



And carved into the back of this gorgeous thing is "carved by Chris Dobranski, designed by Anne Cameron". It is gorgeous! Gives me bubbles in my tummy.

Squid woman gave the secret of the compass to Banba the Celtic mythological woman.

The beak of the squid is carved from a piece of mammoth tusk I've had on my desk since the dawn of time as I know it...I'd hold it sometimes and think of all those millions of years and how insignificant we are... but carvers cherish the stuff so I gave it to Chris in the hope he could "do" something with it...we talked and yakked and "you could..." and "if you..." and "what if..." throughout the piece but I didn't expect to get credit as the designer...the piece is made of red cedar, yellow cedar and yew, with argillite centrepiece face and suckers, and mammoth tusk beak and teeth... it's the kind of piece you want to touch... and when you do it is so smoooooth and so sensuous it gives shivers....

He's having a big show in Port Coquitlam at the municipal art and performance gallery on April 15 and some of us are making a safari from Tahsis to support him and cheer...

Squid Woman

Squid woman was feeling very relaxed, almost lazy. She spread her tentacles and drifted in the gentle current, enjoying the musical sound of the rain pattering on the surface of the sea. Rainy days and nights were always enjoyable, the rhythm of the raindrops different with each squall, each storm, and the melodies seemed to caress her soft body, surrounding her with soft sensation.

Her belly was full, life was good, and would be better if not for a slowly increasing intrusive sound, a scraping and at times tapping which in no way fit the rhythm of the rain.

Squid woman tried to ignore the bothersome sounds but she was drifting closer and closer to the source of them, and, finally, feeling more than a bit miffed and close to a state of real pique, she propelled herself toward the intrusion, determined to find out why this foreign noise was encroaching on her pleasant reverie.



There, ahead of her was a ship where no ship had gone before. The sails were furled, two anchors were set, and hanging over the side, with a rope around her waist, a woman with a young face and body but with the white hair of a crone, was busily working away with a scraper, determinedly removing the weed, the barnacles, the shellfish growing on the hull. It was obvious to Squid woman this boat had been in the water a long time, the burden on the hull was thick and would have slowed the progress of the craft considerably.

The scraper cut easily through the sea weed, and as the vegetation dropped down to the bottom of Squid Woman's home, small snails and other little life forms drifted from it, many of them becoming food for ever-hungry fish. When the scraper encountered a particularly well set and cemented barnacle, the woman tapped, tapped, even pounded it with the edge of the tool, sending bits of broken shell falling, and releasing the soft bodied creature inside. These morsels were invariably swallowed by fish, which, as far as Squid Woman was concerned, was just fine. It was the noise which bothered her. "What are you doing?", she asked. "And why? And more to the point, how long is it going to take?"



"My heavens' sakes!", the woman was obviously startled. "I've heard stories of such things but you're the first I've actually seen with my own eyes."

"Who else's eyes would you see with?", Squid Woman laughed. "You have a strange way of talking." "You think so? Who are you, and as much to the point, what are you?"

Squid Woman

"I'm Squid Woman. And yourself?"

"Banba is my name.", and she thrust out her hand. Squid Woman reached out and took Banba's hand in one of her own. Then a second, then a third. "That's a tad disconcerting.", Banba admitted. "The stories I've heard are stories of giant versions of your soft self upsetting ships and eating the entire crew." "That's not me. That's the Kraken.", Squid Woman corrected. "And I'm not entirely sure there actually is a Kraken, I, myself, have never seen one.", and she winked, "Not with my own eye, anyway."

Banba recognized she was being teased, and she laughed easily. "Do you have to stay in the water or could you come up on deck for a nice cup of tea?" "I stay in the water.", Squid Woman said firmly. "But it might be interesting to try this tea of which you speak. What is it?" "Rather than describe it, I'll go make us some. I'll just haul myself up the rope here and..." "Give me those tools and tell me what you want done with them." "Clean the hull. It's fairly routine and easy enough, although it's tiring."



While Banba went up the rope and hurried about the business of making tea, Squid Woman busied herself scraping vegetation and other forms of growth from the hull of the craft. When Banba came back down the rope with two mugs of honey-sweetened tea she was amazed at how much space had been cleared in the waving forest growing from the bottom of her boat.

"You've done well.", she complimented.

"If I'd had more scrapers I could have done more."

"Careful, dear one, it's still a bit hottish.", Banba warned, blowing on the surface of her tea. "I hope it's sweet enough for you."

"It's beautifully sweet, but I have to admit to you this seems an odd thing for me to be doing. Do you drink this tea very often? Is it like a medicine?"

"It's by way of being an indulgence.", Banba grinned. "Why, every day I invent at least four good reasons to reward myself with a good cuppa. Today, you're one of the reasons. It makes for a most welcome break from the boredom of sitting here waiting for the rainclouds to blow away."

"Why do you have to sit and wait?"

"Well, I can't see the stars at night, can I? If I can't see the stars I can't figure out which direction I should go. No use heading off with no idea of where I'm headed."

"Are you serious?", Squid Woman sipped the tea and liked her second mouthful even more than the first. "This does seem to be an acquired taste.", she smiled, "And I do believe I'm acquiring the taste."

"There's more in the pot.", Banba promised.

"So tell me more about this navigational problem you're having. I have no trouble at all finding my way, and I don't have to come to the surface to look at stars, either."

"I'd be most interested in knowing how you do that. Every time it rains the clouds obscure the stars and the stars are the only way I have of figuring out where it is I'm supposed to head. I lay my course

Squid Woman

at night, then travel during the day. When these rain storms come...", she shrugged, "Ah well, it gives me a chance to clean the hull. And to drink tea with newfound friends."

For hours they alternated between drinking cups of tea and working on the hull of the ship. Banba hunted out other scrapers and Squid Woman wielded them with all her many arms, moving through the forest of weeds at great speed, sending an absolute feast of snails, barnacles, even oysters and scallops to the happily feasting fish. And every now and again Squid Woman would put down the scrapers just long enough to use her sharp beak to open a particularly big gooseneck barnacle, or to munch happily on a fish she had caught. She handed several good specimens to Banba who went up the rope and cooked them, then came down the rope again, to share them, and they feasted together, with, of course, many cups of delicious honey-sweetened tea.



All too soon the hull was scraped clean, the scrapers stored away, and the two friends looked at each other and smiled. "A good job well done. And I do thank you my many-armed friend."

Written By Anne Cameron

Squid Woman

"You're very welcome my arm-deprived friend. We might have more tea, perhaps, and then I will show you how even the rain clouds cannot delay your progress."

Banba went back up the rope to make more tea and when she came back down again with two welcome mugs of brew, Squid Woman had arranged herself on the surface of the waves, her many arms spread out around her. "This", she said, "is what I call a compass. This", she held out a small fleck of what might or might not have been a bit of rock or shell, "will always point north. Always. Ever and always.". You put it in a bowl with a bit of water, enough to make it float, and the pointy end of it will find North for you. And there you are."

"What if I don't want to go North?", Banba teased

"Directly across from North is South. You can mark that on the outside rim of the bowl. Then halfway between North and South you'll find East and West. Mark them. If your head is toward North and your bum is toward South then your left arm will point west and your right arm will point east and you're as good as on your way."

"Compass, you say."

"Compass." Squid woman said firmly.

"And the little bit of stone is..."

"I call it lodestone. It's hard to find, but not impossible. Just keep your eyes open. Of course, you'll have to use your own eyes, ", she teased.

Banba went up the rope and found a bowl. She knew what she was about to do was important, perhaps one of the most important things she would ever do and so she chose a particularly beautiful alabaster bowl. Into it she poured a bit of fresh water, and into that she placed the lodestone. When the thinner, pointy end steadied, Banba carefully marked an "N" on the rim of the bowl.

"And now what?", she called.

"Now you must have faith." Squid Woman replied. And even though she was a citizen of the deep seas she came arm over arm over arm over arm up the rope and slithered her way to where Banba was staring down into the alabaster bowl. "I might be false-faced", Squid Woman said quietly. "I might have been sent here by Kraken to fool you and steer you straight into his ever hungry maw."

"I don't believe that to be true.", Banba said quietly. "You have a good, gentle feel about you."

"Then you have faith. Unfurl your sails, decide the direction you intend to go and...go safely."

"Will you come with me?"

"No. I will never be far from you. Any time you need me, just put the kettle on, get ready to make a big pot of tea, and slap the surface of the water several times, in rhythm. I will sense the rhythm, my entire skin will feel it, and I will speed to where you are. And if ever I need you, you will hear a rhythm coming from the very ocean around your ship, a rhythm which will pattern the surface of the sea. Head for the centre of the pattern, and that is where I will be."



Squid Woman

“Thank you.”, Banba hunkered to put her arms around Squid Woman. “Oh my dear”, she whispered, “it isn't easy to hug you; if I squeeze you will slither out and pop up out of my embrace.” “Ah, but the thought is there and it's the thought that counts.”, Squid Woman replied, wrapping all her arms around Banba and holding her. And then she was gone, she just slithered across the deck, dropped over the side and vanished into the dark water.

Banba knew she would miss her new friend. But she had a memento, and it stayed with her for the better part of a week. Her arms were touched with little red marks where the suckers of Squid Woman had clasped her.

In spite of the overcast, in spite of the clouds and the rain, Banba put her trust in what Squid Woman had told her. She studied the lodestone, then studied the map, took a deep breath, and nodded her head. She dropped the sails and raised the anchors, and then set off on a new adventure, secure in the knowledge the compass would always guide her way.

**Artist Chris Dobranski and Author Anne Cameron
with finished Piece, “Squid Woman”**

