



Ulrich and the ice island

Many, many years ago, the Vikings thought the earth was as flat as a pancake.

Today we find that laughable, but it's true. The Vikings were convinced that the horizon marked the end of our planet. And that if someone overstepped that limit, they'd fall into space. This was why they would never lose sight of the coast when sailing.

But not all the Vikings were afraid. There was a boy named Ulrich who dreamt of nothing but sailing out to sea to the end of the world.

Ulrich, a clever, handsome lad, could think of nothing else. Since he was so obsessed with the idea, one day he decided to stop dreaming and to go out and seek adventure.

Before leaving, Ulrich built a ship out of an oak tree. If he wanted to sail far away, the ship had to be just the right size. If it was too big, it would be too slow. If it was too small, it would be swallowed up by the sea like a walnut shell.

When he hoisted the sail, Ulrich knew the great day had arrived.

And that very afternoon, he boarded his vessel, cast off and set sail for the horizon.

The first days the sea was very calm.

The ship lightly ploughed the waters of the North Sea, sailing under a sky that filled up with thousands and thousands of stars every night.

But the calm didn't last very long. After a few days, the crew began to get nervous because they had not seen land for days.

Especially Olaf, a veteran sailor with a big moustache, wouldn't stop protesting.

"We'd better turn around and go back," he repeated time and again. "We're reaching the end of the sea and we'll fall off the horizon into the pit!"

The men were very afraid of vanishing over the horizon, but Ulrich wouldn't give in.

Ulrich and Olaf argued on deck every day. On behalf of the whole crew, Olaf demanded that they return to port. But Ulrich, who was very strong-headed, always refused, saying that the sea was full of surprises.

Despite these minor setbacks, the Viking ship sailed forth without changing its course in the least.

It sailed on and on gliding over the water under a blazing sun or under the light of the moon that hung from the sky like a lantern.

But the days passed and there was no land in sight.

The crew couldn't bear it anymore. The men felt defeated.

"We want to go home!" shouted the sailors. "We're tired of seeing nothing but water!"

To stave off a mutiny, Ulrich ordered them all on deck.

"I beg you to make one last effort," said Ulrich to his men. "I'll bet the horns on my helmet that we're about to discover a new world. And if we do, we'll go down in history as heroes!"

Encouraged by Ulrich's words, the men went back to their posts.

That night they rowed so hard that they left the stars behind.

The next morning when Ulrich woke up, he thought that maybe his men were right. They were groping in the dark and perhaps the time had come to find out once and for all where they were headed! They couldn't continue their journey without knowing for sure that they would find land.

But what could he do?

"I've got it!" exclaimed Ulrich from the ship's prow. I'll take the two ravens that we have caged up in the kitchen and set them free. If the ravens fly back to the ship, it means they couldn't find anywhere to land. But if they don't, if they don't return it will mean they have found land!

Ulrich lost no time in freeing the ravens, one after the next, hoping that they wouldn't return.

He gazed at them as they flew off. And while he was watching them fly away between the sea and the sky, he was wondering how it would all turn out.

Ulrich intuitively changed course and set sail in the same direction the birds had taken, until they flew out of sight.

"Where could they have gone?" wondered Ulrich as he looked up at the sky. "Will they come back or not?"

But Ulrich didn't have to wait very long for an answer.

Suddenly, the Viking ship came upon the coast of an impressive ice island that they named Iceland.

They had made it!

And this was how Ulrich and his crew, thanks to the two ravens, made history.

But Ulrich's adventures didn't end there.

Not at all! Ulrich spent his life traveling all over the world. He discovered new lands and sailed

the seas alongside whales and dolphins.

But he never, never discovered that the earth is as round as a melon.

Script: J.M. Hernandez Ripoll

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