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Emma awoke as Aunt Stella was drawing the curtains to let the morning sunshine flood into the room.

“It’s after 9 o’clock, sweet children. You really need to wake up now so you’ll be ready when your Mummy and Daddy arrive.”

In the other bed, Carl sat up sleepily and rubbed his eyes.

“And just look at what we’ve got here!”

Aunt Stella gestured towards the window and they trundled open-mouthed towards her.

“Wow!”

It was Emma’s turn to exclaim. It had been snowing all night. The garden was covered in a sparkling white layer of powdery snow, and high above them the sky was a clear, wintry blue.

“Oh, we must go sledging!” Carl shouted.

Just then, a man appeared out of the forest. He trudged through the garden pulling a sledge bearing a large fir tree. Emma immediately recognised the man with the chainsaw.

“Here’s John with my Christmas tree.” Aunt Stella turned away from the window. “I’ll go down and open the door for him. And then we absolutely must find that key today!”

Emma and Carl dressed quickly. Before they went downstairs, Emma took Carl upstairs to the room in the turret. There was no sign of the mouse, but they stayed there a while, looking across the lake. The frost had given the surface a thin layer of ice, and they could see all the way across to the other bank today. There was no island to be seen.

As soon as they had eaten breakfast, Emma and Carl rushed out to play in the snow. They were busy building a snowman, positioning his carrot nose, when the sound of laughter stopped them in their tracks. Up from the road, Father was walking along carrying Mother on his back!

“We got stuck,” Father explained, once everybody had finished hugging and kissing. “It’s a good thing we’ve arranged with Aunt Stella to celebrate Christmas here, because there’s no way that car is going to move any time soon.”

Aunt Stella helped Mother indoors into the warmth, while Carl, Emma and Father pulled her sledge up to the car and loaded it up with bags and packages. When they returned, Aunt Stella was standing in the dining room with her head half submerged in a huge Chinese vase.

“I’ve got to find that key now!” she said, her voice reverberating. “It’s for the chest where I keep all my Christmas decorations up in the loft.”

Emma watched for a few moments as Aunt Stella opened a cabinet of silverware and turned all the cups and trophies upside down. Then she shot Carl a glance.

“I think we know where it is.”

