

Mr. Wiggly's Final World Tour

CHAPTER 25

Wiggly stood on the edge of that world, that particular slice of world, an island of stone and hard-won soil, and felt the wind rushing through his head; now thin, now thick, now on its edge slicing through his skull as if he didn't exist, now roiling the sea at his feet and railing against the falling sun to the west.

"I saw a Viking ship one day with my Mum right here," said the boy.

"You did, Stephen?"

"Yes, sir. Or a cloud that looked like a ship, anyway, way out there, at the edge there."

Stephen pointed out into the Western seas to a thin grey line and the sleeve of his wool jumper rose quickly like an obedient bird. His thin, white wrist and small hand hung still and exposed.

"Out at the horizon, Stephen?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did your mum see it as well?"

There was a pause and the wind settled somewhat, awaiting the boy's answer.

"She saw the cloud of it for sure, sir, but I saw the ship of it." The wind howled and tore off.

"They were here before, sir. Long before."

"Yes, I know," said Wiggly quietly. "I went to Skara Brae earlier today before you came home from school."

"Aye, they were there too, sir, digging into the side of the sea."

"Yes, I saw where they did that, into the ...side of the sea," nodded Wiggly.

The sky began to flicker out as the sun slowly drowned in another evening.

"I think, sir, that when something has been somewhere, it never really leaves. I mean, it can go away but not all of it goes away. Something stays behind."

"Like the ruins at Skara Brae, you mean, Stephen?"

"No, sir, I don't mean that at all."

"Oh," murmured Wiggly.

The wind shifted uneasily in the crimping of the light.

"How old are you, Stephen?"

"I am eight, sir, and to be nine on April 23rd next."

"Right. Eight."

Wiggly scanned the horizon for a sail.

"Are you getting a little cold, Stephen?"

"Yes, sir, but I am used to it."

"Well, let's go back to the car and drive into town, supper must be almost set by now."

"Alright, sir," said the boy and squinted one last time at the edge of his world. They turned and walked away from the grey, slate sea.

"You know, you don't have to call me "sir", Stephen. You can just call me Wiggly."

"Well,...sir....that is a funny name and it makes me want to laugh when I say it and I don't want to laugh at you. Mum says it's not polite to laugh at another person."

"Your Mum said that?" Wiggly smiled remembering earlier in the day.

"It's a very old name, the name 'Wiggly'," remarked its namesake, tipping his head slightly to one side.

"It is, sir?"

"Yes, Stephen, it may even have been a Viking name."

"Really, sir?!"

"Really. Or some form of it anyway. No one would have laughed then, would they?"

"No, sir. No, not at all, sir."

"It could have been Wiggla, or Wiggom, or Wiggsum or Wiggenson...."

"Really, sir?"

They reached the car by "Wiggelsonnen", and before Wiggly could further set himself in the landscape and the boyscape, Stephen had gotten into the passenger's side and closed the door. Wiggly stood at the driver's door and smiled. He inhaled deeply. The smell of the sea, of the rocks, the tailings of the wind, perhaps whispers of far Africa or the warm Caribbean, all rushed into his mind. He was content and that surprised him. He was far from home and yet at home. He was not cold at all. His hand rested

on the door handle and the boy in the car waited. He gazed across the waters toward where the boy had pointed, wishing for a sail, then opened the door and got in. As the wind thrashed the sea to frenzy and the last shafts of the day's light descended beneath the sky, they drove back through the beaten hills to Kirkwall and supper.

CHAPTER 28

They all sat down to the table finally, and after saying grace, Stephen told his parents that no one should ever laugh at Wiggly's name again because he was a descendant of Viking raiders.

"Well, we shall have to lock the cupboards tonight before bedtime then," said Stephen's father, with his wife, the mother of Stephen, nodding seriously in agreement.

"I had some suspicion of this man when he pulled up on that old black motorcycle. A cold, dark wind out of the East whipped across the front garden just as he dismounted, the very wind reported in early chronicles we have read about those marauders. Am I right, mother?" He looked to his wife.

"Aye, dear, that's how it was. I know the exact page you are referring to," she replied in a low tone, so as not to incite a violent response from this "barbarian" they hardly knew.

"Right," the father continued, seemingly emboldened by his wife's support, "that very same cold, dark wind was said to have accompanied the barbarous Viking raiders so many hundreds of years ago."

Steven's eyes widened to the size of the butter plate in front of him. Wiggly said nothing, sitting very still, his hands folded on his lap, looking at Mr. Eunson calmly.

"Stephen, would you pass the roast beef to our guest?" said his mother quietly, daring not to look at her husband or Wiggly, or the boy for that matter. She seemed to be speaking to the porcelain bowl of green peas to her left. Stephen looked at his mother, then at the roast beef, medium rare, red, and juicy, thinly sliced, leaning at a slight angle on its platter. Images raced through his mind: colored sails rising from beneath the blue horizon, oars beating against the surf, men jumping from their beaked long boats onto the stony coastal beaches in the dark of night, thatched houses on fire, sword blades flashing in the stuttering light of conflagrations small and large.

"Yes, Mum." His hand reached slowly for the platter but stopped midway, eyes locked on the roast beef. "You are trying to scare me now, I know, but I am almost nine and no longer easily scared. And whenever Mum speaks to me whilst looking at the peas, I know she is just trying to keep from laughing."

Stephen's Mum and Dad and Wiggly burst out laughing. Stephen laughed as well, a twinkle in his eye, easily seen

by an outsider to have been inherited from the two people he most loved and lived with. He turned his gaze from the plate of meat to look directly at his father.

"Wind is not dark, Father. Clouds are dark, or the sea can be dark, but wind has no color excepting for what is carried in it. It would be scarier if you had said it was a cold, colorless wind, because then it would be a coldness carrying nothing. That sounds scary because I think that's what emptiness is, and emptiness is scary. Isn't it, Mr. Wiggly?"

Everyone stopped laughing and looked at the boy, then at each other, and finally all eyes were on Wiggly. Wiggly leaned toward the boy.

"Stephen, for a boy of eight going on nine, you see a world far greater than some that have traveled it round and round. I think...." And here he paused to look at Mr. and Mrs. Eunson. "...that there are many kinds of emptiness, and some are scary, the cold carrying nothing kind, for example; other sorts of emptiness are beautiful and reassuring, and still other emptiness offers new places to go in one's mind and heart; and this we all struggle to learn, and relearn when we become scared, no matter how old we are."

"I will think about that, sir," said Stephen, picking up the roast beef platter and offering it to Wiggly.

Wiggly found the Eunson table to be as much a verb as a noun. It was center of nourishment of all kinds; food for the heart, mind, soul, and body. It was a still fruitful, living tree from which sprang rich conversation, profound expressions of love and caring, and wild, wonderful flights of imagination.

"Pass the peas, please, if you would, sir," said Stephen to Wiggly.

"A young man who likes his peas. I am impressed," chuckled Wiggly with a smile as he received the peas from Mrs. Eunson and held out the bowl to the boy.

"Oh, no sir, I am not in the habit of liking peas, but unless I eat them quickly, they will sit on my plate until they are as cold as asteroids lumbering through deep space, and still they will have to be eaten."

"Ah," exhaled Wiggly, his eyes widening. "And you said that you were how old?"

"Eight, sir, to be nine on the...."

"Twenty-third of April next."

"Yes sir," spoke the boy, his eyes twinkling with the joy of being heard and remembered.

"And here are the potatoes, love, to disguise the horribleness awaiting you," lightly spoke his mother as she passed the china bowl of steaming potatoes.

"Thanks, Mum," and Stephen piled potatoes next to the peas in a ratio that seemed scientific; the height of the potato pile twice that of the smaller green legumes.

“And if your mother had made a gravy tonight, there would be no pain at all, would there, son,” said Mr. Eunson with a faint smile.

“No dad, ‘cause with Mum’s gravy for cover, I could eat asteroids all night.” Wiggly sat in the midst of laughter and cooling asteroids, ate heartily with his new family, and thought of Bettina.