


*THE* **CASE** *OF THE*  
**PHANTOM**  
**TREASURE**



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## PROLOGUE

1723

Captain Horatio Huxley hauled himself up to the crow's nest and wrapped an arm round the ship's mast, shielding his eyes from the rain and wind that whipped through the sails and threatened to blow him overboard.

Scanning the horizon, which was shrouded by dark clouds and split by streaks of lightning, Huxley pulled a sodden clump of parchment from his overcoat. What had once been a map of the way home now resembled a damp rag that had been used to wipe up an oil spill. He tossed it into the wind with a snarl.

'Make a U-turn!' came a voice from his shoulder.

‘Shut it, Mosey!’ snapped Huxley. The parrot squawked back in indignation. ‘If it weren’t for you,’ he bellowed over the screaming wind, ‘we’d be sitting in front of a roaring fire, bellies full of roast pheasant and hot cocoa!’

‘At the roundabout, take the second exit!’ Mosey screeched.

‘We’re in the middle of the ocean!’ Huxley roared. ‘There are no roundabouts here!’

‘Make a U-turn!’ Mosey cried again. ‘Make a U-turn!’

The ship suddenly gave a violent lurch, and Huxley hugged the mast even tighter. The *Captain’s Revenge* was being tossed like a rag doll back and forth, enormous waves battering her from every direction. Somewhere far below, Huxley heard a tremendous *crunch* as the ocean gnawed away at the ship’s hull – she wouldn’t hold up much longer in this storm.

Huxley looked down and saw his first mate staggering across the deck, spluttering against the sheets of rain pummelling the ship.

‘Damage report, Podge!’ Huxley barked down at him. Podge caught hold of the mast and hung on tight.



‘I’m soaked, cap’n!’ he called up. ‘I think I sprained my ankle, the scurvy is making my teeth fall out, I’ve lost the feeling in my toes and I can feel a migraine coming on!’

‘The ship, Podge!’ roared Huxley. ‘A damage report for the ship, you gilly-livered greasepot!’

‘Oh . . . We’re sinking!’ called back Podge. ‘The hull, bow, keel, galley, bridge, hold, stern and amidships are all underwater!’

‘Good grief!’ shouted Huxley. ‘That’s almost the entire ship! What about the poop deck?’

‘The poop deck is fine, but it smells awful! Permission to panic, cap’n?’

‘Pull yourself together, Podge!’ commanded Huxley. ‘Ready the lifeboats.’

‘Oh, I knew I forgot something. They’re underwater too, cap’n!’

Huxley growled and spat out a mouthful of rain. On his shoulder, Mosey was still giving directions.

‘Take the next right, then join the motorway!’

‘What’s the satnav saying, cap’n?’ shouted up Podge.

‘It’s on the blink!’ Huxley yelled back. ‘It thinks we’re on a motorway.’

‘Speed cameras ahead!’ squawked Mosey.

Huxley pulled up his collar round his face and tried to think of a plan. He wasn’t ready to let the *Captain’s Revenge* sink to the black depths of the sea, taking him, his crew and their precious cargo with her.

‘We’ve come too far to give up now, Podge!’ he yelled down to his first mate. ‘We found the treasure, and we’re going to bring it home!’

Suddenly, there came a tremendous sound, as if the sky itself was being ripped apart.

Podge checked the seat of his trousers. ‘I think my breeches have just split,’ he cried.


‘Idiot!’ Huxley pointed upwards. ‘It’s the sail!’

The wind had sheared the sail of the *Captain’s Revenge* into rags. It whipped away and disappeared into the frothing ocean below.

‘Permission to panic now, cap’n?’ Podge called up to the crow’s nest.

Huxley sighed down at his first mate, then raised his hand to his temple in a stiff navy salute. ‘Permission granted, Podge. We’re going down.’

‘Thank you, cap’n.’ Podge returned the salute, then screeched in terror and ran from the deck.



Huxley watched him go sourly. ‘It’s just you and me now, Mosey,’ he growled to the parrot.

Huxley thought of the treasure he’d found, now hidden deep in the belly of the ship. Would the riches end up like him and his men, lost to the sea? Would they ever be found? The thought lit an angry glow in his chest, and he screwed his hands into fists.

‘I swear this, Mosey!’ he shouted to his parrot over the crashing of the waves. ‘No one will ever take my treasure from me! Anyone who finds this ship will wish they’d never even laid eyes on it!’ Captain Horatio Huxley looked out over the heaving ocean before him, his mouth a grim slash of determination. ‘That’s a promise!’

