

## Chapter 8 The Daring Rescue (by Dr. Benjamin Johnson)

*(Extracted Directly from the Personal Log book of Gideon Livingston, the Fire Lord, the journal of Camphoria Livingston, and the memoirs of Ariel Livingston)*

I concentrated like I had practiced at the garrison when Aunt Mercedes gave it to me, and green fire lit the clear stone mounted in the ring on my left hand. We walked along in silence. Grandfather Livingston walked quickly and I struggled to keep up. He kept his gray hair neatly trimmed under his captain's cap, though it ended in a small pony tail at the nape of his neck that bobbed up and down as he walked ahead of me. Though he was as tall as I, at 12 hands, the stoop in his gate spoke volumes of the hard life he had lived. I noticed that his shoulders that were once broad, now were more rounded. He had the boney look of an aged man, nevertheless, as old as he was, he had not lost much of his energy but seemed to have gained even more this past week. The bags we carried clanked with each step. The glow stick Grandfather carried lit the narrow tunnel in which we walked and cast grotesque shadows on the wall. We hurried because we had little time to accomplish our task. Soon the 8<sup>th</sup> morning bell would sound and we would set our part in motion just at the turn of the watch.

Gratefully we arrived at the ladder at the end of the tunnel. Grandfather ascended first and I followed, careful to not bang the bag on my shoulder against the wall.

*No use in alerting them of our presence earlier than necessary*, I thought. Then Grandfather Livingston rapped a peculiar rhythm on the trap door...it opened with a creak.

As I came up the ladder through the trap door in the floor strong hands helped me enter the basement of the home. In the flickering light of the glow stick, I saw that those hands belonged to a young lady with hair red enough to match my own. Her eyes sparkled in the glow stone's light as she smiled and introduced herself.

"Hello, I am Camphoria. I work in the Adjudicator's mansion but I have pledged myself to the resistance."

"I..."

Grandfather interrupted me as I was about to respond, "Formal introductions can wait. We must hurry."

He stepped between us and continued to the stairs at the far end of the room. I lowered the trap door and I was amazed that it completely blended with the tiles on the floor, making it impossible to discover if you did not know it was there. I made a mental note of its location then silently followed Camphoria up the stairs.

"Be careful your Lordship and good luck be with ye. Dunna think bad of me for what is to happen next," Camphoria whispered. She deposited a piece of parchment in my hand and walked ahead of me. I stood there for a moment not comprehending her words. It was so dark, I couldn't have read anything even if I had time to spare, so reflexively I put the parchment in my vest pocket and followed.

Grandfather and Camphoria went left to the kitchens and I went to the right to access the second-floor stairs. I set my bag down with as little sound as I could and took out the two round clay pots. I struck a spark stick and ignited the wicks extending from the side of each pot. Grandfather had told me exactly where to put the smudge pots for greatest effect: right under the stairwell in the center of the house. The chemicals in the pot would produce volumes of smoke

and stinging fumes that would force anyone out of the building. I quickly scooted the lit pots to their hiding places and withdrew the wet translucent cloth from the pouch on my hip. I placed the cloth over my head. It was cool on my face and smelled of the chemicals that counteracted the effects of the smudge pot which would allow me to see and breathe without difficulty for a short time.

I saw that Grandfather Livingston had donned his wet cloth also and had grabbed a pot and a metal spoon for both of us. As the smoke filled the hallway near the stairs, the 8<sup>th</sup> watch bell rang in the distance. We walked by the servant's quarters on the first floor and it dawned on me that Camphoria was not with us.

"Where's Camphoria? Isn't she coming with us?" I asked.

"She'll be along in a bit. She's goin' ta wake the other servants when we sound the alarm."

Our mission was to draw all the Boar Riders to the house to put out the fire. While the Adjudicator McFarland was busy saving his house, we would board the Betty-Lou and quietly slip away. We stopped on either side of the door to the room where the guards slept. It was helpful that Grandfather knew the house so well because black smoke already filled the hallway. At a signal from Grandfather, we banged as loud and as fast as we could on the pots while we shouted, "Fire! Fire!" Simultaneously we heard a woman's voice shouting the same thing from the servant's rooms. We dropped the pots and headed for the basement. Soon, we heard above us other's joining the shouting of, "Fire!" and we heard feet pounding as they rushed to exit the building.

After the sounds died down, Grandfather Livingston said in a casual tone, "I've a small matter to attend to. I'll be but a moment. When we knock thrice, let us down," he bounded up the stairs, "Keep a weather eye for trouble, would ya now?" He called down not waiting for a reply.

I didn't have to wait even a second. "Wait, I'm coming with you!" I called up, but Grandfather had gone.

Besides not being able to see clearly under the wet rag, the smoke that still billowed from the smudge pots made visibility almost impossible. I concentrated a bit more and the stone in my ring glowed brighter, lighting no more than a barrel length in front of me. I could hear some noise on the second floor and headed up the stairs. I had no expectation of finding anyone else still in the building so I was completely surprised when I was struck a vicious blow from behind. Lucky for me my concentration was broken and the light in my ring went out. I fell to the floor and instinctively rolled to the left because of cycles of nine-ball training to avoid being trampled. This saved my life as I heard the whoosh and crunch of an axe biting into the floor where I had fallen. Instead of rolling further away, reflexively, I rolled back towards the axe, knowing that my assailant was trying to remove it from the floor. I grabbed the axe handle and aimed a swift kick at where I thought his head would be. I was rewarded with a sharp crack as my hobnailed boot connected with his skull. That was not a nine-ball technique.

I relit my ring and saw my attacker unconscious on the floor. He also wore a protective cloth on his head. From this I surmised that the adjudicator knew we were there and that we had been expected. I rushed to the next room where I saw my Grandfather struggling with two burly men, also wearing wet cloths. The scene was eerily lit by Grandfather's glow stick on the floor. One attempted to stab my Grandfather from behind with a sword and the other menaced him with a spear in front. I shouted, "Behind you!"

As if in slow motion I saw my Grandfather step aside as both men attacked simultaneously. Grandfather drew his sword and diverted the spear just as it thrust towards him. A gasp of surprise escaped the man behind Grandfather as the spear entered his chest. The attacker in front of Grandfather fared equally as poorly with Grandfather's sword in his heart. It was over in a blink of an eye.

Grandfather then rushed to what was obviously the adjudicator's office. He pulled a black cylinder from his backpack and in large black letters wrote, "The dragon has returned!" directly over the smirking face of the adjudicator's self-portrait. Grandfather then grabbed the large book that lay on the adjudicator's desk and stuffed it into his bag. As if noticing my presence for the first time, Grandfather whispered, "Quickly, we must hurry. The building is surrounded."

"And Camphoria? She's coming with us right?" I asked him.

"I think not me lad. We'll chat later. Now, run!" Grandfather growled.

I refused to move. "We can't leave her!!!" I shouted angrily.

"Shhhh. We dunna have time ta talk about this. We must go! She'll not be comin'! Do ye hear me?" Grandfather whispered ferociously.

I burst into green flames as my anger took over. "She has to come with us!" I demanded.

Grandfather was as angry now as I was. "Quit bein' a petulant child 'n understand what I tell ye. She betrayed us 'n will'na be comin'! Now douse yer flames 'n let's go!"

It was too late to douse the flames because the floor and wall had caught on fire. I was confused and could not believe that we had been betrayed, but my own eyes had seen the men with the wet cloths, waiting for us. I numbly followed Grandfather and concentrated on turning off the green flames.

We hurried down the stairs and to the basement just as we heard running feet and shouting overhead. "They have to be in here! Find them! Fire! Bring water!"

I headed towards the location of the tile that was the trap door, but Grandfather grabbed my arm. "We cann'a be goin' back that away lad. If Camphoria has sold us out and that path be compromised. Follow me."

He went to the opposite wall and twisted one of many hooks on the wall. The floor tile on which he stood folded beneath him and he disappeared into the depths. I followed by twisting the same hook and found myself sliding down a chute as I had at the Captains Keel. I landed painfully on something hard and by the loud grunt realized that it was Grandfather.

"Yeh could'a waited for me to get out 'o the way, lad. Ye be a might heavier than ye appear," he said as he took off the wet cloth and rubbed his back where I had landed on him.

"Sorry Grandfather, are you ok?", I asked as I removed my wet cloth and returned it to the pouch at my waist.

"I'll be fine in a jiffy. We dunna have time to waste. Hurry lad. Time be on our side now, whilst the adjudicator and his soldier be tryin' to trap us in his home," Grandfather turned and then said, "Er...be a good lad and shine yer light a bit brighter please. I lost me glow stick in the struggle above."

I obliged by concentrating and making my ring glow bright as a green spark rocket and we headed down a tunnel at a quick trot. Though I had only just met her, I could hardly believe that Camphoria had betrayed us. I still felt it was wrong to leave her at the mercy of the adjudicator.

I was not surprised that Grandfather had installed two escape routes in his home. Without this kind of preparation, the resistance would have been discovered and destroyed long

ago. We came to the end of the tunnel and ascended wooden stairs leading up to the right. At the top of the stairs Grandfather unnecessarily turned and put his finger to his lips, “Shhhh,” he motioned for me to extinguish my ring.

Quietly he opened the thick ironwood door and we stepped out into the ravine in the moonlit early morning. I realized immediately that this was the same ravine that we had traversed while escaping the Captain’s Keel. The shaded path lay before us, hidden from view by a thick wall of woody grass that extended far above our heads. We hurried down this path escaping the growing noises coming from the adjudicator’s mansion. “Fire! Bring buckets of water! Put it out!” men and women screamed.

We had traveled about 300 paces when I clearly heard a click of metal on stone. We both froze in the gloom of the path. Grandfather withdrew his sword and I mine. He struck the stone of the pathway twice with his sword. As soon as he had done this, two men disconnected themselves from the darkness and greeted Grandfather with hugs and backslaps.

“I be Jasper Bragg, and he be Sir Percival Kendrick your excellency.”

The largest of the men pointed to his companion. They both swept their broad brimmed hats off their heads and performed a deep bow. Jasper Bragg was more than a hand taller than the Percival and was built like boar wrestler, with massive hands and broad shoulders. Percival Kendrick, was a more average size, but was obviously athletic and in good shape. Both sported beards. In the dark I could tell that Bragg’s was scraggy, while Kendrick’s was pointed and well groomed.

Addressing Grandfather, he continued, “The adjudicator’s men’ve surrounded the Betty-Lou all day, waitin’ for us to make a move. Yer plan worked perfectly and the main force were drawn to the mansion when the 8<sup>th</sup> bell rang. We had no problem overcomin’ the few men that remained guardin’ the jails.”

“We still expect to find that other ensnarements have been laid, but so far we have been able to discover them before any one has been injured,” the older man named Kendrick shared.

On closer examination, both men wore the outer cloak of noblemen yet their demeanor was not that of effete nobility, but rather the hard-bitten determination of seasoned soldiers.

“This way yer majesty,” Bragg motioned for us to follow.

“They’ve tried ta capture and even destroy the Betty-Lou but as ye would know, they’ve so far been unsuccessful,” Bragg explained as he led the way. “Ha...when some Boar Riders tried to get aboard the Betty-Lou, she threw’em overboard right away. Another poor soul she shot out through the bilge tank. She had a right good time of it. She tied others with ropes, or snapped’em with the ends till they screamed in pain and jumped off. Then from a distance, they tried to burn her with flaming arrows. She dodged most of’em, and she put the ones that landed out with a simple flip of her sails. They even tried the flame thrower but the ship flapped her side wings like a nectar bird and returned the flame in the same direction, setting several Boar Riders ablaze.”

Kendrick added, “Sire, our men warned us that troops are ensconced in other boats, and the dockworkers actually are soldiers in disguise. They will attempt to eliminate us before we embark on the Betty-Lou, but we have already laden all the accoutrements and only awaited your highness, you, and Camphoria.”

“Camphoria betrayed us. They were waitin’ for us inside. We left without her,” Grandfather shared.

“Na, that canna be true!” Bragg choked. “Nay Captain, ye were not betrayed by my own daughter?”

“I couldn’ a believe it myself,” Grandfather replied and put his arm on Bragg’s shoulder consolingly. “We must hurry a’fore they realize that we are not in the mansion,” Grandfather headed down the path after them.

“I’m goin’ back ta fetch me daughter!” Bragg announced.

“Ye canna. She be discovered ‘n captured already. Ye’d just get captured yeself. We’ll rescue her when we’ve made it aboard the Betty-Lou,” Grandfather stated firmly. “How many new recruits did ye rescue from the jails?” he asked Bragg, who appeared to be some sort of commander.

“Only 47 have been gathered aboard the Betty-Lou. Many of the original resistance be too old or infirm. Even still, we have far too few able-bodied men. Most of the men we freed from the jail be terrible afraid o’ what the Boar Riders will do ta their families and though they promised ta keep the fight goin’ here, they ran ta protect their families.

“Also, with all the preparations, we had little time to recruit from neighboring lands,” Sir Kendrick reported dejectedly. “We did convince 16 men from Sparfold, and six from Blue Rock to join us as soon as they could settle their affairs.

Both Bragg and Kendrick walked ahead and I and Grandfather followed.

“Grandfather, I have been wondering, why do they address you as if you were nobility?” I whispered.

He chuckled a bit, “Tis not I they be addressing as a king but ye.”

“What? Why would they do that? I’m not royalty!” I objected.

“Did ya’ forget the legend so quickly now? We’ve been waitin’ fer a new king fer many centuries, and then ye shows up. Ye canna blame Captain Bragg nor Sir Kendrick for being excited about the prospects,” Grandfather kindly explained and slapped me on the back, “You’ll make a fine king, when the time comes.”

Full realization of my role in the resistance came to me with a shock. Not only was I going to topple the current monarch, but I was to take his place as supreme ruler. How I was supposed to do this, I didn’t have a clue. What I did know was that I knew nothing about ruling a kingdom.

I suppose that Grandfather could tell I was overwhelmed with the idea of being the king. “Dunna worry about this now. Ye will have plenty of time to prepare. Just focus on what be ahead of ye...one step at a time,” he said encouragingly, “Trust yer instincts lad. Leadin’ be in yer blood.”

We arrived at a gap in the side of the hill where there was a narrow door hidden by trees and bushes. Grandfather knocked his peculiar rhythm and the door opened.

“Come in quickly now, the adjudicator has troops scouring this hill looking for all ye,” a voice whispered from the darkness.

One by one we entered through the narrow door; purposefully narrow so that only one person at a time could enter and making it easily defended. There were at least 20 people in the narrow passageway. I lit my ring and there were gasps of surprise and murmurs of, “It be true then!” We followed in single file up the winding stairs until we arrived at the small room at the top of the stairs.

“On the other side of this door, rests the Betty-Lou, not 20 feet above us. Upon a signal from Captain Livingston, she will drop rope ladders and we must swiftly climb. Once aboard we will set sail at yer discretion yer majesty,” Captain Bragg explained.

One by one we exited the hidden door and made our way directly beneath the Betty-Lou. Without warning, five rope ladders slithered down to us. I was surprised that I did not hear any signal from Grandfather for Betty-Lou to do that.

Before any of us could ascend the ladders we heard a man's muffled oath and a girl's voice, "Run it's a trap!" and then a man's voice, "Catch her! She must not escape!" Then a beam of light shot from the opposite side of the ravine fully exposing me to fire.

"That's Camphoria!" I said ignoring the light, "We must save her," I pointed to the direction of Camphoria's voice.

I was tackled by Captain Bragg just as several arrows and stone projectiles hit the lighted area where I had just been. Strong hands quickly dragged me back into the hidden entrance, that was not so hidden anymore as arrow shafts and projectiles hammered the door.

"Let me go! We cannot leave her!" I growled as I struggled to get free.

"Dunna be a fool, lad. She sold us out and this be just another ruse for us to follow. Why do ye think that they brought her?" Grandfather scolded angrily.

Captain Bragg spoke solemnly, "Though, my Camphoria would never betray us, I agree with Captain Livingston. That be not the way to save her."

Only when I stopped struggling did I notice that several of our company had been wounded, including Captain Bragg, who had received a shaft in his arm. "Thank you for risking your life and saving mine Captain Bragg," I said breathlessly, to which he simply nodded acknowledgement.

Then a thought struck me and I voiced it, "Captain Livingston, Camphoria had said something to me as we entered the house. 'Dunna think bad of me.' Why had she said that? There was something else...she gave me something. I remembered her strong hand in mine... a parchment. It was dark, so I decided to read it later. I put it... where? Aha!" I shouted pulling the parchment from my vest pocket.

Every eye was now upon me as I read the parchment aloud:

*Most honorable Lord Gideon:*

*They know you are here. Do not go upstairs. Men are waiting for you. Find another way out. I will escape and wait at the right spot.*

*Camphoria*

"You see! My Camphoria tried to warn ye but ye were too dense to understand! She be not a traitor!" Bragg pointed out enthusiastically.

"Watch yer tone when speaking about His majesty!" Sir Kendrick growled menacingly with his hand on his sword.

Bragg blanched when he realized what he had said. "A thousand pardons yer Excellency. I meant no disrespect," Bragg bowed low and did not rise.

Knowing that I had to say something, I walked over to Captain Bragg, frantically thinking, *What would a king say?... Look, he is shaking in fear. Oh no! He is thinking he might be killed.*

"Rise Captain Bragg. Your insult is forgiven. I know you were concerned about your daughter Camphoria. The task at hand is discovering how we will board the Betty-Lou and then devise a plan to retrieve your daughter. I cannot afford to waste good men like you over unintentional slights."

Captain Bragg stood up shakily, much relieved.

Grandfather spoke, “They will be surrounding this location in a moment. We can stay here and fight our way onto Betty-Lou, or we can seek another avenue to board her. What say ye m’Lord?”

This was the first time that Grandfather had addressed me in this fashion. I was so shocked that even he regarded me as something more than a lad, it took me a second to reply.

“We cannot stay here. We cannot fight because they have the high ground and we cannot see how many there are. Lead us to your second escape route,” I pronounced. It was a total shot in the dark that sounded kingly. I clung to the hope that since there were two escape hatches in the mansion, there would be two here also.

“Right away m’Liege. This way.”

He rushed down the stairs, and all of us followed suit. He stopped abruptly at a door that I failed to notice on the way in. He pried it open and entered. We followed him up the steep stairs. Arriving at the top, Grandfather motioned for us to be silent, remain still, and extinguish our lights as we stood in the small room. He then opened a door and exited silently. We could feel the cool morning air rush into our cramped space.

A moment later he returned and whispered, “Nice call about the second escape route. Betty-Lou will be here shortly. We must be prepared to board her. Follow me.”

We heard a commotion of angry shouts from below followed by the concussion of explosive fire shafts and high velocity shrapnel weapons designed to cripple airships. Based on the amount of cursing we heard, the Betty-Lou easily avoided the threats.

Not daring to illuminate ourselves, we had to trust that the Betty-Lou knew where we were. After a few anxious moments, Grandfather whispered, “She is here. Grab the ladders.”

I was the last to make my way up the ladder and heard the shafts and stones zoom past me. I swung my foot over the side of the ship and as soon as my foot touched the deck, I felt the same powerful surge of energy I had felt the first time I set foot on the Betty-Lou, but this time it was 1000 times stronger.

Everyone gasped loudly. Not only was I enveloped in green flames, but so was the Betty-Lou! That was not all, however. We heard a loud grinding noise and fell to our knees because deck of the Betty-Lou trembled and shook as from a land quake. The Betty-Lou had transformed from a wide and elegant merchant vessel into a sleek and ferocious looking fighting ship. Two different sides of the same dragon!

I stood up and I came to my senses. “No!” I shouted. “We cannot be seen!” I concentrated furiously to douse the flames, but it was too late.

Though it was only a second or two, it seemed like an eternity—enough for the troops of the Adjudicator to fire their weapons at us. There was no time to relay orders to the helmsman. We had to move out of the firing range now!

How the Betty-Lou responded to Grandfather’s requests without words, I did not know, but I guessed that the Betty-Lou and Grandfather had a special mental connection. Perhaps he knew her thoughts and she his. I didn’t have time to make a request to Grandfather for him to make the command--we had to move immediately. So for the first time I attempted to communicate in my mind to the Betty-Lou the urgency of moving away from the spot we now occupied.

“Betty-Lou, I need you to move out of danger immediately or we will all die,” I thought forcefully.

The response was instantaneous. The Betty-Lou shot forward so quickly that everyone was knocked down to the deck once again. The scatter shots and the deck slicers missed the Betty-Lou by less than the breadth of a hand span.

“Thanks, Betty-Lou! We are not out of trouble yet, keep moving about, and keep out of range,” I thought.

I could not be sure but it seemed I heard her reply, “You are welcome.”

Grandfather stood by my side and whispered, “If ye need my help ‘n dunna know what ta do, just ask, I’ll be right here. Ye be in command now!”

“I’ll do my best. Thanks!” I replied and then I called to the helmsman, “Do you know the ‘Right Spot’?”

“Pardon m’Lord, but we canna go there right now. We were betrayed and it be just another trap,” Grandfather advised in a whisper.

I blazed green in anger, this time only me, and shouted, “Am I not in command?”

As soon as I said those words in that way to Grandfather, I knew that it was wrong. I was starting off my command poorly.

“Of course yer excellency. Helmsman take us to the right spot.” He relayed the command.

The helmsan looked at me quizzically and then Grandfather Livingston stepped to his side and explained to him the location. “Yes, your Excellency. I can take us there, but we’ll be vulnerable ta be attacked if we moor there. It be on a hill where all would be able to see us in the moonlight.”

“Leave that to me. For now, take us out of range of those weapons!” I said grimly. I had an idea. It occurred to me that where there was fire, there was smoke. As sure as I could use my power to create green fire, I believed that I could create a smoke screen as well. I pulled out my sword and instead of thinking about covering it with bright green flames, I concentrated on smoke instead. Sure enough, my sword began exuding copious amounts of green smoke.

“Wow!” I said as I swung it through the air leaving ribbons of smoke, “This could be useful in battle.”

Though I had never been in a battle, I envisioned what it might be like. The closest thing to a battlefield in which I had much experience was the nine-ball pitch. Still swinging the smoking sword, I wrote my initials in the air “GL”

As I watched my initials dissipate in the air, I spoke what I was thinking, “Green smoke won’t do. We will still be seen. There has to be something else.”

Since I was the Fire Lord, I thought the answer might be once again found in fire itself. Then I started thinking more about the anatomy of a fire. I lit a spark stick and a flame erupted from its end. I brought it to my eyes to observe it in detail. “Closest to the wood burning the fire it is completely transparent, then blue, then yellow, then the smoke,” I muttered, “I wonder...?”

I pulled out my sword and focused my thoughts on the transparency below the flame. The sword became as transparent as a stinging cloud floater.

“Ah ha!” I exclaimed.

Once again, I became aware that all eyes were upon me, awaiting instructions and mesmerized by what I had just done. “Er hum...It is set, then. We will have to fly by sight only,” I told the helmsman. I didn’t know if that was possible, but I figured that if we were transparent it would be impossible to see our instruments.

“Yes m’Lord, so it shall be done,” the helmsman responded nervously. I saw that Grandfather Livingston was trying to calm him down.



“Captain Bragg, assure that everyone has a station and that everyone on deck is fitted with a safety line. We are going to rescue Camphoria. We may have to move quickly and cannot afford to lose men overboard,” I instructed, “Let me know when you are ready.”

My thinking was that Captain Bragg would know where everyone was supposed to be. I also guessed that there were safety lines that could be attached to the crew above deck.

“It will be done, my Liege,” Captain Bragg bowed and then turned to begin giving orders to the multitude of people on deck.

Apparently, I had said the right things because everyone now moved with purpose and their attention was elsewhere besides being fixed on me. I approached Kendrick and asked, “I would like to stand in the forecandle for best visibility, what safety lines can be attached to me?”

“If you will allow me Sire, I will show you,” Sir Kendrick said with a bow and indicated the way to the forecandle.

Soon I was stationed at the light stone controls and was connected with a harness that would allow me to remain standing on the deck regardless of what kind of flying the Betty-Lou was doing.

“Kendrick, let everyone know that it is going to be difficult to see on board the ship in a few moments. Tell them to have their weapons and tools at easy reach,” I requested.

Kendrick returned and said, “M’Lord, all the crew be prepared.”

“Thank you and get to your own post. Ok, Here we go!” I responded.

I concentrated on making the whole ship just like the invisible part of the flame. The ship began fading until all of its timbers, sails, and weapons became transparent and the sleek form of the Betty-Lou became hazy and was soon lost to view completely. I could feel the energy draining from my body and wondered how long I could maintain invisibility.

I called out to the helmsman, “Fly us straight and true to the right spot.”

“Aye, aye yer Majesty!” he replied.

The Betty-Lou descended from the clouds, completely invisible. She picked up speed and the only thing visible was that she left a cumulus trail in her wake.

I had no idea where the “right spot” was, but I trusted my Grandfather and the helmsman knew.

Just then, the helmsmen nervously shouted in my direction, “Sire, we be above the location, what be yer orders?”

“Hold your position for now...uff,” I responded, now struggling to focus on maintaining invisibility. The effort was taking all my attention and my strength.

Though we could still see the hazy outlines of the ship, we could see right through it to the ground below. It was also an eerie feeling—not being able to see oneself. But there was one person we could see in the moonlight. She was running full speed to the top of the hill where the rocks formed a small landing pad and a tall tree served as a mooring pole. She was being pursued by several of the Adjudicator’s troops.

“Helmsman. Get us closer,” I ordered and furiously tried to think how to get her aboard. I knew I could shoot flames at the pursuing men and roast them alive, but I also knew that they were just following orders. “What do we have to help her?”

As all the ideas seemed to be coming today, it started with a simple thought. Ships have nets to catch food like sky crawlers and jelly pods. “Ah, ha! We can lower the nets and catch ourselves some troops,” Then I thought, “What do we want the troops for? Let’s catch Camphoria!”

I spoke quickly to the Helmsman, “Move us right above Camphoria.”

“As you wish Sire.”

“Kendrick, prepare to lower the nets over Camphoria,” I said as we approached unseen, not ten body lengths above her.

“Right away m’Lord,” he responded and issued his own commands to the crew.

“Ye know where the nets be, e’en though ye canna see em. Reach out ’n touch’em... Move them into place now. Well, done lads.”

The troops were gaining on Camphoria, I had to slow them down. I pointed my sword and shot a bolt of green fire in front of the charging men. They jumped back in alarm as green flames erupted in front of them. The discharge of energy left me panting for breath and my knees began shaking from the strain of holding the ship invisible. I could see the ship becoming visible again. I refocused all my attention on becoming invisible, but to no avail... I could not do it. I was too weak. Then I felt a surge of energy rise from my feet and instantly the ship was invisible again.

As I looked at the men dousing the flames that had gotten on their clothing, I wondered how I had fired the flames right through the hull of the Betty-Lou. I prayed that I had not done her any damage.

“Lower the nets now!” I shouted.

Translucent nets were lowered onto Camphoria and she screamed in shock and fear. Violently she struggled to be free of her invisible bonds. “Grab a hold of them and we will pull you aboard!” I shouted to her.

Her struggling stopped and she questioned in disbelief, “Lord Gideon? Be that you?”

“Yes, this is Gideon and the Betty-Lou. There’s no time to explain. Grab ahold tight,” I shouted down.

“Sir Kendrick, reel her in!” I ordered, wondering if those were the right terms.

Camphoria squealed a bit when her feet left the ground. The pursuing troops were even more shocked for when they saw her floating in the air they turned around and ran.

“Bring her aboard carefully, Sir Kendrick,” I knew I didn’t have to say that as soon as the word left my mouth, but I felt that is what a captain would say.

“Helmsman, we have to raise the Betty-Lou up to the clouds. Call Captain Bragg to the deck,” I knew I did not need to give those orders either. Even though he was below, Captain Bragg could well see his daughter floating beneath the ship as the nets were drawn in.

Camphoria was shivering with fright as invisible hands brought her aboard an invisible ship. “What magic hath wrought this? I can feel ye and hear ye but I canna see ye,” she looked around wide-eyed, “Be I aboard the Betty-Lou?”

I responded, “Yes Camphoria, you are aboard the Betty-Lou.”

“My Lord! Help me. I be bound with invisible cords and held fast with invisible hands.” She pleaded in the direction of my voice.

“Be patient Camphoria. We had to use the nets to retrieve you, but the men are having trouble untangling you because they cannot see anything either,” I explained.

As we gained altitude, I stopped the invisibility so the men could safely handle the netting and the winches. I was becoming accustomed to hear the audible gasp from the crew as the ship became solid again. I was amazed that I could hold the invisibility. Before the infusion of power from the deck, I had exhausted all of my strength and could barely stand. I could feel the energy coming up from the ship, fortifying me and replacing the energy that I had expended. “I will have to investigate where this energy came from later,” I thought.

I disconnected my safety harness and left the forecandle to help with bringing Camphoria aboard. The winches were just being drawn into the deck of the ship with Camphoria securely within the nets. Captain Bragg stood by, anxiously awaiting his daughter's release from the nets. Sir Kendrick and his team efficiently lowered the nets to the deck and successfully disentangled Camphoria.

As soon as she was free a shout of triumph rang from all on deck. Captain Bragg loudest of all, held his arms wide open to hug his daughter as she ran towards him. Camphoria ran past her father and to my surprise gave me a hug that once again reminded me of the constrictive strength of rock serpents.

"I knew you would come for me Lord Gideon!" she said as she took my face in her hands and she kissed me full on the lips.

After the surprise of it, I cannot say I did not enjoy it, but I barely knew her. Luckily her father came to my rescue when he saw my confusion and said, "Camphoria, dear. Mind your place. You be huggin' and kissin' His Worshipfulness. Tis not befitting yer station."

She right away disengaged and a red flush filled her face. "Please pardon my affrontery m'Lord!" She bowed low, with her arms out to her side.

"Rise Camphoria. There is nothing to pardon," I grinned, "I am just as glad to have you back again... doubly so," I casually touched my lips, "Here is the man you should be hugging and kissing whose bravery and loyalty only match your own," I pointed to her father.

"Thank ye my Lord," she said as she stood and then rushed over to give her father a big hug.

## Chapter 8 The Daring Rescue

*(Extracted Directly from the Personal Log book of Gideon Livingston, the Fire Lord, the journal of Camphoria Livingston, and the memoirs of Ariel Livingston)*

I concentrated like I had practiced at the garrison when Aunt Mercedes gave it to me, and green fire lit the clear stone mounted in the ring on my left hand. We walked along in silence. Grandfather Livingston walked quickly and I struggled to keep up. He kept his gray hair neatly trimmed under his captain's cap, though it ended in a small pony tail at the nape of his neck that bobbed up and down as he walked ahead of me. Though he was as tall as I, at 12 hands, the stoop in his gate spoke volumes of the hard life he had lived. I noticed that his shoulders that were once broad, now were more rounded. He had the boney look of an aged man, nevertheless, as old as he was, he had not lost much of his energy but seemed to have gained even more this past week. The bags we carried clanked with each step. The glow stick Grandfather carried lit the narrow tunnel in which we walked and cast grotesque shadows on the wall. We hurried because we had little time to accomplish our task. Soon the 8<sup>th</sup> morning bell would sound and we would set our part in motion just at the turn of the watch.

Gratefully we arrived at the ladder at the end of the tunnel. Grandfather ascended first and I followed, careful to not bang the bag on my shoulder against the wall.

*No use in alerting them of our presence earlier than necessary,* I thought. Then Grandfather Livingston rapped a peculiar rhythm on the trap door...it opened with a creak.

As I came up the ladder through the trap door in the floor strong hands helped me enter the basement of the home. In the flickering light of the glow stick, I saw that those hands belonged to a young lady with hair red enough to match my own. Her eyes sparkled in the glow stone's light as she smiled and introduced herself.

“Hello, I am Camphoria. I work in the Adjudicator’s mansion but I have pledged myself to the resistance.”

“I...”

Grandfather interrupted me as I was about to respond, “Formal introductions can wait. We must hurry.”

He stepped between us and continued to the stairs at the far end of the room. I lowered the trap door and I was amazed that it completely blended with the tiles on the floor, making it impossible to discover if you did not know it was there. I made a mental note of its location then silently followed Camphoria up the stairs.

“Be careful your Lordship and good luck be with ye. Dunna think bad of me for what is to happen next,” Camphoria whispered. She deposited a piece of parchment in my hand and walked ahead of me. I stood there for a moment not comprehending her words. It was so dark, I couldn’t have read anything even if I had time to spare, so reflexively I put the parchment in my vest pocket and followed.

Grandfather and Camphoria went left to the kitchens and I went to the right to access the second-floor stairs. I set my bag down with as little sound as I could and took out the two round clay pots. I struck a spark stick and ignited the wicks extending from the side of each pot. Grandfather had told me exactly where to put the smudge pots for greatest effect: right under the stairwell in the center of the house. The chemicals in the pot would produce volumes of smoke and stinging fumes that would force anyone out of the building. I quickly scooted the lit pots to their hiding places and withdrew the wet translucent cloth from the pouch on my hip. I placed the cloth over my head. It was cool on my face and smelled of the chemicals that counteracted the effects of the smudge pot which would allow me to see and breathe without difficulty for a short time.

I saw that Grandfather Livingston had donned his wet cloth also and had grabbed a pot and a metal spoon for both of us. As the smoke filled the hallway near the stairs, the 8<sup>th</sup> watch bell rang in the distance. We walked by the servant’s quarters on the first floor and it dawned on me that Camphoria was not with us.

“Where’s Camphoria? Isn’t she coming with us?” I asked.

“She’ll be along in a bit. She’s goin’ ta wake the other servants when we sound the alarm.”

Our mission was to draw all the Boar Riders to the house to put out the fire. While the Adjudicator McFarland was busy saving his house, we would board the Betty-Lou and quietly slip away. We stopped on either side of the door to the room where the guards slept. It was helpful that Grandfather knew the house so well because black smoke already filled the hallway. At a signal from Grandfather, we banged as loud and as fast as we could on the pots while we shouted, “Fire! Fire!” Simultaneously we heard a woman’s voice shouting the same thing from the servant’s rooms. We dropped the pots and headed for the basement. Soon, we heard above us other’s joining the shouting of, “Fire!” and we heard feet pounding as they rushed to exit the building.

After the sounds died down, Grandfather Livingston said in a casual tone, “I’ve a small matter to attend to. I’ll be but a moment. When we knock thrice, let us down,” he bounded up the stairs, “Keep a weather eye for trouble, would ya now?” He called down not waiting for a reply.

I didn’t have to wait even a second. “Wait, I’m coming with you!” I called up, but Grandfather had gone.

Besides not being able to see clearly under the wet rag, the smoke that still billowed from the smudge pots made visibility almost impossible. I concentrated a bit more and the stone in my ring glowed brighter, lighting no more than a barrel length in front of me. I could hear some noise on the second floor and headed up the stairs. I had no expectation of finding anyone else still in the building so I was completely surprised when I was struck a vicious blow from behind. Lucky for me my concentration was broken and the light in my ring went out. I fell to the floor and instinctively rolled to the left because of cycles of nine-ball training to avoid being trampled. This saved my life as I heard the whoosh and crunch of an axe biting into the floor where I had fallen. Instead of rolling further away, reflexively, I rolled back towards the axe, knowing that my assailant was trying to remove it from the floor. I grabbed the axe handle and aimed a swift kick at where I thought his head would be. I was rewarded with a sharp crack as my hobnailed boot connected with his skull. That was not a nine-ball technique.

I relit my ring and saw my attacker unconscious on the floor. He also wore a protective cloth on his head. From this I surmised that the adjudicator knew we were there and that we had been expected. I rushed to the next room where I saw my Grandfather struggling with two burly men, also wearing wet cloths. The scene was eerily lit by Grandfather's glow stick on the floor. One attempted to stab my Grandfather from behind with a sword and the other menaced him with a spear in front. I shouted, "Behind you!"

As if in slow motion I saw my Grandfather step aside as both men attacked simultaneously. Grandfather drew his sword and diverted the spear just as it thrust towards him. A gasp of surprise escaped the man behind Grandfather as the spear entered his chest. The attacker in front of Grandfather fared equally as poorly with Grandfather's sword in his heart. It was over in a blink of an eye.

Grandfather then rushed to what was obviously the adjudicator's office. He pulled a black cylinder from his backpack and in large black letters wrote, "The dragon has returned!" directly over the smirking face of the adjudicator's self-portrait. Grandfather then grabbed the large book that lay on the adjudicator's desk and stuffed it into his bag. As if noticing my presence for the first time, Grandfather whispered, "Quickly, we must hurry. The building is surrounded."

"And Camphoria? She's coming with us right?" I asked him.

"I think not me lad. We'll chat later. Now, run!" Grandfather growled.

I refused to move. "We can't leave her!!!" I shouted angrily.

"Shhhh. We dunna have time ta talk about this. We must go! She'll not be comin'! Do ye hear me?" Grandfather whispered ferociously.

I burst into green flames as my anger took over. "She has to come with us!" I demanded.

Grandfather was as angry now as I was. "Quit bein' a petulant child 'n understand what I tell ye. She betrayed us 'n will'na be comin'! Now douse yer flames 'n let's go!"

It was too late to douse the flames because the floor and wall had caught on fire. I was confused and could not believe that we had been betrayed, but my own eyes had seen the men with the wet cloths, waiting for us. I numbly followed Grandfather and concentrated on turning off the green flames.

We hurried down the stairs and to the basement just as we heard running feet and shouting overhead. "They have to be in here! Find them! Fire! Bring water!"

I headed towards the location of the tile that was the trap door, but Grandfather grabbed my arm. "We cann'a be goin' back that away lad. If Camphoria has sold us out and that path be compromised. Follow me."

He went to the opposite wall and twisted one of many hooks on the wall. The floor tile on which he stood folded beneath him and he disappeared into the depths. I followed by twisting the same hook and found myself sliding down a chute as I had at the Captains Keel. I landed painfully on something hard and by the loud grunt realized that it was Grandfather.

“Yeh could’a waited for me to get out ‘o the way, lad. Ye be a might heavier than ye appear,” he said as he took off the wet cloth and rubbed his back where I had landed on him.

“Sorry Grandfather, are you ok?”, I asked as I removed my wet cloth and returned it to the pouch at my waist.

“I’ll be fine in a jiffy. We dunna have time to waste. Hurry lad. Time be on our side now, whilst the adjudicator and his soldier be tryin’ to trap us in his home,” Grandfather turned and then said, “Er...be a good lad and shine yer light a bit brighter please. I lost me glow stick in the struggle above.”

I obliged by concentrating and making my ring glow bright as a green spark rocket and we headed down a tunnel at a quick trot. Though I had only just met her, I could hardly believe that Camphoria had betrayed us. I still felt it was wrong to leave her at the mercy of the adjudicator.

I was not surprised that Grandfather had installed two escape routes in his home. Without this kind of preparation, the resistance would have been discovered and destroyed long ago. We came to the end of the tunnel and ascended wooden stairs leading up to the right. At the top of the stairs Grandfather unnecessarily turned and put his finger to his lips, “Shhhh,” he motioned for me to extinguish my ring.

Quietly he opened the thick ironwood door and we stepped out into the ravine in the moonlit early morning. I realized immediately that this was the same ravine that we had traversed while escaping the Captain’s Keel. The shaded path lay before us, hidden from view by a thick wall of woody grass that extended far above our heads. We hurried down this path escaping the growing noises coming from the adjudicator’s mansion. “Fire! Bring buckets of water! Put it out!” men and women screamed.

We had traveled about 300 paces when I clearly heard a click of metal on stone. We both froze in the gloom of the path. Grandfather withdrew his sword and I mine. He struck the stone of the pathway twice with his sword. As soon as he had done this, two men disconnected themselves from the darkness and greeted Grandfather with hugs and backslaps.

“I be Jasper Bragg, and he be Sir Percival Kendrick your excellency.”

The largest of the men pointed to his companion. They both swept their broad brimmed hats off their heads and performed a deep bow. Jasper Bragg was more than a hand taller than the Percival and was built like boar wrestler, with massive hands and broad shoulders. Percival Kendrick, was a more average size, but was obviously athletic and in good shape. Both sported beards. In the dark I could tell that Bragg’s was scraggy, while Kendrick’s was pointed and well groomed.

Addressing Grandfather, he continued, “The adjudicator’s men’ve surrounded the Betty-Lou all day, waitin’ for us to make a move. Yer plan worked perfectly and the main force were drawn to the mansion when the 8<sup>th</sup> bell rang. We had no problem overcomin’ the few men that remained guardin’ the jails.”

“We still expect to find that other ensnarements have been laid, but so far we have been able to discover them before any one has been injured,” the older man named Kendrick shared.

On closer examination, both men wore the outer cloak of noblemen yet their demeanor was not that of effete nobility, but rather the hard-bitten determination of seasoned soldiers.

“This way yer majesty,” Bragg motioned for us to follow.

“They’ve tried ta capture and even destroy the Betty-Lou but as ye would know, they’ve so far been unsuccessful,” Bragg explained as he led the way. “Ha...when some Boar Riders tried to get aboard the Betty-Lou, she threw ’em overboard right away. Another poor soul she shot out through the bilge tank. She had a right good time of it. She tied others with ropes, or snapped ’em with the ends till they screamed in pain and jumped off. Then from a distance, they tried to burn her with flaming arrows. She dodged most of ’em, and she put the ones that landed out with a simple flip of her sails. They even tried the flame thrower but the ship flapped her side wings like a nectar bird and returned the flame in the same direction, setting several Boar Riders ablaze.”

Kendrick added, “Sire, our men warned us that troops are ensconced in other boats, and the dockworkers actually are soldiers in disguise. They will attempt to eliminate us before we embark on the Betty-Lou, but we have already laden all the accoutrements and only awaited your highness, you, and Camphoria.”

“Camphoria betrayed us. They were waitin’ for us inside. We left without her,” Grandfather shared.

“Na, that canna be true!” Bragg choked. “Nay Captain, ye were not betrayed by my own daughter?”

“I couldn’ a believe it myself,” Grandfather replied and put his arm on Bragg’s shoulder consolingly. “We must hurry a ’fore they realize that we are not in the mansion,” Grandfather headed down the path after them.

“I’m goin’ back ta fetch me daughter!” Bragg announced.

“Ye canna. She be discovered ‘n captured already. Ye’d just get captured yeself. We’ll rescue her when we’ve made it aboard the Betty-Lou,” Grandfather stated firmly. “How many new recruits did ye rescue from the jails?” he asked Bragg, who appeared to be some sort of commander.

“Only 47 have been gathered aboard the Betty-Lou. Many of the original resistance be too old or infirm. Even still, we have far too few able-bodied men. Most of the men we freed from the jail be terrible afraid o’ what the Boar Riders will do ta their families and though they promised ta keep the fight goin’ here, they ran ta protect their families.

“Also, with all the preparations, we had little time to recruit from neighboring lands,” Sir Kendrick reported dejectedly. “We did convince 16 men from Sparfold, and six from Blue Rock to join us as soon as they could settle their affairs.

Both Bragg and Kendrick walked ahead and I and Grandfather followed.

“Grandfather, I have been wondering, why do they address you as if you were nobility?” I whispered.

He chuckled a bit, “Tis not I they be addressing as a king but ye.”

“What? Why would they do that? I’m not royalty!” I objected.

“Did ya’ forget the legend so quickly now? We’ve been waitin’ fer a new king fer many centuries, and then ye shows up. Ye canna blame Captain Bragg nor Sir Kendrick for being excited about the prospects,” Grandfather kindly explained and slapped me on the back, “You’ll make a fine king, when the time comes.”

Full realization of my role in the resistance came to me with a shock. Not only was I going to topple the current monarch, but I was to take his place as supreme ruler. How I was supposed to do this, I didn’t have a clue. What I did know was that I knew nothing about ruling a kingdom.

I suppose that Grandfather could tell I was overwhelmed with the idea of being the king. “Dunna worry about this now. Ye will have plenty of time to prepare. Just focus on what be ahead of ye...one step at a time,” he said encouragingly, “Trust yer instincts lad. Leadin’ be in yer blood.”

We arrived at a gap in the side of the hill where there was a narrow door hidden by trees and bushes. Grandfather knocked his peculiar rhythm and the door opened.

“Come in quickly now, the adjudicator has troops scouring this hill looking for all ye,” a voice whispered from the darkness.

One by one we entered through the narrow door; purposefully narrow so that only one person at a time could enter and making it easily defended. There were at least 20 people in the narrow passageway. I lit my ring and there were gasps of surprise and murmurs of, “It be true then!” We followed in single file up the winding stairs until we arrived at the small room at the top of the stairs.

“On the other side of this door, rests the Betty-Lou, not 20 feet above us. Upon a signal from Captain Livingston, she will drop rope ladders and we must swiftly climb. Once aboard we will set sail at yer discretion yer majesty,” Captain Bragg explained.

One by one we exited the hidden door and made our way directly beneath the Betty-Lou. Without warning, five rope ladders slithered down to us. I was surprised that I did not hear any signal from Grandfather for Betty-Lou to do that.

Before any of us could ascend the ladders we heard a man’s muffled oath and a girl’s voice, “Run it’s a trap!” and then a man’s voice, “Catch her! She must not escape!” Then a beam of light shot from the opposite side of the ravine fully exposing me to fire.

“That’s Camphoria!” I said ignoring the light, “We must save her,” I pointed to the direction of Camphoria’s voice.

I was tackled by Captain Bragg just as several arrows and stone projectiles hit the lighted area where I had just been. Strong hands quickly dragged me back into the hidden entrance, that was not so hidden anymore as arrow shafts and projectiles hammered the door.

“Let me go! We cannot leave her!” I growled as I struggled to get free.

“Dunna be a fool, lad. She sold us out and this be just another ruse for us to follow. Why do ye think that they brought her?” Grandfather scolded angrily.

Captain Bragg spoke solemnly, “Though, my Camphoria would never betray us, I agree with Captain Livingston. That be not the way to save her.”

Only when I stopped struggling did I notice that several of our company had been wounded, including Captain Bragg, who had received a shaft in his arm. “Thank you for risking your life and saving mine Captain Bragg,” I said breathlessly, to which he simply nodded acknowledgement.

Then a thought struck me and I voiced it, “Captain Livingston, Camphoria had said something to me as we entered the house. ‘Dunna think bad of me.’ Why had she said that? There was something else...she gave me something. I remembered her strong hand in mine... a parchment. It was dark, so I decided to read it later. I put it... where? Aha!” I shouted pulling the parchment from my vest pocket.

Every eye was now upon me as I read the parchment aloud:

*Most honorable Lord Gideon:*

*They know you are here. Do not go upstairs. Men are waiting for you. Find another way out. I will escape and wait at the right spot.*

*Camphoria*



“You see! My Camphoria tried to warn ye but ye were too dense to understand! She be not a traitor!” Bragg pointed out enthusiastically.

“Watch yer tone when speaking about His majesty!” Sir Kendrick growled menacingly with his hand on his sword.

Bragg blanched when he realized what he had said. “A thousand pardons yer Excellency. I meant no disrespect,” Bragg bowed low and did not rise.

Knowing that I had to say something, I walked over to Captain Bragg, frantically thinking, *What would a king say?... Look, he is shaking in fear. Oh no! He is thinking he might be killed.*

“Rise Captain Bragg. Your insult is forgiven. I know you were concerned about your daughter Camphoria. The task at hand is discovering how we will board the Betty-Lou and then devise a plan to retrieve your daughter. I cannot afford to waste good men like you over unintentional slights.”

Captain Bragg stood up shakily, much relieved.

Grandfather spoke, “They will be surrounding this location in a moment. We can stay here and fight our way onto Betty-Lou, or we can seek another avenue to board her. What say ye m’Lord?”

This was the first time that Grandfather had addressed me in this fashion. I was so shocked that even he regarded me as something more than a lad, it took me a second to reply.

“We cannot stay here. We cannot fight because they have the high ground and we cannot see how many there are. Lead us to your second escape route,” I pronounced. It was a total shot in the dark that sounded kingly. I clung to the hope that since there were two escape hatches in the mansion, there would be two here also.

“Right away m’Liege. This way.”

He rushed down the stairs, and all of us followed suit. He stopped abruptly at a door that I failed to notice on the way in. He pried it open and entered. We followed him up the steep stairs. Arriving at the top, Grandfather motioned for us to be silent, remain still, and extinguish our lights as we stood in the small room. He then opened a door and exited silently. We could feel the cool morning air rush into our cramped space.

A moment later he returned and whispered, “Nice call about the second escape route. Betty-Lou will be here shortly. We must be prepared to board her. Follow me.”

We heard a commotion of angry shouts from below followed by the concussion of explosive fire shafts and high velocity shrapnel weapons designed to cripple airships. Based on the amount of cursing we heard, the Betty-Lou easily avoided the threats.

Not daring to illuminate ourselves, we had to trust that the Betty-Lou knew where we were. After a few anxious moments, Grandfather whispered, “She is here. Grab the ladders.”

I was the last to make my way up the ladder and heard the shafts and stones zoom past me. I swung my foot over the side of the ship and as soon as my foot touched the deck, I felt the same powerful surge of energy I had felt the first time I set foot on the Betty-Lou, but this time it was 1000 times stronger.

Everyone gasped loudly. Not only was I enveloped in green flames, but so was the Betty-Lou! That was not all, however. We heard a loud grinding noise and fell to our knees because deck of the Betty-Lou trembled and shook as from a land quake. The Betty-Lou had transformed from a wide and elegant merchant vessel into a sleek and ferocious looking fighting ship. Two different sides of the same dragon!

I stood up and I came to my senses. “No!” I shouted. “We cannot be seen!” I concentrated furiously to douse the flames, but it was too late.

Though it was only a second or two, it seemed like an eternity—enough for the troops of the Adjudicator to fire their weapons at us. There was no time to relay orders to the helmsman. We had to move out of the firing range now!

How the Betty-Lou responded to Grandfather’s requests without words, I did not know, but I guessed that the Betty-Lou and Grandfather had a special mental connection. Perhaps he knew her thoughts and she his. I didn’t have time to make a request to Grandfather for him to make the command--we had to move immediately. So for the first time I attempted to communicate in my mind to the Betty-Lou the urgency of moving away from the spot we now occupied.

“Betty-Lou, I need you to move out of danger immediately or we will all die,” I thought forcefully.

The response was instantaneous. The Betty-Lou shot forward so quickly that everyone was knocked down to the deck once again. The scatter shots and the deck slicers missed the Betty-Lou by less than the breadth of a hand span.

“Thanks, Betty-Lou! We are not out of trouble yet, keep moving about, and keep out of range,” I thought.

I could not be sure but it seemed I heard her reply, “You are welcome.”

Grandfather stood by my side and whispered, “If ye need my help ‘n dunna know what ta do, just ask, I’ll be right here. Ye be in command now!”

“I’ll do my best. Thanks!” I replied and then I called to the helmsman, “Do you know the ‘Right Spot’?”

“Pardon m’Lord, but we canna go there right now. We were betrayed and it be just another trap,” Grandfather advised in a whisper.

I blazed green in anger, this time only me, and shouted, “Am I not in command?”

As soon as I said those words in that way to Grandfather, I knew that it was wrong. I was starting off my command poorly.

“Of course yer excellency. Helmsman take us to the right spot.” He relayed the command.

The helmsan looked at me quizzically and then Grandfather Livingston stepped to his side and explained to him the location. “Yes, your Excellency. I can take us there, but we’ll be vulnerable ta be attacked if we moor there. It be on a hill where all would be able to see us in the moonlight.”

“Leave that to me. For now, take us out of range of those weapons!” I said grimly. I had an idea. It occurred to me that where there was fire, there was smoke. As sure as I could use my power to create green fire, I believed that I could create a smoke screen as well. I pulled out my sword and instead of thinking about covering it with bright green flames, I concentrated on smoke instead. Sure enough, my sword began exuding copious amounts of green smoke.

“Wow!” I said as I swung it through the air leaving ribbons of smoke, “This could be useful in battle.”

Though I had never been in a battle, I envisioned what it might be like. The closest thing to a battlefield in which I had much experience was the nine-ball pitch. Still swinging the smoking sword, I wrote my initials in the air “GL”

As I watched my initials dissipate in the air, I spoke what I was thinking, “Green smoke won’t do. We will still be seen. There has to be something else.”

Since I was the Fire Lord, I thought the answer might be once again found in fire itself. Then I started thinking more about the anatomy of a fire. I lit a spark stick and a flame erupted from its end. I brought it to my eyes to observe it in detail. "Closest to the wood burning the fire it is completely transparent, then blue, then yellow, then the smoke," I muttered, "I wonder...?"

I pulled out my sword and focused my thoughts on the transparency below the flame. The sword became as transparent as a stinging cloud floater.

"Ah ha!" I exclaimed.

Once again, I became aware that all eyes were upon me, awaiting instructions and mesmerized by what I had just done. "Er hum...It is set, then. We will have to fly by sight only," I told the helmsman. I didn't know if that was possible, but I figured that if we were transparent it would be impossible to see our instruments.

"Yes m'Lord, so it shall be done," the helmsman responded nervously. I saw that Grandfather Livingston was trying to calm him down.

"Captain Bragg, assure that everyone has a station and that everyone on deck is fitted with a safety line. We are going to rescue Camphoria. We may have to move quickly and cannot afford to lose men overboard," I instructed, "Let me know when you are ready."

My thinking was that Captain Bragg would know where everyone was supposed to be. I also guessed that there were safety lines that could be attached to the crew above deck.

"It will be done, my Liege," Captain Bragg bowed and then turned to begin giving orders to the multitude of people on deck.

Apparently, I had said the right things because everyone now moved with purpose and their attention was elsewhere besides being fixed on me. I approached Kendrick and asked, "I would like to stand in the forecandle for best visibility, what safety lines can be attached to me?"

"If you will allow me Sire, I will show you," Sir Kendrick said with a bow and indicated the way to the forecandle.

Soon I was stationed at the light stone controls and was connected with a harness that would allow me to remain standing on the deck regardless of what kind of flying the Betty-Lou was doing.

"Kendrick, let everyone know that it is going to be difficult to see on board the ship in a few moments. Tell them to have their weapons and tools at easy reach," I requested.

Kendrick returned and said, "M'Lord, all the crew be prepared."

"Thank you and get to your own post. Ok, Here we go!" I responded.

I concentrated on making the whole ship just like the invisible part of the flame. The ship began fading until all of its timbers, sails, and weapons became transparent and the sleek form of the Betty-Lou became hazy and was soon lost to view completely. I could feel the energy draining from my body and wondered how long I could maintain invisibility.

I called out to the helmsman, "Fly us straight and true to the right spot."

"Aye, aye yer Majesty!" he replied.

The Betty-Lou descended from the clouds, completely invisible. She picked up speed and the only thing visible was that she left a cumulus trail in her wake.

I had no idea where the "right spot" was, but I trusted my Grandfather and the helmsman knew.

Just then, the helmsmen nervously shouted in my direction, "Sire, we be above the location, what be yer orders?"

"Hold your position for now...uff," I responded, now struggling to focus on maintaining invisibility. The effort was taking all my attention and my strength.

Though we could still see the hazy outlines of the ship, we could see right through it to the ground below. It was also an eerie feeling—not being able to see oneself. But there was one person we could see in the moonlight. She was running full speed to the top of the hill where the rocks formed a small landing pad and a tall tree served as a mooring pole. She was being pursued by several of the Adjudicator’s troops.

“Helmsman. Get us closer,” I ordered and furiously tried to think how to get her aboard. I knew I could shoot flames at the pursuing men and roast them alive, but I also knew that they were just following orders. “What do we have to help her?”

As all the ideas seemed to be coming today, it started with a simple thought. Ships have nets to catch food like sky crawlers and jelly pods. “Ah, ha! We can lower the nets and catch ourselves some troops,” Then I thought, “What do we want the troops for? Let’s catch Camphoria!”

I spoke quickly to the Helmsman, “Move us right above Camphoria.”

“As you wish Sire.”

“Kendrick, prepare to lower the nets over Camphoria,” I said as we approached unseen, not ten body lengths above her.

“Right away m’Lord,” he responded and issued his own commands to the crew.

“Ye know where the nets be, e’en though ye canna see em. Reach out ’n touch’em... Move them into place now. Well, done lads.”

The troops were gaining on Camphoria, I had to slow them down. I pointed my sword and shot a bolt of green fire in front of the charging men. They jumped back in alarm as green flames erupted in front of them. The discharge of energy left me panting for breath and my knees began shaking from the strain of holding the ship invisible. I could see the ship becoming visible again. I refocused all my attention on becoming invisible, but to no avail...I could not do it. I was too weak. Then I felt a surge of energy rise from my feet and instantly the ship was invisible again.

As I looked at the men dousing the flames that had gotten on their clothing, I wondered how I had fired the flames right through the hull of the Betty-Lou. I prayed that I had not done her any damage.

“Lower the nets now!” I shouted.

Translucent nets were lowered onto Camphoria and she screamed in shock and fear. Violently she struggled to be free of her invisible bonds. “Grab a hold of them and we will pull you aboard!” I shouted to her.

Her struggling stopped and she questioned in disbelief, “Lord Gideon? Be that you?”

“Yes, this is Gideon and the Betty-Lou. There’s no time to explain. Grab ahold tight,” I shouted down.

“Sir Kendrick, reel her in!” I ordered, wondering if those were the right terms.

Camphoria squealed a bit when her feet left the ground. The pursuing troops were even more shocked for when they saw her floating in the air they turned around and ran.

“Bring her aboard carefully, Sir Kendrick,” I knew I didn’t have to say that as soon as the word left my mouth, but I felt that is what a captain would say.

“Helmsman, we have to raise the Betty-Lou up to the clouds. Call Captain Bragg to the deck,” I knew I did not need to give those orders either. Even though he was below, Captain Bragg could well see his daughter floating beneath the ship as the nets were drawn in.

Camphoria was shivering with fright as invisible hands brought her aboard an invisible ship. “What magic hath wrought this? I can feel ye and hear ye but I canna see ye,” she looked around wide-eyed, “Be I aboard the Betty-Lou?”

I responded, “Yes Camphoria, you are aboard the Betty-Lou.”

“My Lord! Help me. I be bound with invisible cords and held fast with invisible hands.” She pleaded in the direction of my voice.

“Be patient Camphoria. We had to use the nets to retrieve you, but the men are having trouble untangling you because they cannot see anything either,” I explained.

As we gained altitude, I stopped the invisibility so the men could safely handle the netting and the winches. I was becoming accustomed to hear the audible gasp from the crew as the ship became solid again. I was amazed that I could hold the invisibility. Before the infusion of power from the deck, I had exhausted all of my strength and could barely stand. I could feel the energy coming up from the ship, fortifying me and replacing the energy that I had expended. “I will have to investigate where this energy came from later,” I thought.

I disconnected my safety harness and left the forecastle to help with bringing Camphoria aboard. The winches were just being drawn into the deck of the ship with Camphoria securely within the nets. Captain Bragg stood by, anxiously awaiting his daughter’s release from the nets. Sir Kendrick and his team efficiently lowered the nets to the deck and successfully disentangled Camphoria.

As soon as she was free a shout of triumph rang from all on deck. Captain Bragg loudest of all, held his arms wide open to hug his daughter as she ran towards him. Camphoria ran past her father and to my surprise gave me a hug that once again reminded me of the constrictive strength of rock serpents.

“I knew you would come for me Lord Gideon!” she said as she took my face in her hands and she kissed me full on the lips.

After the surprise of it, I cannot say I did not enjoy it, but I barely knew her. Luckily her father came to my rescue when he saw my confusion and said, “Camphoria, dear. Mind your place. You be huggin’ and kissin’ His Worshipfulness. Tis not be fittin’ yer station.”

She right away disengaged and a red flush filled her face. “Please pardon my affrontery m’Lord!” She bowed low, with her arms out to her side.

“Rise Camphoria. There is nothing to pardon,” I grinned, “I am just as glad to have you back again... doubly so,” I casually touched my lips, “Here is the man you should be hugging and kissing whose bravery and loyalty only match your own,” I pointed to her father.

“Thank ye my Lord,” she said as she stood and then rushed over to give her father a big hug.