



## **Bettyhill Beach**

'Come on into the water, Mum, it's lovely and cool.' Gillian Reynolds was obviously having the time of her life. So excited was she that Sue and Paul, her parents, found they just had to lay aside their towels and take the plunge into the Atlantic waters that girdle the north coast of the County of Sutherland.

Yes, this was Scotland. Sue Reynolds could hardly come to terms with it. The azure sky, the turquoise waters lapping on the white sands of a beach that still awaited discovery by the masses. Here was beauty, warmth and peace.

'Jason, you pig, stop it.' Gillian was being splashed by her brother who, being nearly two years older than her, assumed that he had a special right to be a nuisance to the younger ones. Unfortunately for Jason, his sister didn't share that belief and soon had



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her brother howling with discomfort as she flung handfuls of cold spray in his face.

The other members of the Reynolds family were running out of the water to meet their parents. Little Mike, aged eight-and-a-half, was holding one end of a blue and white rope he had found washed up on the shore from the previous night's tide. On the other end of the rope was Mega, the family's young Labrador. She was having the time of her life despite the attentions of Michelle, the daughter of friends of the family. Michelle was trying to slow Mega down by pulling her tail, a very unwise thing to do but for the placid nature of the friendly dog, whose wagging tail was proving too much for the little girl to hold.

'Mum, Mum,' cried little Mike with obvious pleasure. 'This is a fantastic place. Can we stay here for ever, or at least till school goes back?'

'Dad, is this what the Garden of Eden was like?' asked Gillian.

Before Paul could answer, he was faced with another request. Mega had shaken herself loose from Michelle's attentions and having laid down the shabby blue and white rope at *the boss's* feet, was barking an enthusiastic invitation to a tug-of-war. It was Mum who came to the rescue, suggesting that they have a drink of lemonade and something to eat before exploring the shore and sand-dunes any further.



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It was a fantastic place, as Mike had said. The children were in their element as they tore back and forth across the beach. They stopped occasionally to show their parents shells or stones they had found, or to ask them yet another question which had suddenly suggested itself on them. So the afternoon passed lazily on with the surge of waves and the cry of the seagulls circling overhead as they looked for welcome scraps.

At last it was time to go home, back over the dunes and up the little hill to the holiday cottage where they were staying. It was a small, well-built place that had two bedrooms for the children and a sitting room which doubled up as a bedroom for Paul and Sue at night. There was neither running water nor electricity.

Water had to be fetched from a nearby well, and there were oil lamps and a stove which was fuelled with an endless supply of peat stacked at the back door. Sue's heart had sunk when she first saw it, but she had quickly seen the advantages. The water was far better than anything she had ever drunk from a tap, and the children loved fetching it. The peat kindled easily, building up a good steady heat in the stove and enabling her to do all the cooking necessary on these lovely summer days.

Furthermore, the lamps were good enough for the simple reason that it



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hardly gets dark at all on the north coast in summer.

The children arrived home at teatime, starving. They wolfed down egg and chips, agreeing noisily between mouthfuls that 'nothing tastes as good as chips made by Mum.'

Tea was just over when a knock at the door announced the arrival of Mr Sinclair, the bailiff, whose job it was to look after the river and see that no one stole or 'poached' fish.

Mr Sinclair was a big man with a craggy, weather-beaten face. He had spent most of his life working out-of-doors 'helping fishermen and hunting poachers' as he put it. Mike noticed that the man had a jolly laugh and was fond of telling stories. After Mr Sinclair had gone the children helped to wash the dishes before going out to play. The long evening was lovely, with only the occasional sound of birds and insects to disturb the quietness, or the bleating of a lamb which had become separated from its mother as it played on the hillside.

'Oh, Mr Reynolds, this is a wonderful place' said Michelle. 'I must tell my Mum and Dad all about it. How I wish they could be here.'

'Why don't you send them a postcard, Michelle?' replied Paul. 'I bought a few at the Post Office this afternoon. Here you are, have this one. It shows the beach where you were playing and I was trying to relax!



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You write a message on it and we'll all sign it after you.'

Michelle was so happy. She had known the Reynolds family for as long as she could remember and had always felt so much at home with them. She had no brothers or sisters and no dog, but with the Reynolds she had all three. She enjoyed going to church with her own parents and the Reynolds.

All good things must come to an end, even a long, warm fun-filled day in a place like Bettyhill.

Mum and Dad Reynolds finally managed to herd the last protesting member of their brood into the house for the night. There was a bath which the children filled for themselves and which proved very popular. It was one thing, however, to go to bed, it was another to fall asleep.

One member of the family who was having more trouble dropping off than the others was Jason. Against his parents' advice he had left his tee-shirt off just a little too long, and as a result was suffering from sunburn. Although his shoulders weren't too sore they certainly were itchy and uncomfortable. No matter how he tossed and turned, he couldn't quite get off to sleep.

Just as dawn was breaking at about 3 am, and when tiredness was taking over, Jason heard Mega begin to growl.

'Go back to sleep, Mega,' he mumbled.



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'Woof,' replied the dog, rising from her rug at the end of his bed and moving to the window.

'Quiet, dog, or you'll wake the whole house,' protested Jason, looking across to the other bed to see if Mega had woken Mike. Mega continued to growl. Was there a prowler? Jason was frightened by the very thought and tried to shut it out of his mind. Nevertheless, he must check, just in case. Making a way past his sleeping brother, he parted the curtains over so slightly. What he saw made him tremble and gasp.

A group of about half a dozen shadowy figures were passing by on the moor, about a hundred yards from the house. They were carrying boxes between them, which seemed heavy. Who were they? What were they transporting? Where were they going? The questions scrambled untidily through Jason's tired, confused mind. Instinctively he wanted to wake the family, especially Dad, but a number of things made him hesitate.

In the first place, whoever these people were, they were moving away from the house. They didn't plan to break in or hurt Jason and his family. At the same time there was something sinister going on, and Jason didn't want to tangle with them if he could possibly avoid it.

Of even more importance to the frightened young boy at that moment was



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keeping the family dog quiet. Mega was sure that something was up. She knew that there were people out there and sensed the fear of her young master. Mega's canine sense of duty demanded that she bark the place down. However, that was not proving exactly easy as Jason's hand had closed round her muzzle and he was forbidding her to bark. Very unwillingly, but with remarkable obedience, the trembling dog settled down again on her rug.

After about ten minutes Jason turned back to the window and looked out again. Whoever had been out there on the moor had now disappeared. All was still and quiet, except Jason's beating heart and Mega's growls of frustration.

'There's only one thing to do about this,' said Jason to Mega. 'I'll tell Mum and Dad in the morning and they will know how to handle it.' They always did. Jason had never known what it was to have worries or fears or doubts that he could not share with his parents. They always understood and always had answers. Above all, they always cared.

How they would solve this problem the young lad didn't know, but he wasn't too worried because he knew that God would help them. Only that very night in their Bible reading from Isaiah chapter 41, Dad had read a verse that now came back to Jason. 'Fear not for I am with you.'



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With that comforting thought, Jason wrapped the duvet around him, put his head on the pillow, and was soon off to sleep.