



Aunt Stella had a big kitchen with a high ceiling and an old-fashioned black iron stove in a corner. Next to it was a modern stove with an oven, from which she brought out the most delicious freshly baked muffins. The children were given hot chocolate, and the grown-ups had coffee. Father and Aunt Stella talked about the weather, which was so wet and dull. It wasn't like December in the old days, with lots of frost and snow.

When Carl had eaten three muffins, he began to wander around restlessly. Emma just sat on a chair, dangling her legs. Eventually, Aunt Stella said they could go and have a look around the house.

Carl followed Emma along the short hallway back to the room with the black and white tiles. There were four doors, two on each side. Emma chose one and it opened into a room with a high ceiling and a huge fireplace. In front of it were two sofas piled with cushions, and on the floor was a zebra hide. On the walls hung animal heads: a stag with curly horns, an elk and some kind of billy-goat. There were also several rows of antlers, some small, some very large.

"Look at that!"

Impressed, Carl contemplated the collection of spears and daggers adorning the wall above the fireplace. Along the opposite wall were cabinets with glass doors. Inside, you could make out lots of figurines and pots and masks. The floor creaked as they tiptoed nearer.

"She hasn't got a telly!" Carl remarked after a while.

Emma didn't answer; she had discovered something. Mounted on a tree trunk on the floor was a stuffed black panther. One paw was raised, and its teeth were bared in a snarl. For a moment, it looked so alive that she stiffened. Then she noticed how worn the fur was; its back had slumped slightly, and its head was at a jaunty angle. The yellow glass eyes stared lifelessly. Nevertheless, there was something about the panther. Carl patted it and a cloud of dust followed. She whispered:

"Careful! Not too hard."

The sound of Father's voice startled them:

"Emma? Carl? Where are you? I have to go now."

