

Good ol' Uncle 'zo

by

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Chapter One

Ahhh yes, Barbara, strange that ye should ast about Lorenzo. Good ol' Uncle 'zo. Well da ah remember ar days together, sailin' out o' tha Grand Reef under a full spread o' canvas, aheadin' east, lookin' fer Spanish Galleons ta plunder. Them wuz tha days. Me an' 'zo took many a lazy Spaniard skipper by surprise, an' spent more gold on drink 'n women than most men 've ever seen. 'zo taught me all ah know 'bout sailin', readin' tha weather, knowin' tha ways o' tha water, pickin' tha port whur we'd not be thrown inta tha hoosegow on sight, an' mighty few o' them ports they wuz, ah kin tell ya, when ya shipped out with Uncle 'zo.

Why, ah remember tha time we breasted the worst gale in 40 years, abeatin' inta 60 foot seas, tha howlin' wind at least a hunnert knots ifn it 'uz a breeze. Headin' fer Casket Bay we wuz, tha only place on the Southern Coast that uz rotten enough ta have us. There we was, afightin' fer our lives an' what did we see but a galleon o' tha Royal Spanish Cavalcade, aheadin' west. Me? I'da ignored her but not Uncle 'zo. Not by yer long wooden leg he didn't! Brought us about single handed 'e did, me bein' a bit green just then, jibbed tha mainsl, belayed tha capstan, avasted tha lubber, keelhauded tha main sheet, furled tha cleats, battened tha foc'sle, an' boarded her he did! It was tha bravest thing ah ever seen a man do, exeptin' o' course fer that time in Halifax Annie's establishment when Big Joe Bobcat walked in with a thousand dollars in his pocket an' bought ever woman in the place, but that ain't no tale fer a lady's ears and anyhow ah was atellin' ya about Uncle 'zo. When he vaulted over them Spanish gunnels, his cutlass aswingin', hollerin' like a gang o' shanghaied Melbourne whores, ah thought them thievin' Spaniards wuz 'bout ta meet their maker, but ah wuz wrong. They wuz a whole gang ov 'em ahidin' behind tha batten locker, an' them schemin' Spaniards jus' swarmed over Uncle 'zo frum behind like ticks on a dog, an' afore ah could find whur I'd left my flintlock, wouldn' a done no good nohow coz ma powder was all wet frum tha gale, but ah tried, ah did, they cut the lines and cast me adrift, cussed Spanish varmint. It 'uz the last ah ever seen o' Uncle 'zo.

Eventually, the gale drove me aground near Purgatory Point an' tha Bristol Biscuit went all ta splinters, good ship that she wuz. Ah wuz rescued by the Monks of St. Patrick, all in yellow robes, with their hands all steepled afore 'em real religious like. Anyway, ah guess that's all ah got ta say 'bout Uncle 'zo exceptin' ah kin see why ya'd think ah wuz related ta 'im. Assumin' of course that we're atalkin' 'bout the same gentleman. If not, then ah guess ah ain't related ta 'im after all. Never even heard o' tha man. Ast me sometime an' I'll tell ya about my Uncle Rufus.

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Chapter Two

Hey Barbara! Guess what!? Ah heard from Uncle 'zo! Them thievin' Spaniards didn't shove 'im over tha fantail after all. They put 'im ta work as a galley slave. Seems their cook 'ad died o' ptomaine. Actually, their ewe died o' ptomaine so they hung the cook from a yardarm. Anyway, they needed a cook an' just 's they wuz 'bout ta shove Uncle 'zo through tha aft bulkhead, his Reader's Digest pocket-size combination salt an' pepper shaker/cutlery set/compass/universal calendar/Swiss Army Knife dropped outa 'is pocket an' they all realized 'e could cook. They wuz mighty tired o' dry flour, corn meal, and pickles so they locked him in the galley. Naturally, it wasn' long 'fore he owned most everythin' on the ship. Craps, ya know. A specialty o' his an' a weakness o' any Spaniard o' tha high seas. By tha time they put into Cádiz, Uncle 'zo was gettin' rich loanin' their own money back ta 'em at usurious interest. Uncle 'zo has that problem, not knowin' when to quit. He snuck off tha ship one night after evenin' chow 'ad been unusually soporific and he'd been unusually lackin' in appetite. Clever devil that he is, he remembered ta take his little fortune with him, an' enough extra ta cover most o' tha interest them thievin' Spaniards owed him. He'da took anuf fer all tha interest but they wasn anuf on tha whole durn ship ta cover it.

Now I've been around with Uncle 'zo before so ah wasn' surprised when 'e said in 'is letter that 'e headed fer what we call tha dark side o' town. What did surprise me was how 'e spent tha money. I'da expected him ta blow it on booze, women, you know, normal fare fer me an' him, but ah guess maybe 'e's gittin' cautious in 'is old age. He bought a place. Los Bandidos it wuz called. He described it as tha seediest, sleaziest, filthiest, most scum-infested parasite-ridden pesthole on the face of the Earth. Now here's tha strange part. Just last October, ah wrote a bit 'o short fiction that happened in a place called Los Bandidos. In Cádiz. It sounds jus like tha same place. An' here's tha even more amazin' part. Uncle 'zo stayed there fer goodness knows how long but one night some hot-shot detective came in after some bandit that wuz known locally as the meanest, toughest, lowest, most feared, most hated, most underhanded, cheating, conniving, stealing, scheming, low-life scumbag cut-throat ever to be produced by the human race. Amazing. That could be a word-for-word description of tha character in my story. Ah don't know. Ah never believed in telepathy before but accordin' ta 'zo's letter, tha place got shut down about tha time ah was writin' tha story. Ah guess there's a link between me an' Uncle 'zo.

Anyway, Uncle 'zo ain't one ta be taken by surprise, exepthin' o' course fer them Spaniard thieves, an' he wuz ready all tha time ta leave at a moment's notice. He snuck out disguised as a dodderin' old grandma while they was bustin' up tha place. When 'e wrote tha letter 'e wuz headin' for a place he'd heard about in southwest Texas. The Barn Grill he called it. Dang. Ah wrote some stories about that place, too.

Good ol' Uncle 'zo. I'll hear from 'im agin when 'e feels like writin'.

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