With special thanks to
Barry Hutchison



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CHAPTER ONE

IN THE MARKET FOR A FIGHT

Vegetables. Vulgar hated vegetables.

Real Vikings shouldn't eat vegetables, he thought. *Real Vikings should eat...* well, he wasn't actually sure what real Vikings should eat, but it wasn't vegetables. Bears maybe. Or dragons.

But not cabbage. Never cabbage.

"Four cabbages," his mum, Helga, said to the man at the vegetable stall. It was

market day in Blubber, the Viking village Vulgar called home. The main square was crammed with well-behaved shoppers buying things from stalls. But Vulgar longed for the bad old days – when proper Vikings looted and pillaged for their dinners!

"Buy five, get the sixth free, darlin'," said the veggie man. "Special offer, just for you, what wiv' you bein' so pretty an' that."



Vulgar almost laughed at that. *Pretty*. His mum was taller and broader than most of the men in the village. She had arms that could lift a horse, and a face that could make it run away. Vulgar had never heard anyone call her "pretty" before, not even his dad.

"Four cabbages," Helga said, glaring at the man. "And cut your nonsense."

The man gulped, nodded, then dropped four cabbages into Helga's bag. Without a word, Helga handed over a few coins, then she caught Vulgar by the arm and dragged him towards the next stall.



"Rags!" shouted another trader. "Get your rags here. Any colour you want, as long as it's grey."

"Fish heads!" cried yet another. "Lovely fish heads.

Free bag of trout eyes with every purchase."

Helga made for that stall. Vulgar's mum couldn't resist a bargain – and his dad was very fond of trout eyes.

"This is *boring*," Vulgar groaned. "Why are we shopping? Real Vikings don't shop, they pillage and plunder. If it was up to me, I'd grab everything and escape in a longboat!"

A bag of trout eyes was thrust in front of Vulgar's face. He pulled back in disgust. "Well, maybe not *everything*."

Helga sighed. "Hell's teeth, I've had enough of your moaning." She took the bag of trout eyes, opened it, and tossed one in her mouth.



It made a squelchy *pop* as she bit down. "Go and take these to your father."

"Yes!" Vulgar cheered. "Where is he?"

"Cleaning the toilets."

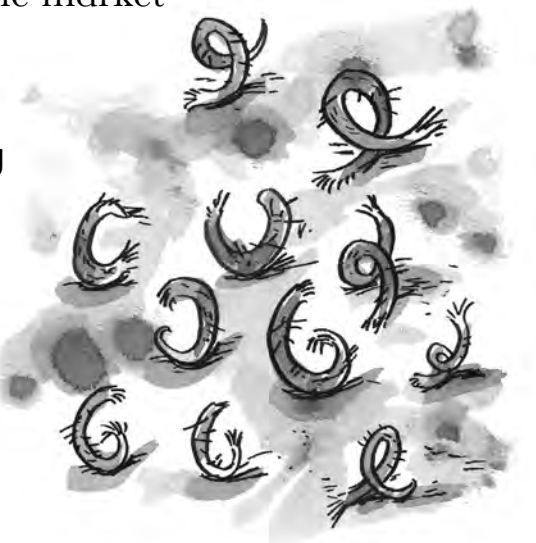
Vulgar stopped cheering. "Oh. Do I have to?"

"Yes," snapped Helga. "Off you go. And don't stop until you get there."

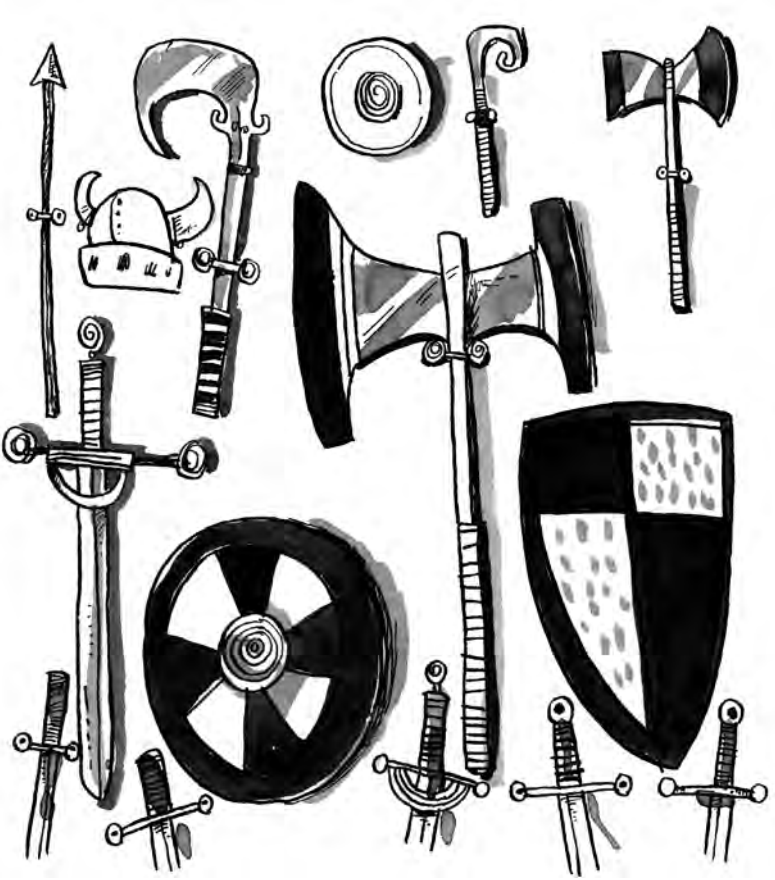
Grumbling, Vulgar turned and plodded off in the direction of the Blubber public toilets. Around him, the sounds of the market continued.

"Pig tails. Git-choor curly pig tails here!"

"Earwax! Nice and gooey. Use it on your floor or use it on your beard!"



"Broadswords! Helmets! Get 'em while they're hot."



Vulgar stopped. The blacksmith's stall stood directly in front of him. Swords and

spears and axes were propped up along the front of the stall. Helmets and shields hung from hooks on each side. Vulgar stared at the display, his mouth open and his eyes wide. Suddenly shopping didn't seem so boring after all.

The blacksmith was talking to another customer, so he didn't notice Vulgar running his fingers across the handles of the swords. Vulgar gripped one with both hands and tried to lift it, but it was heavier than he expected. He staggered backwards, his knees almost buckling, his face turning redder by the second.



Eventually, he gave up. Straining, he dragged the

sword back over to the stall.

Vulgar peered at his reflection in a shiny shield. Could it be? Oh yes, at last… Was his beard finally beginning to grow?



No, it was just a smudge of dirt on his cheek. Vulgar pulled a silly face and adjusted the helmet that covered his messy hair. It was dented in a few places, but then proper Viking helmets should always be dented, he thought. Dents showed a helmet had been well used.

He wasn't so keen on the horns on his

helmet, if he were honest. They were small and stubby like a baby sheep's, not scary looking at all. The helmets hanging from the blacksmith's stall had *proper* horns. They curved up like mammoth tusks, pointed and sharp.

The blacksmith was still talking, so Vulgar slipped off his own helmet, pulled down a new one, and plonked it on his head.

The world went dark. The helmet was a bit on the big side. It covered most of Vulgar's face, making it impossible to see. He pushed it back a little and saw the lanky figure of his best friend, Knut, walking towards him.

Knut's helmet was even worse than Vulgar's. The horns were pointing in opposite directions, one up, one down. It looked ridiculous, but Knut never seemed all that bothered.

"All right?" Knut said, giving Vulgar a

friendly grin that showed his buck teeth.

"Look at this stuff!" said Vulgar, excitedly. "Grab a helmet, quick!"

"I've got a helmet," Knut replied with a shrug.

Vulgar pulled down another new one from the stall. He tossed it to Knut. "Stick that on."

Knut changed helmets. It covered his head all the way down to his chin.



"What now?"

"Helmet war!" Vulgar cried. He lowered his helmet and charged blindly.