

— CHAPTER —



Even though it was still daytime, the fog made it seem almost dark. You couldn't see much of the forest lane, even with the fog lights on. Father had slowed right down, peering to the right all the time.

"There's a gate here somewhere. Keep a lookout, Emma."

Emma couldn't see anything, apart from fog and black tree trunks. Or could she? She gave a start. All of a sudden, it seemed as if a shadow was moving in the undergrowth. It looked like a large animal.

She pressed her face close up against the glass. There it was again. As if it was escorting the car.

"There's something out there, Daddy!"

"Where? What?"

He braked.

"Some sort of animal..."

Father looked in the direction she pointed out. But there was only the fog, drifting grey and silent between the trees.

"Oh, Emma, I think it must just be a fallen log or something like that."

"No, there was definitely something there."

"I saw it too," Carl piped up. He had just awoken.

"Did you?" Emma was delighted. Carl didn't always take her side.

"Well, I think so. Are we nearly there yet?"

Father had a smile in his voice as he answered:

"In a minute. I think this is the driveway, right here."

Immediately after, they turned in through two tall iron gates and continued down a gravel lane.

"The house is beside a lake. That's why it sometimes gets so foggy here," Father explained.

The lane turned, and they drove into the courtyard in front of the house.

Emma and Carl were both open-mouthed.

Aunt Stella's house had two storeys, with a round tower in the middle. It had balconies and chimneys and recesses, and a big, arched front door.

"Wow!" exclaimed Carl. "It's a castle!"

"Not exactly, but there are lots of rooms." Father got out and opened the boot to get their stuff. "Uncle Ricky probably inherited it from a rich grandfather."

Emma slammed the car door and looked around. Opposite the house was a sloping lawn, and she could just make out the shore of the lake. There were no other buildings nearby, and unlike what she was used to, you couldn't hear any traffic noise or other people.

"Who's Uncle Ricky?" Carl asked.

"Aunt Stella's husband. He died before you were born."

"What did he die of?" Predictably, Carl wanted to know.

"He was old, and then he got ill. Come on. Let's get inside where it's warm."

Emma took a last look around, without catching even the smallest movement anywhere. Then she followed Father and Carl up the steps to the front door.

