

The Curse of the Ivory Witch

When Jillian saw the mast of the old ship, she thought it was a tree stripped of its branches and left standing like a landmark for someone to find. As she and her two older brothers rode closer on their bikes, she was amazed by the towering structure that had been beached.

“Look at the size of this thing!” Marcus yelled, biking right up onto the side and jumping off his bike as he got closer to the ship. “How old is it?”

“It doesn’t look too damaged,” Pete said. “You think it’s worth something?”

“Should we call the police?” Jillian asked.

“We will!” Marcus said, rushing up to the ship. “But we should grab some souvenirs first!”

“Marcus, no!” Jillian said, jumping off her bike. “We should call someone about this!”

“Quit being such a baby, Jillian,” Pete said. “Come on, let’s go take a look!”

“This isn’t safe! We could get in trouble!”

Jillian watched her two brothers go running up towards the ship, climbing the rocks and getting up over the railing. Jillian walked around towards the front of the boat. It reminded her of an old pirate ship from a storybook with three big masts, a solid wood hull, and portholes for canons. There was even a crow's nest at the top of the middle mast and a mermaid figure at the bow. As she walked along the front hull of the boat, Jillian picked at a few barnacles that had settled into the wood and looked up at the name of the boat: The Ivory Witch.

After another loop around the boat and some anxious pacing in the sand, Jillian followed up the rocks after brothers. She lost her footing for a moment as she hopped down onto the slanted deck, but Jillian caught herself on some old railing. The deck was also in pretty good condition, considering that the boat hadn’t been looked after for years. Jillian could easily imagine the ship in its prime with a full crew running on deck under the orders of an angry sea dog of a captain. It was romantic in a way, but the eerie silence made Jillian’s skin crawl. There was a door open, swaying in the light breeze.

“Marcus?” Jillian hissed through the open door. “Pete?” No answer came, so Jillian stuffed her fears down and stepped into the heart of the pirate ship.

While the exterior was charming and romantic, the interior reeked of decay and it made

Jillian's skin crawl. The boat would groan and whine each time the sea breeze ruffled the sails and Jillian felt like she was in the bowels of some hungry monster. "Marcus?" She whispered. "Pete! Come on, this is it funny!"

A door slowly creaked open with a breeze and Jillian felt her blood chill. She swallowed and took a few cautious steps into the room. She assumed, upon entering that these were the captain's quarters. Besides a fine desk and an actual bed, the room had a captain's jacket, a tricorne hat, and a long sword with a fancy hilt. On the desk was a wooden chest, opened with stacks of gold coins and jewels.

Jillian screamed as a pair of hands grabbed her and pulled her back. Marcus and Pete laughed as she faltered in her panic. "You're both such jerks!"

"Oh, come on," Pete laughed, adjusting the hat he'd put on his head with one finger. "It's not like we'd ever turn down the chance to give you a good scare and where better to than this!"

"Put that stuff back!" Jillian scolded them, taking the hat off Pete's head. "This is dead people's stuff, you shouldn't touch it!"

"Oh, come on, Jillian," Marcus said, taking the captain's sword and hopping into an en guard stance, "it's not like they're using it! We should keep something! Just something to commemorate the find!"

"Like Mom would let you keep a sword?" Jillian folded her arms. "We should call whoever is in charge of this kinda thing and let them figure it out."

"Just a small thing!" Pete said, walking over to the chest and pulling out a gold coin. "How about one of these each?"

"This belongs in a museum or something," Jillian said. "I'm telling you this is a bad idea..."

"Fine," Marcus took a coin for himself and a second one, "but I'll grab you one so you don't cry about it later."

Jillian rode home after the boys, keeping in the middle of their back tires. Their mom was on a work trip and their dad wouldn't be home from the hospital until tomorrow morning. Pete and Marcus called the town hall to report the wreck. The office called back an hour later saying that there was no sign of any ship beached on the shore. Pete and Marcus argued on the phone for an hour, but they stopped when the police chief threatened to call

their dad.

The boys were disappointed, but they were still enthusiastic about their treasure for the day. While Jillian sat on the couch watching TV, the boys were focused intently on their coins. Pete was watching his glitter under the lamp and Marcus was running his finger along the edge of his coin. He offered Jillian her coin, but she wanted to forget the whole day and move on. The boys were still downstairs when Jillian went upstairs to shower before bed.

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“Where be me gold?”

Jillian woke up sharply at the sound of the voice in their house. She sat up and looked around, unsure if the voice was in reality or leftover from a half-remembered nightmare. Her heart pounded in her chest as she waited. The air smelled like low tide and it sounded like the waves were outside of Jillian’s window.

“Where be me gold?” The voice repeated, deep and gravely to the point that it grated on Jillian’s bones. Jumping out of bed, Jillian crouched on the floor, watching the small sliver of light coming from under the doorframe.

Thump-thud! Thump-thud! Thump-thud!

Jillian almost thought the sound was her heart pounding in her chest as she crouched behind the mattress. The noise got louder and closer until she heard the steps just outside her door, followed by the dark masses of two big feet that stomped passed her room.

“Where be me gold?” The voice asked again, angrily stomping down the hall towards her brothers’ room.

Thump-thud! Thump-thud! Thump-thud!

Jillian slipped out from behind her mattress and cautiously approached the door. Hands shaking, she turned the handle of her door and carefully opened the door.

The hallway was empty, but Jillian recoiled when she stepped out onto the soaked carpet. She pulled her foot back up and put her slippers on before sneaking out into the hallway again.

“Where be me gold? The voice boomed from her parent’s room.

Jillian ran down the hall and snuck to her brothers’ room, slamming the door behind her and locking it. Her brothers were still in their beds with the covers pulled up over their

heads. Jillian ran over to Pete's bed and pulled the covers away, shaking him awake.

"Jillian?" Pete asked, rubbing his eyes. "What is it?"

"There's someone in the house!"

"You just had a nightmare. Go back to bed..."

"Marcus, wake up!" Jillian pulled the blankets away to reveal a bloated, drowned corpse of her brother Marcus. Jillian screamed and rushed away from the sopping wet bed of her brother Marcus. She turned to look at Pete, but he had also drowned in the time it took her to turn around.

The door to the room swung open and the light blinded Jillian for a moment. The figure silhouetted in the door was over six feet tall in a dark blue coat and tricorne hat. The man in the door had broad shoulders and a narrow peg leg in place of his left foot. His left hand was empty, but he held a long saber in his right. The skin on his face and visible hands was rotted and slimy. The monstrous man snarled in the door and glared at Jillian with one gold-colored eye. The captain glared down at Jillian and yelled through rotting teeth.

"Where be me gold?"