

gardens. She had promised her aunts that she would not pick any of the kind king's flowers. She wanted very much to be good and to keep her promise. So she was very cross when she found that there were no flowers to pick.'

'Why weren't there any flowers?'

'Because the pigs had eaten them all,' said the bachelor immediately. 'The gardeners had told the king that he couldn't have pigs *and* flowers, because pigs eat flowers. So the king decided to have pigs, and no flowers.'

The children thought that this was an excellent idea.

'Most people choose flowers,' said Cyril. He looked very pleased. 'But of course, pigs are *much* better than flowers.'

'There were lots of other wonderful things in the palace gardens,' the bachelor continued. 'There were lakes with gold and blue and green fish in them. There were trees with beautiful birds that could talk and say clever things. There were also birds that could sing popular songs.'

'Well, on the first Friday afternoon in May, Bertha came to the king's gardens. The king's soldiers saw her beautiful white dress and her three medals for goodness, and they opened the doors to the gardens at once.'

'Bertha walked up and down and enjoyed herself very much. As she walked along, the three medals on her beautiful white dress clinked against each other. She heard them clinking, and she thought: "I'm here in these lovely gardens because I am the Best Child in the World." She felt pleased and happy and very, very good.'

'Just then a very big, hungry wolf came into the gardens.'

It wanted to catch a fat little pig for its supper.'

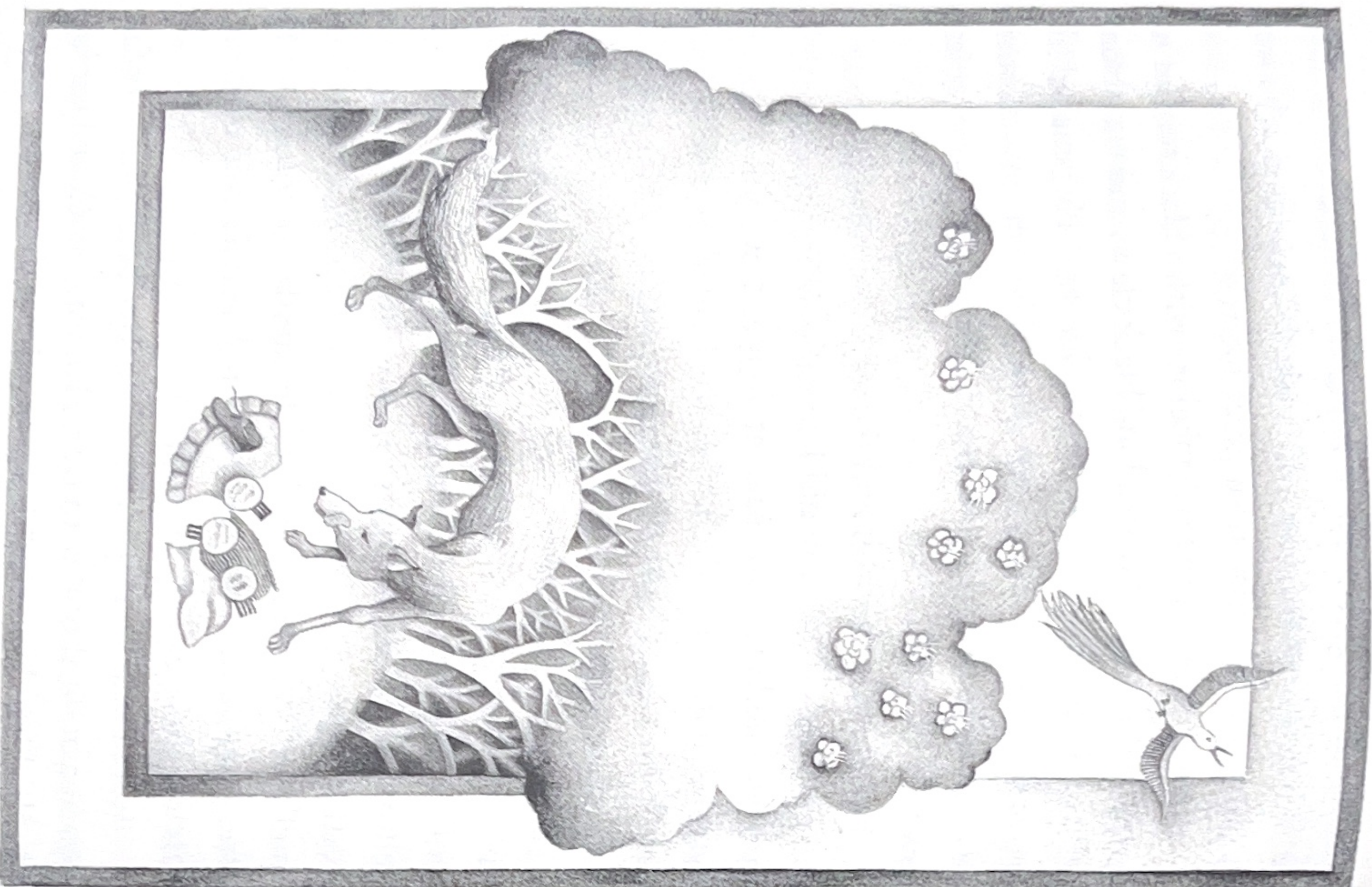
'What colour was the wolf?' asked the children, who were listening to the story with great interest.

'He was grey,' said the bachelor, 'with a black tongue and angry yellow eyes. He had long black claws and big, strong, yellowish teeth. The wolf was hungry. He smelled the ground with his long grey nose. Then he saw Bertha's beautiful, clean white dress and began to move quietly towards her.'

'Bertha saw the wolf and she wished she had not come to the gardens. "Oh, why did I come here?" she thought. "All the bad children are safe at home. I wish I wasn't an extraordinarily good child! Then I could be safe at home too." She ran as hard as she could, and the wolf came after her on his long grey legs.'

'At last Bertha managed to reach some big, sweet-smelling myrtle bushes, and she hid herself in the thickest bush. The wolf walked round and round the bushes, with his angry yellow eyes and his long black tongue. But he couldn't see Bertha because the bushes were too thick, and he couldn't smell her because the smell of the myrtle was too strong. So after a while the wolf became bored, and decided to go and catch a little pig for his supper.'

'Bertha was terribly frightened. Her heart beat very fast and her body shook with fear. Her arms shook and her legs shook. Her three medals for goodness shook too. And as they shook, they clinked together. The wolf was just moving away, when he heard the medals clinking, and he stopped to



'The wolf ate everything except Bertha's shoes, a few small pieces of her dress, and the three medals for goodness.'

listen. The medals clinked again. The wolf's yellow eyes shone, and he ran into the myrtle bushes, pulled Bertha out, and ate her. He ate everything except her shoes, a few small pieces of her dress, and the three medals for goodness.'

'Were any of the little pigs killed?' asked Cyril.

'No, they all escaped.'

'The story began badly,' said the smaller girl, 'but it finished beautifully.'

'It is the most beautiful story that I have ever heard,' said the bigger girl.

'It is the *only* beautiful story I have ever heard,' said Cyril. The aunt did not agree. 'It was a most improper story!' she said angrily. 'You mustn't tell children stories like that! You have destroyed years of careful teaching.'

'Well,' said the bachelor. He put on his coat and picked up his bags. 'The children sat still and were quiet for ten minutes while they listened to the story. And they didn't do that for *you*.'

'I feel sorry for that woman,' thought the bachelor as he stepped down from the train at the next station. 'What will people think when those children ask her for an improper story!'

Gabriel-Ernest

Cunningham had spent an agreeable week in the country with his friend Van Cheele. Now Van Cheele was driving his guest back to the station. Cunningham was unusually quiet on the journey, but Van Cheele talked all the time, so he did not notice his friend's silence.

Suddenly Cunningham spoke. 'There is a wild animal in your woods,' he said.

'A wild animal? A few rabbits, perhaps. Nothing very terrible, surely,' said Van Cheele. Cunningham said nothing.

'What did you mean about a wild animal?' asked Van Cheele later, at the station.

'Nothing. It was my imagination. Here is the train,' said Cunningham.

That afternoon Van Cheele went for a walk through his woods. He knew a little about plants and animals, and he enjoyed walking through the woods around his house and looking at the birds and flowers there. He also enjoyed telling everyone about them afterwards. Of course, he never saw anything very surprising – until that afternoon.

During his walk Van Cheele came to a deep pool under

some tall trees. He knew it well: after all, it was his pool. But today, he saw a boy of about sixteen lying on a large rock beside the pool. The boy was drying his wet, naked brown body in the sun. His hair was wet too, and he had long, golden, wolfish eyes. He turned those eyes towards Van Cheele with a look of lazy watchfulness.

Van Cheele was surprised to see the boy. Where does this wild-looking boy come from? he thought. Can he be the miller's son? He disappeared two months ago. People say he fell into the river. It's a fast-running river, and nobody ever found his body. I wonder? But the miller's boy was only a young child . . .

'What are you doing here?' asked Van Cheele.

'Enjoying the sunshine, of course,' said the boy.

'Where do you live?'

'Here, in these woods.'

'You can't live in these woods,' said Van Cheele.

'They are very nice woods,' said the boy politely.

'But where do you sleep at night?'

'I don't sleep at night. That's my busiest time.'

Van Cheele began to feel cross. What did the boy mean?

'What do you eat?' he asked.

'Meat,' said the boy. He opened his mouth, showing very white teeth.

'Meat? What kind of meat?'

'Well, if you must know, I eat rabbits, wild birds, chickens from the farm and young sheep from the hills. I like children when I can find them. But they're usually too well locked in



'I don't sleep at night. That's my busiest time,' said the boy.

at night. It's two months since I tasted child meat.'

The boy is joking about the children, thought Van Cheele. But perhaps he really is stealing animals from the woods and farms. I must find out more about this.

Aloud he said, 'You catch rabbits? You must be joking. Our rabbits are much too fast for you.'

'At night I hunt on four feet,' was the boy's surprising reply.

'You mean that you hunt with a dog?' guessed Van Cheele.

The boy sat up suddenly and laughed a strange, low laugh.

To Van Cheele that laugh sounded horribly like a growl.

'I don't think any dog would like to hunt with me,' the boy said. 'Not at night . . .'

There is something horrible about this boy, thought Van Cheele. I don't like the way he looks and I don't like the way he talks.

'I can't let you stay in my woods,' he said aloud.

'Very well then – shall I come and live in your house?' replied the boy.

Van Cheele thought about his quiet, tidy house. No, he did not want this strange, wild boy at all. Of course, the boy was joking . . . but Van Cheele was not amused.

'If you don't go away,' he said, 'I shall have to call the police.'

At once the boy turned and jumped head-first into the pool. A moment later, his shining, wet body landed half-way up the grassy bank where Van Cheele was standing. Van Cheele stepped backwards. His foot slipped on the wet grass and he fell. He found himself lying on the grass with those

wolfish yellow eyes uncomfortably near to his. He felt a moment of horrible fear. The boy laughed again, a laugh that was like the growl of a wild animal, then disappeared among the bushes.

'What an extraordinarily wild animal!' said Van Cheele as he picked himself up. And then he remembered Cunningham's words about a wild animal in his woods.

As he walked slowly home, Van Cheele thought about several things which had happened in and around the village recently. Perhaps this boy knows something about them, he thought . . . Something has been killing rabbits and birds in the woods lately. Something has been stealing the farmers' chickens and carrying off the young sheep from the hills. Is it possible that this wild boy is hunting at night with a fast, intelligent dog? The boy talked of hunting on four feet at night . . . But he also said that dogs did not like to hunt with him at night . . . Very strange indeed.

As Van Cheele walked along, he turned the questions over and over in his head. Suddenly he stopped. The miller's son! he said to himself. The child disappeared two months ago. Everyone thought that he had fallen into the river and been carried away. But the child's mother did not believe this. She said she had heard a scream – and the scream came from the hill, a long way away from the water.

It's impossible, of course, said Van Cheele to himself. But the child disappeared two months ago, and the boy talked about child meat. He was joking, of course . . . but what a horrible joke!

Van Cheele usually talked to his aunt about the birds, plants and animals he saw on his walks. But today he said nothing. He was an important man in his village. If there was a thief living in his woods, he did not want anyone to know. If people hear about the boy, he thought, perhaps they will want me to pay for their lost chickens and their disappearing sheep.

He was unusually quiet at dinner. 'What's the matter with you?' joked his aunt. 'Did you see a wolf on your walk?'

At breakfast the next morning Van Cheele realized that he still felt uncomfortable about yesterday's adventure. I know what I'll do, he said to himself. I'll take the train to London and I'll go and see Cunningham. I'll ask him if he was joking when he said there was a wild animal in my woods.

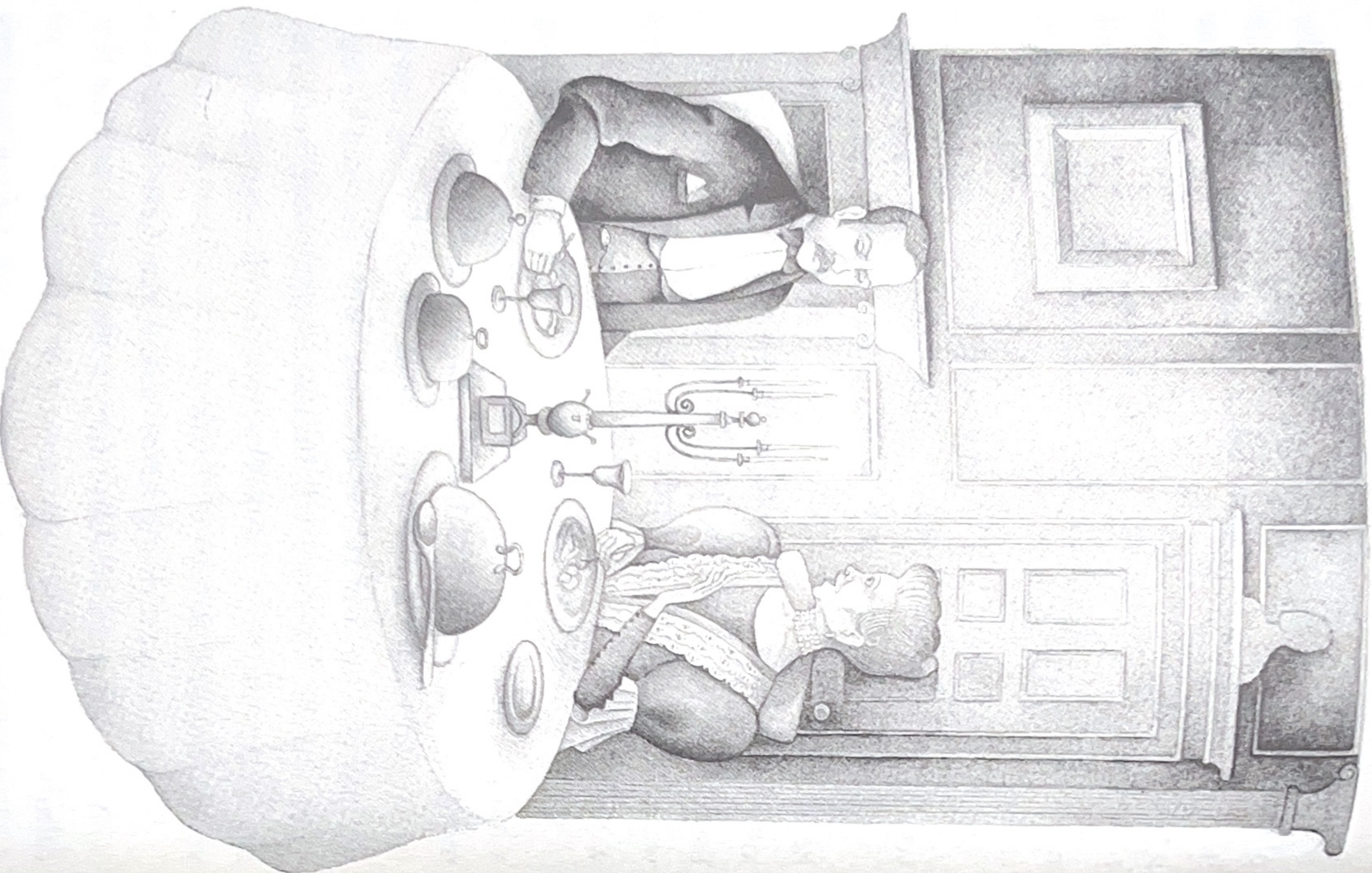
After he had decided this, Van Cheele felt better. He sang a happy little song as he walked to the sitting-room for his morning cigarette. His fat old dog walked beside him.

As Van Cheele entered the sitting-room, the song died on his lips and his dog ran away with his tail between his legs. There on the day-bed, with his hands comfortably behind his head, lay the boy from the woods. He was drier than yesterday, but he was still naked.

'What are you doing here?' asked Van Cheele angrily.

'You told me I couldn't stay in the woods,' said the boy calmly.

'But I didn't tell you to come here. What if my aunt sees you? What will she think?'



Van Cheele was unusually quiet at dinner.

Van Cheele hurriedly covered his unwanted guest's nakedness with a newspaper. At that moment his aunt entered the room.

'This is a poor boy,' explained Van Cheele quickly. 'He has lost his way – and lost his memory too. He doesn't know who he is, or where he comes from.'

Miss Van Cheele was very interested. 'Perhaps his name is on his underclothes,' she said.

'He has lost his underclothes too,' said Van Cheele. The newspaper was slipping off the boy's naked body. Van Cheele hurried to replace it.

Miss Van Cheele was a kind old lady. She felt sorry for this naked, helpless child.

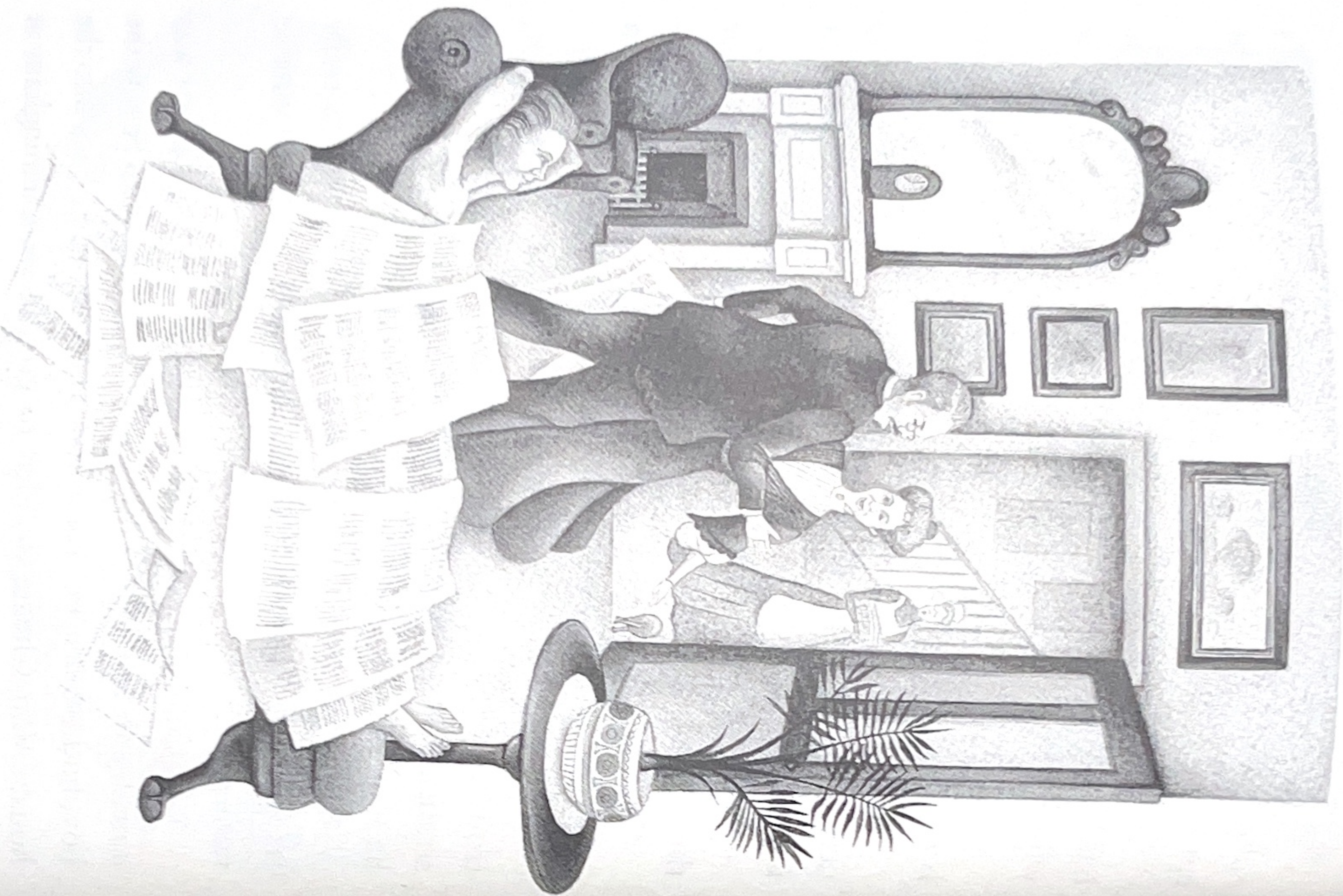
'We must help him,' she said. She sent the housekeeper to a neighbour's house to borrow some clothes.

Soon the boy was clean and tidy, and dressed in shirt, trousers and shoes. Van Cheele thought he looked just as strange and wolfish as before. But Miss Van Cheele thought he was sweet.

'We must give him a name until we know who he really is,' she said. 'Gabriel-Ernest, I think. Those are nice, suitable names.'

Van Cheele agreed. But he was not sure that the boy was a nice, suitable boy. Van Cheele's old dog, when he saw the boy, had run away in fear and would not come back into the house. Van Cheele decided to go and see Cunningham at once.

As he got ready to go to the station, his aunt was busily



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arranging a children's tea party in the church hall.

'Gabriel-Ernest will help me with the little ones,' she said happily.

When Van Cheele got to London, Cunningham did not want to talk at first. 'You'll think I'm crazy,' he said.

'But what did you see?' asked Van Cheele.

'I saw something – something unbelievable. On the last evening of my visit to you I was standing half-hidden in the bushes, watching the sun go down. Suddenly I noticed a naked boy. He has been swimming in a pool somewhere, I said to myself. He was standing on the hillside and he too was watching the sun go down. Then the sun disappeared behind the hill and its light was gone. At the same moment a very surprising thing happened – the boy disappeared too.'

'What? He disappeared just like that?' said Van Cheele excitedly.

'No. It was much more horrible than that. On the open hillside where the boy had been, I saw a large, blackish-grey wolf with long white teeth and yellow eyes. You'll think I'm crazy—'

But Van Cheele did not wait. He was running towards the station as fast as he could. He did not know what he could do. I can't send my aunt a message, he thought. What can I say? 'Gabriel-Ernest is a werewolf'? My aunt will think I'm joking. I MUST get home before sundown.

He caught his train. With painful slowness it carried him to the station a few miles from his home. He took a taxi to his village.

'Take me to the church hall – and hurry!' he ordered. The taxi drove along the quiet country roads, and the sky turned pink and purple as the sun got lower and lower in the west. His aunt was putting away some uneaten cakes and sandwiches when he arrived.

'Where is Gabriel-Ernest?' screamed Van Cheele.

'He's taking little Jack Toop home,' said his aunt calmly.

'It was getting so late. I didn't want to send the dear little boy home alone. Isn't the sky beautiful this evening?'

But Van Cheele had no time to talk about the beautiful sky. He ran like the wind down the narrow road that went to the Toops' house. On one side was the fast-running river, on the other was the dark hillside. In a minute I'll catch up with them, Van Cheele thought.

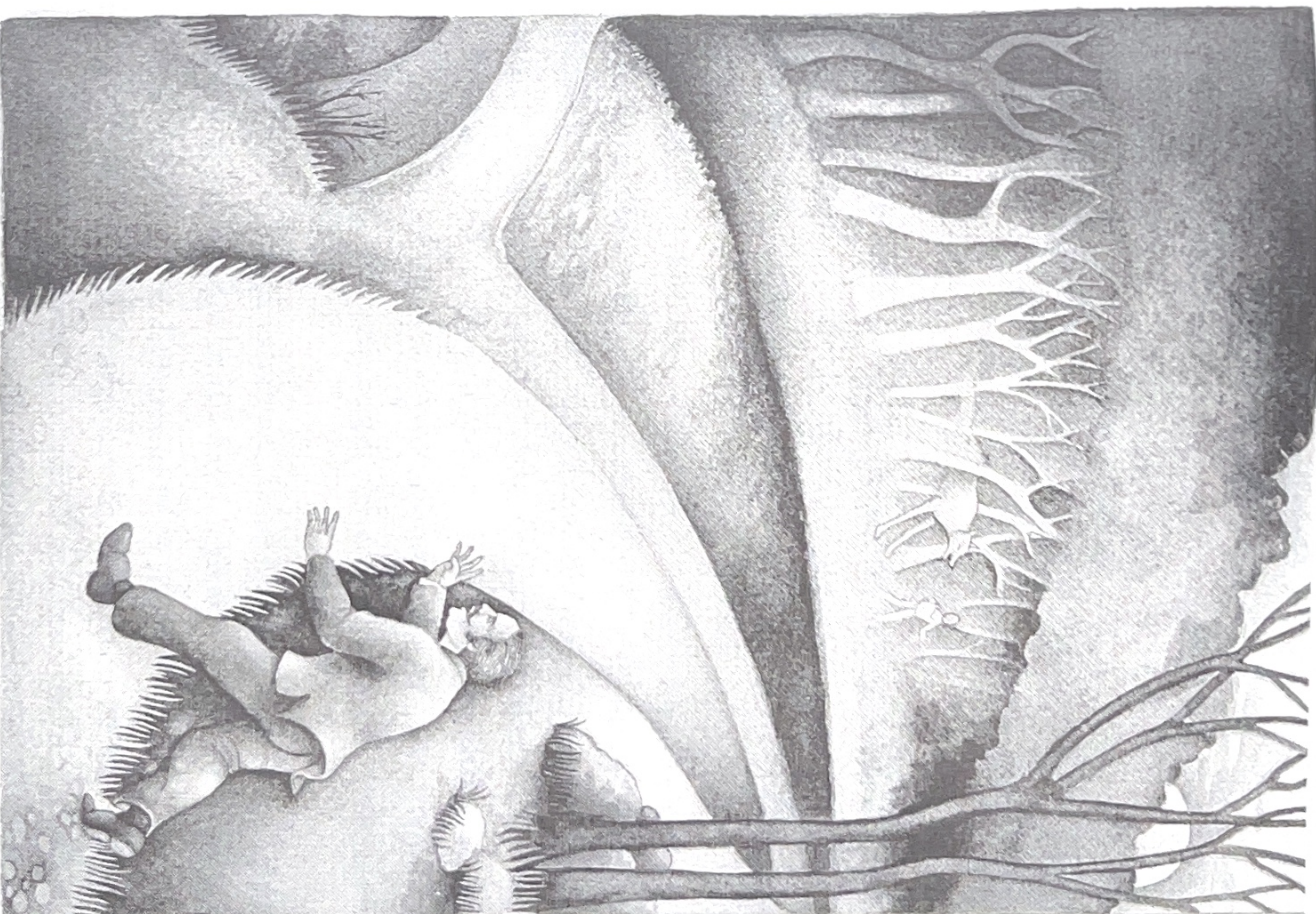
Then the sun went down behind the hill and the whole world became grey and cold. Van Cheele heard a short scream of fear, and he knew he was too late.

Nobody ever saw little Jack Toop or Gabriel-Ernest again. Gabriel-Ernest's clothes were found lying in the road.

'Poor little Jack fell into the river,' said Miss Van Cheele. 'And dear Gabriel-Ernest took off his clothes and jumped into the river to try to save him.'

Mrs Toop had eleven other children and did not cry too long for her lost son. But Miss Van Cheele was terribly sad about Gabriel-Ernest.

'He must have a memorial in the church,' she said. She chose the words herself.



Van Cheele ran like the wind down the narrow road that went to the Toops' house.