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The Manaus Museum of Natural History was very quiet this weekday morning. The boy who swept the floors was outside, weeding the flower beds, the porter dozed in his cubicle, and there were no visitors.

But in his lab behind the office, Professor Glastonberry was worrying about the giant sloth.

He often worried about the sloth. For the past year he had been putting the skeleton of the great beast together and it was going to make a most impressive exhibit.

At least it should have done.

For the truth was the skeleton was not complete. It was nearly complete but not quite. One rib was missing. The third rib on the left hand side.

Professor Glastonberry had made a false rib out of plaster of Paris and now he fitted it carefully into the breastbone, and it looked fine.

At least it did if you didn't know...

The trouble was that the professor did know.

He stood looking at his handiwork. The sloth on its metal stand seemed to fill the whole room.

He took the rib out. He put it in again. He sighed. A false rib was cheating.

But a missing rib was untidy.

At that moment he heard the creaking of the revolving doors and peering out, realized that two people had come into the museum whom he recognized. The tall, thin woman who had been interested in Bernard Taverner's collection and the schoolgirl who had been with her: a girl with a lot of dark hair and intelligent eyes.

He came out of his office and said, 'Good morning.'

The tall woman smiled and at once looked less alarming. 'This is Maia,' she said. 'She has come to make some drawings of bird's wings. May I leave her here to work on her own? I'll fetch her at three o'clock. I don't think she'll be any trouble.'

'I'm sure she won't,' said the professor. He was still holding the false rib and looked distracted.

'What a large rib,' said Miss Minton.

'Yes.' He took a deep breath and poured out the problem of the missing bone. 'No one would know it was not the real one,' he said.

Miss Minton looked severe. 'You would know,' she said.

The professor sighed. 'That's what Taverner used to say.'

'May we see it? The sloth?' asked Maia.

'Certainly.'

He led them through his office and into the lab.

'It's not upside down,' said Maia. 'I thought sloths always hung from trees?'

'Not the giant sloths. They'd have splintered any tree they tried to hang from. This one would have weighed about three tonnes when it was alive, but they've been extinct for thousands of years.'

Once again the professor put the rib in and once again he took it out.

'What do you think?'

'I think you should go and find the missing bone,' said Miss Minton.

The professor stared at her. Was she serious? Surely not...

'I'm afraid that's impossible,' he said. 'The original skeleton came from a cave near the Xanti river, miles away to the north. And I'm too old for expeditions.'

'Nonsense,' said Miss Minton. 'Anyone who can walk can go on expeditions.'

Then she took her leave and Maia said 'Good morning' to the stuffed Pekinese before she settled down at a table near the 'Birds in Flight' exhibit, and began to draw. It was good to be in the museum again, and away from the Carters. Not just the Pekinese, but the Amazonian river slug, the lumpy manatee, the shrunken head, all seemed like old friends — and of course the Taverner Collection which she now saw with new eyes. And as she drew, Maia tried to puzzle out the problem of her governess.

Maia had told Miss Minton that Clovis was safe with the Indian boy. Miss Minton had nodded, but she asked no more questions. It was strange how little she asked Maia about her comings and goings, when she pounced on every strand of unbrushed hair or a fingernail not scrubbed to cleanliness. Then when Maia said she needed to go and work in the museum to finish her project on 'Birds of the Rainforest', Minty had done no more than raise an eyebrow and had gone about arranging it. She had even persuaded Mrs Carter to let them go down on the rubber boat so as to give them more time in Manaus.

And why did Finn want to know Miss Minton's Christian name?

But she wasn't in the museum to think about Minty, or even to draw birds. She was here to do a job for Finn, and when she was sure the museum was empty she walked over to the door marked 'Private' and knocked.

Professor Glastonberry came out at once. He really was a very nice man with his round, pink face and white fringe of hair.

'I'm sorry to disturb you again,' said Maia, 'but I have a message for you.' And she handed him the note that Finn had written in the hut.

The professor read it and looked at her intently. So she had found Finn and made friends with him. Not only that, but she wanted to help him.

'Yes,' he said. 'I see. You are a messenger and to be trusted. Come in.'

He led her into his office and locked the door. Maia had never seen such a room. There wasn't a centimetre that wasn't covered in something: limb casts, snake skins, jumbled bones... and books everywhere, even on the floor. But it was a friendly clutter, not like the mess in Mr Carter's room.

'Sit down,' he said, and moved a stuffed marmoset from a rickety chair. Then he read the note again. 'I don't see why not. If it's just for one night. No, I really don't see why not.'

'He said you knew a good hiding place. He said you showed it to him.'

Professor Glastonberry smiled. He must have been close on sixty, but he looked like a pleased pink baby.

'Ah, he remembered, did he? Well, come along. If Finn says you're to be trusted, I'm sure he's right.'

He took her into the lab and, for the second time, Maia was led to the giant sloth. But this time the Professor put his shoulder to the heavy metal stand which moved slowly to one side. On the wooden floor, grimed with dirt, Maia could just make out a square of darker-coloured wood and an iron ring.

'It's a trapdoor,' he said. 'Goes down to a cellar and storeroom — but it's well ventilated. Got one high window. Best hiding place in Manaus, we used to say. Finn liked to play down there when he was little, while his father helped me.'

Maia stood looking at the flight of steps which led into the darkness.

'Would you like to go down?' the professor asked.

'May I?'

'Of course. But you'd better have a light; there's no electricity down there.'

He brought her a hurricane lamp and she climbed down. The cellar was huge and vaulted, with a recess at the back full of packing cases. Between the cases were exhibits which the professor had not had room for, or those waiting to be repaired. A beam of light fell on the red eyes of a moth-eaten puma. There were unstrung bows and painted shields, and a harpy eagle sitting on a lopsided nest. In a corner was a heap of round objects which might have been carved coconuts, but might have been shrunken heads. But the floor was dry, and in the far end of the room, the high window gave a glimmer of light.

'It's marvellous,' said Maia, coming up again. 'No one could find you unless they knew.'

The professor moved the stand back over the trapdoor. 'I sometimes store Billy down there when the trustees come on an inspection. They don't approve of stuffed Pekinese in a serious museum.'

'There's just one more thing,' said Maia, as the professor led her out of the lab. 'Finn thought that we should — that I should — steal the spare keys, so that no one gets into trouble. Your staff or you if anything goes wrong.'

'I doubt if anyone could do much to me,' said Professor Glastonberry, 'but it's true I wouldn't want my cleaners or my caretaker blamed.'

'The trouble is,' said Maia, looking up at him, 'I haven't actually stolen anything before.'

'There is always a first time,' said the professor cheerfully. 'The spare keys are hanging on that hook over there. And I'm going out in half an hour to have my lunch.'

'There she is,' said Mr Trapwood, looking out of the window of the Pension Maria at the slender blue funnel of HMS Bishop, the sister ship of the Cardinal, which had just come into port. She would spend four days on the turnabout while the crew cleaned the ship, took on supplies and had some time ashore. Then

on Saturday morning she would set off again, to the mouth of the Amazon, across the Atlantic and back to Britain.

The crows had been so sure of finding Taverner's son that they had booked a three-berth cabin for the return journey.

But they were beginning to give up hope. For it was clear that the wretched boy was deliberately hiding from them. At first people had tried to deny that Taverner had a son at all. Now, though, they were beginning to laugh behind their sleeves, and as the day for the detectives' departure grew closer there were sly digs about the boy having outwitted them.

But why? The crows were hurt. They had come as bearers of good tidings to bring a savage jungle boy the news of his inheritance. They had been prepared to introduce him gradually to polite society — perhaps on the journey to teach him to use a knife and fork. Sir Aubrey had even given them some money to buy him clothes, in case he'd been brought up in a grass skirt.

And they had expected gratitude. It was only natural.

'Thank you, Mr Low,' the boy would have said, grasping them by the hand. And: 'Thank you, Mr Trapwood. You have saved me from a life of toil and darkness.'

Instead of that the boy was deliberately hiding and everyone in Manaus seemed to be helping him.

'We've got three more days,' said Mr Trapwood. 'There's still a chance to flush him out.'

'To carry him aboard by force if necessary.'

'To get the bonus from Sir Aubrey!'

That was the most important thing of all. Sir Aubrey had promised them a hundred pounds each if they brought his grandson safely home.

'I still think there was something fishy about that pigtailed girl at the Carters' place.'

Mr Low agreed. 'She had a shifty look. We'll have to keep an eye on her.'

The crows were looking very much the worse for wear. Their black suits were dusty and torn; the maid at the Pension Maria had burnt every one of their shirts as she ironed them. Mr Trapwood's face was covered in lumps where the bites of the tabernid fly had gone septic, and both their stomachs had become boiling caverns of agony and wind.

'But we can still do it,' said Mr Trapwood, punching the table. 'We'll try downriver this time. Those houses by the fishing place. The people there look poor enough; they should take some notice of the reward.'

Mr Low nodded and made his way stealthily towards the door.

'If you're thinking of getting to the lavatory before me, don't try,' said Mr Trapwood. 'I'm going first.'

'No you aren't. I need it!'

'You need it...!'

Shoving and jostling, the two detectives raced each other down the corridor.

Professor Glastonberry, making his way up the hill to the café where he usually had his lunch, stopped, as he always did, by the bookshop in the Square. It was run by a man who bought in books from all over Brazil, specializing in books about Natural History.

In the window was a copy of *Travels in the Amazon*, by Alfred Russel Wallace, open at a beautiful woodcut of an Indian village.

He was admiring it, when he realized that the tall, straight-backed woman who was also staring in to the window was the lady who had left Maia in the museum.

‘A beautiful book,’ he said, raising his hat.

She sighed. ‘Yes. Quite above my means, I fear.’

‘It is not a first edition,’ he said. ‘You might get it quite reasonably. I know the owner — perhaps he would put it aside for a while.’

‘Thank you, but he would have to put it aside for most of my life. My salary is not... princely... even when it is paid.’

Both of them looked for a while longer at the book. Then Miss Minton gave her tight-lipped smile.

‘I was dismissed once for reading,’ she said.

‘Really?’ The professor waited but she said no more. ‘I left Maia working hard,’ he went on. ‘The caretaker promised to keep an eye on her.’

Did she know what Maia was really doing in the museum? he wondered. Probably not, yet she didn’t look like a person easy to hoodwink. As she bent down to pick up the basket with Mrs Carter’s shopping, he said, ‘Allow me.’

She shook her head. ‘Thank you, but it’s not heavy.’

They began to walk towards the main street with its cafés and shops.

‘I have been thinking about what you said — about the missing bone. Of *Megatherium*. The sloth, I mean.’

‘You have decided to go and look for it?’

‘No, no. But Taverner was also against putting in a false rib. He was a good naturalist and a good man. I miss him.’

‘Yes. I can imagine that. Was it he who found the skeleton?’

‘No. It was found many years ago. It went to a museum in Rio — too important for my little place — but no one had time to assemble it, so they sent it down to me. But Taverner knew the place it came from. Not only that—’ He broke off. ‘His wife came from up there,’ he went on. ‘It’s practically unexplored country.’

‘Did you know his wife?’

‘Yes. She was beautiful and gentle. She died in childbirth because the English doctor wouldn’t come out to an Indian girl at night. As you can imagine, it didn’t make Taverner any more anxious to return to England.’

They walked on for a while without speaking. Then the professor, blushing a little for he was very shy, asked Miss Minton if she would care to join him for lunch. ‘It’s only a little local café but the food is good.’

But as he had expected, she refused. ‘Thank you, I have some sandwiches.’

But at the door of the café, Miss Minton was overcome suddenly by the glorious smell of real, strong Brazilian coffee.

'Perhaps a cup of coffee,' she said.

It was a nice café; friendly and cheap and it cost Miss Minton some effort not to allow the professor to buy her a dish of chicken and rice. 'I lunch here most days,' he said. 'Since my wife died.'

'Was that a long time ago?'

'Yes. Ten years now. I blame myself, the climate didn't suit her. I should have taken her back to England.'

Miss Minton frowned. She did not approve of people blaming themselves for what was done.

'Are the caves difficult to reach? The ones where your sloth came from?' she asked.

'Yes. Difficult but not impossible.'

'Did Taverner think there were more remains there? More bones?'

'He thought there might be. But that's neither here nor there. I shall be fifty-eight next year: an old man.'

'That is the kind of remark I don't enjoy,' said Miss Minton cuttingly, and picked up her coffee cup.

When she came back from the museum, Maia found the twins in an even worse mood than usual.

'What are those supposed to be?' sneered Beatrice, turning over Maia's drawings. 'I can't make head or tail of them.'

'I know...' Maia sighed. 'But birds are really difficult to draw.'

'Well, why do you have to go and show off in the museum then? I suppose you want everyone to say how clever you are.'

'And you've got a mosquito bite on your forehead,' said Gwendolyn. 'It looks like the kind that goes septic.'

'You've probably caught lice too on that Indian boat. You'd better not come near.'

Maia said nothing and went to her room. She had stopped wondering what she had done to annoy them. But to tell the truth, the poor twins had just learnt something which upset them very much, and they had learnt it from their mother.

'We don't like Maia, Mummy,' the twins had said. 'She's a prig.'

'The way she goes on practising the piano when she doesn't have to.'

'And she flirts with the boys at the dancing class and shows off the whole time.'

'And she's conceited about her hair. The way she brushes it and brushes it.'

'And she sneaks off to talk to the servants.'

Mrs Carter sighed. 'I know you don't like her,' she said.

'We hate her,' said Beatrice.

'When is she going away again?' wailed Gwendolyn.

'Oh, don't!' cried Mrs Carter, caught off her guard. 'Don't ever mention her going away. If Maia goes we are undone!'

The twins stared at her. Their small, round mouths hung open.

Mrs Carter tried to pull herself together. 'No, no; it's not as bad as that. But your father... there have been difficulties with the price of rubber... and so on... Maia's allowance from her guardian is absolutely necessary to pay the bills.'

'You mean she's staying for ever and ever?' said Beatrice. 'Just because she's rich and we're poor?'

'It isn't fair!'

'Now, please, girls. I'm sure your father will find a way round, and when he does we can send her away. But just for now please try to be nicer to Maia.'

The twins shot her a furious look from under their pale eyelashes.

'We'll have to think of something,' said Beatrice when they were alone again.

'We certainly will,' said Gwendolyn.

'But if we get rid of her we won't be able to have any new clothes.'

'Unless we can get hold of the reward for the Taverner boy.'

'If we get that we won't need to see Maia ever again,' said Beatrice gloatingly.

'I still think she knows something. I'm going to watch her night and day.'

'I'm going to watch her too.'

When she had first seen Finn's hut and the lagoon, Maia thought it must be the nicest place in the whole world.

Clovis did not think that at all. He liked being inside the hut, especially at meal-times, but he found the surrounding jungle most alarming. The anteater lumbering down to drink like a grey tank sent Clovis rushing back indoors, and the chattering of the monkeys in the trees kept him awake at night.

Finn made him help with all the chores. Clovis had to keep the hut clean, scrub out the saucepans, and help get the Arabella ready for her journey. Clovis liked the humming birds; he learnt to refill their bottles of sugar water, and he didn't mind painting the boat — he was used to painting scenery — but cleaning the bilges and burying the kitchen waste was not to his taste at all.

But if Clovis wasn't very good at rough work, he was absolutely first-class at learning his lines. Every morning and every afternoon, he sat down with the old red notebook in which Finn had written down all that his father had told him about Westwood, and when Finn tested him he found Clovis word-perfect.

'There isn't very much,' Finn had told him at the beginning. 'Because my father never talked about Westwood if he could help it. And remember, they won't expect you to know anything — they probably think you've been brought up a savage. All the same, if you're going to stay for a week or two without being found out, it might help you to know a little.'

So Clovis sat by the table in the hut, twisting a curl round his finger, and studied the notebook, and every hour or two Finn came and tested him.

'What does the front of the house look like?'

'It was built by Sir John Vanbrugh. There are two wings, an East Wing and a West Wing, and in the middle is a block with six stone columns where the main rooms are.'

'What about statues?'

'There's a statue of Hercules strangling a snake in front of the West Wing and a statue of St George spearing a dragon in front of the East Wing.'

'Now go through the front door. Think of yourself as coming back to where your father grew up. Think of yourself as Bernard Taverner's son,' said Finn — and had to turn his face away as he remembered how good it had been really to be his father's son, and how much he missed him.

'You go into a Great Hall which is always cold, with stone flags, and a big oak chest into which Dudley shut your father for a whole night when he was three years old—' Clovis broke off. 'Dudley is dead, isn't he?'

'Of course he's dead,' said Finn impatiently. 'That's what all the fuss is about. Go on. Go upstairs.'

'There's a Long Gallery with a knight's armour, very tall, which used to shine in the dark. Once Dudley got in and made it raise its arm and a housemaid fainted. And there's a picture of a Taverner ancestor who went to the crusade, with the head of a Turk impaled on his lance.'

Clovis sighed. Westwood did not sound cosy.

'What about Joan?' Finn went on. 'Remember she's your Aunt Joan really. Where was her room?'

'On the next floor, overlooking the stables. The walls were completely covered with rosettes she'd won for riding — red ones and yellow ones and blue ones, and she had a fox's tail with dried blood on it nailed above her bed. Only it isn't called a tail, it's called a brush.'

'And what was her nickname?'

'The Basher. Because she bashed people.' He looked anxiously at Finn. 'But she isn't there now, is she? You promised.'

'No, of course not. She's married to a man called Smith and has four daughters.'

But he could see that Clovis was looking far from happy so he flicked over the pages of the notebook to find the few things at Westwood which Bernard had liked.

'What about the bluebell wood?'

'It's on the far side of the lake — not where Joan held his head under the water. On a slope down to the river. There was a pair of woodpeckers nesting there, and a badger sett.'

'And the garden?'

'There was a walled kitchen garden and the gardener was nice. He used to let your father pick strawberries, but he had a stammer and Dudley used to imitate him and—'

'Never mind Dudley,' said Finn quickly. 'He's dead. What about the other servants?'

'The butler was called Young, but he wasn't young he was old, with liver spots on his hands and everyone was scared of him. He got a maid sacked for reading the books in the library — the one that helped your father.'

'And the dining room?'

Clovis rattled through every detail of the dining room. It always cheered him up thinking of English food and English meals.

But as often as he felt brave and forward-looking, Clovis felt scared and told Finn he couldn't do it.

'I wish Maia would come,' he kept saying, which annoyed Finn. Finn wished it too. Till Maia came they would not know what had happened in the museum and whether their plan would work.

But when she did come, the next day, they saw by her face that all was well.

To get away from the Carters, Maia had needed to work hard at her pulmonary spasms. She had had a spasm at breakfast, wheezing and twitching, and another one in the drawing room when she was doing her embroidery. They were good spasms, she thought, but it wasn't till the third one, just before tea, that Mrs Carter said icily that if her lungs were giving her so much trouble she had better go out.

Since it was raining — the heavy, dark rain that fell so often in the afternoons — she thought Maia might refuse, but she was out of the house in minutes.

And Furo, thank heaven, was in his hut and ready to take her to Finn.

This time the dog greeted her as a friend, placing his cold nose in her hand, and the happiness she always felt when she came to this place rose up in her.

'It's all settled,' she said. 'The professor was wonderful — he showed me everything. And I stole the keys,' she added proudly. 'At least I think I did, though he did tell me where they were so that may not be proper stealing.'

She handed them to Finn, hoping for praise, but he had obviously expected her to do what he had asked.

'Good. The trapdoor may be difficult to lift, we'd better take some oil. It's still under the sloth, is it?'

'Yes. And the professor is still worried about the missing rib. How's Clovis?'

'He's washing his hair. He's always washing it,' said Finn gloomily. 'I thought you might cut it for him.'

'I've never cut anyone's hair before.'

'There's always a first time.'

Clovis came out of the hut then, with a towel round his head and very pleased to see Maia.

'She's done it,' said Finn. 'The hiding place is set up, she's got the keys. The boat goes at dawn on Saturday, so on Friday we'll get you settled there. We'll need blankets, a lamp, some food. I'm going to let everyone think it's me hiding there, even the Indians; that will make it safer. I'll tell them that the crows have heard about the lagoon.'

But Clovis was looking definitely green. 'How long do I have to be in the cellar?' he asked fearfully.

'Not even a whole night. The crows are due back on Friday afternoon; they'll come looking for you almost straight away. You'll see it will work.'

'Clovis, it's the best thing, honestly,' said Maia. 'The Goodleys have been turned back at the border. They've been locked up until they can sell their assets and clear their debts. They think you're staying with me so they won't bother about you any more.'

'I suppose I could stay here,' said Clovis doubtfully, looking round the hut.

'No, you couldn't,' said Finn. 'I won't be here, I told you. I'm setting off in the Arabella.' He turned to Maia. 'Come and see her,' he said. 'We've done quite a bit to her.'

Maia followed him onto the launch. The rain had stopped. Finn had painted the floorboards and mended the awning. 'She's almost ready,' he said.

'Are you sure you can sail her alone? With having to get wood and everything?'

'Yes. I couldn't take you anyway,' he said, reading her like a book. 'I don't even know exactly where I'm going and you're a—'

'Don't say it,' said Maia angrily. 'Don't you dare say I'm a girl.'

Finn shrugged. 'All right, I won't. But it could be dangerous and I won't involve other people.' He looked back at the hut where Clovis was towelling his hair. 'He's absolutely hopeless at the chores, but he's amazing at memorizing things. I reckon he knows everything about Westwood already. We did Sir Aubrey this morning — his eyes, his whiskers. An actor's training is not to be sneezed at.' Then: 'How long have you got?'

'Long enough to help you polish the funnel,' said Maia, and took a cloth.