



I. The Ark in London

Sir Stamford and Lady Raffles,
1824–6

They could not save the animals, Tom's collection, so lovingly assembled – the pet monkeys, the bears, the tapir, the tiger. 'My Noah's ark', he'd called it – all now aflame on one great, terrible funeral pyre. Sophia knows she will never forget the hellish crescendo of the beasts' barks and cries, loud even above the cracking of the burning wood and the thunder of the hungry flames; the frantic, futile flapping of countless feathered wings against iron bars. No! She will not forget it, not for as long as she lives. However long that might be.

The human cargo has been a little more fortunate: bodies packed into two little boats the crew had managed to free in the chaos, now at a safe distance. The longboat had been aflame before they even got to it. Sophia is half naked and, as she watches the sheet of fire thrust ever higher into the abyss of the heavens, only now coming round from the daze of slumber

broken by panic. The night had been thick and dark as tar but the carcass of the *Fame* is blazing more wildly with every quickened heartbeat; no longer a ship but a bonfire shifting against an unseen horizon. The surface of the ocean is seemingly alight all round them, like molten metal. Like Hell itself.

But worse is to come: the black mouth of the ocean that swallows them once the ship has eventually burned itself out, the nothingness that gnaws at them as they drift on the newly silent seas. Unseen faces, huddled together. Sophia clutches the boy to her, her nephew, as Tom in turn clutches her close. Together they float, on and endlessly on, in the total, maddening darkness. Sophia slips in and out of consciousness. All are cold without their clothes, thirsty without water, desperate without much hope. Everything they own is dancing its way to the bottom of the ocean. After all the ordeals they had already been through, a lesser woman might have wished herself there too.

But Lady Raffles is nothing if not a fighter. She has not survived the East, which snatched four of their little children from them, only to die tonight. On she clings. On and endlessly on.

It was a Sunday when they finally sailed up to the English coast: Sunday, the 22nd of August, 1824. Six months after the fateful, fiery night on the *Fame*, Sophia stood on the deck as the *Mariner* – which had borne them and their hastily assembled replacement possessions for four frightening months – made its final approach into Plymouth. It was a cool, sunny morning. Seagulls glided above, cutting between the ship's sails, and the wind tugging at Sophia's hair made her eyes water until her face was sticky with salt and tears. They were home.

And Cousin Thomas there to greet them! Sophia was giddy with a relief that dressed itself up as joy. Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles – *her* Tom – was less buoyant, and complained of a headache. He told his cousin, who had rushed to meet them after his

morning sermon in Devonport, that it was *from the effects of landing*. As Tom made his formal goodbyes to Captain Young and his crew, and greeted the few friends that were gathered to meet them, Sophia confided to the minister that her husband had not been well of late.

But then, of course, he had not been well before they had even set out from Bencoolen. Failing health was the reason cited for their premature departure from that wretched place, for their forfeiture of the few more years of the Governor-General's salary they had reckoned with. Money was not enough to keep them there, with only ghosts for company, at the mercy of a climate and a land that had turned on them. No, the East India Company could keep its money. She had not been sorry to turn her back on the directors, so comfortable, so ignorant in London.

She did not speak this aloud. She did not need to: Cousin Thomas knew of their many great sorrows. Tom was more broken by it than she was, it seemed. Sophia looked over to where her husband stood a few yards away on the quayside, and the cleric's gaze followed her own. They stood a moment, watching the head with its distinctive snatch of fox-coloured hair between hat and collar. The face they both loved was turned away from them in conversation. But they observed Tom's stoop: was it more pronounced than usual? The bent back, which, he said, resulted from the ten years he had spent hunched over the clerks' desks of East India House. Then he had been just a boy, a stranger to Sophia. Now her husband of seven years had turned forty-three, had passed that milestone in the timeless, shapeless Atlantic Ocean. It was no novelty to him. He had passed other birthdays at sea and – like their first child, their poor little Charlotte – he had been born at sea. Albeit a sunnier one, a kinder one than that which had nearly snatched him back. Oh, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles was nothing if not a man of the world.

And he was her world. Sophia could not bear to think of what would become of her if she were to lose him too. He was the reason she had set her jaw and clung to life as all the forces of the earth and the heavens had conspired against them in their battle to get home. The *Mariner* had been shaken so violently that she had been roped to her couch for days on end, water pouring into the cabin around her. Yes, she had clung on for her Tom, and for Ella. How she wanted to see dear, dear Ella, who – thank God! – they had been able to send home before she, too, could be taken by the sickness that had so rapidly robbed them of the other children.

And now here they were. They were home. Home and alive – albeit barely. Tom seemed somewhat buoyed by the crowds that were now gathering on the quayside, come to see the man and his wife who had famously survived the terrible fire at sea. Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles always rose to the demands of a public occasion. Sophia thought she could see a little colour returning to his cheeks.

When it came, the much longed-for reunion with Ella was a subdued affair. Her parents were strangers to her. It had been more than two years since they had hurriedly sent her home from the unforgiving East, the sole survivor of their brood. Then she had been just a babe in her nurse's arms. Sophia remembered the terrible countdown to the arrival of the boat that they had decided would bear away their remaining three children after the burial of their beloved Leopold. Yet only Ella had survived long enough to be loaded on to the *Borneo* with Nurse Grimes when it came. The others – even the one yet to be born – would never leave that foreign soil.

And here she was before them once again: their one small miracle. That same bundled babe now a rosy-cheeked, healthy little girl. Ella knew no other life than the one she had shared

these past years with her grandparents in Cheltenham. Her infant mutterings and musings betrayed no memory of the unpredictable fevers she had been saved from or the brothers and sisters who had been snatched from her, or the exotic animals with which she had shared her Sumatran home. Dove Ridge, the family's lush estate outside Bencoolen, which loomed so large in her parents' thoughts, was lost to her. She had no memory, even – save the ones Nurse Grimes had forced upon her – of the mother and father who now fussed around her, marvelling at her.

It was not only Ella who was a stranger to them. The town they knew well from the days of their courtship was near unrecognizable. It was not just that the years had changed them, Cheltenham *was* different. There was a delightful new promenade, an endless proliferation of spas and baths. A whole new estate was being built, which would rival the town centre when it was complete – *it was to have its very own pump room*, so Sophia's parents said. The traffic was incessant. The dusty roads were forever pounded by drays piled high with raw blocks of stone going one way and crates of debris the other, in addition to the carriages more liberally loaded with the better-dressed visitors and residents. They had arrived in the middle of the season, the town choked with fashionable ladies and gentlemen decamped from London.

And it was all so . . . modern! Work would soon be under way to bring piped water to the houses, and there were gas lights in the streets now – every last oil lamp gone, replaced by these new, brighter stars. It was quite remarkable to see here. Sophia remembered their arrival in London, the neat orbs lighting the sky above Westminster Bridge – it had been such a wonder! Now it was *normal*, even for a provincial town like Cheltenham. It came as a shock to those whose recent lives had been so dictated by the rise and fall of the sun. Here, at all hours of the

evening, voices and footsteps and carriage wheels passed by the fine, if somewhat small, house they had taken on Wellington Place.

The Rafflesees did not make use of this new release from nature's clock, or their proximity to the town and its multiplying attractions. Sophia did not feel at ease in this new, gaudy world. She did not seek out her old friends. She and her husband focused on quietly recovering themselves and on trying to become a family, of sorts, once again. They passed their days in relative isolation at their 'snug little house', save on those mornings when they ventured out to take the waters and convention demanded they stop to exchange greetings with their fellow humans. The town's healthy air and healing waters did not work any miracles on their shattered bodies overnight, but as the gentle English summer waned and the days grew shorter, their health slowly started to improve. They were well slept from nights in dry, unshaken beds and well fed. It was a relief not to be locked in constant struggle with the natural world, not to fear its teeth at every turn. And yet Sophia remained much shaken. On many mornings it took her some moments to realize, on waking, that she was no longer trapped in a dank, tossing cabin. And Tom's headaches had not disappeared.

Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles was not a man who enjoyed being idle, in good health or ill. He could not be long without an ambition, an occupation. He started speaking again of a long-held desire, one that Sophia had heard more idle talk of many times before. Her husband dreamed of setting up a society devoted to the study of the creatures on God's earth, about which they still knew little. So very little! *The time was ripe*, he said, *the nation was ready*: prosperous and at peace; at the centre of an Empire that afforded unparalleled opportunities for the discovery and collection of every bird and beast that God had put

upon it. *The time was ripe*, he said, *nay, over-ripe*, to create London's very own 'Jardin des Plantes'.

Sophia well remembered the fine gardens, with so many exotic residents, that they had visited in Paris on their honeymoon in 1817. Oh, it was a magical place, quite unlike anywhere she had been before: the little rustic houses containing countless monkeys and exotic birds, a pit for the bears, a rotunda for the elephant and a giraffe, and all laid out within beautiful varied landscapes. She and Tom had been enraptured as they had walked the winding pathways that escorted visitors from one wild world to the next. How she had loved the area that emulated a Swiss garden, with its freely roaming beasts! It could not have been more different from the dingy, circus-like menageries she had come across before. This was nature, in all its Creator's intended glory.

She remembered that as they had admired the many beautiful corners of the grounds, her new husband had told her its story. The Jardin des Plantes had been born in the aftermath of the bloody Revolution, as a place where animals could be *observed* and *studied*, not just paraded and enjoyed by the rich. Tom had been so animated, saying over and over that *it was a travesty that their vanquished enemy had such a thing, and England – King and Country – did not. Why, London was the capital of the world, the metropolis of a great Empire!* An Empire of which he now knew so much, had seen so many of its beasts and plants for himself. About which he was yet hungry to know more. To *understand* more.

Now, with many more years of collecting and studying natural history behind him, he had begun to talk of it in earnest. He was sure he could do something similar – no, something *better* in London. Something worthy of an Empire of progress; something worthy of him, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles. He was not at all deterred by the loss of his own papers, preserved specimens

and live animals with the *Fame*, a collection he had so painstakingly gathered together over the years in the East Indies, intended as the beginnings of such a venture. It had been his passion, the work of his heart, the work of a lifetime. And all burned! Yet it had made him only more determined.

For now, his replacement collection of preserved specimens, hastily assembled while waiting for the *Mariner*, was still largely in boxes, waiting to find its place, its home, in this new land. As she and Tom waited, too, she thought. As Sophia listened to her husband paint a picture of the Jardin des Plantes he would build for England, she felt as if she might be ready to begin living again. For in these optimistic moments, when Tom was animated by his ambitions, the pain of their past seemed to fade a little. She dared, even, to believe that the future might hold happiness for her family. Or what remained of it.

He was anxious to get back to London. He grew restless in their cosseted world in Cheltenham. For a start, he was keen to see his East India Company colleagues to set his record of service straight. He had been away for seven years and he had a great deal of explaining to do. The months-long delay in communications between the colonial backwater of Bencoolen and his superiors in London or even Calcutta had meant he had often acted upon his own authority – even when setting up a new outpost for the Company at Singapore, at the risk of provoking the Dutch. It had suited him well at the time, but he was now worrying that he might be denied the financial compensation he surely deserved after his work, not to mention misfortunes, in his employer's name. He needed money to set up his family in a new life. He determined to venture to the capital, said he could not relax until it was done.

Sophia, as ever, refused to allow him to go anywhere without her, but for once she overestimated herself. The ordeal of the

two-day journey, the filthy air and chaos of the city that met them at the end of it – so alien to them after so many years away – rendered her near useless to him, confined to their smart hotel room on Berkeley Square. Tom did what he could. He met friends at India House, managed to see the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Company, and glorious accounts of his conduct overseas appeared in the press. But it cost him much energy. They were both glad to get back to the relative peace of Cheltenham. They were not yet ready for the swirling metropolis, for society, for politics, for real life. Not yet.

They would, in all likelihood, move to London permanently – in time. *All in good time*. When they had both recovered themselves. Sophia entreated him to *focus on the present, for now*. Yet Tom could not stop himself looking ahead. The part of him that longed for peace and contentment said he thought he might like to farm the land, or perhaps take on a post as a country magistrate. But the hungry, ambitious part of him, a part he could never ignore for long, was fretting that he was being left behind. He was considering a career in politics, but overriding all was his passion for his own Jardin des Plantes. Before he could plan anything, however, he needed to settle his accounts with the Company. He set himself to the task.

By mid-October, the weather had turned. Hard, cold rain, propelled by churning winds, raged against the windowpanes, ever-audible, even through the thick curtains that were pulled across them. The weather was not the only thing that had turned against the Raffleses. Tom's health, which had seemed to be slowly improving, had taken a sudden battering, too. He had been in bed for some days now with an attack of his headaches. This one had rendered him more infantile, more dependent than little Ella, unable to hold a pen or sit up in bed, unable to endure even the cold, dull light of these stormy autumn days. And they

had hoped to be better before the winter hit them. Sophia did what she could to nurse him, but she knew well enough, after so many years of it, that all she could do was sit and wait for it to pass. So sit and wait she did, listening to the rain clattering on the walls and windows of their little home. It gave her plenty of time to think. She was feeling a little stronger now.

Tom had been desperately writing an account of his services to the East India Company; his side of the story. He said he might need the public's support, that if people knew how hard he had worked – for the good of the nation, after all! – the directors would not dare to withhold what he was owed. It had been an ordeal, having to crawl through the recesses of his memory, with all his papers out of reach, swirling at the whims of the Indian Ocean currents. He had done some sums and had calculated a debt of at least twenty thousand pounds, lost through his efforts in Sumatra and Singapore. And yet his 'statement', as he called it, was unfinished, though it had nearly finished him.

She knew – they both did – that it was the exertion and the worry that had triggered this latest episode. And now he lay still, in the dark, helpless as a babe, as Sophia sat helpless too. How she hoped he might soon give up the idea of politics! Had it not taken enough from him already? Enough from them? The more she thought about it, the more she hoped that natural history might take priority. Was that not what made him happy? They shared so many wonderful memories of their little family's own explorations and pursuits in this field. She thought of the Animal Kingdom they'd built within their own walls at Dove Ridge, their Sumatran estate.

As the rain drummed on out of sight, she allowed her mind to return there; to lose herself in joyful memories of their children playing with the young tigers in the nursery, of Tom's daily survey of his plantations with Charlotte, Leopold and little Stamford, and how they had all traipsed through the aviary,

dodging flapping wings and bullets of excrement – not always successfully! She thought of the native man of the woods who had worked for them, no more than two feet high, how they had all loved him, with his jet-black face and white surtout! And, of course, dear Mr Silvio, the monkey, who was brought into the dining room to entertain them after dinner. She had used to tease Tom that he preferred the company of that furry little creature to his own children's! It seemed a hollow joke, now. She even allowed herself to remember how, in the darker times she usually dared not think of, their ceaseless work of collecting and cataloguing specimens had provided them with much-needed distraction, comfort even.

How much good natural history had done them! How much good it might do them yet. Yes, she decided, as the rain drummed on. Yes, she would encourage him in this venture.

Little more than a month later, on the evening of Tuesday, the 30th of November, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles was back on his feet, quite literally. He stood, glass raised, around a large table in the cavernous room of the Crown and Anchor on the Strand. The weather had not improved, but in the grand, candle-lit room, filled with the smells of their recently consumed dinner, one would never have guessed that outside the walls it was a particularly foul day.

It was St Andrew's Day and, therefore, the anniversary meeting of the Royal Society. During the proceedings earlier, just a little way down the Strand at Somerset House, Sir Stamford had been elected to its Council. It was a prestigious appointment for a man such as he; a man who had had, much to his regret, so little formal education. He was now not just a member but a *Council member* of the oldest, the most prestigious scientific institution in the world. *Look to what heights young Tom from Walworth has pulled himself!* He wanted to shout it out. Yet he had accepted

the honour quietly, suppressing the childish pride beneath his practised decorum. Now, some hours later, he was no longer restrained. Now he celebrated, surrounded by almost a hundred leading men of the arts and sciences. All of them, at this moment, turned to face their re-elected President, Sir Humphry Davy, as he made the usual loyal toasts to the King. The newest Council member joined in most heartily. More than just back on his feet, Sir Stamford Raffles was back in society, back in the world – and elated to be there.

The Raffles family had arrived in London just a couple of weeks earlier, ready for what Sophia called their ‘winter campaign’. Sir Stamford had recovered from his attack and, despite continued poor health, refused to delay the move any longer. *They needed to secure their future*, he insisted. To *begin* their future. Once more their possessions had been packed up – at least, those that had been unpacked in the first place. The 173 cases that contained the pieces of their lives to date, those that had not perished with the *Fame*, had been loaded onto a series of carts and dragged off in the direction of the capital. The family had followed. Tom had been impatient: *he had so much to do!*

Already things were coming together. This very man, Sir Humphry Davy, the President of the Royal Society no less, now midway through his speech – this man was helping him to make things happen. Sir Stamford and Sir Humphry had become acquainted on his previous trip home, and since he had been back this time they had had a few encouraging conversations. Most encouraging!

Sir Humphry took his seat and the rest followed, drink and age allowing them to do so with varying degrees of elegance: the Home Secretary, Mr Peel; the long-time Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord Bexley; the President of the Royal Academy, Sir Thomas Lawrence; and the many other gentlemen, the great and good of intelligent London society who surrounded the

vast table. The Treasurer of the Society remained on his feet, Mr Davies Gilbert MP. A mathematician, it was he who had first recommended Davy for work in the scientific laboratories of the newly formed Royal Institution. He turned to where his protégé now sat, most comfortably, in the top chair. The Treasurer began his customary speech in praise of their President. *Sir Humphry Davy, a man whose discoveries in analysing the alkalis and the earths were unequalled in brilliance and importance since those of Isaac Newton.* Sir Stamford made the appropriate noises of assent alongside his peers. *Yes, yes, Sir Humphry was a brilliant man. Indeed, he was a pioneer, a great thinker!*

And this man was going to help him, of that Sir Stamford was sure. They'd already shared a few tentative words about another great society: his Zoological Society.

In the first cold month of the new year, Sophia watched her husband – who she'd just ensured was suitably attired for the weather in his winter cloak – descend the steps of the house to the busy street below. He fixed his hat to his head and, with a step that was almost sprightly, he wove a course through the clattering carriages and carts, and made for the green expanse of the park. Sophia stood for a moment at the window, still watching him. He seemed well today. He did look aged, so much thinner, but Sophia knew him minutely. She studied him daily, in much the same way, she liked to think, that Tom had kept such a close eye on the plants at Dove Ridge, on the coffee and spices he had laboured over. She was a botanist, too, in her own way. She could detect change coming, gingerly, imperceptibly, just like the slow growth of a tree. She saw the energy she had always admired in her husband creeping back. She turned away from the window as he cleared the traffic.

They had been in the house on Piccadilly for two months now, but were still living in a state of disarray and packing

crates. Tom had been trying to sort out his papers, but it was a task to which he had so far proved unequal; despite the superficial improvements, he was still not in good health. Besides, they were moving again very soon, taking over the lease of Sir Humphry Davy's London house on Lower Grosvenor Street. Their current residence was not adequate to their aspirations. Tom dreamed of having all his preserved animals and birds and his natural-history drawings on show, and almost as soon as they had arrived here he had declared that 104 Piccadilly *simply would not do*. There was no point settling here then, Sophia had told herself. They would sort everything out after they had moved. She hoped that in the new house they would find she could make a proper home for her little family at last.

For all the shortcomings of the present residence, its location on Piccadilly was not one: it stood directly opposite the Green Park, which Sir Stamford had now reached. The day was clear and cold, the ground frozen but free of snow – which suited him. Oh, how he valued these excursions! Sophia and his friends pressed him not to go out too much, and certainly not after sunset – his headaches still plagued him, despite the mercury he took – but whenever he could he ventured out to reacquaint himself with the capital city of the Empire he had so long served from afar. On the days he felt well, like today, he rose early, breakfasted with the family at nine – and then the morning was his, though it pained him that this was what he was reduced to. All the expeditions he had undertaken – they had both undertaken; up mountains and through rivers, knee-deep in leeches, Sophia surrounded by natives who had never seen a white woman before . . . Now he seldom went further than the other side of the park.

And yet . . . How much there was all around him to interest him! London was truly changed since the last time he had seen

it, back in 1817. Then the cloud of war – raining wretchedness and frugality – had still lingered, hanging heavy over everything. Now Britain was booming, and quite visibly so: there were building works in progress everywhere he looked. He felt almost as if he was exploring a strange new land once more. The house was just a short walk from the newly constructed Piccadilly Circus, intersecting the grand ceremonial route from Carlton House to Regent's Park, which was the ambitious creation of John Nash. Regent Street was almost finished now, neatly separating the West End from the sprawling eastern side of the city. He admired the sense of order, the planning that had gone into it. The chaos of the old city was being tamed into a capital that befitted a nation that now led the world. It looked like a new Rome! He wished Napoleon could see it for himself.

On fine mornings like this, as he felt the cold, hard earth crunch beneath his elegantly shod feet (how different from what they had worn in the tropics!) and as the noise of the chaotic morning streets receded behind him, he felt strong and hopeful, in spite of his reduced physicality. He walked south through the park, leaving Piccadilly behind him. There were many others out that morning, taking advantage of the good weather, and he occasionally raised his hat to his fellow walkers. He would go as far as Buckingham House before turning back, he told himself. He had heard that this was going to be the next project by Nash, transforming the Queen's House into a new residence for the King. A new King, as far as he was concerned – George IV had been Prince Regent when he had last been in the country. Now on the throne, he was not a popular monarch, but Sir Stamford approved of his ambitions for rebuilding the nation, if not his personal decadence. The parks were about to be overhauled, so it was said, redesigned for this era of greatness and affluence. It was hard to keep up with all that was going on – though Sir Stamford tried his very best. He was fascinated to learn daily

from the papers about who was investing in what; the many grand schemes that were planned; the engineering marvels that would soon be set in motion.

Right now, just five miles from where he trod, they were beginning work on a tunnel that was to go beneath the Thames. How staggering to think of it! Marc Brunel had invented a cast-iron tunnelling shield for the task, and this time they must succeed, surely. Sir Stamford had unshakeable faith in the locomotive steam engine, which would soon be taking travellers and goods – *without horses* – across the country at speeds of ten or twelve miles per hour! It was almost a reality: construction was nearly complete on a twenty-five-mile colliery railway line. He was proud to be part of the coming revolution, for he was involved in one such venture himself, as Deputy Chairman of the Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex Railroad Company, hoping to build a railway line from London to Norwich. He loved to think of himself now, in London, at the centre of a web of innovation that was transforming the nation, indeed the world, as he walked and lived and breathed. There was so much opportunity here, if only he was up to seizing it.

He could not help but wonder, too, what was happening now in all the other places he had lived, and governed: in Penang, where he had met his first, much-loved wife, Olivia; in Batavia, where he had buried her; in *his* Singapore; in Bencoolen, where his beloved children lay in the earth, now simply handed over, unbelievably, to the Dutch. He tried not to think of how he was being repaid by his employers for all he had done in their service. He still had not heard from the Company's directors about what he was to receive by way of a pension and compensation. He had had the statement he had written privately printed and circulated at the end of last year, to all the influential people he could get it to: members of the government and powerful friends. He had hoped it would force the Company's hand, making it widely

known how much he had done in his nation's interest, how hard he had toiled for the best part of two decades. But Farquhar, the wretch, was now making problems for him. Farquhar, a man *he* had promoted, a man *he* had made Governor of Singapore, a man who had ignored all his orders – who had let slavery, opium and immorality flourish, the enemies of civilization he had always worked so hard to eradicate, on the newest corner of the world that he himself had claimed for the British Empire. A man now calling him, Sir Stamford Raffles, a tyrant!

But enough of that. He could feel a headache coming on, and he did not want the morning to be ruined. He paused and looked up at the trees, devoid of leaves at this time of year, yet still grand. They were plane trees, genus *Platanus* (he tried to use Linnaeus's classifications when he could). He had not quite reached Buckingham House, though he could see it ahead. He decided to take the most direct route instead, and turned east. He might even take a chaise. His head was throbbing now, and he was keen to press on before it got the better of him.

He was bound for Somerset House to meet Sir Humphry Davy. Since the night of the Royal Society dinner a few months ago, they had seen much of each other. Sir Humphry was fully committed to the idea of a society dedicated to the study of zoology, and they were now – rather wonderfully! – embarking on the joint enterprise of setting it up. They had to work out precisely what it might become, what form it might take . . . but those were just details. Sophia was always telling him not to let his hopes run away with him, but he was sure that London would have its Jardin des Plantes. And it would be a place of science, of investigation, of knowledge. They had much to discuss, he and Sir Humphry, two men with a hunger for knowledge and the spirit of discovery in their veins. On a more mundane level, there were also a few final things he wanted to ask about the house he would take over from him.

Yes, this was it: he was being welcomed into the circles he had long felt he belonged to, among the pioneering men of the age. The explorers of their day! He had almost forgotten about his headache as he hurried along in the winter sunshine.

It all began to happen fairly quickly. By the time the new leaves, shiny and green, were unfurling on the branches of the city's many plane trees, Sir Stamford Raffles's dream was also springing to life. His work had been achieved without the help of the shy March and April sunshine, for he had spent the majority of the recent weeks shut away in the study of his new home at 23 Lower Grosvenor Street. It was a prestigious address and he was pleased with it. They all were. The house – like their lives – was slowly becoming more ordered, the packing crates disappearing as the shelves and cupboards filled. It was becoming something resembling the home they had long sought. Sir Stamford was now looking for a country residence to which the household could retreat for the summer. The long-desired picture of normality for his diminished family was close enough to touch.

But that was not his prime task now. This morning, as on most others of late, he was bent over his desk, writing, writing, writing. *He had come full circle, back to his days as a young clerk*, he had joked to Sophia over breakfast. It was another wet morning, but he was oblivious to the bloated raindrops rolling down the window glass before him. The metal-nibbed pen he now used (he had thrown away his quills the moment he had discovered these modern implements on his return) scratched lightly as it moved across the paper. A rhythmic scrawl, interrupted periodically as pen was dipped into inkwell. On and on he wrote, without pause. In front of him on the desk was a proud pile of papers, copies of the prospectus for the proposed Zoological Society of London, which he had drafted and Sir Humphry had approved. Yes, it was real now.

The prospectus, dated the 1st of March, 1825 and printed just over a week later, laid out the details of the vision Sir Stamford had long had in mind: the creation of an establishment dedicated to the scientific pursuit of natural history. It would combine the study and teaching of zoology with a collection of living animals. A public menagerie, yes, but one that would allow naturalists to observe the creatures *scientifically*. There would be a collection of preserved specimens too, affording naturalists ‘the correct view of the Animal Kingdom at large in as complete a series as may be practicable’. Using the knowledge so gained, the Society planned to introduce and domesticate new breeds of animal likely to be useful in common life, animals that could better serve the farmyards and dinner tables of this great nation than those that occurred naturally.

Sir Stamford wholeheartedly believed that man could control the glorious natural world bestowed on him by God. In fact, he did not just believe man could control nature but that man *should* do so. Only by studying God’s creatures would mankind be able to glimpse the true wisdom and power of the Creator – and make proper use of these gifts, as He surely intended. Just to *enjoy* God’s creatures, to be entertained by them without seeking to understand them, to ogle them as they performed tricks, as people did in the menageries that already existed in the nation – well, that seemed so . . . frivolous. And while Sir Stamford was many things, a frivolous man he was not. As a child he had visited and even enjoyed that most famous of all menageries, the Exeter ‘Change on the Strand. How he had laughed at the monkeys gambolling in their cages! But now, to listen to grown men telling him there was no need of his proposed Zoological Collection because there were already such creatures in London – for the masses, at Edward Cross’s establishment; for King and Court, at the much-diminished Tower Menagerie – well, he could scarcely hide his fury.

He had felt compelled to see for himself Chuny, the famous elephant they all spoke of with such laughter. *Chuny will take a sixpence off you with his trunk, and then he will return it, into your hand!* When he had ducked into the tall building on the Strand and climbed the stairs to the Exeter 'Change menagerie, he had walked through the rooms filled with cages, cages filled with creatures, creatures watched and goaded by little boys and girls. He had passed by them all, making his way through the Grand Hall until he stood outside the bars of its most enormous cage, ready to witness this spectacle. A finely dressed couple duly appeared and held out their hands, sixpences in their palms. And at the moment when the huge grey trunk, so coarse, so pink at the end, obligingly appeared through the bars, the absurdity of it all had struck him so he had almost laughed aloud. Just minutes away, in the Royal Institution on Albemarle Street, Sir Humphry Davy's protégé Michael Faraday was taming the elements and forces of the natural world. Here, where he could hear the roar of a lion and the chattering of monkeys and see the great hulk of an elephant in front of him, man was content just to *watch and laugh*. It was ludicrous.

Sir Stamford and Sir Humphry were not the first who believed it was time to look more closely, more scientifically, at the earth and the life that God had created. Their prospectus specifically referred to the Horticultural Society, founded just twenty years earlier: their proposed Society would do for zoology what the Horticultural Society had already done for botany. For this was an age of order, of understanding, of cataloguing, of putting everything in the world in its place, and a time when that world was increasingly within the British grasp. No longer did the Royal Society enjoy its centuries-old hegemony over knowledge and experimentation. Now gentlemen enthusiasts and those with a more professional interest in the natural sciences came together in their own associations, focusing on their specific shared pursuit.

In recent decades societies dedicated to the study of plants, geology, public science and technology had been founded. Only zoology had been neglected, apart from the attempt by the Linnean Society to set up a Zoological Club. Sir Stamford, recently elected a member of that Society himself, did not care for it. It felt too limited by the Linnaean traditions and methodologies of the last century, and its leading members – important naturalists, such as Joseph Sabine, Nicholas Aylward Vigors and Edward Turner Bennett – were all supporters of his independent plans. His bigger, grander, more modern plans.

His Society would offer ‘a collection of living animals such as never yet existed in ancient or modern times’. So he had written in the prospectus. His creatures would not be ‘objects of curiosity’, as they were in other menageries. Neither would they be ‘spectacles of wonder’ and savagery, as they had been in ancient Rome. Uncivilized Rome! In his menagerie they would be ‘objects of scientific research, not of vulgar admiration’. It was an opprobrium to the age and to the nation that no such undertaking already existed. He, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, would finally right that wrong.

Sir Humphry Davy was out of town – and, anyway, he was a man whose time must be apportioned between so many projects, from the Royal Society to the Board of Longitude to the Athenaeum Club he had established. It had been left in Sir Stamford’s hands to distribute copies of the prospectus and entice subscribers in. Sir Humphry had left him with a list of potential supporters and Sir Stamford spent hours each day writing to them, and to everyone else he could think of who might be willing to lend their name or money to the endeavour. Sir Humphry and he differed somewhat as to how scientific it might eventually be: Sir Stamford was the more passionate on the point, Sir Humphry more concerned about its use to the amateur naturalists and country gentlemen who were in a position to support

it financially. But they agreed in the main, and that had been enough to begin. Now the pile of prospectuses they'd had printed diminished rapidly, as Sir Stamford sat writing, writing, writing . . .

He had told Sir Humphry – had told everyone he spoke to about it – that he was confident he could attract twenty thousand members, such a need was there for this! And yet not everyone, it seemed, was quite as confident. He had yesterday's edition of the *Literary Gazette* folded next to him. Even without his looking at it, its more memorable phrases – 'altogether visionary', 'wild speculation' – seemed writ large. He was being ridiculed! Recruitment had not been as successful as he had hoped: so far, he had a mere fifty subscribers. But what did that mean? It was only a matter of more work, more time, surely. And he had some great names among them: Mr Peel, Lord Spencer, Lord Lansdowne and Lord Stanley, as well as reputable naturalists, such as Mr Vigors, Mr Bennett, Mr Sabine, and anatomists, Sir Everard Home and Mr Joshua Brookes, the latter with his own museum and anatomy school on Great Marlborough Street. Besides, Sir Stamford had never been troubled by whether something was probable or simple. Nothing had been simple in Java, or in Bencoolen, or in Singapore, and he would press on now, just as he had then. The status quo meant nothing to him. In fact, he loathed the status quo. Loathed the Exeter 'Change and its wasted opportunities.

He was busier than he had ever been, and not just the mornings, like this one, he spent in his new study: his afternoons and evenings were also increasingly occupied. Sir Stamford and Lady Raffles, now settled among the great and the good of London society, and feeling fitter than they had for a long time, were finally in a position to gorge on the feast of intellectual stimulation and pleasure available to them here. They tasted sweet after the scant offerings in the East: *he was like a bee buzzing greedily*

between an abundance of flowers, he liked to say. Just last week he had been presented to the King at His Majesty's first levee of the season, surrounded by the nation's ancient nobility and new leading lights. Pall Mall had been thronged with people desperate for a glimpse of their monarch. And in his carriage he had passed them all and swept through the entrance to Carlton Palace. Such a spectacle had awaited him there! The porters at the gates in their bright liveries, the King's Guard and the Royal Horse Guard in the Palace Yard, with the booming processional music of their accompanying bands; the Grand Hall lined with a party of the Yeomen Guard, the two toweringly tall Royal Horse Guardsmen accoutred as cuirassiers . . .

He was allowing his thoughts to drift. He was, admittedly, still not quite himself. In weaker moments, he wondered if the strength would ever return to his limbs, to his head. But he banished such dispiriting thoughts when they surprised him. He had work to do, vital work for the Crown and Country of which he was so proud. He dipped his nib in the inkwell. The sound of pen scratching across paper resumed.

The new pace of life did not abate: May was even busier than April had been for Sir Stamford and Lady Raffles, now much in demand on the social circuit. Tom's work took up much of the time that was not occupied by social engagements and Sophia had hardly seen her husband take a moment's rest these past weeks. On this Thursday afternoon he was out of the house and not expected home until dinner, so when she heard a sudden agitation below she knew instantly that something was awry. She put down her pen and listened. The front door was open, allowing the rumblings of the outside world to drift up to her. The sound of voices inside, raised in alarm, brought her rushing down the stairs. The sight that greeted her in the doorway pulled a cry from her mouth and stopped her only a few steps

down the staircase. Her Tom lay in the arms of a stranger, hatless, his collar roughly opened. *Was he . . . ?* She clutched her throat with one hand while the other found the banister.

One of the strangers looked up at her, read her face. *He's alive, but he's been unconscious.* She felt the breath rush out of her, and ran to her husband, who was now being manoeuvred clumsily into the drawing room.

He was in bed again. Awake, but buried somewhere within himself. He looked out at her from his shrunken face, with . . . Was it fear? A sense of his own mortality, perhaps. As if he were a frightened animal finding itself for the first time in an unfamiliar place. Not unlike when they had first brought Mr Silvio, the wild monkey, into Dove Ridge, she thought, but did not say. She had never seen that look in Tom before, had never had to be so careful with him. She thanked God he was still with her, even as she prayed silently that his usual ebullience would triumph over the strange creature that had taken hold of him.

He had collapsed when out walking and had been unconscious for almost an hour, insensible in the grime of the street. A surgeon who happened to be passing had found him, loosened his clothing and tended him where he had fallen. When he had awoken they had brought him home, conscious, just, but unreachable still. For Sophia it had seemed an age, sitting at his bedside, as she waited for him to come back to himself. Back to *her*. The doctor had suggested he be bled. She had felt as if she had been hurled into a fever-induced dream, as she so often had been out East. *Tom had been quite well that morning*, she had kept saying, when he had strode out to visit Mr Murdoch, the Scottish merchant and Fellow of the Royal Society, to talk to him about the Zoological Society, no doubt. Quite well if, on reflection, a little tired. Yes, it had been a busy few weeks for him.

If she was honest with herself now, as she sat in the quiet

dimness of Tom's chamber, curtains drawn, Sophia had known that he had been pushing himself too hard. But she had not seen him so animated for a long time, and had not wanted to dampen his ardour, the spirit that had awoken in him once more. She had been proud to sit next to her husband at dinners and watch him command the room, silence his critics, win admirers as he spoke of his great vision for the Jardin des Plantes of London. His enthusiasm was unrelenting.

Behind closed doors, things had not been as simple as he had made out over the many glittering dinner tables at which they had sat. He had been toiling on a revised prospectus, having sent out every last one of the previous batch, and had fallen out with Sir Humphry over it. Much to Tom's chagrin, Sir Humphry was wary of making the Society seem overly scientific. He had suggested that *perhaps given the low numbers of subscribers they ought to broaden its appeal*. Tom had refused to back down. They had reached a compromise, of sorts, republishing the original prospectus with a new statement attached. It had been sent to the printer on the day he had collapsed. She could not help but wonder if it was connected, though Tom had said he was happy enough with the new version.

He seemed a little better now, she thought, looking to where he lay next to her, sleeping. Yet he still spoke little. After bleeding had restored him to sensibility, a few days of bed-rest had seemed to help his body recover. She had told the newspapers that he was well again. It was not, as they had at first feared, apoplexy. She did not want word to get out that he was diminished in any way. It was bad enough that everyone knew he had collapsed. She still could not bear to think of Sir Stamford Raffles lying in the dust and dirt of the street.

Things would improve when they went to the country, she thought. Tom had found a place for them now, a fine estate not far from town in Highwood, eleven miles to the north of

London, or thereabouts. It was adjacent to one that their friends Mr Wilberforce, the famous abolitionist, and his wife had bought. He and Tom had long shared a hatred of the evils of slavery, through which they had become acquainted some years ago, and now they were set to share the lovely hill in Highwood. There were tussles over money still – the current owners had asked twenty thousand pounds – but Tom had assured her all would be resolved. He was still thinking about his career, had not given up on the idea of a seat in Parliament, but perhaps once they were in the fresh air again, with their grounds to maintain, he would think less about that. And now that his Zoological Society – the project closest to his heart – seemed to be in train, perhaps he might relax. She looked at him, lying quietly in his bed. She hoped he'd live to see his dream fulfilled. As soon as that thought took form, she shook her head to be rid of it. She must never think like that. Tom was strong. Tom had so much still to do.

A little over a month later, on the 22nd of June, 1825, Sir Stamford Raffles was well enough to attend a meeting he had arranged for the subscribers of the Zoological Society of London (at least, those who had not yet left town for the season). The group met in the rooms of the Horticultural Society on Regent Street. The Earl of Darnley took the chair. Those in attendance would appoint a committee to oversee the establishment of the Society. Sir Stamford, hardly able to restrain his enthusiasm, was the first to volunteer.

He was happy. It was something he had not felt in himself for a long time, and it had taken him by surprise. He had learned to live again after their misfortunes, but he had done that by suppressing a part of himself. Not quite his heart, but . . . Whatever it was, that was how he had picked himself up after they had lost

their first child, their beloved little Leopold, and how he had lived through the loss of the other three. Tom had swallowed his capacity for real emotion, heartbreak and joy alike. He had lived, he had breathed; he had been stimulated by challenge and conversation; he had set himself tasks and even enjoyed achieving them . . . but he had felt nothing as intimately as he had before. He would never return to his old self, he knew – but now he felt . . . content, and even the first mutterings of joy. He had never thought he would feel it again. Indeed, after his collapse, he had wondered if he would ever feel anything again.

But here he was, out walking before breakfast on his very own farm, belonging to his new country house. It was glorious! The weather had been hot, stiflingly so, and Sophia had suffered terribly. He had not minded it so much. It was easing off now, and so early in the day, it was pleasant. He looked around where he stood. He could not see the entirety of the 111 acres he now possessed, but he surveyed as much as he could. It was a lovely piece of land. The views were wide and with enough variety to please the eye wherever it strayed. From this very spot, at the edge of the field where his men were making hay, he could see the stacks drying in the surrounding fields, the hills and dales beyond, and in the further distance, a dark green stripe of woodland. Behind him, there were extensive lawns around the house, itself solid and modern. The lawns were browning a little in this weather, but they were still perfectly delightful.

He looked at his handful of workers, moving rhythmically as they scythed the long grass, still damp with morning dew but drying in the first warmth of the day. He breathed in its strong, fragrant scent. So different from the putrid breath of London! He listened to the sounds of the birds, of the long blades swooshing through the grass, and the occasional bubble of words between the workers. He liked the clarity of the natural order of things, the lord of the manor – a position won by virtue and

industry, rather than bestowed on him by birth – overseeing the happy labourers as they toiled on the land. Here he felt close to God, for surely this was the world as He had intended it.

He had taken on all the growing crops with the property, and they kept poultry, pigs, cattle and sheep, too. They had no grapes for wine, or water for fish, but the land allowed them to be near self-sufficient in everything else. The animals were his wife's domain, especially the poultry and the pigs, and she kept herself busy in the dairy. He oversaw the rest. They brewed their own beer and baked their own bread. They lived a quiet life, himself, Sophia and Ella, their nephew Charles, their few servants and labourers. It was quite unlike Dove Ridge, which, despite its remoteness, had always been so full of people: the four children and Nurse Grimes, the keepers for the monkeys, cats and tiger cubs they had kept in the house, the sultans calling in for conversations, guests from the settlement who came for the lively dinners, servants rushing to him with the poisonous snakes they had trapped . . . But he was grateful for the solitude of Highwood and he liked being tired and satisfied at the end of each day. They had found a new kind of happiness here, there was no denying it.

His friend Mr Wilberforce had not yet moved in his own family next door, but he had entrusted the laying out of the grounds to Sir Stamford. They were both becoming involved in local life, and were trying to get a chapel built – a Chapel of Ease: they were more than four miles from the nearest church. The local vicar, the vicar of Hendon – who apparently had interests in the West Indies – had not cooperated with two men known for their abolitionist ideals but neither was put off by such a trifle. They would achieve it in time. Sir Stamford also hoped to become the local magistrate; Mr Wilberforce was urging him to do so and he was happy to oblige. He liked the prospect of bringing law and morality to these lands as he had in far distant ones. He saw his future here. He liked what he saw.

That was not to say he had given up his ambitions in London. The Raffleses still had the house on Lower Grosvenor Street and would move back there in the new year. For the time being, the journey to the capital was manageable, if a little unpleasant; three miles to Edgware, and from there eight miles along the Edgware Road to Tyburn Turnpike. But it was summer now, and London had no need of Sir Stamford and his family nor they of it. The committee of the Zoological Society would not meet until next year, and things were in hand with that. He had already written to his friends in the East, calling for animals for the Society. He expected an orang utan skin and skeleton from Sumatra any day now. In the meantime, he had more than enough to keep him stimulated here. He was organizing his personal collections. At Highwood he finally had the Museum Room he had long craved, and was gleefully overseeing the unpacking of the specimens he had sent back to England from Sumatra, and before that from Batavia, and those he had managed to assemble after the *Fame* had gone down. He had tapirs – stuffed and preserved in spirits – a dugong skeleton, rhinoceros skins . . .

Yes, Highwood was the perfect place for his little family. There was just one problem: he could not afford it. But surely the Company would settle his claim soon. He could not believe that he had still not heard from them. In the meantime, he asked his friend Thomas McQuoid to send to him the last of his money that was in Batavia, all sixteen thousand pounds. That would cover most of it, anyway.

He was hungry. It must be breakfast time. He turned and made for the house.

It was a long and bitter winter. The first snow had fallen in October and then, in the early weeks of 1826, an unfathomably cold snap pounced. A devastating frost blinded the windows of

Highwood House and brought the estate to a sparkling standstill. In the villages nearby it brought down the shutters of the shops, and slammed the doors of butchers, who feared for their stock. Tom was not in Town to see the chaos and frivolity brought to London by the Siberian weather, but the papers brought tales of it to his wintry seclusion, albeit somewhat delayed. The Thames, that great artery of the metropolis, gleamed with frost as its depths clotted. It fell eerily empty of its customary traffic, a blank, white path winding through the city like a ghost. The Serpentine, its tiny sister, froze solid, but she was busier than ever, her glittering surface alive with skaters, gingerbread-sellers and smartly attired ladies promenading neatly while their common counterparts more freely enjoyed its slippery surface. Those Londoners old enough to remember said it felt colder even than the winter of 1814, when the Thames herself froze solid.

The weather was not the severest blow that London had to deal with in those icy months. It was not the worst with which Tom had to contend. It was news of a graver nature that he sought in the newspapers. In December, the ‘money market’, which had seemed so invincible in the heady days of prosperity he had met on his return from the East, suddenly failed. The price of the stock that everyone – himself included – had bought with such confidence plummeted overnight as investors hurried to offload it. There was a run on the banks in London, which closed their doors to the endless customers wanting to withdraw their funds, and many country banks followed suit as the year staggered to a chilly close. There was no discernible reason for it: no war, no failed harvest. Though Tom sought answers in the papers, he found none. The days of optimism were over. And he still had not heard from the East India Company.

By late February, the worst of the cold weather was behind them, and Sir Stamford Raffles was drawing to a close the first

ever meeting of the Committee of Proposers of the Zoological Society of London. That was now its official designation: the Zoological Society of London. It was the obvious and only choice, though including the capital city in the title was a splendid patriotic flourish. They had just agreed on it, he and his fellow Committee members gathered around the table of gleaming wood in the Horticultural Society's offices on Regent Street – the Society's Secretary, Mr Joseph Sabine, had permitted their use for this important Sunday congregation.

Sir Stamford was overseeing the proceedings from the chair, commanding the Committee that consisted of his co-conspirator, Sir Humphry Davy; his friend the Duke of Somerset; another dear friend from his days in Java, Dr Thomas Horsfield, the American physician and naturalist; the Royal Society's Treasurer, Mr Davies Gilbert MP; the famous surgeon and anatomist Sir Everard Home; the Earl of Darnley; and finally the secretary of the Linnean Society's Zoological Club, Mr Nicholas Aylward Vigors. It was a prestigious scientific committee of which its organizer was justifiably proud. The politicians Lord Auckland and Sir Robert Inglis, along with Dr Harewood, were also there, not elected to the Committee but keen to be involved with the nascent Society in the future. All had just participated in the making of history, of that Sir Stamford was sure.

He was feeling better again, despite the rough winter and the shocks it had delivered. He and his family had left Highwood in early February, to return to London for the season. He was surprised to find that he was not sorry to be back in Town, though the stinking air and incessant noise were a shock to senses soothed by the natural beauty and stillness of the English countryside. He was especially not sorry to be there today. The meeting concluded, and the distinguished company began to rise, the tone of their voices turning from formal to cordial.

Their work was well done. They had not only agreed on a name for the Society, they had started to make plans for it. Sir Stamford, with Sir Humphry, Lord Auckland and the Earl of Darnley, was to investigate the possibility of acquiring land for a menagerie in the Regent's Park. There was much to do. They agreed to meet again the following Saturday.

Sir Stamford left the building, stepping out onto the imposing Regent Street. So indescribably grand! Classical perfection. He paused to look in the direction of the park at its end, where he hoped his long-nurtured dream would become reality. The finest, newest park in the capital was the perfect spot for such a modern undertaking. He could not help but recall the words of the *Literary Gazette* article that had so angered him almost a year ago. Or, he corrected himself, which had spurred him to action: 'altogether visionary', 'wild speculation'.

No longer.

Three days later, a most distressing occurrence took place in the heart of London, on the busy Strand. Sir Stamford did not witness it but heard reports of it from newspaper-sellers, his servants, his dinner guests and, not least, his colleagues at the Royal Society, whose rooms at Somerset House were perfectly placed for them to experience, at first-hand, a struggle between man and beast.

This was what had happened, from what he could deduce, once exaggeration and speculation were removed from the story. At half past four on Wednesday afternoon, an employee of Edward Cross ran into the yard at Somerset House, and begged the soldiers on guard to follow him to the menagerie across the Strand. Chuny had started to batter the bars of his cage most violently. Cross feared the elephant would break free and tear to pieces the entire structure of Exeter 'Change and anyone in it. He begged the soldiers to put his star out of action. Quickly.

For the next hour and a half, the Strand shook with the beast's roars and thunderous kicks against the bars, and the incessant boom of the soldiers' guns as they fired into the cage, over and over again. People gathered outside, listening, blocking the traffic as their numbers swelled. Rumours flew around the crowd: *all of Cross's beasts were free and every keeper massacred!* On the commotion went. Not until the one hundred and fiftieth bullet had entered Chuny's great frame, this one just behind the ear, did the beast seem affected at all. Finally, he collapsed to the ground, rocking the building as he did so. One of his keepers had attached a sword to a pole and now rammed it into the enormous grey hulk on the floor, rammed it in right up to the hilt, again and again. He had not forgotten how Chuny had turned on a fellow keeper in October and killed him. Yet he could not help but feel a deep sadness at his demise.

Sir Stamford was appalled. It was all so unsavoury, confirming what he had long believed about the nature of establishments such as Mr Cross's. However, he read with interest the details of the elephant's care that littered the London papers; the vast quantities of food and liquid the animal had consumed, not to mention the sedative medicines they had been trying to trick him into swallowing, without success. Twenty pounds of salts at a time! Six ounces of calomel! (Sir Stamford was an habitual user of mercurous chloride for his headaches, but never took more than a single grain or two.)

The spectacle, like the endless articles in the press, did not cease with Chuny's death. Over the course of the week, thousands of people – men of science and tourists of the macabre alike – flocked to the Strand. They squeezed themselves into Exeter 'Change, waiting their turn to mount the staircase to the Great Hall, to peer into the now silent den at the far end where the bloodied carcass of unimaginable proportions lay. A number of special visitors were permitted to view it at close quarters.

One cold morning, in the darkness before dawn, a certain Mr Delville, a phrenologist, was permitted to take a cast of the head. He declared that Chuny's 'bump of fury' was exceedingly well developed, just as he had expected. Sir Humphry himself popped in to peer at the carcass. As the days wore on, the visitors had more than just the elbowing crowds to contend with: a vile stench set in, which grew so putrid that the residences of the Strand had to be evacuated.

Sir Stamford and his colleagues in the Zoological Society were more interested in what followed: a dissection of the great beast, for the purposes of comparative anatomical study. Sir Stamford followed the proceedings with fascination. So, too, did most of London. The elephant was raised from the ground with an enormous pulley, then flayed by a team of nine butchers, working through the night on Saturday. The one-ton skin they removed, three inches thick in places, was taken off the premises on Sunday morning and sold to one Mr Davis for fifty pounds. The celebrated anatomist Mr Joshua Brookes, one of the first subscribers to the Zoological Society, oversaw the dissection. He had never before worked on such a scale, but he proceeded methodically, aided by a team of eminent surgeons. First the contents of the abdomen and pelvis were removed, then the enormous heart – found to have been pierced by the sword blade – and the bullet-riddled liver. The hall was lined with green baize and filled with spectators on specially erected seats; they had paid a hefty fee to watch the show. The room was well fumigated, but still the air scratched at the backs of their throats. Hundreds more who could not get in crowded the Strand, watching the carts loaded with flesh wheeled out. Everyone wanted a piece of Chuny. A few, apparently, tried a cooked elephant rump steak, and newspapers published recipes for elephant meat, but most of it was sold by the ever-enterprising Mr Cross for cat food. More useful was the portion allowed to Sir Everard Home, an old

acquaintance of Sir Stamford (he had sent Sir Everard numerous specimens from his own travels) and another subscriber to the Society, to be used in his experiments on muscle tissue.

It was a deplorable state of affairs, Sir Stamford and Sir Humphry agreed, to see the study of animals reduced to this: professional men of science chasing after the scraps thrown to them by showmen like Cross. The Zoological Society would allow dissections at the menagerie, but in a manner befitting the true study of comparative anatomy. On a more positive note, the feverish interest in the details of the dissection – as much as in the stories of the elephant’s demise – proved what an insatiable appetite there was for the study of God’s creatures. It confirmed Sir Stamford’s belief that the day was ripe and the need urgent. He was keen to begin building the reputable, serious establishment that had now been agreed upon and to create a menagerie that befitted this great nation.

On a Thursday afternoon just a few weeks later, he came a step closer to his dream – many steps closer, to be precise. He was walking in the Regent’s Park with a fellow member of the sub-committee established with the purpose of obtaining land for the Society, Lord Auckland. It was a cold March day, but Sir Stamford refused to recognize the chill. Today he saw only the sunshine. He had been permitted to enter the Regent’s Park a number of times, most recently to search out possible grounds for the Zoological Society. It had impressed him on every occasion.

When he had first started work at India House in 1795, this swathe of green to the north of London had been known as the Mary-le-bone Park, or Marybone Park to the uneducated people he had grown up among in Walworth. It had been mainly farmland, with a few fine squares for wealthy townspeople at its southern tip. Young Tom had not been part of that sequestered

world. But look! How quickly things changed. The park was now the crown of Nash's vision for a new London, at the northern terminus of his ceremonial street running almost all the way to Westminster. The Regent's Park was like a whole new town, with a crescent of grand white houses at its base and terraces springing up at its borders, many still being built. Sir Stamford had not seen the ruins of ancient Rome but he suspected these majestic buildings must outshine even that city's finest temples. Chester Terrace – being completed now – had almost knocked the breath from him, with its triumphal archways. It made him glad that he had lived to see this new dawn in London.

The park itself was gloriously designed, Sir Stamford thought. A huge green expanse of perfect gardens with an ornamental lake, and even a canal running around it. It was a wonder of planning, like a fine country estate – yet the din of London only a mile away! The Royal Residence that Nash had planned for it, a summer palace, had not materialized, for the King had turned his attention to Buckingham House. Many fine villas had been built within it, though, some already occupied by men of commerce and science. Men like himself, he thought, men of the new age. Indeed it was the perfect place for the Zoological Society – with its shared vision of progress, of order, of the natural beauty of God's world – to put down its roots.

He could see it now, in his mind's eye. He could picture the fine buildings he would construct on this spot and that spot in the grounds, elegant buildings that would honour and augment such a beautiful setting. Each animal would have its own accommodation – an aviary here, a paddock for deer there, the lake filled with fish and frequented by aquatic birds. He could imagine a house there for the lions from Africa, another nearby for the apes of Asia, yet another for the elephants of India. All of these beasts, from across the earth, from every corner of the endless Empire, gathered here! He could almost hear the roars.

There must be space, too, for a Museum to contain all the skins, skeletons and stuffed bodies he was already receiving for the Society from his friends out East. And rooms for the members to meet and study in. Everything would be ordered, everything in its place. There would be no poky, crowded buildings, like Exeter 'Change, filled at random. No dim corners for a huge beast like Chunya to die in. Mr Cross had already offered the Society his own animals. Ha! Cross knew that the days of such palaces of frivolity were over. A new age was upon them. Sir Stamford thought back to his visit to the Jardin des Plantes in Paris with Sophia. To the enclosures there, so suited to the outdoor setting, to the proper study of the creatures. In the Regent's Park they would be able to match it – to better it. There was so much space to build in!

Sir Stamford was happy to be making this closer acquaintance with Lord Auckland, a man of about his own age and similarly attired in a tall silk hat, high-collared shirt and cravat, a thick coat pulled around him to ward off the cold March wind. Lord Auckland was a politician from a very prestigious family. He knew well the leader of the House of Lords, the Earl of Liverpool, and had sat on many committees with him. The Society had initially hoped that Liverpool would be able to whisper the right words in the right ears, and thus procure the parcel of land upon which Sir Stamford had set his heart, upon which his mind had already built the wonders of his menagerie. It was inside the Inner Circle, near to the glorious ornamental lake, and currently cultivated by a nurseryman.

That was not where they were today. The Commission of Woods and Forests had directed them to another area, beside the newly constructed canal on the northern edge of the park. That was where they were walking now. The canal was just ten years old, a marvel of engineering, and ran all the way from Paddington, through the new village of St John's Wood, with its

Continental villas to the west of them, and on to the London docks to the south-east. This element of Nash's grand plan had cost the nation at least half a million pounds, he had been told. But it was so efficient! All the speed of water transport, yet unencumbered by the wind or tides, of which he knew all too much. The two men stood on the bank, watching a laden barge move westward, tugged along by a chestnut horse. Sir Stamford wondered how far its goods, hidden in crates, had travelled already.

A canal would surely be useful to a Society that must rely so heavily on London's links to the rest of the world. Indeed, but the road . . . They were so close to the road that they could hear its noise even now: the constant chatter of wheels and hoofs. That would not do, would it? And it was so narrow here. They would not be able to lay out the buildings as Sir Stamford had imagined. Why were the Commissioners reluctant to give them a finer stretch of land? Did they not foresee the benefits the Society would bring? How magnificently it would adorn the already magnificent park?

No, it was not what they needed, they agreed, turning back to the road and Lord Auckland's carriage. Sir Stamford suggested that they go post-haste to talk to Mr Decimus Burton, a young architect who had been recommended by Mr Bellas Greenough, one of the subscribers to the Society and the owner of the finest of all of the Regent's Park villas, Grove House. Mr Burton had designed it for him, and was working with Sir Humphry too, on the Athenaeum Club. Sir Stamford had spoken to him already, and the young man had said he would be happy to help the Society with its plans. He was the right man for the job, Sir Stamford had no doubt: his father, Mr James Burton, had been Mr Nash's builder here and had put into stone and stucco the architect's marvellous vision. And Burton the Younger had not only designed Mr Bellas Greenough's villa but many others in the park – and even been given charge of some of the terraces by Mr Nash. Sir Stamford had been most impressed, however, to

learn that the huge domed exhibition hall, the Colosseum, which was now being constructed to the east of the park, was entirely his design. A most exciting and breathtakingly modern undertaking, a purpose-built construction to house a panoramic, perspectival view of London based on exact geometrical drawings made from the dome of St Paul's. Magnificent!

Lord Auckland agreed that they should indeed talk to Mr Burton, and the two men walked briskly, both secretly glad to be getting out of the cold.

A few days later, a letter arrived for Sir Stamford at Lower Grosvenor Street, from his friend Thomas McQuoid. He had instructed McQuoid to remit his remaining money in Batavia to London so that he could pay for Highwood House. The letter contained grave news: McQuoid's company had gone bankrupt. He had lost everything – including Sir Stamford's sixteen thousand pounds. It was, more or less, the last money the family had been able to count on.

Just a few weeks later, another letter followed this most unwelcome news: a long-awaited correspondence. It was the response from the East India Company to his statement, recognizing his good service in their name. Yes, yes, he knew all of this, he thought, as he read it. But where was the detail as to how they were going to compensate him for it?

On the same day, an invoice from the Company arrived. The directors had done their own calculations. They reckoned that they were not in Sir Stamford's debt to more than twenty thousand pounds, as his own sums had indicated. Rather, he owed that amount to them. Twenty-two thousand two hundred and seventy-two pounds, to be precise.

On Saturday, the 29th of April, 1826, the first general meeting of the Zoological Society of London took place in the rooms of the

Horticultural Society. This time, it was not just the proposers of the Society who passed through the grand doorway of 21 Regent Street. On that spring afternoon, forty-eight men crossed the threshold and made their way to the meeting room. Forty-eight men who had responded to the invitation to its inaugural meeting, sent to all of the existing subscribers, and many other important and influential figures besides. There were many great men among them, professional men of science and amateur naturalists alike. Even the Lord Mayor, Mr William Venables MP, had come, Sir Stamford was gratified to see.

Sir Stamford had been called to the chair and the proceedings were under way. He was reading aloud, to those assembled, a letter from the Commission of Woods and Forests granting them a plot in the Regent's Park. The Commissioners had refused to compromise on the area they would offer, so Sir Humphry and Sir Stamford had conceded. They had taken the land by the canal, despite its drawbacks. It would do. The deal was done. They had taken on a lease for five acres, at six pounds and six shillings per acre per year. He read from the letter, in the voice he reserved for such occasions: 'The Society is to fence and lay out, plant, keep and occupy the ground within the Park in such manner as shall be previously approved by the said Commissioners, who are at liberty to require the removal of any animal which may be brought upon the premises by the Society, which may be deemed likely to become a nuisance or objectionable in the neighbourhood.'

He looked up at this point to gauge the reaction of his audience to the fact that the land was *already theirs*, and that they would soon start preparing it for the reception of the first live animals. He did not feel quite the sense of pride he had anticipated of this momentous occasion. He was, if he was honest, a little distracted. A friend who had come to the meeting, whom he had not seen for a time, had – rather unhelpfully, he

thought – told him how unwell he looked. He was probably right. He certainly did not feel at full strength, as he stood there now.

Just that morning he had finally managed to sit at his desk to respond to the East India Company's devastating demand. He had written what he thought was a dignified letter, in the circumstances, to the Company Secretary, Sir Joseph Dart. He had simply asked for time to comply with their demands. Though quite what time would give him, he did not know. He felt as if he was under siege. He had nowhere to turn, no battle-winning strategy. He – a man of action, of ingenuity, of confidence – was paralysed. How would he ever pay for Highwood? It would have to go. What else they would have to part with, he dared not think. Not yet. Not while he was so busy. He would focus on the Society for now, with what energy he had left. Once that was done, he would think about money.

It was a shame that his mind kept wandering back to that, because as soon as he was elected President he would move on to a speech that he had been, mentally at least, preparing for years. A speech he had made so many times in his own mind, or shared with Sophia, and more recently with anyone who would listen. A review of the state of zoology in Great Britain, and a laying out of the objectives and details of the Society he had planned. He tried to focus on the task at hand. But he was so very tired.

It all started to come together before his very eyes, crafted with his own hands – or near enough. Sir Stamford Raffles, duly elected the first President of the Zoological Society of London at its first meeting, wasted no time in commencing the work thus assigned to him. Just a week later, he was able to report to the first Council meeting of the Society that he had taken temporary accommodation until they could build in the park itself: a town-house on Bruton Street, the former residence of the late Royal

Academician William Owen. He took Mr Burton, the architect, there to survey the building. It was the first occasion upon which the two men had spent any time together, and he found Burton eminently professional, despite his age. He reminded himself that he had been even younger when he had been sent out to Penang, and not much older when he had mounted an invasion of Java and become its first Lieutenant-Governor. Mr Burton did not betray the enthusiasm of most young men, but he seemed appropriately interested in Sir Stamford's plans, and understood what he wished to achieve. Sir Stamford reported back to the Council that he thought the building entirely fit for purpose, with a few renovations. The Museum could be installed there as soon as the renovations – whitewashing and painting, some repairs to the chimneys and roof – were completed.

Sub-committees were established to oversee every detail of the forthcoming work required to accommodate the Society. Sir Stamford volunteered to sit on four out of six, despite his wife's concerns that he was pushing himself too hard. The subscriptions kept coming in. Five thousand pounds were set aside for the Gardens in the Regent's Park and the President asked Mr Burton to draw up a detailed plan. Until the menagerie was ready – which even the ever-impatient Sir Stamford realized might take time – they would need somewhere to keep the donations of living animals already made to the Society. Reluctantly, he agreed with Mr Cross of the Exeter 'Change and Mr Cops, keeper of the Tower Menagerie, that they would have temporary care of them. A griffon vulture and a white-headed eagle were bestowed upon the Society by Mr Brookes, who was soon to retire. By June 1826, the Zoological Society of London had its first Council of eminent scientists and gentlemen, its first President, a future headquarters and Museum, its first live animals, and the land that would boast the most magnificent menagerie ever seen.

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Yet the venture was still mocked by the press. Sir Stamford could not believe they doubted, even now. The *Literary Gazette* called it the 'Noah's Ark' Society, claiming of its ambitions that 'there is neither wisdom nor folly new under the sun'. They compared it to the wild-beast shows of which the Romans had been so fond! Had these so-called journalists not read the prospectus, in which he had *specifically* outlined how this would be entirely different from the savagery and spectacle of ancient Rome? And the mockery hadn't ended there: they had also written that the aim was to propagate 'strange reptiles' all over the Kingdom. The absurdity! Sophia had had to calm him down when he showed it to her, almost shaking with disbelief. What he was doing *was* new! And it *was* serious. He would show them.

He wished that he did not have to expend so much energy on worrying about money. He had not yet addressed the catastrophic financial situation his family now faced. That could wait. He was Noah, if they liked, because he *was* building an ark, right here in London.

In the middle of June, the family moved back to Highwood House. Sophia hoped her husband could finally relax. He had been so terribly busy, and irritable, even – rare for Tom. The children, Ella and her cousin Charles, had been ill with whooping cough and he had suffered from it too. Back at Highwood, everyone found health and good spirits once more. Tom began to unwind. The Wilberforces moved in next door. Sophia knew there was concern over money, but surely they could sort it out. Tom's health was still poor, but she was sure it would improve now they were back in the country. They loved it there.

Just three weeks into their summer at Highwood, on the 5th of July, Sophia awoke in the first eerie light of dawn to find her husband absent from their chamber. He had come to their bed at his normal hour, and she wondered why he had risen so

unusually early. She went after him. She found him at the bottom of the stairs, unconscious. The household was awoken to her screams for a doctor.

It was the day before his forty-sixth birthday.

Report made to the Family of the Late Sir T. S. Raffles of the result of the examination as to the immediate cause of his death

On inspecting the body of the late Sir Stamford Raffles in the evening of the 5th of July 1826 the following morbid appearances were observed:

Upon removing the cranium, the anterior part of the right frontal bone was twice the thickness of the left; this must be imputed to the effects of the sun in India since it is a common occurrence in those who have resided long in hot climates. The outer covering of the brain was in a highly inflamed state, which had been of long continuance, from the thickness of the coats of the vessels. In one part immediately upon the sinciput, this vasculosity exceeded any thing I had ever seen. In the right ventricle of the brain there was coagulum of the size of a pullet's egg and a quantity of bloody serum escaped, which measured six ounces. This extravasation of blood, which had been almost instantaneous, was the cause of immediate death, so far as the faculties of the brain are concerned. In the other viscera of the body there was no appearance connected with disease.

Signed, Everard Home