

“That was the greatest thing that’s ever happened to me!” howled Billy.

Mark seemed overwhelmed by the bizarre encounter and sheer madness of his friends and other passengers. But the uneasy feeling he had experienced during his sleep was gone. Stefanie noticed his demeanor and approached him. “I told you something was out there. Didn’t I tell you there was something out there? You should have stayed with me, then you would have known there was something out there.” Mark wasn’t listening. He was staring at Stefanie’s hand. Stefanie followed his gaze and suddenly remembered the paper placed in her hand by Blackbeard himself.

Billy and Daniel calmed down and approached the other two. “What’s that?” Daniel asked, pointing to the paper.

Stefanie looked at it. “I don’t know. Blackbeard gave it to me.”

“Say what?”

“Blackbeard gave it to me. Right after he winked at me. Then he said, ‘Look to the chair,’ and left.”

Daniel opened his mouth, but nothing came out.

Billy scratched his thick crop of hair and looked confused. “He winked at you?”

“Yeah. It was really weird. He said if I lived three hundred years ago, he would have married me. Then he gave me this piece of paper, but I didn’t get to look at it because Stede Bonnet came by, and that’s when y’all came out of your room and all the ghosts left.”

Daniel put up a finger, letting everyone know that he had something to say, but it took a while before he managed to get the words out. “All this commotion and bumping into the pirate ship was to give you a piece of paper?”

“I guess so.”

“He winked at you?” asked Billy.

“Yeah.”

“What’s that got to do with anything?” asked Daniel. “We just went through a time warp so he could give her a piece of paper. Do you know how impossible that is? Ghosts can’t just show up and hand over pieces of paper! Isn’t there some kind of law of physics they broke?”

“What’s a law of physics?” asked Stefanie.

“I don’t know. I heard it on the Discovery Channel. The point is, ghosts don’t just pop up and hand over real pieces of paper.”

“Blackbeard did,” said Stefanie. “Right after he proposed. And some other pirate took my mother’s earrings.”

“Come on. He didn’t really propose,” said Daniel.

“Yeah, but he winked at her,” said Billy.

Mark, who had stayed out of the conversation, came over to Stefanie, took the piece of paper out of her hand, and gently opened it up.

“Wow. It’s really old,” said Billy.

“Of course it’s old,” sighed Daniel. “It came from a pirate who lived three hundred years ago.”

“I thought you just said he couldn’t give me a piece of paper,” sneered Stefanie.

“Well apparently, he did,” admitted Daniel.

“Look. It has a date on it,” said Billy, pointing to the bottom of the page. “Wow! ‘1067.’”

Stefanie took back the paper and examined it herself. “How do you know that’s a date?”

“I don’t know. It just looks like a date.”

Daniel took the paper and ran his fingers across it. “It’s papyrus, a really old kind of paper.” He studied the unrec-

ognizable language written on both sides of the paper and the strings of dashes ending in a square in the middle of one side. “It looks like some kind of map. Come on,” he told the others. He opened the stateroom door and the four kids went inside. They carefully laid it on a small table.

Billy brought a lamp closer. He pointed to the small word near the bottom. “I wonder what the word ‘scone’ means?”

“Ohhh! I bet it’s some kind of diamond or emerald. Maybe it’s that, uh . . . what’s it called? That big diamond at the museum that we saw in that movie.”

“Not every pirate map has to do with jewels,” said Daniel.

“Actually,” stammered Billy, “most of them do.” He looked at Stefanie. “Did he really wink at you?”

“I know what a wink is, Billy.”

Mark clapped his hands and placed them on his hips. He scowled at the lot of them. All this talk about scones and jewels was getting them nowhere. He walked over to the table, slammed his fist down so hard the lamp jumped, and pointed to the square in the middle of the map.

“That must be the treasure!” Stefanie brightened.

“What treasure?”

“The treasure treasure! A treasure map has to have a treasure or it wouldn’t be a treasure map, and if it has a treasure it would be in the middle of the treasure map like this one is, or it wouldn’t be the treasure map and wouldn’t have anything in the middle like this one does.”

Daniel gawked at the girl. Understanding “Stefanie babble” was an art usually practiced after a good night’s sleep. “We don’t know for sure it’s a treasure in the middle of the map,” he told her.

“Of course it is! If it weren’t a treasure, Blackbeard wouldn’t have given it to us. Besides, the square in the middle has to be the treasure or it wouldn’t be in the middle of the map, because the middle of the map means it’s the most important part of the map, and the most important part of a map is the treasure. And look at this. There’s a cross on one side of it and a star on the other side of it. That proves it’s a map.”

“That doesn’t prove it’s a map,” argued Daniel.

“Of course it does. Treasure maps always have markings people don’t understand so it can be confusing, so only the best mystery solvers are interested enough to follow the clues and find the treasure. Here’s another one,” said Stefanie. She pointed to the bottom right corner of one side and saw a small faded etching of a square with a triangle perched on top. “Blackbeard was always looking for treasures, so he was probably great at solving mysteries except for the treasures he hid, but they don’t count because he hid them.”

Daniel raised his eyebrows and glanced at Billy. “I’ll say one thing about her. She may not always be correct, but she sure is always right.”

“I heard that.”

“That’s a Jewish star,” Billy said, pointing to the image on the left side of the inside square. He recognized the six-pointed religious symbol. “Rachel wears a silver one around her neck. He grandmother gave it to her. I’ve seen it plenty of times.”

“So have I. So there’s a Jewish star on the left side of the square and a Christian cross on the right side of the square. That means the treasure, if it is the treasure, has some kind of religious meaning.” Daniel leaned in closer

to the paper. “What do y’all think that mark in the middle of the square in the center of the map is?”

“It’s a lightning bolt,” said Billy.

“A lightning bolt?” asked Daniel and Stefanie as one.

“Well, what do you think it is?” asked Billy.

Daniel scratched his head. “I don’t know. Maybe it is a lightning bolt.”

Daniel turned the paper over. “Well, it’s not written in English, that’s for sure. This map is not going to do us much good if we can’t read it.”

“I wonder what the map has to do with ‘Look to the chair?’” asked Stefanie.

“Are you sure that’s what he said?” asked Daniel.

“Yep. Plain as day. He winked at me and said, ‘Look to the chair.’”

“When did he propose?” asked Billy.

“Somewhere in between.”

“He didn’t propose!” shouted Daniel.

“How do you know? You weren’t there,” debated Stefanie.

Mark reached out and took the map. He gently placed it in his pocket, waved goodnight to everyone, and crawled into bed.

“Mark’s right. My mom’s probably freaking out because she doesn’t know where I am,” said Stefanie with a yawn. “See you in the morning. Har. Har. Har.”

While Stefanie returned to her stateroom, Elizabeth checked on the boys to see how they fared after the ghostly invasion. Billy and Daniel were too excited to sleep and continued talking about the pirate raid, but said nothing about the map. Mark, who was feigning sleep, thought back over the night’s events, his dream, and Stefanie’s

vision. As for Elizabeth, she would remember this night for the rest of her life. As scared as she was during the raid, she was also intrigued. On her way back to her own state-room, she grinned at the memory of the ghostly swabby washing the floors. “I wonder if he does house calls.”