
Book One: Remarkable Rascal

"Gulls Come a Flappin"

(Traditional Sailor's Ditty...Author Unknown)

Gulls come a flappin'

Waves are a lappin'

Tars afeared of dirty weather

While memberin the scent of heather

 Heave Ho...Heave Ho...Don't Let Go!

 Heave Ho...High and Low...Heave Ho

Behind are our loving families

Ahead lay unknown enemies

Captain bellows a call for all hands

While hoping to spot a spit of dry land

 Heave Ho...Heave Ho...Don't Let Go!

 Heave Ho...High and Low...Heave Ho

Time aboard moves far too slowly

A seaman's life is dull and lonely

Sweet liberty on all our minds

Wondrous dreams of rum and sweet wine

 Heave Ho...Heave Ho...Don't Let Go!

 Heave Ho...High and Low...Heave Ho

Strumpets willing to give us pleasure

Coins and gems traded as treasure

Their company costs a pretty penny

But offered readily to satisfy many

 Heave Ho...Heave Ho...Don't Let Go!

 Heave Ho...High and Low...Heave Ho

Pirates lurking in hidden shallows

Thieves bound to swing from the gallows

Our voyage fraught with pain and troubles

Our wake long and full of bubbles

 Heave Ho...Heave Ho...Don't Let Go!

 Heave Ho...High and Low...Heave Ho

2 / Bilge Rat

PROLOGUE

The damned ship was sinking into the brilliant coral blue sea and there was nothing I or any of the remaining survivors could do to avert this final disaster. Well, perhaps not a completely blue sea since it was dotted here and there with bright red splotches, as if God's own paintbrush had been dipped into it. These red blemishes were a result of blood loss... serious blood loss! Perhaps this was our ultimate punishment... God knows we probably deserved it. Pirates never seemed to have really good luck, and this lethal predicament was just one more wretched example. The stygian black fins of the relentless sea predators were painstakingly making their assigned rounds in anticipation of a good day's meal. As the dead or severely wounded tumbled off the listing remnants of the ship, they were immediately ravaged by the savage gnashing teeth of *God's Welcoming Committee*. I've seen many ways in which a man can join the everlasting, and while many seem to me to be a lot worse, this current situation put me in a very foul mood.

The question was, "*Did I deserve this type of fate?*" This query has probably been asked by a host of forsaken souls. A far more relevant question was whether fate ruled our destiny. Was it predetermined that each human was subjected to an unchanging series of events that dictated the path of his or her life? If fate does not rule an individual's destiny, does each of us then have sole ownership over our own existence and outcome? Learned and wise thinkers have long debated these fundamental questions without reaching a consensus. Therefore, in the absence of definitive answers, I have come to trust in my own judgment to provide illumination on these salient queries.

In doing so, here are my thoughts on these age-old human preponderances. I believe that each individual has a multitude of choices to make throughout his or her life, which operate independently of all that fate decrees by the will of their choice of Supreme Being. Further, I believe a man's destiny is determined by the subtle mixture of these two elements, providing an individual with a final outcome that is partially based on individual choice as well as determined fate.

Sitting on the fire-torn scrap of this mortally wounded ship, I now think back to a good many of the choices that I have made over the course of my life. What I am attempting to understand is which of these many choices made should have been challenged in an effort to alter my present predicament. I know you are thinking to yourselves that this seems like a very bad time to recollect on my lifetime given that the maritime dinner bell is about to be rung. However, this is my life we are discussing, so you are just going to have to bear with me.

In spite of my precarious predicament, I will utilize what little time remains to examine in detail the various choices I have made throughout my life and the consequences they have caused...for I am William *Echo* Eden...rascal, scoundrel and pirate!

Chapter 1: Early Remembrances

Where should I start...a nagging question that faces us daily? I have heard travelers say that a journey starts with the first step. A seasoned sailor answers that a voyage starts with the weighing of the anchor. A man's start in life is easy to identify since it begins with his birth. But this is a bit misleading, because a man's early years cannot be truly remembered, at least certainly not by that individual! Rather the first several years of a man's life are remembered by others who have shared those experiences. In my case, any early remembrances are entirely unknown because I lost both parents to the plague in these early years. The truth is that if they were consumed by the plague, then you could say that I was lucky! Before you judge me harsh, callous or totally insane, let me explain. In my experience, I have seen many a young child simply buried alongside their parents when the *Plague Master* has seen fit to make an unexpected visit. Harsh and cruel you say...perhaps.

When it comes right down to the nub, human beings crave survival at any cost. While Toby, my younger brother, and I escaped the misery, pain and ultimate death at the hand of the *Plague Master*, we were left as helpless orphans in a cruel world that had no time or love to share with us. This was a death sentence pure and simple. You see, both Toby and I were born in London, England's largest city, to poor pathetic parents. They could hardly take care of themselves let alone a couple of squalling obligations. I cannot tell you very much about them...truthfully only their names. The year of their death was 1695. This means that Toby and I were born somewhat before this date, which placed me at the time somewhere in my early to middle teens and Toby several years younger.

London was a huge and fast growing city that had little or no time or care for a couple of filthy orphans. From the moment of our parents' cruel and untimely deaths, the fate my brother and I shared was not to be a happy or joyous one. While we were both lucky to be alive, the odds on the matter said that we would be joining our parents in the very near future. Yes, it is true that London had organized homes for orphans. The conditions of these homes left much to be desired. Many

were poor substitutes for slave quarters, utilizing their innocent and helpless residents as laborers in the burgeoning work industries that were springing up all over the city. These institutions demanded a fresh supply of human fodder to be continually sacrificed in the effort of making the factory owners wealthy. Hard labor, starvation and harsh punishment were an orphan's daily companions, with no hope for salvation other than an early death.

Toby and I were spared this ugly fate by a distant relative. Our great uncle came to our rescue, the retired Arch Deacon, Williamson Archibald. He told that this kindness came as a result of his strong feelings for our mother, who he informed us happened to be his favorite niece. Later we both came to understand the real truth of the matter. But the fact was that we were both given shelter, food and care rather than face the brutal realities of the London streets. Our uncle was the appointed keeper of Saint Agnes of Agony Basilica. This hulking structure became our home over the next several long years. As to our great uncle, he was a very learned and pious man, who was almost blind due to an eye ailment that left both of his eyes covered by a milky white substance, making it very hard for him to endure any type of strong light. Toby called his condition *ghost eyes*, which in fact it did resemble. We both had a hard time adjusting to his extremely grotesque appearance. We came to call him the *Old Ghost* when not in his presence, and just Uncle Arch to his face. He was basically a good person, who spent most of his time in the bowels of the church, where there was no bright daylight to torture his suffering eyes. This also proved to be a positive for parishioners, who were genuinely disturbed by our great uncle's appearance and tended to avoid his eerie stare at any cost.

The *Old Ghost* was encouraged by his superior, Vicar Walters, to keep himself in seclusion so as not to alienate the congregation. Our uncle did have many duties to perform despite his eye affliction, including the general maintenance and upkeep of the basilica proper. Now all of this could have been handled by even an old man like our uncle, had he only been able to see. But having the curse of poor eyesight made even those simple tasks almost impossible for him. That is where Toby and I entered the grand scheme...we supplied the labor to ensure that our uncle kept his position at the basilica.

But that was not the only service Toby and I provided for our uncle. The old structure was subject to a very real problem that all of London suffered...rats! Yes these loathsome, furry little devils had virtually a free run of Londontown scurrying from one building to another...from basements to attics...from back alleyways to front streets. These black disgusting pests were a standard sight to citizens, and for the most part ignored with a shiver and a quick shift in sight. Daylight sightings were not all that rare. But these loathsome creatures became especially bold after sundown, when they exited their slime-filled lairs to prance and cavort throughout the city in search of food or adventure. The problem was not isolated to the poor downtrodden sections of the city, but it sure seemed like these hideous demons took a liking to the poor. Maybe it was a sense of brotherhood they shared with the starving and unwashed unfortunates, or maybe it was that the poor had little time to bother with their presence. In any event, these scurrying devils became the main reason both Toby and I were saved from an unhappy existence in a cruel and brutal London orphanage.

Rats also had a distinct negative impact around faithful churchgoers. You see a devout churchgoer was for the most part an highly superstitious type of person...trusting in all that was seen and certainly that which was not. Of all the superstitions that abounded at the time...and believe me there were a great number to choose from...the superstition that strongly stood out was the dreaded curse of viewing a rat in a place of worship. Only one circumstance was actually deemed worse...being touched by a rat in a church! It was firmly believed that any unfortunate rat contact in a place of worship meant that the individual was doomed to die in a most horrible way. Basically, rats kept people away from services, which meant less money for any religious institution. Rats literally *scared the religion* out of parishioners!

That was exactly why Toby and I had a solid roof over our heads and food in our bellies. You see no matter how many cats were on hand to protect against these creeping adversaries, there were never enough. Therefore, it was up to each institution to find a way to keep this crawling pestilence at bay. Traditionally, that meant hiring *ratters*, whose job it was to ensure that the rat population inside of church boundaries was kept in check by whatever means necessary. Our uncle, charged with

this vital responsibility, settled on a very simple and convenient solution. Find a youngster that could serve as his arms and legs in the Saint Agnes rat war. Better yet, why not settle on a couple of lads who could not only perform daily cleaning assignments while at the same time keep the rats in check!

Therefore, the basement of Saint Agnes became both our home and our workplace. Our learned uncle also acted as our private tutor. The *Old Ghost* would send us up into the church during the day to perform necessary cleaning chores armed with an educational problem for us to ponder and solve as we went about our assigned duties. In this manner, he hoped to provide us with vital knowledge as we fulfilled his charge to the vicar. At the end of the day, we reported back to the *Old Ghost* on both our cleaning progress and to provide answers to his *problem de jour*. We would sit with our uncle after each long day and discuss the answers to these daily educational riddles. We were totally unaware of the gift of knowledge he was imparting to us.

Uncle Arch was a master of languages, mathematics, history and science. I never found these exercises to be troublesome or boring, while Toby struggled mightily. In my case, I guess learning came easy because I had the strange ability to remember all that our uncle would say by way of instruction. All I had to do was hear something once and I never forgot it! I became the star pupil, while my brother became the dunce of our tiny class. My brother's attempts at formal education proved to be nothing more than failure. I, however, learned a slew of new languages both in oral and written form. These included English, Latin, Spanish, Italian, French and Dutch. I also picked up great knowledge in mathematics, chemistry, geography, map reading, history and so much more. As you can imagine, this proved to be a great help later in life.