

KIDDLEYWINKS AND PIRATES

by Philippa Trethewey-Ettore

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Chapter 1

Clever Deception

The day Arti Treetwaddle was born, the year 1852 to be exact, her mother was very disappointed indeed. A squeaking, bawling, tomato-faced baby girl, was placed firmly in her arms.

"I wasn't expecting this," she said bewildered, "what am I going to do with all those darling little brown trousers I went and bought."

Arti's father, an immense sea-faring man, an ex-pirate, didn't seem too perturbed about it all.

"Just put them on her anyway," he muttered, "they all look the same: just fat and round, screaming blue-murder night and day. No-one will know or care. Just give her a good hair-cut once in a while and our friends will be none the wiser."

He slammed his bottle down on the table and went out into the garden.

"So much for this joyous occasion," grumbled Mrs Treetwaddle. "Well I never," she said, smiling down at the little brown-eyed, brown-haired Arti. "I suppose he's right in a way."

As quick as a flash and with a mischievous twinkle in her eye, she sent word round the town, by means of Shifty-

eyes Sam, the village hang-about. He had driven the midwife up the hill that same afternoon in the horse and cart. The message said simply, "People of Mevagissey, Ada and John Treetwaddle are proud to announce the birth of Little Arti. Born 4:27 Thursday afternoon."

Friends and neighbours came to look and coo and no-one even thought to query whether Arti was a boy's or girl's name. They just assumed. Mrs Treetwaddle said nothing, no-one said anything. So Mrs Treetwaddle just carried on as usual, showing off her chubby bundle to anyone who wanted to see.

As the years went by, Arti grew bigger and stronger, and Mr and Mrs Treetwaddle seemed to forget that Arti was a girl. Her dad loved nothing better than to sit her high on his knee and tell her the odd pirate yarn. They would talk for hours on end together, while Mrs Treetwaddle pounded the dough and looked disgusted.

"You must have been very brave," said Arti, as she stared mesmerized into her father's face. Her father's eyes, on the other hand, would glow with excitement, as the wild stories poured out.

"You know Arti, I became a pirate when I was the same age as you are right now," he boasted one day. "I had your same brown curly hair and red cheeks and..."

"What! seven years old!" exclaimed the incredulous Arti.

"Oh, is that all you are. You're mighty big for your age son!" pondered Mr Treetwaddle.

"Well no, it was eight years old," he said after some heavy thinking. "I was little, but a darn good pirate," he added

with a blush.

It was there on the spot that Arti decided to follow in her father's footsteps. The stories she'd heard had sent her head spinning. All those narrow escapes, all that excitement and all that money! Sometimes, though, she did wonder why her dad wasn't as rich as she thought he should be after all that plundering. "Oh well," she concluded, "what comes in with the tide goes out with the tide, I suppose!" Still, she did wonder.

The next morning, after a sleepless night, Arti rose early and raced into the kitchen. Mr Treetwaddle was bending over a drawer, sharpening a knife. Mrs Treetwaddle was peeling onions.

"I've made up my mind," said Arti, "I want to become a pirate just like you," she blurted out joyously.

Mr Treetwaddle cut his finger, Mrs Treetwaddle shot an onion clear across the room. Arti wasn't sure whether the tears in her eyes were real or just onion sting.

"Well bless my barnacles and strike a light!" exclaimed Mr Treetwaddle. "I should have guessed you'd take after your dear old dad. I know just the man and just the ship," he said. "But it isn't all plain sailing, you know! You'll have to pass a gruelling test first, before they'll have you?"

This didn't put Arti off, though. She'd decided she wanted to be a pirate and be one she would. This was going to be the first real test she had ever done in her life, as children in Mevagissey didn't go to school. Well, not that many anyway.

Mr Treetwaddle decided to take Arti down to the docks that very afternoon.

"To meet a Captain Blighter," he said. "He will tell you all about the initiation test."

So it was all decided. Mrs Treetwaddle pressed Arti's brown trousers till they shone with the heat and generally fussed about. Arti was acutely embarrassed.

"Mother," she said in her deepest voice, "pirates don't press their trousers! And don't you dare put that brush anywhere near my hair."

She took hold of her father's hand, hoping no-one would see and they both set off towards the dock. As they walked, Mr Treetwaddle sang rude pirate songs from the olden days. Arti liked them the best, because they had such mad rhymes.

There once was a lady from Hold,
Who found a big basket of gold.
She hid it upstairs,
In her neat under-wears,
And now she is bitterly cold.

Twenty-two rude songs later, Arti and her dad reached the dock and came to a halt alongside a huge old wooden ship, tied up securely with the longest, knobbiest, twistiest ropes, Arti had ever seen. Large, silver discs were placed here and there up the ropes and gleamed brilliantly, as the sun was reflected off the water. There was a horrific stench of pilchards in the air.

"What are those for?" asked Arti, pointing to the silver discs.

"Those are to stop the rats running up the ropes and onto

the ship," explained Arti's dad, "they go flying up there, usually during the night, crash head-first into the disc, knock themselves out and do a nose-dive into the water below. Dumb rats never learn. You hear heads crashing all night long on a good night."

Arti was hugely impressed and immediately made a mental note of that clever trick just in case she should ever find a need for it.

"Come along now," said Mr Treetwaddle deepening his voice and pulling in his thick, brown belt around his equally thick waist. "Let's go and see Blighter before the rum in his tea gets to his head and he forgets who the hell I am."

Both clambered up the swaying gang-way, Arti collecting a few nasty splinters on the way, as she rubbed her hand up the rope railings.

"I'm surprised the rats make it as far as they do," she grumbled, "they must have pretty rough feet!"

As they reached the top and stepped onto the deck, a very fat, sloppily-dressed pirate gave a weak, drunken attempt at a boarding salute. He missed, poking himself fair in the eye.

"I hope you're better at fighting than you are saluting," mocked Arti's dad.

Both proceeded along the deck, stepping over ropes and boxes as they went. Arti noticed a big arrow pointing downwards, beside a large opening in the floor. It said, Captain's Cabin. Tread lightly and mind your head! One look and it was obvious to Arti that the pirates on board this ship couldn't read. The framework around the opening was dented into a deep groove from many head bangings.

As they went down the stairs and Arti's eyes drew level with the deck, she saw dozens of men lying sprawled out asleep, exhausted after a good day's plundering. As they climbed down deeper, Arti could feel the ship rocking gently and wished she hadn't eaten sixteen winkles for lunch.

At the bottom of the stairs they came face to face with a huge, oak door. The word CAPTAIN was printed neatly, but rather vainly, in gold lettering, in the centre. Arti's dad knocked and they both waited. Suddenly, the big oak door was flung open and there standing in the doorway, with thin, stockinged legs, knobby knees, purple-velvet jacket and lace ruffles round the wrists stood the infamous Captain Blighter himself. Arti was momentarily stunned. She tried desperately not to laugh but failed to stop the two squeak-like coughs that spurted out. Her father suspected as much and pretended to give her a helpful slap on the back, narrowly missing her left ear.

"Well I never!" spurted a lisping, spluttering voice from the Captain's mouth. "Treetwaddle isn't it? I thought you went down with the ship years ago."

"No sir," replied Mr Treetwaddle, "I've taken up gardening instead."

Next the Captain's eyes fell on Arti. "Sweet, Tilly Tregoney, who have we here, sweetie?"

Arti stepped back three paces, trying to avoid the nose-shattering pong of perfume, rum and mothballs. The Captain flicked the lace cuffs back from his wrists.

"This is my lad, Arti," beamed Mr Treetwaddle, "he's decided to follow in my footsteps and become a sea-faring

smug... sailor. He wants to try the initiation test and start right away, sir! I've told him it's tough and you set a very high standard, but it hasn't put him off in the slightest. A real chip off the old block if you don't mind me saying so!" Heavens to Betsy and skin me alive!" exclaimed the Captain. "He's a bit small for that, don't you think, Treetwaddle?"

"Begging your pardon sir, but if you remember, or perhaps you don't, I tried and passed my test just one year older than Arti. A better pirate you couldn't find, if you don't mind me saying so again, sir!"

Arti was embarrassed, but didn't have time to go red as Captain Blighter had flicked his wrists and fluttered clear across the room. A sickening trail of perfume followed behind him.

"Draw a chair up, lad, and let's have a good chat," said the Captain.

The talks went on for ages and ages. The Captain handed Arti a sheet of crackly paper.

"This is a list of all the things you must do to pass the pirate's test," he said.

Arti was impressed and scared.

"There you are, my lad, run along now and get cracking. Remember, you only have seven days to do it all in! Mind you, Treetwaddle, no helping your son, it's against the rules and I can usually tell if you have!"

Arti clutched the paper and felt a chill go down her spine, then with a flash of lace they were both shown out and the big oak door was slammed shut once again. A cloud of dust shot out dramatically as it did so. Arti picked her nose

rather nervously, and followed her father up the steps and onto the deck, all the time clutching her precious piece of paper.

Outside, in the brilliant sunshine, Arti pulled the sheet out from underneath her arm. She tried to read it quickly but felt sick. Then, hastily rolling it up into a huge cigar-shape, she walked with a deliberate swagger down the gang-way behind her father. She knew all the pirates' eyes were burning into her back wondering what was going on.

Chapter 2

The Initiation Test

On dry land once more, Arti said a quick goodbye to her father and raced off to find a secret place to study her tests. Her father had made some weak attempts over the years to teach her how to read and write but she wasn't very good at it. Mr Treetwaddle had a fair idea what was on the paper, so he didn't ask to see it. He could help Arti read it later. He just laughed and walked back towards the house, to tell Mrs Treetwaddle about the tremendous change in Captain Blighter. She wouldn't believe it. "Not lace!" he could hear her say.

Meanwhile, Arti slipped into a nearby kiddleywink and sat down on an old wooden box in a secluded corner. She wasn't really supposed to be there, as the place had

somewhat of a rough reputation and only permitted people over five foot tall and twenty years of age.

The owner didn't seem to notice as she tried to read the scrawled words written on the paper.

She noticed a rather chewed up looking cat outside the window, crouching near the edge of the dock watching the glistening murky water.

Initiation Test for smugglers, she read or at least that's what she thought it must have said. She continued on for a bit but became rather muddled with all the fancy talk, so decided to take it home and let her father explain it in simple English. She didn't feel like whistling, as she jostled her way out of the kiddleywink door, down past the busy bunch of fishermen neatly setting out their crayfish pots and knotty fishing-lines.

Mr and Mrs Treetwaddle were waiting for her in the kitchen when she finally arrived, panting after the steep walk up the hill.

"There you are," sighed Mrs Treetwaddle, as she placed a steaming bowl of soup on the table. "We thought you must have started your tasks already, it's mighty late you know! Here, eat up and tell us all about it," she urged.

"Well, mother, I've an awful lot to do," sighed Arti as she placed the paper on the table.

Mrs Treetwaddle snatched it away from her and smoothed it out with her big, broad hands. They all leaned over and gazed at it intently.

"Pheeeew!" whistled Mr Treetwaddle.

"I knew it!" whined Mrs Treetwaddle, "she's going to get herself into a whole lot of trouble. Oh my little Arti, why

couldn't you have been a baker instead of a smelly, beery pirate!"

Arti's determination burst through once more. Her mother's opinion always had that effect on her. She leaned over further and read aloud, following the words after her father. Pirate's Initiation Test.

Test number one: Applicant must survive being rolled down a steep hill in a beer-barrel and then be able to walk a straight-line for twenty seconds afterwards.

"Gosh," said Arti, "I feel sick just reading that one!"

Test number two. Applicant must smuggle silver snuff-box from Captain's desk without him knowing.

Test three. Must spend the night on board ship alone, with nothing but the rats and stars for company.

Test four. Must smuggle jail keys from town jail and hang them on the nail in ship's crow's nest.

Test five. Must light large fire on beach and keep it alight for ten minutes without the police arriving.

Arti felt completely at a loss. She rolled up the paper and climbed the stairs with leadened shoes.

"I'll work it out in bed," she called down the stairs behind her.

Mrs Treetwaddle was just about to protest about the abandoned bowl of steaming soup when she caught sight of Mr Treetwaddle gesticulating madly from the corner of the room.

"Let her go," he said sympathetically, "she'll be up and about in the morning happy as a lark." Little did he know he'd be forced to drink two bowls of soup that evening.

Sure as seagulls, Arti was up at the crack of dawn, her

usual, chatty self. She had done a tremendous amount of thinking during the night and had already worked out several plans.

"Dad, can you help me with something?" she asked on entering the kitchen.

Mrs Treetwaddle was attacking the floor with a rather large, bristly broom. You couldn't see for flying dust. Arti dragged her father out through the choking air and into the garden. She had remembered that there was an old, empty keg of rum beside the garden shed. Grasping it in her chubby hands, she carefully tipped out the two, unsuspecting, sleeping, smelly cats and rolled the barrel round to the front of the house.

"Here, let me carry that for you," said Mr Treetwaddle as Arti heaved and grunted. "I'm sure Captain Blighter wouldn't consider that cheating."

As Arti's house just happened to be right on top of a very steep hill, she decided to carry out her first task right there at home.

"Come on lad ---er lass I mean, jump in," enthused Mr Treetwaddle."

He was really entering into the spirit of things. Mrs Treetwaddle glared furiously out through the swirling dust. Arti crouched down so that her knees knocked her chin fiercely, as she waddled into the barrel like a drunken duck.

"Everything O.K.?" asked Mr Treetwaddle as he spread his itchy fingers out across the barrel. He gave an almighty push. Down went Arti, or rather round and round went Arti as the barrel quickly picked up speed. It went spinning and

lurching faster and faster down the hill, rising spectacularly into the air several times as it hit rocks and potholes. Mr Treetwaddle watched transfixed, as the barrel neared the bottom of the hill. Suddenly his face went pale.

"Oh, shiver me timbers," he cried, "it's heading straight for that tree!"

Mrs Treetwaddle squeezed her broom handle and trembled violently.

"Look out Arti," she yelled, but her voice was drowned out by a terrifically loud bang, as the barrel crashed against the tree.

Mr Treetwaddle raced down the hill like a demented grasshopper. On reaching the still, lifeless barrel, he could barely breathe.

"Arti, are you all right? Speak to me!"

He waited for a few seconds then suddenly the barrel began to squeak and grind. With a tremendous groan, every plank of wood burst open and collapsed onto the ground, rather like a dissected orange. Arti's face peered out and beamed up at her father.

"Quick," she said, "now time me for twenty seconds!"

Up she sprang, only to collapse again in a wobbly heap. She tried again, this time managing to place one foot in front of the other to keep her balance.

"Stop!" yelled Mr Treetwaddle triumphantly. "You've done it Arti, well done. Now if you feel like it, we'll go tell Captain Blighter right away."

Arti was thrilled but very dizzy. She had to hold on very tightly to her father's arm to stop herself from crashing to the ground. They both disappeared down the hill, swaying

and singing. Mrs Treetwaddle let go her grip of the broom and shook a cursing fist skyward.

When Captain Blighter heard of the first triumphant attempt, Arti noticed a definite glint of anger and disbelief in his eyes. The captain flicked his lace cuff in the air and complained of a twinge of arthritis. Then as he sat himself down on the cabin's window ledge, he mumbled, "Well I suppose congratulations are in order, but before you embark on your next test, I've now decided to assign one of my men to accompany you on all your tasks. Just to make sure, mind you."

Arti was more than willing. She desperately wanted to show that she could do it all on her own. She gave a quick shrug of her shoulders and a little, sympathetic smile to her father.

"He'll be round tomorrow morning first light," sniffed Captain Blighter as he ushered them rudely out the door. Arti and her dad walked home, a very proud twosome.

"Oh, well I never!" exclaimed Mrs Treetwaddle, when they told her of the latest development. "Now be more careful in future Arti. No ruining your best trousers shinning up ship's masts and the likes!"

Arti felt pretty confident and could almost feel the pirate scarf on her head and the salt spray in her face.

Chapter 3 Spike and Lilly

Next morning the cock crew, the sun exploded in a brilliant blaze and a thunderous knock sounded at the front door, shaking the entire household and its contents. Arti leapt into her trousers and flew down the stairs tripping over her badly fitting socks. She opened the door and lo and behold, there, blocking the sun from the entire doorway, was an immense pirate, dressed in a huge black coat and a big blue hat. In his ear glistened a large gold earring, the size of a door knocker.

"Morning son, boomed a loud voice, "Captain Blighter sent me. He said you'd know what for. May I introduce you to Spike." The pirate grappled furiously behind his back.

"Spike who?" queried Arti, as she neither saw nor heard anyone.

Just at that moment, a spikey tuft of multicoloured feathers was pushed up from behind the man's shoulder.

"Pleased to meet you, pleased to meet you. Look out men, run."

The scratchy, squeaky voice almost burst Arti's eardrums.

"Oh! for a moment there, I thought you'd gone a bit bananas," said Arti.

"Bananas, bananas," mimicked Spike.

"What's your name, sir?" asked Arti, finally remembering her manners.

"Lilly" boomed the immense man. "And it's no laughing matter," he hastened to add.

Arti nearly blew her socks off with suppressed laughter, but pretended instead, to tickle Spike's neck with her little finger.

"Hang on just a second while I get my shirt," said Arti as she raced back inside, remembering she was only half dressed.

"Mum, Dad, I'm off now with Lilly and Spike. I'll be back for tea!"

Arti took a quick glimpse at the list and was out the door in a flash.

"Lilly? Lilly who?" bellowed Arti's father.

"Captain Blighter's Lilly with the parrot," yelled back Arti.

"Oh yeah, Lilly bye," said Mr Treetwaddle in a rather unsurprised voice. Mrs Treetwaddle gave him a very queer look and rolled over in bed. She had learned to accept anything lately.

"Well now," said Lilly scratching his thick, curly black hair. "It's the pirate's test, isn't it. The Captain mumbled something of the sort this morning. What's your task for today? I suppose things have changed since I was a young lad like yourself." Arti smiled, trying to imagine this immense man ever being a small boy.

"Well, Lilly, it says I have to smuggle Captain Blighter's silver snuff box away from his desk, without him seeing me."

"Ooofff," sucked in Lilly with a low whistle. "Could be tricky that, you know. Captain rarely leaves his cabin during the day. Allergic to sea air he is! Tell you what though, I'm sure I can help you a bit without breaking any rules."

Captain Blighter has morning tea every day at 11.07 precisely. A cup of tea and a rather sticky, sticky bun.

"I was thinking, what if I was to put a little something in the

sticky bun, that would upset his stomach, let's say, just a little. Then he'd have to answer the call of nature. While he's out you can do your dastardly deed."

"Wonderful!" squeaked Arti. "Let's get going straight away." On board ship, all the pirates were busy sleeping as usual. A huge, fat rat, nibbled very boldly at a large cheese on a bench. Lilly knocked it with his stubby black boot. The rat went squeaking off, holding its head.

"Now Arti, wait here a bit while I go down and talk to my mate in the scully."

"No, I have a better idea," said Arti. "I'll go down below and hide as near as possible to Captain Blighter's cabin. That way I can make a dash for it when, or if he comes out."

"Right you are then," whispered Lilly, as best he could whisper. His voice was rather like a fog-horn in full operation. He quickly but clumsily vanished below deck. Arti followed glancing all around her. As she neared the huge oak door, she could hear the Captain practising his scales. She had to muffle her mouth very tightly, to stop herself from laughing. Suddenly, she noticed a small square in the wall near her and saw what looked like a latch. Quickly she lifted the latch and squeezed her fingers into the crack. Next thing she knew, she was lying flat on the floor. A springing door had slapped her right in the chest. Slightly stunned, she jumped up and stared into the dark hole. It was stacked with small, wooden barrels. On the sides were marked the words GUN POWDER. Quick as a flash, she jumped inside and slowly pulled the door towards her, making sure to leave a tiny crack so that she could see and breath. She waited and waited.

Two hours and two cramped legs later, she heard clicking footsteps descending the stairs. She held her breath and waited nervously. Through the thin crack she could just make out the figure of a sturdy, but smallish pirate, dressed only in shorts and a striped apron. In his hands he delicately carried a huge silver tray, laden down with a large silver pot and three sticky, sticky buns. The pirate gave a loud bang on the door with his heel.

"Morning Tea, sir," he bellowed. Captain Blighter who had by this time finished his singing lessons flung open the door in his usual manner. All Arti could see, was a flash of lace and silver and the door was slammed shut yet again.

"Thank you, Spider," came a rather low, uncharacteristic voice from behind the door. The pirate cook sauntered off, wiping his nose with the back of his hand. After a few seconds, Arti could hear the most disgusting, slurping noises coming from inside the captain's cabin. She could just picture him stuffing the buns in his mouth. Won't be long now, thought Arti. She pushed the cupboard door open just a little more. A loud sneeze, followed by a screeching voice filled the lower deck and out raced the captain from his cabin, tugging frantically at his trouser belt. What a sight he made as he ran wildly down the passage opening up doors, first jumping on one leg then the other. He made a final lunge at the last door on the left and disappeared.

Arti, seeing the wide-open cabin door grabbed her chance. As quick as a fox, she leapt out of the cupboard and into the captain's cabin. As she raced towards the captain's desk, her foot trod on something. All squidged up round

her shoe, were the remains of a sticky, sticky bun. Quickly, her sharp eye spotted the silver snuff-box lying on the desk, next to a hideous photo of what Arti assumed was Mrs Blighter. She grabbed the box and shot out of the room, back into the cupboard, slamming the latch behind her. Suddenly her heart froze. She had locked herself in! She didn't know what to do. If she screamed, everyone would know. If she didn't, well...

Then Arti heard footsteps approaching. Closer and closer they came, passed the cupboard door and stopped at the captain's door. There was silence for a moment, then a shuffling of feet. Arti heard the footsteps approaching her cupboard. They stopped. Next Arti heard a gentle tapping sound on the door.

"Arti, Arti are you in there?" asked a familiar voice.

"Yes Lilly, it's me. Get me out will you?" answered Arti, in a softish, loudish voice. Lilly bent down and lifted the latch. The door sprung back, hitting the parrot Spike, clean off his shoulder. The bird hit the floor with a tremendous thud. Feathers flew in all directions. Then there was silence.

"Is he all right"? asked Arti rather concerned.

"Yeah, sure," said Lilly, as he stooped and picked the parrot up. "Just a bit winded, that's all." With a definite bent beak and slightly crossed eyes, the parrot sat quietly back on Lilly's shoulder.

"How did you know I was here?" asked Arti.

"I just followed your sticky trail!" answered Lilly rather proudly. "Now come along Arti, we mustn't hang around here much longer. You don't want to get caught before you've finished."

They made their way quickly towards the stairs. As both stepped simultaneously onto the bottom step, their stomachs collided.

"You first," said Lilly as he withdrew his protruding belly. Once on deck, they made their way over towards a large, flat bench and quickly made themselves at home.

"What do we do now?" queried Arti, who wasn't very clued up on pirate etiquette.

"I think a message to the captain is in order," answered Lilly. "Hey you boy," he bellowed at a spaghetti-thin boy who was passing behind their bench. The boy's hand flew out of his pocket, as he desperately tried to touch his forehead in a form of humble salute.

"Yes sir, me sir?" said the boy shakily.

"Go find Captain Blighter and tell him there's someone important on deck to see him. Tell him it's to do with a matter of silver," grinned Lilly.

"Yes sir, right away sir," replied the boy obediently, as he bowed and crouched away.

"Mind your step!" bellowed Lilly anxiously. "Well now lad, make yourself comfortable. I don't suppose the captain will be up straight away, you know what I mean!" he winked.

Arti laughed as she sat down on a large, looping rope hanging from the mast. She began to swing to and fro. A large rat at the top of the rope hit the deck with a bump and bounced off into the water. Several pirates opened their eyes for a second, then closed them heavily once more.

"I thought you said the rats couldn't get on board," said a surprised Arti. Lilly shrugged his shoulders.

"Must have used the gang-way," he replied casually.

"Just what did you put in the captain's sticky, sticky bun?" asked Arti, when she was sure no-one could hear her.

"Well, it's a very old recipe," said Lilly smiling. "All I did was tip a bottle of powdered figs and plums into each sticky bun, when my mate had his nose buried in a bottle of whisky ! My grandma swears by it. Reckons you could wipe out an entire fleet with just a whiff!"

"Do you suppose he'll be all right, then"? asked Arti nervously.

"Yeah sure, it only works for about ten minutes all in all," reassured Lilly. Spike dozed happily on his shoulder. Arti continued to swing to and fro in the warm sun, pointing her brown-buckled shoes as far out in front of her as possible, narrowly missing the snoring nose of one of the sleeping pirates. The pirate gave a swipe of his hand each time she came near, thinking it was an insect of some sort.

A high-pitched, hysterical voice screeched out across the deck. Every sleeping pirate sprang to his feet in a shambled daze. They crashed helplessly into each other. There were pirate parts everywhere!

"Attention! Attention!" screamed the captain. "Straighten up, you men. I said straighten up."

The pirates managed to pull themselves up to a standing position and gave a long, shaky salute.

"I have some dreadful news men. My snuff-box has disappeared from my desk. Does anyone know what has happened to it? I'll never forgive myself, if it's been stolen. Oh my dear mother, it was my 21st birthday present from her and now it's gone," he wailed.

Suddenly the captain remembered where he was and abruptly stopped snivelling. Arti looked across nervously at Lilly. The big pirate gave a little nod of encouragement. Arti put her hand in her trouser pocket and stepped forward gingerly. She did wish her red socks would stay up.

"Please sir," she said softly.

"Yes speak up, who is it?" spat the captain, as he swung around flapping his lace like a demented sea-gull.

"Sir, I have your snuff-box," said Arti with a little more confidence in her voice now, "it was part of my pirate's initiation test. You wrote it yourself. I had to smuggle it away from your desk without you knowing it. I succeeded pretty well, don't you think so, sir?"

Captain Blighter's face went scarlet and Arti thought it would burst all over the deck. His nose puckered up into a furious, wrinkled ball and his eyes literally steamed up. He was just about to open his mouth to speak, when he caught sight of Lilly, Spike and all his crew rolling around the deck in helpless, painful fits of laughter.

"Well I never," spluttered the captain, trying to regain his composure. "Are you sure I said that?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Arti proudly. "Here it is back sir, good as new."

The captain reached out and swooped it out of Arti's hand.

"Well carry on lad, you no doubt have many more tests to carry out before you've finished my list."

Arti watched, as the captain disappeared in a mad dash down the stairs. The air reeked of musk and mothballs.

"Number two accomplished," boomed Lilly. Arti swelled with pride, as all the pirates gathered round to

congratulate her.

Chapter 4

Jail Keys and Exercising Pirates

Next day, Arti decided to have a lie-in. She really had to plan out her next task. She read it out loud: "Smuggle jail keys from town jail and hang them from the nail in the ship's crow's nest." That's going to be a tough one, she thought. A knock at the door jolted her back from her thoughts. It was Mrs Treetwaddle. Mrs Treetwaddle, it must be said, possessed a most beautiful skin. It was on account of the vitamin D in the fish. She also took great pride in her glistening hair which trailed down her back in a twisty plait. Her beauty certainly didn't match her abrupt manner.

"Oh, will you look at this," she said, picking up Arti's shoe, still smothered in squashed sticky bun. "What have you trodden in?" she yelled, none too pleased. She knew who had to clean off that little mess!

"Did you know rats bounce"? asked Arti, in a distracted voice. Mrs Treetwaddle left the room in disgust. This next task is going to take some very careful planning, thought Arti. I wonder if Lilly will come round today. Sure enough, a loud thud and a piercing squawk sounded at the front door.

"Arti in, Mrs Treetwaddle?" asked Lilly cheerfully.

"Yes, Lilly, come in" she answered. "But mind your boots. Arti's gone and trodden in something filthy and blow me if it doesn't always get left to me to clean up," she said huffily.

Lilly plonked himself down in a floral patterned arm-chair. A small puff of dust rose around him as he did so. Spike climbed down from Lilly's shoulder and strutted around the room, talking furiously to himself.

"Get that parrot off my rug!" screamed Mrs Treetwaddle, as her broom swung down wildly, collecting Spike in its bristles and sending him spinning clear across the room. Lilly roared with laughter. Spike reluctantly waddled back up the armchair, onto Lilly's shoulder. Arti could hear the bad language from the bedroom.

"Won't be long," she called out.

It was a glorious summer's day, so Arti and Lilly decided to discuss plans outside on the garden wall.

"Getting the keys to the Mevagissey jail is going to be another real tough one," said Lilly, as he stared intently out to sea. Arti's house was beautifully positioned on a high hill overlooking the sea. The sun glistened on the ripply waves, like a large bag of shiny marbles. It almost blinded Arti as she followed Lilly's gaze out to sea. Just then, a large sea-gull did an enormous plop on Arti's shoe.

"Sign of good luck that is," said Lilly, not batting an eyelid.

"Not with a mother like mine!" added Arti, desperately trying to rub it off on the grass. Both sat in silence for a good half hour. Spike decided to wonder off across the grass in search of a bit more excitement. Lilly had

decided, many years ago, to clip Spike's wings, as the bird had once flown off alone, all the way to Looe, where he had become involved in a disgraceful brawl outside a local drink-house. Lilly had found him the next day, returned by some do-gooder, with a black-eye and a cracked beak. It was such a disgrace for any pirate to have such a rebellious parrot, let alone a brawling one! Spike cursed a few sea-gulls flying overhead, then waddled back to Arti's feet. He promptly curled up and fell asleep.

"I've got it!" cried Arti as she jumped up sending Spike spinning. "Listen Lilly, what do you think of this. Everyone knows that every Thursday afternoon, Constable Blacklock exercises the prisoners in the jail courtyard. Well, how about if I sneak the keys off his belt while he's busy watching them? Then we can run like mad, back to the ship, before he's had time to notice they've gone."

"Mmmmm," said Lilly thoughtfully. "Seems O.K, but it will take a bit of skill to pull that one off. Captain Blacklock is not as dumb as he looks, you know!"

"Isn't he?" replied Arti. It was decided then. They would go that very afternoon, as it just happened to be a Thursday.

"Where are you two off to, then," asked Arti's dad, as they walked past his rather smelly cabbage patch.

"We're off to do my next test," beamed Arti. "We'll let you know how we go when we've done it."

Mr Treetwaddle shook a disgusting looking worm off his garden fork and waved goodbye.

"Mind how you go Arti," he called out.

Lilly sang as they strode along in the wonderful summer's heat. Arti sweated. Spike cursed.

They all went down to the shore at night.
With daggers and swords, what a terrible sight.
For on the horizon in the howling gale.
Was the ghostly remains of a sailing-ship's tail.
They plundered and murdered well into the night.
And didn't let up until it was light.
Heave ho me hearties Heave Ho.

Lilly's voice trailed off as they neared their destination.

"Did you really do all those things when you were young"?
asked Arti unbelievably.

"Worse!" muttered Lilly, trying to look tough, with a
ridiculous bird on his shoulder. A terrible racket rose up
and over the jail wall. It sounded like a hundred, panting
seals doing press-ups on a rocky beach.

"Good Lord," exclaimed Lilly, "what an unhealthy lot they
must be!"

As they rounded the corner, a dozen, shabbily-dressed
men were doing running-on-the-spot, just near the wall. Arti
had never seen a rougher looking lot.

"Are they all ex-pirates?" she asked wide-eyed.

"No, only one or two that I recognise in this bunch," said
Lilly. "See that fat man over there with the grey beard and
scar on his face? He used to be my best friend years ago.
We lost touch. Got done in, I heard, for knocking a fellow
clear out of the crow's nest. Broke just about every bone in
the fellow's back. Not to mention the bloke he fell on!"

"What do you think they'd do to me if they caught me?"
asked Arti very nervously. She didn't like the idea of
spending the rest of her life doing running-on-the-spot,
with a bunch of scar-faced, sweaty pirates.

"I'm sure they'd be pretty lenient, knowing what you'd done it for," assured Lilly.

"Look!" whispered Arti, "there's the jailer now."

A very large man appeared from the prisoner's midst, wearing a dark-brown uniform, three sizes too small. In one hand he held a big truncheon, in the other, the hair of one of the prisoners. Around his waist was a large, gold chain, on the end of which, attached to a gold ring, was a jangling, clanking set of keys. Arti shivered excitedly.

"Look, there they are," she said nudging Lilly, casting her eyes in the direction of the jailer's waist.

"Hold on just a minute young lad," said Lilly, "this has got to be played very carefully. We're going to have to sit here for quite a bit, until we can grab just the right moment to make our move."

"Hey, you over there!" thundered a loud voice. "What do you think you are doing hanging around here?" asked the red-faced jailer, letting go of the prisoner's hair.

"It's just me, Lilly, and my friend Arti," yelled back Lilly. "We were on our way to the docks, when we heard your interesting foot-work from behind the wall. The boy just wanted to sit and observe for a bit. That is, if you don't mind?" asked Lilly, in a very well-mannered voice. Arti couldn't believe it. Spike rolled his eyes heavenward. The jailer grunted something, then turned to face the prisoners again. New orders were bellowed out and all the men turned their backs and recommenced their hideous movements. Bottoms hit the ground, arms and legs flapped around in all directions.

"Pitiful!" roared the jailer.

Then Arti saw her chance. The jailer had picked out one particularly weedy prisoner and was hell-bent on making him do the exercise properly. In order to show the man the correct way to do the bobs, the jailer undid the dragging gold chain from around his waist. He placed it carefully on the ground at his feet.

"Take it slow and easy," urged Lilly, as he clasped his hand over Spike's beak as a safety precaution. Arti gently wormed her way over on her stomach, to where the bellowing jailer stood. The golden key ring was almost hers. She waited. One bob. The jailer missed the ground by one inch, then rose again. Arti stretched out her fingers as far as she could. Finally, one of her finger-tips landed on the ring. She unclipped the keys and slid them back slowly towards her. Twice they got stuck on tufts of grass, but she finally managed to pull them under her chest. She pushed them through the opening in her shirt. The keys felt icy cold against her bare chest. She wormed her way backwards again, bumping into Lilly's leg as she did so. Quickly she stood up straight, slipped the keys out of her shirt and stuffed them into her trouser pocket. Both she and Lilly folded their arms and put on the most innocent faces one could imagine.

By this time the jailer had given up all hope of ever teaching his motley crew the art of exercising. He roughly booted his weedy victim back into line with the others. Suddenly, he swung round to Lilly and Arti.

"And that is your lot for the day too," he yelled angrily, "this isn't a circus you know!"

At this, Lilly and Arti saw their chance to escape. They

both set off at a neck-breaking speed down the dusty road, not daring to look back.

"Hey, you forgot something," the jailer's voice resounded. Lilly and Arti froze in their tracks. Suddenly, a squawking mass of coloured feathers came bowling down the road behind them. Arti gave a sigh of relief. "Quick" she said. "Let's get to the ship before he discovers anything else."

It was beginning to get dark as they finally reached the dock. Several huge, grey ships rose up and down gently on the blackish-blue ripples of the sea. The setting sun glistened weakly on the tangled mass of cobweb-like ropes hanging from the masts. Pirates slipped backwards and forwards in the half-dark, stacking boxes of tobacco and rum. The air smelt lonely, but exciting.

"You go ahead, Arti," said Lilly as he sat down wearily on an old wooden box. "I'll watch from here. My legs aren't what they used to be, you know."

Arti took the keys from her pocket. She had been fingering them all the way back, just to make sure they hadn't slipped out. The setting sun made them shine a dull, heavy gold. She slipped them back into her pocket and made her way towards Captain Blighter's ship.

Silver Nightshade Arti read out loud. She had never noticed the name of the ship before.

Once on board, Arti was surprised by the change of atmosphere. The sleepy, day-time pirates had now been transformed by the approaching night into a quick moving, sure-footed, mysterious crew efficiently going about their business in the most impressive manner. Arti smelt the heavy, dizzy smell of tobacco and musk. She edged her

way quietly towards the centre of the ship, weaving her way in and out of the pirates as they tottered around the deck with large, wooden boxes on their shoulders. Small bright lights began to light up along the water front. She bent her head backwards and looked up. Someone lit a huge rushlight at the top of the mast. The mast stretched endlessly into the dark sky, a cluster of shiny stars circled the point.

"Now it's my turn," she thought.

Making sure the keys were still securely wedged in her pocket, she glanced from side to side, as she placed her small hands on either side of the slippery wooden pole. No-one was watching. Most were busy stacking boxes, others leaned over the ship's side, smoking smelly pipes and spitting into the sea. Arti was just about to wrap her legs round the base of the mast when she noticed a spider-web shaped net swinging alongside the pole. It seemed to be attached and reach right the way to the top.

"So that's how you climb up," marvelled Arti. She was mighty relieved at the thought of not having to pluck a million splinters from her hands and backside. Shakily she grabbed hold of the ropes and moved one hand, then one foot, in a monkey like fashion. After a few moves she felt confident enough and grabbed at the ropes excitedly. Up and up she swung, the deck growing smaller and smaller beneath her outstretched shoes. Once she paused for a breath. As she did so, she looked out across the quay and thought she could just make out the hunched figure of Lilly, sitting patiently in the dark. Or was that his shadow standing against the brightly lit window of the local

kiddleywink. She was pretty sure which shadow belonged to Lilly.

With a loud bang, Arti hit the bottom of the crow's nest platform with her head. She was momentarily stunned. Next, she swung her leg over and onto the wooden floor then pulled herself up. She rose to her feet shakily. She seemed a million miles up. The lookout swayed gently backwards and forwards making Arti feel a bit sick. She decided that it was best not to look down. She then pulled the keys out from her pocket and looked for a likely spot to hang them. She was in luck. Luck always seemed to smile on Arti. A juicy big nail stuck out from the side of the mast. Arti slipped the key ring onto the nail. She took one quick look around, sucked in a lump of warm, night air and began her descent.

Climbing down was the same dizzy experience as climbing up, the only difference being the change in pattern, with feet hands instead of hands feet. Soon her feet hit solid ground once more, as she landed on deck, narrowly missing a passing rat's tail. The rat turned with a disgusted look. Arti felt very tired and drained of all excitement. She thought it best to show Captain Blighter the next morning. With his bad eyesight he probably couldn't tell a set of keys from bat droppings in the dark. Arti stole secretly away in the direction of the kiddleywink. She pressed her nose up against the pub window. A large, red-headed woman with an equally large dress the colour of a cornish pastie, seemed to have caught her arm around Lilly's neck, in a deadly lock. Lilly was washing his face in a large mug of beer. Arti walked home alone in the

warm night air. After everything she had accomplished, she didn't feel a bit afraid. Mrs Treetwaddle thought otherwise.

"Coming home all hours," she yelled in a worried voice.

"Everything's O.K.," muttered Mr Treetwaddle, as he placed his gardening boots outside the back door to get rid of the smell. A passing slug did a quick detour. Sleep that night for Arti was very difficult indeed. She kept going over in her mind, everything that had happened that day. There was also the problem of getting the keys back to the jail without the jailer seeing her. Did she really want to be a pirate? YES.

Next morning, Arti woke to the smell of freshly baked cakes. Mrs Treetwaddle had placed a clean pair of trousers over the back of the chair. "Oh heck!" thought Arti. "Who's ever going to take me seriously in these sick green trousers."

"Don't you think you should do a bit of reading with your father today?" asked Mrs Treetwaddle, as she stuck her head around the door.

"I think dad reads quite well!" shot back Arti, as she narrowly missed her mother's out-stretched broom.

"Just you come back here. You've forgotten your shoes!" yelled Mrs Treetwaddle. But Arti was out and down the road before she could finish another swing of her broom. The grass along the roadside felt good between her toes. Arti felt the excitement swell up inside her again. As she reached the dock, she saw Lilly sitting on an upturned crayfish pot. Spike was nowhere in sight.

"Where's Spike today"? asked Arti a little concerned.

"Had a bit of a headache today," said Lilly, sounding none too well himself. "Well, did you manage it, my lad?" he asked hopefully. Arti swung round, took a quick look upwards then pointed her finger.

"See for yourself," she said proudly. Way at the top of the Silver Nightshade's mast, shone a dazzling, golden light. As the ship dipped down into the gentle waves, the glint disappeared momentarily. Then as the ship rose again, the sparkle caught Lilly right between the eyes.

"Well blow me if you haven't accomplished that one as well !" said Lilly proudly. "You're going to make one hell of a smart pirate me lad!" Arti's top button popped open with pride. "Let's go and wake Captain Blighter and tell him," suggested Lilly.

Just as they spoke, a vicious, yapping sound rang out from behind them. Both Arti and Lilly swung round and saw none other than the Captain himself, being pulled frantically along the dock by a spiteful-looking little Pekinese. The captain was trying desperately to hold his wig on, but it was tough work running in high heels and a tight velvet jacket.

"Out of my way boy," he yelled to Arti, as the dog lunged forward hysterically.

Lilly quickly stuck his boot out and the Pekinese went spinning into the air doing several somersaults as it did so. The dog finally landed with a thud and a puff of grey dust. There was silence for a moment, then the insane barking sounded off again.

"Remind me to add Peking to the list of stops we have to make next time we set sail," said Captain Blighter as he

adjusted his wig. "I always make it a habit to return things that don't work properly."

At this, the dog spotted a stray cat and took off after it at top speed, its squashed little face, drooling saliva which splashed out disgustingly in all directions.

"Like a dog sonny?" queried the captain with a sickeningly, sweet, insincere voice.

"Actually sir, what I'm here for is to show you that," said Arti, pointing again towards the ship's mast. The glistening keys flashed defiantly in the captain's face.

"What's that?" asked the captain half interested.

"The jail keys," said Arti. "Test number three if you remember, sir."

Captain Blighter looked momentarily puzzled, then a wave of recognition spread across his face.

"So it is boy, so it is. My! You are quite impressive, aren't you lad." The captain turned and walked shakily away towards the ship. He stopped for a moment, looked back and asked again, "Sure you wouldn't like a dog sonny?"

Arti's next big task was to get the keys back to the jailer. Lilly waited as usual, while Arti scrambled up the ropes once more. This time in the daylight, she wondered why she had thought it so hard and scary. She didn't look down though. Once safely down and the jail keys in her pocket, she sat down on the dock beside Lilly. "Are you coming with me today?" she asked uncertainly.

"Well Arti, if you don't mind, perhaps I'll stay here and fish a bit," said Lilly, rubbing the side of his head. "Wouldn't do to leave Spike alone for too long either!" he added. Poor old Arti set off once more in the direction of the jail. It was

also on her way home, so she thought perhaps she could do a bit of reading with her father after all, just to please her mother.

It was still quite early in the morning as she drew near the jail courtyard. Everything was silent. A cow belched in a nearby paddock. As she rounded the wall, Arti noticed that several of the cell doors on the other side of the yard had been left open. Then as her eyes travelled further along, she noticed the huge figure of the jailer slumped over a stool, sound asleep outside a locked cell door. A large, black blunderbuss lay propped up against the brick wall. The jailer had put all the prisoners into one cell and tied the door up with a large rope!

Arti crept up silently behind the him. Hurriedly she placed the keys on the ground in front of his ugly black boots. The jailer snorted, half frightening the daylights out of Arti. Then he fell into a deep sleep once more. Feeling a bit more daring, she gently tipped the slipping cap back onto the jailer's head, then she ran as fast as she could till she reached home.

The day went by very slowly for Arti. She saw several other children playing below at the bottom of her hill, but she decided it was best not to get involved with them right now. Perhaps after she had finished the tests. Arti was a bit grown-up for her age.

"I saw the village school teacher yesterday," said Mrs Treetwaddle as they sat over their supper bowls that evening. Arti dropped several, large chunks of bread into her soup and splashed the table. Mrs T. clipped her round the ears. "She was saying that one of the boys is leaving

Mevagissey next spring and she would have a vacant seat. That is, if we were interested," she added. "I told her we'd think about it," she said wistfully. Arti changed the subject much to the relief of her dad.

"I finished the third test today," she piped up proudly. "Number four is going to be even harder. You still want me to be a pirate and smuggler like yourself, don't you dad?"

"Can't say I do. Can't say I don't," answered Mr Treetwaddle gruffly. Mrs T. kicked him underneath the table. The agony on his face had to be seen to be believed.

That evening, Arti pulled the rolled-up piece of paper from underneath her bed. She read the fourth test and smiled. "That one is the easiest by far!" she thought as she went down stairs.

Chapter 5

Alone on the Silver Nightshade

Mrs Treetwaddle was sitting in a rocking-chair shelling peas. Arti made her move.

"Mother, my fourth test says I must spend a whole night alone on board Captain Blighter's ship. Can I go tonight please?"

Mrs T. pressed hard on the pea-pod in her hand and sent two, large peas flying into the air. She let out a huge sigh of frustration.

"Oh well, if you are so intent on following this thing through, it's no use me trying to reason with you or your father. He's just as bad as you are! Mind you," she added determinedly, "you must take that old blanket from the trunk in the attic. I'll have no child of mine lying on a filthy, fishy floor." She dug her fingers furiously into the bowl.

Arti raced off to get the blanket. The attic was very small and the trunk was about the only thing in it. Arti lifted the lid and pulled out a hard, grey bundle. She shook it and the smell of mothballs almost bowled her over. She rolled the blanket up, tied an old strap round it and slipped it over her shoulder. She climbed down the small, winding attic steps and went into the kitchen. As she passed, she stuffed a large, green apple into her trouser pocket.

Arti made her way back to the dock in the growing darkness, making sure to make a detour round the jail courtyard just to be on the safe side. Lilly was still sitting on the crayfish pot attempting to fish. Arti suddenly saw something moving inside the pot beneath Lilly's huge body. "Run for it, run for it," squawked a familiar voice.

"Hi Lilly, I see Spike is feeling better!"

"Yes," said Lilly. "A bit too better. I had to shut him up for a bit. It's the only way I can make sure where he is. What are you doing with that blanket?"

"It's for my fourth test," said Arti. "What! On your next one already?" asked Lilly rather flabbergasted. "My, you are eager, aren't you. Well what is it then?"

"I have to spend a night alone on board ship," answered Arti. "Want to join me? Captain Blighter has to know I really did do it and you're the one who's supposed to

check that I do."

"Well, I can't really say I fancy that one," added Lilly.

"Anyway, it's not allowed, is it? The rules say ALONE."

"Oh yes," replied Arti, feeling a bit stupid.

"Tell you what, though," added Lilly, "I have to pay a visit to the widow Nancy just near here. If you need me at all during the night, I'll be at number 8, Wharfside Drive. I'll probably be there all night, as we are playing cards." Lilly blushed.

"Bananas!" replied Spike.

"Listen," said Lilly. "Would you like Spike for company? He's not a bad watch-bird, you know. Once frightened off a couple of intruders at the Skipper's Arms a few years ago, when I had a job there."

"Oh thanks," said Arti, rather pleased at the idea. She never thought she'd be happy to spend an evening with Spike.

Lilly tilted the crayfish pot and pulled Spike out by the leg. Spike came out protested wildly.

Lilly clamped him firmly on Arti's shoulder.

"Now Spike, shut up and behave yourself. Arti is going to take care of you tonight, so off you go now and not a squawk out of you."

Lilly stood up, shook his baggy, grey pants and ran his large fingers through his beard, in a rushed attempt to make himself presentable. Arti waved goodbye to him as he walked away along the dock, his fishing-rod swinging dangerously over his shoulder.

It was getting quite dark now and everything seemed very still on board the Silver Nightshade. Unnaturally quiet

thought Arti as she struggled on board with her huge blanket and lopsided bird.

On the poop-deck, she could hear a real commotion coming from below. She went over to the hatch and listened. As she peered down, she could see that the gully was packed with pirates fighting and arguing as they shoved each other out of the way to get a better view of a small, cracked mirror, nailed to the wall.

"Who pinched me spice!" yelled a small, thin man, as he darted frantically from corner to corner.

"Here it is, Dan," yelled another, who was putting the finishing touches to a really slicked-down hair-do. A tall, skinny man spat on the mirror and wiped it clean with his sleeve. How disgusting, thought Arti.

The noisy scene went on for sometime, while Arti tried to figure out what it was all about. Suddenly she got her answer. Captain Blighter appeared at the hatch doorway, dressed to the nines in a royal-blue jacket, lace blouse, and matching lace socks. To top it all off he wore a pair of silver shoes!

Arti darted back into the shadows but was not quite fast enough. Captain Blighter spotted her and pulled her forward into the light.

"You!" he said. "What are you doing here at this time of night?" He hadn't noticed he was holding one of Spike's legs. Spike shook it viciously and the captain jumped back in horror.

"Please sir, it's my fourth test," piped up Arti. "It says I must spend the night on board your ship alone. Do you remember?"

"Well, you couldn't have picked a better night for it," said the captain. "Me and the lads are off to a party. I've no idea what time we'll be back. Just as well you are here boy, you can keep guard of the ship while we're away. Yes! I'll add that to the list, eh?"

Arti was too surprised to answer. At that moment, a group of sickly smelling pirates burst out of the hatch and onto the deck.

"How do we look, Captain?" they asked, flattening down their hair and jackets. Arti clasped her hand over Spike's beak. She never knew just what he was capable of coming out with next.

"Never mind how YOU look," sniffed the Captain. "Are my shoes a little too much do you think?" he asked, giving a tiny twirl.

All the men looked sideways and tried desperately to suck in their cheeks.

"Well, let's away then," said the captain.

"Tell me, what is that wondrous smell?" he asked as he brushed past Arti's blanket.

The gang-plank rattled uncontrollably, as they all strode down it, laughing roughly. Soon they were out of sight and Arti was left alone. She walked over to the side and peered out across the dock. The water seemed so black and cold. She spread her blanket out on the nearest bench and sat down. She did wish she had someone to talk to. She decided to sing a song to pass the time away and cheer herself up.

The night was dark and stormy,

The Pirates knew no fear.

For all the wind and rain and spray.

Didn't stop their flow of beer!

Spike hopped off Arti's shoulder and walked around the ship's railing, pretending to slip every now and again for a bit of attention. "Stupid Bird!" said Arti. Next she decided to lie down on the bench. She thought perhaps the next day would come faster if she went to sleep earlier.

As she gazed into the night sky, she worked out patterns in the bright stars. One looked remarkably like her father's gardening boot. Another looked like a man picking his nose.

The waves made strange, popping sounds as they hit the side of the ship. The mast made strange creaking sounds. "Was it the mast, or was it footsteps?" thought Arti, as she pulled the blanket round her. The air was turning a little cold now but there was a wondrous, comforting smell of cooking in the air.

Arti seemed to have been asleep for sometime, when she was awakened by the sound of heavy creaking foot-steps coming up the gang-way. She shook herself awake and listened again. The footsteps stopped at the top and Arti heard a loud belch. Her heart jumped sideways with fright, but in the same instance, she remembered that Captain Blighter had put her in charge, so she acted quickly.

"Stop! Who's there?" she asked, surprising even herself with such a strong voice. A swaying figure jumped back startled.

"It's Johnny Spaulding. Is this the Wayward Gloria?" he slurred. Arti noticed the glint of a bottle in his outstretched hand.

"No, this is the Silver Nightshade, can I call the Captain for you?" asked Arti.

"Well you could call the Captain if you liked boy, but I don't really want him, do I!" said the man backing down the gang-way unsteadily.

"Must have miscounted the ships," he said gruffly.

"They told me the sixth ship after the warehouse. Can't see in all this darkness."

Arti by this time was feeling a little more confident, especially with her clever bluff.

"Like a few men to show you off?" she called after him.

The man didn't seem to hear. He raised the bottle to his lips and stayed in that position for some time. Soon he was staggering off down the dock, narrowly missing a pie stand.

"That was a close one!" she said to Spike. "Spike, Spike, where are you?" shouted Arti.

She noticed a small tuft of feathers sticking out from underneath her blanket. She pulled it back to reveal a cowering Spike, feathers trembling. Arti laughed. "Poor Spike, I guess you are a bit human after all. Stay where you are, you can spend the night with me." They both cuddled down together. The blanket felt so comforting and warm. Arti wondered how long it would be before the crew came back.

She lay there for a long time trying to keep her eyes open. They felt so heavy. Suddenly she was aware of a tugging feeling on her leg. She paused for a minute, yes! there it was again. She flung off the blanket to discover Spike pecking away at the apple in her trouser pocket.

"Oh Spike!" she yelled. "Don't you ever stop annoying people!"

She flung the apple clear across the deck but Spike flew after it frantically, grabbing it with his claws and devouring it ravenously. Arti turned over to find a more comfortable position and remembered no more.

A plop of rain bounced off her nose waking her instantly. It was morning. She was so thrilled she had made it through the night safely. Quickly she rolled up the blanket and tucked in her shirt. Spike flew over from goodness knows where and sat on her shoulder, trying to flick off the annoying drops of water.

The rain was getting heavier, so Arti made a mad dash towards the hatch door. She had just stepped inside when a tremendous downpour hit the deck with a deafening bang.

Arti crept down the steps. She didn't want to wake anyone, as she wasn't sure how pirates reacted to an early awakening after a night out. She wondered if she should tell Captain Blighter that she had accomplished her fourth task. No surely he must have seen her lying there when he came home. Just out of curiosity she tip-toed over towards the Captain's door. She heard tremendous rumbling sounds coming from the other cabins, but she couldn't quite make out if it was thunder or snoring.

Outside the captain's door she noticed a lace stocking draped across the handle. She gave a gentle knock. Nothing happened. She knocked again and gave a slight push. The door creaked open slightly, revealing the sprawled-out body of the captain lying flat-out on his bunk.

His clothes lay in different spots around the cabin. One large, silver shoe rested precariously on the captain's chest. As he snored, the wig that had slid down over his eyes, fluttered gently with each snorting breath.

This was neither the time nor place to declare her triumphs, so Arti tip-toed over to the captain's desk and took out a piece of paper and a fat, gold pen. She wrote:

Dear Captin,

I hop yoo had a good tym at the party. I had a good tym on yor ship, and garded it safly wile yoo were away. Pleez note--this is Arti Treetwaddle and I hav akumplished test number for. I now hav only one mor togo.

Yorz Sincilly.A.T.

Arti looked at her letter proudly and wondered why on earth her mother had ever thought she needed to go to school when she could write such an impressive note as that. She clasped her fingers over Spike's beak and tip-toed out, past the snoring cabins, up the creaky, wooden steps and onto the shiny, wet deck. The rain had almost stopped and a slice of sun was trying to squeeze out from behind a heavy cloud. As Arti walked down the gangway, she noticed a familiar figure at the bottom. Her father had come to collect her. He was holding an umbrella.

Burning Bonfires

Arti stayed home all that day, as the sky showed no sign of clearing up. Spike had been banished to the garden shed and could be heard swearing as far away as the kitchen.

"I do wish that Lilly person would come and take away that cursed bird," moaned Mrs Treetwaddle, as she sat darning a pair of her husband's socks. "I can't think why on earth anyone would want a rude, smelly bunch of feathers on their shoulder all day long," she muttered with six pins sticking out her mouth. Arti didn't have the courage to tell her that Spike had spent the night or rather part of it, bundled up in her very own blanket!

"I think it's about time you spent a bit more time at home, instead of forever thinking of all this pirate nonsense," muttered Mrs T. "It's about time you helped around the house a bit more. Goodness knows your father could do with an extra hand digging in the garden."

Just then, Mr Treetwaddle opened the kitchen door, kicking off his boots behind him as he did so.

"Raining again, dear!" he said. Mrs T. turned and looked up from her sewing with a look on her face as if to say: "You don't have to be a genius to know that!"

"Well now, Arti, come over here and tell your old dad how everything has been going so far," he said as he squeezed his bent garden back into the rocking-chair.

Arti had been bursting to tell her adventures for days but felt that her mother would probably be too upset to hear about all the dockyard goings-on. Mrs T. pretended to sew, but her ears were almost glued to the rocking chair. As Arti

told her stories, her mother's eyes almost popped out of her head. She didn't even notice that she had darned a sock from the toe, right up to the heel in one go! When Arti reached the bit about the lace stocking on the door and the silver shoe on the Captain's chest, the needle went straight through her finger.

"Awwwww!" she screamed. "Well, I never heard such things in all my years as a pirate's wife. And to think my little Arti is mixed up in all that!" she moaned.

Arti and her father spent the rest of the afternoon telling pirate jokes and laughing. Mrs T. pounded the dough in the kitchen so hard, that puffs of flour hit the ceiling.

Next morning was still wet and windy when Lilly turned up as usual. He had heard Spike's cursing as he strode up the hill and had collected him from the garden shed. His usual, thunderous knock, shook the household. Arti stuck her head out the window and called down.

"Morning Lilly, won't be long. Make yourself at home, the door's open." No-one ever locked their doors in Mevagissey. Pirates on land were very honest in that respect. The only dirty deeds they committed were on sea, not land and that was only for survival.

Lilly decided to seat himself on the garden wall, knowing that Mrs Treetwaddle wasn't all that in love with Spike. It seemed a good place to think things out and also it was the right height to cock a leg up and place your bum on. Spike sat pecking at a loose thread on Lilly's collar. The gathering wind blew right up his feathers making him look like an old hair brush.

"Hi, Lilly!" chirped Arti as she swung herself up onto the

wall. "We did pretty well last night, old Spike and me. You should have seen us, We even managed to scare off an old drunk!"

Lilly was hugely impressed and listened eagerly.

"Well Arti, you've done pretty well so far. Anyone would be proud of you, I know I am."

Arti blushed a little and checked the buckles on her shoes. She pulled her woolly hat down over her ears.

"Just one more left!" she said as she unrolled the paper. They both studied it together. Lilly noticed a small red tick beside the numbers one to four. Number five was still unmarked.

"Light a fire on the beach and keep alight without the local constable seeing you," read Arti aloud. They weren't exactly the words, but near enough for her.

"How do you think I'll go with that one, Lilly?" she asked.

"How did you manage when you did the test?"

Lilly scratched his mop of curly, black hair and pondered a bit.

"Can't recall at all really," he said.

"In my day, the tests were different, I think. They needed pirates badly, so they made the tests pretty easy. Captain Blighter is a recruit from those days too, would you believe?"

Arti could well imagine it, in fact, she had wondered how he had ever made it as far as crew member, let alone Captain.

"Are you going to come with me on this last one?" asked Arti pleadingly.

"Well, sure," said Lilly. "Must see the final one out eh! Put

my seal of approval on things and report back to the captain. What do you suggest we do first?"

"Let's go along to the dockside kiddleywink. I can't think on an empty stomach," said Arti.

Lilly thought this was a good idea. So off they raced.

On reaching the kiddleywink, a loud racket and din could be heard as a drunken mass came flying through the door, almost bowling them over.

"Mind where you're treading," yelled Lilly, rather angrily, as he rubbed his foot behind his other leg.

They both made their way to the far corner of the room and nestled into the warmth of the crowded tables and chairs.

This was a place where big men came to laugh and cry and talk their problems through with anyone kind or stupid enough to listen. Even Arti liked the comfort and closeness of the atmosphere. She felt it a good place to put her thoughts in order. The room was brightly lit, buzzing with life and excitement, enough to jolt any bright young mind.

"Name your poison," nudged Lilly, as Arti slid her cap off and crunched it in her hands.

"What?" she asked rather puzzled.

"What will you have to drink?" winked Lilly, as he smiled at a friend at a nearby table.

"I'll have milk, if that's O.K.?" she replied.

Lilly screeched his chair backwards, rose and pushed his bulky frame towards the bar, dodging women's arms and pirates' out-stretched legs.

The bar was ablaze with hundreds of reddish, brown bottles, all lined up in neat shiny rows behind the

kiddleywink owner's back. He in turn was reflected back into the room by means of a huge polished mirror.

Arti could see Lilly mouthing the words beer and milk in the mirror and noticed the barman's suspicious glance.

Arti sat and watched and thought.

How could her last and final task be achieved. She thought and thought, as she slid the small paper beer mat round and round the table. It had to be a good one, the best one of all.

"Here you are, me mate," said Lilly, as he splashed a piping hot mug of cocoa down on the ruined, tarnished table top.

"My favourite," beamed Arti, as she gently sucked in the frothy top layer, between her outstretched lips.

"This place is good for thinking in," she said with a smiling milk moustache.

"Glad you think so," said Lilly, as he gazed around intently as if trying to find someone.

"Well," said Arti, "I've been wondering. What's so important about lighting a fire on the beach?" she asked mystified.

"Well you see, Arti, it's very important really," Lilly informed her. "It's the whole basis on which pirating and plundering is based. It's been a custom for centuries. Whenever a ship is spotted out at sea in rough waters, preferably in a beauty of a storm at night, the pirates light a fire on the beach, tricking the ships into believing that the light is guiding them through the rough waves away from the perilous rocks."

"That seems pretty kind to me," added Arti.

"Ah yes," replied Lilly. "But what they are really doing is

putting the fires in all the wrong places, guiding the ships onto the dangerous rocks. That way, the ship is broken up into millions of bits and all its valuable cargo is washed up onto the beach."

"That seems a terrible thing to do," said Arti, rather ashamed of her pirate connections.

"Aye indeed," answered Lilly looking rather sad.

"I've seen many a body washed up on these shores the morning after. It's not a pretty sight I can tell you."

"Why do they do it?" asked Arti rather horrified.

"Well you see lad, I don't know if you've ever really noticed, but people down here in Mevagissey, well all over really, are quite badly off. In fact you could say poor. They are cut off from the rest of the mainland. It's the only way people manage to survive. They know it's wrong but they don't want to die of starvation."

Arti saw the reasoning in this and understood.

"Still they shouldn't kill people. They should start a vegetable garden like my dad."

"I know, I'll light a helpful fire," she cried as she leapt to her feet, sending her empty mug crashing to the floor. The kiddleywink owner rose on his toes and peered in the direction of the noise.

"We'll go down to the beach," said Arti, "and see which way the wind is blowing and where the dangerous rocks are hidden. We'll place our fire right where the rocks are, so the ships can follow the light and steer clear."

"Good idea," beamed Lilly, as he eased his bottom off the chair. "It's not really ideal conditions being the middle of summer and all, but I'll admit it is a bit stormy and rough

today."

"Let's go back to your house and start from there," he added.

Lilly slapped a few brown coins onto the table and both made their way towards the door.

"What's that boy doing in here?" yelled the owner. "Don't you know, you young'uns aren't allowed in here."

"He's with me," yelled Lilly over the din. "He won't be a young'un much longer after today, if all goes well."

The kiddleywink owner seemed unimpressed as he hurried over to the door and glanced furtively up and down the dock for any signs of a passing policeman.

Lilly and Arti strode back confidently towards the house through the cold wind.

"Let's go down to the beach and make our plans," said Lilly.

A small path beginning near the shed wound down and around the hill. It ended in a small, sandy cove at the bottom. Lilly, Spike and Arti descended carefully as the wind was blowing rather fiercely by this time. Lilly held onto Spike for good measure. Several goonhillies grazing on the hillside huddled together for protection, as the wind tossed their manes and tails like spun silk. Spike spread his wings a few times, just to remember the joyous feeling of flying, but nothing happened.

The sky was now turning a very threatening grey, with enormous dark clouds swirling up over the horizon. Even the hillside and luscious grass had turned a dull, dry yellow. The sea had whipped itself up into a frenzy, as a strong, driving wind sent the rolling waves crashing down

upon each other.

As they reached the beach, a large fish flew head-first out of the wild surf and landed unconscious at Arti's feet. She placed it carefully in a nearby rock-pool to recover.

"What will we do first?" she then asked with chattering teeth.

"Let's spread out and look for firewood," said Lilly. "Then we can study the tide and rock position."

Lilly went sinking off in the sand in one direction, Arti in the other. There were plenty of choice-looking bits of driftwood scattered all over the beach, some in the most ridiculous shapes and positions. One piece Arti found was the exact shape of a bottle of beer!

There were too many bits to carry all at once, so she took off her belt and strapped it around the large bundle. She then hoisted it over her shoulder and sank off again in the cold sand towards the oncoming, black figure of Lilly. They met beside the unconscious fish.

"Should be out cold for a while yet, considering how hard it hit the ground," concluded Lilly.

"If it doesn't come round, he can be my dinner guest tonight!" He roared loudly above the crashing surf.

A funny, salty smell filled Arti's nostrils, as she stopped to watch hundreds of shiny, smooth rocks being pulled into the sea by the rolling waves.

"How did you get on?" she asked eagerly. Lilly pointed to a large pile of twisted bric-a-brac lying a little way along the beach. Spike had helpfully collected a string of seaweed.

"No problems so far," said Lilly. He put his arm round Arti's shoulder and both went off to study the situation. Arti

wasn't sure whether she preferred the bone-chilling wind or the heavy, lead weight of Lilly's arm on her neck. She wriggled out from beneath it, pretending to pick up an interesting something or other.

Spike by this time had been blown off Lilly's slanting shoulder and had hopped towards the water's edge for a better look at the rolling pebbles. Few birds came more inquisitive than Spike. Suddenly there was an ear-piercing screech. Lilly and Arti swung round in time to see Spike standing up to his knee in a pool of water. One leg was kicking out in all directions trying to shake something off. As Arti ran closer, she could see the shape of a large crab, its claws clasped tightly round Spike's leg.

Getting the crab off was much harder than either of them imagined. It stuck on like glue, its eyes bulging in a stubborn, furious manner. It seemed determined to pull its catch back into the sea for some odd reason. Spike wanted out. He squawked and bit and jumped up and down on one leg like a crazed drunk. In desperation, Arti picked up a large rock and cracked it down hard on the crab's back. Instantly it let go of its grip and hurtled sideways back into the frothing surf. Spike rubbed his leg furiously with his beak, then started rubbing Arti's leg in a smarmy, sickening gesture of gratitude and affection. Arti knew he didn't really mean it, so she pinged the back of his tail with her fingers and walked back towards Lilly.

Lilly by this time had fallen flat on his back in hysterical laughter at the ridiculous sight of the wrestling trio. It took him a full five minutes to recover and struggle to his feet. There was a big dent in the sand where he had fallen.

"Phew! Haven't laughed so much since Paddy McGuire's funeral!" he hiccuped.

"Come on!" said Arti anxiously. She was very determined to see this last test through so she could finally become a pirate.

"Let's go up on that cliff over there," she pointed, "and see if we can spot the dangerous rocks. "You know about the tides, don't you Lilly?"

"Sure as sandwiches," added Lilly, reaching into his inside pocket.

"I happen to have just the thing we need," he added, as he drew out a long, brown object.

"Oh great," exclaimed Arti. "A spy-glass! Can I have a look?"

They continued along the beach towards the cliff base, Arti holding the spy-glass up to her eye the entire way.

When they reached the cliff, both rested for a breath. The wind had been blowing hard against their chests trying to hold them back.

"I think if we just climb up a little way," said Lilly, "we can see the sea pretty clearly. It's too windy to go up too high."

Arti passed back the spy-glass.

A flock of seagulls screamed incessantly as they flew in circles around the climbers' heads. Both climbed up and up, Arti digging her nails into every crack and crevice she could find. Small pebbles gave way and crumbled under her feet as they rolled with great speed towards the bottom. She was glad Lilly was underneath her, to catch her if she slipped. Lilly wasn't.

Spike had decided to leave them both to it and sat

huddled on the beach pretending to read an old, washed-up copy of the Mevagissey gazette.

"Let's rest there!" yelled Lilly, over the howling wind, screaming seagulls and crashing surf. He pointed to a large flat rock jutting out above them.

"That's a good platform for us to sit on," he yelled again.

Arti managed to roll her body up and over onto the flat rock. Lilly followed in a lumbering clumsy fashion. At least he made it!

"Can I have the spy-glass again," yelled Arti in Lilly's ear. She could distinctly smell a whiff of rum on Lilly's beard even in the powerful wind.

"I can see for miles with this," she marvelled.

"Not a ship in sight though," she added rather flatly.

"Train it over that way," said Lilly, pointing to a large, dark patch further down the beach.

"You're right!" screamed Arti in delight. "There's a huge mass of rocks over there just below the surface. Looks pretty dangerous to me too!" she added in a knowledgeable voice.

"My best bet is," said Lilly "we build, let's say, two fires. One directly opposite the rocks and one over here at the base of the cliff. That way the ships should be able to steer well clear of these two danger spots."

"I agree," added Arti folding up the spy-glass in a professional manner.

"Now let's get back and light those fires," puffed Lilly.

Arti stepped forward but was pulled back rather abruptly.

"Hang on a minute there Arti, not so fast! We still have a bit of thinking to do yet. Firstly, one of us, preferably you,

has to go back and get some matches, then one of us, preferably me, as I know about these things more than you, has to go back to the dock and check out when the next ship is due in dock. Don't want to sit here on our behinds for weeks, waiting for some ship to pass, do we!"

"Clever thinking," piped up Arti. "Now let's get down from here and get started."

Climbing down brought back the old nightmarish memories of shinning down the Silver Nightshade's mast. Arti reached the bottom with a slightly bleeding knee and three broken fingernails. Lilly wouldn't say what he was missing. Both set off up the beach again braving the pushing winds.

It took Arti a quarter of an hour to scramble up the hillside to her house, where she found her mother scrubbing the back doorstep. Breathlessly she asked for some matches.

"Go and look in your father's shed," answered Mrs Treetwaddle with an exaggerated huff.

"He must have half his life stored out there and more besides. He never throws anything away!"

Arti found them under a bag of compost. She blew away the pong and stuffed them in her trousers.

"Put your coat on," bellowed MrsT. as she threw a large, grey-flannel coat straight at Arti's face. Arti put it on, thankful for the comforting warmth it gave her and set off down the hill again. She could barely breathe, the wind was so stiff up her nostrils.

Lilly took considerably longer but finally made it back, his coat-tails flapping wildly behind him in the wind.

"Well?" asked Arti bursting with curiosity.

"Tonight!" grinned Lilly as he threw himself down on the cold, grey sand.

"There's one passing through tonight, but they can't say what time exactly because of the wind. They say it's a big one loaded with cargo from Jamaica." Lilly's eyes positively glowed as he said it.

"We'd better get moving quickly," said Arti dragging Lilly to his large, flat feet. "I'll stack the wood over here and you and Spike can pile yours down the other end of the beach near the cliff."

As Arti dragged the different bits and pieces to the centre of the beach where she calculated the hidden rocks to be, she didn't notice a small, brown dinghy appear round the corner of the cove. She looked up, to see the local constable sitting bolt-upright in the centre of his boat looking rather startled and somewhat puzzled at the sight of the two figures. Arti waved. The constable raised a baffled eye-brow and waved back. Soon he had drifted turbulently out of sight, carried along by the driving winds and pushy waves.

"Strange man," thought Arti as she gathered more driftwood.

"That was a close one!" yelled Lilly from the far end of the beach.

Mission accomplished and two proud cone-shaped bonfires later, Lilly and Arti sat down for a rest.

"I wonder when it's going to come?" asked Arti impatiently.

"I mean if it comes when it's dark we won't be able to see it. We can't keep our fires going all night just in case," she added annoyed.

"We'll have to be patient a bit," replied Lilly as he reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a small bottle of rum. He took a long, hard swig. Spike lay sheltering in his large, upturned pirate hat which had fallen off in the wind. The two huddled together, back to back like a pair of stiff book-ends, waiting for their ship to come in. "Sing one of your songs Lilly," pleaded Arti. Her teeth wouldn't stop clattering as the wind whistled into every crack of her body. Lilly sang while Arti buried her legs in the sand in a desperate attempt to keep warm. The cargo-ship was laden down with rum and spice and loot, It even carried twenty tins of plundered Spanish fruit. Lilly's voice stopped abruptly and in the shake of a parrot's hind leg he was up on his feet. "Get up Arti!" he yelled. "It's coming!"

To find out what happens next, please purchase the whole book (\$3 only) by visiting <<http://order.kagi.com/?3YD>>