

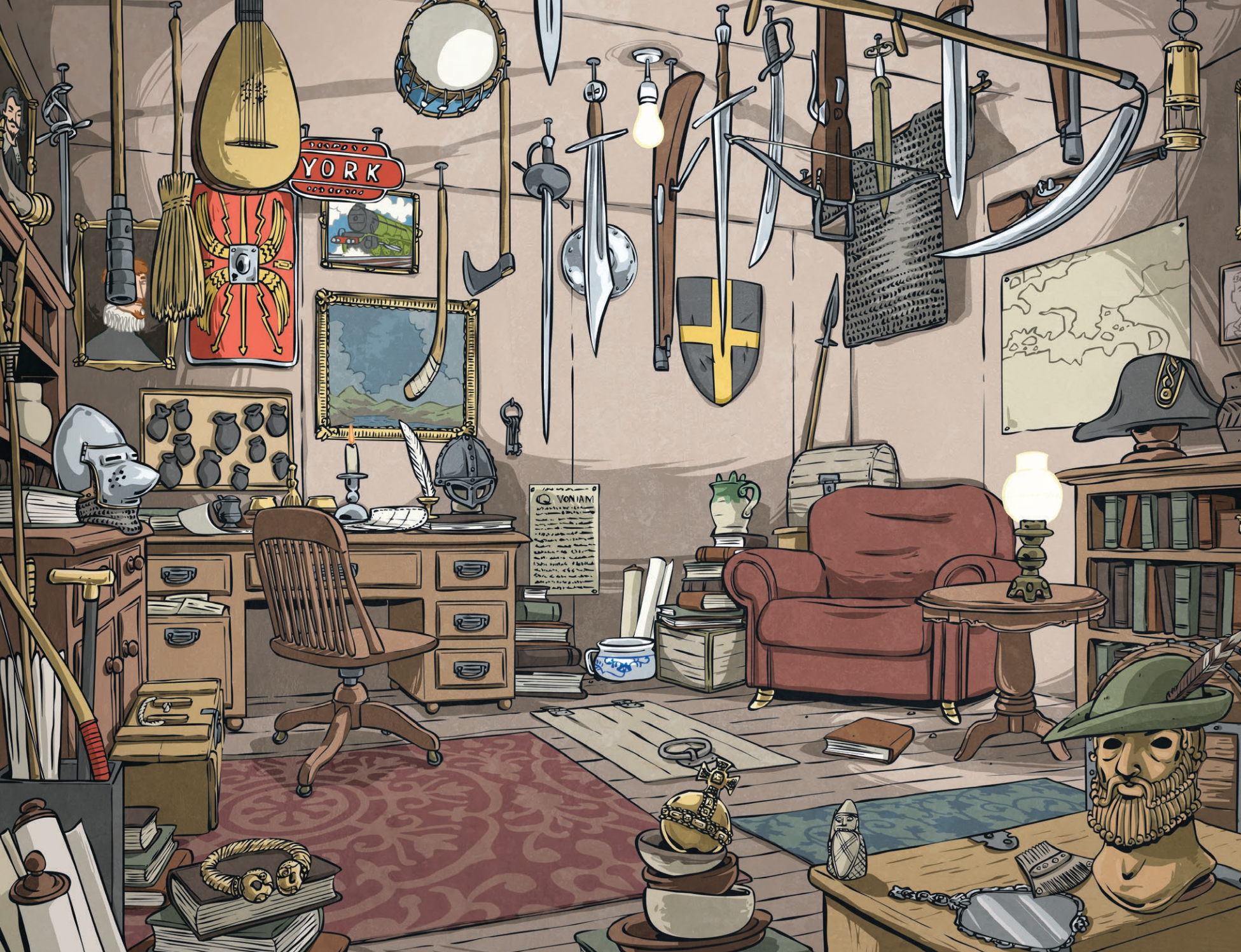
A TWINKL ORIGINAL

HISTORY HACKERS



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A TWINKL ORIGINAL

HISTORY HACKERS



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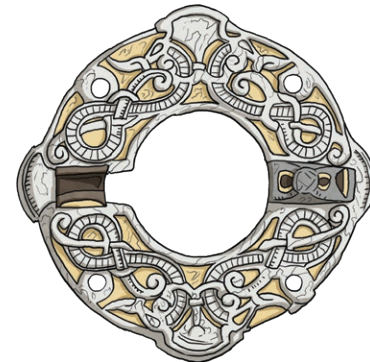
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Chapter One

A Surprise in the Attic

Icy raindrops peppered the first-floor window like tiny stones, reminding Tilda and Charlie Hacker that the freshness of spring was still several months away.

At ground level beneath them was Hackers' Antiques. On the busy street outside, the bitter winter weather pushed York's visitors straight past the family's shop with barely a second glance. Most had their faces protected against the biting chill by snug hoods; others shielded themselves from the relentless downpour beneath large, colourful umbrellas. It seemed that nobody had time for a browse today.

None of this mattered, though, to the two siblings in the lounge above the shop. A warm and crackling fire kept the cold at bay, bathing them both in orange light and heat as they sat across from each other on the floor.

The pink tip of ten-year-old Charlie's tongue looked like it was trying to escape from his mouth as he focused on scrubbing the last bits of dirt from his goalkeeper boots.

"Do you *have* to do that in here?" Tilda asked eventually. "There's muck everywhere!"

Charlie scrunched up his face. "I don't *want* to do it at all but Mum says they need cleaning before the next match and I'm not doing them outside in this weather."

Tilda's freckled nose wrinkled as she sighed. "Well, you could try and be more careful about it. You're flicking dirt all over my stitching. I want to get this finished today and I don't want it ruined before it's even done."

Charlie peered down at the handmade item resting on his eleven-year-old sister's knee.



Several days ago, he'd watched Tilda use a paper pattern to cut shapes from a single piece of fabric. He was amazed to see that those shapes had now been transformed into quite an impressive satchel, although he'd never admit that to her.

"What's the rush?" he asked. "Hoping to sell it at the next car boot sale?"

Tilda's creased forehead told him she wasn't pleased with the suggestion. "I thought car boot sales were for selling junk. Does this look like junk?"

"No! Of course not!" Charlie shook his head. "I just—"

"Mum says she might be able to display this in the shop," Tilda interrupted. "I've used a Viking pattern we found online to make it."

Tilda and Charlie lived above their family's shop, Hackers' Antiques, which was located in the centre of the city. York had a rich history and tourists loved to come and hear about all the different cultures that had made a home

there over the centuries. The Viking period was just one of the past eras that added to stories of the city's background. The siblings couldn't help but hear lots about it — whether it was at school, in their parents' shop or from the many historic attractions they'd visited over the years.

Charlie snorted, "A Viking pattern? Did Vikings even make satchels? Weren't they too busy burning down villages and stealing people's gold and silver?"

Now, it was Tilda's turn to shake her head, sending her blonde hair swishing like a horse's tail. "You're only thinking of the warriors. I'm talking about the normal Vikings who settled in York. Most of them were ordinary people, who made things to use and sell."

"Like that satchel?" Charlie's words were still thick with disbelief.

"Yes, and other things too, like bowls and cups and jewellery. Most things would be handmade." Tilda reached forwards to grasp the footwear from her brother's hands. "They even made shoes — but not quite fancy football boots!"

“Geroff! I’ve nearly finished cleaning them!” He snatched back the boots. “You make Vikings sound just like us, Tils. I thought they were all bloodthirsty invaders with beards and helmets.”

“Of course not! I thought you knew your history better than that, Charlie! You’d be surprised by how similar the Vikings were to people today. Go back over a thousand years and you could easily find two Viking kids doing exactly what we’re doing now.”

Charlie smirked. “Arguing?”

Tilda gave him a grin. “No, I mean making something or cleaning muddy boots. They might have been doing the very same thing and even have lived on the very same street as we do. Isn’t that amazing?”

This was all too much for Charlie to take in. He knew that York was famous for its Viking past — the city even had a world-famous museum devoted to the marauding invaders — but he just couldn’t imagine how parts of Viking life were in any way similar to his existence in the twenty-first century.

Perhaps sensing her brother’s doubts, Tilda sprang up off the sofa and stepped towards the rain-spattered window. She pressed her face against the glass as she beckoned Charlie towards her.

“Look outside,” she insisted. “Even today, there are direct links from us to that time over a thousand years ago.”

Sighing, Charlie shuffled to join his sister at the window and glanced out. “It’s just a street. And I *definitely* can’t see any Vikings.” He could feel the icy coldness from outside reaching towards him like a ghostly finger as he used the window’s reflection to admire his latest scruffy, blonde hairstyle.

“Don’t look at the people and shops,” Tilda told him. “Read the street sign.”

“Goodramgate.” He turned to his sister and shrugged. “Big deal. What does that prove?”

Tilda gasped. “It proves more than you think. It has the word ‘gate’ at the end.”

“So, it’s named after a gate. York has loads of gates. What’s so special about that?” Charlie asked. Losing interest, he stepped away from the window and slouched onto the sofa.

It was true. The city of York had dozens of streets inside and outside its walls ending in the word ‘gate’. Most people overlooked this quirk of the historical town but, sometimes, the names helped tourists to navigate the city streets. Castlegate, for example, was a narrow road leading up to the old castle tower and museum. Others such as Whip-Ma-Whop-Ma-Gate brought more amusement than useful directions.

Tilda chuckled, “The Vikings used the word ‘gate’ for street.”

When Charlie glanced up, his eyes shone with a renewed interest. “So, what does that mean they used to do on Goodramgate?”

“I dunno,” Tilda admitted as a sense of mischief began curling her lips into a smile. “But you know how we can find out more if you’re feeling curious...”

Charlie raced ahead of his sister to the top of the narrow set of attic stairs. He pressed his back to the old wooden door, arms outstretched, and his face wore a mask of steely determination.

“Wait a minute, Tils! We’re not going in there until you promise me something. We’re not going to get dragged into another time-travel disaster again, are we? This is *not* going to end up like when we were captured by Roman soldiers or running from Victorian workhouse masters, is it?”

Tilda paused several steps away from her brother, gazing up at him as he barred her passage. She offered him a soothing smile, hoping he couldn’t see the fingers she had crossed behind her back.

“Since when did you become such a scaredy-cat? I just want to look at Professor Howe’s journals, honest! I remember skimming through one of them about the Vikings. He travelled back to Viking York several times so I’m sure he’ll have made a note about what he found on all the different streets. We can see if he said anything

about Goodramgate. We don't *have* to go back in time ourselves. We can just look."

"All right!" breathed Charlie, clearly relieved. "Because the last person I ever want to encounter when I go back in time is a Viking warrior whose favourite hobby is killing people."

It no longer seemed strange or unusual for the Hacker siblings to discuss time travelling. It was now just as much a part of their lives as catching the school bus or shopping for new clothes. The only real difference was that it remained a secret they shared just with each other.

Tilda could still remember the first time they'd discovered the tiny room and its treasure trove of items, all hidden behind the attic wall. It had been constructed by the house's previous occupant, a man named Professor Howe. The professor had since gone missing, vanishing without a trace. When the authorities had given up on ever finding him, Tilda and Charlie's parents had bought the old, ramshackle house. They had turned it into a bustling antiques shop, filling the ground floor with a collection

of historical curiosities that York's many visitors eagerly snapped up.

What Tilda and Charlie's parents didn't know, however, was that in a secret room at the top of the house sat a horde of incredible artefacts and treasures from the past. This included Shakespeare's original pocketbook, handwritten manuscripts penned by Charles Dickens himself, sketches drawn by renowned artists and so much more.

Each priceless item had been collected and meticulously catalogued by Professor Howe yet, despite their incredible value, none of these items were as precious as the room's real hidden treasure — the means to actually time-travel!

Feeling the familiar rush of excitement that accompanied her whenever they visited the professor's room, Tilda scurried up the last few stairs. "I think York's Viking era was the professor's favourite period," she said, shouldering open the door. "He filled the pages of several journals with tales of his adventures and..."

The creaking door was still swinging shut behind him when Charlie slammed into the back of his sister. They both tumbled across the bare wooden floor, landing in a dusty heap in front of a pair of very familiar size eleven shoes.

“Dad! What are *you* doing up here?” Charlie coughed as he scrambled upwards.

“Perhaps I should be asking you two the same question,” their father replied as he helped both children to their feet. “There’s nothing up here of any interest to you — just a few boxes of clutter and old books.”

As their father waved his hand towards the storage boxes piled in the corner of the room, Tilda and Charlie swapped anxious stares; they knew they had to keep the hidden room and its contents a secret.

“Well, we... uh... it’s...” Charlie spluttered. “Tilda... she... uh...”

“We came looking for *you*, Dad!” Tilda lied. “We couldn’t find you anywhere.”

“I’ve been up here all morning, looking through the unsold stock,” their father explained. “Your mum wants to take it to a car boot sale.”

He wiped beads of sweat from his forehead and then twitched his nose before a sneeze exploded down both nostrils.

“Ah! Oh! Argh! There’s so much dust in here. I really should get this entire room cleaned and decorated. I was thinking of using it as an office.”

“An office?” Charlie gasped. “Up here?”

“It’s lovely and quiet,” their father nodded. “And your mum doesn’t like those steep stairs, so I thought there might be more chance of being able to concentrate on some work up here.”

Just as Charlie was starting to feel panic flooding his brain, Tilda said, “It would make a rubbish office, Dad. You’d bang your head on the ceiling beams and it’s really cold up here in the winter.”

“Cold in the winter? How do you know it’s—”

“And don’t forget the pigeons,” Charlie interrupted. “Remember how much you hate pigeons!”

Their father scratched his head, glancing up at the ceiling with worried eyes. “Pigeons? I haven’t noticed any—”

“Oh, they love it up there,” Tilda added, gently steering her father towards the door. “We’ve seen them sitting on the rooftop as if they own the place.”

Nodding eagerly, Charlie continued, “Yep, hundreds of them. An entire flock — maybe two flocks. I’m surprised you haven’t heard them cooing and flapping and doing whatever else those filthy, smelly pigeons do.”

Glancing back up at the ceiling, their father shuddered slightly. “Well, now you mention it, I did hear *something*.”

“That’s definitely the pigeons, Dad,” Tilda said. “Imagine hearing that every day. You’d hate it up here.”

“Hmm, maybe you’re right, Tils. Perhaps I’ll see if I can clear out the cellar instead. It’s a lot cosier and your mum is claustrophobic so she wouldn’t disturb me down there either.”

Opening the door for their father, Tilda nodded enthusiastically. “Great thinking, Dad. Why don’t you go and take a look in the cellar, right now, while we both make a start on trying to clean up some of this dust.”

As he left the room and began to descend the first few steps, Mr Hacker stopped and turned back to beam at his children. “You know, you really are a couple of clever kids — and so thoughtful too. Just wait until I tell your mum!”

Tilda closed the door and quietly locked it from the inside as the two children listened to their father’s footsteps retreat down the stairs. “That was *too close!*” she admitted breathlessly.

Charlie nodded. “Yeah. If Dad had his office up here, it would ruin everything!”

“Good thinking with the pigeons.” Tilda winked. “I think you might have saved us.”

“Let’s get inside the professor’s room before Dad changes his mind,” said Charlie. “If he ever finds out what we really get up to in the attic, we’ll need more than York’s stinking pigeons to save us!”



Chapter Two

Charlie Finds a Challenge

Tilda and Charlie worked fast. The pile of boxes was easily slid aside, allowing Charlie to feel along the section of timber flooring until his fingernails found a thin ridge. Moments later, he had lifted the hidden trapdoor to reveal a small wooden ladder descending under the floorboards.

Their entry was so much smoother than the first time they had stumbled upon the hidden space. Tilda had first needed to bash the attic door handle with Charlie’s shoe while they speculated about the place being haunted. Once inside the main attic room, they had eventually

discovered the almost invisible trapdoor. Now, however, they knew where to grip their fingers around the cracks to lift it and had mastered a slick route from the main dusty room into the secret treasure trove beyond. Only the pair of them knew it existed and, so far, they had managed to keep it that way.

Charlie followed his sister down the six rungs, pulling the trapdoor shut behind them, before navigating an identical ladder sitting opposite the first and emerging into Professor Howe's hidden room.

The room's heady mixture of age and decay never failed to send a flutter of excitement through Charlie's belly. He took a deep breath as he scanned the now familiar collection of historic treasures and artefacts. Then, he weaved his way between the forest of medieval swords, sabres and muskets hanging from the ceiling. Brooches, bracelets and precious amulets littered the shelves and surfaces. Eventually, he arrived at a worn leather chair beside what had once been Professor Howe's writing desk.

Tilda had already begun to rummage through

a shelf of bulging notebooks and diaries. Her fingertips danced up and down the creased spines, skimming over scribbled dates and titles until they lingered on one that read 'Vikings: One'.

"I knew it was here," she sang as she eased the book free. "This should tell us everything we need to know about Jorvik."

"My Vic? I don't know any Vic," Charlie said.

"I said *Jorvik*," Tilda giggled, rolling her eyes. "That's the name the Vikings gave York. Surely you knew that?"

Charlie blushed. "Yeah, sure. Of course I knew that. But why do we need to read the professor's journals to find out stuff like that? I'm sure all the facts will be online."

Tilda sighed. "Professor Howe is the only person from our time who has actually ever visited Viking York. His notes will tell us much more than any website or museum ever will."

Charlie peered down at a journal he'd picked

up and slowly leafed through its pages. He much preferred playing video games to reading books and soon found his attention wandering. The book's stitched leather binding quickly became much more interesting than the professor's notes.

Next to him, Tilda was browsing the pages of a similar-looking journal. One paragraph in particular seemed to really ignite her excitement. "It says here that Vikings weren't actually called Vikings at all."

Charlie glanced up from the binding. "That doesn't make any sense. They're called Vikings in all the history books and in movies. They can't *all* be wrong, can they?"

Tilda tapped the page in front of her. "Professor Howe should know. According to this journal, he went back to Jorvik a few separate times."

"I guess that makes him more of an expert than most of us," Charlie conceded, shrugging. "So, what were the Vikings called, then, if they weren't called Vikings?"

Tilda paused to read a line of the professor's journal before replying. "Apparently, they were from Denmark so most people called them Danes. Or pirates!"

Charlie sat forwards in his chair, fixing his sister with an enthused gaze. "Pirates? As in sailing the sea, wearing an earring and with a parrot on their shoulder?"

Giggling, Tilda shook her head. "I don't think they were that kind of pirate. But they did cross the sea, and, according to the professor's notes, the word Viking actually translates as 'someone who lurks in a bay'. I guess they waited in the bay before they attacked. Wow! This is really fascinating stuff."

"Does it say where they hid their treasure?" Charlie asked. "Maybe there's a map and a big X on the next page."

Tilda shook her head again. "I don't think Professor Howe was bothered about finding gold and jewellery." She cast her gaze around the small room, lingering on the ancient armour and chain-mail suits that hung from one of the

walls. “He seemed far more interested in historic artefacts. The kind of stuff even more valuable than money.”

“Well, he was silly then,” Charlie huffed, returning to the leather spine of the book in his own hands. “He could have been a very rich man if he’d brought back things that were really valuable, instead of all this other stuff.”

As his fingers continued to pick at the spine of Professor Howe’s journal, Charlie cast an eye over his shoulder, settling on a corkboard with a number of small leather pouches hanging from labelled hooks. His belly began to fizz with excitement as he silently read the names above each bag: Romans, Victorians, Vikings...

He moved over to the corkboard and carefully ran his fingers over the tiny drawstring bags. The adventurous side of him was still tempted by the amazing ability they’d discovered to travel back through York’s timeline. However, it had so far landed him in some pretty hair-raising scenarios and he was determined to stick to his guns this time.

“You did say we’re just going to look — remember, Tils?”

Tilda snatched an ancient riding crop from beside her foot and used it to swat her brother’s hand away from the pouches. “Better keep your mitts off that corkboard then, hadn’t you?”

Charlie turned his attention back towards the professor’s journal in his hands. His fingers had done more damage to the book’s binding than he’d ever intended and the spine’s leather jacket yawned widely up at him. He was about to return the book to the shelf, hoping that Tilda wouldn’t notice his accidental vandalism, when something unusual caught his eye — the folded corner of a hidden sheet of paper.

Wondering if it might be the treasure map he had hoped for earlier, he gently teased the slip of paper free. As he opened the last fold to reveal the note’s hidden secret, Charlie’s breath caught in his chest.

Completely oblivious, Tilda continued to scour the pages of her journal until she found the passage she was looking for. “Here’s the

proof... I knew I'd seen it before," she exclaimed triumphantly. "Professor Howe says that he visited a street where the locals sold coal and charcoal for fuel. He says it was so smoky and dirty that he could barely breathe as he walked past the scruffy, little homes and workshops. According to the professor's notes, the street still exists in exactly the same place today and it's called Colliergate. That must be the Viking name for the street of coal traders."



Excitement was flushing up Tilda's face and her nose was pressed so close to the book that it looked like she might fall through the page. "He visited Goodramgate too! That's the one opposite our house. It says here that it belonged to some important Viking jarl... I'm not sure what a jarl is... but his name was Guthrum. Wow, he must have been really—"

"Will you shut up about streets and gates?" Charlie snapped. "Look what I've found."

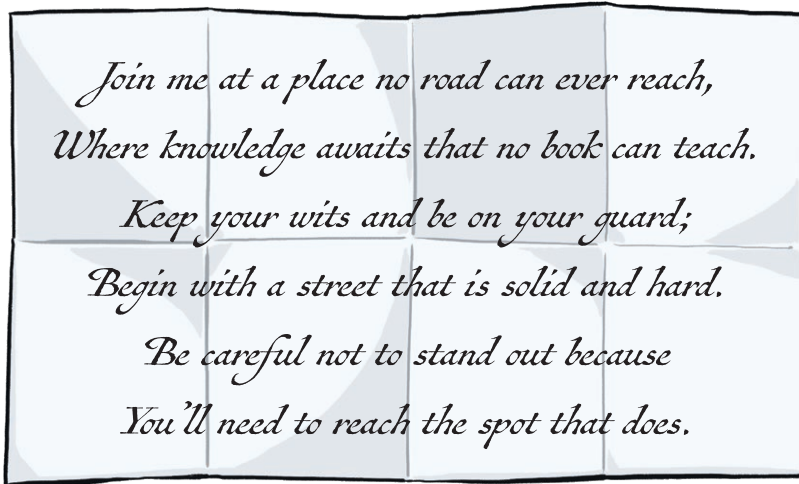
Wearing an annoyed scowl, Tilda glanced up towards her brother. "Big deal, Charlie. You found some paper in a book. What's your next trick — leaves on a tree?"

Charlie waved the note towards her. "It was hidden in the spine of the professor's journal. I think he put it there deliberately so that somebody would find it. There's a secret message on it!"

Tilda jumped from her seat and reached for the note. "Secret message?"

Charlie handed the note to his sister. Tilda peered

down at the square of creased paper. Despite its tiny proportions, there was quite a lot of the professor's exquisitely formed handwriting inscribed across it. She read it and then reread it several times, her forehead creasing deeper and deeper each time she did.



"It's mostly gibberish!" Charlie observed. "Perhaps all that time travelling finally sent the poor prof into a muddle!"

Tilda silenced him with a sudden clap. "I know what this is... a riddle!"

Charlie groaned. "I hate riddles. Let's put it back!"

But it was too late for that. He'd seen Tilda in the grip of enthusiasm many times before and Charlie knew any attempt to dampen her excitement was a complete waste of energy.

"This is amazing," his sister gushed. "I think it's some kind of clue — 'a street that is solid and hard'." She read the middle part of the note again out loud.

"See, that makes no sense at all," Charlie said, wearily shaking his head. "I mean, all streets are solid, right?"

Tilda shrugged. "Yep, but—"

Charlie wasn't listening. "And what does he mean by 'the spot that does' — does what?"

"Wait!" Tilda silenced her brother with an open palm aimed at him. "What did you just say?"

"I was just talking about the 'spot that does' bit."

Tilda tried to push his words away with her hand. "No, no, no. I meant the other bit."

“Oh, the solid bit? Yeah, aren’t all streets solid and hard? That was definitely how it felt when I fell off my bike the other week and banged my elbow when I landed. Definitely felt hard to me.”

Tilda sprang from her seat, rushed over to her brother and ruffled his scruffy, blonde hair. “Charlie Hacker, sometimes you say the daftest things...”

“Geroff!” Charlie objected, trying to wriggle away from her.

“...but you’re also sometimes a little genius.” She pointed to the corkboard hanging on the wall behind him. “Now, grab that little bag from the Vikings hook. We’re going back in time to Jorvik and we’re going to find Professor Howe!”

“No!” Charlie retorted. “No way! Not this time. Not today. You promised!”



Chapter Three

The Hackers Look the Part

Charlie’s refusal had fallen on deaf ears but he hadn’t given up protesting yet, even after they had left home through the back door of the antiques shop.

“I’m telling you that this is *not* a good idea,” he moaned. “I’ve got a bad feeling about this one. Let’s do the time travel next week — or in the summer when it’s warmer?”

“Where’s your sense of adventure gone, Charlie Hacker?” his sister teased, leading the way out of their street.

"I probably left it in the Roman dungeon or the Victorian workhouse! Have you forgotten those already?"

"Oh, come on! It'll be fun!"

Tilda and Charlie loved living in York. It was a city so rich in history that there was always something new and exciting to discover round almost every corner. Their time-travelling expeditions had added a whole new dimension to life, though. As tempting as the adventures were, Charlie knew he had a knack for getting caught in the wrong place at the wrong time.

It seemed that tourists flocked to York from every part of the world, in every season. Many came in large groups, on organised trips, and the people of the city made a living from showing them their home town's many treasures.

"If Professor Howe is happy back in Jorvik," Charlie persisted as they walked under grey, cloudy skies, "what's the point in trying to find him? Perhaps he'll be angry if we just turn up unannounced."

It had only taken a couple of turns before the two Hacker children began following one of these groups as they eagerly accompanied a pair of tour guides from street to street.

Although the morning's rain had given way to hints of watery sunshine through the cloud, Charlie's teeth had started chattering from the moment he'd set foot out of the house.

"We won't be *unannounced*," said Tilda, her excitement building. "That little note you found was the professor's invitation. I wonder what he looks like. I reckon he's quite tall with broad, rugby-player shoulders and the wild features of an explorer from all his travelling."

"As if! I bet he's not! I reckon he's got a curly moustache, a top hat and one of those single eyeglass things on a chain from his waistcoat pocket," Charlie suggested.

"You mean a monocle? Not likely if he's living in Viking times and trying to fit in. Nor a top hat!"

Suddenly, she ducked into the doorway of a

bustling cafe, pulling her younger brother into the small space too. “Quick! Don’t let those guides see you, Charlie. I don’t want them to be suspicious.”

“Suspicious?” Charlie snorted, snuggling into the doorway. The smell of freshly brewed coffee tickled its way up his nostrils and the warmth from inside the cafe caressed his neck. “Why would the guide be suspicious of two children dressed like us?” Opposite, their reflections gazed back at them from the large window of a popular gift shop. Charlie stared at his own image. “Tell me again, Tils. Why am I wearing a pair of Dad’s baggy woollen trousers and why did you wrap those dirty bandages around my shins? The clue said, ‘Be careful not to stand out’. I stand out like an elephant up a palm tree right now.”

“They’re not bandages,” Tilda scolded him. “I’ve told you already — most Vikings wore leg wraps in winter to keep themselves warm and also to keep their trousers clean. Back then, York was a dirty place, especially in winter. The streets were mostly covered in dirt and, well, other yucky stuff, and Vikings liked to look good.”

“So, why aren’t you wearing leg wraps too?” Charlie asked. “Am I the only one of us who has to look this ridiculous?” The trousers that Charlie was wearing were much too big for him and when he had first tried them on, they had fallen around his feet after just a few steps. Tilda had solved that particular problem by tying a length of gardening string around his waist like a belt. Charlie thought it made him look more like a tied sack of potatoes than a Viking but his sister had promised him that string belts were all the rage back in AD 900.

Tilda popped her head out from the doorway, checking that the tourists were still there. “I can hardly put leg wraps on when I’m wearing Mum’s dress, can I?” She pulled open her ankle-length coat. Her mum’s brown linen dress was as close to an apron dress as she’d been able to find and, with her father’s cream, collarless shirt underneath, it would just about pass as a Viking outfit.

Charlie seemed much less convinced. “Nobody is going to think that we’re Vikings,” he complained. “We just look like badly dressed

kids. If I bump into anyone I know, looking like this...”

Tilda sighed, clearly frustrated by Charlie’s protests. “That’s why we’re following these tourists. It’s a Jorvik tour from the museum and the guides are dressed as Vikings. Remember?”

Now, it was Charlie’s turn to poke his head out from the cafe doorway. His eyes settled on the three guides, each dressed as an authentic Viking. Their costumes certainly looked more convincing than his. They even had swords and shields.

Charlie was still uncertain but Tilda gave him one of her ‘trust me’ smiles and then grabbed his wrist and tugged him back out onto the cobbled street. “Don’t you worry. Just make sure you’ve got the professor’s map ready.”

Professor Howe’s hand-sketches map of York’s streets was the last piece of his incredible time-travelling jigsaw. It was also one of Charlie Hacker’s favourite possessions. Right now, it was safely tucked away in the pocket of his

father’s borrowed trousers. Charlie didn’t need to take out the folded square of paper to know that it contained the most important element of the professor’s century-hopping toolkit: the location of every time-travelling doorway in York. In his journal, the professor called them ‘gates’ and indicated their location on the map with a reference to the time period and a symbol of a tiny key.

As Charlie and Tilda had already discovered, using the trinkets and coins stored in the little bags hanging on the corkboard, it was possible to pass through these gates and travel back and forth between the present and the past. It was this secret knowledge that sent a quiver of apprehension racing down Charlie’s spine whenever he touched the map — and today was no exception.

The three Viking tour guides led their party into York’s small but bustling market square. Rows of covered stalls were shoehorned together, each piled high with a different collection of irresistible goodies. Once inside the labyrinth of stalls, the tourists were funnelled down narrow passageways, where they soon fell victim

to the persuasive charms of the stallholders themselves.

“Can you believe this is probably the exact same spot where Vikings held their markets too?” Tilda whispered as the two children covertly tracked the tour guides.

“D’you think so?” Charlie wondered aloud. “And do you think they sold the same tat as this lot?”

“That’s not the point,” Tilda replied. “York’s one of the only places in the world where you can come and walk on the same streets as the Romans, Vikings and Normans. Some bits have hardly changed at all.”

Charlie hugged his shoulders as a gust of wind whipped through the market. “Does that include the weather, Tils? I bet it wasn’t this cold in Viking times.”

“Of course it was,” Tilda laughed, nodding towards the tour guides who were huddled close to a stall selling hot soup. “Why do you think these guys are wearing those lovely, thick cloaks?”



Shrugging, Charlie admitted, “I thought they were just for show.”

“Nope, that’s what real Vikings wore. That’s why we’re gonna borrow them for our trip. Can’t exactly wear our own jackets, can we?”

Charlie gulped. “Aren’t you the same Tilda who told me that stealing is still stealing even if you go back in—”

Tilda raised a hand to stop him. “It’s borrowing, not stealing. We’ll just take them for a few seconds, that’s all.”

“We’re going back over one thousand years in time,” Charlie laughed. “That’s more than a few seconds.”

“But time stands still back here,” his sister reminded him. “We can spend weeks in another time zone but when we step back through the gate, no time has passed at all. So, if we’re quick, those guides will never even know we *borrowed* their cloaks.”

Charlie gave an unconvinced shake of the head.

“They look pretty attached to them if you ask me — look how tightly they’re bundled into them.”

“Don’t you worry about that,” Tilda sniggered. “We’ll have those cloaks in our hands in less than three minutes.”

Charlie raised his eyebrows at her for a second and then thrust out his hand. “Two quid says we don’t!”

His sister gave his hand an eager shake. “Done!”

It turned out that three minutes had been an overestimate. Charlie was about to ask his sister to reveal her master plan when, to his surprise, the largest of the three guides removed his cloak. As their group perused the market stalls, his two colleagues quickly followed him, each folding their own cloaks across the back of a wooden chair.

“What are they doing?” Charlie gasped.

“Toilet break!” Tilda shone a triumphant smile towards him. “The guides have a deal with the

stallholder: they bring in the tourists in return for a free drink and a trip to the loo. It's the same most days. Now, let's grab those cloaks before anyone notices."

"Why couldn't I take the red cloak?" Charlie complained. "This green one itches my neck and I think the clasp is faulty too."

Borrowing the cloaks had been incredibly easy. The soup-serving stallholder was far too busy dishing out his hot and steaming wares to be suspicious of two children. Nobody batted an eyelid when the siblings gently teased a cloak each from the back of the chair.

"The red cloak would make you stand out," Tilda told Charlie. "Professor Howe's journal explained that it was the most difficult colour to find. The Vikings had to import something called a madder root from a place called Francia just to make the dye, so only rich people could afford to wear red."

She pulled her own brown cloak around her

shoulders, enjoying the cosy warmth of the wool before brushing flecks of dirt from the fabric. "It'll be much better to be wearing green and brown cloaks like these when we get there. Hey, speaking of getting there — have you got the map?"

"Of course I've got the map." Charlie bristled. "It's safely tucked away in my pocket. But we don't need it. I already checked the location of the Viking gate before we came. It's on Jubbergate, just a few streets from here."

"Jubbergate? I wonder what that means in Danish," Tilda pondered aloud.

Unlike other Viking streets such as the Shambles and Coppergate, Jubbergate wasn't a popular tourist destination and there was definitely no obvious clue to the origin of its name. Still, it was quite easy to find, pinned between a bank and a coffee shop near the entrance to the Shambles market. The two children were soon standing at its corner, gazing down the thoroughfare.

"The map says the professor's time gate is somewhere in the middle," Charlie announced,

tugging the map from his pocket. He opened it out flat against a wall.

“Look!” He ran his finger beneath the word ‘Viking’ and then jabbed it towards a small, sketched image. “That looks more like a stone than a door.”

Tilda tutted in his ear as she leant closer. “Time gates don’t always have to be doors. Remember the wall we fell through into the Roman era?” She peered at the small image. “It could be a Viking stone, I guess. You check one side of the street and I’ll check the other.”

“Two quid says I find it first!” Charlie insisted as he began his search.

“You’re on!” Tilda replied. “You must like handing over all your pocket money to me.”

It didn’t take long for her to find what they were looking for. Down a narrow alley between two shop buildings, Tilda prodded a pitted, grey stone with the toe of her shoe. It seemed to poke up from the base of one of the buildings, as if trying to escape from the foundations.

It certainly looked much older and far more weathered than anything else on the narrow street.

“This has to be it,” she insisted.

Charlie frowned. “It’s tiny! You don’t win the bet unless that thing actually works, you know!”

After a moment’s thought, Tilda shrugged. “I guess we’ll see. Perhaps the stone is just a marker,” she said, gesturing at the brightly painted brick wall facing them. “Let’s hope for the best. Did you bring the bag?”

Charlie eased the small leather pouch from his other pocket and emptied the contents out onto his sister’s upturned palm. A couple of small, round coins rolled across her skin, followed — after an extra shake of the bag — by a tiny silver ring.

Charlie squeezed the pouch, making sure it was empty. “Hmm. Is that it? I guess the professor used the other pieces to travel himself.”

“That would make sense,” agreed Tilda as

she picked up the ring and slipped it onto her little finger. She handed one of the coins to her brother. "Let's see if you owe me another two quid then. Ready?"

Charlie took a deep breath as his fist closed around the coin. He checked over both shoulders to make sure that the coast was clear before offering his sister a tentative smile and nodding. "See you in a thousand years!"



Chapter Four

No Stone Left Unturned

There was no sense of drama underpinning whatever enchanted magic or uncharted science had originally created time travel. So, when Tilda watched her brother vanish through the wall on Jubbergate, she witnessed no puff of smoke or bright flash. Charlie simply disappeared from view, as if the wall itself had eaten him.

Tilda glanced left and right. She waited for an old couple to dodder past the alley's narrow entrance before she took a deep breath, closed her eyes tight and stepped towards the brickwork.

She didn't have to open her eyes to know

that, with a single step, she had travelled to a destination no rocket or future space traveller could ever reach. The bitter smell of ancient Jorvik told her that she was more than a thousand years from home.

A familiar grip shackled her wrist. “We should have brought nose clips, Tils. This place is even stinkier than Victorian York.” Her mind was instantly cast back to the trickle of brown sludge they had been disgusted by as it ran down the cobbled street, welcoming their arrival in that era.

When Tilda finally dared to open her eyes, she found herself standing in a version of Jubbergate that was almost unrecognisable. The solid cobbles had yet to be laid and, instead, she was standing almost ankle-deep in what she *hoped* was just mud.

Jorvik looked nothing like the York she knew and loved. The tall red-brick buildings and shopfronts had been replaced with much smaller and simpler constructions, just one storey high. The walls and doors were made from thick, rough wooden planks, or else strips of woven

wood that seemed to have had dirt rubbed onto it.

When she glanced towards the roofs above the houses, instead of the neat, grey slate she was used to seeing, Tilda saw thick fringes of thatch. Although it didn't look quite as pretty as the thatched cottages she'd seen on holiday in Dorset, it still had its own rustic charm and Tilda imagined that these Viking homes might actually be quite cosy inside.

Charlie didn't seem to share her appreciation. “This place is disgusting. How can people live like this?”

Although Tilda's nose was getting used to the smell, it was the noise and bustle of ancient Jorvik that she found most disorientating. Jubbergate was suddenly so busy and loud. Clearly, the locals didn't just live inside their houses but worked there too. Hammering sounds came from one home; the sound of wood being chopped echoed from behind another. All around them, people in dirty clothes squelched through the mud. Some carried bundles of sticks or a jumble of fabric. One man even hauled what

looked like fresh animal skins across his back. None of them looked particularly happy. None of them looked like a Viking either.

A confused Charlie leant close to his sister as two dark-haired men hustled a group of squealing pigs down the middle of the street. “Why don’t any of them have beards and braided hair? They don’t look like Danes.”

“Danes?” remarked a soft voice beside them. “You won’t find any Danes on this street.”

Both children turned to find a smaller girl looking up at them. She was hugging a grey, mud-splattered cloak around her body but it was clear from her chattering teeth and the threadbare fabric that it did little to keep out the chill.

“Oh! Uh, hello,” Tilda said, smiling.

The girl scowled back at her, fixing an envious gaze on Tilda’s own cloak. “What do you want with the Danes? Looking to trade that nice cloak?”



Tilda took a nervous step backwards. “Oh, no. We just thought we would, uh, see more Danes around here.”

The girl snorted and brushed thin strips of matted, brown hair behind her ears. Tilda noticed how dirty the girl’s hands were. There was a flash of energy behind her bright, green eyes when she spoke. “The Danes don’t come around ‘ere. They stick to their streets and we stick to ours.”

“I hope their streets are nicer, for their sake,” coughed Charlie.

The girl swept her hands wide. “Do you think we’d live ‘ere if we had the choice? My parents come from Cambria, in the west. It’s much nicer there. They named me after their village, Arelath. Mother says it’s as pretty as I am.”

Charlie gave the girl a puzzled look. “So, why did you come to York — I mean, Jorvik?”

“We had to move. The Danes invaded our entire village. None of us want to live on Bretgate, though. We hate it ‘ere.”

“Bretgate? But I thought this street was called Jubbe- OUCH!”

Tilda jabbed her toe against her brother’s shin before he had the chance to say too much. The last thing either of them needed was the unwanted attention any awkward questions might bring. “Bretgate?” she asked Arelath. “I haven’t heard that name before.”

The girl screwed up her face, as if she’d just licked a spoonful of salt. “You’re not from around ‘ere, are you? It means street of the Britons — they use that name for anyone who isn’t Danish. You shouldn’t linger ‘ere if you’re strangers. People will be suspicious.”

Charlie agreed, tugging at his sister’s cloak. “She’s right. We’ve got other places to go, remember?”

Tilda followed him away but then stopped and turned back to the girl. “Do you know Jorvik well, Arelath?”

The girl shrugged her slender shoulders. “Well enough, I s’pose.”

Tilda smiled, remembering Professor Howe's first riddle. Glancing down at the bare, muddy earth beneath her feet, she said, "In that case, am I right in thinking there's a street in Jorvik that's made of stone? Which way would it be from here?"

"What are you doing?" Charlie hissed as soon as they were far enough away from Bretgate to feel relaxed. "What if she tells someone about us?"

"Arelath? Why would she tell anyone about us?" Tilda asked.

Charlie glanced furtively over his shoulder. "Didn't you see the way she looked at your cloak? Knowing our luck, she'll get a couple of Cambrian heavies to *borrow* these cloaks from us." He offered his sister a questioning glance. "Where exactly is Cambria, anyway?"

Tilda raised an eyebrow and glanced upwards. "Sounds quite like Cumbria. That's not too far from here. Those names could be linked,

maybe. And I don't think we have much to worry about from Arelath. I think she's more interested in where her next meal is coming from. I thought she was very helpful. You should have known the answer to Professor Howe's riddle straight away. Didn't you get it? Solid and hard — stone. It must be Stonegate. Your favourite fudge shop is on Stonegate! I just wasn't sure of my bearings and thought she could confirm what I thought before we set off looking."

The street was only a short distance from Bretgate and, by following Arelath's directions, Tilda and Charlie arrived there in less than ten minutes. The contrast between the two streets was startling. Whereas the young girl's street had been ankle-deep in disgusting slop and all the houses built on bare earth, Stonegate was evenly paved in footworn stone and much neater.

"This is more like it," Charlie enthused as his feet stepped from mud onto slabs of pale Yorkshire stone. "I guess this is one of the newer parts of Jorvik?"

“Nope, it’s actually one of the oldest streets,” Tilda told him, tapping the sole of her shoe against the road surface. “I think this is one of the old Roman roads — in fact, one of the first stone-paved roads in York. They were much more advanced than the Saxons and the Vikings.”

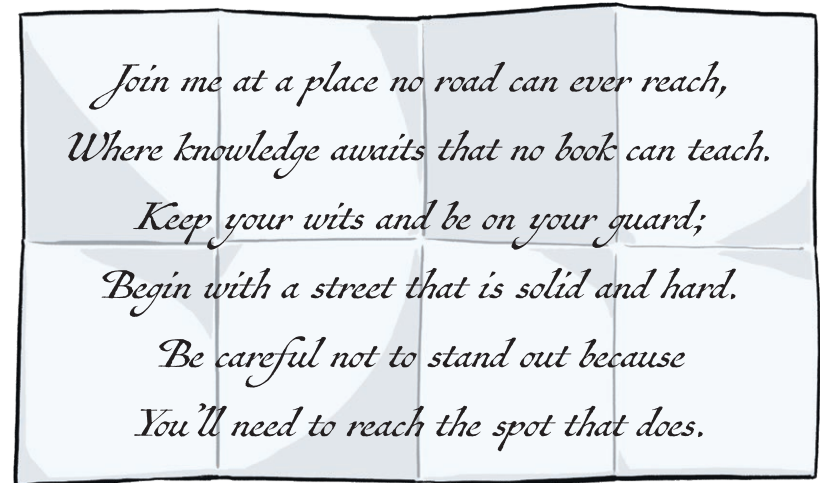
Charlie’s eyes widened. “But the Romans left York centuries before this. How can these people be less advanced?”

“The Romans did a lot that was pretty advanced for their time; they certainly lived in nicer buildings than these,” Tilda shrugged, gesturing at the small wooden dwellings. “Remember when we went back to Eboracum? Lots of the buildings were made from stone. They even had underfloor heating and drainage systems. I know which period I prefer.”

“Even though you got captured?” Charlie reminded her.

“That was just a misunderstanding,” Tilda sniggered. “Now, let’s see if we can find the professor’s next clue.” She pulled out the piece of

folded paper and read the handwriting quietly to herself.



Her forehead wrinkled into a frown. “I guess it has to be around here somewhere...”

Charlie gazed up and down the narrow street. Although the street surface had survived, any buildings from Roman times clearly hadn’t. Instead, both sides of Jorvik Stonegate were lined with yet more wooden, thatched homes. The only real difference was that these seemed a little neater and perhaps more solid, as if their owners had taken more care when building them. Aside from the paved roadway, the biggest difference was the street’s inhabitants. These

people definitely looked more like he expected Vikings to look.

“How come these people are all so big?” Charlie whispered. “And so...”

“Hairy?” Tilda asked as a broad-shouldered man swept past them, rubbing his thick beard while flicking a strip of braided, blonde hair across his shoulder.

“I wish I could grow a beard.” Charlie rubbed his chin. “I bet it keeps their faces really warm.”

Tilda nodded towards a small group of blonde-haired women. They were gathered around two younger men seated on low stools, watching them play some kind of board game. “Look how beautiful their clothes are. I never knew Viking cloaks were so colourful.”

Charlie’s own green cloak looked quite dowdy compared with the blues and purples and even yellows on display. Other women, perhaps the wives of the wealthiest Vikings, wore cloaks with fur-lined hoods, for extra warmth. Their dresses were equally bright. Some were even

decorated with colourful trims or tied at the waist by patterned belts.

“I’d love one of those handbags,” Tilda cooed, admiring the leather bags most of the women had slung across their shoulders. “Look how well they’re stitched. They’ve even engraved little patterns onto the leather — how do they do that?”

“I’d prefer some of the jewellery,” Charlie confessed. “Being a Dane seems to be quite a profitable profession.”

“They’re nothing but greedy thieves,” snapped a voice from behind them.

When Charlie and Tilda spun round, they were shocked to see a familiar face.

“Arelath?” gasped Tilda. “What are you doing here? Have you been following us?”

Arelath shrugged. “My dad said you might need some help. Jorvik can be a dangerous place for strangers.”

“We’re not strangers,” Tilda assured the girl. “We’ve lived here for years.”

“Really? So, I suppose you didn’t *actually* need directions to the stone street, eh? And you’re not even the *slightest bit* surprised that the Danes wear such colourful clothes?”

Tilda and Charlie swapped worried glances. “We’ve been out of town for a few months,” Tilda lied.

Charlie nodded enthusiastically. “Yeah! We’ve travelled a long, long way.”

“We’re on a mission,” Tilda lied again, leaning close to the small Cambrian girl. “Our friend sent a message asking us to come to Jorvik and find him. That’s why we needed to find this street.”

Arelath’s green eyes suddenly widened with intrigue. “Is your friend ‘ere?”

Charlie snatched his sister’s arm. “What are you doing, Tils?” he hissed in her ear. “I thought we were going to do this alone. There’s less chance

of getting into trouble that way.”

“She’s already followed us here,” pointed out Tilda. “She’s not just going to toddle off back to Jubbergate because we ask her to. Besides, Arelath knows Jorvik. Maybe it would be useful to have her help.”

“What guarantee do we have that we can trust her?”

“There’s two of us and just one of her. She’s tiny too. What’s the worst she can do?”

Charlie’s stomach was churning uneasily. He was still worrying that a trip back to Jorvik might not have been such a good idea. He tried to calm himself by remembering that on their trip to Roman Eboracum, they had been captured by this point and in Victorian York, his sister had been sent to the workhouse before they had even had a chance to look around properly. Their luck so far on this trip was already a vast improvement on their previous excursions.

Tilda obviously shared none of her brother’s anxiety and turned back to Arelath. “You really

hate the Danes, don't you?"

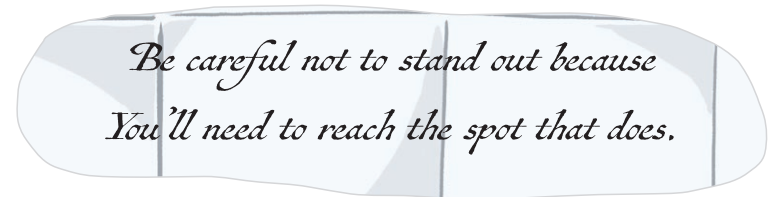
Arelath nodded. "So would you if they'd ransacked your entire village. They come over 'ere in their fancy boats and feed off our land. They came to steal treasures from the churches at first and now, they've driven people out of their homes and taken over their farmland."

Arelath spat on the floor as a group of children scurried by. "Our elders said the Danes were sent by the gods to punish us for doing wrong. But some people from the South told us that most of the Danes are farmers and came 'ere because there's not enough land in their own countries. Before Danelaw, we used to fight them. Now, it seems that they can do whatever they want."

Charlie was about to ask what Danelaw was when Tilda ushered them all towards the corner of a building. "I think we're beginning to attract the wrong kind of attention," she whispered. She pointed towards the group of Viking women they'd noticed earlier. Several of them seemed to be staring at the unlikely trio.

I told you people would be suspicious of strangers," Arelath said.

"I say we get out of here as quickly as possible," Charlie said. "Let's hurry up and find the next message, OK?" Remembering what the professor's note had said, he tried to imagine where he might hide the next clue.



"The spot that does," he mumbled to himself. "I get it now — the spot that stands out. We need to look at the stones for a spot that stands out... but they all look the same to me."

Tilda didn't have an answer. Not at first, anyway. But, as she scanned the surface of the road, she suddenly spotted something unusual. "Look!" She directed her brother's search towards a cracked and broken section of the road, away from the main hustle and bustle.

Half in shadow, a small area of paving stone

was lighter than its neighbours and more rough, as if it had been taken from a different source of rock entirely. When Tilda and Charlie knelt beside it, they found it was a slab of what felt like chalk.

“The Romans wouldn’t have put this here,” Tilda muttered to her brother. “The rest of this road is covered in Yorkshire stone but this looks like it might have been taken from one of the cliffs at Bempton.”

When she glanced up at Charlie and Arelath, she was wearing an eager grin. “Quickly, help me lift it up!”



Chapter Five

A Bucket Full of Clues

The three children peered down at the patch of empty earth revealed beneath the stone. Not even a worm wiggled across the damp, sandy ground.

“Do you think he put the clue somewhere else?” Charlie wondered aloud, scanning the rest of the street for likely hiding places.

“Where else would he put it?” Tilda grumbled. “It’s just a flat, paved road. Surely, he wouldn’t expect us to check inside all the buildings too?”

“Not unless your friend wanted you dead,”

Arelath added. "You don't go inside a Dane's home unless you're invited." She scratched her head as her own gaze surveyed the street.

"Could he have hidden it beneath another stone?" Tilda said.

Charlie wiped the back of his hand across his brow. "There are hundreds of them but they all look the same. It has to be around... Wait! What's that?" Charlie reached down towards the raised stone and flipped it over. There, hidden on the underside of the chalk slab, was a small paragraph of engraved writing.

"That's it!" Tilda high-fived her brother. "Let's read it."

"You can read those symbols?" gasped Arelath.

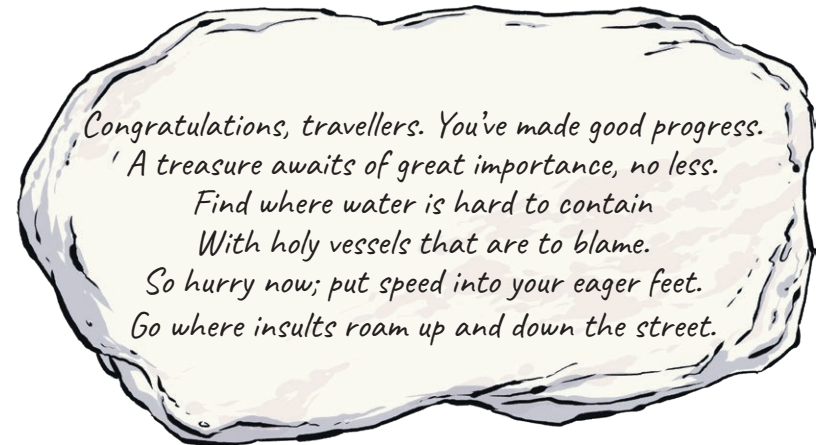
Tilda was surprised by the question. "Uh, yes. Can't you?"

The girl shook her head, making strands of her lank, brown hair jiggle like a dozen snake tails. "Only men of God can read. And some of those who practise sorcery. Are you..."

Charlie giggled. "Ooh, sorcery? Like magicians? I wish we were!"

Tilda pressed a finger to her lips. "Shush! Both of you. I want to see what this says."

Most of the professor's engravings were covered in a stubborn layer of dried dirt, which Tilda had to scratch away with her fingernail.



The children wallowed in a moment of silence, each trying to make sense of the latest clue. Charlie finally said what they were all thinking. "I definitely think the professor must have lost his mind now. Holy vessels?"

"You said you were looking for a lost friend,"

Arelath reminded them. “Yet that message mentions treasure. Are you searching for gold too?”

Tilda carefully lowered the chalk paving stone back into place before jumping to her feet. She could sense something else burning behind Arelath’s eyes.

“We’re here to find the professor,” she insisted. “Nothing else!”

Arelath wouldn’t be deterred. “My family’s only bit of gold was all taken when our village was ransacked. Perhaps if we find him, your friend called ‘Professor’ will reward us.”

“Don’t get your hopes up,” warned Tilda as she quickly began to lead them away from Stonegate. The less they talked about treasure, the more chance they had of avoiding any unwanted attention or trouble.

“Hey, what are those guys doing?” Charlie pointed towards a couple of large boys, hunched over some kind of square board, placed on a surface, in front of a small building.

Arelath glanced round. “Playing hnefatafl.”

“Oh, bless you,” said Charlie, feeling his own nose twitch.

“Eh? I mean the game. Don’t you know it? Hnefatafl,” she repeated slowly with something that sounded like ‘ne-fa-taf-ful’. When Charlie ventured closer to the group of boys, she tugged at his sleeve. “Dane boys take it really seriously. Best leave them to it.”

But Charlie was too intrigued to heed her warning. Curiosity kept him lingering. “It looks like chess. I’m good at chess!”

Tilda stopped walking. “Charlie,” she called anxiously, but Charlie was already peering over the shoulder of one of the players.

“What are you looking at?” said one of the boys, lifting his head. He had a large face and grey, serious eyes that glared at Charlie as though he were something unpleasant found on the sole of his shoe. It was enough to make Charlie take a small step backwards.

“Uh, nothing. I was just watching...”

The boys were big. Even though they were sitting on small wooden stools, their heads were almost level with Charlie's. Small cuts and scars lining their cheeks suggested that they enjoyed fighting more than board games.

“Who do you think you are, watching us?” the second boy snarled. Thick fingers brushed shoulder-length, blonde hair away from his eyes and his top lip curled into a sneer.

“Sorry,” said Charlie. “I was just looking.”

The first boy slowly rose to his feet, until his wide shoulders threatened to block out the day's weak sunlight. “You should be careful about the company you keep.” He jabbed a gnarly finger towards them, spitting the words out as if they were pieces of rotten meat. The second boy stood up, showing himself to be even taller than his friend, with arms as thick as logs folded tight across his chest.

Tilda knew she had to act fast. Her brother was like a magnet for trouble and she suspected he'd



found more than even he could handle. “Ignore my brother.” She grasped Charlie by the collar of his cloak, dragging him along after her as she spoke. “You must be mistaking us for someone else. He’s leaving. We’re all leaving. Forget we were ever here. Have a lovely day. Goodbye.”

None of the children dared to speak until they were out of sight of the boys. Tilda had been holding her breath for what seemed like several minutes and finally collapsed against a wall, gasping for air.

“I told you to keep away from those two,” Arelath reminded them. “Olav and Eirik are always spoiling for a fight.”

“What’s their problem?” Charlie asked, rubbing at his neck.

“Their father is Jarl Guthrum, an important man in Jorvik,” Arelath told him. “They think they can do whatever they want.”

“Guthrum!” Tilda panted, her eyes widening as she remembered the important name they had read back home in the attic. She was pretty sure the journal referred to a jarl as the top of the Viking hierarchy classes too — basically, some wealthy chief not to be messed with. “Well, we just have to make sure we stay away from them. Right, Charlie?”

Her brother nodded. “Let’s just find the professor

and get out of here. What did that last clue say?”

“Something at the end about finding where insults roam up and down the street,” Tilda recalled.

“And the treasure,” Arelath added, keenly.

Tilda ignored her. “I don’t understand what it means. Where do insults roam the street?”

Charlie asked, “Surely, only *people* roam the streets?”

“Well, not just people. You really have been away from Jorvik a long time, haven’t you?” Arelath sniffed the air before adding, “Why do you think this place smells so foul?”

“Uh, because nobody washes and you throw all your waste onto the streets?”

Arelath rolled her eyes. “Because the place is full of beasts, of course. The Danes keep them ‘ere to sell at the market for slaughter. And a lot of beasts make a lot of stinky mess.”

“What kind of beasts?” Tilda asked.

“Uh, cattle for meat and milk; sheep for wool and mutton; ducks and geese for eggs; swine for cured meats,” Arelath told her.

Tilda’s eyes widened again. “What did you say about cured meats?”

“Danes love cured meat,” said Arelath, screwing up her face, “so they keep swine in their backyards. All the grunting and squealing gives me and my father headaches.”

“Haha, swine!” Charlie chuckled. “That’s what Auntie Betty calls Uncle Sid when he’s—”

Tilda slapped her brother on the back. “That’s it, Charlie! She’s got it. A street of swine. It’s an insult but it just means pigs. The professor’s next clue has to be somewhere on Swinegate!”

“How can anyone be insulted by the name of a beast?” Arelath muttered as she led them through a labyrinth of filthy backstreets. “You people are so strange!”

Many of the small houses they passed were also used as workshops, where people busied themselves making jewellery, metal and woodwork items, even clothing. Yet the Vikings didn’t seem to be the cleanest of York’s historical residents and the children had to dodge piles of rotting food and rubbish from the workshops.

“This is even dirtier than those Victorian slums we visited,” Charlie whispered to his sister. “These yards and alleyways are just a dumping ground.”

“That’s why we know so much about them,” Tilda reminded him. “The archaeologists found lots of evidence about Viking life buried in the ground. If they hadn’t been so messy, we wouldn’t know half the things we do.”

“Well, did they find out how smelly it was?” Charlie coughed. “That awful whiff is getting stronger.”

Charlie was right. Jorvik’s dreadful odour seemed to be wrapping itself around them like a blanket of smog.

Tilda coughed as the trio rounded the next corner and found themselves gazing down a thin strip of earth, flanked on either side by scruffy wooden huts. Unlike the clean, paved Roman road of Stonegate, this particular street was pitted with ruts and muddy potholes. Recent rainfall had turned the earth into a porridge of sloppy filth that seemed to swallow people's feet up to their ankles. And it wasn't just humans occupying this strip of Jorvik. It was home to dozens of pigs too.

"A street of pigs," Charlie mused. "That's why they called it Swinegate, huh?"

Tilda was finding it difficult to breathe. The smell wafting from the animals was overwhelming. "I didn't think there'd be so many."

"It's a selling day so the owners are showing their best beasts." Arelath pointed to a cluster of stern-faced men who were inspecting a rather large pig. "Those men are Jorvik's butchers. They're looking for swine to sell on their stalls on Fleshammels."

Charlie's eyes blazed with excitement as he

looked towards his sister. "Do you think she means the Shambles?"

"Probably," Tilda nodded, although she sounded far less excited than her brother as she turned to the girl. "Let's do our best to find the next clue as soon as we can, before I part company with my breakfast."

Remembering their mission, the three children contemplated the busy street.

Charlie pointed to the timber shutters attached to the windows of each hut. "Could those be for keeping out water, like the rain? Maybe he'd have carved it into one of those."

Swinegate didn't seem to him to be the kind of place where rich families lived. Instead of a glass window, some buildings had a space cut into a wall to let light into the home. Some had crude wooden shutters to keep the English weather at bay. Others didn't even have those. They appeared to be covered by what looked like an extremely thin and almost see-through layer of animal skin stretched across the gap, perhaps to let sunlight in and keep the rain and

wind out. Yet some others, he noticed, didn't seem to have any windows at all.

"Hmm, maybe. I doubt the owners would have taken kindly to someone carving graffiti into their property," Tilda pointed out. "The clue said where water was not well contained, not where it was kept out — and something about holy vessels."

"I thought vessels were big ships," said Charlie. "Wouldn't they be somewhere along the river, not down this street?"

"That's not the only meaning of vessels, you know," his sister replied. She was scanning the scene around her, searching for a link. "A vessel could be a cup or a jug or anything to hold water. *Holy* vessels, though — maybe it's something religious."

Tilda had heard about the Vikings raiding monasteries and churches when they invaded. She also knew they had many gods of their own that they worshipped. However, there was little sign before them of anything along those lines in Swinegate. There were a series of linked posts,

used to fence in the pigs. Beneath their feet, the ground was muddy and mixed with straw. As her eyes drifted upwards, Tilda thought how much more sky she could see. All of the single-storey buildings left acres of white and grey clouds drifting above them.

Although Swinegate wasn't the longest street in York, it still had enough space to comfortably accommodate half a dozen large, stone water troughs. She was sure there was nothing religious about these stone troughs. Something didn't feel right about the 'holy' reference in the clue. The professor was clever. Tilda wondered what else it could mean. Beside each trough sat a handful of basic-looking buckets. One of the stern-faced butchers grabbed the nearest and dunked it into the water. He lifted it out and hurried with it towards the snuffling pigs.

"That looks like a rubbish bucket," Charlie laughed in the direction of his sister. "It's leaking more water than it's keeping in!"

"I don't believe it! Charlie Hacker, you've gone and solved it again!" she gasped.

“Have I?” he asked. “I mean, oh, yeah, I have. What exactly do you think I’ve solved?”

“Leaky buckets!” exclaimed Tilda. “It’s like a cryptic crossword clue. He’s used *holy* as a play on words. It’s *holey* vessels. Vessels with *holes*. Of course, buckets were actually quite tricky to make watertight. That’s why they don’t hold water very well.”

Charlie was just about to insist that was what he meant all along when something on the bottom of one dirty, discarded bucket caught his eye. Writing! Writing!



Chapter Six

Chaos in the Mud

“I saw it!” Charlie shouted, excitedly. “I saw the clue. It’s written on the bottom of one of those buckets.”

Charlie watched as the butcher dipped a different bucket back into the trough and then carried it across the street, where three more hungry snouts lapped at its contents. Once the pigs had finished drinking, the bucket was tossed aside. It bounced and bobbed before clattering into a cluster of identical containers — scattering them through the mud.

His sister looked dismayed. “What? Where?”

The buckets were now all mixed up and Charlie had no idea which one carried the professor's clue. Worse still, one of the pig traders looked like he was getting set to start collecting them all up.

"We need to search them," Tilda said, "before they're taken away."

"I recognise the man," Arelath told them. "He buys those vessels from the street of joiners. He's always haggling over a trade."

As Charlie rubbed the Viking coin inside his pocket, an idea began to grow. "Why don't we offer to buy the bucket from him. We could use my—"

"The man's price would be too high," warned Arelath. "Besides, I have a better idea."

The small girl was already heading towards a pen containing several pigs. Although a couple of large traders were close by, neither paid her any attention. It was something they would soon regret.

"What's she doing?" whispered Tilda.

"Something I should have thought of!" An approving smile crept across Charlie's mouth. "This girl thinks like me! It's going to get messy, Tils. Better make sure you're not dragged into the middle of all the chaos."

"What chaos?"

Tilda's answer arrived when Arelath reached the pigsty and casually kicked open the flimsy gate. Sensing this was their chance to escape the butcher's block, the pigs made a noisy dash for freedom.

In seconds, the street was in uproar as the traders made desperate attempts to contain the escapees. Some attempted to rugby tackle the beasts. Others gave chase, only to end up sprawled, face down, in a puddle. Even the man with the bucket joined in, grabbing one pig around its neck, only to be dragged down the street like an unseated rodeo cowboy.

Spotting his opportunity, Charlie leapt into action. He happily sidestepped a large, brown

porker and then dodged two men in hot pursuit, before arriving beside the stack of wooden buckets. He quickly began rifling through until he found what he was looking for.

Squealing pigs almost drowned out Tilda's warning. "Hurry! He's coming!"

Long, muddied hair was plastered to the bucket-man's filthy head and foul-smelling slop poured down his face. But it was the look of utter rage contorting the man's features that scared Charlie the most.

There seemed to be no escape. Yet, as the man closed in on him, Charlie received help from an unexpected source. A rogue pig made its dash for freedom, barrelling into the bucket-man and tipping him, face first, into one of the large drinking troughs.

"Run," Tilda urged, as the man flapped his arms and stomped his feet in the slop. "RUN!"

Tilda and Charlie followed Arelath as she retreated into a narrow alleyway a few streets away and kept going until they were well clear



of the disarray they'd caused.

"That was smart thinking," Charlie told Arelath through his gasping breath.

"It was dangerous," Tilda panted. "What if you'd been caught?"

Arelath grinned, brushing mud from her clothes. "I can handle myself."

Tilda shook her head in disapproval as she grabbed Charlie's bucket. "Let's see what the professor has to say before those angry Danes come looking for us." She quickly tipped the bucket upside down, revealing the message scratched into the wood.

*You're getting close but there's still
some way to go.*

*Time to see how smart you are – how
much you really know.*

*Find a place long since lost, where you'd
expect the poor to stay.*

*To find my next clue, seek help beyond
what's on display!*



Chapter Seven

A Viking Home from Home?

"Did I mention I really hate riddles?" Charlie complained.

"Yes," groaned Tilda.

"Why couldn't Professor Howe just give us his address, like a normal person?" The trio had run until their hearts were pounding and Charlie was still waiting for his hammering pulse to return to normal. As it turned out, they had hurtled aimlessly in the direction of the River Foss. This river joined with the city's other big river, the Ouse, a little farther along. As Tilda

looked around, slowly catching her breath, it dawned on her that there was no castle towering above them on any of the streets. Her sense of where they were was just about enough to realise that the famous Clifford's Tower, which still dominated modern-day York city, had not even been built in the period they were currently visiting.

Tilda scratched her head, as equally confused about the latest clue as her brother. Yet the smile on her face told the others that she didn't share her brother's frustration. To her, this was fun!

"I really hope we meet the professor. We could learn so much from somebody as clever as him. I've got so many things I want to ask him."

"Just make sure you ask him where the treasure is," insisted Arelath.

Tilda looked up from the bucket. "You know, Arelath, there might not actually be any—"

"Oh, great!" Charlie interrupted as a giant raindrop splashed across Tilda's forehead. "It's

raining. These streets will turn to soup if we get a downpour."

"OK, OK, let's try to solve this next clue then." Tilda huddled into her cloak, trying to stay as dry as possible.

"What do you think the professor means by a 'place long since lost'?" Charlie asked. "How can a street become lost?"

"Uh, think about where we've come from, Charlie." Tilda chose her words carefully so that Arelath didn't get too confused. "An almost identical street might have one name here but a completely different name back home. Geddit?"

"No!" Bubbling with annoyance, Charlie jabbed a finger towards the bucket. "Look — he says that we should go to a place where the poor might stay. Does he mean beggars?"

Arelath shook her head as if neither of her new friends were making any sense. "Why would your friend call Jorvik's beggars poor? They're some of the city's wealthiest traders?"

Charlie and Tilda both scrunched up their faces. The girl brushed strands of wet hair away from her eyes. The rain was falling much harder now and they were all getting soaked and cold. “Who do you think makes all the bags you see the Danes carrying over their shoulders?”

Charlie shrugged. “Beggars make bags?”

Tilda shushed her brother and then turned to Arelath. “What’s the bag makers’ street called?”

The Cambrian girl spoke to her new companions as if they were both toddlers. “Beggargate, of course!”

Tilda couldn’t hide her excitement. “Bag makers, not beggars, Charlie. Can you take us there straight away, Arelath?”

Unexpectedly, Arelath now took a step back from her two companions and began to wring her tiny hands. “Sorry, I can’t come with you. I need to go home.”

“You can’t go home now!” Tilda reached for the hem of Arelath’s cloak. “We need your help.”

Arelath’s gaze darted between Charlie and Tilda as she seemed to wrestle with some kind of worry.

“This is my best cloak,” she finally explained. “Mother will be angry if it gets too wet. I need to change and then I’ll take you to the bag makers’ street. I promise!”

As Tilda watched their guide back away, she called out, “Wait! Why don’t we come with you?”

“My father doesn’t like strangers.” Arelath wagged a finger. “I’ll meet you near the street of stone. Just make sure you stay out of trouble!”

Rainfall descended across the rooftops of Jorvik like a sheet of damp misery as the two siblings walked solemnly along, their foreheads dripping wet. The streets were almost deserted and what had been a noisy bustle just minutes earlier had now been replaced by an eerie silence.

“I reckon Vikings were a lot smarter than we

thought,” Tilda said, doing her best to keep her feet out of the deep puddles. The raindrops bounced in the murky water. Mud was encasing their shoes and slopping right up their shins. The scent of dampness all around reminded her of a wet dog. “I guess I’d go inside too if nobody had invented the umbrella.”

Charlie didn’t care about the rain. He was too preoccupied with something far more important. “Do you think Arelath was telling us the truth?”

“About the bag makers? Sure!” Tilda nodded, ducking away from a torrent of water that fell from a thatched roof. “Dad showed me an online article that said lots of York’s street names have changed over the centuries. Just because there isn’t a Beggargate back home now, that doesn’t mean there isn’t one here today. Names — and meanings — change over time.”

Charlie waved away his sister’s answer as if it were an irritating wasp. “I’m talking about her *cloak*. She said it was her best one and she had to change it but that thing had more holes in it than a fisherman’s net, Tils. If that was her

best cloak, I’d hate to see what her worst one looks like!”

“But why would she lie to us?”

Charlie was wondering the same thing when his sister suddenly grabbed him by the arm.

“LOOK!” Tilda stopped and pointed across the street. “I think that’s where *we* live!”

Peering through the grey veil of rain, Charlie struggled to make sense of his sister’s claim. All he could see was a hotchpotch of small, tatty buildings, much the same as every other street in Jorvik.

“Have you lost your mind, Tils? There’s not enough money in the world to make me live here.”

His sister giggled. “No, silly. I think this is Goodramgate. Look — there’s a crossroads there just like back home. And the buildings curve in the same way, see? In fact, I think that building on the corner might be where the antiques shop is now. We should take a closer look.”

“What? Wait! No!”

But it was too late. Tilda was already splashing her way through the street’s maze of muddy potholes.

Charlie kicked the surface of the nearest puddle before reluctantly following his sister. He caught up with her as she leant against one of the single-storey houses. Its roof was covered in turf and the horizontal wooden strips of its walls were woven together for strength. “Tilda, what are you—”

“Shh!” Tilda held up her hand. “They’ll hear us!”

“Who will?”

“The family who live in this house. Look!” She nodded towards a window.

Pulled forwards by his own curiosity, Charlie peered in and found himself staring into a surprisingly spacious Viking home.

“It’s only got *one* room,” he whispered to himself as his gaze roamed the house.



One corner was filled with a line of crude beds, each covered with several layers of blankets and fluffy animal furs. Opposite, the family was gathered round a large table, sitting on what looked like handmade benches.

Charlie was shocked to see that, instead of a carpet or rug, straw had been spread thinly across the floor. Beneath the straw was nothing more than a layer of hard, trodden earth. He was even more shocked as his eyes squinted to confirm that the bleating he could hear was coming from what looked like a goat tied up in the far corner.

“Isn’t it amazing?” Tilda whispered. “Just think — those people are sitting where our mum and dad’s shop is now!”

Charlie nodded a weak reply but was far too distracted by what was burning in the middle of the Viking home — a glowing, open fire. Large logs hissed and crackled, sending orange flames reaching to lick the bottom of a huge iron cauldron.

A woman was filling the aged, blackened pot,

adding chunks of thickly sliced vegetables to a bubbling, brown stew that sent a delicious aroma through the house and straight into Charlie’s nostrils.

His mouth was beginning to water as his eyes settled on the wooden plates and bowls already spread out across the table. There were no biscuits, cakes or pastry treats on this Viking table. Instead, Charlie watched the family pass around a bowl piled high with shelled hazelnuts and walnuts. They also bit into hard-boiled eggs, spread lumpy butter across strips of crusty bread and tucked into what looked like fillets of smoked fish.

Before he knew it, Charlie was completely enticed by the intoxicating scent of the delicious Viking food. It suddenly felt like a long time since breakfast. He closed his eyes and inhaled while his tummy rumbled. As he stepped back with a dreamy grin on his face, his string belt snagged on the coarsely woven material of the outer wall. He stumbled and, as he tried to regain his balance, one foot slipped into a shallow, muddy pothole.

“Yeeoww!” he cried out as he staggered and only just avoided falling flat on his face.

Instantly, the Viking family inside turned towards the door, locking their startled glares upon Charlie. The youngest member howled a terrified scream.

“INVADERS!”

“Who? Where?” Charlie spluttered, until he realised the little girl was talking about him. “Oh, no! I’m not. I was just smelling the... I tripped and... I just...”

Ignoring Charlie’s clumsy effort at an explanation, the girl’s father leapt to his feet and reached for the huge sword resting against the wall. His threatening stance filled the small doorway and was more than enough warning for Charlie.

“Let’s get away from here, Tils,” he said, grabbing his sister by the arm, “before we’re gutted like that fish they were just eating!”

For the second occasion in a short space of time, the two Hacker siblings found themselves running for safety. Breathing heavily again, they reached the familiar paved surface of Stonegate. They had escaped the sword-wielding inhabitant and the old Roman road all around them was now empty.

“We need to keep our noses out of Viking business,” Charlie insisted. “It’s harder than you think to fit in when you’re a thousand years outside your own time period! I’d normally enjoy saying ‘I told you so’ but, right now, I reckon the sooner we find Professor Howe and get back home the better.”

Tilda nodded, clearly shaken by their latest encounter. “We need to find Arelath. I thought she’d be here by now.”

“Maybe she’s staying indoors until the rain stops,” Charlie wondered aloud, “if that really was her reason for going home.”

They both leapt with surprise when a harsh voice snarled behind them, “You two again?”

Charlie and Tilda spun on their heels to find themselves gazing up at Olav and Eirik. Before they could move, strong fingers curled around the necks of their cloaks.

“Our neighbour just said he almost caught a couple of snoopers,” Eirik growled.

Olav scratched his thin beard and peered down at Tilda. “He described them as looking odd! Don’t suppose that could be you two, could it?”

“Us? Snoopers? No, we’re just minding our own business here,” said Charlie, trying to muster an innocent look.

Rain dripped from the tips of the large boy’s messy, blonde hair. Eirik peered towards Charlie as if he were a captured animal. “Hmm. Well, you’re too *puny* to be a Dane and you look too *weak* to be any kind of invader.”

“And too *ugly* to be from Wessex!” Olav dragged Tilda towards him and sniffed her hair. “This one’s too clean to be a Celt or a Scot. Maybe they’re from Francia. Or Northmannia?”

“Gerroff us,” Charlie squirmed. “We’re not from anywhere. And we wanna get back there as soon as we can.”

The two Vikings shared a bewildered stare. “How can you not be from *anywhere*?” Eirik asked. “Even that thieving friend of yours is from somewhere.”

Charlie stopped squirming. “You mean Arelath? She’s not a thief. You’re lying!”

“Me, lying?” Eirik growled. “How would you know? Are you sticking up for her then?”

“We’re just looking for her,” Charlie told the large Dane. “She’s helping us. We were supposed to meet her—”

“We lost her,” Tilda interrupted. “We thought she might have come back here.”

Olav shook his head and grunted. “Not if she knows what’s good for her — and you ought to steer clear if you know what’s good for you as well.”

Eirik loosened his grip on Charlie's cloak, letting his captive drop to the ground. "I'm telling you she can't be trusted. She's tried stealing from our father before."

"Yeah, well" — Charlie shrugged as he straightened his sopping wet cloak — "she's been kind to us and she said she could help us."

"The only people her type want to help are themselves. That girl is almost as bad as her wretched father," Eirik snorted. "If you're associating with her, you're not going to be too popular around here then."

"You know Arelath's dad?" Charlie asked.

"We all know him!" Olav growled. "My father's friend is a fisherman and swears that Arelath's clan are stealing from him. He thinks the girl's dunga of a father is the ringleader. One day, we'll catch him aboard and then he'll get his comeuppance!"

Charlie scratched his head. "What's a dunga?"

Olav shook his head, roaring with laughter.

"Only a dunga would ask what a dunga is."

Eirik joined in, "No, brother. This boy is way too useless to be a dunga. He's more of a *fifl*. Or a *vamr*!"

As the two Vikings backslapped each other, Charlie whispered to his sister. "I haven't a clue what these two are talking about. I think they're speaking a foreign language."

"Uh, it could be Old Norse," Tilda whispered back. "And it's probably an insult. 'Dunga' sounds pretty unpleasant in any language."

"There's only one thing worse than a dunga or a *fifl*," Olav told them. His laugh had turned into a scowl. "And that's a *thief* like Arelath or her father."

Nodding, Eirik leant close to Charlie, dowsing him in sour Viking breath. "Or their friends!"

Charlie backed away, saying, "I didn't say we were friends. I just said she was helping us. We hardly know her. Honestly..."

“Well, you’re wasting your time looking for her here. And you’re wasting our time too!” Olav said. “We just passed her heading towards the bag makers’ street.”

Tilda’s eyes widened. “What?”

“She seemed to be in quite a hurry too,” Olav told them.

“What? Over that way?” Charlie pointed in a random direction over to the boys’ left. The Danes laughed at him.

“You really aren’t from these parts. The bag makers are that way!” Eirik said, gesturing towards his right instead.

Wrapping an arm around his sister’s shoulders, Charlie steered her away from the two Danish boys. “Thanks for telling us. And if we see those snoopers, we’ll tell ‘em you want a word.”

“WAIT!” Eirik boomed, halting Charlie and Tilda in their tracks. “Where do you think you two are going?”

The pair of time travellers swapped nervous glances. Before they could answer, Olav waved his giant fist in the air. “Ah, let them go. Mother is roasting a boar for supper and she’s promised I can have one of the ears all to myself.”

Eirik licked his lips, clearly sharing his brother’s hunger. “Think yourselves lucky but remember — a dunga or a fifl will *always* get their comeuppance!”



Chapter Eight

Charlie and Tilda Get Knotted

By the time Charlie and Tilda reached Beggargate, the rainfall had stopped. Already, scores of eager Danes had emerged from their houses, returning what had been a quiet afternoon back to the noisy bustle of vibrant Viking life.

The two time travellers were the shortest people there and struggled to see over the shoulders of the traders and shoppers who pored over the stalls of beautifully made bags and satchels. Tilda soon found herself distracted by the clever needlework and exquisite Viking crafts on show.

“These leather wallets are amazing,” she gushed, pausing to inspect a table piled high. “I could have a go at making some of these back home.”

Up and down the street, similar tables were stacked with an assortment of bags. As Tilda studied them closely, she couldn’t help wondering if the soft leather and delicate fabrics were proof that the Viking traders journeyed to faraway destinations, like the Middle East.

She wasn’t the only person admiring the goods. Men and women stood shoulder to shoulder, bartering their own goods for the bags. Some clutched silver coins but others were haggling over items they were trading.

“Why don’t they all just use money, like we do?” Charlie whispered, watching as a small man exchanged a stack of wooden bowls for a patchwork, leather shoulder bag.

“I think coins are still a fairly recent thing here,” Tilda answered. “Before coins, everyone traded with their goods instead. Some are obviously still doing that. The man probably made those bowls himself but needs the bag more.” She

gazed longingly at one of the satchels. “I wish I had something to trade.”

They returned to scanning the busy street, hoping to catch sight of Arelath between the scrum of Danes.

“Maybe we should forget about Arelath,” Tilda suggested. “I’m not sure whether we should trust her or not now. You heard what those two Danes said.”

“Yeah, but she has only ever been helpful to us,” Charlie countered. “How do we know whether she’s a thief or not? They could be making it up.”

Tilda nodded, hoping they hadn’t wasted too much time on their fruitless search. “OK, I think we should just concentrate on finding the professor’s next clue. So if he left something here, where would it be? He wouldn’t leave it inside a bag. The clue told us to seek help beyond what’s on display.”

Slowly stroking his chin, Charlie surveyed the street with a fresh gaze. Eventually, he pointed

to a rough timber seat, propped beside one of the houses. One of the sellers had been sitting on it when the pair first arrived in the street. “That’s not on display. It’s not for sale!”

Tilda’s cheeks flushed with excitement as they weaved their way across the street. But her enthusiasm quickly ebbed away as their search of the seat uncovered nothing but an infestation of woodworm.

“Oh, man, I thought we had it!” Charlie slumped onto the wooden seat. “This is the only thing on Beggargate that’s not on display.”

He racked his brain for inspiration but it was Tilda who had the eureka moment!

“The traders *themselves* are not on display!” she cheered. “Maybe the professor has left a clue with one of the bag makers.”

Charlie counted at least twenty different bag makers. Most were men and looked like they’d rather fight an army than help a couple of children. “I’m not asking them!”

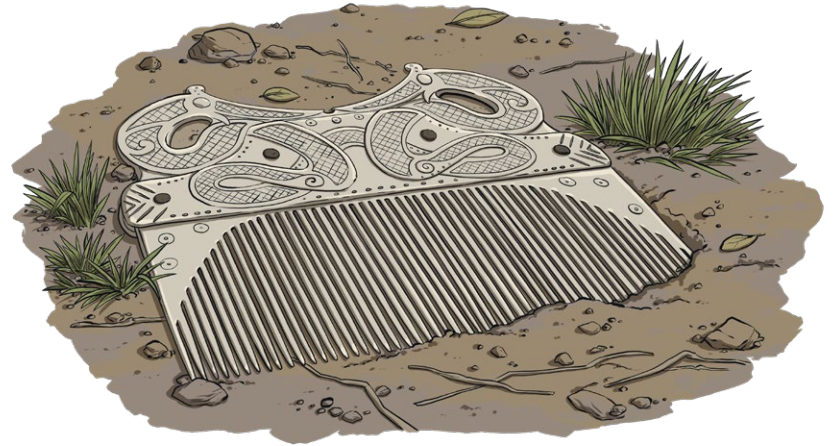
“Come on — talking to people is fun,” Tilda insisted, leaping to her feet. “I’ll take the left side of the street; you take the right. Bet you two quid I find the clue first!”

Charlie stayed where he was. He hadn’t fared well in his recent bets with his sister. He hoped that if he left Tilda alone for long enough, she’d find the clue without his help. Besides, he was feeling wary of talking to new people based on their time travelling so far. It usually seemed to lead him to trouble.

Guilt eventually dragged him off his seat but after being ignored or rebuffed by half a dozen traders, Charlie gave up. He hoped that Tilda was having more luck on the opposite row of stalls.

Shortly after returning to the seat, he noticed something interesting lying on the ground. A comb!

He rushed to retrieve it and managed to snatch the comb from the mud before the sole of a large



Viking boot had the chance to crush it into tiny fragments.

At first, he’d thought it was made from wood but, on closer inspection, Charlie was shocked to find that the comb had been fashioned from something much different — bone!

Somebody had gone to great lengths to engrave the handle with a beautiful Viking pattern. What looked like the heads of tiny serpents guarded each end of the handle, stretching into swirling and interlocking tails that twisted along the bone before continuing their journey onto the other side. There, they joined the tails of two identical serpents, creating a pattern

that Charlie could have admired for hours.

As his eyes followed the twists and turns of the hand-carved pattern, an idea suddenly began to form inside his head. Smiling to himself, Charlie clasped his new treasure tight in both hands and stepped back into the street's bustle.

"Clear off, little troll!" the first trader snapped. "I've no time to babysit... oh!"

The man's tone changed the moment Charlie revealed the ornate comb. "Looking to trade, are you?"

The flash of greed that seemed to have lit the trader's eyes made Charlie hold on to his comb tightly. "Uh, maybe. But I'm also looking for a friend."

"No friends here," the man said, thrusting a satchel towards Charlie. "Just bags... like this!"

"My friend's name is Howe. He might have left something for me?"

"Never heard of him. Try farther along!"

At least the traders were prepared to speak to him now. Charlie set off along the street, trying again, and wondered how his sister was getting on at her end.

Meanwhile, her spirits sagging, Tilda was having no more luck. She'd lost sight of Charlie and was running out of people to ask. She was about to approach the last stallholder when she felt strong fingers grip her elbow. A rasping voice hissed into her ear.

"If you're looking for the professor, come with me."

Tilda twisted her head to look at this new messenger but the man had already turned away. "Wait! I need to tell my—"

"Your brother's already waiting for you," the voice mumbled. "Hurry!"

Making sure she didn't lose sight of the man, Tilda quickly gave pursuit through the crowded street. 'Charlie must have had more luck

after all,' she thought to herself. In less than a minute, the man had led her into a narrow sidestreet littered with straw. A small door stood ajar under a thick wooden-beamed doorway. Stepping through the opening, the man ducked to enter the low-roofed building.

"In here!" he called.

He turned and held out a hand to help Tilda through the door. As she grasped it, he gave her an unexpected yank over the threshold instead. She stumbled past him into the middle of what appeared to be a shadowy storeroom. A smell of damp wood and straw mixed with the stale, cold air. The beams felt imposingly low. In the darkness, a tight knot was developing in her chest. Fear stabbed at her when her eyes then fell upon the gloomy sight ahead. There, trussed tightly to a simple bench by strong lengths of coiled rope, was Charlie.

Her brother's bright blue eyes were stretched wide with terror and muffled cries fought to escape the dirty rag tied across his mouth.

Emboldened by a mix of anger and fear, Tilda

spun to face the stranger. But it wasn't just the man she'd followed who greeted her gaze. A familiar figure stepped out from the shadows.

"Arelath?"

The girl smirked through the straggles of hair that draped down her grubby face, nodding to the man at her side. "Tilda, this is my father. Do as he tells you."

"But..."

"We don't want to hurt you," Arelath continued, as her father pushed Tilda towards a second bench. "We just want you to help us."

Tilda wrestled to escape but there was nothing she could do to stop the larger man from tying her to the similar bench before dragging her towards Charlie. It was a roughly hewn piece of wood on legs, with no backrest. She felt like she could topple backwards if it weren't for the bindings holding her in place.

The rope looped around Tilda's wrists and then around the flat part of the seat. The

rough strands dug into her skin each time she tried to move, biting like teeth. "I thought we were friends."

"Be quiet!" Arelath's father ordered, pulling another dirty rag from his pocket. He seemed to be enjoying his power a little too much.

"Not yet!" Arelath snatched the cloth from her father's hand. "We need to hear her answers."

Beside Tilda, Charlie thrashed his head back and forth wildly and groaned a single syllable.

"I'm not helping *you*," Tilda insisted to the pair standing over her. "I don't care what you do to me."

Arelath laughed. "That's what I thought you'd say. It's why I asked my father to get your brother tied up already. If you don't tell us what we want to find out, it's your brother that'll get hurt."

"That's not fair!"

Tilda heard Charlie whimper beside her as

Arelath's father reached beneath his cloak to retrieve a pair of sharp iron scissors. With his eyes fixed on Charlie, he slapped them menacingly against the palm of his hand.



Chapter Nine

Tricked, Trapped and All Tied Up

The jagged blades of the scissors looked like they had been made to shear through leather or another tough fabric. What little light leaked into the storage room fell against their shiny surface like a trickle of tiny diamonds. That glint of cold iron sent a shiver through Tilda's body. Beside her, Charlie fought against his bindings. He thrashed his head from side to side, desperately trying to communicate with their captors.

Arelath's father slapped the heavy blades against his palm again. "Your precious brother

is safe as long as you give us what we need."

Arelath's smile turned into a sneer. "But if you don't, who would come looking for a couple of strangers in Jorvik? No one knows you're 'ere."

Tilda couldn't answer. It was true. Nobody knew they were in Jorvik. Nobody would come looking for them if they never left the dirty storeroom.

"What do you want?" she asked, her eyes fixed on Arelath.

Arelath pulled a folded scrap of parchment from beneath her cloak. "You can read the symbols. I need you to tell me what this says."

Tilda thought for a moment about what to do. She glanced at Charlie. His wide eyes were clearly begging her. For what — to read the note and save them? Or to refuse to help the disloyal girl and her father? Tilda couldn't tell. She looked at the note and back at the iron weapon in the man's huge hands.

"OK, I'll help you," Tilda said softly, her head dropping and her gaze falling to the floor. "Just



promise to let us go.”

“We’ll let you go when we’ve got the treasure,” snarled Arelath’s father. “And not before. So don’t go thinking you can deceive us. We’re too smart for that.”

Charlie’s forehead creased. Tilda fired him a wink as she replied, “Yeah, don’t worry — we can see that. Where did you get this note?”

“That doesn’t matter!” Arelath snapped, flapping the piece of parchment in Tilda’s face. “But if you must know, it was stuck to the bottom of an old seat on Beggargate.”

Tilda sighed, realising they were looking in the right place after all when they had first arrived on the street. They’d just been beaten to it. She looked at the note that Arelath was holding up, glanced away and then spoke.

“You’ve proven your worth. My final clue is in your hand. You’ll discover my treasure where the creatures of the sea arrive on land.”

The siblings’ captors stared at Tilda. Then, at

the note. Then, back towards Tilda.

“That doesn’t make any sense,” Arelath’s father finally spat. “Fish are the creatures of the sea. They don’t come onto the land. They live in the water.”

Charlie wriggled again, making the legs of his short bench shuffle an inch along the floor. His face reddened as he tried in vain to speak, silenced by the dirty cloth across his mouth.

Arelath stamped her foot. “What does it mean? This is no help. You need to tell us what it means or your brother won’t be wriggling any more.”

Tilda sighed. “We need to figure out what the professor means. I guess there’s somewhere in Jorvik where you can find fish on land. Perhaps there’s people who help to bring the fish to the land.”

Charlie’s shoulders sagged in disappointment at his sister giving in to help the villains.

The man was none the wiser and angrily drove the sharpened tips of his scissors into the

wooden door. “This is a waste of time, Arelath. Fish don’t live on land. If they did, there’d be no need for the men on Fishergate to cast their nets into the river...”

“Wait!” Arelath said. “That’s it, Father. You’ve solved it! The men with the big boats. They go fishing every week and land their catches at the docks. It’s the boat we’ve been to before!”

Charlie was swallowing his rage as Arelath offered him a smug grin. Not only had Tilda read them the clue but she’d also led them to solve it.

“Landing their catches,” the man agreed. “You’re right! Fishergate is where creatures of the sea arrive on land.” He gave Arelath a congratulatory hug. “We’ll clearly find this professor’s treasure at Fishergate!”

Arelath turned to face Tilda. “It looks like you saved your brother and kept yourselves alive. We don’t need you any more but you can both stay tied up ‘ere while we go and get the treasure. Thanks, fifls.”

Her father pulled the rag roughly from Charlie's mouth, leaving it hanging loosely around the boy's neck. "Lucky you've got a smart sister to look out for you. Better say thanks to her." He grinned as he turned away and retrieved his scissors from the door.

The father and daughter duo left the storeroom. As soon as the heavy door slammed shut, Charlie growled at his sister.

"Nice work, Tils," he huffed, wriggling against his rope shackles. "You didn't have to make it so easy for them!"

Tilda smirked. "I didn't. Do you really think I'd just give them the answer?"

"Obviously... the note... you read it and then you virtually solved it for them when they had no hope of getting it themselves!"

"I didn't read what was actually on the note. I made it up. I told them what they wanted to hear — a riddle. But it wasn't *the* riddle."

Charlie felt a flush rise across his already beetroot cheeks.

"Arelath's father was right about one thing. Lucky you've got a smart sister to look after you, huh?" Tilda boasted. "I've sent Arelath and her dad to Fishergate to buy us more time. I just made that riddle up for them! I made it easy and still had to give them a nudge to work it out. So, all we have to do now is solve the professor's *real* riddle and then go and collect his reward."

"Aren't you forgetting one teensy, tiny thing, Tils?" He raised his eyebrows. "We're both tied to these benches. How can we go anywhere?"

"That's easy to fix," she promised, twisting and jerking her body until her bench toppled against Charlie's, knocking them both onto the floor. As they hit the ground, a loud 'crack' filled the room.

"Arrggh!" Charlie shrieked. "Something's broken. It's my leg... It's my arm... It's..."

"It's your bench, silly," Tilda assured him. "Look!"

The fall had shattered two of the bench legs and snapped them clean off from the flat seat. The previously sturdy bench was now little more than firewood and the bindings that had held Charlie tightly now hung loosely across his body. He wriggled free and quickly set about untying his sister. Moments later, they were both standing at the storeroom door.

"I can't believe Arelath betrayed us," Charlie fumed. "Eirik and Olav were right — we shouldn't have trusted her."

"Well, she'll soon realise that she shouldn't have trusted us either and then she'll come back with her dad to find us."

Charlie gulped. "With those scissors!"

"Yep, so let's get out of here," Tilda urged, reaching for the door handle.

Charlie stepped forwards, blocking her path. "Shouldn't we solve the real riddle first?"

"Nope! No need. I memorised what the note really said and it's pretty straightforward." Her

eyes flicked upwards, recalling the actual riddle before reciting it.

"I trust my riddles have tested you. Your adventures shall soon be repaid. Now, use your new-found wit and guile; go where cups and bowls were made."

"So, all we need to do now is find a street where cups and bowls were made!" Tilda beamed.

"Uh, sure... yeah..." Charlie tried to kick-start his brain in case he was missing something obvious. "So, where exactly is that?"

"Well... I'm not entirely sure — but we can just ask someone. It can't be that hard!" Tilda said. She was full of excitement as she headed to the door.

Back out on the narrow street, there was no one around. Earlier, Arelath's father had led Tilda quickly to this more isolated location. She had lost her bearings. The pair wandered to the end of the straw-covered street in search of anyone to ask.

They spotted a woman hurrying along, a shawl tightly clutching her shoulders. Her long, brown hair trailed behind her as she moved. In her hand was an empty basket.

“Excuse me!” called Tilda. The woman spun round to confront them but her face was plastered with a look of confusion. “Can you help us? We need to find the street where cups are made.”

Still, the woman looked mystified. Then, she spoke. Whatever she said neither Charlie nor Tilda could comprehend. She was speaking a different language and she could probably understand them no more than they could her.

“Cups?” Tilda tried again, more simply. She raised her eyebrows and the woman mirrored the expression.

“Bowls, cups,” Charlie pitched in, adding gestures to mime what he was talking about, like playing a strange game of charades. “Water, drink...” he continued, exaggerating the action of bringing a cup to his mouth. Next, he tried to mime splashing water on his face and then

eating using an invisible bowl and spoon.

Tilda looked at him with increasing bewilderment. Yet, the woman suddenly grasped some understanding of Charlie’s actions.

“Ah!” she said and motioned for them to follow her.

“Yes!” Charlie punched the air. “Lucky you’ve got a brother smart enough to help you out, hey, Tils?”

Tilda shook her head and rolled her eyes as they quickly hurried after the woman who had begun to march away along the cobbles, beckoning them after her.



Chapter Ten

Fishy Business at the Riverside

Charlie and Tilda barely had a chance to register the streets around them as they doubled their strides to keep pace with the woman. Wherever she needed to be with her basket, she must be running late.

At first, Tilda briefly noticed their close proximity to the River Ouse. She'd spent many happy summer afternoons by the riverside. Then, the woman turned another corner ahead and, as they followed suit, the full view of the river appeared. The location brought a feeling of growing concern to Tilda's chest.

The Viking river was a scene she barely recognised. Gone were the walled banks and paved walkways she was used to. In their place were steep, muddy slopes and thick wooden jetties. She'd never realised how busy, or important, the river was to York. But now, she understood. It was the beating heart of the city, pumping a lifeblood of products and people from the bellies of those ships. And it needed a small army of busy people to keep pace.

The river itself seemed infested by a variety of ships and boats. Huge sails flapped like sheets on a washing line, while the constant dip of oars in the water beat out an oddly comforting rhythm. Anchored ships hugged the riverbank, submitting to groups of men who unloaded furs, fabrics, wood, metals and even pottery, from goodness knows where. One magnificent example caught Tilda's eye. Long and sleek, it sat high in the water with majestic curves. It must have been big enough to hold a hundred people. A huge, striped sail billowed in the breeze round a tall, central pole; taut ropes descended in acute angles to the edges. On its timber outer shell, it was bejewelled along each side with shield-like emblems. Most striking was

a fierce dragon's head adorning the prow of the ship, reaching into the sky like it was about to breathe fire from its jaws.

Many smaller boats could be seen up and down the river. Men yelled. Sails flapped. Boxes slammed. The menagerie of exotic scents drifting from the ships helped mask the underlying odour of rotting fish guts. None of these things were the cause of Tilda's concern, however.

As the woman stopped in front of them, Tilda's fears were realised. The well-meaning local waved her upturned palm in front of them to present the scene. Then, she copied Charlie's earlier mimes back to them, looking pleased with herself. She hadn't led them to a street where bowls and cups were made. She'd led them to the water where fresh fish was traded. She'd led them to Fishergate — exactly where Tilda had sent Arelath and her father.

"Nice job, Charlie," Tilda scolded her brother. "You've managed to get us to the one place we *didn't* want to be."

"It's not my fault, is it? How was I to know this



is where she was leading us?”

“Well, no point arguing about it now. Let’s hide here for a moment and try to get a good look around. Arelath and her father could be anywhere nearby. We need to work out which direction is safe to slip away in and hope they don’t spot us before we see them.”

The pair crouched behind a large box of freshly caught fish. A wooden plank led from the land a few steps away up to the nearest boat. All around, there were streams of eager buyers, sellers and workers. Charlie’s gaze pinballed from one ship to the next as his eyes searched the army of men unloading cargo. Tilda scanned the dock as she watched more than just fish being unloaded from the boats.

“Uh-oh!” Charlie uttered. He pointed over Tilda’s shoulder. “Good news is I’ve just spotted them. Bad news is they’ve seen us first and they’re coming straight for us!”

Charlie was right. Tilda shot to her feet.

“How did you two get free?” The roar came

from Arelath’s father as he bounded towards them. His face was burning red. Creases from his cheeks and forehead drew attention to the menace in his eyes. In one hand, he still clutched the iron scissors that he’d threatened them with earlier. “You think you can beat us to the treasure? Wait till I get my hands on you two!”

There was no way Tilda wanted to find out what he was going to do. She spun round and was about to bundle Charlie in the other direction to get away from their pursuers. However, Charlie stood firm. Tilda realised that approaching them from the other side was the familiar duo of Eirik and Olav.

“You again!” bellowed one of the Viking brothers.

With the boys bearing down on them from one side and Arelath’s beastly father from the other, there was only one way left to escape. Tilda grabbed Charlie’s sleeve and yanked him towards the plank that led up onto the boat. They were immediately plunged onto a busy deck.

In every part of the boat, more boxes of fish were piled high, ready to be unloaded. A mixture of sea water and fish scales swilled around their ankles but it was the stench of what sat just behind her that made Tilda gag. Oozing sacks of fish guts were perched on the ship's hull, no doubt waiting to be dumped back out at sea.

The Hacker siblings had already been followed up the ramp by Arelath and her father, with Eirik and Olav not much farther behind. Now, they were all aboard the boat and there was nowhere for Charlie and Tilda to go.



Chapter Eleven

A Very Messy Conclusion

Tilda and Charlie hopped from one box of fish to the next. Anxious to get away from the stinking cargo, they hauled themselves onto the stacks of boxes still waiting to be unloaded.

Arelath's father circled round from one direction, trying to head them off. He pulled himself up with a dangling rope onto the highest box, blocking Tilda's path. As Arelath joined him, the glint of a metal scissor blade reminded Tilda that the man was armed. The Cambrian pair towered above her but it was an unsteady-looking pile that they had mounted.

Tilda turned quickly, hoping to flee back across the boxes, only to find that Eirik and Olav had circled round from the other direction and formed an impregnable wall on their opposite side. She knew that they were trapped. Their only escape was through the dozens of sacks of stinking fish guts to one side, or straight over the side of the boat into the churning soup of a freezing cold river.

“They’re here again,” Olav told his brother. “I told you we’d catch these thieves on our boat sooner or later.”

“We’re not th-” Tilda began to protest.

“We told you they were nothing but trouble,” Eirik added. “Especially *him!*”

“Stay out of this,” Arelath’s father growled. “Our business is with these strangers, not you.”

Suddenly, Tilda realised that neither she nor her brother were the targets of the Danish brothers. They were concerned with Arelath and her father. They had talked earlier about them being thieves and not to be trusted. It turned

out they were right about part of it, at least.

Eirik wore a cold smirk. “This boat belongs to our father and we know you’ve stolen from us before. Now, we’ve caught you lurking around here again. Here to steal fish for your supper, are you?”

“We’re leaving,” Arelath insisted, pulling at her father’s sleeve.

“Not without *that* girl,” insisted her father, giving the Danes a glare every bit as sharp as his scissor blades but pointing his finger at Tilda.

Olav beckoned Charlie and Tilda towards them, away from the danger of Arelath’s father. Realising that the Danish brothers were now unlikely allies, Tilda edged backwards towards them, nudging Charlie in the same direction. Arelath scowled at them but said nothing.

Eirik stepped in front of them, acting as a shield between them and the onlooking father and daughter. It was only then that Tilda saw that Eirik was carrying a deadly-looking spear. The

wooden shaft was longer than his arm and it had a sharp metal head, which was pointed directly up at Arelath's father. Olav also stood protectively in front of the Hacker siblings and Charlie spotted that this brother had pulled an axe from his belt.

"Looks like you've got two choices now," Eirik said calmly to the man. "You either jump down here to fight me, where this spear is waiting for you — or you keep climbing that rope."

Arelath's father clutched the oily rope with one hand, seemingly showing his likely choice. Beside him, Arelath tightly held on to her father's sleeve with both hands as she silently mouthed Tilda a promise, "This isn't over!"

Tilda never had the chance to respond. Arelath's father grasped the rope with both hands. In front of Charlie, Olav swung his axe. The whoosh of the weapon soared past Charlie's ears and the blade came down onto the knot where the other end of the rope was tied.

The tension vanished from the rope just as Arelath's father was heaving himself up it.



Losing his balance and grip at the same time, he tumbled in the air. Arelath was still clutching her father's sleeve. The stack of boxes on which they had climbed toppled beneath them as the man kicked out.

For a second, the pair seemed to be suspended above the deck. Then, gravity took command, spinning them down towards the belly of the boat, where they each landed head first in separate sacks of pungent fish guts.

By the time Charlie and Tilda had caught their breath, Arelath and her father were surrounded by a bunch of older Danes on the boat. The would-be thieves had been fished out of the stinking sacks and were both hunched on the deck, looking very sorry for themselves.

Olav and Eirik were busy receiving backslaps and congratulatory neck squeezes from the older Danes but soon made their way back towards Charlie and Tilda.

"I knew we'd catch those thieving wretches one

day," Olav boasted. "Everyone knows they've been stealing down here before. We just needed to see them back here. I think we should celebrate! Come and join us! We'll put on a feast. A bowl full of spitted horse meat for a real treat!"

"Urgh!" Charlie gasped. "Horse meat?"

"Yes," Eirik rubbed his belly. "And a plate of pickled fish... all washed down with cold nettle soup!"

"No, thanks," Tilda offered. "Even though that sounds lovely, maybe you can help us in a different way."

The two Danes looked at each other and shrugged.

"Could you, perhaps, help us find somebody? He's called Howe. We think he might be on the street where cups and bowls are made."



Chapter Twelve

The Professor's Unexpected Reward

"Are you sure this is the right place?"

Charlie had expected Jorvik's street of cup makers to be pretty boring. Actually, there were all kinds of things being made by individuals in their little thatched-roof buildings: jewellery, metal knives and tools, leather goods and combs carved from bone and antlers.

"Coppergate is the street of cup makers. This is where your friend earns his living," Eirik assured Charlie. "He's a real expert. Ahead of his time. He caused quite a stir when he

first arrived. He makes the best cups and bowls around."

"Ha! Ahead of his time! A stir — making cups!" laughed Charlie to himself. "Geddit? Never mind. You two are funnier than you realise."

Eirik looked nothing but confused.

"Why don't you ask him about them yourself?" Olav pointed towards one of the small workshops halfway down the street.

The door had just opened and a small, bearded figure stepped out onto the muddy thoroughfare.

Charlie and Tilda could barely contain their excitement. They didn't even stop to say thank you to Eirik and Olav as they splashed across the gap like a couple of giddy autograph hunters.

"Professor! Professor Howe!" Tilda chirped. "Is that you?"

Charlie felt his pulse quicken, putting an extra bounce in each step as he imagined getting his hands on the treasure that the professor's

riddles had promised. Part of him was already spending his soon-to-be-claimed riches as they approached the startled man.

“You’re older than I imagined,” Tilda said.

“Shorter too,” Charlie added, running his gaze up and down the man, who was barely taller than he was.

“And no top hat or monocle.” Tilda rolled her eyes in Charlie’s direction.

In fact, Professor Howe wore no hat of any description. He ran a hand through a nest of silver curls that matched his goatee beard and thick eyebrows. He did sport a modest, silvery moustache but not as curly as Charlie had imagined. Predictably, perhaps, his outfit was much more in keeping with the times in which he had chosen to live. A beige tunic covered most of his body, down to his knees, with similar coloured trousers beneath it. A cloak of darker brown was draped around his shoulders, pinned with a simple brooch on the left side of his chest. It looked very much like one that Charlie remembered seeing in the secret attic

room at home. Fastened around his middle was a low-slung leather belt.

Stepping back towards his front door, Professor Howe scanned the two newcomers with a mischievous gaze. “Well, I was expecting my first-ever visitors to be a little older and perhaps even better dressed. But I suppose you’ll have to do.”

“Do you know what we’ve been through to *finally* meet you?” Charlie snapped. “If you wanted visitors, why didn’t you just leave an address instead of those ridiculous riddles?”

“Charlie Hacker!” Tilda hissed. “How dare—”

The professor raised his hand. “It’s all right, my dear. Charlie has every right to ask his questions. He’s travelled over a millennium to get here, after all. You’ve both proved your worth by getting this far.”

“Yeah, we have!” Charlie clamped his hands onto his hips.

The man ushered both children into his small

Viking home. Eirik and Olav had already turned on their heels and headed back to the docks.

The house was surprisingly light and far cosier than Charlie had ever imagined a Viking home could be. He glanced around for any hint of gold or valuable objects but it was a fairly simple space. Warm embers still glowed in the ashes of a fire and burning candles sent tongues of orange light dancing across the walls. Thick skin rugs covered the floor, tickling Charlie's ankles. There was a low wooden bench ahead, which seemed to double as a pretty uncomfortable-looking bed.

"Would anyone like a cup of warm milk?" the professor asked. "Or maybe a chunk of bread and cheese. Everything's freshly made. I'm pleased to say that the Danes haven't invented supermarkets."

Tilda perched herself on the bench, looking keen to accept the professor's hospitality, while Charlie's impatience got the better of him.

"This is great. Thanks, Prof, because I'm actually starving but — didn't want to mention

it straight away — didn't one of those riddles mention something about treasure?"

"Ah, yes, the treasure," said the professor, thoughtfully massaging his chin.

"Charlie! Give us a chance to at least get to know the professor first. It's not all about treasure, you know. Imagine what stories the professor has to tell."

"Not to worry," the man said with a smile. "There's plenty of time for stories too. Let me show you something that I'm sure you will be pleased to receive."

Charlie was finding it really difficult to contain his excitement as he watched the professor disappear into a back room. His mind was alive with images of new games consoles, mountain bikes, designer trainers and all the other things he could buy when he returned home to sell this treasure.

Tilda's stern words snapped him back to Viking York. "You're being very rude, Charlie. We're guests of the professor, remember. The least we

can do is enjoy a chat and a drink first.”

Charlie sniffed away his sister’s reprimand. “I hate Viking York. It’s the worst place we’ve been. I just wanna get what we’ve come for and go home, OK?”

Tilda looked like she was going to lose her temper when the professor summoned his guests into the back room. “Perhaps you’d both like to come through here. I think you’re going to like this.”

Charlie pushed past his sister with an enthusiasm he usually reserved for one of his favourite all-you-can-eat buffets. However, the sight that greeted him stopped him in his tracks.

He gazed up at a wall filled from floor to ceiling with cups and bowls. “There’s enough here for the entire school canteen.”

The professor stood proudly in the middle of the room, behind a large and extremely worn workbench. It was littered with a collection of basic and weathered woodworking tools. It wasn’t the tools or the bench that held Charlie’s attention, though. Instead, his eyes were locked

on the small, rectangular package sitting in Professor Howe’s right hand.

“Why are you here?” Tilda asked, ignoring the package. “It seems such a... backward place to choose out of everywhere you could be.”

Professor Howe laughed. “Backward because there are no mobile phones or computers or Internet? That’s why I like it so much. Jorvik offers an uncomplicated existence. It’s such a fascinating period.”

Tilda reached out to run her fingers across an ornately decorated bowl. “I think my little brother prefers his twenty-first-century comforts. I’d love to see what life was like in Tudor times, though. Those clothes looked incredible!”

Charlie rubbed his hands together, clearly trying to recall a memory. “Wasn’t Henry the Eighth a Tudor king? He’d lop your head off as soon as he looked at you, Tils.”

"I met him once," nodded the professor. "He came to York in 1541 so I slipped back through the time door on Hungate. He puts on a lovely feast, you know. I wish I'd asked his cook for her gingerbread recipe."

"You could always go back," Tilda pointed out.

"Me? No. Never!" the professor shuddered. "They didn't take kindly to me borrowing their artefacts. I couldn't resist adding to my collection."

"Yeah, we've seen your secret room," Charlie pointed out.

Professor Howe nodded. "Ah, that's what got me into so much trouble with William the Conqueror in those years following 1066. Nasty business. What a vile man. He tried to wipe Yorkshire off the map, you know. Never go back there. That Norman Conquest was a dangerous time. Do you hear?"

Tilda's skin rippled with goose pimples as a look of terror contorted the professor's wrinkled face.

"Anyway, he objected to me borrowing his second volume of the Domesday Book and locked me up in his dungeon. I bribed his jailer and escaped after a month, but that was it for me. My time-travelling days were over. So I gathered up what gold and silver I'd plundered through the ages and retired here. Couldn't be happier, my dears!"

Tilda saw her brother's eyes widen with hope and greed at the mention of precious metals.

"I'm so glad you both came," the professor continued. "I wondered if anybody would. People dream of travelling through time but nobody actually believes it's possible. I once thought about writing to Professor Brian Cox, you know. But perhaps the responsibility is best passed on to young minds like yours. You are our future but you can learn so much from the past."

Tilda wasn't sure what to think. She was excited at the possibilities of time travel and seeing York's different eras but she didn't want history to be invaded by a clutch of any old unwelcome sightseers parading through its streets.

“Well, we did come,” Charlie reminded the professor. “And we solved all those riddles. We did pretty well, huh?”

Professor Howe held up the package. “So, you want your reward?”

“Uh, well, that would be nice!”

“And so you shall have it.” Professor Howe beamed proudly as he handed Charlie his prize. “Enjoy your riches, Charlie.”

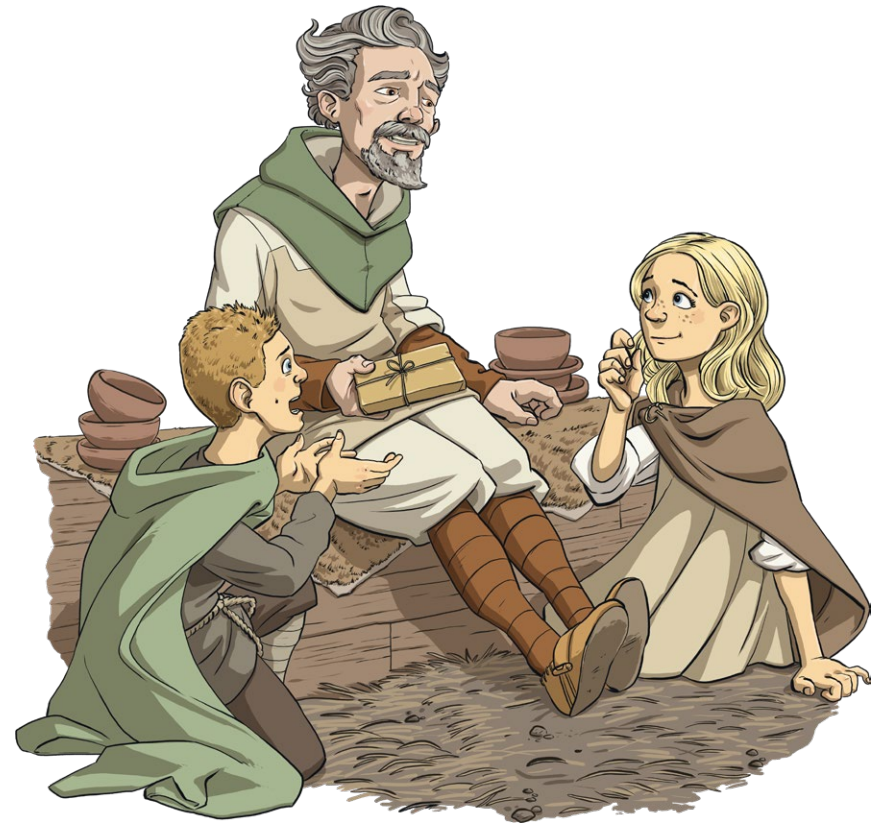
Unable to contain his excitement, Charlie snatched at the linen, pulling it away until he revealed...

“A book?”

He turned the small leather journal in his hands, opening it and rummaging through the pages. He even tipped it up and shook it like a wet umbrella.

“We came all this way for just a book?”

“Charlie! Don’t be so rude!” Tilda reached out



and snatched the book from her brother’s hand. She cradled it against her chest.

“But he said we’d get a reward,” Charlie sulked. “He said *treasure*, Tils.”

Professor Howe sighed. “There are more

valuable things in this world than gold and jewels, Charlie.”

Charlie wasn't convinced. “But York's got a library full of books. I can order more on the Internet too. I don't *need* another book.”

“It isn't just *any* book,” the professor patiently continued. “It's knowledge. Those pages contain details of everything I've ever learnt about creating time doors and travelling through history. Scientists are still centuries away from these discoveries and, even then, they'd still only know a fraction of what's written on those pages. It's priceless!”

“The professor's right, Charle,” Tilda agreed, hugging the book even tighter. “This is an enormous responsibility. It's so valuable. It's...”

Charlie snorted. “It's not gold, is it? I can't spend knowledge, can I?”

“Forget about placing value on possessions and riches,” the professor softly counselled him. “Those can be taken away from you or lost in a moment. But knowledge” — he tapped the side

of his head — “nobody can steal that. Once you have it, you have it for ever and you can share it with others too. What can be more valuable than that?”

When Charlie offered him a sullen glare, Professor Howe shrugged and said, “OK, give it back. I'll keep it safe for the next visitor.”

“No chance!” Charlie snapped. “We're not travelling back over a thousand years and leaving empty-handed.”

The professor winked at Tilda, who had to turn away to hide her grateful chuckle. She couldn't wait to get home and read all the things the professor had discovered. Professor Howe's little book had the potential to make them both the world's leading experts on time travel — something that had supposedly not yet been invented. This would not limit them to just York but could take them anywhere and to any time in history — ancient Greece or Egypt; the discovery of America; maybe even times before humans were on the Earth at all. As far as she was concerned, that was worth more than all the games consoles, bikes

and designer trainers money could buy!

“Thank you,” she said, nuzzling her chin against the book’s cover. “It’s a wonderful gift! We will take the responsibility very seriously, I promise.”

“Well, I think you should be embarrassed, Charlie Hacker,” Tilda told her brother as they made their way back towards the slums of Bretgate. “You sounded as greedy and ungrateful as Arelath and her father.”

Charlie had left the professor’s home in a strop and Tilda had said a hurried goodbye before chasing after her brother. She’d wished she could have spent more time with Professor Howe.

“Yeah, well, I just wanna get home now.” Charlie continued to sulk. “Coming here has been one big waste of time.”

The day’s weak sun was dipping beneath Jorvik’s horizon, casting a veil of gloom across the shallow rooftops. Dark shadows lurked menacingly in almost every alley and it was the

fear of what they might conceal that sent both pairs of Hacker feet into a scurried overdrive.

Tilda pressed her hand against the professor’s new journal. It was out of sight, tucked under her dress, but she knew it was the most precious thing she would ever own.

“We’ll be back home in a few moments,” she reminded her brother as they reached the mouth of Bretgate. “All we have to do is get through the time door without being seen.”

“Lucky for us the Vikings haven’t invented street lamps, huh,” Charlie muttered. Then, he sniffed the air. “Shame they haven’t invented air fresheners, though. Urgh, what is that awful smell?”

Tilda reeled away from the vile stench as if she had just been slapped. As her stomach threatened to empty its contents into a muddy pothole, she suddenly realised where she had smelled the fishy odour before. Fear and panic ignited her instinct to run but it was too late.

Arelath and her father stepped from the

shadows, blocking their path to the time door.

“I told you they’d be back along ‘ere eventually,” Arelath snarled. “All we had to do was wait.”

The girl’s father gave his daughter a congratulatory backslap. “Good work, Arelath. When we’ve relieved these two of their treasure and returned to Cambria, I’ll give you a herd of cattle to raise.”

The promise drew a wide smile across Arelath’s mouth. It quickly turned into a mean sneer as she met Tilda’s gaze.

“Ignore the boy. The girl’s the smart one. She’ll have the treasure.”

“Hey!” Charlie objected. “I’m just as—”

“Is this what you want?” Tilda held out the professor’s journal. “How many cows can you buy with this?”

“You said they would have treasure,” the man growled.

Arelath shrugged off her father’s confusion. “It’ll be hidden inside. Or perhaps it’s made from solid gold, father. Don’t let her trick you!”

“Give that here!”

The man swiped a large hand towards the book but Tilda was too fast for him.

Tilda dodged another swipe and then directed a breathless order at Charlie. “Get ready to play catch!”

Before her brother could respond, Tilda stepped away from another lunging grasp and then launched the professor’s book high into the Viking sky.

Luckily, Charlie understood her plan. And as the two Cambrians twisted and turned in the mud, watching the book flap and spin over their heads, Charlie darted past them. When the book began its descent back towards the earth, Charlie was already waiting for it, grasping it in both hands with all his goalkeeper skills.

Tilda quickly dodged past her two startled

assailants and as their angry cries and threats pursued them down Bretgate, she pulled a Viking coin from the pocket of her dress.

“Next time I have any strange ideas about seeing Viking York for myself,” she panted, “buy me a ticket to the JORVIK Viking Centre instead.”

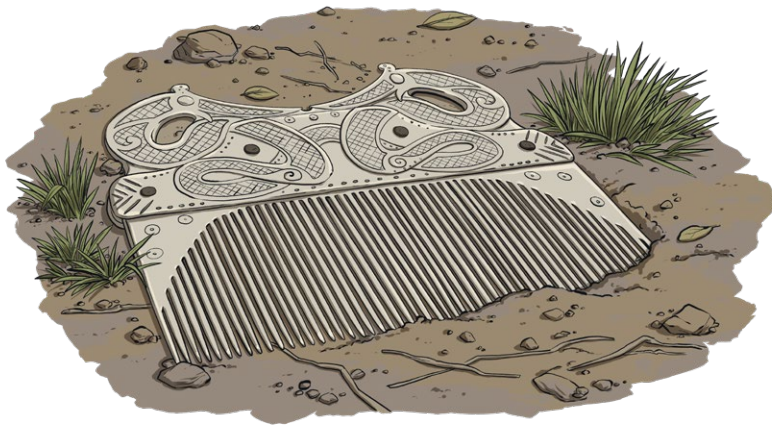
Charlie slipped the tiny Viking ring onto his finger as the duo raced towards the secret time door.

“Sure thing, Tils,” he said, diving head first at the large stone. “That goes for Vikings, Normans, Tudors or any other time. My time-travelling days are over.”

“We’ll see about that,” muttered Tilda to herself, watching the stone swallow her brother whole. Her mind was already thinking of what the future might hold for them. They didn’t just have access to York’s secret time-travelling gates now. They had the secrets of time travel itself. The possibilities were endless.

We've created a wide range of materials to support teaching on this book.

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Voyaging Vikings

Questions

1. What is the main purpose of the text?

2. How do you think the Vikings felt about their journey?

3. What do you think the Vikings learned from their journey?

4. How do you think the Vikings would have reacted to the challenges they faced?

5. What do you think the Vikings would have done if they had more resources?

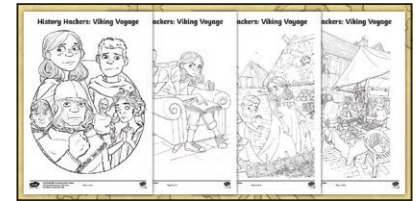
6. How do you think the Vikings would have reacted if they had been discovered?

7. What do you think the Vikings would have done if they had been captured?

8. How do you think the Vikings would have reacted if they had been killed?

9. What do you think the Vikings would have done if they had been rescued?

10. How do you think the Vikings would have reacted if they had been freed?



Direct Speech Presentation

Direct Speech Presentation

Direct Speech Presentation



Viking Drawing Pack

Viking Drawing Pack

Viking Drawing Pack

The Rules of Debating

The Rules of Debating

The Rules of Debating

Anglo-Saxons people who lived in Britain and Ireland	ingeld a Viking's treasure	hmet a Viking's helmet	ling a Viking's sword	king the ruler of a country
archer someone who shoots with a bow and arrow	inlaw a person's brother-in-law or sister-in-law	n cup a Viking's drinking cup	igdom a Viking's land	kingdom an area ruled by a king
axe a long-handled tool with a sharp metal head	isla a Viking's island	vade a Viking's shoe	phouse a Viking's house	longhouse a long, narrow house with a central fire
Dane a person from Denmark	vaja a Viking's boat	hart a Viking's horse	gship a Viking's ship	longship a long, narrow ship used by Vikings

Viking Clothing

Viking Clothing

Viking Clothing

History Hackers: Viking Voyage

Guided Reading Questions

Crack the Runes Code

Crack the Runes Code

Crack the Runes Code

**“Grab that little bag from the Vikings hook.
We’re going back in time to Jorvik and we’re
going to find Professor Howe!”**

Searching in the secret attic room above their parents’ antiques shop, Charlie and Tilda Hacker discover a cryptic message from the mysterious Professor Howe, inviting them to meet him in Viking York. However, there’s a catch: they have to solve a series of riddles to discover his location. Despite Charlie’s protests, the pair travel back over a thousand years to Jorvik.

Join the time-travelling siblings for the third instalment in the History Hackers book series! Can they crack the clues, avoiding the dangerous characters they encounter along the way, and finally meet the enigmatic professor?

