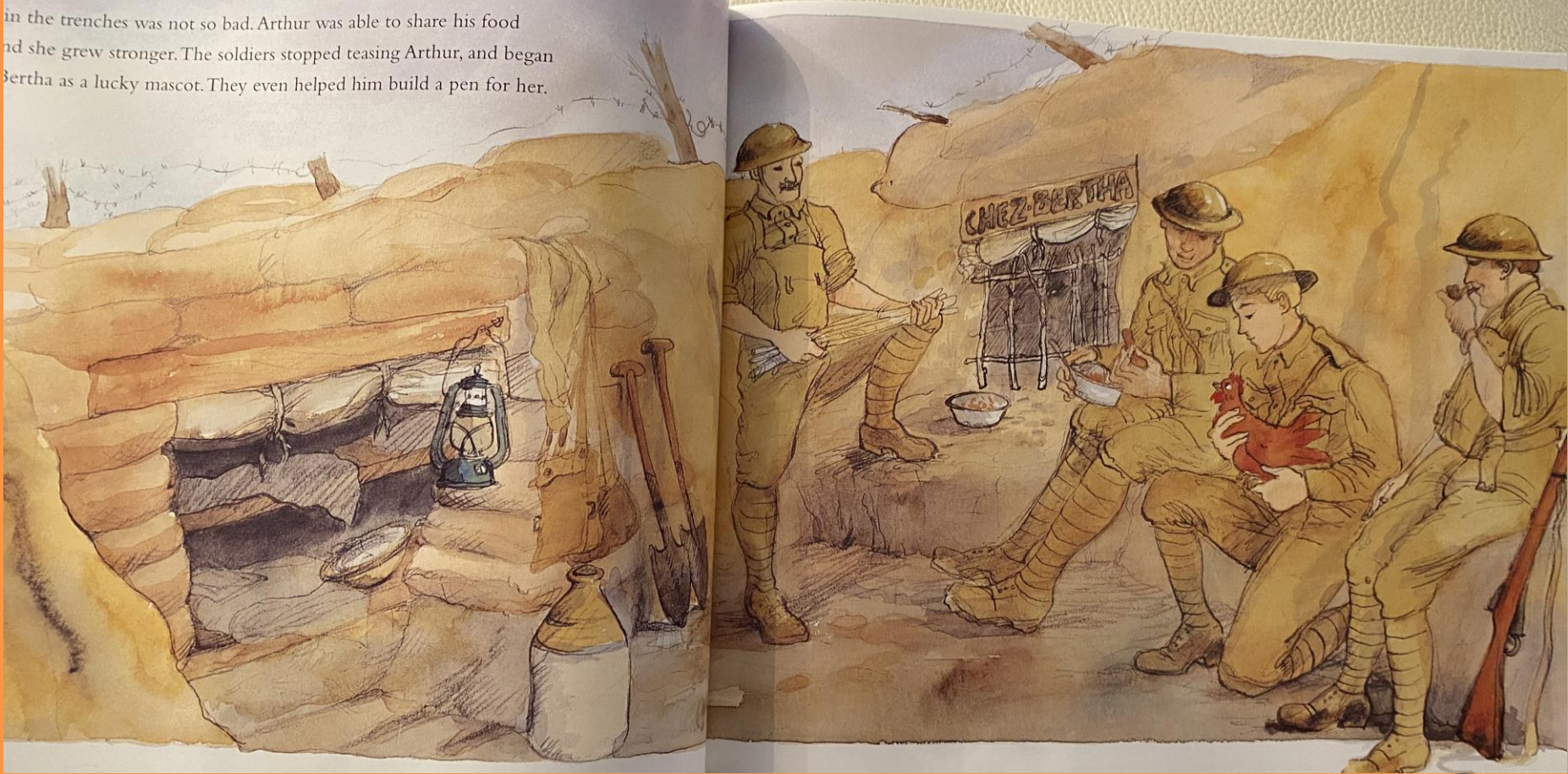


in the trenches was not so bad. Arthur was able to share his food
and she grew stronger. The soldiers stopped teasing Arthur, and began
Bertha as a lucky mascot. They even helped him build a pen for her.





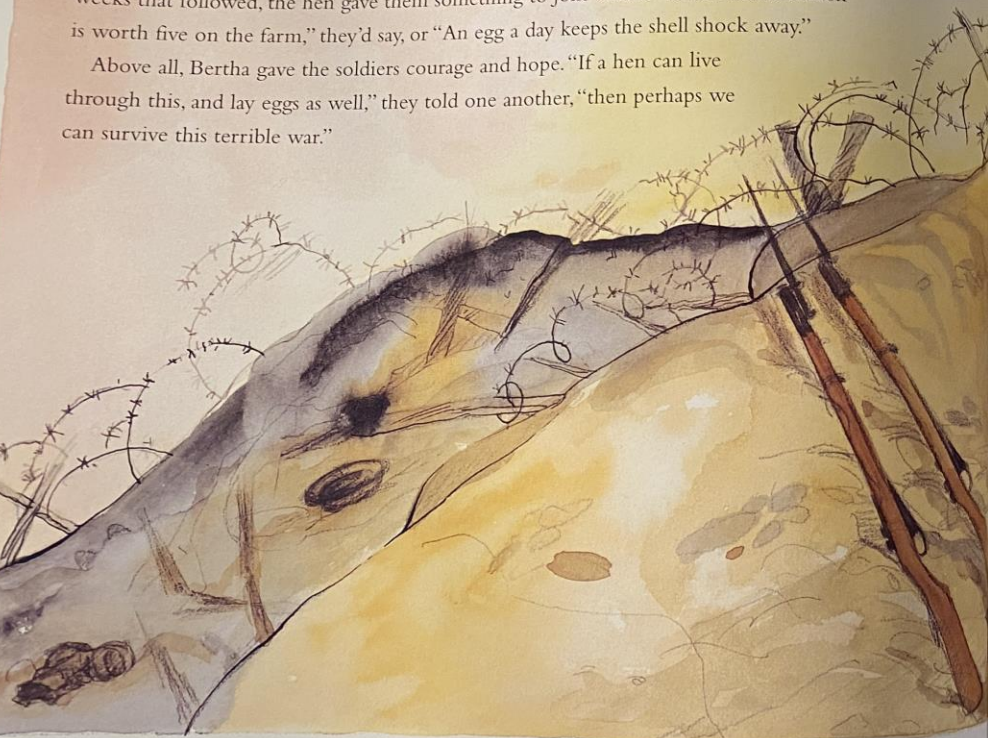
But the fighting grew heavier. Food became scarce, and Arthur and his companions collected grubs and worms for Bertha from the muddy banks of their clay prison. And she rewarded them. In the midst of a raging battle...

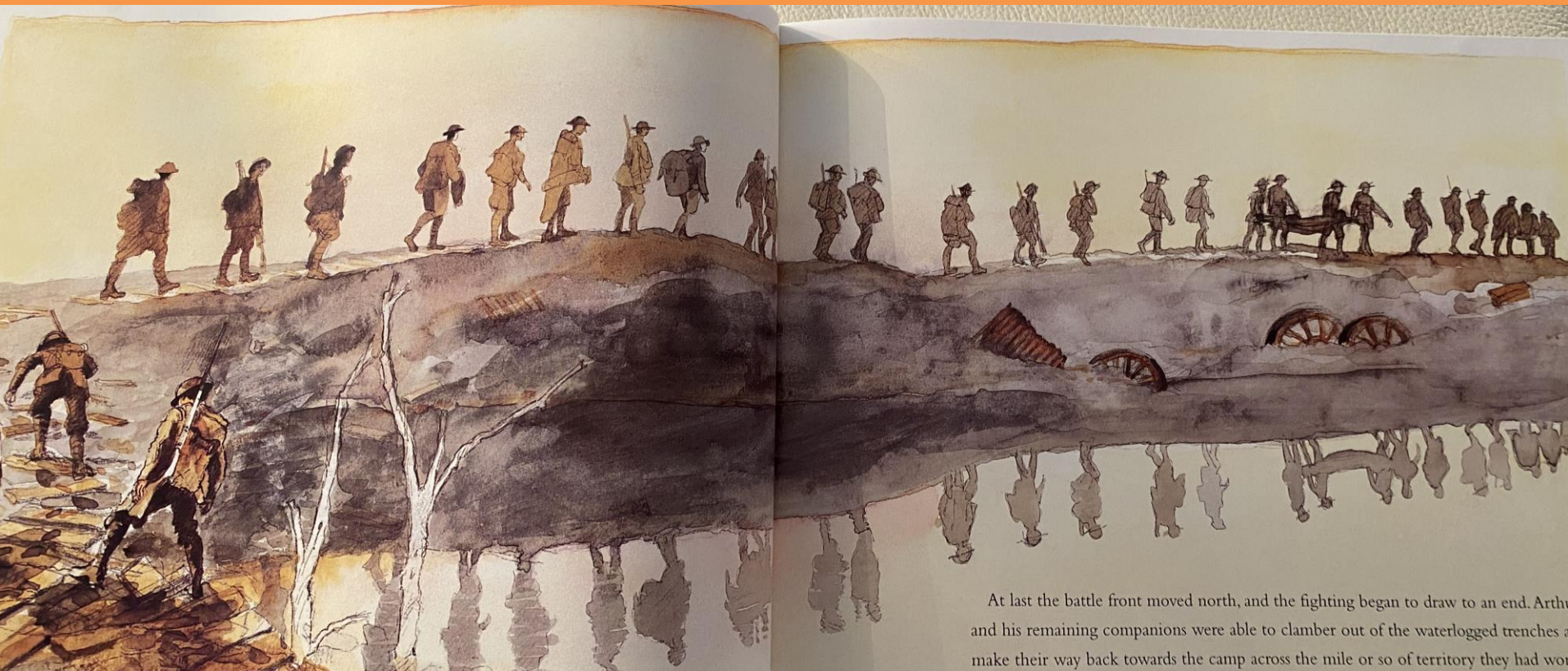




Every morning from then on, as regular as daybreak, Bertha laid an egg for Arthur and his friends. They shared the eggs, a treat for those who were most in need. During the terrible weeks that followed, the hen gave them something to joke about. "A hen in the trench is worth five on the farm," they'd say, or "An egg a day keeps the shell shock away."

Above all, Bertha gave the soldiers courage and hope. "If a hen can live through this, and lay eggs as well," they told one another, "then perhaps we can survive this terrible war."





At last the battle front moved north, and the fighting began to draw to an end. Arthur and his remaining companions were able to clamber out of the waterlogged trenches and make their way back towards the camp across the mile or so of territory they had won.

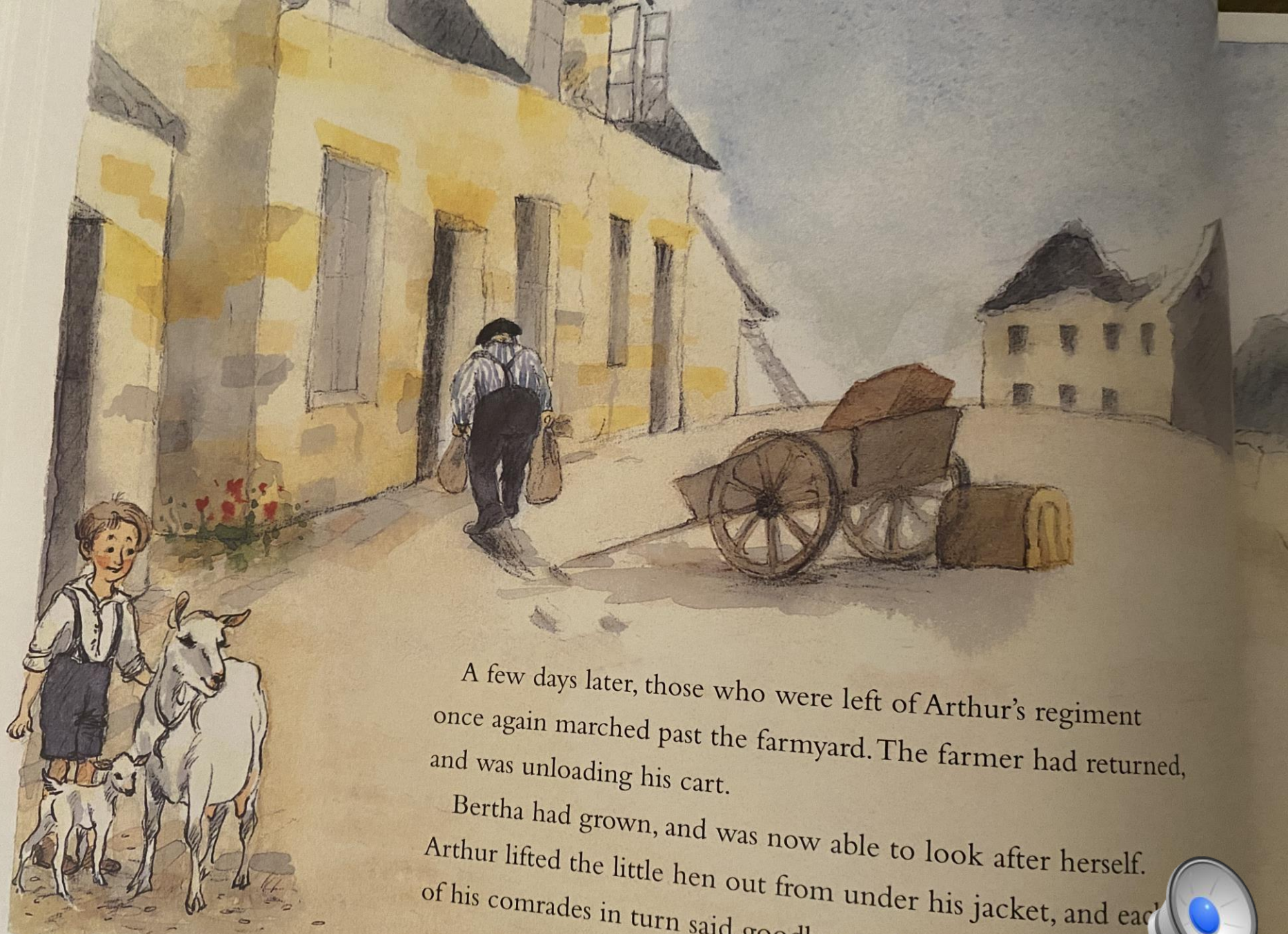




When the soldiers had begun to recover their strength and it was time to leave, they pleaded to be allowed to take Bertha home with them.

“Sorry,” replied the officer, “we’ve a long way to go. You must leave her here.”



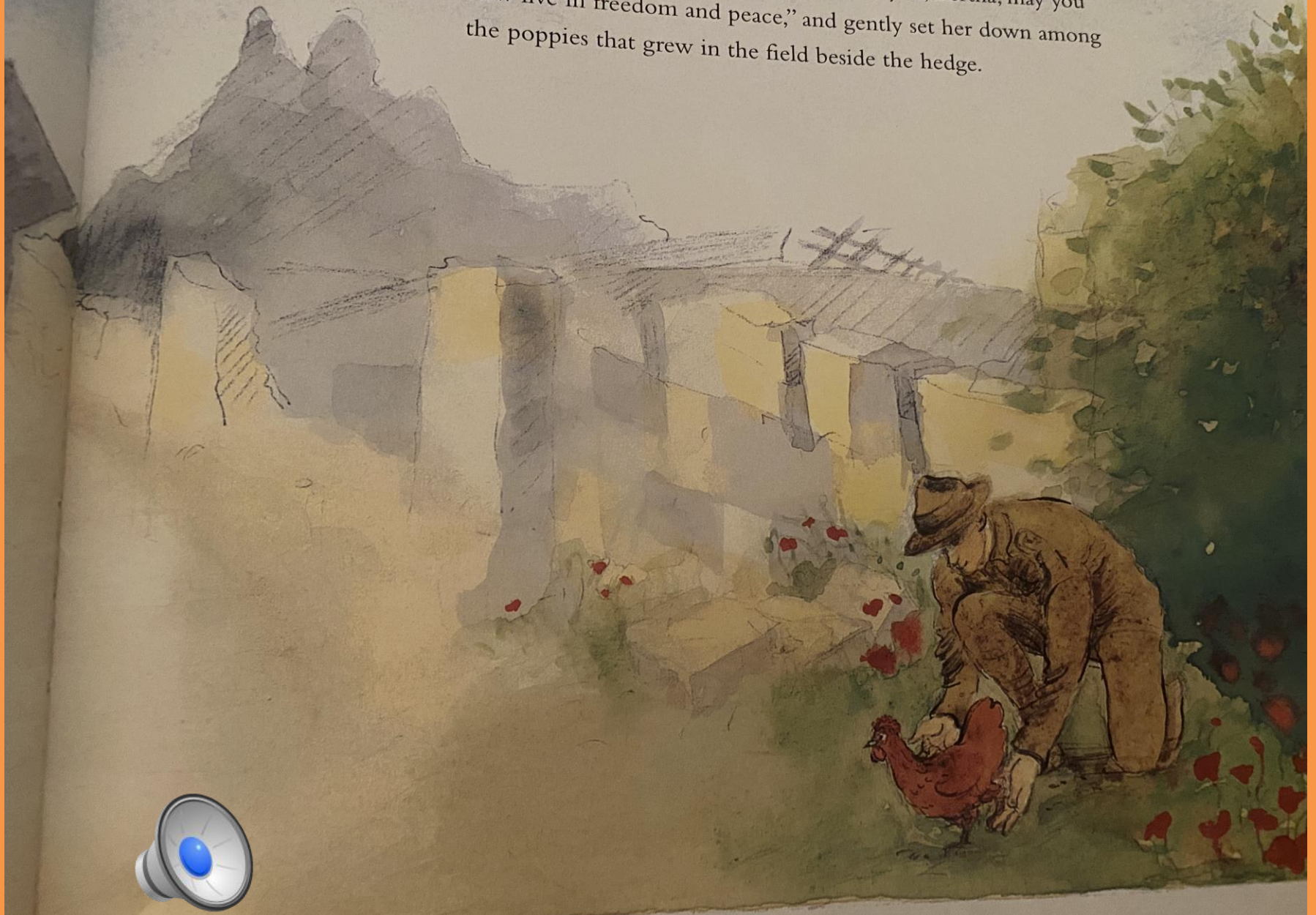


A few days later, those who were left of Arthur's regiment once again marched past the farmyard. The farmer had returned, and was unloading his cart.

Bertha had grown, and was now able to look after herself. Arthur lifted the little hen out from under his jacket, and each of his comrades in turn said goodbye to her.



Arthur was last. He whispered, "Thank you, Bertha, may you now live in freedom and peace," and gently set her down among the poppies that grew in the field beside the hedge.





Many months later, the soldiers left Europe on a troopship for home. When they finally sailed into the harbour, the wharf was crowded with people waiting to welcome them. Arthur's family hardly recognised the tall young soldier being farewelled by his friends.





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to the farm, and once again his niece Bertha
g the school holidays. A flock of hens now
l. Arthur showed Bertha how to feed and care
soon followed her everywhere.
ked much about the war, but one day he said
t to tell you a story . . .





“... about a hen I called Bertha.”

