

When Chris Van Allsburg was invited to the home of Peter Wenders, he discovered fourteen drawings that were, like pieces of a picture puzzle, clues to larger pictures. But the puzzles, the mysteries, presented by these drawings, are not what we are used to. They are not solved for us, as in the final pages of a book or a film's last reel. The solutions to these mysteries lie in a place at once closer at hand, yet far more remote. They lie in our imagination.

For those who have thought of themselves as unimaginative, this magical and inspiring book from the Caldecott Award-winning Chris Van Allsburg will prove the opposite. Even the most reluctant imagination, when confronted by these drawings, will not be able to resist solving the mysteries of Harris Burdick.

'The perfect book for stimulating children's creative writing...
a unique picture book with a brilliant premise.'

Anthony Browne, Children's Laureate

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THE MYSTERIES OF HARRIS BURDICK



CHRIS VAN ALLSBURG

With thanks to
Peter Wenders

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INTRODUCTION

I first saw the drawings in this book a year ago, in the home of a man named Peter Wenders. Though Mr Wenders is retired now, he once worked for a children's book publisher, choosing the stories and pictures that would be turned into books.

Thirty years ago a man called at Peter Wenders's office, introducing himself as Harris Burdick. Mr Burdick explained that he had written fourteen stories and had drawn many pictures for each one. He'd brought with him just one drawing from each story, to see if Wenders liked his work.

Peter Wenders was fascinated by the drawings. He told Burdick he would like to read the stories that went with them as soon as possible. The artist agreed to bring the stories the next morning. He left the fourteen drawings with Wenders. But he did not return the next day. Or the day after that. Harris Burdick was never heard from again. Over the years, Wenders tried to find out who Burdick was and what had happened to him, but he discovered nothing. To this day Harris Burdick remains a complete mystery.

His disappearance is not the only mystery left behind. What were the stories that went with these drawings? There are some clues. Burdick had written a title and caption for each picture. When I told Peter Wenders how difficult it was to look at the drawings and their captions without imagining a story, he smiled and left the room. He returned with a dust-covered cardboard box. Inside were dozens of stories, all inspired by the Burdick drawings. They'd been written years ago by Wenders's children and their friends.

I spent the rest of my visit reading these stories. They were remarkable, some bizarre, some funny, some downright scary. In the hope that other children will be inspired by them, the Burdick drawings are reproduced here for the first time.

Chris Van Allsburg
Providence, Rhode Island

ARCHIE SMITH, BOY WONDER

A tiny voice asked, "Is he the one?"



UNDER THE RUG

Two weeks passed and it happened again.



A STRANGE DAY IN JULY

*He threw with all his might, but the
third stone came skipping back.*



MISSING IN VENICE

*Even with her mighty engines in reverse,
the ocean liner was pulled further and
further into the canal.*



ANOTHER PLACE, ANOTHER TIME

If there was an answer, he'd find it there.



UNINVITED GUESTS

*His heart was pounding.
He was sure he had seen the doorknob turn.*



THE HARP

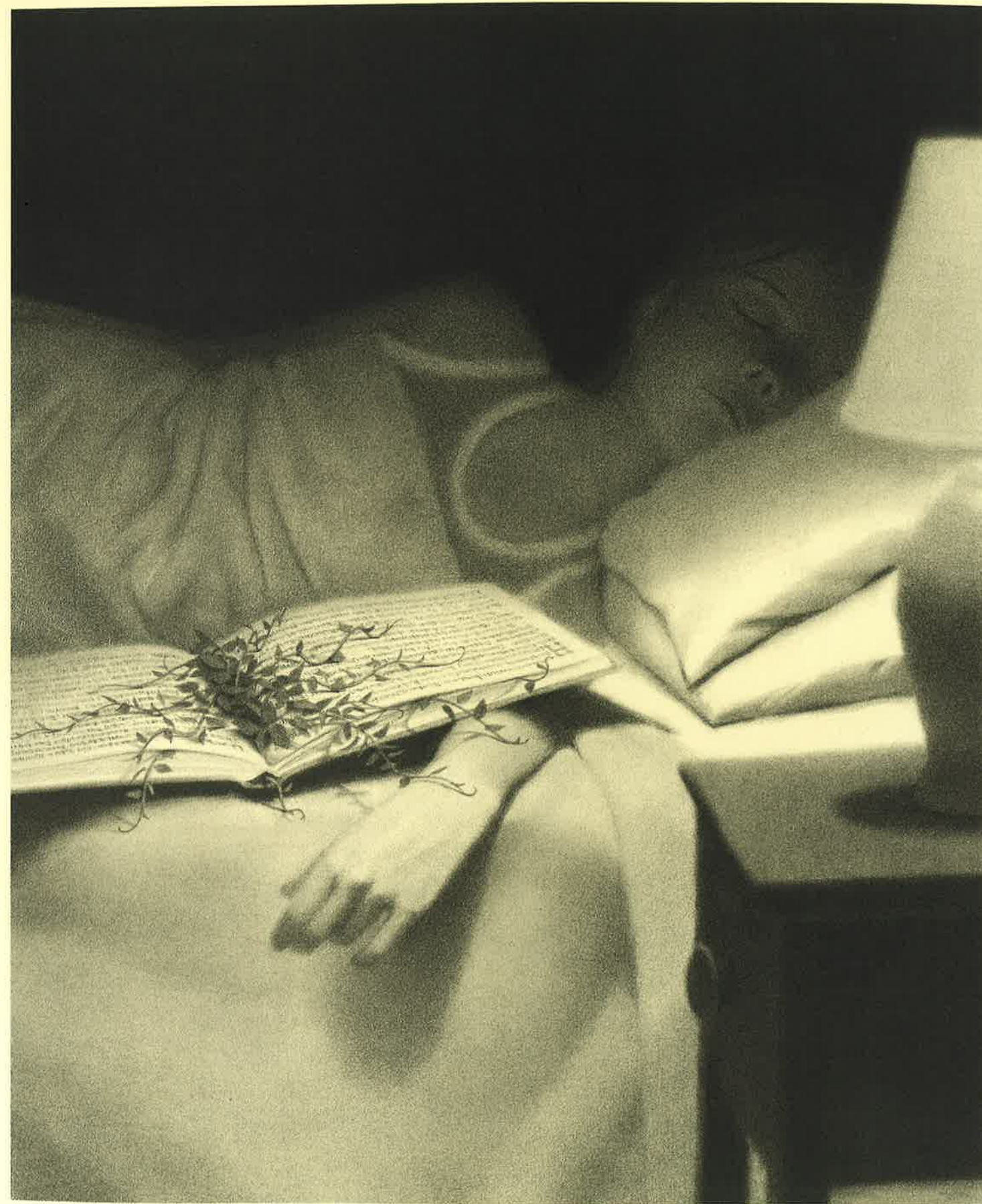
So it's true he thought, it's really true.



MR LINDEN'S LIBRARY

He had warned her about the book.

Now it was too late.



THE SEVEN CHAIRS

The fifth one ended up in France.



THE THIRD-FLOOR BEDROOM

*It all began when someone left
the window open.*



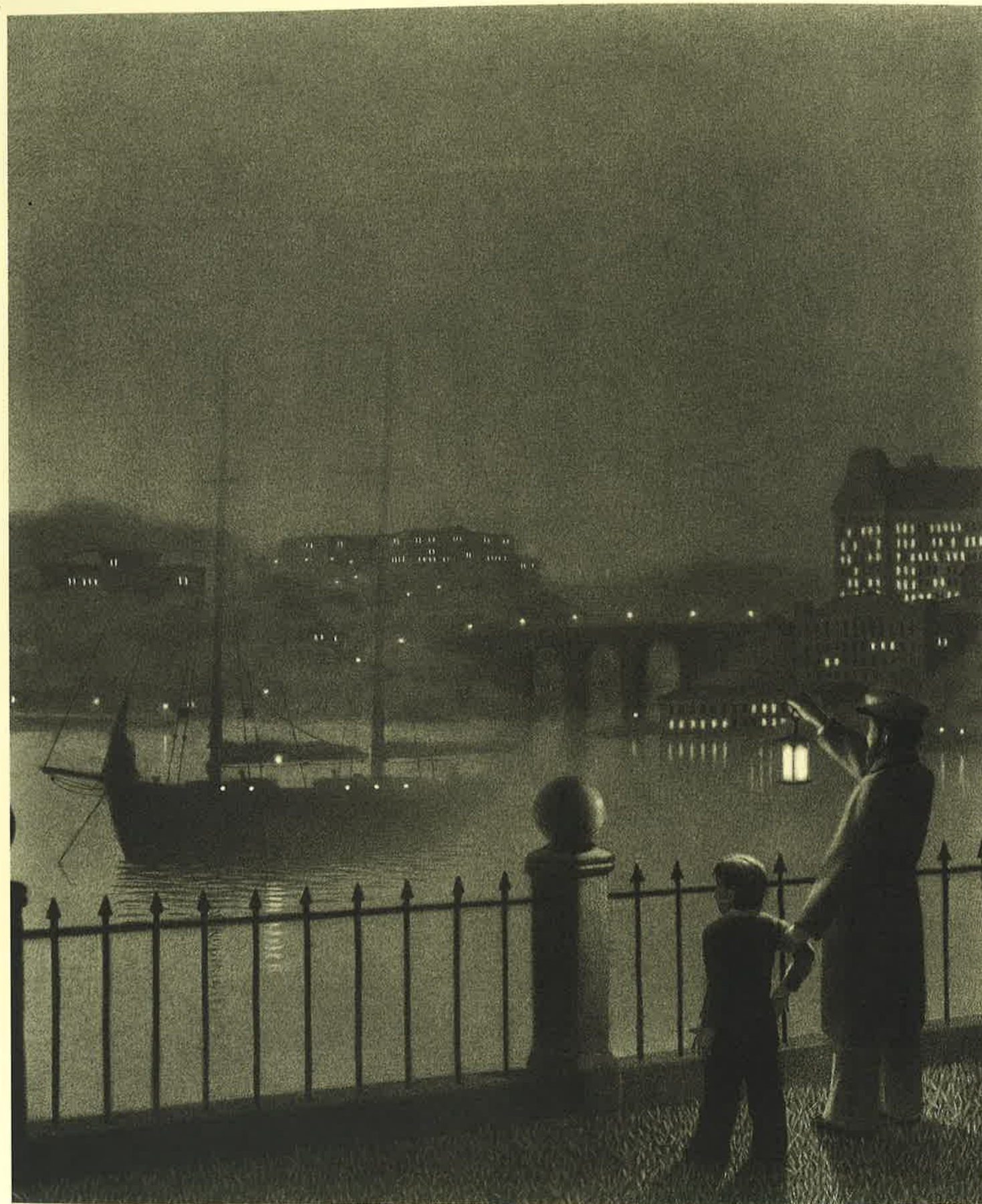
JUST DESERT

*She lowered the knife and
it grew even brighter.*



CAPTAIN TORY

*He swung his lantern
three times and slowly the schooner appeared.*



OSCAR AND ALPHONSE

*She knew it was time to send them back.
The caterpillars softly wiggled in her hand,
spelling out "goodbye".*



THE HOUSE ON MAPLE STREET

It was a perfect lift-off.

