

As background to her characterization of Grendel from *Beowulf*, Peggy Keene writes: "Beowulf strikes me as being a bit of a pain, he is so perfect. Fair hair glinting in the sunlight, blue eyes flashing, a real winner. It just didn't seem fair for poor old Grendel to have the sins of his forefather Cain visited upon him. My Grendel is, of course, somewhat modelled on Lenny in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, and also on a kid I remember from school. I remember the joy with which he would fling himself into a game, only to find it was always the wrong thing at the wrong time. He would first of all laugh to try and curry favour, but then you could see his bewilderment and growing resentment. Then there came the day when he finally realized that he was stronger than any of the other kids."

## Peggy Keene / ME NAME?

Me name? what do you want to know me name for?

O alright, its Grendel. I don't care, you can laugh if you want to. I don't have another name, I never knew who me Dad was, — tell you the truth, I don't think Mum did either — she used to say I was like him though, big and strong like.

I always was big, even when I was a nipper. I used to give the other kids rides on me back — then some of the kids wouldn't let me play with them, they said I was too rough, and that I was clumsy.

One day, there was this kid, and he had something in his hand, and he was showing it to all the other kids. I could see it was all shiny and sparkly and I wanted to have a look at it, but he kept laughing and hiding it and saying I musn't touch it, that I'd break it. I only wanted to have a look. I don't remember much what happened then I'd done something bad and Mum and me had to leave town. Mum said it wasn't my fault and I was to forget all about it. I dunno, things get sort of mixed up and my head hurts.

We got along alright, Mum and me, we had this place by the lake with lots of trees and things all around and it was all cool and shady. Never had lots to eat mind you, Mum had a bit of a garden out the back, but the ground wasn't very good, bit rocky like, but we could get fish from the lake and we managed.

There is this man in the town, Mr. Hrothgar his name is, and he's got a big house, all posh and la-di-dah, he gives big parties and everyone gets to go to them, not us of course, Mum said she wouldn't want to go in any case, bunch of dolled up tarts, and men she wouldn't bother to spit on. I used to like to look though, at all the lights and things. One night, he had this great big party, I used to watch from the bushes like, and I could hear everyone talking and laughing and joking, and everyone was excited because Mr. Hrothgar was going to give everyone presents and things. I've got this place in the bushes, like I told you, and I've fixed it up a bit, make it more cosy like, gets a bit parkey out here some nights. Well this night, I sort of fell asleep. I woke up and everything was quiet. Cor was I cold, and then I see the door was open, and I thought

I'd just nip in for a warm up. Well there was no one around, and I thought I'll just have a dekko while I'm here. Well there was this one old geezer lying there, snoring his head off and then I seen something shiny beside him, I'd just touched it, and he started to wake up. I put my hand over his mouth to stop him shouting, when all of a sudden he went all limp. I didn't know what to do. I knew I'd hurt him, so I picked him up and carried him outside, thought the fresh air would make him better. He was all heavy and floppy and I wanted to go home, Mum would know what to do — his head kept falling all over the place, so I put him over my shoulder and ran home as fast as I could. Mum's face was all funny, when I got home, and she said he was dead. She took him from me and said she would look after it. My head was hurting and I was all sweaty and hot — and I went to sleep then. When I woke up, Mum said some men had been around, in the trees at the back of us, and they had guns, and they were shouting, and that we had better go away for awhile. We packed up some things and Mum said she knew of a cave round the other side of the lake, so we went round there. It wasn't as nice as our old place, it was cold and wet and it was hard to catch any fish because Mum said that no one must see us.

I knew Mum didn't like it there, and wanted to go home. It wasn't fair, I didn't mean to hurt him.

Then one night I heard singing and music and I knew that old Hrothgar was giving another party. It was bitter cold that night, and the cave was all draughty and I thought why can't we go home all them down there laughing and eating and drinking and its all warm and everything — who do they think we are to tell us we can't go home. Mum knew who the men were who had come with the guns, and I bet they were all warm and had plenty to eat and enjoying themselves. I went down to the town and to the house, by this time it was all quiet again, and then all of a sudden I felt all sick and my head was aching and I couldn't stop my hands from shaking and I went into the house and I killed one of them. I didn't tell Mum. I knew she would be all upset. And this time it was different. It was so easy. Just a little squeeze and it was all over.

There weren't any more parties after that. No one would go to them. The house was empty.

Sometimes things were alright, then sometimes I'd get that funny feeling, and I knew I would have to go out and wait for someone and kill them.

They would try and find us but we were too clever for them, they couldn't ever get us.

Then one night I heard the music again, it was on Mum's birthday, and suddenly I thought I would go down there and pinch something nice as a surprise. I waited till everything was quiet, then I crept inside, there were people sleeping all over the place and I saw something shiny and pretty.

I touched it, then all of a sudden something grabbed me by the arm, I thought they've put a trap there like they catch animals with and I pulled and I pulled and I couldn't get my arm free then I saw it wasn't a trap it was a man as big as I was and he had my hand and he was twisting it and twisting it and it hurt me and I wanted to go home I pulled and pulled and suddenly I was free and running.

I must get home its not much farther I've got to get home Oh, Mum please help me please help me I can't see my shoulder hurts so.

Mister, its getting awful dark in here  
its getting awful dark.