

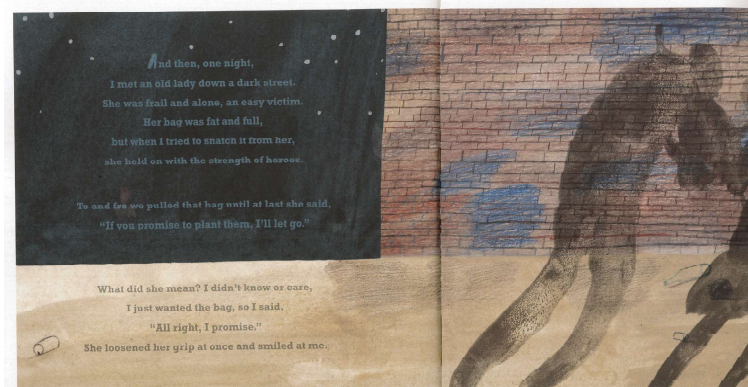


Nothing grew. Everything was broken. No one ever smiled.



People had grown as mean and hard and ugly as their city,  
and I was mean and hard and ugly too.

I lived by stealing from those who had almost as little as I did.  
My heart was as shrivelled as the dead trees in the park.



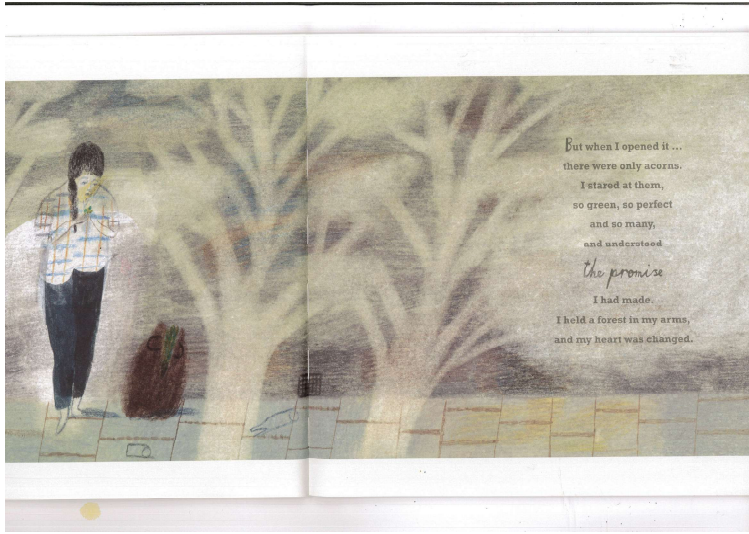
And then, one night,  
I met an old lady down a dark street.  
She was frail and alone, an easy victim.  
Her bag was fat and full,  
but when I tried to snatch it from her,  
she held on with the strength of horses.

To end for we pulled that bag until at last she said,  
"If you promise to plant them, I'll let go."

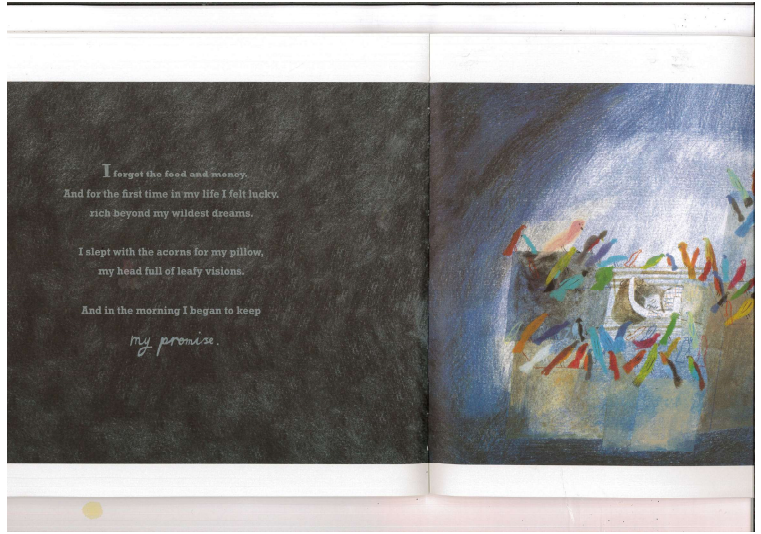
What did she mean? I didn't know or care,  
I just wanted the bag, so I said,  
"All right, I promise."  
She loosened her grip at once and smiled at me.



I ran off without a backward look,  
thinking of the food and money in her bag.



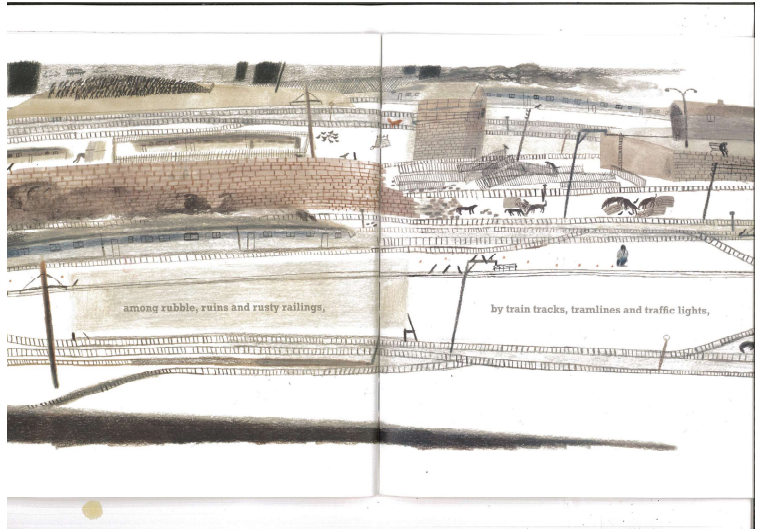
But when I opened it...  
there were only acorns.  
I stared at them,  
so green, so perfect  
and so many,  
and understood  
*the promise*  
I had made.  
I held a forest in my arms,  
and my heart was changed.



I forgot the food and money,  
And for the first time in my life I felt lucky,  
rich beyond my wildest dreams.  
I slept with the acorns for my pillow,  
my head full of leafy visions.  
And in the morning I began to keep  
*my promise.*



I planted *hacido vnade, an roundabouts,*



among rubble, ruins and rusty railings,

by train tracks, tramlines and traffic lights,



In abandoned parks  
and gardens laced with broken glass,  
behind factories and shopping malls,  
at bus stops, cafes, blocks of flats

I pushed aside the mean and hard and ugly  
and I planted, planted, planted.



Nothing changed at first.

The gritty wind still scratched the parched, cracked streets.  
The people scowled and scuttled to their homes like cockroaches.  
But slowly, slowly, slowly shoots of green began to show...



TREES!

Fivet have

and there,

then everywhere.

People came onto the streets to see.

They touched the leaves in wonder,  
and they smiled.

They took tea together  
by the tiny trees.

They talked and laughed ...



and pretty soon they were planting too. Trees and flowers,

fruit and vegetables, in parks and gardens, on balconies and rooftops.

