

## PETER PIGEON OF SNUG HARBOR

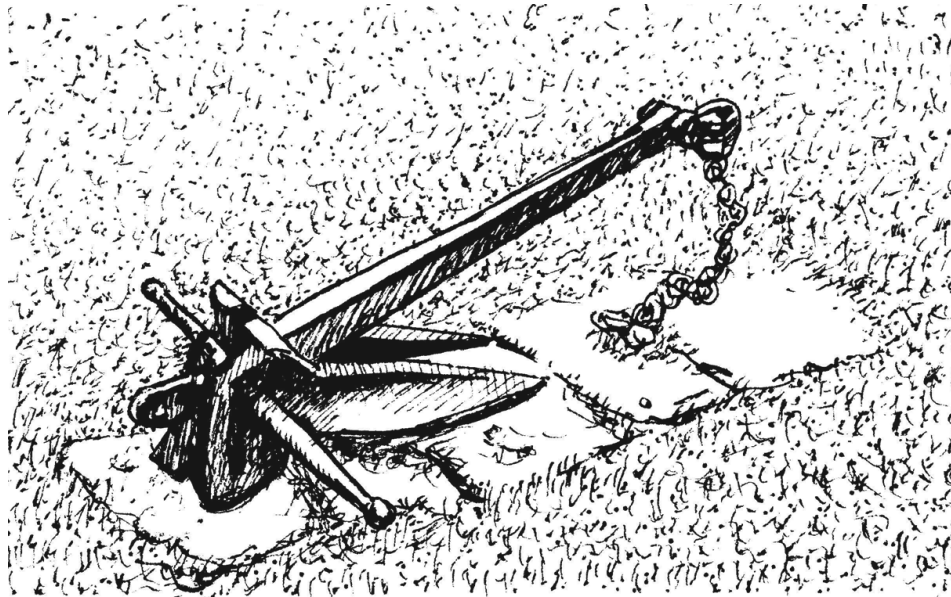
sweaters, carving scrimshaw, playing cards and doing other fun things, Captain Hardtack just sat in the chair next to his bed where Peter was lying, feeding him South Sea grog and encouraging him. For three months, Captain Hardtack never left his side, except to go to the bathroom. All the time, he was talking to the baby pigeon in the gentlest, nicest, way he knew. “C’mon, little Pete,” he would say. “C’mon, boy, just take a little drop of this South Sea grog, just another little drop and you’ll be fit as a fiddle.”

Gradually, Peter’s appetite improved. When he ate heartily, it reminded Captain Hardtack of a favorite cousin, Commodore Roderick Mayo Pigeon. In honor of his cousin, Captain Hardtack gave Peter the last name of “Pigeon.” The Snugs all agreed that it suited Peter perfectly. Except for Seaman First Class Rumplemyer, who had always wanted to name someone after his favorite dish, herring-salad. “Peter *‘Herring-Salad,’* it’s got a real ring to it, doesn’t it?,” he tried to persuade his fellow

## AN UNLIKELY NURSE

Snugs. Each Snug had the exact, same, one-word reply — “No.” Until the Seaman spoke to Captain Hardtack, who said, “frankly, Rumpemyer, that’s a bit silly.” After that the matter was settled, Peter ‘*Pigeon*’ he would remain.

By the time spring rolled around, Peter was well again and an amazing thing had happened. Because he had listened to the Captain nonstop for three months, Peter was able to understand English, which is very unusual for a pigeon.

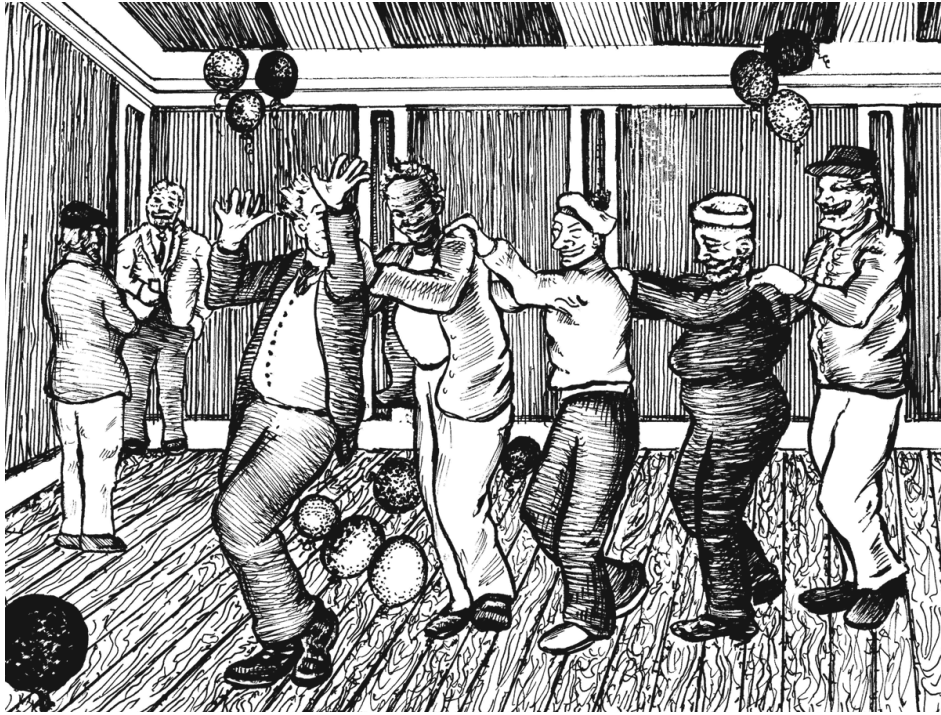


An Old Anchor at Snug Harbor

### 3. A Pigeon's Progress

*T*he Snugs were all very happy to see Peter feeling better, so they threw a party to celebrate. Everyone drank the Captain's South Sea grog. And even though they were feeling very good, it made them feel even better. Just before the party ended, the sailors sang three choruses of "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" and presented Peter with a tiny captain's cap. At this point, Captain Hardtack would have taken Peter back to his parents. But nobody knew where they were.

## A PIGEON'S PROGRESS



Chief Petty Officer Jackson thought that maybe Peter's parents had gotten lost in a snowstorm and flown away. Lieutenant Martinez, who was quite familiar with the wildlife of Staten Island, thought that maybe they had been attacked by a wild cat or dog, or been carried away by a lonely possum. Seaman 1st Class Rumplemyer felt that maybe Peter had just hatched himself. But the other Snugs thought that was pretty silly.

One thing they all agreed on was that Peter's own parents couldn't have taken care of him any

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better than Captain Hardtack was doing. Every morning, Captain Hardtack would take Peter across Richmond Terrace, the road that runs outside Snug Harbor's north gate. On the other side of that street is a bluff with the words "Snug Harbor" carved into it that looks out over the Port of New York. It was Peter's favorite spot in the whole world. He and the Captain would stand there and watch the ships sail by. "There's a frigate, Peter," Captain Hardtack would say. "There's a tug! A tramp steamer! An ocean liner! See that tanker? Those flags it's flying means it was in the China Sea."

There was a sturdy medium-size orange ship that Peter saw often. When he pointed it out, the Captain explained — "That's the Staten Island Ferry, Peter. It doesn't go very far, just back and forth between Manhattan and Staten Island. But it's very important; it carries thousands and thousands of people to work each day."

The Captain felt responsible for Peter, and he was determined to teach him all that he knew, which

## A PIGEON'S PROGRESS

was almost everything about sailing and almost nothing about anything else. So Peter did not learn about tap dancing, Bible studies, or football. But he did learn all about different ships and how to salute properly with his right wing. He even was taught all the special words sailors use, like “port” instead of “left,” and “starboard” instead of “right.”

Captain Hardtack also tried to be helpful with things he didn't know about. When Peter was flying, Captain Hardtack would sit with a stopwatch and cheer him on. “C'mon, little Pete!” he would shout. “Thattaboy, you shaved another second off yesterday's time!”

If there was any sunlight left after dinner, they would do what Peter loved best: Return to the bluff overlooking the port and pretend they were sailing in some far-off place like the South Malacca Sea or the Antarctic.

Captain Hardtack would call out orders and Peter would pretend to turn the steering wheel on their boat. “Icebergs dead ahead,” Captain Hardtack

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would shout. "Hard to starboard 20 degrees!" Then Peter would leap into the air, land on the imaginary wheel and flap his wings until he had shifted it exactly 20 degrees to the right.

In this way, Peter sailed all around the world without ever leaving Snug Harbor.

