



Hey, are you awake, then?" Aunt Stella popped her head round the bedroom door just as Emma closed the cupboard door behind her. "What do you say to having breakfast in the jungle?"

"Are there any panthers?" asked Carl.

"No, unfortunately not. At best, a cat."

"Sounds good to us!" Emma decided.

"Let's get your sweaters and slippers on before we start the expedition!"

A short time later, they followed Aunt Stella through a glass door into the conservatory at the back of the house. It did seem like a real jungle. Towering ferns and palm trees in tubs, vines strung from the ceiling and flourishing bushes. Wrapped in blankets, they enjoyed tea and toast while sitting around an electric heater.

"Well, it's not as hot as a tropical rainforest here," Aunt Stella said. She started talking about the time she and Uncle Ricky went on a jungle expedition. They had to hack their way through, and at night they slept in hammocks suspended between the trees.

"Were there any wild animals?" Emma asked.

"Oh yes, lots!" Aunt Stella talked about orangutans and snakes and toucans and giant spiders.

"Where did you go to the toilet?" Carl wanted to know.

"When we had to go, we dug a hole in the ground with a little shovel we'd brought with us. Once, I was squatting, ready to pee, and I noticed a monkey up a tree, staring at me in bewilderment."

The three of them laughed.

"But what I remember best," continued Aunt Stella, "was our guide, Matt. He didn't have a map or a compass, but he could find his way around anyway. During the day, he kept an eye on the sun, and at night, he always made sure that we set up camp in a location where there was an opening in the treetops. Then he could see the stars. That's how he

knew which direction we should go."

"Shall we go on an expedition in this jungle?" suggested Emma.

"Good idea!" shouted Carl.

The three of them played in the conservatory until just before lunch. They crossed a river and found their way to a village and played hide-and-seek among the greenery. When they had eaten, they had another look for Aunt Stella's key, this time in Uncle Ricky's office. It had a soft, patterned carpet on the floor, and on the wall was a gigantic picture of some people on a mountaintop, because Uncle Ricky loved climbing mountains, Aunt Stella explained, pointing out his old walking



pole tucked away in a corner. On a low cabinet, there were some gilded statues of deities from the Himalayan Mountains and some stripy bowls and jugs made of clay from the Andes Mountains in Peru. In a large glass display cabinet, there was a collection of stones and rocks of all colours and shapes. Carl and Emma were fascinated, too, by the Swiss cuckoo clock hanging on the wall, and Aunt Stella wound it up, making a little bird wearing a top hat pop out twelve times.

The big desk in the middle of the room had lots of drawers, but the key was not to be found in any of them. Not even in the secret compartment that you could open by pressing a button. There was just a dried rose, which made Aunt Stella smile, but it did nothing for Carl. He looked in all the bowls and jugs, and then gave up. Aunt Stella stopped the cuckoo clock again and said she would have to take an afternoon nap now. Meanwhile, they could go outside and look around the garden and woods.

“Yes, we’d love to!”

Carl tore off immediately in the direction of the wardrobe next to the stairs, and brought out his boots and jacket.

Emma hesitated while pulling on her jacket. She stood on the step at the front door. The fog was like a wall around the house. There was neither sun nor stars to show you the way here!

