

# Chapter Five

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## Buried Alive

The following morning was as crisp and spring fresh as a newly starched shirt. The Leadington twins arose with a curious optimism hugging their hearts which unfortunately did not last long as they discovered that somebody had stolen their horses.

“Bats, buttons and balderdash! Well really!” exclaimed Arthur Canarthy, “What is the world coming to! It will take us ages to reach Vienna on foot now.”

“Can’t we just buy some more?” suggested Albert, “I mean we’ve got enough money.”

“That’s not the point and besides, I shall end up dying a pauper at the rate we are going!”

“Looks like we’re goin’ to ‘ave to but I don’t think we ‘ave much choice,” frowned Ebenezer Smythe. “I’ll ask Franz, ‘e’s bound to know where we can purchase some more ‘orses I’ll go an’ find ‘im now.”

And sure enough Franz Tripenburg did. “It’s a terrible business when thieves rob from one of our friends. But rest assured we’ll find the culprits and when I do I’ll cut off their hands,” Wolfgang snarled indignantly.

“I won’t tolerate some common opportunist stealing on my patch!” growled Franz, shaking his head angrily. “Anyway, I do

have a contact that lives about half an hour's walk from here and he's bound to be able to help."

"Well, let's go then," Arthur Canarthy nodded impatiently.

They followed the Tripenburg brothers to the outskirts of some woodland, walking under a leafy canopy that sprouted from the trees, until Franz halted abruptly in a small clearing.

"You're going to have to wait here. My contact is somewhat of a hermit. He has a shack just beyond those firs," announced Franz. "He's a little wary of strangers though, so it might be best if Wolfgang and I speak to him first. He's more likely to settle on a good price for the horses if we negotiate with him on your behalf. Stay put and I'll signal for you in a minute. It shouldn't take long."

A few moments later Franz reappeared with three horses and called over to them.

“Well knock me down with a feather!” exclaimed Arthur Canarthy, “If I’m not very much mistaken those are our horses!”

“So they is,” growled Ebenezer Smythe.

Quickly they began to walk towards him, but had only gone a few steps when suddenly the ground collapsed beneath their feet and they found themselves falling.

They all landed heavily on a wooden floor and, as they looked round, the small group realised they were in what appeared to be a huge tall coffin. A carpet of fallen debris surrounded them, made of leaves and broken branches.

“Flibbertigibbets! What the ‘ell just ‘appened?” panted Ebenezer Smythe, rubbing

his elbow and dusting himself down. “Is everybody alright?”

“I think so,” groaned Florrie, pulling a twig from her hair.

“It would appear that we have fallen into a hunter’s trap of sorts or something similar,” mused the children’s guardian. “It’s just as well we weren’t out here by ourselves or we might have been in real trouble. Er, fellows! Could you give us a hand please? Perhaps you would be so good as to throw us a rope!” Arthur Canarthy called out to the Tripenburg brothers.

“Oh dear, that was unlucky!” commented Franz, peering down at them.

“Yes, it was rather but we all seem to be in one piece, so as I said if you could assist us in getting out then that would be most helpful.”

“Yeah, come on lads! Don’t just stand there - get us out of ‘ere!”

“We’d love to help you,” smirked Franz, the mock concern of his expression peeling away like onion layers to reveal something altogether more sinister. “But no can do I’m afraid. You see if we did Mr. Canarthy would realise we’d liberated him of all this money,” he continued, holding up a bag of coins.

It was at that point the horrible realisation that the two brothers weren’t going to help settled on them as quick as mercury and they started to panic, especially when Wolfgang began to drag a wooden lid over the entrance.

“Oi! Wot you doin’? This ain’t funny lads! Quit foolin’ around.”

“It’s called covering our tracks,” shouted Franz.

“But I trusted you!” yelled Ebenezer.

“More fool you then,” retorted Franz.

“Listen to me! You can keep the money! Keep all of it! Please don’t do this! Just let us out!” shouted Arthur Canarthy.

“I’m afraid that won’t be possible. Now, as much as I would love to stay and chat, we have work to do,” chuckled Franz, as he helped his brother finish putting the lid over the coffin.

“No!” bawled Arthur Canarthy, desperately trying to claw up the walls, “No! Please, I’m begging you not to do this! You’ll be murdering us!”

But the noise of their terrified screams and pleas clearly fell on deaf ears, as they could hear earth being shovelled on top of the cover overhead. The darkness was completely

suffocating, like having tar smeared over your face.

A small trickle of dirt fell through a crack in the wood, accelerating their fear.

“Bleedin’ ‘ell, this ain’t good,” gulped Ebenezer, striking a match and looking up. “It’s too ‘igh up to push the lid back.”

“What are we going to do?” cried Florrie, clinging to her brother.

“Albert get your penknife out an’ climb onto me shoulders, maybe you can jigger it open before they bury us completely!” urged Mr. Smythe.

“We’re all going to die! We’re going to die a slow and horrible death and nobody will even know we are down here!” wailed the children’s guardian hysterically, as he pulled at the few greasy strands on his balding head.

“Arthur, pull yourself together! Come an’ ‘old the matches, get strikin’ ‘em so the lad can see wot ‘e’s doin’!”

Albert scrambled up on the smuggler’s back as quick as a monkey and frantically tried to prise the lid off, twisting the knife this way and that, but to no avail, as too much earth had already been piled on top.

“I can’t breathe! The walls feel as if they’re closing in on me,” gasped Mr. Canarthy, beads of sweat pricking through his skin as he shakily lit another match.

“It’s no good!” Albert shouted.

“Keep tryin’, it’s our only chance!”

“I am but it won’t budge!”

“Haven’t you got anything in your satchel that might help us?” Florrie asked desperately, as her brother climbed back down.

“Nothin’ that will be of use to get us out of ‘ere,” replied the smuggler, shaking his head.

“We’re doomed! We’re all doomed!” shrieked Arthur Canarthy, pummelling his fists against the wall. “Help! Somebody help us!”

“I’m frightened,” whimpered Florrie, starting to cry.

“Wait! The needle and thread that Lily Divitan gave us - the one that can unstitch time, we could try it and see what happens!” exclaimed Albert.

“Good idea lad! We certainly ain’t got nothin’ to lose but we need to calculate ‘ow many stitches we’ve got to do before we fell down this bleedin’ ‘ole.”

However, as it happened, there was no need to use the white witch’s gift, as at that

precise moment they suddenly heard a faint sound overhead, a scratching, scraping sound and a voice called out, “Hold on we’re coming!”

“Hurry! We’re down here!” yelled Albert, as the others joined in.

After what seemed like a month of half crescent moons, the lid of the coffin was wrenched back and sunlight stung them once again in a way they never thought they would appreciate.

“Thank god!” exclaimed the children’s guardian, as they all squinted up to see who their rescuer was.

“It’s all right, you’re safe now. Are any of you injured?”

“Just cuts and bruises I think.”

“I’m going to lower a ladder so that you can climb up,” said the voice, and before they

knew it they were standing back on solid ground, surrounded by a most peculiar bunch of characters.

There was a gentleman who was as tall as a tree, an albino, a bearded lady, a tiny midget, a man who appeared to have a horn growing out of his head, a bald woman with the longest nose the children had ever seen, and another who was as wide as a sofa.

“Are you all alright?” asked the tall man, handing them a flask of water.

“Yes, thank you. How did you know we were down there?” asked Mr. Canarthy shakily.

“I was collecting wood when I saw two men digging. They looked suspicious and ran off the moment they saw me. I figured they were up to no good so I went to get the others.”

“I’ll bleedin’ well kill those two if I ever see ‘em again,” growled Ebenezer Smythe.

“We can’t thank you enough. You saved our lives,” said the children’s guardian, shaking the man’s hand profusely.

“We found these horses here. Are they yours?”

“Yes, thank goodness! I thought they’d taken everything,” replied Mr. Canarthy.

“They must have left them behind when they panicked. Anyway, we’re camped out just over there, so why don’t you come with us and get yourselves cleaned up. It looks like you’ve had quite an ordeal.”

“You can say that again!”