



Early the next morning, Emma woke up. Outside, daylight was only just breaking. She was in her bed in the bedroom where she had been tucked in the night before. Carl was still asleep in another bed. At first, Emma couldn't work out what had woken her. Then she heard the scratching sound again.

She sat up abruptly. Aunt Stella had left a single lamp lit on a table over by the door, and in its weak glow, she caught sight of a mouse in the middle of the floor between the two beds. It might have been the same one she had seen when they arrived yesterday. It sat up on its haunches and briefly cleaned its head with its front paws, all the while seemingly keeping an eye on her. Emma didn't move. Mother probably wouldn't approve of there being mice in Aunt Stella's house, but it really looked quite cute.

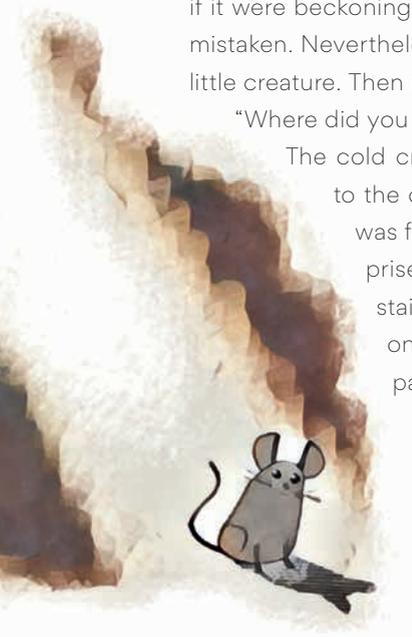
"You're obviously not afraid of Stripy," she noted.

The mouse dropped onto all fours and slipped away in the direction of the wall. It stopped just once, and it looked as if it were gesturing to her with its paw. As if it were beckoning her to follow. Of course, it was very dark, so maybe she was mistaken. Nevertheless, Emma crawled out of bed without taking her eyes off the little creature. Then it squeezed beneath a cupboard door and disappeared.

"Where did you go, mousy?"

The cold crept up through her feet and lower legs as she tiptoed over to the cupboard. For a moment, she wondered what to do, but she was far too big to squeeze through a crack, so instead she carefully prised the door open. There was no cupboard behind it, but a staircase leading steeply upwards. The mouse was sitting waiting on the top step; she could just make out its dark silhouette in the pale light of morning.

Emma set foot on the first step. As soon as she moved, the mouse darted away. By the time she reached the top of the stairs, she couldn't see anything. It immediately struck her that she must be in a room in the turret, because the walls



were curved. In good weather, you would probably be able to look out across the lake. Right now, everything was just dark grey outside the windows. Emma shuddered and turned her back on the dismal view. Only then did she notice the single item of furniture in the room: an old wooden chest. The mouse was sitting on it, right in the middle.

Just then, Carl called:

"Emma? Where are you?"

In a flash, the mouse disappeared down a hole between two floorboards, and Emma was left standing there alone.