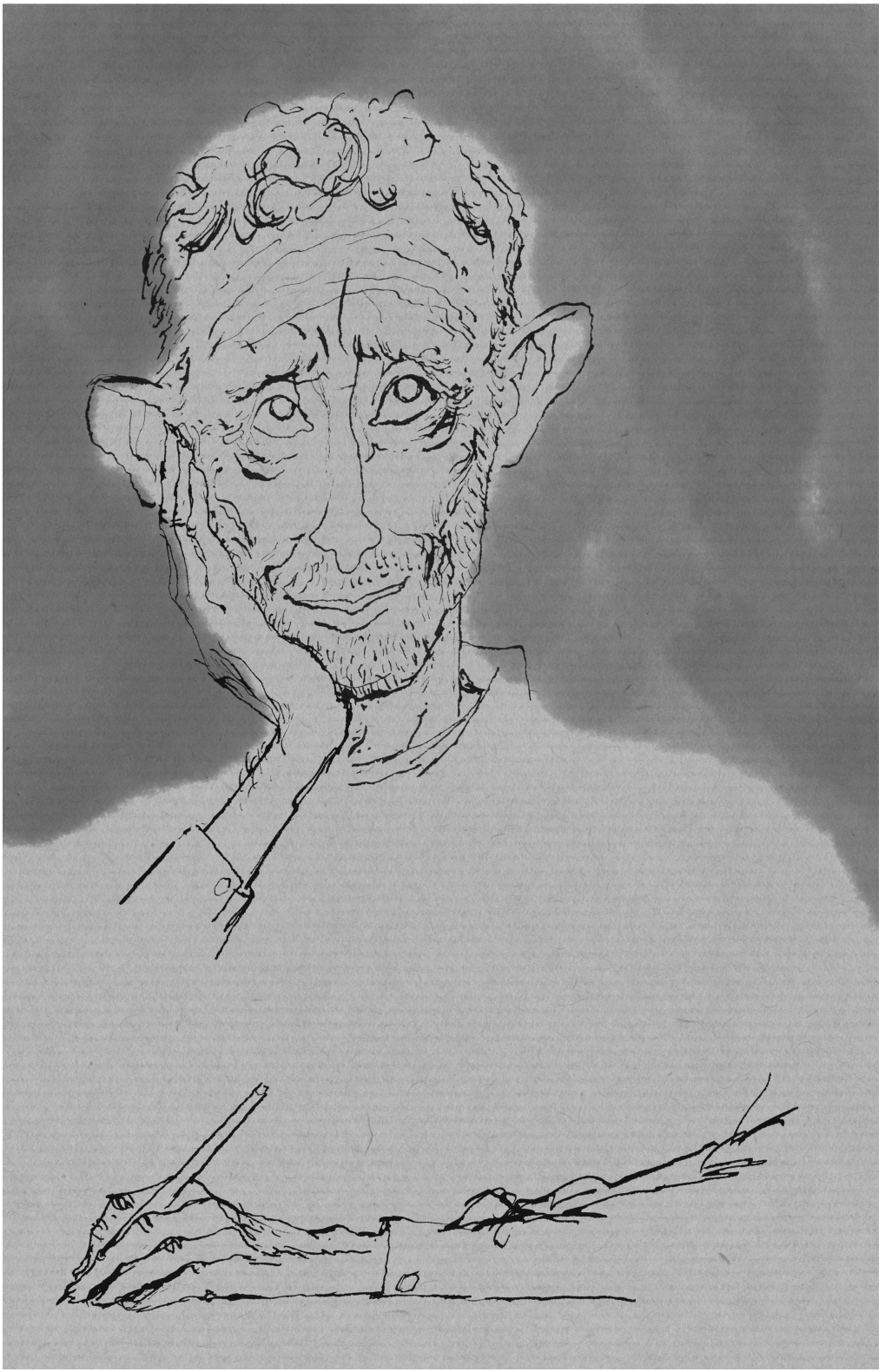
Out of this WORLD



Michael Rosen

Out of this WORLD

Poems to make you laugh, smile, and think

Drawings by Ed Vere

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For Joni
Love Zeyde Mick

For Rach
With love, E V



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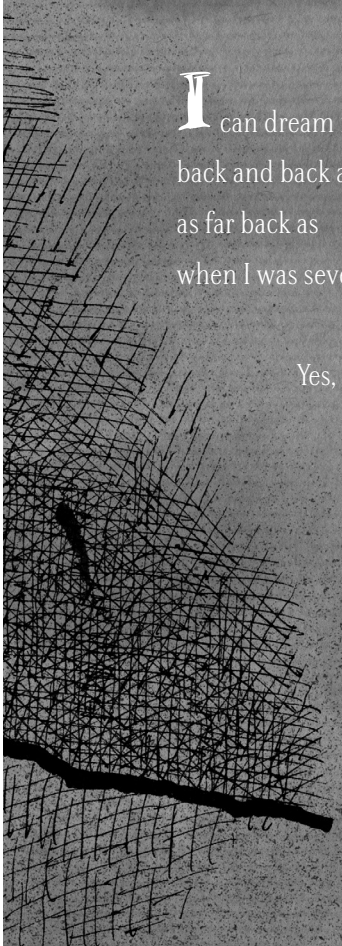


The Schloch

I can dream myself
back and back and back
as far back as
when I was seven or eight.

Yes, I am seven.

At night
I read books in bed.
There are demons and ghosts.
Like. . .
Grendel
Medusa
The Kraken.



In my parents' stories
there are people
I never meet in these books.

Let me tell you about one of them.
The worst.

There's the Shloch.

What's a Shloch?
Do you want to know what a Shloch is?
Let me tell you how I know about the Shloch.

Mum says to me sometimes, 'Don't be a Shloch!'
It sounds bad.
Very bad.
She says, 'You don't want people to think
you're a Shloch.'
I'm worried.
'What's a Shloch?' I say.
She says, 'It's what you don't want to be.'

It sounds very bad.

What could be worse than
the thing you don't want to be?

At night
in bed
I start to think about the Shloch.
I start thinking what the Shloch could be like.
This thing.
This thing I shouldn't be.
Is it like Grendel, the monster
that runs over the moors at night
and attacks the warriors as they sleep?
Is it like Medusa who, if you look into her eyes,
can turn you to stone?
Is it like the Kraken
who rises out of the sea
and pulls ships down, down under the waves
and all the sailors drown?

But I don't tell anyone.

Because . . .
Because. . .
when I was seven
I had a secret life.

None of my friends knew
that I was worried about the Shloch.
I figured that if I met the Shloch
I'd be. . .in tsores.
Do you know what's 'in tsores'?
In tsores
is you're in trouble.
Believe me, you didn't want to be in tsores.
Tsores is the trouble
you can't get out of.

None of my friends knew what it was like
when I went to see my grandparents.
For a start, I didn't call my grandparents
'Grandma and Grandad',
I called them:
'Bubbe' and 'Zeyde'.

No one knew that.

No one knew what it was like
at their place.

I loved going to visit them
apart from one thing.
Just one thing.

This is how it was:

Mum says to us, 'We're going to Bubbe and Zeyde's.
Come on, Muzhik!' she says to me.

Muzhik – that was another of the words.
This one was a nice one.
At night,
Mum'd give me a big hug and a squeeze,
play blowy blowy down my neck,
kiss me
and say, 'Good night, Muzhik.'
'What's a muzhik?' I'd say.

‘Someone nice.
A little Russian fellow,’ she’d say.

‘I’m a little Russian fellow?’
‘Shh, go to sleep now.’

Bubbe and Zeyde’s place
was a flat, a ground-floor flat.

We’d eat:
pleyve – crumbly cake
platzels – freshly baked rolls
with sweet chopped herring
and latkes –
they’re like hash browns
and there’s the smell of warm bagels
that we call beigels.

People are laughing,
Zeyde shows me the ship in the bottle
that sits above the fire place

on the mantlepiece;
a ship that sails
along the mantlepiece
on and on and on
all the way to the 'Heim'.

What's the 'Heim'?
Where's the Heim?

Heim is where Bubbe and Zeyde's
parents come from, they say.
I wonder:
do the Shloch and the Muzhik
come from the Heim?
I think so.

We play games:
snakes and ladders,
fox and geese.
If I win,
Zeyde calls me a 'knakke'.
What's a knakke?

It means you're clever,
and you act like you know it.

If I laugh a lot
Zeyde tells me I'll plotz.
Plotz? What's that?
'You're laughing so much,
you'll plotz,' he says.
'You mean I'll wet myself?' I say.
'No, like you'll burst.
Like you'll plotz.'

Oh no!
Why did I say, 'laugh so much
I'll wet myself?'
Now I need to go to the toilet.
But
But
that's a problem.
That's a big, big, big problem.

The toilet

was outside.

I didn't want to go out there
to the. . .
. . .outside toilet.

But I need to go.
I have to go.
But I don't want to go out there.
Out there is dark and cold.
I don't want to go out there
all on my own.

And I don't want to go
into that outside toilet,
sitting in the dark
waiting for me.

Not the outside toilet.
Pleeeeeze.

What shall I do?

I'll try to hang on.
Yes.
I'll hang on.

'You're wriggling about,' Mum says,
'do you need to go to the toilet?'
'No,' I say.
'You do,' says my brother.
'I think you do,' Mum says,
'you're not scared,
are you?' she says.
'No,' I say.
'You are,' my brother says.
'I'm not!' I say.
'So just go,' he says.

He knows I'm scared.
but I'm not going to admit it.

He knows.

But really:

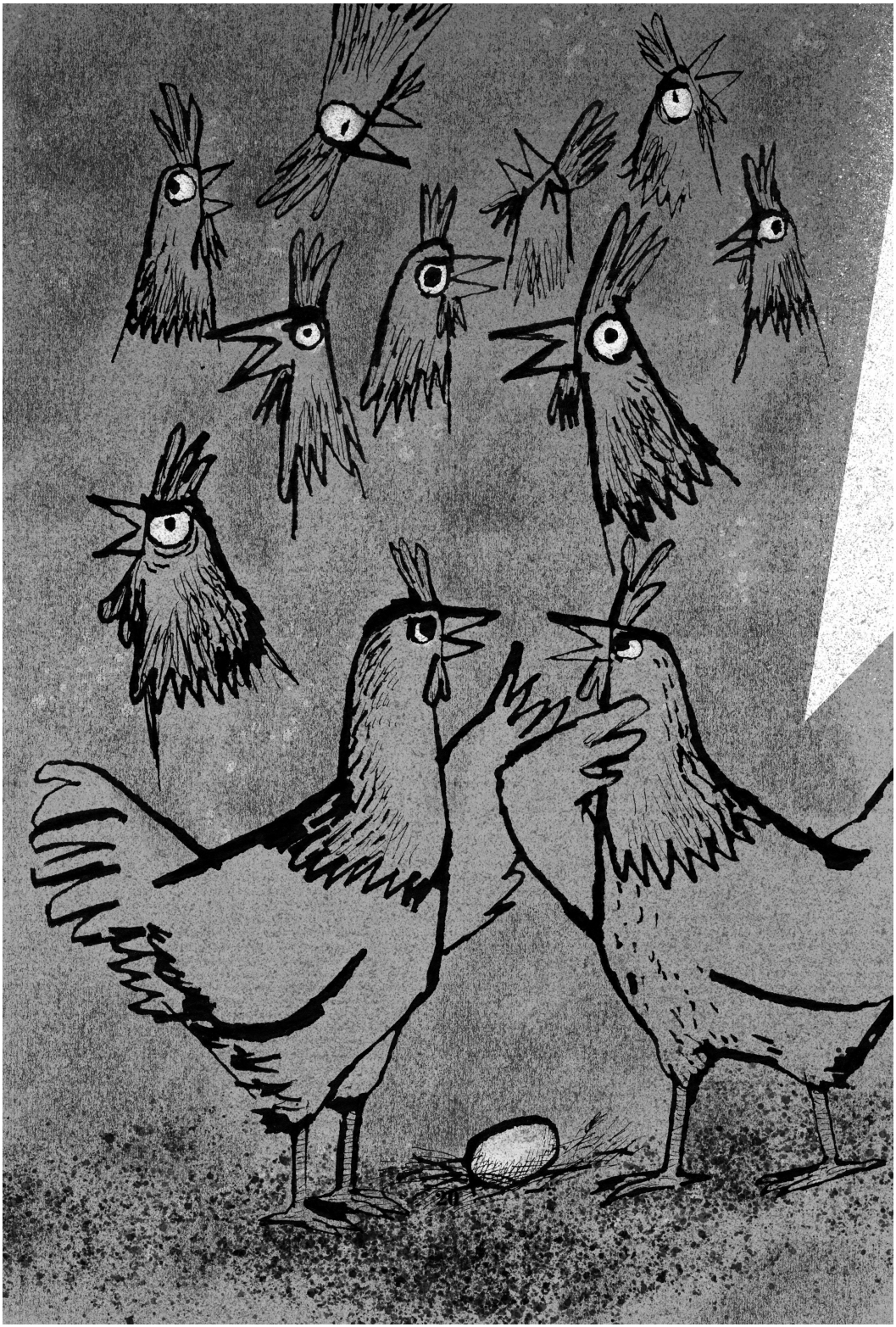
I am so scared.
I so don't want to go to the toilet.
So I hang on
I hang on
I hang on

but:

in the end
I have to go.

My brother watches me as I go out of the room. . .

. . .out of the warm living room
through the little kitchen.
Shadows on the floor
shadows on the walls
out through the back door
into the back yard. . .
into the night.





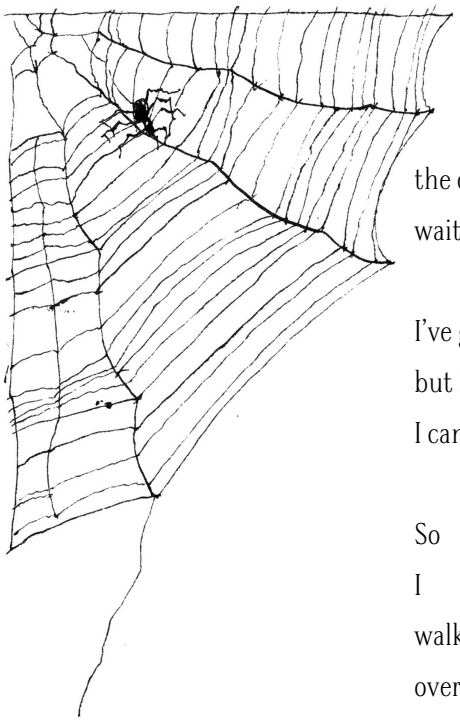
I don't like this.

Out here:
there are chickens.
Bubbe's chickens.
The chickens are talking
dwoork dwoork dwoork.
I think of their beady red eyes
and their fierce beaks.
They could come at me
peck peck peck
with their fierce beaks.
Staring at me with their beady red eyes.

The night sky goes on forever.
The neighbours are groaning into their tea.

I mustn't stop.
I must go to the toilet.

And then
there it is:



the outside toilet
waiting for me.

I've got to go in there.
but I so don't want to go in there.
I can't go back.

So
I
walk
over
to
the
dark
door.
Open the door:
and in.

Inside it's a cave:
darker than the sky,
colder than the night.



This
is
where. . .
. . .
. . .
. . .
. . .the spiders live:

krierching up the walls
krierching across the floor
chwee chwee chwee

leaving long lines
from wall to wall,
dusty whiskers that
fall in my face.

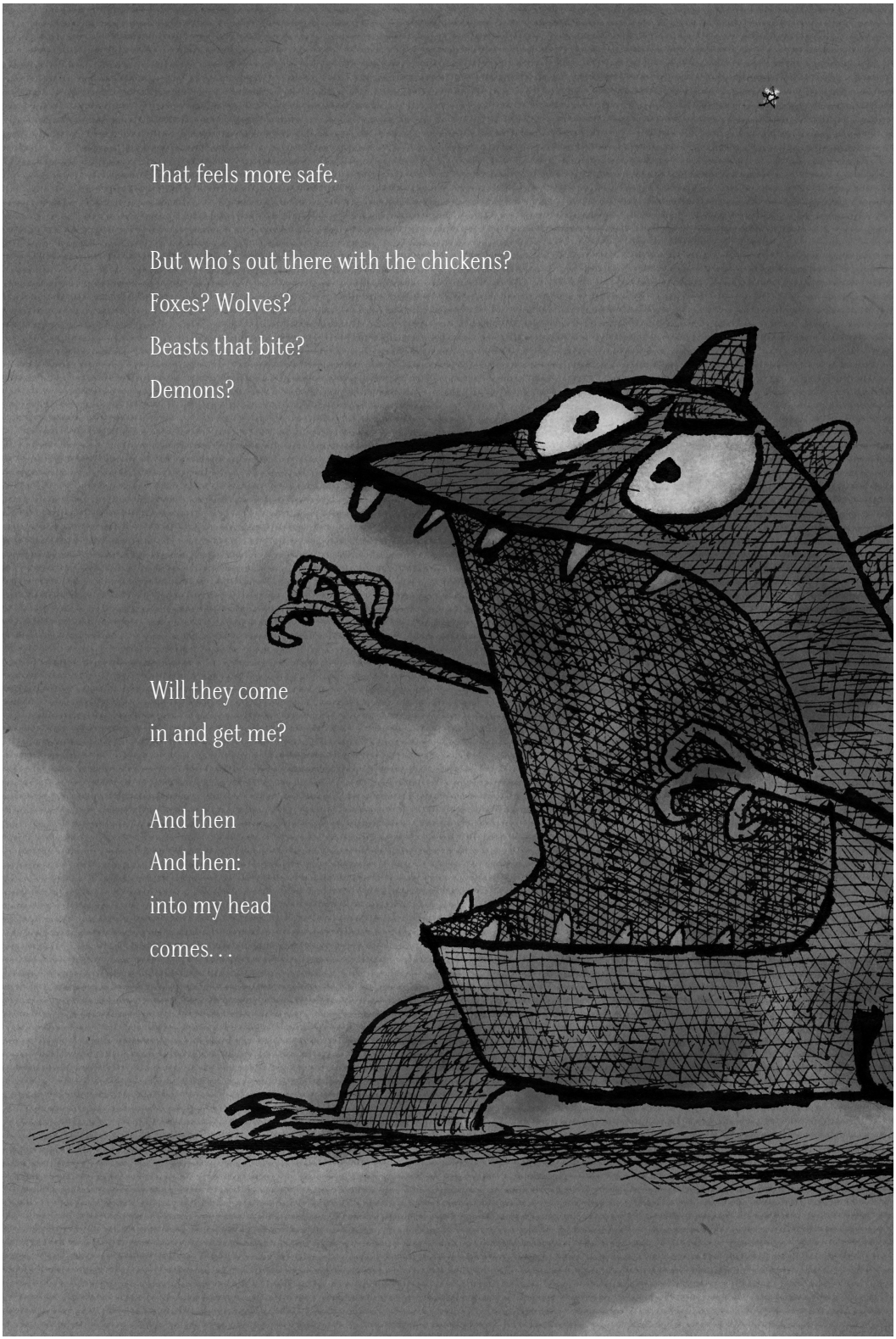
Yaaaaa!!!!!

The toilet seat is damp.

I'll leave the door open.

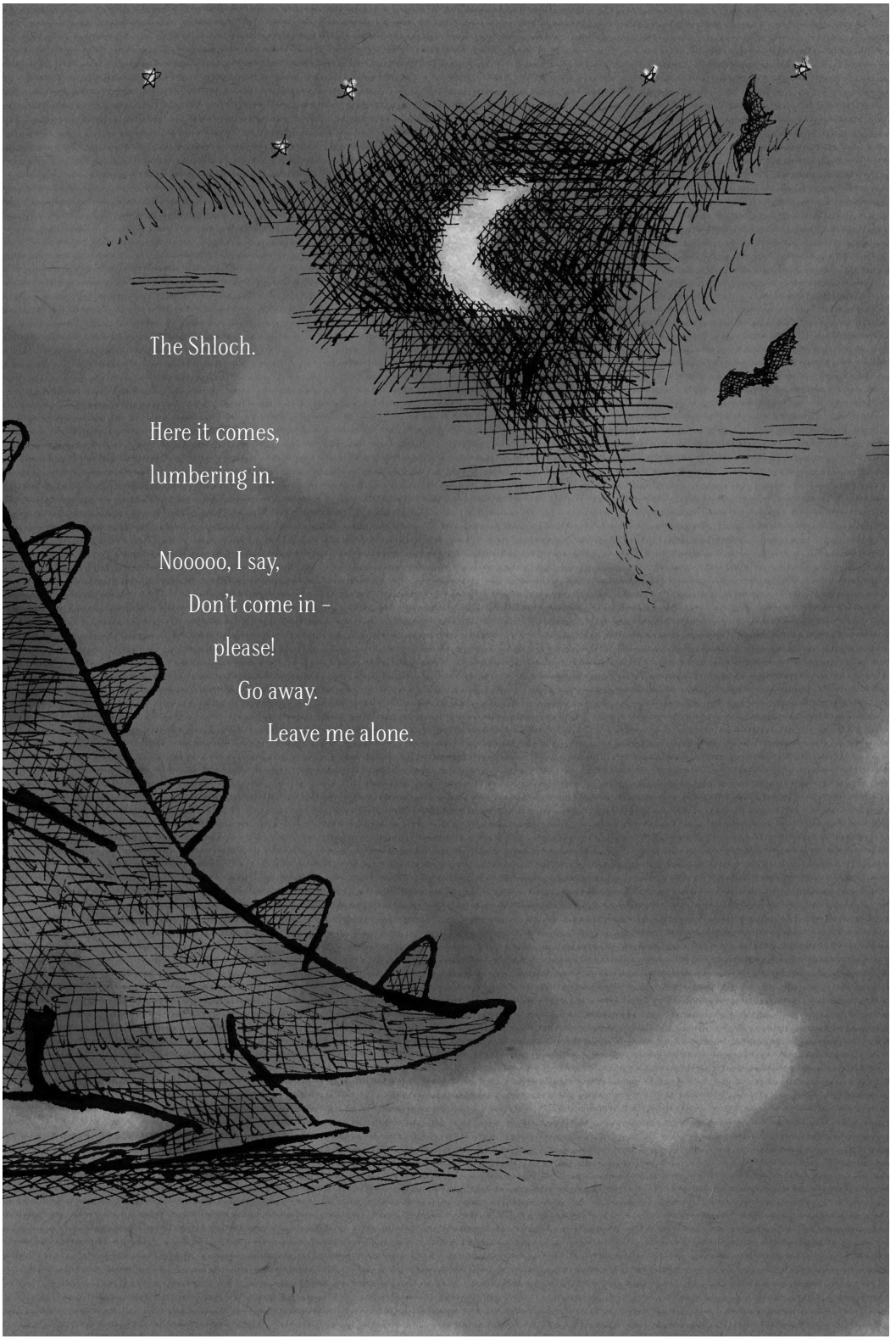
That feels more safe.

But who's out there with the chickens?
Foxes? Wolves?
Beasts that bite?
Demons?



Will they come
in and get me?

And then
And then:
into my head
comes. . .


The Shloch.

Here it comes,
lumbering in.

Nooooo, I say,
Don't come in –
please!
Go away.
Leave me alone.

I'll call out for help –
'Mu—!'

But I said I wasn't scared.
My brother will say,
'Ha ha, I said you were scared.'

The Shloch is right in here with me now.
Right in my face.

What can I do?
What can I do?
You know what I am now?
I'm in tsores.

What can I do.
The Shloch fills my head.
All over me
all round me
all in me.
Grinning
and slobbering

and spiky
and fiery.

What can I do?

I know
I'll think about something else.
But what?
What can I think of to get rid of the Shloch?

What about that thing
Mum calls me?
What is it?
What's the word?

Ah yes:
The Muzhik.
I'll think of the Muzhik instead.
Maybe
the Muzhik will push the Shloch away.

Think Muzhik.

Don't think Shloch.
Think Muzhik.
Don't think Shloch.

I shut my eyes. . .

Come on, Muzhik,
Come on Muzhik!

And yes!

The Muzhik that comes
with a big hug
and a squeeze
and a kiss
hugs and squeezes the Shloch away.

Yessss!

Now what?

It's out of the door

back through the yard:
skid past the chickens,
with their beady red eyes
and fierce beaks,
open the back door
it's getting lighter
through the scullery
Ahhh the smell of warm beigels,

into the light warm living room.
I'm back.

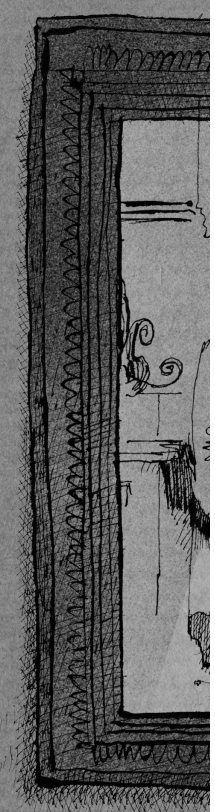
'All right?' says Mum.
'Were you scared?' says my brother.
I say, 'Nope.'
'Not even a little bit?'
'Nope.'
'Not a bissel?' says Zeyde.
'Hmmm mmm – a bissel,' I say.
My brother winks.
Does that mean he gets scared in there too?
Does he?



Does he?

I smile back.

And look!



There's Zeyde's ship-in-a-bottle
sailing down the mantlepiece
all the way to the Heim.
There's the game of fox and geese
waiting on the table,
waiting for Zeyde to say,
'Come on, knakke, I'll play you.'
And Bubbe to say,
'Have another beigel,
you must eat,
you get ill, if you don't eat.'

And there on the wall
is the photo
of the day Mum and Dad
got married.


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