



**Chapter 3**  
Rabbits and  
Mountains

Hi Dad,

Here's a photo of my new bedroom for you. Mum says it's very yellow - a bit of a shock - but I like it.

It will be like good weather all year.

Love, Ella

xxx

You know when you have a doll's house and some mean brother tips it on its side and all the little things tumble and fall? Well, that was Molly's house. Someone seemed to have shaken it so hard that some of the furniture had fallen over. But there was far more furniture than normal houses too – enough for ten houses. I could see wardrobes, chairs, sculptures, an actual sink in the middle of the hall. And machinery and packages and jugs and blankets and... well, just everything. The smell was bad. Cabbage-y.

Rabbits and cabbages. Weird!

*I shouldn't be in here.*

But I still wanted to get a photo of that rabbit. Where was he? I pulled out my phone, opened the camera, set off. Past the sink, a chest of drawers, basket of clothes, a table on its side, through into the darkened front room.

More odd stuff! A rocking horse, a pottery pot... There it was: the whisk of white. Strong back legs leaping. The white rabbit. *Click... click.*

No wonder the room looked so dark from outside.

A white bobtail disappeared into a tunnel of wooden furniture legs... *click.* A rolled-up carpet.

A piano and, yes, a rocking horse on top. A picture on top of a suitcase on top of an armchair on top of...

*Rustle...*

Something stirred. "Molly?" A little breathy voice. A head turning.

I looked down. The side of a pale face with a dark cloak wrapped round. White fingers stretching out to me. A person!

I was back in the hallway in a flash and out the door, panting, shoving the phone in my pocket.

Feet came down the stairs. I stood on the front doorstep, swung round and felt eyes on me – Molly, only just behind. "Where's your mum. Has she gone?" she asked.

It was like a challenge, like, *have you lost her?*

"I... um... I mean, Mum got a phone call."

Molly's stern eyes rested on me.

I made my face blank. My eyes slid down to a pair of mud-crusting green PE socks, dangling from her hand. "I grew out of these too," she said in her flat dead voice. "Ten pounds for all of it."

I nodded frantically. "Thank you... I mean, OK. I'll get the money off Mum." Thank goodness, just then Mum appeared at the garden gate.

Ten pounds was handed over. Molly retreated back inside.

"Nice to meet you!" called Mum as the front door slammed shut.

I shook my head at Mum. "Why did you leave me?"

I took off, running up the road. It felt so good to be away from there.

Mum caught up. "Ella! Slow down. I want to talk to you. Did you know that girl from school?"

"I think she's in my class. She's called Molly. She's weird."

"Maybe she's shy."

"She's rude."

"Well, at least we got your jumper. Let's give it a wash. It is second-hand."

"No, Mum. I need it for tomorrow."

Mum frowned. "All right. Well, that's another thing ticked off."

She let us in. She had put up a little cupboard in the hall with hooks for all the keys and she handed me hers to hang up.

"I want to cycle to school. Can I?" I asked.

"It seems rather early days. I'll think about it," Mum said, disappearing into the study.

I stared at the keys with their neat labels ... Back Door ... Bikes ... Spare Front ... One key ring looked familiar. I unhooked it. A yellow and blue snapping crocodile, hard and shiny. It was Dad's; I'd given it to him for his birthday. I remembered him saying how much he loved the snapping crocodile; he would never lose his keys again. I twisted the key off, hung it back on the hook and put the key ring in my pocket.

I wiped my eyes and took my shoes off.

x

That evening, after tea, I flicked through the pictures on my phone, looking for the rabbit. Most of them were of Molly's strange house. The rabbit was only good in one of them, leaping away from the camera.

Molly's house looked like nobody cared.

At least I'd got my jumper, even if it did look old and worn.

Even though only a few hours had passed, I felt as if I must have dreamed Molly's strange house down the road ... like a place in a film.

Not real at all.

x

That evening, Mum came to say goodnight and

watched me while I soaked my hands.

"I saw you were writing to Dad again," she murmured.

I darted a look at her, my face flushing, and stopped swirling the oil around my fingers. "Have you written to him, Mum?"

Mum sighed. "You're not old enough to understand..."

"He won't know what we're doing." Words tumbled out. "I need to tell him about the house and school and..."

"I don't mind you writing." Mum's voice had gone firm and brisk. "Now, let's just leave it." She patted my hands dry, handed me my pot of cream and helped me rub it in. "I'm glad we've sorted out your uniform."

I climbed into bed and she kissed me. "And you're pleased with the phone? Grandma was determined to get you one."

"It's brilliant. I love it."

Mum was at my door. But then she stopped. "Just one thing. Let's not talk about what happened in Milton... with other people, I mean."

"Nobody?"

"I really can't discuss this, Ella. There's so many

new things to sort out." She came over and hugged me tightly. "We're going to be happy here: new school, my job... Please, love, don't argue." She flicked off my light. "Goodnight."