

*Volume XIX, No. i – Spring 2005*  
*Sorcery at Sea*  
*By Keper Shipwright*

The ship's Captain muttered under her breath, starring up at the rigging. Neither sheet nor rope so much as fluttered. Her entire crew was assembled on deck, standing at attention as she paced the quarterdeck.

*This is impossible* she thought, and would have thrown up her hands in outrage, had she not been standing in front of her officers. Instead, she addressed them in a barely controlled voice, her hands folded artfully behind her back, "We are in the middle of the Northern Sea in *March*, when the trade winds blow the best, Master Grumrold, tell me *how can this be!*"

Grumrold, Senior Officer and Master of the Forecastle, looked straight ahead, out to the deadened sea. They had been over this at least five times in the past quarter of an hour, "Captain D'Cordelia, ma'am, I have no idea."

The same answer he had given before; the same answer every single one of her shipmates had given her before: they had no idea.

*Sorcery*, came a whisper from one of her Lieutenant's.

"Did I hear a theory, Lieutenant Caraway?"

The youngest, and newly appointed Lieutenant, carefully cleared his throat, as if to speak. A heavy foot landed on his, courtesy of his seasoned compatriot Darrow, silencing him. Captain D'Cordelia strode up to the two boys, both easily six or more inches taller than the she-elf, "Did you have something to tell me, Lieutenant?" Her eyes darted from Caraway to Darrow. Neither one replied. Her eyes narrowed on Caraway; he shifted uneasily from one foot to the other – once, then stood still, starring straight ahead.

Rodin Rae D'Cordelia turned on one foot, back up to the front of the line of gathered seamen, "Master Grumrold, furl these useless sails, then drop the boats. The *Darkmyst* will make it to port Morgandy on E'Atarra if I have to row the damn thing myself!"

"Aye, Aye, Captain!" Grumrold saluted her, then passed the order down.

"Caraway, in my cabin after the dinner bell. I want a full report," she added, as her men saluted her in unison and made to carry out her wish. Instantly, the ship was alive with men running to their tasks, some aloft to furl the sails, others preparing to drop the boats, man them, and begin dragging the becalmed *Darkmyst* toward its destination.

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Rodin Rae Duana Cordelia, Captain of the *Darkmyst*, was frustrated. She sipped her mulled wine, studying the charts before her as the evening wore on. Something gnawed at her; an uneasy thought that she worried but could not put her finger on, like a loose tooth in her mind.

The *Darkmyst* was loaded with cargo, a king's ransom in alum, recently pulled from the new-found mine in the North. As valuable as salt, alum was used in tanning, dyeing fabric, book-binding, and medicine. It was even used to purify water, which for a ship on a long sea-voyage, was invaluable. It was imperative that the *Darkmyst* make Morgandy before her competitors knew of her return. The powerful L'Dici family, sole controllers of E'Atara's alum trade, would not be happy to find a new proprietress spoiling their monopoly. Rodin Rae had hoped to make it quickly back to port and off-load the goods before word of her cargo reached the L'Dici. Her clansmen had already agreed to help her disseminate the alum; some would hide it, like Rinka Tur, others would transport it to their homeland and sell it there to the refineries, where the L'Dici family held no power.

*But not if we don't make it home*, she thought, shivering. *Sorcery indeed*, her mind echoed the reckless words spoken by Caraway on deck. She was contemplating the charts again when his knock, a tentative *rap-rap*, came at her door.

"Enter," she called, sipping her wine.

"Ma'am," Caraway entered, and stood at attention.

"At ease, man," she offered him a seat. The new Lieutenant saluted and graciously sat down. Rodin Rae smiled inwardly at his uneasy formality; he was young, no more than twenty or so in human years, and this was his first commission. Despite his youth, the Captain thought, this Caraway, *James* she recalled was his name, would go far. That is, if he kept his head about him for the next decade or so.

"Your report?" She prompted him.

"Ahem, yes," he cleared his throat, barely able to look at her. He was nervous, in part she assumed because he was young and uncertain of himself. He gave his report concisely, with little flourish, which the Captain appreciated. Everything was as it should be; that is, except for the odd fact that there was no wind and almost no current to bear them home.

Rodin Rae made as if to return to her charts but she did not dismiss the Lieutenant. He continued to stand at attention until she turned back to him, "You have a theory on our current situation?"

"No, ma'am," he answered quickly, looking down at his feet.

"But surely I heard you on deck, Lieutenant?" She caught his eye and he could not help but return her gaze, neither confirming nor denying her statement.

"I am an elf, James," she said, matter-of-factly, dropping her voice, "You could whisper into the North wind from the forecastle and I would hear you in the nest." He blushed visibly, and broke her gaze. She quickly changed her tone, "You must never be afraid to speak the truth to me, as I will learn it one way or another."

"Yes, ma'am," he answered, unsure if he should feel more comfortable or less. "I do have a theory," he said, waiting for her to raise a brow and motion him on before continuing, "I believe that this dead calm is the working of a fell force, some sort of sorcery. The sailors say the ship is enchanted, not that I believe them, begging your pardon, ma'am." He shifted uneasily, as she was discovering was his nervous habit.

She considered for a moment telling him the secret of the *Darkmyst*, then decided against it. In time, he would learn about its unique characteristics. Instead she said, "I appreciate your honesty, Caraway. Do you have anything to back this ... theory?"

As she suspected, he shook his head from side to side. Rodin Rae sighed inwardly. It would have been a boon if he was a budding Adept, or in some way had a skill for prescience. Just rumor, however, would get them nowhere.

"Without facts, Caraway," she said, "your theory does little to aide our predicament. I would suggest, therefore, that at the present time you keep your concerns to yourself. Uneasiness in the officers unsettles the crew. I need them focused on the task at hand, not otherwise engaged in wild speculation. Dismissed."

"Good night, ma'am," he saluted her, leaving her alone again with her charts and her thoughts.

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Rodin Rae awoke from her sleep in a start. Though barely awake, her senses were alert; it was late in the night, the ship was almost stationary, and there had been a noise. Her heart was racing, an annoying vestige of a now fleeting dream. Something important was just out of reach in her mind. *A noise*, she thought. What had she heard? She searched her mind, trying to capture the wisps of the dream. She could remember only that something had fallen on the floor. *My charts*, she thought, calming herself as she reluctantly let the dream go. She slid out of bed, glancing at the cabinet where her precious, invaluable sea charts were kept. The cabinet was locked, as she had left it. Out of habit, she armed herself with her most beloved

dagger, threw her cloak around her shoulders, and went above to the main deck.

Grumrold was on watch, and he saluted her when he noticed her suddenly before him. He had long ago acclimated to the Captain's stealth and it no longer surprised him when she seemed to appear out of the darkness.

"All's quiet, ma'am," he said.

"I thought I heard something," she answered, "It woke me."

"Night's quiet," he repeated, as if to reassure her, "Clear, except for a few low clouds over our port side." He gestured in the direction.

"Hmm," she answered distractedly, glancing to where he had indicated. "Odd," she said, half to herself.

"The stillness?" he queried.

"My dream," she said, but did not extrapolate. Though she had sailed a long time with Grumrold, Rodin Rae did not feel an easy companionship with the man. Theirs was a strictly professional relationship, she the Captain, he the obedient officer. She felt that he, in some ways, resented her authority. Perhaps he longed for a ship of his own to Captain. Perhaps he was jealous of the skills she possessed as an elf that he himself did not and could not as a human. It was impossible to know. A heaviness then fell over Rodin Rae; she longed to be back with her Clan, and to see Dranoel, who was now Captaining the *Emerald Lady* in Rodin Rae's absence. Now there was an officer whose mind was open to her. She knew she could trust Dranoel with her own deep thoughts, as well as feel secure putting her life in his. She sighed, a barely audible breath, but Grumrold heard it and turned to her, "The calm is disturbing to many a man's sleep," he said, "I heard some of the deckhands complaining of it."

"Oh?" She looked at him, raising a brow.

"Nothing serious, ma'am, but the crew is brooding. They're anxious to make it home safe; got a mind to spend the money they haven't yet earned."

Rodin Rae had calculated her profits at least half a dozen times since they left the alum mine. But they would have to make port before any profit could be realized, and the crew would not get paid their share until they off-loaded the cargo, as was the terms of their contract. She sighed again, and looked out to the deadened sea, "The sentiment is mutual," she answered.

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The dawn broke quietly over the still calm sea, the morning sun rising weakly, as if it had spent a lazy night beneath the depths. Rodin Rae had not gone back to bed after her talk with Grumrold, but rather

had spent her time on the ropes, checking the handy-work of her crew. They might have run aground, the *Darkmyst* lay so still in that unmoving ocean. In the east, low on the horizon, glowed *Leta*, Queen of the Sea, defender of sailors, and the brightest star in the sky, day or night. *Leta* positively burned, as if to compete with the dawn, then allowed herself to fade against the morning rays. A queer sensation, similar to being on land, passed over the sea-elf Captain as the sun rose. *Still as glass*, Rodin Rae thought, gazing down at the dark depths far below her. She began her descent to the main deck. During the night she had contemplated what their options might be if the winds had not picked up by daybreak. None of them pleased her. She supposed they would spend another day towing the *Darkmyst*.

She gave that order to Darrow, the Senior Officer on deck, and returned to her cabin. Barely had she shut the door when the alarm bell began its loud peal. She swore under her breath, grabbed a dagger for her boot, one for her bodice, and her cutlass, and bounded back up on deck.

"Darrow?"

"We've raised a ship, Captain!" He pointed out off their port side, toward where the clouds had been gathering last night. There on the horizon, in the mists, glinted the rigging of a ship.

Rodin Rae groaned, and made the sign that sailors make to ask *Leta* for protection. "Can you tell if it is friend or foe?" she asked, squinting into the morning light.

"Not clear, she's still in the mists," Darrow replied, peering again through his glass. "I almost didn't see her, cloaked as she was. But the sun sold her out." Others were running on deck now, her officers gathered around her, the crew prepared to carry out whatever orders their Captain declared.

Darrow, still looking through his glass, exclaimed, "I've got her! She is curiously rigged, both fore and aft. Two main masts."

Rodin Rae cursed under her breath.

"A *corvette*," Rodin Rae and Darrow said in unison, the Captain seeing, without having to see, what lay ahead. "Modified not only for speed but for war. Can you see her colors?" the Captain asked, beginning to pace.

"No..." Darrow responded, then slowly, "Yes." He dropped the glass from his eye and looked at her dead-on. He mouthed the word to her, but she knew instinctively before he said it just what to expect.

*Pirates.*

Rodin Rae nodded, "Good job, Darrow. Stay here and keep an eye on her. Let me know if she comes so much as a hair closer. And try to figure out how, since our sheets haven't moved in three days!"

"Aye, aye!" he saluted her, and took to his post again. Rodin Rae spun to her other officers. "Grumrold," she said, "we must prepare for an attack. Get half the men below-board, arm them. They do not come up until I raise the alarm. You know the drill. I want two score archers on the port side, in form. Send two men to the nest to call maneuvers to us, have the men prepare pitch, and see if you can't find some way to fortify the hold."

"Aye, aye!" Grumrold saluted her and bolted to his tasks as she spun to Caraway, "You," she said, "set up a brigade."

"Water?" he ventured, and she violently shook her head, cutting off any of his other questions with her tone, "With the pitch."

"But ..." he began, obviously confused.

"This ship has its own sorcery, Caraway, you need not fear the enemy's flaming arrows." She watched as his eyes grew wide, but he did not question her sanity, which was more than she could say for others who had once been in his place. "I want you to prepare our men to aide the archers, is that clear?" He nodded, forgetting the appropriate response, and headed off to do his share. She didn't bother reproaching him for his lack of respect, assuming this was his first time preparing for battle, but she made a mental note to remind him of his manners later. *If we get out of this*, she thought to herself. Then, keeping up with appearances, she cried, "TO ARMS MEN!" Captain D'Cordelia drew her cutlass as her crew cheered, and called, "LET OUR FRIENDS KNOW WE SALUTE THEM, OUR ENEMIES WE ARE PREPARED!"

The din from the crew grew to a fevered pitch, as they prepared their own weapons, ready for whatever the lurking ship in the mist had in store.

Rodin Rae hurried below deck, back to her cabin, to prepare a few things should her ship be taken. It was never a bad idea to be prepared for such unfortunate events. She grabbed the charts that were strewn on her table and quickly, but carefully, rolled them up. Then she went to the cabinet where she unlocked the other charts that were as valuable to her as the cargo she now carried. *More valuable*, she thought. Since the great Cataclysm had changed the land and seascape, accurate sailing charts were hard to find. She felt grateful for the ones she owned, having earned some of them and paid dearly for others. If the *Darkmyst* was taken, she would burn these, or toss them overboard in a weighted sack. As she gathered them up quickly in her arms, one fell from her grasp, a small medallion tied to it clanging on the floor. *Just like my dream*, she thought, and reached down to retrieve the chart. The seal was odd, old; it was one of her maps from before the Cataclysm. On a whim, she unrolled it. It was a chart of the sea in which she now found her ship becalmed and under

immanent attack. She quickly grabbed her dividers and plotted their current position, using one of the only things that was still common to both the old and the new seascape: Leta, the star that she had seen this morning.

"Leta's balls!" she exclaimed, as she looked between the old chart and the new, the meaning of her dream now clear to her: They were becalmed in the sea that had once, before the Cataclysm, held the Nor-atul archipelago; home of the *Gall-Gael*, the Sons of Death. She had once dumped her cargo to outrun them long ago. She cursed again, angry that she had not the capacity to read the meaning of her dream earlier, when it could have done her crew and her ship some good.

"Captain!" Caraway came bolting through her cabin door, hastily saluting her.

"Speak," she said, stuffing her charts into a sack.

"Darrow begs you to come above board, the ship is moving closer."

"Directly," she answered, making a last mental sweep of her cabin. "Here," she said, thrusting the sack toward him, "if I'm forced to surrender the ship ..."

"Never!" Caraway exclaimed, despite himself.

"... make sure they end up over the side," she finished, not waiting to see his salute before she bolted back above.

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"What do you have?" She asked Darrow, who was looking markedly paler than the last time they spoke.

"They're approaching, and fast. They mean to take us broadside. I'm afraid we're sitting duck."

"The men are prepared, Captain," Grumrold announced, slightly winded and flushed with the excitement of impending battle. Rodin Rae nodded, approving the configuration of archers on the port side, one line directly behind the other, the crew set in pairs to their right—one to dip the arrow in pitch, the other to light the one at the archer's ready. Her crew was armed, eager for the ships to engage. If the crew of the *Darkmyst* succeeded in taking the enemy ship, their compensation would be the contents of its hold. If the crew of the *Darkmyst* lost, there would be a painful journey down to Davie-Jones's Locker. It was better to accentuate the positive, so they cheered, eager to test their fate under the protection of their Goddess.

"Ma'am," Darrow continued, "I haven't figured out how they have wind to maneuver." Rodin Rae noticed he had drawn his sword.

"Sorcery, Darrow," she answered him, "Sorcery." She paused for a moment, feeling the calm before a battle settling in around her, her loyal crew, her beloved ship, the beauty of the morning, and the approaching enemy ship.

She called to her men, "HAVE HEART, MATES, DESTINY APPROACHES!" They cheered in unison. She could see the colors on the *Gall-Gael* corvette now, a silver wave on an ebony field, three stars below and two above. Rodin Rae starred in disbelief. *Could this be?* She shivered, instantly recognizing the familiar standard. The ship was approaching quickly, positioning itself to come parallel to the *Darkmyst* so that its sailors—pirates—could throw grapple lines and board her. It all seemed to be happening very slowly for her. The silver standard gleamed in the morning light.

*Delorian Grey de van Huesen*, she recalled, remembering how she had left him last: hog-tied to a bed with his ship's deed in her hand; payback for his insult upon her honor, she had claimed his ship for herself and renamed it the *Sea-Sylph*. That ship now lay charred at the bottom of the sea. No doubt de van Huesen had come to mete out his own vengeance.

"Grumrold," Rodin Rae cried, finally coming back to herself, "get our two best archers up in the ropes, quickly, elves, if you please. One of their crew must be a weather witch; find out whom."

"Will do," he replied.

The enemy ship was so close now that Rodin Rae could see the name, painted on the side, *Mithaglar*, the Grey Glory. *How appropriate*, she thought wryly, finally catching sight of her rival.

"Hail, Lady Bellock!" He called to her by the name with which he knew her. She thought he cut a fine sight, for an enemy: dressed in black, a fabric so fine that it seemed to catch the morning sun and hold it within its depths, like the sea itself; his silver mane of hair, now past his shoulders, fell around him in glory.

"de van Huesen," she called back, barely saluting him, as was customary under such conditions. They were not considered enemies until one of them fired upon the other. The *Mithaglar* inched closer to the *Darkmyst*.

"You seem to be in quite the spot!" He said, gesturing to her furled rigging, and insinuating his approaching ship. "Perhaps she's ridding too low in the water!"

She followed his thread, did he expect her to off-load her cargo to him in return for better weather?

"I thank you for your concern, but she's just fine! The men enjoy rowing," she said, rolling her eyes, "Exercise!" He snickered at her, his ship almost parallel to hers now.



"I do believe you owe me a ship's deed," he called, "Surrender the *Darkmyst* to me, and I will spare your life, and the lives of your officers." She could clearly make out his aquiline features, and the glint of his cold, angry eyes.

"And what of the lives of my men?" She yelled back.

"Surrender to *me*, and I will consider them," de van Huesen replied with a broad, sinister smile.

The two ships were now within easy range of each other, the *Gall-Gael* readying their ropes, the archers on the *Darkmyst* taut with anticipation.

"Tempting," Rodin Rae spat back, gripping the hilt of her cutlass tighter, "But you'll have to board me first, which, if I remember correctly, is precisely what you were attempting to do the last time you lost a ship to me!"

de van Huesen's eyes narrowed and Rodin Rae sensed they were now done with their conversation.

"Fire!" he yelled to his men.

"Archers, return fire!" Rodin Rae called. The air was suddenly filled with the acrid stench of burning debris. To the untrained eye, mayhem ensued. For Rodin Rae, the battle progressed much as battles often do, first one side having the upper hand, then the other. She saw her job, as Captain, to ensure that it ended when her men were up.

Rodin Rae watched in satisfaction as the frustration of the *Gall-Gael* grew, for none of their attempts to light the *Darkmyst* aflame singed a board. The sails had been furled, since there had been no wind to fill them, and the *Gall-Gael* were not remarkable archers, so most of the *Darkmyst's* rigging was safe from their vain attempts. Twice, she saw members of her crew stamping out small, smoldering flames in the ropes—those, like her sails, were not magical, and could burn quite well—but all in all, Rodin Rae thought de van Huesen figured out her ship's unique property rather quickly.

Almost instantly, he ordered the *Gall-Gael* to launch the grappling lines. Rodin Rae had a brief moment to doubt that de van Huesen had ever really wanted to burn the *Darkmyst*, and then they were besieged; the *Gall-Gael* flowing from the *Mithaglar* to the *Darkmyst* like an army of rats. What the *Gall-Gael* lacked in their skills as archers, they more than made up for in their skills as fighters. Brutal and unyielding, they were not simply marauders; they seemed to *enjoy* killing for its own sake.

Rodin Rae watched in horror as they gave no quarter to her men. Infuriated, she fought harder, trying to keep an eye on de van Huesen, but she lost sight of him in the melee.

The *Darkmyst's* archers had climbed the ropes, raining down arrows on the pirates. Rodin Rae's arm began to go numb, as she swung her cutlass over and over, realizing she was in the midst of the storm. Grumrold suddenly appeared beside her, then Caraway. Her two officers fought brilliantly beside her, though the battle was near the point where it looked like they might actually lose.

"To the alarm!" She motioned toward the quarterdeck where it hung, and the three of them began working their way there, knowing that they could easily turn the tide if the rest of the crew suddenly appeared above-board. In horror, she saw Grumrold go down, a blow to his head spraying both her and Caraway with blood, before she could lift her cutlass to protect him. Caraway whirled, lodging his dagger into the heart of the pirate standing over Grumrold's still body. They were a few steps from the rise to the quarterdeck. "Go!" Caraway yelled, meaning to hold off the pirates himself while she rang the alarm. She knew he wouldn't last long if she didn't hurry.

Rodin Rae flew up the stairs to the quarterdeck, a breath away from the alarm when de van Huesen cornered her, an absurd grin on his face. She stopped short, facing him.

"Well, Lady Bellock, we meet again! You're looking ravishing as always," he taunted her. She was covered in gore from head to toe.

"You may call me Captain Duana Cordelia." She was furious, and pointed her cutlass at him in challenge.

"Dark jewel, indeed," he laughed, as he translated her name from elven, crossing his sword with hers. "And you may address me as 'my Lord', as I have recently been landed. I'm Duke de van Huesen, now." She lunged at him and he parried effortlessly.

"You are out-manned and out-matched, do you surrender?" He artful swung his sword to the right, catching the tip of her cutlass and skillfully forced it from her grip. It made a dead-thud sound as it hit the planks of the quarterdeck. Rodin Rae quickly glanced down the length of her ship, where her crew was obviously fighting a losing battle. She saw her two young officers, Caraway and Darrow, still holding their own but looking overwhelmed. If they were to survive, she would have to make her move now.

"Yes," she said, withdrawing the knife from her boot and making as if to hand it to him in defeat. He eagerly reached for the handle she was presenting him, his eagle eyes sparkling; obviously, he had waited a long time for this. As he leaned forward, Rodin Rae suddenly jerked her wrist up and the knife went flying, crashing loudly into the alarm bell. de van Heusen's eyes narrowed, at first not comprehending her treachery. Then lucidity came as her reserved men came pouring up from the lower deck.

"It is you who are out-matched, de van Huesen. Again, I might add," she said. He was fuming with anger. "Do *you* surrender?" She asked slyly.

He screamed something inaudible and lunged at her. She tried to step aside, thinking that he meant to spear her with his sword, but instead he tossed it aside and reached for her hair, grabbing a handful of it and swinging her off balance onto the quarterdeck. Taken utterly by surprise, she fell with him, the wind knocked from her lungs. He pulled his fist back and clocked her square in the face before her own men grabbed him and pulled him off of her.

"Are you alright, Captain?" Caraway asked, appearing before her in a haze of watery white light. He looked a mess, one arm hanging at an odd angle, the other covered in blood.

"Are you?" She queried. He helped her to stand as she groaned loudly. de van Huesen had hit her pretty damn hard. She could feel her eye already swelling shut.

"Captain D'Cordelia," Darrow called, miraculously unscathed and looking ready to commit murder on his Captain's behalf. "The pirates have been subdued," he said, "What should we do with this ..." he spat on the quarterdeck, not knowing a curse terrible enough to call de van Huesen.

"Take him to the hold, and lock him there," she said, as Darrow saluted her and dragged her now subdued enemy away. "Someone find their weather-witch!" She cried, "Let's see if we can't get these sails un-furled and head for home!"

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But they could not find the *Gall-Gael* weather-witch, and so the *Darkmyst* remained becalmed, the *Mithaglar* with it. It was sunny, still as death, and late-afternoon when Rodin Rae could finally assess the damage to her ship and crew. She had ordered a full glass of rum for everyone and someone had miraculously thought to bring her a poultice of alum for her eye. She thought that was particularly amusing.

"Get these pirates off my deck, send them down below, where they belong," she ordered as she helped the men to heave the bodies of their enemies overboard. Then she went to her medic, who was tending the wounded.

"How many dead?" She asked.

"Fourteen," he said. "Three times that wounded. Two may not make it through the night." She nodded, feeling that they had gotten off easy. Had de van Huesen really meant to take her ship? Noticing her Senior Officer sitting off to the medic's right side, she saluted him.

Grumrold's right arm was in a sling and his head was wrapped in a bandage, blood already soaking the new dressing through.

"Grumrold."

"Captain," he made as if to rise, and she shooed him back down. He looked terrible, but she was grateful that he had survived.

"I want you to take possession of the *Mithaglar*. As soon as we get some wind, you will Captain it back to Morgandy," she said.

"Me, m'lady? But my arm ..." he looked confused, uncertain of her motive.

"Yes, you've earned it."

"But I failed you, I went down in battle ..." he looked at her with his brow creased, not understanding how he had come to deserve such an honor.

"You took a blow to the head today, yes. I took one to the eye," she reached her hand down to him, "But you have served me faithfully for more years now than I can remember. The commission of the *Mithaglar* is yours," she said, saluting him. He saluted her in return. She turned quickly on her heel and left him, before the tears in his eyes threatened to dishonor him.

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That night, after she said prayers over the bodies of their fallen comrades and committed their bodies to the sea, Rodin Rae gave her crew leave to celebrate by splitting the pirates' booty and imbibing in the rum they had earned. From the merriment she heard, she guessed the *Mithaglar* had been hauling quite a cache. She had ordered Darrow to find out from the captives how it was that there was still no wind, and had no doubt he would be able to vet out that information from them. She also posted a watch, feeling increasingly uneasy about their victory.

In her own cabin, she sipped her favorite mulled wine and planned a simple ceremony for tomorrow, when she would promote her two junior officers, and formally hand the *Mithaglar* over to Grumrold. Her head throbbed with pain from her eye and for a moment she considered visiting her captive, de van Huesen, to probe him for information. She loathed for him to see her with the shiner he had given her. *Let him rot down there*, she thought, and lay for a moment on her bed. She closed her one good eye and promptly fell asleep.

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Rodin Rae woke to the sound of gale winds and the violent, yet familiar, motion of her ship rocking. She tried to jump out of bed but the excruciating pain in her head forced her to do more of a slow roll out of it. She groaned, even as the *Darkmyst* echoed her own sound, and leapt forward. Above-board, the alarm bell began to peal.

"Leta's balls," she moaned, grabbing her cloak and cutlass, and ran as fast as she could onto the main deck. A storm was raging around them; the sea swells rocked them madly, the rain pelting down around them.

She hurried to where Caraway stood on watch.

"It just started, out of the blue, like," he yelled, practically screaming over the gale to be heard.

"Set the main sails!" She ordered, "With care! Lo—someone grab that!" A spar had swung loose and men were scrambling to get it under control. Around them, men were running, tying each other to lines, and scurrying up the ropes to set the sails. Though the weather was treacherous, the mood was joyful—they would finally be going home.

Rodin Rae looked out to where the *Mithaglar* was, her sails mimicking the motion of the *Darkmyst*. Rodin Rae was relieved, Grumrold must have been preparing his ship for the journey and been on board when the gale started.

All in all, things were starting to look up. "Set the course for South-southeast, two by four. Where is Darrow?"

"South-southeast! Two by four!" Caraway called, then answered his Captain's question, "Don't know, Ma'am, perhaps he was on the *Mithaglar* when the winds came."

Just then, Darrow came sprinting to the upper-deck, saluting his Captain, "We're missing a boat, ma'am. We're short handed, so I ran to check on the prisoner. He's gone."

*Damn!* She thought, of course he was. It suddenly made sense. "Come with me!" She ordered.

They headed below, first so that she could see the irons from which de van Huesen had escaped, then to her cabin. She noticed immediately that someone had broken into her cabinet.

"He tried to steal your charts? That bastard!" Darrow exclaimed.

"I knew it was too easy," she said. "Sorcery, indeed, Caraway. de Van Huesen was the *Mithaglar's* weather-witch, but that was not his only trick."

"He must be an Adept of some kind," Caraway mused, "To sneak in here under your nose." Darrow shot him a violent look.

"Yes," she conceded, and said a silent prayer that he hadn't killed her in her sleep. She collapsed into a chair, Darrow handing her a glass. She noticed it wasn't filled with wine, but rather with water.

"He obviously wasn't here to try and take the *Darkmyst*, but rather to make an inventory of her goods. He's most likely headed straight to the L'Dici family to report to them. I wonder how much they paid him."

"At least they didn't get these," Caraway said, pulling a rather large sack from beneath his cloak. He returned to the Captain the charts she had given to him in haste yesterday, before they were attacked.

"Good job, James!" Darrow exclaimed.

"Thank the Goddess!" Rodin Rae said. "Well, then," she concluded, returning her charts to their locked cabinet. "All's well. Caraway, double check our course for home, then meet us on deck. There's work to be done if we're to make it home by week's end!"

"Aye-aye, Captain!" Caraway said, saluting her, as they all returned to the duty at hand.

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*I saw those two ships sail into port Morgandy, two fine beauties, one dark, one grey. My old comrade Grumrold, he's proud as a peacock, Captaining that wizard's ship. I told him he ought to watch out, cause there ain't no way that wizard ain't coming back for his ship. And the good Captain D'Cordelia, well, she's not saying a word 'bout her black eye, makes up a different story every time. Her crew's got tighter lips than a clam, not one of 'em will tell me the truth. But I suspect it, I suspect it, I do. And I say we all need to take care, watch our backs for that wizard.*