

All That Glitters

You're sure there's nothing at *all* frightening or suspicious about those beautiful glowing golden coins as the creature stands in the water and proffers a webbed hand that seems to pulse in the dim light in time with the spinning of the distant lighthouse lamp, illuminating the visitor's frills with that same warm golden glow.

Pulsing, pulsing, slick as molten gold as you slip into the water. You expect cold, but you feel only warmth and a strange sense of longing as the gold coins continue to call to you. Twinkling, glinting, rasping as they rub against one another, almost like breathing, almost as if they are alive.

Another pulse of light as the fins and frills shudder with the ripple of the water, the sighing crash and retreat of the tide on the shore. It is like a gentle embrace. A calling. A welcoming. An invitation...

A promise.

In the back of your mind, something stirs, a strange muted sort of buzz, almost like an alarm, almost like a scream.

A scream....

You frown. Why would there be a scream? Why should there be? There is treasure and gold, the promise of more, the promise of endless, endless, beautiful, writhing gold swaying like the fins in the waves, like the open hand, back and forth, back and forth....

You're not entirely sure how long you've been treading in the water. You barely remember the sensation of the ocean waves breaking against you as you walked through the surf and into the bay to reach that which lies so close to your grasp. The fish man grins at you with his razor teeth. His eyes pulse like the gold, like the light of the lighthouse, two sunken coins deep, deep in the hidden depths. The crevices of the sea, personified in this *glorious* messenger.

The water laps over your chest and shoulders now, dragging at your clothing, clutching, pulling as it sinks its claws into the fabric. Yet you do not

tire. Your neck tingles with your teeth and jaw as the water laps over your skin. The murky light of the moon and lighthouse through the fog bank give the illusion of that same slimy slickness of your companion, your guide, the one who brought you the gift. The one who seeks to give you more. So very much more.

"Come. Come," the messenger urges. And you are not sure whether you heard the garbled voice uttered aloud, in your head, or both. It is as though it were spoken like the wind is blown through a bottle, with just a hint of phlegm, that fleck of foam that always remains on the ocean tides, churned by the gargling sea. "More awaits. Come. Come."

You are not certain that you care anymore about how you hear it. What matters is the message. What matters is that you listen.

The murky light flashes through the thickening bank of fog, and the light pulses once more from the messenger's eyes. The gold is clasped tightly in his webbed fist. Now you can only find your coins in his eyes. His mouth curves upward in a smile. Your mouth curves with it.

The shadows of the reef jut below you, the valley of sunken ships, a graveyard from the olden days, in the times of the great whale huntings and the old ways of fishing. A time when humans gave thanks to the sea for their bounty and held respect for the denizens of the deep. These ships that did not make it back to harbor were warnings for the next generation to brave the waves.

One must respect the ocean. One must respect The Deep.

The light flashes over his face now, rather than his back.

How far out have you been carried on the tide? Does it matter? Was it a current, or did you come under your own power?

You see him now, in all his beauty and his ugliness. He is of man, but he is also of the sea. He does not belong above, yet he tarries for your sake, to speak with you, to guide you, to pull you out like a fish on a line. Out of your element. Out of the home where you have dwelled for so many years. Drawn by a promise, a whisper, a glint, a *lure*.

The sea brushes your sides, your arms, your hands, your legs, your feet. It caresses what you first thought to be nothing more than bits of seaweed caught against you as you swam with your escort. But now the glow is brighter. Now it has spread in the water beneath you, around you.

You do not fear it. Why should you fear the gift of the gold? The endless light of those orbs flow into your own as your guide seizes your hands with his webbed ones. There is no disgust, no loathing at the touch, only a sense of welcome and belonging. The delivery of the promise. And the invitation for more.

The coins exchange hands. And as if your desire to protect this most precious of gifts has been heard, webbing grows to consume and merge with your fingers. Your nails, once soft, frail, and translucent, grow thicker, darker, and much harder as they lengthen and sharpen to match your guide.

The better to protect your new treasure, this precious, *precious* gift. You sense the subtle changes in the currents. You feel the warmth of the harbor cycle into the sea beyond like the outpouring of breath on a winter day. The edge of the harbor opens to the maw of the sea and the jutting shadows of ships that dared to defy the will of The Deep, to disrespect ... what? Whom?

You clutch the gift close to your chest. Flecks of gold seem to sparkle in your skin, as if the ocean were telling you to make the coins a part of your flesh, a part of your essence, a part of your very being.

Beautiful.

Fluid.

Gold.

Writhing like your body now writhes. Writhing like the undulations of the seaweed that reaches up from the depths to snare at passersby and conceal what lies beneath.

What wonders must wait beneath those waves.

The light pulses from you now, even as it does from your guide. He smiles as your gill slits open for the first time. Your long swim has transformed your body, filled it with carved, hard, powerful muscle beneath a slimy scaly hide sheathed and restricted by the nets of your human trappings. You feed greedily from his eyes now. And you shudder as, like the flick of a comb's tine, barb after barb erupts from your scalp, arcing down your spine, then slowly being woven with that same pulsing gold webbing along your new dorsal fin. Your skull adapts to a new configuration, and what hair remains falls or sticks to your side to await that final shucking cleanse that proves you are ready to cast off all that remains.

It requires but a prompting to give meaning to the urge that is rising within you as your sharpening vision reveals more and more of the skeletal remains from those aged shipwrecks. The ocean agrees with you. It seeks to cleanse you of your weakness in a form of baptism.

Baptism. Yes. And baptism requires *immersion*.

You bare your new fangs at your guide, trembling, wanting, *needing* to slough off the last disgusting pieces from the land.

And he obliges.

"Sink."

The word fills you with a thrill of excitement, and you obey without question. The water welcomes you like an old friend. You do not feel cold. And though your lungs were used to breathing the air above, the sensation of water flooding that space is natural, as though the ocean were not only clearing off the outside but cleansing, *purging* you from within.

You sink deeper, deeper, *deeper*. And you feel the strength of the ocean flooding into you as your frame expands, tearing out of the clothing that seeks to hold you back, as if to pull you away from this new promised land. You wait for the flinch, the scathing self-rebuke over your nakedness to rise. And yet, it does not come. It is as though with the forsaking of the land, you have forsaken the god which dwells there in the skies above. You have no shame.

Great tendrils, massive beaks, sinewy tails, and tentacled appendages all brush over you and wave, as if to welcome you, to greet you, to know you

as they remove the last tatters of your human trappings. These are things of the wilds, of The Deep. Servants who crushed the invading overlanders, who spawned from the corpses of the chum on the land.

A new tongue licks your teeth and lips as you ponder about what that flesh must taste like.

Your guide grins wider at the sight, as if he knows what you are thinking and approves.

At last, you see another golden light, this one pulsing in time to your own and your guide's. The limbs part ways to let you through, and you swim with all speed. The gold pulls you, calls you, as if you were meant to be there, a part of some vast underwater hoard.

Before you can even think, you are surrounded by piles and piles of gold that illuminate the space with their glowing yellow light. The coins came from here, you are certain. And in time, you blink in surprise as you realize that you are not in the open ocean anymore, but rather in a chamber with a great vaulted ceiling. The ebb and flow of the sea water's currents pass through the area like the breath of some great beast waiting to wake from its slumber.

You perceive a curling black throne atop a dais and instinctively kneel, then avert your eyes.

The voice that carries through the water is soft, and yet it is filled with all the crushing pressure of the deepest marine trench.

"I bid you welcome, mortal, to my domain. Arise and present yourself to the Scion of Carcosa."

You no longer have the capacity for your breath to be stolen from you under the water, but had you beheld this majesty on the land, you would have gasped, and perhaps even screamed.

But here, now, there is only awe. There is only wonder and a strange gnawing need that burrows deeper and deeper in your mind like a worm, but you cannot identify what this urge could mean, what you want. Surely, this

wonder of wonders beneath the sea can tell you, show you. You would do anything to be shown, to be told.

Anything.

What looks for all the world like burnished and polished gold tendrils writhe and drift in the water from the ruler's navel to his chest, from his forearms near the elbows, from his goatee at the edge of his long muzzle, from the mane that cascades down his head and surrounds two great black polished horns. His whole torso reflects that same gold.

His face is a perfectly pale white with hints of gray at the tip of his goat head. The same delicate white consumes his hands to his wrists, save for the silvery gray color of his hoof-like fingertips. Each curls almost like a claw. His lower torso is all black fur with the same silvery gray for his goat hooves. It reminds you vaguely of the ancient tales of the Satyr and Faun that once were so prolific in the region. And indeed, they are still very popular to this day. It is only too clear there were elements of truth to those tales, given what now stands before you. An unusually long tail prehensile tail writhes lazily behind him, and a hint of golden ichor seems to ooze from the tip, almost like drool or slobber. Or perhaps some form of algae?

You do as instructed, feeling almost compelled to obey this call that vibrates through your very being. You soon stand before the throne and proffer your clenched webbed hands to reveal the gold. You were commanded to present yourself, and part of your self resides with this gold now.

The anthropomorphic caprine's lips curve into a beneficent smile. This time, when he speaks, the pressure is gone, yet you feel an instinctive need to show submission to this suddenly soft-spoken velvet-voiced ruler.

"It is good to see that you have accepted my emissary's offer. Even better to see that my experiment has been successful."

You feel like you should be concerned at this, and yet instead, you feel joy at the thought of having been of help to this creature.

...

No, not a creature. That would debase him. He is above such lowly monikers.

“You may return them now.”

Your guide is suddenly standing there with a vessel. He holds open the lid, and golden fluid jiggles lazily within the vessel’s confines as it mingles with the seawater and gradually begins to dilute. You insert the coins deep into the substance until you feel the rest of its kind clink against your claws and the metal sings. You smile as you remove your hand. New sharp claws emerge from your flat webbed feet and dig into the surface beneath you as a shudder of unbridled pleasure racks your body. The pulsing golden substance absorbs into your scales. Your body continues to shake as the energy runs down your spine, your arms, your face, your torso. The room grows brighter as your scaly hide flickers with the dimmest hints of light.

“Oho!” This time, the caprine’s lips pull back into a feral grin, exposing sharp fangs, jagged incisors, and molars. “A new breed? Or perhaps something more efficient....” His clawed finger plays with his beard as he approaches you.

You desire so desperately to be of use. That must be the need. That must be the compulsion that you feel swelling against the confines of your mind. And it only grows stronger as he approaches, as if he feeds it. The closer he draws, the more the room seems to fill with whispers that lap at the edge of your consciousness. And yet, you do not fear this. It is much like the sensation you experienced when communing with your escort.

And then he is there in front of you, his fingers cupping your chin as he stares into your eyes. He grins and licks his lips with a long golden tongue slick with the same substance you saw on his tail. “You wish to enter my service, little mortal?”

He is in your mind. He must be to know your desire. The voices claw and whisper all the louder, practically keening their will. The order to listen, to join, to obey, to follow, to serve. So many calling together, all going one way, like a group, a pack, or a ... school....

Your gaze darts to your escort ever so briefly, and you swear you hear his voice louder than the others pushing, urging to speak the will of the collective.

And you are powerless to resist as you open your mouth and speak for the first time under the water. “I will serve.” It is no surprise to you that you sound like your escort now. The many other voices that are and yet are not his cheer as one in your mind. You have been welcomed. You have been found worthy.

And not just by the school.

The golden orbs that once carried the flat rectangular pupil so common to goats now have warped into spirals that spin and swirl as majestically as a whirlpool, with an even greater pull. The power of your escort’s gaze is nothing compared to this, and you soon find yourself slumping forward as your new master licks his lips with that oozing golden tongue.

“Excellent. Now open wide.”

There is no thinking, only obedience. You agreed to serve. You agreed to obey. You agreed. You agreed. You agreed....

Thrill after thrill after thrill. The mass shoves into your mouth as the caprine pulls you to him, swathing you in his embrace and the tendrils of his golden fleece. You have no choice. You swallow ... and swallow ... and swallow. Eventually, it is more like suckling than anything else. Your gills are free to breathe, which means there is no fear of choking.

Layer after layer of sharp teeth sprout in your mouth along the roof and jaw beneath your tongue. They clamp gently onto the caprine’s tongue, and you continue to feed. The light pulses stronger and stronger from your eyes, followed by the flickering of patterned lights from patches of your scaly hide. Bioluminescence made all the stronger by your master’s will. Your frills and fins all glow brighter as you fall deeper into those eyes. The room suddenly feels so very, very much smaller. And then you’re standing in the open ocean again. Your master is staring into your massive eye as he hovers in the water.

“In this shape, you will draw ships to me and redirect the flow of the mortal vessels. Rip out their hulls. Consume them. And then offer the survivors my gift of service.

You feel so good, you would do anything for him. Anything at all. A few ships? No problem. Your mouth snaps shut in anticipation of tearing into that metal. Your claws clench in longing pierce and pry apart the bolted and soldered paneling. Your scaly hide to repel all weapons the humans would bring to bear. The land dwellers deserve to serve your lord, not the other way around. They have forgotten. You will help them to remember. And oh, they will remember.

A few moments later, you are staring down at His head, standing just a foot taller than He. His eyes still swirl as He looks at you. Your whole body pulses with the thrum of your heartbeat as your new luminescent patches flow through a pattern of strobing gold to show your complete docility and obedience. After all, you are but a vessel of His will, one of the many tangled tendrils that twitch and lash at the slightest thought from their head. Another set of fins has jutted out on either side of the main frill that now runs down your back to add to the show, and your body mass is twice the size it was when you first arrived at your scion’s realm.

“And in this shape, you shall be my emissary, drawing worshippers to serve me, as *you* serve me. You will spread the influence of my kingdom. Carcosa is tired of sitting beneath the tides. It will surge as the storm. And you shall break at its head.”

“Yes, Master.”

“Tell me, who do you serve? What is your master’s name?”

The words flow into your mind as easily as the tendril that invaded your mouth with that sweet ichor from earlier. “I belong to Master Canthus, Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath, Scion of Carcosa, The Golden Coat.” You kneel before Him. “I belong to you, Master.”

You hiccup, and a golden coin surges up your throat and out of your maw into your master’s waiting hand. He slathers it with his tongue and places it in your hand with six others just like it.

“Good. Now bring me more followers.”

You turn in obedience and leave your master’s domain. “Yes, Master. The Cult of the Golden Coat will surge again.” You travel with one purpose in mind, your master’s presence watching over you from His watery domain. Though you may have left Him, you know that He will never leave you. After all, He owns your soul.

You sneer as you approach the beach. The fog was already rolling in again in the world above. It was time for The Deep to claim its offerings again.

The tide is turning inland, and you wait beyond the shore, staring as your new lights pulse hypnotically, invitingly. It is only a matter of time before a lone human is snared by your gift.

Not all will be bound to the depths at first. The master requires pawns on the dirt, little tadpoles that will one day mature and join the ranks of the school in the depths.

But they will bring more to the Master. And His *glorious* influence will spread and flourish as in days of old.

Your voice rumbles, croaks, and thrums through the waves as the rippling water surges and beats against the shore, waiting to erode the humans’ will. They will be claimed. All must submit to The Golden Coat.

You lick your lips once more to get the last savor of your master’s touch, that lingering ichor suffusing you with pleasure. You feel your master’s presence as His power joins with yours, and once more you speak the invitation and the summons.

“Come.”

A loud splash echoes over the harbor.

“Man overboard!”

©ries. Havoc. Panic. A vain attempt to find the one that already speeds to accept the call, the invitation, the summons. You sneer and palm your coins in anticipation. You know your master’s will.

It is better to share one’s good fortune when one is able. The crew would soon learn to respect The Deep after you pass the master’s gift to the one who heeded soonest and send him back to induct the crew.

And you will be ready to teach them when they, too, heed the master’s call. You smirk at the golden ichor that glows on the coins. The waves draw the prospective acolyte to you, and you swim to meet him as your eyes flood with the master’s gold to whisper His will into the new vessel.

It is only a matter of time. And there is nothing but time in the depths beneath the waves, in the timeless city of ©arcosa, where the Old Ones still walk and wear away at the realm of man as the ocean consumes the land over the eons.

All will bow.

All will serve.

“All hail the Scion of ©arcosa. All hail the Golden Coat. All hail the Dark Young of Shub-Niggurrath.”

Your sneer widens into a predatory grin as the human’s blank gaze fills with that same radiant gold. You remove his gloves and give him the coins, even as his monotone repeats the adoration that your master deserves and craves. His teeth sharpen ever so slightly. The barest hints of webbing begins to form between his fingers as he pledges his allegiance under the master’s crushing mental presence. “Hail. Hail. Hail the Dark Scion....”

You whisper his orders as your fins cut through the waves, driving you swiftly and soundlessly to the vessel where he jumped and the waiting buoys that have been thrown. You slip silently beneath the depths and guide him

from below the dark waters to avoid the search lights. He grasps the buoy with one arm, the gold clenched in his other hand. The command has been planted.

Grant them the gift of Midas.

And you know that he will. He cannot resist the will of your master any more than you can. It will be a simple matter to visit them during their long voyage out to sea. The acolyte will plant the seeds with the coins. Your master's nectar will make the ground fertile.

And *you* will make them flourish.

You chuckle as an old adage from the usurping Christian god flickers across your mind. It seems strangely appropriate for the situation, and you bare your teeth once more in a grin at the thought when the boat's motor starts and the vessel chugs away over the water.

"Fishers and hunters of men, indeed."