**UNFERTH’S CHALLENGE**

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| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Unferth spoke, Ecglaf’s son, |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Who sat at Hrothgar’s feet, spoke harshly |
| 235 | And sharp (vexed[°](javascript:code.getNodeByID('id_30_2').doEvent('onClick');) by Beowulf’s adventure, |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | By their visitor’s courage, and angry that anyone |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | In Denmark or anywhere on earth had ever |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Acquired glory and fame greater |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Than his own): |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | “You’re Beowulf, are you—the same |
| 240 | Boastful fool who fought a swimming |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Match with Brecca, both of you daring |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | And young and proud, exploring the deepest |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Seas, risking your lives for no reason |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | But the danger? All older and wiser heads warned you |
| 245 | Not to, but no one could check such pride. |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | With Brecca at your side you swam along |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | The sea-paths, your swift-moving hands pulling you |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Over the ocean’s face. Then winter |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Churned through the water, the waves ran you |
| 250 | As they willed, and you struggled seven long nights |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | To survive. And at the end victory was his, |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Not yours. The sea carried him close |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | To his home, to southern Norway, near |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | The land of the Brondings, where he ruled and was loved, |
| 255 | Where his treasure was piled and his strength protected |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | His towns and his people. He’d promised to outswim you: |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Bonstan’s son[°](javascript:code.getNodeByID('id_128').doEvent('onClick');) made that boast ring true. |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | You’ve been lucky in your battles, Beowulf, but I think |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Your luck may change if you challenge Grendel, |
| 260 | Staying a whole night through in this hall, |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Waiting where that fiercest of demons can find you.” |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Beowulf answered, Edgetho’s great son: |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | “Ah! Unferth, my friend, your face |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Is hot with ale, and your tongue has tried |
| 265 | To tell us about Brecca’s doings. But the truth |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Is simple: No man swims in the sea |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | As I can, no strength is a match for mine. |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | As boys, Brecca and I had boasted— |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | We were both too young to know better—that we’d risk |
| 270 | Our lives far out at sea, and so |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | We did. Each of us carried a naked |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Sword, prepared for whales or the swift |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Sharp teeth and beaks of needlefish. |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | He could never leave me behind, swim faster |
| 275 | Across the waves than I could, and I |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Had chosen to remain close to his side. |
|  | I remained near him for five long nights, |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Until a flood swept us apart; |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | The frozen sea surged around me, |
| 280 | It grew dark, the wind turned bitter, blowing |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | From the north, and the waves were savage. Creatures |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Who sleep deep in the sea were stirred |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Into life—and the iron hammered links |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Of my mail shirt, these shining bits of metal |
| 285 | Woven across my breast, saved me |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | From death. A monster seized me, drew me |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Swiftly toward the bottom, swimming with its claws |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Tight in my flesh. But fate let me |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Find its heart with my sword, hack myself |
| 290 | Free; I fought that beast’s last battle, |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Left it floating lifeless in the sea. |

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| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | | “Other monsters crowded around me, | |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | | Continually attacking. I treated them politely, | |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | | Offering the edge of my razor-sharp sword. | |
| 295 | | But the feast, I think, did not please them, filled | |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | | Their evil bellies with no banquet-rich food, | |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | | Thrashing there at the bottom of the sea; | |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | | By morning they’d decided to sleep on the shore, | |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | | Lying on their backs, their blood spilled out | |
| 300 | | On the sand. Afterwards, sailors could cross | |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | | That sea-road and feel no fear; nothing | |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | | Would stop their passing. Then God’s bright beacon | |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | | Appeared in the east, the water lay still, | |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | | And at last I could see the land, wind-swept | |
| 305 | | Cliff-walls at the edge of the coast. Fate saves | |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | | The living when they drive away death by themselves! | |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | | Lucky or not, nine was the number | |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | | Of sea-huge monsters I killed. What man, | |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | | Anywhere under Heaven’s high arch, has fought | |
| 310 | | In such darkness, endured more misery, or been harder | |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | | Pressed? Yet I survived the sea, smashed | |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | | The monsters’ hot jaws, swam home from my journey. | |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | | The swift-flowing waters swept me along | |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | | And I landed on Finnish soil. I’ve heard | |
| 315 | | No tales of you, Unferth, telling | |
| http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | | Of such clashing terror, such contests in the night! | |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | Brecca’s battles were never so bold; | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Neither he nor you can match me—and I mean | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | No boast, have announced no more than I know | | | 320 | To be true. And there’s more: You murdered your brothers, | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Your own close kin. Words and bright wit | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Won’t help your soul; you’ll suffer hell’s fires, | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Unferth, forever tormented. Ecglaf’s | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Proud son, if your hands were as hard, your heart | | | 325 | As fierce as you think it, no fool would dare | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | To raid your hall, ruin Herot | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | And oppress its prince, as Grendel has done. | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | But he’s learned that terror is his alone, | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Discovered he can come for your people with no fear | | | 330 | Of reprisal;[°](javascript:code.getNodeByID('id_74').doEvent('onClick');) he’s found no fighting, here, | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | But only food, only delight. | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | He murders as he likes, with no mercy, gorges | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | And feasts on your flesh, and expects no trouble, | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | No quarrel from the quiet Danes. Now | | | 335 | The Geats will show him courage, soon | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | He can test his strength in battle. And when the sun | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Comes up again, opening another | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Bright day from the south, anyone in Denmark | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | May enter this hall: That evil will be gone!” | | | 340 | Hrothgar, gray-haired and brave, sat happily | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Listening, the famous ring-giver sure, | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | At last, that Grendel could be killed; he believed | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | In Beowulf’s bold strength and the firmness of his spirit. | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | There was the sound of laughter, and the cheerful clanking | | | 345 | Of cups, and pleasant words. Then Welthow, | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Hrothgar’s gold-ringed queen, greeted | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | The warriors; a noble woman who knew | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | What was right, she raised a flowing cup | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | To Hrothgar first, holding it high | | | 350 | For the lord of the Danes to drink, wishing him | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Joy in that feast. The famous king | | | http://my.hrw.com/images/points/1.gif | Drank with pleasure and blessed their banquet.   |  | | --- | | Then Welthow went from warrior to warrior, | | Pouring a portion from the jeweled cup | | For each, till the bracelet-wearing queen | | Had carried the mead-cup among them and it was Beowulf’s | | Turn to be served. She saluted the Geats’ | | Great prince, thanked God for answering her prayers, | | For allowing her hands the happy duty | | Of offering mead to a hero who would help | | Her afflicted people. He drank what she poured, | | Edgetho’s brave son, then assured the Danish | | Queen that his heart was firm and his hands | | Ready: | | “When we crossed the sea, my comrades | | And I, I already knew that all | | My purpose was this: to win the good will | | Of your people or die in battle, pressed | | In Grendel’s fierce grip. Let me live in greatness | | And courage, or here in this hall welcome | | My death!” | | Welthow was pleased with his words, | | His bright-tongued boasts; she carried them back | | To her lord, walked nobly across to his side. | | The feast went on, laughter and music | | And the brave words of warriors celebrating | | Their delight. Then Hrothgar rose, Healfdane’s | | Son, heavy with sleep; as soon | | As the sun had gone, he knew that Grendel | | Would come to Herot, would visit that hall | | When night had covered the earth with its net | | And the shapes of darkness moved black and silent | | Through the world. Hrothgar’s warriors rose with him. | | He went to Beowulf, embraced the Geats’ | | Brave prince, wished him well, and hoped | | That Herot would be his to command. And then | | He declared: | | “No one strange to this land | | Has ever been granted what I’ve given you, | | No one in all the years of my rule. | | Make this best of all mead-halls yours, and then | | Keep it free of evil, fight | | With glory in your heart! Purge Herot | | And your ship will sail home with its treasure-holds full.”… | | | | | |  | | --- | |  | |  | |  | |