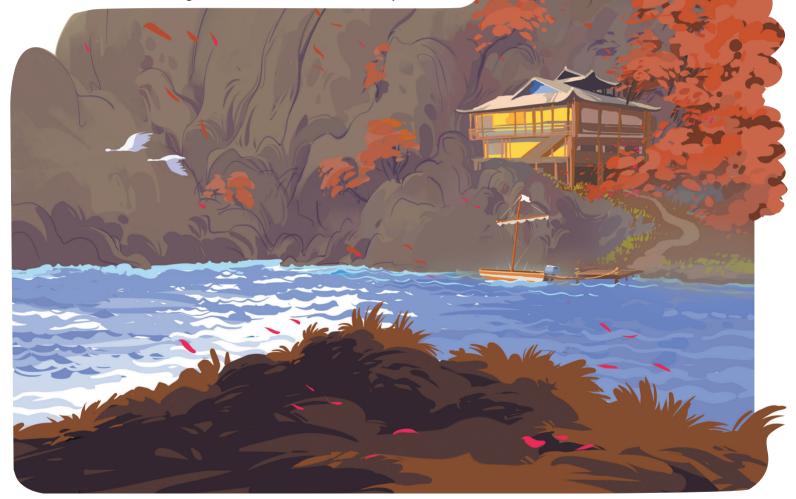# Swan Island

Hugo, Charlie and Jack lived with their parents next to a large lake. Hugo and Jack were boys, of course, but Charlie was a girl. Her real name was Charlotte but the family usually called her Charlie or Lotty because those names were shorter.

The children lived in the countryside so there were no cinemas or exciting skate parks near their home and there were no concerts or festivals or restaurants to go to. But the three children didn't mind because they all loved sailing. Their father taught them to swim and sail when they were very young. Hugo and Charlie were brilliant at sailing. But Jack needed more practice.

There was an island in the middle of the lake. The children called it Swan Island because once, only once, they found a swan's nest there. They often sailed across the water to it. When they got to the island, they sometimes made a fire there and cooked meatballs or sausages. Some nights they stayed on the island in their father's old tent. They were never afraid of sailing to the island by themselves or frightened of sleeping there alone on dark, cold nights.

While they were having breakfast last Sunday, the children decided to take a picnic to Swan Island. Hugo carried a backpack that was full of food and Charlie and Jack carried everything else they needed down the steps to the water.

'It's quite windy today, isn't it?' Jack said.

'Yes, but the wind's coming from the north. It's OK,' Charlie whispered to Jack.

Jack was the youngest and Charlie liked looking after him. She didn't want him to worry about anything or think that a storm might come.

The children took off their shoes and threw them into the boat. Then they carefully put the backpack on one of the seats and pushed the boat into the water. When the water came up to their knees, they jumped in. They pulled up the sails, which soon filled with wind, and sailed towards the island.

Two bluebirds flew over their heads and disappeared around a corner in the lake. 'That's unusual,' thought Hugo but he didn't say anything.

Then something more unusual happened. The wind changed. It began to come from the west and suddenly got very strong. Hugo said, 'Sit on the other side of the boat. Quickly!' Charlie did, but Jack didn't and he fell into the water.

Jack was quite good at swimming but the waves were getting higher every minute. 'Come on, Jack! Swim to the boat! You can do it!' Charlie shouted. Jack tried and tried, but Hugo could see that his younger brother was getting tired. He looked at Charlie. 'I don't want my sister to be alone in the boat,' he thought. 'But, but …' Then, 'HELP!' Charlie shouted.

Suddenly, a huge pirate ship appeared from behind Swan Island! It was moving really fast. Hugo and Charlie could only see two pirates on the ship. Both pirates quickly jumped into the water and helped Jack get back into the children's sailing boat.

'All right now, Jack?' they asked.

'Yes. I'm sorry for falling in! Thank you so much!' Jack said.

The wind stopped blowing so hard and changed again.

'It's coming from the east. No! It's coming from the north again.' Hugo said.

The taller pirate looked up at the flag to see and the shorter pirate put her finger up in the air to feel the wind. 'Yep! You're right, Hugo,' they said together.

Hugo wanted to ask the two pirates lots of questions.

'How did they sail their ship to their lake? The sea was 200 kilometres away!

Where were the other pirates? The ship was too big for only two people to sail. And how did the pirates know their names?'

But Hugo kept quiet.

'We're going to have a picnic on Swan Island,' Charlie said. 'Would you like to eat with us?'

'Sure, Charlie,' the shorter pirate said. 'We can bring our food, as well.'

The pirates' food was different from the children's. They brought fat black olives and green limes and dry biscuits, but everyone enjoyed the picnic. While they were eating, the pirates taught them pirate songs and told the children some scary pirate stories. They all laughed and laughed.

When it began to get dark, the taller pirate stood up, smiled (some of his teeth were missing!) and said, 'We have to go now. But remember … when the wind suddenly changes and comes from the west, strange things can happen.'

The pirates got into the children's boat and because there was no wind now, Hugo started the engine. He took the pirates back to their ship, then returned to the island.

'Quick,' he said to Charlie and Jack. 'Let's run up to the top of the hill to see where they go!'

The three children ran up and up the path through the trees to get to the top of Swan Island hill. Then they looked north, south, east and west but they couldn't see the ship anywhere.

'It disappeared,' Charlie said.

'Yes. And I didn't ask my questions …' Hugo said.

'Perhaps one day, we can have some more fun with them,' Jack said.

'Perhaps,' Hugo said quietly.

And each time after that day, when Hugo sailed to Swan Island, as a boy AND as a man, he hoped to meet the pirates again. But he never did.