

Storm  
Horse

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## 1 \* *A Storm and a Funeral*

THE WIND HOWLED. Rain lashed against the windows. The ferryboat lurched as a wave of dirty brown water slammed into its side, and for one terrifying instant, Flip thought they were going to capsize. His throat closed up. The blood roared in his ears and he squeezed his eyes tight shut, expecting the sea to come crashing in around him any second.

Then the boat righted itself and plowed on through the heaving sea. It was heading for Mossum, the tiny island that was to be Flip's new home. He wasn't looking forward to it. He didn't feel happy. He'd never been to the island and he didn't know anybody who lived on it. Nobody, that is, except for the silent, forbidding figure beside him.

Uncle Andries.

Uncle Andries scared Flip. He'd scared him from the moment they'd met, two days before, when he'd

arrived in the city to arrange his brother's funeral. His brother was Flip's father. And as Flip's mother had left them three years before and never been heard from since, twelve-year-old Flip was all alone in the world.

His uncle's appearance had only made him feel more alone. He'd walked into the house where Flip had been staying, looked the boy up and down, and said, "I'm your father's older brother. You will call me Uncle Andries."

He was a tall man with a big head that looked even bigger because his hair had been cut so short that the back and sides were almost bald. The sleeves of his jacket and the legs of his pants were short too and made his hands and feet stick out. He loomed over Flip like a silent giant expecting a reply.

Then he frowned. "Don't you shake hands here in the city?" he asked. "It's considered good manners where I come from."

Flip was too startled to speak. He'd never seen a picture of his uncle in his life. Even more confusing, Uncle Andries had a very thick northern accent Flip found hard to understand and he'd been busy concentrating on listening instead of offering a greeting.

"I suppose," Uncle Andries continued, "your father never bothered teaching you. That does not surprise me."

“I—I’m sorry,” Flip began, finally holding out a trembling hand.

But Uncle Andries had already left the room. He took Flip back to the apartment—the apartment where Flip had lived with his father—then left to speak to the landlord. Finally he went out. When he returned, he said he’d made all the arrangements for the funeral. He also said he’d arranged with the authorities for Flip to come and live with him, and told him he should pack everything he wanted to take in two suitcases. *Only* two. Then he’d made them both supper and gone to bed. Not once had he asked Flip how he was.

He didn’t ask the next day, either. The two of them got up, ate a silent breakfast, and carried their suitcases to the cemetery. There they stood at the graveside, listening to the priest intone the service. Flip did his best to pay attention, but he couldn’t concentrate. He missed his dad, but he missed his mom even more. And all he could do as he stood beside his uncle was keep looking up and across the gravestones to the cemetery gates, hoping—really, really hoping—that she would come walking through them any minute. Even though she’d left them all those years ago, Flip couldn’t believe his mom would leave him on his own now.

But she never appeared. And Flip’s loneliness only deepened.