

# **Choosing Your Way Through the World's Medieval Past**

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**illustrated by Steven Meyers**



**J. Weston Walch, Publisher**  
Portland, Maine

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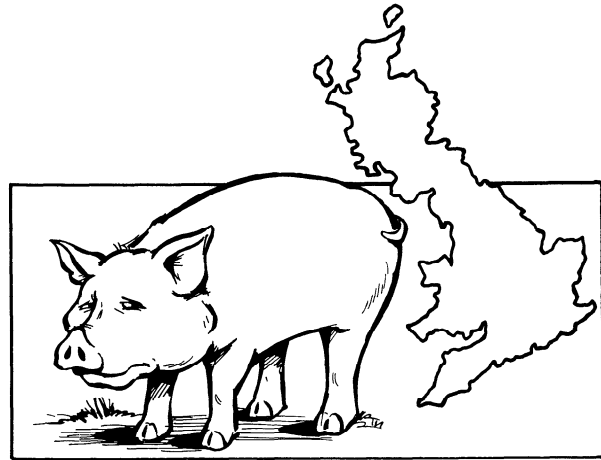
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- (a) Burn down the landlord's house.
- (b) Refrain from burning it down.

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## *A Germanic Villager— A.D. 500*



You live in an Anglo-Saxon village in Britain. Your parents raise grains, vegetables, and fruits. You eat these foods, as well as meat from your pigs. You have an alphabet consisting of about twenty-four letters called runes. The runes have simple lines, which you carve or etch into wood, bone, or stone.

About thirty families live in your farming village. Your house is a thatched hut with one room. It is built out of wood and clay. You don't have a chimney. The smoke from your fire escapes through a hole in the roof. When the weather is cold, your cow and the pigs live in the house with you. The more creatures you have breathing in the small hut, the warmer it is.

You love to walk through your village and look at the one fine home. You like to dream that when you are grown you will live in such a house.

Today all your chores are done, and you walk down the road to look again at the fine home. As you walk, you see stone ruins. These were once Roman villas. A very old man told you of them.

The lord of the village lives in the fine home. He owns the land your parents and the others farm. The lord's house is made

from split logs. It has a kitchen and separate sleeping rooms. How wonderful it must be to have a separate room to sleep in! Your brothers and sisters and even the pigs step on you as you sleep!

The lord has silver and gold ornaments that shine like the sun. You cannot imagine owning such beautiful things! You would never tire of looking at them if they were yours.

You are old enough to take some household utensils to your grandparents in the next village. They are old and cannot travel. You should leave at once, but you are tempted to delay. Sometimes the lord lets you do chores for him. Then he allows you to touch his ornaments.

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■ *If you leave at once for your grandparents' village, turn to page 3.*

■ *If you stop at the lord's house, turn to page 4.*

**Find out what your fate is!**



You load the heavy sack filled with pliers, a chisel, some knives, and a few wooden spoons over your back. You hurry down the old Roman road. Your parents are very proud of you to be making this long journey alone.

The first night you plan to sleep under a tree because the weather is warm. But you fear being robbed during the night. You walk into a meadow and dig a hole. Here you will bury the few coins you carry. You will hide your sack in the brush.

But as you dig you strike something hard! At first you think it's a rock. After digging deeper you find a small box. You open it with trembling fingers. It is filled with silver spoons! How the silver shines! You find a big spoon, a middle-sized spoon, and a tiny pointed spoon. You remember stories your old friend in the village told you. The Romans used different spoons for everything!

You forget all about sleeping. You are too excited. You load the box into your sack and hurry towards the next village. You will be able to offer a coin to sleep in someone's hut. It will be safer there. You cannot risk being robbed of your silver spoons!

As you rush along, you meet a man coming in the opposite direction. He wears a sheepskin and an old cloak. You hope he is not a beggar. You dislike turning people down and you are much too poor to share. You don't know how much the silver spoons will bring, but you will need every bit of it for your family.

As the man draws closer, you see he is a monk.

"Good evening," you say cheerfully. He has kindly blue eyes and he wears a wooden cross around his neck. Perhaps he will give you a blessing.

"Good evening," he says. "Are you a traveler in need of a night's shelter, youngster?"

"Yes. I was going to the village," you say.

"Ah, we have a few huts for travelers up in the hills. We can offer you bread and cheese and a mat to sleep on," says the monk.

You find the offer tempting. But what if the man is not the monk he appears to be? What if he is a robber disguised as a monk?

■ *If you go with the man, turn to page 5.*

■ *If not, turn to page 6.*





You knock gently on the lord's door.

"Good morning, Sir," you say when he opens. "Do you have a chore I might help with?"

Thankfully the lord is in a fine mood. He grins and says, "Come in, youngster. You might sweep the floor. I will give you a coin and you might admire the ornaments you like so much."

You hurry to sweep the floor as the lord has an argument outside with his son, who is about your age. When you are finished, the lord tosses you a coin and you go to admire the ornaments. You touch the satin smoothness of the gold vessels and tell yourself you will own such beautiful things one day. Then you leave and go down the road. But you don't get far. The lord is running after you, his face red with anger. "A vessel of gold is missing from my home!" he shouts.

You are shocked. "My lord, I did not take it!" you cry.

"You and my son were the only ones near the house this morning. Do you think my own son would have robbed me? No, you ungrateful wretch. You loved the ornaments too much. Now you have robbed me," shouts the man.

"Look in my sack," you offer. "You will see I have only household goods I take to my grandparents."

The lord searches your sack, but he is not convinced. "You had time to hide the vessel in these woods! You are only a child, but old enough to be tried as a thief! Now woe to you!"

You are terror-struck. You have seen youngsters like you tried and convicted and punished savagely. You might be whipped or even lose a finger or a hand as a thief!

The angry lord has called his son to bind you and prepare you for trial. You wonder if you should make a run for it. You could hide in the woods and hope the real thief is uncovered. Perhaps that is safer than going on trial. But you don't want to run. That would make you look guilty.

■ *If you run, turn to page 7.*

■ *If you stay, turn to page 8.*



You decide to trust the monk. You follow him up a small hill to a few huts in a grove of trees. The monk shows you into one. There is only a mat on the floor and a stool to sit on. The monk brings you a crust of bread, some cheese, and a jug of cold water. You gladly eat the bread and cheese. It tastes wonderful because you are hungry.

"You may stay as long as you need to," says the monk.

You are curious about this man. "How long have you lived here?" you ask.

"Since I was seventeen. I am now forty-seven," he says.

"Surely you do not live on just bread and cheese in a rude hut? Not for all those years," you say.

"Ah, it's a joyous life. The beauty of the sunrise and bird songs awaken me."

"I have no fear of losing my property. I have nothing to lose," laughs the monk.

You sleep soundly. When dawn is red in the sky, you get up and splash cold water on your face. Then you hear singing! At this hour? You peer from your hut. Sure enough, the monks are singing as they walk up the hill!

You notice a few other huts far from the grove. When the monks stop singing you ask who lives there.

"Ah," says the monk you have met before, "that is where the lepers<sup>1</sup> live. They have no other place to go because people are afraid of them. We take care of them, but their huts must be a little ways from the huts we offer the travelers. The travelers would not want to be near the poor lepers."

Your heart is touched. You reach in your bag and give the monk the large silver spoon. "You may have this to sell and help the lepers."

"Bless you," says the monk.

You hurry on to the village and sell the other two spoons for a good price. Then you go to your grandparents' house. It is a happy visit. You are proud of yourself for making the long journey. And you feel good about giving away the silver spoon.

■ *Turn to page 9.*

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<sup>1</sup>People suffering from the disease called leprosy. Once incurable and deforming, it was feared. Now it can be treated.



You decline the monk's offer and hurry on to the village with your sack of silver spoons and tools. You offer an old couple a coin to sleep in their hut. You sleep with the sack under your pillow. You dread that something will happen to your silver spoons.

In the morning you hurry on. When you stop for lunch, you look in your sack. Oh no! The middle-sized silver spoon is gone. You were robbed! How clever they were not even to awaken you! What light-fingered thieves!

You hurry on again until you find a wealthy shopkeeper. You show him the two silver spoons.

"I will buy the large one," he says. "I do not care for the tiny one. I think the Romans used it to eat eggs and shellfish."

You tuck the coins you received into your cloak. It is less than you expected. You are disappointed. Did the shopkeeper cheat you? How should a poor youngster like you know?

As you near your grandparents' village, you notice ragged-looking fellows behind you. You decide to run. Then you trip on a rock and your sack goes flying. The chisel and the tiny silver spoon tumble into a ravine. You cannot get them back. Oh, what miserable luck.

When you reach your grandparents' hut, they greet you warmly. They hug and kiss you. They are poor people, but they have even made a little cake for you. How good the honey cake tastes with fresh milk.

You tell your grandparents the sad story of the silver spoons. "I thought I was rich, and now I just have a few coins. I was robbed and struck with misfortune."

"Ah," says your grandmother with a little chuckle. "You had nothing before you found the silver spoons. Now you have several coins. So you are lucky. Do not count what is lost. Count only the good you have."

You remember those words all your life. You always count what is good in your life. You try to forget the bad things very quickly. You find your grandmother gave you good advice. Such advice is worth more than a dozen silver spoons!

■ *Turn to page 9.*



You run quickly into the woods. You have spent many hours roaming here. The lord and his son cannot find you because you know tree hollows and caves to hide in.

But you are an outlaw! Soon everybody thinks you stole the golden vessel. You do not dare return even to your parents' house.

You live off the land for many weeks. You keep hoping that the true thief will be found. But then an old traveler tells you that your hopes are foolish. He thinks the son of the lord himself stole the vessel and the truth will never come out. You think the same. You must flee to where nobody knows you.

You make your way to the English Channel and cross over to the other side on a keel boat, a long narrow boat propelled by oars. You arrive in Gaul, where war has been raging for a long time. There is a Frankish leader named Clovis who is trying to conquer everybody else and rule alone. Different tribes are battling all the time. You are so frightened. It is dangerous even for a youngster to travel through the countryside.

You must steal to live. You were never a thief when the lord accused you. But now you must be a thief. You snatch a chicken here and some fruit there. You are sorry to do it, but there is no other way to keep alive. You are sure that even God will forgive you for crimes like this.

You find small jobs here and there. But most of the time you must steal. Nobody will hire a skinny youngster without skills. How you long to go home, but that can never be.

One night, as you sleep in strange woods, a cold, driving rain comes. You crawl deeper under the tree, but soon you are soaking wet and shivering. Death comes to you before dawn. Now, at last, you will have peace. You have lived a short, hard life.

■ *Turn to page 9.*



You are innocent and you refuse to run. You are sure that you will be declared innocent in the trial.

Your guilt or innocence will be decided in an unusual way. It is called trial by ordeal. You are tied up and lowered into cold water. If you sink, you will be declared innocent because pure water will not receive a guilty person, it is believed. If you float, you will be declared guilty. Then you will be pulled out and punished as a thief.

You are very nervous as you plunge into the cold water. You sink at once! You almost drown before you are pulled from the water!

“Good youngster,” says your accuser, the lord of the village, “I can see now that you were misjudged by me. I was wrong to accuse you. The water has proven you guiltless by accepting your innocent young body.”

You are glad to be free, but you do not like the lord anymore. You smile and do chores for him, but in your heart you dislike him very much.

One day as you are walking past the lord’s house, you see his son hurry by with a beautifully engraved sword. You know that is the lord’s most treasured possession.

You go to the back door of the lord’s house and tell him what you saw. He rushes out as the son is climbing on his horse.

“Ungrateful son!” shouts the lord. “You would steal my sword?”

“You are stingy, father. You drive me to steal,” cries the wretched son.

You are surprised by what happens next. The lord takes his sword from the son. Then he turns and gives it to you! “Here, good youngster, sell this treasure for the good of your poor family! You showed me the truth about my wicked son.”

The sword brings a good price. Your family can now live in a better home and have more pigs and two cows. You can even give money to your grandparents so that their lives are easier.

■ *Turn to page 9.*



## Treasures of the Anglo-Saxons

The Angles and the Saxons were primitive Germanic tribes who settled in England. They were not civilized like the Romans, but they had treasures of their own. One was a poem called *Beowulf*. This poem was spoken at feasts and around fires. Then it was written down. It tells about a young hero named Beowulf who defeats an evil monster named Grendel. In the poem are strange and colorful terms. The sea is called a *whale-path*. A traveler is called an *earth-stepper*. The story is rich with excitement and drama. It has been loved for hundreds of years.

### Matching

- |   |            |
|---|------------|
| _____ 1. Letters of the Anglo-Saxon alphabet      | a) Beowulf |
| _____ 2. The head of a village                    | b) runes   |
| _____ 3. The young hero in the Anglo-Saxon poem   | c) sea     |
| _____ 4. The evil monster in the Anglo-Saxon poem | d) Grendel |
| _____ 5. Whale-path                               | e) lord    |

### Group Activities

1. Find a copy of *Beowulf* and read portions of it aloud in class.
2. On a large map of the medieval period find the different Germanic tribes and note where they settled. Find the regions settled by the Franks, Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Vandals, Burgundians, Angles, and Saxons. What countries are these today?
3. Discuss what life was probably like for the farmer who lived on the lord's land. How would this life compare with that of migrant workers today?

### Individual Activities

1. Find information about one of the following people and write one paragraph about him.  
a) Clovis              b) Venerable Bede
2. Look up runic writing. Copy a few sentences.
3. Using the type of colorful language in *Beowulf*, write a colorful term for the following:  
airplane                      automobile                      spacecraft  
baseball player              singer

