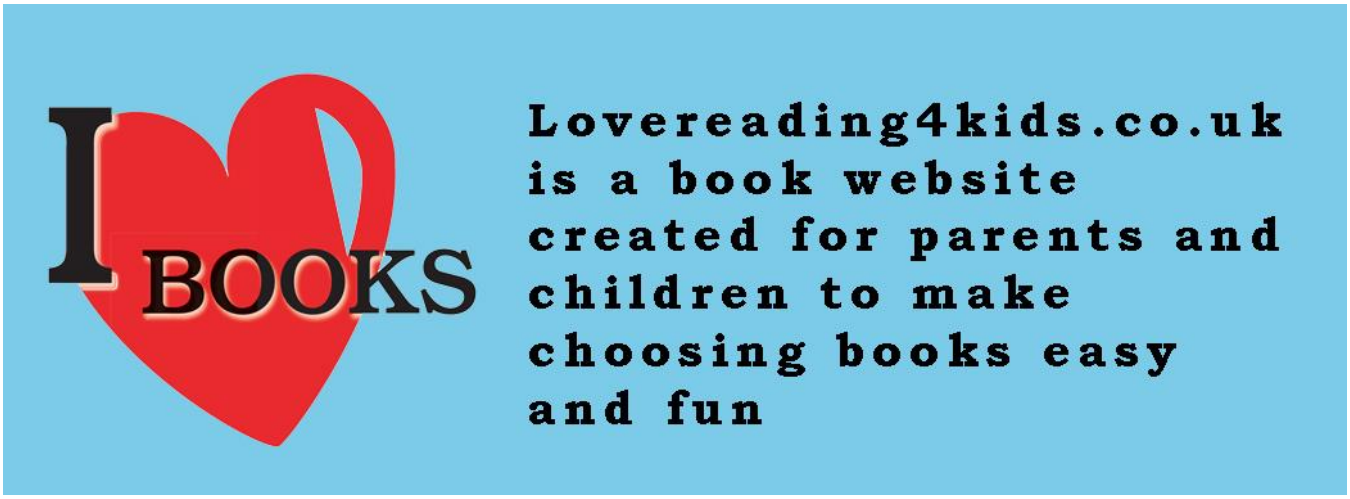


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PART I

THE TOOTH

HE WALKED THE BADLANDS FOR TWO DAYS WITHOUT *food or water. The boy was naked, painted in white clay, searching for the gift he had seen in his vision. With jagged stones he raked his chest, and still heaven and earth wouldn't open their secrets to him. He began to despair. He was lost and needed to be guided. He was a boy and needed to be a man. He staggered on into the night, hoping dawn would bring the fulfillment of his vision. But it came instead from the darkness.*

Its eye was a gaping hole in a skull built from black bones. The boy struggled with the beast as it tried to drag him beneath the earth. Kicking, yelling, he pushed against the dark teeth to keep the jaws from closing on him. The teeth pierced his hands. He was pulled down to a place without moon or stars, but he fought on. Light disappeared, and time with it. Finally he was still and thought he'd died and would never see the dawn again.

When he woke, the sun was rising and he was walking, streaked with blood, a black tooth clutched in his fist.

1.
THE ELASMOSAURUS

I WOULDN'T SAY MY FATHER WAS A VIOLENT man, but he wasn't afraid to talk with his fists. And I was glad of it. Because if he hadn't belted Professor Cartland that night in the Academy of Natural Sciences, I wouldn't have had the chance to see Rachel's eyes up close.

When I first saw her in the lobby, I didn't even know her name. She was just an ordinary-looking girl, dowdily dressed with all the flair of a cabbage moth. Her nose and jaw were too big to make her face delicate. Fair hair, quite fine, reddish tinged, parted severely in the middle and pulled back from her face.

She stood out because there were only two girls in the entire lobby—and the other one was Anne Atkinson. I'd glimpsed Anne several times before. She was the oldest young person I'd ever seen. Bowed and strangled in bonnet and lace. Rickety as the aging uncle she steadied during monthly meetings.

And then there was Rachel. I wondered who she'd come with.

She left the crowded lobby, where people were talking before the lecture, and wandered into one of the galleries. Behind the giant Irish elk and prehistoric turtle was *Hadrosaurus foulkii*.

It was still an impressive brute, no matter how many times I'd seen it. Just sixteen years ago Joseph Leidy had dug it up. The first dinosaur skeleton unearthed from American soil. Mounted on its rear legs, it stood fourteen feet tall. Twenty-six feet long, head to tail. Forelimbs gripping a fake tree added for support. You could go and stand right underneath the rib cage.

She was staring at it intently, a vertical line between her eyebrows.

"Never seen it before?" I asked.

She only half turned, just enough to glimpse me, and then directed her gaze back to the hadrosaur.

"No."

Just no. "You're not from here?"

Since it went up several years back, the hadrosaur had become such a popular attraction that the academy had cut back its visiting hours and started charging admission. I figured everyone in Philadelphia had seen it by now.

"We're visiting from New Haven."

"Ah." She didn't seem at all interested in me. Most girls were. I wondered if I smelled like the pickle I'd eaten with dinner. More likely she was just shy. I wanted her to turn and look at me properly. "Those aren't the real bones," I said.

"I know. They're just plaster casts."

I studied her anew. "How'd you know that?"

"I read an article."

I looked around to make sure Professor Leidy wasn't nearby. Whispered anyway. "They never found the skull, so they had to invent one."

"They based it on an iguana."

She was getting more intriguing by the second. And then she looked at me straight on for the first time. Her gaze was frank. No flirtatious lift of an eyebrow, no smile. I got the feeling she'd be just as happy without me. Happier maybe. For a moment I couldn't think of anything to say. Unusual for me.

"That's a very pretty hairpin," I lied.

"No, it's not." She gave a little sigh, like she was disappointed in me.

I'd never met a girl reluctant to talk about her hair ornaments. I chuckled. For a second I thought she might too.

I added, "I just thought it was . . . unique in its . . ."

"It's just a regular hairpin," she said, touching it.

The tip of her left thumb and index finger were both stained with ink.

She saw my gaze and answered before I asked. "I draw my father's specimens for him."

Tonight, everyone crammed into this building was a naturalist of some sort. Probably her father was just another gentleman dabbler.

"He's a collector?"

"Yes. And he's quite exacting in his drawings."

"You must be very skilled."

There was no one who didn't like being complimented, but she

showed no sign of pleasure, only tilted her head slightly and said, "It's very challenging. I hope to get better with more practice."

"My father's speaking tonight."

She looked genuinely surprised. "You're Michael Bolt's son?"

I nodded at the large display case against the wall. "That's his *Laelaps aquilunguis* in there."

My father might not have been the first to discover a dinosaur in America, but he was the second. What he found was only a partial skeleton, but I'd memorized every bone: mandible; clavicles; both humeri; femur; tibia; fibula; phalanges; lumbar, sacral, and caudal vertebrae. The pieces were enough to let him guess its size and weight and eating habits. And win him the right to name it. *Eagle-clawed terrible leaper*. A carnivore, with a curved claw to do its slashing and killing.

"There's talk of making a cast and mounting it one day," I said.

She walked over and looked solemnly at the bones. Completely absorbed. I worried she might've forgotten me altogether.

"You seem very interested in dinosaurs," I remarked.

Still not looking at me. "I am. I know more about snakes, though."

"Really?"

"I keep several," she told me.

I was delighted. "We have a tortoise at home. Horatio. He roams around. We also have a Gila monster."

She turned to face me. "Does he roam around too?"

"She. No, we keep her in a vivarium. She likes raw eggs and getting her head scratched. She's venomous, of course."

I usually got a dainty squeal when I said this, but she simply nodded, wanting more.

"We have a fernery in our back room with tree frogs and salamanders. Our housekeeper complains. She keeps finding them in the sink."

This time she actually smiled. "I adore salamanders."

"Did you know they can regrow lost limbs?"

"Yes," she said, which was a bit disappointing, since this was the one good thing I knew about salamanders.

"I know a fair bit about them," she said. "Of course, there are over four hundred species, so there's a great deal to know."

We talked about salamanders. She got fairly animated, and I think I did too, because I liked this kind of talk, and it was rare to have with anyone my age—and never with a young woman. I'd never been more aware of a girl's scent—not just the pleasant floral of soap, but the smell of her hair and heat of her skin. To my horror, I felt myself stiffening between my legs, and I silently counted backward from ten. Which usually worked, but didn't now, so I imagined Mrs. Shaw, my former history teacher, which *always* worked.

It did, but slowly. To distract myself—and her, in case she looked down—I asked how she'd gotten interested in the natural sciences.

"I spent a lot of time looking into puddles," she said.

That made me laugh. And then she told me how she got her first magnifying glass early on. I liked the way she talked, very direct and honest. For such a plain girl she was extraordinarily

interesting. She asked me what sparked my scientific interests.

I shrugged. "I guess I had a knack with bones. No shortage in my house."

"Your building blocks and jigsaw puzzles," she said with another small smile.

"My father taught me their names. By six I could put a foot together. At eight I did a whole squirrel. Sometimes at parties he'd drag me out in front of everyone, give me a bunch of bones, and time me. Once I put together a raccoon in three minutes. I can put pretty much anything together."

She said nothing, then abruptly, "Well, I look forward to your father's lecture."

"Maybe we'll have a chance to talk afterward."

"Excuse me," she said, walking away, and I wondered if I smelled like pickle after all.

I went to the ladies' lavatory and splayed my fingers against the cool marble counter, waiting for the color to leave my cheeks. It was unusual for a young man to talk to me, especially such a handsome one, but I knew exactly why he had. I was the only young woman in the room, and no doubt he was bored and wanted to try his charms on someone. Certainly he was charming, and knew it. And all that talk about how fast he could sort bones: so boastful.

Still, he did not condescend when I revealed my interest in salamanders. I liked that very much. Our conversation felt like one between equals. Almost. That was rare.

He was tall, with a mop of wavy, coarse hair. He looked like one of those puppies that hadn't grown into its body yet but gave all the signs of its full size to come: the paws, the huge eyes. I'm not sure I'd ever seen a more perfect nose. It sloped at just the right angle, with a perfect set of nostrils at the end. How nostrils could be perfect, I didn't know, but his were.

Darwin talked about advantageous traits, how they're all divvied up and it's all random—and my portion did not favor physical beauty, and there was no point pretending it did. In the mirror I saw the perpetual disappointment that was my face. Every day, all around me, I saw beauty blooming in fields or flitting between trees or frozen in marble in an art gallery or simply walking down the street. But the closest I came to it was drawing it, line by line, in ink.

You fool. You felt bathed in the warmth of his eyes, but they've practiced that look on many girls, no doubt, that easy smile. He just wanted a bit of attention, and you would have to do.

There. My pulse was calm; the blotchy redness had left my cheeks. No more nonsense. Easy as slamming a gate.

When I returned to the lobby, I found Papa looking for me, could sense his impatience in the angle of his domed head. Everyone was going into the lecture hall.

"I saw you talking to a young man," he remarked.

"He's Michael Bolt's son."

"Ah. The spawn of our illustrious speaker."

And then we were inside and taking our seats. I casually looked around the hall but didn't find the boy, and then the

chairman of the academy came out to give a tedious preamble and make the introductions.

"And now please join me in welcoming Professor Michael Bolt."

"Professor," my father whispered mockingly. "Difficult, without a university post."

Plenty of times I'd heard Papa complain that Bolt had no formal degree. That he was mostly self-taught, an amateur with no teaching position. In fact, I was quite certain my father had just rejected Bolt's application to teach at Yale, where my father chaired the paleontology department.

Professor Bolt bounded to the stage. He was very tall and had feet so large his shoes must have been specially made for him. He was in every way an overgrown version of his son. Or I supposed a *grown* version. He had an eager forward lurch, a sway of the shoulders that made him seem off balance. But he didn't stumble; he rocked and rolled. He had a well-tended beard and a slim jaunty mustache, which gave him the look of an eager fox, especially with his ample hair spiked out to either side like alert ears.

And when he spoke, Professor Bolt was a mesmerist.

He began by telling us how a series of crates had arrived from a certain Dr. Hawthorn from Kansas, a dentist by training, but an amateur naturalist. How he'd opened the crates like the Ark of the Covenant and drawn out, one by one, the bones hastily wrapped in newspaper. They were still burdened with the chalk they'd been dug from. Bone after bone, each of a size that promised a creature of huge proportions.