

The Tale of Glam

A poem by Caitlin Christiana Wintour

The poem's story comes from a prose tale in the medieval Icelandic *The Grettis Saga*. I wrote the poem in the style of Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry, a style dating from 650 A.D. to 1000 A.D. Instead of rhyming and/or beat conventions, Anglo-Saxon poetry depends on combining two half-lines to make a full line, with each half-line containing two stressed syllables along with a few more unstressed syllables. In addition, each beginning half-line alliterates with the next half-line like this: either the first or second stressed syllable of the first half-line alliterates with the first stressed syllable of the second half-line.

I dedicate my original poem to the people of medieval Iceland, who gathered around the fires at night to tell ghost stories, and who firmly closed their sturdy doors against the coming of the night.

Wealthy was Thane
a deadly winter
At first the thane
thickly moved

Thorhall when one year
deepened in his land.
felt no fear, though
the mists over hill and fen.

For that same winter
ghost, came to foul
Death-walked the wight
cursing the living with
green-cloaked valleys
with shepherds' blood.
Thorhall's good land
Wild darkness,

a wight, a violent
Thorhall's fair land.
in wretched Shady-vale
lonely death,
now grim and stained
Sun that had shone on
lost to the glooming.
wraith-rode ruin.

So did Thorhall
to seek a shepherd
Found he grim-faced
with a hero's heart
For godless was
a hater of holiness,
Warned him of the wight
"No fright have I
said Glam growling,
for the seeing."
straightway they sped
Throughout the summer
where Glam kept guard,
no serpent-son to
Summer and autumn

to Althing come
scornful of danger.
Glam, great in stature
but a heathen soul.
Glam, and surly,
harsh as north storms.
but no warning Glam heeded.
for fearful sight"
"Gladder is life
His shepherd found,
to Shady-vale.
silent were the vales
no ghostly foe faced,
sear and slay.
swiftly turned to winter.

Then hard on the
a wailing wind
and madly moaned
Blasphemous was Glam,
with rude rantings
Shepherd unshriven,
Heathen in a holy
into the darkness.
and deep the mist
heard a dire cry
waited the wight,
Glam returned not
as living man.

At sunrise, searchers
In high hills they
wandering sheep,
Then folk foundered,
stared at the sight
Of the wight, no sign
big as barrels
slope, where they
Glam's body lay
corpse blue and
signs and symbols
the fearful *draugr*.

No more would any
but ran from haunted
For the newborn wight
darkness and in day.
on houses as if
shook and

The call for a hero
Many heard the tale
come, fearing
Then one man heard,

Grettir the Strong was
from lonely mere
But a hero of men
Grettir headed
Shadyvale. Saw he
empty, the sheep

holy eve of Yule
withered warmth
its midwinter cry.
galling the folk
and revels ill-done.
shrieked there was no God.
hour, Glam strode
Deep was the snow
over moor when Glam
in the dark where
wintery-born.
that night nor any

sought the shepherd.
happened on his
shivering and afraid.
faces blanched,
of savage battle.
save bloody footprints
hobbling down a rocky
shrank and vanished.
against a rock, huge
big as a bull,
of soulless undead,

man watch the sheep
hills and hellish sight.
walked abroad in
The *draugr* rode
they were horses,
shivered the fire-halls.

heralded far.
told but none would
for their lives.
and hearing, came.

he, no shepherd far
and mountain stream.
hardy and fearless.
his horse north to
a sad land and
scattered and

the town forsaken.
from Glam's damned
splintered the doors

So Grettir came to
and hid himself
At midnight the
clawing deep the
bursting in to
Grettir loathed what
and with fiery curse
His strong arms
to shatter and break
But no mere man
and hard-pressed was
And so they fought
twisting and grappling,
Hurled each other

where Glam halted,
Dead eyes stared
pale as bones and
filling wight's eyes
His doom was come,
"Under dead moon
Yet fell is your fate,
Comes the dark
for my gaze will
dead eyes watching
until you run mad.
Then Grettir grew strong
His sword flashed and
and *draugr* crumpled

Thorhall greatly
and they gave
they burned Glam's
and buried the wight
And Grettir the Strong
and many praised his
But to be alone in the dark – he would never dare.

Torn were the roofs
dancing and
from *draugr*'s haunts.

thane's great hall
in the high rafters.
the monster came
carven doors and
break and slay.
lurked below him,
crashed to the floor.
seized the wight
the bone-walker.
this monster was,
the hero to live.
in the fire-hall
Glam and Grettir.
outsideto the street –

hesitated.
at the sky-disk,
pallid it shone,
with white moonlight.
so cursings howled Glam.
death takes me.
fey warrior.
in dread and terror,
go before you,
woeful sight
Unmade are you."
with strength enough.
felled the beast,
dead again.

thanked Grettir,
glory to God.
body to coals
where no man goes.
grew in fame,
prowess and deeds.