**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° 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° 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! |
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| 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;° 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.

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| 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.”… |

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