



Emma slipped silently out of bed. She noticed that Aunt Stella was no longer in the armchair. With bated breath, she tiptoed over to Carl by the window. The fog was gone; she could see the entire garden with its benches, flower beds, bushes and trees. A white hoar frost made everything sparkle in the moonlight. The only thing that wasn't glistening was the big cat in the middle of the lawn outside the window, its black coat seemingly absorbing the light. It looked as if it was sitting there looking directly at them.

"What's it doing?" whispered Carl. "What does it want us to do?"

"I don't know."

They could feel the chill from the window, and Emma shuddered. Then they heard some gentle scratching. On the floor behind them, illuminated by the moon, was the mouse. One of its front paws seemed to point to them, and then it turned round and scurried towards the door, which was ajar, leading to the hallway.

Emma hesitated. Part of her wanted to crawl back into bed and hide under the duvet, but she knew what she had to do now.

"Come on," she said. "Put some warm clothes on."

Without protesting, Carl pulled on a sweater over his pyjamas and found his thick socks under the bed. A while later, the mouse was nowhere to be seen as they sneaked downstairs and put on their outdoor jackets. Without making a sound, they opened the back door and hurried past the large greenhouse, its glass panes covered by frost flowers. Their steps along the gravel path sounded loud in the still of night.

Finally, they came near to where the panther had been.

"It's gone!"

Carl spun round, looking everywhere.

"There!" Emma pointed.

Over by a bush, she could make out the outline of something moving. They started running, but before they got there, the shadow had slipped further away, jumping effortlessly over the gate and out to the woods.



"After it!" gasped Carl.

The dead leaves crackled under their feet as they passed along the alternating strips of light and shade on the forest pathway. The large oak tree was nicely silhouetted and it almost seemed to greet them as they passed by. Emma was in no doubt about where they had to go now.

The black panther was sitting on the end of the jetty. It was staring across the lake where the moonlight created a silvery pathway across the gleaming surface of the water.