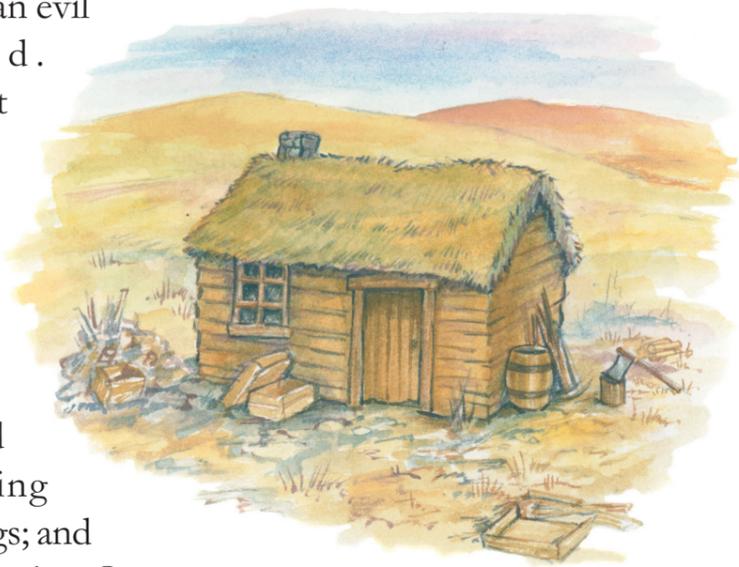


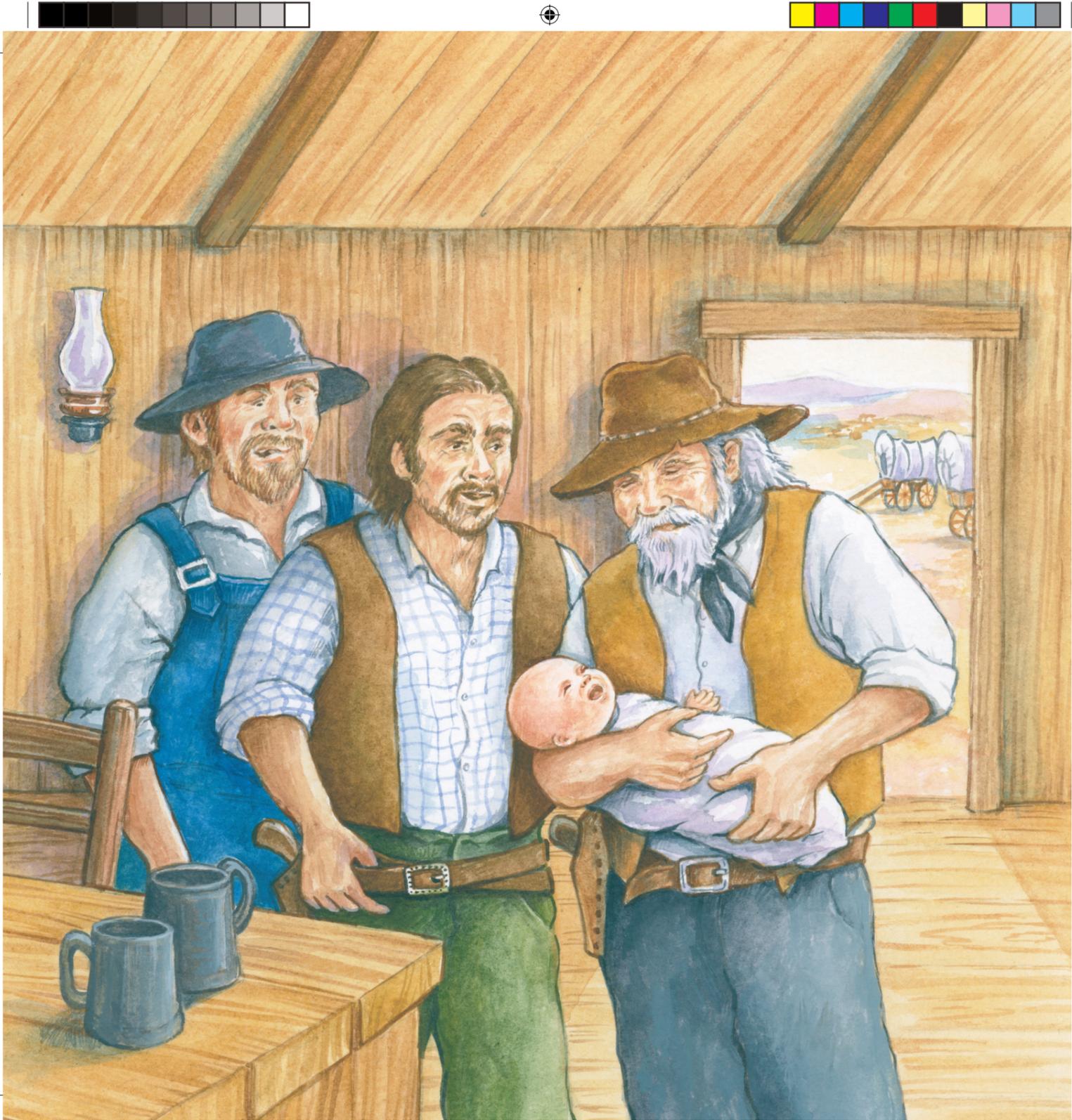


It was an evil place where the miners camped and an evil life they lived. The settlement consisted of some broken down shacks, a couple of taverns, and every man carried a knife. Many of them were desperate characters who had good reasons for disappearing west with the digging gangs; and of all the settlements Roaring Camp was the most notorious for drunkenness, murder and general wickedness.



The nearest medical post was miles down the track so no one knew what to do when, one day, a tired girl on the point of collapse, staggered into the settlement and begged shelter. They laid her on a mattress in a deserted shack, and the girl closed her eyes and turned her face to the wall, while they went in search of help. But when they came back it was too late. The tired girl had died, leaving a wailing newborn daughter with no clue as to where she had come from or where she was going.







Once again no one knew what to do. They attended to her as best they could and buried her in soft earth down by the river. Someone suggested putting the child on the next truck from the mine and sending it down to the nuns; but no truck was leaving for three days, and the baby was wailing bitterly. They were staring at it helplessly when, to everyone's surprise, old Charlie strode through the middle of the group, and picked up the dirty, wailing bundle.

'Leave her to me,' he said abruptly. 'I've reared a young'un before now. You, Tom, find the shepherd on the hill over yonder, and tell him to bring some milk mighty quick, and you, Jo, go down to the trading store and don't come back without a baby's bottle.'

The men were amazed. Charlie was probably the oldest man in the camp and his shack was if anything the dirtiest. Lonely, grizzled and despondent he seldom joined in the wild parties of the young men. He would sit for hours staring out over the scarred landscape, chewing on his pipe. He seldom spoke, and no one knew where he came from or what he was fleeing from. A strange, remote character was Old Charlie, and no one cared to cross him.

