

When Emma and Carl got up the next morning, the fog had lifted slightly, but not much. The evening before, Emma had secretly put a few crumbs by the door to the hidden staircase, and they had gone. However, there was no sign of the mouse.

They found Aunt Stella in the hallway, rummaging through a tall chest of drawers and wearing a very strange hat. All the drawers were open, and brightly coloured fabric, lace and knitwear protruded from the overflowing drawers.

“What are you doing?” Emma asked.

“Oh, good morning! So you’re awake, then? I’m looking for my key, of course. I know I put somewhere safe...”

Aunt Stella held up a necklace with large turquoise beads in one hand, and adjustable pliers in the other. Then she sighed and stuffed them both back in the drawer. Emma and Carl helped her to hunt through the rest of the chest of drawers. The contents included embroidered hair bands, crocheted shawls, Icelandic sweaters, jodhpurs and a bracelet of shark’s teeth, but no key.

“What are you actually wearing on your head?” Carl wondered.

“This gravy boat thing? It was in the bottom drawer. It’s an admiral’s hat. It’s part of a uniform.”

Aunt Stella quickly closed all the drawers and took them into a bedroom with a four-poster bed and a huge wardrobe. It was packed with clothes and boxes of shoes and hats. Carl was allowed to try on the admiral’s hat and a gold-braided uniform jacket with shiny buttons. Emma tried on a very fine Japanese silk kimono with a pair of wooden flip-flops. Aunt Stella brought out a party dress embroidered with beads and tiny silver sequins, holding it up and twirling around while humming a dance tune. It looked so funny because she was wearing a safari helmet at the same time.

Emma opened a box containing a headband of faded artificial flowers. They belonged to a Polish national costume. Carl rummaged around in the bottom of the wardrobe and pulled out a pair of old ski boots. They were obviously too big for him.



Then Aunt Stella found an oblong box. As she lifted the lid, she exclaimed: "Oh!" Emma and Carl both looked inquisitively at the three long, bright green feathers in the box.

"Those are tail feathers from a very beautiful bird from Guatemala in Central America," Aunt Stella explained. "It's called a quetzal. An Indian chieftain once gave me those. They're rare. And maybe slightly magical."

Ceremoniously, she picked up one feather and held it out to Emma, and then held out another to Carl.

"Take good care of them. There are fewer and fewer quetzal in the world because their rainforests are disappearing."

Emma and Carl were both absolutely fascinated by their feathers. Then Aunt Stella inserted the third feather into the strap of her safari helmet.

"Time for breakfast!" she declared.

