

In torment, lying and trembling, waiting  
 For the brightness of God to bring him his reward."  
 Unferth grew quiet, gave up quarreling over  
 Beowulf's old battles, stopped all his boasting  
 Once everyone saw proof of that prince's strength,  
 Grendel's huge claw swinging high  
 From Hrothgar's mead-hall roof, the fingers  
 Of that loathsome hand ending in nails  
 As hard as bright steel—so hard, they all said,  
 That not even the sharpest of swords could have cut  
 It through, broken it off the monster's  
 Arm and ended its life, as Beowulf  
 Had done armed with only his bare hands.

980

985

990

## 15

Then the king ordered Herot cleaned  
 And hung with decorations: hundreds of hands,  
 Men and women, hurried to make  
 The great hall ready. Golden tapestries  
 Were lined along the walls, for a host  
 Of visitors to see and take pleasure in. But that  
 glorious  
 Building was bent and broken, its iron  
 Hinges cracked and sprung from their corners  
 All around the hall. Only  
 Its roof was undamaged when the blood-stained  
 demon  
 Burst out of Herot, desperately breaking  
 Beowulf's grip, running wildly  
 From what no one escapes, struggle and writhe  
 As he will. Wanting to stay we go,  
 All beings here on God's earth, wherever

995

1000

1005

It is written that we go, taking our bodies  
 From death's cold bed to the unbroken sleep  
 That follows life's feast.

Then Hrothgar made his  
 way

To the hall; it was time, and his heart drew him  
 To the banquet. No victory was celebrated better,  
 By more or by better men and their king.

1010

A mighty host, and famous, they lined  
 The benches, rejoicing; the king and Hrothulf,  
 His nephew, toasted each other, raised mead-cups  
 High under Herot's great roof, their speech  
 Courteous and warm. King and people  
 Were one; none of the Danes was plotting,  
 Then, no treachery hid in their smiles.

1015

Healfdane's son gave Beowulf a golden  
 Banner, a fitting flag to signal

1020

His victory, and gave him, as well, a helmet,  
 And a coat of mail, and an ancient sword;  
 They were brought to him while the warriors  
 watched. Beowulf

Drank to those presents, not ashamed to be praised,  
 Richly rewarded in front of them all.

1025

No ring-giver has given four such gifts,  
 Passed such treasures through his hands, with the  
 grace

And warmth that Hrothgar showed. The helmet's  
 Brim was wound with bands of metal,

1030

Rounded ridges to protect whoever  
 Wore it from swords swung in the fiercest  
 Battles, shining iron edges

In hostile hands. And then the protector  
 Of warriors, lord of the Danes, ordered

1035

Eight horses led to the hall, and into it,  
 Eight steeds with golden bridles. One stood  
 With a jeweled saddle on its back, carved  
 Like the king's war-seat it was; it had carried  
 Hrothgar when that great son of Healfdane rode  
 To war—and each time carried him wherever

1040

The fighting was most fierce, and his followers had fallen.

Then Beowulf had been honored by both the gifts Hrothgar could have given him, horses and weapons:

The king commanded him to use them well.  
Thus that guardian of Denmark's treasures  
Had repaid a battle fought for his people  
By giving noble gifts, had earned praise  
For himself from those who try to know truth.

1045

16

And more: the lord of Herot ordered  
Treasure-gifts for each of the Geats  
Who'd sailed with Beowulf and still sat beside him,  
Ancient armor and swords—and for the one  
Murdered by Grendel gold was carefully  
Paid. The monster would have murdered again  
And again had not God, and the hero's courage,  
Turned fate aside. Then and now  
Men must lie in their Maker's holy  
Hands, moved only as He wills:  
Our hearts must seek out that will. The world,  
And its long days full of labor, brings good  
And evil; all who remain here meet both.

1050

1055

1060

Hrothgar's hall resounded with the harp's  
High call, with songs and laughter and the telling  
Of tales, stories sung by the court  
Poet as the joyful Danes drank  
And listened, seated along their mead-benches.  
He told them of Finn's people, attacking  
Hnaf with no warning, half wiping out

1065

That Danish tribe, and killing its king.  
Finn's wife, Hnaf's sister, learned what good faith  
Was worth to her husband: his honeyed words  
And treachery cost her two beloved lives,  
Her son and her brother, both falling on spears  
Guided by fate's hand. How she wept!

1070

1075

And when morning came she had reason to mourn,  
To weep for her dead, her slaughtered son  
And the bloody corpse of his uncle—both  
The men she most dearly loved, and whose love  
She could trust to protect her. But Finn's troops,  
too,

1080

Had fallen to Danish spears: too few  
Were left to drive the Danes to their death,  
To force Hnaf's follower, Hengest, to flee  
The hall where they'd fought and he'd stayed. Finn  
offered them,

1085

Instead of more war, words of peace:  
There would be no victory, they'd divide the hall  
And the throne, half to the Danes, half  
To Finn's followers. When gifts were given  
Finn would give Hengest and his soldiers half,  
Share shining rings, silver  
And gold, with the Danes, both sides equal,  
All of them richer, all of their purses  
Heavy, every man's heart warm  
With the comfort of gold.

1090

1095

Both sides accepted  
Peace and agreed to keep it. Finn  
Swore it with solemn oaths: what wise men  
Had written was his word as well as theirs.  
He and the brave Hengest would live  
Like brothers; neither leader nor led would break  
The truce, would not talk of evil things,  
Remind the Danes that the man they served  
Killed Hnaf, their lord. They had no king,  
And no choice. And he swore that his sword would

1100

1105

silence  
Wagging tongues if Frisian warriors

Stirred up hatred, brought back the past.  
 A funeral pyre was prepared, and gold  
 Was brought; Hnaf's dead body was dressed  
 For burnings, and the others with him. Bloody  
 Mail shirts could be seen, and golden helmets,  
 Some carved with boar-heads, all battle-hard  
 And as useless, now, as the corpses that still wore  
 them.

Soldier after soldier! Then Hnaf's sister,  
 Finn's sad wife, gave her son's body  
 To be burned in that fire; the flames charring  
 His uncle would consume both kinsmen at once.  
 Then she wept again, and weeping sang  
 The dead's last praise. The Danish king  
 Was lifted into place, smoke went curling  
 Up, logs roared, open  
 Wounds split and burst, skulls  
 Melted, blood came bubbling down,  
 And the greedy fire-demons drank flesh and bones  
 From the dead of both sides, until nothing was left.

## 17

Finn released a few of his soldiers,  
 Allowed them to return to their distant towns  
 And estates. Hengest lived the whole stormy  
 Winter through, there with Finn  
 Whom he hated. But his heart lived in Denmark—  
 Which he and the other survivors could not visit,  
 Could not sail to, as long as the wind-whipped sea  
 Crashed and whirled, or while winter's cold hands  
 Froze the water hard, tied it  
 In icy knots. They would wait for the new year,

For spring to come following the sun, melting  
 The old year away and reopening the ocean.

Winter was over, the earth grew lovely,  
 And Hengest dreamed of his home—but revenge  
 Came first, settling his bitter feud

With Finn, whose bloody sword he could never  
 Forget. He planned, he waited, wove plans  
 And waited. Then a Danish warrior dropped  
 A sword in his lap, a weapon Finn

And his men remembered and feared, and the time  
 Had come, and Hengest rose, hearing  
 The Danes' murmur, and drove his new sword  
 Into Finn's belly, butchering that king  
 Under his own roof. And the Danes rose,  
 Their hearts full of Finn's treachery,

And the misery he'd brought them, their sword  
 arms restless

And eager. The hall they'd shared with their  
 enemies

Ran red with enemy blood and bodies  
 Rolled on the floor beside Finn. They took  
 The queen, looted everything they could find

That belonged to her dead husband, loaded  
 Their ship with rings, necklaces, shining  
 Jewels wonderfully worked, and sailed  
 Bringing treasure and a willing captive to the land  
 She'd left and had longed for, alone no longer.

The singer finished his song; his listeners  
 Laughed and drank, their pleasure loud  
 In that hall. The cup-bearers hurried with their  
 sparkling

Vessels. And then the queen, Welthow, wearing  
 her bright crown,

Appeared among them, came to Hrothgar and  
 Hrothulf, his nephew,

Seated peacefully together, their friendship and  
 Hrothulf's good faith still unbroken.

And Unferth sat at Hrothgar's feet; everyone  
 trusted him,

Believed in his courage, although he'd spilled his  
relatives' blood.

Then Welthow spoke:

"Accept this cup,

My lord and king! May happiness come

To the Danes' great ring-giver; may the Geats  
receive

Mild words from your mouth, words they have  
earned!

Let gifts flow freely from your open hands,

Treasures your armies have brought you from all  
over

The world. I have heard that the greatest of the  
Geats

Now rests in your heart like a son. Herot

Stands purged, restored by his strength: celebrate

His courage, rejoice and be generous while a king-  
dom

Sits in your palm, a people and power

That death will steal. But your sons will be safe,

Sheltered in Hrothulf's gracious protection,

If fate takes their father while Hrothulf is alive;

I know your nephew's kindness, I know

He'll repay in kind the goodness you have shown  
him,

Support your two young sons as you

And I sustained him in his own early days,

His father dead and he but a boy."

Then she walked to the bench where Hrethric  
and Hrothmund,

Her two sons, sat together; Beowulf,

Prince of the Geats, was seated between them;

Crossing the hall she sat quietly at their side.

1170

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1190

They brought a foaming cup and offered it  
To Beowulf; it was taken and given in friendship.  
And he was given a mail shirt, and golden arm-  
bands,

And the most beautiful necklace known to men:

Nowhere in any treasure-hoard anywhere

On earth was there anything like it, not since

Hama carried the Brosings' necklace

Home to his glorious city, saved

Its tight-carved jewels, and his skin, and his soul  
From Ermeric's treachery, and then came to God.

Higlac had it next, Swerting's

Grandson; defending the golden hoard

His battle-hard hands had won for him, the Geats'

Proud king lost it, was carried away

By fate when too much pride made him feud

With the Frisians. He had asked for misery; it was

granted him.

He'd borne those precious stones on a ship's

Broad back; he fell beneath his shield.

His body, and his shining coat of mail,

And that necklace, all lay for Franks to pluck,  
For jackal warriors to find when they walked

through

The rows of corpses; Geats, and their king,

Lay slaughtered wherever the robbers looked.

The warriors shouted. And Welthow spoke:

"Wear these bright jewels, beloved Beowulf;

Enjoy them, and the rings, and the gold, oh fortu-  
nate young

Warrior; grow richer, let your fame and your

strength

Go hand in hand; and lend these two boys

Your wise and gentle heart! I'll remember your

Kindness. Your glory is too great to forget:

It will last forever, wherever the earth

1195

1200

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Is surrounded by the sea, the winds' home,  
 And waves lap at its walls. Be happy  
 For as long as you live! Your good fortune warms  
 My soul. Spread your blessed protection  
 Across my son, and my king's son!  
 All men speak softly, here, speak mildly  
 And trust their neighbors, protect their lord,  
 Are loyal followers who would fight as joyfully  
 As they drink. May your heart help you do as I  
 ask!"

She returned to her seat. The soldiers ate  
 And drank like kings. The savage fate  
 Decreed for them hung dark and unknown, what  
 would follow  
 After nightfall, when Hrothgar withdrew from the  
 hall.  
 Sought his bed and left his soldiers  
 To theirs. Herot would house a host  
 Of men, that night, as it had been meant to do.  
 They stacked away the benches, spread out  
 Blankets and pillows. But those beer-drinking  
 sleepers

Lay down with death beside their beds.  
 They slept with their shining shields at the edge  
 Of their pillows; the hall was filled with helmets  
 Hanging near motionless heads; spears  
 Stood by their hands, their hammered mail shirts  
 Covered their chests. It was the Danes' custom  
 To be ready for war, wherever they rested,  
 At home or in foreign lands, at their lord's  
 Quick call if he needed them, if trouble came  
 To their king. They knew how soldiers must live!

1225  
 They sank into sleep. The price of that evening's  
 Rest was too high for the Dane who bought it  
 With his life, paying as others had paid  
 When Grendel inhabited Herot, the hall  
 His till his crimes pulled him into hell.

1260  
 And now it was known that a monster had died  
 But a monster still lived, and meant revenge.  
 She'd brooded on her loss, misery had brewed  
 In her heart, that female horror, Grendel's  
 Mother, living in the murky cold lake  
 Assigned her since Cain had killed his only  
 Brother, slain his father's son  
 With an angry sword. God drove him off,  
 Outlawed him to the dry and barren desert,  
 And branded him with a murderer's mark. And he  
 bore

1265  
 A race of fiends accursed like their father;  
 So Grendel was drawn to Herot, an outcast  
 Come to meet the man who awaited him.  
 He'd snatched at Beowulf's arm, but that prince  
 Remembered God's grace and the strength He'd  
 given him

1270  
 And relied on the Lord for all the help,  
 The comfort and support he would need. He killed  
 The monster, as God had meant him to do,  
 Tore the fiend apart and forced him  
 To run as rapidly as he could toward death's  
 Cold waiting hands. His mother's sad heart,  
 And her greed, drove her from her den on the  
 dangerous  
 Pathway of revenge.

1280  
 So she reached Herot,  
 Where the Danes slept as though already dead;  
 Her visit ended their good fortune, reversed  
 The bright vane of their luck. No female, no matter  
 How fierce, could have come with a man's strength,  
 Fought with the power and courage men fight with,

Smashing their shining swords, their bloody,  
 Hammer-forged blades onto boar-headed helmets,  
 Slashing and stabbing with the sharpest of points.  
 The soldiers raised their shields and drew  
 Those gleaming swords, swung them above  
 The piled-up benches, leaving their mail shirts  
 And their helmets where they'd lain when the ter-  
 ror took hold of them.

To save her life she moved still faster,  
 Took a single victim and fled from the hall,  
 Running to the moors, discovered, but her supper  
 Assured, sheltered in her dripping claws.  
 She'd taken Hrothgar's closest friend,  
 The man he most loved of all men on earth;  
 She'd killed a glorious soldier, cut  
 A noble life short. No Geat could have stopped  
 her:

Beowulf and his band had been given better  
 Beds; sleep had come to them in a different  
 Hall. Then all Herot burst into shouts:  
 She had carried off Grendel's claw. Sorrow  
 Had returned to Denmark. They'd traded deaths,  
 Danes and monsters, and no one had won,  
 Both had lost!

The wise old king  
 Trembled in anger and grief, his dearest  
 Friend and adviser dead. Beowulf  
 Was sent for at once: a messenger went swiftly  
 To his rooms and brought him. He came, his band  
 About him, as dawn was breaking through,  
 The best of all warriors, walking to where Hrothgar  
 Sat waiting, the gray-haired king wondering  
 If God would ever end this misery.  
 The Geats tramped quickly through the hall; their  
 steps

Beat and echoed in the silence. Beowulf  
 Rehearsed the words he would want with Hrothgar;  
 He'd ask the Danes' great lord if all  
 Were at peace, if the night had passed quietly.

Hrothgar answered him, protector of his people:  
 "There's no happiness to ask about! Anguish  
 has descended

On the Danes. Esher is dead, Ermlaf's  
 Older brother and my own most trusted  
 Counselor and friend, my comrade, when we went  
 Into battle, who'd beaten back enemy swords,  
 Standing at my side. All my soldiers  
 Should be as he was, their hearts as brave  
 And as wise! Another wandering fiend  
 Has found him in Herot, murdered him, fled  
 With his corpse: he'll be eaten, his flesh become  
 A horrible feast—and who knows where  
 The beast may be hiding, its belly stuffed full?  
 She's taking revenge for your victory over Grendel,  
 For your strength, your mighty grip, and that mon-  
 ster's

Death. For years he'd been preying on my people;  
 You came, he was dead in a single day.

And now there's another one, a second hungry  
 Fiend, determined to avenge the first,

A monster willing and more than able  
 To bring us more sorrow—or so it must seem  
 To the many men mourning that noble  
 Treasure-giver, for all men were treated  
 Nobly by those hands now forever closed.

"I've heard that my people, peasants working  
 In the fields, have seen a pair of such fiends  
 Wandering in the moors and marshes, giant  
 Monsters living in those desert lands.  
 And they've said to my wise men that, as well as  
 they could see,

One of the devils was a female creature.  
 The other, they say, walked through the wilderness  
 Like a man—but mightier than any man.  
 They were frightened, and they fled, hoping to  
 find help

1285

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1320

In Herot. They named the huge one Grendel:  
 If he had a father no one knew him,  
 Or whether there'd been others before these two,  
 Hidden evil before hidden evil.  
 They live in secret places, windy  
 Cliffs, wolf-dens where water pours  
 From the rocks, then runs underground, where mist  
 Steams like black clouds, and the groves of trees  
 Growing out over their lake are all covered  
 With frozen spray, and wind down snakelike  
 Roots that reach as far as the water  
 And help keep it dark. At night that lake  
 Burns like a torch. No one knows its bottom,  
 No wisdom reaches such depths. A deer,  
 Hunted through the woods by packs of hounds,  
 A stag with great horns, though driven through  
 the forest  
 From faraway places, prefers to die  
 On those shores, refuses to save its life  
 In that water. It isn't far, nor is it  
 A pleasant spot! When the wind stirs  
 And storms, waves splash toward the sky,  
 As dark as the air, as black as the rain  
 That the heavens weep. Our only help,  
 Again, lies with you. Grendel's mother  
 Is hidden in her terrible home, in a place  
 You've not seen. Seek it, if you dare! Save us,  
 Once more, and again twisted gold,  
 Heaped-up ancient treasure, will reward you  
 For the battle you win!"

1355 "Let your sorrow end! It is better for us all  
 To avenge our friends, not mourn them forever.  
 Each of us will come to the end of this life  
 On earth; he who can earn it should fight  
 For the glory of his name; fame after death  
 Is the noblest of goals. Arise, guardian  
 Of this kingdom, let us go, as quickly as we can,  
 And have a look at this lady monster.  
 1360 I promise you this: she'll find no shelter,  
 No hole in the ground, no towering tree,  
 No deep bottom of a lake, where her sins can hide.  
 Be patient for one more day of misery;  
 I ask for no longer."  
 1365 The old king leaped  
 To his feet, gave thanks to God for such words.  
 Then Hrothgar's horse was brought, saddled  
 And bridled. The Danes' wise ruler rode,  
 1400 Stately and splendid; shield-bearing soldiers  
 Marched at his side. The monster's tracks  
 Led them through the forest; they followed her  
 heavy  
 Feet, that had swept straight across  
 The shadowy waste land, her burden the lifeless  
 1405 Body of the best of Hrothgar's men.  
 The trail took them up towering, rocky  
 Hills, and over narrow, winding  
 Paths they had never seen, down steep  
 And slippery cliffs where creatures from deep  
 1410 In the earth hid in their holes. Hrothgar  
 Rode in front, with a few of his most knowing  
 Men, to find their way. Then suddenly,  
 Where clumps of trees bent across  
 Cold gray stones, they came to a dismal  
 Wood; below them was the lake, its water  
 Bloody and bubbling. And the Danes shivered,  
 Miserable, mighty men tormented  
 1415

By grief, seeing, there on that cliff  
Above the water, Esher's bloody  
Head. They looked down at the lake, felt  
How its heat rose up, watched the waves'  
Blood-stained swirling. Their battle horns sounded,  
Then sounded again. Then they set down their  
weapons.

They could see the water crawling with snakes,  
Fantastic serpents swimming in the boiling  
Lake, and sea beasts lying on the rocks

—The kind that infest the ocean, in the early  
Dawn, often ending some ship's  
Journey with their wild jaws. They rushed

Angrily out of sight, when the battle horns blew.  
Beowulf aimed an arrow at one  
Of the beasts, swimming sluggishly away,

And the point pierced its hide, stabbed  
To its heart; its life leaked out, death  
Swept it off. Quickly, before

The dying monster could escape, they hooked  
Its thrashing body with their curved boar-spears,  
Fought it to land, drew it up on the bluff.  
Then stood and stared at the incredible wave-  
roamer,

Covered with strange scales and horrible. Then  
Beowulf

Began to fasten on his armor,  
Not afraid for his life but knowing the woven  
Mail, with its hammered links, could save  
That life when he lowered himself into the lake,  
Keep slimy monsters' claws from snatching at  
His heart, preserve him for the battle he was sent  
To fight. Frothgar's helmet would defend him;

That ancient, shining treasure, encircled  
With hard-rolled metal, set there by some smith's  
Long dead hand, would block all battle  
Swords, stop all blades from cutting at him  
When he'd swum toward the bottom, gone down  
in the surging

Water, deep toward the swirling sands.  
And Unferth helped him, Frothgar's courtier  
Lent him a famous weapon, a fine,  
Hilted old sword named Hrunding; it had  
An iron blade, etched and shining  
And hardened in blood. No one who'd worn it  
Into battle, swung it in dangerous places,  
Daring and brave, had ever been deserted—  
Nor was Beowulf's journey the first time it was  
taken

To an enemy's camp, or asked to support  
Some hero's courage and win him glory.  
Unferth had tried to forget his greeting  
To Beowulf, his drunken speech of welcome;  
A mighty warrior, he lent his weapon  
To a better one. Only Beowulf would risk  
His life in that lake; Unferth was afraid,  
Gave up that chance to work wonders, win glory  
And a hero's fame. But Beowulf and fear  
Were strangers; he stood ready to dive into battle.

## 22

Then Edgetho's brave son spoke: "Remember,  
Frothgar, Oh knowing king, now  
When my danger is near, the warm words we  
uttered,

And if your enemy should end my life  
Then be, oh generous prince, forever  
The father and protector of all whom I leave  
Behind me, here in your hands, my beloved



Comrades left with no leader, their leader  
 Dead. And the precious gifts you gave me,  
 My friend, send them to Higlac. May he see  
 In their golden brightness, the Geats' great lord  
 Gazing at your treasure, that here in Denmark  
 I found a noble protector, a giver  
 Of rings whose rewards I won and briefly  
 Relished. And you, Unferth, let  
 My famous old sword stay in your hands:  
 I shall shape glory with Hrunting, or death  
 Will hurry me from this earth!"

As his words ended  
 He leaped into the lake, would not wait for any-  
 one's  
 Answer; the heaving water covered him  
 Over. For hours he sank through the waves;  
 At last he saw the mud of the bottom.  
 And all at once the greedy she-wolf  
 Who'd ruled those waters for half a hundred  
 Years discovered him, saw that a creature  
 From above had come to explore the bottom  
 Of her wet world. She welcomed him in her claws,  
 Clutched at him savagely but could not harm him,  
 Tried to work her fingers through the tight  
 Ring-woven mail on his breast, but tore  
 And scratched in vain. Then she carried him, armor  
 And sword and all, to her home; he struggled  
 To free his weapon, and failed. The fight  
 Brought other monsters swimming to see  
 Her catch, a host of sea beasts who beat at  
 His mail shirt, stabbing with tusks and teeth  
 As they followed along. Then he realized, suddenly,  
 That she'd brought him into someone's battle-hall,  
 And there the water's heat could not hurt him,  
 Nor anything in the lake attack him through  
 The building's high-arching roof. A brilliant  
 Light burned all around him, the lake  
 Itself like a fiery flame.

Then he saw

The mighty water witch, and swung his sword,  
 His ring-marked blade, straight at her head;  
 The iron sang its fierce song.  
 Sang Beowulf's strength. But her guest  
 Discovers that no sword could slice her evil  
 Skin, that Hrunting could not hurt her, was useless  
 Now when he needed it. They wrestled, she ripped  
 And tore and clawed at him, bit holes in his helmet,  
 And that too failed him; for the first time in years  
 Of being worn to war it would earn no glory;  
 It was the last time anyone would wear it. But

Beowulf

Longed only for fame, leaped back  
 Into battle. He tossed his sword aside,  
 Angry; the steel-edged blade lay where  
 He'd dropped it. If weapons were useless he'd use  
 His hands, the strength in his fingers. So fame  
 Comes to the men who mean to win it  
 And care about nothing else! He raised  
 His arms and seized her by the shoulder; anger  
 Doubled his strength, he threw her to the floor.  
 She fell, Grendel's fierce mother, and the Geats'  
 Proud prince was ready to leap on her. But she

rose

At once and repaid him with her clutching claws,  
 Wildly tearing at him. He was weary, that best  
 And strongest of soldiers; his feet stumbled  
 And in an instant she had him down, held helpless.  
 Squatting with her weight on his stomach, she drew  
 A dagger, brown with dried blood, and prepared  
 To avenge her only son. But he was stretched  
 On his back, and her stabbing blade was blunted  
 By the woven mail shirt he wore on his chest.  
 The hammered links held; the point  
 Could not touch him. He'd have traveled to the

bottom of the earth,

Edgeth's son, and died there, if that shining  
 Woven metal had not helped—and Holy  
 God, who sent him victory, gave judgment

For truth and right, Ruler of the Heavens,  
Once Beowulf was back on his feet and fighting.

1555

## 23

Then he saw, hanging on the wall, a heavy  
Sword, hammered by giants, strong  
And blessed with their magic, the best of all  
weapons

1560

But so massive that no ordinary man could lift  
Its carved and decorated length. He drew it  
From its scabbard, broke the chain on its hilt,  
And then, savage, now, angry  
And desperate, lifted it high over his head  
And struck with all the strength he had left,  
Caught her in the neck and cut it through,  
Broke bones and all. Her body fell  
To the floor, lifeless, the sword was wet  
With her blood, and Beowulf rejoiced at the sight.

1565

The brilliant light shone, suddenly,  
As though burning in that hall, and as bright as  
Heaven's

1570

Own candle, lit in the sky. He looked  
At her home, then following along the wall  
Went walking, his hands tight on the sword,  
His heart still angry. He was hunting another  
Dead monster, and took his weapon with him  
For final revenge against Grendel's vicious  
Attacks, his nighttime raids, over  
And over, coming to Herot when Hrothgar's  
Men slept, killing them in their beds,  
Eating some on the spot, fifteen  
Or more, and running to his loathsome moor

1575

1580

With another such sickening meal waiting  
In his pouch. But Beowulf repaid him for those  
visits,

1585

Found him lying dead in his corner,  
Armless, exactly as that fierce fighter  
Had sent him out from Herot, then struck off  
His head with a single swift blow. The body  
Jerked for the last time, then lay still.

1590

The wise old warriors who surrounded Hrothgar,  
Like him staring into the monsters' lake,  
Saw the waves surging and blood

Spurting through. They spoke about Beowulf,  
All the graybeards, whispered together

1595

And said that hope was gone, that the hero  
Had lost fame and his life at once, and would never  
Return to the living, come back as triumphant  
As he had left; almost all agreed that Grendel's  
Mighty mother, the she-wolf, had killed him.

1600

The sun slid over past noon, went further  
Down. The Danes gave up, left  
The lake and went home, Hrothgar with them.  
The Geats stayed, sat sadly, watching,  
Imagining they saw their lord but not believing  
They would ever see him again.

1605

--Then the sword  
Melted, blood-soaked, dripping down  
Like water, disappearing like ice when the world's  
Eternal Lord loosens invisible

1610

Fetters and unwinds icicles and frost  
As only He can, He who rules  
Time and seasons, He who is truly  
God. The monsters' hall was full of  
Rich treasures, but all that Beowulf took  
Was Grendel's head and the hilt of the giants'  
Jeweled sword; the rest of that ring-marked  
Blade had dissolved in Grendel's steaming

1615

Blood, boiling even after his death.  
And then the battle's only survivor  
Swam up and away from those silent corpses;

The water was calm and clean, the whole  
Huge lake peaceful once the demons who'd lived  
in it  
Were dead.

Then that noble protector of all seamen  
Swam to land, rejoicing in the heavy  
Burdens he was bringing with him. He  
And all his glorious band of Geats  
Thanked God that their leader had come back  
unharméd;

They left the lake together. The Geats  
Carried Beowulf's helmet, and his mail shirt.  
Behind them the water slowly thickened  
As the monsters' blood came seeping up.  
They walked quickly, happily, across  
Roads all of them remembered, left  
The lake and the cliffs alongside it, brave men  
Staggering under the weight of Grendel's skull,  
Too heavy for fewer than four of them to handle—  
Two on each side of the spear jammed through it—  
Yet proud of their ugly load and determined  
That the Danes, seated in Herot, should see it.

Soon, fourteen Geats arrived  
At the hall, bold and warlike, and with Beowulf,  
Their lord and leader, they walked on the mead-hall  
Green. Then the Geats' brave prince entered  
Herot, covered with glory for the daring  
Battles he had fought; he sought Hrothgar  
To salute him and show Grendel's head.  
He carried that terrible trophy by the hair,  
Brought it straight to where the Danes sat,  
Drinking, the queen among them. It was a weird  
And wonderful sight, and the warriors stared.

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Beowulf spoke: "Hrothgar! Behold,  
Great Healfdane's son, this glorious sign  
Of victory, brought you by joyful Geats.  
My life was almost lost, fighting for it,  
Struggling under water: I'd have been dead at once,  
And the fight finished, the she-devil victorious,  
If our Father in Heaven had not helped me.

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Hrunting,  
Unferth's noble weapon, could do nothing,  
Nor could I, until the Ruler of the world  
Showed me, hanging shining and beautiful  
On a wall, a mighty old sword—so God  
Gives guidance to those who can find it from no one  
Else. I used the weapon He had offered me,  
Drew it and, when I could, swung it, killed  
The monstrous hag in her own home.  
Then the ring-marked blade burned away,  
As that boiling blood spilled out. I carried  
Off all that was left, this hilt.  
I've avenged their crimes, and the Danes they've  
killed.

And I promise you that whoever sleeps in Herot  
—You, your brave soldiers, anyone  
Of all the people in Denmark, old  
Or young—they, and you, may now sleep  
Without fear of either monster, mother  
Or son."

Then he gave the golden sword hilt  
To Hrothgar, who held it in his wrinkled hands  
And stared at what giants had made, and monsters  
Owned; it was his, an ancient weapon  
Shaped by wonderful smiths, now that Grendel  
And his evil mother had been driven from the earth,  
God's enemies scattered and dead. That best  
Of swords belonged to the best of Denmark's

1685 Rulers, the wisest ring-giver Danish  
 Warriors had ever known. The old king  
 Bent close to the handle of the ancient relic,  
 And saw written there the story of ancient wars  
 Between good and evil, the opening of the waters,  
 The Flood sweeping giants away, how they suffered  
 And died, that race who hated the Ruler.  
 Of us all and received judgment from His hands,  
 Singing waves that found them wherever  
 They fled. And Hrothgar saw runic letters  
 1695 Clearly carved in that shining hilt,  
 Spelling its original owner's name,  
 He for whom it was made, with its twisted  
 Handle and snakelike carvings. Then he spoke,  
 Healfdane's son, and everyone was silent.

1700 "What I say, speaking from a full memory  
 And after a life spent in seeking  
 What was right for my people, is this: this prince  
 Of the Geats, Beowulf, was born a better  
 Man! Your fame is everywhere, my friend,  
 Reaches to the ends of the earth, and you hold it  
 in your heart wisely,  
 1705 Patient with your strength and our weakness. What  
 I said I will do, I will do,  
 In the name of the friendship we've sworn. Your  
 strength must solace your people,  
 Now, and mine no longer.

1710 "Be not  
 As Hermod once was to my people, too proud  
 To care what their hearts hid, bringing them  
 Only destruction and slaughter. In his mad  
 Rages he killed them himself, comrades  
 And followers who ate at his table. At the end  
 He was alone, knew none of the joys of life  
 With other men, a famous ruler  
 Granted greater strength than anyone  
 Alive in his day but dark and bloodthirsty  
 In spirit. He shared out no treasure, showed  
 1720 His soldiers no road to riches and fame.

And then that affliction on his people's face  
 Suffered horribly for his sins. Be taught  
 By his lesson, learn what a king must be:  
 I tell his tale, old as I am,  
 1725 Only for you.

"Our eternal Lord  
 Grants some men wisdom, some wealth, makes  
 others  
 Great. The world is God's, He allows  
 A man to grow famous, and his family rich,  
 Gives him land and towns to rule  
 1730 And delight in, lets his kingdom reach  
 As far as the world runs—and who  
 In human un wisdom, in the middle of such power,  
 Remembers that it all will end, and too soon?

Prosperity, prosperity, prosperity: nothing  
 Troubles him, no sickness, not passing time,  
 No sorrows, no sudden war breaking  
 Out of nowhere, but all the world turns  
 1735 When he spins it. How can he know when he sins?

## 25

1740 "And then pride grows in his heart, planted  
 Quietly but flourishing. And while the keeper of his  
 soul  
 Sleeps on, while conscience rests and the world  
 Turns faster a murderer creeps closer, comes carry-  
 ing  
 A tight-strung bow with terrible arrows.  
 And those sharp points strike home, are shot  
 1745 In his breast, under his helmet. He's helpless.

And so the Devil's dark urgings wound him, for he  
can't

Remember how he clung to the rotting wealth  
Of this world, how he clawed to keep it, how he  
earned

No honor, no glory, in giving golden  
Rings, how he forgot the future glory  
God gave him at his birth, and forgetting did not  
care.

And finally his body fails him, these bones  
And flesh quickened by God fall

And die—and some other soul inherits

His place in Heaven, some open-handed

Giver of old treasures, who takes no delight

In mere gold. Guard against such wickedness,

Belovèd Beowulf, best of warriors,

And choose, instead, eternal happiness;

Push away pride! Your strength, your power,

Are yours for how many years? Soon

You'll return them where they came from, sickness  
or a sword's edge

Will end them, or a grasping fire, or the flight

Of a spear, or surging waves, or a knife's

Bite, or the terror of old age, or your eyes

Darkening over. It will come, death

Comes faster than you think, no one can flee it.

"So I have led the Danes for half

A hundred years, protected them from all peoples

On this earth, my sword and my spear so ready

That no one anywhere under God's high sun

Was eager to wage war here in Denmark.

And here, here too the change has come,

And we wept for our dead when Grendel invaded

Herot, my enemy raided this hall;

My sorrow, my grief, was as great and lasting

As it was helpless. Then thanks be given to God,

Eternal Lord of us all: you came

And that endless misery was over and I lived,

Now, to behold this bloody head!

Go in, go in: feast, be as happy  
As your fame deserves. When morning shines  
We shall each have owned more of my treasures."

Beowulf obeyed him, entered Herot  
Cheerfully and took his place at the table.

And once again Danes and Geats

Feasted together, a host of famous

Warriors in a single hall.—Then the web

Of darkness fell and it was night. They rose;

Hrothgar, the gray-haired old Dane, was heavy

With sleep. And Beowulf was glad that a bed

Was waiting, the bravest of warriors exhausted

With the work he'd done. A Danish servant

Showed him the road to that far-off, quiet

Country where sleep would come and take him

And his followers; Hrothgar's visitors were well

Cared for, whatever they needed was theirs.

Then Beowulf rested; Herot rose high

Above him, gleaming in the darkness; the Geats

Slept till a black-feathered raven sang

His cheerful song and the shining sun

Burned away shadows. And those seafarers hurried

From their beds, anxious to begin the voyage

Home, ready to start, their hearts

Already sailing on a ship's swift back.

Then Unferth came, with Hrunting, his famous

Sword, and offered it to Beowulf, asked him

To accept a precious gift. The prince

Took it, thanked him, and declared the weapon

One he was proud to own; his words

Blamed it for nothing, were spoken like the hero

He was! The war-gear was ready, the Geats

Were armored and eager to be gone. Quickly,

Beowulf sought Hrothgar's throne, where the king

Sat waiting for his famous visitor's farewell.

Beowulf spoke: "We crossed the sea  
 To come here; it is time to return, to go back  
 To our beloved lord, Higlac, Denmark  
 Was a gracious host; you welcomed us warmly.  
 Anything I can do, here on this earth,  
 To earn your love, oh great king, anything  
 More than I have done, battles I can fight  
 In your honor, summon me, I will come as I came  
 Once before. If I hear, from across the ocean,  
 That your neighbors have threatened you with  
 war, or oppressed you

As enemies once oppressed you, here, I will bring  
 A thousand warriors, a thousand armed Geats  
 To protect your throne. I trust Higlac:  
 Our king is young, but if I need his help  
 To better help you, to lend you our strength,  
 Our battle-sharp spears, to shield you and honor  
 you

As you deserve, I know his words and his deeds  
 Will support me. And someday, if your oldest son,  
 Hrethric, comes visiting our court, he will find  
 A host of good friends among the Geats:  
 No one who goes visiting far-off lands  
 Is more welcome than a strong and noble warrior."

Hrothgar replied: "All-knowing God  
 Must have sent you such words; nothing so wise  
 From a warrior so young has ever reached  
 These ancient ears. Your hands are strong,  
 Your heart and your lips are knowing! If your lord,  
 Hrethel's son, is slain by a spear,  
 Or falls sick and dies, or is killed by a sword,  
 And you have survived whatever battle  
 Sweeps him off, I say that the Geats  
 Could do no better, find no man better

1820

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Suited to be king, keeper of warriors  
 And their treasure, than you—if you take the throne  
 They will surely offer you. Belovèd Beowulf,  
 You please me more the longer I can keep you  
 Here in Denmark. You've turned Danes  
 And Geats into brothers, brought peace where once  
 There was war, and sealed friendship with affection.  
 This will last as long as I live, and am king here:  
 We will share our treasures, greeting travelers  
 From across the sea with outstretched hands;  
 Ring-prowed ships will carry our gifts  
 And the tokens of our love. Your people live  
 By the old ways, their hearts, like ours, are forever  
 Open to their friends, but firmly closed  
 Against their enemies."

Then he gave the Geats'  
 Prince a dozen new gifts, prayed  
 For his safety, commanded him to seek his people,  
 Yet not to delay too long in visiting  
 Hrothgar once more. The old king kissed him,  
 Held that best of all warriors by the shoulder  
 And wept, unable to hold back his tears.

Gray and wise, he knew how slim  
 Were his chances of ever greeting Beowulf  
 Again, but seeing his face he was forced  
 To hope. His love was too warm to be hidden,  
 His tears came running too quickly to be checked;  
 His very blood burned with longing.  
 And then Beowulf left him, left Herot, walked  
 Across the green in his golden armor,  
 Exulting in the treasures heaped high in his arms.  
 His ship was at anchor; he had it ready to sail.  
 And so Hrothgar's rich treasures would leave him,  
 travel

Far from that perfect king, without fault  
 Or blame until winter had followed winter  
 And age had stolen his strength, spirited it  
 Off, as it steals from many men.

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1885

Then the band of Geats, young and brave,  
 Marching in their ring-locked armor, reached  
 The shore. The coast-guard saw them coming  
 And about to go, as he'd seen them before;  
 He hurried down the hillside, whipping  
 His horse, but this time shouted no challenge,  
 Told them only how the Geats would be watching  
 Too, and would welcome such warriors in shining  
 Mail. Their broad-beamed ship lay bobbing  
 At the edge of the sand: they loaded it high  
 With armor and horses and all the rich treasure  
 It could hold. The mast stood high and straight  
 Over heaped-up wealth—Hrothgar's, and now  
 theirs.  
 Beowulf rewarded the boat's watchman,  
 Who had stayed behind, with a sword that had ham-  
 mered  
 Gold wound on its handle: the weapon  
 Brought him honor. Then the ship left shore, left  
 Denmark,  
 Traveled through deep water. Deck timbers creaked,  
 And the wind billowing through the sail stretched  
 From the mast, tied tight with ropes, did not hold  
 them  
 Back, did not keep the ring-prowed ship  
 From foaming swiftly through the waves, the sea  
 Currents, across the wide ocean until  
 They could see familiar headlands, cliffs  
 That sprang out of Geatish soil. Driven  
 By the wind the ship rammed high on the shore.  
 Harbor guards came running to greet them,  
 Men who for days had waited and watched  
 For their beloved comrades to come crossing the  
 waves;  
 They anchored the high-bowed ship, moored it  
 Close to the shore, where the booming sea

Could not pull it loose and lead it away.  
 Then they carried up the golden armor,  
 The ancient swords, the jewels, brought them  
 To Higlac's home, their ring-giver's hall  
 Near the sea, where he lived surrounded  
 By his followers.  
 He was a famous king, with a fitting  
 High hall and a wife, Higd, young  
 But wise and knowing beyond her years.  
 She was Hareth's daughter, a noble queen  
 With none of the niggardly ways of women  
 Like Thrith. Higd gave the Geats gifts  
 With open hands. But Thrith was too proud,  
 An imperious princess with a vicious tongue  
 And so fierce and wild that her father's followers  
 Averted their eyes as she passed, knowing  
 That if anyone but their king watched where she  
 walked  
 Her hands would shape a noose to fit  
 Their necks. She would lie, her father's lieutenants,  
 Would write out her warrants, and he who had  
 started  
 Would end his life on the edge of an ancient  
 Sword. And how great a sin for a woman,  
 Whether fair or black, to create fear  
 And destruction, for a woman, who should walk in  
 the ways  
 Of peace, to kill with pretended insults.  
 But Hemming's kinsman tamed her: his hall-guests  
 Told a different story, spread the news  
 That Thrith had forgotten her gory tricks  
 Once her wise father had sent her to a wedding  
 With Offa, married her to that brave young soldier,  
 Sent her across the yellow-green sea  
 To that gold-adorned champion, a fierce fighter  
 In war or peace. They praised her, now,  
 For her generous heart, and her goodness, and the  
 high  
 And most noble paths she walked, filled

With adoring love for that leader of warriors,  
 Her husband; he was a man as brave and strong  
 And good, it is said, as anyone on this earth,  
 A spear-bold soldier who knew no fear,  
 Exalted with gifts, victorious in war,  
 A king who ruled his native land  
 Wisely and well. Emer was his son,  
 Hemming's kinsman, Garmund's grandson,  
 A powerful swordsman and his warriors' shield.

1955

1960

## 28

Then Beowulf and his men went walking along  
 The shore, down the broad strip of sand.  
 The world's bright candle shone, hurrying  
 Up from the south. It was a short journey  
 From their ship to Higlac's home, to the hall  
 Where their king, Ongentho's killer, lived  
 With his warriors and gave treasures away. They  
 walked  
 Quickly. The young king knew  
 They were back, Beowulf and his handful of brave  
 Men, come safely home; he sat,  
 Now, waiting to see them, to greet  
 His battle-comrades when they arrived at his court.  
 They came. And when Beowulf had bowed to  
 his lord,  
 And standing in front of the throne had solemnly  
 Spoken loyal words, Higlac  
 Ordered him to sit at his side—he  
 Who had survived, sailed home victorious, next to  
 His kinsman and king. Mead cups were filled

1970

1975

1980

And Hareth's daughter took them through the hall,  
 Carried ale to her husband's comrades.  
 Higlac, unable to stay silent, anxious  
 To know how Beowulf's adventure had gone,  
 Began to question him, courteous but eager  
 To be told everything.

1985

"Belovèd Beowulf,  
 Tell us what your trip to far-off places  
 Brought you, your sudden expedition on the salty  
 Waves, your search for war in Herot?"

1990

Did you end Hirothgar's hopeless misery,  
 Could you help that glorious king? Grendel's  
 Savagery lay heavy on my heart but I was afraid  
 To let you go to him; for a long time  
 I held you here, kept you safe,  
 Forced you to make the Danes fight  
 Their own battles. God be praised  
 That my eyes have beheld you once more, un-  
 harmed!"

1995

Beowulf spoke, Edgetho's brave son:  
 "My lord Higlac, my meeting with Grendel  
 And the nighttime battle we fought are known  
 To everyone in Denmark, where the monster was  
 once

2000

The uncrowned ruler, murdering and eating  
 Hirothgar's people, forever bringing them  
 Misery. I ended his reign, avenged  
 His crimes so completely in the crashing darkness  
 That not even the oldest of his evil kind  
 Will ever boast, lying in sin  
 And deceit, that the monster beat me. I sought out  
 Hirothgar, first, came to him in his hall;  
 When Healfdane's famous son heard  
 That I'd come to challenge Grendel, he gave me  
 A seat of honor alongside his son.

2005

2010

His followers were drinking; I joined their feast,  
 Sat with that band, as bright and loud-tongued  
 As any I've ever seen. His famous  
 Queen went back and forth, hurrying

2015