

ELSBETH  
AND THE  
FREEDOM FIGHTERS



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*The Cape Cod Witch Series*  
BOOK II

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Cape Cod, Massachusetts

## Chapter One

### Magical (and Other) Trouble on Cape Cod

Two shimmering fairies dance in a meadow ring of daisies. They laugh a mean little laugh as they twirl themselves in the sparkling morning sun. Quick words of magic are spoken in their ancient language. A field mouse stops nibbling the sweet wild strawberry in his tiny paws and watches nervously.

Not far away, ElsBeth's grandmother, Hannah Prudence Goodspell, walks through her healing garden. The older witch looks uncertain.

Out in the ocean, a family of whales swims in tired circles. Scientists fear they may soon head for the beach.

All is not right in this beautiful place beside the Atlantic.

Strange, disturbing, unexplainable things are happening.

Let's take a closer look in on the village and those who live there, magical and not, and see if we can figure out what is going on.



## THE YOUNG WITCH AT SCHOOL

Perched on her wooden seat in the third row of the narrow classroom, ElsBeth Amelia Thistle, the youngest witch on Cape Cod, was completely, out-of-her-head wild with excitement.

What an adventure they were going to have—a class field trip—all the way to Boston! “Beantown” itself, home to all kinds of fascinating history, *and* the greatest baseball, football, basketball and hockey teams ever. At least that is what her pesky classmate Robert Hillman-Jones said.

Being a genuine witch, ElsBeth didn’t really pay much attention to ordinary boys. But Hillman-Jones was convincing when he spoke about sports. The fellow second-grader seemed unshakably certain that Boston was a sports town above all others.

ElsBeth was nervous about being able to go on the upcoming trip, though. Her grandmother usually supported all her interests, but not this time.

“Too many ghosts and ghouls around that town. Mean spirited, too, most of them,” the older witch added each time the field trip was mentioned.

To make matters worse, Grandmother was completely caught up in all the odd happenings around town lately and it was difficult to have any serious discussion with her.

ElsBeth was almost through second grade, and she was beginning to feel she could handle anything. She wasn’t worried about a few ghosts and ghouls. If she could just get Grandmother to understand. After all, how many witches made it through a whole year with Ms. Finch as their teacher? Well, almost made it.

The *only* time this entire school year that Ms. Finch had

been *at all* nice had been on Halloween, when ElsBeth and her good friend Johnny Twofeathers had rescued Robert Hillman-Jones and several of the other second-grade boys from the notorious ghost of pirate Billy Bowlegs and some nasty treasure hunters cleverly disguised as bird watchers.

Ms. Finch had even given them candy then. Why couldn't it always be Halloween, ElsBeth wondered.

But that was a long time ago. Now, it was May. And though all of Cape Cod was fresh and green and alive with spring, Ms. Finch was her same mean, old, stuffy self.

These thoughts ran through ElsBeth's mind while she daydreamed during long division class.

"Ms. Thistle ... Ms. Thistle ... MS. THISTLE!"

ElsBeth looked up, horrified to see a red-faced Finch leaning over her.

"I SAID, 'What is the quotient of 21 and 7?'"

Quotient, quotient? ElsBeth's mind raced. What was a "quotient" again? Oh, no. ElsBeth had totally forgotten what a quotient was.

The little witch sat hard on her hands so she didn't cast a "holding spell" by accident. Even if that would have given her time to look up the answer. She was *definitely* not allowed to use magic at school.

ElsBeth decided honesty was her only hope. It was less risky than making up an answer, or guessing, especially wrongly.

"A quotient ... I don't remember what a quotient is," she stuttered.

Oh, no, ElsBeth had just broken at least three Finch rules:

One—she didn't know the answer.

Two—she hadn't been paying attention.

And three—she forgot to end her statement with, "I'm sorry, Ms. Finch."

Boy, was she in for it now.

Ms. Finch turned sharply. "Double assignments, Ms. Thistle, for the rest of the week. You lack discipline, young lady!

"And I'm just the one to fix that," the teacher sneered.

Ms. Finch walked away with a pleased look on her sour-pickle face. She *loved* any excuse to give ElsBeth extra work. Something about ElsBeth just seemed to annoy Ms. Finch to no end. And ElsBeth's latest crime was worthy of punishment for the whole week.

The stick-thin Ms. Finch rubbed her hands together in delight.

ElsBeth began to sweat. She was already behind in her magic lessons at home. A whole week of extra assignments would make it a lot worse. How would she ever catch up?

But the school day went on from there as it always did, and somehow, despite the horrifying beginning, ElsBeth managed to make it through with no further disasters.

When the end-of-school bell rang, her classmates began to pack up and head out, but ElsBeth could barely drag herself up from her seat.

Her good friend Veronica stopped and said, "ElsBeth, you've got to get it together. Daydreaming in class is just asking for trouble. You don't want extra work next week. Four Seas Ice Cream Parlour is opening for the season, and *everyone* is going over to Centerville."

Veronica tossed her head artistically. She had practiced this move so she looked like that hip singer in the indie band her mother liked.

Veronica was always cool, unlike ElsBeth, who tended to be a bit of a hothead. Veronica had no worries as she headed out into the perfect Cape Cod afternoon.

Johnny Twofeathers had his own issues with the difficult teacher, and when he walked by he gave ElsBeth a sympathetic look. ElsBeth almost always knew what Johnny was thinking. He didn't have to say anything. With just a nod in her direction, ElsBeth felt better.

Then Amy Clark slipped by. Her thick, yellow-blond banana curls mostly hid her sweet face. Along with an embarrassed glance, she gave ElsBeth a small smile of encouragement.

Nelson Hamm watched Amy longingly, just two steps behind the slight girl in pink. He sighed, his ears turning red. "It could have been worse," he mumbled to ElsBeth as he passed.

Robert Hillman-Jones swaggered up last, kicked ElsBeth's desk, and squeaked, mimicking ElsBeth's latest run-in with Ms. Finch. "Oh, quotient, quotient. What is a quotient?"

He laughed hard and burst out of the classroom toward the freedom of the schoolyard. His every step said *he* was going to have some fun.

ElsBeth frowned. Things were not going at all well. But she squared her slim shoulders and moved out into the hall.

She began to sing a little tune she made up on the spot to lighten her mood. Time to face up to her long, lonely afternoon of extra assignments for the Finch.

Chapter Two  
The Witches of Six Druid Lane

When ElsBeth arrived home that evening, Grandmother was unusually quiet. Normally the plump older witch would bound out of the garden, give ElsBeth a big hug, and ask all about her day at school.

Instead, Hannah Goodspell barely noticed her granddaughter.

ElsBeth turned to Sylvanas, the magical cat. “What’s up with Grandmother?”

Sylvanas didn’t answer. He just looked back with his nose in the air, as if to say, “It is far beneath *me* to pry.” Which was a little silly, since Sylvanas was probably the nosiest creature in the whole town, perhaps even all of the Cape and Islands.

He really was an impossible busybody.

ElsBeth, however, soon forgot her own concerns and the annoying Sylvanas when her grandmother cast the same spell three times in a row and nothing happened.

ElsBeth realized something was really, really wrong.

Hannah was one of the most respected witches in Massachusetts, and Massachusetts' witches were the most respected witches in all the New World, both North and South America. If Hannah was *this* messed up, it must be serious.

Was it more than just the business with the fairies? They certainly could stir up more trouble than a truckload of two-year-olds—devious, devilish two-year-olds at that.

Grandmother wandered toward the house and ElsBeth decided she had to ask Bartholomew. Sylvanas clearly wasn't going to be a help.

She quickly found Bartholomew in the back of the garden. The extraordinarily big, bright green frog, who had, oddly enough, once been a handsome Native American prince, could almost always be found in the garden.

And he could almost always be counted on to listen to ElsBeth's difficulties. ElsBeth didn't really have many difficulties. But when she had them, she could count on Bartholomew for good advice.

She sat down on a rock in the minty medicinal herb section by the lemony plants. Bartholomew was at eye level, comfortably settled on his ornately carved garden stool.



He turned his glimmery golden eyes to the young witch. “Don't worry, ElsBeth,” he croaked.

“Your grandmother

is just a little nervous. Er ... there have been some new goings-on with the fairies. You just can't predict what they will get into next."

There had been problems with the fairies since Halloween, when the little creatures had stirred things up at the pirate's cave. But trouble with them was nothing new, just one of those things a witch had to deal with on a daily basis.

ElsBeth tried to question Bartholomew further, but the frog just wouldn't say more. He simply sat, looking wise and humming a pleasant Beatles' tune while evening settled quietly over the garden.

ElsBeth couldn't help thinking there was more to her grandmother's odd behavior than Bartholomew was letting on. She could sense there was something else, but she couldn't for the life of her tell what was happening.

She made up her mind. She really *would* have to talk with Sylvanas. *And* get him to answer. Right after dessert!

That morning, Grandmother had said they might have maple custard at supper. And with the thought of this tempting treat, all else, for now, was instantly forgotten.

ElsBeth jumped up, gave Bartholomew a quick hug, and went in to help with the meal.

As she stepped onto the porch, the heavenly smell of fairy cupcakes seeped into her senses. Double-double chocolate chip fairy-cream cupcakes were her all time favorite! Even better than maple custard! The young witch skipped happily inside.

### Chapter Three

## Mathematics Has Its Uses

That evening, after a delightful, though unusually quiet dinner, Professor Badinoff spent a whole hour going over the basics of multiplication and division with her.

Fortunately, like all witches, ElsBeth had a “familiar”, a unique, magical animal friend who helped and protected her, no matter what. ElsBeth’s familiar was a bat, Professor Badinoff.

The Professor was an extraordinary teacher. He had a way of explaining things, especially mathematics, that ElsBeth could understand with no difficulty.

Why couldn’t Ms. Finch be more like Professor Badinoff?

ElsBeth started to giggle, picturing Ms. Finch with pointy bat ears and sharp teeth. That would be something! Shaking with belly laughs, she slid to the floor and rolled around.

Professor Badinoff cleared his throat. He was a respected teacher, after all, and didn’t often have students

rolling on the floor during math lessons. This wasn't proper behavior.

"Yes, well, as I was saying ..." the professor continued.

Badinoff pointed to the collection of rubber tree frogs that ElsBeth kept in a basket in the corner of her room. "ElsBeth, count out one hundred frogs, please."

ElsBeth busily added up the required number of amphibians and placed them around on the hooked rug by her bed.

The professor flew to the slate chalkboard he used for mathematics lessons. He wrote neatly, in fancy script, "*100 divided by 5 = ?*"



“ElsBeth,” the professor pointed, “please separate the one hundred frogs into five equal piles.”

ElsBeth divided the tree frogs by color, because she liked the look of it that way, and put the green, brown, purple, orange and red frogs in their own neat rows.

“Now, ElsBeth, count how many frogs are in each group, please,” the professor instructed in his serious teaching voice.

ElsBeth carefully added up the number of frogs in each group, her tongue sticking out the side of her mouth with the effort to keep track. Then she neatly lined them up with four rows of five frogs in each colored grouping to make it easier to see and just to be sure she had it right.

“Twenty! There are exactly twenty in each.”

“Precisely,” said Badinoff. Flapping his wing over the slate, he erased the question mark and wrote “20” in its place. “The quotient is twenty.”

ElsBeth frowned. “What’s a quotient?”

Badinoff smiled, his exceptional ears perking up. “Excellent question, ElsBeth. The word ‘quotient’ comes to us from Latin, an important language for magical beings, by the way.

“In Latin the word means ‘how many times.’ The basic idea is ‘how many.’ So, if you had one hundred frogs, and you wanted to split them up into five groups—so you could have them jump out from all sides and surprise an enemy, for example—you would have a tidy total of twenty frogs in each group.

“Finding a quotient comes in handy for cooking and spell making, and dividing and placing your troops in any

serious battle—just to name a few uses off the top of my head,” he added.

“I would love to have a hundred frogs jump out and surprise Ms. Finch when she’s picking on me. Or at Robert Hillman-Jones when he’s pulling my braids. I never knew mathematics could be so extremely useful.

“Thank you, Professor,” she added respectfully.

Professor Badinoff puffed out his chest and lightly fluttered his wings at the sudden interest he had inspired in his young pupil.

He was about to continue the lesson and get into his favorite Einstein equations when he took a second look at ElsBeth’s shining face. He saw that she had learned something important and that it was time to end off for now.

The wise bat said, “Well ... er ... yes. I think that is enough for today. Well done, ElsBeth.”

With a quick sweep of his wing, he erased the board and took off out the window, looking for someone with whom he could debate some of Einstein’s less well understood theories, a favorite pastime when not teaching ElsBeth, or gobbling up some of those tasty New England mosquitoes.

## Chapter Four

### A Witch's Dreams

That night as ElsBeth crawled into bed, the silvery moon shining through her window seemed to be winking at her in a friendly fashion.

The stars were twinkling cheerily, too.

Her lids grew heavy in the night's soft light and she soon dropped off to sleep. But it was a fitful sleep and full of dreams.

“ElsBeth, save me!” Robert Hillman-Jones stumbled down a tunnel, his expensive hiking clothes covered in muck. ElsBeth called over and over for him to stop, but her classmate just ran on deeper into the darkness.

ElsBeth tried, but she couldn't catch up. She fell farther and farther behind. She was so tired, but knew she couldn't quit. Suddenly she felt a cold, creepy presence. Something, or someone, not of this world.

Now something chased ElsBeth! She tried to run faster, but the muck sucked at her sneakers. The thing behind her closed in. Her heart raced. She couldn't go any faster and

it was almost upon her. ElsBeth collapsed, and waited for the end ... but nothing happened.

“Wake up, dear. It’s time to get up.”

ElsBeth blinked. She rubbed at the bat birthmark on her heel for a moment. It was morning. The sun was already up and she was tangled wrong way to in the half-moon comforter on her little captain’s bed.



Sylvanas was perched on the windowsill, looking down on her with narrowed eyes.

Grandmother stood in the doorway. She still looked distracted, but the important thing was that she was there. ElsBeth relaxed.

It was just a bad dream. But Grandmother had cautioned her in the past that a witch’s dreams could be important. She must write everything down in her diary before she forgot.

ElsBeth took up the small dream book she kept on her bedside table. “I had another dream, Grandmother.” She pulled the velvet ribbon, opening her diary to the next blank page.

The silver bat that weighted the end of the ribbon flashed in the morning sun. Its reflection looked like a small bat was flitting about the room. The young witch scribbled everything she could remember.

This was the first dream she’d had since Halloween. Then she had dreamt of the pirate Billy Bowlegs and his awesome treasure. And *that* dream had turned out to be true.

While ElsBeth tried to remember if there was anything else to write, Grandmother wandered in and plopped down into the rocking chair by the window. The older witch shook her head and seemed to be talking to herself.

Then, for no apparent reason, Grandmother suddenly sprang up, walked in a small circle three times, patted ElsBeth’s head, and walked out, seeming to forget that ElsBeth was even there.

ElsBeth had never felt so alone as she watched her grandmother leave. Grandmother hadn’t even asked about the dream.

What could be wrong with Grandmother? ElsBeth’s mind raced through the possibilities as she pulled on her comfortable old purple shoes and got ready for school.

Chapter Five  
School—Again!

ElsBeth arrived at the schoolyard filled with new confidence. She definitely knew what a quotient was now, and she knew several practical reasons why anyone would even *want* to know about such a thing. Mathematics had suddenly become a very useful tool, in her opinion.

She was finally ready for Ms. Finch.

“Just go ahead and ask me for a quotient,” ElsBeth muttered to herself as she passed through the tall oak doors of Capeside Elementary School.

Robert Hillman-Jones bumped into her, accidentally on purpose, and said quietly under his breath, so there were no witnesses, “You’ll never pass second grade, ElsBeth. Too bad you’re so dumb.”

ElsBeth lost her temper, an unfortunate failing of hers. She pushed him back—*just* as Ms. Finch appeared outside the classroom door. Was the teacher a mind reader?

“I saw that, Ms. Thistle! Apparently no one has taught you how to act like a young lady. Perhaps we need to make

your double work assignments permanent. No, maybe ...”

The teacher’s complicated mind was working overtime. Elsbeth could feel, and almost see, dark thoughts flash by in Ms. Finch’s head.

“Maybe you should stay back and study ‘proper behavior’ while everyone else goes on the field trip to Boston next week. Yes. That will teach you a lesson.”

At that point the school principal, Dr. Titcomb, popped his silver head out of his office and frowned at Ms. Finch.

“Elvira, could I see you in my office for a moment?” Dr. Titcomb’s words came out more like an order than a question.

Ms. Finch looked a little afraid and resentful at the same time. She glanced sharply at Elsbeth and headed down the hall.

Five minutes later Ms. Finch came back to the classroom. Her face was deep red. Elsbeth was relieved when nothing more was said about her not going to Boston.

Spelling and reading flew by that morning. Today math came right after lunch, and Elsbeth was actually looking forward to it for a change. She was completely prepared, thanks to Professor Badinoff’s excellent instruction.

Ms. Finch put a question up on the board, squealing the chalk for as long as possible. The students covered their ears in pain.

The question she asked today was ... “100 divided by 5 = ?”

Wow, Professor Badinoff had even guessed Ms. Finch’s exact question.

Elsbeth shot her hand straight up. She would prove to

Ms. Finch and that rotten Robert Hillman-Jones she was not dumb.

Ms. Finch, however, turned a blind eye to Elsbeth. It was as if the young witch didn't exist. Elsbeth quickly looked down at her body to make sure she hadn't gone invisible—a thing that she knew could sometimes happen with a witch. But she was still there.

Ms. Finch glared down each row. No one else had raised a hand. Finally she spotted a victim.

Her eyes stopped at Nelson Hamm. Nelson's ears were bright red again, and sticking out particularly far today, due to an unfortunate haircut at Barber Bernie's Hair Emporium last Saturday.

Nelson had been staring at Amy's blond curls, and was far away in thought. He imagined saving little Amy from a ferocious, fire-breathing dragon. He was right at the critical moment when ... Ms. Finch's icy voice cut through.

"Mr. Hamm, what is the quotient for this problem?" She tapped the blackboard loudly to intimidate him.

Nelson also had no idea what a quotient was and sputtered several times before finally guessing.

"Twenty?" he whispered.

He had the correct answer so Ms. Finch could only criticize his slow reply. "Well, are you quite sure about that?" she snapped at him.

Nelson sputtered some more.

Ms. Finch turned her stony face toward Robert Hillman-Jones and softened a bit. Robert was her favorite. "Robert, I'm sure you know the answer to this problem and won't have to equivocate."

Robert Hillman-Jones wasn't sure that twenty was the answer, either. And he definitely wasn't sure what "equivocate" meant. But he figured it had something to do with sounding uncertain.

So he took a chance and answered boldly. What the heck, he thought, the weirdo teacher liked him anyway and he might score some more points with her if he were right.

"Ms. Finch, the answer to this problem is clearly twenty!"

Ms. Finch sent a rare smile in Robert's direction. "Yes, Robert."

Then she frowned at the rest of the class and added, "At least *one* student in this class has been paying attention."

ElsBeth was ready to explode. For most of the day Hillman-Jones had been shooting dried wasabi peas through a straw at the girls. The last thing he had been doing was paying attention.

ElsBeth was not going to stand by silently while he got away with this. It was wrong! She started to huff.

Ms. Finch raised an over-plucked eyebrow in ElsBeth's direction.

Fortunately, however, just at that moment, Sylvanas the cat, in all his feline majesty, plopped his fluffy black self on the windowsill, distracting ElsBeth from doing something she was sure to regret.

Sylvanas let out a distinct hiss aimed directly at Ms. Finch.

The teacher's head snapped to the window. She jumped back behind her desk, panic stamped on her pinched face.

Sylvanas was quite satisfied with this reaction. Ms.

Finch would not dare mess with ElsBeth, no matter the circumstance, when *he* was there to intervene.

His action on ElsBeth's behalf complete, and having several other bits of mischief in mind to stir up elsewhere just then, he vanished from the windowsill, quicker than smoke. Only the little witch and the teacher had observed his mysterious and brief appearance.

ElsBeth cooled off. That was a close one. Disaster had been narrowly avoided. She owed Sylvanas. Again.

Chapter Six  
Difficulties Between the Witches

That evening, after another double work assignment, during which even she would have to admit her penmanship *had* improved nicely, ElsBeth again wound up in the garden with Bartholomew.

The huge frog leaned back against the maple tree, deep in thought. ElsBeth sat on his green garden stool and looked at her friend.

Before she said anything, the frog croaked sympathetically, “I know, Ms. Finch isn’t fair.”

ElsBeth was taken by surprise. “How did you know what happened, Bartholomew?”

“Sylvanas,” Bartholomew replied. No further explanation was needed.

ElsBeth, and everyone else for miles around, were quite aware that Sylvanas was a compulsive gossip and meddler. Of course he would have passed on this juicy information.

“Yes, well, she isn’t fair. What can I do, Bartholomew? I want to go to Boston. I’ve never been off-Cape and

*everyone* is going.” ElsBeth whined, quite unbecoming in a witch.

Bartholomew understood, though. “Don’t worry, little one. Ms. Finch won’t actually keep you here. She just enjoys making you and the other students feel upset. Unfortunately some people are like that.

“But I need to warn you,” the frog continued. “Not everywhere is like Cape Cod. There are things you will see in Boston that could frighten you. It is an old place with many kinds of ... disagreeable magic.” His face screwed up before he snapped out his tongue at a nearby bug.

What was happening here? Bartholomew had never before cautioned her about anything. ElsBeth knew he frowned upon cowardice above all else.

“What do you mean, Bartholomew? What should I be afraid of?”

Bartholomew just shook his head. “Nothing, little one, really. You should never walk in fear. But it is wise to pay attention when the storm clouds gather and the enemy grows strong.”

ElsBeth felt her eyebrows shoot up and wrinkle her forehead. She was completely confused.

“Just pay attention and you’ll be fine,” the frog summarized, in a tone that said that was that.

Now ElsBeth wondered what she was supposed to pay attention to. She looked at Bartholomew in the fading light. The frog sat very still, and for just a moment she saw him as the handsome Native American prince he had once been. His now deep brown eyes held many secrets.

ElsBeth blinked twice, and once again there was only a simple, though exceptionally large, green frog leaning

against the tree.

Reminded of Bartholomew's true nature, she felt better somehow after their little talk. She smiled at him and headed off for supper.

As she skipped up the path, dark clouds swept in low and fast from the ocean. Very fast. Faster than fast.



Their pink and lavender Victorian house, with its fancy curlicues, glowed in the streaks of sunlight that broke through before the rush of towering storm clouds. Zig zags of lightning shot out of the sky in all directions. ElsBeth stopped and stared.

Weather was unpredictable on the Cape, but she had never before seen a storm move in like this one.

A fat drop of rain splashed on her nose. In a moment she was drenched. She scooted up the steps onto the wide pine planks of her front porch.

Safely out of the downpour, she turned and looked back at the storm. Outlined by the lightning against the dark clouds was the faint form of a face. It reminded her of someone, but she couldn't think who it was.

She stood there dripping as she puzzled over the image. Then the wonderful smell of Grandmother's cranberry-orange bread pudding caught her.

She stepped inside. "Grandmother, you made my other favorite!"

The oven door was open and ElsBeth's mouth watered as she watched grandmother pull out the bowl of golden pudding with bits of red and orange fruit sticking out on top. Suddenly all else was forgotten.

"Yes, ElsBeth, I thought we should have a special dinner. And after that we need to talk."

ElsBeth was too interested in pudding to notice the serious tone in her grandmother's voice.

After dinner ElsBeth completed her homework and her chores. (Even witches have to do chores every day.) Then she and Grandmother ended up in the living room.

A small fire crackled. The welcoming scent of cedar perfumed the room. The evenings were still cool, and a fire took the chill off.

They settled in the comfortable, faded-blue wing chairs by the fireplace and sipped their cocoa. ElsBeth's steamed from her favorite bat mug and Hannah's from the big green cup that looked a little like Bartholomew.

"ElsBeth, you come from a long line of accomplished witches. We've talked about this before. As a witch you have certain duties."

ElsBeth nodded.

Grandmother continued. “You know we are responsible to see that the villagers and the animals and the plants are looked after, that the weather is kept somewhat under control, and that the magical creatures in our area are safeguarded. Those are our most important duties.”

“Yes, Grandmother,” ElsBeth replied earnestly.

“Well, ElsBeth, I know you are hoping to go to Boston. This is difficult for me to explain, but there hasn’t been a respectable witch in Boston for over two hundred years.

“There are all kinds of troubled ghosts, ghouls, goblins and restless spirits there. The city is really out of control—magically speaking.”

Grandmother shifted uncomfortably in her chair. “No one really knows why, but even the most skilled witches can’t seem to stand more than a day in the city before they just go mad.”

Now ElsBeth shifted uncomfortably.

Grandmother didn’t seem to notice. “In fact, that’s why all the Boston witches moved back to Salem. It’s a mystery no one’s been able to solve. And believe me, many of us have tried over the years.

“Now, I know you have your heart set on going with the class on this field trip. And I know you’d only be in the city itself for a few hours. But I’m concerned.

“What with the fairy situation, and the recent storms here on the Cape, and ... well ... everything else, I have my hands full right now. I just don’t think I can be worrying about you in Boston, too.”

ElsBeth was crushed. Did this mean Grandmother would not sign the permission slip?

Then suddenly her grandmother stopped speaking and looked muddled again.

And, happily for ElsBeth, no more was said about the subject that night.

Later in her little captain's bed, snug in her pink bat pajamas, for the first time in her life ElsBeth was upset with her grandmother.

How could she even imagine not letting me go on this trip? ElsBeth began thinking up arguments she could use to change her elder's mind. ElsBeth *had* to get her grandmother to stop worrying. She could handle the trip. She just knew it.

ElsBeth glanced out the window at the clouds that were passing in front of the moon. She saw Professor Badinoff fly by, his wide wings creating an inky shadow that chased over the ground. She wanted to discuss this difficult situation with her friend and teacher.

“Professor!” she called out. But he was too far away.

ElsBeth's mind went round and round on the sticky problem.

“What should I do?” she whispered over and over again as she fell into a restless slumber.



Chapter Seven  
Sylvanas “Helps Out”

“I’m wearing my lime green capri pants with my purple hoodie, and I’ve got this great new backpack with tons of pockets. *And* my mother is letting me wear the latest sea-glass necklace she created for her new jewelry line!”

Admiring girls crowded around Veronica in the schoolyard.

Veronica loved to plan out what to wear. But ElsBeth didn’t really want to hear about Veronica’s outfit for the Boston field trip, particularly when she wasn’t even sure she’d be allowed to go.

Her mind drifted, imagining everyone going. Robert Hillman-Jones, Johnny Twofeathers, Nelson, Amy—all the kids. Even the Nye twins, who were being home schooled, were going to go.

Out of the corner of her eye, ElsBeth thought she saw a face disappear behind the apple tree in the back of the school playground. She started toward it to investigate.

She could hear a rustling noise behind the tree as she

came closer. And the air smelled funny, like it does after a summer thunderstorm.

Suddenly ElsBeth felt cold. She began to feel afraid. She swallowed her fear and stepped forward. Then ... the bell rang.

All the second-graders exploded toward the door. No one *ever* took a chance on being late to Ms. Finch's roll call. Ever. ElsBeth had to go, but who ... or what ... was behind the tree?

### NATIVE AMERICAN HISTORY LESSON

The last class period was history, one of ElsBeth's favorite subjects. And today they were learning about Native American tribes in New England.

The Algonquins, the Iroquois, the Nipmucs, the Abenakis and the Wampanoags, to name a few. Johnny Twofeathers was essentially Wampanoag royalty, though you'd never know it.

He wasn't stuck up or anything. In fact, he seemed embarrassed today. Perhaps it was because Ms. Finch kept calling the Native Americans "savages." Each time she said the word she glanced over at Johnny, as if she expected him to protest.

ElsBeth thought Ms. Finch was trying to get Johnny to lose his temper. What Ms. Finch didn't understand was that Johnny never lost his temper. He was the least likely to ever get *deserved* punishment.

It wasn't that he was a fake goody-goody like Robert Hillman-Jones tried to be sometimes. Johnny was just a truly good person. ElsBeth counted herself lucky to have

such a friend.

She started thinking about all the different, amazing Native Americans she knew, daydreaming again.

Ms. Finch interrupted ElsBeth's thoughts with a sharp rap of her wooden pointer on the blackboard.

It appeared that many of the students had drifted off while the teacher had gone on and on about the least interesting aspects of Native American culture, which was a hard thing to do, since Native American culture is actually completely fascinating. Luckily ElsBeth wasn't caught out for daydreaming this time.

It turned out that Ms. Finch had moved onto an entirely different subject.

"I need all your permission slips for the trip to Boston. Please hand them forward."

Oh, no. ElsBeth had *totally* forgotten they were due today. She hadn't even had another chance to talk to Grandmother about going.

She looked around self-consciously. Everyone seemed to be pulling a note from his or her lunch box or backpack. Everyone except Robert Hillman-Jones. Was it possible his parents didn't want him to go, either?

Hillman-Jones raised his hand, smiling brightly at Ms. Finch. The Finch's face seemed to crack as a small smile broke through her frown lines. "Yes, Robert?"

"My father is in New York this week and my mother is in London, so I don't have a note. My father said he would call Principal Titcomb this evening and give their OK for me to go."

Ms. Finch's face almost cracked again, but not with

a smile this time. Robert was, without a sliver of doubt, her favorite, but the crabby teacher hated any, that is *any*, deviation from the rules.

“Permission slips are *required*, Robert.” She turned her back on the shocked student and faced the blackboard.

Hillman-Jones had rarely been refused anything in his short, expensive life. For once he was speechless.

“Now children, pass in the slips!” Ms. Finch also hated repeating herself.

They hurried to follow her directions before some sort of Finch-eruption took place.

Nelson Hamm dropped his slip several times. Ms. Finch always got to Nelson. His ears were practically neon red right now. He finally got it together and passed his slip forward.

Veronica whispered, “ElsBeth, where is your note?”

Before ElsBeth could answer, the shifty black cat suddenly appeared again on the windowsill. He grinned. ElsBeth dared to hope.

And just as suddenly, North Wind burst in the open window and blew through the classroom, creating mini-whirlpools as he swept and swirled down the aisles. He seemed to howl with laughter as he whipped up Ms. Finch’s hair to a spiky peak and blew off her glasses.

Permission slips rose in a funnel cloud, lifted out the window and scattered every which way over the playground.

Ms. Finch’s hair continued to stand straight up. Whether this was because she spotted Sylvanas staring at her, or because the wind kept whipping about her head,

wasn't clear.

"ElsBeth!" the teacher shouted. "Get that cat out of here!"

In response, Sylvanas leapt several feet in the air, sailed in a most graceful fashion for such an oversized cat, and landed neatly in the center of Ms. Finch's tidy oak desk. He slowly arched his back and hissed at the Finch.

Then he casually turned and soared back through the window. North Wind followed, with more permission slips trailing after, as he, too, dramatically dashed away.

The students stared stunned.

Ms. Finch, usually *extremely* well organized and in control, was at a loss. The trip was tomorrow.

She would have no time to get new slips printed and sent home. At least three days notice to parents was required. How could she explain this to the principal? In the heat of the moment, under pressure, she made a snap decision.

"Right. Very well. It looks like we'll all be going. Class dismissed."

ElsBeth floated above her body. She could go on the trip! Down deep she knew it wasn't *completely* honest to go without Grandmother's permission. But a little voice inside quickly piped up with several excuses ...

"Grandmother never *exactly* said I couldn't go, she was just concerned. If I'm very careful there will be nothing to worry about. I'm just a small witch and hardly count, and we won't be in Boston more than twenty-four hours. I get along well with most all magical creatures. Grandmother will never know, and I shouldn't bother her with this right

now. Besides, Sylvanas wouldn't have helped me unless he thought I should go."

In short order ElsBeth had it well and completely justified why she should not tell her grandmother. Though she couldn't help struggling with feeling it wasn't *quite* right.

Finally, she made up her mind. I'm almost through second grade. I'm going to have to make my own decisions and take responsibility for my own life sooner or later. It might as well be now.

And so, that decided, and with only a few niggling guilt feelings still prickling at her conscience, the young witch headed out from school.

On her way home, the thoughtful blue heron, Thaddeus Crane, flew low by ElsBeth's head.

"ElsBeth, what's wrong?" he called out. "Your grandmother is not herself, and now you seem different and upset, too. All the marsh creatures are worried."

ElsBeth *did* have serious things on her mind, but she didn't feel she could burden the kindly bird with all that.

"It's OK, Thaddeus. It's just the fairies again. Grandmother's had a lot to handle with them lately. That's all."

Thaddeus's soulful eyes looked right through her. "I don't think that *is* all, ElsBeth."

He paused a moment with her. "But remember, we marsh birds are here if you need us."

He flapped slowly away and called back. "We all love you and Hannah. Remember your friends."

Thaddeus swooped twice in a lazy circle, tipped his

wings in salute, and was off to the nearby salt marshes for dinner.

ElsBeth scuffed down the crushed shell drive, not noticing all the animals who watched her pass.

Othello leaned over his pine branch perch. He didn't miss much. The odd, old owl blinked golden eyes that closely followed ElsBeth's small figure.

"There is something wrong with that young witch," he hooted to himself.

Persephone, the graceful yellow coyote, moved along with ElsBeth, well hidden in the woods. Her paws made no sound as ElsBeth's feet crunched noisily down the drive.

Persephone was sensitive. She wasn't going to intrude on the little witch's thoughts, but she kept watch over ElsBeth her whole way home.

Three fat gray squirrels stopped their endless play and chatter and stared as she passed them by.

Thelonius Chipmunk, ElsBeth's wildly talented neighbor, paused his musically rhythmic nut cracking to observe the witch's unusually quiet mood.

"That's odd," he said to Mehetabel, his mate. "ElsBeth always likes to hear my latest Jazz tunes when she goes by. I wonder what shakes?"

Mehetabel turned from grooming her glossy red fur and began aligning her black stripes to best advantage. "You can never tell with witches."

"Strange and unpredictable creatures they are," she added, while she admired herself in a pool of collected rainwater.

Thelonius thought his mate was a more strange and

unpredictable creature than *any* witch he'd ever met. But he carefully kept his mouth shut.

A harmonious marriage in the chipmunk world required a lot of restraint. Maybe in any world. He went back to gathering nuts and experimenting with a new beat.



Thelonus operated on the guiding principle that one could never have too many nuts for a Cape winter. Or for the rhythm section of a chipmunk band.

Sylvanas had been keeping an eye out for ElsBeth, too,

waiting for her at the edge of the garden. But ElsBeth kept walking and didn't even notice, until she'd nearly stepped on his splendid tail.

"Oh, sorry Sylvanas," she said absently, but she continued walking, completely unaware the magical cat was waiting to speak with her.

ElsBeth had been thinking she couldn't easily talk with Grandmother now, and lately Bartholomew wasn't much help either. She might have to try to take things up with Sylvanas again.

She wasn't happy about this, though. Sylvanas was exceptional in many ways, but not to talk to. That cat almost never gave a straight answer to any question put to him.

Still, she needed to discuss things with *someone*, and decided it would have to be the mischievous Sylvanas after all.

The big black cat had kept up with ElsBeth as she had blindly paced along the drive. She finally noticed him.

Sylvanas somehow managed to look down on ElsBeth while actually looking up at the young witch. Sylvanas was tricky that way. Everyone always felt they were beneath Sylvanas somehow.

Persephone watched the two magical beings. The small witch looked agitated, and the imposing cat looked ... well ... imposing.

The coyote wondered what they were saying, but she had difficulty understanding English. She could see they were planning something, though. Coyotes were very good at picking up intentions. They had to be alert to survive in the world of people.

But what were ElsBeth and Sylvanas up to exactly? She decided she had better keep an eye on these two. *Something* was definitely going on.

## A DISTURBING DINNER

Grandmother seemed even more distracted at dinner that evening. The whole-wheat pineapple upside-down cake was served right side up! Dessert was served before the main course, and they had no honey milk.

There was no happy chatter, practicing of incantations, crystal ball readings or anything interesting. Things at Six Druid Lane were definitely not normal. Even for a magical family.

Only Sylvanas was his usual self. He smiled secretly at odd moments. It was as if the cat had a cunning plan he was keeping to himself. He licked the heavy cream on his dessert, and purred quietly with a mysteriously satisfied grin.

## Chapter Eight

### Boston or Bust

On the day of the class trip ElsBeth woke up from a curious dream. She had seen a face that looked so familiar, but she couldn't place it. Again she had seen a dark tunnel, and rooms and rooms full of gold and jewels. What did it all mean?

Even though she had gotten up late, she took a few minutes to write everything down in her dream diary. She marked her place with the velvet ribbon and rubbed the silver bat at the end for luck. She threw on the first thing she found in her closet and ran down to breakfast.

Grandmother was in the kitchen as usual. Her fluffy gray hair and her face were decorated with flour dustings. She looked pale and exhausted, but fresh-baked, hot cranberry scones were on the table, loaded with cream cheese and honey.

For once ElsBeth didn't want to take her time and chatter away with her grandmother over breakfast. She gulped down her yogurt with nuts and berries and took one of the cranberry scones.

She kissed her grandmother on the tip of her floury nose and gave her an extra big hug, but she was careful not to look Grandmother in the eye.

ElsBeth waved at the moon-faced grandfather clock in the corner, he winked back cheerily, and a moment later she was out the door.

When ElsBeth got to the schoolyard, she found most of her classmates dressed as if they were going to see the President of the United States.

Amy had on a pink satin creation, with patent leather shoes that shined blindingly in the morning sun.

Veronica looked like a little rock star, though with several more layers of clothes.

Nelson Hamm looked sporty in a green and blue polka dot bow tie.

Carmen wore her sister's brilliant yellow Confirmation dress with pale orange tights. Her mother was known around town for severe color blindness and favored the brightest colors in unique combinations.

Fortunately Carmen looked great in yellow, though the orange tights gave her a stork-like appearance.

Jimmy Miller fought to stuff the yellow rain slicker his father had insisted he take into his backpack, but it wouldn't quite fit.

Jimmy's family had been fishermen forever and his father was a firm believer in being prepared for any weather condition. This meant Jimmy and his brothers always had a heavy yellow slicker and an extra-heavy-duty flashlight on hand.

After all, it could be sunny on the Cape one minute and

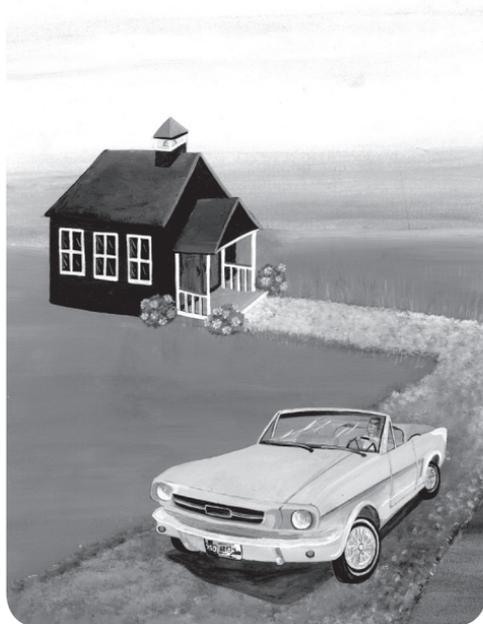
a full storm with gale winds could hit the next.

Lisa Lee wore a lovely pale blue silk suit. With her oversized glasses she looked like a midget Chinese grandmother, but she was also oddly elegant. An interesting brown belt held her red, padded, dragon jacket together.

Johnny Twofeathers showed up at the last minute in pressed khakis, a crisp white button-down shirt, striped tie and a navy blazer.

He looked like a small-scale, well-tanned, Harvard law student. He did, however, carry an oversized backpack with dozens of pockets that looked suspiciously practical.

ElsBeth looked down at her own clothes. She had grabbed her oldest purple tights, a worn denim skirt and a lavender hooded sweater that was slightly too small.



How embarrassing. This was their first class trip, all the way to the city. They would, in essence, be representing their entire school, all of Cape Cod even. Boy, had she messed up.

But ElsBeth was distracted from these unhappy thoughts when Robert Hillman-Jones arrived in his uncle's classic, perfectly restored, Skylight Blue, 1964½ Mustang convertible. Robert always knew how to make an entrance.

Everyone was there, except the Nye twins. The girls had been thrilled when they first found they were to be included in the school trip.

They usually only got to go anywhere with their mother—the major downside to the home school program in their opinion. But a case of the measles had destined the fun-loving redheads to miss out on the excitement.

Chapter Nine  
All Aboard the Magic Bus

“Stop shoving!”

“You stop shoving!” Frankie’s stocky boxer frame blocked the kids behind him from getting seated. Frankie trained hard in the ring with Uncle Vittorio and was prepared to use force.

He’d gotten into a small disagreement earlier with Nelson over which team was the best, the New England Patriots or the Boston Red Sox, and in the heated discussion had forgotten his lunch. Frankie was pretty focused when it came to food and he’d had to run back for his lunch box. No way was this Italian boy skipping lunch!

Now Frankie couldn’t decide what to do. Most of the boys had taken the seats in the back and the girls had started filling in up front. Frankie was now stuck in the middle of the girls.

This was just not happening! Frankie was in the second grade—almost done with second grade. There was no way he was sitting with a girl.

Hillman-Jones shoved past. “Frankie, we’re sitting here.” Hillman-Jones pushed Amy’s slight body out of the way and plunked down in front of Veronica.

“We can definitely cause more trouble from the middle,” he added, looking back at Veronica with a nasty grin, and staring her down at the same time.

Nelson immediately jumped up to defend Amy, who had been pushed back into the boy’s section. But Ms. Finch’s sudden scowling appearance at the front of the bus stopped him cold. Nelson was really scrawny, but when it came to Amy, the skinny boy knew no fear—except for Ms. Finch.

He slowly melted back into his seat.

Ms. Finch, with unfailing radar, had sensed growing joy and promptly took action to crush it. Under her threatening stare, the students quieted and settled into their seats.

ElsBeth sat with Lisa Lee. Her mysterious backpack, covered in strange symbols that surrounded a bright red painted dragon, took up most of the seat.

It was like having another squat kid between the two girls, and ElsBeth had to scrunch up against the window. Every once in a while the bag squirmed on its own. ElsBeth was intrigued.

Many of the kids had never been on a bus before. ElsBeth, in fact, had rarely been in a car. The Cape Cod witches didn’t often find it necessary to travel in motorized vehicles.

And Grandmother was quite opposed to fossil fuels—she said they hurt the environment. ElsBeth only hoped the bus wouldn’t use too much fossil fuel.

ElsBeth watched out the window as the bus driver arrived with a perfect double somersault, followed by a tight back flip.

McTodd MacSweeney was a favorite among the schoolmates. McTodd was only five feet and one inch tall, which had earned him the nickname “Big Mac.”

The driver was most admired, though, for being, in his off hours, an expert Irish sword dancer and bagpiper. His performances on Saint Paddy’s day drew crowds from all across the Cape.

Big Mac sprang aboard and bowed neatly to the students, just as Ms. Finch began to call roll.

Each answered up crisply, except Nelson, who stuttered a bit when it was his turn—Ms. Finch just made him so nervous!

As she finished up the list with Frankie Sylvester’s name, a tall stranger swung gracefully up the steps of the yellow Bluebird bus.

This was a small town and everybody knew absolutely everybody. Who was this man?

Ms. Finch sensed she had lost the children’s undivided attention, especially demanded during roll calls. Or else.

She turned around, and her breath caught in her throat. Before her was the most handsome man she had ever seen.

Unconsciously she fluffed her short blue-black hair. Then remembering herself and her position, she turned back to the no-nonsense activity of organizing the students.

When she finished snapping instructions, she again turned to the gorgeous man behind her. “May I help you?” she asked, pretending she was completely disinterested in

the stunning stranger.

The tall man closed the short distance between them. Her cold heart beat faster.

His voice was rich and warm and vaguely foreign. “Are you Elvira Finch?”

“Yes,” Ms. Finch purred as she looked into midnight blue eyes framed by thick black lashes.

The children watched, fascinated.

“Principal Titcomb asked me to assist you today in guiding the students through the Boston Freedom Trail and museums. Mrs. Bottomley is ... unavailable,” he added, with no further explanation.

“I’m Xavier Saint Georges. Charmed to meet you, Elvira,” he added with a slight smile.

“Yes,” was all that Ms. Finch could absently purr again. The fearsome teacher looked absolutely hypnotized.

Xavier placed his handsome hands on the teacher’s thin shoulders and gently guided her to a seat at the front of the bus.

Ms. Finch smoothed her skirt, shook herself a little, and cooed, “We’re all set, Mr. MacSweeney.”

As Big Mac shut the door, a small black streak barreled through the opening.

Sylvanas made it past Ms. Finch easily. The teacher was still staring dreamily at Xavier.

And none of the kids noticed the black blur shoot onto the back of an empty seat, and up into the storage area overhead.

Even ElsBeth missed Sylvanas’s entrance. Veronica

had tapped her shoulder from across the aisle at just that moment and asked, “Did you see that? Ms. Finch is in love, and I don’t blame her. That stranger is *beautiful*.”

Veronica was too interested in boys and love in ElsBeth’s opinion.

ElsBeth turned toward the strange man, and for some reason she couldn’t exactly put her finger on she felt uneasy. There was something familiar about him, but something was not quite ... normal, too.

Big Mac put the bus in gear, and with hisses and puffs the second-grade class—with two important additions—was off.

They headed away from the salt marshes and cranberry bogs, and the scrub pines and twisted oaks of home.

Before long a large, thatch-roofed building appeared on the right. It looked like something from a fairy tale. The Christmas Tree Shop, a sign read. How cute, ElsBeth thought. She couldn’t wait to tell her grandmother about it.

The big yellow bus rumbled across the Sagamore Bridge, and over the canal that cut the Cape from the mainland.

When they reached the other side ElsBeth suddenly felt a shift. The world looked different. The sun was less bright. The shadows darker. The air less sweet.

Odd, ElsBeth thought. Then a long, low hiss sounded above her. Even odder, the young witch observed.

In the front of the bus, McTodd changed his Nantucket fishing cap for a shiny Boston Red Sox baseball hat. They were off Cape now, for real.

As they rolled along the Pilgrim Highway, cars with intense, serious-looking passengers passed them by. ElsBeth noticed many were dressed in dark blue jackets and pink shirts with colorful ties. She thought this must be some strange kind of uniform.

Then she saw swans swimming up a small creek. At least that was just like on the Cape.

They passed the sign for historic Plymouth. On the left a huge totem pole stood in front of a rest area just off the highway.

The feathered headdress on top towered above the roofline of MacDonald's. ElsBeth hadn't known that the Native Americans owned MacDonald's.

This was all so interesting and new!

Then, for just a moment, ElsBeth saw a flickering image—a grim-faced Pilgrim in a tall black hat next to a pale woman in a long homespun dress. The woman held the hand of a small child with haunted eyes. And standing tall right beside them, a muscular Native American looked sad. There was something disturbing about them.

But the bus sped on down the highway. And when ElsBeth looked back, she saw only the totem pole. "Strange again," she mumbled to herself.

Lisa Lee, her seatmate, wasn't very talkative—ever. So ElsBeth had plenty of time to think. She turned her attention to the problem of Grandmother.

ElsBeth knew well that fairies could cause enormous concern. Getting into mischief was their favorite thing to do, particularly when they were angry about something. And even more particularly with royal fairies.

The fairies had helped ElsBeth and Johnny Twofeathers escape from the pirate cave last Halloween. But at the same time they'd been naughty and annoying.

They *loved* being contrary. They'd been locked in a velvet-lined chest a couple of centuries ago. And they'd had plenty of time to sleep and dream—especially to dream of ways to cause all kinds of chaos.



But was it just the fairies causing all the recent trouble in the village? There'd been the fistfight that broke out at the town meeting when Cyrus Nickerson accused his Uncle Eldred of using shockingly improper language.

Then there was the strange weather, and the lost manatee found nearby at the Dennis town dock.

And what about the whales that kept bumping into the fishing boats, and the seagulls dropping masses of shells on the steps of the Town Hall—and the balloon festival, when all the balloons blew out to sea and had to be rescued by the Coast Guard? Not to mention what happened to old lady Cahoon’s wig!

It did seem that a lot of mysterious things were going on in the village lately.

Lisa Lee’s quiet but precisely spoken words broke in on ElsBeth’s thinking. “Magical beings can cause trouble.”

ElsBeth did a double look at her classmate. “Excuse me, Lisa Lee. What did you just say?”

“It is a well-supported theory that supernatural beings are behind a large percentage of seemingly impossible happenings,” she explained.

ElsBeth had never heard this many words spoken aloud in a row by Lisa Lee before. “What do you mean?” ElsBeth finally asked.

“Well, clearly you were disturbed by the ghosts in Plymouth, leading logically to thoughts about the recent strange happenings in town, and no doubt ending in your concern about Miss Cahoon’s wig.”

“Wow, Lisa Lee, how ... how did you know all that?”

“Elementary. I saw them, too.”

“Well ... how did you know I was thinking about Miss Cahoon’s wig?”

“You were patting your hair. Obvious, really.”

ElsBeth’s jaw hung open. Then her attention drifted out the window. She saw a small hill topped by a sign that read “Pleasant Mountain Pet Rest.”

She and Lisa Lee both watched a sleek Dalmatian dog being chased by a yipping black and white Chihuahua. Several orange striped cats looked on with disapproval, while a sad Labrador retriever puppy sat alone on his hind legs, as if begging to be hugged.

ElsBeth and Lisa Lee looked quickly at each other, then back at the cemetery, which was now completely empty.

Lisa Lee nodded slowly. “This is going to be an interesting trip.” She folded her hands neatly in her lap and was perfectly still again. ElsBeth wasn’t sure what to say, or what to think.

Every few miles ElsBeth noticed figures that seemed out of place. In Marshfield, several Native Americans in yellow buckskins chased a white wolf. And just south of Braintree, a man dressed as an old-fashioned locomotive engineer hovered over the train tracks.

As they neared the city, a horse and rider passed by. He carried a lantern and leaned low, urging his horse to speed. He appeared to be waving at ElsBeth. She thought he looked like the picture of Paul Revere that Ms. Finch had put up in the classroom when they had studied about the American Revolution.

Lisa Lee made no further comments. She just looked quietly intelligent, as usual.

The other children chattered excitedly. There was no serious monkey business, of course. Ms. Finch would have been on them in a New York minute (whatever that was) if anyone significantly misbehaved.

Sitting up front, and talking in hushed tones with the mysterious Xavier, Ms. Finch was thoroughly occupied—sufficiently so that the students’ spirits were able to rise,

along with the sound level, to that of a normal busload of second-graders.

Finally they entered the city. Boston! Home of the Boston Tea Party, revolutionaries, Freedom Fighters, the lot!

Here it was, its shining, tall buildings poking into the sky—the John Hancock, the Prudential, Government Center ...

Lisa Lee sat up even straighter and leaned toward the window when they passed the highway exit for Chinatown. Her eyes lingered on the curly, bright blue, tiled roofs that reflected the spring sun. But she quickly settled back as they flew on to the day's destination, the Boston Common.

All this time, just above them, Sylvanas had indulged in one of his favorite activities—extreme cat napping.

He'd found Veronica's quilted knapsack and several emergency blankets and had created a highly satisfactory bed for himself.

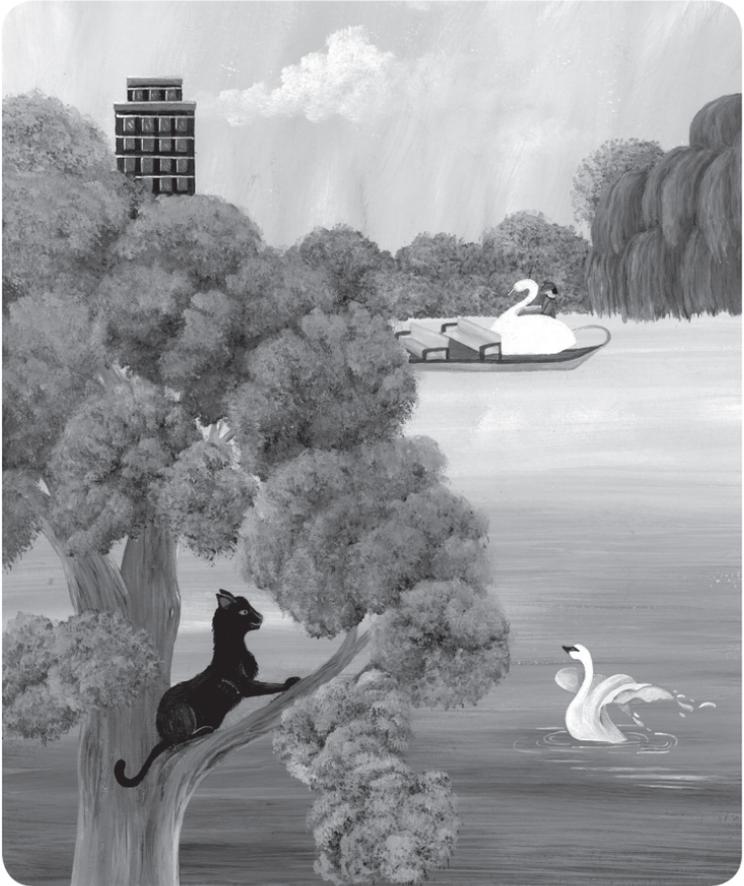
He preferred an extra-soft, down comforter piled high with several Egyptian cotton pillows. But he was able to rough it in a pinch. And he had quite happily slept through most of the seventy-five-odd miles from the Cape to the legendary city.

He stretched lazily and his big green eyes began to survey the local scenery. He hadn't been off Cape himself for close to two centuries. Things had certainly changed from the swampy cow paths and smelly marshes of the old settlement.

Sylvanas wasn't much interested in the amazing architecture of one of America's first cities, though. That subject was really quite beneath him.

But ghosts—that was another thing. Boston was full, stuffed, loaded and positively jam-packed with ghosts.

And somewhere in this gold mine of haunted spirits was one with the answer to Hannah Goodspell's recent strange behavior. Sylvanas was sure of it! And this particular fat black cat fully intended to get some answers, even if it meant getting ElsBeth into a little hot water.



After all, if it came to that, he would just get her right back out of it again.

And with one final, long stretch of his roundish body, Sylvanas was ready for action.

The bus pulled into the Public Garden near the swan boats. Ms. Finch reluctantly tore her attention away from Xavier and began shouting instructions to her bubbling students.

“Single file, children. Off the bus. Line up *neatly* in groups of no more than three. *No* talking, Veronica.”

The students grabbed backpacks and jackets and headed down the aisle. Ms. Finch glared at each one, managing to dampen their spirits only slightly, as they moved to the front, down the steps, and out into their adventure.

## Chapter Ten

### Bustling Busloads

They all lined up with minimum fighting over who was in each group. Veronica and Elsbeth were together. Amy, Carmen and Lisa Lee stood nervously right beside them.

Robert Hillman-Jones grabbed Frankie Sylvester and they stood side by side looking tough. Johnny Twofeathers headed his group with Nelson Hamm and Jimmy Miller.

Two other buses approached as Ms. Finch again called roll. The teacher marked off each student's name with a precise, black tick in her precisely-lined, neat, black notebook.

The Cape Codders looked on with mild interest as two dozen students in cookie-cutter uniforms stepped sharply off the sparkling red bus, now parked next to MacSweeney's yellow pride and joy.

A dusty bus labeled "South Boston Elementary" wheezed in next. The door puffed open and groaned, and a sturdy looking bunch of second-graders loudly tumbled and shoved their way out of the beat up old rust bucket.

The students from the uniformed group managed to look disinterested in the Cape Cod youngsters. And everything else. But two of the bigger South Boston kids spotted Frankie Sylvester and called out rude comments.

“Hey, fat boy, you been eating too much cannoli, or what?”

“Come over here, I can take you!”

Ms. Finch quickly took control before Frankie could even get his fists up. “Frankie, eyes front!”

Then, “Stay in line. No talking. Follow me and *stay* together.”

She broke off her stream of instructions to look up dreamily at Xavier, and added, “Mr. Saint Georges ...” in a soft, un-Finch-like voice, inviting him to walk beside her.

Veronica turned around to ElsBeth. Her fingers played with the embroidery on her designer hoodie, and she flipped her hair. She pointed at the uniformed students and dared to whisper, “What snobs.”

Veronica twisted her pretty mouth and scowled at a particularly nice-looking girl in a crisp, plaid, pleated skirt with a perfectly matching navy jacket.

The gleaming white socks with the lace edge that peeked above the girl’s tasseled loafers seemed to especially offend Veronica.

“Really, who do they think they are?” She stuck out her tongue in a rare moment of childish behavior. Veronica always prided herself on her maturity.

ElsBeth acknowledged Veronica without paying her much attention. ElsBeth didn’t really get what the point was with fancy clothes. She didn’t like to look a mess, but

mostly just wanted to be comfortable.

A good pair of boots and a new rain slicker were nice. The wind and water could really get through to you on the Cape without them, especially when you were working in the garden or hiking the trails. Clothes were useful, but really, what was the big deal?

“Students,” the tall middle-aged man standing next to the red bus called out. His voice cut through the air like a knife. He spoke through his nose and *he* really did sound snobby.

The man was dressed a lot like Johnny Twofeathers, only many sizes larger. His candy-red-framed reading glasses hung low on his beaked nose.

Lisa Lee, suddenly talkative again, at least for her, said, “Brahmin ... Boston Brahmin.”

“What?” ElsBeth asked, surprised to hear Lisa Lee speak again. The normally science-crazed girl was suddenly turning positively social.

“Boston Brahmin. Old money. Old family. They have to go into banking, law or politics. Teaching is the last choice, barely acceptable.

“Probably the black sheep of an old New England family.” She nodded in his direction.

ElsBeth, Veronica, Carmen and Amy stared with mouths open at their little classmate, then at the faintly disturbing man.

ElsBeth wasn’t sure what Lisa Lee was talking about, but didn’t expect to get much more of an explanation. So she turned around to take in the surroundings.

Everything was beautiful. The cherry and magnolia

trees were in blossom. The air was perfumed with sweet spring flowers, mixed with the tang of salt from the sea, though a trace of bus fumes did spoil the effect some.

A few, fluffy white clouds sat in a perfectly blue sky. The colors in the gardens lit up the grounds.

ElsBeth sighed. We're in Boston. It's really not a bad place, she thought. Then a spiky chill shot down her spine to sharply contradict this cheery state of mind.

## DOUGHNUTS

Sylvanas, meanwhile, took his time getting off the bus. He waited until McTodd MacSweeney, the scrappy but now starving bus driver, had stepped down and wandered toward a nearby doughnut stand.

Big Mac loved doughnuts. The rumor was that he had actually made a point of sampling every single doughnut outlet from one end of Cape Cod to the other. From Provincetown to Falmouth, he had judged them all.

He was partial to Dunkin', but always hoped for even tastier treats, and searched these out with care. He was definitely willing to experiment.

MacSweeney considered himself an adventurous sort. And those double-glazed, chocolate-mousse-filled jellies he spotted in the distance looked like a bold taste treat. His step quickened.

Sylvanas was also passionate about doughnuts, no doubt at least one cause of his slight weight problem.

But the cat was on a mission. There would be no doughnuts for him ... er ... perhaps that was too hasty. Maybe later, he decided, upon getting another whiff.

The cat leapt from the bus and in one quick bound was comfortably settled in a nearby elm tree, surveying the scene.

Yes, he purred, observing a city full of magic. Boston was just the place for this cat to find some answers.

## Chapter Eleven

### The Ghostly Freedom Trail

One of the park guides had on old-fashioned brown clothes. He looked like the schoolbook pictures of Ben Franklin, except he was black. This caused a small argument, as most of the kids were pretty sure Ben Franklin was white. In any case, the Ben Franklin look-alike led the fascinated Cape students toward an open spot.

Following close behind were the perfectly matching outfits of what Lisa Lee had explained were kids from a private school. They now thought of the teacher, the gentleman in the candy-red glasses, as the “Boston Brahmin,” as Lisa Lee had called him.

Happily pushing and scuffling their way forward, the class from South Boston brought up the rear of this exploration into the city’s natural (and sometimes unnatural) history.

The students from the three schools were herded, more or less successfully, by their teachers to a spot in front of “Ben Franklin,” who was now joined by a plump woman in a puffy cap and a wide brown skirt.

Ben Franklin and the larger lady began to tease a third guide who pushed his way through the crowd. He wore a long red coat and had white hair braided in a pigtail. On his head was a funny looking cap.

“Red Coat” gathered the children closer and explained the British version of the history of Boston, “A colony of England founded in the 1600’s,” he explained. Elsbeth was fascinated by this news. Her grandmother had come from the Old World in the 1600’s. How interesting.

“Boston Public Garden, where we stand now, used to be a swamp. And over there,” he pointed, “where the gold-roofed State House overlooks the park, there were once three wooded hills.

“They were leveled to fill in the original wetlands. Several streams ran through here back in those days.” The guide swept his hand to indicate the now dry, flat land.

This news put Johnny Twofeathers on alert. Even in his short life he had seen this happen. A beautiful, wild place was bulldozed flat, and before you knew it there were boring houses with perfectly even green lawns and perfect, bright flowers plunked in the middle of some artificial-looking landscape bark.

This idea of “perfect” didn’t make any sense at all to the young Wampanoag.

He remembered his grandfather saying, “When woods are destroyed, the healing plants that live alongside the trees are lost. Sometimes forever.”

His grandfather said his people had knowledge of more than two thousand plants that were used for medicine, and most of them were now gone.

Johnny listened, but no longer to the words of the

guide. He listened to the leaves growing in the trees, and to the life that still struggled to exist on the scraped land.

He felt hopeful and sad at the same time, and he made a decision.

Johnny vowed to himself he would protect the land of his people. The nearby streams and the woods of his Cape village were as much home to him as his house. He didn't want them to look like this.

ElsBeth watched Johnny. She could feel her friend's concern. And she felt the same way.

The Red Coat guide moved on and the students followed, heads turning in all directions, each taking in the sights and history, each seeing it in their own way.

As they left the park, ElsBeth was amazed by so many tall buildings cramped so close together. The people walked by them so fast. Where were they going in such a rush?

They didn't seem interested in any of the wonderful sights around them. So strange.

Veronica, Amy and Lisa Lee took the city in stride. They had been to Boston before, as had Robert Hillman-Jones. But many of the rest of their group had never been off-Cape, and they seemed uncomfortable with the strange sights and sounds and smells.

Looking at the nervous faces of several of her classmates, ElsBeth briefly wondered if this trip had been such a great idea after all.

In a ragged group, they all continued to follow along, trying to listen to Red Coat as he described battles, politics, and the city's unique architecture. When they could no

longer hear him speak above the shrill noises of the city, their attention turned to other things.

The farther they went, the more upset Veronica became. She was really irritated. Not about difficulty hearing the history lesson, though.

What got to Veronica was that she hated to be out-dressed, and there was no getting around it, the kids from the private school were creative dressers.

They had somehow managed some unique individual looks while still wearing a school uniform. Beautiful hair ornaments, rings and jewelry set off their crisp skirts and blouses.

One had a stunning silver dragon pin with diamond eyes that decorated her beret. Another had a really unique enameled, green-on-green frog with yellow opal eyes.

“What’s so great about semiprecious stones and diamonds anyway?” she sputtered to ElsBeth.

“And my mother says they are ‘blood diamonds’—kids get blown up in Africa in fights near the diamond mines. That can’t be right.” She stamped her foot to make her point.

Next to the volcano that was Veronica, walked a quiet Amy. And upsetting Veronica even further, a handsome, dark-eyed, turban-wearing private school boy kept glancing shyly at the sweet girl.

Veronica wasn’t the only one to notice, either. Nelson Hamm watched in horror as Amy was glancing back. Veronica gave Amy a sharp little kick. “Stop it. You’re encouraging him.”

Amy looked down, embarrassed, and the turbaned boy

quickly sped up to the rest of his group.

Boys, particularly strange ones, always seemed to fall all over themselves when Amy was present.

Veronica had complained to ElsBeth about this before. “Amy never wears any color except pink. Her clothes are old-fashioned and she never does anything with her hair. She has no sense of style,” Veronica would sniff. “What is it about that little mouse, anyway?”

Veronica actually liked Amy a lot. Amy was one of her best friends, after all. But Veronica was clearly a little jealous of her style-unconscious friend’s ability to attract lots of attention from the boys.

As the fashion drama unfolded up front, Carmen had fallen behind and the South Boston girls began teasing her, calling her “Big Bird” because of her yellow and orange outfit.

ElsBeth began to feel a little more at ease in her old clothes. At least no one was picking on her.

She had just come to this comforting conclusion when Robert Hillman-Jones bumped into her, accidentally on purpose as usual, and said, “Gee, ElsBeth, what’s the matter? Your grandmother can’t afford to buy you new clothes?”

ElsBeth was about to lose her temper, when Ms. Finch tore her eyes from Xavier long enough to notice that the class had become disordered from their initially perfect formation. Ms. Finch would certainly have made a great United States Marine sergeant.

“Students, line-up. RIGHT NOW. Er ... please,” she added sweetly, smiling up at Xavier, trying to show her best side.

They lined up. But Nelson, who was now staring angrily at the back of the turbaned boy, almost got trampled in the haste to restore order.

“We are about to enter one of the oldest cemeteries in the United States. It’s called the Granary Burying Ground, because there used to be a building nearby that stored grain. Many famous historical figures are buried here.

“Listen carefully to the guide. He will give you all the details.

“Pay strict attention and take notes. You *will* be quizzed,” the Finch threatened.

Xavier frowned slightly at Ms. Finch, who quickly pasted on a smile and murmured, “It’s for their own good. We have standards to maintain after all.” The smile looked more like an expression of extreme stomach pains, which was pretty scary, but the young people felt encouraged anyway.

They quickly took out their notebooks, though. No telling how long Ms. Finch’s good mood would last.

Red Coat started talking about the famous people buried in the graveyard. But ElsBeth’s attention was drawn to the details of his costume.

His coat was brick-red wool with lots of brass buttons and fancy gold braid on the shoulders. His white pant legs had six brass snaps at the bottom that went over his boots. His crisp white vest lay under his red coat, which was edged with navy blue cuffs and lapels.

ElsBeth found it interesting that a man dressed just like the guide popped up from behind one of the gravestones. He seemed to be making fun of the redcoat guide, and trying to get ElsBeth’s attention.

Then ElsBeth saw strangely dressed figures suddenly appearing beside gravestones everywhere. And they were all speaking to her at once.

On her right, next to his own gravestone, appeared the famous Samuel Adams. He wore a fancy gray wig and called to ElsBeth. “Young witch, young witch, come here. I have some complaints that need to be addressed. This taxation without representation cannot be tolerated. No taxation without representation, I say!”

ElsBeth stared wide-eyed. She wasn’t too sure what taxes were, but according to Mr. Adams they were definitely a bad thing. Especially if you had them and you weren’t represented.

The ghosts of the real Ben Franklin’s mother and father argued about their son. “What will he come up with next? We never should have sent him to the Latin School,” shouted Ben’s father.

“That boy never could control his imagination after studying the classics. Next thing you know he’ll try to harness lightning itself!”

The chubby old fellow laughed at his own joke and then asked ElsBeth her opinion. “What do you think, young witch?”

ElsBeth had no thought in her head about this at all!

Then Paul Revere jumped up on his horse, looked over the crowd, and called out, “There’s a good witch nearby. Where is she? Let me through! We need to speak.”

Other ghosts began shouting over each other to be heard. ElsBeth put her hands over her ears to shut them out.

Veronica said, “What’s up, ElsBeth? It’s a graveyard.

It's not *that* noisy here.” It seemed ElsBeth was the only one who could see and hear them.

She tried hard to block out the ghosts, and soon figured out that if she concentrated on the tour guides and the other real live people around her, the spirits began to fade.

When the students were finally led away from the cemetery, it got quieter for her and ElsBeth began to relax. Then she felt someone's stare on her. So much for relaxing.

She looked around quickly and saw Xavier Saint Georges gazing intently at her with an odd twinkle in his eye.

ElsBeth wasn't sure why, but the man just didn't seem quite ... normal. She began to wonder if he were a witch, too. But if he were a witch, then how could he stand it here in Boston? Her grandmother had been quite specific that most witches went mad in Boston.

Then the children from South Boston swarmed around and cut off her view of Xavier. They were jabbering excitedly about a pirate the third-grade class at their school had learned about during their field trip to the Old North Church last year.

The young toughies shoved in front of the Cape group, but seemed to leave the private school kids alone—maybe because the private school kids made fun of everybody in a quiet, superior sort of way and the South Boston kids didn't want to get made fun of. (But if the kids from South Boston had thought about it, they probably would have admitted *they* often made fun of everybody else themselves.)

In any case, Robert Hillman-Jones, Johnny Twofeathers and especially Frankie Sylvester did *not* like being shoved aside. Hillman-Jones pulled the boys together to figure

out how to get the upper hand with these kids from South Boston.

Cape kids have experience defending themselves. They're used to handling harsh weather, and a crazy summer tourist season, and can be fierce and cunning when necessary.

Robert had also overheard the talk of pirates, and he wanted to know more. Hillman-Jones was *extremely* interested in all things pirate. He often went to the Pirate Museum in Provincetown, and headed to the Pirate's Cove in Yarmouth every chance he got.

Frankie was all for getting up on a high fence and landing on the Southies. Frankie preferred the direct approach.

Hillman-Jones was more devious. He wanted to lock them up in the basement of the Old North Church. He heard there were tunnels and cells down there. And they could freely search for the pirate's treasure when the other kids were out of the way.

"This is a *real* pirate's treasure," he assured the other boys. "It's not just some old story you hear."

He was convinced even though all he had to go on was that the Southie kids had mentioned the words "pirate" and "Old North Church" and "underground tunnels." But he was *sure* there was buried treasure to be found.

Ms. Finch had momentarily lost track of the boys. The perfumed air of spring and Xavier's long lashes had lulled her into a sense of romantic contentment.

But suddenly she noticed some of the students had fallen far back. "Johnny Twofeathers, stay with the group," she shouted.

It didn't make any sense why the teacher chose Johnny to pick on, since Hillman-Jones and Frankie were the obvious troublemakers. But the boys temporarily suspended their plans for "Operation Capture" and caught up with the rest of the class, now headed down Spring Street.

"This was once the water supply for the city," the tour guide explained. The Cape students looked at each other skeptically.

Veronica said, "I can't imagine how that can be." They looked at the tiny street with stones all over it and tall buildings all around. How could this have been a spring where people came for fresh water?

But a copper plaque on one wall marked this as the spot. And, in a flash, ElsBeth could see it as it once was, a beautiful place where sweet water and all the town gossip could be found.

ElsBeth was having trouble keeping the past separate from the present. There was so much history here, and in a funny way it seemed like it was all still happening now.

Soon they emerged from the dark street and passed the Paul Revere Mall. Spontaneous running began once the space opened up, and the teachers had difficulty controlling their high-spirited young students.

Several of the girls just stood there, though. Confused looks clouded their faces.

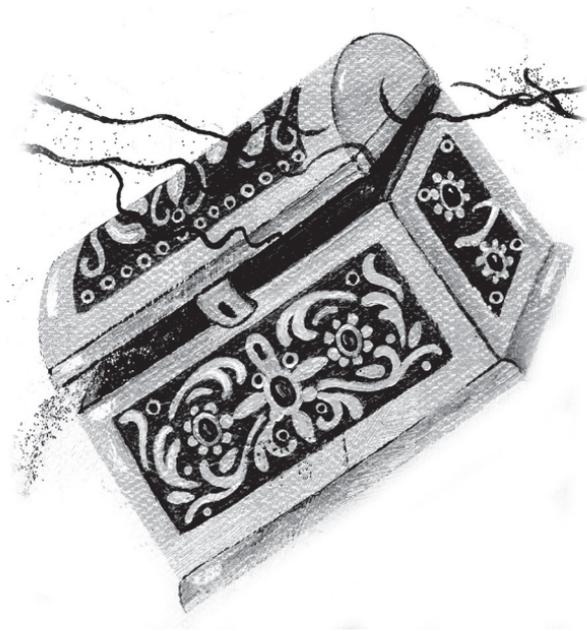
"This doesn't look anything like the Cape Cod Mall. I don't see Nordstrom's or Abercrombie & Fitch. In fact, I don't see any stores at all," complained Veronica.

Lisa Lee spoke up. "Different type of mall. 'Mall' also means a shaded place where people walk."

“Lisa Lee, do you know everything?” Amy asked.

Robert Hillman-Jones pushed Amy and Lisa Lee aside. At the end of the mall on the right he could see the Old North Church.

The Cape boys elbowed each other and passed the word along. They all agreed. First they were going to scare the socks off the South Boston kids. Then they were going to take off in search of pirate treasure.



Chapter Twelve  
Beneath the Old North Church

Somehow the boys would have to get into that basement. Johnny Twofeathers was sent to scout things out. The young Wampanoag melted away unnoticed and silently circled the building. He soon found a hidden garden on the other side of the churchyard.

As he looked around for a way in, he heard a rusty, scraping noise and felt a cold, damp puff of air. He hid behind a tree.

A skeletal hand inched out of an old door set low into the building, half below the level of the garden grounds.

Johnny swallowed his fear as the hand became an arm. The vine-covered door opened a little wider and a scrawny old man poked his face out.

The fellow looked around guiltily, then popped outside, holding a cigarette he then lit and puffed at with his wrinkled lips.

He strolled calmly from the church, his secret safe, and Johnny relaxed. Luck was with the young scout—the

sneaky smoker had left the cellar door slightly ajar.

Johnny scrambled back to his classmates, now neatly lined up for a tour of the building. The boys passed the word again. And one by one they silently dropped back and headed for the other side of the church and the hidden basement door.

### CAPTAIN THOMAS JACQUES

ElsBeth huddled in line with the remaining kids from all three schools. When the doors opened they poured into the church.

The Boston Brahmin stood to the side and lectured as they passed. “The ‘docents,’ or knowledgeable guides in other words, will explain the fascinating history of the building. Please stay close and pay attention.”

A cheerful, red-haired young woman named Beth, introduced herself as the docent. ElsBeth had to chuckle as this was pronounced “doe scent” and she couldn’t help sniffing the air when the doe-like Beth passed by.

Beth walked backward as she led them up the church’s aisles into main space with its rounded windows, funny pew boxes and high ceilings.

She began to tell the story of the beautiful carved angels that decorated the upper level of the Church. “The angels had been stolen at sea by the famous pirate, Captain Thomas Jacques, who later made a generous gift of them to the church.

“Captain Jacques was considered by many to be a ‘privateer,’” Beth said, “which was basically a pirate, but a pirate with a ‘letter of marque.’”

“A ‘letter of marque’ was an official piece of paper from a government,” she explained further, “that made it legal to steal from enemy ships.”

Most of the children looked confused. (Except those destined to be lawyers and politicians—to them this made perfect sense.)

“Anyway,” Beth continued, “recent research has discovered that Captain Jacques really was a true pirate.

“Granted, he wasn’t just an *ordinary* pirate. He was a very *popular* pirate. The church community gratefully accepted the lovely stolen angels, and Captain Jacques was forgiven his many sins.

“When Captain Jacques lived in Boston he held a place of honor in the church, in fact. More interesting still, in his later years, Captain Jacques became a revolutionary, and fought for freedom from an oppressive monarchy.”

## THE CRYPT

The boys, now lurking in the basement, could hear Beth’s clear voice. And though they weren’t paying much attention to the history lesson, Robert loudly shushed them the instant the word “pirate” was spoken.

Robert had begun to organize them for action, when suddenly footsteps were heard descending the staircase to the basement. There was not a lot of space, so the boys scrambled around to find nooks and crannies to hide in as best they could.

The knowledgeable Beth was leading a special tour for the private school kids. The stylish girl, the one Veronica had objected to so much, passed by the dark recess where

Hillman-Jones hid. He scrunched back farther into his hidey-hole, but she smiled and nodded at him.

“Drat,” Hillman-Jones coughed under his breath. This wasn’t going according to plan. They wanted to lock up the South Boston boys, not these rich kids.

A rather noble-looking boy, in fact the very one with the turban who had admired Amy, walked close by where Johnny Twofeathers was hidden. Two sets of almond-shaped, brown eyes met in the dark. Some kind of recognition seemed to flash between them.

Beth began explaining as they walked around. “This is not only a church basement. As is found in many churches from earlier times, the Old North Church contains a centuries-old burial place—the crypt.”

Beth stopped the tour in front of a small chamber and picked up a wooden coffin cover. “In the old days a hole was cut out of the coffin lid right above where the head of the ‘deceased’ would be.

“This was just in case someone had made a mistake and the unfortunate person was not actually dead.” This got everyone looking around nervously.

Beth walked farther into the poorly lit basement, and stopped where the body of Major John Pitcairn lay buried.

“Here may very well lie a restless spirit,” Beth explained in hushed tones. “The wrong body was sent to England.” The children looked at each other. This was another alarming idea.

“At the bloody battle of Bunker Hill,” Beth continued, “after trying to make peace between the colonials and the British troops, this beloved officer had fallen off his horse and was killed.

“There were many dead and injured on both sides in the battle, and they were all brought to the church. Some bodies of the fallen soldiers got mixed up in the confusion. It was war, after all.

“Major Pitcairn’s family sent for his body to be buried properly at Westminster Abbey in London. But the wrong body was mistakenly sent to England, and the Major remained here—despite formal protests and much argument from mother England.”



The children got more and more nervous with this talk of restless spirits and misplaced bodies.

Beth turned a corner and passed along another wall.

“Behind here is the saddest place. Here is where all the orphans are buried.”

Frankie was hiding right next to this spot and he tried to move away as far and as fast as possible.

Many shivers ran up and down spines as the students

filed past.

Beth led the group a little farther on and came to an area directly under the altar of the church above.

“Finally,” she explained, “this thin plaster wall here is all that separates us from the *main* underground burial chamber or crypt.

“And it’s rumored that somewhere on the far side of *that* crypt is a maze of caverns and tunnels that were used by pirates and smugglers in the old days.

“These ran right under the north end of the city, and straight out to the sea!”

As the pretty young docent spoke these fateful words, a deep rumble and sharp crack burst the plaster wall in front of them into a cloud of swirling dust.

Before any of the private school kids or Cape boys could think a thought, three black-hooded figures rushed through the hole and grabbed the young turbaned student.

One of them shoved Beth, who was closest to the wall. She fell back and hit her head. Knocked unconscious, her body slid to the floor.

And *still* before anyone could think a thought, the hooded ones disappeared with their captive back into the darkness of the crypt.

## Chapter Thirteen

### Kidnapped

All Robert Hillman-Jones could think was that the hooded men who burst through the tunnel wall must be after the pirate treasure. And there was no way they would get away with that!

The treasure was *his*. Who knows why they took the kid.

Hillman-Jones and Johnny Twofeathers shot off after them.

The two boys vanished into the shadows behind the wall. Frankie unfroze and stumbled after his friends, followed by Nelson, who had thoughtfully taken care to sit Beth up first—she had started to choke on the plaster dust. When he saw she was breathing OK, he took off, too.

Jimmy Miller picked up the rear, his backpack trailing his yellow slicker as he ran.

Behind them the private school kids panicked. One shrieked, another started crying.

Strangely, though, if any of them had bothered to look,

they would have seen their teacher's eyes shining excitedly behind his candy-red glasses.

Considering how quickly the kidnapping had happened, it was surprising that the mysterious Xavier managed to plunge down the ancient staircase and through the hole in the crypt wall, merely seconds after the boys.

Not willing to be parted from the handsome Xavier, Ms. Finch dashed down the stairs after him. She fell a little behind and lost sight of him on the long, twisted stairwell. Of course, the curious Cape girls were right behind Ms. Finch—not knowing what was happening, but not wanting to be left out.

ElsBeth's head began to throb the minute her foot touched the basement floor. Hundreds of ghosts shouted at her trying to get her attention. But by concentrating as hard as she could, she was mostly able to block them out.

The young witch took a breath and spotted the pretty private school girl standing close to the stairwell. "I'm ElsBeth. Did you see what happened?" she asked.

Despite the circumstances, the girl answered politely, with perfect manners and perfect pronunciation. "Hello, ElsBeth, I'm Violet. Someone grabbed Prince Abu Nadir and took him into the crypt. I think it's a kidnapping."

Lisa Lee was right behind ElsBeth and immediately grasped the situation. "Ransom. Abu Nadir is the most important prince to come out of the Arab Emirates in decades. He is royalty of two nations and worth incredible riches. Highly unusual for one so exalted to be without body guards."

ElsBeth couldn't believe Lisa knew all this. And even stranger was that her classmate was speaking. Again.

Veronica, Carmen and Amy gathered round. Amy had overheard Lisa Lee, and her eyes glistened with tears. She'd only glanced at the prince, but he seemed like such a nice boy.

“Oh Amy, don't be a baby. Get it together,” Veronica said. “ElsBeth will think of something.”

ElsBeth was brought up sharp by this idea. But she remembered her grandmother's words—witches had duties.

ElsBeth sure wished her grandmother were here now to tell her what she should do. But she knew she should do *something*. Now. And there was no use wishing for things that couldn't be, especially when someone was in danger.

“OK, girls,” she said. “We're going into the tunnel. We need to be quiet. And the first thing we do is find them.”

ElsBeth narrowly avoided breaking the rule against using magic without supervision when she created an extra-heavy cloak of dust to hide the girls' exit from Ms. Finch and the private school group.

It wasn't *entirely* magic, she figured, because she used some science. She magnetized the plaster dust particles that still hung in the air—and just gave them a little spin.

Behind this cover of dust, the girls slipped into the cool dark of the crypt. None of the Cape girls noticed right away, but Violet had silently followed.

Luckily they all wore quiet shoes—even Amy's patent leathers and Veronica's hip-hop, rhinestone-studded sneakers made no noise. Of course, the innocent little “quiet spell” (those hardly count) that ElsBeth cast didn't hurt.

“Hold hands,” Veronica whispered when they quickly began to bump into each other.

ElsBeth heard a squeak ahead. “Thank goodness. I hear a bat,” she said to herself.

Most people aren’t too fond of the furry little flyers, but ElsBeth trusted them above all other creatures. ElsBeth squeaked out a quick greeting in bat-speak and then asked, “Which way did they go?”

“Which ones?” the bat squeaked back.

“What do you mean, ‘which ones’? We’re trying to find the kidnapped prince.”

“Oh, those ones went this way. Follow me, young witch.” And the helpful bat headed out, squeaking loudly to guide her.

ElsBeth used her own echo-location, sending out little squeaks and sensing where the walls were by the sounds that came back.

She began to “see” the walls around her, even though it was pitch dark. The other girls had no such ability, and they stumbled along behind her, desperately holding hands.

Only Lisa Lee seemed steady on her feet. Her backpack made odd small noises, but no one paid attention in the tenseness of the moment.

Carmen stifled a scream when she thought she felt a mouse. Everyone knew Carmen was deathly afraid of the little creatures. But she was trying to be quiet, and brave, so she choked down the squeal that desperately tried to escape.

The girls, truth be told, were terrified. But they trusted ElsBeth. And the idea of letting someone capture a prince

from another country was *really* not OK.

So they trudged on, but not wanting to think about what was up ahead, though this would have truly been a very good question.

### GHOSTLY GRAY EYES

It quickly became too dark in the tunnel for the boys to see and they stopped.

Johnny Twofeathers took out the solar flashlight he always carried in a special pocket of his backpack. He focused it toward the ground and used his hand to block the light from the men up ahead.

Of course, Jimmy Miller had his super heavy-duty, waterproof, crank-powered lamp. His father's frequent lecture on preparation for emergencies echoed in their heads. "You can't be a commercial fisherman on the Cape without thinking ahead. You have to be ready for anything Father Neptune or Mother Nature can throw out at you!"

Jimmy also pointed his toward the ground.

Frankie found a little goblin flashlight his mother gave him last Halloween. It was still in his pack under many empty candy wrappers.

Frankie had been taught not to trash the environment, so he never threw a candy wrapper on the ground. Ever. And he ate a *lot* of candy! And since he made it a practice never to clean his backpack, there were a lot of wrappers in there. If the boys ever needed to build a fire, they were all set.

He found one candy bar that was only half eaten and quickly popped it in his mouth. He didn't bother to turn his

flashlight on.

Robert Hillman-Jones decided they needed a plan. “OK, we have plenty of light. We need to find the guys who busted through the wall. They can’t be too far ahead. They’re after the pirate treasure, I’m *sure* of it. And we’ve got to get to the treasure first.”

“What?” Johnny said, louder than he should have. Sometimes Robert didn’t make any sense at all. “Those men just kidnapped that boy in the turban. We have to rescue him.”

The two boys faced off.

Hillman-Jones wheedled quietly, trying to get his way but also trying to sound “reasonable.”

“Listen. We can rescue the kid. But those men must be after the treasure, too. So, we might as well try to get to the treasure first.”

Nobody was convinced by Robert’s ridiculous “logic” and the boys agreed with Johnny to follow the kidnapers at a safe distance, but close enough so the bad guys didn’t get away while they tried to figure out a real rescue plan.

They moved as quickly and quietly as they could through the muck of the centuries, away from the crypt and into the tunnels that went out toward the sea. Going the same way that pirates and criminals had done for ages.

A pair of ghostly gray eyes followed the progress of both the boys and the villains from behind a rusty iron grate set in the tunnel wall. A haunting, low chuckle emerged from the owner of those eyes. The lonely caw of the phantom parrot perched on his shoulder accompanied his laughter.

The boys and the kidnapers pursued their separate plans, unaware that just on the other side of the rock walls they touched were hidden chambers filled with gold, silver and glittering jewels: the bounty of many daring adventures from long ago on the high seas.

After the fourth time past the same skeleton of an old rowboat, the leader of the kidnapers called a halt. He took off his infrared goggles and flashed a small light on the map he carried in his vest pocket.

“Something’s wrong,” he grumbled, more to himself than to his men. “We should have been out of here by now.”

The more he studied the map, the more confused he became.

The ghostly, gray-eyes looked on, amused.

Chapter Fourteen  
Cape Cod Kids Caught

The boys, not realizing the kidnappers had stopped temporarily, almost ran right into them. Johnny saw the light ahead and grabbed Hillman-Jones just in time.

Frankie, Nelson and Jimmy bumped into each other. Nelson rubbed his nose and whispered, "What's up?"

Johnny made the silence sign and hushed the boys before they gave themselves away.

Hillman-Jones leaned against the tunnel wall to catch his breath and there was ... nothing. Robert stumbled. He tried to grab Nelson to stop his fall. But Nelson just collapsed, tangling up both Frankie and Jimmy, and they all tumbled into dark space.

Johnny tried to grab Jimmy to hold *him* back, but only succeeded in pulling the yellow slicker out of Jimmy's backpack. Johnny lost his balance, and fell in on top of the others.

And the rock wall slipped silently, and firmly, back into place.

Nelson panicked. He frantically pushed against the wall. He began pounding and threw his full, but rather slight, weight at it. It didn't budge.

Nelson wasn't too keen on small dark spaces. In fact, he hadn't been happy at all when he heard the docent Beth describe the crypt and people being buried alive.

"Buried alive," he moaned. They were trapped underground—that was the same as being buried alive! Nelson once again beat hysterically on the wall until Johnny grabbed his arms.

"Nelson, it's OK," Johnny spoke calmly. "There is fresh air in here. Do you feel it on your face?" Nelson stopped struggling and felt the cool, fresh air.

"We're going to be OK," Johnny said. "Save your energy and try to be quiet. We don't need to let those guys out there know we're here, OK?"

Nelson relaxed some. "Yeah. Right, Johnny. We've got to rescue the kid. Right," he said again, still nervous, but calmer than before.

But it sure looked to Johnny like they *were* trapped and he had no idea how they could escape. He just didn't want his friend focused on that.

Johnny needed to think.

## CARMEN MEETS A MOUSE OR A MOUSE MEETS CARMEN

Meanwhile, the girls moved ahead unaware that the boys were also in the tunnels.

Veronica was *not* pleased that she'd fallen down and

gotten her new clothes muddy.

Amy worried about the mysterious young boy who seemed so nice.

Violet followed quietly, holding hands with Amy and Lisa Lee.

Carmen was being as brave as she could in the presence of probable mice everywhere!

Lisa Lee stayed steady, calculating the situation. Her backpack, however, squirmed even more than before.

ElsBeth was able to focus more easily now that they had distanced themselves from the crypt. But she had a funny feeling there was somebody ... or something ... else down here.

Despite the feeling that an unworldly presence was nearby, and probably watching, ElsBeth knew she had to concentrate on the kidnapped boy. She kept asking herself what she and her friends could do when they found him.

Farther down the tunnel, not a great distance ahead of them, she could just make out the echo of shapes clustered in a space where several tunnels came together. They needed to figure out what to do. And fast.

Just then a real mouse ran across Carmen's red suede shoes and up her orange tights. The nervous second-grader lost it. She shrieked at the top of her lungs, "Help! A mouse! A MOUSE!"

The girls froze.

The boys, locked behind the wall, heard the wail, and all together said, "Carmen?"

Johnny unnecessarily added, "Oh, no. The girls are down here."

Worse yet for the girls, one by one the black-clad figures up ahead turned toward them.

Two held the young prince tight, while three others dashed to grab the girls ... even before the mouse could get away.

One took Amy and Veronica and another held Carmen and Violet. Carmen continued to shriek. Really loud.

The biggest one captured ElsBeth and Lisa Lee, their legs kicking wildly, and hauled them over to the leader of the pack.

“Well, well, well. A flock of little girls,” he said in a heavy foreign accent.

The one holding Amy and Veronica said, “What should we do with them, Badir?”

The leader turned to the prince and said, “You heard my man. What do *you* think—should we dispose of them here, Your Highness?” The man laughed cruelly.

The young royal stiffened.

“No. I think we’ll bring them with us. They could come in handy,” Badir said to his men.

“If I know our young prince, his sense of honor will keep him in line the minute I threaten to touch a hair on one of their sweet little heads. Ha, ha.” He laughed at his clever little plan.



Things were *not* looking good. The boys were trapped. The girls captured. Ghosts everywhere. And a

royal kidnapping.

Boston was certainly turning out to be quite a city—above *and* below street level.

Perhaps Hannah Goodspell had been right.

Chapter Fifteen  
The Pirate is Pushed Too Far

The famous pirate Captain Thomas Jacques hadn't had anyone dare enter his smuggler's den in ages. In fact, it had been so dull in these tunnels since he'd scared away the last set of criminals that the bored ghost had mostly just taken a long nap.

Then those kidnappers had crashed through the wall in the church and woken him up.

He'd had some fun leading them in circles the last half hour or so. And trapping those pesky boys had been a treat.

But now he was mad.

You didn't kidnap fair young maidens. This just wasn't done. It was against the rules of war, after all.

"These villains will not get away with this," the pirate declared. "Not in me domain!

"And, I don't like them getting that close to me treasure."

The parrot on his shoulder squawked, "Treasure!" in agreement with his master.

The pirate thoughtfully scratched his neatly braided beard.

“Well, Percival,” he nodded to his fine feathered friend. “They need to learn a lesson. Don’t they, now?”

The parrot nodded enthusiastically.

The pirate then counted off the important points of his personal philosophy.

“Number One: Ye don’t mess with young misses.

“Number Two: Ye don’t mess with a pirate.

“And Number Three: Most important of all, ye don’t mess with *me treasure!*”

And with this said, he roared mightily and materialized in full glory, right in front of the villains.

For some reason, maybe because he thought this was a mere genie, the lead kidnaper was not impressed. “What’s this? Some pesky spirit from a bottle?”

Pirate Captain Thomas Jacques snarled back. “Insult me at yer peril, ye dusky villain. I’m no weak-willed spirit who was foolish enough to be stoppered in a bottle. I’m a proper pirate ghost, I am.”

The pirate did a couple of fancy spins and swished his sword through the air. “Prepare to meet yer maker, ye luckless landlubber!”

Badir was still not impressed. He clearly wasn’t familiar with the capabilities of a genuine American pirate ghost.

The other members of his gang, though, tried to melt back into the wall.

The villain stuck out his chin and glared. “You’re a weak apparition if I ever saw one.”

“Aargh,” howled the pirate. “Ye’ll regret this, ye mortal!”

He swung his cutlass and whacked the villain with the flat of his sword on the foolish fellow’s broad behind.

“Oowww! That ghost’s for real,” squealed Badir. “Run, men!”

The big fellow was off as fast as his tree-trunk legs could carry him.

His men needed no further encouragement. The two holding the prince kept a firm grip on their prize, but the girls were dropped like so many sacks of grain.

All except Amy, whose curly hair and frilly dress got caught up in the gear of the kidnapper who was holding her. It was easier for him to run with her on his shoulder than to stop and try to untangle the little girl. And that is just what he did.

## FLATTERING THE PIRATE

The tunnels under Boston’s North End seemed to go endlessly on and on. But the young prince wasn’t scared. He’d been schooled in ancient warrior skills all his young life.

Fear was not something he would allow. What was the worst that could happen, after all? These bumbling men would attempt to ransom him and his father would lose a few millions. Or not. Something his family could afford in any case.

The only thing that worried him was the young girl. It pained him when he heard the girl with blond curls sobbing quietly. He couldn’t let an innocent get hurt in all this.

While in the shadows of the wall, and unworried about anyone's feelings but his own, the ghostly Captain Jacques felt his enchantment slip.

After all these years of sleeping, the pirate captain was out of practice. He found he had trouble maintaining several ghostly effects in the material world at the same time. When he had used his energies to materialize and scare the villains, he couldn't also still hold the boys. The stone rolled away from the chamber where they were trapped.

Captain Jacques stood there and muttered his frustrations to himself, unnoticed.

The boys, now freed, rushed toward the commotion—in other words, toward the girls.

Johnny ran up to ElsBeth, who was amazed to see the boys were in the tunnel, too.

ElsBeth took Johnny's shoulder. "Johnny, we've got to do something to save the prince and Amy."

Nelson came out of shock when he heard Amy's name. "Oh, no! They've got Amy? What are we going to do?"

"We're going to get the treasure first. That's what." Hillman-Jones stubbornly persisted with his original plan.

Captain Jacques snapped to attention at Hillman-Jones' words. His hand went to his sword.

"In case you didn't notice, there is a pirate over there," Veronica pointed out. "And it would be my guess that it's *his* treasure. And he looks pretty mean to me."

The pirate reckoned he did look pretty mean, too. With his long, red, curly hair and his silver sword and his ghostly-gray parrot. Yes, he reckoned he was still quite a

sight.

“We need to get out of here,” Violet whispered.

Veronica noticed Violet for the first time. “How did *she* get here?”

“It doesn’t matter,” Lisa Lee spoke up. “The kidnappers out there are obviously afraid of the pirate. Maybe, if we appeal to his sense of honor, we could get him to help us.”

ElsBeth, as the only witch present, she was quite sure (although she was having some doubts about Lisa Lee now), recognized the burden was on her to approach the pirate ghost.

Alive or dead, she knew all creatures were tied by an unbreakable bond. ElsBeth’s grandmother had several ghost friends. Some were friendly, and some ... well, some were not so friendly.

But she quickly decided not to dwell on that. She had to do *something*. The prince did seem like such a nice boy. And Amy was one of her best friends forever.

“Flattery, ElsBeth. You can win him over with flattery,” the bat whispered in her ear.

“And don’t call him a ‘pirate.’ He hates that. He likes to think of himself as a ‘privateer,’ and a patriot.

“Oh, and his name is Captain Thomas Jacques,” the bat added helpfully.

ElsBeth was confused. “What’s the difference between a ‘pirate’ and a ‘privateer’?” she asked. “They sound pretty much the same to me.”

“Well,” the bat said, “a pirate just takes what he wants from other ships. Stealing, you know.

“But a privateer has permission from his government to steal from an enemy ship. It’s a fine legal point, to be sure. But as they say, ‘All is fair in love and war,’ ” the clever bat added.

ElsBeth still wasn’t really sure what all this meant. But she got the point that the pirate liked to be called a “privateer,” and it was good to know his name.

“Mr. Privateer ... er, Captain Jacques,” ElsBeth called out respectfully.

The pirate captain, who was deep in thought at that instant, turned to ElsBeth, surprise stamped on his ghostly face.

“You’re not afraid of me, little girl?” he asked quietly.

“Well, sir, Mr. Privateer, sir, maybe I’m a little afraid. But those bad men took that nice prince and one of our best friends, and we need help to get them back.

“Can you help us, sir?” she added politely, remembering the lesson her grandmother taught her about the importance of manners, particularly in sticky situations.

The pirate was even more surprised. Then understanding dawned. This little one’s a witch! Haven’t seen a witch in Boston for centuries. She must be a brave one.

“Well, why not,” he muttered to his parrot.

He squinted at the little witch and her mates. “Yes, why not! It’s been as boring as a one-sided game of chess down here the past few decades or so, ever since the last smugglers stopped using me tunnels.

“I surely do need some adventure.”

He grinned from ear to ear. Though his grin, unfortunately, was even scarier than when he was scowling.

Then the captain's smile disappeared and he growled at ElsBeth. "I'll help ye on one condition. And it's non-negotiable.

"Ye have to steal me a ship. Those scallywags must be headed to sea and we'll need to go after them."

"I long to feel me sea legs again. I long to smell the ocean breezes. A sea chase is just what I need. That way we'll save yer friends and I'll have me fun along the way."

"Well ... ah ... OK," said ElsBeth. She wasn't *at all* happy about stealing anything. Her grandmother had taught her a lesson about that, too.

She knew very well that taking things that didn't belong to you was wrong. But she figured they could return the ship when they were done, and explain the situation, and all would be forgiven—if they could only rescue their friends.

Veronica burst out, "Wait a minute, we can't steal a boat!"

"Yes, we can," Robert Hillman-Jones declared. Then he whispered, half to himself, "And after that we can come back for the treasure."

Then Nelson surprised them all by boldly jumping in front of the pirate. "We're wasting time. We need to rescue Amy!"

And with a gleam in his eye, the ghostly captain slapped Nelson on the back. "That's the spirit, me bucko! Off we go!"

## AN ENCHANTMENT ENDS

Up to this point the pirate ghost had at least managed

to hold the part of his enchantment that kept the villains running endlessly in circles through the tunnels under Boston's North End.

But now that his attention was *thoroughly* distracted by the prospect of once again adventuring at sea, that enchantment faded, too.

Suddenly the criminals could see the old granite steps and weathered wooden door, barely held together by leather straps and rusty iron bars, that stood right in front of them.

"This way, men!" Badir yelled.

They scrambled out into the blinding daylight and found themselves next to a wharf in Boston Harbor.

The kidnappers hadn't planned to end up here. They had arranged a getaway car, but that was blocks away.

So when they saw the pirate burst through the door close on their heels, and now looking a little more real than ghostly, Badir ran onto the wharf and jumped onto the deck of the nearest motor yacht. His men were right behind.

Urged on by Badir, the men scrambled to untie the moorings, start the engine, and in less than a minute were off. Just before the pirate could get to them.

Nearby sparkled a trim wooden sailing ship, and Captain Jacques smiled.

"There ye are, me lovely!" he purred, and he sprinted for its gleaming decks.

A young couple in crisp white sailing outfits stared at the large, sword-carrying pirate running down their gangway at full speed.

"Oh, it must be a Mardi Gras theme party. What fun,"

the woman said to her husband.

But when the pirate pushed her husband aside it didn't seem so cute.

"Now, now, my good man," the gentleman protested. "You must be drunk. Get off my boat this instant or I'll call the harbor master."

And at that, the pirate threw the fellow *and* his stylish wife into the water.

Johnny Twofeathers grabbed two life rings and swung them down to the sputtering pair, while ElsBeth, Nelson, Frankie, Hillman-Jones, Jimmy, Carmen, Veronica, Violet and Lisa Lee (and her noisy backpack)—and finally the parrot, who'd fallen behind when the pirate made his mad dash for the gangway—all jumped aboard.

"I *really* didn't want to steal a boat. Do you think we'll get arrested?" asked ElsBeth.

Veronica, wise in the ways of the world, replied. "Of course, we will. It's stealing after all.

"We don't own it, do we? Now we're common criminals. The police will be after us in no time," she added darkly.

Veronica's words didn't exactly put ElsBeth's already overactive conscience at ease.

## SYLVANAS GETS INVOLVED

Sylvanas had kept a magical eye out for the young people, even as he was involved aboveground in his own search for the answer to Hannah Goodspell's problems.

He had perceived that ElsBeth was in *some* kind of

trouble down in the tunnels. But the cat wasn't big on being underground himself—too many spiders for his liking, and he had already used up most of his nine lives.

So he had patiently watched for them, hoping they would pop up before he'd have to come to their rescue.

Of course, if things had gotten *really* out of hand, he would have been there like a shot, spiders or no spiders.

Now that the kids were out of one dangerous situation but probably into a worse one, Sylvanas decided he really *did* need to get involved. His research into Hannah's condition would have to wait.

He leapt aboard after them. And what a beautiful leap! He flew just above the water and landed softly in the rolled-up canvas sail near the ship's railing.

Unfortunately, he got a little tangled in the ropes. And with all this exertion, the plump Sylvanas curled into the sail and fell promptly into a deep sleep.

No one on the ship had noticed the large black cat, who, at the last moment, had jumped aboard the pirate's newly claimed vessel. Of course, the invisibility spell he used may have helped.

Nearby on deck, Johnny Twofeathers took the pirate's directions, and cast off all lines as fast as he could.

Jimmy Miller took the wheel.

The sails were raised and the pretty little racing yacht was underway as slick as can be.

Jimmy was right at home on this vessel, which wasn't much different from the boat his Uncle Edison had.

Under the captain's directions, and in the Cape crew's capable hands, the ship sailed smartly out of the harbor.

The pirate moved to the rail, raised the spyglass from his belt, and with a keen eye watched the kidnapper's ship ahead come up to speed.

If the pirate had looked back, he would have seen that the mysterious Xavier had found his own small craft and joined the pursuit.

And Captain Jacques no doubt would have wondered: Who was he anyway? Why was he here? And what did that stranger intend for all those involved?

## Chapter Sixteen

### Ships at Sea



The kidnappers hadn't seen the kids and pirate take the other boat. They were too busy trying to get past the harbormaster unnoticed.

Somehow they managed to navigate through the narrow channel and around the confusing buoys, and their ship, fittingly named *The Jolliest Roger*, was soon out into open water.

On the navigation deck, Badir leaned over a desk covered in ocean charts, calmly making plans to meet up with the men who'd ordered the kidnapping.

His gang, though, kept a nervous distance. They were still spooked after their close encounter with the pirate, and Badir's unpredictable temper always put everyone on edge.

Stomachs rolled with the breaking waves, and the crew definitely felt at sea and in over their heads, far adrift from the safe desert sands of their homeland.

Despite the word *Jolliest* in her name, this was not a happy ship.

#### BEHIND THEM ON THE *BON ADVENTURE*

On the following ship, Frankie leaned over the stern rail. "Hey guys, you see this?" He read the ship's name and homeport on the back.

"She's called the *Bon Adventure*. She's out of South Yarmouth, right near home."

It looked like the Cape second-graders were certainly off on an adventure, whether they wanted to be or not. And they could only hope it would be "bon," which Lisa Lee had patiently explained was the French word for "good."

The ghostly captain of the *Bon Adventure* explored his new vessel like a kid exploring a really big Halloween candy bag. His happy grin widened when he found several flags stowed on board by the owners—who either had a

sense of humor, or at least knew how to throw a good party.

The pirate chuckled to himself as he chose the black flag with crossed swords, and chuckled harder when he pulled out a flag with an hourglass.

He had Hillman-Jones run them up the mast.

Pirate flags have special meanings, as all of the Cape kids knew. The pirate had just notified any ship nearby that the *Bon Adventure* crew was “ready to fight” (the flag with the crossed swords) and that “time was running out for the enemy” (the hourglass).

The parrot’s feathers began to change from ghostly gray to his natural colors as he became excited and caught up in the action.

He flew over to the furled sail where Sylvanas was sleeping, ever so peacefully, and the irritating bird squawked, “Stowaway! Stowaway! Overboard with the stowaway!”

Captain Thomas Jacques yelled back, “Quiet, me silly, feathered shipmate and pay attention. The chase is on.”

With the ship now under the pirate’s stern command, and with Jimmy Miller’s steady hand on the helm—though he had to stand on a champagne crate to be able to see ahead—the rest of the Cape classmates huddled together.

No one spoke. They were on a stolen ship, captained by a temperamental ghost pirate who was hundreds of years old, in pursuit of desperate and dangerous criminals. The situation didn’t look too good to them.

Johnny finally said aloud what they were all thinking. “What’s next?”

## ABOARD *THE JOLLIEST ROGER*

Out ahead in the waters of Massachusetts Bay, *The Jolliest Roger* was not jolly at all.

The villains were worried. The plan to abduct Prince Abu was not going smoothly. They had missed the rendezvous with their partners-in-crime back in Boston. They were in a stolen ship, and they had a small blond American girl aboard, an added complication.

Badir looked out over the rough, cold, gray water, unsure now of his plan. A large Coast Guard vessel lay ahead, and that made his decision for him.

“We’re heading south,” he told his men. “We’ll take the ship to Cape Cod.

“We can hide in one of the ports there. Then we’ll hijack a plane from one of their little airports. Those small town chowderheads won’t have the guts to refuse our demands. And soon we’ll be out of the country with millions in ransom!”

His indecision evaporated in the salty breeze and he smiled his scary smile, his front gold tooth gleaming in the sparkling sun.

## BACK TO THE BONNY *BON ADVENTURE*

On the pretty little sailing yacht manned by the Cape crew, another scary looking individual was smiling.

Captain Thomas Jacques stood near the bow with Sir Percival parrot perched proudly on his shoulder.

At last the fearsome pirate ghost had a ship under his legs and another in his sights. Oh, it had been a long time since he’d felt the wind on his face and a prize in his glass!

They were not yet out into the Bay and it was early in the chase, but he felt this would be a good contest.

The ship ahead had more size and speed, but he could tell the captain wasn't much of a sailor. The craft had barely missed the marker buoys heading out of Boston Harbor.

As the pirate surveyed the busy harbor, his eyes gleamed. So many boats, so much wealth must be stored in those holds!

It was hard to concentrate with this many possible prizes at hand. He took in a deep breath to calm himself and ... picked up the biting smell of diesel fumes.

"Argh!" he barked. "What have the foul British gone and done? Two hundred and fifty years ago the air smelled of ocean and fish. Sweet in its own salty way," he added, contradicting himself.

"They've messed up the very air!" he coughed angrily, causing Carmen and Violet to jump up and hug each other in fright.

ElsBeth knew what he was talking about, though. Grandmother had told her that in the old days ships travelled all the seven seas with only the winds and tides to power them. It was the fossil fuels that were messing up the water and air.

Grandmother had explained. "The earth is like a living body, and some things are poisonous to it just like some things are poisons to people and animals."

ElsBeth newly decided that after they rescued Amy and Prince Abu, she would work hard to help the planet. After all, it wasn't like they could just take off and go somewhere else!

Captain Jacques' shout interrupted ElsBeth's high-minded thoughts. "Right rudder, Jimmy, me boy. And be sharp about it!"

The pirate had noticed the Coast Guard patrol boat dead ahead, and figured the *Bon Adventure* might arouse a bit too much attention—being piloted by an eight-year-old, captained by a ghost, and manned by a pack of second-graders. (Smart move, Captain.)

Nelson was leaning well out over the bow just then, straining to catch sight of his dear Amy in the ship ahead that was rapidly outdistancing them.

When Jimmy turned the wheel back to dodge a buoy, Nelson's weight shifted, and he fell over the rail. Luckily Frankie Sylvester was near, and with his quick boxer reflexes, he caught Nelson's sneakers as they flew by.

Nelson hung upside down over the side, his hair dipping in the water. Frankie teetered on the verge of going over himself, pulled forward by Nelson's momentum. But Frankie was big-boned, and carried his weight low, which came in useful at times like these. Gravity finally won out. He pulled Nelson back in and dumped him on the deck.

Instead of fretting over Nelson, as Amy would have done, Veronica peered down at him, hands on hips. "Nelson, we're on a rescue operation. It is no time for a swim!"

Veronica wasn't known for excessive sympathy. She tossed her head and strode back to the stern where most of the others were gathered powwow style.

The Captain stood by the mast, ignoring the nearly lost crew members. He bent down for an earnest conversation with Johnny. Captain Jacques explained, "Now mate, the wind is steady, and I think the weather will hold. We need

to let out all the sails.”

Johnny added, “Right, we’re low on fuel.”

The Captain squinted, confused by what Johnny meant by “fuel.”

“Quiet, boy. As I was saying, their ship is faster, but they are the worst sailors ever a’ sea.

“They look to be headed ta Plymouth or Cape Cod. If we’re cunning as we should be, we’ll take advantage of the winds and currents, and we may just catch them up yet, afore they hit land.”

Johnny, as usual, was thinking things all the way through, and was not to be ignored. “I don’t think we should use the radio to call for help right now because those men might get desperate, and they could toss the prince and Amy overboard if they felt boxed in.”

The captain looked blank again when Johnny said “radio.” He stared hard at Johnny, who stared right back just as hard.

“I like ye, boy, but don’t know what yer saying. All I know since I’ve sailed these seas is ye need the wind and the element of surprise to capture yer prize. Don’t use fancy words, boy. It makes it hard for a man ta understand.”

Lisa Lee sat quietly, observing this discussion at her place in the circle. Her backpack was squirming again, and making funny noises, odd squeaks and clacks. She pushed it behind her. Then she added her own take on the situation, calling out in a high, clear voice, “They are probably going to try to steal a plane at one of the Cape airports.”

Sets of wide eyes turned to Lisa Lee. Their classmate was kind of like Sherlock Holmes. She just needed the

smallest clue and she could piece the whole thing together.

Maybe this came from all the science projects she did. Anyway, Lisa Lee was scary-smart, and they were all happy she was on their team. Even if she was a little strange at times.

The pirate, his command again questioned, glared at Lisa Lee. She didn't pay any attention to him, though, and added, "Our main concern has to be speed. We can save a lot of time cutting through some of the shallow waters once we get near the Cape.

"But they still out-power us in open waters." Lisa Lee lowered her beautiful, slanted eyes toward ElsBeth. "We need a strong wind."

ElsBeth was on excellent terms with the North Wind as it happened. She'd done him a favor recently when he got in a tangle with a hurricane from Florida.

The little witch had created a diversion with a simple enchantment under her grandmother's supervision, and helped him escape to the Gay Head cliffs of Martha's Vineyard, where he had hung low and managed to narrowly avoid being caught up and carried away by the storm.

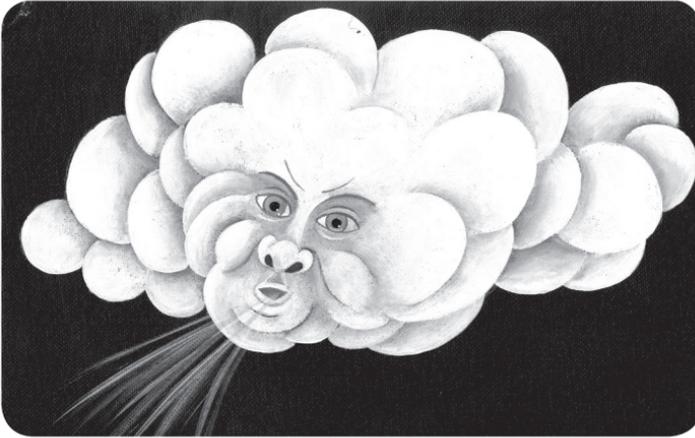
She'd call in the favor now.

ElsBeth reminded herself she wasn't to do spells on her own, but she told herself there was no rule against talking to a friend.

ElsBeth cast her perceptions wider and wider until she found him. At that moment he was up in Nova Scotia bedeviling a particularly annoying fishing fleet, one of the few still using nets that are dangerous to dolphins and whales.

The little witch caught the North Wind's attention by creating a small twister ... just a matter of heating up some molecules and getting them racing around. An easy task for even a beginner witch.

The North Wind immediately noticed the pretty little cyclone and came over to investigate.



ElsBeth sent a “whoosh” message, using the vibrations of the spinning molecules, a technique which she found lots of fun, especially on Halloween when she wanted to create surprising sound effects on people.

The North Wind understood the situation right away, and with a last blast of cold air that sent the lead fishing boat spinning around twice, he took off for Massachusetts Bay.

Meanwhile, the pirate decided he needed to take firm control of the vessel.

He fired off orders with lots of shouts and stares. The crew pulled together to raise the remaining sails, not an

easy job for people mostly under four feet tall and with an increasing wind at their backs.

The task was made even more difficult by Sir Percival the parrot, who felt he needed to have a hand (or more accurately, a wing) in the supervision of the vessel, too. He was not pleasant about this and screeched criticism at their efforts at every opportunity.

Somewhere along the line the salty parrot must have learned this method of command, but had never observed it really wasn't very effective—especially with second-graders from Cape Cod, who would have done just fine if he'd left them alone.

To make matters worse, he squawked so loudly that this time he did wake Sylvanas from his cozy nap. Of course Sylvanas would have woken anyway because he was wrapped up in one of the sails, and they were all now being raised and set.

Sylvanas was none too happy to end his nap with being dumped on deck to the unpleasant sound of a bad-tempered, bossy, squawking parrot.

The waking cat raked one paw lazily in the air, and in so doing caught the parrot's beak and held it shut, while blinking his green cat eyes innocently at the bad-tempered bird. The parrot flapped his wings wildly, feathers flying everywhere.

In the excitement of dealing with the magical cat, Sir Percival's feathers had returned even more fully to their natural bright yellows, greens, reds and blues.

The young crew momentarily stopped their work and stared in wonder. (If they had looked closely they would have seen that the pirate's dull skin and clothes were

becoming brighter, too.)

Eventually Sylvanas tired of holding onto Sir Percival and let him go. The parrot said some nasty things in response. “You gosh darned landlubber cat! You *Felis domesticus*! You son of a barnacle toad!”

It was hard to understand how Sylvanas, clearly a cat, could be the son of a barnacle toad. In fact, no one was sure what a barnacle toad was, except that it seemed unpleasant.

After this distracting spectacle, Nelson—not normally the ordering-about type, but probably with heaps of attention on Amy in the ship ahead—took the lead in getting the young crew back to task.

“Veronica, pull that sail over! Johnny, help me here!” And soon all the ship’s crisp sails snapped out full in the wind.

And when ElsBeth had the chance to explain the urgency of their situation in more detail, the North Wind began to blow his hardest.

Jimmy Miller had to lash himself to the wheel to make sure he didn’t blow away. The others grabbed onto whatever was handy so they wouldn’t fly overboard.

*The Jolliest Roger* was still speeding away, and moving fast out of sight. But with the wind picking up and filling its white sails like fat balloons, there was hope the *Bon Adventure* could catch the faster vessel.

Captain Thomas Jacques, happier now that he’d had a chance to shout some orders, explained his plan.

“If the little girl with the squirmy backpack is right, and that’s where the devils are headed, we can dance this

nimble ship through the tricky waters off Cape Cod and gain on *The Jolliest Roger*.”

As the pirate gave the worried classmates real hope they might have a chance to rescue Amy and the prince, Elsbeth happened to look to the sky.

What she saw was troubling. There again was that familiar face she'd seen recently in the stormy sky at home. There now in the clouds just as clear as could be. Who was it? Why was it there? What did it mean?

(If the little witch had looked behind her and seen the small boat skimming over the water toward them, faster than any natural vessel could go, and had seen who was at the helm, she may have had a clue.)

## ABU FIGHTS BACK

On *The Jolliest Roger*, the young prince demanded to speak to the leader of the kidnapping band.

The prince was no fool. He had learned to watch the ways of men in his few but privileged years of life. In his part of the world, a young royal had to grow up quickly to stay alive.

Now he must be smart and cunning. He needed to gain any advantage he could. And he could not let the pretty blond girl come to harm, no matter the risk to himself.

Abu recognized something about his captor, and he decided he would try intimidation, which sometimes worked with non-royals.

“I say, don't I know you?” the young sovereign demanded in his best mocking tone, at the same time looking the hulking brute up and down as if he were no

more than a slug to be squished.

Abu had practiced this look with his many half brothers and knew he was quite good at it.

The large villain looked a little nervous, but this didn't stop his rude response. "You'd better be thinking about how to stay alive, and not anything else, if you know what's good for you. And the little girl," he added, looking hard at Amy.

The brave young prince was not to be sidetracked. "You're a Bedouin," Abu said. "I recognize the accent. My cousin's clan speaks as you do."

The kidnapper sneered back. "What do you know of the Bedouins, you pampered young pup?"

"I know they are a brave desert tribe led by a flawed man." Abu answered with no hint of fear.

The villain's body jerked as if he would strike his prisoner, and the prince saw his chance.

He taunted the huge man once again. "Your headman, my father's cousin, is a coward, a man of no honor. That is why he was not chosen for the throne, even though he was the eldest son of the eldest son."

The prince's words struck home. The giant turned purple with anger. He lost all control and swung his arm at the eight-year-old.

Abu stepped easily aside, neatly slipped free of the man restraining him, and kicked Badir's smartphone out of the man's hands and it flew overboard.

The kidnapper made a desperate lunge to save his precious instrument—without it he had no contact with his employer. And worse, he had no Internet access to up-to-

date nautical charts, no data, nothing.

But he was too late. He and the prince watched the device fall in a graceful loop into the choppy blue waves, casting a colorful rainbow spray before disappearing altogether.

Alongside, a dolphin broke the surface, chattering away, sounding as if she were laughing at them.

Badir went wild and took another swing at Abu, who ducked easily again. But the young prince failed to notice the three men now at his back. They landed on him in a heap, and he was down.

The leader slowly shook his head. He had instructions from the very man the prince had spoken of that the boy was to be unharmed, if at all possible.

The reward was much higher if they managed to keep him alive, whole and safe. The tribal leader was a moody one—who knew what would happen if he noticed bruises on his young relation? Best not to take a chance at stirring him to anger.

“Take the little blighter below,” he growled at his men. “Get ‘His Majesty’ out of my sight before I’m tempted to do something I’ll later regret.”

Beneath her blond curls, Amy’s clear blue eyes followed the prince as he was shoved below decks. A single tear slipped down her cheek.

Chapter Seventeen  
Ms. Finch Teams Up with Big Mac

“When I get my hands on those children ... I’ve never had a second-grade class like this in all my years!

“What will I tell the parents? What will I tell Principal Titcomb? What will I tell the School Board?”

A new, and darker, thought struck the teacher. “What about my retirement fund?”

Ms. Finch paced back and forth in the cold cellar of the Old North Church. Beth, the docent, was starting to come around.

With all the wrestling around her students loved to do, the teacher of the rowdy Southie children had, of necessity, become an expert at first aid. She had immediately covered the docent with her colorful Peruvian poncho to help with the shock.

Her students, normally as unruly a group as you could find anywhere, were for once being quiet and respectful. It was beyond even their experience to witness a kidnapping and the disappearance into thin air of an entire second-

grade class.

They had rushed down the steps as soon as they'd heard the disturbance below, and had just caught a glimpse of a leg of the last Cape girl going into the dark.

Some of these bold youngsters had been quite ready to follow into the crypt, but their teacher had quickly put an end to that idea.

Over to the side, the private school students were huddled together and whispering loudly.

Apparently some of them had been warned about kidnappings and ransoms. Being from wealthy families, they faced quite different risks than the class from South Boston.

They looked to their "Boston Brahmin" teacher for guidance. His arctic-ice blue eyes behind his deceptively cheerful candy-red glasses, discouraged them, however. And the slight, cruel smile on his lips made the youngsters turn nervously away.

Then he caught himself, and made a big show of concern. His voice dripped with a too-sweet sympathy. "Don't worry, students. I'm sure young Abu will be fine. The police will find him."

Though how this was to happen, when no one had actually called the police, was a bit of a mystery.

Finally one practical second-grader whipped out his forbidden cell phone to make the call, but the teacher grabbed it from his hands.

"Cell phones are not allowed to students. *I'll* take that, thank you!" He pocketed the offending device.

The boy tried to explain. "But no one has called the

police yet. I was just trying to help.”

The teacher pretended to be offended. “Of course the police have been called. I did it myself just a moment ago. You must not have noticed.” He stared the young boy down.

Several students looked at each other. No one had seen or heard any such thing. They began to inch away from their weird teacher, who was acting weirder by the minute.

Even Ms. Finch felt that something was terribly “off.” She found herself unconsciously backing up as far as she could until she was against the old plaster wall.

Then she turned abruptly, took a few steps to her left, and quietly let herself out the door to the garden at the side of the church.

She knew her students. They were Cape Codders. She knew they would somehow make it through this ordeal. And she needed to be there when they did.

Ms. Finch would never admit it, but sometimes she had these flashes of intuition, and she had one of those now.

It was not that she believed in the supernatural or magic in *any* form. But she found it always paid off to listen when she had “one of those feelings.”

She dashed awkwardly down the pavement back toward Boston Garden, looking like some great, strange, thin, gawky bird with her billowing scarf flapping behind.

Ms. Finch pushed and shoved through the crowds of tourists, students and even a few native Bostonians.

As she came to the swan boat pond she spotted her bus driver’s athletic figure. He was sampling a jelly doughnut, sniffing it with perfect pleasure, immersed in anticipation

of a large juicy bite.

She wasted no time. “Come with me, Mr. MacSweeney. We are leaving right now.”

This command was delivered in her best “don’t mess with me, young man” voice, which always produced instant compliance.

The astonished MacSweeney dropped his exquisite doughnut, an occurrence that would have never happened under normal circumstances.

“Where is the class?” he managed to mumble, sweet jelly oozing over his sneaker.

Ms. Finch ignored his question and merely snapped, “Never mind.”

She rushed headlong into the yellow Cape bus. Mac hopped in behind and up the steps in one leap.

The trusty engine coughed to life, and with a short squeal of the tires, they sped through the park and entered the tangle of downtown Boston traffic, her strong feeling leading them south toward the friendlier land of Cape Cod.

Chapter Eighteen  
Rocks and Shoals, Tides and Currents

With the North Wind at near-gale force behind it, the little sailing yacht *Bon Adventure* sped through the rough waters of Massachusetts Bay.

But it still couldn't match the pace of *The Jolliest Roger* and its powerful diesel engines set to top speed.

Jimmy Miller had done his best, and quite a good job that was. If he were just a little taller he could probably be at the helm of a winning schooner in the Figawi Regatta, the annual sailboat race from Hyannis to Nantucket.

He had learned to navigate the always-changing waters around the Cape and Nantucket Sound with his dad, and this ability was likely to come in handy trying to catch up with these villains.

But ElsBeth was worried. Even with Jimmy's impressive skill, there was a good chance they would lose sight of the other vessel, which was even now receding to a small dot on the horizon. And if that happened, they'd never be able to find it with all the opportunities for escape along the complicated Cape Cod coastline.

The pirate edged over to ElsBeth and placed an icy hand on her shoulder. “Well, little witch, I’ve sailed many a worthy vessel and had some fine sailing pilots work in me crews. And I’ll vow to ye our young helmsman could keep pace with the best of them.

“Fact is, I wish I had young Jimmy with me last time I was outrunning one of His Majesty’s vessels on the high seas.” The pirate dandy grinned slightly with a far-away look.

But his encouraging words did nothing to lift ElsBeth’s mood.

What difference did it make if Jimmy was doing his best and they still lost their friends? ElsBeth was getting mad.

Actually, she was frightened for Amy and Prince Abu, but the words came out like she was angry. “You’re the pirate! I thought you were going to help!”

She was so upset, she began to blame Captain Jacques for their situation. The pirate was guilty of a many things, true enough, but he had nothing much to do with *this* state of affairs. He understood the witch’s frustration, but he wasn’t about to let her get away with bad manners.

“Well, well, little missy, first of all, I’m a privateer, not a pirate,” he said pointedly.

“And next, I’m yer elder, so ye’ll treat me with respect! And finally, yer the witch,” he whispered in her ear.

“A captain can only make a vessel go as fast as the winds will take her. We’ve gotten every knot of speed out of her she can give us.”

He winked at ElsBeth. “If we can’t go any faster, we’ll

need *another* kind of solution.”

The nerve of him, ElsBeth thought, to wink like it’s a joke when our friends are in danger of their lives!

Then suddenly the little witch got it. She’d already used her best magic to get North Wind to make them go fast. The pirate seemed to be saying that if they couldn’t go faster, she needed to do something to make the other ship go slower.

ElsBeth frowned. How can I slow them down? I’m not very good at getting the ocean to do things. Grandmother hasn’t taught me much about that yet.

She looked into the sky, and noticed a graceful sea bird circling the ship. She looked down, and saw a dolphin jump out of the water. An idea was forming.

ElsBeth knew she *was* good at communicating with creatures. It was her strongest skill. Somehow, maybe, the sea creatures could help her slow down that boat.

The dolphin perked up just as ElsBeth had this thought. Her sleek bullet shape jumped high out of the water and splashed with a loud thwack. ElsBeth listened carefully to the dolphin’s series of clicks and clacks.

“I’m Desdemona, the adorable, at your service, young witch. I see you’re in some distress.”

She clacked away sweetly. “I was just at the ship up ahead and a gadget got tossed overboard. I think it was important—one of the men on the ship was so angry he lost it that he turned bright red.

“Would you like to see it?” she clicked cheerfully.

ElsBeth didn’t see how it could help, but at this point she was glad for any assistance she could get.

“Yes, please, Desdemona,” she replied politely. Dolphins are intelligent and helpful, and ElsBeth knew they should be given every courtesy.

The rest of the Cape crew were huddled in the stern of the boat, trying to stay warm while the North Wind’s icy breath was on them. But from the bow, the pirate looked on ElsBeth’s conversation with approval.

Several other dolphins broke the surface of the blue-gray waters. A plump, silver-bellied one nimbly tossed a black instrument from the tip of her nose.

It landed on deck at the pirate’s feet. He wasn’t impressed. “What’s that? Looks like a small block of black iron.”

ElsBeth had seen one of these before. Robert’s Uncle Preston had one. She hated to do it. Robert Hillman-Jones was such a know-it-all and a pest, but this time she needed his help.

“Robert Hillman-Jones,” she called.

Hillman-Jones looked up, surprised. He jogged to the bow where ElsBeth and the pirate stared at the object. “What’s up, ElsBeth?”

“What’s this for?” ElsBeth asked, getting right down to business.

“ElsBeth, don’t you know anything? That’s a new style smartphone, a pretty good one, the latest model. My Uncle Preston has one just like it.

“But it’s all wet.” Hillman-Jones pressed the buttons at a mad rate without any response.

“What do you use it for?” asked ElsBeth.

“Well, it’s a phone, and an advanced computer, and

a camera, and an Internet connection and a lot of other things. Why?" Hillman-Jones was so genuinely curious he forgot to be sarcastic. "Is there a treasure map on it?"

"You mean you can get ocean charts with this?"

She had an idea. If the kidnappers were angry at losing this, maybe they needed it to guide them. And if they lost it, they'd have to rely on whatever charts they had on the vessel.

ElsBeth's thoughts were on a roll. The Cape waters are always changing depths. Tides and storms cut new channels and filled in places, and even made new mini-islands and sand bars all the time.

It was almost impossible to keep up with these changes on printed charts. She got excited that losing this device might really cause the kidnapers trouble and slow them down.

And that could give the *Bon Adventure* a big advantage when they got close to the tricky Cape shoreline.

Jimmy, on the other hand, knew all the shallow places and rocks from sailing them every day. He knew the currents and could get them safely and swiftly through the risky Cape waters.

If they could only keep the other ship in sight, Jimmy could start to gain on them, for sure, as soon as they got near the Cape.

These were a lot of "ifs." Still, ElsBeth took heart. There was a *chance* they could catch up.

But then what? Well, she wasn't going to think about that now.

ElsBeth had not been looking out to sea since she'd

been talking with Hillman-Jones. Now her gaze swept the horizon.

“Oh, no!” she cried. “We’ve lost them.” ElsBeth, the pirate and Hillman-Jones just stared. What could they do now?

## CAPE COD BAY

Tensions were mounting on *The Jolliest Roger*. The sturdy ship had sped across Massachusetts Bay without incident. But fuel was being consumed at an alarming rate.

As they entered Cape Cod Bay, the villains realized they’d need to land before long. And with no Internet connection, they would have to rely on the few old charts on board.

“Curses. That little brat messed us up when he kicked my smartphone overboard.” Badir was not the trusting sort, and no one else in his crew had been allowed even a cell phone.

And, of course, they couldn’t exactly use the ship’s radio for help. Being international criminals involved in the politically sensitive kidnapping of a Middle Eastern prince didn’t allow for that option.

That the whole crew was made up of desert dwellers didn’t make them the best sailors, either. The only point in their favor was that one of the crew had a small talent with engines.

He could get them running, and point the vessel in a general direction. But that Cape Cod coast didn’t look all that easy to approach.

*The Jolliest Roger* had kept near the shore as it went

by historic Plymouth, and then along the north side of the Cape. It quickly passed Sagamore, Sandwich, Barnstable's Sandy Neck, Dennis and Brewster.

It continued east, but now had to turn north, and was headed straight up toward the very tip of the Cape. It looked strange to them, though, that the land ahead seemed to turn back to the west!

(For those unfamiliar, Cape Cod does a cute little curve-back on itself. And the tip at Provincetown isn't all that far, as the crow flies, from the where the Cape begins at the mainland.)

The villains, who only felt safe when they were near dry land, had followed tight in to the coast and ended up traveling much farther than they needed in their search for an airport.

But they carried on, and as they passed Orleans and Wellfleet, and then the sands of Truro, the lighthouses made them even more nervous.

Lighthouses were only built where you had a dangerous coast and lots of shipwrecks. Even criminals from the desert knew that!

Would the Cape Cod waters claim yet another ship?



## Chapter Nineteen

### Lessons Learned

ElsBeth marched back and forth, ignoring Robert Hillman-Jones's steady stream of comments about treasure. But Captain Thomas Jacques finally grew tired of the greedy boy. "Quiet, ye selfish little pirate," he snarled.

"In me day, we took treasure for our country or our families—or at least for the love of the game. What's the matter with ye, lad? There is more to the chase than the gold." The pirate's beaded braids rattled as he shook his head.

"There is freedom and honor and friendship, and best of all adventure. Ye need to learn to care about something worth fighting for.

"Something other than yeself," he added sharply.

Hillman-Jones was stunned. *No one* talked to him like that. He stomped off, sulking, but began to think about the pirate's stinging words.

ElsBeth had missed most of the prickly exchange between the pirate and her classmate. But she heard the

part about caring for something worth fighting for, and she thought the pirate was right.

As she scanned the horizon once more, desperately hoping for a glimpse of the other ship, a circling osprey caught her eye.

A general alert had been sent out by Thaddeus Crane, ElsBeth's magical friend who lived in the marsh near home. He and Persephone the coyote had been worried about Hannah Goodspell's strange behavior for a while, and they'd agreed to keep an eye on both witches.

Hannah had come to their aid more times than they could count. They owed the loveable old witch so much, the least they could do was watch out for her and her granddaughter.

Thaddeus had sensed serious trouble brewing today, and passed the word to every bird he met to watch out for ElsBeth. So Oscar the osprey had stayed with the boat as soon as he saw ElsBeth was aboard. Now ElsBeth had finally noticed him.

As Oscar circled lower and lower on graceful sweeping spirals, the large bird called to ElsBeth. "What's happening? Is something wrong?"

ElsBeth instantly felt a burden lift. She wasn't alone. Her friends were here helping. The dolphins were nearby. Even the dangerous pirate ghost seemed determined to help. And now one of her dear friends, Oscar, had arrived.

ElsBeth called back. "Oscar, Amy and a new friend have been kidnapped. They are on a powerboat named *The Jolliest Roger*.

"We lost sight of it almost an hour ago, and we need to find it." The little witch fought back tears.

“Don’t worry, ElsBeth. I’ll search the seven seas for her.” And Oscar was off.

He swooped close over the *Bon Adventure*, nearly knocking Sir Percival off his favorite perch on the captain’s shoulder.

The parrot had fallen asleep as the ship had sailed farther and farther south. He woke in a fine panic when he saw the osprey seeming to dive straight at him and passing less than a foot from his beautiful tail feathers.

When asleep, the bird had reverted to his pale ghostly-gray color. But on waking, in alarm, his feathers again turned bright reds, greens, yellows and blues.

Now, all ruffled up, he decided to find Sylvanas and pick another fight. It was always good to scare someone else when you were terrified.

“Made one feel better, it did,” the strange bird muttered to himself, taking off in a flurry of color.

Sylvanas at that moment was lying on his back, all four paws straight up in the air, his large belly comfortably balanced in between. He purred contentedly and dreamed of golden jelly doughnuts. In his dream he was about to sink his teeth into a delicious raspberry cream.

Suddenly a nasty squawk woke him. Eyes still closed, one paw shot out and snatched the parrot’s beak, mid-flight.

Sir Percival had failed again.

When Sylvanas fell back asleep, his claws relaxed and the parrot fled once again to the safety of his captain’s shoulder. He smoothed his feathers and pretended that nothing at all had happened.

Having observed the whole incident, the pirate smiled.

His bad-tempered parrot seemed to have met his match in that lazy cat.

Sir Percival, for his part, did not forgive the insults he'd suffered from Sylvanas. And he lapsed into a quiet song to cheer himself up:

*O pity me, this bird at sea,  
Who doesn't have a friend.  
From ghostly sea to ghostly sea,  
I sail on to the end.*

*But what end can be for a ghostly me,  
Who doesn't have a friend?  
A lonely me on a lonely sea,  
I sail on to the end.*

*Rum-tum, that cat! That feline gnat!  
I curse him to the end!  
That lazy cat may win a spat  
But I'll get him in the end!*

*Halloo! Hurray! All night and day  
I'll fight him to the end!  
The game is on, he is my pawn!  
I'll get him in the end!*

While Sir Percival had made a foolish and failed attempt on Sylvanas, Oscar's search had been successful.

The bird's sharp eyes had spotted *The Jolliest Roger* off the waters of P'town (Provincetown, the outermost town on the tip of Cape Cod for those not familiar with Cape-speak).



He now reported his finding to ElsBeth. Armed with this vital information, ElsBeth knew it was time to work out a plan with the pirate and Johnny. She spoke to Johnny first as the captain didn't understand some things that were a little more modern than he was, like radio and engines and that sort of thing.

“Johnny, they are off P'town. They may not have any communication except ship's radio, and like you said they might be afraid to get caught if they use that. Their ability to navigate is probably limited by whatever charts they have aboard. So ... what do you think we should do?”

Without for a minute questioning how ElsBeth knew this, Johnny judged the situation.

“Our speed is good, but we'll never catch them at this

rate. That type of vessel will have used most of its fuel by now, but P'town is too well policed for a landing. Though they'd probably blend in fine with that colorful crowd," he added as an afterthought.

"They'll be worried about being questioned by a harbor master wherever they land. My guess is they'll try to put in somewhere on the south side.

"They'll try to escape notice in one of the smaller ports. I say we take the canal and try to intercept them on the south coast of the Cape."

The pirate had listened carefully to Johnny. "A bold plan, me boy! I like it. It will be hard to find the scoundrels, though. We'll have to count on luck, and we've practically no chance if we can't catch up and stay close to them.

"But wait a minute, what are ye saying about a canal? There's no canal across Cape Cod. I've sailed these waters more times than ye can count. I guarantee there's no water route across this perilous spit of land!" He shook his head at the ridiculous idea.

Just then Jimmy shouted. "There's Sagamore Beach." They all turned and watched as the broad mouth of the Cape Cod Canal opened on their right.

"Blow me down! There *is* a canal, just like the little Indian boy said. I wouldna believed it if I hadna seen it with me own eyes!"

The pirate slapped his leg and roared with laughter. "We'll get those blighters now, you wait and see!

"Helmsman, hard to starboard!"

The North Wind had been so intent on blowing to the south he would have missed the sharp right turn to get the

vessel into the canal, but ElsBeth caught his attention with a little science/magic. She lined up some electricity in the air and sent it to him like a miniature lightning bolt.

He shook off this surprising tingle, understood her message, and quickly shifted to the west, blowing the sails full, just as hard as before with barely a moment's slack.

(For weeks afterward, hikers and bikers on the canal paths would comment about the crazy, unnaturally strong and icy winds that had been blowing that day and seemed to come out of nowhere.

Joe, the Channel 5 News meteorologist, puzzled over this phenomenon, and could be seen shaking his head over it for days. He was used to odd, New England weather, but this was ridiculous!)

The *Bon Adventure* sped through the canal, then south again as fast as the powerful North Wind could take them. They raced by Falmouth and then Wood's Hole at the southwest tip of the Cape.

Soon they could make out Martha's Vineyard in the distance. The fairytale gingerbread buildings of Oak Bluffs were just visible through the pirate's glass as he looked past the twin lighthouses on the island's northern tip.

The perky ship flew along the Cape's south shore, past the quaint village of Osterville and the busy port of Hyannis. They passed a racing sloop, and Veronica swore it was one of the Kennedys aboard with two happy Labradors at the bow.

Hillman-Jones disagreed. "No, of course it's not. The Kennedy's are all at a fundraiser in Washington this week."

They continued past the small harbors of Yarmouth, Dennis Port and Harwich Port, and finally to Chatham.

Monomoy Island was coming up, and beyond that the historic whaling port of Nantucket.

But where was *The Jolliest Roger*? They surely should have spotted it by now. Disappointment fell hard on the crew.

ElsBeth looked at Johnny and Johnny looked at the pirate. Their shoulders sagged. The young Wampanoag and the witch were out of ideas.

The pirate frowned, Sylvanas yawned. The parrot squawked.

ElsBeth searched the waters ahead. And breaking the surface in the distance, she saw the sleek, curved backs of a pod of whales.

She saw a small rocky island with seals lazing in the sun. Gulls and other birds filled the air. The dolphins still breached the water's surface alongside their little boat.

These were her friends. She could communicate with them, and they could communicate with each other. She knew that some of the whales or seals or even the gulls *must* have noticed *something*. This was the answer!

ElsBeth skipped to the bow of the ship and leaned over the side. She sent out a series of sharp clicking sounds. "Desdemona, we've got to find that ship that tossed the little black box in the water." She click-clacked in perfect dolphin-speak.

Desdemona eagerly clicked back, "I knew you'd need our help! We don't usually go beyond Plymouth Bay. But we had a feeling we should stay with you through the canal."

The lively mammal chattered with the other dolphins, a

bit too fast for ElsBeth to follow. And the biggest one, with a dark fin and a broad, powerful chest, flashed forward and into the deep.

“Dennison is going ahead to check with the whales. Darling will find out what the seals have seen.” The smallest, most graceful dolphin took off toward the nearest island.

“Dorcas will check with the sharks,” she shivered. “He is very brave. If that ship is in these waters, we’ll find it!” Desdemona clicked emphatically.

ElsBeth was relieved to have their help. She focused on the waters, waiting for the dolphins’ return, but a persistent cry from above distracted her.

A black and white seagull of enormous size dropped in close. “I’m Silas. I say, there seems to be quite a lot of activity coming from this little boat. What goes on here?” he called out.

ElsBeth knew of Silas Seagull. He went to all the outdoor concerts on the Cape during the summer. Silas was known as a pretty hip bird. He loved people and their music, particularly experimental jazz.

And he loved popcorn most of all, his favorite food, even better than fresh oysters. Yum! Everyone knows you can’t get fresh popcorn from the ocean, so Silas tried to hang around people whenever possible.

Living by the water, ElsBeth had seen lots of gulls. She knew Silas by sight, but she’d never taken the time to get to know him, or any gull, really. Seagulls didn’t have the best reputation.

Then she realized, she’d never actually even met a gull personally, so how was it right to judge them? Despite

anything bad she had heard about gulls, she decided she had to overcome that prejudice.

“Hello!” she shouted. “We do need help, if you would be so kind. Our friends have been captured and are aboard a ship called *The Jolliest Roger*. It sailed around Provincetown a couple hours ago, and we’re trying to find it.”

Silas puffed up his big white belly in pride. He had never been asked for help from a witch before. The idea intrigued him.

“We gulls have to watch out for other birds kidnapping our young,” he responded sympathetically. “Of course, I’ll help.

“In fact, all the gulls on the south coast will help!” he cried, warming to the subject. “Never let it be said that a gull would not help when there was need!” The heavy bird had worked himself into an emotional frenzy, and was off.

ElsBeth soon heard his piercing pleas to a swirl of gulls gathered on the beach.

Suddenly the air was filled with white wings headed north and south, all over the National Seashore that ran along the whole east coast of the Outer Cape. Their cries were deafening even to those on the boat. The excitable Silas had them all stirred up.

ElsBeth began thinking about what else she could do when Johnny raced over to her.

Johnny had paled to the color of the ghost.

ElsBeth’s heart fluttered.

“Look!” He grabbed ElsBeth’s shoulder and pointed off the bow.

Racing right at them was the biggest whale ElsBeth had ever seen, far bigger than the *Bon Adventure*.

The Cape crew all ran to the rail, hypnotized by the sight.

“Hard right rudder!” the pirate captain yelled. If they were rammed, the ship would shatter and no one would survive.

Hillman-Jones, in a rare moment of thinking of someone other than himself, began to pass out lifejackets, getting Frankie to help, too. They struggled into the adult-sized vests.

Hillman-Jones saw they were two short. There weren't enough.

He climbed out of his and passed it to ElsBeth, who put it on in stunned silence.

Frankie gave his to Violet.

The two boys looked at each other bravely as if to say goodbye forever, but they were too manly to say anything.

Was this it for the story of their young lives?

Would this simply be ... the end?

Chapter Twenty  
Nantucket Island



Meanwhile *The Jolliest Roger* was in its own trouble.

They were travelling south and it was now low tide.

One of the men happened to look down into the water alongside and spotted a rock, not two feet below the surface. He couldn't breathe. He couldn't speak. All he could do was point.

Once he found his voice, he squealed like an eight-

year-old girl who'd just seen a particularly ferocious mouse! (Carmen sounded just like that.)

Others of the crew quickly peered over the side. And nearly jumped ship!

Two of the desert-dwellers lost their breakfasts then and there. (This nasty deposit seriously upset some curious fish in their crystal-clear Cape Cod waters below.)

The man at the helm didn't understand the situation or the screams. He just panicked. He yanked on the wheel trying to avoid the underwater hazard, but ended up badly overcompensating.

One of the propellers smashed hard into the rocky shoal. The sound was a sickening metal scraping (not unlike Ms. Finch at the blackboard).

The dangerous currents and treacherous shallows off the National Seashore had almost wrecked the kidnapper's ship.

Recovering from this very thin, narrow escape from complete disaster, the ship was now limping toward the far side of Nantucket, where Badir felt sure he could find an airfield.

It was the headman's fault. He had mistakenly assumed that because Nantucket was farther away from the Cape that this would take them through safe, deep water. But if he'd understood the depth markings on the charts, he would have been terrified.

The waters of Nantucket Sound are actually remarkably shallow except in the narrow shipping lanes.

Wampanoag legend explains that Gay Head, the spectacular cliffs of Martha's Vineyard, was the dwelling

place of the great chief Moshup, a kind of Wampanoag giant.

One day Moshup stepped off from his home on the cliffs, his great weight crushing the land below. The sea rushed in, creating Nantucket Sound.

And when he emptied his sand-filled moccasins, he created the islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket.

Amy knew this legend and that the Sound was shallow. But from her viewpoint on *The Jolliest Roger*, she didn't know what was worse—to crash the ship, or to get to shore and ... who knows what.

So, she kept quiet and prepared to swim.

She thought about the prince, held below, and how fearless he had been. She thought, too, about Nelson Hamm, and how his ears stuck out, and how his glasses slid down his nose, and how he always stood up for her no matter what.

The two boys couldn't have looked more different, but at heart they were the same, both brave and true.

Amy decided if they ever got out of this mess, she would bake them both their favorite cookies. Amy was quite good at cookie baking, and she imagined the prince's pleased smile.

Maybe he liked chocolate chip. Nelson, she knew, liked peanut butter. His ears would turn bright red if she made him some cookies, and he'd probably stutter, too. It would be totally sweet!

Amy's pleasant daydream was interrupted by a shout from belowdecks. The engine was sputtering and men began running up and down, calling out and generally

being confused.

Badir climbed to the top-most deck. “We’re running out of fuel, men.” He looked over and yelled at the man at the wheel. “Bring her in!”

Dead ahead was a natural cove with a rambling mansion set well away from any other homes.

“Looks like those rich people will have some company for supper. Us!” he laughed.

### A WHALE OF A SITUATION

The whale’s huge, blunt, black head continued to rush directly toward the bow of the bonny *Bon Adventure*.

“Blimey, I’ve never seen such a whale!” said the captain. And if he weren’t already a ghost, he would have been saying his prayers right then and there.

The parrot was hiding his face in the pirate’s long hair. He didn’t want to watch.

Frankie Sylvester and Robert Hillman-Jones lined everybody up on the land side of the ship, ready to jump and try to swim to shore.

Except for Jimmy Miller, who was holding hard to the helm.

Jimmy wasn’t about to abandon ship just yet. He figured if he timed it right, he might be able to outmaneuver the charging whale and avoid collision at the last minute by turning the wheel hard and changing course before the whale could react.

ElsBeth grabbed Johnny’s hand. An idea was sneaking up on her. “Johnny, have you ever seen a whale charge a

ship like this?”

Johnny was silent a moment, then answered. “Grandfather said that in the days of the whale hunts, a whale would sometimes ram a boat if its calf had been taken. But I’ve never seen anything like that myself.”

Something here didn’t make sense.

ElsBeth looked back at the whale and there it was, plainly written on her face.

The whale’s gigantic eye showed kindness and concern.

ElsBeth finally understood. The whale, the fastest creature around, was trying to get to them as quickly as possible ... with the location of the other ship.

The whale wasn’t going to ram them. She wanted to help! ElsBeth started to giggle, totally out of control.

Johnny and the pirate looked at her, worried. She was losing it. This happened sometimes. People reacted differently when faced with mortal danger. Robert Hillman-Jones sometimes got heroic. Jimmy remained steady on. And ElsBeth ... well ... apparently she giggled.

The whale was almost on them. Jimmy Miller threw the full weight of his seventy-pound body onto the ship’s wheel. And the *Bon Adventure* spun sharply, nearly capsizing.

The whale stopped, a surprised look on her really big features.

ElsBeth ran over and stared at the whale’s huge right eye, now level with the top of the ship’s rail. In it she saw a reflection of *The Jolliest Roger*, and the unmistakable coastline of Nantucket Island (the former whaling capital, oddly enough).

With her job done, the gentle giant turned and sank below the surface.

ElsBeth wished she could express her appreciation to her new acquaintance, but for now that would have to wait. Someday, though, she promised herself, we'll meet again and I'll properly thank you.

The crew chattered excitedly. "Did you see that?" "Wow, that was close!"

Robert Hillman-Jones boasted how he "wasn't afraid, not even for a minute."

Frankie, less gifted with words, merely added, "Me, too!"

Veronica, for once, was speechless.

Lisa Lee looked thoughtful, muttering something about "the incredible amount of calories the whale must have burned going so fast," and how "straight line swimming was abnormal behavior for North Atlantic right whales ..." Even in the nearest brushes with death, Lisa Lee could be counted on to be analyzing the scientific nature of things.

ElsBeth tugged at the pirate's ghostly cloak. There was not a moment to lose. "We need to get to the other side of Nantucket," she whispered. "Fast!"

The pirate alone immediately understood what had happened between ElsBeth and the whale. He'd long since figured out that the other children didn't know ElsBeth was a witch. And he was used to the way most people were afraid of the supernatural.

Being a ghost, he was the target of the worst kind of discrimination. Many people even said he didn't exist. Balderdash. That was really the most terrible insult.

Granted, he couldn't do many of the things he used to do when he had a proper body, but there *were* benefits. Now he could do *other* things even better.

In any case, he quickly set about giving orders to get the ship underway with all speed. He was rather enjoying this. This was the life, once more on an adventure at sea.

“Listen up, me mateys. We're Nantucket bound. We'll catch that villain ship and free your friends before this day is done.

“Helmsman Miller, back to the wheel and hard to starboard. Compass heading thirty degrees east by southeast.

“Seamen Hillman-Jones and Sylvester, check all equipment on deck. Mr. Twofeathers, set about trimming the sails to the wind.”

The pirate couldn't quite bring himself to ordering the girls. He hadn't grown up with the idea that girls could do much more than sewing and cooking, so he just turned his back on their expectant faces.

Veronica quickly understood they were being ignored and jumped in with instructions of her own.

“Lisa, Lee stow the life jackets. We don't want those stupid boys tripping on them.

“Carmen, neaten up the ropes and ties.

Violet ...” Veronica didn't yet like Violet very much, but she decided the too-pretty girl could probably do *something*. “Violet, go see if Jimmy needs anything.”

The girls got busy under Veronica's orders. (Veronica could get cranky if you didn't do exactly what she said. And quickly.)

Veronica saw ElsBeth scouting the island so she let her be, and just kept an eye on Hillman-Jones and Frankie while they scampered around to get the boat gear just right. The pirate may approve, but Veronica wasn't sure their work would be up to *her* standards.

The North Wind had been a little insulted when Jimmy had earlier steered off his course, but forgave the young sailor when he saw the whale heading dead at the ship.

The wind didn't sulk this time like he sometimes did when he felt his efforts weren't appreciated. Instead, he began to blow again for all he was worth. And as a result Nantucket loomed closer by the minute.

The pirate carefully watched for shoals, but he needn't have worried. Jimmy was well aware of every shallow spot in this stretch of sea.

Since he was a wee lad he'd heard stories of shipwrecks and lost souls. His Great-Aunt Millie loved to scare Jimmy and his cousins, when no other adult was around to stop her.

She'd pull out ancient nautical charts from the attic and point to the location of this wreck and that. She never tired of telling the terrible fates of the olden vessels in the Sound and the countless dangers of the sea.

But Jimmy had fortunately been out to sea enough himself to know and respect these waters firsthand. And he wasn't afraid, despite Aunt Millie's best efforts. Her tales just added to his education was how he saw it.

Soon the *Bon Adventure* passed the northeast tip of the old whaling port. The pirate scouted with his brass spyglass. The crew was tense.

Would the kidnapper's ship be there? Would Amy and

the prince be OK? And the big question—how could they rescue them?

## THE NANTUCKET ESTATE

Not far to the south, *The Jolliest Roger* struggled into the small private harbor on the far side of the island.

“Back up, you numbskull!” yelled Badir when he saw they were about to crash.

The helmsman had been so relieved to finally be getting to dry land again that he didn’t realize he needed to ease the ship in slow alongside the long dock—not aim straight at it headfirst!

This point was now being brought to his attention by his boss, with lots of yelling and bad words.

The man at the wheel was so shook up, though, that instead of reversing, he pulled the wrong lever and accelerated.

Shouts and screams were drowned out by the crash when they rammed the dock at a good clip.

Amy was at the rail holding tight, but she couldn’t look. She covered her eyes. As a Cape Codder, born and bred, she couldn’t stand to see such bad seamanship.

The now pitiful *Jolliest Roger* sat wedged within the splintered framework of the hundred-foot-long dock and was not about to go anywhere soon, never mind the damaged prop and practically no fuel.

Badir eyed the mansion across the once-manicured lawns that now sprouted gangly weeds. There was no sound. It appeared no one had been home to observe their less than perfect landing.

He yelled to the helmsman, "Scout out the house."

The luckless former helmsman continued his streak of misfortune when he jumped to the broken dock, lost his footing, and slipped neatly into the drink.

Shouting words not meant for young ears, the man scrambled onto the nearest dry planks, shaking and shivering like a happy Labrador puppy. Though he was hardly happy.

Dripping wet and cold, he cautiously crossed the lawn toward the spooky mansion, wondering ... what else could go wrong?

Chapter Twenty-One  
The Pirate Spots His Prize



“Oh ho, my pretty, there ye are!” The pirate beamed brightly.

Not only were the ocean blue, the air sweet, and a strong wind blowing, but there in his spyglass was the very ship they sought.

The crew crowded round. They couldn’t yet see the

ship themselves, even with their sharp young eyes.

Nelson nearly collapsed with relief that he was one step closer to the chance to save his friend. “Amy ...” was all he could say.

Johnny Twofeathers concentrated on the shoreline ahead. “Maybe we can catch them by surprise.”

“No!” said Robert Hillman-Jones. “I’m not afraid of any kidnappers.”

Robert obviously hadn’t thought a lot about how they were going to free their classmate and the prince from some pretty scary-looking-and-acting criminal adults.

The pirate ignored both of the boys. “We’ll keep out of sight till the last minute, then sneak up on them.

“I know ye are all brave lads, but we’ve women aboard and we need to be careful.”

Veronica, Carmen and Violet looked insulted, and at each other, and said at the same time, “What?”

Jimmy expertly slid the boat closer to shore so they’d be able to approach without being spotted.

“Good lad, Jimmy,” called the pirate. “But ye’re supposed to wait till the captain gives the order,” he added a little crossly.

The crew was now keyed up for action.

Lisa Lee held tight to her squirming backpack. Hillman-Jones noticed this. “What you got in there, Lisa Lee, a cat or something?”

Sylvanas heard this, woke up and snarled. “Another cat on board?” Sylvanas didn’t like to share the spotlight.

Hillman-Jones playfully kicked at the backpack.

Lisa Lee screamed, “NO!”

But the backpack flew open, and out popped the horny head of a creature seen only in storybooks, and the occasional movie.

It had yellow-orange eyes that flashed like on fire, a long red tongue, and spikes up its back.

“My parents will kill me!” Lisa Lee wailed, while desperately trying to stuff the little fellow back inside.

Jimmy Miller was so shocked he almost ran them aground on a sandbar. He tugged wildly at the wheel and the ship pointed back out toward open water.

While remaining hidden, they’d gotten closer to *The Jolliest Roger* all the while. But when the bow of the *Bon Adventure* popped away from tight against the shore, the little ship could now be seen. And as luck would have it, or not, one of the villains was looking that way just then.

The shout, “A ship!” rang out loudly on both vessels.

There was nothing for it. The *Bon Adventure* was spotted. The element of surprise was gone, just like that.

Youngsters scampered. Villains scrambled. Alone, the pirate watched calmly.

Time for a new plan.

## Chapter Twenty-Two

### Under Attack

Jimmy Miller headed the *Bon Adventure* straight for *The Jolliest Roger*. Once again the pirate's orders were executed before he had a chance to give them voice, and he was none too pleased.

You have to remember it had been a long time since the he'd had a chance to boss anyone around. He really enjoyed hearing his orders boom across the decks again and hated to lose any opportunity to command.

But Captain Jacques tried to be a sport about it. "Jimmy, me boy, good job," he shouted. Though he couldn't keep a hint of resentment out of his voice.

The pirate didn't have long to hold his grudge with Jimmy, though, because complete chaos erupted up ahead.

Arrows began to rain down from the widow's walk of the old mansion.

The Cape Coddors were all familiar with a "widow's walk," a railed walkway on the roofs of many old houses along the coast, built so a sea captain's wife could watch,

sometimes in vain, for her husband's ship to return from a long voyage. But they'd never heard of one being used for launching an attack.

In the midst of this crazy clash of arrows, Lisa Lee once more lost hold of the baby dragon, and the little spitfire scooted over the rail and out of the boat.

Nelson, initially stunned silent by the shower of arrows falling on *The Jolliest Roger*, finally found his voice. "They're being attacked by Indians!"

Johnny Twofeathers did a double take. "I didn't know any of my people lived on *this* side of Nantucket!" he yelled back.

"Look!" Veronica pointed to two elderly women in old-fashioned, fancy clothes up on the widow's walk.

Violet looked up, "Oh, that's funny! They look just like pictures I've seen of my Uncle Melville's great-aunts, Faith and Mercy.



“I’ve never met them. In fact, I didn’t even know they were still alive. But I heard they lived in a big old place on Nantucket. And, well, they were supposed to be a bit ... eccentric. *And*, they used to be archery champions.”

“Wow.” Veronica was impressed. “Archery champions. Wow!” It took a lot to impress Veronica, but it appeared that Violet and her likely long-lost aunts had succeeded.

Family connections were forgotten when Nelson caught a glimpse of Amy’s blond curls as the *Bon Adventure* continued to close in on *The Jolliest Roger*.

He began running back and forth, yelling, “We’ve got to do something! Amy’s on that ship. We’ve got to stop the arrows. They might hit her.”

Despite all this commotion, North Wind had not let up on his near-gale force blow. Jimmy, nonetheless, managed to neatly steer the yacht in the fierce wind, right for the damaged wharf.

And, unseen by all but the parrot, who could hardly squawk he was so agitated, a small boat skimmed silently across the surface of Nantucket Sound. The handsome fellow at the tiller looked like any young corporate executive on holiday. Except he did not look entirely real or solid. He shimmered a bit, which is what had got the parrot to squawking.

As the *Bon Adventure* bore down on *The Jolliest Roger* and what was left of the wharf, the pirate finally had a chance to yell an order. “Hard to port!”

Then he leapt the last five feet, touching down on the very edge of the now rickety dock, and holding on only by the tips of his pointy-toed boots.

Cutlass outstretched, he stormed down the wooden

planks, hair streaming behind, the ghost parrot Sir Percival flapping loyally at his side.

“Arrrgh, ye villains!” he roared. “Prepare to meet yer maker!”

Sizing up the situation—arrows raining down, a dead pirate running headlong at them, ship wedged in the dock—Badir knew his only hope was to use his hostages.

Running as if his life depended on it, which it almost certainly did, he grabbed little Amy and was belowdecks in two winks, the rest of his men quickly following.

All, that is, except for the wet helmsman, who had reached the mansion’s front porch just as the arrows had begun to fly.

Badir shoved Amy in with the prince, who’d been locked in the hold earlier.

ElsBeth finally caught North Wind’s attention and let him know he was off-duty.

He’d need at least a week to recover from all that intense blowing. He drifted off deflated, but proud to have been of service to Hannah Goodspell’s granddaughter.

Meanwhile, Jimmy brought the *Bon Adventure* to a perfect stop, just kissing the side of the wharf as the ship came alongside.

ElsBeth, Nelson and Johnny jumped onto the dock but went no farther, stopped short by the sight of the pirate ghost stomping along the top deck of *The Jolliest Roger*.

Captain Thomas Jacques strutted back and forth. “Ye lily-livered cowards, hiding behind a young girl’s skirts.” The pirate’s voice rose in volume with each word, and he thrust his cutlass into the air with each breath.

The sword wasn't hitting anything, but it seemed to make the pirate feel better to be taking bold action.

ElsBeth noticed a small open window on the side of *The Jolliest Roger*. And without further thought, she jumped up, grabbed the ship's rail and swung herself through, just like on the monkey bars at school.

Johnny tried to grab her as she flew in, but missed. He yelled, "No, ElsBeth!" as her slight form disappeared into the darkness below.

ElsBeth landed, in the dark, but fortunately it was a soft landing. Unfortunately, it was soft because she landed right on top of one of the kidnapppers.

## LING LING

Back on the *Bon Adventure*, Sylvanas was not pleased about the wetness all around him. After all, this was the ocean, and he was a cat, and the two didn't mix. So he'd slept through almost everything, up until now.

But the minute ElsBeth got into the hands of the kidnapppers, he was up and away.

He flew through another small window in the side of the kidnapper's ship and let out a hair-raising screech, scaring everyone—including the two old ladies with their bows and arrows up at the mansion.

At the same time Nelson climbed aboard and pounded on the hatch.

The kidnapppers yelled, "Get back or we'll hurt the girls."

The pirate stamped across the top deck.

Every once in a while an arrow from the mansion struck the ship.

It was a Mexican standoff (whatever that is) and for a moment no one moved an inch.

Then two, golden-orange eyeballs, underneath a couple of funny-looking horns, appeared at the window that Sylvanas had just jumped through.

The baby dragon had bumbled its way over to see what all the noise was. (Dragons are terribly curious.)

“Ling Ling, you’re okay!” Lisa Lee cried.

Her little stowaway was so overjoyed to see Lisa Lee again that steam seeped out his ears and flames shot out his mouth.

Left alone in Lisa Lee’s backpack, Ling Ling had been wolfing down banana-pomegranate granola bars all day. And suddenly it was all too much! He tooted.

A dragon toot should be avoided all costs. It is stinky beyond words.

Think of smelly feet, rotten eggs, baby vomit and dog dodo all mixed up, and you’ll have a *faint* impression of what a real dragon toot is like.

Everyone on board caught a whiff and choking and retching erupted all over. Even Sylvanas, known for his iron stomach, felt queasy. It was horrible.

And Ling Ling tooted with so much force he was propelled head over tail up onto the deck of *The Jolliest Roger*.

Nautical charts had been left rolled up in a corner, and that was exactly where the baby dragon landed.

His fiery dragon breath created a neat little bonfire, which would have been perfect for toasting marshmallows in other circumstances. But fueled by the tooting gases, the blaze rapidly spread out of control.



“Grab the prince!” Badir yelled to one of his mates. “And hold onto those two girls,” he added, pointing his chin at ElsBeth and Amy.

“And you back off!” he shouted to the pirate captain above him. “We’ve got the hostages and we’re coming up!”

The pirate and Nelson backed up a step.

The hatch popped open and one villain, face blackened with smoke, crawled up. Then another, and another, pushing ElsBeth, Amy and Abu ahead.

Soon all of them were on deck. Badir stared at the pirate. The pirate stared at Badir. And the standoff, now a staring contest, continued.

This was broken briefly by a shout from the still wet, former helmsman of *The Jolliest Roger*, now on top of the mansion.

“I’ve got the house secured.” He waved from the widow’s walk, holding the two old ladies, hands bound at their backs.

But tumbling and flaming and tooting loudly, little Ling Ling lifted up off the deck and into the air.

Spontaneous gasps of amazement mingled with yells of “Yuck!” and “Pee-ew!” at the stinky, little flying fellow. But Lisa Lee couldn’t have been happier.

Badir paused only a moment, then yelled again. “Back off! We’re taking the prince and the two girls. Anyone makes a move, they’re toast!”

The pirate and the others moved back again. But flames and smoke were everywhere. They were all going to have to get off soon, or end up as *burnt* toast for sure!

The pirate and the Cape crew watched helplessly as the kidnappers pushed their captives toward the dock.

But behind them, the little boat that had been following the whole way from Boston, slid silently alongside, and the handsome Xavier stepped lightly onto the dock.

“Kindly unhand my cousin. Right now, if you please,” he said to the man holding ElsBeth.

His voice was low but filled with menace. And Xavier had a fancy dueling pistol in his hand, cocked and ready.

ElsBeth twisted around and glared. “I’m not your cousin!”

Xavier ignored the little witch and repeated himself, not louder, but more menacingly still. “Now, I said.”

Badir turned slowly toward Xavier ... then pushed Amy hard into him. Xavier lost his footing for a moment.

Nelson sprang to grab Amy.

In a dark blur, Sylvanas streaked up from the hatchway and pounced on the man holding ElsBeth.

Lisa Lee let out a stabbing scream and began a sequence of Judo, Tai Kwon Do and other advanced moves, all the while looking like a small extra in one of those amazing martial arts action films.

And speaking of hidden dragons, the no longer hidden Ling Ling devotedly followed Lisa Lee, move for move, tooting and flaming his way across the deck.

Johnny Twofeathers and Robert Hillman-Jones joined hands and tripped the kidnapper trying to flee with the prince.

Abu, free at last, gave his new friends a quick smile and jumped into the brawl.

Captain Jacques stomped over and growled, "This one is mine!"

He grabbed Badir by his hair and preceded to verbally abuse him with the best pirate insults he'd saved up for hundreds of years.

Chapter Twenty-Three  
The Yellow Bus Arrives

On the opposite side of the Nantucket mansion estate, out of sight of all involved at the dock, a yellow Bluebird bus rumbled up the long, overgrown, cobblestone drive.

Ms. Finch, contrary to her usual, firmly logical leanings, had gone all the way with her intuition this time. The teacher had bullied Big Mac into boarding the high-speed ferry to the island.

Truth was, Big Mac wasn't afraid of anything in this world—except Ms. Finch. And he had meekly followed every one of the teacher's outrageous instructions.

When they arrived at the wrought iron gates at the back side of the mansion, he immediately spotted the two damsels in distress—at least from a distance they appeared to be damsels—who were being held at the edge of the widow's walk on the roof by a wet and shivering captor.

Mac jumped out of the bus and shimmied up a copper drainpipe, a ceremonial sword gripped between his teeth. (He used this for his Irish sword dancing exhibitions and always kept one hidden, but handy, under the driver's seat of his bus, in case of emergency.)

He promptly subdued the wet fellow—who at this point seemed overjoyed to be, himself, now captured.

Anything to get away from the two old maids, who'd been badgering him to death with all kinds of unpleasant threats like, "We'll tell your mother on you." "What's a nice boy like you doing breaking in on two sweet little old ladies?" And so on.

The "sweet little old ladies" seemed to have conveniently forgotten that they had been the first to attack with a thunderstorm of arrows just a few minutes before.

Big Mac, with one swoop of his brilliant sword, neatly cut the ladies loose.

They now chattered away even more than before, if that were possible, and enthusiastically led Big Mac and the soggy captive down three grand flights of stairs to a kitchen big enough to roller-skate in.

Mercy, the eldest twin (by two minutes) announced, "Our hero looks like a man who likes his jelly doughnuts. Let's make him some."

"Yes, dear," her sister Faith readily agreed. "We must properly thank the young fellow. Excellent swordplay. Absolutely top-rate!" she gushed. "I'll get right on it."

Big Mac settled in comfortably at the head of the table, one eye on his shivery prisoner, while the two old gals began to cook.

Outside, Ms. Finch collapsed on a granite bench shaded by overgrown grape vines and closed her eyes. She had a blinding headache, something that seemed to follow her rare bouts of intuition.

She laid her head back on the cool stone and soon

dozed off in the late afternoon sun.

On the shore side of the estate, *The Jolliest Roger* was now in full flame.

The *Bon Adventure*, however, had been floated over to the safety of a nearby dock by the ever-alert Jimmy Miller. It now sat secure, out of the billowing smoke and fire.

The fighting had stopped. The dragon was now quieted and lovingly placed again in Lisa Lee's backpack for a nap. Things were settling down.

And with the villains now in hand, Captain Thomas Jacques announced that he would sail the *Bon Adventure* back to Boston Harbor, manned by his new crew, the kidnappers.

Johnny and Robert Hillman-Jones tried to talk him out of this. They were afraid the bad men would mutiny and turn on their new friend Captain Jacques.

"I've usually had at least one or two villains in me command in any ship of mine.

"And I learned from me hero and fellow privateer, Billy Bowlegs—who also suffered from accusations of being a pirate!—that a villain or two in one's crew is the nature of a seafaring life.

"I've always found a few months at sea good for reflection, brings a man to his senses, clears his head, heals his soul.

"Besides, these men are the absolute worst sailors I've ever set me eyes on. And I haven't had a good challenge since I fought for democracy back in the 1700's.

"It's about time I did something interesting for a change. Turning this lot into a proper crew could be the



finest work of me long and amazing career,” the captain added modestly.

“Besides, the salt air smells fine and the sun feels grand,” he added with a twinkle in his gray-blue eyes.

“I’ve a feeling there’s treasure to be found around these waters—and I’m just the ghost to do it!”

That worried ElsBeth. She felt responsible for the safe return of the yacht they had “borrowed.”

“You’re going to take the boat back to the rightful owners, aren’t you?” she quizzed him.

The pirate glared a ghostly eye, now more gray than blue, at the young witch.

“Sir,” she added, in a small voice.

“Well, don’t ye be worrying too much, missy. I’m sure this fine craft will find its way back to its owners ... in due course,” he added mysteriously.

Others of the Cape Coddors also looked concerned about the proper return of the *Bon Adventure*. No one dared say anything, though. Except Hillman-Jones.

“If it’s treasure you’re after, I’m your man!” And he stepped right up to the fearsome pirate.

“Well, me boyo, I’m a man of letters, meself. And after ye finish school, I might consider taking ye on.

“Ye started out a greedy little hooligan. But ye showed some backbone when things got rough back there.”

Robert puffed out his chest. He was pleased the pirate had noticed he’d been brave when the whale had headed straight for their ship.

“But I wanna come now,” Robert whined, in his poor-little-rich-boy voice, which had always worked with his parents.

“Now, none of that sissy talk, young mister! Ye’ll come when I say ye’re ready and not a moment sooner!”

Hillman-Jones wasn’t too happy about being called a sissy, especially in front of the girls. Captain Jacques had proved considerably more effective than Robert’s parents, and Robert reluctantly dropped the subject.

Many of the Cape crew looked sad at the thought of leaving Captain Jacques. In one short day they’d grown quite attached to the famous pirate ghost.

And truth be told, the pirate was a little sad, too. A small tear glistened in his ghostly eye.

There would have been an emotional group hug at that very moment if Ms. Finch, having woken up from her nap, hadn't wandered to the mansion's shore.

Holding her head in her hands as if it were about to burst, she muttered, "I know those children are around here somewhere."

The wily pirate saw his exit opportunity. He corralled the villains at sword point, tossed off the bowline Jimmy Miller had so neatly set, and slipped quietly off to sea in an unnatural fog that had conveniently just moved in.

The *Bon Adventure* disappeared into the gray-on-gray of water and sky.

The Cape Cod classmates now had a new challenge to face. Ms. Finch was back again, and boy was she going to be mad!

ElsBeth was about to step forward and take the blame for their wandering off the Freedom Trail. (Witches are trained early to take responsibility for their actions.) But her foot suddenly stuck.

The mysterious Xavier stepped lightly across the lawn, motioning to the children behind his back to be silent.

"Elvira, delightful to see you again! How's the head? Sit here with me a moment in the shade."

Ms. Finch looked up dazedly at the handsome Xavier and promptly forgot her headache, and everything else. Her beady black eyes gazed into his deep blue ones.

"My dear, you look chilled to the bone. Here, take my sweater," he said.

Xavier neatly turned the teacher away from the students, who passed silently behind him toward the

mansion as instructed, and gently wrapped her in his thick, cotton, cable knit sweater.

But when Frankie got to the corner of the mansion and saw the bus, he let out a yelp. The big-boned boy raced as fast as he could. In that beloved vehicle was his lunch box. There'd been so much excitement he hadn't thought about food ... much ... all day.

Now that things had calmed down, his stomach was making scary, nasty, gurgling noises. Frankie was up the steps and into his peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, stuffing them down with both fists faster than you could easily follow (if you were actually brave enough to watch Frankie eating—few were).

Ms. Finch heard Frankie's excited shouts, and even Xavier couldn't distract her further.

She caught a glimpse of ElsBeth and stomped over, all puffed up and looking ready to explode. There was something about that girl that drove the teacher absolutely mad.

But Xavier caught up with the testy Ms. Finch.

"Elvira, surely we shouldn't make a fuss. I'm certain the children will say nothing of what happened today.

"Which is really best under the circumstances, don't you agree?"

It didn't take long for the Finch to imagine what the parents would say if they found out their children had been lost under the Old North Church, and been alone on the open ocean and out of their teacher's sight all day.

Particularly Robert Hillman-Jones's parents—there were lots of lawyers in that family.

Never mind what the principal Dr. Titcomb would say, and the School Board. She pictured worsening scenarios of no promotion, no retirement, and darkest of all ... no opportunity to be the theater coach, ever.

Yes, Xavier was right. If they headed back now, they could just be home before it was far too late.

And they could blame their “reasonable” lateness on the Boston rush hour traffic. Little calculation wheels whirred as these thoughts whizzed through her mind.

“On the bus, children! Chop, chop! And Lisa Lee, clean out that backpack. It smells awfully!”

They marched quietly aboard, suddenly feeling pretty tuckered out after the day’s rather spectacular events.

“Where is Mr. MacSweeney?” the teacher asked, looking all over for the dynamic driver.

“Oh, I’ll get him.” Xavier leapt up onto the mansion’s broken down back porch, and followed his nose to an enormous kitchen—not a difficult task as the kitchen now emitted the divine scent of freshly baked beach plum jelly doughnuts.

He found Big Mac seated at the head of a long banquet table made of an exotic, dark wood and set with crystal bowls and silver serving dishes. Mac looked like a miniature king of old.

A huge platter of doughnuts was piled high in front of him next to a steaming coffee drink in a matching mug. His mouth was wide for his first bite.

“Sorry, my friend,” Xavier said sympathetically. “I’m afraid there’s no time now. We must be off.”

The two old gals were very sorry to release their hero.

They were particularly thrilled when he'd given them a brief sword dancing demonstration while the doughnuts were being prepared. But on seeing Xavier's determined look they surrendered their new friend and pushed the still wet villain into Mac's chair.

"Here dear, you'll like a fresh jelly doughnut," Mercy said, and nudged the platter toward him.

The sisters fortunately had a ready substitute to dote on, who no doubt found remaining on the island with these two a more pleasant idea than sailing off with Captain Jacques.

In any case, the near-frozen criminal had no strength to object, and the smell of fresh, warm doughnuts sealed the deal.

All he could meekly manage to ask was, "Could I have a cup of chamomile tea, please?"

"Of course, dear," said Faith. "It won't be a minute."

Xavier figured the thug was on his own, and would have no chance against those dear little ladies. They'd have him civilized in no time.

On the big yellow bus Ms. Finch was doing a final head count and came up with two too many.

Her face turned red and the students prepared for an explosion.

Veronica's quick thinking cut in. "Violet's staying overnight with me, and Prince Abu is staying with Johnny Twofeathers." The resourceful second-grader spoke firmly and quite convincingly.

Then Xavier stepped onto the bus and caught the teacher's eye.

Ms. Finch looked up at him dreamily. She smiled sweetly, turned to the front of the bus, and calmly closed her roll book. “We’re all set then, Mr. MacSweeney.

“Let’s head back home. If we are quick, we should just be able to catch the late afternoon ferry.”

The bus spun out of the drive. Violet looked over to Veronica, who was intentionally looking away, still trying her best not to show much interest in the private school girl.

“Thanks, Veronica,” Violet said. “I wasn’t sure about spending a night with my great-great-aunts. From what I’ve heard, *nobody* in the family ever went there if they could avoid it.

“I’m sure they are nice enough, but they seem a little odd. And I think it would be hard to explain how I ended up on Nantucket Island. It should be easier to come up with an excuse for a sleepover at your house.” Violet looked relieved and smiled shyly at Veronica with their shared secret.

Toward the back of the bus, Prince Abu was equally happy to be staying with Johnny.

After only their brief time together, Abu respected the Native American boy. He asked, “Johnny, have you ever just met someone and felt a connection, like they are an old friend?”

Johnny looked at Abu with his calm, deep eyes and nodded. He knew exactly what Abu meant.

But in the middle of the bus, a confused ElsBeth kept looking back and forth between Lisa Lee and Xavier.

There were some strange things going on with these

two that she just didn't understand.

She'd heard of dragons, of course, and knew they were real—or at least that they had been real at one time.

She hadn't known that any still existed, though. She thought they were all extinct, like the dinosaurs, and she was going to have to ask Grandmother about this.

And Lisa Lee seemed different around Ling Ling. She actually spoke! Could it be that the little creature made Lisa Lee feel more confident with people, or different in some way, when they were together? There was a lot to think about.

And Xavier says he's my cousin! What could he mean? Grandmother won't talk much about the family. She says it's still too painful. And what does she mean by *that*?

And Grandmother is all fuddled now. How will I ever understand?

Tears welled up. But then she felt attention on her from the front of the bus.

Xavier had turned around in his seat. He caught her eye and smiled gently.

ElsBeth *really* didn't understand. But for a moment she felt better, and not quite so all alone.

Almost everyone else on the bus was happy. Jimmy Miller had sailed the yacht pretty much all by himself. He'd never sailed before without his father's watchful eye on him.

He was reliving his perfect docking of the *Bon Adventure*, over and over, smiling happily to himself.

Frankie, too, was happy. He was always happy to be with his friends, and he finally had a chance to get to his

lunch.

Best of all, his mother had packed a quarter of an apple pie, his absolute favorite, just for him.

He rubbed his rounded belly and let out a small, satisfied burp.

“Oooh!” spouted Veronica. “Don’t *do* that. It’s rude.”

Veronica’s disgust lasted only a moment. She was happy because she had a chance to show Violet two pieces of the jewelry her mom designed, and Violet thought they were beautiful.

Finally, someone to share her love of fashion with. And it turned out Violet’s family had a summer cottage in Chatham and stayed on the Cape every summer. They’d be able to go shopping together in just a month. This was going to be great.

Amy and Nelson sat together. Not looking at each other, of course. Anything but. But still, happy to be together.

Hillman-Jones, his eyes closed, was daydreaming about meeting up with Captain Thomas Jacques again.

He’d show that pirate he knew his “letters,” whatever that meant. (Many years later, Robert would be reading an old novel that mentioned “a man of letters” as someone who was well-educated, and he would laugh out loud at his earlier, “unlettered” self.)

Robert was sure someday he’d find more treasure than that pirate ever imagined. (Which was actually the case, but that is well in the future.)

Even Ms. Finch seemed to be enjoying herself. She had begun a fascinating conversation with Xavier concerning some obscure aspects of early seventeenth century theatre,

about which he seemed extremely, and suspiciously, knowledgeable.

There were two on the bus, however, who were none too happy.

Big Mac's stomach was rumbling. He'd been dead set on that delicious doughnut.

He'd had a taste of the homemade beach plum jam, and it was without doubt the *best* filling he'd ever had. And the dough had smelled heavenly. It would have been *so* incredibly scrumptious, he thought sadly.

The other unhappy character was on top of the bus, hanging on by his toenails. He'd almost missed his ride when he had tried, unsuccessfully, to snatch one of the fresh-baked treats.

He, too, was sore about missing out on the doughnuts. In one day he'd lost out on two of possibly *the* best doughnut opportunities in the great state of Massachusetts.

And he longed for the soft bed he'd made for himself inside the bus. Sylvanas was fond of his comforts. He wasn't a "rough it" kind of cat.

Worst of all, he still hadn't figured out how to help Hannah. He'd been certain the answer was in Boston. But

...

And he wasn't at all sure about this character Xavier. He said he was ElsBeth's cousin. Sylvanas wasn't convinced. He seemed too smooth, too unlike Hannah and ElsBeth.

Still, Sylvanas reflected, he hadn't been around any other members of the family for a *long* time except Hannah's husband Nathaniel, who'd been overwhelmed by the intensity of the troubles, in 1860, when he tried to

keep the peace between the North and South just before the start of the American Civil War.

Even a powerful witch like Nathaniel couldn't ease the depth of that hostility.

Anyway, Sylvanas thought, until I know more, I'm not about to trust that fancy-pants Xavier, even if he is distracting Ms. Finch from picking on ElsBeth.

The Finch just can't stand that much adventurous spunk, he thought. And being pretty spunky himself, he was sympathetic to ElsBeth's difficulties with the teacher. ElsBeth just couldn't keep her spunkiness in check!

School could be difficult for children with that much spirit. Particularly when they had a teacher who worshipped authority—her *own*, that is.

Sylvanas would have to plan more distractions for ElsBeth's class to keep things in balance between these two forces of nature.

With the pleasant thought of more opportunities to create mischief, the oversized cat was able to relax, except for his paw holding tight to the rail on the top of the bus.

He was once again ready to indulge in one of his favorite activities. He drifted off to sleep.

Chapter Twenty-Four  
Home Sweet Home



The high-speed ferry back to Hyannis was uneventful, though several of the children did notice a ship on the horizon sailing erratically, and wondered if it could be Captain Jacques putting his crew of unseamanlike villains through their paces on the *Bon Adventure*.

Mac drove the bus off the ferry, and the general mood of the students turned more serious when they began to consider what exactly they'd tell their curious parents about their first field trip off Cape.

ElsBeth advised no lies. "It never pays," she said knowingly.

"That doesn't mean you have to tell absolutely *everything*, though," the witch added with a twinkle in her eye.

"Yeah," Veronica agreed. "I'm going to talk about the first part of the trip on the Freedom Trail. It was *very* educational." She rolled her eyes and started giggling.

"You, on the other hand," she said looking at Violet, "may have some more difficult explaining to do."

"I know," Violet said. "I've been thinking quite a lot about it.

"There's something not right about our teacher, Mr. Benedict. When I get back, I'm going to talk with Prince Abu and we'll do some detective work.

"I have the idea Mr. Benedict was somehow in on the kidnapping. I noticed he didn't look at all surprised when it happened. Almost like he expected it.

"First, I'm going to call the school and tell them he gave me permission to stay overnight with you. And I bet he won't dare say anything.

"It's a boarding school, after all, and the last thing they'll want is to have to tell my parents they lost me for a whole day.

"I don't think *I'm* going to be in any trouble at all," Violet smiled. "I think we might find someone *else* is."

Not only did Violet have great fashion sense, Veronica thought. She could also think like a brilliant military strategist. Something else Veronica admired about her newfound friend.

Prince Abu told Johnny he'd be honored to stay at his house. "Could I call my father, though? He might have heard something about the kidnapping and might be worried," Abu asked, though he also knew his father fully trusted Abu to protect himself.

The prince had his own strong suspicions that the teacher was somehow involved in all of this. But Abu would have to be skillful in handling the situation. He liked his school and he found living in Boston endlessly interesting. He was surprised to find he liked the United States almost as much as home.

If this teacher was a rotten apple, he didn't want to have to leave just because of him.

Abu felt confident he could talk this through with his father, whatever came up.

He'd even let his father provide him with bodyguards again, if necessary. He hated being looked after, as if he couldn't take care of himself. But if it meant he could stay in Boston, it would be worth it.

Most of all, he wanted to spend time with his new friends on Cape Cod.

As the bus pulled into the schoolyard, several anxious parents cheered.

"You're back safe and sound!" Veronica's mother hugged her little daughter. "We figured you got caught up in the rush hour traffic, but you were still pretty late."

“Oh, Mom, you worry too much. What could happen on a field trip with Ms. Finch anyway?” Veronica smiled sweetly.

Veronica’s mother now noticed Violet, standing quietly beside her daughter. Mrs. Smythe crouched down, a bit confused but friendly, and asked, “Who are you?”

Before Violet could answer, Veronica chirped up. “This is my friend, Violet. I invited her to spend the night.”

OK, Mom?” she added a little nervously. She had never asked to have a friend over before with no advance notice.

“Well, of course,” the young mom replied. “But I should speak with her parents to be sure it’s OK with them.”

Violet chimed in, “Oh, it’s OK, I’m at a boarding school. I just need to talk to my dorm mother and let her know I arrived safely.”

“Well ... that’s fine then,” Mrs. Smythe said. She didn’t seem to *totally* understand, but the girls were here and safe and happy, and that was the important thing.

Veronica’s mother took both their hands, the two girls exchanged knowing glances, and they headed for home.

On the other side of the parking lot, Frankie’s mother greeted him with a steaming pot of meatballs and spaghetti. “I just heated it up. A couple of times, actually.

“I knew you’d be hungry when you got back from all that hiking around Boston.”

“Yeah, all that hiking ...” And Frankie dug in, right there in the parking lot.

Under the apple tree in the corner of the schoolyard, Johnny Twofeathers introduced Prince Abu to his grandfather.

The old man searched Abu's warm brown eyes and accepted the young man immediately. "The prince is welcome always," he said to his grandson.

"Welcome home, Abu," the old man then whispered to the young prince.

Abu looked up. "Yes, my father, I feel I am at one of my true homes."

And the two young boys and the tall old man headed off in the quiet of the Cape Cod evening.

Lisa Lee met her father, who was just back from a long expedition on a research vessel out of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. He had been studying the effects of plastic pollution on the world's seas.

"First daughter, I smell the family pet. It seems judgment is lacking, even if the heart is big."

Lisa Lee looked back as she climbed into the family's new solar-powered electric vehicle.

"Bye, ElsBeth," she said. "Trust in family and those you love," she added mysteriously, as she patted her backpack.

One by one, parents met their children and set off home.

Ms. Finch looked admiringly at Xavier as she waited for the last of the students to leave.

And now there was only ElsBeth, shadowed by an achingly sore Sylvanas.

ElsBeth had said goodbye to all her friends and there was nothing to wait for, but somehow she wasn't anxious to rush home tonight.

She felt she had kind of cheated to go on the trip in the first place. And even though her grandmother hadn't

outright said no, the young witch knew she had taken advantage of Grandmother's recent forgetfulness.

ElsBeth just plain felt wrong as she started slowly down the road.

She knew she would have to face up to what she had done. And she decided, right then, she would tell her grandmother the truth. No matter the consequences.

And with this resolution, the little witch picked up her pace and felt not so heavy at heart.

Persephone the coyote, following silently beside, also felt more at peace, for she could sense that ElsBeth would now be all right.

Othello the owl noticed this, too. And he called to the other local creatures to let them all know that ElsBeth was back, safe and sound—in body, mind and spirit.

Bartholomew jumped off the garden stool where he had finally fallen into a restless sleep, exhausted after worrying about ElsBeth all day. He was relieved when he heard the news, and he hopped eagerly forward to be there to greet his young friend when she arrived.

ElsBeth's feet crunched along the seashell drive. Thelonus Chipmunk's smaller feet crinkled softly along next to her.

He spoke for all the creatures. "You had us worried, ElsBeth. We're glad you are back."

She grinned at the little nutmeg-colored Thelonus. "I'm glad I'm back, too.

"How's Grandmother?" she added anxiously.

Thelonus paused. "Oh, well ... she's fine. She's ... about the same," he stuttered. He stepped back, not wanting

to say more about Hannah Goodspell. That was just too much for him to think about.

ElsBeth frowned and looked down—then she slowly lifted her head and her eyes searched for the comfort of the moon. She saw his full shining face and felt a little better.

Then a shadow moved across his brightness—a drifting cloud in the shape of that familiar face she’d been seeing the past days. “Who ... or what ... *was* it?”

ElsBeth felt strong hands on her shoulders. But she wasn’t afraid. She reached out her heart, and found ... her cousin.

Of course! He was her family! She realized he’d been trying to contact her for days. The face, the presence. He’d been trying to introduce himself.

ElsBeth turned and Xavier said, “I’m here to help, ElsBeth.

“I wasn’t able to get here until you were just taking off for Boston, and I thought I’d better follow. I was trying to let you know help was on the way. But I’m not sure you know how to interpret those kinds of messages yet.

“Hannah is not well,” he added. “Your grandmother has been on her own for a long time. And even though you are coming along well, you are not a very skilled witch.”

ElsBeth looked crossly at Xavier, about to protest.

“*Yet,*” he said. “You are not a very skilled witch *yet.*”

“It is hard to take care of even a small village all alone. And the challenges we face become more difficult every day.

“You probably noticed it is much cleaner here on the Cape than in Boston.”

ElsBeth nodded. For sure she had noticed that.

“Many other witches of our clan, and I, and even dedicated ordinary people—though how you can call *any* being ‘ordinary’ is beyond me—work hard to fix damage done to the Earth.

“Even beautiful places like the Cape are in need of help.

“Magic alone just isn’t enough to fix things now. It will take both magic and science, and a lot of caring people and witches working together, to make things better.”

ElsBeth couldn’t help remembering what Captain Thomas Jacques had said to Robert Hillman-Jones. About caring about something worth fighting for, something bigger than yourself.

*That* was what made life interesting and fun, she thought. And an adventure worth sharing with friends.

And for her, this meant fighting to help the make the natural world be healthy and safe, for all her friends and the creatures who live here.

This felt, to her, a little like the fighting for freedom that the captain had done back in the 1700’s.

ElsBeth was glad she had met Captain Thomas Jacques. And she knew she would always remember him and what he said.

Xavier continued. “All the things that have been happening around town are just because your grandmother has been alone too long, and she has lost the full control of her magic.

“Hannah is still a powerful witch. But she just hasn’t been able to concentrate. The power of her magic has been

stretched too thin.

“It hasn’t really been the fairies at all.

“But we can make her better. You and I together. One person, all alone, can’t always continue to care for an area and make it right. With the world in this much trouble, it will take us all.

“Will you help?”

ElsBeth hugged Xavier as tight as she could, tears streaming down her face. “Of course, I will help,” she choked out.

After the long overdue hug, the two began to glow.

As they continued down the drive, Sylvanas stepped up along with them. Persephone the coyote followed, as did Thaddeus Crane and Thelonus Chipmunk.

Finally, Bartholomew joined them when they reached the porch.

The odd little group arrived at the top of the stairs just as Hannah opened the kitchen door to greet them.

“ElsBeth, you’re home. I made you some oatmeal bread, and we have fresh butter from Farmer Green’s cow, Beatrice.”

Hannah spoke on in a dreamy voice, not noticing the others.

“Hannah,” Xavier’s eyes shone with tears. “You have help, we are here.”

Xavier folded the older witch in his arms. ElsBeth held onto her grandmother, too. And all the animals nuzzled up to the three witches.

A soft, warm light begin to shine from the porch at Six

Druid Lane.

Hannah still looked muddled, but she smiled a contented little smile.

Suddenly the air crackled. There was a smell of ozone. And two fairies appeared near Hannah's head.

"Wake up, you foolish old witch!" they said, impatient as always. "Can't you see they love you? Can't you see they need you? We *all* need you!"

"You have work to do, and you've been falling down on the job. You've got to get it together." Beautiful fairy rosebud lips chattered away.

Finally the female fairy, the most impatient one, gave the old witch a firm pinch.

"Ouch! You stop that, you little pest." Hannah's old, true voice broke through.

"My, how nice to see everyone," she said, as she finally really did see everyone who had gathered on the porch.

Her eyes rested on Xavier.

"Xavier, is it really you?"

"Yes. It really is."

Hannah laughed. "I feel I've been away a long time and am finally back home. And here you all are."

"Come in, come in. You are all welcome."

The fairies rushed ahead, brushing past everyone as they flew to the table. They hadn't had a witch's home cooking for ages.

The others glided over the threshold following behind—ElsBeth beaming as wide as could be, Xavier happy to be able to help his favorite aunt at last, Bartholomew and all

the rest.

Last through the door was a very happy, very large black cat.

“I’m glad I finally solved that situation!” Sylvanas announced.

Then he added loudly, grinning ear to ear, “What did you say was for dinner?”

And everyone laughed.

THE END

## Author's Historical Notes

Captain Thomas Jacques—and the notorious pirate Billy Bowlegs mentioned in *ElsBeth and the Pirate's Treasure* (originally titled *The Cape Cod Witch and the Pirate's Treasure*)—both have a basis in real life characters. Billy Bowleg's life parallels Captain William Kidd, and Captain Thomas Jacques shares his life's story with Captain Thomas Jacques Grouchy.

Captain Kidd, who lived about one hundred years before Grouchy, is reputed to have buried a treasure on Cape Cod, which is still searched for today. And he was rumored to have had a lady friend on the Cape, too—just like in the first book of the *Cape Cod Witch Series*.

Captain Grouchy did steal and donate lovely carved angels to the Old North Church in Boston, where he was popular and warmly regarded. He also was, in fact, a revolutionary in the late 1700's.

Both Grouchy and Kidd, too, felt wrongly accused of being “pirates,” and passionately proclaimed they were patriotic “privateers.” Whether they were misunderstood and unjustly accused, or not, they are part of New England's rich sea-faring history and legend.

## ElsBeth's Further Adventures

All are again hopeful in the small Cape village, and life goes on. But what sort of adventure ... or trouble ... will the little witch and her friends find themselves involved in next?

In Book III, *ElsBeth and the Call of the Castle Ghosties*—When their ancestral home and lands are threatened in a way not ever before seen in their far-reaching pasts, three ancient ghosts need one of their clan from the living world. They call the young Cape Cod witch across the sea to the old country.

Not yet proven or highly skilled, but with a personal calling to protect the natural world, and her own need to find out more about the family mysteries, ElsBeth is in well above her magic level.

And if you haven't yet experienced ElsBeth's earlier adventure in the *Cape Cod Witch Series*, this story awaits you!

In Book I, *ElsBeth and the Pirate's Treasure*—A never-quite-forgotten pirate's prize stirs up some serious trouble when Halloween approaches. It takes the youngest witch on Cape Cod, some of her magical friends and her non-magical but spirited classmates to resolve an encounter with the notorious pirate Billy Bowlegs!

Also, the award winning *Little Cape Cod Witch Cookbook, The Secret Recipes of Hannah Goodspell*—Wholesome, tasty treats you can make with a grown-up helper and enjoy with friends. The cookbook includes full-color pictures and stories and fun cooking facts. And you can find out how “Cooking is a kind of magic!”

Visit [www.CapeCodLittleWitch.com](http://www.CapeCodLittleWitch.com) to find out more.

Double-Double Chocolate Chip  
Fairy-Cream Cupcakes  
(ElsBeth's Favorite!)

From Hannah Goodspell's Secret Recipe Book

Ingredients

14 tablespoons butter (best from Farmer Green's cow, Beatrice)

½ cup unsweetened cocoa

1¼ cups agave nectar

3 large eggs (ElsBeth and Hannah like Hattie the Hen's eggs best)

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

½ cup whole-wheat pastry flour

1 pinch of salt

1 cup walnuts, chopped (if you like walnuts)

½ cup chocolate chips (ElsBeth likes the grain-sweetened ones)

Directions

1. Place oven rack in the middle of the oven. Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
2. Line 12-count muffin tin with cupcake liners.
3. Melt butter. Whisk in unsweetened cocoa. Add agave nectar and mix well.

4. In another bowl lightly beat together eggs with vanilla extract. Add egg mixture to the cocoa mixture and blend together. Then mix in flour and salt. Fold in walnuts and chocolate chips.
5. Pour into muffin tins and bake for about 20 minutes. To test for doneness, insert a wooden toothpick into the center of the cupcake; the toothpick should have some moist crumbs attached to it. Do not overbake!
6. Remove from the oven and cool completely on a wire rack.

## Fairy-Cream Frosting

### Ingredients

1 cup heavy cream (also best from Beatrice)

¼ cup agave nectar, more or less

1 teaspoon vanilla

### Directions

1. Beat cream until stiff (Hint: Sprinkle unflavored gelatin on the cream as you beat it and it will become stiff more easily and hold its shape longer.)
2. Then slowly add agave nectar and vanilla. (Hannah lets ElsBeth lick the bowl!)
3. Then place a cupcake in a pretty dish, and add as much fairy cream as you like.

And remember, it is always the most fun to share!

## Dedication

This book is dedicated to Emelia and Maddie,  
to the teachers who inspire so many  
and to the young who inspire right back.

This story is for you.

## Acknowledgements

I want to relay a special thank you to Bill Hiss of Bates College for his kind editorial assistance. Any remaining errors are the sole responsibility of the author.

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*Author J Bean Palmer*

In the *Cape Cod Witch Series* J Bean calls upon her family's long history in New England including a Revolutionary "Green Mountain Boy," Cape Cod cranberry farmers and artists, and an oft-told family legend that as her grandmother's ancestors stepped off the Mayflower, her grandfather's relatives were there to greet them. With a degree in Environmental Science, the author's ElsBeth stories reflect a passion and respect for the natural world and its magical kinship.

*Illustrator Melanie Therrien*

Illustrator Melanie Therrien lives in western Maine with her husband Glenn, their dog Tito, and three cats, one of which was the model for Sylvanas in the ElsBeth books. The juried fine artist looks to the state's natural beauty for inspiration for her fanciful images and landscapes. The stylistic artwork for the *Cape Cod Witch Series* is her first book illustration project. The artist may be contacted at [www.wickedillustrations.com](http://www.wickedillustrations.com)

