

the
silver
key



“Are.”

“Arrrrgh!”

I sighed, exasperated.

“Try *our*, Captain. Open mouth: *our*. That’s our money.”

“That booty be arrrrghs!” He bellowed. Everyone stared.

Jesus God. This would kill me.

Speech therapists get all kinds: executives determined to lose a lisp, immigrants eradicating phonetic peculiarities marking them as non-natives, and, in a free public clinic, occasional random nut-jobs.

‘Captain Coffin’ seemed downright delusional at his intake yesterday :

‘Good morning, Mr. Coffin.’



“Cap’n Coffin, ye tidget!” he corrected. “If ye please.”

“Alright, *Captain* Coffin.” I said, modelling ‘inside voice’. “And you want speech therapy because...?”

“Madam, me tale do beggar belief.”

Really.

“I hail from ‘days forever past’.”

Blank look from me.

“The long ago and far awa’?” he tried.

“Tell me why you came to the clinic, Captain,” I said. “Not your life story.”

“Me life story, missy, would involve *vernackeler unsuitable for the ladies.*” He winked. I rolled my eyes. “Only hearken: afore yesterdee, the last I remember

is lockin' the Time Portal door aboard the *Providence Defiled*. (Me 'floatin' mistress'.)" Wink.

"*What?*" I said, equal (and large) parts disbelief and sarcasm.

"Me Brigantine, madam," he said, tri-corner hat mashed against his breast. It had been fancy once — heavy silk velvet — but suffered heavy use and hard times. Coffin's eyes were wet.

"A ship?" I asked.

"Aye. None sleeker, whip-trim sheets, lightning-fast... He gazed past me, the tear sliding down. "I set the Portal for eighteen-aught-five — to kill Mary Read afore she captured me ship. The Portal hummed, a-rumbled, and... love-a-lily-white-duck if I don't awaken on Long Wharf yestermorn!"

"Long Wharf? Here in Boston?"

"Aye. A small craft — the *Best Whale*

Watches! — lay nearby, but the Moorish lass what was her cap'n wouldna' let me aboard. '*Just unto Boston-town!*' I begged. '*I'll shew ye the Time Portal!*' I e'en flashed the Silvern Key."

Seeing my confusion, Coffin produced an ancient key. "Opens the Portal, that does. 'Yore *in Boston-town!*' warbled the saucy wennet. 'And I barelee unnerstand yoo.' She spoke kinda *queenly*, see."

My girlfriend Keisha captains a Whale Watch boat. She couldn't have...

"Ye ne'er went aboard?" I imitated him unconsciously. (What can I say? I'm a speech nerd.)

'Lor, never!" Coffin laughed, wheezing. "Th'insolent wench tossed me this —said ye'd learn us the *linguee-frankee*."

It was one of my own business cards. On the back was scribbled :

Corinna, can you help this guy? hook him up w counseling? IDK. Gave me the creeps. Call me!

I would definitely be calling Keisha.

“To find me Portal, miss, I mun’ be unnerstood.”

I believed his tale. It wasn’t his smell, his clothes, the pistols (each weighed probably ten pounds) — though those *seemed* authentic. It was his *vowels*. Those linguistic irregularities were impossible to fake consistently.

Why not try? I thought. *Maybe this Portal can take me out of drearily hostile Boston.*

“We’ll commence tomorrow!” I exclaimed.

He stood, bowed, then looked me in the eye.

“Thankee, madam! Ye may be the finest treasure I ever found.”