

Tonight, as ever, we will leave this great and shining hall, for the monster will return. I wish you luck in stopping him; but many of our bravest men have died in the attempt.'

'Great king,' said Beowulf, 'we have no fear. Your troubles will soon be over.'

Chapter 3

*The First Encounter*¹

Night fell slowly over the city. King Hrothgar and all his host² began to withdraw from the hall. The king was the last to go. 'Brave young man, I fear you do not understand the danger you are facing. Good fortune be with you.'

Beowulf smiled. 'Great Hrothgar, people say that I have the strength of thirty men. This I will prove to you tonight.'

Beowulf and his men were soon alone. They locked the doors, even though they knew that locks would not keep Grendel out. Every movement echoed through the hall. Night had fallen, and they

¹ *encounter*—meeting or battle.

² *host*—men.

waited in darkness, swords ready for battle. Only a faint moonlight allowed them to see at all.

Beowulf put down his sword, for he knew it would be useless now. This monster could not be killed with swords. It was strength and courage alone that Beowulf must rely on.

As his companions went to sleep, Beowulf waited, listening. If Grendel came, he hoped there would be time to wake the Geats. Hour after hour passed. Even Beowulf himself came close to sleep.

Then, a noise. Doors crashed open. In the dark, something moved. A scream ripped through the silence—a man was taken! Grendel had already grasped one of Beowulf's soldiers and ripped him in half! The Geats leapt to their feet, fumbled for swords, looked madly about trying to see in the dark.

Grendel's green, angry eyes glowed in the darkness. As he reached for another man, suddenly he felt an iron grip lock around his arm. Whatever grasped him had the strength of many men, and for once he himself felt fear.

Beowulf had Grendel by the arm, and the monster howled like a trapped animal. He wanted to escape and madly pulled against the grip of Beowulf. The hero tightened his hold with all his might, and the two foes staggered about the hall,