



Through the window, not so very far away, he could see the big black secret wood that was called The Forest of Sin. It was something he had always longed to explore.

His mother had told him that even grown-ups were frightened of going into The Forest of Sin. She recited a poem to him that was well-known in the district. It went like this:

*Beware! Beware! The Forest of Sin!
None come out, but many go in!*

“Why don’t they come out?” Little Billy asked her. “What happens to them in the wood?”

“That wood,” his mother said, “is full of the most blood-thirsty wild beasts in the world.”

“You mean tigers and lions?” Little Billy asked.

“Much worse than that,” his mother said.

“What’s worse than tigers and lions, Mummy?”

“Whangdoodles are worse,” his mother said, “and Hornswogglers and Snozzwangers and Vermicious Knids. And worst of all is the Terrible Bloodsuckling Toothpluckling Stonechuckling Spittler. There’s one of them in there, too.”

“A Spittler, Mummy?”

“Of course. And when the Spittler chases after you, he blows clouds of hot smoke out of his nose.”

“Would he eat me up?” Little Billy asked.

“In one gulp,” his mother said.

Little Billy did not believe a word of this. He guessed his mother was making it all up just to frighten him and to stop him ever going out of the house alone.

And now Little Billy was kneeling on the chair, gazing with longing through the window at the famous Forest of Sin.

“Little Billy,” his mother called out from the kitchen. “What are you doing?”

“I’m being good, Mummy,” Little Billy called back.

Just then a funny thing happened. Little Billy began to hear somebody whispering in his ear. He knew exactly who it was. It was the Devil. The Devil always started whispering to him when he was



When he had ventured some distance into the forest, Little Billy stopped and stood quite still, listening. He could hear nothing. Nothing at all. There was absolute silence.

Or was there?

Hold on just one second.

What was that?

Little Billy flicked his head round and stared into the everlasting gloom and doom of the forest.

There it was again! There was no mistaking it this time.

From far away, there came a very faint whoozing whiffing noise, like a small gusty wind blowing through the trees.

Then it grew louder. Every second it was growing louder, and suddenly it was no longer a small wind, it was a fearsome swooshing whooshing whiffing snorting noise that sounded as though some gigantic creature was breathing heavily through its nose as it galloped towards him.

Little Billy turned and ran.

Little Billy ran faster than he had ever run in his life before. But the swooshing whooshing whiffing snorting noise was coming after him. Worse still, it was getting louder. This meant that the *thing*, the maker of the noise, the galloping creature, was getting closer. It was catching him up!

Run, Little Billy! Run run run!

He dodged around massive trees. He skipped over roots and brambles.

He bent low to flash under boughs and bushes. He had wings on his feet he ran so fast. But still the fearsome swooshing whooshing whiffing snorting noise grew louder and louder as it came closer and closer.

Little Billy glanced back quickly over his shoulder, and now, in the distance, he saw a sight that froze his blood and made icicles in his veins.



especially bored.

"It would be easy," the Devil was whispering, "to climb out through that window. No one would see you. And in a jiffy you would be in the garden, and in another jiffy you would be through the front gate, and in yet another jiffy you would be exploring the marvellous Forest of Sin all by yourself. It is a super place. Do not believe one word of what your mother says about Whangdoodles and Hornswogglers and Snozzwangers and Vermicious Knids and the Terrible Bloodsuckling Toothpluckling Stonechuckling Spittler. There are no such things."

"What *is* in there?" Little Billy whispered.

"Wild strawberries," the Devil whispered back. "The whole floor of the forest is carpeted with wild strawberries, every one of them luscious and red and juicy-ripe. Go and see for yourself."

These were the words the Devil whispered softly into Little Billy's ear on that sunny summer afternoon.

The next moment, Little Billy had opened the window and was climbing out.

In a jiffy he had dropped silently onto the flowerbed below.

In another jiffy he was out through the garden gate.

And in yet another jiffy he was standing on the very edge of the great big dark Forest of Sin!

He had made it! He had got there! And now the forest was all his to explore!

Was he nervous?

What?

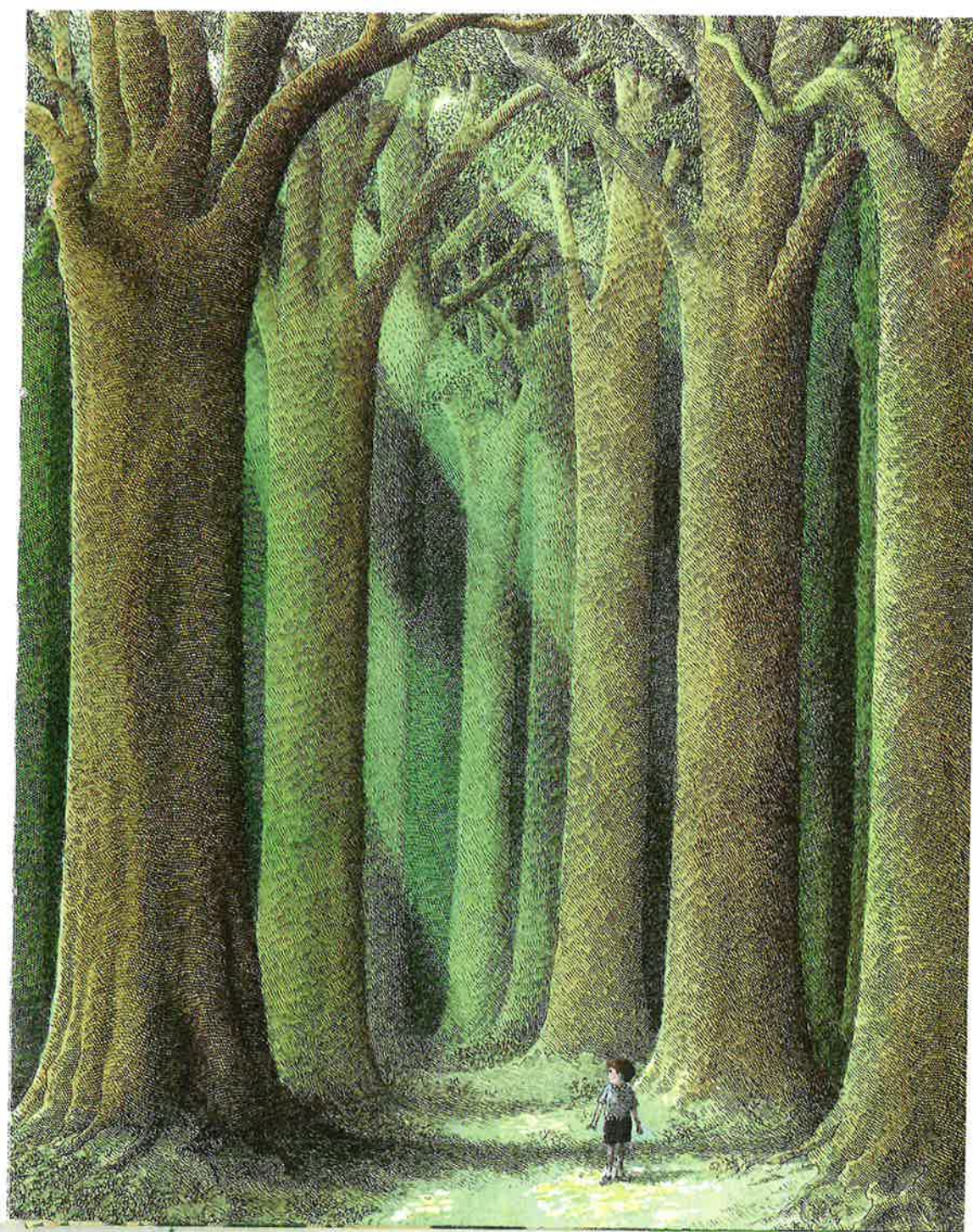
Who said anything about being nervous?

Hornswogglers? Vermicious Knids? What sort of rubbish was that?

Little Billy hesitated.

"I'm not nervous," he said. "I'm not in the least bit nervous. Not me."

Very very slowly, he walked forward into the great forest. Giant trees were soon surrounding him on all sides and their branches made an almost solid roof high above his head, blotting out the sky. Here and there little shafts of sunlight shone through gaps in the roof. There was not a sound anywhere. It was like being among the dead men in an enormous empty green cathedral.



What he saw were two mighty puffs of orange-red smoke billowing and rolling through the trees in his direction. These were followed by two more, *whoosh whoosh*, and then two more, *whoosh whoosh*, and they must surely be coming, Little Billy told himself, from the two nose-holes of some galloping panting beast that had smelled him out and was coming after him.

His mother's words began thrumming once again in his head:

*Beware! Beware! The Forest of Sin!
None come out, but many go in!*

"It's the Spittler for sure!" Little Billy cried out. "Mummy said the Spittler blows smoke when it chases you. This one is blowing smoke! It's the Terrible Bloodsuckling Toothpluckling Stonechuckling Spittler! And soon it will catch me up and I'll be bloodsuckled and toothplucked and stonechucked and chewed up into tiny pieces, and then the Spittler will spit me out in a cloud of smoke and that will be the end of me!"

Little Billy was running with the speed of an arrow, but each time he glanced back over his shoulder the puffs of orange-red smoky-breath had gotten closer. They were so close now he could feel the wind of them on the back of his neck. And the *noise!* It was deafening in his ears, this fearsome swooshing whooshing whiffing panting noise. *Woomph-woomph*, it went. *Woomph-woomph, woomph-woomph! Woomph-woomph!* It was like the noise made by a steam locomotive pulling out from a station.

Then suddenly he heard another noise that was somehow more fearsome still. It was the pounding of gigantic galloping hooves on the floor of the forest.

He glanced round again, but the Thing, the Beast, the Monster, or whatever it was, was hidden from his sight by the smoke it shot out as it galloped forward.

The smoky-breath was billowing all around him now. He could feel its hotness. Worse still, he could smell its smell. The smell was disgusting. It was the stench that comes from deep inside the tummy of a meat-eating animal.

"Mummy!" he cried out. "Save me!"

