



Chapter Three

Maia had been certain that the twins would be at the docks to meet them, but there was no sign of them or of their parents.

The passengers had all left the ship; their luggage had gone through customs; the bustle of the quayside had died away, and still no one came up to them.

'Do you think they've forgotten us?' said Maia, trying to sound off-hand. Suddenly she felt very forlorn and incredibly far away from everyone she knew.

'Don't be silly,' snapped Miss Minton, but her nose looked even sharper than usual as she turned her head from side to side, searching the quayside.

They had waited for over an hour when a man in a crumpled cream suit and a Panama hat came up to them.

'I am Rafael Lima, the agent of Mr Carter,' he said. He had a sad yellow face and a drooping moustache, and his hand, as he shook theirs, was moist and limp. 'Mr Carter has sent the boat for you. He could not come himself.'

They followed him and the porter to a floating dock on which were moored boats of every kind: dug-out canoes, fleet sailing boats with names like Firefly and Swallow, and trim launches with gaily striped awnings and gleaming paint.

But the Carters' boat was painted a serious dark green, like spinach; the awning was dark green too and there was no name painted on the side, only the word CARTER to show who owned it.

As they came up to the boat, an Indian who had been perched on one of the bales of rubber waiting to be loaded, got up and threw away his cigarette.

'This is Furo, the Carter's boatman. It is he who will take you there.' And with another limp handshake, Lima was gone.

Furo was not like the Indians they had passed, smiling and waving; not like the sailors on the boat with whom Maia had joked. He showed them into the cabin and shrugged when they said they wanted to sit out on the deck. Then he started the engine, lit another cigarette and stared, unsmiling, out at the dark river.

They travelled for an hour up the Negro, leaving all signs of the town behind them. Without realizing it, Maia had edged closer to Miss Minton. It was oddly different, this stretch of the river: straight and silent

with no sandbanks or islands and no animals to be seen, and the Indians working the rubber trees who looked up as the boat passed, and turned away...

Then Furo pointed to the right-hand bank and they saw a low, wooden house painted the same dark green as the boat, with a veranda running its length.

And down on the jetty, waiting to greet them, were four people: a woman holding a parasol, a man in a sunhat — and two girls!

‘The twins!’ cried Maia, her face alight. ‘Oh look, there they are!’

Her spirits rose with a bound. They were there and everything was going to be all right. Miss Minton gathered up their belongings, the boat came in quietly, and without waiting for Furo to help her, Maia jumped out onto the jetty.

Remembering her manners, she went first to Mrs Carter and curtsied. The twins’ mother was plump with a heavily powdered face, a double chin and carefully waved hair. She looked like the sort of person who would smell of violets or lavender, but to Maia’s surprise she smelled strongly of Lysol. It was a smell Maia knew well because it was what the maids had used at school to disinfect the lavatories.

‘I trust you had a good journey,’ she said, and looked taken aback when Maia said it had been lovely. Then she called, ‘Clifford!’ and her husband, who had been giving orders about the boat, turned round to do his duty. Mr Carter was a thin, gloomy-looking man with gold-rimmed spectacles. He was wearing long khaki shorts and mosquito boots and did not seem very interested in the arrival either of Maia or her governess.

And now, as Miss Minton, in her turn, shook hands with the Carters, Maia was free to turn to the twins.

She had imagined them well. They were fair, they were pretty and they were dressed in white.

They wore straw hats, each with a different coloured ribbon round the rim, one pink, one blue, and the sashes round their flounced dresses matched their hats. Their fair ringlets, a little limp in the heat, touched their collars, their round cheeks were flushed, their light blue eyes were framed by pale, almost colourless lashes.

‘I’m Beatrice,’ said the one with the pink ribbon and the pink sash. She gave Maia her hand. Even so short a distance from her house, she was wearing gloves.

Maia turned from one to the other. Though they were so alike, down to the slight droop of their shoulders, she thought she would always be able to tell them apart. Beatrice was just a little plumper and taller; her eyes had a little more colour, her scanty ringlets had more body than Gwendolyn’s and she had a tiny mole on her neck. It was as though Beatrice was the mould from which Gwendolyn had been taken and she guessed that Beatrice was the older, if only by a few minutes.

But now Gwendolyn held out her hand. She had taken off her glove and her hand stayed in Maia’s a little longer than Beatrice’s had done.

Then they turned to follow their parents into the house. But Maia lingered for a moment, looking down at the palm of her outstretched hand. Then she shook her head, ashamed of her thoughts, and ran off after the others.

An hour later, Maia and Miss Minton sat on upright chairs on the veranda, having afternoon tea with the family.

The veranda was a narrow, wooden structure which faced the river but was completely sealed off from it by wire netting and glass. No breath of wind came from outside, no scent of growing things. Two fly-papers

hung down on either side, on which dying insects buzzed frantically, trying to free their wings. On low tables were set bowls of methylated spirit in which a number of mosquitoes had drowned, or were still drowning. The wooden walls were painted the same dark clinical green as the house and the boat. It was like being in the corridor of a hospital; Maia would not have been surprised to see people lying about on stretchers waiting for their operations.

Mrs Carter sat at a wicker table, pouring tea and adding powdered milk. There was a plate of small, dry biscuits with little holes in them and nothing else.

‘We have them sent specially from England,’ said Mrs Carter, looking at the biscuits, and Maia could not help wondering why they had taken so much trouble. She had never tasted anything so dull. ‘You will never find Native Food served at my table,’ Mrs Carter went on. ‘There are people here who go to markets and buy the food the Indians eat, but I would never permit it. Nothing is clean, everything is full of germs.’

The word ‘germs’ made her mouth pinch up into a disapproving ‘O’.

‘Couldn’t it be washed?’ asked Maia, remembering the lovely fruit and vegetables she had seen in the market, but Mrs Carter said washing was not enough. ‘We disinfect everything in any case, but it doesn’t help. The Indians are filthy. And if one is to survive out here, the jungle must be kept at bay.’

The jungle certainly had been kept at bay. There were no plants on the windowsills — none of the lovely orchids and crimson flame flowers that had been on the balconies of the houses they had passed along the shore, and the garden was a square of raked gravel.

‘In England I always had cut flowers in the house,’ Mrs Carter went on. ‘Lady Parsons used to say that no one could arrange roses better than me, didn’t she, girls?’

The twins nodded in exactly the same way, once down, once up...

‘Yes, Mama,’ they said.

‘But not here.’ She sighed. ‘Lady Parsons is a relation,’ she explained. ‘A second cousin on my mother’s side.’

‘Do you have any pets?’ Maia shyly asked Gwendolyn, who was sitting next to her. There seemed to be no kittens, no dogs, no canary singing in a cage anywhere in the dark house. In the corner, propped up against a chair was a large flit gun full of fly spray.

Gwendolyn turned to Beatrice. Maia had noticed already that it was usually Beatrice who spoke first.

‘No, we certainly don’t have any pets,’ she said.

‘Pets bring in fleas and lice and jiggers,’ said Gwendolyn, smoothing down her spotless white dress.

‘And horrible worms,’ said Beatrice.

‘All right, girls, that will do,’ said Mrs Carter.

A maid came to bring more hot water; she had two gold teeth and the same sulky closed look as Furo the boatman, and when Maia smiled at her she did not smile back.

‘Did you bring us any presents?’ Beatrice asked, and Maia said, yes, and asked if she could get them from her case.

‘Oh, but those are made here; they’re market things,’ said the girls when she came back. ‘We want proper presents from England.’

Maia tried not to feel snubbed. Then she caught Miss Minton's eye and said, 'I wanted to bring some baby chicks,' — and the twins shuddered.

'Now, Miss Minton, if you will come with me, I will inform you of your duties,' said Mrs Carter. 'Beatrice and Gwendolyn will show Maia where she is to sleep.'

The Carters had built their bungalow on land which had belonged to the Indians. The main rooms faced the river: the dining room with a large oak table and button-backed chairs; the drawing room, furnished with overstuffed sofas, a marble clock and a large painting of Lady Parsons wearing a choker of pearls; and Mr Carter's study. All the windows were covered in layers of mosquito netting and the shutters were kept partly closed so that the rooms were not only hot but dark.

From the front of the house two extensions ran back towards the forest. Maia's room was at the end of one of these: a small bare room with a narrow bed, a chest of drawers, a wooden table. There were no pictures, no flowers. The smell of Lysol was overpowering.

'Mama made them scrub it out three times,' said Beatrice. 'It used to be a storeroom.'

There was only one window, very high. But there were two doors; one which led out into the corridor, and one which was bolted.

'Where does that door lead?' Maia asked.

'Out to the compound where the servants live. The Indians. You must keep it locked always. We never go out there.'

'So how do you go outside?' Maia asked. 'To the river, I mean, and the forest.'

The twins looked at each other.

'We don't go out because it's too hot and full of horrible animals. When we go anywhere we go in the boat to Manaus.'

'For our dancing lesson.'

'And our piano lesson.'

'And you mustn't go out either.'

Maia tried to take this in. It looked as though the Carters were pretending they were still in England.

'The maid'll help you to unpack,' said Beatrice. 'She's stupid but it's her job.'

'What's her name?' Maia asked.

'Tapi.'

'Is she the one who brought hot water for tea?'

'Yes.'

Remembering the heavy, sullen face of the woman, Maia said she could manage on her own.

'All right. Supper's at seven. There's a gong.'

As they opened the door, Maia heard Mrs Carter's voice raised loudly in the corridor. 'Just remember this, Miss Minton: I shall always know. Always.'

The twins looked at each other and giggled. 'She's warning her not to remove her corset,' they whispered. 'Some of the other governesses tried to do it, but Mama can always tell!'

‘Oh but surely in this heat—’ began Maia, and bit off her words. She could imagine how uncomfortable those stiff, wired undergarments would be in this climate.

Supper in the dining room, under the whirr of a creaking fan, was not a cheerful meal. They ate tinned beetroot and tinned corned beef, both shipped out from England, followed by a green jelly which had not set and had to be chased over the plate with a spoon.

When the Carters first came from England, their servants had cooked all the best dishes that were eaten in Brazil: freshly caught fish served in a saffron sauce, sweet peppers stuffed with raisins and rice, roasted sweetcorn and chunky soups. They had picked fresh fruit for the Carters: mangoes and guavas and pomegranates, and had gone out at night to search for turtle eggs.

But not for long.

‘Only British food will be served at my table,’ Mrs Carter had said.

So the servants had given up. They opened the tins that came from England; they poured boiling water onto whatever pudding powder Mrs Carter had put out for them, not caring if it was rock hard or running off the plate — and went back to their huts to make themselves decent food at night.

‘Shall I call Miss Minton?’ Maia had asked as they sat down. ‘Perhaps she didn’t hear the gong?’

‘Miss Minton will have supper in her room,’ said Mrs Carter. ‘Governesses join us at breakfast and lunch, but never at dinner.’

‘Miss Porterhouse never had dinner with us,’ said Beatrice.

‘Nor did Miss Chisholm.’

Maia was silent. She had had a governess before she went to the Academy. She’d been part of the family, sharing all meals except formal dinner parties, when she and Maia ate together in the schoolroom, and to her dismay Maia felt a lump come to her throat as she remembered the warmth and laughter of her old home.

After supper the girls worked on their embroidery and Mr Carter went to his study. He had said almost nothing during the meal, only complaining once because the servants had moved some papers on his desk. ‘You can’t trust anyone out here,’ he grumbled, and told Maia to beware because all the Indians were out to cheat you.

‘I expect you must be tired after your journey,’ said Mrs Carter, and Maia said, yes she was, and went back to her room.

Presently there was a knock at the door, and Miss Minton came in. She looked at Maia’s room in silence. ‘I’m next door,’ she said, ‘so you can always knock on the wall. Do you need any help with your hair?’

Maia shook her head but Miss Minton took the silver-backed hairbrush and started to brush the long thick hair. She said nothing for a while, letting Maia gather herself together.

‘It’s not quite like I thought it would be, is it?’ said Maia ruefully. ‘I don’t think the twins like me.’

‘They will do when they get to know you. Remember, twins are used to living in their own world.’ She put down the brush and began to re-plait Maia’s hair. ‘Give them time.’

‘Yes. It’s just... I don’t really understand why the Carters offered to have me.’

Miss Minton opened her mouth and closed it again. She knew exactly why they had offered to have Maia. Her interview with Mrs Carter had made that absolutely clear, but she would not tell Maia. The child had been hurt enough by her parents' death.

'You'll see, it will all look different in the morning. Have courage. Courage is the most important thing.'

'Yes.' Left alone, Maia climbed into bed. There was no fan, it was incredibly hot and stuffy. But she would have courage. She stretched out her hand and looked at the tiny bruise in the skin. It was silly to think that Gwendolyn had dug her fingernail into her palm. Why should she want to hurt someone she had never met? She must have had something caught under her nail and not realized it; a tiny piece of wire or a thorn.

But not a thorn from a rose, in this house without flowers.

Maia turned out the lamp, but still she could not sleep. After a while she got up and pulled a chair up to the window.

Out there in the forest were the huts of the Indians who worked for the Carters — not cool, native huts with thatched roofs, but wooden shacks built to house servants. She lifted a corner of the mosquito net and saw fireflies — a hundred points of dancing light — and heard the croaking of frogs. How alive it was out there, and how dead inside the house!

As she watched she saw a girl in a bright frock, carrying a baby on her hip, go into the middle hut. As she opened the door there was the jabber of a tame parrot, the brief yapping of a little dog. Then came the sound of singing — a slow crooning song. A lullaby for the baby perhaps.

Then silence again... But just before she left the window, she heard somebody whistling. The sound came from behind the end hut, set a little way back in the forest, where the rubber-gatherers slept — but the strange thing was that she knew the tune. It was a North Country air — Blow The Wind Southerly. Her mother had sung it often.

She listened till it died away and went back to bed. Hearing the familiar tune so far away from home had comforted her, and almost at once she slept.

Mr and Mrs Carter had come to the Amazon from Littleford-on-Sea, a small town in the south of England.

Mr Carter had worked in a bank, but he had lost his job and decided to take his family to the Amazon to make his fortune. Many Europeans went out at that time, some to plant coffee or cocoa, some to try and find gold — but most to harvest rubber, the 'black gold' of the Amazon. It sounded an easy way to get rich. Rubber trees grew all over the Amazon basin; all one had to do was hire some Indians to collect the sap from the trees, take it to the sheds to be smoked, and send the balls of crude rubber down the river to be exported.

And certainly a lot of people had made their fortunes. There were people in Manaus who lived like princes. But not the Carters. Because to get the juice from the rubber trees you need Indians who know the forest and understand the trees. And Indians are proud people who have their own lives. If you treat them like slaves they don't revolt or go on strike; they simply melt back into the forest, join their tribes and disappear.

This is what had happened to the Indians which the Carters had employed. Every month Mr Carter lost some of his work force, and far from making his fortune, he was getting poorer and poorer.

So when Mr Murray had written to ask if they would have Maia to live with them, the Carters had been overjoyed. They did not want Maia, they were far too selfish to want anybody, but they needed her.

Or rather they needed the money she brought with her. Mr Murray had never told Maia how much money her father had left her; she knew she did not have to worry about having enough and she seldom thought about it. But the fact was that she was rich now, and would be richer when she was twenty-one. The Carters had explained that life was very expensive on the Amazon; everything had to be shipped from England — every digestive biscuit, every jar of marmalade. So they had asked a very large sum of money for having Maia to live with them.

‘We’d love to have her for nothing,’ Mrs Carter had written, ‘but times are hard.’

Mr Murray had agreed but he was a careful man, as lawyers are. He had sent the first month’s keep with Miss Minton for he knew she could be trusted. Later, Maia’s allowance, and the salary he was paying Miss Minton to look after her, would go straight into a bank in Manaus.

And Miss Minton had only taken a few minutes to realize why the Carters wanted Maia. Mrs Carter had not been able to hide her relief and her greed as Miss Minton counted out the notes the lawyer had trusted her with. As for Beatrice and Gwendolyn, they had been told nothing — only that a distant cousin was coming to stay with them and must be welcomed. But the twins had never welcomed anybody in their lives.

Maia woke next morning not to the sound of bird-song, but to a noise she could not place at first. A sort of swishing, squelching noise followed by thumps and bumps and cries of ‘Out!’

She put her head round the door. In the corridor, wearing a dressing gown and a turban to protect her hair, was Mrs Carter. She had the flit gun in her hand and was carefully squirting every nook and cranny with insect-killer. Then she disappeared into the cloakroom, fetched a broom, and began to thump and bang on the ceiling to get rid of possible spiders. Next came a bucket full of disinfectant and a mop with which she squelched across the tiled floor — and all the time she muttered, ‘Out!’ or ‘That will settle you!’ to the insects that she thought might be there. Mrs Carter did nothing else in the house, but this early morning hunt was one she did not trust to the servants.

Then after breakfast Maia started lessons with the twins.

They did them in the dining room, sitting at the big oak table. The room was already hot at eight in the morning. They could not use the fan because it blew the pages of the books about and to the smell of insect-killer were added the other morning scents of the house: carbolic soap, Lysol and Jeyes fluid.

Mrs Carter had given clear orders to Miss Minton.

‘The girls work from a set of books by Dr Bullman. As you see, the books cover all the subjects they will need.’

She pointed to Dr Bullman’s English Grammar, Dr Bullman’s English Composition, Dr Bullman’s French Primer, Dr Bullman’s History of England and Dr Bullman’s Geography. All the books had the same brown covers and on each one was a picture of Dr Bullman himself. He had a pointed beard, staring eyes and a bulging forehead, and as Maia looked at him she felt a slight lurching of the stomach.

‘I want you to stick absolutely to the exercises in the books,’ Mrs Carter went on. ‘No making things up. No straying. I have always made this the rule — then when a governess leaves, the next one knows exactly where to take over.’

‘Yes, Mrs Carter.’

‘Every three months a progress report is sent out to Dr Bullman in England. You will of course show me yours before you send it.’ She gave a couple of squirts with the flit gun in the direction of the window where a small fly had appeared. ‘You will find the books very clear and easy to use,’ she said, and left.

The twins were dressed in white again. Today Beatrice had a green ribbon in her hair and Gwendolyn's was yellow. Seeing them so fresh and pretty made Maia ashamed of her thoughts the night before, and she smiled at them. They would be friends in the end, she was sure of it.

Miss Minton looked at the timetable. English Grammar was first. She opened Dr Bullman at the page with a marker.

'That's where we were when Miss Porterhouse left,' said Beatrice with a sly look at her governess.

'She left suddenly,' said Gwendolyn.

'Mama sent her away.'

Miss Minton gave her a steely glance. 'Beatrice, read out the paragraph on The Use of the Comma, please.'

"'The Comma is used... to divide... a sentence into... phrases,'" read Beatrice. She read slowly and with difficulty, and Maia looked up surprised, for Beatrice was older than her, and they had done The Use of the Comma two years earlier at the Academy.

'Now, Gwendolyn. Look at the first exercise. Where does the comma go in that sentence?'

Gwendolyn's round blue eyes looked puzzled. 'After... after station...'

'No. Have another look.'

The morning dragged on. Dr Bullman's exercises were the most boring Maia had ever seen and the girls worked so slowly that she had to look away so as to hide her expression. But when Miss Minton asked Maia to read a paragraph, she stopped her almost at once. 'All right, Maia, that will do,' she said crossly, and Maia looked up, puzzled. It was a ridiculously easy passage, surely she had not read it wrong? But Miss Minton did not ask her to read again.

After English Grammar came English Composition. Dr Bullman did not believe that children should write stories using their imaginations. He gave set subjects, examples of how to begin, how to end, and the number of words they were to use. Then came French — and Maia had to sit in silence while the twins stumbled over phrases she had learnt in her first year.

But the boredom was not as bad as knowing she had upset Miss Minton. The governess gave her no chance to read or take part — she did not even look at her. Maia had begun to think of Miss Minton as her friend, but clearly she was wrong.

At eleven Mrs Carter came back with the flit gun, followed by the sullen maid with a jug of tinned orange juice and four of the dry biscuits they had had the day before.

'Would you like to take your elevenses in the garden?' suggested Miss Minton.

The twins looked at her in amazement.

'We never go out into the garden,' said Beatrice, looking at the raked square of gravel which an Indian was spraying with something.

'You get stung,' offered Gwendolyn.

So they stayed in the hot room with the loudly ticking clock. After break came arithmetic. The twins were better at that, and as it was Maia's weakest subject she was able to work out the sums without too much boredom. But history, which for Dr Bullman was the History of England and nowhere else, was deadly: the repeal of the Corn Laws and a list of pointless dates. There was not one lesson which touched the lives of

the twins in Brazil; Geography was about coach-building in Birmingham, and RI was about a girl who would not read her bible and was struck down by a terrible disease.

After lunch the twins did needlework in the drawing room, watched by their mother, who kept the flit gun by her chair as other women might keep a pet dog — a Dachshund or a Pekinese. Beatrice was embroidering a table mat with primroses, Gwendolyn's was covered in violets. Maia was given a square of linen and a skein of embroidery thread.

'What are you going to put on yours?' asked Beatrice.

'I thought I'd like to do those big red lilies that grow everywhere here. Canna lilies I think they're called.'

Beatrice made a face. 'Oh, you don't want to do them. They're native flowers and they're nasty.'

'Mother says they're a Breeding Ground.'

Maia looked up, surprised. 'What are they a Breeding Ground for?'

'Horrid things. Things that bite you and make you ill. They crawl out of the inside.'

Another hour of lessons followed. Then Miss Minton suggested they might like to read some poetry, and Maia's face lit up.

'Must we?' asked Beatrice. 'Can't we just go on with the exercises?'

'Very well,' said Miss Minton, ignoring Maia's disappointed face.

The afternoon ended with the twins' piano practice. They did exactly half an hour each, with the metronome set. Scales, arpeggios, The Dance of the Butterflies, The Merry Peasant... And after half an hour exactly they stopped, even if they were in the middle of a bar.

'And you, Maia?' asked Mrs Carter. 'Did you have piano lessons in England?'

'Yes, I did,' said Maia, looking longingly at the piano.

'Well tomorrow you shall have your turn to practise. I have rather a headache coming on now.'

As she sat at supper, to which Miss Minton was not allowed to come, it occurred to Maia that the twins had not once been out of doors; not for five minutes to look at the river or take a stroll.

How am I going to stand it? thought Maia, shut up like a prisoner.

Back in her room she turned out the lamp and pushed the chair under the window as she had done the night before. She was beginning to make out the people who lived there. In the middle hut lived Furo the boatman, and Tapi, the sullen maid to whom he was married — but it was from there that the singing had come so there had to be other people living there: so sulky a woman could not have sung such a song.

The girl with the baby lived in the hut on the left: she was the wife of the gardener who sprayed Mrs Carter's gravel and was half Portuguese, which was why her baby sometimes wore nappies instead of running naked as the Indian babies did. The little dog belonged to her. There was a chicken run behind the huts — an old woman with long grey hair came out sometimes to feed them — and she had heard the grunting of a pig, but all the animal noises were quickly hushed — for fear of the Carters she guessed.

The next three days were exactly the same. The sound of squirting and stamping at dawn, Doctor Bullman's boring lessons, unspeakable meals — tinned fish in a bluish sauce, endless beetroot, and a cornflour 'shape' that seemed to quiver with fear as Tapi brought it to the table. The twins, who always looked so clean and fresh in the morning, were flushed and grumpy by the end of the day. Mr Carter

scarcely spoke and disappeared into his study, and whenever it was Maia's turn at the piano, Mrs Carter had a headache.

But Maia could have coped with it all. What really upset her was Miss Minton. Her governess went on ignoring her in lessons, and never let her read or answer questions, while Beatrice and Gwendolyn became more and more smug as they saw Maia being shown up as a fool. I must have made her angry, thought Maia, but try as she would she could not think what she had done.

Then on the fourth night there was a knock at the door and Miss Minton entered.

'Right,' she said. 'Come down off that chair. I think we are ready for the next step.'

'What do you mean?'

'I am going to see Mrs Carter tomorrow. I shall tell her that you are not able to keep up with the twins in lessons.'

'But—'

Miss Minton held up her hand. 'Don't interrupt, please. I shall tell her that I will set you to work separately because you are holding the twins back. That means I am trusting you to work on your own. I shall of course help you whenever I can but you must keep up the deception.' She gave one of her tight smiles. 'I don't see why we shouldn't have an interesting time. I have a book about the history of Brazil, and one by Bates, the explorer who first described this part of the Amazon. And another by Humboldt — a very great scientist. The twins may live as though they are still in Littleford-on-Sea, but there is no need for us to do so.'

Maia jumped from the chair. 'Oh, Minty,' she said, and threw her arms around her governess. 'Thank you. I'm sorry... I thought—'

'Well don't,' said Miss Minton briskly. And then: 'Come along, it's time we opened my trunk.'

Miss Minton had been poor all her life. She had no trinkets, no personal possessions; her employers underpaid her when they paid her at all — but her trunk was an Aladdin's cave. There were travel books and fairy tales, novels and dictionaries and collections of poetry...

'How did you get them all?' Maia asked wonderingly. 'How did you manage?'

Miss Minton shrugged.

'If you want something enough you usually get it. But you have to take what goes with it,' — and she pointed to her shabby blouse and mended skirt. 'Now, let's see — what shall we start with? Ah yes, here is Bates — he must have sailed down this very river not sixty years ago. Look at that drawing of a sloth...'