

## Found

“Oh no! Man overboard! Man overboard! I’ll save you! Thanks, Captain! Don’t do it again, we’ve got to find that treasure.”

I’m Charles, Charles Grettinburg, and I am, er, was *obsessed* with pirates. As a kid I spent all my time outside pretending I was the captain of my ship (a cardboard box) and my crew (all my stuffed animals.) I didn’t really play with other kids very much, I mean, why have other actors when you can play every role perfectly all by yourself? “Let’s chart our course south east... no... west east towards the uhh, skull pond!” I would say as I came up with new obstacles and adventures for my crew and I to conquer. Living in the big city, that joy soon died, at least on the outside. I got teased and bullied as I grew up, and I soon learned to keep the thrill of escaping to sea in my mind, never showing any bit of emotion whenever even the subject of pirates comes up. Now I’m just the kid in the back that is always daydreaming and never knows the answer.

“Charlie Brown? Charlie Brooown? Hey! Charlie? Wake up!” my teacher calls out. I snap out of my daze after what seems like years later.

“Sorry Mrs. Cambarry. Ummm... what was the question?” I ask. The class starts laughing, and I slump in my seat.

“Well if you were paying attention, you would know, wouldn’t you?” replied my english teacher, Queen Alexandra Petunia Cambarry the 3rd.

Her real name is just Alex Cambarry, but she wants all of her students to “*live the story*”, so she acts like we’re all in an ultimate story mash up of bits of every genre and every style, giving us each nicknames and characters to play. The minute she learned my name, she said, “Like Charlie Brown!” and stuck with it throughout the year. It’s pretty annoying, but what can I do? Adults never listen to me. No one ever listens to me.

She continues, “And that’s Queen Cambarry to you. Anyway, the question was, if I give you the sentence, ‘Bob goes home to blank his house’ what verb would I use? Clean, or cleans?”

“Umm, cleans?” I answer. The class laughs once more.

Mrs. Cambarry walks over and grabs my notebook. “No!” I gasp. I had been doodling treasure maps, pirates and ships. I anxiously watch as she scans over my so called notes. Not

looking upward, she tells me, “Come with me.” She walks out into the hallway, notebook in hand, not even glancing back to see if I follow. Reluctantly, I do.

The hallway was cold, with tall, red brick walls and smooth white tiles covering the ground. There’s a window into my classroom and I can see all the kids in there whispering about what they think is going on. I see one girl with bright red hair and a face full of freckles lean over and speaks to her brunette friend in a hushed tone, “What a weirdo.” I see her friend whisper back, “I know right? He’s so stupid he never knows the answer. I hope he gets in HUGE trouble.” The red head nods. I think to myself, that’s strange. Those two are normally nice to me at lunch.

As I close the door behind me, Mrs. Cambarry takes a seat on the ground. “Sit,” she beckons to the empty space in front of her. Closing my notebook and staring at me through her big, red glasses with her deep blue eyes, she sighs, “You’ve got to *focus*, Charles.” I was taken aback. She used my actual name; this must be serious. My teacher continues with an earnest look in her eyes, “You’re failing this class and from the looks of it, many others as well. I know sometimes school can be boring and it’s much more fun to draw in your book, but you’ve got to get your head out of the clouds! You don’t want to have to repeat sixth grade! Look, if pirates are what you want then I can incorporate them into our story somehow. Do you think that would help you pay attention? I could tell the class that you had a suggestion for our story and…”

“NO!” I interrupt, “No they can’t know, you can’t tell them I... *ugh* you don’t have to do anything, I can figure this out on my own. I’m *fine*!”

I get up and storm back to the door, snatching my book, but she grabs my arm. “What are you doing? Let go! Just leave me alone!” I yell, struggling to escape from her firm grip.

“Charles! Listen to me! I’m not mad and you’re not in trouble! I just want to help you!” she tries to calm me down.

“No! You’re not my mom!” I scream, now in tears. I sink back down to the ground and curl up into a ball. “You’re not my mom.”

My mom died last year. She had severe pancreatic cancer. For months she told me that it was going to be okay, that the doctors were doing everything they could to help her, but it wasn’t enough. I watched her slowly lose her strength, then her hair, then her life. Since then, my love of pirates resurfaced. It’s been the only thing that can calm me down and distract me from how much I miss her, how much I want to crawl up into her bed and hug her until I feel better. How

much I want to sit down at the dinner table and have her warm, homemade rolls and lasagna. How much I want to be able to give a gift on mothers day, and bring two parents to my graduation. But all that disappears when I think of pirates. I'm not the weird kid with no mom when I'm sailing the seas searching for lost gold. I'm not the kid in the back of the class who never knows the answer. I'm happy and free when I'm a pirate. But eventually I have to stop, and cold, harsh reality punches me in the face as I remember who I am, and what my life really is.

"Oh, sweetie," Mrs. Cambarry whispers, "I'm so sorry. I know I'm not your mother. Your mother was an astounding woman, do you know how I know that?"

"No," I mumble.

"I know because she was able to raise an incredible young man like you. I *dream* of accomplishing such a thing with my two little boys. Every mother does. Is this why you can't focus? Is your mother's death, for some reason, why you doodle pirates in your notebook?" Mrs. Cambarry carefully takes my notebook from my hands and skims back through the pages of daring pirates in dangerous quests to save the day. I watch her scan through, and I see the realization hit her as she goes back and double check. In every drawing, in every doodle, the main character has the same green eyes and messy brown hair as me. Also in every page, the pirate saves a beautiful woman with identical green eyes, yet her own, flowing blonde hair from some untimely death.

"Is this you?" My teacher asks. I nod. "And is this her?" I nod once again. "Oh honey," she pulls me in for a hug, "It's okay, it's okay. You couldn't have saved her. I wish you could have, just as easily as in your drawings, but there was nothing you could have done. I'm so sorry." As we both sit there crying in the middle of the hallway, I find a small bit of comfort in her embrace. This is the first time I've ever let anyone see my art. I've never talked about it, or my mom before. It feels... good, letting it all out. It's like, I finally found the map to a big treasure chest. Like I finally found a way to start dealing with my pain instead of bottling it all up. In that moment, I realize something. For the first time in a long, long time, I opened up. And more importantly, I have a friend.

The End