

The European Adventures #3

# Digging for Trouble

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Images by Rachel Selle

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Cover by Vale Gogin

To my 4<sup>th</sup> graders at OES.

♥ Mrs. Selle ^..^

*“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn’t do than by the ones you did do, so throw off the bowlines, sail away from safe harbor, catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore, dream, discover.”*

*— Mark Twain*



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# Digging for Trouble

## 1 FRIENDS, ROMANS, COUNTRYMEN

The Murphy children pressed their faces against the windows of their rental van. Ten-year-old Simon read from a book as the van whizzed through the English countryside. “The Romans built many roads after they landed in Britain as a way to connect military outposts. Their empire was so big that effective communication became key to keeping control.”

“Wait a second,” interrupted Jane, one eyebrow raised. “We’ve been learning about different European countries in my social studies class. I know Rome is in Italy, not England. Why would the Romans need to control anyone here?”

Jane’s thirteen-year-old sister Maxine said, “Don’t you remember our mystery at Mouse Castle? We learned about the Holy Roman Empire and how it based its name on the first Roman Empire.”

“Mmm, now that you mention it, I guess it sounds familiar,” Jane said. “I’ve learned so much about European history in the last few months. I’m starting to mix things up,” she admitted.

“Well, they called it holy because they were Christian. And they called it Roman because they wanted to be like the original Roman Empire: big, powerful, and long-lasting. After all, the Roman Empire lasted from 27 BCE to 476 CE and included three continents,” Simon replied, reading the dates from his book.

“It sounds like they’re copycats,” Jane said, looking skeptical. Being six years old, copycats were a big deal at school.

“Copycat seems like such a negative word. I would say they wanted to honor the Romans because they were so successful,” Mr. Murphy suggested from the driver’s seat.

“We’ve been studying the Roman Empire in history,” Simon said. “I love it! It’s incredible how they managed to take over so much land and keep it under their control. They didn’t have telephones or computers. That meant they needed to be really organized. I can get behind that.”

“I don’t get the dates, though,” Jane said. “Simon said some letters, right?”

“He sure did, kiddo,” Mr. Murphy replied. “BCE stands for ‘Before Common Era’ and the CE stands for ‘Common Era’ and just means the year one and onward.”

“Hey, Maxine,” Mr. Murphy called back. “Have you learned anything about the Romans in school yet?”

Maxine looked up from her book. “No, not in school. But Simon’s been reading us facts from his book for the last few weeks, so I feel like I’ve studied it,” Maxine teased.

“I ordered the book through the school library so I could do some research for the trip. I can’t believe



all the neat things they invented,” Simon said as he leafed through the book. “It’s mostly about the Romans in Britain, though. They came here later, around 43 CE, and stayed until 410. That’s still a pretty long time.



It’s no wonder they left so many fascinating artifacts for us to dig up!”

“You know, the Romans are responsible for many things that still affect our lives today,” Mr. Murphy said.

“Really, Dad?” Jane asked. “Like what?”

“Well, art and architecture, for sure. Although the Romans were influenced by the ancient Greeks, they took many inventions, tweaked them, and made them even better.”

“I just read a cool fact in my book, Dad,” Simon said. “Do you guys want to hear it?”

Not waiting for a reply, Simon started reading. “The Romans were sport-loving people and built enormous colosseums to hold their events. Architects today use them as a model for modern-day sports stadiums. So, next time you’re enjoying a football game, thank the Romans for the stadium’s tiered seating and oval shape.”



“You know, Simon, I bet we can find even more examples without looking too far,” Mr. Murphy said, pointing to a small farm they were passing. “Farmers worldwide owe the idea of crop rotation to the Romans. They used a special system called food, feed, and fallow to ensure that everyone, including their animals, had enough food. This concept is still used in modern farming.”

“Food and feed are obvious, but what does fallow mean?” asked Simon.

“The Romans divided their fields into three sections. One part was food for people, another was used to grow animal feed, and the fallow section was left without a crop. Soil needs to regenerate and replenish minerals to regain fertility so it can continue producing,” Mr. Murphy explained.

“It is neat to think that inventions from long ago are still important today,” Jane said as she admired the fields.

Mr. Murphy glanced into the mirror and smiled. He was glad the children had agreed to accompany him to England. Because of their interest in history, it wasn’t a hard sell. He looked forward to showing them the ins and outs of a real archaeological dig. He always told them about his adventures in faraway places, but they had never visited one of his sites.

As head archaeologist on the project, the work would keep him busy. However, he was convinced that the excitement of being at a dig, not to mention the mystery weekend at the country manor, would keep the children suitably entertained.

“What’s this area called again, Dad?” Maxine asked.

“The Cotswolds. It’s famous for its charming villages, stone cottages, and thatched roofs. Add the rolling hills and meadows, and you’ve got yourself a postcard.”

"I'm always eager to see new places, but I'm mostly excited to see Agatha," Jane said after they'd passed another field.

"Oh, me too!" Maxine agreed.

Agatha Harrington, their sixteen-year-old cousin, lived with them in Germany. She had spent the first week of their two-week fall vacation at an art class in London. Early that morning, she had caught a National Express bus and was waiting for them at the manor house where the dig was taking place.



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"I hope she learned some new techniques at that course of hers," Mr. Murphy said amiably.

"She was really looking forward to it," Maxine added. "She said the course was specially made for people who needed help sketching faces."

"But Aggie is the best artist ever. She doesn't need any help," Jane said defensively.

"Our Agatha is certainly talented, but everyone needs help sometimes," Mr. Murphy said. "It's just like me, kids. You all know I'm the greatest cook ever. Nobody can beat my Saturday morning pancakes. But even I need to follow a recipe from time to time."

The children looked at each other and burst into laughter. Their dad was the worst cook ever. Their mom often joked that he could somehow manage to burn water.

"Luckily, you won't have to cook this vacation, Dad," Simon said.

"And boy am I glad! I'm looking forward to sampling some delicious English food. Especially English pies," Mr. Murphy replied.

"You always say that I have to eat real food first before I have dessert, Dad. You should do the same thing," Jane said.

Mr. Murphy laughed. "Well, I should lead by example, my dear, but I didn't mean sweet pies. Traditional English pies are a mixture of meat, vegetables, and gravy baked in a deliciously flaky crust. And now that I think of it," he started, chuckling, "you'll never guess who invented the pie."

"Well, gee, let me guess," Simon said. "The Romans!"

"Right-o, Simon," Mr. Murphy replied.

"Mom always sings a song about blackbirds baked in a pie. Is that the same kind of pie you're talking about, Dad?" Maxine asked.

"Sing a Song of Sixpence is an old British nursery rhyme. And given America's shared culture with Britain, many songs, stories, and foods are common to both countries," he replied.

Little Jane started humming the song, and the others jumped in with the words. Soon, the whole car was merrily singing the nursery rhyme.

After a few rounds, the group settled down, and silence fell over the group. Simon and Maxine entertained themselves by looking out the window and enjoying the autumn foliage and the mist rising from the green hills of the English countryside.



An hour later, the van drove up a long gravel road that led to Beresford Hall. Lovely hedgerows led up to a gigantic stone house set back from the driveway. A lush green lawn and low stone fences encircled the house, and rolling fields surrounded the property as far as the eye could see.

Since the group had left London before dawn, it was still quite early in the morning. Jane, always up for a cat nap, had fallen asleep on Maxine's shoulder. She shook Jane lightly and whispered, "Jane, wake up. We're here." Jane didn't budge. *She's impossible to wake up*, Maxine thought as she rolled her eyes and remembered the many early mornings spent trying to get Jane out of bed in time for school. Maxine had an idea and tried again. "Jane, wake up. Agatha's here." This worked like a magic charm.

Jane's eyes popped open, and she sat up straight. "Aggie!" she cried with glee. Luckily, Maxine's bluff turned out to be a good one.

Standing in front of the house, waving excitedly, was Agatha. Her blonde hair blew gently in the slight breeze, and the broad smile on her face told everyone in the car she was happy to see them.

The reunion of cousins was a whirlwind of questions and hugs. Each wanting to know how her class went and Agatha wanting to hear about their week in Frankfurt without her. As they caught up, a young woman came out the front door and stood to the side. Seeing her, Agatha waved her over.

"Hi," said the new girl warmly. "My name is Nova Corson. I'm the student director here at Beresford Hall. Your cousin told me so many fun stories about you this morning. I feel like we're old friends." Turning to Mr. Murphy, she held out her hand and spoke with a tinge of awe. "I am so honored to meet you, Dr. Murphy. I've read all your books, studied all your research papers, and know all of your biggest discoveries."

Mr. Murphy, not one to get easily embarrassed, turned red. "Oh, my," he said. "I am honored to be invited back to Beresford Hall. The last time I was here was over ten years ago. I had the privilege of working with some archaeology students who, after their studies were finished, became esteemed colleagues. I hope the same happens this time."

"The students on the dig are equally excited to work with you. We are all learning a lot, and everyone gets along well. But unfortunately, Lord Beresford—" She stopped speaking and waved her hand as if to shoo away a fly. "You know what, never mind. Now is not the time. Let's get you all settled and into your rooms."

"No, no," Mr. Murphy pressed. "If something is bothering you, I want to know. Please, I'm here to direct the dig, but sometimes that means dealing with a whole host of other problems. Trust me, I've seen it all. So, please, tell me what's on your mind."

"Well, if you're sure," Nova consented with a sigh. "You've probably heard that Lord Beresford—" Nova stopped and looked in the children's direction. "He's the man who owns the manor. He wanted to

make some extra money, so he partnered with a party planning firm that runs mystery weekends at Beresford Hall. It's actually quite fun. I participated in one last month."

"That sounds pretty cool, Nova," Simon said. "Can you tell us more about it? Maybe Lord Beresford would let us participate this weekend?"

"Well, actually, I have a surprise for you," Mr. Murphy said. "I've already reached out to the coordinator of the mystery weekends. He's booked you in for this weekend. His name is Atticus Arrington. Isn't that funny, Agatha?"

Agatha, whose last name was Harrington, smiled and said, "I met him briefly this morning. You know guys, we'd better get our magnifying glasses out, polish them up, and get ready for a mystery!" She winked at Jane.

"What a great surprise, Dad," Maxine said, giving her father a hug.

"Given your history of solving real-life mysteries, I knew you would want to take part," Mr. Murphy said as he started taking out the group's suitcases from the back of the van.

Jane rubbed her hands together and said, "I love a good case. We always catch the bad guys."

"Nova, I'm so sorry. We got sidetracked and didn't get to the problem with Lord Beresford," Mr. Murphy said, setting a suitcase on the gravel driveway.

"It's OK, Dr. Murphy. I would rather sit down and talk about it over some tea. Can we meet quickly after you've unpacked? Afterward, I need to meet the students and give them their jobs for the day."

"OK, but only if you're sure it can wait." He looked at Nova, who nodded.

"I'll bring these guys to the rooms and meet you in the café. Let's say in twenty minutes?"

"Let me show you to your rooms. I have a few minutes to spare," Nova replied.

"Alrighty, kiddos," Mr. Murphy said. "Let's get this van emptied and then wake up with a nice cuppa!"

"Cup of what?" Jane asked, feeling like she'd missed something.

Mr. Murphy laughed. "A cuppa is the English way of saying a cup of tea."

Jane grimaced. "I don't like tea. I want to have a cuppa hot chocolate instead."

They all laughed. Mr. Murphy shook his head. "Not quite, Janey. Not quite."

Soon, the van was empty and the group headed into the house. The grand, wooden door swung open to



reveal an interior almost completely covered in dark wood. In front of them was the most enormous staircase they had ever seen. The first few steps led to a landing, which split and went up either side of the house.

The interior teemed with pictures hung haphazardly next to each other. Men and women on horseback hung next to portraits of people dressed in their finest clothes.

As Nova led the group up to the first landing, she pointed to a portrait. The ornate gold frame had a small engraved plaque underneath. “This is a portrait of the first Lord Beresford. He was given the land in 1716 by King George I because of his support against the Jacobites. I’m sure you’ve heard of the Jacobite Rising of 1715.” Nova turned from the picture to the children with an expectant look.

The blank stares and wide eyes told her everything she needed to know. “Alrighty, that’s a history lesson for another day,” she chuckled. “Anyhow, with his new land, he started a profitable farm and designed and



built the first section of Beresford Hall. Over the years, the main building has been expanded, and other smaller structures have been added. It was during one of these renovations that traces of the Roman villa were discovered. As the builders were digging the foundation for a new greenhouse, they found a mosaic. Luckily for us, they knew it was something special and called in an expert from London. The Museum of London Archaeology sent a team

and they set to work carefully excavating the first section of our dig.”

“You know, I met the former Lord Beresford many, many years ago when I was here for my very first dig,” Mr. Murphy said. “He was the father of the current lord and quite an extraordinary person.”

“I’ve heard so many stories about him. He’s kind of like a superhero in English archaeological circles,” Nova said, continuing up the steps.

“Was he a famous archaeologist or something?” Simon asked.

“No, no, nothing like that. But he was what we call an amateur enthusiast. Most importantly, he had the idea of opening the site to universities. The site used to be accessible by paying customers only,” Nova explained. “Because of the limited access, nothing else was found after the initial dig.”

“That’s so silly,” Agatha said. “You would think that they would be eager to find as many things as possible.”

“Back then, they had little to no knowledge of what might lie underneath the ground. Their knowledge of Roman life and civilizations in Britain was also limited. The family probably found the excavation work tiresome and just wanted their peace,” Nova said.

Seeing Jane’s face, Agatha leaned down and whispered, “It means they were probably annoyed by all the digging.”

“Luckily, we are better informed today, or our need for adventure and mystery is greater,” Nova added with a smile.

“When I first met the former Lord Beresford, I was impressed with how knowledgeable he was about the artifacts we found,” Mr. Murphy said. “Because of the estate, he had always taken an interest in archaeology. Although he went to Oxford University and became a lawyer, or solicitor as they’re called in Britain, he kept up with the archaeology world. He was convinced that there was more history hiding beneath the ground. Boy was he right! Because he allowed universities to come in and excavate, we were able to find many more artifacts,” Mr. Murphy explained.

“Not to mention all the students that learned their trade here,” Nova added.

“How lucky! Imagine if all that stuff was still hidden underground,” Jane said.

Nova stopped again in the hallway and faced the group, looking serious. “Yes, but it’s been slow the last five years. The teams aren’t finding as much as they used to, and now the site’s main purpose is to allow newer students to learn the ins and outs of a dig. There’s nothing like real-life experience to master certain techniques.”

“Sounds like a great place for learning the profession,” Agatha said.

“Absolutely. I will be doing a lot of teaching while I’m here. I’ll have a few lectures in the library and will work one-on-one with the students,” Mr. Murphy said.

“Well, that’s what I wanted to talk to you about, Dr. Murphy,” Nova said hesitantly. “Because the students aren’t finding many artifacts, Lord Beresford has informed us,” she looked down and gulped, “that the dig will be ending soon. Permanently.”

“What!” exclaimed Mr. Murphy, dropping his suitcases to the floor in shock.