

## Jim's Beads

Jim was very happy when he and his younger sister, Lisa, moved with Mum and Dad into their new house. It was so different from the drab, city street where they had lived. Yet the village was not too far from London; it had a railway station so Dad could easily get into his job in the city each day and Jim himself could get up to London whenever he wanted to.

Lisa was very happy when she discovered there were stables five minutes walk away where she could have riding lessons; and Mum was happy that she had been offered work as a teaching assistant in the village's primary school. Indeed, the whole family happily settled into village life and all made many friends there. They thought nothing could go wrong.

The trouble began the next year during the Summer holidays. On many days Jim would go off 'on expeditions' with friends across the fields and neighbouring woodland. He would often come back from such expeditions with 'findings' which, much to his Mum's annoyance, he collected in his bedroom. There were several odd-shaped pine cones, the feathers of various birds, the skull of some small mammal, shards of old pottery, Victorian bottles, odd shaped flints and so forth. One day Jim brought back three odd looking beads. "They're not wood," he said. "I think they're made of ivory."

"Ugh! Ugly things," said his mother, looking at them. "They don't look ivory to me; they're too dull and grubby."

"Well, they have been in the ground," said Jim. "They're bound to look a bit grubby. But when I've cleaned them and polished them up, I bet they'll look great."

"Umm," muttered Mum, who was not very convinced.

Just then their cat sauntered into the kitchen where they were. It suddenly stopped; its hair stood on end as it gave a great howl and charged at speed from the kitchen, narrowly avoiding Lisa as she came in.

"What the heck?" exclaimed Jim.

"Blessed if I know," said Mum, equally perplexed.

It did not occur to either of them that it might have anything to do with the beads Jim had found.

"Never mind the cat," said Lisa. "I'm hungry, Mum. When's tea?"

"Soon," said Mum, "just be patient."

"Look what I've found, Lisa," said Jim, excitedly. "I'm going to clean them, polish them up and give them to you."

Lisa looked at the dirty beads and crept behind her mother, clinging tightly to her, as she said: "They're scary. Take them away. Don't want them. Take them away!"

"Suit yourself," said Jim, a little surprised and disappointed. "I'll keep them myself."

The beads were indeed cleaned, polished a little and placed among the rest of Jim's collection in his bedroom.

That night Lisa's sleep was disturbed by strange dreams. There seemed to be a young girl looking for lost beads; but she was a strange looking girl. Her clothing looked very odd indeed. Lisa told her Mum about it in the morning.

"You and your imagination," said Mum. "It's because of those dirty beads your brother found, I expect. You've let your imagination run away with you. Now have your breakfast and forget about it. Think of the riding you'll be doing

later."

"OK, Mum," she said, reaching for her favourite cereal.

When Jim woke up he was a bit surprised to find his collection has been re-arranged. One of the objects was on the floor. When he went down for breakfast he complained about his Mum coming into his room to tidy up when he was asleep.

"You even dropped one of my shards on the floor," he said, accusingly.

"Don't be silly," said Mum. "I haven't been into your room, and I certainly wouldn't leave something on the floor. Now eat your breakfast."

"Well, someone's been there," he said, grumpily.

"It must have been the cat," Lisa laughed.

But it was not the cat. They noticed that the cat just would not go into Jim's room. They thought it a bit odd, but did not worry.

Lisa's sleep continued to be interrupted with the strange dream.

"It's just a phase she is going through," said the doctor. "She'll grow out of it. I'll prescribe a mild sleeping tablet to help her get more regular sleep."

So Lisa did have more sleep and her dreams troubled her less. But Mum began hearing strange voices in the night; she could not make out what was being said and, indeed, thought it was probably not English they were speaking. She did not like this, but thought she would say nothing to her family as she did not want to worry them. She told the doctor that she was not sleeping well, but she did not mention the voices.

"I expect you are worried about Lisa," he said. "I'll you give this prescription. It will help you get some proper sleep."

Meanwhile, Jim had grown increasingly annoyed at the way his collection kept getting changed. He did not say anything and wondered whether it really was Mum or was Lisa doing it for some reason. He could not imagine that Dad would do it.

When Mum began taking sleeping pills, she no longer heard voices because she was too fast asleep. It was then that the knocking started in the night.

"It must be something to do with the pipes," Dad said. "I expect there is an air block or something. I'll get the plumber to come have have a look."

The plumber came the next day and checked the whole system. He could find nothing wrong with it. "There's certainly no air-lock," he said.

They were puzzled. When Dad came home that evening, they told him.

"Strange," he said. "If we hear knocking again tonight, I'll get up and find out exactly where it's coming from."

The knocking did occur that night; Dad did get up and tried to find where the knocking was coming from. But he had no success; whenever he got to where he thought the noise was coming from, it seemed to come from somewhere else. Eventually it stopped, and Dad went back to bed, tired, frustrated and annoyed.

When Jim woke up next morning, a bit later than usual because of the interruption in the night, he saw his collection was disturbed again. Feeling tired after his interrupted night, he became very annoyed and stormed down stairs.

"Mum," he shouted, "a joke's a joke. But come on! Leave off messing my collection about."

Mum was equally tired and grumpy and told him off in no uncertain terms. If he could not look after his collection himself, then he had better get rid of it.

"If it wasn't you," he shouted, "then it must be Lisa!"

"Don't be so daft!" said Mum, crossly. "You know quite well Lisa won't go

into your room; she's been too scared ever since you got those beads."

"The beads!" both of them exclaimed together, as they ran up stairs to Jim's room.

As they entered, they saw all the items in his collection suddenly fly off the shelf onto the floor, all except the three beads. They both heard what sounded like a girl sobbing. They went to Lisa's room; she was still asleep.

"It's those beads," said Mum. "They're haunted. They've got to go."

"All right, Mum," said Jim who was feeling a bit shaken. "I'll take them along to Mr Harrison, the local historian. He lives in the next street."

So as soon as Jim had washed and dressed properly, he took the beads to Mr Harrison. He was so keen to get them out of the house that he did not even stop for breakfast.

When Mr Harrison saw them, he said "Those are just like the beads we found several years back in the burial chamber in that old barrow up at Nether Pendle. I always thought there were some missing from that girl's necklace."

He went on to explain to Jim about excavations five years before of a neolithic burial in the barrow. He said that the skeletons and all the tomb offerings buried with them had been removed to the museum in the neighbouring town of Lodcaster.

Jim explained to Mr Harrison about the weird goings on at his house and asked "Haven't they had anything like that happen at the museum? I mean, shifting all those skeletons - didn't it - like - upset the dead?"

Mr Harrison laughed. "I seems not, Jim" he said. "I expect it's a good deal more comfortable and interesting in the museum than stuck in that cold, dark and damp barrow. Like to come to the museum this afternoon with your beads?"

"You bet!" replied Jim, who ran off home, leaving the beads with Mr Harrison. He told his Mum what had happened, ate a hearty breakfast and then let his friends know he would not be joining them that day.

That afternoon, Jim went with Mr Harrison to the museum. He was shown the skeletons retrieved from the barrow. Only two were on display; the rest were kept in the museum's archive section. He saw the artifacts buried with them, including the broken necklace found with the skeleton of a young girl. Jim's beads were strung on with the other bone beads and Jim could swear he caught a fleeting glimpse of a smile from the girl.

When Jim got back from the museum he found that all his collection had been put back in place and it was never disturbed again. From that day Lisa's dreams and Mum's voices ceased and there was no more strange knocking in the night.

Jim was very proud when he saw a short report of his discovery with a picture of the restored necklace in the Lodcaster Echo. They all agreed that there seemed to be an air of contentment and benignancy about the house as though they were being particularly blest.

Indeed, Jim and his sister spent a very happy childhood there and his parents still live there. As for Jim, he went on to university and is now a well respected and famous archaeologist.