

## Searching for Treasure

(by Mrs Sproulle and Mr Sproulle)

Billy and Jill were looking forward to spending the summer with their grandparents. There was never a dull moment at Granny and Grandpa's. They would take the dogs for walks, work in the garden, listen to stories about pirates and adventurers. And - what was even better - their grandparents lived by the sea!

So, when Mum and Dad dropped them off, told them to be good and they'd see them after their business trip, Billy and Jill couldn't be happier. The previous summer their grandfather had taught them how to sail and they couldn't wait to get on the water again.

"This time I'll take the tiller," announced Jill. "You got to do all the proper sailing last summer."

"That's because I'm better at it," retorted her brother.

'We'll see about that,' thought Jill.

On the second day of their stay, Grandpa said he wanted to show them something down the coast. They got into the little sailing boat, called the Gentle Breeze, and he let Billy and Jill take turns steering and hoisting the sail.

Soon they caught sight of an old house on the cliff. They beached the sailboat and climbed up the steep hill. What they found was a ruin with sagging roof and broken windows and doors creaking in the wind.

"I thought you'd like to see this place before they knock it down altogether," said Grandpa. "It used to belong to an ancestor of ours, hundreds of years ago." He paused. "And he was a pirate."

"A pirate?" chorussed the children. "Seriously?"

"Yes, seriously. At first the family thought Captain Hickcup was a trader in fish. But then they found some documents which showed that he would often attack other ships and steal their cargo. So, he was hanged."

"Hanged?" Billy and Jill couldn't believe it.

"Well, it was a long time ago when the King - and government - did that sort of thing. And Captain Hickcup apparently attacked a lot of ships. Anything with treasure on it. But the documents also said that he liked playing tricks on the other traders, telling them there was buried treasure all around the coast when there wasn't. They weren't too happy about that."

They had a look around the house, treading carefully over creaking floorboards and looking out for sagging beams. In the corner, underneath some fallen beams, Billy could make out an old, dust-covered chest but their grandfather was saying they had to get back.

“The wind’s getting up. You never know, there might be a storm brewing and then, watch out! It can get pretty rough on these waters.”

“What’s in the distance,” asked Jill, pointing to a hump on the horizon.

“Oh, that’s a little island. Well, actually only a rocky outcrop, not much beach. Don’t think anyone’s been there in ages. Now, who’s sailing her back?”

That night Billy and Jill discussed what they had seen that day. “I bet there’s treasure in that chest,” said Billy. “If Captain Hickcup was a pirate.”

“But wouldn’t someone have found it by now?” said Jill. “There might be a map, though. That someone didn’t find.”

They decided they had to get back into that house and the next day they set off, after getting their grandparents’ permission, of course. They took along some shovels, just in case.

Luckily the sea was calm and they hardly noticed the waves. They beached their sailboat and climbed the hill. Soon they were inside the creaky, spooky old house.

“There’s the chest,” said Billy. “Let’s see if we can open it.”

“Let me,” said Jill, as she pushed her brother aside. “I’m better at this.”

Billy didn’t agree and said so. But together they managed to prise open the wooden, rusty-hinged chest.

There was no treasure in the chest, as Billy had expected, but only a crumpled, partially burnt piece of parchment.

“Maybe it’s a treasure map,” said Jill, as she had suggested. “Let’s try to figure out what it means.” The drawing showed a hump with an X in the middle and lines on both sides.

“The island!” cried Billy excitedly. “I bet that hump shows the island. You said it looked like a hump on the horizon. And look, X marks the spot!”

“But these lines on the left and right, what are they?” asked Jill.

“The waves, of course. Come on! We’ve got to find the buried treasure.”

They put the map in their backpack and set out for the island, or the rocky outcrop, as their grandfather had called it. But when they got closer they found there was one lonely tree right in the middle, clinging onto the rocks.

“I bet it’s buried under that tree,” said Billy as they beached the boat. “Treasure is always buried under trees. So, this will be easy with only the one.”

They got out their shovels and started digging and digging and digging until suddenly their shovels hit another wooden chest. Billy shouted, “I told you we’d find treasure. Let’s open it! Quickly!”

This time they managed to crack it open more easily; the wood had partially rotted away.

“What is it?” asked Jill, who was also getting very excited.

Billy pulled out - a piece of paper. In fact, it was the same drawing showing a hump with X in the middle and lines either side. “What?” he shouted again. “I don’t believe it! We’ve sailed all this way, done all this digging and for the same piece of paper!”

Jill shook her head. “I don’t understand it either, but we’ve got to get back. We promised.” She had also noticed the dark clouds rapidly scudding their way.

They pushed the boat into the water and this time Jill took the tiller. Billy would have to trim the sails as best he could. Soon the waves were lapping around their boat and into their boat and they were pitching up and down. Billy wanted to be sick but didn’t want his sister to see him being sick.

As they neared their beach, both children soaking wet and Billy still sick, they saw Grandpa and Granny rushing towards them.

“Where have you been? What happened to you? Didn’t you see the storm coming in? We were worried sick!”

Too many questions and two exhausted, wet children unable to answer them. So Granny gave them hot soup, a hot bath and sent them straight to bed.

The next morning they were given a stern talking-to. Grandpa said he was very impressed with their sailing and getting back safely despite the storm but they had been reckless to go out to the island, for whatever reason. Granny just said over and over how worried she had been and they were not to go sailing for the rest of their stay,

So, for a whole week Billy and Jill walked the dogs, helped in the garden and read. But at the end of the week, Billy said to Jill, “We’ve got to tell Grandpa and Granny about the map and explain why we went to the island. Perhaps they’ll let us sail again, maybe come with us to the old house.”

“Well, it can’t hurt,” said Jill.

They showed their grandparents the map and how convinced they were that it was a treasure map. Surely, it was on the island, that hump with the X in the middle.

Grandpa studied the map carefully. Granny also came to have a look, shook her head and said, “You’ve got it upside down. See, now it’s a hole in the ground. These lines are floorboards. If there is any treasure, Captain Hickcup buried it in his house, under the floor.”

“Please, can we go and look,” pleaded Billy and Jill.

“Alright,” said Grandpa. “But this time I’ll do the sailing.”

They set off, the children trimming the sails, their grandfather on the tiller and reached the cliff in no time. Climbing to the top, they were just in time to see the last of the trucks carrying away the timber and rubble that had been Captain Hickcup’s house.

All that was left was a hole with lines of mud on all sides. It was deep and it was empty. There was no pirate treasure.