



The Governor's House at Snug Harbor

8. Maria Maria

*T*he sun was setting when Peter came ashore, and the chilly breezes of the sunny afternoon had turned icy in the darkness. Peter shivered a bit as he flew along Richmond Terrace, retracing his path back to Snug Harbor. When he got there, Peter found that the window to Captain Hardtack's room had been left open a crack and he slipped inside. Hannah, the groundskeeper had opened it for him. And just as Captain Hardtack asked, she had also prepared

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a Tweet-Tweet microwavable gourmet bird dinner, and a snack of bread crumbs and a cup of water. They were waiting in the little wall nook next to Peter's bed and the tintype of Vice Admiral Hardtack. The room was freezing cold. Peter shivered as he ate and then climbed into bed and buried himself under the blankets. For a while he lay awake thinking of all the warm and cozy days he had spent in that room with Captain Hardtack. And then he thought about how pleased the Captain would have been to see him steering the Staten Island Ferry. He fell asleep with that thought. It was a thick and heavy slumber that lasted through the night.

The next morning, Peter was woken up by a loud bang that was followed by a woman's voice shouting, "You're a freak, Roger! Get out of my hair!" Then he heard another bang and the man's voice yelling back, "Oh, shut up, Maria!"

Peter peaked outside the door of Captain Hardtack's room and stared at the angry couple. They were glaring at each other across the large

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cardboard boxes they had just dropped. The woman said, "As you know, Roger, my name is not Maria! It's Maria Maria! And as you also know, I never shut up except when I'm sleeping! So you'd just better get out of my hair and stay out of my hair! Stay out of my hair for good!"



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As Maria Maria said this, she shook her hair, which was long and thick and very black; and it was a bit frightening.

Behind Maria Maria and Roger, there was a huge commotion going on. The government of the City of New York had taken over Snug Harbor and turned it into an arts center. It seemed like the perfect thing to do with the space now that the Snugs were gone. The artists wouldn't really need much heat, because as long as they had a cheap space to do their paintings they were happy. And since they were only supposed to be there during the day, there was no need to keep the boiler on at night. So the expensive heating bills that had concerned Ms. Martinette, would no longer be a problem

Now all the artists were moving in with their paints and canvases, sculptures and blowtorches, stuffed armadillos, phosphorescent snowshoes and all sorts of peculiar things. Peter hadn't seen this much activity since the Snugs finished the Captain's South Sea grog at his last party.

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Hannah, the groundskeeper, was running all over the place trying to help the artists find their studios — which were to be set up in the rooms where the Snugs had lived.



Maria Maria charged over to Hannah and begged her for a different studio. “Please,” she said, “I can’t share a studio with Roger. He’s just too creepy to share a studio with!”

Hannah didn’t really think Roger was all that creepy. But she did remember that when she was

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Maria Maria's age, certain guys really did seem pretty irritating. And she wanted everyone to be happy.

"Well," said Hannah, "Everything is taken except for Captain Hardtack's room. It's much smaller than the others because, being a captain, he had it all to himself. Well, except for Peter. You would have to share it with Peter."

"That's all right," Maria Maria said. "I don't mind if he doesn't. Can I talk to him?"

"Well, I guess you could talk to him. Captain Hardtack certainly did. He thought that Peter understood every word he was saying."

"Why wouldn't, Peter understand?" Maria Maria, asked. "Does Peter have a hearing problem? I know sign language, I'm sure he could understand me."

"Peter's a pigeon," Hannah explained.

"Oh, wow, that is so cool!" said Maria Maria. "I would so love to talk to Peter and see if I could be his roommate."

After being introduced to Peter, Maria Maria proceeded to tell him the story of her life. She felt

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he should have this type of information if they were going to be roommates. And anyway she enjoyed talking about herself. Maria Maria's original name was Maria Colacco, but she thought that this name sounded very ordinary.



So just last year, on her 21st birthday, she changed her first name to Otto-Von-Bismarck. This made her parents very unhappy, because they thought Maria was a lovely name. Which, of course, it is. So to make them feel better, she changed her first name

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back to Maria. And to make herself feel better, she changed her last name to Maria. From that point on she was known as Maria Maria and everyone was very happy. Or at least, Maria Maria was very happy, and her parents figured they could live with it. Because once you've had a daughter named Otto-Von-Bismarck Colacco, Maria Maria sounds pretty good.

Unfortunately, however, not everyone was as understanding as her parents. In fact, no one at the Slurpee counter at the 7-11 where she worked could get her name right. But Maria Maria was convinced that before long, everyone on Staten island would know and understand the correct way to say her name — even the people at the Slurpee counter. That's because Maria Maria planned to enter the annual art contest held by the Staten Island Advance and win the cash first prize. It was not only the money she was interested in, though. Maria Maria felt that the world was a pretty dreary place and it was her duty to brighten it up with her art.