

Breaking The Seal

By Matthew Perrett
www.mattperrett.com
mperrett@mattperrett.com

Frank stuck his head inside the cave, peering around cautiously. "Hello?" he called. "Someone said there was a quest in here?" He could see his breath in the chilly air as he stepped deeper into the passageway.

"Indeed," responded a stately female voice. Rounding a corner, Frank took in the unexpected sight of a beautiful, scantily-clad, platinum blonde woman. She sat straight-backed in a crude stone throne with her legs in shackles, a brazier at each arm casting a dim light over the room. "Enter, hero," she declared grandly, "and listen to my tale of woe." Noticing the adventurer's lack of attention, she stopped. "What?"

Frank gestured at her skimpy garb. "Aren't you cold in that getup?"

The chained woman rolled her eyes. "Very," she replied tersely. "Can I get on with the tale of woe?"

"Huh?" The adventurer tore his gaze away from the blonde's shapely form. "Oh, right. Yeah, I'm listening."

The woman sighed, then resumed her story. "In ages past, I took a lover – a powerful man who catered to my every need and whim. Over time, however, I grew tired of his endless deference and greasy touch." She paused for a moment, shuddering at the memory. "I left to seek a new man, one who could satisfy more than just my material desires. In retaliation, he banished me to this cave and laid upon me the most terrible curse--" Frank raised a hand curiously, and she broke off her speech. "Now what?"

"Maybe you shouldn't have cheated on him then," Frank stated matter-of-factly. He held up his hands defensively as the woman stared daggers at him. "Just sayin'."

The blonde cleared her throat. "As I was saying before I was so *rudely* interrupted," she continued, "my curse binds me to this eternally frigid place. Only a man who can forgive my transgressions and break the seal can free me."

The warrior cracked his knuckles and stretched in preparation. "Well, I'll see what I can do," he said confidently. "Where is this seal, anyway?"

"There," the prisoner answered, pointing at a pedestal in the far corner of the chamber. "My jealous ex-lover positioned it in plain view to mock me."

Frank walked over and examined the platform's contents. "A baby seal?" he asked, shocked.

"Do not let it deceive you!" the woman cried. "Its appearance is an illusion, masking a relic of immense arcane might!"

Confused, the adventurer eyed the adorably fuzzy animal carefully. It gazed back at him with deep, soulful eyes. "So, uh, I just have to hit it with my sword or something?"

The blonde shook her head. "One cannot destroy an artifact of such power by ordinary means. You must use this." She reached behind the throne and pulled out a hefty wooden object.

"A club?" Frank sputtered skeptically. "Are you sure about this, lady?"

"Positive," the woman retorted, her tone eager. "Now hurry – I long to leave this awful place!" She held out the weapon expectantly.

Not sure what to think, the warrior took the stout club from the captive woman, then returned to the pedestal. He raised his arm to attack, but the seal tilted its head and barked timidly, causing him to hesitate. "I don't know if I can do this..." he said uneasily.

"You must not hesitate!" exclaimed the blonde. "Strike quickly, hero, and I will be warm – I mean, free!"

Frank lowered his arm and slowly turned to face the chained woman. "What did you just say?"

Flinching at her mistake, the blonde tried to act nonchalant. "Nothing. Why aren't you breaking the seal?"

The adventurer stomped over to the seated woman, club in hand, and pointed at the infant critter. "That's just an ordinary seal, isn't it?" he inquired angrily.

The woman crossed her arms with a huff, a petulant expression on her face. "Yes," she reluctantly replied.

"And this isn't a magic club."

"No." Seeing the rage on Frank's face, she whipped out a pair of glasses and put them on. "You wouldn't hit a girl with glasses, would you?"

"Luckily for you," the adventurer growled, "I don't hurt anyone who can't defend themselves. I'm outta here." Dropping the club, he stalked over to the pedestal and picked up the baby seal. "And I'm taking the seal." With that, he stormed out of the cave, the seal tucked under his arm.

The woman leaned forward and put her head in her hands. "I'm never getting that fur coat at this rate." she groused. She sighed and slipped out of her shackles, then rose from her seat. Disappearing into a back room, she returned a few minutes later with another baby seal. She

placed it squarely on the pedestal, hid the club behind the throne and sat back down. Smoothing her hair, she put on the fake chains with practiced ease and settled in to wait for the next adventurer.

Roger poked his head into the living room, where Frank sat by the fireplace, nursing a drink. "Hey Frank, what's the deal with the seal in our bathtub?" he asked curiously.

"Don't ask!" yelled the adventurer before draining his glass.

Roger shrugged and left Frank to stare into the fire alone. He knew better than to bother the man when he was like this.