

As she reached forward to brush a sharp stone from the sole of her foot, Cherry noticed that the narrow entrance to the cave was half sealed in. She ran her fingers over the stones and cement to make sure, for the light was poor. It was at that moment that she recognized exactly where she was. She recalled now the giant fledgling cuckoo one of her brothers had spotted being fed by a tiny rock

pipit earlier in the holidays, how they had

quarrelled over the binoculars and

how when she finally usurped

them and made her escape

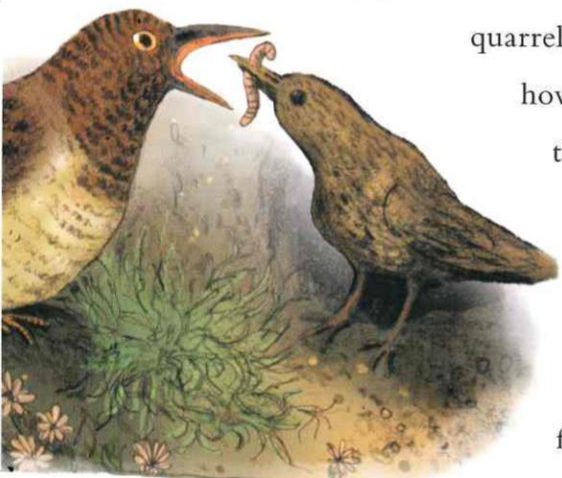
across the rocks she had

found the cuckoo perched

at the entrance to a narrow

cave some way up the cliff

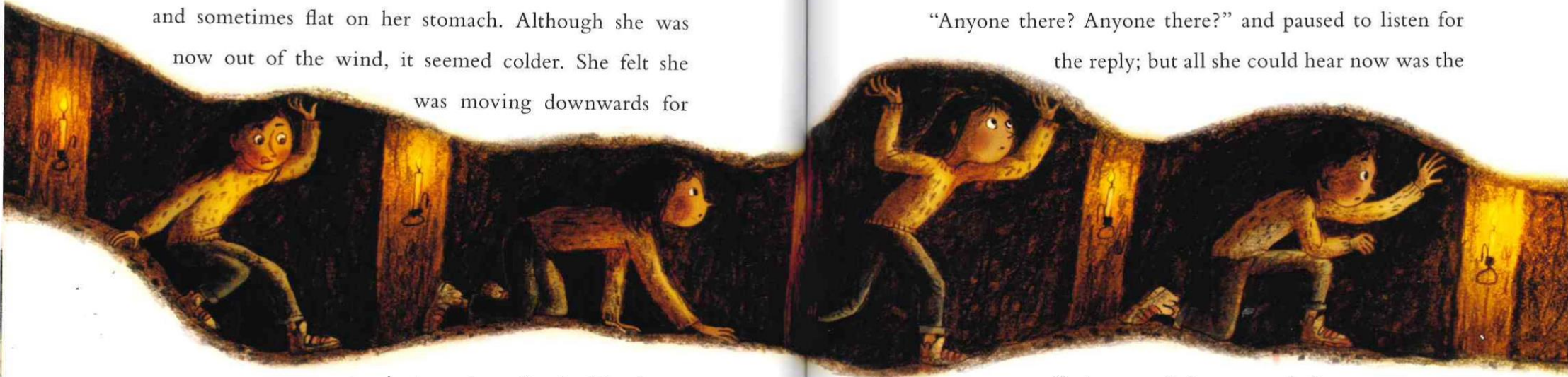
face from the beach.



She had asked then about the man-made walling, and her father had told her of the old tin mines whose lodes and adits criss-crossed the entire coastal area around Zennor. This one, he said, might have been the mine they called Wheel North Grylls, and he thought the adit must have been walled up to prevent the seas from entering the mine in a storm. It was said there had been an accident in the mine only a few years after it was opened, over a hundred years before, and that the mine had had to close soon after when the mine owners ran out of money to make the necessary repairs. The entire story came back to her now, and she wondered where the cuckoo was and whether the rock pipit had died with the effort of keeping the fledgling alive. Tin mines, she thought, lead to the surface, and the way home. That thought and her natural inquisitiveness about the source

of light persuaded her to her feet and into the tunnel.

The adit became narrower and lower as she crept forward, so she had to go down on her hands and knees and sometimes flat on her stomach. Although she was now out of the wind, it seemed colder. She felt she was moving downwards for



a minute or two, for the blood was coming to her head and her weight was heavy on her hands. Then, quite suddenly, she found the ground levelling out and saw a large tunnel ahead of her. There was no doubt

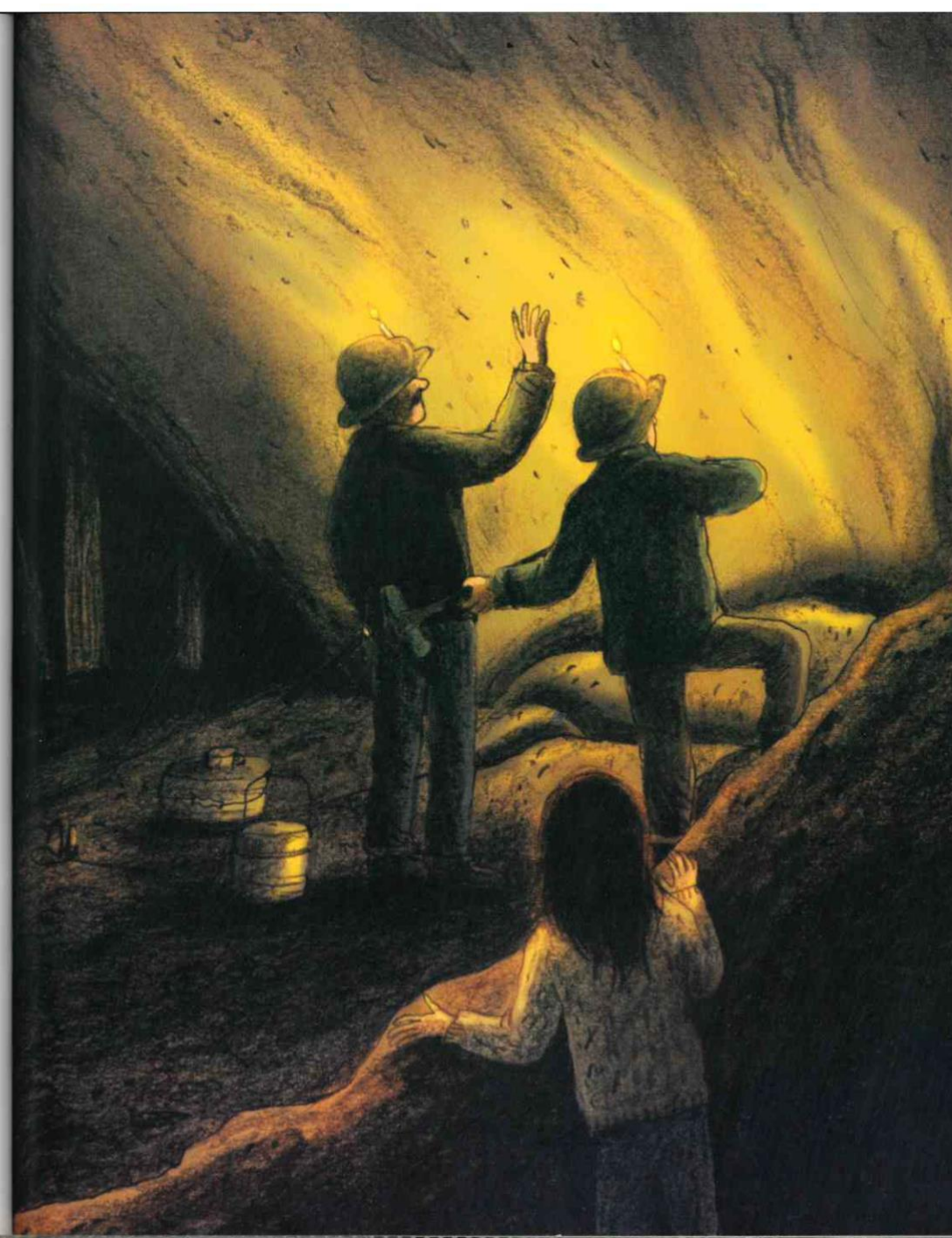
as to which way she should turn, for one way the tunnel was black and the other way was lighted with candles that lined the lode wall as far as she could see. She called out, "Anyone there? Anyone there?" and paused to listen for the reply; but all she could hear now was the

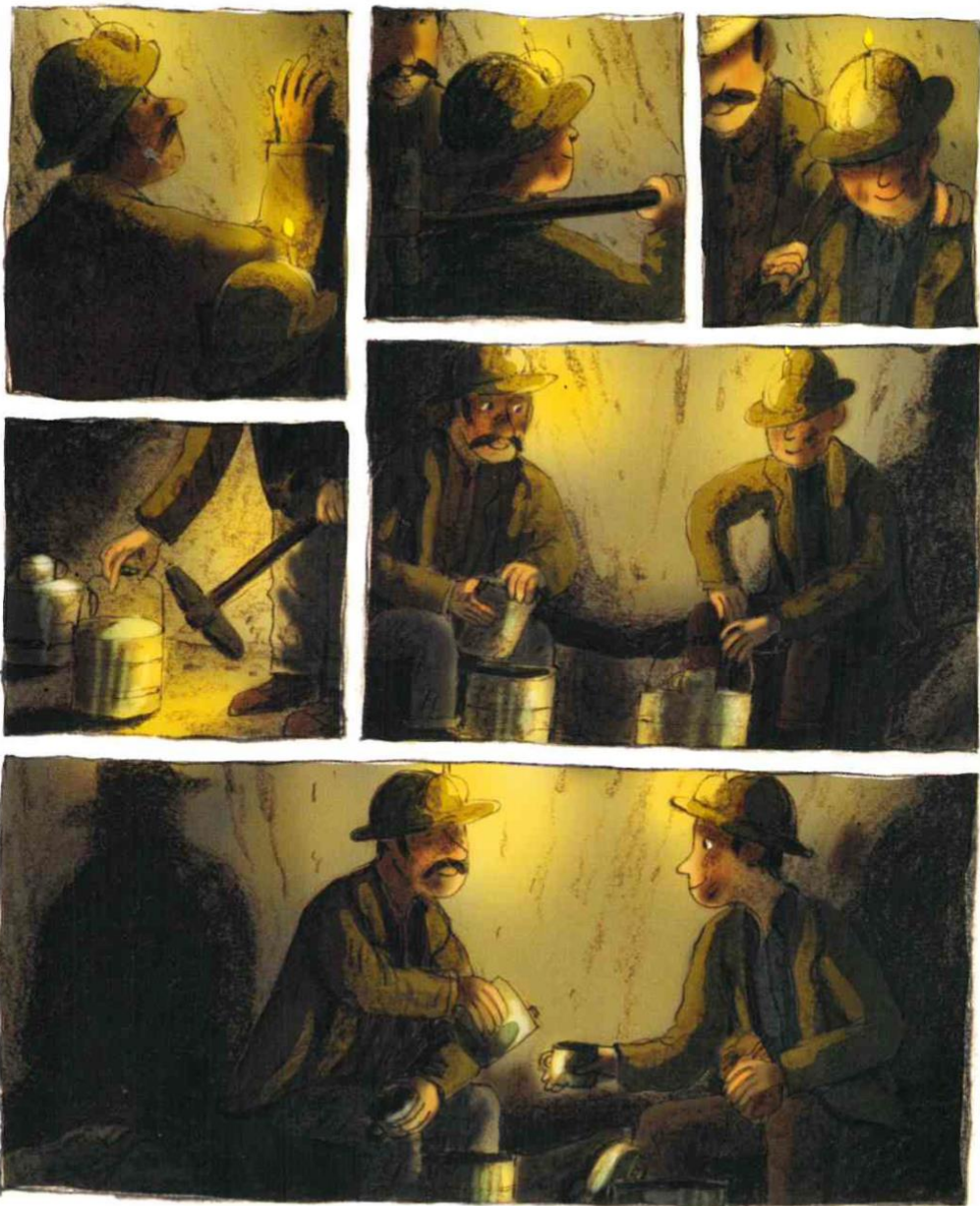
muffled roar of the sea and the continuous echoing of dripping water.

The tunnel widened now and she could walk upright again; but her feet hurt against the stone and so she

moved slowly, feeling her way gently with each foot. She had gone only a short distance when she heard the tapping for the first time, distinct and rhythmic, a sound that was instantly recognizable as hammering. It became sharper and noticeably more metallic as she moved up the tunnel. She could hear the distant murmur of voices and the sound of falling stone. Even before she came out of the tunnel and into the vast cave she knew she had happened upon a working mine.

The cave was dark in all but one corner and here she could see two men bending to their work, their backs towards her. One of them was inspecting the rock face closely whilst the other swung his hammer with controlled power, pausing only to spit on his hands from time to time. They wore round hats with turned-up brims that served also as candlesticks, for a lighted candle was fixed





to each, the light dancing with the shadows along the cave walls as they worked.

Cherry watched for some moments until she made up her mind what to do. She longed to rush up to them and tell of her escape and to ask them to take her to the surface, but a certain shyness overcame her and she held back. Her chance to interrupt came when they sat down against the rock face and opened their canteens. She was in the shadows and they still could not see her.

“Tea looks cold again,” one of them said gruffly. “’Tis always cold. I’m sure she makes it wi’ cold water.”

“Oh, stop your moaning, Father,” said the other, a



younger voice, Cherry felt. "She does her best. She's five little ones to look after and precious little to do it on. She does her best. You mustn't keep on at her so. It upsets her. She does her best."

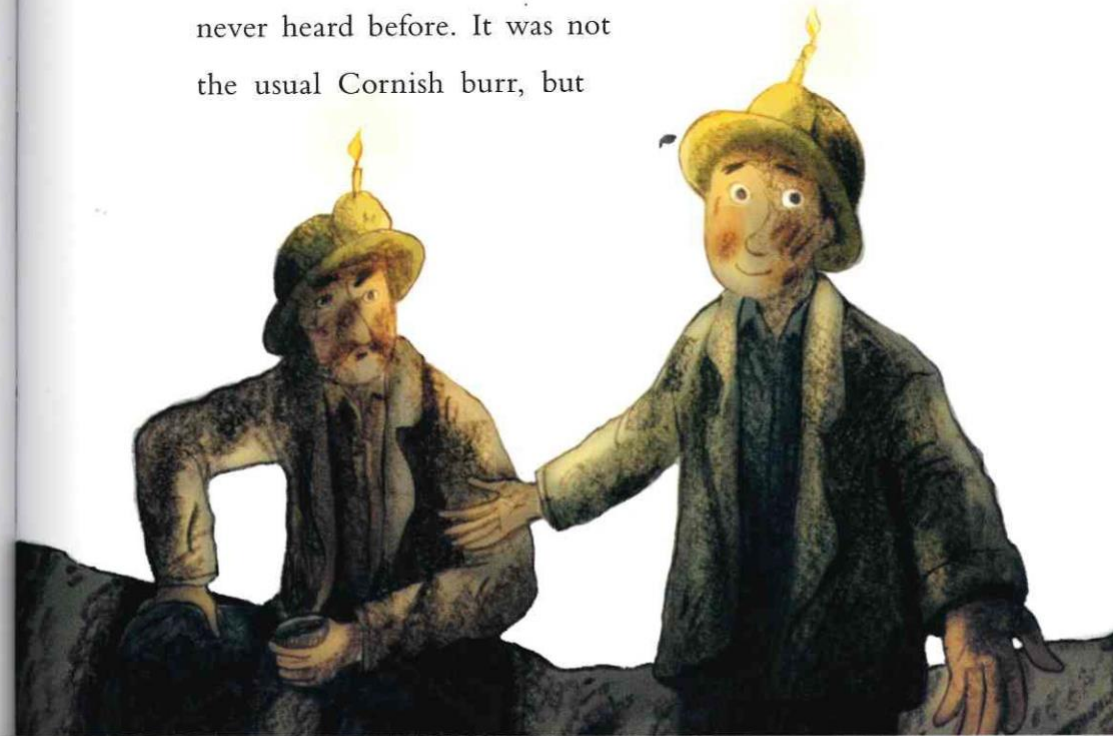
"So she does, lad, so she does. And so for that matter do I, but that don't stop her moaning at me and it'll not stop me moaning at her. If we didn't moan at each other, lad, we'd have precious little else to talk about, and that's a fact. She expects it of me, lad, and I expects it of her."

"Excuse me," Cherry said tentatively. She felt she had eavesdropped for long enough. She approached them slowly. "Excuse me, but I've got a bit lost. I climbed the cliff, you see, cos I was cut off from the cove. I was trying to get back, but I couldn't and I saw this light and so I climbed up. I want to get home and I wondered if you could help me get to the top?"

"Top?" said the older one, peering into the dark. "Come closer, lad, where we can see you."

"She's not a lad, Father. Are you blind? Can you not see 'tis a filly. 'Tis a young filly, all wet through from the sea. Come," the young man said, standing up and beckoning Cherry in. "Don't be afeared, little girl, we shan't harm you. Come on, you can have some of my tea if you like."

They spoke their words in a manner Cherry had never heard before. It was not the usual Cornish burr, but





heavier and rougher in tone and somehow old-fashioned. There were so many questions in her mind.

“But I thought the mine was closed a hundred years ago,” she said nervously. “That’s what I was told, anyway.”

“Well, you was told wrong,” said the old man, whom Cherry could see more clearly now under his candle. His eyes were white and set far back in his head, unnaturally so, she thought, and his lips and mouth seemed a vivid red in the candlelight.

“Closed, closed indeed; does it look closed to you? D’you think we’re digging for worms? Over four thousand tons of tin last year and nine thousand of copper

ore, and you ask is the mine closed? Over twenty fathoms below the sea this mine goes. We’ll dig right out under the ocean, most of the way to ’Merica, afore we close down this mine.”

He spoke passionately now, almost angrily, so that Cherry felt she had offended him.

“Hush, Father,” said the young man, taking off his jacket and wrapping it around Cherry’s shoulders.

