

EVIE AND THE ANIMALS

CHARACTERS

PEOPLE

EVIE TRENCH — a girl with the Talent to communicate with animals.

LEO TRENCH (DAD) — Evie's protective father.

GRANNY FLORA — Evie's grandmother and teacher of the Talent.

RAMESH — Evie's school friend.

LEONORA — Evie's former best friend.

MRS BAXTER — the school headteacher.

SAM — a young boy who can talk to dogs.

MORTIMER J MORTIMER — a dangerous man who controls animals.

SAM'S MOTHER (WOMAN) — a frightened parent at the zoo.

MAN IN CROWD — a visitor at the lion enclosure.

LEONORA'S FRIENDS — schoolchildren who mock Evie.

EVIE'S MOTHER — seen in a childhood memory; non-speaking.

ANIMALS

BEAK — a friendly sparrow.

KAHLO — a wild rabbit rescued by Evie.

SCRUFF — a cheerful stray dog.

MARMALADE — a sharp-tongued ginger cat.

BIBI — Leonora's little dog.

PLATO — Granny Flora's mysterious bearded dragon.

LEAF (SNAKE) — an emerald tree boa Evie once saved.

LEONIE — an elephant at Lofting Zoo.

ORWELL — an elephant grieving his mother.

DELIA — a lioness at the zoo.

MALE LION — a hungry lion in Delia's enclosure.

STAG — a deer under Mortimer's control.

MICE, HAMSTERS AND GUINEA PIG — small animals in Mortimer's army.

BULL — an animal that pursues the escaping family.

RABBITS — Kahlo's colony, which digs the rescue tunnel.

SNAIL — reveals a memory to Evie; non-speaking.

POISON DART FROG — seen in Evie's childhood memory; non-speaking.

SCENE 1

(Evie's bedroom. EVIE is beside the open window, holding a photograph of her mother. BEAK, a sparrow, is nibbling seeds on the windowsill.)

BEAK (Telepathically)

You seem sad today, Evie.

EVIE (Telepathically)

I miss her, Beak.

(Evie lowers the photograph.)

BEAK (Telepathically)

I miss my mum too. To be fair, I only knew her for a short time, but she seemed great.

EVIE (Telepathically)

I never really knew mine either. I mean, I can't really remember her. I get all my information from Granny Flora. And Dad, of course. Is that strange? To miss things you never really knew?

BEAK (Telepathically)

Not at all. I miss all my friends I haven't made yet. And I have thousands of friends already. We fly around together. But I am still new. Young. There will be many more friends I will make. And I miss them. Because I am sure they will be special.

EVIE (Telepathically)

What's it like to fly, Beak?

BEAK (Telepathically)

It's the easiest thing in the world. If you have wings. It's like freedom. To be able to go up and down and side to side and anywhere you want, with the wind rushing through your feathers, eating whatever flying insects come your way. You would like it, Evie.

EVIE (Telepathically)

I think I would. Apart from the eating insects part.

(DAD pushes the door open. BEAK's head jerks around. BEAK flies off.)

DAD

Come on, Evie, you should be ready for school by now. Evie, what have I told you about taking seeds off the bread to feed the birds?

EVIE

I'm sorry, Dad. It was just, if I'm not allowed a pet I...

DAD

You weren't trying to talk to that bird, were you? With your mind, I mean?

EVIE

No. I wasn't talking to the bird.

DAD

Good. Now. School.

SCENE 2

(School Canteen. EVIE and LEONORA sit together. Leonora shows a picture on her phone.)

LEONORA

Ah. You should come around and see Bibi! Tonight! You'll love her. I mean, you love all animals, I know. Even the ugly ones. Even cockroaches. So you're going to love Bibi. She is totally adorbs. You could even be in a video! If, you know, you sorted your hair out a bit.

EVIE

What's wrong with my hair?

LEONORA

It's just a bit, you know, dull.

EVIE

Is it? I just thought it was hair.

LEONORA

Hahahahahaha. You are FUNNY, Evie. I love you so much. But don't worry, it's what's on the inside that counts.

SCENE 3

(School corridor. A small hutch outside the secretary's office. KAHLO the rabbit is inside. EVIE walks past.)

KAHLO (Thought)

There's another one. Walking straight past. Not a care in the world. Oh, this is no good. They'll die without me.

EVIE (Whispering / Telepathically)

Kahlo, what is the matter? Kahlo. What. Is. The. Matter?

KAHLO (Thought)

You understand what's in my head?

EVIE (Telepathically)

Yes.

KAHLO (Thought)

I've never seen a human do that. Other animals, all the time... But a human? That must be rare. I am not meant to be here. I belong in the woods. I was taken from the Forest of Holes. I belong in the warren. I belong with my colony.

EVIE (Telepathically)

The Forest of Holes?

KAHLO (Thought)

Yes. It's very near. I was stolen by Brenda.

EVIE (Telepathically)

Brenda? Who on earth is Brenda?

KAHLO (Thought)

Brenda. Brenda Baxter.

EVIE (Telepathically)

Mrs Baxter's a Brenda? Amazing. Brenda Baxter. Mrs Baxter, the headteacher stole you from the wild?

KAHLO (Thought)

Yup.

EVIE (Telepathically)

That's terrible! She wouldn't do something like that!

KAHLO (Thought)

Well, it's true. Rabbits don't lie. I was kidnapped. She took me. And I need to go back. I've got all my family. I've still got my mum. Do you know what it's like to be away from your mum?

EVIE (Telepathically)

More than anything.

KAHLO (Thought)

Please. She's only two hundred hops away. Hopping! How I miss hopping! But I can hardly do a hop in here without bashing my head. You've got to help me. You're the only one who can hear me.

EVIE (Telepathically)

How do you want me to help you?

KAHLO (Thought)

You have to get me out of here. How would you like to be in here? Lying on some straw, staring out through all these metal squares. Scratching against that stupid tube for my water bottle. Having hundreds of human fingers try to poke at you every day. Look at this place. Could you live here?

EVIE (Telepathically)

Probably not.

KAHLO (Thought)

Please. You have to help...

EVIE (Telepathically)

I'm sorry.

(Evie runs towards the library. MRS BAXTER spots her.)

MRS BAXTER

No running in the corridor, Evie.

EVIE

Mrs Baxter, um, can I ask you something?

MRS BAXTER

If you must.

EVIE

Do you think it would be possible to build Kahlo, the rabbit, a new hutch?

MRS BAXTER

She has a hutch.

EVIE

I mean, a bigger hutch. So she can hop about more. It seems sad for a rabbit not to be able to hop around. We could do it as a...as a... project.

MRS BAXTER

Kahlo is a rabbit. She will have the hutch she's been given. There will be no bigger hutch. There will be no Five Star Rabbit Hotel. There will be no hutch with a swimming pool.

EVIE

I'm pretty sure rabbits don't want swimming p-

MRS BAXTER

Now, Evie, we have the school inspectors coming next week and I have some very important paperwork to do. Goodbye.

(Mrs Baxter leaves. Evie returns to Kahlo.)

KAHLO (Thought)

Please. You have to help me. I have to get out of here.

(Evie unlocks the hutch, picks up Kahlo, and runs outside to the grass.)

KAHLO (Thought)

Thank you. Thank you! You will be known as the Human Who Is Good! Thank you! Thank you...

EVIE

Go. Quick, before anyone sees. Keep going. And don't stop until you get there.

KAHLO (Thought)

If you ever need a favour, just ask.

SCENE 4

(Leonora's living room. LEONORA is squeezing BIBI the puppy into a tiny ballet outfit. EVIE is holding a phone, filming.)

BIBI (Thought)

I hate it, I hate it, make it stop!

EVIE

I don't think she likes this.

LEONORA

Evie, shut up, we're filming. She looks funny!

EVIE

I just don't think she finds it funny.

LEONORA

How do you know? Dogs can't laugh. She might be laughing inside.

EVIE

She's not laughing inside. She doesn't like it.

(Leonora grabs the phone. Bibi runs away.)

LEONORA

What's the matter with you, Evie?

EVIE

Nothing.

LEONORA

Well, you're not being very fun. You are being the exact opposite of fun. You are being a BIG WORLD-RECORD BORE. Mummy says I should only have positive people in my life. That's why she unfollowed four hundred people on Instagram. And you are not very positive. You are unpositive. I

can't help it if you never knew your mum and all that.

EVIE

What has my mum got to do with anything?

LEONORA

I just think maybe we shouldn't be friends any more.

EVIE

Fine.

LEONORA

Fine.

EVIE

Fine.

SCENE 5

(Outside Leonora's house. EVIE waits on a bench. SCRUFF, a scruffy dog, hobbles in, paw raised.)

SCRUFF (Thought)

I am hurt.

EVIE (Aloud and Telepathically)

Hey, dog. I can help you. Let's look at your paw. Please. I won't hurt you. Give me your paw.

SCRUFF (Thought)

I'm hurt.

EVIE (Telepathically)

I know. What I am about to do might hurt a little, but you will feel better afterwards.

(Evie pulls out a black thorn.)

SCRUFF (Thought)

Thank you. I will be able to run again. Running is my favourite.

EVIE

Have you got an owner? A home? A name?

SCRUFF (Thought)

Scruff. That's what the woman says. The woman who feeds me the meat the humans don't want. At the place where they come and eat.

EVIE

A restaurant?

SCRUFF (Thought)

I don't know. But that's what she calls me. I like it. Scruff.

EVIE

Cool. Well, I'm Evie.

(MARMALADE, a ginger tabby cat, hisses at Scruff.)

SCRUFF (Thought)

Come on, Marmalade. We've been through this. I'm not going to hurt you.

MARMALADE (Thought)

I know that. I just don't like you. You trouble me. All dogs trouble me.

SCRUFF (Thought)

That's prejudice. Plain and simple.

EVIE (Telepathically)

Why do dogs and cats hate each other if they understand each other?

SCRUFF (Thought)

Understand each other? Cats and dogs? We do and we don't. A bit like humans and humans.

(Dad's car pulls up.)

EVIE

Where do you live, Scruff?

SCRUFF (Thought)

Everywhere. And nowhere.

EVIE

You don't have an owner?

SCRUFF (Thought)

Don't be ridiculous.

EVIE

That's my dad. I'd better go. But I'll see you around, Scruff.

SCRUFF (Thought, sniffing Evie)

You smell of house dog. And rabbit. And fear. And goodness. You've got goodness in you. You are good, Evie. Don't let that fade away.

EVIE

Yeah. Bye, Scruff.

SCRUFF (Thought)

Okay. Sniff you later. Life is good.

SCENE 6

(Evie's living room. GRANNY FLORA is sitting with PLATO, a bearded dragon lizard. DAD is looking at his phone.)

DAD

Sorry, but I'm going to have to repair a sofa in the garage. The people want to pick it up tomorrow.

GRANNY FLORA

I am starting to think if we want to spend time with you we should maybe turn ourselves into a broken piece of furniture!

DAD

Not funny.

GRANNY FLORA

Sofas don't ever ask you how you are feeling. I suppose that's why you like them.

DAD

Maybe that's it.

(Dad shuffles out. Granny Flora gives Evie a liquorice sweet.)

GRANNY FLORA

It's getting stronger, isn't it?

EVIE

What is?

GRANNY FLORA

The Talent. That's what it's called, buttercup. The Talent. The ability to communicate with animals. Telepathically. Most animals have it instinctively. They are connected to the natural world. But very few humans have it. Not these days. Only the special ones. Like you. Like your mother. And like me.

EVIE

How did you know about me?

GRANNY FLORA

Plato told me. He knows everything. You won't be able to understand him yet, because these are complicated creatures. But they know a lot about the world. They see everything. Past, present, sometimes even future. And bearded dragons are the wisest of the wise. Oh, and someone else hinted too.

EVIE

Dad?

GRANNY FLORA

No. A little birdy.

EVIE

Beak! Wow. I'm not a freak! I'm like you! And Mum was like this too...

I don't understand something. If she was so good at talking to animals, why was she killed by one?

GRANNY FLORA

You are just like your mother. Asking questions about things that you wouldn't want to know the answer to.

EVIE

But-

GRANNY FLORA

Please, Evie. Listen. I know about what happened today. With the rabbit.

EVIE

How?

GRANNY FLORA

As I said. Plato knows everything.

EVIE

Please don't tell Dad.

GRANNY FLORA

I won't. But he is going to find out. And that would only be the start of the trouble. Please, you must try to keep the Talent under control. You must never act on it.

EVIE

But why?

GRANNY FLORA

The more you use the Talent, the stronger it becomes. I was about your age when I started hearing the thoughts of ants, mice and flocks of birds all at once. Sometimes it was overwhelming. I kept answering them because I wanted to understand every animal. But the stronger the Talent became, the harder it was to live an ordinary life.

That's why I worry about you, buttercup. You're clever, like your mother, but some voices can lead you into danger. Please be careful. I want you to have a normal life.

SCENE 7

(Evie's Dream. A jungle. A bright green emerald tree boa (SNAKE) is looking at a poison dart frog. EVIE appears in the dream as a toddler.)

EVIE (Telepathically)

If you even touch that frog, you will be dead.

SNAKE (Thought)

It looks plump. It looks tasty.

EVIE (Telepathically)

No. It is deadly. It is a poison dart frog. You are still a very young snake. You don't understand these things.

SNAKE (Thought)

Why do you want to save me?

EVIE (Telepathically)

Because I can.

SNAKE (Thought)

Thank you. You are a good human. Not like Mortimer.

EVIE (Telepathically)

Mortimer?

SNAKE (Thought)

He is after me. He is trying to control me. He is not like you. Or your parents.

EVIE (Telepathically)

You know my parents?

SNAKE (Thought)

Yes, they are right there.

(The snake slides away. Toddler Evie sees her Mum and Dad.)

EVIE

Mum!

SCENE 8

(Mrs Baxter's office. MRS BAXTER bobs a teabag. EVIE is sitting across from her.)

MRS BAXTER

It's chamomile. Chamomile tea. It says it calms people down. I need calming down. This is my seventeenth of the day. Evie Trench, Evie Trench, Evie Trench... So, you have something to tell me...

EVIE

Um, do I?

MRS BAXTER

We have cameras everywhere in this school. We know you stole Kahlo.

EVIE

I... I didn't steal her.

MRS BAXTER

Well, what would you call it then?

EVIE

Rescued. I rescued her. The hutch was too small. She wanted to escape.

MRS BAXTER

Do not try to correct me in my own office. Now, there is no excuse for endangering the health and welfare of an animal.

EVIE

I'm really sorry, Mrs Baxter, but I was actually doing the opposite. Kahlo hated being in that hutch. She wanted to be free. She wanted to escape back to where she was from.

MRS BAXTER

Oh, and how do you know this? Are you a rabbit mind-reader or something?

EVIE

No. Of course not. No. That would be... impossible. It's just I imagined that she must be feeling squished up.

MRS BAXTER

Well, maybe your father will be able to help.

EVIE

No. Please. Don't call my dad. I beg you.

MRS BAXTER

Too late.

(DAD enters, looking pale and serious.)

DAD

I am so sorry about Evie's behaviour, Mrs Baxter. This has never happened before. And this will never happen again. I assure you. I can see, Mrs Baxter, this is not the way of things here, nor should it be. You are an exceptional head teacher.

MRS BAXTER

You are right, Mr Trench. In the entire history of Lofting Primary School, no one has ever stolen a rabbit.

EVIE

I didn't steal it, Dad. I released it.

DAD

Evie, it doesn't matter whether it was stealing or releasing. You took it. It was an incredibly stupid thing to do. I am so sorry for my daughter's behaviour.

MRS BAXTER

Well, I can see, Mr Trench, that you understand the seriousness of this matter.

DAD

I do. I absolutely do. You don't have to worry at all, Mrs Baxter.

MRS BAXTER

I'm not sure it's as simple as that... You see, there is a school inspection next week and the subject of the rabbit is bound to come up. And we need to look tough. And so I really think Evie will have to find somewhere else to get her schooling.

DAD

You're expelling her?

MRS BAXTER

I see no other option.

EVIE

Erm, do you think the school inspectors would be interested to know where you got the rabbit from?

MRS BAXTER

What are you talking about?

EVIE

There were witnesses who saw you take the rabbit from the forest. A head teacher should not be stealing wild rabbits.

MRS BAXTER

I... I... do you have any idea how hard it is to balance the school budget? I have to make cuts somewhere!

EVIE

Well. Maybe you'll explain that to the inspectors.

DAD

Or... We could just all forget this ever happened.

MRS BAXTER

Good, good. Well, in that case, no further action is required by myself or the school.

DAD

Thank you, Mrs Baxter. Say "thank you", Evie. And that you are grateful to Mrs Baxter for her kindness.

EVIE

Thank you.

SCENE 9

(In Dad's car.)

DAD

I am not cross, Evie. I am sad that you can't keep the one secret I asked you to keep.

EVIE

I was helping a rabbit.

DAD

You promised you weren't going to do this.

EVIE

I know. I'm sorry. I know.

DAD

I've told you. You mustn't do this. If you start listening to animals, it will lead to big trouble... Mortimer.

EVIE

Who is Mortimer, Dad?

DAD

now is the time... Evie, I was going to wait until you were sixteen, but there is something you need to know.

EVIE

Is this about Mum?

DAD

Yes. It's about Mum. It's about us. It's about everything.

You weren't born in England, Evie. You were born in the city of Tena in Ecuador. In the Amazon rainforest. You moved here when you were three years old. I told you your old life was one big dream. That it never happened. And, eventually, you forgot about where you were when you were three.

EVIE

Is... is this a joke?

DAD

You were called Isabella Eva.

My original job was a translator. And I stayed being a translator when I moved to Ecuador. That is how I met your mum. She was already over there, trying to save the rainforest. Trying to save the animals. Eva was your middle name. Mum always called you Evie, so that was your new name when we moved here. And Trench. Trench was our new surname. And I changed my first name from Santiago to Leo.

EVIE

You changed our names! I don't understand.

DAD

I'm sorry, Evie. I had to do it. I had to do it for you. I had to do it for your mother. I had made her a promise. To keep you safe. We had to start again. New names. New country. New everything.

EVIE

Am I Evie or am I Isabella?

DAD

You are Evie. You are Evie Trench. It's just... You didn't start off that way.

EVIE

Why?

DAD

Your mum was a very special woman. Even more special than I have told you. She was like you. She wanted to save the rainforest - the Amazon rainforest - from being destroyed.

Your mum had the Talent, Evie. Just like you. The animals told her terrible stories about the humans who were destroying their land. And she helped them. She was a hero to the people who wanted to save the rainforest. But other people didn't like her. The business people. The loggers. The cow farmers. And one man in particular really didn't like her. Someone even more powerful than your mum.

EVIE

Mortimer.

DAD

That's right. Mortimer J Mortimer. The worst man ever to have lived.

Mortimer J Mortimer can do more than hear animal thoughts. He can control animals completely. He used them to steal and to kill people who tried to protect the rainforest. The companies clearing the forest paid him to silence their opponents. And he wanted other people with the Talent to join him, so he could become even more powerful.

EVIE

He wanted Mum?

DAD

He wanted people like your mum to join him. She refused. He believed her goodness weakened his power. The next day, he controlled a Brazilian wandering spider and made it bite her. I tried to save her, but we were too far from a hospital. Before she died, she warned me that he would come after you if he discovered your Talent. That's why we changed our names and came to England.

EVIE

Why didn't you tell me before?

DAD

Mortimer uses animals to kill everyone with the Talent. This is why you must never act on it again. Do you understand?

EVIE

I understand. I won't any more. From now on. I'll ignore all the thoughts of animals.

SCENE 10

(Lifting High. In a maths lesson, EVIE sits beside RAMESH, a classmate who shares her interest in animals.)

RAMESH

Hypotenuse is a good word. Hy-pot-e-nuse.

EVIE

Sounds like a newspaper for hippos...

RAMESH

I like that.

EVIE

What's your favourite animal? In the zoo?

RAMESH

Well, I like the meerkats. They're cool. But I like saltwater crocodiles. And we don't have them. They're

the most dangerous animal in the world.

EVIE

Nope. They're not.

RAMESH

Are you kidding? The saltwater crocodile can kill anything. On land or water. It can kill wild buffalo. Even sharks. It grabs them in its jaws and does a death roll.

EVIE

The saltwater crocodile is actually not even in the top three most dangerous animals.

RAMESH

Oh, so you're counting humans?

EVIE

Well, humans are the deadliest animal. No question. We kill each other. And we've wiped out millions of other animals.

RAMESH

I know, it totally sucks.

EVIE

But even if you don't count humans, the saltwater crocodile is not the deadliest animal.

RAMESH

What is, then?

EVIE

Easy. Mosquito. They kill three million people a year. By spreading really, really dangerous dis-

RAMESH

You know a lot about animals.

On Saturdays I help out at the zoo. Do bits and bobs for my mum. Mainly, though, I just hang around. If you wanted to come along, I can give you a behind-the-scenes tour. We've got some cool creatures.

EVIE

Thanks, but I can't.

RAMESH

Why?

SCENE 11

(Evie's living room. GRANNY FLORA is chewing liquorice.)

GRANNY FLORA

Do you want one?

EVIE

Thank you, Granny. What are you doing here?

GRANNY FLORA

I came to see you.

EVIE

Where's Dad?

GRANNY FLORA

He's out. He told me earlier he had to pick up a sofa from somewhere. I need to talk to you.

EVIE

Why? What's the matter, Granny Flora?

GRANNY FLORA

Plato.

EVIE

Is he hurt?

GRANNY FLORA

No, buttercup. It's worse than that. The thing you should know is that Plato is a bearded dragon and bearded dragons are lizards and lizards are reptiles. And reptiles are... Special. Reptiles are special. They are different to other animals. They have powers. They know things. I have made a mistake.

EVIE

What was the mistake?

GRANNY FLORA

I have to teach you. I have to help you develop the Talent. It's very important. Your life depends on it... But it has to be a secret. Not even your dad can know. It would put him in grave danger. Do you understand?

EVIE

Yes, Granny. Of course.

GRANNY FLORA

Different animals have different kinds of minds. Whereas a dog thought can just arrive in your mind, simple and complete, like a slipper dropped on the carpet, a lizard thought is something that darts around, hard to catch. Right. You can start with that cat over there on the wall.

EVIE

Well, that's easy.

GRANNY FLORA

I don't want you just to understand the cat. I want you to persuade it. I want you to get the cat to come over with nothing but your mind.

EVIE

What? That's impossible. You can't tell a cat what to do.

GRANNY FLORA

Focus on the subject. Imagine there is nothing else in the world than that particular cat sitting on the wall. Now. Bow and arrow. Imagine your mind is a bow, and the thought is an arrow. Pull back, and speak a thought into the cat's mind.

EVIE (Telepathically)

Hello, Marmalade. I would like you to come over here, please.

MARMALADE (Thought)

Now why would I want to do that?

EVIE (Telepathically)

Well, because it's nice here. And because I'm telling you.

MARMALADE (Thought)

That's not a reason. Sardines are a reason.

GRANNY FLORA

No bribery. Remember. He has to come simply because you are mentally telling him to.

EVIE (Telepathically)

Come here, Marmalade. Come here, Marmalade. Please come, Marmalade...

(Marmalade jumps away into the next garden.)

EVIE

Oh no, he's gone.

GRANNY FLORA

Oh, he's not gone. Watch this.

(Granny Flora closes her eyes in concentration. Marmalade jumps back onto the wall, then down, and trots over to rub against Granny Flora's ankles.)

GRANNY FLORA

And not a single sardine in sight. You see, your problem was that you were asking Marmalade to come to you. You need to make it INEVITABLE. You need not a shadow of doubt. You need to become him.

EVIE

That sounds impossible.

GRANNY FLORA

Everything is impossible until you can do it. And you'll do it. It's called the dawa. It's like a river. It flows through everything. It connects all life on this earth together.

EVIE

Dawa.

GRANNY FLORA

And to become a true Talent, you will have to be able to feel the dawa.

EVIE

Will I, Granny?

GRANNY FLORA

Oh yes, Evie. Oh yes. You'll get there. I know it. But you need to surround yourself with as many animals as possible. Every species. Exotic animals.

SCENE 12

(Street. EVIE sees SCRUFF by a bin.)

EVIE (Aloud)

Hello, Scruff.

SCRUFF (Thought)

Oh. I'm good enough to talk to now, am I?

EVIE (Telepathically)

I'm sorry, Scruff, I really am... Come here, Scruff. I want to come to Evie.

SCRUFF (Thought)

Your mind control won't work with me, Evie.

EVIE (Telepathically)

Sorry, I was just testing something.

SCRUFF (Thought)

And I was just sniffing something. Something delicious. Pizza in a pizza box. I like you, but I also like pizza. Life is good. Life is good...

(Evie walks on and sees SAM, a 5-year-old boy, watering plants.)

SAM

It's you, isn't it? I saw you. With the dog. Scruff.

EVIE

Scruff? How do you know his name?

SAM

He told me. He told me your name too, Evie. I can talk to dogs. But not cats. Only dogs. Please can you teach me? I want to talk to all animals...

EVIE

Who knows you have the Talent? Who knows that you can talk to animals?

SAM

No one. My mummy, but she thinks I'm being silly.

EVIE

Good. Good. Don't tell anyone else, okay? Right, I'd better go.

SAM

I want to talk to animals. Big animals.

EVIE

Bye.

SAM

Evie, my name's Sam.

EVIE

Bye... Sam.

SAM

Bye, Evie.

SCENE 13

DAD

How are you getting on at school? Any new friends? Any nice people?

EVIE

Well, there's a boy called Ramesh who seems okay. His mum works at the zoo. He's asked me to come over and see all the... All the animals. And so I just wondered if I could go along... this Saturday.

DAD

I thought you didn't like the idea of zoos. I thought you didn't think animals should be in captivity, that all animals should exist as freely as nature intended.

EVIE

Dad, please.

DAD

What about Leonora?

EVIE

She doesn't speak to me any more. She hangs around with mean people. Ramesh is my only friend at the moment. Well, I don't even know if he's a proper friend. But he's good to talk to. He's the only one at school who likes talking about weird animal facts.

DAD

Okay. You can go to the zoo. But be very careful, do you understand?

EVIE

I promise.

SCENE 14

(Lifting Zoo. Elephant enclosure. MRS SENGUPTA feeds LEONIE. RAMESH and EVIE enter.)

LEONIE THE ELEPHANT (Thought)

Exquisite. What a wonderfully yummy piece of fruit. I am blessed.

RAMESH

All elephants like to eat. But Indian elephants really like to eat. I mean, that's all they do. Eat, eat, eat, poo, eat, eat, drink, eat, eat, sleep, eat. But mainly eat.

ORWELL THE ELEPHANT (Thought)

This makes things better. Bananas make everything better. They nearly make the sadness go away.

EVIE (Telepathically)

Why are you sad?

ORWELL (Thought)

You... understand me?

EVIE (Telepathically)

Yes.

ORWELL (Thought)

I'm sad because I've been thinking about when my mother died. Men with guns shot my mother. And I saw it with my own eyes. And it was terrible. I had nightmares. Did you know elephants have nightmares? But you know that pain, too, don't you?

EVIE (Telepathically)

My mother died too, yes. How did you know?

ORWELL (Thought)

Elephants always know. We understand the pain of others. Like yours. And the boy's. It's a terrible curse.

EVIE (Telepathically)

Did you mean Ramesh? Is he in pain?

ORWELL (Thought)

Yes. Since his dad died. He normally cries with me. When no one else can see. I knew his dad. He was a good person, too. But then he got very ill and he couldn't see me any more. And Ramesh was in a lot of pain. He still is. But he seems happy, now. That you are here. He needs a friend.

RAMESH

Here we go. Who's that?

(Evie waves to SAM behind the fence.)

EVIE

No one. I don't know. Just a friendly kid.

SCENE 15

(Lion Enclosure. Crowd is screaming. SAM is inside the enclosure.)

WOMAN

Do something!

RAMESH

What happened?

WOMAN

It's my son! He's fallen! He climbed up the fence! I tried to stop him! And...and... he's in there. He's in there with the lions. LOOK!

EVIE

Do something! There's definitely a kid in the enclosure!

RAMESH (On walkie-talkie)

Calling all units! Emergency! There is a child in the lion enclosure! Repeat! THERE IS A CHILD IN THE LION ENCLOSURE! Mum! Everybody! THERE IS A HUMAN CHILD IN THE LION ENCLOSURE!

EVIE

Oh no.

WOMAN

Like a statue! Stand still like a statue!

DELIA THE LIONESS (Thought)

I need to eat the boy.

MALE LION (Thought)

He does look very tasty.

EVIE (Telepathically)

No. No, don't eat the boy. He has a mother. He has people who love him. Please, don't eat the boy. Don't eat Sam.

MALE LION (Thought)

Make sure you share him with us.

MAN IN CROWD (As Evie climbs fence)

What the hell are you doing?

EVIE

Sorry!

RAMESH

Evie! Evie! Oh man. What are you doing?

DELIA (Thought)

I am going to eat the boy. He looks a bit crunchy. But tasty.

EVIE (Telepathically)

No.

DELIA (Thought)

Yes. Yes, I am going to eat him. And then, after that, I am going to eat you.

MALE LION (Thought)

But you'll still share, right? I'm getting REALLY hungry.

SAM

It's you! I was waiting for you to come... I knew it was safe if you were here! Tell me how to speak to the lion! I want to speak to a lion! Please!

EVIE (Telepathically)

We don't want to hurt you. Come on. We have people who love us. Please...

DELIA (Thought)

Why should I care about you humans? You don't care about me.

EVIE (Telepathically)

Look! Look up there. If you so much as scratch either one of us, they will kill you. You will be dead. I'm sorry. But it's true. They will kill you. If you touch either the boy or me, they will kill you.

DELIA (Thought)

You are lying.

EVIE (Telepathically)

No. It will happen. Please... if you hurt me, or the little boy, they will kill you.

DELIA (Thought)

I am the queen of beasts. No one is in control of me.

EVIE (Telepathically)

Oh, really? Look around. Can you leave here if you want to? No. The humans are in charge here.

DELIA (Thought)

You're right. The human girl is right. It's not worth it.

EVIE (Telepathically)

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. (To Sam) Sam. When I stand up, you walk very slowly towards that open door, do you understand? Come with me, and you'll stay alive.

SCENE 16

(Dad's garage.)

DAD

Are you crazy?

EVIE

No, Dad.

DAD

What were you thinking?

EVIE

I was thinking that no one else would have been able to communicate with the lioness. I was thinking that there was a good chance that I could save that boy's life. I was thinking I had no choice.

DAD

There is always a choice, Evie. And besides - even with the Talent, you can't just jump into a lion

enclosure. Especially as you haven't used it in a long time.

EVIE

I have used it.

DAD

What? Evie! Why? After everything I told you.

EVIE

I'm sorry, but...

DAD

You're lucky you weren't killed!

EVIE

But I wasn't!

DAD

Yet. Look. It's all over social media!

(Dad's phone rings. He answers.)

DAD

Hello? No, I don't want to talk to the New York Times. And nor does my daughter. Yes, I know about the video. Goodbye!

(He hangs up and turns to Evie.)

DAD

It's international now. The New York Times! And that boy is telling everyone you have the Talent. This is a nightmare! And you know why, don't you?

EVIE

Mortimer.

DAD

Exactly.

We can't stay here! He'll come for us...

EVIE

Dad, we can't just run away. He'll come for the boy, too. That's all over the news as well. We can't just leave him here.

DAD

That boy is not my responsibility, Evie; you are. My final promise to your mother, before the venom took over completely, was that I'd look after you. She just wanted me to keep you safe, Evie. We've got to go. And we'll take Granny Flora too.

GRANNY FLORA (Opening eyes suddenly)

NO!

DAD

No, what?

GRANNY FLORA

We can't move. We have to stay here. That's what Plato believes. If we leave, the trouble will end us. If we stay, we can end it.

DAD

We can end it? We can end it? What does that mean?

GRANNY FLORA

I don't know. I just know we have to stay. And wait.

SCENE 17

(Street. EVIE walks past SCRUFF.)

SCRUFF (Thought)

There is an air of weirdness.

(Evie sees MARMALADE the cat in a window.)

MARMALADE (Thought)

Help me. Only you can stop this. You have to stop this, before it's too late.

(Marmalade squeezes out window and runs away fast.)

EVIE

Marmalade? Marmalade? Weird. Very weird.

(Evie spots missing pet posters on a lamp-post.)

(Evie reads missing-pet posters for Lady Gaga, Cocoa, Mrs Cuddles and other animals.)

EVIE (Thought)

This is getting weirder and weirder.

(Evie passes Leonora's house. BIBI the puppy is in the window.)

BIBI (Thought/Yapping)

He's coming! He's coming! He's coming! He's coming! He's coming! He's coming!

EVIE (Telepathically)

Who? Is it a man called Mortimer?

BIBI (Thought)

He's coming! He's coming!

SCENE 18

(School Yard.)

EVIE

How's your mum? I heard they're closing down the zoo for a little while...

RAMESH

A month. Mum's fine, though. She's just pleased no one got hurt.

EVIE

I'm sorry.

RAMESH

Hey, it's not your fault. You were just trying to help the little idiot. I mean, BOY. Even if you hadn't gone over it'd still be closed down. We might even be in a worse situation... Everyone really DOES think you can talk to animals, y'know? That's what the boy said you told him. Sam. It's all over the internet.

EVIE

I never told him that.

RAMESH

Oh.

EVIE

But it is true.

RAMESH

Whaaaaaaat? Don't mess with me.

EVIE

I have something called the Talent. It means I can communicate telepathically with animals. It is a skill that, once out in the open, puts me in great danger. I'm not joking. I am incredibly serious.

RAMESH

Prove it. Prove you are not just...

EVIE

A weirdo?

RAMESH

Well, I KNOW you're a weirdo. But I'm a weirdo too. Weirdos are the way to be. Especially in a school full of NAUSEATING NORMALS. I mean, prove you're a WEIRDO WITH SKILLS.

EVIE

The lioness backed down. That's because I told her she could get killed.

RAMESH

That's not proof. The lioness might not have been in the killing mood.

EVIE

Oh, she was!

RAMESH

Right. Sure. You know that.

EVIE

You saw me in the reptile house. You thought I was acting a bit odd. That's because I was trying to communicate with the axolotl.

RAMESH

Ah. Trying to and ACTUALLY DOING SO are very different things.

EVIE

And the elephant - Orwell - he told me...

RAMESH

What? What did the elephant tell you?

EVIE

Nothing.

RAMESH

I miss him, you know. Every day, I wake up and there's a moment I still think Dad's here. And then I realise that he's gone. That he'll never be able to go to the cinema with me, or tell me off about my messy room, and I find it too much... You're a hero, mate. You probably saved that boy's life.

LEONORA (Approaching, filming)

I'm taking a picture of you both. It's for a photography project for art class...

EVIE

You generally ask someone before you take their picture.

LEONORA

I might put it on Instagram, too. Got 400,000 followers now. I just need a title for it. The picture, I

mean. "Sad Boy and Lion Girl"... That might work. Or "The Girl Who Thought She Was Special Finds a Friend"... or just "Weirdos". Yeah, I like that.

RAMESH

You're just jealous that you're no longer the most famous girl in school.

LEONORA

Yeah. That must be it. Jealous. Got it. Well done, Sherlock Holmes.

(BEAK the sparrow flies in.)

BEAK (Thought)

Are you all right, Evie?

EVIE (Telepathically)

Yes.

BEAK (Thought)

Are you sure?

EVIE (Telepathically)

No, Beak. I'm not all right.

BEAK (Thought)

Do you want that girl to leave you alone?

EVIE (Telepathically)

Yes. But I don't think that's going to happen.

BEAK (Thought)

Wait there. I'll get my friends. They're right there, in that tree.

LEONORA

Hell-ooo! Are you listening? Is anyone home? Earth to Evie...

BEAK (Thought)

Not the ones sitting down... the others.

(Beak returns with a huge flock of sparrows.)

LEONORA

Ugh! Oh my god, it just pooped on me!

LEONORA'S FRIENDS

Aaaagh! Those evil birds!

Ugh! It's in my hair!

SCENE 19

(Evie texts Dad. No answer. Evie runs home. She searches.)

EVIE

Dad? Dad? Are you here? Weird. Weird, weird, weird.

(Evie spots a SNAIL outside.)

EVIE (Telepathically)

Can you see me? Snail, can you understand me? Can you hear my thoughts? I am here. I am human. The big creature looking down at you.

(Evie focuses hard, finding the Dawa. The snail does not speak. Through its memory, Evie sees a man in khaki trousers with a snake tattoo on his right hand arrive at the house and later leave with Dad.)

EVIE

Mortimer! He took Dad!

(Evie immediately runs to Granny Flora's house. She finds PLATO the lizard there alone.)

EVIE

Plato. (Telepathically) Plato. Plato, where is Granny Flora? Plato, Granny Flora is in trouble. You need to tell me what you know. What is going on?

(Evie closes her eyes, reaches into the Dawa.)

PLATO (Thought)

The forest. You must go to the woods. There, you will find all that you seek. He knows you will come. But there, your past will free your future...

EVIE

Thank you, Plato.

SCENE 20

(Lofting Wood. Night. EVIE meets a STAG.)

STAG (Thought)

What are you?

EVIE (Telepathically)

I'm Evie. I'm a human. But I'm not going to hurt you.

STAG (Thought)

You are not of the forest.

EVIE (Telepathically)

What?

STAG (Thought)

There are two kinds of thing. Things of the forest. And things not of the forest. And you are not of the forest.

EVIE (Telepathically)

You are right. I am not of the forest. And I will leave the forest. I just need to find someone. Maybe you could help me... I'm looking for my dad. He's like me. But taller. And a man.

STAG (Thought)

I don't know. But there are a lot of cats. And dogs. And other things not of the forest.

EVIE (Telepathically)

Where?

STAG (Thought)

They went that way... I will show you. Follow me. This way, this way... You're getting closer... This way... this way... this-

GRANNY FLORA

Evie! No! Don't listen to the stag!

EVIE

Granny?

GRANNY FLORA

No!

(Evie falls into a deep hole. DAD is at the bottom.)

DAD

Evie, are you okay?

EVIE

Dad! Oh, Dad. What's going on?

DAD

It's him. It's Mortimer. He's got us both here. He came for me earlier. I had to go with him. He said if I didn't he'd hurt you. But he knew you would follow...

STAG (Thought from above)

I have followed my command...

DAD

He's mind-controlling all the animals in Lofting. Most of them, anyway.

EVIE

Is there a way to climb out?

DAD

No. It's too deep. It's amazing what a few mind-controlled dogs can do. And he's got Granny Flora tied to a tree.

EVIE

I know. I saw. Poor Granny Flora. Where is he?

MORTIMER (From above)

Oh. I'm everywhere. So, here we are, Isabella. All three of you. The hat-trick.

EVIE

My name is Evie.

DAD

Please. Do anything you want to me. But don't hurt Evie. Don't hurt Flora.

MORTIMER

Oh, Mr Navarro. Santiago, if I may. You overestimate your importance. I am here for them. The ones with the Talent... Now, obviously, their Talent isn't quite a match for mine. It never could be. But it would be very useful if we were all on the same team.

EVIE

You killed my mum. I could never be on your team.

MORTIMER

You need to see the bigger picture, Evie. I can devote myself to good causes.

EVIE

Good causes? Like murder?

MORTIMER

No, like animal preservation. And there's only one way to do that...

EVIE

How?

MORTIMER

Well, we get the animals to take over. I've been working on it for a long while. I've been trying to recruit people. People like you. People like your grandmother. And I must admit, it hasn't been entirely

successful so far. I even tried to recruit your mother, back in the day. Did you know that?

EVIE

So when people turn you down, you kill them?

MORTIMER

That's quite a negative way of looking at it. But yes, essentially correct. It is a vision of a better world.

EVIE

A better world?

MORTIMER

Yes. The animals will take control, with my guidance. Your Talent could help us. Join me, Evie, or stand against me — but the revolution begins tomorrow.

EVIE

I don't want to take over the world. I just want to be free.

MORTIMER

It's the same thing. Now, I'll leave you to decide. Join me and live. Or... a little bite from my snake friend here. The choice is yours. Back in a while... Toodle-pip.

(Mortimer leaves.)

DAD

I don't know what he is going to do with me. But you and Granny Flora can be free. All you have to do is agree to work for him.

EVIE

But that's not freedom. He wants to wage war on humans. He doesn't care about animals. He cares about controlling them. He cares about power.

DAD

He's going to kill people. That's what he is going to do.

EVIE (Thought)

Well, I'm not going to be his slave.

(Evie tries to climb out of the hole and falls back.)

DAD

There's no way out that way. I've tried.

KAHLO (Thought)

Digging is fun. Digging is joy. Digging and hopping make worries fade away. Nothing beats digging and hopping. Down in the dark. Dig dig dig. Hop hop hop.

EVIE

Kahlo.

DAD

What?

EVIE

Nothing. (Telepathically) Kahlo? Can you hear me? It's me, Evie. The school girl who set you free from the hutch. Last year.

KAHLO (Thought)

Evie?

EVIE (Telepathically)

Yes.

KAHLO (Thought)

I remember you. Of course I remember you! The Human Who Is Good. I didn't know you liked digging at night too?

EVIE (Telepathically)

I, um, don't.

KAHLO (Thought)

Night digging is the best!

EVIE (Telepathically)

Kahlo, listen. I wasn't digging!

KAHLO (Thought)

Well, how are you down here, then?

EVIE (Telepathically)

Mortimer has trapped me and my dad in a hole. Granny Flora is tied to a tree nearby. He is controlling the animals above ground, and we cannot get out. Can you help us?

KAHLO (Thought)

Of course. The whole colony thinks you're a hero. The Human Who Is Good.

DAD

Evie, what are you doing? You're not using the Talent, are you?

EVIE

Dad, if there was ever a time to use it, I think it is now, don't you? Wherever Mortimer's gone, he's going to be back soon. So we have to act fast, Dad. (Telepathically) Now, I have a plan. But I'm going to need you and all your friends to help...

KAHLO (Thought)

All here at the service of the Human Who Is Good!

(Rabbits dig a tunnel to Evie and Dad. Evie crawls up near Granny Flora.)

GRANNY FLORA

Oh my! Good work, buttercup! But be quick... Look!

MARMALADE (Thought)

Must stop them! Must kill them!

EVIE (Telepathically)

Marmalade, snap out of it. You are being mind-controlled. You all are.

MICE (Thought)

Must kill!

HAMSTERS (Thought)

Must stop them!

GUINEA PIG (Thought)

Must destroy!

BULL (Thought)

I WILL DESTROY YOU!

(Evie cuts the rope, and pushes Granny Flora into the tunnel.)

(The Bull crashes into the tree, felling it, blocking the hole behind them.)

KAHLO (Thought)

Quick! This way! Follow us.

EVIE (Telepathically)

Thank you, Kahlo. Thank you, everyone. You have been so helpful. I will never forget this. None of us will.

RABBITS (Chorus of Thoughts)

Goodbye. We shall never forget this night we worked together for the Human Who Is Good.

EVIE

What now?

DAD

Well, I don't think we should even try to go home. We should probably just get a taxi and get as far out of Lofting as possible. Before Mortimer comes back...

GRANNY FLORA

No. Something is wrong. I can feel it.

(Evie checks her phone.)

EVIE

OMG – someone broke into the zoo! No joke. Repeat – no joke. THE ANIMALS ARE MISSING!!!!!!!!!!

SCENE 21

(Mortimer approaches with a procession of zoo animals and pets, holding SAM'S hand.)

DAD

Oh no. He's got the boy.

MORTIMER

Well, well, well. I must say, I underestimated you. So, I think this tells me everything I need to know about your decision. I must say, I'm disappointed. Very disappointed indeed.

SAM

Hello, Evie!

EVIE

Hi Sam. Where's your mum?

SAM

Oh, she's asleep. But a cat told me to sneak out and meet Mr Mortimer! He's going to help me talk to all the animals!

MORTIMER

I certainly am. You're my apprentice now.

SAM

App-ren-tice.

GRANNY FLORA

You've got to stop this, Mortimer.

MORTIMER

Let's play a game! It's called "Snake, lion or gorilla". Basically, you can choose how you want to die. Oldest first. That seems fair. How do you want to die?

DAD

No. Me first. Start with me. The one you knew first...

MORTIMER

Poor old Santiago. Always too late, too weak, too pathetic to be the hero. How. Do. You. Want. To. Die?

GRANNY FLORA

I am a mere eighty-two years old. I have no plans on dying any time soon, thank you very much.

MORTIMER

Snake, you say? Well, that's convenient. Because Leaf right here-

GRANNY FLORA

No. I choose lion.

DAD

You know. You're right. I'm too weak. I don't have any special Talent. I am just a man who tries to fix broken things. But I would rather be me. I would rather be able to do a little good than to do a whole world of bad.

MORTIMER

Oh, are you giving me a lesson? So inspiring.

DAD

I knew the very first time I met you in Ecuador that you were bad news. But, somehow, I can't hate you. Even after all you've done. To be as evil as you are must be such a curse. To have no light in your soul. Nothing but darkness... You don't deserve hate. Hate is a waste of energy. You have a great Talent, but it means nothing. Because you have lost yourself. You are nothing. You are a black hole.

MORTIMER

Shut your mouth, Santiago.

DAD

No. No, I won't. Because you don't understand what you are doing. What is the point of all this? What happens? What will you do?

SAM

I... I don't want to be an app-ten-tice. I want to go home.

(Evie recognises Leaf as the young snake she once saved from a poison dart frog. She concentrates on him.)

LEAF (Thought)

It was you!

EVIE (Telepathically)

Yes, it was me. I tried to save you. Unlike Mortimer, who tried to control you. Who is still trying to control you...

MORTIMER

What's going on? Leaf, what are you doing? You are under my control... You know you are under my control... I command you. I command everything. I have power over the dawa...

LEAF (Thought)

You don't control me. No one controls me. You took me from my home, and I won't forgive you. You will not harm the girl who saved my life. I will not let you...

MORTIMER

Leaf! Slide off me! Get off me and across the grass and constrict yourself around that old human woman! Now! Now! Nowaaaagh!

SAM

Wow.

(Leaf constricts Mortimer, killing him. The animals are freed from his control.)

GRANNY FLORA

Good boy. There's a good boy. Well, I guess Plato was right. We had to stay and solve this.

DAD

Yes. Yes, she did. She's my star - mi estrella - and I should have followed her all along.

EVIE

Thanks, Dad.

EVIE

Scruff? What are you doing here?

SCRUFF (Thought)

I was thinking...

EVIE

What were you thinking, Scruff?

SCRUFF (Thought)

Will you, possibly, maybe... take me home?

EVIE

Dad. Please.

DAD

Are you sure?

EVIE

Absolutely.

GRANNY FLORA

Your real talent isn't talking to animals, Evie. It's kindness. That's what made you stronger than Mortimer in the end. Kindness is a boomerang. You throw it out and you get it back. You had done kind things in the world, and you had been rewarded with kindness in return.

EVIE

Thanks, Granny.

GRANNY FLORA

Well, think about it. You were kind to that rabbit, and she then helped us escape. You helped that snake, and it saved your life. Our lives. You were kind to Scruff when you helped his poorly paw, and now he loves you. You were kind to Beak, and he pooped on your enemies... Your mother would be proud of you.

DAD

Yes, she certainly would.

EVIE

I love you, Dad.

DAD

I love you, too. And from now on, you must never be afraid to be special. It's your gift...

SCRUFF (Thought)

Life is good, Evie. Life is good.

EVIE

Yes, Scruff. You are right. It really is. Life is good.

(BLACKOUT)