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Wait for me!” Carl called after Emma. But she didn’t slow down – on the contrary! She chased after the grey streak of lightning, across the clearing, continuing along a path that turned a corner and led downhill. Carl yelled to her at the top of his voice: “Emma, stop!” – so loud that he almost drowned out the chainsaw.

“We need to follow the mouse,” she replied over her shoulder. “Come on!”

“What mouse?”

The very next second, Emma caught sight of something black among the undergrowth. She stopped so abruptly that Carl almost bumped into her.

“Shhh!” she hissed.

They were frozen to the spot. The chainsaw fell silent again, and Emma was aware of her heart pounding.

“I can’t see a mouse,” Carl remarked.

“It wasn’t a mouse.” She was gazing into the tangled undergrowth. “It was something else. The same thing I saw when we were in the car.”

“Are you sure?”

Emma didn’t respond.

“Shall we go and look for it?”

Carl spoke very softly, as if someone might overhear them.

Emma shook her head.

In the same instant, the leaves ahead of them stirred. They both turned their heads, and Emma thought Carl must have seen something moving, too, by a tree stump a little further ahead, because they both broke into a run at exactly the same time.

The path was sloping steeply now. Carl nearly tripped over a tangle of roots and almost slid into the squishy leaves. They virtually tumbled down the last part of the bank to the lake shore, where the path ended in a little cove. A bathing jetty extended into the water, with a rowing boat at the end of it. Sitting on its haunches on the bollard that the boat was moored to was the mouse, looking towards them.



As soon as it became aware of them, it leapt into the boat.

“What’s it doing?”

Treading carefully, Carl walked out onto the jetty, which was covered in green algae.

Emma kept glancing back into the forest, but she couldn’t see anything. In front of her was the shimmering water, reflecting the dark tree trunks on the edge of the woods. The fog drifted like low clouds; it was impossible to make out the opposite bank.

“Leave it, Carl. We’d better get home.”

Without paying any attention to her, Carl knelt down on the jetty, leaning towards the boat.

“Oh, it’s gone.”

Emma glanced over her shoulder again.

“Come on. We can follow the shoreline.”

They got back to the house, hot and out of breath, because Emma was in a hurry.

Fortunately, Aunt Stella was awake. Better still, she was busy making pancakes for them.