

— CHAPTER —



“Come on, Emma!” Carl shouted, already partly enveloped in all the greyness. Slowly, Emma walked down the three steps and followed him along the house. First she walked on the gravel. Then, turning the corner of the house, she stepped onto a lawn. The ground beneath her boots felt soft and spongy. Even though it was chilly, it didn’t feel really wintry; it didn’t really feel like any season in particular.

“What a massive garden!” Carl remarked, stopping to let her catch up with him. “It’s bigger than the park back home.”

Emma just nodded. The smell of the soil and wet leaves reminded her, too, of the park near their apartment, but it seemed so strange not to see other people. The fog kept moving around, so sometimes they could see a little bit further, and sometimes not. They could make out the outline of bushes and borders with withered flowers. The world was silent, apart from a gentle splashing of water, which, it turned out, came from a pond with a fountain in the middle. It was shaped like a fish spewing a jet of water out of its mouth.

Carl immediately sat down on the wide bank of the pond and started launching twigs in the water like ships. Emma pulled one mitten off and dipped her fingers in the icy cold water.

Somewhere in the woods, the sound of a chainsaw broke the silence, and Emma and Carl looked at each other.

“Who could that be?” Carl asked, getting up. “Shall we take a look?”

“Oh, isn’t it a bit too far away?”

Emma couldn’t explain why, but she preferred not to stray too far from the house.

“It sounds like it’s just over there.”

Carl was already moving in the direction of the noise. Emma didn’t want to let him go alone, so she followed along a gravel path to a fence with a gate. The hinges squeaked when Carl pushed it open.

Now the chainsaw fell silent. Emma looked nervously around but could not see anything other than tree trunks.

“This way!” Carl decided.

A thick carpet of brown leaves covered the forest floor and continued onto what might or might not be a path. After they had walked some distance along it, they came to a clearing. In front of them was the biggest tree they’d ever seen. Its trunk was broader than Aunt Stella’s front door, and its branches stretched out high above their heads.

“Wow!”

Carl tilted his head back as far as it would go. Next to him, Emma stared down at the soft soil between two tree roots. There was an imprint, almost like from a very big paw.

“I think I want to go back to the garden now,” she said.

Right then, the whining sound of the chainsaw began again, and a tall figure emerged from the fog straight ahead of them.

