



ROBERT SMALLS

A Not-Too-Tall Tale

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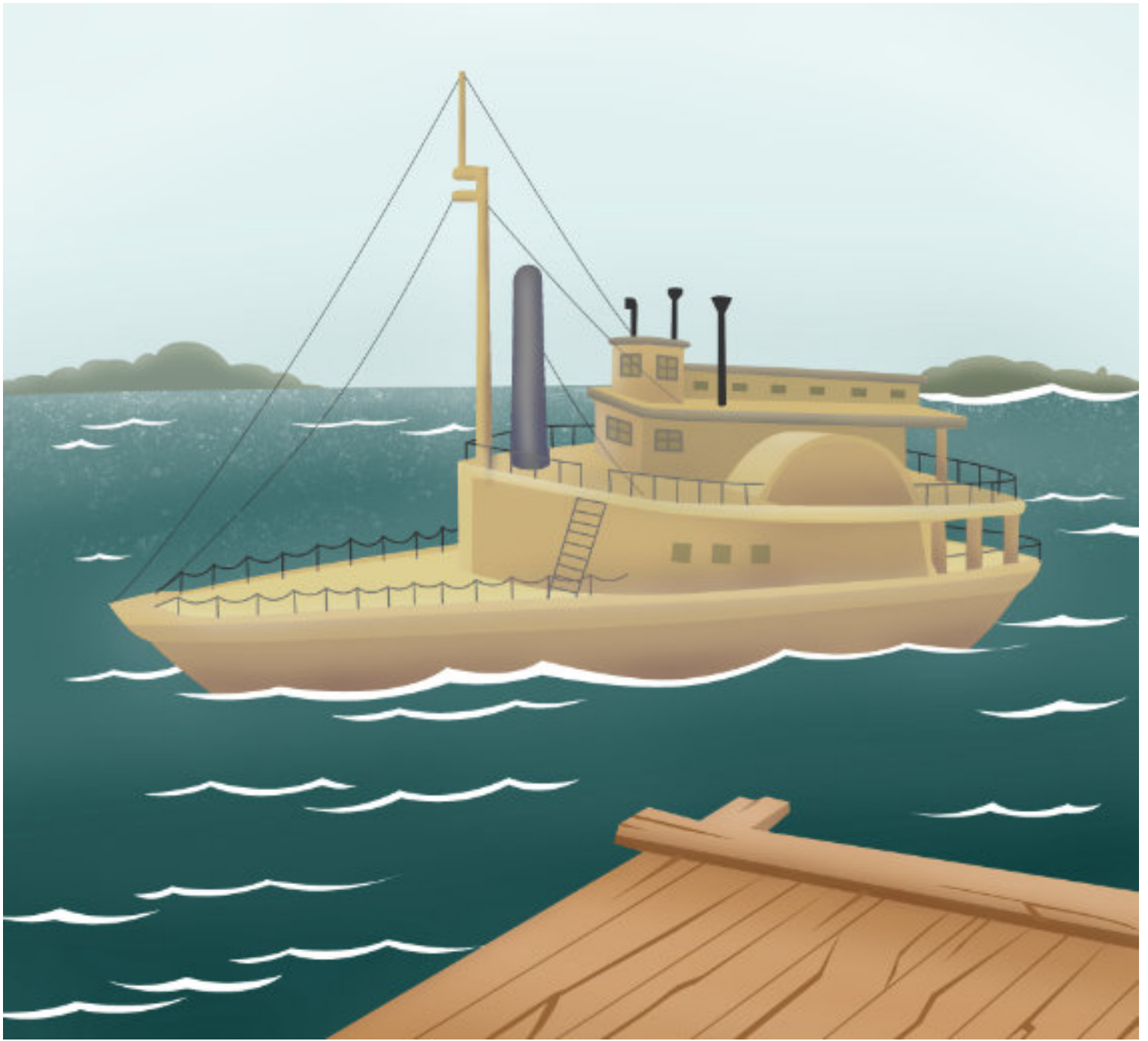
Robert Smalls was born a slave in South Carolina in 1839.



When he grew up, he was sent by his master to work as a laborer.



He worked as a lamplighter, a longshoreman, and a wheelman in the Charleston Harbor.



When the Civil War came, Robert was pressed into service on the Confederate gunboat CSS Planter.



The boat delivered troops and supplies and laid mines.



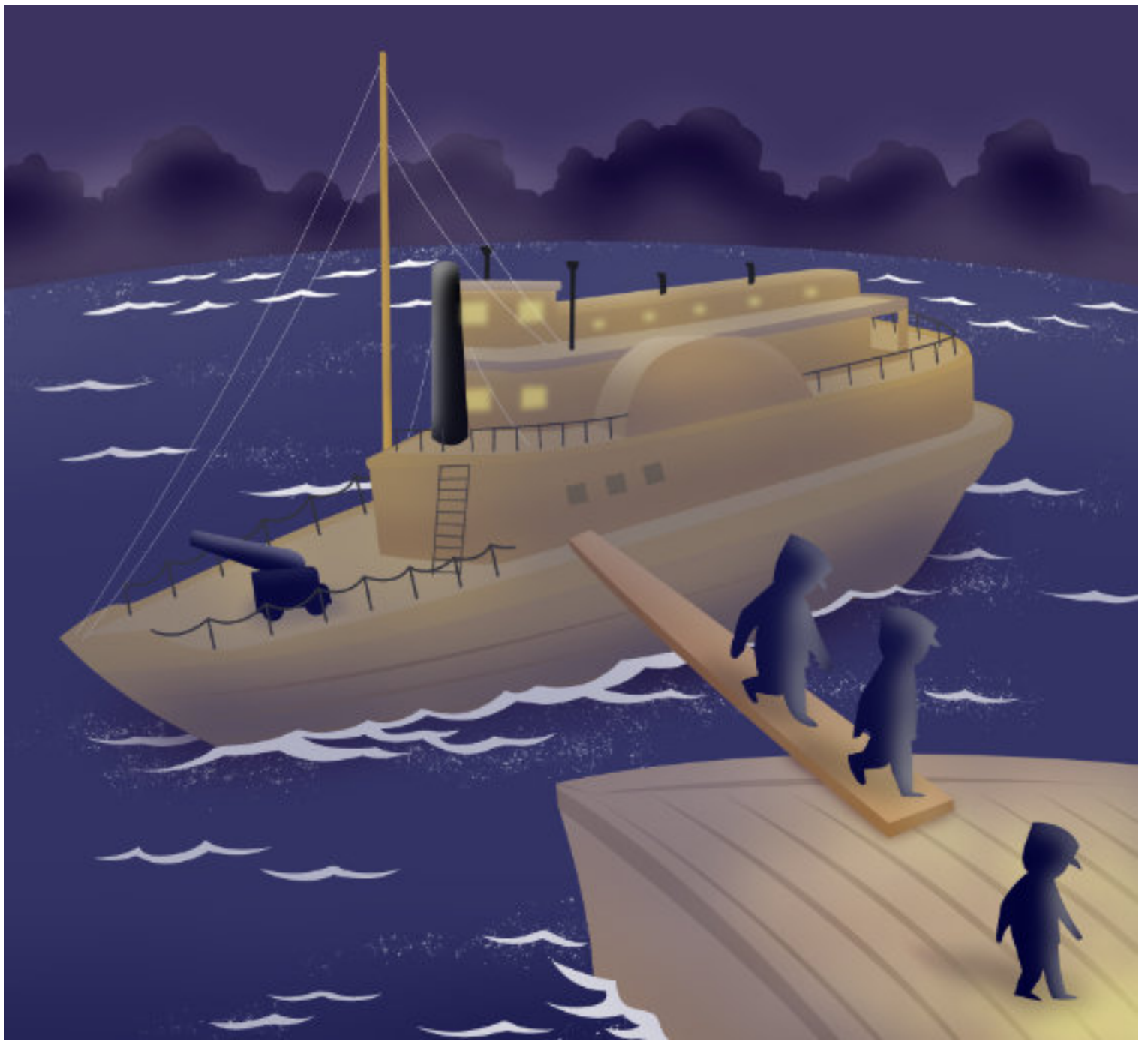
One day, the Planter was loaded with some valuable cannon.



Robert hatched a plan. Robert and the other slaves would steal the cannon and escape to freedom!



They could not leave their families behind, so they received permission for their families to visit.



As usual, the white officers left the ship that night to relax.



After the officers left, Robert told the families of the plan to escape.
They were shocked.



Robert's wife said, "It is a risk, dear, but you and I, and our little ones must be free."



The others agreed and so they sailed off into the darkness.



They soon approached Fort Sumter. Everyone was nervous. If the soldiers there knew what was happening, the Planter would be blown to bits.



But Robert gave all the right signals and they sailed past the fort.



They were not safe yet. Ahead lay the Union blockade. They raised a white flag.



The Union ships held their fire. They were free!



The cannon and Robert's own knowledge of the Charleston Harbor helped the Union win several key battles. He was a hero!



Robert fought bravely with the Union for the rest of the war. Even in tough battles, he refused to surrender.



Robert continued to fight for freedom after the war ended. He became a Republican politician and civil rights advocate.



He died at 75 and was buried under his most famous quote:

"My race needs no special defense, for [they are] the equal of any people anywhere. All they need is an equal chance in the battle of life."

About the Author

Patience Clay is a parent and history buff. She has always loved sharing history with her kids. Now, she wants to share some of her favorite true tales with other children around the world.

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