



PIRATES & PLUNDER ♦

Henry Every's Great Escape

An Al Wrangler illustrated story



From the film

MARTY

Come in out of the dark, friends, and lean close, for most of our pirate tales end on a gallows or under the waves, but tonight we tell of the one who got away. Henry Every pulled off perhaps the richest single robbery in the whole history of piracy, set half the world hunting him, and then simply vanished off the face of the earth with his plunder and was never, ever caught. They called him the Arch Pirate and Long Ben, Carol, and his is the great escape.

CAROL

The one who got away clean. Oh, Marty, after Kidd hanged in a cage, I could use a story where the pirate wins. What was this great robbery of his?



MARTY

To understand it, Carol, you must picture the richest empire on earth at that time, the empire of the Grand Mughal of India, wealthy beyond a European's wildest dreams. And once a year a great fleet of the Mughal's ships would sail home from the holy pilgrimage to Mecca, laden with treasure and pilgrims. The jewel of that fleet was an enormous treasure ship, the Ganj-i-Sawai, a floating fortune of gold and silver and gems, carrying, it was said, members of the Mughal's own court. And in the year sixteen ninety-five, this ordinary English sailor named Henry Every set out to take her.

CAROL

One pirate captain, against the treasure ship of the mightiest empire on earth. Marty, the sheer nerve. How did a common sailor even come to lead such a thing?



MARTY

By mutiny, Carol. Every was first mate on a privateer whose crew had gone months without pay, and one night he led them in seizing the ship for their own and turned pirate. He renamed her the Fancy, made himself captain, and sailed for the mouth of the Red Sea, where he knew the Mughal's pilgrim fleet would pass. He was not alone, either. He gathered a little pack of pirate ships to lie in

wait together. And when the great fleet came through in the dark, most of it slipped past, but the Fancy caught the two richest stragglers, a smaller treasure ship first, and then the giant herself, the Ganj-i-Sawai.

CAROL

So he actually caught her. Marty, a huge Mughal warship must have been able to fight back. How did a stolen privateer take a prize like that?



MARTY

She could fight, Carol, and she should have won, for she was bigger and better armed. But fortune turned against her in the first minutes. One of the great ship's own cannon burst as it fired, killing her own gunners and throwing the defenders into chaos, and a lucky shot from the Fancy brought down the treasure ship's mainmast. And in the confusion the pirates swarmed aboard. And now, Carol, I must tell you the hard truth of it, because this is not a merry tale of plunder. What followed on the decks of the Ganj-i-Sawai was days of horror, the pirates torturing the crew for hidden valuables and committing terrible cruelties against the passengers, many of them helpless pilgrims. It was one of the ugliest episodes of the whole pirate age, and we should not dress it up.

CAROL

No, we should not, Marty. It is easy to forget, under all the treasure and adventure, that these were violent, brutal men and real people suffered. Thank you for saying it plainly. So they took the fortune. What happened when the world found out?



MARTY

The world erupted, Carol. The plunder was almost beyond counting, a fortune worth many millions in today's money, shared out so that every ordinary pirate aboard suddenly had wealth beyond anything he could have earned in a lifetime of honest sailing. But the Grand Mughal was enraged, and rightly, and he came near to throwing the English trading company out of India altogether, which would have ruined a great and powerful business. So to save that trade, the English crown put an enormous bounty on Henry Every's head and launched what many call the first worldwide manhunt in history, wanted posters and rewards spreading across the seas from India to the Americas to the British Isles.

CAROL

The first worldwide manhunt, all for one man. Marty, with the whole world looking, how did he possibly slip through?



MARTY

By being clever and quiet where his crew were loud, Carol. Every knew that a huge crew of newly rich pirates would draw every eye, so he broke his company up. He sailed the Fancy across to the Caribbean, and the men scattered in ones and twos to make their own way and spend their fortunes. And then Henry Every, the most wanted man on the seas, simply melted away. Some of his crewmen were caught and put on trial back in England, and there is a curious thing about that trial, Carol, the first jury actually acquitted them, so embarrassing was the whole affair, and the government had to try them again on another charge to get its hangings.

CAROL

Even the courts did not quite want to touch it. But Every himself, Marty, where did he go? Somebody must know.



MARTY

Nobody knows, Carol, and that is the glory and the frustration of the tale. He is believed to have made his way back to the British Isles, to Ireland or to England, under a false name, and there the trail simply goes cold. He never spent his fortune openly, never boasted, never surfaced. The most successful pirate thief in history, hunted by the whole world, walked into the crowd and was gone, and no gallows, no cage, no watery grave ever claimed him that anyone can prove.

CAROL

He just became an ordinary man in a crowd, forever. Marty, that is almost eerie, the completeness of it. But you have a certain look. Is there a sting in the tail?



MARTY

There is a rumor of one, Carol, and it is the kind of ending the old storytellers loved. For all we know, Henry Every lived out a long and comfortable life on his stolen fortune, laughing at the world. But there is a persistent legend that says otherwise, that when he came home and tried to turn his diamonds and gold into ordinary money through a group of merchants, those merchants realized exactly who he was and that he could never dare report them, and so they simply cheated him, took his treasure, and paid him next to nothing. And the legend says the Arch Pirate, who robbed the richest empire on earth and escaped the whole world's justice, died at last a poor and forgotten man, unable to prove he had ever owned a thing.

CAROL

Robbed by respectable merchants because he could not go to the law himself. Oh, Marty, if that is true, it is a perfect and terrible kind of justice, the thief with no one to steal his stolen goods back from. What meaning do you take from Henry Every?



MARTY

This, Carol. We tell his story because he is the one who got away, and there is a sneaking thrill in that. But look closely and the escape rings hollow. Whatever he won, he could never truly enjoy, because a fortune you cannot explain is a fortune you cannot spend in the light. He may have died rich and hidden, or poor and cheated, but either way he spent the rest of his days as a ghost, unable to be who he was, jumping at every knock on the door. He escaped the noose, Carol, and walked straight into a prison of his own making, and the door of it was the loot itself. I'm Marty Shepard.

CAROL

And I'm Carol, and tonight I am thinking of the most wanted man in the world melting into a crowd, rich beyond dreams and unable to say so to a living soul. Some escapes are their own kind of cage, friends. Come back to the fire.

