

## ***Holme Fen 1801 and Girton 2021***

*This story took place in the long lost past when the fens were not yet drained. Everything was wild back then and the place was its own strange kingdom.*

*A giant came. He'd travelled the land for years and years; crossed valleys and hills, destroyed small towns; butchered all those who tried to stop him, became fat on the beasts and men he slayed. He hadn't seen the Fens before, but strode out as he loved to stride out. Being more than twenty feet tall, he didn't think the wet ground would be hard to cross but suddenly found that he sank to his knees – even down to his waist. He refused to turn back though - nothing in his long life had been know to stop him.*

*Only when he looked back did he see how far he'd come. Only when he looked around did he know he was lost, nothing in sight to guide him or protect him from the wind. He didn't know what to do so stopped walking. He squatted down and tried to come up with a plan but planning was not his strong point. You rarely have to plan when you're so big; everything simply runs its course. Other's do the work. Either they run and you chase after them, or they fight and you kill them. During his long life he hadn't once been lost - looking down from his great height, he could see most things - even a large tree was small to him – even a town small – but now, surrounded by the fens, endless miles and miles of reed and sedge there was nothing in sight to show him the way. Surely it could not stay like this forever, he thought. Everything looked the same, nothing but reed and sedge as if he hadn't moved since the last time he looked. He struggled on and on for miles but this only seemed to make things worse.*

*He realised for the first time in his long life that he was lost and had no idea where to go.*

*Even worse, for the first time in his long life he felt scared*

*Even worse, for the first time in his long life he felt small.*

*Desperate now, he crashed on through the wet ground – leaving a long trench behind him that ran through the fen like a long black thread. If only he hadn't come this way, he thought, or turned back when he'd had the chance. Its relentless nature made him see the fens as some strange kind of hell - not one created from fire but out of this world of the dead. Water as damnation. The devil, might rise up out of a pool of mist cloaked in black mud and stagnancy. It wouldn't be the first time he'd seen him skulking in his wake.*

*The giant walked on but then a sharp flash of light caught his eye – it quivered and shone as it turned in the wind and fell down on a bed of reeds. He hurried to get to the light, sending up great plumes of mud that splashed either side of him. Slowly the flash grew and formed a line of silvery motion that spread through the reeds. The giant pushed away the leaves, but, beyond them, the light spread more and made a great wandering river, chased by the sun. This river was not like the ones we see today - narrow and dull and held by banks - the water was wide and ran freely like a great eel as it turned from side to side on its long passage to the sea.*

*The giant went to the shore to wash the mud off his feet. He waited for the dirt to clear then cupped his hands to scoop up the cold water that was so fine and sweet on his parched lips and dried out throat. He withdrew his hands and then saw his own huge face, and eyes wide with apprehension. A flurry of wind broke up the face but then it died down and soon returned his look once more. He covered his face with his hands and the hands emptied the pool - he grinned and the face grinned up at him which made the look dissolve. He slowly stood up and the face was gone.*

*During all those years when he'd crossed the land and caused such fear and confusion, he'd never once had sight of his own face - never found his own kind - however hard he tried. His brothers, he thought were long gone from the world. No creature or man he'd seen had been half his size and now he was on his own in the universe. He believed though in fear and death and he loved the ways of the giants. He'd rampaged through the land like a great storm. This was his religion. It, therefore, hurt him to see this face. A giant could not look nervous. A giant could not be scared. It wasn't his way to feel pain or loneliness. It terrified him to have such thoughts, so he stopped and held them in his clumsy hands.*

*Wandering along the bank, he tried not look down - kept clear of the water's edge, but it was no use. He couldn't help but look at each and every puddle, creek and pool that lay by the bank - noticed his face again and again, until all he could do was drop down on his knees and rest. He fell asleep but when he woke, the fenland sky looked so large, it filled him with terror. He even thought the birds had come there to mock him with their calls and chatter and he tried to pull them down but he was too slow and his hands too clumsy.*

*Annoyed, he rushed to the shore to look for his face once more but, before he could get there, the wind rose up, as it does all the time in the fens, and the river swelled out, and the waves turned as they fought the wind and the tide*

*confused all of them. He'd only hoped to find some peace of mind. He began to dig with his great hands, opened holes in the waves but they fought back endlessly.*

*Absolutely nothing was there.*

*Angrily, he walked back to the bank but then saw a shape in the waterlogged muddy ground that spread out long arms and legs either side of a large pool. He approached the pool and looked down at the black water. Within it he saw his face. He didn't know how it had got there. He noticed the face was sharp. His immense nose and eyes were perfectly clear as they stared up at him. Tentatively, he touched it with his finger, but it broke and sank, so he lowered his hand down to drag it out but found nothing. He recoiled and roared out so loud, it made the birds rise up and scatter for miles on all sides - north, south, east and west. He couldn't bear the confusion. He didn't know what to do or where to go and he started to scream and kick out and make such a fuss that the ground shook like an earthquake. The water spat and churned but then it died down all was still once more.*

*Becoming lost in the old Fens did strange things to your mind - lost in relentless reed and sedge - without a clue of where to go next - you'd end up walking back and forth, cold and wet, more and more scared - your skin torn again and again by the sedge - divorced from who you were when you'd arrive in this foul place - confused - on your own - lost and soon to be forgotten. Many died this way back then - simply walked out one day - and disappeared.*

*Raging and crazed, he started to dig down in the hope he might find some part of himself, but nothing was there, so he pushed on with yet more desperation - digging as if this was the one thing in his head - unearthing strange things he found in the ground - huge bones of lost creatures - massive trunks of bog oak as wide as his legs - he embraced each one of them and dragged them out - objects he made his own possessions, making them form his own flesh and blood from a race of giants. He believed they'd once ruled the world when it was young. A terrible roar came out of his mouth. Thousands of birds rose and every pool shook and the wind turned to look but, then, he stopped and all was suddenly still.*

*He continued to dig down through the peat and found a strange kingdom of lost beasts; unearthed the bones of whales and the teeth of hideous monsters. He carried on each day and night - year on year. The excavation spread out for miles - deepened as he dug through the earth, unwilling to stop, worried he might miss out on new things from the time of*

*creation - miraculous finds that had come out of the hands of his own creator. He'd emerge one day from the mud with the pure light of divinity shining from his eyes. Within his hands would be a great silver sword. He imagined the sword each day as he tore at the mud angrily with his bare hands. It belonged to the king of the giants. Nothing but black mud was there most days but he kept on regardless. Although he knew it was mad to live this way, he didn't know how to stop - couldn't think how else to keep going. He didn't give up. He forgot how men had once been so frightened of him. He forgot his size. The water and wind didn't care you see. Sometimes, he dreamt of meals he use to love - a human plucked from its bed - a cow from a field - but only found scrawny eels and snails in ponds that grew out of his wanderings. He recalled how scared men how run for their lives. He'd enjoyed their fear. Thinking of this made him laugh out loud but starvation drained this hope. Nothing much more was left. He became thin and weak - little more than skin and bones - laid out on the muddy ground.*

*Eventually, he sat in the mud and cried - cried and cried for all the hours remaining to him but, soon, grew tired of this and he lay his head down in desperation. The winter cold crept through his skin then deep into his bones.*

*Suddenly, heavy rain fell down on the fens and the pools rose up and the river swelled out and a great flood crossed the marsh and met the trench where he continued to rest on the ground, and, within this great breach, a new lake appeared that stretched out for miles and seemed to be made out of his desperation.*

*Slowly his flesh turned as black as the peat and then it turned to peat as every other dead thing does - deep in the fens.*

*Before long, all that was left of him was the lake; so deep and wide it continued to be there as time passed, even when droughts and storms arrived, even as the years ran out but brought the birth of new ones, even as they abandoned the past. Having found its place in the fens, the mere stayed there forever.*

*Anyway that's how it seemed.*

*No-one then knew then how this tale would end.*

*Sometimes, when the air grow calm and the night comes down, a*

*desperation rises up from the mere - a presence felt but not yet understood.*

*Everyone who goes there feels the weight of the things that are gone or soon to be missing.*