

JACK FERRINGTON AND THE SCHOOL FOR SWABBIES



CLINT PERRY

**JACK
FERRINGTON
AND THE SCHOOL FOR
SWABBIES**

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Jack Ferrington and the School for Swabbies
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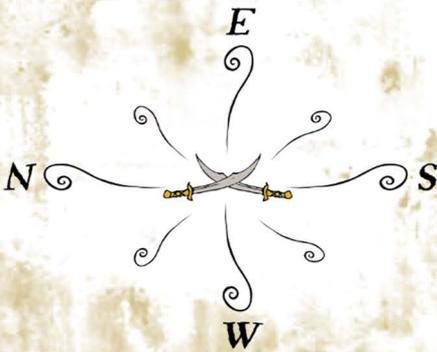
Dedicated to my favorite swabbies,
Sean, Connor & Brandon.

ISLAND OF MAGIC



WRECK
ARCH

CRYSTAL
ISLAND



TERRA
ISLAND





TRADER'S BAY

ISLAND OF WIND

MANTA RAY BAY

COMPASS COVE

HILLMAN HARBOR

TRITON COVE

ISLAND OF FIRE

CKED
IPELAGO

*“Yes, I do heartily repent.
I repent I had not done more mischief...”*

— Anonymous Pirate



CHAPTER 1

THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

Jack was wide awake before his parrot, Cap'n Keno, had a chance to squawk out an alarm. For a parrot, Cap'n Keno had an incredibly accurate sense of time and knew the hours of the day almost as dead on as a watch. Today it was his job to make sure Jack got up in time for school, but there was no need. Jack beat him to it.

Nonetheless, at 7 AM, Cap'n Keno squawked, "Get yer booty outta bed!"

"Keno," Jack said with a chuckle. "You can see I'm already awake."

"Keno bell. Keno bell," The parrot responded, bobbing his head in an up and down

motion.

Today was the first day of the sixth grade at pirate school. Jack was giddy with anticipation. He had barely slept the night before, tossing and turning in his hammock, just under the edge of sleep, dreaming of sea serpents and sword fights. He woke several times throughout the night, hoping it was morning, but when he looked out his porthole, all he could see see was stars and the black sea.

Jack had been waiting for this day for five years. No more lessons in numbers and letters. No more tests on pirate history. No more lunches with the 1st-grade pirates. They were the worst! Brand new to the pirate school, they couldn't stop asking questions. Oh, Jack was *so* done with 1st-grade pirates, not remembering he had once been one himself.

He already had his new octopus backpack filled with all the supplies he thought he'd need for the first day of school. Octopuses made for great backpacks. The tentacles worked as straps, and the octopus itself was a stretchy elastic book bag with great durability. You just had to get

used to the suction cups sticking to any exposed skin. That could be kinda creepy.

His octo-pack contained some seagull feathers and a new bottle of squid ink for writing, a compass for direction (no good pirate would ever be without a compass), a bandana, in case he had a stray booger or needed to dry something off, his knife (sixth-grade pirates were now allowed to carry a small utility knife) and a spy glass.

Jack quickly threw on his breeches, boots, shirt, monkey jacket (that's what pirates call a vest), tri-corn hat and grabbed his octo-pack. He headed straight to the galley for some grub.

His mom waited with a plate of salted junk, cackle fruit and a glass of apple cider. He loved cackle fruit, or eggs as the landlubbers called them. He didn't get them often and knew this was special for the first day of sixth grade. More than ever before, Jack felt like a grown-up pirate.

Keno had flown in through the galley window and rested on the table in hopes of picking at Jack's scraps. Jack wasn't sharing

today. Keno squawked, “Cackle fruit” but Jack only waved him away. Keno fluttered in the air a moment and landed on the other side of Jack, “Salted junk!” he screeched. Jack loved his parrot, but today Keno was just going to have to survive on his normal bird seed and rat tail combination. Jack needed his strength.

“Are ye excited?” Jack’s mom, Grace, asked.

Grace had been up early preparing Jack’s first-day-meal and seeing Jack’s father, Morgan, off to work.

Jack’s father would leave before dawn most mornings. He was a big and burly pirate who, when not on a raid or treasure expedition, worked as a fisherman on a ship that trolled the Caribbean for codfish. Codfish was a main ingredient in many pirate dishes and had to be caught and brought to market almost daily.

Jack’s father’s size and strength made him a valuable asset to have on a fishing boat, hauling in heavy nets.

“Yes!” Jack said through a mouthful of old, salted turkey meat. “I can’t wait to learn

how to shoot a cannon.”

“I don’t think that’ll be ye first day,” She chuckled.

“I know,” He said while gulping down some apple cider, his spittle spraying Keno.

“Wet bird,” Keno interrupted.

“But I can still be excited, can’t I?”

It didn’t take long before Jack was finished breakfast. He got up from the table, quickly hugged his mom and raced up the ladder to the upper deck.

“Wait!” He heard from below.

He turned to find his mom halfway up the ladder holding his octo-pack. “Aye, don’t forget this,” she said with a reassuring smile. “Now hurry along, or you’ll miss the ferry bus. Oh! And your father says, ‘heave ho!’” she finished in her best impression of Jack’s father’s deep voice.

Jack lived in Manta Ray Bay. It was a small bay on the north side of the Island of Wind. The Island of Wind was one of six islands that made up a circular chain in the Caribbean Sea known as the *Wrecked Archipelago*. It was named by

the pirates living there because ships, unfamiliar to the chain, would often wreck and sink trying to find their way to the center. It proved a great chain of islands to defend, live in and learn in. Plus, with so many accidental shipwrecks, it was a great way to aquire treasure... somewhat legally.

Jack ran to the ferry bus dock, his dark brown hair blowing in the wind from underneath the sides of his hat as he hurried to get there on time. At five-feet, Jack was a little taller than the average twelve-year-old, so his longer legs gave him an advantage against the ticking clock. He got that extra height from his father, but his dark eyes, that matched his chestnut hair, his warm smile, and his approachable demeanor came straight from his mom. As he ran, Jack thought back to the day he learned the name of the island chain: *Ark-i-pe-la-go*.

“A r c h i p e l a g o . A r c h i p e l a g o . Archipelago...,” He said it a few times under his breath. Each time it made less sense. Why couldn’t they just say *group of islands*? Why the fancy word that no one would ever use, and that

he could barely pronounce? This is the type of useless information he was hoping to avoid as he entered the sixth grade.

Sixth grade would be about cannons, muskets, sailing, spying, sword fighting, blacksmithing, navigation, construction, strategy and parlay.



CHAPTER 2

CRUSTY'S WILD RIDE

The ferry bus arrived at Dock 15 just as Jack started running down the dock. The bus was a relatively small barge, ideal for weaving in and out of the island chain. The ferry bus was rowed by twelve muscular pirates whose job it was to get the kids to Triton Cove by 8:30 AM. These were some of the strongest pirates in the island chain and when they weren't rowing the bus, they were often found at the trade docks loading ships.

Their captain, Crusty Taggert, was one of the wildest ferry bus drivers in the group of islands. Every morning, Crusty Taggert had less than one hour to circle two islands and get the

kids to school in Triton Cove.

Triton Cove was tucked into the northwest side of the Island of Fire. It was where all the young pirates from the Island of Wind and its neighbor to the south, the Island of Fire, went to school.

It was a fantastic cove that broke into three smaller coves as one made their way deeper inside. Each smaller cove was home to a carrack. Carracks were one of the largest European sailing ships to travel the Atlantic. Three of the carracks had been confiscated over the years from lost traders in the Atlantic. The ships were then retired and remodeled, in Triton Cove, and collectively called School for Swabbies.

The first tip of the Triton was home to those pesky first-grade pirates and ended at fifth grade. The Tip of the Spear, the center cove, was where Jack was headed, but he'd never get there if he didn't get to his bus.

Kids kept filing into the bus. One by one, over the gangplank they walked. Parents of younger pirates stood and waved. Older pirates made their way to their normal spots and Crusty

yelled, “C’mon! C’mon! We ain’t got all day.”

Jack made it to the gangplank just as it was about to be brought in and crossed in two quick jumps. He quickly found a few of his friends from last year and sat down. Tom Goff, Finn Doherty and Macy Douglas had all been in his fifth-grade class at Shark Bait Elementary. The name seemed harsh, but it also seemed to keep the young pirates from creating too much mischief. Maybe they thought of it as the final punishment for too much trouble. After all, getting expelled did include walking the plank.

Jack was glad to see his friends. Yes, he had seen them throughout the summer, but seeing them here on Crusty’s bus was a comforting consolation for a new year of school.

Finn seemed excessively excited. “Do ya think we’ll start with fire?” He asked.

“What do ya mean, ‘with fire’?” Macy asked with a note of concern in her voice.

“I don’t know,” Finn answered, “just anything with fire would be awesome!”

“I think they’ll probably want to get to know ye a little better before they just let ye go

‘round playing with fire,’” Tom said sternly.

He knew Finn was a loose cannon, outgoing, full of mischief and had a passion for blowing things up. Just this past summer, Finn had blown up a rum barrel at the trade dock on the Island of Wind, just to see what would happen. What would happen? Well, it would appear that no one told Finn that rum is flammable, meaning, it catches on fire. Finn thought the barrel itself would burn, but the liquid inside would put it out, once it burned through the wood. Finn and Jack thought the logic was solid. Wrong! That barrel blew into a thousand pieces, and the rum inside exploded all over the dock, the other barrels of rum, a supply shed and even a couple of catamarans floating in the nearby water. It looked like a tidal wave of light orange had washed over the dock.

Jack, Finn and Tom took off running up a the hill as pirates from nearby homes and ships raced for the dock. The good news was that the rum had burned itself out by the time they had gotten there. The bad news, one of those pieces of barrel had shot itself directly into Tom’s right

leg. He spent the rest of the summer limping around the island. When people asked what had happened, he just smiled and said he fell while trying to hike down to Triton Cove. The flammability of rum wasn't something they had been taught yet in pirate school, but Jack, Finn and Tom knew all about it now.

As Jack's friends bantered about what the new year might bring, Jack drifted off into thoughts of school. He started thinking about the final tip of the Triton, or High Tide High, which was home to grades nine through twelve. His daydreams about the ninth grade and what that meant for pirates were quickly interrupted by Crusty Taggart loudly bellowing, "Watch war yer goin!"

The ferry bus jolted left, then right. Kids and octopuses rolled everywhere. Laughter erupted, and the younger kids grabbed frantically for the rails. Ha! First-graders, Jack thought and shook his head with a smile. They'd soon get used to Crusty. Jack had spent five years on this bus and knew it was a wild ride. A pirate better have an iron stomach to ride with Crusty. If they

didn't, they'd get one. He remembered when Macy vomited over the side of the boat for the first week of their first-grade year. He thought, even then first-graders were so annoying.

Crusty had his route down to a science, but there were plenty of wild turns and evasive maneuvers, as he'd like to call them. Especially when some other pirate ship or small fishing boat was in the way of his planned route.

"Don't ye know it's the first day of school, ya scallywag!" He screamed at a small fishing boat just evaded by the cat-like reflexes of the barge and its commander. "Get out of the way," He continued.

Maybe Crusty had mellowed out in the last year. Maybe he had been scolded by a pirate mom or dad, because when he was riled up his language was often much saltier. Maybe he was just trying to start the year with a little more self-control. Often one could hear him yelling, "Left up!" or "Pull 'em in" followed by some under the breath curses or hexes he may have learned at the Island of Magic. But no matter what Crusty said, Jack liked him. He was always impressed

with his ability to maneuver that barge. In the years Jack had been riding with Crusty, there had never been a wreck. In these islands...that took skill.

Crusty Taggert's bus made its way from Manta Ray Bay to Compass Cove and on to Hillman Harbor before coming around the southern tip of the Island of Fire and into Triton Cove. His route was like a giant "S" around his designated islands.

In between each of his stops was a barrage of hard turns, fishtails, weaving in and out of rocks, loud screams and seasick students. Jack had spent five years getting used to the choppy ride that came with Crusty at the helm, but as they finally started the hard right turn into Triton Cove, he looked around and saw many green faces. Some of the older kids, like him, were just fine, but there were plenty of first, second and a few third-graders that would be making their way right to the infirmary on board the Shark Bait carrack. What's funny is that each of them was making their own shark bait as they hurled over the side. Maybe this is why they were given

that name, Jack thought with a smile.

They entered the Triton Cove after fifty-seven minutes and docked at the gated entry to the three long gangways that led each set of students to their correct ship. Crusty stood at the gangplank and patted each departing male student on the back and tipped his raggedy tricorn at each female student as they left. He loved his job and secretly kept a running tally of each seasick student. No one knew, but Crusty kept a record of how many students left his ship a little more wobbly in the legs. This first day of school had been a record with at least thirteen students still hunched over the rails as the majority departed. If anyone looked closely, they could see him smile and quietly count as the students left his ferry bus.

Jack, Finn, Macy and Tom exited and started toward Moray Middle. In just a few more minutes they would officially be “Fighting Eels,” their school’s mascot.

“Move outta the way!” They heard from behind. They turned around to look and saw John Lawson pushing his way down the gangway

to school. John was a seventh grader and Jack hadn't seen him in over a year. John had moved on to Moray Middle while Jack was still stuck at Shark Bait.

John was even bigger than Jack remembered. It looked like he had grown about a foot in the last year, and was that facial hair? He'd always been bigger than the other kids, and he used his size to muscle his way around school and intimidate other pirates. But now, he looked like he should be in high school.

Jack and his friends all pushed their backs against the railing as John stomped through giving Macy a smirk while flicking Tom in the ear as he passed.

“Jerk,” Tom said, under his breath.

John paused, and closed in on Tom, “What was that?” He growled, towering at least six inches over the slighter Tom. Finn took a step forward.

Tom had neither the size or personality to provoke someone like John Lawson, but Finn had some size and strength that Tom didn't. If Tom needed him, Finn would step in.

Tom cowered and, with a shake in his voice, answered, “Nothing... I was just thinking about work. Ya know...all the school work we’ll have to do.”

John hovered, then flicked Tom in the nose again, snickered and said, “And I’m sure you’ll be doin’ some of mine.” He turned and continued stomping down the gangway.

Finn stepped back. Tom took a deep breath.

Finn put his hand on Tom’s on the back, “Don’t worry, we won’t let that overgrown seaweed mess with ya this year.”

Tom smiled meekly and said, “Thanks”

Jack didn’t think John wanted to get to school any faster than the rest of the kids. He stomped, pushed and raced his way to the ship to show his dominance over the new and smaller kids at school.

Jack and his friends continued to make their way to the ship, crossed the gangplank and found seats on the Main Deck near the front.

School for Swabbies was about to begin. As Jack looked around the Main Deck he saw his

instructors waiting to be introduced. They were everything he expected and he couldn't wait to meet some of the Caribbean's most notorious pirates.



CHAPTER 3

TIME TO MEET THE TEACH

The Main Deck of the ship had been converted into an amphitheater of sorts with wooden planks set atop barrels running in a semi-circle all facing the Quarterdeck.

On the Quarterdeck stood a large podium that displayed the school's mascot; a large, fierce-looking Blackspotted Moray wrapped around an anchor. The school colors decorated the Quarterdeck, as was normal with any sailing ship. However, this ship was also adorned with flags and banners in many of the visible areas on the upper decks. Faded yellow flags that slowly became light blue with black spots hung from the rope ladders, railings and masts. These were

the colors of the Fighting Eels, and they waved proudly.

Milling about the Quarterdeck was this year's faculty and staff. It was a gruff looking entourage of experienced pirates, all ready to take on the challenges of another year training eager, young pirates still wet behind the ears. Jack didn't know who was who yet, but that was the point of this morning's assembly.

Jack had his theories. He had heard Blackbeard was an instructor in the both the middle and high schools and he wondered if he was among the group of pirates standing before them on the Quarterdeck.

He took notice of a young lady pirate with flowing red hair, and a beautiful smile. She wore a long red and brown skirt, cut in shreds at the bottom and paired with a dirty white corset as her shirt. A red sash wrapped loosely around her neck hung down from both shoulders, but what really caught Jack's attention was the sparkling silver-barreled musket in her belt. The barrel and hammer had gold inlay in curling patterns, finished at the end with a dark walnut handle.

Jack had never seen a musket like hers before and wondered if this could be the infamous Anne Bonny. He also noticed that she seemed to command the attention of a number of the male pirates on the Quarterdeck. They seemed unable to keep from glancing in her direction.

One of the pirates was missing an arm, and another had a stump for a leg. When he was at Shark Bait, most of his instructors were a little more put together than this ragtag group. It only made Jack more excited about this year's prospects of real pirating.

The deck was buzzing with young pirates chattering about their expectations of the year and which teacher was which.

The energy on deck was electric in the first few rows, with new sixth-grade pirates making most of the ruckus. As the rows extended back, the buzz grew quieter with the cooler eighth-grade pirates playing some kind of numbered stone and coin pick up game on the benches between various groups. Every now and then Jack would hear an "Aye!" or "Avast, keep yer filthy hand off me coin," come from the back,

then die down as the pirates looked up to see who may have taken notice. Jack had a feeling that the game they were playing wasn't exactly allowed on deck.

As the chatter and noise grew to a frenzy, a resounding "QUIET!" rang out like a deep bell from above. The assembly of students immediately hushed. A pirate who looked to be almost seven feet tall emerged from behind the group of pirate teachers on the Quarterdeck. His size made his features easily visible. He had black hair tied back with a red bandana and a well-worn tricorn hat atop his enormous head. The hat held the initials "M.E." Jack assumed that meant "Moray Eels" and not just a moniker symbolizing this pirate's high self-esteem. A scar ran in a diagonal line from his left eyebrow across his nose and ended on his right cheek. His thick, black beard was well groomed and his dark red coat hung with tails to the back of his shins. His large black boots were well shined.

Jack was most fascinated with his cutlass. The sword carried by this pirate must have been almost three feet long. Only a pirate of his stature

could wield it with any accuracy and force. It had a polished gold hand guard encrusted with jewels. The grip was silver wrapped in tight black leather, and the pommel looked like a shrunken head. This cutlass was unlike anything Jack had ever seen. He elbowed Finn, who was sitting to his right and whispered, “Look at that sword.”

I said, “Quiet!” came the voice again. Jack looked up and saw it was directed at him. Jack was startled. How did he hear me? Jack thought. Jack decided that if the teacher’s head was that big, his ears must match and his hearing must be extraordinary. Jack quickly decided he wouldn’t be sharing any secret information within earshot of this instructor.

Again, the pirate said, “Quiet.” in a lower tone, followed by, “Calm down now, we be having much to cover.” He continued, now with a slight grin, “Welcome to a new year of pirating at yer home away from home for the next nine months, Moray Middle and the Fighting Eels!” His voice got louder as he finished his sentence.

At that, the assembly erupted into cheers. The students stood up. Hats flew in the air and

a contraband musket or two fired as part of the spontaneous celebration.

“OK! OK!” The pirate bellowed. “Let’s take our seats...”

“Where should we take ‘em?” came a sarcastic remark from one of the eighth-grade boys. The other students couldn’t help but let out a little laughter.

“Don’t be thinkin’ I don’t know that was you, Quick-tongue Quivers. Ye didn’t get that name fer nothin! Ok, so where were we?” He continued. “Oh yes, Welcome! Now please, hhhm,” he cleared his throat, “take yer seats.”

The pirate paused for 30 seconds, waiting for the students to silence, and then continued, “I be Edward Teach,” A gasp arose from a majority of the sixth-graders sitting next to Jack, including Macy. He didn’t know why until the giant pirate continued. “Some of ye may know me as Blackbeard.”

Blackbeard let that hang in the air for a few seconds. He could see the excitement in the eyes of many and even a little fear. Jack could see that Blackbeard relished his reputation.

Jack smiled. It all made sense. The pirate's size, clothes and weapons could only lead to the conclusion that this giant pirate was indeed the legendary Blackbeard.

Blackbeard continued, "I see some of ya newer students may have heard of me. I am the principal and headmaster of both High Tide High and Moray Middle. I am also yer Strategy & Tactics instructor. I be here today to introduce the instructors for the year and assist in handing out yer class schedules. When I am within the school boundaries or anywhere in Triton Cove, you will address me as 'Mr. Teach'."

Jack thought how appropriate it was that the headmaster of the school and the head pirate of all the teachers had the last name "Teach." Awesome.

The assembly moved along, and Mr. Teach introduced the instructors in no particular order.

The first instructor was introduced. A hush fell over the crowd, and Anne Bonny moved forward.

"This'll be yer instructor in Firearms and Sword Fighting," Mr. Teach said after gaining

his composure.

Jack elbowed Tom in the side and whispered jubilantly, “I knew it!” He then turned to Finn and said, “Did you see her musket?”

Mr. Teach went on to explain that Anne Bonny was an expert with a pistol and cutlass. She was considered as dangerous as any of her male counterparts. Jack had heard about Anne Bonny and knew Mr. Teach was telling the truth.

Next was Mr. William Dampier. He would be the instructor for Speech Class.

Speech, Jack pondered. Why would we need to learn to speak? We already do that well. It was pointed out that there was no better instructor than William Dampier for speech. As a former member of the British Royal Navy, Dampier had been well educated in proper English and was exceptional in the art of parlay.

Now Jack understood. Parlay was incredibly important in a pirate’s life. He could certainly understand the need to be taught the proper way to negotiate surrender, capture or safe passage with a potential enemy. The incorrect usage of this technique could cost a pirate his

life or worse, his ship!

Next, was Richard Worley. Mr. Worley would be the instructor in Navigation & Exploration, in other words: Treasure Hunting. Mr. Worley had made a name for himself as one of the first pirates to fly the skull and crossbones flag. His explorations and accumulation of treasure along the east coast of the American colonies and the Caribbean Sea had made him the ideal teacher for this class. Rumor had it that he and Blackbeard were actually friends in the open sea and had raided a few towns together.

To Jack's dismay the next instructor, Henry Every, known around the Caribbean, as "Long Ben" was introduced as their Math instructor.

"Oh man!" Jack blurted out.

His row of friends looked at him crossly, and Mr. Every eyed him suspiciously. He didn't mean to blurt out, it was just that he thought all that math and counting was over. He hated math.

Mr. Teach conveyed that Mr. Every was an expert in counting, division and multiplication. He was also the wealthiest pirate west of Asia.

Mr. Teach gave him a big slap on the back, almost knocking poor old “Long Ben” off his feet.

The final instructor to be introduced was Bartholomew Roberts, aka Black Bart. He would be guiding the young pirates in their courses in Astronomy. He was well known for his early work on the pirate Howell Davis’ ship as navigator, especially at night. He knew every star formation in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. However, he wasn’t incredibly fond of piracy and found that spending his time with students and good English tea was much more acceptable than months on the ocean.

Mr. Teach continued down the list of pirates standing on the Quarterdeck. He introduced Doc Davies, who took up his daily residence in the infirmary. Then, he introduced Mr. Walters.

“Chum Bucket!” someone yelled out, and everyone chuckled.

“Mr. Walters’ll be the one serving yer grub,” Blackbeard scolded. “So I’d be careful about ruffling his feathers. He usually saves the rats for the sharks, but ye might be findin’ one in yer stew if ye ain’t mindin’ yer manners.

Which reminds me,” he went on, “rats... I, I,” he stuttered, “I mean lunch, is served at noon sharp. Don’t be late or ye’ll be eatin’ scraps off the floor. Lunch be in the galley known as The Chum Bucket.”

After introducing a few more deckhands, the assembly was almost over. In the final few minutes before class began, schedules were to be handed out.

From behind the podium, Mr. Teach informed us that schedules included one elective that could be chosen by each student. These electives would be available to any student that hadn’t already taken the class and were taught by an instructor with knowledge in that field.

As Mr. Teach continued to speak, deckhands went to the first student at the end of each row and handed them a stack of parchments to pass down their row.

Jack, Macy, Finn and Tom each took a schedule and compared them one to the other. They were all the same.

8:45: Astronomy

9:40 AM: Navigation & Exploration

10:45 AM: Snack

11::05 AM: Firearms & Sword Fighting

12:00 PM: Lunch

12:35 PM: Elective - Pirate's Choice

- Cooking (Chum Bucket)

- Cannon Operation (Orlop Deck)

- Marine Biology (Forecastle Deck)

- Animal Husbandry (Cargo Hold)

1:20 PM: Strategy & Tactics

2.05 PM: Math

2:45 PM: Speech

3:20 PM: Go home or to Davy Jones' Locker (a.k.a. The Locker, The Brig, Detention), whichever ye deserve.

Jack let out a small, "Ugh, math." At least it was a shorter class. He looked at Tom and asked, "You'll help me again this year, if I need it right?"

Tom, with a worried smile, said, "As long as ye be helping me with John Lawson."

"Deal!" Jack agreed.

He hated math, but he wasn't going to worry about that now. His thoughts turned to the 12:35 class that Mr. Teach called an elective. As

Mr. Teach said, each student on board was able to pick the class that interested him or her. Jack immediately knew Cannon Operation was for him.

He didn't exactly know if he'd get to fire one, but the title of this class made him certain it was for him.

He excitedly looked at Finn and said, "Cannons? Ya in?"

Finn, in eager anticipation, gave him half a thumbs up. Finn didn't exactly have a whole thumb to give. His love of fire and lack of knowledge in dynamite had led to the unfortunate loss of the top of his right thumb.

Luckily, it had been a very small stick of dynamite, one used for celebrations, and Finn's grip was such that the rest of his fingers were saved, though severely burned. His thumb, not so much. Blew the top clean off. If the stick had been any bigger, he might have been the first of the bunch to be wearing a hook.

Macy looked at them both and said, "You two always trying to set something on fire. There's more to pirating than causing explosions."

Sometimes she wondered if she was only their friend to keep them in line. Someone had to!

They looked at her, then at each other, and simultaneously said, “Like what?” as they laughed and shook their heads in blatant boyish disapproval.

In truth, Finn was the pyromaniac in the bunch, but his enthusiasm always reeled Jack in. Together they had devised and pulled off a number of fire-related pranks. Most of these pranks involved a paper bag, a mound of animal poo and a small fire, left strategically in front of the principal’s office.

Poor old Principal Sanders, he fell for that poo on fire prank every time. He was even seen chucking his defiled boot out one of his portholes and into the ocean while yelling something that sounded like “biscuit eater.”

Jack and Finn were never caught and surprisingly so. They would loudly snicker among themselves every time they saw Principal Sanders hobbling around school with one boot.

“So, whatcha gonna take?” Jack asked Macy.

“I don’t know, but Marine Biology sounds interesting. I love the ocean, and I overheard a seventh grader say something about cutting open creatures. That’d be cool!”

Tom gave a quick shudder, “That sounds disgusting!” He said. “Why’d ye ever want to cut open an animal?”

“I don’t know,” Macy said. “Why don’t ya ask yer octo-pack?”

“What? Whatcha mean?” he asked.

“Yer octo-pack,” she said with a questioning look and eyebrows raised. “How do ya think all that space was made inside its head fer yer school supplies?”

“Aye GROSS! I never thought about it. Just figured it fer an empty head.”

“Yer the one with the empty head,” Macy said with a laugh.

“Ha, ha,” Tom said sarcastically, “I’m not sure I want to keep me books in there anymore.”

“It’s no big deal,” said Finn. “Just pretend that every time yer taking something out, it’s like pullin’ out its brains.”

“OK, now I know I be done with this

pack.”

Tom picked up his octo-pack, held it upside down and dumped all his supplies out. Amongst his supplies was a folded up pirate flag. Tom carried this flag with him everywhere. It was a replica flag of the flag that waved over the pirate ship where his father had been the First Mate. It had disappeared when Tom was just six years old. It was assumed that the ship had sunk in the southern Caribbean waters. The ship and crew were never to be seen again. The flag was presented to Tom at his father’s memorial, and it had never left his sight since. It seemed to create good luck for Tom, as if his dad’s spirit clung to the flag protecting Tom.

Now, it would prove both useful and lucky, as Tom unfolded it and wrapped up his supplies. He then tied the four corners together to keep things secure and pushed his octo-pack under the bench.

Tom was the queasiest of the bunch. He was the smallest and often times the most timid. He was bookish, and wore spectacles that made his hazel eyes look extra big. His brown hair,

pulled back in a ponytail, gave him the look of a small British scholar.

Tom's love of rules didn't quite mesh with his identity as a pirate. Jack attributed some of it to his father's disappearance and wondered if Tom would finish pirate school and leave the Island of Wind. Perhaps he would take up a career tending a farm on Terra Island, the island to the northwest of the Island of Fire. Tom loved animals and often preferred them to people. So, it was no surprise to any of his friends when he said he was going to pick Animal Husbandry as his elective. Taking care of animals seemed a perfect fit for Tom.

"Avast!" Came the booming voice from Mr. Teach again. Avast was pirate for *stop and listen*. "I've got just a few more thing to be tellin' ya before we go. We're starting a new program here at Moray Middle this year with the new sixth-grade pirates."

Jack's head quickly raised up from his schedule. What could it be? he thought. His mind went to free diving, a technique that required an incredible breath-holding ability and was used

for quick dives to abnormal depths. What about blacksmithing? He noticed that hadn't been talked about at all and wondered if he'd have the opportunity to learn how to make swords after all.

Mr. Teach continued, "We instructors have discovered that we be lacking in leadership trainin' here at the home of the Fighting Eels."

At the mention of the mascot's name, a number of students erupted in cheers again.

"Let me finish, ya bilge rats!" He bellowed as the crowd quieted. "So, we've decided to begin a new sort of trainin' by experience."

Ok, not sword making, Jack thought. But leadership trainin'? Hmm...maybe we get to captain a ship or teach a class.

"This year we'll be pairin' each a ya sixth-graders with a swabbie from the first-grade class at Shark Bait Elementary. You'll be their Cap'n one day a week, starting today at noon. They'll meet ya in The Chum Bucket. Now off to yer first class."

Jack's mouth dropped open, his grip loosened, and his schedule floated to the floor.

Without thinking, Jack yelled out, “FIRST-GRADERS? Not first-graders!”



CHAPTER 4

STARS AND SWORDS

The whole assembly turned and faced Jack. Mr. Teach looked down at him over the podium and said, “Aye, humility is a big part of leadin’ a crew. Looks like ye be needin’ a larger dose than most.”

Jack couldn’t believe it. Not in his wildest dreams would he have ever thought he would have to look at, sit by, walk or talk with a first-grader again. This was worse than those nightmares where he was walking the plank in his skivvies while the rest of school laughed and rocked the plank up and down until he fell into the water.

If he had been just one year older, he would

have avoided this “new program”. What luck! Why couldn’t he have been a seventh-grader?

As he bent down to pick up his schedule, Jack tried his best to make himself invisible. He had garnered way too much attention on his first day already. He didn’t need to be on Blackbeard’s list of mischievous pirates. That was a list very few escaped without consequence.

He looked at Finn and mouthed the words “first-graders!” while rolling his eyes. The rest of the assembly stood up and were making their way to their first class of today’s modified schedule.

The assembly had taken up an hour of their morning, and this meant that their first four classes would be shortened by fifteen minutes. The day would resume as normal after lunch. If Jack had been in charge of scheduling for the first day, he would have just cut out Math and made the rest of the classes the normal length. He thought that made a lot more sense.

They made their way to Astronomy. Today’s first class started on the Poop Deck.

It didn’t matter how many times they

heard it, hearing the deckhands or instructors say, “Poop Deck” always got a brief chuckle from Jack, Tom and Finn. Today was no different. They inquired with a deckhand as to the location of Astronomy class and upon hearing its location let out a laugh.

“Oh, grow up,” Macy said. “We’re not in elementary school anymore.” She went on to tease them and show her maturity (or lack it) by repeating in a sing-song voice, “Poop Deck, Poop Deck, Poop Deck.”

Again, the boys busted up! Even the rugged deckhand couldn’t help but crack a smile.

“C’mon, let’s not be late,” Tom said.

While most classes were held in classrooms in the lower decks below the Main Deck, Astronomy was held both inside and outside. Some days it would be held in the Upper Cannon Deck, the first deck under the Main Deck. This allowed their teacher to illuminate star charts on the ship’s wall with a lantern passing light through holes poked in a sheet of leather. There were hundreds of these leather sheets. Each sheet contained a different star pattern found relating

to different months of the year.

Today, however, Astronomy class would start outside on the Poop Deck.

The Poop Deck was not where they kept the poop, as it's names suggested, but was the highest deck of the ship and the best place to view the sky. Its name originated from the Latin word *puppis*, meaning ship stern.

This Poop Deck had been modified with a teacher's podium in the corner and large spy glass telescopes mounted at the far stern railing for celestial gazing.

Jack and his friends made their way quickly up the large step-like architecture of the Quarter, Sterncastle and Poop Decks that made up the rear, or stern, of their school.

When they arrived at the Poop Deck, it was crowded and noisy with sixth-graders milling about looking through the spy glasses, standing behind the teacher's podium or chatting in newly formed cliques.

Jack found a seat on a bench near the front and Tom and Macy sat next to him. Finn went up to telescope and peered through. "Cool," he said

with one eye firmly pressed into the eyepiece.

The sound of thick boots came from behind, and a loud voice boomed over the fifteen or so student pirates there for Astronomy, “Booty’s need be seated.”

Bartholomew Roberts, aka Black Bart, made his way to the podium through excited sixth-graders.

Black Bart had dark skin and wavy black hair. Gray streaks swept back from his temples and forehead. His eyes were deep set and a vibrant turquoise. He looked out upon the students and caught Jack’s eye. With those eyes, Jack felt that he was looking straight into his soul. He was average height for a man and fit but not overly muscular. His long black coat was well maintained and gave Jack the sense that, to Black Bart, appearance was important. He carried a cup of hot tea in a steel mug with the initials “B.B.” on the front. When he finally weaved his way through the students, he pounded the mug like a judge’s gavel on the podium, splashing tea onto it and the floor.

“Come now,” He said. “We be havin’ a

shortened class, and I've got a few things to be tellin' ya!"

Students shuffled to their seats. Finn squeezed himself onto the bench next to Jack.

"Hey, careful of my feet!" squealed Macy as Finn stomped all over them making his way to Jack.

"Oops. Sorry." He said. "I thought I be steppin' on yer octo-pack. Wow, ye've got squishy feet."

Macy didn't retort. She looked down at her feet and shyly pulled them in.

"Firstly," Mr. Roberts, as he asked his students to address him, said, "There'll be no using the spy glasses without me permission. They be a very delicate instrument and must be handled with a teacher's supervision."

He continued with more rules including, not talking when the teacher spoke, keeping one's hands (or hooks) to oneself, and never ever call him "Black Bart." That moniker was not his doing, and he preferred to go by his given name of Mr. Roberts. Besides most people thought his nickname had come from his vicious temper or

love of cruelty on the seas, but in truth, it was a nickname derived from his darker skin. He did not like the name.

Violating this last rule would, surely, land a young pirate in Davy Jones' locker after school. That's where misbehaving pirates were detained when the final bell rang.

As Mr. Roberts finished explaining the rules of behavior for the class, he handed out parchments for each student detailing what this semester of pirate school would entail.

Jack was learning all sorts of new words today. "Semester," the first half of the year. "Syllabus," the parchment that Mr. Roberts dispersed with the class info on it. Jack liked it, it made him feel more grown up.

Mr. Roberts explained the syllabus, further detailing the constellations, phases of the moon, stars and star patterns that the class would be learning about this semester. The class would focus on the Northern Hemisphere's fall and winter star charts. The list included names like Ursa Major, Ursa Minor, Draco, Hercules, Vega and more.

He continued to explain that by the end of the semester, the final exam would require them to correctly label and understand the night sky from September through February.

The students erupted in chatter when Mr. Roberts told them there would be an overnight field trip each month to view the sky through the spyglasses on deck. The young pirates would bring an overnight pack and stay on board for the night, sleeping on the Main Deck. They would not be back home until classes ended the following day.

“That’s awesome!” Finn exclaimed.

“It sure is!” Tom agreed.

“Sir,” came a small voice from the back. It was Hobart Dinkle. Jack remembered him from fifth grade. He was a slight boy with hair cut like his mom had put a bowl on his head and trimmed what was sticking out. He raised his hand and said, “Is it safe?”

“Who cares about safe!” came the louder voice of young female pirate Jack didn’t know. “The more danger the better! We be pirates after all, not chik’ns.”

The rest of class gave a hearty, “Aye!” at the young pirate’s outburst!

Finn and Jack looked at each other and raised an eyebrow in approval and intrigue. This sounded like their kind of pirate.

“Well, I just mean,” he stuttered. “What if something happens while we’re be on board. I’ve...I’ve just never done anything like that before.”

“You can always stay home...”

“With yer mommy!” came a quick interruption from that same young female pirate.

Mr. Roberts shot her a wicked look and continued, “You can always stay home, but you’d be required to chart the sky from there and bring it in the next day for grading,” He continued, “but it’s perfectly safe. The entrance to Triton Cove is gated at night, and I, and other deckhands are on board for the entire evenin’. We’ve never had an incident.”

At that Finn, snickered, and said under his breath, “Looks like we’ll have to be a changin’ that.”

Macy elbowed him in the ribs and

whispered, “No fire-poop!”

“Ha ha!” he whispered, “I’ll leave a little star cluster fer the teachers.” Finn loved using gross double meanings.

Macy disapproved, “Gross!”

Finn kept chuckling, and Mr. Roberts finished with, “Ye’ll also have a great time. Be there any more questions regardin’ this semester’s class?” He waited a few seconds, but no one raised a hand. “Good,” he said. “That’ll be all. Grab yer things and make yer way to yer next class.”

With that, the young pirates rolled their syllabi and shoved them into whatever bag kept their supplies. Tom folded his and slipped it inside his tied up pirate flag. Then he and the rest of the class stood up and made their way to the exit.

The pirates shuffled down the steps. A few continued to the Main Deck for a different class, but Jack and his crew made a U-turn off the steps to stay on the Sterncastle Deck for their Navigation & Exploration class that was held directly under the Poop Deck. This room was the

Navigation room found in a normal ship of this size. Now it was their class.

The rest of the day was similar to Astronomy. No real learning was done. It was mostly introductions, rules, class expectations and questions from the students.

In Navigation & Exploration, Mr. Worley handed maps of the Caribbean. As he handed them out, he weaved his way through the wooden chairs telling students they needed to bring a compass and an instrument called a Backstaff. It was explained that a Backstaff was a navigation device invented by an English explorer named John Davis. The Backstaff made it possible to easily figure out the sun or moon's altitude. This gave both pirates and sailors the ability to, within a few miles, figure out their latitude on a map accurately.

Mr. Worley finished Navigation & Exploration class with a pop quiz, trying to find out what these young pirates might know about the sea in which they lived. When they finished, they were free to go.

The quiz only had five questions:

1. What is the name of the sea that surrounds these islands?
2. What is another name for “group of islands”?
3. Name one item used for navigation.
4. Who governs the island of Jamaica?
5. Who flew the first skull and crossbones flag?

Jack knew three of the five questions. The first, of course, was easy, *Carribbean*, although he spelled it incorrectly. The second gave him a smile, *Arkipelago*. Ha! He knew that word would come in handy. Although, again, he spelled it wrong. The third question was answered in class, but he wouldn't have answered it correctly anyway, *map*. He spelled that one right.

Jack knew it was the obvious answer, but it was still correct. The answers to number four and number five were a mystery. He left them blank, and figured he'd find out the answers tomorrow.

Jack quickly collected his things, delivered his paper to Mr. Worley's desk and exited to the outer Sterncastle Deck.

A few students were waiting to enter the next class. Jack quickly looked around and saw Tom near the steps leading down. Macy and Finn hadn't finished the quiz yet, so they waited.

"How'd ye do?" Jack asked Tom.

"Pretty good," Tom said shyly.

"Really? Did ye know the Gov' nor of Jamaica?" Jack asked.

"Aye," Tom said. "My mom is always cursin' his taxes."

"Ha, I could see yer mom doin' that," Jack laughed. "So... what be his name?"

"Somethin' Beeston," Tom offered and added, "My mom's always sayin' somethin' like 'Thar be no feastin' with Gov'nor Beeston!'

I figure he takes too much of the pay mom earns from her work as a seamstress. Without dad around...," He stopped and gripped his flag-now-bag a little tighter, "... she be workin' a lot harder to take care of us, she don't care for givin' some of her pay to royals on a different island."

"Aye, that makes sense," Jack agreed.

"No wonder we took to piratin'," Tom added.

"Got to make back them doubloons some how."

“Fer sure,” Jack said, but his tone suggested he didn’t quite agree.

As Macy, then Finn, exited the class and walked to the staircase leading down to the Quarterdeck, Tom added, “Oh, and ye know, of course, the last question be a nod to our teacher. Mr. Worley, right?”

“Whatcha mean?” Jack asked.

“He,” Tom emphasized the *he* and continued, “flew the first pirate flag with the skull and crossbones.”

Jack scoffed, “Should’ve known!” Then added, “Come on, we better be gettin’ to our next class.”

Jack was incredibly excited about his next class, Firearms & Sword Fighting, but not quite as much as Finn. Finn was already down to and across the Quarterdeck before Jack had finished his sentence.

“Hey! Wait up!” Jack yelled enthusiastically as he followed Finn to the Main Deck. His excitement for the next class almost made him forget that following Anne Bonny’s class was lunch.

Lunch. Ugh, Jack thought. He kept trying to forget that lunch was going to be no picnic. Why couldn't they have waited to the second or third day of school? How about the last day of the week? How about never!

BANG!

Jack ducked. Startled out his thoughts, he looked around and saw the other students also crouched down into a position of defense.

“Ha ha ha ha!” Came the scratchy and salty laughter of Anne Bonny. “Now that’s how ye start a class!”

The startled students slowly rose from their protective positions and relaxed.

“Please, please,” she encouraged, “Go ahead and sit down. I won’t be doin’ that again... today,” She said, giving Tom a wink.

Tom’s eyes dropped to his feet immediately, and he gave a sheepish grin.

Macy gave a “hmpfh” of disapproval mixed with envy and sat down.

“So, listen here,” Anne Bonny said. “We’re gonna be shootin’ things and stabbing things in this here class. One a ya’s a bound to get poked

or grazed by some fool hardy pirate with bad aim. I'd like to keep that to a minimum. So, there be no touchin' anything on this table without me or another adult swabbie's permission. Ya hear!"

"Yes, ma'am," came the young pirate's voices in unison.

On the table in front of Anne Bonny were an impressive mix of cutlasses, daggers, bucklers, scimitars, muskets and rifles.

She continued, "Oh and forget the 'ma'am' or Miss Bonny. It'd be fine by me if ye call me Anne. Heck, ya can even call me Bonny, but none of this formal 'ma'am' and miss. Ok?"

"Yes, Ma'...I mean Anne," came Tom's voice. He was going to have a hard time getting used to the informal approach of Anne Bonny.

She heard the start of his 'ma'am' and looked his way to give him another wink.

"Oh my gosh! What, is she in love with ya or something?" Macy said.

"Looks like someone be havin' a crush already," Jack said, crossing Macy to give Tom a slap on the knee.

"Leave me alone," Tom said coyly with a

smile.

Anne Bonny, like the other instructors, spent her first day going over expectations, rules and requirements. She too handed out a sheet of parchment, this one listing the weapons on the table. She held each up as she went down the list.

The only surprise to Jack was the word “Dirk” which was a term used for a long dagger. Anne Bonny explained that many times these dirks were cut-down swords mounted on a dagger hilt. She personally did not like them. She said, “A dagger is a dagger. If ye be close enough for a dirk to work, then ye’ll be close enough for a dagger to do the job too.” She followed that up by saying she couldn’t trust a weapon that’s been jimmied together by two broken ones.

Class, all too quickly, came to an end. As students shuffled to grab gear, Anne picked up a musket and fired into the air. All the students jumped and looked at their teacher in surprise.

Hobart Dinkle, the smaller sixth-grader who questioned the Astronomy overnighter, jumped at the explosion, and said, “Hey, I

thought ya weren't gonna do that no more."

Anne said, "I didn't," with a rebellious smile. "The first shot started class. That one ended it."

With that, she grabbed the ends of the cloth under the weapons, folded it end to end and proceeded to leave the Main Deck.

She stopped after a few steps, turned back to the class and shouted, "Class dismissed," in a hurry-up-and-get-out kind of way. "Ye gotta be hurrying up to get to lunch down at The Chum Bucket. I hear ye have guests a waitin'" Jack sighed, "Lunch time. Here we go."



CHAPTER 5

IS THAT RICE IN YER SOUP?

The Chum Bucket could be found on the aft third of the Main Deck. It had been remodeled and made larger, taking up two sections of the stern Main Deck. Skilled shipbuilders had also extended the ceiling up into the Great Cabin making The Chum Bucket a grand galley decorated and inviting.

It was made bigger to house, not only the kitchen and the ship's staff, but also the extended population of students and their teachers.

Jack and the sixth-graders from Firearms class arrived a little late to The Chum Bucket and joined a long line of students at the cafeteria's door. The seventh and eighth-graders were on

their way out and Mr. Teach was standing at the door. He wouldn't allow a sixth-grader to enter until all the older pirates had left the galley.

In line, standing in front of Jack, was the same girl from Astronomy with the smart mouth. She hadn't been in Navigation or Firearms. This was his first time seeing her since that first class.

She was yelling, "C'mon, let us in already. We be starving," and added, "I could eat a goat!"

Jack laughed.

"Something be funny?" She turned around and asked.

"Oh nothin'," Jack said. "I just thought, why a goat? Wait, is that what's fer lunch?"

"I hope not," she raised an eyebrow and continued, "Why'd ya hear something?" she questioned, looking Jack up and down. "Hey, yer in my Astronomy class, ain't ya?"

"Yep," Jack offered.

"What they be callin' ya?" She asked.

"My name's Jack Ferrington. What about you?"

"Piper Burnworth," She said,

"Nice to meet ya."

“We’ll see if it is?” Piper scoffed and turned.

She was taller than Jack, wore all black clothes and had her black hair cut so that it hung longer to the right side of her face but was short in the back. Piper wore lots of silver jewelry and had a lot of it in her ears. Jack felt entranced by her “coolness” and wanted to keep the conversation going.

He stood up a little straighter and in an easy going voice said, “Burnworth, huh? Ye sure had some burns for that kid Dinkle in Astronomy.”

Piper turned, flashed him a smile and said, “Hey, just like me last name says, if it ain’t ‘burn-worth-y’ then don’t say it.”

Jack chuckled, “I be thinkin’ it was ‘if ye can’t say nutin’ nice, keep yer porthole shut?’”

She laughed out loud. “Porthole,” she said. “Good one,” then continued, “speaking of portholes, did ye be seein’ that line a shrimps waitin’ ‘long the outside wall of the galley?’”

“No,” Jack said, “Why?”

“That’s why they won’t let us in until all the seventh and eighth-graders leave. They’re

gonna pair us up with one of them first-graders, waiting like cowardly dogs along the wall. They be lookin' so nervous.”

Jack looked along the wall and sure enough, a line of thirty to thirty-five little first-grade pirates were standing there waiting to meet their mentor and leader-in-training.

The last eighth-grader left The Chum Bucket and Mr. Teach, in loud voice, said, “Let me have yer attention, please. I know ye be hungry and anxious to see our fine galley, but first, we be needin' to be pair ye up with one of the fine swabbies from Shark Bite, we mentioned in assembly.”

The line of sixth-grade pirates groaned.

“I know. I know. You'll be eatin' in a second,” Mr. Teach said, oblivious to the fact that the sixth-graders were moaning about having a pirate shadow, not about getting to eat.

He went on to say that the pirates would only be with them at lunch and the elective after. It was to be a short and informal “how do ya do.”

When the elective was over, the sixth-grade pirates were to bring their first-grade

friends up to the Main Deck. Then the first-grade pirates would be collected by their teachers and walked back to Shark Bait.

Jack thought he could handle it, but he was worried about his new tag-a-long getting in the way of Cannon Operation. Nobody was going to ruin that for him. He'd been dreaming of cannons since, well, the first grade.

Mr. Teach finished with the speech and started calling out names from his clipboard. "Macy Douglas," he called first.

Macy looked at Jack, Finn and Tom with a quizzical look and stepped forward.

"Aye, Mr. Teach."

"Aye! Thank ya, lass," Mr. Teach said. "Please come forward you'll be paired with, let me see...ah yes, Harriet Sharp."

Macy made her way toward Mr. Teach as a young pirate girl with mousy brown hair tied in a bow, a gray dress with a brown belt and brown boots came forward to meet her.

Macy may have been into dissecting creatures, but she was also an incredibly sweet girl and made Harriet feel welcome immediately.

Mr. Teach continued down the list, it seemed, in no particular order.

Finally, he came to Jack. Finn and Tom had already been called and were inside eating and most assuredly fending off the thirty-gun-cannonade of questions from their young pirate friends.

“Jack Ferrington!”

“Aye, Mr. Teach,” Jack answered.

Mr. Teach looked up from the clipboard.

Jack wondered if he recognized his voice from assembly earlier.

Mr. Teach smiled, “Aye, yes. If it isn’t Mr. Humble.”

Yep, he remembered.

Mr. Teach looked down the clipboard. “Let’s see, you’ll be paired up with...,” he paused. “Mr. Bantam? Max Bantam!”

Jack slowly walked down to the cafeteria’s door as a small boy with curly black hair and a wicked grin leapt forward from the first-grade line.

They met at the door to The Chum Bucket. Mr. Teach looked at Max and gave him a wink

and a smile. Jack noticed but disregarded it as Mr. Teach trying to make the youngster feel at home.

They shook hands. Jack noticed that Max's hand was cold and clammy. Then he caught the slightest whiff of smelly fish.

"That be comin' from you?" Jack asked Max.

"What?" Max responded defensively.

"That fish smell," Jack replied.

"I don't know. I don't smell nutin'." Max said, whistling as he said the word *smell*.

"Great," Jack said to himself. "I've got the smelly one with clammy hands who whistles through his teeth. This should be fun."

"Sorry?" Mr. Teach said, "Whatcha be sayin'?"

"Oh, um, I be sayin', 'this should be fun.'" but with feigned enthusiasm, instead of the disdain he was feeling.

"C'mon Max, let's be gettin' this over with." He said.

Mr. Teach gave him a cross look.

"I mean, let's get some grub."

They made their way into The Chum Bucket and found their way to the round table where Tom, Finn and Macy were sitting with their first-grade counterparts.

Finn had saved Jack a seat which Max jumped into immediately.

“Hey, minnow,” Finn exclaimed. “That seat ain’t fer you. If we ain’t got a seat, you stay on yer feet.” Finn said with pride at his quick creation of the rhyme.

Max said, “If ye ain’t gonna share, I ain’t gonna care,” feeling his own sense of pride at the retort.

Finn was trying to save some face and come up with another rhyme, but Jack interrupted.

“It’s cool,” he said. “I’ve got to be gettin’ in line for me chow anyway,” He looked down at Max who was staring up at him from his own seat and said, “C’mon. Yer comin’ too.” and walked away.

Tom, Macy and, especially, Finn stared at Max as Jack walked away.

“Ya know, ye should be following him,” Tom said.

“Maybe I will. Maybe I won’t,” Max chimed.

“Ok,” Macy declared. “I’m sure Jack don’t care if ye eat or not. I hear it’s special fer the first day and the first-graders, flounder stew with potatoes and carrots.”

Max felt the pull of hunger winning over defiance and reluctantly went after Jack, who was already waiting in line.

Max tried to squeeze in with Jack but a few other sixth-graders protested, giving Jack and Max a little shove toward the rear of the line.

“I hope they don’t run out,” Jack said.

The Chum Bucket was a well-kept cafeteria. It had ratlines along the walls and the skeletons of sea creatures, like whales and dolphins hanging from the ceiling. Circular tables throughout the galley provided the eating surfaces, and barrels for collecting refuse were placed in each corner.

It was each student’s duty to discard all their waste into the barrels. They were required, after that, to take their forks, mugs, plates or bowls to a counter where part of the kitchen staff

would collect them for cleaning.

If a pirate failed to clean their mess, they were ordered to kitchen duty after school. Kitchen duty included scrubbing the floors and tables and washing some dishes, including the big cast iron cauldrons that formed the line and barrier between the students and the kitchen.

Jack was now standing before one of those cauldrons, waiting for a kitchen hand to fill a cast iron bowl with today's fish stew.

The kitchen worker ladled the freshly caught flounder, peas, carrots and potatoes into Jack's bowl. It smelled delicious.

He knew this was special for the first day and that most meals would be a biscuit, some bitter cider, a boiled potato and maybe a dried piece of meat. To see anything with color on the plate was a rare occasion and to not find any 'rodent rice' in the food was an even bigger treat.

Rodent rice was the name students gave to misplaced rat and mice poop. It was all too often that a pirate or two would end up with some in their meal. Mr. Walter's was one of the best galley managers within the three schools, but

it was a pirate ship after all, and rats and mice were just something pirates had to get used to.

With a tip of his hat to the server, Jack grabbed his bowl and spoon and made his way back to the table. Max hadn't returned yet, so Jack took his own seat.

As he sat, Tom said sarcastically, "Looks like ye got just what ya were hoping fer: quiet, respectful and considerate."

"Speaking of considerate," Macy said, "Shouldn't ye be waitin' for him, so ye can walk him back to the table?"

"He'll find his way," Jack mumbled through a mouthful of stew.

A few minutes passed, but Max hadn't returned.

Tom was the first to notice and said, "He ain't back yet."

Jack, feigning concern, turned and looked throughout the galley but didn't see him. The line of students at the row of cauldrons had dwindled to nothing, and Max wasn't there. He scanned the room, but all Jack could see was a bunch of sixth-grade pirates and their first-grade shadows

laughing, talking and eating, some looking over the info they'd collected during the first half of the day.

Jack stood up and looked again. Max was still nowhere to be seen. Growing more concerned, Jack stood on the bench, looked around the room and yelled, "Max!"

The room hushed, and the other students turned to face Jack.

"D'ya lose somethin'?" came the gravelly voice of Mr. Walters from the dirty utensil and plate counter.

Jack said, "Uh, nah, we're just playin' some hide and seek. Ya know, to break the ice."

"I see," Mr. Walters nodded doubtfully.

With that, Jack took his seat and the hustle and bustle of the students in the cafeteria continued.

Leaning toward the center of the table, Jack softened his voice, just above a whisper, and said, "Where is he?" His concern was growing with each passing minute.

Mr. Teach didn't lay out the consequences of losing your first-grader on the first day, but Jack

couldn't help but assume they'd be dire. Would he have to walk the plank...in his underwear... while everyone laughed? He wondered.

Mr. Teach wasn't known as a merciful man. Jack had heard stories of pirates being hung upside down from a ship's mast by their feet. This didn't sound to Jack like something he wanted to discover first hand...or foot for that matter.

While lost in thought about the various types of punishment he might receive for losing a real live pirate, he heard a "plop, plop, plink" followed by another "plip, plop, plink."

He didn't think much of it until Macy flung herself back from the table with a loud, "Disgusting! What the..."

All eyes turned back to Jack's table. Jack and his group of friends all looked up.

There, inside the large whale skeleton hanging from the ceiling was Max. He held a hand full of "rodent rice" and was dropping it to Macy's stew.

Another "plink, plink, plop" sounded as he dropped a pinch into Finn's stew.

Finn quickly jumped onto the table and reached for Max.

Laughing hysterically, Max released what was left of his rice and scrambled back through the long whale skeleton for the wall. The rice rained down into everyone's bowls causing an eruption of curses and exclamations that filled the room.

"Dang it!" was heard from Jack, knowing his stew was ruined and there wouldn't be any seconds.

Max was quick and wiry, he made it to the ratlines decorating the wall in seconds. Climbing down the rope ladders as fast as he could, Max shuffled under the nearest table to hide.

The cafeteria erupted in laughter and chatter. Mr. Walters came out from behind the counter and summoned to kitchen pirates to help him get to Max.

He didn't know exactly what was happening, but with all this commotion, it couldn't be anything good. He wasn't about to have his precious galley turned into a circus on the first day.

It wasn't just Mr. Walters and his pirates chasing Max either. Finn had given chase immediately, and Jack and Tom were not far behind, circling the galley. They had asked Macy to stay at the table and keep an eye on the other first-graders. She obliged happily. She could see time in The Locker coming for her three friends, and she wanted no part of it.

Max, sensing his impending capture, quickly crawled to the next table. A few girls squealed as Max made his way between their feet. There was so much noise in the galley that the squeals went unnoticed and the search party continued to close in on the original table.

Mr. Walters arrived at the table first, ducking down to see what all the fuss was about, but didn't see anything.

"What be goin' on?" he demanded. He was interrupted when Piper alerted them to Max's presence under her table.

The search party changed direction and headed to Piper's table on the other side of The Chum Bucket.

"How'd he get there so fast?" Jack asked

Tom as they changed direction. “That be closer to our table.”

Tom didn’t answer, he just kept weaving his way in and out of the tables. Neither he nor Jack could move very fast through the cafeteria and while Finn was on top of the tables, he was doing his best not to spill or step on anyone else’s lunch. His progress was slower than expected, but he wanted to stay on the tables to give himself a height advantage.

Jack arrived first, then Tom, then Finn who stood in the center of the table. Jack thought that his interaction with Piper, earlier, in line, had led her to help them with Max but was proven wrong when he looked under the table and found nothing but books, backpacks (both octopus and burlap) and feet.

He looked up at Piper and said, “Well, where is he?”

She said, “Who?” with a sly grin.

“Ah! Was he ever here?” Jack demanded.

Acting perplexed Piper repeated, “Who?”

“He ain’t here,” Jack moaned and looked at Piper and said, “Thanks fer nothin’.”

Piper retorted, “I love me a good chase. Figured I’d extend it a bit.”

Just then he heard a “Get out there,” from Hobart Dinkle at a table in the center of the room.

Jack moved toward Hobart’s table. Unlike Piper, Hobart Dinkle didn’t strike Jack as the type to lead them on a wild treasure chase.

Jack said loudly, “C’mon Max. We ain’t gonna hurt ya. We just need to get ya back into our group so we can clean up and be headin’ to elective.”

“I’m electin’ to stay here,” Max responded with a laugh.

The sixth-graders at Hobart’s table stood up. Mr. Walters was approaching for the other side of the table. He had issued silent order for his kitchen hands to block any exit toward the kitchen or Main Deck. They had Max surrounded.

As they closed in, Max crawled out from under the table. He turned and reached into the nearest bowl and flung the contents of his hand at Jack. Jack ducked as fish, potatoes, carrots and peas all scattered in a shotgun-like blast over Piper and her friends.

“That’s it!” She proclaimed, rising from her seat. “I may like a chase, but I like food fight even better!” And with that, she grabbed a handful of stew and hurled it toward Max.

Some flounder popped Tom in the back of the head on its trajectory toward Max, but most of it landed on the students at the next table.

Within seconds stew was flying everywhere. Flounder was splashed across the floor and walls. Carrots were scattered like shelled orange scallops all over the floor. Potatoes exploded like tiny cannon balls as they hit students in the head, back and chest. Peas spread through the air like tiny balls of musket shot.

Stunned first-graders quickly joined in the fight. If this was middle school lunch, they never wanted to go back to Shark Bait. What fun!

Mr. Walters stopped his chase of Max and screamed, “THIS AIN’T NO BATTLEFIELD. PUT YER STEW DOWN!” but no one was listening.

However, one young pirate, funnily enough, named Stu, was being held in the air by a

friend, for better accuracy, and was immediately dropped with a thud.

“He didn’t mean me,” Stu shouted grumpily.

Stew kept on flying. Piper got hit in the face with a potato and retaliated by picking up her bowl and spinning around, letting the contents spray everywhere in a circular pattern.

Macy, on the other side of the galley, still with the first-grade students Tom and Finn left behind, couldn’t help but join in. She grabbed her spoon, scooped up some fish, potatoes and some of Max’s added “rodent rice” and let it fly. She had turned the spoon into a makeshift catapult, pulling back on it with her right hand while her left provided the tension.

Her artillery blast flew halfway across the room, hitting the still bellowing Mr. Walters in the back.

Mr. Walters turned around, yelling, “WHO DID THAT?”

Macy, hiding the spoon under the table, looked at him innocently and shrugged.

This was Max’s opportunity. With

everyone distracted by flying fish, vegetables and broth, he bolted for the exit.

Slipping and sliding his way through students in battle, Max found the exit and disappeared out the door.

Jack gave chase. He was almost out the door when he was grabbed by the nape of the neck. His tricorne hat flew forward as he was brought to an abrupt stop.

“Aye, let go of me!” he shouted, pushing off the hand that grabbed him, stopping short when he realized it was Mr. Walters.

“That be yer first-grader?” Mr. Walters asked.

“Aye, sir,” Jack answered hesitantly.

“Then this...this mess be yer doin’, don’t it?” He asked, stretching out an arm and slowly moving it from left to right, showcasing the new lunch time arena.

“No, No, it be me first-grader. His name is Ma...,” he was interrupted.

“No. NO! Like ye said. It was *yer* first-grader,” He snapped. “That means he be *yer* responsibility. That means this mess be yer

responsibility.” Mr. Walters emphasized the word “yer” again, then continued, “Ye’ll be bringing yer sixth-grade booty back here after school and ye won’t be leavin’ till there ain’t a single pea on the floor.”

Jack was incredibly dismayed and angry, but the sixth-grade boy in him couldn’t help but chuckle at the “pea on the floor” remark.

“Somethin’ be funny?” Mr. Walters added with a sneer and a raised eyebrow.

“No, sir,” Jack offered.

“Good! Then I be seein’ ya after school. I hope ye be good at swabbing a deck. Now get outta me sight,” he said and released Jack out the door.

Jack reached down to grab his hat and raced through the door. As he did, one more screech came from Mr. Walters’ gravelly throat, “What be ye name?” He yelled.

“Jack, sir,” came the reply and the door swung shut.

Lunch had been ruined and his much-anticipated elective hung in the balance. Would he go to elective and let the trouble with Max

work itself out? Surely, someone would find him. Or would he go after Max and try to juggle his remaining classes while on the hunt?

Jack considered it for a minute when the thought occurred to him: What if Mr. Teach found Max first? That could be the end of his time at Moray Middle, before it even really began, whether by expulsion or some other horrible punishment left to the imagination of the infamous Blackbeard. There was no question, he decided that the risk of completely losing Max or Mr. Teach finding him first was too great. He reckoned that missing part of a class or two would only lead to some time in the Brig and that was far better than the alternatives. What was time in the Brig to him now anyway? He already was on the hook for after-school duty. What's another hour? After weighing the options. He decided: On the hunt, it would be.



CHAPTER 6

SEARCH PARTY

Jack was busy searching the Main Deck when his friends exited from lunch.

“Jack!” Macy called.

He looked up from his inspection of a barrel that

had made up part of a bench used in this morning’s assembly. The barrels had been laid sideways against the port, or left, side of the ship and the planks that made the sitting areas were laid on the starboard, or right, side of the ship. Jack was on his hands and knees. He had been looking inside each barrel.

He got up and ran to meet his friends in the center of the deck.

“Any luck?” Finn questioned.

“Na, but I didn’t really expect to be findin’ him out here,” Jack said.

“Well, he couldn’t have left the boat,” Macy encouraged.

“Probably not, but this is a big ship, and he could be anywhere,” Jack proposed.

“He’s always been trouble,” came the voice of Tom’s first-grade counterpart. Jack hadn’t taken the time to meet him yet. He was the size of an average first-grade pirate with wavy golden hair, big blue eyes and his two front teeth missing.

“Aye, do tell,” Jack said, “and what be yer name?”

“My name be Rowan. Rowan Caster,” he answered, then continued, “he lives near me in Compass Cove. We were in pirate day care together last year. He was always gettin’ in trouble for giving lip to the teacher or gluing other pirates together. One time he cut all the hair off the school’s dog. Then he took the hair and glued it to the faces of some of the kids during nap time.” Rowan interrupted himself

with laughter. “That was kinda funny,” he said, “seeing a bunch of five and six-year-old pirates with patchy dog-hair beards.”

Jack and his friends looked at each other and chuckled too.

Rowan continued, “There was a time he ran away from the day care. Everyone in the cove was out looking for him. Finally found him just back at home. The mayor was furious. Said that if Max ran away again, he’d better stay away!”

“Oh boy,” Macy sighed, “This ain’t gonna be easy, but we be willin’ to help, right Tom? Right Finn?”

“Aye! Heck yeah,” Finn said, “If I be findin’ him first, maybe I’ll cut all his black curls off and glue them to his face.”

“Aye, and with all that dark hair he’d be lookin’ like a mini Blackbeard too,” Macy laughed.

“No, ya won’t,” Tom admonished. “You’ll be takin’ him to Mr. Teach’s office.”

Jack didn’t like the sound of that. “Can’t we just hang on to him till he gets picked up?” His mind was circling all the different punishments

to come his way if the principal found out.

“Aye, I guess that’d be OK too, ” Tom agreed.

The principal’s office was the only room toward the bow of the ship, built on the Main Deck. The Forecastle Deck was its roof. Macy would be taking Marine Biology on the Forecastle Deck. She’d be the only one outside during their next class, and she vowed to keep an eagle eye out for any misplaced kids during that elective.

“How about we be makin’ a plan?” Jack said.

“Whatcha thinkin’?” Macy asked.

“Well, we all be heading to different classes now, right? It gives us the chance to spread out.”

“Aye, aye,” Finn continued, “We can each search the area around our class.”

“Aye,” Jack said, “We can go to class but excuse ourselves to go to the head.”

Harriet looked at Jack curiously.

He looked down at her and said, “Ya know, the toilet.”

“Oh!” She said with a shy smile.

Jack continued, “It’ll be givin’ us the chance to look for that little scoundrel then too. Whatcha ya think?” he asked.

“Sounds good, but what about Harriet or Rowan or...wait, what be yer name?” Macy asked the first-grader assigned to Finn.

Unlike Finn, who was the loudest and most brazen of the four friends, this young boy was quiet, and reserved. He had close-cropped brown hair with a cream colored bandana tied around it. His face was dirty, and he smelled slightly of seaweed.

“Marcus,” He said.

“OK, so what do we do with Harriet, Rowan and Marcus during our bathroom breaks?”

“I reckon they’ll have to go with ya,” Jack offered.

“Yeah, why not?” Finn said, “They’ll help search too right?” as he grabbed Marcus’ shoulder with questioning enthusiasm and a smile.

“S..s..sure,” Marcus said. Rowan and

Harriet also nodded in agreement.

As they spoke, students filed out of the cafeteria laughing and carrying on. Laughter and comments like, “Did ya see his face?” and “I got a carrot right in the eye!” filled the air as the students scattered in different directions toward their next class.

From a distance, Piper yelled, “See ya after school!” to Jack. She shot him a wink and a smile, accompanied by a musket-like gesture fired with her hand.

Jack didn’t respond.

Tom offered, “She must have to help ya clean up after school. I mean, she did start the food fight.”

The search party watched as Piper made her way toward the staircase leading up to Marine Biology.

“I hope ya have fun with her in elective,” Jack said sarcastically.

“Speakin’ of electives,” Tom started. “We gotta find that barnacle’s backside before they end. All these kids are supposed to be back up to the Main Deck by 1:15.”

“We will,” Jack said, then reminded his friends, “Keep an eye on the hourglass up on the Quarterdeck. Remember, when elective starts, we only be havin’ till that hourglass runs out,” Jack finished.

The hourglass was kept near the podium. Every forty-five minute period was counted down with a turn of the glass. When the sand ran out, the pirate keeping time would blow a conch shell signaling the end of class.

A smaller hourglass, but still visible to students, if need be, sat directly to its right. This hourglass had only five minutes of sand and was used for the five-minute breaks between classes and the fifteen-minute snack time that was usually between second and third period. The two hourglasses could be combined if extended time was needed. The conch shell would also be trumpeted for the beginning of classes.

“One more thing,” Jack continued, “so far only Mr. Walters knows that Max was my responsibility and that he ran away. Let’s hope he’s way too busy dealing with the mess in the galley to go and tell on me. I’m sure if he does,

ye all won't be seein' much of me 'round here anymore."

His friends nodded in agreement. Jack took some comfort in the concerned looks on their faces.

"It'll be OK." Tom said in the most encouraging way he knew how.

He said, hopefully, "If he hasn't said anything to Mr. Teach, then no one but us and Mr. Walters, and maybe Piper...ugh Piper," He mused, "know anything about our stowaway. Let's try and keep it that way!"

"Aye, aye, cap'n," Finn and Macy said in unison and snorted out a quick laugh.

They all gave each other knowing looks, then turned in the direction of their electives. Macy and Harriet made their way toward Marine Biology, while Tom and Rowan started toward the staircases leading toward the lowest area of the accessible ship, the Cargo Hold.

If they could pull off their plan to find Max, no one would be the wiser. Jack hoped some of the luck in Tom's pirate flag would rub off on the group.

“C’mon,” Jack said with a wave of his hand, “Finn, Marcus, let’s go see about those cannons.”



CHAPTER 7

THE NOT-SO GREAT ESCAPES

“Get away from that cannon!” came the already familiar voice of Edward Teach.

He was scolding one of the other students as Jack, Finn and Rowan entered the class.

The student had been sitting on the powder side of the cannon but quickly jumped at the booming reprimand from Mr. Teach.

“As ye’ve assumed by now, I’ll be yer instructor fer Cannon Operation,” Mr. Teach said.

Mr. Teach was so tall that he almost had to slouch to make his way through the Orlop Deck, where Cannon Operation was held. The Orlop Deck was the lowest deck of the ship

and a quarter of it had been walled in to make a classroom that housed six cannons, three on each side, a chalkboard, and two rows of ten wooden chairs, back to back so that each row was facing their assigned set of cannons. It looked like the young pirates would be playing a pirate version of musical chairs, and the losers would be substituted for cannon balls.

Of course, there were more chairs than students in this class, so everyone would be seated comfortably.

Jack looked around and saw a few familiar faces including that of school bully, John Lawson.

Electives weren't just for sixth-graders and could be a mixed class. John had gotten kicked out this elective last year when he, not only primed a cannon for firing, but ignited it too. Luckily, nothing had been loaded into the cannon, but the sound inside the walled Orlop room sent quite a few young pirates home that night unable to hear for days. Mr. Teach had to apologize to several livid pirate parents, and even called a special assembly to reassure the school

that they were not under attack. Deaf pirates got a few days of shore leave, and John had been denied the ability to take the class again for a full year.

Now here he was, and Jack wondered if the tide would remain against him. He had started the day late to the bus, then created a scene in assembly, made an enemy in Piper, lost his first-grader, started a food fight, and now had his most anticipated class with a well-known bully. On top of that, he and Finn had to find their way out of the elective to continue the search for Max. He didn't know why, but Jack knew that John's presence might make that harder.

He nudged Finn. "Look," he said.

"Aye, I see 'im," Finn responded.

"Tom's not with us," Jack encouraged. "Maybe he won't remember that we're Tom's mates and he'll just leave us alone."

"Aye, let's be hopin' so," Finn said.

They both glanced over at John and took their seats.

“Want to touch it?” Piper asked Macy, dangling a cold, dead and slimy eel in her face.

“Sure!” Macy said, disarming Piper’s attempt at trying to make her squeal. Squeamish wasn’t Macy’s style.

“Oh, ok...go ahead,” Piper said deflated, but quickly tried to win her leverage back by tossing it at an unsuspecting Macy.

Harriet jumped back but Macy quickly put her arms out and let the dead eel flop onto her outstretched hands. Their school mascot may be the Fighting Eels, but this eel had no fight left.

“Where’d ya get this?” Macy asked.

“It was in one of those jars of cloudy water in the back,” Piper chuffed.

“And I suggest ya don’t reach yer pillaging hands into one again!” Came the scolding voice of Mr. Dampier. He grabbed the eel forcefully from atop Macy’s arms as he hurried past her.

“Uh, uh, I be sorry, sir,” she stammered as he stomped toward the bow of the deck.

Piper guffawed, “Aye, girl. Ye shouldn’t be gettin’ into things that ain’t yers,” and walked away.

The front of the Forecastle Deck had makeshift shelves of wooden planks and crates. They were packed with jars full of different creatures including small sharks, crabs, sea stars, urchins, clams, mussels, octopuses, squids, eels and more. All were kept preserved in salt water for scientific study. Some were more preserved than others, but all were fascinating to see.

Barrels were aligned in a square along the outer edges of the deck with the safety railing behind. Each barrel-seat had a small desk in front of it. This is the first time Macy had seen a seat-desk combo today, and she relished finally having a place to set her ink and quills.

She sat at the desk nearest the staircase, hoping it would make leaving this elective easier when needed. Harriet stood behind her, leaning on the rail.

They had spoken briefly on their way to class and agreed that while Macy was seated, if seats were available, Harriet would look around the ship from her position at the railing.

They also decided that Harriet would be the one to need to use the toilet. It seemed

to Macy that the idea of a helpless first-grader being on the verge of flooding her britches would be much more approval worthy than a sixth-grader needing and unnecessary bathroom break.

“Let’s come to order,” Mr. Dampier commanded.

He appeared to be a no-funny-business instructor. Not that the rest of her instructors weren’t, but there was an air to Mr. Dampier that said, “*Don’t mess with me.*”

His strict and proper upbringing in the Royal Navy hadn’t disappeared with his turn to piracy. Macy thought Tom would love this teacher and was looking forward to seeing their interaction in Speech class at the end of the day.

Students quickly moved around the deck, scrambling for their desired seat. Mr. Dampier passed out the class syllabus.

“This is Marine Biology,” he circled the inner area the deck, “and this semester, we’ll be getting familiar with the creatures that live in our fair sea,” He said with a smile. “We’ll be learning what you can eat. What you can’t. We’ll

even be learning about what might eat you,” He said with a smirk.

Mr. Dampier took some pleasure in that last line. He smiled as his words it sank in, and a few heads popped up in concern.

“But don’t worry much about that,” he chuckled. “As long as you behave yourselves, there won’t be much risk of finding yourself inside the mouth of a shark or tangled up with a giant squid.”

No nonsense indeed, Macy thought again. She looked at Piper who was seated near the far starboard corner, and whispered to Harriet, “I’m betting she sees a shark tooth or two in her lifetime.”

“So,” Mr. Dampier continued, walking toward the shelves and pulling down a jar, “can anyone tell me what this is?” He asked as he lifted the jar in the air and turned in a semi-circle on the deck.

A boy, at the desk next to Macy, raised his hand.

“Aye, Mr. Cutter thinks he knows,” Mr. Dampier said, looking at the young man. “Well,

go ahead,” he dared.

“It be a lionfish,” he countered, “but I’ve heard it be called a few names, like a turkeyfish or a firefish.”

Macy thought that all those names made sense. To her, it looked kind of like an orange and white striped, stumpy tree branch, with leaves all sticking out of one side of its body. It was fascinating, and she could also see how people might think it to have a lion’s mane or appear on fire.

“Aye, you are correct!” Mr. Dampier exclaimed. “Very good. How did you come to know that?” he questioned.

“My sister stepped on one,” the boy said.

“Ah! always a painful way to learn something new.” He said with a note of compassion and continued. “If you haven’t gathered yet, lionfish are a fish to avoid. They pack a fierce sting and are not much for eating and that is something else we’ll be learning,” he continued on, “what to avoid. They may not eat you, but they’ll cause you a whole ocean of trouble.”

Thinking of an “ocean of trouble”, Macy wondered if Jack, Finn or Tom had started the search for Max. He could be anywhere on this ship, it would take all of them to find and subdue the little scallywag. Her concern for Jack and the others was what made Macy a good and loyal friend. She knew she didn’t have to help with the search, but she wasn’t about to see one of her best mates made a fool of if she could help it.

As she thought more about it, their lack of time started to become more and more apparent. Macy knew they would have to get out of class soon. She raised her hand.

Mr. Dampier was still talking about sea creatures to avoid when he looked her way and said, “Yes, miss....”

“Douglas,” Macy offered. “Macy Douglas.”

“What can I do for you Miss Douglas?” Mr. Dampier inquired.

“Well, sir, my first-grade friend, Harriet, here’s in need of a trip to the toilet and I be wonderin’ if I can take her.”

With that Harriet started shuffling her feet

back and forth as if she was squishing a bug. She gave Mr. Dampier a half-smile of concern.

“Why do you need to go as well?” He pushed.

“Well, she’s new to this ship and a little fearful of the other students. ‘Sides, she don’t know where the toilet be.”

Mr. Dampier looked at Harriet and asked, “Do you know where the head is on your ship at Shark Bait?”

Macy was concerned by that question. She could see where this was leading and didn’t like it. If Harriet said yes, Mr. Dampier would just have her go alone. She didn’t realize it, but she was holding her breath.

“No sir,” Harriet said, “It’s only my first day too, and I hadn’t gotten that far yet.”

Macy, slowly let out her breath.

“Fine, Macy, take miss...” He didn’t know her last name and wasn’t going take the time to learn it, “Harriet, here to relieve herself and hurry back, otherwise you’ll have me to avoid along with these other sea creatures.”

Tom figured this was his chance to sneak out of Animal Husbandry to the decks above. Mr. Every and the rest of the students were crouched over that small sixth-grade student, Hobart Dinkle. He had just been kicked by a horse. No one was watching.

Hobart had been kicked while Mr. Every was introducing the animals kept in the Cargo Hold. Ironically, he had been lecturing the students on how a pirate should never stand behind the animal when the unfortunate accident occurred. Hobart didn't know. He just ran right up to the horse, startling it from behind.

Tom felt sorry for this new and awkward sixth-grader. He had always been a little awkward, but Hobart had him beat. First he was teased in Astronomy and now kicked by a horse in Animal Husbandry. His year was not starting off great, but Tom couldn't get sidetracked by pity. He had to escape the class.

He didn't like the idea of sneaking out. It went against his rule following demeanor.

He hesitated briefly, then gave Marcus, his first grade tag-along, the signal to move. They both quietly moved towards the staircase leading to the higher decks.

“Son?” came a voice from behind them, stopping both boys in their tracks. Tom turned and found Mr. Every and the rest of the class looking at him.

“Where ye lads be goin’?” Mr. Every asked suspiciously.

Tom could feel his palms start to sweat and his gut knot up. Thinking quickly, he said, “I thought...I thought we may be needin’ Doc Davies. We were gonna get him.”

“Aye! Good thinkin,” Mr. Every praised.

Tom felt his gut unknot immediately.

“But I think this young lad can walk.” He looked down at Hobart who nodded in agreement. “Why don’t ye be accompanying him to the Infirmary, just in case he has a spill along the way. Ye can be leaving the young one here,” he nodded his head toward Marcus, “we’ll keep an eye on him.”

What luck! Tom always seemed to be on

the receiving side of good luck, and this was an opportunity to get out of the Cargo Hold and up to higher levels with the full permission and knowledge of his teacher! No one said he had to stay with the Hobart at the Infirmary, but no one had to know he didn't stay at the Infirmary either.

He'd help Mr. Gut-Kicked to Doc Davies and then head up to the Main Deck.

"Aye, aye," Tom said and walked to Mr. Every and the group of students gawking at Hobart on the ground. "I'm Tom," he said to Hobart, not having been formally introduced, as he reached down to give him a hand up.

"I'm Hobart," the boy responded.

"I know," Tom said, "Let's get ya up to the doc." So with arms entwined over each other's shoulders, Tom helped a doubled-over Hobart across the room and up the steps.

"We gotta get outta here!" Jack whispered to Finn.

“I know, I know. Right now I wish we hadn’t taken the same elective,” Finn said. “Half our search party be stuck in here. I wonder if Macy and Tom be out searchin’ yet?” he said.

It had only been ten minutes but Jack was getting more anxious by the second. He couldn’t concentrate on what Mr. Teach was saying. He could barely focus on the piece of parchment in his hand, a drawing that would normally have captured his full imagination.

It was a piece copied from a book by John Roberts, it was called *The Complete Cannoniere*. It was a beautifully drawn cannon barrel with all the pieces labeled and marked.

Jack thought if he ever caught Max, he’d sure like to send him flying from one of these cannons. But for now, getting permission to excuse himself from class was the priority.

“Mr. Teach,” Finn interrupted. Mr. Teach had been pronouncing the names of each part of the cannon listed in the picture.

“Tr-u-n-yun,” Mr. Teach was saying when Finn raised his hand in interruption.

“What be it Finn?” he asked. He had

learned all the student's names when he took down the ledger of those electing the class.

"I gotta hit the head," Finn said crudely.

"Make it quick!" Mr. Teach growled.

Finn jumped up, looked at Jack with a wink and mouthed the words, "I'm out!"

"Come on, Rowan!" Finn ordered, and the two of them left the cannon room.

Jack just looked at him stunned. Now he was left alone. He hoped Macy and Tom were on the hunt by now, at least three of them would be searching. But how was he going get out now? He couldn't suddenly need to use the toilet too. Mr. Teach had seen them together two other times today and would certainly suspect shenanigans. He had to come up with a different plan.

Mr. Teach continued pronouncing the names on the picture, "C-orn-ish ring, Re-in-fors ring..."

Ring. ring. ring. Jack kept hearing the word "ring." It gave him an idea. As Mr. Teach circled the chairs on each side, Jack grabbed his octopack and moved closer to John Lawson. The seat behind John was empty and Jack quickly moved

into it.

Jack turned his head left and whispered, “John. John.”

John turned his head, “What do yo want bilge rat.”

Jack continued, “Is it true? D’ya set one of these off last year?”

John, now a little prouder that his work had been recognized, perked up and said, “Yeah, no artillery be in the cannon, but the place shook like thunder.”

Mr. Teach continued circling the class. As he came closer, Jack quieted.

“Can anyone tell me why we really be havin’ this class?” He asked as he continued to circle the room.

Jack ignored the question and continued to whisper to John, “Could ye do it again?”

“Course,” John scowled, “but I wouldn’t. I’d be gone fer sure. I’d never be comin’ back.”

Mr. Teach, returning to Jack’s end of the circle, boots stomping loudly on the floor, said, “That’s right,” as another student’s answered his question correctly. “To learn how to make haste

in the firin' of a cannon. Aye...Aye, but also," he continued, "to determine the arch ye be needin' to hit the target and the...."

Jack couldn't focus on the rest.

"Ok, I don't need ye to be firin' a cannon, but could ye be showin' me where the firin' powder is?" he asked.

"Why'd I be doin' that?" John inquired.

"I need to be settin' some off."

This got John's attention and he turned to look Jack square in the eye. He seemed to be searching for something that would give him a sense that Jack may be double-crossing him, but he found none. As he studied Jack's face, he whispered, "Why?"

Frustrated, Jack thought carefully about his answer. After a few seconds of locking eyes with John, he said, "'Cause I heard about yer firin' it last year and made a bet with me mates about which one of us could do it first this year. Blastin' it on the first day seems to me like it be makin' me the winner. "

Again, Mr. Teach circled to their side and they quieted down. This time he lingered for a

few seconds as if he suspected something might be going on.

After a tense moment, he began his stroll of the class again. He felt he had made his point. His physical presence alone said, “be quiet.”

Jack gave no mind to that point and asked again, “Can ye be showin’ me?”

John hesitated. Time was growing shorter and shorter.

Finally, John said, “It be hidden behind the blackboard.”

Jack gave a quizzical look, “Really?”

“Aye, lift the blackboard from the bottom toward ya, you’ll be feelin’ rows of jars. That’s the powder. If we be usin’ it in class for a day, Blackbeard’ll take the jars out before we start, so no one knows where they be.”

Jack was curious to know how John found out, but he’d save those questions for another day.

Luckily for Jack, the blackboard was on his side of the room. All he had to do was make a quick play for a jar while Mr. Teach had his back

turned.

“Each of ya will be put into teams of six...” Jack could hear Mr. Teach saying. He figured he’d give Mr. Teach one more circle around the chairs, and then as he passed John’s seat behind him, Jack would make his move.

Mr. Teach turned to walk back toward Jack saying, “...two of ya will be primer. One of ya will be powder monkey....”

Jack was getting more nervous as Mr. Teach walked his direction. He felt like Mr. Teach was reading his every thought. His hands were clammy, and he wondered if he’d even be able to keep hold of the powder jar.

Mr. Teach moved around Jack, continuing his speech on the cannon team structure, and slowly started walking toward the front of the class.

This was Jack’s opportunity. Quietly and slowly, he lifted from his seat and took two silent steps toward the blackboard. Reaching his hand under the lip, he lifted the board. It gave a small squeak and Jack stopped dead in his tracks. With a quick glance over his shoulder, he could see

that Mr. Teach hadn't heard. The sound of his booming voice and heavy boots had kept the squeak from reaching his ears.

What Jack didn't see was the smirk on Mr. Teach's face just moments after the squeak sounded.

He reached in carefully and felt for a bottle. There were a few blank spaces on the shelf, but he finally made purchase and pulled out a tiny glass vial, flat on the bottom, filled with black powder. He took two steps back and sat down. The whole grab took less than ten seconds, but to Jack it had felt like hours. He quickly maneuvered the vial into the waist of his pantaloons.

"Where is he?" Finn asked Macy.

"Jack or Max?" Tom asked.

"How 'bout both!" Macy exclaimed.

"I don't know 'bout Max, but Jack be still trying to find his way out of Mr. Teach's cannon class," Finn said.

“Ya left him there?” Macy questioned with surprise while giving a light backhanded slap to Finn’s shoulder.

They had all found their way to the Main Deck, and as planned and were hiding under the Quarterdeck in front of the galley. Here, they could not be seen by anyone from the Forecastle Deck or Quarterdeck above. Without Jack, the group didn’t exactly know what they should do next.

Tom explained how he got out of class, and the group chuckled. Poor Hobart. Macy proudly shared that she used Harriet to get out, but wouldn’t be returning to class. Finn, with Rowan in tow, nodded in agreement with Macy and explained to them how he had just asked for permission and got it. Macy and Finn agreed that they’d probably be sent to the Brig after school, but that they were fine with it.

“So, what do we do now? Have ya searched the areas near yer class?” Macy asked.

“Aye,” said Finn and Tom simultaneously. Tom continued, “I didn’t find nothin’.”

“Neither did I,” Finn concurred.

“Let’s split up again, each of us can take a different...”

BOOM!

The whole boat shook, and the door to the galley immediately flung open.

The five students stood there in shock, staring at Mr. Walters. He looked right through them.

“Not again!” He shouted.



CHAPTER 8

THE AFTER SHOT

Students scrambled like mice from the decks below. Macy's elective class all stood up immediately and ran to the aft edge of the Forecastle Deck. Other students scurried down from the Poop Deck and Navigation room. Not since assembly this morning had they all be in one place.

Teachers were reassuring students that nothing terrible had happened. There was even mention of the volcano.

The Island of Fire, where Triton Cove was harbored, was formed by a volcano centuries ago. It had been dormant for decades and decades.

However, with an unexplained boom coming out of seemingly nowhere, it wasn't impossible that it had suddenly decided this was the time to wake up.

Mr. Teach suddenly appeared from his office under the Forecastle Deck and proceeded calmly across the Main deck, through a whirlwind of panicked children, and up to the Quarterdeck.

He had a special "staff only" set of steps that led from the lower decks to his office. They were very handy in a panic situation like this.

He knew his demeanor would set the tone for the rest of the day, and so he didn't run to the Quarterdeck or seem to be worried in the least.

Frantically, Jack made his way up to the Main Deck, pushing and shoving other pirates out of his way. He wasn't supposed to leave the Orlop Deck's cannon room, but he did anyway. He was already in too much trouble for anyone on their first day and didn't care. Besides, he could blame this lack of obedience on his inability to hear what Mr. Teach had said to him right after the blast went off. His ears were ringing as if he was standing under a church bell as the whole

congregation beat it with steel mallets.

On reaching the Main Deck, Jack weaved his way between students, teachers and deckhands, always careful to avoid being seen by Mr. Teach.

Crouched down behind a set of wooden planks, he spotted Finn through the crowd. They were still under the Quarterdeck. He carefully made his way over to them, trying not to look suspicious, while at the same time avoiding Mrs. Teach's line of sight. He waited until Mr. Teach was at the top of the steps to the Quarterdeck and then made a sprint to his friends.

“Jack!” Macy shouted.

Smiling, Jack gave Macy a “quiet down” signal with his hands. Then, louder and slower than he should have, said, “You are gonna have to yell into my ear. I can't really hear you. I lost my hearing, for the moment, in the blast.”

“What blast?” Finn eagerly yelled into his ear.

“Ouch!” Jack said. “Not that loud,” and gave Finn a friendly shove backward.

The noise on deck, from frightened and

curious students and staff, drowned out any excessive noise coming from the group of friends under the Quarterdeck.

“That be me,” Jack said.

“What be you?” Tom asked, not quite on the same page as Jack yet.

“The blast. I set off a cannon in my class.”

“What!?!” Came the simultaneous response of all five students.

Suddenly, Tom got nervous. “Where’s Rowan?” he asked. “Oh man, I can’t be losin’ my shadow too.”

“Calm down,” Macy assured. “You said Mr. Every said he’d watch him, right? I am sure that be what he’s doin’.”

Jack had no idea what they were saying, but he felt confident it wasn’t about him.

They turned their attention back to Jack, and Tom yelled in his ear, “Why’d ya do that? Yer gonna get kicked outta class.”

“I couldn’t think of anythin’ else,” Jack stated, then continued, “Finn just left me, and I couldn’t use the bathroom excuse. I started panickin’, and I figured what be better: getting

expelled, or worse, for letting yer first-grader fall off the ship and become chum in the Cove, or have to wait to take Cannon Operation until next year?”

“Man, I wish I could have been seein’ that,” Finn said. “Yer gonna have to show me where that powder be.”

Jack didn’t quite make out everything Finn said, but he could tell by his enthusiasm and the subject that the best way to answer was “No way!”

Finn looked hurt.

“Have any of ya had any luck?” Jack asked.

They all shook their heads in a defeated, no.

“Arghh. Look,” Jack said, “The deck be full of students and teachers. It’s a good distraction. Let’s be spreadin’ out real fast to other parts of the ship to look fer him. That blast had to have scared him out of his hidin’ hole. I be thinkin’ everyone’s here and the rest of school be empty. It could be our chance to find that dried clam.”

“Good idea,” Tom said. The rest of the

group nodded in agreement.

Jack continued, “Tom, can ya go back down to the Cargo Hold and search the other side. There be so many sails, ropes and supplies down there. He could be hidin’ in any of ‘em.”

“Aye! Aye!” Tom nodded, and off he went, quickly disappearing into the crowd.

“Macy, can ya take Harriet and find yer way to the Orlop Deck and the aft side of that deck? I be pretty sure Max ain’t in the Cannon Operation classroom. Go into the Infirmary too and have a look. Who knows, maybe he’s there, but don’t be long. Harriet’s got to be back up here soon.”

Macy didn’t say anything. She looked at Harriet, and they both made their way into the crowd on deck.

“Finn... Finn,” Jack said, coaxing Finn out of his disappointment. “I need ya to be searchin’ the Upper Cannon Deck. None of us had classes there. It’d be a great place to hide.”

“Will do, Jack. But where are ya goin’?” Finn asked.

“Mr. Teach thinks I’m still down in the

Cannon Room, so I can't be takin' the risk of him seein' me in the crowd. I'm gonna stay under here and search the galley and try to get up to the Poop Deck."

"Be careful," Finn pleaded, "See ya soon. C'mon Marcus."

Jack watched his last friend make his way through the crowd and disappear down a step ladder into the decks below.

From his position, he could hear Mr. Teach trying to calm the crowd, "Can I have yer attention?" he commanded.

A few of the students turned to look, but many were remained caught up in their own musings and imaginative ideas of what may have happened just minutes ago.

"EXCUSE ME!" Mr. Teach hollered.

The other teachers began directing students to give their attention the principal on the Quarterdeck.

Mr. Teach waited as a hush slowly fell over the crowd.

Finally, Mr. Teach felt he got the quiet he needed to discuss what happened. "I know ye are

all concerned and many of ya are thinkin' of all sorts of imaginative reasons for that unexpected boom.”

Someone near the back of the crowd yelled, “Is the volcano eruptin’?”

“For heaven’s sake, NO!” Mr. Teach exclaimed. “We’ve had a cannon incident.”

The volume of the crowd increased immediately. Students looked at each other in dismay and concern. “I knew it!” and “Told ya!” could be heard from a the few with prior knowledge of John’s incident last year.

Teachers caught each other’s attention and gave quick head nods and knowing smiles.

“The student suspected of the blast is being detained. He’ll be dealt with. For those of ya suspecting, it was not last year’s perpetrator,” Mr. Teach confirmed.

As Mr. Teach continued to answer questions, Jack slipped into The Chum Bucket.

“Holy Carp!” He exclaimed.

Mr. Walters hadn’t cleaned a thing! Jack had hoped Mr. Walters’ need for order would have prompted him to get started, but no. He

was saving it all for Jack and Piper. Jack hadn't seen the full extent of the battle, he looked around with awe at the places some of the edible artillery was lodged.

Jack sloshed his way toward the kitchen, wading through the leftover broth, fish, biscuits, carrots and peas from the food fight Max started but for which he was ultimately held responsible.

He searched inside the cauldrons, ovens, cabinets, closets and under flour, bean and dried corn sacks. No Max.

He heard movement in the dining area and raced out to check. Maybe Max was following him. Maybe he'd been a bigger fool than he thought. He hoped this nightmare might be over, but was dismayed to see the noise was coming from two rats nipping at each other over a half-eaten biscuit.

With a heavy sigh, he started looking under all the tables.

All he found was more of today's lunch, the sole of a well-worn boot, a forgotten burlap backpack and a tooth.

Hmm, a tooth, Jack thought. That must

have been a hard potato.

“What ye be doin?” came the unexpected, gravely voice of the kitchen’s proprietor.

“Agh!” Jack bumped his head as he jumped up from under the table.

Jack quickly grabbed the tooth. Gross!

“I was just lookin’ fer the tooth I lost at lunch,” he said and lifted it into the air.

“Disgustin’ filth!” Mr. Walters cried. “Get yerself and yer tooth outta me galley. Ye can come back at the right time after school.”

“Yes, sir,” Jack replied. For now, he could mark the kitchen off his list. Kitchen. Check.

Jack stumbled out the galley door. The crowd was still milling about. Jack saw new members of the assembly and realized it was staff from Shark Bait coming to pick up their students. He didn’t see Macy, Tom or Finn. However, Rowan was standing next to an unfamiliar adult who appeared to be in charge of a small group of first-grade students.

Mr. Teach had left the Quarterdeck and was now on the other side of the Main Deck near his office, talking quietly with Mr. Worley.

Jack peeked out from under the deck to look at the hourglass. It had been turned. It was time for Strategy & Tactics, but it looked like class had been canceled or postponed. If he was lucky, maybe cancellation would extend to Math.

“Come on!” Jack whispered aloud. He was concerned for Macy and Finn getting back in time with Marcus and Harriet.

As the words left his lips, Macy appeared with Harriet in tow. She appeared to be asking Mr. Every what to do now, and passed Harriet off to the teacher Jack recognized from Shark Bait. Then Macy proceeded up to the Forecastle Deck. She got to the top and turned to look for Jack. When they locked eyes, she gave him a shake of the head. Jack knew it meant she had no luck.

The minutes passed. No one left the deck. Teachers from Moray Middle spoke with teachers and staff from Shark Bait. It looked as if both also tried to reassure the departing first-grade students that all was well.

Jack still couldn't see Finn. He scanned the deck from his shadowed hiding spot and saw

Marcus. So Finn had returned. He must have come back while Jack was still in the kitchen.

Jack, feeling relieved, almost forgot he was supposed to be in the Cannon Room. Adrenaline coursed through his veins as he looked around for Mr. Teach. The principal was still on deck, smiling and shaking hands with Mr. Furlong, Jack's first grade teacher from Shark Bait.

Jack needed to get back to the Cannon Room and fast, but he hesitated when he heard Mr. Furlong announce, "Avast! It appears we have everyone. Let's be movin' along."

Wait. Jack thought. That can't be right. In all the confusion, did Max make his way back to the Main Deck and fall in line with the rest of his class?

Jack watched as the first-graders marched along the gangplank, and then on to the long dock that connected Moray Middle to the gangway between all three points of the spear. He couldn't see Max, but maybe his eyes were deceiving him.

He turned and looked toward the deck. Mr. Teach was nowhere to be seen.

Jack sprinted out from under the Quarterdeck, made an abrupt turn, and then sprinted from the Main Deck up three decks to the Poop Deck.

Out of breath, he looked left then right. No one was there. He made a quick dash to the spyglasses and trained them on the ant-like line of marching first-graders.

Up and down the row he went. No curly black hair. No one out of place, or out of line. Max wasn't there.

Panic spread through Jack's veins. He wanted to scream, "Wait! Ye be forgettin' one!" but the fear of the unknown consequences kept his lips from moving. He pictured punishments like being shocked by Moray Eels or having sand sharks nibble at his toes. He knew Blackbeard's reputation on the sea, but wondered how he dealt with troublemakers like Jack at school? Jack was sure he'd soon find out.

He sighed, turned around and rested his shoulders against the railing between two spyglasses.

"Hmmm," he heard someone clear their

throat. It was Mr. Roberts.

“May I ask why you are alone up here?”

Jack bolted upright to attention. “Sir?” he said, as if not hearing the question.

“Mr.Ferrington. Is that right? He asked.

“Aye, sir,” Jack answered.

“Were ya usin’ the telescopes?” He asked with disapproval.

Jack hesitated. He looked down, then up, as if searching for the right words. As he stalled, something caught his eye. Way up in the crow’s nest on the main mast was the smirking face of the black-haired troublemaker named Max.

Jack looked closer.

“Excuse me,” Mr. Roberts directed at Jack. “Did ye use the telescopes?”

Jack, still unresponsive, couldn’t do anything. He watched Max wave a hand at him from eighty feet up. He was caught between Mr. Roberts and the ability to chase after Max.

“Jack!” the quick snap from Mr. Roberts brought Jack back to the problem at hand. “Ye needin’ to be answerin’ me, now!”

“Sir, ye don’t understand. I lost somethin’. I was hopin’ the spyglass, telescope, whatever it be called, could help me find it.” His eyes kept darting from the crow’s nest to Mr. Roberts and back.

Mr. Roberts caught these transitions. He turned around to see what Jack was looking at, but saw nothing as Max ducked quickly out of view.

“Did ye not hear me this mornin’ when I said, ‘don’t be touchin’ without me permission?’” He queried.

“Aye, sir, but it be urgent and I didn’t think to ask.”

Jack’s eyes were still darting up and down.

“I am very sorry, sir. I am, but I really need to be goin’, sir,” Jack pleaded.

Black Bart hesitated for a moment, though it felt to Jack like aeons. He finally said, “Alright, but if I see this again, ye’ll be spendin’ every day after school polishing these ‘scopes till I can see me pristine reflection in ‘em.”

“Aye!” Jack said and flew past Mr. Roberts.

Max, seeing what was transpiring, watched as Jack started his pursuit. He wasn't about to be trapped like a caged bird in the Crow's Nest. He flipped himself out, over the edge, and half fell and shimmied down the eighty-foot ratline.

Down the decks Jack flew. He wasn't going to let anything stop him from catching Max at the bottom.

Max was nearing the Main Deck.

Students and teachers were still milling about as classes and normal activities had not yet resumed. After an event like a cannon blast, staff always like to have a 'cool down' period for students.

No one, though, was even paying attention to the small boy almost dropping from the ratline rope ladder.

Suddenly Jack heard a familiar and unwelcoming voice, from the Forecastle Deck, yelling, "Hey, Jack! Lookin' forward to another food fight after school!" It was Piper, but even worse, her outburst caught someone else's attention.

"Halt!" the voice boomed. It was Mr.

Teach. “Jack, what in the name of Neptune are ye doin’ up here!”

Some eighth-grade boys, playing the numbered stone game, jumped up from their game as Jack almost tripped head over heels into them in his attempt to stop for Mr. Teach.

Jack composed himself and turned around to confront the intimidating presence of his principal.

“I know Strategy & Tactics has been canceled, but ye should be waiting in the Cannon Room, like I said, shouldn’t ya?” Mr. Teach admonished.

“Aye, is that what ye said, sir?” Jack responded, pretending to be dumb to the previous order. “I couldn’t have been sure with me ears ringin’ and all.”

Mr. Teach eyed him suspiciously, squinting as if trying to see the truth in Jack’s eyes.

“Wait here!” he commanded and bound up the steps to his place in front of the podium on the Quarterdeck.

He didn’t say anything about not turning around, so Jack did. He surveyed the deck. Max

was nowhere to be seen. “Cannon balls!” he muttered.

“Avast me crew and fellow Fighting Eels!” Mr. Teach called out to the crowd, some of whom whooped and hollered at the mention of the mascot. “Let me have yer attention.”

The chaotic assembly, having calmed a bit, readily gave their attention to their leader.

“OK, we’ve been here for a while. I think things have settled down. The youngsters have all gone and we can now resume class.”

A collective groan sounded from the assembly as teachers and students started to stand and collect their things.

“That means ya too, M... Jack.”

“I’m sorry,” Jack said. “What was that?” He was trying to add to his proof of premature, cannon-induced, hearing loss.

Mr. Teach sauntered down from the Quarterdeck and grabbed Jack by the collar. “Head off to Math now and come see me when school be over.”

Jack, not thinking any better, started to argue, “Mr. Walters....”

Picking Jack up a little higher off the ground by the collar, Mr. Teach clenched his teeth and said, “Mr. Walters will understand if he has to wait.” He slowly eased Jack back to firm footing, dusted off the boy’s collar, adjusted his hat, and in a far more genteel way, said, “Now get to class.”



CHAPTER 9

TWO AND TWO MAKE?

What was gonna happen next? Wait, don't ask yourself that, Jack thought. He meandered into Math thinking back on the events of the day and how he was so close to nabbing that first-grade stowaway. On top of it all, he still had to suffer through Math.

Here's some Math, he thought, 1 loud-mouthed, bad-attitude bearing sixth-grader + 1 grumpy galley manager + 1 unruly first-grader + 1 backstabbing broad + 1 food fight + 3 great friends + 1 helpful bully + 1 illegal cannon fire + 1 Black Bart + 1 Crow's Nest + 1 Blackbeard = A whole mess of trouble. See, he thought,

Math still eats whale snot! He wondered briefly if his attitude had been different from the very beginning, if all of this would have been different. The day was going so well until lunch. What if he'd sucked up his pride and been nicer to Max? Could his chilly hello have immediately turned the tide?

As he entered the classroom, on the previously unused Upper Cannon Deck, he found a seat near the front. This was another class with makeshift desks.

Macy, Tom, and Finn were already seated and looked concerned as Jack sat down.

“Well, we’ve had quite the afternoon,” Mr. Every started. “What do ya say we take it a bit easier in Math today?”

Mr. Every was a jolly pirate. His extreme wealth ensured there was no shortage of meat at his table, and he had the belly to prove it. He wore a pant and jacket combination of a dark tan color with a white ruffled shirt underneath. He was missing the middle part of his hair, but white curls still flanked the sides of his rotund face. He had a friendly smile and rosy cheeks.

His hands were adorned with golden rings and his coat with jewels.

Jack looked at him and thought, if I have to do math, at least it will be taught by someone nice with a good fashion sense.

Mr. Every continued, “I was going to save this for later on in the year, but with the ruckus of this afternoon, I think we’d all enjoy just playin’ a game.”

Cheers went up from the class. Macy, Jack, Tom and Finn all looked at each other and smiled with a head nod or shoulder shrug.

Mr. Every pulled out a box of filled with wooden cups and tiny model ships that looked like they’d been whittled out of driftwood. Each cup had two stones cut in a ruggedly cubish shape. Dots representing numbers adorned each side of the small cubes. One dot for the number one, up to six dots representing the number six.

“Hey, weren’t some eighth-graders playing this today?” Finn chimed in.

“In a way,” smiled Mr. Every. “We’re not exactly allowed to play it they way they do. They’re rolling numbers in a game of highest

number wins some doubloons. Which, by the way, is not allowed on school premises.” He warned sternly.

Mr. Every explained that the students would be paired into two even teams. Each student in the class would have a cup of numbered stones. A charcoal line would be drawn on the floor and the teams would take up positions on each side. Each student would get a wooden ship. They would pick an opposing student and challenge them to a best of three rolls of the stones. After three rolls, the highest total would be declared the winner and the losing student’s ship would be sunk, or in this case removed from the battlefield. Finally, one student would remain and be declared the winner. That winner would get a ‘free pass’ for no homework for any night they chose.

Normally, this game would have intrigued and excited Jack, but he was full of nerves. It felt like a school of fish was swimming in frantic back and forth motions all through his body. He continued to think about Max, his meeting with Mr. Teach, his duties in The Chum Bucket after

school, and then finally his parents. Oh, what would his parents say?

“Come on, Jack! Roll,” Finn beckoned.

“Oh, right. Yeah. Sorry.” Jack said.

He tossed his stones. The first showed two. The second twirled on end a little longer, then stopped with a six.

Mr. Every had split the students, as he said in two teams. Each team had eight students. Finn and Macy were on one team. Jack and Tom were on the other.

“Ha!” Finn cheered. His stones were showing six and three. He didn’t have any hesitation in challenging Jack to the first battle.

“Roll again,” Mr. Every encouraged.

Jack dropped his stones in the cup and gave it a quick shake. They tumbled onto the floor and showed a two and a one.

“Yikes! Not the best roll,” Mr. Every declared. “Can ye tell me what the total of yer two rolls are now?” He asked Jack.

“I believe so,” Jack stated, then took a second to count the total in his head. “Eleven,” he declared.

“That be correct, Mr. Ferrington. Good job.” Mr. Every said with a smile. “It be yer turn Finn.”

Finn gave his cup a shake and blew in it for luck. He let the stones loose. They bounced along the floor and came to a stop near Jack’s feet. It was doubles, three and three.

“What’s yer total?” Mr. Every questioned Finn.

“It be fifteen, sir.”

“Correct!” Mr. Every commended.

Mr. Every turned to Jack, “It be yer turn again.”

Jack rolled his stones. They bounced and spun. The first landed on two. Jack laughed. No surprise there. Two seemed to be his number. The second stone spun and spun the stopped on five.

“Total?” Mr. Every kindly demanded.

“Um,” the seconds passed. “Eighteen!” Jack said.

“Very good, lad. Tell me how many does Finn need to sink yer ship?”

Jack’s mind was swimming with thoughts

of Max and the end of school. He was having trouble focusing on the question.

“Uh, I have eighteen. How many does Finn have, again?” He asked.

“Fifteen.” Mr. Every recounted.

“Ok, so eighteen be three more than fifteen, but he’d be needin’ nineteen to win.” He paused again. “So... he be needin’ four.” He looked up for approval and said, “Aye, four to win.”

“Good job, son. Finn, will ya please roll?” Finn had a smug look on his face. He gave his stones a roll. The game was surely his. They clattered to the ground and tumbled to a stop. One and one.

“Snake eyes, Mr. Doherty!” Mr. Every shouted with a slap to his knee. “Looks like ye’ve lost. Can ye tell me why?”

“Aye, I be needin’ four. I only rolled two. Jack wins the round eighteen to seventeen.” He said with defeat. He replaced his stones, picked up his ship and offered a hand to Jack with a quick, “Congrats!”

The game continued on like this until

fourteen of the sixteen players, including Tom, Macy and Finn had been eliminated.

Jack stood across from Piper as the rest of the class watched the final round.

Jack had sailed through the battles, almost in a trance. His mind would wander to the events of the day and the events to come. He was able to pull himself together each time Mr. Every would demand an addition or subtraction answer from him, but the answer would take longer than it should and was delivered in a “not-all-there” kind of way.

Jack should have been enjoying his rise to the top of this game, not to mention the possibility of humiliating Piper in the final battle, but he kept focusing on the time and its countdown to galley duty, Davy Jones’ Locker and whatever other punishments Mr. Teach was devising right at this very second.

He had enjoyed the game, though, what he could make of it and thought it a clever trick by Mr. Every, getting them to review addition and subtraction in such a fun way.

“...two and two together...put two and two

together and add them to yer current total.” Jack could hear Mr. Every saying as he started to bring his focus back to the game. “Mr. Ferrington, please!”

“C’mon Ferrington, where’s yer head at?” Piper chimed in.

Finn gave Jack a nudge. Jack’s mind started swirling around the words “two and two together.”

He looked up at Mr. Every, his kind face turned from slight concern to a smile, and then he gave him a wink.

BOOM! It was as if a cannon had gone off in Jack’s head and a map formed in Jack’s mind. He could see the encounter at lunch. It was the first point on the map. The careful choice of Max by Mr. Teach. The wink and the smile. The overprotective concern by Mr. Teach when he criticized Max’s smell and whistle. The points on the map started lining up. He could see the first point connect to the second.

Then came elective. Jack thought about his attempt to set off the cannon. Mr. Teach had crazy good hearing. That had been discovered

at the morning's assembly. How did Jack get away with that prank...*in* Mr. Teach's class? From the squeak of the blackboard, to the sound of the cork opening on the powder bottle, to Jack's movement from chair to cannon to drop the powder down the cannon vent, then back to chair again, to when he picked up straw from the ground for the wick, to the final lighting of the straw on a lantern before the boom. It didn't make sense. He should have never been able to do all that in a class run by a man with bat-like hearing. The more he thought about it, the more certain Jack became that Mr. Teach let him set off that cannon. Why would he let him? His mind was reeling.

He thought about the incident on the Main Deck after the blast. Mr. Teach was smiling and shaking hands with Mr. Furlong. He thought about all the first-grade students leaving. Then, just as he was about to grab Max coming down the ratlines, who was there to conveniently stop him? None other than Mr. Teach....and Piper!

He raised his head and focused on Piper's face. Had she seen Max on the rat lines coming

down from the crow's nest? Was she trying to keep Jack from getting to Max or was she just an inconvenient annoyance? After all, she was the only other student Jack thought might know what had happened.

“What're ya starin' at?” She asked.

Jack just ignored her and went back to his thoughts. He was now staring *through* Piper, not at her and considering the curious incident when Mr. Teach started to say Jack's name with an “M” as he scolded him for leaving the cannon room? Could he have been about to say “Max”? Why would that name have even been in his head?

Jack could see the whole map of the day in his mind and the points led to a big red X on top of Mr. Teach and Max. As he focused on that X, his gut feeling grew stronger and stronger. He was certain Mr. Teach had been in on it.

He had to get out of there and to the principal's office.

“Are ye gonna roll?” Piper demanded, but it would have to wait. The conch shell blew. Class was over. Jack dropped the stones, grabbed his octo-pack and ran out the door. It was forty

minutes early, but he was going to the principal's office now.



CHAPTER 10

PRINCIPAL REVELATIONS

“Wait a second!” yelled Finn, “Where ya goin’?”

Macy, Tom and Finn were all on Jack’s heels as they ran across the Main Deck toward Mr. Teach’s office. He had bolted out of Math without saying a word, and they weren’t gonna let that go without finding out why.

Jack came to an abrupt stop at the door to the principal’s office. The wooden door was ominous and foreboding. It was seven feet tall with a rounded top, and made from four-inch thick cedar wood. It had two ten-inch metal straps across the top and bottom. Just under the top metal girder was a black, well-weathered

skull with a large ring held between its teeth.

Jack reached up to grab the ring but hesitated. If his intuition was wrong, he might bring even more trouble down on himself. He would not only be skipping Speech class, but would also alert Mr. Teach to his failure as a leader by admitting his misplacement of Max.

He turned and looked at his friends, “I think Mr. Teach knows where Max is,” he said.

“Really?” questioned Tom. “Why?”

“It’s a gut feeling that keeps gettin’ stronger as I think back on the day. It hit me hard, like sea sickness on Crusty’s bus, as we were playing that game in Math,” Jack said. “Heck, maybe Math’ll end up bein’ good for somethin’,” he mused. He quickly got back to the point and continued, “If I be wrong, though, I may end up for the worse if I knock on this door,” he interrupted himself, looked them all in the eyes and said, “Ya shouldn’t be here. You’ll be late to class and, if I’m wrong, you’ll all be trapped in the net of trouble too.”

“Ya kiddin’?” Finn answered. “Macy and I already got time in the Brig after school for

ditchin' elective. This ain't gonna make that too much worse. Besides," he continued, "if ye be right, this should be fun to see!"

Macy and Tom smiled and nodded in agreement.

Tom said, "Wait a second."

He knelt down and untied his pirate flag, littering the contents on the deck in front of Mr. Teach's door. He walked over to Jack and whipped the flag over his head. Then with both hands, brought the flag ends in front of Jack and tied them together in a knot, making a pirate flag belt for Jack.

He looked at Jack and smiled, "For luck!" he said.

Jack gave him a nod, turned around, grabbed the metal ring and pounded it against the door three times. Knock. Knock. Knock.

The door creaked open. Mr. Teach stood tall inside, almost filling up the whole frame.

"I thought it might be you," he said. "However, we weren't expecting the whole gang. Shouldn't ya be in class?" he asked Jack's loyal friends.

Before anyone could answer Jack's head tilted to the side and he said, "We?"

Mr. Teach slowly stepped backward and to his left, revealing the inside of his office.

There was a very large oak desk filled with candles, vials of liquid, a few small animal skeletons and a number of quills sticking out of cork. Behind the desk sat a large, dark walnut captain's chair with ornate woodwork and fine leather padding. Seated in the center was a small, curly black-haired boy.

"Max!" Jack blurted, and without being asked, rushed into the office.

The others, dumbfounded, looked at each other, then up at Mr. Teach. He smiled and encouraged them to come in too. They stepped in and Mr. Teach closed the door.

Max smiled at them all from behind the chair and said, "Should we tell 'em?"

Jack asked, "Tell us what?"

"Just that I've been here the whole time," Max stated in a "*na-na-na-na-na*" sort of way.

"I was hopin' ye be smart enough to figure it out," said Mr. Teach.

“Figure what out?” asked Finn, still a little behind the rest of the group. Finn may have been quick with math, but sometimes abstract concepts didn’t sink in quickly.

Mr. Teach looked over the group standing in front of him and with a big smile said, “That I knew about Max the whole time,” He then continued, “Max ran directly here after the incident in the galley. Partly because he was scared, and his feelin’s had been hurt by how ya treated him, but also ‘cause someone kicked out one of his chompers when he was hidin’ under a table.”

Jack lit up and reached into his breeches. “Ya mean this tooth?” he answered enthusiastically, lifting the tooth he found in the galley into the air.

“Aye, that’d be it,” Mr. Teach said laughing. “How’d ye find it?”

Jack told Mr. Teach about how his friends had all found reasons to duck out of elective so they could help comb the ship for Max. He recounted the events of Cannon Operations, and how the chaos on deck after he set off the empty

cannon gave them another opportunity to search. It was then that Jack searched The Chum Bucket for Max and found the tooth under a table.

“Sounds like ye’ve got yerself quite a crew,” Mr. Teach said with an air of approval in his voice as he looked at Macy, Tom and Finn. “So tell me, Jack, how’d ya figure it out? What finally made ya put two and two together.”

“That very phrase,” Jack explained. “Mr. Every had us playin’ this game in Math. I was havin’ a hard time concentratin’, even though I was winnin’. In the last round, I had rolled a two and a two on the stones. Mr. Every, tryin’ to get my attention, kept saying, ‘put two and two together.’ As I focused on the game and looked at him, he winked at me with a smile. That’s when it hit me like a cannon ball in the gut. I suddenly remembered yer curious wink and smile at Max in the lunch line, and the whole picture came into my head like a map.”

He continued to tell Mr. Teach, his friends and Max how he played out certain events through the day, and as he did, his gut instinct had told him that the answer lay in the room they

were in now.

Jack looked at Mr. Teach and asked, “Did ya know what I was doin’ in the cannon class?”

“Aye, I heard the blackboard squeak,” he confessed. “I saw ye switch seats and start having a whisper fight with John Lawson, he got kicked out of that class last year for the same incident. I thought I might know what be goin’ on,” he concluded.

“But why?” Macy asked. “Why’d ya let him do it?”

“Oh many reasons, lass,” Mr. Teach said. “When Max first came to my office bleedin’ from the mouth and scared about gettin’ beat up by some sixth-graders, I had a mind to march into the galley and pull ya” he looked at Jack, “by the bootstraps to me office for a reprimandin’ and orders to be nice.” He paused.

Jack looked ashamed.

Mr. Teach continued, “But I remembered ye from this mornin’s assembly. First, ye had a loud and expressive mouth. Did ya know that usually goes hook-in-hand with someone born to be a captain?”

Jack looked puzzled. The first half of that sentence was insulting, but the second half was complimentary. He wasn't sure which he should focus on, although he did stand up a little taller.

Mr. Teach went on, "Second, I noticed ya seemed to be leadin' this crew when ya boarded the ship this mornin'. They all followed ya to the seats and looked to ya for guidance as ye made yer way to the first class."

"Hey, wait a minute," Finn chimed in.

"Calm down, son," Mr. Teach retorted. "Every part of the crew's important, but there can only be one captain."

Finn's shoulder's slumped and he went silent.

"Third, as I mentioned at the assembly, I thought ye might be needin' a good dose of humility.

I gave it some thought and decided I might test some of yer early leadership skills and problem solving, while givin' ya that good dose of humility. So, I let Max stay."

"That certainly be one way to handle it," Tom said, slightly disapproving.

Mr. Teach looked at Tom and said, "I think it worked, don't?" focusing again on Jack.

"I, I guess so sir," Jack said, still feeling ashamed.

"Aye, chin up son," Mr. Teach encouraged. "Think about yer day. Ye certainly garnered the loyalty of yer friends. Heck, they even be willin' to risk The Locker to be here right now."

"Ah, we already got that!" interrupted Macy and Finn at the same time.

"I see," he looked at Tom, "What about ye lad."

Macy didn't let Tom answer but spoke for him when she said, "Not him, he's got lady luck on his side."

"Impressive," Mr. Teach said. He cleared his throat and looked back at Jack. "Ye also led them in a secret search of a very large ship. I say that's the makins' of a leader."

Jack was feeling a little better, his friends saw some hope that this might end with pardons for everyone.

"Tell me somethin', Jack. Will ye be makin' assumptions and treatin' young pirates,"

he paused, then modified his question, “let that be any pirates poorly anymore....at least without gettin’ to know ‘em first?”

“No, sir!” Jack answered immediately.

“Then it sounds like yer first day was a great success!” he declared.

“I guess that be perspective, sir,” Jack said. “I still gotta clean the galley, and I’m sure Mr. Dampier is gonna send us all to the Brig for missin’ his class.”

“Aye, don’t ye be worryin’ about William. He’ll be undertandin’ when I tell him yer first lesson in parlay was with me.”

“Huh!” Macy exclaimed, “I guess it was.”

“Besides,” Mr. Teach continued, “Max’ll help ya clean it up.”

Max popped out his seat, “What! C’mon, Pa!”

“Pa?!” All four friends gasped simultaneously.

“Oh, I didn’t mention it?” Mr. Teach was enjoying this tremendously. His face was a giant smile and his eyes were glistening in delight, “Max be my son.”

“No wonder he be runnin’ straight here.” Macy interjected.

“No wonder ya was smilin’ and shakin’ hands with Mr. Furlong,” Jack deduced, then added, “Wait, are ya the Mayor of Compass Cove?”

“Aye, I am at that!” Mr. Teach confirmed.

Tom said, “Hmm, I guess Rowan didn’t know.”

“Oh?” Mr. Teach said inquisitively.

“Yeah, he told us a bit about Max, and that the Mayor got mad at him.”

“Well, I be the Mayor, and I get mad at him all the time,” He said as he reached across the deck and mussed Max’s hair.

“What about the last name?” Jack asked. “Bantam was it?”

“Oh, that be his mother’s maiden name. For safety reasons, we didn’t want him to carry my last name, Teach. I’ve made me share of enemies, it be safer if they don’t know of me kin.”

“That makes a ton o’ sense,” said Tom.

“Our lips are sealed,” Macy offered.

Mr. Teach sensing their thoughts, smiled and said, “I think this’ll turn out to be a grand year. You’ll see. Now, get goin’. What ye waitin’ for? Pea ain’t gonna clean itself off the floor.”

As middle schoolers do, they burst out laughing at Mr. Teach’s joke and headed to the galley.

Jack looked at his crew and couldn’t wait for day two.



About the Author

Clint Perry is the author of two other rhyming and picture books for kids, *Pack Rat Pat, Don't Take That!* and *Creature in the Sea*.

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Clint also fronts the popular kids band
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The Pirate School

The Pirate School

Where we all learn all the Pirate Rules

Like all the pirate's names

Like Captain & Boatswain

and all of the jobs that the pirates do

Like raising up the mast

Set off a cannon blast

or how to guide the ship on a course that's true

Detention's always done in the brig

If you want extra credit, learn a pirate jig

If your cheating then you're marked as a spy

and the only thing we say to our teacher is "aye"

Like pack a powder keg
Or whittle a wooden leg
Or how to scale up a castle's stoney walls
Teach parrots how to speak
Or fix a deck that leaks
But don't get trapped on the poop deck halls

Detention's in the brig for a prank
Getting expelled means you're walking the plank
The highest grade we get is the "Sea"
And when we graduate we start out as swabbies

Blackbeard is our favorite Teach
Dampier teaches science and speech
And after school we're hanging out in Davy Jones'
locker

Black Bart teaches 'bout the stars
Anne Bonny gives a couple scars
On our arms and on hearts cause she's a real sweet
talker

Every leads a field trip
Out to the site of some sunken ships
Our math test is dividing the loot
But don't get caught with some hidden in your boot

