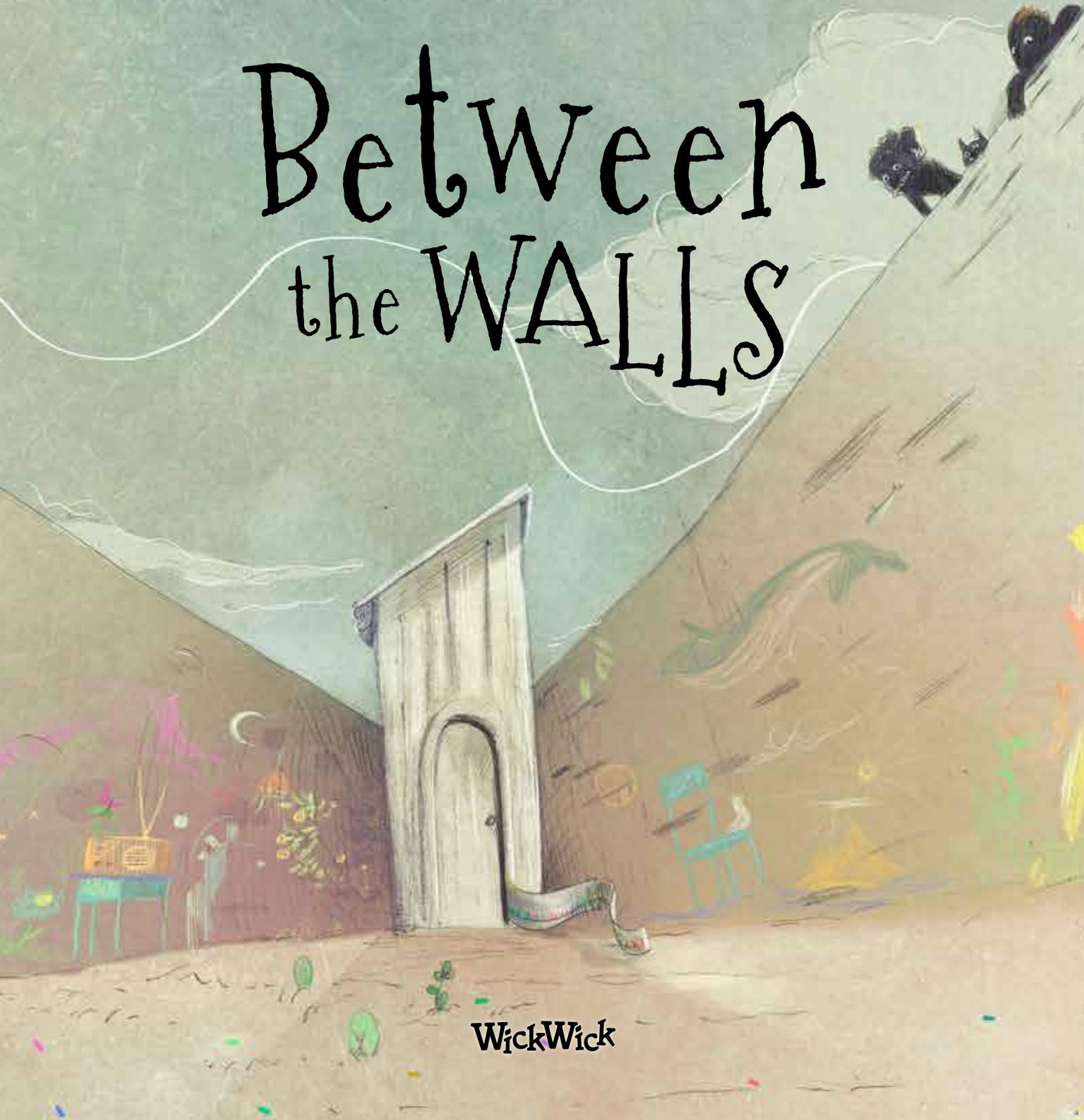


ENGLISH EDITION

Tuula Pere  
Andrea Alemanno

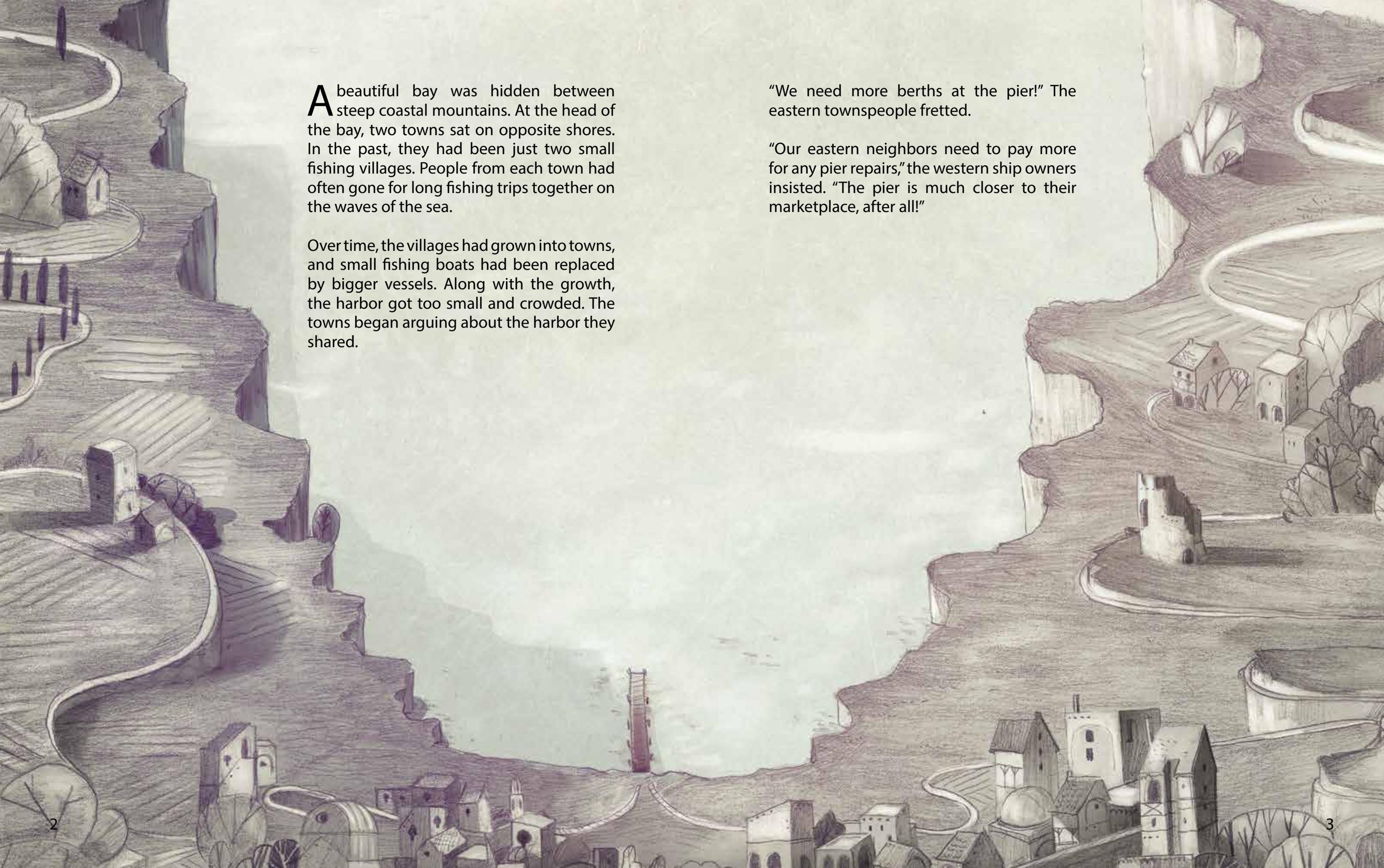
# Between the WALLS



WickWick

Between the WALLS





**A** beautiful bay was hidden between steep coastal mountains. At the head of the bay, two towns sat on opposite shores. In the past, they had been just two small fishing villages. People from each town had often gone for long fishing trips together on the waves of the sea.

Over time, the villages had grown into towns, and small fishing boats had been replaced by bigger vessels. Along with the growth, the harbor got too small and crowded. The towns began arguing about the harbor they shared.

"We need more berths at the pier!" The eastern townspeople fretted.

"Our eastern neighbors need to pay more for any pier repairs," the western ship owners insisted. "The pier is much closer to their marketplace, after all!"



The dispute over the shared harbor grew more tense. People who used to be friends turned into enemies. Fishnets and baits had their share of strange mishaps. Fishing boats clashed against each other when docking.

Ships and boats from each side raced seaward, each trying to reach the best fishing spots before their competitors.



One foggy evening, there was a particularly heated dispute between fishermen. A ship returning to the harbor docked in a wrong berth, sinking a boat that belonged to a fisherman from the other town.

"You did it on purpose!" the furious fisherman yelled from the pier. "Thank goodness my crew and I got off the boat in time!"

"It was an accident!" The captain of the ship tried to defend himself. "It's this wicked fog! I couldn't see your boat!"

After this, the tension only grew. Before long, both towns were ready to break off all relations with their neighbors.

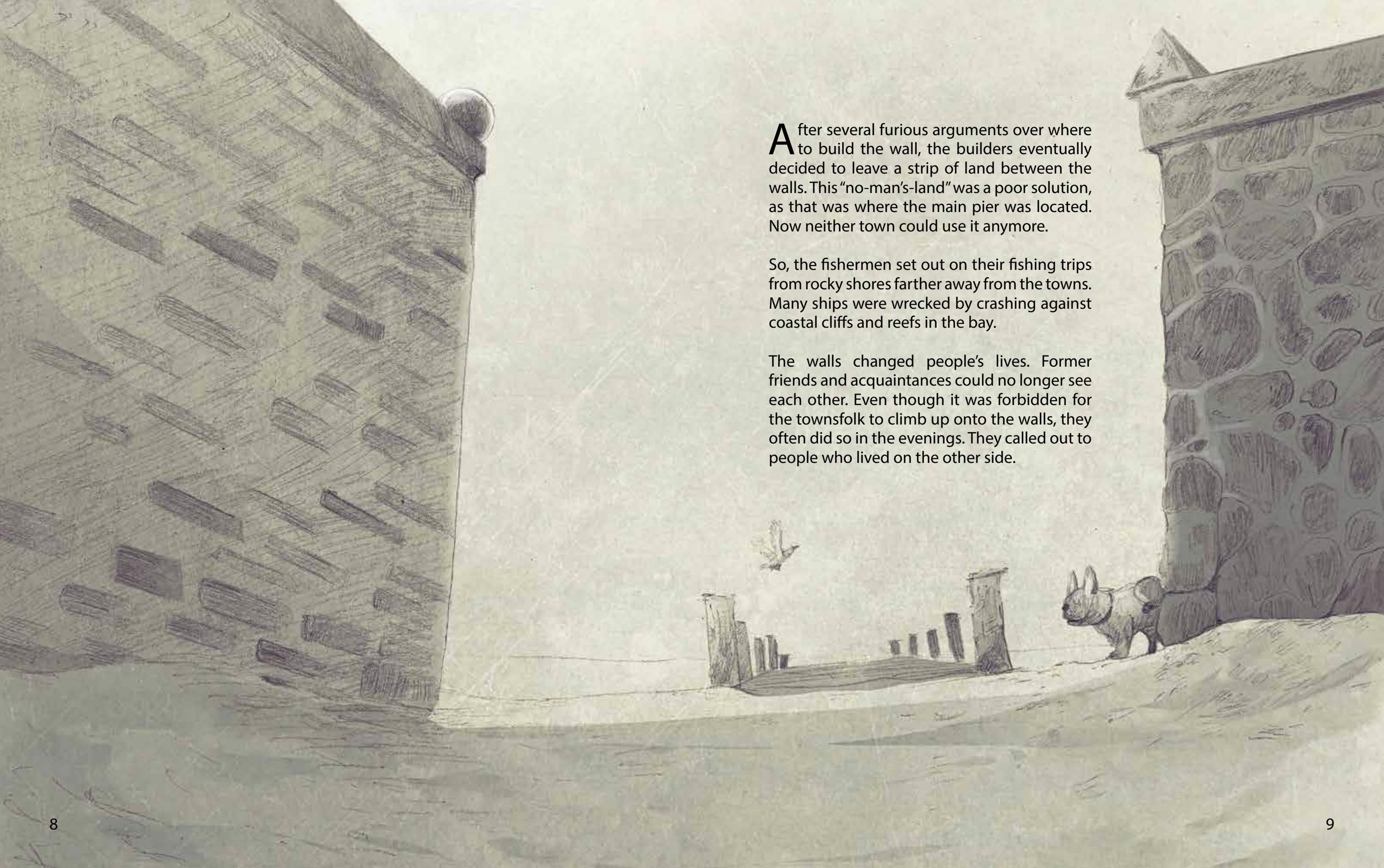
"We will build a wall between our towns," the mayor of the western town announced to other mayor.



"So will we!" the mayor of the eastern side exclaimed. "And our wall is going to be thicker and higher than your wall!"

Some of the townspeople didn't see any sense whatsoever in this wall-building plan. But they had no choice but to abide by their mayors' decisions. Everyone had to participate in the work.





After several furious arguments over where to build the wall, the builders eventually decided to leave a strip of land between the walls. This “no-man’s-land” was a poor solution, as that was where the main pier was located. Now neither town could use it anymore.

So, the fishermen set out on their fishing trips from rocky shores farther away from the towns. Many ships were wrecked by crashing against coastal cliffs and reefs in the bay.

The walls changed people’s lives. Former friends and acquaintances could no longer see each other. Even though it was forbidden for the townsfolk to climb up onto the walls, they often did so in the evenings. They called out to people who lived on the other side.

Life behind the walls made people suspicious. The neighboring towns were no longer in touch with one another. Both mayors sent angry letters back and forth. They complained about the other side's loud carnivals, its booming fireworks, and its stoves that gave off too much smoke.

It was the children who came up with something to do together, regardless of the barriers. They made paper planes and flew them over the walls, passing greetings to their playmates on the other side. On windy days, flocks of kites rose into the air from both sides. The colorful kites swirled together above the sulking towns.

"If only we could visit our friends in the east one day! We'd surely have a great time," the children on the western coast said.

Meanwhile the children on the eastern coast studied their wall closely. "Maybe we can make a secret gate," they thought. They carefully tested the stones along the thick wall. But none of them would budge.



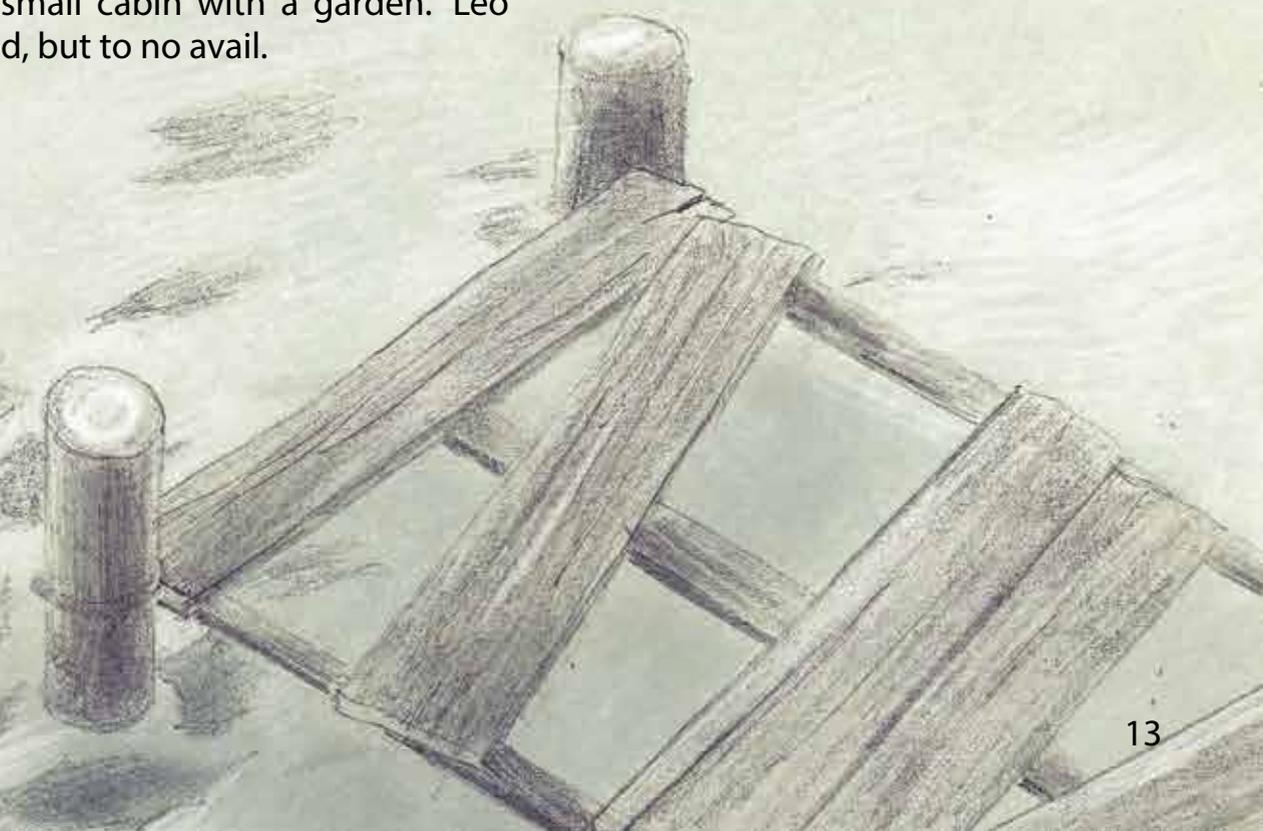
It was quiet in the neglected harbor. The fishing vessels had gone elsewhere. Only seagulls remained, sitting idly around the decaying pier.

On one of these quiet mornings, a little sailing boat approached the bay on a gentle wind. It was steered by a boy called Leo, who had nothing but a canvas bag with him. He wanted to build a cabin of his own and settle on the shore of the beautiful bay. As soon as he had docked, he headed determinedly toward the western town gate.

Leo knocked and knocked for a long time before he was let inside the town wall.

"We can't give you permission to stay here. We don't even know who you are. You might as well be a spy from the neighboring town!" the mayor said suspiciously.

"All I want is a berth for my sailing boat and a small cabin with a garden." Leo pleaded, but to no avail.



Disappointed, Leo walked to the other town's gate. The guard let him in and showed the way to the town hall. His reception was not one bit friendlier here.

"Not for the world! You can't just walk in here!" the mayor of the eastern town lashed out at his visitor.

"But where on earth will I live if I'm not welcome on either side?" Leo wondered.

The mayor's little daughter had followed the conversation, standing next to her father. She could not understand why nobody wanted to help the kind-looking little boy.

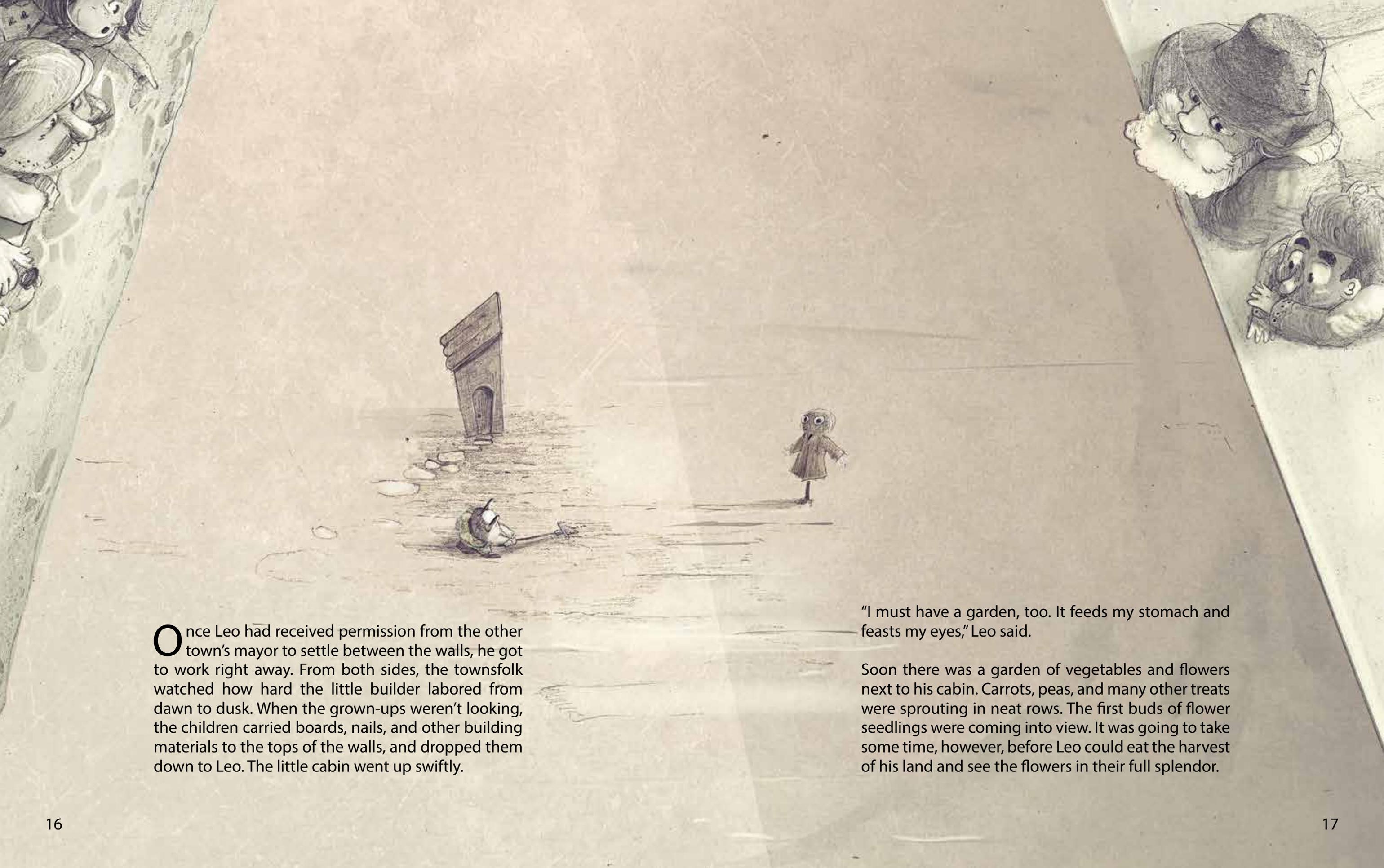
"There is a no-man's-land between the walls," she said. "Couldn't Leo build his home there? I'm sure there's plenty of room for one little cabin and even a garden."

"That sounds wonderful," Leo said, delighted. "Would you please consider it, if the other mayor says yes too?"

"Oh, all right, then. But you'd better remember to stay there, and not come to our town to bother us," the mayor snapped.

The children smiled at each other.





Once Leo had received permission from the other town's mayor to settle between the walls, he got to work right away. From both sides, the townsfolk watched how hard the little builder labored from dawn to dusk. When the grown-ups weren't looking, the children carried boards, nails, and other building materials to the tops of the walls, and dropped them down to Leo. The little cabin went up swiftly.

"I must have a garden, too. It feeds my stomach and feasts my eyes," Leo said.

Soon there was a garden of vegetables and flowers next to his cabin. Carrots, peas, and many other treats were sprouting in neat rows. The first buds of flower seedlings were coming into view. It was going to take some time, however, before Leo could eat the harvest of his land and see the flowers in their full splendor.



Leo sat in his garden and looked at the ugly stone walls on both sides.

“I could surely do something about those gray walls,” the boy thought and opened his bag.

The children sitting on top of the walls watched Leo curiously. What was he doing? They could see an assortment of drawing materials on the stairs of the cabin. There were crayons, paint cans, and brushes.

“How on earth did all those things fit in his bag?” they wondered. “It must be a magic bag!”

Leo could hear the children talking, but he didn’t reply. He only smiled mysteriously, went to get a ladder, and started painting. By dusk, the walls were covered with beautiful decorations—winding chains of flowers, trees, and birds. The strangest thing was that in the darkening night, you could almost hear the birds in the paintings singing.



**W**hen the grown-ups heard about Leo's wondrous wall paintings, they couldn't resist going to the walls to see for themselves. A little bewildered, they came in the evenings to listen to the singing of the magic birds and to admire the paintings. Everybody also admired Leo's pretty little cabin and his flourishing garden, which was becoming richer in colors day by day.

"I must admit, that little wanderer is a very skilled boy," said the mayor of the western town. He, too, had ventured out to his side of the wall.

"I suppose there's no harm to anyone," the mayor on the eastern wall agreed.

Night after night, more and more people showed up. They brought blankets and snacks with them, and called out to their former friends on the other side.