

Beowulf

(Adapted book. Intermediate level)

Chapter 1.

The old Danish kings were men of courage, and their exploits are famous.

One of these kings was called Shield Sheafson. He had been abandoned as a child, but he grew into a fierce warrior who subdued his enemies. He was a good king. Shield Sheafson's son was called Beow. Beow recognized what the people had suffered in the past, and he rewarded them generously whilst his father was still king. In this way the young prince, who was blessed by God, gathered around him friends who would be loyal in times of trouble.

When Shield died, he was given a splendid funeral. They placed his body in a boat and loaded the boat with treasure. They hung a golden standard above his head to show who he was. Then they pushed the boat out to sea, where it drifted on the waves. No one knows who found the boat and kept its rich treasure.

Now it was Beow's turn to protect the Danes. He, too, was a good king and the people liked him. Beow's heir was the great Halfdane. Halfdane had three sons, Heorogar, Hrothgar and Halga.

He also had a daughter who married the Swedish king Onela.

Hrothgar was lucky in war. Many men were keen to serve him and his army grew. He decided to build a great mead hall as a sign of his power. He wanted the mead hall to be his throne room. He also wanted it to be the place from where he would share his goods with the people.

He summoned workers from all over the world to come and build his mead hall, which was called Heorot Hall. Soon the building was finished, and it was splendid. Its towers rose high into the sky, and its roof was wide.

There were feasts and singing every day in Heorot Hall. Harpists played their music, and poets told the story of how God created the earth, the sun and the moon.

But there was a demon that hated the happiness of Heorot Hall. His name was Grendel, and he lived on a bleak part of the coastal lands. Grendel had previously lived in exile with the family of Cain, who had murdered his brother Abel.

One night Grendel came to Heorot Hall to look at the Danes feasting and enjoying themselves there. He found them asleep after their drinking, and he seized thirty men and carried them away with him. He returned to the Hall later that night, and left thirty bloodstained corpses there.

When morning came the Danes woke up and saw the bodies of their friends. They wept at the sight. King Hrothgar did not know what to do, and he was ashamed that he had not been able to prevent the terrible deed. He was sad for the loss of his men.

The next night Grendel came back again, and killed more of Hrothgar's men. The Danes were now afraid, and they began to leave Heorot Hall.

Grendel now ruled. Heorot Hall was abandoned. King Hrothgar suffered for twelve long years. Musicians carried the story of Grendel all over the world. They sang about the horrible murders, and the long war between the demon and the king. They sang about the danger that everyone felt.

Grendel continued his attacks on the Danes. He took over Heorot Hall, although he could not enter the throne room.

King Hrothgar's advisers made plans to defend the kingdom from the demon. Sometimes, too, they prayed to false gods for help in their trouble. They forgot the real God who made the heavens and the earth.

The king of Geatland was called Hygelac. One of his lords had heard about the demon, and he decided to help Hrothgar. This lord was the strongest man on earth, a real warrior. He gave orders that a boat should be made ready for him to travel in. He found fourteen men who were willing to go with him, and they set off together in his boat.

The lord's boat sailed quickly through the waves on its journey. They soon reached their destination, and they were glad to be on land again. They thanked God for the swift crossing.

When the Danish watchman saw men in armor come out of the boat, he went to them and issued a challenge:

'Who are you, and why have you come here in armor? My job is to watch for the arrival of dangerous men on our shores. I have never seen a group of armed men like you before. You did not ask anyone for permission to land.'

The watchman looked at the warrior, and then he went on:

'And I have never seen a man as big as you. You must be an important man. You must tell me who you are, before you go inland from the coast. And you must also tell me why you have come here.'

The warrior gave this reply to the watchman:

'We are from Geatland, and our king is Hygelac. I am the son of Ecgtheow, who was a great soldier in his day. We have come here to help your king, and we have no secret purpose. Therefore, please tell us what has been happening here. We want to know everything about this great danger that comes in the night, this killer of men in your country. I want to offer Hrothgar my help and advice. I know how to defeat this enemy, and how to make the king calm again.'

The watchman looked at the warrior, and then he replied:

'I believe you. Pick up your armour and your weapons, and I'll take you to the king. My men will look after your boat until you go back to Geatland.'

Chapter 2.

The watchman led the Geat soldiers to Heorot Hall. They were amazed when they saw the huge building. Now the watchman left them, saying that he had to go back to his duty on the coast.

The Geat warriors approached the Hall. Their armour shone in the sun as they walked. When they entered the building, they sat in the Hall.

The Danes were curious about the newcomers, and asked them questions:

'Who are you, and why have you come here carrying your weapons?'

The Geat warrior gave this answer:

'We are Hygelac's men. Beowulf is my name. I will tell your king the purpose of our visit if he will see me.'

A Wendel chief called Wulfgar agreed to take Beowulf's message to the king. He said that a group of people from Geatland had come ashore, led by a warrior called Beowulf, who seemed a strong man.

Hrothgar replied:

'I know Beowulf. I remember him as a young boy. They say he has the strength of thirty men. God has sent him here to defend us against Grendel. I'll give him a large reward. Now go and ask the Geats to come in, and be sure to tell them they are welcome in Denmark.'

The Geat warriors went into the throne room, and Beowulf spoke to the king:

'I am Beowulf. I have had great victories against my enemies, and now I have heard the story of Grendel and the destruction he has brought to Denmark. Travellers have told us how Heorot Hall has been abandoned by its people because they are afraid of the demon. Hygelac's advisers encouraged me to come here to help you, because they know how strong I am. They know I have fought against men and sea-monsters, and have always avenged the Geats. I want to fight Grendel in single combat. I ask you to let me fight him like that, I have also heard that Grendel does not use any weapons. I won't use any weapons, either. We will fight with our hands only. God will decide who wins. I know that it will be terrible if Grendel wins. The demon will eat my body, and I won't have a proper burial. Then he'll kill my soldiers. If I die, please send this armor of mine back to King Hygelac. That's all I ask.'

Now King Hrothgar replied to Beowulf:

'You have come here to help us and to fight for us. I remember your father well, and how I helped him once when his people drove him away because of a feud. I am sorry to ask anyone for help in our troubles with Grendel, but he is destroying my soldiers. Only God can stop him! Our men discuss the demon when they are drinking, and they promise to protect Heorot Hall. Often they have waited for him in the night with

their swords. But in the morning their blood is found everywhere in the Hall. That's how they have died, and I have lost many soldiers.'

Hrothgar invited the Geats to dine in the Hall, and they sat together. They ate well, and a minstrel sang for them.

One man was not happy that the Geats had come to Denmark. This was Unferth. He was jealous of Beowulf's courage and his fame. Now he spoke challengingly to the Geat warrior: 'Are you the same Beowulf who had a famous swimming match against Breca? That was just vanity; you wanted to win even though people warned you of the danger. You went into the water and it was cold and rough. You struggled for seven nights, but Breca was stronger than you. He reached the land one morning, and proved that he was a better swimmer than you. It will be the same with Grendel. No one has lasted an entire night against that demon.'

Now Beowulf smiled at Unferth as he answered him:

'That swimming match came about because we had drunk a lot. What really happened was this. Breca and I were good friends. We had known each other all our lives, and we were always challenging each other. Both of us swam with a sword, to protect ourselves from the sea-monsters. I was stronger than him, and could always swim further out to sea than he could. We went on for five days in that dreadful cold, swimming side by side. Then the wind drove us apart. Sea-monsters attacked me all the time, but I killed nine of them with my sword. In the end I landed safely.'

Beowulf stared hard into Unferth's eyes, and then he continued: 'I can't remember any struggle of yours like that, Unferth. You've killed your own people, and so you'll go to Hell when you die. Anyway, if you were really as brave as you say, you would have done something about Grendel. But he knows that he needn't be afraid of you - or any Dane, come to that. But he'll soon learn that I am different. I'll show him what a Geat can do in battle. Heorot Hall will then be safe for you Danes again.'

King Hrothgar listened to Beowulf's words with pleasure. He relied on the hero's courage and strength.

Now the noise of talking and happy laughter filled the Hall. Queen Wealhtheow entered. She greeted everyone and offered the king something to drink. Then she went round the Hall offering everyone a drink, as the custom was. When she came to Beowulf, she welcomed him to Denmark. She told him that God had answered her prayer by sending him. Beowulf took the cup from the queen, and replied to her words:

'I had a clear intention when I got into my boat with my men. That intention was to help your people or to die in battle with Grendel. I shall be true to that intention.'

Chapter 3.

There was a new atmosphere of cheerfulness and hope in Heorot Hall now that Beowulf was there. The drinking and laughter continued until it was time for Hrothgar and his queen to leave the Hall.

Hrothgar knew that Grendel would come that night, and he wished the hero good luck:

This is the first time I have let anyone else defend Heorot Hall. Guard it well tonight, and be careful of the enemy.'

God had given the Danes someone who could protect them from the demon. Beowulf left his armor with a soldier, and told him to look after it well. Then he prepared for sleep, saying proudly:

'I will not use any weapons in the battle with Grendel. He is very strong, but with God's help I will overcome him.'

Beowulf lay down, and his Geats rested as well. No one expected that Beowulf would ever return to his own country, but God was preparing a victory for him. The Geats would win because of the strength of one man alone.

Suddenly Grendel came out of the darkness. He opened the iron door of the Hall and entered the great building. He was full of hate. Once inside, Grendel moved secretly and quickly past the guards who were asleep. Grendel thought he would kill many men that night, but his days of murder were coming to an end.

Beowulf was watching the demon in the darkness. Suddenly the demon took hold of a man who was sleeping. He bit into the man's body, and the blood flowed everywhere. Then he moved towards Beowulf.

Beowulf leapt up from his bed and began to wrestle with the demon. The demon struggled against the warrior, but Beowulf held on to him tightly. Grendel tried to escape, but he could not free himself from Beowulf's grasp. Man and demon were locked together in the fight, and the noise of their battle could be heard all over the Hall. Suddenly Grendel gave a great cry - it was the cry of the defeated. The man had beaten the demon.

Beowulf did not want to let Grendel leave the Hall alive. His men were awake now, and they rushed to help their hero with their swords. They did not know that the demon could not be hurt by any sword. He had magic against human weapons.

Now Grendel began to weaken. Beowulf still held on to him, and the demon was in agony. The injuries that Beowulf gave him were terrible. He pulled the demon's arm and shoulder off. At last the demon fled the Hall. He disappeared into the darkness, but he was dying and he knew it.

The next morning warriors came from everywhere to discuss the battle. They saw the traces of his blood on the ground outside the Hall. They saw the place where the demon had dived into the water and drowned. His soul had gone to Hell. The warriors praised Beowulf's courage. They said there was no braver man than him in the whole world.

One of the king's minstrels began to compose a poem in honor of the Geat warrior. The poet told the story of Sigemund the dragon-killer, and compared Beowulf to that hero.

King Hrothgar came into the hall with his queen Wealhtheow. He looked at the remains of Grendel's arm and shoulder, and then he spoke the following words:

'We must thank God for this victory. A little while ago, it seemed that this house would always run with the blood of Grendel's victims.

But God brought Beowulf here, and Beowulf has achieved something that we Danes could not do.'

He turned and spoke directly to the Geat hero:

'I now think of you as if you were my son. I will give you all the wealth that you want. I hope that God will always protect you and reward you.'

Now Beowulf replied to the king:

'We have survived this great adventure. I wish, all the same, that you could have seen his body here in the Hall. I wanted to use my strength to make him fall down, and then to squeeze the life out of him. He escaped me, however, and God allowed it to happen. The demon left his arm and shoulder here with me, and that was a heavy price to pay for his freedom. He will soon be dead because of that injury, if he is not dead already. Then he will go before God and receive judgment for his wickedness.'

Unferth looked at the demon's arm and shoulder, and he was quiet. He could not criticise Beowulf for anything now.

Chapter 4.

King Hrothgar ordered his men to prepare Heorot Hall for a victory feast.

Men and women worked hard together to remove the traces of the terrible struggle between Grendel and Beowulf from the building. Everything that had been damaged in the fight was renewed, and soon the Hall looked splendid once more.

On the night of the victory feast there was great happiness at Heorot Hall. The cup passed from hand to hand, and there was happiness and friendship.

Hrothgar gave Beowulf a gold standard as a victory gift. He also gave him some armour, a helmet, and a sword. Then the king told his men to bring eight horses into the Hall. One of the horses was wearing the king's own saddle. Hrothgar gave these horses to Beowulf as well.

There were also rewards for the other Geats. Every man who had been on Beowulf's boat received a valuable gift, and there was compensation for the Geat warrior that Grendel had killed.

The harpists and musicians now came forward, and they played tunes and sang tales of heroes to please the king and his guests. The poet recited a poem about an old feud between the Frisians and the Danes. The poem told a bitter story of blood, betrayal, and revenge.

Everyone listened to the recital with pleasure.

Queen Wealhtheow said to Hrothgar:

'Drink to the Geats, my lord. Be generous to them, and enjoy their company. But think carefully about what you are doing. You have said that you think of Beowulf as if he were your son. Be sure you leave your kingdom to your own sons when you die. Remember your brother, Hrothulf. If you die before he does, he will look after Denmark for our children. He will treat them well.'

The queen glanced over at her two sons, Hrethric and Hrothmund. Beowulf was sitting happily between the two brothers.

There were more gifts for Beowulf - gold, rings, and a magnificent torque.

The queen spoke to Beowulf:

Wear this torque for luck, and also this armor. I wish you luck throughout your life. Treat my sons kindly, because here in Denmark friends are loyal to each other.'

The feast continued. The warriors were drinking wine, and none of them knew the terrible things the future was bringing them. At last the feast came to an end, and guards were posted at the Hall. Everyone prepared to sleep, but they kept their armor and their weapons close to them. That was the custom.

Beowulf was not in the Hall. He had been given a bedchamber away from the other warriors.

While everybody slept, something horrible entered the Hall in the darkness. Suddenly the Hall was full of noise and shouting, and the warriors woke up. There was a moment's confusion. People did not know what was happening.

Then they understood. Grendel's mother was determined to avenge her son's death. She had already killed one warrior while everybody was sleeping. She had taken the body to her hiding-place outside the Hall. The dead man was called Aeschere, and he had been one of the king's best friends.

The Danes reached for their swords as quickly as they could. Now the demon grabbed her son's arm and shoulder and ran from the Hall.

In a few moments Beowulf came running into the Hall with his men. Hrothgar spoke to him:

'Suffering has come back. Aeschere is dead. He was my best friend, and always fought alongside me in our battles. This monster came in and murdered him. She must have decided to avenge Grendel's death. I don't know where she is hiding, but I have heard some stories from some of the lords who live a long way from the Hall. They say that people saw two of these monsters. One of them looked like a man - that was Grendel, whom you killed. The other one looked like a woman - that must be his mother. There is a strange place a few miles from here where the forest comes down to a mere. It is a forbidding place because the water burns. An animal that is being hunted will turn to face the hounds rather than dive into that water. You must go there, Beowulf, and see if you can find the demon.'

Chapter 5.

Beowulf replied to Hrothgar's words:

'Do not be sad, sir. It is better to avenge a friend's death than to cry over it. Let's go after this monster together. She won't escape, I promise you.'

Hrothgar was cheered by Beowulf's words. He called for his horse immediately, and the king left the Hall Beowulf and some warriors.

They rode into the forest, where they could see the tracks of the monster. They followed the trail until they came to the part of the forest where the mere was. Then they saw Aeschere's head lying on the ground in front of them.

The warriors looked around them. They saw monsters sitting on the cliffs above them. Then they looked down at the water, and saw that it was full of snakes. Beowulf shot an arrow at one of the snakes,' and they watched the horrible animal die in the water. Some of the warriors pulled the snake's body to the land.

Beowulf put on his armor. This would keep him safe from the monster when he fought it. He put on his helmet. Then he took a wonderful sword that had been given to him by Unferth. The sword was called Hrunting. No one who used that sword had ever been defeated. Unferth's gift of the sword to Beowulf proved that he was afraid to pursue the monster himself.

When he was ready Beowulf spoke to the king again:

'Remember what you promised me earlier, my lord. If I am killed in this battle, look after my men for me. And send the gifts you have given me to Hygelac. If I die, I want Unferth to have my own sword. The one he gave me I am taking with me to the battle.'

Then Beowulf dived into the foul water. He swam down for nearly a whole day before he could see the bottom.

The monster was immediately aware that a human being was coming towards her. She swam up and caught hold of Beowulf. Then she dragged the warrior down to the bottom. She took Beowulf to her court, holding on to him so tightly that he could not use his weapons against her.

When they arrived at the court Beowulf saw a great crowd of sea-monsters. They swam towards him and attacked him.

Beowulf sprang free from the monster and raised his sword. He brought the sword down on the monster's head, but nothing happened. The magic sword failed him. Beowulf threw it away in disgust.

The warrior knew that he would have to fight the monster with his own strength. He seized her shoulder and threw her to the ground. Grendel's mother got up quickly and caught hold of him again. Beowulf lost his balance and fell. The monster jumped on top of him and pulled out a knife. She tried to stab him, but Beowulf's armor was strong - it saved him from harm.

Now God gave Beowulf the victory. He rose to his feet and grabbed a sword that he saw in the monster's armory. It was a huge sword that no other man could lift. Beowulf picked it up and swung it at Grendel's mother. The sword struck her on the neck. She fell to the floor. Beowulf cut off her head.

Chapter 6.

Hrothgar and his men were still by the side of the lake, watching for any sign of Beowulf. Suddenly they saw a huge wave, and the water turned red with blood. Hrothgar's advisers shook their heads sadly. They thought the hero had surely met his death down there in the depths. They did not expect to see Beowulf come back to them.

The king and his men waited for some time longer, and then they went back to Heorot Hall. Beowulf's men, however, remained where they were. They had no hope that Beowulf would survive, but they stayed all the same.

At the bottom of the lake Beowulf watched as the sword he had used to kill Grendel's mother began to melt. It dissolved the same way that the frost dissolves when the sun is warm. Beowulf looked round the monster's court, and he saw a lot of rich treasure there. He took nothing with him when he left, however, except the monster's head and the sword hilt.

He swam upwards through the water. The snakes had gone now that the monster was dead, and the water no longer burned. Beowulf swam strongly for the land, pulling his heavy load behind him.

The Geats were full of joy when they saw their hero reach the land. They helped him to take off his armor, and to carry the monster's head. They put the head on a spear, and they set off for Hrothgar's Hall.

Beowulf showed the king the monster's head when he arrived at the Hall. He had won his victory, and spoke to the king:

'We are happy to bring you this sign of our victory. The battle under the water was a difficult one, and I nearly died down there. I could not have done it without God's help. Hrunting is a good sword, but it

failed me in the battle. Luckily, I found another sword, an old one, and it was with this that I killed the monster. Now you can sleep safely, I promise you. That terrible monster will not disturb you again.'

Beowulf gave the sword hilt to the king as a present. Hrothgar examined it carefully, and then he spoke:

'A king like me, who has promised to protect truth and to defend tradition, has the right to say that a warrior like Beowulf will achieve great things in his life. You are famous now, Beowulf, everybody knows who you are. And because I am wise, I want to share my wisdom with you.'

Then Hrothgar gave Beowulf this advice:

'It is wonderful how God allows a man to achieve many things and to become powerful in his own land. But then that man forgets that he has to die one day. He lives for pleasure, and thinks nothing of old age and sickness. He does not worry about his enemies. He sees the whole world obey him, and he becomes proud. He ceases to look around him. Then, one day, a killer comes after him, someone with a bow. The killer strikes at him and the proud man is hit in the heart. Now the demon comes to him, and makes everything bitter. Nothing has meaning for him anymore, and he ignores old customs. His body dies, and the man's goods are given to someone else who does not take care of them.'

The king looked at Beowulf for a moment, and then he went on:

'Do not fall into that trap, my friend. Put your trust in eternal things. Do not be proud of your strength, which does not last forever. Remember that you can be destroyed by sickness by the sword, or by old age. Death will come to you one day.'

Everyone was now listening to Hrothgar's words of wisdom. He went on:

'I was like that, you see. I ruled for fifty years. I defended my people with my sword. I thought that I had no more enemies. Then Grendel appeared, and he destroyed the land. I thank God I have seen this monster's head after all my sufferings.'

Chapter 7.

The next day Beowulf and his Geats prepared to leave Denmark. They were impatient to go back to their own country.

Beowulf gave Hrunting back to Unferth, and thanked him for the use of it. He said it had been useful to him, and he did not blame Unferth for its failure in the battle.

The Geats came into the throne room to salute Hrothgar. Beowulf spoke:

'We want to return now to our home. We have been welcomed here, and you have treated us well. If I can do anything more for you, my lord, I shall be ready to do it. If enemies come to your kingdom I will cross the sea once more to help you against them. I know King Hygelac will also be willing to help you if you need us. If your son Hrethric wants to travel and he comes to visit the Geats, he will find many friends there.' Hrothgar listened to Beowulf's words, and then he replied: 'God sent you those words, my friend. You are strong in body, and you are strong in mind. If anything bad happens to Hygelac, if some enemy should kill him, or some sickness destroy him, you would be an excellent king for the Geats. I like you, Beowulf. You have brought friendship between the Geats and the Danes, despite the hatreds of the past. I will be the Geats' friend as long as I live.'

Then Hrothgar gave Beowulf more treasures and told him to set out on his journey. The king embraced the hero, and tears were in the old man's eyes. He feared he would never see the hero again, and this thought made him sad.

Beowulf and the Geats marched to the sea. They passed the watchman, who rode up to say goodbye to them. Then they loaded their ship with Hrothgar's gifts and sailed away.

Their journey across the sea was a quick one, and they soon arrived home. The Geat watchman ran to welcome them home, and he moored their boat for them. Then the treasure was carried ashore, and Beowulf and his men went to King Hygelac's stronghold.

Hygelac greeted the hero and his men warmly. Queen Hygd passed the cup to each of them in a kindly way. Then the king began to

ask Beowulf about his exploits. He wanted to know everything that had happened. The king put his questions:

'What happened on your journey? Did you help Hrothgar?

Your adventure worried me, I was afraid for you. I thank God you have returned here safely.'

Now Beowulf answered the king's anxious questions:

'Everything was done well. Hrothgar welcomed us and asked us to sit with his sons in the Hall. He treated us well.'

Then Beowulf spoke about the enmity between the Danes and the Heathobards:

'Hrothgar's daughter, Freawaru, is going to marry Ingeld the Heathobard. They hope the marriage will make peace between the Danes and the Heathobards, but I am not so sure about that. How will the Heathobards feel when the Danes come to the wedding? The Danes will be wearing some of the armor they took from the Heathobard warriors when they defeated them. Some old Heathobard who remembers those days will look at the Danes. He will recognize a piece of armor that used to belong to an old friend who died in the slaughter. Then he will become bitter with his memories. He will say to the dead man's son, "That's your father's sword, young fellow - the one he wore the day he went to fight the Danes". Then the young man will get up and avenge his father's death. The Danes and the Heathobards will rise angrily to their feet. Ingeld will look at his young wife Freawaru and begin to hate her because of the violent past.'

Now Beowulf told King Hygelac about his encounter with Grendel. He described how he had fought the monster in Heorot Hall, and how he had killed him there. Then he described the fight with Grendel's mother, and the successful conclusion to it.

When Beowulf stopped speaking, he called for the gifts that he had received from Hrothgar. He presented these to Hygelac.

He gave the king the standard, the helmet and the armor, and the fine horses. He gave Queen Hygd the magnificent torque that Hrothgar's queen had given him. Beowulf kept nothing for himself. He behaved with full honor.

Chapter 8.

Beowulf's reputation among the Geats was great now. King Hygelac had not thought highly of the young hero before, but all that changed after he heard about Beowulf's adventures. The king rewarded him generously for his courage, giving him a sword and land.

The years passed, and the Geats became involved in wars with their enemies. Hygelac was killed in battle, and Beowulf became king. He ruled well for fifty years, and grew into old age with wisdom.

Now a new danger threatened the Geat kingdom. There was an underground barrow, which contained a great quantity of treasure. The treasure had belonged to a noble family a long time before, but the family had been destroyed in war. Alone survivor of their blood had buried their riches in the ground.

Three centuries earlier a dragon had found the place and made its home there. He guarded the treasure in peace and quiet. No one came to disturb the dragon's rest beneath the ground.

Now a foolish man went into the dragon's hiding-place and stole a jeweled goblet. The thief took the goblet back to his master, and told him where the treasure could be found.

The dragon awoke from his sleep and was furious at his loss.

He saw the tracks of human feet, and emerged from the barrow when it was dark. He breathed fire in his anger, and wanted his revenge. He attacked the people on the land, burning their homes and killing everyone he found.

The Geat nation was afraid of the terrible destruction that the dragon brought with him. They feared his attacks in the darkness, the flames and death he carried with him.

One day Beowulf heard bad news. The dragon had come to his own house and burnt the throne room.

Beowulf was troubled at the news. He thought he had offended God in some way. He decided to take his revenge against the dragon. He

was too proud to use his whole army in the battle, and he was not afraid of the dragon's strength. He thought he was stronger than the beast.

He remembered all his past adventures, and this gave him courage. He remembered his battles against Grendel and the monster's mother. He remembered how he had helped the Geats after their king Hygelac was killed. He had defeated the Geats' enemies with his sword, and had protected Hygelac's son Heardred. He had become king after Heardred's death. Later he had avenged that death. When he thought of all these things, he was not afraid.

Beowulf took eleven warriors with him, and went out to look for the dragon. By now he understood what had happened. He had found the thief who had taken the goblet, and he made that man come with him. He told the thief to show him where the dragon's barrow was. The thief led them to the coast, and showed them the place.

Beowulf sat at the top of the cliffs. He was sad because he felt that his death was near. He wished the Geats who had served with him good fortune in the future. Now he spoke to them:

'I have survived many dangers in my life. I came to the court when I was young, and I saw trouble among the king's family and war against our enemies. Hygelac gave me land to reward me for my loyalty to him. I always took my place at the front of the battle - and I shall fight like that until the end.'

Beowulf made a final promise to his men:

'I was often in danger when I was young. Now that I am old, I will risk it once again for the sake of glory. I will fight that dragon if he comes out of the barrow.'

Then the warrior hero said goodbye to his friends. He ordered them to remain where they were so that they could see the outcome of the fight.

Chapter 9.

Beowulf saw a stone arch at the entrance to the barrow. A stream of hot water flowed out of the entrance. It would be difficult for him to

fight the dragon inside there. He went towards the entrance and shouted a challenge to the beast. His voice echoed loudly in the barrow.

The dragon heard the human voice and was enraged. He emerged from the barrow, breathing fire as he came. He was ready for battle.

Beowulf stood ready for the beast with his sword and shield. The dragon turned around him, but the warrior hero did not flinch. Soon the dragon's flames covered the place where he stood. His shield did not protect him from the heat and smoke. He raised his sword and gave a mighty blow at the furious beast, but his sword did not stop the dragon.

The dragon continued to send out flames. Beowulf's sword had failed him, and he had to step backwards. It was not easy for him to retreat from an enemy. It was Beowulf's destiny that day to leave this life.

Now the dragon attacked again. Beowulf was in danger, and there was no help from his friends. All of them wanted to run away to save their lives. Only Wiglaf remained with the king. He called to his companions to stay and fight the dragon with him:

'We all promised to be loyal to our king, and he presented us with valuable gifts and weapons. Now he needs our help. Let's go to him and bring him safe out of the dragon's flame and fire.'

It was no use. Wiglaf's companions fled in fear. He drew his sword and moved forwards to Beowulf's side. He was a young man, and this was his first battle. He encouraged Beowulf with his words to him:

'Go on, my lord. Do everything you promised that you would. Your courage has made you a famous man. Defend yourself, and I will stand beside you.'

The dragon came forward once again, and Wiglaf's shield did not protect him from the heat. Beowulf covered him with his own shield. Then the warrior hero gathered his strength together and delivered a great blow with his sword. This time the sword broke over the dragon's head.

The dragon was eager for blood now. He breathed fire over Beowulf and ran in quickly. Then he bit deeply into the warrior's neck. Blood flowed from the wound. Beowulf was dying.

Wiglaf saw that the king's life was in danger. He stepped forward and plunged his sword into the beast's belly. Now the dragon bled, and his flames grew weaker.

Beowulf made a final effort. He drew out a knife from his belt. He stabbed the dragon in the side, killing his enemy. Wiglaf and Beowulf had destroyed the dragon.

Beowulf's wound began to hurt, and he realized that the dragon had poisoned him. He felt sick and weak, and he went to sit down. Wiglaf washed his wounds, and did everything he could to make Beowulf comfortable. Beowulf knew that he was dying, and he spoke to Wiglaf:

'I have ruled for fifty years. No enemy could frighten me. I always did the best I could, and was kind to my people. This knowledge comforts me now that I am dying. I have done nothing to make God angry with me.'

Then Beowulf gave Wiglaf his orders:

'Go and take out the treasure from the barrow. I want to see it before I die.'

Wiglaf hurried to obey the king. He went into the barrow, and there he saw the dragon's magnificent treasure. He picked up the treasure quickly and rushed back to Beowulf. He hoped that he would find the king alive when he returned to him. Beowulf opened his eyes and looked at the treasure. Then he spoke:

'I thank God that I have seen this treasure. Now I can leave it to my people when I die. You, Wiglaf, must look after them when I am gone. Order my soldiers to build a barrow on the cliffs near the coast. I want it high up on the cliffs, so that sailors will see it as they cross the sea. They will call it Beowulf's barrow.'

Then the king took off the golden collar that he wore. He gave it to the young man with these words:

'You are the last of us.'

Chapter 10.

Beowulf's companions who had run away from the dragon now came back.

They were ashamed, and they stood watching as Wiglaf tried to revive their king. Wiglaf looked up at them and spoke these words angrily:

'Beowulf gave you weapons and other gifts, but it was useless. When he needed you, you deserted him. Yet God allowed him to kill the dragon. I could not do much for him during the battle, but I tried to help him. I managed to wound the beast myself, but there were not enough of us.'

Wiglaf now spoke of his fears for the future:

'When our enemies hear about your cowardice today, they will come to destroy our nation. The Franks and the Frisians will soon know that our king is dead. They will soon come here with their warriors. The Swedes will come as well. When Beowulf was king he protected us and kept us safe. He looked after the people, but he was also a hero.'

Then Wiglaf told the warriors what they had to do. He said that Beowulf's funeral pyre should be a rich one. They should put the treasure he had won from the dragon onto it.

The warriors wept now as they looked down at the body of their king. Next to Beowulf they saw the body of the dragon. Nearby they saw the rich treasure from the barrow. After a few moments Wiglaf spoke again:

'It is often dangerous for a man to do as he wants. This is what happened here. Beowulf disturbed the dragon who was guarding this treasure. Our warrior hero found the treasure, but the cost was high. He died as a result of his search. He told me what to do before he died. He said that we should build a barrow for him on the cliffs.'

Wiglaf took the warriors into the dragon's hiding-place. They took out the treasure that was still there. Then they threw the dragon's body over the cliff into the sea.

Wiglaf now told them to prepare wood for Beowulf's funeral pyre. The Geat people built a great fire. They put shields and helmets on the

fire, as Wiglaf had instructed them to do. Then they placed Beowulf's body on top.

They lit the funeral pyre, and flames and smoke rose into the sky. The noise of the fire was greater than the sound the people made as they wept for their king.

A Geat woman began to sing about her pain and loss. She sang about her fears and her grief for the nation. She sang about the danger of invasion, the threat of enemies. She sang about the death of the Geats, their slavery and humiliation.

Then the Geats built a large barrow on the cliff. It was big enough for sailors to see from a long way away. It took ten days to finish the work. They took the dust that had been Beowulf, and they placed it inside the barrow. They buried the dragon's treasure next to their dead king.

Finally, twelve men rode around the tomb. They were all kings' sons and brave warriors. They sang a dirge for Beowulf, lamenting him as both a man and a king. They sang about his famous deeds, and they thanked God for his greatness. This was how the Geat people mourned their lord. They said that he had been the best king in the whole world, and that he had been very good to his people.

- THE END -

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