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BIG CAT

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Tara looked over in the direction of the voice. She could see a girl kneeling in a similar shallow pit, holding a hammer. She was peering at something in the dirt. A boy appeared next to her and handed her a chisel. He then sat back on his ankles. He caught sight of Tara and grinned.

"Hello! I'm Ortez. Welcome to the dig. This is Ayesha. She thinks she's about to make an important palaeontological discovery!"

"A what?" asked Tara.

"She thinks she's found a fossil!"

Tara stepped up out of her hole and went over to theirs. *A dinosaur fossil?* she wondered. She felt a surge of excitement. Ayesha was gently chiselling away at the rock on one side of the hole. Dust puffed in all directions with each bang of the hammer.





Suddenly she stopped and sighed.

"False alarm," said Ayesha, shaking her head. "It's just another piece of stone."

"How long have you been digging here? Have you found anything yet?" asked Tara.

"Not yet," replied Ortez, "but this is a good spot. A river flowed into an ancient sea here, in prehistoric times. But the Earth's crust moved and the sea bed was slowly pushed up to the surface. It took millions of years, but now it's a green hillside far away from the coast. There are places like this all over the world, and they are usually very good spots for finding fossils."

No entry

Danger

Chapter 3

"What's happening up there?" asked Tara, pointing up the hillside. "Are you digging there, too?"

Huge deep pits had been dug out of the ground, further up the hill. Some still had diggers and bulldozers in them, noisily scraping out the earth and rock. Almost the whole of the top of the hill had been cut away.

"No," laughed Ayesha. "We don't use big diggers like that on our site. They'd smash to bits any fossils we found."

"That's a building site," explained Ortez. "They're building a theme park, with rides to go on and playgrounds to play in. Everyone likes the idea – plenty of jobs for people living nearby and lots of fun for their families. All that digging showed lots of different layers of rock. And a lot of the rock was ancient sand and mud. That's how we knew this place was perfect for finding fossils. So they let us in to have a look."

Tara could see coloured stripes of rock where the diggers had been working.

"Couldn't they stop the building work while you check for fossils?" asked Tara.

Ayesha put down the chisel and shook her head.

"No. The building site isn't a safe place to go poking around for fossils. Besides, we'd be holding them up, delaying the building work. They have roller coasters and restaurants to build."

Ortez knelt down in the hole again. He scooped away some of the loose dirt.

"They let us dig down here because the bulldozers won't be clearing this bit for another month. So we haven't got long to check out as much of this area as we can. That's why there are so many of us, spread out all over the hillside. But the weather has been terrible. Rain and wind have slowed us down even more."

