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The next morning, she phoned Mother to say hello. Aunt Stella still had one of those old-fashioned telephones with wires. She kept it on a table next to the front door. Carl spoke to her first, and then it was Emma's turn.

"I had a lovely dream about you last night, Emma," Mother told her cheerily. "We got a letter from you, and the envelope was full of this fine gold dust, which coloured my fingers, and everything I touched began to sparkle."

"You could probably sense me thinking about you," Emma replied, but she didn't say anything about the star or the feather under her pillow, or the other thing.

Now Aunt Stella appeared from her charming room with the open fireplace. She had a garish yellow scarf tied around her head and a big, patterned piece of cloth wrapped around her body. Emma turned round to smile at her and nearly pulled the phone off the table!

"What are you doing right now?" Mother asked.

"Right now, we're in West Africa."

Aunt Stella had been showing them some of her African masks and figurines, and had found outfits to match. She'd given Emma a lacy blouse and a gaudy skirt, and Carl a kind of shirt with gold trim. Everything was a bit too big.

Mother laughed.

"That sounds like fun. What a pity I'm stuck here!"

"Mmm," said Emma. She felt a twinge in her stomach at the sound of her mother's voice. "Is your foot any better?"

"Yes, I think it's a lot better today. We'll soon be back together, darling."

"I know. Bye, Mum..." Emma mumbled.

"I've found it!" Carl yelled the instant Emma hung up. "Here it is! It's here!"

Emma and Aunt Stella both rushed through to see Carl, who was jumping around on the zebra-skin rug in front of the fireplace, waving something.

"It was in that jar!" He was eagerly holding out a leather strap with a flat key towards them. "Christmas is coming!"

Aunt Stella clapped her hands.



“Wow, Carl, you’re amazing! That’s my spare car key. I haven’t seen that for at least twenty years!”

Carl stopped short, mid-jump.

“So that’s not the one we’re looking for, then?”

“Unfortunately not. But I’m thrilled you’ve found this one.”

Emma could see that Carl was close to tears now.

“Where’s your car?” she asked quickly. “Can we see it?”

Much to her relief, the sight of Aunt Stella’s old sports car out in the garage made Carl forget all about the key. They opened the soft top and the three of them piled into the car, and because it wasn’t drivable, they had to content themselves with a make-believe journey. On the bright side, though, that meant Carl was allowed to sit in the driving seat and drive them out to sea, continuing under water, where they saw stripy fish, turtles and sea anemones. They ate lunch on their journey, and when Aunt Stella felt like taking a lunch-time nap, Carl and Emma were allowed to carry on playing in the car. Later, in the kitchen, they baked biscuits with her and helped to make the dinner: chicken with rice and tomato salad. In fact, they were so busy that Emma didn’t even think about Mother and Father again until the evening, when she was being tucked into bed. But before she got as far as missing them, she fell asleep.

The next morning, once again, the breadcrumbs she had left by the cupboard door had been eaten.

