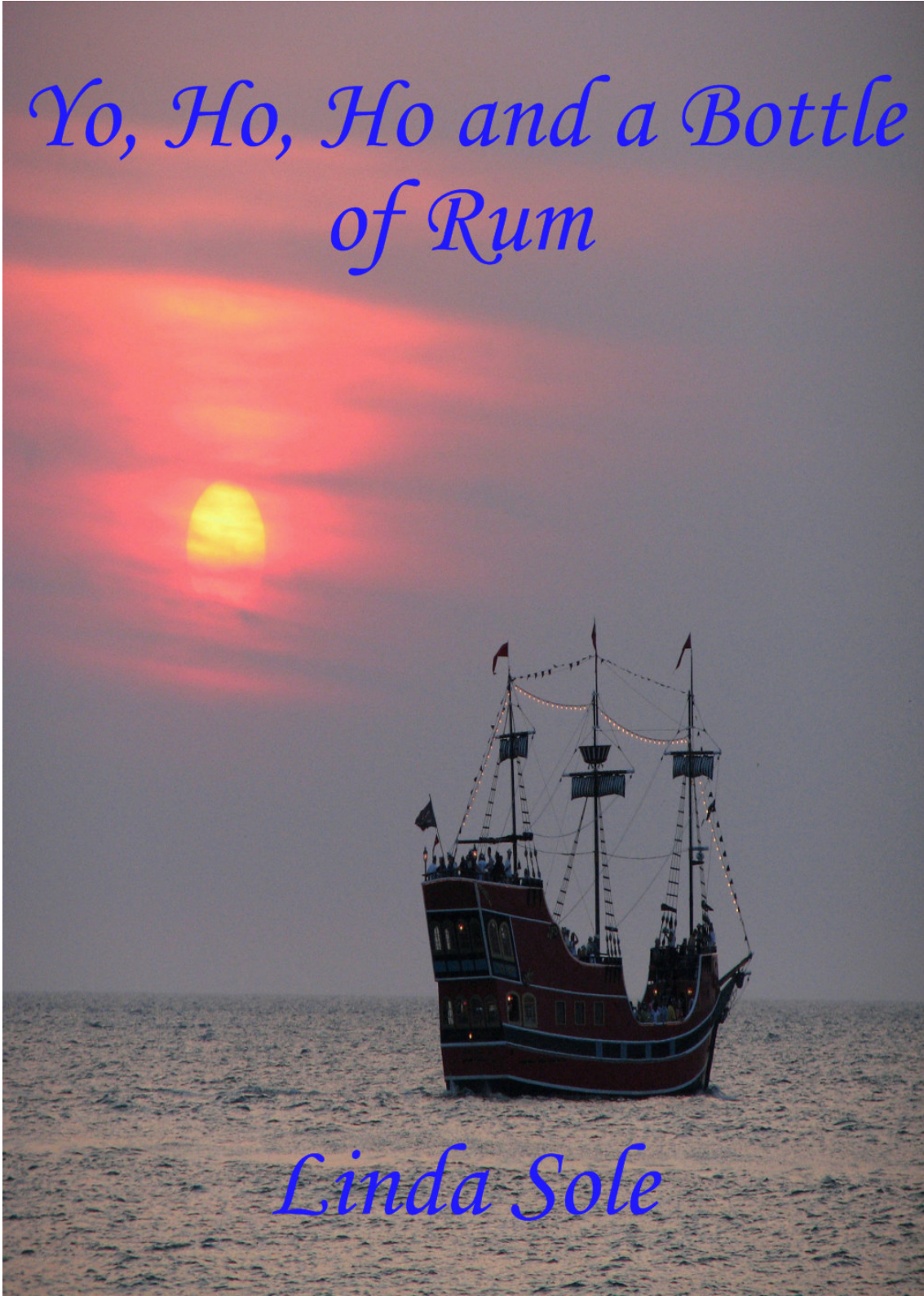


*Yo, Ho, Ho and a Bottle  
of Rum*



*Linda Sole*

Yo, Ho, Ho, and a Bottle of Rum! (Sole, Linda)

Yo, Ho, Ho and a Bottle of Rum

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Jack Hawk walked towards the clearing, which lay inland some distance from the beach on the uninhabited, Caribbean island. In the gathering dusk he could smell the heady perfume of exotic blooms mingling with the heavier aroma of roasting meat. Behind him, his men had built bonfires on the sand and were preparing to roast the wild pig they had shot earlier in the day. Already he could hear the sounds of laughter and shouting, and knew they had broken open the casket of rum he had given them for their feasting. It would keep them busy while he attended to his own business.

Jack had been waiting for this day for a long time. It was exactly a year ago that he had received the sealed letter telling him that this was the meeting place. He'd put up with some grumbles with a few of the men, for though they enjoyed time to drink and relax, they would have preferred to head for one of the larger islands, where they could meet women and spend some of the money they had earned on their latest ventures. Jack Hawk's ship the Vixen was the most feared on the Caribbean seas – at least it had been until the arrival of Red Henry. The pirate called Red Henry had taken a couple of ships from right under their noses a couple of years back. Red's ship the siren Song was as fast as the Vixen, if not faster and its captain was an expert seaman. Jack had admitted defeat at the time with rueful good grace, but since then Red Henry's reputation had grown, and Jack had known that one day there would have to be a reckoning with his rival.

There were merchant ships and enough of the Spanish treasure ships to go round without fighting over them. They just needed to agree territory and make sure they didn't get in each other's way. It was pirate law that you did not betray a comrade, and though Jack had heard a few curses from the men when they were robbed of their prize, he knew most admired their rival for the deeds of daring that were talked of whenever they put into port.

So it was business that had brought Jack to this rendezvous, at least that was what he had been telling himself all these months of waiting. Definitely not that he was eager to discover if one of the more curious tales he had heard about his rival was true! There were so many lurid tales circulating about the pirate captain that Jack knew many of them had to be false. The one that intrigued him was sure to be just a tale – but at least tonight he would be able to discover the truth for himself.

The moon sailed out from behind the clouds as he reached the clearing. He saw someone waiting for him and his heart raced with excitement. Then the figure turned and his excitement was stilled. The man's bearded face was in shadow, but his hair was a flaming red. So all the tales of Red Henry being a woman were false, as he had supposed.

“Red Henry?” he asked as he approached and offered his hand. Jack was an English gentleman turned pirate, because he had been forced to leave behind his birthright and his place in society after being arrested for being a Protestant in days when that had suddenly become a crime. He had escaped being burned at the stake and taken up piracy as a means of making his living. “So we meet at last. Why did you ask me to come this evening? I know we have crossed each other's paths once or twice. You stole a prize that should have been mine, and I took a Spanish merchant you had been shadowing. But there are prizes enough for us both I think?”

“Everyone says that we should fight it out,” the man said gruffly. “One of us must give way to the other. You were the master of these seas until I came. Now I want you to pay homage to me – a tenth of all the prizes you take and an acknowledgement that Red Henry is the best of them all.”

“Damn you no!” Jack growled. “I'll not pay you one penny, you rascal. If it is a fight you want, I'll give it to you now!” His hand went to the hilt of his sword and he poised, glancing round as if he suspected a trap. “I came here in good faith to talk...”

Suddenly, he heard laughter – a woman's laughter. Stiffening in suspicion, he stared as the figure in front of him transformed itself. The beard was pulled away as was the untidy red hair and cap. The long hair that tumbled from beneath the wig was if anything even redder, and silky, falling in waves about her shoulders. Jack caught a breath of perfume that stirred his senses and he looked at her in disbelief as she moved closer and he could see her face.

“Henrietta!” Jack cried, drawn towards her like a moth to the flame. All at once the memories tumbled back into his mind. Memories of that wonderful hair spread out on the pillows of his bed, of her in his arms, their bodies entwined in love. She was the only woman he had ever desired, the only woman he would ever love. “How have you come here? I don't understand. I left you in England...”

“Did you really think I would stay at home and weep for you, Jack?” Her eyes mocked him. “I begged you to take me with you, but you said the life you must lead was too hard for a woman...so you abandoned me.”

“You could have married whomever you wished,” Jack told her. “You were the most sought after lady at Mary's court – God damn her!”

“Did you think I would settle for another man after you?” Henrietta moved in closer so that her perfume tantalised him, arousing such need and desire that he trembled inwardly. He had taken women since leaving her but none had ever satisfied the hunger in him. “You said that I could not live without my satins and laces – well, I have proved you wrong. I took you on, Jack, and I beat you at your own game...”

“By God! So you did,” Jack said, moving towards her. He caught her in his arms, crushing her against him. He was breathing hard as his mouth sought hers in a kiss that seared his soul, his body aching with the long suppressed need and desire. She clung to him, melding with him, their tongues tangling in a delicious dance. “Henry...you have never left me in my dreams. I wanted you, longed for you...”

They sank together to the sandy floor of the sheltering woods, protected, secluded, lost in each other as their bodies slaked the hot need they had both endured these past three years. Kisses and caresses were not enough. Jack ripped away the shirt that covered her breasts, his eyes feasting on the treasure that meant more than all the Spanish gold in the world. His greedy mouth sought her breasts, sucking and licking, teasing her with his teeth until she arched and cried out. And then they were lying naked on the ground, their flesh touching, entreating as they touched and tasted, greedy for all the pleasures so long denied. Jack plunged into her and she shrieked her joy, taking him in all the way, loving the feeling as he filled her. Her nails raked his back as she arched and bucked beneath him, the sensation mounting, mounting, and mounting until it exploded in a crescendo of pleasure.

“Oh, Henry,” Jack muttered as he came inside her. “My own, darling. I have missed you so much...you will never know what it cost me to leave you. I thought it was best for you...”

She bent over him, her long red hair brushing his face, tantalising him with its scent. “Now you know you were wrong,” she said. “Admit it! Admit that I've bested you, Jack.”

“Yes,” he said and laughed for sheer joy. “You win, Henry. I was wrong. You were right.”

“So what are you going to do about it?” she demanded, her eyes bright with challenge. She was so beautiful, so bold, so brave, and he knew that his life would be nothing if he lost her now.

“You wouldn't consider giving up the life if I built a house for us in the New World?”

“Only if you give it up too,” she said, her eyes flashing a warning. “When you are willing to become Sir Jack Hawkins again, I shall be your lady. Until then you are Hawk and I am Red Henry.”

“Then we sail together,” Jack said but she shook her head. “The Vixen and the Siren Song, side by side – for another year, and then I shall have amassed enough gold to keep my lady as she deserves.”

“Your lady has already earned enough to keep herself and you in comfort,” Henrietta said and laughed. “But for one more year we shall sail together – and then you will keep your promise to wed me. A promise you broke three years ago...”

“I shall marry you before that,” Jack said and grinned as he reached for her once more. “I can't lose you again, my love... Besides, I want my rival where I can keep an eye on her...”

“Men!” Henrietta said but she was laughing. “I really gave you a run for your money, didn't I?”

Jack smiled. She was the bravest, most beautiful woman he had ever met, and if the truth were known as good or better at sailing her ship than he was himself!

## **Linda Sole**

LINDA SOLE was born in Swindon. Her family moved to Ely in Cambridgeshire when she was nine, and Linda attended the local school but left at fifteen to work as a hairdresser in her father's business. She was married at eighteen and ran her own hairdressing business for some years before moving to Cambridge, although Linda has now moved to somewhere a bit quieter in Cambridgeshire. She started writing in 1976, combining this with helping her husband to run his antique shop.

Visit her website at <http://www.lindasole.co.uk>