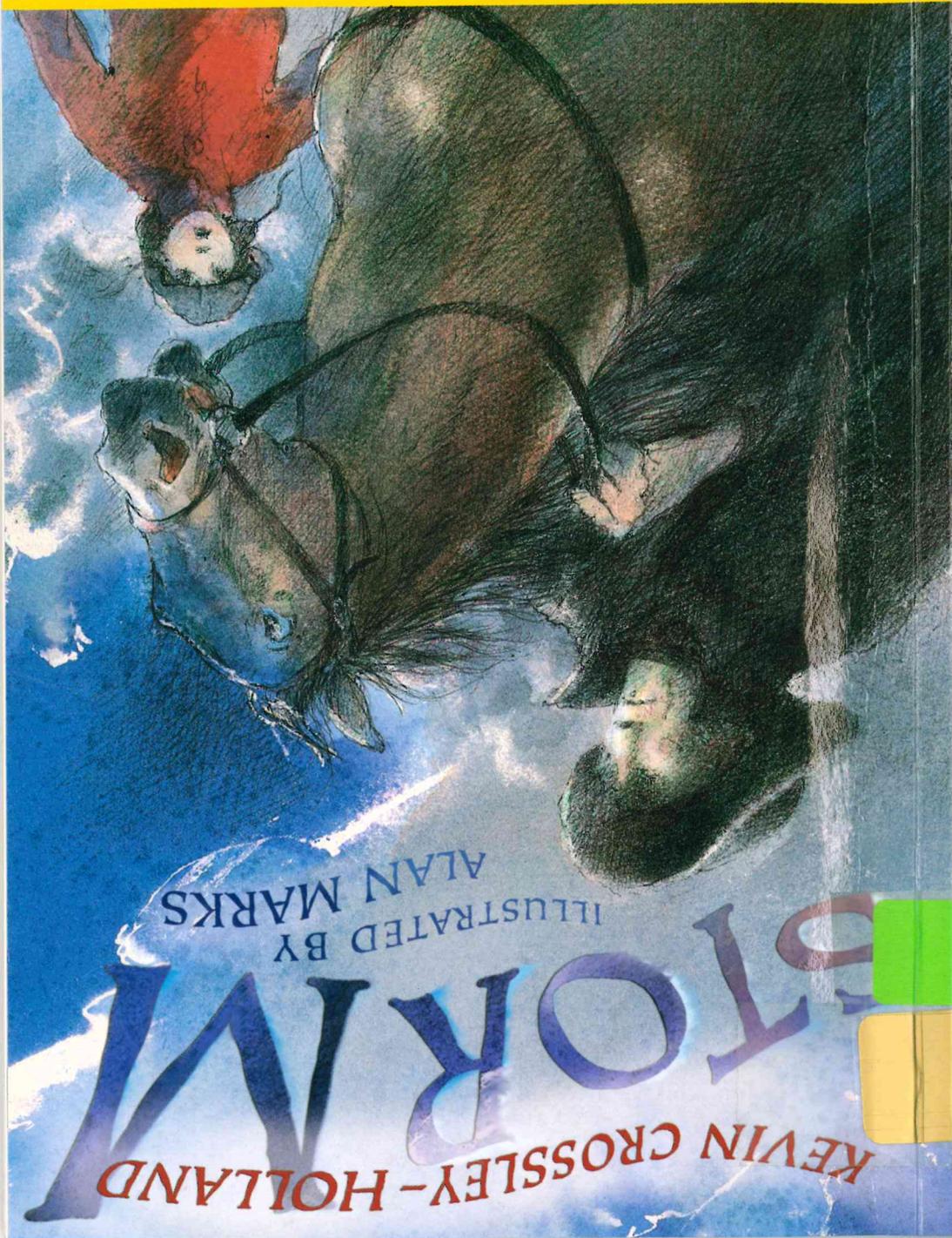


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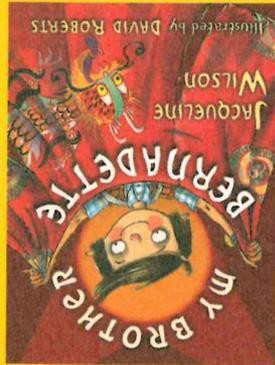


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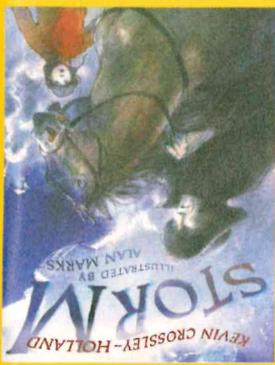
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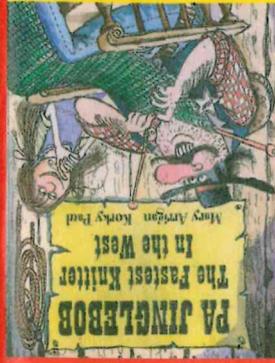


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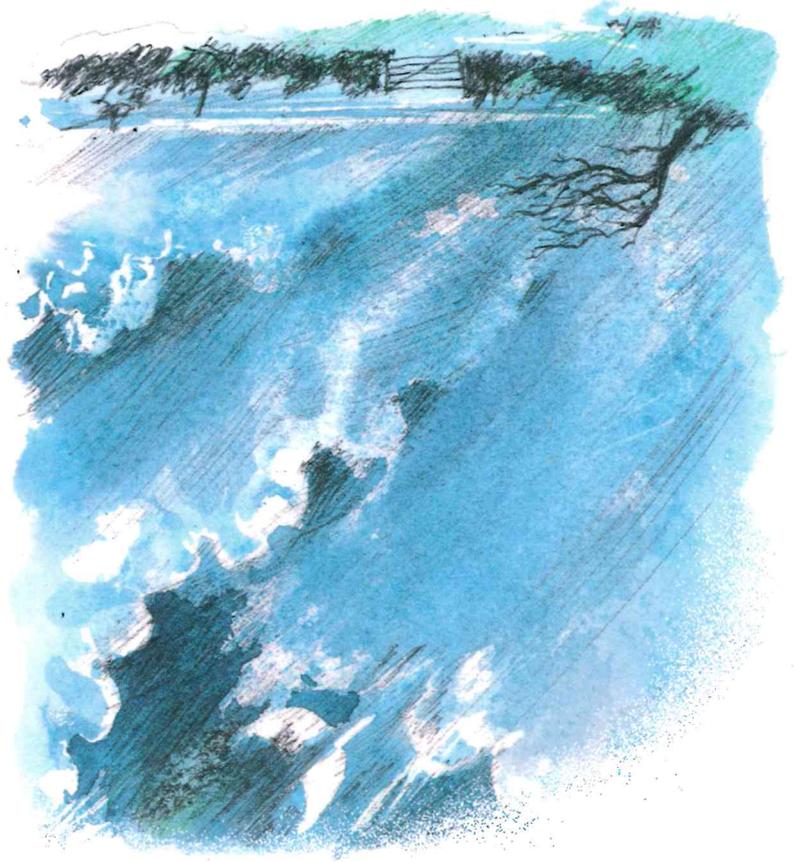
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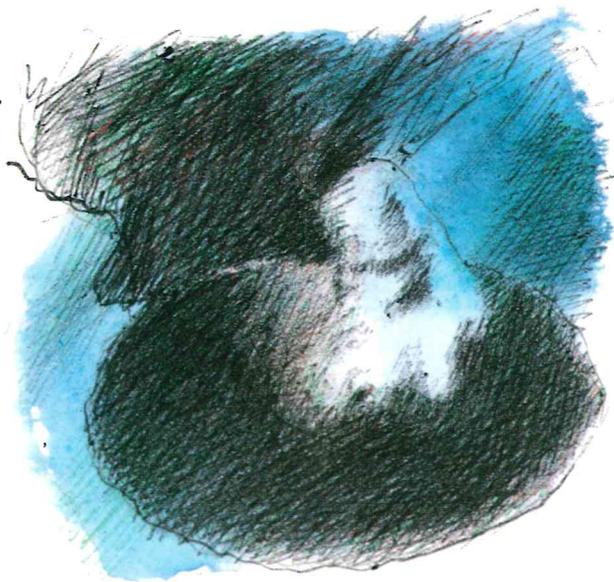
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Yellow Bananas

ILLUSTRATED BY ALAN MARKS



KEVIN CROSSLEY-HOLLAND

# STORM

*For Kate, soon*  
*K C-H*

'SEVEN SWANS A-SWIMMING,' sang Annie,  
 six geese a-laying . . .  
 Annie was walking along the edge of the  
 marsh, in no particular hurry because it was the  
 first day of the Christmas holidays. After a while  
 she began to practise clicking her fingers in  
 time with the numbers. 'Three,' - CLICK! -  
 three French hens, two; - CLICK! - 'two turtle  
 doves . . .'  
 Annie was used to being on her own. She  
 was used to talking and singing to herself, and  
 playing games like two-handed poolsticks and  
 patience and solitaire. She really had no choice  
 because her sister Willa was already grown up  
 and married to Rod and expecting a baby and,  
 anyhow, she lived fifty miles away.

## Chapter One

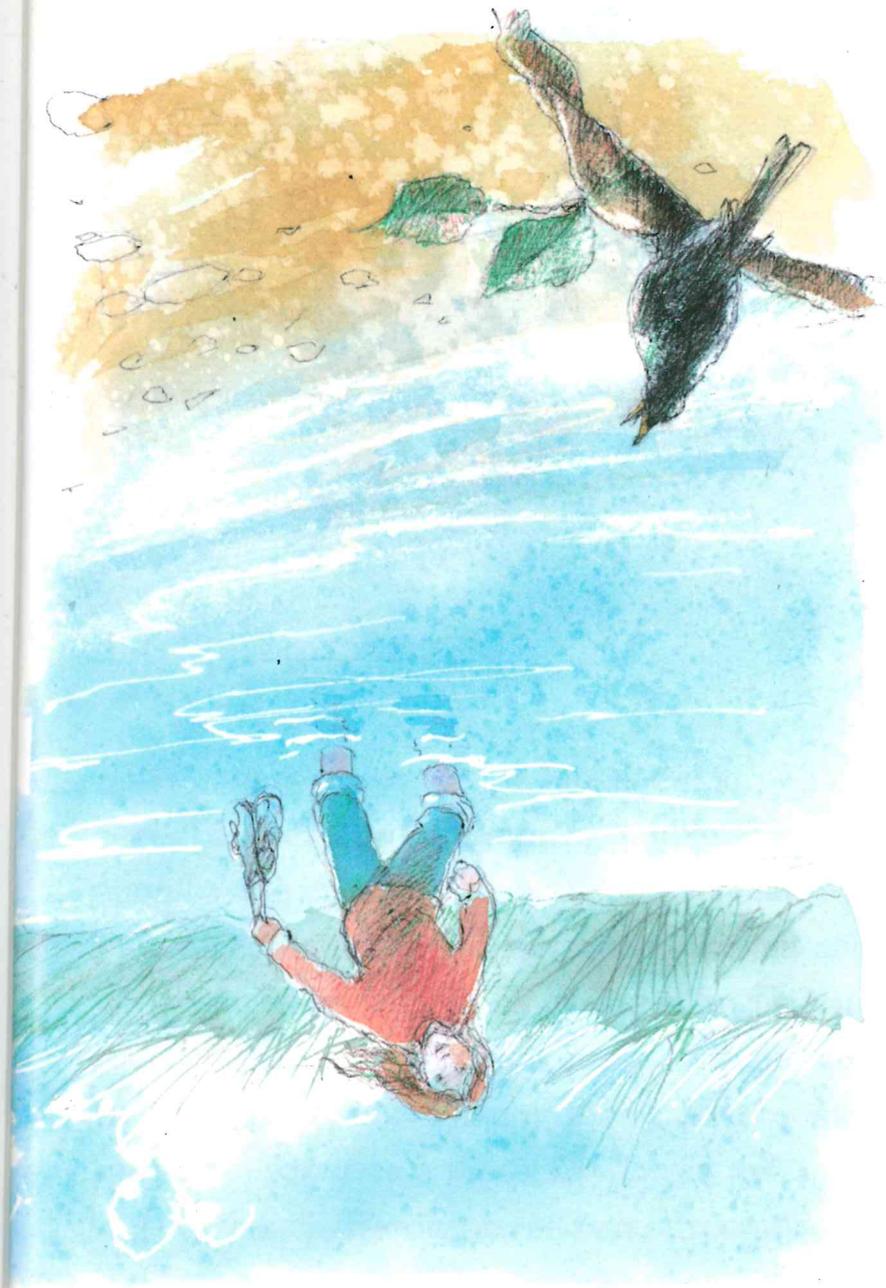


Annie's parents, Mr and Mrs Carter were rather old and not too well. Every day her mother complained that she felt as stiff as a whinging hinge. 'It's that marsh,' she kept saying. 'The damp gets into my bones.' And since his stroke, her father was only able to walk with the help of two sticks. He had become quite mild and milky, like grain softened by mist.





Their cottage stood on its own at the edge of the great marsh, two miles away from the village of Waterlain. That marsh! Empty it looked and silent it seemed, but Annie knew better. She knew about the nests among the flags and rushes, she knew where to find the dark pools teeming with shrimps and scooters. She knew the calls of the seabirds, the sucking sound of draining mud, the wind hissing in the sea lavender.



Everyday in termtime Annie had to walk along this track at the edge of the marsh. She had to take off her shoes and socks to paddle across the ford of the river Rush, the little stream that tumbled all summer, but burbled and bustled all winter when it was sometimes as much as twenty paces across. And then she hurried up the pot-holed lane to the crossroads where the school bus picked her up at twenty to nine and took her into Waterlain.

The only thing that Annie didn't like were the steely winter days when it began to grow dark before she came home from school. The marsh didn't seem such a friendly place then.



The wind whined, seabirds screamed. At night, the boggarts and bogles and other marsh spirits showed their horrible faces. Once, Annie had heard Shuck, the monster dog, coming up behind her and had only just got indoors in time. Worst of all was the ghost who haunted the ford. Annie's mother said that he didn't mean to harm anyone, he just liked to play tricks on them and scare them. On one occasion Mrs



Carter had dropped a basket of shopping into the water, and she complained the ghost had given her a push from behind. And the farmer, Mr Elkins, told Annie he had heard shouting and whinnying at the ford, but could see no man or horse to go with them. Annie always ran down the lane after school in winter so that she could get past the ford before it was completely dark.



'You know the baby's due on Christmas Day?'  
'Willia!' cried Annie.

She's coming home tomorrow.'

'Your sister's just been on the telephone.

Chill air washing round her ankles.

heard Annie open the door and felt a tide of

'Lunch!' called her mother as soon as she

have I got to go in when I was just going out'

wrong direction. And why, wondered Annie, why

picked up her words and carried them off in the

'What?' she shouted. 'What is it?' But the wind

standing at the door of their cottage, waving.

Annie turned round and saw her mother

'An-nie! An-nie!'

**T**WO TURTLE DOVES, sang Annie –  
CLICK! – and a partridge in a pear tree.'

## Chapter Two



'Of course I know,' said Annie.  
'Well, Willa says Rod can't get  
home now until early in the  
New Year.'

'Why not?' asked Annie.

'Just when she needs him,' said

Annie's mother. 'Can you imagine?

Thousands of miles away on the Indian Ocean.'

'I wouldn't like to marry a sailor,' said Annie.

'So she's coming tomorrow,' her mother

repeated, and then she smiled at Annie. 'She

wants a bit of company.'

'What about the baby?' asked Annie.

'She'll have the baby in the cottage hospital,'

said her mother. 'Doctor Grant has arranged that.'

'How long will she be in there?'

'Two days or seven days,' said Annie's mother.

'That's the rule.'

'Two, I hope,' said Annie. 'Then it can sleep

in my room.'

'It can sleep with Willa,' said her mother. 'Oh!

That marsh. The damp gets into my bones.'



## Chapter Three

**T**HE NEXT DAY, Annie and her mother crossed the ford and walked up to the crossroads and met Willa off the afternoon bus.

'What a journey!' said Willa.

'Two changes?' asked her mother.

'Three!' said Willa. 'This place is miles from

anywhere;

Annie said nothing. She had never thought

of her home and the great marsh as miles from

anywhere. To her, they were everywhere,

everywhere that really mattered.

'Miles!' said Willa again. 'Hello, Annie!'

Annie felt quite shy as she kissed her sister.

Perhaps Willa felt shy too. It always took them

a few minutes before they got used to

each other and found it easy

to talk to each other

again. But once Annie

and Willa began to

talk, there was no

stopping them.

They talked at breakfast and lunch and tea.  
They talked as they walked along the marsh  
track and talked their way along the legs of  
the dyke that led out to the booming sea.  
Willia told Annie what it felt like to be having  
a baby and Annie told Willia about school in  
Waterslain – the same

school Willia had  
attended when she  
was a girl. Willia told  
Annie about town  
life. Annie told Willia  
the names of plants  
and birds.

'I never did learn  
them,' said Willia,  
'and I always wish I  
had.'

When they came  
to the ford, Annie  
asked Willia about the  
ghost.



Annie felt a cold finger slowly moving from the base of her spine up to her neck, and then spreading out across her shoulders. 'Where were standing,' said Willa. 'What happened?' asked Annie.



'He's here, all right. He's here,' said Willa. 'You know the story?' 'What story?' asked Annie. 'When he was alive - I mean when he had a body - he used to own Mr Elkin's farm. That was in the days when there were highwaymen. Two of them ambushed him right here.'



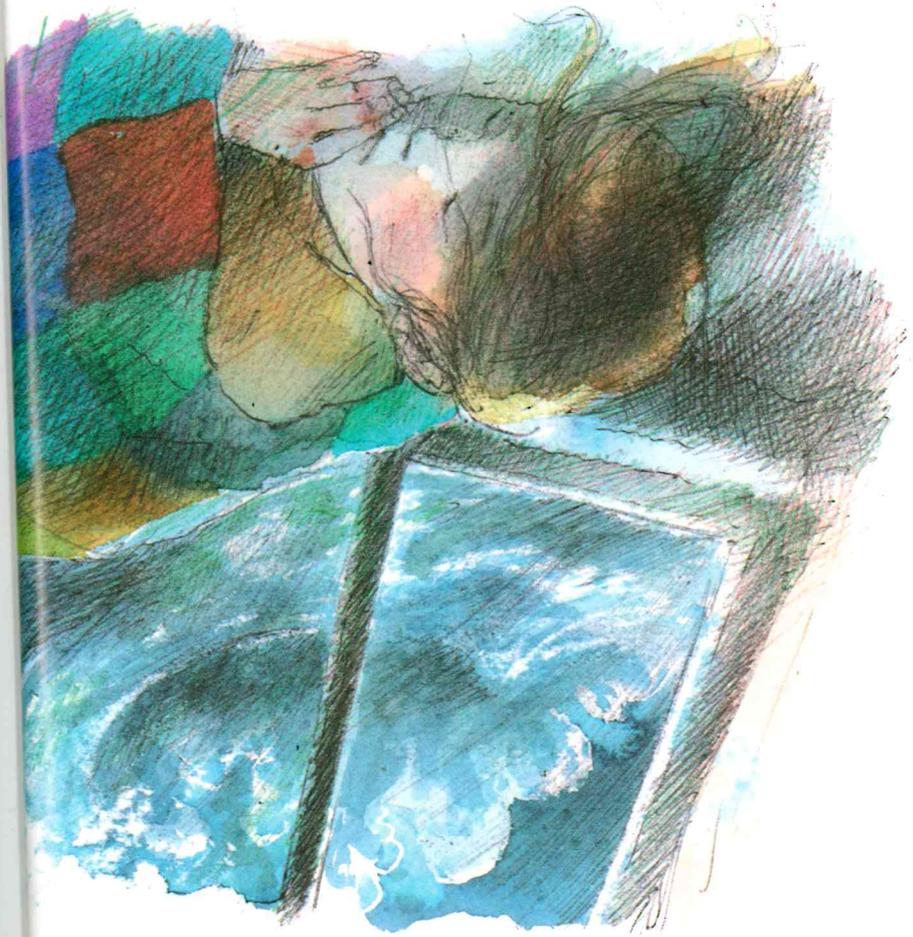
'He wouldn't give them his money,' said Willa. 'He was that brave. So they killed him and his horse.'

'His horse!' cried Annie. 'That's horrible!' And at once she began to think of her lonely walks back from school – the dark January journeys lying in wait for her.

'So they got his money anyhow,' said Willa. 'That's what I've heard.'

'And the ghost?' said Annie.

'That goes up and down and around and pays out passers-by,' said Willa. The sisters fell silent and stared at the flashing water.



**O**N THE THIRD night after Willa came home there was a tremendous storm. Annie lay warm in her bed and listened to the wind going wild outside. It bumped and blundered against the walls of the cottage,

## *Chapter Four*



it whistled between its salty lips and gnashed  
 its sharp teeth.  
 As Annie dozed, she began to imagine she  
 was not in bed but in a boat, rocking, quite  
 safe, far out at sea. The sheets of rain lashing  
 at her little window were small waves smacking  
 at the bows, streaming down the boat's sides . . .  
 This was the night on which Willa's baby  
 decided to be born. Just before midnight, it  
 began to heave inside its mother like a buoy  
 on surging water.

Everyone got up. Willa and Annie and their  
mother and even their father. All the lights were  
turned on again. The kettle began to sing.  
'A cup of tea first,' said Annie's mother,  
looking pleased and shiny.  
'You said Christmas,' protested Annie.  
'You never can tell,' said her mother. 'Anyhow,  
early or late, storm or no storm, it's on its way.  
There's no stopping it now!'



hand. He listened again. There was not a sound.

banged the telephone with the palm of his  
and put an ear to the black receiver. Then he  
Mr Carter dragged himself across the room  
'Come and listen to this,' said Annie's mother.  
'What's wrong?' said Mr Carter.

alarmed.

first looked worried, and then she looked really  
When Annie's mother lifted the receiver, she

went upstairs to get ready.

said Willa and, taking her tea with her, she

'Ask them to come for me in half an hour,'

ready,' said her mother.

'I'll ring while you get yourself packed and

there's time but . . . ?

'Shall I ring the hospital?' said Willa. 'I know

old name in these parts.'

'Storm,' repeated Annie's mother. 'That's an

'Storm?' said Willa.

'That's not a name,' said Annie.

unexpectedly.

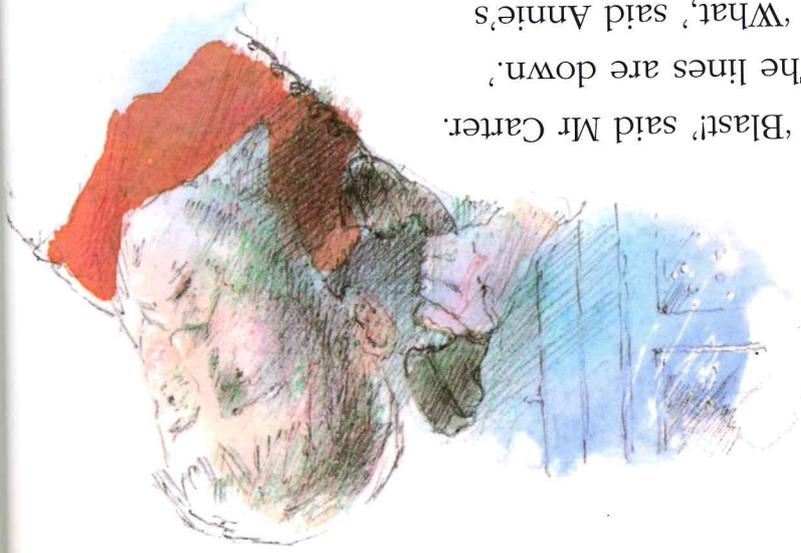
'You could call it Storm,' said Mr Carter

someone else speaking.  
 had the strange feeling that it wasn't her but  
 'I'm the only one who can,' Annie said. She  
 'No, no,' said her mother.

'I'll go,' said Annie.  
 'You can't walk and I must stay in case . . . ?'  
 Annie's mother. 'We must get Doctor Grant.  
 'What are we going to do, Bill?' repeated  
 'Blast!' said Mr Carter. 'That's a tile gone.'

outside the window a smash.  
 wind and a grating noise overhead, then  
 than it had been before. There was a howl of  
 If anything, the storm was even fiercer now  
 mother, 'are we going to do?'

'What,' said Annie's  
 'The lines are down.'  
 'Blast!' said Mr Carter.





For once Annie took care over getting ready  
to go out. While her mother fussed round her  
and Willa sat very calm and upright on her bed,  
she put on her underclothes and then her track  
suit and then an old mackintosh over that.

ambulance and then come at once himself?  
Grant. Ask him to ring the hospital for an  
up and you'll be all right. Go straight to Doctor  
Annie's mother looked worried. 'It's the only  
way, Annie,' she said. 'We'll get you well wrapped

'Willa can't,'  
Mrs Carter frowned and shook her head.  
'We can't do without a doctor,' said Annie.