

The Adventures of Mydge

I

Mydge was born and raised in the swamps of Bilefen. She was taught the mysteries of martial healing from a young age. At age 20, she prepared to set out on a voyage to Westmarch to find a master for further training. In these lands, she was called a monk by profession. She understood that chi harnesses all life force energy, and that focusing it gave her the power to heal or harm. But she was untested outside the swamps of her youth and had much to learn.

Her mother was worried. And not just in a typical empty nest kind of way. Mother was a respected priestess of the Moon, and she was worried about her only child's timing to set forth on her journey. The Worm Moon was coming soon, an ominous time in the folklore of Bilefen.

The superstitious "swamp people" generally believed that this was the worst time of the year to start anything, resulting in a two-week religious holiday where everyone did nothing. Mydge always got restless at this time of year. She found doing absolutely nothing to be particularly difficult. And two weeks per year is a long time to suffer it.

Mother always resented Mydge's rebellion during the Hibernation each year. But in the privacy of their home, Mother allowed Mydge to use this time for self-reflection and quiet learning instead. But with the Worm Moon fast approaching, Mother cautioned Mydge to consider waiting until after the Hibernation to leave on her journey.

At first, Mydge was petulant about Mother's advice – she was ready to go! But then, she had an idea. She offered Mother a compromise. She would remain for one more Hibernation, but during their quiet time at home, Mother would teach her the Moon Mysteries that she had hitherto been "not ready" to learn. Mother thought this was a great show of maturity and agreed to teach her.

For the next two weeks, Mydge learned the ways of the Moon Mysteries. She began to understand new things about the world. She learned to still her mind and listen for messages from the Lady of the Moon. But she learned so much more about her mother and the superstition that fed the local beliefs.

A great festival called Awakening Day ended the Hibernation. Merchants came from near and far to peddle their wares while crowds danced to music, consumed some good food and mead, and told their stories about the previous year. It was the highlight of the season for the people of Bilefen.

It was a particularly beautiful Awakening Day this year. For the first time, an animal vendor had come to the festival. He had many beautiful cats available. Wildcats, by nature, but these kits had been domesticated. Mydge had never seen cats before, but her soul called her to one kit in particular. She was yellow with brown spots, and she looked into Mydge's eyes as if to say, *namaste*. This was the moment when Mydge met Tessa.

Most purchases were made by barter, so Mydge traded some charms and handicrafts for the privilege of Tessa's companionship. She was still a babe, but quickly became Mydge's fiercest protector and closest friend. They shared a soul bond from the moment their eyes met.

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II

Mydge was filled with excitement about her upcoming journey. She was buzzing with energy, and she could tell that Tessa was feeling it, too. They were finally preparing to depart. As she was packing her few necessary items, her mother came to her with a gift. It was a Moon medallion, to carry the energy of the Moon and the mysteries she had learned with her on her way. It was an unexpected gesture, and Mydge was truly moved. She expressed an emotional appreciation to her mother for all she had done. While they were both sad, each one knew in her heart that it was time for Mydge to seek her own destiny.

And so, they were off. They were two ladies on a mission. Their journey would first take them Northwest to Wortham. This was the longest part of the trip. There, they could rest and resupply for the final leg of their trip to Westmarch. There was a more direct route to Westmarch, but the entire road would be through the mountains. The road from Bilefen to Wortham also covered mountains, but by stopping off at this waypoint, the final journey to Westmarch would be across relatively flat ground. Still, the mountains were treacherous either way. Mydge was nervous but determined.

Bilefen, Wortham, and Westmarch were all ports in one form or fashion. As Mydge was making preparations, she spent some time at the docks bartering for supplies. While there, someone tapped her on the shoulder. She turned to see a tall man who looked like he could hold his own in a fight, although he was probably not much older than herself. He introduced himself as Bergen.

He inquired about the destination of her journey. When she explained her plan, he made an unexpected suggestion. He was captain of a passenger ship that was going directly to Westmarch. She'd have to work the ship on the journey to pay for safe passage for herself and Tessa, who was still a babe but growing bigger so quickly. The trip would take two weeks, and Mydge wondered how big Tessa would be when they arrived. She would surely be a show of force to keep them safe.

Mydge spent some time alone with Tessa that night contemplating what they should do. The sea voyage would be so much more comfortable, and the captain seemed agreeable. But being trapped in a ship on the sea has its own dangers. She stilled her mind and asked the Lady of the Moon for advice.

The next day, Mydge, Tessa, and their little bit of cargo boarded the *Sea Witch* for the first time. Bergen seemed quite happy that the two ladies decided to travel with him. He assured them of his prowess as a captain and that they would be safe with him at the helm. Mydge found him arrogant for this boasting, and hoped he could live up to his own hype.

And he did. It wasn't long into their voyage before the ship came upon a threatening storm during the night. The rough seas woke most of the passengers who were on the main deck and quickly starting to panic. Not only did Bergen deftly navigate the ship through the storm, but he also kept everyone calm in a surprisingly quiet and soothing manner.

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The next day, she would have to thank him for his bravery. That night, she was going back to sleep, although she was pretty sure that Tessa would stand watch all night to keep her safe after the chaos.

The next morning, Mydge awoke to the smell of someone cooking a hot breakfast. One of the passengers was cooking for everyone after the storm. It was touching to see how everyone really pulled together after that event. She stopped by Bergen's table and thanked him for his efforts. He was genuinely appreciative and gave her an authentic smile in return. Tessa rubbed her head against his leg in gratitude for keeping them safe.

III

One thing that Mydge had never experienced in the swamp was that people could send messenger crows to each other. How amazing! She watched other passengers receive and send messages to their loved ones at a distance. This was fascinating. Until the day that a messenger crow came to visit her. There was a somber letter attached. Mother had passed away. The message was from her uncle, on her father's side. He had helped her family out after Father died when Mydge was very young.

Mydge began to experience the power of worry and regret. Should she go home? Could she have helped if she had stayed? Did she make all the wrong decisions? Her head swam. Was Mother sad that she wasn't there at the end? Of course, she was. Mydge's vision began to dim as she was overwhelmed with grief.

She awoke to find Tessa snuggled at her side, and Bergen looking down from above her. She had passed out in shock. He was glad to see her awake, but then his face became grim as he expressed his condolences. He told Mydge that the passengers had agreed to cover her work for the next three days to allow her time to rest and grieve.

Mydge suffered greatly during this time but was comforted by her mother's words in her heart and Tessa at her side. Bergen brought her meals and checked on her from time to time. The other passengers were kind to her, but he was the closest thing she had to a friend on board. This time together allowed her to vent her feelings and emotions and to begin to heal.

When Mydge left her bed on the fourth day after receiving the message from the crow, the Sun was bright in a clear sky. She was temporarily blinded by the bright sunlight after several days below deck. When she could see again, the other passengers were there to greet her and welcome her back to the crew. The captain then announced that they would drop anchor and have a celebration tonight!

The party was so much fun! Mydge had never experienced anything like this before. They had celebrations in Bilefen, of course, but they were rather boring and quiet in comparison. Bergen had asked her and Tessa to sit with him for dinner, and they found themselves quickly immersed in engaging dialogue. They ate, they drank, they danced, they sang. Then they talked until dawn.

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IV

As they finally approached the outskirts of the port of Westmarch, a small dingy paddled towards the *Sea Witch*. The harbor is temporarily closed, a small man in the small boat explained. They were at capacity, and it could take a few hours to a few days to get clearance for the ship. They had enough rations, but Mydge and Tessa were restless to get to shore. A hot bath and a long sleep were overdue for both of them.

Mydge despised actively waiting. It made her feel unnecessarily trapped, at the whim and timeline of someone else. It was much like the Hibernation back home. She decided to spend the extra days prepping herself and Tessa to set out on their adventure in Westmarch. They spent their extra time with Bergen, sharing stories of their lives and how they came to meet in this way.

Mydge looked across a green field and saw a bear in the distance. Oddly, the bear beckoned her closer. She noticed that Tessa, ever by her side, was missing. But Mydge trusted her instincts and walked hesitantly toward the bear. She looked directly in its eyes and saw the soul of Mother! After sharing a big hug and some tears, Mydge asked if she had died. Mother replied that she was simply dreaming. She had come to tell Mydge a few pieces of wisdom:

- Act quickly but not rashly.
- Play fair.
- Don't take shortcuts.

The dream faded away as abruptly as it had started. Had this been a visitation from her recently departed Mother, setting her free?

After a day and a half, the harbor was finally cleared, and they could enter. The passengers were happy to find that Captain Bergen is well-respected in Westmarch, as they received top-notch accommodations and a welcome feast by one of the wealthy city landowners.

Another great party! This one was much more lavish than the party aboard the *Sea Witch*, and the passengers and crew enjoyed the spoils of arriving safely to their destination. At the first celebration, Tessa had snuggled in Mydge's lap. But she grew so much during their voyage that she was now relegated to the floor, although she graciously accepted a cushion from the host's thoughtful wife.

Just before dawn, the landowner and his family invited their guests outside to view a fireworks display! Mydge was incredulous at the spectacle. She suddenly felt a long way from home. Yet, here was Bergen standing behind her, wrapping his arms around her in a big hug. As the fireworks wound down, he asked her to settle with him in his Westmarch home. It was modest, but functional, and she would be free to travel and adventure as she wished. She happily accepted.

After getting adjusted to her new home, Mydge began to search for a master to train further in her profession. She found him in Wehsu, an unconventional martial healer who only accepted one student at a time. Apparently, it had been a while since his last student. It was also unconventional for a monk to grow up in swampy Bilefen, and they were a perfect match of introverts. She began training immediately. Wehsu even brought Tessa into the training, helping the two learn to function as a team in battle.

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Bergen continued to ferry passengers around the closest port cities, providing a comfortable income for them while Mydge trained. When her training came to an end, she took a freelance adventuring job. While Bergen was at sea, Mydge began hiring out her substantial protection services to fellow citizens and treasure seekers. She and Tessa set out together once again.

And so the adventure began...