

THE YELLOW GALLEY-FULL

C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne

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MAJOR JOSEPH COLT stood six feet two on his bare heels, and as the 'tween decks of H.B.M. 20-gun brig Frolic offered only some five feet seven of head room, he did most of his travelling below bent into the form of an ass.

Like all tall men, Colt was used to keeping his head out of collision, and so avoided actual bumps and abrasions. But his height extracted constant sarcasms from both his stumpy fellow seamen and the stocky petty officers, and like all United States citizens of that period he was perilously sensitive to any criticism which came from British lips.

The clumsy little war brig hung on to the coasts of Cabrera through gale and calm, guarding the 5450 half starved and wholly savage French prisoners, ready to spit red battle at a hundred seconds' notice, and carrying on always her own domestic affairs under the iron discipline of Captain John Benjamin Meadey.

Every morning, whether the brig beat wetly through a gale, or grilled under an outrageous sun, gratings were rigged in the gangway, and the cat-o'-nine-tails scored the backs of sundry members of the crew. It was Captain J.B. Meadey's theory that plenty of flogging made his men both tough and smart; and whatever may be said for the specific, there is no doubt that as nautical fighting material, the Frolic's crew were hard to beat. They accounted themselves the equal of four times their number of Frenchmen, and six times their number of Spaniards, and on at least nine separate occasions had proved this balance to be satisfactorily correct. The trifle that half their sea fights were won by superior seamanship and gunnery was left out of the record. It was an unscientific age, and any advantage that was gained otherwise than by personal bravery was rather looked upon as hitting below the belt.

In the Frolic's forecabin there was Joseph Colt, ordinary seaman and pressed man, and aft (where she had usurped Meadey's own sleeping cabin as boudoir and sanctum) was domiciled a bright little woman with a remarkably neat ankle, who styled herself Countess Czerny, but who was more widely (and more accurately) known in French Army circles as Mademoiselle Clarice de la Plage.

The Frolic's officers understood that Captain Meadey himself had rescued the lady from the insults of Spaniards one evening in Cabrera, and the detail that Meadey had dined rather opulently before his trip ashore, and had swallowed far more muddy port than was good for him, weighed with them as nothing in the transaction. All English gentlemen did drink as much port as they could get hold of in the year 1810, or they were not gentlemen; and anything bad about a Spaniard was easily understandable. That at least was the way the Frolic looked at the matter. The average Briton of the period had a far greater contempt for his ally the Spaniard as a man, than for his hereditary enemy the Frenchman.

To see Captain Meadey, who had a most insular and ferocious contempt for all unmentionable foreigners, doing the amiable to Clarice was a sight for the gods. By right of proprietorship over all the oceans, the British sea officers of those days had an intimate acquaintance with charts, harbours, sea-borne commerce, and coastal ports; they were mightily self-complacent in view of the fact that they held the seas in the teeth of Bonaparte; and they had a good deal of contempt for those who arranged land affairs and allowed the French to beat them. Accordingly, to avoid being mixed up in any way with these incompetents, they took a frigid pride in knowing nothing about the land and the ways thereof, and on the Frolic, which was as eminently British a brig as ever designer bungled, there was not a man who could have drawn any fuller map than a mere coast-line of Europe.

Austria they knew as a name, but beyond that it was to them merely a blank piece of territory of vague size, peopled apparently by a soldiery uniformed in white coats, who got more lickings from Bonaparte than did most of their neighbours.

Came then among this ship's company Mademoiselle Clarice de la Plage, a lady of nimble wit and highly

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fascinating manner. She said she was Countess Czerny, and because no one could disprove the statement, they took it for fact. She knew the Czerny country — as a point of fact she had bivouacked amongst the ruins of the old château when she was a vivandière with the conquering French Army — and she told them all about the place and its histories and its beauties, and they listened, politely uninterested. It was the morning after her arrival on board, and Captain John Benjamin Meadey, who had a bad headache, broke in upon the subject by asking where he could put her ashore.

But Clarice by this time was getting a more full measure of her entertainer. She was desolated to think what inconvenience her intrusion amongst so many gallant officers could have caused. But she had a mission. On her estate of Czerny she had fighting cocks; she had come to Spain for more birds to improve the strain.

Englishwomen at that time did not often take interest in sport, and certainly they never fought cocks. Englishmen did, and cock-fighting happened to be a passion with J.B. Meadey. Of course to an Austrian woman anything was possible; and, at anyrate, this taste seemed a creditable one. His interest in her grew. He had fighting cocks in his hencoops — it was from them, by the way, that the lady had got her pointer — and he insisted on displaying to her their qualities.

Now Mademoiselle Clarice knew poultry only from the mess table point of view. But she was an actress, and as she was acting then, as she told herself, to an audience which could throw her a noosed rope as an adverse criticism she did her best.

"Devilish smart young woman that," condescended Captain Meadey an hour afterwards to his second in command, Lieutenant Cabott. "Smart for a foreigner, that is. Knows a thing or two about game fowl, I can tell you. Pity she isn't an Englishwoman. What the blank she wants to go back to that dashed place of hers in Austria for, dot me if I can see."

"The lady wants to have another look at Boney, perhaps, sir. She knows she won't see much of him aboard here? Boney's not likely to call on us, eh, sir?"

They both laughed at this bright joke, and then said Cabott: "Bo's'n's mate reported that new hand we pressed last night, sir, is showing ugly."

"Then the bo's'n's mate will probably provide him with physic at the gangway to-morrow."

"Oh, I have him in irons already, sir. The fellow complained to me that he was a free-born American citizen, and when I promised that we'd make an honest man of him instead before the end of the commission, he was insolent to me. I promised him the cat, of course. I should say, sir, three dozen will meet the case."

"Six dozen," said Captain Meadey pompously. "I always support my officers, Mr Cabott, in matters of discipline. By the way, I wish you'd call away a cutter, and go over yourself to that yellow-painted gunboat, and find out what's wrong between her skipper and the Countess here. I didn't quite understand the matter last night. Fact is, I was thinking over something else at the time, and just took the young lady away principally because she wanted to come."

"Quite so, sir."

"I know I gave the fellow some good straight English, and he seemed annoyed. I remember he said that he would come and take the Countess back by force. Of course, you will tell him that if he tries that on, I shall fire into him at once. You can tell him I am Captain John Benjamin Meadey, and don't stand dictating to from any Jack-Spaniard living."

"Certainly, sir."

"That's all, Mr Cabott. You may call away your boat. And, oh! by the way, if you can manage to get me a bag of small red maize from anywhere, I'd be obliged to you. The butcher tells me we're out of corn, and he's been obliged to feed my game birds this last week on ship's biscuit, and they've distinctly lost brightness. The Countess noticed it at once, and she says there's nothing like small red maize, steeped in a little beer, for bringing them round."

"Very good, sir," said Lieutenant Cabott, and took himself off upon his errands.

Captain Meadey rejoined his guest on the quarter-deck. "I've sent off," he said, "an officer and boat's crew to teach manners to that Jack-Spaniard you were foul of last night. By the way, I didn't quite catch what the bother was about. If the fools can't speak English how can they expect one to understand them?"

"A law ought to be passed," said the lady pleasantly, "that all peoples that are not English should be taught English without further delay."

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"Now that's a very sound idea," said Meadey, "and," he added thoughtfully, "it would really be worth their while. It would save them a tremendous lot of trouble in making themselves understood. I always think a man must be abominably handicapped in having to sacré—parlez—vous all day long when he wants to say anything. Now, there's your own example. You were brought up, I suppose to speak Carpathian, or some language like that, all c's and z's and j's, that you have to translate with your hands and feet as you go along. But your people had taught you English, and you can see for yourself how much more useful and easy it is.

"English is a most noble and melodious tongue as one hears it spoken here on the Frolic, Captain Meadey."

"Of course it is, of course. No one could help seeing that. Why if you stayed with us a bit longer, and practised, I don't believe anyone would guess you were a foreigner."

"Ah, Captain, you are holding out too dazzling hopes. But when I have done my errand I must get back to my own poor country again."

Captain Meadey stared down upon his guest. She was a devilish smart little woman he told himself, and what few foreign notions she had left could be soon knocked out of her. He was a bachelor, and getting on. He felt that he might do worse. He rubbed his hands, and looked at her with a very appreciative eye.

"If I could only find a boat," said the lady, "however small, and a couple of sailors to man her, I could slip across to my friends in Italy."

"You don't seem to get on very well with Spaniard," observed Meadey thoughtfully, "and that's a fact."

"I suppose you couldn't wink at letting me have a crew of those poor French prisoners?"

"Impossible, madam; impossible. Indeed, I'm surprised at your asking it. As an Austrian you ought to hate a Frenchman worse than I do, and I hate 'em as badly as I hate the devil."

"My dear Captain Meadey, was I proposing to do the wretches any special benefit? Once ashore on Austrian territory they would be prisoners just as much as they are here. But, yes, Captain, I can assure you that in one point the poor Austrian can beat the proud Briton."

"I don't take you. How do you mean madam?"

"Why in hatred of the French, Austria is far ahead of you. No, I think you might trust any Austrian not to be over kind to French prisoners."

But Captain Meadey shook his head obstinately, and Clarice dare not press the question further just then. Still Meadey was perceptibly thawing, pompous Island bear though he was, and there, under the warm Mediterranean sunshine, she set herself to further fascinate him, whilst on the snow—white deck planks their shadows danced round them to the swing of the brig.

In the meanwhile, away below in the cable tier, with his heels handcuffed to an iron "horse," sat Joseph Colt awaiting stripes. For the pain of the flogging he was not much concerned. He had stood up once, tied to a Huron torture stake, and had watched unmoved a fellow white man killed with every horrid circumstance, and had only escaped his turn through a fortunate capture of whisky by the Indians. He was a man absolutely stoical in this respect; but when it came to insult and indignity at the cousinly hands of the British, he was a mere bundle of hysterical nerves.

It made him rage to think that after the contemptuous Lieutenant Cabott, other members of the Frolic's ship's company had set themselves out to draw him, and he had been fool enough to let them do it to the top of their bent.

So as he sat there, with his heels in the bilboes, he bit his thumbs in an ecstasy of rage, and, could he have had the ordering of it, he would have ruthlessly sent every Englishman on the Frolic to death to the accompaniment of torture.

By degrees, as the first flux of his rage wore through, shreds of his old scheming coolness returned to him, and he began to make exploration with a view to finding some plan for escape, or, at least, revenge. His prison was in black darkness. He commenced to fumble over it with his fingers in every direction to the limit of his reach.

He was built in on all sides with great knees and massive planking of heart of oak. His head as he sat was a good fathom below the brig's water—line. Down in that darkness there he saw red when he thought of the torture—stake ahead of him — for that was how he classed Captain Meadey's grating and cat—o'—nine—tails — and if with his teeth and talons he could have torn a hole through the ship's side and scuttled her he would have drowned himself without a pang. But, as it was, he could only rub his chin in impotence.

Then a sound came to him: it was a snore, an unmistakable snore. For an hour previously the marine sentry

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outside the door had been thoughtfully hiccupping the vapour of new rum, and here the man had fallen off to sleep. The discovery thrilled him.

He unlatched the clumsy door, and softly fastened it back upon its hook. Then he leaned forward upon his knees, stretching out as far through the doorway as his shackled ankles would permit. Not a fibre of his clothing rustled; not the slightest clank came from his irons: the Indian training held good.

Major Colt was a very tall man, and his arms were abnormally long even for his height. The drowsy sentry was almost beyond his reach. Only with his finger tips could he touch the man's bayonet, and the weapon was tight in its scabbard. But even those finger tips could grip with the strength of a hand vice. He strained and strained, and stretched out a further quarter of an inch. He got another finger—nail on to the scabbard, pressing downwards, and by hair—breadth pulls drew the weapon out.

Presently, and with the same quickness and the same caution against noise, he was squatted back in his prison with a British bayonet in his hand.

He slipped the weapon inside one of his leg—irons and strained at it. The fetter opened with ridiculous ease under the leverage. Another wrench at the other ankle, and he was free. Free and armed. Outside the door the sentry snored and exhaled a stale vapour of rum. Colt emptied the priming from his musket, took the lantern which stood at his feet, and stole on down the dark alleyway. He had it in mind then to reach the magazine, stab the sentry, lay a minute's train of powder, fire this, fight his way on deck and overboard, and leave the brig to blow up behind him as a salve for his ruffled honour.

As a point of fact, he would have failed in this attempt. The magazine was aft, and heavily locked, and its keys were in Captain Meadey's cabin. But as it was, his attention was turned to another scheme for revenge. He passed a gloomy cabin with the unlatched door swinging idly as the Frolic shouldered over the swells. The dim lantern light showed him a sea—chest, with lid thrown back, and inside the orderly array of a ship carpenter's tools. There was a two—inch auger, bright, new, and sharp. A gush of joy well—nigh choked him as he stooped and took it in his hand. Also there were some small shot—plugs newly made.

It was back in his prison that he started to scuttle the brig, boring vertically downwards through her floor, and plugging each hole as he made it. The auger bit finely, and his jarred nerves were soothed as the piles of wet oak chips grew.

But after boring the fifth hole of a sudden Colt stopped, and plucked vexedly at his square black whisker. "My Land!" he said, "just consider me for a fool! Here's my girl has me come to Europe to get on and secure a position, and here am I wasting time just to scratch even with John Bull Meadey and Ice—Cream Cabott. Moreover, unless I light out of here quick, it strikes me I shall drown, and that stops promotion anyway." He dropped the auger and pulled out the plugs. Water whistled into the Frolic in five steady fountains.

Outside the door the sentry snored, and exhaled more rum. The gloomy, unventilated labyrinths of the brig beyond the carpenter's cabin were still strange to him, and though he moved in the shadows with all the stealth and quietness of his Indian training, he bumped into hammocks and aroused men here and there. One and all they spotted him in some undefinable way, and lent venom to their comment with some gibe at his nationality. Colt came very near to slipping the marine's bayonet into some of them.

That he must have escaped from his irons one and all of these aroused sleepers on the lower decks knew full well, but they made no effort at interference. "Run, Yankee, run!" they scoffed. "John Benjamin will score up your rebel hide finely to—morrow."

But Colt had no mind to go out on to the upper deck, and there be forced to surrender at discretion. He found the one gun port that was triced up to give air to the lower deck. Blackness and the sea were outside, and he leaped into these with a beaver's splashless dive, and was swallowed out of sight.

Only the lower deck knew, and though they were just as willing as their betters to chaff the Yankee, still of course they were loyal to the lower deck. So no alarm was given from below that Ordinary Seaman Colt was attempting to desert, and the upper deck knew nothing of it till the master—at—arms made his report next morning. Then of course it did not take long to discover the sudden leak which had kept the Frolic's crew so hard at work all night.

In the meanwhile Colt swam away from the brig under water till he nearly burst, dived again as soon as he had breathed, and so on, till he had run her out of sight in the darkness. On one side the low hills of Cabrera loomed black through the purple blackness of the night, and for that destination he swam, and presently was encouraged

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by hearing behind him the dim bellow of distant orders, and then the unmistakable cluck—clank of hard—driven pumps.

"I guess," he mused as he swam — "I guess I'm causing that push of Britishers considerable pain at the pump breaks, anyway. If I could only have scuttled that cursed Frolic completely, my Land! but I should have been a big man. Still, when I send the facts home to Boston, and Patience Collier works them up into her 'Conduct of the French War,' I reckon they'll add to the sale of that volume. Gee! It's just the thing to sell a book our side."

The water was warm, the sea smooth, and Colt was a strong man and a powerful swimmer. The black outline of Cabrera came nearer to him and more near, and he had decided in his own mind exactly where he would land, where he could conceal himself, and how he would set about getting away with the next batch of those prisoners which the great Emperor wanted so badly for his army. But there was no Escape—Agency business for him that night, and it was out of a quite unexpected quarter whence came the interruption.

To his ear there drifted the faint thud of row—locks, irregularly pressed. At first he thought it was a small boat which was coming towards him; but as it drew more near he diagnosed it for one of the Spanish war—galleys which helped the Frolic to guard the island; and presently when it loomed into sight, he could see the great oars hitting the water one after another, like a peal of bells.

"Well," thought Colt, "there is plenty of room in the Mediterranean for both of us" — and kept on his course. But the galley, it soon appeared, had a helmsman as bad as her rowers, and she steered the vilest course imaginable, yawing to this side and that, till there was no deciding what her intended course might be. And then, as she drew still more near, Colt found her suddenly on the top of him, dived to clear her, and thereupon very nearly lost his life. Some spiteful (or, it is more probable, unskilful) slave dug his oar down to beyond the prescribed depth, hit the American on the head, and stunned him deep down there below the surface.

As it happened, the wash of the oars brought him up again, where he was seen — and ignored. The Spanish watch officer was too idle or too callous to bring—to for a mere anonymous swimmer.

But another galley was close upon her heels — they were hunting in couples it appeared — and someone hailed. She yawed, either through bad steering or design, and a couple of slaves fished up the flotsam with a boat—hook. Spanish galley slaves always appreciated getting an extra hand on board who might possibly be set to an oar.

The night passed on, and the galley thumped and lurched on her way round the island, guarding always against escape of the French prisoners. On her foredeck lay her new acquisition, left there to die or survive, as he thought fit. The slaves were callous, the officers and crew careless as to the result. If he survived they could inquire as to who he was, and, anyway, that was for mañana. The Spaniards were an incurious race, and very much impressed with the futility of doing anything to—day that there was the chance of putting off till to—morrow.

In due time Joseph came by his wits again, and there was the sun up, and genially employed in drying for him his sodden clothing. The musky smell of the slaves made him cough and spit, and presently he was aware that his head ached as though someone had been endeavouring to chop it in two. That and a further odour of garlic gave him the clue to recent proceedings, and he sat up and propped his back against the galley's bulwark.

His survival was languidly reported to an officer on the quarter—deck, and he was ordered aft, and went there in somewhat tottery fashion. As an officer in General Dupont's army he had fought against Spaniards in Spain, and had caused casualties to many of them. But he saw no necessity to mention this. He stated the solid fact that he was a citizen of the United States, and the officer bowed and gave him a civil smile.

"But how did the señor come to be in the water?"

An answer to this might be awkward. Colt squeezed his muddled wits for diplomatic reply.

"There was no vessel near the señor," the officer went on languidly, "except that detestable Frolic."

"Oh, detestable, is she?" thought Colt. "Well, I'll risk telling I was pressed on her against my will, and was escaping." He did so, and was promptly shaken by the hand and invited below for breakfast.

"Bully for me," thought Colt, but did not say so aloud. Instead, he went below, availed himself of what primitive toilet appliances the galley offered, and presently was seated in a tiny cabin, eating an olla which was largely made up of heat, garlic, and high—flavoured Mallorquin olive oil.

Don Randolphe, the galley's captain, was a long and melancholy Spaniard, with a square—cut whisker, almost of the pattern of Major Colt's own. The situation explained itself quickly.

"The diplomatists of my country," said Don Randolphe, "have made an alliance with these detestable British;

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and perhaps at the time it was necessary to use any stone which one could throw at the French. But their presence is hateful, and their manners are a constant insult."

Major Colt hit the table. "My Land! Cap, but you should hear an American talk about them!"

"Figure to yourself an instance. Three evenings ago I was ashore to see these French cattle, and to rub my hands and think that we could hold so many of the Corsican's men to such an abominable imprisonment. There was a lady there, an Austrian, the Countess Czerny. At least she called herself an Austrian, but I have my doubts."

"Ah!"

"Of course, you have met her, Don José. Now, what do you think? Is she Austrian?"

"How should I know? Me meet her? Where can I have seen her?"

"Why on the detestable Frolic?"

"Oh, to be sure; on the Frolic! Why, you see, Cap, I was forrard, and she was aft, and we didn't have much truck. So if the lady says she's Austrian, I guess you'd better take her as such. But might I ask what you were doing with this Countess?"

Don Randolphe preened himself in his melancholy way. "Why, señor, one does not so often see a woman on this service that one can afford to neglect opportunities."

"I see. Thought you saw your way to do a bit of lady—sparking; and then up came John Bull Meadey and wanted to punch your head?"

The Spanish captain's face—muscles tightened. "Ah, you also are Anglo—Saxon. You speak lightly. You cannot understand how a Latin feels when his honour is touched. You would never grasp my feelings towards Captain Meadey."

"Sir, you're making a very considerable error. I tell you, you can't guess anything bad I wouldn't like to do to J.B. Meadey. He treated me worse'n if I was a yellow dog, and, so far's it doesn't clash with other business in hand, I've got to get square with him."

"Then rest content, Don José. Presently your vengeance shall be carried out completely and horribly — by other hands."

The American did not show enthusiasm. "I guess you mean it very kindly, Cap, but if it's all the same to you, I rather fancy I'm competent to settle up my own accounts, and if they have to be somewhat long outstanding, I don't forget to clap on reasonable interest. I picture myself one day with a hand on the back of John Bull Meadey's collar, and then if I don't get my shoe—toe six times hard into his posteriors, I'm content to have that negligence mentioned in a history of the war now being written by Miss Patience Collier, of Boston."

The captain of the galley looked mystified. "You speak of things, Don José, which are beyond me."

"Sir, I am a free American, and hate all Britisher in a way that would surprise you."

"Then why do you not rejoice when I tell you that shortly he will be punished? Listen, Don José! I shall set two sets of dogs mutually to worry and tear one another. On that island are French curs innumerable." He waved a hand to where Cabrera baked under the midday sunshine. "To—night the Frolic anchors inshore off the castle. News will be taken to Señor Meadey of a landing of Frenchmen come to rescue prisoners. Meadey and half his crew will go ashore to capture these. While they are gone, a great mass of the French prisoners will find boats on the beach, will put off under the darkness, and will take the Frolic. Many of the dogs on both sides will be killed. Then will return Meadey and his men. They will go aboard unsuspecting, will be surprised, and killed. And so is wiped out the detestable Captain Meadey."

"This is playing my game," thought Colt. "A nice brig—load of the prisoners should escape. But they shan't do it, all the same. It's not a fair trick. Besides, I don't approve of Jack—Spaniards putting their knives into white men, even though they are a pack of stuck—up Britishers."

"Afterwards, of course, Don José, we shall deal with the Frolic. There will be four galleys of us lying off her bow and her quarter, and when we perceive she is out of the hands of our dear ally, the detestable Britisher, we shall open fire on her — the four against the one — and sink her. So will end the Frolic. And so will be cured your wounded honour, Don José, and mine. May I offer you cigarettes?"

"Thanks, no." Colt pulled from his pocket three tubes and a bowl, and screwed them together. "I'll put your tobacco, if you'll give me a load, in this. There's nothing like a cool, long pipe for a pleasant smoke, especially if you want to put in a big think as well."

"Well, señor, with permission, I will leave you to it. It is my hour for siesta. May I offer you a cabin?"

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"Why, if it is the same to you, I'd rather sit right here on deck. I guess I'm a man that wants to get too much out of life to have any immediate use for sleeping when the sun's turned on."

Now, as Colt knew full well, the great Emperor looked more to results than means, and if he could contrive to bring three or four hundred men back to the Eagles, with a British 20-gun brig thrown in as a *bonne bouche*, that act would go a long way to sending him up in the scale of promotion and bringing him nearer to that marshal's bâton which he so ardently coveted, and which he had marked for his own.

As to his own personal scruples, they must be neglected for the time being, and, of all British subjects, surely Captain Meadey deserved least consideration from him.

Supposing (he told himself) he were boarding the Frolic with a crew of Americans, he would tomahawk Meadey with his own hands as soon as look at him; so why be scrupulous of doing the same thing by deputy without risk?

Miss Collier had bidden him come to Europe to "get on," and to take the Frolic into Toulon full of Frenchmen would be doing this. He set his jaw, and proceeded to think out a process of persuading the captain of the galley to set him ashore.

As it turned out, his diplomacy to this end went very much astray. He first of all ruffled Don Randolphe's temper, and next aroused his suspicions, and in the end, when, after nightfall, the galley had set up to moorings in the little harbour of Cabrera, near the ruined castle, he got ashore by the simplest of all means.

The captain and those of the officers he had spoken to were below; he was pacing the deck in sulky solitude under the stars; and a boat came alongside with a message from the shore commandant.

Major Colt walked to the gangway, stepped calmly down into the boat, and there was no one near who dreamed of questioning him.

He got ashore with an equal lack of formality, and a minute later had strolled away into the friendly darkness. He could have laughed aloud at the easiness of it all.

Time pressed. If Don Randolphe was to be believed, the plot for the capture of the Frolic was already afoot, and Colt had no mind that any boarding-party should go off to the Frolic without his company. In the first place, he had his personal account with Meadey to square, though it irked him horribly to let Frenchmen be mixed up in this adjustment; and, in the second place, once the brig was captured, it must be his part to see that Clarice got clear.

Don Randolphe, it must be remembered, had only divulged half his plot to the French prisoners. They knew he wished them to take the British brig: they did not know he intended to silence them with his own guns immediately afterwards. Colt felt he must be there in person to attend to Don Randolphe.

Again and again Colt came across batches of prisoners, or went into their rude huts and tried to get in touch with those who were in the secret. Some regarded him with open suspicion; others took him for what he said he was; and others remembered him as a Major in General Dupont's army. But none had heard of any scheme to take the Frolic. Or, what was far more to the point, no one owned up to having heard of such a scheme.

The warm night passed on, and Colt grew more insistent in his inquiries. There was a curious wakefulness over the isle that made him sure that something was afoot. When 5450 men all whisper together, a noise goes up like the subdued hum of machinery. But one and all they most exasperatingly kept him out of their councils.

Then Major Colt got a shock. A voice from the blackness of a hut's doorway said, "Joe! You! — and they told me he was dead! Dear Mary!"

"Clarice!" cried Colt. "I beg your pardon, Miss Clarice, I should have said. My Land! how did you get here?"

"Come in here out of the moonlight, monsieur. I squeeze your hand, Monsieur Joe. Word was brought to Captain Meadey that there had been a landing of French Escape Agents, and he has come ashore with fifty of his crew to capture them."

"But why are you here?"

"Oh, that was simple, once I heard he was going ashore. The brightness of his fighting-cock's plumage was dulled; he told me so, the dear, heavy creature, and I agreed with him. There was no cure for it like the leaves of a certain herb, boiled in a little port, and served with red pepper. What was the name of the herb? Well, I could only think of the Hungarian name, and nearly blew out a tooth in saying it. It grew largely on my estate of — I nearly forgot that name too, but got it in time — estate of Czerny, and also, Monsieur Joe, on Cabrera. No, I could not describe the herb, but I would in part discharge myself of the enormous obligation under which the great, the

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magnificent, Meadey, had placed me. I would go ashore and find it myself."

"Well?"

"I must own he did not see it at first, but I wheedled him into it. Oh, I can do anything with the dear Meadey — 'Jack' he desires that I should call him. Figure it to yourself, Monsieur Joe — he wants to marry me."

"Here, miss," said Colt sharply, "I can't spend all the night chattering like this. You and I are here on Cabrera as Emperor Bonaparte's Escape Agents, and if we don't want to be superseded, we must get to business right now. Whose hut is this you are in? Who is that sniggering there in the darkness?"

"Sergeant Colorado, my Major."

"Come, now, are you as behindhand as all these other fools? Do you know anything about this attack on the brig?"

"The men are to muster for it an hour after midnight, Monsieur the Major, and because we have no watches, and the parish clock does not chime to-night, the intelligent Spaniard has given to one of us a pistol with which to sound réveillé. At the noise of the first pistol shot, those of us who feel inclined, get to the harbour. At the sound of the second shot, some swim, and the rest take what boats are there on offer. We reach the brig. We take her. There it is — all."

"How are you armed."

Sergeant Colorado thrust out a large lean hand into the moonlight, and showed a heavy knob of jagged rock — "It will serve, Monsieur the Major, till I can borrow a more polite weapon from some English unmentionable pig. Name of Mahomet! but I can smash faces finely with this little tool!"

Colt tugged vexedly at his square black whisker. At last: "Here," he said, "Sergeant, you go and play outside. I've something to say to mademoiselle."

Sergeant Colorado saluted, grinned and went.

"I suppose," said Colt, "you hardly want me to set these wolves to cut John Bull Meadey's throat now, miss?"

"But tell me," said Clarice sweetly; "do you want to do it yourself, Monsieur Joe?"

"Well, I do. I want to handle Meadey myself. I want badly to handle him. But I don't want any Frenchman or Spaniard to do it for me, and that's a fact."

"But still, you are in the Emperor's service, and the Emperor's enemies should be your enemies."

"They are miss, they are. Only, when I entered that service I made one proviso — I wasn't to be called upon to fight against Britain. My Land! hark to that."

Crack!

The sharp whip of a pistol shot divided the night outside.

"It seems to me," said the vivandière, "that there's little time left now for monsieur to argue out these niceties further. This poor Captain Meadey, that had been so gallant to me, I have a tenderness for him. But with a Frenchwoman the Emperor must come first."

"Right," said Colt, with sudden inspiration. "Emperor Bonaparte shall come first. You stay here. You'll be safer on the island."

"No, Monsieur Joe," said the little woman. "I am accustomed to the fighting line, and I shall come with you."

Outside, in the warm darkness, there came the noise of bare feet padding quickly over the bare earth, and Colt and Clarice de la Plage (after another moment's talk) ran from one to the other, quietly passing the word. The English brig, they said, was too ugly for them. These perfidious British were so full of their own undesirable fog, that they had forgotten how to sleep. Besides, even if they took her, there was a calm, and they could not sail her away. Now the galleys had oars, and the yellow-painted galley in particular was swift and easily handled.

Against the Spaniards these prisoners were always especially bitter. It was the Spaniards who had originally broken the terms of the capitulation, and instead of sending them back to France, had marooned them on this desolate Cabrera; it was the Spaniards who had starved them there; it was the Spaniards who had heaped upon them a thousand indignities. The British they merely disliked with a national enmity. For the Spaniards each separate prisoner had a venomous personal hatred.

By the time they had reached the harbour, word had been passed, and each man of the storming party knew of the change of plan. They were desperate fellows all, unarmed except for sticks and stones, volunteers for this most forlorn of all forlorn hopes. None of the women prisoners were there. The only member of the gentler sex with the storming party was an ex-vivandière, who wore a face of easy assurance, and carried a tongue of the most

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cheerful, but who was inwardly half-frozen with terror at what was to happen. I think it never occurred to those who knew Clarice de la Plage to credit her with half of what she had to go through.

As it chanced, the languid watch-officer of the yellow-painted Spanish galley, with infinite carelessness had paid out his head warp from the buoy, and let his vessel's stern come within a fathom of the stone quay. A plank bridged the two — it saved the trouble of getting a boat into the water — and that it placed every throat on board in jeopardy did not trouble the languid officer. It did not occur to him that the 5450 French prisoners that he insulted on every possible occasion should ever resent their treatment.

Then crack, another pistol shot snapped out, and from behind every rock, every wall, every building, from out of every patch of shadow there issued men, dumb, half-naked, shaggy men, who ran swiftly on naked feet, making for the galley's stern.

A great bottle-nosed Sergeant and a tall black-whiskered man raced for first place. Bottle-nose was on the plank first, but black-whisker jumped and landed on the galley's rail ahead of him. Of their following, only a few could use the plank, many jumped and missed, and of those on the brink of the quay, scores were thrust over into the water by those pressing on behind. The watch on the galley's deck fought savagely, the galley's crew poured up from below and fought savagely also. At them the stormers raged with teeth and talon, with jagged rock and with weapons snatched from the fallen. It was just a shambles of a fight.

In the water some drowned, some doggedly held on till they scrambled on board, some struggled back to the shore. On the galley men hacked, and stabbed, and strangled, and there was only one who gave a thought or a care to any wounded, and that was a woman.

Then it began to be plain that the French were getting the upper hand. The tall, sallow, black-whiskered man, who seemed to be everywhere, and to see everything, and to fight harder than anybody else, jumped on a gun and bawled above the din: "Over the side with them now — slaves and all!"

The order was carried out with a furious rush.

"Now then, we must light out of this right now. All you gentlemen to the oars, and row like galley-slaves, or slaves you'll be for the rest of your lives, with Meadey's cat-o'-nine-tails to help you on. Now, cast off those warps."

Away they went with a roar and a rattle of sound. The other galleys were awake and buzzing, and one had cast loose and was under oars. Upon her Colt bore down, threatening to ram. Whereupon she dodged, and fouled one of her friends. Shot came after them fast and thick. But the hot, still night was too dark for accurate aim, and away they tore out on to the open sea without further scathe.

And then came the time to sort out the dead for over-side, and to give more care for the wounded than Clarice could contrive with her crude, first-aid appliances during the thick of the fight.

When dawn burned up egg-yellow over distant Minorca, the galley had rounded the westernmost cliffs of Majorca, and was heading north for France over a desert sea. The shaggy, half-naked prisoners bent lustily to the oars, and from the cook-house, which was clamped to the deck just abaft the great fore-castle gun, there billowed a rich and appetising scent of roasting coffee.

Mademoiselle Clarice came aft on to the quarter-deck, and brought up her hand in military salute to Major Joseph Colt, who was still at the galley's tiller.

"Of sound men, and those wounded which are likely to recover, there are one hundred and eighteen, Monsieur the Major. A tidy mouthful even for the Emperor."

"Tidy enough. Are you sound, Clarice? What's that blood on your sleeve, girl? My Land! I felt as if I was stabbed myself when I saw you down, with that great gawky Randolphe standing over you with his knife, and I couldn't get near."

"Ah, but he was the jealous one, monsieur. However the good Sergeant Bottle-nose plucked him from me, and threw him over the side. This blood — that's the Sergeant's. Just a scratch on the wrist. I mended it for him, and kissed his purple cheek for a reward."

"You are mighty free with your kisses, miss."

"To those I don't care about, yes. Will you have one, Joe?"

"I guess not."

Mademoiselle Clarice de la Plage stood in the sunlight, and addressed the East: "Now what is it, I ask you, that this dear Joe desires? Meadey, Don Randolphe, Sergeant Colorado, all of whom I care nothing about, I kiss

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those, and he resents it. I would kiss dear Joe also, to show I care nothing about him too, but he will not let me. There is a Miss Patience Conyers that he prates about ——"

"Collier."

"Miss Patience Collier, a schoolmarm and writer of history in distant, very distant Boston. Now if he really loved this Miss Collier, to whom he is affianced, he would take a kiss from me, as that would show he knew I cared nothing for him, and did not mind. But, no, he will not, this dear Joe. I wonder what does he really wish for?"

"Miss," said Colt savagely, "if it were a thing any American could do to a woman, there are times when I should like to take you up and shake you. You are that exasperating. I keep on telling you I am properly engaged, and have to stick to it."

"La—la!" said Clarice. "But I wager that I do not appear in the 'History of the Wars,' which the correct Miss Collier is writing for the enlightenment of Boston. La—la! dear Joseph."