





For Theron,  
Merciful hunter and my grandson  
WW

To the students, teachers, parents, and administrators of  
Strickland Christian School, Austin, Texas  
DT

*I am My Grandpa's Enkelin*

2007 First Printing

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Illustrations copyright 2007 by Donald Tate

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## *Spring*

When I was a little girl  
My grandpa plowed behind two horses.  
He called the black horse Prince:  
“Get up, Prince!” he’d say. “Get up—”  
And the earth was turned by the plow blade, black.  
Whenever he saw me running across the field,  
Old honey buckets hanging from my hands,  
Grandpa said to the dappled horse,  
“Whoa, Silver, whoa!”  
Here comes that pretty Enkelin with my lunch.”

In one bucket, bread and sausages;  
In the other, grandpa’s coffee, hot and black—  
And a little sip for me.

Sometimes when he finished eating  
Grandpa would stretch out  
In the shade of a maple tree,  
Then stick a toothpick in his mouth,  
And point it at the sky,  
And tell me tales of chickens and snails  
And foxes who crept through the night.



After lunch,  
When he began to plow again,  
The reins across his shoulders,  
And I turned to carry the buckets home,  
The day was so quiet, so quiet the day,  
That I could hear  
The horses snort,  
And the drag of the plow,  
And grandpa singing in German:  
"Du, du, liegst mir im Herzen—"  
Nodding and calling,  
"Mein Enkelin is going away."

Before supper it was my job  
To lead the big horses down to the pond  
To let them drink the water  
Where geese and the ducks  
Taught their hatchlings how to swim.  
But the closer the horses came to water,  
The harder they blew and the faster they trotted,  
And I, so short between their shoulders,  
Hurried, hurried to keep up:  
Watch out!  
Watch out for hooves as big as my head!  
Then stop! Stop!  
Before they stop and I fly into the pond!

On Saturday nights we all ate the popcorn  
Grandpa had planted and picked  
And grandma had shucked and shelled.  
We played cards in the parlor—  
Then prayed our prayers while the old dog barked  
And one cow lowed  
And a dreaming chicken clucked her fears  
And the fox crept to the coop,  
Making no sound at all.



## *Summer*

When I was a little girl  
And grandpa's corn grew west of the house  
("Knee-high by the Fourth of July,"  
And then it tassled taller than I!),

Grandmama kept a criss-cross garden  
In the yard to the east.  
Peas were the first to ripen.  
We popped them from their pods  
And dropped them, bump and tumble,  
in the pot.

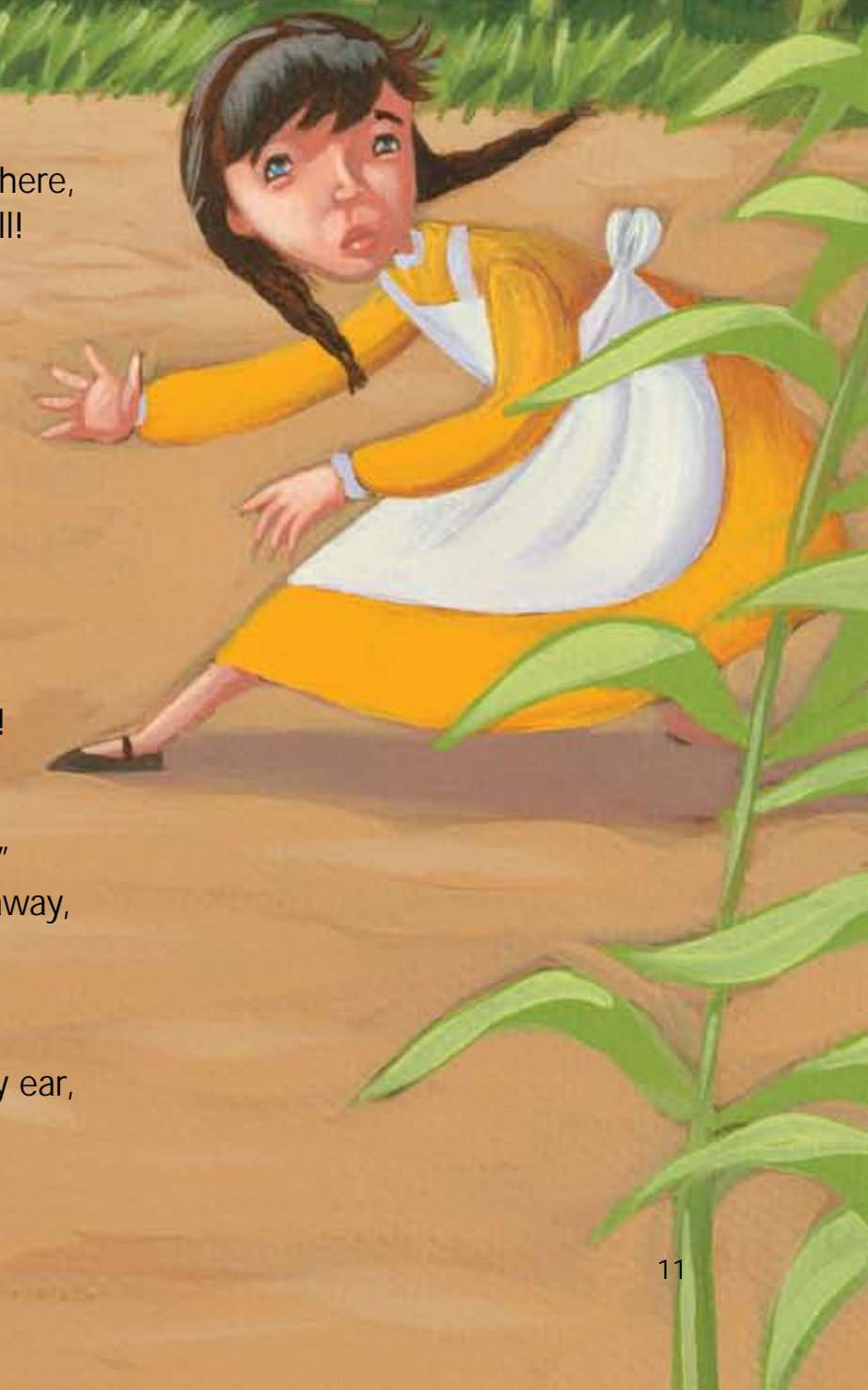
Radishes, lettuces, spinach, and kale,  
Pole beans, peonies, cucumbers, dill,  
Roses, petunias, snapdragons, dahlias,  
Tomatoes and berries both red and black—  
The vegetables we cooked and canned,  
The fruits we turned into jellies and jams,  
And the house was filled with grandma's flowers,  
Sunlight on the stormiest summer's day.

My jobs:  
I dropped slops in the pigpen.  
I scattered feed for the chickens.  
I gathered their eggs,  
still warm to my hands—  
But the worst, let me tell you:  
The worst job on grandpa's farm  
Was cleaning out the chicken coop  
Of chicken poop!



One August day,  
Hot and humid and long and humdrum,  
I sneaked between the cornrows with a book to read.  
But soon, in the buzzing heat, I fell asleep.  
I dreamed that the foxes were licking my face  
With tongues as sharp as needles.  
I dreamed the birds were fluttering above me,  
Whispering, *The girl is lost! The girl is lost!*  
*And who can find her now?*  
Suddenly I woke up.  
No, it wasn't foxes' tongues;  
It was the long leaves of the cornstalks!  
No, it wasn't whispering birds,  
But a breeze in the leaves around me.  
All around me!  
Which way was out?  
I got up and ran down one row.  
I cut through the stalks  
And ran down another;  
But I couldn't find the way out anywhere!  
"Grandpa!" I yelled.  
"Grandpa!" I wailed:  
"This little girl is lost, and who can find me now?"  
Far, far away I heard a voice call:  
"Enkelin!"

But it was so far away  
That it seemed to come from everywhere,  
Everywhere, anywhere, nowhere at all!  
"Enkelin!"  
It was my grandpa.  
I heard his voice say, "Do not run!  
Do not move.  
The field is too huge!  
But sing the song with me  
And shake a cornstalk to the beat,  
And I will hear you where you are."  
Grandpa started the song,  
And I shouted as loud as I could:  
"DU! DU! LIEGST MIR IM HERZEN!  
DU! DU LIEGST MIR IM SINN!"  
Grandpa sang another line:  
"Du, du machst mir viel schmerzen—"  
By then his voice was just two rows away,  
So I started to cry,  
And he crashed through the tall corn  
And picked me up  
And carried me, and whispered in my ear,  
"Stille, stille."

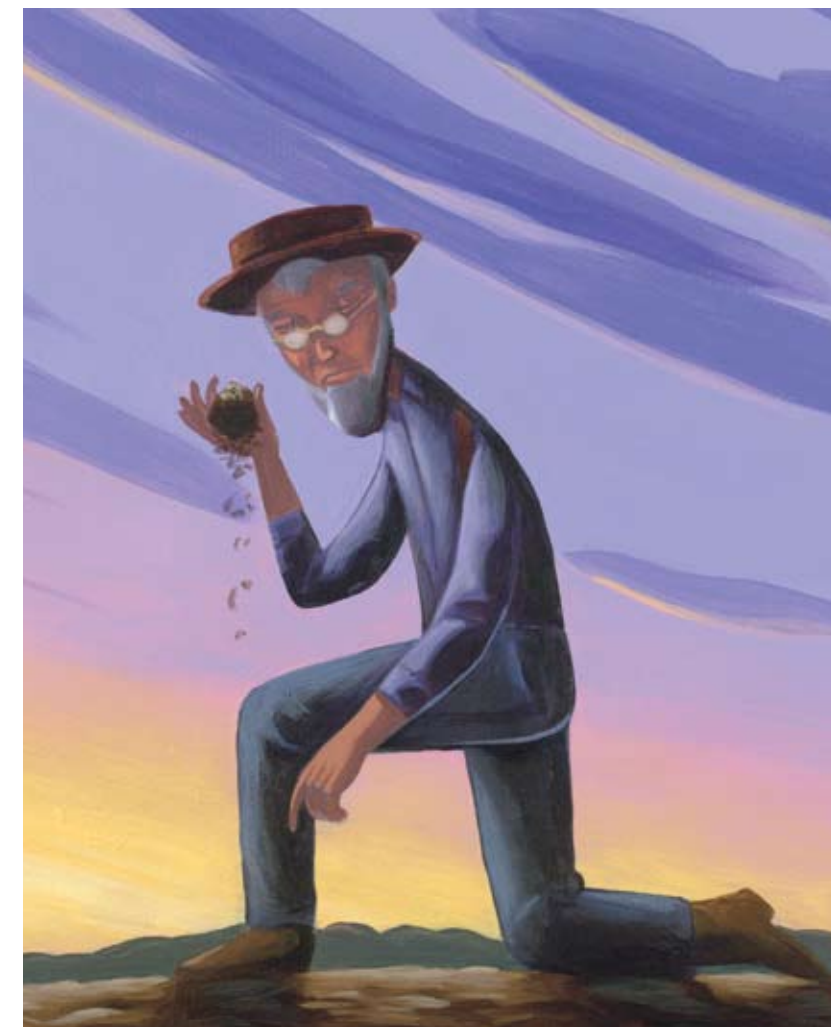


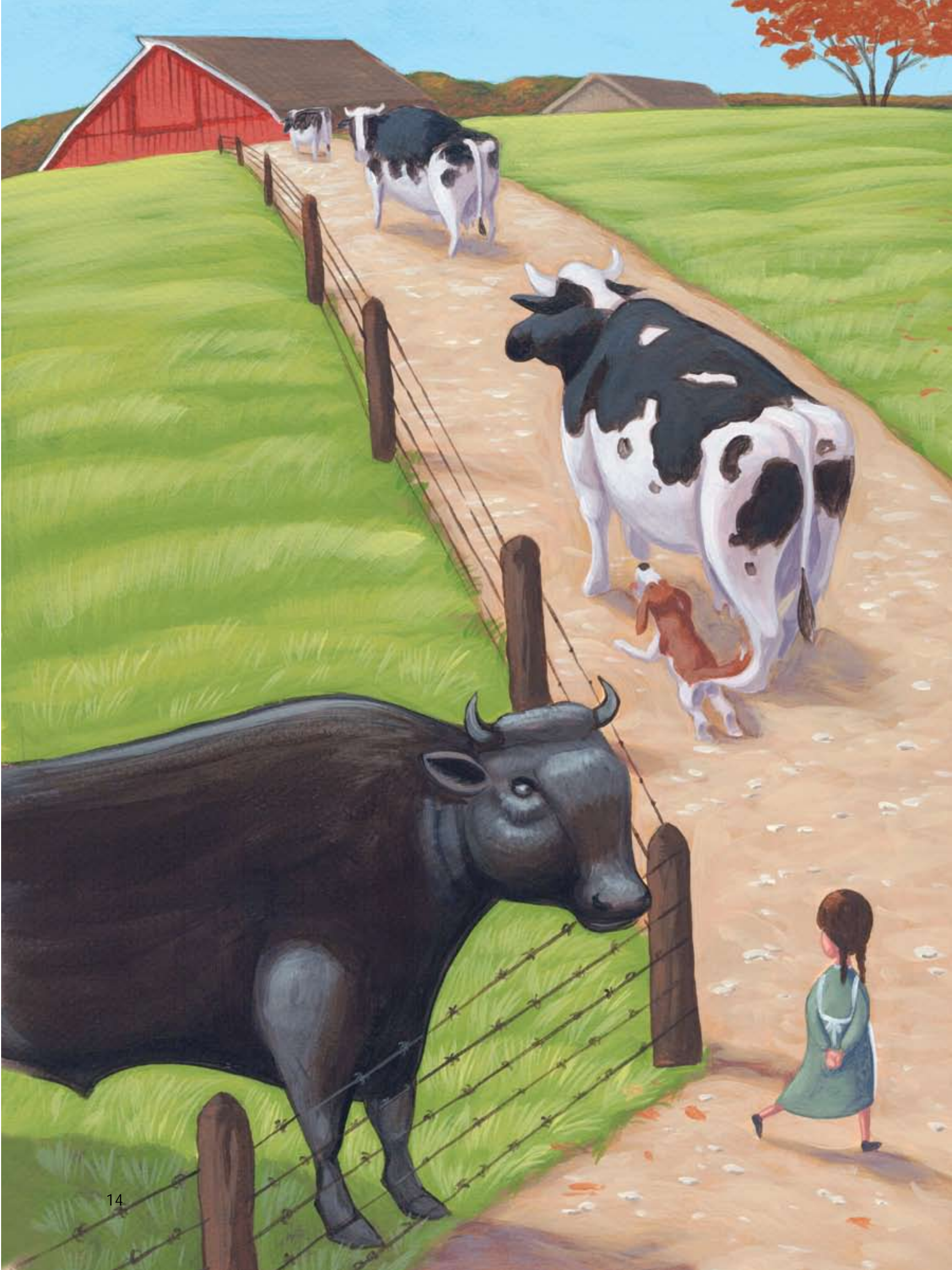


That night,  
Even before we finished our supper  
Of a fine fat duck,  
Roasted to a crunchy brown,  
Grandpa bowed his head and prayed:  
“Lord, I will not always be nearby  
To find mein Enkelin when she is lost.  
Stay with her.  
Be to her the hen  
That gathers her chicks to her bosom at night.”  
Then he sighed.

After supper he popped a toothpick into his mouth,  
And strolled outside to stand in the mown alfalfa field.  
I watched my grandpa,  
Standing black against the starry sky.  
A bent-backed man, a mighty shadow,  
That toothpick sticking out  
Like a tiny sword of glory  
And protection.

And sometimes before the planting  
I would see this too:  
That’s when grandpa stood dark in the twilight,  
He would kneel down  
And gather soil in his hand  
And hold it to his nose  
To judge if the earth was ready for seed.  
My grandpa knew the earth right well,  
And the night,  
And the darkness—  
And me, too.





## *Autumn*

When I was a little girl,  
The cows walked narrow paths  
From the barnyard to the harvested fields  
Where grandpa let them graze  
On fallen ears and grain.

Mornings, they walked out on their own.  
Evenings, I went with the dog to drive them home again;  
Not very hard work.  
Their milk bags were full.  
They wanted to come.

But when we passed the yard  
Where grandpa kept the bull,  
I went by at a fast skip.  
That bull would charge at people.  
Once I saw my uncle Hans take off  
And sail right over the barbed-wire fence,  
The bull's horns right behind him!

When October came  
And the wind tore leaves from the trees,  
We gathered potatoes and squashes,  
Pears and nuts and gourds and pumpkins,  
Apples for cider, apples for sauce,  
Apples whole to eat in winter;  
We gathered them in bushels and bags  
And stored them in the root-cellar,  
All rich with smells  
Sweet and tingling and full of earth,  
And a cool stroke to the skin.

We kept a lantern in the root-cellar,  
Ever full of kerosene,  
Even in the spring and summer,  
Because this is where we hid  
When the sky turned yellow-green  
And the wind dead-still  
And the dog's hair rose all down his spine—  
Signs that a tornado might drop down from heaven  
And sweep the house away.

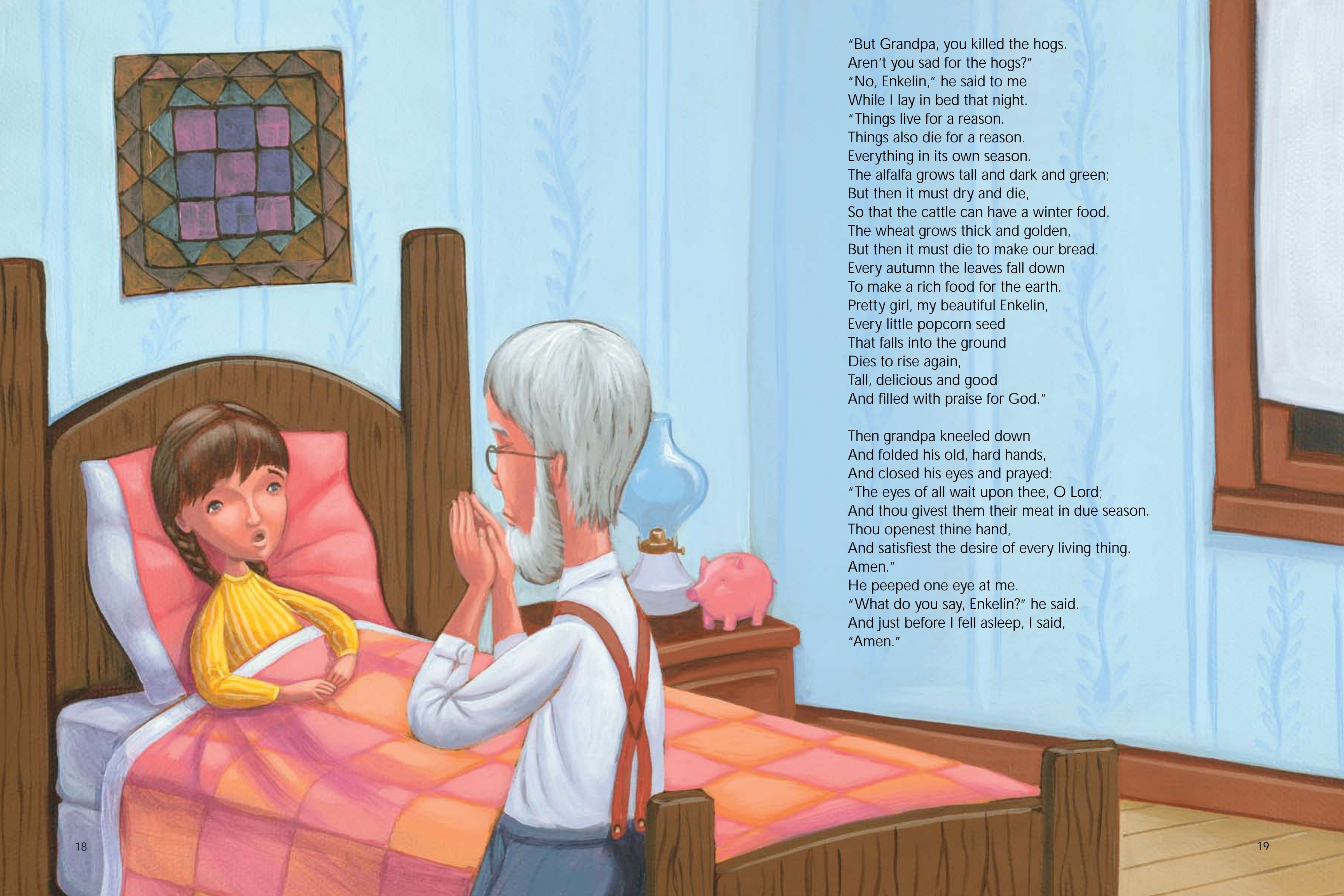


During one of the coldest days in November  
Neighbors came with food  
And boards for trestle tables  
And enormous iron pots  
And wooden spoons as long as my leg  
For rendering the fat of the hogs  
That grandpa was butchering that day.  
One perfect knock in the head  
And the hog was dead.

Two strong men dipped the body  
In a barrel of boiling water  
To make the bristles soft enough  
To scrape them from the skin.  
Oh, we worked hard the daylong,  
Stringing the hogs up by their hind hooves  
In the doorway of a shed,  
cleaning the guts out,  
Saving the good parts,  
Intestines to pack sausages,  
The heart, the kidneys and liver  
(Don't you just love the kidneys and liver?).

We cooled lard for frying and baking,  
Roasted cracklings of the flesh,  
Ground meat for stuffing sausages,  
Cut hams and chops  
And fatback for bacon.  
We hung these cuts in our little smokehouse  
Which soon was cloudy with hickory smoke  
To preserve our meat,  
To make it tasty and safe  
For eating in the winter—  
All these good things  
we shared with our neighbors.

Afterward everyone  
Ate outside at one long, long trestle table,  
Chicken and beans and potato salad  
And cakes and pies  
and laughter and happiness.  
And there at the head of the table  
My grandpa grinned  
And flipped a toothpick round his mouth.  
These were the people we saw in church  
On Sunday mornings,  
The day we did no work at all  
(Except to milk the cows).



"But Grandpa, you killed the hogs.  
Aren't you sad for the hogs?"  
"No, Enkelin," he said to me  
While I lay in bed that night.  
"Things live for a reason.  
Things also die for a reason.  
Everything in its own season.  
The alfalfa grows tall and dark and green;  
But then it must dry and die,  
So that the cattle can have a winter food.  
The wheat grows thick and golden,  
But then it must die to make our bread.  
Every autumn the leaves fall down  
To make a rich food for the earth.  
Pretty girl, my beautiful Enkelin,  
Every little popcorn seed  
That falls into the ground  
Dies to rise again,  
Tall, delicious and good  
And filled with praise for God."

Then grandpa knelt down  
And folded his old, hard hands,  
And closed his eyes and prayed:  
"The eyes of all wait upon thee, O Lord;  
And thou givest them their meat in due season.  
Thou openest thine hand,  
And satisfiest the desire of every living thing.  
Amen."  
He peeped one eye at me.  
"What do you say, Enkelin?" he said.  
And just before I fell asleep, I said,  
"Amen."

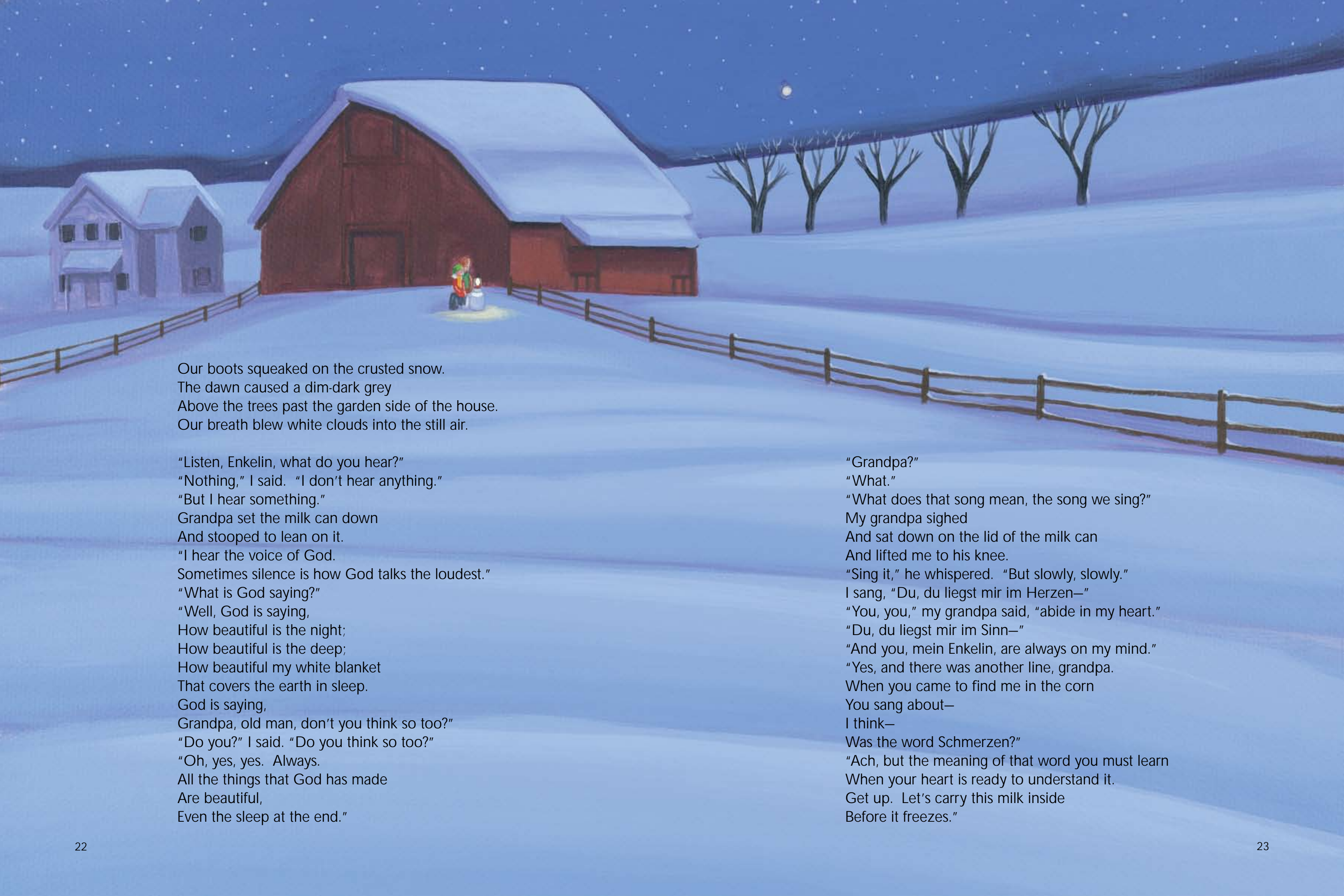


## *Winter*

When I was a little girl,  
There was no bathroom in grandpa's farmhouse.  
Even on the coldest days  
We went to sit in the two-hole outhouse  
On the far side of the kitchen yard, freezing our behinders.

Neither did the house have a furnace.  
Grandpa kept a coal stove in the dining room  
And grandma used a wood stove in the kitchen.  
She lit her fires with corncobs  
And with fire heated water in a tank attached to the stove  
And baked her cakes with fire.

Early, early in the mornings  
When I heard grandpa lighting the coal stove below,  
I woke with frost on the blanket beneath my nose.  
I dressed under the covers.  
Then grandpa and I went outside together  
Into the zero cold, into the perfect wintry darkness.  
Time to milk the cows.  
The barn was warmed by the cows inside.  
Grandpa had a one-legged stool  
Which he sat on when he reached to wash  
The cow's milk-bag and then her teats.  
Next he squeezed those teats between his fingers, swiftly,  
Laying his cheek against her warm flank,  
Squirting needle-shots of milk  
Into the pail between his ankles.  
Sometimes he aimed a squirt at the barn cats  
Who caught the mice and rats  
And loved milk straight from the cow.  
When his pails grew full, I carried them away.  
I poured the foaming milk into large cans,  
Cans too big for me to carry.  
So grandpa hefted them  
And heaved them outside toward the milk house,  
Where there was a flow-well, even in the winter.



Our boots squeaked on the crusted snow.  
The dawn caused a dim-dark grey  
Above the trees past the garden side of the house.  
Our breath blew white clouds into the still air.

"Listen, Enkelin, what do you hear?"  
"Nothing," I said. "I don't hear anything."  
"But I hear something."  
Grandpa set the milk can down  
And stooped to lean on it.  
"I hear the voice of God.  
Sometimes silence is how God talks the loudest."  
"What is God saying?"  
"Well, God is saying,  
How beautiful is the night;  
How beautiful is the deep;  
How beautiful my white blanket  
That covers the earth in sleep.  
God is saying,  
Grandpa, old man, don't you think so too?"  
"Do you?" I said. "Do you think so too?"  
"Oh, yes, yes. Always.  
All the things that God has made  
Are beautiful,  
Even the sleep at the end."

"Grandpa?"  
"What."  
"What does that song mean, the song we sing?"  
My grandpa sighed  
And sat down on the lid of the milk can  
And lifted me to his knee.  
"Sing it," he whispered. "But slowly, slowly."  
I sang, "Du, du liegst mir im Herzen—"  
"You, you," my grandpa said, "abide in my heart."  
"Du, du liegst mir im Sinn—"  
"And you, mein Enkelin, are always on my mind."  
"Yes, and there was another line, grandpa.  
When you came to find me in the corn  
You sang about—  
I think—  
Was the word Schmerzen?"  
"Ach, but the meaning of that word you must learn  
When your heart is ready to understand it.  
Get up. Let's carry this milk inside  
Before it freezes."



### *The Last Spring*

When I was still a little girl—  
(Big in my body, going to college  
Two hundred miles away from the farm,  
But still just a little girl inside my heart)—  
I lost my grandpa in the spring.

He had not finished planting the corn seeds.  
Grandmama said he lay down under the maple tree  
Where once he told me tales.  
She brought his lunch in honey buckets.  
He saw her arrive beside him.  
He smiled.  
He breathed three quick breaths,  
And then he died.

“Please come,” my grandmama said on the telephone.  
“You must be here for his funeral.”

I was so sad.  
My baby-heart hurt  
As if it were a burning stove  
Or a little fox chewing inside my chest.

I took a bus from school back to the farm.  
Grandpa, I thought, you were not supposed to die.  
You were supposed to be near me always,  
To find your Enkelin whenever she got lost.  
But I felt lost right then,  
Sitting on the bus,  
Looking out the window  
At all the farmers in their fields,  
On tractors,  
Planting corn seeds in the ground.

Uncle Hans, who had grey hair now,  
Drove me from the bus station  
Into the barnyard.  
Grandmama came on the porch to meet me;  
And I, when I felt her arms around me,  
I started to cry.  
“Stille, stille,” my little old grandmama  
Whispered in my ears.  
I looked around while grandmama held me.

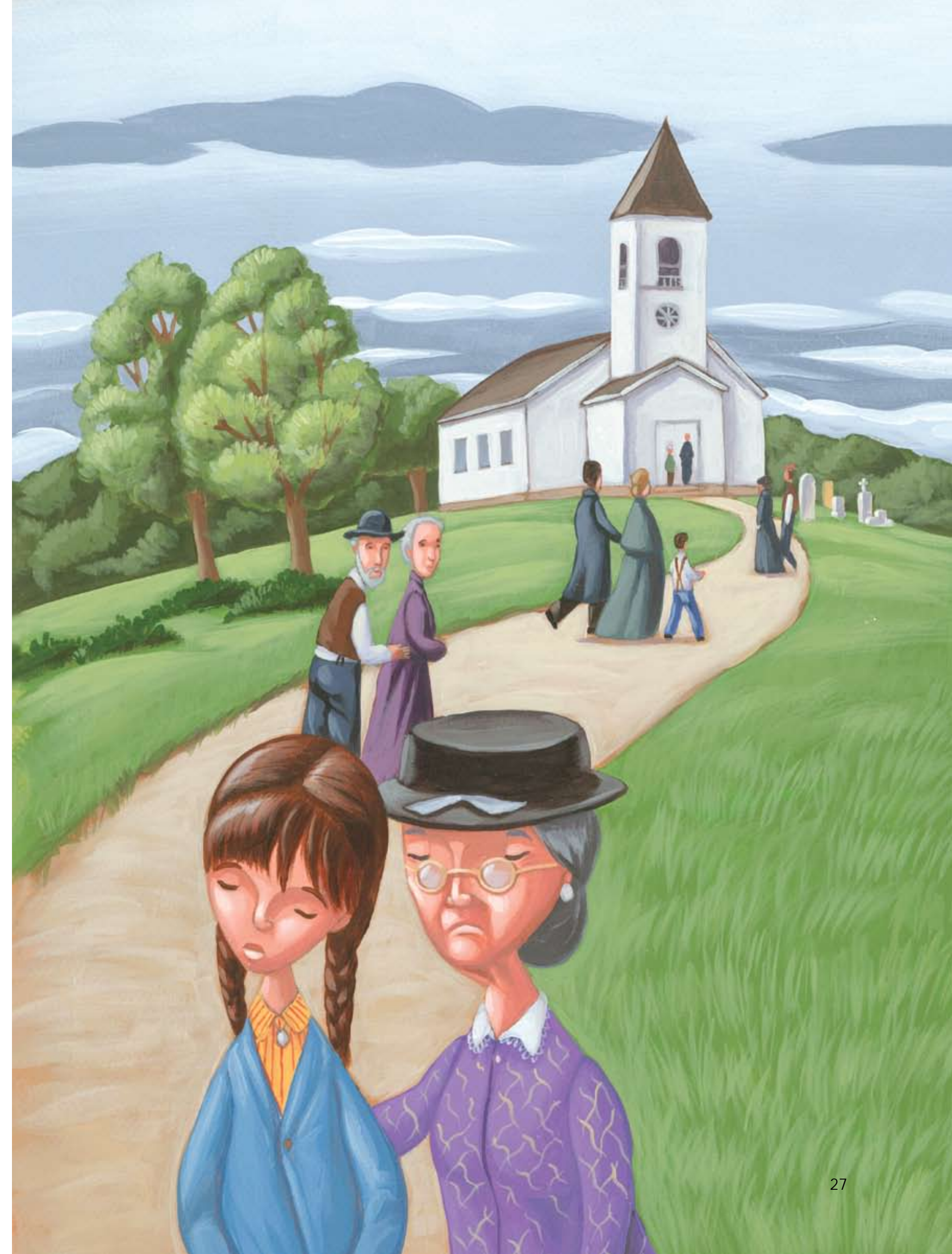
While I was crying, I looked around,  
My eyesight blurry with the water.  
It seemed to me that all the animals were standing still.  
The chickens were sad. The cows were sad.  
The ducks and ducklings, the geese and the goslings  
Waddled close and bent their necks.  
The old dog hung his head with sorrow.  
But Prince and Silver, where were they?  
Grandmama said, "They didn't last, child.  
They must have known that something was coming to pass.  
Honey, grandpa's plow horses lay down in the winter  
And let the snowfall cover them."

Grandmama stood back and took my hands.  
"Come, child," she said.  
"Let's go say goodbye to your grandpa  
Where he lies in the funeral home."

And there, crowded inside, were all the people  
Who had shared the farmwork with grandpa,  
All who helped when he butchered the hogs,  
All who sat in church around us every Sunday,  
Crowded in a bright room  
With my grandpa at the end of it,  
Lying in a casket.

Even among these people I still felt lost,  
As if they were rows and rows of murmuring cornstalks.

*Du, du*, I heard in my heart:  
*Liegt mir im Herzen.*  
*Du, du liegst mir im Sinn—*  
And suddenly I remembered the whole next line,  
As if grandpa had just sung it in my soul:  
*Du, du machst mir viel schmerzen—*  
And I knew his language too,  
And I understood what these words meant:  
"You, you cause me such pain!"  
Yes, grandpa—you cause me pain  
As I walk through this crowd  
To look at your last, lonely lying place.





No,  
But it was grandpa who sang that line,  
About me.  
Had I caused him pain in his heart?  
Could it be the sweet pain of love  
That his Enkelin had caused him?

Then,  
Standing by the casket,  
Finally,  
I looked down.  
I looked at the face of my grandpa,  
And what I saw there tickled me.

I put my hand to my mouth.  
Is it okay to laugh in a funeral home?  
I couldn't help it.  
I giggled.  
I started to laugh.  
All of grandpa's friends—  
They, too, were tittering and giggling.  
So then I let myself laugh hard and happily,  
Even till my sides ached from the laughing—

Because there,  
Sticking out of the corner of his mouth,  
Was that brave toothpick—  
"Grandma!" I cried. "Did you—?"  
She nodded.  
And look:  
My grandpa was grinning!

## *The First Spring of All*

I am a big girl now.

And now I know  
That when I was still a little girl,  
I had gotten it all wrong.

In fact grandpa had finished planting  
All his seeds!  
Because,  
In that spring,  
He had planted  
His last and his best seed of all.  
He had stood in the spring field before plowing,  
In the twilight,  
A brave black shadow  
Against the starlight;  
He had held the soil up to his nose  
To judge whether it was ready  
For one tough seed.

It was ready.  
The earth was ready for this,  
His most important planting.  
It was himself.  
He was the seed.

And one day, years from now,  
But in a day exactly right,  
Grandpa will rise  
Higher than the cornstalks,  
Higher than the haystack,  
Higher than the farmhouse  
And the barn  
And the smoke that goes up from our little  
smokehouse.  
Grandpa will rise with his little sword of glory,  
Exactly like the man of heaven.

Even now, while waiting,  
Grandpa peeps one eye at me,  
His grown-up girl.  
"What do you say, Enkelin?" grandpa whispers.  
And I know exactly what to say.  
I say, "Amen."  
And I say it again:  
"Amen."



