

Please note: Page 3 is an illustration...

'Do you know why there're no moles living under the grass here?' asked Gary, pushing his hands as far as possible into his coat pockets and wishing that he wasn't too cool to wear gloves.

'Because it's winter and it's too cold,' Katie was the oldest and the most sensible.

'No. Too much blood,' said Gary darkly. 'When the Vikings came and attacked Pegwell Bay there was such a battle here that blood and bones covered the entire field. It was soaked red as far as you could see, and since then no mole has ever dared poke its head up through the ground.'

'Don't be silly, Gary, nobody ever fought anything here. It's too boring. I bet the Vikings just came, took one look round and told the locals they could keep it. All we've got now is a Pitch and Putt course, and if the Vikings had been here in winter, even that would have been closed.'

In front of the shack, the wind flapped a rickety wooden sign advertising **BURGERS MADE WITH REAL NORSE MEAT**. Anybody who'd ever tried one thought it was a spelling mistake. The wind whipped up the road lifting the light tarpaulin someone had placed over their car and written **FOR SALE** on.

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Joshua ran up to join Katie and Gary. 'Let's go down on the beach and see if we can find anything exciting,' he shouted. 'There might be washing-up.'

'Washing-up? What d'you mean, shrimp?' asked Gary. He was nine but very nearly ten and he felt that Joshua ought to be a little more in awe of him.

'From the storm, last night.'

Katie interpreted. 'He means there might be things washed up on the shore after the storm.'

Gary shook his head in disgust. 'Washing-up! If I were a Viking I'd sail away from here.'

'If you were a Viking, you'd have been dead a thousand years,' replied Katie, and headed off to the beach.

By Thor it was so cold. Nobody with any sense would have gone down to the beach that afternoon. On a fine day, a few keen dog-walkers might have been out on the seafront at this time of the year, or perhaps you'd have caught sight of Mr Patterson pacing up and down and looking out to sea. He ran the Pitch and Putt in the summer and was always at a loss as to what to do with his time during the winter. Today, however,

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even he had found something better to do and Pegwell Bay was completely and utterly deserted.

Joshua ran on ahead, with Gary being more careful because he was wearing his new trainers and he liked to admire them as he walked. The beach itself was covered in flotsam washed up from the bad weather. Flotsam is a good word. It means anything that has ended up in the sea by accident and then washed ashore. Today that meant cans and bottles, old plastic bags and even the right leg from a shop window dummy.

'Here's something, here's something,' shouted Joshua, picking up a large yellow stone. Gary thought it unlikely Joshua had found anything interesting. It looked like any yellow stone. Joshua moved it to show his brother and sister but as he did so the strangest thing happened. The yellow colour of the stone began to turn blue.

'Let me see that,' said Gary. As he grabbed the stone from Joshua's hand and turned it for a better view, the stone once again became yellow. Even Gary was impressed. He turned the stone again and again. Each time it turned blue, then yellow and then blue again.

'Whatever can it be?' asked Katie.

Just then, as if in answer to her question, the children thought they heard something in the howling wind.

'Det er min. Jeg skal brug de til min rejse.'

Gary shook his head and listened again. Slowly the sounds became clearer. It was a voice, getting louder and louder.

'Det er min. That's mine. Jeg skal brug de til min rejse. I shall need it for my journey.'

The children huddled together. They looked round, but there was no one there.

'I need it for my journey,' the voice called again.

'Who's that?' whispered Joshua, wishing he'd remembered to go to the bathroom before they came out.

'I don't know,' Katie hissed back.

Now Joshua really did need to go to the loo. His big sister, Katie, normally knew everything but she didn't know what the stone was and now she didn't know who was speaking either.

Gary looked around at the white cliff-face of the bay that circled round beyond them. Although he had been to the beach a hundred

times he noticed for the first time what looked like the entrance to a small cave.

'I think the voice is coming from that cave,' said Gary, pointing.

Joshua had started hopping from one foot to the other. 'Why don't we just go home for a while,' he mumbled, 'and come back some other day? I need to go—'

'Oh, come on,' interrupted Gary.

The children made their way up to the sandy shore. Gary, who was enjoying being in charge for a change, had forgotten to step carefully so as not to mess up his trainers. Joshua shifted nervously from foot to foot, now desperate to pee, while Katie wished she wasn't twelve and the oldest and could run home. As they drew near, the cave entrance looked dark and forbidding. Joshua began shaking. He'd heard that dragons liked to live in dark caves. Now even Gary stopped in his tracks. He had been as brave as he could, but he had also just remembered reading something about smugglers with guns hiding in caves.

'Who's there?' he called out softly, so as not to wake anything that might be hiding inside.

