

'I am Grettir, conqueror of trolls and ghosts!' thundered a voice echoing in the cave. All three children would have run away there and then, but somehow their feet wouldn't do as they were told. Even stranger, each one felt that they must have blinked for a moment, because at first no one was there, and then suddenly a small girl seemed to . . . well . . . fade into view. She stood in the cave entrance and looked at them. Gary, Katie and Joshua forgot all their manners and stared back. And Joshua even forgot that he needed to go to the loo.

In front of them stood the strangest little girl they'd ever seen. She was no bigger than six-year-old Joshua but she wore the most peculiar clothes. She had a brown dress with woollen leggings, leather shoes that didn't look like they'd come from the high street and a hood with a long streamer of material down her back. The dress was pulled in tight around her chubby waist with a leather belt in which she'd stuck a small sword. A miniature blue cloak hung from her shoulders and on her head she had a grey metal hat that looked like the upturned end of a large bullet. Two small blonde plaits stuck out

below either side of her helmet, and around her neck she wore a leather chain with a small silver hammer hanging from it.



'Say something, Katie,' gulped Gary, pushing his sister forward.

'Uh . . . you're not from round here, are you?' managed Katie in a high-pitched voice.

'Maybe she's from the grammar school,' suggested Joshua, who knew that the grammar-school pupils wore a fancy uniform.

The small girl scrunched up her face into the fiercest expression she could manage.

'Beware, for I am the great god, Grettir, conqueror of trolls and ghosts,' boomed the little girl in a surprisingly loud voice, which could have earned her a good living selling strawberries at Pegwell market.

Joshua thought for a moment and then spoke. 'Sorry to be rude but I don't think you're big enough to be a god.'

The little girl eyed him suspiciously.

'Alright,' she boomed, slightly less confidently.

'How about, "I am the witch Gullweig, mistress of evil magic"?'

The children all thought for a moment.

'I still think you're pushing it a bit,' said Gary.

The strange girl nodded. 'So, you're going to be tricky, eh? Let's see . . . Would you believe I was a great Viking hero come from fighting hordes of giants in the east?'

The children looked at each other and shook their heads: 'No.'

'Oh.' The small girl ploughed on. 'A little Viking hero come from fighting a few giants? . . . OK, one giant? . . . Alright. A small Viking, not a hero at all, come from home and got a bit lost really and . . . oh . . . oh . . .' And with that, the little girl sat down and began to weep.

'Now look what we've done,' said Joshua. 'We've made her cry.' Joshua had more sympathy than the others with people who'd been made to cry, as it happened rather too often to him. He marched over and put his arm round the girl, while Gary, who hated crying, wandered away for a moment.

'What's your name?' asked Joshua.

'A-A-Amber,' she stammered through her tears. 'I am Amber, Ha . . . Ha . . . Hammer of the Nn . . . Nn . . . North.'

'What are you doing here?' asked Katie, approaching slowly.

'I got lost in a storm and my boat was smashed up and I can't get home and I'm hungry and I don't know what to do . . .' blurted out Amber, and she began weeping again.

'What were you doing in a boat on your own?' Katie knelt down next to Amber.

'I wanted to go to Vineland and fight trolls with seven heads and find a great kingdom and win untold riches to bring back for m . . . m . . . Mother,' Amber mumbled.

'Vineland? I think she's taken a bit of a wrong turning,' said Joshua.

Meanwhile Gary was poking around in front of the cave. He was astonished by what he found. Pulled against the wall was the world's smallest Viking boat. Well, what was left of it. It had all the same fittings as Pegwell Bay's Viking ship but all in miniature. Two little oars lay cracked and splintered next to a single red shield. The front of the boat had a whole chunk missing and several of the planks which had held it together lay broken. Amber stood up and came to look at the ruined boat.

'It's hopeless. I don't think I can fix it.' She sighed.

Gary tried to shift the boat away from the wall to get a better look, but it was far too heavy.

'Here, let me.' Amber reached out with one hand and moved the entire vessel over.

'How did you do that?' asked Gary in complete amazement. 'It weighs a ton.'



'I may be little,' said Amber, 'but I was the strongest girl in our village. When I was on my father's boat I could leap over the gunwale and bound from oar to oar as his men rowed. If I met a troll . . . which you know, I haven't yet, but if I did, I could chop off its head with a single stroke of my sword and it would be no tougher than cutting through butter. I could do anything, 'cause I'm strong.'

'I bet you miss your mum though,' said Joshua.

'Yes, yes . . . I do,' admitted Amber, and she dissolved into tears once more. Gary patted her gently on the back and then coughed and moved his hand when he realized what he was doing.

'Gary, Joshua, come here,' said Katie, beckoning them away from the cave. 'Now, we've got to be sensible about this. What do you think we should do?'

'I still need to go to the . . . ' said Joshua.

'Not that,' replied Katie, getting irritated.

'Who is she?'

'Maybe she really is a Viking,' said Gary slowly. 'I mean, there's the boat and everything. And her clothes look a bit, er, Vikingish . . .'