

This Novel Hosted by: <http://free-online-novels.com>

Author retains copyright. All rights reserved. The Author has kindly made this digital copy available to you for your personal reading enjoyment. Any other use including redistribution is strictly prohibited.



HORRIBLE HARRIS
AND THE LEGEND OF THE GOLDEN ORCHIDS

By

ANDREW HARTLEY

HORRIBLE HARRIS – AND THE LEGEND OF THE GOLDEN ORCHIDS

CHAPTER 1 - HOMELESS

“What the devil is this, Ratty?” roared Captain Horatio Harris, his voice trembling with rage.

“That, my dear Captain, is what is called an eviction notice,” replied Mayor Ratcliffe, smugly sitting back in his leather office chair and watching the Captain closely.

The Captain’s snow white eyebrows bristled above his bright blue eyes and beneath the peak of his battered, navy blue captain’s hat as he battled to control his anger.

“It’s quite simple really. Even an old sea dog like you should be able to understand it. It means you are to move out of the boathouse. It is no longer your home. As I say, quite simple really.” Beneath his desk top the Mayor rubbed his soft pink hands with glee as he saw the consequences of the piece of paper he had just handed the old sea Captain sink in. He allowed himself a small smile as he watched the Captain read the document again.

Captain Harris stood speechless, staring at the piece of paper grasped in his large, weather beaten hand. Ever so slowly the piece of paper began to crumple as the Captain’s powerful fingers tightened around it and crushed it into a crinkled ball. Then, slower still, Captain Harris looked up from the huge, menacing fist into which the small paper ball had disappeared.

The bright blue eyes in the Captain’s tanned face blazed above his snow white beard as he glared across the table at the small man whose unfortunate face resembled that of a rat, and who had just taken such great pleasure in handing him the eviction notice that was throwing him out of his home. Silence hung in the air of the richly decorated town mayor’s office. Captain Horrible Harris placed his two mighty fists squarely on the desk and leaned forward toward the Mayor, who seemed to getting smaller by the second.

Mayor Ratcliffe’s smug smile began to fade as the Captain’s large face, with teeth bared and gritted, loomed in front of him. Suddenly, the Captain shot out a hand and pointed his thick finger squarely at the Mayor’s face, mere inches from his shiny, pink pointed nose. The Mayor pulled his head back until the back of his small, pale head with its ring of wispy grey hair was pressed firmly against the soft leather of his executive chair. If he had not adjusted the chair to make him look taller, his feet would have touched the carpet and he could have pushed the chair back on its casters, but as it was, the leather soles of his expensive, handmade Italian shoes found nothing but air as they dangled inches above the thick carpet and he was stuck where he was.

The Mayor squirmed. He was not used to this kind of treatment. It was not going at all the way he had planned. Why was the Captain not begging for a reprieve? He was being thrown out of his house, or boathouse in his case, and would be homeless. In the face of the Captain’s large, unwavering finger and under the glare of his blazing blue eyes, the Mayor realised that he had made a big mistake. It was not a nice feeling and one that he was not at all used to. He was used to pushing people around, to bullying and threatening ordinary townspeople. He was used to old people pleading not to be thrown out of their homes because they couldn’t afford to pay the high council taxes he imposed on them.

Now, in pursuit of the nasty, sadistic pleasure of seeing the captain brought to his knees, he had forgotten just whom he was dealing with. The man in front of him might look like an old man, be it a somewhat large one, who could be dealt with as the mayor pleased, but this was Captain Horatio Horrible Harris, not Captain Horatio Meek and Mild Harris. The Mayor sat still, unable to move like a rabbit caught in a car's headlights as he stared into the Captain's deep blue eyes. He sat and waited.

Again the Captain surprised the mayor because when he finally spoke, he spoke softly, albeit softly with an underlying tone that was extremely menacing. "Listen to me Ratty, for I shall say this only once. As you know, I have lived in that boathouse on the edge of the lake in the park for a very long time. Four hundred years, in fact. No scrawny little money hoarding pen pusher, even if he does wear a chain of office around his neck, is going to throw me out of it. Not without a fight, anyway. Do you understand me?"

For some reason, the Mayor found these quietly spoken words more frightening than if the Captain had bellowed them at the top of his voice. He fingered the thick and gaudy gold chain of office that hung around his neck nervously. A chain, incidentally, that he'd had made slightly larger than the original because he thought it made people more impressed. They probably wouldn't have been impressed if they knew it was paid for by the money the council got from the extra taxes the poorer people of the town were struggling to pay.

"Ah, hmm, I'm afraid there is nothing I can do," lied the Mayor, once he could moisten his mouth enough to speak. "That part of the park has been earmarked for a small, luxury housing estate to be built there. It's for very nice, expensive houses. It will be very nice for the town's appearance and more in keeping with the town's new image. The council has voted on it and passed it."

"I'm sure they have, and I have no doubt that you browbeat the bunch of spineless, lily-livered cowards into doing your bidding the same as usual. It's a park for heaven's sake. Children go there to play and sail and canoe on the lake. The park belongs to the working people of this town, not some bunch of yuppies with money from god knows where."

"You mean yuppies. Anyway, the council has decided..."

"You mean you decided, or more precisely, whoever has offered to pay you handsomely for your co-operation in building these expensive new houses, has decided."

"I think the lake will look much prettier without all those silly little boats on it with their gaudy sails anyway" muttered the mayor, nervously.

"Prettier from the balcony of the expensive houses none of the local families can afford," growled the Captain.

The mayor was starting to sweat as he squirmed in his expensive leather chair. He just wished the man in front of him would go away and in a moment of bravery he thought about telling him to. That brief moment of bravery seemed to be contagious because he had another and almost spoke this time, but instead said it to himself. "He's just an old man, and soon he'll be a homeless old man." The mayor was, all of a sudden, starting to feel much better. "Damn him," he thought, "I'm the mayor, I'm a very important person and I rule the borough." Then he made the mistake of looking into the Captain's blue eyes and they had gone very, very cold indeed.

The Captain spoke through clenched teeth to the rat-like man in front of him. “I will fight you with the last breath I have in my body. You’re not behind this alone, you haven’t got the guts. Someone has put you up to this and I know who it is. Well you can tell him from me, I’ve beaten him before and I’ll beat him again. Time is the same for me, as it is for you and him. I was stronger and cleverer back in the old days and I had good people by my side, the same as I have now.”

“You have a ten year old working...”

“Daniel is twelve, almost thirteen, and he’s already worth ten of you, and you’re over four hundred years old now, the same as me,” said the Captain, referring to the young lad that helped him run his canoe and small boat business on the lake.

Captain Horrible Harris withdrew his large finger from the Mayor’s face and stood up to his full, impressive height.

The Mayor, relieved at not having the Captain’s face with its icy stare so close to his began to compose himself. He felt another surge of reckless bravery and spoke, which was only really a mumble as he pretended to tidy some papers on his desk. With all the authority he could muster he mumbled. “As I say, it has been passed by council and you have fourteen days in which to either take your boats and possessions and leave the park or launch a formal appeal in a court of law. So if you intend to appeal the decision you had better get yourself a lawyer. And I suggest,” said the Mayor smugly, “that you make it a good one because you won’t only be up against the council’s own team of lawyers, but that of the company that is going to build the houses. And a very wealthy company it is as well. I assume you can afford a lawyer, they’re very expensive you know.” The Mayor allowed himself a small smile, which to anyone other than himself, appeared to be an ugly, lopsided sneer.

The Mayor was starting to feel much better, because he now remembered why he was so confident before the Captain had arrived. He knew the Captain had no money because he had his friends at the bank check up on the Captain’s bank account, and they had told him the Captain did not have much money at all, and certainly not enough to hire a lawyer, even a bad one. Yes, the Mayor was feeling much better.

The Captain squared his shoulders. “I’ll get a lawyer, and I’ll get your damned eviction notice thrown out of court.” Just how he was going to find a lawyer to act for him when he had no money to pay them with was beyond him at the moment, but he was not one to be daunted by what seemed to be impossible tasks.

“Then I don’t think we have anything further to discuss,” said the Mayor and pretended to read a piece of paper on his desk as a way of showing that the meeting was over. He expected to hear the door of his office open and close and look up and find the big man gone. He was yet again to be disappointed. The Captain was not about to retreat without firing one last broadside at his enemy across the desk. The Mayor looked up furtively from the document he was pretending to read. At times like this, he didn’t realise just how much like a rat he looked with his beady, suspicious eyes, narrow face and pointy nose. All he needed was some whiskers to complete the picture.

Again the Captain spoke quietly, but his voice sent a chill down the Mayor’s spine. “You will live to regret this day, you mark my words. It is my right to

live in that park and I will fight to the death to protect it. I make a good friend, but a horrible enemy. And you Mayor Ratcliffe are now my enemy.” The Captain continued to fix the Mayor with his blazing blue eyes for a moment before he turned on his heel and strode from the room, slamming the door behind him.

Mayor Ratcliffe breathed a sigh of relief and then smiled his lop sided sneer. “We’ll see. In the modern world one needs money, and you, you old goat, have none. We shall see who has the last laugh. You’ll be homeless in under a fortnight at most and then, as I say, we’ll see who has the last laugh.” The Mayor started to giggle as he thought about the Captain’s plight and then he started to laugh. His cackling, evil laugh echoed around the rich timber panelling of the mayor’s chamber. It was an eerie, unkind sound, not at all like the laughter of someone having fun, but more like the insane cackling of a madman. A madman laughing at someone else’s misery is not a nice sound.

In a dark corner of the room, next to a bookcase full of beautiful leather bound books that never got read, a small whiskery nose appeared from a hole in the dark wooden panelling where it met the richly carpeted floor. The nose twitched as it tested the air for any sign of the Captain and, more importantly, his dog. The nose twitched again and was followed from the hole by a pair of beady red eyes and then a black furry body. Once Niven the rat adjudged that the Captain had definitely left, he scurried from the hole, sat on the thick pile of the expensive carpet for a moment and then scuttled across it and under the Mayor’s desk, his long leathery tail stretching out behind him.

Niven leapt up onto the dangling shoe of the mayor, slipped a little on the highly polished leather, before he scampered up the outside of the Mayor’s trouser leg, up his jacket and perched himself on the right shoulder of the Mayor’s expensive suit. Niven’s nose twitched and he sniffed the air as the mayor cackled away, not even noticing the presence of the rodent on his shoulder. Niven’s leathery tail swished back and forth across the Mayor’s scrawny back as he turned his beady little red eyes toward the Mayor’s head, watching him. Slowly the Mayor’s head turned and his own beady little bloodshot eyes fell on those of his furry black companion.

The mayor locked eyes with Niven and there was an unspoken bond between the two. Niven was the Mayor’s only real friend, and always had been, and the Mayor wanted to share his joy at the Captain’s misfortune. “At last, Niven, after all these years, we have the Captain at our mercy. The mighty Captain Horatio Harris is to become one of the homeless. And we do not tolerate homeless in this town, do we, Niven. This town is far too nice to tolerate homeless tramps and hobos. This time, we have well and truly blown the Captain’s ship out from under him.”

As the Mayor’s hideous cackling began again, Niven just wanted to know what was going to happen to the Captain’s dog, Sam. Whatever it was, Niven hoped with all his little rat’s heart, that it would be nasty. Very nasty. To see him in the council dog pound would be nice. Niven set his mind to conveying this idea to the man whose shoulder he was perched on. No, he would have to wait until the Mayor stopped cackling, but that didn’t bother Niven, for he was a very patient rat. Meantime, the Mayor continued to cackle and cackle and cackle.

The Captain, his large hands thrust into the pockets of his well worn navy blue blazer, walked slowly through the park he knew so well. His mind was in turmoil as he tried to think of a way out of his predicament. Over the years, many years, on the high seas the Captain had faced all manner of dangers and

overcome seemingly impossible odds, for once upon a time, long long ago, Captain Horatio Horrible Harris had been a pirate. He was going to have to summon the same strength and courage now.

The Captain came to the top of a small, grassy hill in the park and looked out over the lake with its small island in the middle and the lock gate on the far side that allowed in the salt water from the harbour beyond. There was only one little sailing dinghy out on the water and that was heading for the short stretch of beach where the rest of the dinghies and canoes lay pulled up on the sand in a neat row.

At the end of the small beach, in the furthest corner of the park, the Captain's bright blue boathouse was perched out over the water on its old wooden posts. The sun was getting low out over the lake and the water in front of the two storey timber building he called home, with its balcony out over the water which shimmered and glittered like gold.

The Captain spotted Danny, the boy who helped him look after the small boats the Captain rented out to children and whoever else wanted to go out on the lake during the school holidays. The Captain charged very little for the boats, and used the money to pay Danny, which left just enough over for the Captain to buy food and other essentials for himself. There was certainly not enough money left over to pay a high priced, fancy lawyer that was for sure. The Captain watched Danny as he stood on the sand at the edge of the water and yelled instructions to the children in the sailing dinghy as they got closer to the beach.

The Captain grimaced. He was going to have to prepare Danny for the worst. He knew Danny's family were one of the poorest in the town and struggling to pay the Mayor's ever increasing council taxes. If the Captain was thrown out of his boathouse and the fleet of small boats and canoes were no longer able to be hired out, what would Danny do for money? There was no amount of paper rounds that would earn him as much as he got from the Captain, and worse still, Danny would not have a dinghy to sail himself.

The Captain had been teaching Danny to sail for many years and he was a good pupil and already a very good sailor. The Captain had no doubt that the lad would go far in the world of sailing, possibly one day even representing his country in the Olympic Games. Well he might if the damn Mayor and whoever was behind him had not put their greed and personal satisfaction at his own demise in front of the good of the people of this town. The Captain squared his broad shoulders and thrust out his chin as he set off for the beach. In the distance a black and white dog sat up on the beach. It was Sam, the Captain's faithful English Bull Terrier. Sam got to his feet and set off toward his master, already sensing that something was wrong.

As the Captain strode purposely down the hill toward the lake, Sam ran in his waddling gait toward him. He was a thickset dog with a broad chest, short legs and plenty of old scars all over him. He was a very powerful animal but very friendly. Well he was to most creatures, but one particular rat he hated, as well as anyone who meant harm to his master or any of the children on the lake. He was not a dog to be on the wrong side of. He ran with his tongue hanging out the side of his white snout with its pink nose and, as always, it appeared that he was smiling, which he usually was. But today he wasn't, for he knew for some reason that something was definitely not right, and, for some reason, he thought of Niven the rat.

The Captain watched Sam run up the hill toward him and realised he too would be homeless. The council would take him away and put him in the dog pound and if the Captain could not find somewhere to live that allowed pets, what would happen to Sam? "First", thought the Captain, "they have to try and take Sam away." For the first time in a while the Captain allowed himself a small smile, because he knew what a fight Sam would put up. "Yes," thought the Captain, "I don't think the council realise just what a fight they will be getting themselves into, and not just with Sam."

The Captain's face broke into a grin as he thought of the battle ahead. The Captain was a brave man and like most great warriors was excited at the thought of a battle. He had never run from a battle, unless he had a very good reason, that is. Again, like most great warriors, he would retreat from a battle if by doing so he would win the war. But this was not one of those times. He felt much better by the time Sam arrived. He bent down and gave Sam's ears a good hard scratch as Sam stared up at him panting with his tongue hanging out.

This was not the first time Captain Horrible Harris and his faithful companion had readied themselves for battle, but usually they had the swaying deck of a pirate ship beneath their feet. They had done it many, many times and both knew they could trust and rely on each other. The Captain would die for Sam, just as Sam would sacrifice his life for his master. Sam too made a good friend but a terrible enemy, and both got the feeling that this would soon be put to the test.

"Come on Sam," said the Captain, and strode off toward the beach and the boathouse beyond, Sam waddling along next to him, his chest puffed out as though he was already marching into battle.

Danny had pulled the dinghy that had just come in up the beach in a neat line with all the others, removed the mast and sails and was turning it over so that if it rained overnight it would not fill up with water. The boat was quite heavy and most twelve year old boys would not have been able to lift it, but the years of sailing out on the lake and work like this had built Danny wiry and strong. As he gently let the dinghy down he looked up. Coming down the hill toward him the Captain and Sam made a very formidable looking team. As he collected up the sails and mast from the dinghy and walked toward the boathouse, but he too could not help feeling that something was wrong.

Inside the shadowy store on the ground floor of the old boathouse, Danny put the mast into a rack on the wall with some others and was laying the rolled up sail on top of several others when the Captain and Sam came in.

"Afternoon Dan lad, everything ship shape and Bristol fashion?" The Captain looked around as he spoke. All the canoes were neatly stacked and everything was neat and tidy as the Captain expected. His eyes came to rest on an old timber boat that took up almost half the width of the boat store and was nearly as long. It was a type of boat called a whaler and was used on big ships to transport people and supplies from one ship to another or from ship to shore. The Captain patted the old timber of its side fondly. Near the bow of boat, in faded white letters was the name 'Razorback', the name of the ship from which the boat came, and the one the Captain had commanded nearly four hundred years ago.

"Yes sir," replied Danny, knowing full well that if anything was not as the Captain expected it he would soon know about it. Sometimes he thought that the Captain was a little too organised, but he realised that on the high seas, this very same organisation and precision could be the difference between life and

death. In fact, the Captain had told him numerous stories where this was in fact the case. Not, of course, that he believed all of the stories of Captain Horatio Horrible Harris. Like the stories of pirating in the Caribbean Sea or the blue waters of the South Pacific, and the plundering of the Spanish treasure ships. How could he possibly know about that, it all took place four hundred years ago? Yet the stories were so detailed, so real, it was almost as if the Captain had really been there. The Captain was either the best storyteller in the world or he had actually been there. But how could that be?

“Come up topside, I think we should have a cup of tea.” The Captain strode up the old and worn wooden stairs that led to the rooms on the top floor that were his home.

Danny finished what he was doing and had a feeling the Captain was about to tell him something, and he was right. And it wasn't just about the Captain being evicted or Danny losing his much needed job.

On the balcony of the boathouse, The Captain, Danny and Sam sat in the warm afternoon sun. The Captain poured steaming mugs of tea for Danny and himself from a large old china teapot. Sam had his bowl of water in front of him and waited patiently for the chocolate digestive biscuit that he knew would come when the time was right. Sure enough, the Captain handed Sam a biscuit from the plate on the table and then bit into one himself. Danny helped himself to two, one of which he held below the table for Sam, because they were great friends too.

The Captain sat back thoughtfully and watched the sun sparkle on the water. He looked out to the island in the middle of the lake for a moment before he spoke. “Danny me lad, we're in a spot of bother,” said the Captain, understating the problem that now confronted them. “It's that damn Mayor, Ratty Ratcliffe.” At the mention of his name, Sam's ears pricked up and a low growl could be heard coming from below the table. “He's going to try and throw me out of this boathouse, so there will be no boats for you to look after.”

This was worse than Danny was expecting. What would he do? This was terrible news, but far worse for the big man across the table who had done so much for him. Danny looked over at the Captain who seemed to be deep in thought as he looked out over the lake to the island in the middle with its thick bushes and single tall tree reaching skywards from its centre. The Sun glinted from the loop of gold through the Captain's left earlobe and his eyes twinkled beneath his furrowed brow. Even though his back was to the wall and things looked bleak, something about the Captain's strong features gave the impression of strength and determination.

Danny noticed this and thought: “that's why he's a Captain.” Danny gave Sam's ears a scratch to soothe him as they both waited in silence for the Captain to speak. The Captain continued to stare out over the lake and then, all of a sudden, he spoke. “Right my hearties, this is what we do.” The Captain watched Danny carefully, as though making an inner decision.

He had obviously made his decision and had decided to trust Danny with his secret. “There are things I haven't told you Danny, things that you will find hard to believe.” The Captain sat back in his chair and fixed his eyes on Danny. “If you decide to hear me out, these are things never to be mentioned to another soul. Not your parents, anybody, ever. If you listen it will change your life. It's a dangerous thing I tell you now and could kill you if you are not careful. It could see you vanish from the face of the earth, but could give you adventure beyond your wildest dreams. Think hard Danny my boy before you agree to

listen. What's it to be? Yes or no?" The Captain sat back and watched Danny closely.

All sorts of thoughts went through Danny's mind. It was exciting, yet the Captain's serious warning rung clear in his head. He knew the Captain would not issue such a strong warning without reason. Danny's curiosity was burning strong within him. What on earth could the Captain be willing to tell him? "Change his life forever" and "see you vanish from the face of the earth." This was scary stuff.

Danny thought about what the future held. All he wanted to do was sail the seven seas. To climb aboard a sailing boat and know he had the knowledge and skill to sail it to anywhere in the world. Knowledge he gained daily from the Captain and his stories. He also realised that his parents could never afford to buy him a boat of any description and that without the money paid to him by the Captain they would struggle to look after younger his brother and sister. Danny gave his father three quarters of everything he earned working for the Captain and saved the rest to one day buy the sailing boat he dreamed of.

Thoughts of his father, who had lost his right hand in a factory accident two years ago, flowed through his mind. The factory owner was a wealthy and greedy man who had saved money by using cheap and faulty machinery that had led to the accident. Danny's father had tried to get compensation but the factory owner's lawyers had taken him to court, where with no money to fight for his rights, Danny's father had lost the court case and been forced to take on whatever work he could manage with one hand.

Danny also knew his father was a good man. Even though he was unable to win for himself when he lost his hand, he was today seeing a new young lawyer who was trying to win some money from the factory owner for one of the other workers who had been badly injured by one of the faulty machines. His father bravely believed that if he stood up in court and told what happened to him and about the faulty machinery it might just help the other man. He knew the rich factory owner could make life even harder for him for sticking his nose in, but he was still going to try and help. He just hoped this man's lawyer was stronger than all the other weak lawyers in town, who once they saw they were up against the wealthy factory owner, just gave up and made a pretend effort for their client so that they would get paid.

His father's bravery was infectious, and Danny felt stronger now and, more importantly, ready to hear what the Captain had to say. Danny braced himself, "I'm ready, Captain."

"I believe you are, lad. I believe you are." The Captain picked up a small, carved box made out of a dark wood that sat on the tea tray. "This is the secret, in here." The Captain gently tapped the small box with the thick nail his of his large finger and then lifted his face to check if there was any breeze. Satisfied there was none, he carefully opened the box.

A golden glow lit the Captain's face as he looked into the box before he held it out for Danny to see. Danny leaned forward to look inside. What he saw was a fine golden dust that shone in a hazy glow.

"What is it," asked Danny? "I've never seen anything like it."

"I should hardly think you would have. Not unless you've been to the island of Aruba in the Caribbean, and to a secret cave on a mountain there, at that" said the Captain, with a smile.

“Is it gold? It must be worth a fortune,” said Danny, still staring at the strange, glowing gold powder.

“It’s not gold, but it is worth a fortune all the same.” The Captain withdrew the box and closed it. “But it’s not the sort of fortune that you imagine. Not a fortune in money.”

“What kind of fortune is it then?” Danny had only ever heard the word fortune refer to money.

The Captain settled back in his chair and looked thoughtful for a moment. Danny recognised this as something the Captain did before he started on one of the pirate stories that Danny loved so much.

“There are people in this world,” started the Captain, “and always has been, who want power, and power comes in many forms. This is the key to a certain power. It was given me by the beautiful princess Shellaya from the island of Aruba in the Caribbean. In January of sixteen hundred and one, me and my crew saved her and some of her tribe from a nasty bunch of Arab slave traders that had just kidnapped them and were sailing for the mainland. It was a terrible battle...”

“Sixteen hundred and one!” exclaimed Danny. “That’s over four hundred years ago. How could...”

“Easy matey, listen to the whole story – well as much of it as an old salt like me understands, anyway” said the Captain, raising an eyebrow and fixing Danny with a look that Danny knew meant “be quiet and listen.”

“As I say, it was a terrible and bloody battle and most of my crew died in the fight but we rescued her and sailed her back to Aruba. When we got there we saw what the slave traders had done. They had killed her parents, the king and queen, when they tried to protect their beautiful daughter, and many of the men of the tribe, so she was now queen of her people. Well, what was left of them.” The Captain’s face went very dark at the memory.

“To thank me and what was left of my crew for saving her she took me to a secret cave high up on one of the mountains that towered up from deep in the island’s jungle. Magnificent it was. There were deep turquoise pools and as we went in further into the cave we came to some glowing, golden flowers that grew out of cracks in the rock wall near where the water trickled down on its way to the pools. Orchids she said they were and special ones at that.”

“Is that where the dust in the box came from?” Danny blurted out, his ears scarcely believing what they were hearing. Was this something to do with why the Captain’s pirate stories always seemed so real?

“It certainly is, lad,” said the Captain and described how the dust was gathered. “Princess Shellaya stroked the bloom of the first flower, real gentle like, and held up the box you see here. The flower lowered its head over the box, shook its head softly and dust fell into the box. When it was finished it didn’t glow as bright when it lifted its head again, but it didn’t seem to mind. Nor did the next one, or any of the others as a matter of fact. I reckon all the creatures on that island loved the Princess because she was so beautiful and kind.”

She also told of us of other flowers, black orchids, that grew further back in the cave where it was dark and cold, but they were different. She told us they were not kind like the golden orchids but powerful just the same.

“What did the other flowers do?”

“That’s another story for another day, my lad.” Answered the Captain, obviously not wanting to be distracted from the story he was telling.

“Since that time I have been back many times thanks to this here powder – and it looks like I’ll be going back again.” Sam pawed the Captain’s leg.

“Yes, Sam, you too.” The Captain smiled and gave Sam’s ears a scratch. “You’re as much a member of the crew of the Razorback as I am.”

Danny waited silently, still trying to take in what he had just heard. The Captain was talking about time travel. He was talking of going back over four hundred years, to the days of pirates and sea battles, of treasure and tropical islands. Beneath the table Danny crossed his fingers and hoped. Would the Captain ask him to go with him? Boy, did he hope so.

“This isn’t just an adventure Danny my boy, this trip back in time. With any luck it may help us out of our present predicament,” said the Captain, thoughtfully. Then, almost as an after thought, “Oh, by the way, you do want to come along, don’t you?”

Controlling his excitement as best he could, Danny tried to appear calm, “If you want me to, Captain,” he said as he tried to suppress the huge grin that was itching to appear on his face.

“Not a word to anyone, understand,” warned the Captain, sternly. “Not that anyone would believe you, mind. They’d just think you’re as mad as I am.” The Captain’s face broke into a wide grin.

Danny hoped that the Captain was not mad.

What a way to spend the summer holidays he thought. No trip to a holiday camp or the week in a caravan in Lyme Regis that his father had saved up for.

“You’d best get off home. Remember what your father was up to today.” Captain Harris liked Danny’s father and thought they might just be able bring back a few trinkets to help him out with his money worries and make life a little easier for him. He also knew who the factory owner was that he was standing up against in court, Lord Algernon Sharman-Barr. Captain Harris knew him by another name, the pirate Ali Sharkbar. It was a name he had known him by for over four hundred years. He also suspected that he was the man behind the Mayor’s move to evict him from the boathouse, for it had all the signs of his greedy, evil ways.

“Yes, you’re right,” agreed Danny. “I expect dad will need a bit of cheering up when he gets in.” Danny knew his father was not looking forward to the court ordeal and felt that even with his evidence, the lawyers from the factory’s wealthy company would win. His dad also knew that Lord Sharman-Barr would make an example of him in order to scare others into keeping their mouths shut about the dangerous condition of the factory’s machinery. Yes, thought Danny, dad is going to need some cheering up.

“When are we going to set off?” Danny could hardly believe he was asking such a question. It sounded more like enquiring about a day trip to London, not going back in time four hundred years to an island in the Caribbean.

“I’ve got a few things to do first, then I suppose we up-anchor and away,” said the Captain, as though it was, in fact, just a day trip to London. The Captain rose from his chair and took the box of golden orchid dust with him as he went inside. He put the box on a shelf and took an old bottle of brandy from beside it. “Give your dad a tot of that when he gets home, it might cheer him up a little. It was a very good year, I seem to remember.” The Captain peered at the faded label to check the date and then handed the bottle to Danny. “None for you mind, you’re not ready for it yet. And make sure you hide it in your bag so nobody sees, otherwise I expect we’ll be in more trouble.”

Danny took the bottle of brandy. “Thanks, Captain. How long will we be away, I’ll have to make up something to tell mum and dad.”

“We’ll be away no real time. Time travel is funny like that. We go and come back and it’s still the same time here.”

“So no one will miss us then,” this was all a little bizarre, but really, really exciting. Danny knew sleeping tonight would not be easy.

“Not unless something happens to us whilst we’re away. We have to try and not get killed, because that works the same in both worlds. Get yourself killed and you won’t be coming back – ever.” The Captain watched Danny’s face. This was his way of showing the young lad it was no holiday trip. “We’re going back to a pirate world, and that’s a dangerous thing. There’ll be plenty of other pirates and ner-do-wells trying to bring us undone, you mark my words.”

Ominous though this warning was, Danny was not going to be put off. No way. “See you in the morning then,” said Danny, and the big grin he had suppressed earlier broke out across his face.

Funny enough, the Captain’s face did the same. “We sail at first light. Be here at dawn”

CHAPTER 2 – THE HAWK

When Danny got home he noticed a small, bright red car parked in the driveway where once, in the better times, his father had parked the one he used to have. He peeked into the car on his way up the driveway to see if he could spot a clue as to the owner of it, and what strange clues they were. First, on the back seat, there was a long black bag with the handles of two swords poking out from one end, the sort of swords a sword fencer uses. Then there was a black silk bag with the gold initials. ‘FH’ elegantly embroidered on it. Then there was the clue which gave away the identity of the owner, and that was a wig. It was a grey wig of tight curls, and Danny knew it was the kind worn by a lawyer in court.

Thus prepared, Danny went indoors. There was a strangely joyful atmosphere in the house, which was not at all what he was expecting. He knew his mother would not yet be home from her job at the hospital and his younger brother and sister would be out playing, so he walked into the sitting room. Inside, his dad and his guests all looked toward him.

“Hello, son,” beamed his dad.

“What happened?” blurted out Danny, as he looked at a man sitting in the chair grinning, despite only having one leg.

“We won son, well Reg here did,” said his dad, motioning toward the one legged man.

Danny looked over to Reg, who was grinning from ear to ear and then to the second guest who stood by the fireplace. Danny had never seen such a beautiful young woman before. She was tall and slender with beautiful long red wavy hair that reminded Danny of flames the way it glistened. She was looking straight at Danny with the most intense green eyes. They were as green and bright as emeralds and sparkled like them too.

“Hello Danny,” said Francesca Hawkstone and offered her hand.

Danny, still staring into her green eyes, took her hand and shook it. Her grip was incredibly strong for such a slender woman. Her smile melted him where he stood.

“Pleased to meet you Miss Hawkstone,” was all Danny could manage.

“Call me Frankie, most people do.”

“Sharman-Barr’s lawyers don’t,” laughed Danny’s dad.

“No, the other lawyers do have a different name for me,” said Frankie, casually. “They call me the Hawk.”

“And swoop down and carve them up today you did,” nodded Reg.

“Do you always win your court cases miss Haw... Frankie?” Danny asked, still captivated by the flame haired young woman.

“No Danny, not always. But make no mistake, I always try. These overpaid, fat cat lawyers that represent the big companies know they’ve been in a fight when they come up against me, and they don’t like it. They’ve tried to buy me off, threatened me and heaven knows what. They think that if they have enough money behind them they can always get their way. Well I like to prove them wrong. Just like today.” Frankie held up her mug of tea as a toast to their victory over Algernon Sharman-Barr’s expensive legal team.

“Sorry I haven’t got anything stronger to celebrate with but I really didn’t think we’d win,” apologised Danny’s dad.

Danny suddenly remembered the bottle of brandy the Captain had given him. Danny fished the bottle out of his bag. “The Captain gave me this for you Dad. He thought it might cheer you up.” Danny held up the old bottle of brandy.

“Well, we don’t need cheering up but it will make a much better toast than tea, that’s for sure. I’ll get some glasses,” grinned Danny’s Dad and went over to the cabinet where they kept their best glasses and china.

Frankie looked curiously at the old bottle Danny held up with its faded yellow label. “May I see that?”

“Sure.” Danny shrugged and handed Frankie the bottle.

Frankie's bright green eyes stared thoughtfully at the label. When she looked up, she looked Danny squarely in the eyes and he realised just how intense her gaze was when she wasn't smiling, but looking for an answer.

"Where did you get this?"

"The Captain gave..." started Danny.

"And just who is the Captain?" Frankie asked evenly.

The others in the room were now watching. Frankie could capture people's attention with only a few words. There was something about her voice and its tone that conveyed the impression that what she was saying was leading to something – and that something was going to be worth hearing.

The room had gone very still when Danny answered. "I work for him at the lake in the park. He lives in the boatshed there. Well he does at the moment but the mayor is throwing him out. He's being evicted."

"And just where did he get this bottle of brandy?" Francesca Hawkstone's sharp mind was now in full swing. In the world of lawyers, law courts and judges, she was not known as the Hawk simply because her name was Hawkstone. It was because once she spotted something out of place, she was upon it like a bird of prey swooping down from high in the sky.

"Off his shelf," answered Danny, truthfully.

Frankie's face broke into a smile and her eyes sparkled at Danny's innocent honesty. "Do you now what the date is on the label of this bottle?"

"No, but it looks pretty old," replied Danny, now looking properly at the bottle and its mottled, yellow label for the first time.

"Fifteen ninety one." Frankie again peered at the label to make sure she was not mistaken. "It's over four hundred years old."

"He said it was a good year," answered Danny as way of explaining the date.

"Danny, this bottle of brandy is probably worth a great deal of money. If it really is that old," she added.

"The Captain wouldn't lie. I mean why would he," said Danny, protectively.

Danny was starting to feel a little uneasy. He could feel his cheeks getting warm. He was now going into dangerous territory. He didn't want to answer any more questions about Captain Harris – not now he knew what he knew. He was too close – Too close to the adventure of a lifetime.

Luckily for Danny, his Dad piped up. "He's a bit of a strange old fellow, but his heart is in the right place. He's been good to Danny, really good. I don't know what we would do without the money he pays Danny to help him with his boats. He pays him far too much really, but we can't afford to complain."

Frankie listened without comment. "No, I imagine not. You say the mayor is evicting him from his boathouse".

"Yes he is. He has to be out in two weeks."

“Is he going to appeal the eviction notice in court?” Frankie’s interest was aroused. “I know mayor Ratcliffe, and I do not like him one little bit. If he wants your Captain out, there will be money involved. Money for him.”

“I don’t know.” Danny watched Frankie nervously. He really could have done without all this. He had enough going on his mind already after what the Captain had told him.

Francesca Hawkstone’s eyes sparkled at the thought of going up against the mayor in court. “Well I think I had better meet Captain Harris,” she stated firmly and in a tone that said that was exactly what she would do. “As for this bottle of brandy, I suggest you put it somewhere safe until you can get it valued by an expert and, for now, we will make do with a toast of tea.” Frankie raised her mug of tea.

Danny watched fascinated. The young flame haired woman in front of him had spoken in a way that allowed no room for discussion. For some reason, everyone in the room would do exactly as she said and, Danny had no doubt, she would also do exactly as she had said.

Danny’s dad closed the cabinet where the good glasses were kept and took up his mug of tea. Reg followed suit and all four raised their mugs together in celebration of the court case win. Frankie passed Danny’s dad the old bottle of brandy and he examined the label himself.

Frankie’s green eyes again fell upon Danny as she produced a business card and handed it to him. “Don’t forget to tell your Captain I would like to meet him. I may be able to help him fight the mayor over his eviction. I have a free hour tomorrow morning. I must go now or I’ll be late for my fencing class.”

“I’ll tell the Captain first thing. I saw the swords in the back of your. Are you learning sword fencing?”

“No, I teach it. One sword is an epee and the other a sabre, which women are not supposed to use in the sport of fencing. I could have competed in the Olympic games with the epee but I had to choose between that and getting my law degree at university. I guess I felt a law degree would be more useful than a sword in the modern world, although I still love the feel of a sword in my hand, it seems to become a part of me.”

Danny’s Dad gave Reg a hand out of the chair. “Thank you again Miss Hawk... Frankie,” Reg said and offered his hand.

Frankie shook Reg’s hand. “My pleasure, Reg. Anything that hurts the pocket of Algernon Sharman-Barr is a pleasure and anything that improves working conditions at his factories is always worthwhile.”

“See Frankie out, Danny, there’s a good lad,” said Danny’s Dad and also shook the lawyer’s hand. “It would be nice if you could help Captain Harris. Like I said, he’s a good old fellow and doesn’t deserve to lose his home.”

“If he asks me I will do my best to help him in any way I can, you can rest assured of that.” Frankie thought for a moment. “For some reason the name Captain Harris seems familiar, but I can’t think why. Perhaps it will become clear when I meet him.”

Danny showed Frankie out and walked her to her car in the driveway.

Frankie stopped at the driver's door. "I expect your Captain is a proud old fellow, is he not?"

"Oh yes. Very proud," agreed Danny, quickly.

"Sometimes older people are too proud to ask for help, especially from a young woman. It might be an idea if I just turn up at the boathouse tomorrow morning and say that I have heard he is to be evicted and would like to join forces with him to fight it?" Frankie watched Danny's face and what she saw surprised her. It certainly wasn't happiness that was showing on his face.

The colour was draining from Danny's cheeks and he could feel it. What if she turned up at the wrong time, for tomorrow was the big day? "Er, ah, that might not be such a good idea," stammered Danny.

The piercing green eyes scrutinised Danny and he was starting to wilt under their gaze. "Oh, and why is that?"

"I think he is going somewhere." And so am I, thought Danny. He wished the lawyer would just get into her car and drive away. "Won't you be late for your fencing class?"

Frankie checked her watch. "Yes. You're right, I must go." It was almost reluctantly that she got into the car.

Danny started to relax, only to be brought crashing back to earth by the smart and wily young woman.

A few years of courtroom questioning had honed Francesca's instincts. She wasn't sure why or what Danny was hiding but she instinctively knew he was hiding something. She was again the Hawk and she was circling. "I think I might have a walk in the park tomorrow morning before work. I believe I can park quite near to the boathouse. I might even see you there, as I believe you start work very early."

Frankie's eyes sparkled with mischief as she got into the car and a small smile lifted the corners of her mouth as she looked at Danny through the open window of the car.

Danny watched the young woman in silence, his mind racing. It was reluctantly that he put on a false smile. "Er, great. I'll see you there."

Frankie started the car and reversed from the driveway, giving Danny a small wave as she took off down the street.

CHAPTER 3 – THE CAPTAIN AND THE HAWK

It was still dark beyond the curtains in Danny's bedroom as he got himself ready for the day ahead. He always got up early during the school holidays anyway, but today he was up particularly early and dawn was still half an hour away. He had awoken from a night of tossing and turning full of excitement, but it was tinged with apprehension: Apprehension for the trip ahead and apprehension regarding Francesca Hawkstone. It was a dilemma alright. If anyone can, the young lawyer might be able to help the Captain out of his predicament, but she might also ruin the most exciting day in Danny's life, anyone's life – a trip four hundred years into the past to a Caribbean desert island to maybe meet a real princess, and who knows what else.

If they did go on their fantastic journey and just in case something went wrong whilst they were on it, Danny felt he should leave a note for his parents. He sat at the desk in his bedroom, tore a page from the back of a school exercise book, took a pencil and that was as far as he got. What could he say? He pushed the pencil and paper to one side and headed down for breakfast.

As usual, Danny's mother had laid the breakfast table last night ready for the morning. Danny worked quietly as he made some toast, not wanting to wake any of his sleeping family at this early hour. He was not only thinking of them as he tried to avoid waking anyone, but also himself. He didn't want anyone getting up and asking questions that would force him to tell a lie. He quickly buttered the toast, gulped down a glass of orange juice and took a bite from the piece of toast as he walked along the hallway to the front door. At the bottom of the stairs he listened for a moment to the silence coming from the bedrooms upstairs. He quietly opened the front door and slipped from the house.

Outside, in the early morning quiet of the empty street, Danny stopped and looked back at the house. He wondered if he would ever see it again, or his family sleeping inside. He stared for a moment, then squared his shoulders, took another bite of his piece of toast and marched off down the street past all the silent houses and sleeping families like his own. He marched down the quiet suburban street to meet his destiny.

The park was also empty and quiet when he walked through the tall, imposing brick gateposts that stood either side of the road that led into the park. The air was still and a light mist hung over the playing field as he walked along the park road toward the lake, where the mist became much thicker. He passed the cafe and the small railway track that carried children and grown-ups around another, much smaller lake than the main one. As he walked across the grass toward the main lake he entered the thicker mist. I didn't bother him because he had made this trip so many times he could do it blindfolded. As he walked along the path at the edge of the lake he was aware of the still water of the lake close by to his left, even though the mist that hung over it was too thick to see through. As he came to an area where people parked their cars to look out over the lake, he was not surprised to find it deserted. Or was it?

Ahead, through the mist, Danny could make out the vague shape of a small car, a small red car. As he got closer, he saw it was the same red car that was parked in his driveway yesterday. When he reached it, Danny peered in through the closed window. It was empty. He looked around but there was nobody, just mist. Danny set off along the edge of the lake toward the Captain's boathouse, wondering where Frankie was and worried that his trip was in jeopardy. He'd only travelled twenty or so paces when he felt a gentle pressure on his shoulder. He stopped and out of the corner of his eye he could see the tip of the shiny blade of a sword that was resting lightly on his shoulder.

"Good morning, Danny," the voice of Francesca Hawkstone came from behind him as she lifted the blade of her sword from his shoulder.

Danny turned as Frankie held the sword upright in front of her face. She kissed the hilt of her sword in salute and smiled. Today she looked much less like a lawyer in her white blouse, tight fitting pants and soft leather boots up to her knees.

"Good morning, miss Hawkstone," replied Danny, for no better reason that he could think of nothing else to say.

“It’s Frankie, remember.”

“Sorry, er, Frankie,” muttered Danny.

“I’ve been here for a while. I love to practice with my sword when it’s quiet and lonely like this. It’s a time when I can become one with my blade.” Frankie dropped the sword to her side.

“It’s quiet but I still didn’t hear you come up behind me. How did you do it?” Danny was amazed that in the absolute silence he hadn’t heard Frankie’s footsteps as she came up beside him.

“I’m very light on my feet. I was very good at gymnastics when I was younger. A natural they said. So first I had to choose between gymnastics and fencing, and then between fencing and being a lawyer. Life is full of decisions and some you get right and some you get wrong. As long as you do what you feel inside is right you usually make the right decision. I decided to come here this morning. Do you think I made the right decision, Danny?” Frankie studied Danny, a small smile playing at the corners of her mouth.

“I... well... I suppose so,” stammered Danny.

“Good, let’s go and see your Captain then.” Frankie clapped Danny heartily on the shoulder and he was propelled forward in the direction of the Captain’s boathouse that lay somewhere up ahead in the mist. Danny was now aware just how powerful this slightly built young woman was. It had been like being clapped on the shoulder by the Captain.

As they walked side by side in the eerie, early morning silence, Danny knew he was not about to shake off the tenacious Frankie.

“Do you always start work for the Captain this early? I wouldn’t think many people take boats out on the lake at dawn,” Frankie said almost absently.

But Danny was getting used to her wily, innocent sounding questions and this time he was ready. “I’ve got a few things to do to a couple of the boats so they’re ready for the day ahead.” Now Danny was no liar but he was being forced to stretch the truth on more occasions than he liked. He did, in fact, have a couple of small jobs to do on a couple of the boats, but normally he would have done them during the day in a quiet spell.

When they reached the beginning of the mist shrouded small beach that Danny operated the boats from, without warning Danny jumped the couple of feet down onto the mist shrouded sand from the lakeside path, hoping to unsettle his unwanted companion as he disappeared into the mist. But, without missing a beat, Frankie somersaulted through the air and landed as light as a feather on the sand beside him and carried on walking as though it was nothing. Danny stopped, his mouth hanging open as he watched Frankie disappear into the mist ahead.

“Come along Danny, we don’t want to be late.”

Danny ran to catch up with her. Up ahead though the mist came a dull yellow glow from the side window and balcony of the Captain’s boathouse.

Frankie noticed the glow. “Ah, what light from yonder window shines,” said Frankie, stealing a quote from a Shakespeare play.

“That’s the Captain’s boathouse. He’s ...”

Before Danny could finish, Frankie put her sword arm across his chest to stop him in his tracks and put her finger to her lips to indicate that he should be quiet. Frankie stood still and Danny could see by the look on her face that she was listening to something. Danny could hear nothing, just silence. Then he heard it. It was faint at first but then he heard the quick footsteps on the sand and then the panting breath. He looked at the young woman next to him. She was unmoving and Danny noticed that her sword was now held in front of her, although safely pointed at a spot on the sand six feet in front of them. He also got the impression that she was ready for action. Frankie had turned her body slightly so that she stood sideways to whatever was coming toward them and Danny definitely got the impression that she could move very quickly indeed should she need to.

But of course Danny knew she wouldn’t need to because the footsteps or, more accurately, pawsteps, and panting breath coming toward them belonged to Sam, who was coming to greet Danny as he always did in the morning.

“It’s all right, Frankie, it’s only Sam, the Captain’s dog.”

Frankie relaxed and lifted her sword up so that the blade pointed harmlessly through the mist at the as yet invisible sky. “Sorry, I read in the paper a few people have been robbed in the park during the tourist season. I don’t suppose there would be any robbers about at this time of day though, it’s far too early for them.”

Sam trundled happily into view through the mist, his tongue, as usual, flopping around as it hung from the side of his mouth. Danny was about to reach down and give Sam’s ears a scratch, but Sam went straight to Frankie, for once ignoring Danny, much to his surprise. Friendly as Sam was, he would always go to Danny first if there was a stranger there. But he had gone to Frankie and his madly wagging tail said that he was very happy to see her.

Frankie went down on one knee and held out her hand for Sam to sniff. Sam sniffed and obviously found Frankie very much to his liking because he happily gave her hand a big slobbering lick. Frankie gave his ears a scratch and stood up. Sam looked up at her, his tail now wagging even more furiously.

“He likes you. He really likes you,” stated Danny, who was now even more surprised by Sam’s show of enthusiasm. Usually Sam would allow children and their parents to pat or stroke him, but it was more just good manners on his part. This show of affection was most unlike him. Perhaps Sam knew something that he didn’t, as animals sometimes do.

“I almost feel that I know him, that we’ve met before”, said Frankie, a quizzical look on her face as she stared down at Sam, “how strange.” Frankie turned her emerald green eyes to Danny. When she spoke she was delving deep inside herself. “Captain Harris and a dog called Sam.”

This brought about a quizzical look on Danny’s face as well as he watched her.

Frankie was silent for a second or two as she searched for a clue as to why the names were familiar to her and then suddenly snapped out of it as if an inner decision had been made. “Shall we?” Frankie gestured that they should move on toward the light up ahead with an old fashioned and elegant sweep of her arm.

Danny couldn't help but notice it was an 'olde worlde' kind of gesture, the sort that he'd seen in a Four Musketeers movie. All Frankie needed was a hat with a feather plume jutting from the hatband to complete the scene. Feeling slightly confused he led the way along the beach with Sam trotting happily beside Frankie.

As they approached the boathouse, in the silence they could hear the Captain's voice as he quietly sang an old sea shanty and the chinking of china as he laid out the breakfast table upstairs. As they reached the side of the building they got a delicious whiff of bacon frying in a pan as the aroma drifted down from the balcony.

"The Captain appears to be cooking breakfast. I hope he doesn't mind me dropping by so early."

Danny thought he'd found an opportunity to put the young lawyer off her planned visit. "Well... He's a little..."

That was as far as Danny got, because the Captain appeared at the side rail of the balcony out over the water and peered down at them through the mist as they stood on the sand next to the boatshed. "Ahoy there. And just who do we have here, Danny my boy?"

"Uh, this is Miss Hawkstone, she's a lawyer," mumbled Danny, his last chance at shaking off the stubborn lawyer having disappeared.

"Is she indeed. And a sword carrying one at that."

Frankie's face briefly showed some confusion, before she quickly regained her composure as though this kind of thing was a completely normal way to start the day. "Good morning, Captain. I understand you have a spot of bother with our nasty little mayor," said Frankie, staring up at the Captain, her hands on her hips and her legs slightly apart.

"I do indeed, but I believe the days of running him through with a sword are behind us... More's the pity. Come aboard the pair of you, I'll throw some more bacon in the pan." Captain Harris turned from the balcony handrail and disappeared inside. A moment later a huge hiss came from within as he none too delicately dropped more bacon into the hot pan.

"Follow me," Danny led off toward the door that led into the boat store. He unlocked the door with the key the Captain had entrusted him with and which he wore on a chunky silver chain around his neck. Frankie and Sam followed him in and when Danny switched on the light Frankie stopped in her tracks. She stared at the old whaler boat, and her gaze was fixed on the faded lettering on the bow that read, 'Razorback'. Gently she reached out and trailed her fingers over the letters, her eyes glazed as she struggled to find why she was so drawn by it and why something was stirring so strongly within her. Danny watched in silence from the stairs that led up to the Captain's quarters.

Frankie slowly pulled herself away from the old boat and looked over to Danny on the stairs. Danny saw something was wrong. "Are you okay?"

"Yes, just a little *déjà vu*. It's like I've seen the boat somewhere before." Frankie shook off the feel and smiled her little smile that she always did when she was amused by something she did not fully understand – of which there wasn't very much. "Lead on and let's hear what the Captain has to say."

Danny moved off up the stairs, but Frankie couldn't help having one last look over her shoulder at the old boat and the name 'Razorback'. She sniffed the air and something about the musty, salty smell of the boat store also stirred something within her. A nudge to her leg brought her back from her thoughts as Sam, tired of waiting, knowing there was bacon in the pan upstairs, decided to nudge Frankie into action with his snout. Frankie smiled down at Sam and headed on up the bare wooden stairs.

Captain Harris was at the old gas stove attending to the bacon when Frankie arrived at the top of the stairs and into the area that served as the Captain's living room and kitchen, or galley as he preferred to call it. The whole room could just as easily have been the cabin of an old sailing ship, the light to supplement the dim, watery light of a misty dawn coming from a lantern hanging from a beam in the centre of the room. The handrail out on the balcony could just as easily have been from around the deck of an old sailing ship as well.

Danny knew his job and took an old, well worn bread board and large knife with its worn bone handle to the breakfast table and began to cut the crusty loaf on the breadboard into thick slices. The Captain's large teapot stood in the centre of the table. The Captain turned from the stove, wiped his hand on a tea towel and looked his guest up and down. Francesca Hawkstone, again with her fists on her hips and her sword dangling casually from her hand, looked Captain Harris squarely in the eye, as she somehow knew she had done before.

Captain Harris stuck out his large hand. "Ah, miss Hawkstone, nice to see you again. Do you mind if I call you Frankie? Or would you prefer the Hawk?"

When he heard this, Danny looked up just as he finished his bread cutting task, and it was just as well that he'd finished because he would probably have cut his thumb off with the large knife as he stared open mouthed at the two other people in the room.

"Frankie will be fine." Frankie smiled as she took the Captain's hand and shook it firmly. "And how exactly do you know my other name. Danny only told you it was Hawkstone?"

"It's a long story, probably best told over a bacon sandwich and a good strong mug of tea. Take a seat"

"Yes, you're probably right." Frankie looked for somewhere to put her sword.

"Here, let me take that. I'll put it with mine." Frankie handed Captain Harris her sword, which was not something she would normally do. Her sword was very important to her and she would not let just anyone handle it, but for some reason it seemed quite alright for the Captain to do it.

The Captain walked over to a tall bookcase, tilted out one of the old, leather bound books and the bookcase swung away from the wall on hinges to reveal several swords in scabbards on a rack.

Danny was just recovering from the Captain knowing Frankie's other name and now his mouth hung open again as he looked at the hidden sword rack and watched as the Captain placed Frankie's sword on the second and only empty space on the rack. There were six other swords, all of them different and most of them larger and heavier than Frankie's. At the top was a curved cutlass with a red braided handle and steel sword guard. Below Frankie's was an Arab scimitar with a broad curved blade and a gold and jewel encrusted hilt and then

a sabre, which was similar to Frankie's but with a thicker, slightly curved blade. Below that was a rapier similar to Frankie's sabre but thinner and the workmanship on the handle and the scabbard was of the finest quality and several hundred years old. Then came a Japanese Samurai katana sword in a black lacquered scabbard and with a sharkskin grip on the handle. The bottom sword was slightly shorter and lighter than the others and very similar to the sabre. There were also several knives of various shapes and sizes in sheaths as well.

Danny stared at the swords and knives. He had had no idea that they were there and the Captain had never mentioned them. Captain Harris turned from the rack and saw Danny staring. "What's wrong, Danny my boy? Surely you can't be surprised at a captain, and a pirate captain at that, having a few swords hanging about, can you lad?"

"No... of course not," muttered Danny.

Frankie watched the whole scene with amusement, the corners of her mouth turned up in a small smile. For some reason the sword case in the Captain's cabin seemed entirely acceptable to her. In fact, the rapier similar to her fencing sabre looked somehow familiar.

The Captain reached down to the bottom sword and took it from the rack. He hefted the smaller, lighter sword thoughtfully in his large hand and then handed it to Danny. "It's yours lad. I'm sure Frankie here will teach you how to use it. You never know when it might come in handy. Right, let's tuck in to some bacon sandwiches, we've a long day ahead."

Danny stared down at the sword in his hands. He was tempted to pull it from its scabbard and look at the blade but decided against it as his fingers felt a little numb and his hands were trembling with excitement. He looked up into the Captain's smiling face. The big man was enjoying himself immensely. "Thank you, Captain," was all Danny could think to say as he again looked at the beautifully crafted weapon with its ornate sword guard and handle bound in gold braid.

"It looks Spanish," commented Frankie, also looking at the sword. "It was made in Seville in the fifteen hundreds if I'm not mistaken."

"You're not." The Captain strolled over to the stove, took the pan of bacon and plonked it on the table. He took his seat at the head of the table and rubbed his hands in anticipation. "Right, let's tuck in." The Captain was already laying a couple of large rashers of bacon on one of the thick slices of bread by the time Frankie took her seat.

As all four tucked into the bacon sandwiches, Frankie swallowed a mouthful and thoughtfully watched the Captain chew mightily on his. "So, you're to be evicted then, Captain. What do you intend to do about it?"

The Captain swallowed the large mouthful he was chewing and casually replied as if it was obvious what he intended to do. "Why fight it of course," and then immediately took another large mouthful of bacon sandwich.

"On what grounds?" asked Frankie as she took a bite of her own sandwich.

"On the grounds that this is my home and has been for some considerable time, and I will not give the satisfaction to that scrawny little jumped up penny counter who calls himself the mayor of seeing me on the street. And I most

certainly won't give Algernon Sharman-Barr, who is no doubt behind it, the satisfaction either. He's been trying to get the better of me for over four hundred years, and without much success I might add. You should know that, Frankie." The Captain took another large bite from what remained of his sandwich.

"How would I know?" said Frankie, somewhat perplexed, but nowhere near as perplexed as Danny, whose head swivelled back and forth between the two others at the table.

"Because you've fought against him before, too."

"I have come up against his team of lawyers on several occasions in court but..."

"No, no." The Captain put down his remaining small piece of sandwich. "On the high seas when he was known as Ali Sharkbar." Seeing that Frankie was dumbfounded by what he was saying, he rolled his eyes and patiently began to explain as if talking to a very young child.

As much as Francesca Hawkstone disliked being spoken to as if she were a child, she sat and listened, be it with a frown on her face.

"You see, long ago Lord Algernon Sharman-Barr used to be a wealthy landowner and not a very nice one at that. His father before him had treated the workers of the family estate like slaves and he followed in his father's footsteps. The workers were paid just enough to feed themselves, that way he knew they could never leave because they had no money. So the poor beggars were tied to the estate for life. In the meantime Lord Algernon Sharman-Barr lived like a king."

"When was this?" Frankie's green eyes drilled into the Captain as she watched his face for any signs that he may be spinning her a story for his own amusement.

"Around the late fifteen hundred and early sixteen hundreds, give or take a few years," replied the Captain casually, and unable to ignore the piece of sandwich on the plate in front of him, poking it in his mouth, swallowing it and then draining the remainder of his tea to wash it down.

"So how would I have known him back then? I'm twenty four years old, not four hundred and twenty four years old."

"Then it must have been one of your ancestors. She looked just like you though, same green eyes and flaming red hair. She had the same name, Francesca Hawkstone, the Hawk. She even used to stand with her fists on her hips just like you do. Pour me another mug of tea would you, Danny lad. Not bad with a sword either I seem to remember."

Danny, almost mesmerised by what was being said, did as he was asked.

Frankie seemed to be pondering what the Captain had said. "When I was young my father once told me a story about an ancestor that was supposed to have been a pirate queen, but I thought that's just what it was, a story, a children's story, a fantasy."

"It was no fantasy, that's for sure. She was a pirate queen all right and as brave as any man that strode the deck of a fighting ship. She sailed the warm waters

of the Caribbean aboard the Razorback with me for nigh on four years. We gave old Ali Sharkbar a torrid time as he tried to plunder the Spanish treasure ships for himself. Sunk his ship out from under him one time and set him adrift in a longboat with what was left of his motley crew. Somehow he managed to make it to Port Royal on the island of Jamaica and that's where he first met Ratty Ratcliffe, who was just as much of a weasel then as he is now. He worked for the British Government and his job was to tally up all the treasure we took to Kingstown, give the Queen the lion's share and then give me our cut to divide up amongst the crew."

"Ratcliffe? The same man who is our mayor?" said Frankie in surprise.

"It surely is. It's strange how bad company finds more bad company. They're still thick as thieves to this day. One of the things I don't understand is how they managed to do it. To be here today."

"More importantly, how did you do it," asked Frankie?

"Fetch me the golden orchid dust will you Danny."

Danny collected the box that contained the golden dust from the shelf and put it on the table in front of Captain Harris. Danny quietly took his seat as if he was worried that if he spoke he might somehow bring the story to an end.

The Captain opened the box and Frankie stared at the box's glowing contents.

The Captain continued on. "See, if we sprinkle this over ourselves, we travel back to whence it came."

"And whence exactly did it come from?" Frankie's voice had a sceptical edge to it which, all said and done, was not at all surprising considering the story she was hearing.

Danny could not help himself and continued the story as the Captain had told it to him, "from a cave on a mountain in the jungle on the island of Aruba. Princess Shellaya gave it to the Captain." Under the scrutiny of Frankie's green eyes, Danny suddenly realised how far fetched the story sounded.

Her scepticism was reflected in the look on her face and, the Captain seeing this, rose from the table and brought the storytelling to an end. In one long stride the Captain was at the sword case and took his sword from the top shelf and the rapier that Frankie thought vaguely familiar and handed it to her. "Look at the scabbard girl."

Frankie took the sword and there on the leather of the scabbard, beautifully inscribed but barely visible in faded gold leaf, was the written 'The Hawk'. Frankie withdrew the sword from its scabbard and balanced the sword across her finger at the point where the blade met the handle, then casually flicked it into the air and caught it by the handle held it upright in front of her. She studied the blade thoughtfully as she stroked her hand along it. It was indeed an old friend.

The Captain and Danny watched in silence. Frankie looked from the sword and fixed the Captain with her emerald green eyes. The Captain grinned. "And now its time to return if I'm to save my home. Are you coming or not, lass?"

"If it is true, what can you do to stop your eviction if we do go back in time, Captain? Her eyes appraising and her face calm.

“A good question. You see, after my years of pirating under a letter of authority, or marque as it was called, from her majesty Queen Elizabeth, I got back to London and was invited to Windsor Castle. She really was a nice lady, Elizabeth the First it was, and she asked me what I would like as a reward for my loyal service and bravery and all that,” added the Captain with what amounted to embarrassment. “Now I’m not a man for big country estates or fancy houses in the city, so I just asked for what I wanted.”

“This boathouse I assume,” said Frankie, motioning to their surroundings.

“Exactly. She offered me a castle for heaven’s sake. But this is what I wanted, a boathouse with enough room to store a few little boats, a cabin for sleeping in and a view out over water from the bridge. So she had her people go out and find me what I wanted and, lo and behold, here it is. She signed a letter which allowed me to live here in perpetuity, or some such word, which means forever doesn’t it?”

“Yes it does. Which brings about the question, how are you being evicted if you have this letter?”

At this the Captain became quite sheepish, “Ah, well that’s the problem. Being the forgetful sort that I am, I lost it. Well, more accurately, I hid it and forgot where I’ve hidden it.”

“I see. And Sharman-Barr or Mayor Ratcliffe wants the land you live on and you have no letter from the Queen to prove that this is yours,” said Frankie, indicating their surroundings.

“Yes. I even own the whole park according to the letter. So, I just have to go back and get a new copy of the letter somehow because I can’t for the life of me remember where I hid it. It was a long time ago you know,” said the Captain, as though to explain his memory lapse.

“Why did you hide it? Why didn’t you put it in a bank or give it to a lawyer to look after?” asked Frankie.

“Because I’m a pirate and we hide valuable things like treasure and stuff. We don’t trust banks and lawyers. Bury it ten paces to the south from a tree on a deserted island, that kind of thing,” explained the Captain as best he could. “So we need to see Queen Elizabeth the First to get her to write another one. But first we go to the Caribbean to pick up the Razorback and her crew, or what’s left of them. So are you in for some adventure, my girl, or not? You always used to be.”

The atmosphere in the room was tense as Danny and the Captain both watched Francesca’s face as she thought about what she had just heard. She was a lawyer, a woman whose life revolved around cold hard facts, courtrooms and judges.

After what seemed like ages to Danny, Frankie grinned broadly, stuck out her chin and put her fists defiantly on her hips. “Damn right I am. We make for the Caribbean and the sooner the better.” She looked over to Danny, her eyes glinting with mischief and a broad smile splitting her face, just like Danny.

“Good.” The Captain took his battered hat from a hook near the door and jammed it down on his head. “Come on Danny lad and don’t forget your new sword, you may have cause to need it where we’re going.” The Captain strode

to the sword rack and handed each person a knife to go with their sword, “you might find a use for these as well”, he said as he thrust a particularly large one into his own waistband. He reached up and took the sword that was at the top of the rack, the heavy cutlass with the red tassel hanging from the handle, and slipped it through his belt. With that he joined the others so they stood close together.

“And you Sam.” Sam waddled over from where he’d been watching the proceedings with interest and patiently awaiting the piece of bacon rind he was not going to get. “Come on, all close together now.”

All three huddled together with Sam in amongst their legs. The Captain picked up the box of golden orchid dust and took a pinch of the beautiful dust between his finger and thumb. He closed the small box and put it on the table. “Ready everyone?”

Danny replied, “aye, aye, Captain.”

Frankie’s was less respectful. “Just get on with it will you.”

Sam barked his readiness once and the Captain, grinning, tossed the pinch of fine dust into the air above them where it spread out and hung in a sparkling golden cloud before it began to fall slowly over them. It seemed to be almost as light as air and glittered and sparkled as it slowly drifted down over them. They all watched the dust in fascinated silence as it fell over and around them and then, as it touched the worn wooden floorboards beneath their feet, they were gone.

CHAPTER 4 - ARUBA

As their eyes became accustomed to the darkness of the large cave chamber and the faint golden glow that surrounded them, they all realised they were no longer in the Captain’s boathouse. The Captain, and of course Sam, were not surprised, although the Captain was always slightly dubious about this time travel business and half expected to end up on the moon or some ridiculous place one of these days. Danny’s eyes were as wide as saucers as he looked about and Frankie’s showed a fair bit of astonishment as well. Whatever doubts Frankie’s lawyer’s instincts had put in her mind about the Captain and his far-fetched story had been well and truly dispelled. When she had agreed to set sail for the Caribbean it had partly been in jest. It now appeared that the joke was well and truly on her.

Around them, nestled in the rocky cracks of the high cave chamber walls, the orchids that had supplied the dust to make what had just happened possible glowed golden, the heads of the flowers seemed to reach out to them. It was almost as if the bell shaped blooms were silently watching them. The golden glow was reflected by a small stream that trickled along next to them in the rock floor of the cave.

The Captain walked over to the flowers and gently stroked one with his large finger. The flower seemed to enjoy it and curled softly around his finger. The Captain smiled and the flower released his finger. “Friendly aren’t they. But not to everyone. They hide in the cracks if a bad person goes near them.”

One of the flowers was reaching toward Danny. It was almost as if it was straining to get to him from its crack in the rock. Danny noticed the rock around the crack had been damaged and reached out his hand to the flower. It gently laid its bell shaped head against his hand.

“That one seems to have a crush on you Danny,” said Frankie grinning.

“Come along then, we can’t wait about here all day, nice as the flowers are.” The Captain clasped his sword and scabbard wedged between his thick leather belt and his trousers and strode off next to the narrow stream. He was already taking his position as captain of the ship, even if they had no actual ship yet.

Danny slowly took his hand from the flower and noticed that all the flowers seemed to be looking at him. Inside Danny something stirred, something he couldn’t explain, but it was there.

For the first time in her life, Francesca Hawkstone actually followed someone without asking why or where they were going, simply because she had no idea where they were and her faith in Captain Harris had taken a considerable lift in the last few minutes. Anyway, what were the options – show her famous stubbornness and head off in the other direction? No, the Captain was the man of the moment and Frankie also slid her sword through her belt and took off behind him.

Danny was still staring at the flowers when a nudge in the back of the knee from Sam pushed him in the direction in which the Captain and Frankie had headed. Danny took one last look at the flowers on the wall and hurried after the other because it’s not often someone not yet quite thirteen years old finds himself magically appearing in a cave in heavens knows where miles and miles from home, and he most certainly didn’t want to stay there on his own. As he made his way after them he fumbled with his new sword and scabbard until he too had the unfamiliar weapon threaded through his belt. The flowers watched him until he was out of sight.

As the group trudged through the gloom, up ahead it was becoming lighter. As they reached a bend in the cave the light became brighter from beyond it and as they came around it they found themselves in another large chamber with a high ceiling. From a large hole in the ceiling a beam of sunlight poured in illuminating the turquoise water of the four pools fed by the stream they had been following.

Captain Harris surveyed the pools. “Yes, this is the right way, Princess Shellaya calls this the chamber of pools. Follow...”

“Captain,” said Frankie, halting Captain Harris in mid stride as he was about to lead off past the pools toward where a tunnel he knew led to the cave entrance.

“Yes, Frankie.”

“What exactly are we going to do when we get out of the cave?”

“We’ll say hello to princess Shellaya and then we’ll board the Razorback and set sail for Port Royal to prepare for the long trip to England so that I can get a new letter from the queen. It’ll be good to have a swaying deck beneath our feet and the salt spray in our hair again.” The Captain smiled at the thought.

“Again? I’m having trouble believing I’ve ever had a swaying deck beneath my feet or salt spray in my hair,” said Frankie, a bemused look on her face.

“It’ll all come back to you, lass.”

“What about me?” asked Danny, never having been on a sailing vessel bigger than a dinghy in his young life.

“You’re a natural. You’ll be as at home on the deck of the Razorback as I am, you’ll see. Now come on, we’ve got a long walk down the mountain and through the jungle before we reach the village and the lagoon. There are a few dangers in the jungle, though, but nothing to worry about.” Captain Harris turned and casually strode off past the pools toward the tunnel.

Danny and Francesca exchanged bemused looks, then both shrugged and took off after the Captain with Sam waddling happily along behind them.

The tunnel got darker as they left the illuminated chamber of pools behind them and then just as it seemed they were about to be enveloped in total darkness and a seed of doubt about the Captain’s navigation or the state of his memory was entering their minds, a glimmer of light came from up ahead. As they walked carefully along the uneven stone floor of the tunnel more light lit the cracks and lumps of the cave walls as it filtered in from the entrance up ahead. They walked faster now, all of them wanting to get their first glimpse of what lay beyond the entrance.

The Captain was the first to emerge from the cave and stood on the wide, rocky ledge and looked out over the sea of dark green treetops below and the sparkling blue sea in the distance. Frankie, Danny and Sam soon joined him. They looked out at the fantastic view and the clear blue sky above and remembered only a few minutes ago they were in the mist of a gloomy English morning and couldn’t even see the lake they were standing next to.

Frankie looked down at the thick carpet of green jungle tree tops below them and then out to the glittering blue waters of the Caribbean Sea in the distance. Yes, this was what the Captain had promised all right. To think they had come back in time as well was almost too much for her disciplined mind that was so used to dealing with logic and fact to easily accept. But here they were.

Danny just stared in silence. In the distance where the jungle met the sea he could see a small trickle of smoke rising skywards and beyond that a circular turquoise lagoon. He could just make out a brown object that must be a ship, sitting on the lagoon’s still waters. Danny pointed to it. “Look there’s smoke and it looks like a ship beyond it.”

“Aye lad, indeed it is.” That smoke is coming from princess Shellaya’s village and the ship in the lagoon beyond is the Razorback, just how I left her.”

Frankie continued to stare at the view. “This is truly amazing,” was all she could say.

“Tis indeed,” agreed the Captain. “And there’s many more amazing things to see yet, this is just the start. Come on, we still have a way to go to get to the village.”

With that the Captain led off along the ledge, which almost immediately became much narrower and steeper as it started to lead down toward the jungle below. As they followed, Danny was drawn to look down over the edge at the trees below and suddenly felt a little light headed and stepped back from the edge. He had never had that happen to him before and usually had a good head for heights, but he decided not to look down again and instead he looked forward along the track and noticed the mountain they were on was one of a

line of smaller mountains the trailed off into the distance as they ran parallel to the sea.

Looking past Danny, Frankie noticed how agile the Captain was for such a big man and one who looked like he was probably old enough to receive an old age pension. In fact, as she thought about it she remembered he was actually more than four hundred years old. As she followed him she began thinking to herself how bizarre this all was and, more disturbingly, how it was beginning to feel so natural. She had already started to let the other world, the modern world, slip from her mind. It was if she was embracing something she knew, and knew well. She just had to relax and let whatever was deep inside her come to the surface and she had a feeling that would be when she set foot on the white sands of the island with the warm, clear water lapping at her ankles or on the wooden deck of the pirate ship Razorback.

“How long will it take to get to the village, Captain?” called Danny to the back of Captain Harris as the big man marched down the narrow mountain track.

“A couple of hours. It’s good that we got an early start. I left in the afternoon once and had to stay in the cave overnight. You wouldn’t want to sleep in the jungle, you’d be eaten alive.”

Danny looked out over the jungle with some apprehension as visions of small black figures with blowpipes darting through the shadows of the jungle came into his mind. “Are there cannibals on the island?”

The Captain stopped and guffawed with laughter. “No lad, but plenty of mosquitoes, and they’re just as much of a nuisance.” After a moment to compose himself he grinned broadly at Danny, shook his head and again set off down the narrow track. “You have a lot to learn, Danny my boy, a lot to learn.”

Frankie clapped Danny on the shoulder from behind. He turned and found her emerald green eyes sparkling with amusement and a smile on her face. “Don’t worry, Danny, we just have to get used to it,” Frankie hesitated for a moment as thoughts flickered in her mind and then added, “I guess.” With that, she shrugged and then smiled again.

They followed the Captain down the steep, rocky path with Sam bringing up the rear. Sam was not at all concerned with the dangers of the jungle or the steep and narrow path, he was just hoping the villagers would be cooking something to eat on a spit over the open fire when they reached the village. Something of which they would give him to eat as he was still miffed at missing out on the bacon that was left sitting on the table back at the boathouse.

The track began to get mossy and the air misty in the warm morning sun. Soon they reached a point so close to the treetops of the jungle that some of the leafy branches were just below their feet. This was where the mountain they had just clambered down met the base of the next mountain. Danny could hear a faint roaring sound coming from where the track disappeared around an outcrop of fern covered rock. The rock was shiny with moisture and drops of water hanging from the ferns that glinted in the hot tropical sun.

The Captain stopped just before the track turned the corner around the outcrop. Drops of water from the moisture in the air were already forming along the edge of the peak of his hat. “Best be careful from now on, it gets a bit slippery as we near the waterfall. Just follow me and you’ll be all right... Oh, by the way, do you want to climb the rest of the way down or jump?”

“Jump!” exclaimed Frankie and Danny as they peered down through the branches of the tall, dark green canopy of the nearby jungle trees to the shadowy depths of the jungle floor. Danny again felt a little strange and stepped back from the edge.

“Don’t be scared Danny, it’s a real hoot,” said the Captain with a grin, and obviously looking forward at what lay ahead. “Now come on, and watch your step.” With that the Captain, again showing the agility that had surprised Frankie earlier, disappeared around the corner of the rocky track that glistened with moisture.

Danny turned to Frankie and was about to voice his doubts about jumping when Frankie cut him short, and then he noticed the determined look on her face and the flinty sparkle in her amazing green eyes.

“If that old goat is jumping, so am I. Follow me.” Frankie squeezed past Danny and took off after the Captain.

Danny felt something nudge against his calf and looked down to find Sam looking up at him. Danny was not sure, but it looked to him as though Sam was smiling more than he usually looked like he was smiling. Sam again nudged Danny’s leg with his wet nose to get him moving. Danny sighed and with a resigned shrug carefully followed the other two around the corner on the slippery track.

As he rounded the corner he was confronted with an awesome sight which he now realised was the cause of the roaring he had heard back around the corner. Thirty paces ahead along the track that clung to the rock wall of the mountain, a narrow waterfall cascaded down from high above and plunged through a hole in the forest canopy into a large pool. Mist rose from the hole and coated everything close by. Just ahead, the Captain and Frankie watched silently. Danny caught up with the others and shared in the moment as they watched one of nature’s most beautiful creations. As the mist wafted upwards and was met by the tropical sun a rainbow arced across the hazy blue sky.

Frankie was the first to tear herself away from watching the beautiful sight and nudged Captain Harris in the ribs. “Jump?” she stated simply.

This got the Captain’s attention and again a grin split his snowy, white beard. “Aye, lass, jump. You can climb down if you want but why would you when you can jump.”

“How far is it?”

From behind them, Danny strained to listen in on their conversation over the roar of the waterfall.

“Who knows, I’ve never measured it but I reckon it would be all of a hundred feet, or thirty metres as you insist on saying back where we just came from,” said the Captain casually. “The pool at the bottom is very deep so it’s quite safe. Come on.” The Captain did not wait for any argument or even a reply, for he was off along the narrow path toward an outcrop of rock right next to the roaring cascade of water.

Danny tugged Frankie’s sleeve as she watched the Captain head for the rock outcrop. “Is he kidding us?” asked Danny, hopefully. “He does like a good leg pull, you know” he said even more hopefully.

Frankie turned to Danny with a wry smile and said what they both knew. “I have a feeling that he is not joking. I also have a feeling that our Captain is testing us, and I for one don’t intend to fail. As I said, if that old goat is jumping, so am I. He must be sixty years... sorry, four hundred years old, so if he can do it, so can we. What do you say?”

Frankie’s determination rubbed off on Danny and as he looked into her sparkling eyes and saw the corners of her eyes crinkle and her lips split into a grin, he suddenly felt he could do it – whatever it was. He felt like others that had been at her side in times of danger and challenge, he felt he could somehow draw on the courage that seemed to radiate from her when times demanded it. This flame haired young woman was certainly something special and before Danny knew it the words were out. “I’m jumping with you.” There, it was said. There was no turning back now. It was as though Danny had made a pledge. A pledge on a ledge above a tropical jungle four hundred years and thousands of miles from home. What the heck had he got himself into?

Frankie clapped her young companion on the shoulder, secretly pleased with the way Danny had responded. He was, after all, thirteen years old and she had just convinced him to throw himself off a mountain, through the cascading water of a waterfall and into a small pool a hundred or so feet below. It was the height of a ten storey building and looked every inch of it from way up high. She turned and walked along the ledge to where the Captain now stood on the rocky outcrop looking down through the mist at the pool at the bottom of the waterfall. Frankie stood next to him and peered down to where the Captain was looking.

The Captain looked skyward for a moment, toward the topical sun way up in the clear blue sky, removed his hat and mopped the sweat from his brow with a large red handkerchief. “A nice cool dip is just the ticket, it’s starting to get quite warm.”

Frankie turned from looking down through the mist into the vague, shimmering blue pool below and fixed her eyes on the Captain’s. When he turned to her, his eyes told her he was most definitely not joking about jumping.

“Come on Sam,” called the Captain and Sam waddled up from behind Danny and eagerly took a position at the Captain’s feet, looked down at the pool and then up at the Captain. “Time for a swim, Sam.” Sam barked once in acknowledgement and licked his lips at the prospect.

Danny nervously took his position next to Frankie, looked down to the pool below and swallowed hard.

The Captain noticed Danny’s apprehensive look. “Are you alright, lad?”

Before Danny could answer Frankie did it for him. “He’s fine. After you, Captain, you know the way.”

“There’s only one way, and that’s down, lass.”

“Well, don’t talk about it, jump,” said Frankie, determined to sound as matter of fact as possible.

The Captain couldn’t help but give a last order before taking the plunge. “Make sure you keep a hand on your sword hilt, a good pirate doesn’t lose their sword you know”.

Frankie rolled her eyes in a gesture that said “Just jump” but instead actually said “I’m sure they don’t. Now would you mind, I believe we have a long way to go today so the sooner we get going...”

“Sam,” said the Captain, doing his best to regain command, “on the count of three.” Sam looked up at his master, wagged his tail eagerly and again licked his lips in anticipation. The Captain jammed his hat down tightly on his head, for it would not be at all dignified for a Captain to lose his hat during the plunge, grasped the hilt of his sword and shouted “one.” He looked over at Frankie and Danny who were watching him intently. “Two,” he shouted above the roar of the waterfall and a grin broke out on his face, then the Captain turned his attention back to the task ahead and shouted “three” at the top of his voice and leapt out into the spray coming from the edge of the cascading water of the waterfall, followed immediately by Sam.

Danny and Frankie watched the Captain plunge through the mist and spray, hollering what sounded vaguely like “Geronimo” as he hurtled downward. Sam didn’t fall as fast as the Captain and had his legs spread as he dropped and his nose turned up ready for the imminent splashdown. Danny’s mouth hung open as he and Frankie watched in fascinated silence as first the Captain hit the churning white water at the base of the waterfall and then Sam, both disappearing beneath the water’s surface. It seemed a very long time before first Sam’s head broke the surface of the water a little away from where the crashing waters hit the surface of the pool and then the Captain. The Captain waved up at them, and even from the height of the rock outcrop it was possible to see the broad grin on his face. He started to swim toward part of the pool that contained the still turquoise water of the shallows and Sam followed, his short legs whirring in a ferocious doggy paddle.

Frankie turned to Danny, who was still watching the Captain and Sam far below. “Well, are you ready?”

Danny swallowed hard and stood upright. “I’m ready,” although he was not at all sure that he was.

“Remember, hang onto your sword. I’ll count to three and then we go.” Frankie pulled her sword and scabbard from her belt and clasped the handle in one hand and the tip in the other and held it out in front of her. She looked over to Danny and was pleased to see that Danny was composed enough to be gripping his sword hilt just below the handle like the Captain had instructed. Frankie needed her hands out in front of her for what she had in mind. She started to count, “one, two... three!”

Danny looked briefly out over the treetops before he gathered all his courage and threw himself out into the cool spray of the cascading water. A moment later Frankie launched herself out in a graceful dive. Danny felt like he was hanging in the air for a second, and then began the long plunge toward the pool. He wanted desperately to flap his arms but he resolutely grasped the hilt of his sword as he had been instructed and used the other to help him keep himself upright as he fell. To Danny it felt like he was falling forever and as the spray soaked him he took the deepest breath he could manage, his cheeks puffed out like a hamster.

From his position in the chest deep water near the edge of the pool, Captain Harris watched the two figures plunging down toward the pool amongst the spray of the cascading water. But it was Frankie that drew the Captain’s gaze as she somersaulted, spun and twirled in a magnificent display of gymnastic

grace as good as any Olympic diver and, within a moment, they hit the water of the pool, Danny with an almighty splash, and Frankie like a spear with hardly a ripple.

The splashdown was not as bad as Danny expected, because the bubbly water at the base of the waterfall offered a much softer landing than flat clam water would, and before he knew it he was sliding downward through the cool bubble filled water of the pool. His downward motion eventually came to a halt, and not the sudden and painful one he half expected if the pool was not deep enough.

Suspended in the deep water, Danny opened his eyes and found he was now out of the bubbly water and into the crystal clear water of the main pool. He looked around and saw Frankie nearby and then up at the surface quite a way above him. He looked over at Frankie again to make sure she was all right and when she gave him the thumbs up, they began to swim for the surface together.

Captain Harris was relieved to see two bedraggled heads break the surface a little distance away and both draw a deep breath of fresh air. And he was not surprised to see a couple of big grins break out on their faces, either.

Danny was beaming from ear to ear as he looked over at the Captain and above the roar of the cascading water of the waterfall let out a booming “yeeeeeha” at the top of his voice. Danny swam strongly toward where the Captain stood in the chest deep water at the edge of the pool. Captain Harris had insisted that Danny trained hard at swimming in the local pool back home. The Captain knew well the importance of bring a strong swimmer if Danny chose a life upon the high seas.

Frankie also had an easy grace in the water just as she did on land, or in the air for that matter. Many years of gymnastic training had seen to that and she glided effortlessly through the water toward the Captain.

Sam, meantime, had had enough of treading water with his stocky little legs and scrambled from the water onto the mossy rocks at the edge of the pool where, of course, he gave himself a good shake as dogs do. Satisfied, he watched the others in the pool.

When the two grinning figures joined Captain Harris in the shallower water he tried to sound as captain-like as possible “Right crew, let’s not dawdle, we still have a way to go.”

Unfortunately for the Captain, even his gruff and commanding tone failed to dispel the excitement that was pumping through Danny’s veins. The grin remained on his face and as his feet found grip on the bottom of the pool he thrust his fist into the air and let out one last holler, “woo hoo, what a buzz,” he shouted.

“Yes, right, that’ll be enough of that” blustered the Captain, “let’s get moving. Oh, and Miss Hawkstone, that will be quite enough of the showing off, thank you, a simple jump would have sufficed.” The Captain turned and waded through the shallower water toward the edge of the pool. He was glad he had his back turned to the others because a grin he had been holding back broke out across his face.

Frankie was still grinning herself, having not had the opportunity to practice her gymnastic skills for some time. She slapped Danny heartily on the back in congratulation at his brave effort, “well done, Danny lad, you showed a lot of

guts there,” and then wondered why she had used the term lad. It sounded very much like the term a pirate would have used, and certainly not one a modern young lawyer would use. Lad indeed. A little puzzled, she too waded ashore.

The four soaked figures stood in the warm, dappled sunlight between the edge of the pool and start of the jungle and Captain Harris checked his crew, “all shipshape and ready for a trek through the jungle?”

Danny, still sporting a grin from his plunge into the pool, looked into the shadows of the jungle and the grin slipped slightly. It looked very dark and a little sinister from where he stood in the sunlight, with creepers hanging from tree branches that could just as easily be snakes and strange noises coming from deep within the jungle’s shadows. The only place he had ever been that remotely resembled a jungle was a school trip to the New Forest in Hampshire and that was not at all like what lay in front of him now. He listened to the squawks and screeches that echoed around the tall trees.

An extra loud screech made them all jump and the Captain was the first to compose himself. “Just a monkey.” The Captain removed his soaking captain’s hat, wrung it out as best he could and jammed the creased but slightly drier hat back on his head, and then added, “I think”.

Danny was quite excited at the prospect of seeing a monkey in the wild, although the idea of snakes, and big ones at that, that made him very uneasy. “Er, are there any snakes, Captain?”

“Of course, it’s a jungle and there’s always snakes in a jungle, lad, just don’t tread on any and keep an eye on the branches overhead. But it’s nothing to worry about. Just follow me.”

With that, Captain Harris marched into the dappled sunlight and shadows ahead. Danny and Frankie exchanged resigned looks, shrugged and took off after the Captain, both keeping a wary eye open for snakes.

CHAPTER 5 - THE JUNGLE

Captain Harris ambled through the jungle as though he didn’t have a care in the world, as did his faithful companion Sam at his side. His two other companions were not quite so relaxed, their eyes darting too and fro at the slightest movement in the shadows.

Danny, making sure he did not drop too far behind the Captain, asked what he felt was an important question, “Captain, how big would these snakes be, exactly?”

The Captain stopped and turned. “Why, some of them are pretty big, full thirty feet long as big around as a man’s chest. Swallow you whole they could. Anacondas, they’re the biggest. Get em around water a lot, like lakes and rivers. Then you have your pythons, they’re pretty big as well. But it’s the smaller ones that you have to look out for because they’re harder to spot and usually they’re the poisonous ones. Mind you, now I say that, there are tales of a huge snake hereabouts that is a bit of a legend in the village. Apparently a few brave souls have gone out to try and kill it after it’s slithered into the village at night and taken a pig or goat or even a cow, and they never returned. That’s one of the reasons the villagers never come as far as the waterfall, only princess Shellaya.”

“Aren’t you scared of it?” Danny’s eyes were wide with surprise and perhaps a little fear.

“Nah. There’s not a snake adangling or aslithering that you can’t take care of with a sharp sword, isn’t that right, Frankie?”

“I really wouldn’t know, Captain. My knowledge on the subject is somewhat limited. All the snakes I’ve encountered so far have been of the variety that I encounter in a court of law. Your friend Algernon Sharman-Barr being the biggest, most dangerous and slipperiest I’ve had to deal with so far.”

“Yes, he’s a slippery snake of a man, alright. Ali Sharkbar as he’s known in these times has been described as a snake by many. Anyway, enough of this twaddle, let’s get moving.” With that the captain turned on his heel and was about to stride off through the jungle when Danny’s eyes, becoming more accustomed to the shadows of the jungle now, thought he saw a movement amongst the leaves of a branch directly above the Captain’s head. Before Danny could shout a warning, Frankie was past him, her sword flashing from its scabbard. From the branch above the Captain a snake had appeared, its forked tongue flicking out and testing the air. It was black and shiny with bright red stripes, as thick around as a bicycle tyre and its dark eyes glinted evilly as its head extended from its hanging body toward the Captain’s neck. The snake’s head pulled back and its mouth opened wide revealing a pair of glistening fangs as it prepared to strike.

The snake struck with incredible speed, but not as much speed as Frankie, whose sword was a blur of shining steel. Too fast for the eye to follow, the blade whisked across the top of the Captain’s head, missing his sodden hat by a whisker, and removed the snake’s head in mid strike. The Captain, blissfully unaware of his brush with death, marched on into the jungle. The remains of the snake slowly slid from the branch and silently fell to the soft, leaf covered ground.

Danny stepped up beside Frankie and both looked at the snake’s headless body laid across the track.

Frankie flicked the snake’s body off the track with the tip of her sword. “It appears I’m capable of dealing with snakes other than those I meet in a courtroom.” Frankie slid her sword back into its scabbard and rubbed her hands at a job well done.

“You were so fast. Will I ever be able to do that?” Danny was staring at Frankie with awe. Never had he seen someone move at such speed and with such accuracy. It made him feel very slow and clumsy.

“I don’t see why not. I’ll teach you how and then it’s up to you to practice and practice hard. I have a feeling that if this is just the start of our adventure that the sooner I start teaching you the better. Come on, the old goat will be out of sight soon and probably getting himself into more trouble.” Frankie clapped Danny on the shoulder and propelled him off along the jungle trail after the Captain.

The Captain seemed to know where he was going, or at least that’s the impression he gave as he marched along the jungle trail. He stopped when they reached the edge of a small stream that meandered into view out of the shadows.

“Better take on some water, it’s pretty warm,” announced the Captain.

“Pretty warm,” commented Frankie, who wiped her brow with a large, green silk handkerchief with her initials embroidered in one corner. “It must be thirty five degrees Celsius”, she added.

“Yes, a tad warm. Soon as we near the ocean we’ll pick up a bit of sea breeze and it’ll cool down a bit. Won’t be long now, another half hour if we don’t have any problems,” said the Captain in a very casual tone.

“What kind of problems? Asked Frankie, suspiciously. Her courtroom instincts had not been completely left back in the modern world.

“Well, I don’t know. Any sort of problems. Jungle problems.” Captain Harris knelt down at the edge of the stream, cupped his hand, scooped up some cool, clear water from the stream and drank it. “Lovely. Like I say, you’d best take some on board otherwise you’ll dehydratermethingy, you know, get thirsty.

“Dehydrate, Captain, is that what you’re trying to say?” said Danny helpfully.

“Dare say it is, lad. Now drink up its nice and...” That was as far as the captain got before the water in front of him erupted and a huge, brown scaly tail leapt from the water and coiled itself around him. The Captain tried desperately to prize himself free as the coiled tail tightened around him, trapping his arms at his sides.

Even Frankie was caught unawares this time and before she could move the Captain was in the water battling with the thrashing tail.

Danny drew his new sword, unsure quite what he was going to do with it but he knew he had to do something. Before he knew it he had jumped into the stream and straddled the body of the huge snake. Danny lifted the sword and, with both hands, plunged the blade into the thick body of the snake as hard as he could. The sword pierced the snake’s huge scales and went deep and he felt the body of the snake between his legs quiver. He pulled the sword free and again thrust it into the body of the giant snake. He noticed the coiled tail around the Captain slacken and the Captain get an arm free and draw his sword.

Frankie stood on the bank of the stream watching and waiting, sword in hand and sensing there was more to come. This was just the tail so there must be a head attached to the other end of the snake, wherever that may be. The question was quickly answered when further upstream the monstrous head of the massive serpent burst clear of the water. It was looking back at Danny and the Captain with evil red eyes and letting out a loud hiss as its long grey forked tongue flicked out.

Slowly the snake’s head moved toward Danny, its tongue darting out testing the air. Danny watched in horror as the huge snake’s mouth opened to a size that could swallow him whole and two large fangs long enough to pierce Danny’s body from one side to the other glinted as its head passed through a shard of sunlight from the canopy of leaves high overhead.

“Get out of there Danny!” shouted Frankie and waved her arms to attract the snake’s attention. “Hey, over here ugly.” It worked and the snake’s movement toward Danny halted and it fixed its glare on Frankie. It was only Frankie’s agility that saved her because the snake’s head turned on its side and the gaping mouth shot toward her at a speed almost too fast to see. But see it she did and

just managed to leap aside as the huge mouth snapped shut exactly where she had been standing a moment before.

Frankie's hurried evasive action had put her off balance and she was unable to ram her sword into the snake's head before it withdrew almost as quickly as it had struck at her.

"Hmm, pretty quick for a big guy", said Frankie as she regained her balance. Frankie's emerald green eyes blazed as she locked eyes with the snake. The snake's head had coiled back, its tongue flicking in and out as it hissed quietly. It was not used to missing its prey. The forest had gone very still and quiet. There were no longer any more squawks and screeches echoing through jungle. Nobody moved. The only sound was that of the snake's sinister hiss.

The snake's head shot forward toward Frankie, but this time she was ready for it. Frankie spun away as the snake's head lunged at where she had stood a moment before, its jaws slamming closed on thin air. Everything seemed to happen in slow motion after that. Frankie had her sword drawn back ready to thrust at her chosen target, the snake's huge red eye. The snake seemed to sense that it had made a fatal error and froze awaiting its fate. Frankie's sword shot forward and stopped a fingernail width away from the centre of the large red eye. The red eye stared past the sword tip into the emerald green eyes of Frankie. Frankie was still, her eyes unblinking as the two were locked together in a battle of wills.

Slowly the snake's huge head moved back toward the stream, its eye never leaving Frankie. Frankie's razor sharp sword tip never wavered. The snake returned to the position it was in before it struck the last time, and there it stayed.

The snake's eyes were still locked with Frankie's and there seemed to still be a battle of wills taking place. Danny looked over at Frankie and he could see the steely look on her face and noticed she had taken up her favourite position of fists on hips and legs apart as she glared at the huge snake's head barely ten metres away. Still the snake's tongue flicked at the air as it hissed softly and tried to gauge just what this creature in front of it was.

"Let us go on our way and we will do you no further harm", said Frankie, her green eyes blazing and her red hair shimmering in the shard of sunlight she'd stepped forward into.

Danny turned his attention to the monstrous reptile. It seemed unsure what to do. Then Danny felt the snake's body beneath him move. He looked around to see the tail of the snake uncoiling from around the Captain. Danny clambered off as the snake's body moved forward beneath the surface of the stream, its scales sliding past his legs. Danny, as though trying not to break the spell that Frankie had cast upon the snake, moved slowly to the bank. Captain Harris, now free of the snake's coils, did the same.

Slowly the snake lowered its head, all the time staring at Frankie. When it was just above the water it stopped.

"Be off, serpent. You will only find death if you attack us again", said Frankie quietly.

The snake blinked once, as though accepting these words and its head disappeared beneath the surface of the stream with the rest of its enormous scaly body.

Captain Harris clambered from the creek and joined Frankie staring at the rippling water as the snake moved off along the stream beneath the surface, the rippling water the only remaining sign of it.

“Well done, lass”, said the Captain sheathing his sword.

“You could of killed him, Frankie”, said Danny, looking up into her green eyes.”

Frankie’s eyes softened and her hard expression broke into a soft smile. “Yes, but why?”

“Because it was trying to eat us”, answered Danny. “It could have swallowed us all. It was huge.”

“And why would it want to do that?” asked Frankie evenly as Captain Harris watched on. Frankie looked over to the Captain and he winked at her, a grin on his face. He knew a lesson was being taught here.

“Because it’s horrible”, answered Danny. “A great big horrible snake that eats people.”

“But why would it do that?” asked Frankie as she pretended to rub her chin thoughtfully.

“Because it’s a great big....”

“Horrible snake,” the Captain finished for Danny. “But that’s not what Frankie’s asking, Danny lad. She’s not asking what it is, she’s asking why it tried to eat us.”

“Because it’s hungry I suppose,” answered Danny after a few moments of thought.

“Exactly. It’s just doing what it has to do to survive, Danny, nothing more,” explained Frankie. “I did the same. I killed the first snake because it was a life or death situation. Had I not acted and taken off the snake’s head, Captain Harris would be dead.”

“What other snake?” asked the Captain, as he had not even seen the first snake’s attack that was aimed at his neck.

“It doesn’t matter,” said Frankie in a matter of fact tone.

The Captain was still confused but dismissed the incident anyway. He carried on in regard to the one snake he most certainly knew about, “it knew it was beaten. It knew that Frankie could have killed it, and it took it a while to realise that what it considered his prey, his dinner, could kill him as easily as that,” the Captain snapped his fingers to emphasise the point.

“The law of the jungle, Danny. I could have killed it but I didn’t. That’s what makes humans different to animals. We have evolved into a society that recognises compassion and mercy, whereas wild animals do not.” Frankie sheathed her sword, the lesson over.

The Captain was not yet finished and had something to add. “What you say is true, to a point, lass.”

“To a point, Captain?” Asked Frankie in her lawyer’s voice.

“Yes. Not all humans have developed compassion and mercy. You work in a court of law, you must have seen a few who have no compassion and no mercy, murderers and the like,” replied the Captain. “And let’s not forget where we are in time as well. The human race has a bloody past and this was one of the bloodiest times, the days of the pirates. I don’t want the lad to expect mercy should the worst come to the worst, as he most likely won’t get it. You must fight lad and fight till you can fight no more when the time comes.”

Danny thought for a moment before he spoke. “I understand, Captain, and I understand what you are saying too Frankie, but I also don’t think the time we come from is as civilised as we’d like to think. Look at terrorists, they murder and injure innocent people. The law of the jungle is more civilised because that snake only kills so it can survive. There’s no politics, no religion and no greed in the jungle.”

Danny’s innocent appraisal caught his adult teachers by surprise. Perhaps the lad had a point – are humans as advanced as they like to believe? They might have invented machines and the like but we are still killing each other for nothing more than land or a god that nobody can prove really exists.

“Mmm, I think that’s enough of this,” huffed the Captain. “We still have a way to go. That little snake has taken up enough of our time. Let’s be off. Follow me.” With that the Captain adjusted his hat, which had slid to an almost impossible position on his head during his struggle with the snake, hitched up his pants and marched off.

“Er, Captain,” called Danny almost apologetically, “I think we were going that way before the snake attack.” Danny pointed in the other direction to the one in which the Captain was stomping. “The stream was on our right.”

The Captain stopped, hesitated for a moment, turned on his heel and stomped back toward Danny and Francesca and, without pausing, marched between the two of them in the direction Danny recommended. Over his shoulder came the words, “I was just testing you. Well done, Danny my boy. Now don’t let’s dawdle.”

Frankie and Danny exchanged amused looks as the Captain marched off following the stream. Frankie leaned down to Danny and whispered in his ear, “I hope his navigation at sea is a little better than on land.”

“Much better,” called back the Captain over his shoulder.

“Nothing wrong with his ears, though,” added Frankie. “Come on, at the speed he’s moving at he’ll be out of sight soon.”

Frankie and Danny headed off after the marching Captain Harris as the sound of the jungle began to return to normal with all its screeches and squawks.

As they walked they could smell the salty air from the sea getting stronger and at the same time the jungle was getting less thick and with more and more palm trees and sunlight. It felt a lot safer than the darkness of the rain forest jungle they had passed through. Danny was filled with questions, some of which the Captain answered, some he evaded or changed the subject and some he simply ignored. Of course when Frankie asked a question only the first option was open to the Captain because Frankie would persist with her question until it

was answered to her satisfaction. She was after all a lawyer, and nowadays, apparently, a pirate queen too!

“What about your crew, Captain or what was left of them. Where are they now?” was one such question.

“You’ll see soon enough” Was the Captain’s short answer.

Unfortunately for the Captain it was not detailed or explicit enough for Frankie. “Do you mean they have stayed in this time for the last four hundred years?”

“It was their choice.” Muttered the Captain in a tone that said that was enough of an answer.

But not for Frankie “What do you mean, their choice?”

The Captain stopped and turned to his two shorter companions. He frowned down at them, obviously tired of the relentless questioning. Out came his large forefinger and he shook it at both of them in turn. “This is the last answer to the last question, do you hear me?”

Frankie and Danny nodded. There was something very final in the way the Captain said the last sentence.

“The reason I have been avoiding some of your questions my dear Hawk is that you would not believe me if I told you.”

“Try me, Captain. I’m here am I not, and is that alone not unbelievable to most people. I believed you in the modern world, why would I not believe you now in this world?”

“True I suppose,” granted the Captain. “Right, listen hard my hearties for it is a bizarre tale to be sure.”

“The whole thing is a bit bizarre, Captain,” added Danny.

“Aye, it is for sure. Well Princess Shellaya has more than one kind of magic at her disposal. She has many others in fact. Most of them are good but some are curses that you wouldn’t want to know about. She learned them from a witchdoctor who came from who knows where. He was washed up barely alive in the lagoon one day. Near dead he was but the princess tried her best to save him. He was very old and never regained his strength. He told her his whole tribe had been drowned when a slave trader foundered on a reef a hundred miles south of the island. How he survived was a miracle, or perhaps magic.”

“His family were all dead and his friends as well. He just wanted to join them wherever they had gone to. But he decided to pass on his magic and spells to the princess because of her kindness, and I think he sensed she was special, perhaps he sensed that there was magic already within her. This witchdoctor knew a lot of magic and he knew things he should not have known. Like where to find the golden orchids for instance. I mean, he’d never set foot on the island before. Anyway, the Princess learned from him and learned well.”

“Well, when she wanted to thank me and what was left of my crew for saving her and she decided to do it with the magic she had learned. We could return home and live on for as long as you wanted but be able to return here to this place and time by using the orchid dust. This is what we all do, sometimes just

because we can, and sometimes because we need to. If the Princess is in danger, without knowing why, we somehow all get a feeling that we should return. It must be something to do with the magic I suppose.”

“Is this one of those times?” Asked Frankie, her mind as suspicious as ever.

“Could be. Follow me.” The Captain ploughed into some thick vegetation that stood in front of them, heaving aside vines and pushing back bushes and suddenly all four of them stepped out onto the whitest sand Danny had ever seen, except in brochures for the holidays in the Caribbean that his father could never afford.

The clear waters of the large lagoon lapped up against the ice white sand. All along the beach toward the village in the distance and the old ship anchored off it, the sand was fringed with lush green vegetation and palm trees on one side and the crystal clear, blue waters of the lagoon on the other. Further out ocean waves sprayed white foamy water up into the air as they came up against the coral reef that formed the outside of the lagoon and was the reason the waters of the lagoon were so calm.

The Captain took in the beauty that never ceased to amaze him. “Tis it not paradise?”

Danny and Frankie took in the idyllic scene and neither of them felt inclined to argue.

“Why didn’t you stay here, Captain?” asked Danny.

“A good question, lad. You see, I had made a promise to the queen and a good man always honours his promise.”

“A good woman too,” added Frankie.

“When I was given the letter of authority by her under which I pirated these waters, her last words were that she prayed that I would return home safely and be rewarded by my country when I had finished my duties, and I agreed to that. And, like I say, you can’t break a promise, especially to a queen.”

“Did none of your crew stay?” asked Frankie, looking up at the Captain as he stared out over the lagoon, his nostrils sniffing the warm salt air.

“A few tried it, but they all ended up back in the old country sooner or later. It’s an adventure to travel in time, and exciting to lead a double life amongst people who have no idea of what you are and what you can do. And pirates like adventure and excitement, so that’s what we do. Jack Tar, Black Jake, Billy Boots, they all come and go, and all turn up when you need them. So there’ll be enough for a crew I’m sure, albeit a small one.”

“Billy Boots? He’s the cobbler in the High Street. Makes the finest boots and shoes in the South of England,” said Frankie, a surprised tone to her voice. “he made these,” she added, indicating her boots.

“He should make good boots, he’s been making them for nigh on four hundred years,” said the Captain, looking down at his own boots. “Made these boots for me, must be five years ago. He’s also as good a pirate as you’ll find and a fine sailor. When he’s at the ship’s wheel we sail as straight as an arrow, and he’s a good man to have next to you in a fight, too.”

“No wonder everyone says he’s had that shop for ever,” added Danny.

“Not ever, near on four hundred years, though.” The Captain grinned. He was happy to be back and feel sand under his boots and have the tropical sun on his back. “Come on lets get moving because there’ll be feasting tonight and that takes a bit of organising, and the sun’s already over the yardarm.

Danny looked up along the beach and noticed footprints leading toward the village from where they stood. And big footprints they were too. Danny put his foot in one and then found he could almost fit in his other foot.

Frankie noticed what Danny was doing as did the Captain. “Black Jake by the look of it. He’s a big un alright. Lives back in Africa, whence he came from, nowadays. I rescued him from a slave trader one time and he joined me aboard the Razorback as one of the crew. Just one look at Jake had the Spanish quaking in their boots. Fully six feet eight and as broad across the chest as an oak barrel and as black and shiny as oiled coal. When he stands on the ship’s rail with his scimitar sword clasped between his teeth as we run up alongside a ship we’re going to board, he’s a fearsome sight. And he’ll fight like a tiger once he’s over the side and on their deck. Fierce as he looks and fierce as he is, a gentler man you’d be hard pressed to find. Except if you’re his enemy, that is.”

“How come he’s here now, Captain?” asked Danny, getting a little confused.

“He probably would have felt the need. But just to make sure I rang him on one of those there telephone things. I did say we were on for an adventure and Jake would never miss that.” The Captain started marching along the beach and over his shoulder Frankie and Danny just caught, “told Jack Tar and Billy Boots too. They’ll be here soon, and they’ll have told the others I’ll wager.”

“So much for the magic,” muttered Frankie. “More like the magic of the telephone.”

Frankie and Danny set off to catch up with Captain Harris and they had to run to do it. The Captain’s gaze was fixed on the Razorback as it lay at anchor out in the lagoon. When Frankie and Danny came up on either side of him, they both followed his gaze out over the turquoise waters as they marched along the white sand that was so fine that it squeaked beneath their feet. The Razorback lay at anchor about two hundred paces off the shore and was just the sort of ship that Danny had imagined, although it looked a bit tatty and rundown. It was too far away to make out much detail but a pirate ship was certainly what it looked like, although it had an eerie, empty feel about it.

Without prompting, the Captain started reciting the ship’s details. “A hundred and two feet long overall and ninety one on the waterline. Beam’s thirty four feet and the main mast is ninety one feet of pure hardwood from this very island. Got dismasted in a bit of a scrap with an armed merchantman out of Havana. Lucky shot it was, never hit us with another cannonball the whole fight. We took her easy and it kept us in rum and tobacco for nigh on two years, not to mention a few chests full of gold for our dearly beloved queen. Although Ratty Ratcliffe was the queen’s bookkeeper in Kingstown at the time, so whether she got it or not is anyone’s guess. The hull is made of oak of course, and” ...

“Of course,” added Frankie somewhat sarcastically.

The Captain stopped in his tracks and fixed her with a glare from the steely blue eye blazing below his raised eyebrow. “Stop me if I’m boring you,” he growled in a tone that said he was not pleased with the interruption.

“No, no, carry on please, Captain,” said Danny quickly, for he was enjoying listening as he was after all a mad keen sailor.

But to everyone’s surprise, including Frankie’s, she was the one to continue with the details. “She’s big for a brigantine. She has twenty-eight four inch cannons, and draws only eight feet of water, which is ideal with all the reefs in this area. She’s sleek, fast and very manoeuvrable in the right hands.”

“My hands,” growled the Captain. “Now will you two stop dawdling, I smell smoke on the breeze and I do believe it’s tainted with the smell of cooking food. I reckon we’re in for a right royal feast tonight.”

Danny realised that he was feeling quite hungry, what with the hike through the jungle and giant snake they had had to deal with. He thought back to breakfast and it seemed a long time ago. Then he realised it wasn’t really in the past, the breakfast he had this morning was actually a breakfast four hundred years in the future. Then it all got too confusing so he contented himself with a whiff of the smoke laced with pork and all manner of other aromas as he walked along the beach.

“How do I know so much about the Razorback, Captain?” Frankie was deeply in thought as to why she knew so many details of the ship.

When the Captain stopped and looked down at her, his normally fierce eyes were soft, because he understood the confusion in her mind. “You sailed on her often enough and you even skippered her for nearly six months when I was sick with malaria, so you should know her. Damn near had a mutiny on my hands when I took command again, the crew were that proud to be sailing under the Hawk.”

Something very unusual was happening to Frankie, something she was not at all used to in her modern life. She was confused and unsure, which were not traits of the modern day Hawk at all. “but...” was as far as she got.

“Save it girl, the Princess will explain it all.” In an exasperated voice and with a roll of his eyes he said sternly, “now, can we please set sail for the village.”

Good idea, thought Danny, as the cooking food smelled delicious.

“We certainly can,” said Frankie and marched off along the beach towards the village, “I want to find out what’s going on and it seems that the good Princess will be the one to tell me.”

Danny and the Captain, stood and watched her for a moment, but not Sam, he waddled off after her because he firmly intended to be with the first one to get to the village as his keen nose had picked up the scent of food ages before the others and it was driving him crazy. With a shrug of the shoulders, the Captain, with Dan at his side, stomped off along the beach after the Frankie and Sam.

CHAPTER 6. - THE VILLAGE AND THE PRINCESS

From where she stood by a palm tree among some hand made fishing boats and canoes pulled up on the sand, Frankie watched brown skinned people moved casually about the small village with its semicircle of eleven neat huts made

from wood and palm leaves fringing the sandy ground in the middle of the village. Nobody had yet noticed the pale skinned, red haired figure with the black and white dog sitting patiently at her feet. As casual as the villagers looked, they seemed to be moving around with some purpose. The centrepiece of the village was the large, slow burning fire with red embers and a huge pig cooking on a spit above it. There was other food wrapped in banana leaves cooking on the hot coals as well. The spit was being slowly turned by an enormous black man with a bald head, no shirt and baggy white Arabian pants with a huge scimitar sword thrust through the thick black leather belt around his waist. His coal black skin glistened with sweat from the heat of the embers. Frankie knew immediately that it was Black Jake

The ten or so men of the village had dark hair, brown skin and wore a brightly coloured cloth around their waist that hung to the knees and they wore no shoes. The women also had brown skin with a pale yellow frangipani flower tucked behind their ear making a beautiful contrast to their silky black hair. They were all dressed similarly too, wearing bright sarongs of a multitude of colours and a necklace of bright shells.

Frankie was so engrossed in watching the scene in the village that she hardly heard the Captain and Dan join her in taking in the scene.

“My little piece of paradise,” said the Captain quietly.

“They’re all so beautiful,” whispered Dan, as he watched the women and girls moving around.

“Indeed they are, lad, and that’s why the slave traders come and try and capture them. Remember, we’re back in the days of the slave trade, so we must always be on our guard, just like the people here. They look relaxed and happy, but they can disappear into the jungle in a flash if a strange ship is sighted. Many a slave trader has met his death in the jungle beyond the village in his evil quest to take these lovely people from their homes and sell them to the highest bidder in heaven knows where,” said the Captain. “And served them right it did too. But they took their toll, years ago there were over a hundred people in this village, now there is only about twenty men and women left.”

“If they’re so alert, why haven’t they seen us yet?” asked Dan.

“They know we’re here, Danny,” said Frankie, without taking her eyes off the goings-on in the village. “But they know we mean them no harm.”

“Come on, no point in standing here,” said the Captain and had barely taken a pace when from the largest hut in village, the one in the centre of the semicircle of huts facing the lagoon, stepped a woman of incredible beauty, even more beautiful than beautiful women that were strolling about. The Captain stopped when he saw her. “She still takes my breath away, even after all these years.”

“Princess Shellaya,” whispered Frankie, not knowing why she recognised her.

“Indeed it is,” said the Captain as he watched her talking to the small white man of anywhere between fifty and seventy or, more like three hundred and seventy in real terms.

Danny said nothing but just stared with his mouth hanging open. It was the stuff of fairy tales; a beautiful Princess and a desert island paradise. When he was younger and had read fairy stories, but never had there been a picture of a

beautiful Princess in any of the books that could compare with the one he was looking at now.

“And I believe that is the cobbler from the high street with her. Am I correct, Captain?” inquired the ever watchful Hawk.

“Yes. I wonder if he brought my new boots with him.” The Captain marched off toward the Princess and Billy Boots with Sam in hot pursuit, for to get to the Princess they would have to pass close to the fire and, of course, the roasting pig. The others followed, their eyes darting everywhere as they took it all in.

Black Jake was fully focused on his job of basting the juicy pork with some kind of juice from a half coconut shell when the Captain came up behind him.

“Well, I can’t say I’m surprised to find you in charge of the food, Black Jake. Is this just for you or are we all going to get some?”

Black Jake turned from what he was doing, dropped the now empty coconut shell and his face split into an enormous grin, his snow white teeth gleaming against his coal black skin. He engulfed the Captain in an enormous bear hug. The Captain was big man himself but Black Jake easily lifted him off his feet. “It’s good to see you again, my Captain.”

“Put me down, you useless fly eaten excuse for a pirate,” blustered the Captain.

Black Jake, still grinning from ear to ear despite the Captain’s insults, gently put the Captain down and released him from the bear hug. The Captain smiled up at the enormous black face above him.

“It’s good to be back, Jake, very good.” The Captain looked past the giant to the Princess, who was watching, her eyes twinkling with amusement.

Sam’s tail was wagging furiously as he patiently waited at the Captain’s side to catch Black Jake’s eye. He knew it would be worth the wait.

Jake looked down at Sam and smiled. “Yes, Sam, I know what you want.” Jake drew a large, savage looking knife from his wide black belt and hacked off a big piece of pork from the roasting pig. “There you are. I bet you’ve been waiting for that since you first set foot on the beach.” He gave it to Sam, who didn’t waste any time, and with a couple of chews it was gone.

Frankie and Dan stood quietly just behind the Captain as Princess Shellaya walked over to the fire with Billy Boots behind her. The whole village had stopped what it was doing and was watching.

Black Jake’s attention had been on his beloved captain, but when he set eyes on Frankie his mouth hung open in surprise. He stepped past the Captain in one enormous stride and scooped Frankie up in his arms. He stared at her face. “You’re alive,” was all he could say.

Frankie was powerless against his huge, muscular arms. “I won’t be for much longer if you don’t let go you muscle bound madman.”

This brought an even bigger smile to his face than when the Captain had berated him earlier. He gently put her down and stood back to look at her. “I can’t believe you’re alive!”

Princess Shellaya was now standing next to the Captain with Billy Boots at her side. “It was difficult to save you Frankie and I couldn’t do for you the same as I did for the rest of the brave crew, but I could do something,” said the Princess. There was an air about the graceful and stunningly beautiful Princess that made people listen when she spoke in her soft and kindly voice. All around her were silent.

“What happened? I don’t understand all this,” asked Frankie, her bright green eyes staring into the large dark brown eyes of the young woman in front of her.

The Princess smiled softly. “You were badly hurt, Frankie, almost lost to us when Jake carried you to me, but you were dying and I knew I couldn’t save you. It was a terrible and bloody battle and you fought as you always do, with honour and courage. But your adversaries did not have the same code of conduct. You have a birth mark on your back don’t you, just about here.” The Princess pointed to a spot on her own back, just above the waist and to the right of her backbone.

Without thinking, Frankie put her hand to the same position on her own back and pulled up her blouse. Danny could see from where he stood that she did indeed have a small, thin birthmark on her back.

“How did you know?” asked Frankie as she touched the mark on her back.

“It was part of the spell. I couldn’t save you at the time, but I could make sure you would come back to us, and to make sure we would recognise you, I put a spell on you that you would carry the mark of where the cowardly slave trader stabbed you in the back. I could not tell when you would be reborn, only that one day you would. And here you are. It’s taken nearly four hundred years but you are back with us at last.” With that the Princess stepped forward and gently embraced Frankie. “Welcome back Francesca Hawkstone, The Hawk”.

Frankie could feel the love and goodness radiating from Shellaya and it was such a good feeling she did not want her to let go. She put her arms around the Princess, the scent of the frangipani flower sweet in her nose as she hugged her in return.

Slowly but surely, in the background a slow chant led by Jake was building to the beat of jungle drums. The Princess released Frankie and stepped back. The chant grew louder and faster and Frankie suddenly realise what they were chanting. “Hawk, Hawk, Hawk, Hawk they chanted. The whole village had formed a circle around the two women.

Dan found himself sandwiched between to boys of around the same age as himself, both of whom were chanting with the others. The chant was infectious and Dan joined in with everyone else.

Frankie looked around her in stunned silence. She couldn’t help smiling.

Princess Shellaya raised her arm and the chanting subsided. She addressed those around her. “Today is the day we have all awaited, the return of the Hawk. Tonight will be a great night of feasting. Let the celebration begin.” She turned to the Captain, “and, as always, I’m pleased to see you too, Horatio.”

“And me, you, Princess. It was a shock when Frankie walked into my home this morning I can tell you. After all this time, I was beginning to wonder whether that spell of yours had worked,” said the Captain as both he and Princess Shellaya looked at the bemused Frankie.

“Our world does not move very quickly, but fast enough at a day for each of your modern world years. Even I had begun to doubt my own abilities. But she is back, and that’s all that matters,” said the Princess, with a happy smile. Noticing Dan for the first time she said, “and who is this handsome young man you have brought to visit?”

Dan felt himself melt under the gaze of the Princess’ dark brown eyes. He even felt himself blushing. It’s not every day a thirteen year old boy gets to meet a real princess on a tropical island, especially when you come from a poor family in a small town in the south of England. Dan mustered his courage and nervously stepped forward to face the Princess. “Daniel Boyd, your highness,” said Danny as calmly as he could and clumsily attempted a bow.

“What a chivalrous young man. Not at all what I would have expected of one of Horatio’s... friends,” she said with a small smile. “And why are you here, Daniel?”

“I’m here to help the Captain. We have...”

“Some business to settle from our world. And Ali Sharkbar and his slimy little friend Ratty Ratcliffe are involved,” cut in the Captain. “It is going to be a long and hard journey to get what I need,” he added.

When Dan heard the last bit of what the Captain said, he realised what an arduous task they had undertaken. They were on a desert island in the Caribbean and the Queen of England was sitting on her throne in Windsor Castle in England. They were going to have to cross the Atlantic Ocean to get there, and in a ship made out of wood with canvas sails and no engine to turn on in emergencies or even a radio. He had a feeling his skills as a sailor would be tested soon enough.

The Princess knew it was serious as she could feel things that others could not. “Well, Horatio I’m sure it can all wait until tomorrow when I have no doubt some more of your crew will be arriving to help you with your quest. When I saw Black Jake walking along the beach and then Billy Boots arriving, I knew something was going on. In the meantime, lets enjoy the evening as we have so many times before.”

With that the Princess beckoned to some girls that were standing nearby holding half coconut shells full of a clear red coloured liquid with pieces of tropical fruit floating in it. They stepped forward and offered one to the Captain and Frankie and one girl around the same age as Dan held one out for him. She was very shy and Dan, full of confidence after having met a real princess, took the drink and smiled at the girl, who then ran off with the other two giggling as girls do.

“You’re a bit of a novelty, Danny,” said Princess Shellaya. They’ll get used to you.” The Princess looked beyond Dan out over the lagoon. “Do you feel that you too have been here before Danny?” Asked the Princess casually.

“I’ve never even been out of England before, apart from a one day school trip to Paris,” answered Danny as he looked at the Princess, who simply smiled at him in return.

In all the excitement, Dan hadn’t noticed that dusk was almost upon them. Had the day passed so quickly because of the excitement or did time travel have something to with it? As he looked at the Princess and noticed that she was

bathed in a golden glow, and so was the Captain. He turned with Frankie and they looked out over the lagoon as the setting sun touched the horizon way out in the distance. The Razorback, anchored out in the lagoon was bathed in the golden light of the sunset. The water glittered like gold as it caught the last of the sun's rays for the day. Dan was amazed how fast the sun slid below the horizon. The sunsets were much slower back home in England.

And then Dan saw it, way out near the horizon: Was it the sails of a ship? He squinted in an effort to see it because of the blazing light of the setting sun, but he lost it in the glare. He was sure it was sails he saw. Should he say something? He squinted into the setting sun again. Yes, he was sure it was sails he saw. "Er, is that sails on the horizon," he said quietly and to no one in particular.

Frankie heard him and looked in the direction he was looking. Her sharp eyes picked them out too. "You're right Dan, it's a ship." Frankie turned to the Princess and the Captain. "Are you expecting visitors?"

There was immediate concern in the Princess' voice, "no we are not, well not from the sea, anyway." The only visitors she was expecting was the rest of the Captain's crew and they would come the same way as the others, which was through the jungle from the cave. She turned to one of the men of the tribe that stood nearby. "Sound the shell!" He ran off immediately.

Barely a few seconds later Dan heard the low and eerie sound of a large conch seashell being blown to sound the alarm. People ran about the village in an orderly but urgent fashion, and slowly a line formed either side of the Princess and the Captain as the men of the village appeared armed with all manner of weapons.

In the gathering darkness it was almost impossible to see the ship out to sea, but Dan's sharp eyesight could definitely tell that the shadowy shape in the distance was getting closer, "it's coming this way," he said. A feeling of apprehension made Dan shiver slightly. As though sensing it, Frankie reached around Dan with one arm and gave him a squeeze. He was amazed at how strong she was.

"If it gets bad, stick close to me," said Frankie, her eyes still fixed on the shadowy shape out to sea. She turned to Dan and fixed him with her emerald green eyes, and this time there was no sparkle or laughter in her eyes, just a cold, hard look. "I don't like the feel of this. Remember, if it comes to a fight, you are fighting for your life, do you understand me?"

The best Dan could do was nod.

Princess Shellaya stepped forward. "He will come with me, it will be safer." She locked eyes with Frankie who, after a pause, nodded her approval.

Frankie turned back to Dan and again fixed him with her amazing eyes. "The Princess is right, Dan, you are not ready for this yet. I fully intend to get you back home in one piece, so it is best you do as the Princess says. You are to protect her at all costs if things take a turn for the worst."

"I will, Frankie," said Dan, vowing inside that he would let no harm come to the Princess. And with that, the Princess walked away.

The Captain spoke in a stern and determined tone. “Off you go lad. Look after the Princess. There will be blood shed this night and we cannot allow it to be that of the Princess.”

Dan nodded and headed off after the Princess, a look of determination on his face concealed the nerves he felt and the butterflies that fluttered in his stomach. Was it only this morning that he was walking along his street on his way to the park?

The Captain dropped to one knee and gave Sam’s ears a good scratch as he looked into his old friend’s eyes, which he always did before a battle. “You go with them Sam and let no harm come to either of them, you understand?”

Sam growled quietly, and when the Captain stood up, Sam turned and trotted off after the Princess and Dan, only turning his head briefly to look at the succulent pork on a spit it appeared he wasn’t going to enjoy after all.

The voice of the Captain rang out over the village. “Take your positions. Women and children go into the jungle and hide with the Princess. If this is who I think it is, we’ll give them a welcome to remember. Black Jake, take Billy Boots and half a dozen of the villagers out to the Razorback, you know what to do. And Jake, show no lights, none at all. That ship has to look as dark and dead as a ghost ship.”

Black Jake, towering over those around him, looked an awesome sight. “Aye, aye Captain, a ghost ship it is.” There was a gleam from his white teeth as he broke into a broad grin at the prospect of action, and in an instant he had set about gathering some men of the village to man the Razorback.

The Captain stood next to Frankie as they again both stared out over the lagoon. Frankie had taken up her normal defiant stance of hands on hips and chin jutting out as though she was daring whoever was aboard the mystery ship to set foot on this particular beach.

“They mean no good, I can feel it,” she said, almost sniffing the air.

“I reckon you’re right, Frankie my girl. I believe we’re in for a fight alright,” agreed the Captain. “But they’ll be getting a reception they’re not expecting, that’s for sure.”

Black Jake was hauling a heavy open wooden boat, exactly the same as the whaler in the Captain’s boatshed, down the beach to the water. The village men he had selected to go with him to the Razorback out in the lagoon helped by pushing the boat, but you got the impression he was very capable of doing it on his own if he had to. His muscles bulged beneath his shiny coal black skin and his face bore a ferocious scowl as he glared toward the back of the boat. That was because little Billy Boots sitting casually in the stern, his legs crossed and his arm draped across the tiller. “What are you looking at? Just get us into the water, there’s a good lad,” said Billy, then added, “come on, all of you push, we haven’t got all day.”

The veins in Black Jake’s neck bulged as he heaved even harder on the bow of the boat. His muscles bulged as he hissed out, “one of these days Billy, I’ll...”

“Less talking and more pulling will get us there quicker, now put your back into it,” said Billy as he pointed towards the water. They were great friends and Billy enjoyed stirring up the huge man pulling the boat. They had saved each others lives plenty of times over the years and were as close as brothers, and

fought like them too. They didn't look much like brothers though, with Billy being twenty years older than Jake, five feet four inches tall and weighing about as much as one of Jake's legs.

Even though he was straining with effort Black Jake managed a huge grin. He was enjoying himself immensely.

"And stop grinning you idiot, they'll see your teeth from two miles," said Billy, which just made Jake's grin even wider.

The Captain and Frankie watched with some amusement and knew the bickering between the two would continue even during the approaching battle.

"Come on girl, we have things to do," said the Captain as he set off toward the huts.

Frankie called after him. "Like what exactly, there's just the two of us?" and took off after him.

Without stopping, the Captain replied over his shoulder, "you might have the eyes of a hawk, but I've got the ears of a bat. Listen." The Captain hesitated for a moment and then, apparently content, he carried on, "more of the crew are close by. They're coming through the jungle. They must have spotted the ship and got off the beach."

Now Frankie heard it, the faint sound of voices coming from the darkness of the jungle. She listened closely. Was she hearing it right? If she was not mistaken, the voices she could hear were singing. Yes, they were definitely singing. And it was a song she'd heard many times before, as it was a song the crew of the Razorback always sang when they were preparing for battle. To Frankie it sounded very good right now, because even though Princess Shellaya had explained what had happened to her and why she was slowly but surely becoming her former self, it would be her first fight as a reborn pirate.

Her logical lawyer's mind took over and she realized that with her gymnastics training in the modern world with all its equipment and facilities and the skills she has honed as a competition fencer, she was now a better swordswoman than she was in the old days and fitter, stronger and more agile, too. A small, impish smile crept to her lips and her emerald eyes sparkled at the prospect of what lay ahead. If it was slave traders out there at sea that intended to attack this village to steal these lovely people and sell them as slaves they were in for a mighty big surprise when they came up against the new Hawk. Without knowing it, she had turned and was standing with her hands on her hips and looking defiantly out into the darkness of the ocean.

A shout from the Captain over at the edge of the jungle snapped her out of her thoughts, "what are you doing, woman, standing there in the middle of the village for all to see?"

"Keep your hair on, I'm coming." Frankie turned and headed off toward the Captain at a run on feet as light as a feather. It was if she hardly touched the sandy ground and could take off and fly if she wanted to, which she did. She flew like an Olympic gymnast and was a blur of somersaulting, twirling and spinning before she landed smack bang in front of the Captain. "Well, I'm here, what do we do now, Captain?" She asked in a very matter of fact and casual tone.

The Captain rolled his eyes. "I think I prefer the old Hawk. The others are nearly here. I've heard Jack Tar's voice, Toby Jug, Well Dressed Frank and a few others, so we might have enough to give them something to remember."

"They've stopped singing," noted Frankie.

"The ship must be close now, and noise travels over water at night so it's time to clam up," said the Captain.

Frankie spoke quietly, "won't they be wary because of the Razorback being anchored in the lagoon?"

"They'll of heard the stories that circulate in the pirate towns and villages around the Caribbean about the crew that disappeared, and disappear we did. To them the Razorback is an empty, rotting hulk inhabited by a ghost crew. Pirates are scared of ghosts and slave traders are terrified of them. They know that they themselves have done a lot of evil things and killed a lot of innocent people over the years and the last thing they want to come up against is a ghost from their past. Little do they know that we deliberately made the outside of the Razorback look like she's ready for Davy Jones locker, but that ship is as strong and ready for action as the day she was launched. And what's more, her gunpowder is dry and the bores of her cannon barrels are clean and shiny, so she's ready to fire a broadside if need be."

"That would explain Black Jake and Billy Boots boarding her with some of the men from the village," mused Frankie.

One by one the crew of the razorback, dressed in a mixture of modern clothes and some more suited to a pirate of the sixteen hundreds, emerged from the inky darkness of the jungle. They were a strange looking bunch in their mix of old and modern clothes, and all armed with swords, but they were all delighted to see the captain and numerous sets of white teeth split the darkness. Of course, these were pirates, so there were numerous black gaps in the teeth, the odd sparkle of a gold tooth or two and some that were just a dull yellow.

Once the twelve men had quietly gone through their handshaking and happy greetings with the Captain their attention turned to Frankie and it all went very quiet. Frankie stood so silent and unflinching she was almost menacing. Then, simultaneously Frankie and the men before her broke into wide grins. Frankie recognised every one of the men and knew them all by name. Her transition back to a pirate queen was all but complete. As for the men, the smiles said it all for they had been reunited with the Hawk, their Hawk.

Unfortunately, the situation did not allow for jubilant cheers and backslapping as the sound of creaking oars told of approaching boats. The men knew what they must do. They would be outnumbered four to one, and many of them had not raised a sword in anger for quite a while. They would need all their courage, skill and cunning if they were to see the morning.

"Remember," whispered the Captain, this is for the people of the village and the Princess, for it was she that has given us what we have. If these scurvy dogs do what I expect, once they find the village empty they will avail themselves of a ready made feast and drink heartily of the potent native brew. Then they will wait until daylight to search the surrounding jungle for the hiding villagers they intend to sell in the slave markets of the world. Well my hearties, they are in for a nasty surprise. We must stop them here, because if they get into the jungle they may find the Princess, and she will be the prize they seek. Now spread out and wait for my signal."

The crew of the Razorback melted quietly into the shadows of the jungle. It was eerily quiet with just the sound of the water lapping up against the sandy beach and the slow rhythmic squeak of oars in rowlocks as the slavers approached the shore. The squeaking stopped and the sound of four wooden boats, one after the other, nudging onto the sand could be heard. Soon after came the sound of footsteps and the drawing of swords.

In a small cave, Dan sat in silence near the entrance, alert and watchful. Somewhere behind him, in the inky black interior of the cave, a mother stifled a baby's crying. The sound seemed incredibly loud to Dan, but he put it down to how silent it was all around, with not even an animal stirring in the jungle in front of the cave. Dan checked his hand and expected to see it trembling in the shard of starlight that crept through the jungle canopy and lit the floor of the cave entrance just in front of him. He saw only a hint of a shake which, considering where he was and what was happening, pleased him very much indeed.

This seemed to boost his confidence and he raised his sword and watched the starlight shine from its razor sharp blade. He was letting his arm get used to the weight, which felt quite natural, when he felt a warm, soft hand on his wrist, which gently moved the sword out of the shard of starlight. He looked around and gazed into the dark eyes of Princess Shellaya. She said nothing, but just her presence filled Dan with a kind of pride. He would fight for this beautiful and enchanting young woman, even if it cost him his own young life, and he would do it happily. His whole body seemed to grow and become stronger because of what he felt. Then he realised that he really was growing stronger. The touch of the princess had done something to his body. Muscles began to bulge in his arms where before they were just wiry from working with the boats on the lake, now they were real muscles, not those of a thirteen year old. He felt his stomach and the muscles that were forming there. He looked at the Princess and she smiled knowingly.

Stealthy figures crept into the deserted village, with its fire still burning and the aroma of delicious roast pork hanging in the still night air. They were a nasty looking bunch alright, the leader of the landing party was a short, stocky Arab with a hooked nose and dark evil eyes that even in the darkness had a glint of savagery about them. He, like the rest, was dressed in black robes with only his eyes and nose showing through a gap in the black cloth that covered his head. Evil Achmed, as he was known, soon realised that the villagers had seen them approaching and taken to the jungle to hide as one by one his men looked over after looking inside the huts and shook their heads.

Achmed walked to the fire, picked up a flaming piece of wood, turned and walked down to the beach and waved the burning wood above his head like a torch and his curved scimitar sword in the other with fire glinting from the blade. In moments a lantern waved back from the ship out in the lagoon near the Razorback. As he turned back to the village, the motley bunch of slavers were already hacking into the pork with long sharp knives and guzzling the potent bowls of drink the villagers had left behind. He pulled away the cloth covering his face and sneered what was his version of a smile as he walked over to the fire. Tomorrow they would comb the jungle for the slaves his captain, Volkram the Vulture, demanded, but for now he would enjoy the food and drink the stupid villagers had kindly left them. He joined in with his men to devour the meat and drink heavily of the strong island brew that was more potent than whisky and rum combined.

Captain Horatio ‘Horrible’ Harris watched the scene from behind a moss covered fallen tree in the shadows of the jungle. He grinned, for everything was going to plan and soon the slavers would be drunk and after that would come sleep. He intended to see they had a rude awakening. But it was not to be!

Another boat pulled up on the beach and Volkram the Vulture, or just Vulture as he was known, strode into the village. “You fools,” he growled at the feasting men.

The men stopped what they were doing because when the Vulture wanted your attention he got it and for most of this bunch had seen what happens to people who do not do as the Vulture bids. He had even been known to have a man fed to the sharks for tending to a starving slave who had been flogged within an inch of his life for stealing a potato.

The Vulture was tall and wiry, with dark skin, a gold tooth and a patch over one eye, which came courtesy of a misfiring musket when he was taking pot shots at the survivors of a ship they had sunk. Of course this was after they had taken prisoner all the people he thought they could sell as slaves. He had a cutlass in one hand and a long curved knife with a bejewelled handle tucked into his belt. It was the same knife that he had used to stab the old Hawk in the back that led to her dying in Princess Shellaya’s arms.

From her hiding place at the edge of the jungle, Frankie’s eyes were drawn to him as he stood erect and threatening, a callous killer who had the men before him cowering in fear. Well she wasn’t a man, and she wasn’t afraid. She also had a score to settle. Frankie stood and walked in to the clearing. As she approached the fire the Vulture noticed the vague shape of the approaching figure for the first time in the darkness.

“And what do we have here?” said the Vulture in an arrogant and superior tone. He was unafraid, for there was no one left in the Caribbean that could threaten him now the crew of the Razorback had mysteriously disappeared. The dark face with the cruel, sneering grin watched as the slender figure slowly emerged from the dark shadows of the jungle trees into the light of the fire. As Frankie’s face was lit by the fire, her green eyes shining and her hair glinting red in the firelight, the grin on the Vulture’s face faded and was replaced by a look of surprise and then confusion.

The slavers turned to look at her, but none made any attempt to move. They just stared in silence.

Frankie’s voice was cold and menacing. “What’s wrong, Volkram, were you not expecting me?”

“It cannot be, you are dead. I killed you myself.” Without thinking, the Vulture’s hand felt for the jewelled handle of the knife in his belt.

Frankie walked forward toward him. “Apparently I’m not.” In a flash her sword was in her hand. “I’m as real as the steel of this blade. And tonight you will feel this steel.”

“You may really be the Hawk, but you are one person, and we are many.” The Vulture indicated the men around her.

Frankie calmly turned her gaze to the thirty slavers that ringed her, and the men looked back, hypnotised by the emerald green eyes and unsure of what they

saw. They had seen the Hawk stabbed in the back by their leader and saw her fall. Was this a ghost before them? They were superstitious sailors, and a fight with other men was a way of life, but a ghost, a spirit with who knows what powers, that was another thing altogether.

The Vulture sensed the men's unease. He had to act now. "Kill her." But no one moved. He said it louder and with a menace in his voice the men knew meant death to those that disobeyed. "Kill her!" shouted the Vulture.

Evil Achmed was the first to move as he obeyed his master and lunged at Frankie. She seemed to hardly move as she turned enough for his sword lunge narrowly missed her chest. But she made no mistake and her razor sharp sword tip emerged from Achmed's back after passing through the middle of his heart. He would never commit another evil deed in this life.

Her eyes never left the Vulture's as she pulled her sword free and Achmed crumpled to the ground dead.

"Get her, hissed the Vulture.

Unsure, the men hesitated. In the light of the fire, the Vulture stared at the wide semi circle of his men behind Frankie and the darkness beyond. One by one they started dropping their weapons.

The Vulture was confused. "What are you doing? Kill her." But nobody moved.

In the darkness beyond the semi circle of men, and out of sight of the Vulture, Captain Harris and his men held swords against the necks of the Vulture's crews. Between each of the Razorback's crew was one of the village men doing the same with a spear. The Vulture's crew knew they were beaten, and being the cowards that they were, they had no stomach for a fight once they were at a disadvantage.

Captain Harris stepped from the shadows. "How many slaves have you aboard your ship, Vulture?"

The Vulture tried to appear calm and in control. "Two hundred. Perhaps we can come to an arrangement. You let me go and you can have half that number to sell to the highest bidder. They are mostly African. You will get a good price for them."

The contempt in Frankie's voice was clear. "We're not slave traders. We will not take half the number on your ship, we will take them all and set them free. They will return whence they came in your vessel. You, on the other hand, along with this bunch cowardly dogs will row from the lagoon in the small boats on the beach, and good luck to you, because you will very probably need it. The ocean is rarely kind to cowards in small boats."

The Vulture's face betrayed the anger that lay within. He was used to other people begging for mercy and now he was going to be forced to do it. "That is a death sentence,"

"The alternative is that you die here and now," said Frankie, and in what was almost matter of fact tone. "Take it or leave it? With that she turned her back on the Vulture, who's terrible and cruel anger was rising to the surface. It was this very uncontrollable anger that made him such a murderous man.

“Then I will leave it.” In a flash the jewelled dagger was in his hand and was flying at Frankie’s back. Its blade flickering in the firelight as it homed in on the same spot it entered her body before.

But this time the Hawk was ready, and before the Captain could shout a warning, Frankie spun around and flicked the flying dagger away with her sword. “You killed me once, you will not do it again.”

“We will see,” snarled the Vulture, and with a murderous glint in his wild dark eyes, he charged at Frankie his sword flashing in the firelight.

Frankie deflected a swing with her blade that would have cut her head off, the force of the blow knocking her off balance. But no matter how many sword blows the Vulture rained upon Frankie, her trusty blade was always there to block it.

Captain Harris and the others watched in silence. Out of the corner of his eye he saw one of the Vulture’s men slowly dragging his dropped sword back toward him with his foot. He rapped the man across the shin with the flat of his blade. “Do you want a wooden leg?”

“I’ve already got one,” replied the man.

The captain glanced down and, sure enough, the man’s other leg was a roughly carved peg leg made out of wood. He quickly went back to watching the fight before them.

Frankie was now attacking herself and forcing the Vulture back towards the fire as he frantically fended away her thrusts and sweeping blows. Frankie’s sword seemed to come from everywhere and only the Vulture’s years of experience saved him. His years of experience had also taught him plenty of dirty tricks, and as he parried a blow from Frankie he feigned a stumble and went down on one knee by the fire as though he was weakening. The next thing a flaming red log was flying at Frankie’s face.

As she lunged to one side to avoid it, the Vulture struck, launching from the ground in a murderous lunge aimed at Frankie’s heart. A momentary snarl of satisfaction split his face, but was quickly replaced by one of surprise as Frankie’s supple gymnast’s body somehow eluded the lunging blade and her own blade slid between the Vulture’s ribs and through his heart.

With a look of total surprise the Vulture dropped to his knees and his sword fell from his dead hand. Frankie planted her foot on his chest and pushed him onto his back as she pulled her sword free. She slowly turned to take in the Vulture’s stunned crew. The Hawk’s face was as hard a stone when she spoke it was quietly but with a menace that had the men quaking in their boots. “And so die all those that ply the slave trade,” Everything was very still and quiet.

The Captain broke the ominous silence. “Get them in the boats and cast them adrift. The wind and current will take them due West to who knows where. And if I ever catch sight of any of you again you’ll meet the same fate as Volkram: A sword through your black heart. Go now before I set Black Jake upon you. You’ll get no second chance with him. He hates slavers even more than I do.”

The Vulture’s crew needed no urging, but got the occasional sword or spear tip jabbed into their backside anyway to speed them toward the beach and the boats pulled up on the sand.

The Captain called after his crew and the men of the village. "Get out to the ship and free the slaves. And tell Jake and Billy boots what's going on, they might fancy a bit of target practice and small boats full of cowardly dogs make for good targets."

Frankie was very quiet as she took in what she had just done, and the Captain knew what was going through her mind.

"You have to leave the modern world behind, lass. This is the sixteen hundreds and a world where the law is the sword. Two are dead, two cold hearted traders in human life. They've died so that two hundred innocent souls imprisoned aboard that ship out there can be free to return to their families."

Frankie pondered this statement. Then suddenly a quizzical look came over her face and she looked to the Captain.

"I hear it too. The Captain, old and big as he was, had turned and was making surprising speed toward the jungle at the edge of the camp as the muffled sound of steel against steel echoed through the trees. Even as the Captain ran at an impressive speed for his age and size, Frankie was past him and darting through the trees in a fast weaving run that left the Captain in her wake.

Danny was fighting for his life. It was fortunate the cave entrance was narrow so that only one of the slavers could fight him at a time, the others being forced to huddle in a group behind him, brandishing their swords in an effort to kill the elusive dog that tore at their legs in a snarling frenzy, for they had guessed what grand prize awaited them inside the cave. But first they had to get past this pesky boy that was denying them their prize and no matter how many glancing sword blows this mad dog took, and regardless of the blood that sprayed from his many wounds, their legs were taking a terrible mauling.

Danny parried one thrust after another from the slaver at the entrance, but still he held his ground. At first he was scared, more scared than he'd ever been in his young life when he confronted the six tough and grizzled crew of slave ship. It had been part of Volkram's plan to land one boat further down the beach and for six of his men to work their way into the forest to cut off any escape, but these six mangy mongrels of men had stumbled on the hiding place of the slave worth more than any other, Princess Shellaya.

Danny, as strong and muscular as he now was, was weakening as a third member of the motley crew, Davros, took the other's place to slash and stab at Danny with fresh arms and attitude. And this man, the cruellest and craftiest of the mob, had waited for Danny to tire before he took his turn at trying to kill the wiry and muscular youth that blocked their way.

Danny was now being forced back from the narrow cave entrance by Davros, and he knew that once inside the cave became wider and they could easily overwhelm him. Sam was a snarling, snapping blur as he forced two men against the rock wall next to the cave. He darted in between their sword slashes and sank his teeth into wherever he could before he had to let go to avoid a slashing blade, but as soon as the blade was past him he went in again. The men were screaming and yelping as they tried in vain to run their attacker through, but he was just too fast. It seemed the more they yelped and screeched the more this snarling whirlwind of claws and teeth savaged them.

It was vital that Danny stood his ground, and he knew he must for he had given his word to the Captain that he would protect the Princess with his last breath.

And Danny had no intention of breaking his word, which was unfortunate for the man in front of him.

Davros lifted his efforts, and so too did Danny, unsure himself how he was doing it. Danny's sword was a glimmering blur of glinting silver as he forced Davros and his men backwards. He was fighting with the strength of a man, and a strong man at that! Davros was now fighting for his life against a mere youth, albeit a strangely powerful one.

One particularly fast and powerful blow from Danny as he emerged snarling from the cave caused Davros to stumble backward and trip over one of his companions and the two men fell to ground in a tangled heap. They looked up at Danny in fear. Davros cowered, weakly holding his sword up as defence against the blow he feared would end his life, but it never came. Instead he heard a voice, a woman's voice.

"You gutless, scurvy dogs. Pick on a boy would you?" The men still standing whirled around at the sound of Frankie's voice to find her standing with a hand on one hip and a blood smeared sword in the other.

A bark from Sam, in addition to the low growl that kept the two men with their backs against the rock wall from moving, got her attention. "Sorry Sam. And a dog. Would you like to try luck against a girl, too?" Frankie's sword snaked out at such speed that the two men that were standing closest to her were standing with their pants around their ankles before they knew it, their belts sliced neatly through.

"A boy, a girl, a dog and an old man," growled the Captain as he walked out of the trees into a patch of moonlight. "You six don't have a chance, so why don't you just scuttle off and clamber into your little boat so you can join the rest of your scum sucking brethren at the mercy of the wind and currents. And you can leave your weapons here."

No one moved. The Captain rolled his eyes and then let out a blood curdling roar. That was all the urging the men needed and soon their swords were clattering into a pile on the ground and the men running for their lives, and for two of them it was a very clumsy exercise as they had to hold up their pants at the same time. Sam, oblivious to his wounds, added to their woes by chasing them, snarling and snapping at their heels.

Danny stood in silence, scarcely believing what had just happened. The he felt soft warm fingers on his shoulder and turned to look into the liquid brown eyes of Princess Shellaya. "Thank you Danny, you are courageous and strong beyond your years. You had the courage and I have given you the strength. From now on whenever you need it, it will come to you.

"Thank you, your Highness," said Danny quietly.

The Princess smiled softly and Danny was struck by her incredible beauty and the kindness that seemed to flow from her when you were close to her.

"Well, I think you and your people will be safe from the slave traders for a while now, Princess," said the Captain as he sheathed his sword to signal that the battle was over.

"Ah, but there are always the pirates to worry about," said the Princess with cheeky grin.

“The pirates won’t bother you if you have no treasure to steal. No gold, or silver, or precious gems like diamonds and pearls,” said the Captain.

Frankie had noticed the sly grin on the Princess’ face and her lawyer’s instincts took over. “But you do have treasure, don’t you, Princess.”

“As always, Frankie, you miss nothing. You truly are the Hawk. Follow me.” The Princess turned and went back into the cave. The others followed.

The inside of the cave was pitch black. Danny saw a small flame as it lit a torch made of dried grass. He couldn’t be sure, but it seemed to come from Princess Shellaya’s fingertip. Soon a yellow light from the torch the Princess held lit the cave as she walked on further into the cave with the others following.

In a few moments they came to the huddled group of women and children from the village.

“It is safe now, you can return to the village. We are alive and free thanks to these people and we must thank them, so again make ready the feast,” said the Princess, and smiles broke out on everyone’s face for the first time since they fled the village.

As they filed past to leave the cave, three of the girls of Danny’s age looked at him as though he was a hero, which of course he was. Danny hardly had time to blush before the girls ran off giggling.

“I think you have some admirers Danny,” said the Princess as she walked further into the cave.

They had walked for quite a few minutes before the Princess had to light another torch that was wedged in a crack in the rock wall from the dying flames of the last one. “It’s not far now,” said the Princess and again started walking.

And then they were there. A large chamber opened out before them and in its centre was treasure, lots of treasure.

“Is this not the kind of treasure that all pirates seek?” asked the princess innocently.

There were two chests overflowing with gold and silver coins, jewels of all colours, silver plates and gold goblets, jewel encrusted necklaces and tiaras, and all piled in an untidy heap around the chests.

Danny’s mouth hung open, for he had never seen treasure before, except in a film or on television, and that all seemed so long ago now.

The Captain looked at the chest with a furrowed brow. The initial ‘B’ neatly carved on the side of the chest was visible next to the heap of gold coins and jewels piled up against it. He walked over to the chest and pushed the pile of coins aside and two other carved initials were revealed, an ‘A’ and an ‘S’ before the ‘B’ to make ‘ASB’. The Captain grinned. “Well, I’ll be. I wondered where this lot ended up. Recognize it, Frankie?”

Frankie had her hands defiantly on her hips as usual. “Of course I do, I stole it off him once.”

“Off of who?” asked Danny, completely baffled by what they were talking about.

Frankie pointed her sword at the chest. “Surely you can guess. Look at the initials.”

Suddenly Danny knew the answer. It was the very same man whose lawyers Frankie had defeated in court for Reg yesterday back in their old world, which was actually the modern world. “Is it Sir Algernon Sharman Barr?”

“Or Ali Sharkbar as he is known on the high seas. And every bit as ruthless and underhanded now as he is four hundred years in the future,” said the Captain. “So how did this get here, I thought we left it aboard the Razorback?”

The Princess lit another torch. “When you brought Frankie to me mortally wounded, the treasure was aboard your ship and Frankie asked me to promise that I would hide from him – forever. But now you’re back it’s yours, Frankie. I was just the guardian.” Princess Shellaya walked over to the chest and picked up a handful of gold coins and gems, and then let them fall through her fingers. The coins and gems glittered as they tumbled to the floor. “This means nothing to me. Why do men fight over it?”

“And women,” added Danny, looking over at Frankie.

Frankie smiled. “I guess we come from different worlds.”

“I think the whole world could learn something from the Princess,” said the Captain, and then added, “but we haven’t yet.”

The Princess walked across scattered coins on the floor with no more interest than if they were pebbles on a sandy beach. “My people have everything we need. Life is perfect, except for the likes of those you defended us from tonight or pirates searching for treasure, and who will kill any that stand in their way in search of these shiny pieces of metal and glittering stones without a second thought. And Ali Sharkbar is one of those.”

“Did he come here?” asked the Captain, a hard edge creeping into his voice.

“Yes.” Most of us managed to hide in the jungle, but he captured some of my people. He suspected his treasure might be here so he tried to force them to tell him where it was.” The Princess face became sad when she added, “they died without giving up the secret.”

Frankie shook her head slowly. “Why didn’t you give it to him, it means nothing to you?”

The Princess smiled one of her lovely smiles. “You forget, I promised you,”

“But I lay dead in your arms and I had not thought about the consequences of that promise,” said a frustrated Frankie. “If you knew by giving up the treasure you would save your people, why didn’t you?”

The Captain knew it was not as simple as that. “It would have made no difference. It may even have made things worse, for once he had what he wanted, Ali Sharkbar would have destroyed the village just because he could, and just as likely killed the whole tribe, or any that he could find for hiding his treasure from him. He’s an evil and vindictive man.”

The Princess walked slowly to the chamber entrance, signalling that they were to leave. “Let us go and see what the slavers have left of our feast.” They walked from the chamber and into the cave tunnel. “And tell me, what will you do with this treasure that is so important in your world? Why is it so important, so cherished? To me it cannot catch me a fish to eat, or make a roof for my hut, and it does not have the scent of a frangipani flower or the beauty of the sea shells I wear around my neck.” The Princess held up a shell from her necklace and the mother of pearl on the inside of it looked like clouds at sunset in the torchlight.

There was silence for a few moments as the others stared at the shell and thought about what the Princess had said. It made all of them, even Danny, wonder about their world. Danny thought about the greed and the importance of money in the world he came from. Hadn’t Frankie just stood up in court against the might and wealth of Sir Algernon Sharman Barr, who would see the likes of Danny’s father and Reg become homeless beggars if it meant a few more precious coins were added to the already enormous wealth that he could never spend in ten lifetimes.

And these few words from Princess Shellaya would change Frankie’s view on money forever, as it had the Captain’s, who had learned long ago that money did not buy happiness, and certainly not the love and happiness that Princess Shellaya’s people had without it. It was why the Captain lived like he did, content with his small boatshed home that allowed him to sniff the sea air every morning, and happy to give most of the little money he made from hiring out his small fleet of boats to Danny.

Frankie was probably the best person to explain to the Princess what money meant in the world they came from. Like the Captain, she was not drawn to money either, but she more than most knew what it could do, both good and bad. “Our people are different to yours. Ever since money was invented our people have sought to have it. In the world where we come from, everyone needs it. Our food is bought with it, not harvested from the forest or caught in the sea and given to the village to share. So if you have no money, you have no food.”

“Or home,” grumbled the Captain.

A quizzical look came over Princess Shellaya’s face. “But now you have wealth or money as you call it.” The Princess smiled, “so now, my Captain, you can have both a home and food. Is that not what you want?”

“Well, yes, of course,” said the Captain, unable to find fault in what the Princess said in all her glorious innocence. Then a huge grin broke out on the Captain’s face and he stopped, “imagine fighting the mighty Sir Algernon Sharman Barr back in the modern world and using his own long lost treasure to do it?” The Captain laughed so loudly it threatened to bring down the cave roof on top of them.

But Frankie could also see how amusing it would be and smiled to herself. The more money Sharman Barr poured into trying to evict the Captain or to evade paying people badly injured in his factories, the more she could fight him for them in court and use his own money to do it. She could employ other lawyers with the money to help her win court cases against him.

Princess Shellaya watched quietly, as did Danny. The Princess looked over at Danny and shrugged. “Come along my strong and courageous protector, you need food to keep you strong, whether it’s paid for by your all important

money or part of a village feast given for nothing. The Princess gently put her arm around Danny's shoulders and they walked off along the tunnel leaving the other two laughing in the darkness. Danny felt ten feet tall. After a few moments the laughter coming from the darkness behind them stopped.

"Hey, wait for us, it's dark in here," called the Captain, followed by the sound of scurrying footsteps. The Princess just smiled and walked on, her proud bodyguard at her side.

CHAPTER 7 - THE FEAST

The villagers and their guests sat around the fire in a wide semi circle. There was still plenty of pork left on the spit over the fire, which was surprising because Jake alone must have eaten a mountain of it, using the food to get over his disappointment at not being involved in the action, no doubt. Although he and Billy Boots had fired a cannonball or two at small boats containing the fleeing slavers to hurry along their departure. Billy Boots sat beside Jake and eating far less than his gigantic friend, although his plate was piled high. Sam sat next to Billy, knowing that Billy would always take more than he could eat, which was good news for Sam.

Danny looked around at the strange mixture of people in the firelight, and then to the Princess next to him. Was this really happening, sitting here on a desert island on a warm tropical night with pirates and a princess next to him?

The Captain sat on the other side of the Princess, gnawing a large and greasy piece of pork, and making quite a mess of it in between talking to the Princess.

Danny noticed that Frankie was missing and then, through the firelight, saw her silhouette leaning against a palm tree by the beach and looking out over the lagoon. Knowing that the Princess was quite safe in this company, Danny quietly left the throng and made his way over to join Frankie staring out over the water.

"You know it's never going to be the same again, Danny," she said quietly and without turning. "This is the real me, I can feel it. I'm a pirate, not a lawyer."

"But you're a good lawyer. Look what you did for Reg."

Frankie turned to Danny, her face close to his and her emerald eyes sparkling in the starlight. "I know. But I can stay here if I want. Sail the seven seas and not be governed by any law but my own. I can be the queen of my own destiny, not following sets of rules laid down by crusty lawmakers who have never known freedom or adventure. Why should I return, Danny? Why? Look at this place."

Danny knew the modern world would be even worse than he now realised it was without a person like Francesca Hawkstone to protect the weak, the poor and the sick and injured like Reg. "Because the modern world needs you," he said simply.

Frankie looked into his eyes, and it was not the fierce stare of a hawk but gentle and kind, and her eyes eventually crinkled up at the corners as a smile came to her face. "You're right." Frankie ruffled Danny's hair. "Anyway, we can come back here anytime now we know how. And you will come with me won't you?" Then, without waiting for an answer, she added, "come on, let's get back to the feast or Jake will have eaten the lot."

Captain Harris listened intently as Princess Shellaya told him a story. It came about after he asked her again about Ali Sharkbar, and you could tell by the Captain's face that he was intrigued.

"He was searching the island with the man that looks like a rat," said the Princess, just as Danny and Frankie joined them. "Ali Sharkbar had heard of a cave high up on one of the mountains where he thought the treasure may be hidden and he found the path by the waterfall that led up to it. The rest of his crew were spread about the island, all looking for clues as to the hiding place of the treasure. His treasure."

"His because he'd carved his initials on the chests. But he stole it from the Spanish, I bet" said Danny as he tucked into a piece of pork. .

"And they stole it from the Inca people of the Andes Mountains in South America," added Captain Harris.

"And I stole it from him," said Frankie.

"And then had to bring it aboard Razorback when your own ship was damaged in a fight with a Spanish galleon not far from here, just before we encountered Volkram and his motley armada of slavers," added the Captain to round off the treasure's journey to the cave where it now lay hidden.

"But how come they never found the right cave? The slavers found it last night easy enough," asked Danny.

"Because they followed Horatio and his crew's trail, and that led to the cave up on the mountain where you arrived today. They thought your Captain had the treasure with him. I watched them from a hiding place high in a jungle tree after I had sent Horatio and his crew to safety by the magic of the golden orchids. Sharkbar and his men went into the cave and only one came out," said the Princess. "When their Captain and his men failed to return to the ship, the crew got scared and sailed away and they've never been back."

"Ran like the cowardly dogs they are," growled the Captain. "Frankie was barely alive and the rest of us were a sick and sorry bunch, nary a one of us without a sword wound or carrying a musket ball inside of us after a fierce battle with a convoy of slavers. We took two of their ships, but the third came at us from astern and in seconds they were aboard. It was the Vulture's ship, and that's when he stabbed Frankie in the back. We fought them off and they fled, but we paid a terrible price. Fourteen left out of forty and all of us barely able to stand. But we made it here. Whether he'd watched the battle from afar or just somehow knew we were weak and at his mercy, Ali Sharkbar's ship was soon on the horizon and heading for the lagoon. So with Frankie dying, Princess Shellaya led us to the cave."

"My men brought the treasure ashore as you asked, Frankie, and they hid it in what little time they had before Sharkbar's ship was upon us," added the Princess, which explained why the treasure was where it was.

Danny listened quietly, but something was stirring within him. The story was reminding him of dreams he used to have when he was at home tucked up safe and warm in his own bed. Dreams about a cave and pirates. They were bad dreams.

"So they must have got some orchid dust to disappear like that as well, if they never came out of the cave" said Frankie, putting two and two together.

“Yes, but it was from the black orchids in the tunnel of darkness far beyond the chamber of pools, not my lovely golden flowers. They would not let him or any of his crew have their golden dust for they knew they were not good men, and only the good, the very good, may have their magic. But the black orchids have no such morals. They will let anyone, no matter how evil, have their magic – but it always comes at a price,” added Princess Shellaya mysteriously.

Frankie asked what they all wanted to know, “and what is the price?”

The Princess smiled softly, “It can be many things, but it depends on the person. Whatever dark thoughts you have will form the price. If you have no dark thoughts you will be rejected by the black orchids and left to face your fate as a mortal.”

“But then the golden ones will let you have their dust if you’re good, won’t they?” asked Danny, breaking out of his thoughts for a moment.

“Only if you ask, Danny,” replied the Princess. “And you didn’t.”

“Me!” exclaimed Danny.

The Princess carried on calmly as the others listened in stunned silence. “Yes, you. You were aboard a British merchantman sunk by Ali Sharkbar off the coast of Zanzibar and one of the only survivors. He took you prisoner aboard his ship to train you in the ways of a pirate and to be his successor, or perhaps the son he never had. But you rebelled against him at every turn. He could not tame you, because you don’t have a black heart like him and his crew of merciless cutthroats. What did happen in that cave, Danny?”

All eyes were on Danny as strange thoughts began to well up inside him. Flickering images of pirates and blood, of blues skies and blackness.

The Princess gently took Danny’s hand and he stared into her dark brown eyes. He looked past the flickering flames from the fire reflected in them and deeper and deeper he was drawn into them until their darkness was replaced by the darkness of the cave.

Danny spoke quietly as he told the story, unsure himself where it was coming from. “We followed the trail up the mountain and Captain Sharkbar was sure he’d found his treasure. And so was Ratty Ratcliffe, so sure he was laughing quietly to himself and rubbing his hands together at the thought of counting all that money. I was behind him, and his pet rat sat on his shoulder watching me all the time in case I tried to run away. If I so much as stopped to wipe the sweat from my face it would squeak a warning for all to hear.”

“I remember how cool and peaceful it was in the cave as we went further inside. We passed the chamber of pools and came to the golden orchids. At first Captain Sharkbar thought they were real gold and as he tried to take one but it recoiled from him into a crack in the rock. It made him angry and he snatched at another and another but they all managed to draw back into the cracks in the rocks before he could seize one. In anger he tried to pry one from a crack with his sword and managed to break off a piece of rock so he was able to tear the beautiful flower from the wall. Realising it was worth nothing to him he threw it on the floor and marched onward. I quickly picked it up and before the two men behind could stop me I put it back in the crack and its roots took hold of the rock again. It curled around my finger for a second, holding it, and then let me go as one of the two pirates with us pushed me forward.”

“It got darker after that and Ali Sharkbar lit a torch to light the way. Soon we reached the end of the tunnel and the light from the torch barely pierced the blackness it was so dark. It was cold and damp and not at all like the other chambers. Captain Sharkbar got angry because there was no treasure. Ratty Ratcliffe and the others were scared because when he got angry he was very dangerous and nobody knew what he would do. In the torchlight his eyes were blazing with rage. He took the torch into even darker corners trying to find treasure that wasn’t there.”

“It was obvious that the treasure wasn’t there, and one of the two pirates was bold enough to tell him. Captain Sharkbar’s rage was instant. He rounded on the sailor, drew his sword and killed him where he stood. His eyes were wide with madness. The other pirate drew his pistol and took aim at the captain, but when he pulled the trigger his powder was damp from the moisture in the air of the cave and the Ali Sharkbar ran him through with his sword as well.”

“Then he looked at me with those mad eyes. I was frozen for I knew I was to be next. And then Ratcliffe noticed the flowers and pointed them out with a trembling, pointy finger. It was if the black, shiny blooms were reaching out toward them, but not to me. The Captain and Ratty walked over to them and, fascinated by what they saw, both stared into the blooms that extended like thin black snakes from the cracks in the rock. And then, like snakes, their heads drew back, and as one they struck, coughing out a cloud of black dust. The Captain and Ratty jumped back but it was too late and the cloud of black shimmering dust descended around them. I turned and ran but a piercing screech from the rat stopped me in my tracks. I turned and saw Captain Sharkbar raising his throwing knife and in a flash it was spinning towards me. It hit me here.” Danny touched his chest. ”When I looked up, they were gone.”

”I knew I was badly hurt, but I just wanted to get out of that place. I stumbled through the darkness and reached the golden orchid chamber, and for a moment I felt stronger, braver. I pulled the knife from my chest and looked around at the orchids. They were reaching out to me, trying to tell me something. But my mind was slipping for I was in so much pain. I ran and stumbled through the chamber of pools and out onto the ledge. I could see the ship in the distance, but I was fading. I looked down at the blood on my chest and then to the canopy of trees tops far below. I was dying and it looked so soft and inviting.” Danny shook his head slowly. “I don’t know what happened next.”

Princess Shellaya gently released Danny’s hand. Danny blinked a few times as he stared into her eyes and slowly he was able to draw himself away from her gaze. The Princess smiled softly and turned to the others, all of whom were utterly silent and fascinated. “I saw Danny fall from the ledge, but I could do nothing. By the time I got to him he was lying on the forest floor. The trees had broken his fall, and he was still alive, but dying, as were you, Frankie.”

“So you did the same for Danny as you did for Frankie,” said the Captain thoughtfully.

The Princess was smiling broadly. “Yes, and the spell worked. You even arrived back together, which was more than I could have wished for.”

Danny opened his shirt and touched the small birthmark on his chest.

Frankie looked at it. “Just like me, Danny. It seems that we both carry the mark of the Princess – luckily.”

“Well I’ll be blowed,” stated the Captain. “I always knew there was something special about you, Danny me lad. I remember I used to see you sitting and watching the boats sometimes, and then you asked me for a job and I somehow knew there was something about you.”

“Because we had no money, it was the only way I could get a chance to sail a boat, and for some reason I knew I had to,” said Danny, still trying to piece it all together.

“Well, now you know why,” said Princess Shellaya. She turned to the others. “And what do you intend to do now?”

“Go back and save my home, I suppose,” said the Captain. “I was going to set sail for England and ask the queen for another letter but we need not bother her now because we have treasure a plenty to fight the council and Ali Sharkbar. We can even buy the park if we have to, and do it with Ali Sharkbar’s own money.”

“In the meantime with that kind of money we can stall the Captain’s eviction in the courts for a long time if we have to,” added Frankie, quietly relishing the idea of making Sharman Barr’s rich lawyers lives hell, and thus making sir Algernon very angry indeed.

“And wait till he and Ratty Ratcliffe set eyes on me,” added Danny. The strength given to him by the Princess coursed through his veins, and he looked forward to the day. “He killed me once, and I firmly intend to make him pay.”

“Good for you, Danny, that’s the spirit, and spoken like a true pirate,” said the Captain, as though it was the finest compliment that could be paid. “And perhaps when we get back we could use a little of the treasure to make your Dad’s life a little bit easier too.

Frankie’s eyes sparkled as she clapped her hands together at the thought of another fight with Sir Algernon Sharman Barr. “Good. Then we will reopen your father’s claim against him. Now other workers have seen Reg win a fight against their boss, they may stand up in a court of law and back his claim. A lot of court cases are won by the rich because they know their poorer opponent will eventually give up through lack of money.”

“But not this time,” grinned the Captain. Poor old Ali Sharkbar will soon be wishing he was back here with his crew of cutthroats rather than stuck in a world four hundred years away.

“But he’s not stuck there, he can return if he knows how,” warned the Princess.

“How? Asked Danny. “They never took any of the orchid dust with them.”

“Are you sure?” The Princess stared directly into Danny’s eyes again. “You said that when you looked back you saw Ali Sharkbar throwing the knife. Where was the man you call Ratcliffe.

Danny’s hand went to the mark on his chest as his mind went back to the cave. “When I turned I saw Sharkbar and the knife, but I saw the red eyes of the rat in the dark shadows by the wall of the cave, and next to them the yellow eyes of Ratcliffe. I couldn’t see clearly, but he was struggling with something. And then the knife was coming at me so fast. I looked down at it sticking out of my chest, and then I looked up and they were gone.”

“Could not this Ratcliffe man have been struggling in the shadows with one of the black flowers, pulling it from the wall? Asked the Princess quietly.

Danny thought about it for a moment. “I suppose so. What else could he have been struggling with?”

The Captain was worried. “So you think they may have a black orchid back in our other world?”

The Princess nodded her head solemnly. “Yes. Which means they may return if they ever realise the power they have in that one single plant?”

“Surely it can’t live for ever,” said Frankie.

“It will live as long as the man that took it from the cave, and that could be a very long time because that part of the magic is the same as the black orchid’s golden cousin. He is its master now and it his servant. But perhaps he will never know of its power, perhaps his mind is consumed with other things.” The Princess hoped that they never did find out the flower’s real power, because it could do a lot more than make people disappear and reappear in a different place and time and live for a very long time if you knew how to make it do it.

“And what about the price to be paid? Asked Frankie.

“It was complicated by the mortal wounding of Danny in the chamber of darkness. The last dark thought in Ali Sharkbar’s mind was killing you, Danny. Magic is complex and even I understand only a little of it. But I assure you he has lived a life of dark and terrifying nightmares, of trusting no one, never finding love only hate in a lonely and dark existence that will continue as long as he lives, and it will eventually drive him mad. The spell can be broken only one way.”

The Captain asked the question they all wanted to ask. “How?”

“By killing Danny again.” The Princess was deadly serious now. “He will know you’re alive, it will have come to him in his dark, torturous dreams, but finding you is a different matter. He may think that it is just a part of the dark and twisted world he has been condemned to.”

“Two negatives make a positive,” mused Frankie. “It seems magic and science are not that far removed from each other.”

“And Ratty Ratcliffe?” asked the Captain. “What about his price to be paid.”

“If the flower still lives he is safe.”

“But he has no friends, no family, and everybody hates him, just like Sharman Barr,” said Frankie, who knew the mayor was a sad, nasty little man, just like everyone else in the town did.

“He has one friend,” stated the Captain.

Princess Shellaya smiled over at Sam as he lay next to Billy Boots, as full of pork as it was possible to be. “Yes, his rat.” Sam’s ears pricked up and a low grumbling growl came from him. “And they will be together forever because they are bound to each other by the power of the black orchid. Once the flower

is dead they will become one. Whether it be as a rat or human, or even something in between, nobody but the flower knows.”

”I’ve known Ratty Ratcliffe for a very long time, as you can imagine, and recently, in fact only yesterday in his office, I noticed he is looking more and more like a rat,” said the Captain. “I thought it was my imagination.”

“Perhaps he forgot to water his precious flower and it’s dying,” offered Frankie.

“Then you may soon see the transformation,” added Princess Shellaya.

“Half man, half rat, that’s revolting,” said Danny, screwing his face up at the thought.

“If I ever find that flower I’ll speed the process up for him,” growled the Captain.

The sun was beginning to light the horizon as one by one the Captain shook hands with his crew as they stood in a line on the beach next to the small boats that would take them out to the Razorback. The Captain reached the last two, Black Jake and Billy Boots.

“Me, Billy and the boys are going to stay a while this time, Captain,” said Jake as he shook the Captain’s hand.

“Can’t say as I blame you. I’d stay as well if I didn’t have things to attend to back home,” said The Captain, withdrawing his large hand from Jake’s even larger hand, before moving on and clasping Billy’s small hand and shaking it.

“We’re going to spend a bit of time aboard the Razorback and make sure everything is shipshape. If you ever need us, you know where we are. Nowadays you can send the lad back to get us, he can take care of himself alright.” Billy nodded in the direction of Dan, who was standing close by. Dan’s chest puffed out at his acceptance as one of their own by the Razorback’s crew.

The Captain turned to him as well. “Yes, he’s one of us now. There’s no escaping he’s got the salt water of a pirate in his veins. He’ll be back.

“And so will I.” Frankie’s voice made them all turn at the sound of it as she walked down the beach from the village. “And make sure the Razorback is ship shape and Bristol fashion when I do, because when we return next time I have a feeling we may have need of her. Now come on Captain, we have business to attend to.”

The Captain turned back to his crew and rolled his eyes, “women,” he muttered.

All the villagers had gathered at the top of the beach and Princess Shellaya walked down to wish them farewell.

Danny joined Frankie and the Captain, with Sam at his feet, as the Princess produced a small box, very similar to the one that held the golden orchid dust. She held it out to Danny. “This if for you, Danny.”

Danny opened the box. From it he lifted out a seashell on a thin silver chain. As he looked at the inside of the shell, the mother of pearl had a mysterious look of an eye about it. "It's beautiful. Thank you Princess."

"It is not an ordinary seashell. I have placed a spell on it. If Ali Sharkbar realises who you are and comes after you, the shell will see him and you will know. It is to keep you safe as you kept me safe. Wear it always, Danny." The Princess stared deep into Danny's eyes to convey the importance of what she said.

Danny lifted the chain over his head, settled it around his neck so the shell rested on his chest. To all that knew no better, it was simply an ornament.

"I wish you all safe travels and I hope the treasure helps you keep your home, Captain." Princess Shellaya kissed the Captain gently on the cheek.

"Thank you Princess. We'll see each other again, I'm sure. Like Frankie, I feel we shall return sooner rather than later because there's something in the air. Come on my hearties, let's go to the treasure cave and then be off. We have a battle waiting for us."

CHAPTER 8 - BACK TO THE FUTURE

The small beach by the lake was still eerily quiet and the mist still hung thick in the early morning air, when suddenly a faint glow of shimmering gold burst from the living room window of the Captain's boathouse.

In the living room golden orchid dust was gently floating to the floor and as it did so the Captain, Frankie, Danny and Sam appeared, and at their feet the treasure from the cave. So heavy were the treasure chests that when they had fully materialised, the ancient timber floor creaked under their weight.

Danny looked around and grinned: he was back. Exciting as the trip was, he felt a sense of relief that they had made it home.

"Right," declared the Captain. "Prepare a boat for sailing Danny. The biggest and strongest we have."

"But it's still early, no one will be here for a good two hours," answered Danny, a little surprised at the order.

"This here is treasure, and treasure needs to be hidden," stated the Captain. And on an island, too." The Captain pointed in the direction of the island out in the centre of the lake, although it was impossible to see through the mist. "So put a spade aboard as well as there'll be some digging to do. We'll do it now under cover of the mist so no one sees us. Jump to it lad."

"Aye, aye, Captain," said Danny and disappeared down into the storage area."

"Wouldn't it be safer in a bank?" inquired Frankie.

"And where would we say it came from? They'd probably call the police. Even you would have trouble talking your way out of that one," said the Captain, pointing to the overflowing treasure chests.

"Come on then, we need to get these chests downstairs and quickly before the mist clears," agreed Frankie.

The Captain went to a drawer and produced several sacks. “The chests are too heavy when they’re full. We need to put some of the treasure in sacks so we can carry it. We’ll refill the chests on the island and bury them.”

Quickly the Captain and Frankie scooped up handfuls of gold coins mixed with diamonds, emeralds, sapphires and rubies and poured them into the sacks. The Captain picked up a particularly ornate gold chalice inset with every kind of gem and put it aside on the table. “I like that one.”

Frankie just rolled her eyes. “We’ll leave some of the gold coins here as well, they’ll be the easiest to convert into modern money.”

The Captain nodded in agreement and then hefted the heavy sack over his shoulder and headed for the stairs.

A few minutes later Frankie and the Captain were loading one of the treasure chests in to the biggest of the small boats that Danny had at the waters edge on the beach. They lifted the empty chest into the boat, where it sat among the sacks of gold and gems presided over by Sam.

“Right, all aboard and out to the island,” ordered the Captain.

“What about the other chest?” inquired Frankie.

“It’s got Sir Algernon Sharman Barr’s initials on it, so I think it’s only fair that he gets it back – empty of course,” said the Captain with a grin. “I think I shall leave it on the doorstep of his mansion tonight so he wakes up and finds it in the morning.

Both of the others knew what that empty chest would mean to Sharman Barr. He would know his treasure had been found, and very probably by whom.

“That’ll be a nice start to his day,” said Frankie, jumping into the boat, “and probably drive his mind even further into the black pit that is his curse. Come on my buckos, push the boat out.”

Danny and the Captain looked at the figure in the front of the boat with her back to them and staring out into the mist ahead with her fists on her hips.

The Captain rolled his eyes in mock annoyance, “women” he muttered as Danny and he put all their strength into pushing the heavily laden boat into the water. Once it was off the beach and floating, the Captain and Danny scrambled aboard. There was no wind so they took an oar each and started to row.

“Put your backs into it, we haven’t got all day,” called Frankie without turning.

This time it was Danny that rolled his eyes. So this was what it was like to have a woman as your Captain. But strangely he found himself bending his back and putting every ounce of his strength into each oar stroke. And so did the Captain.

With the Captain and Danny bending their backs to the task, they were at the island in the middle of the lake in less than five minutes, and soon the boat was running its bow up onto the sand at the edge of the island as Frankie jumped from the boat and onto the sand as lightly as bird. Danny had sailed on the lake for years but had never set foot upon the island, probably because of the big sign that read ‘keep off, wildfowl breeding ground.’

Reading the sign through the mist, Danny asked, “what about the ducks and swan nests?”

The Captain already had a sack and was handing it to Frankie. “It’s not the breeding season. But don’t stand on the old nests if you can help it, they sometimes use them again,”

Sam jumped ashore and headed off into the bushes and trees of the small island.

“Is there anywhere in particular that we are going to bury our treasure?” Inquired Frankie.

The Captain and Danny both clambered out of the boat with a heavy sack each. “There’s a big old tree in the middle. Must be over four hundred years old, because it’s been there as long as I can remember,” said the Captain.

“We’ve already established that your memory of things long ago is less than perfect or you’d remember where you hid your copy of the Queens letter and then all this treasure business wouldn’t be necessary,” called Frankie over her shoulder as she headed off after Sam into the islands bushy interior.

“Grab the spade from the boat, Danny,” was all the Captain said in reply.

In the centre of the island there was a small clearing around the large old tree that rose far higher than anything else on the island. Sam was sitting at the edge of the clearing when the others appeared from the bushes.

Danny put down the heavy sack. “Where do you want me to dig, Captain?”

The Captain walked to the tree, put his back against it and looked up to hazy glow of the sky. “Five paces east I reckon.” Once he had his bearings he paced out five large paces and dug his heel into the dirt. “Here,” he declared.

Danny walked over with the spade and prepared to dig as the other’s watched.

Sam was sitting in a position that would have been five paces west if the Captain had chosen that point of the compass instead. It seemed the others had forgotten about him as Danny set about his task. Sam barked once to get their attention, and then started to dig where he had been sitting. The others all looked over as Sam scratched away at the ground with some urgency.

“I said east, Sam, not west,” said the Captain.

But still Sam continued to dig.

“He’s trying to tell us something,” said Danny.

“I always bury treasure to the east of my marker,” said the Captain, scratching his chin as though trying to remember something.

“Are you sure?” asked Frankie. “I think Sam probably has a better memory than you do. Would it make any difference if we bury it to the west, Sam has the hole half dug already.”

“I suppose not. West it is,” said the captain, a marched over to where Sam was digging. “Come on Danny, give him a hand, time’s a wasting. Come on Frankie, we’ll get the rest of the treasure.”

Danny joined Sam in digging as Frankie and the Captain disappeared into the bushes.

When they reappeared with the chest on the last trip and placed it by the hole, Danny was past waist deep in the hole as he shovelled at the soft soil. “How deep, Captain?”

“Your nearly there, lad,” said the Captain as he checked the hole was to his satisfaction. “About waist deep on a man is the depth a pirate buries his treasure.”

Suddenly Danny’s spade hit something solid. It did not make the grinding noise of metal on rock, more the dull ring of metal hitting metal. Frankie heard it and joined the Captain and Sam looking down at the bottom of the hole. Danny bent down and scraped away the dirt with his hands. Soon the flat metal top of a small round container was exposed. Danny scraped away the dirt around it and pulled it free of the soil. It was almost as wide as Danny’s hand and twice as long. Sam barked his approval, his tongue happily hanging out the side of his mouth. Danny handed the heavy brass container up to the Captain.

“What is it?” inquired Frankie.

The Captain’s large hand gripped the top of the container and with considerable effort, managed to twist it to break the seal. Slowly he unscrewed the top. When he looked inside, a large grin split his face. He reached inside and, as delicately as his large fingers would allow, removed a rolled sheet of thick yellow parchment that was tied with a red ribbon. “It’s Queen Elizabeth the First’s letter that grants me ownership of the park.” He looked over at Sam, whose tail was wagging furiously. “Well done Sam.”

“So we needn’t have travelled back four hundred years, met a princess, fought slave traders, freed slaves and brought back all this treasure after all,” said Frankie.

“No, but it was an adventure wasn’t it. And I’ll wager you’d do it again if I asked you,” said the Captain, grinning.

Frankie looked over to Danny and they both broke into broad grins. It would take a brave man to try and stop them because they were, after all, pirates.

In the early morning mist, in the middle of a small island in a small lake on the south coast of England, the three of them, bound by the magic of a princess far away in time and distance grinned broadly at each other and Sam wagged his tail and grinned his lopsided grin along with them. They made a formidable team and for some reason they all knew that they would one day be returning to the warm waters of the Caribbean where they would again ply the seas as pirates aboard the Razorback.

And each and every one of them was looking forward to the day.

THE END