

An inconvenience is only an adventure wrongly considered;
an adventure is an inconvenience rightly considered.

-- G. K. Chesterton

Dedicated to Lily Jo DeVillez, my goddaughter

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Other Titles by the Author:

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Creative Communications

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The Meyers of Crystal Creek (online story)

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Chapter 1

Junior the Polite Young Man

Once upon a time, an imaginative and polite young man named Junior lived near the sea with--

(Junior tugged at my sleeve and I stopped typing and looked through my bifocal glasses at him. “Excuse me, Grandma! Couldn’t this be a pirate story instead?”)

“I’m sorry, Junior, but I know very little about pirates. Writers generally write what they know about, so this is not a pirate story.”

“But I do know about pirates, Grandma, and I could help you out,” Junior said. Junior looked out my library window toward the sea. “I’d really like to be a pirate in this story.”

“Hmm. What kind of a pirate would you like to be, Junior?”

My grandson jumped up and shouted, “I’d steal a ship and make the crew swear loyalty to me or walk the plank. Then I’d hoist the anchor and start looking for buried treasure and . . .”

I interrupted. “Not a chance. Intolerable. And uncharitable.”

“How about if I was an honest pirate and bought the ship instead?” Junior asked.

I placed my chin in my hand and thought. “That’s a possibility.”

“Thank you!” Junior shouted.

“You’re welcome. However, promise me that you will be polite, or I shall have to have you killed off before the story ends,” I insisted, glaring at him and pushing a strand of gray hair back.

“Yes, ma’am,” Junior agreed. “Now, about my name . . . Why couldn’t I be called Bluebeard instead?”

“Because you are too young to grow a beard, and you aren’t blue, sir,” I answered. “But I see what you mean about the name. Somehow ‘Junior the Pirate’ doesn’t work, does it?”

“What about Red? You could call me Red Rowdy the Pirate, Grandma,” Junior suggested.

I looked him over. “Your hair is black, your eyes brown, no freckles, and when was the last time you washed



those hands, young man?” I said. “Although the name does have a certain sort of seaworthy spirit.”

“One minute. I’ll be back in one minute,” Junior said and raced from the room. He returned wearing a red t-shirt that had belonged to my dear late husband and that Junior liked to wear sometimes. “How’s this?” he asked.

I nodded, deleted my previous title and sentence, and began typing again.)

Red Rowdy the Pirate

Once upon a time, a pirate named Red Rowdy lived near the sea.

(“I need a sword. Please don’t forget that,” Junior suggested.)

Red Rowdy was restless. Red Rowdy was ready for adventure. He buckled on his heavy-duty water pistol.

(I experienced a minor explosion from the mouth of my grandson, “Whoever heard of a pirate with a water pistol?”)

“You, sir, cannot walk down to the docks wearing a sword. Officer Parker would arrest you before you got to the corner. Society frowns upon children of your age wearing swords.”

“Why does society do that, Grandma?” Junior asked, frowning himself.

“Because it isn’t courteous to frighten the healthy sea air out of people. Please sit still and listen,” I commanded and turned back to my keyboard and the nearly blank computer screen.)

Red Rowdy swaggered down to the docks, which were as noisy as a flock of sea gulls. Red Rowdy approached a man coiling line on a 54-foot sailing yacht.

“I’m looking for a fast ship,” he said to the man. “Do you know of any? The name’s Red Rowdy. I’m a pirate.”

The man squinted at the boy pirate. He rubbed his wind-burned face as he considered taking on a pirate. “The Miss Ginger is a fast ship. Are you looking for work, Mr. Rowdy? Because I’m short-handed, and we sail today. In one hour, the Third Most Important Yacht Race of the Season begins.”

“Yes, sir!” Red Rowdy said.

“Good! By the way, how is your nautical protocol, Mr. Rowdy?”



“My what?” Red Rowdy’s mouth fell open.

“This is a small yacht, and we work together as a team. My name’s Bly, Captain Bly, and I don’t need any disagreeable, uncouth knaves onboard,” the captain said. “You’ll have to mind your manners, sir.”

“Oh, I’ve promised my grandma that I’d be polite, or else she’s going to kill me off before the end of the story,” Red Rowdy assured the captain.

The captain held out his hand. “Good man. Come aboard then, Mr. Rowdy.”

Red Rowdy took the offered hand and leaped beside him, being careful to mind the toerail. “What do I do first, sir?” he asked.

“Go below to the galley, and help the cook make sandwiches for the crew. We’re hungry as sharks sniffing around a broad-billed swordfish,” the captain said.

“Yes, sir.” Red Rowdy disappeared.

The first mate looked up from polishing the brightwork and said, “Captain, don’t you think he should tell his mother where he’s going?”

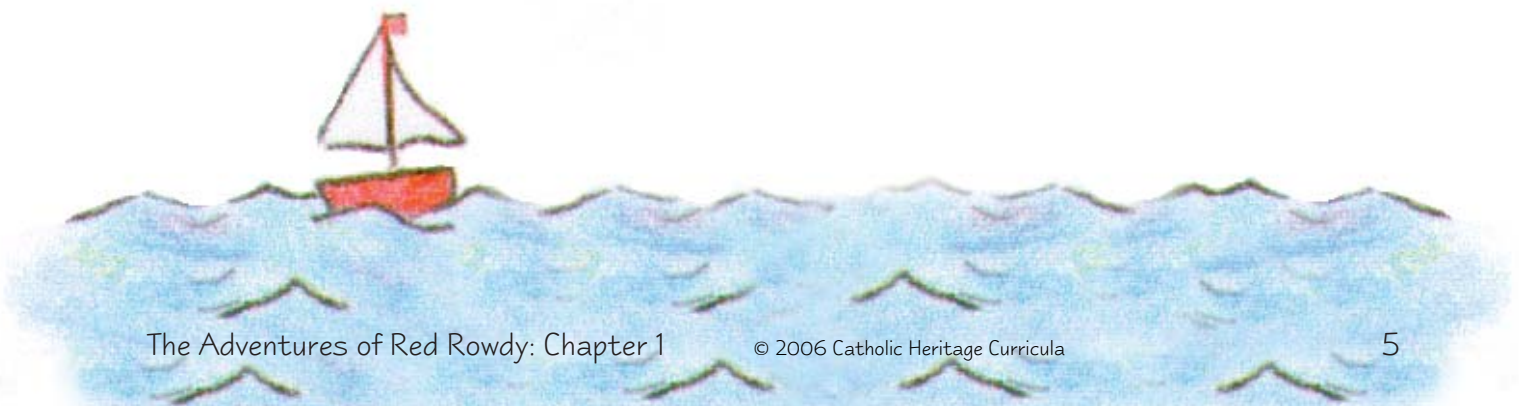
The captain shook his head. “The cook is his Uncle Paul. He’ll look after him, and the writer is Mr. Rowdy’s grandmother. She’ll send word on to his mother.”

(I nodded. “Aye, Captain Bly. Consider it done.” Junior handed me the telephone, and I informed his mother, who was also my lovely daughter, that Junior was helping me with a story. She wanted to speak with him, so I handed the telephone back to him and resumed typing. I scarcely noticed when he came to stand and read over my shoulder again.)

Red Rowdy made peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. He made roast beef sandwiches. He made chicken salad sandwiches. He made ham and cheese sandwiches. The crew ate every bite. They shook his hand, thanked him, and went up on deck, leaving him the galley to clean. Red Rowdy would have preferred to take a nap, but pirates didn’t nap. So he cleaned the galley.

“Get above deck and have a look about, Red,” his uncle said when they had finished. “But be back in fifteen minutes, because the crew will be hungry again.”

Red Rowdy took his heavy-duty water pistol with him. The sea air rushed past him. He heard a snapping sound and looked up to see the American flag brisking in the breeze. He looked down to see the sea curling off the bow. Miss Ginger was a fast yacht, but the Eagle Queen and the Princess Tiger were ahead, far ahead.



Everywhere he looked, he saw the rippling seawater and the sunlight running through the ripples. A fish fin caught his attention, and he squirted it with his water pistol. An idea was nibbling at him. He went to see the captain.

“Captain Bly, sir!”

“Yes, Mr. Rowdy?” The captain was sitting at the navigation station, checking the weather reports and barely glanced at him.

“We’re in third place, right, sir?” Red Rowdy asked.

“Yes, that’s right, Mr. Rowdy” the captain said.

“If we had some cannons, we could blow the competition out of the water,” Red Rowdy suggested. “Do we have any cannons, Captain?”

The captain sighed. “That would be rather excessive, don’t you think, Mr. Rowdy? And just to mention it, illegal. I think I hear your uncle calling you.”

“Isn’t there anything else I could do, sir?” Red Rowdy asked. “I mean, besides making sandwiches?”

“You could try walking the plank, Mr. Rowdy,” the first mate said as he appeared.

“I understand perfectly, sir,” Red Rowdy answered. He went below to make more sandwiches.

Later that day, the Miss Ginger slipped past the Princess Tiger. Red Rowdy shot off his heavy-duty water pistol in triumph. The crew of the Princess Tiger laughed. “It isn’t over yet, Red Rowdy! Yo ho ho!”

Red Rowdy went below to make more sandwiches. He sang as he worked. “Yo ho ho and a bottle of rum. Ho ho yo and lots of cheer. Yo wo wo and a dash of plum. Wo wo ho, I have no fear.”

His uncle laughed. “No rum on this yacht, Red. The captain throws drunks overboard for shark-bait. Yes, sir.”

“It’s a rough life, isn’t it?” Red Rowdy said. “Have you ever been thrown overboard, Uncle Paul?”

“No, because I mind my etiquette, Red. That’s the way to succeed at sea. Yo ho ho and a word of thanks, Ho ho yo and forget the planks, Yo wo wo and if you please, Wo wo ho, let’s shell these peas.”

“Aye, sir,” said Red Rowdy.



They sailed on. Red Rowdy vowed never to eat another sandwich again. They sailed on. The mayonnaise began to run low, very low. They sailed on. The flag continued to snap, the water splashed onto the decks of the Miss Ginger, and the crew worked up enormous appetites. Where was the finish line? What if they ran out of supplies? Where were the other ships?

Red Rowdy was awakened one morning by a heavy hand on his shoulder. He was being chased by a large roast beef sandwich that wanted more pickles, so he wasn't annoyed in the least by the end of his dream.

The captain hauled him out of his bunk. "Mr. Rowdy, you lazy bones, quick!" The captain was bouncing about and laughing.

Red Rowdy clambered above deck. There was the dock. There was a crowd. Where were the other yachts?

The crew was cheering. "We won! We won the Third Most Important Yacht Race of the Season!"

"Hooray!" The first mate grabbed Red Rowdy and spun him about. Whoa there! That was no way to treat a sandwich maker, that is, a pirate.

Newspaper reporters scrambled over the docks like fiddler crabs on sand dunes. Everyone was talking at once. Red Rowdy saw his parents and waved. They couldn't get through the thick crowd. Red Rowdy pulled out his heavy-duty water pistol and was about to blast his way through, but the captain caught his eye and shook his head firmly.

"Excuse me," Red Rowdy said. "Pardon me!" The crowd parted. He ran and hugged his mom and dad. They were so proud.

The captain came over and shook hands with Mr. and Mrs. Rowdy. "You have a fine boy there," he told them. "We would have starved without his help."

Red Rowdy posed with the crew to have his picture taken for the newspaper. His mother bought twenty papers and clipped the story to send copies to all his relatives.

The En-

("Wait! That can't be the end!" Junior protested. "There was no buried treasure. No sea battles. Not even a hurricane. Please, Grandma.")

I considered his distress. "Okay, but just a little longer, Junior. I have choir practice tonight. We're having difficulty with Mozart's 'Laudate Domino.'")



Captain Bly had to take the Miss Ginger to a shipyard for repairs. He asked Red Rowdy if he wanted to come along. Red Rowdy wasn't sure. He had to think about it.

"How about if I drop you off on an almost deserted island, Mr. Rowdy? You could dig for buried treasure there," the captain offered.

"How deserted is almost deserted?" Rowdy asked.

"Well, there's a cottage with a butler, a gardener, and a maid. Mrs. Simpson, the owner of the Miss Ginger, lives here in Portlee most of the time and asked me to check up on the cottage for her. I'll stay out of your way, and you don't have to split the treasure with me," the captain said.

"Is there a map, Captain?" Red Rowdy asked hopefully.

"No, you'll have to find the treasure the hard way." The captain grinned. "Just ask the gardener to lend you a shovel, Mr. Rowdy."

Red Rowdy agreed. He was going to sea again.

The captain left Red Rowdy on the island dock and continued on with the yacht. Red Rowdy followed the boardwalk toward the cottage and knocked on the door.

The butler welcomed Red Rowdy. "Good morning, sir. I hope you had a pleasant voyage. Please come in."

Red Rowdy went in. The maid smiled and nodded at him and then continued dusting. Red Rowdy nodded back.

"May I offer you something to drink, sir?" the butler asked.

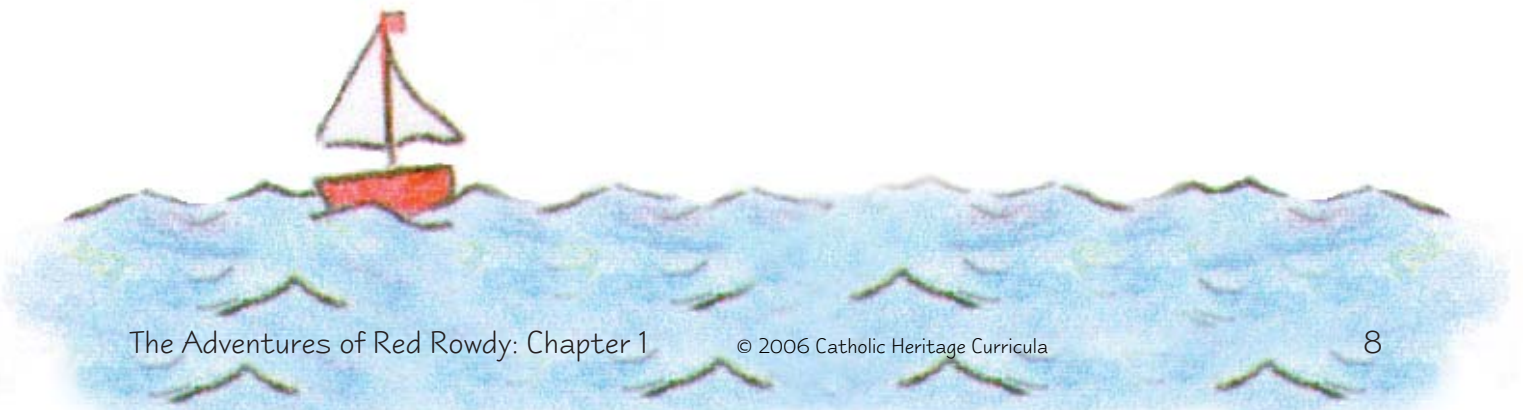
"Do you have any soda water?" Red Rowdy asked.

"No, sir. I'm sorry, but we're fresh out of soda water, and your grandmother would not approve this close to dinner. How about some orange juice?" The butler looked apologetic but firm.

"Thank you, orange juice will be fine," Red Rowdy said. "Do you know my grandmother very well?"

"Yes, sir. She is my grandfather's sister-in-law," the butler said, "which means that she is my great aunt."

Red Rowdy look a bit confused, but he decided against asking any further questions, which might only lead to more confusion.



“Isn’t he sweet?” Red Rowdy heard the maid say to the butler as they went to the kitchen.

Red Rowdy drank his juice. Then he rang for the butler, who was his grandma’s great nephew if he understood correctly, to find out where the gardener was. The butler speed dialed the gardener on his cell phone to inquire about a shovel, and within minutes, the gardener appeared like a dolphin coming up for air. Red Rowdy thanked them both, took the shovel, and went out upon the beach.

“How do I know where to begin digging?” he asked, staring at the large stretch of sand dunes.

(“Is that a rhetorical question?” I asked him when he didn’t move.

“No, I would be grateful for a clue, ma’am,” he said.

I took a pencil and marked an X in the sand. I pointed at it. “Dig there, please.”

“Are you sure?” he asked.

“Positive,” I said. “I am the author. Authors know these things.)

He began to dig. He struck a piece of driftwood immediately. “I found something,” he shouted. “Oh, it’s just a piece of old driftwood.” He tossed it aside. Next he dug up some pink shells. Shortly thereafter, Red Rowdy began to sweat. It poured off his forehead, stinging his eyes. He kept digging. A blister began to form on his right hand. He paused.

(“Absolutely sure?” he asked me.

“Yes, please continue digging,” I reassured him.)

He did so. And Red Rowdy found something.

(“What? What did I find?” my grandson shouted at me.

“Sh!” I hushed him. “You will spoil the ending, Junior. And I haven’t quite decided yet. It must be something valuable . . .”

“Gold?” my grandson asked.

“But not too valuable.” We both sat very still, thinking hard. In desperation, I glanced at the silver-framed print of my favorite author for inspiration. Gilbert Keith Chesterton sat wrapped in his cape with his walking stick in hand. “What about something inside out and upside down?” he seemed to suggest. I resumed typing.)



Red Rowdy reached into the sand and pulled out a bottle in a message.

(I stopped typing. Junior read the line and looked at me. He reread the line. He corrected me, “I think you mean that I pulled out a message in a bottle, Grandma.” I merely smiled and returned to my keyboard.)

Red Rowdy thought this was rather out of the ordinary, but he unfastened the message, which was written on waterproof paper with waterproof ink, from around the green plastic bottle. Red Rowdy read the message aloud: “I am sailing from this beach in my grandmother Simpson’s kayak to encounter adventures and inconveniences. I expect to find both, and if you are brave enough and wise enough, you will find the same whether you stay at home or travel. I may return one day to my home, and then again, I may not. Since you are reading this, please be so kind as to remember me in your prayers and place the message in the attached bottle. Throw the bottle into the sea and perhaps my words will find me wherever I happen to be in this wide and wonderful world. Yours truly, Andrea Anderson”

“Wow!” Red Rowdy said. He read the message again. “I wonder where Andrea Anderson is now.” He gazed out at the breakers splashing upon the beach. “I’ll bet she’s having lots of adventures. I wonder if I could sail from here and find her. What if she’s in danger and needs rescuing?” He rolled the message up and then unrolled it. “I’m going into the cottage for a pen. Might as well send her a reply.”

Red Rowdy ran up to the cottage, and the gardener obliged him with a waterproof pen, because he was fresh out of regular pens. With the waterproof pen, Red Rowdy wrote the following: “Dear Andrea Anderson, I was digging for buried treasure on Mrs. Simpson’s beach and found your bottle in a message with some help from my grandmother, who doesn’t seem to be related to you at all. I will remember you in my prayers, and I hope that you are having many adventures with only a few inconveniences. I may try to find you one day, but I don’t yet have a boat since I am not allowed to steal one. But I wanted you to know that I found your message, and now I hope it finds you again. Yours, Red Rowdy”

Red Rowdy let the maid, the butler, and the gardener read both messages. The maid giggled, the gardener put the cap back on the pen, and the butler asked if his services were required to launch the bottle into the sea. Red Rowdy thanked him but said that he preferred to do the required throwing himself. The butler let him out the door, and Red Rowdy walked down the boardwalk to the docks.

Twice he made sure the cap was securely fastened to the bottle. He tested the wind with a wet finger, and then he heaved the bottle as far as a blue whale could stretch into the rippling, sparkling water. The bottle with the message now inside was lost in the billows beyond the breakers.

(“Does the bottle find Andrea Anderson?” Junior asked me as I clicked to save our story and turned away from the computer.



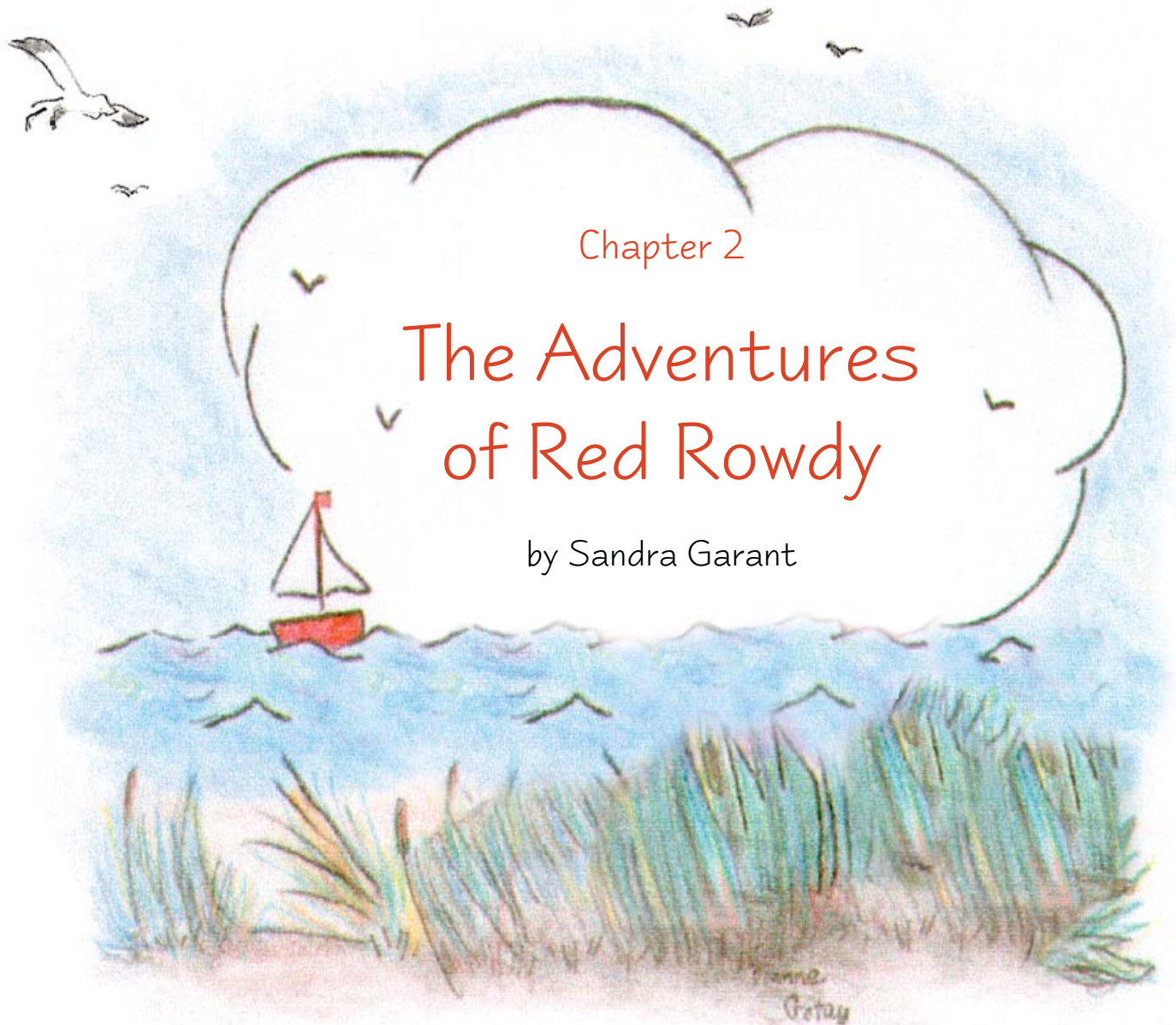
“I’m not sure,” I said. “These things take time.” I straightened my desk, my glasses, and my hair. “And it is time for you to go home and have supper with your mom and dad. They shall suspect that I am holding you for ransom.”

Junior shuffled toward the door. “Thanks, Grandma.” He hesitated. “Would you mind if I kept the shirt? I’ll take good care of it.”

I nodded. “I know you will, Junior. See you tomorrow?”

“Of course, Grandma!” He ran back and gave me kiss on the cheek and then flew out the door like a minnow caught in a current.)





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Chapter 2

I was dusting my computer and the silver-framed print of my favorite author when I heard Junior yank open the screen door and saw him tumble into my library.

“Have you started writing yet, Grandma?” he gasped.

I frowned slightly and folded my arms.

“I mean, Good morning, Grandma. How are you doing today?” He started over again. Today, Junior was wearing his red t-shirt and carrying a flat board with a crude handle nailed to one end.

I smiled and answered “Good morning, Junior. I’m fine, thank you. And you?” I stopped dusting and gave him a hug, trying to avoid the board in his hand. “I haven’t yet begun to type this morning. Are you ready?”

“Yes, ma’am!” he answered and settled down to watch me work.

I flexed my fingers and placed them on the keyboard. “Here we go!” I murmured. I had a wonderful idea.

Junior Learns to Swim

One day late in the spring, Junior’s mother bought him a pair of red swimming trunks to surprise him. She had signed him up for swimming lessons down at the Portlee City Pool. The lessons were at eight o’clock on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings. Because Junior was interested in ships and such things, his thoughtful mother decided he should learn how to swim.

“Grandma?” Junior said, flicking the flat board within inches of my silver-framed photograph.

“Yes, Junior, and please take your stick outside,” I answered, moving the photograph further back on my desk.

“It’s not a stick, Grandma. It’s a sword. Would you mind if I sheathed it instead? Someone might steal it, and then where would I be? Without a sword, that’s where.” He placed the flat board carefully through his belt. He peered over my shoulder and scowled as he read the beginning. He shook his head sadly at me. “I already know how to swim. I learned last year,” he stated. “And please, call me Red Rowdy.”

“I’m a little behindhand in writing your memoirs,” I agreed and then added, “Red Rowdy.”

Red Junior Rowdy put one hand on the board in his belt. “What I’d really like to learn is how to swordfight.” He waited.



“Yes, I’m sure you would, Jun-- Red Rowdy, but no one in Portlee teaches sword fighting,” I pointed out.

“Actually, the librarian, Mrs. Read, is ordering a book on sword fighting for me. She says it builds character,” he counterattacked. “And it has its own kind of etiquette and right of way rules. And G. K. Chesterton wrote about swordfights. You told me so yourself.”

I was caught off-guard. “Well,” I began. I made a note to have a word with my sister-in-law, Mrs. Read. She was married to my younger brother, Booker.

“Oh, thank you. Thank you, Grandma.” Red Rowdy wrapped me in a hug like an octopus going after its prey and squeezed the breath out of me. “Would you mind changing the title to Red Rowdy the Swashbuckler?”

“Very well,” I said. I straightened my bifocals and started over.

Red Rowdy the Swashbuckler

After surviving and winning the Third Most Important Yacht Race of the Season and finding buried treasure and losing it again, Red Rowdy arrived home. Soon his mailbox was crammed with offers from around the world inviting him to sign up for expensive cruises, to purchase pirate outfits, and to learn the exciting art of fencing.

(“When do we get to the sword fighting?” my rowdy grandson asked, reading over my shoulder.

“Fencing is sword fighting. Modern and safe sword fighting,” I replied over my shoulder.

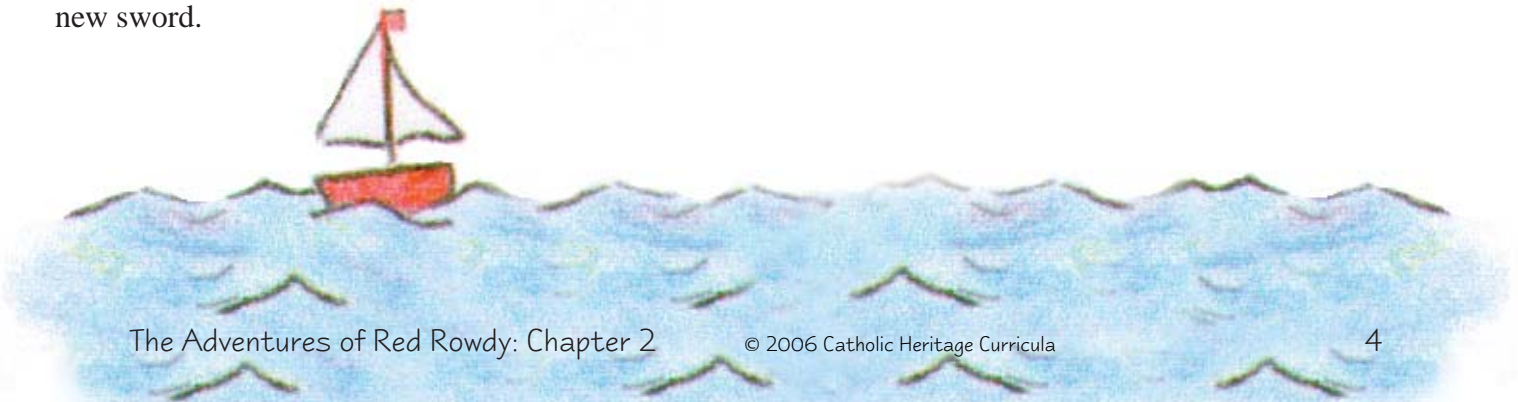
“Oh,” he said. “Sorry.”)

Red Rowdy’s parents reviewed each offer and cast them all away like a barracuda nosing about for one particular tasty morsel. They threw away everything, except for the offer on fencing. Red Rowdy’s mother called the toll-free number for more information. Within minutes, Red Rowdy was downloading an e-book on fencing.

(“Do I order my Spanish tempered steel sword online, too?” suggested Red Rowdy. “I saw an El Cid for \$175. That’s not too much money for a fiction story that isn’t really true, is it?”

“Yes, it is too much even for fiction, and no, I’m sorry, but sword smiths don’t sell to anyone under the age of nineteen,” I parried.)

Red Rowdy’s father went into his workshop and made a handsome wooden sword with an embossed leather sheath for Red Rowdy to practice with. Red Rowdy was enchanted by the beauty and safety features of his new sword.



(Junior Rowdy humphed when he read about the safety features. I raised my right eyebrow at him with grandmotherly sternness.

“What do you mean by ‘safety features’?” he asked me.

Getting straight to the point, I said, “The sword is blunt.” I returned to my keyboard.)

Red Rowdy practiced for three hours every day. The first hour consisted of footwork drills. He lunged, he advanced, he retreated, he accelerated, he stomped, and he hopped. He devoted the second hour to hacking, riposting, glissading, flicking, and other such maneuvers. During the third hour, he drank plenty of water and took a shower.

Red Rowdy’s backyard rang with the sounds of “On Guard!” and “Take that!” and “You villain!” It was great fun except for the fact that he was wearing ruts in the yard. His mother asked him to go play in the street for a day or two. So Red Rowdy ventured out into the streets of Portlee with his handsome wooden sword.

A scrawny mutt barked at him as he neared the playground. The mutt showed Rowdy its teeth, and Rowdy showed his sword. He advanced and the dog chose to retreat before the battle started.

A roar of laughter caused Red Rowdy to turn about. “You look so stupid!” several big boys shouted at him. “What are you supposed to be?” They walked over.

(“That’s very rude,” my grandson said. “Are you going to kill them off?”)

I raised my left eyebrow at him and shook my head.)

Red Rowdy stood his ground and permitted them to approach. “I’m a pirate,” he said calmly, with his hand still gripping his unsheathed sword.

“Ha! That’s stupid,” one of the boys said.

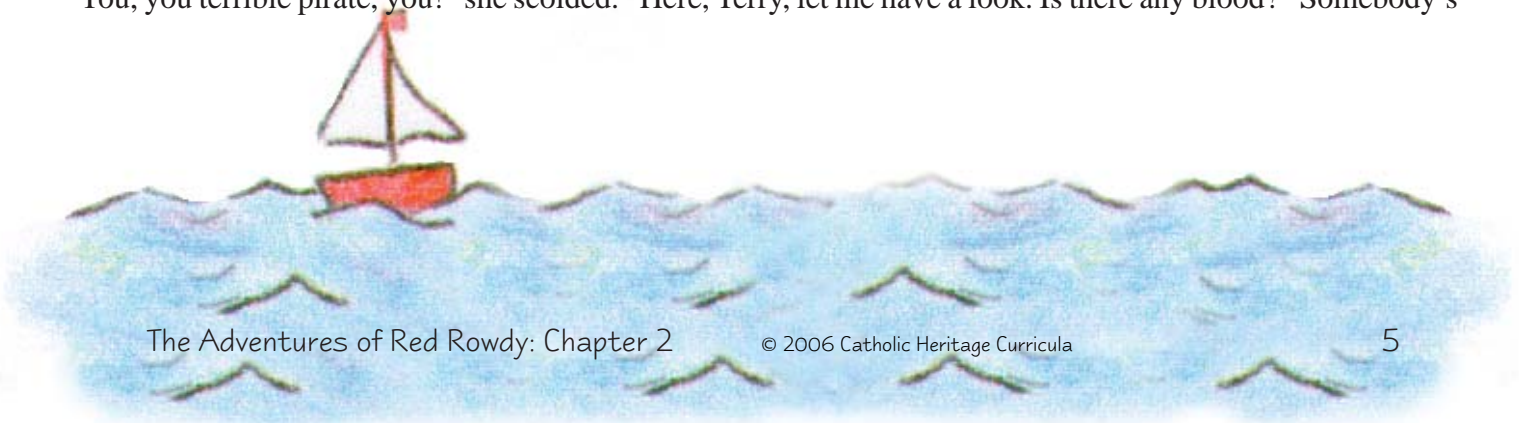
Red Rowdy was silent. He flicked his sword expertly and bent a dandelion over.

The boys howled with laughter. “Ha, ha, ha!” Then one of them leapt forward to shove Red Rowdy. Red Rowdy had no time to think. He parried and caught the boy’s forearm a great crack.

“Aaaaa!” the boy screamed. The rest of the boys fell back.

“Good heavens! What’s going on here?” cried somebody’s mother. All the boys scattered, except for Red Rowdy and the injured victim.

“You, you terrible pirate, you!” she scolded. “Here, Terry, let me have a look. Is there any blood?” Somebody’s



mother made soothing noises, but Terry backed away and stormed off with a threat. "I'm telling my dad on you, Red Rowdy."

"Oh my," said somebody's mother. "You're in trouble now."

"Yes, ma'am," said Red Rowdy. He sheathed his sword. "I think I'll go home now."

"Well," somebody's mother said with her hands on her hips.

"Well," said another voice. It was police officer Thomas Parker with a cell phone in one hand and his sunglasses in the other. "I saw the whole thing. Red Rowdy stood up to all of them, and Terry attacked first. It was self-defense. But I guess we'll have to put a stop to this all right." Officer Parker put on his sunglasses and walked off while dialing a number, but not in the direction of Red Rowdy's house. He went to visit the Portlee mayor.

("Do I have to go to jail, Grandma?" my grandson asked, leaning far forward. "Would Uncle Tommy throw me in jail?" he wondered.

"You'll have to wait and see, sir," I told him.)

Red Rowdy walked home. He was in a low mood. A retreating swordsman has a hard time putting on a happy face.

He opened the back door and walked into the kitchen where his mother was peeling potatoes. "Mom, I will miss you," he said.

"That's nice. I will miss you too," she said. "Where are you going, son? Is there going to be another race?"

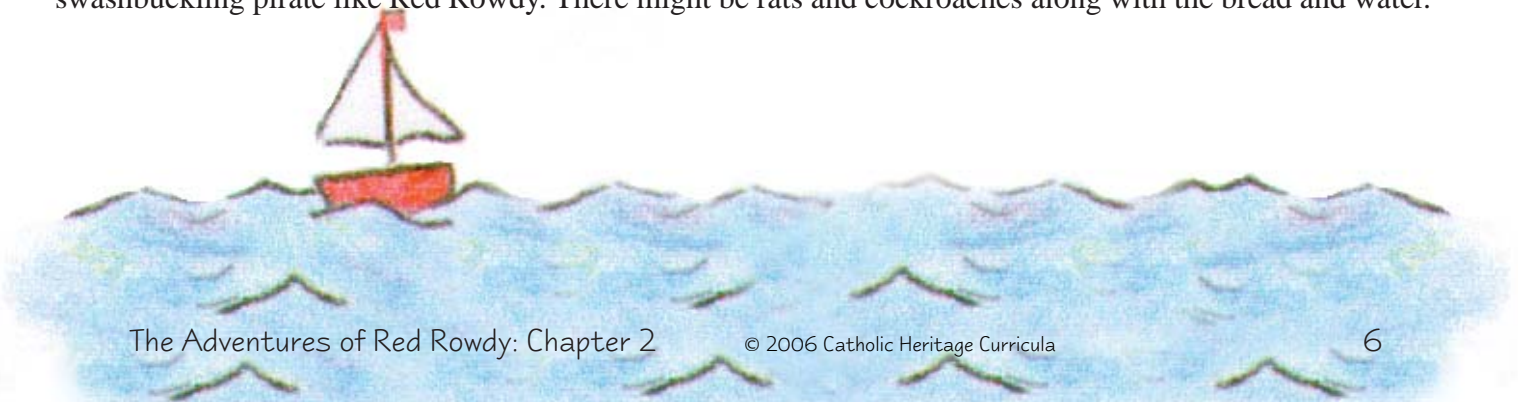
"I will probably be thrown into the deepest, darkest dungeon Portlee has to offer," Red Rowdy said.

His mother looked somewhat alarmed. "Why?"

"I hit Terry just a little while ago with my sword. He's going to have an awful bruise on his arm. He tried to push me, and I blocked him with my trusty blade. There were witnesses," he added. "Will you come and visit me?"

His mother put the potato and the potato peeler down and kissed him on his sweaty forehead. "Yes, I won't forget you, I promise. No matter how dark or how deep the dungeon."

Red Rowdy shuddered. The thought of a dungeon was not to be considered without a shudder even by a swashbuckling pirate like Red Rowdy. There might be rats and cockroaches along with the bread and water.



And damp walls and musty air. And more cockroaches.

There was a knock at the door. Rap, rap, rap.

Red Rowdy took off his sword and gave it to his mother. “Keep it safe for me, Mom. In case I manage to escape.”

(“Grandma, are you going to help me escape?” my grandson asked excitedly. “That would be a lot of fun.”

“No, I do not assist criminals,” I told him. “I’m a law-abiding grandmother.”)

His mother took the sword and hurried to open the front door. She greeted Officer Parker and the mayor of Portlee. “Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Good morning, Tommy, um, I mean, Officer Parker. Please come in.”

“I see you have the alleged weapon,” began the Portlee mayor as he squeezed his large frame through the front door.

“Yes, my son surrendered it to me just now. He’s ready to do the time for his crime,” Red Rowdy’s mother said.

(“You mean, my mom is just going to hand me over to the police!” Red Rowdy was shocked to the roots of his black hair.

“Your mother does not assist criminals either,” I informed him. “Please remember that I brought her up with a proper respect for authority.”)

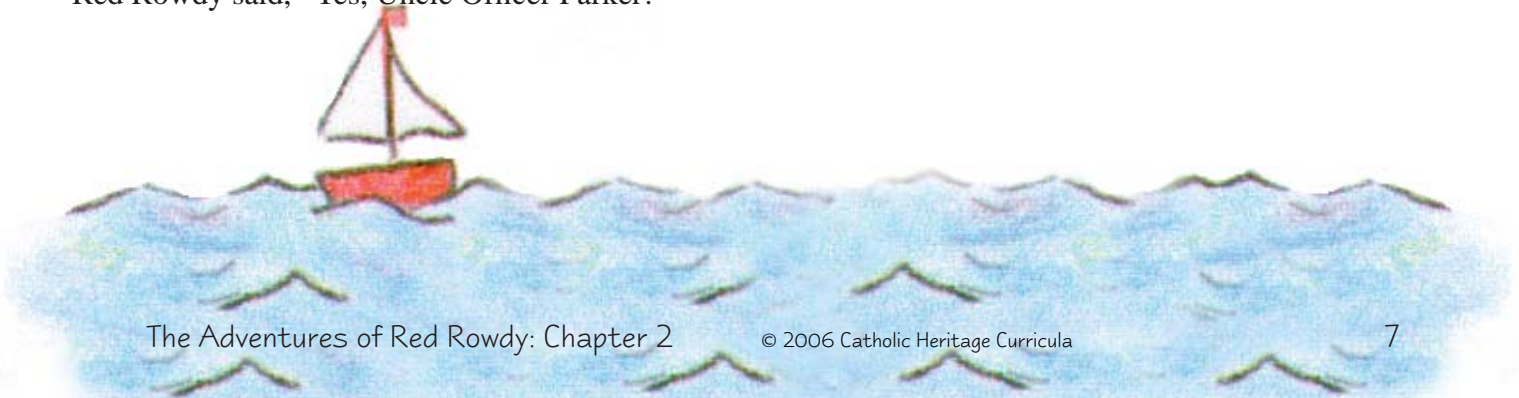
“Well,” said Officer Parker, fiddling with his long mustaches, “It’s a serious matter--one that calls for a stern reprimand and community service. Because I would not feel comfortable having a famous swordsman in the city jail. It would distress the other inmates.”

Red Rowdy appeared. His knees were shaking, but he gave no signs of resisting arrest.

“Ah, Red Rowdy, there you are.” Officer Parker noticed him. “You have skillfully bruised a citizen of Portlee with a dangerous weapon. However, I remarked on the circumstances. You were outnumbered and provoked. You could have struck more than once, but wisely refrained. And you did not flee, but stood your ground like a—like a swordsman.”

“Fencing is an honorable sport, but you may not leave these premises carrying your sword. Is that clear, sir?” Officer Parker glared at Red Rowdy.

Red Rowdy said, “Yes, Uncle Officer Parker!”



“You are free to move about the city as long as you are sword-less, except for next weekend,” Officer Parker finished.

Red Rowdy’s eyebrows shot up. “Sir?”

The Portlee mayor stepped forward. “As further punishment for this offense against the peace and tranquility of the city, you are hereby sentenced to act as escort for the Portlee Seaside Parade and Festival. You may wear your sword then as long as you abide by all the rules of parade etiquette and don’t go swatting the parade watchers. That would be in bad taste. And, I should mention, rather perilous for the parade watchers.”

“Yes, sir!” Red Rowdy saluted the mayor and Officer Parker. They bowed and left.

Next weekend, Red Rowdy wore a new red t-shirt. He had polished his wooden sword with lemon oil until it shone. He ran through all the parade etiquette he could remember--obey the marching orders, stay in the middle of the street, keep his distance from the two women carrying the Portlee City banner, acknowledge the crowd, stop and bow in front of the judge’s stand, perform his fencing routine once, and then move on until the end of the route.

He was not to unsheathe his sword until the parade began. The women picked up the velvet banner and nodded to him. Red Rowdy took his position. The band behind him began to play. The parade commenced parading. He slipped his sword out, bent his right elbow smartly, and held the sword motionless with the blunt end pointing upward.

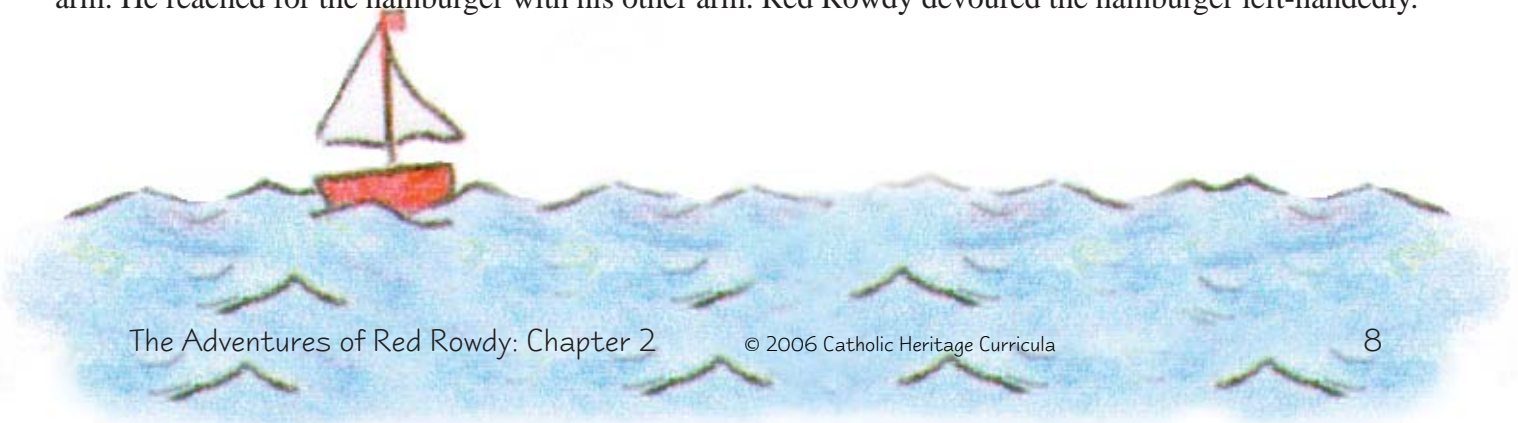
The crowd cheered and waved. Red Rowdy grinned and waved back with his free hand. They walked and walked. Red Rowdy’s arm began to grow tired. He tried not to think about it. He had never noticed before how heavy the sword was. He guessed maybe ten pounds, no, perhaps fifteen. He kept walking.

Finally, he reached the judges’ stand. He saluted the judges and bowed. Then he bowed to the crowd. From the on guard position, Red Rowdy swept into action. He lunged and struck, he stomped and feinted, he double advanced and thrust, he retreated with a parry. His invisible partner was swift, but Red Rowdy must have been even swifter. Dripping with sweat, he completed his maneuvers. He bowed to the crowd and bowed to the judges. Then he walked on.

After the parade, Red Rowdy sprawled on the grass. His sword weighed about thirty pounds. He closed his eyes for many minutes.

“Red Rowdy! Aren’t you hungry?” Red Rowdy’s parents shook him awake. They had bought a hamburger and a root beer for him.

Red Rowdy opened his eyes and sat up. The sun was setting. He shook his sword arm, which was now a sore arm. He reached for the hamburger with his other arm. Red Rowdy devoured the hamburger left-handedly.



“Red Rowdy, please put the wrappers in the trash,” his mother said.

“Yes, ma’am,” Red Rowdy said. Red Rowdy’s mouth stretched open in a yawn like a whale breathing in gallons of plankton. After the yawn, he began to doze again on a bench.

Officer Parker came along to shake Red Rowdy’s hand. Since it is not proper to shake the hand of a sleeping pirate, he shook Red Rowdy’s father’s hand. “Well done!” he said and winked at his sister who was Red Rowdy’s mother. “Thank you, Tommy,” she said. “Life is one adventure after another when your son is a pirate.”

Red Rowdy’s father carried him home and put him to bed. The sword was carefully placed over the mantel in the living room for all visitors to see and admire.

“What a cool idea, Grandma. Thanks for getting me out of jail before I was arrested,” my grandson said. He unsheathed his flat board and slashed about with it. “Wouldn’t it be great if I really did get sword fencing lessons? I’ll bet if you talked to my mom and let her read this story, she’d sign me up.”

“Oh, dear!” I said to myself. “How am I going to write myself out of this story?”

“How about a real hamburger for lunch, Junior, I mean Red?” I said aloud. “You can toast the bread while I make the beef patties and light the grill.”

We both got busy with lunch preparations. After a while, my grandson remarked, “That’s one bad thing about books, Grandma. They don’t smell as nice as real life, do they?”

“Aye, aye, Red Rowdy,” I agreed heartily, and I silently hoped that that would be the end of the sword fencing lessons.

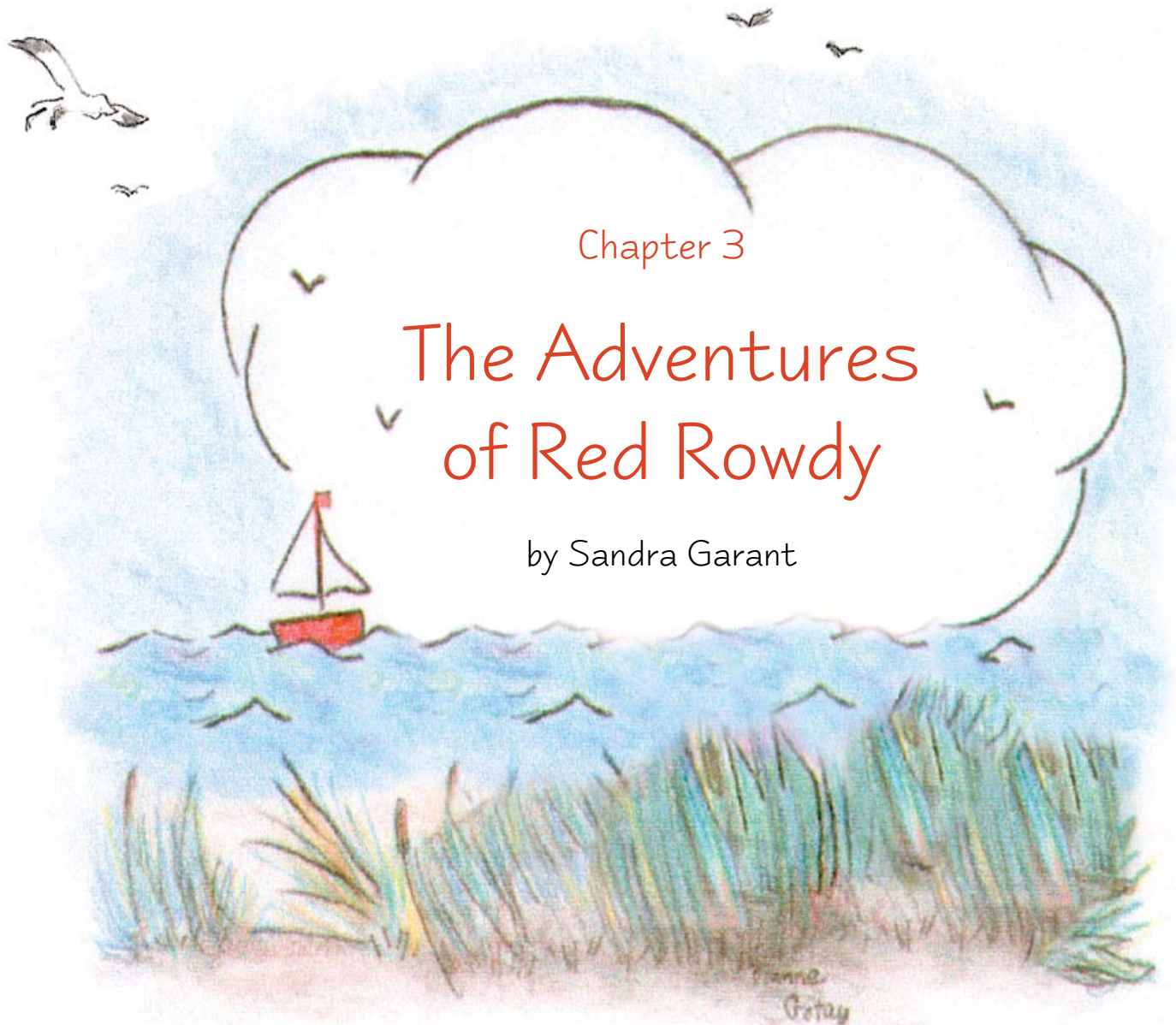
“After lunch, do you want to go with me to the library to see if the book Mrs. Read ordered has come in yet?” my grandson asked.

I choked on a bit of hamburger.

“Are you all right, Grandma?”

“Yes, dear. I’m sure I will be fine,” I reassured him. This was not the end, after all, of the sword fencing lessons. My grandson the pirate had only just begun to fight.)





An inconvenience is only an adventure wrongly considered;
an adventure is an inconvenience rightly considered.

-- G. K. Chesterton

Dedicated to Lily Jo DeVillez, my goddaughter

Artwork by Dianne Gotay (adapted). Used with permission.

Other Titles by the Author:

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It's a Mystery! Catholic Children's Retreats:

The Holy Trinity, The Perfect Personality, The Secret Garden, The Household of God

The Meyers of Crystal Creek (online story)

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Chapter 3

When my grandson did not invade my house in the middle of the morning for two days running, I began to be suspicious. I baked a batch of chocolate chip cookies and walked over for a visit. Chocolate chip cookies are not strictly pirate's fare, but I was sure that Junior would forgive me.

He did forgive me by taking a large bite of cookie. I suppose that pirates must often be forced to dine upon whatever fate or their grandmothers provide.

“Nooooowgwa-maw, pweaze”

I held up my hand. “Red Rowdy, I simply cannot and do not wish to interpret any communication attempted by someone chewing chocolate chip cookies. I am not about to rush off. I shall speak with your mother while you finish.”

My daughter Christine who is not at all rowdy, and I enjoyed a lovely cup of tea and a sliver of lemon cake.

“Mother,” Christine said, “I’m not sure about encouraging this swashbuckling behavior. When he isn’t reading about sword fighting, he is looking for large logs to hollow out. For a canoe!”

I set my teacup down gently because this is the best way to set down a teacup. “My dear, he has enthusiasm, imagination, and energy. I could think of worse personality traits.” I added to soothe her, “Perhaps, he’ll join the Navy when he’s older or become an adventure tour guide—the sort that leads whitewater rafting trips or photo-safaris on the African savannah.”

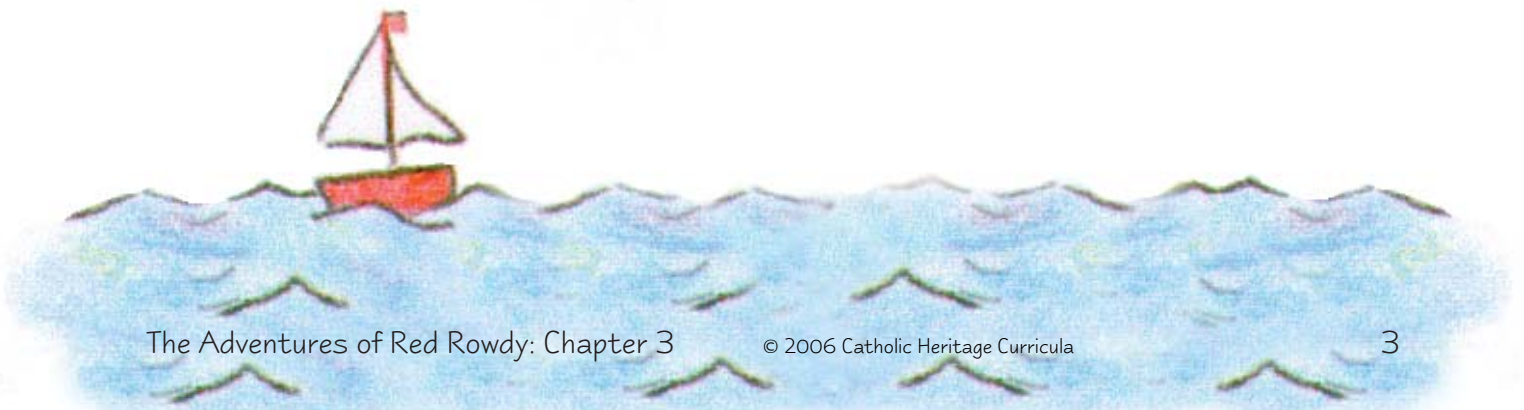
“Mother,” Christine said, “large logs mean big trouble.”

“Yes, I understand. However, let’s be patient,” I said, trying to remember if I had any large logs lying about my house or yard. Well, it might be fun to build a raft rather than a canoe. Canoes can be tippy in the water. Just a small safe steady raft. In my long life, I had done many things, but I had never built a small safe steady raft.

“Grandma, thanks again for the cookies.” Junior came into the kitchen to wash the chocolate smears off his fingers.

“You are welcome, Junior.”

He sat down beside his mother. “Can we talk about boats now? A pirate needs a boat. So I just have to have one. And you can call me ‘Red Rowdy’ for short.”



Christine and I looked at each other. “How about if Red Rowdy builds a boat in a story?” I suggested.

My grandson slumped in his chair. “It’s not really the same thing,” he said.

“True, but if he never builds a boat, he will probably never find Andrea Anderson,” I argued.

He sat up with a burst of good posture. “Okay. But if I help you write a story, will you help me figure out how to build a real boat, Grandma? It doesn’t have to be big, but it has to be real. We can launch it on Parker’s Pond. If you don’t mind,” he added.

Parker’s Pond was named after my father-in-law, who didn’t care much for the sea, but did like to fish from dry land on Sunday afternoons. So he had a pond dug in one corner of his property. It was no more than six feet deep, which was a good thing, if we were going to launch a homemade boat on it. It covered about a half an acre and was surrounded by tough grasses with a few willows draping themselves over the water’s edge.

“Let’s go, then,” I said, kissing my daughter good-bye. She looked suspiciously at us both, and the telephone rang, so Red Rowdy and I took off.

Back in my library, I cleaned my bifocals, and Red pushed the start buttons on my computer monitor and the CPU. The screen lit up, and we sat down to write our story.)

Red Rowdy, the Raft Builder

(“Wait, Grandma. A raft?” my grandson said. “I was thinking more about a sailboat. A red sailboat.”)

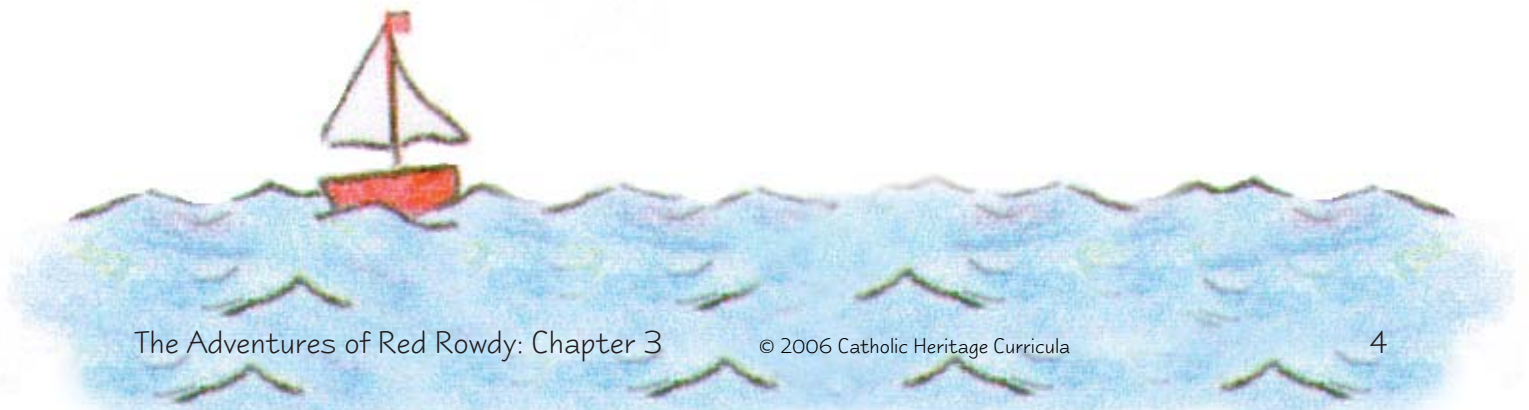
“Patience, Junior,” I answered. “It has to be a raft. You’ll see why,” I promised him.)

Red Rowdy was hankering after more adventures once he recovered from the parade. He was ready to quit the shore and sail upon the briny blue again. And he had dreams of finding and rescuing Andrea Anderson from any inconveniences she might be encountering.

So Red Rowdy went to visit Captain Bly down at the docks. Captain Bly seemed happy to see his old sandwich-making crew member once more.

(My grandson sighed. I kept typing.)

“Captain, I need a ship for a long voyage. I don’t know for how long though, and I don’t know where. Do you know of any for sale? I had better buy one because I don’t know if I shall return.”



The captain pushed his cap back and rubbed his forehead. “How big of a ship, Mr. Rowdy?”

“Big enough for two people at least,” Red Rowdy said.

“How much, Mr. Rowdy?” was Captain Bly’s next question.

“How much what, Captain?”

“How much can you afford to pay?” the captain explained.

Red Rowdy checked his pockets. “About \$5.”

Captain Bly thought. He scratched his ear. He rubbed his nose. Finally, he said, “Mr. Rowdy, a boat for two people is going to cost much more than \$5.”

“How much more?” Red Rowdy had to know.

“Much, much more,” the Captain said.

Red Rowdy sighed and shook the captain’s hand and went to sit on a pile of netting on the docks. He had to think. If he tried to steal a boat, this story was going to end in a bad way. He didn’t have enough money to buy a boat. He looked about. The sea gulls were arguing over scraps of fish. A buoy was floating about a hundred yards away. All around him, large and small boats were rising and falling with the restless motion of the waves. The dockhands were busy with the many miscellaneous tasks that boats require. An empty barrel floated past him, bobbing up and down. Then another floated by and bumped into the first one with a dull clang. Red Rowdy frowned. People shouldn’t be dropping empty barrels in the water. That was littering. There was no telling where those barrels might end up, floating about like that.

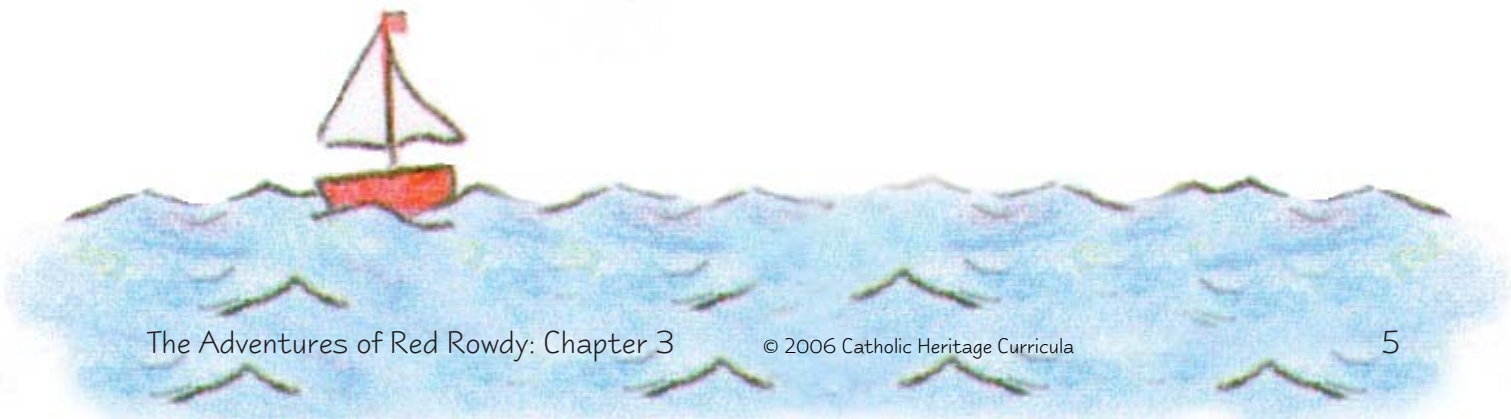
“Give me a hand, son,” someone said behind him. “Let’s get those barrels out of the water.”

With a grappling hook and some patience and muscle, Red Rowdy and the man pulled four barrels up alongside the docks and then stood them on end so they wouldn’t roll back into the water. “Don’t want to leave these here. Do you think Booker Read might find some use for these old barrels, son?” the man asked.

“Yes, sir. I think he might,” Red Rowdy said. “I can call him if you let me borrow your phone.”

(“Grandma, what’s Mr. Read going to do with those barrels?” my grandson asked. He leaned forward so far that I didn’t have room to type.

“You may call him Great Uncle Booker” I said. “He’s going to . . . well, let me type it out and you’ll see.”)



Red Rowdy called Great Uncle Booker. He told his great uncle about the barrels and his plan for using the barrels. Red Rowdy returned the phone to the man. “My great uncle Booker Read is coming over to pick up these barrels. I’m going to guard them until he gets here, and we will have them off the docks and out of your way in about half an hour.”

“Suits me,” said the man, and he walked off with the grappling hook.

Red Rowdy smiled. And he sat on a barrel, not even caring that it was wet and a bit rusty, and he waited for Great Uncle Booker to arrive.

They heaved the barrels into the bed of his great uncle’s pick up truck. Booker Read was a carpenter, so he knew that Red Rowdy’s plan was a good one. They drove to Read’s Woodworking, Inc., which was a workshop in Booker Read’s backyard, and prepared to build.

Great Uncle Booker and Red Rowdy drew a diagram of Red’s plan, and then they began cutting 4 x 6 inch boards and nailing together a sturdy 10-foot square framework. Once the framework was complete, they nailed shorter boards on top of the square to cover it completely. This formed a solid deck. Red Rowdy decided to add a two-inch toerail around the edges. Then they varnished the wood carefully on both sides to seal it from the water and the sun.

(“Grandma, I don’t think this is going to work. You’re going to drown me with that raft. It will never float,” my grandson said.)

“Let’s get the barrels, Great Uncle Booker,” Red Rowdy said at last. They rolled the barrels over to the wooden deck and drilled holes to attach each barrel securely with large screws to the underside of the deck.

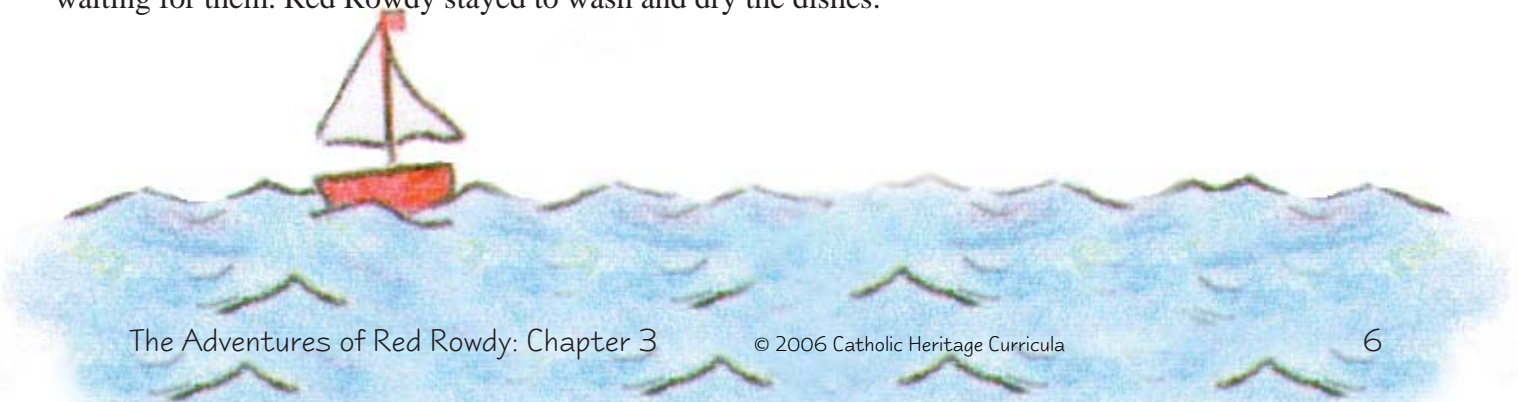
“It looks grand,” said Booker Read when they had attached the fourth barrel. “What a raft!”

“I’m going to need a mast, a sail, and a rudder,” said Red Rowdy. “Or she will be too hard to maneuver on the open water.”

“Aye, aye,” replied his great uncle. They set to work again, and by the time the last rays of sunlight were falling upon them, Red Rowdy had his own raft with a tall mast, a canvas sail, and a long rudder.

“I guess I’m a Captain now,” he said. “Now that I have my own ship. Thank you, Great Uncle Booker. I’m going to call her Read’s Raft in your honor.”

His great uncle bowed, and they cleaned up the tools and put everything neatly away before going into supper. Mrs. Read had returned home sometime during the long day’s labor and had a delicious seafood chowder waiting for them. Red Rowdy stayed to wash and dry the dishes.



“So where are you taking Read’s Raft? Around the world?” his great uncle asked.

“To the Indian Ocean to try your swordsmanship?” asked his great aunt.

Red Rowdy shook his head. “I’m going to set out to find Andrea Anderson.”

“Who is Andrea Anderson?” they wanted to know.

“I’m not sure,” said Red Rowdy. “But I dug up her bottle in a message, and then I sent her a message in the bottle. I want to know if she got my message. So I am going to find her.”

“That will have to wait until tomorrow,” said his great aunt firmly. “It is too late to set sail, journeying toward we don’t know where and we don’t know for how long tonight. I called your mother, and she said that you could sleep here.”

(My grandson began bouncing up and down on the chair. “Grandma! Do you think it would work in real life? Do you?”

“Junior, civilized people do not bounce up and down on the furniture. Desist at once, or I shall send you cruising home, young man.”

He stopped bouncing. “Can I bounce if I’m not on the furniture?” he wanted to know, sliding off the chair.

I considered. “Yes, but only once or twice, if you don’t mind.”

He bounced twice on his feet and then stopped. “Grandma, let’s try it. Call Great Uncle Booker and see what he says.”

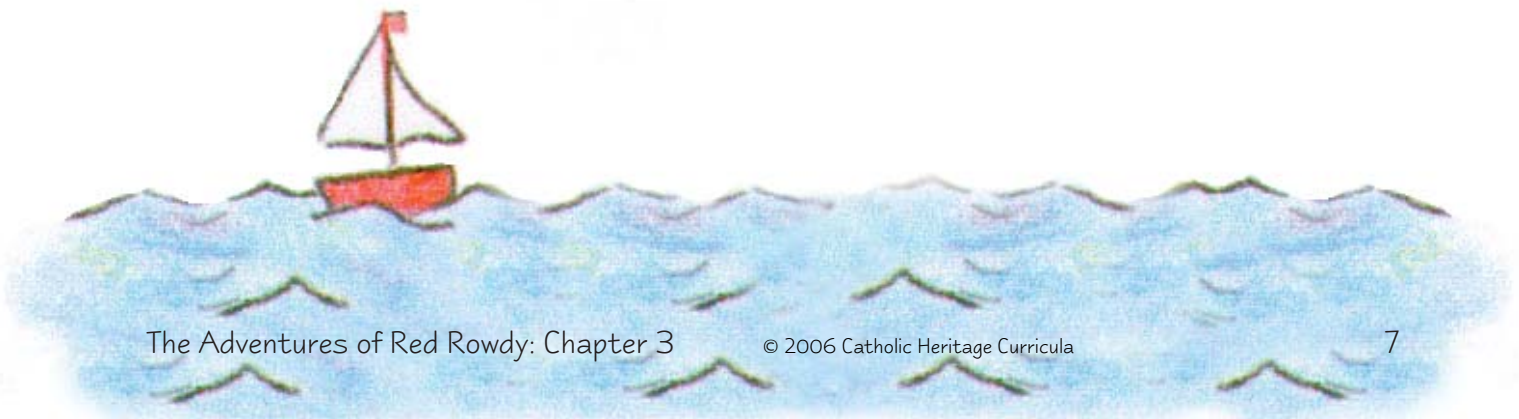
I called my brother while my grandson leaned in close to hear as much of the conversation as he could. I frowned at him until he leaned back. “Booker, Junior and I would like to go rafting on Parker’s Pond. Do you have any empty barrels about your workshop that would float a raft?”

“Tell him the name of the raft,” my grandson whispered.

My brother laughed. “So our pirate needs a ship, eh? To go along with the sword fencing?”

“That’s right,” I said. “And he might as well assist you with the construction. Are you free now?”

“Only to build a raft,” my brother said, still laughing. “Come on over. I will start measuring and cutting the wood. Junior can help with the nailing.”



“Fine, then we shall be there in about twenty minutes to assist you with the construction of Read’s Raft,” I said and hung up.

“Let’s go!” said my grandson, bounding out the door.

I grabbed my cream straw hat, keys, and purse, and off we went.

“It’s nearly dark and we aren’t finished yet,” my grandson exclaimed several hours later. “It didn’t take this long in the story.”

“Well, I hurried the story along a bit, so we could get started today. Building a raft takes time,” I explained. “In real life.”

My brother wiped his brow. “Whew! It does. But she will be a fine raft.”

We had the framework finished and the deck nailed on. My brother thoughtfully added two wooden benches with hinged lids for stowing supplies. As the sun was setting, we varnished the wood and decided to let it dry overnight before adding the barrels.

Junior and I walked home in the dark lit by street lamps. “We can go back tomorrow and finish it and float it, can’t we? I just don’t think I will be able to sleep tonight thinking about it,” he confessed.

“You should be tired enough to sleep till noon tomorrow,” I said. “We can finish the raft tomorrow and set sail. Or rather not, I guess, because we won’t have a sail. We will have a stout pole to push the raft out into the middle of Parker’s Pond though.”

My grandson seemed to pep up a bit at the thought of rafting out to the middle of Parker’s Pond. I decided not to tell him about a surprise I was planning. It’s all very well to go rafting, but it was a small pond, and I had thought of something to add to the adventure.

My grandson did not sleep until noon. He was knocking on my door at seven in the morning, and he came armed with a new sword. Apparently, my son-in-law had actually made him a short, flat wooden sword. “It was longer, but I kept tripping on it, so Mom made Dad cut it shorter,” my grandson explained. He pulled a red handkerchief out of his pocket to polish the sword so I could see it shine.

“I see,” I said. “Let me get a few things together here in the kitchen and then we will go.” I slipped a compass into my pocket and we left. My grandson did not pay much attention to the basket I carried along on the trip to his great uncle’s workshop.

We arrived as my brother was finishing his ham and eggs for breakfast. And then we all trooped out to com-



plete the raft. Positioning the barrels exactly right was more difficult in real life than it had been in our story, but we managed by working all together. My brother drilled the holes, two for each barrel. We fitted the large bolts in place one by one and secured them with much twisting of nuts and bolts.

And Read's Raft was ready for the water.

Except that we were not near the water and she was a heavy craft. How to get the raft to Parker's Pond?

Mrs. Read helped us out. As we were pondering what to do, my great nephew drove up with a flatbed trailer. My sister-in-law had realized what would happen and called for back up. A very special back up.

My brother called out, "Just what we need, Father!" He said that because my great nephew was a priest.

"Grandma, isn't he the butler from Chapter One," my grandson asked.

"Yes, he is. I'm afraid I turned him into a butler for the story, but so he is. Father Butler is his name," I explained quickly.

"Good morning," Father Butler said.

With the addition of Father Butler's muscle and many grunts and groans, we lifted Read's Raft onto the trailer. Mrs. Read brought out my basket, and I placed it inside one of the raft benches. My great nephew obliged us by pulling a bottle of holy water out of his pocket and blessing the craft. He winked at us and then got back into the truck and drove us to Parker's Pond.

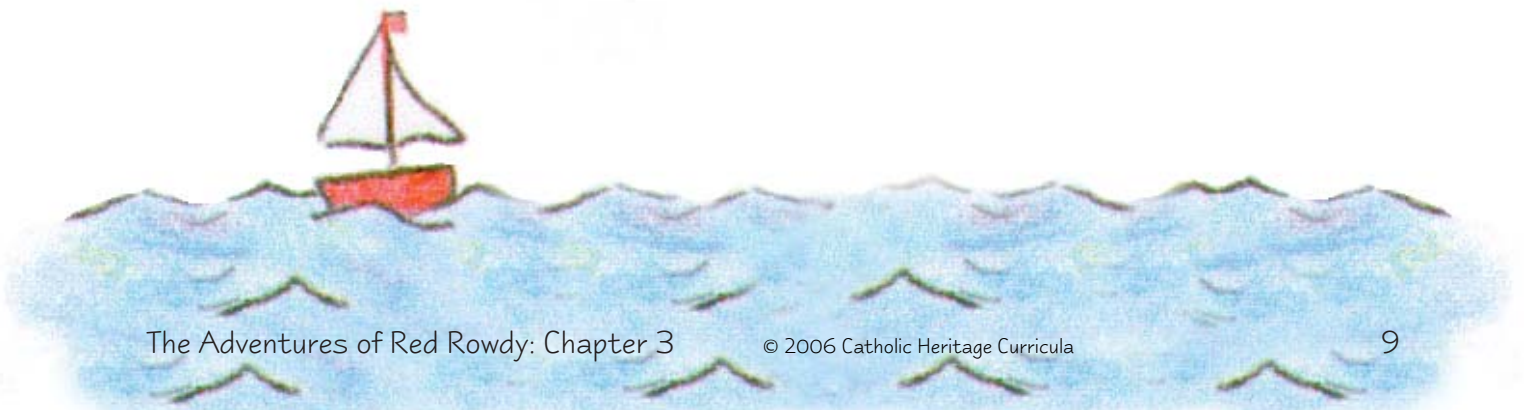
Naturally, Read's Raft slid into the calm green waters of the pond and floated. Father Butler and my brother helped us climb on board, and my grandson immediately grabbed the pole, eager to be off.

"Have a pleasant voyage. And please don't drown," my great nephew made me promise. I smiled and thanked him.

"Don't worry, Father Butler, I will look after her," my grandson said.

"Aye, aye, Captain," he said, and they drove off.

Captain Red stuck the long pole into the pond and pushed us out to the middle in a few minutes since the pond was so small. The wind rippled the waters gently, and the water slapped and sucked lazily against the barrels and the wooden deck. Once we got to the middle, my grandson sat down on a bench. "Now what do we do?" he asked.



“How about lunch first and then a poem?” I suggested, finally bringing out my surprise. We lightened the basket of chicken salad sandwiches, dill pickles, cookies, juice and my book.

“Let’s eat and then read,” my grandson suggested. “We’ll read on Read’s Raft. We ate until our tummies were full, and then we proceeded to fill our imaginations with a poem about the great sea battle of Lepanto.

“Where the grey seas glitter and the sharp tides shift/And the sea folk labour and the red sails lift.”

“Don John of Austria/Is shouting to the ships”!

“I’m glad that Don John of Austria won that battle,” my grandson said at the end. “Wouldn’t it have been awful for us if he hadn’t?”

“Yes, catastrophic,” I agreed.

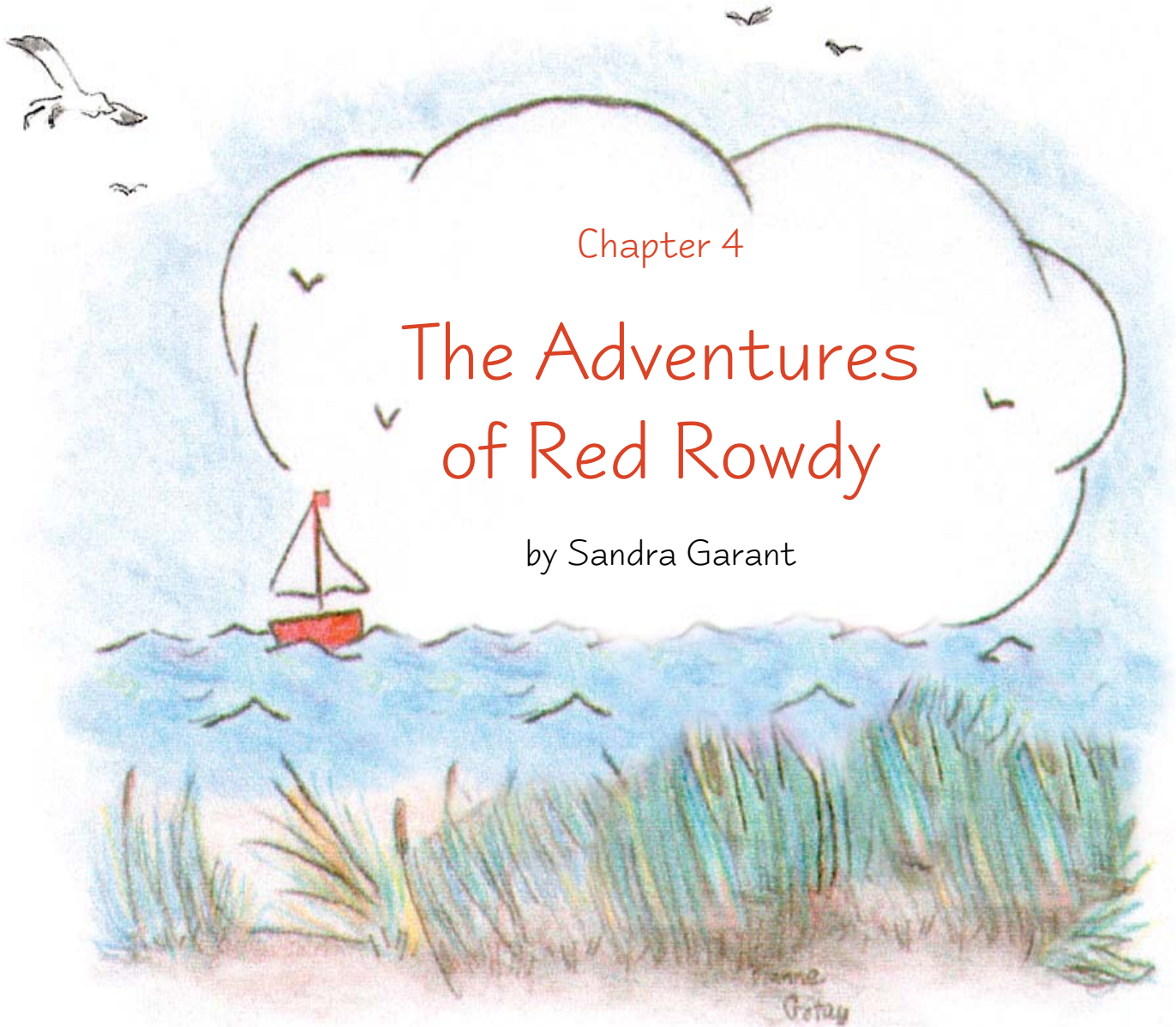
“Don John pounding from the slaughter-painted poop/Purpling all the ocean like a bloody pirate’s sloop,” my grandson jumped up and repeated, waving his short sword in the air. Then he gave me a big hug that rocked the raft.

“It’s nice to be alive and be on a raft with you, Grandma.”

“It is lovely,” I agreed. We sat together on our raft and tried to find north on the compass I had brought along and talked about the kinds of things people kept in their pockets, like holy water and compasses and handkerchiefs and rosaries.)

[“Lepanto” was written by G. K. Chesterton and commemorates the decisive victory of the European Christians against the invasion of the powerful Islamic naval forces on October 7, 1571. The Ottoman Empire was well on its way to overrunning Europe and probably would have succeeded if its naval forces had won this battle. This day became known as the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary because the Christian soldiers carried rosaries with them into the battle.]





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Chapter 4

Junior Hits a Homerun Junior's Visit to the Circus

“Grandma, I don’t have time to hit a homerun. Or visit the circus. I have to start looking for Andrea Anderson,” my grandson insisted the morning after our rafting adventure on Parker’s Pond.

“Junior, I’m running out of ideas,” I admitted, turning away from the keyboard. “I’m afraid that my brain feels as empty as a plundered treasure chest.”

My grandson frowned and wandered about the library. I dusted Mr. Chesterton’s photograph. Junior opened my large atlas. “Grandma, let’s find an island first. Here’s Little Goat Island, and Belle Island. Oh, how about Sullivan’s Island? That sounds like a place a pirate might go.”

We heard a knock at the door, and a hearty voice boomed out, “Anyone home?”

I jumped up and ran to the door even as Charles Parker, my youngest son, walked through. He had been stationed on the West Coast for several years, and although he regularly sent e-mails and called, I had not seen him for the past four years.

“Surprise, Mom!” he said and nearly hugged me off my feet. He looked very fine in his United States Coast Guard uniform, a dark blue coat with four gold bars on the sleeves. He swept his white cap off.

Junior gasped. “Grandma, look! It’s Captain Bly! He’s real.”

Charles laughed. “Have you been writing stories, Mom? And of all men, Captain Bligh? I should hate for that news to get around to my crew. I want no mutinies on my ship.”

I turned red and replied, “I seem to remember you insisted upon being called Captain twenty-four hours a day, Captain Parker, when you were eight years old. Besides, our Captain Bly is spelled B-L-Y. No relation to the poor British captain of the Bounty.”

“That makes a huge difference.” He laughed again and stooped to shake Junior’s hand. “You were barely walking the last time I saw you, William Christopher.”

Junior’s mouth fell open. “What? Who’s William Christopher?”

“Oh, dear,” I said. “You are William Christopher.”



“Named after your father,” Captain Parker said. “Not after poor Captain William Bligh. At least, I hope not.”

“Oh,” Junior said. “I don’t know how I will keep all my names straight now. I prefer to be called Red Rowdy. I’m a pirate,” he explained to Captain Parker.

My son took a step backward upon hearing this. “I see,” he said, frowning at me and shaking his cap. I think my son was trying to decide whether I deserved a scolding or not.

“I am sure that Red Rowdy, I mean, Junior, would enjoy talking to you, Uncle Captain Charles,” I said, pushing my son into the library. “And I will brew a fresh pot of coffee.”

I hurried into the kitchen as Junior was saying, “Are you really and truly Grandma’s son? And a captain at the same exact time? Do you know my mom? And Uncle Officer Thomas? And Father Butler?”

The timely arrival of Uncle Captain Charles Parker caused Junior and myself to forget poor Andrea Anderson and her need for a rescue. I was able to find out how my son and his wife and two daughters were in between him answering Junior’s questions about his ship, which was called the Wellabout.

“She’s three hundred and seventy-eight feet long. And gorgeous now that she’s been renovated and updated,” my son said. “The best high endurance cutter in the west. We can run down any go-fast on the waters.”

“What’s a go-fast? A boat that goes fast?” Junior asked. “That would be handy for a pirate to have.”

“Hmm, yes. And for criminals. But they don’t go fast for long. We chase them down with helicopters, and our sharpshooter disables the engines.” He pretended to raise and sight down a gun barrel.

“And then what do you do with them?” my grandson said with wide eyes.

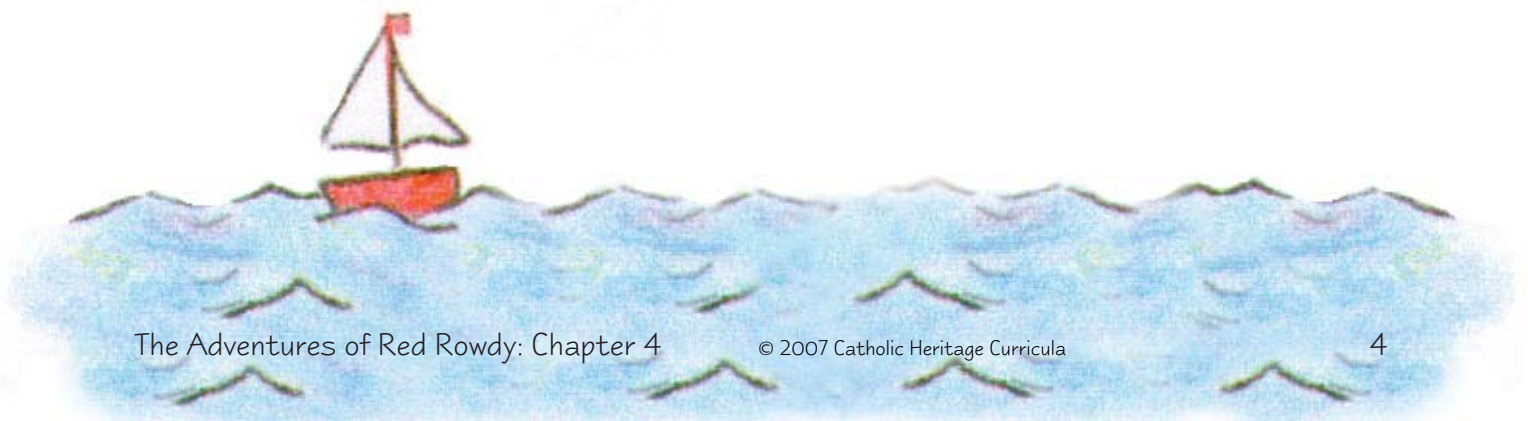
“We arrest them.”

“Because they were going too fast?” Junior asked. “Is there a speed limit on the ocean?”

“No, because they are bad men. They try to bring illegal drugs into the United States, and it’s my crew’s job to stop them before they can sell the drugs.”

“You mean, they’re like pirates?” Junior said.

“Yes, in a way, they are,” my son said. “A pirate is someone who attacks or steals from someone else without any reason other than selfish greed.”



“Oh,” said Junior. He slumped in his chair.

My son and I looked at each other.

“But we do other things as well,” Captain Parker announced. “Want to hear a true story about some very lucky fishermen?”

“Yes, sir!” said Junior, sitting up.

“One day we were out in the Pacific on patrol. The crew were going about their daily duties, and we had a stiff breeze from the West. We received a distress call on the radio. A Russian fishing boat was on fire about 10 miles north by northwest. By the time we arrived, the fishermen were treading water, and the boat was sinking fast. They couldn’t get to their life raft. We sent out an RIB--that’s a small but fast inflatable boat--to pick up the men in the water. The fire was roaring. Diesel fuel burns hot. We tried to put out the fire with hoses, but there was no saving the fishing boat. A rescue team airlifted the captain off the burning deck before she went down.

The Wellabout has a medical team aboard, so we were able to save all the men even the ones who were burned. That’s a good feeling, William Christopher. It’s more than a job, and I like it mighty well.”

“Wow, you mean, you get paid to stop ships, arrest bad people, and rescue good people,” my grandson said. “I don’t believe it!”

“Junior!” I said, “that was not polite.”

“I’m sorry, Uncle Captain Charles,” Junior said, “but it sounds wonderful. As good as being a pirate.”

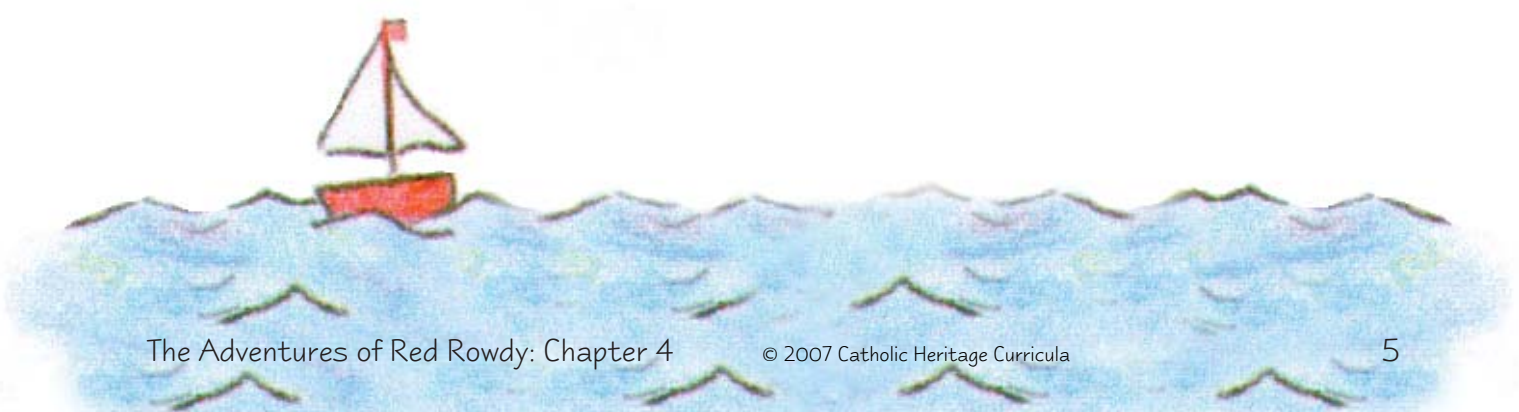
“Oh, better,” my son and I both said.

“Right, because people prefer to be rescued rather than made to walk the plank,” my son explained. “And we have clean uniforms. And ships without rats.” He stood up. “Mom, I have a few more visits to make, but I promise to be back in time for dinner. Until then you’re at liberty.” He winked at Junior, and we saw him off down the porch steps and into the street.

“At liberty” my grandson said, “What does that mean?”

“That means that we are free to continue with our story.”

Junior jumped up. “You mean, I can still rescue Andrea Anderson? Even if I’m a pirate?”



“Oh, yes,” I said, giving him a hug. “You are a unique pirate. One with proper nautical protocol, as Captain Bly might say.”

“I don’t think Uncle Captain Charles likes me very much, Grandma,” Junior said.

“Oh, I think he likes you, but I don’t think he likes the thought of you being a pirate. If he didn’t like you, he wouldn’t be worried about you being a pirate,” I explained. “Adults worry about things like that.”

“Why do adults do that?” he wanted to know.

“Well, because. That’s part of being an adult. You look out for others,” I said. “When you are on a ship, you have to keep a look out for other ships, right?”

“Are you worried about me being a pirate, Grandma?” Junior asked.

I sighed and pushed my bifocals back in place. “I wouldn’t want you to be a pirate in real life, Junior. I hope that you will look out for others and be responsible like your mom and dad and all your uncles and Father Butler.”

Junior nodded. “I wouldn’t want for you to worry about me.”

“Well, for now, we will get on with the story,” I said. So we settled down in front of the computer once more.)

The Voyage of Red Rowdy

After a refreshing night’s sleep, Red Rowdy set sail on the high seas in search of Andrea Anderson.

(“Grandma,” Junior said. “Remember that it’s a raft. You had better make the seas a bit lower.”

I agreed.)

The weather was fine with low seas when Red Rowdy set sail from Portlee. The mayor, Uncle Officer Parker, and his mom and dad watched him step onto the raft and raise the red sail. His bright orange life jacket hampered his movements somewhat because the mayor had fastened it very tightly. It was a gift from the city according to the mayor, but Red Rowdy suspected that his Uncle Captain Parker might have had something to do with it.

(“Did he?” Junior asked. “I guess that means he must like me a little. Does it have a Coast Guard decal on it?”



“Yes, yes, it does,” I said. “It certainly does.”)

The orange life jacket had a highly visible United States Coast Guard decal on the left front and two pockets and two white glow in the dark stripes. The inscription on the decal read “Semper Nostra Optima.”

(“Does that mean that it’s a life jacket for Catholics?” Junior asked.

“No, that’s the ship’s motto,” I said. “It means ‘Always Our Best.’ Mottos are often written in Latin. It’s not quite as dead a language as some people think.”)

He did not bring along a crew because he wanted room for his cargo of crackers, cheese, bottled water, and sunscreen, all of which his mother had thoughtfully packed for him. If you will recall, Red Rowdy had vowed never to eat another sandwich, which did not leave much else for his mother to pack for him on a long sea voyage. The gulls escorted him out of the bay, hoping for remnants of his crackers. But he soon left the noisy birds behind and encountered the vastness and solitude of the great ocean.

Not much happened so Red Rowdy practiced his swordplay and counted fluffy clouds that looked like sheep until it made him sleepy. At night, he looked for shooting stars, but it wasn’t much fun because he began to miss his family. By day, there wasn’t much room to move freely about the raft. At night, the darkness seemed infinite. Red Rowdy began to wish that he had had a first mate along on this voyage. He decided that he did not enjoy traveling alone. And that a sandwich would have tasted quite fine.

One morning, however, he hailed a large tanker on his starboard side.

(“Which side is my starboard side?” Red Rowdy asked. “I keep forgetting, Grandma.”

“It’s the right side of the ship,” I whispered.)

“Hello, there!” A man shouted from the high deck of the tanker. “Don’t worry. We’ll have you out of danger in a jiffy.”

“I’m not in any danger!” Red Rowdy roared. He waved his sword. “I’m looking for adventure and Andrea Anderson. I’m a pirate, sir!”

“Oh,” the man said. “We aren’t allowed to bring pirates onboard. They are too mean and troublesome. Besides, we’re a little behind schedule.”

Red Rowdy paused. Pirates seemed to be unwelcome in several quarters, but he had better press onward. “I don’t want to go onboard, sir. Have you seen any adventures or Andrea Anderson?”



“No, but we passed a girl on an island several days ago,” the man said.

“Really!” exclaimed Red Rowdy. “What did she look like?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t actually see her myself since I was off duty and asleep. We couldn’t get in close because the ship would have run aground, and we’re on a tight schedule. We don’t have much time for rescuing people,” he said. “If you don’t want rescuing, we’ll be on our way.”

Red Rowdy assured the man that he did not want rescuing and directed his course as best he could in the opposite direction of the tanker. He scanned the horizon for some sign of an island. Within the hour, he spotted something low and dark on the horizon.

(“It’s the island,” Junior breathed in my ear. He startled me, and I jumped and hit several wrong keys and had to delete the results. “I’ve found her,” he said.

“I’m afraid not, Junior,” I replied. “Now, no more interruptions because I need to concentrate. This is going to get scary. Do you want to go home and do your math problems?”

“I’ll be quiet. I’m not scared, Grandma,” he said. “But what’s about to happen?” His eyes got big when I looked through my bifocals at him and did not answer.)

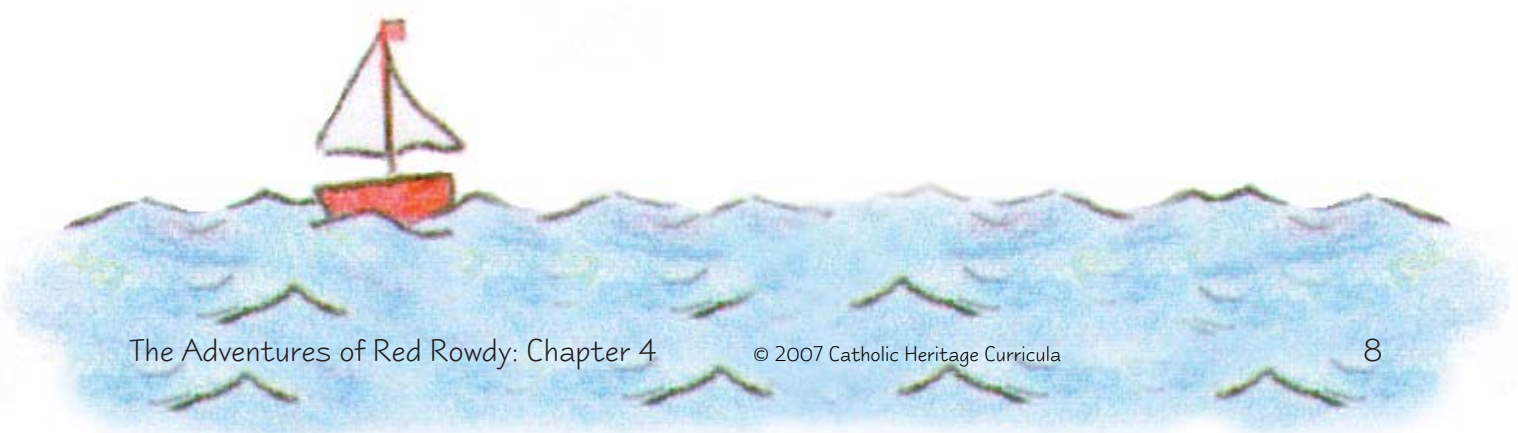
A rumbling and a flash of light warned Red Rowdy that he was heading into a storm. The stripes on his life jacket began to glow as daylight was doused. The storm clouds rushed upon the raft and Red Rowdy like a toothy barracuda after a tasty morsel. Red Rowdy checked the zipper on his Coast Guard life jacket to make sure that it was all the way up. He hoped it had been well made.

His red sail flapped and snapped, and then it ripped. A wild gust of wind cracked the mast and sent it flying past Red Rowdy’s head. The foaming waves struck the raft and nearly swept him into the sea. Red Rowdy clung to the remaining stub of the mast and said his prayers.

(“Grandma, what’s going to happen?” my grandson said. “Are you sure that the story is supposed to go this way?”

“Hang on tight,” I advised him and continued typing.)

The thunder was roaring in his ears. The salty sea water was streaming into his mouth and nose. The fierce waves tugged at Red Rowdy’s arms. The raft rose higher and higher and then dropped down the sheer side of a huge wave. Red Rowdy’s stomach felt as if it did not appreciate the commotion. He was descending into the depths of the storm and the ocean, and there was no telling which was rougher or wetter.



(My grandson grabbed my arm, and I had to stop typing. “These storms move fast, Junior,” I reassured him. “Just close your eyes, and it will soon be over.” He relaxed his grip.)

The raft was spinning and diving at the same time. Crack! Cra-ack! The raft splintered, and Red Rowdy was flung into the cold, foaming waves. He sank down and down. He thrashed and kicked. His life jacket hoisted him upwards. And then his head was above the waves just long enough for him to gasp for breath. Salt water slapped him, and he went under again. He kicked again and pushed himself upwards toward the blessed air. In a flash of lightning, he spotted the wreckage of his raft and pulled himself over to the sorry remains of the deck. The remains were not large enough to climb onto, and he was too tired to do more than hook his arms over the floating bit of wood. Up and down he bobbed. The waves sloshed past, and the rain flung itself down.

Finally, Red Rowdy could hold on no longer. He was so very tired. His arms slipped off the deck, and he floated on his back held up only by the orange life jacket. His feet drifted downwards. His feet struck something solid, but he did not understand this for several minutes. He rested as best he could. And then his feet again struck against something that was not liquid.

Red Rowdy scrambled upright and found that he could stand. The dark clouds were rushing to the edge of the horizon, and Red Rowdy had landed on the edge of an island. He struggled up to the sandy beach and was surprised to discover that he still had his sword with him. That was a comfort.

“What a relief!,” Junior said, collapsing into a chair. “I might need that sword, too. Good thinking, Grandma!”

“Maybe we should take a break,” I suggested, flexing my fingers. I checked the clock. “And I have dinner to get. A very special dinner for a captain. And you are invited along with your mom and dad. Tell them six o’clock sharp.”

“Thanks, Grandma. We’ll be here.”

Later that evening, my grandson whispered to me, “Grandma, adults sure talk a lot.”

I laughed. “Yes. We have a lot of catching up to do. Your mom hasn’t seen her brother in four years!”

Junior looked confused.

“I mean your uncle Charles. She sees your uncle Paul almost every week and your uncle Thomas nearly every day,” I said.

Junior said, “Is Uncle Captain Charles related to everyone?”



“Well, everyone here,” I said. “Can you take the crackers while I carry out this delicious shrimp gumbo that your uncle Paul made? We’ll come back for the coleslaw, potato salad, and the crab cakes.”

“How was your trip to Korea, Charles?” my daughter asked.

“Long,” her brother said, putting his napkin in his lap. “Six months long.”

“I don’t know how Barbara and the girls get along without you when you’re away,” she said. Then she noticed her son. “You’re being a big help to your grandma, Junior. Thank you.” Junior put the crackers on the table in front of his mother.

“It isn’t easy,” Charles said. “That’s why I haven’t seen any of you for so long, Christine. I head back home whenever possible in the hopes that Barbara hasn’t forgotten who I am.”

“Has Barbara ever forgotten you?” Junior wanted to know.

“Say ‘Aunt Barbara,’ Junior,” I whispered to him.

Everyone laughed.

“Not yet, thank goodness!” Captain Parker said. “She seems glad to see me. And I’m glad to see your shrimp gumbo, Paul. Mmm. Be sure to e-mail this recipe to my wife.”

“I can’t. I have a secret ingredient that I refuse to reveal. This gumbo must remain one of the great mysteries of the world,” Paul replied. “A good cook has to have at least one secret recipe. I’ll send her my bouillabaisse recipe.”

“Then you had better get Mom to spell check that for you,” my daughter said. “The name of the recipe is longer than the list of ingredients.”

We managed to be quiet long enough to ask the blessing, and then the chatter started up again.

“How’s the store, William?” Charles asked.

Junior’s father nodded. “Fine. We had a busy summer. And no major storms to keep the visitors away. The ice machine didn’t break this year. That keeps the fishermen happy.” Junior’s father owned a fishing supply store. He sold fishing gear, coolers, boots, hats, and lots of ice to the fishermen.

“And how is school?” Charles asked his sister.

“I’m afraid my student plays truant at his grandmother’s nearly every day,” she said.



“We are engaged in a great literary enterprise, Christine,” I defended my grandson. “He’s learned quite a bit about grammar and spelling.”

“And what have you learned?” William grinned.

“I have learned quite a lot about sword fencing fighting and raft building and toe rails and such things,” I said.

“Raft building?” Charles asked.

“Yes, Charles, our very own mother had Uncle Booker build a raft. It’s on Parker’s Pond,” my daughter explained.

“It doesn’t go very fast, Uncle Captain Charles,” Junior explained. “You aren’t going to shoot it full of holes, are you?”

“No, indeed!” he said. “But we weren’t allowed to go boating on Parker’s Pond,” he said looking at me.

“Of course, not,” I said. “Grandmothers are allowed to make more allowances than mothers are.”

Naturally, my children and my son-in-law laughed at this remark. Junior did not laugh. He simply listened.

Thomas took a short break from his evening patrol duty and stopped by long enough to hug his brothers, his brother-in-law, his sister, his mother, and his nephew and then sample the gumbo. “This looks like a party,” he said.

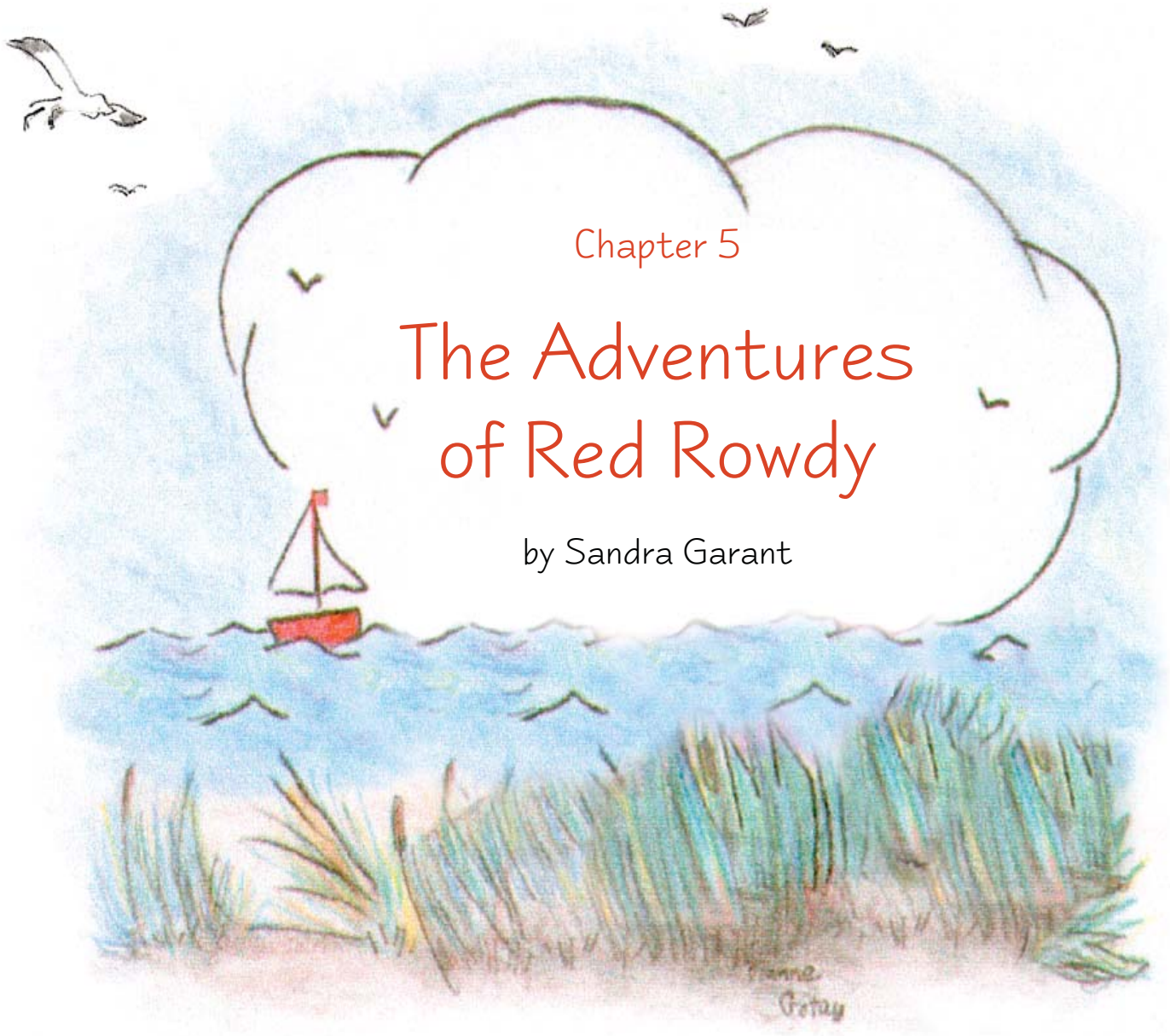
“It’s a family party, Uncle Officer Thomas,” Junior said. “We’re all related!”

Uncle Thomas laughed. “Hard to believe, but yes, we are all related, thanks to your grandma.”

“And to his grandfather,” I added. “I won’t take all the credit.”)

[Lieutenant William Bligh was commanding officer of the HMS Bounty on its trip to Tahiti to load breadfruit plants for transplanting in colonies in the Caribbean. The breadfruit was to be used as food for slaves in the Caribbean colonies. The long sea voyage ended with a mutiny on April 28, 1789. Fletcher Christian and several of his crew mates took over the ship and set Bligh and the rest of the crew adrift. The mutineers finally ended up on Pitcairn Island where some of their descendants still live today. Bligh and his loyal crew survived being set adrift in the ship’s launch and eventually returned to England. Bligh wrote two narratives about the mutiny, and the mutiny has been the subject of many articles, books, and movies.]





An inconvenience is only an adventure wrongly considered;
an adventure is an inconvenience rightly considered.

-- G. K. Chesterton

Dedicated to Lily Jo DeVillez, my goddaughter

Artwork by Dianne Gotay (adapted). Used with permission.

Other Titles by the Author:

A Catholic Garden of Puzzles

Creative Communications

It's a Mystery! Catholic Children's Retreats:

The Holy Trinity, The Perfect Personality, The Secret Garden, The Household of God

The Meyers of Crystal Creek (online story)

Sandra Garant is the mother of three, author, and a writing tutor. Visit her website for writing workshops, monthly book discussions, word games, and more: www.workshopsbyemail.com. Sandra is a member of the support team at Mom-to-Mom Connections and is available to answer writing-related questions: www.chcweb.com.

Chapter 5

Red Rowdy Meets Andrea Anderson

(The morning after the party, Junior showed up at his usual time in my library ready for the continuing story of Red Rowdy. “Good morning, Grandma! Is Uncle Captain Charles awake yet?”)

“Oh, yes. He had bacon, eggs, and hash browns with me and was off to a Coast Guard meeting. That’s one reason that he’s here in Portlee. It’s what we call a working vacation,” I said.

“I thought a vacation was when you didn’t work,” Junior said.

“Yes, it is, but captains are busy people and may work during their vacations, too. Shall we meet Andrea Anderson today?”

“Yes!” my grandson said. “Where did we leave off though?”)

We had last left Red Rowdy struggling onto the beach after a horrific storm. The storm destroyed his raft, but Red Rowdy has survived with his sword intact. His intent was still to rescue Andrea Anderson.

(“That’s right! Let’s go rescue her,” Junior said. “That’s the sort of thing I plan to do when I get old enough to join the Coast Guard.”)

“Junior, I am afraid that the Coast Guard does not look kindly on pirates.”

“I know. Uncle Captain Charles explained that to me. I think I will be a pirate for just a little while longer. My mom said she would be happier if I would be in the Coast Guard. We had a discussion about it this morning during breakfast. Did the decal stay on during the storm, Grandma?”

“Oh, yes,” I assured him. “It was a permanent decal.”)

It was a very small island with a rocky beach and a grove of trees that looked as if they were all leaning over from backache. Suddenly a twelve-year-old girl appeared from behind a tree. She was wearing a blue denim shirt and blue jeans with her brown hair tied back by a blue ribbon.

She smiled at him and picked up her umbrella, which was not blue but black. It had been leaning against the tree trunk to dry after the storm.



“Hello, sir,” she said, walking up to him. “That was a sensational landing.”

“Good morning, ma’am. I’m here to rescue you,” Red Rowdy said weakly as he tried to stand upright in his water-logged clothing.

“I don’t want rescuing,” she said. “Are you going to stand or stagger? Would you like some help yourself?”

Red Rowdy’s eyebrows shot up. “But aren’t you marooned here, ma’am?”

“You are very polite, but I’m not actually a ma’am. I’m a Miss because I’m not married,” she explained, giving him her arm for support and helping him through the rocks to the shade of several bent trees. “I like your life jacket. It must have been very handy.”

“My grandmother insists on politeness, or else she has promised to kill me off,” Red Rowdy told her. “And yes, a life jacket is a handy thing to have onboard a ship or a raft.”

She looked rather puzzled. She seemed to be thinking that perhaps he had been out in the storm for too long.

“I mean, my grandmother will kill me off in this story. We’re just imagining you and the storm and all this. She’ll kill me off in the story,” he reassured her. “Not in real life, miss. She would never do that in real life. But this is a real Coast Guard life jacket. You can tell by the decal.” Red Rowdy showed her the decal and she nodded.

(“Grandma, find out if she’s Andrea Anderson,” Junior said. “Or else I’ll have to keep looking.”)

I agreed. It was rather important to know who she was. And it was not safe to assume that any young lady you happened to meet on an island was the particular young lady you were looking for.)

She nodded because the life jacket look quite real to her. “My name is Andrea Anderson. I live here. Who are you?”

“My name is Red Rowdy. Didn’t you get my message?”

She smiled and pulled a strip of waterproof paper out of her pocket. “I did. It arrived a week ago. It was very nice of you to let me know that you’d be dropping by. If you like, Mr. Red, I was about to have some tea and cookies, and I would be happy to share them with you.” She twirled the closed umbrella. “Now that the storm is over.”

“Oh, yes,” Red Rowdy agreed. He had not been allowed to take cookies with him on his voyage, and he had



missed them. He wasn't too fond of tea, but it would not be polite to ask for a substitute. He hoped she had peanut butter cookies or chocolate cookies instead of oatmeal and raisin. His grandmother made oatmeal and raisin cookies, which he politely ate but didn't really prefer.

“Really?” I asked Junior. “You don't like my oatmeal and raisin cookies?”

Junior blushed. “They're interesting, Grandma, but not quite as interesting as your peanut butter cookies with the chocolate kisses in the center.”)

They walked further under the shelter of the windswept trees. Andrea Anderson ordered him to sit still and rest, and then she disappeared into a tiny hut made of weathered boards and brought the teapot and cookies outside. She had a glowing charcoal fire going already and set the teapot on a rack over the fire. They sat on a thick log and continued talking while waiting for the water to boil.

“Did you build the hut yourself, Miss Andrea?” Red Rowdy asked, eyeing the cookies. They looked like peanut butter cookies with chocolate kisses in the center!

“No, my brothers helped me. I have five,” she answered.

“Five huts?” he said, looking about for the other four.

“No, five brothers, Mr. Red,” she corrected him. “So it didn't take long. They cut the boards because I'm not allowed to use a saw, but I hammered the boards to the posts. They come to visit me sometimes.”

“That's very kind of them,” Red Rowdy said.

“Do you have any brothers or sisters? I have five,” Andrea Anderson said.

“Yes, Miss Andrea. You already mentioned you have five brothers,” Red Rowdy reminded her.

“No, I have five sisters, too,” she said. “My father has warned me about the misuse of pronouns when I talk. I will try to be more clear.”

“Oh,” he said. “I don't have any. I mean, I don't have any brothers or sisters.”

“I'm very sorry,” she said. “We have a lot of fun together.”

“Then why did you leave them?” he asked.

“Because when I go back, I shall appreciate them even more,” she answered. “All of my brothers and sisters



and my mother and father,” she said to make sure that he understood the number of people involved.

Red Rowdy thought about that. He was not sure about her logic since it seemed to him that she could appreciate them more when they were together. But he had never been together with five sisters, five brothers, and a mother and a father.

The tea was ready, and they began to drink it and eat the peanut butter cookies with chocolate kisses in the center. Red Rowdy appreciated them very much after his long soaking in the ocean even if they were not real cookies like his grandmother made.

“What do you do here all day? You must get bored,” Red Rowdy ventured between bites of cookie and sips of tea. He was wondering how she could bake the cookies on the island without an oven.

“I work in my garden and go fishing. And I write stories and talk to God,” she said.

“My grandmother writes. My dad goes fishing, and my mom gardens,” Red Rowdy said.

“That must leave talking to God for you,” Andrea Anderson remarked. “You do say your prayers, don’t you?”

“When I remember,” he said, squirming. “And I did remember during the storm. You must know my grandmother, Miss Andrea.”

“No, I don’t think I’ve met her. Why are you called Red Rowdy?” she asked finishing the last bite of the last cookie.

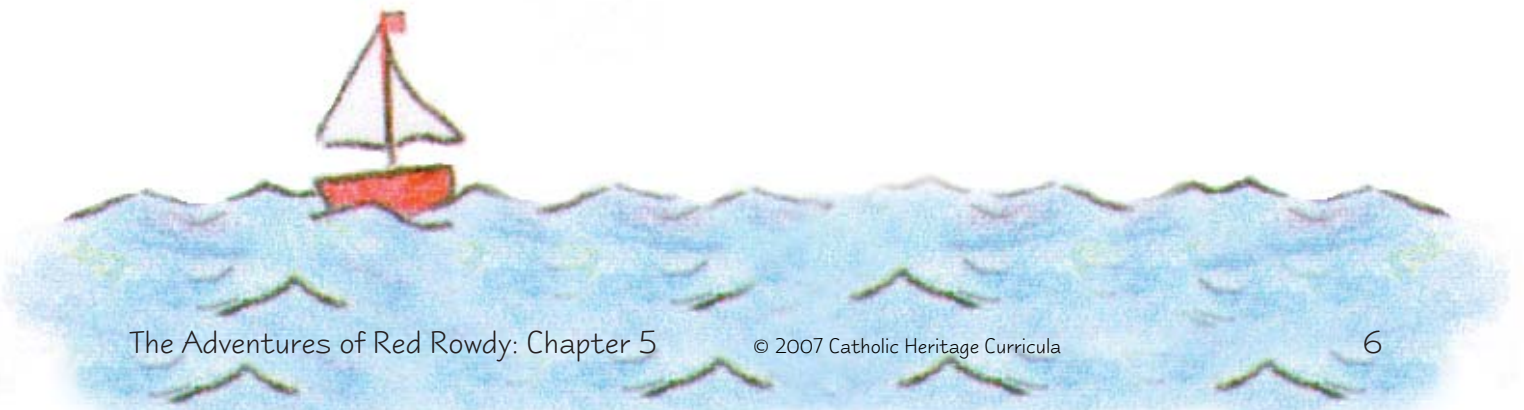
“Because when I was little, I wanted to be a pirate,” he said. “Everyone called me ‘Junior,’ which is not a good name for a pirate. It isn’t believable.”

Andrea Anderson looked at him. “And now that you aren’t little, what do you want to be, Mr. Red?”

“I’ve decided to be in the Coast Guard and rescue people,” he said, “like my Uncle Captain Charles Parker.”

“Oh, so you were going to practice with me. I regret that I do not need rescuing so I can’t help you there,” she said. “I would very much like to help you because I do try to be helpful. However, let’s go back to this point about my being imaginary, Mr. Red.”

“What do you mean?” Red Rowdy asked.



“You said that you were just imagining me. I feel quite real myself,” she exclaimed. “Perhaps my grandmother Simpson is writing a story about me, and we are just imagining you.”

“Oh,” Red Rowdy said. “I didn’t think of that. I know that I’m real because . . . because my grandmother is real. Does your grandmother write too?”

“No, she prefers to travel. Mostly in boats. Would you like to see my boat? I mean, the boat my grandmother let me borrow?”

“Yes,” Red Rowdy said even though he was worn out from his shipwreck. He stood up.

“Oh, no, please stay here. I’ll bring it to you,” she said.

(“Wow! Grandma, she must be really strong,” Junior exclaimed. He was remembering the difficulty we had in getting Read’s Raft launched.)

In a few moments, Andrea Anderson returned carrying a kayak upside down over her head. It was a double-passenger kayak.

“This is the cockpit,” Andrea Anderson told him after she had turned the kayak right side up. “You sit here and use a two-bladed paddle. It’s easy to carry because it’s made of Kevlar, the kayak, not the paddle.”

“What’s Kevlar?”

“It’s a really tough fabric, like steel, but flexible and lightweight,” she said. “You might find out more about it in the Coast Guard, if you need to wear a bullet-proof vest some day.”

(“Is she telling the truth, Grandma?” my grandson asked.

I nodded. “Oh, yes, Junior. You can ask your Uncle Captain Charles about it later.”)

“I put my pack in the extra cockpit here and covered it so nothing would get wet,” Andrea Anderson continued. “My grandmother trusts me completely with it. I mean, she, my grandmother, trusts me completely with this particular boat.”

“I was in a race on one of your grandmother’s boats, the Miss Ginger,” Red Rowdy told her.

“Oh, then you won the Third Most Important Yacht Race of the Season,” she said. “My grandmother was very happy about that. I named this boat though.” She pointed to the lettering on the side.



Red Rowdy read it aloud, “Lily Jo.”

“That’s right. I named the kayak after Lily Jo, my favorite teddy bear. My grandmother gave her to me when I was little, and I still have her although I don’t sleep with her any more. She’s up on a shelf at home so I can look at her.”

Red Rowdy nodded. He did not think very much of naming a kayak after a teddy bear, but it was not his boat after all.

“Later if you like, we can go kayaking in the Lily Jo. She’s a bit tippy but fast. And if you have been through a storm, you won’t be afraid of getting tipped out once or twice. If you have your life jacket on,” she suggested.

Red Rowdy agreed. He was not afraid of getting tipped over, and it would be fun to paddle a kayak.

“Would you like to see my garden now, Mr. Red?”

“Yes, please, Miss Andrea” said Red Rowdy.

“It’s just a few steps over here,” she said, leading the way.

Near the hut, Andrea Anderson had cleared a large patch of ground. “This is lettuce and tomatoes for my brothers who like salad. There are the peppers and the onions for my oldest brother who likes Tex-Mex food. These big bushes are beans and squash because I like those best with corn. My mom cooks that sometimes. What I mean is, she cooks beans and corn and squash together in a big pot. And she cooks other things, too, of course. In fact, she cooks every day since we eat every day.”

“What are these?” Red Rowdy asked, pointing to a row of spindly looking stalks.

Andrea Anderson scrunched her face. “That’s broccoli. It’s not growing well, but I don’t mind because I don’t care much for broccoli.”

“Then why did you plant it?” Red Rowdy asked. “For your five sisters?”

“Because my mother put the seeds in my pack,” she said. “I plan to take it home for her if it ever grows right. She appreciates broccoli more than I do. So it only seems fair that she should eat it.”

Red Rowdy nodded that he understood perfectly before she decided to explain what she meant once more. Then he yawned into his hand.



“I like your cross,” she said.

Red Rowdy looked around for a cross. “I don’t have a cross.”

“Your cross,” she said, indicating the sword at his side.

“It’s not a cross,” he explained. “It’s a sword.” He unsheathed his short sword and waved it about as evidence.

“Swords are sharp and pointed,” Andrea Anderson said. “Crosses sharpen us and make us come to the point.”

Red Rowdy looked at his blunt wooden sword. He frowned. It did look more like a cross than a sword. And he was too tired to contradict her. Besides, it would not be polite. He yawned again.

“I think that you should get some sleep,” she said. “How about a hammock?”

“What’s a hammock?” Red Rowdy managed to ask after another yawn. He hoped it was a place to sleep.

“Over there, that thing. Just stick your cross in the ground here, and you can sleep in the hammock,” Andrea Anderson said. She pointed to what looked like a length of fishing net strung between two trees. “Climb in. It swings, but I’ll hold it steady for you.”

Red Rowdy leaned his cross sword against a tree and used his last bit of strength to climb into the hammock. “It’s been a long day,” he said to his hostess.

“It’s only one o’clock by the position of the sun,” she said. “But I guess being shipwrecked is an exhausting ordeal. Shall I tell you a poem to help you get to sleep?”

Red Rowdy wriggled in the hammock. It was not quite as comfortable as his bed back home, but one must not expect luxury after being shipwrecked on an island inhabited by a twelve-year-old girl. “Yes, please,” he said, “Only not a boring poem.”

Andrea Anderson nodded and recited a non-boring poem by Edward Lear:

They went to sea in a Sieve, they did,
In a Sieve they went to sea:
In spite of all their friends could say,
On a winter’s morn, on a stormy day,
In a Sieve they went to sea!



Long before she finished reciting the rest of Mr. Lear’s poem, Red Rowdy fell asleep in the slightly uncomfortable hammock, and he dreamed that Read’s Raft was in a terrible storm and that he had fallen overboard and was shipwrecked on a very small island. But he managed to survive with his sword and his life jacket intact.

Andrea Anderson quietly got out her writing supplies and wrote about her guest who had wanted to be a pirate when he was little.

“She’s okay, I guess,” said Junior. “But it’s too bad she doesn’t need rescuing, Grandma. A Coast Guard Captain needs someone to rescue. Couldn’t you make her need rescuing?” he suggested. “And she thinks my sword is a cross. What are you going to do about that?”

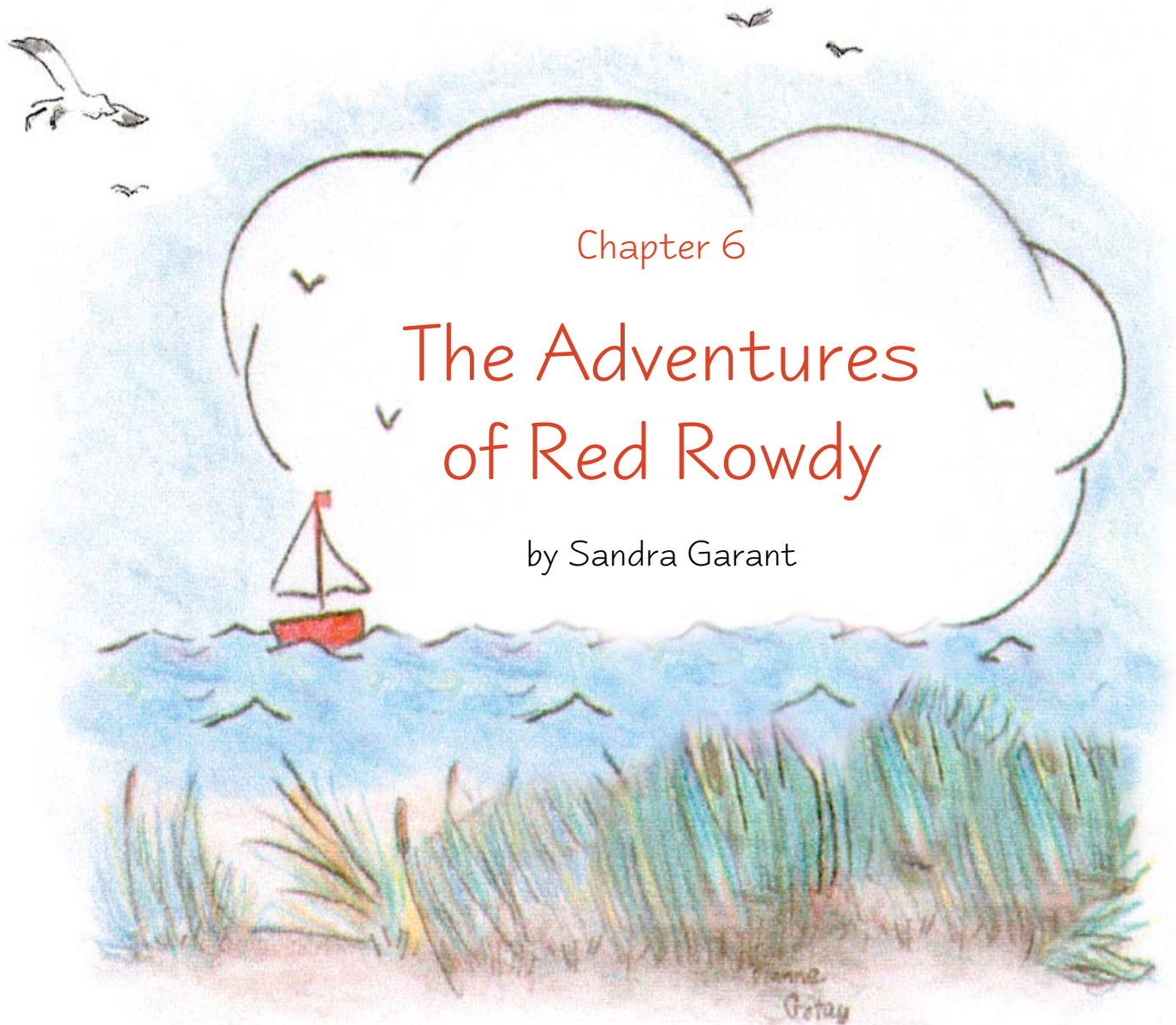
“You no longer have a raft to rescue her with,” I pointed out. “Besides a cross might come in handy on an island. I will think about it. We have to figure out how to get you off the island since the raft is damaged. You certainly can’t swim off, not if Andrea Anderson is going to take the broccoli to her mother. But now, I need to get lunch ready for Captain Parker. He’ll be back soon from his meetings.”

“Okay, but think of something good, Grandma.”

“Steak and potatoes,” I suggested.

“I mean, about my sword. Please.”)





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-- G. K. Chesterton

Dedicated to Lily Jo DeVillez, my goddaughter

Artwork by Dianne Gotay (adapted). Used with permission.

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Sandra Garant is the mother of three, author, and a writing tutor. Visit her website for writing workshops, monthly book discussions, word games, and more: www.workshopsbyemail.com. Sandra is a member of the support team at Mom-to-Mom Connections and is available to answer writing-related questions: www.chcweb.com.

Chapter 6

Red Rowdy by Land and by Sea

(After lunch and his daily math problems, Junior returned to see how the story was getting along and if Red Rowdy had awakened from his nap in the slightly uncomfortable hammock. My son Charles had no meeting that afternoon and sat in the library, pretending to read the Portlee newspaper, although I suspected that he wanted to find out how the story was coming along.

“Hello, Uncle Captain Charles,” my grandson said as he entered the library.

“Hello, William Christopher,” my son said, looking up from behind the newspaper. They saluted each other.

We all settled into our respective places, my son on the sofa, Junior in his usual chair by my desk, and myself in front of the computer. I straightened my bifocals in order to see the screen better.

“Did you think of something good, Grandma, about the sword?” Junior whispered.

“I did think of something, but it is rather sad,” I warned him in a low voice. “Would you mind terribly if the sword stays on the island since you have decided not to be a pirate for much longer?”

Junior squirmed. He glanced at Uncle Captain Charles, of whom we could see nothing but his long legs and his tanned hands. Then he nodded at me. “But if I think of something better, will you change it later?”

I nodded and began typing.)

Red Rowdy awoke rather suddenly from his nap. He had heard a shovel striking a rock. He forgot that he was in hammock and promptly fell out of it when he tried to get up.

“Are you all right?” Andrea Anderson called out, running over to help him to his feet.

“Yes, thank you. I’m fine.” He rescued his sword and sheathed it. “I must have been dreaming. I thought I heard sounds of digging, Miss Andrea.”

“Sorry. That was no dream,” Andrea Anderson said. She was slightly grimed with dirt. “I’m digging a grave.”



Red Rowdy was not sure that he heard her correctly. “A grave?”

“My guinea pig died while you were asleep,” she explained. “Of old age. She turned five two weeks ago. I’ve got to bury her properly.” She sniffed a little.

“I’m very sorry,” Red Rowdy said. “What was her name?”

“Sam. Short for Samantha.”

“Would you like some help?” Red Rowdy asked.

“No, I should do it by myself, but you can watch if you like,” she said. Andrea Anderson picked up the shovel that she had dropped when she had come running to see if Red Rowdy was okay. “I wrapped her up in some leaves over there. You may look at her if you like.”

Red Rowdy walked over to the still bundle of leaves. He wasn’t sure if he would like people looking at him if he were dead. He hesitated.

“It’s okay,” Andrea Anderson told him. “She never bit anyone even when she was alive.”

Samantha was a very handsome light brown guinea pig with a white nose. She had small ears and a fat round body with little legs. Red Rowdy touched her soft fur. She must have been a very nice pet. He thought that he should make some kind and sympathetic remark about Samantha. “She looks very--peaceful,” he told Andrea Anderson and wrapped Sam up again in the leaves.

Andrea Anderson finished the tiny grave, and Red Rowdy carried the little bundle and laid it down in the hollow. “We should say a few words before we cover her up,” Andrea Anderson decided. “Have you ever conducted a funeral?”

Red Rowdy shook his head.

Andrea Anderson had to pause a while in thought. She wanted to find the right words, which usually go into hiding at funerals so that no one seems to be able to say what it really meant.

“Sam, you were a good friend and a great pet. I’m sorry about the time I stepped on you in the dark and the time I dropped you and the time I forgot to give you fresh water. I will miss you very much, and I will never forget you as long as I live,” she said. They both made the Sign of the Cross, and then they filled in the grave, and the earthly remains of Sam were well covered and protected.

Andrea Anderson sighed, and Red Rowdy wished the right words would come out of hiding. He stood on



one foot and then the other. He clutched his sword tightly. “Miss Andrea, I would be honored if you would use my sword as a cross for Samantha’s grave.”

(My son rattled the newspapers loudly at this point. I glared at him, but he had the papers in front of his face and couldn’t see my glare.

Junior barely noticed. “Wow!” he said. “That’s not a bad idea, Grandma. I mean, if I have to give it up. Since it was blunt anyway.”

“I’m glad that you like the idea, Junior,” I said. “It is a very kindly thing for a pirate to do.” And I resumed typing.)

So Sam’s grave was graced with the sword of the famous pirate, Red Rowdy. And if the wind and the waves have not carried it off, the sword is probably still there on Andrea Anderson’s island for anyone to see.

Andrea put the shovel away in the little hut. Then they carried the Lily Jo down to the beach, and Andrea Anderson held the light kayak steady while Red Rowdy climbed into the aft cockpit.

“What do I do with my legs?” he said.

“Stretch them out in front. They’ll fit,” she said. She fastened a spray skirt around him to keep the water out of the kayak. Then she settled herself in the fore cockpit, grasped the double-bladed paddle, and began to stroke vigorously through the waves out into the open sea. Because she had only one paddle and they were pushing against the waves, the kayak did not move quickly. Still the light boat seemed to cut through the water smoothly unlike the bulky raft. The waves splashed up into their faces, and Red Rowdy did not mind since the afternoon was sunny and breezy without any shadow of a storm on the horizon.

Once they passed through the breakers, the kayak glided swiftly through the water. Up and down went the paddle. The blade bit cleanly and rose with barely a splash. It seemed easy enough to Red Rowdy. He was glad to be on the water again and eager to try this new kind of boating.

After a while, Andrea Anderson handed the paddle back to Red Rowdy along with a few instructions. “Sit up straight and don’t bite too deep into the water. Try not to splash too much.”

Red Rowdy dipped the blade into the water, and the kayak didn’t move.

“Twist a bit as you pull the blade back,” Andrea Anderson suggested.

Red Rowdy twisted, and they nearly capsized. “Not quite that much, Mr. Red,” she said. “Don’t worry. It took me forever to learn. You’ll catch on. Just try again.”



Red Rowdy kept trying and trying. First, he made one mistake, and then he made a different mistake. The kayak tipped to one side and then the other. They were no longer gliding but plowing through the water.

However, with some more helpful instructions from Andrea Anderson, the kayak seemed to stay more or less steady, and they were cutting through the waves, not quite as quickly as when Andrea Anderson had been paddling, but she assured him that he was doing fine for a beginner.

“It’s like dancing on the water,” she said, “while you are sitting down.”

Red Rowdy did not know much about dancing so he said, “I’m glad that it’s easier to get back,” as they turned and paddled back to the island. The waves did most of the work in this direction.

They landed smoothly and pulled the kayak out of the surf and stowed it under the trees.

“Thanks, Miss Andrea,” Red Rowdy said. “The Lily Jo is quite a boat.”

“She is,” Andrea Anderson agreed. And then she announced “It’s time for supper. Let’s roast hotdogs.”

“Okay,” Red Rowdy said, and his stomach growled in agreement.

In front of the hut, the fire glowed red. Andrea Anderson disappeared into the hut and brought out two wooden skewers and a package of hotdogs, mustard, pickles, and buns. They poked the skewers through the hotdogs and held them over the red coals. They talked about kayaking as they waited for the hotdogs to cook.

“Turning is not too hard. You sweep the water. But the faster you are going, the harder it is to turn.”
“I like it when the spray splashes up,” decided Red Rowdy, “when we were going really fast.”

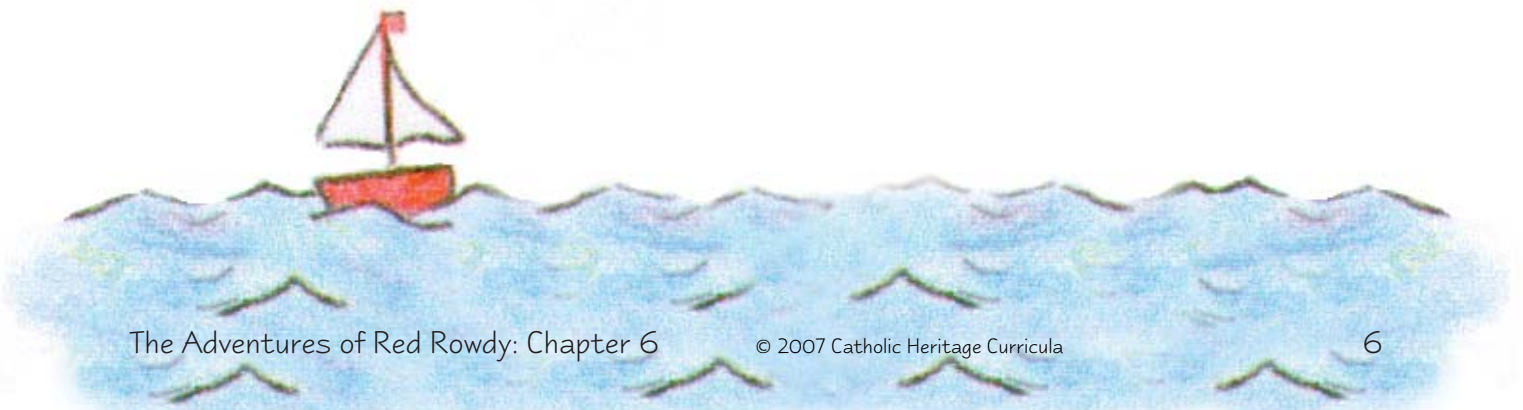
“But you have to learn to brace and push against the water just the right amount with the paddle so as to keep her steady when you are going fast. You’ll learn that. It takes time.”

“Is that why you can twist more and we don’t tip over? It’s because of the bracing?” Red Rowdy asked.

“Right. And you twist so your arms don’t have to do all the work. Probably sort of like sword fighting.”

Red Rowdy nodded. For a moment, he wished he had his sword back. It would have been fun to show Andrea Anderson what he knew about sword fighting, but he was tired and hungry and his hotdog was blackening up nicely. Red Rowdy ate two hotdogs with lots of mustard.

“They taste best when you cook them outside. I wonder why?” Andrea Anderson said as she took a huge bite out of her hotdog.



“My uncle Paul says that it’s because everything tastes better when it’s mixed with fresh air and fire. And he should know because he’s a good cook.”

“Do you know the poem about the strawberries and the herrings?” Andrea Anderson asked him.

“Sure,” he said.

“This is a good time to mix an old poem with fresh air,” she said.

So together they recited:

The man in the wilderness
Asked me
How many strawberries
Grew in the sea.
I answered him
As I thought good,
As many as red herrings
Grew in the wood.

“I prefer peanut butter cookies with chocolate kisses and hotdogs to red herrings,” Andrea Anderson said, as she carefully put the fire out with dirt and water. They cleaned up the mess from their meal, and she stowed everything away in its place in the hut.

“I’m really glad that you came to visit me, but I have to go home now. The sun is setting.”

“What do you mean?” Red Rowdy asked.

“I’m only twelve. I have to be home before dark,” she explained.

“How can you get home before dark?” he wondered.

“I walk across the bridge,” she said. “There’s a bridge on the other side of the island.”

Red Rowdy scarcely knew whether she was telling the truth because it sounded quite unreal. As she showed him the way through the woods, Andrea Anderson explained that her grandmother owned the island, too. It was, after all, a very small island.

“I come here nearly every day. As long as I’m home by dark, no one minds.”



“But in your message on your grandmother’s other island you said that you were going on a long voyage and you might never return,” Red Rowdy said.

Andrea Anderson blushed. “Well, I wrote that when I was little,” she said.

(“Um hum!” my son said from behind the papers.

“We were all young once,” I remarked. “If an eight year old can be Captain, I don’t see why an island can’t have a bridge.” But my son did not look out from behind the papers.

Junior was leaning forward to see what would happen next.)

“But it took me days to get here,” Red Rowdy said.

“I expect your grandmother had you take the long way around,” Andrea Anderson explained. “You said that she was making everything up. It wouldn’t have been very exciting if you had gotten here too quickly and easily. But I am sorry about your raft.”

“That’s okay. In real life, my raft is safe on Parker’s Pond where we left it.”

“Here’s the bridge.”

They came out of the trees upon a trim wooden bridge with thick bracing for support and a handrail on both sides. There were no missing or rotten planks on this bridge. The sun was setting with a show of red and purple.

“There’s my house,” she said, pointing to a red brick house halfway up the hill in front of them. “And my grandmother’s house is at the top of the hill.”

Red Rowdy suddenly realized where he was. He had passed by this place many times before. He looked back and saw that the bridge was hidden by thickly growing shrubs so that the island didn’t even seem to be an island.

“I have to run now. It was great to meet you, Mr. Red. You can stop by any time,” and Andrea Anderson took off running up the hill, trying to make it home before the sun disappeared.

Red Rowdy started to run, too, and then he remembered that he was still a captain even if his raft had been lost at sea, and his father and mother were not expecting him home by dark. In fact, they would be surprised to see him returning so soon. So he walked thoughtfully home in the twilight.



As he walked, he remembered that he had left his Coast Guard life jacket behind on the island, so he would have to go back someday to rescue his life jacket. And he thought that he would save his money to buy a wonderful Kevlar kayak. He would have to think of a good name for his kayak. He could name it Christine after his mother or maybe, just maybe, he would start calling himself William Christopher and name the kayak Red Rowdy.

“I never guessed,” Junior said. “You mean Andrea Anderson really lives right here in Portlee? I thought we were going to go home in the kayak, and we were really home all along. Without leaving home.”

“Hmmm,” my son said from behind the newspapers. He had had more than enough time to read the whole paper, but he still seemed to be right in the middle.

“Well, Andrea Anderson isn’t real, Junior. And the island isn’t real,” I explained. “However, it is true that twelve year olds don’t usually live on islands all by themselves. And now you know how she was able to serve you peanut butter cookies on the island. She probably made them at home and brought them over.”

“But, Grandma, Captain Bly was real, and the butler was real,” Junior said. “And I do like William Christopher. It’s a pretty good name. You can call me that sometimes, but not when you’re mad at me, okay?”

“Okay,” I said. “I will not call you William Christopher when I’m angry with you, William Christopher. Do you have a preference as to what I should call you when I am angry with you?”

My son was certainly laughing behind the paper because it was shaking rather violently, but I ignored him.

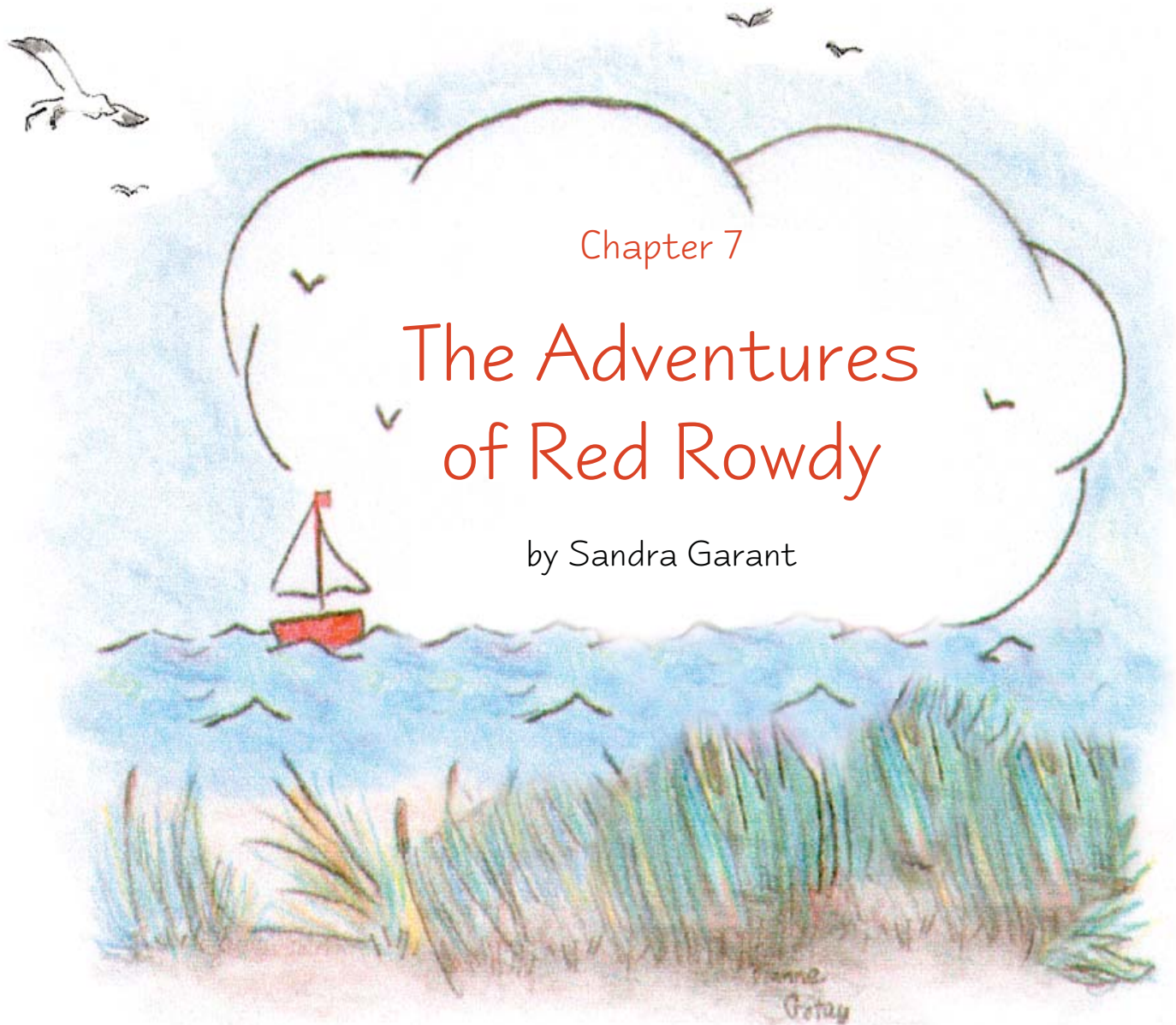
“No, not really. I would prefer most of all that you aren’t angry with me,” William Christopher said.

I nodded. “And we will see what we will see about Andrea Anderson, the girl with the blue ribbon in her brown hair, because we have one chapter left in this story to make everything come right in the end.”

“Does everything come right in the end?” William Christopher asked.

“Quite often it does,” I said, “although hardly ever just the way we expect it to.”





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Chapter 7

The End of One Story

(William Christopher appeared in the library as usual the next morning, but he was not interested in a story. “Grandma, I had a bad dream last night, and we need to go check on Read’s Raft. Just to make sure that it’s okay. So can we go to Parker’s Pond this morning instead of writing stories? Would you mind?”

“That must have been a nightmare,” I said. I wondered if my story-writing was getting out of hand. Perhaps I had overdramatized the storm and really frightened my grandson.

“I would like to see this raft of yours, William Christopher,” Captain Parker said. “The breakfast dishes are done, and I have no meetings today, so I’m at liberty. How about if we go down to the pond together and you can show me your ship?”

William Christopher’s eyes grew wide, and he straightened up and began to look pleased instead of worried. “I would be happy to show you around my raft, Uncle Captain Charles,” he said.

They went out, and this is what happened according to my grandson and my son who both told me about their excursion to Parker’s Pond later:

When they arrived at Parker’s Pond, the raft was floating serenely still in fine shape and still fastened securely to a willow. William Christopher hesitated at the edge of the pond. Who would be the captain of Read’s Raft now?

Captain Parker hesitated. He had to remind himself that the pond was not that deep.

“This is my ship,” William Christopher finally said. “You’re welcome to come aboard, if you like.” He stepped on to the raft.

“I’ll cast off,” his uncle said, “since my legs are longer than yours. And I would prefer to get you home dry.” He unfastened the mooring line, gave one of the barrels a shove, and jumped from the bank to the deck. The raft heaved with his sudden weight and he waved his arms wildly for a moment to balance himself.

William Christopher picked up the pole. “This is how we go. I just push the raft along. It’s slow, but the pond isn’t very big.”

“When I was little, it seemed bigger,” his uncle said. He sat down on a bench and watched his nephew guide



the raft out to the middle of the pond. “I think it is a fine ship, Captain William Christopher.”

William Christopher smiled at his uncle. Maybe his uncle liked him after all. He had left his sword at home. He was glad that his sword wasn't really on Andrea Anderson's island, but he should really have liked an official Coast Guard life jacket. He guessed that maybe you had to be in the Coast Guard to get a real life jacket with a permanent decal. Because he was afraid that he would say something impolite, he decided to think about something else. He wondered if his uncle liked poetry on water.

Before he could ask, his uncle said, “It's like walking on water, isn't it?”

William Christopher nodded. Being on a raft was not like being in a kayak. Paddling a kayak was like dancing on the water, but poling a raft was like walking on the water. Just like Peter, the fisherman and the pope. A pope was like a captain. Maybe that's why Peter was the first pope because he knew about being a captain and the dangers of shipwrecks. He told his uncle all of this, and his uncle agreed that it might be so.

“I'm glad that my raft didn't get shipwrecked,” William Christopher confided to his uncle. “It's okay for a story, but not in real life.”

Uncle Captain Parker heartily agreed with him. “Shipwrecks are much better in stories than in real life. I prefer to avoid them for my crew and myself.”

“Uncle Captain Parker, why do people talk so funny in stories?” William Christopher asked suddenly. “We don't talk that way in real life.”

His uncle scratched his head. “Maybe we would if we were better educated,” he said. “But you had better ask your grandmother about that.”

Then William Christopher took his uncle to his father's store and showed him the ice machine and the rods and reels and fishing tackle. They all ate a vanilla ice cream because there were no customers in the store. Then William gave William Christopher an ice cream to take to Uncle Officer Thomas.

The next day was Sunday, and I spied William Christopher sitting next to his mother, father, and uncles. I was up in the choir loft, getting my sheet music in order. Before the organ master began the processional hymn, I noticed William Christopher fidgeting. He did not usually fidget and turn this way and that in church. His mother must have whispered to him to sit still because he stopped. But I wondered what had disturbed him. I looked about and did some fidgeting myself. Sitting cater-cornered to the Parkers below were Mrs. Simpson, the real Mrs. Simpson, and her real grandchildren. And one of her grandchildren was a seven-year-old girl wearing a blue dress with a blue hair ribbon in her brown hair. It was Samantha Simpson. She was sitting in the middle of her three brothers and three sisters. They must be visiting their grandmother. The processional hymn began, and I didn't have time to think anymore about it.



After the Mass, William Christopher waited frantically for me to descend the stairs from the choir loft. “Did you see her, Grandma?” he whispered. “It’s Andrea Anderson after all.”

“Actually, it’s Samantha Simpson,” I said. “She and her brothers and sisters must be visiting. And she’s seven years old.”

“I’m going to meet her,” William Christopher said.

“Oh, dear,” I said and watched him march into the middle of the Simpson clan.

“Hello,” he said. “My name is William Christopher. How do you do?”

Mrs. Simpson turned about. She had just shaken the deacon’s hand. She smiled. “You are Parker’s grandson, I believe.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he said.

“These are my grandchildren. Fred, James, Robert, Katie, Samantha, Marie, and Agnes.”

“Hey,” Fred said. He seemed to be the oldest. William Christopher guessed he was about twelve or thirteen.

“Did you just get here?” William Christopher said. “I haven’t seen you before.”

“Yes, we have two weeks holiday.”

“We came in late last night.”

“By a plane.”

“First by a plane and then by Grandma’s car.”

“We don’t know anybody here yet.”

“Well, now you know me, William Christopher.”

“I’ll bet you don’t remember all our names.”

“Try it, see if you can remember,” the younger ones shouted.



William Christopher held out his hand and tried to match the names to the children in front of him. “Fred, James, Samantha, Agnes, and . . .”

“He’s getting us all mixed up.”

“All but Fred and Samantha.”

“That’s okay,” Samantha said. “There’s a lot of us to remember.”

“If it’s okay with my grandmother, see if you can come over after lunch,” Fred said.

“We’re going to play ‘Ain’t No Bears Out Tonight’ even though it’s not going to be night,” Samantha said. “You have to have a lot of kids to play it.”

“Right, and we can’t play it at home because we have a fence around our yard and our mom says it gives her a headache,” Fred explained.

“The game gives her a headache, not the fence,” explained James.

“William Christopher! Time to go!” His mother called to him. “We don’t want to keep Uncle Paul’s Sunday roast waiting.”

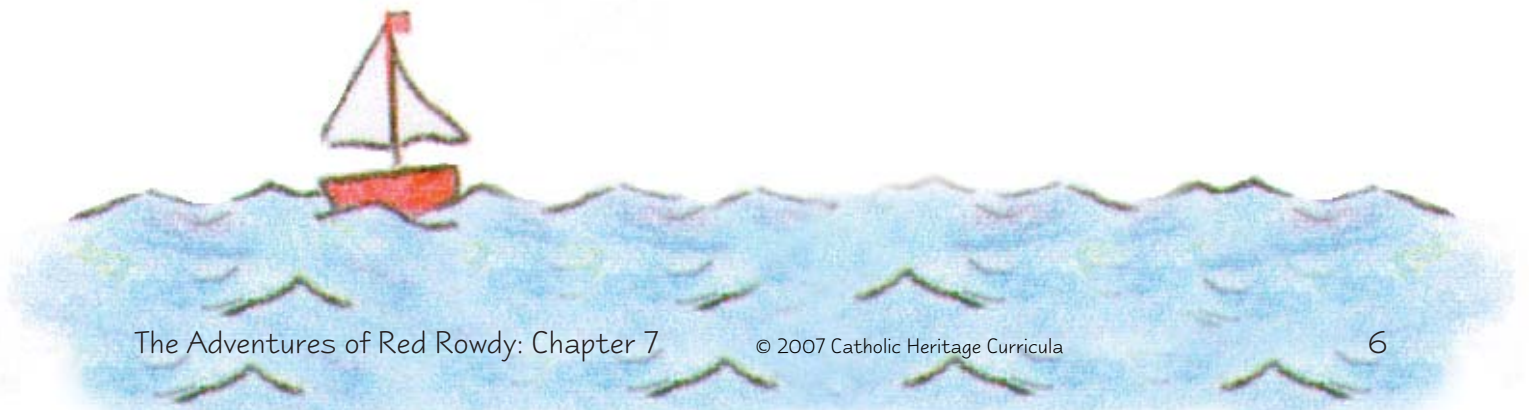
“Bye! I’ll try to come over. I know where your grandmother lives. In the house on the hill. I’ll be there if I can,” William Christopher said.

“What a nice boy!” I heard Mrs. Simpson say.

Later that afternoon, William Christopher did run up the hill to play with Mrs. Simpson’s grandchildren.

Fortunately, Mrs. Simpson was slightly deaf because the whole point of the game was to march about the house shouting as loudly as possible “Ain’t no bears out tonight because my daddy caught them all last night!” again and again. The bear, who seemed to always be Fred, hid. The children confident in their father’s hunting abilities marched closer and closer to the bear until he sprang out. They shrieked and ran for the safety of a flagpole in the front yard. I noticed that Fred was careful not to catch little Agnes even when she tripped and fell in front of him. William Christopher took a turn at being the bear once he caught on to the game. He ran after Fred and nearly chased him down. I could understand why Mrs. Simpson the mother did not allow the children to play it at home as the screams and shrieks drifted down the hill to my house.

“No stories today,” Charles said.



“No, I think he’s too busy with real life today, and that makes for a good ending.”

The next day, Captain Charles and I were surprised to see William Christopher in the morning. We had just finished our last cup of coffee when he bounded in.

He was wearing his red t-shirt and said that he and the Simpson children were going to search for missing islands.

“If there were any, Christine, Paul, Thomas, and I would have found them years ago,” his uncle said. “We looked and looked until your grandmother made up one island for each of us. I suppose it was to keep us quiet. My island was called Borromeo’s Point, if I recall correctly.”

“William Christopher, the island in the story was made up,” I said.

“I know, Grandma, but we are going to look just the same. Just for fun,” my grandson explained. “It’s okay if we don’t find an island with a bridge. And guess what?”

“I give up. What?” I said.

“Samantha Simpson has a black gerbil. Not a guinea pig. Well, Fred and James have a guinea pig. They each own half of it. And it isn’t dead,” he said. “Not the gerbil or the guinea pig. The gerbil lives in a glass box and sits in her hand, but she had to leave it at home. She named it Butterball,” he added with a grimace. “That’s not a good name for a gerbil, but I didn’t tell her that. And the guinea pig is called Geronimo, and it has a bigger cage.”

“Ah,” said his uncle in approval. “I can see that your grandmother has taught you something more than how to write pirate stories.”

“And Samantha doesn’t know anything about kayaking. And the others don’t either. I know everyone’s name now—Fred and James and Robert and Katie and Samantha and Marie and Agnes.”

William Christopher’s face was bright with joy, and he was bouncing up and down, not on the furniture, however. “We’re going to spend the whole day exploring Portlee. Fred wants to know if Uncle Officer Thomas will let us look at the jail. And Robert and James want to see Dad’s store. And Katie and Samantha don’t believe that you are a real Coast Guard Captain, Uncle Captain Charles, so if you could put on your uniform later on today, then I guess they’ll believe me all right.”

His uncle nodded.

“So I wanted to let you know that I wouldn’t be here, Grandma, if that’s okay?”



“Of course, we can write another day. Besides, the Simpson children are only here for two weeks,” I reassured him.

William Christopher stopped bouncing. “They are a lot of fun. I wish I had brothers and sisters. It isn’t fair . . .” he began, and then he blushed and fell as silent as the sun when it sets. He had been advised on many occasions by his various relations that life is not always fair.

His uncle and I both sighed. “Well,” I began. “Well, you do have brothers and a sister, William Christopher.”

His eyes got wide and he sat down. “Really?” He leaned forward and then he sat back. “Oh, Grandma, is this a story? I don’t want brothers and sisters in a story. I want them in real life.”

“No, it is not a story, William Christopher,” his uncle said.

I settled my bifocals in place and looked straight at him. “Not all babies grow up, William Christopher,” I said softly.

“Are you going to cry, Grandma?” he whispered.

“Well, perhaps, a little,” I said, “because it is very sad to lose a baby.” I pressed my hands together. “Your older brother, Francis, lived a few days. The doctor managed to keep your sister, Elizabeth, alive only for a few moments. Then you were born, and we held our breath and prayed hard. And you survived by the grace of God. Two years later, your brother Mark lived barely a week after he was born. I am sorry, William Christopher. We were not quite sure how to tell you, all of us.”

William Christopher got up and climbed in my lap even though he was really too big to do such a thing. “I’m sorry, too, Grandma. I wish they had all lived.” He looked up at me.

I blew my nose on the tissue my son handed to me and nodded. “We are very happy to have you, William Christopher. And I imagine that your brothers and your sister are happy that you are alive and well.”

“I guess I can imagine them, can’t I? I mean, what they are like,” William Christopher said. “I wish I could see them with my own eyes for real, but if I can’t, it’s nice to know they are there. That I do have brothers and a sister. Francis and Elizabeth and Mark.”

“May they rest in peace,” his uncle said. “And may they look after you in all your adventures wherever you go, William Christopher. Just because we die, it doesn’t mean that we stop caring about each other.”

“Francis and Elizabeth and Mark and William Christopher,” my grandson repeated. “I have to imagine them,



but I guess they can see me fine.”

“I guess they can,” I said. “I am sure that they know a lot about you. And I am sure that they care about you very much.”

“And they are really my very own brothers and sister,” he said. “Really and truly?”

“Yes, really and truly,” I said.

There were several knocks of varying intensity at the door. “It’s the Simpsons,” my grandson said, getting up and giving me a kiss on the cheek. “I had better go now, Grandma, because they are expecting me, but I’ll be back.”

He saluted his uncle and turned. He did not run to the front door, but stepped straight and tall as if he had grown another year older since bounding through the door only a few moments ago.)

“When we step into the family, by the act of being born, we do step into a world which is incalculable, into a world which has its own strange laws, into a world which could do without us, into a world we have not made. In other words, when we step into the family we step into a fairy-tale.”
—*Heretics*, by G.K.Chesterton

The End

