

# The Ulfberth

Gudmund stared at his sword. It glinted in the early dawn light and a shiver ran down his spine. Soon it would be time. He looked down at the others. The warriors looked peaceful as they lay around the camp, the sun's rays slicing their sleeping bodies between long, tree-lined shadows.

"Not long now," a voice rumbled from behind Gudmund's shoulder.

Gudmund gripped his sword and spun round. A huge warrior stood over him. He had deep, shadowed eyes, a matted beard, and wild, yellow hair. Gudmund loosened his grip, it was Bjalki, his friend and comrade. The huge man tore at a piece of meat with his teeth and sat down beside Gudmund. "Today you will have peace, my old friend," he growled, chewing at some gristle. "As Odin is my witness."

Gudmund tried to smile. "Do you know how long it has been, Bjalki?" he asked, staring at the strange markings that ran along the sword's blade. "I was just seven seasons old." A light breeze eased through Gudmund's hair and the sky darkened. "I remember Valgard attacking the village. I remember him fighting my father..." His eyes misted over and he ran his fingers over the handle of his sword. "And I remember the ship burial when my father was laid to rest."

Bjalki reached over and slapped Gudmund's shoulder with a giant hand. "Then today you will have your revenge," he smiled; his eyes wide and wild. "And if not, then you shall meet your father again in Valhalla!" The sun crept out from behind the clouds, and the blade glistened once again. "That is an Ulfberth sword," Bjalki exclaimed, the sun reflecting into his eyes.

"Indeed it is," Gudmund smiled knowingly, rising to his feet. "It was my father's, and his father's before him."

"Then Odin really is with you!" Bjalki laughed. He jumped up and began kicking at the sleeping men's feet. "Wake up!" he roared. "We are Vikings! Today we battle! Today we taste victory!"

"For Odin!" the men cheered.

"For our king!" Bjalki bellowed, raising Gudmund's arm into the air.

'For my father', Gudmund thought, as the Ulfberth glinted in the early dawn light.



1. When Bjalki first speaks, his 'voice rumbled from behind Gudmund's shoulder'. Why do you think the writer used this verb to describe the way Bjalki speaks?

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2. What is an 'Ulfberth'?

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3. How do you think Gudmund was feeling when Bjalki crept up on him? Give two reasons why you think this.

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4. Explain what you think happened when Valgard attacked Gudmund's village:

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