

BEOWULF

This is a story about a king; a king who was bold and fierce and whose name was Hrothgar. One day, he made up his mind to build a wonderful hall. Stonemasons came and the banging of hammers and the chink of chisels filled the air. At last it was finished and it stood tall and firm on the edge of a misty fen. The king invited all the noblest lords in the land to a feast, and when it was finished, thirty of the king's bodyguard lay by the fire and slept.

In the darkness of the evil fen something stirred. It was a fiend from hell, cruel and slimy. Its wicked heart was darker than the darkest place that night. Even the moon refused to shine on it. The creature had huge claws, reddened with blood and breath that stank like the foulest of drains. As the creature slithered across the mud, it left a trail of blood behind it.

The fen was full of evil things that feared the light; rats as big as dogs swarmed about in packs killing and eating anything that got in their way. From the deepest and darkest of the pools in the fen this fiend from hell came. It made a noise in its throat like the crunching of bones. The other horrors of the fen turned in terror and fled when they saw its terrible head emerging.

A name was murmured on the warning wind, "Grendel, Grendel."

The awful creature began to slowly drag himself towards the hall.

In the morning, the wonderful hall was in ruins. The stout wooden door had been smashed down as if by a single blow and there was no sign of the thirty warriors that had slept there. The walls and floor of the hall were dripping with blood.

"Who has done this terrible deed?" said the king. "They will pay with blood of their own!"

"It was the monster, Grendel," a voice said, "and he will be back!"

Now sailors took the story of Grendel to many lands, and a young lord named Beowulf, who was known for his courage and daring, heard of the dreadful deeds of Grendel. He decided to go and help King Hrothgar, and he chose fourteen men to sail with him.

When they arrived, Hrothgar welcomed them with a sad heart, for so many brave lives had been lost in the fight against the terrible monster.

"If you have come to fight the monster Grendel, go home, for there is nothing anyone can do," said the king.

Beowulf laughed and such a laugh had not been heard in that hall for many a day.

"Well, if anyone can kill the monster," said the king, "I think it is you!"

Beowulf's men were tired after the journey and soon slept, but Beowulf watched and waited.

The night passed slowly, the torches began to burn low, but still there was no sign of Grendel.

At last, just before dawn began to break the dark, there was a sound like the splintering of bones or the breaking of ice underfoot. Then there was a terrible hissing, gasping, panting noise outside the door. The silence as if someone or something was just outside holding its breath and waiting to pounce.

Beowulf stood up and his voice rang through the raftered hall.

“Grendel,” he called. “Grendel, come down into this hall, for I am Beowulf. I am not afraid of you. I am Beowulf who has come here to kill you.”

The monster howled with rage, ripped down the wooden door with his claws and fell into the hall.

The first thing Beowulf noticed was the smell like the stench of rotting matter. It brought tears to his eyes and filled the hall like poisoned gas. The dark evil of Grendel was so huge and black that the smell came before anything your eyes could make out. He was a foul fog. A choking murk of evil, looming and slithering on the ivory floor. Then Beowulf saw coil after coil of slimy skin, mucid, spongy and dripping with the dreadful filth of the fen. There was a pair of green glaring eyes, slobbering lips and enormous claws stretching out to snatch a warrior from his sleep. Grendel grabbed his victim crunching the bones in his cavernous mouth.

As he slithered past them, the torches in the hall went out. Grendel gurgled with glee for the darkness was his home. Suddenly, light caught him. It was Beowulf! Grendel gave a dreadful scream as Beowulf touched him. Made of darkness, the good in Beowulf burned into him. Beowulf’s fingers felt like red-hot nails in his skin. Grendel shook to be free, but Beowulf would not let go. He began to speak and, though his voice was quiet, Grendel heard every word like thunder in his brain.

“Light holds you, Grendel. Light has you in its power. My fingers are like shining stars. I do not fear you Grendel. You must die.”

Grendel bellowed and thrashed; he tried every vicious trick he knew, but Beowulf stood firm. He grew angrier and angrier; he shook his arm and dashed it against the wall, trying to break away from Beowulf’s grip. He tried to jerk his arms free, but Beowulf wound his arms around a pillar and held firm.

Then there was a dreadful sound of flesh tearing and bones snapping. The monster’s arm had been pulled out of its socket! Grendel howled in pain and fear. The blood was pouring from his wound and he knew he must die.

Beowulf let him go and listened to the hideous howling of the monster slowly fading away across the fen.