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opening extract from

Call of the Deep

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Chapter 1
Defeat

A long time ago, King Gradlon of Cornwall grew rich from all the battles he had won. He owned a great fleet of boats. He led hundreds of young men out to sea. They fished for him and fought for him. They sailed his many boats into the cold north seas and made him very powerful.

As years passed, most of the young men grew tired of fighting. They had seen friends die in battle and longed for a different life.

They wanted to find wives, have children, and live in peace. But their king made them carry on.

One day, in the middle of a terrible winter, he ordered them to attack another fortress in the north. First one man rebelled. Then another, and another. The first boat turned around. Others followed. Soon every ship was sailing home, apart from the one carrying King Gradlon himself.

King Gradlon did not chase the men who left him. For the first time he felt alone and deeply depressed. After so many battles and adventures, he had been beaten. Not in battle, but by his own men.

Chapter 2
New Life for Old

Day and night, King Gradlon stayed alone, wrapped in his cloak, on the freezing deck of his ship. He hardly ate or spoke. The few loyal men who had stayed with him were scared and did not know what to do. They were out in the middle of an ice cold sea. Their nets were empty. Even the fish had fled away and they had no more food.

They might have died there. But one dark night, when King Gradlon felt that Death was

near, he looked up and saw a woman standing above him. Her silver armour sparkled with stars. Her face was as pale as the moon, while her long red hair shone like the rising sun. King Gradlon held his breath. Was this not the Queen of the North who ruled a land forever frozen under snow? What was she doing here on his ship?

"I know you, King Gradlon," she said. "You are still young. I know your skill in battle. You are not like my husband, who is now old and rusty, like his sword."

She held out her hand. Her long white fingers reached down to him.

"Come with me! We shall get rid of my husband. Then I shall be your wife and return with you to your own land."

This was indeed the Queen! Her words stirred him. She was offering him a new life. King Gradlon rose up and took her hand.

“All hands on deck!” he shouted. “Pull up the anchor! We sail tonight.”

A great cheer rose from his men. They could now break free from Death’s icy fingers.

The Queen stood beside King Gradlon at the helm. She pointed the way north between floating islands of ice. At last they saw a great white castle through the freezing mist.

The Queen and King Gradlon stepped down into a little boat. They rowed towards the castle and landed below it. King Gradlon followed the Queen up narrow stairs to a bedroom, where they found the old King of the North sound asleep.

King Gradlon pulled out his sword. The Queen joined her hand with his. They held the sword above the old King of the North’s heart. Then together they killed him.



Quickly, they filled a chest with gold.

"We shall take my magic horse," said the Queen. "You will soon see why I call him Morvarch, my 'Horse of the Sea'!"

At the sound of his name, a splendid horse appeared. His coat was black as night and fire blew from his nostrils. He shook his head and whinnied as King Gradlon lifted the Queen and the chest onto his back. Then King Gradlon leaped up.

Seconds later, they were galloping over the sea. Morvarch's hooves hardly touched the foam on the crests of the waves. Horse, King and Queen sped like the wind until they reached the King's boat.

They sailed south through the wild seas. They were near the Misty Isle when a storm struck. Violent winds and giant waves pushed their boat far away, back to the north and to the west. For one long year they were lost.

In that time, a baby girl was born to the Queen. They called her Dahut. But the Queen became very ill. With no doctor, nurse or medicine on the boat, she died.

Once again, King Gradlon fell into a terrible dark mood. But this time he had a baby to care for. If they did not reach land soon, the baby would die. He ordered his men to sail south until, at last, they saw rocks and reached a bay. King Gradlon gave thanks. He was even more thankful when he found that they could understand the language of the people. They had arrived in the land we call Brittany.