

MAID IN WATERDEEP

by Bianca Bickford

CREATURE: *Merfolk* | **LEVEL:** 1

SYNOPSIS

Characters are ready to make their mark as adventurers and travel to the City of Splendors to begin their careers. Their first job in Waterdeep promises to be a memorable one: a mermaid has hired them to rescue a kidnapped bard and bring justice to the witch who stole her voice.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Looking for a new start in the City of Splendors, characters visit the famous Yawning Portal in the Castle Ward of Waterdeep. They find a job board featuring a poster that promises 10 gold per adventurer to find a kidnapped woman, no previous experience required. The note says to meet in the tavern tonight an hour before sundown. The tavernkeeper, Durnan, points out the table for the meeting, where several other adventurers have gathered. A beautiful human woman approaches the party with determination set on her face.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The party has been hired by Lily, a young human rogue and former mermaid from Thar Qualnaar.

A month ago, the mermaid Lily rose to the surface to watch one of the frequent party caravels in the Great Harbor. She was entranced by the fireworks, but the voice of a young bard was more astounding than the lights. A red-haired human woman performed mesmerizing ballads to the delight of a noble — and Lily. The bard sang about new love and whispered promises as an unexpected storm quickly rolled in. The guests took cover inside the quarterdeck. Lily watched in horror as lightning struck the mast and split the ship in half. As the boat sank, Lily frantically searched

and found both the noble and the bard sinking to the sea floor. Making an impossible choice, Lily rushed the bard to the surface and carried her to the shore.

Lily watched from the safety of the water as the survivors were rescued and returned home. After a little time passed, Lily found her thoughts often returning to the bard and wondered about her fate. She confided in her sisters about the encounter. Shortly after, her sisters excitedly returned with the news they had gathered — that the bard lived in the Dock Ward of Waterdeep.

Lily went to the beach where she left the bard in hope of seeing her, and saw a witch obscured by black robes and a hood walking on the sands. Optimistic, she described the woman to the witch and asked for help in finding her. The witch knows the bard, named Sanger, and offered legs to Lily to find her — but for the price of a voice.

Lily agreed to give her voice and the witch chuckled. The witch straightened and said that he wasn't asking for Lily's voice. He murmured a magical message into his hands and Lily felt daggers in her tail as it transformed into legs.

He revealed himself as Heks Vand, the noble who was on the caravel that hired Sanger. He saw the mermaid save Sanger and was livid that she did not choose to save him since he was the most important person on the vessel. Even though he was rescued by a fishing boat a day later, he was taking his revenge for the suffered indignity. Having already kidnapped Sanger in retribution, Vand has ordered his men to cut out her tongue as a sacrifice to his patron. He gloated to Lily that Sanger's tongue was forfeit at the next full moon, in two tenday's time.

Lily picked herself up off the beach after he left, and decided to save Sanger no matter the cost. In desperation Lily found she was good at picking pockets,

and through new connections, odd jobs, and gathered coin, she uncovered a lead on rescuing Sanger and posted the flyer in the Yawning Portal. It is now two days until the full moon.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **LILY:** Formerly a **merfolk** and now a human **spy**.
- **SANGER:** A human **bard**.
- **HEKS VAND:** A human noble (uses stats of a **cult fanatic**).
- **LOPER:** A half-elf servant (**commoner**) to Heks Vand.
- **DURNAN:** A human tavernkeeper and retired adventurer, owner of the Yawning Portal.

CHAPTER 1 – THE MERMAID

It's a cool afternoon in the city of Waterdeep. The sun is starting to set as the party gathers in the Yawning Portal. Durnan, the tavernkeeper, directs inquiries about the job to a table near the fire. The party gathers; prompt players to introduce their characters.

As you look around at your fellow adventurers, you see a raven-haired human woman with dusky skin walk toward the table with determination. *"I'm glad you're here for the job,"* she says, cutting through any conversation. *"10 gold each upon rescue of a dear friend of mine. My name is Lily. Do you have any questions before we get started? Time is short."*

The characters may ask questions about her or the job which is detailed in the *Adventure Background*. Any Wisdom (Insight) check about her background passes, as Lily (CG human **spy**) is completely genuine. If specifically asked how she gathered the coin to pay the party, she says it was from odd jobs. A successful DC 16 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that Lily is embarrassed that she pickpocketed most of the coin from nobles who won't miss it.

WHAT IS THAR QUALNAAR?

Some Waterdavians know that merfolk are a part of the city's defenses, living in the Deep Harbor long before Waterdeep was founded. In recent years, merfolk work with the Lords of Waterdeep and are considered a part of the City Guard if they patrol the waters and help with attackers, sunken vessels, and spilled cargo. The merfolk city has a population close to 500 with a few sea elves in residence. It is located near Deepwater Isle within the Great Harbor.

After Lily answers, read or paraphrase the following:

"You know my story," she says and she looks at each of you. *"Now it's time to see if there's a happy ending."*

"We're looking for a man in this tavern by the name of Loper. He works for Heks Vand and can lead us to him, or to Sanger, if we can persuade him. It doesn't matter to me how we convince him, but he's the best lead I have."

Lily describes Loper as he was described to her: a half-elf with a sallow complexion, dirty blonde hair, and wearing a blue sash around his neck.

A DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check spots Loper on the upper floor two levels above the party, deep in an earnest conversation with a blue dragonborn in wizard's robes. If the party fails the Perception check, Lily finds Loper after a few moments and quietly points him out. She asks the party how they would like to proceed.

THE SERVANT

Loper (CN half-elf **commoner**) is a middle-aged man who often visits the Yawning Portal to escape the boring routine of running Heks Vand's households.

If more than one party member approaches Loper, he gets nervous and immediately flees through a window; jump to *The Servant's Flight*, pg. 9. If only one party member engages Loper in conversation, the blue dragonborn stands up and gestures for them to take his seat as he walks away.

THE SERVANT'S PRICE

Wary of being approached, Loper listens for about a minute before he gets suspicious and flees. A DC 16 Charisma (Persuasion) check makes Loper comfortable enough to offer his information about Sanger at a price of 30 gold. He barter to 25 gold. If the character refuses to pay, or attempts an Intimidation check, Loper escapes out a window. If Loper is successfully convinced, see *The Servant's Information*. He leaves the Yawning Portal immediately after the conversation concludes.

THE SERVANT'S FLIGHT

If the party follows Loper, they find that he has climbed to the rooftop to run away. Have the pursuers roll initiative to determine how the chase plays out.

The chase begins at Cook Street and Rainrun Street. Loper is running to Hek's secret house, located along The Way of the Dragon at Drakiir Street in the Trades Ward three blocks east from the tavern. Lily passively follows the chase but does not cause any damage to Loper. Use the "Chases" mechanic in Chapter 8 of the *DMG* with the "Rooftop Chase Complications" table in Chapter 4 of *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*.

If captured, the party can press Loper for information. A successful DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) or DC 12 Charisma (Intimidation) check, or a bribe of 20 gp, loosens Loper's tongue; proceed to *The Servant's Information*.

THE SERVANT'S INFORMATION

Loper is reluctant to answer questions. His eyes flit about as he gives in.

"Look, just don't say it was me, a'right? Heks'll do worse than just kill me if he finds out."

"He keeps a secret house, separate from his manor, over in the Trades Ward, where he does his dirty work. Gotta keep it away from the fancy folk, y'know. He casts his rituals there and it's where he's keeping that pretty red-headed woman. Maybe you'll get lucky and she'll still be alive when you get there."

"Look for the blue house with the white shingle roof at Drakiir Street, near The Way of the Dragon. That's the place."

Loper smirks at you. *"That's all I know, so I'll just be on my way now that you got what ya wanted."*

A DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check draws attention to the keyring on Loper's belt with keys to Heks Vand's houses.

THE SERVANT'S ESCAPE

If the party fails to capture Loper or kills him before obtaining the address, Lily tells the party that she will meet them in the morning. When they regroup the next day, Lily has the address to the secret house. She owes an unspecified favor to the Zhentarim and is concerned about the debt.

DEVELOPMENT

Equipped with the house address, the party knows where Sanger is held and plans their approach.



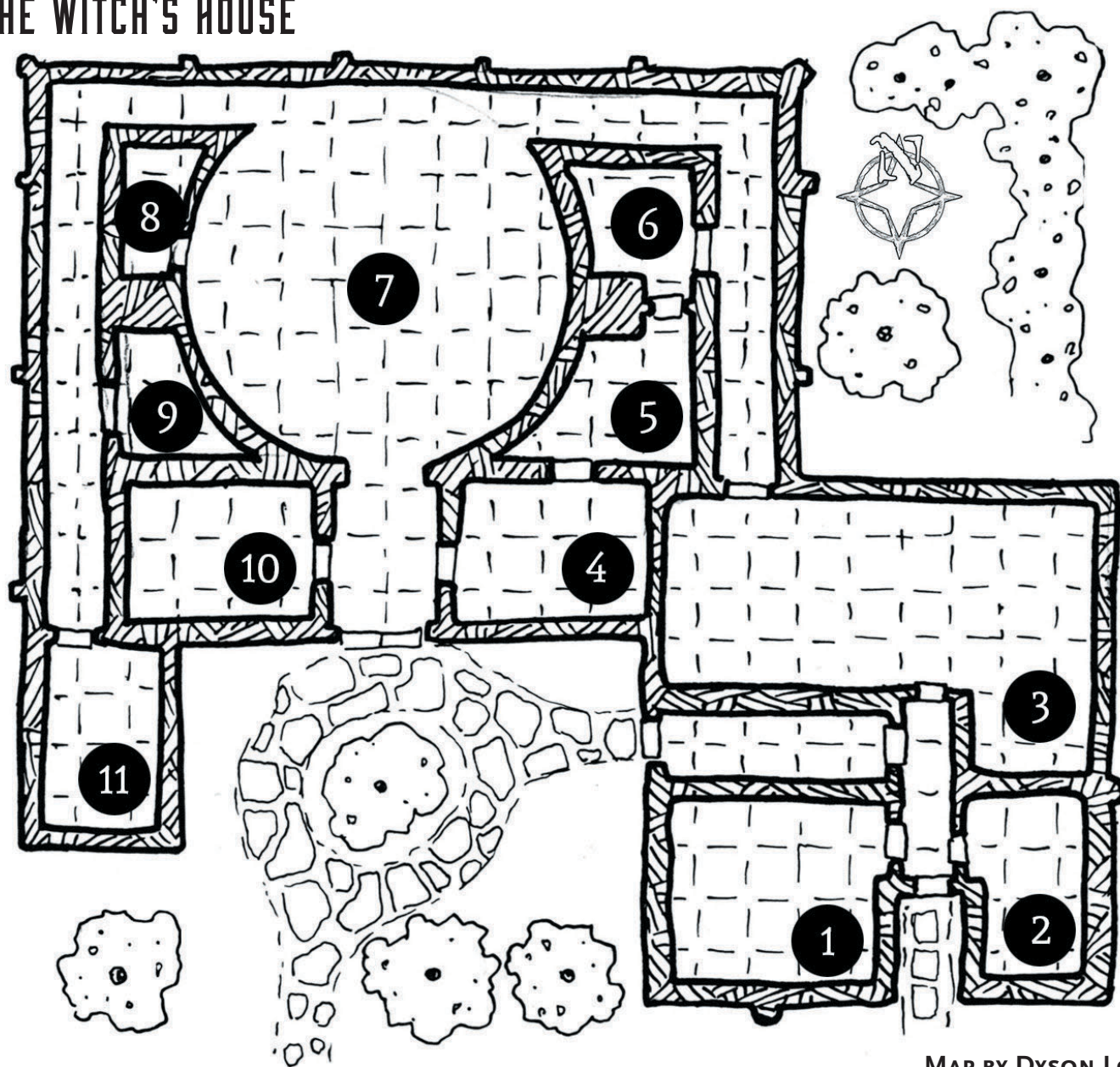
MAP LEGEND

1. KITCHEN
2. SERVANT'S ROOM
3. DINING HALL
4. LIBRARY
5. WITCH'S WORKROOM
6. STORAGE ROOM

7. RITUAL ROOM
8. CELL
9. CELL
10. CLOSET
11. TORTURE ROOM

BLANK PLAYER MAP IS IN APPENDIX C.

THE WITCH'S HOUSE



MAP BY DYSON LOGOS

CHAPTER 2 — THE WITCH

THE WITCH'S HOUSE

The blue house with a white roof belonging to Heks Vand (CE human **cult fanatic**) is found easily enough. It fits the same style as the surrounding buildings with nothing standing out to attract attention.

The plain blue house stands among many homes along the east-west road of Drakiir Street. Well-kept bushes and trees tastefully decorate the quiet property.

A stone pathway leads to the white double doors that appears to be the main entrance, with a smaller path meeting a wood door to the east. You can see a side entrance from the road that leads to another wooden door. All of the white-washed shutters on the windows are closed.

A DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that the front double doors are barred from the inside and cannot be opened. Upon inspection, the shutters are sealed shut and bar access through the windows. Both the door located to the east of the main doors and the door on the south side are locked. Traps on both doors can be detected with a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check and disarmed with a DC 10 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. If the disarm attempt fails, a needle pierces the character's hand and they take 1 piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) poison damage. The doors can be opened with a DC 12 Dexterity check using the thieves' tools or a DC 15 Strength check to force it open. The keys from Loper unlock the doors without setting off the traps.

THE WITCH'S MANNERS

Both entrances lead to the southeast corner of the house, an area that Heks maintains to keep up normal appearances when there are unexpected visitors. The larger room to the southwest is the kitchen (1 on map), and the room across the hall is a servant's room (2). Looking around the servant's room at various books and journals will identify the room as belonging to Loper. A DC 16 Intelligence (History) check plus

proficiency in Abyssal (or a successful check at DC 20 without) indicates that many of the texts detail rituals to show devotion to a demon.

The large room down the hallway is a dining hall (3) with a sitting area on the east side of the room. The furniture, while clean, looks like it has never been used.

THE WITCH'S WORK

The east hallway wraps around the building. The first door to the west reveals a storage room (6), filled with dried herbs and vials. A DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) or Wisdom (Medicine) check hints that the ingredients are used in poisons and spellcasting. A DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals two daggers hidden on a shelf.

The connecting door leads into the witch's workroom (5). Alchemy benches along with a 6½ foot table line this neatly organized room. A DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check of the longer table shows dried blood and other liquids that have soaked into the wood over time.

The southern door of the workroom leads into a large library (4). It almost seems out of place compared to the previous room; it has deep carpeting, a luscious reading chair, and a table with brandy and glassware decorate the room. A large fireplace makes the room deceptively cozy. A DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check of the dry bar reveals two fine cigars (valued at 1 gp each).

Exiting the west door of the library places the party in the foyer. The double doors have a large wooden beam barring them shut. The party can lift the bar to unlock the door with success on a DC 13 Strength check.

The western door from the foyer leads to a simple closet (10). Several hooded black robes hang on pegs next to a pair of worn, blood-stained boots. A basin, filled with fresh water, sits atop a small table. A long bench is pushed up against the wall.

When the party enters the large circular ritual room (7) at the heart of the building, read the following:

You enter the large, lowlit circular room. A large sigil is painted on the floor, surrounded by manacles mounted to the walls. A wide eye centered in the middle of a pentagram stands out in white paint with deep grooves gouged into the floor. Evenly spaced unlit candles complete the circle's sinister implications. To the west sits a dark cage.

The dimly lit cell (8) is unlocked. When the party investigates, they find it completely clean and empty with no evidence of anyone recently imprisoned. A DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check confirms this is a summoning circle for a demon.

If the party made noise at any point upon entering the house, four **skeletons** come around the northwest corner into the ritual room and attack them. Lily can join the fight to aid in combat. A passive Perception (DC 10) alerts them to the skeletons' presence; otherwise they begin the round **surprised**.

After the encounter, the party can explore down the west hallway. As the party approaches the next cell (9), it is empty if they have defeated the skeletons. If not, the cell door opens as they approach and the four skeletons attack.

SCALING THE BATTLE

Add or remove the number of skeletons in the room depending on the number of players.

THE WITCH'S REVENGE

The room in the southwest of the house is locked (11 on map). The door can be opened with a DC 12 Dexterity check using the thieves' tools or a DC 15 Strength check to force it open. Once the party opens the door, read the following.

A nobleman in loose black robes sits on a velvet dining chair, flanked by two skeletons standing in a guard position. He raises his glass of wine to Lily as you enter the room.

"Honestly, I thought you'd be here days ago. We've been so bored waiting for your arrival."

He jerks his head behind him and you see a beautiful redheaded woman chained to the wall. She yanks against the bonds and glares at the man.

"My apologies, where are my manners? My name is Heks Vand, and you have all broken into my workshop."

He stands to give a mocking bow, picks up his quarterstaff from next to the chair, and continues. *"Now that you're here, sweet mermaid, you can join the sacrifice to my patron. Money is simple to procure. Power is not. Your legs came at the cost of Sanger's voice, but the reward I will get for all of you will make my revenge even sweeter. I'll make sure to kill her first so you can watch."*

Lily draws her dagger and looks to you, then makes eye contact with Sanger. *"On your go,"* she murmurs.

The party can question Heks about his motivations, but he, along with the two skeletons, attack after one or two questions.



CONCLUSION

If Heks and his guards are defeated, Lily releases Sanger from her bindings.

Lily supports Sanger as the bard tries to stand and straighten out stiff muscles. “Um, hello,” Lily says to her, sounding a bit insecure.

“I’m Lily. I’m sorry I got you into this mess, but I’m not sorry to have met you. I will cherish the memory of hearing you sing aboard that caravel, and I am at your service.”

Sanger smiles and wraps an arm around Lily in a loose embrace.

Lily looks at you and grins for the first time since you’ve met her. *“Thank you, all of you. Let me get Sanger someplace safe and I’ll meet you shortly at the Yawning Portal.”*

Lily and Sanger do not immediately leave if the party wishes to talk to them further or check Heks for valuables. A DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds a scroll of *hellish rebuke* folded up inside Heks’s left boot.

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

At this point, Lily and Sanger can leave. They pay 10 gp per party member later at the Yawning Portal.

However, if the party chooses to restore Sanger’s voice, reward each player with an additional 50 to 100 XP. There is no one way to accomplish this; reward creativity at the table.

CHANGING THE ADVENTURE FOR YOUNGER PLAYERS

You can choose to use these optional adjustments for players ages 9 to 12:

- Sanger’s voice is magically removed, and her tongue stays intact.
- Instead of a human, use a sea hag in place of Heks.

REWARDS

Each character receives 10 gp for completing the story.

XP REWARDS

Add the total XP of creatures defeated by the party, then divide by the number of characters to determine individual rewards.

OBSTACLE/FOE	XP
Loper	10
Skeleton	50
Heks Vand	250

NON-COMBAT REWARDS

TASK/ACCOMPLISHMENT	XP PER CHARACTER
Did not kill Loper	10
Restored Sanger’s voice	50 to 100

AUTHOR’S NOTES

This module was influenced by *The Little Mermaid* by Hans Christian Andersen, where I re-imagined a fierce and capable mermaid who refused to fade away. Thank you to my sister Kelly Knox for her incredible editing skills and my fiancé Cory Arnold for his expert guidance (and making dinner when I was living in Waterdeep). So much appreciation for Ashley Warren for writing inspo and creating the *Uncaged* anthology.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bianca Bickford is a lifelong geek living deep in the Heart of Texas. She can be found running around the jungles of Chult or pulling off the biggest heist in Waterdavian history. Bianca DMs for friends and one-shot adventures for girls ages 9 to 12 to introduce them to the imaginative world of *Dungeons & Dragons*. Specializing in digital and content marketing, Bianca works for a non-profit organization that moves more women into leadership positions.