

people at his boldness, and blithe their joy over the well-served hall-cup.

Then King Hrothgár would seek his evening rest, for the wan shadows of night were already darkening the welkin. The company arose and greeted man to man, and Hrothgár greeted Beówulf and said, 'O friend, never before did I commit this hall to any man's keeping since I might lift a spear. Have now and hold this best of palaces. Be wakeful and be valorous, and nothing that thou mayest ask shall be too great a prize for victory.' So the king departed with his troop of heroes from the mead-hall.

Beówulf took off his coat of iron mail, loosed the helmet from his head, and from his thigh the well-chased sword; and having put aside his war-gear wholly, stepped upon his bed and laid him down. Around him in the dusk lay many well-armed Danes slumbering from weariness. The darkness fell, and all the keepers of the palace slept save one. Beówulf in a restless mood, naked and weaponless, waited for the foe.

Then in the pale night Grendel the shadow-walker rose up with the mists from the marshes and came to Heorot, the pinnacled palace. He tore away the iron bands, fire-hardened, where-with the doors were fastened, and trod the many-coloured floor of the sounding hall. Like fire the anger flashed from his eyes, lightening the darkness with a hideous light. Terribly he laughed as he gloated on the sleeping Danes and saw the abundant feast of human flesh spread out around him.

Beówulf, the strong Wægmunding, held his breath to watch the method of the Ogre's onset. Nor did the fiend delay, for quickly seizing a sleeping warrior he bit him in the throat, drank the blood from his veins, and tare his limbs and ate the dead man's feet and hands. Then coming nearer, Grendel laid his hands upon the watchful champion. Suddenly Beówulf raised himself upon his elbow and clutched the Ogre fast; against the shoulder he fastened on the grim Jötun with his hands; and held him. Never before had Grendel met the gripe of hands so strong. He bent himself with all his might against Beówulf and dragged him from his bed, and toward the door; but Beówulf's fingers never slackened from their hold: he drew the Ogre back. Together they struggled upon the hall pavement till the palace rocked and thundered with their battle. Great

wonder was it that the palace fell not, but it was made fast with well-forged iron bands within and without; yet many a mead-bench overlaid with twisted gold was torn from its place in the furious strife, and the ale spilled on the floor. But Grendel found the clutch of his enemy too strong; he could not loose it with all his wrestlings; and he knew that he must seek to flee away and hide himself in his marsh dwellings. But Beówulf griped him tight; and when the fiend would drag him down the hall he put forth all his strength into his clenched hands. Suddenly the Ogre's shoulder rift from neck to waist. The sinews burst asunder, the joints gave way, and Beówulf tare the shoulder and the shoulder-blade from out his body. So Grendel escaped from Beówulf's grasp and in his mortal sickness fled to the fens. There Death clutched him and he died.

Then in the morning many warriors gathered to the mead-hall; and Beówulf brought his trophy, Grendel's hand and arm and shoulder, and hung it high in the palace that all might see. So hard were the fingers and the stiff nails of the war-hand that no well-proven steel would touch them. Hrothgár thanked God and Beówulf for this deliverance, and having made the broken palace strong again with iron bonds and hung it round about with tapestry, he held therein a costly feast of rejoicing with his warriors and kinsmen, whereat many a mead-cup was outpoured. To Beówulf he gave rich gifts: a golden earring and a helm, a breastplate and a sword, each wrought with twisted work of gold, together with eight horses whose housings shone with precious stones. And when the lay of the glee-man was sung and the wine flowed, and the jocund noise from the mead-benches rose loud, Queen Wealtheow went forth under her golden crown and bare the royal cup to Beówulf to drink. A ring she gave him of rare workmanship all aglow with carven gems, likewise sumptuous dresses, rich with brodered gold and needlework of divers colours. 'Be happy and fortunate, my lord Beówulf!' she said. 'Enjoy these well-earned gifts, dear warrior, for thou hast cleansed the mead-hall of the realm, and for thy prowess fame shall gather to thee, wide as the in-rolling sea that comes from all the corners of the world to circle round our windy walls.'

Then Wealtheow and her Lord King Hrothgár departed to take their evening rest, and