



‘Safely back in the bushes, Wise-as-an-Owl flipped through the Book of Spells until he found the page he needed: *How to Destroy the Chimera*. Tashi tried to peep over his shoulder. It was too hard to read the ancient writing in the dusky light, so he turned to help Lotus Blossom. She was making Much-to-Learn as comfortable as she could with a sling and a splint.

‘Soon the old man lifted his head. “Yes, it’s quite straightforward. Once we get the ingredients from my library—”

‘Ah Chu choked. “Go back down there, do you mean?”

“Just give me a list,” Tashi said quickly. “I know where all your potions and mixing bowls are kept, Wise-as-an-Owl. I’m quick and light – it will be easier for me to clamber over all that wreckage. “Look,” he went on, “it’s nearly dark and the Chimera has been quiet for ages. I’ll creep down and see if it’s asleep.”



‘Tashi wished he felt as brave as he had sounded. A droning noise greeted him as he drew near. He thought his pounding heart would surely wake the Chimera as he felt his way over the smashed walls and windows. The monster slept, eyes closed, wings furled amongst the wreckage. Only its great tail lay slowly twitching, gleaming through the grass.

'Tashi tip-toed to the library in the main house where the moonlight poured through the windows, lighting up the shelves of beakers in its cold, eerie beam. Working silently, Tashi found the ingredients on his list, one by one, and put them into a large mixing bowl. He was almost finished when he heard something move behind him.



'He stood, terrified, his insides churning. The sound came again, slithering towards him across the floor. The hairs on the back of his neck prickled. He looked down and saw something glittering in the moonlight, beside his heel. The tip of the monster's tail!

'Tashi tried to slow his breath, to make his hands still. Maybe the creature would think he was a statue, or a piece of wood. But the tail was sliding over his foot!

'He dug his toes into his boots. He imagined he was a tree, rooted to the ground. The serpent tail was heavy, like the weight of two men.



'Tashi was melting with fright. But the tail came to rest over his feet. Oh *please*, thought Tashi, *please stay asleep!* He counted to one hundred, and still the tail didn't move. Then slowly, smooth as honey dripping from a spoon, Tashi slid one foot then the other from under the tail.



'When he was free, Tashi bolted back to the hideaway. Wise-as-an-Owl told him they'd have to wait until it was light before mixing the potion. They all tried to get some rest but twigs and stones stuck into their backs and Ah Chu's stomach was grumbling like thunder. When the sun finally came up Ah Chu said it looked like a great fried egg and that made everyone even hungrier.

‘But it was time to get to work. Wise-as-an-Owl checked every item, asking Tashi to tick each ingredient as he added it to the bowl. Much-to-Learn sniffed, offended by his father’s choice of helper. “I could have done that, better than young Tashi,” he said, “only my arm—”

“If you hadn’t played the fool with the Book of Spells, we wouldn’t have to do any of this,” his father growled.



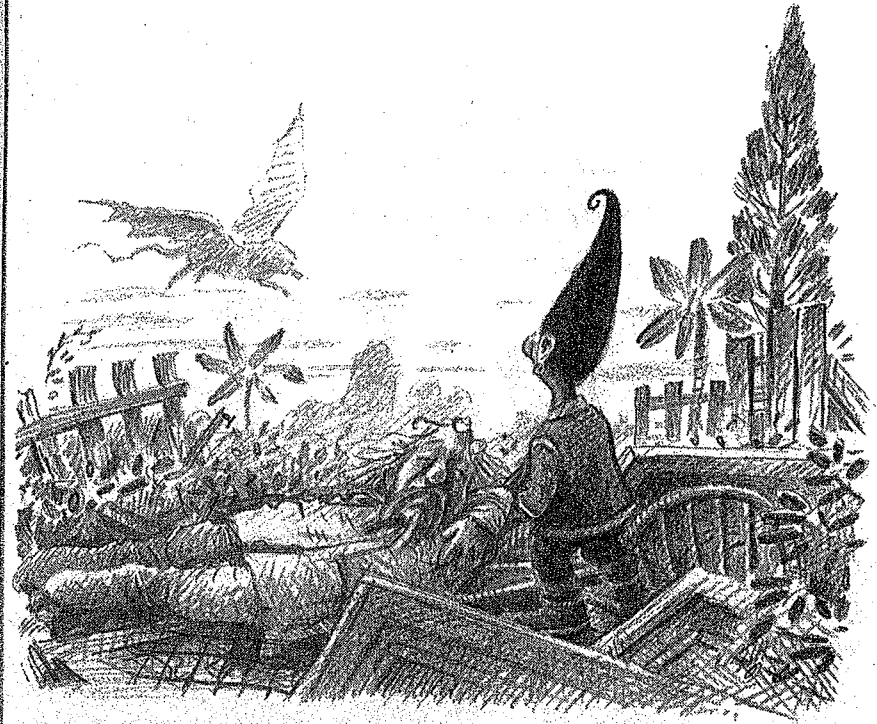
‘He turned to Tashi. “We’ll wait until the Chimera goes hunting for its next meal and then take this bowl to his den. We’ll just have to keep our fingers crossed that he drinks it when he returns.”

‘Finally the Chimera woke and left to look for food. When he was out of sight Tashi, with Wise-as-an-Owl close behind, carried the bowl of precious mixture down to the ruins of the workshop. He was just deciding where to put it when the air was suddenly filled with the screams of a terrified pig.



“Quick Tashi, let’s go!” Wise-as-an-Owl swung round, twisting his ankle on a loose board. He staggered and fell, hitting his head on the edge of the table as he went crashing down.

‘Tashi’s breath stopped in his chest. The old man’s face was still. Tashi tugged at his arm and called his name, but there was no response. He wasn’t dead, was he? You couldn’t die from a fall, could you?’



‘He tried to drag his old friend across the rubble. Wise-as-an-Owl was frail and thin, but now he seemed as heavy as a sackful of bricks.’

‘And then, Tashi looked up to see the Chimera flying across the fields towards him. So this is it, he thought. This is how I’m going to die.’

‘He felt a sharp shove in the middle of his back and Much-to-Learn said, “Quick, take my father’s feet, Tashi. You two, whatever your names are—”

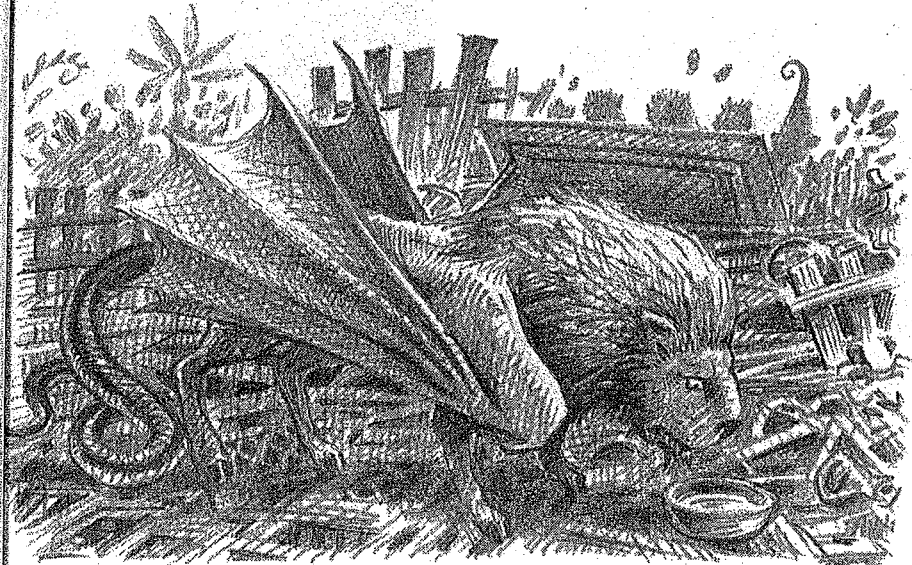


“*LOTUS BLOSSOM* is my name!” said Lotus Blossom, “and this here is *AH CHU*, if you *don’t* mind, and as if you *wouldn’t* know our names, when we’ve both followed you into this death-trap, risking our very *lives* for a mistake *you—*”

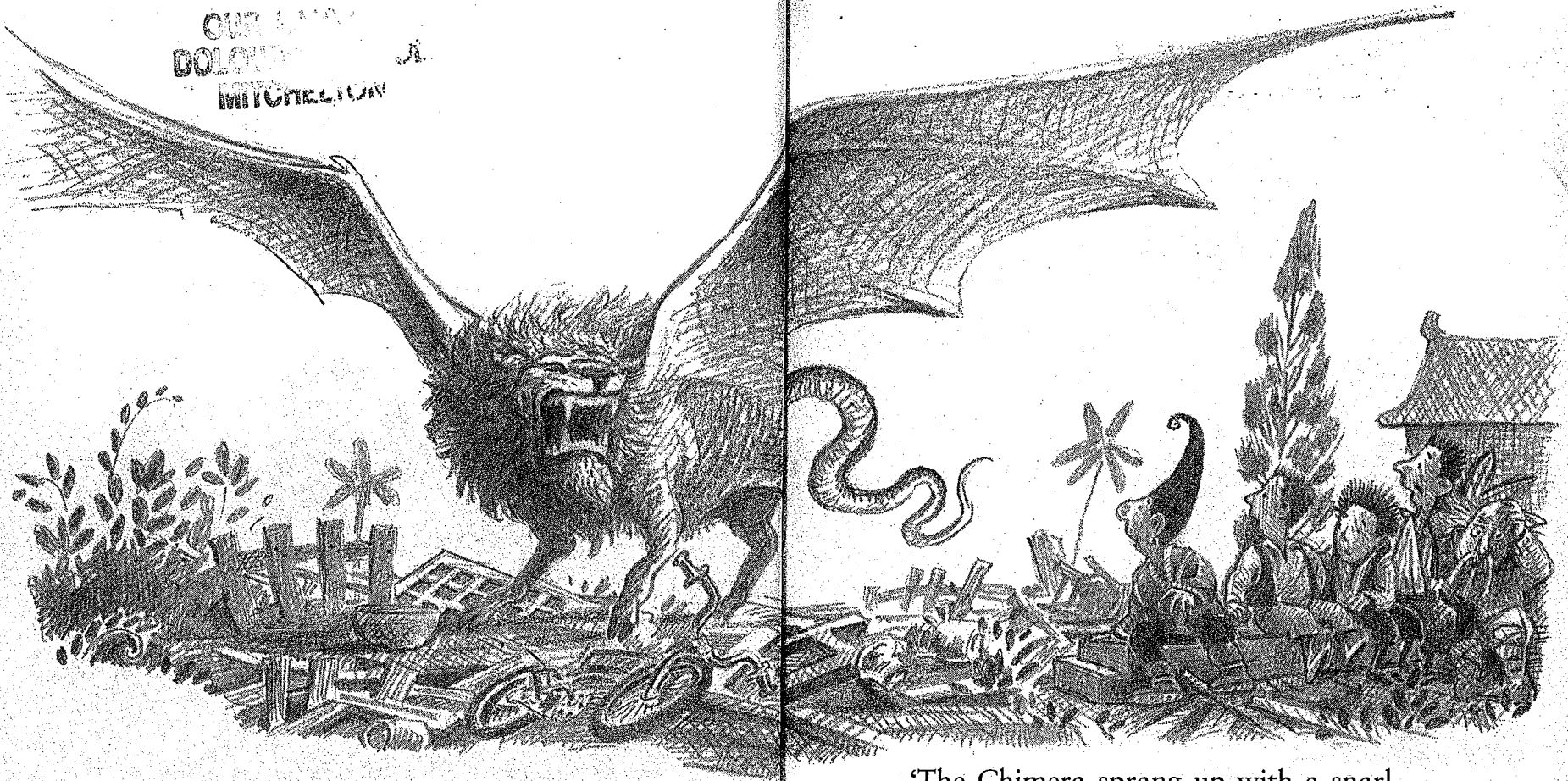
“Oh just get on with it,” panted Much-to-Learn. He was dragging the workshop door across the floor with his left hand.

“What are you doing with that?” asked Lotus Blossom. But then she said nothing more as she watched him lift the door and prop it up against a broken chair.

“Bring him over here, quick, and hide!” cried Much-to-Learn.



‘They ducked down behind the door just as the Chimera dropped to the ground. It looked around warily and moved over to sniff the bowl. Four pairs of eyes watched it without blinking.

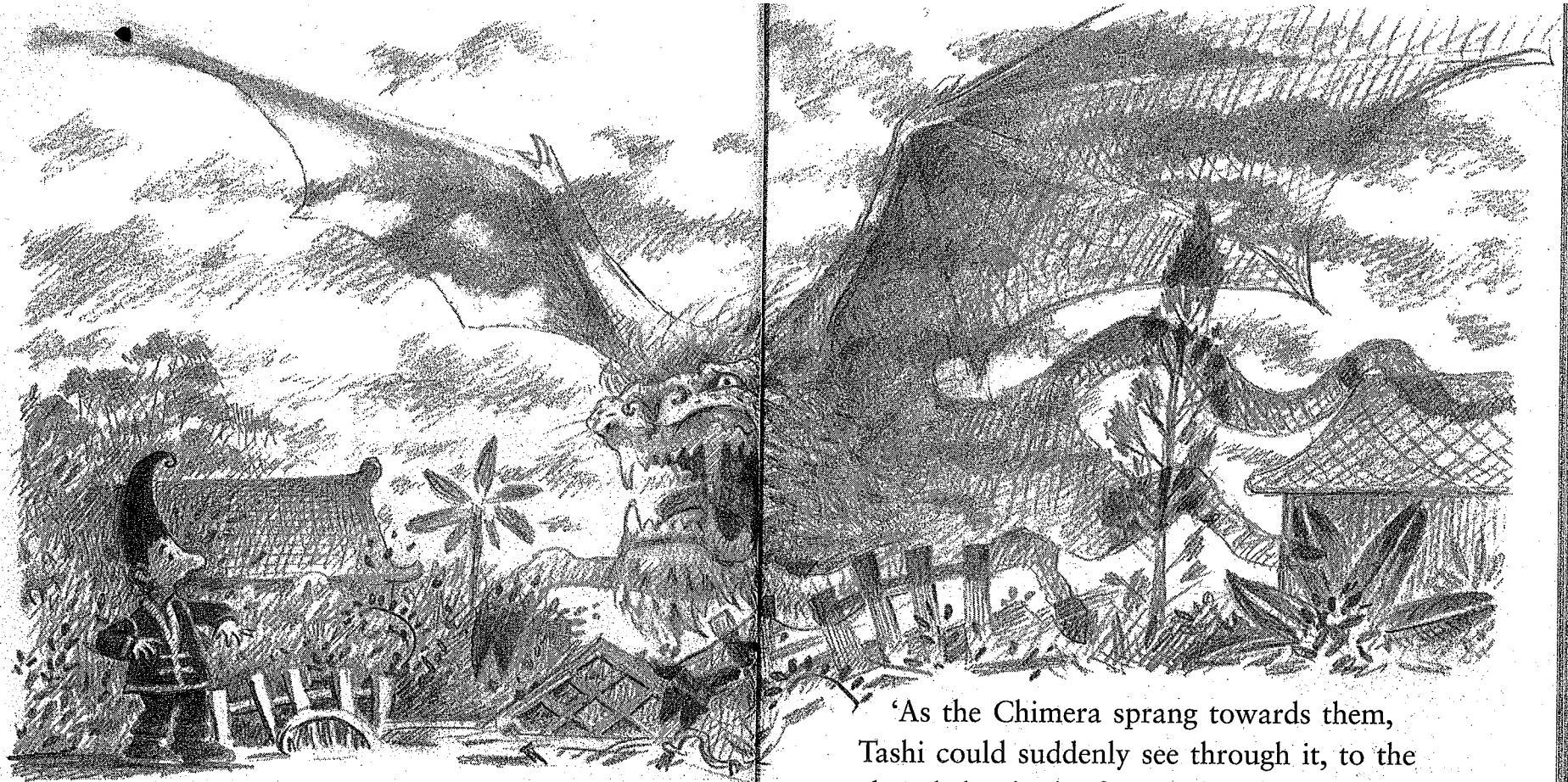


'It slurped the potion.

'Out of the corner of his eye, Tashi noticed that Wise-as-an-Owl had lifted his head. The old man looked around, dazed, and rubbed his forehead.

'*CRASH!* The door suddenly banged down, *WHUMP!* on the floor.

'The Chimera sprang up with a snarl and faced its enemies. It spread its wings wide, scales glinting like fire, cutting like glass. Its teeth were bared, its nostrils flared in fury. It pawed the ground with its terrible hoof and opened its mouth and roared a thousand times louder than the Magic Warning Bell.



‘The children clapped their hands over their ears and squeezed their eyes shut, and still the grinding roar went on and on and on until...

“Open your eyes. Look!” cried Tashi.

“No, I can’t!” wailed Ah Chu.

‘As the Chimera sprang towards them, Tashi could suddenly see through it, to the chair behind. The fiery scales were growing dull, wavering in the air like puddles after rain. The dripping teeth were fading with every second. Something hot stung Tashi’s cheek, leaving a small wet patch. And then, as the children all opened their eyes wide, the monster dissolved like a bubble in the air and there was nothing left to see, at all.

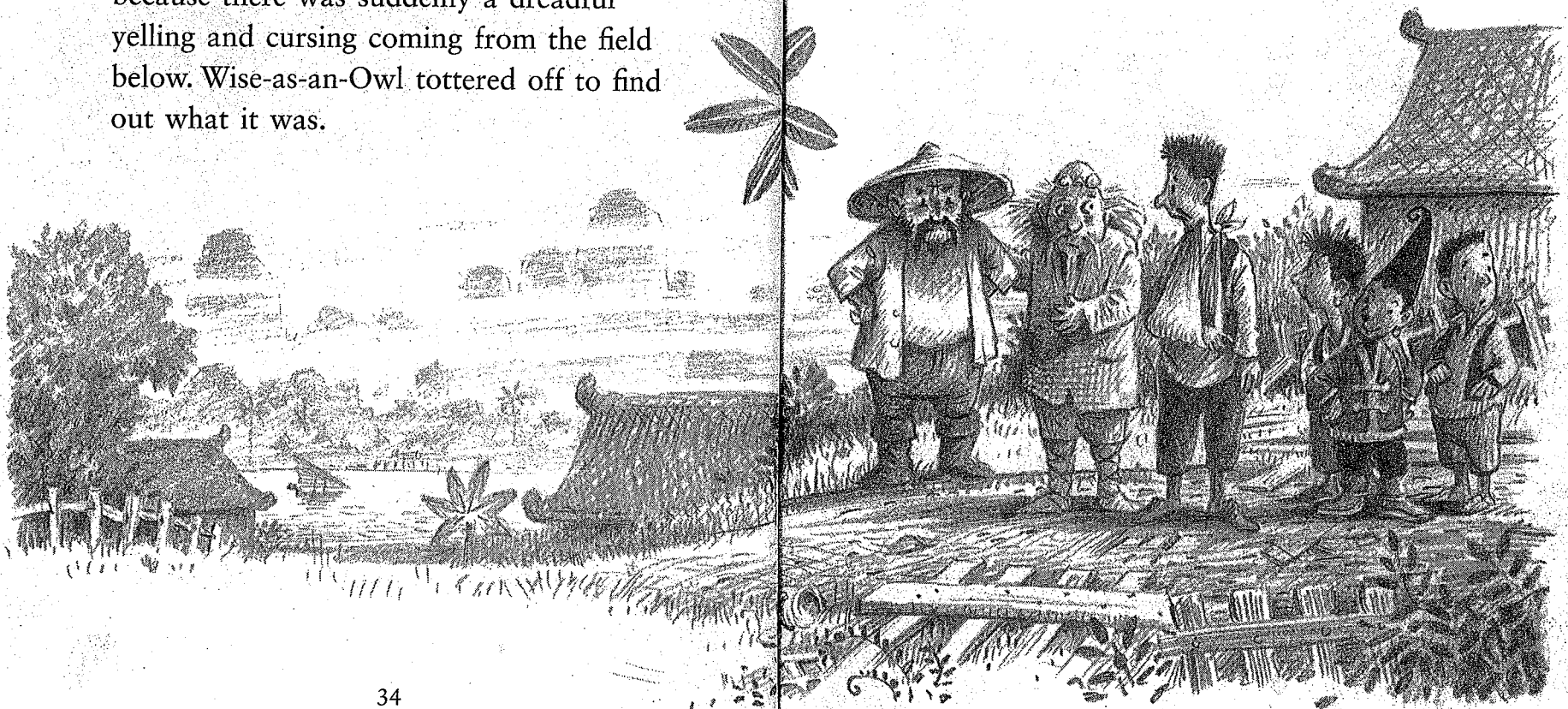
“What? How?” Ah Chu was rubbing his eyes as if he couldn’t believe them. The others just stood silently, feeling their hearts thumping.

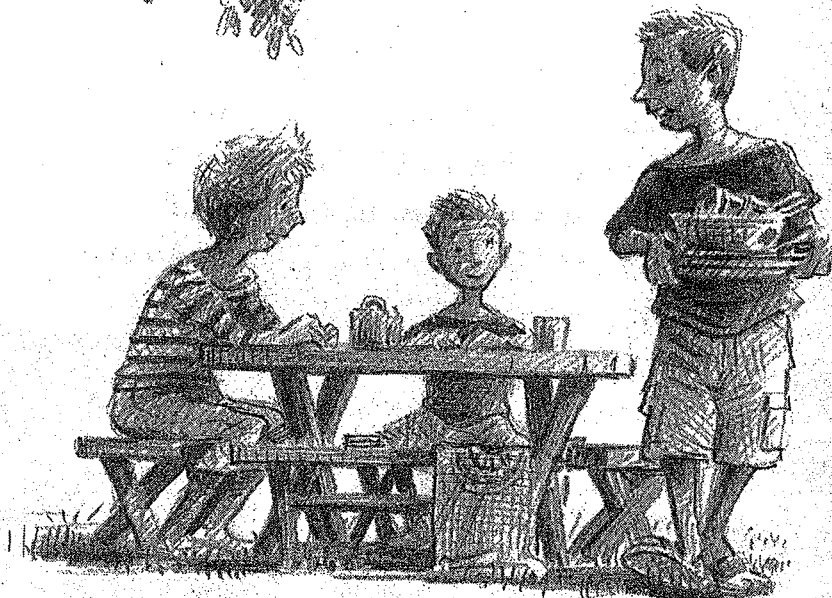
“Well done, Father. Brilliant! I knew you’d find the very potion we needed! Let’s—”

‘But you know, they never did hear what Much-to-Learn was going to suggest because there was suddenly a dreadful yelling and cursing coming from the field below. Wise-as-an-Owl tottered off to find out what it was.

‘He came back with Mr Ping from the village. Much-to-Learn was still beaming. “Well, as I always say, all’s well that ends well!”

“Yes you always do, my son,” Wise-as-an-Owl said dryly. “Perhaps you would like to explain that to Mr Ping. He says that someone has stolen his prize pig.”





'Well,' said Dad, getting up to make a cup of tea, 'it just goes to show you should always listen to your father. Isn't that right, Jack?'

'I suppose,' said Jack. 'Especially if your father is as wise as an owl.'

'That's right,' said Dad happily.
'Absolutely right.'