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written by

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ABANDONED!

Mystery surrounds the origins of a miniature baby girl discovered in a shoe box outside the Artemisia Hospital on Thursday night. The newborn, who weighs about the same as a block of butter, is in excellent health according to doctors, who can find no explanation for her unusual size.

The baby has stolen the hearts of Artemisians, with dozens of families already offering to adopt her. Meanwhile, the hospital has renewed appeals for the baby's parents to come forward.



MINIATURE BABY HEADED FOR PALACE!

It's official. In a move that will disappoint hundreds of hopeful families, Papa King announced last night that he will be fostering Artemisia's famous miniature orphan himself.

'It's my job to look after all disadvantaged citizens,' the king said. 'I am determined that this tiny abandoned baby will have the chance she deserves.' Artemisia's ruler has already chosen his new baby's name. From now on, she will be called Rosamund, after his mother, the late queen; and Miniver because she is a 'miniature version' of a human being.

A sister for Rosamund

Now there are two of us! Artemisia's darling, Rosamund Miniver, is pictured here with her new miniature sister, Emily, who was found in a basket on the steps of Miniver House yesterday morning.

'The baby is absolutely gorgeous,' said excited foster father Papa King. 'Rosamund is so excited, she won't leave Emily alone. Now there's another Miniver for Artemisians to love.'



Emily

Sweet and fresh as a Miniver Morning
A new perfume from *Delaney's* of Queen Street

It's a Miniver Morning

'Miniver Morning', Rosamund Miniver's first single, has debuted at Number 1 in the Artemisia charts.

'I'd like to dedicate the song to my little sister Emily,' Rosamund told Pop Music Weekly. The miniature pop star ruled out the possibility of a concert tour, as four-year-old Emily is too young to go with her. 'We Minivers do everything together,' Rosamund said. 'I can't travel anywhere without Emily. It would be awful.'

MINIVER HOUSE DÉCOR SETS NEW TRENDS

PINK IS THE NEW COLOUR for home this summer, with the Miniver sisters' announcement that the outside of Miniver House is being completely repainted in blush pink. The pink accents continue inside the miniature mansion, where new rose-coloured living-room carpet will be highlighted by green and white. Rumour has it that Rosamund, who favours bold colours, has ordered cerise and gold furnishings for her gorgeous turret bedroom. Since Minivers love to do everything together, our guess is Emily's room is being redecorated to match in her favourite turquoise blue.

MINIVERS CONCERT BREAKS ALL RECORDS



More than twenty thousand people braved thunderstorms to attend a rare Minivers live concert at the Artemisia Cricket Ground last night. Watched by Papa King and backed by a thirteen piece band, the miniature singing sensations wowed their audience with hits, including their latest Number 1, 'Sisters Forever' from the album Minivers Together. The televised event was watched by an estimated 85% of the viewing audience, the most ever recorded.

HIT MINIVER TV SERIES RETURNS

CHANNEL 6 has confirmed that the Miniver sisters will return to Artemisia's screen for another ten episodes of *The Minivers' Music Hour* in the New Year. The third series of the successful programme will show the Minivers performing in the studio, and give never-before-seen glimpses of the famously close sisters' private life. Filming has already begun and the first episode will be shown in early February.

Dress like the Minivers

New seasons' fashions inspired by Rosamund and Emily Miniver's exclusive wardrobe. Only at Eastman's.

EASTMAN'S DEPARTMENT STORE

WHERE THE MINIVERS COME TO SHOP

241 GEORGE STREET, ARTEMISIA

PAPA KING HAS STROKE

Papa King remains in a serious condition following a stroke late yesterday afternoon. A palace official has confirmed that Artemisia's ruler was unconscious when he was taken to the Royal Artemisia Hospital shortly before six o'clock.

Papa King had been entertaining his foster daughters, the famous Miniver sisters, but is believed to have been alone when the stroke occurred. A spokeswoman said that the Minivers were trying to comfort each other. 'They are shocked, because they are fond of Papa King. They hope he will be better soon.'

Doctors say it is too early to know whether Papa King will recover.



1
THE BIRTHDAY

It was eight o'clock, and the fans outside the hotel on Miniver Boulevard had been milling about behind the barriers for hours. It was a hot night and there were the first rumblings of a thunderstorm. The people at the front, who were squashed up against the crowd fences and actually had a chance of seeing the Minivers when they arrived, had been sprayed several times with water to keep them from fainting. The news helicopters, buzzing overhead, sent warm air gusting over the greasy pavements and swept their searchlights over the glass and chrome frontages of the surrounding buildings.

Walkie-talkies clicked and crackled. Security men in blue uniforms looked anxiously at the crowd barriers and stopped the fans who were silly enough to try and jump them. From time to time, limousines pulled up at the end of the long red carpet. Each time this happened, there was a flurry of excitement, but the people who got out were only guests, who passed quickly through the

waiting news crews and went into the hotel. In the foyer, encased in perspex and surrounded by admirers, was a shoe box. It was nothing special, just a little red and blue battered bit of cardboard, but it had a security guard all to itself, and from the look on his face and the gun in his belt, it was clear that he meant business.

Soon after eight o'clock, a roar went up at the far end of Miniver Boulevard. This time there was no mistake, for the car had a red flag with the sweeping initial *M* on the bonnet.

"It's them! It's them! It's the Minivers!" cried the crowd. As the great black limousine crawled, bit by bit, towards the hotel, the fans swelled forward until the barriers rocked and sent the security guards scurrying to hold them back. By the time the limousine pulled up at the red carpet, the screams were so deafening it was hard to believe they could get louder. But they did, as the driver got out of the car and produced a step; they got louder again as he put the step beside the rear passenger door, and when he opened the door and Rosamund Miniver climbed out of the car, they echoed off the surrounding buildings until it sounded as if their glass fronts must shatter and the whole lot fall down in a heap.

Rosamund Miniver was wearing a red silk halter-neck dress, covered with sequins that caught the flash of a thousand cameras. The rich colour made her pale skin

look paler, and her dark hair and eyes even darker than they were. A smile broke over her lovely face at the sound of the cheers, and she lifted a small white hand in acknowledgement.

Her sister Emily followed, dressed in shimmering green, with gold sandals on her feet and dozens of sparkling butterflies scattered through her hair. The fans roared, and the Minivers paused to wave again and blow kisses.

"Rosamund! Rosamund! Happy birthday, Rosamund! We love you, Rosamund! Emily! Emily, we love you, too!"

The two girls linked hands and walked towards the building. Unable to see them, the fans at the back started jostling for position. Children and grown-ups alike were pushed forward, fainting and screaming, until the fences bulged and threatened to give way.

"Rosamund! Emily!" they sobbed, as the Minivers disappeared into the building. "Come back!" A few people climbed on each other's shoulders to catch one final glimpse, but for most of them, it was hopeless. For Rosamund and Emily Miniver, though slim, dark-haired and beautiful, were not like any other girls alive.

The most famous people in Artemisia were only two feet tall.



"Stupid old thing," muttered Rosamund Miniver, as she and her sister were escorted by Ron, their Chief of Security, past the perspex case in the foyer. "I don't know why everyone gets so excited about it. It's just a shoe box, after all."

"It's *your* shoe box, Rose," said Emily. "Don't forget, most people only get to see it once a year. Of course they find it exciting."

Rosamund and Emily walked towards the ballroom. As its golden doors were flung open, there was a cascade of applause and a blinding battery of camera flashes. A floodlight swung down from the ceiling to highlight their diminutive figures and the band, which had been playing jazzed-up versions of famous Minivers songs, started playing "Happy Birthday" instead.

It was Rosamund Miniver's fourteenth birthday. Fourteen years ago she had been found on the steps of the Artemisia Hospital in the same battered shoe box that the fans were admiring in the foyer. The nurse who found the box had been in the very act of dropping it in the rubbish when a faint cry from inside caught her attention. When she removed the lid, she had discovered a tiny naked baby, so small she could have fitted into a child's plimsoll. That was why Rosamund, and later Emily, had been given the surname Miniver. It had been chosen for them by their foster father,

Artemisia's ruler, Papa King, because they were miniature versions of human beings.

Emily's arrival had been less spectacular. She had turned up four years later in a rush basket on the steps of Miniver House, the miniature mansion Papa King had built for Rosamund to live in with her housekeeper, Millamant. Emily and Rosamund had been together, ever since. When Emily was unhappy, it was Rosamund who made her laugh again; and it was Emily who stopped Rosamund from getting worked up and upset.

Hand in hand, the Miniver sisters made their way through the adoring guests to a central dais. Here, raised above the floor so that they would be on the same level as everyone else, were their miniature dining table and chairs, and, on a separate table, Rosamund's birthday cake. Millamant had made it in three pink tiers, with real sugared roses falling in waterfalls down its sides. The dais overflowed with presents, and in the midst of everything stood a very small woman, Millamant herself. She was wearing a blue dress and flat satin shoes, and her blonde plaits were pinned across the top of her head. She looked, as she usually did, like a tiny human bulldog.

"Milly! What a beautiful job!" Rosamund climbed the steps and kissed her. "Real roses, too! Look, Emmie, isn't she clever?"

Millamant went pink. Emily guessed that she, too, had

been pleased with the roses, though being Millamant, she would rather have died than admit the fact. Suddenly another voice spoke directly behind them. Emily jumped.

"Good evening, Rosamund, Emily."

A pale woman with drab brown hair had walked, completely uninvited, up the steps. It was Papa King's daughter Karen, known as Madame. She was standing extremely close and Emily edged protectively nearer to Rosamund's elbow. Something about Madame always made the Minivers feel nervous, though there was no real reason why it should.

"I didn't realize you were coming, Madame," said Rosamund. "Did we send you an invitation?"

Madame's plain face flushed unattractively. "Oh, yes," she said. "Papa King sends you his good wishes – and this present." She produced a small pink parcel from her handbag and handed it over with some reluctance.

Rosamund's guard immediately dropped. "From Papa King?"

Ever since Papa King had become ill and Madame had returned from her mysterious exile, Rosamund and Emily had scarcely seen their foster father. Rosamund, who had always adored him, had gone to the palace once and insisted on visiting him. She had come home very upset. Papa King, she had told Emily, was attached to a machine that did his breathing for him, and he had

not even recognized her. But if Papa King had remembered her birthday, perhaps he was getting better. Rosamund ripped the gift wrap off the parcel and eagerly opened the tiny box within.

It contained a key.

"That's a strange present," remarked Millamant.

Rosamund turned the key over. The back was perfectly flat, as if it had been cut in half right down the middle.

"Is this a joke?" she asked suspiciously. There was no answer. As unexpectedly as she had arrived Madame had departed, and her beige trouser-suit was already beating a retreat into the crowd.

"Charmed, I'm sure," said Millamant. "And to think I sent her an invitation."

"She's seen that key before, Rose," said Emily thoughtfully. "Did you see her face? When you took it out, she looked almost sick. She wasn't expecting it at all. I wonder what it's for?"

"If I need to know, Papa King will tell me," said Rosamund. "As for Madame, good riddance to her. She's not a real relative, anyway." She dropped the key into her diamanté evening bag and snapped it shut.

"Happy birthday, Rosamund!" A group of fans, wearing Minivers T-shirts and badges, emerged from the throng of guests. The Vice-President of the Minivers Fan Club, a young man called Titus, went down on his

knees before Rosamund with a bunch of roses. Rosamund smiled as she took the flowers from him and buried her face in their fragrant petals.

"Mmmm. My favourites. Thank you, Titus. You always know just what Emily and I like." She handed the roses to an attendant, who was already holding several huge bunches of flowers. One of the women pushed forward a girl who was about Emily's age.

"Introduce Fiona, Titus, she's new," she said.

"Of course," said Titus, though for a moment Emily thought he did not look pleased. "Rosamund, Emily, this is Fiona Bertram. Her mum, Brenda has just joined our committee."

"How do you do?" Rosamund smiled and reached up to shake Fiona's hand. Fiona blushed furiously. Emily knew exactly what she was thinking. *My goodness, she is so small! I mean, I knew she would be, but she barely comes past my knee. And look at her little hand – why, it's just like a doll's! If I shake it too hard, I'll break it!* Some people were actually rude enough to say things like this to the Minivers' faces, but Fiona had obviously been told how to behave, because she merely asked for an autograph. Rosamund was signing her name with a flourish, taking care to leave room for Emily, when everything went horrendously wrong.

"Of course," Fiona was saying (like a lot of fans, she was trying to sound cool, as if meeting a Miniver was

something she did every day), "it's not really your birthday today, is it? I mean, it can't be, if you were found in that shoe box the way everyone says you were. I expect nobody really knows when your real birthday is—"

Rosamund's hand stopped moving over the page. For a moment, her expression froze under her carefully applied make-up. Then her lower lip wobbled. A rush of tears welled up in her big dark eyes, the autograph book fell from her hand, and she fled across the ballroom without another word.

"Rosamund! Rosamund!" Emily dived into the nearest forest of giant adults. As she squeezed out the other side, she knew immediately that everyone had seen. People were turning this way and that, the shockwaves following Rosamund across the crowded ballroom. Rosamund was heading for a side exit, but at the last moment, she seemed to realize she was too small to reach the door handle. She veered, ran up on to the stage where the band was, and vanished through the silver curtains at the back.

Emily hurried after her. "For goodness' sake, start playing!" she hissed to the guitarist as she passed him, for the band had stopped dead and the party had ground to a halt. As she followed Rosamund through the curtains, Emily heard their latest hit start up again behind her, and the terrible sound of Rosamund's weeping ahead.

The backstage area was not large: just a dusty, dimly

lit space draped with black curtains. Emily picked her way carefully over snaking ropes of cable. Rosamund was sitting on a plastic crate, her tiny shoulders convulsed with sobs. She had wrenched the heel off one of her diamanté sandals, and tears were streaming uncontrollably down her face.

Emily knelt beside her. "Rosamund, Rosamund what's the matter?" She reached out her arms and Rosamund clung to her hysterically. Her hot tears flooded over Emily's bare shoulders, and they held each other close.

"Oh, Emmie, I'm so unhappy."

"But Rose, why? She didn't mean any harm. I mean, I don't know when my real birthday is either—"

"Emmie! *Don't!*"

There was the sound of footsteps. Emily glanced up and saw Millamant picking her way towards them. "Please, Rose," said Emily. "Please try and stop crying. You can't storm out of your own party. You have to let the guests know you're all right."

"I'm not all right!" Rosamund wailed. "This is the worst day of my life. Oh, Milly, my face! I must look like a *freak*." And indeed, there was so much eyeshadow and mascara streaming down Rosamund's cheeks that she looked as if she had two black eyes.

"I said you were wearing too much make-up," said Millamant sternly. Rosamund choked and laughed

through her sobs. Even Emily managed to smile.

"Why don't I tell everyone you're sick? That you'll be back in a few minutes."

Rosamund shook her head. "I can't go back," she said. "I just can't. Please, Emily. Don't make me. I just want to go home."

Emily looked at her sister's tear-stained face. She still did not understand what was happening, but she knew Rosamund must be really upset to have broken down in front of her fans. "All right," she said. "I'll make an announcement."

Emily walked back to the wings. In the darkness, she unexpectedly bumped into Ron.

"Tell the band to stop playing," Emily ordered him. "Then help Rosamund to the car. You'll need to have it sent to the back entrance so no one sees." She straightened her shoulders. The band was still playing, but at a gesture from Ron, they stopped. The lights in the ballroom dimmed. The guests, who had been milling around, gathered in clumps at the front of the stage.

Emily took a deep breath and walked out on to the stage. The ballroom seemed full of huge sweaty shapes, all staring at her, waiting for her to speak. Cameras flashed and news cameras zoomed in close, but Emily had been appearing on television all her life. She could not remember a time when she had not been in front of

one camera or another, and it did not bother her that they were there. The band's guitarist handed Emily a microphone. A spotlight swung down on her tiny figure and she began to speak.

"Tonight is a special time for a very special person. My sister Rosamund is fourteen years old. I'm sure you'd all like to join with me in wishing her a happy birthday." Emily paused, and there was a warm scattering of applause. "Unfortunately, Rosamund has been taken ill. She has had to leave the party and will soon be going home. I know she is disappointed, but it will cheer her up if you can join with me in singing her 'Happy Birthday'."

The band struck up. Emily sang the first phrase into her microphone and, after a ragged start, the crowd warmed up and sang along with her. As she reached the last line, Emily started walking slowly back across the stage. Suddenly, in the midst of the crowd, in front of Rosamund's forgotten birthday cake, her eyes caught sight of Madame. Of everyone in the room, she alone was not singing. She was gazing at Emily with an expression that was almost like hunger it was so intense.

A great fear, unlike anything she had ever felt before, took hold of Emily's heart. The song ended, the spotlight went out. Emily fled the stage while it was still in darkness. The wind of change was in the air, but as yet she had no way of telling in which direction it was blowing.



2
KIDNAPPED

Rosamund was very quiet on the way home. She sat on the back seat of the limousine, surrounded by unopened presents, one hand clasped limply in Emily's. Emily glimpsed a tear on her cheek and tried to speak to her. But Rosamund merely squeezed her fingers and turned her head to stare at the rain-soaked streets.

Lightning flashed, and there were low rumbles of thunder. In the front seats, the driver, Joe, talked about the cricket with Alastair, the duty security guard. Emily wanted to shout at them. Didn't they realize something terrible had happened? Even Millamant, on the opposite seat, had been silent since they left the party. Emily leaned over and whispered in her ear.

"Do you think Rosamund's ill?"

"Shhh." Millamant put a stumpy finger to her lips. Frustrated, Emily picked up a fragrant bunch of red roses, the same colour as Rosamund's dress, and buried her face among the blooms. As she did, a tiny card fell

into her lap. *To Rosamund*, it said, *With love from Titus and the Minivers Fan Club.*

The limousine pulled into the driveway of Miniver House. As it slowed in front of the big iron gates, reporters rushed towards them, waving cameras and microphones. Several flung themselves at the car and banged on the doors and windows, while one woman, more agile than the others, landed on the bonnet. She lay spreadeagled for a moment across the windscreen, her mouth opening and closing like a fish against the tinted glass. Emily winced. Joe accelerated through the opening gates and the woman jumped off into the darkness and was left behind.

"I hate it when they do that," said Rosamund, in a muffled voice. "I wish they'd leave me alone."

"She made an awful bump when she hit the bonnet," said Emily anxiously.

"Serve her right if she was run over," said Millamant. "But I don't think she will have been hurt, little Emmie. We were hardly moving. Don't worry, the guards will look after her."

The car pulled up at the terraced front of Miniver House. It was a long, turreted building with two Miniver-sized storeys, painted soft pink and white and nestled about with trees. As soon as the car came to a halt, Rosamund jumped out and ran into the house.

"Rosamund?" Emily hurried after her. The lights were out in the hallway, but upstairs she heard Rosamund's bedroom door slamming shut. Emily turned on the light and followed. She tapped once on Rosamund's door – there was no lock, for they had never wanted to keep each other out – turned the handle, and walked in.

Rosamund was lying on her white and gilt bed. Her face was even paler than normal under her raven hair, and though Millamant had wiped away the worst of the make-up smudges, Emily saw that she had been crying again. She was turning the key Papa King had given her over and over, as if she was standing in front of a door and could not make up her mind whether to open it. The expression on her face was almost more than Emily could bear. She sat down on the bed, twisted her fingers in her lap, then spoke.

"Rosamund, what's the matter?"

Rosamund stopped playing with the key. She looked at it for a moment, put it on the coverlet and propped herself up on her elbow. "Emily, haven't you ever wondered where we come from? I mean, who put me in the shoe box and you in the basket, and why?"

"Sometimes," said Emily slowly. "Well, of course I have. It'd be strange if I hadn't when we look so different to everyone else. But nobody's ever been able to find out the answer to those questions, and if they could, I think by

now they would have. Anyway, what does it matter where we come from? Isn't it more important who we are?"

"No." Rosamund sat up suddenly on the bed. "No, it isn't. Don't you understand, Emmie? You and I – we have no real beginning. That's why I got so upset tonight. That girl, Fiona, was right when she said I don't have a real birthday. Neither of us knows when we were born, or where, or even why. Ordinary people, even ones who were adopted, can find the answers to those questions. But you and me – we're not real people at all. We're Minivers. We just – *are*."

"But Minivers belong to everybody," said Emily. It was something Papa King had always told them, and she believed it with all her heart. "Minivers are for people to love."

"Are they, Emmie?" said Rosamund. "Are they really? Papa King taught us that, but since his stroke, I sometimes even wonder about that."

The fear that had been in Emily's heart when she had seen Madame at the party struck her now for a second time. "But the fans love us, Rose," she whispered. "They always have, especially you. Look at the presents and letters people send you every day. You got seventeen sacks of mail this morning just for your birthday. Isn't that enough?"

Rosamund shook her head. "You don't understand. Not now. But you'll know what I mean one day." She

shifted restlessly, and the key that Papa King had given her slipped off the bed and landed on the carpet. Emily picked it up.

"Don't lose this, Rose," she said. "It might be important."

"You take care of it for me. You know how careless I am." Rosamund leaned over and kissed Emily on the cheek. "I'm tired, I want to go to bed. Good night, Emmie. Love you."

"I love you too." Emily returned the kiss, and they hugged briefly. But, as she trailed out of Rosamund's bedroom into her own adjoining room, Emily still did not entirely understand.

"Minivers are for everybody." Emily repeated the slogan as she put Rosamund's key in her bedside drawer. Millamant was standing by her bed, turning back the covers and plumping up the pillows. "Minivers are for people to love. Everybody loves the Minivers. Everybody." There was a loud thump on the roof and Emily started. "What was that?"

"It sounded like a possum," said Millamant. She handed Emily her pyjamas. "Is Rosamund all right?"

Emily shook her head. "She says we have no beginning. That being a Miniver isn't enough any more. I don't understand what's wrong with her."

"Growing up," said Millamant wisely. "It was bound to happen, sooner or later. Don't worry, Emmie, she'll be

herself again soon enough. Come along to bed." She waited while Emily put on her pyjamas and cleaned her teeth, then tucked her in and left her with a brisk and businesslike kiss.

But Emily could not sleep. She felt stressed and confused, and the evening's events kept running around inside her head. Again and again, she saw Rosamund fleeing across the crowded ballroom, saw Madame's colourless grey eyes staring up at her on the stage. What did Madame mean by walking away like that? What door did Papa King's key open and why had he given it to Rosamund? With all her heart, Emily wished that Papa King was well again. Though he had always been more like a distant grandfather than a real father to her and Rosamund, he had always watched over them and protected them from harm. Emily's eyes filled with tears. The storm was still rumbling and the rain was thrumming on the roof. Once or twice she thought she heard the possums again, going clunk-clunk-clunk over the tiles. Then, at last, without realizing how or when, she fell into a fitful doze.



A shrill, piercing scream brought Emily wide awake in an instant. She sat up, panting and terrified. Her nightie

was twisted around her legs and the bedding lay in a heap on the floor. For a moment, she was not sure whether the scream had been real, or whether she had dreamed it. Then she saw something so strange, so almost impossible that for several seconds she sat round-eyed and staring, unable to believe it.

The window was open and the soft plush pink of her bedroom carpet was marked by wet footprints. Somebody had come in through the window, walked through her room in dirty trainers and passed through Rosamund's door, leaving behind bits of wet leaf and mud. And the footprints were normal-sized.

In an instant, Emily was out of bed. She shoved open Rosamund's door and snapped on the light. If Rosamund had been there, she would have screamed and thrown a pillow at Emily's head. But Rosamund was not there. Her Miniver-sized bed, with its gilt bedhead, was empty.

A glass of water had been knocked off the bedside table and the bedding pulled from the bed. As Emily ran to the window and leaned over the sill, a security alarm suddenly went off, shrill, mocking, too late. Dark shapes were running over the lawn of Miniver House. Through the drumming rain, Emily thought she heard a distant scream.

"*Rosamund!*" she yelled.

Now there really was no doubt. Emily turned and ran from the room, stopping only to grab a pair of slippers

from the jumble of dresses and miniature feather boas that spilled from her sister's dressing-room. She scurried downstairs, past pictures that showed her and Rosamund together on television, with their gold records, with Papa King. At the bottom of the stairs she bumped into Millamant.

"What's happening?" Millamant's blonde hair stuck out in two stiff plaits on either side of her head. She was in her nightie and had one stumpy arm in and the other out of her dressing gown. "Where's security?"

"I don't know. Milly, somebody's kidnapping Rose! We've got to help!"

"Emily! Emily stay here!" shouted Millamant, but Emily had already wrenched open the door and run out into the rain. Torches were moving through the darkened garden, flickering this way and that; she heard footsteps running on wet gravel and men shouting as the security guards tried to work out which way the intruders were going.

"*Ron! Alastair! What's happening?*" Emily bawled. Ignoring Millamant, who was still yelling at her from the house, she ran across the terrace and down the shallow steps. It was so hard to see anything in the rain and darkness that by the time she reached the bottom she was drenched through and confused about where to go next. Emily hurried over the driveway, her small feet

wobbling and stumbling on the gravel. There was thunder in the air and the dim glimmer of lightning. Mist floated across the paths between the flower beds. Emily heard the distant crackle of walkie-talkies, moving around to the front of the house. Then, at the side gate, she heard a car engine starting up in the street.

"*Rosamund!*" Emily darted between two huge pink canna lilies. They shook and rustled over her head as she forced her way through, and she lost a slipper in the sodden mulch as she vaulted from the garden bed on to the grass. Ahead of her, beyond the rose garden, was the murraya hedge that had been planted to keep out prying eyes, and a strong gate that was always secured by a chain. As Emily ran towards it there was a flash of lightning and she saw that the gate was swinging open.

"*Stop!*"

Thunder exploded overhead. In the street, two dark human shapes were wrestling a struggling bundle into the back of a van.

Emily thought she heard a muffled cry. "Rose, I'm coming!" she shouted.

The kidnappers jumped into the van. With a last desperate effort, Emily shot through the gate on to the footpath. As she reached the van, its doors slammed in her face. The driver revved the engine, and it sped off through the teeming streets and was gone.