

Asgrim's Moment of Doubt
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(361 words)

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Asgrim the Wolf pulled on his plaid woollen breeks, then buckled the belt that held his trusty, sharp-bladed scramasax in its decorated scabbard. He put on his rough sheepskin tunic, then the soft leather boots, hand-stitched by Irmgard the Fair, as a token of her love.

He picked up his great battle-axe. Donned the scarred-steel helm.

He yelled the ancient Viking battle-cry of his clan into the gloomy, empty hall. "Baresaark!"

He was late.

So he loaded his kit into the car and drove aggressively down the dual-carriageway. When he arrived, the car-park was choked so he had to make do with street-parking on a single yellow line. He couldn't find any sign telling him whether this was legal at this time of day.

Irritated, he hurried into the school.

A hundred fresh-scrubbed faces looked up in wonder. "This is Asgrim the Wolf," announced Miss Jones.

"Baresaark!" he yelled, raising the great axe high.

"He's going to tell us what it's like to be a Viking..."

An hour later, after he'd explained enthusiastically about Viking life, clans, farming, clothes, religions, their raiding and their sagas, and answered the children's many inquiries, Miss Jones drew the session to a close. "One last question."

"Have you ever *blood-eagled anybody?*" leered a sweaty boy from the back, naming a particularly vile viking practice.

"No, no," he sighed, "look, this is just a hobby. We dress up as Vikings at weekends. Umm...we don't actually kill anybody..."

"*Bullshitter,*" muttered the boy. Everybody heard.

"Class, thank Asgrim now. He's got to go off on his longship." said Miss Jones lamely.

"Thank you Mister Asgrim the Wolf," chorused all the children. Except the sweaty boy, who scowled.

Asgrim had a cup of tea in the staff-room, then trudged slowly to his car, feeling a tinge of sadness: that he'd failed in some obscure way.

Writing a ticket, back to him, was a traffic warden.

Who turned.

His jaw dropped, glasses slipping down his nose in stupefaction.

"Baresaark!" yelled Asgrim the Wolf.

The warden fled.

As Asgrim the Wolf got into his car, the thought occurred to him that perhaps there were some advantages to being a Viking after all.

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