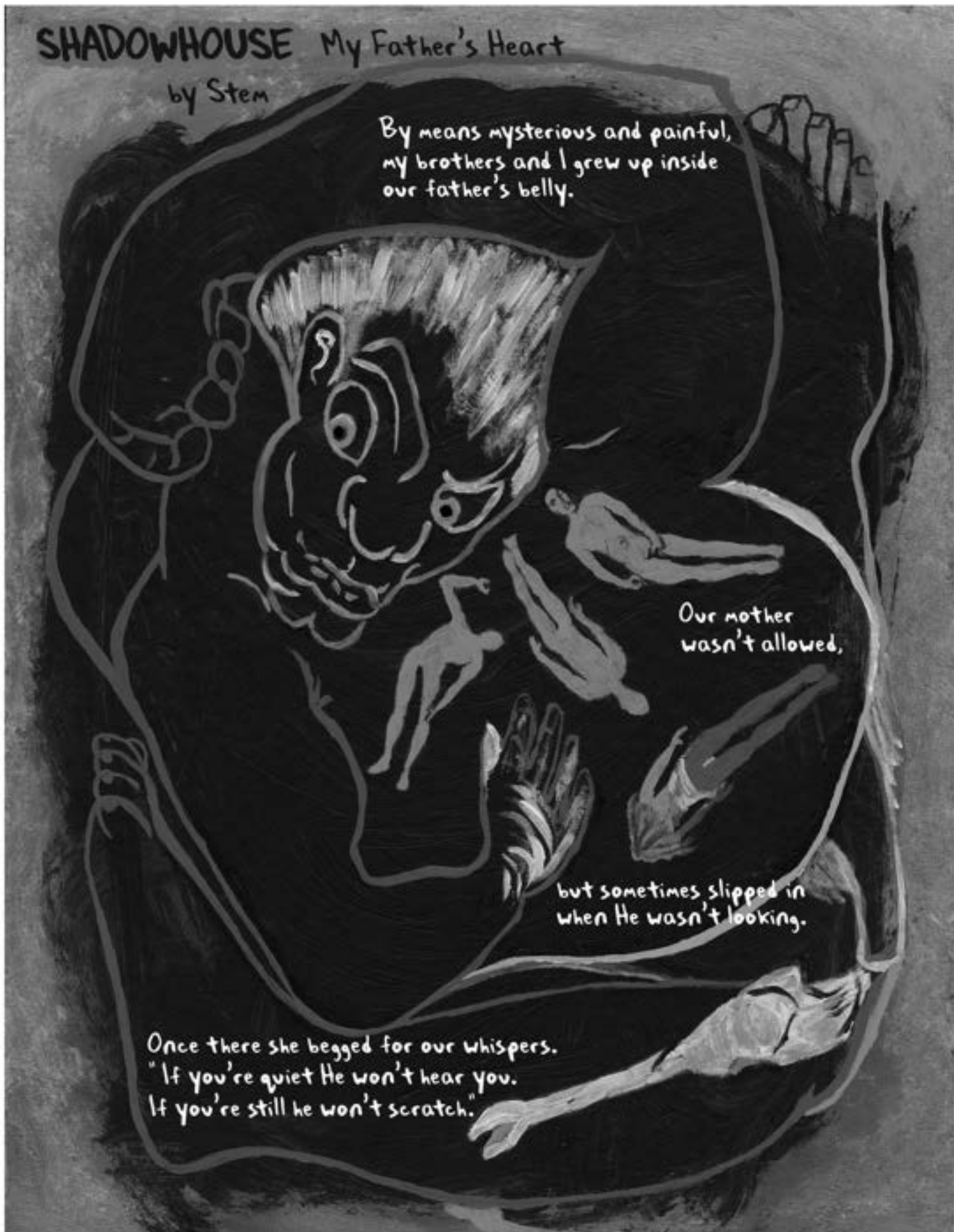
by Stem

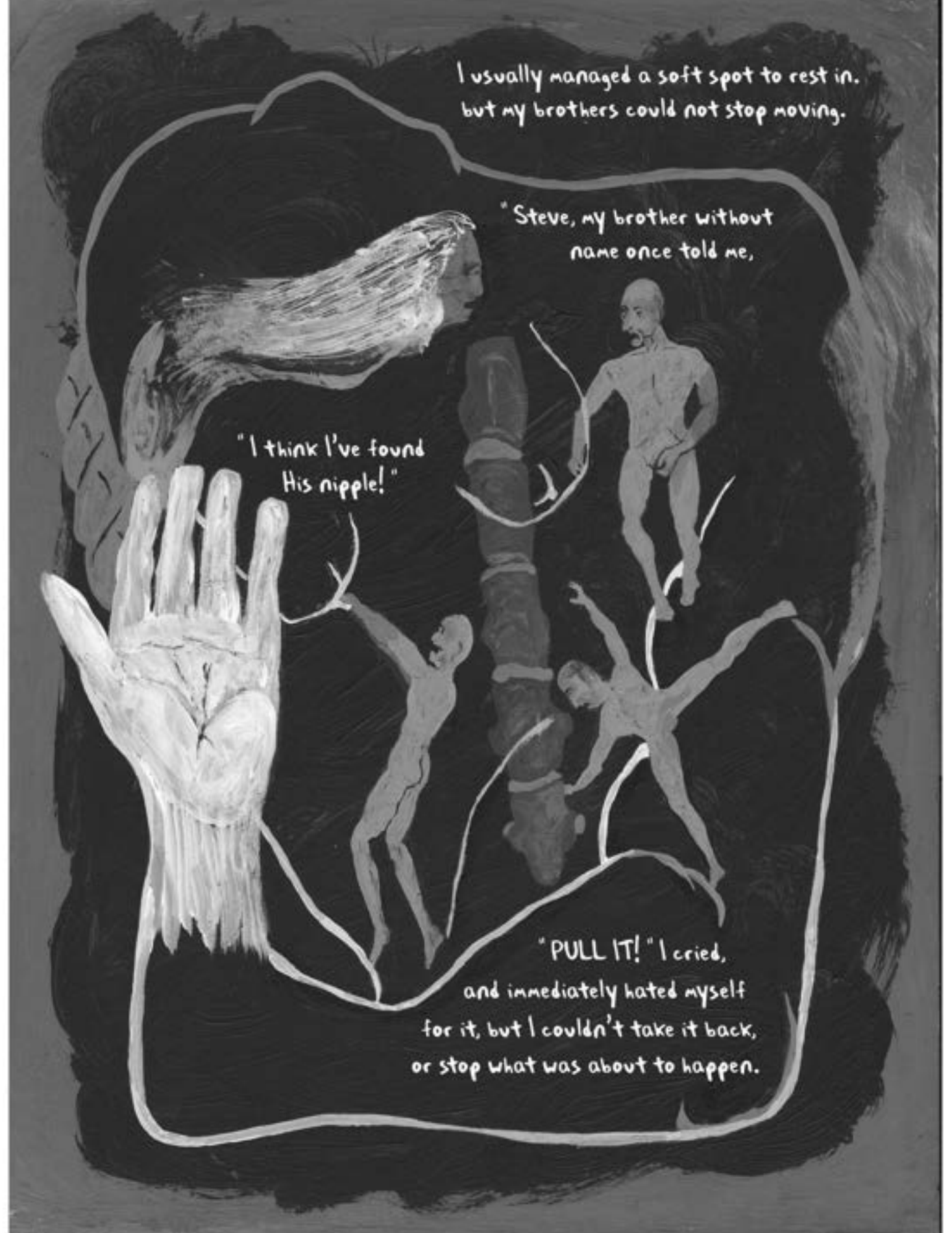
By means mysterious and painful,
my brothers and I grew up inside
our father's belly.

Our mother
wasn't allowed,

but sometimes slipped in
when He wasn't looking.

Once there she begged for our whispers.
"If you're quiet He won't hear you.
If you're still he won't scratch."





I usually managed a soft spot to rest in.
but my brothers could not stop moving.

"Steve, my brother without
name once told me,

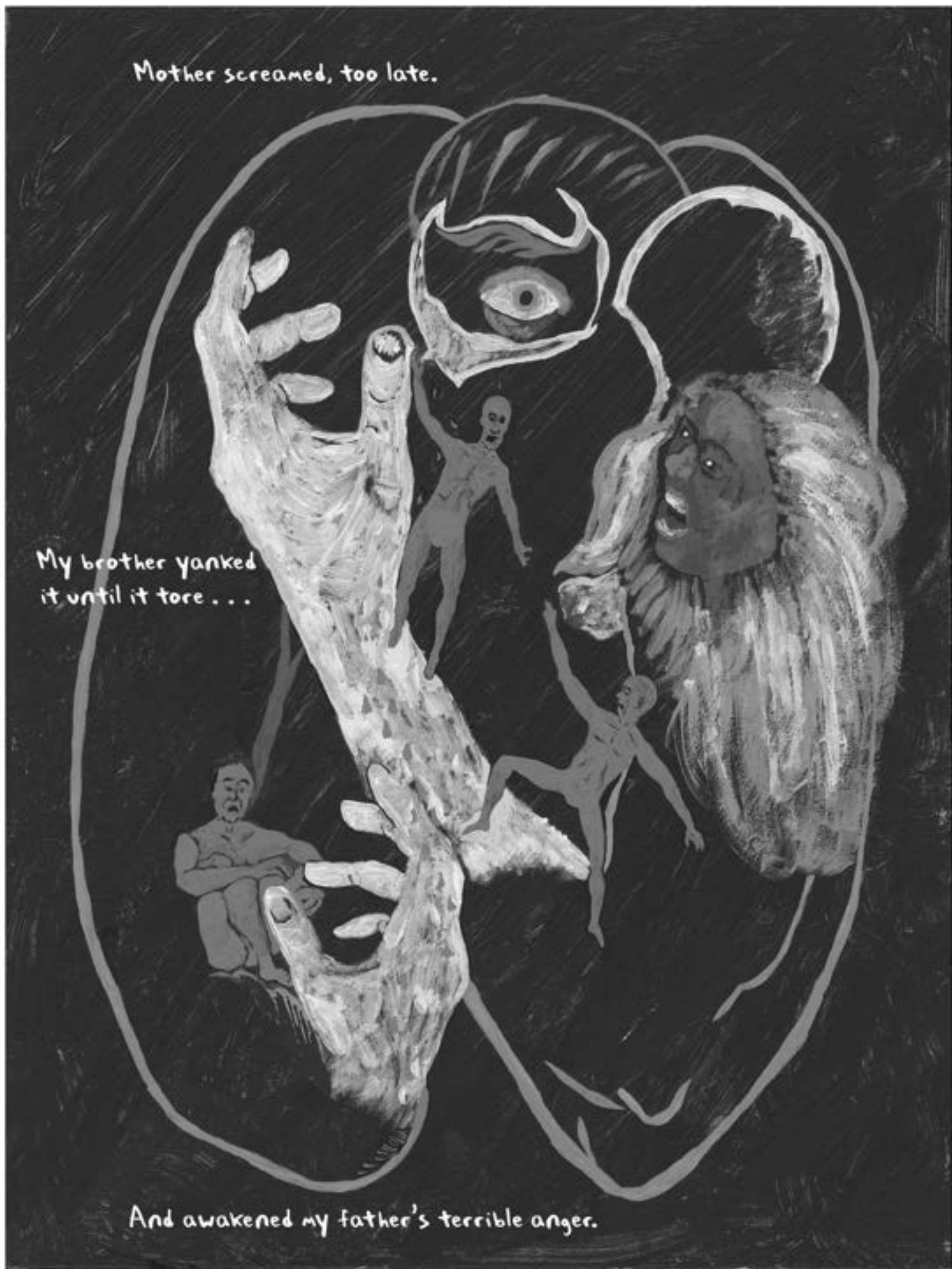
"I think I've found
His nipple!"

"PULL IT!" I cried,
and immediately hated myself
for it, but I couldn't take it back,
or stop what was about to happen.

Mother screamed, too late.

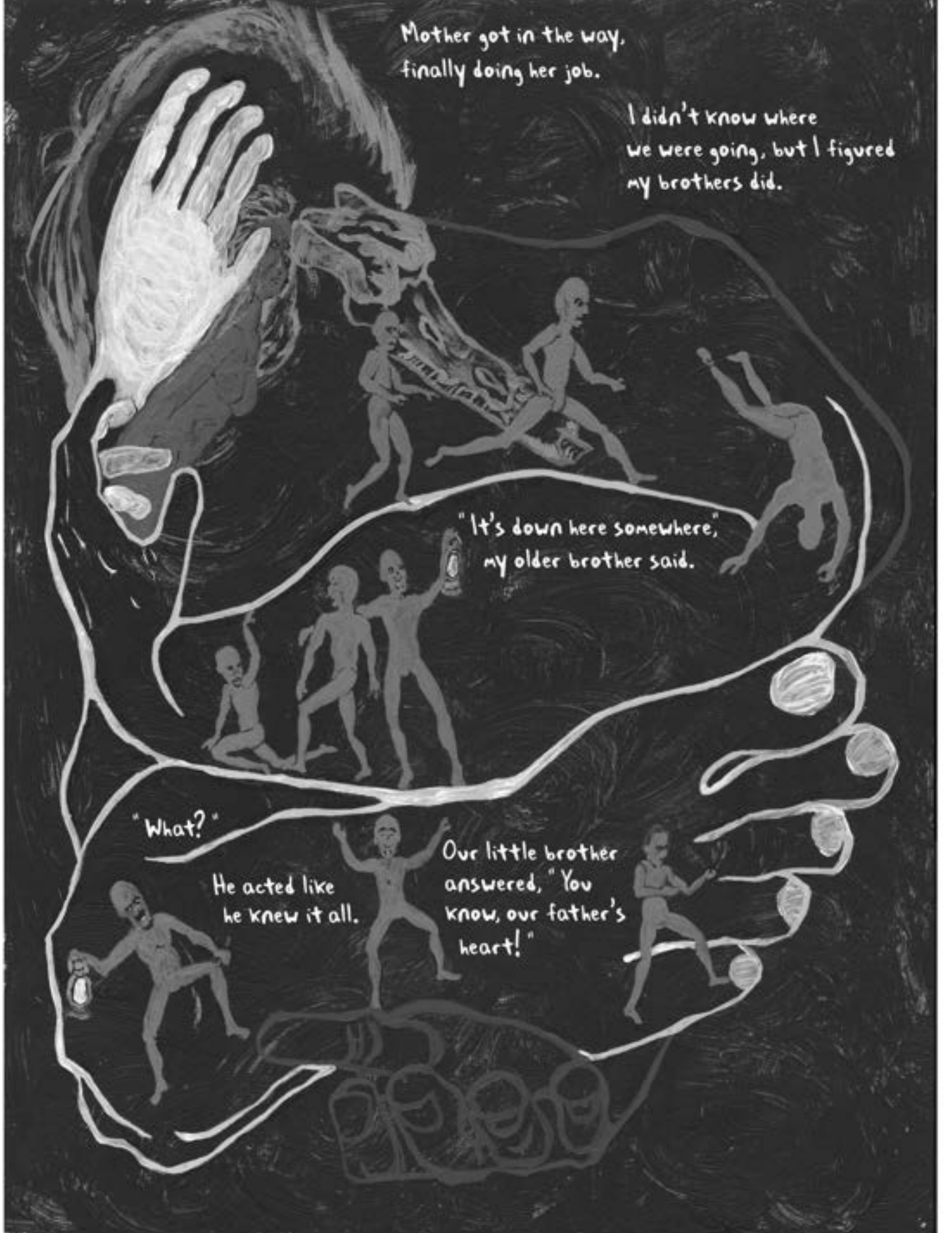
My brother yanked
it until it tore . . .

And awakened my father's terrible anger.









Mother got in the way,
finally doing her job.

I didn't know where
we were going, but I figured
my brothers did.

"It's down here somewhere,"
my older brother said.

"What?"

He acted like
he knew it all.

Our little brother
answered, "You
know, our father's
heart!"

"You're CRAZY!"
I told them...

I couldn't see them,
but I heard their
voices...

"The old man
doesn't have
one!"

"Can't you see
He's empty!"

"There's NOTHING
here!"

I heard
their screams,
the things
He did to them
with that...
RAGE of His

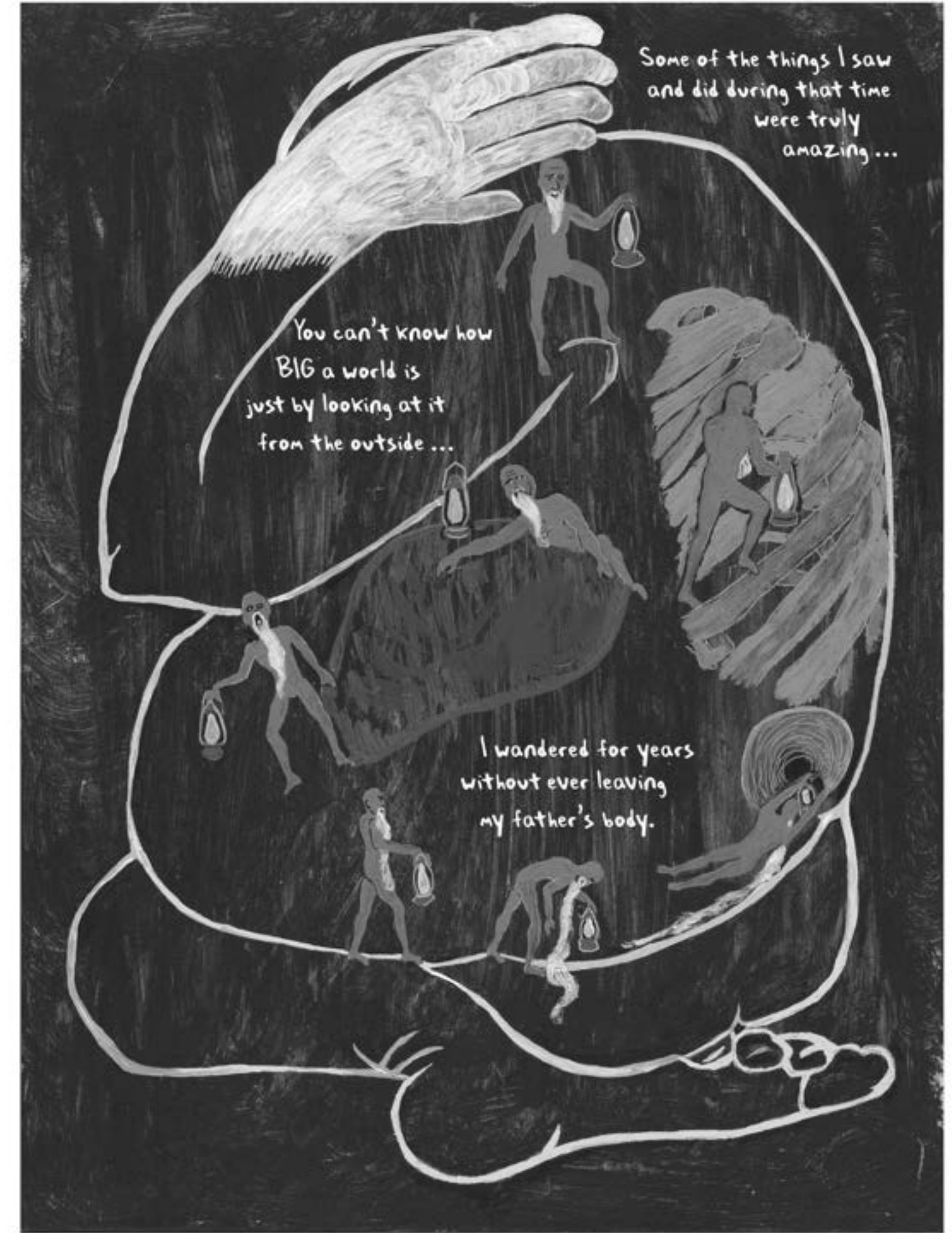


before the great
folds of His body
absorbed their
cries...



I would not see them again

for YEARS.



Some of the things I saw
and did during that time
were truly
amazing...

You can't know how
BIG a world is
just by looking at it
from the outside ...

I wandered for years
without ever leaving
my father's body.

"Hey, brother,"
they said, as if we'd
only spoken
yesterday.

"You're both
still here?"

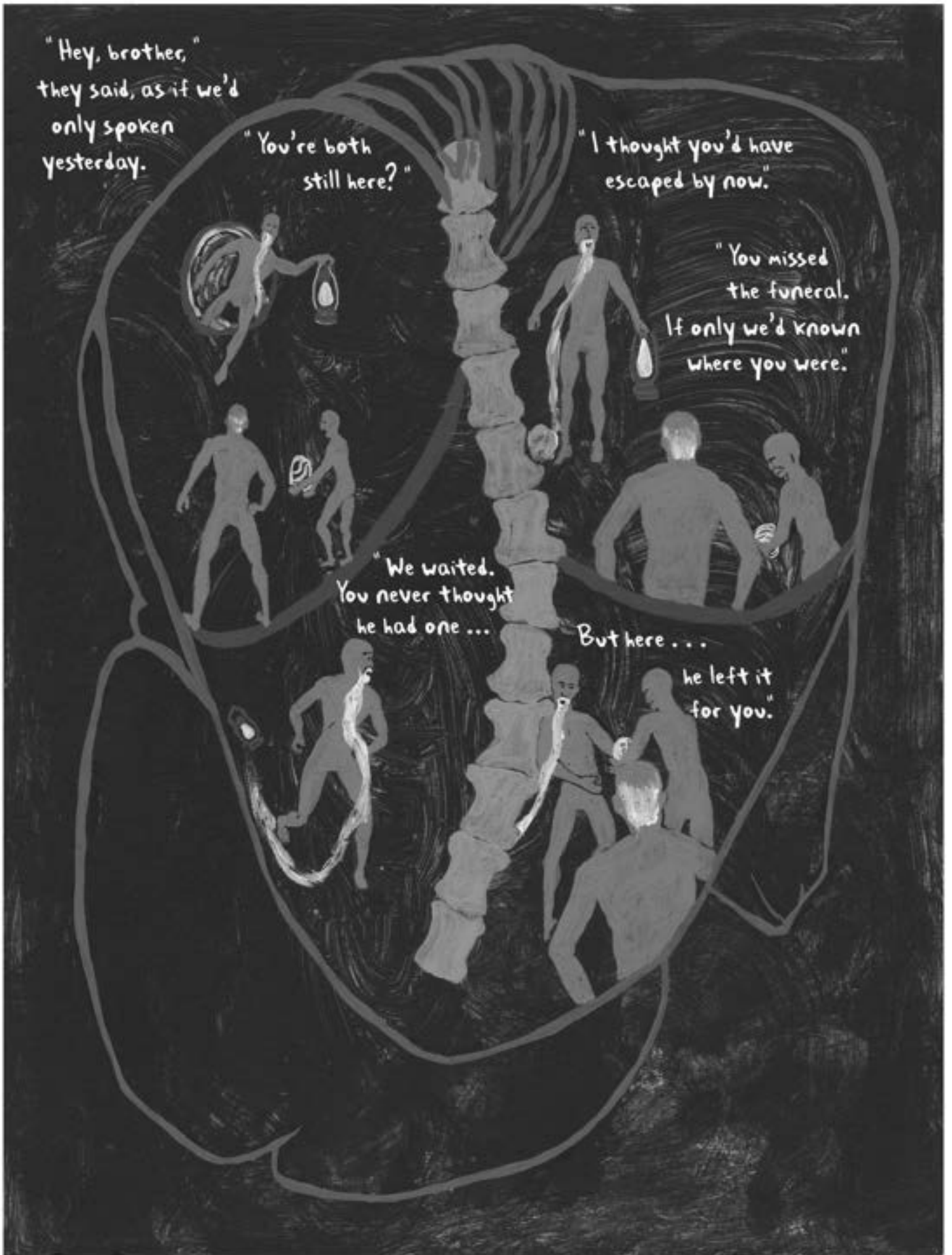
"I thought you'd have
escaped by now."

"You missed
the funeral.
If only we'd known
where you were."

"We waited.
You never thought
he had one ..."

But here ...

he left it
for you."





My face . . .

My eyes . . .

and beneath it all

His heart.

SHADOWHOUSE A CHILD'S HOUSE

I understood very little about our house when I was small. I wasn't even sure what our house WAS.

Maybe it was some kind of animal.

Bigger than an elephant, but smarter.

Maybe a giant CAT.

My parents gave me facts, other explanations I couldn't understand.

I knew parents didn't always tell the truth.

And I could hear the cat's body at night

the beat of its heart,

it's thoughts,

scratching at the walls.



Later, I believed our house was some kind of machine.

Like a giant robot.

I loved robots.

They were very awkward but they were very smart, very strong.

If you had a giant robot on your side,

nothing could hurt you.

If you lived

in a giant, robot house, nothing could get

to you.

Not floods,

not storms,

and certainly not robbers.

Later still, I believed our house was a dream. Sometimes, it was a dream that made you smile in the morning.

Sometimes it became a nightmare that made absolutely no sense.

During the day

it took less than a minute to go from one side of the house to the other. But at night, after sleep,

At night the doors changed and some hid entirely.

My bed became enormous and floated up to the ceiling.

Most of the windows disappeared.

And under my bed, someone (the fairies?) had built a whole other house.



If I slept just
the right way

I could slip from bed and enter the trap door

that led into the attic of the underbed house.
And below this attic lay a room full of sky,



a second room full of trees,



and a third room full of ocean.



The fish in that ocean wore glasses and smoked pipes.



The fish were so smart they read books



but the books were far too wet to read.

Every night I explored
the underbed house,

going from
room to room,

taking the trapdoors
from floor to floor,

lying
on the beds,

using
the bathrooms,

and chasing
the TVs that ran
like rats
with cyclopean eyes.

They all showed
the same program:
something about a houseboat,
and the people who lived there.

Sometimes terrible things happened in the underbed house, and I had to hide until they were done.

A horse, trapped in a bedroom, would tear down the walls.

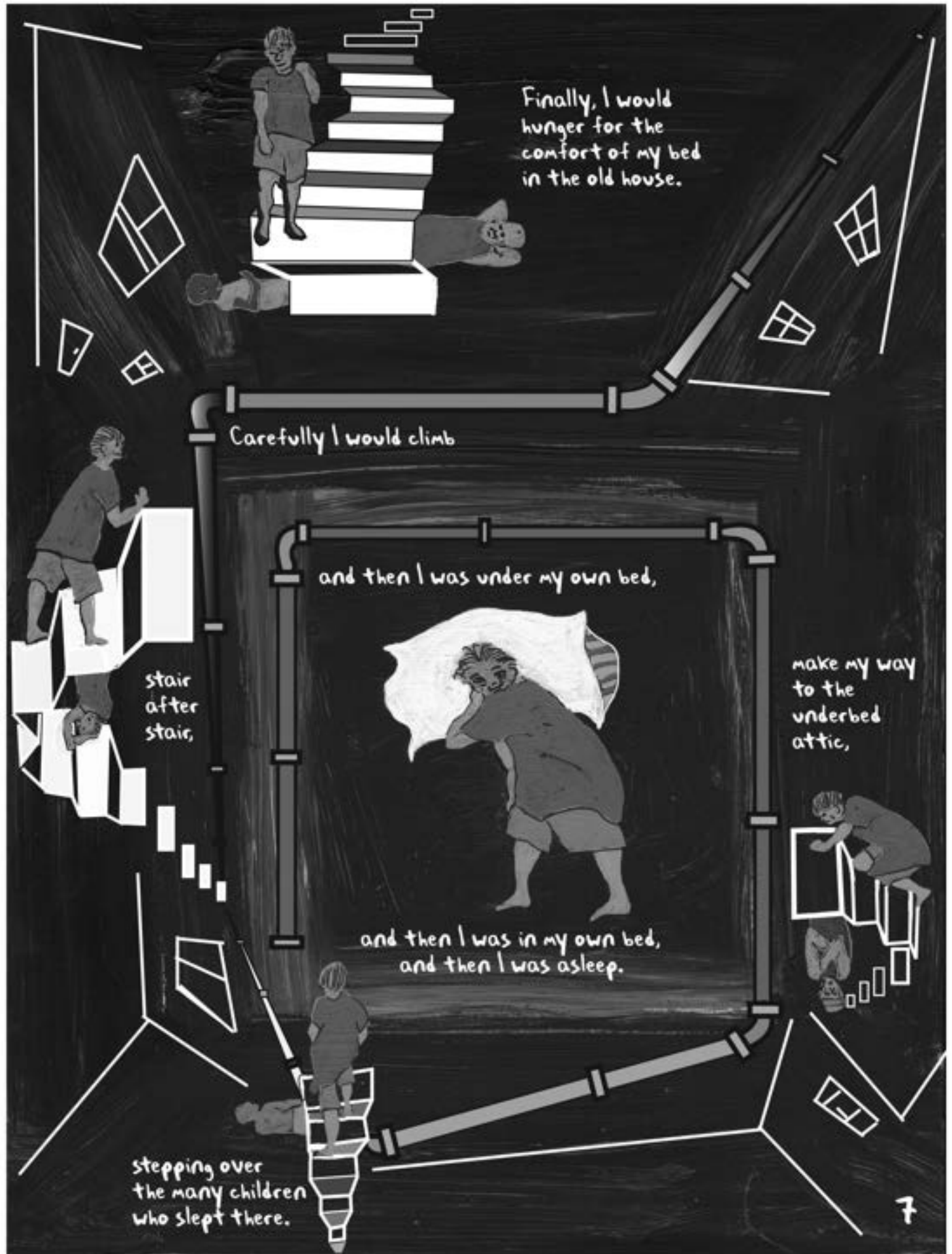


A mother would be cooking, and set fire to her hair.



A father would come home ravenous, and eat his own children.





Finally, I would
hunger for the
comfort of my bed
in the old house.

Carefully I would climb

and then I was under my own bed,

stair
after
stair,

make my way
to the
underbed
attic,

and then I was in my own bed,
and then I was asleep.

stepping over
the many children
who slept there.

One day I woke up in a different house.



The furniture was right, but the walls were wrong.

I went from floor to floor,



and room to room.



I saw my mother and father in the living room



watching TV.


There were my two brothers, quietly playing a game.



I went as far as I could, and returned to my room.



I looked under the bed, and found nothing but a few toys. The underbed house was gone.



For months, for years,
I searched our house
looking for the underbed
house.

I knew it still
existed.
It had just moved.
But I never could
find it.

I had to content myself
with writing stories
about it, drawing pictures
of it, which I hung
on my walls.

I stayed in my room,
oblivious to the noises outside.
When I did venture out,
I recognized nothing,
not even my family.
The furniture had been replaced.
All of their faces had changed.

Eventually my brother came to me
and woke me up.

I didn't recognize his face
in the dark, but I still asked him
what happened to our house?



"You broke it," he said.

"Mom and Dad
told me.



You broke it,



Now nothing will ever be the same!

I didn't believe him.
He always lied.



Mom and Dad always
lied.



But he was right.



Nothing
was ever the same
again.



SHADOWHOUSE

THE WINDOWS OF SLEEP

It's been decades since I lived
In my childhood's home, but sometimes

In this house,
Where I've raised
my own kids
and walked in and out
of the dark,

I have felt the approach

of old dreams



And shutting eyes
so that I might dream

And knowing they were coming



Like a storm
of shadows,
I have made
my rounds

Lowering
windows,
and closing
curtains,



In that
other
life

And my house might dream

it was that other house



of shadows,
and windows,
and doors.

That old house sat inside a pocket in the mountains

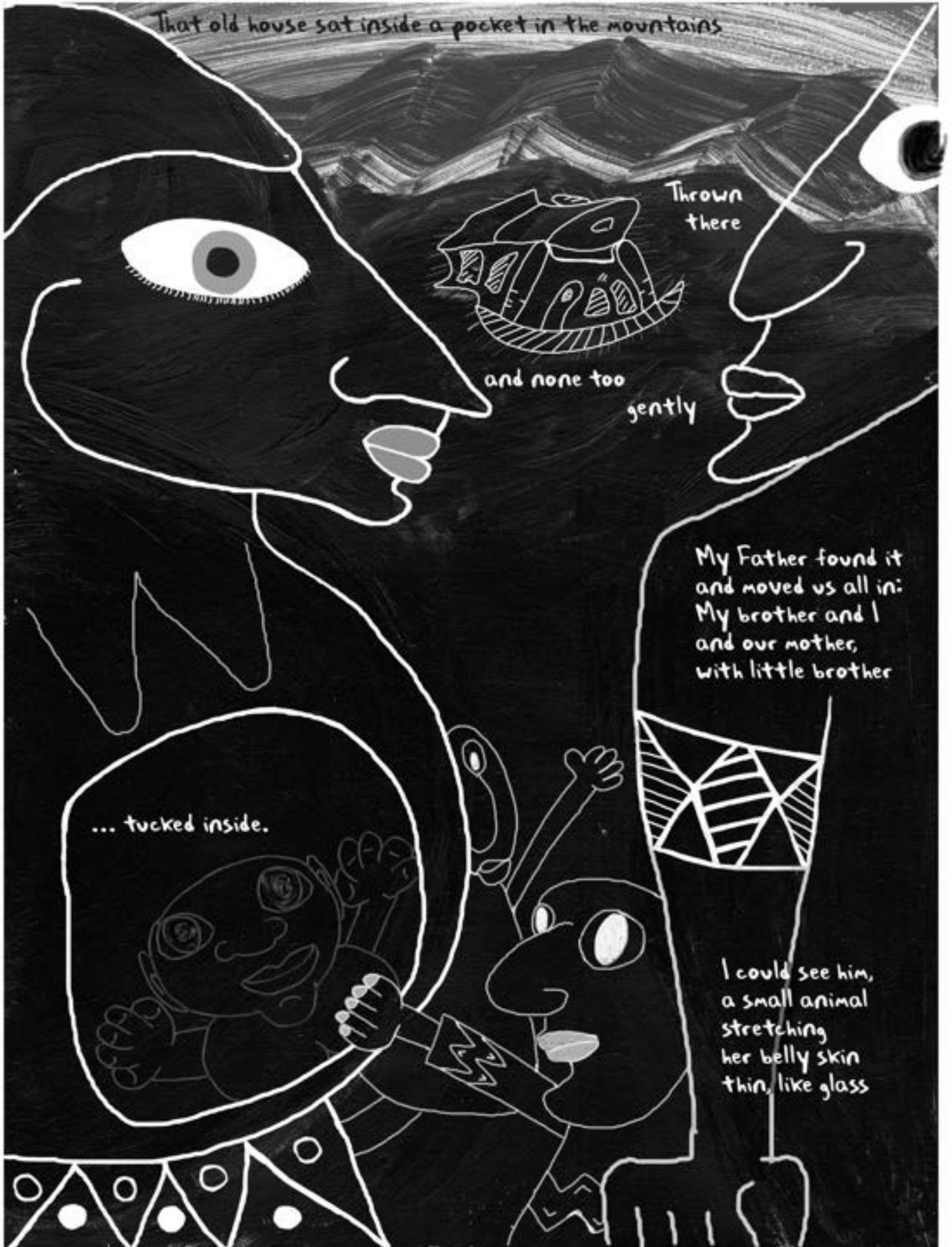
Thrown
there

and none too
gently

My Father found it
and moved us all in:
My brother and I
and our mother,
with little brother

... tucked inside.

I could see him,
a small animal
stretching
her belly skin
thin, like glass



Our house had more
than its share of Windows

There was
Mother's Belly

And back of the house
the one small window
Planted
right into the hillside
where we could see

And
Father's
Eyes,

And Father's
Mouth with
the FIRE inside,

what the Dead did
during the day,

Twin to the Window

Basement
Furnace,

on the



Not to mention
all the Mirrors
exposing our
other selves,



The Ones
we didn't show
the neighbors.

And,



of course,

the
Standard
Windows

which weren't that Standard,
in every wall of the house
so that we could see Everything

But then Everything could see us,

With all our Warps and Scars.



There were three windows right in front,
the Eyes of the house:

The Lazy one on the Left,

And above them the Ghost
of an opening, watching
every bad move of
Hide and Seek,

The Cracked one
on the Right, that I broke
with a football, and Dad
wouldn't fix out of spite,

Finding you
when you forgot
where you hid
yourself.



That was the house's SPIRIT EYE,
Stolen from Insects and Mystics.

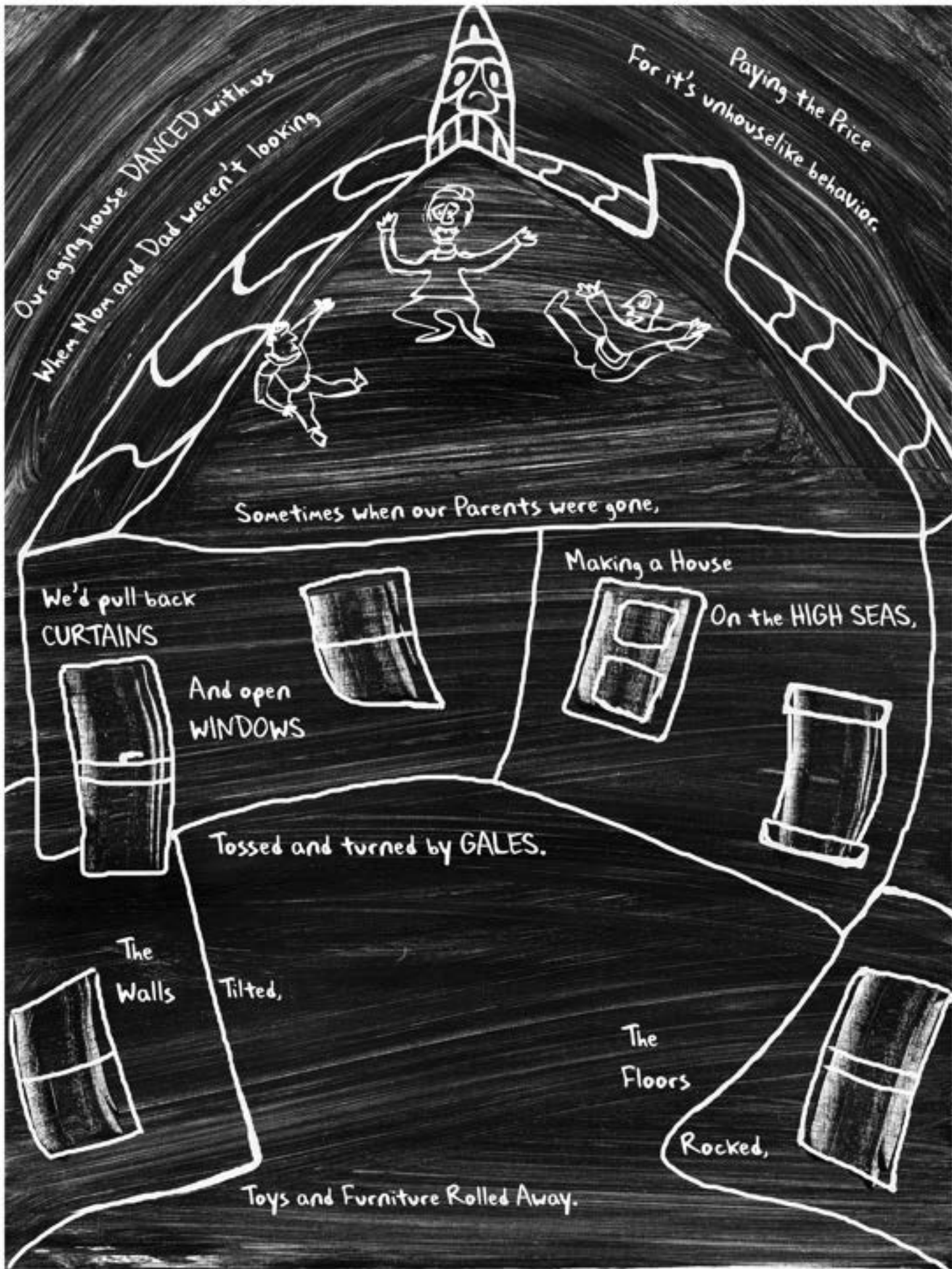


My brothers and I
weren't much better.



Two more windows
wounded the front of the house:
Dad nailed them shut,
But never told us why.
He loved that house and hated it,
Like pretty much everything.

We never let it rest,
We kept it up all night,
Too scared to be awake,
and left alone.



Our aging house DANCED with us
When Mom and Dad weren't looking

Paying the Price
For it's unhouselike behavior.

Sometimes when our Parents were gone,

We'd pull back
CURTAINS

And open
WINDOWS

Making a House

On the HIGH SEAS,

Tossed and turned by GALES.

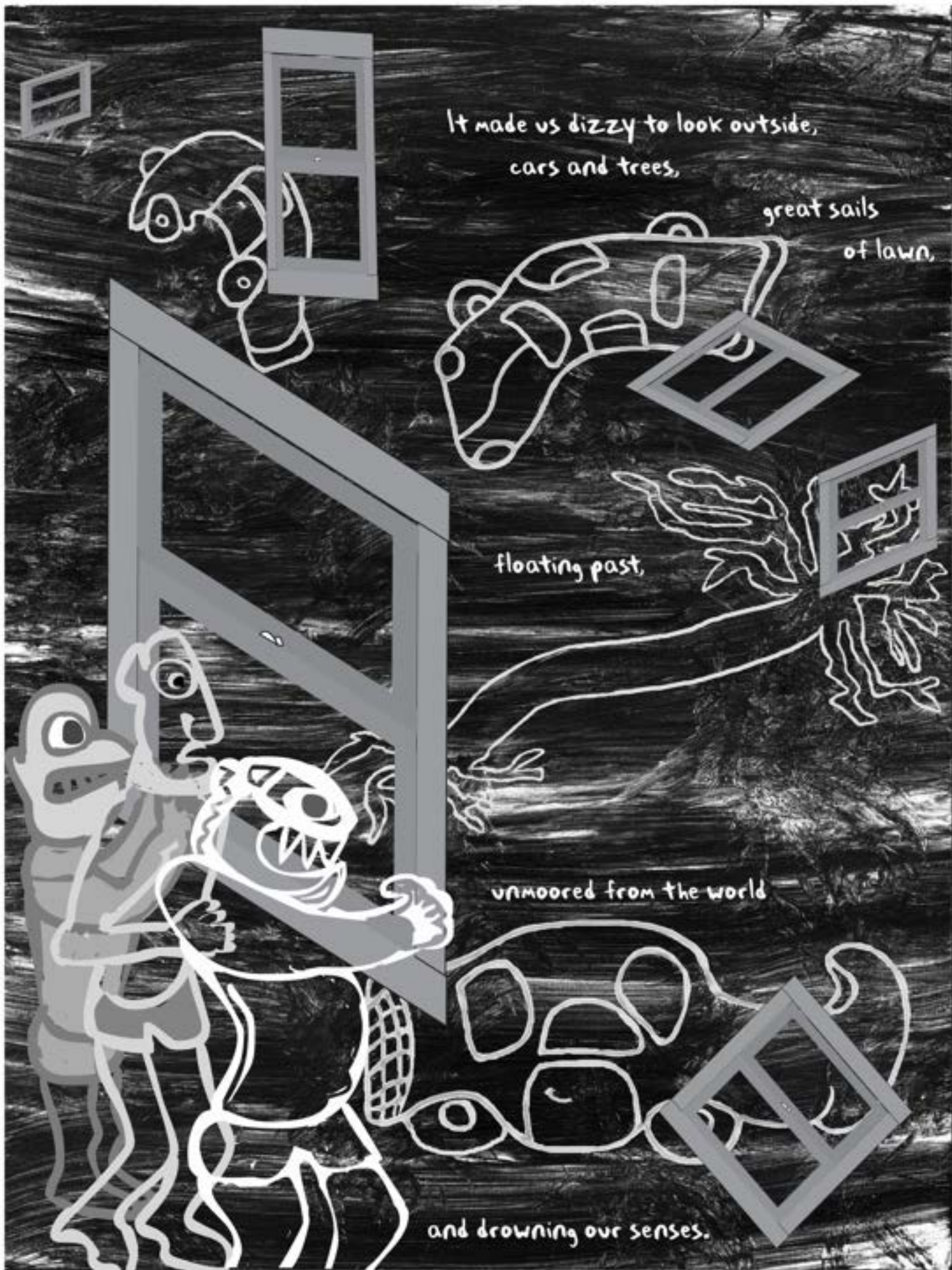
The
Walls

Tilted,

The
Floors

Rocked,

Toys and Furniture Rolled Away.



It made us dizzy to look outside,
cars and trees,

great sails
of lawn,

floating past,

unmoored from the world

and drowning our senses.

Mom and Dad would come home,
find Everything
wet and wind damaged.



When they asked me what happened I
couldn't exactly lie.



I told them we had a Hurricane.



Sometimes Dad came home
so angry the house shut
its windows to keep him
OUT. He'd Rage and
Prowl the yard for hours.

Some weeks the windows were so clear
They showed us places we'd NEVER

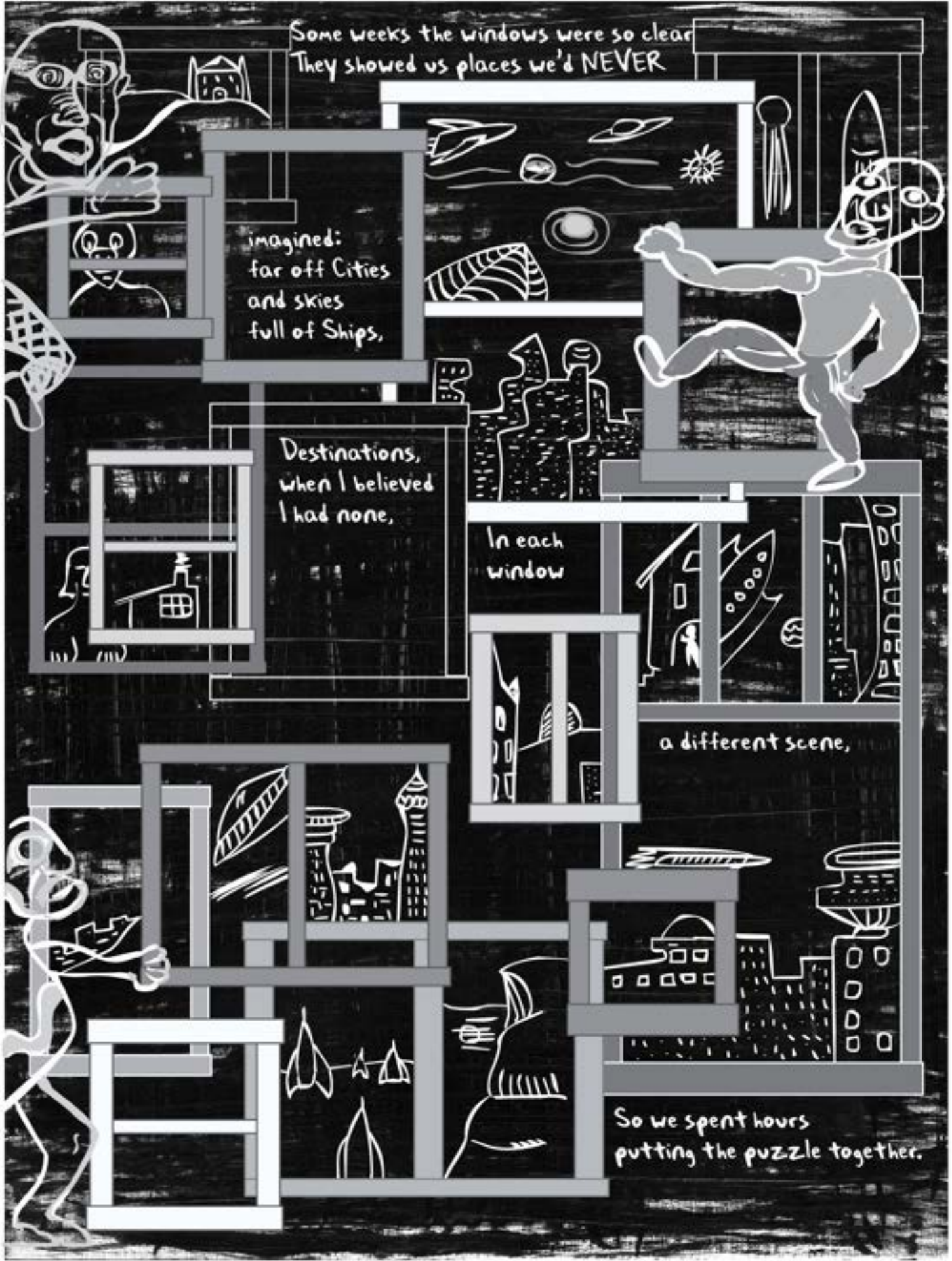
imagined:
far off Cities
and skies
full of Ships,

Destinations,
when I believed
I had none,

In each
window

a different scene,

So we spent hours
putting the puzzle together.





At Night, the Windows
grew Bored,

Sometimes they filled the Same wall.



Sometimes they were just
Gone,
shutting us inside
a pitch dark Box.

I'd search the house,



I'd replace them



but the next day
the parents knew
everything was Different,
but not How.



If I sat before a Window
Long enough, I could see
what the house saw:



Memories of
the Forest,

How Scared
it was



the first time
Sun lit the Roof,



How Old the Mountains were,

And all the People it
would Lose



before it Burned,
before they Tore it
Down.

Some days the Light
that Filled its Windows
was like the Love
We All Deserve
but Rarely see.



On the Best Nights
it Folded you
into Pockets
and Folded you
into
Sleep.



Mom told me
Never sit in a
Windowsill. "You're
Bound to Fall!"
One Window she Kept
Curtained. She didn't Like
the View.



I Thought she was just Afraid
of What it Showed: Houses
as Far as I could See, and Each
with it's Own Secret Window.

She didn't Understand
How the World Always
Looks Nicer through a
Window.



Windows give us Hope
Before Doors take it
Away.



It is Windows that Stretch the Floor,



Raise High the Roof,



Blow Out the Walls.



It is the Windows in our Sleep



That Show us the Way Out

Of this Cold and Listless Heart.