

Pirate - The barking Kookaburra

Adrian Plitzco

“This is a cute, funny, amazing story”

Natasha

“This book deserves 100 stars”

Davey, 3rd grade

“Sooooooooo cute!!!!!!!”

Esme Prasad, age 9

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Chapter One

Thunderstorm

A thunderstorm had just passed over the little farm house. You could still

hear a faint thunder, rolling up the valley of Tantaraboo. The rain had dumped lots of water onto the backyard with its tiny vegetable patch and dozens of flower pots. The vegetables and the flowers weighed down by heavy water drops looked sad, as if they were crying. But soon they would suck in the water, stand up straight again and look more beautiful than ever before.

Not so the little bird standing between the lettuce and the carrots. It was soaked, its feathers pointing away from its shivering body like crooked needles.

“What the blooming tail is it, mate?” Buddha asked. Buddha was the black cat who knew almost everything. He knew instantly what kind of baby bird it was he was looking at. But he pretended not to know, because he wanted to tease the dogs. The dogs would not know the answer, Buddha knew that. In his opinion dogs knew nothing and they definitely were stupid.

“I don’t know,” Hoover answered. Hoover was the neighbour's dog. “But it looks like lunch to me,” he quickly added and leaped forward, his mouth wide open. Just before his fat paws would crush the little bird, Ajax unexpectedly made a dart for the bird, picked it up and threw it into the air.

“It's a great toy,” Ajax said. Ajax was the other neighbour's dog. He wagged his tail, swayed his bottom back and forth, ready to jump and catching the bird midair. Ajax was not aware of Stelze sneaking up on him from behind. Stelze was the dog who belonged to the farm, like Buddha, the cat. She placed her big paw on Ajax's tail as he jumped.

“Ouch!” he yelped and fell flat onto his snout.

“It is not lunch and it is not a toy,” Stelze said with her deep and firm voice.

With a splish-splash the soaked bird landed on her snout.

“It's a baby bird,” she now said as softly as she could.

Buddha rolled his eyes. “It's a kookaburra, mate. They are birds you only find here in Australia and also in New Guinea. They eat fish, frogs, lizards and snakes.”

“Yuk!” Ajax said, shaking his head.

“Yum!” Hoover said, licking his lips.

Buddha started to yawn. He seemed to be bored with lecturing the dogs about Australian bird life. But looking closer you could see that he enjoyed it. “Yeah, mate,” he concluded, “it is a bloody kookaburra.”

“It's a baby,” Stelze said again, her eyes crisscrossing, trying to focus on the kookaburra sitting on her snout. Stelze was a very tall dog. Her legs were longer than the longest stilts. And because she was a Doberman dog of German origin, her name was Stelze, the German word for stilts. She actually was not as stupid as Buddha liked to portray her. She was an old dog and her life had taught her a lot of valuable lessons. She was smart and wise. She knew what was bad for her and she knew what was good for others. She had a big heart for all creatures of the world. “Do you have a name?” she asked the kookaburra as gently as possible so she would not scare it.

“Pirate,” the kookaburra peeped, his eyes wandering from Hoover to Ajax and back to Buddha.

Stelze could sense that Pirate was a bit scared. “Don't worry about them, Pirate,” she said. “They are my friends. They won't do you any harm. Ajax just loves to play. Hoover is always hungry and just eats anything that has flavour. But by now they know that you are neither a toy nor a sandwich.” She looked at Ajax and Hoover with stern eyes. “Don't they?”

Ajax and Hoover nodded.

“And Buddha is not interested in birds. He's too busy telling us dogs how stupid we are. Am I right?”

Buddha did not even look up. He rolled his eyes and yawned once more.

“I am Pirate,” Pirate said again, now more proudly.

“And you look like one too,” Ajax and Hoover said at the same time.

Pirate indeed did look like a pirate. All around his left eye, in a perfect circle, grew black feathers. At either end there was a thick line of black that went all around his head. It looked as if he wore a black eye patch, like real pirates do.

“But I am sure he is not as naughty as real pirates are,” Stelze said. “After all he is still a baby. He can't fly yet.”

“I am not a baby. I am the most dreaded pirate in the world”, Pirate said, puffing up his chest. “All the creatures in the bush fear me. Watch out for me! Or I will come and give you a hiding until you beg for your life. And I can fly.” He flapped his soaked wings, splashing the water into Stelze's eyes. She instantly closed them and bit her tongue so she would not growl. Ajax, Hoover and Buddha

burst out laughing.

“Stelze hates water,” Ajax shouted.

“That's your first shower for years. It was about time,” Hoover screamed.

“Why are your ears so big?” Pirate asked and jumped onto the top of Stelze's head.

“They're her bed,” Hoover quickly said. “She uses the left ear as her mattress and the right one as a blanket.”

“No, they're her wings,” Ajax joked. “Watch out, she'll fly away any minute.”

“She might give you flying lessons,” Hoover added.

Pirate was jumping up and down on Stelze's head. “You are funny,” he said, peeping wildly in between. “You make me laugh.”

“Kookaburra's laughter sounds different to me, mate,” Buddha said. “Their laughing call is raucous and crazy.”

“Yeah, you're right,” Ajax and Hoover agreed. “When kookaburras laugh it sounds like a bunch of monkeys having fun.”

“Why don't you laugh like a real kookaburra, mate?” Buddha asked.

Pirate went quiet all of a sudden. He stopped jumping, his wings now hanging down from his tiny body as if they had become too heavy to ever spread again. “I don't know,” he said.

“Where is your home?” Stelze asked, her eyes rolling, trying to catch a glimpse of Pirate sitting on top of her head.

“I don't know,” Pirate answered.

“How did you get here without flying?” Buddha asked.

“I . . . I don't know.”



Chapter Two From Outer Space

In the evening, after Ajax and Hoover had gone back to their own homes and Buddha was on the roof top watching the stars, Stelze lay down on her couch out on the veranda. Pirate quickly curled up between her long legs and fell asleep in an instant. His feathers were now fluffy and shiny, his stomach full. Because everybody insisted, Buddha had agreed to share his dinner with Pirate.

“Kookaburras don’t eat dog food. They eat fish. It was *you* who said that,” the dogs had lectured him.

Pirate loved it. He sunk his strong beak into the mushy fishy bits and swallowed them as if there was no tomorrow. Earlier in the evening Stelze had wondered where Pirate could sleep tonight. Maybe she would lift him up onto the lowest branch of the gum tree in the backyard. But she quickly dismissed the idea. What if a feral cat sneaked up on him and grabbed him? She thought about scratching some leaves together to build a nest under the house. But what if a snake sneaked up on him and bit him? Pirate had to sleep on the couch, between her legs.

Stelze did not take her eyes off him. At one stage she tried to hum a song she heard once on her master's radio. She thought that would comfort Pirate. But Buddha was yelling down from the roof top:

“Hey, mate! Your howling gives me the shivers. Are you trying to scare us all to death?”

So she stopped humming and instead licked Pirate's feathers clean, gently and carefully.

“How is he doing?” all of a sudden Hoover asked.

“Holy bone!” Stelze whispered. “You gave me a fright. What are you doing here so late at night?”

“I couldn't sleep. So I asked myself why don't you wander up here and see how Pirate is doing.”

“He is doing fine. He's asleep.”

“Poor thing”, Hoover sighed and rested his snout on the couch, very close to Pirate.

“You're not trying to snatch him away from me, are you?” Stelze growled.

“No! No! No!” Hoover insisted, “I'm not eating my friends. Friends are for

life. You have to treat them with love and care.”

“That's something I have never heard coming out of your brain before. Who told you that?”

“I did, mate,” Buddha yelled from the roof top.

“Well”, Stelze sighed, “Pirate is indeed a poor thing. It must be hard for him not to be with his parents.”

“Perhaps he doesn't have any. Where he comes from there are no such things as parents,” said Hoover.

“What a lot of offal! Where do you think he comes from?” Buddha yelled from the roof top.

“From outer space!” It was Ajax’s voice.

“Holy bone,” whispered Stelze. Her heart was pounding.

“Holy lunch,” whispered Hoover, pulling his tail between his legs.

“You gave us a fright,” said both.

“I couldn't sleep. So I asked myself why don't you wander up here and see how Pirate is doing,” said Ajax and jumped onto the couch. “Hey, listen! I have the proof that Pirate is from outer space. Do you remember the thunderstorm this afternoon? Do you remember the lightning? Well, that wasn't lightning. It definitely was not. I mean it was kind of a lightning. But in fact it was the engine of a UFO. It sends out a bright light, as a disguise, so you can't see that it is a UFO.”

“UFO!” Buddha yelled down from the roof top. “There aren't any UFO's.”

“Yes there are,” Ajax insisted.

“Mate, it is scientifically not proven,” said Buddha. “And who knows better than me that they do not exist? I have been watching the night sky all my life and have not seen a single one so far.”

“Will you guys shut up,” Stelze interfered. “Your stupid argument will wake up Pirate.”

“Well, he definitely fell out of the sky,” Ajax now said quietly.

“He's right,” Hoover agreed. “And we only first saw him after the lightning. Maybe it was a sorcerer or a wizard who brought him here. He performed magic with his wand. They have sort of a flashing light, haven't they? Maybe Pirate was

originally a flower.”

“Or a rock,” Ajax suggested.

“Or a worm,” said Hoover.

“Oh you dogs are so stupid. It makes my claws cringe,” Buddha yelled down from the roof top. “There are no UFO's and there are no sorcerers. Get it, mate?”

“Oh yeah, Mister Know-It-All. Do you have a better explanation why he's here?” Hoover and Ajax asked.

“Not yet, mate. I'm still thinking about one. That little bird didn't come from a different planet.”

“No, he comes from the furthest star away,” said Ajax. “From the edge of the universe.”

“Hang on,” Hoover interrupted. “Since he's a pirate he must have arrived on a huge pirate ship.”

“A schooner that would be,” Buddha corrected him. “A pirate's ship is called a schooner. It was the pirate's favourite ship in the Caribbean. . .”

“Let's stop right there,” said Stelze. “We will find out where Pirate comes from and we will take him back there. But right now he needs to sleep. He still is a baby.”



Chapter Three

Floppy Ears

The next day, long before the first sun beams hit the couch on the veranda, Pirate woke up. He did not open his eyes yet. He felt the warmth and the softness of Stelze's legs around his body and snuggled up to them, one last time. He felt so comfortable that a deep sigh came out of his beak, from deep down in his belly. Finally he jumped up like a spring and hopped onto Stelze's forehead.

“Wake up!” he peeped. “Let's play.”

Stelze did not hear him. She was still snoring.

Pirate looked around. What he saw seemed strange, but at the same time very familiar to him: the backyard with its tiny vegetable patch and dozens of flower pots; the gum tree in the far corner; the veranda with its sun bleached timber decking; the couch with its ripped cover and Stelze. Somehow Pirate felt a bit strange about himself too. He couldn't really say what it was that made him feel safe being around Stelze. She definitely was not a kookaburra, or any other bird. However her ears were as big as grown up kookaburra wings. Pirate could not imagine that Stelze would ever manage to fly with them. They were too fluffy. He took a good grip with his claws on Stelze's forehead and leaned forward. He stretched his neck as far as he could and grabbed the tip of Stelze's ear with his beak. He lifted it up. It was very hard work. The ear was heavy and Pirate had to step backwards, at the same time making sure he did not fall off. It cost him a lot of effort and he surely was losing strength. Soon his beak could not hold onto it any longer and he let go. Stelze's ear slipped back like a wet towel falling off a rack and landed over her eyes with a slap. That looked too funny. It made Pirate laugh, but all that came out of his throat was a weird and squeaking sound.

Compared to Pirate's beak, Stelze's mouth was an odd shape and texture. Pirate's beak was pointy, hard and strong. Stelze's mouth was round and the skin as soft as the feathers under a bird's wing.

"How does she catch a worm with that?" Pirate asked himself, pulling her lips. Both claws pushing firmly against Stelze's snout he used all his strength and stretched the gummy lip almost over his head. There was this hollow smack, like the sound of a popping cork, as the lip flicked back and Pirate fell backwards, landing on his bottom.

"Ouch!"

Stelze opened her eyes.

"What happened?" she asked, "did you hurt yourself?"

She pulled her tongue over Pirate's chest, licking away some dust stuck between the feathers. Pirate thought it was a funny game.

"Yeah!" he shouted and surrendered himself to the tickling of the tongue. He squealed and shrieked and thought this was sheer bliss. Stelze's tongue made its way up to his head. Pirate, still on his back and his legs helplessly kicking the air,

stared at the huge tongue hovering above his face. It was as wet as a dripping facecloth.

“No!” he yelled.

But it was too late. The tongue landed on his face with a smack like a whale’s splash into the ocean. It buried him under its warm and spongy flesh. Pirate held his breath.

“Yuk! Yuk!” he choked as the tongue slid over his beak and eyes, leaving a soaking trail of dog’s spit.

“Having a morning bath, mate?” Buddha said amused as he placed himself on the couch’s arm rest.

“Babies are all the same,” said Stelze. “They don’t like to be washed.”

“I am not a baby anymore,” Pirate insisted. “I am the most dreaded pirate in the world.”

Ajax jumped onto the veranda. He was panting:

“I did it. I have won. I am first again. Great. Absolutely fantastic. Nobody beats me. I am the fastest dog in Tantaraboo. Good morning, everybody.”

Shortly after, Hoover jumped onto the veranda. Rather, he dragged himself up. His tongue was hanging out of his mouth and nearly touching the ground.

“I nearly won”, he panted, “I nearly won by the skin of my teeth. But, at least I came second. That’s pretty good. Good morning, everybody.”

“How can anyone be so brainless,” said Buddha, rolling his eyes. “Speaking of brain, I thought last night about our strange fellow Pirate. The fact that he does not know where his home is and how he got here means that he is suffering amnesia.”

“Ahm . . . what?” the dogs asked.

“Amnesia,” Buddha repeated, “Am-ne-sia.”

“Is that the name of the UFO he travelled with?” Ajax asked.

“It is the name of the planet he comes from,” Hoover corrected him.

Buddha threw his front legs over his head.

“Amnesia is the medical term for loss of memory. Pirate can’t remember a thing. It’s like he has an empty wall in his head. Someone or something has taken off the pictures. They’re gone. He’s lost them all.”

“I haven’t lost anything,” said Pirate. “I’ve never had anything anyway.”

Buddha pointed at him and shouted:

“See what I mean?”

“How can he lose his memory?” Stelze asked.

“Probably got a hefty knock on his head, mate. Or had a bad adventure he prefers not to remember.”

“Did you?” Hoover asked Pirate.

Pirate shrugged his wings.

“Let’s go and search for your memory,” said Ajax. “Us dogs are champions in sniffing things out.”

“Great idea!” Hoover added. “Let’s start in the backyard. It might still be there.”

Buddha raised his voice. You could hear that he now was on the brink of losing it.

“Hold your breath, you . . . dogs! A memory is not a thing hiding under a rock. His memory got lost in his brain, mate. He has to find it himself.”

“As a matter of fact it is a brilliant idea to search for Pirate’s memory”, Stelze now declared. “We will take him on a walk through Tantaraboo. Any tree, rock or creek we’ll come across he might recognize it, and it may trigger his memory. Step by step he will remember where he came from.”



Chapter Four

Sword of Gold and Silver

Their walk took them to the many secret places in the valley of Tantaraboo. At the western end they came across the hollow gum tree. A fire had gone through the area many years ago. The tree withstood the flames. But its core burnt out completely. Now it was hollow. A gap led inside the tree where it offered enough

room for three dogs and a cat.

“We call it the cave,” Stelze said to Pirate. “Do you recognize it?”

Pirate shook his head but said:

“A cave! There must be a treasure in there.”

Hoover looked at him in surprise.

“There is no treasure in there.”

But Pirate insisted.

“There certainly is. Every cave has a treasure. Let’s go on a treasure hunt.”

He disappeared through the gap.

“He doesn’t recognize it,” said Stelze. She was disappointed. “He obviously didn’t come through here when he got lost.”

“I didn’t know there is a treasure in there,” Hoover said, still baffled. “I wonder what kind of treasure it could be.”

“A big fat bone, for sure,” said Ajax, wagging his tail.

Hoover pricked his ears. Saliva was dribbling out of his mouth.

“Let’s go and find it.”

Both squeezed themselves through the gap, disappearing too into the cave.

“Wait for me,” Stelze called and rushed through the gap as well.

Buddha stayed back. He shook his head.

“Blooming dogs! They hear bone and instantly lose their mind.”

Inside the cave it was dark. Pirate could not see much. But he clearly heard the dogs sniffing around.

“Pirates, avast! Find the treasure!” he called. “That’s an order.”

“Aye, aye captain!” said Hoover, bumping into Ajax.

“Get your nose away from my bottom,” he protested.

“I can’t smell a bone,” said Stelze. “I don’t think there is one in here.”

“I found it,” yelled Pirate. “I found the treasure. Yo-ho-ho!”

The dogs chuckled as they saw the crooked twig Pirate had picked up from the dusty ground. He proudly held it in his beak.

“It’s a sword. It’s made of gold and silver.”

“Wow!” said Ajax.

“It’s the most beautiful sword I have ever seen,” said Hoover.

“It must have belonged to a king once,” said Stelze.

“Now it’s mine,” said Pirate, brandishing the twig. “Pirates, avast! Look over there. It’s Captain Crook from the ghost ship. He is attacking us. He’s after the sword. Everybody take their weapons. Fight for your life.”

The dogs had given up their hopes of finding a bone. Instead they now enjoyed playing along with Pirate’s pirate play. Stelze danced on her hind legs, wrestling one of Captain Crook’s bloodthirsty buccaneers. Ajax bit them in their legs and made them fall over. Hoover had picked up a stick himself and swung it around, hitting the buccaneer’s heads.

“Take this,” he shouted. “Take that. And this. And that.”

Pirate was the bravest. He fought Captain Crook, piercing the gold and silver sword straight into his heart. But Captain Crook did not cringe. He still stood on his legs with a dirty smirk on his face. “He’s not dying,” Pirate shouted. “He and his pirates are ghosts.”

“They are invincible,” said Hoover.

“The darkness is their protector,” said Stelze.

Ajax suggested it would be best to lure them outside.

“The sunlight will kill them.”

“Follow me,” said Pirate.

He was just about to jump through the gap when all of a sudden a hollow voice from above shouted:

“Booh! Booh!”

Everybody froze.

“What was that?” whispered Hoover.

“A ghost?” Ajax feared.

“I can’t smell anybody,” said Stelze.

“It’s impossible to smell ghosts,” said Ajax. “They don’t reek because they’re dead.”

The hollow voice spoke again:

“It’s me, Captain Crook.”

Everybody was now screaming. Pirate dropped his twig and hid between Stelze’s legs. Hoover pushed himself under Stelze, trying to hide too. And Ajax

jumped on top of Hoover, at the same time squeezing himself under Stelze's belly. Only Stelze had no one she could hide under. She was shaking with fear.

The hollow voice continued:

"I want my sword back."

Everybody flinched.

"He's a real ghost," said Hoover.

"What do we do now?" asked Ajax.

"Someone has to give him back the sword," said Stelze.

"Not me," said Pirate.

"Just give me the blooming sword, mate," chuckled the hollow voice.

"Hang on," said Ajax. "I think I know that chuckle."

"It's Buddha," said Hoover.

"He played a trick on us," said Stelze.

Buddha was rolling on the ground with laughter as Pirate and the dogs came out of the tree. Pirate hopped onto his belly, shrieking and peeping:

"I was so scared. That was so funny."

"I had the best time in my life, mate," Buddha laughed.

After everybody else had a good belly laugh Stelze suggested walking on to the next secret place. After all they were on a mission. They wanted to find out where Pirate came from. Pirate grabbed the stick. He did not want to leave it behind. It was his treasure. And so they marched on.



Chapter Five

Avast

At the northern end of Tantaraboo they reached the boulder. It was gigantic and had a face. Two horizontal crevices across the top marked the eyebrows. Its hollow eyes below were made out of two dents. Right in the middle of the face sat

a big fat bulge. That was the nose. The mouth was a circular hole.

“We call it *The Whistler*”, Stelze said to Pirate. “Do you recognize it?”

Pirate again vigorously shook his head and said:

“But it looks great. Is that Treasure Island?”

“Yes, it is,” Hoover said all excited. He knew that Pirate would come up with another pirate adventure. “I do remember now. I did once hide a bone under it. But I never found it again.”

“That’s what Treasure Island is for,” said Pirate. “For hiding your treasure, so nobody can find it. Let’s hide my sword. Pirates! That’s an order!”

“Aye, aye captain,” Ajax and Hoover said and followed Pirate who had started running around the boulder. All of a sudden he stopped. Ajax managed to stop just in time. But Hoover had not paid attention and bumped into Ajax.

“Get your nose away from my bottom,” Ajax protested.

“Shush! Avast!” Pirate said. “There is a big ship landing on the other side of the island. It’s a schooner full of pirates.”

A bunch of greedy pirates jumped off the ship, shouting and swearing.

“They look very scary,” whispered Pirate.

Hoover was scratching his head.

“What are you talking about? They’re not pirates. It’s Buddha and Stelze.”

“Shush!” Ajax whispered. “Of course they are pirates. They are from Bloodcrust Island. Look at them how bloodthirsty they are. If they find us they will slit our throats.”

“You’re right,” Hoover agreed. “They do look really scary.”

“They are after my sword,” said Pirate, determined to defend his treasure. “We’ll surprise them. We’ll attack them from two sides. Ajax and I go this way. Hoover you go that way.”

“Aye, aye captain,” said Hoover, chuckling and rubbing his paws. “That’ll be great fun.”

“But watch the crocodiles,” Ajax warned him.

“Crocodiles?”

“Treasure Island is teeming with big fat crocodiles.”

“And lions and tigers,” Pirate added. “And dragons. And monsters.”

Hoover hesitated for a moment but then puffed up his chest.

“No problem. I can handle them.”

“Let’s go,” Pirate ordered. “We attack the pirates on my command.”

Pirate, Ajax and Hoover were crawling around the boulder, trying not to make any noise. Pirate watched out for the wild animals, carefully checking out every corner, gap and crevice in the boulder. He felt safe with his sword of gold and silver and was not afraid of the battle with the greedy pirates. Hoover however on the other side of the boulder tried hard not to burst into laughter. He was too excited by the thought of charging from behind the boulder, roaring like a lion, and giving Buddha and Stelze the biggest fright of their lives. Still, he carefully watched his surroundings. You never knew if there really was a dragon or a monster hiding somewhere.

“Attack!” Pirate shouted and on command the three rushed forward, screaming, yelling, Hoover again chuckling. But Buddha and Stelze were not where they were supposed to be. The spot where they had just been standing was now deserted. They were gone. They had vanished. Pirate, Ajax and Hoover looked at each other puzzled.

“Where are they? Where have they gone?”

That very moment, Buddha and Stelze suddenly popped up from behind the boulder. “Attack!” they yelled and charged Pirate, Ajax and Hoover. All three got a big fright and ran away like headless chooks. But eventually, after they realized what was going on, everyone chased everyone around the boulder. There was heaps of screaming and giggling and laughing. Pirate had great fun. Hoover snatched his stick, Pirate snatched it back. Buddha tickled him, Pirate poked his leg. Ajax nudged him with his paw, Pirate nipped his tail. Stelze smacked him with her dripping wet tongue, Pirate jumped onto her nose. On and on it went until everybody dropped onto the grass, out of breath and exhausted.

“What about my sword?” Pirate asked. “We still need to hide it.”

Ajax had a funny idea. He shoved the stick into the boulder’s circular mouth. Now *The Whistler* was not whistling anymore. It looked as if it was sucking a noodle. Everybody was rolling on the ground laughing. Except Pirate, he was shrieking.



Chapter Six

The Giant Octopus

Their walk finally ended at the third and last secret place. It was the gorge in the eastern corner of Tantaraboo. One side was a steep bank. The other side was like a cliff. Tall gum trees stood squeezed in between the huge rocks. Along the bottom of the gorge ran a creek. In one spot it had banked up against a rock and formed a big pond. Its water was crystal clear, deep and icy cold. Perfect for a dip on a hot summer's day.

"We call it the pool", Stelze said to Pirate. "Do you recognize it?"

Again, Pirate vigorously shook his head.

Hoover jumped right into the water with a big splash.

"What is he doing?" Pirate asked.

"He's swimming," Ajax answered.

"Like a pirate ship," Pirate shouted. "It's my ship. My schooner. I want to hop on."

Hoover swam back to the bank for Pirate to jump onto his back. Pirate was now in command. He was dreaded Captain Babybird, ruling over the gang of pirates on his ship. He told the Quartermaster to look out for the other ships they could attack. The Sailing Master pulled up the sails to catch the wind, despite the still air down here in the gorge. The Gunner quickly aimed the cannon at everything that moved.

Ajax jumped into the water.

"Avast! Avast!" Pirate shouted. "There is the sea monster. The giant octopus. It's going to eat us. Let's get away from here."

"Aye, aye captain," Hoover said, accidentally swallowing water. He snorted and coughed while Pirate was urging him to go faster.

“It’s hungry like a bear. It wants us for breakfast.”

Ajax liked the idea of being a giant octopus. He gave everything to be a very scary one. He raised his front legs, pretending to swing around his giant tentacles. Their countless suction cups hovered over Pirate and Hoover, threatening to latch onto them and suck them dry. Ajax took a mouthful of water and spouted it in a big fat jet directly at Pirate.

“The octopus is spitting black ink at us,” Pirate yelled. “Faster, Hoover. Go faster.”

The force of the jet nearly swept Pirate off Hoover’s back. He clung to Hoover’s ear, burying his claws deep into the skin.

“Ouch!” Hoover yowled. “We have been hit. We’re going under.”

Pirate yelped and screeched. He was terrified of getting eaten by the giant octopus. Well, he knew that Ajax was only pretending. He actually was not keen to get wet. He was a bit scared of falling into the water. After all he was a bird that could not swim.

“I am not a giant octopus anymore,” Ajax eventually said. “I am now a pirate too. Captain Crook from Bloodcrust Island.”

“Friend or foe?” Pirate asked.

“Friend. Let’s have a pirate’s party.”

“Yo-ho-ho!” everyone cheered.

Whilst Pirate, Ajax and Hoover went back onto safe ground, Stelze and Buddha were watching them from under a tree. They had a serious talk.

“My idea of showing him all these places is not working”, Stelze said disappointed. “He cannot remember a thing.”

“He truly lost his memory, mate,” said Buddha.

“I guess we will never know where he comes from.”

“It might not be for good, mate. Sometimes memories do come back after a while.”

“How?”

“Well, it either just comes back by itself or Pirate gets another whack on his head and then it comes back.”

“No, we can’t do that. We can’t hit him. We can’t do him harm.”

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