

Four

Bella's fingers trembled as she reached for the window. They shook as she loosened first the catch for the window and then the screen. Grandad had made it so you could swing them both open at the same time, so there was nothing between you and the sky.

Mum thought it was dangerous but Grandad said, 'Nonsense! Not if a girl is sensible.' He turned to Bella. 'You are sensible, aren't you?'

Bella nodded quickly, because it was quite possible to be a dreamer and sensible at the same time. And whenever she opened the screen she was careful to sit quietly in the

window, perhaps letting her legs dangle a little over the side but never leaning out.

She would be even more careful now. She wouldn't climb up into the window but would keep her feet planted firmly on the floor. And lean out just a little, just enough to see. How could the house be moving? Grandad had said a little strangeness could be a good thing, but ...

The house swung suddenly to one side and Bella gripped the window frame, steadying herself. The house slowed as it reached a corner, then turned this way and that, as if it were wondering which way to go.

Bella waited until it straightened, until they had set off again through the quiet streets. And then she leaned out into the night to see what she could see.

But when she looked down, there was nothing but roof. Her room was set back from the front of the house and the eaves were too wide to see past. She could lean a little more

... but that would be dangerous and she was sensible and ...

Suddenly, it came to her.

You never know when something like that will come in handy.

She picked her way unsteadily to where her school bag hung on its peg by the door. The periscope was still folded up inside where Grandad had put it. She carried it over to the window and unfolded it piece by piece. Then she lowered it until it hung below the edge of the roof, and put her eye to the opening.

At first she saw only darkness. She blinked and refocused. Was she even doing it right?

Then there was a flash of something – a wash of pale light and a shape moving through it.

Of course. She was seeing darkness because it was dark. Because it was night-time. The periscope could see around corners but it couldn't cut through the blackness.

For that, she needed the streetlights.

There was another one up ahead. She

pressed her eye back to the periscope and waited.

There it was again – something moving across the lens. It looked knobbly and pink and almost like ... no.

She shook her head. That was just silly. She needed to get a better look, but the light flashed past so quickly each time.

Then they rounded the corner and she smiled.

Just ahead was the shopping centre, awash with bright light.

She waited, ready.

The house continued onward with its rhythmic, bobbing motion.

As they came into the glow from the shops, the shape moved past her eyes with each roll of the floor. Up and down, up and down. And slowing now, as the house eased to a stop.

Bella blinked. She had been right.

Pink and knobbly and ... *one, two, three, four, five.* She swung the periscope sideways,

scanning for what she could hardly believe must be there.

And there they were. Another group of five, pressed flat to the footpath. Some large, others smaller. Just as you'd expect. Just as toes should be.

Pink toes on the end of flat, wide feet, on the end of ...

It was impossible. It was true.

The house was walking.

The house had legs.

Five

Bella stumbled backwards. The periscope slipped sideways, sending everything into a spin before her eyes.

Legs?

She straightened the periscope and set her eye to it again, breathing out slowly, trying to calm her racing heart. With her steady gaze, there was no mistaking it.

Legs. Two of them, spindly and long like a flamingo's.

Impossible. True.

And still there were no footsteps in the hall; there was only the low rumble of snoring from downstairs as Mum and Dad slept on.



She drew the periscope back into the room and set it on the floor beside her. She pulled the window closed and climbed up onto the sill, leaning back against the curve of the wood.

For a while, the house roamed around the shopping centre. It walked past the bank and the supermarket. It lingered outside the travel agent, tipping Bella's room sideways as it leaned down into the window. Plastered to the glass were brightly coloured posters with photos of tropical beaches and enormous cruise ships. *Fabulous Fiji!* they read. *Sail Away to Paradise!*

Then it straightened and set off again, striding swiftly onward. And Bella sat and watched the night stream by – row after row of slumbering houses, street after street of quiet blue dark. She watched until she couldn't watch any more. There was something about the gentle swaying of the house, the soft sighing of the wood, that was like a lullaby.