

National Bestselling Author of
THE LOST YEARS OF MERLIN

T. A. BARRON



the merlin effect

"The greatest wizard of them all continues to inspire."

—Los Angeles Times

THE

MERLIN EFFECT

To my father,
ARCH BARRON

*With special appreciation to
BROOKS,
age four, who will one day sing with the whales
and to
TERRY,
who values the empty places between stars
as well as the stars themselves*

Thanks also to those who advised me on matters of science: Eric, on genetics; Charlie, on whirlpools; Celia, on marine flora and fauna; and a certain gray whale off Baja California, who swam up to my kayak and let me touch his back.

The whirlpool drowned the treasure ship

Upon that dreadful morn,

And buried it beneath the waves

Along with Merlin's Horn.

And so today the ship's at rest,

Removed from ocean gales,

Surrounded by a circle strange

Of ever-singing whales.

A prophesy clings to the ship

Like barnacles to wood.

Its origins remain unknown,

Its words not understood:

One day the sun will fail to rise,

The dead will die,

And then

For Merlin's Horn to find its home,

The ship must sail again.

—fragments from
“The Ballad of the *Resurrección*”

IN SEARCH OF THE LOST SHIP RESURRECCION AND THE MERLIN EFFECT

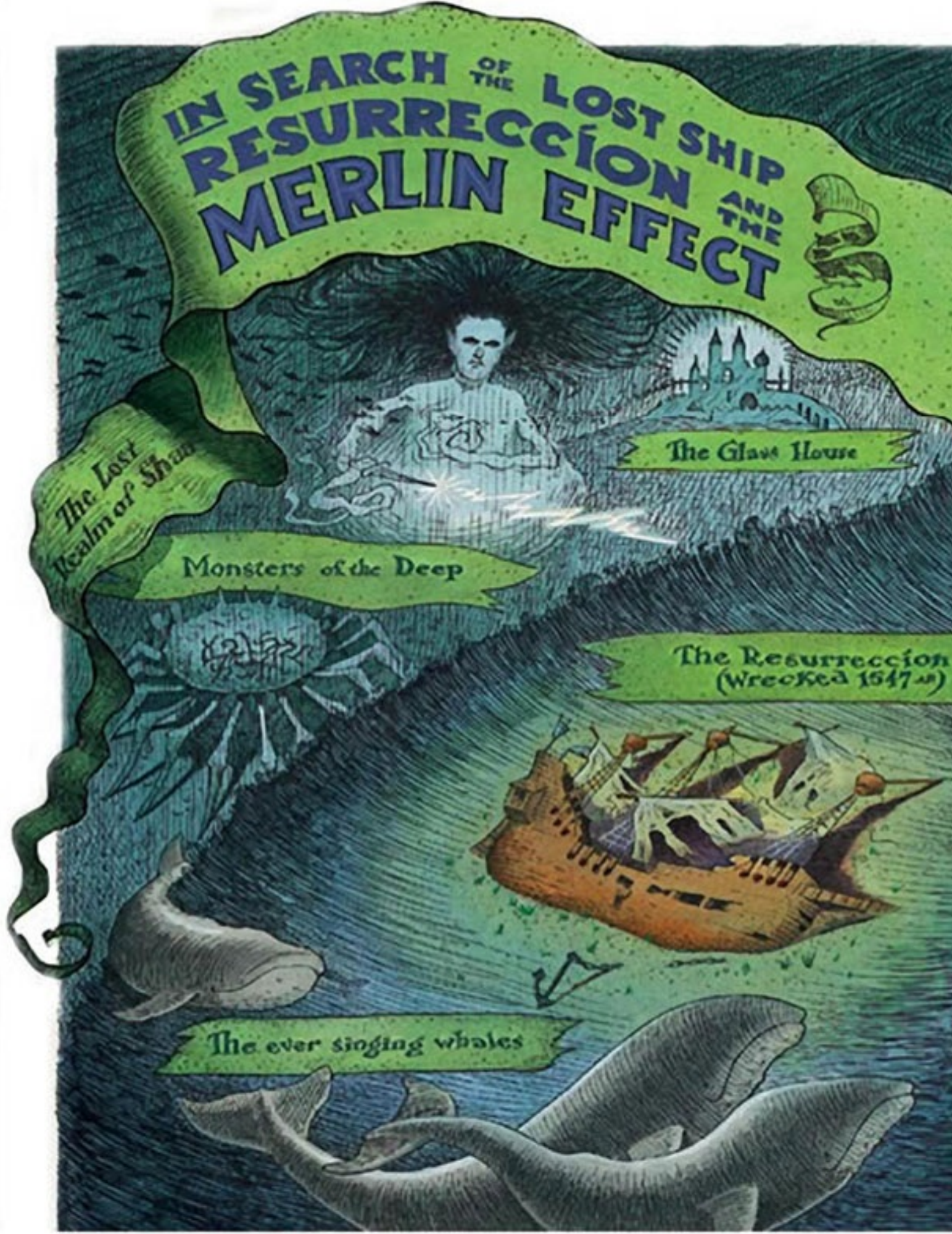
The Lost
Realm of Shambhala

Monsters of the Deep

The Glass House

The Resurrection
(Wrecked 1547 AD)

The ever singing whales



One day the sun will fail to rise
The dead will die and then
For Merlin's Horn to find its home
The ship must sail again.



Mer People

Pieces of eight

PART ONE:
Beyond The Lagoon

Farther from shore, nearer to death.

With every pull of her paddle, Kate recalled the much-repeated warning about these waters. Yesterday felt different. Today the sea looked tranquil, even inviting.

Her arms, brown after almost a month in the Baja California sun, churned rhythmically. The kayak cut through the water, slicing the glassy green walls that rose and fell like a heaving chest. As the protected lagoon receded behind her, open ocean stretched before her. The swollen sun drifted low on the horizon, glowing like a lump of melting gold.

A wave slapped the kayak, drenching her. She shook herself, pulled a piece of kelp off her forearm, and then resumed paddling.

She glided past the forest of mangroves lining the mouth of the lagoon. Despite the low tide, she skirted within a few feet of their long, spindly roots. Planted in the mud, they resembled a family of long-legged waders. An immature heron resting on a branch watched her slide by, but Kate's attention had turned to a copper-stained mound at the end of the bay. The last dune. And beyond it, the breaker line.

Never been out this far before, she thought. What a place to see the sunset! Too bad she had waited so long to venture out. Now only a few more days remained before she would have to leave all this for good.

She lay the paddle across her lap, licking the salt from her sunburned lips. As the vessel coasted quietly with the current, she listened to the trickle of water running down the ends of the paddle. Slowly, the sun ignited sea and sky with streaks of crimson. Just beneath the waves, a web of golden light shimmered.

A plover swooped past, barely a foot above her head, searching for a crab-meat supper. Meanwhile, two sandpipers, standing one-legged in the shadow of the dune, chattered noisily next to the hissing rushing waves. Kate drew in a deep breath, feeling the warmth of the fading sun on her face. At midday, it had struck with brutal force, yet now it soothed like a gentle massage.

As the current pulled her past the last dune, she scanned the line of whitecaps ahead. The breaker splashed and sucked, a stark barrier of volcanic rock. Yet the ocean beyond looked calm, serene, almost deserving of the name Pacific. At this moment, it was hard to believe all those tales of sudden squalls, murderous shoals, and swelling tides that had made this stretch of Mexican coast a sailor's nightmare for centuries. Not to mention the legendary *Remolino de la Muerté*, the Whirlpool of Death, discussed by the local people only in whispers.

True or not, those tales—along with the harshness of the desert landscape—had kept the population of this area to a few scattered fishing villages. Almost nobody came here by choice. That is, until her father plunked his research team at San Lazaro Lagoon.

With a flick of her paddle, she spun the kayak around to face the lagoon. At the far end sat the research camp, its white canvas tents washed in the rich colors of sunset. Behind them rose the flagpole, still sporting the purple T-shirt hoisted by her father when the official colors blew away, and the wind generator, its steel propeller spinning lazily. Close to the beach, the converted trawler *Skimmer* lay anchored. Not far away bobbed the silver-colored submersible, awaiting its next deep-water dive.

She shook her head. Dad was still working on the boat. Though she could not see him, she could hear the familiar sputtering of the aging trawler's engine. It didn't make any difference that the ship

was almost beyond repair, that the project's days were numbered, or that a spectacular sunset was about to happen. He probably wouldn't budge to see a sea monster taking a bubble bath in the lagoon. Or the lost ship *Resurrección*, laden with treasure, rising out of the waves as the old legend predicted.

And the others on his team were no better. Terry constantly fiddled with his scientific equipment, whether in his tent, on the *Skimmer*, or on the team's two buoys. Isabella, for her part, divided her time between her makeshift laboratory and the submersible, which she pampered as if it were her own baby. She would be down inside its hatch right now, doing her evening maintenance, if she had not agreed yesterday to work the camp's radio constantly in a last-ditch attempt to get the project's permit extended.

During the past few weeks, Kate's job as cook and dishwasher for the team had allowed her plenty of time for exploring the beach, snorkeling, scaling dunes, or taking sunset kayak rides. None of the others had ever joined her, not even her father. So much for her high hopes of spending lots of time with him in this isolated lagoon. She had seen only a little more of him than she had of her mother, who was thousands of miles away at their home in New England.

For a while, she had at least been able to share supper with him when the group assembled in the main tent at the end of each day. Lately, though, even that tradition had suffered, as everyone worked later and later into the night. The specter of the project's permit expiring, with no results to show for the entire month, hung like a dark cloud over them. Especially her father. He had given up trying to learn anything useful from the villagers, and had spent the last twenty-four hours on the *Skimmer* trying to adapt Terry's precious equipment to his own purposes. Outside of his increasingly tense arguments with Terry, his conversations had shrunk to a distracted *thank-you* to Kate whenever she brought him some food.

Not that this so-called team had much in common to talk about anyway. Isabella was a marine biologist, Terry a graduate student in undersea geology, Kate's father a historian. He was leader of the group in name only. About the only thing they managed to do cooperatively was to tow the submersible out to sea for Isabella's deep-water dives.

Kate dipped her paddle and heaved. The kayak spun like a leaf on the water. Once more she was facing the sinking sun. Its color had gone from gold to crimson, and it seemed squashed, as if a greasy boot were stepping on it.

With a start, she realized she had drifted out and was almost on top of the breakers. Rough water boiled just ahead. Quickly, she paddled a few furious strokes in reverse, then started to turn the craft around. Better to watch the sunset from inside the lagoon. That way she would be sure to get back plenty of time to prepare supper.

Suddenly she halted. The breakers didn't really look so bad. Not nearly as dangerous as the rapids at Devil's Canyon where she had kayaked last summer. Sure, Dad had firmly cautioned her never to cross them. Yet he and Terry did it every day in the *Skimmer* to check the buoys. The white water would make a thrilling ride. She might not get another chance. And besides, she was thirteen now, old enough to make her own decisions.

Surveying the line of turbulence, she picked the best point to cross. Farther out, in the calm waters of the sea, the team's two buoys floated, decorated with brightly colored equipment. The first buoy seemed surprisingly close; the second, much farther out. In the distance, beyond the second buoy, a spiraling tower of mist hovered over the sea, swirling slowly. For an instant, the mist thinned just enough to reveal an ominous pursing of the waves, rising out of the water like an underwater volcano.

Farther from shore, nearer to . . .

Kate bit her lip. It was probably nothing more than a reef. And even if it were something more dangerous, it was too far away to pose any risk. Whatever, it seemed to taunt her, daring her to cross.

the breakers.

She glanced over her shoulder at the research camp. No one would miss her. Absorbed as he was, her father wouldn't even notice if supper came a little late tonight.

Just as she raised her paddle, a lone gull screeched overhead. She hesitated, looked again out to sea. The distant mist had thickened once more, concealing whatever she had seen. Sucking in her breath, she propelled herself at the breakers.

The wind gusted slightly, playing with her braid, as she drove the kayak forward. Effortless as a frigate bird soaring on the swells, she raced across the water.

"*Hooeeee!*" she shouted aloud as the craft plunged into the whitecaps. She paddled even faster. The narrow boat almost seemed to lift above the waves.

With a final splash, she cleared the breakers completely. The water grew calm again. Breathing hard, she placed the paddle across her lap and glided toward the sunset.

It was nearly time. Rays of peach and purple mingled with the sky's brighter flames. The rippling crests around her quivered with scarlet light. Water birds fell silent. The sun pressed lower and lower, flattening against the sea. Then, in the blink of an eye, it dropped below the horizon.

She shifted her gaze to the strange spiral of mist beyond the second buoy. Was it only her imagination, or could she hear a distant humming sound from that direction?

Absently, she drummed the shaft of the paddle. A trick of the ocean air, perhaps? The local villagers claimed to have seen and heard many bizarre things off this coast. Isabella, who had grown up not far from here, had told Kate many of their tales during lulls in her lab work.

Too many, probably. One night last week, while paddling in the lagoon, Kate had heard what sounded like wispy voices, wailing and moaning in the distance. What was she to think? That she had heard the ghosts of the *Resurrección's* sailors, swallowed by the whirlpool nearly five centuries ago? She was too embarrassed to tell anyone about it, or about how poorly she had slept that night. She was too old for that kind of thing.

Yet . . . her father didn't seem to be. He had spent his whole career as a historian trying to prove that some pretty far-fetched stories could actually be true.

Jim Gordon had a reputation as an accessible man, one of the most approachable people at the university. People rarely bothered to call him professor. Just Jim would do. No matter that he was one of the world's leading scholars on the legend of King Arthur, that he had done more than anyone to prove that Merlin was not merely a fictional wizard but a real person, a Druid prophet who lived long ago in what is now Wales. His book *The Life of Merlin* had become not only a classic study of the links between myth and history but a popular best-seller as well.

Many, including Kate, wondered why a Spanish galleon wrecked off Baja California should be of any interest to him, a professor of early English history. But on that subject, he kept silent. Even to his colleagues. Even to his daughter.

Kate slapped the water angrily with her paddle. Jim this. Jim that. If he were so approachable, how come she found it so hard to get any time with him? Something had happened to the father she used to know, the father who used to enjoy nothing more than leaning back in his chair and telling a good story about ancient heroes and gallant quests.

A briny breeze blew over the water. Feeling a bit chilly, she reached under the kayak's spray skirt and took out a crumpled blue cotton shirt. As she unsnapped her life jacket to slip into the shirt, she looked back toward the camp. A band of pink shone in the sky above the tents. Although it was still light, a sprinkling of stars had started to appear overhead.

Then she saw the moon, rising out of the eastern horizon like an evening sun. At first only a wispy halo lifted above the desert hills, then a slice of gold, then a disc of dazzling orange. Higher the moon rose, climbing slowly into the twilight sky. It cast a fiery path across the water, a path that burned i

way to her tiny vessel, flooding her with amber light.

~~Turning again out to sea, she followed the rippled path to the buoys and beyond. The waves glittered, as if paved with gold.~~

She took up her paddle. There was just enough time, if she hurried, for a brief sprint to the first buoy before dark. Kitchen duty could wait for once. She grinned, picturing the amazed look on her father's face when she would tell him what she had done.

She began to paddle toward the open ocean.

Vigorously she stroked. The kayak surged forward, bounding over the water. Even as the sky darkened overhead, the full moon brightened, lighting her way.

She raced toward the first buoy, her heart pounding more from exhilaration than from exertion. Only twenty more strokes and she would be there. A gust of wind pushed the kayak slightly off course, but with a hard pull to starboard she corrected it. Fifteen, twelve, ten. She raced a gull, skimming the waves. Five more. Three more.

Her wake washed against the first buoy. She exhaled in satisfaction and set down her paddle. From this close, she could see the full extent of the buoy's gadgetry. Cylinders, plastic cases and colorful cables dangled from its sides. Thick nylon netting covered most of its base, shielding it from dolphins and other curious marine life. Its gleaming transmitter dish, aimed toward shore, gave it the appearance of a refugee robot from space.

Coming about, she wiped the perspiration from her brow with the sleeve of her shirt. Darkness was settling, but the camp remained visible among the dunes. Someone had switched on a light.

She glanced to the rear. The tower of mist beyond the second buoy seemed anything but threatening now, a billowy presence curling on the waves.

Then she heard the humming. The same sound she had heard before, only louder. It came from somewhere out to sea, somewhere behind the mist. Like the drone of a distant engine, it churned steadily, ceaselessly.

She tried to pinpoint its source but could see nothing. A boat out there? Unlikely. The *Skimmer* was back at camp. Fishermen didn't stay out this late. Who else might be sailing after sunset? That was a good way to end up like the *Resurrección*, dragged down by . . .

The whirlpool! So that's what that was. *Remolino de la Muerté*, considered by some to be as ancient and foreboding as the sea itself. She shivered slightly. Perhaps the sailors on board the *Resurrección* had heard that very same humming, only to drown a few moments later.

Raising her paddle, she turned back to shore. Airy fingers of fog were spreading across the lagoon. With any luck, she would return to camp with a little light to spare.

Just as she dipped her paddle in the water, another sound arrested her. At first she thought it was the kayak, creaking strangely. Then she realized it was more of a banging sound, coming from behind her.

She swung her head back out to sea, straining to hear. Although it was hard to tell, the new sound seemed disconnected from the constant humming of the whirlpool, and closer. Between the rhythmic pulsing of the waves against her boat, it banged irregularly, like an off-key bell. Now it beat furiously, now it died away, now it came back again.

Something about this sound gave Kate the eerie feeling that it came from a living creature. Like a person drowning, flailing, fighting for another breath. Yet she knew well the ocean often distorted sounds. It could be nothing more than the waves pummeling a reef.

A sudden motion caught her eye and she focused on the second buoy, perhaps a hundred yards away. A large object, silver in the moonlight, rose out of the waves and smacked the buoy with terrific force. The buoy rocked violently, almost toppling over. Something was trapped there!

She turned again toward shore. Whether from thickening fog or deepening darkness, the tents could now barely be seen. Another light went on, flickering weakly. She had to start back.

Then a high-pitched shriek ripped the air, lowering to a piteous wail. It came from the second buoy. She had no idea what kind of creature could make such a sound. She only knew it was a creature in pain.

Biting her lip, she whirled the kayak around. Her paddle spun in the air as she raced toward the first buoy. Salty spray stung her eyes, but she covered the distance in seconds.

As she approached, a hulking body lifted slightly above the waves and took an exhausted gasp of air before thrashing and rolling wildly in the water. A new wave drenched her, and with it came recognition. It was a whale.

Never had Kate seen a living being so large, at least three or four times her height in length. White barnacles peppered the whale's glistening skin, covering head, back and fins.

Isabella had mentioned that a small group of gray whales remained near the lagoon all year round instead of joining the rest of their kind in the annual migration to the Arctic. Although this behavior baffled scientists, no one had ever succeeded in getting close enough to study them. All anyone knew was that the whales stayed by the whirlpool, circling and singing without rest.

Isabella had even given Kate a brief lesson in whale biology in case she should be lucky enough to see one of them during her kayak trips. She had only half listened, estimating her chances of spotting a whale at zero. Yet there could be no mistaking this huge creature that was right here before her, struggling to stay alive.

Careful to keep clear of the enormous body, Kate brought her kayak nearer to the buoy. She realized, as the whale rolled over, that she had encountered a young male. Big as he was, he had only reached half of his adult size. If, in fact, he ever made it to adulthood. For his plight was clear. His tail flukes were completely tangled in the nylon net attached to the buoy. Wires wrapped tightly, sliced deeply. Blood swirled on the water. The corner of one fluke hung loose, nearly severed.

Once more the whale flailed, knocking his tail against the instruments, blowing a blast of spray that rained down on Kate. She stowed her paddle and leaned over to the side, nearly swamping the kayak, trying to pull the net off the tail, itself almost as big as her boat. Yet as hard as she tugged, the net would not come free.

Bracing her hands on the slippery skin, she tried again, pulling with all her strength. No success.

Her fingers stiff from cold, she reached for one of the two big knots attaching the net to the buoy. At length she succeeded in untying it. Carefully, she pulled herself over to the other knot. It resisted but finally gave way. As the net slid into the water, she felt a surge of hope. Then she realized that the net connected to the buoy in a third place, at the base of the transmitter dish.

At that instant, the great tail whipped out of the waves, smacking her hard across her left side. The kayak flipped over, plunging her into icy blackness. She swallowed water, struggling to breathe. Her arms flailed, but she could not pull herself out of the boat. Pain shot through her chest, throbbed in her head. Desperately, she punched at her spray skirt to free herself.

Suddenly she tasted air again. She gagged, coughing up sea water. The momentum of her roll had flipped the kayak upright, but the boat now rode dangerously low. Her sun hat was gone; her spray skirt was torn. Choking, she rubbed her stinging eyes, as water cascaded down from her hair and shoulders.

Even as she scolded herself for trying to rescue a whale all by herself, the injured animal abruptly ceased fighting. But for a single quivering fin, he lay motionless in the water.

She surveyed the young leviathan, lying limp by the buoy. Resignedly, she looked toward shore. The wavering lights of camp seemed to welcome her, offering warmth and safety and dry land. Then the whale stirred, releasing a low, shivery moan, the sound of a living being preparing to die.

The whale's eye, as round and silver as the moon itself, met hers. For a long moment, they held each other's gaze.

Instinctively, she reached for the transmitter dish where the nylon net connected to the buoy. One of the two rods anchoring the dish to the buoy had already broken. Perhaps . . . She stretched herself farther, farther, waves slapping against the boat and her chest, until at last her hand grasped the remaining rod.

She hesitated. This equipment belonged to the team. Her father, she knew, was trying to use it, and he was Terry. Breaking off the dish might cause some real damage.

Once more she peered into the silver eye. It watched her intently, not blinking.

Clenching her teeth, she gave a wrenching tug. The rod snapped, the transmitter dish plunged into the water.

Several seconds passed. The whale did not move. Then, suddenly, his tail lifted, yanking the net free from the buoy. His massive head bent downward. His flukes, red with blood, arched upward before smacking the water with such force that Kate nearly capsized from the wave. Then he dove into the depths, pulling behind the transmitter dish ensnared in a web of nylon.

Alone again, she retrieved her paddle. Spotting a flickering light through the mist, she started for shore, feeling exhausted but pleased with herself. Water sloshed inside the kayak, but she could do nothing about that now. A loose object bumped into her leg: her father's headlamp, stored in the kayak for evening outings. Strapping it on her forehead, she flicked it on, sending a thin white beam across the bow.

A big wave tumbled over her, soaking her again. Then another. She paddled hard, ignoring the growing ache between her shoulder blades. For some reason, the going seemed more difficult than the direction. A tricky bit of current, perhaps, or the added weight of the water she had taken on. Her arms felt weaker with every stroke. Her head hummed.

At once, she realized the humming was not just in her head. Checking over her shoulder, she saw rising out of the mist a great bulge of water, coursing and crashing under the lamplike moon.

The whirlpool! The current had dragged her closer! She threw all her effort into every pull of her paddle. But *Remolino de la Muerté* tugged steadily at her slender craft. Her shoulders throbbed. As she grew more tired, the boat began to slip backward. In no time, she lost what little headway she had gained. Soon the second buoy disappeared into fog.

Again she stole a glance to the rear. Now the whirlpool jutted out of the sea like a circular tsunami. Spiraling whitecaps curled around its frothy rim, climbing steadily toward the center. Sheets of cold spray rained down on her.

Terror crowded out her thoughts, growing with the din of the whirlpool. She stroked feverishly, though waves battered the boat and she could no longer see the lights of the camp. Even the moon faded now and then from view, obscured by the rising spray.

Then, not far ahead, a dark shadow appeared. Slowly, against the swirling mist, the form grew fuller and sharper. Broad at the base and ragged at the top, it lifted above the water as precipitously as an island. But Kate, catching her breath, knew it was no island.

It was a ship.

Suddenly, a great wave swept over her, an avalanche of foam, capsizing the kayak. A few seconds later, the small boat drifted back to the surface, floating aimlessly. For now it carried no passenger.

Scrambled eggs, coming up,” announced Jim Gordon, trying for the third time to light the burner. “Just got to get this blasted thing to work. Meanwhile, you can finish off that tea in my thermos.”

He struck another match, then blew gently on the gas outlet while holding the flame as close as possible. With a *whoosh*, the burner caught fire, just as the match started to singe his fingers.

“Ow! There now. We’re set.” He straightened his tall, lanky frame, so that his bristly brown hair grazed the ceiling of the boat’s cabin. Planting a heavy cast-iron pan on the sputtering burner, he tossed in a lump of butter. As the smell of sizzling butter filled the cabin, he wiped the mist inside the window with his sleeve, scanned the dark waters outside, then observed the girl in the corner bundle under two wool blankets. Beside her on the floor lay her wet clothes in a pile.

Kate raised her head, looked into his chocolate brown eyes. “Pretty stupid, huh?” She took a sip from the mug in her hands.

Her father cocked his head and started cracking eggs into the pan. “No, I wouldn’t say stupid. More like idiotic.” He threw the shells into a trash bin under the steering wheel. “That was a close call for both of us. I try hard never to go out past the second buoy.”

She listened to the waves lapping at the sides of the *Skimmer*. “I can see why.”

“At least you had enough sense to wear your life jacket. And that headlamp. I never would have seen you otherwise.”

“It was dumb luck, not sense.”

Turning back to the eggs, Jim began stirring them with an old wooden spoon. “Like them plain? Or my special way, Baja Scramble?”

“Your way is fine,” mumbled Kate feebly. She swallowed some more tea, her eyes roaming the boat’s interior. The chipping gray paint, the shelves of food supplies, the boxes of diving equipment and spare parts, and the piles of nautical maps gave no hint that this was anything but a normal shrimp trawler. Only the counter by the burner, piled high with computer equipment, discarded printouts, and reference books on sonic imaging, revealed anything different.

“How come you were out so far in the kayak?”

“I was just, ah . . . exploring.”

“Exploring!” Jim stopped stirring. “You could have been killed!”

She frowned, said nothing.

“Don’t you know there’s a whirlpool near here? Half a mile wide and probably just as deep?”

“Sure, but—”

“Then what ever possessed you to come out so far?”

“The second buoy.” She paused, on the edge of describing her contact with the whale, then thought better of it. “I wanted to, ah, check it out.”

Her father scrutinized her, then resumed cooking. “You’ve got to respect the sea, Kate. It’s full of surprises, often deadly. It’s no place to play around. There’s an old saying about this coastline. *Más lejos de la orilla, mas cerca de la muerté*. It means Farther from shore . . .”

“Nearer to death,” she finished grimly. Trying to change the subject, she asked, “So why were you out with the *Skimmer*? You almost never sail after dark.”

Jim tasted the eggs, then went back to stirring. “Well, it’s like this. You know how long it’s taken me to get Terry to part with his precious equipment so I could use it to take a sonic picture?”

“Ever since we got here.”

“Right. Well, ~~no sooner do I get it all set up and start to shoot the area right under the whirlpool~~ than the screen goes blank. Completely blank! The monitor showed a malfunction at the second buoy so I hustled out here to check.”

Kate stiffened. “The second buoy?”

He glanced her way. “Don’t worry, we’re safe. I’ve got us tied up tight to the buoy. We’ll only stay here a little while longer, so I can do the repairs.”

Stirring uneasily, she asked, “Repairs?”

“On the sonar gear.” Pouting, he wiped the spoon on the edge of the pan. “Some damned sea animal decided to get playful with the transmitter dish. Broke it clean off, though I’m sure it’s still there tangled up in the net someplace.”

Again she stirred beneath the blankets. “What if the transmitter dish is . . . gone?”

“Sunk? No chance. I tied those knots myself.”

“But—”

“Before I can repair the buoy, though, I need to see if any data got stored before the dish broke off. Reaching his long arm to the topmost shelf, he steadied himself against the rocking of the waves and pulled down a jar of salsa. As he unscrewed the cap, he nodded toward a black cable stretching from the computer out the door of the cabin. “I’m processing that right now. It’ll take a few minutes. The equipment here on the boat isn’t as powerful as what we have back at camp.”

Pouring the spicy salsa into the pan, he mixed it with the eggs. “I’m glad you’ve learned your lesson. All my life I’ve been around water, and I’ve never seen anything half as dangerous as the coast. If I didn’t have to come here to find out more about that galleon, believe me, I’d be somewhere else.”

Feeling he just might be ready to open up to her, Kate decided to save the truth about the transmitter dish for later. She drew in her breath. “What’s so special about that old ship, anyway?”

Dumping a heap of eggs on a plastic plate, he handed it to her. “There you go, Baja Scramble.”

“Thanks,” she replied, looking dubiously at the concoction. Suddenly, the aroma aroused her hunger. She took a small bite. “Hey, this is pretty good.” Another bite followed, then another. “Can you believe how hungry I am.”

“A swim will do that,” he said wryly.

“Now can you tell me?”

He aimed a fork at the eggs in the pan. “Tell you what?”

“What’s so special about that ship.”

Glancing at his watch, he said, “Almost time to see what we’ve got. Then a few quick repairs and you’ll be back at camp before you know it.”

Kate surveyed the cabin, her head swaying to the rhythm of the waves. She sensed she should try a different approach. “Want to hear something crazy? When I first saw your boat, in all that mist, you’d never guess what I thought it was.”

“Let me guess. The Navy? The *QE II*?”

“No,” she answered. “Even crazier. I thought you were the sunken ship, sailing again like the legend says.”

“The *Resurrección*?” Jim laughed. “Guess I’ve infected you with my own wild dreams.” He grinned mysteriously. “You never know, though. Myth and reality aren’t always so far apart.”

“Something you’ve tried to show with Merlin.”

“That’s right,” he said through a mouthful of eggs. “Merlin’s life and legend are impossible intertwined. That’s one reason a lot of people still refuse to believe he was a real person.”

Kate stabbed at the remains on her plate, then asked as casually as she could manage, “Will raising

the *Resurrección* help you settle something about Merlin?”

“You could say that.”

“But, Dad, we’re in Mexico. Halfway around the world from where Merlin lived! What could I have to do with this place?”

“More than you know,” he replied, setting down his fork. “But raising the old ship isn’t really necessary. Besides, there’s no way, with this little manpower and time, I could ever hope to do that. Especially with the whirlpool so near. All I need to do is prove the *Resurrección* actually existed. If I can just do that, then . . .”

“Then what?”

“Then I can organize a proper expedition to salvage whatever is left of it.”

“Then what?”

Jim tugged playfully on her braid. “Then maybe you’ll stop asking so many questions.”

“I learned that from you.”

“I see your point. Historians do ask questions for a living. All right, then, here’s one for you. How about some hot cocoa? I think there’s some powdered milk around here someplace.” He took a plastic container from the shelf and set it down with a thud. “Now all we need is the cocoa.”

“Please tell me.”

“All right. Tell you what?”

Straightening her back, she asked, “What could Merlin have to do with the ship? Besides, didn’t I live in the fifth or sixth century? The *Resurrección* went down—”

“In 1547,” completed her father. “You remember more of the old bedtime stories than I thought. Could it be you’re a fan of Merlin, too?”

“I *hate* Merlin,” blustered Kate, surprised at the force of her own words. “He’s just a stupid magician. I couldn’t care less about him. But if I listened to your Merlin stories, I got to see you even once in a while! At least that used to be true before you got all wrapped up with this ship project.”

Jim turned away and began prying open a canister of cocoa. “That bad, huh?”

“That bad.”

Pouring some of the powder into two green mugs on the counter, he went on, “Some father I am. You have to nearly drown yourself to get my attention.”

“It worked, didn’t it?” She managed a grin. “You used to say the first quality of a historian is resourcefulness.”

Thoughtfully, Jim mixed some powdered milk in a pot. “Guess I don’t blame you for feeling that way.” He sighed. “Too bad you didn’t like the old stories, though. Telling them to you gave me a chance to work through my theories about Merlin.”

“Well, I did sort of like the ones when he turned King Arthur into different kinds of animals.”

“You especially liked the one about Arthur becoming a fish. You made me tell it every night for a month.” He lowered the pot of milk onto the still-sputtering burner, then winked at her. “So I’m not a total failure as a storyteller after all?”

She eyed him for a moment. “Almost total.”

“Thanks,” he replied. “Do you, by any chance, remember any of the stories about the Thirteen Treasures?”

After a long pause, she replied, “The Thirteen Treasures of the Isle of Britain. Merlin had to search for years before he found all of them.”

“Almost all of them.”

“Whatever. Then he took them to a secret hiding place called the Glass House.”

“That’s right. Nobody knows where the Glass House might have been, only that Merlin planned to store the Treasures there until the prophesied return of King Arthur. He believed that Arthur would

need them to win the Final Battle.”

Jim checked his watch. “Hold on. I’ll be right back.” He stepped to the door, opened it, ducked his head and walked out on the deck. His first stop was the machinery bolted to a metal stand in the middle of the deck; his second, the buoy bobbing just off the stern. The chill, salty air of the sea flooded the cabin, as did the sound of waves sloshing against the boat. And, in the distance, another sound, humming steadily, that made Kate’s stomach clench.

In a few seconds, he returned and shut the door. “I’ll know pretty soon whether I got any data before the accident. Now . . . where were we?”

“The Thirteen Treasures.”

“Right.” He gave the milk a stir, then asked, “Can you remember which was the one Treasure Merlin wanted most? The one he thought was more powerful than all the others combined?”

Kate’s brow furrowed, as she listened to the *kerslap, kerslap* of the waves on the hull. “It wasn’t . . . the sword of light. Or the cauldron of knowledge. Or the knife that could heal any wound.” Her eyes roamed the cabin, coming to rest on the pair of green mugs. “I remember! The thirteenth Treasure. The magical drinking horn.”

His gaze seemed to peer right through her. “The Horn of Merlin.”

“But what does all this have to do with the ship?”

“Everything.” Sliding into his chair, he leaned back and said, “In all the years I’ve been studying Merlin, no element of the legend has been more fascinating—or frustrating—than the Horn. It’s kept me awake for more nights than I can remember. The trail has led me to Cornwall, Normandy, Iceland, Italy, Spain, and now here. And with very little to show for it. Until recently.”

He doused his finger in the pot of milk. Shaking his wet finger, he declared, “As it is, I still don’t know much. But what I do know is . . . intriguing.”

“The story of the Horn has two parts. The first part begins long before Merlin ever found the Horn in a forgotten land called *the place where the sea begins*. It concerns a legendary craftsman, Emrys, his love for someone named Wintonwy, and the origin of the thirteenth Treasure. The second part is even more mysterious—the part that concerns the whirlpool and a certain Spanish ship.”

“The *Resurrección*?”

“None other.” He searched her face. “Care to hear a story?”

Kate half smiled. “Better be a good one.”

“You can be the judge of that.” He reached over and squeezed her forearm under the blanket. “Make yourself comfortable. This will be like old times.”

IV: The Story of the Thirteenth Treasure

Long ago, in a land beyond reach and a time beyond memory, a great craftsman lived alone on a mountain precipice. Only the eagles knew where to find him. Yet even they did not visit, for they, like all the creatures of this land, were not welcome.

His true name has been lost from memory, but he is known in legend as Emrys of the Mountain. So vast were his skills that he required no helpers, no messengers. Indeed, Emrys needed no one even to bring him food, for he had devised ways to make stones into loaves of bread, snow into cheese, water into wine.

Such solitude suited his purpose, for Emrys wanted no one else to understand the secrets of his craft. His knowledge was hard won, and he hoarded it greedily. He refused all offers to sell either his skills or his creations, for he held no interest in riches or titles or the ways of men. Any visitors who by design or chance, came near his alpine hold returned with both empty hands and empty thoughts, unable to recall nothing of what they had seen.

Emrys almost never ventured forth, except when he needed to gather the few substances that he could not himself manufacture. He worked ceaselessly, since his work was his only passion. Yet he rarely felt satisfied with the fruits of his labor. He destroyed any creation that he did not deem utterly perfect.

After all his years in the mountains, only twelve creations met his standards, and only twelve did he retain. They were his Treasures. First he forged the sword of light, so powerful that a single sweep of its flashing blade could kill any creature, whether made of flesh or of spirit. Then he made the ever-bubbling cauldron of knowledge, the whetstone that could turn a strand of hair into a gleaming blade, the halter that could make an ordinary horse run like lightning, and the pan that produced the world's loveliest smells. Next came the mantle that could turn its wearer invisible and the ruby ring that could control the will of others. To these Emrys added the inexhaustible vessel of plenty, the harp that could make haunting music at the merest touch, the knife that could heal any wound, and the chessboard whose pieces could come alive on command. Finally, he designed the flaming chariot, whose fire came from the very heart of the Earth.

Yet with all his Treasures, Emrys still lacked one thing. He remained mortal. He was destined to die like all mortal beings. In time, his hands would lose all their skill, his mind would lose all its knowledge. The shadow of this fate so darkened his days that, at last, he could bear it no longer.

In desperation, he left his mountain lair to search for the secret of immortality. He had no idea whether he could find such a thing, but he knew he must try. He brought with him only two of his Treasures: the sword of light and the ruby ring that could make others do his bidding.

His quest led him to many wondrous lands, but he did not stay long in any of them. Emrys searched and searched, following every clue he encountered, but without success. Nowhere could he find the secret that he craved. No one could help him.

At last, after many years of searching, he finally gave up. He made ready to return home in despair.

Then, as he sat in the shadow of a great tree, he heard a young mother telling her child a story. She told of a mysterious realm beneath the sea called Shaa. Only mer people, half human and half fish, lived there. No one but the mer people could find their way to Shaa, though many had tried. And anyone knew was the legend that it lay in *the place where the sea begins, the womb where the waters are born*. Merwas, emperor of the mer people, had ruled the realm of Shaa with wisdom and dignity.

over many ages. In fact, it was said that Merwas had discovered a way to live far beyond his time, but he could remember the birth of islands that men considered older than old.

To most listeners, this tale would have been nothing more than a simple child's entertainment. Yet to Emrys, it held a seed of hope. He vowed never to rest until he discovered whether the ancient ruler Merwas still lived beneath the waves.

But where was this land of Shaa? *The place where the sea begins, the womb where the waters are born.* It was not much of a clue, but it was all that Emrys had.

With his superior skills, he fashioned a hood that allowed him to breathe underwater with the ease of a fish. He descended into the sea, full of renewed hope. Yet soon he began to realize the enormity of his challenge. The realm of Shaa, if it did exist, would be nearly impossible to find. So vast were the many seas, he would have barely begun his search before his remaining life ran out. Still, he vowed to persist.

Years passed, and although he followed many leads under the sea, he was ever disappointed. Even his ring of power and his flashing sword could not help him. He began to wonder whether he had really heard the story of Shaa at all, or whether it was only a remnant from his fevered dreams.

One day Emrys smelled the sweet aroma of an underwater plant called apple-of-the-sea. It reminded him of apple blossoms in the spring. For a moment he felt captivated by the perfume, and he strolled in memory through apple groves he would never again see on the land.

Then, out of a crevasse before him, a strange form arose. First came the head of a woman, with long black hair flowing over her shoulders. She seemed darkly beautiful, although her eyes were shadowed, almost sunken, so that they gave the impression of being bottomless. With a gasp Emrys realized that, below her shoulders, her body was nothing more than a cloud of dark vapor, curling and twisting like smoke. Two thin, wispy arms formed out of the cloud, one of them clasping a dagger in its vaporous hand.

"Who are you?" asked Emrys, his own hand on the sword of light.

"Nimue issss my name." Her voice hissed like steam vapor.

"What do you want from me?"

She pointed at his ruby ring. "It issss beautiful."

Emrys drew back.

Nimue watched him, coiling and uncoiling her vaporous arms. "It would sssseem a ssssmall price to pay . . . to find the ssssecret entrancce to the realm of Shaa."

"You know the way to Shaa?"

"An enchantressss knowss many thingss."

Emrys hesitated. The ring had helped him often over the years. Yet he knew also that soon he would die and the ring would then serve him no more. Although it was probably folly to trust the enchantress, what did he have to lose? Giving Nimue the ring seemed a small price to pay for a chance to achieve immortality.

So Emrys agreed to the bargain. Nimue took the ring and scrutinized it carefully with her bottomless eyes. Then, wordlessly, she beckoned to her servants, a band of enormous eels with triangular heads and massive jaws who had been hiding in the shadows. Emrys knew at once that they were sea demons, among the most feared creatures in the ocean. His blood chilled at the very sight of them.

Yet the sea demons did not attack. They merely surrounded Nimue with their slithering bodies. Cautiously, Emrys followed as they led him some distance to the mouth of a deep abyss dropping down from the bottom of the sea. Here, declared Nimue, was the entrance to the secret realm ruled by Merwas.

Then Emrys noticed that the abyss was guarded by a monstrous beast of the sea, a spidery creature

with many powerful legs. Though the creature had only two narrow slits for eyes, it seemed to sense the presence of intruders. Its huge jaw opened a crack, revealing a thousand poisonous tongues.

“Treachery!” cried Emrys. “That monster will never let me pass.”

But Nimue only laughed and hissed, “I sssaid I would bring you to the door. I did not sssay I would open it for you.” With that, she turned her vaporous form and melted into the dark water followed by the sea demons.

Before Emrys could decide what to do, the monster stirred and suddenly attacked. Wielding the sword of light, Emrys battled bravely, but the spidery creature pinned him against an outcropping of rock. With a last thrust of the sword, Emrys cut off one of the creature’s legs. As it shrieked in pain, Emrys slipped past and escaped into the abyss.

Darkest of the dark, the abyss plunged downward. Emrys, wounded and weak, followed its twists and turns, doubting he would ever reach the end. And even if he did, who could tell whether this was indeed the route to the land of Shaa? More likely, Nimue had tricked him yet again.

Then, at last, the abyss opened into an undersea cavern as wide as a valley. Water so pure it seemed to glow dripped from the high ceiling, gathering into waterfalls that tumbled radiantly into the lake filling the cavern. Fragrant winds, bearing all the smells of the sea, flowed through the cavern’s airy spaces. *The place where the sea begins, the womb where the waters are born.* At the far end of the cavern rose a magnificent castle made of streaming, surging water, its turrets and walls as sturdy as glass yet as fluid as the ocean itself.

Instantly, Emrys found himself surrounded by mer people, glistening green. They appeared unafraid and rather amused by his curious form. They escorted him to the shining castle and brought him to the great hall, which was filled up to the base of the windows with water, allowing the mer people to come and go easily. There, seated upon a crystalline throne, was their ruler, a mer man whose eyes flamed brighter than lightning bolts and whose long, white beard wrapped around his waist and prodigious tail. At long last, Emrys stood before Merwas, ruler of the land of Shaa.

When Merwas demanded to know what purpose had brought Emrys there, and how he had discovered the way into Shaa, Emrys told him of his quest to find the secret of immortality. Yet Emrys chose not to reveal that he had been helped by Nimue, fearing that the mention of the enchantress would make Merwas suspicious. The ancient ruler listened carefully, then declared, “Your search, though valiant, has been in vain. I have nothing to give you except a brief rest while you heal your wounds and prepare to return to your home.” Then, in a voice like waves crashing upon the cliffs, he added: “You have much yet to learn.”

Despite the beauty of this land under the sea, for Emrys it seemed utterly bleak. His quest lay in ruins. He wished he could just lie down and die, rather than attempt the long journey back to his mountain lair.

Then, while wandering alone through the corridors of the castle, he chanced to meet Wintonwy, the only daughter of Merwas. The bards of that realm had long celebrated her virtues. Sang one:

*Graceful as coral, true as the tides,
Constant as currents the rising moon rides.
Fresh as the foam, deep as the sea,
Bright as the stars, fair Wintonwy.*

For the first time in all his years, Emrys fell in love. He set to work, crafting for Wintonwy a bracelet of gleaming bubbles and other wondrous gifts. Although Wintonwy ignored him, Emrys hoped that his attention might eventually touch her heart.

And, in time, Wintonwy took notice of him. She invited him to join her on a voyage through Sha

They set off immediately and traveled to the farthest reaches of the realm.

One day, as they camped near a fountain of warm water, Wintonwy chose to explore alone while Emrys designed a new creation. Suddenly, he heard her screams. He leaped to her aid and found she had been attacked by a vicious shark. Seeing he could not reach her in time, he hurled the blazing sword of light with all his strength. It struck the shark in the eye just before the ferocious jaws clamped down on Wintonwy.

She was badly injured, but alive. Emrys carried her in his arms all the way back to the castle, singing continually to ease her pain. Upon seeing them, Merwas raced to join them. Although the emperor worried how a shark had managed to enter the realm, he chose not to dwell on such concerns and to overcome with relief that his dear Wintonwy was safe. In gratitude for saving her life, he asked Emrys to make a wish—any wish.

“To spend the rest of my days at your court,” answered Emrys without pause.

“Then you long no more for eternal life?”

“No, my king. I long only to live my life anew at Wintonwy’s side.”

Bowing his head, the emperor declared: “If my daughter agrees, your wish shall be granted.”

Soon the castle came alive with the announcement of their wedding. While Wintonwy prepared for the ceremony, Emrys labored to make a wedding gift of unrivaled elegance. On the eve of the marriage, he unveiled it, a drinking horn whose beauty surpassed anything he had ever made. It was shaped like a spiraling shell, and it glimmered with the light of stars seen through the mist. And remembering his mountain home, Emrys endowed the drinking horn with a special virtue. Anyone who held it near could smell the fragrant air of the mountaintop, even if he did so at the bottom of the sea. He named it *Serilliant*, meaning *Beginning* in the mer people’s tongue.

Emrys offered it to Wintonwy. “I give you this Horn, the most lovely of my Treasures, as a symbol of our love.”

“Our love,” she replied, “is all we shall ever need to drink.”

The Emperor Merwas then came forward. “I have decided to give to Serilliant a special power, the greatest I have to bestow.”

“What is this power, my father?” asked Wintonwy.

“It is . . . a kind of eternal life, but not the kind most mortals seek. No, I give to this Horn a power far more precious, far more mysterious.”

“Can you tell us more?”

Merwas lifted the Horn high above his head. “I can tell you that the Horn’s new power springs from the secret of the newly born sea, the secret we mer people have guarded for so long.”

As he spoke, the Horn swiftly filled with a luminous liquid, as colorful as melted rainbows. Then Merwas declared, “Only those whose wisdom and strength of will are beyond question may drink from this Horn. For it holds the power to—”

Merwas never finished his sentence. The castle gates flew open and Nimue, leading an army of sea demons, drove down on the helpless mer people. The sea demons, growling wrathfully, slew anyone who stood before them.

As Nimue aimed her black dagger at Merwas himself, Emrys raised the sword of light in wrath and charged. But just before he could strike her down, Nimue held up one vaporous hand. On it rested the ring that Emrys himself had once worn.

“Look into thissss ring,” commanded Nimue. The ring flashed with a deep ruby light.

Emrys froze.

“Now,” she continued. “Drop your ssssword.”

Unable to resist the power of the ring, Emrys shuddered, then dropped the sword of light.

“Good.” The enchantress laughed. “I could kill you, but I will not because you have been quiet.”

ussseful to me. You wounded the ssspider monsssster, allowing me at lassst to enter the realm of Shaa.”

Emrys wanted to pounce on her, but he could not find the strength to move.

“Go,” ordered Nimue.

Haltingly, Emrys turned and left the castle.

When at last the invaders departed, both Merwas and his beloved Wintonwy lay dead. The few men and women who survived fled the castle, leaving it abandoned forever. They scattered far and wide, becoming the most elusive creatures in all the sea.

Yet Nimue’s triumph was not complete. The Horn somehow disappeared during the battle, and neither she nor her sea demons could discover its whereabouts.

Emrys, stricken with grief, eventually made his way back to his alpine lair. There he resumed the life of a recluse, but never again did he create any works. He did not even try. For the rest of his life he bore the pain of the love he had found and so soon lost. Worse yet, he bore the pain of knowing that but for his own folly, fair Wintonwy would still be alive.

What a sad story,” said Kate, swaying with the rocking of the boat. “But what does it have to do with Merlin? Or the sunken ship?”

Her father poured hot milk into the mugs and handed one to her. “I told you that the story of the Horn has two parts.”

“You mean . . . Serilliant . . . became the Horn of Merlin?”

“Yes! Merlin, in his search for the Thirteen Treasures, finally found it, the most precious Treasure of all. He kept it with him for a time—though for some reason he didn’t take it to the Glass House with the others. And then, somehow, he lost it.”

“Lost it? How?”

“Nobody knows.”

Kate’s eyes fastened on her father.

“Losing the Horn must have been a terrible blow. So terrible that I’m convinced it finally killed him.”

She squeezed some of the water from her braid, then leaned forward. “So what happened to the Horn?”

“I’ve been trying to answer that question for years.”

She watched his face, anxious but determined. “And you think finding the *Resurrección* will help you do that.”

“That and more.”

Clasping her mug with both hands, she inhaled the rich, chocolate aroma. The memory of the whirlpool’s icy waters now seemed far away. “Dad,” she asked quietly, “what is this all about?”

He ran a hand through his bristly hair. “I suppose there’s no harm in telling you. We’re almost out of time. And unless I can get a sonic picture that shows something, this whole project is as sunk as the *Resurrección*.”

“Maybe Isabella can talk the government into an extension.”

“I doubt it,” he said dispiritedly. “She did phenomenally well to get us a permit in the first place. They have strict rules against people coming down here, you know. Whirlpools and killer shoals don’t fit the tourist paradise they’re trying to promote. It was only because of Isabella’s stature as a scientist that they let us in at all—and then only for a month, with no extensions possible. Still, I was certain that would be enough time to find some hard evidence about the ship. Then, with the prospect of all that gold bullion, they’d be sure to change their tune and grant an extension. But here we are, with just three days left.”

Jim set aside his mug and stood up, his frame almost filling the cabin. He stepped to the counter and punched a few commands onto the computer keyboard. With a scowl, he studied the screen. “Nothing yet. We’ll give it just a bit longer, and if there’s still nothing, we’ll fix up the buoy and try again.”

“After you tell me what’s going on.”

Returning to his chair, he said, “All right, you win. But first, you’ve got to promise me *never* to tell anyone what I’m about to tell you. Not even your mother, not even Isabella. The risks are too great. Do you understand?”

Kate swallowed, but not her cocoa. “Yes.”

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