

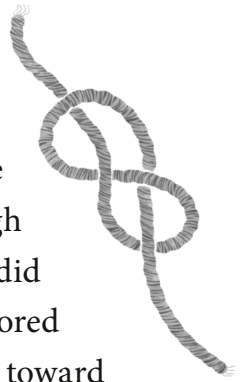
Quivers called everyone to attention. “Have we forgotten our manners? Let’s give Neo a very warm welcome to Pirate Academy.”

The Barracudas were thrown into confusion. They had never had a new classmate before. Captain Quivers broke the awkward deadlock by starting to clap. Jasmine followed her cue and found others, even Jacoby, doing the same.

Captain Quivers put a hand on Neo’s shoulder. “I know we are all looking forward to getting to know you. I wonder, is there anything you’d like to say to your new comrades?”

Neo hesitated, looking like he wished the floorboards would swallow him up. He ran a hand through his dark curls, then cleared his throat. “It’s great to be here,” he said. “And I’m looking forward to getting to know everyone too.” His eyes met Captain Quivers’s, pleadingly.

“Well, let’s press on!” the captain said. “We have an awful lot to get through.” She tapped the board behind her. “Today, we are going to work on an attack knot.” She was interrupted by a fanfare of whoops—attack knots were always a firm favorite. The captain stepped forward toward her table and scooped up a pool of colored rope.



“Here’s one I prepared earlier,” she announced. “I call it Quivers’s Catch of the Day.” She smiled. “Looks harmless enough at first sight. Rather festive!” The rope did indeed look like a harmless, multicolored fishing net. Now, Captain Quivers turned toward Neo. “Mister Splice, if you’d be so kind as to help me demonstrate? That’s it, just take a step away from the window and don’t be too nervous!”

Watching Neo standing there alone, Jasmine felt for him. It couldn’t be easy being the new kid. Her eyes returned to Captain Quivers, just in time to see the captain launch the rope net in Neo’s direction. It found its target cleanly and landed like a plain lasso on his shoulders. As Captain Quivers pulled sharply twice on the rope, the netting extended down Neo’s entire body until he was bound from his neck to his ankles.

There were fresh whoops from the class. *Classic Quivers*, Jasmine thought. Nodding, the captain waited for the excitement to die down. “Looks like you’ve been caught in my net, Neo!” she said. “Now see if you can break free.”

Neo did as she instructed, frowned, wriggled again, and then shook his head.