

Down at the very bottom of the world, there's a huge island that's almost completely covered in snow and ice. It's called Antarctica, and it's the coldest, windiest place on Earth.



The weather's bad enough there in summer, but in winter it's really horrible.

It's hard to imagine anything actually living there.



But wait ...
what's that shape over there?
It can't be.

Yes!

It's a penguin!

It's not just any old penguin either.
It's a male Emperor penguin
(the biggest penguin in the world),
and he's doing a Very Important Job.


He's looking after his egg.

Male Emperor penguins are about 1.3 metres tall.

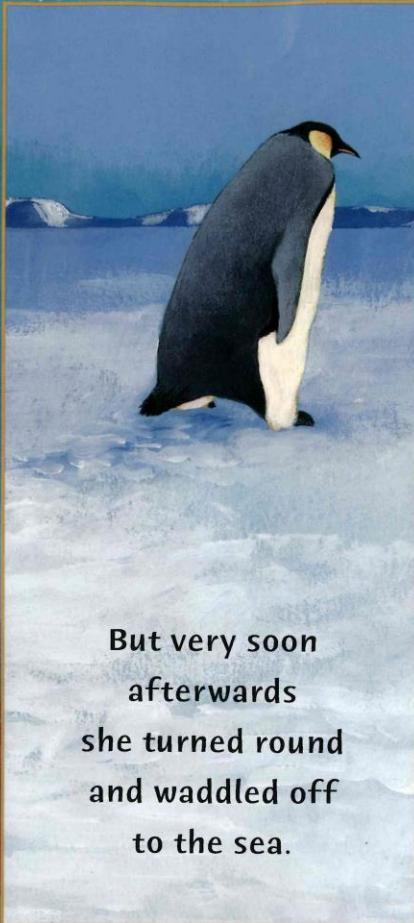
The females are a little smaller.



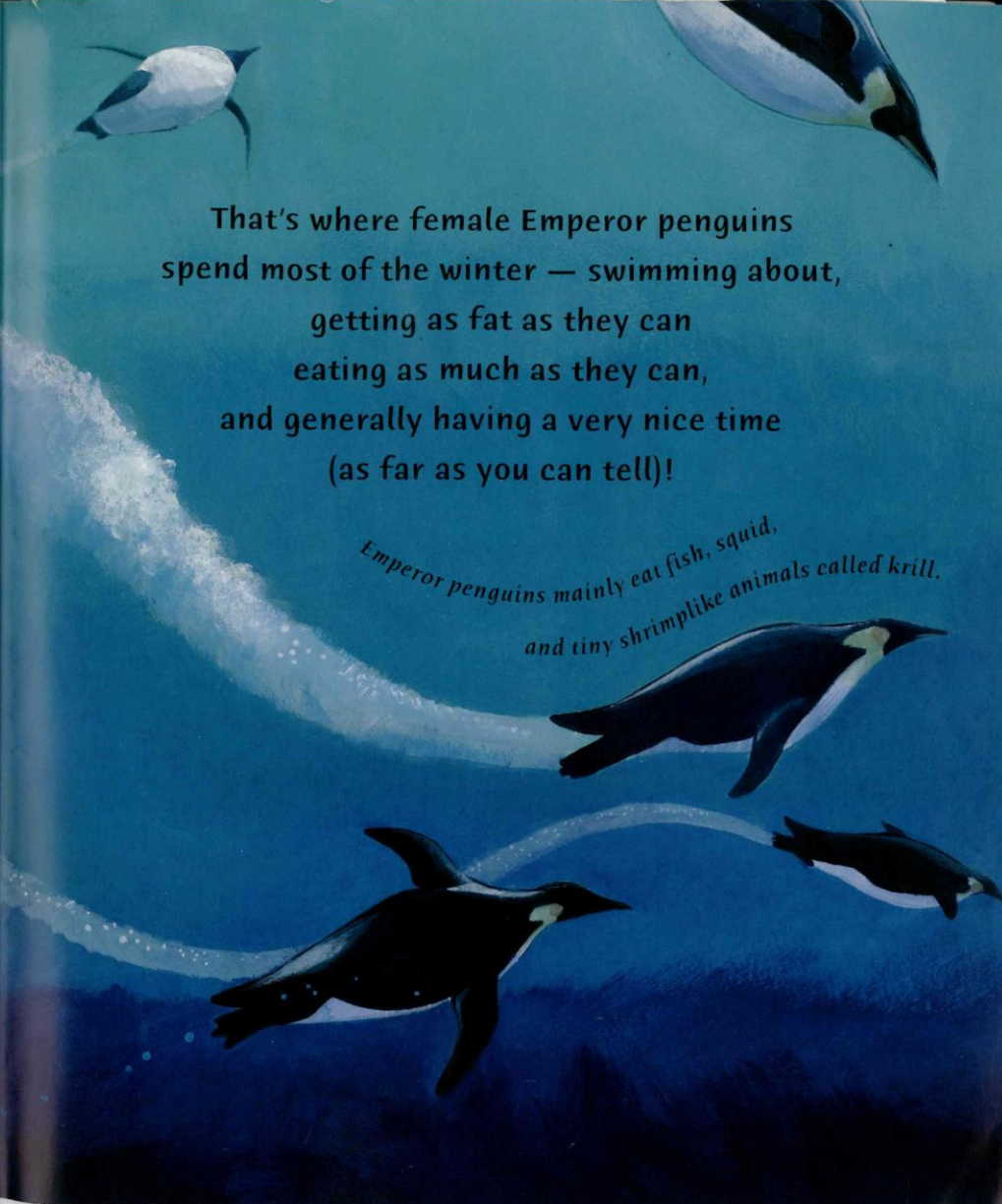
He didn't lay it himself, of course.



His mate did that
a few weeks ago.

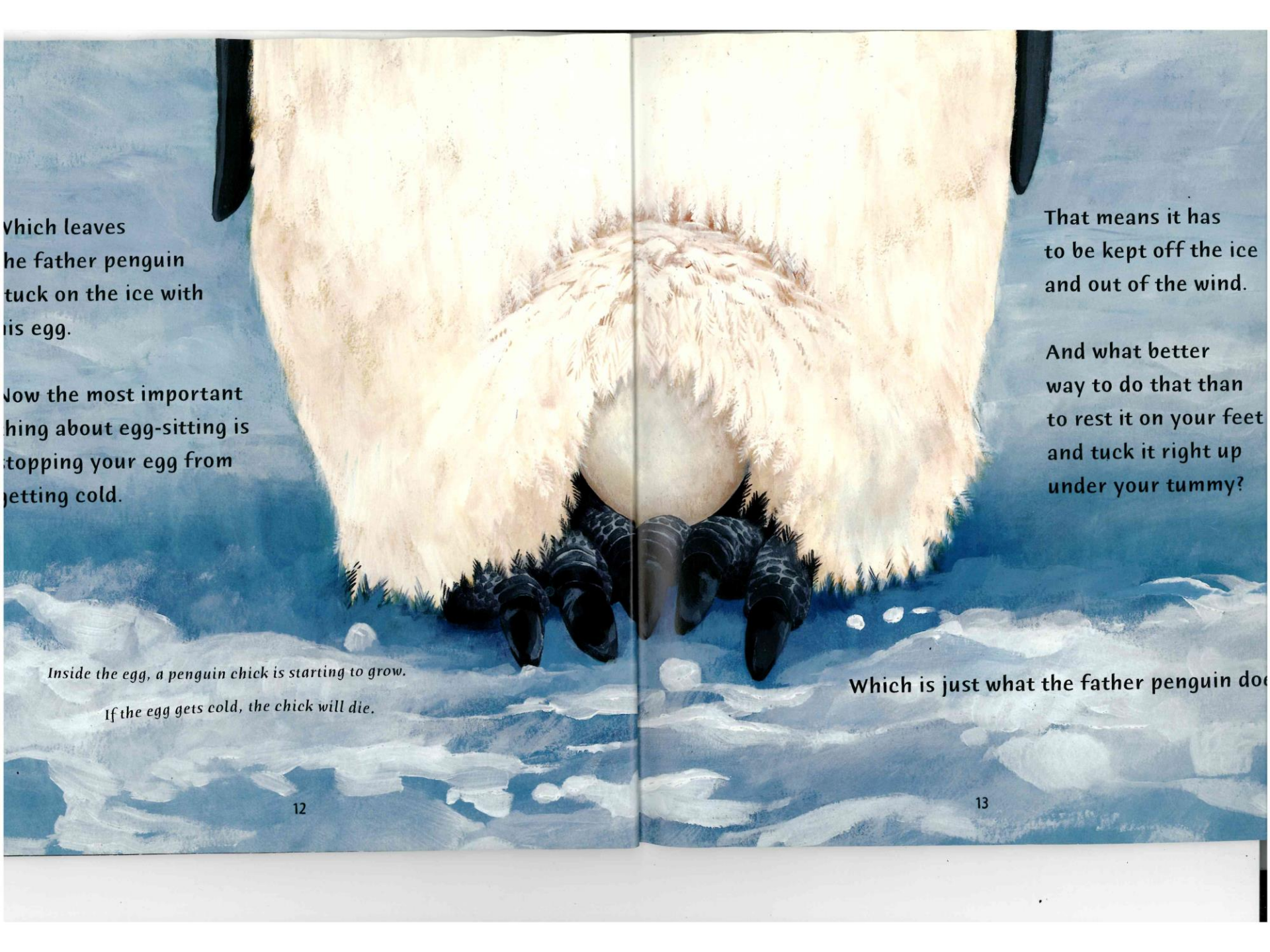


But very soon
afterwards
she turned round
and waddled off
to the sea.



That's where female Emperor penguins
spend most of the winter — swimming about,
getting as fat as they can
eating as much as they can,
and generally having a very nice time
(as far as you can tell)!

*Emperor penguins mainly eat fish, squid,
and tiny shrimplike animals called krill.*



Which leaves
the father penguin
tuck on the ice with
his egg.

Now the most important
thing about egg-sitting is
stopping your egg from
getting cold.

Inside the egg, a penguin chick is starting to grow.

If the egg gets cold, the chick will die.

That means it has
to be kept off the ice
and out of the wind.

And what better
way to do that than
to rest it on your feet
and tuck it right up
under your tummy?

Which is just what the father penguin does.

that's how he'll stay for two whole months,
his egg is ready to hatch.



Can you imagine it?
Standing around in the freezing cold
with an egg on your feet
for **two whole** months?



*Female Emperor penguins lay one egg in May or June
(which is the beginning of winter in Antarctica).*

What's more, there's nothing for
the father penguin to eat on land.



And because he's egg-sitting,
he can't go off to the sea to feed.



So that means two whole months
with an egg on your feet

and no supper!



Or breakfast



or lunch



or tea.

I don't know about you



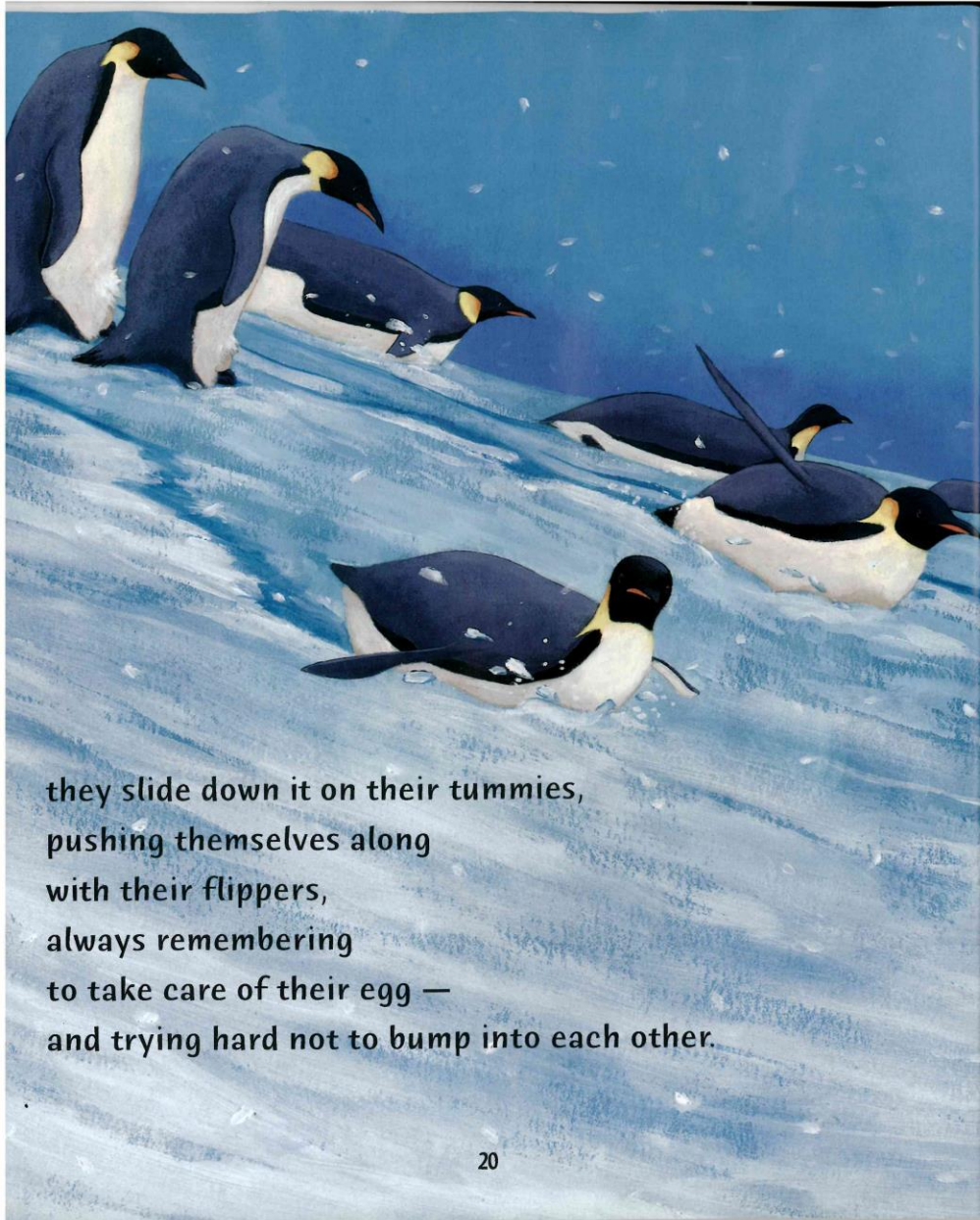
but I'd be **very very** miserable.

Luckily, the penguins don't seem to mind too much. They've got thick feathers and lots of fat under their skin to help keep them warm.

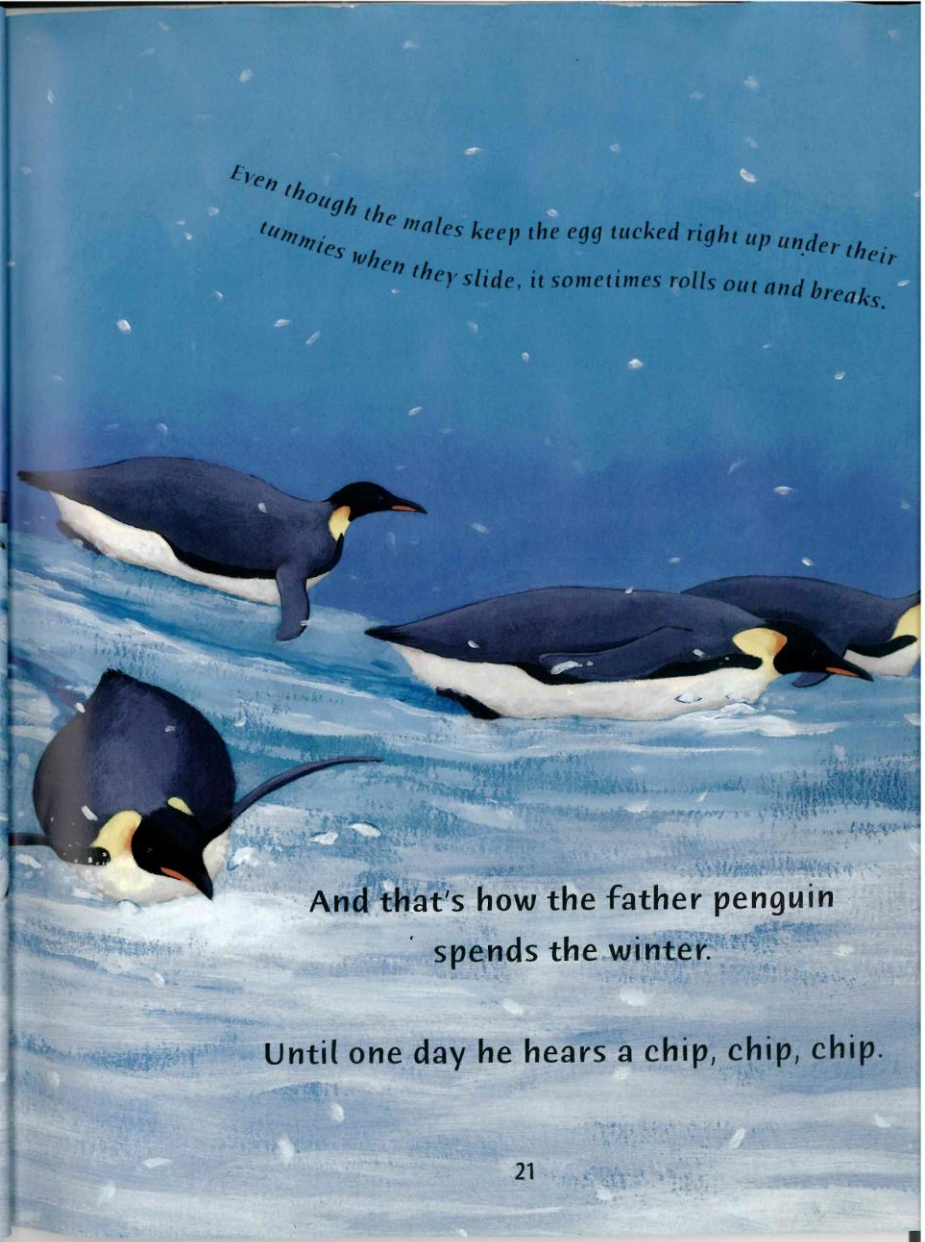
And when it gets really cold and windy, they all snuggle up together and shuffle over the ice in a great big huddle.

Most of the time the huddle trundles along very very slowly.

But **sometimes,**
when the penguins get to a particularly slippery slope ..



they slide down it on their tummies,
pushing themselves along
with their flippers,
always remembering
to take care of their egg —
and trying hard not to bump into each other.



*Even though the males keep the egg tucked right up under their
tummies when they slide, it sometimes rolls out and breaks.*

And that's how the father penguin
spends the winter.

Until one day he hears a chip, chip, chip.

His egg is starting to hatch.
It takes a day or so, but finally the egg
cracks right open —

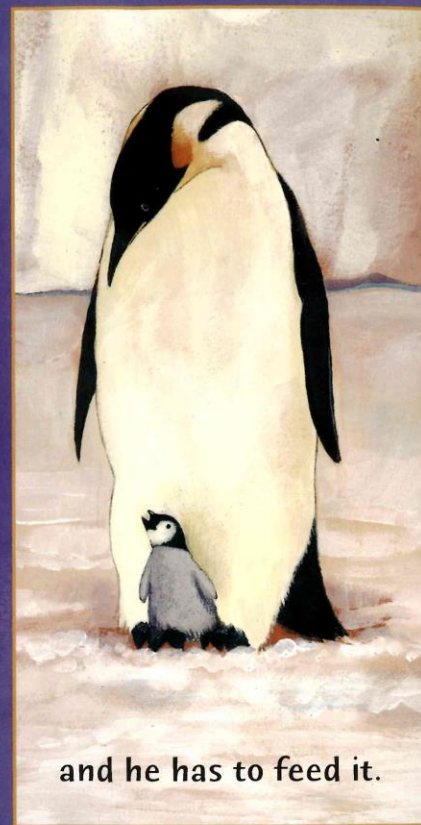


and out pops a penguin chick.

Now the father penguin
has two jobs to do.
He has to keep
the chick warm



and he has to feed it.

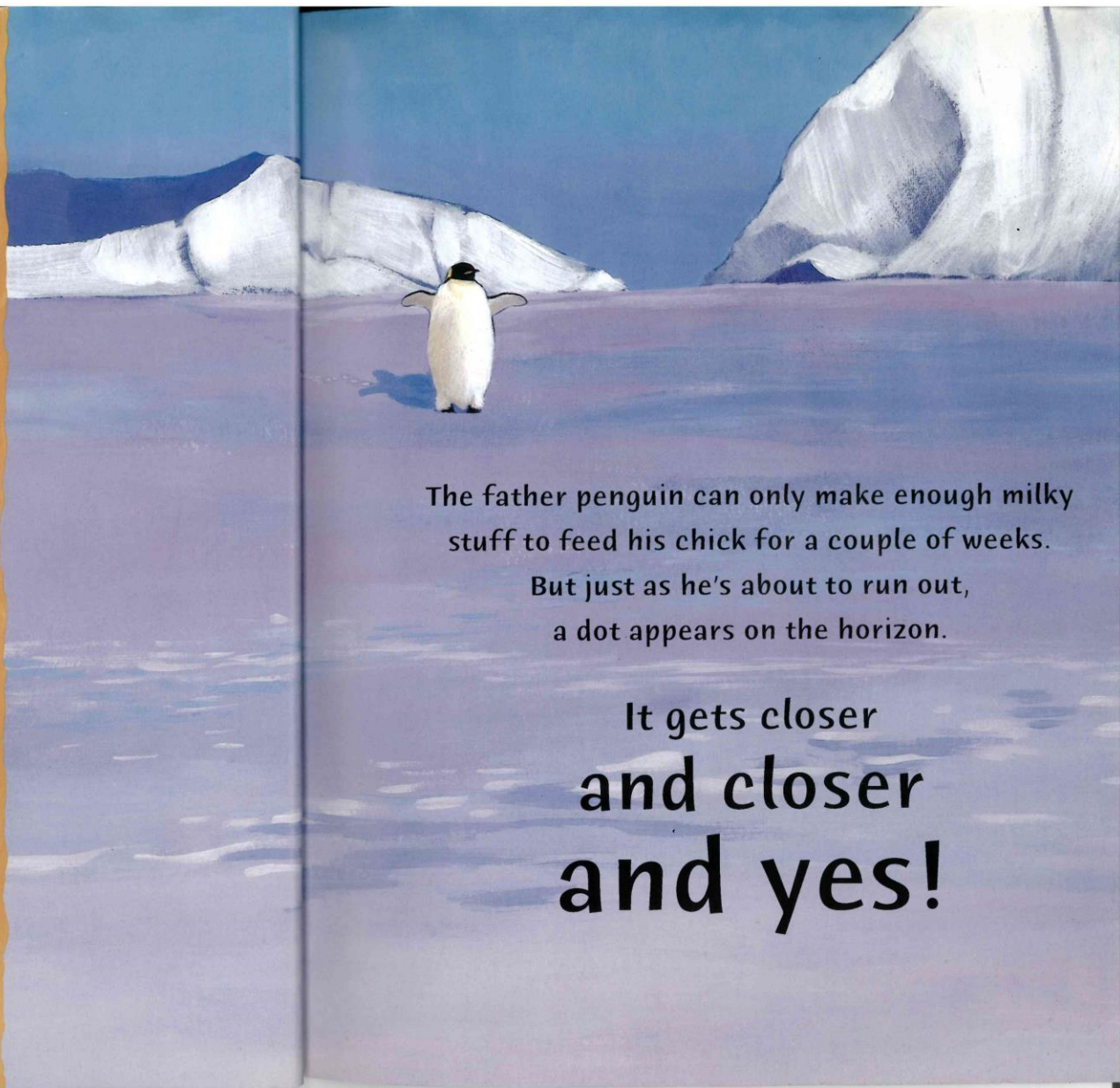


*The chick is only about 15 centimetres tall at first,
and much too small to keep warm by itself.*

But on what? The chick is too small
to be taken off to sea to catch food,
and it can't be left behind on the ice.



Well, deep down in the father
penguin's throat there's a pouch
where he makes something rather
like milk. And that's what he feeds
to his hungry chick.



The father penguin can only make enough milky
stuff to feed his chick for a couple of weeks.

But just as he's about to run out,
a dot appears on the horizon.

It gets closer
and closer
and yes!

It's mum!

She starts trumpeting "hello"
and the father penguin
starts trumpeting "hello"
and the chick whistles.

The racket goes on for hours
and it really does sound as if they're
incredibly pleased to see each other.



Every adult penguin has its own special call, like a fingerprint.

Chicks have their own special whistle, too.

As soon as things have calmed down,
the mother penguin is sick — right
into her chick's mouth!

Yuk,
you may think.

Yum,
thinks the chick.



And it gobbles the lot down.



It's the mother's turn to look after the
chick now, while the father sets off to sea
for a well-earned meal of his own.

About time too!