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The Popcorn Islands

Have you ever heard of the Popcorn Islands? Probably not. Very few people have – but if you look hard at a map of the Caribbean Sea, you might just see four little dots not far from Jamaica. The dots won't be named, of course – they're too

small for that – but those are the Popcorn Islands.

Not long ago, nobody lived on these islands. From time to time, sailors were shipwrecked on them, and sometimes stayed for months, or even years. Sooner or later, though, they would be rescued and the islands would be deserted again. The shipwrecked sailors were often rather sad to go, as these were comfortable islands, with plenty of fresh water and lots of wild fruit trees. The turtles and birds who lived on the islands were also very friendly, as they hardly ever saw any humans and were always pleased to have some company.

Then, almost one hundred years ago, Lucy's great-grandfather, who was a ship's captain, sailed past the islands and decided to drop anchor and explore them. He liked them a great deal, and his wife, who always went with him on his voyages, liked them even more.

"Let's stay here," she said to her husband, as they sat on the beach and watched the turtles lumbering up from the water's edge. "Let's stay here and build a house. I'm tired of sailing around and never staying in one place very long. I want to have a house, with curtains, and sleep in a real bed, with legs, instead of a hammock."

"I know how you feel, my dear," mused the Captain. "I'd like to look out of my window and see hills, and trees with birds in them, instead of just waves and more waves."

"And eat fresh pumpkins," continued his wife, "instead of dry biscuits and salted ham."

The captain spoke to his sailors, and they all agreed that this was a very good idea. They too had had enough of pulling sails up and down and singing sea shanties as they climbed the rigging. They wanted to have little houses, too, with taps that ran fresh water, and plates that didn't always taste of salt when you licked them. So they

left the Captain and his wife and took the ship off and fetched their own wives and children. Then they returned to set up home on the Popcorn Islands. And that is how it all started. It was as simple as that.

As the years went by, the number of people on the islands grew. By the time that Lucy's grandfather was born there were fifty people on each of the four islands, and by the time that Lucy herself arrived, there were one hundred and twenty-five people on each. And that was about right, as it meant that there were just enough people for everybody to be

able to find friends, and not so many that the islands became crowded.

It was Lucy's grandfather who made the great discovery that was to give the islands their name. In his day, they had no real name, and were simply called Big Island, Middle Island, Small Island and Tiny Island. Then one day, when he was wondering whether he would plant pumpkins and melons again that year, he made the amazing discovery that the soil of the islands was suitable for growing popcorn. In fact, it was perfect for it. If you put some popcorn under a shallow covering of the islands' rich, dark soil, within a few days a strong little popcorn

plant would be pushing its way up into the light.

Then, less than six weeks later, you would have a lush crop of popcorn ripening in the sun, ready to be picked.

It was a marvellous discovery and everybody was quite overjoyed.

"It will be a great change from growing pumpkins," people said. "Imagine having all the popcorn we could possibly want, right here on our doorsteps!"

"And we can sell it too," said another. "We can send it off to America by boat. They love popcorn there!"

"We'll all become rich!" said another. "Fancy that!"



Well, not everybody became rich, but certainly they did very well out of popcorn, and soon there was a thriving trade. From then on, it seemed natural to call the islands the Popcorn Islands. It suited them so well, and the people were proud to come from a place with a name like that.

They were, not at all surprisingly, all very happy – until things suddenly went very badly wrong.