The Horse Dreamer

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For Coco-Wren

Treasured is the person who sits calm in the storm,
holding the hands of those who are afraid.





Someone is calling me.

My ears flicker this way and that, alert to the sound. The earth's heartbeat pulses through my hooves and legs. I am made of leaf and sky, of water and stars.

A creature of courage and hope.

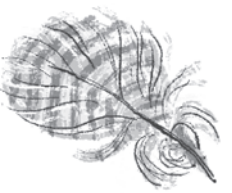
A companion when you are lost.

A friend when you are alone.









CHAPTER 1

Merryn lay under the old ash tree, gazing up at the bright sunshine streaming through the leaves. She loved the luminous green that unfolded in the spring, how cleverly nature had kept it all hidden through those sleepy dark days of winter. Now life seemed to be sprouting from every corner of the seaside forest she loved so much.

Shading her eyes from the sun, Merryn watched a pair of wrens build their nest in

the tree that towered above her. Back and forth, back and forth they went, bringing pieces of moss, lichen and dried grasses, then disappearing behind a curtain of dark green ivy.

If I were tiny, I would curl up and live in this very spot, she thought.

Merryn rolled over. The cool damp from the earth had seeped through her T-shirt.

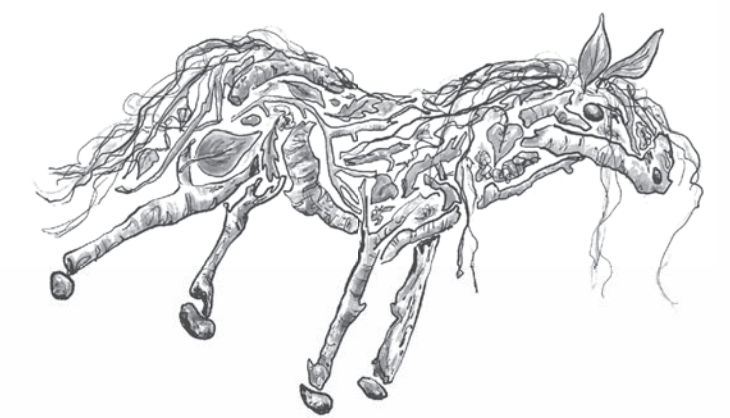
'Never mind, your skin's waterproof,' she muttered to herself, echoing her mother's well-used phrase. But it was her father's face that appeared in her mind. A sudden memory of racing home together in the rain, so wet they didn't even bother to avoid the puddles, laughing as they ploughed straight through them, competing to see who could create the biggest splashes.

Merryn missed Dad's silliness, his spontaneous hugs, the times he took her outside in her pyjamas to look at the stars.

Her fingers trailed over a small pile of sticks in front of her. White fur or hair had drifted down on top, a gift from the wrens. Idly she made a curved neck, a long back, four legs. She found pebbles for hooves and sorrel leaves for ears, and carefully twisted the white hair into strands of ivy for a mane and tail.

'There. Perfect.'

Her stick horse looked magnificent.



She closed her eyes and breathed in the smells of the forest, imagining herself galloping along her secret beach on a powerful, handsome horse. Hair whipping about her face and hooves thundering beneath her . . . Merryn could almost feel the sand flicking up at her bare feet as she galloped along, arms outstretched, her lungs full . . .

Strange, she thought, opening her eyes. Underneath the forest scent of damp soil, decayed leaves and new growth was something else now. The smell of salt and seaweed, sea scents that only blew as far as the trees when the weather was turning.

Merryn knew this meant just one thing: a storm was coming.