

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

Stash (after ‘Beowulf’)

by Steve Brown

I.

And if some slave or hero’s wingman, stumbling
down a straitened earthen corridor, discovers,
in amongst the dark entanglements
of doubtful roots and all the deceitful shadows,
a dragon’s hoard – with all its warmth of gold,
the brittle sheen of silver – and his quick eye
begins to inventory: the armoured hoops,
the tarnished rattle of chainmail; the helmets,
with grim golden visors; the heft of swords
with inlaid handles, still sharp and brave
in blade; wall-hangings, worked and intricate
with silver thread; the goblets, wide and gaping
at their mouths, once brimmed with mead and loud
and clinking in some forgotten hall; the harp
once set trembling, singing in all the warmth
and smoke of some close, fire-lightened company;
all this, and more – then, he would know
in his deep blood, these were the dreadful relics
of a lost and scattered people, blown

into darkness by the whims of Fortune,
the biting winds of the shifting bitter sea,
and he would both bless and curse
the calloused hands of Fate, who gives and takes,
both blindly, and he would lift an ample armful,
and take it home, prepared to risk,
all rashly, all a dragon's anger, knowing
that treasure is rare, and that the shine of gold
looks like life itself, with all its uncertain grip.

II.

Knees still scabby from the playground,
fresh from all the broken Airfix planes,
the casualties of battle, like with the dragon's hoard,
you stumble into 'Beowulf', knowing, too,
that this was a message never meant
for you – a voice made up of shadow,
strange and harsh and gripping,
both unlike and echoing the cries and shouts
in the endless-running game of football –
so, like some chance coin, you pocket it,
and take it home, and this has made all the difference.