

The
Bold Ship
Phenomenal

For Ben and our four boys, all of whom know where adventure is to be found – SJ

Published in 2015 by Flat Bed Press
PO Box 131, Raglan, New Zealand 3225

www.sarahjohnson.co.nz

Text © Sarah Johnson, 2015
Illustrations © Sarah Johnson, 2015

ISBN 978-0-473-31314-2

The moral rights of the author have been asserted.
Deborah Hinde asserts the moral right to be identified as the illustrator
of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or
transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical or digital,
including photocopying, recording, storage in any information retrieval
system, or otherwise, without the written permission of the publisher.

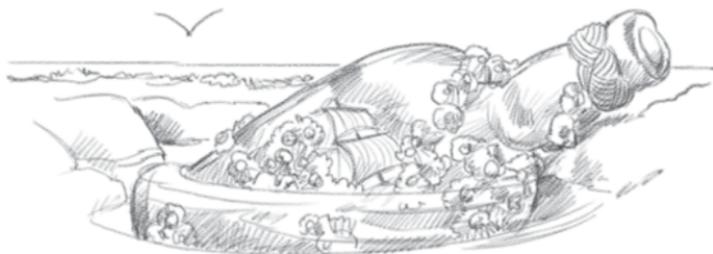
Cover illustration and artwork by Deborah Hinde: www.picturebook.co.nz
Edited by Sue Copsey: www.suecopsey.com
Typeset in Horley Old Style by Book Design Ltd: www.bookdesign.co.nz
Printed and bound in China by Asia Pacific Offset Ltd



The
Bold Ship
Phenomenal

SARAH JOHNSON





Chapter one

MALACHI FOUND THE BOTTLE on the shore.

He was kicking along the tide line when he saw it, each jab of his toe scattering the sand before him in a damp pink fan.

“Science sucks,” he said, booting at the sand.
“Science sucks, science s ...”

Then he saw the bottle, and he stopped.

The bottle was propped on the edge of a shallow pool, scooped by the retreating sea. Further down the beach, the sea slid *ssshh ssshh*

onto the sand, but the pool that the bottle rested in was perfectly still, cradling its glassy catch.

Normally this was the sort of thing that interested Malachi. Jetsam and flotsam: trinkets and treasures delivered by the sea. He would squirrel his findings home to consider in the peace of his room. Where had they come from? Whose had they been? Were they discarded, or lost?

This morning, though, he couldn't be bothered. Not after the way his day had kicked off. Malachi aimed another grumpy swipe at the sand and hoisted his bag up his back. He would have to hurry. Science was the first lesson of the day and he was already late.

Yet something about the bottle drew back his eye. Something about the way it reclined, half in, half out of the pool; as if it was struggling to stand upright, against the weight of whatever was inside.

With a sigh, Malachi dropped his bag and

walked down the beach to the pool's edge. He eased the bottle free. It was covered in sand, so he rinsed it in the pool.

The bottle was large and surprisingly heavy, with a long narrow neck and a bulbous belly that gave it an old-fashioned appearance. Stained string coiled around its neck, below a red wax-coated bung. Grey barnacles clung to its belly and base, and its glass was coated in slime and salt.

Malachi stretched his sleeve over his hand and dipped it in the pool. He rubbed the bottle with the wet sleeve, trying to make a clear space in the glass, so he could see inside.

As he rubbed, the sound of the ocean filled his head. Gently at first – *ssshh*, *ssshh*, *ssshh* – then building, until the waves' song thumped and thundered on the shore. Startled, Malachi looked up, but the beach was quiet; the small waves melting back into themselves before they'd finished their journey up the sand.

Malachi turned his attention back to the bottle. His rubbing had made no difference; the glass was still too murky to see inside. The bottle felt heavy, as if it might be full, but when he shook it, no liquid sloshed against the glass. He would have liked to have taken it home and cleaned it properly, but there was no time for that now.

He took off his jersey and wrapped it carefully around the bottle, before placing it in the top of his bag. Then, trying to keep as even a pace as possible, he jogged along the tide line, making up for lost time as he headed straight for school.



Chapter two

MALACHI HAD BEEN DREAMING when his father stuck his head around the bedroom door, earlier that morning.

“Come on lazybones, time to get up.”

Malachi had scraped his duvet off his face.

“What day is it?” he asked.

“Wednesday,” said his father.

“Excellent!” Malachi sat up. “Only three days until the weekend.”

“Have you got plans?” his father asked.

“We’re going camping, remember?” said Malachi.

His father scratched his head. “Was that this weekend?”

He’d promised months ago that they would go camping this weekend. Malachi had wanted to go at the time, but his father had said things were still too unsettled after Mum, and Malachi hadn’t felt able to argue. So they’d picked a weekend several months out, and Malachi had marked it on his calendar with a thick black cross.

“X marks the spot,” he’d said, and he’d been looking forward to it ever since.

Now the weekend had finally arrived.

“I’ll clean the tent after school,” he’d said this morning. “It’ll need it after all this time.”

But his father had sighed. “I don’t know, Malachi. I’d forgotten all about it.”

“That doesn’t matter, Dad. I can get the stuff together. I know where it all is.”

“It’s not that, Malachi,” his father said. “It’s just that I have so much to do here and I’m still really busy at work. I was hoping to make a start on the garden, it’s turning into a jungle. Perhaps, you could help me with that instead?”

Malachi had stared at his father in disbelief. “But you promised. If Mum was here ...”

For a moment his father had looked like he might crumble. Then he’d straightened his tie and shaken his head. “I’m sorry, Malachi. I know you’re disappointed, but that’s just the way things are at the moment.”

After that, there hadn’t seemed much point in getting up, and when Malachi had finally rolled out of bed he was already late. Finding the bottle had made him later still, and by the time he reached school, the playing fields and courtyards were empty.

Through the science lab windows, he could see his classmates, already seated at their desks. Mrs Green was up the front, writing on the

whiteboard. Malachi took a deep breath and pushed open the lab door. His day may have started off badly, but he had the distinct feeling it was about to get worse.



Chapter three

MRS GREEN PAUSED, pen poised mid-stroke, as Malachi scuttled towards his seat at the back.

Jarrod was already there, hunched over the bench. He ignored Malachi, as Malachi got out his pens and books. *Fine*, thought Malachi. He wasn't in the mood for being hassled today.

Mrs Green finished writing and turned around. She was wearing her usual white lab coat, buttoned so tight that Malachi wondered how she managed to breathe. When she took it

off at night it must leave an angry red line, like a scar, running around her neck.

Mrs Green scanned the tables until her eyes rested on Malachi.

“Glad to see you could join us, Malachi,” she said. “But if you daydreamed a little less, perhaps you’d make it to class on time occasionally.”

Jarrod sniggered. Malachi looked at the bench. Mrs Green was big on punctuality. In fact, Mrs Green was big on lots of things that Malachi wasn’t particularly good at. Like ordering and labelling; putting things in categories; keeping his words and thoughts tidy; neatness.

Today, as she did every day, Mrs Green had written *Order of Lesson* at the top of the whiteboard in black pen. Below this, in blue, she had listed everything they would be covering in class. As they finished each item, Mrs Green liked to give it a big red tick.

Today, under *Order of Lesson*, Mrs Green had written:

Our science projects:

1. *Explain systematic scientific observation*
2. *Describe project parameters*
3. *Outline rules for record taking*
4. *Distribute notebooks.*

Mrs Green rapped her red pen on the desk then pointed at item one.

“In our science projects this term, we will be applying the principles of systematic scientific observation,” she said. “Through applying these principles in the context of carefully constructed experiments, then accurately observing and recording the results, science has been able to demystify many previously unexplained phenomena.”

Jarrod yawned loudly and rested his head on his hands. Mrs Green ignored him and turned to face the other side of the class. Malachi took the opportunity to shuffle his bag out from

between his feet. He lifted out the bottle and balanced it on his knees.

The bottle was certainly heavy. It also smelt: salt and seaweed, mingled with something chemical, like rubber or tar.

Malachi wanted to see inside. He took a swab out of a box on the bench and dipped it in the methylated spirits for the Bunsen burners, then rubbed at the glass until he'd made a clear patch the size of a marble. He bent his head and peered inside.

What he saw made him reel back in surprise.

The bottle slid off his lap. Malachi grappled with both hands, stopping it just before it hit the floor. He tucked it back between his knees.

A hard pellet of damp paper pinged off his cheek.

“What ya got there?” Jarrod hissed.

Malachi turned his knees away and shrugged. “Nothing.”

“Don't talk rot,” said Jarrod, leaning along

the table and trying to see into Malachi's lap. Malachi pulled his bag up to cover the bottle. "Show me," hissed Jarrod.

"No," said Malachi. "It's private."

Jarrod was the last person in the class he'd show the bottle to. He wasn't exactly a bully, but he was harder than the other kids, with a grown-up swagger and a knowing air. He only shared a bench with Malachi because no one else wanted to sit there. Malachi thought they suited each other – two loners stuck together at the back – but he doubted Jarrod shared his views.

"Show me or I'll stick you with my compass," said Jarrod.

"Jarrod," said Mrs Green. "Leave Malachi alone." She pointed to the second point on her list: *Describe project parameters*. "Now class, as I was saying, we will be working on our projects all term, so it's important to choose a topic that really interests you, something you've always

wanted to know more about.”

Malachi waited until Jarrod had gone back to sketching skulls on his refill before sliding his bag to one side and peering again through the small window he'd cleared in the glass.

Pointing straight at him was a cannon: a tiny black cannon coated in grime and soot. The cannon was mounted in a wooden wall, and when Malachi turned the bottle slightly, he glimpsed a flap of tatty grey canvas billowing above it. Twisting the bottle down, he made out the frothy top of a grubby grey wave.

“Of course,” he whispered. “It’s a ship.”

Mrs Green rapped her red pen. “Did you have some observation you wanted to share with the class, Malachi?” she asked.

Malachi’s head jerked up. “Ah, ah ... no,” he stammered. “I was just thinking about what you were saying.”

“Glad to hear it,” said Mrs Green. “But please try not to think out loud.”

The class laughed and Malachi slipped the bottle back into his bag.

Mrs Green pointed at item three on her list, *Outline rules for record taking*. Malachi noticed that she'd already placed a tick next to items one and two. He'd missed them.

"You should record everything," Mrs Green said. "Every change in state, appearance and smell. Write it all down in your notebooks as accurately as you can. If you have any questions or reach any conclusions as you go along, write these down too." She placed a red tick beside item three and lowered her pen to hover over item four, *Distribute notebooks*. "We will be using new notebooks for the projects. You may each collect one when class is finished."

As if on cue, the bell rang. Malachi joined the end of the line and filed past to collect his notebook. It was thin, with a blood red cover and pale yellow pages. He had no idea what he was supposed to be writing in it. The science

room door banged shut behind him and he glanced back just in time to see Mrs Green, up at the whiteboard, giving her fourth and final point a decisive red tick.