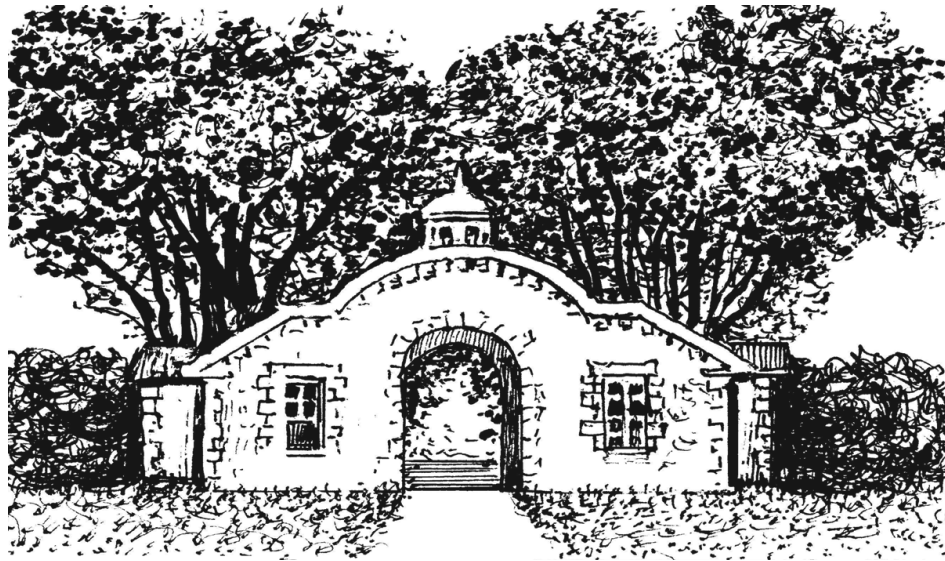


PETER
PIGEON
OF
SNUG
HARBOR





The North Gate of Snug Harbor

1. Snowball Fighting Season

Snug Harbor is on the northeastern edge of Staten Island in the Port of New York. And although it's supposed to be part of New York City, Snug Harbor doesn't seem like a city at all. It's full of trees and plants and flowers. There are no skyscrapers in Snug Harbor. Its buildings are only a few stories high and they are made of brick and stone, not concrete or glass. They were built centuries ago thanks to a rich man named Robert Richard Randall, who was the son of a pirate. When he died, he left all his money

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to buy Snug Harbor and build a home for “aged, decrepit, and worn-out sailors.” That’s how Captain Hardtack came to live there. For he was aged and worn-out. But he was not decrepit, and he took great pains to point that out to everyone, whether they asked or not.



SNOWBALL FIGHTING SEASON

In fact, all the old sailors at Snug Harbor were pretty lively, though they did have to be careful about their health due to their age and worn-outness. So the “Snugs,” as they called themselves, took plenty of naps, ate three square meals a day and never went outside when it was cold.



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Except for Ensign Uckluk, who was from Alaska, and Boatswain Jonsen, who was from Norway. They had both grown up in such cold places that Snug Harbor winters didn't bother them. Just the opposite. Each year they looked forward to the snowball fighting season.



SNOWBALL FIGHTING SEASON

The two sailors had very different methods when it came to snowball fighting. Ensign Uckluk was small and quick — very quick — for a little, old sailor. So he would dart from side to side, pelting Boatswain Jonsen with as many snowballs as he could fire off.

Boatswain Jonsen was slow, but he was very large and enormously strong. So while he was being socked with little snowballs from Ensign Uckluk, Boatswain Jonsen would build one gigantic snowball. Then he would raise it high over his head and wait for Ensign Uckluk to let his guard down.

Each winter's day, the Snugs would gather by the windows in the mess hall on the first floor to watch the snowball fight. As a service to the other sailors, Captain Hardtack would take out his spyglass so he could see close up and describe the action like a sportscaster. While he spoke, the other old sailors would bet candy bars on the outcome of the fight.

One day, however, Captain Hardtack's sportscast took a strange turn. "Uckluk has moved to his left,"

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the Captain said, “barely sidestepping a baby pigeon. He lifts a curve ball towards Jonsen, who catches it with one hand and pounds it into his giant snowball. Uckluk feigns to his right. Once again he’s almost stepped on that baby pigeon. Uckluk, watch out! There’s a bird at your feet. Be careful!” Before long, Captain Hardtack realized that Ensign Uckluk was too involved with the snowball fight to notice the baby pigeon, or hear his shouting. So the Captain jumped through the mess hall window, or at least he tried to jump through the mess hall window. But Captain Hardtack had become a bit bottom-heavy in his old age and he got stuck.

“All hands,” Captain Hardtack, yelled “Push my butt through this window, that’s an order!” The Snugs stared at each other for a second. They didn’t feel very good about the idea of pushing the Captain’s butt. Sailors are not supposed to push captains’ butts.

But even worse than pushing a captain’s butt is disobeying a captain’s order. So the Snugs did as they were told and the captain shot through the window and crashed into the snow below.

SNOWBALL FIGHTING SEASON

Then Captain Hardtack picked himself up and ran towards Ensign Uckluk. As he ran, he yelled — “Uckluk, watch it. There’s a baby pigeon there under your feet. Stand aside, Uckluk, that’s an order!” But Uckluk, after having landed a series of hits on Jonsen, was now dodging back and forth, hoping to avoid the giant snowball that would soon be coming his way. As he moved to and fro, the Ensign didn’t notice the little bird at his feet, or the Captain running towards him. Neither did Jonsen, who picked that moment to launch his giant snowball. Frantically, Captain Hardtack dove towards the pigeon as Ensign Uckluk skillfully ducked away from Jonsen’s throw. The huge snowball missed Uckluk and landed squarely on Captain Hardtack, burying him beneath. When the two snowball fighters had fished the Captain out and carried him inside, he was almost frozen stiff. But in his hands, he held the baby pigeon.



Building B at Snug Harbor

2. An Unlikely Nurse

*T*he Snugs pried open Captain Hardtack's hands and took out the little bird. They could see that the baby pigeon was feverishly ill, so they laid him on the pillow on Captain Hardtack's bed. Then they thawed out Captain Hardtack. When the Captain came to, he prepared a batch of his South Sea grog, a special restorative tonic whose recipe he had learned from natives of the distant island of Pango-Pango.

AN UNLIKELY NURSE



Then he got an eyedropper from his medicine chest and tried to use it to feed the tonic to the bird. But the little creature was so sick he would not open his beak. Captain Hardtack thought that the baby pigeon looked like his great granduncle Vice-Admiral Peter Hardtack, who was famous for his poor

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appetite. So he started calling the little bird Peter, while encouraging him to take the grog. “C’mon, Peter, just a drop. Just a wee little drop, c’mon, Pete. Just take a tiny little sip, Petey,” the captain would say for hours on end. And sure enough, thanks to the encouragement, Peter would take a sip and then another.

The Snugs were shocked to hear Captain Hardtack speaking in this gentle way. Although he



AN UNLIKELY NURSE

was known as a good captain who always gave his men extra dessert whenever they did a good job, Captain Hardtack was a rough, tough, man of the sea. And he had gotten into the habit of yelling orders to his crew. When you are sailing through squalls, and typhoons, and hurricanes, and tsunamis you don't have time to discuss things. If you're the Captain, you just have to shout exactly what everyone should do, because the whole ship could sink while you're trying to be polite. But Captain Hardtack knew that shouting at a sick baby pigeon wasn't going to help anything. And he knew that without his help, Peter was not going to get well. So if the Snugs had thought about it, they would have realized that Captain Hardtack had not really changed. He had never lost a ship at sea and he didn't want to lose Peter. And Captain Hardtack knew that just as sailors in a typhoon need orders, little sick baby pigeons need encouragement.

So, for the rest of the winter, while the other Snugs were watching snowball fights, knitting