

## Chapter 12

### Beneath the Old North Church

Somehow they 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. And a scrawny old man opened wider the vine-covered door.

The old man looked around guiltily, then popped out, 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 basement door.

#### CAPTAIN THOMAS JACQUES

ElsBeth huddled 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, the docent (pronounced “doe scent”) leading the group this morning, began to tell the story of the beautiful carved angels that decorated the upper level of the Church.

They had been stolen at sea by the famous pirate, Captain Thomas Jacques, who subsequently 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 began to organize them for action, when suddenly footsteps were heard descending the staircase to the basement, the centuries-old burial place -- the crypt.

There was not a lot of space in the basement, so the boys scrambled around to find nooks and crannies in which to hide 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 further 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. And some kind of recognition seemed to flash between them.

Beth stopped the tour in front of a small chamber and held 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 the children 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 disturbing 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 kids 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 this 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 13

### Kidnapped

All 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.

Robert Hillman-Jones and Johnny Twofeathers shot off after them.

The two boys vanished into the shadows behind the wall. Frankie then 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, the one with the candy-red glasses, standing by calmly with a small, satisfied grin.

Considering how quickly the kidnapping had happened, it was surprising that the mysterious Xavier had managed to plunge down the ancient staircase and through the hole in the crypt wall, too, 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, though, 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 when she realized something was seriously wrong here, she concentrated as hard as she could and was mostly able to block them out.



## An Orphan Ghost

The little witch spotted the pretty private school girl standing close to the stairwell and said, “I’m ElsBeth. What happened here, anyway?”

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, too. 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 from Ms. Finch and the private school group.

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

Behind this cover of dust, she and 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 started 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 also used her own echo-location, sending out little squeaks and sensing where the walls were by the sound 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 holding hands.

Only Lisa 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. Good question, though. What *was* up ahead?

## GHOSTLY GRAY EYES

The boys stopped for a moment and regrouped, to see what they had they could use in the tunnels ... and to plan.

They had several flashlights. Johnny Twofeathers had a one he always carried in a special pocket of his backpack.

Not surprisingly Jimmy Miller had a heavy-duty, waterproof, crank-powered one, too. Jimmy's father was big on preparation for emergencies. "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," he always said.

Frankie had a little goblin flashlight his mother packed for him last Halloween. It was nestled under many empty candy wrappers.

Frankie had been schooled 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.

"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 are after the pirate treasure, I'm *sure* of it. And we've got to get to the treasure first," Hillman-Jones said.

"What?" said Johnny. 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 then wheedled, 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."

But Johnny Twofeathers won out, and the boys agreed to follow the kidnapers, at a safe distance, while they tried to figure out a 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 -- just as pirates and criminals had always done.

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. And a haunting, low chuckle emerged from the owner of those eyes, accompanied by the lonely caw of a phantom parrot perched on his shoulder.

The boys and the kidnappers 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, however, the leader of the kidnappers 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.”

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

The ghostly, gray-eyed figure looked on, amused.