

HASS
Year 4/5

The Little Wooden Horse



Mark Wilson

The Little Wooden Horse

Mark Wilson

TR
W
T
P

Elizabeth and Tom are two of the first convict children to be sent to Australia. Set in Georgian England in 1787, their story tells of the circumstances that lead to their imprisonment and deportation to Botany Bay. *The Little Wooden Horse* also tells us of the triumphs, trials and tragedies of the epic journey of the First Fleet.

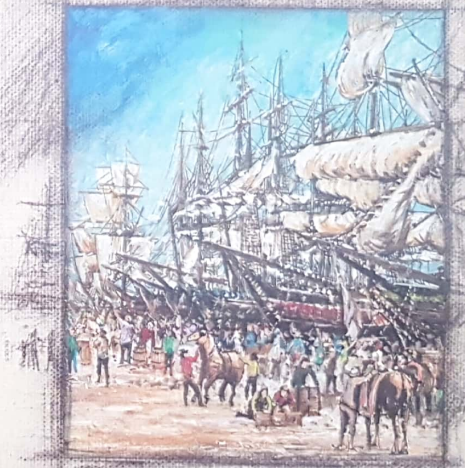
A Helen Chamberlin Book



www.windyhollowbooks.com.au



w8 2018 25.00
WOODLANDS
PRIMARY SCHOOL



The Little Wooden Horse

For Koby

With special thanks to the students at Clayfield College,
Clayfield, Queensland, Australia

Mark Wilson is an author/illustrator who lives in Melbourne, Victoria. He loved drawing from a very early age and also loved comics, especially *The Phantom*. He spent his teenage years drumming with the rock band Centerfold, and trying to sing like John Lennon.

Mark's many picture books include *Angel of Kokoda*, *My Mother's Eyes — The Story of a Boy Soldier* (CBCA Notable Book 2010), *The Last Tree* (Whitley Award 2007), the Extinction Series (Wilderness Society Award and Whitley Award 2004), *Journey of the Sea Turtle*, *Young Murphy* (CBCA Notable Book 2005), *The Penguin Shore* (CBCA Notable Book 1996) and *Yellow-eye* (Wilderness Society Award and CBCA Notable Book 2002).

A Helen Chamberlin Book

First published in 2010 by Windy Hollow Books
PO Box 265, East Kew, Victoria 3102, Australia
Reprinted 2014

This book is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission. Enquiries should be made to the publisher.

Copyright © Mark Wilson 2010

National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Author: Wilson, Mark, 1949.
Title: The little wooden horse / Mark Wilson.
Edition: 1st ed.
ISBN: 9781921136535 (hbk.)
Target Audience: For primary school age.
Dewey Number: A823.3

Initial concept and layout, Mark Wilson
Design and Prepress by Hell Colour Australia
Printed by Sky Art Hong Kong

The Little Wooden Horse



Mark Wilson

A Helen Chamberlin Book



www.windyhollowbooks.com.au



The Cotton Mill

Elizabeth held the little wooden horse tightly in her torn pocket. Her friend Tom had made it for her at the orphanage in North London.

When Tom first arrived at the orphanage after both his parents died in the smallpox epidemic, he was quiet and scared. Elizabeth, who had been at the orphanage all her life and had never known her parents, took him under her wing.

When the other children teased him because he could read and write, Elizabeth would sing him her favourite song:

Hush-a-bye, don't you cry,

Go to sleep, little baby.

When you wake, you'll have cake

And all the pretty little horses.



One night, as Elizabeth was singing to him, Tom pulled a carved wooden horse from his pocket.

'Here, this is for you,' he said, gently rubbing the neck of the little horse as he handed it to her.

Tom had carved it with a piece of sharpened tin he found near the blacksmith's forge. His father had been a carpenter, and Tom used to sit on the floor next to him as he worked and carve little animals.

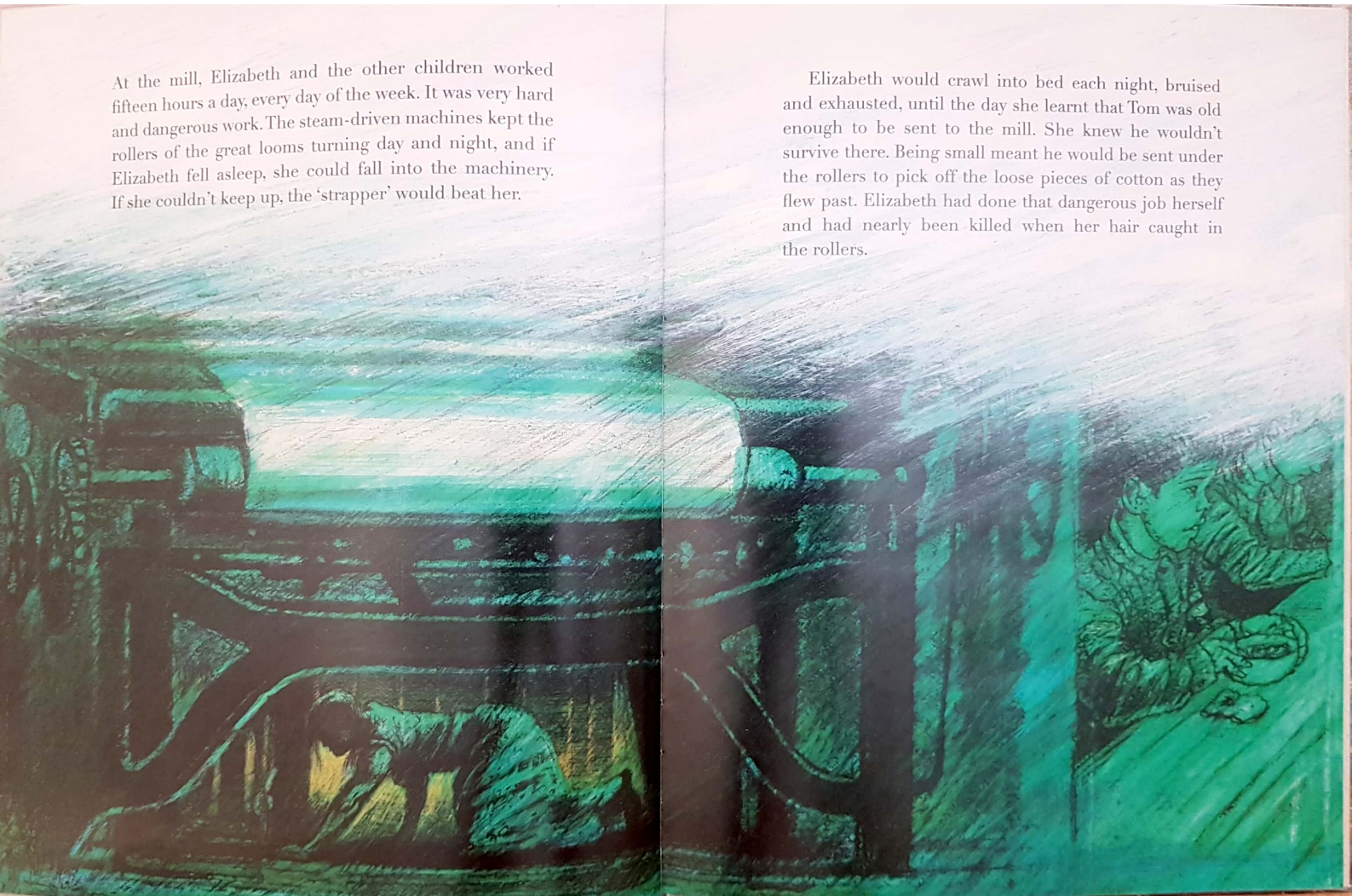


The wooden horse was beautiful, leaving Elizabeth lost for words. She hugged Tom and whispered, 'Time to go to sleep now.'

Elizabeth and the older children were sent off to work at the cotton mill each morning, well before the sun came up. Before they left, she would wait near the horses in the stable. It was her favourite moment of the day. She was especially fond of Milly, an old draught horse, and would whisper goodbye to her each morning.

At the mill, Elizabeth and the other children worked fifteen hours a day, every day of the week. It was very hard and dangerous work. The steam-driven machines kept the rollers of the great looms turning day and night, and if Elizabeth fell asleep, she could fall into the machinery. If she couldn't keep up, the 'strapper' would beat her.

Elizabeth would crawl into bed each night, bruised and exhausted, until the day she learnt that Tom was old enough to be sent to the mill. She knew he wouldn't survive there. Being small meant he would be sent under the rollers to pick off the loose pieces of cotton as they flew past. Elizabeth had done that dangerous job herself and had nearly been killed when her hair caught in the rollers.



One cold September night, as the other children were going to bed, Elizabeth noticed there was no one in the kitchen. She quickly bundled bread and cheese into a flour sack and crept back to find Tom in the darkened dormitory. He was scared, but she coaxed him to come with her, and with her arm around his shoulders, they tiptoed to the stables.



Elizabeth rubbed Milly's neck and whispered a final goodbye. Suddenly lanterns flickered through the trees and the guard's dogs began to bark. The children climbed an old cypress tree behind the stables, and were soon over the orphanage wall and running.

That was how they came to live in the alleyways of London.



In the bright sunshine of a spring morning, Elizabeth gently guided Tom through the streets. Neither of them had eaten for days and Tom was sick. Elizabeth knew she had to find food for him.

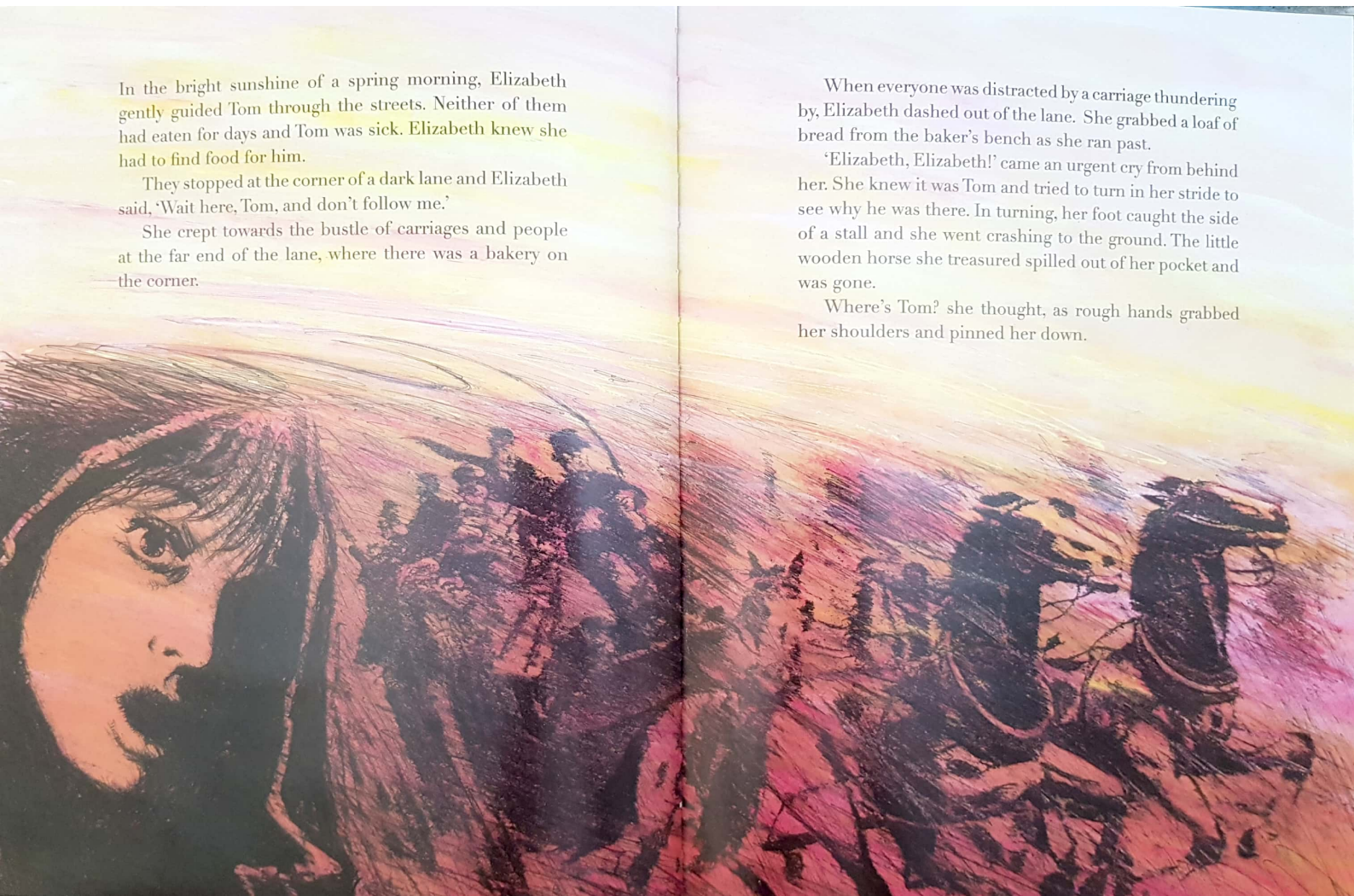
They stopped at the corner of a dark lane and Elizabeth said, 'Wait here, Tom, and don't follow me.'

She crept towards the bustle of carriages and people at the far end of the lane, where there was a bakery on the corner.

When everyone was distracted by a carriage thundering by, Elizabeth dashed out of the lane. She grabbed a loaf of bread from the baker's bench as she ran past.

'Elizabeth, Elizabeth!' came an urgent cry from behind her. She knew it was Tom and tried to turn in her stride to see why he was there. In turning, her foot caught the side of a stall and she went crashing to the ground. The little wooden horse she treasured spilled out of her pocket and was gone.

Where's Tom? she thought, as rough hands grabbed her shoulders and pinned her down.



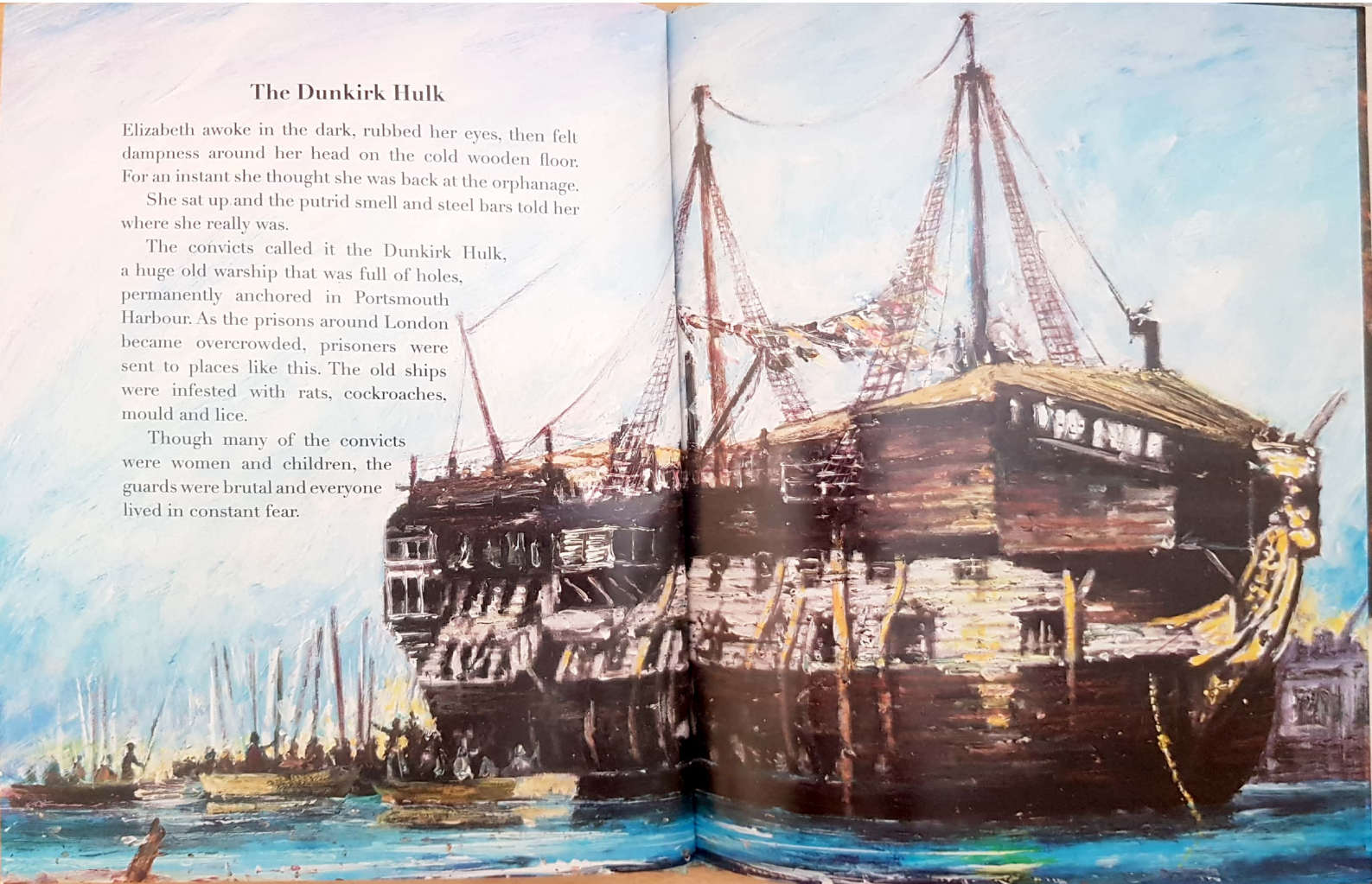
The Dunkirk Hulk

Elizabeth awoke in the dark, rubbed her eyes, then felt dampness around her head on the cold wooden floor. For an instant she thought she was back at the orphanage.

She sat up and the putrid smell and steel bars told her where she really was.

The convicts called it the Dunkirk Hulk, a huge old warship that was full of holes, permanently anchored in Portsmouth Harbour. As the prisons around London became overcrowded, prisoners were sent to places like this. The old ships were infested with rats, cockroaches, mould and lice.

Though many of the convicts were women and children, the guards were brutal and everyone lived in constant fear.





On their second night in the hulk, Elizabeth gave Tom her ration of bread. Tom looked up and smiled at his friend.

'Ta,' he said softly, as he rubbed the mould off, leaving a dark stain on the crust.

Tom had kept a little piece of tin from the orphanage, well hidden in his jacket. He took it out and scratched the letters of Elizabeth's name into the wooden bunk. Elizabeth carefully copied what he had written.

'Yes,' she said, when she had finished, spelling the letters out. 'E-l-i-z-a-b-e-t-h.'

Tom smiled at her, but then he started to cough and had to lie back on the wooden pillow.

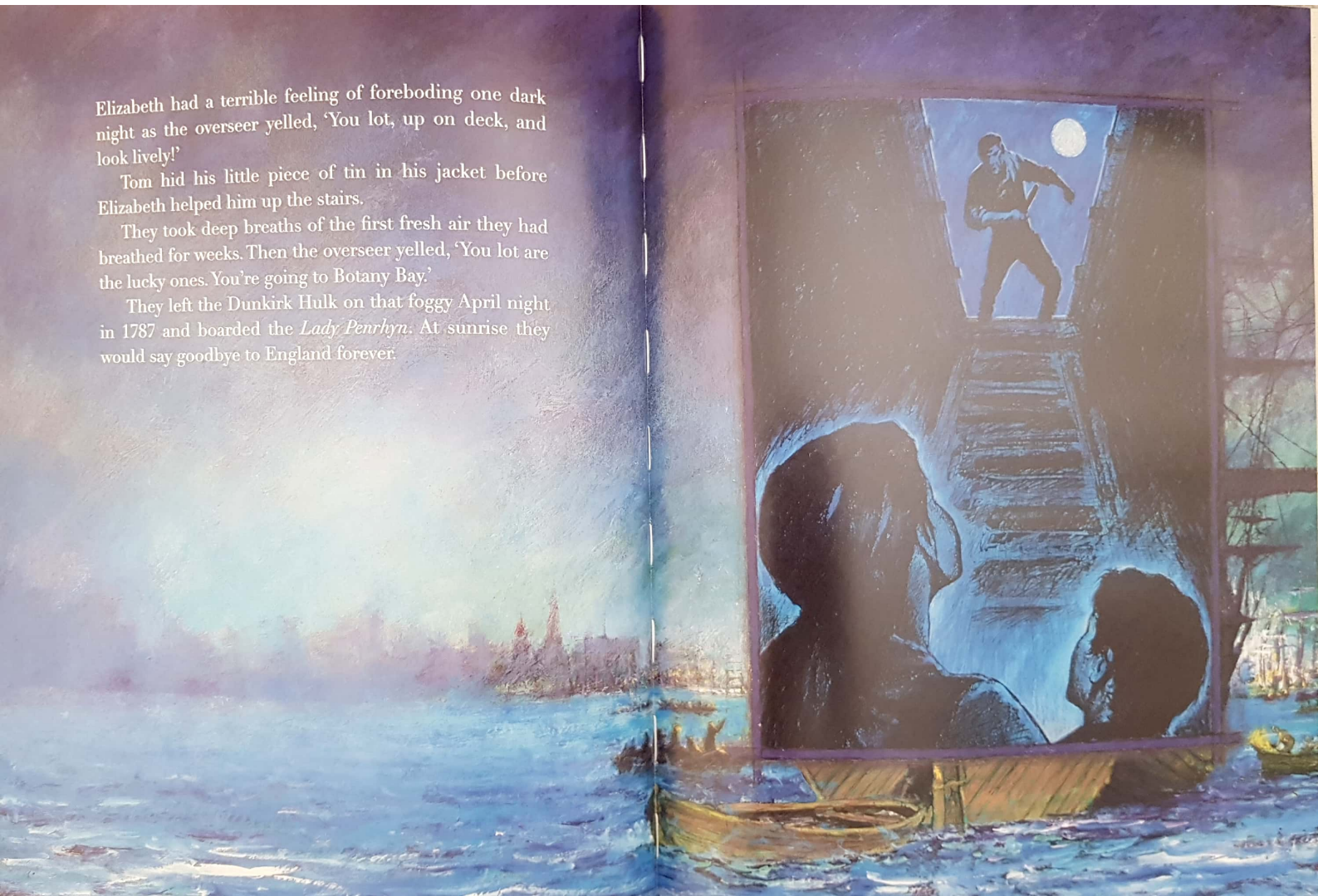
If only Tom hadn't come down the alley that day, Elizabeth thought, with a sick feeling in her stomach. He told her later that he had seen the baker watching her and tried to warn her. That was how he got caught as well.

Elizabeth had a terrible feeling of foreboding one dark night as the overseer yelled, 'You lot, up on deck, and look lively!'

Tom hid his little piece of tin in his jacket before Elizabeth helped him up the stairs.

They took deep breaths of the first fresh air they had breathed for weeks. Then the overseer yelled, 'You lot are the lucky ones. You're going to Botany Bay.'

They left the Dunkirk Hulk on that foggy April night in 1787 and boarded the *Lady Penrhyn*. At sunrise they would say goodbye to England forever.



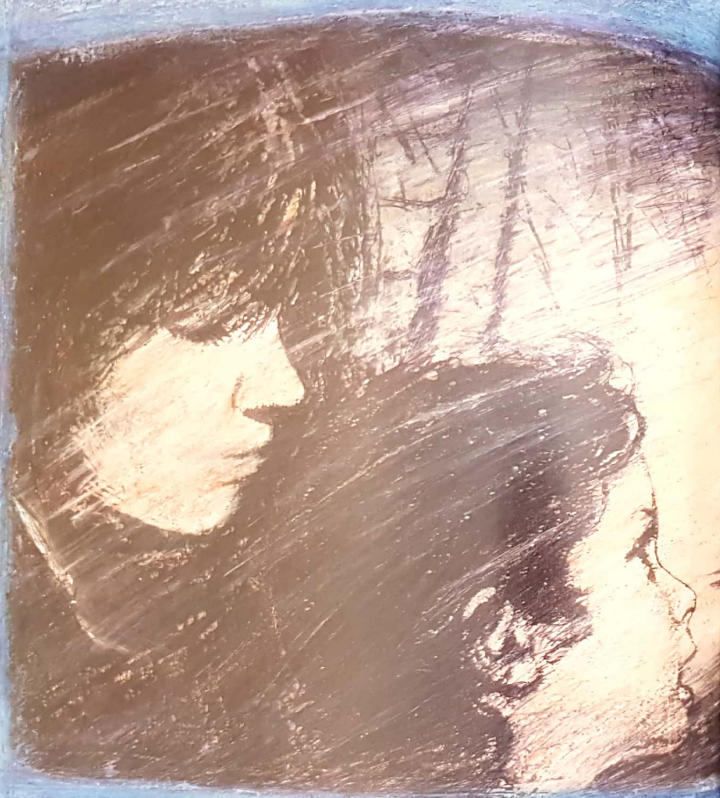


South to Rio de Janeiro

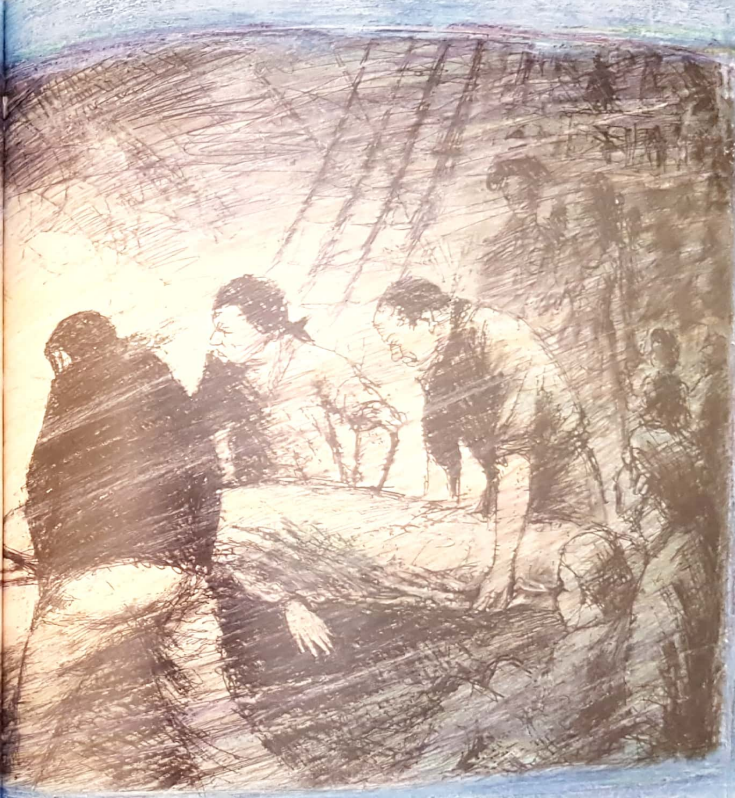
Elizabeth watched the sea birds whirling and diving into the spray as the ships of the First Fleet passed the Isle of Wight, heading south. A strong wind was blowing and they had a full set of sails up.

'Back, stand well back, the lot of you,' growled a sailor, ushering the convicts away from the main hatch.

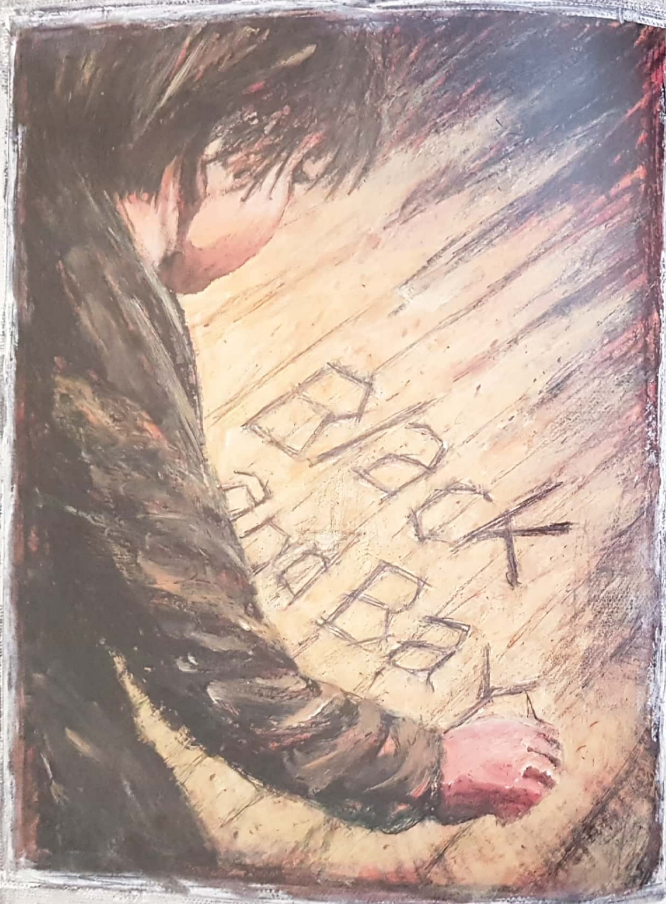
Elizabeth felt a chill run up her spine as the body of an old woman was brought up on deck. She felt for the little wooden horse in her pocket for luck, forgetting for a moment that she had lost it in the chase outside the bakery.



The woman had been sick for a long time, and had died soon after they set sail. Elizabeth had brought her water as she lay on the floor below decks, too ill to move.



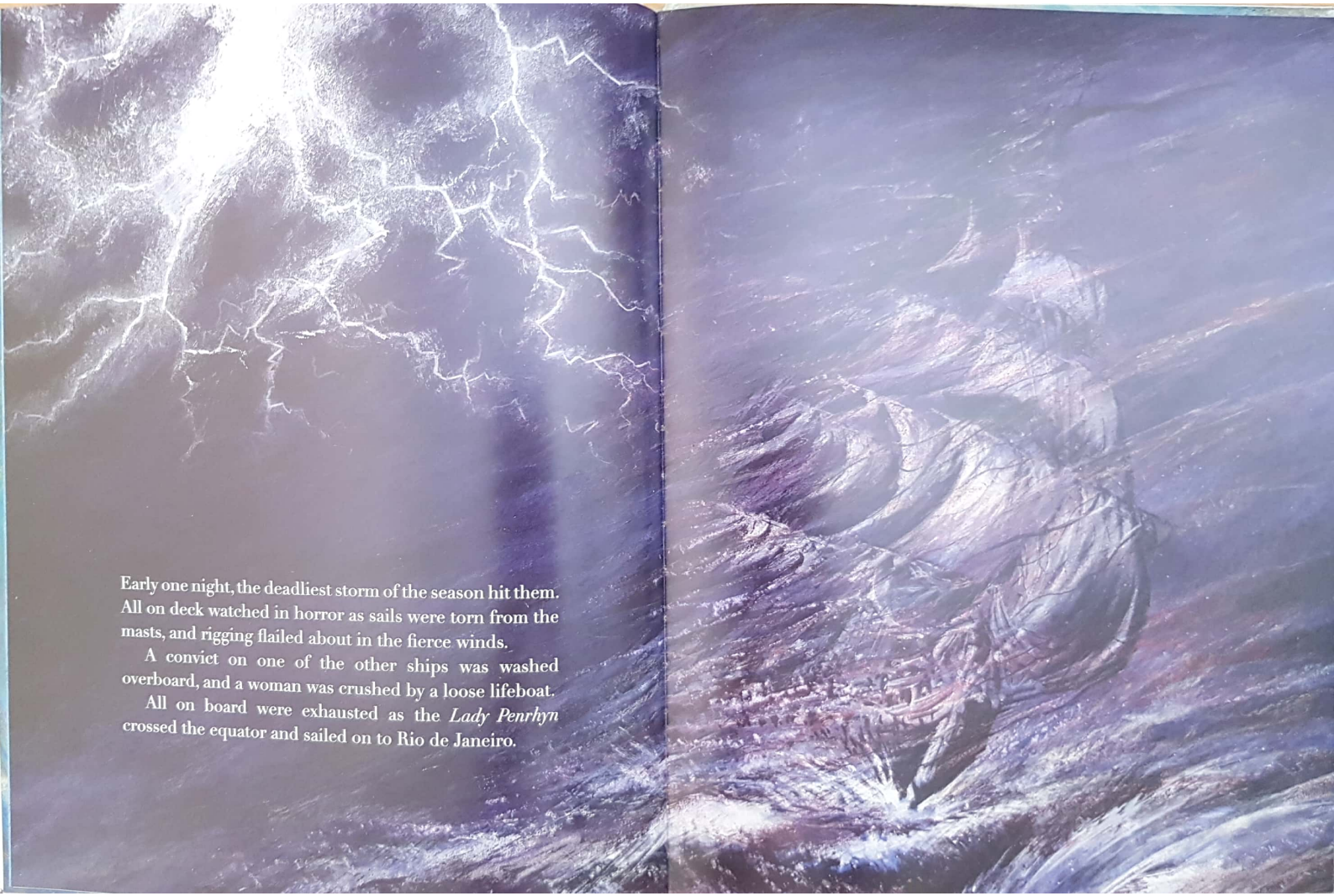
A sombre mood hung over the ship as it sailed southwards.



At night, Tom would take out his little piece of sharpened tin and write words on the wooden floor of their cell, and Elizabeth would copy them. When Elizabeth had trouble concentrating as she tried to keep the rats and cockroaches away, Tom started teaching her to write the words of her favourite song.

During the day the children helped the women convicts scrub the decks. They saw whales and turtles for the first time and Tom could not believe there were creatures so big.

But these small moments of joy were short-lived.



Early one night, the deadliest storm of the season hit them. All on deck watched in horror as sails were torn from the masts, and rigging flailed about in the fierce winds.

A convict on one of the other ships was washed overboard, and a woman was crushed by a loose lifeboat.

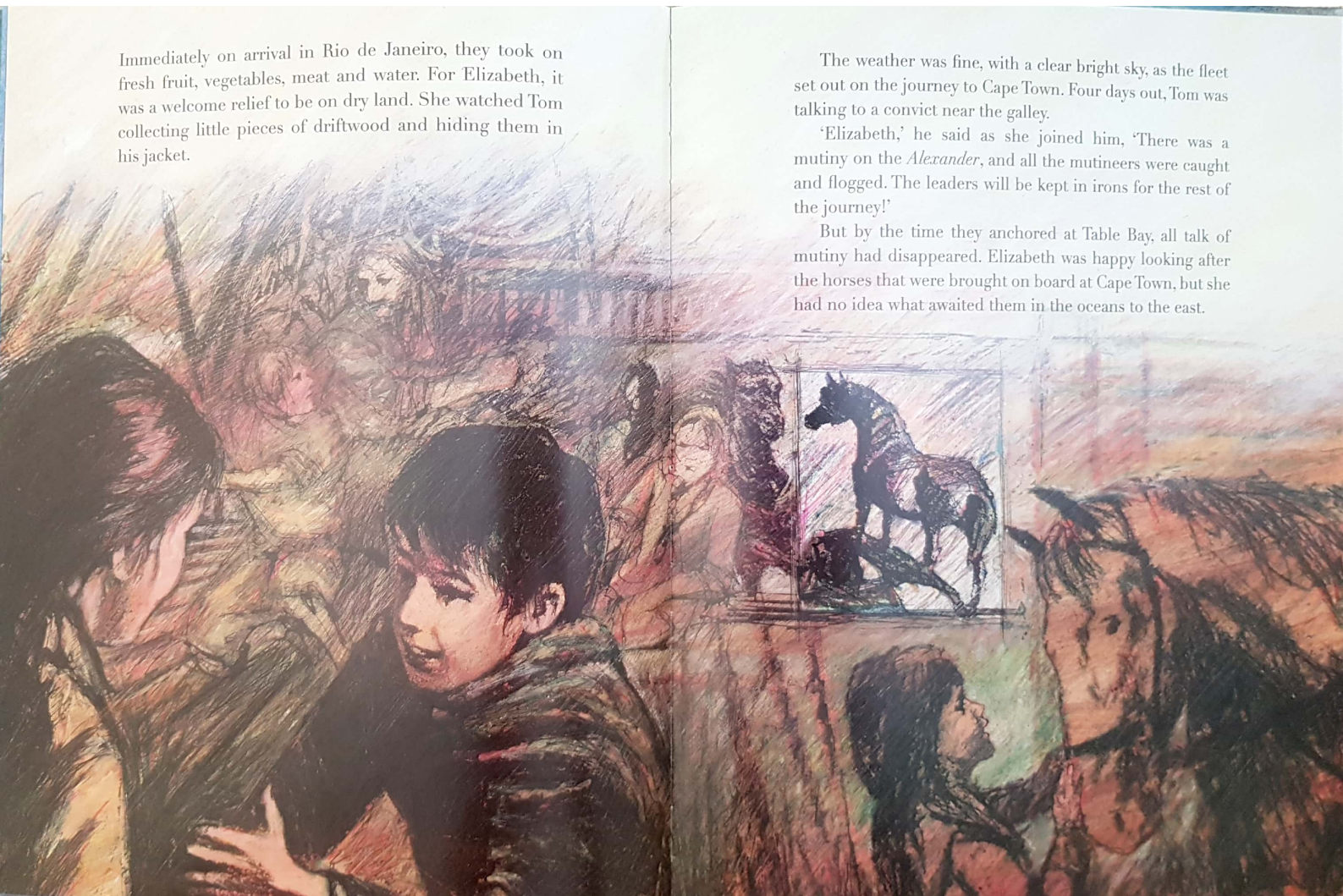
All on board were exhausted as the *Lady Penrhyn* crossed the equator and sailed on to Rio de Janeiro.

Immediately on arrival in Rio de Janeiro, they took on fresh fruit, vegetables, meat and water. For Elizabeth, it was a welcome relief to be on dry land. She watched Tom collecting little pieces of driftwood and hiding them in his jacket.

The weather was fine, with a clear bright sky, as the fleet set out on the journey to Cape Town. Four days out, Tom was talking to a convict near the galley.

'Elizabeth,' he said as she joined him, 'There was a mutiny on the *Alexander*, and all the mutineers were caught and flogged. The leaders will be kept in irons for the rest of the journey!'

But by the time they anchored at Table Bay, all talk of mutiny had disappeared. Elizabeth was happy looking after the horses that were brought on board at Cape Town, but she had no idea what awaited them in the oceans to the east.



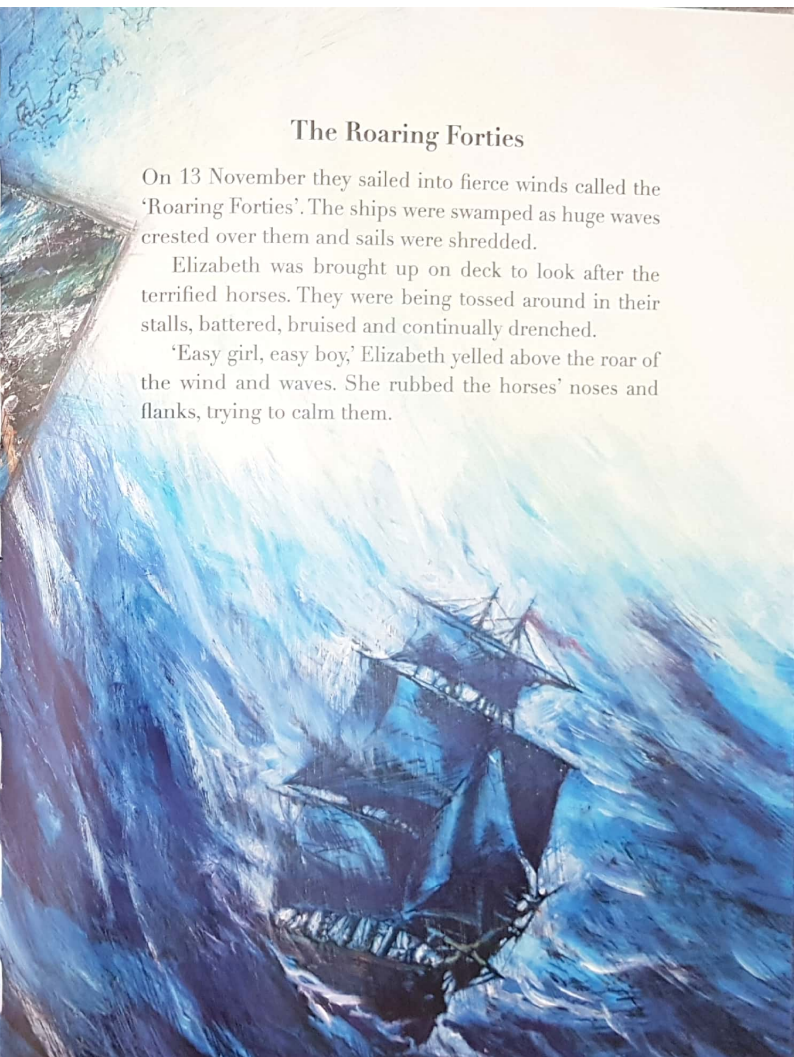


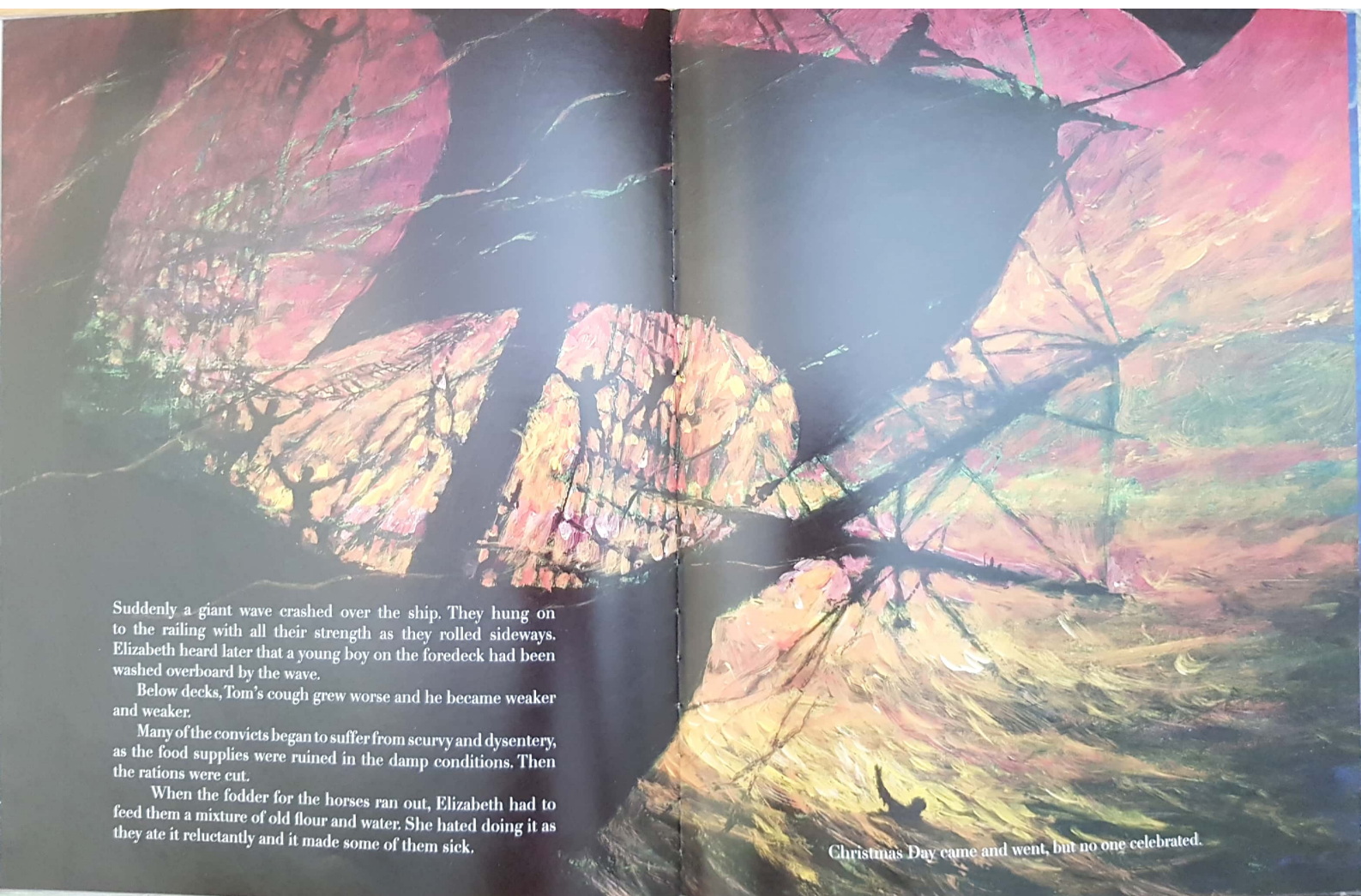
The Roaring Forties

On 13 November they sailed into fierce winds called the 'Roaring Forties'. The ships were swamped as huge waves crested over them and sails were shredded.

Elizabeth was brought up on deck to look after the terrified horses. They were being tossed around in their stalls, battered, bruised and continually drenched.

'Easy girl, easy boy,' Elizabeth yelled above the roar of the wind and waves. She rubbed the horses' noses and flanks, trying to calm them.





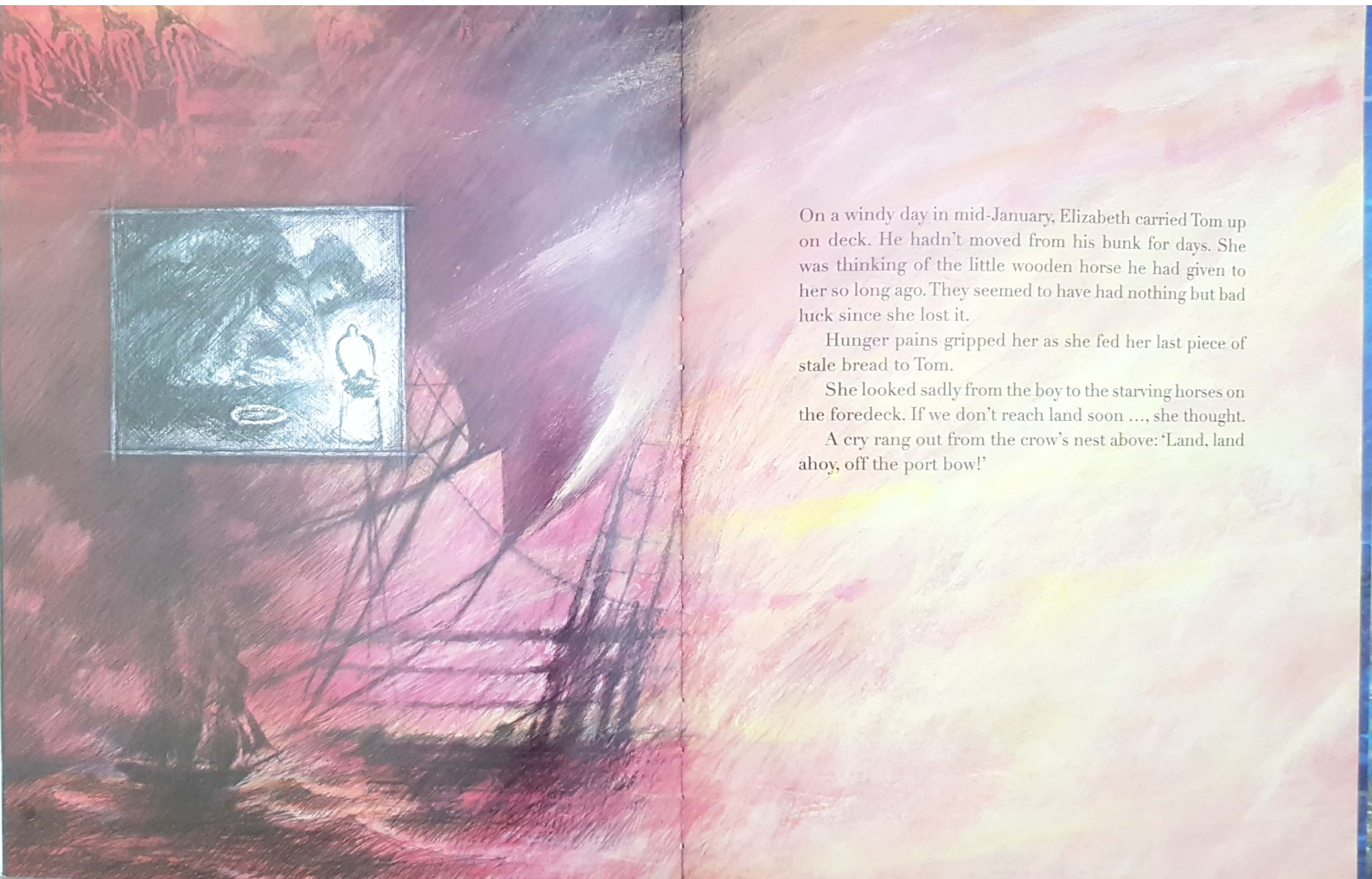
Suddenly a giant wave crashed over the ship. They hung on to the railing with all their strength as they rolled sideways. Elizabeth heard later that a young boy on the foredeck had been washed overboard by the wave.

Below decks, Tom's cough grew worse and he became weaker and weaker.

Many of the convicts began to suffer from scurvy and dysentery, as the food supplies were ruined in the damp conditions. Then the rations were cut.

When the fodder for the horses ran out, Elizabeth had to feed them a mixture of old flour and water. She hated doing it as they ate it reluctantly and it made some of them sick.

Christmas Day came and went, but no one celebrated.



On a windy day in mid-January, Elizabeth carried Tom up on deck. He hadn't moved from his bunk for days. She was thinking of the little wooden horse he had given to her so long ago. They seemed to have had nothing but bad luck since she lost it.

Hunger pains gripped her as she fed her last piece of stale bread to Tom.

She looked sadly from the boy to the starving horses on the foredeck. If we don't reach land soon ..., she thought.

A cry rang out from the crow's nest above: 'Land, land ahoy, off the port bow!'



Tom tried to smile, but he was shivering with fever, so Elizabeth held him tightly in her arms.

As the sea birds circled above, she whispered, 'We've made it, Tom, we'll be alright now... We've finally made it to the new land.'

Tom slowly reached into his jacket pocket, then pressed something into Elizabeth's hands. Tears welled in her eyes as she saw it was a good luck charm, a new wooden horse, carved from driftwood.

Black and bay, dapple and grey,

Coach and six little horses.

Hush-a-bye, don't you cry,

Go to sleep, little baby.

Hush-a-bye, don't you cry,

Go to sleep little baby.

When you wake, you'll have cake

And all the pretty little horses.