

LO: Comprehension

"Time to go," said Thorkel. Gunnar threw the torch as far as he could onto the roof and looked over his shoulder as they hurried away. The thatch was already burning strongly, and someone was banging at the doors from inside.

Thorkel took Gunnar and Rurik to a ship at the far end of the harbour. There were enough torches on this part of the quayside for Gunnar to see it was a fine-looking craft, a lean warship with a tall carved prow. He had also witnessed enough sailings from Kaupang to know it was on the point of leaving. The crew – perhaps thirty men in all – were sitting at the benches holding their oars.

"Hey, Viglaf, glad we caught you," said Thorkel, looking down into the ship from the quayside, his voice light and easy. "I've come to collect that favour you owe me. I want passage out of here for me and my companions."

A short, stocky man looked up at them from the stern of the ship. He had on a red cap, and the sides of his head were as smooth and white as a duck's egg.

"Is that so?" Viglaf said. "I can't deny I owe you a

favour, Thorkel, but isn't this a bit sudden? You didn't mention anything about it when we spoke last."

"Well, you know how it is," said Thorkel. "You can have enough of being in one place, and we've had our fill of Kaupang. So can we come aboard?"

"But you don't even know where we're going," said Viglaf, a look of deep suspicion stealing onto his face. "I'm sure I didn't tell you. And who are the other two? I've seen the big man before. Isn't he one of Orm's Hounds?"

There was movement further down the ship. A crewman was standing on his rowing bench, gesturing at the town and saying something. Gunnar turned to look in the direction he was pointing. A fiery glow lit the sky over the roofs of the huts. Bright flames were leaping, and there was shouting as well.

"I'm a friend of Thorkel's, and the boy is my slave," said Rurik. "We don't care where you're going, so long as you take us out of this stinking hole."

"It might not stink so much once it burns down," muttered Viglaf. "Is that anything to do with you?" he said, nodding in the direction of the flames.

Retrieval

1. How many crew were there on the boat ?
2. What was already burning strongly ?

Words in context

3. Find and copy a simile.
4. Find and copy a word which 'means narrow'.

Inference

5. Give two reasons why Viglaf might not want to help.