



## Pirate Food

The parrot squawked, signaling the end of swashbuckling class. Marianne lumbered across the deck to her next class, How to See with an Eyepatch.



She couldn't believe how interested all the other student pirates were. They took notes. They practiced tilting their heads to look out from under their patches. They discussed fabric and elastic. But Marianne didn't care. Marianne was dreaming about omelettes.

In particular, she was dreaming about the omelette she had eaten the day before. She often jumped ship during lunch hour and rowed ashore in a canoe. Once on land, she'd savor the latest meringue desserts and cheese casseroles at the chic village restaurants.



During every meal, she scribbled her thoughts in a notebook. "The red pepper in the sardine sauté leaves a hint of intrigue on the tongue," she'd write. "But the real star of the meal is the praline pie, which adds just the right dash of pizzazz."

Then she'd put away her notes, shove a few morsels in her pocket as a souvenir, and head back to the pirate ship just in time for sword fighting class. As she paddled, Marianne always thought about how there had to be more to life than swabbing decks and lugging treasure chests up from the briny deep.

So when career day rolled around, it was her big chance to reveal her secret dream.

The young pirates gathered around Cap'n Grossbeard to listen to him jabber about the importance of choosing a career.



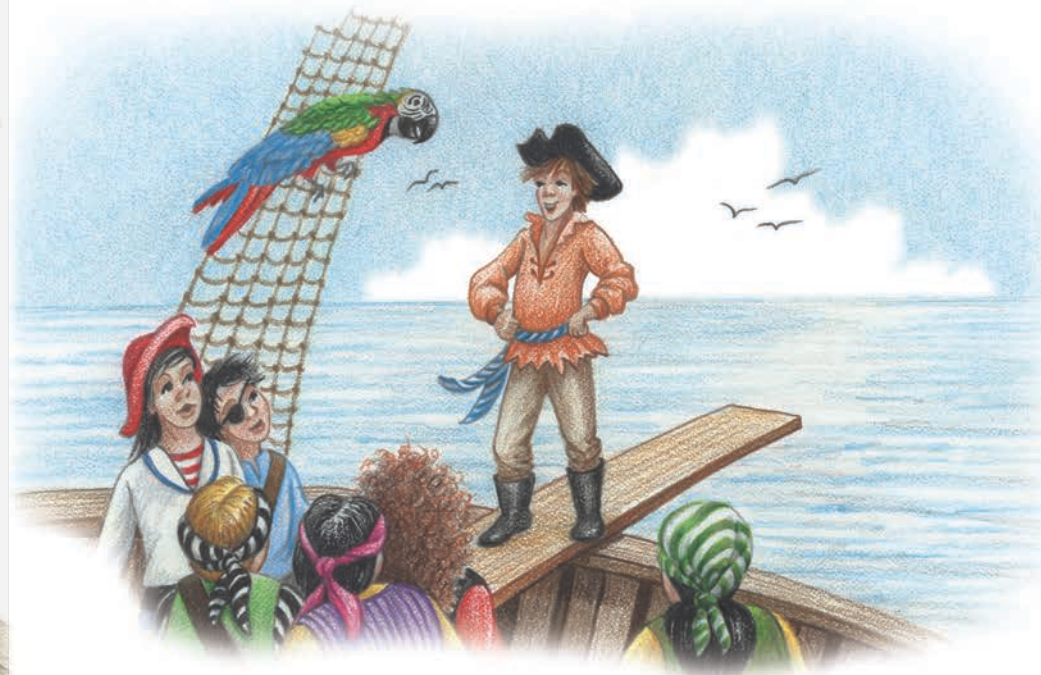
After his speech, Cap'n snarled, "Now, ye bunch o' worthless scallywags, get up on that plank and tell me what ye plan to do with yer scurvy lives."

One by one, the students bounded onto the plank, full of pride and fire.

"I be the peg leg maker!"

"I be the mender of sails!"

"And I be guard of the booty!"



Cap'n Grossbeard gloated over his students' choices. Then he poked at Marianne with his hook. "And ye, lass?"



Marianne ambled onto the plank. She swung around, stabbed her sword in the air, and declared, "I will be a ... food critic!"

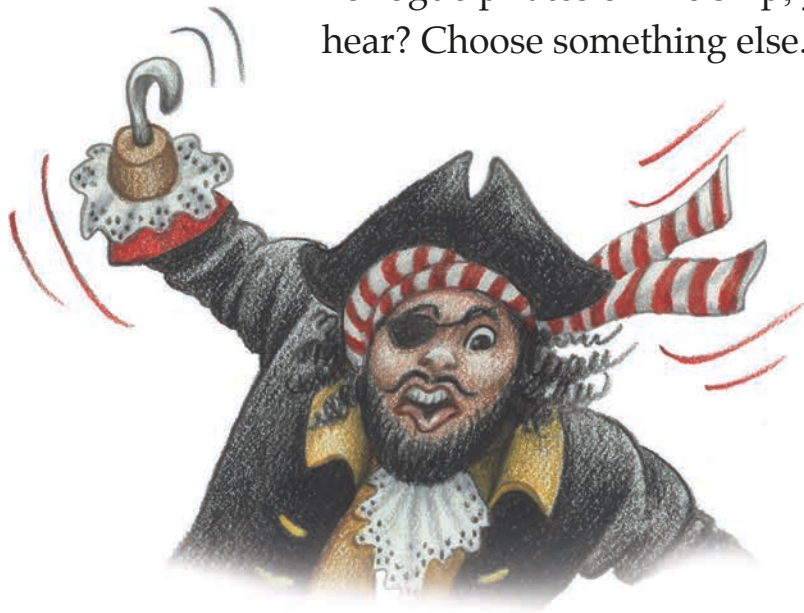


Snorts of laughter rose from all sides. "Food critic? What ye be writing a critique about? How mushy our porridge be? How scurvy our fruit be? Food critic. Arr!"

"That's right," Marianne shouted above the din. "There's more in the world to delight your taste buds. The crumbly crackers and pasty hardtack offered on this ship are pitiful!"

Cap'n rapped his hook on the rail and growled. "Ye rascal! Our food be good enough for any able body. You be a blight upon the good name of pirates!"

He leaned in so close that Marianne could smell the sardines on his breath. "There'll be no rogue pirates on me ship, ye hear? Choose something else."

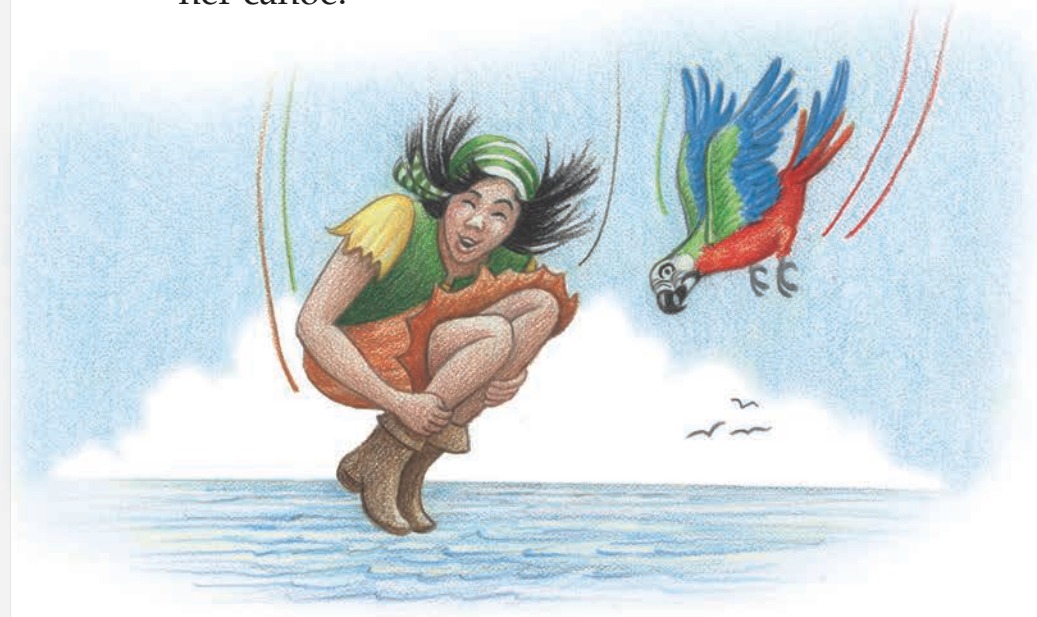


Marianne's eyes narrowed and her mouth twitched. Then she growled as growly as Cap'n Grossbeard.

"I will be a food critic and you can't stop me."

Cap'n grinned. "Is that right, matey? Choose a career befitting a proper pirate or march yer hide right off that plank."

"As you wish, Cap'n," Marianne sneered. And amid the jeers of her peers, she cannonballed into the drink and swam for her canoe.



Cap'n chortled and said, "Aye, if ye be forced to walk the plank, ye might as well do it with style." He turned to the young pirates. "Now get back to yer learnin', ye scurvy bilge rats."

Down near the hull of the ship, Marianne hauled herself into the canoe and paddled to a nearby island. After a fine meal among the landlubbers, she once again stuffed some morsels into her pocket to enjoy later.

Marianne expected Cap'n to blubber at her some more when she returned, but instead she found him pacing the deck.

“C'mere, lass!” He shook a handwritten note in her face. “It's from me mother!”



Cap'n Grossbeard pulled at his beard and groaned. “Says right here she be visiting for a fortnight. She'll expect a shipshape ship and gourmet goodies. I can't feed her hardtack and cackle-fruit!”

“Why not?” Marianne smirked. “I heard tell that our food be good enough for any able body. Your mother will love the slimy burgoo and stinky cackle-fruit.”



Cap'n Grossbeard moaned. “Ye don't know me mother, lass. She be tough as they come. She'll tweak me nose and box me ears!”

As Cap'n sniffled and paced, Marianne reached into her pocket and pulled out a few morsels of lemon chicken sprinkled with cracked pepper and chives.

“What be that?” sputtered Cap'n. He swiped the chicken from Marianne's hands and tore off a chunk with his ragged teeth.



Then he leaned in so close that Marianne could see the bits of chicken stuck in his beard. He narrowed his eyes and hissed. “Get in yer canoe. Go to the village. Bring me more ... with extra mayonnaise.”

Marianne met his glare. “I can bring back a feast that will turn your mother into a sweet little lamb. But you and I need to reach an understanding first.”

As she spoke, Marianne backed Cap'n Grossbeard onto the plank.



“I'm a food critic, so I won't be practicing any more parrot wrangling or eyepatching, ye hear? I'll be spending my time scouring the villages for the finest flavors and the best chefs. Are you with me so far?”

“Aye, lass. But ye better shake a leg. Me mother be arriving at four o’clock sharp.”

“Not so fast, Cap’n,” Marianne hissed. “You also have to get my critiques published in *Pirates’ Life* magazine, put a motor on my canoe, and promise to never sabotage my career as a food critic.”

Cap’n Grossbeard nervously checked the position of the sun. Time was slipping away. “Shiver me timbers!” he finally roared. “You’ve backed me into a rough spot, ye scallywag. Ye be as tough as me mother. Now off with ye—and hurry!”



Marianne didn’t have to be told twice. She hopped in her canoe and paddled to town.

When she returned, the canoe was loaded with enough takeout dishes and doggie bags to feed the whole pirate gang and the toughest mother ever to set foot on a pirate ship.

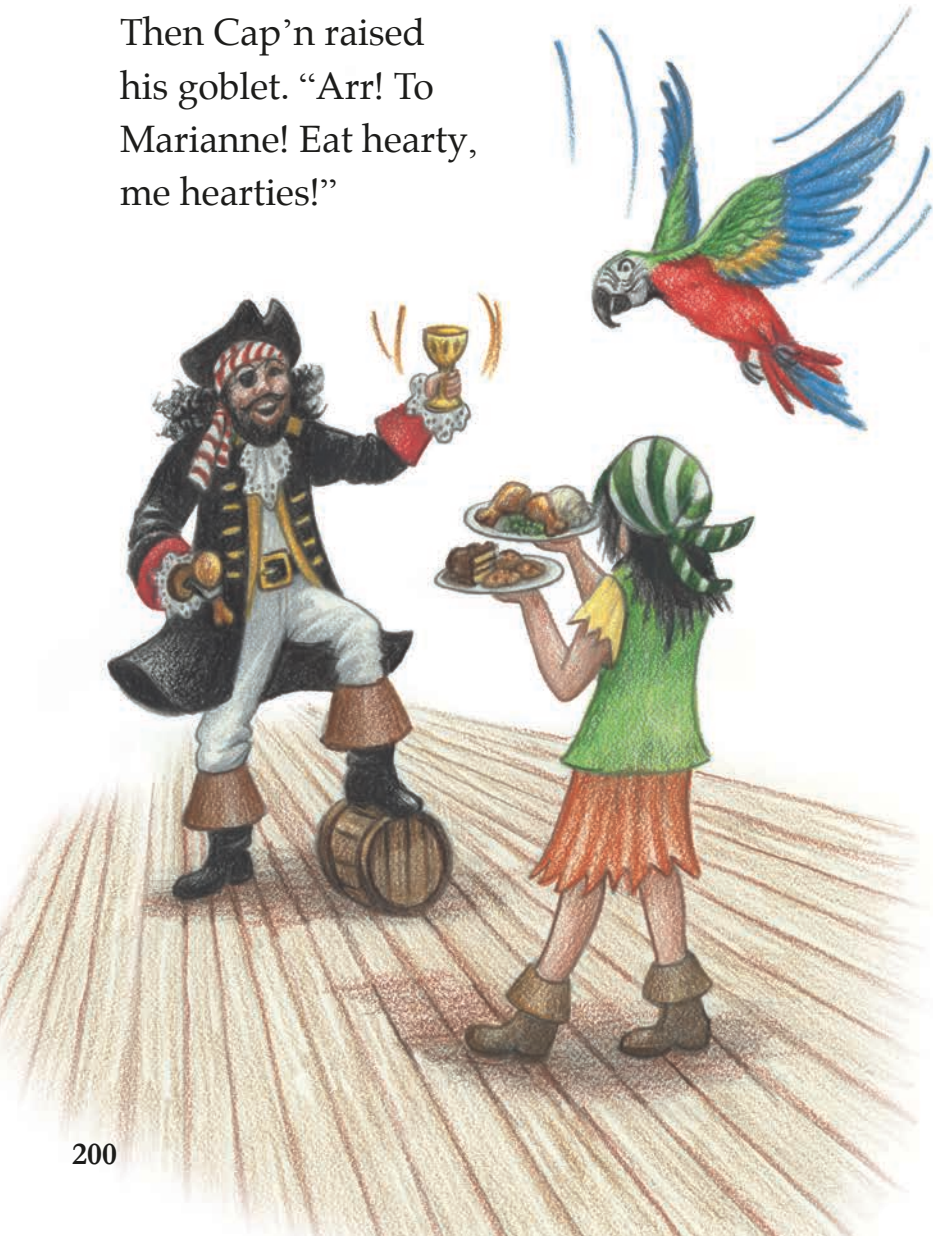


The students cheered and feasted. They clapped Marianne on the back, thrust their swords in the air, and sang sea shanties in her honor.



“Blimey!” burped Cap’n Grossbeard as he finished off his meal. “I was too hard on ye, lass. That marinated lamb satisfied me mother, and the endive salad enticed me tongue.”

Then Cap’n raised his goblet. “Arr! To Marianne! Eat hearty, me hearties!”



**The End**





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