About the Author

Thomas Rockwell lives on a farm near Poughkeepsie, New York, that boasts of having four placid ducks, an irascible goose, a hee-hawing burro, a senile cat, and a leaky roof. The author, who has also written **Rackety-Bang and Other Verses** and **Humphl**, is married to the artist Gail Rockwell. They are the parents of two children.

About the Artist

Michael Horen brought a motorcycle man's genuine enthusiasm to the task of illustrating **The Neon Motorcycle**. The artist, who also illustrated **Once Upon a Truffle**, teaches at Pratt Institute and lives in New York City.

The Neon Motorcycle
By Thomas Rockwell
Pictures by Michael Horen

Every boy's dream comes true in this unconventional tale of a runaway motorcycle with remarkable abilities of propulsion. Suddenly, Sam is on the Harley Davidson and the Harley begins to MOVE. From rooftop to roller coaster there follows a breathtaking escapade that only a brave rider can enjoy.

Thomas Rockwell's fresh, vigorous language is the perfect expression for his original story, and it carries the reader along on an adventure that turns into a happening. Michael Horen's vivid pictures capture all the color and movement of the story, making an unusually appealing picture book.

Franklin Watts, Inc.
New York
1973

THE NLON MOTORCYCLE

Franklin Watts, Inc., New York, 1973

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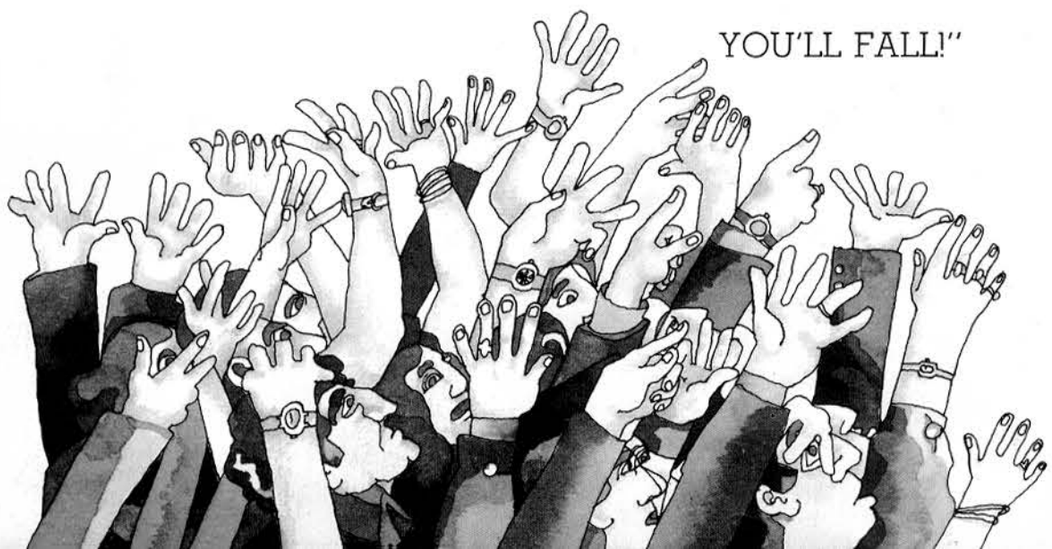
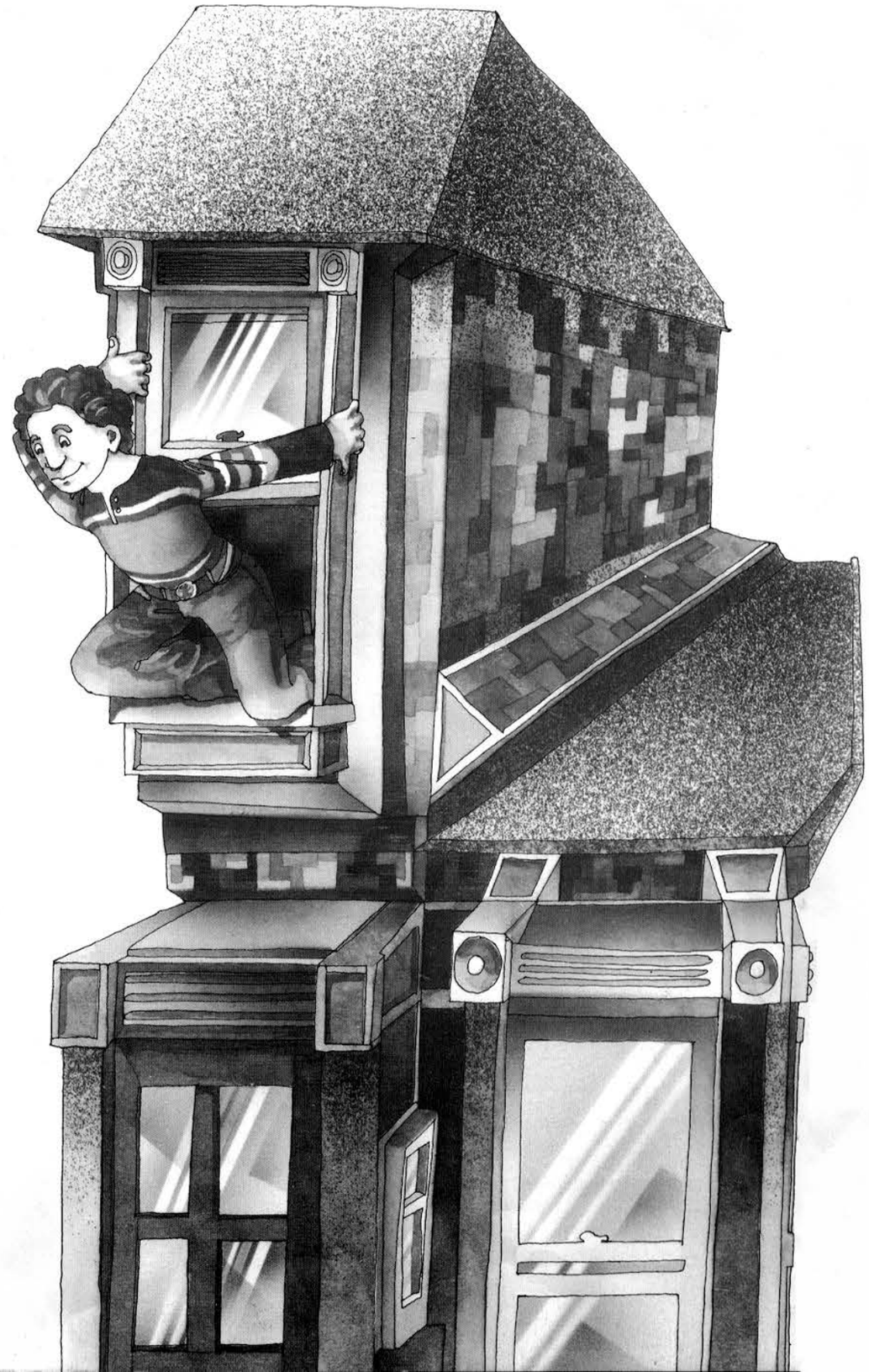
"SAM WATERHOUSE!"
cried his father, his mother,
his brother, his sister,
his grandfather, his grandmother,
his aunt, his uncle,
his cousin Joe, his cousin Alice,
his great aunt Helen,
and her friend Miss Harrington.

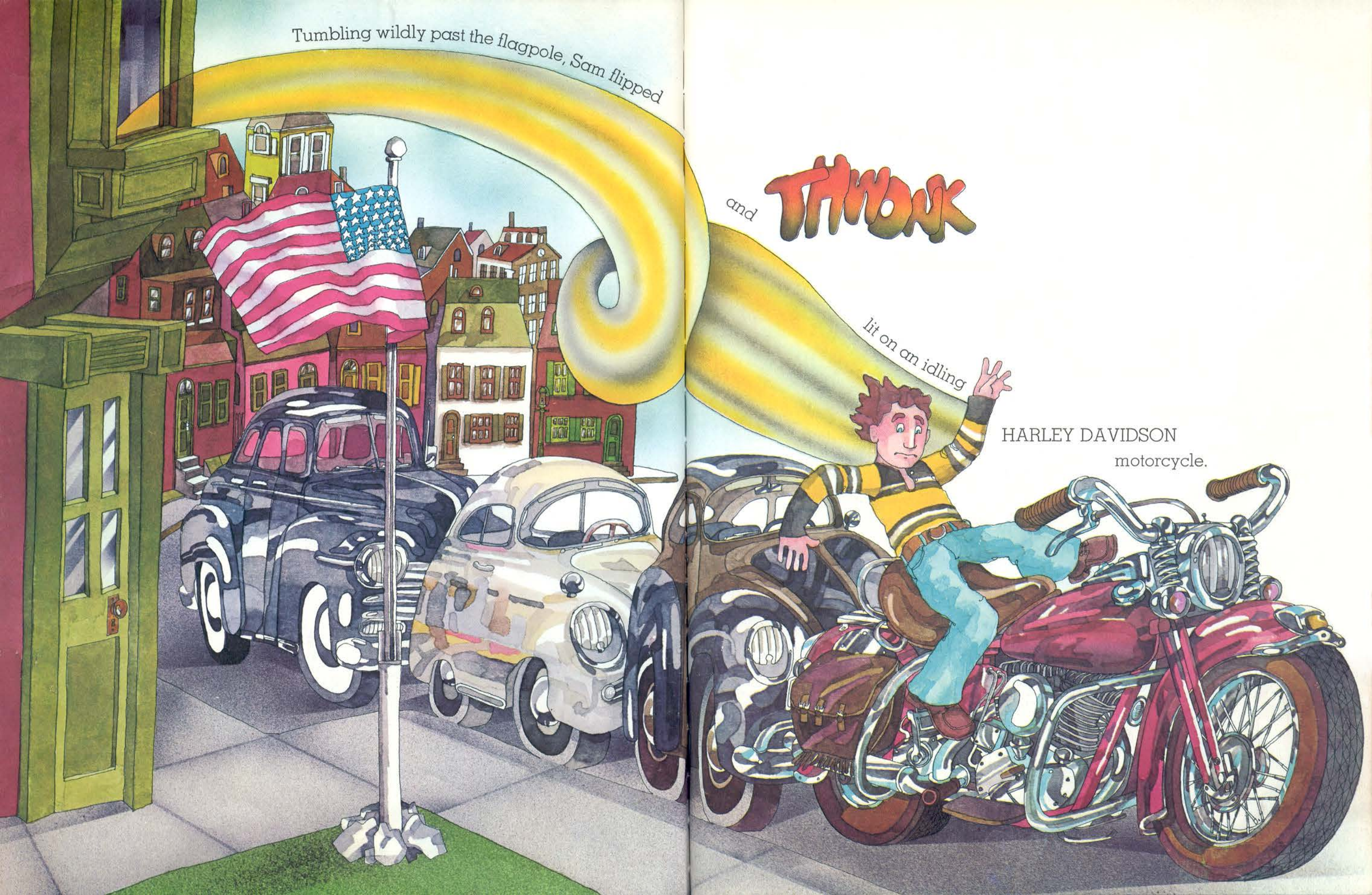
"SAM WATERHOUSE!

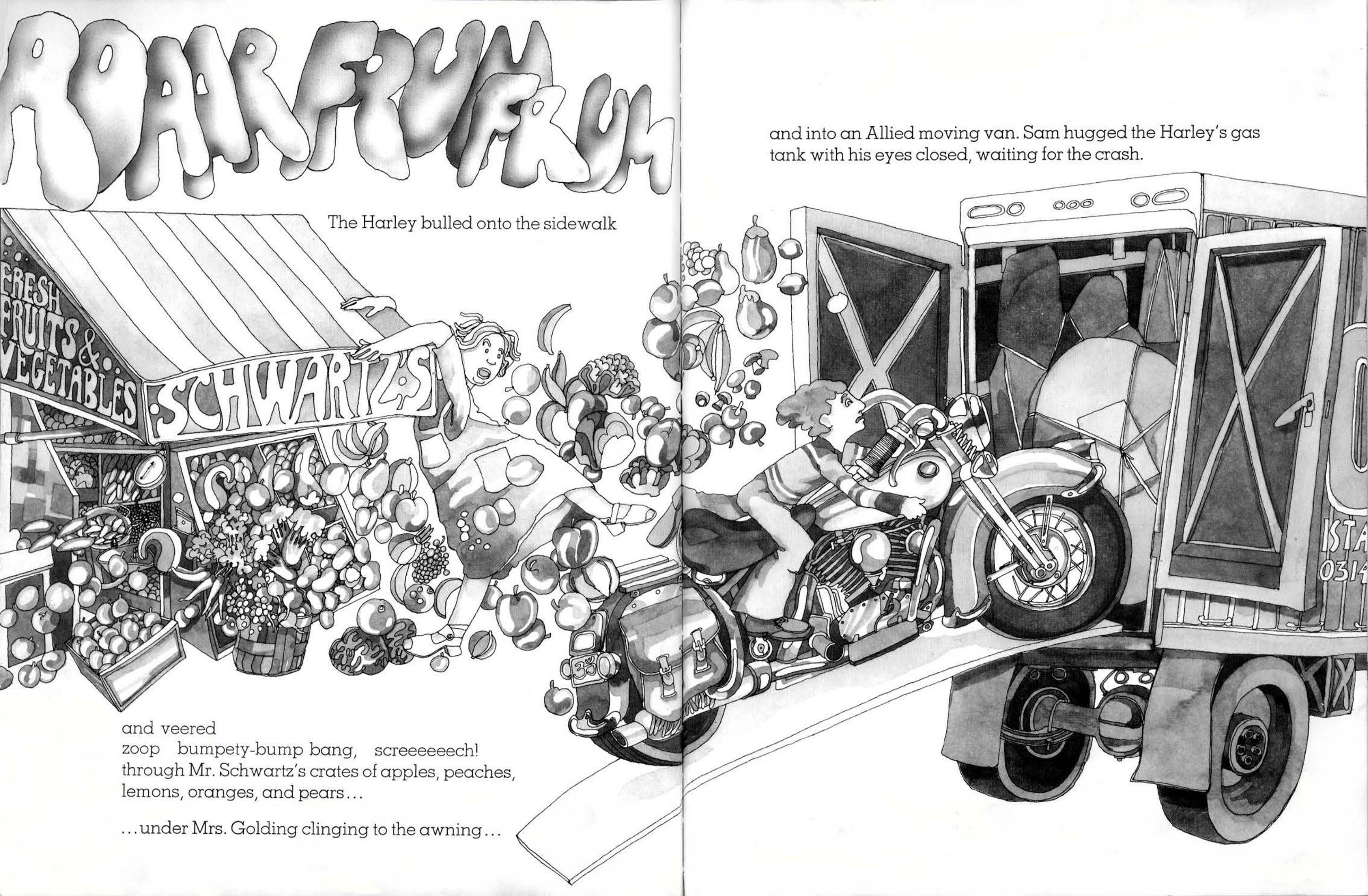
DON'T HANG OUT THE WINDOW!

YOU'LL FALL!"






Tumbling wildly past the flagpole, Sam flipped
and THWOUK
lit on an idling
HARLEY DAVIDSON
motorcycle.



The Harley bulled onto the sidewalk

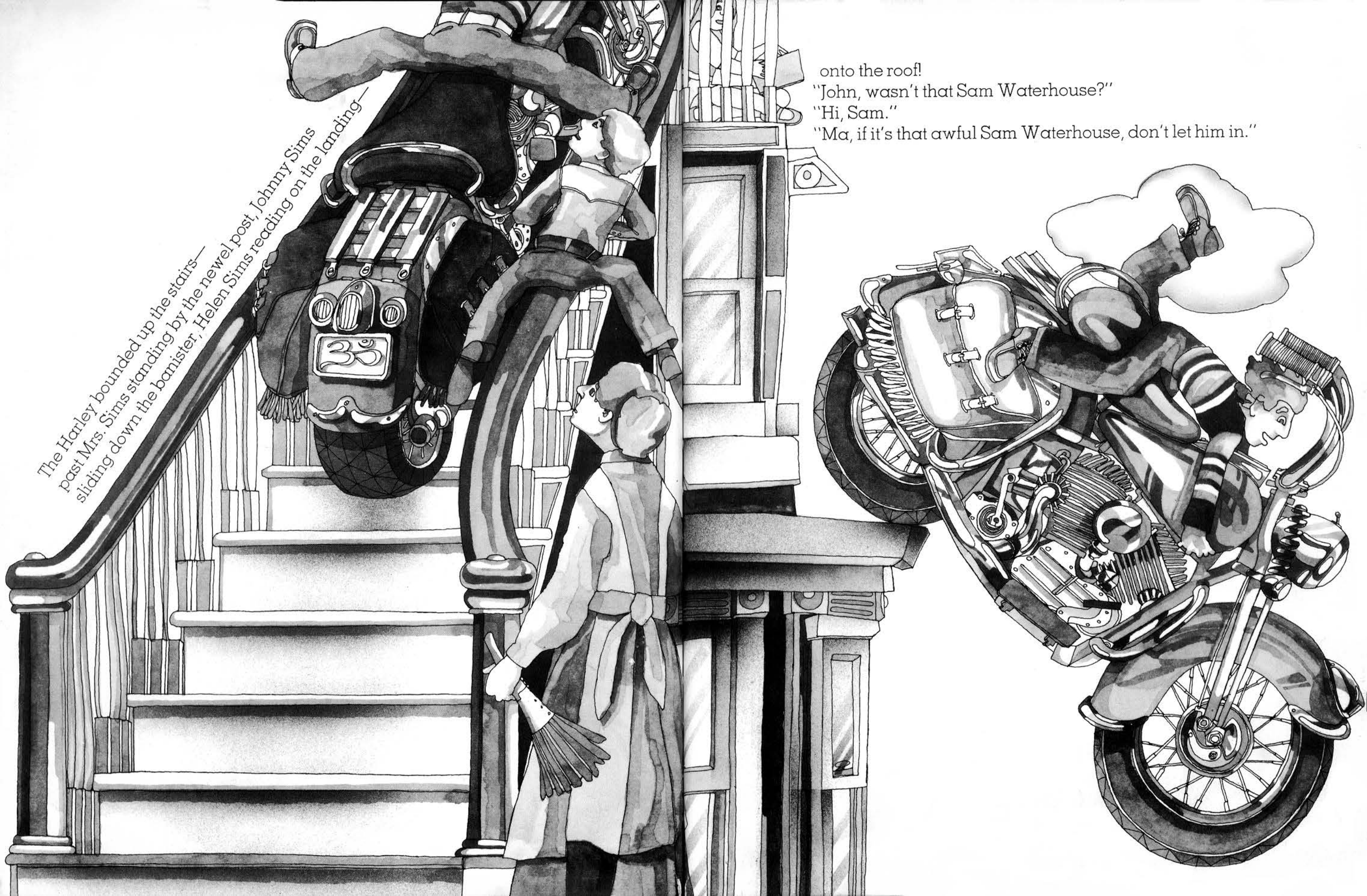
and veered
zoop bumpety-bump bang, screeeeeech!
through Mr. Schwartz's crates of apples, peaches,
lemons, oranges, and pears...

...under Mrs. Golding clinging to the awning...

and into an Allied moving van. Sam hugged the Harley's gas
tank with his eyes closed, waiting for the crash.

The Harley leapt from the van and sailed through the shattering doors of No. 8 Garrity Street. "Should I hang on or fall off?" muttered Sam.

Around a dining-room table, up a pile of mats, flip over, and bangety—bangety—bangety down the sidewall, sped the Harley.



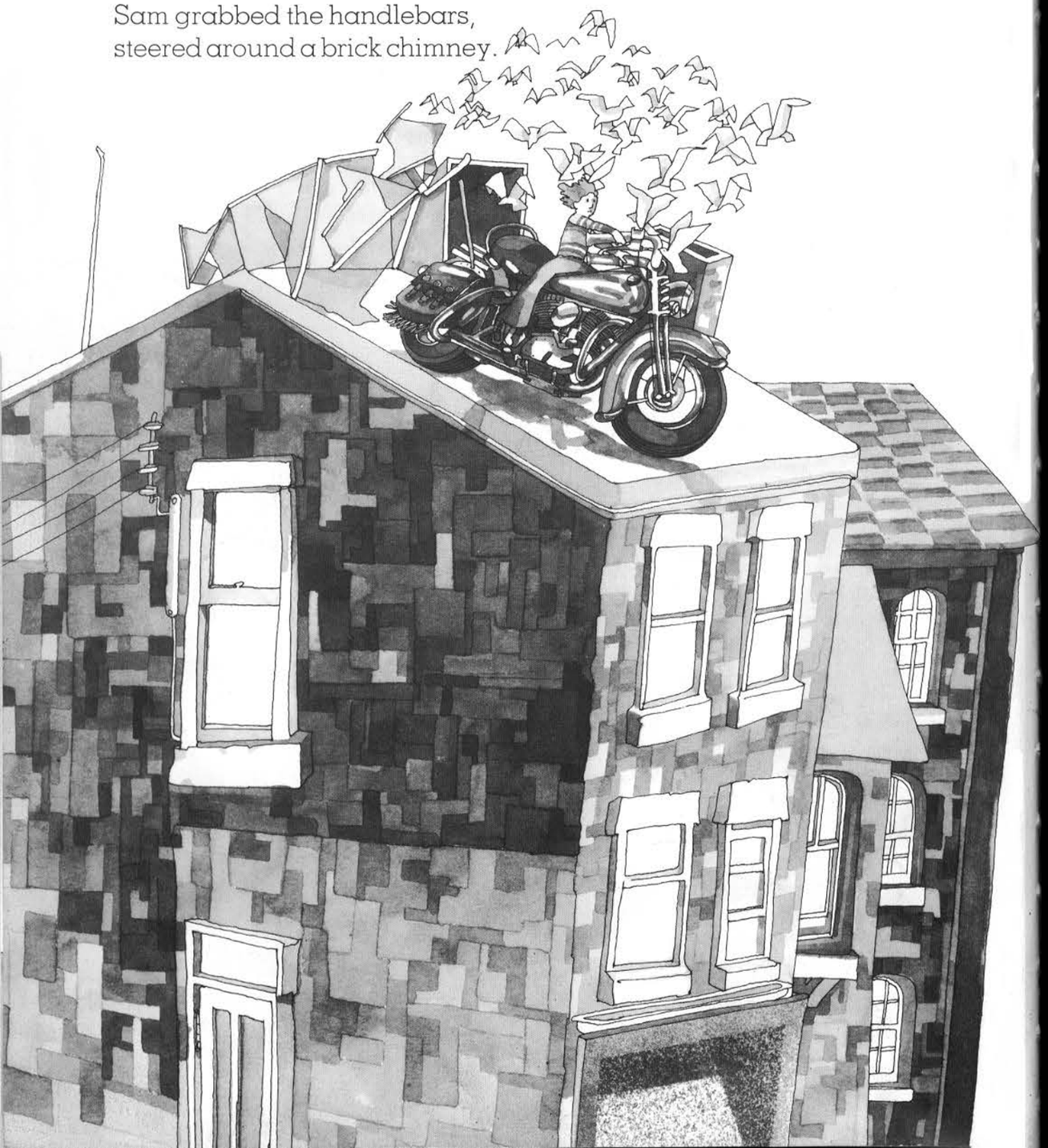
The Harley bounded up the stairs—
past Mrs. Sims standing by the newel post, Johnny Sims
sliding down the banister, Helen Sims reading on the landing—

onto the roof!
"John, wasn't that Sam Waterhouse?"
"Hi, Sam."
"Ma, if it's that awful Sam Waterhouse, don't let him in."

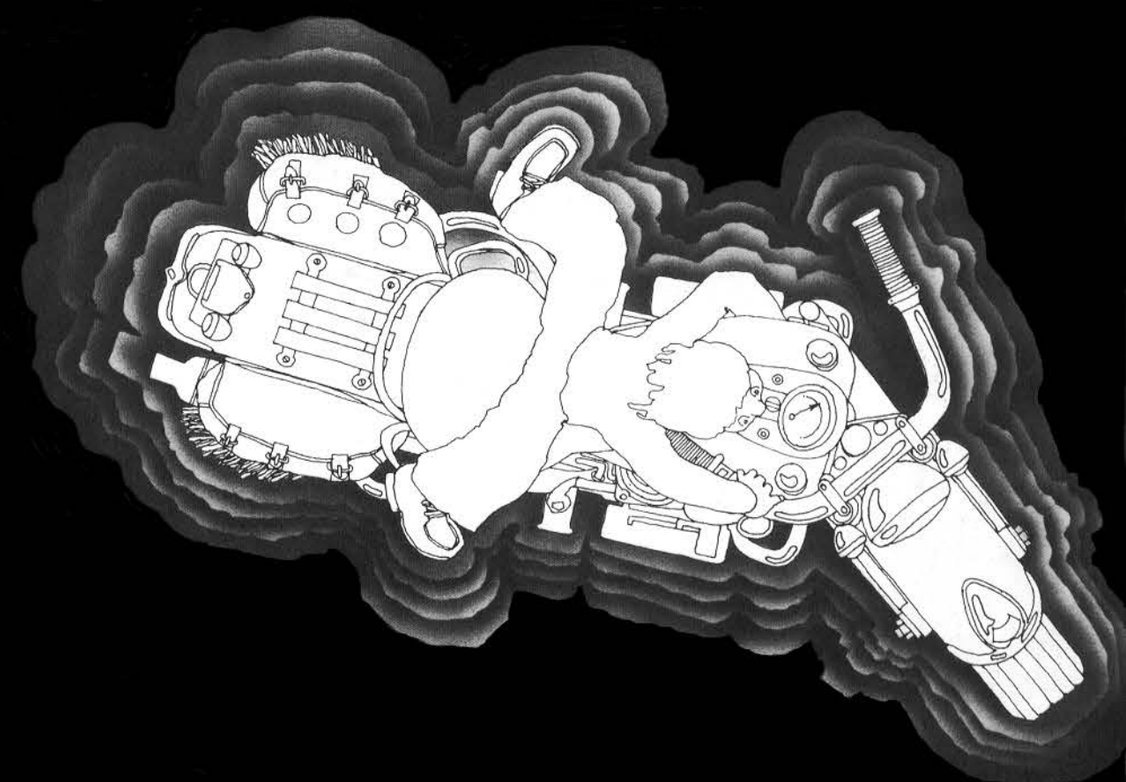
The Harley leapt into the silence over Utica Street.
Hugging the gas tank, Sam opened his eyes.

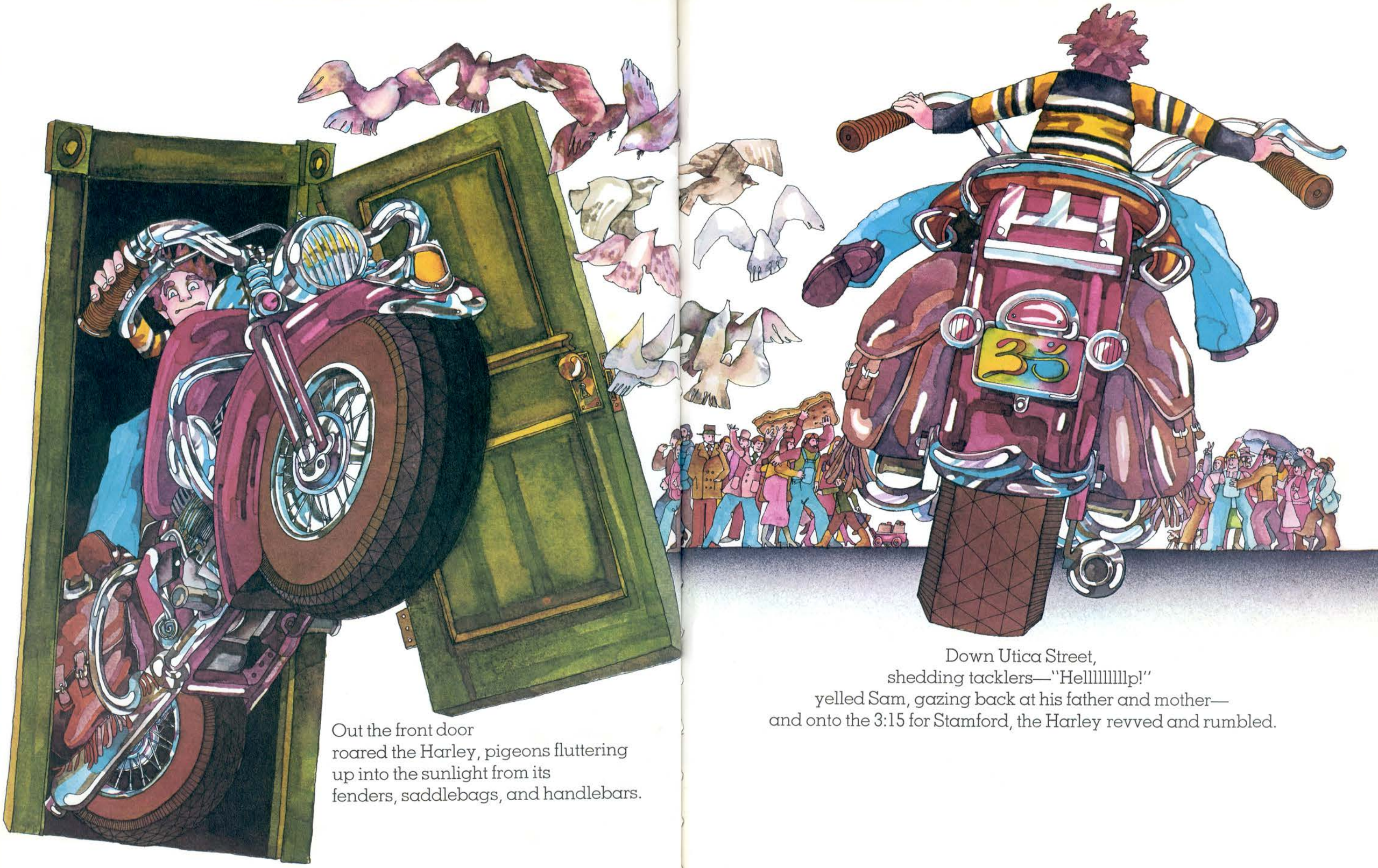
This is a picture of Sam's stomach
as he gazed down into Utica Street far below.

The Harley exploded through
Mr. Tannenbaum's pigeon coops
and zigzagged across two rooftops.
Flamboyant with pigeons,
Sam grabbed the handlebars,
steered around a brick chimney.



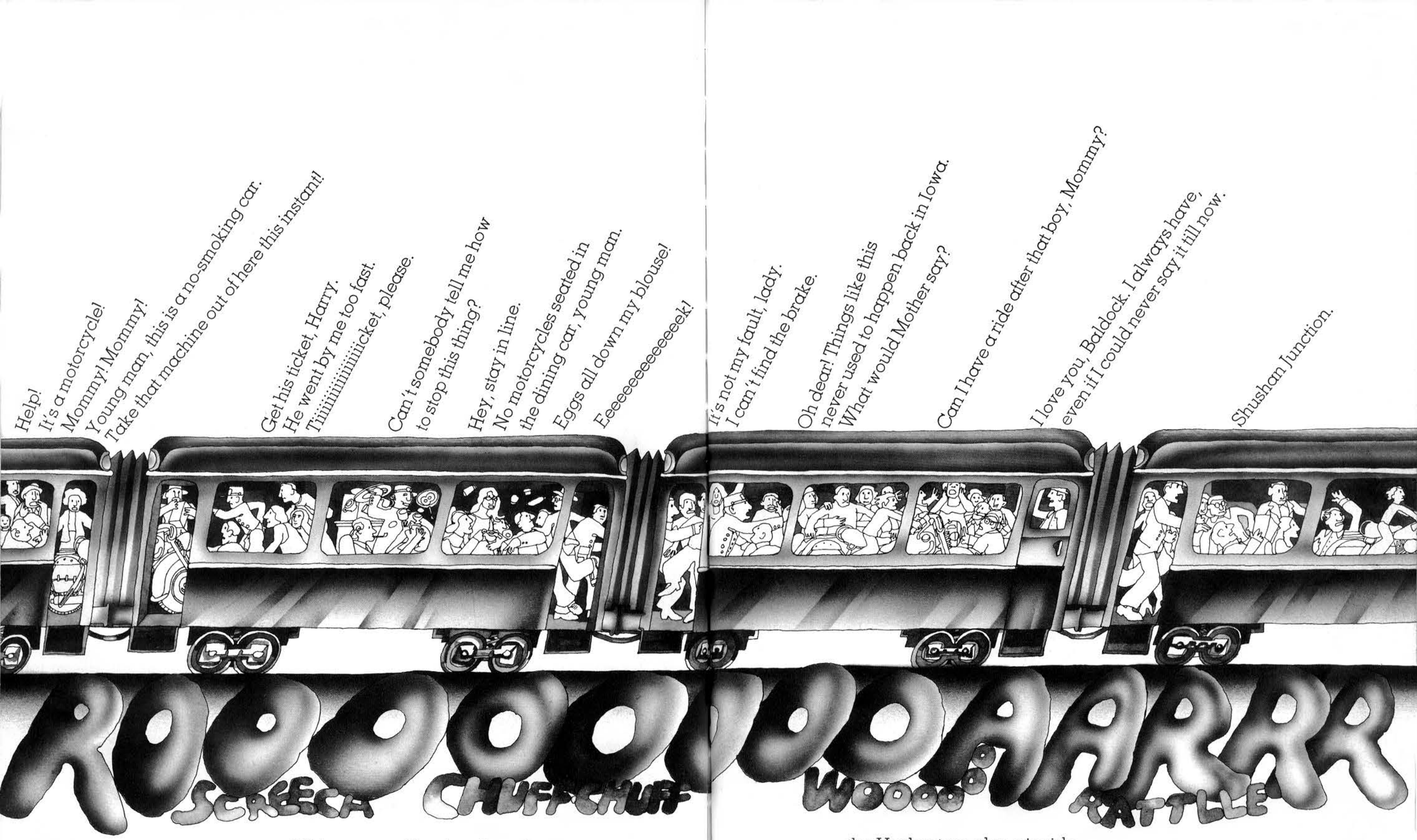
The Harley plunged
into a stairway,
down
down
down
through the dimness,
bumpety—bumpety—bumpety, Sam hugging the gas tank.
"N-n-n-n-now I n-n-n-n-know what a m-m-m-m-malted
m-m-m-m-milkshake f-f-f-f-feels like," st-st-st-st-stuttered S-s-s-s-sam.





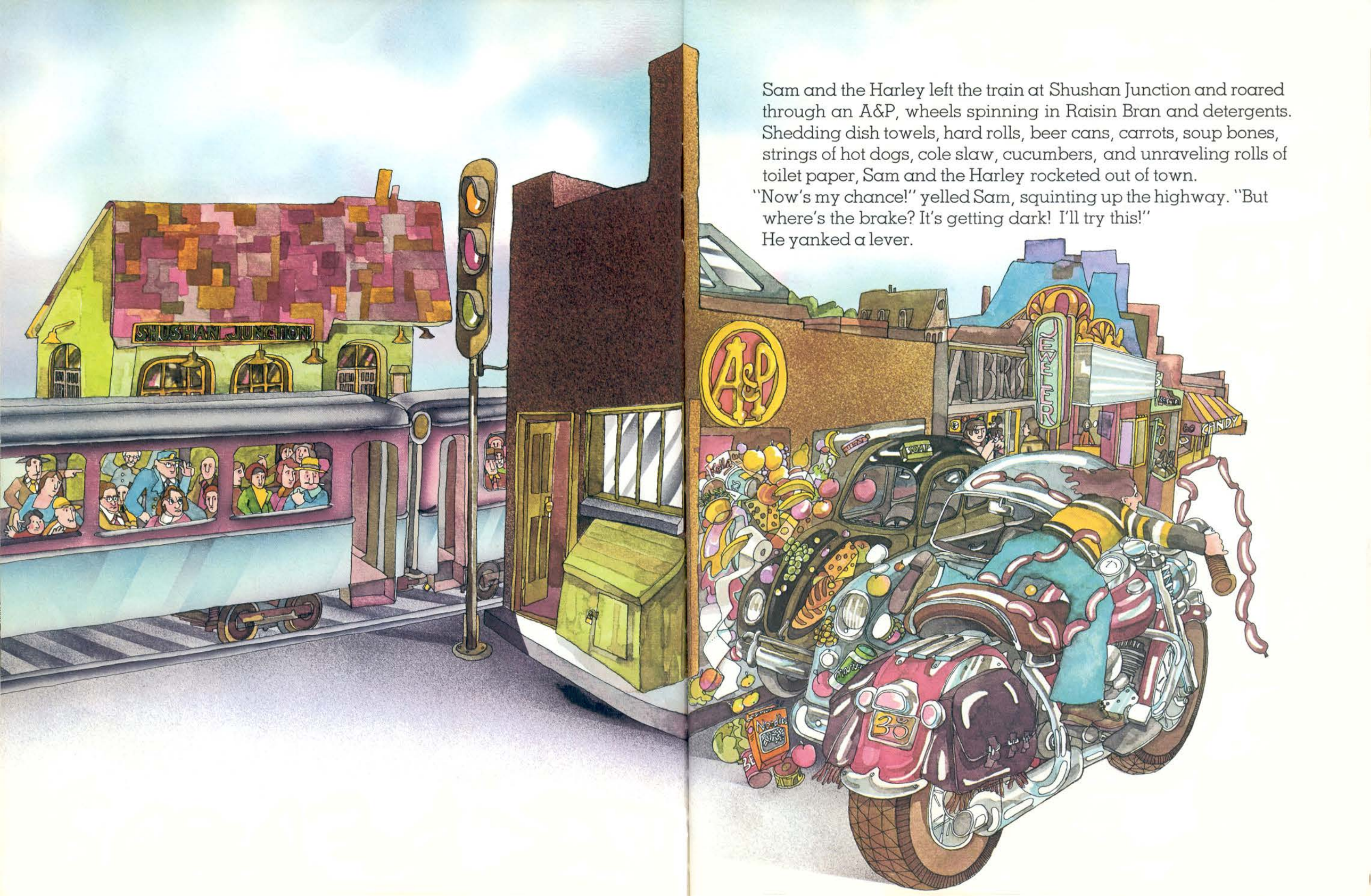
Out the front door
roared the Harley, pigeons fluttering
up into the sunlight from its
fenders, saddlebags, and handlebars.

Down Utica Street,
shedding tacklers—"Hellllllllp!"
yelled Sam, gazing back at his father and mother—
and onto the 3:15 for Stamford, the Harley revved and rumbled.



All the way to Shushan Junction,
as the train wheels clickety-clacked over the rails,

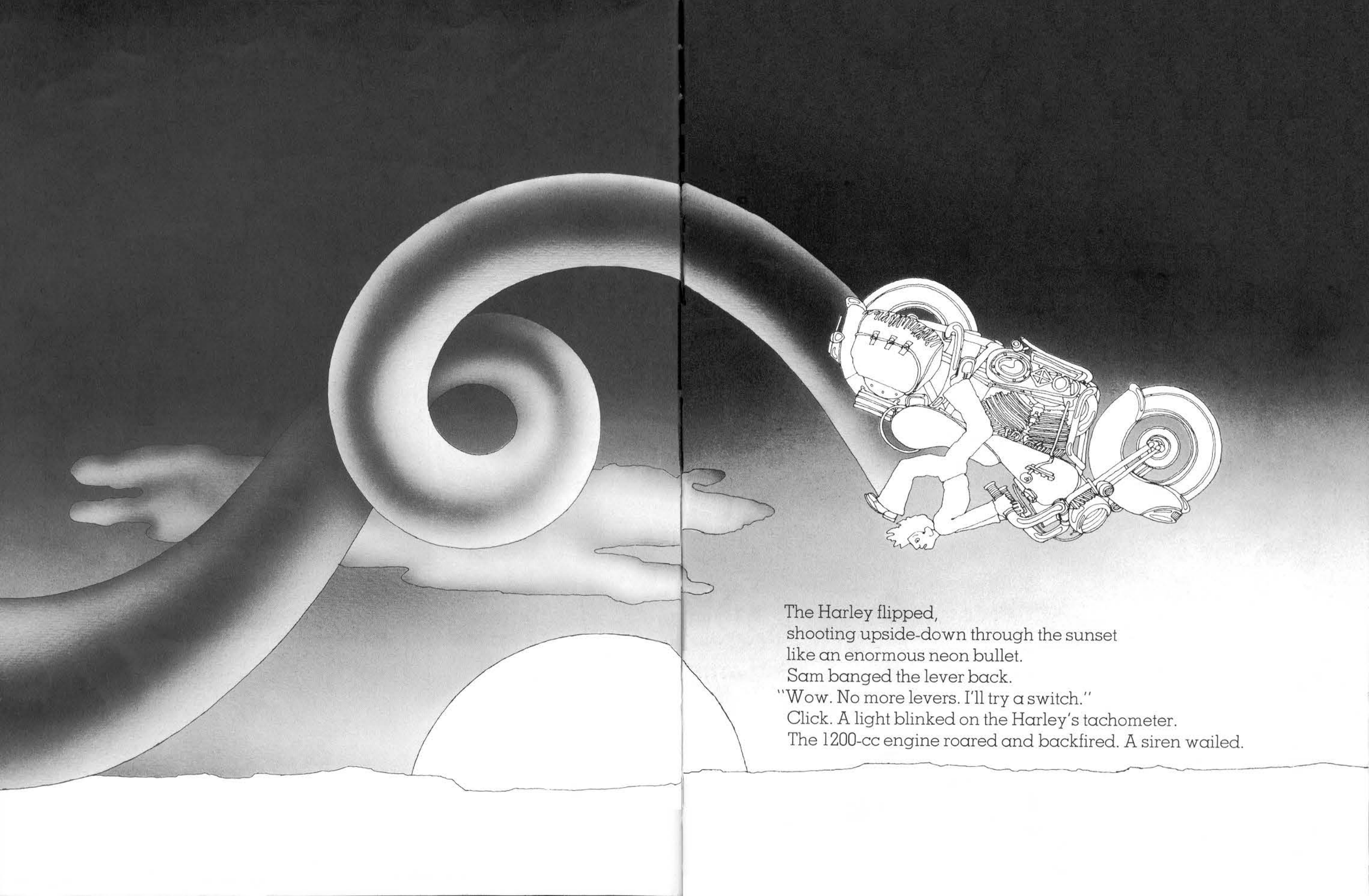
the Harley tore along inside
the train like a man walking up an up-escalator.



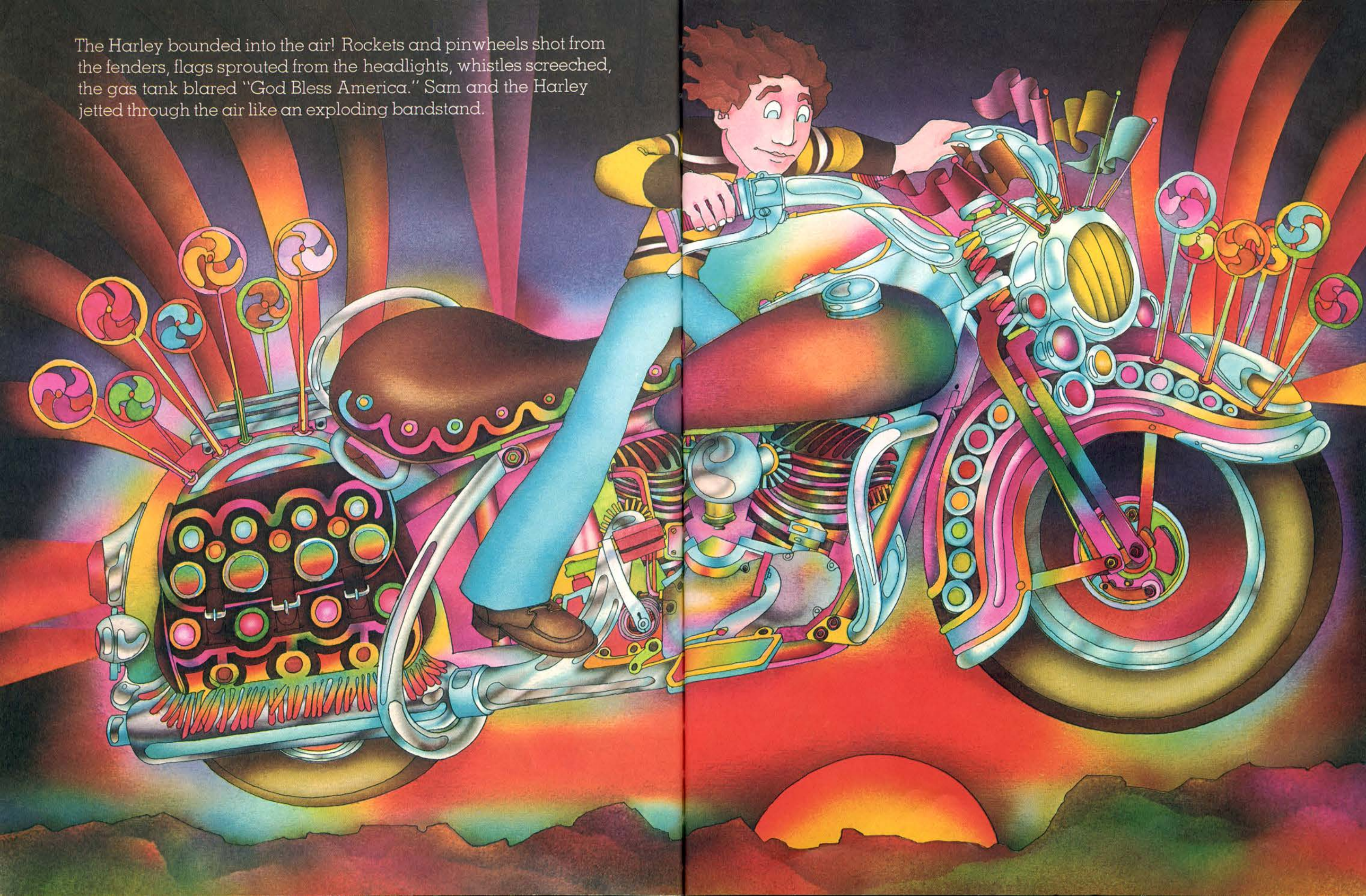
Sam and the Harley left the train at Shushan Junction and roared through an A&P, wheels spinning in Raisin Bran and detergents. Shedding dish towels, hard rolls, beer cans, carrots, soup bones, strings of hot dogs, cole slaw, cucumbers, and unraveling rolls of toilet paper, Sam and the Harley rocketed out of town.

"Now's my chance!" yelled Sam, squinting up the highway. "But where's the brake? It's getting dark! I'll try this!"

He yanked a lever.



The Harley flipped,
shooting upside-down through the sunset
like an enormous neon bullet.
Sam banged the lever back.
"Wow. No more levers. I'll try a switch."
Click. A light blinked on the Harley's tachometer.
The 1200-cc engine roared and backfired. A siren wailed.



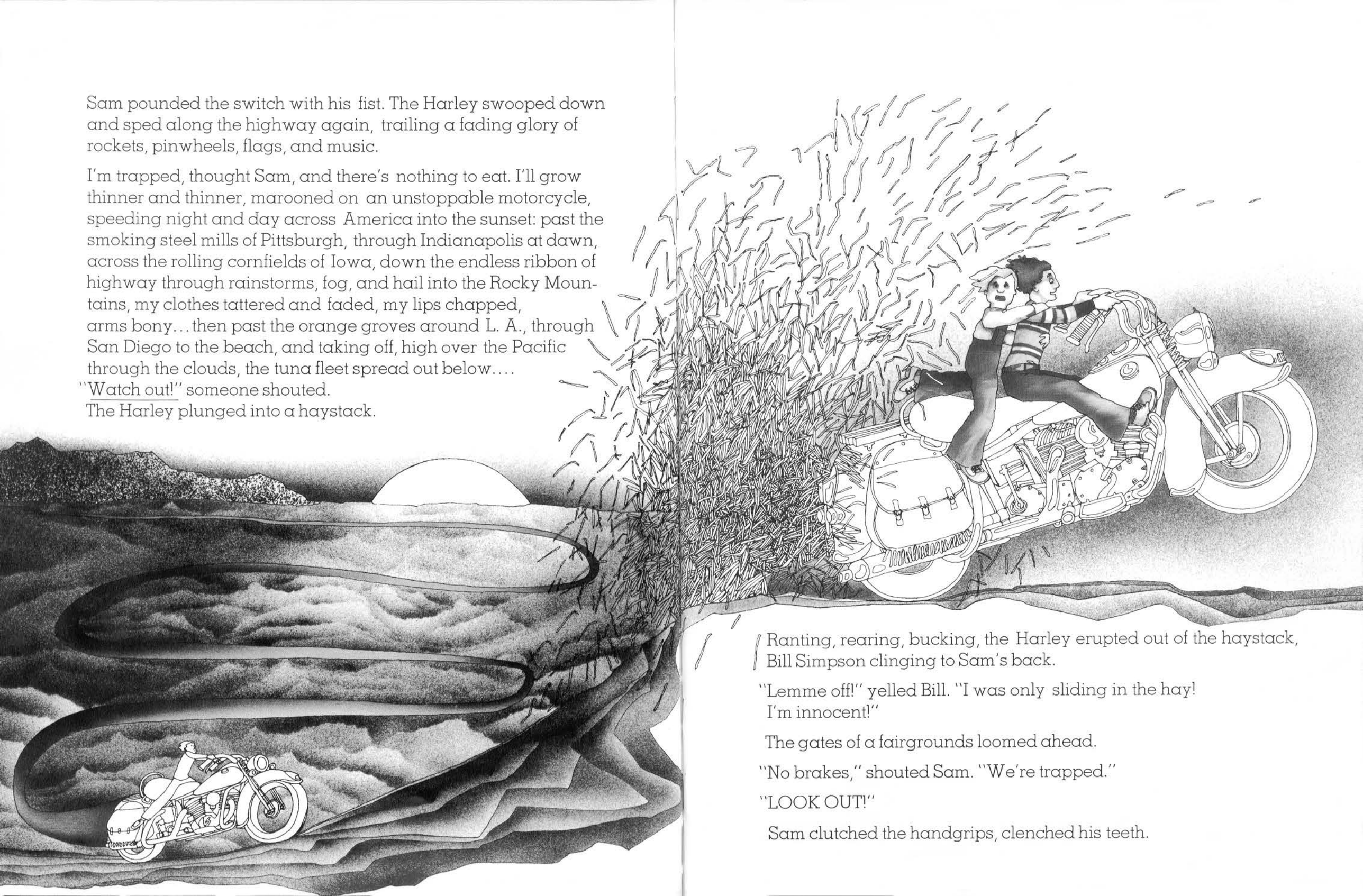
The Harley bounded into the air! Rockets and pinwheels shot from the fenders, flags sprouted from the headlights, whistles screeched, the gas tank blared "God Bless America." Sam and the Harley jetted through the air like an exploding bandstand.

Sam pounded the switch with his fist. The Harley swooped down and sped along the highway again, trailing a fading glory of rockets, pinwheels, flags, and music.

I'm trapped, thought Sam, and there's nothing to eat. I'll grow thinner and thinner, marooned on an unstoppable motorcycle, speeding night and day across America into the sunset: past the smoking steel mills of Pittsburgh, through Indianapolis at dawn, across the rolling cornfields of Iowa, down the endless ribbon of highway through rainstorms, fog, and hail into the Rocky Mountains, my clothes tattered and faded, my lips chapped, arms bony... then past the orange groves around L. A., through San Diego to the beach, and taking off, high over the Pacific through the clouds, the tuna fleet spread out below....

"Watch out!" someone shouted.

The Harley plunged into a haystack.



Ranting, rearing, bucking, the Harley erupted out of the haystack, Bill Simpson clinging to Sam's back.

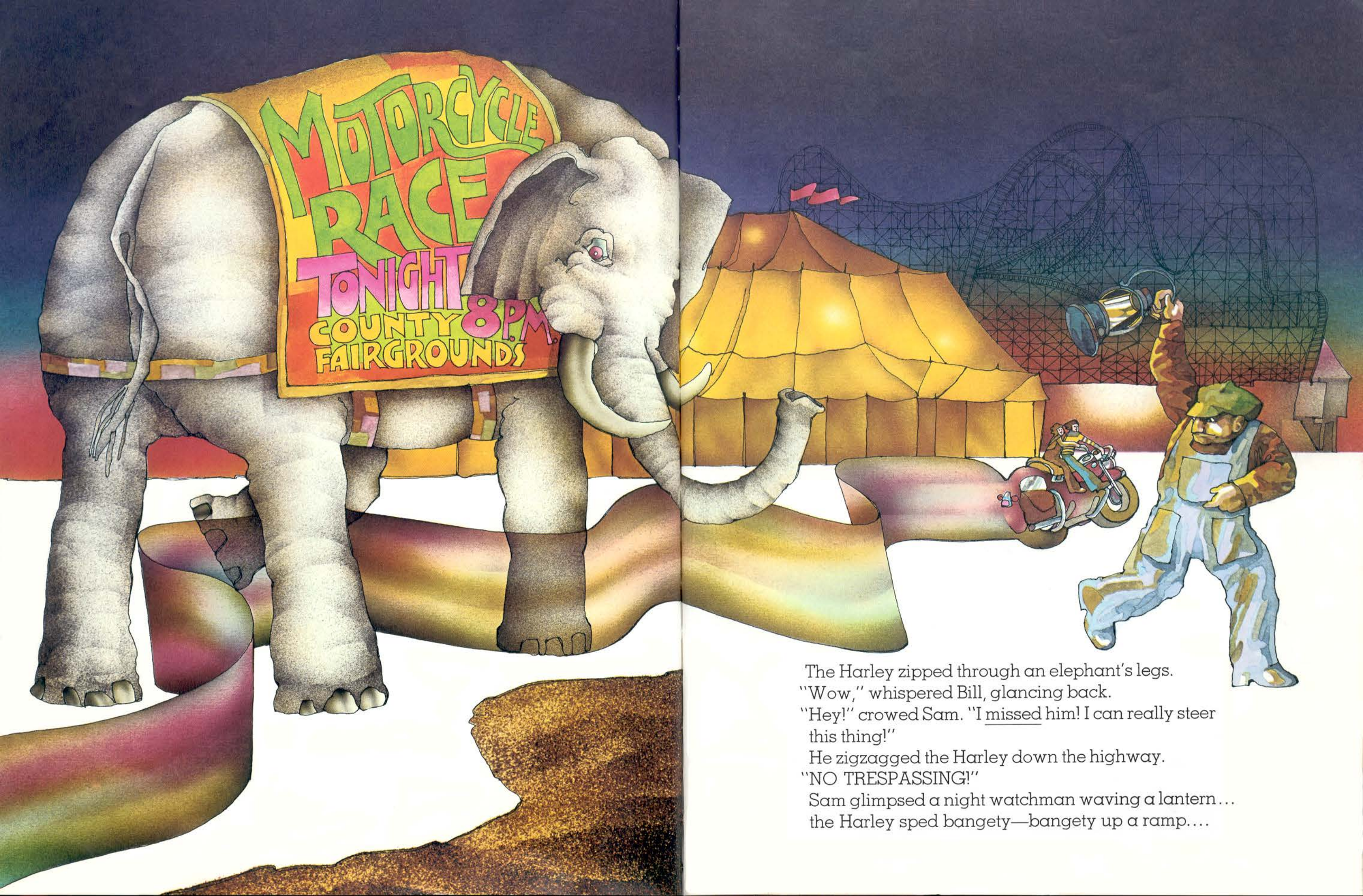
"Lemme off!" yelled Bill. "I was only sliding in the hay! I'm innocent!"

The gates of a fairgrounds loomed ahead.

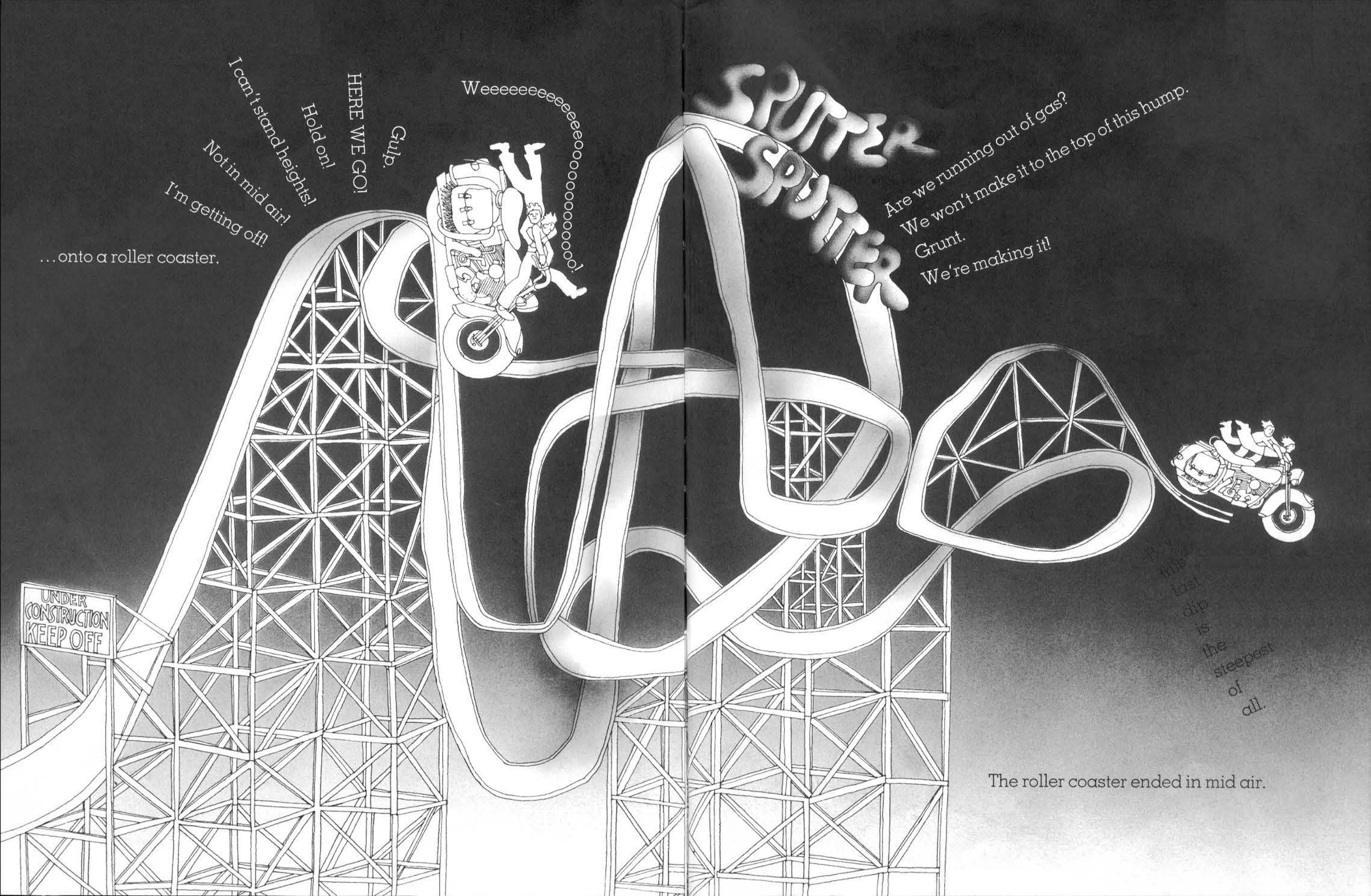
"No brakes," shouted Sam. "We're trapped."

"LOOK OUT!"

Sam clutched the handgrips, clenched his teeth.



The Harley zipped through an elephant's legs.
"Wow," whispered Bill, glancing back.
"Hey!" crowed Sam. "I missed him! I can really steer this thing!"
He zigzagged the Harley down the highway.
"NO TRESPASSING!"
Sam glimpsed a night watchman waving a lantern...
the Harley sped bangety—bangety up a ramp....

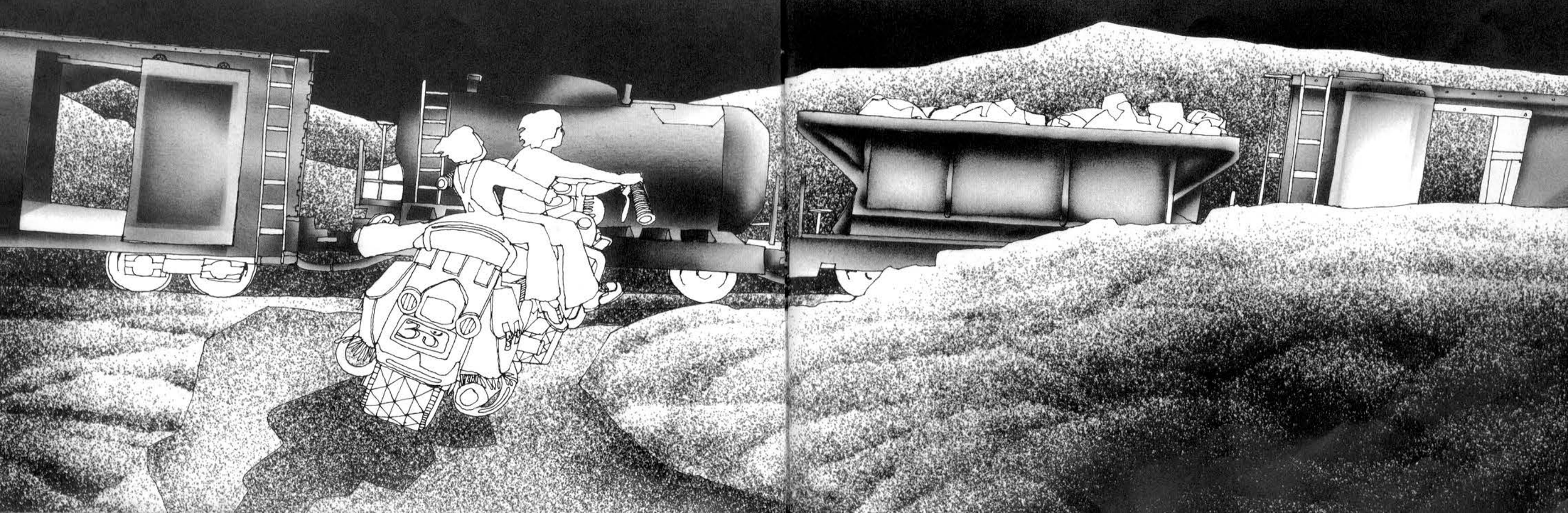

...onto a roller coaster.
I'm getting off!
Not in mid air!
I can't stand heights!
Hold on!
HERE WE GO!
Gulp.
Weeee

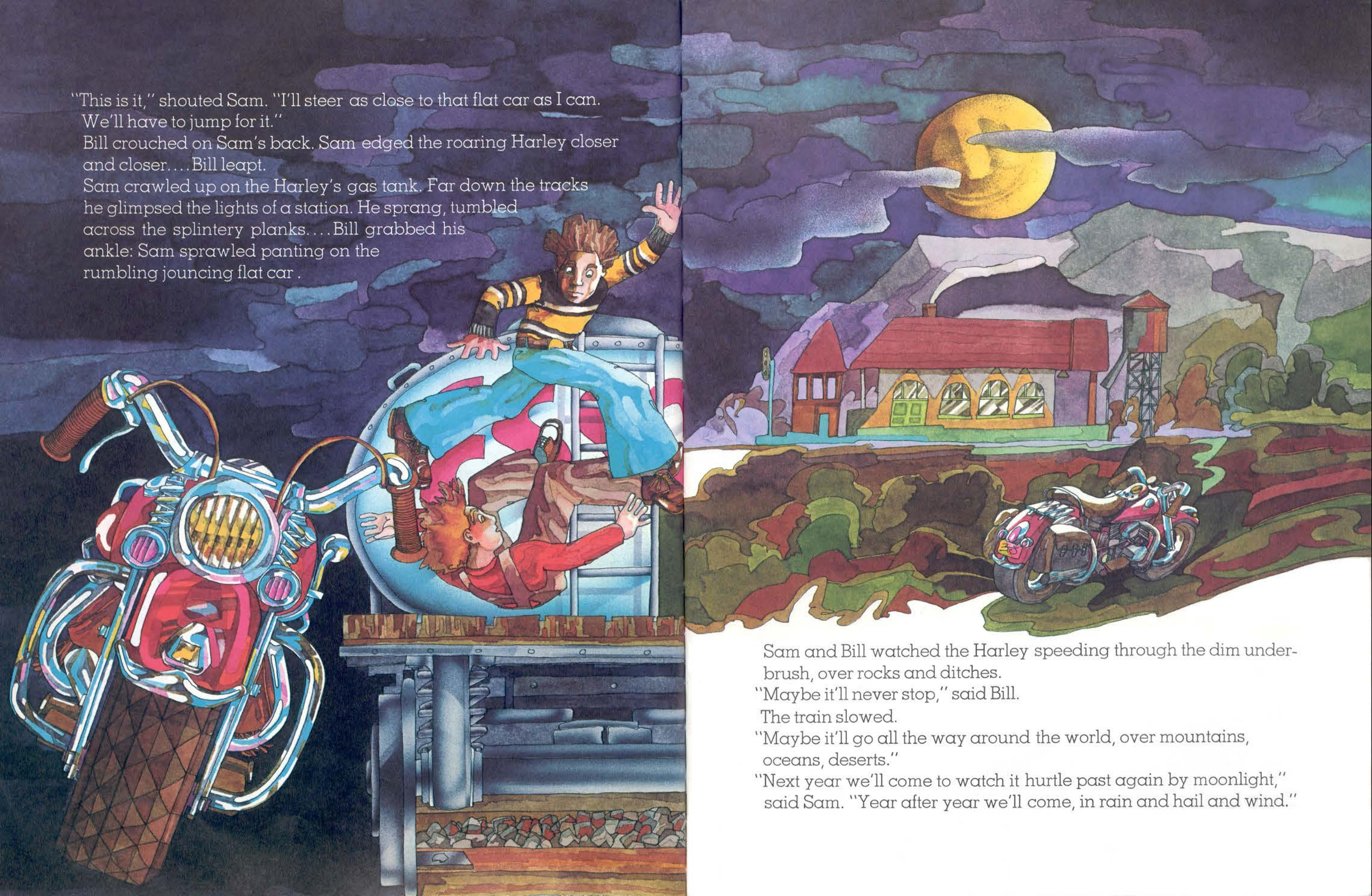
The Harley lit on the slanting abutment of a grandstand.
"Why's everybody cheering?"
"Maybe they think we won the race."
Sam, Bill and the Harley sped past the finish line, scattering the crowd which had run forward to congratulate them, and thundered up a ramp into the stadium.

"Gangway!" yelled Sam gleefully, weaving the Harley down the floodlit, labyrinthine corridors under the stadium, past refreshment stands, screaming ladies clutching children, men shaking their fists, fleeing souvenir vendors.

Then they were speeding
through the night again.
The moon rose, glittering in the
vast swamp beside the highway.
Sam's hands ached
from gripping the handlebars.
Bill clung to his back.
The Harley roared steadily on beneath them.
"It's never going to run out of gas," yelled Sam.
"We've got to find a way to get off."
A train whistled somewhere ahead.
"Sam! A railroad crossing! A train! We'll crash!"

The dark hulks of freight cars glided
rumbling across the highway.
"Hold on!" yelled Sam. "The road's curving."
The Harley careered around a long curve
and roared east toward the rising moon
beside the speeding train.





"This is it," shouted Sam. "I'll steer as close to that flat car as I can. We'll have to jump for it."

Bill crouched on Sam's back. Sam edged the roaring Harley closer and closer.... Bill leapt.

Sam crawled up on the Harley's gas tank. Far down the tracks he glimpsed the lights of a station. He sprang, tumbled across the splintery planks.... Bill grabbed his ankle: Sam sprawled panting on the rumbling jouncing flat car.

Sam and Bill watched the Harley speeding through the dim underbrush, over rocks and ditches.

"Maybe it'll never stop," said Bill.

The train slowed.

"Maybe it'll go all the way around the world, over mountains, oceans, deserts."

"Next year we'll come to watch it hurtle past again by moonlight," said Sam. "Year after year we'll come, in rain and hail and wind."

They watched the neon Harley roar into the darkness
beyond the floodlit station.
"And then when we grow up," said Bill, "we'll get back
on and ride around the world to China and Tibet."
"To Timbuctoo and Madagascar."
"We'll hunt tigers on our Harley in Hyderabad."
"We'll coast our Harley down the Caucasus into
the warm Black Sea."
The train halted, clanking, hissing. Far up the tracks the
neon Harley's taillights faded into the night.