

GROGGY • MIND YOUR P'S AND Q'S • A RULE OF THUMB

By Carole L. Cooney

During the 18th century, the drink for sailors was called grog and it was made from rum. The Captain had water added to the beverage in hopes of ending fights among the men. When a sailor drank too much, he appeared to be “groggy” or mildly drunk.

The keeper of the beverage might shout to the sailors to “mind their p’s and q’s” which meant to pay attention to how many pints and quarts of liquor they drank.

In order to determine whether a liquid was the correct temperature before adding other ingredients to make beer, the brewer would dip his thumb into the mixture. This is where the saying “rule of thumb” originated.

Setting: On board the tall ship, *The Valiant Lady*

Characters:

Narrator

Captain Smithy White

A group of sailors: Billy, Sly, Little Joe, Mike, Smiley

The Grog Keeper: Francis

The Brew Master: Samuel

Narrator: The *Valiant Lady* set sail in the early morning of 1777. The seas were calm as the sun rose in the sky. Sailors moved about the deck, scrubbing and cleaning. Down in the hull, the brew master was teaching Smiley how to making beer.

Brew Master: You’ve got to stir and watch and make sure everything is hot enough – just hot enough. What I mean, it’s got to be just right – not too hot and not too cold. You got the idea, matey?

Smiley: Yes sir. I think so. (Scratching is head.)

Brew Master: Now here’s the trick. You put your thumb into the liquid to test the temperature before you add the yeast. It’s the thumb that rules the brew – and that’s called the rule of thumb. Now don’t you be forgetting the rule of thumb otherwise the beer will taste like sea water.

(Smiley fearfully puts his thumb into the liquid and pulls it out quickly. He is surprised that it wasn’t scorching hot. He smiles.)

Smiley: Oh, I get the idea, sir.

Brewer: Now, mate. The Captain wants there to be water added to the rum. That’s so the mates don’t drink too much grog.

Smiley: Aye, aye, sir. (He pours half water and half rum into the bottles.) Oh, the mates will think this is the best grog ever!

Brewer: (calling to the Captain) The grog is ready!

Captain: Aye, it’s ready. Call the men, Bar Keep.

Bar Keep: All right now, come on one at a time and get your grog. Hey, hey, not so fast, I say. Now mind your “p’s and q’s. I’ll have none of you falling off the ship again. (Laughing) What a sorry sight that was last night, Little Joe!

(They pass the bottles around and drink heartily from their cups of grog, while laughing at Little Joe.)

Billy: How much treasure do you figure *The Valiant Lady's* carrying?

Sly: I'd say about 500 ton.

Billy: Naw... it's more like 800 ton. (They wag their heads in agreement.)

Little Joe: What do you think is in those wooden crates?

Mike: I bet it's those spices the rich are so wanting.

Billy: Naw! It's precious stones. (Lifts his cup high)

Little Joe: How much do you want to bet it's full of those fancy silks.

Mike: All right! Put up your money. (He drop a coin on the deck floor)

Sly: (Loud whisper) You know Mike always cheats. (laughing) He's probably taken a peek into one of those crates.

Mike: Who calls me a cheat? Is it you? (points to Billy)

Billy: (backing away with hands up) Not me!

Mike: Who is it then?

Sly: It's me. (Stands up tall) And what are you going to do about it?

Mike: (Stands) Here put my grog in safe keeping. (Hands cup to Little Joe)

(Sly and Mike begin to spar with one another, weaving this way and that.)

Billy: Will ya' look at those two. They are *mighty* groggy.

Little Joe: I think it's time to get back to work before the Captain sees us.

Captain: (walking toward the men) What goes on there?

Billy: (pulling the two men apart.) Nothing, Sir! Just the men taking a little rest and a bit of grog before getting back to their jobs.

Captain: Well, you better make it quick if it's your pay you're wanting.

All: Aye, aye, sir! (They rise and walk back to their scrubbing and cleaning the deck.)