

Birthday Magic

By Jewel Beth Davis

Sylvester perched by a large table made of waterlilies and pearls many leagues under the ocean. He was a seahorse, and he bounced up and down softly in the current, taking in the jovial faces of his dearest friends whom he'd invited to his birthday party. Usually, birthdays and parties made him anxious, but he felt unusually calm. He'd been meditating often lately, and he credited his new habit with his sense of reassurance and calm. There were fifteen candles around his shiny, dark green cake made of seaweed, and one in the middle for luck. They were magic candles that burned brightly even under water. His parents had provided both the cake and the special candles. Then they took off, having engaged a serious commitment from him he would allow no one in who carried drugs or alcohol.

Sylvester gazed at the candle in the middle. He didn't really believe in luck, unless it was the kind that you made yourself. He spent a lot of time speaking positively to himself while he meditated because that's how he believed he would create his own best future. His parents told each other Syl was just going through a phase with all this new age nonsense, but Sylvester ignored the comments they whispered just loud enough for him to hear. He felt much less anxious lately, so the meditating must be working.

His closest friend, Rodger the Seadog, stood beside him. Never a beauty, Rodger had a pronounced under bite; his razor-sharp pointed lower teeth protruded above his upper lip and jaw. If his skin wasn't so pink and the insides of his ears so yellow, he would have been terribly intimidating to everyone who came in contact with him. But physical impressions were misleading, and the other sea animals found him endearing. Rodger was a sweet soul and good to everyone he met, unless someone threatened his friends. To decrease his impression of intimidation further, Rodger had had a pronounced lisp since he was a little sea pup. Sylvester watched Rodger who appeared to be counting the numbers of friends attending.

"Rodger, what's up with the math work at my party? There's no need for equations. I didn't invite Mr. Zerosky." Syl smiled wryly. Mr. Zerosky was their math teacher.

"No, I know, Syl," Rodger said. He looked unusually uncomfortable, moving from one front paw to the other. "I just wanted to make sure everyone you invited showed up." There was something about the way Rodger was shifting his eyes back and forth, from right to left to right that made Sylvester doubt Rodger's explanation.

"Well, that's good of you, but it really doesn't matter. If they come, they come. If they don't, it's their loss. More seaweed cake for everyone else."

"Sure, sure," said Rodger. "Absolutely. Nothing for you to worry about. You just forget about it and have a good time." His large bumpy head snapped away from Sylvester to his right, across the room to the punch bowl's locale. "I hate to mention this, Syl, but I just saw Brutus the Sea Monkey dump a half bottle of Sloe Gin into the punch bowl. He's taking off out the side cave entrance. You know what you promised your parents."

"Hold on, hold it," said Sylvester. "You just used the word worry at my party? Forget about Brutus and the Sloe Gin. No one uses the word worry anywhere if there's nothing to worry about. If there weren't, that word wouldn't have come up."

Rodger craned his neck towards the other side of the water cave. "I think I see some new party guests just arriving. It looks like the Seaworm Twins." He took off doing an Olympic version of the dog paddle before Sylvester could grab onto his fur coat. Syl thought Rodger was acting strangely. He watched Rodger greet Sanford and Scroggle the Seaworms with warmth and ease them into the crowd of attendees. Then the Seadog stood near the cave door checking out the surroundings and again counting the attendees at the party and jotting their names down in his waterproof cell phone. He moved his jaw back and forth with concern and raised his thick, hairy eyebrows up and down. Then he checked the dance floor and the line to the punch bowl and sandwiches.

Sylvester had just about enough of this anxiety producing mystery. He was about to move to the door to confront Rodger when his close friends, Fluff Sea Flower and Red Sea Cardinal moved up on either side of him, with celebratory smiles.

"When are you going to make your wish and blow out all those candles?" Fluff wanted to know. "I wonder what your wish is this year...?" She grinned.

"No way am I going to tell you that!" Sylvester said. The three laughed.

"Can I assist you in cutting up the cake? You know you get the first piece," Red chirped with excitement. His feathers riffled as he spoke.

Sylvester had to have help since he had no arms. "Sure. Rodger was going to do it, but he's standing by the door growling and counting."

Fluff glanced over at Rodger. "Yeah, I noticed that. I thought he was acting a little out of the ordinary." She looked back at Sylvester. "Hey, Syl, I know you said no gifts, but I

didn't buy a gift. I made you something." She produced a beautiful handmade heart made of silver sea weeds and she pinned it to his chest. "Hope you like it."

Sylvester's eyes bugged out. It was exquisite. Fluff gazed down at the sandy bottom and blushed a little. He wondered why he deserved such a special homemade present from Fluff. "Oh, wow. It must have taken you a really long time to make. I totally love it. Thanks, Fluff." Fluff continued to look down at the ocean floor and avoid eye contact.

"You're welcome. No biggie," she said. She smoothed a bright red petal back into place.

Something caught their attention. The three of them brought their focus to the albino sea beaver named Scooter swimming hurriedly in and out of the celebrants.

"Hey, wait a second. I didn't invite him! What's Scooter doing here?" said Sylvester.

Red hopped from one foot to the other. "It's a good thing you didn't invite him. Wherever he goes, the next thing you'd see is the Sea Witch."

"Oh, no!" said Fluff. She blanched and her petals shook.

The Sea Witch was a threatening being who dressed in black from head to toe. Her headdress of glittering black cloth extended about a foot above her head to both the right and the left like horns. All that you could see of her was her pointy, angry features and glittery eyes. All the sea teens avoided running into her as best they could. No one knew where she'd come from. She'd appeared one day about four years ago.

The three friends watched as Rodger made a grab for Scooter with his mouth to stop him from escaping, but failed. Scooter slunk away out of reach. The slimy beaver was clearly going to report back to the Sea Witch about a party Sylvester hadn't invited her to. Syl finally figured out what Rodger had been doing all night. He'd been keeping his eye out for Scooter and the Sea Witch. Rodger must have picked up on some gossip before the party that the future might bring them some cracked punch bowls or magically stricken dancers with broken paws and fins.

The partygoers spontaneously broke into singing Happy Birthday to you! The three near the cake weren't singing; they were on high alert. Then the waters in the cave went black and freezing cold, and the singing went silent all at once. The icy waters were spookily still.

The Sea Witch appeared out of nowhere. She had swelled in size and loomed large over everyone at the party. Scooter waited beside her, a triumphant grin on his face.

"So," she screamed, "you have a party, and you didn't invite me!" She threw sparks of lightning across the room. Party favors blew up or burned even in the water. The guests screamed. Internally, Sylvester was horrified. Externally, he remained calm. What had happened to his joyful fifteenth birthday party? Rodger was surreptitiously moving towards the Witch with low growls, his teeth sparkling as he crept along.

Sylvester craned his head upwards and saw that she was much younger close up than he'd realized. She must have been a teen like the rest of them, but he had never seen her at their school. Syl could feel Fluff and Red vibrating with fear next to him. The Seahorse had to remain outwardly under control for his guests and for the Witch; that was important.

"I'll destroy all of you!" the Sea Witch said. Sylvester saw a ripple of panic travel through the crowd.

Rodger crept silently behind the Sea Witch with his mouth wide open. His teeth flashed and drool dripped nonstop from his mouth. His pink tongue pushed out. He was ready to pounce.

Sylvester abhorred violence and tried something else. He took a deep breath and blew it out slowly as his Agua Guru Dev had taught him.

He gestured to the party. "Sorry for the oversight," he said with a serene smile. "I didn't know your address or your name."

The Sea Witch hesitated. Everyone held their breaths. Then she shrunk down to normal size. "Sonya," she said in a soft voice.

"What?"

"My name is Sonya!"

Sylvester had to come up with something quick. "Well, Sonya, would you be willing to help me blow out the candles and cut the cake into slices? It's too much for me to do alone. Considering we seahorses don't have any arms." Syl flashed her a smile that seemed an apology for his flaws. It allowed her an opportunity to save face.

The Sea Witch thought about it for a moment. She checked out her black nails that were far too long and pointy. Then, she pulled up her black tights that were bagging. Finally she said, "Yes, I suppose so."

Fluff poked Sylvester. "Are you really going to trust her, Syl?"

He responded in a low tone out of the side of his mouth and shrugged. "I really don't see that I have much choice."

It must be the meditation changing his life. Whatever it was, it was working. Or so he thought. Sylvester bent over the candles to make a wish. Sonya thought she needed some space to blow, so with one arm, she shoved Sylvester out of the way. His friends cried out. She took several deep breaths and with each one, the frightened guests said, "Ah...AH...AHHH!!!" They all held their breath.

Sonya blew out all sixteen candles. Her breath contained flames, and it burned away a little of the frosting. A few sea otters clapped. When no one else did and others stared at them, they looked a little embarrassed and dropped their paws. Sonya picked up the large knife lying next to the cake and turned with it toward Sylvester. Then she swished and turned it back and forth under the lights in a sort of weapon choreography. With each swish, Sonya brought the sharp knife close to a new part of the crowd and they screamed. Rodger growled more loudly this time. Again and again, she repeated her tarantella with the knife and a distinct group of sea creatures shrieked in distress, more loudly than the last group.

At last, she turned back to Sylvester, knife in hand, and began walking towards him in a measured way.

"Oh, Lordy, Lord!" Sylvester shrieked internally. And he closed his eyes and chanted a mantra to himself, hoping he'd go calmly. "Hara hara hara hara gobinde. Hara hara hara hara mokande. Hara hara hara hara udare. Hara hara hara hara apare."

He opened up one eye just as The Sea Witch sunk the big knife deeply into the center of Sylvester's...cake. "Hare hare hare hare harianne." Sylvester continued the mantra internally as he fainted into Red and Fluff's arms. They fanned him and slapped his face lightly and he came to quickly.

Sonya backed up to the cave's exit and raised both arms overhead. Fury twisted her face. "Next time," she said, "it won't be the cake." She disappeared with Scooter under her arm. Her exit left a residue odor of ammonia and rotten eggs.

Sylvester turned to Rodger, Fluff, and Red, pinching off his nasal passages. "I guess my meditation isn't as successful as I thought."

"Keep at it," Rodger said, with a wry smile, and sucked in his drool.

