

ENGLISH EDITION

RASPBERRY RED

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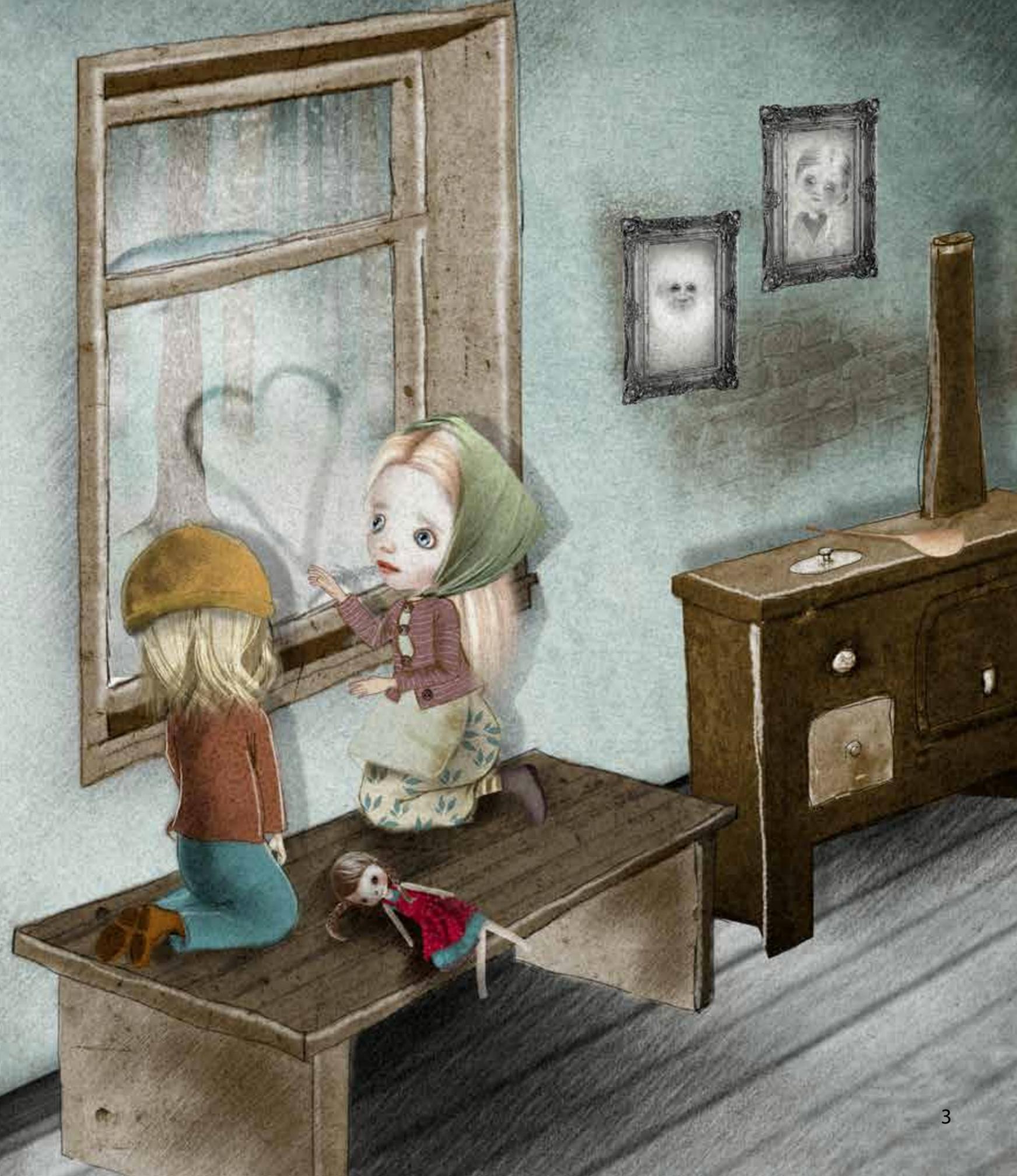


It was a cold winter, the coldest in living memory. The windows of Aino's home were covered with ice flowers. Every now and then, she and her friend Kerttu would climb onto a bench and kneel there, pressing their hands and noses against the window.

Aino had a plan. "I will draw a picture of a heart here, so that Dad can see I've been waiting for him by the window."

The grown-ups seemed worried, and whenever that happened, Aino felt upset, too. She noticed they were listening to the radio news every day. She didn't quite understand what all the talk was about—getting prepared . . . the army . . . negotiations. All she knew was that it couldn't mean anything good.

For Aino, the hardest part of all was that her father was not at home.





Aino often recalled that one strange morning some weeks back. Very early at dawn, Aino had awakened. Her father was leaving for somewhere. Wearing his winter jacket, he bent over to stroke his daughter's hair, telling her to go back to sleep.

"Where are you going?" Aino asked.

"You don't know the place," her father murmured.

"When will you come back?"

"I don't know for sure yet."

"But you will come back, won't you, Papa?" she kept on asking.

Aino's father turned his face towards the window and let out a deep sigh.

"I will come back as soon as I can. After all, this is where I belong—right here with my little Aino."

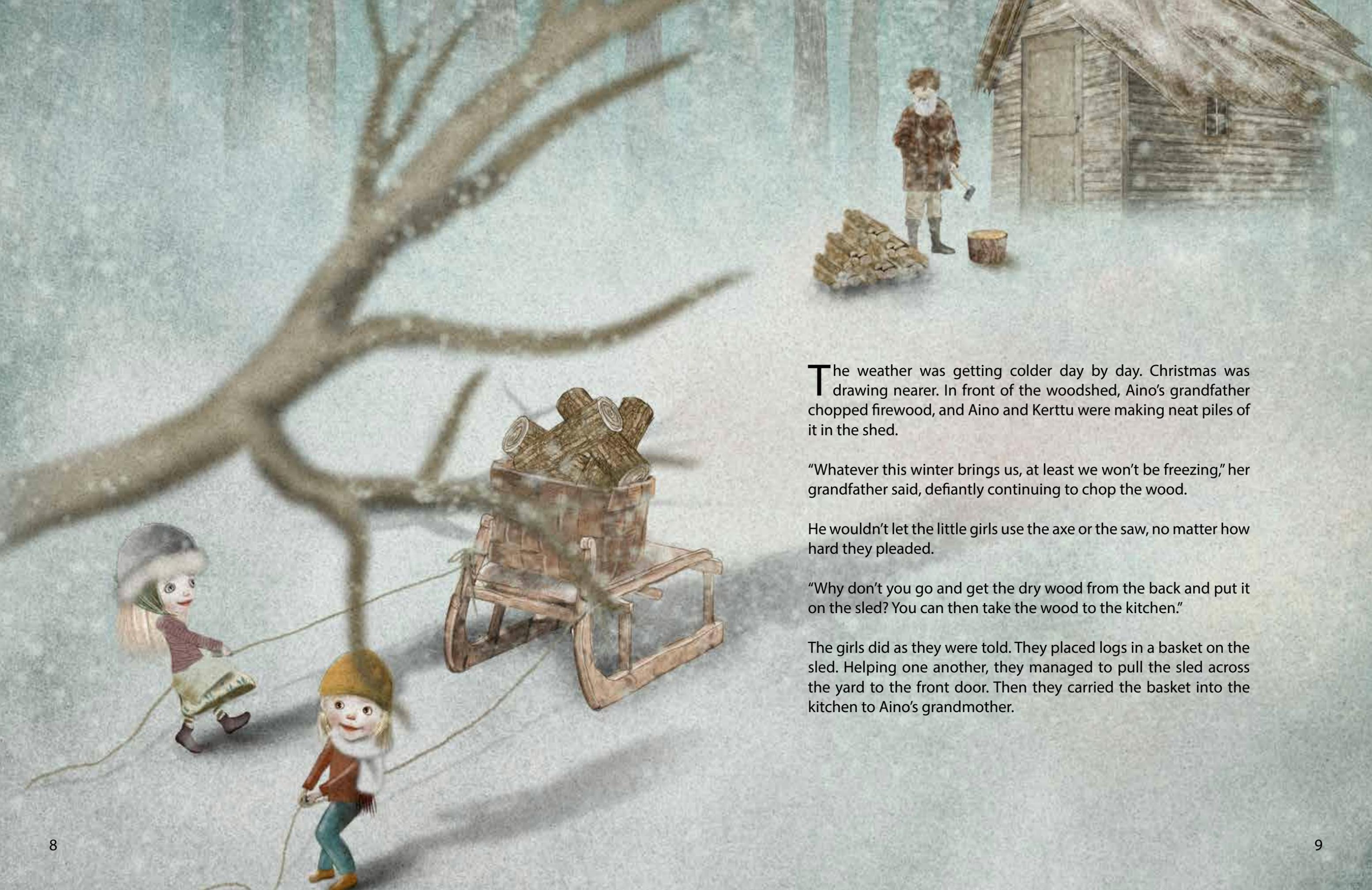


Almost all the other children's fathers had left, too. Mothers and grandparents took care of the everyday chores in the village, and children helped with what they could manage.

Aino had learned many new things. *I have something new to tell Papa in my letter*, she thought excitedly, now that she had learned how to light a fire in the wood stove.

Aino's family ran a village shop, and Aino tried to help her mother the best she could. Even though she was not even in school yet, she knew how to count the day's cash.

In the evenings, Aino arranged all the coins and bills in their own piles to count them. Her mother noted down everything carefully. Mama was a very organized person and always kept the shop in shipshape condition. Aino herself liked to straighten the shelves of food packages and make sure that all the nails of different sizes were in their right boxes.



The weather was getting colder day by day. Christmas was drawing nearer. In front of the woodshed, Aino's grandfather chopped firewood, and Aino and Kerttu were making neat piles of it in the shed.

"Whatever this winter brings us, at least we won't be freezing," her grandfather said, defiantly continuing to chop the wood.

He wouldn't let the little girls use the axe or the saw, no matter how hard they pleaded.

"Why don't you go and get the dry wood from the back and put it on the sled? You can then take the wood to the kitchen."

The girls did as they were told. They placed logs in a basket on the sled. Helping one another, they managed to pull the sled across the yard to the front door. Then they carried the basket into the kitchen to Aino's grandmother.

Christmas Eve was freezing cold. Aino's grandparents had come over to spend the evening with Aino and her mother.

"What's it like for Papa this Christmas somewhere out there?" Aino asked her grandfather.

"Who knows," Grandfather replied with a sigh.

"But at least your father's toes are warm," Aino's grandmother chimed in. "Your mother and I sent him so many pairs of woolen socks that he won't be cold, that's for sure."

After the Christmas meal, Aino climbed on a bench to sit next to her grandmother. To mark the special day, Grandmother was wearing one of her better shawls. Aino pressed her cheek against the coarse woolen cloth.

"I'd like to learn how to knit socks. Will you teach me how to knit the heel?" she pleaded.

"Maybe it's better to start with a scarf," her grandmother suggested.



The new year dawned just as cold as the old year had ended. Children went out to play in the snow while grown-ups kept warning them to stay near the house.

Aino was confused. *But it's just as cold next to the house as it is in the forest!*

From the grown-ups' talk, Aino finally realized they were worried about something far more serious than the frost. The war had come too close. They could all hear it booming behind the snowy forests.

"We need to leave quickly," Aino's mother said one day, after she had a long telephone call in the village shop.

All the villagers would have to leave their homes for safe places.





Aino's grandfather went to spread the word around the village. By the next morning, they would all have to get to the village center and board a train. The villagers packed all night long. Mothers dressed their children and wrapped up little bundles of food to take with them. Cattle were led to the station along the snowy roads, and horse sleighs and trucks were loaded with baggage and personal belongings.

"I'm going to take my rag doll with me," Aino said.

The rag doll was Aino's beloved treasure. Her grandmother had made the doll a beautiful raspberry red apron out of patches left over from Aino's Sunday dress.

Early in the frosty morning, Aino went out to the dark yard with the rag doll under her arm. Her mother was still in the house making some final arrangements. She'd just called out to Aino that it was time for her to get into one of the trucks that had come to pick them up. However, the girl had decided to make one more visit to her playhouse that stood across the yard. There'd still be time. After all, someone should check that everything was all right there, too.

Aino was wrapped up in her thoughts as she bustled about the playhouse. When she finally stopped, she realized something terrible—the very last truck had just left! Horrified, she ran back to the house, but her mother, too, had left and locked the door behind her.

Aino's heart beat fast. *All I can do is run after the trucks and follow the road to the station, she thought.*

She hadn't even made it to the road when she heard strange voices from behind the house. In her felt shoes, she ran as fast and quietly as she could. She ducked behind the playhouse.

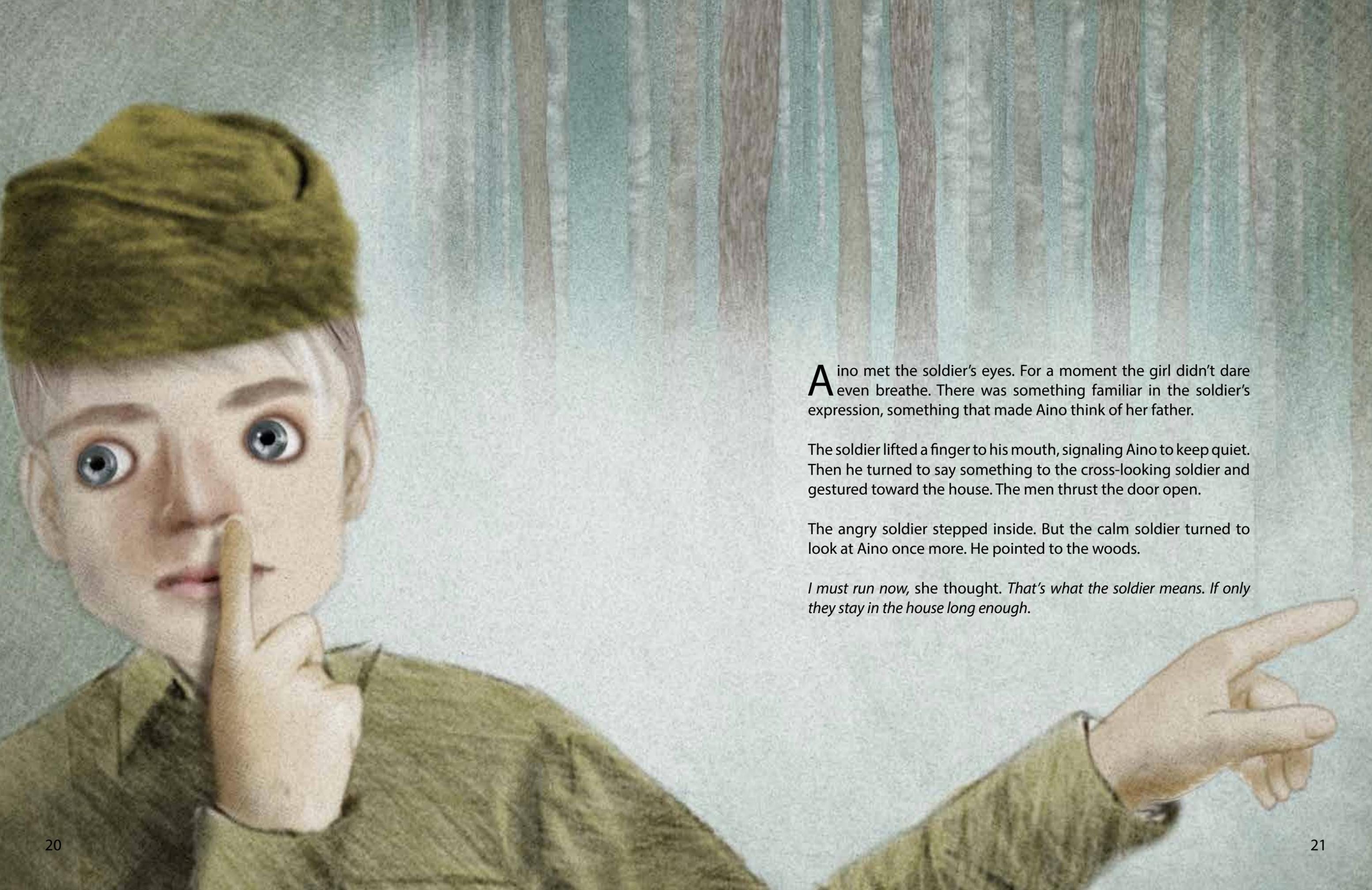


From her hiding place, Aino could see two uniformed strangers with guns. Never in her life had she been as scared as now. The men spoke in a foreign language. One man looked angry and kept turning around nervously, but the other one just stood there peacefully.

To her horror, she noticed that her doll's raspberry red apron had fallen on the ground as she was running. There it was, shining brightly on the white snow.

Just then the calm soldier turned his gaze to the playhouse. He noticed the small footprints in the snow, which led to the side of the playhouse.





Aino met the soldier's eyes. For a moment the girl didn't dare even breathe. There was something familiar in the soldier's expression, something that made Aino think of her father.

The soldier lifted a finger to his mouth, signaling Aino to keep quiet. Then he turned to say something to the cross-looking soldier and gestured toward the house. The men thrust the door open.

The angry soldier stepped inside. But the calm soldier turned to look at Aino once more. He pointed to the woods.

I must run now, she thought. That's what the soldier means. If only they stay in the house long enough.