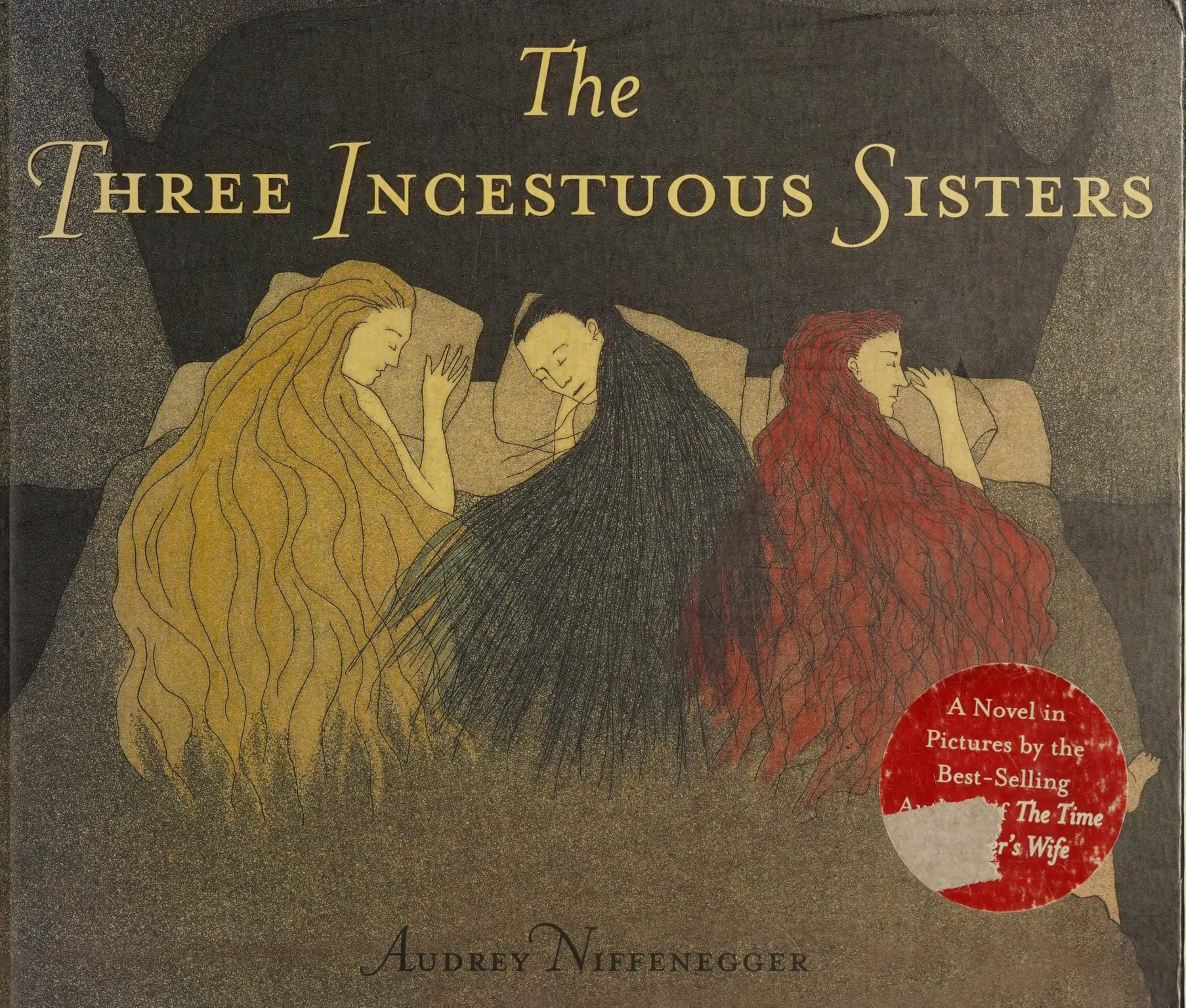
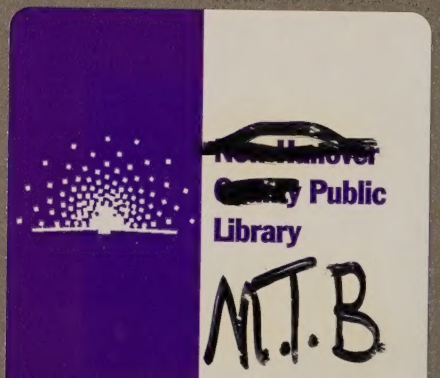
The Three Incestuous Sisters



A Novel in Pictures by the Best-Selling A[illegible] of *The Time* [illegible]*r's Wife*

Audrey Niffenegger


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The Three Incestuous Sisters



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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED WITH LOVE TO

MY SISTERS,

BETH AND JONELLE NIFFENEGGER




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Bettine

There once were three sisters:
Clothilde, Ophile, and Bettine.



They lived together in
a lonely house by the sea,
near the lighthouse,
miles away from the city.



Bettine, the youngest, had blond hair and was considered the prettiest sister. Ophile, the eldest, had blue hair and was often thought to be the smartest sister. And Clothilde, who had red hair, was in the middle, and was the most talented sister.



As the curtain slowly rises, the story
begins with a gathering storm.



The house must be shut
against the coming storm;
Bettine moves from window
to window, closing them all
against the water that is about
to come but leaving the door
open to admit the cool breeze.



The death of the old
Lighthouse Keeper
by lightning:



Oh! How terrible, how very sad;
poor old man, we must
send for his son.



Enter Paris,
the Lighthouse
Keeper's son.



Bad luck: Bettine.



Bad luck: Ophile.



Bad luck: Clothilde.



A few days later;
Clothilde practices
levitation at breakfast.



Paris's choice:



The courtship of Paris and Bettine.



Tea in the old nursery.



Ophile finds herself
watching them secretly, and
is jealous and ashamed.



Clothilde in her
own little world:



Clothilde *knows* that the cause of
headache is birds using pieces of her
hair to build their nests. Therefore,
she saves all her hair in jars hidden
in her closet. Despite this,
she continues to suffer.



Clothilde's headache:



One hair left and
one bird waiting.



Another lovely day.



A kiss.



Ophile, miserable and sorry.



Being cruel to Bettine.



Paris intercedes.



Ophile, miserable,
small, and alone.



In Bettine's bedroom:



Clothilde, raptured.



The conception:



Afterward:

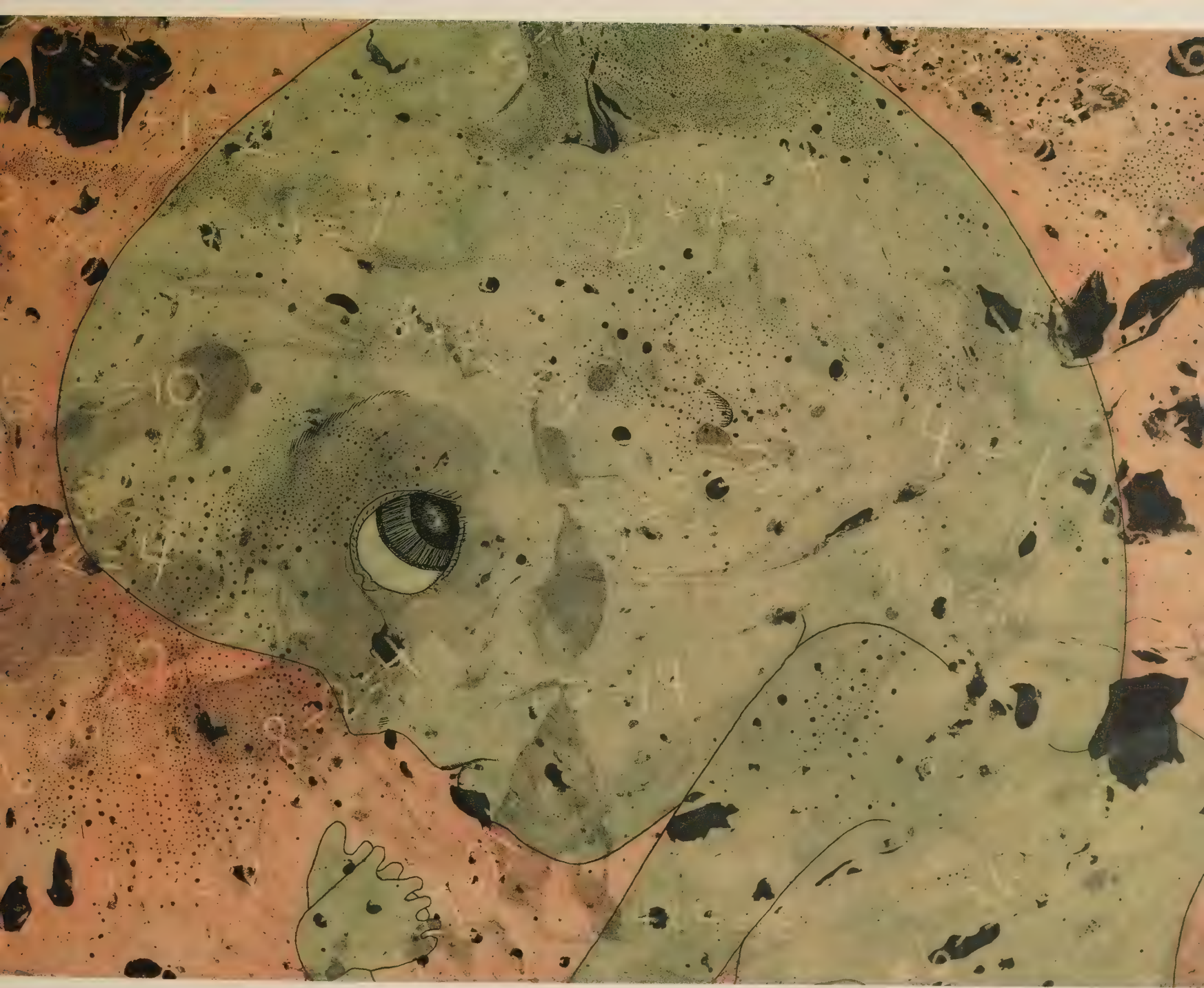


Many weeks later;
Clothilde and her nephew
communing late at night.

The astronomy lesson:



The mathematics lesson:



The naming of things:


drum
thread
bird
mouse
ashtray
bow
brick
snake
spoon
fork
hammer
ball
cat
earrings
candle
necktie
bug
teddy bear
egg
horse
tomato
tree
flowers
spectacles
clock
teacup
butterfly
baby
tortoise
shoe
swiss cheese
hair brush
rattle
glove
bowl
knife
buttons
razor
toaster
leaf
stockings
book
hat
fish
grapes
duckie
newspaper
globe
measuring tape

The flying lesson:

When you are older, you will fly like a bird,
over the heads of all the people, above the trees
and houses, and people will think you are
an angel, or a devil; they will be afraid
of you and call you names, but your real name is
The Saint, because you are perfect, and beloved.



OPHILE

Ophile realizes that
Bettine is pregnant.



Being cruel to Bettine.



Ophile confesses her
love and is rebuffed.



Out, get out of this house!



They flee to the city,
but are pursued.



Ophile's revenge:

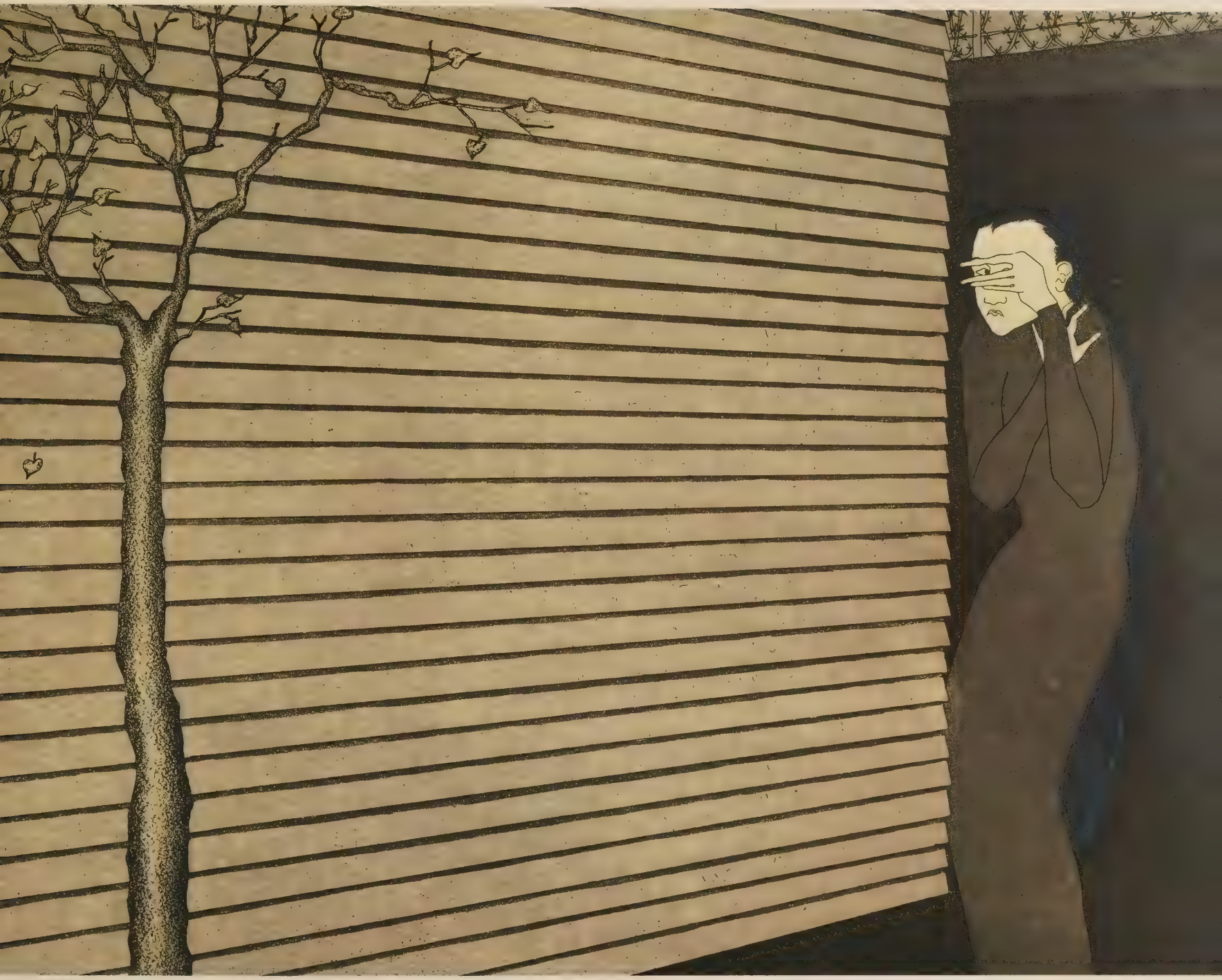


A firecracker in a
baby carriage!



Mistaken identity.

Ophile, horrified.



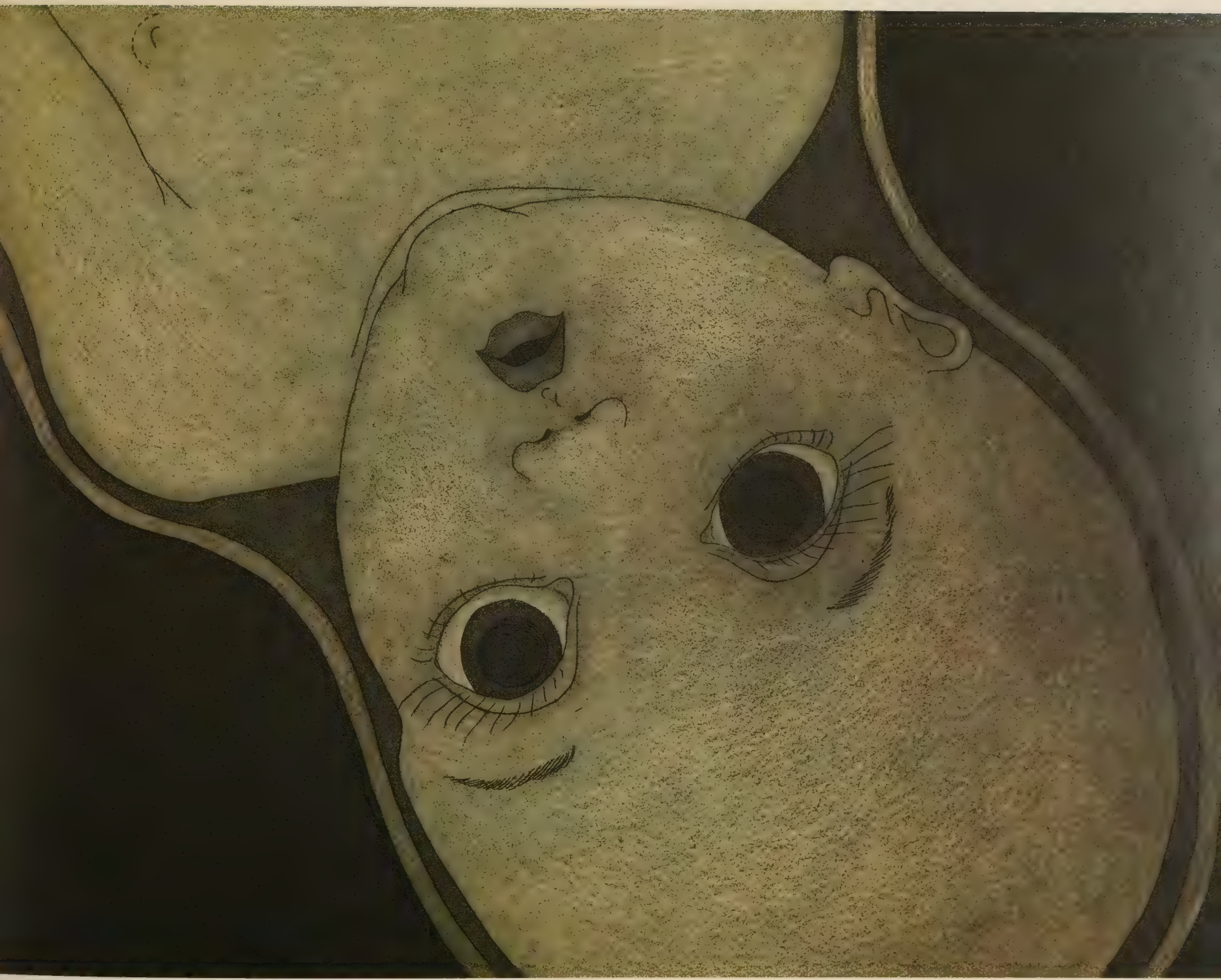
Clothilde, horrified.



Rescued, but too late.



Panicked!



The birth of The Saint.



The death of Bettine.



*M*adness and grief;
a plea for forgiveness.



Paris runs away to sea.



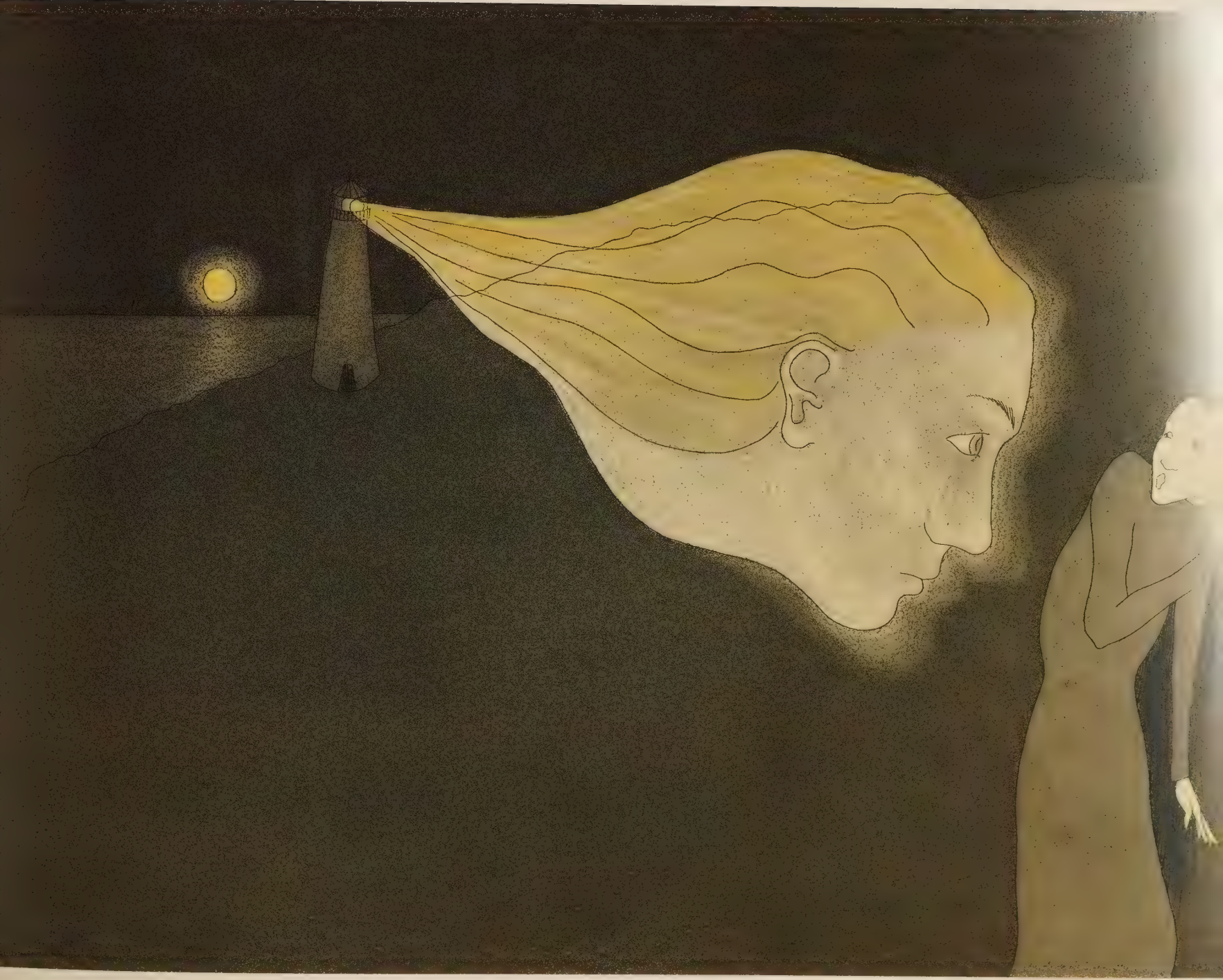
His small voice is gone, gone forever.



Ophile, waiting for
Paris's ship to come in.



Haunted.



Haunted.



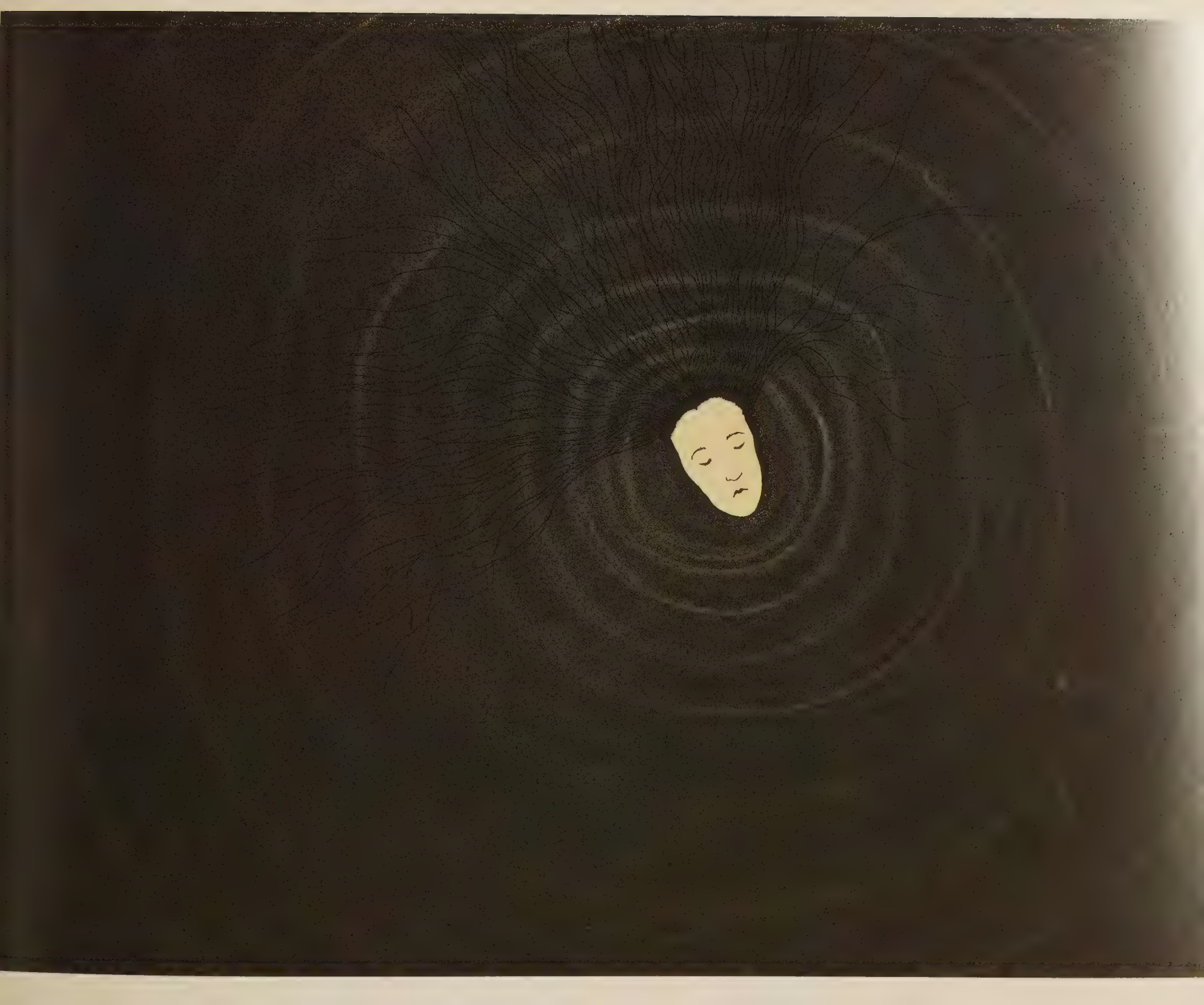
Ophile is reproached by
the ghosts of her parents.



Overwhelmed by remorse,
Ophile throws herself
from the lighthouse.



*D*rowning, drowning
in sadness, and the sea.



CLOTHILDE

*M*any years pass.
Clothilde lives sadly,
alone in the house.



Suddenly one day,
she hears a voice:
Here I am, here I am!
Not dead at all! Come
to the City, Clothilde!



The Circus is coming to town.


ANGEL
or
DEVIL?

A Circus Parade.


ANGEL
OR
DEVIL

The Amazing Flying Boy!



Liberation.



He reads her mind
like a book.



The Saint tells Clothilde his story:



Don't be sad; look!



The levitation lesson:



The invisibility lesson:



The flying lesson:

Flying at last, like a bird,

above all the houses and trees.



A trip to the Aquarium:

Here is someone you should meet.



This is your Father.



Paris faints.

Reunion.



All this time, we
thought you had died . . .



Returning home.



Many greetings:



The Three Sisters:







The End

Afterword

This is the book of my heart, a fourteen-year labor of love.

Three Incestuous Sisters's first incarnation was as an artist's book, in a handmade edition of ten. I created story in pictures, sketching page spreads the way a director might work out the storyboard for a film. I the text; as the images gained in complexity, the text dwindled until the weight of the story was carried images. I then spent most of the next thirteen years making the aquatints, designing the book, and ng and printing the type. The final year of the project was spent binding the books, elaborately, in her. I make books because I love them as objects; because I want to put the pictures and the words together, use I want to tell a story. I call the books I make *visual novels* to acknowledge a debt to Lynd Ward, whose odcut novel" *Gods' Man* was the first book of this kind I ever saw, and to differentiate my books from hic novels.

These images are aquatints. They are made by covering a zinc plate with an acid-resistant ground, ving through the ground with a needle, and immersing the plate in a nitric acid bath, which results in a e that has the lines of the drawing etched into it. To create tone, fine rosin dust is melted onto the plate.

I block out areas that should not be bitten by the acid, and the plate is placed in the acid bath in succe stages. I am working in reverse, and blind; I don't know what's actually on the plate until I print it. The is watercolor, painted onto each print. Aquatint is an idiosyncratic, antique process, which for some re makes me love it all the more.

A teacher of mine once invited my classmates and me to his studio. He was working on six paint simultaneously, and when someone inquired about this, he explained that he could make one paint week, or six paintings in six weeks. He preferred the latter, because then all the paintings were being r over a longer period of his life, and thus the end result was richer. I thought about this frequently durin long siege on this fortress of a book, and he was right. *The Three Incestuous Sisters* became itself through the sage of time and gradual changes in my skill and imagination.

During the years I worked on *The Three Incestuous Sisters* I went to graduate school; moved; started G Window Printers with Pamela Barrie and moved that nine years later; went to Europe five times; and eight solo exhibitions, four love affairs, three cats, and several hundred students. I also began to work o first "real" novel, *The Time Traveler's Wife*, which started its life as the project I played with when I should been finishing the *Sisters*.

When I try to explain *The Three Incestuous Sisters* to someone who hasn't seen it, I tell them to imagine a s film made from Japanese prints, a melodrama of sibling rivalry, a silent opera that features women with long hair and a flying green boy. I never try to explain what it means; you can find that out for yourself. glad that it has finally completed its long journey from my mind to yours. Enjoy.

Audrey Niffenegger

November, 2004

Acknowledgments

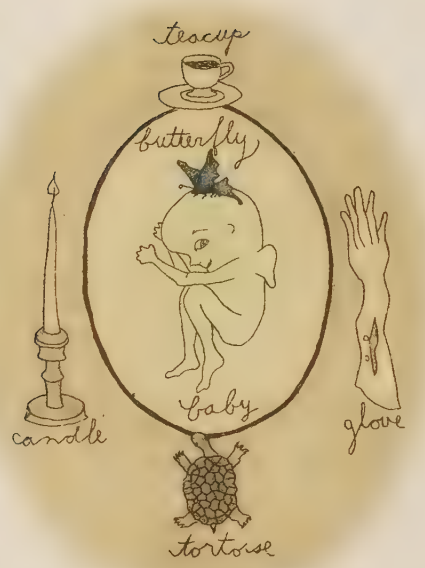
Incestuous Sisters is a book with a double life: it began as a hand-printed work of art, and now it is
you are holding in your hands, which has come into being through the auspices of modern printing
nology and the good graces of many people.

This edition of *The Three Incestuous Sisters* would not exist without the vision and perseverance of Tamar
Howard Reeves, Celina Carvalho, and Becky Terhune of Harry N. Abrams. Dan Franklin of Jonathan
was the first to say "Yes." He gave me hope that it could happen, and has been a source of encourage-
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all things, and to Christopher Schneberger, my complementary color, without whom everything woul
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teacup
butterfly
baby
candle
glove
tortoise



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