

WILL OF THE ISLANDS

"Pirates!"

Will woke with a start and, for a moment, all he could see was a screeching seagull circling above him in a gray sky. He thought he must be dreaming – a gull wouldn't be warning him about pirates.

But it was Mr. Phips who carried the bad news as he approached Will at a trot.

"We've got to get moving, Will. Follow me."

Will jumped up, even though his head was pounding like a hammer on an anvil, and took off after Phips who was headed into the water of St. Thomas Bay and started running along in the shallow water just below the wave marks on the shore. Will didn't know where they were going, but he trusted Phips completely. Phips kept looking behind them, and Will didn't really want to know what he expected to see.

Their progress seemed agonizingly slow in the soft sand of the shallow water. If pirates were really chasing them, wouldn't they make better time on the hard, wet sand just beyond the waves? Suddenly Phips stopped at a part of the beach where the reedy grass extended almost to the water's edge.

"Jump out of the water as far into the grass as you can and then head for the trees," he instructed, pointing toward the dense trees and bushes. "I'll be right behind you. Now go!" Will took a mighty leap and made it just into the grass. Four more long strides put him into the foliage. He looked back to see Phips coming toward him dragging a large, tangled piece of kelp behind him. When Phips reached the trees, he swung the kelp around his head a few times and sent it flying back into the water.

"There. I don't think they'll see any sign that we've been here. I just hope they keep on going down the beach long enough to give us a healthy lead in the opposite direction," he said, as

he moved deeper into the trees and then headed in the direction they'd just come from. "Just stay close to me, Will. And when I tell you to stop and get down, you do it immediately without uttering a peep. Got it?"

"Yes sir," said Will, who'd learned a few hard lessons over the past year-and-a-half about when to keep his mouth shut.

They moved quickly through the undergrowth, making better time than they had slogging through the water. They soon passed the place where they'd hidden the little dinghy that had gotten them safely to shore the day before. Another few minutes put them close to a large rock formation that jutted out of the scrub almost to the water's edge. This is where Phips had stopped to let Will rest and had gone ahead to see what was just around the rock. Apparently, he'd found pirates!