

THE MAGNIFICENT GLASS GLOBE

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Month9Books

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For Ellen (1985-2016) - a steadfast cultural bridge builder.



CHAPTER ONE

Hide and Seek in the Museum

“**W**e’re ready,” Mary said, as she and Helen adopted running stances.

Ike turned to the wall and covered his eyes.

“ONE!” he counted aloud.

With that signal, Mary took off, running at full speed across the museum. Her best friend jogged alongside with ease. No matter that they were the same age—Helen’s long, athletic body was the reason others often mistook the eleven-year old for a teenager.

“... Two ... Three ... four!”

“You keep going,” Helen whispered.

From the corner of her eye, Mary watched Helen disappear

as she veered into the African pottery exhibit. Mary pushed ahead, her kinky dark hair bouncing as she went.

A feeling of unexpected pleasure bubbled up inside her as she ran. A broad grin spread from ear to ear.

Now's the time, she thought. It'd been a while since this feeling had last come.

She closed her eyes briefly, imagining the place she longed to see above all others. As she reopened them, the marble floor turned to dirt beneath her feet. The white walls of the museum sprang forth into lush greenery as leaves and vines covered them. The transition took only seconds, and soon Mary was no longer running through the museum.

She was back, flying on her feet through the rainforest. It really had been too long.

"Ha ha!" she laughed, upping her speed a notch.

Mary felt free and fearless, leaping over fallen logs as she bounded through the jungle. Glancing to the left, she saw two lanky monkeys, swinging from branch to branch and hooting excitedly as they matched her speed. The air felt steamy, and beautiful rainforest noises echoed all around.

Mary turned sharply to her right, rounding a wide tree. Ike would never find her now.

An unexpected light appeared in front of her eyes, catching her off guard.

Huh? she wondered.

And with that momentary, out-of-place thought, it was over. The trees around her vanished, returning to the dull, darkened corridors of the museum.

“No!” she cried in despair. “Come back!”

Mary tried to pretend otherwise, but this adventure hadn’t been real.

“I’m in the Amazon. I’m *in* the Amazon,” she urged herself, straining to get the engine of her imagination to turn over.

It was no use. Whatever had been working before was gone now. All she could conjure up were vague images, like black-and-white photographs that vanished into smoke before she could get a good look at them.

I’m probably getting too old for this, she thought. She’d be twelve soon, after all. Did all imaginations stop working at twelve? Without hers, who would she be?

It’s all because I’ve been spoiled.

Spoiled by the museum. Not that she’d change anything. She likely wouldn’t have formed her imagination in the first place if not for this place. As the curator’s daughter, she’d practically grown up here. But maybe it’d caused an overload. The fires of her mind burned too hot, and she’d used up the finite amount of imagined adventure her brain had to offer.

Mary reluctantly accepted, yet again, that the museum was only a museum. Not the real thing. Just a place that could provide glimpses of what she might find in faraway places. Places that weren't here, where she was, and probably always would be.

"Ready or not, here I come!" Ike called from the distant wing of the empty museum.

Oh yeah, she remembered. Hide and seek.

Mary began looking for a place to hide. Ahead, that light which had yanked her out of the rainforest shone brightly. It took a moment to realize what it was. As she did, her spirit swelled, and her smile returned.

"My lucky day," she said, walking toward the light.

She might not be able to will her imagination back, but Mary knew another way to get the results she craved. It kind of felt like cheating, but at this point, she'd take what she could get.

In front of Mary was her favorite thing in the whole museum. The beautiful world map, illuminated by the spotlight, hung proudly on the corridor wall.

Almost immediately, she felt that familiar tugging sensation. The black-and-white photographs didn't vanish right away. She sighed in satisfaction. There it was.

Faraway places.

Adventures. All thanks to the map.

The rest of what the museum had to offer might be losing its potency, but the map was still an effective way to stimulate the imagination. Something about it, and all maps for that matter, could always draw her in.

Nearly ten feet high and twenty feet wide, the stunning map filled the entire wall. It showed the world in amazing detail. It even had pictures of plants and animals lining its border. Each was connected to a spot on the map by a red line, indicating the native habitat of the plant or animal. As always, Mary dreamed that simply touching the map could magically whisk her away to any place she desired. She wouldn't need her imagination then. Then she'd have it all right in front of her.

In the back of her mind, Mary again remembered the game of hide and seek.

Just another minute, she told herself. It would take her little brother a while to find her, especially since he wouldn't come looking in these darkened exhibits alone. She had time.

And she needed this.

One bright picture caught her eye, as it had countless times before. A large, spotted cat climbed along a green log in an even greener jungle. She looked at the description and read:

The Amazon jaguar (Panthera onca onca) is one of the largest predators living in the rainforest basin. Accurate numbers are difficult to estimate, but they are very rare, and seldom seen by humans.

A line connected the picture to the heart of the Amazon. Reaching up, Mary traced it with her finger.

“Right there,” she said, tapping her finger in the middle of the rainforest. “That’s where I want to go.”

Her mind’s eye began to produce the rainforest once again, as creeper vines sprung from the surface of the map and wrapped around her wrist. The melody of chanting birds and monkeys filled the air.

Deep down, Mary understood the solution to her problem. She had for a while. Her imagination wasn’t dying. It’d only matured, just as she had. Babies could live on milk, but as they got older, they needed more variety in their diet. Her younger imagination could produce the adventure she craved when fed by the interesting artifacts of the museum, but it needed something more now.

She needed to be fed the real thing.

This was why she’d been begging her parents for the chance to *really* go somewhere. To keep her imagination alive and healthy.

“Yes, I think it would be an interesting place too,” said an unexpected voice from behind.

Mary yelped as she spun around, startled by the intruder. All traces of her imagined rainforest vanished yet again.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to frighten you,” apologized the janitor.

The tall, aging man pushed a wide broom across the floor. His white hair was trimmed short and neat, much like his narrow white mustache. It matched his pale skin. Mary had seen him before, but had never spoken to him. He hadn’t been working at the museum for long.

“So, you like to travel?” the janitor asked, revealing his slight accent.

She tried to remember the man’s name.

“Yes, well, I think so,” Mary stammered, her heart still racing from the fright he’d given her. “I’ve never actually gone anywhere.”

“And why the Amazon?” asked the janitor. “You like hot weather?”

“I don’t know,” Mary said. “Maybe because there’s more life in the Amazon than any other place on earth. But I think I’d like to go anywhere, really.”

The janitor stared at her again for a moment, smiling awkwardly in a way that only made Mary feel uncomfortable.

"You know," he finally said, "life is always better when seeking adventures."

Boy, did she ever know that. She didn't need the janitor to tell her.

"I wish I could have adventures," she admitted. "But if my father has his way, I'll be here forever. He's not a fan of traveling."

"Well, that's understandable," the janitor replied. "After all, adventures don't come cheaply. And they take time. Maybe it's best to just imagine adventures here in the museum."

Yeah right, she thought. Easier said than done.

"That's what Dad always says," Mary replied. "But it's not the same."

Not anymore, she added silently.

"I've been around the world a time or two," the janitor said. "It can be more trouble than it's worth. But maybe things will get better. Perhaps in your lifetime, people will be able to travel wherever and whenever they desire, and in the blink of an eye."

Mary laughed, realizing she'd only just been wishing for the same thing.

"That would be nice," she said. "But with my luck, it still wouldn't work for me."

"I'll tell you this," the janitor said. "Whoever discovers a

way to make it happen will become very rich, and powerful.”

“Well, maybe I need to start studying harder so I can be the one to discover it,” she said.

“Not unless I discover it first,” replied the janitor.

A strange greedy look enveloped him, his eyes reflecting like fire in the spotlight. The change in his demeanor caught Mary off guard.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

The janitor shook his head slightly.

“Oh, nothing,” he said. “I’m getting old, so I say strange things sometimes. I should probably get back to work. Have a nice night.”

Before Mary could respond, he turned away abruptly, and resumed sweeping his way down the dark hallway and out of sight.

Mary wasn’t sure what to think about the exchange. There certainly was something strange about that janitor. She shrugged, and turned back to the map.

As soon as she did, her imagination flooded back to life, but only for a few seconds. Voices echoed from somewhere in the museum, jolting Mary’s memory and reminding her of the game. Hastily, she tore away from the map, desperately seeking for a place to hide.

It was too late. Before she could even step away, Helen

and Ike emerged into the corridor. Standing below the map's spotlight, Mary had nowhere to go.

"I found you," Ike said sarcastically. "Nice hiding spot."

"Oh man, not again!" Helen said, slapping her palm to her forehead.

"I'm sorry," Mary replied. "It's just that I—"

"We know," Helen said. "You and your map thing."

"It wasn't just that," Mary said. "That old janitor came by and started talking to me, and I couldn't hide until he left."

"Uh-huh, sure," Ike said. "And it's just a coincidence that you're in front of your geek map."

Mary blushed, realizing she was caught.

"Well, so what?" she said in defense. "You can laugh all you want, but if I'm going to start traveling the world soon, I have to be ready. So stop making fun of me, and maybe I'll let you come with me."

Ike and Helen didn't share her enthusiasm. Helen pretended to yawn, as if bored.

"Whatever you say, Magellan," she teased. "If you ever do travel the world, you'll need me there anyway to get your wimpy butt out of trouble whenever you find it. Until then, can we at least have fun while we're stuck here?"

"Who's not having fun?" said a man's voice.

Into the corridor stepped Lewis Tucker, chief curator of

the Charleston World Museum.

"That's impossible," he continued. "A closed museum, all to yourselves? It's the happiest place on earth!"

"I think you're confused with Disneyland, Dad," said Ike.

"We *were* playing hide and seek, but Mary quit on us in the middle of the game," Helen said. "She got lost in one of her map fantasies again."

"Oh she did, did she?" Dad turned to Mary and raised a questioning eyebrow. "What was it this time? The Trans-Siberian railroad? The Australian outback?"

"Dad, I *really* want to go to the Amazon!" she blurted out. "You know my twelfth birthday is coming up next year. Maybe we could make it a family trip?"

"Now hold on there, Mary," Dad interrupted with a laugh. "We've talked about this time and time again. You know how expensive and difficult it is to take a big trip like that."

"I know, but I'll do anything you ask. I can do extra chores for a year, or I could ... "

Mary could tell by the smile on his face that he wasn't taking her seriously.

"Dad, if we send Mary to the Amazon, can I have her room?" Ike asked.

"Nobody's going to the Amazon," said Dad. "For crying

out loud, your own father runs one of the biggest museums in all of South Carolina. We can enjoy places without *actually* having to go there.”

“But Dad! Please? Will you at least think about it?” Mary begged.

“I’m sorry, my girl,” Dad said. “But the only place we’re traveling to right now is home for dinner. If we don’t get there soon, your mother might banish *me* to the Amazon. Let’s not hear any more about this traveling nonsense, okay?”

“Yes, sir,” Mary said, deflated.

There had to be some way to convince him. Pestering Dad for months on end to let her travel was clearly not working. “Not until you’re older,” she was always told. But Mary didn’t think she could be that patient. It wouldn’t be easy to convince Dad to change his mind, and she knew her dream was a big one. But she was smart enough to find away. Maybe she was just going about all wrong. Maybe if she started smaller ...

“If we can’t go to the Amazon, could we at least go to Disneyworld?” she asked, flashing her father a big smile.

“Oooohhh, I’d like to second that motion,” Ike said, also beaming.

“I volunteer to come as a chaperone,” Helen offered.

“Why me?” Dad said, raising both hands into the air

while talking toward the sky.

Mary and Ike laughed as they said goodbye to Helen, who waited as her father, the museum's head of security, locked up the building.

I'll find a way to convince him, Mary told herself as she buckled her seatbelt.

If there was a way, she'd figure it out. After all, she'd never given up on anything before.



CHAPTER TWO

Dinner with Grandpa

“Grandpa’s here!” Mary shouted as Dad pulled the car into the driveway.

As they came to a stop, both Mary and Ike stripped off their seat belts and bolted from the vehicle. Mary leapt into the arms of the tall, thin man who stood on her front porch, waiting to embrace her. Grandpa was nearly knocked over backward by Mary’s forceful hug.

“Well, hello, it’s nice to see you too,” Grandpa said, flashing the bright white teeth that lined his ever-wide smile.

He laughed as he tried to keep his balance, then planted a big kiss on Mary’s darkly freckled cheek.

“We didn’t know you were coming over tonight,” Ike exclaimed.

“Well, to tell you the truth, neither did I,” admitted Grandpa. “That is to say, at least not until your wonderful mother called me up and invited me over about an hour ago. How could I say no to a real home-cooked meal? It sure beats the canned soup I planned for supper.”

Mary looked nervously at Dad, wondering how he’d react to Grandpa’s unexpected appearance. Dad’s face was blank of any emotion. He didn’t say a word, instead walking straight into the house without even greeting his father. Grandpa looked longingly at his son, sadness crossing his face as Dad passed silently by.

“Come on, Grandpa,” Mary said, trying to distract him from the moment. “Let’s go see what Mom made for dinner.”

The tension soon evaporated away as they stood in a home full of the aroma of food cooking. Following the delicious smells, Mary could tell that Mom had gone all out tonight.

“Meat!” Ike exclaimed, sounding carnivorous.

“And Jean’s world-famous mashed potatoes,” Grandpa added. “Now I’m definitely glad I came over!”

Everybody gathered around the dinner table, anxious to see what else Mom had prepared.

“I want to sit next to him!” Ike complained as Mary tried to take the seat next to Grandpa.

“You know, one of you could sit on either side,” Mom

suggested as she stepped into the room.

Soon they were all seated, with a meal in front of them that was large enough to feed a small army. In addition to the steak and potatoes, there was hot-steamed broccoli dripping with melted butter, and flaky, freshly-baked dinner rolls. Mary felt her stomach rumble in anticipation.

Ike, with his customarily bad manners, started shoveling food onto his own plate, ignoring everyone else. Mary made sure that Grandpa got some of everything, and shot a disapproving look at her brother.

Ike didn't notice, as he was intently focused on building what looked like a volcano out of his mashed potatoes. He looked up at her, opening his eyes wide and smiling like a mad scientist.

"Behold my creation!" he said.

Before Mary could blink, Ike violently threw his face into the mashed potato volcano and started eating, straight from the plate, with no hands. He made noises like a wild animal.

"Excuse me, mister? Did you forget that we have a strict no-feral-child policy at the dinner table?" Mom scolded.

Ike looked up, not saying anything, but with mashed potatoes smeared across the lens of his glasses. He tried to bite Mom's finger as she wagged it at him from across the table.

"I always thought he might be part snapping turtle," Grandpa said, earning laughs from everybody, except Dad.

"So, Jean, what's the special occasion?" asked Dad, finally breaking his silence.

"No special occasion," Mom replied casually. "I just realized we aren't spending as much quality time together as a family. Everybody's always so busy with school and work. But isn't this what normal families do? Sit and eat together, having normal conversations?"

"A great suggestion, Jean," Grandpa agreed. "And why don't I start some of that normal conversation? I'd been hoping these young folks would let an old man know what's going on in the school these days."

"It's still standing." Ike said quickly. "It hasn't burnt down yet."

A piece of steak fell from Ike's fork before it could reach his mouth, bouncing off his wrinkled school uniform and leaving a brownish grease stain. Mom groaned as she leaned across the table and started rubbing at the stain with a wet napkin.

"Well, that's a good thing, isn't it?" Grandpa asked.

"Only if you're Mary," Ike replied.

"Mrs. Lehmann has been teaching us about the conservation of trees," Mary piped in, hoping to spare them

all from more of Ike's attempted humor.

"Oh, now that sounds interesting," said Mom, clearly eager to do the same. "And what have you learned so far, dear?"

"That too many trees are being cut down, and that more and more forests are being destroyed every year," Mary answered in a depressed tone.

She paused for dramatic effect.

"Especially in the rainforest."

Dad coughed, almost choking on a piece of broccoli.

"You know Grandpa, Mary's an expert on the rainforest," Ike jumped in. "In fact, she's taking us all there for her birthday."

Mary ignored her brother and kept talking.

"Mrs. Lehmann said that one of the biggest reasons the trees are destroyed is so people can raise cows. They burn down the trees in areas and turn the land into fields. Then, they sell the cows for beef in other countries."

Mary looked questioningly down at the steak on her plate.

"Really?" said Mom, also glancing at her own plate. "I had no idea. Do you think these steaks came from cows raised in the rainforest?"

"I hope not," Mary said. "Because when the cows graze

in the areas where the forest used to be, they ruin the soil so the trees won't ever grow back. It's destroying the rainforest."

"Yeah, because of too many cow pies," Ike inserted.

"Ike!" Mom reprimanded, though she was trying to hold back her own laughter.

It annoyed Mary that this was turning into a joke.

"Don't worry too much, Mary," Dad said, noticing her frown. "A lot of smart people are working hard to protect the rainforests. It's a big place and a lot of the land's preserved. It won't all be destroyed."

"I know," Mary said. "But it still isn't good that so much of it keeps getting burned or cut down. It makes me sad to think about all the animals that have their natural habitats destroyed. Mrs. Lehmann said that thousands of different species go extinct every year. She said that some of them are animals we don't even know about yet."

"That's really a shame," Mom said, now sounding genuinely concerned. "I wonder if there's anything we could do?"

"Maybe we should eat more cow pies?" Ike suggested.

This time not even Mom laughed.

"Remember what I said about jokes only being funny the first time?" she asked.

Ike sat back and pouted at his failed attempt at humor.

Somehow he now had bits of broccoli stuck in his dark hair.

“One of the things we talked about was doing research to make sure that our beef doesn’t come from cows raised in areas cleared from the rainforests. It’s at least one thing we could do.” Mary suggested.

“Yes!” Mom said, brightening. “I think that’s a great idea. I’ll do some research on the internet and find out which companies are okay to use.”

“I’m proud of you Mary,” Grandpa said, giving her a pat on the shoulder. “You’re a wise girl for your age. We need more people like you who want to make the world a better place.”

Mary beamed. Being praised by her beloved grandfather felt as good as anything she could imagine.

Grandpa sat back with a thoughtful look on his face. He seemed to be contemplating something pleasant.

“The rainforests really are so beautiful, and so full of life. They were always one my favorite places to visit,” he said, to nobody in particular.

Suddenly, Grandpa seemed to realize what he was saying, and snapped back to reality.

“Anyway, that’s not important. What else have you kids been doing in school?”

Mary, shocked, completely ignored his question.

“Grandpa, you’ve *been* to the Amazon before?” she asked.

“Well ... ” he said, carefully, “ ... yes, but it was all such a long time ago. I don’t really remember that much.”

Mary knew he wasn’t telling the whole truth. Grandpa nervously glanced over at Dad as he spoke. Dad refused to look up, instead remaining focused on his food.

“Tell me about it, please?” Mary pleaded. “I want to go to the rainforest more than anything. What was it like? What did you see? Did you see any animals? Did you—”

“Why don’t we talk about something else?” Dad said. “Your grandfather doesn’t want to be bombarded with all these questions.”

Mary winced. She’d pushed too far again.

“Maybe your father’s right,” Grandpa said. “We can talk about it another time.”

“Oh Lewis, don’t be that way,” Mom cut in. “I want to hear about it too. Especially after what Mary’s been telling us about the rainforest, it might be nice to hear from somebody who’s actually been there before.”

“Jean, I really don’t think that’s a good idea,” Dad said, trying to gesture at Mary with his eyeballs.

Mom either didn’t notice or ignored Dad’s nonverbal pleas.

“Go on, Ephraim,” Mom said. “Tell us about it.”

“Well, I’ll try to tell you what I remember, but like I said, it was a long time ago. When you get old, your memory starts to fade, you know,” Grandpa said, still proceeding with obvious caution.

Dad looked particularly annoyed, but instead of saying anything, went back to concentrating on his food.

Mary sat attentively and faced her grandfather.

“Tell me everything,” she demanded.

“Well, I remember it being very loud for one thing,” Grandpa said. “There were animals everywhere making some sort of noise. Birds, monkeys, insects. Oh, and it’s also extremely hot and humid. Even the humidity here in the South is nothing compared to the rainforest. I was constantly sweating.”

“Why did you go there? What did you do? How—”

“MARY!” Dad was now clearly angry. “I thought I made myself clear! I don’t want to hear any more talk about the rainforest, or about traveling, or about anything else!”

Mary immediately went very quiet and sank into her chair. She felt tears well up in her eyes.

“Lewis, what’s wrong?” Mom asked, genuinely surprised at Dad’s outburst.

“It’s nothing,” Dad said sharply. “But if you’ll excuse me, I have some work to do.”

Before anybody could say another word, Dad stood up from the table, and stormed out of the room. Nobody said a thing, clearly shocked at his eruption. Dad often got annoyed, but was rarely angry like that.

Grandpa cast another sad look at Dad as he left the room. Mary wished she knew why there was always this wall between them. What had happened?

Later that night, lying in her bed, Mary couldn't stop thinking about the incident. She couldn't understand why Dad was so opposed to traveling. Mary knew that a trip to the rainforest was a longshot, but what hurt the most was that Dad wasn't even willing to talk to her about it. It was her dream, and it was as if he was trying to crush it before it could even grow.

A knock sounded on her bedroom door.

"Mary, may I come in?" Dad's voice called from the other side.

"I guess," Mary said, coldly.

Dad entered and sat at the foot of her bed.

"Mary, I'm sorry for the way I reacted at supper this evening," he apologized. "It was wrong of me to get angry like that. I know that you really want to travel and see the world."

Mary sat up in her bed.

"Dad, I know I can do it!" she blurted out, hoping this

would be her chance. "Believe me, I'll do all the research necessary. Don't worry, it'll be safe."

"Mary, I'm sorry, but it is a little bit more complicated than that," Dad said. "First of all, you're only eleven. But there's something more than that. It's hard for me to explain. I'm just ... I'm just afraid of what might happen."

"Is it the money? I promise I'll do whatever I can to earn it," she reasoned.

"No, it's not that," he said, staring at the wall. "I just can't, I mean, it would be too hard ... "

"What is it?" Mary asked, eager to hear whatever was so hard for him to say.

"I'll tell you about it someday. The subject's just still a little too sensitive for me," he confessed, his voice quivering slightly.

Dad stood up and walked toward the door. Mary thought she saw the glint of tears in his eyes.

"You're a wonderful girl, Mary," he said. "I love you. Keep working hard, and I'm sure you'll find all the adventure you'll ever need."

"So does that mean you'll still think about us going on a trip together?" Mary asked, hopeful.

Dad sighed.

"We'll see, Mary. We'll see."

He walked into the corridor, and shut the door.



CHAPTER THREE

The Mysterious Trunk

For the next two weeks, Mary was extra helpful around the house. She worked harder than ever at school. She knew that Dad hadn't *actually* agreed to let her take a trip, but she had to at least try to win him over. He couldn't hold out forever, could he?

Every time Dad praised Mary for her efforts, she gently hinted that she hoped it was enough to convince him to let her travel. She was careful, not wanting to push too hard and undo all of her hard work. Yet every time she tried, Dad quickly changed the subject.

"I don't know what else I can do!" Mary lamented to Ike and Helen, as the three children sat bored in the museum one afternoon.

"Maybe we could play hide and seek?" Ike suggested.

"No way," Helen protested. "There's nowhere new to hide."

"I'm not talking about that," Mary said. "I'm talking about convincing Dad to let me travel."

"I hate to break it to you, Mary," said Helen. "But fifth-graders don't travel the world. You might have to wait until you're old enough to go on your own, just like everybody else."

"I'm pretty sure Mary's already, like, forty," Ike joked.

"I really hope you're wrong, Helen," said Mary in despair. "I don't think I can wait that long. I want to go now!"

"Come on," Helen said, standing up. "Let's find something else to take your mind off traveling. If you really want to be an explorer, so why not start smaller, like with the warehouse?"

Helen raised an eyebrow, shooting Mary a devious look.

Mary couldn't help but laugh. Helen always had a way of distracting her from whatever was on her mind. Sometimes that was a bad thing, but right now, Mary welcomed the chance to put her depression aside.

"Why not?" Mary said, jumping up and following Helen.

The museum's warehouse was located in an enormous open area below the ground floor. The entire space was filled

with stacked crates, which contained the museum's collection of items currently not on display. Going into the warehouse was technically off limits, but Mary knew they'd stay out of any real trouble. Besides, it would still be another couple of hours before Dad was ready to go.

"Isn't it a little bit dark in there?" Ike asked, trying not to sound afraid. "You know, I just don't want to have to save you girls if you think you see a ghost or something."

"Oh sure," Helen said. "We'll definitely need the brave little nine-year-old to keep us safe. Oh, Ike, my hero!"

Mary and Helen both got a good laugh at Ike's expense. He shrugged off their teasing.

"I'm just saying," he said. "Girls are afraid of the dark sometimes."

"Ike, if you're scared, you don't have to go down there with us," Mary said.

"I'm not scared!" Ike insisted as he followed them toward the stairway that led to the warehouse.

It got progressively darker as they descended the long staircase. Soon, there was barely enough light to see the steps in front of them. Once they reached the basement floor, Helen quickly punched in a few numbers on the keypad, disabling the warehouse's alarm system.

"Now, where's that light switch?" Ike asked, looking for

the nearby master control for the overhead lighting.

"I don't think so," Mary said, giving Helen a knowing nudge. "The whole idea is that we need to be explorers in the dark."

"Yeah, that's right," Helen said, catching Mary's clue. "And in this game we're not allowed to speak to each other either. The first one who makes it through the maze of crates and reaches the loading dock on the other side is the winner."

"In the ... dark?" Ike asked, timidly. "Don't you think that'll be a little bit too hard?"

"Of course," Mary replied. "But that's why it's fun. You said you weren't afraid, right?"

Helen's game actually did sound fun. Helen would win, of course. She always won at these types of games. But it was at least something new and different.

"Fine," Ike relented. "I just wanted to make sure that you're all okay with being in the dark."

"Everybody ready?" Mary asked.

"Ready," Helen said.

"I guess so," Ike said.

"On your marks ... get set ... GO!"

They plunged into the dark room, each taking a different path and feeling their way through the maze of crates.

Mary moved deeper and deeper into the darkness. There

were so many crates! Dad said that at any given time, only about five percent of the museum's collection was actually on display. Some items were on loan to other museums, but the vast majority of what the museum owned was jammed into this warehouse. Mary wondered how they'd ever acquired so much.

As she maneuvered through the wooden labyrinth, Mary nearly tripped over a long, flat crate in her path. She carefully stepped over it. On the other side, to her dismay, Mary found a dead end, a wall of stacked crates blocking her path. How was she supposed to get through now?

Mary bent down, hoping to find another way through. Much to her delight, she discovered a small open space between two crates. It was just large enough to let her squeeze through. It could be a shortcut, which meant she might be able to beat Helen after all.

As she crawled on her hands and knees, Mary heard Ike fumbling his way through the warehouse. She stifled a giggle as he crashed into some crates.

"For the love of barnacles!" he yelled in frustration.

Mary continued to squeeze forward through the tiny tunnel, which continued for several feet. She hoped she'd find the other side soon.

Her luck ran out. Instead of leading to an exit, Mary

found her way completely blocked by another crate. She tried in vain to find a way around it.

As she explored with her hands, she noticed something strange. This crate wasn't made of plywood like the others. Instead, it was made of some other sort of hard, smooth material with metallic edges. On the side of the crate, Mary felt a large, flat metal disk with a keyhole in its center.

What was this thing, and why was it buried here under all these crates?

Without warning, the lights came on in the warehouse, shining through spaces in the boxes above her. Mary gulped, fearing that Dad had discovered them.

"What did you do that for?" Helen yelled from the far end of the warehouse.

"Come on, it's impossible to see anything in this place in the dark!" Ike yelled back.

Mary sighed in relief, thankful that Dad hadn't walked in on them after all.

Before Mary could slide backward out of the tunnel, she caught a glimpse of the odd crate that had blocked her way. With the lights now on, Mary could just make out some of its details. It wasn't a crate after all, but another box which had previously been inside one of the normal plywood crates. Somehow, the crate's side had broken open, revealing the

strange box it contained. Something about it looked vaguely familiar to Mary. It took her a minute to realize what it was. As soon as she did, she was instantly filled with excitement.

An old-fashioned travel trunk! It was well worn, and the edges were lined with tarnished and dented metal. The exposed side of the trunk had a handle, two metal buckles, and several faded labels, which said “FRAGILE” or “HANDLE WITH CARE.” Mary had no idea why this well-used suitcase of a seasoned traveler would be among the museum’s collection. It certainly wasn’t like any of the other items the museum tended to display. Mary’s mind fantasized about all the distant lands this old box had likely seen. She was jealous that a simple suitcase had probably been all over the world, while she hadn’t been anywhere.

It was cramped in the tunnel under the crates, and Mary wanted to get a better look at the travel trunk. Straining, she grabbed the case’s handle and pulled the heavy trunk as she backed out of the tunnel. It was hard to maneuver in the tight space, but fortunately, there was just enough room to slide the trunk out into the open light.

When she emerged from the tunnel, the first thing Mary noticed was a small brass nameplate with an inscription: “PROPERTY OF E. B. TUCKER”

Mary’s eyes almost popped out of her skull when she

realized what she was seeing. She knew that name all too well.

"Ike, Helen, come over here and look at this!" Mary yelled in exhilaration.

Within a few moments they were at her side, peering down at Mary's discovery.

"What is it?" Helen asked.

"It's an old travel trunk," Mary answered reverently. "One that's probably been used to travel around the world."

"Seriously, Mary?" Ike complained. "You think we're going to get as excited as you over an old suitcase?"

"You will when you see this."

Mary triumphantly pointed to the inscription.

"What are you talking about—" Ike said, stopping short as he read the label.

His mouth and eyes both opened wide.

"It's Grandpa's!" he exclaimed. "E. B. Tucker is Ephraim Byron Tucker! But how did it get here?"

"Well, Grandpa did work here for years," Mary said. "But this looks more like his personal property. I have no idea why he'd put it here in the warehouse."

"I wish we could see what's inside," Ike said.

"Then why don't you open it, genius?" Helen suggested.

Mary and Ike looked at each other for a moment, as if unsure whether they actually should do it.

“Well,” said Ike, “If this is Grandpa’s personal suitcase, wouldn’t he show us what’s inside anyway if he were here?”

The logic was enough to convince Mary. Both she and Ike simultaneously dove toward the trunk and started unfastening its metal buckles.

Once the buckles were unfastened, they tried to push open the lid. It wouldn’t budge. Mary had forgotten about the keyhole. Indeed, as she found the metal disc, she discovered that a big, locking clasp held the lid firmly closed. Mary sighed with dashed hopes.

“We can’t open it without the key,” Ike complained.

“I guess we’ll have to ask Grandpa about it next time we see him,” Mary said. “Just make sure it is not when Dad’s around.”

“Step aside, amateurs,” Helen said, pushing past them and toward the travel trunk. “Keys are completely overrated.”

Helen hunched over and fumbled around with the locked clasp for a minute. She forcefully made a pushing motion, and a metallic “pop” sounded. Helen, holding a small screwdriver in her hand, stood up to reveal the previously locked clasp, now opened wide. She spun the tool around her finger, and blew on it like a smoking pistol.

“You’re welcome,” she said.

“Wait a minute,” Mary said, confused. “How did you—”

“Oh please,” Helen said. “Old locks like this are hard to pick, but they’re not very strong. My parents still have one similar to this on our back gate. When I was seven, they gave me a key one day when I was coming home from school early. They told me it was mine, and not to lose it. Well, I lost it three days later. I was too afraid to tell them, but I learned fast enough that with the right leverage, you can pop these clasps right open.”

Mary stared at Helen, dumbfounded. Her friend was always full of surprises. But before she could think any more about Helen’s unexpected skill set, Mary remembered the trunk, which now sat unlocked before her. She reached down, and slowly lifted the lid.



CHAPTER FOUR

A Globe of Glass

“**N**ow that’s what I’m talking about!” Ike said as he pulled a long, shiny blade from the trunk.

It looked like a sword, only not as long, and with a much wider blade. Ike held it high above his head as he yelled like a gladiator calling out to an invisible opponent.

“Come on and fight like a man!”

“Oh, put it away, Ike,” Helen said. “I don’t even trust you with plastic scissors, and I’d like to keep my eyeballs today.”

Ike responded with his best ninja impression. Pushing his glasses up his nose, he swung the blade around, adding his own kung-fu sound effects. It didn’t look natural with his stocky body, short legs, and thick mushroom of hair. Mary

ignored her brother, but looked at the sword. She knew it wasn't really a sword, but rather a machete—a long, wide knife that was used to cut through dense jungles.

It would be perfect for the rainforest, Mary thought, wondering whether Grandpa had used the machete during his trips to the Amazon.

Mary turned back to the open trunk to see what else it contained. She pulled out a pair of army green backpacks made from a thick, canvas-like material. She opened one of them, and inside found a small leather-bound book, some folded raincoats, and two metal canteens, and a few other things. Without thinking, Mary replaced the items and slung the backpack over her shoulders as she continued to dig through the trunk. Every item caused Mary to wonder how each had been used in adventures around the world.

As she rummaged deeper, Mary's fingers made contact with the edge of a smaller box, buried beneath the assortment of gear. It was a sturdy, cubical case of smooth metal. Mary tried to lift it, but found it was too heavy. Increasingly curious, she cleared the items covering the metal box until its entire lid was exposed. Mary unlatched the lid, and opened the case.

She was confused by what she found. Instead of a fancy camera or some other piece of valuable equipment, Mary found a small, simple-looking instrument. It was unlike

anything she'd ever seen, and she didn't have the slightest clue what it was.

The most striking part of the unknown object was a smooth sphere of pale glass, about the size of a large orange. The sphere was mounted on a golden stand, and tilted at an angle.

Mary carefully lifted the strange, heavy artifact out of its case.

"Look at this weird glass ball," she said. "It's like a globe, only without a map."

"Maybe it's a globe of the moon?" Ike suggested, stopping his machete swinging to come and admire Mary's find.

"What do you think it does?" Helen asked.

"Beats me," Mary replied, honestly.

She turned the globe-like item around a few times, searching for anything that might reveal its purpose. Why would a useless object be kept in such a secure, padded case? And what was it doing in Grandpa's old travel trunk anyway?

Mary touched the surface of the glass sphere, and found that it could spin just like a regular globe. The thick glass rotated effortlessly as Mary gave it a push with her fingers.

The glass orb swiveled normally a few times when, without warning, it began rotating rapidly. It was like it had a mind of its own!

The rotations grew faster and faster, and within seconds,

the ball of glass was spinning on its stand at top speed. As the globe continue to whirl, the pale glass suddenly lit up.

Mary was so startled she almost dropped it.

“Holy cow!” Ike yelled, jumping back. “What is it?”

“It *is* a globe!” Mary said, once she’d recovered from her shock.

The light of the orb steadily grew brighter, revealing a map of the world where, a moment earlier, there’d only been blank, pale glass. Though the glass was still spinning, the illuminated image of the earth’s surface didn’t move.

The map didn’t look exactly like those found on other globes. It showed no borders of countries, nor did any names of places appear. Mary realized that it looked much like pictures she’d seen of the earth as taken from space, with deep blue oceans and green and brownish land masses. Even white clouds were visible, covering parts of the planet’s surface. It was amazing!

“The clouds are moving,” Helen noted in surprise.

Mary couldn’t figure out how such a small object could project a map of the world in such intricate detail. She watched the clouds slowly drift over the map, gradually changing their shape. Gazing deeper into the glass, more details came into focus. Mary could see the rippling movements of the ocean and slow currents churning deep within the water.

"This is the most unbelievable thing I've ever seen," Mary exclaimed in sheer awe.

Mary turned the globe in her hands, searching again for any indicator of how it worked. As she tipped it upward, Mary was treated to a great view of South America.

"Look at this," she said. "It's the Amazon."

Sure enough, by gazing deep into the globe, Mary distinctly saw a pattern of brownish lines branching like tiny veins through the heart of South America, indicating the mighty river.

"Wow, Mary," said Ike. "I think you broke your record. Seven minutes without mentioning the Amazon. Way to go!"

Mary ignored Ike and fixated on the Amazon. It looked far more beautiful than it did on conventional maps. The rainforest was a deep green, greener than any other part of the globe.

Deep within her, Mary felt a funny sensation. An energy came from the spinning sphere, which called out to her in a silent yet powerful voice.

Touch the globe, she heard in her mind.

Mary slowly moved her finger closer to the glass surface. She felt a surge of nervous anticipation. She could feel that something exciting was about to happen. Looking over at Ike and Helen, Mary saw that they both felt the sensation too.

Was it a good excitement, or were her instincts warning her of danger?

It didn't matter. Mary's urge to touch the globe was too strong. Her finger made contact with the spinning glass, right in the heart of the Amazon. Just as she did, Helen reached out with a gasp and clasped Mary by the arm.

"Don't touch it!" she said, but too late.

In the blink of an eye, something extraordinary happened. The globe grew! Mary wasn't sure if the globe was actually changing in size, but her view of it certainly did. Within a few seconds, the warehouse completely disappeared, and all she could see was a giant earth before her. Mary glanced to one side, to see a frightened Helen. Her iron grip on Mary's arm felt like a vice. Mary looked to the other side for Ike, but he was nowhere to be found.

"Mary?" Helen said nervously. "What's happening?"

Mary returned her gaze to the massive globe in front of her. She felt like she was floating in outer space, looking down at the surface of the planet. Mary could still feel the globe in her hand and her finger pressed against the glass, even though the globe had disappeared. Steadily, the earth continued to grow larger. She and Helen were actually zooming in toward the point where Mary's finger made contact.

Helen shrieked as she felt them moving, and suddenly let

go of Mary's arm.

"Helen!" Mary cried, watching her friend vanished completely into thin air.

Shocked by the turn of events, Mary quickly pulled her finger away from the glass. Her expanded view of the world faded, and the globe returned to its original size, once again visible in her hand.

"What just happened?" Mary asked with a trembling voice.

She turned to Ike, who looked like he was about to throw up.

"You tell me," he said. "You both dis ... you disappeared completely!"

"What?" Mary said. "You couldn't see us either?"

Ike shook his head.

"No," he said. "Helen came back first, then you."

"That thing is freaky," Helen said, clearly disturbed. "It was like we were in a life size version of Google Earth! It felt like we were falling from space."

"What?" said Ike, suddenly not looking quite so woozy.

"That sounds awesome! I want to see what it does!"

Mary wasn't sure what to say. What exactly could this little globe do? Her heart was pounding, but despite the feelings of anxiety, the almost irresistible urge to touch the globe returned.

"Okay Ike, hold on to me and I'll touch it again," she said.

“Just don’t let go. When Helen let go of me, she disappeared.”

“Mary,” Helen said quietly, while squeezing Mary’s shoulder. “Are you sure this is a good idea? I have a really funny feeling about this. I don’t think I’ve ever been more scared in my life.”

“On second thought,” Ike said, letting go of Mary, “maybe Helen’s right. Maybe there’s a reason Grandpa kept this thing hidden here.”

“Don’t worry,” Mary assured them. “Last time everything went back to normal the second I pulled my finger away from the glass. I came right back to the warehouse, and so did Helen when she let go.”

Mary looked at Helen and Ike. She was sure they were curious too. Finally, Helen gave Mary a reluctant nod. She and Ike each put a hand on Mary’s shoulder, and Mary reached her finger toward the spinning glass once again.

“My goodness, you’ve found it!” said a deep voice from somewhere behind them.

Mary turned in surprise to see who had spoken. It was the old janitor. How had he been able to sneak up on her once again? Mary stared at him in confusion, her finger hovered a centimeter away from the glass.

“I’ve been looking for this for forty years, and here it is!” he exclaimed, gleefully, reaching out and taking a step toward Mary. “Hurry, Child, hand it over!”



CHAPTER FIVE

Nowhere to Run

Mary was trapped. She, Ike, and Helen were backed against a wall of crates, and the old janitor was closing in.

“Don’t be afraid, just give me my globe,” he said, with insatiable greed in his eyes.

Instinctively, Mary clutched the still-spinning globe tightly against her chest. She tried to another step backward, but the wall prevented that. There was nowhere to run.

“It doesn’t belong to you,” Mary said, trembling in fear as the janitor loomed nearer. “It was in my grandfather’s travel case.”

“Don’t be foolish, child,” the man snapped back. “It’s

mine, and nothing will stop me from finally getting it!”

Mary let out a small scream of panic when he reached into his jacket pocket and extracted a black handgun. He aimed it directly at her. Mary had been afraid already. Now she was terrified.

“Now, be a good girl and give me the globe. Hand it over without any trouble, and I promise that nobody will get hurt,” said the old man.

He didn’t sound very convincing.

A thousand thoughts raced through Mary’s mind. Her heart was pounding out of control. What could she do? She was petrified with a fear she’d never felt before, but at the same time, she knew that she could *not*, under any circumstance, allow this man to get the globe.

“What are you waiting for?” Ike whispered urgently. “Just give it to him already!”

Mary was still frozen. There had to be something she could do.

Touch the globe. The powerful, penetrating thought came to her mind, just as it had before.

But would that work? When she touched it the first time, Ike said they disappeared. Would they be able to escape the janitor?

Touch the globe! came the urge once again.

With the old man's pistol still trained on her, Mary glanced down nervously at the globe. Her hands were shaking uncontrollably, and she could barely even hold on to the heavy object.

Here goes nothing, she thought, as she reached out with a quivering finger.

Before she could change her mind, Mary pressed against the surface of the spinning glass.

"Wait, stop!" the man yelled, dropping his gun and lunging at them. "Don't touch it!"

His hand was inches away from the globe as he faded into nothing. As before, the room was gone, replaced by the enormous view of the earth below.

Mary braced herself, half expecting to still feel the janitor wrench the globe from her fingers at any moment, invisible or not. But to her great relief, he was gone.

"It worked," she whispered.

"What's happening?" Ike said, fear and surprise heavy in his voice.

"I touched the globe," Mary said. "Whatever you do, don't let go of me, or you'll end up back in the warehouse."

Mary felt both Ike and Helen immediately tighten their grips on her shoulder.

Everybody was silent, and for a moment, all Mary could

hear was the sound of three pounding heartbeats. Below, the dazzling earth shone like a giant blue orb. Mary kept her finger held firmly against the invisible glass, and the earth continued to grow.

“So what are we gonna do?” Helen finally asked. “Just hang out here in space forever?”

“I don’t know,” Mary answered, truthfully. “But I can’t let go now.”

“Won’t we have to go back at some point?” Ike asked.

“I’d rather be floating out here in fake outer space than in that warehouse with a gun pointed at me,” said Mary. “Maybe if we stay out here long enough, the old man will eventually leave.”

“I don’t know,” said Ike. “He looked pretty serious about wanting the globe. What if he just sits there and waits for us to reappear?”

“Eventually he’ll have to leave,” Helen said. “My dad will come looking for us, and when he doesn’t find us, the first thing he’ll do is check the security cameras. He’ll see everything that happened, and I doubt the janitor will want to wait around to deal with him.”

Ike seemed satisfied by the answer, and Mary suggested they stay at least three hours, just to be sure.

“Fine by me,” Ike agreed. “Like you said, better out here

then back there with the crazy guy.”

Throughout their conversation, Mary watched as the massive earth grew before them. She could still feel the globe, now held more tightly in her hands than ever. She pressed as hard as she could, not daring to take her finger off the glass.

Exploring the amazing view before her, Mary’s fear from being held at gunpoint slowly dissolved. Her heart rate slowed, and her thoughts instead turned to the exhilarating experience of zooming in toward this indescribably beautiful view. It was far more vivid than any of her imagined adventures had ever been.

Staying out here for a few hours won’t be that bad at all, she thought.

Secretly, Mary suspected she could stay out there for much longer if she wanted to. The wall map in the museum that she so dearly loved seemed small and dull compared to the magnificent view before her now.

Still, Mary was troubled by the fact that she didn’t know how this globe worked. Question after question raced through her mind as she tried to puzzle out the remarkable object. Was it connected to a satellite or telescope? How close would they zoom in if she kept pressing?

“How close to the earth do you think this will take us?” asked Helen, as if reading Mary’s mind.

"I don't know," Mary answered. "But since we have time, why don't we find out?"

Mary wasn't paying attention to where she pointed at first, but almost subconsciously, began guiding their descent in the direction of the Amazon. As the world got bigger, Mary periodically made slight adjustments by sliding her finger along the glass. She did this instinctively, and it worked. As her finger moved, so did the center of their descent.

The Amazon steadily grew more visible. Its thousands of arms branched through the rainforest. They were now so close that Mary could no longer see the Atlantic or Pacific Oceans to either side of South America. All she saw was a giant mass of green, stretching as far as her eyes could see. Though no borders nor labels were visible, Mary guessed they were approaching somewhere near the point where Brazil, Colombia, and Peru all met.

As they zoomed in even closer, more details became clear. Mary could plainly make out the tops of thousands of trees, all bunched up together to create a solid, vast canopy of leaves.

"Birds!" Ike yelled.

Mary looked, and saw a colorful flock flying far below. They were tiny from this distance, but there was no mistaking those striking blues, reds, and golds.

“They’re macaws,” Mary said, amazed. “And we can actually see them flying. I wonder if we’re really looking at what’s happening in this part of the world right now?”

Eventually, their descent slowed down. Despite the wonder of the experience, Mary couldn’t help but feel a little disappointed that she couldn’t get even closer. She wanted the experience of actually being in the Amazon.

Still, they hadn’t stopped yet, so Mary kept pressing her finger firmly against the glass, hoping that there would still be more to see.

Ike, from behind, fidgeted and shifted in an attempt to get a better view.

“Be careful!” Mary warned. “What if you accidentally let go?”

“Sorry,” Ike said. “I’m just trying to see better.”

“Try now,” Mary said, lifting her elbow.

Ike adjusted his position, attempting to look under Mary’s raised arm. As he did, he smacked his head squarely against her elbow. The jolt caused Mary’s finger to slide far along the glass. Their position shifted rapidly, with green trees flying by beneath them. Mary couldn’t tell where they were, and the land turned to a green blur. She steadied her finger, trying to get their view of the Amazon back into focus.

“What’s wrong with you?” Mary yelled, as their shifting

slowed and trees took shape once again.

The river was now nowhere to be seen.

“Let go, Mary!” Ike pleaded suddenly. “Please! Something isn’t right.”

“What are you talking about? Everything was fine until you ...”

Mary’s words trailed off as the picture came back into full focus. During the confusion of the shifting map, she hadn’t realized how close they’d gotten. The trees were right below them. If this were real, her feet would almost be touching the leaves.

And to Mary’s surprise, they did.

Her shoes brushed against the top of the canopy. The moment they made contact, everything changed. In an instant, Mary could no longer feel the glass against her finger, nor the floor beneath her feet.

Instead, Mary felt different sensations. Falling. Leaves and branches scraping against her body as she tumbled into a very real tree.

Ike and Helen were screaming, but Mary could hardly hear them over her own cries of fear. She bounced like a pinball between branches as she fell. A moment later, it all stopped as her head hit hard against a branch, and everything went dark.

END OF SAMPLE