The Treasure Ship of St Isabella



Frank Pedersen

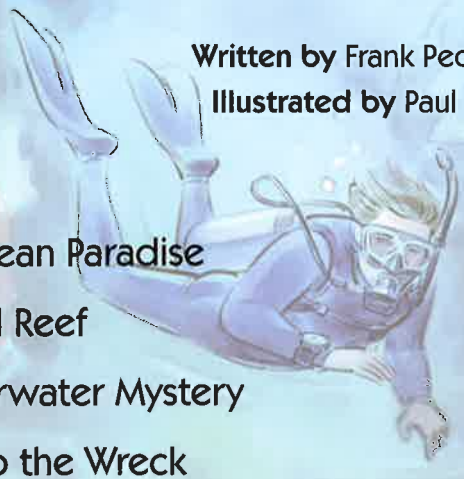
Paul Könye

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The Treasure Ship of St Isabella

Written by Frank Pedersen
Illustrated by Paul Könye



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Meet the Characters

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Jennifer

An 11-year-old girl.



Peter

Jennifer's father, a geologist and diver.



Miguel

The captain of Peter's exploration vessel.

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POST CARD

Dear Reader

Over 100 Spanish ships sank in the Caribbean Sea between 1500 and 1750, many of them carrying gold, silver and precious jewels from South America. Storms, pirates and attacks from other ships caused most of the losses. What's interesting is that fewer than 50 of those shipwrecks have been found. Here's a story about one of the "lost" ships!

Frank Pedersen
Author

The Caribbean Sea



1. Cuba
2. Jamaica
3. St Isabella
4. San Antero
5. Caracas

1 A Caribbean Paradise

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Jennifer watched the fiery Caribbean sunset fill the sky. The sand into which she buried her bare feet was still warm from the sun that had just slipped below a shimmering golden horizon.

A few metres along the beach, her father Peter was scooping sand out of a shallow pit. Twenty minutes earlier, a driftwood fire had been glowing in the pit. Peter had covered the embers with a layer of sand, dinner, and more sand.

"Are you ready for the main course?" he grinned. He took two parcels wrapped in steaming newspaper from the pit.

"Absolutely," smiled Jennifer, who was suddenly hungry. Peter and Jennifer both unwrapped their parcels. Stuck to the newspaper, the skin of the whole fish that lay within peeled off to reveal a feast of steaming, freshly cooked flesh.



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"Who needs an oven, when you have a beach to cook in?" winked Jennifer's father.

"Or a table with knives and forks?" added Jennifer, popping a flake of juicy fish into her mouth.

Peter looked at the sunset sweeping across the sky and smiled.

"This is better than the fish fingers I used to cook back in the city," he said.

"Back home, there weren't any reefs to go diving on, Dad," said Jennifer.

"That's true," agreed her father. "And the dive tanks I practised in never seemed to have any fresh fish swimming in them either!"

The pair laughed. Since Peter had got a job with the oil company, mapping the seabed around the Caribbean island of St Isabella, life had certainly changed.

Jennifer found it hard to imagine her previous life. A month ago, she was watching the traffic inching its way through the crowded streets below their tenth-floor apartment.

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Now, the only things inching past were sand crabs or the sail of a distant yacht, far out to sea.

St Isabella lay at the end of a string of islands curving out into the Caribbean Sea. Largely ignored by tourists and cruise ships intent on visiting more well-known destinations, the island had been chosen as a base for Peter's seabed mapping because it was close to the oil-rich nation of Venezuela. The oil company hoped that, like the Gulf of Mexico to the north-east, the southern regions of the Caribbean Sea would yield some good exploration sites.

Jennifer knew that as a diver and a geologist, her father held strong views about the environment. It was only after the oil company promised to keep its impact on the local marine environment to a minimum that he agreed to work for them.

As she sat on the warm, sandy beach, watching the sunset and feasting on freshly caught seafood, Jennifer was glad that he had.

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Jennifer and Peter finished their evening meal. They covered up the cooking pit with sand again, packed away the old newspapers and headed along the beach. Soon, they came to the traditional wooden chattel house they rented.

"Are you diving tomorrow, Dad?" asked Jennifer.

"Boat leaves the wharf at 8.00 am sharp," he nodded. "Plenty of time to make sure you're logged onto the distance learning website before I go," he added with a wink.

Jennifer sighed. Even being on a remote island, there were some things, like school, she just couldn't escape.



2 A Jagged Reef

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The anchor of the *Blue Sunrise*, the exploration vessel that Peter was aboard, plunged into the deep blue sea. St Isabella was barely a speck on the horizon.

Peter checked his GPS and wrote down their position. With no landmarks to use as a guide, anyone mapping the seabed had to know exactly where they were.

A month before, the oil company had done an aerial survey of the area. They used complex magnetic equipment to measure changes in the earth's crust under the sea.

"This is a good area," Pete's boss, Dan O'Hara, had told him. "We old oil workers can just feel it in our bones!"

Now, as he prepared to dive with sensitive seismic detectors to place on the sea floor, he felt a sense of excitement too. As an environmentalist, he had