

**Extract from *Anna* by Laura Guthrie (Cranachan Publishing, 2020): Bat in the Bedroom (pages 29-31)**

Mum didn't come home before I went to bed. It was incredibly stuffy upstairs. I opened a window, lay down and dozed off, but was woken by something fluttering back and forth across the light at high speed. At first I thought it was a large moth, but as it flew past my face I realised it was in fact a pipistrelle bat.

"Silly bat," I said. "You can't live here! There aren't any insects and there's no water. Besides, you'd miss your friends." I tried to wave it towards the window, but it was darting all over the place. Mum was on the phone in the kitchen. Perhaps Molly was telling her about our encounter. I tiptoed to the cleaning cupboard in the hall, where I found a plastic bucket near the back. Once in the bedroom I stood on the bed and tried to trap the bat. It kept getting away, and I found myself jumping around, clapping the bucket against the ceiling.

"What are you doing?" Mum's voice sounded from the doorway. Then she saw the bat, and flung her arms up around her face. "Get it out! GET IT OUT!"

"It's only a little bat!"

She had gone all pale, trembly and glassy-eyed. I made a quick decision to temporarily disregard rules about personal space, took her by the arm and marched her into the landing, before returning to the bedroom and shutting the door.

"Come on, little bat," I said in a soothing voice, though I was shaking all over. After about a minute it stopped its fluttering and clung to the curtain with its tiny thumbs. I was able to get the bucket over it, cover it with the curtain, and guide it out the window.

I found Mum leaning against the landing wall. She had a little more colour in her face, but was still shivering.

"Wash your hands."

"Why?"

"Just wash them!"

I ran to the bathroom and did as she said. When I got back she was sitting on the bed, taking deep breaths.

"Bats aren't scary," I said. "They're just little mice with wings. They can eat up to three thousand midges a night – except for fruit bats and vampire bats, but you don't find either of those here. They navigate using echolocation because they've got very poor eyesight. And they're wonderful mothers."

Every muscle in her body seemed to go tense at this last sentence, and she seemed to struggle for breath. For a second something in her eyes looked like how the cat had looked just before it had scratched me. Then she stood up and, hiding her face, ran from me for a second time.