

第三章 回到过去

Chapter 3 The Past



几个孩子敲门的时候，“可怜的学者先生”正对着窗子，坐在桌子旁——上面摆满了奇形怪状的石头与雕像，用一把小钳子夹着什么东西在看，完全没有注意门的声音。他们小心地推开门，结果全部都吓了一跳，原来门遮住的墙壁当中竟然是一个漆得花花绿绿的木乃伊棺材！

学者先生摘下放大镜，说：“对不起。”这声音很温和——是上过牛津大学的先生的声音。

“是我们，很抱歉打扰了您，”西里尔作为代表，彬彬有礼地解释了造访的原因，“我们弄到了一个护身符，因为听说您非常有学问，所以想请你读读上面的名字……”

学者笑起来：“你们是住在楼下的小朋友们，对不对？你们是找到了什么东西，认为是古董，所以想请我来鉴别鉴别吗？我感到非常高兴。”

安西娅便把护身符拿出来，学者接了过去。正在这时，他全身都定住了，声音也变了：“对不起，但是你们在哪儿找到这东西的？”

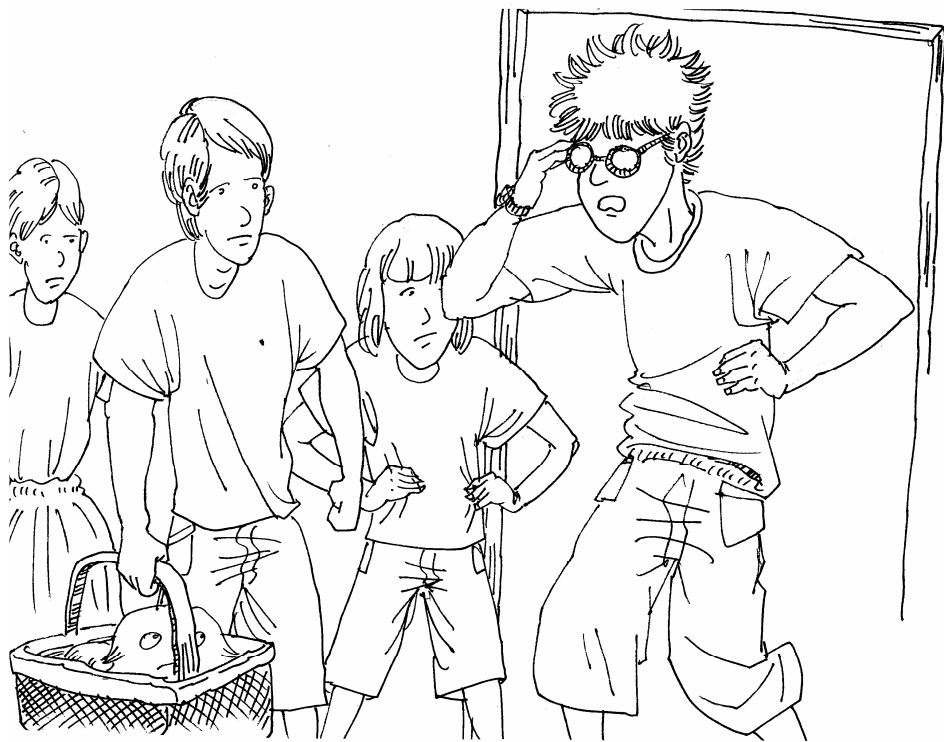
“我们是在一家店买来的……”西里尔说。

“我想我必须告诉你们，这东西非常非常有价值，”学者先生着重地说，“万一你们要出让，能优先考虑卖给我吗？”

“我们会的，不过我们现在还不想卖，”西里尔说，“你能读出上面的名字吗？”

“哦，可以。这名字是，**乌尔·赫考·塞却。**”

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去拜访学者

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他们用各种能想到的客气方式表示了感谢，然后退回到客厅，让沙仙教他们如何准确地使用这个名字。

孩子们与沙仙围成一圈蹲在了地板上，护身符就放在圈子里——外面阳光灿烂，但是当安西娅说出那个名字时，全世界所有的亮光一下子都消失了，所有的声音也消失了。

圆圈当中开始露出淡淡的、美丽的亮光，一个轻轻的、悦耳的声音开始说话了：

“说吧，你们想要听什么？”

“对不起，我们想知道护身符在什么地方。”西里尔开口说。

“护身符的另一半失踪了，也许和存放它的祭坛一起变成粉末，散落在大海里了。”那声音说，“你们只能到它还是完整的时候去找，也就是‘过去’。”

“在过去的哪一个时间呢？”

“我不能告诉你。但如果你们能选定一个时间，我就可以把你们送到当时它所在的地方去。”

“那么你能把我们带回到你的两半都太太平平地待在那里的时候吗？”安西娅问。

“可以，你们将我高高举起，念那个名字，然后一个个穿过我——进入‘过去’，”护身符说，“如果你们想回来，就面朝东把我举起来，念那个名字……”

就在这时，铃铛响起来，是老保姆按铃叫他们吃茶了。

美丽的亮光渐渐消失，漆黑和死寂却转眼变成了耀眼的白天，响起了伦敦城的喧闹声，孩子们都擦擦眼睛，重新收好了护身符。

The learned gentleman had let his dinner get quite cold. It was mutton chop, and as it lay on the plate it looked like a brown island in the middle of a frozen pond, because the grease of the gravy had become cold, and consequently white. It looked very nasty, and it was the first thing the children saw when, after knocking three times and receiving no reply, one of them ventured to turn the handle and softly to open the door. The chop was on the

end of a long table that ran down one side of the room. The table had images on it and queer-shaped stones, and books. And there were glass cases fixed against the wall behind, with little strange things in them. The cases were rather like the ones you see in jewellers' shops.

The 'poor learned gentleman' was sitting at a table in the window, looking at something very small which he held in a pair of fine pincers. He had a round spy-glass sort of thing in one eye—which reminded the children of watchmakers, and also of the long snail's eyes of the Psammead. The gentleman was very long and thin, and his long, thin boots stuck out under the other side of his table. He did not hear the door open, and the children stood hesitating. At last Robert gave the door a push, and they all started back, for in the middle of the wall that the door had hidden was a mummy-case—very, very, very big—painted in red and yellow and green and black, and the face of it seemed to look at them quite angrily.

You know what a mummy-case is like, of course? If you don't you had better go to the British Museum at once and find out. Anyway, it is not at all the sort of thing that you expect to meet in a top-floor front in Bloomsbury, looking as though it would like to know what business YOU had there.

So everyone said, 'Oh!' rather loud, and their boots clattered as they stumbled back.

The learned gentleman took the glass out of his eye and said—'I beg your pardon,' in a very soft, quiet pleasant voice—the voice of a gentleman who has been to Oxford.

'It's us that beg yours,' said Cyril politely. 'We are sorry to disturb you.'

'Come in,' said the gentleman, rising—with the most distinguished courtesy, Anthea told herself. 'I am delighted to see you. Won't you sit down? No, not there; allow me to move that papyrus.'

He cleared a chair, and stood smiling and looking kindly through his large, round spectacles.

'He treats us like grown-ups,' whispered Robert, 'and he doesn't seem to know how many of us there are.'

‘Hush,’ said Anthea, ‘it isn’t manners to whisper. You say, Cyril—go ahead.’

‘We’re very sorry to disturb you,’ said Cyril politely, ‘but we did knock three times, and you didn’t say “Come in”, or “Run away now”, or that you couldn’t be bothered just now, or to come when you weren’t so busy, or any of the things people do say when you knock at doors, so we opened it. We knew you were in because we heard you sneeze while we were waiting.’

‘Not at all,’ said the gentleman; ‘do sit down.’

‘He has found out there are four of us,’ said Robert, as the gentleman cleared three more chairs. He put the things off them carefully on the floor. The first chair had things like bricks that tiny, tiny birds’ feet have walked over when the bricks were soft, only the marks were in regular lines. The second chair had round things on it like very large, fat, long, pale beads. And the last chair had a pile of dusty papers on it. The children sat down.

‘We know you are very, very learned,’ said Cyril, ‘and we have got a charm, and we want you to read the name on it, because it isn’t in Latin or Greek, or Hebrew, or any of the languages WE know—’

‘A thorough knowledge of even those languages is a very fair foundation on which to build an education,’ said the gentleman politely.

‘Oh!’ said Cyril blushing, ‘but we only know them to look at, except Latin—and I’m only in Caesar with that.’ The gentleman took off his spectacles and laughed. His laugh sounded rusty, Cyril thought, as though it wasn’t often used.

‘Of course!’ he said. ‘I’m sure I beg your pardon. I think I must have been in a dream. You are the children who live downstairs, are you not? Yes. I have seen you as I have passed in and out. And you have found something that you think to be an antiquity, and you’ve brought it to show me? That was very kind. I should like to inspect it.’

‘I’m afraid we didn’t think about your liking to inspect it,’ said the truthful Anthea. ‘It was just for US because we wanted to know the name on it—’

‘Oh, yes—and, I say,’ Robert interjected, ‘you won’t think it rude of us if

we ask you first, before we show it, to be bound in the what-do-you-call-it of—’

‘In the bonds of honour and upright dealing,’ said Anthea.

‘I’m afraid I don’t quite follow you,’ said the gentleman, with gentle nervousness.

‘Well, it’s this way,’ said Cyril. ‘We’ve got part of a charm. And the Sammy—I mean, something told us it would work, though it’s only half a one; but it won’t work unless we can say the name that’s on it. But, of course, if you’ve got another name that can lick ours, our charm will be no go; so we want you to give us your word of honour as a gentleman—though I’m sure, now I’ve seen you, that it’s not necessary; but still I’ve promised to ask you, so we must. Will you please give us your honourable word not to say any name stronger than the name on our charm?’

The gentleman had put on his spectacles again and was looking at Cyril through them. He now said: ‘Bless me!’ more than once, adding, ‘Who told you all this?’

‘I can’t tell you,’ said Cyril. ‘I’m very sorry, but I can’t.’

Some faint memory of a far-off childhood must have come to the learned gentleman just then, for he smiled. ‘I see,’ he said. ‘It is some sort of game that you are engaged in? Of course! Yes! Well, I will certainly promise. Yet I wonder how you heard of the names of power?’

‘We can’t tell you that either,’ said Cyril; and Anthea said, ‘Here is our charm,’ and held it out.

With politeness, but without interest, the gentleman took it. But after the first glance all his body suddenly stiffened, as a pointer’s does when he sees a partridge.

‘Excuse me,’ he said in quite a changed voice, and carried the charm to the window. He looked at it; he turned it over. He fixed his spy-glass in his eye and looked again. No one said anything. Only Robert made a shuffling noise with his feet till Anthea nudged him to shut up. At last the learned gentleman drew a long breath.

‘Where did you find this?’ he asked.

‘We didn’t find it. We bought it at a shop. Jacob Absalom the name is—not far from Charing Cross,’ said Cyril.

‘We gave seven-and-sixpence for it,’ added Jane.

‘It is not for sale, I suppose? You do not wish to part with it?’

I ought to tell you that it is extremely valuable—extraordinarily valuable, I may say.’

‘Yes,’ said Cyril, ‘we know that, so of course we want to keep it.’

‘Keep it carefully, then,’ said the gentleman impressively; ‘and if ever you should wish to part with it, may I ask you to give me the refusal of it?’

‘The refusal?’

‘I mean, do not sell it to anyone else until you have given me the opportunity of buying it.’

‘All right,’ said Cyril, ‘we won’t. But we don’t want to sell it. We want to make it do things.’

‘I suppose you can play at that as well as at anything else,’ said the gentleman; ‘but I’m afraid the days of magic are over.’

‘They aren’t REALLY,’ said Anthea earnestly. ‘You’d see they aren’t if I could tell you about our last summer holidays. Only I mustn’t. Thank you very much. And can you read the name?’

‘Yes, I can read it.’

‘Will you tell it us?’ ‘The name,’ said the gentleman, ‘is Ur Hekau Setcheh.’

‘Ur Hekau Setcheh,’ repeated Cyril. ‘Thanks awfully. I do hope we haven’t taken up too much of your time.’

‘Not at all,’ said the gentleman. ‘And do let me entreat you to be very, very careful of that most valuable specimen.’

They said ‘Thank you’ in all the different polite ways they could think of, and filed out of the door and down the stairs. Anthea was last. Half-way down to the first landing she turned and ran up again.

The door was still open, and the learned gentleman and the mummy-case

were standing opposite to each other, and both looked as though they had stood like that for years.

The gentleman started when Anthea put her hand on his arm.

‘I hope you won’t be cross and say it’s not my business,’ she said, ‘but do look at your chop! Don’t you think you ought to eat it? Father forgets his dinner sometimes when he’s writing, and Mother always says I ought to remind him if she’s not at home to do it herself, because it’s so bad to miss your regular meals.’

So I thought perhaps you wouldn’t mind my reminding you, because you don’t seem to have anyone else to do it.’

She glanced at the mummy-case; IT certainly did not look as though it would ever think of reminding people of their meals.

The learned gentleman looked at her for a moment before he said—

‘Thank you, my dear. It was a kindly thought. No, I haven’t anyone to remind me about things like that.’

He sighed, and looked at the chop.

‘It looks very nasty,’ said Anthea.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘it does. I’ll eat it immediately, before I forget.’

As he ate it he sighed more than once. Perhaps because the chop was nasty, perhaps because he longed for the charm which the children did not want to sell, perhaps because it was so long since anyone cared whether he ate his chops or forgot them.

Anthea caught the others at the stair-foot. They woke the Psammead, and it taught them exactly how to use the word of power, and to make the charm speak. I am not going to tell you how this is done, because you might try to do it. And for you any such trying would be almost sure to end in disappointment. Because in the first place it is a thousand million to one against your ever getting hold of the right sort of charm, and if you did, there would be hardly any chance at all of your finding a learned gentleman clever enough and kind enough to read the word for you.

The children and the Psammead crouched in a circle on the floor—in the

girls' bedroom, because in the parlour they might have been interrupted by old Nurse's coming in to lay the cloth for tea—and the charm was put in the middle of the circle.

The sun shone splendidly outside, and the room was very light. Through the open window came the hum and rattle of London, and in the street below they could hear the voice of the milkman.

When all was ready, the Psammead signed to Anthea to say the word. And she said it. Instantly the whole light of all the world seemed to go out. The room was dark. The world outside was dark—darker than the darkest night that ever was. And all the sounds went out too, so that there was a silence deeper than any silence you have ever even dreamed of imagining. It was like being suddenly deaf and blind, only darker and quieter even than that.

But before the children had got over the sudden shock of it enough to be frightened, a faint, beautiful light began to show in the middle of the circle, and at the same moment a faint, beautiful voice began to speak. The light was too small for one to see anything by, and the voice was too small for you to hear what it said. You could just see the light and just hear the voice.

But the light grew stronger. It was greeny, like glow-worms' lamps, and it grew and grew till it was as though thousands and thousands of glow-worms were signalling to their winged sweethearts from the middle of the circle. And the voice grew, not so much in loudness as in sweetness (though it grew louder, too), till it was so sweet that you wanted to cry with pleasure just at the sound of it. It was like nightingales, and the sea, and the fiddle, and the voice of your mother when you have been a long time away, and she meets you at the door when you get home.

And the voice said—

‘Speak. What is it that you would hear?’

I cannot tell you what language the voice used. I only know that everyone present understood it perfectly. If you come to think of it, there must be some language that everyone could understand, if we only knew what it was. Nor can I tell you how the charm spoke, nor whether it was the charm that spoke, or

some presence in the charm. The children could not have told you either. Indeed, they could not look at the charm while it was speaking, because the light was too bright. They looked instead at the green radiance on the faded Kidderminster carpet at the edge of the circle. They all felt very quiet, and not inclined to ask questions or fidget with their feet. For this was not like the things that had happened in the country when the Psammead had given them their wishes. That had been funny somehow, and this was not. It was something like Arabian Nights magic, and something like being in church. No one cared to speak.

It was Cyril who said at last—

‘Please we want to know where the other half of the charm is.’

‘The part of the Amulet which is lost,’ said the beautiful voice, ‘was broken and ground into the dust of the shrine that held it. It and the pin that joined the two halves are themselves dust, and the dust is scattered over many lands and sunk in many seas.’

‘Oh, I say!’ murmured Robert, and a blank silence fell. ‘Then it’s all up?’ said Cyril at last; ‘it’s no use our looking for a thing that’s smashed into dust, and the dust scattered all over the place.’

‘If you would find it,’ said the voice, ‘You must seek it where it still is, perfect as ever.’

‘I don’t understand,’ said Cyril.

‘In the Past you may find it,’ said the voice.

‘I wish we MAY find it,’ said Cyril.

The Psammead whispered crossly, ‘Don’t you understand? The thing existed in the Past. If you were in the Past, too, you could find it. It’s very difficult to make you understand things. Time and space are only forms of thought.’

‘I see,’ said Cyril.

‘No, you don’t,’ said the Psammead, ‘and it doesn’t matter if you don’t, either. What I mean is that if you were only made the right way, you could see everything happening in the same place at the same time. Now do you see?’



孩子们围成了一圈



‘I’m afraid I don’t,’ said Anthea; ‘I’m sorry I’m so stupid.’

‘Well, at any rate, you see this. That lost half of the Amulet is in the Past. Therefore it’s in the Past we must look for it. I mustn’t speak to the charm myself. Ask it things! Find out!’

‘Where can we find the other part of you?’ asked Cyril obediently.

‘In the Past,’ said the voice.

‘What part of the Past?’

‘I may not tell you. If you will choose a time, I will take you to the place that then held it. You yourselves must find it.’

‘When did you see it last?’ asked Anthea—‘I mean, when was it taken away from you?’

The beautiful voice answered—

‘That was thousands of years ago. The Amulet was perfect then, and lay in a shrine, the last of many shrines, and I worked wonders. Then came strange men with strange weapons and destroyed my shrine, and the Amulet they bore away with many captives. But of these, one, my priest, knew the word of power, and spoke it for me, so that the Amulet became invisible, and thus returned to my shrine, but the shrine was broken down, and ere any magic could rebuild it one spoke a word before which my power bowed down and was still. And the Amulet lay there, still perfect, but enslaved. Then one coming with stones to rebuild the shrine, dropped a hewn stone on the Amulet as it lay, and one half was sundered from the other. I had no power to seek for that which was lost. And there being none to speak the word of power, I could not rejoin it. So the Amulet lay in the dust of the desert many thousand years, and at last came a small man, a conqueror with an army, and after him a crowd of men who sought to seem wise, and one of these found half the Amulet and brought it to this land. But none could read the name. So I lay still. And this man dying and his son after him, the Amulet was sold by those who came after to a merchant, and from him you bought it, and it is here, and now, the name of power having been spoken, I also am here.’

This is what the voice said. I think it must have meant Napoleon by the

small man, the conqueror. Because I know I have been told that he took an army to Egypt, and that afterwards a lot of wise people went grubbing in the sand, and fished up all sorts of wonderful things, older than you would think possible. And of these I believe this charm to have been one, and the most wonderful one of all.

Everyone listened: and everyone tried to think. It is not easy to do this clearly when you have been listening to the kind of talk I have told you about.

At last Robert said—

‘Can you take us into the Past—to the shrine where you and the other thing were together. If you could take us there, we might find the other part still there after all these thousands of years.’

‘Still there? silly!’ said Cyril. ‘Don’t you see, if we go back into the Past it won’t be thousands of years ago. It will be NOW for us—won’t it?’ He appealed to the Psammead, who said—

‘You’re not so far off the idea as you usually are!’

‘Well,’ said Anthea, ‘will you take us back to when there was a shrine and you were safe in it—all of you?’

‘Yes,’ said the voice. ‘You must hold me up, and speak the word of power, and one by one, beginning with the first-born, you shall pass through me into the Past. But let the last that passes be the one that holds me, and let him not lose his hold, lest you lose me, and so remain in the Past for ever.’

‘That’s a nasty idea,’ said Robert.

‘When you desire to return,’ the beautiful voice went on, ‘hold me up towards the East, and speak the word. Then, passing through me, you shall return to this time and it shall be the present to you.’

‘But how—’ A bell rang loudly.

‘Oh crikey!’ exclaimed Robert, ‘that’s tea! Will you please make it proper daylight again so that we can go down. And thank you so much for all your kindness.’

‘We’ve enjoyed ourselves very much indeed, thank you!’ added Anthea politely.

The beautiful light faded slowly. The great darkness and silence came and these suddenly changed to the dazzlement of day and the great soft, rustling sound of London, that is like some vast beast turning over in its sleep.

The children rubbed their eyes, the Psammead ran quickly to its sandy bath, and the others went down to tea. And until the cups were actually filled tea seemed less real than the beautiful voice and the greeny light.

After tea Anthea persuaded the others to allow her to hang the charm round her neck with a piece of string.

‘It would be so awful if it got lost,’ she said: ‘it might get lost anywhere, you know, and it would be rather beastly for us to have to stay in the Past for ever and ever, wouldn’t it?’