

A Washed Up Friendship

By Redwall_Artist

Submitted: December 31, 2005

Updated: April 14, 2006

It's about a sea otter named Strike Speedwater, once a cabin boy to a band of sea rats, and a river ottermaid named Barkwater Streamtail, a lone traveling otter, and where the road of friendship takes them.

Provided by Fanart Central.

http://www.fanart-central.net/stories/user/Redwall_Artist/25702/A-Washed-Up-Friendship

Chapter 1 - Prolouge	2
Chapter 2 - Barkwater Streamtail	3
Chapter 3 - Past's Told	5
Chapter 4 - Lunch and Company	8
Chapter 5 - Words of Wisdom	11
Chapter 6 - Sea Rats	13
Chapter 7 - Salamandastron	17
Chapter 8 - The Galedeeps	21

1 - Prolouge

"Strike, come back `ere!" came the voice of Edider Speedwater. She was a homely otter. Always helped her mother out by watching Strike, who always had ideas on what to do next.

"No! Don't wanna come!" said Strike Speedwater the sea otter, he was just coming out of dibbun-hood, but still talked the dibbun language. He ran along the beach, Edider chasing after him.

"Come back `ere or the vermin'll see ya!" Edider shouted.

As if on cue, a wicked looking sea rat walked out from behind the rock. He picked up Strike, who was bawling. He had never seen a sea rat so close before. He could smell his foul breath, like rotten fish, and it scared Strike even more. Edider ran up, her little dagger that she always kept, gripped in her paw.

"Hurt `im and you're a dead beast." She said coldly. The rat dropped Strike, but only to get a big scimitar out. He lunged at Edider, she tried moving out of the way, but couldn't. As his blade sliced through her, the little dagger slipped out of her lifeless paw. Strike quickly reached for the dagger, and put it in his pocket.

"An' as fer you," he said grabbing Strike, "You'll be the new cabin boy. Won't that be fun?"

Strike didn't answer because he was bawling again. He never got to see Edider again, but he kept her memory with him always. He would take care of the dagger, he promised. And one day he'd avenge the death of his older sister Edider, who gave her life to make sure he could have his.

2 - Barkwater Streamtail

10 seasons later:

Barkwater Streamtail, named for her bark looking fur, was a young ottermaid. She wore a dark green tunic to match her eyes. Her only weapon was a javaline, which also served as a walking stick, for she was a traveler. She had just finished visiting her friends, the McNales. She was walking along River Moss up to Salamandastron, the great mountain of the Badger Lords and the famous Long Patrol, when she spotted a dark object on the bank. She ran up to it. It was a sea otter. He looked 17 seasons old, one season older than her, he wore rags, and was bruised, as if he had received many a beating. She could tell he needed help right away. The McNales's house wasn't to far away. Maybe she could carry him. As she half dragged, half carried him, she thought to herself, *Next time I'm going to study herbs so I won't have to go through with this.*

She was greeted by a young squirrelmaid, about the age of 13. "Back so soon? You usually don't coom back fer months!" she joked. Her family had come from the Highlands, seeking a new home.

"Stow the jokes Laya!" Barkwater said, struggling to keep him up," He's `urt! Bad! He needs `elp right away!"

For the next hour, Laya's mother tended to the sea otter. All the while, the ottermaid and the squirrelmaid played around with Laya's little brother Chugga. Chugga was a very hyper little dibbun. He also loved eating, so he was a bit chubby.

"There! All doon!" Laya's mother said, "He should be fine. Strange thing is, you told me he was on the bank of Rivah Moss, right Barkwater? Weell Ah've never known a sea otter to coom so far inland. Ah guess we'll find out when he wakes up. Goodnight dears."

That night, Barkwater thought on what Laya's mom said. It was true, that sea otters never came so far inland, only if they had to. In all her travels, she had only seen sea otters in one place; the beach. Her thoughts were interrupted by a low moaning sound. She looked over at the otter. He seemed to be

rolling, the best he could, and moaning. He opened his eyes. They were a soft brown. They gazed up into her piercing green ones. She saw so many things, fear, hatred, pain, sorrow, and many other things she wouldn't have ever been able to explain. He atomically sat up, but laid back down moaning, "Sorry I dozed off, Cookie. It won't happen again!" He flinched, as if ready to receive a beating.

Thinking of what to do next, she decided to comfort him. "There, there. Yore among friends. We won't `arm you." She told him.

He looked around the room, and then back on Barkwater. "Who... who are you?" He asked.

She looked surprised as she answered, "Why, I'm Barkwater Streamtail. And you?"

Wincing with pain, he said, "I'm Strike Speedwater."

3 - Pasts Told

As Strike recovered throughout the week, Barkwater learned a great many things about him. Like he was originally a cabin boy to a band of searats. What she couldn't get over was how he looked at her, as if she had done a heroic deed. She blushed whenever he looked at her. She still remembered what she had seen in his eyes. It scared her, but she was still very curious about this strange otter.

One day he finally healed, and Barkwater was ready to travel again, but there was one problem. Strike wanted to go with her. After constant begging, she finally agreed. She couldn't believe she was going with someone, after all he travels, she had, almost, never had a traveling partner, and those who did come with her only stayed with her for a day or two, which he highly doubted he would do.

Barkwater picked up her pack and headed for the door. "Bye Laya, take good care of Chugga."

"Mes no needs to be watched. Mes de one who watches afta Laya." Came the little voice of Chugga.

Barkwater hugged him and said, "You keep doing that. Where would yer old mum and sis be without ya?" Chugga blushed at this response.

Barkwater hugged Laya's mom and thanked her for the stay. Strike merely thanked them for caring for him. And with that, Barkwater Streamtail and Strike Speedwater, left.

After a half hour without speaking, Strike said, "I thank you most kindly for saving me. I will serve your needs and wants."

"Well you can tell me why you were so far inland and why you were a searat cabin boy."

And so for the next hour or so, Strike told her that once lived by the shores of Salamandatron, but never really met the famous Long Patrol. He had been playing with his older sister Edider, and how she died. He told Barkwater that he vowed he would keep her memory alive with the help of the little dagger- that's when Barkwater noticed it. He told that he had been made the new cabin boy, tortured and slaved. He learned the ways of searats, how to avoid them when they were most dangerous, and their schedules. A few days from when Barkwater found him, the ship had wrecked upon the shallows. He must have floated down River Moss without knowing.

"Now I'm curious about you. Where did you come from, why do you travel alone?"

Barkwater had only recited her past two times before. But she knew he'd pester her till she told him.

"Well, I grew up a little south of Redwall Abbey. I had no siblings, so I was lonely most of the time. To make up time I would practice my survival skills. When I was old enough ta leave, that's exactly what I did. I've met dozens of beasts, been many places, and no one `as ever traveled with me for a long time. I've made a little song about myself, I guess I could tell ya if you wanted me too."

"Why not. It will take up tha time."

Barkwater sang in a strong clear voice, kind of like water flowing.

Alone I am,

Alone I'll stay,

Until we meet another day.

It all started with a young ottermaid,

Alas at her home she would not have stayed.

Seeking adventure,

She took her javelin and left one day.

She roamed the lands,

Fighting with her own bare hands.

Along the current,

She swam so freely,

Nothing to worry about really.

She might stop here,

Or swim right through,

There's no telling what she'll do.

Alone I am,

Alone I'll stay,

Until we meet another day.

At the end of her song it was quiet. Strike kept walking ahead. Finally he said, "Where are we going?"

Barkwater thought for a moment then said, "We're taking our own nice time getting' to Salamandastron."

"Then that means we're goin' towards tha coast." He said stiffening as he did.

No one spoke a single word until lunch.

4 - Lunch and Company

They stopped by the river, and Barkwater got out cheese, fruit, and bread, all of which Mrs. McNale had packed for them.

“There! A nice liddle meal,” Barkwater exclaimed. She looked over to see Strike looking at the water. “Well don't sit there like a frog wid no pond. Come on and eat.”

“The sea rats aren't dead. If, a half starved ship boy can stand a crash like that, then they sure can,” Strike said aloud.

“Wut's that gotta do wid eaten' this lovely looking food?” she licked her lips at the mention.

Strike stood up, his eyes blazing with hatred at the thought of the sea rats, and Barkwater's cheek. “It means, Miss Streamtail, that we might meet up with `em on our way. It'd be two again' a crew of `em.”

Barkwater quivered at the look of him. She then stood up and looked right into his blazing eyes. “Just call me Barkwater, or Barky if ya prefer. And I can handle sea rats. I've made it this far. If I wasn't good wid a weapon, well, I'd be in tha grave right now. My javline can be just as deadly as that liddle dagger ye have.”

Strike looked at his `liddle' dagger, then back at Barkwater. She saw tears streaming down his face. “It may be liddle, but it has served me well, as it did my sister Edider before me. If you ever criticize my `liddle' dagger again, you will see just how deadly it cin be.”

“You wouldn't dare,” said Barky in a most sure voice.

“Ho yes I would!”

“Ye wouldn't cause ye need a guide. And wid out me, you'd prolly be dead right now. Plus, wid out me, it would be one, instead of two, against a crew.”

“I'm not afraid to show you a liddle thing this liddle dagger cin do!” He lunged at the ottermaid, and nicked her on the arm. Barkwater looked at the bloody cut on her arm.

“yer gonna wish ye never did that.” She grabbed her javline and tried to get at Strike, but an unfamiliar voice stopped her right in her tracks,” Shouldn't be fightin', wot wot.”

Barkwater turned to see a female hare, with chestnut fur, looking at her. The hare had a sabre strapped to her belt.

Strike took the moment to lung at Barkwater again. He was in mid air, when a pair of paws caught him and squeezed him close.

“Not very manly, wot wot.”

Strike struggled against the grip, which belonged to a large male hare. His little dagger fell from his paw. “Not very manly ye say? Huh! Yer the one who caught me wid out me knowin'!”

“Well, she's a lady, yer not. Unless ya put on a dress and prance around, wot,” said the large hare. He then turned to the female hare.” No offense Miss Sabrepaw,” he said.

The chestnut colored hare, obviously Sabrepaw, waved her hand and said, “No offense taken Fwirdle. Now put `im down and if he tries to hurt her again, bind him. Lets see him try and hurt this lady otter.”

Strike glared hatred at Sabrepaw and Fwirdle. He glared at Barkwater. “Lady my rudder! She don't know a bit of decency. And she better quit cheeken wid me, or else she *will* know how me liddle dagger feels.”

Barkwater glared back at Strike, her green eyes lit with fire. "You dare call me anythin' of tha sort, and ye'll feel my javaline!"

While the two otters bickered, the two hares whispered to each other. "I think the boy should be bally well tied up. And maybe both of their weapons taken away, wot, till we get to tha mountain, o' course."

"Yah. He seems a bit dangerous when he's bally mad. Lord Oakstripe will want to see `em, that's fer sure, wot wot."

"Sshh! They stopped arguen' and ther lookin' at us, wot."

"Ah... is yew Salamandastron hares?" Barkwater said.

Sabepaw laughed, "Course we are! An' we're gonna bally take ya there!"

5 - Words of Wisdom

Strike didn't try to attack Barkwater again. He had heard what the hares had said about tying him up. He never did take his eye off of her though. Barkwater tried to stay as close Sabrepaw as possible.

"Looks like that bloke wants anotha fight, wot wot," Sabrepaw said to Barky.

"That's exactly why I'm staying near you. I know I'm not gonna sleep in a room next ta him."

Fwirdle had taken away Strike's dagger anyway, just in case. That only made the otter madder. Strike stomped on every plant he could find, which wasn't very much since they were walking sand. Fwirdle noticed Strike's madness.

"Cheer up chap! Nothin' worse than a long face on the Long Patrol, wot. Huh huh. That's a good un, long face on the Long Patrol," he straitened up when he saw Strike was looking away. "Listen now. I can tell you're mad at Miss Barkwater over there, bu-"

"Mad!? I'm fuming! She thinks she can do that to me she's wrong!"

Fwirdle looked up at the sky and waited for him to take a breath before finishing. "Look, Sirah! I get mad at Sabrepaw all the time, but we always make up. No since in holding a grudge, as it's not gonna do anything, wot wot. Tell me that."

Strike glared pure hatred at the hare, but he spoke anyhow, "I don't know. She was gettin' on me worst nerves."

"Still don't make it right to carry a grudge. Just shake it off. I mean, one time I had just baked the best

cake ever, don't you laugh! Well I put it on the tabletop, wot, and in comes jolly ole Sabrepaw. She noticed an apple pie on the counter across from my beautiful cake. She leans over and that blasted sabre tips over me cake, wot. I was flippen mad, wot. Wouldn't speak ta her fer days. Then I got ta thinkin', there was no point to it, wot. What was done was done. Can't change the bally past, wot wot. So I told I was sorry fer ignoren her, and she said she was sorry for knocken down me cake, wot."

"So?" said Strike, not really caring what this cake-baking hare said.

"So? So? Well the flippen point is grudges make no bally sense, wot. There's no point!"

Sabrepaw and Barkwater had been looking ahead for anything.

"Anything?" Barkwater sighed.

"Notin'," Sabrepaw sighed back.

Barkwater looked out at the on going sand dunes. She looked to the right then gazed around her. With out warning, she jerked her head back to the right.

"I... I see something! I see something," she exclaimed while jumping and pointing.

The other three creatures looked where she was pointing, just in time to see something move in between the dunes.

Fwirdle spoke for them all, "That's not a something, but somethings."

6 - Sea Rats

"All right, time for a basic plan of action," Sabrepaw said in a most military voice.

"She's the daughter of Colonal Windpaw Warwind and Lady Layna. Offisahs yah know, wot wot," Fwirdle whispered to the two otters.

"Fwirdle, you'll stay close to me. So if you trip on your bloomin' feet again, I can save you, wot. Barky, you will scout ahead to see what's up there. Yell if yah get into trouble. Strike, you'll stay here with me `n' Fwirdle," Sabrepaw ordered.

Barkwater nodded and crept forward.

The trio had barely been resting when Barky ran up.

Gasping for breath, Barkwater told what had happened. "I went ahead like ye said Sabrepaw. I snuck around a dune and I saw a bunch of sea rats." Strike stiffened up. "They looked like they had been walking for awhile. They might be the crew that had Strike. I ran as soon as a rat that looked in charge turned around. I don't know if they saw me."

Sabrepaw nodded her approval, "Well done Barky." Sabrepaw paced back and forth thinking. The hare and two otters waited patiently. Sabrepaw then spoke up, "I will try to get help some where. Until then, Fwirdle, you're in charge, sah. You two chaps follow his lead. Try not to fight the vermin and stay out of sight. If the vermin spot you, run for Salamandastron. If nothing else works out, then you may fight. But I wouldn't. You'd be outnumbered three to one." Sabrepaw rose to tip toe and glared at Fwirdle. "Unless you want to be a dead beast, and not by the vermin, I would suggest stay away from the vermin. Am I clear?"

"Yes, Miss," chorused the three.

“Good.” And with that, Sabrepaw raced toward the mountain.

Under his breath, Fwirdle mumbled, “Always count on Sabrepaw to threaten death if you don't obey her orders, wot wot.” In a normal voice he said, “Lets just start walking to the jolly ole mountain.”

“Least we'll be getting closer,” Strike said.

They started to head in the direction Sabrepaw had gone, but were stopped by a high-pitched whistle.

They turned around to see the band of sea rats. Out of the corner of her eye, Barkwater saw Strike freeze.

“What's wrong, mate?” she asked.

Strike uttered one word, “ Flogtail.”

Barky remembered that Strike had mentioned that name before. Who it was had escaped her memory. It all flooded back to her. Flogtail was the sea rat captain who had taken Strike!

Her thoughts were interrupted by, “RUN!” She followed after Fwirdle, who had yelled, but stopped. Strike was still back there frozen with fear.

Men, she thought. She ran back and shook Strike. It didn't work.

The rats were getting closer.

There was only one solution. *He is gonna kill me.*

Barkwater grabbed her javaline and jabbed Strike's rudder so hard he jumped up yelling, "I'm gonna kill you Barkwater Streamtail!"

"Maybe I can get him to chase me after Fwirdle," Barky mumbled to herself. The plan worked fine. As she raced toward Fwirdle, Strike followed close behind.

Barkwater and Strike bumped right into Fwirdle.

Currently forgetting his anger at Barky, Strike asked, "Why'd ye stop, mate?"

"We're cut off!" Fwirdle wailed.

As he said it, another group of sea rats inched forward. They were surrounded. The numbers of sea rats ranged to about fifty. There would no possible way to fight them off.

The three beasts grouped together.

The vermin came closer by the second, slowly, but surely, they came.

Strike turned Barkwater around and said, "If we don't survive this, I have one thing to say."

“Now's not the time for chitter chatter, Matey,” Barkwater said with a bit of nervousness in her voice.

“I'm awfully fond of you,” Strike said with a gleam in his hazel eyes.

Anything else was cut off from Fwirdle yelling, “Sabrepaw, I'm sorry I didn't get to say goodbye! You were the best friend a hare could have had! Please send some miracle to save us so I can see you one more time!”

Not to far off was the unmistakable voice of Sabrepaw Minksey Warwind yelling, “Eulaliiiiiiaaaaa! `S death on the wind!”

Barkwater turned back to Strike, “You were saying.”

7 - Salamandastron

A few minutes after the vermin fled, Sabrepaw showed up with a small squad behind her. Fwirdle ran to Sabrepaw. "I thought we was bally done for, wot wot!" he cried.

"I wouldn't leave yah to die, yah big leveret," Sabrepaw said sarcastically. "Besides, who else would save yah, huh wot?" Sabrepaw turned to the two otters, who were looking at each other with a weird expression. "Break it up already. We gotta get back to the mountain!"

Strike turned to Sabrepaw. "How far is it?" he asked.

A lanky hare with a mustachio, a monocle, and several medals on his bright pink tunic, walked up to Strike. "Well, we're only an hour away, wot. The squad and I were gonna go on nother patrol, when Sabrepaw here came runnin' up. She explained that ye had a bit of a rat problem, wot wot. Mr. Fwirdle! Get a hold of yerself!"

Barkwater stepped up to the hare. She had a quizzed look on her face as she asked, "Excuse me askin', Matey, but who are ye?"

Fwirdle stepped up. His face still had the look he had before, like something impossible had happened. "That's the bally colonel!!!!!" he exclaimed.

"You mean Sabrepaw's dad?!" the otters chorused together.

The colonel threw an elegant leg, "Colonel Windpaw Warwind, at yah service, marm, wot wot."

.....

About an hour later, the group reached the famous Salamandastron. They were greeted by a booming, challenging voice, rather than a welcoming committee, "Who dares stand at the door of Salamandastron, the Fire Mountain, and home of the famous Long Patrol?!"

The hares didn't seem startled by this at all. Suddenly, Windpaw yelled up to the mountain, "Colonel Winpaw Warwind and Squad F!"

Sabrepaw called up after her father, "Sabrepaw Minksey Warwind, Fwirdle Tusslefur, and two guests!"

The door in front of them opened. In the doorway stood a giant badger with a brown stripe on his muzzle. "Then welcome," he said in a voice that sounded like the challenging one, but softer and friendlier.

Windpaw walked up to the big badger, and tried to swing a paw around his shoulders, only reaching half way there. He smiled up at him and said, "Ah, Oakstripe, yah old rascal, yah haven't even made us a welcome dinnah, I bet, wot wot."

The badger, obviously Lord Oakstripe, looked down at the colonel, "Well what's this? Only two hours and you come back to the door asking for food. Haven't I broke yah of the habit?"

Windpaw put on a mock glare at Oakstripe. "At least some of us bally chaps have manners, wot wot," he said before going inside the mountain.

Oakstripe turned to his guests. He looked both over then said to Barky, "Welcome back Miss Barkwater Streamtail. Glad you could visit."

"I'm glad to be back, Lord Oakstripe. May I introduce Strike Speedwater?" Barky said, motioning to Strike. "He lived with, until recently, with the sea rat captain, Flogtail."

The Badger Lord nodded gravely, "Ah yes. Flogtail. He has caused much distress among the shores." Oakstripe motioned them inside. "But we can talk over dinner."

Inside the mess hall, dozens of hares sat at long tables, all chatting. Oakstripe went to the front of a big table with lots of officers, along with Colonel Windpaw with a female hare at his shoulder. Sabrepaw motioned the otters over to sit with her, Fwirdle, and some other hares their age.

After the duo sat down, introductions were made. Sabrepaw did the talking. "Barky, Strike, this is Fleetear, Roald, Mimly, Honeyleaf, and Rayla. Everyone, this is Barkwater Streamtail, and Strike Speedwater, wot wot."

They were interrupted by Oakstripe's booming voice. Immediately, everyone became quiet. "Today we have two guests with us. Barkwater Streamtail, whom some of you might know from the last time she visited, and Strike Speedwater." Everyone's heads turned to see the newcomers. "Now I thank the chef for her wonderful meals, without which we would starve." The chef blushed in the doorway. "And I thank the Long Patrol for all the great things they have done. You may now eat." Steaming food was placed on the table, where the hares of the Long Patrol started scoffing it all down.

Between bites, Strike asked Sabrepaw, "Who's that lady hare with yer dad, matey?"

Sabrepaw grinned. "That's me bally mum. Lady Layna."

After supper, the otters were shown to their rooms. As soon as Strike fell on the bed, he went into a deep sleep.

.....

In Strike's dream, a mouse in armor walked up. A magnificent sword was at his side. Strike looked in his eyes and saw boldness and determination, but also kindness and a protector. Beside him was an ottermaid. Strike went to run up to the ottermaid. As far as he knew, he was seven again, running up to

hug his sister Edider.

Edider smiled at Strike, hugged him, then walked back to the mouse warrior. The mouse spoke, "Strike Speedwater. You must find Flogtail and stop him. As we speak, he is headed to the coast to cause chaos. You must stop him. The fate of many creatures lays in your paws, along with your sister's dagger."

Strike spoke with a not so sure voice. "In *my* paws? I can't stop Flogtail!"

Edider spoke to Strike this time. Her voice soothing, just like Strike remembered it, "Strike, ye are not seven any more. Like Martin said, ye must stop them before he gets our family, and other like them. You must do this." She went to hug Strike again. "Until next time ye little rascal." She stepped back to with the warrior mouse.

"Wait! Edider! Come back!" Strike cried, but there wasn't anyone but him around. They had both vanished. Only the voice of the warrior mouse, Martin the Warrior, spoke.

"You must stop him Strike. You must stop him."

8 - The Galedeeps

Strike woke with a start. It took him a moment to realize what had happened. Edider had come to him with a mouse warrior named Martin in a dream. But it wasn't a dream. It was a message. He jumped out of bed and put on a fresh tunic, which had been laid out for him. He ran to Barky's room and knocked on the door. A very tired looking face looked out at him with annoyance.

"What do you want?" Barky asked in an annoyed voice to match her tired face. "Don't you know how early it is? I haven't had a good sleep since I was at the McNale's."

"Sorry Barky, but I had a strange dream. My sister Edider came to me, along with a mouse named Martin."

Barky straitened up at the mouse's name. "*Martin* came to you?"

Strike wasn't too sure of what to say. "Uh... yes? Why?"

"Martin the Warrior is the spirit of Redwall Abbey. He'll send messages to young creatures through dreams. Is that what he did? Good. What he say?"

"He and Edider told me to go to the coast to the otter clans. He said that Flogtail is going there to slaughter them. We have to hurry." Strike said with urgency in his voice.

"Hold on." Barky closed the door on Strike and came back out in her tunic, dark green to match her eyes. "Righty. We need Sabrepaw and maybe Fwirdle to come with us. There is no possible way I'm going against a bunch of searats without a squad."

.....

Walking along the beach, Strike remembered some of the things they were seeing from his childhood days. There was a tree that he always liked to climb, but it was bigger. Then there was a little pool that he swam in. He started to remember more and more of the landscape around him the further they went. Then he stopped. This was where Flogtail had killed his sister Edider and taken him. He started weeping when a paw held his shoulder. He looked up and saw Barky smiling at him. How he loved her.

After traveling down the beach for a while, they were greeted by five otters with weapons. Most slings. A male otter walked up. Strike could tell he was a warrior by his scars over his muscular body. When he spoke, his voice was almost a boom, though not like Lard Oakstripe's voice. "What do you want here?" he asked, none too kindly.

Sabrepaw, who was in charge, stepped up to say her piece, "Good day, sah. I see you've found us. We're friends, I think, wot wot. Could you possibly tell us where the Speedwater Holt is?"

A pretty light brown ottermaid walked up. "I am Silmara Galedeep. We know the Speedwater Holt, but it's kinda far, mates. Why don't you stay with us for the night? It gets pretty cold on the beach."

Strike smiled at the ottermaid. "That would be nice, thank you."

"Right this way then," Silmara said. "Oh, and you can call me Sil. Don't mind my brother Herm," She indicated the big otter who had spoke first, "he just doesn't like visitors too much."

They reached a den near the sand. A motherly otter mum ran out wailing, "Sil! Herm! What have I told you about bringing visitors without me knowing!?"

"Mother, they're headed for the Speedwater Holt, so Sil thought they should stay with us for the night," Herm said, an annoyed hint in his deep voice.

The otter mum calmed down some. "Oh, ok. That's fine. By the way, why do they want to go to the

Speedwater's anyways?"

Strike spoke for them all. "Marm, I am Strike Speedwater. I'm going home to warn them that a searat captain and his evil crew are headed this way to destroy the otter clans here."

The otter mum had been stirring a stew, but dropped the ladle when she heard his name. "*You're* Strike Speedwater? I was told that after Edider Speedwater, bless her, was found dead, and with her dagger missing, on the beach ten seasons ago. She had been chasing her brother Strike and no one knows what happened. Everyone thought he was dead, too. Do you know what happened if you really are Strike Speedwater?" she asked, her eyes huge with wonder.

Strike took a deep breath before telling her what had happened since that awful day on the beach ten seasons ago. When it was all over, Strike's face was tear stained, all of the beasts listening sat with wonder, and the stew over boiled.

Sil spoke in a shaky voice. "We'll make sure you get home, Strike."