

# SUMMARY

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**I**t is the turn of the thirteenth century, 800 years ago in Latvia. The Baltic gods have gathered to consult the Father of Destiny about their own fate and that of the Latvian people. Both are under threat from invading German knights, who have been sent by the Pope to christianize the Baltic region, under the command of Bishop Albert. Pērkons calls on all the gods to guard and nurture the Latvians, and they promise to do so, each in his or her own way.

As the Council is breaking up, the Goddess Staburadze reveals that she has rescued a young man from beneath the River Daugava, where he was cast down by two witches. She has taken him to her Crystal Palace beneath the river in the whirlpool of Staburags, from which no human can emerge alive. The canto ends with the revelation by Pērkons that this youth is Bearslayer, who will become a noble warrior under the protection of Pērkons, and will strive mightily against the forces of evil.

At the beginning of Canto II the action goes back in time to the Castle of Lielvārde, shortly before the Council of the Gods described in the previous canto. The eighteen-year-old son of the Lord of Lielvārde reveals mighty strength, killing a bear with his bare hands. This first heroic deed wins him the name “Bearslayer.” (This young man is the hero that Pērkons revealed to the other gods in Canto I.) The youth is not the true son of the Lord of Lielvārde, but a foundling suckled by a female bear in the forest. (Although it is not directly explained until almost the end of the poem, it is important to know that Bearslayer has bear’s ears, and that if these are cut off he will lose his bearlike strength.) Bearslayer was brought to Lielvārde as a baby by Vaidelots, a messenger of the Gods, to be raised until he reached manhood. After killing the bear, he is sent to study for seven years in the Castle of Burtnieks, in order to learn the ancient wisdom of the Latvian race. Accompanied by the good advice of his foster father, he sets off.

On the way to Burtnieks, Bearslayer visits the Castle of Aizkraukle, where he is stunned by the beauty of Aizkrauklis’s daughter, Spīdala. However, he watches her and discovers that she is a witch. He follows her by hiding in a hollow log on which she flies to the Devil’s Pit, and witnesses evil rites, as well as seeing the false holy man, Kangars, promise to serve the Devil by working against the ancient gods and supporting Christianity, because Christians are

easier prey for the Devil. On the journey back to Aizkraukle, Bearslayer is cast down into the whirlpool of Staburags in the River Daugava by Spīdala and another witch. From here he is rescued by Staburadze, as we already know from Canto I, and taken to her Crystal Palace beneath the whirlpool.

With the help of the beautiful and virtuous maiden, Laimdota, Staburadze nurses Bearslayer back to health. She reveals to him that he has been chosen by the gods to fight against evil, especially Spīdala and Kangars, who are plotting in secret. Staburadze gives him a talisman, a magic mirror, and Laimdota gives him a ribbon decorated with an oak-leaf pattern. He leaves the Crystal Palace and is duly turned to stone, as are all mortals, but is restored to life by Pērkons. He performs a second heroic deed, saving a boat that is sinking in a raging river by rowing with his bare hands, and is befriended by a powerful youth, Koknesis. Together they ride to Burtnieks, accompanied by the curses of Spīdala.

Canto III opens with Spīdala hurrying to Kangars's hut to warn him that Bearslayer was present in the Devil's Pit and saw the shameful deeds. To prevent Bearslayer revealing that he and Spīdala are in league with the Devil, Kangars decides to lure the young hero into a trap by provoking a war against the Estonian Giant, Kalapuisis, certain that Bearslayer will rush into battle against the invincible foeman and be killed. As Kangars explains this plot to Spīdala a terrible storm arises, and Spīdala is unable to return home.

The storm was sent by Pērkons to destroy a ship just arriving at the mouth of the Daugava from Germany, in order to kill the German missionaries it is carrying. Led by the priest, Dietrich, they have come with the intention of forcing the Baltic people to accept Christianity. However, the Livian fisher-folk of the Daugava estuary rescue the passengers from the ship. Thus, they thwart the will of Pērkons, who had planned to drown the newcomers. In doing this they save the very people who will eventually become their conquerors. The morning after the storm a fisherman brings Dietrich to Kangars, and an alliance is forged, since both want to introduce Christianity, although for differing reasons.

Years pass. Bearslayer and Koknesis study hard in the castle of Burtnieks. Bearslayer has a special reason to seek perfection. Laimdota is the daughter of Burtnieks and has returned to the castle from the Crystal Palace of Staburadze, where she and Bearslayer met. They fall in love, but just as Bearslayer is about to ask for her hand news arrives that Kalapuisis has entered Latvia and is killing and laying waste. Burtnieks offers Laimdota's hand to any warrior who can rid them of Kalapuisis.

Bearslayer faces Kalapuisis, and defeats him in single combat. However, just as Bearslayer is about to kill him, Kalapuisis reveals a prophecy told to him by his mother that a bear cub from the Daugava, who is of noble lineage and equal to Kalapuisis as a warrior, will come and save the Latvians from their conquerors. The two warriors realize that Bearslayer is this bear cub, and that they have a common enemy—the Germans—and make peace, so that they can work together against the invaders.

Successful in the Estonian war, Bearslayer returns to Burtnieks's castle with the other Latvian warriors. They are greeted in song by the local maidens. Laimdota places an oak-leaf wreath on Bearslayer's head and sings of his might, promising to make him a true and virtuous wife. Bearslayer replies in song that he will live and die for Laimdota. Amid great joy and feelings of brotherhood the warriors toast Bearslayer. They give him legendary status by concluding that the gods personally thwarted Kangars's plot and turned it round so that, instead of destroying him, the plot added to Bearslayer's fame.

Once again, time passes while Bearslayer studies at the castle of Burtnieks. One night he notices in the fortress's undercroft a trapdoor, left half-open to reveal a stone staircase leading below. He goes down and follows a tunnel until he enters a large chamber that he judges to be beneath the centre of the lake. He is in the Sunken Castle that Laimdota had told him about. He discovers Laimdota reading an ancient book. She explains to him that if a mortal remains in the Sunken Castle overnight and survives until morning, the castle will rise once more into the light of day. Bearslayer resolves to carry out this heroic task, and Laimdota leaves him.

Midnight passes and the Sunken Castle grows cold. Bearslayer lights a fire from broken wood lying around. Suddenly seven evil spirits enter the room carrying an open coffin, in which an old man with huge sharp teeth and long fingernails is lying. He begins to groan horribly and complain that he is cold. Bearslayer cannot bear the sound and hauls the man from the coffin to the fire, but the old man tries to bite off Bearslayer's ears, knowing that without them Bearslayer is weak. Bearslayer fights back and holds the old man in the fire, saying that he will only let him go if the Sunken Castle is raised to the surface.

At this, a whirlwind springs up, and the seven evil spirits return, led by Spīdala. They attack Bearslayer and he is about to be defeated when he remembers the mirror that Staburadze gave him. He pulls it out and holds it in Spīdala's face. A howling fills the air and all the evil spirits turn to dust and are whirled around the room in the whirlwind. The spirit of Viduveids, a wise

man of ancient times, appears in human form and greets Bearslayer, saying that the young hero will save the Latvian people. Viduveds's hand-maidens make a bed for Bearslayer, and he falls into a deep sleep.

Next morning the people are amazed to see a castle standing on an island in the middle of the lake. Laimdota tells Burtnieks that Bearslayer has spent the night in the castle, and the old man realizes at once that Bearslayer has broken the magic spell and saved the Sunken Castle. Laimdota and Burtnieks enter the castle and wake Bearslayer. He claims Laimdota as his bride and Burtnieks gives his blessing, saying that the union of the two clans (Burtnieks and Lielvārde) will save the Latvians.

One evening, later, Laimdota reads to Bearslayer from the ancient books found in the Sunken Castle. She reads how the ancient Latvians were led to the Baltic Sea from a land far to the east by Pērkons. With the favour of the gods, they established a golden age on Earth. However, this made the Devil jealous and he commanded a whirlwind to raise up a lake and deposit it in the valley. This was done and the valley, including the castle the Latvian people had built in it, was drowned. The people would have died too, but Liga, the Goddess of Song, saved them by using the music of her kokle to open up under the lake a tunnel that led them to safety. The castle is the one Bearslayer raised and the tunnel the one he used to enter the castle.

On another occasion, Laimdota reads to Bearslayer the story of the creation. In eternal space there was once nothing except a celestial light. In it lived God and a second mighty spirit—the Devil. At that time the Devil still obeyed God, although he was already growing rebellious. God decided to create the Earth and sent the Devil to fetch a handful of slime. The Devil was curious and kept a second handful for himself, hiding it in his mouth. When he brought the slime to God, God commanded the slime to form the Earth, throwing it down. The slime began to grow, and formed the level plains of the Earth. However, the slime in the Devil's mouth also obeyed God and grew until the Devil could no longer hold it in his mouth. He spat it out and it fell to the newly created Earth, forming the mountains.

From his own substance God created the Sun and Moon. He was so pleased with the Earth and Sun he had just created that he also created the first living creatures: the Sons of the Gods and the Daughters of the Sun. The Moon took a gigantic Daughter of the Sun as his wife, and the stars are their thousands of children. The Sons of the Gods divided up the Earth among themselves.

The Devil grew more rebellious and began to defy God. A great rivalry grew up between them, and the Devil tried in vain to outdo God, who, however, always had the upper hand. Eventually God created humans and made them capable only of good, but the Devil interfered and gave them the power to be evil as well as good. God grew furiously angry at seeing his creation ruined, and banished the Devil to Hell. There the Devil created evil demons and with them rose up from Hell and fought against God and all good spirits. Eventually, the Devil was defeated and driven back to Hell after Pērkons intervened in the fight.

Later Laimdota read from the teachings of the guardian of the Latvian race, in which he listed the tasks of worthy human beings: to seek perfection of the human race, to fight against evil spirits by preserving the ancient teachings, to make just laws and drive out bad rulers, and to love nature.

All Souls' Eve comes. The people of Burtnieks's castle celebrate this in the traditional Latvian way. Next morning, however, Laimdota and Koknesis have vanished, and Bearslayer sets off to find them, vowing never to return unless he is successful. Meanwhile, a German ship has arrived at the mouth of the Daugava and Dietrich and Kangars persuade the local Latvian Lord, Kaupa, to return in it to Rome with Dietrich. Kangars stays behind, but knows that the Germans' friendship is only a trick to gain control of Latvia.

The ship sails. Just then, Bearslayer rides up. He knows full well that Kangars and Spīdala have kidnapped Laimdota, and demands that they give her back. Spīdala tells him that she is on the ship just vanishing over the horizon. Kangars says that she and Koknesis are lovers. Bearslayer does not believe this lie, although he experiences some doubts, and rides off in deep despair. Spīdala gloats over his sorrow. She has her revenge, and Bearslayer's life is worse than death.

Bearslayer returns to Lielvārde, his home. He is greeted warmly, but his father sees that something is wrong. Bearslayer tells him all and his father consoles him with wise words of hope: Perhaps Laimdota loves him still and will yet be saved. Bearslayer spends his days roaming the cliffs above the Daugava brooding, and longing to go with the waters down to the sea to fight against the North Wind and meet the North Wind's Daughter. One day he vanishes, and no-one knows where he has gone.

Canto IV opens with Kaupa in Rome. He is seduced by the wealth and power he sees, doubts the old gods, and decides to embrace Christianity and convert the Latvians. Back in Latvia, the people labour long building a walled city for the Germans, who are now present in large numbers—this city is Riga.

Once they have their fortress the Germans begin to plunder everything they can get their hands on, to pillage and to destroy. Full of bitterness, the Latvians realize that they have been tricked.

Meanwhile, in Germany Laimdota is being held prisoner in a convent. Spīdala had tricked her into leaving her father's castle back in Latvia by pretending to be her mother. Laimdota was then seized by Spīdala's minions, brought to Riga, and placed on the ship to Germany as a prisoner. During the journey Dietrich tries to calm her and tells her that she will soon be the Bride of Christ. Laimdota replies that she loves Bearslayer, will not be forced to become anyone else's bride and is, in any case, a mortal and not fit to become the Bride of Christ. Although hardened and without pangs of conscience, Dietrich blushes at her virtuous answer and leaves her. Kaupa refuses to help her on the grounds that it is the will of Destiny that she go to Germany. Soon both Dietrich and Kaupa forget about her.

The convent prioress tries to persuade Laimdota to accept Christianity and threatens to allow her to be seized by a local count and used as a concubine. To escape this fate, Laimdota pretends to accept Christianity but, despite this, one night armed men break into the convent and seize her. As they are about to carry her off, an unknown warrior appears and fights all the attackers on his own. He kills all except one, and rescues Laimdota. She recognizes him as Koknesis and they flee into the mountains. Along the way, Koknesis explains how he too was tricked into going on board the ship to Germany. Once in Germany, he heard that a Baltic woman was being held in the convent and decided to rescue her, without knowing that it was Laimdota.

The action turns to the Northern Sea, where Bearslayer is wandering in a ship, lost on the way to Germany to seek Laimdota. The North Wind's Daughter hears the sailors calling upon her in song, and she comes to them in her own ship. She says that it would be best if they came to her island to rest, before continuing their journey, and Bearslayer agrees. They avoid the Castle of the North Wind, where he is sleeping, perhaps for another month. Once he is awake the winter will set in and they will not be able to escape, because of the ice and storms.

The island is warmed by fires from the centre of the Earth, and the sailors enjoy a pleasant stay. Eventually the North Wind's Daughter tells them that her father is about to wake up and that they must leave. She advises them not to return by the route that they came by, because Bearslayer's enemies now know that he is using that route and may be too strong for him. She describes an alternative route, but warns of its great dangers, including

the Island of the Dog-Snout Ogres, the Kingdom of Dreams, the Hill of Diamonds, and the Enchanted Isle. The sailors set off in the nick of time: The North Wind has woken up and they are involved in a fearsome storm, from which they barely escape.

They reach the Island of the Dog-Snout Ogres, where they tie up. Bearslayer goes ashore with a party of men to cut up and share the meat of some deer he has already killed. They are at work when suddenly the Dog-Snouts pour out of a cave and attack them. They tear the men apart with their teeth and even Bearslayer is scarcely able to save himself. He is wounded and seems doomed when he notices that no more Dog-Snouts are coming out of their cave. He slips into the cave, and is able to defend himself with his spear in its narrow opening. The Dog-Snouts then bring up large boulders and block the entrance, trapping Bearslayer inside.

Back at the ship the sailors wait in vain for their comrades. Their orders forbid them to go ashore and seek them. At the last moment Bearslayer appears and tells them to disembark at once. They do so and escape the Land of the Dog-Snouts. At sea, Bearslayer explains what happened. He got out of the cave by digging a hole at the rear with his spear. This took several days, but he found some raw meat in the cave and lived on that. The Dog-Snouts were busy watching the front of the cave, and thus did not see Bearslayer as he escaped at the rear.

They sail on and reach the Kingdom of Dreams. This is where Heaven and Earth come together, the gates of Paradise standing alongside the entrance to Hell. This land is the location of the Gardens of the Sun, where the Sun returns at dusk and rests at night before setting off each morning. Under the protection of the Sons of the Gods and the Daughters of the Sun they stay in the pleasant Kingdom of Dreams for some time, but eventually set off again.

They travel in pitch darkness at first, but later see a tiny glint of light, towards which they sail. They come closer and sight the Hill of Diamonds, its peak glowing brilliantly. The ship docks and the sailors rush on shore. Despite Bearslayer's warning, one sailor climbs to the peak and vanishes. A second does the same. A third ties himself to a rope and is pulled back by his comrades as he is vanishing. He is saved, but never speaks again.

They sail away and encounter fair winds and weather. Fog obscures the course and they suddenly emerge close to a beautiful island. Bearslayer realizes that this is the Enchanted Isle the North Wind's Daughter warned against, from which no ship can escape. They try to sail away but are drawn to the island until the ship runs up on its shore.

Canto V continues on the Enchanted Isle. There is no sign of life, except for a track leading from the forest to a bridge and, at the seaward end of the bridge, a beautiful palace. Inside is a sumptuous meal and in a second room soft beds for all. The sailors fall upon the food and then all go to bed. Bearslayer arms himself and stands guard at the end of the bridge.

At midnight a rider comes out of the forest. It is the Three-Headed Demon. He speaks aloud, revealing that he hates Bearslayer, but believes that his enemy is far away, trapped on the Northern Sea. At this Bearslayer roars that he is there. The rider challenges Bearslayer to fight and show his strength. They ride into the thick forest where the rider blows down the trees, so that they will have a clearing in which to fight: One breath clears an area three miles across! They fight and the demon's blows drive Bearslayer into the ground up to his knees. None the less, Bearslayer prevails. He then returns to the palace at the bridge and lies down to sleep. Nothing further disturbs their rest that night.

The next night Bearslayer again stands guard. Again, at midnight a rider comes out of the forest. This time it is the Six-Headed Demon, who also hates Bearslayer and believes that he is lost on the Northern Sea. Again Bearslayer challenges the demon, who clears the forest by blowing down trees, this time six miles around. They fight and Bearslayer is driven into the ground to his hips, but still wins with some difficulty.

The third night, before going on guard, Bearslayer tells the others that he may need their help. He places Staburadze's mirror on a table alongside a bowl of water and tells them that if, during the night, the water turns to blood, they must bring the mirror to his aid. At midnight the Nine-Headed Demon appears at the bridge. Bearslayer and the demon fight in a clearing nine miles across, and Bearslayer is driven into the ground to his armpits. He looks in vain for help from his shipmates, and is about to be defeated. Desperate, he throws his club three miles through the window of the palace where the others are sleeping. This wakes them, they see that the water has turned to blood, and they hasten to bring Bearslayer the mirror. In the nick of time he shows the demon the mirror and it falls down frozen. Bearslayer climbs out of the ground and kills it.

To be sure that the island is safe they search it and discover a beautiful valley in which is a well of clear water, alongside it a leafy apple tree with magnificent fruit. The men want to drink, but first Bearslayer thrusts his sword into the water, marking a triangle. There are screams and the water turns to blood, but soon clears and they drink in safety. After this, the men want to eat apples, but Bearslayer grows angry, saying that they are not

there to pick fruit. He threatens to cut down the tree with his sword, but suddenly a voice from the tree begs for mercy. Bearslayer steps back and the tree turns into a beautiful young woman. To Bearslayer's horror it is Spīdala.

Spīdala throws herself at his feet and begs for mercy. She swears to make good all her wicked deeds, and never to do evil again. Bearslayer grants her her life—he fights demons and giants, not women! Spīdala tells him that Laimdota and Koknesis are loyal and pure, and reveals how she and Kangars tricked them into going to Germany. She also reveals how the ancient witch cast a spell on the island to draw in ships. Once trapped on the island's shore, the ships' crews sink into a deep sleep. This is the spell that drew Bearslayer's ship to the island, where the witch intended to trap him. The three demons were her sons. On hearing of their death, the Old Witch set a trap by changing herself into the well and Spīdala into the apple tree. When Bearslayer plunged his sword into the well he killed the witch, and thus broke the spell on Spīdala.

Spīdala reminds Bearslayer that it is his duty to return to Latvia and drive out the marauding Germans. She yearns to help, but is trapped in a pact with the Devil. Bearslayer realizes that she is truly repentant and wants to help her. Suddenly, he remembers the little package that he brought with him as a souvenir of the Devil's Pit, and he orders some sailors to fetch it and give it to her. When Spīdala sees it she is overjoyed: It is her contract with the Devil! They go to the beach, where Spīdala releases the ships and sailors trapped on the shore. Suddenly, among the people released, Bearslayer sees Koknesis and Laimdota!

Koknesis and Laimdota tell the story of their escape from Germany. They too were drawn on shore on the Enchanted Isle by the old witch, and put into a long sleep. Spīdala hangs back, but Bearslayer tells the others that it was she who broke the spell on them: They thank her and the four swear eternal friendship. Spīdala shows them around the island, which she knows well, and some of the awakened people decide to live there for good. Eventually, however Bearslayer, Koknesis, Laimdota and Spīdala decide to leave.

The evening before they depart, Koknesis wanders back to the well in the valley. He sees Spīdala burn her pact with the Devil. She asks him to keep this a secret. He agrees, but in turn tells her his secret: He loves her and wants her to marry him. She eventually agrees. They set off back to Latvia on Bearslayer's ship, and on the way Koknesis and Spīdala tell Bearslayer and Laimdota about their love. These two are overjoyed. After a long journey they sight Latvian shores, and eventually sail into the mouth of the Daugava.

Canto VI opens with Midsummer's Eve in Latvia. The people are called together by the Midsummer Priests. They bring offerings for the gods and gifts for each other, and gather around fires on the Azure Mountain. They pray for blessings for the coming year and pay respect to the spirits of their ancestors. The oldest priest calls on them to live together in harmony, and many grudges are settled with a handshake. The young men and women begin to dance together.

While the young people celebrate, the clan chieftains meet in council on the Azure Mountain. They are concerned because the prophetic writings kept in the Sacred Grove on the mountain side predict calamity. Lielvārdis arrives and reveals that the German knights have captured a number of Latvian stockades and built their own stone castles, and are imposing Christianity at the point of the sword. His own stronghold at Lielvārde has been seized. Bishop Albert is bringing more knights from Germany to take over all Latvia. At this moment Bearslayer appears, together with Koknesis, Laimdota and Spidala. Bearslayer is elected leader of the Latvian warriors. All pledge themselves to fight to free their land, and return to their homes to prepare for war.

Bearslayer and Laimdota, as well as Koknesis and Spidala, are married at the castle of Burtnieks, Laimdota's home. There is a great wedding celebration, but this is cut short by Burtnieks, who tells them that they will soon be at war. The new couples have little time for wedded bliss before the men have to set off to fight the German invaders, and Laimdota and Spidala, refusing to be separated from there new husbands, set off with them. The Latvian host gathers and marches on Turaida. On the way, they eliminate German infestation whenever they encounter it.

Alarmed by the Latvian uprising, many Germans have fled to Turaida and taken refuge in the stone castle built there by the Germans. The Latvians lay siege to the castle, and eventually are able to scale the walls at night and fight on the ramparts. A fearful battle ensues, with heavy losses on both sides. Bearslayer kills many Germans and, realizing that he is too strong for them, the Germans surrender. Among those captured is Dietrich, who is handed over to the locals for punishment. However, he tricks them into setting him free.

They now march on Lielvārde, Bearslayer's home, where the German knight, Daniel, has built a stone castle. Just before they arrive, Daniel invites the chieftains of some Latvian clans that had fled into the forest to a parley. However, once he has them in a great pavilion he locks them in and sets fire to it. The elders cry for help as Daniel and his men watch in glee from the castle walls. In the nick of time Bearslayer arrives with his army. He rescues

the chieftains and attacks the German castle. The Germans fight hard but are defeated, and all except Daniel are slaughtered. He is handed to the local people for punishment, and they throw him into the Daugava tied to a plank. Bearslayer reestablishes himself at Lielvārde

Meanwhile, Albert has returned to Germany to recruit more knights. He leaves Kaupa in charge in Riga, to where most Germans have now retreated. All seems well for the Latvians, and Bearslayer and Laimdota settle down to married life together. The others too return to their homes, thinking to live out their lives in peace.

Springtime comes, and the Latvians have little thought of war. Even Kangars is working in his garden. His life is bitter: He receives no honour from anyone, any more. He knows that death will bring him the torments of Hell, while his remaining days of life are wracked with the knowledge of his own wickedness. One day Dietrich comes to him and asks him to communicate with evil spirits to discover the source of Bearslayer's strength. Kangars says that it is no concern of his that Bearslayer is killing Germans, but that he has his own reasons for wanting to destroy the young man. He wrestles with demons for three days and nights without sleep, and they reveal to him the secret of Bearslayer's strength—his bear's ears.

Among the new knights brought back from Germany by Albert is the Black Knight. He is already experienced in doing wicked deeds in Germany. He claims to be the son of a witch and immune to harm from wounds. One day Kaupa takes a party of knights, including the Black Knight, to Lielvārde, and asks for admission, saying that he wishes to make peace between the Latvians and Albert. Bearslayer wants peace and they are admitted. They are well treated and Bearslayer organizes a tournament to entertain them.

In the tournament, both Bearslayer and the Black Knight defeat their opponents, and the Black Knight suggests that they fight each other. Bearslayer refuses, although he does not want to insult the Black Knight. The Black Knight then says that it would hardly be a test of his strength to fight Bearslayer, any way, despite all Bearslayer's boasting. At this Bearslayer seizes his sword, and the two fight.

At first Bearslayer thinks that it is mere sport, but the Black Knight fights with great vigour, and suddenly cuts off one of Bearslayer's ears. Enraged, Bearslayer now attacks in earnest, and with a terrible blow of his sword splits open the Black Knight's armour and wounds him. However, his sword breaks. Seeing this, the Black Knight attacks again, and cuts off Bearslayer's other ear.

Terribly angry, Bearslayer seizes the Black Knight and they wrestle together. In their fight they stumble to the very edge of the high cliffs above the river Daugava. Bearslayer's men look on, grown pale with apprehension and rooted to the spot with fear. Three times Bearslayer lifts up the Black Knight, but each time the German kicks free. Finally, Bearslayer throws him over the cliff into the river's depths, but the Black Knight drags Bearslayer with him. Weighed down by the knight's heavy armour, they sink to the bottom. At this moment the waves roar and an island rises up in the river. In the castle, Laimdota, who had had a premonition of disaster, shrieks and ends her own life.

Soon, the Latvian heroes are defeated one by one by the Germans, for whom they are no match without Bearslayer. The Germans establish themselves as harsh masters, and the Latvian people are plunged into centuries of slavery. However, for them Bearslayer is not dead, but sleeps beneath the island in a golden bed.

Even today, sometimes at midnight boatmen on the Daugava see two shadowy figures locked in struggle on the cliffs above the river, while in the ruins of the old castle of Lielvārde a little flame burns. The figures struggling on the clifftop are Bearslayer and the Black Knight, and the flame in the castle is Laimdota. Each time they fight the two warriors plunge together into the river. A terrible scream sounds in the castle, and the flame goes out.

The day will come when Bearslayer will defeat the Black Knight and cast him down alone into the river to drown. On that day, the Latvians will be free and the Golden Age will return!