

# A Deep Problem

*Brother Bartholomew*

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With a sigh, Grover Treeman pushed the small pile of copper and silver coins into the box and locked it. Business was not too bad at the Rusty Scupper, considering that it was a midweek night and all of Toolibrie was suffering from the lack of trade, not to mention the recent Catastrophe and the Lyfeyian Inquisition. He watched the rest of his staff – his daughter-by-bond Lariandra, Otis the bouncer and Amanda the cook – finish cleaning the taproom and gather the sweepings into the fireplace. The portly, tired man rose to his feet with a grunt and went to pour himself a small tankard of dark ale. He had earned it already, he thought, and the night was far from over.

As he returned to his seat, he reflected on how lucky they were that they didn't really have to depend on the earnings of the tavern to survive. If they did, they would have had to lower the quality of their offerings, as had most of their competitors. However, the Rusty Scupper had developed a reputation by now of a place to get a beer that wasn't watered down, a meal that wouldn't make you sick, fair to good entertainment, and most importantly, safety. Patrons knew that they didn't have to worry about their pockets being picked or some bullying stranger provoking a fight. Otis and Grover were both big men, and while they were mild-mannered like many big men, they had proven they knew how to handle themselves in more than one brawl. And somehow, Grover's two daughters-by-bond had an uncanny knack at spotting a dip or a guller, so that pickpockets and con artists found other places to ply their trades. The reputation for safety and privacy brought them plenty of business, even if the serving wenches never seemed to be interested in earning any extra coin for their favors.

Grover wondered what his clientele would do if they knew that he and all his staff were flying under false colors. He was actually Bartholomew, Druid of the Grove, Guardian of the Tree of Life, and Moonstone-holder of Faló, the Clan of the Heart, while his "daughter" Lariandra was Rodin Rae D'Cordelia, captain of the good ship Darkmyste and also Moonstone-holder of Faló. Galen, who was "visiting her parents," was in actuality Shade Song ri Lomelindele, Baroness of Boren Dur and also of Faló, while "Amanda" and "Otis" were Druids of the local Grove.

Bart, Rodin Rae, and Shade Song had opened the Rusty Scupper about three years ago, when Toolibrie had become unsafe for the fey, and humans who associated with them, due to the inroads of the Lyfeyian missionaries from across the Westron Sea. It allowed Faló, the Druids, and their friends and allies to have an active ear into doings in Toolibrie, both on the surface and in the underworld.

Their normal lines of information, Jomton the Shipwright and Mother Mabel's House of Pleasure, had both closed up for the duration of the troubles. While Jomton had reopened, Mabel and her girls were having too much fun shocking the poor sisters of the House of Mercy in the countryside to want to come back to their "business." Otis and Amanda, actually Brother Hawthorne and Sister Laurella of the local Druidic Grove, ran the place with hired local help when Bart, Rodin Rae, and Shade needed to be elsewhere.

There was a faint knock at the door. Rodin Rae was near it and looked at Bart with a raised eyebrow. He nodded, and she turned to take down the wooden beam that barred the door for the night.

Bart turned to the other two in the room. "My children, if you would excuse us now?" he said. "This business does not need you, and you should rest." He

lifted his hand in the sign of benediction of his Order. "May the Great Tree guard your rest."

The two Druids bowed their heads in acceptance, and retired to the kitchen, just as Rodin Rae ushered Jomton into the taproom. She greeted her old friend with a peck on the cheek and saw him to a chair while Bart brought a tray with a pitcher of ale, two mugs, and assorted food tidbits. He poured for his friends.

Jomton took a deep swallow, belched and wiped his handlebar moustache. “Ah, tha’s a good’un. Thankee, Cap’n Bar... I mean, uh, *Brother* Bart.”

Bart looked at his former crewman with a dour glare, while Rodin Rae snickered. True, it was an open secret now that the good and kindly Druid had once been the notorious pirate and reaver known as Black Bart, the terror of the Westron Sea, but he still didn’t care to have it mentioned so casually. However, try as he might, he had never been able to break his former ship’s carpenter of the habit of addressing him as “Captain Bart,” and as he aged, Jomton slipped more and more into his old ways.

It’s starting to happen, old son, the Druid mused, just as Ghost Dancer told me so long ago. While my bond with the Tree preserves me, all my old shipmates and comrades are aging and nearing the end of their spans. I begin to see why he called it ‘the elfin curse’. “Humph,” he muttered to the others, “let’s get down to business, here. It’s late, and Rodin Rae and I have a tavern to run tomorrow. Jommie, what can you tell us?”

Jomton turned to the elvin woman, his wide smile revealing more spaces than teeth. “Lass, that’s a sweet ship y’have a’builidin’, eff’n I say so meself. She’s come through her sea trials right proper, an’ she’ll be ready fer yer usage in less’n a fortnight, if I ken it properly. But she still doon’ have a name, an’ it ain’t fitten that a sweet lady such as her should make her maiden voyage wi’oot a proper name, eh?”

Rodin Rae looked up at him. “Aye, Jommie, I know that. But the naming must wait on another, she who gave us the special wood for the hull. And I have not heard from my sister Angelica in several moons now. So if need be, the new vessel will sail nameless, although like you, I would rather it be otherwise.”

It was Jomton’s turn to sigh. “Eh, lassie, if the Gods will it, then that is what must be. But I have other news for ye, and for you too, Bart.” The old pirate unconsciously leaned closer and lowered his voice, as if he didn’t trust that they were truly safe from being overheard. “Here’s what them Lyfeyian bastards are up to now...”

The three remained at the table for several hours, analyzing and discussing the plans of their sworn enemies. When they found they were going over the same ground again and again with no further progress, Bart and Rodin Rae bid their guest good night, and Jomton went out into the darkness.

Before they took to their respective bedchambers, Rodin Rae looked at her clan brother. “He’s getting too old for this, Bart.”

“I know, Captain, I know. As would I, if not for the Tree’s Grace. He’s lucky that he has Gwillem. At least his son will take up the helm of the shipyard when Jommie finally comes to port.”

“Yes. Well, I’m for bed. It’s been a long day.”

“Aye, Captain, and it promises to be another just like it in the morn. But we will have to do sommat within the week, if we want to finish our business and still be able to be at Willow’s for the Yule gather. May the Great Tree guard your rest, my sister.”

As he lay in his bed, Bartholomew tried to remember what he knew of sea elves. He had spent much time with Shade Song in his youth, some forty or more years ago, and had been foster father to her brother Luthenar for much of the past decade, so his knowledge of the ocean-living Fey was more than most landlubbers would have. He even spoke the Star Cove dialect of sea elvin, after a fashion, and could read their language passably well, but he really knew nothing of this new deep-ocean tribe.

The letter had come as something of a surprise. Rinka Tur, his new friend, had discovered a scroll in her pouch addressed to “Blackpearl,” the sea elvin name that Rodin Rae bore, and somehow she *knew* when she handed it to him that it was meant for him as well. It told of a new danger for both the sea folk and the land folk, brought on somehow by the Great Cataclysm that had recently shaken the whole world. Once he had a

chance to bring it to Rodin Rae at the Rusty Scupper, she too professed ignorance of this tribe of sea elves, but they both felt it was necessary to investigate further into the threat it mentioned.

*Well, old son, he thought drowsily, at least you'll get more use out of the Necklace of the Dolphins Shade Song gave you so many years ago...*

And so it was that, less than two weeks later, Bartholomew and Rodin Rae found themselves in a secluded cove, a few leagues south of Toolibrie. Their mounts and belongings, except for what they planned to take with them, would be left with the faithful Brother Hawthorne, who had accompanied them and would be returning to this spot at high tide each night for the next week. The small fishing skiff that would be their resting base was floating at anchor, ready to depart with the tide fast approaching ebb. It had been brought to this bay by one of the sea elves who lived near Toolibrie, aided by the local Druids, and was equipped with food and supplies for a two-week trip.

Wearing only his magical necklace and holding his Druid's staff, Bart turned to his companion and clan sister. Rodin Rae had not disrobed completely; she was still wearing an undergarment that covered her from chest to knees. It seemed to be some type of linen shift, but with legs like a pair of treads.

"Rodin Rae? Are you planning on wearing that under water? It will only serve to slow you down when swimming." Bart noticed that she seemed to be looking anywhere but directly at him, and her face was turning some interesting colors.

"Uh, yes I am, Bart. Does that present a problem for you?"

"No, my dear, if that's what you choose." Without saying another word, the Druid donned his smallclothes again, and saw his companion noticeably relax. "And now, if you're ready, let's begin."

The two waded out into the surf. Bartholomew took a deep breath, but no more than that, and dove beneath the waves. He felt the *tingle* pass through his body, signaling a magickal spell taking effect over him, and he stretched his arms and took a swimming stroke. His body shot through the water, much faster than a normal swimming human. Looking to the side, he saw Rodin Rae keeping up with him, stroke for stroke, without the benefit of any magickal device.

Very strange, old son, he thought, she swims almost as well as a sea elf born. Worth looking into, once we finish the business at hand.

They rapidly approached the fishing boat and pulled themselves aboard. With the ease of long familiarity, Bartholomew raised the sail and took the tiller in hand while his companion pulled the anchor aboard. The small craft rapidly made its way out to sea, and before long, their companion on the coast was beyond the horizon. The three-quarter waxing moon gave them plenty of light on the cloudless night, and the sea was deceptively smooth and calm.

For most of the next week, the two companions followed a set schedule, ranging out from their boat as far as they could in separate directions and returning in the early afternoon to eat and rest. This was followed by moving their craft further out into the limitless ocean waters until well after sundown, one at the tiller while the other scouted through the waters, until the time was right for them to take their rest in turns until dawn. Fortunately, there was but one storm during this time, which the pair of experienced sea-farers passed uneventfully.

Still, their scouting expedition found nothing out of the ordinary – no strange sea-elvin, no monsters, no new dangers of any kind. True, the sea revealed beauties and terrors, but of the normal kind. There were sharks and barracuda aplenty, but there were also dolphins and whales and fish and birds. Rodin Rae and Bart quickly fell into the habits of old, passing long hours in silent but agreeable companionship, speaking when the needs of the moment or their mission required.

On the day before their last on – the day they had agreed to turn homeward – Bart surfaced next to the small skiff to find Rodin Rae already there. This was unusual, because as time had passed, they had

discovered that she could swim farther and faster than he, and remain under water far longer, so that she had taken to ranging further and further out into the ocean and returning a bit later than he. Moreover, there was a glint of excitement in her eye and in her posture.

“You’ve found something, lass?”

“Aye Bart, I have, or rather, *it* has found *me*. At the limit of my search this morning, I saw a sea elf swimming towards me, mounted on a large dolphin. He spoke to me in some underwater language, all whistles and hums, but when I indicated I didn’t understand, we surfaced and spoke in Common. We’ve found them, Bart! This woman, Melindara, who sent me the scroll, is of their tribe! He even asked me if I was ‘the Blackpearl,’ and told me that they have been looking for me for over a moon!

“When I told him that I had a companion, we agreed that he and an escort will meet us here this afternoon and lead us to his people’s home islands! Oh Bart, we must take care! She and her friends are acting without their leaders’ permission, and they can be executed if they are discovered!”

Bart nodded. “Yes, lass, the scroll she sent made that clear. Are you sure that this is safe for us to do, both for ourselves and for them?”

“Bart, we have little choice. We must help them, and at the same time help ourselves and our friends. We must discover what this danger is that is facing us all, and do what we can to eliminate it.”

“Then I shall pray to the Tree for guidance and protection, Captain, and I suggest that you do the same.”

Within an hour, four sea elves riding dolphins and carrying long trident spears popped up through the water with a large, showy display, bracketing the skiff. There were three men and one woman, and none of them seemed to be wearing more than a small loincloth and decorative necklaces and bracelets. The female approached the boat.

“Land-dwellers, you are to come with us. The princess awaits.”

Bart and Rodin Rae looked at each other in surprise. There had been nothing in the scroll from Melindara to indicate that she was of noble birth. With a shrug, they agreed to go with their escorts. Lines were quickly attached to the forward thwarts on the skiff and looped around two of the dolphins. With their riders swimming alongside, they began pulling the craft along the surface of the ocean, and before long it was moving faster than it ever had under its sails. After about three hours, they stopped briefly while the pulling dolphins were unhitched and exchanged with the other pair.

Long after sundown they continued to move through the waters, until Bart could hear, off in the distance, the faint roar of surf hitting a beach. He looked at his companion questioningly.

“Yes, I hear it, Bart. Land.”

Before long, the boat came to a halt, and one of the male sea elves indicated that they would have to swim ashore from where they were. Both Bart and Rodin Rae easily made shore, and the woman and one of the men joined them.

“This way,” the woman said curtly, and started off through the brush. The man took up the rear.

They made their way down a small path through the underbrush and shortly came to a clearing. It was covered with clean sand and surrounded by palm trees. Waiting at a small fire were another female sea elf and two elderly males. The men stood as they approached, but the woman remained seated. In the firelight, Bartholomew could see that both men wore some kind of pectoral device, held to their bare chests with straps. It was a design both familiar and strange; a palm tree in a circle. With a start, Bart realized that these two were Druids; not of his order and training, but Brethren just the same. The greeting they gave him, virtually identical to the sign of blessing he used, was the proof.

“Well met, Brother,” said one. “We greet you in the Fellowship of the Tree, and make you welcome to our Grove. Come, we have much to discuss, while the Lady you brought speaks with the Lady who summoned her. And, of course, you will want to pray...”

As Bartholomew started to go off with the two sea elf Druids, Rodin Rae made as if to call him back.

“There is no need, sister.” The sea elf woman’s voice was low but melodious. “He is safe, as are you. We mean you no harm; rather, we seek your help, as I have stated.”

“You are the one who wrote the scroll? I have so many questions...”

“Yes, sister, I am sure you do. But please, sit here with me, and refresh yourself.” She held out a bowl filled with tropical fruits, and Rodin Rae helped herself.

“I- I don’t know where to begin,” Rodin Rae said. “Your scroll calls me ‘sister,’ but as far as I know I only have a little sea elf blood in me... And there is this danger you spoke of. Does it have anything to do with the ships we have lost? And what can I do about it? And just who are you, and why are you in danger from speaking with us?”

“Patience, sister.” The sea elf smiled softly. “One thing at a time. I will give you what answers I can, but I must first talk of our plight.

“I am daughter to she who rules our clan. The youngest of three, I have no power and no voice in the decisions made by our rulers, since it is thought that I stand little or no chance of leading our people. I, therefore, was not watched as closely as my older sisters were, and I was able to range far and wide through the seas. I have met and befriended many land-dwellers, and learned that even the humans are not all evil in their ways.

“Then came the Great Shaking, six moons ago, when all was made new and yet still remained old. New chasms opened in the depths, and currents flowed in new directions. And from out of the depths came a creature of ancient legend and nightmare, which has laid waste to our home seas and your vessels alike.

“We could not swim against this monster alone, but all our efforts to reach our brothers and sisters of the Eastron Reefs have been in vain. I asked the council and my mother to seek aid among the surface dwellers, but they refused – so set in their ways, like a clam embedded in the coral, that they would rather perish than chance contact with those such as your companion.

“My only hope for help lay with our Ocean Priests. They are of the same faith as your human friend, although they swim with different strokes, and they told me of you. And so I reached out, sending scrolls of message with the few sailors I had come to trust, and prayed that they would find you. As you see, my prayers have been answered.”

Rodin Rae sat for a moment in thought. “Well, I’m sure you think your prayers have been answered, but I am only a ship’s captain, and one without a crew at that. What makes you think I can help?”

“You really don’t know, do you, Blackpearl? There is more in the sea’s depth than the surface would suggest, eh?” The sea elf looked at Rodin Rae archly. She in turn shifted uncomfortably in her seat. “Besides,” she continued, “you have friends who command great powers. If you cannot help, my people are doomed.”

“Uh, yes,” Rodin Rae responded, “well... perhaps. But you still haven’t told me just what it is that you face.”

“In the morning, my sister. I will take you then to see for yourself. But for now, I ask that you follow me. There is a hot spring where you can bathe, for I know that you of the surface value that, and then a safe place to sleep for the night. Your companion will pass the night with our Druids, and together in the morning you will see.”

It was as she said. Melindara led Rodin Rae to a secluded pool where the water was slightly warmer than body temperature. After a relaxing bath, she was given a warm robe and led to a cave where a pallet over cut brush made a fair bed. Rodin Rae quickly fell asleep, and did not wake until dawn.

Brother Bartholomew joined her at breakfast, and he was uncommunicative about his night. She assumed that what had transpired was one of those “Druidic Mysteries” he had mentioned from time to time, and so forbore to ask any questions. As they were finishing up, the sea elf princess appeared again, greeting them gravely.

“My friends, if you are ready, we will show you the menace before us. Be warned; we are swimming in dangerous waters, so follow our lead exactly.”

She led them to the shore, where they all dove under the waves and swam out into the ocean. Three of the other sea elves were waiting there sitting upon dolphins, with extras for Melindara, Bart, and Rodin Rae. The two land-dwellers were shown how to “ride” their mounts, and told to remain in the middle of the group, for safety. Then they all set off for the open sea.

After a good hour’s swim, the group suddenly dove deep. Bart, caught by surprise, had a bit of difficulty holding on to his dolphin, but he saw that Rodin Rae managed the maneuver easily. He shook his head. One more reason to think there was some truth to the sea princess’ claim.

Deeper and deeper they went. Although the trusted magic necklace kept him comfortable, Bart was all too aware of the hundreds of feet of ocean over them, and the weight of its waters pressed on his mind if not his body. Soon they came to an old, dead coral reef, and the dolphins swam between and under them as if to hide. The elf in the lead held up his hand and they all stopped. He turned to Bart and Rodin Rae and mimed to them for silence. Then he indicated that they should look off to the right, where the sea floor continued to slope downward into the depths.

At first Bart saw nothing. Black waters was all. But slowly, as his senses adjusted, he felt a stirring of the waters rising from far below. It was cold and somehow menacing. And then he saw it. A huge shape, far larger than anything he had seen before, looming up out of the deeps. As it neared, it continued to grow, until he could scarcely comprehend how large it was. It was as if a mountain of flesh was rising up from the deep ocean floor. Its long tentacles, each as thick as the trunk of a large tree, were writhing in front of it. As it passed, Bart could see an eye, larger than his head, darting around. It radiated a cold intelligence and implacable evil. And then it passed.

Bart shivered as he watched it swim away through the waters. He looked over at Rodin Rae, and saw the look of despair on her face that mirrored his own. She, too knew the menace they faced; a creature out of ancient legend. A monstrous fiend to be reckoned with. Kraken.

“This is ridiculous!” Rodin Rae slammed her hand on the table, anger and frustration coloring her face. “We have been sailing in circles for nearly two hours now. Can’t anybody come up with a workable plan?”

Her companions around the table looked at her with differing emotions. Jomton, the aged shipwright, looked amazed, his almost-toothless mouth agape. Cygnus, the Blue Star Mage, smiled a small smile into his beard and, as usual, appeared totally calm. Skye the fairy, his consort, looked at her Clan sister with worry writ large on her expressive face. Willow, an elf gypsy, looked sympathetic, while Bartholomew the Druid just sighed with impatience.

True, they had all gathered at Jomton’s shipyard to finalize their plans about dealing with the giant Kraken that had been terrorizing the waters off Toolibrie city for six moons now, but despite all their collective knowledge and various abilities, no one seemed to have a workable idea. And, due in large part to the chaos and confusion caused by the great Cataclysm, they were the only Stoneholders of Faló, the Clan of the Heart, able and willing to deal with this problem.

“Captain, Captain,” said Bart soothingly, hoping his private name for her would calm her a bit, “we all share your impatience..”

“Bart, you don’t get it,” she said sharply. “I’m losing time, I’m losing money, I simply *must* get back to Sheldon, and these people are depending on me to help them with the Kraken first.” She referred, of course, to the newly discovered tribe of sea elves that claimed blood kinship with the diminutive elvin seafarer. “And nobody can come up with a workable idea!” Her face was a picture of frustration.

Bart rose from the table and went to the sideboard to refresh his cup of tea. “Well, Captain, just what do you propose we do?”

“Oh, I don’t know!” she almost wailed. “Next, I suppose someone will suggest something as preposterous as just going up to the Kraken and politely asking it to leave!”

Bart felt a tingle go down his spine. An idea was taking seed in his mind. Turning, he replied, “You know, my dear Captain, that might not be such a wild idea after all.”

Returning to his seat, he began to lay out his thoughts to his friends and companions. As he spoke, they all seemed to pick up on his ideas and, strangely, each seemed to have significant contributions to make, both to the plan and its execution. Their tiredness and frustration gone, the newly invigorated group stayed at the table late into the night, refining their plans.

It was not until the sky was streaked with dawn-light that old Jomton sprang the next problem that seemed to put an end to their plans: the elvin ship was not yet ready.

“What now?” Rodin Rae’s face was livid. “Jommie, there’s been one delay after another! I *need* that ship, and I need it *now*!”

The shipwright’s face was full of rueful honesty. “Oi’m sorry, Milady, but Oi canna’ deliver her t’ye joost yet. Seems that she’s far nimbler and fleeter than we ivver dreamt, an’ she needs a new suit o’ sails. The ones we planned fer ‘er be just too small, an’ she won’t gi’ ye the speed and response t’ the rudder ye want wi’oot them. Aye, tha’s some strange wood ye gave me t’ work with; sweet an’ foine, but strange ne’th’less.”

Rodin Rae glanced around the table before responding. All the Stoneholders of Falo knew that the wood was donated by Angelica, Queen of the Ravenhilt fairies, who was also a Clan sister. It came from the trees of Dryads killed by the Cataclysm, and was therefore magically augmented, but Jomton was not party to that knowledge. Visibly reining in her temper, she turned to him.

“Well then, Master Shipwright, what do you suggest?”

“As it ‘appens,” he said with a smile, “Oi have a ship fer ye ter use. It’s a two-master cog, left for careenin’ by me old mate Teredon before the Great Changes, but he ain’t been seen since, so’s I figger it’s moine ter use as Oi sees fit. She’s a bit slow, but responsive ter the helm, an’ she needs but a crew of twelve or so, an’ she’s ready ter sail, once she’s loaded an’ crewed. Oi’ve renamed her the *Molly Barlow*, an we kin go look a’her now, if ye loike.”

“You didn’t!” Bart exploded. “The ‘*Molly Barlow*?’” The rest of the group looked at him with amazement. “Jommy, that’s probably the worst song ‘Pinky Curl’ ever wrote! Why did you have to pick *that* name?”

“Oh Cap’n, it ain’t sech a bad song. Oi kinda loike it.” Try as he might, Bart could never get his old crewman to stop calling him “Captain,” even though it had been forty years since they sailed together. And “Pinky Curl” had been his ship’s cook, who fancied himself a Bard, and had written some of the most abominable songs Bart had ever heard after the crew went their separate ways. And of them all, “Molly Barlow” stood near the bottom of the list.

“Well, old friend, it’s your ship and if you must, you must. I’ll learn to live with it.”

The *Molly Barlow* proved to be quite seaworthy, and Bart set himself to the task of provisioning it, using his contacts in the shipping industry in Toolibrie. Rodin Rae and Jomton took on the task of hiring a crew, which was not so easy. While there were many unemployed seamen gracing the docks of that port city, most were afraid to sail out during that time when one out of every four ships leaving the harbor were never heard from again. Others had a reputation for being untrustworthy or were too unsavory for Rodin Rae’s liking. Skye and Willow spent most of the time swimming the waters in and around Toolibrie, familiarizing themselves with the currents and reefs that protected the harbor, while Cygnus secluded himself with studying a series of tomes that he somehow kept in pockets in his garments. In all, it took a good week before they were ready to sail, but sail they did, on a sunny morning about an hour before dawn.

The first two days' sail were uneventful. Captain Rodin Rae used the time to begin molding her crew into a working team. Willow and Skye, by far the most at home in the waters of the Clankin present, ranged out through the sea, looking for signs of the Kraken. Bartholomew and Cygnus spent much time discussing and refining their plans, and the rest in arcane discussions of Magicks and their applications. While their disciplines were quite different, there were, nevertheless, many points of similarity in their applications. Bart also told his companion of what he had learned from his meeting with Quinnareas, Willow's Triton father, just off the coast of Toolibrie after that worthy's visit to Falo at the March Gather.

And then they waited.

The third day brought the storm Bart's *Weather Sense* spell had predicted. They'd had ample time to prepare, and the ship, its passengers and crew showed their mutual seaworthiness by coming through with little or no damage. But now came the time they were both anticipating and dreading: according to their best guesses, the Kraken would be surfacing after such a storm, looking for an easy meal.

And so it was that at mid morning, Willow broached the waters near the *Molly Barlow* in a leap worthy of a dolphin and landed on the deck, water streaming from her long red hair. "Eet ees comink!" she cried, her gypsy accent strong in her excitement. "I haff seen eet! De monster ees very close!"

Skye, too, popped up from the waters, her wings giving her a different approach to the ship. "Ooh, it's here! I hope this will work!"

"We'll all do our parts, m'love," Cygnus replied with a twinkle in his eye, "and trust in that to do the trick. It *should* work."

"Aye, brother," muttered Bart, "if the Lord and Lady favor us this day. All of us to our places!" he cried, "Captain, tend to your ship!"

Rodin Rae had already signaled the bo'sun to pipe "all hands on deck," and the small crew was rushing to their emergency stations. Feeling somewhat like an orchestra conductor, Bart turned to the Gypsy Elf and the Water Fairy. "Willow, Skye, you both know what you have to do. Go to it, my sisters, and may the Tree guard us all!"

The Druid drew a deep breath and began intoning a prayer which was also an incantation. He seemed to somehow grow taller and more dignified, and his hair began to rise off his head, as if filled with static electricity. With a few arcane words, he *activated* a holy *working*, using the abilities granted him by his deities, Mother Earth and Father Sky, over things of nature. A *shiver* ran through the hull of the ship, and although it still looked the same, its very being changed. The Druids called this working *IronWood*, and it strengthened any wooden item to the hardness of steel armor. Bartholomew immediately began a second spell.

At the same time, Cygnus, the Mage of the Blue Star, was speaking his own *words of power* and moving his hands in strange ways. He too, for those sensitive to it, became surrounded with magickal auras, and a feeling of great energies held in check. And in the sky aft of the *Molly Barlow*, clouds began to gather....

And at the same time, Willow dashed down the hatchway to their cabins, emerging a moment later with a small waterproof container in her hands. Without pause, she dove over the railing, cutting the water smoothly without a splash. Out of the corner of his eye, Bart saw her legs change color, and he knew that she was undergoing the change that proved her Triton ancestry; her legs were becoming scaly and her toes webbed, allowing her to swim with and as the dolphins. She rose halfway out of the water, balancing on her moving legs, and began throwing handfuls of a yellowish powder from the container all over the ship. Wherever it touched it clung to the hull and seemed to absorb water from the sea. It glistened in the air, and spread out over the hull, even clinging below the waterline. Within two minutes, she had coated the entire ship with the sticky, shiny coating.

Skye's Reflection on the Water was nowhere to be seen. She had flown off the deck and seemed to melt into the ocean water as she touched it. As a water fairy, she could blend with and, to a great extent, control any body of water. True, the Westron Sea in its entirety was beyond her capabilities, but *sections* of it would

respond to her commands. Bart was sure she knew what to do, since they had discussed and even rehearsed their parts several times.

And again they waited....

Suddenly the waters half a league in front of the ship exploded upward! Huge tentacles, each as thick and as long as a tree trunk reached up and up from the water. They seemed to go on forever, reaching up toward the sky, before falling over towards the *Molly Barlow*, bringing the massive body of the sea monster to the surface. The Kraken had arrived!

It swam towards the ship with an incredible speed, looming ever larger as it neared. When he judged it to be just beyond its reach of the ship, Bart nodded to Cygnus, and the mage and the Druid spoke the last words to complete their second incantations.

With a huge explosion of sound, a booming as if of thunder, a hundred-foot tall representation of Cygnus sprang into existence just in front of the ship. At the same moment, the Kraken unexpectedly slowed its approach to a complete stop. Skye's spell to thicken the waters had worked, and the Kraken was trying to move through water the consistency of thick mud.

Bartholomew, using the spell of *Speaking With Sea Life* that he had learned from the Sea Elf Druids months earlier, when he and Rodin Rae had journeyed out in response to their plea for help, insinuated his thoughts into the Kraken's mind as words it could understand. According to Quinnareas, these creatures were just intelligent enough to have a simple language, but since it involved changing color patterns on their bodies, it was easier to communicate mind-to-mind.

***STOP!*** Bart projected to the monster. ***I AM GARLOCK, MASTER OF THESE WATERS. WHO ARE YOU AND WHY DO YOU ATTACK MY SERVANTS?***

The Kraken raised its rear out of the water and turned slowly, to allow one of its huge eyes to take in the apparition before it. ***Master of these waters? I am master of all where I swim!*** the Kraken responded. ***And I think I eat you for my next meal!***

As fast as a snake striking, one of its two longer tentacles lashed through the air for the giant figure apparently standing on the waves in front of it. But, equally fast, a bolt of magic lightning sizzled down from the overhead clouds, slicing off the tip of the arm and cauterizing the cut at the same time.

Bart winced as the Kraken's mental shout of pain echoed through his head. ***BE WARNED, CREATURE OF THE DEEPS. I DO NOT THREATEN IDLY! I ASK YOU YET AGAIN: WHO ARE YOU AND WHY ARE YOU HERE?***

The Kraken's painful recoil from the lightening bolt had been a sideward move, which put it out of the direct line of the giant and a bit closer to the ship. Bart could feel the waves of hatred and pain in its thoughts, but without a response the Kraken lashed out at the ship.

Once again, it recoiled in pain with a mental roar of anguish. Willow had coated the ship with a concentrated essence of jellyfish poison, a gift from her father and the Triton nation. The Kraken's tentacles coiled and uncoiled in pain as the creature lay there, almost completely stuck in the solidified water.

***THAT IS YOUR SECOND WARNING, CREATURE, AND YOUR LAST. IF YOU TRY TO HARM ME OR MINE AGAIN, I WILL KILL YOU. NOW STOP AND SPEAK, AND PERHAPS YOU CAN GET OUT OF THIS WITH YOUR LIFE.*** The giant figure, aping Cygnus' shape and look, folded its arms and looked sternly at the Kraken. Cygnus was quickly following the words he heard Brother Bart speak in a low voice, which were being projected into the Kraken's mind.

The Kraken lay there in the water. ***What do you want of me? I came here after the Great Wave destroyed my home. The cliffs fell, and my places in the deep were not good any more. There was no food. The whales and the fish and the little cousins did not come there any more.***

*I UNDERSTAND, Bart replied, THE GREAT WAVE DID DAMAGE HERE TOO. BUT YOU WERE FOOLISH TO COME HERE WITHOUT KNOWING THE WAYS OF THIS PART OF THE WATERS, ESPECIALLY OF ITS MASTERS.*

The Kraken, although still sullen, seemed curious. Bart continued, *BEFORE YOU CAME UP HERE, DID YOU KNOW THAT THE WATER ENDED AND THERE WAS A BIG BUBBLE OF AIR ON TOP OF IT? OF COURSE NOT! DID YOU KNOW THAT WATER COULD FALL FROM HIGH IN THE AIR AND LAND IN THE SEA, THE SAME WAY FOOD FALLS FROM ON HIGH WHEN YOU ARE IN THE DEEP? NO AGAIN. AND DID YOU KNOW THAT THERE WERE CREATURES THAT BREATHED THE AIR, AND THAT I WAS THEIR MASTER? NO AND NO AND NO AGAIN! I SAY IT ONCE MORE; YOU WERE FOOLISH TO TRY TO MAKE YOUR HOME HERE ON HIGH, WITHOUT KNOWING ALL THERE IS TO KNOW OF ITS DANGERS.*

*BUT I WILL BE MERCIFUL. I HAVE MY OWN THINGS TO DO HERE, AND I DO NOT NEED A BATTLE WITH YOU. IF WE FIGHT I WILL KILL YOU, BUT IT WILL WEAKEN ME FOR A WHILE, AND LEAVE ME LESS ABLE TO DEAL WITH MY REAL ENEMIES. INSTEAD, I TELL YOU TO GO BACK TO THE DEPTHS WHERE YOU WILL BE MASTER AGAIN. MY SERVANT, THE SMALL ONE WITH THE LOWER HALF LIKE A FISH AND STREAMERS THE COLOR OF CORAL AT HER HEAD WILL SHOW YOU THE WAY TO A DEEP THAT IS GOOD HUNTING, WHERE YOU CAN BATTLE MY WHALES AS LONG AS YOU LIKE.*

It took several hours to finally convince the creature of the deeps that it was better off returning from whence it came. It tried to attack several times, but Cygnus' magic bolts sizzled, Willow's jellyfish poison stung, Skye's water control frustrated its movements, Bart's spell on the ship kept it from being crushed, and Rodin Rae and her crew worked wonders to keep the small vessel from being swamped or capsized. Eventually the Kraken, exhausted, indicated its agreement. Cygnus made his phantasm nod and smile and waved his hand. Willow dove overboard and waved to the Kraken. As she began to swim away, Skye thinned the waters holding the Kraken, and it began to follow the Triton/Elf.

“Tell Skye to stay with them, to guard against treachery, old friend,” Bart whispered to the Mage, “and have her stay in contact with you so that we can know what happens. The Kraken has, I think, seen the wisdom of my words, but I still don’t trust it completely.”

Cygnus nodded his agreement, and together the two men watched the creature swim away and begin to submerge into the depths.

By evening it was over. Willow and Skye had returned to the *Molly Barlow* unharmed, and Rodin Rae had turned them back towards Toolibrie. With the favorable winds and tides, they should make landfall within a day. The friends and Clankin were relaxing over the remains of a good meal in the ship’s mess.

They all agreed; it could have gone a lot worse.

“But there’s one thing I don’t understand, Bart,” Rodin Rae said. “Why did you insist that Cygnus call himself ‘Garlock?’ The Kraken didn’t know who we were, and any name would do.”

“Not quite, my dear Captain. This was special. You know I’ve always been quite fond of hot fried squid in ‘garlock’ sauce...hey! Quit throwing those rolls at me! What’d I do? Stop it...!”