



Poppy and the Thief



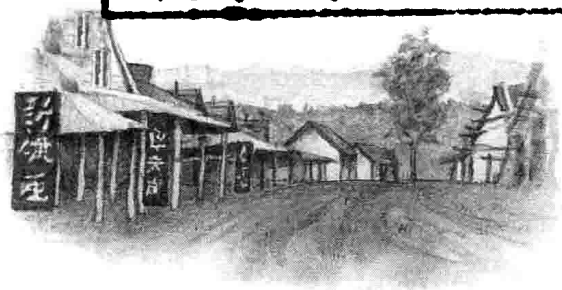
Gabrielle Wang



Poppy and the Thief

常州大学图书馆
藏书

Gabrielle Wang
草



With illustrations by Lucia Masciullo

Puffin Books

PUFFIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group

Melbourne • London • New York • Toronto • Dublin

New Delhi • Auckland • Johannesburg

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices:

80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Published by Penguin Group (Australia), 2011

10 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2 1

Text copyright © Gabrielle Wang, 2011

Illustrations copyright © Lucia Masciullo, 2011

The moral right of the author and illustrator has been asserted.

All rights reserved.

Every effort has been made to contact the copyright holders for material used in this book. If anyone has information on relevant copyright holders, please contact us.

Cover and internal design by Evi O. © Penguin Group (Australia)

Cover portrait copyright © Tim de Neefe

Cover photograph copyright © Rob Palmer

Typeset in Bembo by Post Pre-press Group, Brisbane, Queensland

Printed and bound in Australia by McPherson's Printing Group,

Maryborough, Victoria

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication data available.

ISBN 978 0 14 330534 7

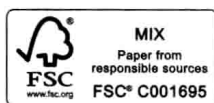
Photograph on page 110 courtesy of the State Library of Victoria

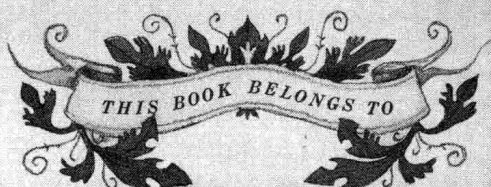
puffin.com.au

ouraustraliangirl.com.au

Charms on the front cover reprinted with kind permission from A&E Metal Merchants.

www.aemetals.com.au







OUR
AUSTRALIAN
GIRL

Poppy and the Thief



Poppy is on the road again, heading to the town of Wahgunyah. On the way she meets a stranger who seems to know something about her past, and her special letter with the red tiger seal. But the more time she spends with this boy, the more difficult he becomes. Should Poppy trust him?

Join Poppy again on her adventure in the third of four exciting stories about a Gold Rush girl who dreams of a better life.

Puffin Books

I would like to thank the following people for their invaluable assistance: Koorie Elder, Uncle John Sandy Atkinson O.A.M.; Koorie Liaison Officer, State Library of Victoria, Maxine Briggs; Koorie Heritage Trust Librarian, Judy Williams.

*For Yullarah —
the beautiful face of Poppy*



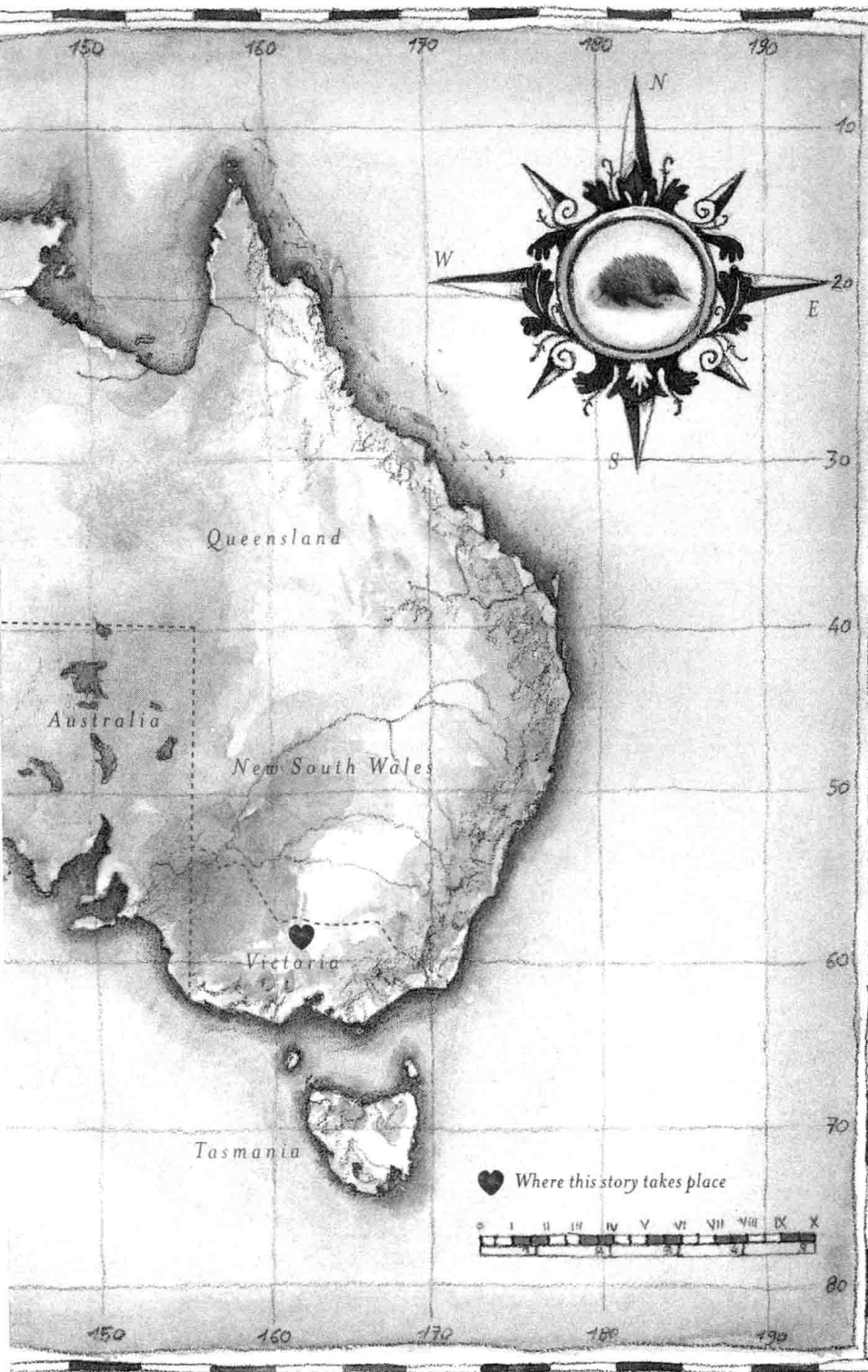
AUSTRALIA

1864

Western Australia

POPPY'S STORY

Poppy travels the countryside all on her own in search of her brother who has gone to find gold. Share in Poppy's exciting adventures as you read this story of a brave Australian girl.



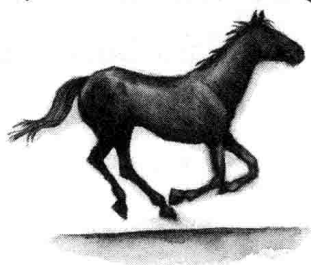




THE STORY SO FAR

Poppy has run away from Bird Creek Mission to look for her brother, Gus, who is heading to Beechworth in search of gold. She is disguised as a boy to protect herself from people who might be looking for her - Mother Hangtree from the Mission and the police! Along the way she has shared a meal with a bushranger and been taken in by a kind homestead family after hurting her ankle very badly. Luckily she has a loyal dog named Fisher to look after her as there are many more obstacles and dangers in Poppy's path . . .

THE CRAZY BOY



As Poppy galloped away from Summerhill, there was a gnawing emptiness in the pit of her stomach. Saying goodbye to Tom and Noni had left her heavy with sadness. I always seem to be leaving, she thought, always saying goodbye. But until she found her brother, Gus, this was her life. The people at the camp said Gus was on his way to Wahgunyah. Well, now so was she. Poppy couldn't stay any longer in case that policeman from Tocumwal discovered the truth about her – that she was a runaway from Bird Creek Mission.

But now she was back in her boy's disguise and on the road again. 'Come on, Fish,' she called out to her dog. She kicked Gideon's flanks and the big black horse lengthened his stride.

Riding bareback had been hard at first. But Tom's words had echoed in her mind and helped her along: *You just do it, over and over. Don't worry you no good. Get good soon enough.* Gideon's spirit was tied to hers, Tom had said. And she knew that to be true. The horse had done everything Poppy had asked him to since their escape from Summerhill.

Wahgunyah lay in the colony of Victoria, on the other side of the Murray River. Bird Creek Mission was in Victoria too. But after hiding on the paddlesteamer heading up the Murray, Poppy had been forced to sneak off the boat at Tocumwal, in New South Wales. Poppy had been on the wrong side ever since. Now she had to get back across,

but the river was wide, and deep.

And Poppy couldn't swim.

Would Gideon want to go in the water? Tom had assured her that horses were natural swimmers. But what if he floundered when they were in the deepest part?

As the miles from Summerhill lengthened behind her, Poppy worried about the river crossing to come.



Several hours later they came to the Murray. What had Tom called it? Oh yes, *Tongala*. Poppy drank thirstily with Fisher and Gideon at the water's edge. Then she rose and washed the dust from her face. The ride had been tiring. Finally she dared to look up and across the river. It was so wide! Poppy felt her heart falter.

No! she thought. How will we ever get across? She stood up, took off her boots and

tied them together by the laces, slinging them around her neck.

‘It’s time to go,’ she said to Fisher and Gideon after a moment.

Fisher wagged his tail and ran into the water, barking excitedly.

‘It will be all right,’ she told Gideon as she climbed onto his back. ‘Even if you’ve never been in water before, you can swim. Come on now.’ Poppy made clicking sounds with her tongue, urging him forward. And slowly, with a few encouraging jabs with her heels, he entered the water.

‘Good boy, Gideon. Good boy,’ she said. ‘You can do it. You can do it.’

Suddenly Gideon lunged forward. He was swimming!

The water was freezing but the horse was warm against Poppy’s legs. Then she felt herself floating off his back. She quickly grabbed chunks of Gideon’s mane and gripped

tightly. As long as she didn't let go she would be all right.

Gideon held his head high. His lips were parted and he was making soft snorting sounds. He seemed to be enjoying the swim.

Poppy then remembered Fisher. He had been swimming alongside her. But where was he now? The current was strong, maybe too strong even for Fisher.

Then she saw him, way downstream, struggling to reach the bank.

'Fisher!' she called. But he disappeared, swept around a bend. She was helpless to do anything except pray that he would not drown. He's swum this river many times before, she told herself. Please, Fish, please be all right.

It took ten minutes to reach the other side. As soon as Gideon stepped out of the water he lowered his head and shook himself. Poppy held on tight. She didn't know horses shook

water from their coats like dogs did. When he was still, she slipped off his back and looked downstream for Fisher. She began to worry even more when she couldn't see him. But then she heard a bark and he came into view, running along the sandy shore towards her, his tongue lolling from the side of his mouth.

'There you are!' She knelt down to give him a big wet hug. 'You're my darling boy, Fish,' she said.



While Poppy's clothes dried over a branch, she sat on the bank watching Gideon graze nearby. He was a handsome horse and his wet coat gleamed in the afternoon light.

Soon she would have to send him back to Summerhill as she had promised Tom she would do. How she would miss this wild horse whom she had grown to love, whose spirit was tied to hers.

Maybe one day Gus and I will have horses of our own, she thought. We'll ride until our muscles ache and our lungs are near bursting. But there will never be a horse like Gideon.

Fisher licked her face as if sensing her sadness.

Poppy dressed and led Gideon down to the water's edge. She stroked his soft muzzle and put her cheek next to his. 'Thank you, my beauty. I will never forget you.'

Gideon blew softly into her hair and nickered.

Holding back tears, Poppy said, 'Off you go, now. Tom will be waiting, and if you don't get back soon, he'll worry.' She patted him on the rump.

Gideon hesitated a moment and stepped into the water.

'Good boy, Gideon. Go on, now. Go home.'

Poppy shaded her eyes against the sun as she watched Gideon swim to the other side. He stood on the bank, lifted his head and sniffed