



## Chapter 5

# A Friendly Warning

*In the year 1852, a farmer bought a piece of land outside the village of Scarborough. Local people welcomed him to the community and wished him well, but as a friendly word of advice, they cautioned him never to go near the long barrow at night, because it was a faery mound, an ancient place said to be haunted by evil faeries who didn't take kindly to being disturbed. The farmer merely smiled, thanked them, and resolved in his mind to go wheresoever he wished at whatever time of day he desired. He'd paid good money for the land and didn't appreciate being instructed on how to conduct his business simply because of a silly superstition.*

*There were long barrows all over the country, people walked past them all the time, and, as far as he knew, not one person had ever come to harm. No, he intended to farm the land as he saw fit.*

*Months went by, business was good, the crops were growing, and the farmer had long forgotten about the childish stories he'd been told. One day, at sunset, he was erecting a fence close to the long barrow when he became aware that he was being observed. A man with wiry, rust coloured hair and a fox-like snout of a nose stood atop the barrow, staring at the farmer with an angry frown. Naturally, the farmer didn't take kindly to seeing a stranger on his land, and so he approached the man and asked him his business.*

*"You're making a dreadful racket there, farmer," the man said. "And those nails you're using must be made of iron, for I have the most awful chills running through my body. So, if I might be so bold as to offer a piece of advice, you'd do well to stop what you're doing, take that fence down, and be about your day."*

*"I didn't ask for your advice, thank you kindly," the farmer replied, feeling his temper rise at the*

*cheek of this demand. "And as the landowner, I might ask you what gives you the right to tell me my business?"*

*"Landowner, is it?" the man chuckled. "My kin have lived on this land for thousands of years. You are but a tenant, Sir, and after you are naught but dust and bones, we shall remain."*

*"Tenant?" the farmer thundered. "I have legal documents that prove this land is mine!"*

*"Documents that mean little to us, farmer," the man said. "For we recognize a different authority to yours."*

*"Those documents are recognized by none other than Her Majesty, Queen Victoria," the farmer scoffed. "Your monarch and ruler of all in this land, so you would do well to take heed!"*

*The man shrugged.*

*"So be it," he said. "You've had your warning, farmer, I wish you well."*

*With that, the man disappeared behind the long barrow, and the farmer angrily returned to his work, determined to forget the matter.*

*Yet shortly after this incident, the farmer's luck began to change. His crops became afflicted with*

*a dreadful fungi that caused the stalks to become brittle as bones and die where they stood. His cattle and sheep came down with a mysterious malady, their stomachs swelling until they keeled over and died. The winter hay stores caught fire and the barn holding them was razed to the ground. Slowly but surely, the farmer's finances began to dwindle to the point where every week brought a new demand from his creditors. At his wits' end, the farmer remembered his curious encounter with the fox-like man at the long barrow, and with no other recourse available, one cold, starlit midwinter night, he found himself standing alone at the very same place.*

*"Come out and show yourself if you are there, Sir, for I fear I may have vexed you and your people, and I wish to make amends."*

*Sure enough, the man with the fox-like features emerged from the shadows that pooled at the base of the barrow.*

*"Salutations of a dark winter's night, farmer," the man replied. "How may I be of service?"*

*The farmer explained his troubles and after apologizing for any offence given, enquired as to whether there might be some agreement they could*

*come to that might reverse his fortunes and bestow bounty on the farm once again.*

*"Why of course, farmer, I'll be happy to help," the man said. "All I need is your hand."*

*Sighing with relief, the farmer stretched out his hand for the man to shake.*

*"I thank you, Sir, and am mightily glad to have ended our quarrel!"*

*Yet the man made no attempt to grasp the farmer's proffered hand. Instead, he chuckled softly, a sly grin spreading across his face.*

*"I fear you misunderstand me, farmer. When I say, all I need is your hand, I mean **your hand**."*

*And with that the small man's expression darkened and he drew out a twisted, blackened blade, which looked as if it had been cast from ancient thorn.*

*Stammering, the farmer backed away, an expression of terror on his face.*

*"Why, you must be confused, Sir! You mean to cut my hand from my body?"*

*"Yes, I do," the man said, as if it were the most reasonable request in the world. "You must make amends for our trouble with the very hand that has*

splintered the trees and cut down our hawthorn and hammered wicked iron spikes into the ground, which cause us no end of strife."

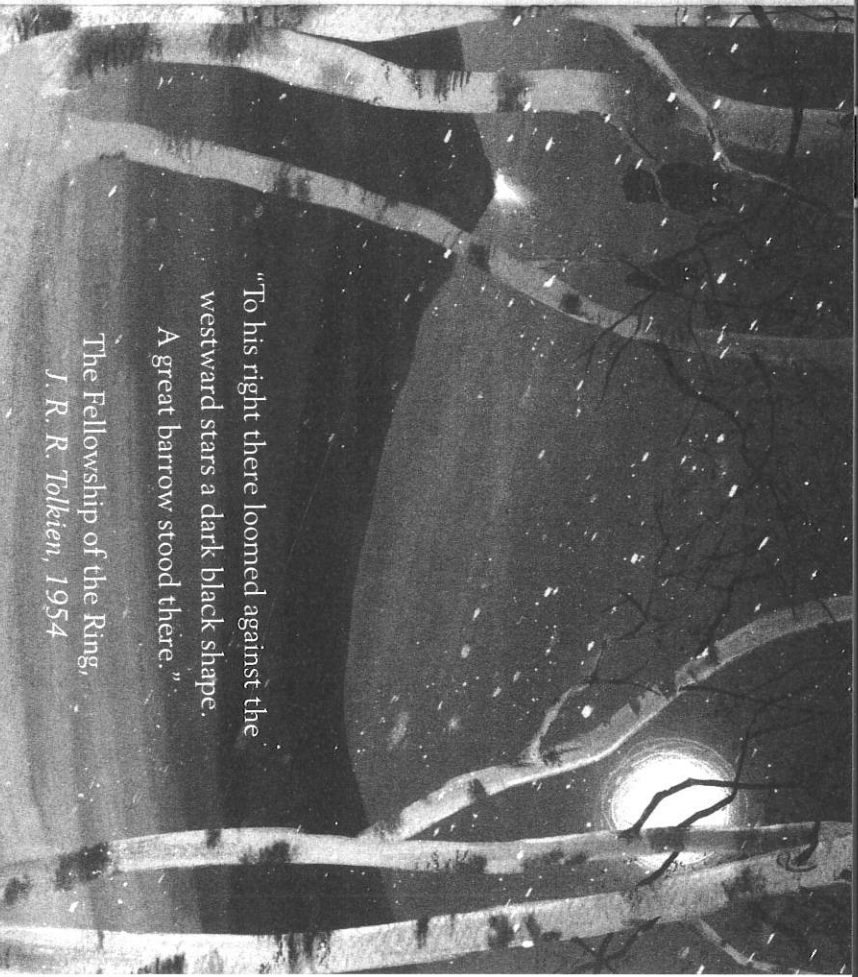
Struck with fear, the farmer stumbled off into the night, fleeing across furrow and field, hurling himself through hedgerows, paying no heed to the thorns that tore his skin, such was his terror. He only rested when he had reached the farmhouse and driven home the bolt on the lock. In the morning, he wondered whether he had had some wicked nightmare, and ascribed his midnight conversation with the fox-like man to some malady brought about by stress.

Yet, his fortunes continued to decline. The land grew barren and bare. The only thing to be seen in his fields were the yellowed skeletons that once belonged to his cattle and sheep. A mighty storm caused a tree to come crashing down on his farmhouse, and when the farmer retrieved his insurance documents, he discovered that he had failed to renew them and no financial relief was available. Shunned by the villagers, who believed him to have been put under an evil faery curse, the farmer sat alone in his ruined farmhouse, the winter

snows pouring in through the gaping chasm in the walls, covering his furniture and floors until it appeared as if both he and his surroundings had been carved from stone. His stores ran dry, the last of his winter wood flickered away in a puff of smoke, and the farmer sat alone in a cold house with only his dark thoughts for company.

Not long after, the villagers were awoken by the sound of dreadful shouts and screams coming from atop the farmer's field. Most huddled in their beds, crossed themselves and prayed that the hidden folk would quickly return to their cold palace beneath the ground. Yet the bravest gathered with flaming torches, knowing that someone had come to harm and that it was their Christian duty to help. With trembling limbs, they marched across the snowy landscape until the long barrow came in sight, and there they stood aghast, fear frozen on their faces as if they had seen the Devil himself. For atop the long barrow, the farmer stood, silhouetted by the moon, screaming that he had made good on his pact and demanding that the "barrow man" honour their agreement. As the farmer raised his arms to the sky, the villagers drew back in horror. For where the

*farmer should have had two hands, they could see  
only one. The other lay by his feet, blood spread  
across the snow like a giant red rose.*



*"To his right there loomed against the  
westward stars a dark black shape.  
A great barrow stood there."*

*The Fellowship of the Ring,  
J. R. R. Tolkien, 1954*



## Chapter 6

# The Barrow

Aveline passed the phone to Harold and waited while he read it. His reaction when he finished was similar to hers. The briefest flicker of fright. Raising an eyebrow, he passed the phone back to Sammy.

"And you think this long barrow is the same one in the story?"

Sammy nodded gravely. "There's only one long barrow in Scarbury."

"Creepy, but you know it's just a story, right?" Harold said with a shrug.

Sammy pursed his lips. Aveline could tell he was annoyed by Harold's casual attitude. She could only feel a cold, curdling fear; the image of the one-handed

farmer burned into her mind.

"You might think it's just a story," Sammy said with a weary sigh, as if this wasn't the first time he'd had to explain this. "Except that time and time again, we're learning that stories like these are often based on real-life events. Like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, for example. Over one hundred children did actually go missing in Hamelin and that became the basis for the story. Or Atlantis. There probably was a massive flood that wiped out some city and that's how the story of this lost civilization came about. So, the more you know about these stories, the better prepared you are."

"You seem to know a lot about it," Aveline said, shyly, taking a bite of her delicious chocolate chip cookie.

"Yeah, I've always been interested in the supernatural and stuff," Sammy replied. "That's why I started the blog."

"Aveline knows a lot about spooky stuff, too," Harold said with a casual toss of his fringe. "So I think we'll be fine."

Aveline whirled around, feeling her cheeks grow warm.

"I'm no expert, Harold. I'm just interested in it, that's all."

"You know about this stuff, too?" Sammy said.

"A little," Aveline conceded.

"A lot," Harold corrected through a mouthful of cookie. Sammy pushed his large glasses back on the bridge of his nose and locked his large, brown eyes onto hers, his frown becoming even more pronounced, as if he were suddenly having to think about something of earth-shattering importance.

"What's the difference between a ghoul and a ghost?"

"Sorry?" Aveline said, even though she'd heard the question perfectly well.

"Do-you-know-the-difference-between-a-ghoul-and-a-ghost?"

Sammy spoke as if he were asking a five-year-old. Feeling a warm flush of anger, Aveline took a deep breath.

"A ghost is the spirit of a dead person. A ghoul is like an evil demon that hangs around graveyards and eats human flesh."

Aveline glanced at Harold, who gave her a sneaky thumbs up.

"How do you know if someone's a vampire?" Sammy asked.

Aveline shrugged. "They drink blood and have fangs."

"And?"

"They have no reflections," Aveline said, racking her

brains. "They hate garlic...um...crosses and holy water. They can shape-shift, into bats and wolves. And they can't come into your house uninvited. Some people say they can't cross running water either."

Sammy nodded, either approving, agreeing or both. But it seemed he hadn't finished yet. Pausing, he massaged his jaw.

"Another name for a lycanthrope?"

"Werewolf."

"Okay...um...do you know what Black Shuck is?"

"A devil dog in East Anglia."

"Poltergeist?"

"Mischievous. Throws stuff around. Hard to get rid of. Sort of like Harold only you can't see them."

Harold guffawed into his fist. He seemed to be enjoying their spooky quiz, his head moving back and forth between them as if he was watching a game of tennis.

"Sorry for interrupting," he said. "This is pretty entertaining, but are we going to go and actually see this long barrow for ourselves or is the Supernatural Smackdown going to last all day?"

For the briefest moment, Aveline thought Sammy might smile, as she did, but he stayed in serious mode.

"I just don't want to take anyone up there that doesn't take the subject seriously. That's how they catch you off-guard. I don't like dealing with amateurs."

"Oh, don't worry," Aveline said, hoping Harold would let it go now. Sammy didn't seem the type for jokes.

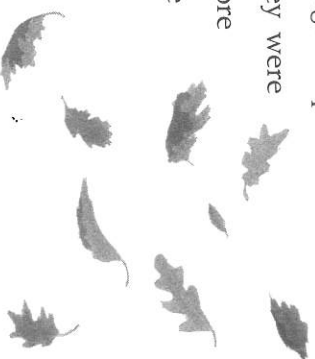
"We're believers alright."

With that, Sammy gave a curt nod.

"Okay. Let's go then. But when we get near, keep your eyes open and stay alert. Faeries can look like humans when they want to. Trust nobody."

Harold raised his eyebrows at Aveline and grinned, but she ignored him and they gulped down their drinks. As Aveline's mum had already agreed to the "educational trip" to the barrow, Aunt Lilian agreed to meet them at home later, as she ordered herself another coffee and settled back down by the fire. Aveline and Harold followed Sammy out of the door. Although Sammy certainly came across as a little intense and humourless, to say the least, Aveline sort of agreed with him. When it came to the supernatural, knowledge was power.

It didn't take long before they were walking out of the village once more and into the countryside. The lanes were strewn with leaves,



which whirled into the air like embers from a fire every time the wind blew. Sammy strode ahead, leaving Aveline and Harold having to walk fast to keep up.

"He certainly means business," Harold whispered.

"Let's just listen to what he has to say," Aveline whispered back. "It's important if we're going to find out more about my uncle. And let's face it, he knows a lot more about the long barrow than we do."

Soon, they came to a sign.

*Scarbury Long Barrow.  
Ancient Monument. ⇒*

"Okay, not long now," Sammy said, with what sounded like a note of uneasiness in his voice. They climbed over a stile and onto a narrow muddy track that led up the side of a field. The air felt heavy and electric, and as they puffed and panted to keep up, small flakes of snow began to fall, like feathers floating down from a pillow fight in the sky.

Sammy had ploughed on ahead and waited for them to catch up. As they reached the top of the field, they climbed over another stile, and the trail snaked left, leading them along the edge of a wood. Twigs cracked beneath their feet. Startled wood pigeons burst through

the branches in a panic of feathers and squawks. Bare silver birch trees stood stiff and white like skeletal fingers.

"It's just along here," Sammy said in a low voice.

And then, rising out of the ground like some grassy whale, they saw it – the Scarbury Long Barrow. It was oval shaped, long and fairly high, maybe the height of a bus. Huge grey slabs marked the entranceway, a doorway made of stone. Muddy pathways made by the curious ran over its length like scars. In any other landscape, it might



have been mistaken for a simple grassy hill. But here, on this otherwise flat hilltop, it had an otherworldly dimension to it, as if something huge was straining to break through the earth.

"Pretty impressive, eh?" Sammy said, darting nervous glances left and right.

"Definitely," Harold said, studying it from underneath his fringe. "How old is it supposed to be?"

"Around 4,000 or 5,000 years, something like that," Sammy replied.

"Wow," Aveline said. "Can you get inside?"

"No, the entrance is blocked," Sammy said. "And probably for the best, too. Here, I'll show you."

Together they went to examine the doorway, which allowed you to walk in a short distance before large rocks barred the way. Aveline pressed her hand against them, wondering if they might suddenly slide away to reveal dark secrets within.

"So are there, like, skeletons and stuff in there?" Harold said, who seemed to have finally accepted Sammy as the local expert.

"Yes, there were, once. Don't know if they're still in there though. Archaeologists found some remains when they did a dig here."

"I've seen a photograph of the dig," Aveline said. "Back in my uncle's study. I think he..."

But she trailed off, still unsure of exactly how her uncle was connected to this place.

They climbed up on top of the barrow and took in the view; a dark tangle of the wood to one side, and the hilltop stretching away on the other. Beyond that they could see across the valley to the hills on the other side. The snow was still light, but the fields had begun to look like they'd been dusted with ash. There was a large stately home off in the distance, obviously the residence of someone very important and very rich. There were smaller houses, too, cosy cottages with smoke rising from their chimneys like wads of cotton wool. The land felt so still and quiet in the midwinter, as if everyone was indoors huddled in front of a crackling fire.

Aveline took it all in, feeling the warmth of their climb begin to fade, to be replaced by a creeping cold that snaked its way past her scarf and settled beneath her skin. Flakes of snow landed on her glasses before melting and she had to keep taking them off to give them a wipe. She noticed Sammy did the same.

"Why are you so interested in this place?" Sammy asked, plucking a few blades of grass and throwing them into the wind.

"I think my uncle was interested in it for some reason. We want to know why."

Despite her reservations about sharing too much, Aveline explained what had happened to her Uncle Rowan and the reason for their visit. Sammy listened, his frown moving from puzzled to intrigued, before his face lit up.

"I know about your uncle!" Sammy said. "He's in my *Dossier of Disappearances*. Here, let me show you."

Sammy pulled out a battered folder from his rucksack and undid the rubber band that tied it together, keeping his hands pressed tightly on the contents so they didn't blow away. Leafing through a series of newspaper cuttings and pages taken from books, he pulled something out and showed it to Aveline. It was a local newspaper, obviously quite old, the paper cracked and yellowed, as if it might flake apart at any moment.

*The Scardale Gazette.*

But it was the main headline that made Aveline's stomach lurch.

### **Fate of Local Man Still Unknown.**

Grabbing it, Aveline scanned the article. It recapped everything about Uncle Rowan's case, including some

information that Aveline didn't know. Apparently, the very last sighting of him had been late in the afternoon, just before Christmas, walking away from the village. That was interesting, Aveline thought: where could he have been going – and why? Then there was a mention of the fruitless police search together with possible theories. But perhaps most interesting of all was right at the end – an interview with a local shopkeeper.

...Bob Andrews was one of the last people to speak to the missing man. When we interviewed him, Bob recalled their encounter. "Mr Jones never used to say much when he came into the shop. He was a quiet sort of chap, but I remember this time because he had mud on his boots and he trod it all over my nice, clean floor. He was terribly apologetic and told me he'd been working at a local archaeological site. I hope they find out what happened to him."

Aveline read this last part out to Harold.

"*Mud on his boots* – what do you make of that?"

Harold shrugged.

"He was an archaeologist, wasn't he? Sort of makes sense that he had mud all over himself."

"But it says right here – a *local* archaeological site! Sammy, are there any other places like this in Scarbury?"

Sammy frowned and pushed back his spectacles.

"Well, there is a lot of history here, you know, churches and old houses. But I've never seen anyone digging at any of them. There certainly aren't any other Neolithic sites."

"It has to be this place," Aveline said, almost to herself.

"That means he was here just before Christmas. And I bet I know *exactly* what day it was. Remember what I said, Harold?"

"December 21<sup>st</sup>," Harold said, picking up on her prompt. "Tomorrow is the midwinter solstice."

"Sammy, who else is in your *Dossier of Disappearances*?"

"Everyone there's a record of," Sammy said bluntly. "You know that story I showed you about the farmer? That's just one. There's a story about two girls going missing in the 1950s who were on a school trip to the area. And there was this man who'd been sent to look at installing new drainage ditches, and he disappeared, too."

"We've seen those already," Harold said. "They're on the wall in Aveline's uncle's study."

"We think he was investigating what happened to them," Aveline said, purposefully leaving out the part

about the séance tapes. She didn't want to make her uncle sound weird, even if it was rather odd.

"Sounds like me and your uncle had something in common then," Sammy continued, returning his dossier to his backpack. "And that's exactly why I didn't want you to come up here alone. I needed to make sure you knew what you were getting yourselves into. Long barrows are said to be gateways to the land of the dead. They're creepy places. And if you let your guard down, well, you might find yourself making an appearance in my dossier."

"What an honour that would be," Harold said, aiming a smirk in Aveline's direction. She could tell that Harold struggled to deal with Sammy's seriousness. All he ever wanted to do was joke about things. Sammy appeared to be the complete opposite.

About to move the conversation on, Aveline paused. She felt uneasy for a moment, as if they were no longer alone. There was movement out of the corner of her eye.

"What is it?" Sammy asked.

"I think someone's watching us," Aveline said, in a low voice, pointing over towards the wood.

They heard a branch crack, like a gunshot. The hedgerow shook slightly, as if somebody had just pushed their way past it.

"I can't see anyone," Harold said.

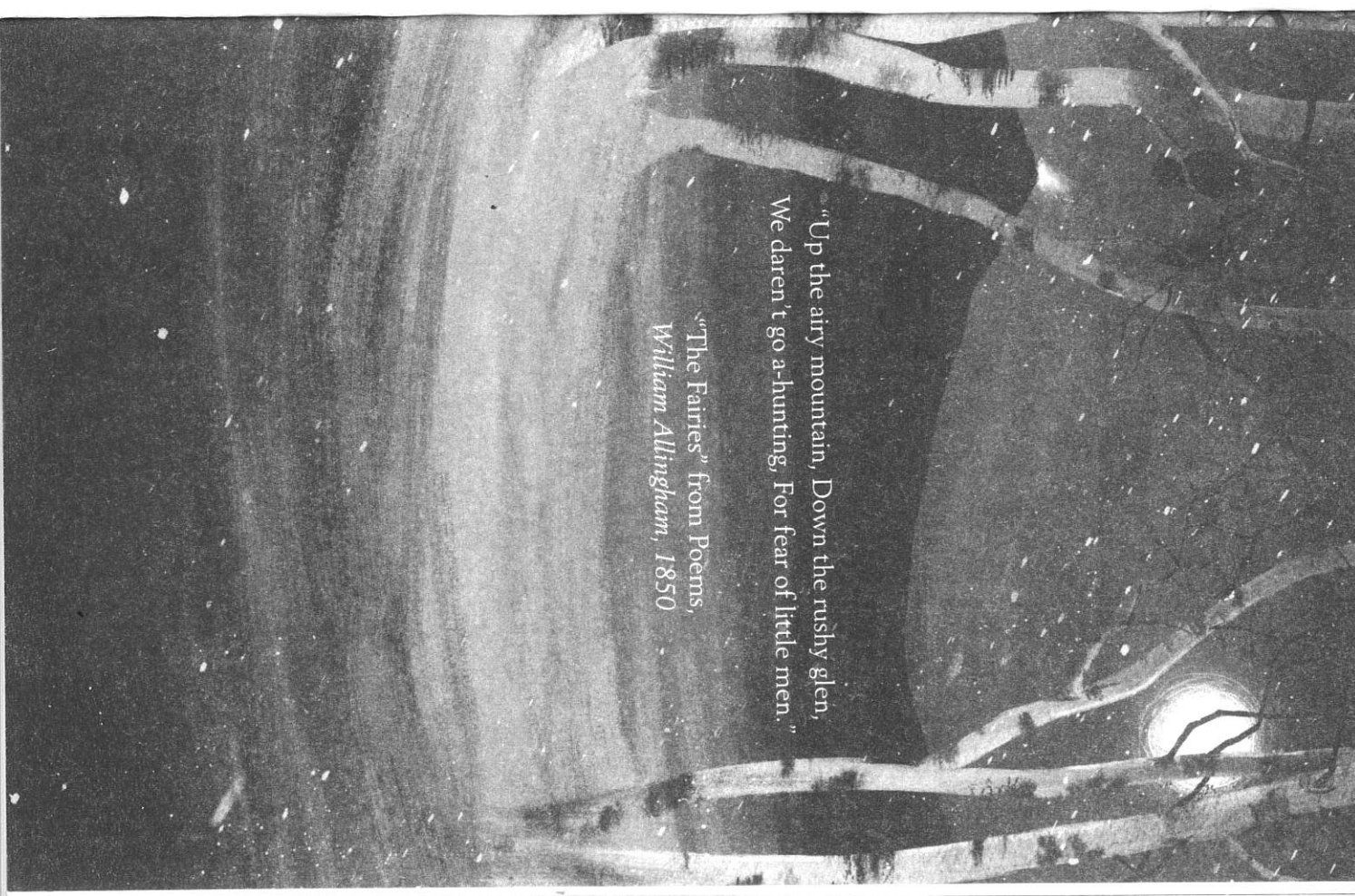
"No, you wouldn't," Sammy whispered. "They keep themselves hidden."

For a few minutes more they watched the wood, but the only thing they saw was a thrush throwing leaves around as it hunted for worms.

"I think we should be going," Sammy said.

Aveline felt the same and she could sense Harold's growing frustration with Sammy, so she clambered to her feet. It was time to head back and think about what they'd learned.

Crunching alongside the wood, they reached the stile that led back down the field to the lane. As Aveline waited for Harold to follow over, she glanced back towards the wood. The hedgerow was trembling again although it could have just been the wind.



"Up the airy mountain, Down the rushy glen,  
We daren't go a-hunting, For fear of little men."

"The Fairies" from Poems,  
William Allingham, 1850