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The Centaur

May Swenson

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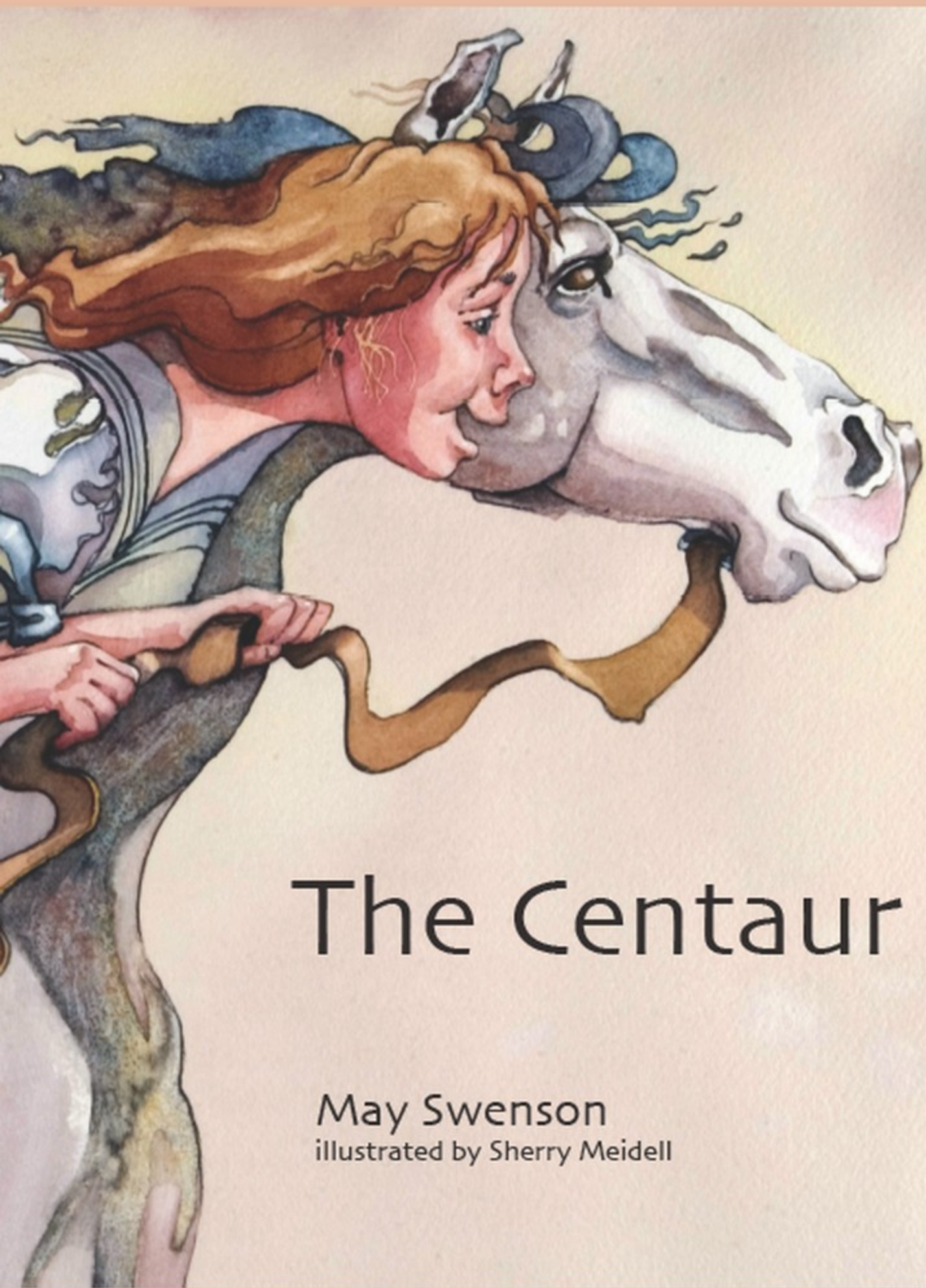
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The Centaur

May Swenson

illustrated by Sherry Meidell



MAY SWENSON was born in Utah in 1913, the first of ten children in a Mormon household. As a child, she really did play in willows along a canal that carried water from the nearby mountains through her small town of Logan. Her brothers and sisters loved her bedtime stories of the fantasy animals she'd met on her path. As an adult, May worked in New York City as a secretary and editor, all the while writing poems that earned her dozens of awards and eventually membership in the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. The last years of her life she served as a chancellor of the Academy of American poets. May died in 1989 and is buried less than a mile from her canal in "The Centaur."

SHERRY MEIDELL and her husband have raised five sons in West Bountiful, Utah. When the boys were little, they would bring home an assortment of wild creatures—like a mother snake that surprised everyone next morning with a large number of baby snakes—plus the usual frogs, dogs, even iguanas. In time, the iguanas got bigger, and so did the boys.

One of Sherry's favorite things is to turn a page of well-written words into full-color images that live in a picture book.

Sherry is a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. She specializes in brushes and watercolor with pencil for detail. *The Centaur* is the ninth book Sherry has illustrated.



The Centaur

The summer that I was ten —
Can it be there was only one
summer that I was ten? It must

have been a long one then —
each day I'd go out to choose
a fresh horse from my stable

which was a willow grove
down by the old canal.
I'd go on my two bare feet.

But when, with my brother's jack-knife,
I had cut me a long limber horse
with a good thick knob for a head,

and peeled him slick and clean
except a few leaves for the tail,
and cinched my brother's belt

around his head for a rein,
I'd straddle and canter him fast
up the grass bank to the path,

trot along in the lovely dust
that talcumed over his hoofs,
hiding my toes, and turning

his feet to swift half-moons.
The willow knob with the strap
jouncing between my thighs

was the pommel and yet the poll
of my nickering pony's head.
My head and my neck were mine,

yet they were shaped like a horse.
My hair flopped to the side
like the mane of a horse in the wind.

My forelock swung in my eyes,
my neck arched and I snorted.
I shied and skittered and reared,

stopped and raised my knees,
pawed at the ground and quivered.
My teeth bared as we wheeled

and swished through the dust again.
I was the horse and the rider,
and the leather I slapped to his rump

spanked my own behind.
Doubled, my two hoofs beat
a gallop along the bank,

the wind twanged in my mane,
my mouth squared to the bit.
And yet I sat on my steed

quiet, negligent riding,
my toes standing the stirrups,
my thighs hugging his ribs.

At a walk we drew up to the porch.
I tethered him to a paling.
Dismounting, I smoothed my skirt

and entered the dusky hall.
My feet on the clean linoleum
left ghostly toes in the hall.

Where have you been? said my mother.
Been riding, I said from the sink,
and filled me a glass of water.

What's that in your pocket? she said.
Just my knife. It weighted my pocket
and stretched my dress awry.

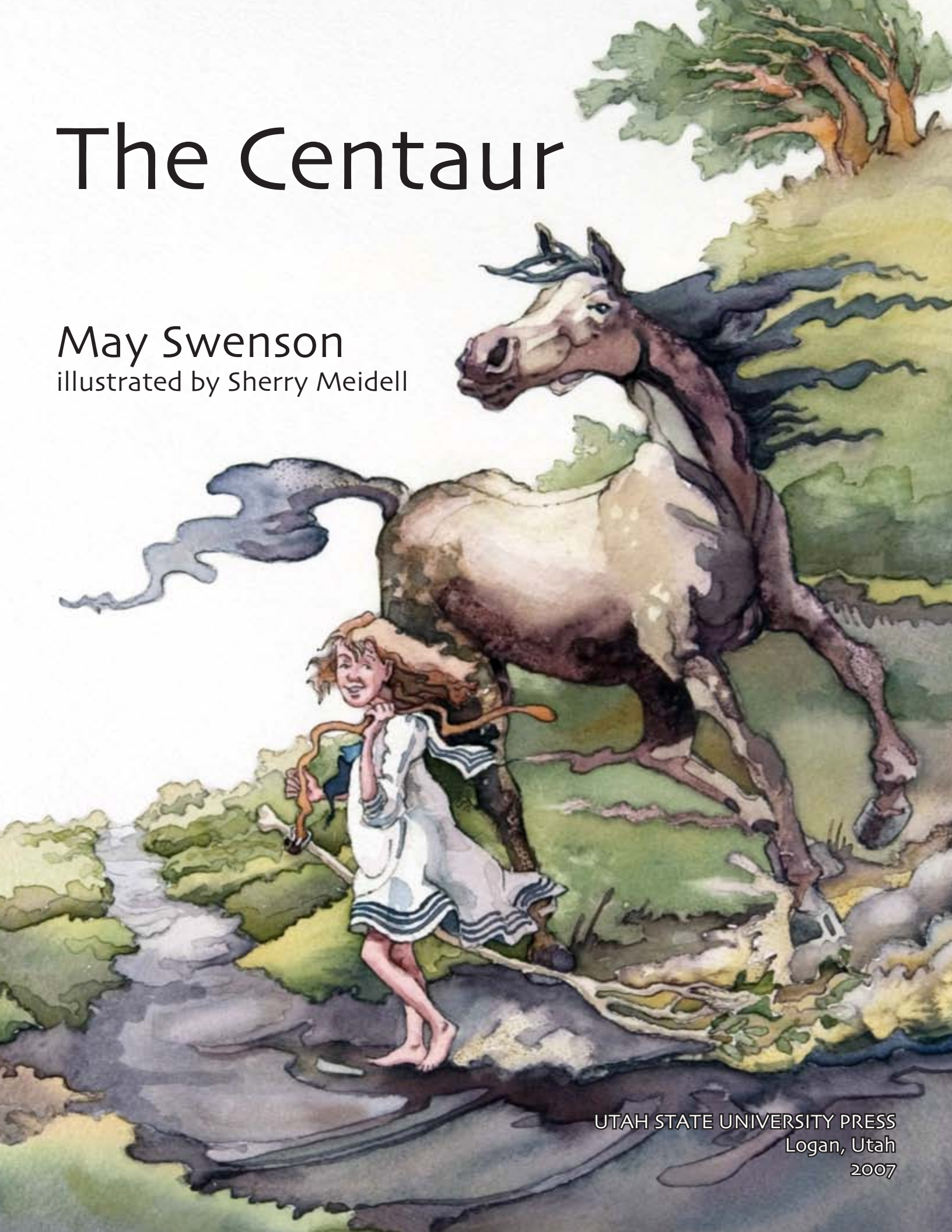
Go tie back your hair, said my mother,
and *Why is your mouth all green?*
Rob Roy, he pulled some clover
as we crossed the field, I told her.

—May Swenson

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For Nate and Kim — Sherry Meidell

The Literary Estate of May Swenson dedicates this book to those who made it possible by their generous contributions.

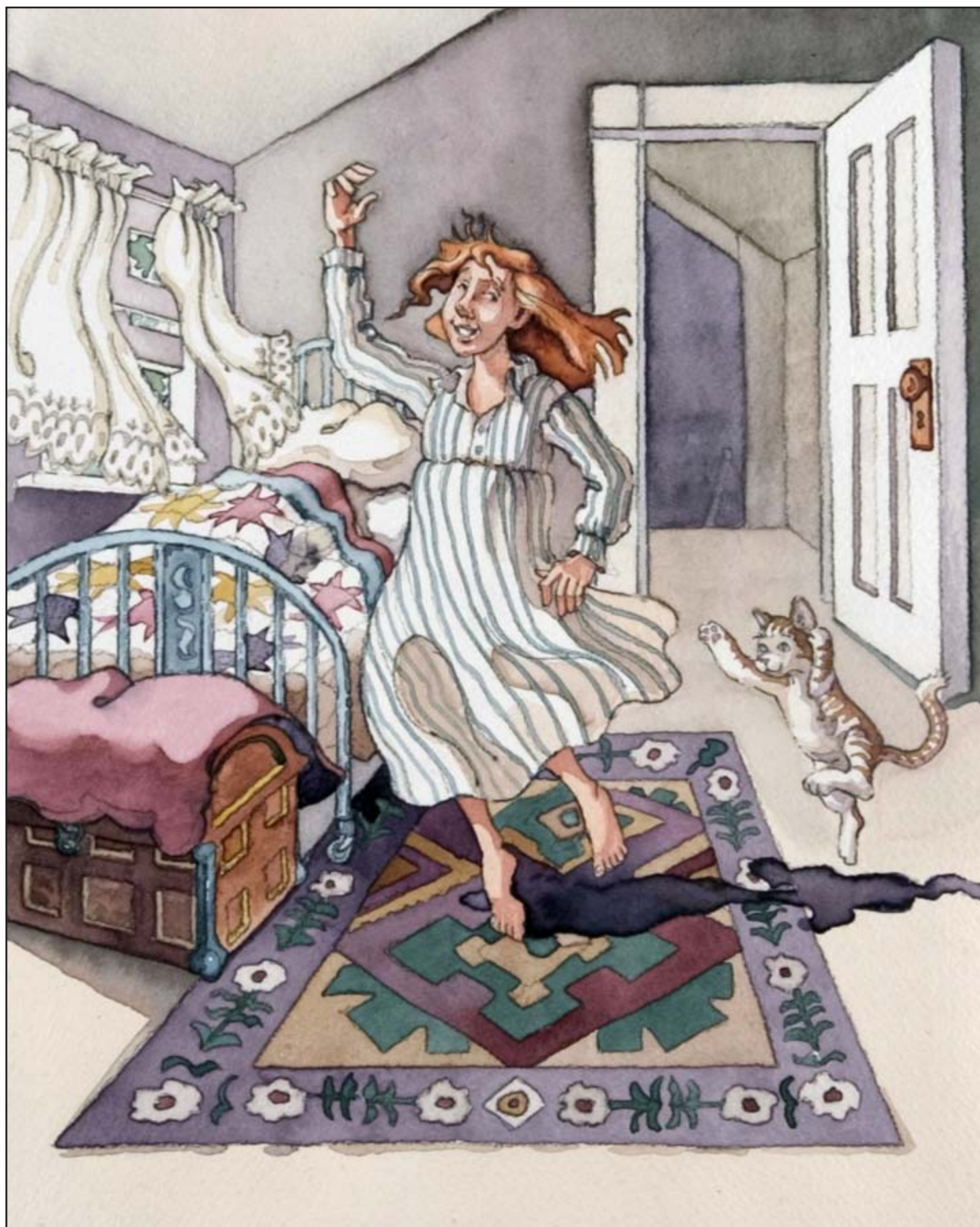
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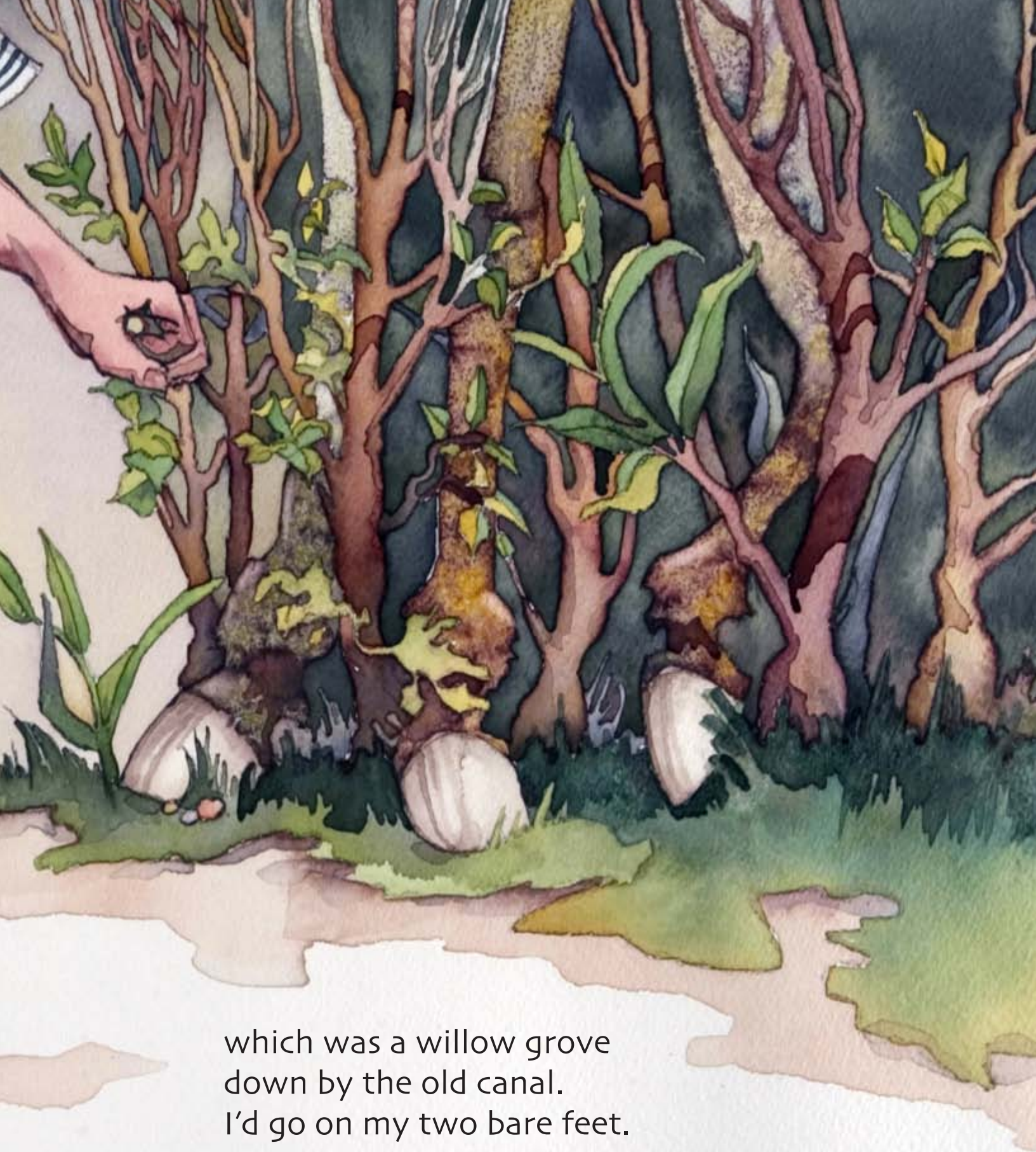




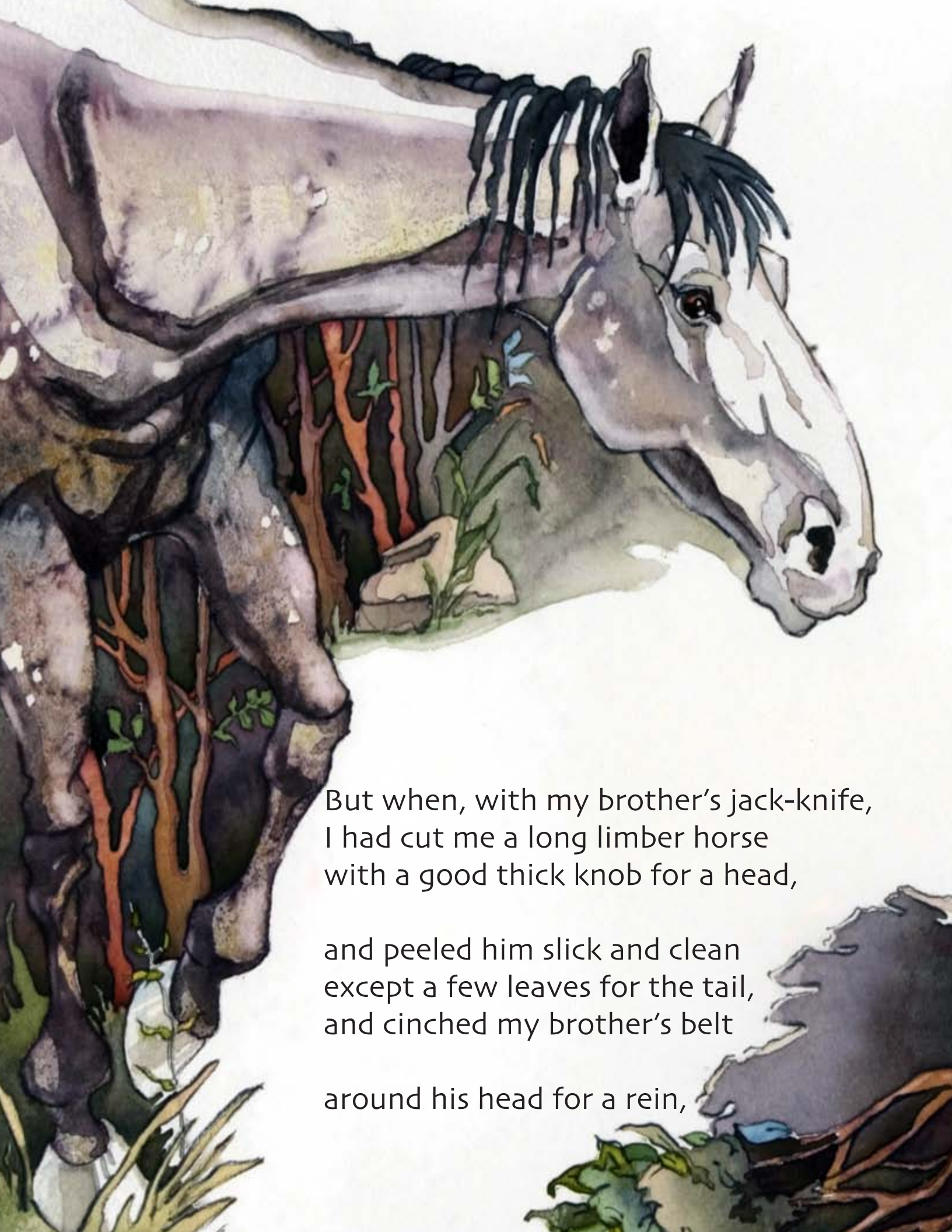


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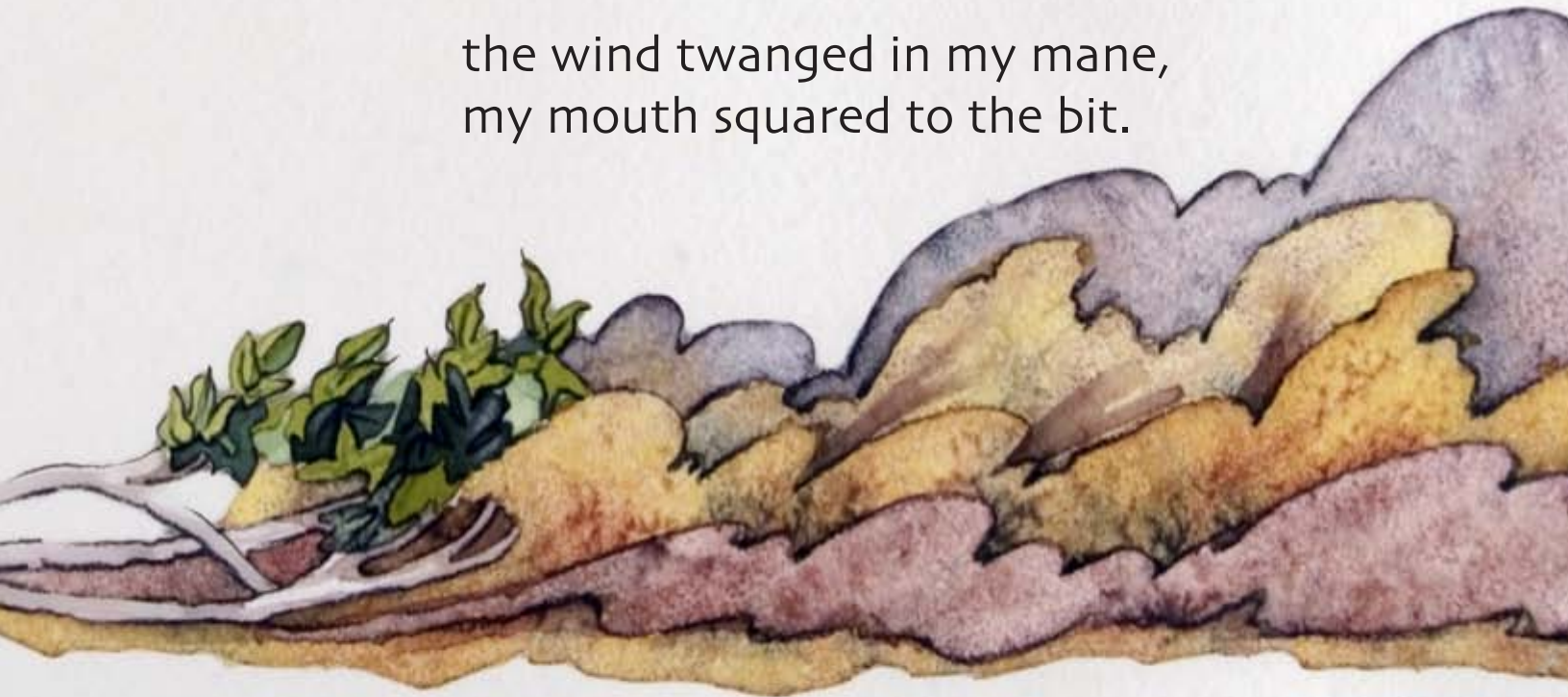
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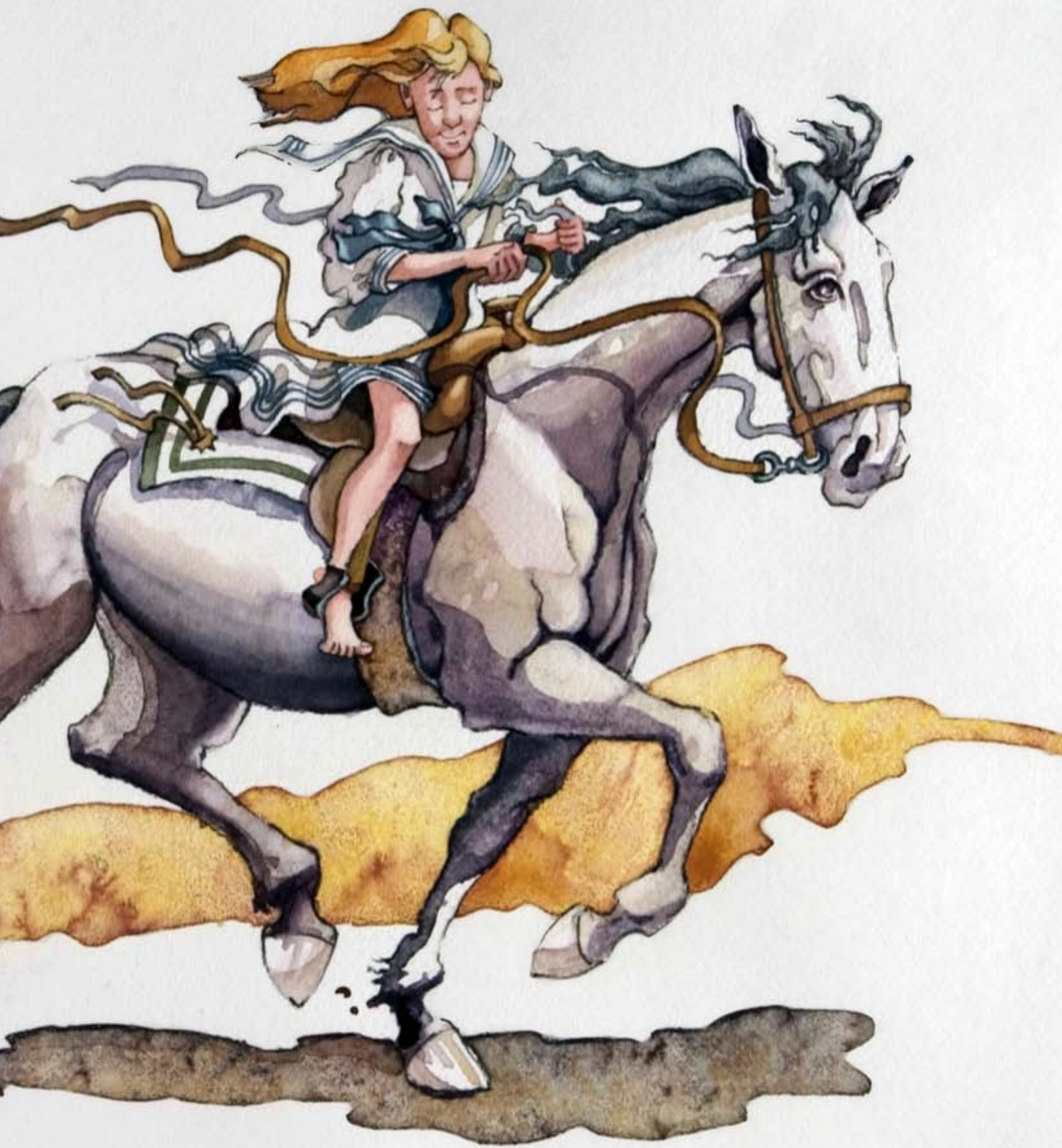
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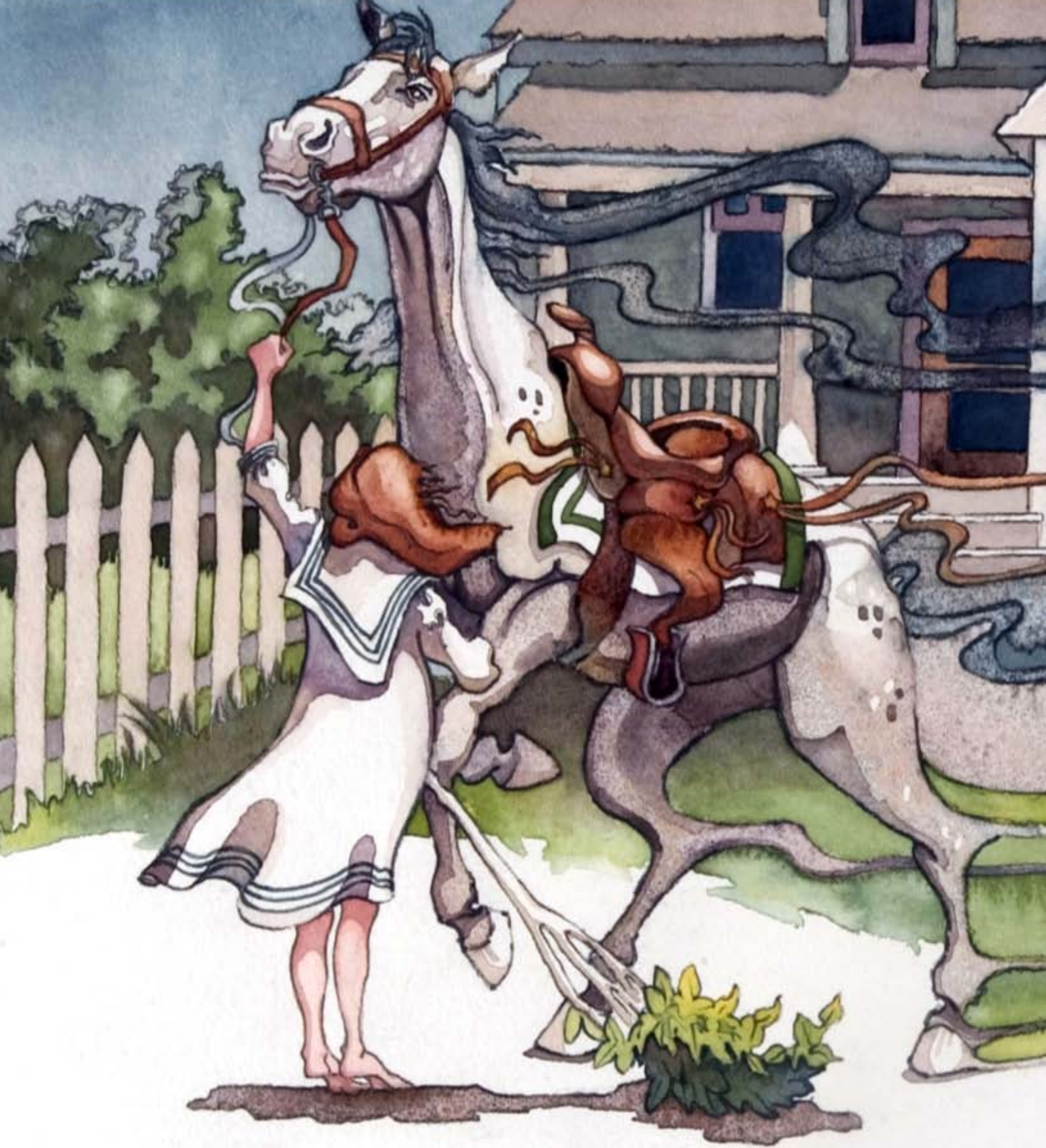


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