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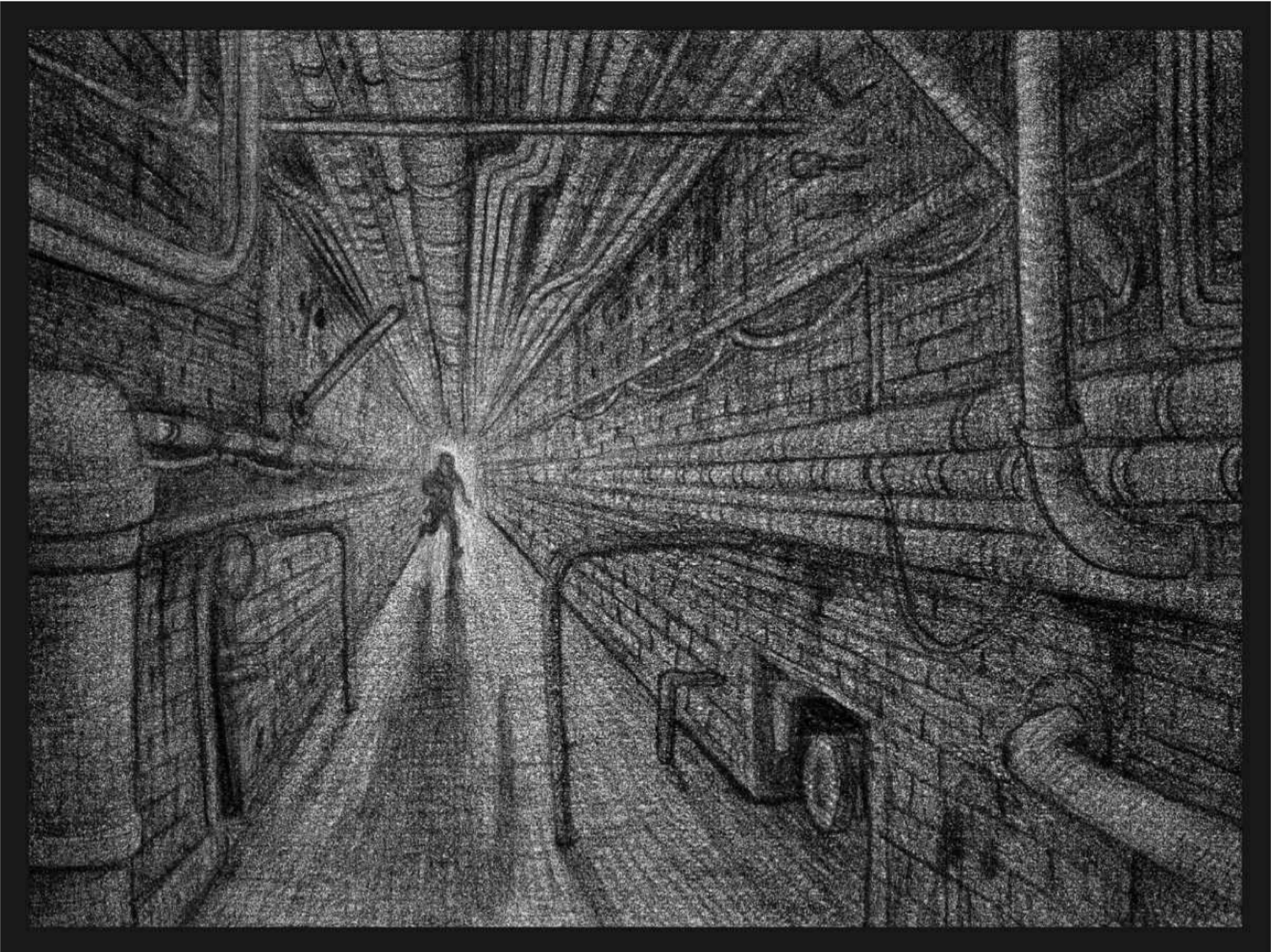


## *The Clocks*

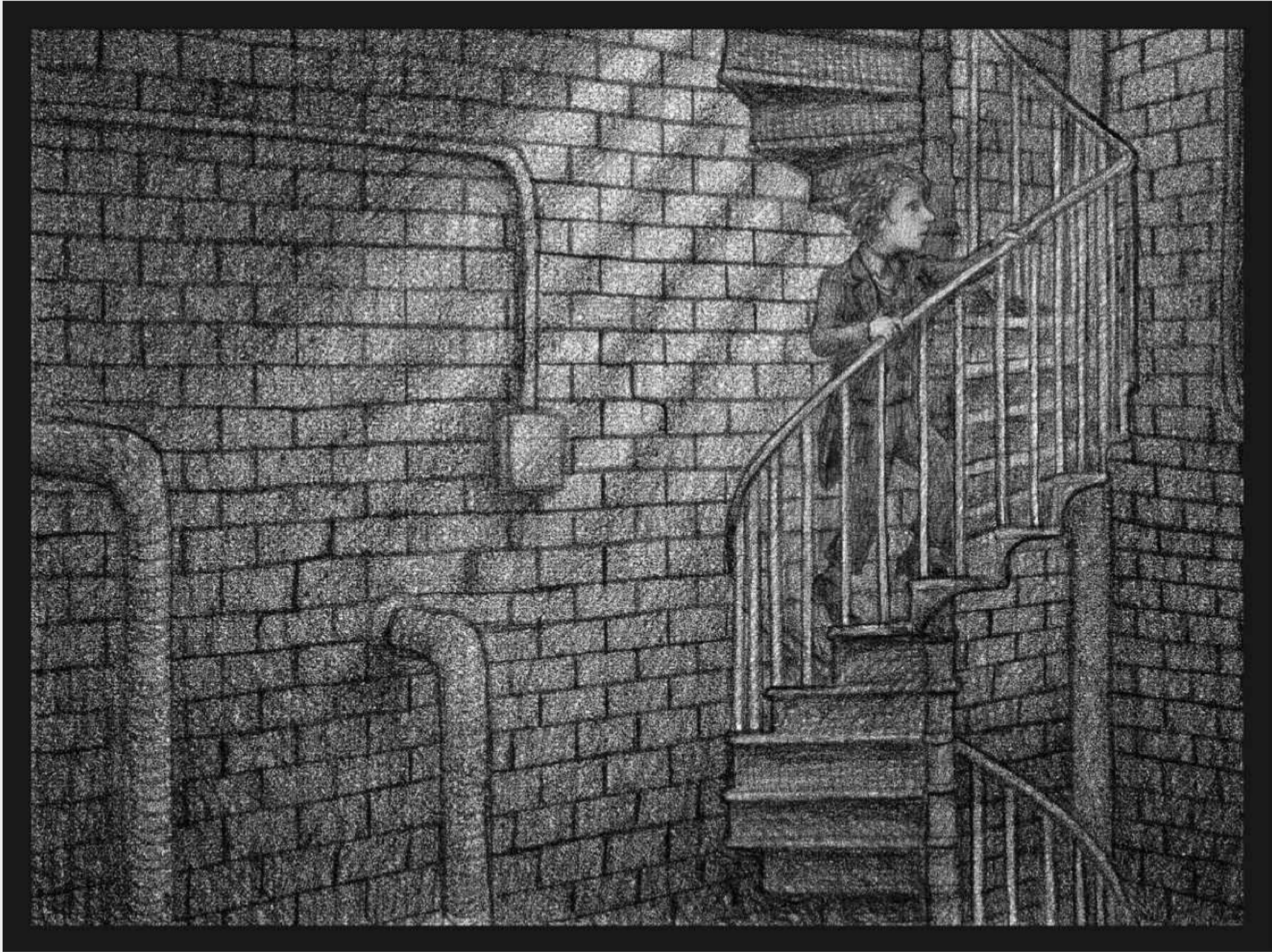
HUGO RAN DOWN THE HALLWAY and disappeared back inside the metal vent in the wall. He paused for a moment. The air was cool and damp. A few dim lightbulbs provided a tiny bit of illumination inside the dark passageways.

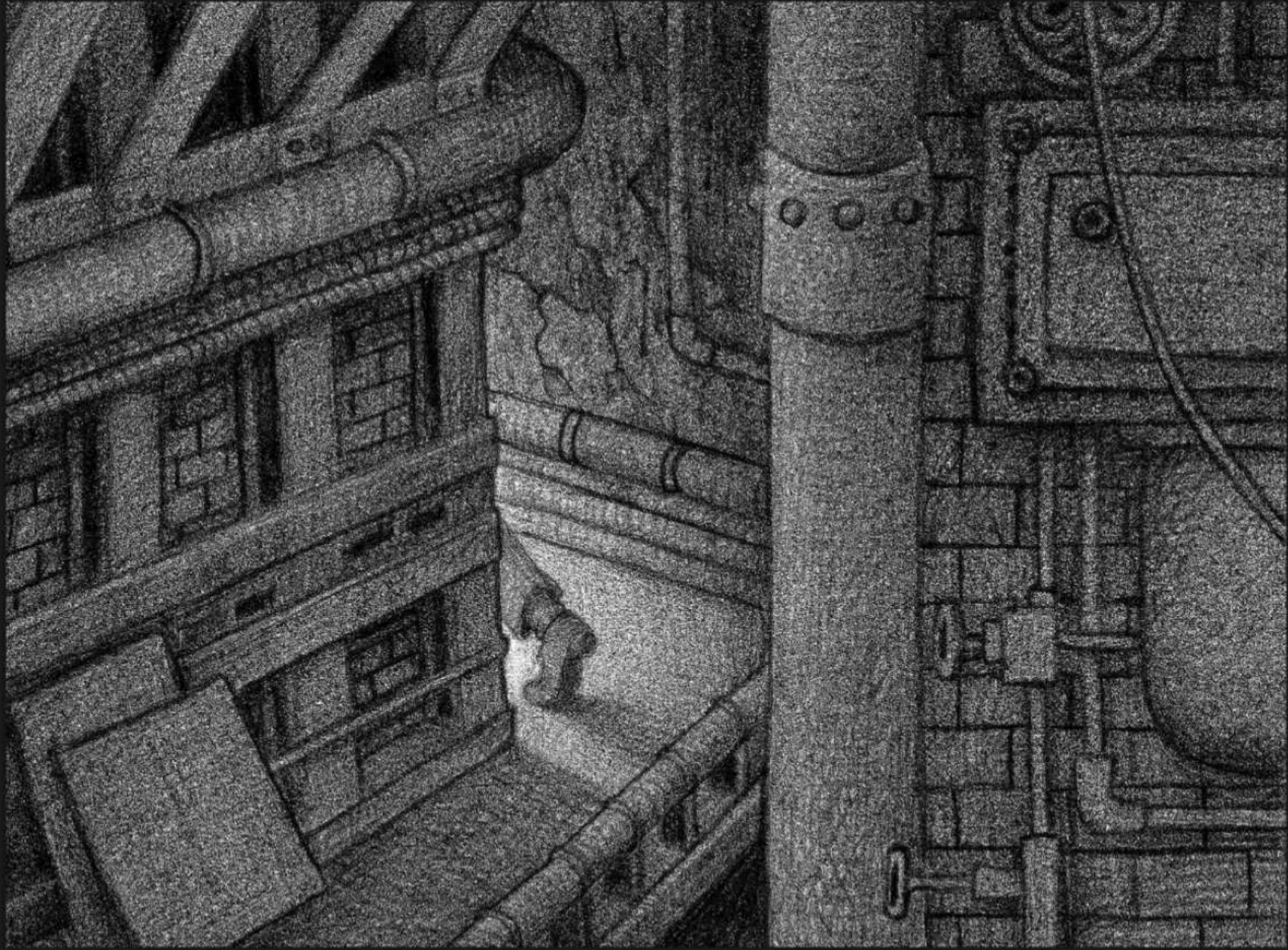


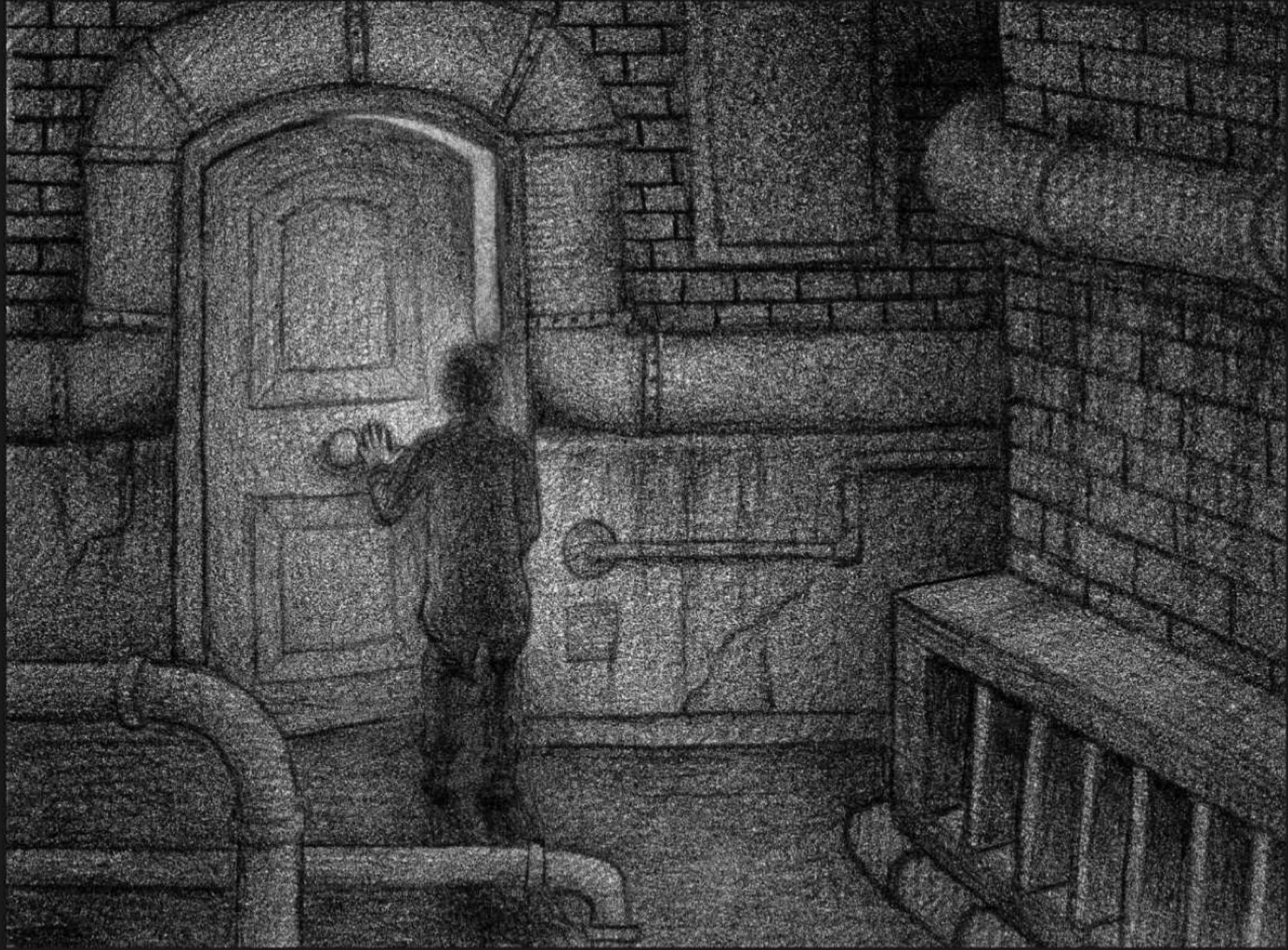












Hugo opened the door and let himself inside.

Above the ceiling of the main waiting area was a cluster of secret apartments that had been built for the people who ran the train station years ago. Most of them had long been abandoned. Only one was still in use.

Some sunlight filtered through the dirty skylight. Hugo looked at the rows and rows of jars, filled with pieces from all the toys he had stolen from the toy booth over the past few months. The jars sat on shelves made from scavenged planks he had found inside the walls of the station. Under his rickety bed lay a pile of Hugo's drawings. His deck of cards rested on a dusty trunk in the middle of the room. Nearby, on a small table, was a stack of envelopes—his uncle's uncashed paychecks, accumulating week by week.

Hugo wiped his eyes and picked up his bucket of tools. He stuffed some more matches and candles into his pockets and set to work.

As usual, Hugo headed first to the big glass clocks on the roof, because they were the hardest to reach. They were like huge round windows and looked out over the city, one facing north and one facing south. Hugo had to climb up a long dark staircase and slither through an opening in the ceiling at the top of a ladder to get inside them. During

the day, his eyes always stung for a few moments from the flood of light through the glass. The motors and gears of these clocks were the biggest in the station, and Hugo was often afraid that his hand was going to get caught.

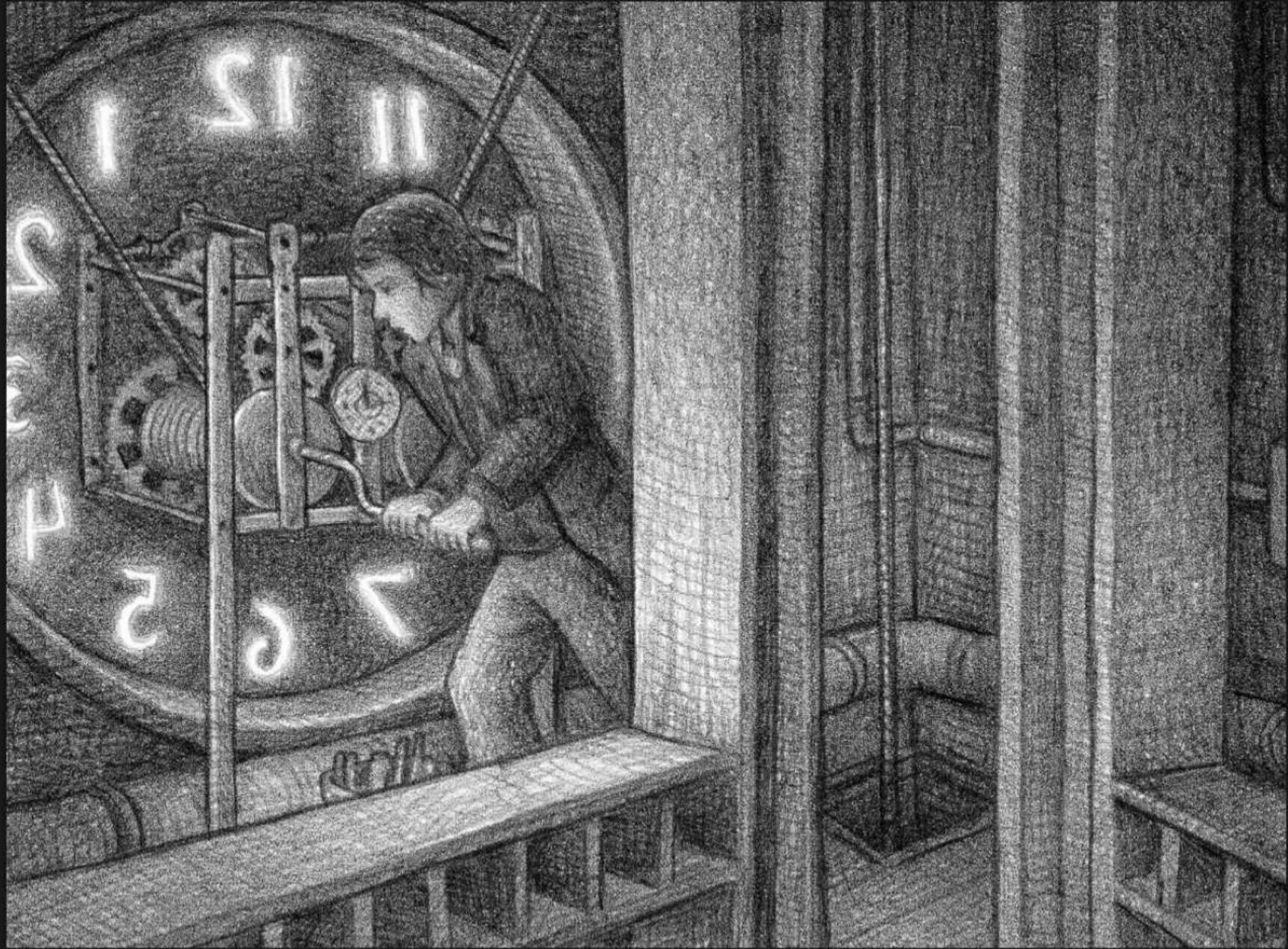
In the corner of the room, attached by ropes, hung huge weights that kept the clocks running. He checked the time on the glass clocks against the time on his uncle's railroad watch, which he kept with his tools and wound diligently every morning. He then took a moment to carefully look the whole mechanism over, and added a few drops of oil to each gear shaft from a little oilcan in his kit. Hugo's head tilted slightly to the side as he listened to the beat of the clock, waiting until he was sure the machine was running correctly.

Once he had finished with the clocks on the roof, he climbed down the ladder and the long staircase. Back inside the dark passageways, he checked the other clocks in the station, all of which were made of brass and could be maintained from inside the walls.

Hugo lit his candles to help him see and began with the clock that overlooked the ticket booths. This clock, like all the others, had weights, too, but much smaller ones, which disappeared into the floor.

Hugo attached a crank to the back of the clock and, using all of his strength, turned it as far as it would go.





Hugo then made sure the gears and levers were moving accurately, and he checked that the time was correct on the miniature dial built into the back of the clockworks. Next he moved through the hidden passageways to the ring of clocks around the train platforms, and then to the backs of the smaller clocks that faced the interior offices, including the Station Inspector's. Looking through the numbers, Hugo could see the Station Inspector's desk, and in the corner of the office, the cage of a small jail cell that sat waiting for any criminals caught in the station. Hugo had seen men and women locked up in there, and a few times he had even seen boys no older than himself in the cell, their eyes red from crying. Eventually, these people were taken away, and Hugo never saw them again.

From the offices, Hugo followed a long, hidden tunnel to the back of the clock opposite the old man's toy booth. He wished he could avoid this clock, but he knew he couldn't skip any of them. Peering out through the numbers, Hugo spied the old man again, alone in his toy booth at the end of the hallway, looking through the pages of Hugo's notebook. Hugo wanted to scream out, but he didn't. He oiled the clock and listened to it carefully. He could tell it wouldn't need to be wound for another day or two, so Hugo kept going, until all twenty-seven clocks in the station had been attended to, just the way his uncle had taught him.



## *Snowfall*

THE OLD MAN SLOWLY SHUFFLED to the front of the toy booth. He was beginning to close up shop, lowering the front wooden grate, when Hugo approached him from behind. Hugo knew how to walk silently, but he let his feet fall loudly on the tiles to let the old man know he was there.

"Pick up your feet, boy." The old man glanced over his shoulder. "I hate the sound of shoe heels clicking on the floor." The old man continued to close the grate and lock it.

The halls of the station were nearly empty. Hugo