

THE PEACE WEAVER: WEALHTHEOW IN *BEOWULF*

A thesis presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of
Western Carolina University in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

By

Jennifer Michelle Gardner

Director: Associate Professor Dr. Brian Gastle
Department of English

March 2006

© 2006 by Jennifer Michelle Gardner

Acknowledgments

Without the input and aid of Western Carolina University's English Department, this thesis would not have existed. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Gayle Miller, Associate Professor in British Literature and Composition, for presenting me with the original idea to write on Wealhtheow's life and for her valuable comments on my drafts. I would like to thank my thesis director, Dr. Brian Gastle, Associate Professor in Late Medieval Studies and Business and Technical Writing, whose time, energy, guidance, discussions, and feedback added extensive scholarly depth to my work. I would also like to thank Professor Deidre Elliott, Assistant Professor in Creative Writing, whose detailed and creative eye significantly strengthened the fictional aspects of my work, and Dr. Vicki Szabo, Associate Professor of History in Medieval Studies, whose knowledge of Scandinavian and Pre-Viking culture was an invaluable asset.

I am also grateful to my family, John, Jerilynn, Josiah, Jonathan, and Joel Gardner, whose encouragement and support assisted me through the trials this project presented, the friends who made me laugh and look at the world through fresh eyes, particularly Dana Henson and Dee Dee Vaughn, my boyfriend, Gregory Randall, for his questions, listening ear, and love, and to God who gave me fingers, eyes, and a brain.

Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract.....	v
Glossary	vi
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Arrival of the Peace-Weaver.....	29
Chapter Two: Noble Wife and Mother	65
Chapter Three: Woman of Intuition.....	102
Works Cited	161
Works Consulted.....	166

Abstract

THE PEACE WEAVER: WEALHTHEOW IN *BEOWULF*

Jennifer Gardner, M.A.

Western Carolina University (May 2006)

Director: Dr. Brian Gastle

This historical novella charts the events as they unfold within Beowulf through the eyes of the minor character Wealhtheow, Hrothgar's Helming Queen. The novella tries to remain as historically accurate to the culture of fifth and sixth century Scandinavia, for this is when most scholars agree the historical events of Beowulf unfolded. This fictional account of the Beowulf-poem presents the story within a different genre in hopes of creating an environment that is vivid and more easily accessible to modern readers, especially young adult readers, not only referencing Scandinavian culture but also the role of Anglo-Saxon women

Glossary

Ak – “Ah,” or “ok.”

Bairn – “Child.”

Bow – Front of the ship.

Bragafull – “Best cup” or “Chieftan’s Cup.” A drinking horn or cup used on ceremonial occasions.

Bjargrýgr – Midwife or birthing maid.

Comitatus – A term developed by the Roman historian Tacitus in his *Germania* which refers to a society or group of men who owe their allegiance to a king, lord, or chieftain and expect to be protected and rewarded for their loyalty.

Datter – “Daughter.”

Fader – “Father.”

Hangerock – Outer apron-like garment worn over ankle length wrap.

Hnefatafl – “King’s Table.” Precursor to chess.

Hnefi – The playing piece designated as “king” in Hnefa-tafl.

Hull – Hollowed out body of a ship.

Hunns – “Knobs.” These are pawn-like pieces in Hnefa-tafl.

Hvonn – Herb known more commonly as Angelica that is used to regulate the body through reducing pain and preventing the growth of bacteria. It also helps build blood and tastes like celery.

Já – “Yes,” “yea,” or “yes!” It is also used as an expression of consent.

Jung-frú – “Princess.”

Jung-herra – “Prince.”

Le-barn – “Infant,” or “baby.”

Lur – Long, thin, and straight trumpet made of wood.

Mainmast – Center mast in the middle of a ship.

Moder – “Mother.”

Nein – “No.”

Port – Left side of a ship.

Prow – Outward coil at the end of stern and bow.

Runá – “Runes.” Inscription used as a form of writing that was said to have been revealed by the gods.

Scop - Old English term for “poet.”

Starboard - Right side of a ship.

Stern – Rear of the ship.

Tafl – “Table.” An Old Norse general term referencing a variety of board games.

Takke – “Thanks” or “thank you.” Also means to be satisfied or grateful.

Thwarts – Fixed planks where rowers sat. Also known as rowing benches. These seats allowed passage along the middle of the ship.

Valkyries – Odin’s handmaidens who never fight in combat directly, but cheer men on and then take the chosen to Vallhalla, the home of the gods. Valkyries are

also known as Norns or Wyrds and they range in number, though nine are usually referenced.

Vödr – “Captain,” “chief,” “watcher,” or “caretaker.”

Weft – Thread on a loom

Wergild – “Man-price.” The amount payable to a victim’s family on the death or murder of a family member. This was either paid by the murderer or his or her family or both. The amount paid depended upon the status and importance of the individual killed. The wergild was established as a form of retribution to reduce the death that vengeance often caused.

Wyrd – Fate.

Introduction

My goal in writing this fictional novella is twofold: to make *Beowulf* more accessible to modern readers and to expound upon the less articulated female point of view in the poem. As a result, I try to create a culture that is as vibrant as the reader's own and transmit the plausible thoughts and actions of a woman living in Scandinavia during the fifth and sixth centuries. Thomas Prendergast states that "Beowulf has a bad reputation," because of the "lack of pleasure that readers take in the Anglo-Saxon work" (129). I want to change this perception for those who are familiar with *Beowulf* and for future readers of the poem.

Fiction, like nothing else, materializes foreign or imagined realms within a reader's mind, drawing on the imagination to help create the unfolding story and generating a world that is exceedingly personal and familiar. Because fiction writing functions in this way, it is highly conducive to the learning process, promoting facts and historical data that can effortlessly, successfully, and memorably be transmitted to readers of any age, but particularly to young adults.

The target audience for this novella is primarily the young adults who read *Beowulf* in High School or College. I envision this novella as a tool for educators who can use the story to further explore early Scandinavian history and issues within *Beowulf*. Beyond the realm of academia and teaching, the novella is largely fictionalized as to make it interesting to readers of any age who may not be studying *Beowulf* or have no

interest in the poem. The discussion of supernatural beings, the attack of monsters, and the battles and violence that the characters face create a science-fiction atmosphere that is vastly popular in today's media. As a result, the novella encompasses a broad audience.

Literary works are famous for their ability to map and preserve past events and cultures. Today's knowledge of the past is largely derived from literary works that have survived mankind's history. The epic poem *Beowulf* is one of the most widely read works of Old English literature and introduces several human themes, motifs, actions, and beliefs that are relevant to today's readers. Andrew Galloway asserts that "Beowulf explicitly presents human choice in an unusually wide range of spheres" (197). With the poem's emphasis on bravery, honor, loyalty, community, religion, transience, evil, and immortality, it reveals the culture of the Old Norse, Pre-Viking period in a very tangible way. Though *Beowulf* is classified as English literature, it deals with the world of early Germanic culture. Heather O'Donoghue succinctly states, "*Beowulf* is an Anglo-Saxon poem set in pre-Christian Scandinavia" (82). *Beowulf* offers a glimpse of Scandinavian life during the fifth and sixth centuries, a time when the English language was just beginning to form and adapt. While scholars, critics, professors, and historians alike have analyzed the epic poem in great detail, no creative writer has come close to enlivening *Beowulf* and placing it within a more modern, personal context than John Gardner in his fictional work *Grendel*.

Gardner focuses upon the symbolic and philosophic aspects of *Beowulf* in order to explore the essence and complexity of Grendel as a monster, revealing humanity's

chaotic disconnect from self and nature and the resulting monster that dwells within each human heart. Gardner powerfully recounts *Beowulf* through the inner struggles of Grendel, creating a complexity to the monster that was not seen in the original epic poem. However, as with the majority of *Beowulf* scholars, Gardner approaches the tale via the patriarchally defined culture of *Beowulf's* early Germanic period. In reading literary works from any age, particularly the earlier periods, the voice of women is often left unexpressed or is transmitted less audibly than the works of their male counterparts.

Examining *Beowulf* and dissecting the poem's breadth of scholarly and critical interpretation reveals that Wealhtheow's feelings and personality are largely unexplored. When scholars use, approach, or refer to Wealhtheow, her presence is used to emphasize the feuding nature of the masculine culture of that time, to represent the role of noble women, or to explore Anglo-Saxon names and their meanings. Wealhtheow is also examined as a representation of Hrothgar's hall, and according to Stacy Klein, queens such as Wealhtheow who wore "elaborate garb" signaled "the wealth and power" of their kingdom (59). As a noble woman living in the war-and-fame driven patriarchal society of early Scandinavia, Wealhtheow not only represents the female's duty to maintain peace between two warring tribes, but her appearance also signifies the status of the court.. In critiquing Michael Enright's book, *Lady with a Mead Cup: Ritual, Prophecy and Lordship in the European Warband from La Tene to the Viking Age*, Alexander Murray comments that Enright is convinced "of the importance of Wealhtheow's ritual and institutional position within the warband of her husband" (1055). Enright, and even

Murray, discuss Wealhtheow only as she relates to the cohesiveness of the community of warriors, and while they view her role as important for the unity and presentation of the court, they do not see her as separate or outside of the society that defines her. In contrast, my novella strives to portray Wealhtheow as a dynamic character whose female individuality is essential within *Beowulf*.

Marijane Osborn comments, “Earlier Germanic literature shows that traditionally the wife was the councilor in the marriage relationship and that it was her duty to speak to her husband-indeed, to each man in her family-about his social responsibilities” (298). Consequently, it is Wealhtheow’s task to speak to the men in the mead hall and remind them of their obligations to king, family, and culture. Within my novella, Wealhtheow speaks freely in the hall because it is part of her role as a queen to do so. This is also why she ends her speech after Hildeburh’s lay with the admonition for the men to do as she bids. As Osborn points out, Wealhtheow is recalling the responsibilities of the warriors and exhorting the men to abide by their oaths. Francis Butler remarks that it was the function of the queen in early Germanic tribes to foster “social harmony through active diplomacy and conciliation” (779). Through her words, Wealhtheow is able to exert the greatest degree of influence in promoting peace.

In his analysis of Wealhtheow, Frederic Amory states, “The reason that the primitive Germans attended to the counsels and sayings of their women (as Tacitus reports) was presumably that the women’s utterances were regarded as inspired rather than as especially ‘intelligent’” (533). Amory’s discussion of Wealhtheow places her

solely within a domestic sphere, and he does not view *Wealhtheow*'s speech or dispensing of mead as very significant or thought-provoking. Pat Belanoff responds to Amory by stating that "The women of Old English poetry have been neglected for too long" and that "much of the richness of the Heorot scene evaporates if we dismiss the ritual overtones" (534). My novella follows the life of an early Germanic woman in hopes of presenting the individual and cultural view that women held during a period where, as Belanoff concludes, the life of Old English women was largely unexplored.

Marilynn Desdmond also maintains that "standard literary histories for the Anglo-Saxon period do little to acknowledge the presence and tremendous importance of women in Anglo-Saxon culture, as authors, characters, or voices" (575). Such a gap in the knowledge of these women's lives has begun to decrease as scholarly research conducted by critics such as Gillian Overing, Marijane Osborn, Helen Damico, and Jenny Jochens have focused on bringing the thoughts, customs, and duties of these women to light. With the growing literary interest and work on the lives of early Germanic and Anglo-Saxon women, a fuller picture of Old Norse and Old English life is constructed.

Desdmond continues "every member of Anglo-Saxon culture was measured by his or her social bonds within the kinship networks of the community," and it was not just women who were confined to the roles assigned to them by their culture (584). Men were warriors, peasants, or lords whose main duty was loyalty to their king, culture, and family. Desdmond states of women that though they were given autonomy and their duties and responsibilities within their home gave them power, women of noble birth

such as Wealhtheow were excluded from “occupying equally with men the central positions of power within the heroic world of the *comitatus*” (585). Though males heeded the words of women, women were rarely, if ever, given a role equal to men within their society. For this reason, Wealhtheow clings to her position as peace-weaver and makes use of the greatest tool available to her, her words.

Representing Wealhtheow as an individual requires a reconciliation of several debated issues left open to interpretation in the poem such as the origin and meaning of her name, the location of her tribe, her role within family life, and the reasons behind her speeches and actions within Hrothgar’s hall. In resolving these issues, I side with the majority of scholarly opinion, trying to remain true to the poem and the historical culture of the period. While *Beowulf* does not present enough evidence to conclude where Wealhtheow is from or how she received her unusual name, the poem does state that Wealhtheow is gracious and dutiful and that her main goal is to appease and soften the character of the warriors and lords.

In *Beowulf*, Wealhtheow is described as non-Danish and of the race of the Helmingas or Helmings, which are part of the Wulfing (Wolfing/Wuffing/Ylfing) tribe (Klaeber 24 and 436; Heaney 43). Although as a queen, Wealhtheow would have more rights and privileges than women of lower classes, her situation epitomizes the plight of the Old English woman: an individual trapped between familial and social expectations, a conflict that many modern women (and some modern men) struggle with today.

Though *Beowulf* is accepted as an English poem, the country of England is not even mentioned. Traditionally, *Beowulf* is thought to be an Old English poem because of its English rhythm and alliteration, and critics such as C. L. Wrenn and Klaeber focus on the possible familial ties Wealhtheow may have had with the Angles who invaded and settled England. In studying the writings of Bede, Wrenn states that the first Anglo-Saxon rulers were Wulfings from East-Anglia (318), and Klaeber speculates that Wealhtheow's lineage may have been Anglo-Saxon and that therefore she may have represented the future character and nobility of England's citizens (Klaeber xxx). As a result of these scholarly opinions, I also believe that Wealhtheow's lineage was Anglo-Saxon and that her relatives may have been one of the first groups to invade England.

I do not place Wealhtheow in Sweden, or assign her to a Frankish tribe, as other scholars have done (Damico 63). Instead, I am convinced by the opinion shared by critics such as Helen Damico and even Klaeber, who place the origin of the Wulfings in the Southern coastal region of the Baltic peninsula (64). In this way, Wealhtheow's family would have direct access to the English continent as well as close relations with the Germanic tribes that initially invaded the Celtic land of Britain. While Wealhtheow's origin is uncertain, to place her close to Denmark as well as Gotland would explain the Geatish feud with the Helmings as well as Hrothgar's willingness to resolve that feud, an action made more beneficial if his own wife belonged to the Wulfing tribe.

The events in *Beowulf* unfold in only two locations, Daneland and Geatland, and in deciding where to place Wealhtheow, I also had to decide where Heorot and Beowulf

were located. The Geats are believed to have resided in Southern Sweden and several scholars such as Jane Leake hypothesize that Beowulf lived in Gotland, an island in the Southernmost part of Sweden whose name was derived from its Geatish inhabitants (73). For the purpose of my novella, I place Beowulf's home in Gotland, close enough to be informed of the happenings in Denmark, yet removed from Heorot's immediate feuding and sphere of influence.

The location of Heorot was harder to decide upon because of the disputed setting of Hrothgar's hall. The two most popular sites for Heorot are the towns of Roskilde and Gamma Lejre (Overing 2). According to Overing and Osborn, Hrothgar's Latin derivative is Ro, and one could make the case for Ro's kilde, or Hrothgar's house, as the meaning of Roskilde (21). However, both Overing and Osborn state that Roskilde was probably derived from the Latin word for horse, *hross* (21) and side with the majority of scholars who place Heorot at Gammel Lejre (2). Gammel Lejre is a six mile journey from the coast of Denmark and is more inland than Roskilde (12), which is why I place Heorot at Gammel Lejre. I also appreciate John Gardner's choice in *Grendel* to locate Heorot on a mountain as a sign of glory and justice (47) and desired to place Heorot on the crest of a mountain in a position of honor and safety. However, there are no mountains in Denmark. Despite this fact, the Beowulf poet discusses mountains in describing Grendel's location. Tuso's translation refers to "mountain streams" (*fyrgen-stream*) (24 1393). Heaney's version has "upward groves" (97 1393), while Chickering's contains "wooded mountain," though both are referred to as *fyrgen-holt* (129 1393).

Because Denmark was so flat, any rise would be viewed with great significance. For this reason, and also to remain as historically accurate as possible, I locate Heorot on a hill.

The next main challenge in creating this fictional account was to invent a possible solution to the problem of Wealhtheow's name. Thomas Hill states that Wealhtheow's "name seems utterly inappropriate for a woman in Wealhtheow's position" (107), and her name "implies that her family and associates continue to be mindful of her foreign and servile origins" (107). I briefly entertained the idea that Wealhtheow may have been captured in a Danish raid as Ruth Mazo Karras (47-51), Fred Robinson (37-39) and Helen Damico (63) also discuss, but dismiss this idea because the peace-weaving nature of Wealhtheow's alliance with the Danes implied a deliberate and purposeful union. On the other hand, I still portray how women were often taken captive and married if found to be of noble blood through the description of Wealhtheow's mother as a captive. I also use this explanation of the status of Wealhtheow's mother to explain the meaning of Wealhtheow's name (*wealh* meaning Celt, foreigner, slave, or servant and *theow* meaning in bondage, servile, or not free, though her name can also be translated as "servant of the chosen") (Damico 59-65; Hill 107). Critic Ruth Karras comments that within the Scandinavian and early Germanic culture, children of mixed marriages adhered to the Roman law in which the child followed the status of the mother (51). Consequently, as a captive, Wealhtheow's mother could best lament and describe her situation through naming her daughter.

The names of the other characters listed in the novella are either taken directly from *Beowulf* or from contemporary tribal and geographical names. I assign the name of Handir to Wealhtheow's father because Handir is said to be the son of Hundor and great-great-grandson of Helm, and this information is taken from Tolkein's timeline in his discussion of the Helmings. The names of Wealhtheow's children, Hrethric, Hrothmund, and Freewaru, are derived from the poem, as are the warriors Wulfgar, Aeschere, and Yrmenlaf, the advisor Unferth, and the name and lineage of Hrothgar's nephew Hrothulf who will eventually kill Hrethric and seize the throne.

Wealhtheow's mother's name, Aland, is based upon the Aland Islands belonging to Finland, equating her with heritage and the conquered and dominated aspect of land. Islands are surrounded by water and I also chose this name because I emphasize the role of water within my story. Researcher Miranda Green states that water was "seen as the foci of the life-force," and that "Water represented liminal space, locations at the interface of earthly and supernatural worlds" (89). I gave Wealhtheow's mother a name that would emphasize Wealhtheow's plight as a woman controlled by social customs and a woman with an intuitive, visionary spirit.

It is not surprising that within this society Wealhtheow's main focus would be fulfilling her peace-weaving duties and ensuring the future happiness and reign of her two sons who are both Helming and Danish. Wealhtheow is all too aware of the importance of her role as woman, queen, and peace-weaver, and she strives to balance her wisdom, grace, and deliberation with orders, boldness, and action. I envision

Wealhtheow not only as a woman of great integrity and decorum, but as a woman unafraid to be assertive and exert influence.

There is also a mystical aura to Wealhtheow as she speaks and acts within the poem. Tacitus comments that the Germans often believed women possessed a sacred or prophetic quality (Benario 23), and I hint at this perception from the very beginning of the novella. For this reason, the story opens on the water, for water is the perfect representation of transition, depth, and mystery. Like Miranda Green, scholar Craig Davis comments that water connects the earth with hell and is a representation of the underworld or otherworldly experience (Davis 93). This concept is mirrored in *Beowulf* with the watery mere as a representation of Grendel's home.

I also attempt to portray Wealhtheow's womanly intuition through the visions she has in the first two chapters and with her actions, words, and thoughts in the third chapter. Within the novella, the visions in the graveyard and at the onset of Freewaru's birth serve to highlight Wealhtheow's role as a prophetess and indicate the future destruction of the Danish empire by Grendel, Hrothulf, and King Ingeld of the Heathobards. In the graveyard, Wealhtheow envisions the dead men rising to life in order to fight an approaching army of red. The dead Danish soldiers represent the return to war and violence that once permeated the Danish landscape before Hrothgar's rule, the future death of Denmark's finest warriors, and the ultimate failure of Hrothgar's toil for peace. This vision is brought to life with the Danish warriors' hunting of the boar,

indicating their enjoyment in the hunt and desire for and complacent attitude toward death.

Wealhtheow's second vision comes just before she gives birth to Freewaru, which is significant since both noble females are linked together in the same fate, that mirrored in the story of the peace-weaver Hildeburh whose attempts to bring peace ultimately fail. Within this vision, shadows and flames engulf an entire hall, indicating that evil comes from within and outside of the human heart and can completely consume an individual and their society. This theme is carried into the third chapter where Wealhtheow gains more self-confidence and becomes Hrothgar's chief advisor and confidant. Despite the external conflicts and fears, Wealhtheow remains calm and supportive of her husband, intuitively aware that the Danes will be rescued from Grendel, but not from themselves.

These visions also serve as a means of portraying Wealhtheow's emotions. In order to reveal Wealhtheow's character to the reader and keep the focus on her, Wealhtheow travels to Denmark in a separate boat from Hrothgar, apart from Hrothgar's importance as king. Although Wealhtheow was raised to adhere to proper customs and to be demure yet visual in her role as princess and future queen, there is no doubt she felt nervous and unsure of herself as the new queen of the Danes. Consequently, having her travel alone would underscore her frame of mind as well as center the story on her. With chapter one, Wealhtheow's desire to serve the Danish warriors on the ship and her interactions with warriors and peasants portray her uncertainty and eagerness to please the Danes and be accepted as their queen.

In contrast to chapter one, chapter two follows Wealhtheow as a mother who has settled comfortably into her new life. Wealhtheow's acceptance into the Danish hall hinges upon her ability to fulfill her duties, most notably, her duty to bear children. Since Wealhtheow has fulfilled her duties, she has been warmly embraced into the Danish culture. Also within chapter two, the imagery of shadows is used to foreshadow not only Grendel's attack, but also Hrothulf's future betrayal, a theme carried into chapter three. Within chapter three, Wealhtheow has been seasoned with age and displays a maturity and wisdom that was not present in the previous two chapters. I indicate Wealhtheow's growth as a woman, individual, and queen in that she is able to reflect upon her own position, the position of her children, and to recognize the tension present in Heorot that will lead to its destruction.

It is impossible to fully characterize Wealhtheow without depicting the characters with whom she interacts. As her husband, Hrothgar's nature would have the most impact upon her. In rendering Hrothgar, I was conscious to present him during different stages of his reign. Before Grendel's attacks, he is confident, cocky, and full of virility and strength in his desire to build Heorot and establish peace. Because *Beowulf* emphasizes Hrothgar's struggle for peace, I not only picture him as a firm authoritarian and mighty ruler whose bravery earns the respect of his men, but also as a dreamer and idealist whose compassionate nature really guides him. I capture this dichotomy in Hrothgar's dealings and speeches with Wealhtheow, his children, nephew, and men. Once Grendel attacks, the struggle to keep peace and the passing of time wear away Hrothgar's physical

strength as well as his determined spirit, though Hrothgar is never broken enough to stop fighting against or to accept the violence and fear Grendel brings to Heorot. Clare Lees maintains that “The great heroic poems of the period celebrate the male body as a conflicted locus of violence, division, and male homosocial bonding,” where “Warriors fight, then embrace, or embrace while fighting” (“Engendering” 21). Therefore, Hrothgar’s duality of character is not that unusual, though his goal for peace and unity is a remarkable one considering his ancestry and social customs.

The roles of Hrethric and Hrothmund, Hrothgar’s and Wealhtheow’s sons, serve to keep the reader conscious of Wealhtheow’s constant concern for the well-being of her family and sons, an impetus that moves her to speak the way she does after Hildeburh’s tale. The two sons reveal the traits most often admired in males of early Germanic cultures: bravery and loyalty. I view the father-son relationships as tight knit and a mirror of the comitatus relationships the king had with his warriors. As such, Hrothgar supports his sons in their endeavors, seen with his excitement over the horse race Hrethric wins. Since Hrethric is the firstborn son who is expected to succeed to the throne, I portray him as more assertive and eager for action than the younger son, Hrothmund, whose nature is more peace-loving like that of his father. In this way, I emphasize the line of succession and the idea that Hrethric and Hrothulf are consistently at odds as they grow older.

Though he is the king’s nephew, Hrothulf is treated like a son by both Hrothgar and Wealhtheow, despite the fact that Wealhtheow never establishes a firm connection with him, further emphasizing her role as a prophetess. Because Hrothulf is a young

child when he is taken in by Hrothgar, I imagine him viewing Hrothgar as a type of savior and father-figure and wanting to imitate Hrothgar's behavior. However, even as a little boy, Hrothulf's antagonistic, headstrong, and violent temperament cannot be suppressed, and these cultural traits only become stronger with age. Like his father and grandfather before him, Hrothulf is concerned with his own position and has no problem using violence to achieve his aims. He begins to long for the fame, glory, and power Hrothgar's throne represents and will inevitably fall into the war-torn cycle that characterizes and destroyed many Old English communities.

Unlike her brothers and cousin, Freewaru's character exists in the background of the story, for though she is noble, she is a young female who does not wield much authority or influence. I portray Freewaru devotedly learning her duties as a young lady and a peace-weaver, paralleling her with Wealhtheow and Hildeburh. Natalia Breizmann states that "the Ingeld/Freearu episode offers a critique of political alliances formed through matrimonial ties," and that along with Hildeburh's tale, Freewaru's looming marriage "emphasizes the tragic nature of violent blood feuds" (1031). In this way, Freewaru's tale of woe will overshadow Hildeburh's and the calamity of her fate is briefly mentioned within *Beowulf*. I also give Freewaru the intuition of her mother, particularly in the sacrificial scene at the end of chapter two. Though she is still a baby, Freewaru is a product of her society and the future perpetuation of the largely unsuccessful practice of wedding daughters to enemies. During this scene, Freewaru begins to cry because she, symbolically and intuitively, realizes that Grendel's violence

has brought to light the human violence and evil that Hrothgar tried to expel from Heorot. As a female, Wealhtheow understands Freewaru's outcry, and she comes to understand that the same spirit of vengeance and murder that rules Grendel lies within her own household and culture.

Scholars generally agree that Unferth, like Grendel and Hrothulf, is a negative figure. Michael Enright views Unferth's characterization as troublesome, and explains that "There is much criticism of Unferth but no dependable testimony to establish a secure reading," pointing out that "Disputes about his behavior and character were already dividing scholars in the nineteenth century" (297-298). Enright states of James Rosier that he believed Unferth to be "a quarrelsome braggart;" Norman Eliason suggests Unferth is "a mere jester," and Fred Robinson sees him as "a blustering mean-spirited coward" (297). In describing him, I adhered to these traditional views of Unferth as cowardly and quick-tempered. I demonstrate these two traits in Unferth's treatment of the servant boy toward the end of chapter one, and I also paint him as resentful in his interactions with Wealhtheow. Symbolically, Unferth's character is also represented by his sword, Hrunting, which fails Beowulf in his fight against Grendel's mother. Enright comments that "the poet wishes the sword to indicate its owner," emphasizing the "magical link between warriors and their swords" (316). Just as Hrunting is powerless and falls short in its capacity, Unferth is also "false" (318).

Scholar Craig Davis insightfully comments of Unferth, that "Hrothgar's most intimate advisor, who sits at the king's feet, is the serpent in the heart of Heorot. In

Unferth burns the hateful spirit which now haunts the hall” (111). Unferth likes to hear the sound of his own voice and enjoys taking credit for what others have done. He continually places himself in the spotlight, and his past actions of killing his own brothers parallels Grendel’s murderous nature. It is puzzling why Hrothgar, in his quest for peace, would allow a man such as Unferth to hold a high position in his hall. I believe the reason for Unferth’s position is because he, despite his faults, appears loyal to Hrothgar, and it is this loyalty that holds the community together and is a trait that the monster Grendel could never comprehend.

In Unferth’s questioning of Beowulf’s bravery, Enright states, that as “the warband spokesman,” it was his “official duty” to question “newly arrived guests” in the desire to defend and secure the hall (310). In this light, Unferth’s challenge of Beowulf’s bravery becomes less severe, though it still reveals Unferth’s role as a dubious counselor. Enright insightfully suggests that “much of the fault for the extremes of paganism among the ancestors lay with bad counselors and, above all, with men like Unferth,” adding that the people of that time were “misled by the eloquence and false teachings of pagan poet-priests” (337). As seen with his actions and the ineffectual use of his sword, Unferth is a counselor who has been corrupted by pride and the desire for power. He will do all that is necessary to maintain the position under Hrothgar’s feet that he has attained for himself.

In characterizing the people of Denmark, I remain true to what is known of peasant life. Because peasants were subjected to several different rulers with various

temperaments and lived within a war-torn era, I picture them as are either indifferent to Wealhtheow's arrival or eager to please her in their attempt to gain more status and power, as with the obsequious storekeeper. I also contrast the status and role of a lower class peasant woman to Wealhtheow's position, alluding to the fact that women were treated like property and were often bent under the weight of chores and duties they had to perform. With the attack of Grendel, I display how Grendel's presence causes the underlying greed, envy, and fear of those in the mead hall to surface, upholding the theme of latent evil within each human heart that Gardner also perpetuates.

In chapter three, Beowulf arrives and combats the turmoil that Grendel's attacks invoked in the Danes. Bruce Mitchell remarks that "with the coming of Beowulf," there is once again "revelry within Heorot" and that "Heorot is alive" (4). Beowulf is the epitome of what his society is built upon. He is aware of decorum and the importance of bravery, fame, and loyalty. I depict him as eloquent, charming, and sure of himself and his abilities, almost to the point of seeming prideful. Manish Sharma observes that Beowulf "must move beyond the human limits in order to have the capacity to combat the monstrous forces that threaten the social order; yet this very movement is identified with the pride and murderous, antisocial rage from which the monstrous corpus itself originates" (264). Particularly when Beowulf returns to Heorot with Grendel's head, I cast him as prideful, a normal feeling for a man who has just defeated fierce opponents, and this trait explains Hrothgar's consequent sermon against pride. In visiting Denmark,

Beowulf not only ends Grendel's raids, he also puts an end, at least for a time, to the human contention that erupted in Heorot with Grendel's bloodshed.

Several plot decisions, questions, and discrepancies also had to be resolved in recounting *Beowulf*. Unlike Gardner's *Grendel*, Hrothgar and Wealhtheow are married before Grendel's attacks. The reason I did not follow *Grendel*'s timeline is because Hrothgar's children are still young when Beowulf delivers them from Grendel, though they are not little children since Freewaru's marriage is looming in the future. Since Klaeber places Freewaru as the third child born to Hrothgar (xxxix) and Grendel attacks the mead hall for twelve years, Hrothgar and Wealhtheow most likely would have been married before Grendel attacked Heorot. Another reason for establishing the marriage before introducing Grendel was to display, and then contrast, the characterization of both Hrothgar and Wealhtheow as they change individually and together, Hrothgar becoming older and less confident and Wealhtheow becoming more mature, confident, and in control of herself and her situation as a mother and advisor.

I also reconcile the Christian and pagan elements in the poem through Hrothgar's acquaintance with Christianity. Galloway asserts that the *Beowulf*-poet explores "the middle ground of social and political choice, common to Christian and pre-Christians and collectively created if not individually controlled by human beings" (206). While the majority of Scandinavia would not have heard of the Christian God, since Christianity was not heavily propagated until about 597 with the reform of Pope Gregory the Great (Morgan 67), the Romans did practice Christianity, and, as a king, Hrothgar would surely

have traveled and come in contact with the Roman influence. Nicholas Howe claims that Rome functioned as the capital for early Anglo-Saxon England in its politics and culture (Howe 154), and therefore it is not unbelievable that Hrothgar would be familiar with the Roman idea of Christianity. I imagine Heorot to be similar to the splendor of the Roman architecture of the time, and it is plausible that Hrothgar, in his desire to imitate the finer aspects of life as seen with his hall, would also imitate the religion of the Romans.

Therefore, I place him on the edge of Christian belief, for though he worships the Christian God, he is not opposed to belief in and worship of the other gods of that period, particularly the spear-wielding, war god Odin and his son, the thunder god, Thor.

O'Donoghue comments that "We know little about Odinic sacrifice – as indeed one might expect from a literary culture written up in Christian times" (88). Since *Beowulf* was written during a time when Christianity was heavily propagated, the intricacies of pagan worship would have been lost or ignored. In the sacrificial scene to Odin at the end of chapter two, I use what facts I could uncover, namely that stallions were sacrificed to Odin, spears were used, and the use of armbands were significant, and then rely upon imagination to describe what may have transpired at a pagan sacrifice.

When Hrothgar refers to God, I capitalize God's name because Hrothgar believes in Christianity, whereas when Wealhtheow and others discuss God, I use a lower case g. This difference in capitalization serves to emphasize that Hrothgar clings to the Christian God more than the other figures in the poem. Samuel Riley discusses Mary P. Richard's and Howell D. Chickering Jr.'s analysis of lines 3180-82 in which they conclude that

Beowulf, as generous and brave, was a Christian figure. Instead, Riley comments that *Beowulf* is a “blend of earthly and heavenly virtues,” and that these lines dealing with Beowulf’s character do not present Beowulf “as a paradigm of Christian excellence,” but “work in harmony...to complete a portrait of a hero who exemplifies the two best traits of an ideal Germanic ruler” (2-3). The religious paradox I present in this novella serves to emphasize the human condition, for just as the *Beowulf*-poet and Gardner focus upon the violent and destructive heart of man, I too focus upon this aspect, reiterating the idea that man is constantly trying to attain meaning through a level of greatness, immortality, or fame.

This thematic element of religion is also represented by the Brossing or Brisingamen necklace that Wealhtheow wears, which symbolically places Wealhtheow on the same level as Freya, the goddess of love, fertility, and battle for whom the necklace was made. Wealhtheow’s necklace enhances and defines both her character and the plot, for Wealhtheow’s duty is to bring peace and love to Heorot, to bear children, and to protect her children and the Danish interest. Wealhtheow avails herself of all three qualities and battles with her words in order to ensure the succession of her sons as the rightful heirs of Heorot and the Danish kingdom. Helen Damico discusses the multifaceted role Wealhtheow plays as hostess, prophetess, wife, queen, bride, and warrior (6). Damico compares Wealhtheow to the mythical and supernatural Valkyries, the servants of Odin who often initiate, perpetuate, and determine the violence of war (14). As with the Valkyries, Wealhtheow’s words often spur the action of the poem

forward and foreshadow the future of the Danes and Denmark. When Wealhtheow gives the Brossing to Beowulf, she is not only thanking Beowulf for his deeds and favoring him as a Valkyrie would favor a champion, but she is also requiring that he honor the rights of her sons to the Danish throne and even ensure their smooth transition to that throne. Modern readers may parallel Wealhtheow's actions to that of a bribe, and in a way, it was.

Wealhtheow gives birth to her daughter in the second chapter in order to remind the reader of Wealhtheow's chief duty to produce heirs. Clare Lees notes that "Marriage, sexuality, and the politics of reproduction- of heirs and of empires- are intimately connected," and that "procreation is uppermost (and upperclass!)" ("Signifying" 10). Jenny Jochens described a normal birth for women of Old Norse society. She writes that only women were present and that the normal position was for women to kneel on the floor (80). Once the birthing process was over, the maid presented the baby to the husband. According to Jochens, "Assuming the father accepted the child, it was brought back to the mother and fed" (82). For this reason, Freewaru is presented to Hrothgar before Wealhtheow is properly introduced to her, because the husband had to accept each baby into the household. Carol Clover also comments that "until the infant was officially incorporated into the family, it was in spiritual limbo and could be killed with impunity" (105). Only with Hrothgar's consent could Freewaru be named and fed, and only once she was fed and named was she thought to be human and given a soul.

Another issue I consciously raise is why Grendel never attacks the royal family. Because *Beowulf* explicitly states that Grendel never attacks Hrothgar or enters the royal chamber, unlike in Gardner's story, I explain the reason for this within my novella. Hrothmund states that Grendel is a cursed creature, while Wealhtheow comments that the royal family is protected by the gods and speculates that Grendel may yet fear the power of man. Since Hrothgar represents and contains that power, Grendel, as a descendent of Cain, could possibly, in some form, recognize the idea of divine protection and the divine right of kings, despite Hrothgar and his men's inability to combat him. Conversely, Grendel may not have the mental capacity with which to realize that he could have raided further into the hall or even torn the hall apart, acting instead like an animal who instinctively returns to the spot where he finds men to eat and murder.

Once Beowulf arrives to rid the hall of Grendel, it may appear rude that Wealhtheow does not serve him first. Within every translation of *Beowulf* I researched, Wealhtheow serves the Danes first before moving to the Geats, though it would seem that the Geats would be served directly after king Hrothgar and that Beowulf would be served first among the Geats. However, the poem does not follow this modern day logic on formality, and the reason for this may have been to allow the Geats time to settle comfortably into the hall and into Danish customs as well as to provide the Danes opportunity to welcome and toast the Geats' arrival.

Because of Wealhtheow's gender, she would have missed many conversations that are discussed in *Beowulf*. I resolve this issue through use of pillow talk where

Hrothgar and Wealhtheow talk over their feelings on the day's events. In this way, I am able to discuss issues that Wealhtheow may not have witnessed. In particular, Wealhtheow is said to enter the hall after Unferth challenges Beowulf's bravery in his swimming match with Brecca. Later that night, I have Wealhtheow ask Hrothgar about Unferth's angry attitude. Hrothgar tells Wealhtheow of what transpired while she was gone. This pillow talk also allowed me an opportunity to further develop Unferth's personality as well as Wealhtheow's through her suggestion about why Unferth challenged Beowulf, and to postulate a reason for Unferth's attack on Beowulf's honor.

In the saga of Finn, which laments the fate of the peace-weaver Hildeburh, I juxtapose Hildeburh's position to Wealhtheow's and even Freewaru's. In keeping with the goals of my novella to reach the young adult audience, I paraphrase lyrics from Seamus Heaney's translation of *Beowulf*. Joseph McGowan comments that only Heaney's translation is so open, and its place in the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, "will introduce a good many readers to the poem for the first time" (41-42). The lyrics make the song less confusing and more dramatic for the reader. I use this song as the impetus for Wealhtheow's speech in which she demands that her sons be treated with respect and inherit the Danish throne. Mitchell notes, "direct succession from father to son was not automatic; indeed Hrothgar himself succeeded his brother Heorogar at the expense of the latter's son Heoroward" (13). Wealhtheow desires to see a more successful outcome than Hildeburh, and this is why she cannot sit quietly after Hildeburh's tale is told. Whereas Hildeburh is forced into silence, Wealhtheow is given a

voice and she uses it to express her concern over Hrothulf's, and even Beowulf's, treatment of her sons and the fear that her sons will not inherit their rightful place as Danish king and lord.

With the introduction of Grendel's mother, Wealhtheow begins to contemplate the lengths she would go to demand vengeance for a dead son, and although Grendel's mother destroys the traditional view of females as peace-weavers, Wealhtheow, who upholds the traditional female role, sympathizes with this female monster in her affection for her offspring. In sympathizing with the monster, Wealhtheow realizes the potential for evil not only within Hrothulf, but also within her own sons and herself.

One of the most puzzling aspects of the poem is the sword hilt Beowulf presents to Hrothgar after the defeat of Grendel's mother. Manish Sharma postulates that because Hrothgar was largely pagan and steeped within the pagan traditions of his society, the inscription on the hilt defined "the boundaries of pagan comprehension," and relayed a Biblical tale whose complex meaning was beyond Hrothgar's grasp (275). If this is the case, the *Beowulf*-poet was also using the hilt to reiterate the pagan and Christian elements. Seth Lerer adds that much like Grendel's severed head and arm, "the bladeless sword-hilt Beowulf recovers from the mere" represents "symbolic remnants of a violent world. While they may once have threatened social life or cosmic order, they survive within the poem's telling as tame representations of a former horror. They are signs and symbols, figures for a violence that has gone on long ago" (740). With the sword hilt, the

poem emphasizes the undercurrents of spirituality at the same time that it highlights the human propensity for violence and man's inability to live in peace.

Within *Beowulf*, the hilt is recounted as having been created to slay the giants who transgressed God's law, formed at the time of the flood, and wielded by a mighty warrior (Heaney 1683-1698, Chickering 1677-1698). While this clearly refers to the Biblical account of the flood and even the Nephilim, the facts are not as easy to follow and the reader is left to wonder why the sword vanishes as Beowulf swims from the mere. According to William Cooke, runic inscriptions "may have been intended as a magic spell to augment the power of a weapon" (303), and that by discussing the disappearance of the sword itself, the *Beowulf*-poet "whet his audience's appetite" or discussed a story the audience was familiar with and required no explanation (305). In contrast, Prendergast purports that with the inability of all heroic objects to point away from destruction and violence, "The melting of the sword's blade after Beowulf has severed the head of Grendel might seem to suggest that the sword has been shorn of its destructive power, but in fact, I would argue that precisely the opposite is the case. The great danger is that the sword itself is a kind of fetish, which, lacking its blade, quite literally points to nothing" (138). Prendergast believes that the melting of the sword is symbolic of how life lived by the sword leads to desolation and unhappiness. Within my novella, I propose two similar solutions. The first is that Beowulf may have slain the last giant and the sword was no longer needed, and the second is that Beowulf's heroic actions represented God's final act of retribution and that the sword had performed its last

destined act of valor. Both theories follow the same line of reasoning, highlighting Beowulf's might as well as the role of faith within the poem.

Gardner also sees faith as a key element within *Beowulf*. In his interviews with Gardner, Winther comments that Gardner's driving theme for *Grendel* was the idea that there can be escape from despair, that spiritual guidance can exist outside of the self, and that there is danger in corrupted, human wisdom. In essence, Winther writes that Gardner promotes the idea that "faith pays" (177). Gregory Moris shares this view of Gardner and his work, emphasizing Gardner's idea that what mankind needs so desperately is to find order out of chaos and an understanding of the limits and failure of human reason (4, 55). According to Moris, "Grendel sees that art redeems, that it is imagination that separates man and monster, that life must be made ethical," and that this is the condition shared by every human (70).

One of the reasons *Beowulf* is so widely read even today is that it addresses complexities that modern individuals and societies face. Humanity is constantly seeking meaning outside of human thought and limitations, and *Beowulf* describes in detail how a society based solely upon the logic of man is doomed to fail as it falls further into violence, anger, pride, and petty grievances. As Gardner suggests, and as *Beowulf* promotes, interpersonal relationships, self-reflection, and faith are the tools needed to succeed in life. Though Wealhtheow's beauty, grace, and wisdom have the power to bring peace and soften man's fury, albeit temporarily, it is her own inner and communal

growth and faith that causes her to become a woman of intuition and to remain such a powerfully fundamental and vibrant character within the poem.

Chapter One: Arrival of the Peace-Weaver

The eye shaped longship tilted on its course, its oars fanning out like eyelashes; black marble water knocked against the oak side panels before bursting up into air. The ocean breeze spattered mist on Wealhtheow's red cheek. She did not wipe it away, but arched her back while the younger of her servant girls flattened herself against the oak hull at the stern of the wooden ship. Wealhtheow stared ahead, her pink lips stretched tight. Catching a glimpse of the stern, she raised her gray-blue eyes, again retracing the outward coil of the prow. She squinted to make out the dragon head at the tip and the carved animal friezes along the outer rims.

Just two weeks ago, she had been weaving beside her mother, Aland, the two of them walking from one end of the vertical loom to the other with each pass of the shutter, pushing the new weft against the woven fabric. They were making a hangerock, an outer apron-skirt trimmed with gold thread for Wealhtheow's wedding. Wealhtheow's father, Handir, son of Hundor and great-great-grandson of Helm, ruled the Helming clan of Wulfings. Handir would enter the chamber while she and her mother were working the thread, his faded blue eyes warming with his reiteration of the importance of Wealhtheow's peace-weaving alliance to the Danish king. Handir painted word pictures of the wealth, power, and courteousness of the Shielding king Hrothgar, of the lushness of the Danish landscape, and the wonders of Hrothgar's hall, Heorot. She and her mother listened in silence, Wealhtheow becoming less confident as her garment took shape. Her

father would also recall the feuding between the Helmingas and the Danes, discussing her cousin, Hjörmund, who had been killed at the hand of a Dane.

Wealhtheow would occasionally nod in understanding, Aland devoid of expression, as the two of them continued to weave. Her mother was a Swedish princess who had been captured in a Helming raid. Handir had married Aland once he discovered her identity, and Aland's marriage had, for a time, put an end to Helming raids on the Finnish lands. It was Aland who had given Wealhtheow her name of chosen servant. Wealhtheow was Aland's only daughter and the symbol of her present life with the Helmings.

Wealhtheow drummed her fingers against her lap. Her mother's wyrd was now her own. Aland had not shared much of married life with Wealhtheow, though Wealhtheow had learned of marital custom by observing her parents' relationship. She hoped to be happier than her mother had been. Her marriage had certainly been more formal. As with most noble unions, she was betrothed to Hrothgar a year before their marriage, and her wedding ceremony lasted a week. Hrothgar presented the Wylfing king with horses, cows, and welded iron, double-edged swords whose hilts were carved gold. For her bride-price, her father had given Hrothgar iron link mail coats, silver-crafted swords, and linden wood shields bound by hardened leather and gilt-bronze rims.

Wealhtheow recalled Hrothgar's black hair and beard. He had a broad chest and muscled arms and carried himself well. His walk resembled a march, and he held his head erect with his eyes always forward. She was fortunate that he was only thirty-nine

to her fourteen years. Whenever they were in the same room, she felt his brown eyes following her, the same eyes that held a depth and softness to them whenever she glanced at his face. Despite the wind, Wealhtheow felt herself flush as she remembered how Hrothgar's calloused fingers had been as light as a blade of grass on her skin.

Wealhtheow turned her head port-ward and looked behind her, searching the ocean for the second boat in the procession. It was laden with wedding treasure, her possessions, and her husband. Wealhtheow paused. The word husband sounded strange in her mind. She felt she could almost shake her head and awake to discover she was dreaming. Was she really married to the king of Denmark? Wealhtheow squeezed her hands together before looking back over her shoulder. She could barely see a white sail, a speck of sunlight in the distance. She had anticipated sailing with Hrothgar and learning more about him, but the royal couple was sailing in separate ships in case misfortune fell upon their voyage.

Wealhtheow watched the bobbing of the wooden boat upon the ocean, a boat that was always towed by longships on lengthy journeys. It drifted from the stern, stretching tight the rope that held it. Wealhtheow's eyes traced the lone boat. She rubbed her hands together. If only leaving home did not have to be so difficult. Even the presence of her two servant girls offered little comfort.

The wind whistled through the boat, filling the sail. Wealhtheow's spine tingled and she shivered. Her servant girl shifted on the seat, reaching for Wealhtheow's gold wool cloak. Wealhtheow hugged the cloak's feather lining to her chest once the servant

girl fastened it with a gold-gilded brooch. Wealhtheow again glanced behind her, and the wind ripped her hood away from her head, tossing her long red hair behind her in a flame. The sound of the sail slapping the wooden mast echoed in her head and she closed her eyes.

Wealhtheow was awakened by a hand on her shoulder. She turned toward the servant girl who pointed to a flock of seagulls flying ahead of them. The sight of seagulls excited the Danish men because it meant they were nearing land. The men began straining against ropes and rowing the wooden oars faster. Wealhtheow watched as a Dane tilted his body off the port side of the boat, stating something about the color of the ocean before dipping his hand down and raising a glove full of plankton.

“It should be about time, my Lady. We have been on this swan-road for almost a week now.” Wealhtheow nodded, but knew it had been more like three days. Her back felt stiff and she straightened on the makeshift wooden bed placed under the prow, adjusting the feather pillows underneath her. She could see a dark speck on the horizon, and figured they would reach port the next morning, if not by nightfall.

She turned her attention to the men on the ship. Though she was not surprised by their behavior, the Danes’ actions made her uneasy. Out of the nearly thirty on board, none had spoken to her. These Danish men appeared far less congenial than her father’s. The Wylfings had an air of danger in their appearance, the way they tilted their heads to the side and constantly moved their eyes, but they were quick to laugh and give gifts. The Danes seemed less friendly, and their speech was laced with strange oaths and

speech patterns that made them seem threatening and foreign. There was a tension in the boat that had nothing to do with the wind that crackled like ice. The Danes rarely looked in her direction, but when they did, their gaze lacked any warmth or welcome.

Wealhtheow glanced at the spears placed around the boat. She hoped the war god Odin had heard her prayers to keep his presence and desire for war from the two tribes and grant the Danes and Wulfings peace. Wealhtheow laid her chin on her fist. She recalled how Hrothgar mentioned another god, one who was in charge of all things and who had made all things. One god who created all life was a new concept to her. She could tell her father was equally as puzzled by this concept because of the blank look he gave Hrothgar who had mentioned this god on their last night of feasting. Hrothgar told them he learned of this God from the Romans soldiers he met in his journeys to Romania and to the province west of the Rhine and south of the Danube. With his voice full of praise, Hrothgar mentioned the amazing buildings, the food, the armor, and the roads of these Romans.

Wealhtheow's hands found the amber pendant; it was encased in gold and lay at the center of the gold collar-necklace she wore. The gold band was large and broad, had hollow rings, and was studded with pearls and gems. Its beauty was unmatched by any other piece of jewelry and was said to have been crafted by four dwarves of the Brising tribe as a gift for the goddess Freya. When Freya had worn the necklace, no one could withstand her charm, and any army she favored won their battles.

Wealhtheow rubbed her index finger over the smooth surface of the pendant. The necklace was believed to have been stolen from Freya by the mischievous god, Loki, recovered by the guardian of the gods, Hama, and then to have fallen into human hands because of the gods' quarrelling. The necklace reached King Hrethel, grandson of Swerting and father to Hygelac, the present king of the Geats. When Hrethel died in the battle between the Geats and Franks, the necklace was taken from him and carried to the Frankish lord.

The necklace was Wealhtheow's most prized possession. It was known as the Broosing or Brisingamen and had been given to her by her Frankish grandmother. She rested her chin on her collar bone and stared into the honey-orange depth of the pendant, wondering what the wise fertility and battle goddess Freya thought of her union. Wealhtheow cupped the pendant in her palms. She kissed the tip of her finger and placed it over the amber oval, asking Freya for wisdom.

"My Lady?" Wealhtheow realized the servant girl was repeating her name. She looked over at her. "Are you hungry, my Lady?" Wealhtheow let her necklace fall back upon her neck. Her servant girls supplied her with all the food she could want during the voyage, but Wealhtheow began to consider the Danes' custom of serving food. She noticed men were resting their oars and relaxing upon the wooden thwarts on which they sat. Some were lying down; others were stretching and moving toward the center of the boat.

“When is the meal?” Wealhtheow asked a beardless Dane who was within hearing. He paused and stood staring down at her. Wealhtheow felt her cheeks turn hot. She swallowed, meeting his impassive look. “You and the warriors must be hungry.” Wealhtheow nudged the servant girl beside her and they both stood. Wealhtheow waited, but instead of answering her, the soldier moved on toward the bow.

“I wish we were back with the Helmingas.” The servant girl returned to her seat. Wealhtheow stood silent, trying to make eye contact with the men who appeared not to notice her.

Sending a quick plea to Freya, Wealhtheow made her way to the mainmast. She counted her steps to try to calm her nerves. It took eight steps to reach the mast support. Several Danes were blocking her path. She touched one on the shoulder.

“Has the food been served?” The Dane moved away from her hand and the men parted. Wealhtheow spied three large skins that appeared to hold cider. She glanced at the men. They were all watching her. Wealhtheow straightened her shoulders and inhaled. She moistened her lips.

“Let me serve you. After the long rowing, you warriors need your strength.” Wealhtheow stepped forward and grasped the skins. She uncorked one and inhaled the fermented apple scent of cider before tossing all three skins over her back. Once the skins were secure, she reached for the wrapped cheese, fish, and flatbread. The weight was heavy on her shoulders, but she turned and faced the men, smiling casually.

“Where can I find the vördr?” Moments slipped by before one of the Danes pointed to a man at the other end of the boat.

“Lord Aeschere.”

Wealhtheow shrugged the weight higher onto her shoulders and made another eight steps to the bow.

She paused in front of a man with sandy blonde hair and a large build. She could tell he had noticed her out of the side of his eye. Wealhtheow paused beside him.

“Vördr Aeschere?” She curtsied when he glanced her way. She uncorked the end of the skin and held it toward him. “If it pleases you, may I offer you some cider?” Wealhtheow waited, her arms outstretched above her head. She felt her smile freeze to her lips.

Slowly, the Dane reached for the fermented apple cider. He lifted the skin to his lips and stood swallowing for a moment before wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

“It appears we will finish our voyage before the onset of the storm.”

Wealhtheow eyed the clouds darkening in the distance.

Aeschere tilted his head and cocked an eye at her. “And how would you be knowing that, my Lady?” His voice was like the wind creaking through a dead, moss-covered oak.

Wealhtheow shrugged her slender shoulders before offering Aeschere bread, fish, and cheese. She glanced at the sea; its brown-green waves cresting around them.

Aeschere took the food with a nod of his head and Wealhtheow graciously tipped her head downward. Her servants were now at her side and they lifted the skins from her shoulders and the bag of food from her hands. With a lightened step, Wealhtheow made her way to the next man. He was thin and pale and faced the port side of the ship, controlling the rudder by an attached wooden shaft. Wealhtheow extended a skin toward him. He likewise accepted the cider and food she offered with a nod of his head.

Wealhtheow made her way around the boat. She stopped before each man. The task took her twenty minutes, and once she reached the back of the boat, she and her servants made another round with the cider. As she finished, the sun glowed red upon her face and hair, and Wealhtheow could feel the Danish eyes upon her. She considered serving more cider, but the Dane closest to her made a slight bow and took the bags from her servant's hands.

“You should eat, my Lady. We are sailing again. You and your servants also need your strength.” The Dane's eyes traced her hair. After a pause, he continued. “We should reach the harbor by morning.” Wealhtheow looked into his face and the Dane nodded at her. He helped her to her seat before picking up an oar and inserting it into an oarport.

Wealhtheow ate as the ship picked up speed. Stars were beginning to shimmer in the sky and she believed they were dancing with relief. Wealhtheow finished her meal, her mind on her home and the meal her family was eating. She pictured the Helmingas eating pork, venison, and cod beside the fire, toasting to health and long life, and

exchanging jokes and insults. Wealhtheow closed her eyes and relaxed her body onto the bed. She tried to envision Heorot and imagined Hrothgar smiling from his throne as she sat beside him in the mead hall. But as her thoughts drifted to dreams, she could not erase the dark shadow she envisioned over their faces.

Wealhtheow roused to the sound of singing and the creaking of ropes. She curled her body into the bed and wondered which of her servants was humming so well. The masculine tone of the voice and the stiffness of the wooden bed jolted her awake, and Wealhtheow lifted her tousled head to peer, slit-eyed, ahead of her. There was a mist on the water and she could not tell which Dane was singing.

Wealhtheow stood and stretched. A whistling Dane passed in front of her, pausing long enough to wish her good morning and tell her they were almost to shore.

Wealhtheow was pleased with the exchange of words. The Danes seemed much more pleasant this morning, but perhaps they were excited because the longship was almost to Denmark. Wealhtheow moved around her two servant girls to look over the starboard side. There was a clearing amid the fog. Wealhtheow glimpsed white sea-cliffs reflecting the sun, green hills, birches, beeches, and dogwoods, and pools of water. The landscape was quite a change from her native home along the southwestern Baltic coast where the land was flat with brown sand and a sprinkling of overgrowth. Wealhtheow inhaled the salt air. Her heart began to beat faster. She was anxious to see this new land.

Wealhtheow craned her neck to the left to try and spot Hrothgar's ship, but she was not sure if the dark outline she saw in the distance was a boat or her imagination. Wealhtheow squinted out over the ocean waves. She recalled the shadow she had seen over Hrothgar's face before falling asleep. Certainly it was just a dream. She would be happy in Denmark with Hrothgar and do all that was necessary to keep peace between the two tribes. Wealhtheow clasped her hands around the amber necklace, her eyes still searching for signs of a ship through the fog.

Finding none, Wealhtheow faced forward just in time to watch the longship sail into a fjord whose banks were lined with oak, ash, and maple trees. Leaves on the banks were beginning to change from green to yellow, and the colors were magnified by the moving mist.

Aeschere gave the order to let the ship drift, and the rudder was raised.

Wealhtheow wondered how the men kept from running aground in such shallow water. She watched as they maneuvered the oars so the boat stayed in the center of the fjord.

Up ahead, Wealhtheow spotted a wooden palisade spanning the mouth of a bay and connecting with and creating a defensive rampart for a village. Seagulls perched on the palisade, and the closer they came to the harbor, the more gulls circled the ship. There was a narrow opening between the palisades with just enough space for two ships to fit through at the same time. Wooden jetties lined the shore beyond, surrounded by cone shaped huts made of wattle-and-daub timber walls and thatched roofs.

The ship sailed through the opening toward a nearby jetty. A warrior dropped the iron anchor into the water with a splash, and the ship slowly drifted toward the jetty. Danes jumped over the side, attaching ropes to posts. Assisted by her two servant girls, Wealhtheow stood. Danish men unloaded bags and packages onto the shore, and Wealhtheow made her way to the side of the boat.

“This way, my Lady.” A Dane spoke from behind. Wealhtheow turned to see him walking forward. He held his hand out to her and she grasped it. A small, wooden ladder appeared next to the boat, and the Dane assisted Wealhtheow in climbing out. The timber on the jetty creaked beneath her khaki, calf-skin, shoes as she stepped from the ladder, supported by the hand of another Dane. She nodded her thanks to the men and surveyed the area as her servants and possessions were unloaded. She noticed a small group of people on shore; they stood motionless, content to view the activity before them. Wealhtheow kept a smile on her face and relaxed her shoulders, making eye contact with the peasants. She noted the fenced palisades along the outer rim of the village and the jagged cliffs and rocks on either side of the bay.

“The King should be ashore shortly, my Lady. He has arranged for a cart to take you and your servants to Gammel Lejre.”

“Gammel Lejre?” Wealhtheow turned her gaze to Aeschere whose sandy blonde hair stuck out in all directions.

“That is where Heorot is. It is a little beyond Roskilde. About a six mile trip from here.” Aeschere bowed. “If you will follow me.”

Wealhtheow glanced at her two servants to make sure they were with her before following the Danes into the village. She passed women washing their clothes in the bay, men sitting on dirt porches, and pigs, goats, geese, ducks, and children kicking up mud between houses. The peasants' clothes and appearance were clean and simple, and Wealhtheow was surprised at the lack of dirt she saw on each face. She was also taken aback by the fact that none of the peasants were very thin, and the stomach of several men strained their tunics. Wealhtheow tilted her head toward everyone she met. Only a few Danish peasants stared back at her, their eyes blank and indifferent.

She and her servants followed Aeschere to the center of the enclosed village. He disappeared into one of the larger buildings flanked by a barn-like structure and surrounded by roads lined with large cobbles. He returned in a moment, shadowed by a short, balding man in an orange, fleece shirt and ankle-high boots. The man bowed as he approached Wealhtheow.

“We are most pleased you arrived safely, my Lady. Allow me to escort you to my store where you can freshen up and eat before your journey.”

Wealhtheow nodded before raising an eyebrow toward Aeschere.

“We will depart in about an hour, my Lady. I will return to you then.” The Dane walked back the way he had come, and Wealhtheow fell into step beside the balding man.

“We are all so delighted that Hrothgar has a queen and a Helming queen at that. Now Hrothgar only has to worry about the Heathobards to the southwest. He has made

peace with the other tribes that surround us. There is none as gracious and peace-loving as our ring-giver, Hrothgar, and the glory of his hall is beyond compare.”

Wealhtheow did not know how best to converse with the man or if even if she should reply. She remained silent.

The bald man led her into his store. The fire from the fire pit warmed her. She followed the man over the soil to the back of the room, passing pickled eggs and bags of wheat. Through an entryway was a smaller room where a ceramic basin stood on a wooden bench. There was also an iron bed, a chest, and an oval, iron mirror.

“I will leave you to your servants, my Lady. A meal has been prepared to be enjoyed at your leisure.” The man bowed before disappearing beyond the thatched door.

Wealhtheow splashed water on her face and neck. Her two servant girls combed her hair and helped her into a fresh, ankle-length tunic of pleated linen fastened at the neck by a gold and ruby brooch. This was followed by a close fitting, calf-length, yellow pinafore dress, fastened at the shoulder straps with two matching brooches. Wealhtheow pinned her hair behind her head and walked ahead of her servants toward the main room.

She heard the bald man’s voice before she entered. “Foolish woman! You knew the queen would be arriving soon and that our Lord wanted us to see to her needs. Why do you have to be so forgetful, today of all days?” The man stood with his feet apart, hands on his hips, scowling at a woman with dirt on her face and gray outer wrap.

“Ak, my Lady.” The man lowered his voice when Wealhtheow entered. “Please have a seat on this cushioned chair. We have cod, blackberries, spinach soup, and

seabird eggs for your pleasure.” The bald man turned to a woman standing beside him. “Get the milk and be quick, wife.” The woman nearly ran out of the room and Wealhtheow shook her head.

The bald man stood beside her chair, waiting for her to take a seat. Wealhtheow considered his words as she lowered herself to the chair. Should she thank him or express her displeasure at the way he handled his wife? If he treated his wife with more kindness, she would work more willingly for him. Wealhtheow had heard this advice from her father.

Wealhtheow eyed the pickled food and sacks of grain and rice on the shelves. “Your store looks well-managed.” The storekeeper bowed and rubbed the top of his bald head.

His wife returned with a ceramic pitcher of milk and curtsied in front of Wealhtheow before pouring milk into a bronze cup. Wealhtheow noticed the wife’s calloused hands and the redness of her skin. The woman was barefoot. Blisters and cuts covered her feet up to her ankles. Lines on her forehead and around her eyes made her look older than her husband, though Wealhtheow was sure the woman was only a little older than herself.

“Takke.” Wealhtheow smiled at the woman who dropped her head to her chest and noticed the bald man scowl at his wife from across the table. Wealhtheow took a bite of the egg. It was gooey and lukewarm, but her stomach could not tell. She ate half a cod, two more eggs, and a handful of blueberries.

“Your efforts have not gone unnoticed.” Wealhtheow directed her gaze toward the woman. The woman looked up briefly and Wealhtheow saw a flash in her eyes before she lowered them. Wealhtheow turned to the bald man. “Your wife is skilled. You are blessed to have her.” Wealhtheow watched the storekeeper clench his jaw. He bowed once more and opened his mouth to speak, but the door creaked open.

Aeschere entered the room. He walked toward Wealhtheow and bowed before her. “If my Lady is done with her meal, we are ready to depart.”

Wealhtheow nodded and finished her glass of milk. She turned toward the couple. “I will tell the king of your kindness and efficiency. He will be most pleased, as I am.” The pair bowed. The servants returned from the kitchen and Wealhtheow stood. She followed the Dane out the door and around the side of the house. She heard the neighing and stomping of horse’s hooves echoing off the walls.

Rounding the corner, Wealhtheow stopped. Before her were warriors on chestnut horses and four wooden, horse-drawn carts. At the center was a large square cart with ornate carvings of a man surrounded by snakes. A drinking skin, feather pillows, and fur blankets lay inside the gold cart. The spoke wheels were large and round and came up to Wealhtheow’s waist. She and her servants were assisted up the ladder and into the cart, and then the four carts and men on horseback started down the cobbled path.

Wealhtheow felt almost every stone as the cart jostled over them. One cart was ahead of hers and two were behind, though men rode at a distance on either side. Her cart was pulled by two white stallions and the driver occasionally cracked rawhide above

the horses' ears. The driver was a boy, a little younger than herself, and his black hair was mostly hidden underneath a goatskin hat. Wealhtheow offered a blanket to her servants and the three of them settled themselves amid the sound of male voices.

“We should reach Heorot before nightfall, my Lady.”

Wealhtheow nodded at the older of the two servant girls. “Já, I hope the light stays until I can see this hall I have heard so much about. I almost expect it to be alive.” Wealhtheow leaned her back against a cushioned side of the cart.

The group passed a lake surrounded by weeping willows, hackberries, and elms. Wealhtheow inhaled the sweet mustiness of the trees. A cluster of sparrows landed on a nearby elm, their black bodies specks in the white-gray sky. Falling water echoed in the distance, reminding Wealhtheow of the stream where she used to play when she was small.

She would sneak off to the spring where her three older brothers held swimming and wrestling contests, mastered sword and spear fights, and practiced drinking and talking with loud oaths and jokes. Wealhtheow immersed herself in the stream, occasionally joining her brothers in mud fights. She returned to her father's hall wet and dirty. While her brothers' behavior was never reprimanded, her mother would lecture her on the qualities of being a lady, and added to Wealhtheow's duties of weaving and serving. Wealhtheow was expected to graciously offer food to visiting guests, laugh at men's remarks, and keep a pleasant face. She was not to run wild like her brothers or display her displeasure or boredom.

Almost as if Aland were standing over her now, Wealhtheow straightened in her reclined position. She glanced at the men who were alternately whistling, singing, or talking. A man in the cart ahead of her was saying something about a giant eel. Wealhtheow moved past her sleeping servants toward her driver, alerting him to her presence by tossing pillows aside.

“If you are agreeable, I would like to sit beside you.” Wealhtheow’s red hair fell over her shoulder as she leaned forward so the boy could see her. His thin body scooted away from her on the bench. Wealhtheow held her yellow robe in her left fist and used her right hand to support her step onto the seat. The horses’ canter made her sway, and she quickly leaned against the wooden seat. They were passing water-meadows filled with bogs, and humidity seemed to steam from the ground.

“Are there many bogs in Denmark?”

The boy shook his head, but kept his eyes on the horses. “Nein, my Lady. Not many. In fact, folks around here say these are where the dragons live and that is their breath you see coming up from the ground.”

“Dragons? Have you ever seen a dragon?”

“I can not say for certain, but I have heard what sounded like a large creature in the woods.”

Wealhtheow smoothed her outer tunic and straightened her necklace. “As long as they do not threaten us, I would not mind meeting one. There are tales of monster

sightings where I come from along the Baltic coast, but no one has ever faced one, at least not in my area. Do you know if anyone in Heorot has ever seen a dragon?”

“There have been rumors, my Lady, but the only unusual creatures we come close to seeing are the ones in songs and legends. You will find that Heorot is one of the most peaceful places to live. King Hrothgar has seen to that. My father tells stories of Hrothgar’s early years, of the reign of his brother, Heorogar, and their father, Healfdene, of the fighting, burning, and death my father lived with. I can not remember the last time there has been a fight on our soil. Hrothgar employs the bravest of men and does his best to keep his land and people protected.” The boy stopped speaking and glanced at Wealhtheow for the first time.

Wealhtheow gave him a maternal smile. “You seem to have a good bit of knowledge about the area. Do you live near Heorot?”

The boy shook his head. “I live back at the bay. My father is the man who keeps the store where you ate. Well, he, my older brothers, myself, and my mother.”

“Já, your parents were very kind.” Wealhtheow noticed they were crossing a field of wheat colored grass sparsely covered with oaks. Grave mounds and rocks covered the ground, bordered the path, and ran as far as the eye could see. Some of the bauta stones bore runic inscriptions and made circular patterns in their locations around the mounds, but many of the burial patterns were erratic and unevenly spaced.

The boy followed Wealhtheow’s gaze. “My ancestors are buried here. The plain of the dead is what I call it.”

Wealththeow's skin chilled as she looked at the mounds and rocks. She envisioned translucent men floating up from the graves, clad in traditional battle gear of iron helmets, swords, and spears. Their presence was so strong that Wealththeow dared not breathe. She simply stared at the scene unfolding before her eyes.

She saw an army of red advancing on the dead soldiers, easily outnumbering and defeating them. The army flowed around and over the field like a river of blood, covering the entire land of Denmark as far as she could see. The Beasts of Battle gathered. Ravens, eagles, crows, and hawks littered the sky and wolves circled the ground, each glossy eye anxious for battle pray. Clouds covered the field with shadows as Odin's battle maidens and servants of slaughter descended. These battle maidens, these Valkyries, were eager to claim fallen warriors. Three Valkyries on cloud horses soared over the battle field, their golden hair, helmets, and shields glittered with the lightning they sent ripping through the clouds. The Valkyries came to rest on a plateau beside the battlefield, urging the warriors on to their fate. They were led by Freya who wore a falcon-skin cloak and a red corselet and helmet. Freya pointed her long spear toward different men as the clash of weapons and amour echoed above the battle.

Wealththeow shuddered and glanced at the boy beside her. He was no longer a boy but a man wearing full armor and holding a small, rust covered mirror and a bag of gold. Wealththeow tossed her head to the side, hoping to dislodge the vision, and noticed her hands were glowing. She stared at the yellow beams as they grew brighter until her whole body was shining. When she touched her hand, the light faded into nothingness.

Wealhtheow moved her head back and forth. Apart from the carts, men, and horses, nothing appeared unusual, though the shadows cast by the burial rocks caused her heart to beat faster. Wealhtheow licked her chapped lips and tasted the iron tinge of blood.

She cleared her throat. "I shall have some cider. Would you join me?" She dared not glance at the boy for fear the illusion was back.

"Yes, my Lady. If I may." Wealhtheow stepped into the cart and found the skin. She glanced at the driver, relieved to see a boy with a goatskin hat. After offering him a drink, she thanked him for his conversation and skill with the animals before drinking some cider herself and settling back among the feather pillows and fur blankets.

Maybe Freya had sent her a vision with which to warn Hrothgar, or maybe she was tired and suffered delusions. Wealhtheow recalled how her grandmother had claimed to see visions and how her father had listened to her grandmother's words on weather and war until she died. Coincidence or not, the Helming tribe of the Wylfings were flourishing, and with her marriage to Hrothgar, her father would no longer have to worry about war with the Danes.

The carts followed a path into the woods, and Wealhtheow relaxed to the calls of starlings, meadow pipits, blackbirds, and magpies. The bouncing of the cart on the path began to lull her to sleep, and she closed her eyes. As she did so, she heard a loud crash in the underbrush to her right, followed by loud grunts and snorts.

She glanced into the thicket of greenery in time to see three men on horseback break from the group and charge off into the woods. The men in the carts began to laugh.

Wealhtheow heard men's shouts come from the forest, and two more men disappeared into the trees while the wagons continued forward. Wealhtheow could not fault the men for wanting some excitement. She felt their interest stir in the stillness of the woods and was intrigued.

"Sounds like a boar," the boy said in front of her. "And a big one at that."

Wealhtheow put her hand to her necklace. "But boars are a symbol of the gods and protected by Freya and her brother Frey. Does not the boar deserve more respect?"

The boy arched his brows but continued to stare into the trees. "Only a cunning warrior can catch a boar. It is a test of valor. We always honor the gods afterwards for bringing the animals to us."

Wealhtheow lay back against the cart. "Is it hard to catch a boar?" She raised her voice so the driver could hear her.

"It is not impossible, my Lady. The problem is that boar's skin is like leather and they have very sharp tusks. It takes a bit of managing, but if you have the strength and agility, it is not too difficult."

Wealhtheow resettled herself and the cart's wheels creaked down the path. The men began to fall silent and no voices came from the woods. Suddenly, a high pitched shriek bounced out of the forest, and she jerked her head toward the sound of hooves crashing past trees, trampling plants and leaves. Another squeal reverberated in the air

followed by loud cheers. The five men on horseback soon reappeared, the first man dragging the boar from a rope behind him and waving his red-tinged spear in the air. The boar's pink tongue hung out of its mouth, its side was covered in red, and a line of blood trailed behind him.

The Danes cheered. Wealhtheow gasped but did not look away. The sight disgusted her, though she forced herself to appear calm. Blood continued to seep from the pig's mouth. The warrior stepped off his horse and approached the pig. He swung his sword in an arch and severed the head from the body. She heard the thwap of the blade cutting through bone and dirt. The body twisted and jerked as the head fell loose and bone and sinew were exposed. Wealhtheow could not stop her hands from covering her face. As the men stuck the pig head onto the stake as a sign of loyalty to the gods, she leaned over the other edge of the cart.

"Put that boar in a sack now!" Aeschere's voice was heard above the others as he rode up beside Wealhtheow. "My men did not mean to frighten you, my Lady. Their sense of adventure overcame them." He reached to steady her in the cart as Wealhtheow stared at the ground, waiting for the sour taste in the back of her throat to ease. A group of men instantly huddled around her cart, their horses pawing the ground and snorting. Aeschere stepped off his horse and offered Wealhtheow water.

Wealhtheow shifted her weight back and gulped the liquid, feeling the lump in her throat begin to loosen. The carts had stopped, and no one spoke. Wealhtheow coughed

and handed Aeschere his water sack. She straightened her back and dabbed at her mouth with the silk cloth the servant girl offered her.

The Dane who had ridden up with the boar stood and bowed before Wealhtheow. “I am sorry to have caused you distress, my Lady. That was not my intention.” He held up a small sprig of white lace elderberries in his gloved hand.

The Danes seemed to be holding their breath. A magpie flew overhead, breaking the silence with its call. Wealhtheow smiled at the Dane. “Nein. It is I who should apologize for my girlish behavior.” She accepted the cluster of flowers and berries and lifted them to her nose. “These smell wonderful. Thank you for your kindness. You should be commended for your swift capture of the boar.”

The Dane’s mouth curved upward and his eyes glowed. He bowed once more.

Wealhtheow shifted her gaze to the rest of the men. “I trust he tastes better than he looks.”

Her comment was met by chuckles and a “here, here” from one Dane. Men patted each other on the back and the group resumed their formation.

“We should be at Heorot within the hour, my Lady.” Aeschere leaned back in his saddle and rode to the front of the procession.

The Danes became more animated the closer they came to Heorot. The men even created a song about killing the boar, and cited the beauty of “their gracious queen Wealhtheow” as the impetus for such a kill. They sang of the fallen boar, the courteousness of their queen, and the restoration of the flower. Wealhtheow laughed

when the Danes sang about her, though she was grateful they had accepted her enough to incorporate her into their lay.

The black figures of men wearing helmets and holding spears dotted the horizon, and these men began yelling greetings once the carts were within hearing distance. Wealhtheow noticed a cluster of huts in front of a backdrop of hills. The huts in this village were made of clay, stacked stone, and thatched roofs. Several donkeys were tied at the front and sides of the huts and grazed on patches of grass. Wealhtheow's cart and a handful of warriors on horseback made their way toward the hills, while the rest of the company went left toward a large, barn-like structure. As her cart veered toward the outskirts of the village, Wealhtheow noticed a stream a few feet from the path.

A field of flowers lay around the village, disappearing from view behind green and brown hills. The group left the houses behind and followed the path through the field of heather, motherwort, and orange hawkweed. The scent of hay and pollen carried on the wind, and Wealhtheow inhaled as the setting sun infused the field with gold.

Leaving the field behind, the path curved and began to ascend into the hills. Rounding the third hill, Wealhtheow inhaled sharply. Above her was a long rectangular hall that came into focus once her cart reached the top of the hill. At the front was a large wooden pole with *Heorot* carved onto the side and the face of a double-headed dragon at the top. Behind the pole stood the largest hall Wealhtheow had ever seen. She turned in the cart and stared.

Heorot consisted of two buildings separated by the width of two doorways. Because the doorway was much higher than the ground, Wealhtheow guessed the hall was suspended on planks above the ground, much like her father's hall. Wealhtheow was certain there was also a pit underneath that served as a cellar. Unlike her father's hall, however, the roof was covered with diamond-shaped timber that extended almost to the floor of the building whose foundation was made of white wattle and daub. In the middle of the structure, on either side of the hall, were oak doorways and one entry at the front. All three were framed with wooden doorposts bearing gold, silver, ruby, and pearl carvings of kings, animals, and soldiers drinking and laughing.

Wealhtheow was delighted at the jovial pictures of men. She hoped her life at Heorot would be as exciting and merry as the pictures indicated. Wealhtheow craned her head back and surveyed the images. Rectangular frames held wooden panels painted with different scenes of feasting and gift-giving and sat above each door post. As the cart drew nearer, Wealhtheow's eyes focused on the planks that angled away from the foundation, almost resembling oars. These planks rested in post-holes outside the outer wall to support the weight of the roof. Her father's hall needed no support, but his hall did not come close to the size of Heorot.

Wealhtheow's eyes were drawn to the triangular, blue and red painting of horses that covered the top of the roof above the front entry. A wooden V perched at both ends of the shingled roof and held the faces of war horses. Smoke rose from the hole in the middle of the building and Wealhtheow could smell the scent of roasting meat. A small

fence extended behind Heorot where livestock were kept. A smaller wattle and daub building was connected to the end of the wide, fenced-in area. Tents perched a few feet from Heorot's walls, and a large wooden amphitheater and racing arena could be seen farther behind the hall.

The cart turned right and Wealhtheow gasped. From this height, she could see the ocean in the distance, its black surface alive in the setting sun.

A group of maidens in white exited the hall, followed by a group of Danes in bright colors. One man with shoulder-length black hair, a scruffy beard and mustache, and beady, hawk-like eyes walked up to her cart and bowed low to the ground, sticking his right arm out behind him. He wore a red, belted jacket trimmed with fur above a red linen shirt. Strips of red cloth bound his trousers below the knee.

“My Lady. Welcome to Heorot. We have been anxious for your safe crossing and are pleased you have made it to us at last. I am Unferth, son of Ecglaf, and one of My Lord Hrothgar's chief warriors and advisors. I am most honored to meet you.” The Dane shifted his weight between his feet, his eyes taking in Wealhtheow's face. His gaze was unsettling.

Wealhtheow nodded at him. “Takke. Heorot is a fine hall, the finest I have seen by far.”

Unferth puffed his chest and Wealhtheow thought his protruding stomach might rip his jacket. “I am glad our hall pleases you, my Lady. Hrothgar oversaw the

construction himself. It is a privilege for me to even talk about it.” Unferth offered his arm to Wealhtheow. “May I escort you to your new home?”

Wealhtheow allowed Unferth to help her out of the cart. “It is unfortunate Hrothgar could not welcome you himself, but he knew you would be in capable hands. And he should arrive shortly.” Unferth led Wealhtheow toward the group of men. “These are Hrothgar’s other chief warriors and advisors.”

“We are at your service, my Lady.” A Danish warrior wearing a green jacket stepped forward and tilted his chest toward the ground. “I am Wulfgar, Wendel chief and one of Hrothgar’s heralds and officers.”

Wealhtheow offered her hand to Wulfgar and he took it before bowing low before her.

“And over here,” Unferth gestured toward the maidens, “these girls will be your personal servants. They will supply you with anything you need or desire.” Unferth walked past the maidens toward the front door. “Allow me to show you our most magnificent hall, Heorot.” Unferth opened a rope-secured latch and held the door for Wealhtheow as she stepped inside.

The mead hall was open and spacious, and at least four times the size of Handir’s hall. Wealhtheow ran her hand along the stacked timber walls. She thought the hall was close to ninety yards tall, twenty-five yards wide, and fifty yards in length. Wealhtheow was delighted to see the numerous painted and carved wooden panels on the walls along with hanging woven tapestries of vivid colors and gold threading. Her father’s hall had

less than half of these tapestries and paintings. They added warmth to the room and were a nice contrast to the swords, shields, spears, and axes that also decorated the long walls.

Wealhtheow ran her eyes along the roof supported by arched timber frames and crossbeams high enough to suspend the chain and cooking cauldron that hung at least ten feet above the hearth. Both the walls and ceiling were held together with reinforced iron bands. The only light came from the open doors and the fires burning on the central hearth running down the middle of the building and on the two sides of the hall. The painted gold on the walls and ceiling reflected the orange glow of the fire, and the room seemed alive with golden energy.

Smoke escaped through raised shutters in the middle of the ceiling. Broad oak benches were fixed to the walls and trestle tables ran in two long rows around the center hearth. Two high seats were at the other end of the hall, both plated with gold and adorned with carved crowns and jewels above the head. Purple cushions lined the interior of the seats and the legs of the chairs were shaped like claws. Wealhtheow could not believe that one of those thrones was for her. They were so resplendent and finely constructed. Behind the thrones, Wealhtheow noticed another room separated by an internal wooden partition.

Unferth stood, letting Wealhtheow gaze around the room. When he noticed her glance past the two thrones, he stepped forward. "Past the mead hall is a cooking area, a bower for you and Hrothgar, a sauna, and a smaller chamber for servants. The courtyard

and the livestock area are behind the building, followed by the smokehouse and storage space.”

“This is truly magnificent. I have never seen a hall so grand. Its skill and design is far beyond anything I imagined.” Wealhtheow recalled her father’s descriptions of Heorot. They had seemed fanciful and unrealistic at the time, but now she saw they had not come close to doing Heorot justice.

“Yes, my Lady. If I may say so, your father could not have chosen a better husband or a more comfortable hall in which to live.” Wealhtheow felt Unferth’s eyes roll over her. She straightened her back and met his gaze. His black eyes stared into her blue. Wealhtheow lifted her head and raised her brows. Unferth cleared his throat and looked away. “You must be tired, my Lady. I will show you to your bower.”

A small boy with brown hair and tunic appeared from the other side of the hall. He hauled an iron pail of wood toward the fire, but tripped on the shaggy, red sheep rug as he rounded the tables in front of Wealhtheow. The wood in his pail spilled over the floor, and the boy jumped up to retrieve them.

“I am sorry my Lady.” The boy’s voice was almost inaudible.

“How dare you be so clumsy, you imp! Especially in front of our new queen.” Unferth was standing close enough to the boy to lift him by the back of his tunic. He shook the boy like a rag. “You clumsy little...”

Wealhtheow laid her hand on Unferth’s arm. “Dear Unferth. I am sure the boy meant no harm.”

Unferth paused, his arm in the air. Slowly he set the boy back on the ground and cuffed him on the side of the head. “Get back to your task.” The boy scrambled away from Unferth, picking up logs as he did so.

“I thank you for your hospitality, Unferth. But I am sure you have more important matters to consider than showing a woman to her chambers.” Wealhtheow spoke in a casual tone. “I am sure my maids can assist me from here.”

“As you wish, my Lady.” Unferth bowed low once more before retreating from the room.

Wealhtheow turned toward the group of maidens who had been waiting beside the entryway. “Would you be so kind as to show me to my chambers? I would like to rest before the meal is prepared.”

The maidens bowed as one and led Wealhtheow through the mead hall, past the double doors, and into a smaller room. Wealhtheow spotted a cooking area to the left. There were several cauldrons boiling over fires and wooden counters filled with berries, nuts, honey, and various jars of food. The section behind the cooking area appeared to be the servant’s quarters.

Wealhtheow followed the maids down the hallway, past the first two sections and noticed steam coming from a small room whose entrance was sectioned off by a wooden door. This room could only be the sauna. She felt the ache of her shoulder muscles and wondered if there would be time to enjoy the sauna before dinner. Wealhtheow continued down the hall toward a gold-plated door decorated with trees, animals, and

images of kings, queens, and children. Through the door was a large sitting room with a hearth, feather-lined benches with cushioned backs, a blue rug covering almost the entire wooden floor, and woven tapestries of landscapes and battles on the walls. There were rooms within this, and the maidens lead her toward the right.

“What are the other rooms?” Wealhtheow pointed to the room on the left.

“My Lord Hrothgar’s chamber, my Lady. And the next is an area for children.”

The closest maid curtsied beside Wealhtheow. The thought of children caused Wealhtheow’s cheeks to redden, though she knew having children would be her most important duty at Heorot.

The maidens opened the door to her chamber, and Wealhtheow was astonished at the lushness she saw. It was almost as if the room had an occupant already. Another red rug covered the wooden floor, and red draperies hung from the walls. There was a small fur rug in front of the broad, wooden bed whose long, thin posts reached flame-like to the ceiling. The bed was covered with bright red, purple, and blue blankets and pillows. A fire glowed in a pit beside the wall.

Her own wooden tub was a few inches from the bed, and a short, pearl table lined the wall, containing liquid aromas, powders, and jewelry. Wealhtheow was transfixed by the amount of bracelets, necklaces, brooches, rings, and earrings Hrothgar had provided her. There were gold, silver, white, green, and a variety of colored glass beads, pendants of rock crystal in silver mounts, a set of thirty-two fish-shaped pendants that formed an elaborate collar, and rings of gold, ruby, amber, sapphire, and jade. Wealhtheow could

not stop herself from running a finger over their polished depths; she had never seen so much jewelry in her life.

Next to the tub and jewelry, tunics, pinafores, and long-sleeved outer garments of almost every color hung from a cord tied from the one end of the ceiling to the other. Lining the walls underneath the dresses were different types of shoes from calfskin to cowhide to fleece.

A lump formed in her throat and she tried to swallow it down. If only her father could visit Heorot and see how beautiful Hrothgar's hall really was. She had married into a culture whose wealth was fit for the gods. Wealhtheow thanked Freya for blessing her with such auspicious surroundings and determined to prove herself worthy of them.

The two Helming servant girls who accompanied Wealhtheow to Heorot entered the room. Both of their faces were flushed.

“My Lady, Lord Hrothgar approaches, and the Danes are preparing to eat their evening meal.”

Wealhtheow felt blood begin to pound in her ears. She was anxious to see her husband again and thank him for his generosity. She looked at her reflection in the mirror above the table. Her face glistened with perspiration and the top of her dress was smudged with dirt. Her maids helped her sponge bathe before stepping into blue linen and a purple pinafore.

The silk felt sleek on her skin and Wealhtheow rubbed her hand over her arm. She had never worn anything so fine. She glanced at the ruby encrusted brooches that

pinned her linen and pinafore in place before choosing beaded necklaces to wear along with the amber Brosing. The maids placed blue fleece slippers on her feet and a golden headband on top of the red hair that ran like water down Wealhtheow's back.

Feeling overwhelmed, Wealhtheow and her maids made their way out of her chamber and down the gilded hallway.

Nearing the hall, she could smell the roasted deer, pig, caraway, and cumin. The sound of singing could also be heard. As she stepped into the hall, the men began to hush. A red-haired scop in a silver tunic paused, mid-note, and lowered his stringed harp.

Wealhtheow had never felt so many eyes upon her. She recognized Aeschere, Wulfgar, and Unferth, along with other Danes who had journeyed with her to Heorot. When she looked their way, these men raised their glasses in toast. Wealhtheow suddenly felt tongue-tied and unsure of the appropriate custom. She took a deep breath.

"Please do not stop your festivities, fellow Danes." Wealhtheow heard her voice echo back to her. She was surprised, yet pleased by the tone of confidence she heard. She raised her head, smiling around the room. "I am pleased to be among you and I expect to serve you as loyally and faithfully as you serve king Hrothgar here in Heorot, the brightest of halls."

Wealhtheow's words were met with scattered applause. She glanced at the scop. "Would you grace us with another song, dear scop?" Wealhtheow watched the scop run his fingers over the harp.

Unferth stood at the table to her right, beside Aeschere, Wulfgar, and the king's empty throne. He raised his glass above his head. "To Queen Wealhtheow! May she live in peace and wisdom and may her children be as capable and gracious as she."

A roar of voices echoed Unferth's toast, and the men lifted their glasses before drinking their ale. Wealhtheow stood, unsure of whether to be seated or to serve the men when the entryway across from her opened and Hrothgar entered. His cheeks were red from the cold, night air and his fur skin cap was tilted over his long, black hair. He wore an overshirt of undyed linen above blue knee-length trousers of fine worsted yarn. His purple, woolen cloak was fastened at the right shoulder by a gold-crusted brooch.

The hall erupted in cheering at the sight of their king. Hrothgar's black beard jiggled as he grinned at his men and strode through the center of the hall towards his throne and a standing Wealhtheow. Hrothgar's brown eyes met Wealhtheow's and she gave him a small smile. His eyes searched her face until he reached her side.

"My Lady. I hope the journey was not hard on you. I regret we had to part for so long." Hrothgar reached for Wealhtheow's right hand. She felt his breath on her skin as he leaned to kiss the back of her hand. "You look good in my home." Hrothgar looked up at Wealhtheow, and the eagerness in his eyes made him seem boyish.

Wealhtheow curtsied, though she wondered if Heorot would ever feel like home. "You have the most beautiful hall I have seen. The stories do not come close to describing its magnificence." Wealhtheow was certain her face was flushed.

Hrothgar gazed into her eyes before taking her arm. Together they faced the men in the mead hall.

Hrothgar held up his right hand. “Tonight we celebrate my marriage to Helm’s granddaughter, Wealhtheow of the Helmingas, and to a long, peaceful life with gifts, food, and wine.” A servant placed a gold cup in Hrothgar’s hand, and Wealhtheow was also given a gold cup filled with wine. “The God of creation smiled upon us and granted us a safe and successful journey. The king of the Helmingas was generous and kind. So tonight, let us celebrate and be merry, for the bonds of peace have finally come to Heorot.”

As Hrothgar spoke, men entered bearing the gifts Wealhtheow’s father had given him. The men and servants laid shields, swords, axes, spears, and mail coats in the center of the tables, along with chests of gold and precious gems. The hall boomed with applause that shook the floor boards.

Hrothgar guided Wealhtheow to the throne beside his and kissed her forehead. He turned toward his own seat. Hrothgar clapped his hands and the scop began to play louder, singing of the happiness and plenty of Hrothgar’s hall.

Servants set dishes of cod, herring, nuts, berries, honey, boiled seabirds, and legs of lamb in front of Wealhtheow. They consistently refilled her cup and made sure the temperature and the type of food were both to her liking.

Hrothgar greeted his warriors and advisors, answering questions about the journey. Midway through his sentence he shifted his head and glanced at Wealhtheow.

Catching her watching him, he winked. Wealhtheow moved her eyes to her plate.

Hrothgar spoke a few more words and then leaned his body toward her seat.

“Ak! I am glad you are here.”

She dipped her head.

“Have you found things to your liking?”

“Já, my Lord.” Wealhtheow’s tongue loosened with the need to express her gratitude. “The chamber, jewelry, and clothes are of such fine quality, even better than at home.” She peeked at Hrothgar behind long lashes.

Hrothgar reached for her hand. He squeezed before letting go.

The rest of the meal passed quickly. Hrothgar recounted his journey to the land of the Helmingas several times, discussing weather and past feuds. Wealhtheow felt herself relaxing as the meal progressed and was laughing as heartily as the Danes at the scop’s antics and the animated discussion of the men. The hour grew late and she stole glances at Hrothgar over her jeweled cup. She wondered when they would retire and ran a hand over the rubies on the side of her glass. Tipping her head to finish her mead, she took a long sip, the liquid cold on her tongue and black in the darkness of the goblet.

“How was your meal?”

The question was whispered in her ear and Wealhtheow started in her seat, almost spilling the cup’s contents.

“Forgive me, I did not wish to startle you.”

Wealhtheow looked into Hrothgar's bearded face. His eyes were warm and seemed to caress her. "It was splendid, my Lord."

"Did you get enough?"

She nodded.

Hrothgar stood and bowed before her, offering his hand. "Then, my Lady, may I escort you to your bower? The past weeks have been overwhelming and I am certain you must be as tired as I."

Wealhtheow stood. Her legs felt like rubber. The two made their way out the mead hall amid the cheers, singing, and revelry that carried Heorot into the night.

Chapter Two: Noble Wife and Mother

Wealhtheow tried to peer down at her feet around her protruding stomach, but finding it too difficult, focused instead on the powder snow ahead of her. The snow hung in blankets from trees and glimmered on the fields.

“Careful, my Lady. There is a dip here.” Two maidens touched Wealhtheow’s arms and steered her around the snow-covered dents and rocks in the field. Hrothgar’s spitz and hounds kicked up snow as they darted ahead of her, their barks resonating in the open field.

Wealhtheow looked up to see her two-year-old son, Hrethric, face down in the snow. Hrothgar reached down to pick him up, dusting the snow from his face and cloak.

“Be careful, Hrethric. Do not scare your moder.” Hrothgar grinned at Wealhtheow and then lifted Hrethric onto his shoulders.

“Ak. Our son is unharmed. He is strong like his fader.” Hrothgar flexed his arm and Wealhtheow laughed.

Another maiden approached, carrying one-year-old Hrothmund bundled in sheepskin.

“Is he warm enough?” Wealhtheow glanced at Hrothmund.

“Yes, my Lady. He’s bundled tighter than a shaft of spears on a donkey.”

Snowflakes began to float like feathers, and prince Hrothmund reached a pudgy hand towards the sky.

“Notice the snowflakes? Já, those are snowflakes.”

“He can not understand you.” Five-year-old Hrothulf walked up beside Wealhtheow. He held two snowballs in his hands. He started to aim one at the baby, but she caught his arm.

“Nein, Hrothulf, not lé-barn. He is too fragile.” Hrothulf jerked his arm from her grasp and threw the snowball at Hrothmund anyway. It landed in front of the maid with the baby, and Wealhtheow glanced at Hrothgar.

Hrothulf was Hrothgar’s nephew, son of Hrothgar’s younger brother, Halga, who had been killed in battle with the Swedish king, Adilis. Adilis had also captured and married Halga’s wife, Yrsa, and Wealhtheow shuddered at the thought of being captured by her husband’s killer. She was thankful that, while Halga had rekindled the feud with the Swedes, Hrothgar was trying to make peace. He had made several gift offerings to have Yrsa returned, but finally decided that Yrsa’s marriage to the Swedish king would cause the feuding to cease, and sent gold and gem-encrusted weapons to king Adilis as part of Yrsa’s bride-price.

With neither parent to look out for him, the orphan had been brought to Heorot and treated as a son. The boy adored Hrothgar, following him like a shadow.

With prince Hrethric on his shoulders, Hrothgar scooped snow and threw it at Hrothulf. It hit Hrothulf in the stomach who let out a whoop before throwing his remaining snowball at Hrothgar.

Wealhtheow took prince Hrothmund from the maid and cradled his head in the crook of her arm. His blue eyes looked up at her. She rubbed a gloved hand over his cheek. “Such a well-mannered jung-herra. Já, you are.” She moved out of the line of fire as Hrothulf tossed another snowball at Hrothgar and Hrethric. Maidens placed a chair under the shade of an elm tree. Wealhtheow covered her chest with a fur blanket so she could nurse Hrothmund without either of them catching cold.

She watched husband and nephew dash over the snow-covered field, tossing snow and laughter at each other. When Hrothgar ran, Hrethric’s legs bounced on his father’s shoulders and his little hands clutched Hrothgar’s hair. After a few more turns around the field, Hrothgar scooped Hrothulf into his arms and placed him behind Hrethric. Both boys clung to Hrothgar’s head and chin as he pretended to be a horse, one hand on each boy’s leg as he lifted his feet into the air. Hrothgar neighed and both boys laughed. He cantered up to Wealhtheow and began nuzzling her hair.

“Faster, Hrothgar, faster.” Hrothulf flapped his legs against Hrothgar’s chest.

“Ak! This horse is tired. You and Hrethric should build a snow dragon.”

“Já!” Hrothulf exclaimed. Hrothgar lifted both boys off his neck and set them on the ground.

“Watch out for Hrethric and stay within view.” He gave the boys a pat.

Hrothulf took Hrethric’s hand and walked him a few feet away.

Hrothgar turned to Wealhtheow, smiling with his eyes as he looked down on her. “And how is my Lady?” He leaned in to kiss her lips, and his beard tickled her chin. Wealhtheow wrinkled her nose but returned his kiss.

Hrothgar rested beside Wealhtheow in another chair and reached for her hand. “It looks like this may have been the last snow before spring. The air is already feeling warmer than it has been and patches of snow have begun to melt.” They gazed at the princes for a few moments, and then Hrothgar looked back at her. “The jung-herras are getting so big.” His eyes fell to Hrothmund. “Before you know it, they’ll be men.”

Wealhtheow nodded. She rubbed the top of Hrothmund’s head. “Já. And I can not believe we are about to have another lé-barn soon. Will you be disappointed if it is a girl?”

Hrothgar smoothed her hair. “I will be pleased either way.”

“You can say that now, since you already have two heirs and a nephew to ensure Heorot lives on.”

Hrothgar grinned shamelessly at Wealhtheow. He leaned forward to kiss her again, but Hrothmund began to whimper.

“He must be through nursing.” Wealhtheow lifted Hrothmund from under the blanket and handed him to Hrothgar. There was a splash of milk on Hrothmund’s cheek, and Wealhtheow handed a cloth to Hrothgar who slowly wiped the baby’s face. He raised the boy to his feet so they could be eye to eye.

“Little jung-herra. How was your meal? Was it pleasing?” Hrothgar jostled Hrothmund on his knee, receiving a toothless grin. “I think Hrothmund looks more like me than Hrethric. What do you think?” Hrothgar held Hrothmund to the side of his face and both looked at Wealhtheow.

Wealhtheow could not stop her laughter. She glanced from the young face to the old one and shook her head. “It may be his personality that favors you, my Lord.”

Hrothgar moved the baby in front of him and looked down into Hrothmund’s face. Hrothgar’s eyes became serious and lines appeared on his forehead and around his eyes. He glanced at Hrothulf who was rolling snow into balls.

“My Lord? What is it?” She inspected Hrothgar’s face, noting his worry and fatigue.

Hrothgar sighed. “I wish for our sons a more peaceful reign than I have had. Yet I doubt this will be the case.”

Wealhtheow rubbed a hand over her stomach before swallowing. She also glanced at the two boys. Hrothulf’s shadow towered over Hrethric, who was sitting in the snow, using his little hands to throw the powder about him. A maid picked Hrethric up and set him on his feet. Hrothulf took Hrethric’s hand and patted a snowball with it.

“You should not concern yourself with worrying over the future, my Lord, but enjoy your time with your sons now. I am sure they will grow to have your wisdom and patience and to strive for peace as you have.”

Hrothgar sighed. He kissed the top of Hrothmund's head before handing him off to the nearby nurse who laid Hrothmund over her shoulder and patted his back.

Hrothgar clasped his hands on his lap. "Some of my men have gone missing. I would normally not be concerned, but the disappearances are erratic: a few soldiers missing from their hunt in the woods, peasants who can not find family members, men taken from their tents outside Heorot." Hrothgar shook his head. "I do not know what army, if any, could be behind it. It is almost as if they disappear by magic."

Hrothgar looked at Wealhtheow. "This is why I need you and the children to stay close to Heorot. I know you have been wondering why I would not take you to the village by the bay." Hrothgar reached for Wealhtheow's hands and held them both to his chest. "Swear to me that you and the jung-herras will not leave Heorot without me."

Wealhtheow rubbed Hrothgar's hands. She leaned over and kissed his bearded cheek. "I swear by the gods, my Lord." She gave Hrothgar a lopsided grin. "I will not be going anywhere until this lé-barn comes. I have already had more contractions than with either Hrethric or Hrothmund."

Hrothgar's hands moved to Wealhtheow's swollen abdomen. He laid his ear on her stomach and then leaned away, startled. "Are you sure we will have a datter? This lé-barn has a strong kick."

She grinned and leaned back in the chair.

"How much longer will you have to wait?"

“Either days or weeks, my Lord.” Her shrug was halted by a contraction and she gripped the arms of her chair.

“My Lady?” Hrothgar wrinkled his forehead, leaning in closer to Wealhtheow.

Wealhtheow managed to breath normally. “I have been having these for days now. Remember this happened with Hrethric and Hrothmund also.”

Hrothgar’s eyes skimmed Wealhtheow’s wrinkleless face. Her blue eyes looked tired and her lips were chapped. He patted her stomach before standing. “I think we have had enough outside activity for one day. May I escort you to your cart?”

She accepted Hrothgar’s hand. Her back ached and her arms and legs felt like iron. Hrothgar led her slowly over the field, and he and a maid helped her into their cart. Hrothgar made sure she was covered with blankets and that Hrothmund and his nurse were also settled comfortably before strolling toward Hrothulf and Hrethric.

Wealhtheow watched Hrothgar pick Hrethric off the ground and swing him in the air. The boy let out a shriek and Hrothgar spun him faster before hugging him in his arms. “It is time we were going boys.” He looked at Hrothulf. “Come Hrothulf, let’s go eat.”

“But I am not done with the snow dragon. It will only take a minute.”

Hrothgar shook his head. “My Lady is tired and you need to get out of the snow before you become a snow dragon yourself.” Hrothgar lifted Hrothulf with his other arm and carried the two boys toward the cart. Covering the boys with blankets, Hrothgar glanced around the field, making sure they had left nothing behind. The maids and

supplies were in the cart behind them, and Aeschere and two soldiers were in the drivers seats. Hrothgar climbed in beside Wealhtheow and whistled for his four dogs to follow the carts as they headed back up the hill to Heorot.

Wealhtheow adjusted her shoulder against Hrothgar's side. His warmth lessened the ache in her shoulders and she closed her eyes.

Once they reached Heorot, Hrothgar directed the servants to serve them their noon meal in the sitting room, and Wealhtheow relaxed beside the fire, feeding Hrethric barley porridge. Hrethric was a clean eater for a two-year-old. She enjoyed watching his mouth open whenever the spoon approached.

She shifted toward Hrethric, catching a spoonful of porridge that was falling down his chin. She spooned this into Hrethric's mouth. "It is tasty, já?" Wealhtheow patted Hrethric's back before relinquishing his feeding to a maid. She turned to eating her own meal of roasted venison, boiled potatoes, carrots, and onions. Wealhtheow noticed Hrothgar solemnly buttering a piece of bread, while beside him Hrothulf slathered his own small piece with almost half the butter in the container.

She smiled at the five-year-old. "That bread looks well buttered, Hrothulf. You might want to taste it and see if it pleases you." The five-year-old paused and glanced at Wealhtheow. He narrowed his eyes and lifted his nose at her before taking a bite.

"Ak! I do not like butter."

"It is because you used so much. You could try rubbing your piece of bread with another to even out the butter taste?"

Hrothulf dropped the bread to his plate and shook his head. He began eating the venison, peeking at Hrothgar out of the side of his eye. Hrothgar looked deep in thought, and Wealhtheow did not want to disturb him.

Wealhtheow chewed on her own slice of deer meat, savoring the pepper herbs she had been craving. She also ate a few slices of pickled cucumber, hoping to appease her body's appetite. In mid-bite, Wealhtheow felt a blow to her rib and jerked back in her seat. She laid her hand where the baby had kicked, gently pressing into her stomach. Wealhtheow felt the baby kick harder and massaged her belly, trying to move the baby's legs away from her ribs. She caught Hrothgar's glance.

She could not believe she was pregnant with her third baby. It seemed like she had arrived at Heorot only days ago, unsure of herself and the future. She glanced at Hrothmund who was asleep in a wooden cradle beside the fire and then at Hrethric who had managed to get porridge in his hair. She observed how Hrothulf swallowed his meat almost without chewing before glancing toward Hrothgar. He was watching her, and she saw the same warm glow on his face that he had given her since their marriage.

Wealhtheow exhaled and let her shoulders drop.

"How is lé-barn?" Hrothgar spoke from across the table.

"More active today than usual." She noticed Hrothgar frown. "But we are both well," she added. Under Hrothgar's eye, Wealhtheow finished the food on her plate before speaking again. "I will be strengthened by a bath and then a nap."

Hrothgar stood as Wealhtheow did and hastened to her side. He offered her his arm as she moved toward her chamber. Leaving the boys to the maid's care, Hrothgar and Wealhtheow entered Wealhtheow's bower. Once in the bathing room, Hrothgar hugged Wealhtheow. She relaxed into his arms. He kissed her before promising to return within the hour.

Wealhtheow awkwardly climbed into the wooden tub. Her maidens helped her out of her blue dress, carefully lifting the cloth over her rounded stomach. Goose bumps rose on her skin as she sat in the chilled room and they did not lessen until the servants filled the tub with boiling water. The ache in her muscles disappeared and she felt weightless. As the water cooled, maidens intermittently placed large heated rocks into the tub with iron tongs to reheat the water. Wealhtheow closed her eyes, feeling adrift in a sea of warmth.

She was not sure what startled her awake, but she adjusted in the tub and ran a finger over her face, feeling her water-wrinkled skin. She tried to calm her beating heart, but could not shake the menace that settled like a cloud over her head.

“What happened, my Lady? Is it time?”

“I am not sure. The baby must have kicked.” Wealhtheow tried to relax back into the tub. As she did so, she realized the water around her legs was cool. Wealhtheow struggled to her feet, her lower abdomen aching with the effort. Water ran down her legs for minutes after she stood, and Wealhtheow knew this liquid was not bath water.

Suddenly, her stomach heaved and she felt herself contracting. She let out a gasp and the maiden appeared at her side.

“I shall bring the bjargrÿgr, my Lady.”

“Nein, wait a moment.” Wealhtheow looked into the young girl’s face. “I’m sure we have hours before the baby is ready.” The servants helped her out of the tub, dried her off, and dressed her in a white fleece sleeping gown. As they helped her to bed, a stronger contraction hit, and Wealhtheow doubled over, crushing the blanket in her hand. Once the pain subsided, Wealhtheow crawled into bed and propped her back and neck on pillows.

Lying in bed helped soothe her, and she stared at the tapestry on the wall opposite her. The flames from the fire caused the jeweled images to jump as if alive. Despite the blankets, Wealhtheow felt chilled. She could not take her eyes from the painting of a king on a white stallion riding toward a mead hall that resembled Heorot. Peasants, soldiers, and scops danced and sang around the king and his horse. A pair of doves flew above the king’s golden crown. The king’s arm was outstretched and a queen stood in the door of a hall whose lights flooded into the darkening streets. The longer Wealhtheow looked at the painting, the more she began to see a shadow taking shape behind the hall. From where she lay, she could not tell if she had never noticed the shadow before or if her mind was creating it.

Wealhtheow shook her head, still gazing at the tapestry. The shadow continued to grow, first swallowing the doves in the sky, next the mead hall, and then the people

dancing around the king. The whole portrait darkened before Wealhtheow's eyes until all she could see were the king and queen. A fire started where the hall had been and war-flames consumed the tapestry. The king's crown melted on his head and dripped down his face until it was a puddle of gold at the stallion's feet. The darkness around the fire turned red and spread over the crownless king on the horse, and as another contraction hit, the entire painted scene was obliterated.

This contraction was more intense than the last and Wealhtheow knew the baby would arrive shortly. She waited a few minutes to be sure, but when an equally strong contraction began, she lifted her head, summoning a servant girl to her side.

"Tell Hrothgar the baby is coming. And fetch the bjargrýgr." Wealhtheow's words were cut short by another contraction. They were coming three minutes apart now and lasting almost a minute. The servant girl scampered out of the room and another maid laid a cold cloth on Wealhtheow's forehead.

Wealhtheow tried to recall the vision she had seen, but all else was forgotten as the contractions grew stronger and more persistent. She felt nauseous, and her body was shaking.

The bjargrýgr entered carrying cloths and a basin. She hummed to herself as she moved toward Wealhtheow and placed a cool hand over Wealhtheow's sweaty cheek.

"May Frigga, holy queen of the gods and esteemed wife of Odin, grant my Lady a safe delivery." After uttering these words, the bjargrýgr took a branch from her tunic and waved it from side to side over Wealhtheow's prone figure. She sprinkled drops of water

onto Wealhtheow by flicking her fingers together, continuing to chant in rúna, asking Frigga to bless Wealhtheow's labor. The bjargrýgr touched a hand to Wealhtheow's stomach and pressed down in a circular motion. A more powerful contraction hit and Wealhtheow arched her back. The bjargrýgr directed the other maidens to help Wealhtheow to the floor. The servants placed pillows underneath her knees and the basin underneath her. Maids supported her arms and Wealhtheow screamed as another contraction shook her.

The bjargrýgr held a cup of warm, green water to Wealhtheow's lips. The liquid tasted of celery, and Wealhtheow knew she was drinking hvonn to help with pain and prevent infection. The birthing maid began to chant from runic inscriptions on a whale bone, and for the next hour, Wealhtheow grew numb as she continued to kneel, pushing and breathing in turn.

The maids rubbed sweat from her face and smoothed her hair. As the final stage began, the birthing maid placed pillows in front of Wealhtheow and had her lean forward onto her elbows, encouraging her to alternately push and inhale. Wealhtheow bit down on a wooden peg and let out a muffled yell as the baby fell behind her into the arms of the bjargrýgr. Wealhtheow could barely move. The birthing maid brought the baby in front of her, removed mucus from the baby's mouth, and smacked the child on its backside. Wealhtheow noticed the baby's face pucker as it let out a wail.

“Thank Frigga and the gods there were no complications and your datter has no deformities. We must present her to Hrothgar.” The bjargrýgr wrapped the baby in

fleece before carrying her out of the room. The other maidens helped Wealhtheow to the bathtub, letting her soak in the warm water before wiping her clean and dressing her in a new linen sleeping gown. Wealhtheow was exhausted and could barely keep her eyes open. The maidens helped her to bed and she waited, her eyes falling shut, for Hrothgar's acceptance of the baby girl.

Wealhtheow did not have long to wait. Hrothgar entered her chamber, cradling the baby in his arms, and walked to the bed. He laid a hand on Wealhtheow's head, peering into her face.

"How are you feeling?"

Wealhtheow's hair stood out above her pale lips and face. She tried to clear her throat but her voice came out as a croak. "Tired, my Lord."

Before placing the baby beside her, Hrothgar rubbed her hair from her face with one hand. "We will call her Freewaru."

Wealhtheow closed her eyes in relief. "Thank you, my Lord. I am glad you are pleased with her."

Hrothgar reached for Wealhtheow's hand. She felt him gazing down on her, but barely had the strength to open her eyes. Hrothgar kissed her forehead. She squinted enough to see Hrothgar back out of the room, his eyes never leaving her face. At the door he turned to the bjargrÿgr. "Thank God for a safe delivery. And thank you for your efficiency."

The birthing maid bowed.

“Make sure she has everything she needs, and come see me when you are finished.” The bjargrýgr bowed again, and once Hrothgar exited, she and two other maidens helped Wealhtheow nurse the baby. Wealhtheow fell asleep with the baby still feeding at her side.

Wealhtheow woke to silence. She felt disoriented and reached for her stomach as had become her custom upon waking. Finding it flatter than it had been in some time, she rose upon her elbows. A maid perched next to her bed, and a low fire glowed in the fire pit.

“Freewaru is doing fine, my Lady. She has slept almost the entire time you have been asleep and has been fed several times by the nursing maid.” Wealhtheow slouched back onto her pillow. The maid walked to the side of the bed. “Is there anything I can get for you, my Lady?”

Wealhtheow licked her lips. “How long have I been sleeping?”

“About a day now, my Lady. Hrothgar and Hrethric have come to visit you several times; Hrethric even fell asleep beside you.”

Wealhtheow smiled at the girl. “Where are they now?”

“Preparing for the dinner festivities in the mead hall, my Lady.”

Wealhtheow threw back her covers and placed her feet on the floor. She felt dizzy and her feet almost folded beneath her when she stood, but she wanted to attend the celebration festivities.

The maid and another servant helped Wealhtheow take a quick bath before dressing her in a purple outer-wrap. They draped a cloak around her shoulders and pinned her hair on top of her head. Leaning on their arms, Wealhtheow made her way out of her room, past the sitting area, through the inner hall, and toward the mead hall. She could hear the cheers and laughter before even reaching the hall. Wealhtheow managed to keep herself steady on her feet as she entered. The cheering grew louder at her appearance.

Wealhtheow managed a smile. After the birth of Hrethric, the Danes had welcomed her more openly to their hall. The Dane's acceptance of her only seemed to deepen with time and the subsequent birth of Hrothmund and now Freewaru.

Hrothgar stood from his throne and escorted Wealhtheow to her chair. He raised his hands for silence. Beside Hrothulf, Hrethric's little arms waved to her. Wealhtheow waved back.

"My fellow Danes." Hrothgar looked around the hall. "Thanks to the efforts of your queen, we have a new addition to the royal line." A maid approached from behind Hrothgar. Freewaru was tucked into her arms. The maid handed Freewaru to Hrothgar and he positioned the sleepy baby against his chest so that the Danes could see her. "May I present to you, Freewaru, princess of Denmark. May she be as loving, wise, and gracious as her mother, and may she have the tongue and spirit of the Danes." The floor vibrated with cheers, and Hrothgar raised his glass with one hand. "To Freewaru!"

"To Freewaru!" The Danes echoed.

“May she live a long, happy, and peaceful life,” Hrothgar continued.

His pronouncement was followed by applause, and the Danes drank loudly from their cups.

Freewaru squirmed in Hrothgar’s arms, but did not cry out. Wealhtheow watched her daughter squirm beneath her swaddling, her round eyes gazing around the room. Hrothgar kissed Freewaru’s head before handing her to the maid who brought her into the hall. Wealhtheow’s eyes followed the maid’s arms as she rocked Freewaru from side to side.

Hrothgar turned to Wealhtheow. He summoned a man to his right who came forward with a small, wooden box in his arms. He brought the box before Hrothgar. Hrothgar put his hand on the lid and stared at Wealhtheow’s face. “God truly blessed me with a wife such as you, and I thank Him you were brought to the Danish household.” Hrothgar opened the lid and Wealhtheow stared. On the yellow cushioned inlay was a black pearl necklace whose strands were intertwined with rubies. At the center of the necklace lay a rounded ruby with engravings on the front. Wealhtheow raised her eyes to Hrothgar.

“My Lord. It is...it is lovely.”

Hrothgar beamed and picked it up. “It does not compare to the Brosing, but it comes close. I had our faces engraved onto the stone.” Hrothgar pointed to the surface.

On the front of the ruby was an engraving of a king and queen sitting on their thrones. Wealhtheow felt her eyes water. Hrothgar fastened the clasp around her neck and straightened the ruby in front.

“I do not know what to say, my Lord. This is such a generous gift.”

Hrothgar surprised Wealhtheow by kissing her lips in front of the Danes. “You are always welcome, my queen.” He squeezed her shoulder before turning toward the hall. “And for the hall...”

Hrothgar signaled to Unferth who stood to his right. Unferth nodded at two servants who exited through side doors. They returned in a moment carrying chests full of furs and finely woven cloaks. Hrothgar waved his arms over the chests. “Imported outer garments, blankets, and furs.”

Wealhtheow was amazed at the quality of the material. Hrothgar had proven to be a generous king, and as the servants began distributing the treasure, Wealhtheow felt heat seep into her face. Hrothgar beamed with pleasure in front of his throne and Wealhtheow felt lucky to be married to such a man.

The scop began to sing of Hrothgar’s generosity, of the beauty of Wealhtheow and her children, and of the blessings of the gods. He then sang of the god Hrothgar believed in, the one who had made the earth and all the living creatures, and how the humans fell from grace, bringing the wrath of this creator upon their heads.

Wealhtheow listened to the tale of this god of creation who fashioned the sun, the moon, and humanity with such care. Though he loved all he had created, he was forced to punish his creations' disobedience. This god sounded more compassionate than Odin.

Wealhtheow glanced at Hrothgar. He was smiling on his throne, glancing at the scop, and nodding his head. Wealhtheow had been energized by the Danes' welcome and by her husband's gift, but she now felt weak. The song made her uneasy, and her discomfort went beyond the exhaustion of her body. As she listened to the scop, she wondered if she should tell Hrothgar of the shadow and fire she had seen on the tapestry.

Hrothgar was gesturing to his advisors, his face full of firelight. He looked happier than she had ever seen him. Wealhtheow picked at the apricots, roasted pork, and apples set before her, trying to ease the tension in her shoulders.

Wealhtheow began to notice Hrothgar's gaze on her, and she tried to appear jovial. She ate the entire contents of her plate and sat sipping wine.

"What is it, my Lady? You seem quiet."

Wealhtheow leveled her shoulders on the throne. "I am still tired, my Lord. I think I may need to lie down."

Hrothgar gestured to a maid standing to Wealhtheow's right. "Please help the queen to her bed, and find the bjargrýgr."

The maid bowed before taking hold of Wealhtheow's arm. Wealhtheow sent a grateful nod toward Hrothgar before accompanying the maidens to her chamber. Before

she exited the mead hall, Hrethric came running over to her. A maid picked him up and held him close to Wealhtheow who stroked his head as he chattered baby talk in her ear.

“Ak? Tell moder all about it. You did? What a big bairn you are.” Wealhtheow commented on his chatter, patting his back, and slowly walking toward her bower.

Arriving at the sitting area, she watched the nursing maids feed Hrothmund and Freewaru. With Hrethric on her lap, Wealhtheow observed her three children. Though she was relieved to be in the bower, she still felt uneasy. Hrethric began playing with the necklace Hrothgar had given her and Wealhtheow jiggled him on her knee.

The bjargrÿgr arrived and examined Wealhtheow, declaring her in need of rest but in good health. The bjargrÿgr checked the children also, but all three had normal temperature and skin color.

Hrothulf entered the room, escorted by a maid, and the bjargrÿgr checked him as well. After finding nothing wrong, the birthing maid gave Wealhtheow a mixture of rosemary, chamomile, mugwort, and white willow bark to help her relax and heal more quickly.

Once Hrothmund and Freewaru were done eating, Wealhtheow helped put Hrethric and Hrothmund to bed. She rocked Freewaru until her eyesight became blurry. At least she need not worry over her children. But where did this anxiety come from? Wealhtheow hoped she was simply fatigued. With the help of a maid, she laid Freewaru in her basket before retiring to her own sleeping chamber where she fell asleep to thoughts of her daughter.

In the middle of the night, Wealhtheow twitched awake. Her skin was cold. She noticed Hrothgar was sleeping beside her. Wealhtheow thought she heard a muffled cry and lay motionless in the darkness, listening to the wind. Suddenly, a scream pierced the air, followed by a series of yells. Hrothgar jumped beside her, scrambled to the floor, and pulled his sword out from under the bed. Wealhtheow rose. Her blood hammered her head.

Someone was pounding on the outer door of their chamber. Before Wealhtheow or Hrothgar could speak, warriors burst through the wooden doors.

“My Lord, you both need to leave. Quickly!” Unferth darted into the room. He had a sword in his hand, his outer tunic was crumpled, and his hair was tousled.

“What is it? What has happened? Is it an army?”

Unferth glanced at Wealhtheow before looking to Hrothgar.

“Nein, my Lord. It is no army. We are not sure what it is. Some type of shadow-walker.”

A soldier’s high pitched voice rang into the room. He entered breathless and wide-eyed.

Wealhtheow’s feet almost dropped from underneath her. Surely it was not the shadow from her visions. She staggered beside the bed, and Unferth reached to stable her. She was too stunned to move away.

“Have the maids fetch the children. Hurry!” Hrothgar hastily fastened his outer tunic. He lifted his crown off the table beside the bed and slipped his feet into his shoes.

He turned to Unferth and Wealhtheow. “Unferth, make sure Wealhtheow and the children escape.”

Unferth nodded

“What about you, my Lord?” Aeschere stood at his side. “You should leave also.”

“I am not leaving. I have worked too long to keep peace at Heorot and will not let it crumble around me. I intend to fight.” Hrothgar glanced at Wealhtheow. “If I do not return within the hour, you and the children must go to the hills. You must hide in the....”

“My Lord?” The warrior Yrmenlaf staggered into the room, speaking between breaths. Blood dripped from his torn tunic and gashes covered his bare chest. “It is over my Lord.”

“What! What do you mean? What has happened?” Hrothgar walked toward Yrmenlaf and the group moved into the sitting room.

A maid brought water and Hrothgar offered it to Yrmenlaf. While he drank, the other warriors spoke in low tones.

Hrothgar turned towards them. “What happened? What was it?”

“We can not be certain, my Lord.” Unferth spoke from Wealhtheow’s side.

“Some type of monster. Men were running around the mead hall and all I could hear was shouting.”

The children appeared through their chamber door, carried by maids and surrounded by guards, food, and clothing. They were all asleep except for Hrothulf who glanced around the room with bleary eyes. A nurse handed Hrothulf a carved wooden horse, and he grasped the smooth toy to his chest.

Hrothgar held up his arm. “Wait for a moment before taking them.” He glanced back at Yrmenlaf. “Tell us what happened.”

Yrmenlaf fell onto a chair, breathing hard. He glanced up. “It was a hideous devil. He ate at least thirty of your warriors, my Lord, tearing them apart. There is blood all over the hall. No one knew what was happening. I watched the monster grab a man in front of me. The monster gurgled and his eyes glistened red. He was bigger than a dragon with massive arms and legs, and looked like a shadowy mountain except for his eyes. He tore a man apart in front of me, uttering some kind of sound or name or....”

“What? What did he speak?” Hrothgar paced in front of Yrmenlaf.

The Dane swallowed. “Gra-n-del? Grendel?” He scrunched his forehead. “Whatever it was, the creature kept pronouncing this sound almost like a laugh. The more the men screamed, the louder he became. And the smell. It was like rotten flesh, only worse.” Yrmenlaf dropped his head to his hands.

Hrothgar stopped in front of him and patted him on the shoulder. He looked at an attending maid. “Clean this warrior up. And gather a group to clean the mead hall. This outrage will not last the night.”

Hrothgar turned toward Wealhtheow and the children. “Stay in the chambers. If you hear anything unusual...” He glanced to Unferth. “You and the advisors take my children and queen to safety.”

Hrothgar glanced toward his men. “We’re going to fight this being, whatever it is. Assemble your weapons, fellow Danes. He turned to Aeschere. “Gather the men. We will meet in the mead hall.”

Warriors scattered and Hrothgar took his axe and spear off the wall. He briefly glanced at Wealhtheow, and she noticed the set of his jaw and the tilt of his head. He gave her a nod as he walked out. Unferth and Hrothgar’s advisors were the only men left in the room.

Wealhtheow could not control her thoughts. Was this the shadow of her visions? If she had shared her visions with Hrothgar, Heorot might have been better prepared for an attack. Wealhtheow shook her head. How could thirty of the Danish warriors be dead? Thirty men whose laughing faces she would never again see in Heorot. Wealhtheow swallowed. This travesty could not go unpunished. Surely with the help of the gods, Hrothgar and his men would repay this fiend for what he had done.

Maids hovered together and over the children, almost motionless in the lull that followed. Wealhtheow first walked to Hrethric. His arms were around his head and his brown hair splayed out on the pillow. She straightened his hair before moving on to Hrothmund who also slept in his basket. She rubbed his stomach, thankful that her sons were safe. She glanced at Freewaru and was surprised to see her daughter’s round eyes

staring back at her. Wealhtheow lifted Freewaru from her makeshift bed, hugging the baby to her chest. She lowered herself to a cushioned chair and rocked her daughter, rubbing her index finger over Freewaru's small, pink face.

"My Lady must be exhausted." Unferth spoke from behind Wealhtheow. His nearness caused her to stiffen. Unferth's presence always made her restless. She tried to avoid him whenever possible, and disliked the way his beady eyes constantly examined her and the activities in the hall.

"No more than you must be, Unferth. Besides, I can not rest knowing my husband and children may be in jeopardy." Wealhtheow turned her head to look at him. Her loyalty and desire for unity outweighed the fear she now felt. "I want peace just as much as you. Yet I wonder why you are in here with the women instead of in the mead hall with the men."

Unferth's face reddened. He adjusted his weight beside Wealhtheow before speaking. "My duty is to advise the king. If I could kill that beast I would. My Lady and her children's well-being are of uttermost importance besides looking out for Lord Hrothgar's safety." Unferth bowed his head.

Wealhtheow did not glance at him but kept her eyes on Freewaru's face, patting the baby's back in order to put her to sleep. She watched her daughter's eyes droop and then close.

"Freewaru is a well-behaved bairn." Unferth's voice was low behind Wealhtheow. She tipped her weight forward and stepped out of the chair without waking

Freewaru. She resettled the baby in a small, rectangular wooden basket and covered her with a purple blanket. Images of fire and death played in the back of her mind as she stood gazing down at Freewaru. Wealhtheow knew she had to see the condition of the hall for herself. She glanced at the advisors scattered around the room. Many were whispering. When they noticed her eyes upon them, they straightened and bowed.

After comforting herself with the fact that the children were resting, Wealhtheow walked toward the center of the room and raised her voice above a whisper so all present could hear her. "I am going to the mead hall. I want to see the damage." Wealhtheow began moving toward the outer chamber. Two servant girls instinctively trailed behind.

"Nein, my Lady. The mead hall is nearly destroyed and there is nothing but evil and danger there now." Unferth moved in front of her, but Wealhtheow sidestepped him. Unferth moved to her side. "My Lady, Hrothgar wanted you to stay here. He would not be pleased if..."

"Hrothgar will not be pleased if we do nothing. You heard Yrmenlaf. The monster has left. It is our duty to restore peace." Wealhtheow moved out the door, followed closely by her two servant girls. She heard Unferth's steps behind her and squared her shoulders. Unferth maneuvered to her right side and walked in her peripheral vision. Wealhtheow ignored him, making her way toward the hall.

The hallway was heavy with motion. The smell of death hung in the air. Maids and even warriors and peasants paced from the hall to the kitchen and back again. There were groups standing in the passageway to the hall, and one maid was even lying on the

floor. As the Danes and servants recognized Wealhtheow's presence, they fell silent and bowed, making room for her as she passed. Wealhtheow walked toward the fallen maid.

“What happened? Is she hurt?” Wealhtheow knelt beside the woman whose white tunic was spotless.

“She just fainted, my Lady. That is all.” Another maid spoke from her left.

Wealhtheow touched the fainted maid's hand. It was ice and Wealhtheow shivered.

Unferth put his arm on her shoulder and helped her stand. “Are you sure you want to do this, my Lady?”

Wealhtheow straightened and entered the mead hall. She paused just past the door, her eyes panning the room. Wealhtheow could not hold the moan that escaped her lips or stop her hand from covering her mouth against the acrid smell.

Hrothgar's throne was tilted on its side. Tables were knocked over and some were smashed to splintered pieces. Blood covered the wooden floors, trickled from paintings and tapestries, and dripped from the ceilings and walls. Feather mattresses placed upon benches to accommodate Hrothgar's sleeping warriors were slashed or ripped apart, and red stained feathers and lining littered the floor. The oak benches had been torn from their sills, and Wealhtheow shuddered at the strength that could rip these benches from the walls.

Servants and peasants scrubbed blood and carried splintered wood, ripped mattresses, and tainted tapestries out the doors. Fire embers dotted the floor and dimly

glittered around the room. The only light came from the open doors and the hole where the front iron-braced door had stood.

With the front door now gone, Wealhtheow stared into the blue light beyond the entryway. The shadows of the night seemed to seep into the room and bring to mind her visions. Her legs began to shake and she was overwhelmed with the desire to flee the hall.

Three warriors had their backs to Wealhtheow and she could hear the fear in their words.

“I can not believe he is gone. It happened so fast. I barely escaped myself. I was sleeping right next to him and felt the creature’s hot breath on my head.” The soldier wiped his face as he spoke.

Another warrior rubbed his head. “I never thought we would see such an evil visit Heorot. Such an enemy could not be defeated.”

The third soldier held up his sword. “I have never experienced anything so horrible. And none of our weapons even dented the creature’s skin, almost as if it were iron-plated.”

Wealhtheow laid a palm on her chest. If that were true, how could any man defeat such a creature? Her thoughts followed Hrothgar and she was certain his determination and love of peace would serve him in his quest. Wealhtheow called upon the gods of her father, on the fury of the war god, Odin, and his son, the thunder and lightning god, Thor, who battled giants with his belt and hammer. She asked them for

Heorot's victory and for vengeance against the evil that had disturbed Heorot's peace.

Wealhtheow was startled when the soldiers turned toward her. She must have spoken out loud.

“My Lady, you should not witness this horror.” One of the soldiers addressed her. He tried to remove the worry from his face. The three warriors bowed before Wealhtheow. “Although your prayers to Odin are always welcome.”

“It is a dark day, my Lady.” Another of the three warriors spoke as they came to stand beside Unferth.

“Where has Lord Hrothgar gone?” Wealhtheow glanced at the three. There was silence.

“He and the bravest warriors are tracking the monster, my Lady.” The Dane who had spoken looked at his fellow soldiers. “I guess we do not fight well enough to be included in the hunting party.” Wealhtheow was surprised by the tone in his voice. She always thought the men felt equal and happy.

“Judging by today's performance, I would say we are all unprepared for the danger that is now on our doorstep,” another warrior added.

Wealhtheow did not know how to respond. She looked each warrior in the eye. “We might have been unprepared today, but we are ready now. And, I am sure Lord Hrothgar needed capable men to guard Heorot until his return.” She waved her arm over the hall. “The safety of Heorot is now in your hands.”

The soldier who had complained tilted his head. “Thank you, my Lady. Please forgive my outburst.”

“There is nothing to forgive. Anxiety is expected under the circumstances.”

“Not to disagree with my Lady, but we have not seen battle in quite some time. Hrothgar should have been more prepared for the attack.” Unferth stepped forward.

The warriors did not move. They waited for Wealhtheow’s reaction.

Unferth paced around the room. He kicked at a cracked bench with his foot. “As generous as our ring-giver is, he is not as battle-wise as some.”

The warriors remained silent and Unferth still had not glanced at Wealhtheow.

She could not believe Unferth dared criticize the king, especially in front of her. “That will be enough, Unferth. Hrothgar is your Lord and you will speak of him and treat him as such.” Wealhtheow’s face burned and her stomach ached.

Unferth now stared at Wealhtheow. She felt bile rising in her throat. Unferth’s eyes were set like rock, and he remained unflinching under her gaze. After a moment, they softened and he traced the outline of her face. Wealhtheow lifted her head. Unferth bowed toward her; a wide, tooth-filled grin covered his mouth. “Forgive me, my Lady. I did not mean to show any disrespect. I was observing the situation. I should not have spoken of this in your presence. Please do not worry. I am certain Lord Hrothgar and the comitatus will return victorious.”

The three Danish warriors still said nothing, and they avoided Wealhtheow’s eyes.

Wealhtheow's head began to ache. She sighed and tried to calm herself.

“Remember your duty to your Lord, fellow Danes. Do not be overcome by the same spirit that now seeks to tear our hall apart.” Wealhtheow did not know where the words came from, but she felt stronger for having voiced them. “I thank you for your loyalty and diligence.”

Wealhtheow glanced around the hall once more. The broken bits had been carried outside, Hrothgar's chair had been righted, and the blood was slowly disappearing. She knew her words were the most powerful tool she had to maintain peace and unity. She nodded at the warriors. “The Danes are men of power. You fight with honor and dignity, and shall overcome this menace.” Wealhtheow turned and strode back the way she had come. As she entered the passage leading to her bower, she heard a chorus of loud voices echoing in the passageway.

“My Lord was not prepared.” She heard a maid say ahead of her.

“The King has become so absorbed with peace that he is unable to protect us.”

This came from a peasant man next to the maid.

“Where is the god he speaks of now? Maybe Odin is trying to teach the Lord a lesson.”

“I do not want to be eaten alive like the warriors in the hall.”

“Who wants to be in the mead hall now? I do not even want to be close to it.”

The words swelled around Wealhtheow. She was stunned. Her headache grew stronger, adding to the surreal situation. First the warriors, now the servants and peasants

were grumbling with disloyalty and faithlessness toward Hrothgar. Wealhtheow cleared her throat and the crowded hallway began to fall silent.

“Fellow Danes. Do not despair. I know you have been startled awake and shocked by the events of the night, but we will overcome. Lord Hrothgar will see to that.”

Wealhtheow swallowed before continuing. “It is time we rested. Guards are stationed out front, and those who have finished cleaning should return to their families and beds. Hrothgar and the comitatus will return shortly, and I am sure they will have good news to report.” Wealhtheow nodded before walking on down the passage. Her legs were shaking and the hall darkened and danced in front of her.

Upon rounding the corner to the sitting room, she staggered. Her servants reached to steady her and assisted her through the doors where maids, advisors, and her children slept. With the maids’ help, Wealhtheow returned to her bed, sinking gratefully into the cushioned mattress.

When the call of a magpie came from outside, Wealhtheow hugged the pillow under her head. She moved to the edge of the bed and stretched her arms. Wealhtheow paused, mid-yawn, remembering the nightmare that had visited Heorot. With the help of her maids, she slipped her arms into a green outer-wrap, pulling the garment tight about her before entering the sitting room. Hrothulf and her children were still sleeping, though the advisors and most of the maids were no longer in the room. Wealhtheow wondered if Hrothgar had been successful.

“Has Lord Hrothgar returned?” Wealhtheow asked a maid who entered carrying fresh linen.

“Já, my Lady. He and his men and advisors are in the mead hall.”

“How long has he been back?”

“Only a few hours, my Lady. And he has not been to bed at all.”

With little cheer, Wealhtheow thanked the maid. If Hrothgar had not slept, that meant he and his men had not found or killed the creature that now stalked Heorot.

Wealhtheow hurried toward the hall. A shroud of silence hovered over Heorot, quite a change from the confusion of the previous night. The doors were closed when she approached and a guard was stationed outside the double doors to the hall. He bowed once he saw Wealhtheow, and she nodded in turn. She reached a hand to open the doors, but the guard stepped in front of her.

“I am sorry, my Lady. Hrothgar has commanded that he and his advisors not be disturbed. He specifically did not want you to tire or worry yourself over the plans they are making.”

Wealhtheow halted, her hand paused midair. Surely Hrothgar would welcome her presence. She was as much a part of this as he was. She sighed. As a woman, she was not always entitled to her husband’s plans, even if she was queen. If Hrethric or even Hrothmund were awake, they would probably be admitted into the room with no problem. She turned toward the guard. “Have they had any refreshments?”

The guard tilted his head and his eyes glanced at the ceiling. "I know they have not eaten since they returned. And I do not think they have had anything to drink either." The guard glanced back at her.

"They will welcome some refreshments then. You yourself must be parched at least." The guard chewed on his bottom lip. She turned toward her attending maids. "Fetch wine, mead, cheese, venison, and vegetables. And bring nuts, bread, honey, and butter."

The maidens bowed before hurrying off toward the cooking area.

Wealhtheow turned back toward the guard. "How long have you been standing here?"

The guard arched his back and straightened his legs. "Must be at least a good three, four hours now, my Lady."

"Were you with Hrothgar on his hunt?"

The Dane nodded his head.

"How close did you come?" Wealhtheow met his look. She knew the search for the creature had been futile and did not pretend to be oblivious.

The guard raised his brows at her question, but he answered her without hesitation. "We went as far as the bogs, but could not pick up the trail outside of Heorot. We were almost wandering blind in the dark, with no trail and no hopes of finding the creature. Lord Hrothgar suspected that the creature lived in or near the mere, but after

several hours of searching with no luck, we finally returned.” The guard looked down at his feet.

“And Hrothgar and his advisors and warriors have been in conference since returning.” Wealhtheow finished his explanation.

Maidens returned with the requested items and Wealhtheow offered a cup for the guard to drink. After he had his fill, she supplied him with cheese, meat, and bread. He thanked her around a mouthful, and she and her maids entered the mead hall.

“We do not even know his moves or when he will attack next.” Unferth stood in the center of the room. He addressed a group of men sitting with their backs to Wealhtheow. Aeschere, Yrmenlaf, and Wulfgar flanked Hrothgar’s throne. Unferth broke off his sentence as he spotted Wealhtheow. The others turned toward her.

Wealhtheow willed her feet to move forward. Smiling, she approached the men, wine and mead in her hands. She felt Hrothgar’s eyes upon her. “I do not mean to interrupt, but we have brought refreshments for you and your men, my Lord.” Wealhtheow bowed before Hrothgar.

No one spoke. Wealhtheow heard the rustle of robes. She extended the goblet to Hrothgar.

After a moment, her hands lightened and she heard Hrothgar swallow. Wealhtheow glanced up at him. He finished drinking and gave her a half smile.

“Thank you, my Lady. Your interruption is welcome and needed.” Hrothgar returned the cup to Wealhtheow’s hands and she curtsied before turning toward the

chief warriors, Aeschere and Wulfgar. After they had their fill, she then turned toward Unferth, whose position as advisor and landholder placed him next under the Wendel chief. As each man accepted the cup, Wealhtheow directed her maidens to serve food.

Once her duty was complete, Wealhtheow returned to Hrothgar's side.

Hrothgar's shoulders sagged on the throne, his hair was disheveled, and his crown lay on his lap. Dirt covered his bearded chin, and dark circles were beginning to form under his eyes.

Turning toward the assembled men, Wealhtheow lifted her voice to be heard.

"Fellow Danes and friends of Heorot! Your loyal and brave acts have carried Heorot this far, causing the Danish land and people to flourish. I know your bravery and diligence will be rewarded, and this menace will be defeated."

The men nodded. Hrothgar straightened in his chair.

"May Odin grant us victory and may his wisdom safeguard us all. With Lord Hrothgar to lead us, we are bound to succeed." Wealhtheow's words were met with approval. The tension in the hall seemed to ease. Men began to converse and raise their glasses, toasting to one another and to Hrothgar.

Unferth stood and toasted Heorot, then walked toward the center of the men. "My Lord and fellow Danes, it would aid our cause to offer sacrifices to Odin." Unferth glanced at Hrothgar. "And to your god of creation also, my Lord." He bowed. "This will inspire lords, warriors, and peasants alike, re-instilling the confidence and peace you have worked so hard to build. It will also please the gods."

Hrothgar stroked his beard. He stood to his feet. “You have a point, Unferth. Let us then offer sacrifices before the noon meal, asking Odin, Thor, and the God of creation for favor.”

Hrothgar reached for Wealhtheow’s hand and she stood beside his throne, holding his thin hand in the warmth of her small one. Warriors entered the hall. Men toasted to success, and hope began to return to Heorot.

Wealhtheow watched maids enter, carrying her children and Hrothulf. The maids came to stand beside Hrothgar and Wealhtheow, and Wealhtheow patted Hrethric’s head with her free hand. Hrothmund and Freewaru were wrapped in blankets; only their faces could be seen.

Two soldiers entered and bowed before Hrothgar. “The horses are ready, my Lord. We chose two of your finest stallions.”

Hrothgar nodded. He stood and offered Wealhtheow his arm. The men quieted. “Fellow Danes.” Hrothgar paused. “We have suffered a blow, but we are not beaten. Dear friends were lost to the demon Grendel that stalked the hall last night, but these deaths will not be in vain. We will arm ourselves with wisdom and strategy, and if that creature dares to show his head again, we will cut it off!”

Hrothgar’s words were followed by loud applause and cheering.

Hrothgar raised the hand entwined with Wealhtheow’s. “Let us now join together and ask for the blessings of the gods: for Odin’s wisdom and victory, for his son Thor’s

cunning and skill in the face of monstrous creatures, and for the God of creation to vanquish his foes. Together we will defeat this evil.”

Cheering followed as Hrothgar stalked toward the side door, his arm still linked with Wealhtheow’s. Advisors, warriors, and servants followed. The assembly passed the mead hall and came to a cliff jutting from the hill. The shadow of a tall, gum tree covered a mound and the carved stones that surrounded it. The scop and two priests stood in the middle of two stones. The scop picked his stringed harp and began to hum in a low voice. The priests raised their arms to the sky and the gold plated statue of Odin, calling upon Odin and Thor to visit their ceremony and grant Hrothgar victory over Grendel.

Two white stallions were brought toward the mound. Hrothgar walked to the middle of the gathering and waited till movement and voices settled. Finally, he raised his voice.

“Let us seek the favor and direction of the gods. With their help, nothing can stand in our way.” Hrothgar raised his hands for the priests to continue, and they sprinkled oil and blood on the ground and the weapons. They circled the stallions, making runic marks upon their flanks with red clay.

Once the dedication was complete, the horses were lead onto the mound. The two priests blindfolded the stallions before raising their spears above them. The horses jerked as the spear heads punctured their skin. They lay quivering for a moment while the priests raised the bloodied spears to the sky.

Wealhtheow glanced at her children. Hrothmund was now sleeping, Hrethric's index finger was in his mouth, and Freewaru was crying in the maid's arms. Wealhtheow reached for Freewaru, smiling into the baby's face. "Ak. what is it jung-frú?" Wealhtheow tried to calm Freewaru by bouncing her in her arms, but Freewaru would not be comforted.

Freewaru's face turned red. Wealhtheow glanced at the dead horses and then at her daughter. She turned her back to the priests and Freewaru instantly became quiet. Wealhtheow smoothed Freewaru's head and cheek and kissed her daughter before again facing the mound. Freewaru began crying and Wealhtheow felt the earth shake beneath her. What did Freewaru know that they did not?

Wealhtheow glanced at Hrothgar. He was watching her. She tried to look encouraging, but Hrothgar's face remained pale and sweat gleamed on his forehead.

Thunder sounded in the distance. The priests took this as a sign of favor and began to sing louder and clasp their armbands. Because Freewaru would not be quieted, Wealhtheow resignedly left the proceedings and walked toward the mead hall. Freewaru calmed with every step, and the sun began to gleam over the ocean as it rose from the east.

Chapter Three: Woman of Intuition

Wealhtheow handed the pitcher to Freewaru. She watched her twelve-year-old daughter pour mead into her father's cup. Freewaru flipped her long brown hair over her left shoulder and tried not to spill.

Freewaru was a pleasant addition to Heorot. She had grown quickly and had been diligent in learning her duties. Wealhtheow glanced at Hrothgar as he patted Freewaru's hand. They would both feel Freewaru's absence strongly once she was wedded to king Ingeld.

The Danish conflict with the Heathobards had grown increasingly worse, and Hrothgar was planning to wed Freewaru to the Heathobard king, Ingeld, to end the feud between the two tribes. Wealhtheow looked back at Freewaru; she was a noble princess and would make a gracious queen.

Wealhtheow placed her arm on Hrothgar's. He turned his white-grey head toward her and his sunken face and eyes tried to smile. He lifted the cup to her in a toast before bringing it to his white lips. His veined and furrowed hands clutched the cup's golden sides.

With the passing of time and the years spent struggling against Grendel, Hrothgar's physical strength had deteriorated. Wealhtheow believed Hrothgar's determination for peace would keep him strong in his war with Grendel, but the

monster's nightly attacks had sapped the strength and resolve from him. This morning, Wealhtheow thought Hrothgar was looking particularly frail.

"That was my piece of meat!" Wealhtheow glanced to her left. Hrothulf had jabbed his dagger into the last cube of venison on the plate before him, staring at the advisor across from him. Hrethric and Hrothmund, seated to Hrothgar's far right, also glanced up. The few Danes eating the noon meal in the mead hall did not appear to notice Hrothulf's lack of manners. They ate with their eyes on their plates, and even Unferth, who usually noticed all activity, did not appear to hear him.

Wealhtheow grasped the pitcher from the tray a maiden held in her arms. She stood in front of Hrothulf. "Hrothulf? Would you like more mead?" She lifted the pitcher before him. He slid his cup toward her without glancing in her direction. "There is plenty of food for all, Hrothulf. You do not need to fight over one piece of venison." Wealhtheow finished pouring the mead. "Save that spirit for Grendel."

Hrothulf spoke with his mouth full of meat "I would, but someone will not let me face the monster." Hrothulf glanced at Hrothgar. He raised his voice. "If no one else can beat the monster, at least I should be allowed the chance."

Hrothgar wheezed out a cough. "Patience." He looked at Hrothulf. "Your time will come soon enough. It never pays to thirst for blood, Hrothulf. You should seek peace first and foremost."

"That has done us a lot of good." Hrothulf grumbled at his table before resuming his lunch.

Wealththeow shook her head and tried to catch Hrothulf's eye, but he did not look at her. She loved Hrothulf as a son, but he was headstrong and independent and had grown to be rather sullen, particularly in his dealings with Hrothgar and her children. She walked past Hrothulf toward her sons at the next table. Both boys wore blue capes and leg wrappings, and daggers were strapped to their waists. She refilled Hrethric's cup with mead, but gave Hrothmund milk.

"Not fair. This is only my second glass. Hrethric's only two years older. Why is he allowed to drink as much as he wants?" Hrothmund poked Hrethric in the ribs. Hrethric fluffed Hrothmund's black hair, and the two began to shove each other at the table.

"That is enough, boys." Wealththeow scooted Hrothmund's cup toward him. "And that was your fourth glass, Hrothmund." Hrethric stuck out his bottom lip and laughed at Hrothmund. Hrothmund narrowed his blue eyes at his older brother.

Wealththeow shook her head and she and Freewaru continued their rounds with the pitcher. As she filled glasses, Wealththeow tried to encourage faith in the men, but even the scop could not keep his eyes off the ground. Wealththeow resumed her place beside Hrothgar. She missed Heorot's feasting, laughter, and fellowship. Hrothgar's warriors, though still trying to defeat Grendel, were sparse in the mead hall and usually scattered after the evening meal.

A coast guard yanked open a side door and launched into the room. He was breathing hard and his haste caught the hall's attention. Hrothgar stopped eating as the

guard approached. The guard made his way toward Hrothgar's throne and bowed four-square in front of the king.

“Warriors have landed at the bay, my Lord. I was sent to relay the news as soon as they were spotted.”

Hrothgar cocked his head. “How many? And where are they from?”

“Only one boat, my Lord. It was impossible to tell where they were from, though the coast guard Guthlaf was on his way to question them when I left.”

Wealhtheow surveyed Hrothgar's face. Though his expression was unreadable, she knew he wondered if the warriors were Heathobards, come to stir up more dissension.

Hrothgar leaned upon his chair in his effort to rise and was assisted by servants as he stood. He raised his voice. “Fellow Danes, a group of soldiers have landed on our coast. We need to ready ourselves to meet these warriors, whether they be friendly or not.” Hrothgar turned toward the warriors and advisors to his right. “Aeschere, you and Wulfgar assemble warriors and keep watch outside the walls of Heorot.”

Aeschere and Wulfgar stood and bowed before taking weapons and men from the hall.

Hrothgar turned to Unferth. “If they ride hard, they could be here in a few hours. What do you say, Unferth?”

Unferth swallowed and then replied. “One ship can barely be a threat, my Lord.”

Another advisor spoke from beside Hrothulf. “Yes, but one ship can do a lot of damage.”

The Danes were silent. Wealhtheow felt the anxiety deepen in the hall. Heorot had had its share of war and violence, and the men were so worn by Grendel that they could not possibly face an army. Despite this thought, the presence of the approaching warriors seemed to calm her spirit.

Wealhtheow leaned toward Hrothgar. “I believe these visitors come in peace, my Lord. Their presence feels soothing.”

Hrothgar stroked his beard and looked at Wealhtheow. He chewed on his bottom lip in silence. No one spoke. Wealhtheow once again noted the weariness in Hrothgar’s eyes. It was often harder to fight for peace than to fight in combat. For the majority of his reign, Hrothgar had been consumed with bringing unity to Denmark. The task was far more exhausting than any war on a battlefield.

Hrothgar turned toward the hall and broke the silence. “Whether they are peaceful or not, we will be ready to meet them. Prepare yourselves for action, but do not act unless the approaching warriors show themselves to be enemies of Denmark.”

Advisors nodded their heads in agreement. Unferth put his forehead in his hand.

Hrothulf scowled. “Why not meet these warriors with men and weapons and let them know we will not welcome them gladly?”

Hrothgar caught Hrothulf’s look. “But if they are friends, we risk a great loss and possibly another feud.” Hrothgar glanced around the room. “Nein, it is better to be prepared for both outcomes and use whichever is necessary.”

Hrothulf threw himself upon the bench and resumed his meal. Wealhtheow smoothed her hair. Hrothulf's words were disappointing, but she knew he would not listen to advice and was determined to create and follow his own path.

Wealhtheow glanced around the room. The hall became louder as men chattered among themselves. The coast guard who had entered was given a seat. The hall was louder than it had been in years. The meal stretched on and the scop began to play, his voice stronger and full of more energy than he'd expressed since Grendel's attacks.

At length, Wealhtheow stood. She curtsied to Hrothgar.

"If I may, I shall retire, my Lord." Wealhtheow kissed Hrothgar's hand.

He rubbed her cheek. "Do you really feel the approaching soldiers are peaceful?"

Wealhtheow gazed at him. "Yes, my Lord. And as you can see from the hall, just the mention of these men has put more life back into Heorot."

Hrothgar nodded slowly. He tugged on Wealhtheow's hand and she leaned down so he could kiss her cheek. "I'll see you for dinner then. We shall wait with expectancy to meet these warriors."

Wealhtheow squeezed Hrothgar's arm before heading out the hall. Escorted by her maidens, she made her way to the sitting room. Freewaru followed her. Instead of retiring to her bower, Wealhtheow rested in the sitting room. Freewaru perched on a chair beside her.

"Perchance the warriors have arrived to defeat Grendel. Do you think that is why they have come?" Freewaru straightened her tunic.

“Only Odin knows.” Wealhtheow smiled at Freewaru. “But I believe your feelings are right. I too perceive they are here to help.”

Hrothulf entered the chamber. He strode past Wealhtheow and Freewaru to his room.

“Hrothulf?” Freewaru’s young voice called to him and he paused before the iron door. “Would you like to join us?”

“Join you? Nein.” Hrothulf flicked his red cape over his shoulder. “I intend to meet these warriors and see what they want.”

“Ak! Hrothulf, I wish you would not.” Wealhtheow turned towards him. “Leave that to Aeschere and the other warriors. They are more than capable.”

“I am more than capable.” Hrothulf tossed his head. “I can take care of myself, dear aunt. You need not worry about me.” Hrothulf disappeared through the door.

Wealhtheow glanced at Freewaru. She was still staring at the spot where Hrothulf had been and twisted a finger in her brown hair. Her eyes held a vague, distant look.

Wealhtheow did not understand what drew Freewaru to Hrothulf. Whenever Hrothulf lounged within the hall, Freewaru was sure to be beside him, talking with and taunting him as if his company was most agreeable and pleasant to her. Hrothulf certainly enjoyed the attention, and Wealhtheow could not tell if he held the same admiration for Freewaru that she did for him. Wealhtheow let her breath out in a rush. With Freewaru’s betrothal, she no longer had to concern herself with the relationship between these two. Still, it was puzzling.

“Freewaru? Let us finish weaving your wedding wrap. It is almost done and the elegant design is sure to impress Lord Ingeld.”

Freewaru stood hesitantly. “Have you ever met King Ingeld?”

Together they made their way to the loom that the servants were leaning against the wall for their use. “I have not. Lord Hrothgar says Ingeld is very loyal to his men and a capable ruler.” Wealhtheow glanced at Freewaru who ran her hands over the two posts on top of which rested the loom’s crossbeam.

“There is not much warp left.” Freewaru grasped the long, gold-laced threads weighed down with stones. The stones clinked together as Freewaru ran her finger over the woven yellow fabric at the top of the loom that gave way to threads of fleece waiting to be woven into the dress. “That means we are almost finished.”

Wealhtheow gathered cloth strands in her hands. “Your marriage to Ingeld will please your father. His poor health and concern over Grendel leaves him little time to worry about feuds.” Wealhtheow spoke as she and Freewaru walked from one side of the loom to the other, moving the center rod in order to alternate the position of the cloth layers.

“Marriage is always difficult at first. But it gets easier. And it is possible to be content with your new life, especially knowing your role as peacemaker is so important.”

Freewaru did not respond and the two wove together in silence. Wealhtheow was pleased with Freewaru’s weaving. They worked quickly, and as the garment

increased in length, Wealhtheow rolled the cloth onto the crossbeam by pulling down the handle attached to the side of the posts.

The door to the out chamber opened and Wealhtheow glanced up to see Hrethric and Hrothmund enter the sitting room. Hrethric was talking and gesturing to Hrothmund.

“What I do not understand is why Grendel never comes any farther than the mead hall. It is almost as if the gods will not allow him to harm Lord Hrothgar or us.”

“He is a cursed creature,” Hrothmund replied. “His violent nature can never overcome the goodness and peace of our father.”

Wealhtheow glanced at her sons. “Remember my sons. As nobility we are both protected by and descended from the gods. And, despite Grendel’s bloodthirsty nature, he may still fear the power of man in some way, at least enough to keep him from fully entering Heorot.”

Hrethric pounded his fist into his palm. “But to our lasting shame we can not defeat the demon. Something must be done.”

“Maybe father should find another supernatural creature to defeat him.”

Hrothmund dropped his weight onto a chair.

The crackling of the fire was the only noise in the room. Both boys fell silent and Freewaru was engrossed in her weaving.

“Let us go race our horses before it gets dark.” Hrethric looked down at Hrothmund.

“But it is just starting to get dark. And I do not want to miss the news of the warriors.”

“I am sure we have time before they get here. And you know Grendel never attacks until after the evening meal.” Hrethric paused. “I wish I could kill that devil with my bare hands.”

Wealhtheow smiled over at her sons. She appreciated Hrethric’s zeal, but was glad he was too young to be placed in harm’s way. “Hrothmund?” She glanced at him. “Go on with your brother. I am sure the evening meal will begin within the hour and the warriors will not be here till then.”

Hrothmund nodded and he and Hrethric left the room.

Wealhtheow stretched her back and glanced at their progress. They were nearly done. “Let us rest from our weaving, Freewaru. Would you like to play tafl?”

Freewaru lifted the rod once more before stepping away from the loom. She smoothed her outer wrap before sitting. A maiden brought the hnefatafl board and adjusted it between two chairs.

Wealhtheow took the seat across from Freewaru. Freewaru chose to play the role of attacker and move the white, wooden pieces, leaving Wealhtheow to protect the royal hnefi by moving the pawn-like hunns.

Wealhtheow moved a hunn in front of her hnefi and Freewaru tilted her head as she gazed at the board. Wealhtheow enjoyed playing hnefatafl. It was her favorite diversion, and she had learned to guess her opponent’s move before they made it.

Wealhtheow moved another hunn, her thoughts distracted by her calculations of when the approaching warriors would arrive at Heorot.

After moving her black wooden pieces into position, Wealhtheow knew the game would not last much longer. Her hunns had captured most of Freewaru's white pieces.

Freewaru moved an attacker to the square before the hnefi and gave Wealhtheow a wide grin.

"You will never take my king." Wealhtheow returned Freewaru's smile as she moved to block the attack with a hunn.

"My Lady." A maid dashed into the room, disturbing Wealhtheow's concentration. Her words left her in a rush. "The warriors have arrived."

"What?" Wealhtheow half rose from her seat. "They are here already?"

Freewaru's hand paused over the board, her attacker frozen in mid-air.

"Já, my Lady. They are outside Heorot's walls. Aeschere and Wulfar are ready to meet them, and Hrothgar asks that you and Freewaru stay here until these warriors are determined to be friendly."

"Have Hrethric and Hrothmund returned yet?"

"I do not believe they have, my Lady. But I will see." The maid quickly curtsied then left the room.

Wealhtheow leaned back against her chair. She stared at the hnefatafl board.

"It only took them two hours. It usually takes more than three hours to reach Heorot. Perhaps they were helped."

Wealhtheow glanced at her daughter. “It is likely they were assisted, which means they have come in peace. I have prayed so often...” Wealhtheow’s eyes were drawn to the fire beside her. The flames were hypnotic and Wealhtheow’s vision became unclear as she watched the flames dance and twist. Perhaps this was the salvation for which they had been hoping. Wealhtheow refocused her attention on Freewaru. “For now, we must wait. And since we are waiting, we might as well finish the game.”

Freewaru folded her hands across her chest. “Why continue? We already know who will win. You even beat Lord Hrothgar on occasion, though he will never admit it.”

Wealhtheow blew air through pressed lips. “You could always beat me. I am vulnerable in certain places.”

Freewaru leaned closer to the board. The firelight played with her face and gave her skin a rosy glow. After a moment, she noticed an attacker could put Wealhtheow’s hnefi in danger. She quickly moved the piece. “Ha.”

“Very good, but...” Wealhtheow moved her hnefi to safety.

The game lasted a few more minutes before Wealhtheow captured Freewaru’s last game-piece.

Freewaru rolled her eyes at her mother. “Ak! You won. How surprising.”

Wealhtheow chuckled. She walked toward Freewaru’s chair and gave her a hug. “You will beat me next time.”

“I doubt that greatly.”

Wealhtheow planted a kiss on Freewaru's brown head before returning to the loom.

She thought of Hrothgar's unease at the approach of the warriors. She wondered what was happening in the mead hall. At least Hrothgar had listened to her proclamation that the warriors meant no harm. Wealhtheow never knew where the thoughts and words came from, but at times she was overpowered by the sense of her situation and the accuracy of the impressions she was given. Though she could not explain the reason, she felt peace with the presence of the warriors. Through her years at Heorot, Hrothgar had given more thought to the advice and thoughts she offered him, and she strove to share her most honest and accurate insights with him.

Wealhtheow resumed weaving while Freewaru lounged before the fire studying the hnefatafl. If only she could be sure that the warriors were here to aid Hrothgar and that Grendel's attacks would end.

"You could almost plan a war, moder. Your strategies are nearly unbeatable."

Wealhtheow warmed at her daughter's words. "Thank you, Freewaru. Hnefatafl not only takes practice and clear thinking, but experience as well. The more you play, the better you will become. There are strategies and answers to life that only experience can give you."

Freewaru joined Wealhtheow at the loom and they resumed their work on Freewaru's dress. "Are you referring to marriage?"

“Já, marriage is one such experience.” Wealhtheow placed her hand on Freewaru’s. “More importantly, I am referring to knowing your duties and the importance of family. With my marriage to Lord Hrothgar, I was not anxious to leave my Helming fader’s house. It was the only home I had ever known. But the happiness and peace of my family depended upon my alliance to the Danes. I know you are apprehensive about your marriage. That is normal. As you know, my own moder was captured from her Finnish lands and wedded to my fader, yet she succeeded in making a life for herself.” Wealhtheow glanced at Freewaru’s face. “Never forget how important your role is to not only to the Danes, but also to the Helmings and Heothobards.”

Freewaru squeezed her mother’s hand. “I will not forget.”

“A firm relationship is built on respect and time. If we could choose our own husbands like many of the peasants, we would be seeking after our own happiness and then only have ourselves to blame when the relationship collapsed.”

Freewaru rubbed a hand over her hair and Wealhtheow could tell she was thinking. They continued weaving in the stillness of the room, until they were interrupted by a servant from the mead hall. He nearly ran through the door.

“My Lady.” He bowed before Wealhtheow. “Hrethric and Hrothmund have returned. They are in the mead hall with Lord Hrothgar and the warriors from Geatland.”

“Geatland?” Wealhtheow tilted her head.

“Yes, my Lady. They are led by a warrior named Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, a warrior-lord for the Geat king Hygelac.”

“Yes. I have heard of him.” Wealhtheow narrowed her eyes. “Hrothgar has mentioned him as did Ecgtheow in his visit.” She recalled the feud that Ecgtheow had started with her Wulfing relatives months after she had married Hrothgar. The feud led to the death of her second cousin, Heatholaf. Just as war between the Geats and Wulfings seemed inevitable, Ecgtheow had asked Hrothgar for help. Hrothgar had invited him to stay at Heorot and made peace between the Geat Lord and the Wulfings by sending a ship laden with treasures to the Wulfings as a wergild for Heatholaf’s death. As a result, not only had Hrothgar emphasized his allegiance to her Helming tribe, he also formed an allegiance with the Geats.

“Hrothgar has welcomed him openly to Heorot, my Lady. And Beowulf promises to rid us of Grendel.”

Wealhtheow’s reverie was interrupted by this news. Her hands dropped to her sides, and she stood motionless beside the loom. She had prayed to her father’s gods and even Hrothgar’s god of creation for so long. She hoped the warriors could fulfill the task.

Wealhtheow glanced at Freewaru. “We must ready ourselves so we can join the men in the mead hall and show the Geats Heorot’s graciousness and thanks.”

Wealhtheow departed to her dressing rooms. Maids helped her into her most elegant wrap of spun gold thread the color of a hay field. Wealhtheow donned matching fleece shoes, gold, pearl, and ruby rings and bracelets, the Brosing, and the necklace Hrothgar had given her. Her maids braided strands of her hair and pinned the strands behind her head in wreath-like fashion. They also placed her most queenly, jewel-

encrusted, gold diadem upon her head. Wealhtheow scrubbed her face and applied a touch of red dye to her cheeks and lips. She tied a gold-fringed, rope-like belt around her waist.

When Wealhtheow appeared in the sitting room, Freewaru and her maids were waiting for her. Freewaru wore a heather-gray hangerock with golden brooches and long sleeved wrap. A jade necklace and other beaded necklaces hung from the brooches holding the hangerock straps, and the hair around Freewaru's face had been pinned behind her head.

The party made their way out the iron door toward the mead hall. Laughter and singing flowed into the hallway. Wealhtheow quickened her step, anxious to meet the warriors who had returned the life and laughter Heorot was built upon.

Wealhtheow stepped into the mead hall. It was filled with more men than it had been in a long while. She walked toward Hrothgar's side and there was a lull in noise. Wealhtheow turned to face the men, saluting them graciously. "Fellow Danes, I am pleased that your laughter and happiness covers Heorot like gold. And welcome dear Geats from the northwest. Your presence has given Heorot hope."

Wealhtheow took a round, golden bragaful decorated with jewels from a tray a maiden held for her. She filled the cup with mead before offering it to Hrothgar. "Accept this mead, my Lord, as a means of solidifying the Danes' tribe with the Geats'. Please drink deeply and enjoy, for yours is a rule beyond compare, and you are dear to us all."

Hrothgar grasped the bragaful to his chest. He threw back his white-gray head and downed the glass in three long gulps. Tipping his head upright, he handed the cup back to Wealhtheow. Once the bragaful was back in her hands, she curtsied.

Hrothgar looked radiant. His skin was flushed with excitement, his eyes danced with firelight, his lips wore a tooth-filled smile, and laugh lines crinkled the corner of his eyes and mouth.

The excitement was so heavy that Wealhtheow became lightheaded. According to custom, she made her rounds, offering the mead to every Danish official, lord, and warrior by rank, allowing time for the Danes to toast the Geats and for the Geats to prepare to partake of mead. Only Unferth scowled as she presented the bragaful to him. Wealhtheow wondered what had been said to make him so morose. He seemed almost to scorn the cup she handed him, glaring at the rim before grudgingly taking it up and drinking. Wealhtheow tried to catch his eye, but Unferth would not return her glance, gazing instead at his plate.

Wealhtheow eyed the Geats as she made her rounds. Fifteen Geatish warriors were present in the mead hall at one table. Iron-plated helmets rested on the table beside them or on their laps and seemed frightening in the Geats' muscled grasp. Moustache and eyebrow attachments glittered in the fire, scratched and dented iron covered the helmet's face down to the chin, and the holes for the eyes and mouth were silent and dark. The iron that extended from either side of the helmet to protect the sides of the face was thick and dagger-like. A gilt-bronze neckguard flowed behind the helmet, carved and

dyed with combat scenes and entangled animals. The gold plated face of a ruby-eyed snake decorated the front of the helmet and was carved face to face with another snake whose iron body started below the nose and ran up toward the head. The two snakes met above the eye holes of the helmet.

Wealhtheow shivered and glanced at Hrothgar; he was laughing and even plucked at a stringed harp. She smiled as his tuneless voice sang above the noise of the hall before returning to watch the Geatish warriors in their hand-linked coat of mail that glinted in the light. Each Geat stood at least six feet tall and black hair covered their faces. Though seated, one Geat immediately drew Wealhtheow's attention. His shoulders were wider than any man she had ever seen, and his upper torso reached a good foot above the other Geats at the table. He looked as powerful as a bear. His hair was also the longest of any of the Geats and came to his waist. While the other Geats had long flowing beards and coarse facial hair, this Geat's appearance was all the more striking because he lacked any hair on his face.

Wealhtheow felt certain this warrior was Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, and her suspicions were confirmed when she caught his glance. There was a familiarity in his brown eyes, resembling that of Ecgtheow's. Arriving at the Geat's table, Wealhtheow offered the bragaful to each Geat, who dutifully thanked her and drank the mead. At last it was Beowulf's turn. Wealhtheow approached him, her gray-blue eyes smiling into his brown. She refilled the mead before curtsying and handing the bragaful to Beowulf.

“I thank the gods for granting my wish to send a deliverer to Heorot who can destroy the shadowy demon that afflicts us.”

Beowulf reached for the bragafull in Wealhtheow’s hands. His red lips parted in a smile before drinking the mead. He then rose to his feet. He was so tall that Wealhtheow had to crane her neck to look at him.

“Thank you, my Lady.” Beowulf bowed from his torso while holding Wealhtheow’s gaze. Upon straightening, he reached for her hand, squeezed it warmly, and then planting a light kiss on her palm. “My men and I are your humble servants. Your beauty and graciousness reached my ear while I was performing many feats of valor. You are a source of light in Heorot, the most magnificent of mead halls, and I will rid you and Heorot of this devil so you can return to the peace you once knew. I had this purpose in mind when I set out on the swan-road. Surrounded by my band of loyal Geats, I intended to defend the Danish people or die in the attempt and struggle with my last breath in the fiend’s clutches. I shall fulfill the purpose I have come to carry out, proving myself through this deed and ensuring yours and Heorot’s splendor lives, even if I die in the attempt.”

Wealhtheow was pleased at the soft, yet determined tone of his voice. There was a fire in his eyes and a swagger punctuated his words. “May the gods give you strength, brave Geat.” She nodded her head at him before taking the bragafull from his hands and returning to her throne beside Hrothgar.

The mead hall grew louder. The scop's voice could barely be heard above the noise, but he strummed his harp and toasted long life to the Geats and king Hrothgar. Hrethric and Hrothmund were at the table beside the Geats. They listened open-mouthed to the exploits the Geats relayed, intermittently laughing and asking questions. Even Hrothulf, at his seat near Hrothgar's advisors, seemed less sullen, engrossed in the tales of the Geats. Drinks flowed throughout the hall, and several Danes danced about the room, calling doom upon Grendel's head and citing the glory of Heorot. A dancing Dane issued a drinking contest, and even the Geats took up the challenge.

Wealhtheow delighted in the jokes both Danes and Geats shared. She and Freowaru made several more rounds in the hall to ensure the mead was plentiful and accessible for each man. The servants entered and re-entered with more food than Heorot had seen in the past weeks. They carried plates of venison, lamb, pig, chicken, salmon, cod, and haddock. There were carrots, turnips, cabbage, spinach, peas, beets, apples, plums, strawberries, honey, butter, almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, bread, and mixed and dried berry spreads. Wealhtheow ate, even though she knew she was full, enjoying the texture and taste of each dish, made sweeter by the laughter of the hall.

The meal grew longer and men pinched maids, spoke with slurred speech, and held wrestling matches. Even Unferth forgot whatever had made him ill-tempered, joining the drinking and arm wrestling with laughter and oaths. As the day came to a close and the day became darker, Hrothgar turned toward Wealhtheow.

“How are you feeling, my Lady?” His eyes gleamed and his head lay on the cushioned back of his seat.

“Very happy, my Lord, but admittedly beginning to tire.” Wealhtheow licked elderberry juice from the side of her mouth.

“I feel the hour is drawing near for Grendel’s approach. It would be wise to let the Geatish warriors rest.”

Wealhtheow nodded. “Yes, my Lord. You are as wise as you are thoughtful.” Wealhtheow stood to her feet and bowed before Hrothgar. “Shall I see you soon, my Lord?”

Hrothgar nodded at her, and Wealhtheow began to leave the room as Hrothgar stood and raised his arms. It took a few moments for the hall to quiet. Men swayed on their feet, stumbled onto benches, or leaned on the table or each other. Hrothgar spoke as silence descended. “Fellow Danes and Geats, though the night has been enjoyable, the hour is late. Grendel is sure to arrive shortly. We must let the Geats rest before their battle.”

Hrothgar turned toward Beowulf. “Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, I wish you the best of health and luck in your fight. You and your men are truly an answer to prayers. Since I have been able to hold a shield and sword I have not given control of the Danes’ hall to anyone, but tonight I give it to you. Guard Heorot, the greatest of halls. Keep in mind your future fame and destiny, and beware of Grendel. He is a formidable foe. If you win this battle and live, there is nothing you may wish for that will not be yours.”

Beowulf bowed. “It will be my honor to face Grendel, my Lord, and rid Heorot of his menace.”

Wealhtheow clapped as she moved out the door. Beowulf seemed so brave and self-assured. She heard Hrothgar order the servants to bring mattresses and blankets to place on the benches for the Geats and then the creaking of benches and floor echoed into the hallway as the gathered men stood to their feet.

Wealhtheow glanced behind her. Freewaru and her maidens walked at a distance. Hrethric, Hrothmund, and Hrothulf followed, chatting loudly. Hrothgar was behind his sons, talking with warriors and advisors. Once inside the sitting room, Wealhtheow bid her children good night and entered her bower to ready herself for bed. Hrothgar entered a moment later and propped his weight against the closed door. He watched Wealhtheow as she stood before the bed.

“It has been a long day, my Lord. A long but glorious day.” Wealhtheow looked at Hrothgar. He gingerly transferred the weight to his feet and shuffled toward her.

“I doubt sleep will claim me long tonight. I will never forgive myself if Beowulf dies on my account.”

Wealhtheow put her palms on either side of Hrothgar’s face. “I expect this is the end of Grendel’s tyrannical reign, and I feel certain that the peace you have worked hard to establish will return to Heorot through Beowulf’s hands.”

Hrothgar leaned his forehead against Wealhtheow's. "Beowulf is a powerful man. His exploits are known throughout the region. At least we are in strong and capable hands." Hrothgar looked into Wealhtheow's face, his nose an inch from hers.

Wealhtheow noticed Hrothgar's eyes droop. "My Lord?" She wanted to ask him her question before he was too tired to talk.

"Já?" Hrothgar paused and moved to hold Wealhtheow in his arms.

"What happened before I entered? Why was Unferth so upset?"

Hrothgar rubbed Wealhtheow's back and glanced at the ceiling before answering. "After the Geats were introduced and Beowulf stated his purpose in coming to us, Unferth questioned Beowulf's bravery by recalling the swimming match Beowulf had with Brecca that we heard about two years ago." Hrothgar smoothed Wealhtheow's hair. "Unferth accused Beowulf of cheating and of losing the race, but Beowulf was very eloquent in correcting him." Hrothgar let out a sigh. "Beowulf asked Unferth if honor meant killing your own kinsman. Even in Geatland he heard how Unferth betrayed and killed his own brothers."

Hrothgar's eyes returned to the wooded ceiling. "Beowulf told Unferth that this shameful act would dam him." Hrothgar did not speak for a moment. And, while it is Unferth's duty as chief counselor to question the character and intent of those who visit Heorot, and I can see why he was upset by Beowulf's remark, I do not know why he remained angry for so long."

Wealhtheow ran a hand over Hrothgar's face. "Unferth continually seeks after glory. He may be a wise advisor and warrior for you my Lord, but he loves being the center of attention. Perhaps he was jealous of Beowulf's deeds."

Hrothgar held Wealhtheow tighter. "Perhaps he was, my Lady." Hrothgar leaned forward and kissed Wealhtheow, and the two stood wrapped in each other's embrace for a few more moments before blowing out the candles and sliding into bed.

In the middle of the night, Wealhtheow's body twitched and she slid an arm under her pillow. She stretched her legs before regaining full consciousness. Wealhtheow turned to look at the dark form of Hrothgar beside her. She could hear him breathing evenly, his nose whistling as he exhaled. Wealhtheow was surprised she and Hrothgar had fallen asleep so quickly. She was anxious to know the outcome of Beowulf and Grendel's confrontation, though she felt as if Beowulf's presence had lifted a weight from her shoulders.

Wealhtheow adjusted her position, trying to clear her mind and fall back to sleep. Just as she began to drift off, a gurgled scream reverberated from the direction of the mead hall and seemed to shake the very walls of Heorot. Wealhtheow jerked in bed. Her pillow fell to the floor. Another howl punctured the air, followed by loud yells. Wealhtheow felt goose bumps on her skin.

Beside her, Hrothgar jumped. He tossed the blanket away and stumbled to his feet. "A scream that loud and angry can only come from a monster! It must be Grendel."

Wealhtheow nodded though she knew Hrothgar could not see her in the dark.

Hrothgar's figure disappeared behind the bed. Wealhtheow heard the clink of iron on the floor and knew Hrothgar was readying himself for battle. She ran toward the fire and lit a twig, igniting a wax candle on a table beside Hrothgar.

Hrothgar's voice was breathless. "I hate feeling so helpless. My strength used to carry me far, and I was able to build Heorot on the wisdom and respect I'd gained throughout Denmark."

Wealhtheow adjusted the mail coat over Hrothgar's shoulders. "You did as much as any man or king could, my Lord. The gods have given Beowulf supernatural strength, and they have sent him to you." She let the mail fall down Hrothgar's back. "Your rule has been more prosperous and has led to more peace than either your fader Healfdene's or your brother, Heorogar's, rule. They would both be proud of your efforts and your reign, and your great-grandfather, Scyld, would be pleased that you are his descendant."

Hrothgar sighed. "It is not just Grendel. I worry too over the condition of Denmark that our sons will inherit."

Wealhtheow handed Hrothgar his helmet. "After tonight, we will not have to worry over Grendel. And your sons have grown to be fine men, just like you."

Hrothgar placed the helmet on his head and gave Wealhtheow a nod before shuffling out the door. Wealhtheow sank back onto the bed, laying her head where Hrothgar's had been. She closed her eyes and said a prayer to Odin, asking him for Grendel's swift defeat.

Wealhtheow awoke to Hrothgar's hand on her shoulder. He smiled at her when she opened her eyes. "It's over. It was over before I entered the mead hall." Hrothgar set his helmet on the table beside the bed.

"I can not believe I slept." Wealhtheow lifted her head and inhaled. "Beowulf?" She glanced into Hrothgar's face. "Was he successful?"

Hrothgar patted her arm. "Yes. But there was much confusion. The Geat and Danish warriors had already left the mead hall once I'd arrived. They are tracking what's left of Grendel. We must ready ourselves to meet the Geats when they return."

Assisted by servants, Hrothgar and Wealhtheow dressed quickly. The barking of dogs, the neighing of horses and the clop of their hooves, and men's voices surrounded Heorot with sound. Hrothgar and Wealhtheow left Wealhtheow's quarters followed by maidens and warriors who'd followed Hrothgar back from the mead hall. Wealhtheow laced her arm with Hrothgar's as they walked down the hallway.

Wealhtheow paused as she stepped into the hall. It had barely been disturbed, though benches and tables were overturned and blood spattered the front entrance and oozed from adjacent walls. Wealhtheow let out a gasp when she noticed what was hanging from the U-shaped rafters. A green-black arm and shoulder covered with boils, bumps, and blood hung from the ceiling. The gigantic limb was almost the length of the hall from rafter to floor, and the paw's three, clawed fingers were clenched in a fist that lay in a puddle of blood. Wealhtheow felt her stomach turn. She had never seen such a

gruesome spectacle. She glanced swiftly at her feet and tried to stop her feelings of nausea.

Hrothgar rubbed her arm and a maiden handed her a cup of water. Wealhtheow drank deeply. At least Beowulf had triumphed over Grendel's evil. The thought gave her courage to stand upright, though she kept the cup in her hands.

After examining the hall, Hrothgar stood gazing at Grendel's limb and the trail of blood that led out the door. He turned and addressed the crowded hall. "First, let's give thanks to the God of creation for this sight before our eyes. We have suffered a tremendous harrowing by Grendel. It seemed I would never find solace from the burden of his attacks, and I was forced to watch in horror as the best of houses ran with blood. Men could not help me save Heorot from this distress, until one man, with God's assistance, accomplished what no one else could manage. Whoever birthed this bold man into the world, if she is still living, can know that she was blessed by Eternal God with such a son."

Wealhtheow scanned the crowd, spotting Hrethric and Hrothmund standing beside Hrothgar's advisors. Their hair was disheveled and their tunics were crinkled. She wanted to smooth their appearance, and if they had been closer, she would have.

Hrothgar raised his hand toward Beowulf. "Beowulf, I adopt you in my heart as a son."

Wealhtheow's blood began to pound. She glanced from Hrothgar to Beowulf. Surely Hrothgar only meant he held fatherly affection for the warrior. He could not

possibly be suggesting adopting Beowulf as an heir. Wealhtheow glanced at her sons. They were the only ones who should inherit Heorot. Wealhtheow refocused on what Hrothgar was saying.

“Maintain this connection, you most noble of men, and there will be nothing you lack, no worldly possessions that will not be yours. I have greatly honored smaller achievements, bringing recognition to warriors not nearly as brave or worthy as you. You have made yourself immortal by your magnificent act. May the God of the Ages bless and keep you.”

Beowulf bowed low before Hrothgar. “I cherish the status you have given me and will strive to maintain this familial connection between our two tribes.” Beowulf glanced at his warriors. “We have been favored in the fight we attempted with the unknown, my Lord. I would have felt greater satisfaction if you could have seen the monster as he lay defeated. I planned to pin him quickly and grapple him to death. I wanted him to pant and plead for life, lying powerless in my grasp. But I could not stop him from wrenching free from my arms. Although he escaped and we could not find him, he left behind his arm and shoulder, and will not be long in the world. He brought his worst, but this wound will kill him. He left limping with pain, and like an outlaw awaiting punishment, he must wait for the gods’ judgment.”

A thunderous cheer went up after Beowulf finished speaking. Relief was evident on each face. Danish lords had journeyed to Heorot to see for themselves the defeat of

Grendel, and these lords now clasped hands with each other, nearby Danish warriors, and visiting Geats.

After a moment, Hrothgar raised his hands for silence. He asked all present to clean the mead hall in preparation for a lengthy celebration. The hall hummed with noise as servants, lords, and soldiers worked to repair the damage left by Beowulf's triumph over Grendel. Wealhtheow noticed Hrothulf, Hrethric, and Hrothmund leave the mead hall through a side door.

Hrothgar summoned Aeschere to his side before turning to Beowulf. "Aeschere will house you in his hall. He will show you and your men to rooms where you can rest while the hall is being repaired. Servants will inform you once the meal is ready."

Beowulf bowed before the king. "Thank you, my Lord."

"And thank you, brave Beowulf. Your courageous act will never be forgotten."

Aeschere led the Geats out of the mead hall.

Hrothgar and Wealhtheow surveyed the activity. The rising sun was beginning to light the hall more clearly, and the stench of blood made Wealhtheow cough.

"My Lady. Shall we retire as we wait for the mead hall to be restored?" Hrothgar offered his arm to Wealhtheow.

Wealhtheow nodded and sagged against Hrothgar. He hugged her before clasping her hand and walking toward the door. There was a spring in Hrothgar's step and the wrinkles on his face seemed smoother now.

“I still can not believe Grendel’s raids are over, my Lord. Years of anguish finally ended.” Wealhtheow spoke as Hrothgar waved at passing men and lords.

“God has delivered us.” Hrothgar squeezed Wealhtheow’s hand as they continued into the hallway. Suddenly, he turned toward Wealhtheow, his voice high with youthful exuberance. “Let us go see what our sons are doing. I bet they are at the racing arena. We have not seen them race in a long while. We should celebrate our independence from Grendel and cheer on our future lineage.”

Wealhtheow laughed. Hrothgar held her hand and they made their way out of Heorot. They passed the enclosed fence filled with livestock. A man with a staff stood in the pen, holding a pig by its back legs. He bowed when he spotted Hrothgar and Wealhtheow. Hrothgar waved at the man, inhaled deeply, and let his breath out in a low sigh.

“I am pleased by your high spirits, my Lord.” Wealhtheow placed her head on Hrothgar’s shoulder. “I have not seen you so full of confidence and joy these past twelve years.”

Hrothgar nodded. “Grendel’s war on us very nearly broke my spirit. But, thank God for Beowulf who has eased our suffering.” Hrothgar paused in their walk. Wealhtheow noticed a shadow fall over his face and she was alarmed at the change in him.

“What is it, my Lord? What has happened?”

“I must strike God as a selfish man. Here I’ve just been delivered from an evil, but I can not help worrying about the future of Denmark.” Hrothgar shook his head.

Wealhtheow patted Hrothgar’s arm. She too was concerned with the future of Denmark and with the reign of her sons. “The future will take care of itself, my Lord. What is important now is that you are happy and the Danish people are happy and that Grendel’s attacks have come to an end.”

Hrothgar nodded. “You are right, Wealhtheow. I guess worry has always been in my blood and naturally grows with age. I know Hrothulf and our sons will hold to the hard-fought peace that my rule, with the help of God and His warrior Beowulf, has established.”

Wealhtheow said nothing but clung to Hrothgar’s side. She recalled the shadow, fire, and blood of her visions, certain that they pertained only to Grendel, and that it had been his evil of which she had been warned. Though she wanted to believe this, she felt her relief over Grendel’s death begin to wane. In its place was a nagging dread of something to come. Wealhtheow tilted her head and looked at the cloud-covered sky.

Hrothgar steered her around the stacked stone wall that lined the perimeter of the arena. Poles with images of snarling animal heads line the top of the walls and red flags flapped on the end of spears lining the inner racing circle. The arena’s oval track stretched almost fifteen yards long. Benches lined the inside and paintings of horses and men covered the walls. There was a raised platform next to the main door they’d entered,

and Wealhtheow and Hrothgar climbed the wooden stairs to their royal chairs on the scaffolding above the benches.

Hrethric, Hrothmund, Hrothulf, and two other sons of Danish lords were racing their white stallions around the circle. Men and women dotted the benches inside the arena and cheered on the racers. As Hrothgar and Wealhtheow took their seats, a lur trumpeted their arrival and the gathered Danes acknowledged the presence of their king and queen. The spectators bowed to the royal couple before refocusing upon the race. The racers seemed un-phased by the sound of the lur, kicking up sand and dripping sweat in their dash around the circle.

Wealhtheow squinted and saw that Hrethric was in first place, followed closely by his cousin, Hrothulf. The other two Danes were almost neck and neck, a foot behind Hrothulf, and Hrothmund was dead last, at least two yards behind the others. Wealhtheow relaxed against her chair, clapping and cheering as the horses drew closer to the marking line.

Wealhtheow watched Hrothgar from the side of her eye. Instead of seating himself in his chair, he stood with his hands on the wooden railing, flailing his fists in the air and calling out his sons' name. Wealhtheow laughed to herself. She had not seen this side of Hrothgar in almost twelve years.

In the racing circle, Hrothulf was pulling ahead of Hrethric, while Hrothmund trailed farther behind. Though thirteen-year old Hrothmund was the youngest of the racers, he usually held his own and occasionally won the race. During these moments of

competition, Wealhtheow found herself secretly rooting for him. Hrothmund's personality most closely resembled Hrothgar's in his desire for unity, and Wealhtheow knew this was why she always cheered for him. The race had five more rounds to go, and it was clear the horses and their riders were tiring. This was usually when Hrothmund took the lead, and Wealhtheow focused her attention on him.

She was not disappointed. As the riders began the last few laps, Hrothmund's horse overtook the other two Danes. He sped up to Hrethric and soon was only a hair length behind him. The horses galloped around the arena. The echo of hooves reverberated in the air. The spectators moved to the edge of their seats as the racers took the last lap. Hrethric pulled ahead of Hrothulf as he rounded the corner. Hrethric paced himself, and his horse finished a full head over the line before Hrothulf's.

The scattered crowd cheered. Hrothgar raised his voice, pride apparent in his tone when he pronounced Hrethric the champion.

Hrothgar and Wealhtheow began to descend their platform when suddenly a fight broke out between Hrothulf and Hrethric. The crowd fell silent as the two princes rolled on the ground, throwing up grass and dust.

Assisted by servants, Hrothgar rushed down the steps ahead of Wealhtheow. Wealhtheow held her outer tunic in her hand and made slower progress. She lost sight of the fight, and by the time she reached the sand, Hrothulf held a spear over Hrethric who lay face up on the ground. Wealhtheow was horror stricken.

Hrothgar hurried to Hrothulf's side, his voice echoing in the arena for Hrothulf to stop fighting.

Hrothulf hesitated over Hrethric, the edge of the spear blade poised above Hrethric's neck and the spear's flag popping in the breeze. Then, slowly, Hrothulf lowered his arms to the side. He threw the spear away and rushed out of the arena, brushing past Hrothgar's outstretched hand.

Storm clouds now covered the arena. Wealhtheow stood rooted to the spot.

Hrothgar lifted Hrethric to his feet, and Hrothmund came to stand beside them.

Finding her legs, Wealhtheow rushed toward the boys and grasped Hrethric to her. "Thank the gods you were not hurt, Hrethric!"

Hrethric broke free of her grasp, a glare covered his face. "Hrothulf is a scoundrel. He lost fairly, but is too obstinate and proud to admit it."

Hrothgar laid his arm on Hrethric's shoulder. "Hrethric, Hrothulf may be headstrong, but he would never hurt you on purpose. His actions sometimes get the best of him, but he is your cousin and your sworn ally. Do not think ill of him. What he did was cowardly, but you can be the better man and the true champion."

Hrothgar's words seemed to calm Hrethric; he relaxed his shoulders.

"Let us return to Heorot. It is about to storm, and I am sure the mead hall will be almost ready for feasting. You boys must be starved after your race." Though they were drenched with sweat, Hrothgar placed his arm around each of his sons and gave their

shoulders a squeeze before letting go. “A warm bath and then a meal is just what you need.”

The family made their way back to Heorot as the rain began to fall. Once inside, there was no sign of Hrothulf. Hrothgar and the boys retired to their chamber to ready themselves.

Wealhtheow called for Freewaru who appeared from her chamber. “Have you seen Hrothulf, Freewaru?”

“Nein, moder. Is something wrong?”

“He and Hrethric had a fight. I wondered if he had spoken to you, but you have not seen him?”

Freewaru shook her head. “I trust he is not hurt.”

“Nein. Thank the gods it was just a scuffle.” Wealhtheow smoothed her tunic. “The feasting will begin shortly. We should ready ourselves.” Wealhtheow went to her bower to change.

Once she had on her purple evening gown, she and Freewaru waited in the sitting room for the men to appear. They did not have long to wait, and the sound of laughter followed Hrothgar and his sons out of their chambers. Hrothulf appeared beside Hrethric. He patted him on the back and the two were laughing as if nothing had happened. Hrothgar was smiling from ear to ear.

“Hrethric? I am glad to see you. Moder said you and Hrethric fought. Is that so?” Freewaru moved toward Hrothulf’s side.

He gazed down at her. “It was merely a tussle. Hrethric and I have been reconciled.”

Wealhtheow felt she was the only one who had not so easily forgiven Hrothulf. She did not see any real sincerity in him and did not want his rash behavior to place her sons in jeopardy.

A servant entered with the news that the mead hall was so full men were being seated at the doors and in the middle of the room. This announcement made Hrothgar chuckle. He reached for Wealhtheow’s arm, and the children trailed behind.

The mead was already flowing plentifully when the family entered. No meat had yet been served, but bread, honey, dried fruit, and nuts covered the tables. The Geats were once again at the table to the right of Hrothgar’s sons, though Beowulf himself had taken a seat in between Hrethric and Hrothmund. Danish lords and warriors filled the hall. They had left with the onslaught of Grendel, but had now returned and were ready to pay homage to Hrothgar.

Wealhtheow grimaced when she noticed that Grendel’s limb still hung from the rafter. Though it had been cleaned and no longer dripped blood, she tried to ignore the arm as she walked to her throne.

The din lessened as Hrothgar moved to his throne. He stood for a moment surveying the hall before summoning a servant and whispering in his ear. The servant nodded before leaving the hall, and Hrothgar raised his hands for silence. The hall quieted and Hrothgar turned toward Beowulf.

“Beowulf, brave Geat and son of Ecgtheow, we are honored to have you and your men with us. As a token of my appreciation for your valor, I present you with this gold banner as a victory gift.” As Hrothgar spoke, servants bore gifts toward Beowulf’s table. Hrothgar continued, “also a breast-mail and helmet made of the finest and most sought after metals. And here is a sword, fashioned with the most formidable iron, plated with gold and precious stones at the hilt, and double-sided to ensure the success of your assaults.”

The servants laid these gifts, as well as chests of gold and jewels, at Beowulf’s feet.

Hrothgar raised his jewel-studded cup to him. “To Beowulf, mighty warrior, ally of the Danes, and defeater of Grendel!” A cheer went up and Hrothgar and Beowulf drank.

Next Hrothgar presented a tall, round shield made of linden wood and eight horses with gold bridles. Atop one of the horses was Hrothgar’s own saddle of softened cowhide covered with jewels and resplendent in its well-carved design. Hrothgar then turned to rewarding the Geatish warriors with gold and weapons, even paying the wergild for the Geat that Grendel had devoured. He gave this gold to the dead warrior’s brother Gizur.

The noise in the hall grew deafening, and the scop began to sing and play as the servants brought numerous plates of food and cups of wine and mead. The scop and Hrothgar’s poet chose words and music to please the courageous Geats. To the gathered

men of high spirits, they relayed the saga of Finn and his sons, specifically the tragedy of queen Hildeburh and the attack in Friesland where Hnaef, king of the Danes, met his death.

Hildeburh had small reason to trust the Jutes.

Son and brother, she lost both on the battlefield.

Bereaved and blameless,

Her kith from both tribes were spear-gored.

How could she not lament her fate,

when the light of morning shown

over her murdered loved ones.

Though Wealhtheow had heard the lay on several occasions, she listened open-eyed to the poet's song of Hildeburh, Hoc's daughter and Danish princess, who was taken in marriage by the Frisian king, Finn. Hildeburh tried to weave peace between the Danish and Frisian tribes. Wealhtheow disliked this tale because Hildeburh was unable to reconcile the two tribes, and once war broke out, she lost both her brother, Hnaef, king of the Danes, and her son, prince of the Frisians, to the war fought at the Finn Hall.

The poet relayed how the Danish warrior, Hengest, made a truce with the Frisian king Finn, demanding lodging for the Danes within the Frisian hall until the weather cleared and they could return to Denmark. The leaderless Danes swore their allegiance to their king's murderer, and in turn demanded that the Frisian king present them with gifts and exact vengeance against any Frisian who harmed them during their stay.

*Then a funeral pyre was readied,
resplendent in gold.*

*The dignity of the Danes
and the Shielding prince
lay awaiting the flame.*

*Hildeburh ordered her son's body be burnt
and honored beside Hnaef's,
her son's flesh to blaze beside his uncle's.*

The poet continued to sing of the destruction to the unity that Hildeburh had tried to create, for while the Danes stayed with the Jutes the entire winter season, thoughts of revenge could not be expelled from their mind. With the beginning of spring, the Danish warrior Hunlafing spurred Hengest to thoughts of revenge. Sensing danger, the Finns ambushed the Danes. However, the Danish warriors Guthlaf and Oslaf fled to Denmark to bring reinforcements, and upon their return, the Danes killed King Finn and the majority of his people, warriors, and lords.

*The hall was red with Jute blood.
Finn was slain, the queen recaptured,
and all riches inside the Finn's walls
-gemstones and gold armor-
were carried to the ship.
Over sea-lanes did the warrior troop*

*return to Daneland,
bearing that lady home.*

Wealhtheow could not suppress the shiver that traveled down her spine at the conclusion of the song. This tale always filled her with loss and foreboding.

Wealhtheow sent a prayer of thanks to the gods that she had avoided Hildeburh's fate in failing to weave peace between two tribes and in losing those she held dear.

As she prayed, imaginary flames of orange and red danced before her in the hall. Her eyes landed on Freewaru who ate roasted lamb. Wealhtheow did not want Hildeburh's wyrd to fall upon herself or Freewaru, and she determined to guard Heorot against the war-flames of her visions. Wealhtheow continued to observe Freewaru as she ate, hoping that Freewaru's marriage would be successful.

Wealhtheow glanced between Hrothulf on her left and Hrothgar to her right. In doing so, she caught Unferth's eye from his reclined position at a chair next to the king. Unferth's face was devoid of emotion, though his eyes were piercing on her face. Wealhtheow looked past him to where Hrethric and Hrothmund talked with Beowulf. She swallowed, desiring to succeed in her quest for peace, not only between the Danes and other tribes, but within the Danish hall.

Wealhtheow stood in the hall and raised her bragaful. The hall became silent and Wealhtheow turned toward Hrothgar. "Enjoy this drink, most generous lord. Raise your goblet, entertain the Geats, and be giving and happy. Take pleasure in their company, but remember as well all the favors and gift bestowed upon you. The glittering court of

Heorot has been purified and now the proposal remains that you wish to adopt Beowulf as a son.”

Wealhtheow paused, steadying herself before continuing. “So while you bask in your good fortune, do not let your exultation overcome you. Do not forget to bequeath kingdom and nation to your kith and kin.”

Wealhtheow glanced at Hrothulf. “I am sure noble Hrothulf will guard the throne well. He will not let you down, but will treat our children fairly, honoring their right to the throne and repaying them with the kindness we have shown him, remembering well all the favor, respect, and riches we gave him from childhood.”

Wealhtheow’s breathing quickened and she dare not look at Hrothgar or Hrothulf. She turned toward the benches where Hrethric, Beowulf, and Hrothmund sat and carried the jeweled bragfull to Beowulf. “Greetings, kind, gracious, and mighty Beowulf. I pray you drink of this cup and be merry.”

Beowulf bowed and took the cup from Wealhtheow’s hands. He downed the mead in one motion.

Wealhtheow smiled at him as he righted his head and looked into her face. She continued, “I too would like to express my appreciation for your salvation of Heorot.”

Wealhtheow nodded toward two maidens who approached the table with gifts in their hands. “Here is a wealth of wrought gold, two golden arm bangles, a strongly carved mail-shirt, and jeweled rings.” Wealhtheow paused as the maidens presented the treasure to Beowulf.

Once Beowulf returned his gaze to her, Wealhtheow reached for the Brosing at her throat. She hated to part with it; she felt as if she were giving Beowulf a part of herself. She slowly unclasped the hinge at the back of her neck, the amber pendant gleamed in her hands. A tremor ran through Wealhtheow's body, but her smile deepened when she saw Beowulf's eyes widen with the realization of what she was doing.

“Take this Brosing, dear Beowulf. It is the greatest necklace on earth, fashioned by dwarves and lords of the earth and blessed by the gods. Wear it for luck and wear also this mail from our armory. May you prosper with them both.”

Wealhtheow glanced at Hrethric and Hrothmund who were watching her, open-mouthed. She spotted Freewaru to her left and noticed her daughter was equally as puzzled.

She handed the Brosing to Beowulf, who gingerly held it in his hands. “May you be known for your strength, and may you take kind guidance of these two Danish princes. You have won great renown and you are known to every man, both now and forever. Your influence is as wide as the home of the wind and as the sea that surrounds the cliffs.”

Wealhtheow held Beowulf's eyes. “And so, dear Geat, I wish you a lifetime's luck and blessings. Treat my sons with care; be strong and kind. Here in Heorot each man is true to the other, loyal to Lord Hrothgar, and affectionate in spirit. The men have one purpose, and the people are ready, having pledged to both you and Lord Hrothgar.”

Wealhtheow glanced at the assembled Danes in the hall. “Let the hall do as I bid and continue to obey the code and honor of warriors.”

Wealhtheow moved stiffly toward her seat between Hrothgar and Hrothulf. Hrothgar raised the mead cup to her as she passed.

Wealhtheow’s back was taut on her throne. The men in the hall continued to drink around her. Lords and warriors were passing the cup, spurring each other to drink. To not accept the cup would display weakness, and each man drank dutifully in turn. Wealhtheow chewed on her lower lip and glanced at Hrothulf through lowered lashes. He was eating and drinking with gusto, his lips wet with mead. She had been uncertain of the reception of her words, but he and the other Danes appeared carefree.

Wealhtheow glanced at Beowulf. While she deeply admired him, he was a Geat who did not belong on the Danish throne. Wealhtheow turned her attention to her plate, but simply picked at the lamb meat in front of her. She felt her temples begin to throb and laid her head on her hand.

“How is my Lady?” This question came from Hrothgar and she smelled the sweet tang of mead on his breath.

Wealhtheow opened her eyes and looked into Hrothgar’s bearded face. “My head is pounding, my Lord. It has been a long day and I feel as if I must retire.”

Hrothgar downed the mead in his cup. “It has been a long day. I am also beginning to tire. My body is not what it used to be.” Hrothgar glanced toward the hall. He offered Wealhtheow his arm and together they stood. Instead of disrupting the

celebration and feasting, the king and queen made their way out of the mead hall amid the songs, laughter, and cheering.

Once in the sitting room, Hrothgar followed Wealhtheow to her chamber. He retired to his own bedchamber whenever he suffered poor health, though he usually slept beside her in her bower.

As they changed into sleeping gowns with the assistance of servants, Hrothgar glanced at Wealhtheow. "I believe Beowulf would do all he could for our sons. He is amiable with them and I feel for him strongly, as if he were my own son." Hrothgar searched Wealhtheow's gaze. "In adopting him I desired to ensure the Geatish allegiance to the Danes and keep the exchange of words open between us." Hrothgar paused.

Wealhtheow held her breath.

"There was nothing more to my offer. I certainly intend to see our sons on the throne. And Beowulf is such a brave and honorable warrior."

Wealhtheow let her breath out silently. "Yes, my Lord. He possesses many admirable traits and will treat our sons with respect."

Hrothgar nodded as he climbed into bed. "And I am sure Hrothulf will preserve the throne for Hrethric and strive for peace."

Wealhtheow moved beside Hrothgar in the bed. She pulled the blankets around her shoulders and turned toward him. "I am sure the gods will favor Denmark and protect its future."

Hrothgar reached for Wealhtheow, and the two drifted off to dreams in the darkness of the chamber.

Wealhtheow was awakened to pounding at the outer door. She jumped from the bed, her heart thumping in her chest. Was Grendel still alive? Was he back for revenge? Wealhtheow threw on her silk robe as Hrothgar's advisors and warriors burst into the bower. Hrothgar's hair was disheveled, and he stood beside the bed, one shoe on and one arm through his shirt.

"My Lord Hrothgar." Unferth once again approached the royal couple in their chambers. This was a scene Wealhtheow thought she would never see again. Yet Unferth stood in the bower, trying to hide the fear in his eyes that had lived there since Grendel's attacks. "Another creature has invaded your mead hall and carried off Aeschere. Unlike Grendel, this creature appears to be a female, my Lord."

Wealhtheow glanced at Hrothgar. Aeschere dead? How could that be? Aeschere had always been such a loyal and capable warrior. He had always been Hrothgar's favorite and his death would be a terrible loss. Had Unferth said this other creature was female? Wealhtheow tilted her head. Could Grendel possibly have a mother? What type of being could possibly birth such a hideous creature?

"The creature also carried off Grendel's limb, my Lord," Unferth continued. "Beowulf and his men have been summoned."

Hrothgar's shoulders slumped. He sunk to the bed and stared at Unferth.

“The Danes are gathering.” Unferth stood before the king. “My advice is for us to track down this she-devil and end the problem once and for all.”

Hrothgar nodded his head and continued to dress. His movements were slow as if he were moving under water. He lifted his sword and mail-coat as Beowulf and the Geats were led into the chamber.

“Were you able to rest at all, my Lord?” Beowulf bowed before Hrothgar.

Hrothgar rubbed a hand over his face. “Rest? I do not know the word. Grief has returned to the Danes! Aeschere is dead. He was Yrmenlaf’s older brother and my shoulder-companion and closest counselor. Aeschere was my right-hand man in battle and contained every admirable trait of a wise man and friend. And he was slain in my hall by this mother demon.” Hrothgar paused. He lifted his sword. “Who knows where this she-devil is hiding, but she has resumed the feud laid to rest with the death of Grendel. Grendel paid with his life, but now this other demon has arrived to avenge her kinsman’s death.”

Hrothgar paced in front of Wealhtheow who stood next to the bed. His back and shoulders were stiff. “I had heard a rumor within my hall and in the country that two such creatures were spotted prowling the moors, huge beasts from another world. One was said to resemble a woman, while the other had a less distinguishable shape of a man and was called Grendel by country people of old.”

Wealhtheow sucked in her breath. She had no idea Hrothgar knew of these creatures. She straightened her back, wanting to ask Hrothgar why he had never shared

this knowledge with her. She glanced into Hrothgar's eyes. The misery she saw reflected in them caused her to drop her stance. She knew Hrothgar wanted to protect her and had done all he could. She tilted her head and listened to Hrothgar's words.

“These are fatherless creatures descended from an ancestry of demons and ghosts. They dwell alone among the wolves on the hills, on windy crags where cold streams vanish under mist and moorland. In the woods a few miles from here is a mere whose bank is a maze of frozen tree roots. The water is said to burn at night, and the mere bottom has never been seen by men. On its bank, the heather-stepper pauses. These horse and deer that flee from pursuing hounds would rather face their pursuers and die in the woods than dive beneath the mere's surface.”

Hrothgar fell into a chair. He looked at Beowulf. “Our salvation solely depends upon you. The strength of this she-demon and the danger of the mere are unknown. Seek them if you dare. I will reward you for settling this feud, as I did with Grendel, and present you with coffer of gold upon your return.”

Beowulf laid his hand on Hrothgar's arm. “Wise king, do not despair. It always behooves a man to avenge loved ones rather than to become lost in mourning. All men must die. Let whoever can win fame and glory before their death. When a warrior is gone, that is his only hope of a legacy. Let us now set out on the trail of this troll-dam. I promise you she will not escape and will have nowhere to flee. Endure your woes as the brave king I know you are. They shall only last the day.”

Hrothgar sprang to his feet. “Thank God for you, Beowulf.” Hrothgar turned to a servant and ordered that a bit and halter be put on his horse. He glanced at Wealhtheow before leaving the room. “Stay inside these walls. And do not let our sons out.”

Wealhtheow nodded. Hrothgar was followed by Beowulf, Wulfgar, Unferth, and Yrmenlaf, and he and the rest of the men departed from the chamber. As they left, Wealhtheow moved to the sitting room.

Freewaru wore a blue robe and moved to a cushioned chair as Hrethric, Hrothmund, and Hrothulf paced the room, their pleas to ride with the men declined and then ignored. Wealhtheow took a seat next to Freewaru.

“What has happened, moder? Has Grendel come back to life?” Hrothmund looked at Wealhtheow. His blue eyes were narrowed and a frown covered his mouth.

All four children stopped their activity and glanced at Wealhtheow who slowly shook her head. “No, it is not Grendel. It is another creature. Unferth believes this one is female.” Wealhtheow swallowed. She glanced up at the boys. “The wretched creature has killed Aeschere.”

This news was met with disbelief, then anger, and Hrothulf stormed out of the room despite Wealhtheow’s request for him to remain with them.

Wealhtheow turned to Hrethric and Hrothmund. “I know you’d love to help Hrothgar and the Geats avenge this death, but you are the future of Heorot. You must stay here in safety and ensure Denmark’s future.”

Hrothmund nodded, but Hrethric folded his arms over his chest.

“You should both go back to bed. I am sure everything will soon be as it should.”

Hrethric stuck out his bottom lip, but he and Hrothmund returned to their chambers.

Freewaru stayed beside her mother. “Moder, why did you give Beowulf the Brosing?”

Wealhtheow did not speak for several seconds. “Do you remember what I said about duty?”

Freewaru nodded.

“Beowulf is a tremendous warrior. His strength is beyond compare and he would be a capable ruler. However, we live in Denmark and your brothers, my sons, are the only two that should inherit the Danish throne.”

“What about Hrothulf? Does he have no claim to the throne?”

Wealhtheow narrowed her eyes at Freewaru. “Has he mentioned this to you?”

Freewaru blushed. She lowered her head. “Nein. I was curious.”

Wealhtheow sighed. “If Hrethric or Hrothmund could not take the throne, Hrothulf would be next in line.”

“But you do not want that to happen,” Freewaru interjected, “nor do you want Beowulf to take over the throne, which is why you gave him the Brosing as a means of ensuring his loyalty to Hrethric.”

Wealhtheow nodded. The two women were still. “You might as well go back to bed,” Wealhtheow spoke at length. “There is nothing we can do, but wait.”

Freewaru kissed Wealhtheow on the cheek before returning to her bower.

Wealhtheow remained seated for a long time. She watched the fire. A mother's revenge was a formidable opponent. Wealhtheow glanced toward her children's chambers. If anything happened to her sons, she knew she would demand that Hrothgar take vengeance, or she might even exact vengeance herself.

Wealhtheow faced the fire again, noting the ashes in the bottom of the pit. Feuds and revenge were their way of life, though Hrothgar was trying to change this. Wealhtheow thought of Hrothulf and his lack of respect. In some ways, he resembled Grendel's impetuous nature. The thought startled Wealhtheow and she straightened. Perhaps in some way, they all did.

Wealhtheow leaned back. Though she, like Hrothgar, wanted peace, if tragedy visited her sons, she would seek retribution. This she-devil had broken the bonds of peace in her desire for revenge. Wealhtheow folded her arms over her shoulders. She did not want Heorot and her family to come to such an end. This thought reverberated in her mind as the fire roared in front of her.

Wealhtheow decided to visit the sauna. The steam would ease her tension and nerves and she could focus on praying to Odin for his protection. Maidens accompanied her down the hall. No one was in the small room when she arrived. Rocks were being heated in a stone fire pit at the center of the room. The smoke and scent of the burning wood-fire filled her senses as she entered. Maids removed her robe and gown before adding freshly drawn water and heated stones to the hearth that ran along the bottom of

the walls. Wealhtheow was already beginning to sweat, and maids rubbed scented oil onto her skin to help her relax.

As the maids left the room, Wealhtheow sat on a wooden bench, breathing in the herbs that burned in two large bowls by the door. She wished Hrothgar was sitting beside her instead of tracking the she-devil. Wealhtheow lifted her thoughts to the gods, referencing each by name and asking their protection for Hrothgar and the Geats.

Sweat ran into Wealhtheow's eyes, and she wiped her forehead. The sauna was almost unbearably hot. Wealhtheow grasped one of the wooden buckets next to her seat. She dumped its water over her body and sighed with relief as her skin and face cooled. She leaned against the wall and watched the water drip from her legs and collect into the drain running through the floor. Wealhtheow laid her head back and closed her eyes.

A blast of cool air rushed over Wealhtheow and she jerked awake. For a moment, she was disoriented. The fire roared in front of her and steam escaped through the open door. Wealhtheow peered through the steam. Hrothgar stood in the doorway. Maidens entered behind him and carried Wealhtheow's robe to her. Wealhtheow sprung from the bench, recalling Heorot's new threat. Her questions were answered before she asked them. Hrothgar dragged his feet as he entered. His eyes were on the floor.

"My Lord?" Hrothgar slowly raised his eyes to Wealhtheow's. The anguish and defeat she saw left her cold. She wrapped her robe tightly around her waist. "What happened, my Lord?" She walked toward him, lending her arm for support.

“We tracked the creature to its mere.” Hrothgar’s voice was raspy and she had to strain to hear him. He dropped to the nearest bench. “We crossed the dark moors and cliffs for almost an hour before finding the creature’s home. The mere was surrounded by slithering black shadows on the ground, in the water, and on the cliff slopes above. Beowulf braved the waters in his mail-coat and helmet. Unferth offered him his sword, the Hrunting, but...but it was not enough.” Hrothgar dropped his head to his hands. His shoulders shook. “We left the Geats at the mere.” Hrothgar spoke behind his hands. “They were still hoping the blood we saw at the surface was not Beowulf’s. Unferth was certain it was.”

Wealhtheow was surprised to hear they had left the Geats alone, and that no one had actually seen Beowulf dead. She reached for Hrothgar and held him in her arms. “My Lord, he may yet be alive.”

Hrothgar shook his head. “Nein, there is no way any man could survive, even a man chosen by God. There were too many creatures and he had been under the water for far too long.”

Wealhtheow felt numb. All she could do was comfort Hrothgar, her heart breaking with every ragged breath he took. They had been so near victory, and now all seemed lost. Wealhtheow’s eyes focused on the fire. It wavered and gleamed in front of her. She wanted to tell Hrothgar of her visions and her feelings, but he spoke first.

“We must assemble the Danes. They must hear the news. I cannot put it off any longer.” Hrothgar stood and tried to straighten his shoulders. His eyes were red and tears

dotted his cheeks. He moved out of the sauna and summoned servants to his side.

Wealhtheow followed behind him as he ordered the servants to announce a meeting in the mead hall. Wealhtheow supported Hrothgar as he staggered down the hallway. Once in the sitting room, he retired to his chamber to change and Wealhtheow also returned to her bower to prepare for the assembly.

Once Wealhtheow reappeared in the sitting room, she noticed Hrothgar stood surrounded by Hrethric, Hrothmund, and Hrothulf. Freewaru stood to the side. No one spoke. As Wealhtheow entered, Hrothgar reached out for her arm, and the group made their way to the hall.

Though it was full, the mead hall was silent once more. Hrothgar made his way to the throne. He seemed to sag upon it and Wealhtheow felt the gloom in the air. All eyes were on Hrothgar. He was quiet on his throne. The servants brought a round of drinks, but no one drank with relish, scattered warriors and lords taking only a few, habitual sips.

Just as Hrothgar opened his mouth to speak, a noise came from the front of the hall, and the double iron doors swung open with a bang.

Armor clinked as the Geats sauntered into the room. The first two warriors entered dragged something behind them, and once they stepped farther into the hall, Wealhtheow realized they carried a giant head by its coarse, stringy hair. The head was the green-black color of Grendel's arm and glistened with slime, boils, and scars. It had a long snout and marble-black eyes.

Wealhtheow glanced quickly away from the head, its long black-purple tongue trailed the ground and blood streaked the floor behind it. Beowulf appeared through the doors, a giant sword hilt cradled in both his hands.

The hall erupted into applause. Hrothgar stared at the sight in front of him.

Beowulf swaggered to the center of the room. He bowed before Hrothgar. “Son of Halfdane, prince of the Shieldings, we are pleased to bring this booty from the lake. It is a token of triumph and we offer it to you. I barely survived the underwater battle. It was a hard-fought, desperate struggle that could have been fatal if the gods had not helped me. I was attacked continually by the underwater creatures before finally coming upon Grendel’s mother in her lair. Although Unferth’s sword, the heirloom Hrunting, is known for its strength in battle, its hard-edge failed me today. It could not penetrate the she-devil’s skin. But the Lord of Men helped me find an ancient sword shining on the wall of Grendel’s lair, a heavy weapon constructed by giants and made for their use.”

Beowulf held up the oversized sword hilt that seemed to glow with white light. “I used this weapon to sever the head of Grendel’s mother. Grendel had crawled back to his lair to die, and I cut off his head to bring back to you, my Lord. As I ascended the mere, the sword blade, stained with the monster’s blood, melted as if it were ice.”

Beowulf lowered the hilt. He glanced around the hall. The Danes were transfixed. They did not move or speak. “I have wrestled the hilt from the enemies hand and avenged the horror visited upon you.” Beowulf redirected his gaze to Hrothgar. “And this I pledge, O Shielding king. You can now sleep secure with your band of warriors in

Heorot Hall, and nevermore will you need fear the loss of a single life, young or old, by the ravages of these beastly monsters.”

The hall exploded with cheers. Beowulf approached Hrothgar and Hrothgar met him halfway, clasping Beowulf to him in a hug. As they parted, Beowulf handed Hrothgar the hilt. Hrothgar could not lift the giant’s weapon by himself, so Wulfgar and Yrmenlaf held either end.

Hrothgar examined the gold hilt and the interlacing imagery of serpents, creatures, and water. He stroked his beard. “This hilt carries the story of the beginning of human strife when the flood was sent to destroy the Nephilim.” Hrothgar rubbed his hand over the runic inscriptions on the hilt’s guard. “There is a name here, but I can not quite make it out.” Hrothgar squinted at the inscription.

After examining the sword for a moment longer, he spoke. “This sword appears to have belonged to a protector, a high born man who was sworn to uphold truth and justice and respect tradition. A man, much like Beowulf, blessed with favor and strength by God and sent to rid the land of the giants who transgressed God’s laws.” Hrothgar paused and gazed at the hall.

Wealhtheow watched Beowulf’s chest swell and she noticed Hrothgar saw it also. Hrothgar frowned down at the hilt. “The sword may have melted because the last of the Nephilim had been killed.” Hrothgar paused. “Or perhaps the sword disappeared because Beowulf’s actions represented God’s retribution, and the sword had performed its last destined act of valor in the hands of a mighty warrior.” Hrothgar glanced around

the hall. “Let us hang this hilt upon our wall as a symbol of Beowulf’s bravery and God’s grace.”

Hrothgar released the hilt to Wulfgar and Yrmenlaf’s grasp. The two warriors carried the hilt to the right wall, and, with the help of servants, worked to mount it between tapestries.

Hrothgar looked at Beowulf. “Beowulf, my dear friend, your fame has been told far and wide. In all your actions you are even-tempered, wise and sensible, steadfast and unwavering. I stand firmly upon the promise of friendship which we exchanged before. Forever you will be the glory of your people and your band’s strongest warrior.”

Hrothgar paused and applause filled the air. Hrothgar clasped his hands together and waited for silence. “And, dear Geats, learn from the example of my blood-thirsty great-great-grandfather, Heremod, father of my great-grandfather Scyld, founder of the Shieldings. Heremod’s rise to the Danish throne brought little joy to the Danes because he killed his own comrades and people. Even though he was powerful and had everything he needed to make him happy, he grew proud, bloodthirsty, and stingy, no longer honoring the Danes with gifts. His fate was to be betrayed and handed over to the Jutes. So learn from his greed and bloodlust. I who tell you this have grown into such wisdom.”

Hrothgar’s gaze sought Beowulf’s. “It is amazing that Almighty God favors humans with wisdom, and, while His influence is wide, sometimes He allows the mind of man to follow after his harmful desires until the man himself no longer exists. A king or

warrior could have everything he wants and more and live in a world that conforms to his will, and yet be guided by lusts which destroy his soul. In his heart he is never satisfied with what he has. When the end arrives, the body collapses and is overtaken by death, and a man's ancestral possessions and hoarded goods are inherited by another who lets them go with a free hand."

The Geats listened silently to Hrothgar. Wealhtheow watched them glance at each other. The Danes nodded at Hrothgar's words, still gawking at Grendel's head.

Hrothgar turned his attention toward the Geatish warriors standing before him. "O brave warriors, be wary of this vice. Choose, dear Beowulf, the better road filled with eternal rewards. Do not let yourself become consumed with pride, for strength remains only a brief while and is easily vanquished by illness, old age, or the sword."

Hrothgar straightened his shoulders and lifted his voice to the entire hall. "I have tried to rule the Ring-Danes' country justly and without pride for fifty years, defending my land and people against assaults. I was so successful that I grew to believe my enemies had faded from the earth. And what happened to me was hard to bear. Grendel struck and ravaged the Danes and their land. He filled me with dread. So I praise God that I have lived to behold Grendel's severed head, dripping with blood, for I can look upon him with triumph at last."

Hrothgar beamed at the Geats and gestured toward the nearby benches at the table beside his throne. "Take your place then with pleasure and confidence and enjoy the feast. Tomorrow our treasure will be showered upon you."

The Geats applauded. Beowulf bowed low. He and his men relaxed upon benches, and the feasting began with the Danes toasting the bravery of the Geats.

Wealhtheow sat between Hrothulf and Hrothgar. She listened to the tale that Beowulf told of his fight with Grendel's mother in the mere. She still could not believe Beowulf had accomplished such feats and had purged Denmark. Wealhtheow glanced at Hrethric and Hrothmund. Hrethric perched on the end of his seat. His eyes stared at the Geats as he listened to their words. Hrothmund reclined in his chair. He laughed with other young lords at his table, eating venison and seabird eggs and occasionally glancing at the Geats.

Freewaru was making rounds with the mead cup, serving first Hrothgar, then the Geats. Hrothulf was making fun of Grendel's appearance and joking with the warriors sitting near him. Wealhtheow turned to Hrothgar; his skin was pale and his frame sagged on the throne. The light in his eyes and the smile on his lips made him seem both frail and tired. Wealhtheow traced Hrothgar's outline with her eyes. She was glad his memories of Heorot would no longer be filled with anxiety, fear, and dread, and that he could look forward to a tranquil and successful end to his reign.

As night crept into the hall, Hrothgar became increasingly quiet. At last he turned toward Wealhtheow. She nodded at him before he even voiced his thoughts, and he gazed fondly at her. Together they rose to retire. Beowulf also stood, weary from his struggles of the day, and Hrothgar ordered a house-guard to attend him and show him to

his quarters. Wealhtheow supported Hrothgar's side and the two moved unevenly toward their chambers as the Danes and Geats continued to celebrate into the night.

Wealhtheow awakened to the call of a whippoorwill. She glanced at Hrothgar. His back was to her and she watched the rise and fall of his shoulders. For the first time in twelve years, they had slept through the entire night. Wealhtheow left the bed and walked toward the tub. As she washed, Hrothgar rose.

“Ak! I had forgotten how restful sleep could be without the fear of Grendel's attacks. Praise God for his mercy.” Hrothgar walked to Wealhtheow's side and kissed her lips. “We are finally free, my Lady.”

Hrothgar's statement did not fill Wealhtheow with happiness. She glanced into his bearded face. “I hope so, my Lord.”

Hrothgar kissed her again. “I will meet you in the mead hall at your leisure.” He disappeared through the doorway.

Wealhtheow tilted her head as she lathered her skin with soap. Why was she still apprehensive? Were Grendel and his mother's attacks still too fresh in her mind? Wealhtheow splashed water onto her face. She could find no explanation for her feelings and praying to Odin and Freya offered no comfort.

Wealhtheow finished her bath and slipped into a velvet-grey outer garment. She added rings, bracelets, and Hrothgar's necklace to her attire before heading toward the hall.

Once in the hall, she joined Hrothgar who sat on his throne. She arrived in time to see Beowulf return Hrunting to Unferth and thank him for his kindness in lending the ancient sword to him. Wealhtheow was surprised to see Unferth receive his sword with a lowered head.

The Geats stood before Hrothgar in their war-gear. They looked as fearsome as ever, but this time Wealhtheow was relieved to see their armor. She and Hrothgar could never repay these warriors for their valor and the peace they returned to Denmark with their heroic deeds.

After returning Hrunting, Beowulf turned toward the king.

“Lord Hrothgar, we who have crossed the sea to aid you are now eager to return to King Hygelac. Here we were warmly welcomed and entertained, and you have treated us well. If there is anything more I can do for you, I will not hesitate to act, my Lord. If from across the ocean I ever hear that battle is threatening your borders, I shall sail with a thousand thanes to help your cause. Lord Hygelac may be a young king, but he will support me in both word and action if honor dictates that I should raise my spear to protect you.” Beowulf glanced at Hrethric and Hrothmund. “If the king’s son, Hrethric, should ever think of traveling to the court of the Geats, he will find many friends.”

Wealhtheow beamed at Beowulf’s words. His intention to protect and befriend Hrethric and to help her son succeed to the throne was the most rewarding of all his actions. Her attempts at peace and unity were powerless if her children, who represented

her efforts, did not attain the throne. For all its glory, Heorot's future was bleak if her sons' reigns were not protected or assured.

Hrothgar laid his hand on his chest. "The Lord sent you those words and they were spoken with sincerity. I have never heard such a young man make more insightful observations. You are strong in body, mature in mind, and impressive in speech. If any of your grandfather, Hrethrel's, descendants die underneath a spear or if deadly disease or sword fells the prince who guards your people, I know the seafaring Geats will not find a more worthy king or protector than you. My admiration for you has deepened with time, dear Beowulf. You have drawn two tribes into peace and a pact of friendship in spite of past feuds. For as long as I rule, I will see to it that the Danes bring tokens and presents to your land. I now know the Geats are beyond reproach and steadfast with friend and foe."

Hrothgar motioned toward his servants and they brought forward twelve treasure chests. "Take these, dear Beowulf. May God grant you a safe and quick voyage."

Hrothgar clasped Beowulf to him in a hug, and he kissed Beowulf's cheek.

Wealhtheow wiped tears from her eyes. She noticed tears also trickled down Hrothgar's bearded face. These brave Geats had saved them all and pledged to befriend them and ensure the success of Denmark's future.

Once Hrothgar and Beowulf parted, Hrothgar and the Danish warriors accompanied Beowulf and his men outside the mead hall. The company walked toward the front of Heorot. Hrothulf stood in front of Hrethric and Hrothmund, and Freewaru

looked at him as she stood beside her mother. Wealhtheow took her place beside Hrothgar and reached for his hand.

Together they watched the Geats mount their horses. Beowulf and his warriors thanked Hrothgar and Wealhtheow for their generosity before driving away with their treasure-filled wagons.

The wind began to blow. Wealhtheow's red hair flew into her face, covering the departing Geats in shades of golden red. She pushed her hair back as the armor and weapons of the departing warriors glinted in the rising sun. Far ahead in the distance, over the cliffs and rocks, waves crashed onto the Danish shore and ocean currents rippled just beneath the surface.

WORKS CITED

Works Cited

- Amory, Frederic and Pat Belanoff. "The Fall of the Old English Female Poetic Image."
PMLA, special topics. 105.3 (May 1990): 533-534. *JSTOR*.
- Benario, Herbert W. Translator. *Tacitus Germany*. Oxford: Aris and Phillips Ltd., 1999.
- Breizmann, Natalia. "Beowulf as Romance: Literary Interpretation as Quest." *MLN*.
113.5 (1998): 1022-1035. *Academic Search Premier*.
- Butler, Francis. "A Woman of Words: Pagan Ol'ga in the Mirror of Germanic Europe."
Slavic Review. 63.4 (Winter 2004): 771-793. *JSTOR*.
- Chickering, Howell D. Jr. *Beowulf: A Dual-Language Edition*. NY: Anchor Press, 1997.
- Clover, Carol J. "The Politics of Scarcity: Notes on the Sex Ratio in Early Scandinavia."
New Readings on Women in Old English Literature. Helen Damico and
Alexandra Hennessey Olson, eds. IN: Indiana University Press, 1990. 101-127.
- Cooke, William. "Three Notes on Swords in Beowulf." *Medium Aevum*. 72.2 (2003): 302-
307. *Academic Search Premier*.
- Damico, Helen. *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and The Valkyrie Tradition*. WI: The University
of Wisconsin Press, 1984.
- Davis, Craig R. *Beowulf and the Demise of Germanic Legend in England*. NY: Garland
Publishing Inc., 1996.
- Desdmond, Marilyn. "The Voice of Exile: Feminist Literary History and the
Anonymous Anglo-Saxon Elegy." *Critical Inquiry*. 16.3 (Spring 1990): 572-590.

JSTOR.

Enright, Michael J. "The Warband Context of the Unferth Episode." *Speculum*. 73.2

(April 1998): 297-337. *JSTOR.*

Galloway, Andrew. "Beowulf and the Varieties of Choice." *PMLA*. 105.2 (March 1990):

197-208. *JSTOR.*

Green, Miranda. *Celtic Goddesses: Warriors, Virgins and Mothers*. NY: George Braziller

Inc., 1996.

Heaney, Seamus. *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*. NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux,

2000.

Hill, Thomas D. "'Wealththeow' as a Foreign Slave: Some Continental Analogues."

Philological Quarterly. 69.1 (1990): 106-110.

Howe, Nicholas. "Rome: Capital of Anglo-Saxon England." *Journal of Medieval and*

Early Modern Studies. 34.1 (2004): 147-172. *Project Muse.*

Jochens, Jenny. *Women in Old Norse Society*. London: Cornell University Press, 1995.

Karras, Ruth Mazo. *Slavery and Society in Medieval Scandinavia*. MI: Yale University

Press, 1988.

Klaeber, Fr. Ed. *Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*. 3rd edition. MA: DC Heath and

Co., 1950.

Klein, Stacy S. "Reading Queenship in Cynewulf's *Elene*." *Journal of Medieval and*

Early Modern Studies. 33.1 (2003): 47-89. *Project Muse.*

Leake, Jane Acomb. *The Geats of Beowulf*. WI: The University of Wisconsin Press,

1967.

Lees, Clare A. "Signifying Gender and Empire." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*. 34.1 (2004): 1-16. *Academic Search Premier*.

_____. "Engendering Religious Desire: Sex, Knowledge, and Christian Identity in Anglo-Saxon England." *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*. 27.1 (1997): 17-46. *Project Muse*.

Lerer, Seth. "Grendel's Glove." *ELH*. 61.4 (1994):721-751. *Academic Search Premier*.

McGowan, Joseph. "Heaney, Caedmon, Beowulf." *New Hibernia Review*. 6.2 (2002):25-42. *Academic Search Premier*.

Mitchell, Bruce. "Literary Lapses: Six Notes on Beowulf and Its Critics." *The Review of English Studies*, New Series. 43.169 (Feb 1992): 1-17. *JSTOR*.

Morgan, Kenneth O, ed. *The Oxford Illustrated History of Britain*. NY: Oxford University Press, 1984.

Moris, Gregory L. *A World of Order and Light: The Fiction of John Gardner*. GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1984.

Murray, Alexander Callander. "Review of Lady with A Mead Cup: Ritual, Prophecy and Lordship in the European Warband from La Tene to the Viking Age." *Speculum*. 74.4 (October 1999): 1055-1056. *JSTOR*.

O'Donoghue, Heather. "What Has Baldr To Do With Lamech? The Lethal Shot of a Blind Man in Old Norse Myth and Jewish Exegetical Traditions." *Medium Aevum*. 71.1 (2003): 82-107. *Academic Search Premier*.

- Osborn, Marijane. "The Wife's Role." *PMLA*. 103.3 (May 1988): 298. *JSTOR*.
- Overing, Gillian R. *Language, Sign, and Gender in Beowulf*. IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990
- Prendergast, Thomas A. "'Wanton Recollection': The Idolatrous Pleasures of *Beowulf*." *New Literary History*. 30/1 (1999): 129-141. *Project Muse*.
- Riley, Samuel M. "Beowulf, Lines 3180-82." *Explicator*. 40.4 (Summer 82): 2-3. *Academic Search Premier*.
- Robinson, Fred C. "Is Wealhtheow a Prince's Daughter?" *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature*. 45 (1964): 36-39.
- Sharma, Manish. "Metalepsis and Monstrosity: The Boundaries of Narrative Structure in *Beowulf*." *Studies in Philology*. 102.3 (Summer 2005): 247-279. *Project Muse*.
- Winther, Per. *The Art of John Gardner: Instruction and Exploration*. NY: State University of New York Press, 1992.
- Wrenn, C. L, ed. "Sutton Hoo and Beowulf." *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism*. Lewis E. Nicholson. Ed. IA: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963.

WORKS CONSULTED

Works Consulted

Baker, Peter S., ed. *The Beowulf Reader*. NY: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000.

This compilation of essays on *Beowulf* discusses Christianity as well as the Danes' feud with Grendel.

Benario, Herbert W, translator. *Tacitus Germany*. Oxford: Aris and Phillips Ltd, 1999.

Benario translates Tacitus' writings on German thought and tradition, and this was a useful source in its depiction of how Germans viewed their female counterparts and the degree of independence women had during the early Scandinavian period.

Bjork, Robert E. and John D. Niles, ed. *A Beowulf Handbook*. NE: University of Nebraska, 1997.

This collection of essays explores the myth and history of *Beowulf*, including who wrote the poem, how the East Anglians descended from Wealhtheow's union with the Scyldings, and the role of queen as an extension of the king's control.

Bloomfield, Josephine. "Benevolent Authoritarianism in Klaeber's *Beowulf*: An Editorial Translation of Kingship." *Modern Language Quarterly*. 60.2. (June 1999). 129-159.

Bloomfield discusses Anglo-Saxon culture, particularly in regards to Klaeber's monumental work on *Beowulf* that was first published in 1922. Bloomfield

analyzes Klaeber's interpretations of vocabulary in various scenes mainly dealing with Hrothgar's reaction to and interaction with Beowulf.

Branston, Brian. *The Lost Gods of England*. NY: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Branston discusses religion and deities, including Odin/Woden, Thor/Thunor, Frey, and Freya. He also refers to the role of Wyrð as omnipresent fate that conflicted with the Christian idea of an omnipresent God. Branston discusses the symbol of the boar, the functioning of the cart and helmet, and presents Old English terms for lord (frea) and lady (frau).

Butler, Francis. "A Woman of Words: Pagan Ol'ga in the Mirror of Germanic Europe." *Slavic Review*. 63.4. (Winter 2004). 771-793.

Butler explores the proper sphere of German women throughout early, pre-Christian Europe, even discussing Wealhtheow's role as queen and peace-weaver and how serving the cup by rank could represent a transfer of power. Butler also points out that Wealhtheow would have served the mead towards the end of the meal and he describes the ceremonial cup or *bragafull* as symbolically offering a share in dignity and nobility to each man.

Chickering, Howell D. Jr. *Beowulf: A Dual-Language Edition*. NY: Anchor Press, 1997.

Chickering introduces *Beowulf* by summarizing several lines at a time in his Introduction. He then presents the Old English verses on the left page and his translation on the right.

Damico, Helen. *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and The Valkyrie Tradition*. WI: The University

of Wisconsin Press, 1984.

Damico analyzes the appearance, name, and function of Wealhtheow, questioning her lineage and discussing how Wealhtheow wields just as much power as Hrothgar. Damico compares Wealhtheow's action and prophetic qualities to the female Valkyries who spur on violent action. Damico also postulates that the Wulfings lived along the southern coastal region of the Baltic peninsula and she attributes Wealhtheow with supernatural abilities, as with the Valkyries and the Norse goddess Freyja. Damico also toys with the idea that Wealhtheow could be Yrsa, the Danish king, Helgi's, widow, which would make Hrothulf her son and explain her suggestion that he rule.

Damico, Helen and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, ed. *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*. IN: Indiana University Press, 1990.

This collection of essays explores the role of women and queens during the Old English period, shedding light on succession and royal ceremony, female infanticide, the scarcity of women, the German view of women, Wealhtheow's position as a woman of power, Freewaru's fate as a political pawn, and Wealhtheow's peace-weaving abilities.

Davis, Craig R. *Beowulf and the Demise of Germanic Legend in England*. NY: Garland Publishing Inc., 1996.

Davis' work was exceedingly helpful for my novella. Davis discusses symbols related to Odin, etiquette at banquets, the cult of Odin and his son Thor, the

behavior of the ruling class, the importance of Wealhtheow's alliance, the pride of Unferth, the previous kings of Denmark before Hrothgar, the foreshadowing of Hrothulf's conquest of Heorot, and the ultimate failure of the peace-weaver.

Falk, Hjalmar and Haakon Shetelig. *Scandinavian Archaeology*. E. V. Gordon. Trans. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937.

Falk et al. presented numerous facts about the villages, graves, and household objects found within early Scandinavia as well as the labels and functions of a pre-Viking ship.

Fulk, R. D, ed. *Interpretations of Beowulf: A Critical Anthology*. IN: Indiana University Press, 1991.

The essays in this book discussed religion in the sixth century and the importance of Odin and Freya as well as the opposing Christian perspectives and thoughts in *Beowulf*.

Gardner, John. *Grendel*. NY: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1971.

Gardner's creative fiction recounts the life of Grendel and his mother, and his descriptions of Heorot, Hrothgar, Wealhtheow, Unferth, and Beowulf made a nice parallel to my own.

Garner, Lori Ann. "Anglo-Saxon Charms in Performance." *Oral Tradition*. 19.1. (2004). 20-42.

Garner discusses healing, religious, and personal fulfillment rituals performed by women, and I used her discussion of herbs and healing remedies with childbirth to

describe the herbs, such as mugwort, that Wealhtheow was prescribed after giving birth to Freewaru.

Gies, Frances and Joseph. *Women in the Middle Ages*. NY: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1978.

Gies addresses the fear and awe of women during the Middle Ages that resulted from the Old English Period.

Green, Miranda. *Celtic Goddesses: Warriors, Virgins and Mothers*. NY: George Braziller Inc., 1996.

Green provides information on beasts of battle such as ravens, crows, and cranes and discusses how women were connected to animals and to water.

Graham-Campbell, James, ed. *Cultural Atlas of the Viking World*. NY: Andromeda Oxford Limited, 1994.

This Atlas portrayed life before, during, and after the Scandinavian Viking World and included maps, descriptions of landscapes, ships, leisure time, life in the home, pagan gods, Runes, and metal workings with armor and helmets.

Guerber, H. A. *Myths of The Norsemen From the Eddas and Sagas*. London: George G. Harrap and Co. LTD, 1908.

Guerber analyzes the origins and life of Odin, Thor, Bragi, Frey, Freya, Heimdall, Loki, the Valkyrs, dwarfs, elves, and giants. His presentation of Valkyries was particularly useful within my novella.

Heaney, Seamus. *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*. NY: Ferrar, Straus and Giroux,

2000.

Heaney's translation is the most lyrical and easy to understand of the translations I have read. I followed Heaney's translated dialogue closely in the speeches of my characters, cross-referencing them with other translations.

Hill, John M. *The Anglo-Saxon Warrior Ethic: Reconstructing Lordship in Early English Literature*. FL: University Press of Florida, 2000.

Hill discusses Hrothgar's desire for peace, Wealhtheow's necklace, the importance of Grendel's mother, Hildeburh's life, and the armor of the Danes.

_____. *The Cultural World in Beowulf*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995.

Hill analyzes wergilds, comitatus loyalties, successions, and possible reasons for Wealhtheow's speeches.

Hill, Thomas D. "Wealhtheow' as a Foreign Slave: Some Continental Analogues." *Philological Quarterly*. 69.1. (1990). 106-110.

Hill recounts the difficulties in interpreting Wealhtheow's name and origin, and he presents and discards the idea that Wealhtheow could have been taken captive by the Danes, for her name implies that her family intentionally gave her a name based on her servile or foreign status. I try to address both of these issues within my novella, incorporating Wealhtheow's mother who may have been a captive.

Huyshe, Wentworth, translator. *Beowulf: An Old English Epic (The Earliest Epic of the Germanic Race)*. NY: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1908.

Huyshe had various helpful comments to make that enlightened the Beowulf story. He particularly discussed the Brosing, Beowulf's character and chivalry in not accepting the Danish throne, Wealththeow's diadem, Hildeburh's tale, and the giant hilt that Beowulf brings to Hrothgar from the mere.

Irving, Edward B. Jr. *Introduction to Beowulf*. NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969.

This book held a wealth of information. It discussed Hrothgar's feelings and actions in his role in *Beowulf*, Beowulf as a historical figure who was named because of his bear-like strength, the architecture of sixth century buildings and halls, armor, ceremonial drinking, and the role of the scop.

Jesch, Judith. *Women in The Viking Age*. NY: Boydell Press, 1991.

Jesch writes of jewelry and belongings of the early Scandinavian era, of a traditional woman's outfit and shoes, of Danish villages, paintings and tapestries, runes, memorial stones used for burial, and the role of women.

Jochens, Jenny. *Women in Old Norse Society*. London: Cornell University Press, 1995.

Jochens explores the excluded role of women in marriage and the benefits and procedures of marriage for both peasants and nobles. She also discusses polygamy, the terror of women's nakedness, the necessity of the father's approval of their child, Norse entertainment and sports, feasting, bathing, food, weaving and the loom, and colors and types of clothes.

Karras, Ruth Mazo. *Slavery and Society in Medieval Scandinavia*. MI: Yale University Press, 1988.

Karras explores the nature of slavery and role of servants within Scandinavian society. She looks at children of slaves, debt-slave, and the practice of capturing women who became concubines. Karras asserts that captured women who became wives were often princesses who were taken hostage.

Kendall, Calvin B. and Peter S. Wells, eds. *Voyage to the Other World: The Legacy of Sutton Hoo*. MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1992.

This collection gives an in-depth description of warriors' armor of spears, shields, mail coats, swords, and helmets. It also describes the length of a ship and royal utensils, and postulates that Wealhtheow may be from the Baltic region.

Kennedy, Charles W. *Beowulf: The Oldest English Epic*. NY: Oxford University Press, 1966.

This version of the Beowulf story is very easy to understand and relayed the poem in more of a narrative fashion. Kennedy's exploration of the historical background and Christian influence were also helpful in writing my novella.

Klaeber, FR, ed. *Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*. 3rd edition. Boston: DC Heath and Co., 1950.

Klaeber comments on Wealhtheow and her heritage, examining her lineage as a Helminga. Klaeber also places Hrothgar in the framework of past and future kings as well as discussing Wealhtheow's two sons.

Klindt-Jensen, Ole. *Denmark Before the Vikings*. London: Jarrold and Sons LTD, 1951.

Klindt-Jensen notes the culture and climate of Denmark through the various ages of Paleolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, and the Bronze, Pre-Roman, and Roman Ages. He writes of the strong ties that the Danes had with the early Roman Empire.

Leake, Jane Acomb. *The Geats of Beowulf*. WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967.

Leake's work was infused with knowledge of the Geats and their land and was helpful for me in my characterization of them.

Magnusson, Magnus and Hermann Palsson. *The Vinland Sagas: The Norse Discovery of America*. NY: New York University Press, 1966.

While the Vinland Sagas did not directly relate to the Beowulf tale, I read this book in order to gain a better understanding of the Norse treatment and actions of women in an era close to Wealhtheow's time period.

Mantell, Stephen, producer. "Beowulf and Old English Literature." VHS.

NJ: Films for the humanities and Sciences, Inc., 1991.

This video was helpful in understanding the customs of the Danes and in dating the events of the poem. The video also discussed the characterization of both Beowulf and Grendel, highlighting the importance of heroism in the culture of *Beowulf*.

Morgan, Kenneth O., ed. *The Oxford Illustrated History of Britain*. NY: Oxford University Press, 1984.

This book presented the historical, political, pagan, and cultural world of Scandinavia, discussing the importance of loyalty to king and kin.

Nicholson, Lewis E. Ed. *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism*. IA: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963.

Nicholson's collection contains essays from critics such as C. L. Wrenn, Peter Baker, Larry Benson, Eric John, and Gillian Overing, discussing a variety of opinions and interpretations relating to *Beowulf* such as Wealhtheow as a nickname, Grendel's feud with Hrothgar, the spread of Christianity, the Wuffings, and the cult of Odin.

Niles, John D. *Beowulf: The Poem and Its Tradition*. MA: Harvard University Press, 1983.

Niles' book presented helpful descriptions of Unferth, Beowulf, Hrothgar, the Danes, and the Geats in a way that reconciled the themes of power, restraint, heroism, and community.

Osborn, Marijane. "The Wife's Role." *PMLA*. 103.3. May 1988. 298.

Osborn highlights that the duty of the Germanic wife was to be counselor in the marriage relationship and it was her duty to speak to her husband. Osborn then discusses Wealhtheow's words and her counseling of her husband.

_____. "The Wealth They Left Us: Two Women Author Themselves Through Other's Lives in Beowulf." *Philological Quarterly*. 78.1-2. (1999). 49-74.

Osborn portrays how women such as Wealhtheow respond to other women's stories, and how with the Hildeburh tale, Wealhtheow reacts so seriously because she identifies with the plot and actions of the story as potential events that could happen in her own life. Consequently, Wealhtheow tries to guide the future in order to ensure that Hildeburh's tragedy is not her own, an aim she is unable to fulfill.

Overing, Gillian R. *Language, Sign, and Gender in Beowulf*. IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990.

Overing explores the role of the peace-weaver, calling attention to Wealhtheow's use of language and knowledge of ceremonial customs.

_____ and Marijane Osborn. *Landscape of Desire: Partial Stories of the Medieval Scandinavian World*. MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

Overing and Osborn present a fascinating account of the Danish landscape, the location of Heorot, the Danish and Scandinavian environment, and the interior of royal halls.

Owen-Crocker, Gale R. *The Four Funerals in Beowulf and the Structure of the Poem*. NY: Manchester University Press, 2000.

I used this source for background material of both royal and peasant burials and used the descriptions of objects in the Sutton Hoo burial to help depict the objects of Wealhtheow's time period.

Puhvel, Martin. *Beowulf and Celtic Tradition*. Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press,

1979.

Puhvel discusses the dichotomies of Grendel's mother that I tried to portray in my novella. He also sheds light onto the purpose and significance of the giant sword hilt that Beowulf used to slay Grendel's mother.

Raffel, Burton, translator. *Beowulf*. NY: The New American Library Inc., 1963.

Raffel's version uses different spellings of names and locations to assist with pronunciation, and his word choices lend variations in meaning and perspectives to certain passages.

Robinson, Fred C. "Is Wealhtheow a Prince's Daughter?" *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature*. 45. (1964). 36-39.

Within this short critical essay, Robinson raises the complexities of Wealhtheow's name and her unknown origin in *Beowulf*. Through examining *dohter*, a word that had previously lead scholars to believe Wealhtheow was the daughter of royalty, Robinson postulates that the word may refer instead to Hygd and that Wealhtheow may not have descended from royalty. Robinson concludes by stating there is not enough information in *Beowulf* to ascertain Wealhtheow's lineage. I reconcile this fact by painting Wealhtheow's mother as a Helming captive.

Sawyer, Birgit and Peter. *Medieval Scandinavia: From Conversion to Reformation circa 800-1500*. The Nordic Series. 17. MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Sawyer presented invaluable descriptions of Denmark landscape and ecology and also discussed the fertility goddess Freyja.

Tuso, Joseph F., ed. *Beowulf: The Donaldson Translation Backgrounds and Sources Criticism*. A Norton Critical Edition. NY: WW Norton and Company, Inc., 1975.

This edition of the Beowulf poem presents clear relationships between the kings of Denmark and their descendants. It also places the Beowulf story within a historical context, referencing the invasion of the Angles and Saxons in England and discussing how Christianity was spread to the Celts and to Scandinavia through Roman occupation in the third century.

Welch, Martin. *Discovering Anglo-Saxon England*. PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992.

Welch's book contained pictures and descriptions of archaeological excavations of fifth century landscapes, housing, fences, burials, women's dress, weapons, jewelry, and other cultural objects. I gleaned most of the descriptions of Heorot from Welch's work.

Wrenn, C. L., ed. *Beowulf: With the Finnesburg Fragment*. Boston: DC Heath and Co., 1953.

Reading the Finnesburg Fragment helped advance the plot of *Beowulf* and this book emphasized the historical importance of Beowulf as it depicted the successful years of Danish rule before Denmark was overrun by war.