

The red Viking

Legends of old speak of a hero who once lived during the time we have all grown to know as the Dark Ages, a period where most of history was lost as mankind turned against one another to fill the void of power left behind for far more enlightened examples of humankind. It was during this period, that a new menace arose from the northern seas: the Vikings. Sailing wide and far aboard their ornate longships, they would plunder lands ripe and full of newly acquired riches, most of which had been stolen from those who came before them.

A menace they might have been, but they were also a perfect example of humanity: always on the move, hungry for knowledge, wanting to test the limits of the known world. Aboard a longship, all were equal. Farmers feasted and fought alongside kings. Men and women fought together and shared the plentiful plunder. All of them following their dreams to the bitter end.

Amongst these Vikings, there was a man who all called the red Viking, a name given to him because of his mighty red beard. He was a farmer who lived in a small cottage in the outskirts of a quiet Norse town alongside his brother, his father and his wife. Although he started ploughing the fields, he eventually found a better trade in building spectacular longships for his brothers and sisters in arms to raid and pillage the far lands of the west.

Ever since he was a small boy, he had dreamt of going on one of those raids. Eventually, the Jarl gave him his leave to go west. As he worked on the ship that would sail them there, however, he had a terrible accident. The ladder he worked on snapped, and he fell. When he woke up, he had lost his sight. The Jarl then withdrew his permission, stating he would not embark on a raid only to be baby sitting a cripple. The red Viking pleaded that he would be allowed to go, finally reaching an agreement with the Jarl that he was allowed to do so if he was able to finish the ship. He left the hall, swearing to finish his ship before the gods and all present, while being laughed at by the greedy men who gloated around the preposterous Jarl. All had taken his promise as a mummer's jape. How would a blind man be able to finish a longboat? It was the Jarl whose laugh roared the loudest above all others in the hall.

Days passed and no news came from the red Viking and his quest. Many forgot the promise that had been made. The day before the time was due, however, the red Viking came into the Jarl's courtroom, interrupting a feast he was holding with rich and powerful friends.

"I have come to deliver the longboat you requested of me". Said the Viking, with an air of triumph.

After a long silence, the hall erupted into laughter, mocking the blind man, once again remembering the whole tale. The red Viking, however, stood firm until the laughter subsided.

"You may see the ship in the dock for yourself, if it please you..."

All followed outside, expecting a crude half-put-together ship, but were astounded by the sight of a large longship with intricate carvings, beautiful detail and splendid colours.

"I have held my part of the bargain, now you must keep yours" said the Viking to the Jarl before leaving. The Jarl, however, far from pleased, was furious. He had never intended the Viking to join him. He had sabotaged the ladder himself and had made the most fun he could from the Viking just to have him succeed against all odds. Why should a simple farmer become more famous than him?

When the guests had left the hall, he assembled his most loyal men and commanded them to seek out the red Viking in his farmhouse and end his life, as he should have done years back. The men complied, only to find the farmhouse empty when they arrived. Not to anger their lord, they decided to raze the farm and report they had succeeded in their mission destroying all evidence that could lead anyone nosy enough back to the Jarl. The Jarl was most pleased, and decided, as a final gesture to mock the red Viking, to sail on his ship to their next raid.

The raid came and the Jarl and his lackeys set sail towards the west. Midway, however, they were hit by a raging storm, coming seemingly from nowhere. Many of the Jarl's ships were sunk under the waves and many more were snapped in half after being struck by furious bolts of lightning. In the end, only the red Viking's ship was left, manned only by the Jarl himself.

Landing on the shore, the Jarl wept, no longer fearing to hurt his pride, as nobody was left to see him. He was surprised by the sudden shuffling of footsteps, and even more when he looked up to find himself face to face with the red Viking.

"Blind I might be, but I made an oath and by all means I intended to keep it. It was hard the first days, I'll admit, but I never let hardship deter me from holding my end of the bargain and making my dream come true, so I endured. I worked day and night and slowly, but surely, my mind became the blueprints, my hands became my eyes, and my tongue became the tool to discern the different colours of my palette. Blind as I was, I was unaware of your ill intent to not hold your end of the bargain, but just as my oath was heard by the gods, so was yours. Odin's spies became my own. They warned me of the incoming danger you sent my way and guided me and my family away from harm's way. Njord sailed us here. Freya kept us fed and well, and Thor enacted vengeance on your treachery".

With incredulous eyes wide open, the Jarl could only but mutter a question:

"If what you say is true, why did I survive?"

"Because the mighty Thor wanted not to mar the ship I built after so much effort and dedication. The men that were onboard with you were simply greedy men, too incompetent for seafaring. You, I suppose were lucky".

With this, the red Viking made his way to his beloved ship, where his family waited for him, ready to set sail to finally live the adventure they had all dreamed of. As he climbed on the ship, the Jarl dragged himself closer to the ship.

"What about me? What will you do with me?" he asked.

Without even turning to face him, the red Viking simply uttered:

"Someone who is so full of hate and that knows no love is not even worth my time. If only you had been kind to your people and told them that you loved them, instead of worrying only about your own greed and desire, you would have stayed safe. There is no room for you on my ship..."

With this, the red Viking set sail, leaving the Jarl to his fate.

Many say he would one day come across the greatest treasure of all, a treasure not accounted with gold, but with the family and friends he had made along his journey. Friends that would feast and toast in his honour, awaiting the day to meet him again in the halls of Valhalla.

Whether this story is true or not, we will never be able to tell. What we do know, is that the red Viking will forever live on as one of the greatest legends in our hearts.

Afterword

Although I typically write short stories with a dark tone or a sudden unexpected twist for the macabre at the end, this story required a different tone to it. I apologize if the writing came as a bit scruffy, as I am not used to writing stories like this one.

This story is the result of a redemption on my Twitch channel (<https://www.twitch.tv/crazyjaegerOw0>), redeemed by DragonYourFeetGaming, and it aims to pay tribute to our friend and fellow streamer VengefulMadness, who sadly passed away along with his wife MrsVengefulMadness, his brother Ringford and his father.

To Alexander Hamilton, James Hamilton, Kyleigh Hamilton and Thomas Hamilton. Be safe out there, be kind to one another, and most importantly, tell someone that you love them.