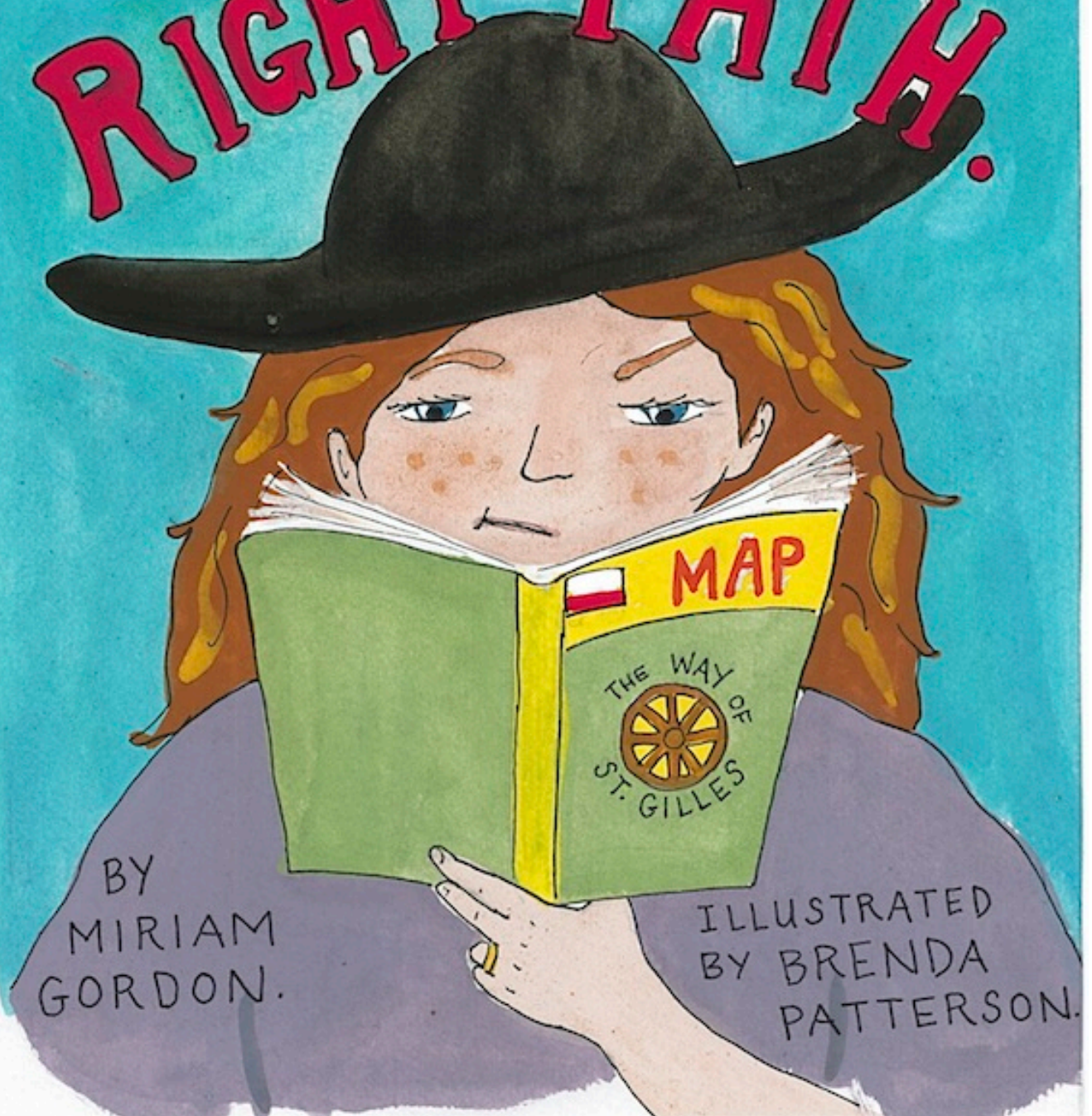


THE RIGHT PATH.



BY
MIRIAM
GORDON.

ILLUSTRATED
BY BRENDA
PATTERSON.

LE PUY-EN-VELAY

BIZAC

COSTAROS
CHARBONNIER

PRADELLES

LUC

LA BASTIDE-PUYLAURENT

PREVENCHÈRES

ST. ANDRÉ-CAPCÈZE
VIELVIC
GÉNOUHAC

LA VERNARÈDE

LE MARTINET

ALÈS

VÉZÉNOBRES

NERES

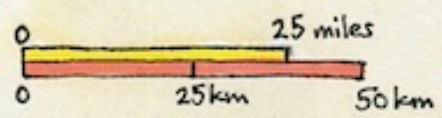
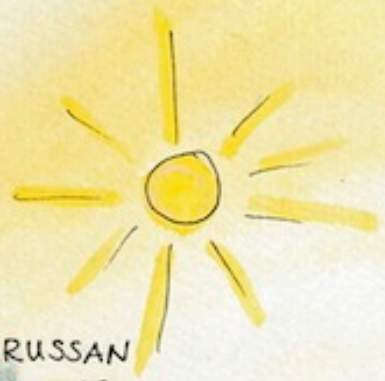
RUSSAN

NÎMES

ST. GILLES-DU-GARD



● = OVERNIGHT STOP



YOUR **40th** BIRTHDAY

IS A WONDERFUL TIME



TO DO SOMETHING ELSE.

ANYTHING ELSE ,

BUT THINKING ABOUT GETTING

OLDER ,

WEAKER ,

sicker .





I DECIDE TO SEE HOW FAR I CAN WALK

THROUGH THE SOUTH

OF FRANCE

IN THE HIGH

SUMMER.

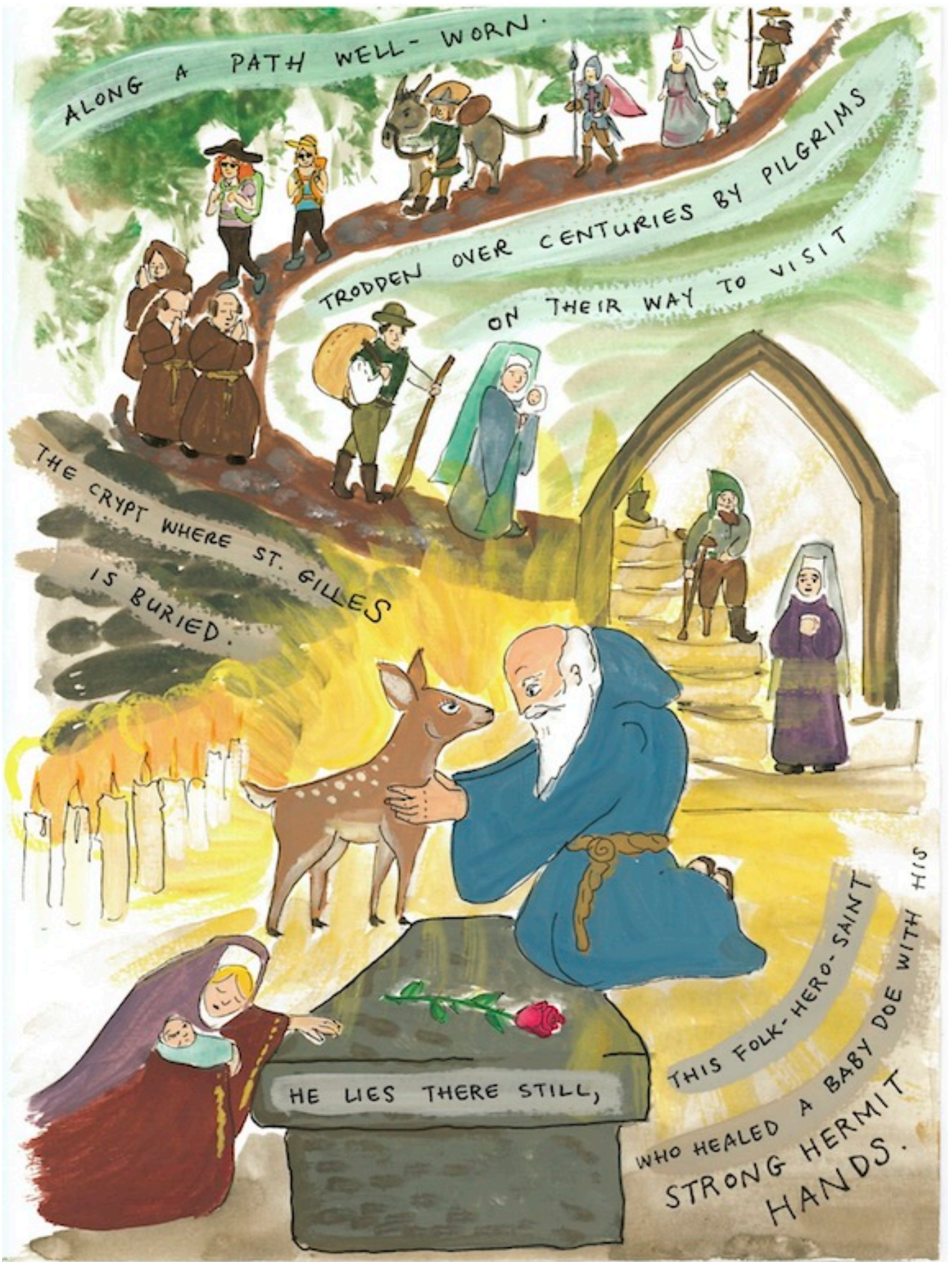
ALONG A PATH WELL-WORN.

TRODDEN OVER CENTURIES BY PILGRIMS
ON THEIR WAY TO VISIT

THE CRYPT WHERE ST. GILLES
IS BURIED.

THIS FOLK-HERO-SAINTE
WHO HEALED A BABY DOE WITH HIS
STRONG HERMIT
HANDS.

HE LIES THERE STILL,



A PATH ALSO CARVED OUT BY MERCHANTS
ON THE SPICE
TRAIL.



WHOSE WAGON-WHEEL MARKINGS GROUND INTO
THE STONE
ARE STILL THERE.



BUT LET'S RETURN TO THE BEGINNING:

A MAGNIFICENT CATHEDRAL



WHICH WE
ENTER
THROUGH
A
STAIRCASE
DIRECTLY
ASCENDING
INTO
ITS
BELLY.



THERE STANDS A BLACK MADONNA.
ONE CAN ONLY IMAGINE THE CENTURIES OF CONTROVERSY RAGING
WHILST THIS EBONY BEAUTY CALMLY SURVEYS
IN HER PINK AND GOLD DRESS.

OR IN HER

RED



OR **LIME GREEN**



OR **PURPLE**

ONE.



NO TIME TO TRY THE FAMOUS LE PUY LENTILS.
WE RECEIVE OUR STAMP FROM THE CHURCH SECRETARY,
SO PROUD OF ITS OVERLY LARGE,
BRIGHT RED DESIGN.

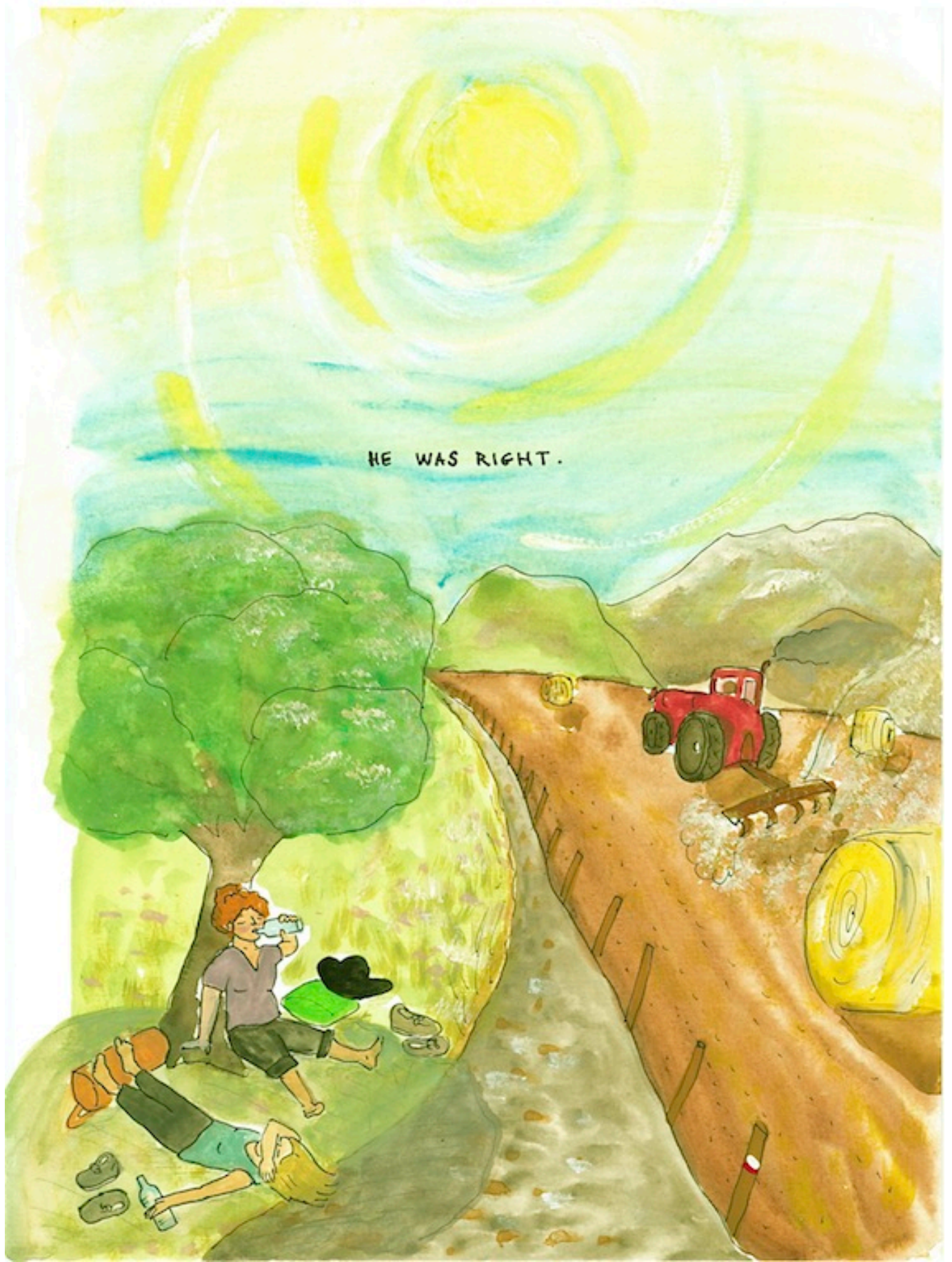


HE WARNS US
OF THE HEAT.

Faites
attention!



HE WAS RIGHT.

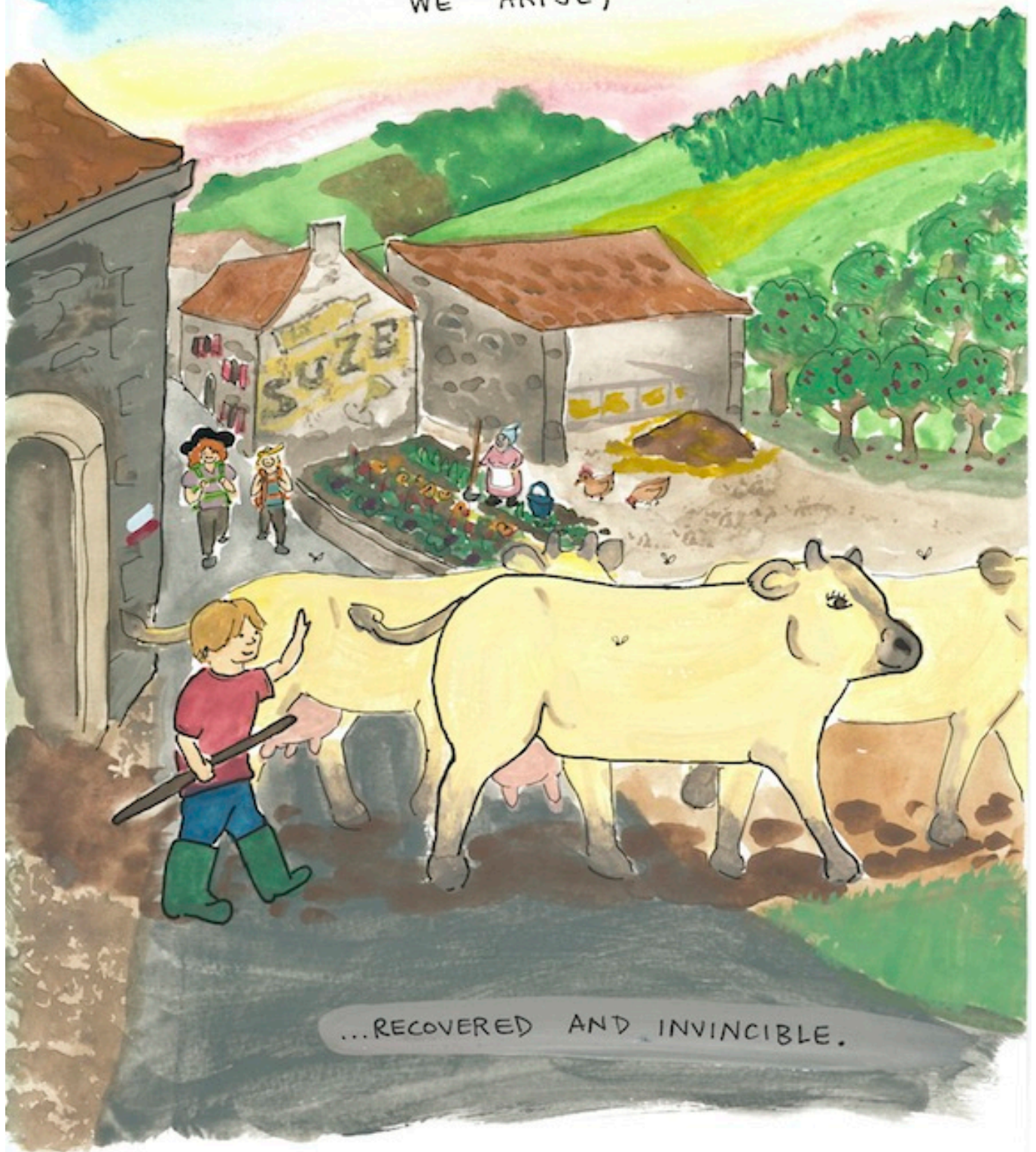






DAY TWO:

WE ARISE,



...RECOVERED AND INVINCIBLE.

OUR DESTINATION,
COSTAROS,



IS WINDY AND UNFORGIVING.

OUR HOSTESS IS MAD THAT WE ARE EARLY.

SHE SPRAYS US FOR TICKS.

DINNER

IS

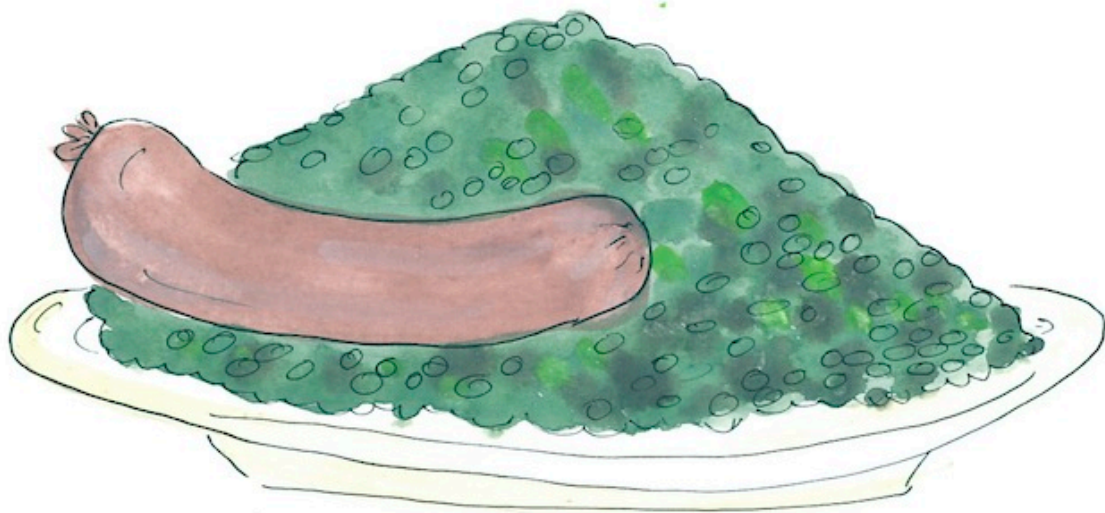
REGRETTABLE ,

SALVAGED ONLY BY...



THE UNEXPECTEDLY LARGE PLATE OF

LE PUY LENTILS



THE BIRTHDAY ARRIVES -

THE FORECAST PREDICTS



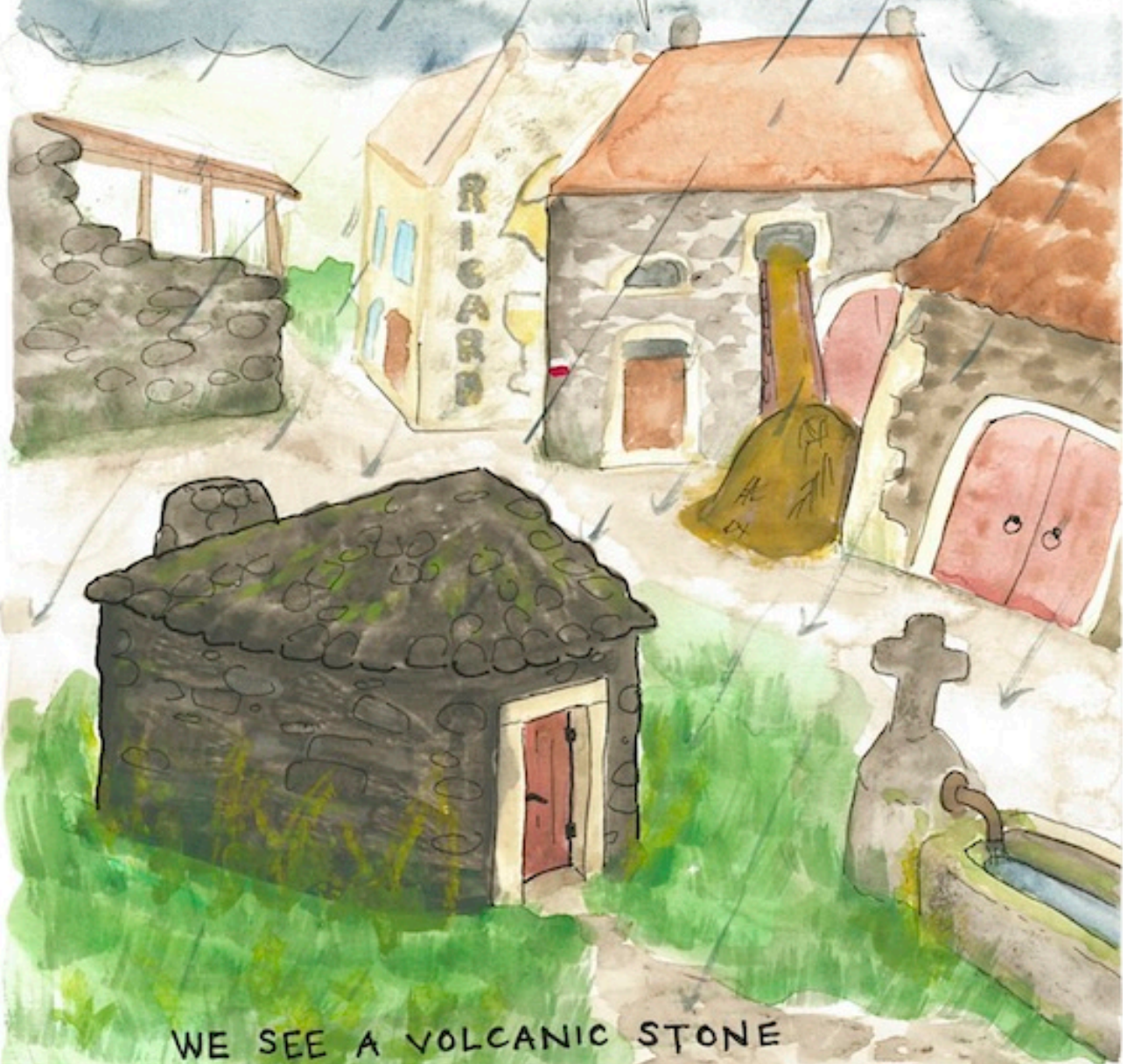
WE HAVE NO CHOICE .

A BIRDWATCHER WARNS US .

"Pas de choix,"

I REPLY .

UNSURE OF THE RULES REGARDING WALKING
IN
THUNDERSTORMS,



WE SEE A VOLCANIC STONE
BREAD OVEN FROM THE 12TH CENTURY,
AND FIGURE IT SHOULD BE A GOOD BET
FOR SHELTER.

A YOUNG, WELCOMING FARMER EMERGES,
EXPLAINING THAT WE HAVE ARRIVED ON THE
TOWN OF CHARBONNIER'S NAME DAY.

THE DAY-OLD
FIRE NOW
GLOWS
IN
POWERFUL
EMBERS.

A MIRACLE INDEED.

WE
CONSIDER
WAITING
AROUND
TO TASTE
THE BREAD AND POTATOES
WHICH WILL SURELY BE UNLIKE ANY OTHER
BREAD AND POTATOES.
BUT WE URGE ON.





OUR DAY GOT LESS LUCKY.



OUR SHELTER, LESS WELCOMING.



LIKE HANSEL AND GRETEL,
WE FOLLOW THE TRAIL
THROUGH THE FOG.

THE DAY ENDS AS IT BEGAN, WITH A MIRACLE.
A COSY ROOM,

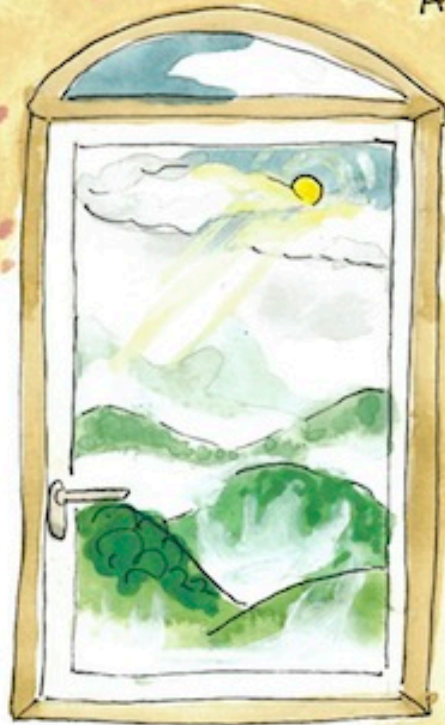
A BEAM OF SUNLIGHT,

A VIEW OVER THE
EPIC VALLEY

AS THE

FOG

LIFTS.



A VERVEINE TOAST
TO A
BIRTHDAY
SURVIVED.



WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW HOW FAR
YOU CAN WALK, ALL YOU CAN DO IS
I M A G I N E .



WHAT WILL BE YOUR DOWNFALL?
BLISTERS?

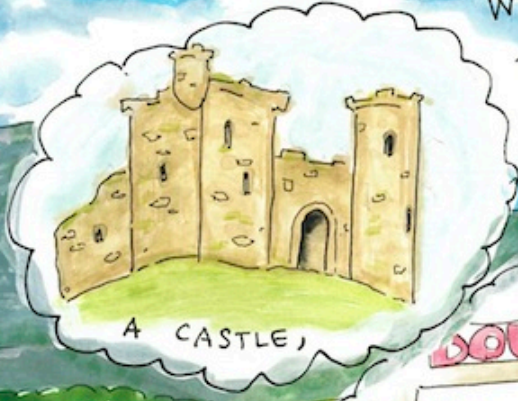
MUSCLE PAIN?

SHEER DISTANCE?



THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE ON OUR LONGEST DAY

WAS ALMOST
TOO
VAST
TO



A CASTLE,



A FOREST,



A TOWN,

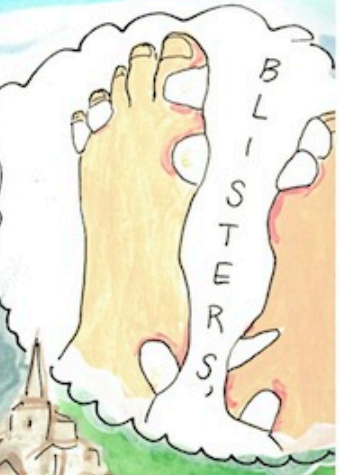
... ALL OF THE ABOVE.

LONGEST DAY



A PAINFUL STING,

REMEMBER.



B
L
I
S
T
E
R
S,



A MOMENT IN A FIELD, SHIVERING AND TIRED,
WHEN THE CLOUDS PART
AND A WARMTH FILLS OUR BONES.
IT'S AS IF WE HAD NEVER BEFORE NOTICED
THE SUN.

HERE IT
COMES AGAIN!

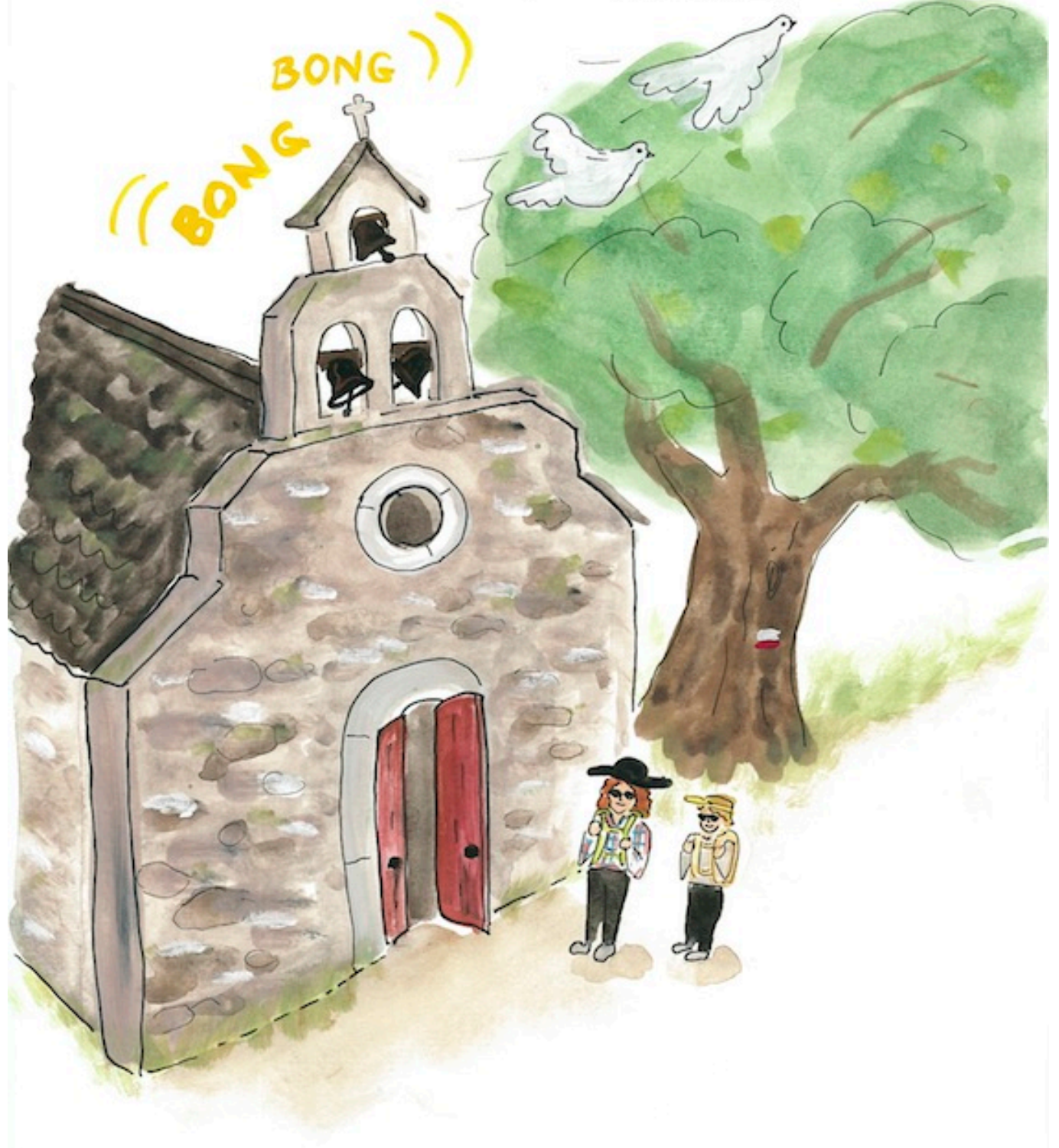
WE CHEER,



AS WE RELISH
OUR 20-SECOND
PATCHES OF
PURE,
HEAVENLY
RELIEF.



A WELL-TIMED
CHAPEL
SEEMS TO CALL US
TO PRAYER.

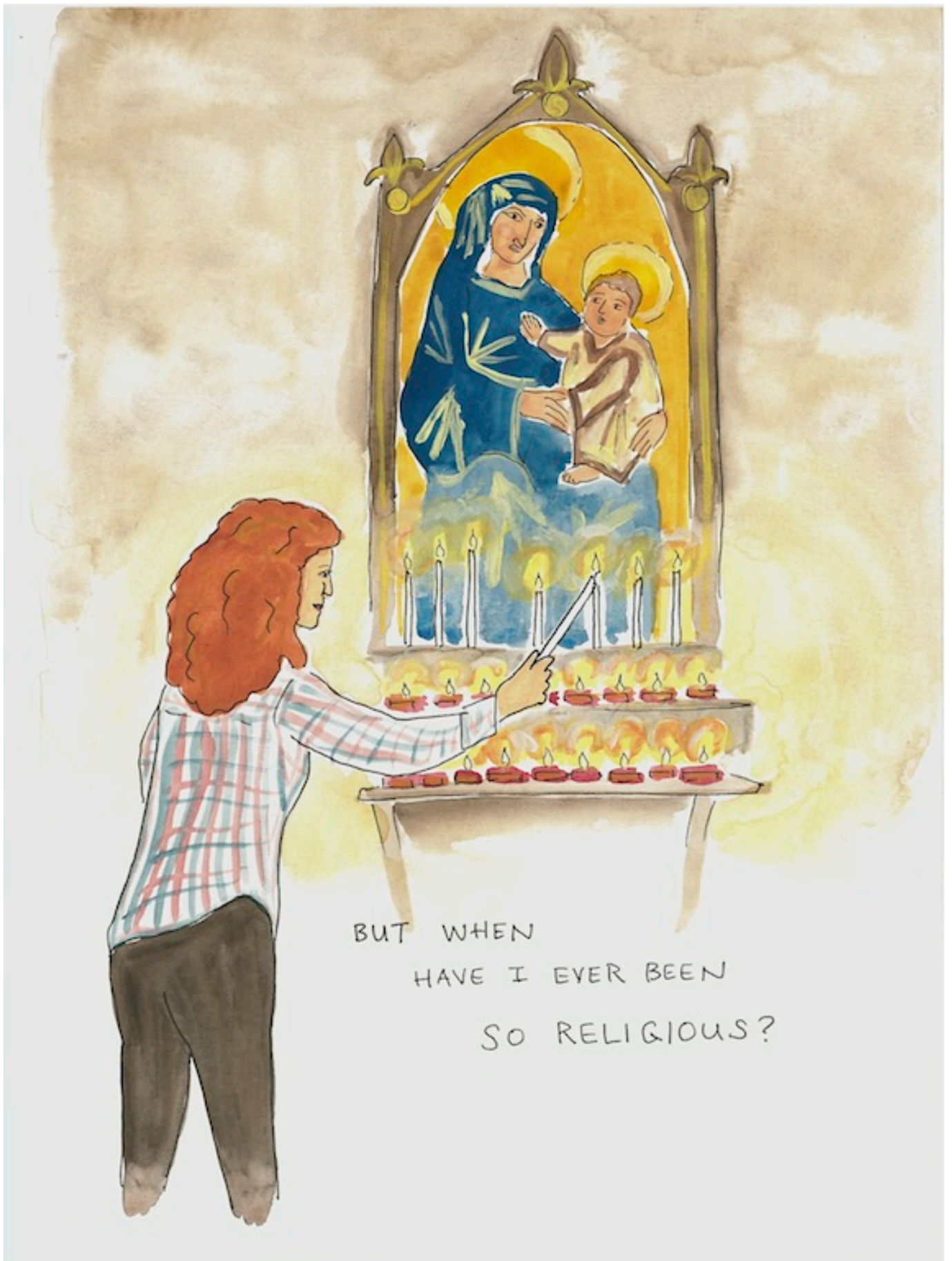


"GOD OF THE OLD, MUSTY PLACES,
THE FRESH, CHILLY PLACES.

GOD OF THE SUNBEAMS
AND OF THE
PAINFUL KNEES.



GIVE ME THE STRENGTH TO GET THROUGH."



BUT WHEN
HAVE I EVER BEEN
SO RELIGIOUS?

WELL, NOW I AM.
I SEEK REFUGE IN THOSE STONE CHURCHES
ANY CHANCE I GET.

"GOD,
STRENGTHEN MY BODY,
OPEN MY HEART."



OUR PACE HAS SLOWED TO HALF.

I TRY TO INSPIRE BRENDA TO KEEP WALKING

WITH HER FEET A MESS OF

PULLED MUSCLES AND BLISTERS.

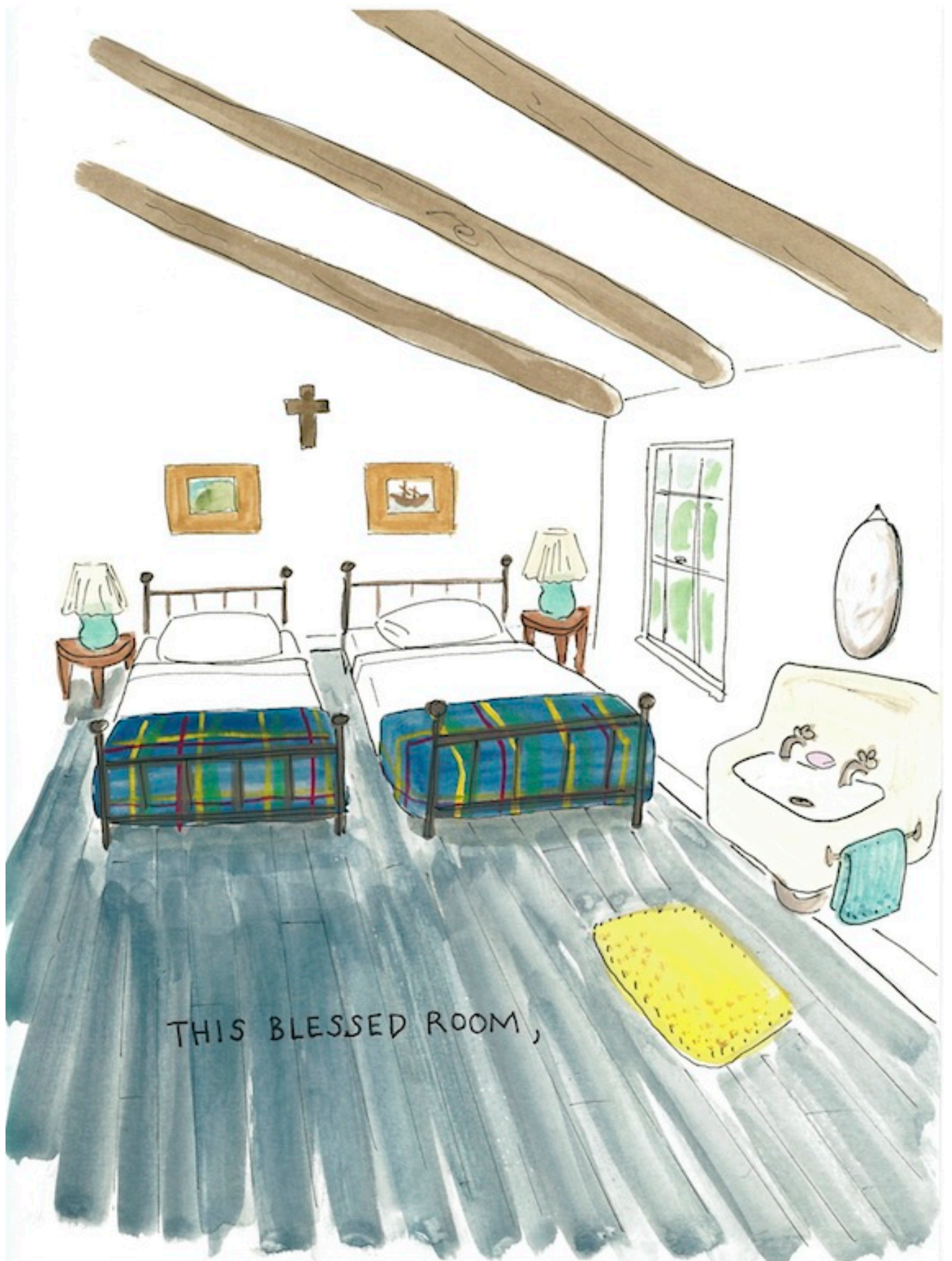


"What that pace was, there was no word mean enough to describe; it was something as much slower than a walk as a walk is slower than a run." - Robert Louis Stevenson

WE SEARCH IN VAIN
FOR A WALKING STICK.
IT'S ONE
PAINFUL FOOT
IN FRONT OF
THE OTHER,
UNTIL



* Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes, 1879.



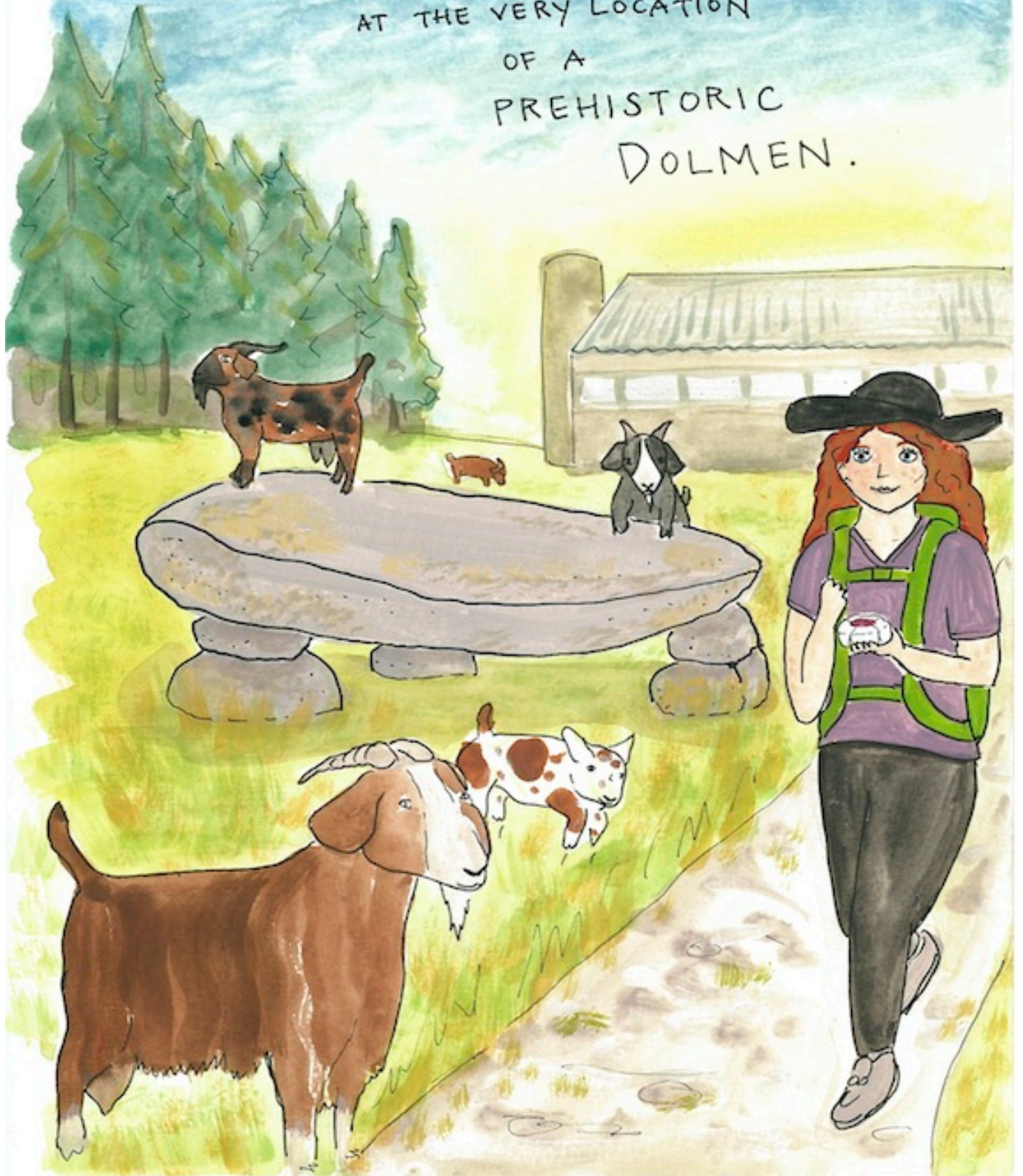
THIS BLESSED ROOM,

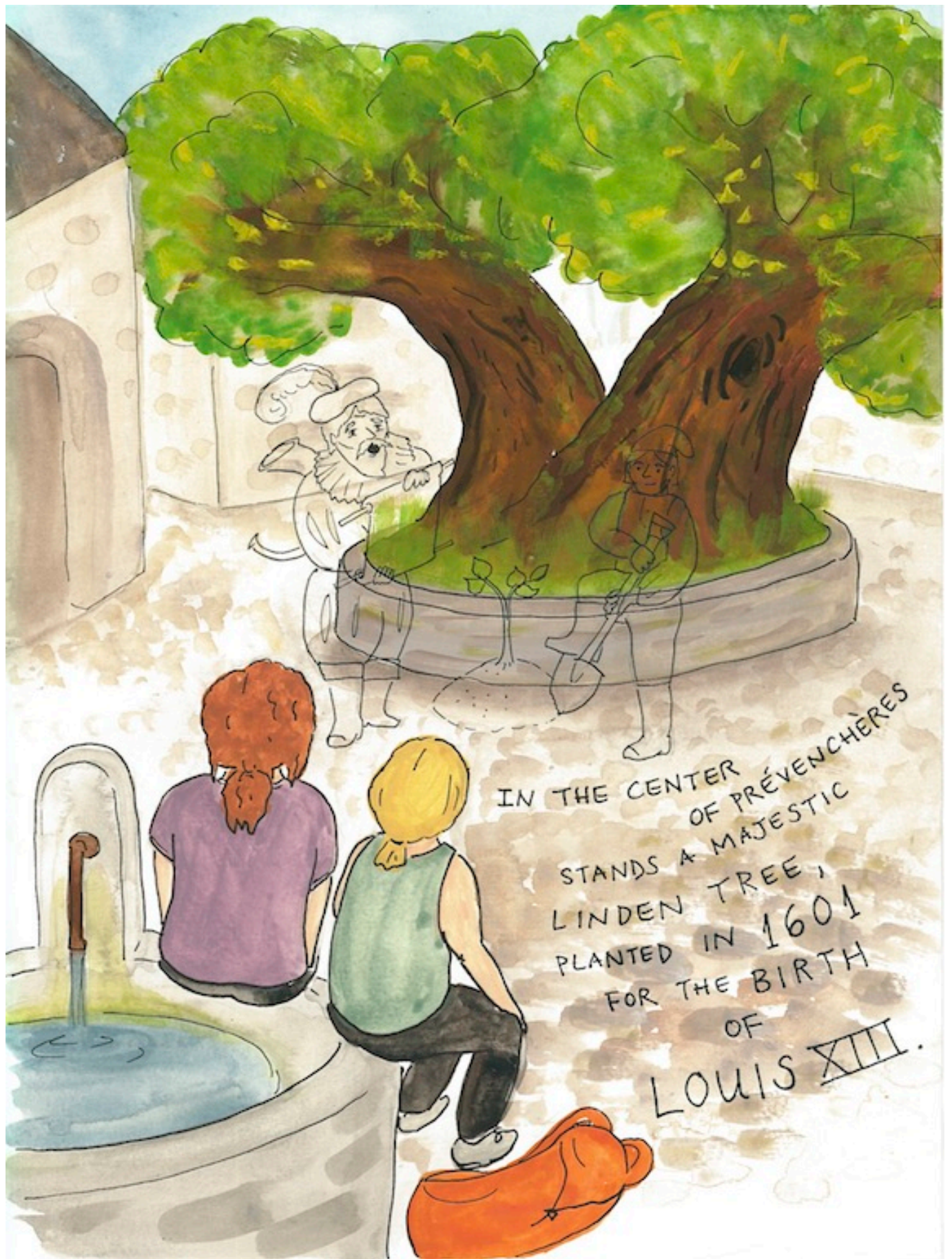
AND OUR HOSTESS
FRANÇOISE,



WITH HER TALES OF THE
FRENCH RESISTANCE.

WE PICK UP A SECOND BREAKFAST
FROM A SERENDIPITOUS
GOAT CHEESE FARM
AT THE VERY LOCATION
OF A
PREHISTORIC
DOLMEN.





IN THE CENTER
OF PRÉVENCHÈRES
STANDS A MAJESTIC
LINDEN TREE,
PLANTED IN 1601
FOR THE BIRTH
OF
LOUIS XIII.

ALL OVER THE TOWN,
THE NAME "LOU PALHIO"

HOTEL
LOU
PALHIO

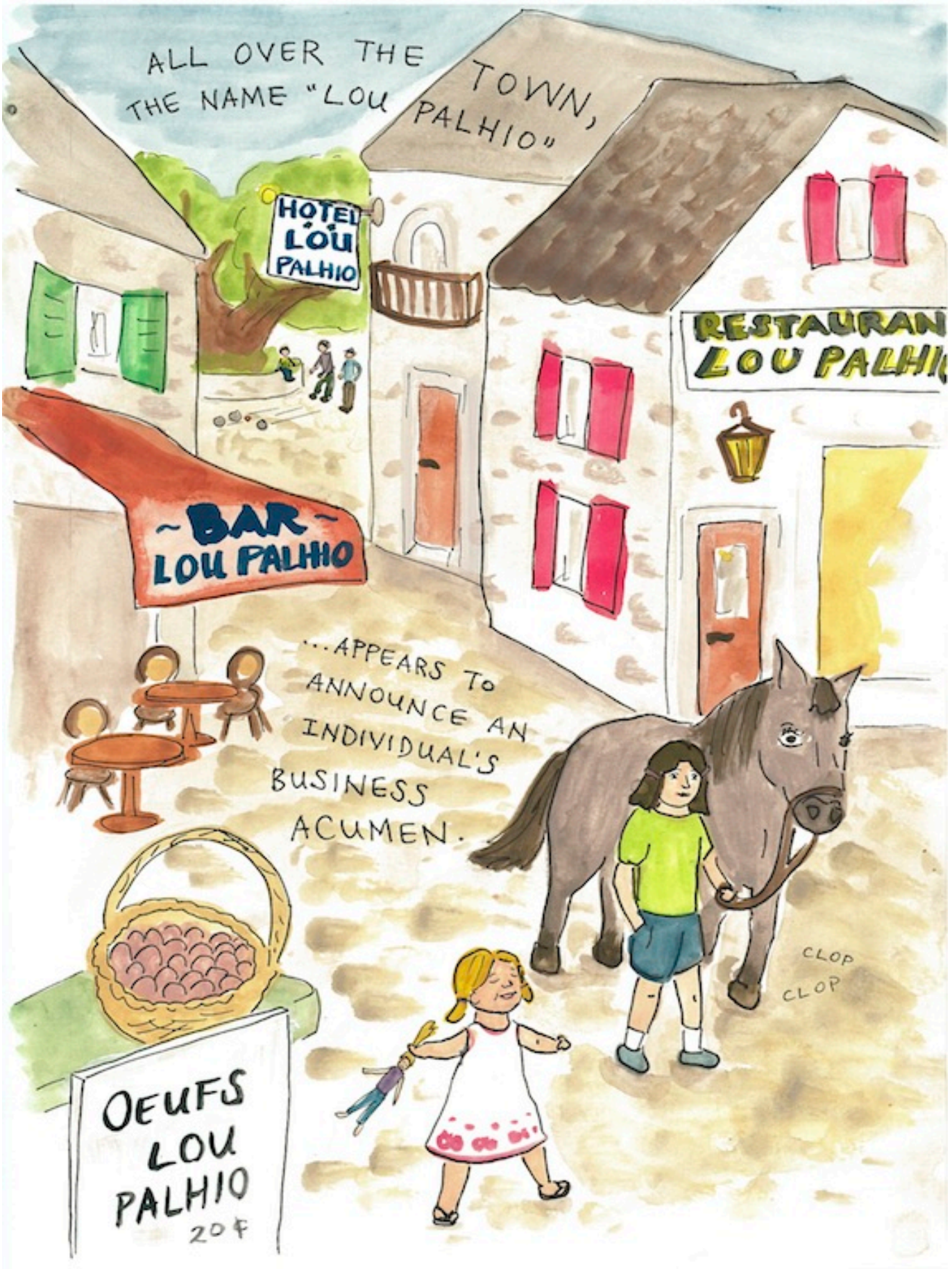
RESTAURANT
LOU PALHIO

~BAR~
LOU PALHIO

...APPEARS TO
ANNOUNCE AN
INDIVIDUAL'S
BUSINESS
ACUMEN.

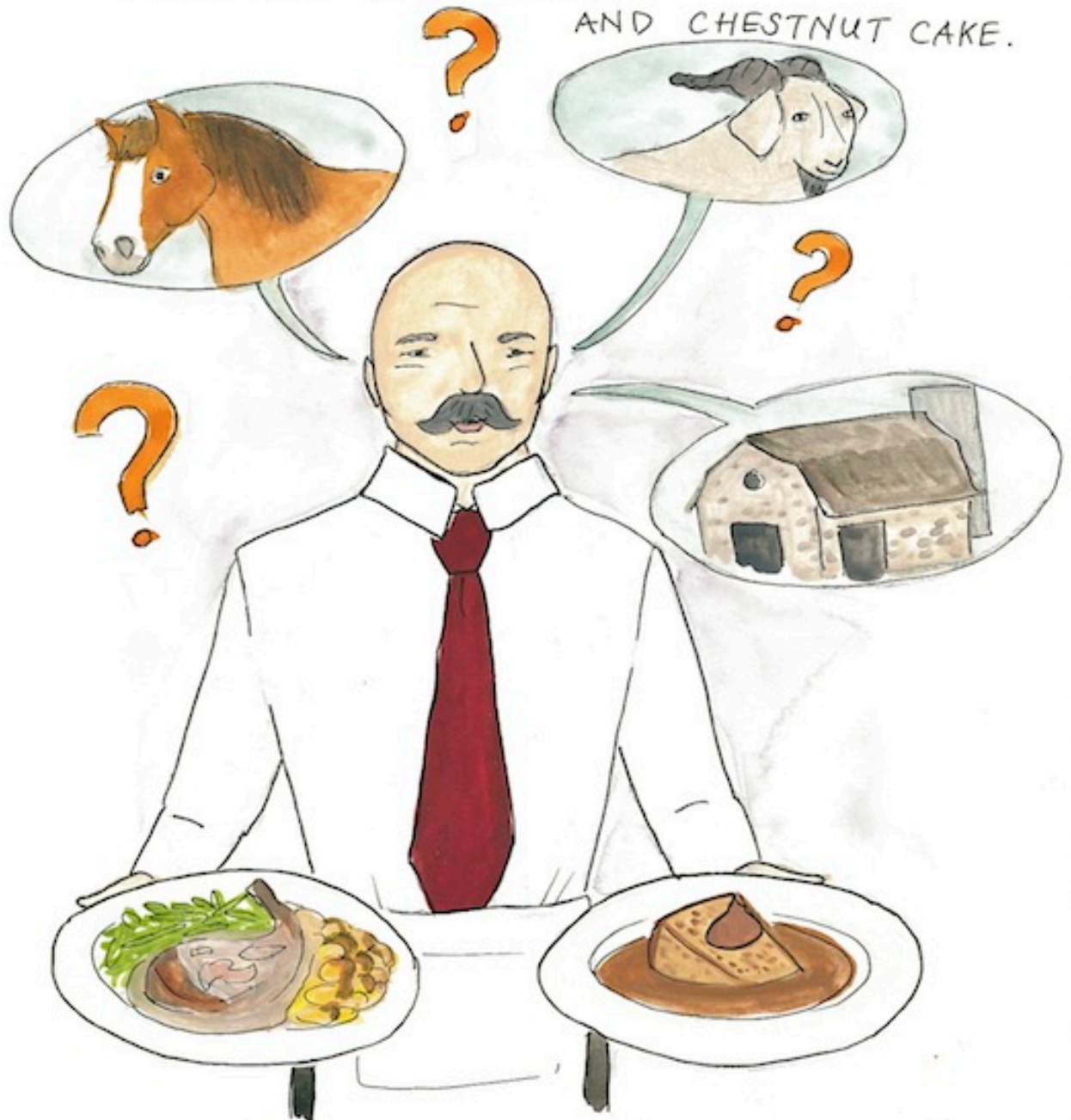
OEUFs
LOU
PALHIO
20¢

CLOP
CLOP



WE ARE SURE THIS MUST BE LOU HIMSELF,
TRYING HIS RUSTY ENGLISH AND SERVING US
HIS TRULY TRANSCENDENT
PORK WITH CÊPES SAUCE,

AND CHESTNUT CAKE.



WE LEARN THAT "LOU" IS DIALECT FOR "LE",
AND "PALHIO" IS DIALECT FOR A
BREED OF HORSE . OR PERHAPS A GOAT .

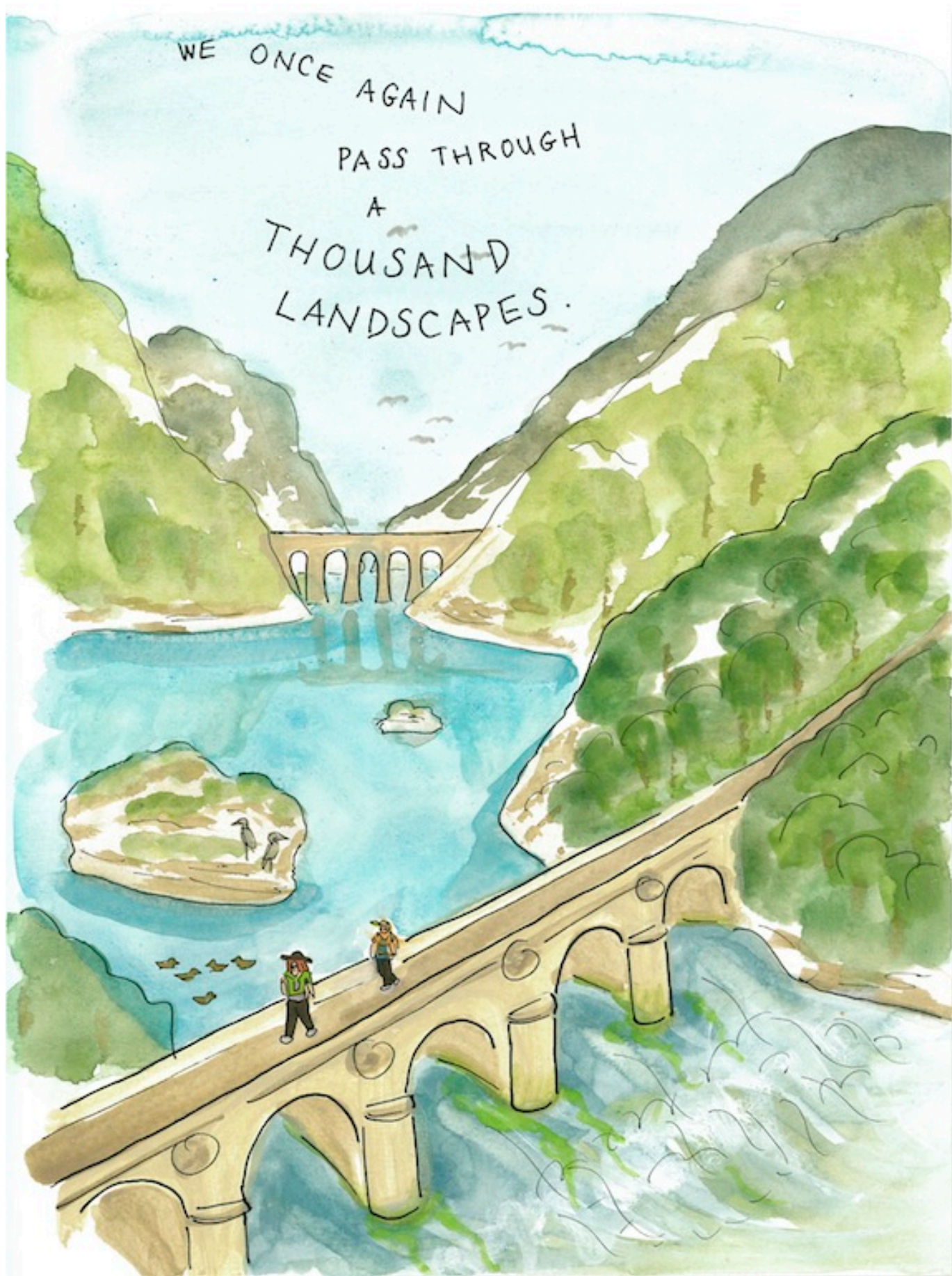
OR A HAYLOFT.

A SEEMINGLY
ENDLESS DESCENT
DOWN A ROCKY
CLIFF
PATH -



THE TASTE OF FRESH
CHESTNUT HONEY
STILL IN OUR MOUTHS.

WE ONCE AGAIN
PASS THROUGH
A
THOUSAND
LANDSCAPES.



OUR FIRST
PASTIS.

BRENDA'S
FEET
CAN GO
NO
FURTHER.



HELPFUL LOCALS GIVE HER A LIFT
TO THE NEXT TOWN,
WHILST I WALK ON
TO
DISCOVER....





... FLAT-
STONED,
ONE-ROOM HOUSES
OF
ST.-ANDRÉ-CAPCÈZE.

OVER
A
TAGINE
OF



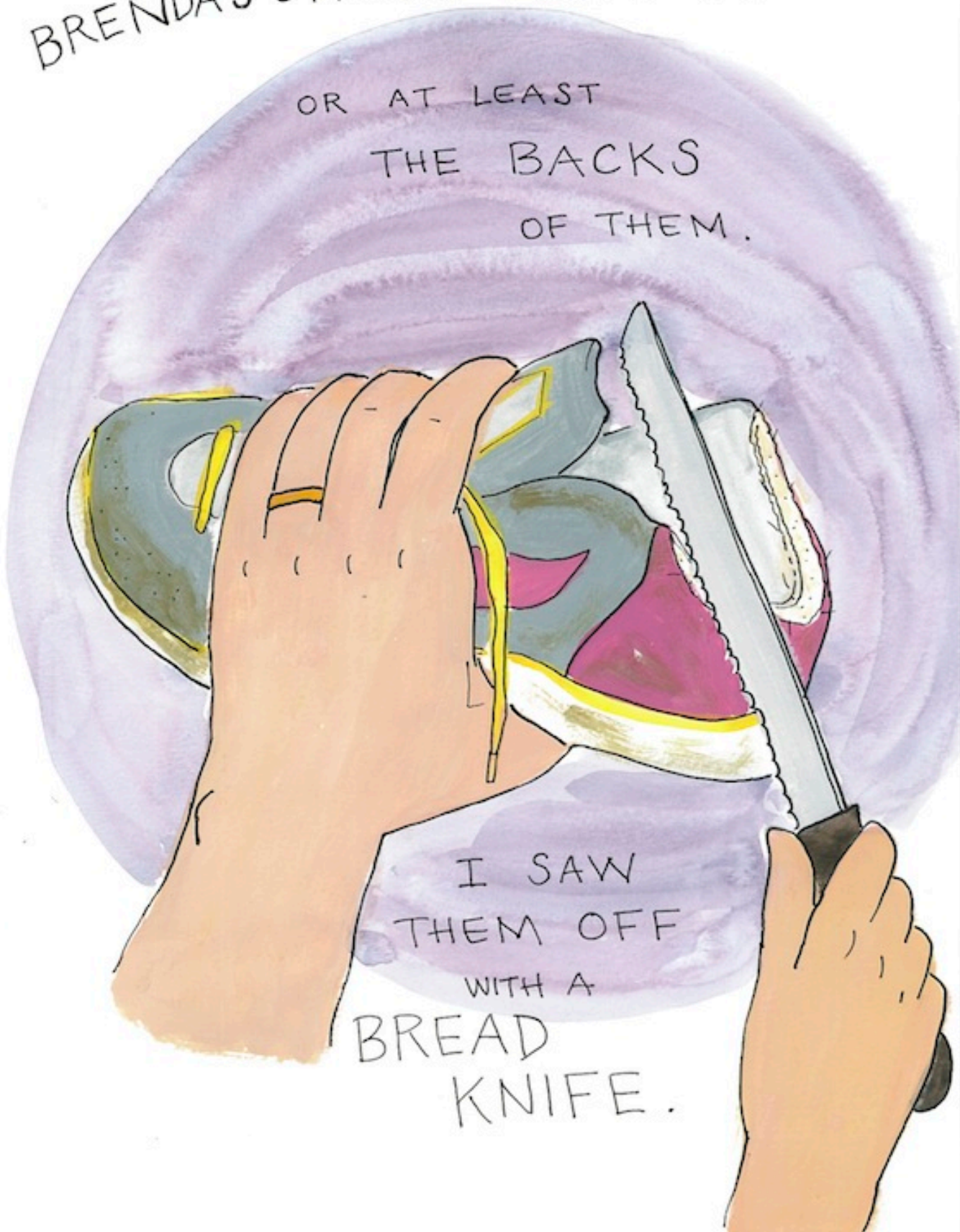
POMMES DE TERRE
À L'ANCIENNE,



WE DECIDE

BRENDA'S SHOES MUST GO.

OR AT LEAST
THE BACKS
OF THEM.



I SAW
THEM OFF
WITH A
BREAD
KNIFE.

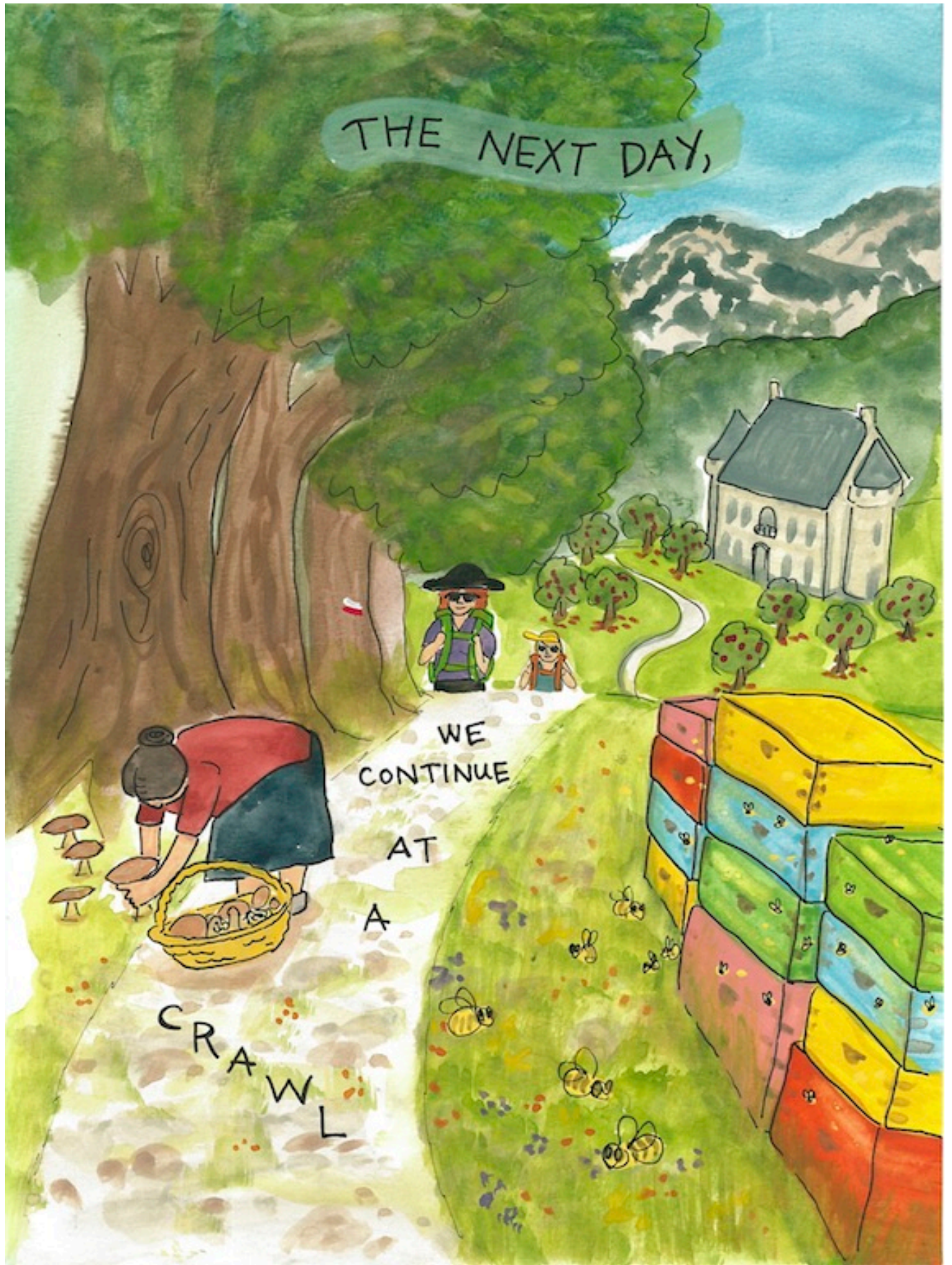
THE NEXT DAY,

WE
CONTINUE

AT

A

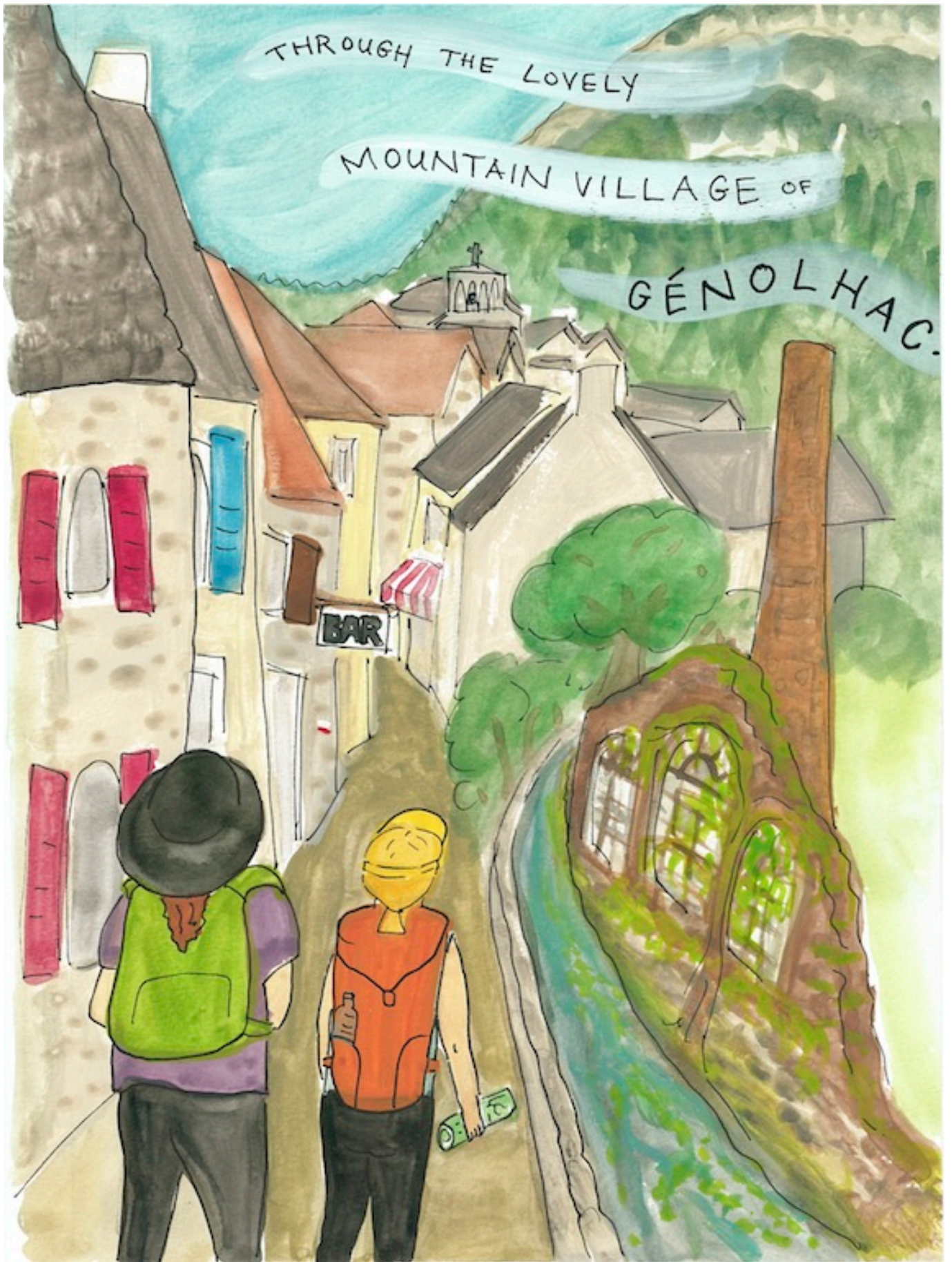
C
R
A
W
L

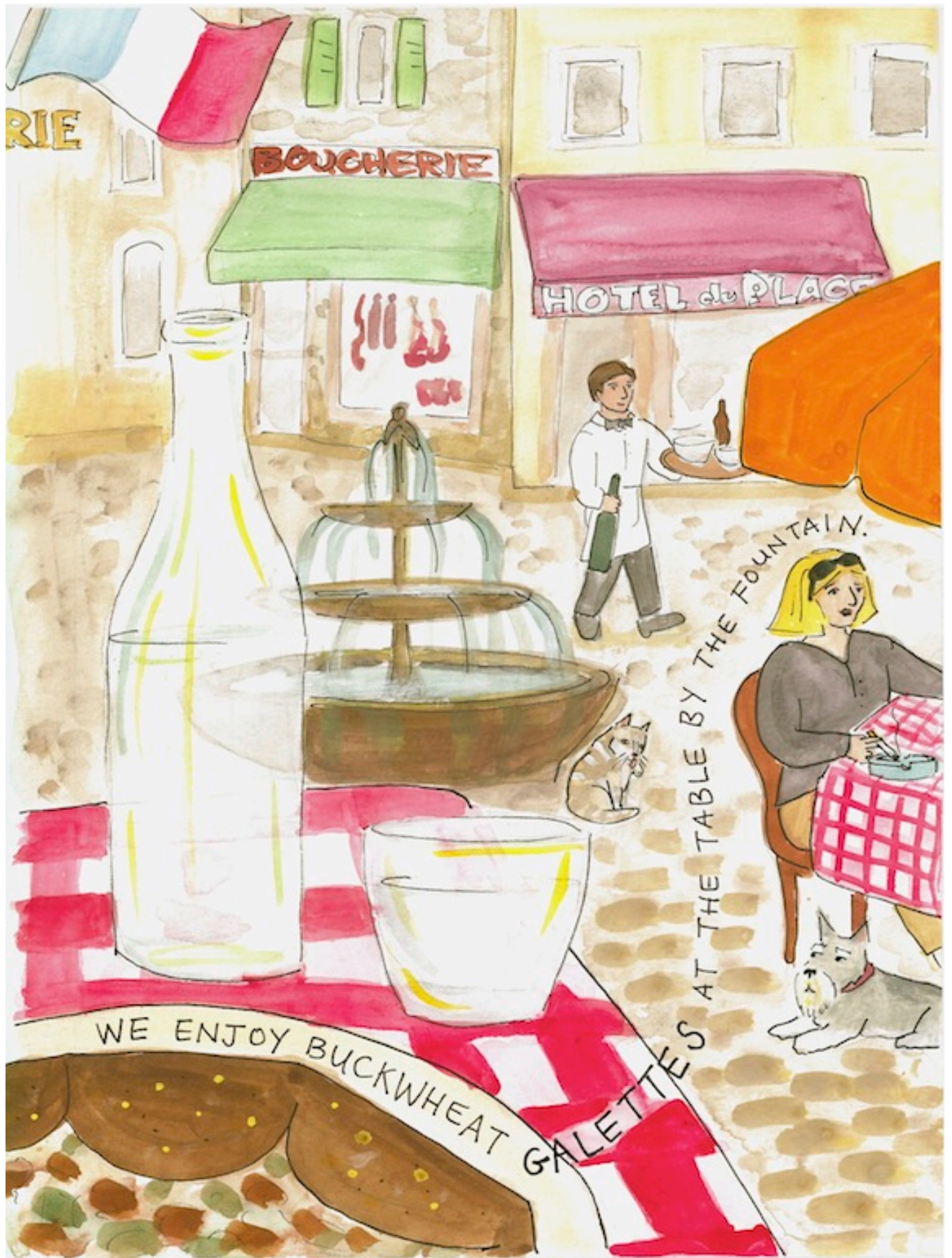


THROUGH THE LOVELY

MOUNTAIN VILLAGE OF

GÉNOLHAC.





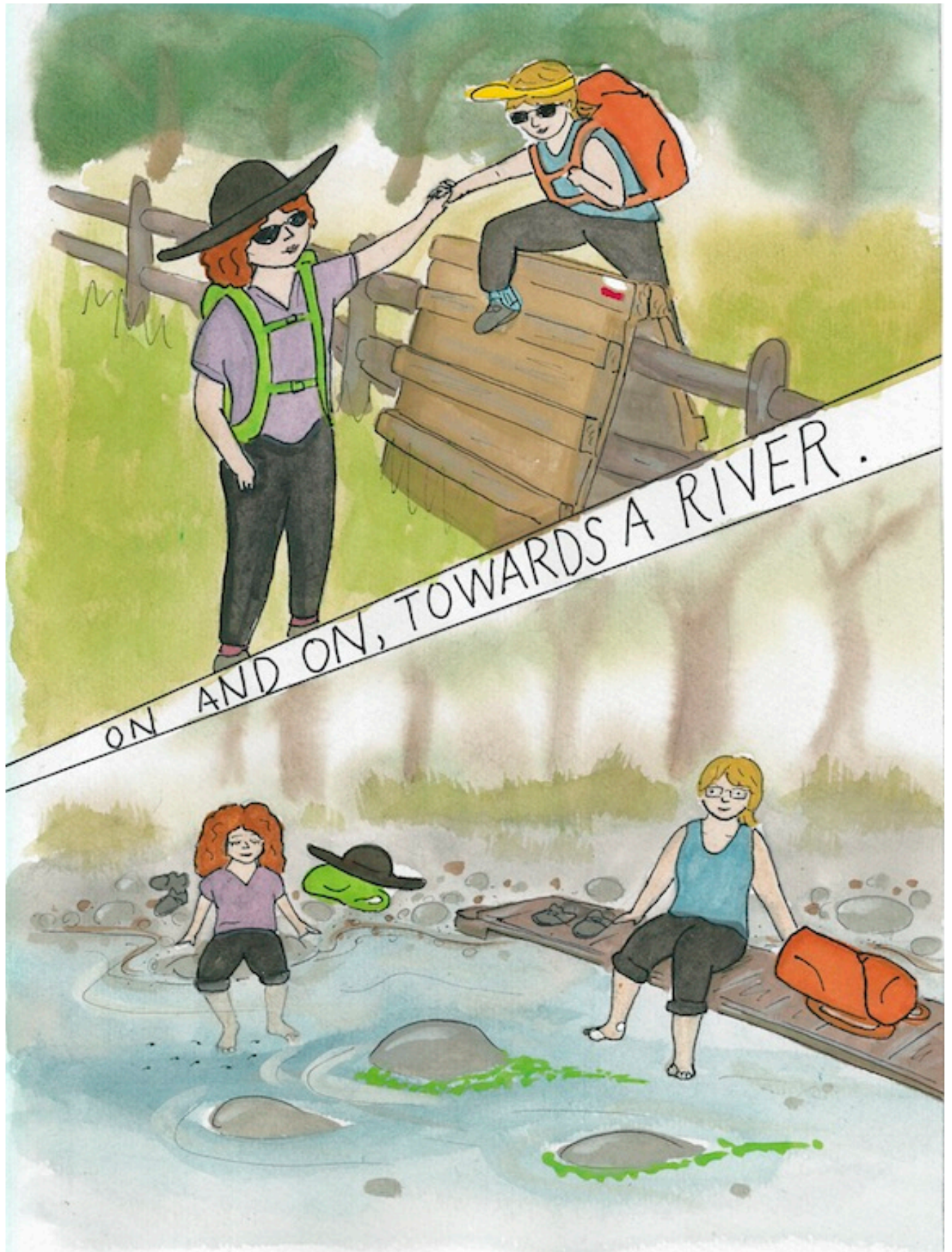
RIE

BOUCHERIE

HOTEL du PLACE

AT THE TABLE BY THE FOUNTAIN.

WE ENJOY BUCKWHEAT GAULETTES

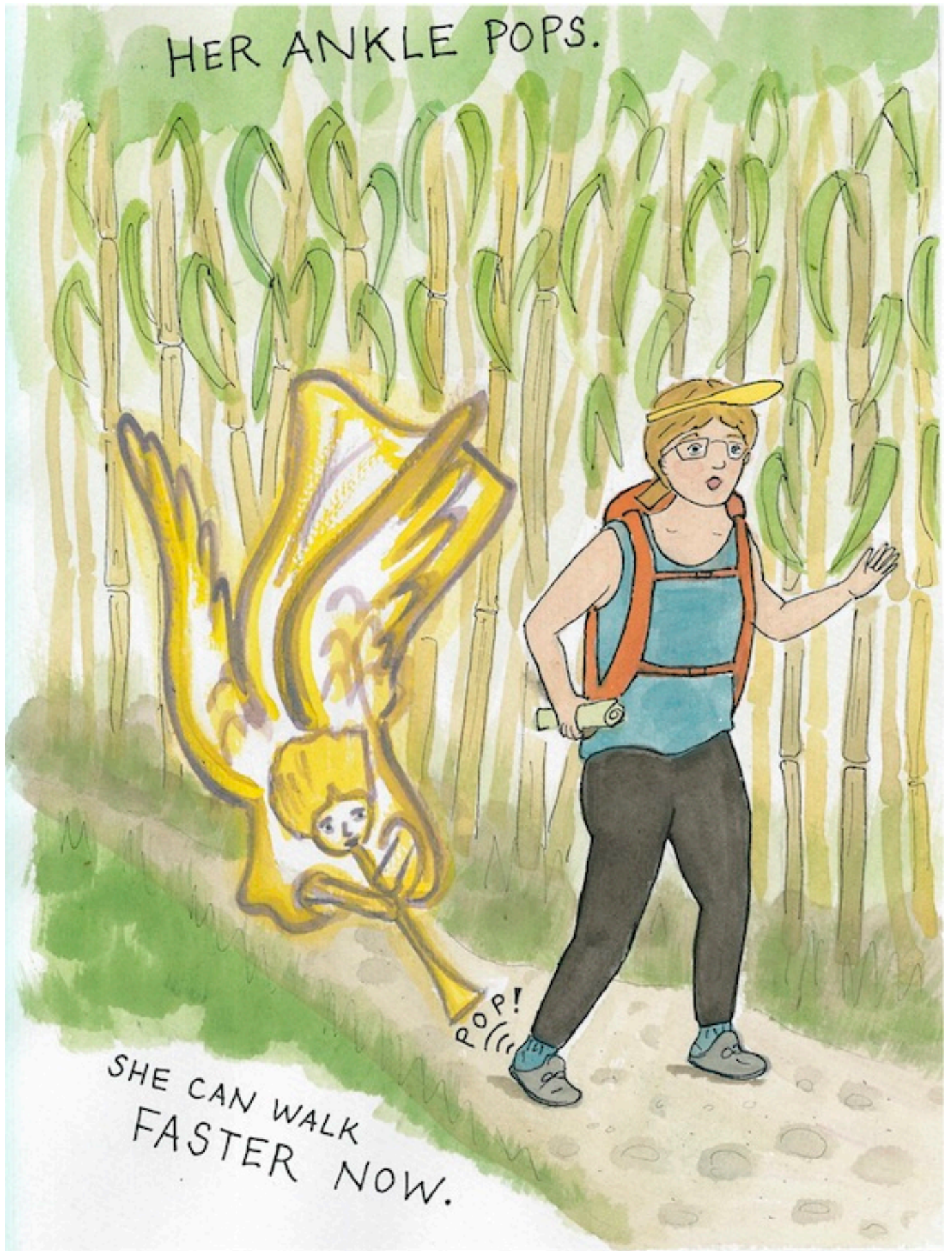


ON AND ON, TOWARDS A RIVER.

AS I PUSH AHEAD, BRENDA
HEARS A HEAVENLY CHOIR
THROUGH THE BAMBOO.



HER ANKLE POPS.



SHE CAN WALK
FASTER NOW.

THE DAYS
ALL
END

IN
EXHAUSTION.





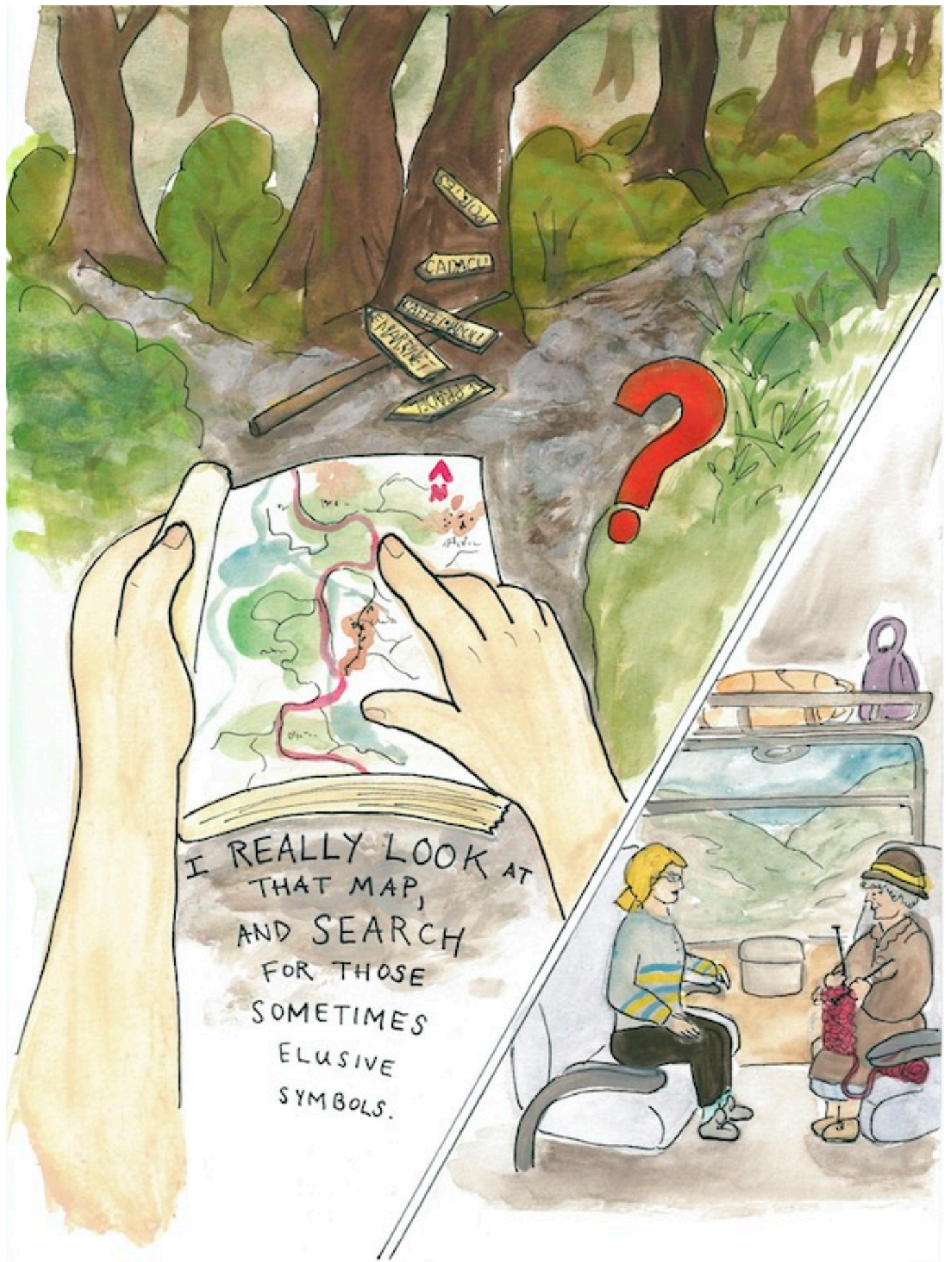
THE FRENCHIE AT
"LOU CANTE PERDRIX"



FEELS OUR PAIN.

A 28 km DAY AHEAD OF US.
WE DECIDE I MUST GO IT ALONE.
I AM NOT A MAP-READER.
I AM SCARED
AND THRILLED.





I AM SO VERY FAR OFF TRACK.
THERE IS NOTHING FOR IT BUT TO ASK FOR HELP
(AND LUNCH) AT THE BIKER BAR IN LE MARTINET.
THE BARTENDER



POINTS ME
ON MY WAY
AND
THEN →



SHE LEAVES HER POST AND HER CUSTOMERS
TO DRIVE ME BACK

TO THE
PATH.

Vous êtes mon ange.



ABANDONED COAL MINES
WHICH LOOK LIKE ANCIENT
METEOR CRATERS.

I HOPE THAT ONE DAY,
THAT IS WHAT GEOLOGISTS
MIGHT CONCLUDE THEY ARE.





SO MUCH RAIN,

A FOREST SO MAGICAL

WITH ITS BIG, FLAT LEAVES,

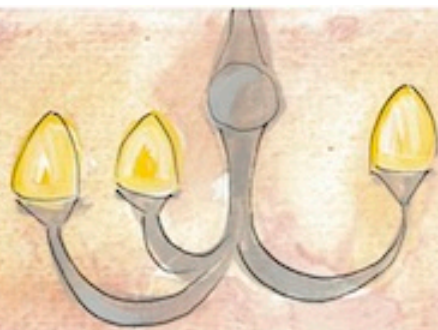
THAT I ALMOST DON'T MIND

NOT RESTING FOR HOURS.

I TRULY LOOK A FRIGHT WHEN I
ARRIVE AT THE FANCY MAS de ROCHEBELLE
IN ALÈS.

BRENDA HAS NEVER BEEN
MORE RELIEVED TO
SEE ME.





OUR HOSTESS



APOLOGETICALLY SERVES US
A DINNER SHE HAS
THROWN TOGETHER.

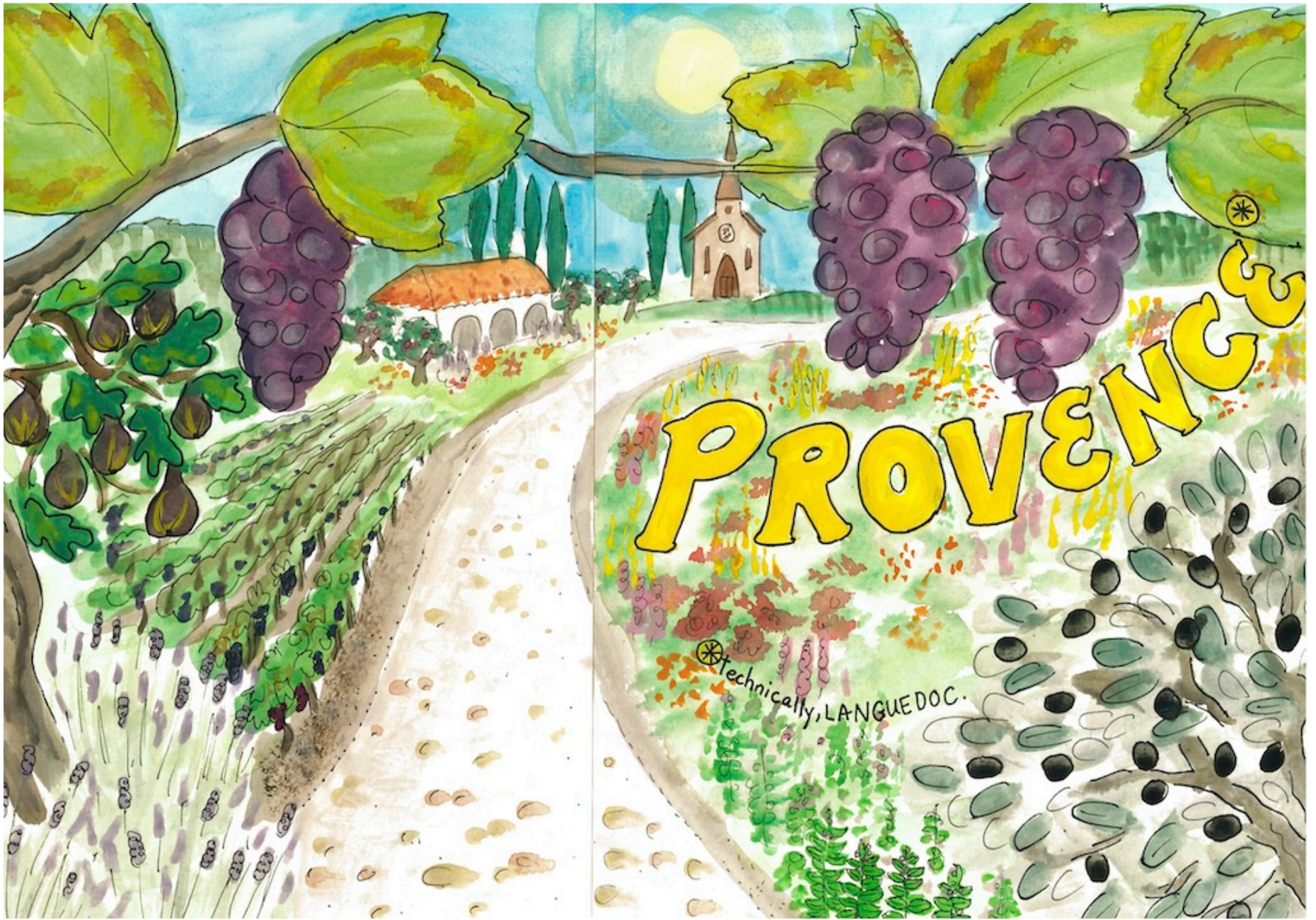
THROUGH THE UGLY OUTSKIRTS
OF ALÈS, ..

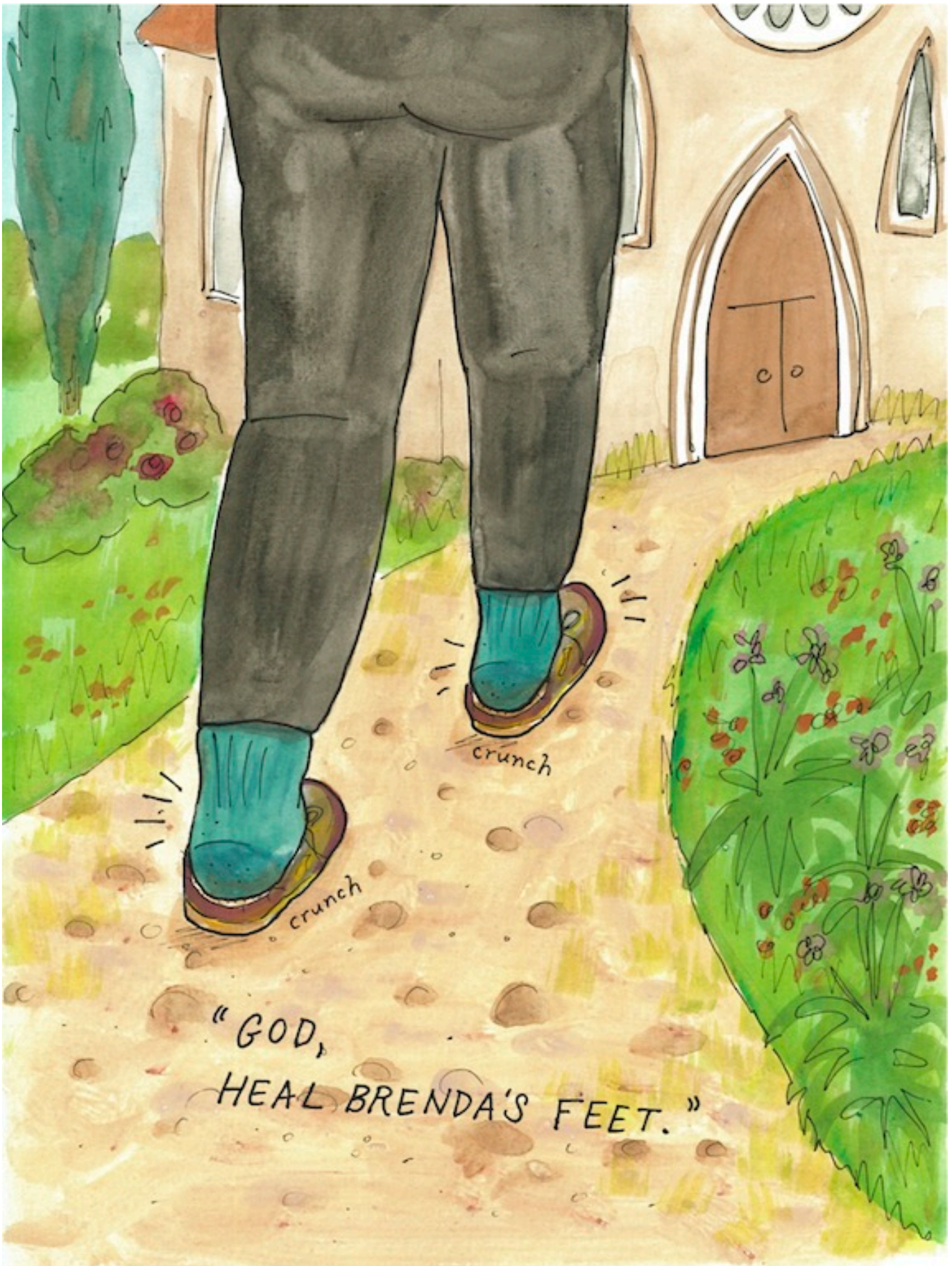


... THE SCRAPPY ORCHARDS,
THE ROCKY PATHS.

BOTH STRUGGLING NOW,
BUT PLEASED TO DETECT
THE OVERWHELMING PERFUMES OF...







"GOD,
HEAL BRENDA'S FEET."

"SHOW ME WHAT I NEED
TO LEARN.

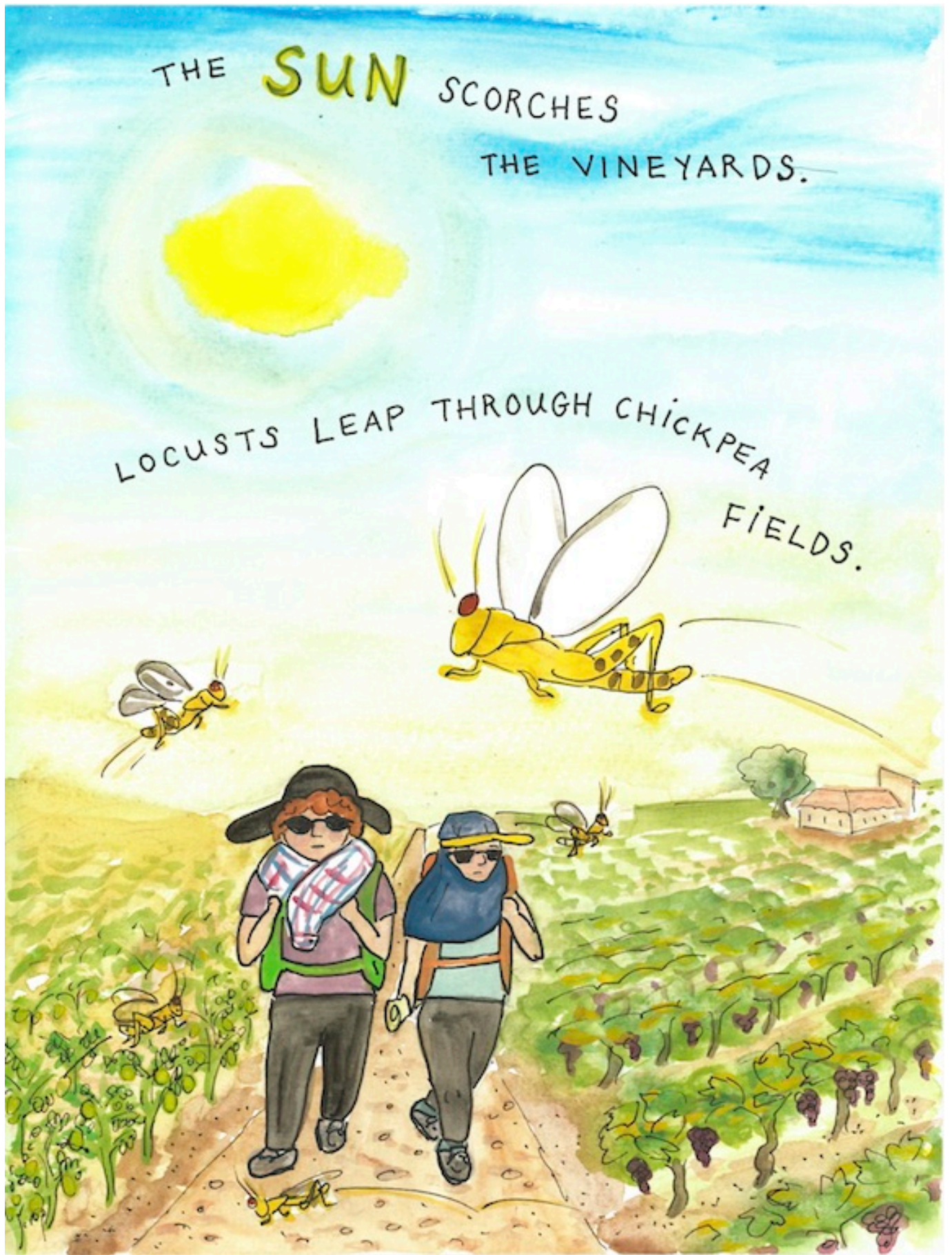
MAKE
ME
STRONGER.



I AM LISTENING."

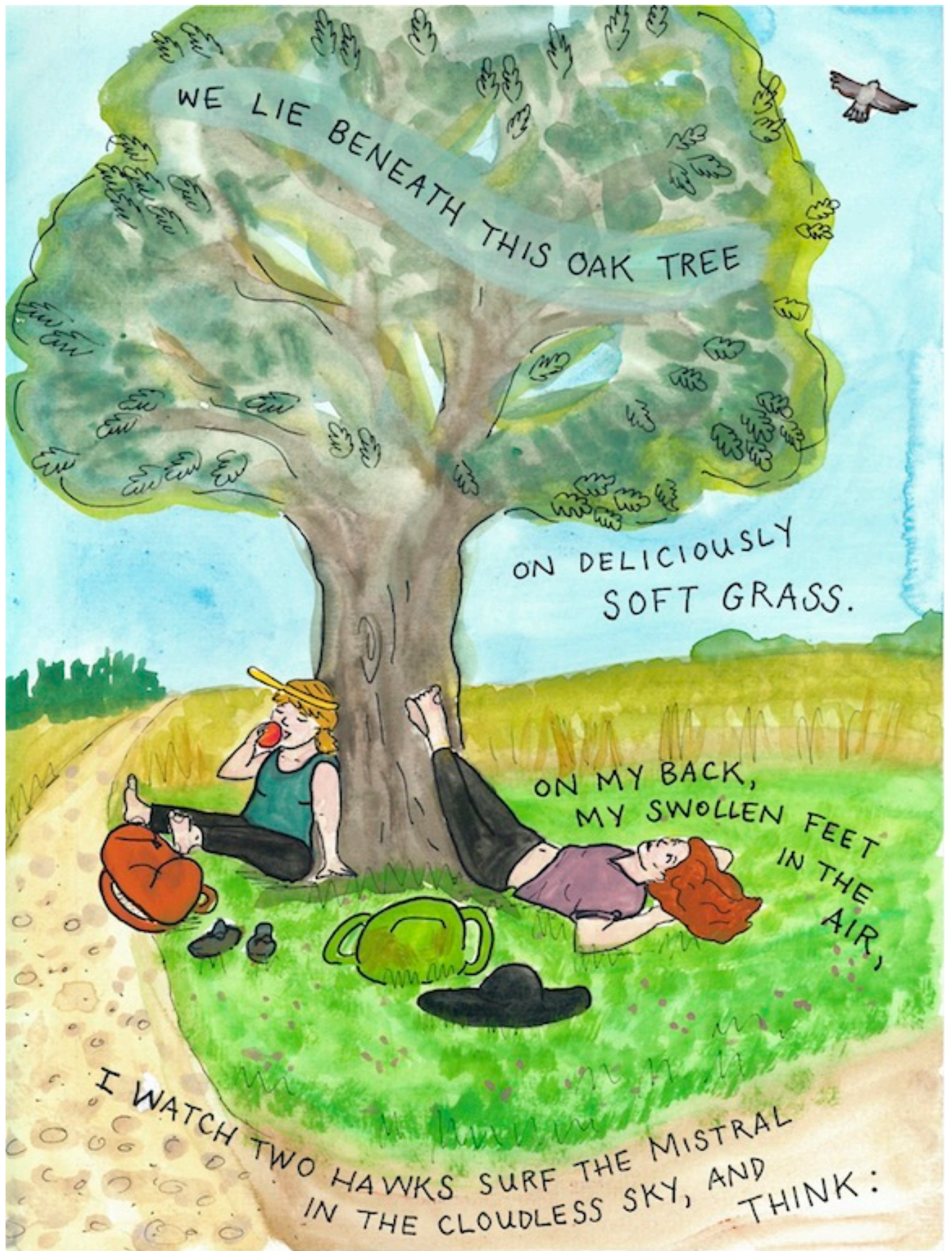
THE **SUN** SCORCHES
THE VINEYARDS.

LOCUSTS LEAP THROUGH CHICKPEA
FIELDS.



EVERY SMALL PATCH
OF SHADE
BRINGS
RELIEF.





WE LIE BENEATH THIS OAK TREE

ON DELICIOUSLY
SOFT GRASS.

ON MY BACK,
MY SWOLLEN FEET
IN THE AIR,

I WATCH TWO HAWKS SURF THE MISTRAL
IN THE CLOUDLESS SKY, AND
THINK:



I WILL NEVER LEAVE THIS PLACE.

TWO



DAYS



HALAL جزارة الحلال

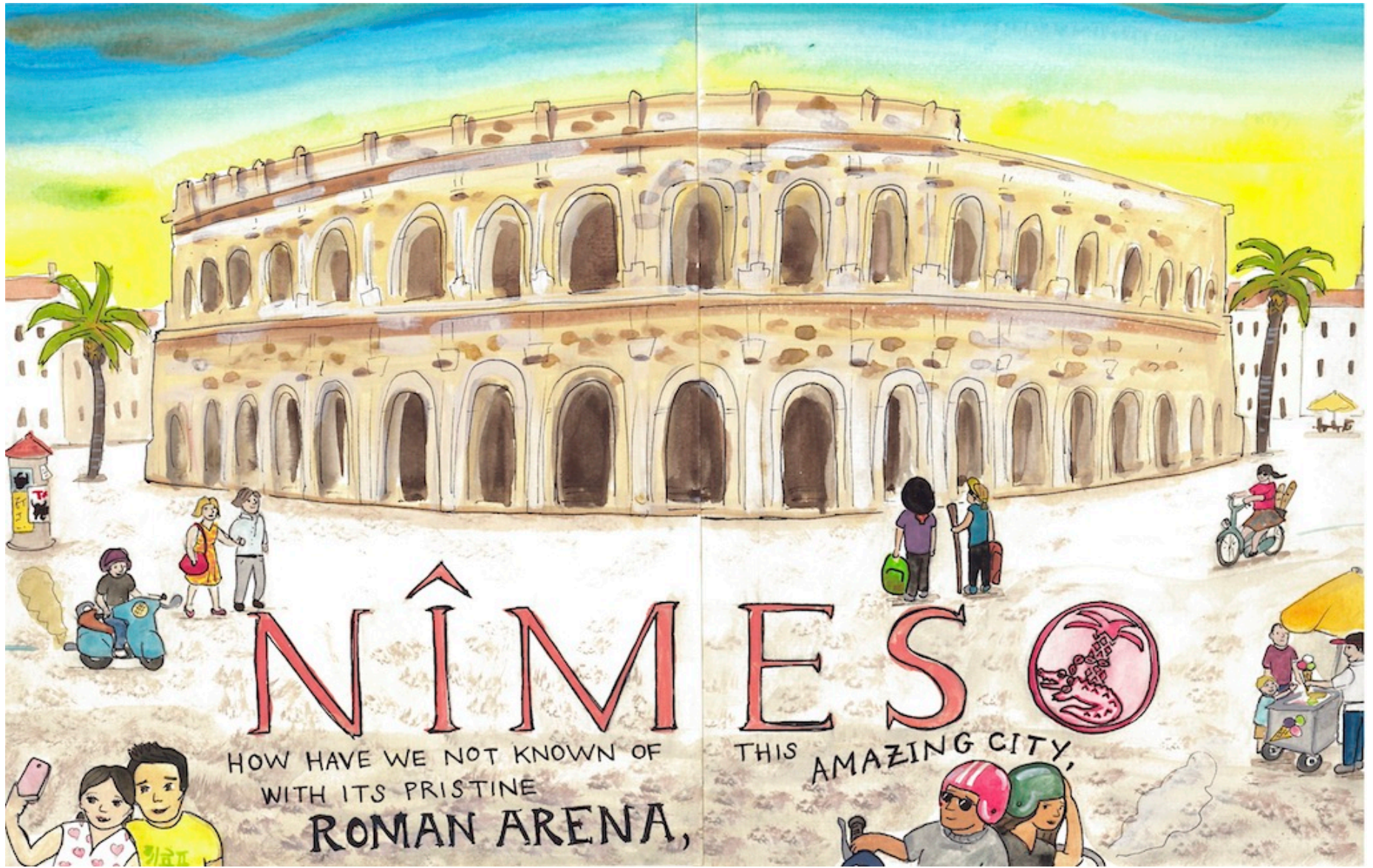
مقهى جزائري
SALON DU THÉ

LATER



... AFTER ANOTHER FULL DAY OF
WILDFLOWER SPECTACLE,
WE ARE SHOCKED TO HAPPEN UPON...





NÎMES

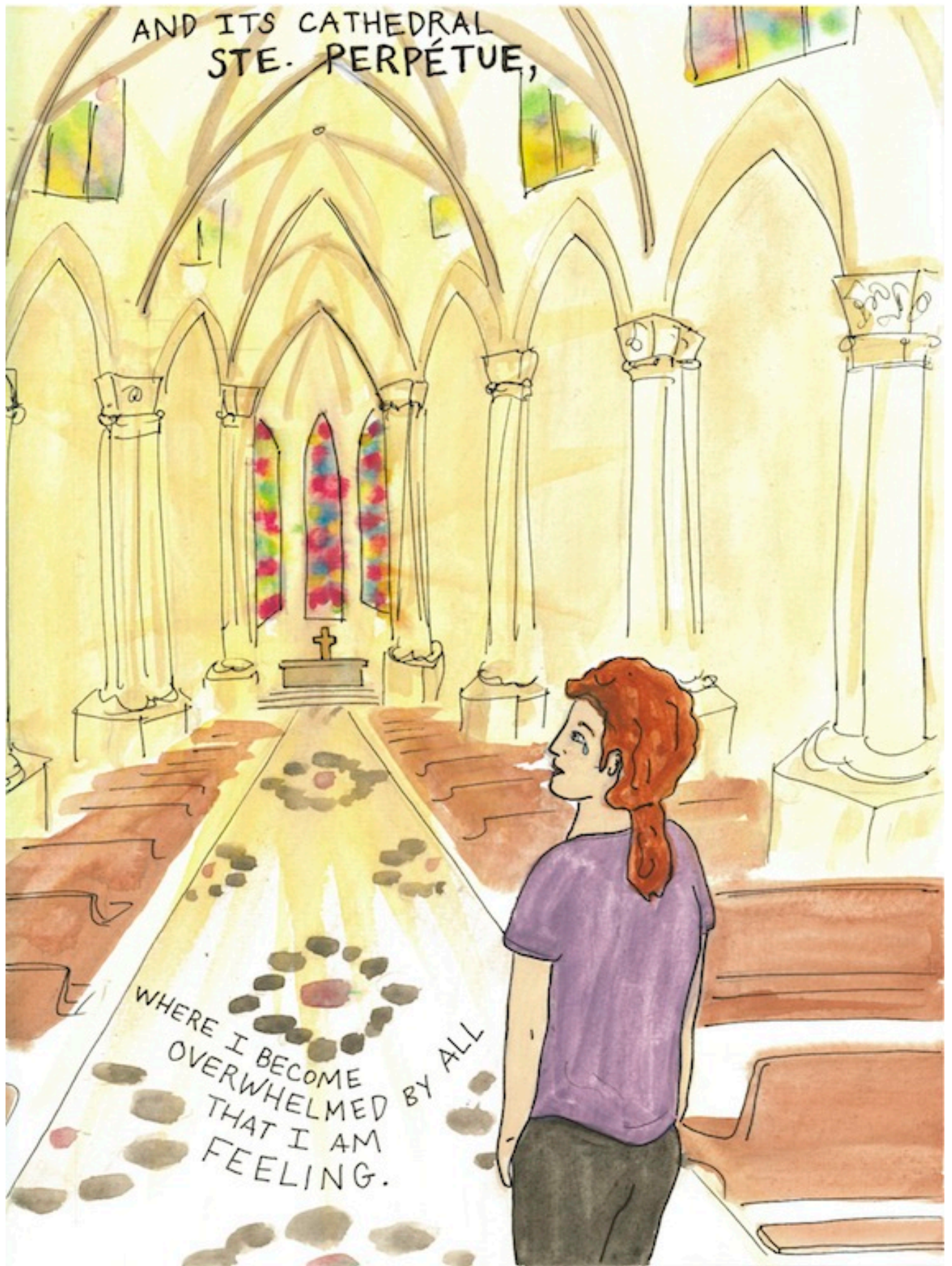
HOW HAVE WE NOT KNOWN OF
WITH ITS PRISTINE
ROMAN ARENA,

ES

THIS AMAZING CITY,

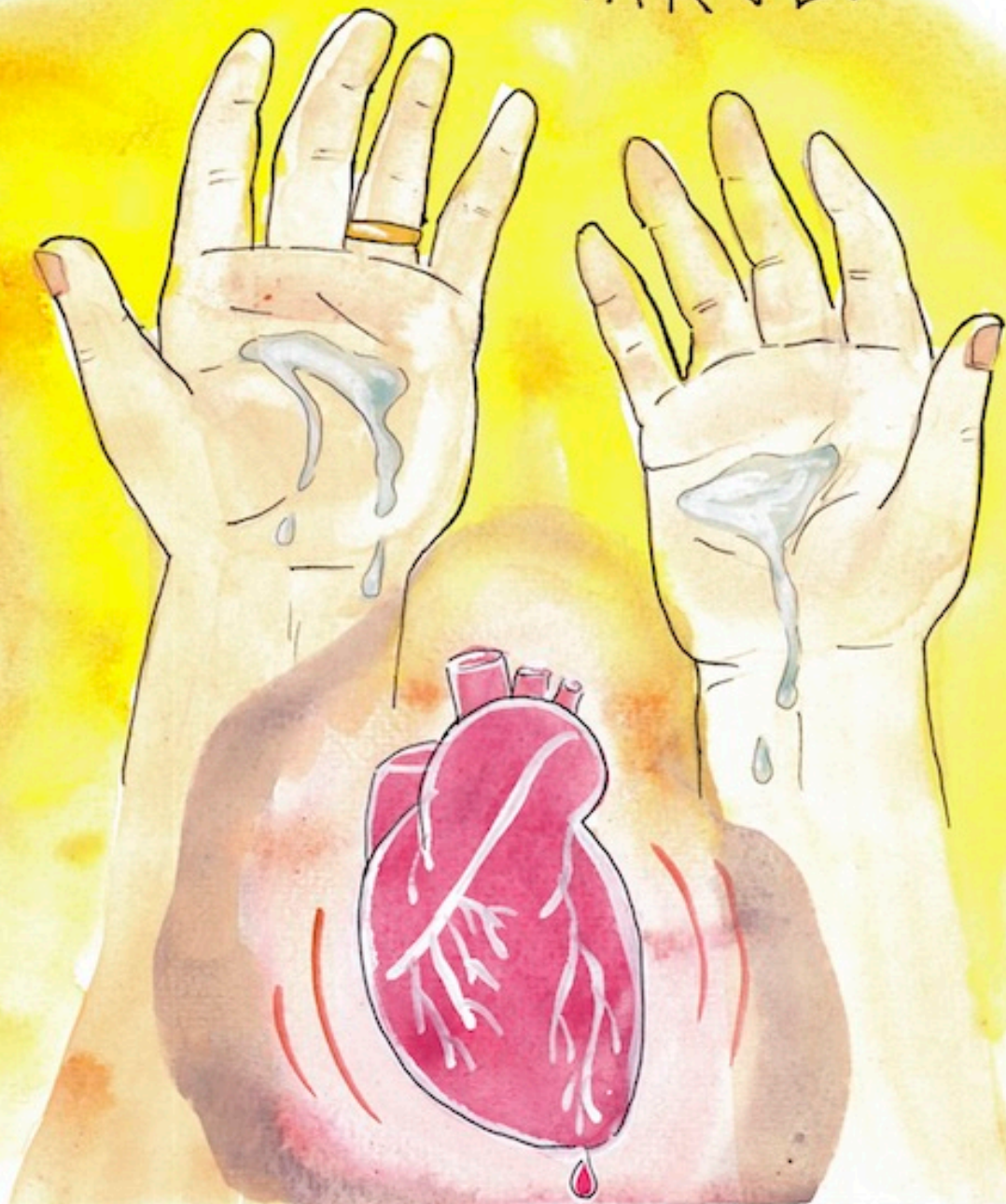


AND ITS CATHEDRAL
STE. PERPÉTUE,



WHERE I BECAME
OVERWHELMED BY ALL
THAT I AM
FEELING.

THE MYSTERY,
THE MIRACLE,
THE MARVEL.



I WEEP
IN SUCH A WAY,
I THINK I MIGHT NOT STOP.



Courage, Pèlerine!



THE OLD SPICE ROUTE IS A ROCKY PATH, THAT



L'ART ZOGAW A STAZOMB
A QUARRIED MINE, A SANDY



FOREST BED,
AND THEN



A HIGHWAY WITH NO SHOULDER,





THE HANDWRITTEN
DETOUR INSTRUCTIONS...

SUIVRE LES
BALISAGES
TEMPORAIRES
GR 700

... WERE NOT ENTIRELY

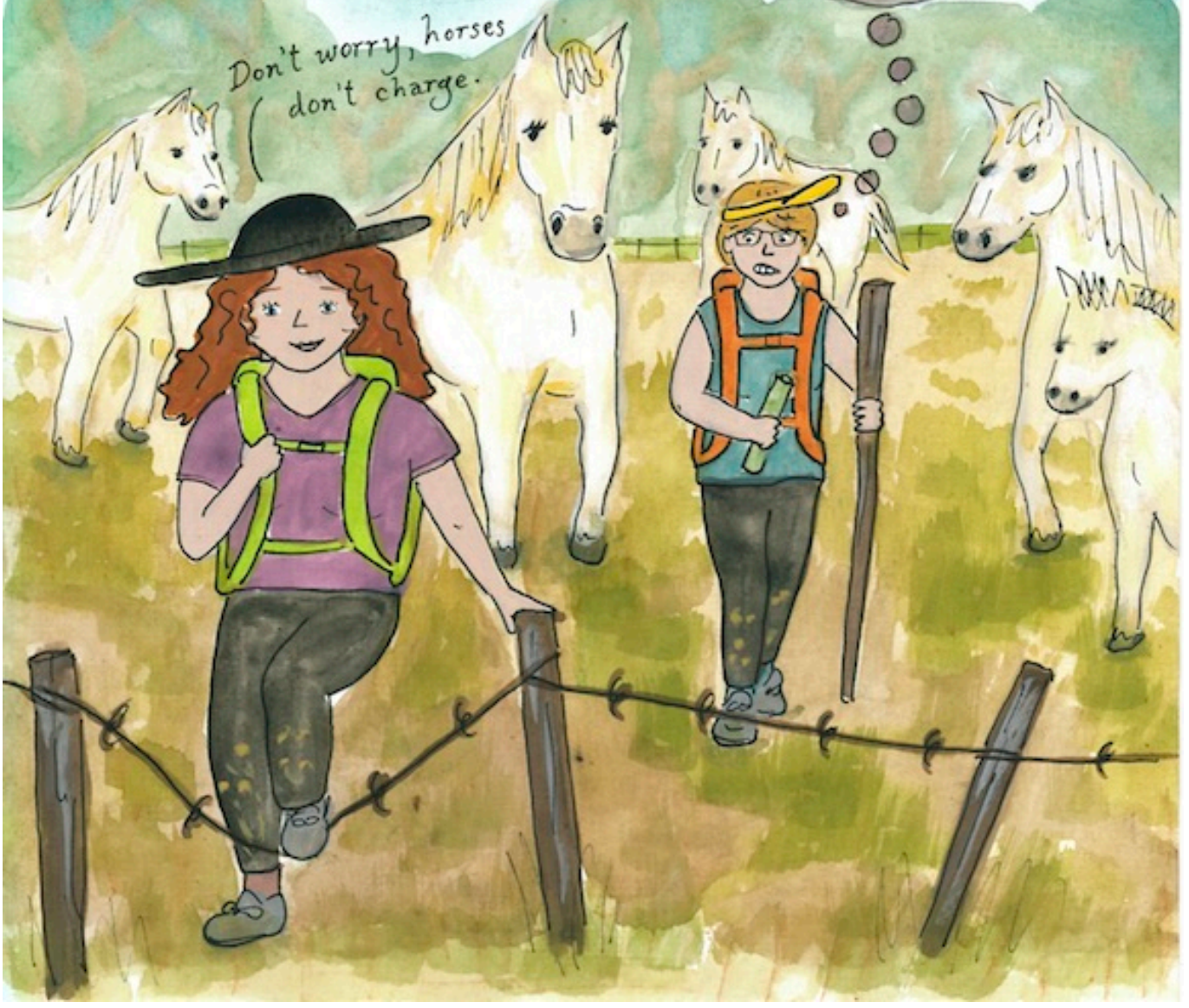
TO BE TRUSTED.



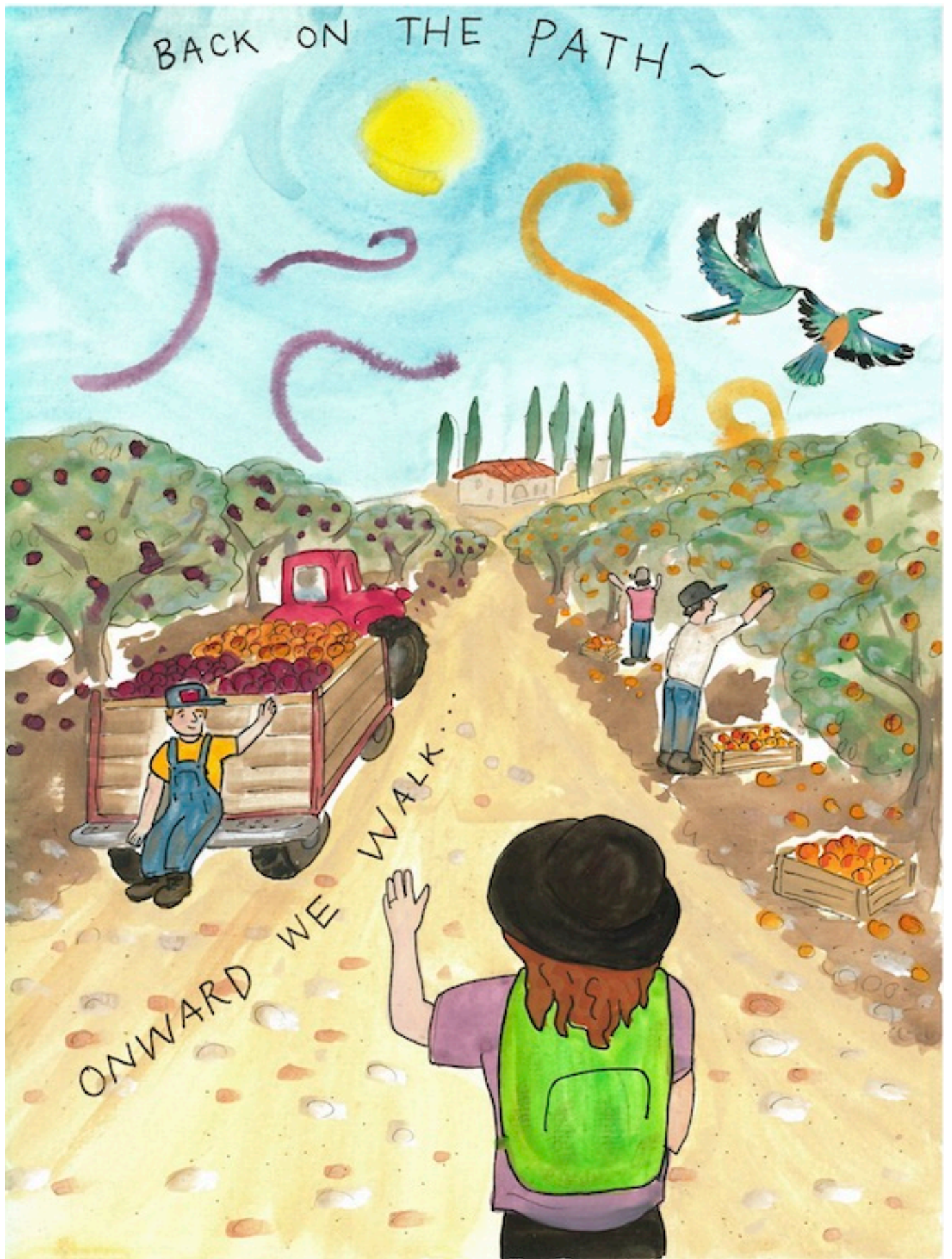
WE IMPROVISE.



Don't worry, horses
don't charge.



BACK ON THE PATH ~

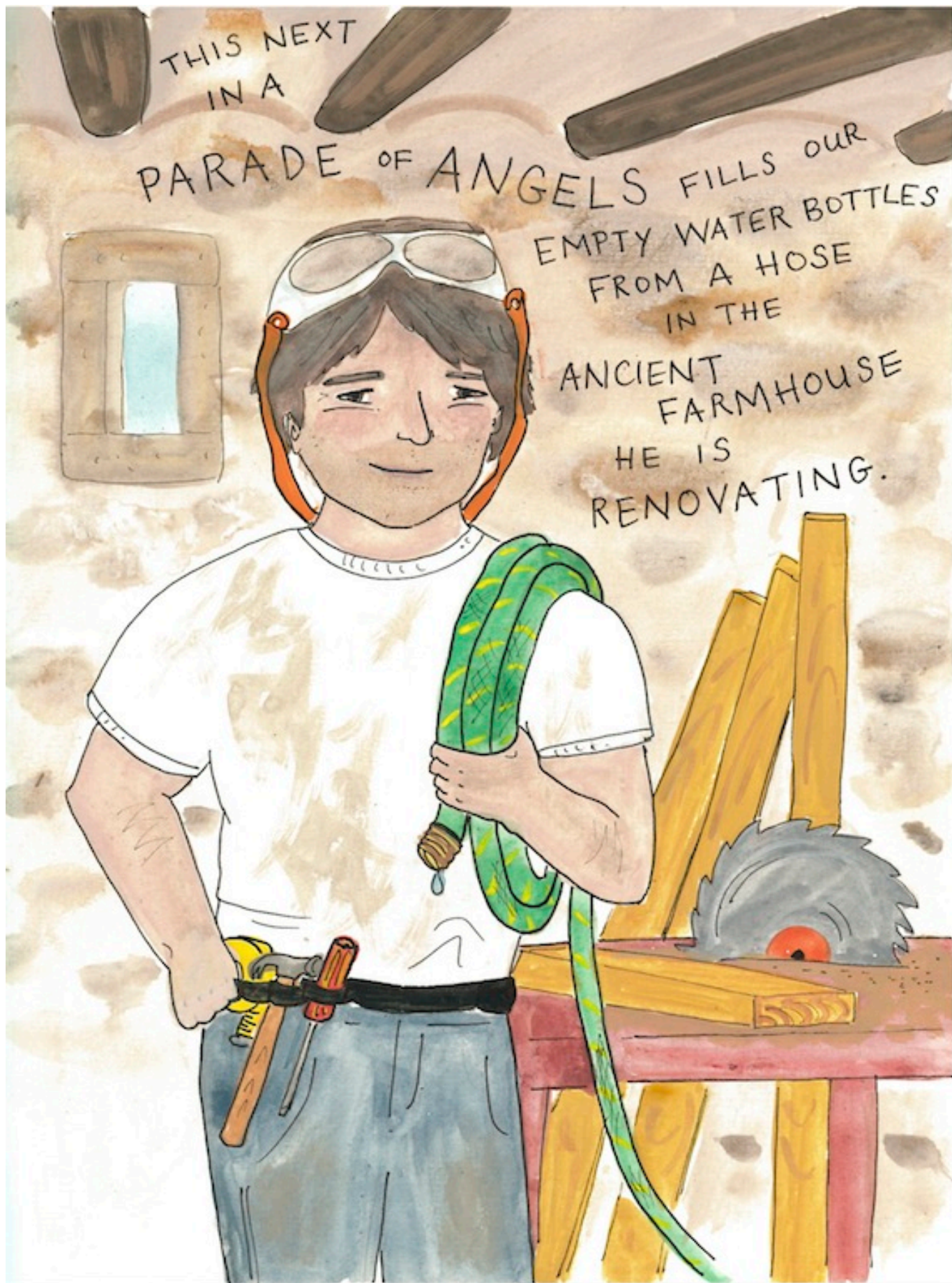


ONWARD WE WALK...

... AND
WALK.



THIS NEXT
IN A
PARADE OF ANGELS FILLS OUR
EMPTY WATER BOTTLES
FROM A HOSE
IN THE
ANCIENT
FARMHOUSE
HE IS
RENOVATING.

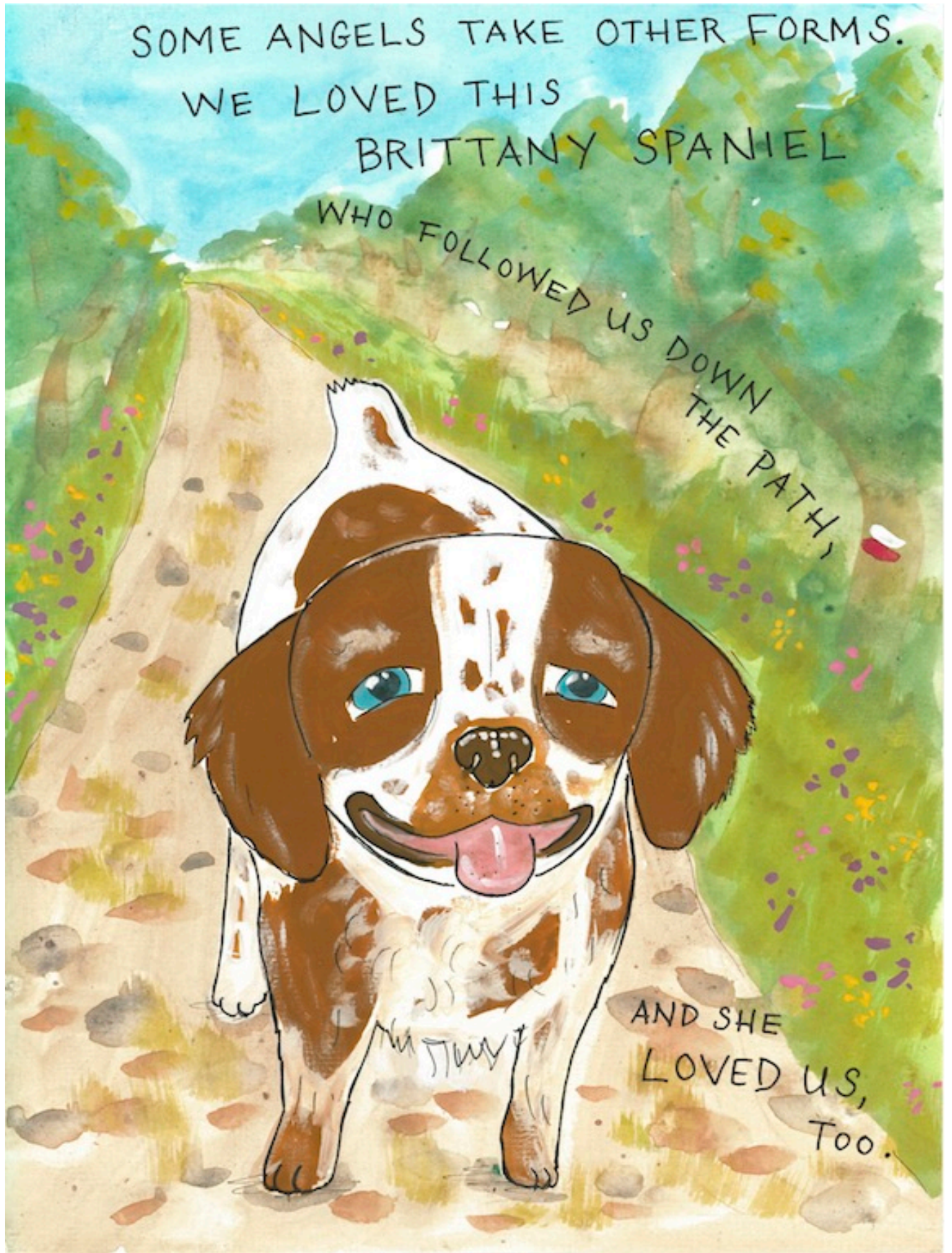


SOME ANGELS TAKE OTHER FORMS.

WE LOVED THIS
BRITTANY SPANIEL

WHO FOLLOWED US DOWN
THE PATH,

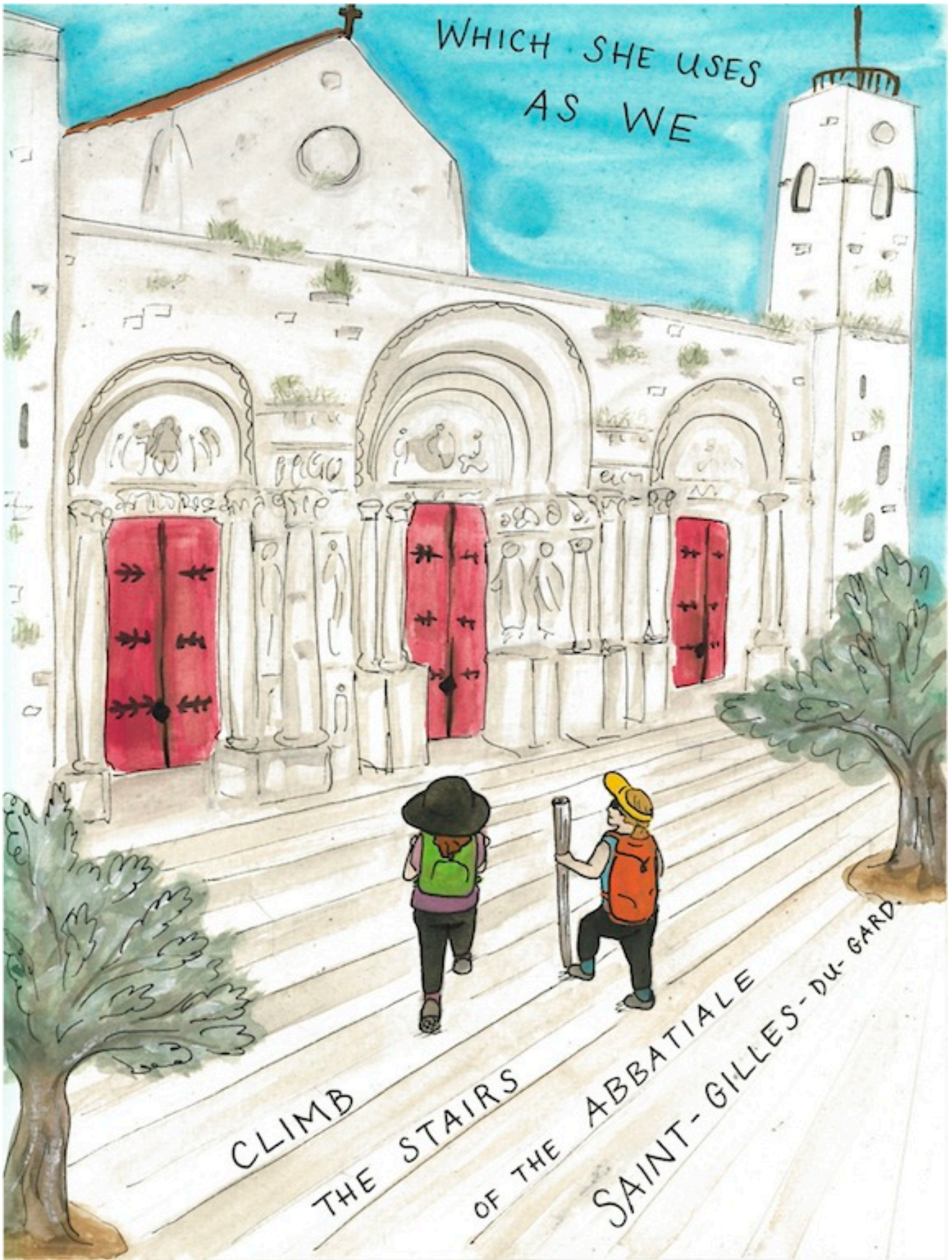
AND SHE
LOVED US,
TOO.



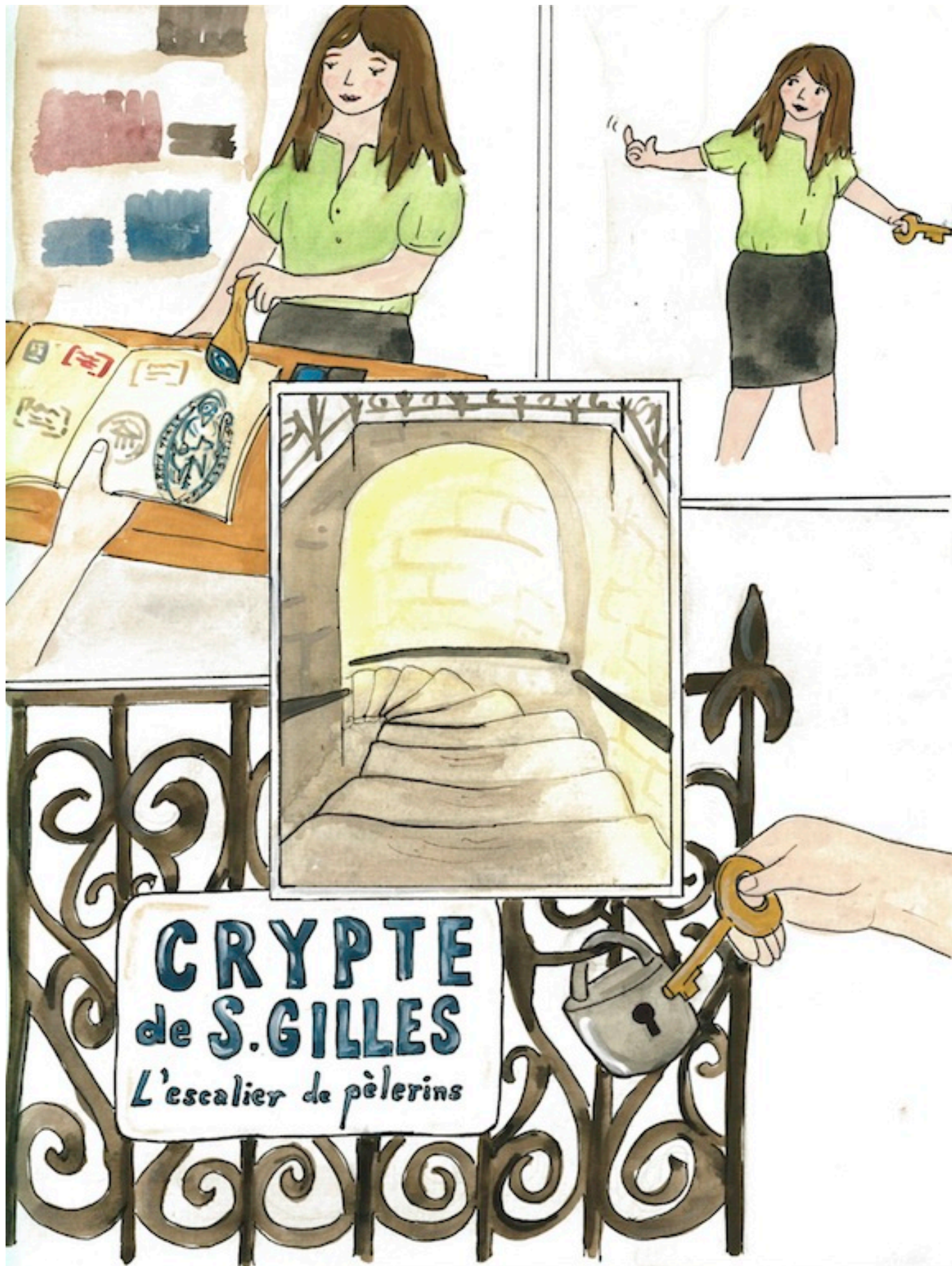
A FOREST-DWELLING ARTIST,
WHO BESTOWED UPON BRENDA
THE PERFECT
WALKING STICK.



WHICH SHE USES
AS WE



CLIMB
THE STAIRS
OF THE ABBATIALE
SAINT-GILLES-DU-GARD.



CRYPTE
de S. GILLES
L'escalier de pèlerins

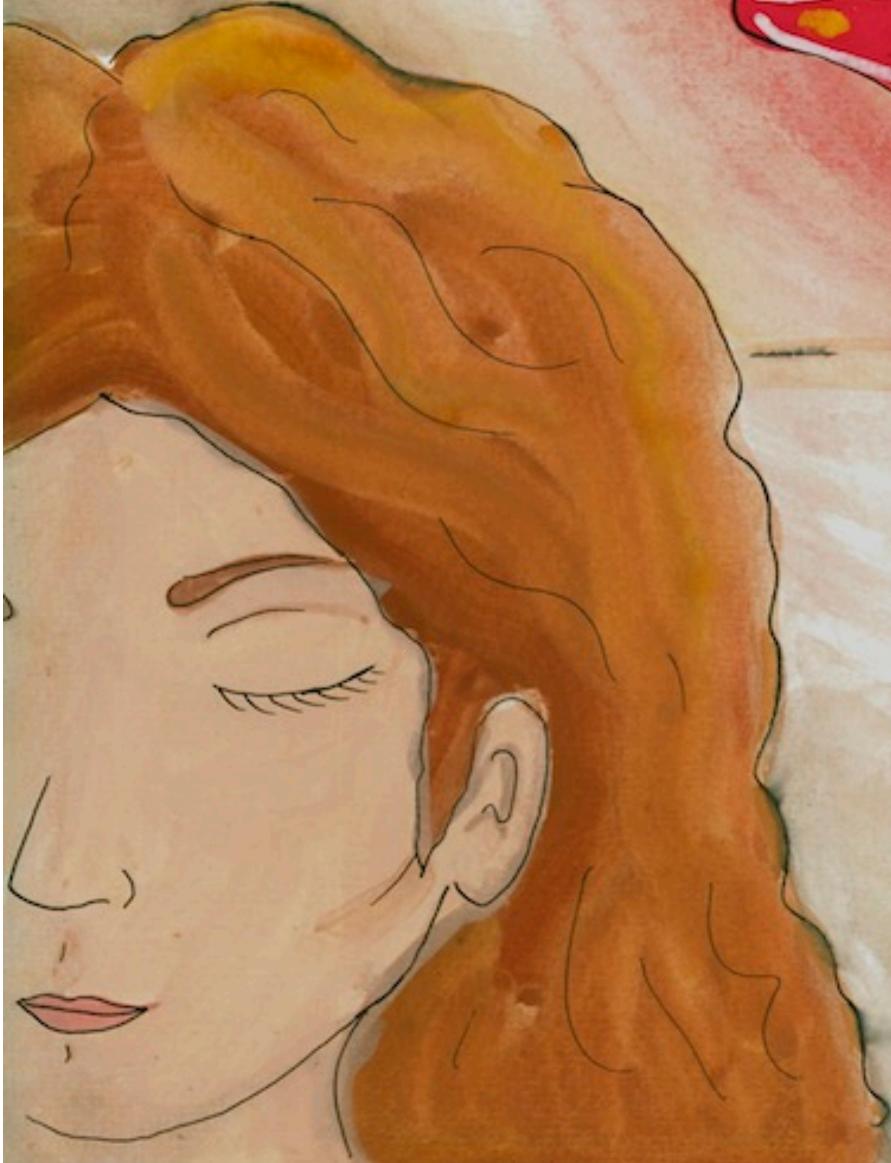








" I ...



... GAVE YOU
STRENGTH.

I OPENED

I SHOWED

WERE HERE.

AND KNOW

THAT YOU ARE STRONG,

AND MOST

I HEALED YOU.

YOUR HEART.

YOU WHY YOU

NOW GO

FOREVER

HEALTHY, LOVING,

OF ALL ...

... YOU ARE ON THE
RIGHT PATH.”





The End.