



Snowfall

THE OLD MAN SLOWLY SHUFFLED to the front of the toy booth. He was beginning to close up shop, lowering the front wooden grate, when Hugo approached him from behind. Hugo knew how to walk silently, but he let his feet fall loudly on the tiles to let the old man know he was there.

“Pick up your feet, boy.” The old man glanced over his shoulder. “I hate the sound of shoe heels clicking on the floor.” The old man continued to close the grate and lock it.

The halls of the station were nearly empty. Hugo

knew the Station Inspector would be making his evening rounds at the other end of the station, and Hugo figured he had a few minutes before he showed up here.

The old man finished closing up and double-checked the lock on his booth.

“What is your name, boy?”

Hugo hesitated. He was going to lie, but then for some reason he said his real name. “Hugo . . . Hugo Cabret.”

“Listen to me, Hugo Cabret. I told you to stay away from me. I will drag you to the Station Inspector’s office and lock you up myself if I see you again. Do you understand what I am saying?”

“Give me back my notebook. . . .”

“I am going home to *burn* your notebook.”

With that, the old man glanced quickly at the clock across from the toy booth and headed out under the great iron ribs of the train station. He emerged through the golden doors into the dark streets of Paris. It was the

end of winter, and a light snow had begun to fall. Hugo watched him go.

It had been a very long time since Hugo had left the train station, and he wasn’t dressed for winter, but within moments he burst through the doors.

“You can’t burn my notebook!” he shouted to the old man.

“I can,” came the answer.

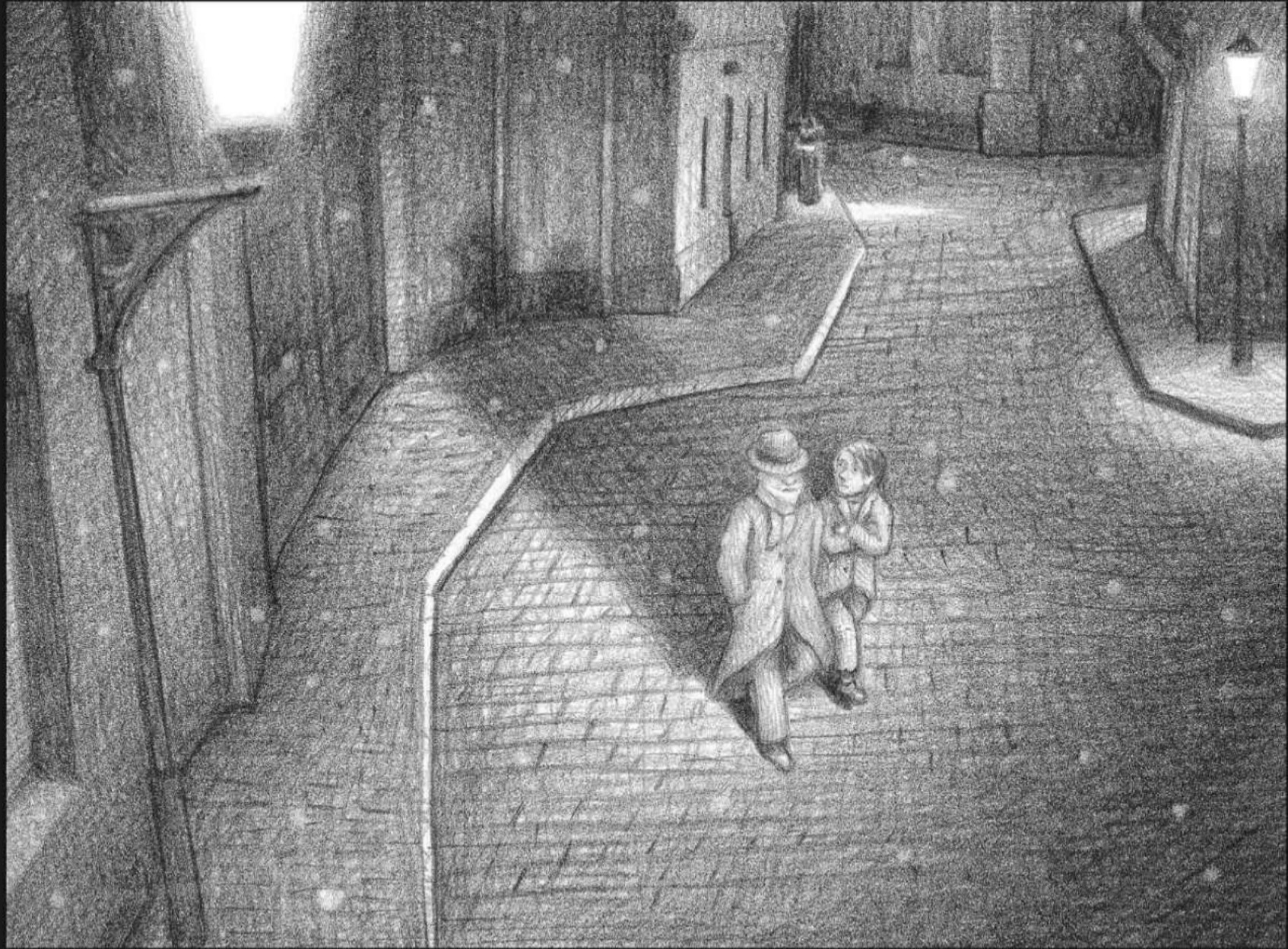
Hugo wanted to tackle him, to knock him to the ground and take back his notebook, but he didn’t think he was big enough. And besides, the old man was strong. Hugo’s arm still ached from where he had been grabbed earlier.

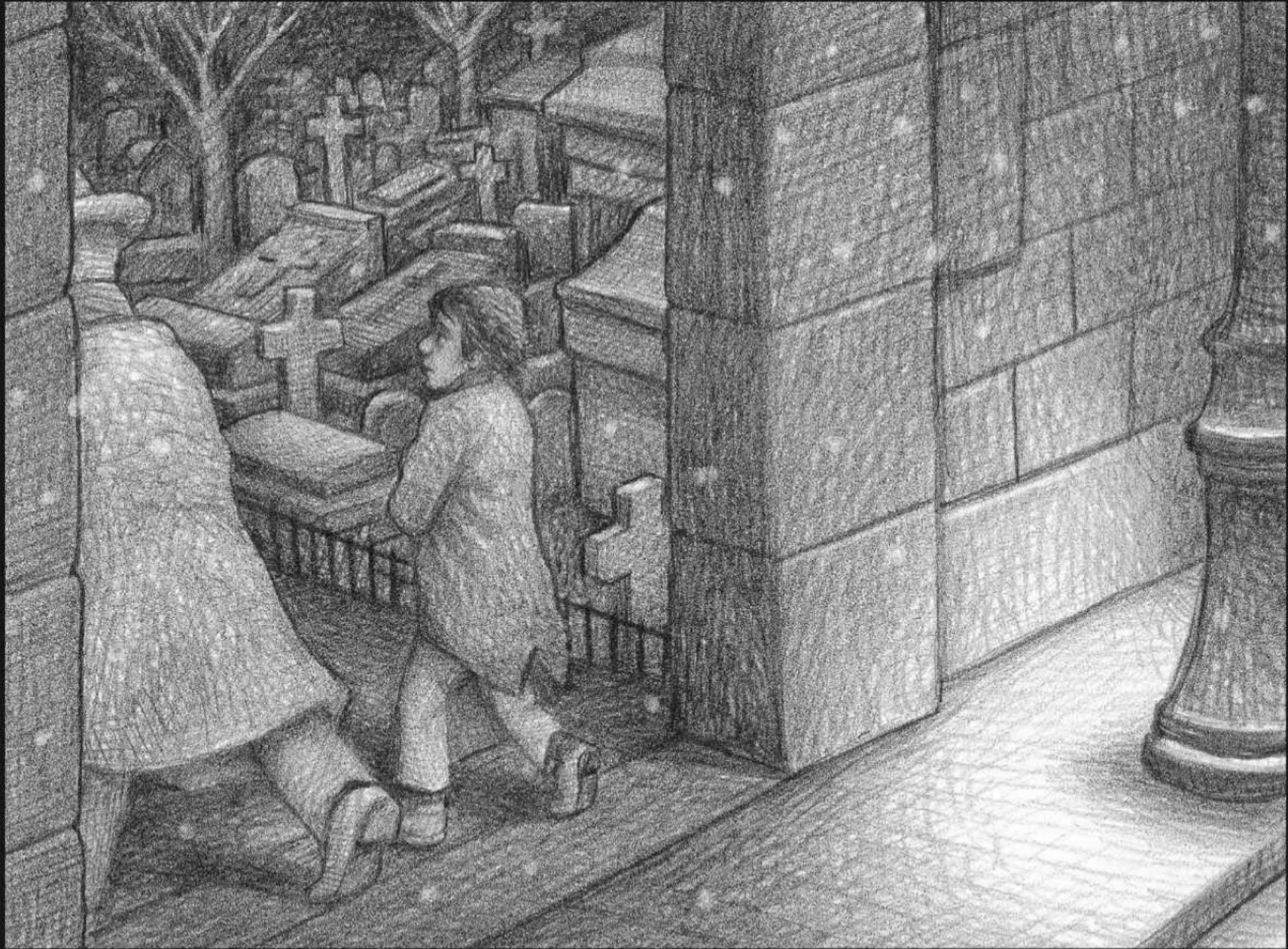
“Stop clicking the street with your heels,” the old man hissed through his teeth. “And don’t make me say it again.” He shook his head and adjusted his hat. Then, quietly, he said to himself, “I hope the snow covers everything so all the footsteps are silenced, and the whole city can be at peace.”











They soon arrived at a decrepit apartment building across from the graveyard. The whole building seemed to lean slightly to the side. Ivy had once covered the walls, but it had been torn away, leaving long interlocking scars in the cracked paint. The old man opened the chipped green door with a large key. Turning back to

Hugo, he said, "Don't you know that the sound of clicking boot heels can summon ghosts? Do you want to be followed by ghosts?"

The old man stepped quickly inside and slammed the door behind him.





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*The
Window*



