

'Blast!' said Mr Carter. 'The lines are down.'
 'What,' said Annie's mother, 'are we going to do?'
 If anything, the storm was even fiercer now than it had been before. There was a howl of wind and a grating noise overhead, then outside the window a smash.
 'Blast!' said Mr Carter. 'That's a tile gone.'
 'What are we going to do, Bill?' repeated Annie's mother. 'We must get Doctor Grant. You can't walk and I must stay in case . . .'
 'I'll go,' said Annie.
 'No, no,' said her mother.
 'I'm the only one who can,' Annie said. She had the strange feeling that it wasn't her but someone else speaking.



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

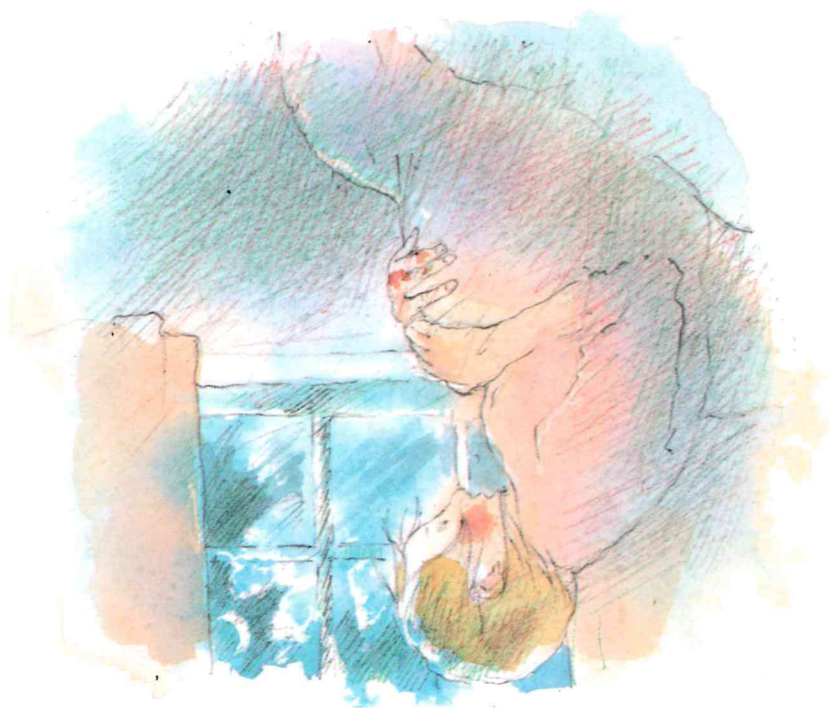
Annie's mother looked worried. 'It's the only way, Annie,' she said. 'We'll get you well wrapped up and you'll be all right. Go straight to Doctor Grant. Ask him to ring the hospital for an ambulance and then come at once himself.' For once Annie took care over getting ready to go out. While her mother fussed round her and Willie 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.



Her mother stuffed a handtowel into one pocket
and slipped a bar of chocolate into the other.
'I'll need my sou'wester,' said Annie. She
picked up the hat from the floor, jammed it on
and tied the lace under her chin.
'And your wellingtons,' said her mother.

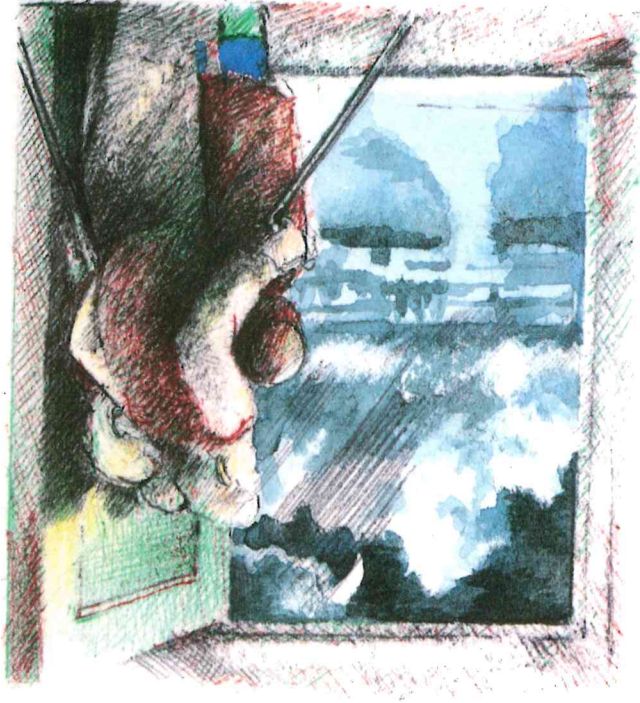


'What else?' said Annie. 'My scarf.'
'A torch,' said her mother. 'Though you
know the way so well by now you could
walk there backwards.'



'You're a real sport, Annie,' said Willa.
'It's only the ford I don't like,' said Annie.
'I don't mind the rest.'
'I know,' said Annie's mother. 'Make sure you
dry yourself properly.'
'You'll soon get past it,' said Willa. Then she
gasped, pressed the palms of her hands against
her stomach, and breathed deeply. 'This baby,'
she said, 'I think it's in a hurry.'

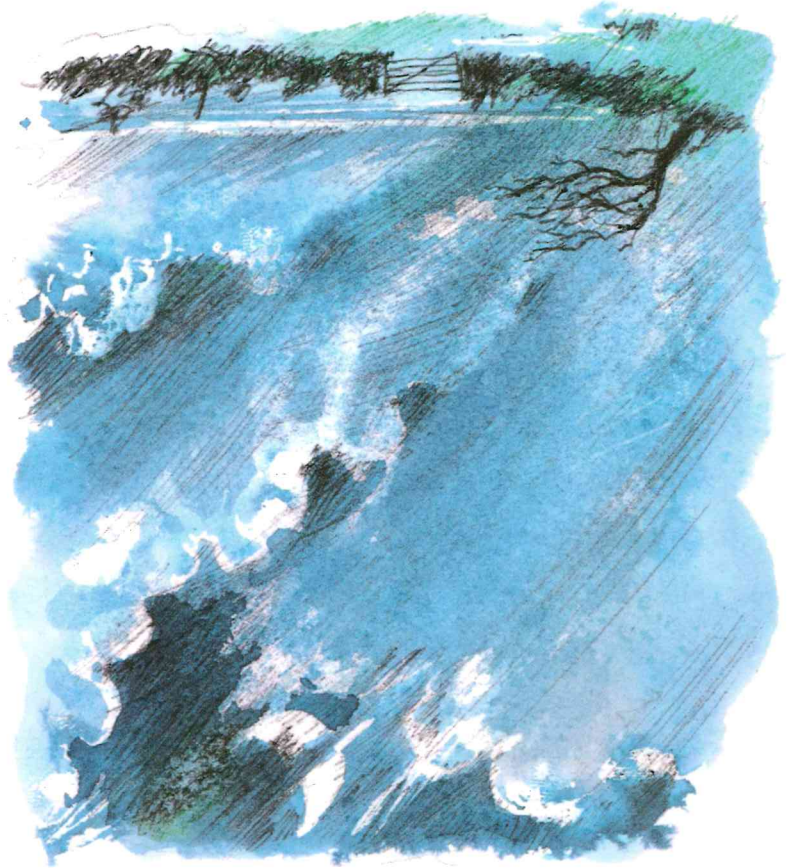
'Blast!' said Mr Carter. 'That's a rough old night!'
The four of them stood just inside the door,
huddled together, staring out, getting used to
the storm and the darkness.



WHEN MRS CARTER opened the cottage
door, the wind snatched it out of her
hands and slammed the door against the wall.

Chapter Five

There was a slice of moon well up in the sky. It seemed to be speeding behind grey lumpy clouds, running away from something that was chasing it. The Carters' little garden looked ashen and the marsh looked ashen and Mr Elkin's fields looked ashen.



They all heard it then: the sound of hooves,
galloping.

'Blast!' said Mr Carter. 'Who can that be, then?'
'In this storm!' cried Annie's mother.

'At midnight,' said Mr Carter.

Annie slipped one hand inside her mother's
hand. The hooves drummed louder and louder,
almost on top of them, and round the corner
of the cottage galloped a horseman on a fine
chestnut mare.



'Whoa!' shouted the rider when he saw Annie and her family standing at the cottage door.



'That's not Elkins, then,' said Mr Carter, hauling himself in front of his wife and daughters. 'That's not his horse.'

The horseman stopped just outside the pool of light streaming through the open door, and none of them recognised him. He was tall and unsmiling.

'That's a rough old night,' Mr Carter called out. The horseman nodded and said not a word. 'Are you going into Waterslain?'

'Waterslain?' said the horseman. 'Not in particular.'

'Blast!' said Mr Carter in a thoughtful kind of way.

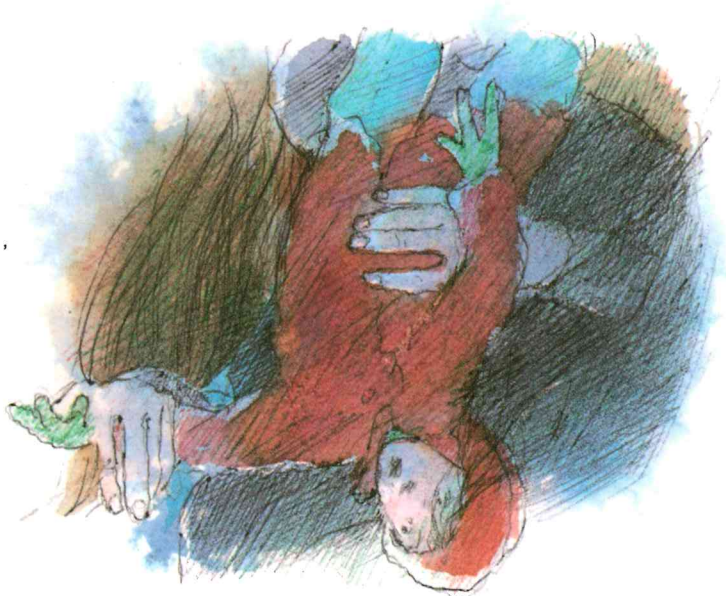


'I could go,' said the horseman in a dark voice, 'if there was a need.'
 Then Annie's mother loosed her daughter's hand and stepped out into the storm and soon explained the need, and Mr Carter went out and asked the horseman his name. The wind gave a shriek and Annie was unable to catch his reply. 'So you see,' said Annie's mother, 'there's no time to be lost.'



'Come on up,' said the horseman.
 'It's all right,' said Annie, shaking her head.
 'I'll take you,' said the horseman.
 'You'll be fine,' said Mrs Carter.
 'I can walk,' insisted Annie.

But the horseman quickly bent down and put a hand under one of Annie's shoulders and swung her up on to the saddle in front of him as if she were as light as thisledown.

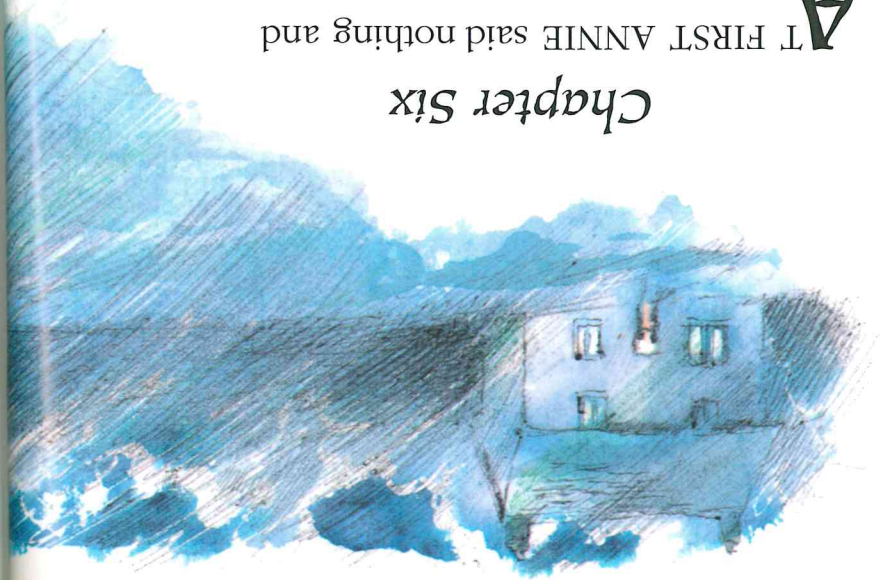


Annie's heart was beating fearfully. She bit hard on her lower lip. Then the horseman raised one hand and spurred his horse. Mr and Mrs Carter stood and watched as Annie turned away the full white moon of her face and then she and the horseman were swallowed in the stormy darkness.

be all right?'
 'Annie,' he said, 'your sister and her baby will
 he was. But then the rider suddenly reigned in.
 rather afraid of him as well, not knowing who
 thought it best not to say anything about being
 At first the horseman didn't reply, and Annie
 of sob, 'I think I'd die if I met him tonight.'
 the ghost.' She paused and then added in a sort
 her baby,' she said, 'And I am afraid of meeting
 'I am,' said Annie. 'I'm afraid for my sister and
 quietly, 'Are you afraid, Annie?'

to wade across the ford, the horseman asked
 the horse slowed to a trot and then began
 the horseman said nothing. But as
 AT FIRST ANNIE said nothing and

Chapter Six



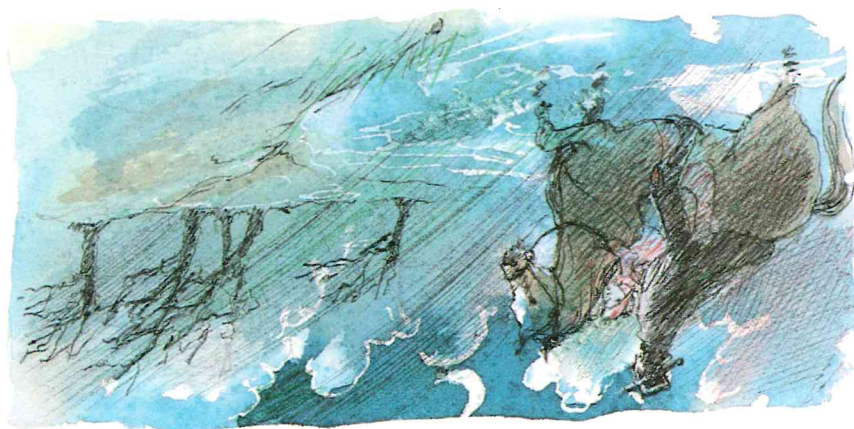


'How do you know?'
asked Annie.
'And you will be all
right,' said the horseman.
'There are ghosts and
ghosts, Annie. Kind ghosts
and unkind ghosts. You
won't meet the ghost you fear
between here and Waterslain.'
And so, step by step, Annie
and the horseman slowly crossed the ford.





Now the chestnut mare quickened her stride again. It comforted Annie to feel the mare's warm neck and flanks, and after a while she leant forward and buried her face in its mane.

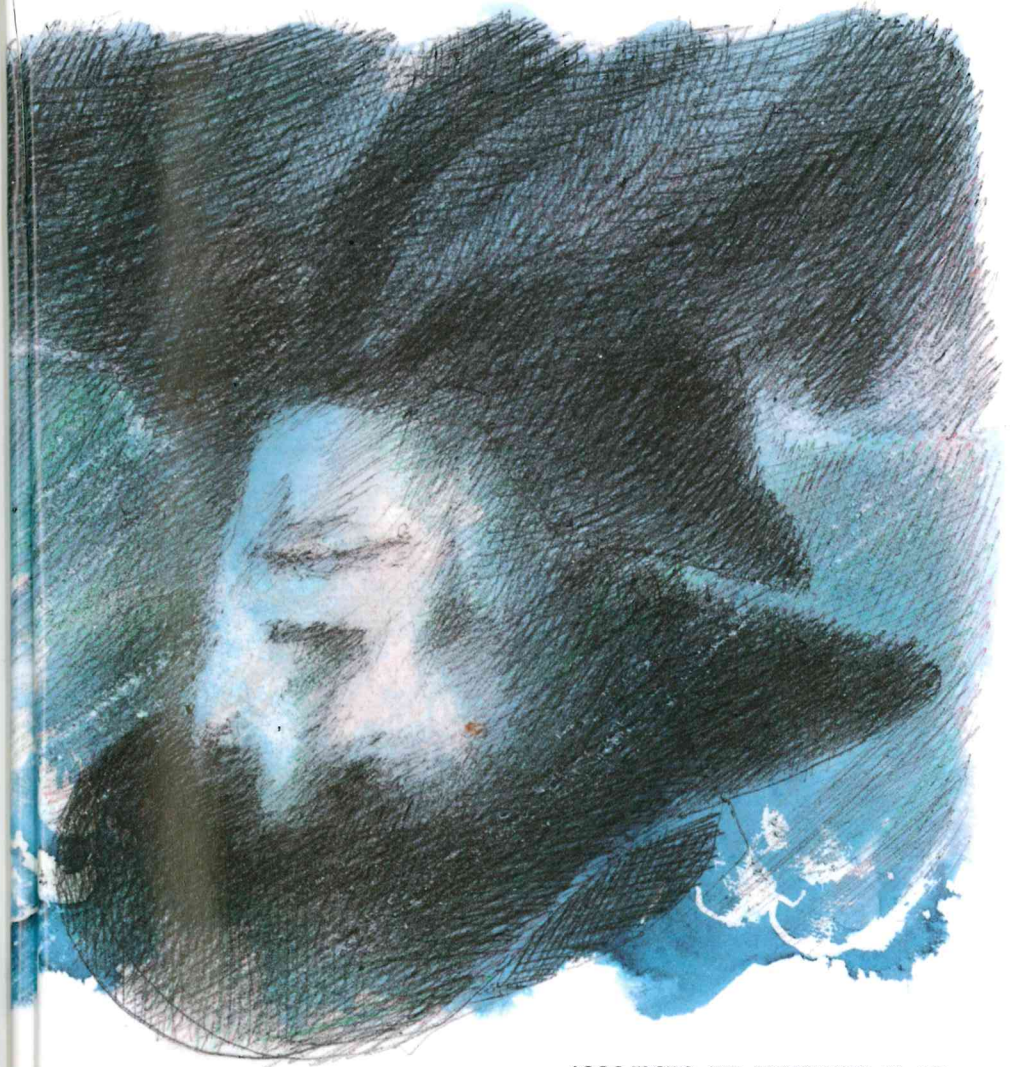


With her eyes closed, Annie had the sense
that she was not so much riding as flying –
flying through the storm on a journey
that might last forever.





He's a ghost himself, thought Annie. He's bewitched us all and he's taking me away into the always-darkness. No! No! That's wrong. No, he's my helper and we're going to the rescue of a maiden in distress.



When she sat up again, Annie felt quite dizzy.
She shook her head and frowned. 'That's silly,'
she told herself. 'You've been reading too
many tales.'

And yet, wondered Annie, who is this rider?
Where does he come from? And how did he
happen to gallop right past our door just when
we needed him? 'What's your name?' called
Annie over her shoulder.

'What's that?' said the horseman. 'My
name? Storm!'

'Storm!' cried Annie. 'That's even stranger.'



W HAT A NIGHT it was! The salty wind was going round and round in circles, first whipping them forward, then holding them up, then barging them towards the hedge on one side of the lane or the deep ditch on the other. The horseman kept one arm round Annie and Annie held on to the horse. The rain flew straight at them, spiteful drops sharp as pins and needles.

Chapter Seven



Then Annie began to sway in the saddle. She thought she could bear it no longer – the furious gallop, the gallop of the storm, the storm of her own fears. What can I do? What if I never get to Doctor Grant?

But the horseman only shouted and spurred his horse to go even faster. He seemed bent on going where he was going as quickly as he possibly could. Faster and faster! So that when Annie looked about her again, there she was! There she was in sleeping Waterslain. The chestnut mare was sweating and blowing out big puffs of condensed air.



'Down Staithe Street,' gasped Annie. 'Doctor

Grant.'

The horseman galloped straight up the middle of the village street. The horse's hooves clattered on the tarmac and Annie saw that several times they struck sparks from pieces of chert and flint. Then they turned into Staithe Street and 'Whoa!' shouted the horseman in his dark voice.

'Whoa!' And his mare at last slowed down to

a trot.

'There!' said Annie, pointing to a gateway flanked by laurel bushes. 'We're there!'





Chapter Eight

DOCTOR GRANT'S LIGHTS were still on. His curtains were the colour of ripe

peaches. And a lantern, swaying in his porch, threw a pool of soft shifting light over the

flagstones and gravel outside the front door.

Annie stared and stared as if she had never

seen bright light before. In the gloom of the

great storm, nothing had looked quite definite

and many things looked frightening: the reaching

arms of the tree, the fallen body of the milk

churn, the gleam and flash of water. There was

danger, too, of meeting these chancy things that

only come out at night – will-o'-the-wykes and

bogles and boggarts and the black dog,

Shuck . . . and worst of all there was the ghost.

But now, in the clear light, there was no longer

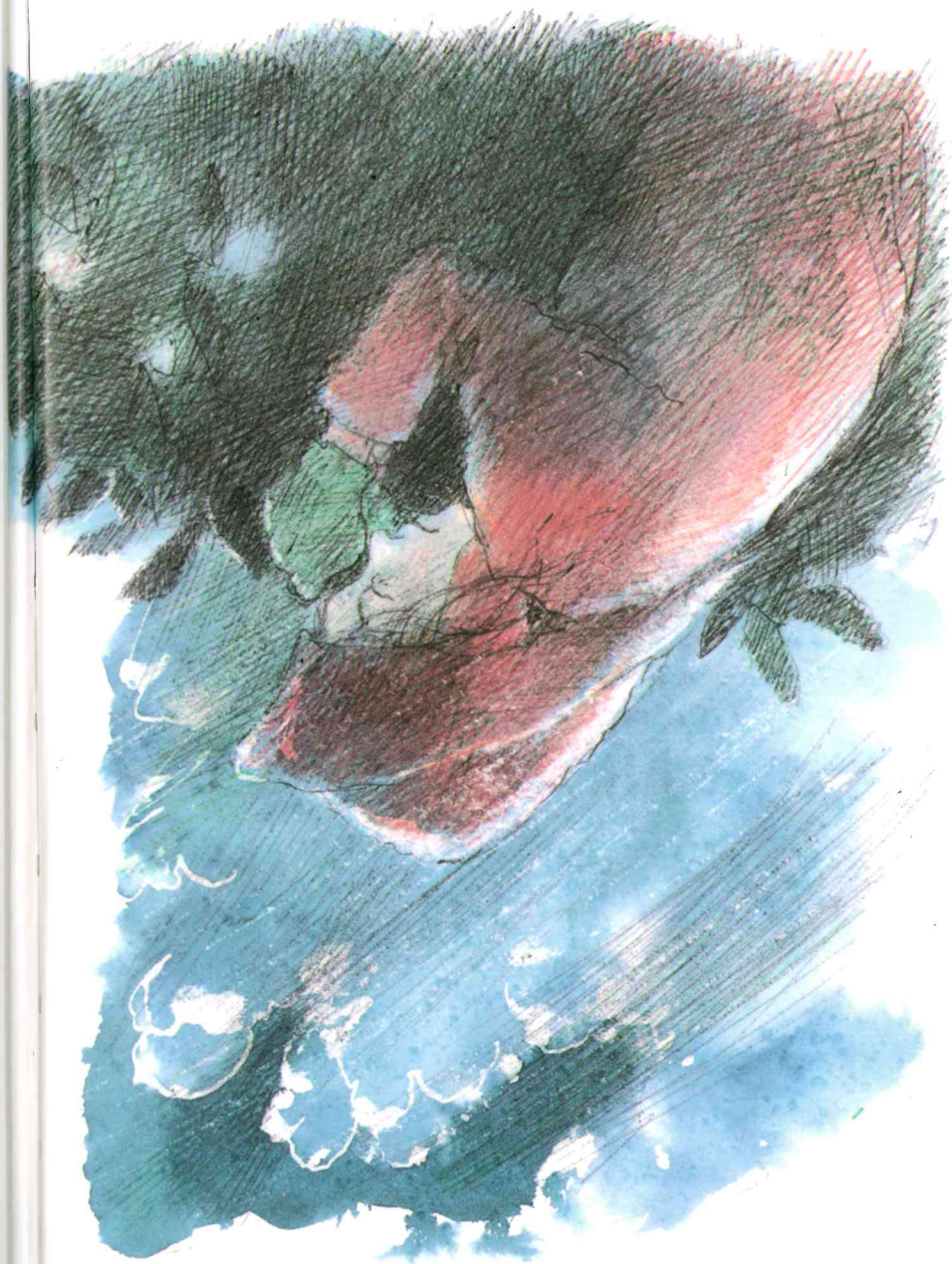
room for anything uncertain or ghostly.



Annie relaxed her grip on the horse and took a deep breath. And when she slowly let her breath out again, she felt as if she had been holding it in ever since she left home. 'So, Annie,' said the horseman, 'this is where I must leave you.' 'Come in!' cried Annie. 'I'm sure you can come in.'

'You must go your way and I mine,' said the
horseman, shaking his head and taking great
care to stop his horse from putting so much as
a hoof into the pool of light. 'Your sister and
her baby will be all right.'





So Annie swung down out of the saddle and stood on the gravel, feeling rather shaky. She looked up at the man, still unsmiling and sitting so still.

'Thank you,' cried Annie. 'Thank you. I was so afraid.' She shook her head. 'I was afraid of meeting the ghost.'

'There was no fear of that,' said the

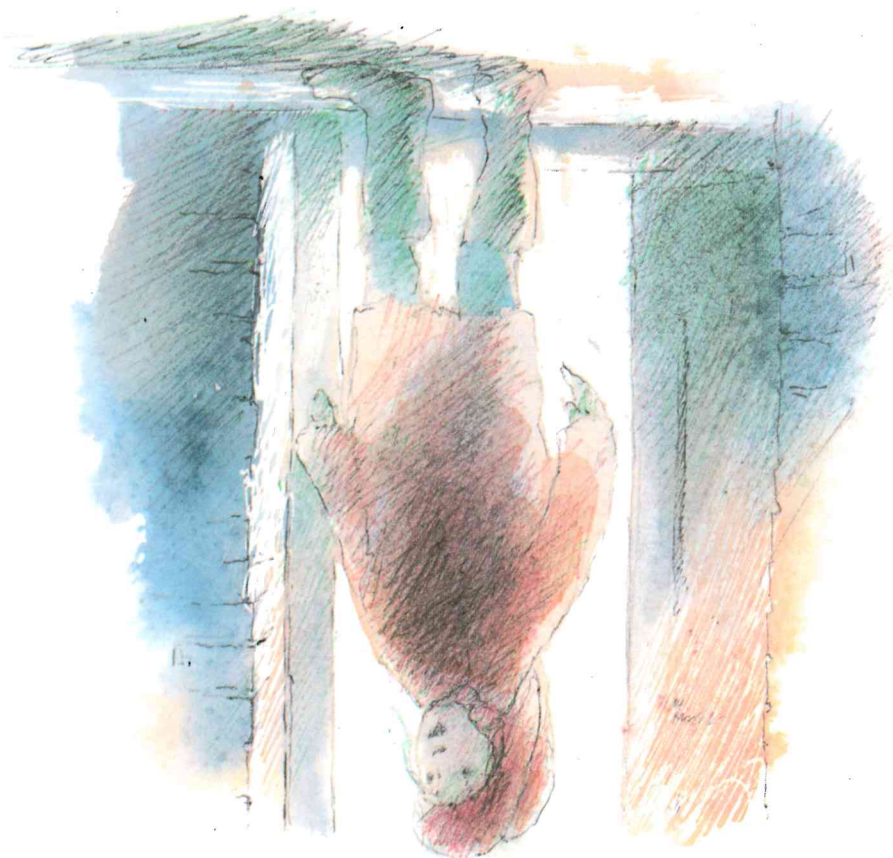
horseman. 'Annie,' he said, 'I am the ghost.'

Annie drew in her breath with a sob. She

raised her arms and for one second closed her eyes as tight as cockleshells.



When she opened them again there was
nobody there, no horseman and no horse.
Dr Grant's lantern still creaked and swayed in
the porch, and its light shone over the flagstones
and gravel, but Storm and his chestnut mare,
they had both completely vanished.



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