— CHAPTER —

13

During the night, Emma was awoken by a sound. She couldn't tell where it came from, and by the time she was properly awake, the house was completely silent. Maybe it was the mouse, she thought, propping herself up on one elbow. Or maybe it was just Carl, lying there snoring as usual. She could just make out the tip of the green quetzal feather peeking out from beneath his pillow. Aunt Stella had said they could put these feathers under their pillows and see what happened. Emma was just about to go back to sleep again when she caught sight of something in the narrow gap between the curtains at the window. Silently, she crept towards it.

A star. The fog had cleared just enough for her to glimpse a sliver of sky, and way up above, a star was shimmering in the dark of night. Emma thought of her mum, who loved gazing at stars. Last summer, visiting their holiday cottage far away from the big city lights, she had put up sun loungers outside for the four of them to spend the balmy night looking up at the starry sky. Carl and Father nodded off pretty quickly, but Emma and her mother managed to spot the Big Dipper, the North Star and Cassiopeia. Emma knew, too, that the bright star you can see at night and in the morning isn't a star at all, but the planet Venus.

It was funny to realise that the stars were so far away that, even if you travelled miles and miles from Aunt Stella's house, you would still see the same stars when you looked up. Aunt Stella and her guide Matt might even have seen that star many years ago in the jungle. And that star up there could be seen from her flat back home in the city, too.

"Give Mum my love," Emma whispered to the star.

Then she noticed something else, and froze. The window overlooked the garden, and down there in the dark, a shadow was moving around. A dark animal with a long tail. Emma was so startled, she shut her eyes. When she opened them again, there was nothing to see. She jumped back into bed, snuggled down under the duvet and pulled it up tightly around her.