

Excerpted from *The Fairy Chronicles: Volume II*

Sandpiper and the Ship of Pools

The Ship of Pools is a magical ship that delivers cargo to many destinations all over the world. The many pools of the ship contain freight such as mules, tools, jewels, stools, rules, and ghouls. When the captain of the Ship of Pools abandons his vessel, Sandpiper and her friends must find a way to make the cargo deliveries. Without a skipper, this trip is destined to be the ship's final voyage. But by a strange twist of fate, the fairies are able to find a new crew for the magical Ship of Pools.



To life's magical voyages

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Chapter One

The Ship of Pools

Blue skies and smooth sailing: That was all Captain Yules used to want. But after nearly thirty years of commanding the Ship of Pools, he was ready for a change. Like many people in the trade and retail merchandise business, thirty years was about all he could take of the constant complaining of never-satisfied customers, and the unrealistic expectations as far as delivery times, even for many of the most exotic, hard-to-obtain items. Yes, sir. He had about had enough of the *Unreasonables*. Though most of his customers were not overly finicky or critical, and paid him on time, those few who seemed to think he should be performing his job entirely at their whim, and nearly for free, had finally gotten to him.

The Ship of Pools was a magical sailing ship that had been in commission for almost two hundred years. In fact, Captain Yules was going to be very sad to miss the bi-centennial celebration of the ship he had so faithfully commanded for almost thirty years. But it wasn't just time for him to retire. It was time for him to skedaddle—right away, as soon as possible—before he lost control completely and did something really regrettable or drastic.

There had already been some yelling at the last pick-up site when the new owner of a trade shop that Captain Yules had previously dealt with for ten years had tried to pawn inferior merchandise off on him. That was the last straw.

For several months, Captain Yules had been itching to tell rude people off, make late deliveries to those customers he disliked, and string up anyone he suspected of trying to cheat him or take advantage of him. But he had resisted. It was important for any captain of the Ship of Pools to maintain a certain reputation.

Since its maiden voyage under the direction of the honorable Captain Knewles, each new commander of the Ship of Pools had strictly followed a code of ethics in treating all customers with respect and courtesy, despite how disagreeable some of them were. Many magical lands and beings the world over depended on the Ship of Pools to obtain items needed to further their work and leisure activities, and the cargo ship delivered important freight to thousands of destinations worldwide.

The Ship of Pools was a very large vessel with huge sails that looked as though they were made of pastel clouds in colors of pale pink, soft lilac, mint green, creamy blue, watery orange, and light yellow. The sails very much resembled cotton candy. And in certain lighting, the colors looked similar to those in a rainbow. The rigging of the ship was silvery gray and very intricate. It had been constructed half by a magical spider and half by a giantess. The spider had spun the upper rigging, which looked like the complex weaving in spider webs. The lower rigging had been crocheted by the giantess and resembled frilly doily lace. The planking of the ship was a warm, golden yellow and was very polished and shiny. Accents such as the railings and trim were a golden-orange color. The tall masts were a darker yellow than the planking and were spiraled as well as tapered. And the figurehead was a giant, orange, talking starfish.

The ship basically navigated itself; however, the wheel needed to be told where to go. After the wheel was told where to go by the captain, or some other person, the bowsprit and jibboom in the front of the ship communicated with the mizzenmast in the rear. The magical wood that made up these three masts had cracks etched into the surfaces that resembled weathered faces, so the bowsprit, jibboom, and mizzenmast were actually able to speak to one another, after a fashion, and throw orders about to raise particular sails and help the wheel steer the ship. A sextant was built into the bowsprit to aid with navigation.

Sunk into the deck of the ship were many pools used to hold the cargo. The pools were different shapes and sizes and were painted various pastel colors to match the sails. There were eleven pools in all in the following shapes: square, crescent moon, triangle, five-point star, round, teardrop, octagon, kidney, oval, rectangle, and plus-sign. The deck of the ship very much resembled the children's game in which different-shaped blocks were fitted into corresponding-shaped holes.

Currently, six of the pools contained cargo set for delivery. The crescent moon pool was full of jewels. Tools filled the oval one. Rules were heaped into the triangular-shaped pool. Four ghouls lounged in the kidney pool, when they weren't floating about visiting with the other occupants of the ship. Mules occupied the square one. And stools filled the plus-sign pool.

Captain Yules left the Ship of Pools docked in the Gulf of Mexico a short distance from Mer-island, the first destination for delivery. Mer-island, also called Gull Rock, was a tiny island floating directly above Ocean Merland, the underwater home of the salt-water merpeople. Even though no merperson had ever been disagreeable to Captain Yules, he was in no mood to face another customer, not even one. He had simply had enough. Some other person would need to take over this job. As he disembarked, Captain Yules thought to himself, *This is it. I am retired.* And he left the Ship of Pools, his home for nearly thirty years, with only a small carpetbag and his memories. He did not look back, not even once.

The Ship of Pools bid him a silent farewell and sat thinking for a long while. The ghouls were napping in deck chairs, and the mules were quietly munching grain in their square pool.

After nearly an hour, the figurehead of the ship had a brilliant idea, and he gave a soft whistle. The whistle called a small tiger shark to a point near the bow of the ship, and the talking orange starfish gave a message to the shark. The

shark passed the information to a sea turtle, who made his way ashore and relayed the message to a blue heron, who immediately went to find Madam Oyster, leader of the fairies for the Gulf region.

The orange starfish figurehead had traveled many oceans and visited many lands, and he knew much about fairies. Fairies were notorious for solving problems, along with protecting nature. They were especially expert in fixing problems caused by other magical creatures. In fact, it was their specialty.

Upon receiving the message from the blue heron, Madam Oyster immediately sent a nut message to Madam Toad, leader of fairies for the Southwest region. Madam Oyster gave the hazelnut to a sparrow in her front yard. The sparrow traveled the first leg of the journey and passed the message off to a sooty owl. After further hand-offs that included a raven and two mockingbirds, the hazelnut finally ended up with a small cottontail rabbit and was delivered to Madam Toad on her back porch, only a mere fourteen hours after the figurehead had dispatched the tiger shark.

If it had been a true emergency, Madam Oyster would have telephoned Madam Toad, since fairies were also human beings and lived in houses with modern conveniences. But nut messages were simply more fun than telephones, and the Ship of Pools was in no immediate danger. In fact, it was magically disguised to look like a regular sailing ship to the eyes of non-magical people.

When Madam Toad read the message, she thought it very lucky that the first Fairy Circle of summer was scheduled for the next day, so this problem could be quickly dealt with.

Chapter Two

Sandpiper

This was the first week of June; and though summer vacation had begun, ten-year-old Emma Maybry was quite as busy as she had been during the school year. For one thing, she was helping her mother, and a garden gnome named Mr. Dusel, tend an enormous vegetable and flower garden.

Regular people couldn't see gnomes because gnomes used disguise magic to look like ordinary objects such as tree stumps, watermelons, garden hoses, and soccer balls. But Emma could see Mr. Dusel because she was a fairy. Non-magical human beings couldn't recognize fairies either when they saw them because when fairies were in fairy form, they were also magically disguised and only appeared to look like their fairy spirits such as flowers, insects, birds, tree blossoms, berries, small animals, and herbs.

Emma had been given the fairy spirit of a spotted sandpiper. Mr. and Mrs. Maybry had seen Emma in fairy form once in the back yard. But other than noting that it was odd for a spotted sandpiper to be this far from the coast, they didn't have any clue that they were looking at a fairy, much less their own daughter.

In fairy form, Sandpiper's dress and wings were made of elegant, tan and yellow feathers accented with soft, gray and white spots. The dress came to just above her knees, and she wore a feathered headband to pull back her short, curly blond hair. Sandpiper's wand, which she carried in her fairy belt, was a collectible mini spoon from Spain.

Each young fairy was assigned a fairy mentor to act as a teacher regarding all things related to being a fairy. Sandpiper's mentor, Madam Robin, was unique in the fairy realm because she was not a fairy. She was actually a very old, wise robin who had been enchanted at one time with the gift of speech and long life.

In addition to being able to fly and carry out magic, each fairy was given a unique fairy gift. Many of Sandpiper's

friends had extraordinary abilities such as super-fast flying speed, enhanced memory, the ability to inspire passion, amazing eyesight, and the power to become invisible. Sandpiper's own fairy gifts included exceptional flying maneuverability and enhanced communication skills specific to sea creatures.

In girl form, as she hurriedly helped Mr. Dusel weed a row of gladiolas that was nearly as tall as her head, Sandpiper thought about her exciting week ahead. Early the next morning, she would be attending a Fairy Circle. Following Fairy Circle, she was going to a three-night sleepover party at a fairy mentor's home with several of her friends.

After brushing off the garden dirt and saying goodbye to Mr. Dusel, Sandpiper went inside the house to get cleaned up. Then she packed her overnight bag for the sleepover. Madam Mariposa was hosting the large, group sleepover since she lived alone and had several guest rooms.

Next, Sandpiper helped her mother make dinner and clean up afterwards. Then she read a book until bedtime.

As Sandpiper was getting into her pajamas, Madam Robin arrived on her windowsill bearing some very exciting news: Sandpiper had been selected to lead a fairy sea mission immediately following Fairy Circle the next day. Madam Robin also told Sandpiper that Madam Goldenrod would be picking her up early to drive her to the Fairy Circle.

Chapter Three Fairy Circle

The next morning, Madam Goldenrod arrived at eight as expected. Ginger and Dove were also in the car. They had been chosen to participate in the upcoming fairy mission too,

and they were very excited about the prospect of a sea fairy adventure.

Ginger's real name was Charlotte Newberry, and she had short dark hair. Her fairy dress was dark green and leafy; and she had pointed, dark orange wings. Ginger's carried an antique skeleton key for her wand, and Madam Goldenrod was her mentor.

Fairy gifts often developed at different rates in individual fairies. Ginger's special fairy gifts were still developing but so far included the ability to cure nausea, dizziness, and upset stomachs in others. She was also able to nurse sick plants and animals back to health quickly.

Dove had shoulder-length brown hair, and her name was Elise Reynolds. Dove's fairy spirit was that of a Spanish dove, so her feathery dress and wings were a soft, pinkish-gray color. Madam June Beetle was assigned as her mentor. Dove's fairy gift was the ability to inspire peace and help settle conflicts, and she carried a small piece of green bamboo for her wand.

Madam Goldenrod's granddaughter was a dewberry fairy. But Dewberry was out of town visiting her aunt so she would not be able to attend the fairy gathering today.

Fairies sometimes held their Fairy Circles under trees with special significance. Ash trees were symbolic of sea travel, representing the abundance of life in the oceans and the many mysteries of the sea, so Madam Toad decided to site their gathering under a cluster of leafy ash and red oak trees in a small, secluded cove of a nearby lake.

Quite a few fairies were absent from Fairy Circle today because they were taking summer trips with their families, and a couple of the girls were away at summer camp. But Sandpiper, Dove, and Ginger got to catch up on news with many of their friends including Pumpkinwing, Calliope, Dragonfly, Harlequin, Marigold, Cisthene, Moonflower, Teasel, and Firefly.

Larkspur, Heather, Cinnabar, and Aloe arrived rather late because Madam Rose had run into a traffic jam just prior to

picking them up. It seemed that summer rush-hour traffic was not much better than the rest of the year on Madam Rose's side of town.

Cinnabar was also very excited about the sea mission. She had received a nut message the previous evening from her mentor, Madam Finch, informing her that she would be going on today's adventure. Cinnabar was also scheduled for the three-night sleepover at Madam Mariposa's house, so she would not be missed from home while out on fairy business.

Cinnabar's real name was Helen Michaels. She was a very beautiful, tall, willowy black girl with short, straight brown hair. Cinnabar got her fairy spirit from a cinnabar moth. In fairy form, she wore a black, velvet fuzz dress and had tall, brilliant red wings with gray striping along the edges. Her belt and slippers matched her dress, and she carried an aspen twig for her wand. Cinnabar's special gift included enhanced night abilities. She had more energy and flew better at night, and her vision was also keener in the dark. Cinnabar was also the most graceful and coordinated of all the fairies; but this came from her skill as a ballerina, not her fairy spirit.

Madam Monarch and Madam Chameleon laid out refreshments for everyone; and the fairies enjoyed a feast of powdered sugar puff pastries, lemon jellybeans, cherry chip loaf, raspberries, peanut butter and marshmallow cr me sandwiches, and homemade fudge. They also had root beer, lemonade, and iced coffee to drink.

When everyone was very full from the sweets, Madam Toad called the meeting to order and began telling them about the fairy mission. "The Ship of Pools, which you can read about in your handbooks, is currently stranded in the Gulf of Mexico. Captain Yules abandoned the ship earlier this week. While the ship is capable of the technical aspects of navigating on her own, she still must have a crew to guide her. The ship cannot sail without direction and guidance. The chosen group of fairies will travel to the Gulf and guide the ship to make the cargo deliveries.

“I have selected Sandpiper to lead this mission,” Madam Toad added. “She is likely our most sea-worthy fairy and can communicate with sea creatures if needed. Ginger, Cinnabar, and Dove will accompany her; and Madam Robin will supervise. Sea Dragon of the Gulf region will also be joining you. Since she has sea experience, and can breathe under water, her skills might be useful.”

Madam Toad did not always explain her reasoning behind selecting particular participants for missions. But she sensed that several fairies were disappointed not to be chosen for this exciting adventure, so she went on to explain her decision. “Ginger’s ability to cure motion sickness could prove helpful. Cinnabar’s night skills might also come in handy since the journey will likely take two days. And Dove will be an asset if any disputes arise.”

Just as Madam Toad finished speaking, the Dark Witch appeared from out of nowhere, standing next to one of the red oak tree trunks. The Dark Witch had met several of the fairies on previous missions.

Next, Madam Toad told the group, “The Dark Witch will be transporting you to the Gulf. If we asked the elves to transport you, it would take forty-five minutes to come out of the elf *Travel-Sleep Spell*, so this will save a little time. She will also be able to bring you home quickly after your mission, in case the time is cut close to the ending of your scheduled sleepover and we end up needing to rush you home.”

Provisions had already been packed for the fairies in duffel bags and backpacks and included blankets, pillows, water, lemon jellybeans, apples, bananas, peanut butter and marshmallow cr me sandwiches, and raspberries.

The Dark Witch greeted the fairies and gathered their bags and packs into her hands. She then instructed them to line up on her outstretched arm. Sandpiper, Dove, Cinnabar, and Ginger all flew into position as the other fairies bid them farewell.

The last thing the departing fairies heard was Madam Toad's familiar, parting words. "Flitter forth fairies and take care of business!"

Chapter Four Jewels, Tools, and Rules

The fairies and Madam Robin were not even aware that they had traveled. Almost immediately upon landing on the Dark Witch's arm, they were greeted by the smell of salty surf and very bright sea sunshine. And the Dark Witch, standing on the deck of the Ship of Pools, was saying, "Here we are." She placed their bags and packs on the deck as Madam Robin flew up to light on a bit of rigging.

Since the first sight of the Ship of Pools was so breathtaking and amazing, the fairies couldn't move for a few seconds. When they heard the witch laughing softly at their open but silent mouths, they finally came to their senses and flew from her arm to land on the deck. They thanked the Dark Witch and she told them, "Madam Robin just has to call for me, and I will return to take you home." With that, the Dark Witch simply vanished.

Sea Dragon was already on board. Madam Oyster was her mentor and had arranged a camping trip excuse for three days so that Sea Dragon could be away from home to help with this mission. There were only four fairies currently in the Gulf region. Since Madam Oyster loved camping and didn't need much of an excuse to spend time with Starfish and Coral, the other two fairies in the area, she looked forward to their excursion to the state park.

Sea Dragon had short, light brown hair. Her name was Sandra Hernandez, and she carried a miniature yellow rosebud for her wand. Sea Dragon had the fairy spirit of a leafy sea dragon, which was really a type of seahorse. She

wore a creamy, yellowish-orange dress with gray and white markings. Her wings were very wild, almost fearsome looking. They were greenish-yellow, extremely large and bushy, and looked like fronds from some type of underwater sea plant. Sea Dragon's fairy gift was the ability to breathe under water. She also had excellent camouflage abilities in the water and expert knowledge of sea creatures.

The talking figurehead was happy to see the fairies and called to them. "We are glad you have come! The first thing you might want to do is check the manifest to find out about the cargo and the order of the deliveries."

The fairies were grateful for this advice, but they didn't quite know where to look for the ship's manifest. They were helped in this area when the four ghouls rose from the blue, kidney-shaped pool and floated towards them, the leader holding a somewhat moldy-looking roll of parchment.

Sandpiper and her friends had never seen ghouls before. The ghostly spirits were a pale, pea-green color; and they were in four very different, distinct shapes. The leader of the group was shaped like a cello with a tapered tail. The next ghoul in line had a torso and head shaped exactly like a tree, but he also had a trailing sort of tail. The third one was very squat and was nearly a perfect square box shape, yet with something like a short tail. And the final ghoul was very straight and skinny. With the exception of his pointed tail, he was the perfect likeness of a tall pickaxe with the curving pick as his head.

The ghoul leader introduced his group to the fairies and Madam Robin. "I am Cello and this is Tree, Box, and Pick."

The fairies smiled at the matching shape-names and introduced themselves. Madam Robin chirped a quick hello, but vowed to keep a watchful eye on the spirits since she had encountered many ghouls before in her travels. Though she had never had any major trouble with them, Madam Robin knew the main purpose of ghouls: They were expert grave robbers.

Cello presented Sandpiper with the parchment manifest rather gallantly with a small bow, telling her, "If you need any assistance, we are available to help. We have traveled many times on the Ship of Pools."

"Thank you," said Sandpiper, unrolling the parchment and checking the listing for deliveries. Cinnabar and Sea Dragon looked over her shoulder while Ginger and Dove flew around the deck checking out the contents of the six occupied pools.

After studying the document carefully, Sandpiper determined that the jewels were first on the list for delivery to a destination called Gull Rock, also known as Mer-island, about thirty miles from where the Ship of Pools was docked. Cinnabar and Sea Dragon concurred with this; and since all of the merchandise aboard the ship was already overdue for delivery, Sandpiper wasted no time in getting started. Having read the entry describing the Ship of Pools in her fairy handbook, she made her way to the wheel of the ship. Then she said firmly, "Gull Rock, please."

The fairies immediately heard creaking and splashing as the anchors were lifted; and with shouts of commands from both the jibboom and the mizzenmast regarding which sails were to be raised based on the direction and strength of the wind, the ship was underway in less than ten minutes.

Several times, the ghouls joined in the shouting of instructions. At first, the fairies thought they were joking, or trying to play tricks on the ship, since a lot of their words sounded like gibberish, especially words like hawse-holes and gudgeons; but it became clear very quickly that the ghouls were excellent sailors and were trying to help. Several times, they relayed commands from the front of the ship to the back when the original messages got swept away by the healthy sea breezes.

Twice, the figurehead yelled, "Thank you!" to the ghouls.

And the mizzenmast told Cello, "Quite right. I will make the adjustment." Then the mizzenmast shouted a slight change of direction to the wheel who made the correction.

Next, the fairies, with the ghouls looking on, decided to review the manifest again to learn about the rest of the cargo. The fairies already knew that the jewels were to be delivered to the merfolk of Ocean Merland, and that the drop-off point was Gull Rock. But they couldn't help staring at the massive amount of jewels heaped into the yellow crescent pool. None of the gems were in settings; all were loose stones. As they gazed at the treasure, the fairies saw emeralds as big as decks of cards, rubies the size of golf balls, sapphires as large as chicken eggs, and several apple-sized pearls.

The green oval pool directly next to the jewel pool was chock full of tools, so they looked that up on the manifest next. As they peered down into the pool, the fairies saw many different kinds of tools. In addition to numerous, common hand tools such as hammers, screwdrivers, and wrenches, the fairies discovered an assortment of power tools including a band saw, drill, sander, router, and grinder.

"Okay," said Sandpiper, studying the parchment. "Now, where are these tools going?" she asked.

The ghouls were very familiar with the manifest, and Tree was just about to answer when he was interrupted. "We can speak for ourselves, thank you," said the band saw.

The fairies were very surprised. These were obviously enchanted tools.

Then the grinder spoke up. "We are destined for the Land of Clamberscale. The Clamberscale Carpenters are makers of magic ladders."

And the drill added, rather proudly, "We are their new tools."

"I see," said Sandpiper. "Thank you." And upon checking the manifest, Sandpiper told her friends, "The tools are the very last delivery."

Just as the fairies were moving toward the next pool, Sandpiper noticed that something was wrong with Cinnabar. Her face had suddenly taken on a greenish tinge, and she was holding her stomach and moaning. Sandpiper wasn't sure what she should do. But Ginger knew exactly what was

needed. In a flash, she quickly ran to Cinnabar and put a hand on her friend's queasy stomach. Then she softly uttered the word, "*Settle*." Since her special gift was curing upset stomachs, she didn't even need to use her wand. Within a few seconds, Cinnabar was no longer green and moaning, and her seasickness was completely cured.

"What a relief," said Cinnabar. "Thank you." Ginger smiled, pleased that she had been able to help.

Next the fairies and ghouls came to the pink triangular pool filled with rules, and Box told Sandpiper, "The rules cannot speak for themselves, but they can be read. However, reading them won't tell you where they are going."

As the fairies looked into the triangle pool, they saw what Box meant. The pool was filled with a jumble of long, twisted strings of words. It looked as though all of the sentences from a giant book had been peeled from the pages and thrown into the pool. As the group watched, several silky strands of dark gray words rose from the pool and hovered in front of the fairies. They looked like shiny, graphite ribbons.

However, the sentences didn't stay suspended long. Sandpiper barely had time to read any of the rules before the sentences slithered through the air and back down into the jumble of other rules in the pool. But she did catch two of them: *don't interrupt* and *eat your vegetables*. As more stringy sentences came forth, the fairies read a few more phrases and even caught a glimpse of the Golden Rule—*Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you*. They were glad that this was included with the many rules, because it was a very important one.

Upon consulting the manifest, Sandpiper told her friends, "The rules are on their way to the Island Colony of Maxim, which is evidently a place where the youngsters are completely out of control, and the parents are in desperate need of some rules to help civilize their unruly children—according to the note here."

The ghouls were all nodding, and the fairies were smiling. So far, the cargo of the Ship of Pools was all very interesting. And Sandpiper added, “They are scheduled second for delivery.”

After they had examined the rest of the pools on the port side of the ship, and discovered no other occupied ones, the fairies moved starboard to examine the rest of the freight.

Chapter Five

Mules, Stools, and Ghouls

The first pool the fairies and ghouls came to was the square lilac one. Inside the large pool, sixteen mules were happily munching on a huge bale of hay.

Sandpiper glanced at the ghouls, and Pick told her, “The mules can’t speak.”

The fairies appreciated the ghouls’ input very much. It had been rather startling to hear the tools talk, so having a commentary was very helpful in being prepared for the unexpected.

Dove and Sea Dragon were looking over Sandpiper’s shoulder, and Dove said, “How interesting,” as she read about the mules.

Sea Dragon was nodding as Sandpiper told the rest of the group, “The mules are headed for Azureland to work for the herders of the famous indigo sheep. Evidently, the blue wool of the indigo sheep of Azureland is highly prized. They are our fourth delivery.”

“But what will the mules do for the herders?” asked Ginger.

Cello answered. “Mules are fierce defenders of both crops and flocks. You must always take care when entering a field with a mule in it. They are expert guards and very

protective of anything that resides in fields in which they are placed. I think llamas are also equipped with defensive and protective qualities, but mules are incredibly fierce.”

Then Tree added, “It is likely that the shepherds of Azureland are having difficulties with some sort of predators, possibly wolves or large cats. Mules are very capable of dealing with those kinds of animals.”

“Or it might just be thieves,” said Pick. “Mules wouldn’t allow stealing either.”

The other ghouls were nodding in agreement. None of the fairies had known that mules were protectors. They often saw them on farms and in fields, but they had no idea of the jobs of mules before now.

As the fairies were moving toward the next occupied pool, they felt the ship give a terrible lurch, as though it had hit something large; and they heard the figurehead shout, “*WHOA!*”

Sandpiper and the others flew to the port side to try figure out what was wrong. They were shocked by what they discovered.

A giant octopus, about the size of a supermarket and exactly the same color as bright lemon yellow, had hold of the ship with his long tentacles. One of the long, curled legs was circled around the jibboom. The bowsprit, overwrought by this sight, began screaming.

The monster started to tip the vessel just as the fairies and ghouls reached the ship’s railing. Behind them, the mules were braying and the tools were yelling from being jolted and rocked. Madam Robin lost her grip on the rigging in which she was perched. She rose into the air and held position directly behind the fairies.

With no fear whatsoever, Sandpiper flew from the ship to a point directly in front of the octopus. Hovering very near his head, she said, “Hello there! You are a fine, big fellow. But you seem to be tangled up with our ship.”

The octopus stopped rocking the ship when Sandpiper spoke to him. Then Sandpiper told the octopus, “We are on

an important mission to deliver cargo, and we are late, so we must hurry along. Please release the ship so we can go.”

Immediately, the octopus let loose his hold on the Ship of Pools. At first he had been angry that this ship had dared cross into his territory; but since the sandpiper fairy had been kind enough to tell him what they were up to, he had no problem allowing them to be on their way. And she had given him a very good reason for their trespass: They were on an important mission, and they were late with their deliveries. No one wanted to receive ordered items late. In fact, the octopus was so happy with the explanation that as soon as Sandpiper had flown back to the deck, he grabbed the ship once more with his tentacles and shoved it along in the water in the direction they had been heading.

The fairies and ghouls waved to the octopus as the ship sailed on. The bowsprit had calmed down enough to be able to check the sextant, and the jibboom was not harmed despite having been squeezed by a giant tentacle.

As the group made their way to the next of the occupied pools, Sandpiper suddenly turned pale; and she had to sit down on the deck for a moment. Ginger thought her friend might be getting seasick like Cinnabar, but Sandpiper shook her head and said, “No, I just can’t believe I flew out and confronted a giant octopus.” The reality of her actions had just now caught up with her, and she added, “I didn’t even think. I just did it.”

Madam Robin landed beside Sandpiper and told her, “You did a very good job too. Your gift of communicating with sea creatures kicked in so that you could face him without fear. And you seem to have told him exactly what he needed to hear so that he would release us.”

Sandpiper got up, now less pale, and flew with the others to the orange, plus-sign pool filled with stools. As they gazed down into the pool, the fairies noticed that the stools were separated into two long rows. Though the stools were many different heights, the taller ones occupied the top part of the

plus-sign; and the shorter stools were sitting in the bottom half.

The ghouls didn't get a chance to tell the fairies anything about the stools, and Sandpiper had not yet read the information from the manifest, when the tallest stool hopped up on deck and addressed the fairies in a squeaky voice. "We are expected on the Isle of Bantam," the stool said. "The Stubboleans who live there have great need for our services. They are very small people, and stools will be of much use to them." With this, the tall stool gave the fairies and ghouls a short bow and jumped back into the plus-sign pool to join his fellow stools.

Upon glancing at the manifest, Sandpiper told the others, "The stools are the third delivery stop."

The blue kidney pool was right next to the stools' pool, though the ghouls didn't seem to spend much time in it. They had traveled with the Ship of Pools so many times that they felt quite at home wandering around. And the ship never minded those aboard strolling about deck.

Tree stepped forward and addressed the fairies. "That just leaves us. We are fifth in line for delivery, and we are heading for Grainland where the growers of magical grains reside. They must have need of our services."

"What kind of services do ghouls provide?" asked Sea Dragon.

"We are expert grave robbers," said Box proudly with Cello, Pick, and Tree nodding in agreement.

The fairies all stared at the ghouls, horrified; and Madam Robin kept silent. But they were all thinking the same thing—*They seem too nice to be grave robbers.*

After several strained moments of silence, Dove managed to ask, "Did I hear you right? You rob graves?"

"Of course, of course," said Pick. "We are hired by beings near and far, all over the world—"

"And some places out of this world," interrupted Tree.

“ —to rob the finest graves and burial chambers.” Pick finished with a slight bounce on his tail and a trilling flourish of the final two words.

“Yes,” said Box. “It is likely some people on Grainland want the treasures their ancestors tried to take with them. Many people are buried with silver, gold, and jewels.”

Cello was slightly brighter than his fellow ghouls, which is why he was their leader, and he recognized and understood the fairies’ concern with their occupation. As the fairies eyed the ghouls warily, he tried to explain. “We understand that some beings may not approve of robbing graves. But it is the nature of ghouls to do this, and all ghouls are highly-skilled grave robbers. Many ghouls, myself included, do not particularly like grave robbing. In fact, I think most ghouls find it distasteful. But it is what ghouls are supposed to do. We are good at it, and it is how we make our living.”

The fairies were trying not to be judgmental, but they were still surprised upon learning about the ghouls’ profession; and none of them could ever approve of robbing graves, so they kept silent.

They were saved from a lengthy, awkward silence by the sight of Gull Rock, straight ahead, and the starfish figurehead calling, “Land ho! Mer-island!”

Chapter Six Deliveries

There was no dock to moor to on Mer-island. But there was really no need. For nearly a week, the merpeople had been keeping watch, expectant for their delivery of jewels. About a quarter of a mile from the island, the ship stopped; and a beautiful mermaid named Denoue surfaced to collect the merchandise. Upon rechecking the manifest, the fairies

discovered that all of the freight aboard the Ship of Pools had been paid for in advance.

Sea Dragon had met Denoue on a mission the previous year, and she flew out to greet the mermaid. The rest of the fairies also flew down to hover above the surface of the water.

Denoue had long, yellow-green hair; and she wore a shimmering pink tunic with a waistlet of tiny pink pearls. The mermaid was happy to see the fairies; and since she knew that fairies fixed problems, she cleverly deduced that the late delivery of the gems was related to a problem that needed fairy fixing, so she didn't complain about the delay.

The ghouls were very excited to see a mermaid, and they all four turned a weird shade of rubber-eraser pink, instead of their normal pea-green color. They too made their way down to the water and floated directly behind the fairies.

Box was the first ghoul to find his voice in the presence of Denoue, and he breathlessly told her, "If you ever need any graves robbed, I am happy to offer my services free of charge."

His cohorts nodded earnestly, and voiced in unison, "Us too, us too."

Denoue smiled at the ghouls and answered politely, "Thank you for the offer. I will keep it in mind."

Cello moved forward and presented Denoue with a small, pea-green card, telling her, "Here is our business card if you ever need to get in touch with us."

Denoue courteously took the card. Then with a wink to the fairies, she waved her hand in a beckoning sort of gesture toward the deck of the ship. Tree mistook her gesture as one indicating she wanted them to move closer. He turned an even brighter shade of pink and floated a bit nearer to Denoue. But her movement evidently had something to do with merfolk magic, because the jewels all rose from the yellow crescent pool and sailed off the ship in a thin stream that was extremely beautiful as it arced through the air, catching rays of afternoon sunlight to glitter and glint

brilliantly like a jeweled rainbow. The arc of jewels dipped into the water; and when the last emerald had submerged, Denoue gave a final wave to the fairies and ghouls as she dove beneath the surface waves and disappeared into the sea.

The ghouls managed to turn green again a few moments later, as they flew with the fairies back up to the deck.

Next, Sandpiper made her way to the wheel and said, “The Island Colony of Maxim, please.”

With a few shouts and calls between the bowsprit, mizzenmast, and jibboom, the ship changed course and they were off.

The next leg of their journey took several hours, and it was quite dark by the time they reached Maxim. As the ship pulled up to a very large dock lighted by enormous torches, a tall gentleman in flowing, plum-purple robes came to take delivery. He had long white hair and a very serious expression on his face.

The ghoul told the rules it was time to leave. End to end, in one long continuous sentence, the words streamed over the side of the ship, much as the jewels had done, and solemnly followed the white-haired gentleman who nodded a stoic goodbye to the fairies and ghouls.

As soon as Sandpiper had told the wheel to head for the Isle of Bantam, Cinnabar ventured a thought. “If the inhabitants of Maxim are all as serious as that gentleman, I wonder how ‘out of control’ their youngsters really are. Maybe they are perfectly normal kids, and they just seem wild to the glum grown-ups.”

Next, the fairies ate dinner. They offered some of their raspberries, peanut butter and marshmallow crème sandwiches, bananas, apples, and lemon jellybeans to the ghouls who politely refused. Ghouls did not often want, or need, to eat. Madam Robin had a small bag of birdseed with her, but she ate a couple of the fairies’ raspberries too.

Box told the fairies that they wouldn’t reach the next port until early morning, so everyone had a chance to relax for a while. The light yellow, five-point star pool, currently

unused for cargo, was filled with water instead, so the fairies got to go swimming. Sea Dragon was especially excited about this since she could breathe under water. While her friends dove and splashed about near the surface of the pool, Sea Dragon swam around the bottom of the star, exploring each of the five points.

After the swim, the fairies had a snack of fruit and lemon jellybeans. It was quite dark and somewhat cloudy; and the moon was only a small, sideways sliver smiling down upon them. Though the ghouls glowed somewhat, the fairies decided they would prefer a bit more light. They each took out their wands and whispered quietly, "*Fairy light.*" Instantly, the tips of the mini spoon, skeleton key, green bamboo, aspen twig, and yellow rosebud all glowed softly.

As the fairies were getting settled for bed with their little pillows and blankets, Dove and Cinnabar wandered over to the stool pool. Dove had noticed that the stools continued to stay separated from one another with the tall stools in the upper part of the plus-sign and the shorter ones in the lower section. As several of the stools squeaked out greetings to the fairies when Cinnabar and Dove peered inside, Dove asked the question, "Why are you all separated by height?"

The tallest stool took the initiative to answer. "Because the smaller stools are less important and should keep to themselves. They won't get used nearly as often as us taller stools, so they need to practice staying out of the way. We tall stools are much more valuable to people, and I'm sure the Stubboleans will appreciate us more. They will surely use us more often."

"I don't think that will be true," said Dove, loudly enough so that all of the stools could hear. "I am a potter, and when I am working at my potter's wheel, I have to use a very short stool to be at the correct height to be comfortable to do my work properly. It is true that my mom sometimes uses a tall stool in the kitchen, but not very often. In our house, short stools are more frequently used."

Then Cinnabar told the stools, “My mother is an artist. When she paints, she uses both a tall stool and a short one. It is hard for her to get the easel height just right, so she paints the bottoms of her large paintings sitting on her small stool, and uses the tall one for the tops of the paintings. Both stools are equally important. And when she works just on small canvasses, she doesn’t use the tall stool at all because she likes to have her feet on the ground.”

The stools were all really surprised to hear this: that people made equal use of both tall and short stools. Many of the tall stools were looking over at the short ones with a new respect. One of the taller stools even moved closer to the shorter ones, as though he might be thinking of starting up a conversation.

Dove and Cinnabar returned to their pillows and blankets to go to sleep, leaving the stools with a lot to think about.

Shortly after midnight, it became so foggy and cloudy that no stars or landmarks were visible to help the ship maintain a safe course. After a short back-and-forth banter, the bowsprit and mizzenmast stopped the ship.

Cinnabar, who was a very light sleeper, awoke, and flew to the front of the ship to ask the figurehead why they had stopped. When it was explained to her that the ship needed to see the stars to sail by, and that land was not visible either to ensure that the ship would not run into any shallows or cliffs, Cinnabar offered to help.

Astronomy was one of her hobbies, and she was very familiar with the main constellations in this hemisphere. She even owned a telescope that she got for her birthday two years ago. But she didn’t need a telescope now. Her extraordinary night vision allowed her to glimpse the stars, faintly visible through the dark gray clouds. Plus, she was easily able to see distant shorelines through the heavy mist and fog. She explained to the bowsprit and jibboom exactly what she was viewing, and answered a few questions about the details as far as the landscape. Then the jibboom called directions to the mizzenmast, who raised particular sails and

commanded a slight adjustment of the wheel; and the ship was again underway without very much of a delay.

Just before dawn, the Ship of Pools reached the Isle of Bantam; and the Stubboleans took delivery of the many stools. Most of the Bantam natives were less than four feet tall. They resembled dwarves somewhat but were not as stocky. And they treated the shorter stools the same as they did the taller ones, as though they were extremely pleased that the stools had come and were very anxious to begin using them for important purposes.

Next, the ship set off to deliver the mules.

Once again the fairies heard the mizzenmast, ghouls, bowsprit, and jibboom shouting things like “Empty the bung dipper!” “Clear out the scuppers!” and “Bring me a bucket of soggy-moggy!” And the fairies were beginning to wonder how the ship ever managed to sail properly when the helpful ghouls were not on board.

When they reached their destination, and the mules were disembarking, the fairies gazed out over the beautiful country of Azureland. They saw many herds of the indigo sheep and noticed that they were not all the same shade of blue. Some were very pale, almost milky blue. Others were a deep dark midnight blue. There were a few turquoise ones mixed in, and a small pen near the dock held six sheep that were bright florescent blue.

As the fairies watched, it became obvious why the bright blue sheep were separated from the others. They seemed to be snapping with sparks of electricity and were very rambunctious. The other sheep, calmly grazing, occasionally looked disapprovingly at their somewhat crazed, electric-blue cousins.

Again, the ship set sail to drop off the ghouls. Cello, Box, Pick, and Tree were anxious to be getting on to their job. Already, they were a week overdue; and the ghouls hoped that their new employers would not hold this tardiness against them.

It was just noon when the ship sighted the shores of Grainland. As they neared the dock, the ghouls said polite farewells to the fairies, Madam Robin, and the ship. Then they floated over the railing toward the welcoming party on shore.

But as soon as the four spirits reached the delivery dock, it became clear that something was very wrong. Mr. Bran, the gentleman in charge of receiving merchandise, was shaking his head emphatically and had turned very red in the face. The ghouls were arguing with him, but Mr. Bran shook his head even more strenuously.

Sandpiper, Ginger, and Sea Dragon flew to the dock to see what the trouble was; and they were startled to hear Mr. Bran's raised voice. "We don't need any ghouls I tell you! It has all been a terrible mistake! We don't have any work for you! Now please get back on the ship!"

When Sandpiper asked what the mistake was, Mr. Bran replied, "We didn't order ghouls. We ordered gruel—you know, breakfast cereal. Our oat producers fell short in their crop this year, and we don't have enough stores of gruel. We were expecting four bushels of gruel. We have no use for ghouls. They will need to go back," Mr. Bran said with finality.

With that, he turned to leave, adding a final comment. "If you can get us the gruel within the next month, we will allow you to keep the payment; otherwise, we will be requesting a full refund."

The ghouls returned to the ship with the fairies and were very subdued. But no one had time to really dwell on this problem because they needed to be getting the tools to the Land of Clamberscale.

Just as the ship was starting off, there was a terrible disturbance in the tool pool. The fairies and ghouls rushed to the side and looked in. Several of the tools were arguing, and the band saw and drill looked as though they might be getting ready to kill each other. Dove took the lead and called to them. "What's the trouble?"

Rather breathlessly, the drill told Dove, “The band saw thinks that the Clamberscale Carpenters are going to like him the best, and that they ‘*won’t really have much use*’ for the rest of us.”

“Well, I *do* have the most horsepower of any tool here,” said the band saw. “How could the carpenters not like the most powerful tool best? The rest of you are just supporting players in this matter. I am sure the ladder builders will use me the most and value my services most highly.”

Dove shook her head and put on her best lecture face to tell the tools what she thought. “All of you are equally important, or the carpenters wouldn’t have ordered you. They need various tools to do different jobs. A drill can’t do what a band saw can.”

“Ha!” said the band saw triumphantly.

“And a band saw can’t do what a drill can,” Dove said further.

“Ha! Ha!” said the drill.

“You are all very important,” continued Dove. “But I think the most valuable and important tools are the hand tools like the hammers, files, punches, pliers, wrenches, chisels, and screwdrivers. They can be used even if the electricity goes out. So if I were collecting tools, I would prefer non-power tools because they are more reliable.”

All of the tools were looking at each other and were now silent. They had much to think about after this.

An hour later, as the Clamberscale Carpenters were *ooohhing* and *aaahhing* over their tool shipment, obviously very excited about all of the tools including the band saw, the drill, and the many hand tools, the tools forgot their quarrel and were just excited to have arrived at their new home.

Chapter Seven

An Order for Spools

“Well, I think it’s time for some lunch,” said Box, rubbing his hands together with false cheer in his voice. Even though ghouls didn’t eat very often, he was trying to keep up the spirits of his friends. The fairies were hungry because they had missed breakfast due to the schedule of deliveries. But it had felt good to get everything, except the ghouls, delivered.

Madam Robin again had birdseed, while the fairies ate more of their provisions. Once again, the ghouls declined to share the fairies’ food. Instead, they ate bowls of dandyfunk. Cello explained that dandyfunk meant leftovers on a ship. But the leftovers the ghouls were eating seemed pretty nasty: a combination of pickles, jam, biscuits, and molasses.

After lunch, the group sat together on deck with the ghouls looking more dejected than ever. Cello and Tree had had a talk with the figurehead and the wheel and were to be dropped off at a port that was not adverse to allowing ghouls to disembark, and not too far from where the ship would dock for the fairies to depart.

One reason the ghouls were so distressed was that it had been quite some time since they had had a job. And it seemed that for the last few years, there had been a pronounced slow-down in the demand for ghouls, so there was considerable competition for the work that was available. Indeed, Cello and his group had lost out on several jobs recently to a particularly assertive ghoulish group headed by a ghost named Fan.

Sandpiper noticed the crestfallen faces of the ghouls, and she asked, “Couldn’t you do something other than rob graves?”

Pick was shaking his head. “It is expected of us, whether we like it or not.”

And Box added, "What would other ghouls say if they found out we stopped grave robbing?" He gave a little shudder.

"Yes, among ghouls, reputation and follow-through is extremely important," said Cello. Tree was nodding.

There was a collective, long sigh among the four; and they silently pondered how to go about getting a new job, since ghouls seemed to be less and less in demand these days. Tree seemed about ready to suggest something when a gull swooping towards the deck interrupted the group.

"Incoming gull!" called the figurehead.

The seagull dropped out of flight and landed directly in front of Sandpiper. He had a long, curly ticker-tape in his beak. Placing the paper at her feet, the gull took off again with a loud cry.

The ticker-tape was quite large for a fairy to manage, so Sandpiper walked along the twisted curls to read the message.

"Oh, dear," she said. "It's an order. What should we do? The ship can't continue to take orders without a captain," she added. "I don't think the Ship of Pools will be able to carry on its business unless a new captain is found."

Sea Dragon had been following Sandpiper along, reading the curly tape. "The order is for spools," she told the others. "It seems the dragons are in need of a great supply of them. I remember reading in my handbook that all dragons are expert tailors, so spools would be of use to them. They are requesting twelve bushels from the Spoolmakers in the Land of Bobbin."

The ghouls were all puzzled as to what to do about the order. They knew that the fairies needed to be getting home and couldn't travel with the Ship of Pools to take orders, arrange pickups, or make any more deliveries.

Sandpiper, Dove, Cinnabar, Ginger, Sea Dragon, and Madam Robin were all looking at one another; and they all just happened to be thinking the same thing. Addressing the ghouls, Sandpiper cautiously suggested, "I wonder if you four might consider a change of occupation to run the Ship of

Pools, at least temporarily, until a new captain can be found. You are all very good seamen, and the work would be interesting and likely more steady than grave robbing.”

Cello, Box, Tree, and Pick all looked disbelievingly at the fairies, and at each other. They had never before considered changing careers. But the more they stared at each other, and the more they thought about it, the better the idea sounded.

Tree found his voice first. “Well, it would mean regular work for awhile. Though I’m not sure how it would affect our reputations.”

“But it would give us an excuse not to rob graves because we would be too busy,” said Box. Then he added tentatively, “I have never really liked robbing graves, especially since we are most often hired by greedy relatives who just can’t stand to see their loved ones buried with any jewelry they might want.”

Pick was nodding.

Cello kept silent during this discussion, but he was obviously thinking very hard. His brows were knit tightly together, and he was bouncing slightly up and down on the deck with his trailing tail swishing back and forth rhythmically. When he finally spoke, the other ghouls leaned forward expectantly and listened hopefully. “I don’t think it would need to be temporary. With the excuse of being busy running the Ship of Pools, we wouldn’t have to worry about other ghouls thinking we are slacking off. Let’s ask the figurehead what he thinks about us taking on this job.”

The four ghouls soared up to the figurehead so quickly that the fairies and Madam Robin had trouble catching up to them.

As Cello explained to the figurehead what they were all thinking, and hoping, the orange starfish said, “The first qualified creature or being to apply for the job, can have the job. So if you are officially applying for the job, it is yours.”

“Yes, yes! Let’s make it official!” said Tree excitedly.

And Cello agreed.

The ghouls returned to deck and were so happy over their new employment situation that they ate four more heaping bowls of dandyfunk, with relish.

As they sailed along, in the distance, the passengers of the Ship of Pools viewed a large humpback whale traveling in the opposite direction as the ship, and blowing great sprays of water out of his blowhole. Since Sea Dragon had expert knowledge of sea life, she told the rest of the fairies some very interesting details about the creature. For one thing, humpback whales could grow to almost fifty feet in length. Also, there were only slightly over five thousand of them left in the world. And they liked to eat mackerel, herring, and krill. Sandpiper was wishing she had remembered to bring her camera.

Chapter Eight The New Crew

With a few shouts of strange sea commands, the ghouls took over their new duties with gusto.

“To the Gulf, to drop off the fairies and this beautiful robin!” Cello instructed the wheel.

As they set sail towards home, Cello barked a command to Box. “Sand up that splinter on the monkey-rail. We don’t want anyone getting scratched.”

“Aye, aye, Captain!” responded Box.

Then Cello told his crew, “We will meet in the forecandle at dusk to discuss our new duties.” The other three ghouls agreed, heartily nodding, and were off about the ship to take care of important things.

Since everything was well under control, the fairies decided to have another swim in the star-shaped pool. As they were splashing about, they sometimes heard the ghouls

yelling instructions to each other. At one point, Pick called to Tree, "I'll be there in a minute to help you check the rudder hugger; I am polishing the bumpkins and bulwarks."

And Tree responded, "Take your time; we want to do this right." Obviously, the ghouls were very interested in seeing to it that the ship was in excellent form.

Ginger was called upon once again to settle Cinnabar's stomach. But Cinnabar admitted that she wasn't seasick; she had just eaten too many lemon jellybeans. That didn't matter to Ginger. Her gift allowed her to ease all kinds of upset tummies, so she had Cinnabar feeling better in less than a minute.

Just as the sun was setting, the starfish figurehead called to the fairies and ghouls. "Starboard side! Very interesting creature to view." As the passengers and crew looked out over the water, they saw an enormous sea serpent. The monster was longer than the ship, and his coils rose out of the water so high that he was almost as tall as the tallest mast of the ship. The serpent was hot pink in color and had an enormous crest on his head that resembled a spiky crown. He glanced at the ship since they were both heading in the same direction, but the monster did not approach or greet them in any way. In fact, he looked rather standoffish, which was exactly correct. When the fairies and ghouls waved to him, he pointedly turned up his nose at them.

This particular giant sea serpent was the only *hot pink* sea serpent in the entire world. Most other sea serpents were green, orange, or black, or sometimes a combination of those colors. Since the hot pink sea serpent knew that he was unique, he often kept to himself. He didn't appreciate the attention that came with being one-of-a-kind, and he also didn't much like associating with other creatures who were not quite as special as he was.

Dove didn't have time to fly out to give the monster a lecture about all creatures being important. But she had a special friendship with a dragon named Élan who was very speedy and could travel extremely fast. She thought that

when she returned home, she might ask Élan for a favor: to deliver a message to the hot pink sea serpent that it was not nice to be so standoffish, and that all creatures were equally special.

As they traveled, the figurehead noticed an eager porpoise flying through the waves alongside the ship. He was pushing a bottle out in front of him. The mizzenmast and jibboom gave orders to slow the ship, and Pick flew down to scoop the bottle out of the water.

The ghouls gathered around Captain Cello as he uncorked the bottle and pulled out a piece of bright red paper from inside. Before Cello even told the others what the paper contained, Tree became very excited looking over his captain's shoulder.

Tree was bouncing up and down on his tail, and Cello was smiling as he told the fairies and his fellow ghouls, "This is incredibly exciting! We have an order for fuels from the Flying Darts!"

When the fairies looked questioningly at each other and shrugged their shoulders, Pick explained. "They race Hotfooters! The Flying Darts are the world's foremost racers of Hotfooters!"

Box, Tree, and Pick then joined hands and spun around in a circle very fast, chanting, "Autographs! Autographs! Autographs!"

Cello laughed and said, "Yes, we can ask for their autographs."

The fairies were happy that the ghouls were enjoying their new job so much.

The winds were just right for quick sailing, and the Ship of Pools reached the Gulf shortly after midnight. Madam Robin gave a soft, twittering series of chirps to call the Dark Witch, who instantly appeared on deck.

The ghouls bid the fairies farewell and thanked them. All of the travelers on the Ship of Pools had enjoyed their journey together very much.

As the fairies lined up on the Dark Witch's arm, they heard Cello telling the wheel, "Onward, to the Land of Bobbin to get the spools!"

The Dark Witch took Sea Dragon to Madam Oyster's campsite first. Then she transported the rest of the fairies and Madam Robin to Madam Mariposa's large sleepover party. Even though it was late, the mentors allowed the girls to stay awake for a long while to talk about the latest voyage of the Ship of Pools.

The ghouls took over running the Ship of Pools with such professionalism and dedication that the ship never again needed another crew. And none of the four ghouls ever robbed another grave.