



Emma Franklin is eleven, but several of her besties are twelve, and one of them, Sarah, is actually thirteen. Emma suspects that some of her own pretty remarkable maturity comes from being city-born and city-bred, right from Day One. Unlike Sarah, for instance, who used to live in the suburbs.

There's only one way in which Emma feels—privately—just a little bit less sophisticated than some of the kids her age: She's very afraid of a certain something.

It has to do with the fact that her family's apartment is in an older building. The style of architecture, at least according to Hugh, the doorman, is Beaux Arts (he pronounces it "Bozart"), which means absolutely nothing to her. When she was younger, she was convinced it had something to do with clowns or at least the name Bozo. Or maybe Mozart, the famous (dead) composer. Anyway, Bozart doesn't have anything to do with those things. The reason the style of building is important is because sometimes, on Beaux Arts buildings, you get statues up on the ledges—creepy, crouching creatures known as gargoyles.

As it turns out, there's one just about fifteen feet to the side of Emma's window. It's made of stone and it's very old. Some of its face has been worn away by the weather. Imagine a wolf crossed with a toad sitting on its hind legs, all lumpy and gross, and then give it the claws of a sloth and the snout of a weasel. Then make it work out at the gym until it's all muscle-y, and you have a good idea of what this gargoyle looks like: scary.

Really. Really. Scary.

Emma's sister, Janie, has a window, but hers looks out to the side, at the building across the street. Even though Emma's view is the entire reason she begged her parents to give her this room, she asked Janie if she wanted to trade a year ago.

"You'd have the most amazing view in the whole city," Emma promised.

"Janie wasn't buying it. 'You're trying to trick me,' she accused, with those annoying little eyes. 'You don't want to have the monster outside your window anymore.'"

*Very helpful*, Emma thought, then tried again.

"Sometimes being generous is its own reward. This

would be my gift to you, as my perfect younger sister: a magnificent view."

"No, thank you."

So Emma was stuck with the gargoyle.

There's an identical one on the opposite corner of the building, but you can't see it from Emma's window. You can't even see the one on Emma's side if you're just hanging out in her room or sitting on the bed. But if you walk right up to the window and look to the right, there it is.

Here's what happens at bedtime: Emma checks her homework folder to make sure there's no surprise drudgery from any evil teachers, then she locks Janie out of the bathroom until she can tell Janie's about to pee her pants and go tell their parents, and then she puts on her pajamas and combs her hair. The weirdest part is what she does next, and has done ever since they moved into this apartment: She looks out the window to make sure the gargoyle is still there.

It's not like she's four and still believes in Santa Claus and unicorns. She just likes knowing that it's still perched there, not moving, not turning around, not going

anywhere. Just staring out over the city like a watchdog. Which is what she read somewhere they're supposed to do.

If she's being totally honest, Emma would have to admit there have been quite a few times when she's had to get up in the middle of the night and check to make sure the gargoyle was still there. But this is definitely the kind of secret you have to keep to yourself; there's no one she could tell this to who wouldn't be tempted, at *some* point, to blab it to everyone for a laugh at her expense.

Tonight is like every other night. Janie is already in bed, not being allowed to stay up late the way Emma is. The house is quiet, with her mom and dad already snoring in front of some reality show.

There's no homework tonight. All Emma's friends have hypervigilant parents who restrict their phones in the evening, so even though Emma's parents don't do that, there's no one to talk to or text with.

Nothing to do but go to sleep.

And check the gargoyle.

She sits for a moment on the edge of the bed. The thing is, it really is a nice view. There are several blocks of buildings that are shorter than their apartment building, so she can see a good distance. Her favorite things to look at are the water towers. It seems so old-fashioned, so weird, that buildings would keep water up on the roof. It seems to Emma that water should come out of the ground, out of a pipe that's hooked up somewhere, or out of a river. She'll have to Google that someday. Figure out what that's about.

This is what it's like for Emma before it's time to go to sleep. She tries to fill her mind with mundane, useless things like rivers and Ping-Pong — whatever she can come up with to keep her mind off the you-know-what.

But it always leads to the gargoyle eventually. In her imagination it's either swimming up the river trying to find her, or it's holding a Ping-Pong paddle and staring her down with those glowing green eyes. She's trying to distract herself so she can forget about the gargoyle and just go to bed without looking.

It isn't working.

She sighs and gets up, crosses to the window. She places her fingertips on the cool glass and allows her forehead to touch it as well, looking along the ledge that runs below her window. And there it is: Crouched in his usual place, the muscle-bound wolf/toad/sloth/weasel looks out over the city.

"Good night, yucky thing," she mutters under her breath.

Emma crosses to the bed, pulls back the covers, climbs in, and gets everything just the way she likes it. She turns away from the window and looks at her room. It's a nice room, although dark this time of the night. She can see in the dim light that she needs to clean her room very soon. It's getting hard to walk between the bed and the window. The piles of clothes on the floor look like little creatures that wouldn't put up much of a fight if you-know-who got in.

She closes her eyes, pulls in a big breath to calm herself down, and lets the air out.

And that's when she hears it.

*Thump.*

"Janie?" Emma whispers. There's no reply. "I'm telling Mom and Dad you're out of bed," she whispers.

Again, no reply, unless you include the new sound she hears. A sound like a nail being dragged, slowly down a window.

*Screeeeeeeeetch.*

Emma peers over the covers at the door to her room. It's open about a foot and a half, enough to see that the hallway is pitch black. She turns and looks toward the window. She can't help herself: She slips out of bed and crosses the room.

She has to take one more look.

She has to be sure.

She places her hands against the glass and moves close so she can look along the ledge outside her window, to the right. What did she expect? He's right there.

Back in bed, she reaches for her MP3 player and starts untangling the cord for the earbuds.

Before she can get them in her ears, another noise.

It's a heavy noise.

A lumbering sort of big noise.

*Shlump.*

She puts down the player and stares at the door. "You are so grounded," she warns. "I'm telling Mom. She'll be mad."

No response.

She exhales and slouches down in the bed in a pout.

"Stupid statue," she says to herself.

Then: "Stupid me."

She throws back the covers and goes to the window once more, leaning close so she can see down the ledge to the right.

She thinks she's seeing things, having a hallucination or a dream.

Emma rubs her eyes, blinks them four or five times fast, and looks again.

And she gasps.

There's the city.

There's the corner of the ledge.

But there's no gargoyles.

She practically flies into her bed and under the covers.

*Thump. Screeeeetch.*

She peeks over the covers, looking at the black rectangle that is supposed to be the hallway, the exit, the path to the rest of her family. The path to still being alive when this terrible night comes to an end.

Right then it seems like it's a place she'll never go, a boundary she'll never cross, ever again. It's so far and it's so dark and . . .

*Shlump.*

She squints into the darkness, trying to see if she can make out a shape. There's a soft, raspy sound. *What is that, breathing?*

Then she notices: In the forbidding blackness, the gloom of the hallway outside her bedroom door, are two heavy-lidded eyes, staring right back at her.