



Oh Captain!



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For the past three moons, the Intrepid had been sailing across the seas. Leaning against the bulwark, Red was scanning the horizon, grumbling to himself: “Darned glowing jellyfish...”

In his right hand, suspended above the water, he was holding the bottle containing the mysterious message that started them on this adventure. Red was considering letting go of it, so it would sink into the abyss, much like anything he ever possessed.

“How goes it, Captain? Feeling homesick, are we?” Ulrich declared, tousling Red’s hair. He was his first mate and also acted as his bodyguard.

“What do you think? We have nothing left. My father trusted me and, while I try to rebuild my wealth after that debacle, this expedition seems to be leading us nowhere...”

“Come on! For now, we have wind in our sails, and Lys has funded this trip pretty lavishly. We just need to find out how long it will last...”

“Not much longer, I hope...”

Suddenly, a scream erupted from behind them and abruptly pulled them out of their dark thoughts.

“Catch her!”

Red had just turned around when Slippy—Nostromo’s pet frog—landed on his face. Even if she did not smell as bad as her owner, her sticky skin inspired disgust in everyone on board. While Ulrich was trying to remove the amphibian from Red’s face, Nostromo came up to them panting and apologizing profusely.

"I don't understand, she's been acting uncontrollably lately!" Dropping the bottle on the deck, Red grabbed the creature by its legs to pull it off his face with all his strength.

"Please, be careful with her! She's been acting up for a few days. Something must be scaring her."

"Here's what I'll do with your darned pet!" replied Red, as he flung the frog that was no longer stuck to him.

"Red, I already told you to respect all living creatures. Be they jellyfish, my frog, or any other animal."

"What about me then? Who will..."



An awkward silence fell on the conversation as a little girl, all dressed in white, ran past them to reach the bow.

Ulrich shouted after her:

"Moon, do not run on the deck! You could hurt yourself... What is wrong, my dear?"

"The winds! They are no longer talking to me!" answered Moon, stopping in her tracks.

Ulrich glanced at the sails before setting his eyes on the horizon. All around them, massive dark clouds loomed menacingly.

"You're right. It does not look like they're in the mood to talk," said he ironically.

"That's what I'm telling you! They sound like they are speaking with a different voice," replied the frail girl spontaneously.

Her bare feet resumed their path toward the front of the ship. Red did not take his eyes off her until her feather headdress disappeared behind the sail.

Nostromo snapped his fingers in front of Red's eyes to stop him from daydreaming.

"Hey! Snap out of it, will you?!"

Coming back to his senses, Red noticed Lys on the other side of the deck picking up the bottle he had dropped earlier. The rigid and thin figure of the old aristocrat moved slowly toward the small group.

"I would very much appreciate if you could look after this," she remarked with a discontent tone of voice. She placed the precious glass container in Red's hands.

"I can only imagine that, with all your years of experience, you have had to look after much more troublesome goods. However, this is our most prized possession. So if you want to make a good captain, show us that you can be reliable!"

Ulrich coughed, feeling badly for Red after such a display of authority from the person on board whom he liked the least. At that particular moment, he could not disagree with her though.



Nostromo, distracted by Moon who was waving her arms at the front of the ship, started to walk away from the group. Worried, he decided to go see what she wanted. Intrigued, the rest of the group followed him.

"Look! Look! The jellyfish, they're gone! They're all gone!"

Panicked, everyone started to search the vast stretch of water that was stirring around the vessel. Where had the glowing creatures that had lit their path since their departure from Eelport gone to?

Ulrich was not worried about the jellyfish, but rather about the gusts of wind that were making the sails quiver more and more rapidly and the creaking hull that indicated that an unprecedented storm was coming.

"Siana, come help me," he ordered the woman who had just exited the nearby cabin.

"Is it time to rock the boat yet?" she declared defiantly.

Within minutes, a hurricane appeared above them. The sky darkened, waves turned into hills, which then turned into mountains. Quickly, gushes of water and wind began swatting them across the face. The salt was burning their eyes.

"Take shelter! It's going to become really unstable," ordered Ulrich screaming to cover the roaring wind.

The four passengers—numb with cold—spent the night huddled deep in the hold. Hour after hour, they could see their chances of survival dwindling slowly.

Alone at the helm, Ulrich was trying to stay on course amidst this hellish storm while Siana was skillfully operating the lines and sails, which risked to break the masts at any time.

“Lower the sails!” cried Ulrich as she leapt from one line to another. “The wind’s going to take everything with it!”

“I won’t be able to!” she said pointing at the hitches. “I don’t have enough time!”

“Do what you can! Otherwise, the whole thing is going to collapse!”

Atop the ship, the blonde acrobat took out her dagger and let herself slide down the mainsail to slice it in half from top to bottom. With the sails in shreds, the ship could now regain some stability.

“Well done!” yelled Ulrich.

“Thank you handsome, but it’s not over yet! Hard to starboard! Hard to starboard!”

The rain was so dense that Ulrich could not see where the ship was headed and, inevitably, the Intrepid was moving toward a huge bubbling whirlpool. They did not see the giant maelstrom until the last minute, and it was as if all hell broke loose under their feet. It was dark. Unfathomable. Terrifying. The ship reached the top of the vortex. And for just a moment, everything was silent. Nothing. No gravity. A few seconds before the ship sank into this immeasurable abyss, even the rain seemed to have stopped. Then, suddenly, everything turned black and upside-down.

In the belly of the ship, the small group bounced around the hull like a bale of hay. The crates of lanterns and the oil jars smashed on top of them. There was no more up or down.

Everywhere, wood was giving in under the force of the salt water that rained on their tired shoulders and numbed their hands and feet. A loud crashing sound erupted and the ship shattered all at once in countless pieces, casting everyone in the furious freezing water.

Red closed his eyes and began to regret having followed the girl who talks to the wind and his old arrogant aunt. He should have trusted his instinct to avoid the worst but it was too late now. Everything was dark and cold...

Under water, holding his breath, Red felt something like a rope graze his skin. He grasped it, desperately, and was pulled out of the water with force. He sprang out of the water screaming: this was no rope, he was holding a monster by the tail! However, he did not let go of it, knowing that it had just saved his life. Between two wags of the tail, he caught a glimpse of Lys and Ulrich, atop the giant beast, trying to catch Nostromo who was still under water. Moon, straddling the beast's head, was laughing and whispered to the beast as she was stroking its antennae: "So, it was you who was talking to the wind?"

The creature exhaled raucously as if answering yes.

"Nukha? Nice to meet you! I am Moon."

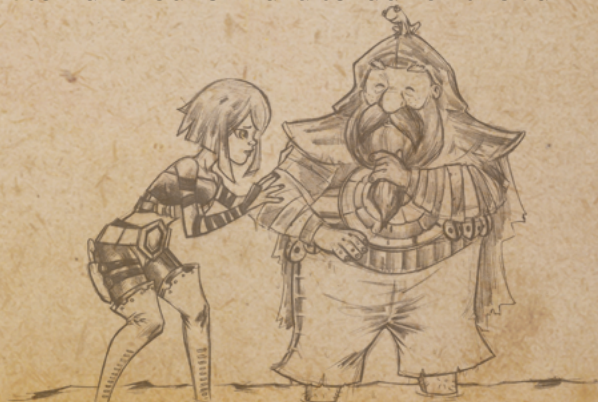
She yelled:

"The Nukha saved us! We don't need to worry anymore!"

The Nukha? Red, still clinging to the tail, could only see the back of the creature, which looked like an enormous blue slug.

"There, look! Land!"

Looking around him, he saw Siana, holding on to one of the creature's flippers and pointing everyone to the bright distance. Behind them, the Intrepid's last debris were sinking down. They were all finally safe, except for his ship. Red screamed in frustration. The strange aquatic convoy was leaving the storm for an unknown coast bordered by beaches and rocky mounds. As they approached the shore, the giant sea monster lurched forward to launch the survivors on the sand.



Worn out, they sat there—flabbergasted—on a strange lilac-colored beach, dotted with violet crystals and bordered by a rock wall on one side. Nobody seemed to know where they had landed. They were amazed by how strange this place looked. Ulrich got up, with his hands on his hips, looking to locate Red in the vicinity. He could not find him and asked his companions. Everyone had seen him clinging to the Nukha's tail... So where could he be?

Soon enough, Red came running, holding up a golden lantern. Pointing to the rocks behind him, he declared: "Over there! That's where the beast sleeps! It's a real treasure cave!"

The monster had hoarded everything it could find from shipwrecks, especially anything shiny. Thus, Red had been able to find a few lanterns of his, and even some gold coins.

"This cave is full of stuff we could use in this... place. We just need to explore it when the beast is asleep. Oh yes! I also salvaged the most important thing," he said, brandishing the bottle containing the message. "As long as I have this with me, I am still the captain!"



When the mystery is too great, no one dares to disobey. Surprised by Red's sudden increase in self-confidence and not seeing any other solutions at the moment, the survivors decided to reorganize and started walking toward the cave, in single file, in order to look for something they could bring back for the good of the whole group... or for themselves!



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