

Beowulf went to a house appointed for him.— But the warriors bared the benches, spread out their beds and bolsters, set their hard-rimmed shields at their heads, and lay down to sleep in the mead-hall. In their ringed mail-shirts they laid them down, ready for war, as was their custom in house and field; ready, if need should befall their lord. Good was the people. So darkness fell in the hall and the Hring-Danes slept, nor wot they that any were fated to die. But at midnight Grendel's mother arose from her dwelling in the cold streams, from her home in the terrible waters, and fiercely grieving for her son's death came and walked the beautiful pavement of Heorot. Greedy of revenge she clutched a noble, very dear to Hrothgár, and tare him in his sleep. Then while the Danes, waking in tumult, were yet smitten with the terror of her presence, she seized from its hanging-place the well-known arm and shoulder of her son, and passed out quickly with the prize. A great cry rose in the mead-hall. Beowulf and King Hrothgár heard it, and came hastily to Heorot.

When King Hrothgár knew what had been done, he said, 'O Beowulf, my friend; still sorrow for my people bindeth me. Aeschere, my counsellor and war-companion, hath been foully torn to death, nor can we tell whose shall be the next blood with which this new wolf-hearted fiend shall glut herself. Scarce a mile hence is her dwelling-place, a stagnant lake within a darksome grove of hoary-rinded trees whose snaky roots twine all about the margin, shadowing it. A foul black water, whereon fire dwelleth at night, a loathely lake wide-shunned of man and beast. The hunted stag, driven thither, will rather part from life upon the brink than plunge therein. Darest thou seek this place, to battle with the monster and deliver us?'

The son of Ecgtheow the Wægmunding answered, 'Yea I dare. For to avenge a friend is better than to mourn for him. Neither can a man hasten nor delay his death hour. Fate waiteth for us all; and he that goeth forth to wreak justice need not trouble about his end, neither about what shall be in the days when he no longer lives.'

Then King Hrothgár gave thanks to the mighty God, and caused a steed with curled hair to be bitted and led forth for Beowulf. With a troop of shield-bearers he accompanied

the hero along the narrow path across steep stone-cliffs overhung with mountain trees, till they came to the joyless wood and the drear water where Grendel's mother dwelt. Snakes and strange sea-dragons basked upon the turbid pool, and Nicors lay upon the promontories. Beowulf blew upon his horn a terrible war-dirge, and they sank and hid themselves. Then in his war-mail shirt which knew well how to guard his body from the clutch of battle, his white helmet, mail-hooded, on his head, and in his hand his hilted knife Hrunting, of trusty steel blood-hardened, Beowulf plunged into the slimy lake and the sea-wave closed above him. Long he swam downward into the dark abyss before he found the bottom. Grendel's mother lay in wait and grappled him in her claws, and bore him to her roofed sea-hall beneath the water, where gleamed a pale fire-light. Then Beowulf saw the mighty sea-woman, and furious, swung his heavy sword and brought it down with a crash upon her head. But the keen steel failed him in his need, for her hard skull turned its biting edge. So angrily flinging from him his twisted blade, and trusting wholly to his mighty hand-gripe, he caught the wolf-woman by the shoulders and bent her backwards to the floor. Fiercely she gave back his grappling, and wrestled him till from weariness he rolled and fell; then, drawing her brown-edged knife she sought at one blow to avenge her son. But the hard battle-net upon his breast hindered the entrance of the knife, and God who rules the firmament protected him, so that he gat upon his feet again. Then Beowulf saw hanging in the sea-hall a huge sword made by giants, a weapon fortunate in victory, doughty of edge, which none but he could wield. Hard grasped he the war-bill by the hilt, and whirled it savagely against the sea-woman's ring-mail in despair of life. Furious he struck, and the bone-rings of her neck gave way before it; so the blade passed through her doomed body, and, war-wearied, her carcase lay lifeless on the floor.

Long time with patience waited Hrothgár and his counsellors, looking into the dark lake where Beowulf went down. Noon-day came, and seeing the water stained with blood, they deemed their champion was dead, and sorrowfully gat them home.

But beneath the water was a great marvel.— Beowulf cut off the sea-woman's head, but so