

In his far-off home Beowulf, Higlac's<sup>3</sup> 110  
 Follower and the strongest of the Geats—greater  
 And stronger than anyone anywhere in this world—  
 Heard how Grendel filled nights with horror  
 And quickly commanded a boat fitted out,  
 Proclaiming that he'd go to that famous king, 115  
 Would sail across the sea to Hrothgar,  
 Now when help was needed. None  
 Of the wise ones regretted his going, much  
 As he was loved by the Geats: the omens were good,  
 And they urged the adventure on. So Beowulf 120  
 Chose the mightiest men he could find,  
 The bravest and best of the Geats, fourteen  
 In all, and led them down to their boat,  
 He knew the sea, would point the prow  
 Straight to that distant Danish shore.

## Beowulf

Reaching the rock-steep cliffs of the Danish shore, Beowulf and his men are escorted to Herot, where Beowulf greets the great lord of the Danes.

"Hail, Hrothgar!  
 Higlac is my cousin and my king; the days  
 Of my youth have been filled with glory. Now Grendel's  
 Name has echoed in our land: sailors 5  
 Have brought us stories of Herot, the best  
 Of all mead-halls,<sup>1</sup> deserted and useless when the moon  
 Hangs in skies the sun had lit,  
 Light and life fleeing together.  
 My people have said, the wisest, most knowing 10  
 And best of them, that my duty was to go to the Danes'  
 Great king. They have seen my strength for themselves,  
 Have watched me rise from the darkness of war,  
 Dripping with my enemies' blood. I drove  
 Five great giants into chains, chased

3. **Higlac** (hīg' ə lāk): king of the Geats (gā' ats). The Geats were a Scandinavian tribe living on a Danish island and in Sweden.

1. **mead-hall**: The metaphor reflects the idea that the chief purpose of a hall such as Herot was as a place for men to feast in.

All of that race from the earth. I swam 15  
 In the blackness of night, hunting monsters  
 Out of the ocean, and killing them one  
 By one; death was my errand and the fate  
 They had earned. Now Grendel and I are called  
 Together, and I've come. Grant me, then, 20  
 Lord and protector of this noble place,  
 A single request! I have come so far,  
 Oh shelterer of warriors and your people's loved friend,  
 That this one favor you should not refuse me—  
 That I, alone and with the help of my men, 25  
 May purge all evil from this hall. I have heard,  
 Too, that the monster's scorn of men  
 Is so great that he needs no weapons and fears none.  
 Nor will I. My lord Higlac  
 Might think less of me if I let my sword 30  
 Go where my feet were afraid to, if I hid  
 Behind some broad linden shield:<sup>2</sup> my hands  
 Alone shall fight for me, struggle for life  
 Against the monster. God must decide  
 Who will be given to death's cold grip. 35  
 Grendel's plan, I think, will be  
 What it has been before, to invade this hall  
 And gorge his belly with our bodies. If he can,  
 If he can. And I think, if my time will have come,  
 There'll be nothing to mourn over, no corpse to prepare 40  
 For its grave: Grendel will carry our bloody  
 Flesh to the moors, crunch on our bones  
 And smear torn scraps of our skin on the walls  
 Of his den. No, I expect no Danes  
 Will fret about sewing our shrouds, if he wins. 45  
 And if death does take me, send the hammered  
 Mail of my armor to Higlac, return  
 The inheritance I had from Hrethel, and he  
 From Wayland. Fate will unwind as it must!" . . .

Then Hrothgar's men gave places to the Geats, 50  
 Yielded benches to the brave visitors  
 And led them to the feast. The keeper of the mead  
 Came carrying out the carved flasks,  
 And poured that bright sweetness. A poet  
 Sang, from time to time, in a clear 55  
 Pure voice. Danes and visiting Geats  
 Celebrated as one, drank and rejoiced. . . .

2. **linden shield**: Linden is the wood of a lime tree.

Then Hrothgar left that hall, the Danes'  
Great protector, followed by his court; the queen  
Had preceded him and he went to lie at her side,  
Seek sleep near his wife. It was said that God  
Himself had set a sentinel in Herot,  
Brought Beowulf as a guard against Grendel and a shield  
Behind whom the king could safely rest.

And Beowulf was ready, firm with our Lord's  
High favor and his own bold courage and strength.

He stripped off his mail shirt, his helmet, his sword  
Hammered from the hardest iron, and handed  
All his weapons and armor to a servant,  
Ordered his war-gear guarded till morning.  
And then, standing beside his bed,  
He exclaimed:

"Grendel is no braver, no stronger  
Than I am! I could kill him with my sword; I shall not,  
Easy as it would be. This fiend is a bold  
And famous fighter, but his claws and teeth  
Scratching at my shield, his clumsy fists  
Beating at my sword blade, would be helpless. I will meet him  
With my hands empty—unless his heart  
Fails him, seeing a soldier waiting  
Weaponless, unafraid. Let God in His wisdom  
Extend His hand where He wills, reward  
Whom He chooses!"

Then the Geats' great chief dropped  
His head to his pillow, and around him, as ready  
As they could be, lay the soldiers who had crossed the sea  
At his side, each of them sure that he was lost  
To the home he loved, to the high-walled towns  
And the friends he had left behind where both he  
And they had been raised. Each thought of the Danes  
Murdered by Grendel in a hall where Geats  
And not Danes now slept. But God's dread-loom  
Was woven with defeat for the monster, good fortune  
For the Geats; help against Grendel was with them,  
And through the might of a single man  
They would win. Who doubts that God in His wisdom  
And strength holds the earth forever  
In His hands? Out in the darkness the monster  
Began to walk. The warriors slept  
In that gabled hall where they hoped that He  
Would keep them safe from evil, guard them  
From death till the end of their days was determined

And the thread should be broken. But Beowulf lay wakeful,  
Watching, waiting, eager to meet  
His enemy, and angry at the thought of his coming.

## The Battle with Grendel

Out from the marsh, from the foot of misty  
Hills and bogs, bearing God's hatred,  
Grendel came, hoping to kill  
Anyone he could trap on this trip to high Herot.  
He moved quickly through the cloudy night,  
Up from his swampland, sliding silently  
Toward that gold-shining hall. He had visited Hrothgar's  
Home before, knew the way—  
But never, before nor after that night,  
Found Herot defended so firmly, his reception  
So harsh. He journeyed, forever joyless,  
Straight to the door, then snapped it open,  
Tore its iron fasteners with a touch  
And rushed angrily over the threshold.  
He strode quickly across the inlaid  
Floor, snarling and fierce: his eyes  
Gleamed in the darkness, burned with a gruesome  
Light. Then he stopped, seeing the hall  
Crowded with sleeping warriors, stuffed  
With rows of young soldiers resting together.  
And his heart laughed, he relished the sight,  
Intended to tear the life from those bodies  
By morning: the monster's mind was hot  
With the thought of food and the feasting his belly  
Would soon know. But fate, that night, intended  
Grendel to gnaw the broken bones  
Of his last human supper. Human  
Eyes were watching his evil steps,  
Waiting to see his swift hard claws.  
Grendel snatched at the first Geat  
He came to, ripped him apart, cut  
His body to bits with powerful jaws,  
Drank the blood from his veins and bolted  
Him down, hands and feet; death  
And Grendel's great teeth came together,