

There is a Viking in my bed!

## Chapter 1

### Crash Landing

Through the mist came the creak of many oars. Now and then there was a splash. The grey mist swirled and slid over the flat, grey sea, but not a sign could be seen of the boats: only the steady slap of oars and a few low curses. Then a dark shadow moved within the mist, growing blacker as it came nearer, until the great wooden hulk of a Viking war-boat emerged, and trailing wisps of fog along its sides. Twenty oars bit into the water, and forty Viking warriors strained over the heavy poles.

'Never have I seen a fog like this,' hissed the leader. He was a tall Dane, with a huge moustache and beard, fiery red. 'There is something I do not like about it.' He cast a glance at the lookout, standing up by the great dragon-head prow. 'Is there no sign of the fleet? Where are the other boats?' The lookout sucked one finger and held it up, as if to judge the wind direction. He stared into the mist, took off his helmet and pulled out both ears like radar scanners. His ears were big and red. The Viking leader cursed. 'Sigurd is an idiot. Why do we use a fool for a lookout?'

Beside him, Tostig laughed. 'It's quite simple, Ulric. Sigurd can't row or cook. What else is there for him to do? You know what happened the last time he was at the oars. We ended up going round in a circle for almost an hour. And when he was cook, he boiled up all our best meat in a pot of seawater — urgh! At least he's safe up there.' Ulric Blacktooth spat. 'Look at him, holding out his ears. What a fool!' He shouted forward.

'What can you see, Sigurd?'

'Wait a minute, the mist is clearing. Yes! I can see it quite clearly now.'

'What is it, what is it?' bellowed Ulric impatiently.

'There's water below, Ulric. I can see water. It's — the sea!' Ulric Blacktooth shut his eyes and banged his head several times against the ship's mast.

'Tostig,' he hissed, 'that man will be the death of us all. Why are we cursed with such a fool?' Tostig was snorting through his nose, a sure sign that he was losing his temper. Temper-losing was something that Tostig was very good at. He did it quite often — and practice makes perfect. Now he drew his sword, which he had named Heartsplitter, and strode forward. In a moment he was beside the lookout.

'Sigurd, of course you can see the sea. We are on a boat. We are at sea.' Tostig spoke as if he wanted each word to hit Sigurd like a hammer.

'Now, Sigurd, if you wish to stay alive, do something useful! Get yourself up that dragon's head, sit on top and don't say a word until you see the English coast. Do you hear?' So saying, Tostig thrust his sword (the pointed end) very close to Sigurd's backside. Sigurd gave a jump and scuttled up the prow, until he was right on the dragon's head. From there he turned and looked back at Tostig.

'I was only trying to help,' he complained. Tostig grunted and returned to Ulric, while Sigurd sighed and tried very hard to see through all the mist that surrounded them. He was bored and tired. He had been on lookout duty for days. For some strange reason, nobody would let him row. Sigurd had always thought rowing was his best subject. The boat was part of a large Viking raiding fleet, headed for England. They had been at sea for seven days, and the mist had been with them for the last twenty-four hours. It was a creepy, evil mist, making everyone nervous and jumpy. Somehow they had become separated from the rest of the fleet. Now they were drifting, they knew not where. Sigurd strained his eyes to see through the swirling greyness. He pricked up his ears. What was that? Could he hear something? There was the splashing of the oars, but was there something else, perhaps the sound of breakers? Sigurd perched as far forward as possible, lying across the dragon's nose.

He thought of shouting to Ulric and Tostig, but they'd only be cross. Sigurd stared and stared. The mist seemed even thicker. But the noise was louder now. It was breakers, surely? That could only mean one thing. They were close to land — maybe too close. Breakers meant a coastline, and that could mean rocks. He must tell Ulric. They were close to land at last.

'Ulric! Tostig! There's...!' At that same moment there was a sickening crunch and the longship ran headlong on to low rocks. Sigurd was catapulted into the clammy English sea. The boat shuddered and stopped. Ulric picked himself up from the deck and shouted to the men.

'Reverse, quick, hard astern, go back, turn about! Full speed backwards!' Twenty oars plunged into the sea, and the Vikings strained every muscle to move their boat off the rocks. Slowly the great wooden keel slid back. Slowly the sea caught hold of the longship and pulled her clear. 'Back, back!' Ulric bellowed, as the warboat gained speed.

'Where's that idiot of a lookout?'

Tostig glanced at the dragon's head.

'Sony to report, Ulric, I think he went overboard when we hit the rocks.' Ulric was about to shout, 'Man overboard!', but stopped himself just in time. Sigurd overboard? What a relief! Ulric smiled. 'Full speed ahead, muffled oars,' he commanded, and the longship slid silently away into the misty North Sea.

Sigurd was not happy. The English sea was wet and cold. This was something he had always suspected, and he was disappointed to find it true. Why hadn't they gone to the South of France for a raid? The sea was warm and blue there. Why did they have come to grotty old Britain? He pulled a large piece of seaweed from beneath his helmet and waded ashore. Sigurd stood on the beach. Cold salt water ran out of his helmet and down his spine. It trickled down his legs and filled his boots. It was not a nice feeling. He walked forward a few steps, slipped on a dead jellyfish and fell flat on his back in a rock pool. A large crab took an angry swipe at one of his big red ears, then marched away. 'Ow!' Sigurd scrambled to his feet.

'This isn't my lucky day,' he muttered. 'Well, there is only one thing to do. If the others are not here to raid a village, I shall just have to raid one by myself.' He drew his trusty (and rusty) sword, which he had named Nosepicker, and set off across the beach. It did not take long to find the path up the cliffs. Indeed, Sigurd was surprised to find good steps cut into the rock face. He moved with all the stealth of a Viking raider, or so he thought. Here came the great warrior, eyes ablaze, sword drawn, soggy feet squelching in sodden boots! The mist did not make things easier. It still clung to almost everything, and there was little that Sigurd could see. At last he reached the top of the cliffs and he followed the well-worn path ahead. He felt there were buildings near-by before he actually saw them. The path became hard beneath his feet. It was made of something he had never seen before. Sigurd's heart beat faster. A cat ran yowling across his feet. Sigurd took a swipe with Nosepicker and almost chopped off his toes. Now he really could see houses. They were huge — much larger than he had expected. They had hard walls, and in the window spaces there was something he had never seen before. It was dark and shiny. Sigurd peered more closely and suddenly saw a fierce warrior glaring back at him. 'Yargh!' yelled Sigurd and thrust forward with Nosepicker. There was a shattering sound and the enemy had gone. Sigurd leaped backwards. What kind of magic was this? The mist was clearing all the time and Sigurd began to see such strange things. He could not even begin to describe them: there were no words in his language to do so. Things with wheels — yes, round wheels, but such small wheels, and certainly not made of wood. They were thick and black and had peculiar-shaped things on top.

Suddenly, two bright eyes appeared. Huge white eyes were glaring at him from the mist. There was a strange clinking sound. The eyes started forward. They stopped. They started again, and were getting closer and closer. Sigurd drew back into the darkness of a doorway. His shoulder pressed against something small and round. 'Bing-bong, bing-bong, bing-bong.' Every time he moved, the same weird sound went off in his left ear. The bright eyes came closer still. A misty shape moved behind them, carrying something that clinked. The eyes whirred and moved away. Sigurd began to breathe more easily. 'Bing-bong, bing-bong.' The door behind him began to open. Sigurd sprang to life and was off like a hare. He ran and ran, wherever the hard concrete paths took him. At one moment he saw those bright eyes again. They were moving much faster, coming straight at him and roaring angrily. Sigurd threw himself down a side path and one of those odd shapes on wheels rushed by. Sigurd stood there panting. He must find somewhere safe to hide. He staggered up the path, his heart pounding. Then all at once he stopped. Right in front of him was a big picture: a portrait of himself! There were the moustache and beard. There were the horned helmet and handsome nose. There was Nosepicker, held aloft. It was himself, no question. Sigurd the Viking smiled and nodded. There was some strange lettering underneath which did not make sense, but Sigurd didn't care. Surely this was his home? He would be safe here at the sign of The Viking. He grinned up at the picture, mounted the steps, opened the door and went inside. Outside, the Viking on the sign almost appeared to wink.

**Questions:**

- 1) Does the story start with: description, action or dialogue? What is the difference?
- 2) What tells you that Sigurd isn't very clever?
- 3) How do you know that Ulric was glad that Sigurd fell overboard?
- 4) Tostig's sword is called 'Heartsplitter.' What is Sigurd's sword called?
- 5) Why did the Viking hotel not have many guests?
- 6) Do you think Mrs Tibblethwaite will make a good guest? Why? Give reasons.
- 7) How did Mr Ellis eventually wake up from the 2<sup>nd</sup> faint?
- 8) Why is Hedeby so 'unusual'?