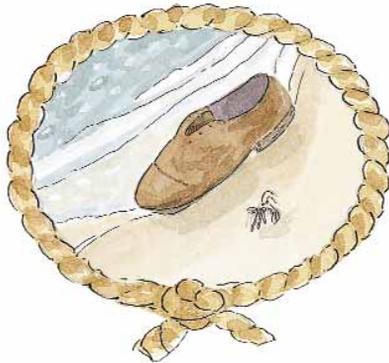


LEFT SHOE

and the Foundling



Annie O'Dowd

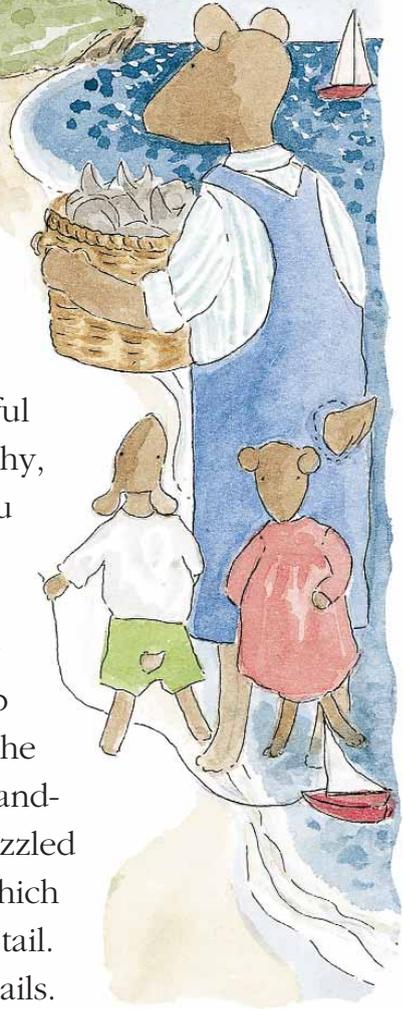


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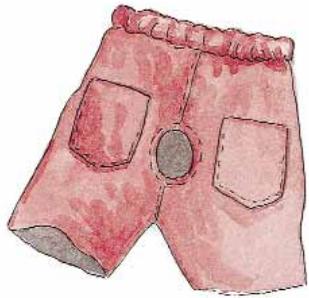
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About Seadogs

LET ME TELL YOU about the seadogs. You probably haven't heard of us, because humans hardly ever see a seadog. We live by the sea in complex burrows near the sand. We are cheerful and social by nature, but also shy, especially of humans. Perhaps you have noticed a little driftwood door under a tree, or seen a scurry of brown fur out of the corner of your eye. Once I saw some humans pick up a pair of seadog trousers forgotten on the sand and marvel at their small hand-stitched seams. They must have puzzled over the round hole 🍌 at the back, which is, of course, for the seadog's stumpy tail. Humans, as far as I know, don't have tails.



Seadog burrows are hidden. They are nestled into the grasses, secreted under rocks and obscured by shady trees. These underground homes are always by the sea. They are gathered in villages, which are dotted here and there along coastlines around the world. I would draw you a map, but I'm not really sure of their exact locations. I only know that we are often visited by seadogs from other villages, sometimes from lands across the sea.



Our village, where this story takes place, is called Foamy Bay. Foamy Bay curves its wide stretch of sand around a quiet cove and then runs northwards to a rocky headland. The water is cool green in the shallows, but dark blue near the horizon, where the wind blows the tops of the waves into foamy peaks. On the edge of the beach, many little boats are pulled up next to the protection of spreading casuarina trees. Under their pale branches is a tangle of burrows. These smooth mounds are built on both sides of a narrow river. Altogether there are twenty-three families in Foamy Bay village, a total of two hundred and thirty-eight seadogs at last count.

Although the entrances to our homes are well concealed, inside they are rather like human houses. There is a kitchen, sitting room and fireplace. Seadogs cook their food on a wood-burning stove. We use pots and plates just as you do!



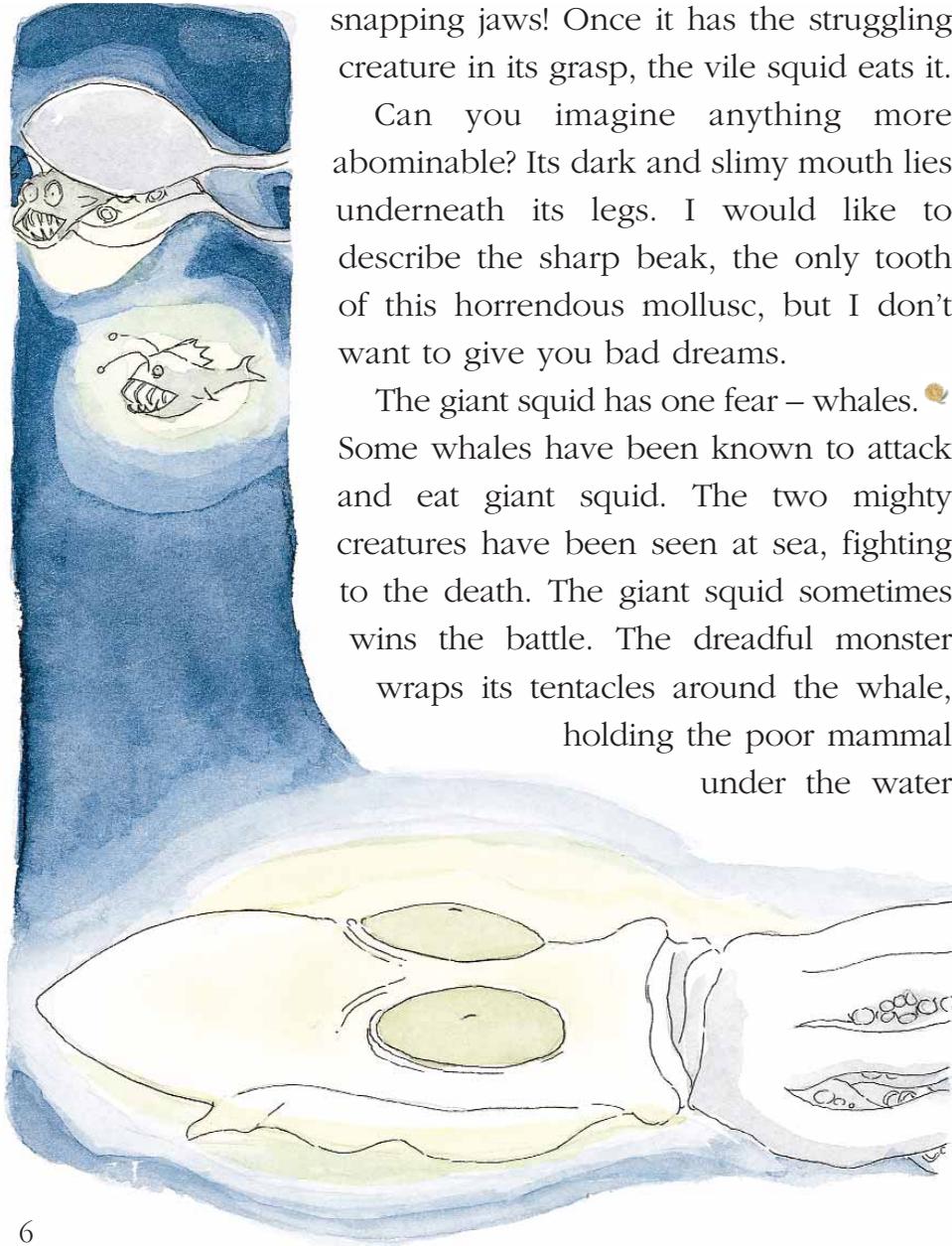
In a burrow like this live Blue Bottle and Old Cork Sandburrow. You might think these names sound strange, but you will soon learn the special way in which we seadogs receive our names.

Blue Bottle and Old Cork's cosy burrow lies behind a low, sloping sand dune beneath some casuarina trees. Their small driftwood front door is only about the size of your school desk. When opened, a round room is revealed. Small circular windows lighten it by day. At night, candles or lanterns spread their warm glow. There is a scrubbed kitchen table and a colourful rug on the floor. The earth walls are painted with whitewash and decorated with all kinds of things found at the edge of the sea: bits of old rope, fishing net and useful pieces of plastic are carefully placed between family portraits. There are cabinets stuffed with books. Against one wall sits a jumbled row of sacks. These contain grass-seed flour or seaweed sugar.



Baskets of dried fish and sea vegetables are stacked under a sturdy wooden bench by the window, where a shutter is usually pushed open to the breeze. There are comfy chairs arranged around the warm iron stove. On the opposite side of the little room, which seadogs call a snug, a tunnel leads to darker parts of the burrow. It is altogether a delightful home, comfortable and safe. I wish you could see such a place, but it's rare for a human child ever to meet a seadog.

It is here in this burrow that the story begins. It is a very exciting story in which you will meet the most carnivorous creature in the ocean: a monster so gruesome and dangerous that you will be frightened out of your wits – the giant squid! The giant squid lives in the deepest, coldest parts of the ocean and can grow up to twenty metres long. Its great eyes are the largest of any creature in the world. This mysterious animal has eight arms lined with round suckers, which can stick to your body like suction cups. Concealed in the suckers are rows of claw-like barbs, which help the squid to clasp its prey. I know all this because I've seen one, so believe me when I tell you that the giant squid has an extra two arms called tentacles. These tentacles are twice as long as the whole creature and can snatch their victim with terrifying speed. On the end of each tentacle is a club, and on each club are four rows of suckers armed with barbed hooks. The dreadful giant squid can also coil the long, feeding tentacles together and use the clubs as



snapping jaws! Once it has the struggling creature in its grasp, the vile squid eats it.

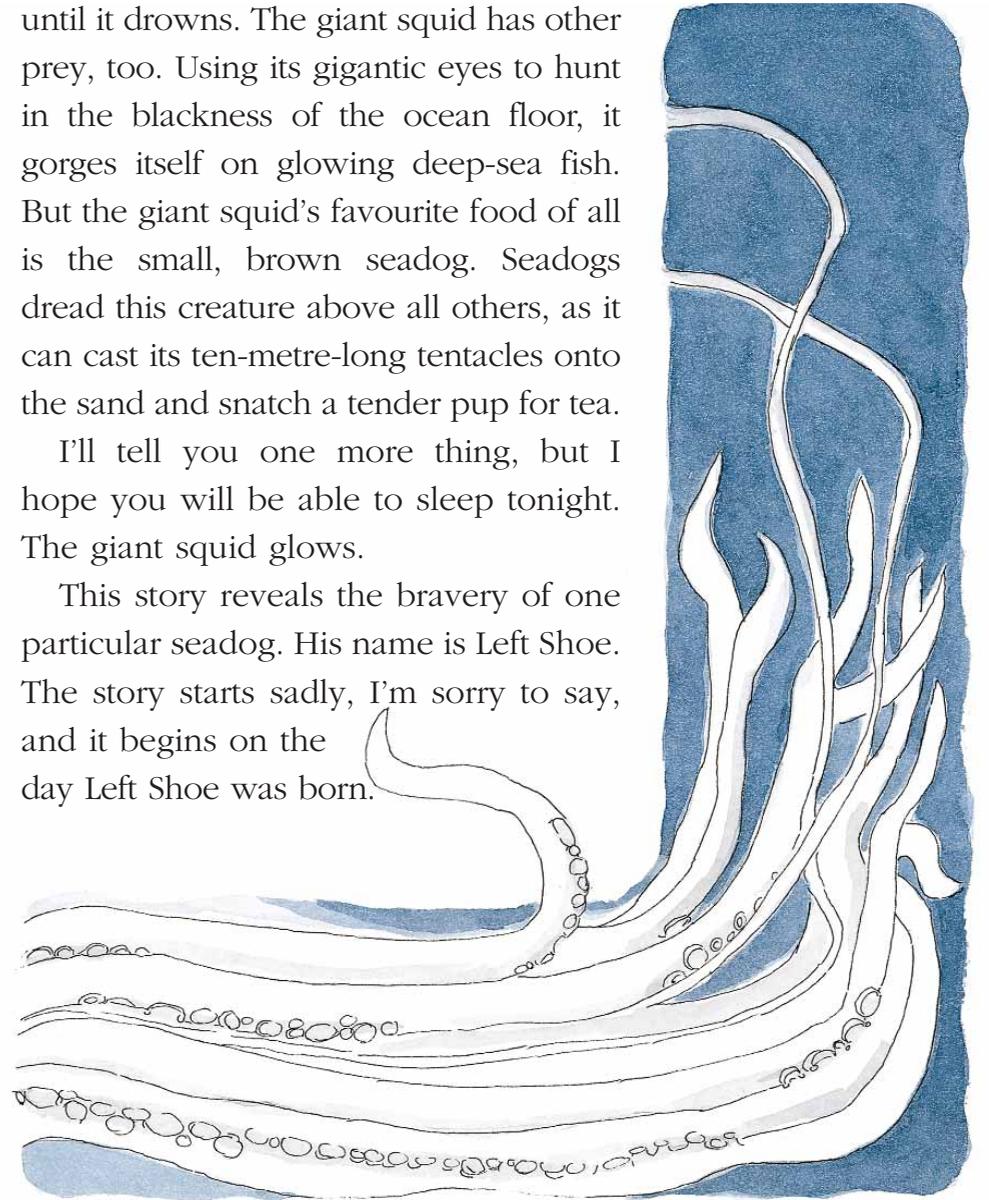
Can you imagine anything more abominable? Its dark and slimy mouth lies underneath its legs. I would like to describe the sharp beak, the only tooth of this horrendous mollusc, but I don't want to give you bad dreams.

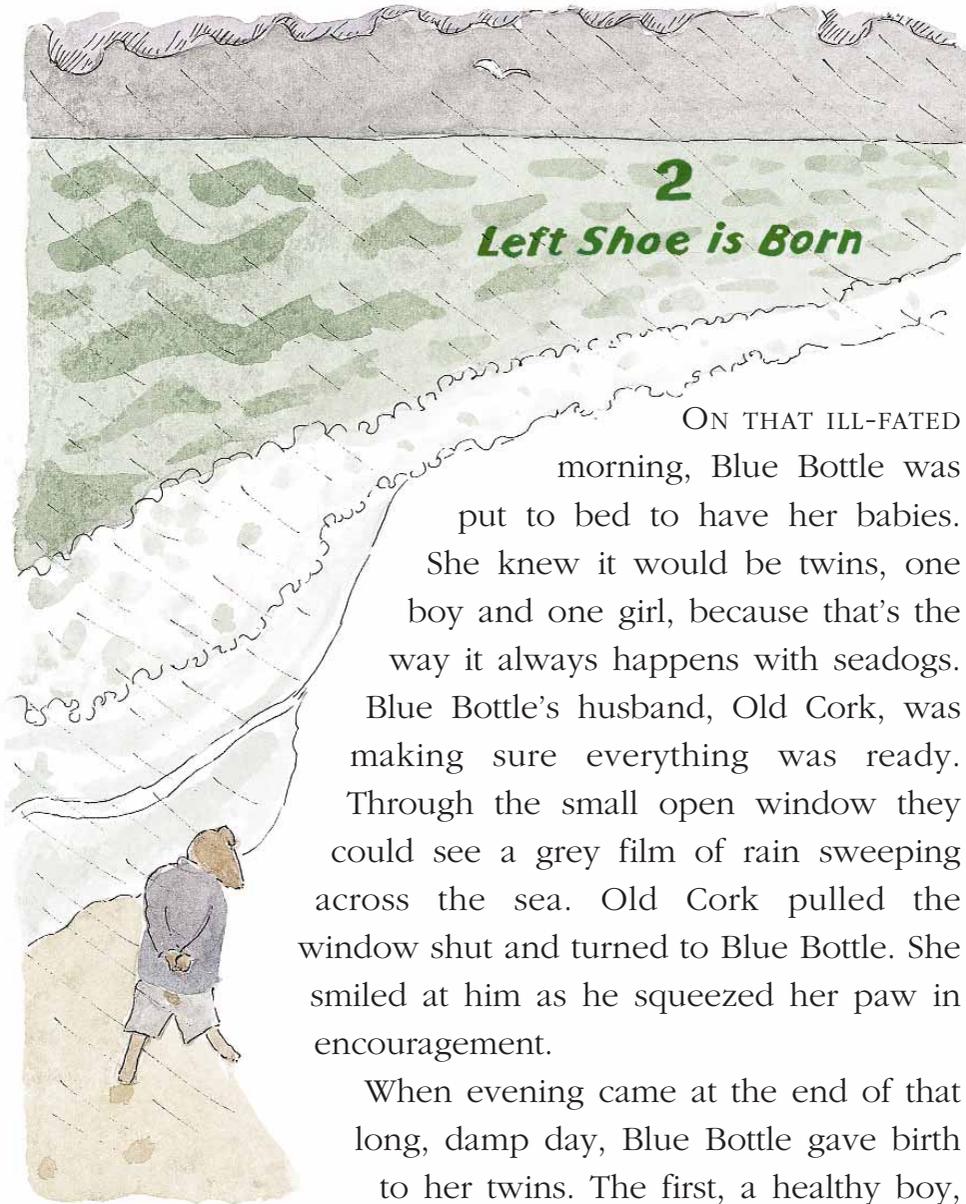
The giant squid has one fear – whales. Some whales have been known to attack and eat giant squid. The two mighty creatures have been seen at sea, fighting to the death. The giant squid sometimes wins the battle. The dreadful monster wraps its tentacles around the whale, holding the poor mammal under the water

until it drowns. The giant squid has other prey, too. Using its gigantic eyes to hunt in the blackness of the ocean floor, it gorges itself on glowing deep-sea fish. But the giant squid's favourite food of all is the small, brown seadog. Seadogs dread this creature above all others, as it can cast its ten-metre-long tentacles onto the sand and snatch a tender pup for tea.

I'll tell you one more thing, but I hope you will be able to sleep tonight. The giant squid glows.

This story reveals the bravery of one particular seadog. His name is Left Shoe. The story starts sadly, I'm sorry to say, and it begins on the day Left Shoe was born.





2 *Left Shoe is Born*

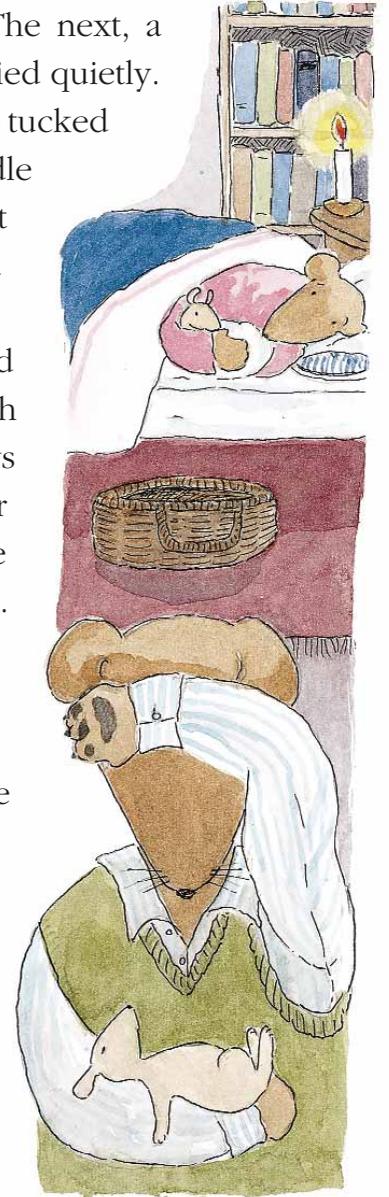
ON THAT ILL-FATED morning, Blue Bottle was put to bed to have her babies. She knew it would be twins, one boy and one girl, because that's the way it always happens with seadogs. Blue Bottle's husband, Old Cork, was making sure everything was ready. Through the small open window they could see a grey film of rain sweeping across the sea. Old Cork pulled the window shut and turned to Blue Bottle. She smiled at him as he squeezed her paw in encouragement.

When evening came at the end of that long, damp day, Blue Bottle gave birth to her twins. The first, a healthy boy,

barked loudly and waved his paws. The next, a pale brown girl, made no sound, and died quietly. She never opened her eyes. Old Cork tucked her into a separate basket and lit a candle for her. Sorrow filled the silence that followed. Then, Old Cork comforted his wife as she wept.

The next morning, Blue Bottle and Old Cork carried their pups to the beach to name them. New babies are always named at sunrise. They are named after the most special piece of treasure discovered on the tide line that morning. When I say treasure, I don't mean gold coins or jewels found in an old chest, I mean seadog treasure! 🐾 This includes any interesting objects washed onto the beach by the sea.

But as Blue Bottle and Old Cork surveyed the wet sand, there was only one thing drifting on the water's edge, pushed in and then sucked out a little by the tide. It was a left shoe. An ordinary shoe like your father might wear, only cracked and hardened





by the salt. It had long since lost its shoelace and had become the home of a rather bad-tempered hermit crab. When the shoe was retrieved, the crab scuttled away, angrily shaking its claw.

‘I name you Left Shoe,’ said Old Cork, gazing down at his new son. ‘Welcome, Left Shoe, to the Sandburrow family.’

Blue Bottle’s tears began to fall again, as there was no treasure for the other little baby.

‘There must be something on the shore for her,’ she said sadly. The small, still girl lay in her arms. Old Cork saw a broken shell at Blue Bottle’s feet. It was striped with many colours.

‘I name you Broken Shell,’ he said.

The next day, Broken Shell was buried. They laid her under a cool pandanus tree overlooking the wide, blue sea.

