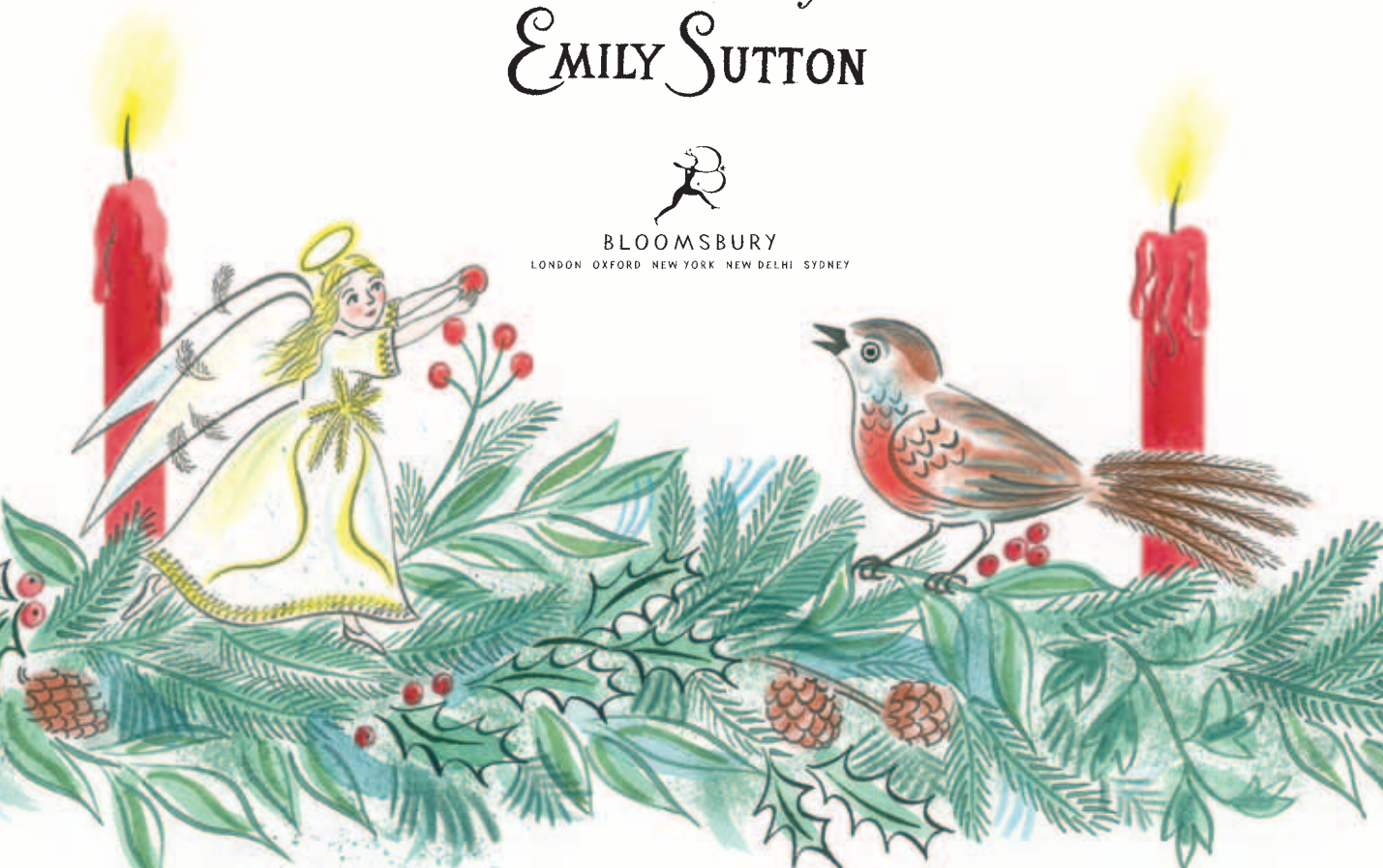

KATHERINE RUNDELL
ONE CHRISTMAS WISH
Illustrated by EMILY SUTTON
BLOOMSBURY

One Christmas Wish

Katherine Rundell

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Emily Sutton

BLOOMSBURY
LONDON OXFORD NEW YORK NEW DELHI SYDNEY





It was Christmas Eve, and Theodore was fighting a cardboard box. The box was winning. Someone had been very enthusiastic in their use of packing tape. Someone had thought it was important that the box stayed safe.

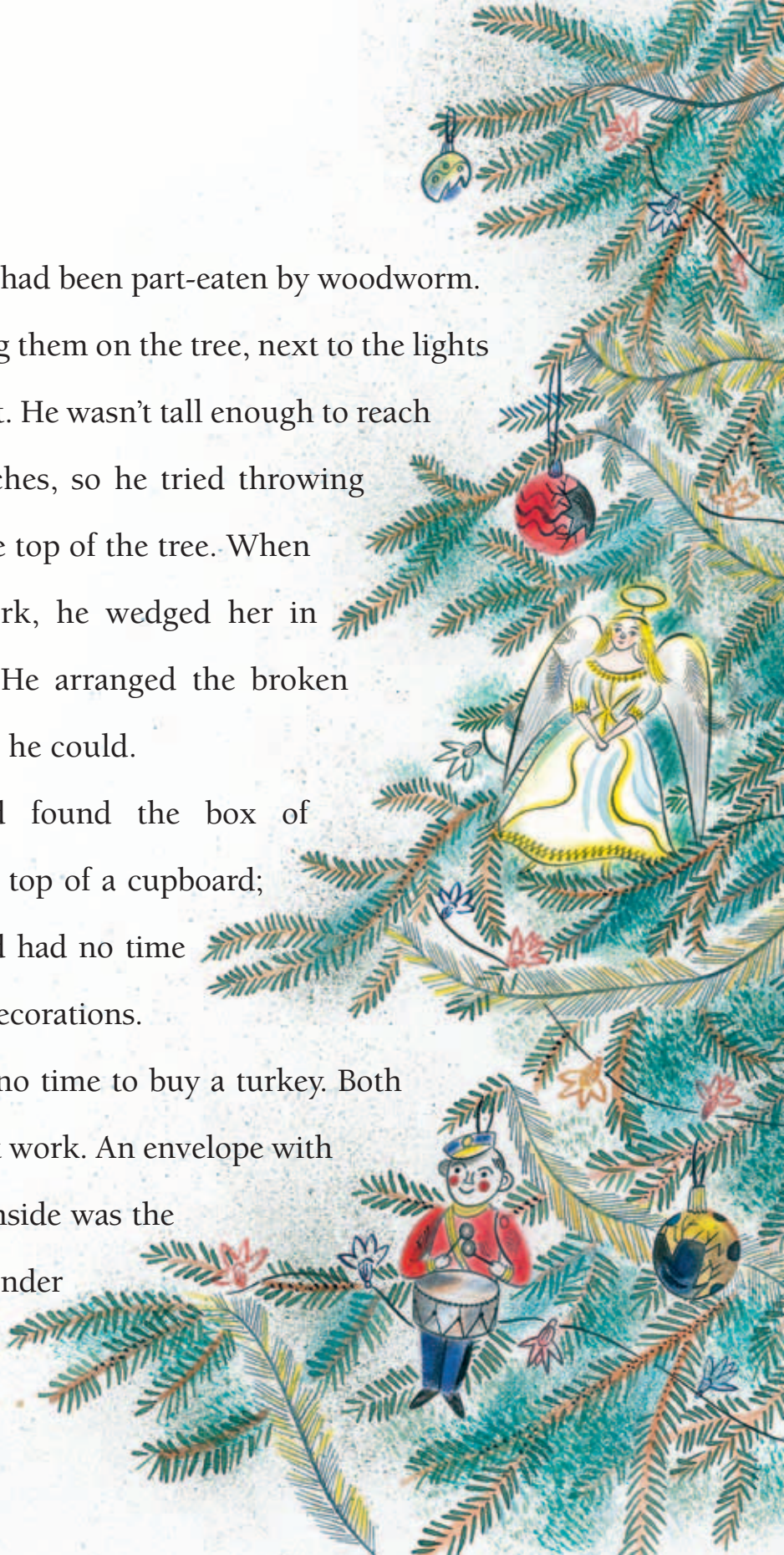
The cotton wool was as old as the decorations themselves; it smelt of spices, and old perfume. Most of the decorations were baubles, and most of the baubles had cracked in half. Theo frowned as he took them out. 'You should not be able to cut yourself on Christmas,' he muttered. 'That's not in any of the Christmas carols.'

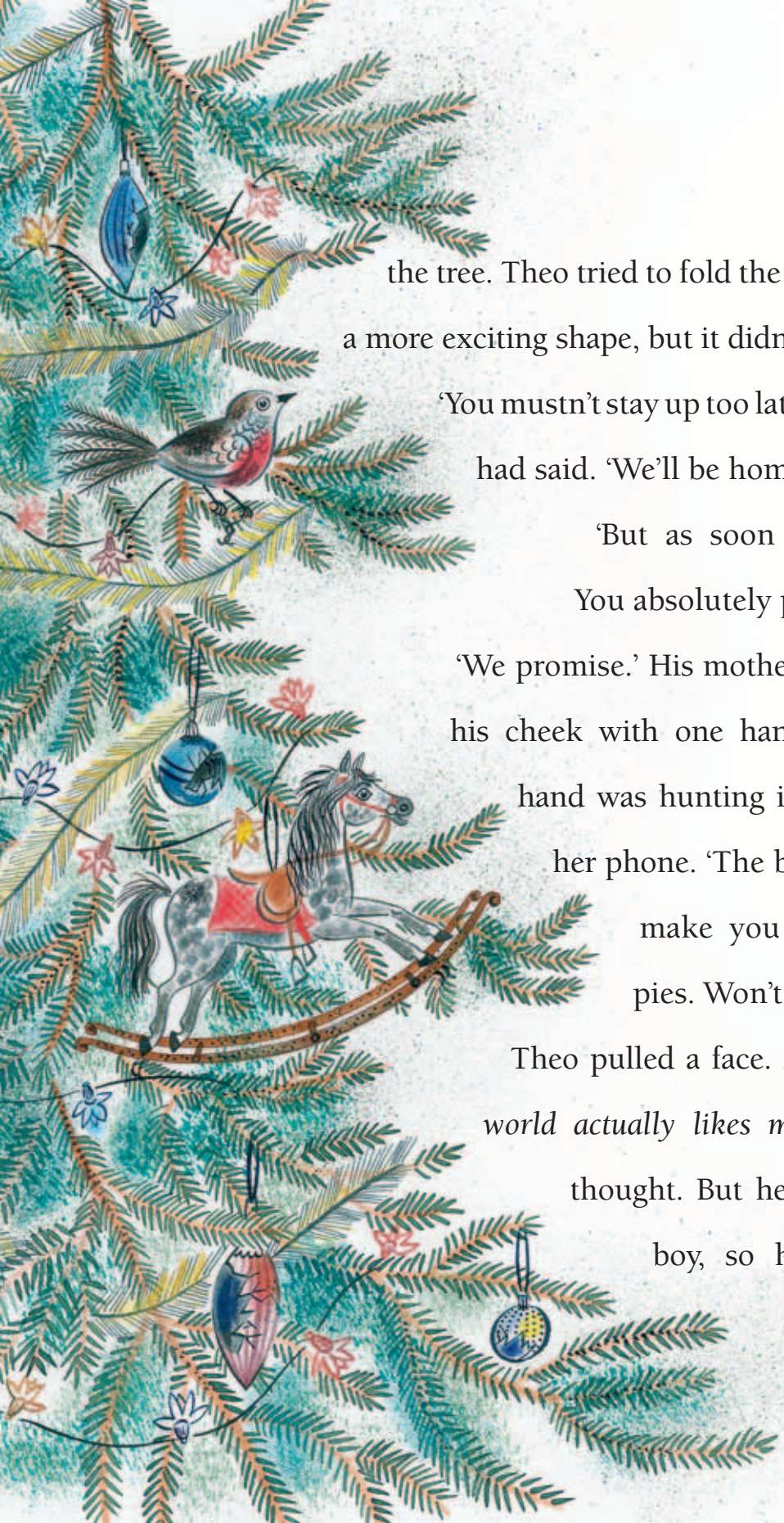
But at the bottom of the box there were four decorations that were different: a rocking horse, a robin, a tin soldier with a drum, and an angel. The angel's wings were moulting, and the soldier's drum had rusted. The robin had developed a bald patch, and the rocking

horse's rockers had been part-eaten by woodworm.

Theo hung them on the tree, next to the lights that didn't light. He wasn't tall enough to reach the high branches, so he tried throwing the angel at the top of the tree. When that didn't work, he wedged her in the branches. He arranged the broken baubles as best he could.

Theo had found the box of decorations on top of a cupboard; his parents had had no time to buy new decorations. They had had no time to buy a turkey. Both of them were at work. An envelope with gift vouchers inside was the only present under





the tree. Theo tried to fold the envelope into a more exciting shape, but it didn't help much.

'You mustn't stay up too late,' his parents had said. 'We'll be home tonight.'

'But as soon as you can? You absolutely promise?'

'We promise.' His mother had stroked his cheek with one hand. Her other hand was hunting in her bag for her phone. 'The babysitter will make you some mince pies. Won't that be nice?'

Theo pulled a face. *Nobody in the world actually likes mince pies*, he thought. But he was a polite boy, so he only said,

‘Why isn’t Mrs Goodyere babysitting me?’

‘She didn’t give a reason,’ his father had said. ‘She only said she couldn’t tonight. And she’s getting rather old, anyway. The neighbours say she’s becoming a little peculiar.’

‘I like her. Actually,’ he said, ‘I love her.’ Sometimes Mrs Goodyere talked to herself, but she gave him chocolate cake with cheese, which was surprisingly delicious, and sang to him at bedtime.

His parents had asked the babysitter to help Theo put up the decorations, but she had fallen asleep at the kitchen table with her nose pressed against her phone.

Theo swallowed. He looked out of the window, because it was less difficult than looking at the tree.

As he looked, he saw a star. It was soaring across the sky, blinking red and green.



For the real Theodore

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