

*Mercedes
and the
Chocolate
Pilat*

A TRUE STORY OF THE BERLIN AIRLIFT AND
THE CANDY THAT DROPPED FROM THE SKY

By Margot Theis Raven

Illustrated by Gijsbert van Frankenbuijzen

One late August day, Mercedes slipped her hand under the white chickens she kept in the small courtyard garden behind her apartment building.


Please let there be eggs, she wished as the silver-winged planes flew above like guardian angels. But like yesterday and the day before, the chickens' nests were empty, except for one small egg.

Mercedes fed each chicken a worm and tried not to cry. She loved her four feathered pets, but Mama would not be happy. Eggs were more precious than gold in West Berlin during the Russian blockade.

"Tomorrow I want an egg from each of you," she scolded the chickens sternly, "or Mama will say we cannot afford to keep you and must have you for dinner instead!"







Walking up the bomb-splintered steps to her apartment, Mercedes was sure her white chickens were just too scared of the thundering planes of the airlift to lay their eggs.

Night and day they roared overhead like huge silver birds into nearby Tempelhof Air Field to unload their supplies. But Mercedes would never complain about the great soaring grocery stores that everyone called *Raisinbombers*, because they carried yummy raisins to eat! They carried flour and clothing and coal too. And something else!





One day Mama read her a newspaper story about the candy that came from the planes. The story told about the wonderful American Chocolate Pilot, Lt. Gail Halvorsen. Every day, he rained down sweets on the children who cheered the planes landing on Tempelhof's runway.

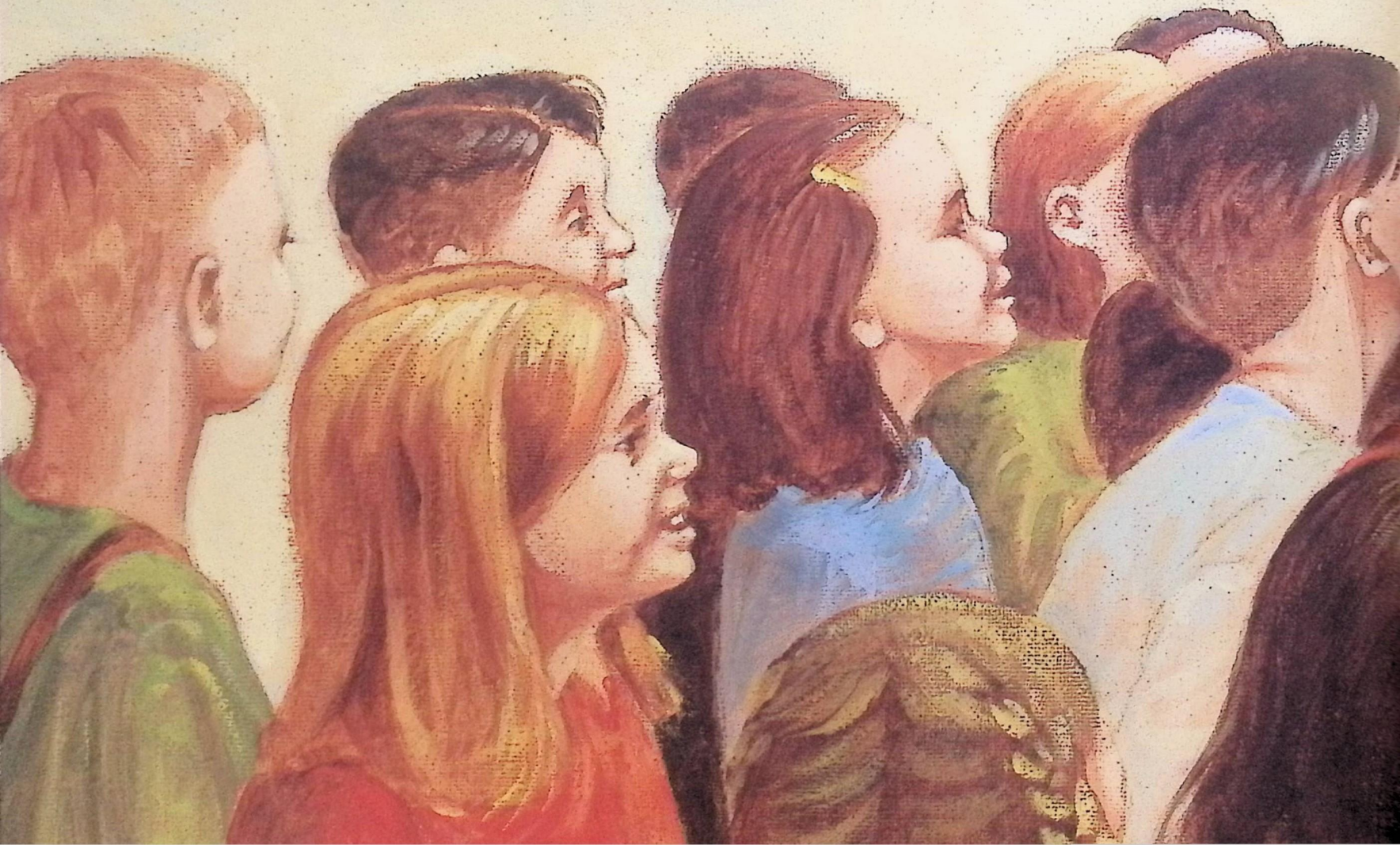




As Mama read, Mercedes learned how the tall, friendly pilot had talked with these children one day at the fence near the runway's end.

"The children didn't ask him for candy," Mama read, "only sweet freedom. Still, before he had to go, he searched his pocket for gum. But he found only two sticks — and there were 30 children!"

"What did he do, Mama?" Mercedes asked.



“He split the sticks for four lucky children,” Mama read, “and the others tore slivers of the foil to smell as their sweet treats. Then, even though he knew he could get in terrible trouble, the pilot promised the children he would drop gum and candy to them from his plane the next day! He stretched out his arms and told them to look for the wiggle of his plane’s wings.”





“That night the pilot made small candy-filled parachutes from handkerchiefs,” Mama read on, “and dropped them in secret to the children at the airfield the next day. He made three candy drops after that, before his troubles began!”



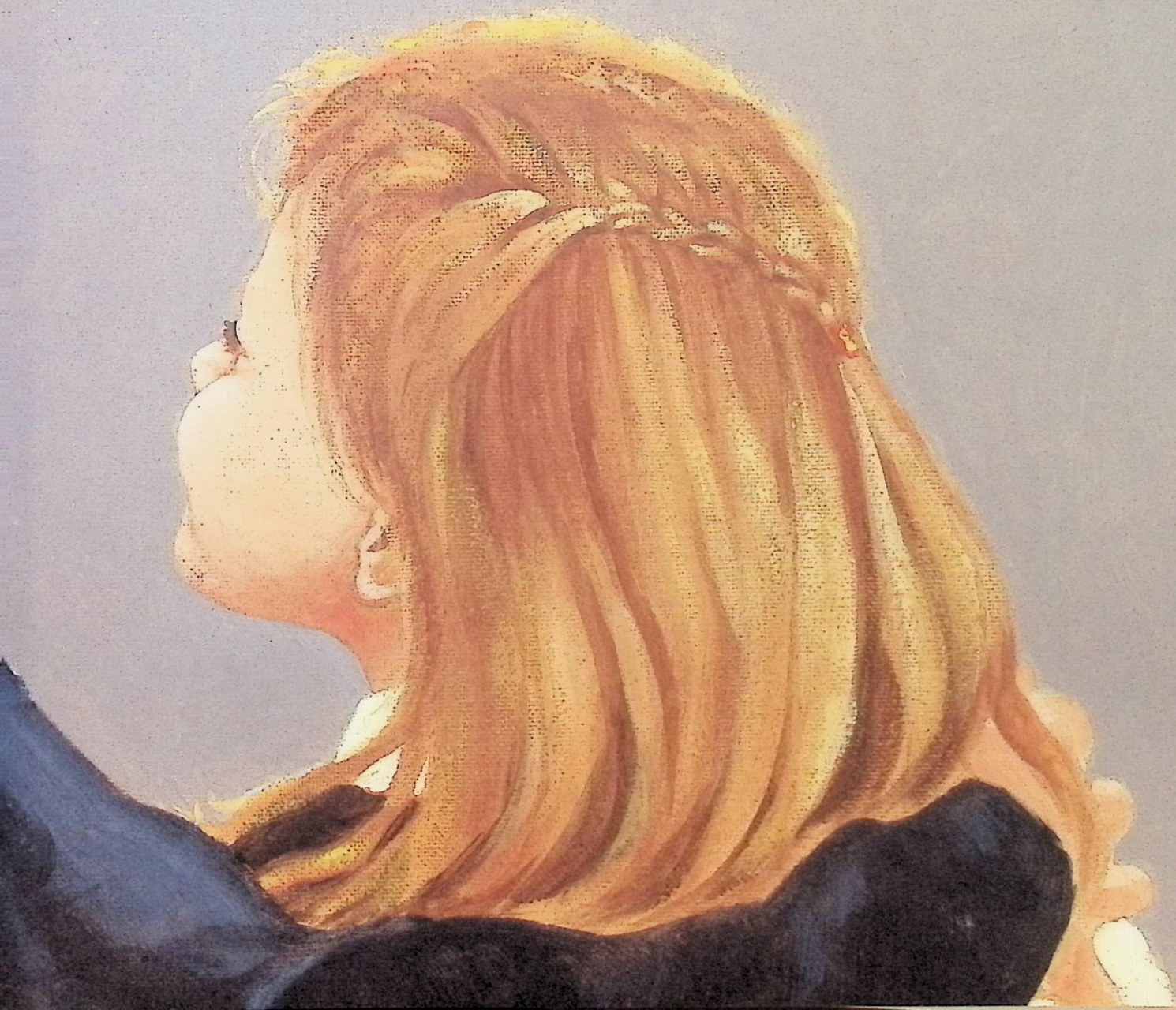
“Children’s letters addressed to *The Chocolate Pilot* and *Uncle Wiggly Wings* began to arrive at the airfield. Then a candy bar almost hit a reporter on his head, and the colonel in charge at Tempelhof read about the pilot’s secret in the newspaper! He was caught!”



“Did the colonel yell at him?” Mercedes cringed, but Mama laughed and said, “Only a little, then he shook his hand and told him to ‘keep dropping and keep him informed!’”

“But won’t he run out of candy?” Mercedes asked anxiously, but Mama laughed again.

“People from all over America now send the pilot handkerchiefs for parachutes, and so much candy that it fills two large railroad boxcars!”

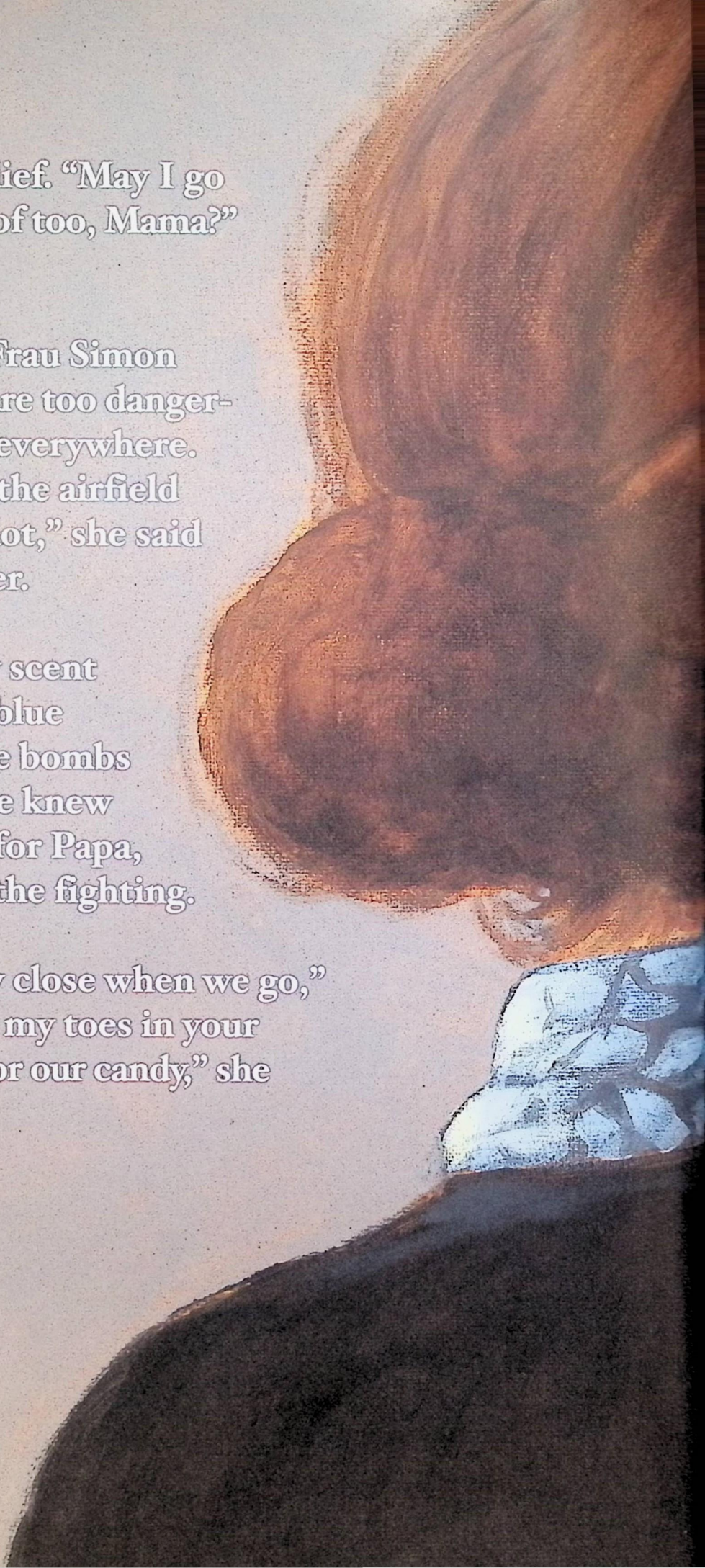


Mercedes heaved a sigh of relief. "May I go catch some candy at Tempelhof too, Mama?" she asked hopefully.

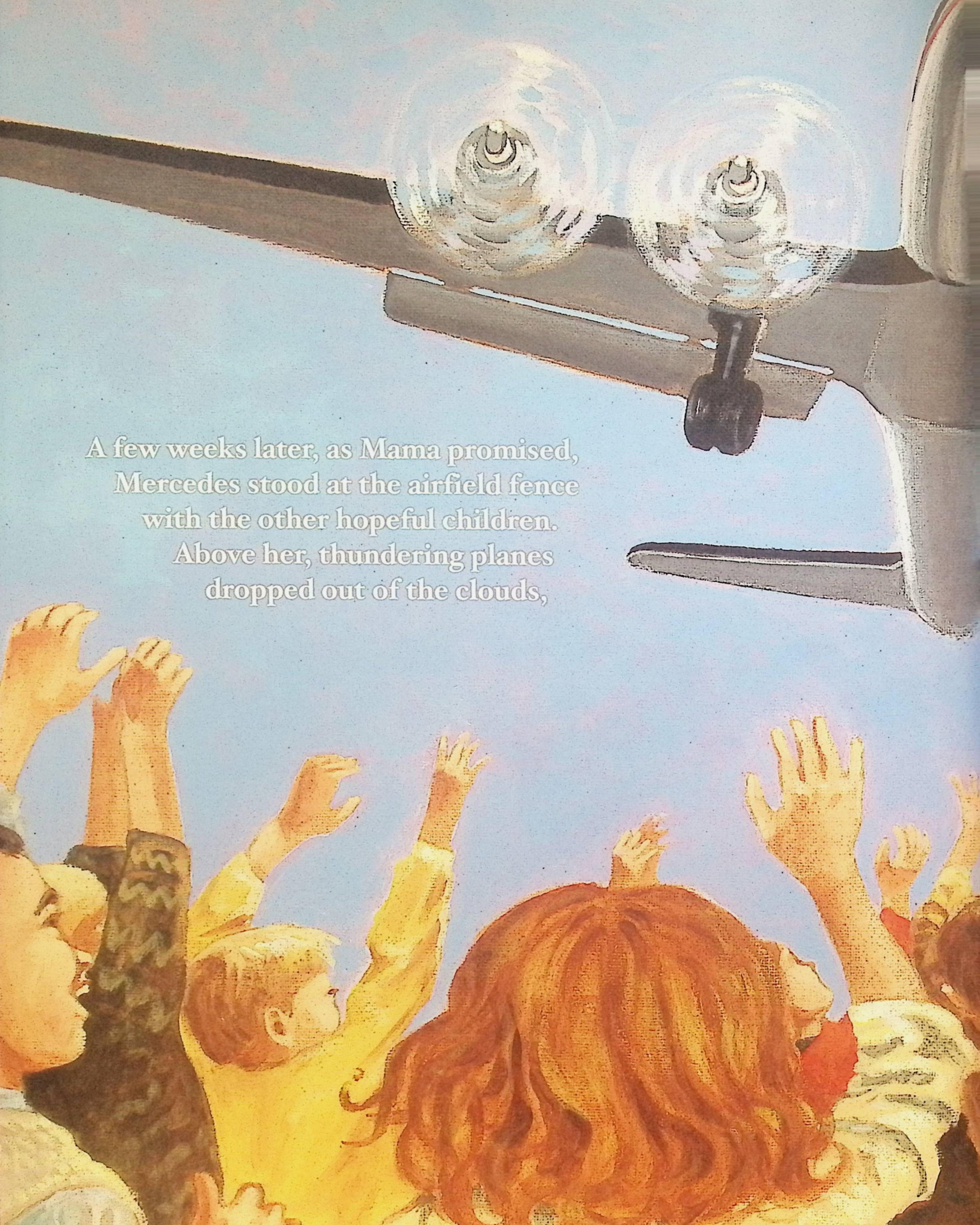
"Not by yourself, liebchen," Frau Simon warned quickly, "the streets are too dangerous with soldiers and rubble everywhere. But I promise to take you to the airfield soon to see the Chocolate Pilot," she said hugging Mercedes close to her.

Mercedes smelled the smoky scent that still lingered in Mama's blue dress from the time when the bombs had fallen during the war. She knew Mama cried quietly at night for Papa, who hadn't come back from the fighting.

"Don't worry, Mama, I'll stay close when we go," she said. "I'll even walk with my toes in your shadow...except when I run for our candy," she added happily.





An illustration of a biplane flying in a blue sky. The plane is shown from a low angle, with its two sets of wings and propellers visible. Below the plane, a crowd of children is gathered, with many of their hands raised in excitement. The children are depicted in various colors, including yellow, brown, and red. The overall scene is one of hope and anticipation.

A few weeks later, as Mama promised,
Mercedes stood at the airfield fence
with the other hopeful children.
Above her, thundering planes
dropped out of the clouds,

“What then of the future? I think
you will agree with me that our children
are our future. Not just our children,
but everyone’s children.”

Remarks by Col. Gail S. Halvorsen, USAF (RET.)

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