The journey down the Amazon was one that Maia never forgot. In places the river was so wide that she understood why it was called the River Sea and they sailed between distant lines of trees. But sometimes they made their way between islands and then, on the sandbanks, they saw some of the creatures that Maia has read about. Once a litter of capybaras lumbered after their mother and they were close enough to see their funny little snouts and sandy fur. Once they passed a tree whose roots had been killed by the rise of the water, and its bare branches were full of scarlet and blue parakeets which flew up, screeching, when the boat came past. And once Maia saw a grey log lying in the shallows which suddenly came to life.

They passed plantations of rubber trees and Indian villages with houses built on stilts to stop them being flooded when the river rose. The Indian children came out onto the landing stage and waved and called out, and Maia waved back and didn’t stop till they were out of sight.

Sometimes the boat went close enough to the shore for them to pass by old houses owned by the sugar planters or coffee exporters; they could see the verandas with the families taking tea, and dogs stretched out in the shade, and hanging baskets of scarlet flowers.

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