

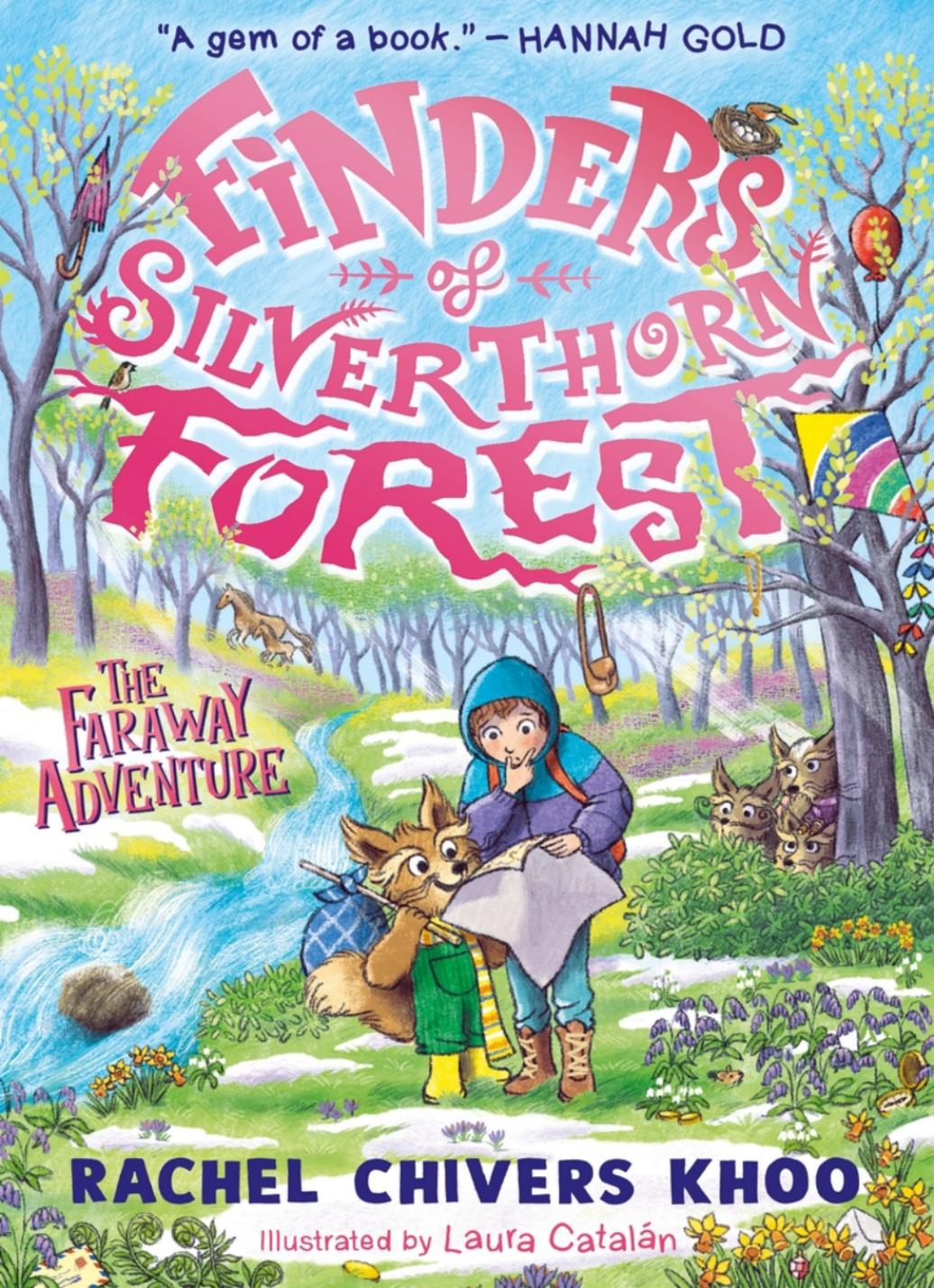
"A gem of a book." – HANNAH GOLD

# FINDERS of SILVERTHORN FOREST

THE  
FARAWAY  
ADVENTURE

**RACHEL CHIVERS KHOO**

Illustrated by *Laura Catalán*







# TO B, WHO IS ALWAYS LEADING US INTO ADVENTURES

**R.C.K.**

# TO VALERIA, MY BIGGEST ADVENTURE

**L.C.**



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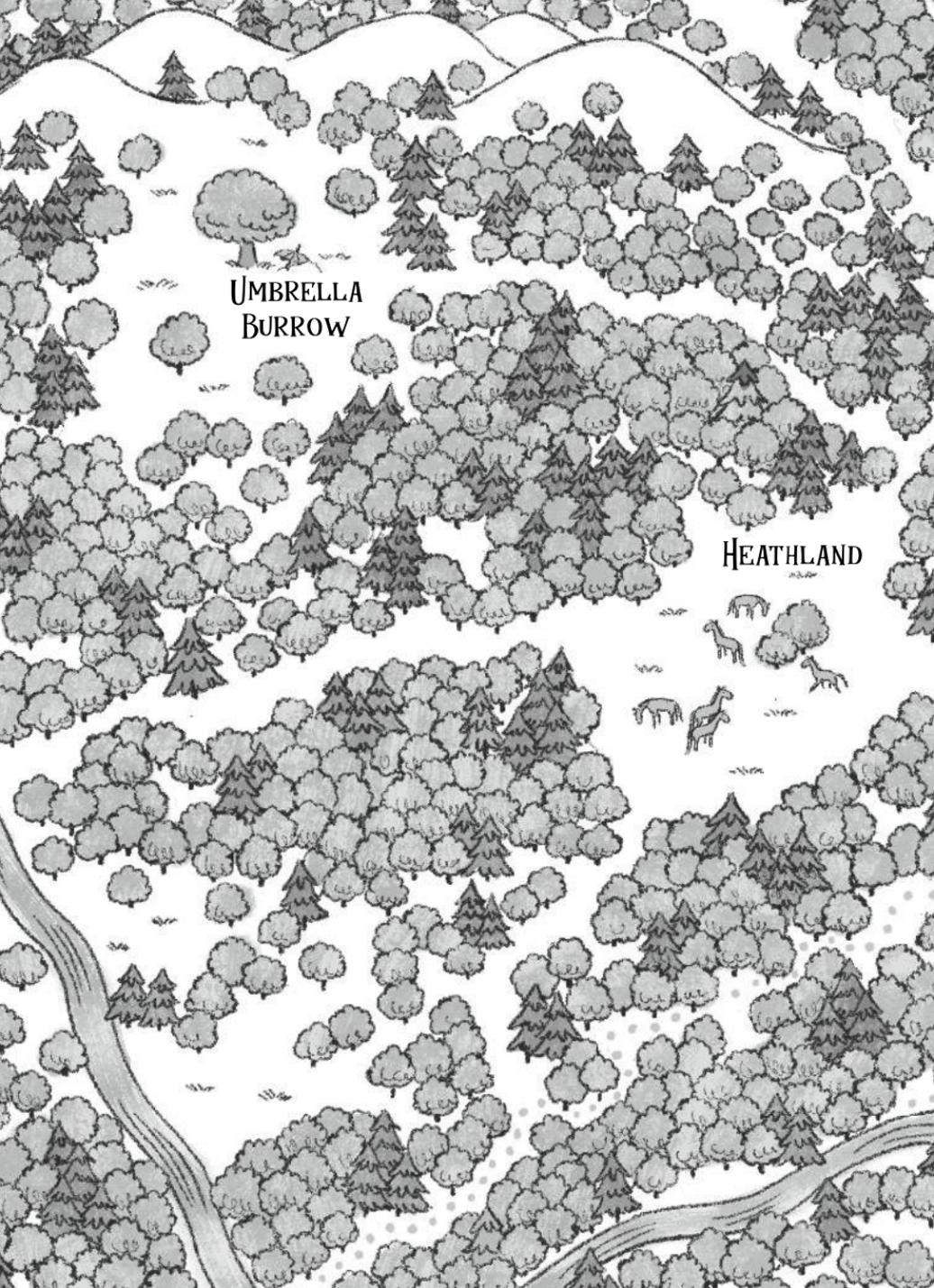
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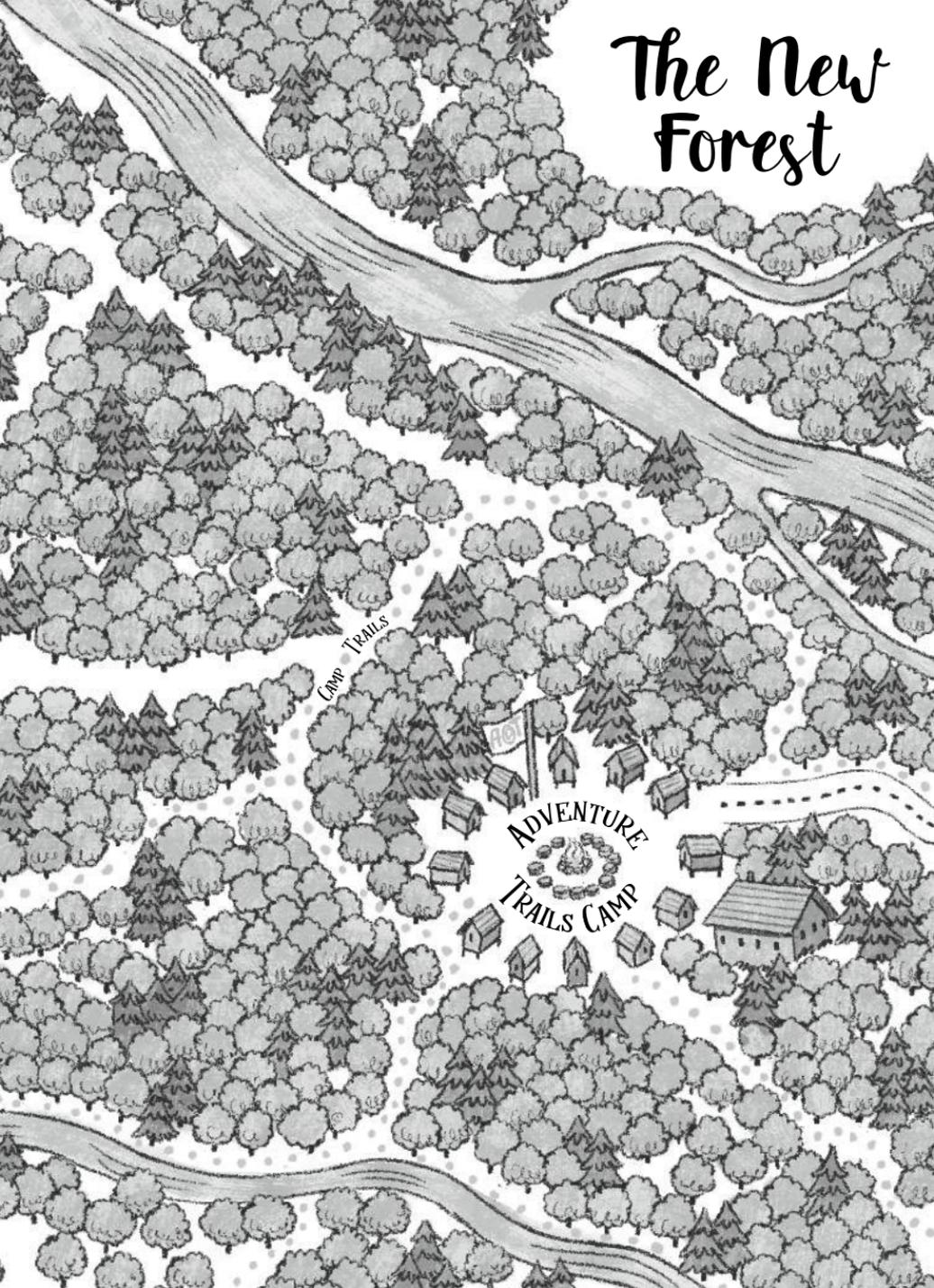




UMBRELLA  
BURROW

HEATHLAND

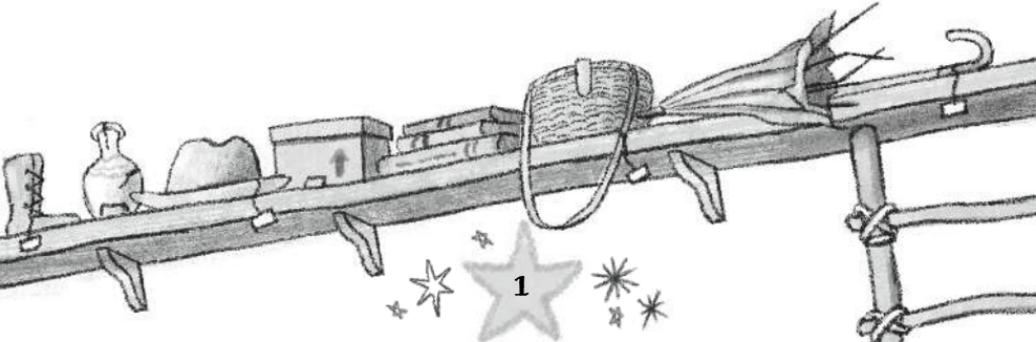
# The New Forest



CAMP TRAILS

ADVENTURE  
TRAILS CAMP

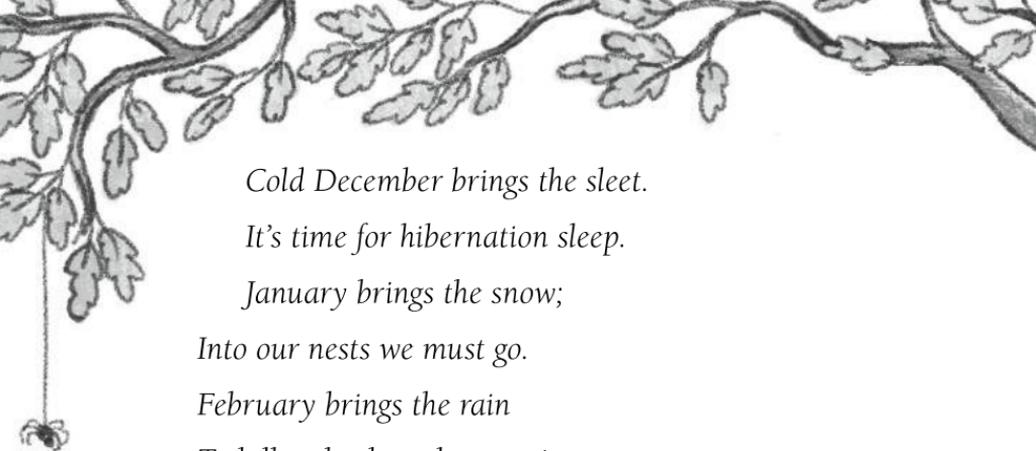




## A SHORT HIBERNATION

**T**uftorous Snook patted his moss-stuffed pillow into shape for the umpteenth time. He lay down on his side with a great *harrumph*, pulled the blanket all the way up to his whiskers and wrapped his bushy tail around his feet. Every Finder in Silverthorn Forest was still fast asleep except for him. This, he supposed, was the price he paid for living in a treehouse rather than a burrow. He'd been woken by a loud gale outside. It rattled the walls of his home.

Squeezing his eyes shut, Tuft remembered the words of the Finders' hibernation rhyme.



*Cold December brings the sleet.  
It's time for hibernation sleep.  
January brings the snow;  
Into our nests we must go.  
February brings the rain  
To lull us back to sleep again.  
March brings breezes sharp and shrill,  
But make sure not to rouse until  
April brings the primrose sweet –  
The scent to wake us from our sleep.*

Tuft pushed his snout-like nose back out from under his blanket and sniffed. There wasn't a hint of primrose. Besides, the chill in the air suggested it must still be March, or possibly even February. A Finder's fur was not cut out for winter. He'd been warned of that many times by Old Grey and the others.

Just then, Tuft remembered he had recently

acquired a faux-fur coat. He sat up and peered around the dimly lit treehouse. The thick coat was just within reach. He pulled it on and was immediately more comfortable.

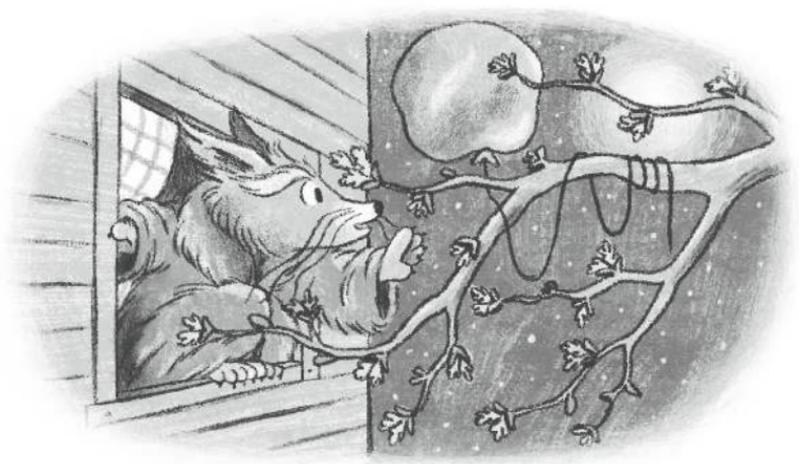
A moment later, Tuft felt his snout prickle. His long whiskers twitched this way and that before pointing decidedly upwards.

“Curious,” he murmured.

Tuft opened the curtains and peered out of the window of his treehouse. There, caught on a bare branch just out of reach, was a somewhat deflated floaty-ball. It wasn't the first time Tuft had seen one of these floaty-balls. Regina Spratt had found one last spring. It had been the talk of the woods for a few days, before the ball shrivelled to the size of a crab apple. But perhaps Tuft would have better luck with his own?

The small Finder took a deep breath and clambered onto the window ledge. Standing on his

tiptoes, he just managed to catch hold of the floaty-ball's string.



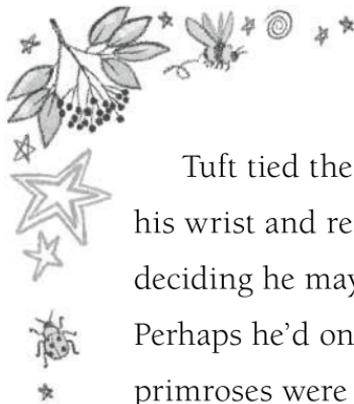
After some tugging and untangling, Tuft pulled the delicate object into the safety of his treehouse. Much to his delight, the shiny foil sphere bobbed in mid-air. It was bright red – a little on the garish side for Tuft's taste – but it was much floatier than Regina's and that was the important thing. Tuft stared out of the treehouse window, wondering where on earth it had come from.



Silverthorn Forest was a smallish patch of woodland, close to a village and encircled by roads. Over the years Tuft's whiskers had discovered all sorts of lost items left behind by humans picnicking in the woods, or discarded by the roadside. He'd often gone all the way to the outskirts of the forest.

Tuft sighed a deep sigh and turned his gaze back to the tomato-red ball. If only he could drift away on a breeze and land somewhere new. Another forest. Maybe even the legendary Faraway Forest? Now *that* would be fun. Tuft had always dreamed of finding it, but Old Grey had forbidden him from venturing outside the boundaries of Silverthorn. Many a Finder had set off seeking the Faraway Forest, including his own parents. No one had ever returned. Like all the young Finders, Tuft had been told the cautionary tale of his Aunt Timodora, who was missing for over a month before the ominous discovery of her anorak at a roadside.





Tuft tied the string of the floaty-ball around his wrist and reached for his prized wellingtons, deciding he may as well take a quick look outside. Perhaps he'd only woken a little early? Maybe the primroses were in bud?

A blast of cold air swept in as soon as Tuft opened the trapdoor. He fastened the buttons on his coat and descended the treehouse's rope ladder, swinging to and fro in the breeze, before landing with a squelch in a little patch of melting snow.

Tuft inspected the wet, icy ground closely. He peeled back the fallen leaves, but couldn't find a single primrose shoot.

"Botheration," he muttered under his breath. Tuft fastened the floaty-ball's string to the rope ladder and began a steady trudge towards the section of the woods where most of the other Finders lived.

Tuft's stomach grumbled and his heart sank lower as he approached a row of burrows and saw that each one was sealed shut. Old Grey's burrow door had a sign pinned to it:

**DO NOT DISTURB THIS BURROW  
UNTIL THE END OF HIBERNATION**

Tuft knew better than to disobey a command from Old Grey. After all, he was the chief of the Finders of Silverthorn Forest. Moreover, he was Tuft's grandfather. Tuft gave up searching for an open door and sat himself down on a fallen trunk. Everyone was still fast asleep. He was utterly alone.

Almost as soon as he sat down, Tuft's frown dissolved. A fresh thought had occurred to him. Perhaps this wasn't a disaster after all? Perhaps this was an opportunity? The youthful Finder sprang to his feet. Everyone in Silverthorn Forest was asleep.

There was absolutely no one to stop him going on an adventure.



In a whirlwind of excitement, Tuft returned to his treehouse and packed up the hibernation nuts and acorns he had stored there, as well as some spare clothes and other essentials. When he tied a knot in his bindle bag, it did look rather empty. Then again, it was good to travel light. The only thing left to do was write a letter to Max in London. If there was anyone to whom Tuft could entrust news of his planned adventure, it was Max. Besides, Max was the only person Tuft knew who wasn't currently in a state of hibernation.

As a rule, the Finders of Silverthorn kept well away from humans. But Max was an exception, since he had saved the entire forest from destruction last summer.

Dear Max,

I know you aren't expecting another letter from me until April, but I've woken early from hibernation and I am going on an expedition. It will be a rather grand expedition and somewhat dangerous. You may remember me mentioning the Faraway Forest, the legendary home of the Finders? Well, at last I have the opportunity to go and look for it.

Many explorers have gone before me, and none have ever returned... I hope to have better luck! However, if you don't hear from me by the start of April, please do your best to get a message to Old Grey and the others to explain where I've gone.

Since there is a small risk of misadventure, I wish to give you my greatest treasure for safekeeping. Please find my rainbow-pearl enclosed. If I never return, then I wish to borrow it to you for keeps.

Love, Tuft

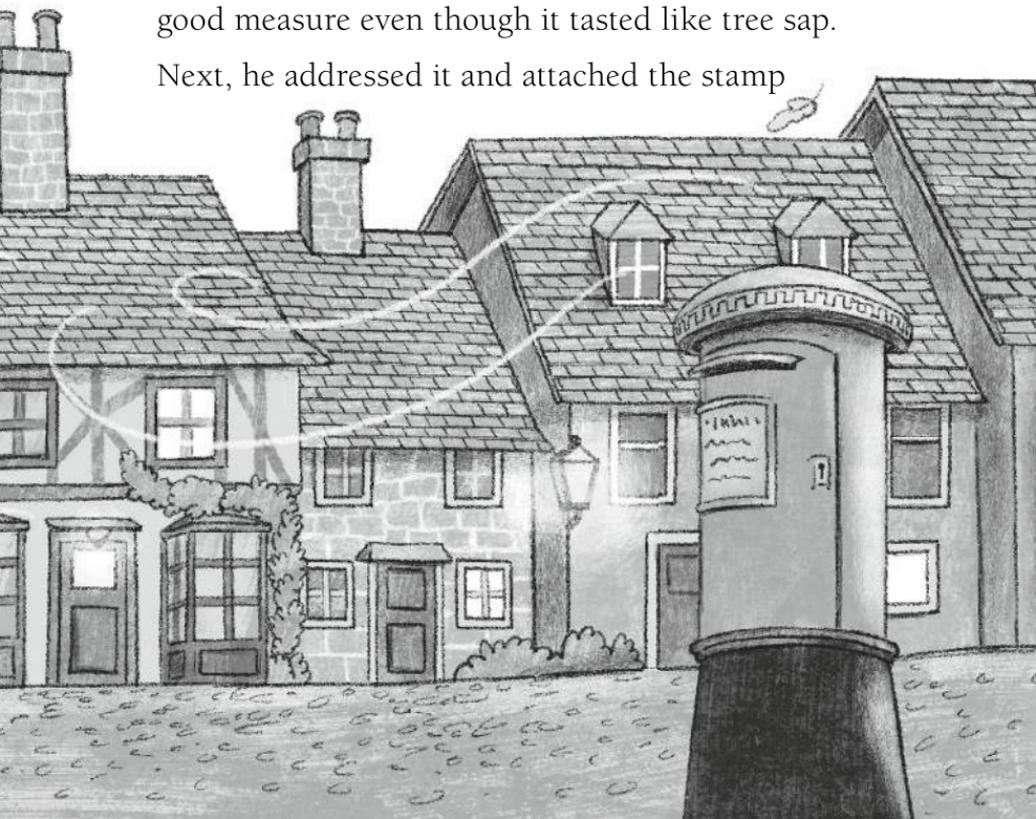
Tuft felt rather sombre as he inserted his most prized possession into the envelope and sealed it shut. But it didn't take long for his excitement to return. By the time he tentatively rounded the corner in Pickwick Village, the spring was back in his step.

Tuft bounded towards the shiny red letter-portal, or "postbox" as Max called it. It was one of those very clever human inventions like telly-phones or elek-trick-city that Tuft had never quite



got his head around. Max had explained the basics of “postboxes” to Tuft when the two of them had officially become “pen pals”, but he had neglected to share the finer details. Nevertheless, Tuft was delighted with their new status of friendship and was always very careful not to forget any of the important steps for the letter-portal system.

Tuft sealed the envelope, licking it twice for good measure even though it tasted like tree sap. Next, he addressed it and attached the stamp



with the King's head, making sure to give a quick bow as he did so.

The final step was simple. Tuft just needed to push the envelope through the portal hole. Max's replies always arrived on the doormat at Pickwick Cottage, the house that had been Max's grandma's home until she'd moved in with Max and his mum in London last year. Now the empty cottage was a safe haven for the Finders, and a crucial part of Max and Tuft's pen pal system.

Tuft readied himself, rising onto his tiptoes as he reached up to the slot in the letter-portal. Just as his envelope disappeared, there was a great roar of an engine behind him. Tuft almost leaped out of his wellingtons. He darted under a bush, out of sight, as a huge red van parked up at the side of the road.

Heavy footsteps approached. Tuft peered through the leaves and to his alarm saw a fully grown human carrying two large white sacks.



The man pulled a set of keys from his pocket and opened a hidden door in the belly of the postbox.

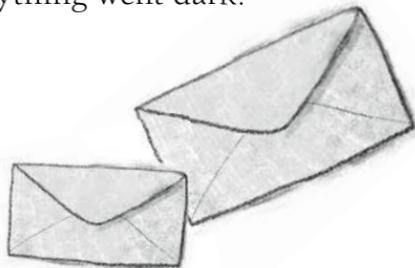
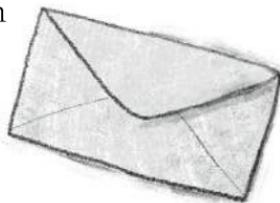
Tuft gasped as a torrent of letters spilled out.

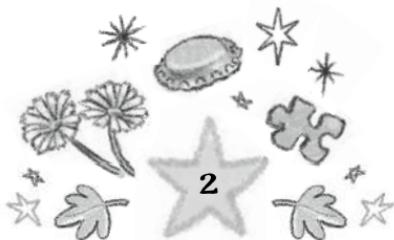
The tall human bent over and swept half of the letters into the first of the two sacks.

Tuft clutched at his chest. Was this man *stealing* the letters? His rainbow pearl was in one of those envelopes!

Just then, the thief turned his back to load the sack into the van. Tuft saw his chance. He sprang out of the bush and darted towards the remaining open sack, managing to scramble inside before he was spotted. Moments later, a flood of envelopes showered down on Tuft's head and he became entirely submerged in letters.

Then the string on the sack was pulled tight and everything went dark.





## AN UNEXPECTED DELIVERY

**M**ax had barely stepped through the front door when Grandma's voice sounded from the living room.

“Max, is that you home? You must be soaked through!”

“Hi Grandma,” he called back.

Max pulled off his raincoat and went in to greet her properly. It was nice coming home to a house that wasn't empty. Max's mum was rarely home from work before five p.m. Grandma had moved in over eight months ago, but the novelty hadn't worn off yet. With the Easter holidays just a few days

away, Max was looking forward to lots of quality time with her.

“This came earlier,” Grandma said, passing Max a card. “I’ve lost my glasses. What does it say? Did I miss a delivery?”

Max read the header text. It was from Royal Mail.

“Oh, it’s one of those cards you get when someone hasn’t paid enough postage for a parcel,” Max told her.

“Who’s the parcel for?” Grandma asked.

“Me, apparently.”

Max was surprised to see his own name on the card.



He wasn't expecting anything in the post. The only person who ever wrote to him was Tuft, and Max knew the Finders didn't wake from hibernation until April, which was still two weeks away.

"I wonder what it could be?" Grandma mused.

"Yes, I wonder..." Max chimed in. "Tell you what, I'll pop out now and collect it."

"Let me pay the fee," Grandma offered. She rummaged under the sofa for her purse. "What will it be?"

"It's one pound fifty," Max replied. "But Grandma, you don't have to pay—"

"Oh, not another word!" she insisted. "I have plenty of money thanks to Mr Pellington."

She and Max exchanged a grin. Mr Pellington was the rather horrid man who had bought Grandma's cottage and woodland from her last year and tried to have the entire plot bulldozed to make way for a huge car park. In the end, Mr Pellington's

plans were thwarted and he'd sold the land back to Grandma at half the original price.

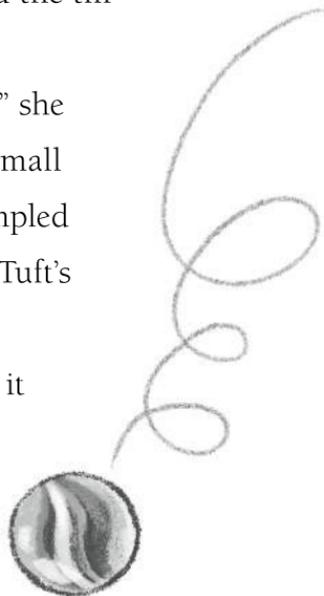
"Thank you," Max said as he took the coins from her. "I wonder what it can be?"



The queue at the post office wasn't long, but Max was impatient with curiosity. His eagerness must have shown, because the woman behind the till attempted to lower his expectations.

"It's not much of a parcel, I'm afraid," she told him. "Just a letter with something small enclosed." She passed him a rather crumpled envelope. Max immediately recognized Tuft's handwriting.

Max thanked her and hastily ripped it open. As he unfolded the letter inside, a colourful marble fell from the paper and rolled towards the exit.

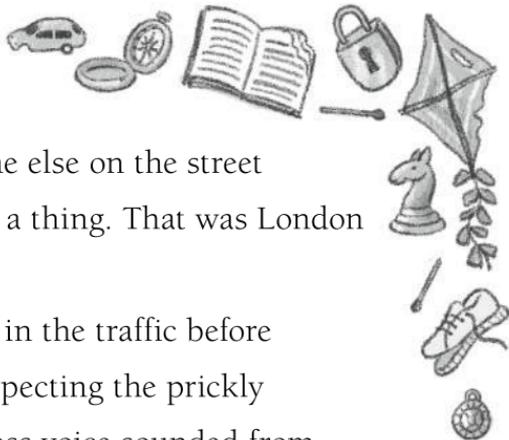


Max rushed after it, watching as it bounced down the steps. He just managed to catch it with his foot at the edge of the pavement.

Pocketing the marble with relief, Max leaned against a wall to read the letter. As he did so, he noticed something very unusual. On the other side of the road, poking out of a low hedgerow, was a broken umbrella. Max watched with curiosity as the umbrella opened and closed three times in quick succession. There was a pause before the umbrella opened again, this time more slowly. It repeated this twice more, before returning to the rapid-fire opening and closing once again.

After staring at it in bafflement for quite some time, Max suddenly understood the pattern he was seeing. It was an SOS distress signal. He looked down at the crumpled note in his hands and then back up at the wonky umbrella.

“It can’t be...” Max muttered under his breath.



He looked around. No one else on the street appeared to have noticed a thing. That was London for you.

He waited for a break in the traffic before crossing the road and inspecting the prickly hedgerow. A small, helpless voice sounded from under the umbrella.

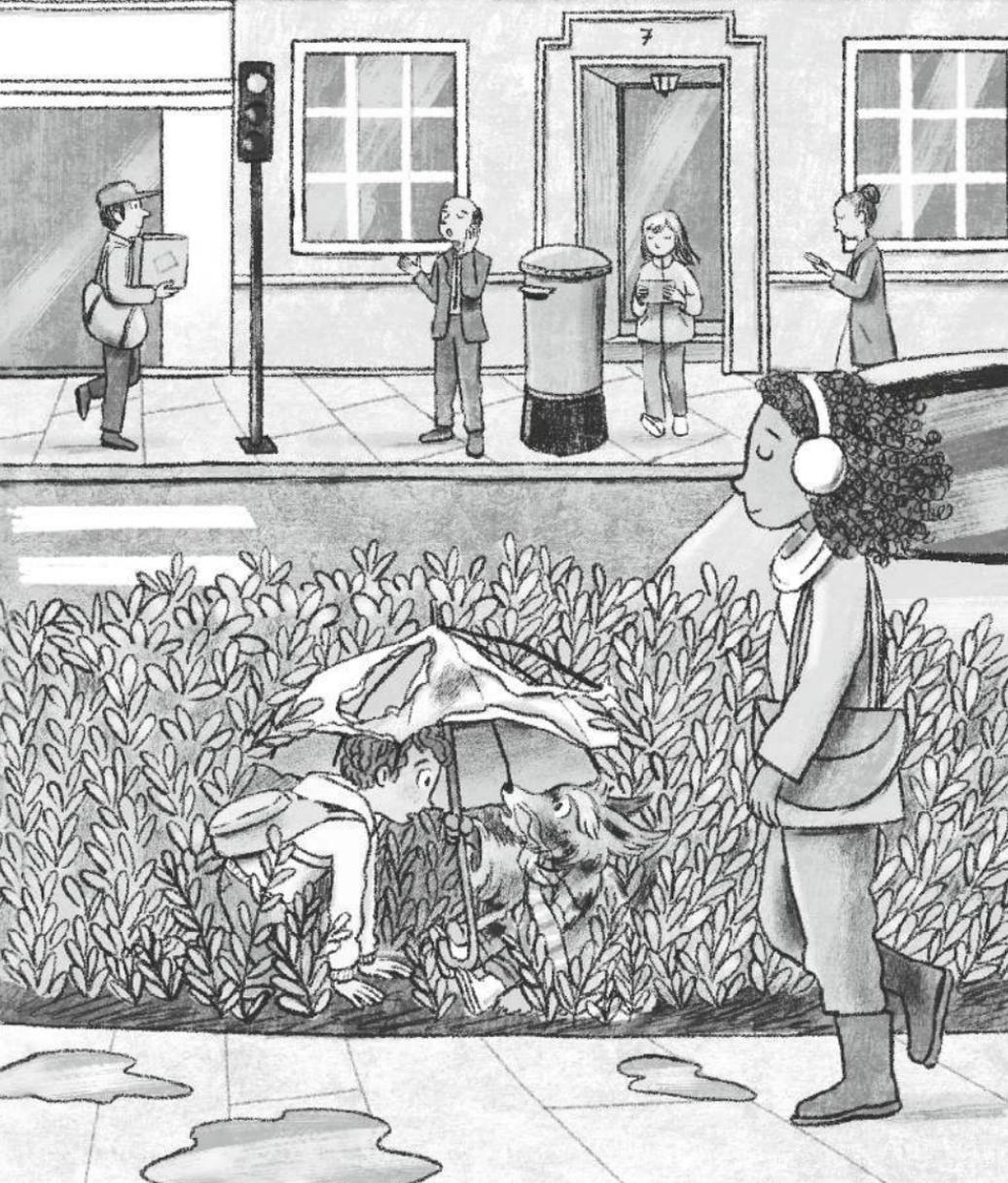
“Max? Is that you?”

Max lifted the brim to reveal two pointed ears and a familiar furred face. A very bedraggled Tuftorous Snook stared up at Max; his hazel eyes were wide with fear. Max kneeled down, ducking under the cover of the umbrella as well.

“What on earth— How did you...” His voice trailed off.

“Oh, Max, it is *quite* the tale,” Tuft informed him. “I’ve been hiding here all day in the hope of spotting you.” He paused. “Can you get me out of here? Can you take me somewhere safe?”

# POST OFFICE







“Um, well, yes, I probably can...” Max looked around at the other pedestrians from under the brim of the umbrella. Everyone seemed to be minding their own business or looking at their phones. He unzipped his backpack, which he’d brought with him in case the parcel was big. Without hesitation, Tuft leaped inside.

“Pass me my bindle bag!” he instructed. Max lifted the familiar checked tea-towel from the ground.

It was bulging with contents. There was no way it would fit into the backpack alongside Tuft.

“Ah,” the Finder said, seeing the problem. “You will have to carry it separately.”

For a moment, Max considered objecting. He was certain he’d attract attention carrying a bindle bag in London. But he knew Tuft would never agree to leaving it behind.

“And just to be certain, you have got my rainbow pearl?” Tuft asked.

Max frowned for a moment, much to Tuft's alarm.

“Oh, you mean this!” Max replied, pulling the marble from his pocket briefly to reassure him. Then Max hoisted the backpack over one shoulder and the bindle bag over the other, and he set off for home.





## LOST POST

**H**alf an hour later, Tuft had tucked himself into the bottom of Max's bed and was scoffing bread and Marmite at an astonishing rate. Max handed Tuft his third cup of lukewarm tea and gently pointed out that he'd devoured half a loaf.

"I just don't want Mum getting suspicious," Max said as he screwed the lid onto the Marmite jar. "I should put what's left back in the kitchen. I can always sneak you out some supper later on if you're hungry."

Tuft handed over the rest of the loaf reluctantly and gulped down a few more mouthfuls of tea.



“I’ve barely eaten for days,” he said, wiping crumbs from his furred cheeks. “I’ve travelled from post office to sorting office

to post office again. I haven’t had a bite to eat, except for a couple of custard creams I found under a counter.” Tuft gave Max a forlorn look.

“You mean to tell me you’ve made your way to London via the post?” Max shook his head in disbelief.

“It all started when a man stole my rainbow pearl,” Tuft began. “At least, I *thought* he was stealing it.”

“You mean the marble you sent me with your letter?”

Tuft nodded. “I jumped into what, at the time, I believed was the villain’s swag bag. It was a very risky thing to do. Rather valiant of me.” He lifted a teaspoon and gazed at his upside-down reflection for a moment before continuing. “Fortunately, as it turns out, the thief was not a thief after all.”

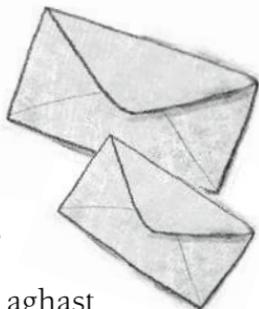
“Let me guess,” Max chipped in. “Was he a postman?”

“A royal male is the correct term, I believe,” Tuft informed him. “I came across many royal males during my ordeal. And royal females. Most of them very diligent and hard-working. They work for the King himself, you know. Anyway, once I understood exactly what was going on, I realized my rainbow-pearl had not been stolen after all. Indeed, I was simply seeing the inner workings of the letter-portal system.”



“Right,” Max said slowly. “But how on earth are we going to get you back to Silverthorn Forest?”

“Wh-what?!” Tuft spluttered, showering Max in droplets of tea. “I’m not going back to Silverthorn Forest. Didn’t you *read* my letter? I’m going to find the Faraway Forest,” he declared. Then, without warning, he unknotted his bundle bag. Letters and parcels spilled out.



“Tuft, is that other people’s post?” Max gave him a look of alarm. “That’s stealing!”

“I would *never ever steal!*” Tuft retorted, aghast at the accusation. “This is *lost* post. My whiskers guided me to them. You know the Golden Rule: *Finders Keepers.*” Tuft gave a sniff. “Anyway, I found something very important. A clue that will lead me to the—”



“It’s against the law to take other people’s post,” Max interjected. “If I get caught with those letters, I’ll be in big trouble!”





Just then, Max heard the creak of footsteps on the stairs. Tuft leaped down, disappearing under the bed in a matter of seconds. Max shoved the small mountain of post under his duvet as his bedroom door opened to reveal his mum.

“Max, did you just say something?” she asked. She was still carrying her bag and had a folder under her arm. “I’m just going to put away my work things and then I’ll get dinner on.” She caught sight of the half-eaten loaf and jar of Marmite on Max’s bedside table. “Oh, I see you’ve had a snack.” She frowned, surveying the crumbs littering the duvet. “Really, Max, I don’t see why you can’t eat at the table. I suppose you won’t be hungry for dinner now?”

“Sorry, Mum.” Max gave her an apologetic look,

before feeling a sharp prod on his ankle. “Ouch! I mean – I’m still very hungry. Plenty of room for dinner!” He began to usher her out of the room. “I just need to get my homework done first.”

Mum nodded understandingly and closed the door behind her, muttering something about growing boys.

Almost immediately, Tuft emerged from under the bed and clambered back up, rummaging under the duvet for his stolen post.

“Tuft, it is not OK that you took these letters,” Max told him. “They have names on them. Maybe the addresses are incorrect, but the sorting office has processes for getting lost post to its intended recipient.”

“But Finders Keepers!” Tuft jutted out his chin.

“Well, I’m not willing to let you store stolen post in my bedroom.” Max put his foot down.

“Fine,” said Tuft. “But I am keeping this one!”

He retrieved a colourful marketing pamphlet from the pile. “This is my ticket to adventure.” Max leaned in closer and saw Tuft was clutching a brochure for a holiday camp. “This will lead me to the Faraway Forest. It’s fate.”

“It’s not fate,” Max told him. “It’s advertising.”

“I have to find a way to get *there!*” Tuft jabbed a furred finger at a panoramic photo of lush woodland in the New Forest. “I have no doubt that place is the Faraway Forest itself. The long-lost homeland of the Finders.”

Max tried to take the brochure from him, but Tuft was gripping it tightly.

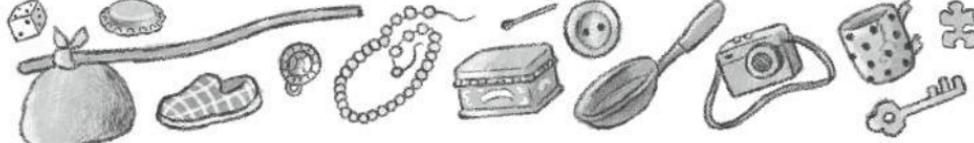
“You can’t go, Tuft. It’s miles and miles away.”

“There is a coach!” Tuft informed him. “It leaves on Saturday morning.”

“But it’s a kids’ holiday camp. You have to book a place, and they aren’t going to give a ticket to a furry woodland creature.”

“Exactly,” Tuft said. He looked up at Max with wide pleading eyes. “So that is why you have to go, and bring me with you.” Max rolled his eyes. “Well, what do you say, Max? Will you take me on the coach to the Faraway Forest?”





“It’s not the Faraway Forest.”



“It is.”



“How do you know?”



“Look how *green* the trees are!” Tuft held the brochure up. “Have you ever seen such green trees?” Max paused for a moment, wondering if he should try and explain the concept of digitally altered photographs to Tuft.



“Tuft, I’m sorry to burst your bubble, but you are very mixed up.”



Suddenly Tuft’s face hardened and he gave Max a sharp stare.



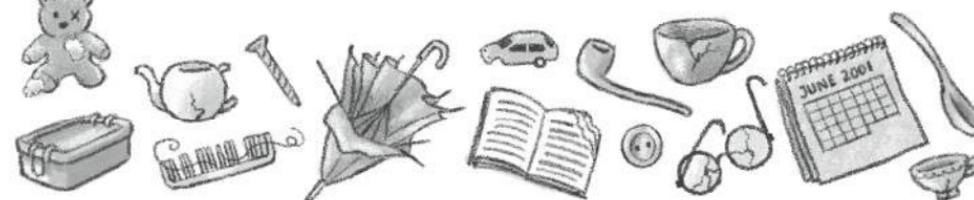
“I have *never* been so *certain* of something in my *entire* life,” Tuft told him.

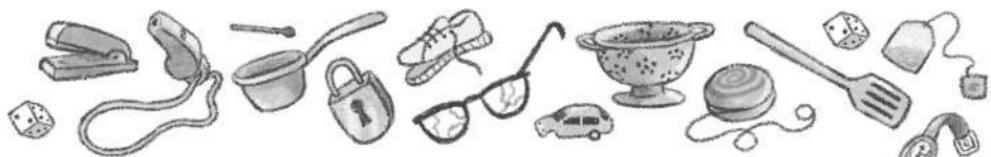


“Argh! You’ve lost your marbles.” Max collapsed on his bed in exasperation. Trying to talk sense into Tuft was infuriating.



“LOST MY MARBLES?” Tuft’s eyebrows leaped up almost to his ears.





Max pressed a finger to his lip.

*“Shush! Or someone will hear you.”*

“MAX, WHERE IS MY RAINBOW PEARL?”

Max suddenly understood the reason for Tuft’s alarm and tried to appease him.

“Oh, I wasn’t talking about your marble.” He reached into his jacket pocket. “I have it right...”

Max felt for the small glass sphere. The pocket was empty. He shoved a hand into the pocket on the other side. “OK, hold on, it must be here somewhere.”

Tuft took a step back from Max. A look of utter betrayal filled his eyes.

“Max, have you—?” His voice broke. “Did you – did you lose my rainbow pearl?”

Max patted down his jeans. He remembered tucking the marble away safely in one of his pockets that afternoon. But that had been before he’d lugged Tuft home in the backpack, along with a heavy



bundle bag. At some point on the journey from the post office to home, Max had taken his jacket off and tied it around his waist. That must have been when the marble dropped out. Max winced as he realized it could be anywhere.

“I’ll find it, Tuft,” Max said, returning Tuft’s stony stare with an apologetic look. “I promise I’ll find it.”





## THE LOST MARBLE

**M**ax set out on the walk to school an hour early the next morning, scanning the streets carefully but to no avail.

He took such a lengthy detour that he ended up arriving late. His teacher wasn't impressed, and her mood worsened when it emerged that Max hadn't done his homework. Of course, Max had a very good excuse: a quarrelsome woodland creature had taken up his entire evening pestering him about a holiday camp. But it wasn't exactly the kind of excuse he could share.

Max spent the whole school day consumed

by worries. What if Tuft didn't stay in his hiding place under the bed? What if he went out looking for the marble? What if Grandma discovered him? The questions buzzed around Max's mind like blue bottle flies, distracting him from lessons.



When the school bell finally rang at the end of the day, Max wasted no time in getting home.

He was relieved to find Grandma reading in her armchair as usual. There was nothing in her demeanour that suggested she had discovered a small magical creature hiding under Max's bed.

"I found my glasses!" she told him with a smile, looking up from the pages of an Agatha Christie novel. "It was the strangest thing. I spent over an hour looking for them this morning. Then the next thing I know – they've suddenly appeared on the coffee table! I was certain I'd checked there already." She gave Max a quizzical look. "Isn't it strange how the thing you've lost always shows up in a place you've already looked?"

"Yes, that is strange," Max replied, swiftly making an excuse to pop upstairs so he could check on Tuft.

He was half surprised to find that Tuft was actually where he'd promised to stay hidden for the day: under the bed.

“I told you I’d behave myself.” Tuft clambered out and brushed his dusty clothes.

“Mmm-hmm,” Max replied, fairly certain Tuft wasn’t telling the whole truth.

“But we are going to have to tweak the arrangement,” Tuft continued. He rolled his shoulders and began a series of elaborate stretches, as if he were about to participate in a marathon.

“Firstly, I ran out of food at eleven a.m.”

“I left you breakfast and lunch.”

“Secondly,” Tuft went on, “I’ll need at least an hour of exercise. A Finder must have time in the day for a stroll, ideally in the fresh air. A chance to stretch one’s whiskers.”

“Oh, I think your whiskers have had plenty of exercise today!” Max raised an eyebrow.

Tuft averted his eyes.

“I have no idea what you are insinuating.”

“I suppose Grandma’s lost glasses just appeared