*Postcards from Valhalla* is a uclanpublishing book

First Published in Great Britain in 2023 by uclanpublishing
University of Central Lancashire
Preston, PR1 2HE, UK

Text copyright © Danny Weston, 2023
Cover Illustration © Daisy Webster, 2023

978-1-915235-65-7

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

The right of Danny Weston and Daisy Webster to be identified as the author and illustrator of this work respectively has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

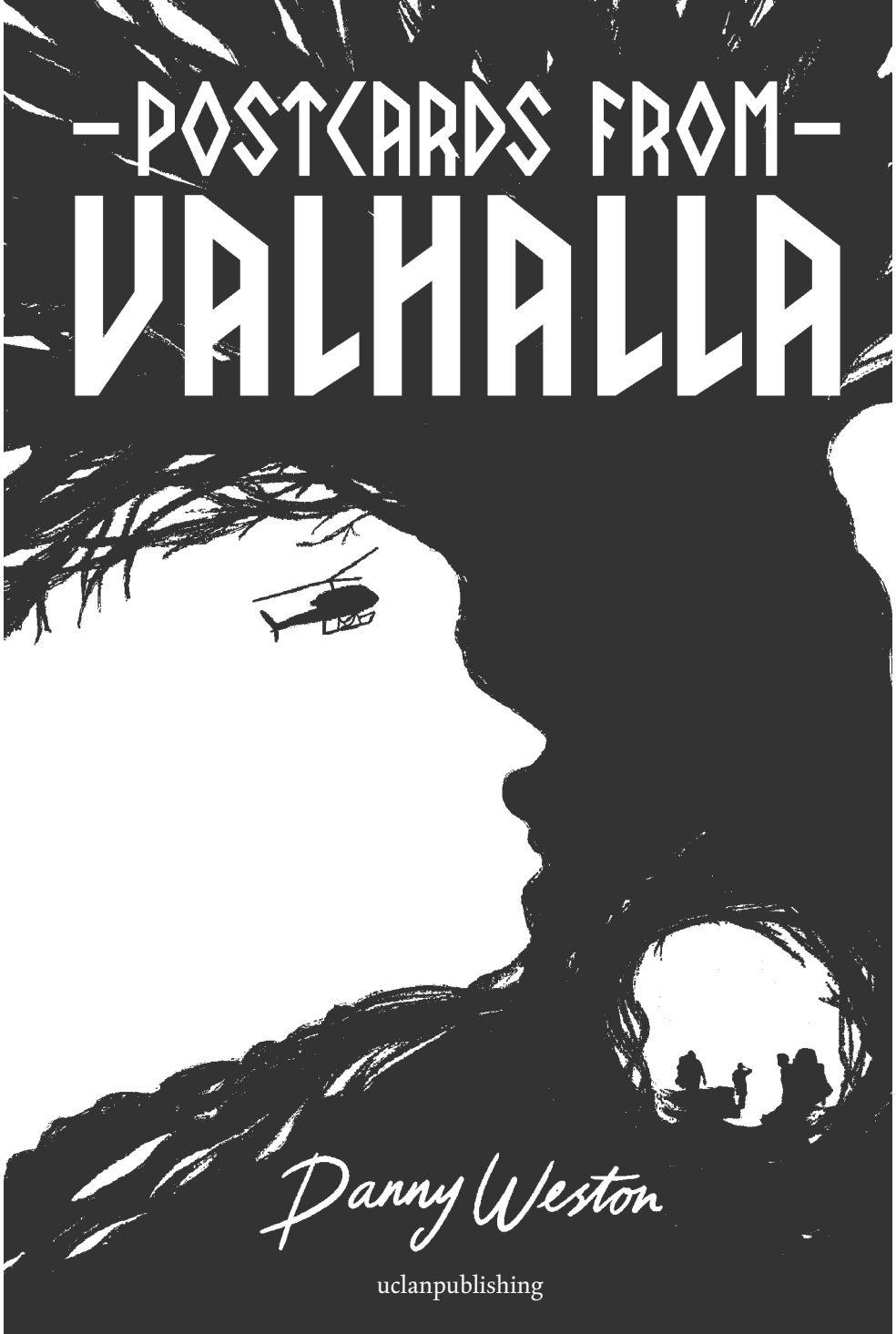
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers.

Set in 10/16pt Kingfisher by Amy Cooper.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

# POSTCARDS FROM VALHALLA



Danny Weston

uclanpublishing

# GO DEEPER

There are five different points in *Postcards from Vahalla* where readers are offered the opportunity to 'go deeper.' Simply scan the QR codes with your mobile phone and you will be taken to three locations that feature in the story - you will also be offered the opportunity to watch a scene featuring the book's lead character that is only mentioned in passing - and you will even be given a tutorial on how to make the perfect Greek honey and orange cake!

# PART ONE

# CHAPTER 1
## A DISAPPEARANCE

Viggo was trying to sleep, but it was proving really difficult.

Out on the street, Edinburgh Council's lorries were already at work, emptying the communal rubbish bins. The noise this created seemed completely out of proportion to the task. The sound of it rolled like thunder, reverberating along the entire length of the road.

And the gulls were doing that high-pitched shrieking thing they always did in the morning, a noise to set anyone's teeth on edge. How was anyone expected to sleep through that?

Viggo had been late getting home last night. Jamie's parents had been out for the evening, visiting friends and staying over, so Jamie had invited a bunch of mates over for a D&D evening and had even managed to find a forgotten bottle of alcohol at the back of a drinks cabinet, something with a Spanish-sounding name that tasted really horrible if you drank it neat, but was tolerable if you mixed it with enough Diet Coke. Emma had been there too and Viggo had tried really hard to engage her in conversation, but she clearly wasn't interested in him, answering his questions with a grunt or a nod. She'd been the first to leave.

By the time Viggo walked home alone, it was nearly 1am but, he told himself, school was out now until the middle of August, so where was the harm? He'd let himself in and padded quietly upstairs, noting with a sense of relief that there was no light under the door of Mum's room, so he wouldn't have to suffer her disapproving looks until morning – only now, somehow, it *was* morning and he felt like he'd barely slept at all. When he'd finally managed to snatch a few winks he'd been troubled by complicated dreams that he couldn't quite piece together. Something about a tunnel, perhaps? Yes, he'd been climbing down this long, dark passage and there'd been something waiting for him deep below the surface, something that . . . no, it was gone.

He turned over with a groan, realising as he did so that he was still fully dressed, which was never a good sign. Reluctantly, he opened his eyes and saw that Mum was sitting beside his bed, looking intently down at him.

'Jesus!' he gasped and sat up. 'How long have you been sitting there?'

'Oh, not long,' she said. And then added. 'I like watching you sleep sometimes.'

Viggo shook his head. 'That's one of the creepiest things anyone's ever said to me,' he muttered. He let out a long breath. 'You scared me.'

'Scared?' she echoed, incredulously. 'Of your own mother?'

'Well, no, not scared exactly, but . . .' He lifted a hand to run it through his wild thatch of blonde hair and ran the tip of his tongue over teeth that felt furry. 'What time is it?' he asked. He was all too aware that he was wearing a watch,



and only needed to glance at it, but somehow it seemed like too much effort.

'It's late,' she assured him. 'Nearly ten o'clock.' Viggo noticed now that she was dressed in a T-shirt and ironed jeans, and her short light-brown hair was neatly brushed. She paused for effect. 'I didn't hear you come in last night,' she said. It sounded like a reprimand.

'Yeah, well, I *was* kind of late. I didn't want to disturb you. It's not like it's a school night or anything, so . . .' A pause. 'I was at Jamie's house,' he added.

She nodded, but didn't say anything.

'He had a bunch of friends over. We were playing Dungeons and Dragons.'

Now she frowned. Viggo knew she didn't really get fantasy games and that she'd rather he was 'outside in the fresh air' or working at his writing. It irked him that she wouldn't take the time to try and understand the game; it wasn't like he and Jamie spent their time drinking paint stripper and setting fire to things.

'Mum, it's just something we like to do. It's no big deal.'

'And you were boozing, I suppose?'

'Not really,' he said, in as vague a way as possible. 'Not what you'd call *boozing*. Just a couple of . . . er . . . was there some particular reason for this . . . visit?'

Mum sighed. 'Yes,' she said. 'It's Magnus.'

Viggo tried not to let out a weary sigh. Of course it was Magnus. It was always Magnus – something he'd done or something he hadn't done or something he was *thinking* of doing. Magnus was Viggo's brother, three years older than

him and, in Viggo's honest opinion, a total weirdo. Viggo had lost count of all the disasters that Magnus had caused but, whenever a new one occurred, Mum always acted surprised.

'What's happened this time?' he asked her.

'Well, he's following in your dad's footsteps, isn't he?'

'Meaning?'

'He's disappeared,' said Mum dramatically, and then, as though realising how it sounded, she went on. 'Well, not disappeared, exactly, but . . . he's still in Shetland.'

Viggo considered this. 'I don't understand,' he said at last. 'I *know* where he is. He's been there for months.'

'Yes. But you remember how anxious I felt about him going in the first place? And the project he signed up to officially finished four days ago.'

'Right, so . . .'

'He was supposed to come straight home afterwards. At least, that's what I thought was happening. But he hasn't turned up. In fact, there hasn't been a word from him in over a week.'

'Have you tried contacting him?'

Now Mum looked irritated. 'Of course I have! I'm not a complete idiot. I've phoned, texted, sent him emails . . . and I've got precisely nowhere.'

Viggo eased himself into a sitting position, keeping the duvet over himself so Mum wouldn't notice he was still dressed. Now he thought about it, he had heard Mum muttering darkly about being unable to contact Magnus over the past few days but he hadn't taken an awful lot of notice. To him it had just seemed like business as usual. He looked straight into her eyes.



'You know Magnus,' he said. 'He's probably discovered something new out there, something amazing – in his opinion – and he's decided to stay on for a while. Or he's met a girl.' He tried not to sound envious about the last bit. 'That's what usually happens. What was he supposed to be doing anyway? In Shetland.'

'I've told you a dozen times. Some reconstructive work at a Viking settlement.'

'Yes, well, there you go. They probably dug up something unexpected. An old sword or a cup or a . . . button . . . something they found exciting.' Viggo tried not to roll his eyes. Unlike his brother, he had never inherited his dad's obsessive passion for all things Norse. Dad had even chosen Norwegian names for his sons, despite his Celtic ancestry. Viggo hated the blank looks he always got whenever he had to give somebody his name.

'*I'm sorry, did you say . . . Vigour?*'

Magnus had got the best of the deal. At least people knew how to spell *his* name.

'You'll see, Mum. He's just decided to stay on a bit longer. It's not like he hasn't done something like this before.'

Even as he was saying it, Viggo knew how hollow his words sounded. After all, Dad had gone 'off grid' in Shetland five years ago and nothing had been seen or heard from him since then. Now he was officially 'missing presumed dead'. Thinking back, it had been a strange process coming to terms with what had happened. Viggo had been twelve years old when his dad had gone away. Now it all seemed like something long and tortuous that had happened to somebody else.

At first, it had been hope that filled his days – the hope that one day the doorbell would ring and Dad would be standing there, giving him that familiar gap-toothed grin. But as the months had slipped by with no word of him, the hope had steadily turned into a kind of simmering hatred, an anger at Dad for running away, for never bothering to get in touch. And in time, the hatred had gradually settled into a kind of empty void somewhere deep inside – the realisation that Dad was never coming back, that he was off somewhere else living a different life, that he probably no longer even thought about the wife and two sons he'd left behind.

So, yes, of course Mum was worried. She'd be crazy not to be. But still . . .

'Mum, I'm not sure I—'

'It was my birthday three days ago,' she interrupted him.

'I know that,' he said, trying not to sound defensive. 'I bought you a card, didn't I? And those nice flowers.'

'Yes. And they were lovely. But Magnus *always* phones me on my birthday, wherever he is. Even that time when he was in America. You remember? Where was it? Montana?'

'Arizona, that time,' Viggo corrected her. 'He was hunting rattlesnakes.'

'Yes. Even then. He never misses, no matter where he is. I don't mind telling you, I'm starting to get a bad feeling about this. And the problem is, he's told us so little about what he's doing over there. Where he's based, who he's working with . . .'

'Well, that's just him, isn't it.'

'And whenever I try to talk to you about him, it's as though you just switch off.'



Viggo shrugged. 'It's not like we've ever been close, is it?'

'That's not true,' Mum told him. ''You were really close when you were little. Thick as thieves, the pair of you. And then, after your dad . . .' She left that sentence unfinished. 'After *that*, something seemed to happen to you both. It was like a wall came down between you and somehow, you just stopped relating.' She looked wistful. 'I remember when you were really small, Magnus was almost like your hero or something. You used to follow him everywhere.'

'I did not!'

'You did! You looked up to him. Idolised him. I often wonder . . .'

'Yes?'

'. . . if perhaps the two of you are too much alike.'

Viggo actually snorted at that. 'We're not alike,' he insisted. 'I don't know where you got that idea from. I'm nothing like him. He's . . .' He shook his head, unable to come up with just one word to describe the human whirlwind that was his brother. 'He's so obsessive about everything. And he wants to fill Dad's shoes; be exactly like him. I never felt that way. So I guess I can call him if you want me to, but it won't make the least bit of difference.'

'Oh, I think it's a waste of time calling him. We need to talk to him face-to-face.'

Now Viggo was totally bewildered. 'And how are we supposed to do that?'

'We're going to Shetland,' said Mum. 'I've just been on the computer booking tickets.'

Viggo turned to look towards his bedroom window –

the rain-streaked glass, the grey tenements across the street, other windows staring sightlessly back at him, all those neighbours whose names he didn't even know.

'Go to *Shetland*?' he muttered.

'Yes, why not?'

'Mum, you do realise how far away it is, don't you? It's not like getting on a bus.'

She gave him a weary look. 'Of course I know. I had to go there myself, didn't I? When your dad . . .' Once again, she tailed off, shook her head. 'I appreciate it *is* a bit of a trip, but we haven't had a holiday in ages, have we? And I seem to remember that the place is quite spectacular.'

He nearly laughed out loud at that. As if it mattered what it *looked* like.

'Can we even afford to go?' he asked her. 'I seem to remember you telling me that because the insurance never paid out on Dad, we can't *have* holidays. And you keep getting those letters from the credit card people.'

'I found a deal online,' she told him, as if it explained everything. 'A fraction of the price it normally costs. As long as we're careful, we should be fine.'

'And anyway, I can't just up and go,' he told her, trying to think of a valid reason why he couldn't. 'There's . . . there's the new Marvel film opening on Friday.'

'Marvel film?' She looked puzzled, as if he'd spoken in a foreign language.

'Yes. The next *Thor*. Me and Jamie have been looking forward to it for just about forever. I promised him we'd see it together.'



She smiled. 'You can see it when you get back. We'll only be gone a week.'

'But that won't be the opening night. It'll already be *old*.'

'Thor was a Norse god,' Mum reminded Viggo. 'And Shetland is the land of the Vikings. So why not visit a place where they actually lived?'

'I'd rather visit Cineworld, if it's all the same to you.'

'Oh, really! Since when did you become such a stick-in-the-mud? I thought it might provide inspiration for you.'

'Inspiration?'

'Yes. Perhaps it'll help you to get your writing mojo back. You remember, you always used to say that was what you really wanted to do with your life?'

'I did say that, yes, but . . . wanting to write and actually doing it, that's two different things, don't you think? Anyway, I was a kid when I said that. I'm nearly sixteen now.'

Mum fixed him with a determined look. 'You're not exactly in line for your pension, are you, love?' She seemed to remember something. 'I read an article in *The Guardian* the other day. A woman of seventy-five who's having her first novel published. So you see, it's never too late. Think of that, Viggo. Seventy-five!'

He stared at her. His first thought was that if you could get published at that age then there was clearly no great hurry, but he could see that her mind was made up. There was probably no sense in trying to change it. Nevertheless, he made one last valiant attempt.

'What happens if Magnus is already coming back and we pass him on the way there?' he asked. 'We'll look pretty stupid