

# **TWO DUELS**

C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne



# Table of Contents

<u>TWO DUELS</u> .....	1
<u>C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne</u> .....	2

# TWO DUELS

## TWO DUELS

### C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne

This page copyright © 2001 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

"NAME OF MAHOMET!" swore Sergeant Colorado, "but I thought you had sent Arcole over the Boundary Line. Your fingers can grip like a crab's claw, my Major."

"It isn't the first time I've squeezed the wind out of a man," said Colt. "It's an old redskin trick. If you keep the little finger of each hand pressing tightly on the patient's carotids you can tell the exact moment when those cease to throb, and if you let them go then, five times out of six he comes round again little the worse. There, look at him, he's beginning to wriggle already. Mr Arcole will get up and walk away in ten minutes from now, and in an hour's time will be plotting another burglary."

"Well," said the bottle-nosed sous-officier, "it's your own affair, of course, Major, but, to my thinking, you would have been better advised either to have left Arcole alone, or to have squeezed harder. We make very few inquiries about a corpse here in this undesirable Cabrera, but latterly we have grown very law-abiding over matters of assault and battery."

"In the name of Fortune, why?"

"Because, I suppose, it gives those we have set up as our rulers something to whet their rulership upon, and so justify their existence. Oh, I tell you, my Major, we were sick to the teeth of anarchy here, and now, naturally, we have run to the other extreme, and govern down to the way a man may draw his breath. Why, I could believe it, if one offered me the statistics that in no State on earth are there more laws per head of population than there are here spread out amongst us wretched prisoners of Cabrera."

Major Colt scratched thoughtfully at his blue-black chin, and then pulled out and screwed together the parts of a long pipe. He sighed as he put it to his mouth, and pulled in tobacco-scented air through the empty bowl. "I don't know how many have escaped by their own arrangements?" he said at length.

"Not a score," Sergeant Colorado assured him, "beyond the 350 that you and Mademoiselle Clarice personally conducted back to the Eagles."

"The prisoners seem woefully thinned since I first visited Cabrera."

"Never army had the knack of dwindling like ours, Major. Here is our history packed small. When the accursed Dupont surrendered, 12,400 men laid down their arms under promise that they should have safe conduct to France. The beastly Spaniards lied, and broke the treaty forthwith, and clapped us in foul hulks. At first we were unpleasantly crowded, but, when some 6000 had died off, the rest of us had more room. Well, then for a health trip, they sent us here to Cabrera, but, as they never fed us much, and some weeks forgot to feed us at all, some of us recruited so slowly that we lost heart and died in the process."

"Disease came, too! then, of course, being French soldiers, and out of employ, we must needs keep our hands in with a little fencing, and more died of that; but it has been King Famine who has hit us hardest. Why, one week, sir, last April, when the beastly Spanish meat contractor over there at Palma in Majorca, forebore to send his provision boat at all, there were no fewer than 300 brave boys who turned up their toes within ten days, and the rest of us were very near put to making a dinner off their ——"

"Tut!" said Colt, "you need not repeat to me all these horrors that I know quite well for myself. The thievish Arcole you will note is sitting up now, and if I can read his ugly eyes correctly he would give about all he will ever possess in this world for the opportunity of murdering me painfully and slowly. Do the Spaniards supply you with a food ration only? Do they never give you clothes?"

"Behold me, Major, clad in a shirt and my sins, If it had not been for a wreck and one who came ashore on the rocks here, with no further use for it, I should not even have the shirt. As for the breeches and a coat, I have forgotten their feel —— Ah, Monsieur Arcole, you get up, and you totter away, and you shake your fist at the Major here. I give you my advice that you fall and break your neck en route for where you are going. It will save

## TWO DUELS

you further trouble. No, Major, the Spaniards give us no clothes, no doctors, no shelter. They present us only with a very meagre ration of food, and a very full ration of curses whenever they meet us. Why there is a captain of a small packet in Majorca there, who is making a fortune by bringing out the young bucks and the señoritas of the Palma gutters for a day's trip to this infernal isle, where they take their refreshment in cursing Spain's prisoners."

"Then the more quickly I arrange to take the best of you back to France the better. Now, Sergeant, I'm dead tired. If I could have kept an eye open that scoundrel would not have stolen the last fill of tobacco I've got out of my very pipe, and been able to swallow it before I could choke it out of him. So I'll trouble you for that corner you offered me in your hut."

The ragged bottle-nosed man saluted, and led the way up from the cluster of shore rocks where Colt had first found harbourage.

A shrill breeze blew over the roof of the isle, and the naked, half-starved men crouched in their miserable burrows and shelters. Major Joseph Colt was lean at the best of times, and after his recent hard spell carried even less flesh than usual; but he looked aldermanic to a Cabreran eye; and many a shaggy, hungry prisoner shook a knot of birdlike talons at him, and reviled him out of sheer envy as he and Sergeant Colorado made their way along the rutted paths which the bare feet had worn so deep.

At last they came to the spot, and with the air of one who was conscious of having carried a musket in Egypt, and hobnobbed with marshals of France, Sergeant Colorado waved the hand of hospitality.

"I welcome you to our quarters, Major, in the name of my five comrades and myself."

"You and them, six, and me seven! My Land! I've see what we call crowded dwellings out in the West. I've seen five Ojibbway braves tucked into a teepee double that size, and you could have dug out the air with a spade next morning. You don't mean to tell me you think seven of us can cram into that shack!"

"Our original complement was ten. There were ten of us who strained our muscles to claw down fir branches, and tear up rock, and steal rushes one by one to build and thatch that maisonnette, my Major, and four of us kindly died, and left more space for their betters. Crowded, did you say? Name of Mahomet! We think it as spacious as a Bey's palace in Cairo! I'll ask you to notice also that a squad of the accursed Spanish carabinieri are just showing their detestable cocked hats over the hill yonder, and you are too fat and too spruce for a Cabreran prisoner."

Major Colt dropped to his knees, and crawled in through the hut's doorway, and coughed and spat as he bit the atmosphere inside.

"I bid you good-day, my children," he said pleasantly. "I never knew what the inside of a parrot-cage smelt like before."

The shaggy savages cursed him.

"What's that? Well, there's no room to stand, but — on your knees — Attention!"

The ring of the sharp, crisp voice lit old embers of discipline. On their knees they shuffled into line; their backs straightened; they thrust out their bony chests, and with heads preened up against the rafters, and hands clasped tight to their sides, they awaited an officer's command.

"Good. When the pinch comes, I see that you have not forgotten what Emperor Bonaparte had taught you. Sergeant Colorado drill this company."

The bottle-nosed Sergeant crawled into the squalid hovel, and straightened up knee high.

"Tention!" he rasped, and so on, for the rest of the manual.

"Stand at ease!" Colt ordered, when the men had worked themselves up to a fine sweat of heat and enthusiasm. "You are of the class that Emperor Bonaparte bid me give this message to: 'My children,' he said, 'come back to the Eagles. I and France have need of you.' Hitherto there have been some small difficulties about ferriage; but my partner in this matter, Miss Clarice de la Plage, has a ship which will lie off a certain point of Majorca, when the nights are sufficiently dark, and I came on here as agent in advance to bid certain picked men have their portmanteaux packed ready for embarkation. See!"

They grinned appreciatively at that word portmanteaux.

"With one exception, I nominate all of you here for seats in the next boat. Sergeant Colorado."

The bottle-nosed man slapped his bare heels together, and drew up stiffly to attention — till, be it understood, upon his knees.

"Sir?"

## TWO DUELS

"You are the exception. I do not consider it fit that you should leave Cabrera and go back to the Emperor's service in Europe."

Sergeant Colorado looked murder, but discipline held strong. He saluted in silence.

"Because you are far more valuable to the Emperor here in Cabrera as local representative of his Escape Agents."

Sergeant Colorado's great nose and his mottled face fairly glowed with pleasure. The starvation, the wretchedness, the unspeakable squalor he would have to put up with went for nothing; one word of commendation from the Great Emperor, be it never so indirect, counteracted all this.

But here an interruption stepped rudely in upon the proceedings. Men, marching up barefoot, had surrounded the hovel noiselessly, and one of them, with military curtness, called for Joseph Colt.

That officer bent down, and peered under the two-foot doorway. "My Land!" he said, "what's this? A prehistoric survival?"

Sergeant Colorado stooped down and peered beside him, and then laughed. "Behold, my Major, the Brigade of Household Guards set up by messieurs our rulers. As the Spaniards and that accursed Meadey see to it that there is no iron in our arsenal in Cabrera, you observe that our armourers lash a lump of rock on to a club's end, and so make a tolerable battle mace, or they burn and sharpen the point of a tree branch, and provide you with an excellent pike."

"If you men do not deliver up Joseph Colt within the next three seconds I will have the hut pulled down about your ears in the name of the Committee of Public Safety."

The American shot out like a rabbit from a burrow. "Who spoke?" he demanded.

"I did," said the giant with a stone axe.

"Then what in hell do you mean by addressing your officer disrespectfully? I am Major Colt."

The giant eyed him doubtfully for a moment, and was apparently impressed by the grim dark face. He swung his stone axe to the vertical till the hilt was level with his chin, after the fashion of a swordsman saluting. "I ask pardon for the omission, my Major. The name was given me without the title. But my orders from the Committee of Public Safety were distinct, and I arrest you all the same."

"Very well," said Colt, who saw no way of resisting it, "I submit to that arrest; and now, perhaps, you will be courteous enough to tell me the charge."

"The charge was not mentioned in my instructions," said the giant, and then, as his men had closed up, presumably in obedience to a previous order, "Seize the prisoner!" he called out. And presently, when the scuffle had ended in the only way a scuffle can end when one man is in the grip of ten, "Search the prisoner," he added as a further command.

"I was told, Major," he explained, when two small pistols and a murderous-looking American knife made from a file were handed to him, "I was told, my Major, that you were a pretty desperate fellow, and took my precautions to prevent a brawl. The Committee of Public Safety have set their faces dead against brawling. For the Hôtel de Ville, quick march."

The town hall, when they arrived at it, was nothing more or less than a disused quarry, and, as it happened, the Committee of Public Safety was in session. The quarry had yielded that soft white building stone which once had been exported to Palma, and its sides ran up in irregular steps. The nine members of the Committee sat on a ledge that raised them some five feet above the floor of the court.

Facing them, and above the further lip of the quarry, there stood a solitary red pine, stripped of all its branches save two, which jutted out at right angles to the parent stem. On this cross a naked man writhed, and for the moment even Major Colt's Indian stoicism was upset, and he winced with the idea that he was looking upon a crucifixion. But presently it was borne in upon him that the man was merely tied to the tree to grill and blister in the outrageous sun, and though the penalty was savage, for anything he knew it might be justified by the crime, and from his experience, both in America and in the French wars, he knew that discipline at times has to be maintained by enforcing strange punishments.

Another trial was just being concluded as he came up. The poor wretch had been accused of the heinous crime of stealing rations. The evidence against him had apparently been conclusive.

The President of the Committee was a tall, half-naked man, shaggy, with clots and streamers of chestnut hair. He turned to the prisoner and inquired laconically. "Any defence?"

## TWO DUELS

"I was mad with famine."

"So would be the man you stole from, after his week's ration was gone. Any further defence?"

"No."

"Take that one away, and hang him. Call the next case."

"Joseph Colt!" called out the Clerk of Arraigns, "to answer a charge of assault and battery. Accuser, Arcole. The prisoner Colt is here, messieurs, but I cannot see the accuser." He called again, "Arcole!"

From above the upper edge of the quarry came a husky voice, which said: "I withdraw the charge."

"It is for the Committee of Public Safety," said the red President, "to decide if a charge once made may be withdrawn. Is that Arcole?"

"Yes."

"You should know the course of procedure. Come down and take your stand on the witness stone."

The man did so slowly, reluctantly. His eyes kept swivelling from the wretch who writhed against the pine tree, like an impaled worm, to the other poor creature who was being made ready for his hanging. Arcole's knees gibbered under him as he took his stand upon the crumbly white stone.

"The accusation originally stood," said the red President, "that this Joseph Colt held your throat till you were within an inch of death?"

"Yes, citizen," said Arcole huskily.

"You do not wish to say, now, that you came here to the Committee of Public Safety and lied about this matter?"

"No, citizen."

"But still I understand you wish to withdraw the charge?"

"Yes, citizen."

"Any reason?"

The man's huskiness nearly choked him. At last, after a dozen efforts, he managed to croak out, "N—no, no special reason, citizen."

"You admit that the man brawled, and then you add your wish to withdraw your evidence against him 'for no special reason.' You know, of course, full well, that this Committee have determined to stamp out brawling amongst the citizens of Cabrera?"

"I'm in a very difficult position, citizen," Arcole wheezed out.

"Ah," pounced the red man, "now we may get to it. Will you tell me freely and truly why this man Colt should have seen fit to half-strangle you, or shall we get that interesting piece of evidence from another source?"

"I am not here on my own defence, citizen."

"Many a man," snapped the red President, "who has come in front of this Committee, parading his honesty, has turned out to be a rogue before I was through with him." He thrust out a long sunburnt finger almost into the witness's face. "You stole from this Colt, is that not so, and he punished you?"

"Quite so, Corporal Garnier," Colt himself cut in. "The man was punished once by me, and therefore needs no further attention. I am quite competent to personally correct the morals of those who offend me, as you yourself will recollect. So in common equity you should dismiss the case."

The eyes of the Committee of Public Safety swung round upon the prisoner, and those of their chestnut-locked President glinted dangerously.

"The penalty for using a *ci-devant* military title here is, at its lightest, that." The President pointed to the pine tree where the naked man writhed under the scalding sunshine. "We stop hardened offenders more effectively. I am Citizen Garnier, and if you address me so, and with the respect due to one who has been elected their chief magistrate by all the other citizens of Cabrera, I shall presently be pleased to hear you. In the meanwhile I have not yet finished with Arcole."

Now, being a man of quick passions, Major Colt had it in him to have retorted promptly and with sharpness. But, with an effort, he withheld retort. It would be sheer folly to lose sight of the main object of his errand to the isle (which incidentally was wrapped up with his own personal advancement) for the mere sake of asserting his superior rank over one who had once been his underling. Besides, nothing, he conceived, of these small differences on Cabrera could find a place in that "Conduct of the Continental Wars" which Miss Collier of Boston was so diligently compiling from his notes; and it was in those permanent pages that he really wished to shine, not



## TWO DUELS

amongst these obscene prisoners. So he closed his mouth till it appeared as a mere straight line across his sallow face, and Citizen Garnier drew away his stare, and fixed it once more on Arcole.

"They are using the rope belonging to this Committee on another thief at present, but if you do not tell me exactly what you stole from Colt I will have you strung up as soon as the rope is free."

"Citizen, you couldn't do that! It would be murder, sheer murder! The man dozed, and his pipe hung loose from his lips. There were scarcely a dozen shreds of tobacco in it unsmoked, and, citizen, I craved so much for tobacco that I must have lost my senses, for presently I found myself chewing them. Moreover, although the man appears to be an American in the French service, I heard him speak an English word — the only English word I know — when he stubbed his foot, and so I judged him by that and by his good clothes to be one come ashore from the British guard-brig. Surely, citizen, it is no crime to steal from a Britisher?"

The red President turned to Colt. "Are you British?"

"My Land, no! I'd ram the teeth down the throat of any liar who suggested I was one."

"I don't see how I can avoid hanging you, Arcole," said the President.

"Citizen, I ask you to remember that first it was a mistake, and second I have had punishment already. He has made me feel death once to-day. And I have my lesson to carry along with me; my throat will never be what it was before he clinched it with his great iron fingers. For God's sake, citizen, do not hang me after all he has made me suffer."

"I am here," said the shaggy red President, "to weigh out exact justice, and that is what you will have." He pointed to the tree where the naked man had ceased his writhing, and now hung limp and flaccid. "You shall not wear the rope round your neck this time, but when that tree is vacant at sundown you shall be tied there for the next twenty-four hours to let your new ideas of honesty burn well in. Stand down from the witness stone. Joseph Colt, by the sumptuary laws of Cabrera, no man may dress better than the President of the Committee of Public Safety. To do so is considered an insult to the chief magistrate elected by all the citizens of Cabrera. You are, therefore, directed to give up your coat, breeches, and boots. As a special act of leniency you may keep your shirt, although its fineness and clarity very nearly mark that out also for confiscation."

Now Major Colt knew when he was in a tight place. He knew that at the least show of resistance on his part (and the red Corporal Garnier obviously looked for it), his clothes would be stripped from him violently, and other indignities would be heaped upon his person. He was only one to a multitude, and would be helpless in face of numbers. Very possibly he might be hanged. But he knew also Garnier's soft place, and he aimed his words for it ruthlessly.

"You may have the clothes if you will take them from me yourself. But I wish to remind you of something else. You say military titles are abolished here in Cabrera. But once when they were in being, and you were Corporal Garnier, and I was Major, we met, if you will recollect, before Saragossa. It was the day before we stormed it, and I beat you over the head with my scabbard in the trenches there, and called you a coward. You could not challenge me then, because of my rank, which I would not waive. But here on Cabrera it is different. Ranks, you say, are gone, so, if you still want satisfaction, send your seconds."

The President threw back his chestnut head. "Our ranks, it appears to me, have been inverted; you here are a nobody, I am what you see; but I will not stand on that. The work of this Committee is over for the day." He stood up, and stepped down to the floor of the quarry. "I am a private individual now, and as such can attend to mine own private honour. Go to your hut, citizen, and appoint your seconds. My seconds will wait upon them there within an hour from this."

"I just hate to think of killing Corporal Garnier," said Colt to Sergeant Colorado, as the pair of them trudged back together over the roof of the island, "but I don't see any help for it. If only I could get him clear of this accursed island he would serve the Eagles again splendidly."

"But, my Major, you say the man is a coward. The Emperor has no use for those."

Colt laughed grimly. "I do not say anything of the sort to you. It is quite true I called him a coward in those trenches before Saragossa, because that was the hatefullest thing I could say to him at the moment. As a point of fact, the man's sergeant had been detailed to lead a section of the storming party, and Garnier picked a quarrel with him and ran him through, so that he might have the honour of leading a forlorn hope himself. That's the sort of coward Corporal Garnier is: frightened to death of being anything but first."

"He's made himself first citizen on Cabrera here, that's a fact, and if you don't know it, I may tell you he's got

## TWO DUELS

his position chiefly through duelling. He's been out twenty times, at the very least, and always pinked his man. We're alone now, my Major. Before we join the others, perhaps there is some message you'd like to leave for your fiancée — in case of accidents."

"There will be no accident to me," said Colt sharply. "I've too much to do on ahead to spare time for being hurt or killed by Corporal Garnier. Besides, Sergeant, it is vastly improbable that you will ever see my fiancée."

"Your pardon, my Major, but if you are scratched, the lady will come into the island as fast as wings can bring her. Name of Mahomet! but I know the sex!"

"You do not know Miss Collier, of 207 Pilgrim Avenue, Boston. Not all the men or all the books that Europe holds would tempt her to leave Massachusetts. Indeed, she has told me as much herself."

The bottle-nosed Sergeant was shaken by an inward spasm, and was forced to turn his back on Major Colt till the emotion was past. But presently: "There is the little vivandière, Mademoiselle Clarice, my Major, that is associated with you in this Escape-Agency business. Now I do not know what your arrangements are with her, but if by chance you should be scratched, I warrant she will come over here with her cool hand, and her lint, and her cup of brandy, in spite of all their teeth."

"You will kindly leave Miss Clarice's name alone."

"Well, Major," said Sergeant Colorado doggedly, "I once had that cool small hand pressed to my own gross head, when a Croat hussar got home here above the eye with his sabre, before I could disengage my bayonet from his covering file. You say you are engaged to Miss Collier, and therefore you cannot love Mademoiselle Clarice; but as far as a rough old fellow such as I respectfully may, I love her from the tip of her spur to the tricolour on her forage cap, and if there's any message, civil or more than civil, which it would give her pleasure to get, I am a man that would stick at nothing to see it reached her."

But to this offer Major Colt gave no reply whatever, and the pair walked the rest of the way to the tiny hutch in grim silence.

"You will kindly act as one of my seconds, Sergeant," said Colt, when he had sat down on the fir branches that made his bedplace, "and I shall be pleased if you will pick out the best drill amongst this squad here as the other. What is the choice of weapons?"

"There is small enough choice. We used spears till recently, Major. We had a pair of scissors on the island, and for an affair of honour the blades were taken apart and lashed to sticks, and there you were. But last week some clumsy boor made a foul stroke. He hit his friend's thigh-bone, and the blade broke off midway. So we have now on the island only one scissor-blade left, and that certainly will not arm two men. How would a stone axe meet your fancy?"

"Finely. I won out of a fight once at Smoked Bear's villages entirely through my tomahawk play."

"Speaking as an old soldier, a stone axe is not what I should call a neat tool, Major; but you've a fine reach and an unexpected lot of strength, and I dare say you could put in some very effective work with it. Only look out for ci-devant Corporal Garnier. If Garnier proposes stone axes, it's all France to a toe-nail that he's been practising stone-axe fence every day for this month past."

"That's all right," said Major Colt easily. "I don't want to whip a man without giving him a show for his money. But over the arrangement of all those preliminaries I give you an entirely free hand. There's only one thing on which I want you to insist: I must have three minute's private talk with Corporal Garner before there's any fight at all."

Sergeant Colorado sprang up to his knees under the low roof in violent protest. "But the thing's unheard of. Once an affair of honour has been placed in the hands of seconds, it is dead against the code for the principals to meet again except across the point of their weapons."

"I know that as well as you do," said the American coldly. "But in this instance I wish to have the code re-arranged to suit my personal convenience. I look to you to see this done, Sergeant, and for the present I am going to put in that spell of sleep that I told you this morning was then overdue by forty-eight hours. You may wake me when the time has come for the meeting."

Now though the bottle-nosed Sergeant was a great stickler for all the niceties of the code of honour as learned in the Napoleonic armies, and imported for use amongst the prisoners of Cabrera, he was very deeply impressed with the need of carrying out the exact orders of that very forceful person, Major Joseph Colt. He convinced his own co-second over the matter, which was no easy job, and together they convinced the seconds of Corporal

## TWO DUELS

Garnier, which was so difficult a task that it led to the threat of a further series of duels before the unheard-of point was finally conceded. It came as rather a surprise to them all that when the proposal was put to Garnier he made no demur at all, and so forthwith Colt was aroused from his slumber.

The American walked up over the rocks to a niggardly ilex-wood that was indicated to him, and there found the President of the Committee of Public Safety in waiting. Major Colt saluted as he came up, and extracted an instinctive salute from the other. Then he sat himself on a fallen trunk, and looked up at the Corporal.

"Corporal Garnier, I have seen you fight, and you have seen me, and there is no question that either of us will shirk a scrimmage if we think it necessary."

The red President laughed grimly. "I had the honour to follow when you led the storming party at Ciudad Real. You got your majority over that, and I got nothing, which I thought then, and still think, grossly unfair. But I do not question your courage, nor do I think you question mine."

"No, you saved my life at Ciudad Real, and I tried hard to get you a commission. You know why the general would not forward my recommendation. Now I do not wish to kill you here, and you could not kill me if you tried."

"I might. There is chance in these things."

"There is not. I have work to do on ahead. I could not afford to be killed. And therefore I should see to it, at whatever cost, that I stayed alive. Now, Corporal Garnier, you wanted that commission badly before Ciudad Real, and I presume you still would snap at it if it was offered. Well, I am here to hold it ready for your taking. I am open, moreover, to promise you that Emperor Bonaparte, when he gets my report, will forget that old black-list mark, and thank you personally — personally, mind — for what you have done amongst the prisoners on this infernal island; and presently, when there is a battle fought, and promotions are next distributed, you shall have your company."

"A captaincy? Is that all you can offer me?"

"It should be enough. Man, think! Imagine yourself a trim smart company commander in a regiment of the French Line. I wish you could see yourself now."

"I am a scarecrow, you mean? Granted. But I am first citizen — and let me tell you that means king — of 5000 other scarecrows; and I'd rather be that than second-in-command of a French brigade."

Major Colt rubbed vexedly at his blue-black chin. "I see your point, and I can guess what you are going to say next. I'm afraid I shall have to kill you."

"Or I you. You see, Major, I know you are here in Cabrera as an Escape Agent. You are proposing to take away my subjects from this Government piecemeal; and that, if I live, shall not be permitted. Man, think! I am getting them under a firm discipline; it has taken many severities to do this, but presently I shall have 5000 hard, desperate men under my sole command. What next, you ask? Well, this war may end, or we may enlarge ourselves by force. Five thousand men have a big momentum if they act sufficiently together. We can offer ourselves to the highest bidder as a Free Company. His Holiness the Pope, for instance, would snap at us if the price was not too dear. Or we might seize one of the smaller States, and set up a Government of our own. Oh, I tell you, Major, there are infinite possibilities in an army of 5000 hard-trained soldiers."

"But you are helpless with naked hands."

Corporal Garnier nodded to where H.B.M. guard-brig Frolic buttocked trimly over the swells "I have plans to take her. I have further plans to take the Spanish guard-boats. There will be our weapons."

Major Colt shook his grim head. "For every hundred times you might catch a weasel asleep, you'd not find Captain J.B. Meadey dozing once. I know that blighter. The Spaniards I'll give you; I've captured one of their galleys myself, as you know; but if you'll take the cinch from me, leave Meadey and the Frolic alone. He'd be a tough contract for even Americans to handle, and I tell you he's far above the weight of anyone bred in Europe. Well, Corporal Garnier, there's a marshal's bâton in store for me; and although I've made you a fair sporting offer, I take it you're going to persist in interfering with my business in Cabrera, and that means getting in the way of my promotion." He stood up on his feet and stretched. "I'm very sorry to have to kill you, but that's what's going to happen next. We'd better whistle up the seconds and get to work."

"There's just one other point," Garnier persisted. "You have a partner in this Escape-Agency business?"

"Yes," said Colt shortly. "Emperor Bonaparte named Miss Clarice de la Plage and me partners over this matter."

## TWO DUELS

"And being, as I understand, affianced to another lady ——"

"To a Miss Patience Collier, of Boston, Massachusetts, whom you are never likely to meet."

"Precisely. You cannot, therefore, have more than a business interest or a friendly interest in Mademoiselle Clarice. Now I have. In short, Major, I love her."

"That will be news to Miss Clarice."

"Not at all. She knew of my affection in Spain. I told her of it again here in Cabrera."

"Miss Clarice is engaged to marry a Monsieur le Brun. She has told me as much."

"Le Sage, I believe the name is. But that does not matter. If you will use your undoubted interest with her, to induce her to marry me, I on my part will rejoin the Eagles, with or without a commission, so soon as ever you can ferry me across to France."

"I shouldn't dream of trying to influence Miss Clarice over such a matter," Colt snapped. "You're wasting my time, Corporal Garnier. Whistle up those seconds, and let's get to work." me, monsieur and mademoiselle, that Egypt you visit first."

\* \* \* \* \*

The duel took place, by the second's arrangements, in a small circular quarry, a regular cock-pit of a place, fringed round by scanty evergreen oaks. The one way down to this delectable spot was by notches cut in one of the walls, which took some nimble climbing. One rather shuddered to think of the pain to which a wounded man would be put when, after a tedious fight below, he was dragged once more to upper earth with the island's one and only rope. The weapons, as Sergeant Colorado had forecasted, were stone axes, such as might have been wielded by warriors in the Cave days.

Major Joseph Colt stripped to shirt and breeches, and climbed down the dusty white stone ladder. He spat on his hands and hefted the clumsy weapon till he learned the balance of it, and then he cast his eye rapidly over the floor of the quarry to memorise the position of the boulders with which it was littered. A stumble would very probably be fatal, once they were hotly engaged, and Major Colt was firmly determined to avoid fatalities — at anyrate to himself. Garnier watched all this preparation with his weapon at rest. Corporal Garnier was evidently well acquainted both with his axe and with the battle-ground.

But presently Corporal Garnier was presented with a surprise. The seconds lay down on their bellies round the lip of the quarry above, and Sergeant Colorado gave the word to engage. Major Joseph Colt split the air with a yell — the savage Mohawk yell with which he had lived in intimate neighbourhood for most of his life — and he sprung for the Frenchman with a wild ferocity.

Garnier considered himself a master of his weapon; had trained himself with tedious diligence to its use; but to this barbaric lack of science, he knew no parry. So he gave ground skilfully, and hoped to tire Major Colt into more seemly fighting.

Twice round the circuit of the quarry they circled in this way, feinting, stumbling, sparring; and then Garnier leapt back a dozen feet, and grounded his axe. "A truce!" he gasped out. "We are betrayed! There's Ice-Cream Cabott!"

Colt looked up. On the brink of the quarry, with hands behind his back, was the first lieutenant of H.B.M.S. Frolic, of his old and painful acquaintance. He was a stiff, starched, pig-tailed British officer, with a finely faded uniform, and a brick-red face; and Colt, who expected insults and arrest, was amazed to hear him thaw into an unexpected civility.

"Go on, you beggars," said Lieutenant Cabott. "Damme, d'ye think I'd stop a fight?"

He dived into his fob, produced a copper box, and from it took snuff with vigour. "Damme, I'm an Englishman, and that means I'm a sportsman. Come now, who'll back Carrots? I'll lay five guineas to three the Black-muzzled One taps his claret next round. Oh, beg pardon; I forgot, you've no currency on this beastly island." He reached up and unhooked his faded epaulettes and thrust them into his pockets. "If it's any comfort to ye to know, we'll make it that I'm here unofficially. Now go ahead. Drop the handkerchief, you Pug-Nose there. D'ye use snuff, Puggy? Try my rapparee."

Again the murderous axes whirled, and again the duel blazed into vicious life. Garnier slashed, and his edge tore the shirt from Major Colt's left shoulder, but did not even graze the skin. But the American's blade never hit anything but air; Garnier dodged like an eel whenever he saw it approach. Round and round the quarry they circled, between and over the tumbled blocks, and the English lieutenant's prize-ring comments from above

## TWO DUELS

scalded Major Colt's nerves like boiling pitch whenever they fell.

And then came the end. Garner fainted again, and Colt gave a sudden quarter-arm swing with his axe. The axe-head nicked the thongs which lashed the Frenchman's axe-head to its handle, and it flung limply to the dusty floor of the quarry. Garnier lost his balance, tried desperately to recover himself, stumbled again, and sprawled down on all fours.

Major Colt stooped down. "I think," he said gently, "that a company command in Europe is better suited to a man of your talents than an uncertain savage life like this."

"You are very generous, Major. And about Mademoiselle Clarice?"

"I forget that you ever mentioned her. So long as I continue to forget, there's nothing broke over that."

From above came the loud harsh voice of Lieutenant Cabott, speaking in fluent, grammatical, vilely accented French, after the fashion set by His Grace, the Iron Duke. "I've very bad eyesight, Sergeant, when I haven't my epaulettes bent, but we've news that a black-whiskered fellow that was entered on the Frolic once is adrift on this island. Of course he's a deserter, and if we catch him he'll have his back finely scored up with the cat. Captain Meadey's great on discipline; he'll give him twelve dozen at the least. It's him I'm ashore after, and I'm bound to find him, too, if he stays here long enough. In fact, my orders are to go through the prisoners here with a fine-toothed comb till he's dredged out!"

"Very good, sir," said Sergeant Colorado. "I believe you'll find your man down by the landing-place, and having his hair curled by the new barber."

"I thank you. Here, take another pinch of rapparee for your information." Lieutenant Cabott stared down into the quarry, a yard and a half past Major Colt's head. "I hate Americans in the bulk, but that black-whiskered fellow seemed to have points about him."

Major Colt hated the British, too, with a fierce enthusiasm, but he could respect a courteous enemy. He saluted Cabott with his stone axe. Lieutenant Cabott saluted space, turned on his heel, and marched sharply away.

Colt stretched out a hand and helped Garnier to his feet. "There," he said, "a drink of water, and a cold bandage on your forehead, where you bumped it in falling, and you'll be as well as ever you were. Now that Englishman behaved well. But I don't want to strain his generosity. We must pull out of Cabrera this very night."

"But how will Mademoiselle — I mean how will your fellow Escape Agent know that this is the night you want the boat?"

"There is no boat. But I have brought with me a pack of bullock's bladders, and to each man who goes back this time to Emperor Bonaparte's service, there will be dealt out two, which he is to blow up and tie beneath his armpits to give him buoyancy in the water. With the help of these bladders we swim across to Majorca there; with the help of our wits we live upon Majorca, whilst we make night marches across that island to the Puig Major on the other side. From the top of that mountain we can look into the Port of Soller down below, and when we see a certain English milady's yacht run into Soller port we go down and join her. That is all."

"And the English milady is Mademoiselle — is your fellow Escape Agent?"

"It is probable."

"Ah, well, I always said she was as admirable as an actress, as in all other ways, though it was the Emperor himself who drove her off the stage. Good, Major, I will be there at the hour to receive my two bladders."

But when it came to the moment of embarkation, no Corporal Garnier groped his way to those dark rocks on the northern shore of this isle which had been appointed as a rendezvous. Three times Colt counted the heads of those who crouched amongst the boulders, and still only twenty-nine were present. The thirtieth, who had been proved to be Corporal Garnier, still remained absent, and the American was on the point of ordering a start without him, when the gloom was parted by the arrival of Sergeant Colorado.

Colt examined him narrowly. The man lurched in his walk, and if drink had been procurable in Cabrera, the cause would have leaped to the imagination in a moment. But on water, which was the only Cabreran beverage, no man could by over-indulgence grow unsteady on his legs; and so Major Colt inspected more closely.

"You are wounded, Sergeant. Why, your arm is in a sling, and your shirt is sodden with blood. Yes, and you are limping in your right leg."

"Mere scratches, my Major. I come to bid you bon voyage."

"Well, we were just on the point of sailing. We could not wait for Corporal Garnier any longer. By the way, where's Garnier?"

## TWO DUELS

"He's wounded."

"Curious. May I ask what wounded you?"

"Impaled my arm on a sharpened stake, Major."

"Garnier suffered from the same complaint?"

"I believe he did. The stakes were fire-hardened at the tips, and went in grandly. He prefers to stay where he is for a bit. Thinks the crossing would be too much for him to-night."

"Were these more affairs of honour?"

"I suppose you might say they were."

"And were you holding the other end of the stake on which Corporal Garnier impaled himself?"

Sergeant Colorado scratched his matted head with his sound hand, and looked preternaturally stupid. "I suppose I must have been holding it."

"Like to tell me your reasons for having the blamed impudence to upset a part of my plans?"

Sergeant Colorado drew himself up and saluted. "Yes, Major. The beast told me he should marry Mademoiselle Clarice in spite of everybody's teeth."

"My Land! ——"

"Yes, Major, I know what you are going to say. You are going to tell me again that the lady is nothing to you, and you could not interfere. But she is all the world to me. I love her as much as a woman may be loved. I have no hopes beyond being permitted to respectfully love her. Name of Mahomet! I would as soon see her marry the devil as marry an old fellow like me. When she does marry, it shall be to a commissioned officer, who may one day carry a marshal's bâton, and not to a non-commissioned lump of incompetent conceit like Garnier. Major Colt, I bid you good-night and good voyage. By the time you return, I will have a fine batch of further recruits ready for you."

Now about the voyage under that escort of bullock's bladders across the strait between Cabrera and the greater island, much might be written; and concerning the land journey across Majorca, a portly volume might be added. But other adventures crowd in for the telling, and there is no space here to narrate even how they lived on the Mallorquin country-side for a whole ten days, without once seeing so much as the green cotton gloves of a pursuing carabinieri. It was a masterpiece of leading and strategy, and like other feats of a like nature, one can only hope that it will appear in Collier's "Conduct of the Continental Wars," when that exhaustive MSS. shall at length find a publisher.

But at last, be it well understood, they were received on board the yacht (which was not a yacht) of the haughty Englishwoman (who was not English), which had successfully imposed for a week past on the simple-minded inhabitants of the little port of Soller. And thereafter, when they had put to sea, and were clear of the guns in the old amber-coloured castle, the two Escape Agents made mutual explanations. me, monsieur and mademoiselle, that Egypt you visit first."

\* \* \* \* \*

"And you fought for me, you dear Joe! You say you did not, but I do not believe you. I adore you more than ever for fighting for me."

"Miss Clarice, I cannot have you going away with that idea. I fought for Emperor Bonaparte. He ought to have had that man Garnier back with the Eagles, and there was no other way of getting him."

"But dear old Sergeant Colorado fought for me, and made no bones about saying so either. If I had him here on the yacht I would hug him."

Major Joseph Colt knit his brows, and with difficulty restrained himself from stamping on the deck. "There are times, miss, when I should like to pick you up and — and ——"

"And kiss me? I knew it was coming. I knew it would come at last."

"No, miss, smack you."

"Oh, that would be the same thing. They would both mean that you love me. Oh, fie, Joe! Think hard of Miss Patience Collier, of Pilgrim Avenue in Boston."