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For Simon,  
thank you for your unfailing love, support and  
encouragement.

And for Mum,  
who always told me I could do it!

## *Prologue*

In a state of total panic and scarcely able to believe the sight which met his eyes, Max hadn't a clue what he should do. A strange cloud, glowing with a mysterious inner light, filled the middle of the room and through the mist he saw what seemed to be the shadowy image of an ancient city. It was rather like the mirage of an oasis floating before the eyes of a traveller in a desert and, in the same way that a mirage seems real, but shimmers in the heat haze before gradually fading from view, so the fuzzy outline of the town flickered and began to disappear.

Suddenly a hand reached out through the mist, clawing desperately at the bare floorboards of the attic as though trying to grab hold of something, while faint, panic-stricken voices cried out from within the cloud.

‘Where’s the key?’

‘I don’t know. I can’t find the wretched thing. I must have left it on the floor next to the book.’

‘But we’re stuck without the key, Isabel. We won’t be able to get back.’

‘Oh my God, what are we going to do?’

Eventually the anguished cries grew fainter as the image of the city continued to fade and the searching hand withdrew from sight. Then all was quiet once more.

Max cocked his head on one side and focused his aquamarine eyes on the last shreds of mist, but there was no longer any sign of the outstretched arm. The desperate voices had ceased and only the rasping of his own breath broke the silence as he gasped in horror. Alone and afraid, he remained rooted to the spot and rubbed a paw over his eyes, staring at the empty space where the vision had been. He settled down to wait for them to come back, but the gateway to the past had now closed and they’d vanished.

In the middle of the floor a carved wooden chest, its open lid revealing a threadbare blue velvet lining, sat beside an old book whose leather cover bore an intricate design. Next to the book and the chest lay Isabel’s favourite gold necklace on which hung an unusual charm. It was the only evidence of the weird event which had just taken place.

## *Chapter 1*

The policeman gazed around the room with a perplexed frown. ‘Well, sir, I must say this is all a bit odd. I can’t see any sign of a struggle in the house, nothing’s been broken, there isn’t anything missing and the front door was locked. I’m sure they’ll turn up safe and sound - that’s what often happens, in my experience. There’ll be a simple explanation, you mark my words.’

‘Officer, my brother and his wife wouldn’t just disappear,

abandoning their children,' said Richard Lancelot. 'And besides, their car is still on the drive so they can't have gone far, but they've been missing for over twenty-four hours now. What on earth can have happened to them?'

The policeman shrugged and shook his head, having no answer to this question. Tired and worried, Richard Lancelot pushed his floppy, light-brown fringe out of his eyes and looked around the attic in complete bewilderment. The only clues they'd found were two sets of footprints on the dusty floorboards, which stopped abruptly in the middle of the room, and also a piece of gold jewellery belonging to Isabel.

'She always wore this,' mused Richard. 'She wouldn't have gone anywhere without it.' He picked up the necklace, inspecting it closely. The clasp didn't appear to be broken, so it seemed unlikely that the chain had simply fallen off. James and Isabel had apparently vanished into thin air and Richard had no idea what had become of them. The real problem for now was the twins. What would happen to them if their parents didn't return?

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### *3 months later*

The rain lashed at Jemima's bedroom window and she watched in misery as the drops turned into rivulets which trickled relentlessly down the panes of glass. For the past few weeks she'd gazed at the sun-dappled playground outside the classroom, counting the days until the end of term. She'd struggled to settle at their new school and had missed her old friends from home. Now the dismal weather this morning, the first day of the summer holidays, reminded her of her sadness and she burrowed her nose into the comforting fur of the sleeping heap by her side. At once a loud rumbling purr started up and Jemima snuggled closer to the big cat lying next to her. She'd just begun to doze off again when she was awoken by an almighty yell

as her bedroom door burst open with a crash.

‘Come on, Jem. Time to get up, Lazy Bones.’ Jemima’s twin brother Joe exploded into the room, causing the startled cat to leap from the bed and dash out through the door, complaining as he went. Jemima also grumbled and attempted to bury herself under the duvet, but Joe proved too quick for her and snatched the cover off the bed.

‘We’re on holiday, Jem. Don’t waste time lying around in bed all day.’

She glanced at her watch. Nine o’clock. Huh! Hardly all day. Did he always have to be so noisy and full of energy? Reluctantly, she crawled out of bed and followed Joe downstairs.

Mrs Garland, Uncle Richard’s housekeeper who came in every day to clean and cook, was bustling around the kitchen. ‘Hello, my loves. Sit yourselves down. Breakfast will be ready in two shakes of a lamb’s tail.’ Joe caught Jemima’s eye and they grinned at each other - she did say some funny things. Mrs Garland, a large, jolly lady with a kind and gentle nature, had developed a soft spot for the ten-year-old twins since they’d come to live at their uncle’s house and she clucked round them like a mother hen. In fact she reminded Jemima of a character from a Beatrix Potter story, providing a warm and comforting presence in the house when Uncle Richard was out.

Their uncle, a professor of archaeology at the University of London, wasn’t married, being far too wrapped up in his work and even spending most of his holidays on some archaeological dig or other. As a result he had little experience of dealing with children, although he loved his niece and nephew dearly. Being more accustomed to retiring to his study, surrounded by dry, dusty books, pieces of broken pottery and bits of ancient bones, he was still getting used to having the sounds of youngsters around the house.

Jemima was also finding it hard to adjust to her new life. She missed her parents awfully and, although Joe did his

best to stay cheerful, she knew he did too. She was lucky they both got on so well – perhaps because they were twins. Some of her friends’ brothers did horrible things to *them* like putting earwigs in their breakfast cereals or sticking chewing gum in their hair.

As for her mum and dad, Jemima thought about them all the time. They still didn’t know what had happened to them and, although the police had conducted a nationwide hunt and their disappearance had been all over the news, the mystery remained unsolved. Of course, everyone feared the worst. Sometimes, however, Jemima felt her parents weren’t far away and that they were watching over the two of them. She even convinced herself that her mother spoke to her at times and Isabel’s voice sounded so real Jemima expected to find her standing in the room. Joe told her it was just wishful thinking, but she wasn’t so sure.

At first, coming to live with Uncle Richard had been a huge shock for the twins as it had meant leaving their family home in Gloucestershire and they’d found moving into his rambling Victorian house in South London an awful wrench.

‘You can each have a big bedroom,’ Uncle Richard had said kindly, trying to make it easier for the twins. ‘I’ll even get them decorated however you choose. And, of course, don’t forget Max can come too.’ Although this meant that Jemima worried constantly about Max now they lived on a busy main road. He wasn’t a city cat at all, being more used to the quiet country lanes and fields where they’d lived before.

No ordinary cat, Max was enormous - not fat, just extremely large - and they’d named him Max, short for Maximus, because of his spectacular size. Whenever he went to the vet, other people in the waiting room would gape in amazement when they peered into his basket, saying things like, ‘What on earth have you got in there? Is it a mountain lion?’ or ‘Hasn’t he got a long snout? He looks more like a hound than a cat.’

Even the vet himself admired him. ‘Aren’t you a handsome boy, Max? What a noble profile you’ve got!’ he used to say. Max thought the vet’s flattery was just to soften him up before inflicting some terrible indignity on him, such as inserting a thermometer up his rear end or jabbing a needle into the back of his neck, but it was true; he was indeed an extremely aristocratic-looking animal.

In fact Max happened to be a Tonkinese cat, a breed which had first been created by crossing a Siamese with a Burmese. On the day they chose him from a litter of six adorable, furry bundles, the breeder informed the family his official colour was “lilac”.

‘We’ve got a lilac kitten,’ Jemima proudly told her friends when she next saw them.

‘A purple cat? Don’t be silly, Jemima,’ they’d laughed and she got quite cross with them all for not understanding. She thought Max the most gorgeous creature she’d ever seen, with his creamy-coloured coat and the pale mushroomy-grey fur on his ears, muzzle, paws and tail. His lovely aquamarine eyes accentuated his beauty even further.

Jemima adored him from day one and, in return, Max followed Jemima everywhere like a puppy. He didn’t miaow in the way ordinary cats do. Instead he made such a variety of different sounds that he almost sounded human at times.

‘I think that cat would talk to us if he could, you know,’ her mum often used to say. He certainly seemed to understand everything they said to him and he even smiled, according to Jemima who swore his mouth turned up at the corners when he was happy.

Breakfast over, Jemima and Joe helped Mrs Garland clear the kitchen table after they’d finished eating.

‘So, what are you two planning to do with yourselves this morning?’ she asked. ‘Your uncle has got lectures today, but he said he’ll try and get home early so you can all plan a day out together for tomorrow. Maybe you can think up a few ideas of what you’d like to do.’

‘All right, Mrs G,’ answered Joe. ‘And Charlie’s coming over to play, if that’s okay.’

‘Of course, my love. You go on up and get yourselves ready,’ she replied, as she turned to start loading the dishwasher.

Charlie Green lived next door and, being the same age as Joe and Jemima, had been delighted when they’d moved in, soon becoming firm friends with Joe. Charlie had never had a close friend before. Small for his age, brown-haired and with big round glasses, he’d often found himself the butt of other children’s teasing: some of them called him names like “Geek” or “Four Eyes” or even “Harry Potter”. Now, he had Joe at his side, school was much more enjoyable. As Joe quickly became a popular member of the class, thanks to his friendship, Charlie also began to be included in everything, delighted to be accepted by the other children at long last.

He’d already known the story about Joe and Jemima’s parents from the news on the TV. His mum, Ellen, had also explained what had happened.

‘You can help them settle in, Charlie,’ she told him after the twins’ uncle had sought her advice. ‘They’re going to need a friend when they move down here and they don’t know anybody.’

Charlie also thought he understood a little bit of what they might be going through. Since his own parents’ divorce, Charlie missed having his dad at home, but at least he still got to spend most weekends with him. He realised how much worse things must be for Joe and Jemima knowing they might never see either of their parents again.

## *Chapter 2*

The doorbell rang as Jemima was tying her long blonde hair into a ponytail. She heard Joe whoop as he hurtled



down the stairs to let Charlie in and the next instant two pairs of thundering feet charged back upstairs again and along to Joe's bedroom. Jemima was just starting to feel a little left out when her door opened and Joe stuck his head round.

'Are you ready, Jem? We're going upstairs to find that book of Mum and Dad's. Uncle Richard said we're allowed as long as we're careful. Coming?'

She nodded and went out on to the landing to join them.

'Hi, Charlie,' she said.

'Hi.' He gave her a shy smile.

They both followed Joe up the staircase to the spare room on the top floor, where their parents' things were being stored while Uncle Richard tried to decide what to do with the family house in Gloucestershire. Joe opened the door and all three of them trooped inside. Both twins experienced a sudden pang of sadness when confronted by their mum and dad's belongings, but Joe marched over to a shelf on the far side of the room and lifted down a heavy wooden box which he placed carefully on the floor.

The spare room was a bit gloomy because the windows were much smaller than downstairs, so they knelt on the carpet to get a closer look. As Joe began to blow the dust off the top of the box an eerie grating noise made them jump and the door to the room started to open all by itself. They turned round, staring fearfully at the door as it swung inwards with a sinister creak. Holding their breath, the three children cast anxious glances at one another, but then a long, mushroom-coloured muzzle appeared and a pair of pale turquoise eyes peeped around the half-opened door.

'Oh Max, you frightened us,' laughed Jemima, as he trotted over to her with a chirrup.

The relieved children returned their attention to the wooden chest on the floor between them. Ornately carved, it looked terribly old to them and as Joe began to lift the lid, a musty odour rose up causing Max to wrinkle his nose and sneeze several times. Inside lay an ancient book, its leather cover

decorated with a complicated swirly pattern.

At first glance it didn't seem terribly exciting, and the twins wondered why this had been one of their parents' most treasured possessions. They'd kept the chest in the attic and had spent many hours studying the book, saying they mustn't be disturbed. To tell the truth, Jemima felt rather disappointed now seeing the old book sitting in its box. She'd expected something much more thrilling. Her father, who'd been a dealer in second-hand books, had travelled all over the world seeking rare editions of ancient texts and had been beside himself when he'd found this particular one. Just what was so special about it? It looked rather shabby in her opinion.

'Let's get it out so we can have a proper look,' said Joe. He gingerly slid his hands underneath and lifted the book out, placing it on the floor with a thump. 'Phew, that's heavy.' However, when he attempted to open it, the cover simply wouldn't budge. 'Impossible,' he puffed. 'You have a go, Charlie.'

Charlie gripped the edges of the cover and tried his hardest to lift it up, but nothing happened. 'I can't. It seems to be stuck down.'

'I know,' suggested Joe. 'I'll go and fetch a knife from the kitchen and we'll prise it open.'

'No,' squeaked Jemima, horrified. 'Don't be stupid. Remember what Uncle Richard said. We mustn't damage it or we'll be in big trouble.'

They studied the cracked leather binding on which was inscribed the title: *SHADOWS FROM THE PAST*.

'Hmm, that sounds interesting,' said Charlie. 'I wonder what it's about.'

Max moved closer, patting the cover with an exploratory paw.

'No, Max, don't touch,' scolded Jemima and pulled him away.

Joe began to trace his fingers over the gilded pattern on the cover. 'Hold on, what's this?' he exclaimed. Under his

fingertip he'd detected a small hole, concealed within the intricate design.

'It's like a keyhole,' said Charlie. 'Just our luck though – there's no key.'

At that moment Jemima let out a yelp causing Joe and Charlie to leap back from the book in surprise. 'Yes there is,' she said. 'I think I might be wearing it. Ouch, it's hot.'

'Don't talk rubbish,' replied Joe. 'What's hot?'

'After Mum and Dad disappeared Uncle Richard found this gold chain. He said it was Mum's and he gave it to me. I like wearing it to remind me of her.' As Jemima spoke, something weird began to happen. The charm hanging on the necklace had now become unbearably hot and had started to really burn her skin, so she reached inside her tee shirt and pulled it away from her neck. Joe and Charlie, who'd already been a little startled by Jemima's cry, now both let out a gasp as they stared at the strangely-shaped charm. It may have been a trick of the light but it seemed to be glowing.

'Take it off, Jem,' urged her brother.

'Okay, but do be careful with it.' She unhooked the clasp and handed him the necklace. Joe took it from her, holding the chain up so that all three of them could see it properly. Now there was no doubt: the charm was definitely giving off a bright light.

Charlie peered at it intently. 'That's the key all right.' He pointed to the charm. 'Look at the shape of it. It's like a number 8 and that's what this keyhole thingy feels like too.'

Joe leaned over and placed the necklace above the hole. 'I think you could be right, Charlie.' As he pushed downwards the charm instantly slotted into place with a quiet click and at once the whole book seemed to tremble beneath his hands. Max took a few steps back, his fur standing on end, making him appear even bigger than usual, but the children were far too engrossed to notice.

'Right,' said Joe. 'I wonder if it'll open now.' Together they

all took hold of the cover and this time there was no resistance. As it opened a small sigh escaped from within the depths of the book and the children heard what sounded like faint whispering voices, but couldn't make them out clearly.

'I'm not sure about this. It's a bit scary,' murmured Jemima, her voice starting to quaver.

'Nonsense,' replied Joe. 'It's brilliant.' He turned to the opening chapter. The first page was beautiful; it looked like a medieval illuminated manuscript, written in italics, decorated in rich colours and embellished with gold leaf. The children gazed in wonder.

'Wow, that's really pretty. I can understand why Mum and Dad liked this book so much now,' breathed Jemima.

The title of the first chapter, however, was a strange word none of them recognised and which seemed to be written in tiny, jewelled stones. The sparkly gems spelled out:

***TALISANT***

And underneath was printed the following rhyme:

*A fabled city lost to time, a distant place we can't recall.  
Was it real or just a myth? Was it ever there at all?  
The waters rose and cover'd the land, then everything fell  
from sight.  
The people perish'd, time stood still and all was endless  
night.*

'How strange,' said Jemima. 'I wonder what it's about. I've never heard of "*Talisant*". Shall we see if it tells us on the next page?'

But when Joe tried to turn over the page nothing happened. The paper seemed to be glued down.

'Oh no, not again,' wailed Charlie.

'Well, I can't see another keyhole,' said Joe.

They hadn't noticed Max creeping closer to the book for a second time and, as they all sat back on their heels pondering their next move, he once more stretched out a paw as if to touch the page.

‘Max!’ shouted Jemima. ‘I’ve already told you to leave it alone. If you don’t behave I’ll have to put you outside.’ Max grumbled and slunk off to a corner of the room, sulking.

‘Maybe the keyhole is really small this time and we’re just not looking carefully enough,’ suggested Jemima. The children all bent forward, staring at the page until they almost became cross-eyed. ‘...or maybe not,’ she concluded after several minutes of intense concentration.

Joe trailed his fingers over the surface of the paper, feeling for anything their eyes may have missed, but on touching the sparkling letters he quickly withdrew his hand and sat back with a start.

‘What’s the matter?’ asked Jemima, seeing the worried expression on his face.

‘I’m not sure, but I thought something moved. I don’t want to spoil it and, if the stones aren’t glued on properly, they might fall off. We’d get into awful trouble with Uncle Richard for ruining the book ... and, besides, it belonged to Mum and Dad,’ he added quietly.

But as the three of them looked at the page they saw the jewelled letters starting to quiver. Jemima placed a trembling index finger on the first letter *T*. ‘The whole thing moved,’ she exclaimed in an excited whisper. ‘But I don’t think the stones are loose.’ She ran her fingertip down the page a little and the *T* followed beneath her touch. ‘That’s weird. This still feels firmly attached to the paper, but it just slides about on the surface. I wonder why?’ She began to try the same thing with the other letters in the title and, sure enough, they all moved in an identical manner.

‘What on earth’s going on?’ asked Joe. The capital letters were now scattered all over the place and the word *TALISANT* had become *A TIN SLAT*. ‘Let me try.’ He moved everything around again until it spelled out *SNAIL TAT*.

Charlie had been watching thoughtfully. ‘Perhaps this is a bit like one of those puzzles where you have to unjumble

the word to find the answer. You know, they're called anagrams I think.' He had a go at sliding the letters around, but only managed to produce *ANT TAILS*.

'This is hopeless,' said Jemima. 'How can you possibly be expected to know what the real word is meant to be?'

They all had a think for a moment, staring at the page for inspiration.

'Maybe we've got to find another clue first,' suggested Charlie.

'Well, the only other thing I can see is the poem,' said Joe glumly.

Jemima's eyes suddenly lit up. 'That's it – the poem *is* the clue. I think it might be a sort of riddle and, if we work out the answer, that'll give us the missing word.' She began to read the rhyme out loud while the two boys listened, hoping to spot something important. From the corner of the room they could hear Max muttering and making odd noises, but kept telling him to shush because he was stopping them from concentrating.

Then Charlie had another of his brainwaves. 'Listen, we know this book is to do with things from a long time ago. After all it's called "*SHADOWS FROM THE PAST*" isn't it? The poem describes a myth about a city – a city destroyed by water, which disappeared for ever and where all the people died. Does that ring any bells?'

Joe shook his head, but Jemima's eyes opened wide as she recalled where she'd heard something similar quite recently. 'Yes, it sounds like that story we read at school this term... and remember the film too... Is it **ATLANTIS**?'

Charlie nodded his agreement. 'I think so.'

Jemima started to rearrange the jewelled letters on the page. One at a time she moved them into the correct order and, as she slid the final *S* on to the end, something odd began to happen. The word suddenly lit up as if someone had flicked on a switch.

At once the children were surrounded by eerie sounds,

accompanied by the distant lapping of waves on a sea shore and they all felt a gentle breeze which seemed to be blowing through the room. Then the pages of the book began to turn by themselves as if by magic. Wide-eyed in wonder, they started to read about the lost city of Atlantis, taking it in turns to recite the story aloud. With each passing page the sound of the waves grew louder and the breeze blew more strongly, ruffling their hair.

The children were too absorbed in the tale to notice what was going on behind them until all of a sudden Max gave an almighty yowl, making the three youngsters almost leap out of their skins. His fur was standing on end and, following his petrified gaze, they couldn't believe their eyes. For in the middle of the room had appeared a large shadow which seemed to be taking a more solid form the more they stared into its mysterious depths. Colours and shapes gradually began to emerge. It was like a film, but, instead of being projected against a white background, the image was floating in the air, making it seem semi-transparent. Nevertheless, the three children could see the three-dimensional vision of an ancient city forming before them and the whole thing seemed staggeringly real.

'C-c-crikey,' stammered Charlie. 'W-w-where's that coming from?'

Joe leapt to his feet and went over to the strange apparition. Cautiously he stretched out his arm and as he touched the mist his wrist disappeared inside. From the outside it looked as if his hand had been chopped off. Charlie and Jemima gasped in horror, but Joe merely said, 'Cool,' and immediately stuck his head into the cloud. He now appeared to be headless, but his voice drifted faintly back towards them sounding rather muffled, as if he was speaking from a long way away; the others couldn't understand a word he was saying.

All of a sudden Jemima became aware of someone calling to her in an urgent voice. 'Quick, Jemima, stop him.' *Funny, that sounds like Mum*, she thought. She scrambled

to her feet and ran over to Joe. Grabbing him by his other arm she yanked him back so hard that he landed on his bottom with a crash.

‘Oi, why did you do that? You’ll never believe the things inside there,’ he gabbled excitedly, pointing towards the mist. ‘There’s a beach and loads of people rushing about wearing weird clothes - you know, tunics and stuff like they wore thousands of years ago – and everyone’s speaking some sort of foreign language. I haven’t a clue what’s going on, but this is brilliant!’

Charlie and Jemima stared at him in disbelief.

‘It’s true,’ he insisted. ‘Go on, have a look if you don’t believe me.’

Charlie hesitantly approached the image and poked an experimental finger inside. At once his finger disappeared from view and, horrified, he snatched it straight back again.

‘What’s the matter? It didn’t hurt, did it?’ asked Joe.

‘No-o-o,’ replied Charlie, sounding a little unsure.

‘Well, go on, have a proper look,’ urged Joe. ‘You’ll be fine.’

So Charlie slowly leaned forward until his head had vanished from sight. After a few seconds he reappeared.

‘He’s right, Jemima. It’s just like he said. You’ve got to see this.’

Jemima hung back. A horrible sensation of unease swept over her and she suddenly felt terribly cold. The woman’s voice sounded like her mother’s, or was it just wishful thinking? ‘No, don’t,’ it seemed to say. ‘Not without the necklace, not without the necklace ...’ Then it faded. She shivered and glanced across at the boys, but they didn’t seem to have heard it so she said nothing.

While they were trying to persuade her to have a closer look, Max had emerged from the corner of the room where he’d been lurking and sidled up to the wooden chest which lay open on the floor. A scratching noise made Jemima turn round and, glancing back, she caught sight of what he was up to and gave a shriek of alarm. ‘No, Max, bad cat!’



Max had found a loose piece of cotton in the worn fabric lining of the box and now his claws had somehow got tangled up in it. When Jemima yelled at him she watched in horror as he leapt backwards, pulling an ever-growing length of thread with him as the velvet began to unravel. 'Oh no,' she wailed, as she tried to grab hold of the retreating cat. 'Look, the fabric's ruined.'

'Wait a minute,' exclaimed Joe, as he came to inspect the damage. 'What's this under the material?' Beneath the hole Max had created they could clearly make out a compartment in the base of the box. 'Hey, I think there's something down here.' He probed with his fingers and extracted a small pouch.

'What's inside?' asked Jemima, bursting with curiosity, her earlier fright now forgotten.

Joe felt hard edges through the soft leather and, untying the drawstring, he peered in. 'I can see something shiny - could be coins,' he said and tipped the contents into his other hand. No, it wasn't money. Instead, four gleaming objects lay in his palm. 'I don't know what these are, but they look as if they're made of gold.' Each one was identical.

'They look like the things that go on a charm bracelet,' said Jemima who picked them up in turn. 'They're little owls, how sweet. And look, they've got small rings on their heads so you can put them on a chain.'

'Yeah, but what are they for and why hide them in that compartment?' asked Charlie, as he picked one up between his thumb and forefinger, inspecting the golden charm at close range. It was exquisitely made and every detail of the bird's feathers was engraved with incredible precision.

'We'd better not lose them,' said Joe, tipping them back into the leather bag and carefully pulling the drawstring tight. 'We'll show these to Uncle Richard when he gets home. He might know.' For now Joe pushed the small pouch into the pocket of his jeans.

At that moment a voice called up the stairs. 'Are you children all right? You've been rather quiet. Would you like

a drink or something?’

‘No thanks, Mrs Garland. We’re fine. We’re just reading a story in an old book,’ replied Jemima.

Smiling, the housekeeper went back to the kitchen, relieved that they seemed to be occupying themselves so sensibly. No DVDs or footballs today – that made a pleasant change! She could go and get on with the ironing in peace.

As soon as she was out of earshot the children returned their attention to the image of the city which still shimmered brightly in the gloomy room.

‘Why don’t we all step inside and have a look round?’ suggested Joe. ‘It’ll be a real adventure.’

‘I’m not sure I want to,’ said Jemima, recalling the voice and the sudden feeling of cold. ‘Actually I’m quite frightened.’

‘Don’t be such a girl. What could possibly go wrong?’ he replied. ‘We’ll have a look round and then come straight back. If we all stick together we’ll be fine and just think what we’ll be able to tell everyone afterwards.’

‘Except they’ll never believe us,’ said Charlie. ‘And anyway, Joe, are you sure we’ll be able to get back again if we go in there?’

‘Oh, that settles it,’ said Jemima, folding her arms across her chest, her mouth set in a stubborn line. ‘I’m definitely not going – not if there’s a chance of being stranded. You just don’t think do you, Joe?’

‘Watch me!’ he exclaimed and, before either of them could stop him, he launched himself into the cloud. Max, however, had moved swiftly and sunk his teeth into the heel of Joe’s trainer, clinging on for dear life and preventing him from disappearing entirely; one foot remained behind. Joe stepped backwards into the room, angrily shaking his shoe to free himself from the cat’s jaws. ‘Get off, you daft animal. What d’you think you’re playing at?’

Max returned to Jemima’s side, feeling rather pleased with himself and sporting a smug grin as he watched Joe inspect

his trainer for teeth marks.

‘Well, here I am back again, in one piece as you can see,’ said Joe triumphantly. ‘So there’s obviously no problem coming and going, is there? You agree with me don’t you, Charlie?’

‘Hmm ... I s’pose.’

‘See,’ continued Joe, ignoring the note of doubt in Charlie’s voice and clearly not prepared to take no for an answer.

‘Even Charlie thinks it’s safe. C’mon, Jem. Don’t be wet.’

Jemima finally relented. ‘Okay,’ she said reluctantly. Everything told her this wasn’t a good idea, but she didn’t want to be left behind on her own while the boys disappeared off to goodness knows where without her.

Joe went first, stepping confidently forward into the shimmering mist, closely followed by Charlie. In an instant they both vanished, which rather startled Jemima and as she hesitated she heard the same voice calling to her from far away – yet again it sounded just like her mum. ‘Don’t forget the necklace, Jemima. Pick up the necklace,’ it urged.

Glancing down, Jemima realised the chain was still lying on the floor where they’d left it after using the charm to unlock the book. She scooped it up and, putting the necklace round her neck, made sure the clasp was securely fastened. As she did so she became aware of Joe’s and Charlie’s muffled voices. ‘Come on, Jemima. Where are you?’ Taking a deep breath she moved towards the shadowy image and with Max pushing against the back of her legs she stepped forwards, feeling the comforting pressure of his furry body. Before her eyes could even begin to adjust to the bright sunlight someone grasped her by the wrist and she yelped in fright.

‘What kept you, slowcoach?’ asked Joe as he let go of her arm. ‘I thought you’d chickened out. We tried to come and fetch you, but we were having a bit of trouble finding the way back through.’

‘What do you mean?’ Jemima started to panic and took a

step backwards, surprised to find herself half-in and half-out of the misty cloud. Heaving a sigh of relief she walked forward once more. 'Phew, it's okay,' she said. 'I thought we were going to be stuck in here.'

'See, I told you there was nothing to worry about,' replied Joe. 'Charlie and I probably weren't in the right place before, that's all.'

'Well, I just hope we manage to find the right place when we want to come back again,' she snapped, still worrying about what they were letting themselves in for. 'Don't forget to make a careful note of what's on the other side because we're probably going to need some sort of landmark we can recognise.'

'Yeah, yeah, stop going on about it and just try to enjoy yourself.'