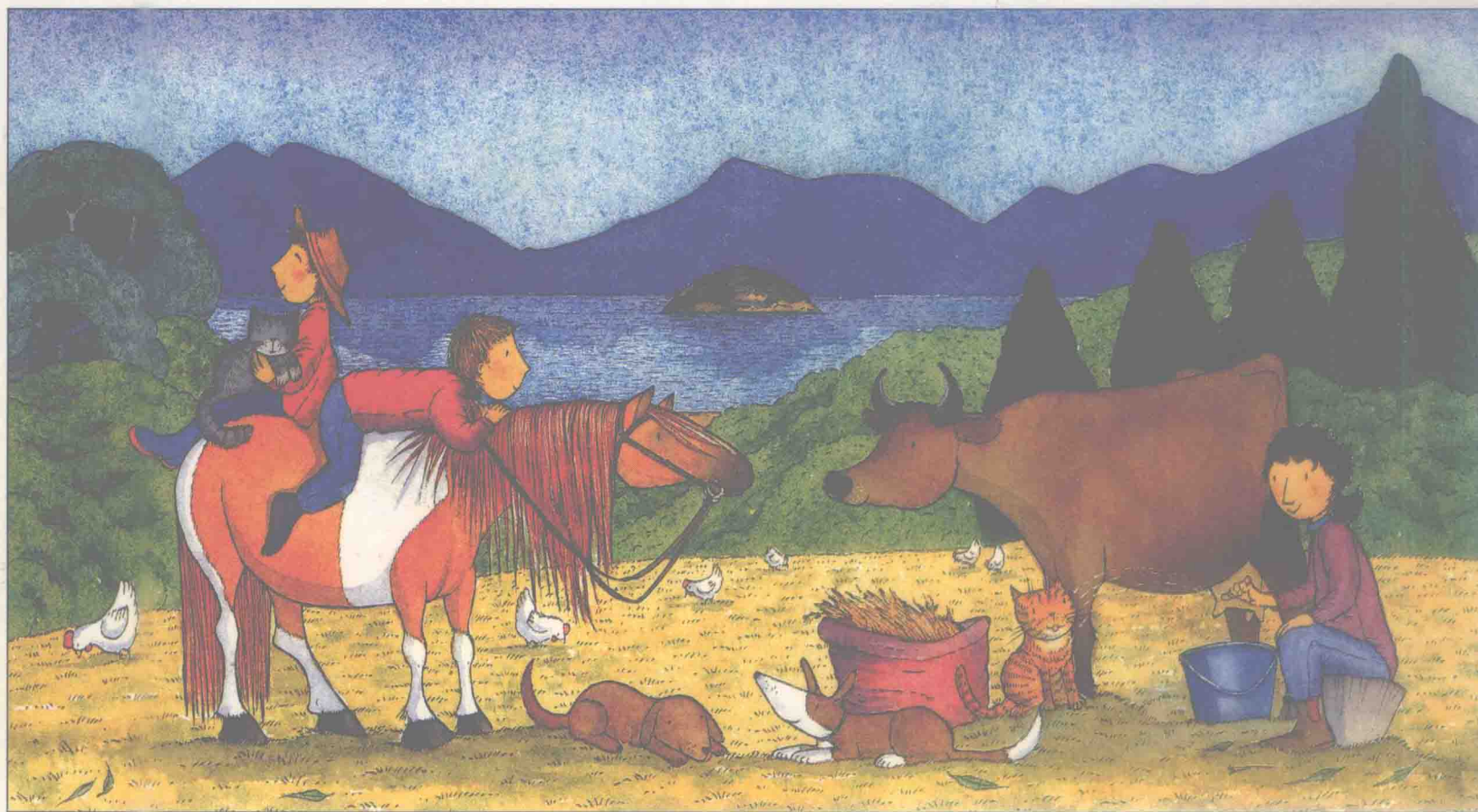


MY FARM

AN AUSTRALIAN
BESTSELLER



Alison Lester

No one wore safety helmets when I was little, so that's how I've drawn it, but these days you'd be crazy to ride without a helmet. So remember, always wear your hard hat, and ride safely.

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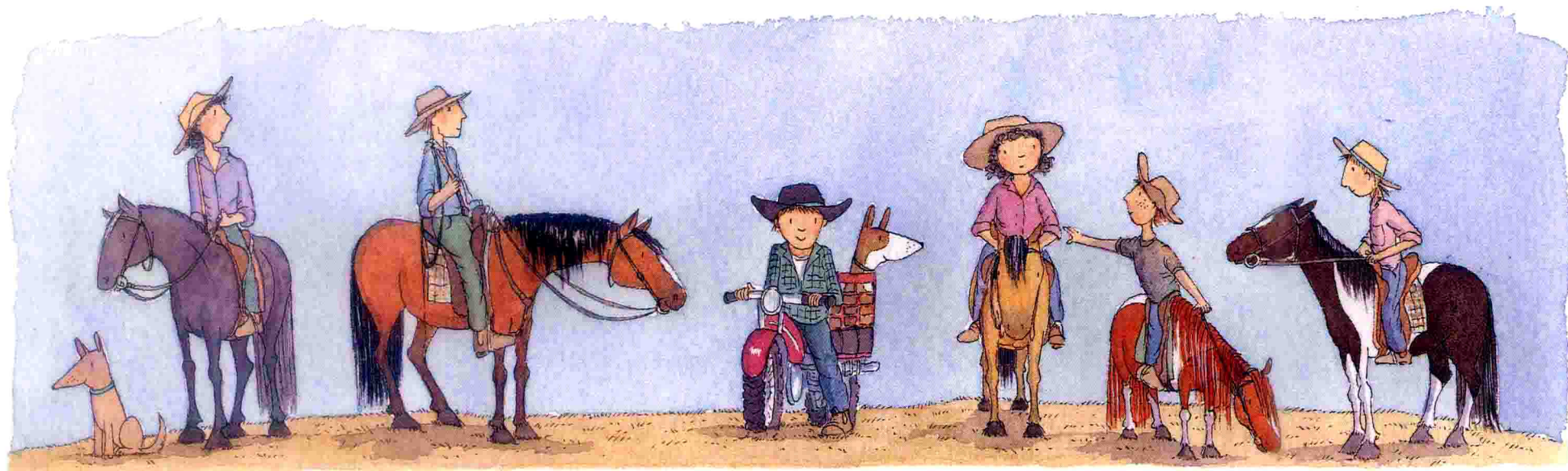
MY FARM

Alison Lester

to Mum and Dad, for a wonderful childhood



When I was little I lived on a farm overlooking the sea.
Through summer, autumn, winter, and spring we worked on the land together,



Mum,

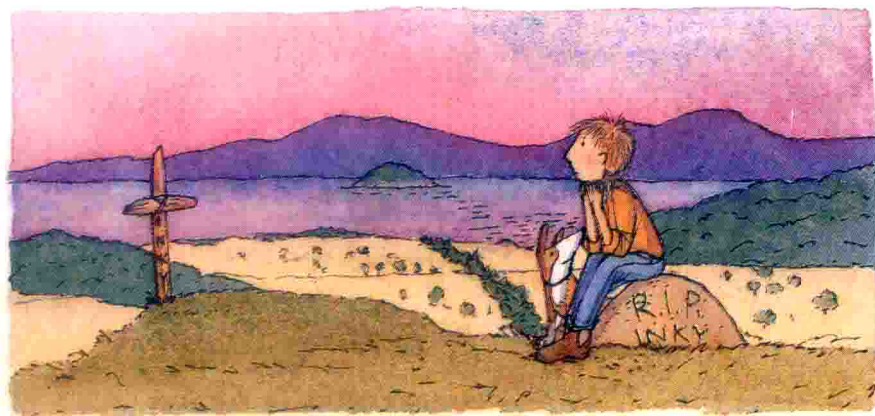
Dad,

Charlie,

Kate,

Jake,

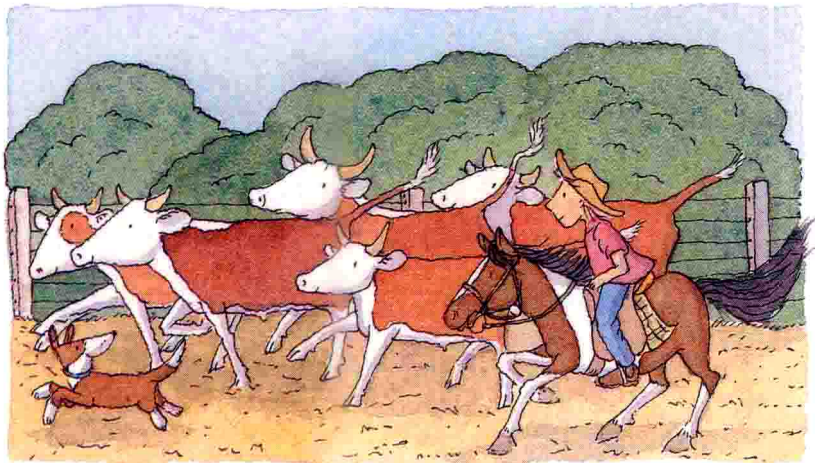
and me.



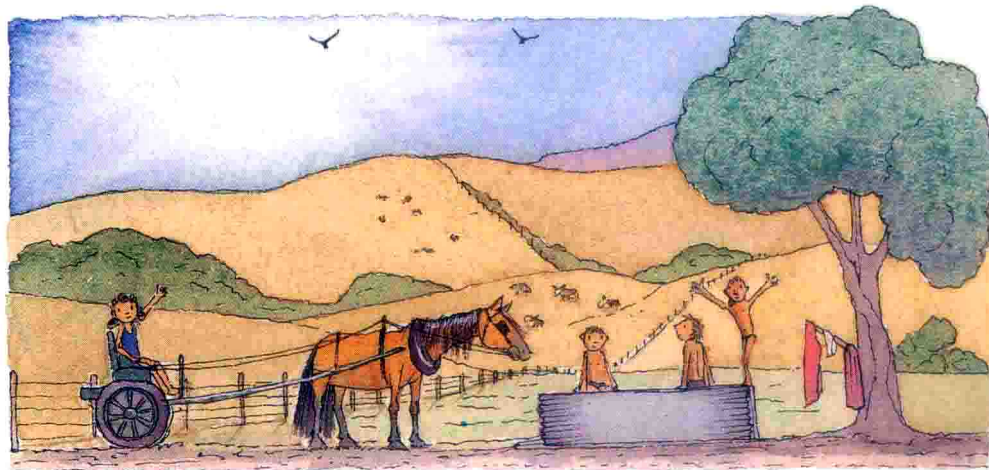
We rode our horses every day and loved them like friends.

The year my old pony died, Charlie let me ride his horse while he used the motor bike. Tricky was all right, but I really missed Inky.

In summer we checked the water troughs to make sure the thirsty cattle had enough to drink. Sometimes we drove the old jinker and stopped for a swim along the way.



On market days huge trucks backed up to the dusty stockyards. Dogs barked, bullocks bellowed, whips cracked, and we yelled 'Oi! Oi! Oi!', 'Get up!', and 'Hooooah!' to drive the cattle up the ramp.

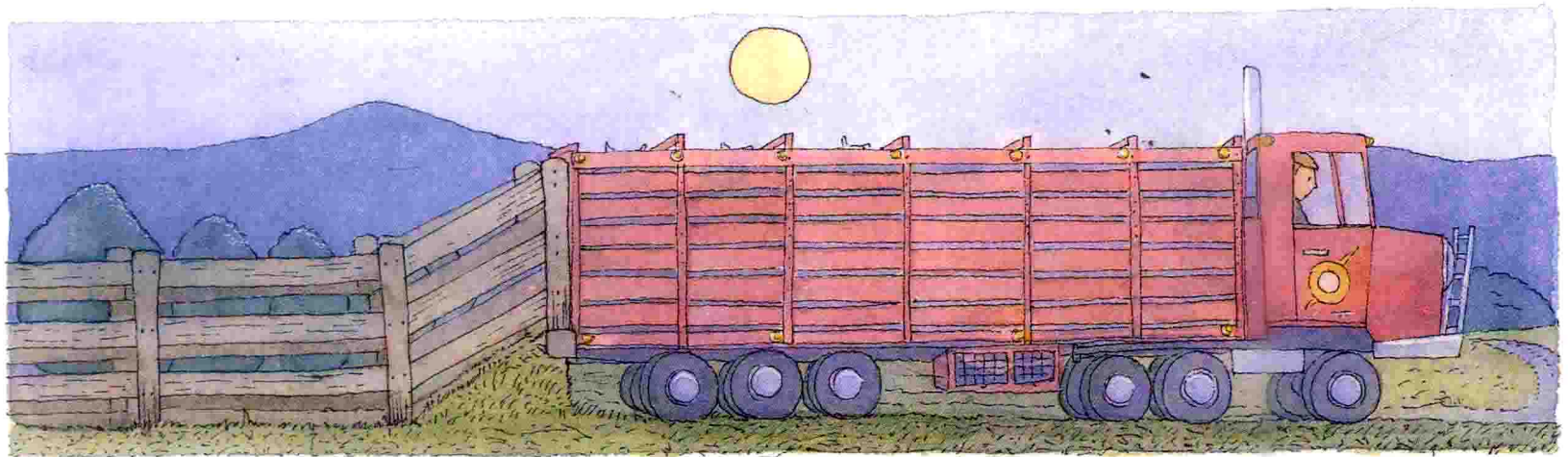


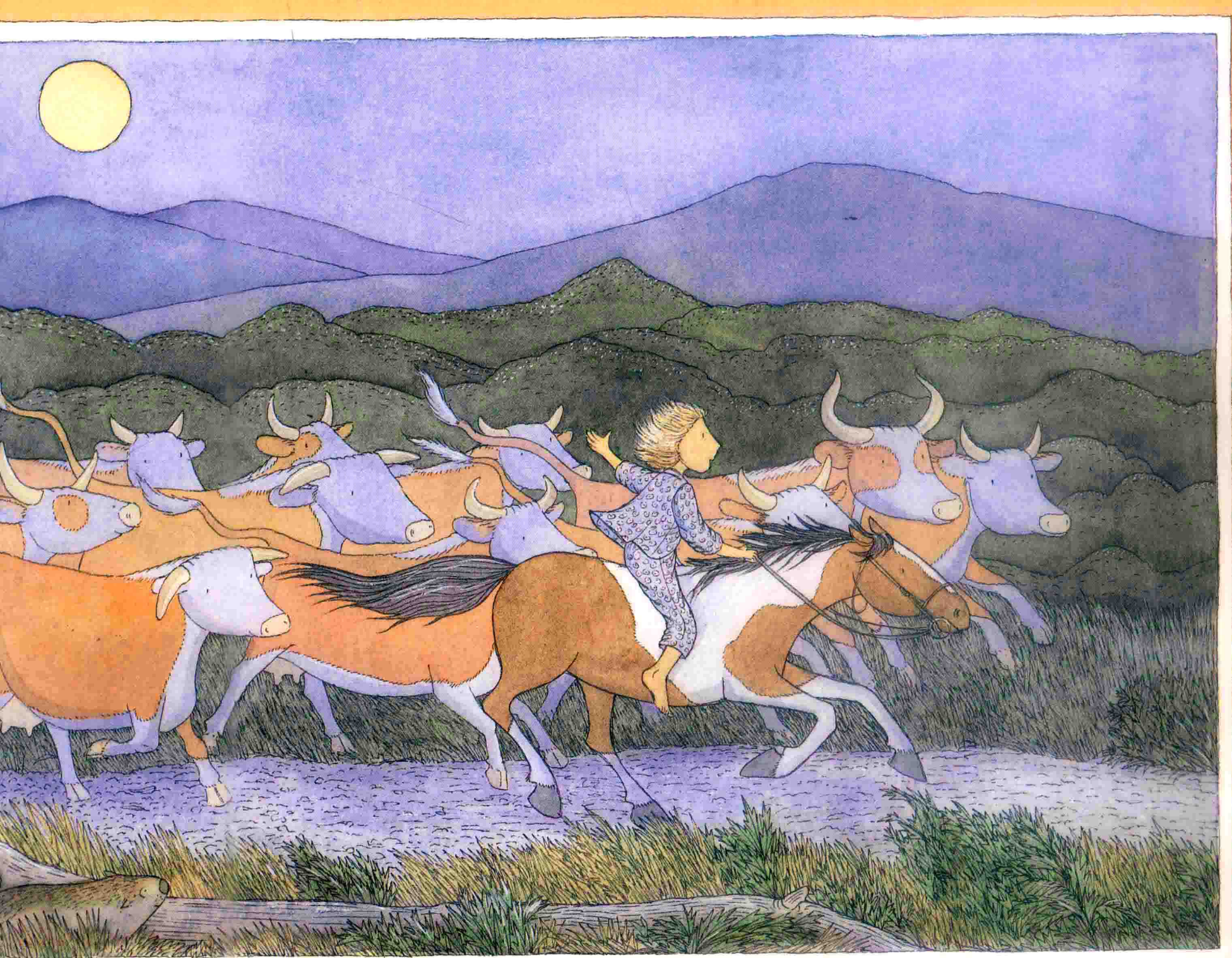
We shifted mobs of cattle to better pasture and sorted out some that were ready to sell.



One moonlit night a truck arrived with some new cows. I went up to the yards with my father to unload them. Something spooked the cattle, and in a flash they were racing down the road. I chased them on Tricky, riding bareback in my pyjamas, and finally brought them home.

I felt like a real hero.

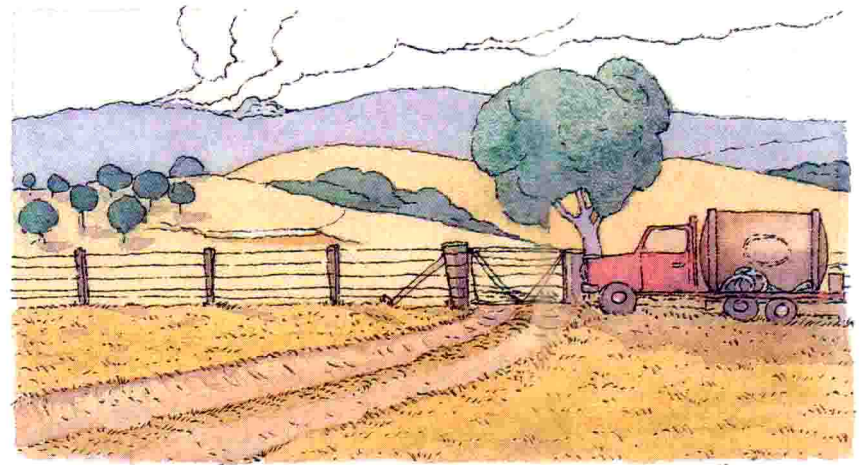




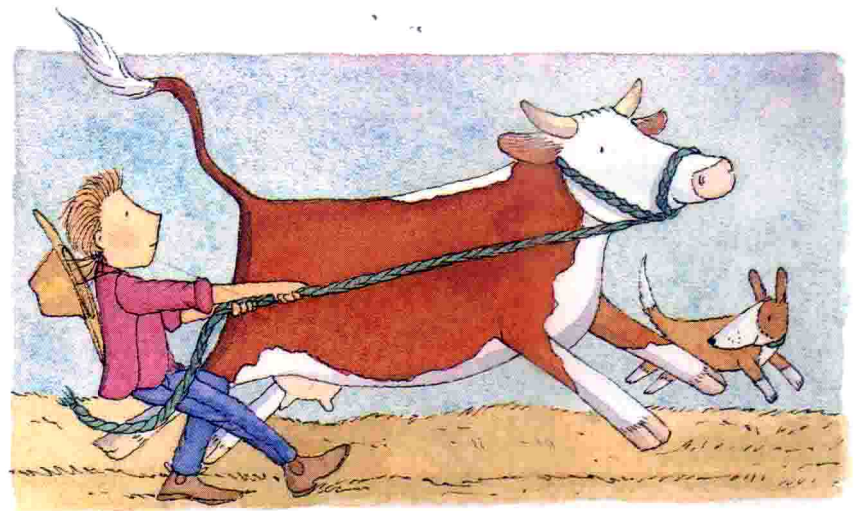
Late in summer, bushfires sometimes broke out in the hills. The smoke cast an eerie yellow light over our farm. We kept a water tank on the truck in case one of the paddocks caught fire.

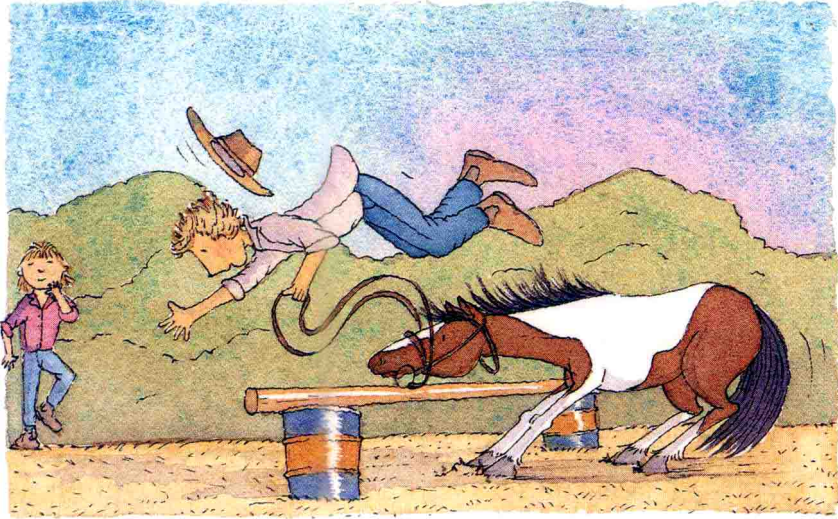


The local show was always a big day for us. It took weeks to get ready. We washed the stud bulls and cows, and taught them how to parade.



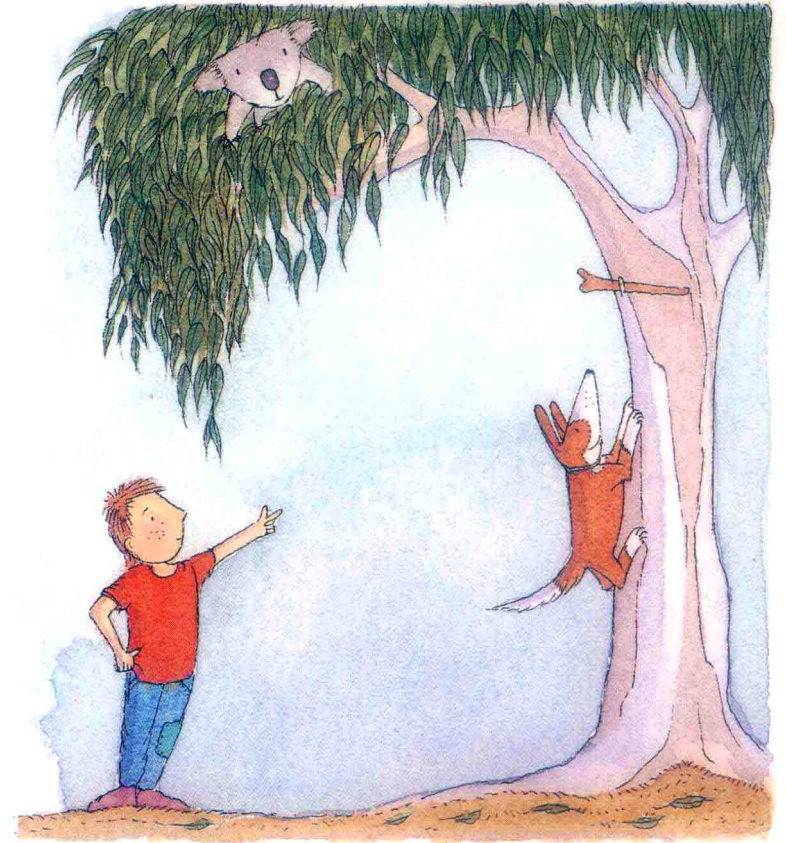
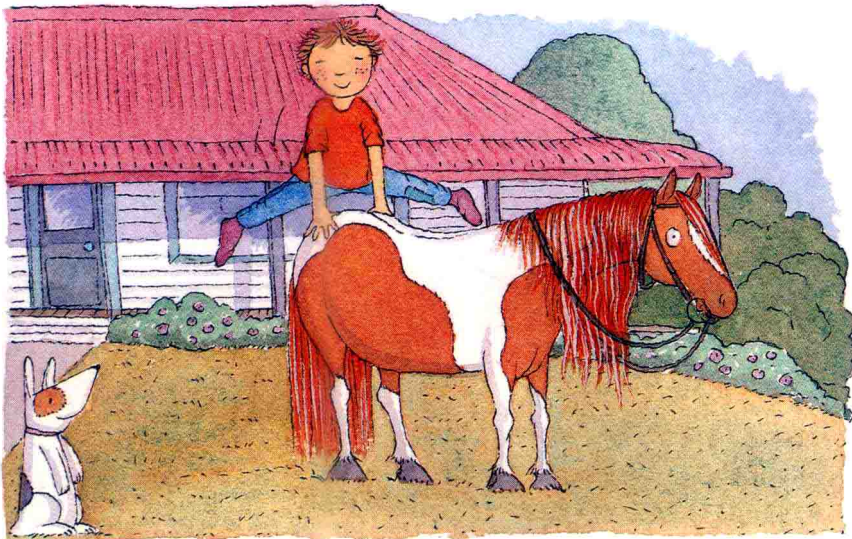
Blackberries were ripe for picking then, and the apples in the orchard were crunchy and delicious.





We brushed our ponies until they shone, and plaited their manes and tails. Dad taught Tricky to jump.

Jake practised his tricks on Bella...

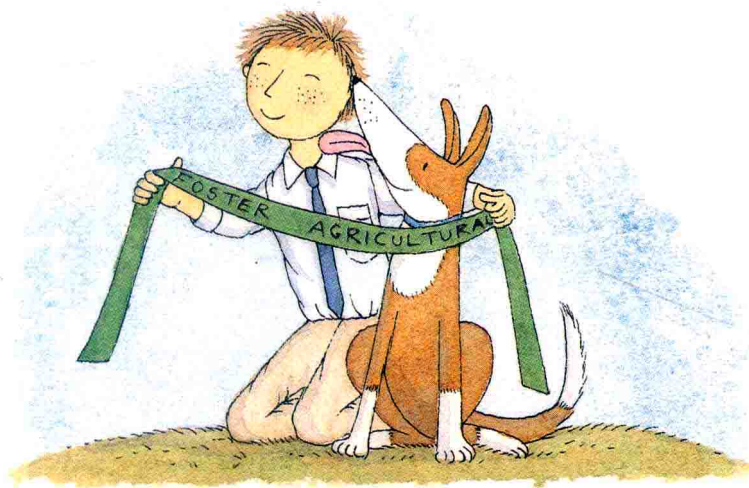


...and trained Sadie for the dog high-jump.

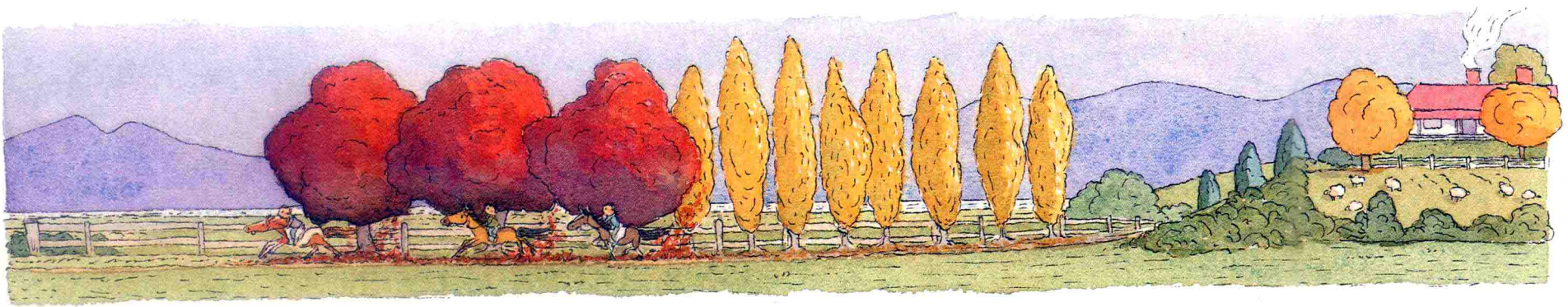
My best friend Maggie double-dinked with me,
and we won the Quietest Pony Contest.
But Charlie took the ribbon because Tricky
was his horse.

I really wished I had my own pony.

Dad's bull was the Grand Champion that year,
and Sadie came third in the dog high-jump.

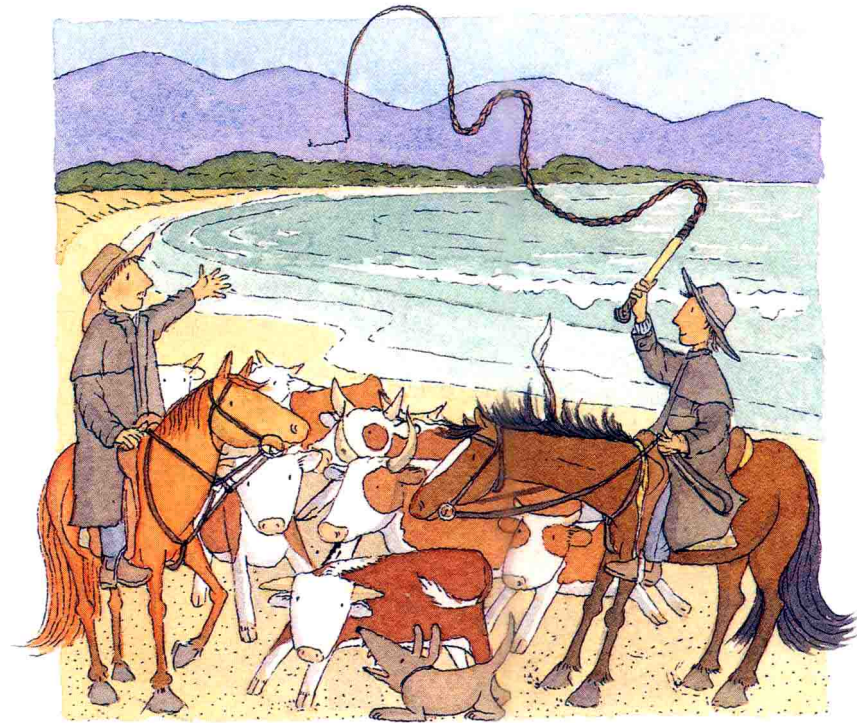




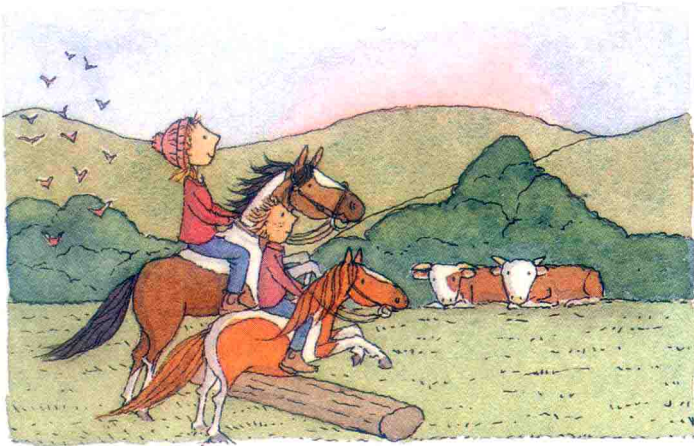


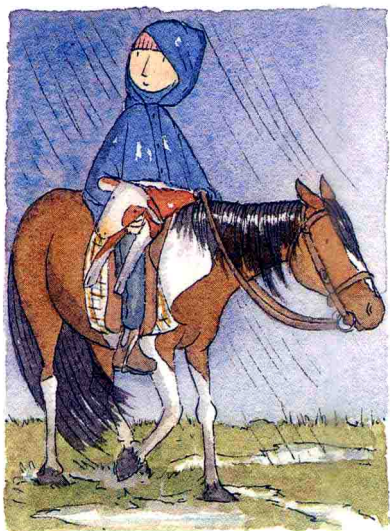
In autumn the trees turned orange and red. We galloped through the fallen leaves, sending them spinning behind us.

New cattle arrived from the Snowy Mountains, and Dad and Uncle Jack drove them down the beach to spend winter on the bush run.

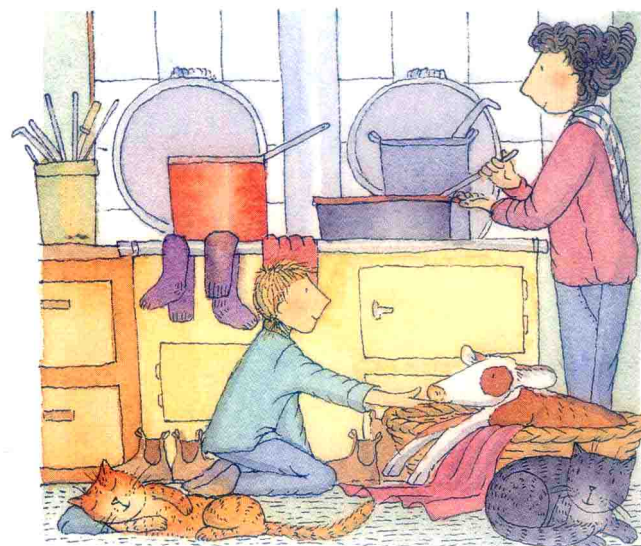


When the cows began to calve we had to check them at least twice a day.

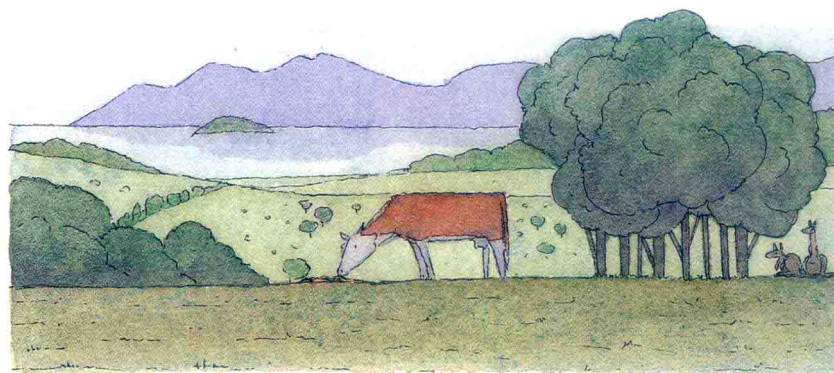
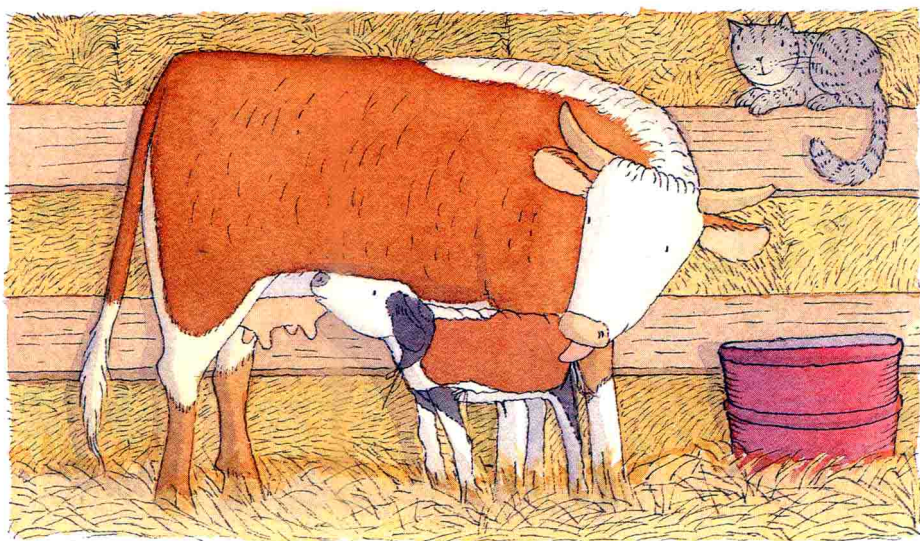




Once I found an abandoned calf,
and carried him home on Tricky.
Mum made a bed for the shivering
baby in front of the stove, and I fed him
warm milk from a bottle. He sucked
my fingers with his raspy tongue.



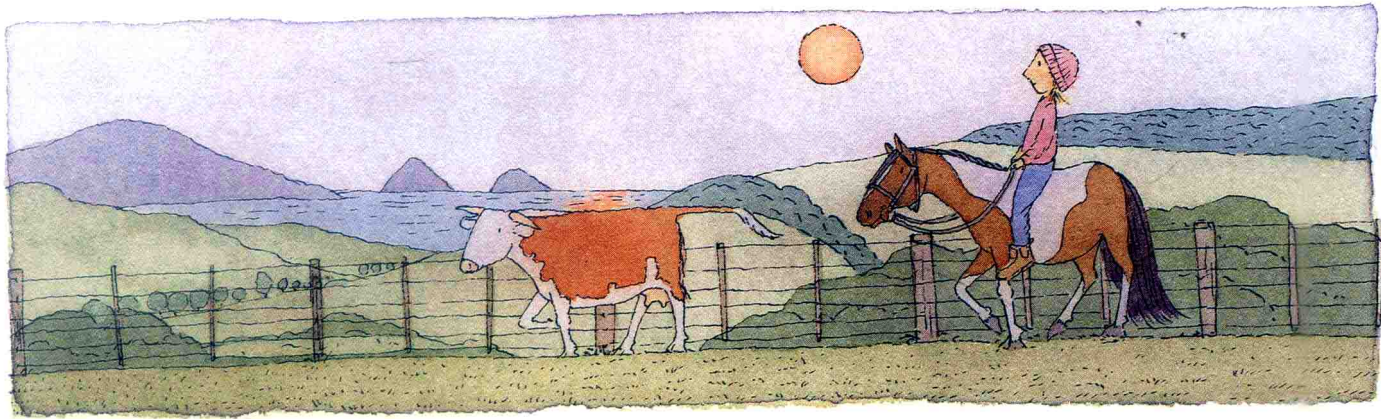
Sometimes a calf died, and we had to find a new
baby for its mother.

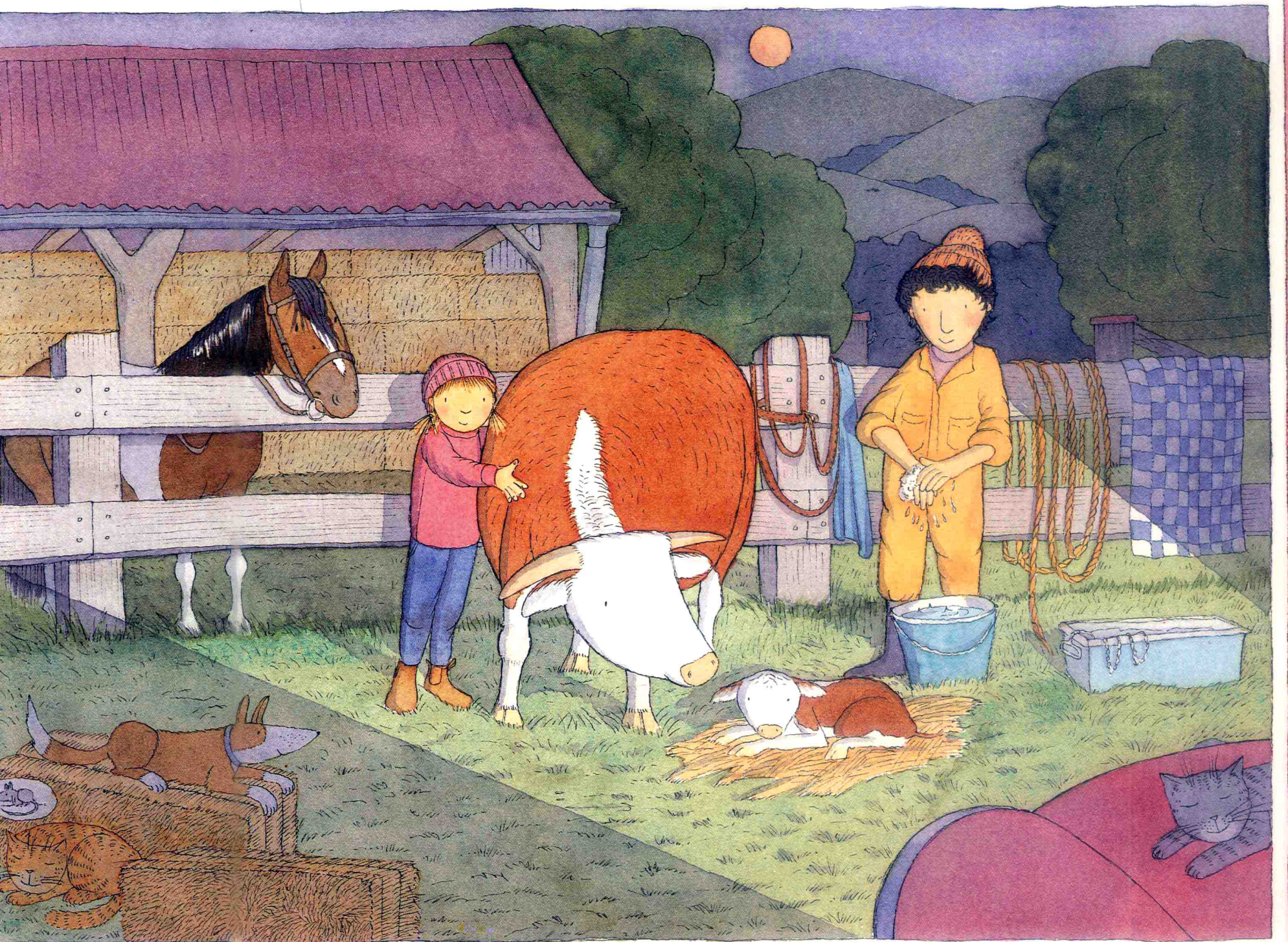


Dad bought an orphan calf from our neighbour,
and dressed it in a jacket made from the dead
calf's skin. The cow recognised the smell of her
own calf, and adopted the orphan.

If a cow needed help to give birth, we'd drive her slowly to the yards.
Mum delivered the calf, just like a doctor delivering a baby.

I was the assistant, patting the cow and soothing her with my voice.
Sometimes I felt frightened, but it was always thrilling to see
the tiny newborn calf.





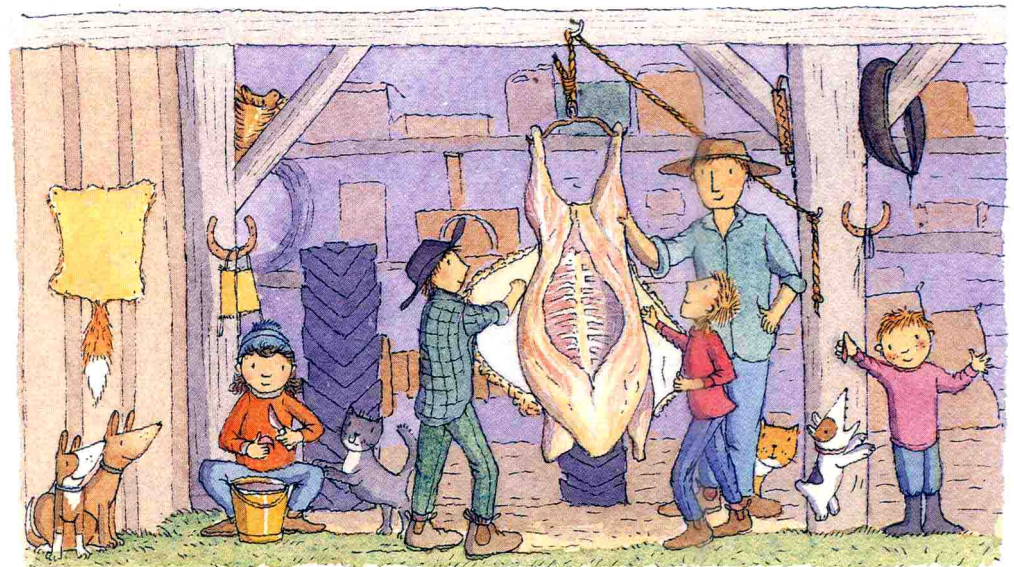
After the first autumn rains, mushrooms popped up in the paddocks. We would trudge for miles, with knives and buckets, searching for a whopper or a perfect fairy ring.



We drove the cattle to the yards again, to be dipped and drenched. The mud was as sticky as glue. Once Kate got so stuck she came right out of her boots.



We didn't need to buy much meat from the butcher because we had our own. None of us liked to be around when Dad killed a sheep, but we all loved to help with the cutting-up. We punched off the skin and investigated the insides. The dogs and cats waited for titbits.





On frosty mornings the mist crept into the valleys, and I'd pretend we lived on a Norwegian fiord.



When rainstorms flooded the flat country, Jake and I loved racing through the water. I always got splattered with mud because Tricky was so slow. I thought about the quicksilver pony I'd like to have.

By the time we reached home we had such cold hands Mum had to unbuckle our bridles.

