

The Seven Ravens



The Seven Ravens

Picture Book by Hilde Langen

Poem by Marta Strachwitz

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Published by the Workshop: "Zu den sieben Zwergen."

Dornach near Basel Switzerland




Once, when Nature lay a-sunning
Near a church upon the mountain,


Seven brothers came a-running,
Came a-running to the fountain-
Came to fetch some sparkling water
To baptize the new-born daughter.
They were all quite out of breath
For the child was near to death.



But the first one shot a crow,
While the second went to dance;
And the third began to mow,
While the fourth one threw the lance;
And the fifth began to dream
With the sixth, beside a stream;
While the last one ran so fleetly
That he lost himself completely.



Ah—what woe then fell upon them!
From their father's mouth a curse
Cast an evil spell upon them,
Till they shriveled—worse and worse—
And as ravens flew afar—
"Woe—ah woe!" cried every star.
Angrily the sun flamed high.
The moon stood frozen in the sky.



Father, tell me, have I brothers?
"Hush! They have all flown away."
"Will they not return, as others?"
"Flew, all black, at break of day,
Flew as ravens, far and wide.
Ask of sun and moon and tide,
Ask of wind, of cloud and star!—
None can tell you where they are."





Out of doors she crept one morning,
Bread and pitcher in her hand.
On she went into the dawning--
On, beyond the last green land.
"Sun! Have you seen anywhere
Seven ravens? Boys they were;
Flew o'er hill and dale afar.
Can you tell me where they are?"

High upon his sky-blue throne
Sat the sun, in blazing wonder.
How his great eyes flashed and shone
And his flames made mighty thunder!
"Quick, be off! No living mortal
Dare to cross my burning portal.
Leave my palace in the skies,
Lest I burn out both your eyes!"

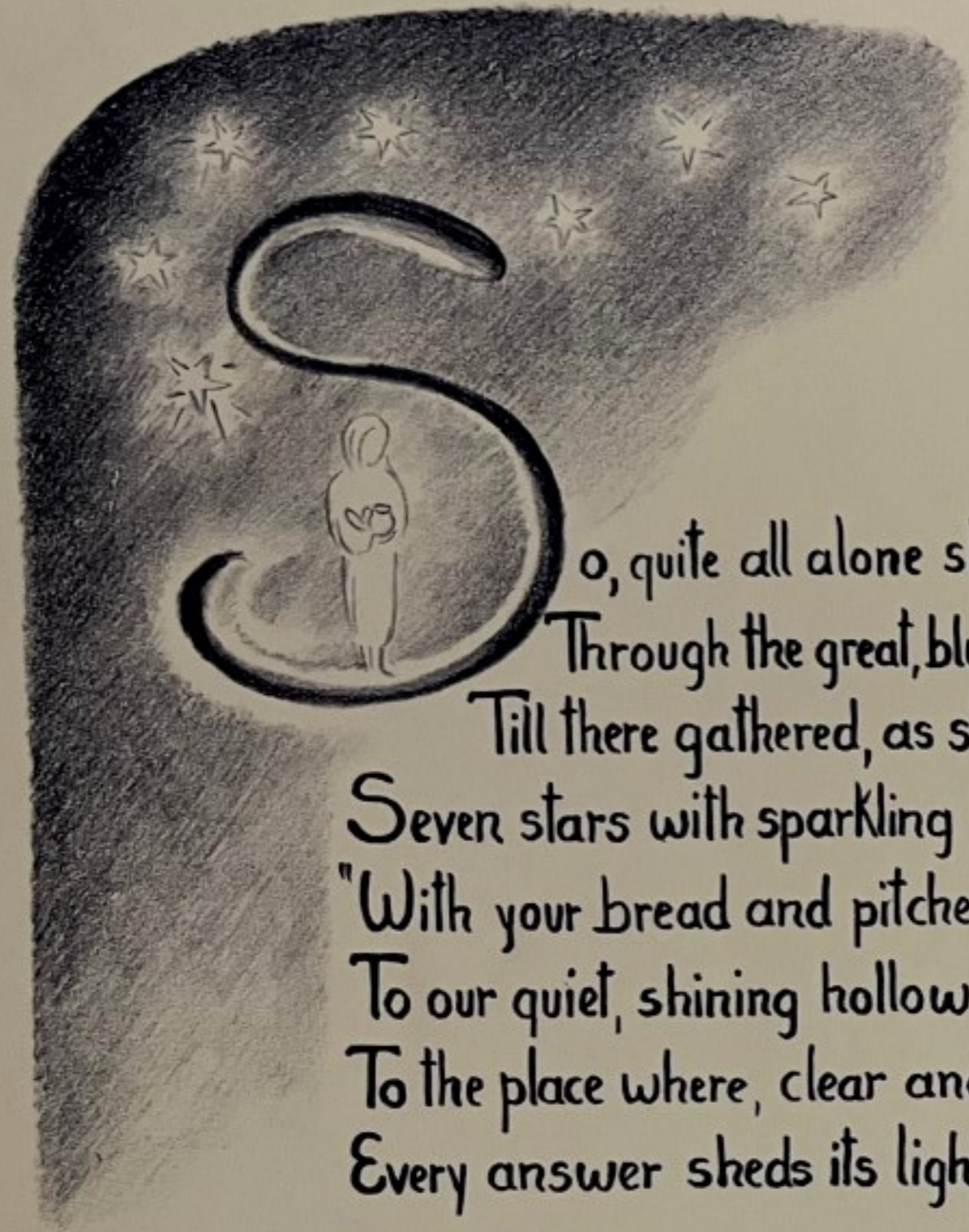




moon, all silver, coldly gleaming
In the dark, unbounded deep,
Where your chilly light is streaming,
Have you seen them, fast asleep?
Once, as mortals they were born
And were lost one fateful morn,
Lost forever - ah - unless
I can end their long distress!"

But the moon, in icy shimmer,
With a face shaped like a ship,
Sat with frozen hair a-glimmer,
Laughed with cold and cruel lip.
"Swift, away! Here everything
Returns again, as in a swing,
All unchanged. So leave my throne,
Lest I wither you to bone."

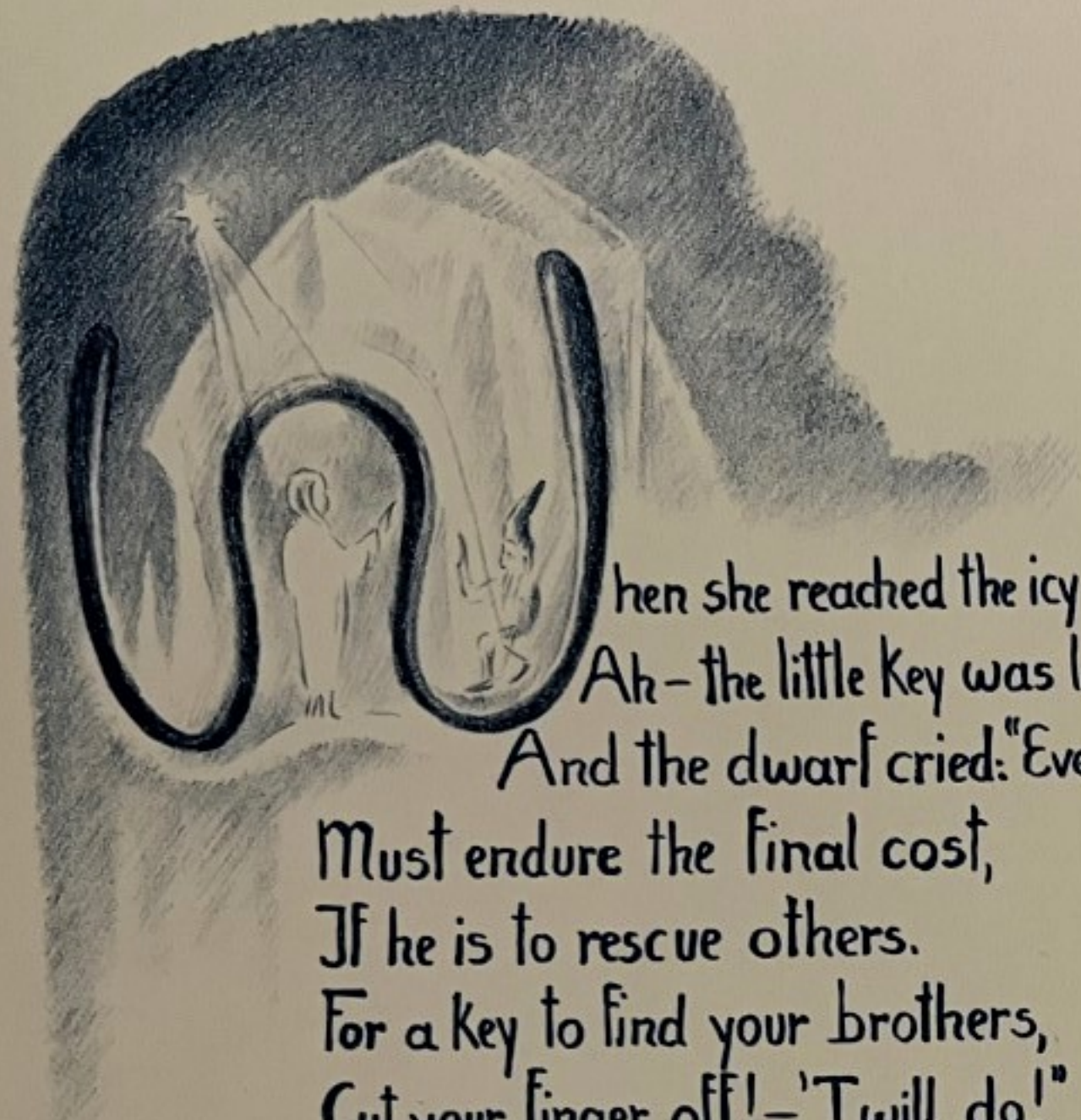




So, quite all alone she wandered
Through the great, blue, boundless spaces,
Till there gathered, as she pondered,
Seven stars with sparkling faces.
"With your bread and pitcher, follow
To our quiet, shining hollow—
To the place where, clear and bright,
Every answer sheds its light."

So they bade her come inside.
Ah—how heavens palace shone,
Where in peace the stars reside,
Each upon a cloud-bright throne!
And the Greatest, smilingly,
Handed her a golden Key.
"To the crystal mountain—hurry!
Ask the dwarf— and do not worry!"

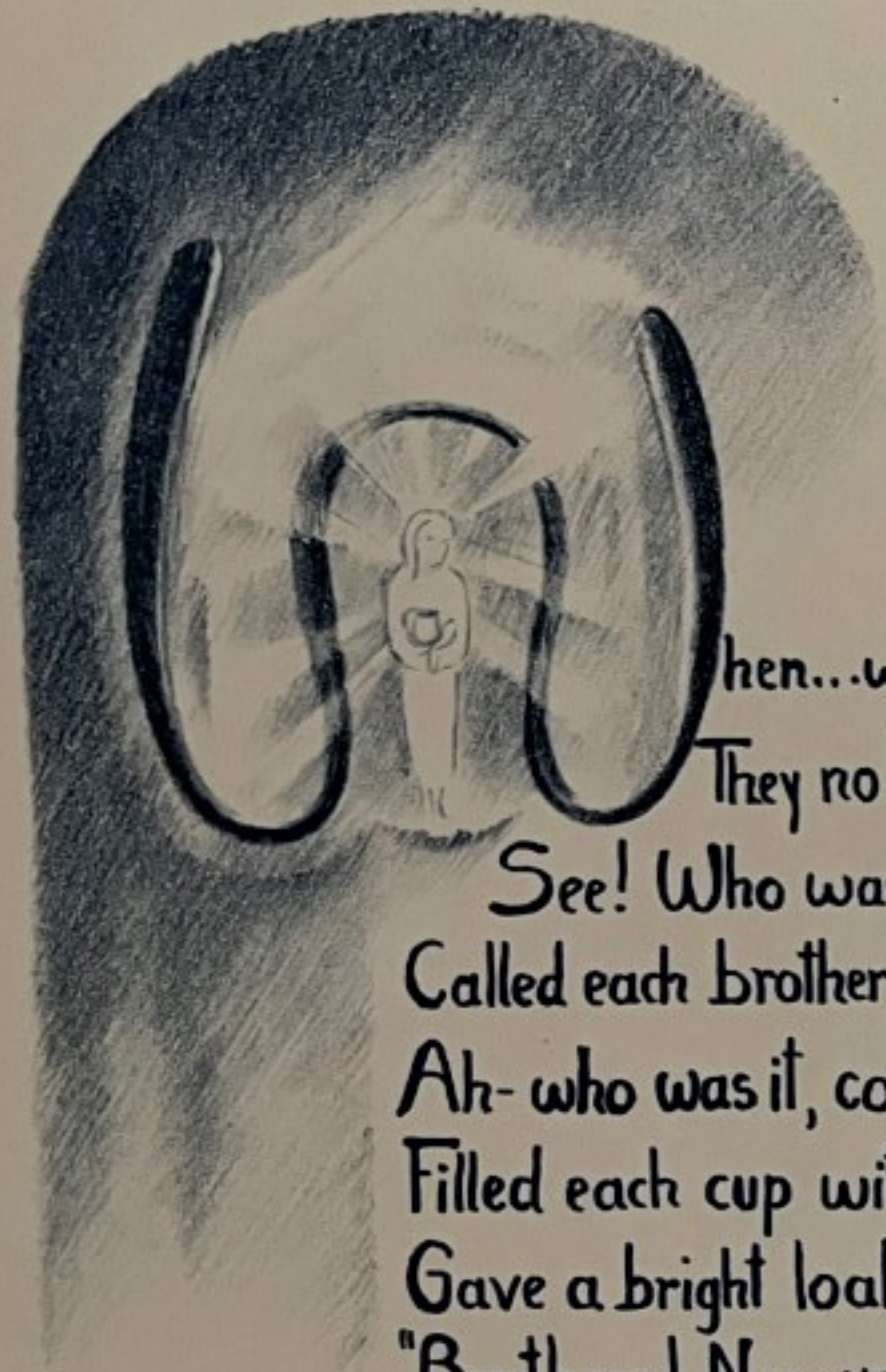




When she reached the icy portal,
Ah - the little key was lost!
And the dwarf cried: "Every mortal
Must endure the final cost,
If he is to rescue others.
For a key to find your brothers,
Cut your finger off! - 'Twill do!"
So she did it - and went through.

Not a single breath was stirring;
Starry blessing filled the night,
When there came a mighty whirring! -
Seven ravens swooped in flight,
Settled slowly round the table,
There at midnight told their fable,
While the clever dwarf stood guard
'Mid the crystals sharp and hard.

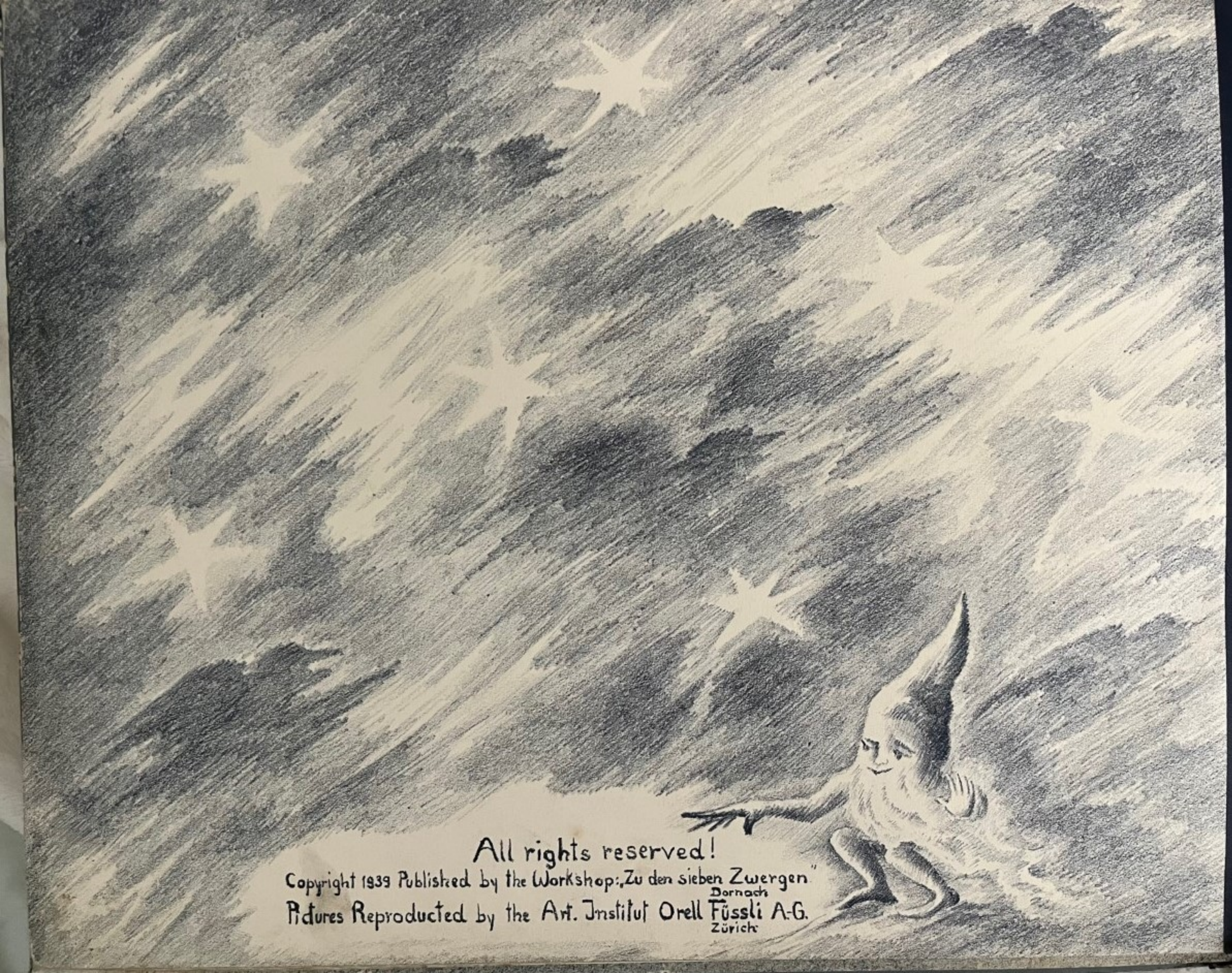




Then... what brightness fell around them!
They no longer were the same!
See! Who was it there had found them
Called each brother by his name?
Ah- who was it, come to dine,
Filled each cup with heavens wine,
Gave a bright loaf to each one? --
"Brothers! Now your woe is done!"

And at last their scrawny feathers
Fell in some dark place or other...
Like the sun through stormy weathers
Each stood forth a human brother,
And embraced her joyfully-
Her, whose love had set them free.
"Sister-- yes, you've healed our woe.
Lead us home! Come- let us go!"





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