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Carl and Emma stopped short on the banks. Very briefly, the panther turned its head towards them. Then it padded down onto the moonlit pathway and started to walk across the lake. The cold nipped Emma's cheeks and the tip of her nose, and the frosty air burned within her lungs as she breathed in. They kept very still. What should they do? Emma thought she knew the answer, but it felt difficult nonetheless.

In that instant, the mouse scurried past them, onto the jetty. It leapt down into the boat and begged up on its hind legs at the prow as if to say: "What are you waiting for?"

Emma stretched out her hand and took Carl's in hers.

"Are you coming?"

Carl just nodded.

Together, they got into the boat. Emma loosened the rope around the mooring and pushed off. They glided forward. Immediately, the boat was taken by a gentle current, and set off after the panther. Suddenly, she realised it was no longer alone: a bird with long, green tail feathers was hovering above it.

Somewhere far out on the lake, a series of fins showed above the surface of the water. It took a while for Emma to grasp what this was: a menagerie of dolphins, seals, sea lions and flying fish, all interspersed. They swam closer, positioned themselves around the boat, leapt out of the water and dived down beneath the prow. A little further away, on both sides, Emma could just distinguish the outline of a number of gigantic whales. She and Carl were so fascinated with the aquatic creatures that they didn't realise they were approaching the shore until the boat began to slow down.

As they bumped against the shoreline, the bright, silvery winter darkness changed. The night was replaced by a ray of rising sunlight coming from all over, yet nowhere in particular.

"Wow!" whispered Carl.

Ahead of them lay a grassy island, and in the middle of the island stood a

tree so huge that it would have dwarfed the old oak in the woods. The trunk was the width of a house and seemed to continue upwards endlessly. A quetzal was perched on one of its thick branches, peering down. And at the foot of the tree, the panther awaited them.

