

A Young Fisherman

Part of the Bloodstone Bestiary

From time to time, there comes a story of lost ships being found just out of sight of the shore. The stories were all similar; lost ships devoid of its crew but otherwise no signs of distress to be found. Stories varied on what had happened. Most were ships found long after they had left port, and madness offered as the most common explanation, but those of piracy, starvation, and storm sometimes arose as well. The dangers of the sea were many, and any long journey would prove to be a perilous one even for experienced sailors.

One such ship, though, was found on a calm afternoon by a local fishing vessel. The ship had left the harbor only the day before. There had been no foul weather and no sign of danger. Fishing vessels had been out in the region that day, and there had been no reports recently of things such as raiders or privateers. And yet, the ship was found adrift.

When the fishermen drew their boat up against the ship, they were able to climb aboard. The ship's hull was undamaged. Its deck was undisturbed, with all the ropes, sails, and tools all in their proper locations. Further exploration by the fisherman revealed much the same across all sections of the ship. There were tables set with meals, half-drunk mugs of ale, and games of card and chance left unfinished. Throughout the ship, nothing was distressed. Most things were still as if members of this ship's crew had vanished.

Despite this, under the bright sun and calm winds, the ship felt peaceful. There was no feeling of ill will or danger. It seemed that everyone had just vanished. The exploration was slow but thorough. They sought every possible hiding place and looked for any given clue. When they found only the ship's stock, they gathered back on the deck of the ship and discussed what could have happened. It was as if every member of the ship's crew had just disappeared. But they left behind riches. There was a hold full of goods; steel, fur, and silver for trade. It was a wealth unseen before by any of them. Now it was theirs.

There was a discussion on what to do. The crew sat around the deck and spoke to one another for a time. The youngest of the fisherman, who was still a new member of the team, was less comfortable than the others. He didn't know them well, and as they talked about what to do, he merely watched. He could not put names to the suggestions, but as they spoke, there were many ideas put forward. The fishermen believed that they had found an abandoned ship, one that could easily lead them to more wealth than a life of fishing would bring them. There was some disagreement between them, though. Return to the harbor, collect the reward for the ship, take what they wanted; all came to the deck as a possibility.

Then a man from their crew spoke up – despite all that he could, the young man could not remember his name or place his face, but he was familiar. He was one of them. Why not take the ship? It lay abandoned, but it was stocked well for a long journey. They could sail to a nearby port as traders, and there they would find their wealth. There, they could start anew.

They discussed their options for a time. They debated. The debate never grew genuinely heated, though, at times, voices did become louder. It was all on minutia, though. How would the wealth be

split? How would they chose and treat new lives? Would they stay a crew or go their separate ways? After all, this was piracy in a way. They were considering taking the ship of the dead for their benefit. There was no sign of a crew though, not even notes or logs from the captain and crew remained. It was a blessing adrift.

There was some debate on taking the ship just back to the harbor from which they had left. Each time it came up, the truth came that the ship would be confiscated if discovered. The fishermen would be without their prize. So, they made their choice. They would take the ship to a nearby port, sell the goods, and start over.

Despite his youth and relatively new position with this crew, the young man did speak up. But he did not do so boldly. He meekly disguised his question as one about what would happen to the old fishing boat. The question seemed to perturb them. Why did it matter? But he pressed the matter, again and again. They relented. He would take the fishing boat back, let the harbor know that they were trying to salvage a ship. When they did not return, he could come looking for them to get his part of the treasure.

The young man left the ship, took the fishing boat, and returned to port. His conscience got the better of him, though, and he reported the situation to the authorities. With the information, he was taken into custody and brought aboard another ship. That ship would take him to the Capital, eventually. First, it stopped by the planned destination of the fishermen. And he waited.

No ship had come to port.

When the navy searched nearby ports, no ship matching that description was found.

The young man served several short conscription terms for his dealings. He lived a life of little substance, struggling to make ends meet. He always listened to the rumors, but the ship and the fishermen were never heard from again.

That was, at least, until he was very old. A stranger came to town, seeking the young man who spoke of a lonely ship – only to find a wizened old man ravaged by the passing of ages. The visitor asked him about the ship he had seen of the story from that day. He asked if anyone had believed him. The old man, of course, said no. No one had, despite the story remaining the same throughout his life. The visitor was enthralled by the story and thanked the old man for sharing it. He asked the man if he had gotten what he wanted in life.

The old man shook his head. He had not. He avoided the fate of his crew, but another fate had followed him.

The visitor needed to return to his ship, and he asked the old man if he would walk with him and share stories of his life. The old man agreed. That was all he wanted – for someone to believe him. The stranger was happy with that and admitted he believed every word.

After all, the old man was the only one to get away from him that day.