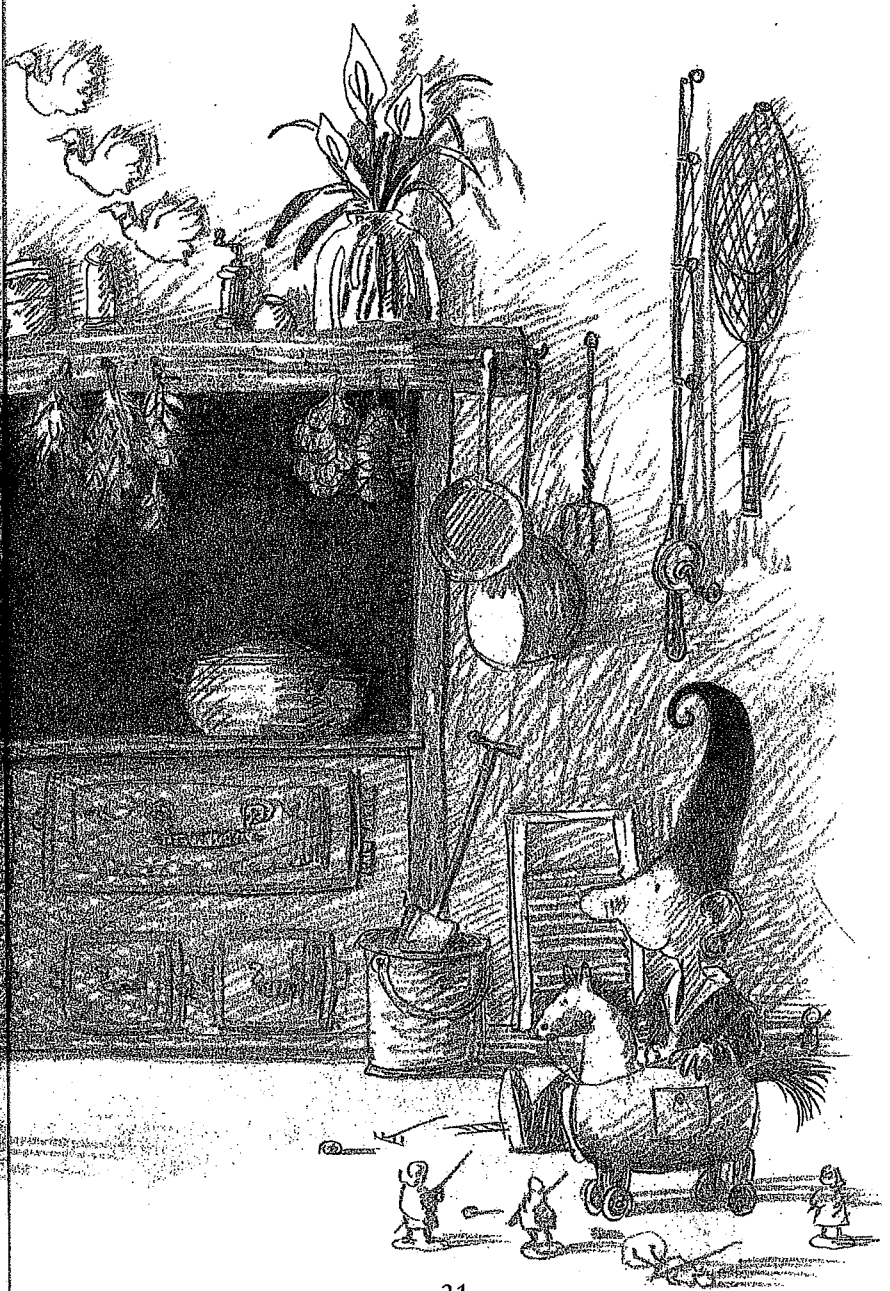


DRAGON BREATH

Jack took Tashi outside to the peppercorn tree.
They climbed up to Jack's special branch and
when they were sitting comfortably, Jack said,
'Did you really meet a dragon?'

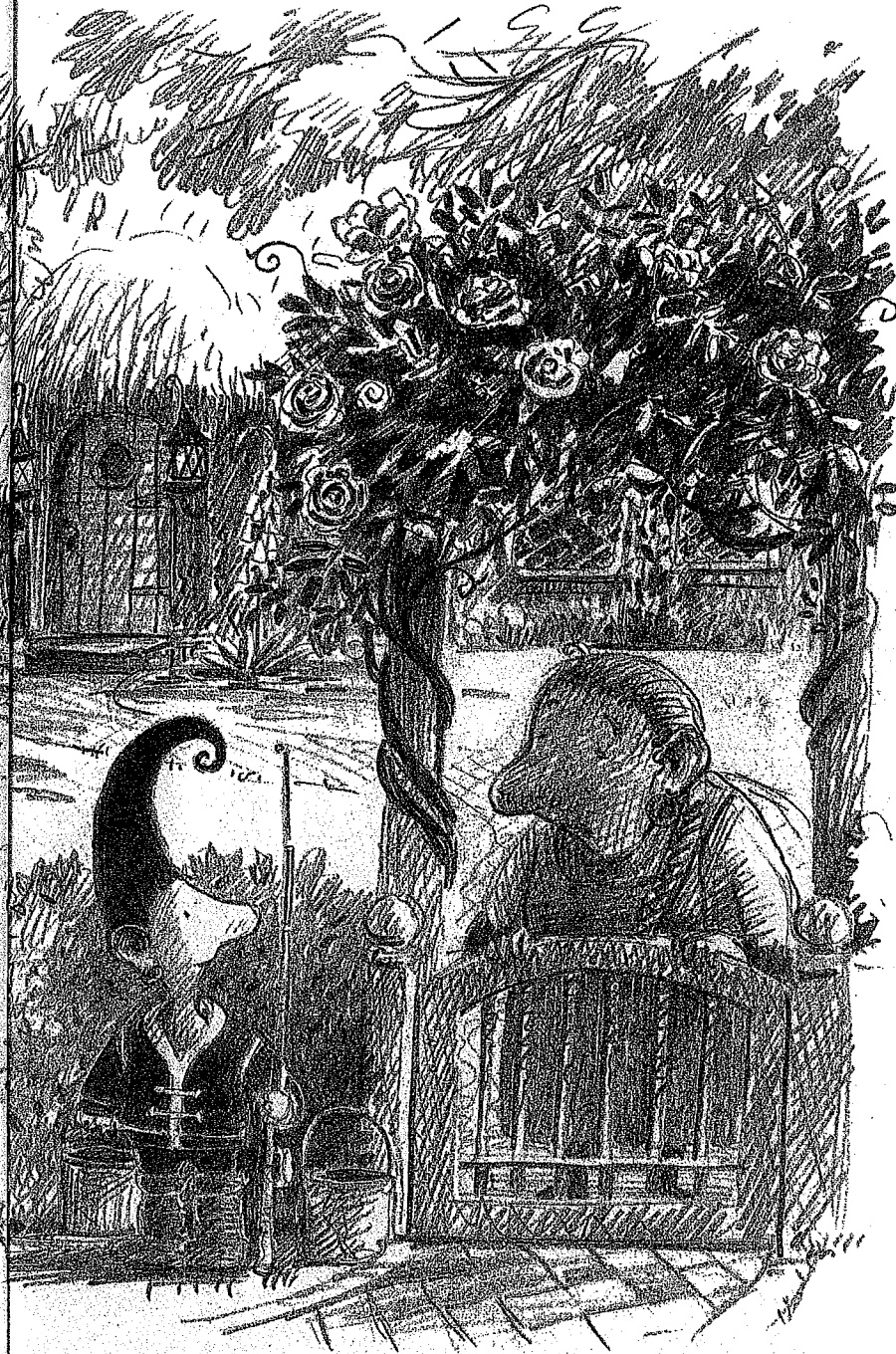


'Yes,' said Tashi, 'it was like this. One day Grandmother asked me to go to the river to catch some fish for dinner.'





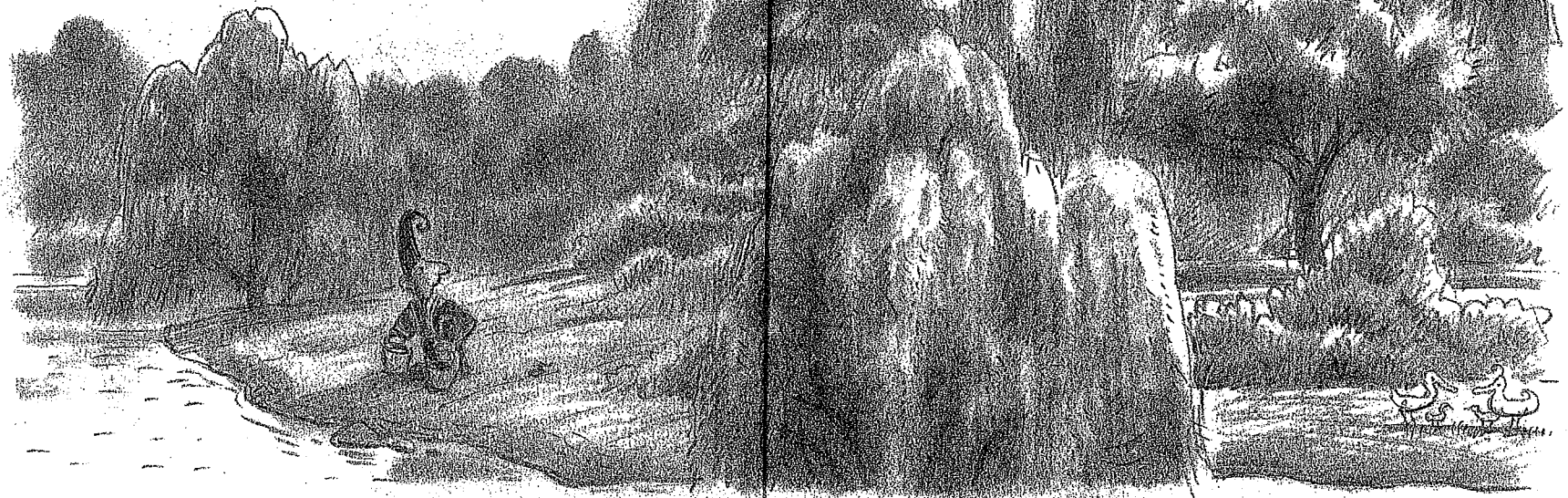
‘Was this in your old country?’ asked Jack.
‘Of course,’ said Tashi. ‘Grandmother doesn’t believe in travel. Anyway, before I set off, Grandmother warned me, “Whatever you do, Tashi,” she said, “don’t go near the steep, crumbly bank at the bend of the river. The edge could give way and you could fall in. And,” she added, “keep your eyes open for dragons.”’



'Dragons!' said Jack. 'What do you do if you meet a dragon?'



'Well, it was like this,' said Tashi. 'I walked across the field to the river and I caught five fish for dinner. I was just putting them into a couple of buckets of water to keep them fresh when I saw a cloud of smoke. It was rising from a cave, further up the mountain.'





'Ooah, did you run away home?' asked Jack.
'Not me,' said Tashi. 'I took my buckets and climbed up the mountain and there, sitting at the mouth of the cave, was the biggest dragon I'd ever seen.'



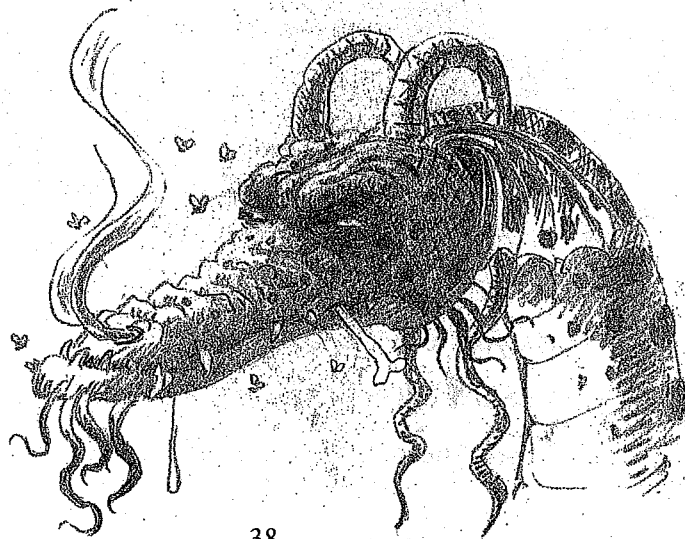
'Have you seen many?' asked Jack.
'I've seen a few in my time,' said Tashi. 'But not so close. And *this* dragon made me very cross.'

He was chomping away at a crispy, dragon-breath-roasted pig.

“That’s my father’s pig you’re eating,” I said.

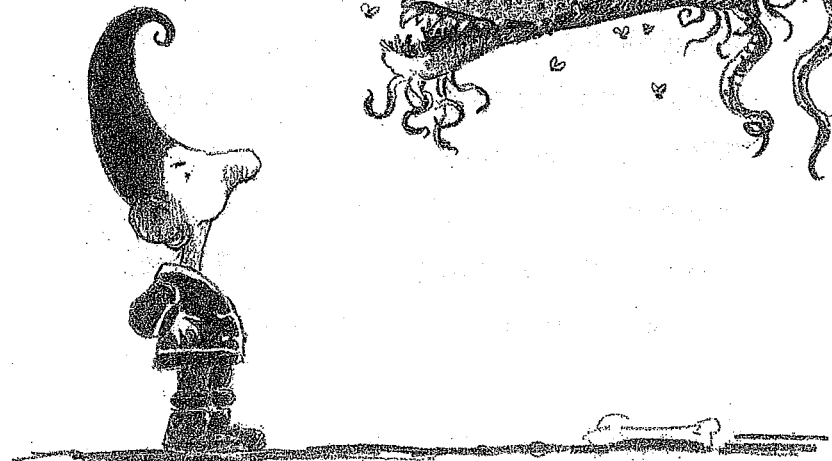
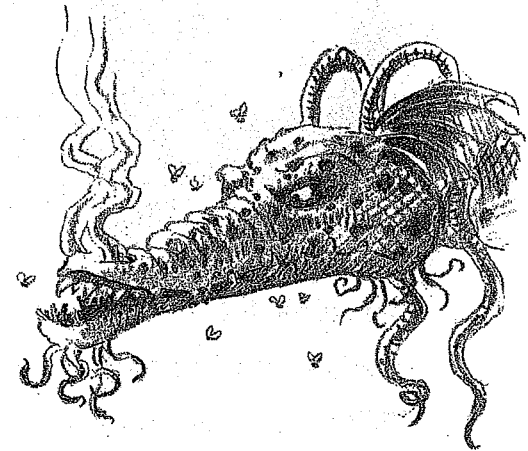


“I don’t care,” said the dragon. “I needed something to cheer me up.”



“You can’t eat other people’s pigs just because you feel like it,” I told him.

“Yes, I can. That’s what dragons do.”



'So I sat down next to him and said, "Why do you need cheering up?"

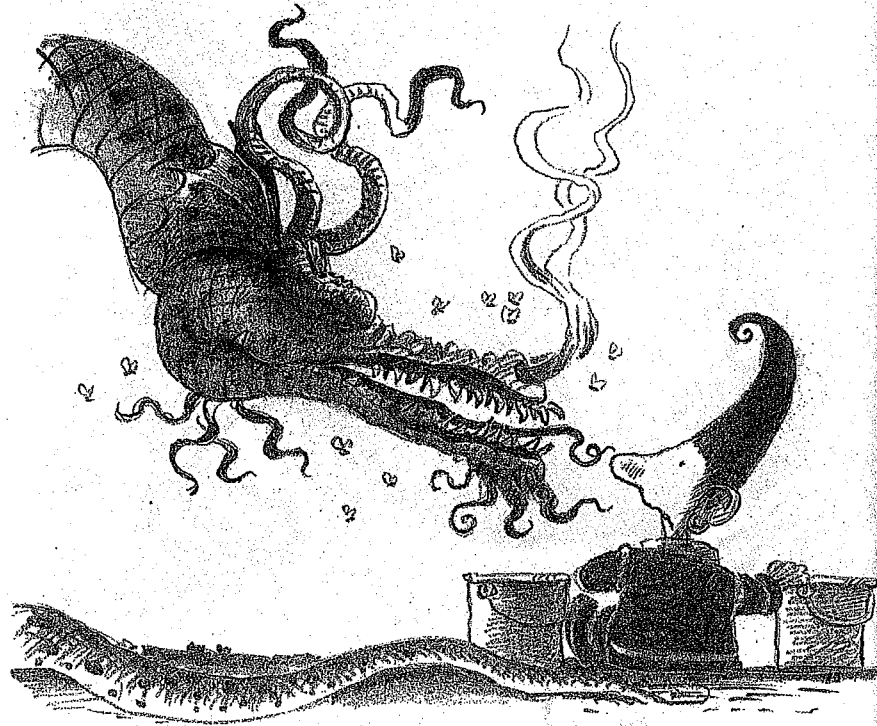


"Because I'm lonely," said the dragon. "There was a time when I had a huge noisy family. We'd spend the days swooping over the countryside, scaring the villagers out of their wits, stealing pigs and geese and grandfathers, and roasting them with our dragon breath.



Then we'd sing and roar all night till the sun came up. Oh, those were the days!" The dragon sighed then and I moved back a bit. "But Mum and Dad grew old and died, and I ate up the rest of the family. So now I'm the only dragon left."

'He looked straight at me and his scaly dragon eyes grew slitty and smoky. "A few mouthfuls of little boy might make me feel better," he said.'



'Oh no!' said Jack. 'What happened then?'
'Well, it was like this. I quickly stood up, ready to run, and the water in my buckets slopped out over the side.'

"Look out!" cried the dragon. "Watch your step! Dragons don't like water, you know. We have to be careful of our fire."

