

LEVELED Book • V

THE HOUSE IN THE DESERT



Written by Rus Buyok • Illustrated by Thomas Boatwright

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www.readinga-z.com

Focus Question

Why does the main character go to the house in the desert? What does she find there?

Words to Know

bamboozled
benign
desolation
enthusiastic
foliage
meander

miscreant
profusely
radiant
rapscallion
sensibilities
vagabond

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Level V Leveled Book
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Correlation

LEVEL V	
Fountas & Pinnell	Q
Reading Recovery	40
DRA	40



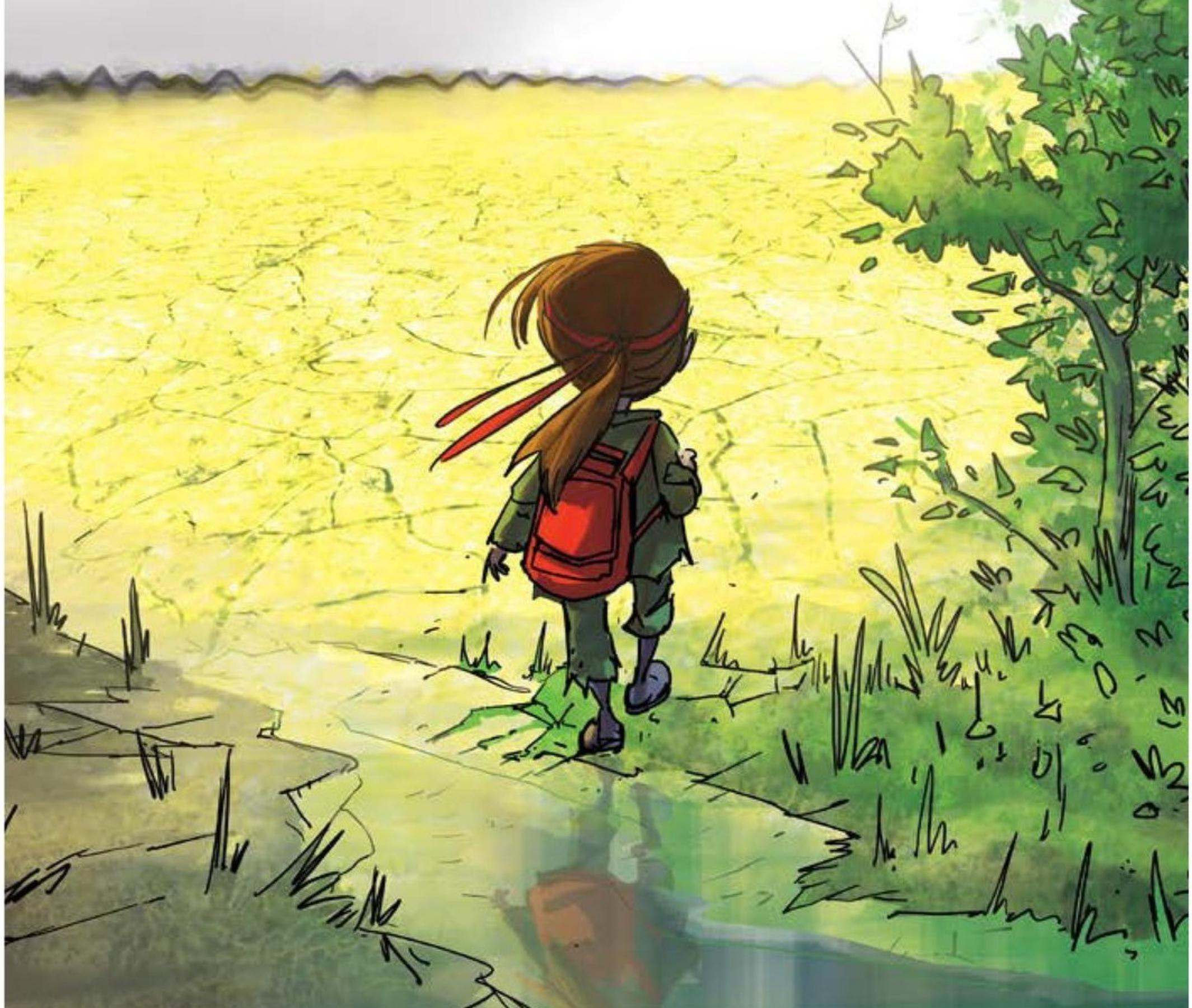
After my encounter with the octopus thing chasing me, I can't bring myself to **meander** through the woods. I can't just stand around, though, so I follow the narrow strip of land between the forest and the cliff's edge. Occasionally, I hear something crashing through the **foliage**, and I hide until it disappears.

Eventually, the forest turns off to my right and is replaced by a vast expanse of scorched earth. I decide to continue following the forest—something about the charred, smoking ground seems more threatening than the looming trees.

I see no indication of Sarah or Jake, though I'm too frightened of attracting attention to yell. I hope they're okay.

As I walk, whenever I'm thirsty, I happen upon a trickling stream of cool, clean water just beyond the forest's edge. I also find blackberry and raspberry bushes whenever I'm hungry. It seems a little convenient, but I'm just grateful not to starve.

After I trudge ahead for some time, the forest veers off to the right again, and an uninviting ocean of dry, cracked dirt stretches before me. In the distance, beyond radiating waves of heat, I see a dark spot. It could be anything, but it seems significant enough to be worth exploring.



It's time to alter my approach, so I abandon the forest. I guzzle as much water as I can from a nearby stream and set off. The second I step onto the cracked earth, the Sun seems to increase in size and intensity. The cool breeze I didn't even realize I enjoyed by the forest immediately disappears, replaced by **radiant** heat from all directions. Sweat trickles down my neck and back.



The place reminds me of our family trip to Death Valley. Mom said it had been one of Uncle Jasper's favorite places—before he disappeared. He liked the **desolation**, she explained to me. He felt he could truly be alone with his thoughts in a place like that. I didn't understand then, but as I walk in the incredible heat, I can't help but think.



I met Uncle Jasper only once that I can remember. It was my birthday, and he gave me a small, leather-bound notebook. He was tall with red hair, and seemed like a stranger. Mom forced me to thank him and give him a hug. I don't know what happened to that book.

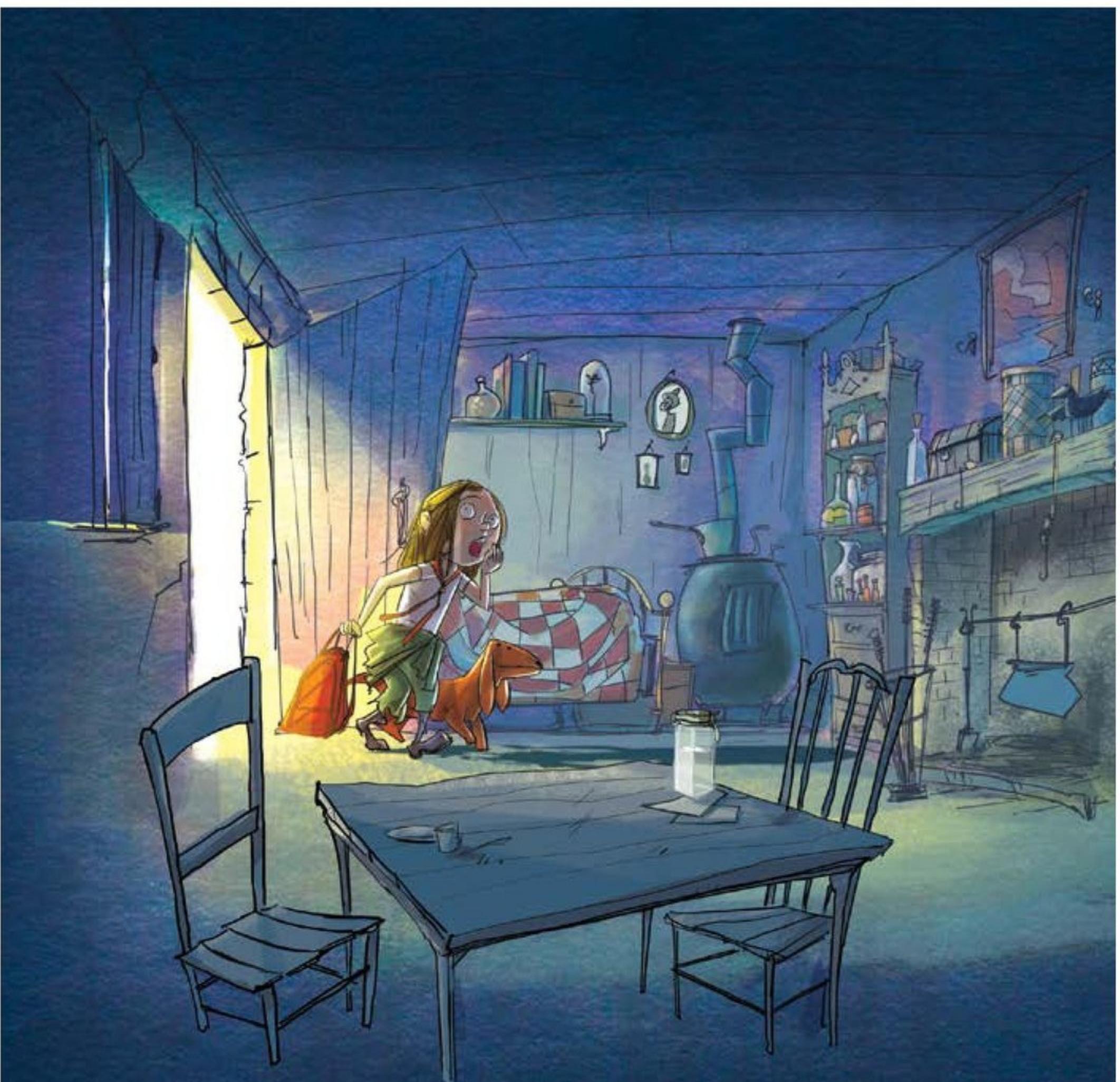
As I plod ahead, the dark spot before me grows until I can see it's a small house with a flat roof, small windows, and a narrow door. The promise of shelter from the heat encourages me to increase my pace.

As I approach the structure, the ground begins to transform. The hard, cracked dirt gives way to sand so soft and fine that it feels as if I'm walking on a cloud. I reach down and pick up a handful. It's cool to the touch, and makes me feel as if I'm holding a breath in my hand as it slips between my fingers.

My spirits suddenly lift, and I start to walk faster. The house is quaint, made out of bricks of dirt and coated with a sparkling layer of the soft sand. As I place my hand on the wooden door, a dog begins to bark. I'd recognize that bark anywhere—Odie!

I throw open the door and my brother's dog dances around my feet. When I pick him up, he gives me an **enthusiastic** tongue bath, and for once I don't mind his awful breath.



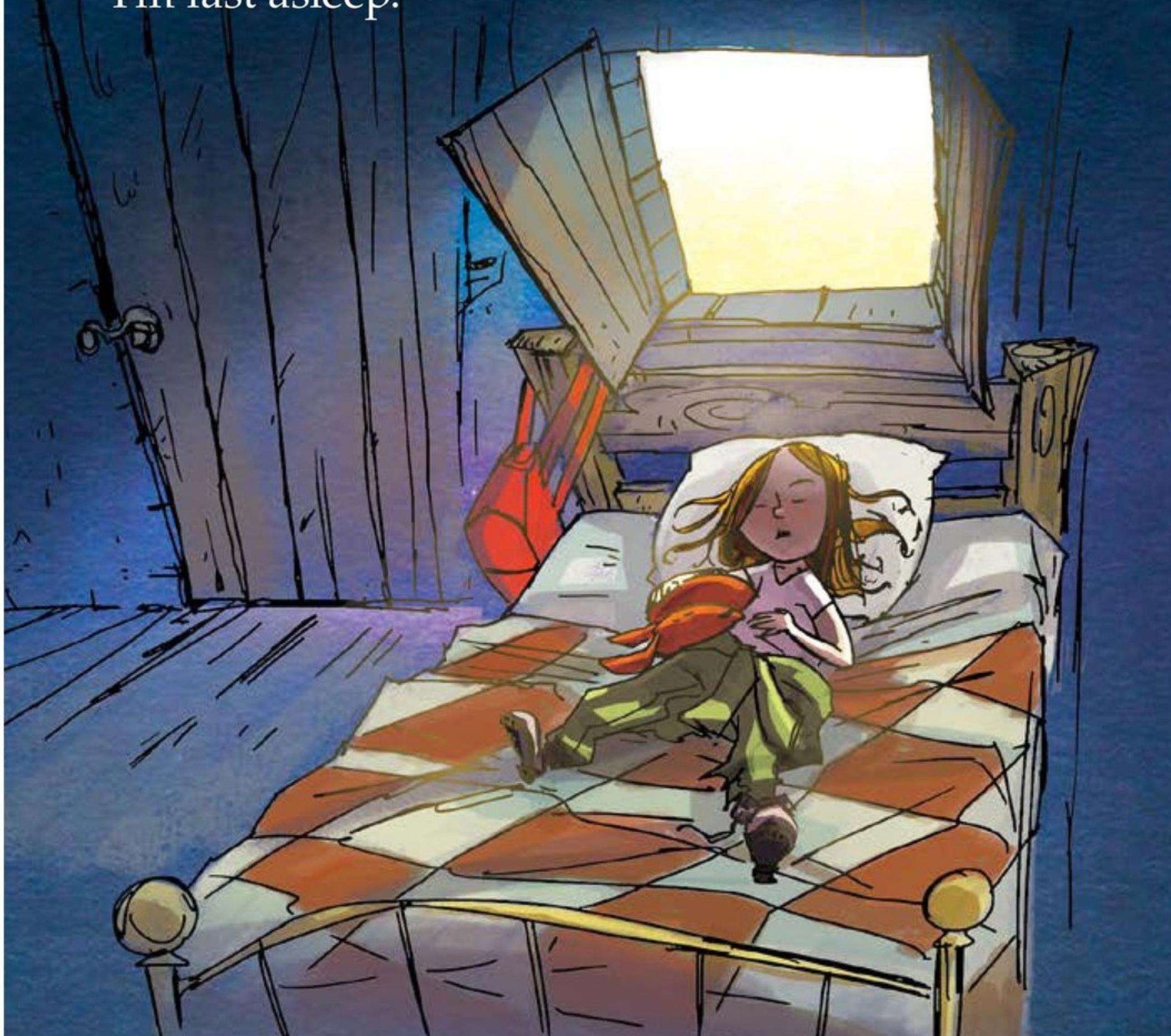


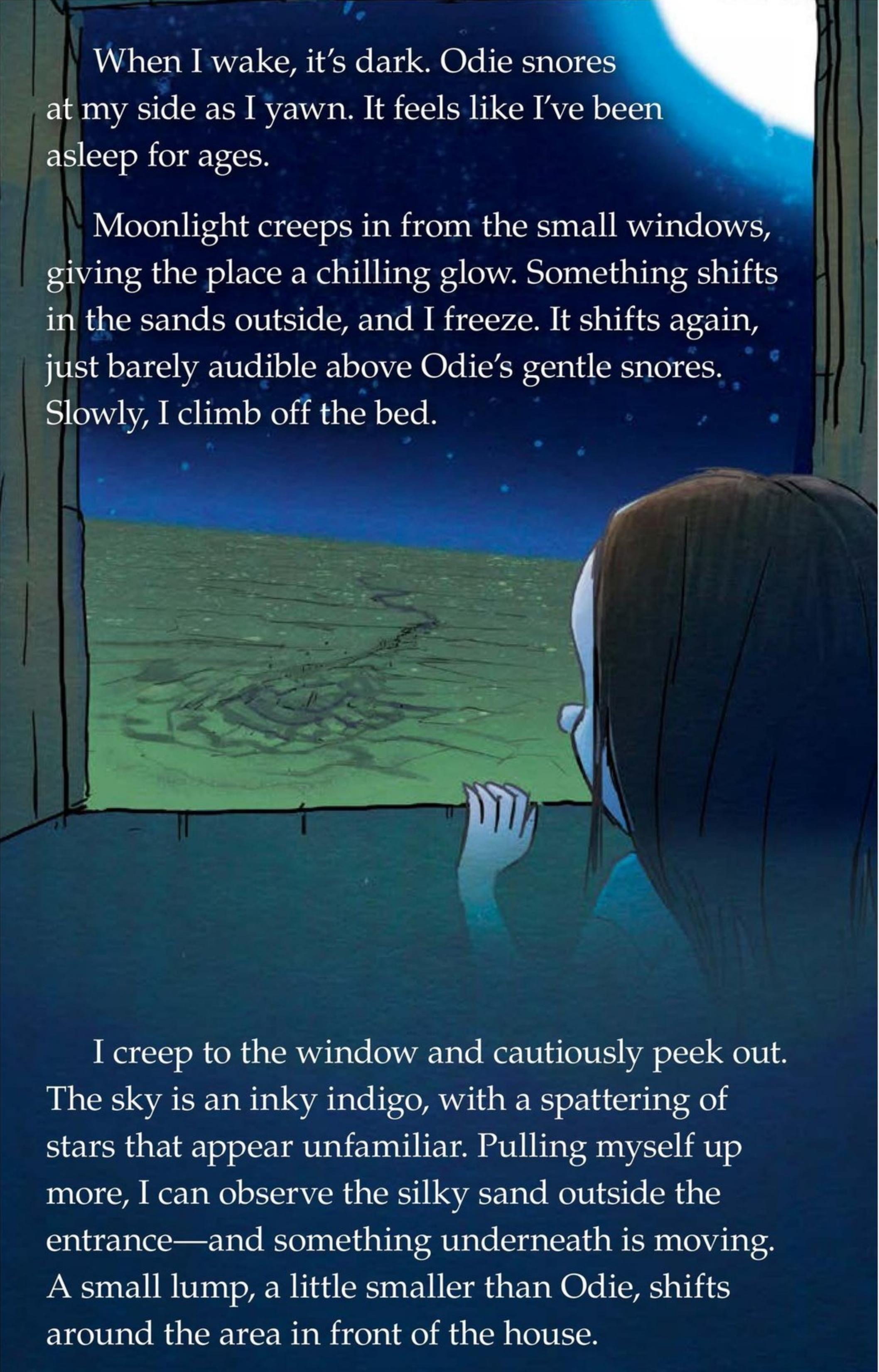
"Jake!" I call. "Jake, are you here?" There's no response but Odie's excited whining.

The temperature inside the house feels nearly twenty degrees cooler. It takes a minute for my vision to adjust to the dimness, but when it does, I see that a table and a couple of chairs sit against one wall, and a comfortable-looking bed sits against the opposite wall. At the far end of the room is a fireplace with a small rack and a pot for cooking hanging over a pile of ashes.

I also discover a jar of the freshest-tasting water I've ever had. After drinking my fill, and putting some water in a small bowl for Odie, I plan my next move. This place is obviously cared for by someone. I don't think the person would want some stranger hanging out and drinking all the water.

I've been walking for so long, though, and need to rest. The bed looks so comfortable and inviting. A small nap couldn't hurt. I climb onto the bed, and Odie curls up next to me. In seconds, I'm fast asleep.





When I wake, it's dark. Odie snores at my side as I yawn. It feels like I've been asleep for ages.

Moonlight creeps in from the small windows, giving the place a chilling glow. Something shifts in the sands outside, and I freeze. It shifts again, just barely audible above Odie's gentle snores. Slowly, I climb off the bed.

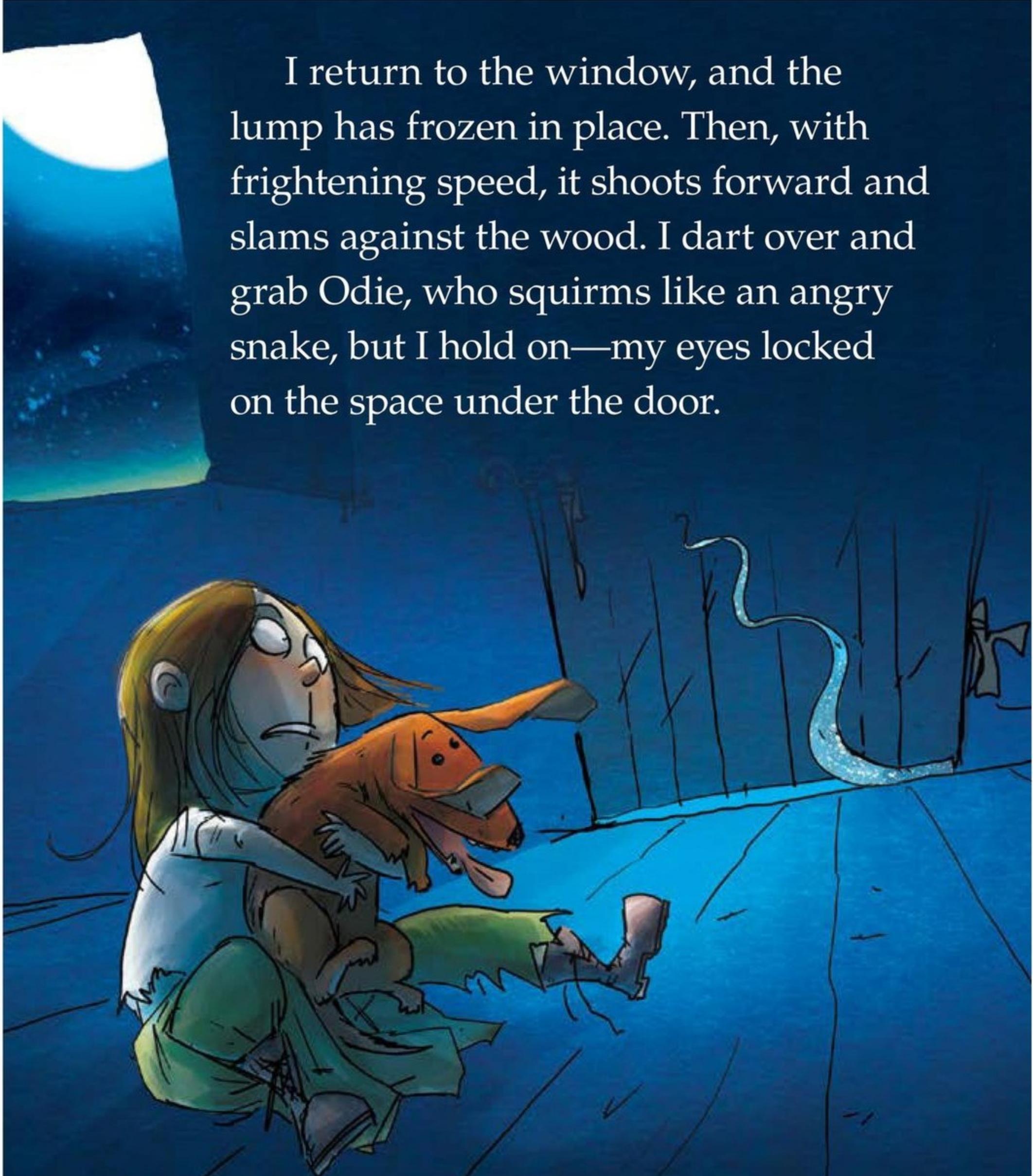
I creep to the window and cautiously peek out. The sky is an inky indigo, with a spattering of stars that appear unfamiliar. Pulling myself up more, I can observe the silky sand outside the entrance—and something underneath is moving. A small lump, a little smaller than Odie, shifts around the area in front of the house.



My breath catches in my throat. Could it be one of those things? If it is, that flimsy door won't keep it out, and I have no place to flee. I can only stare as the lump shifts, the sand shimmering over it in the moonlight.

Suddenly, Odie leaps off the bed, and before I can nab him, he's at the door scratching and whining as though he wants to go outside.

"Odie, knock it off," I hiss. The dog looks at me, wags his tail with his ears pushed back, and whimpers.



I return to the window, and the lump has frozen in place. Then, with frightening speed, it shoots forward and slams against the wood. I dart over and grab Odie, who squirms like an angry snake, but I hold on—my eyes locked on the space under the door.

Whatever the thing outside is, it's moving, causing the door to shudder. It's definitely attempting to get in. Something long and thin snakes under the door and slowly climbs the inside—it's a tentacle. I restrain my scream.

Another tentacle wriggles through the crack, and I clutch Odie tighter. I have no escape.

“I can’t believe he let that mongrel in the house and latched the door,” someone says. Odie and I are definitely alone. The voice is coming from outside. “Jasper! Jasper, you in there?” The door rattles.

“Jasper,” I whisper, confused. This thing couldn’t be talking about my uncle—could it?

“I’m not cleaning up any mess that beast created. If you’re in there, open the door,” the thing continues, tentacles flailing.

“Jasper’s not here!” I blurt out.

The thing stops moving for a moment, then it shrieks, “Thief! Burglar! **Rapscallion!**”

“I’m none of those things—I think. I’m not too sure of the last one,” I reply.

“It defines you, you **miscreant**. Let me in, and I’ll show you what for.”

“That doesn’t make me want to open the door for you!”





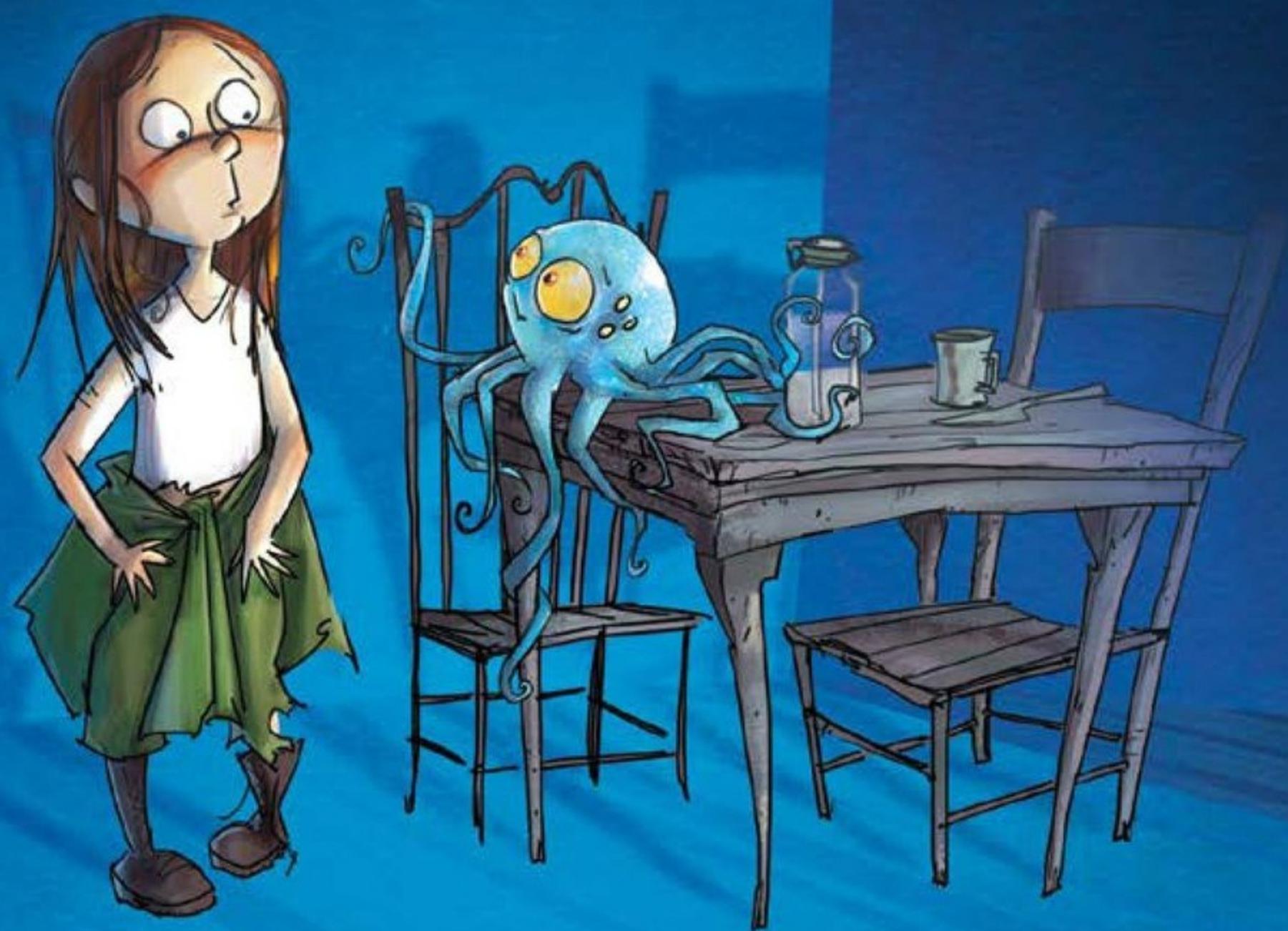
The thing pauses, and I can feel it thinking. “You’re right. I apologize **profusely**,” it says. “It’s dark and frigid out here, and I’m . . . I’m frightened, okay. You’ve **bamboozled** the truth from me, and now it’s out. This world is not as **benign** as it once was—a little **vagabond** like myself will be captured by those baddies almost immediately.”

It sounds sincere, and its tentacles have stopped flailing. “If I let you in, you won’t attack me? I’ve already been attacked by one horrible tentacled creature. I don’t think I could handle another.”

"I'm hardly horrible," it scoffs. "Calling me such offends my delicate **sensibilities**."

I cautiously stand and open the door. Odie squirms out of my arms and darts outside to do his business. The thing and I stare at each other for a moment. It appears similar to the creature from the forest, though it's not threatening at all—in fact, it's kind of adorable. Its bulbous eyes glint in the moonlight, and its bluish-green skin sparkles where it's covered in sand.

It moves past me on its tentacles and climbs onto the table. "Fabulous, another human," it sighs. "Precisely what we needed."



Glossary

bamboozled (<i>v.</i>)	tricked someone using dishonest ways (p. 14)
benign (<i>adj.</i>)	not dangerous or harmful (p. 14)
desolation (<i>n.</i>)	the state of a place being empty or barren (p. 5)
enthusiastic (<i>adj.</i>)	having or showing excitement or strong interest (p. 7)
foliage (<i>n.</i>)	plant leaves (p. 3)
meander (<i>v.</i>)	to follow a winding path or course; to wander without a destination (p. 3)
miscreant (<i>n.</i>)	someone who does bad or illegal things (p. 13)
profusely (<i>adv.</i>)	to a large amount or degree; abundantly (p. 14)
radiant (<i>adj.</i>)	sent out from something in rays or waves (p. 5)
rapscallion (<i>n.</i>)	a mean or untrustworthy person; someone who is annoying or a troublemaker (p. 13)
sensibilities (<i>n.</i>)	the emotions or feelings that a certain kind of person has (p. 15)
vagabond (<i>n.</i>)	a person with no home who travels all the time and has little money (p. 14)

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A Reading A-Z Level V Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,410

Connections

Writing

Which three words best describe the main character? Why? Write a paragraph about it.

Art

Make a diagram or model of the house in this story. Use descriptions from the story and your own imagination to design the house. Present your diagram or model to the class.

The logo for Reading A-Z features the word "Reading" in a large, bold, red sans-serif font. Above the letter "i", there is a small graphic of a sun with rays. To the right of "Reading", the letters "A-Z" are written in a larger, bold, black sans-serif font.

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