

THE PIRATE

C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne

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THE captain of the pirate was a Portuguese, and carried the name of Hernando de Soto in deference to the feelings of his friends when his time should come for the gallows. The mate was a Frenchman, wore his own name, Georges Chobar, and gloried in piling infamies upon it. The second mate was a Moor of Algiers, decked out in the style and clothing of a Spaniard. Call him Pedro, and he would beam upon you. Slip out Ali, and if the night was sufficiently dark, it was odds on your feeling the chill of his knife.

Half of the crew of this pirate felucce were as great a mix of nationalities as the afterguard; the other half were African Moors or African negroes.

A pirate she was open and confessed, flying any flag that came first to the halyards, a pariah in every sea; and one would have thought that to put a woman on such a craft was to enlarge the limits of calamity. Yet there was a woman on this dark schooner, a Mademoiselle Clarice de la Plage, and she was there, moreover, by her own free will and choice. Into such desperate situations could the glamour of Bonaparte lure even a woman who had once known and appreciated all the delicacies and dainties of Paris.

Out of all that wild ship's company there was only one man she could trust, and he was an American — one Joseph Colt. But then he also was in the service of the great Emperor, and, as it happened, they were partners in the same enterprise. Major Joseph Colt was the pirate's purser, and, for the one and only time in his ambitious life he was not anxious to climb to a higher grade in the service. There was only one other English speaker on board, a half-witted creature called Trotter, but he never seemed clear whether his nationality was British or American, and he was a man who had brought unreliability up to the level of a fine art.

The tale of their arrival on this picaroon was sufficiently adventurous. They had stolen a Spanish galley, and in her had carried stolen French prisoners from Cabrera, and brought them back to Toulon, there to rejoin the Imperial Eagles. They had set off back to the Balearic Islands for another load, but the very first night they dropped the French land, the galley and her feeble crew had been snapped up by a pirate out of Algiers. Into her hold they were clapped, with the promise of slavery later on in Algiers city; and because the Dey of Algiers cared not one jot for Bonaparte or anybody else, they were morally sure that this promise would be faithfully carried out.

The pirate, however had been successful; she had made many captures and had sent away many men as prize crews; and because slaves were a commodity marketable in Algiers she had a fine assortment of sailormen sandwiched in between the pilfered bales in her hold.

Amongst these an insurrectionary movement was already on foot when the galley's contingent arrived and that night it gushed over into activity. They gained the deck. The Moorish captain rushed up, and was promptly killed. A couple of his men followed him over the side, and the two parties were within an ace of commencing a mutual massacre. But the Moorish first lieutenant, Ali (who called himself Pedro), jumped into the forerigging, and howled out for a parley and a truce.

The Moors, it seemed, were sick of their present employment. They were pirates, with all the risks and without any of the more pleasing emoluments of piracy. If caught they were hanged; if they turned their cruises to a profit, that profit went to His Highness the Dey. They had for long enough wanted to go a-pirating on their own account, and only the captain (just recently deceased) had stood in the way. Now that he was removed, the advantages of a free commission seemed still more pleasing. They even went further: they suggested a joint-stock concern for all hands.

The Europeans from the hold were struck by the fairness of the proposition. They had got what they were fighting for — liberty; and now they began to look a little more to the future. Even if they did capture the felucce, how were they to decide where to take her? They were of too many nationalities for all to agree. The

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world was full of war. The French, British, Spanish, Russians, Austrians were all fighting this week or next in the year 1810, and taking from each other eagles, territory, ships, anything they could capture. Why not set up a new nation of their own — the Felucce Nation for example — and make war themselves? It would be no more risky than fighting for other people, and they could see to it that the plums and prizes did not go astray.

The beauty of the scheme struck the majority as marvellous — and the small minority held their tongues. Major Colt was amongst that minority and so also was Mademoiselle Clarice, and they would very much like to have offered an alternative plan. But some wit knocked out the gangway, and rigged a plank outboard by which objectors might leave the ship if they found existing arrangements damaging to their tastes; and this chilled the critics. So all hands fell to electing officers.

On the strength of her previous practise as vivandière, Mademoiselle Clarice was named purser's—assistant (with special reference to the grog department), and nurse to any wounded that the carpenter might find necessary to whittle down. There was no one on board, it appeared, who was qualified to act as surgeon, but the carpenter was a handy man, and said that after a few trials he had no doubt he could amputate as well as anybody.

In view of mademoiselle's election, Colt saw to it that he was appointed purser. He had no following to support him, and he proposed and seconded himself in the teeth of another candidate who was strongly supported.

"I hate to think I'm pushing in where I'm not exactly wanted," the tall American explained civilly, "but if there's any gentleman here with an eye to that pursership, he's just got to fight me right now; and when I've shown up the colour of his inside I'm ready for the next, and so on for as many times as there are applicants. But it's just the one office I've got use for on this ship, and it won't do for anybody to forget it."

Upon this the other candidate discovered that a knowledge of reading and writing was one of a purser's necessary equipments; acknowledged himself illiterate; and gracefully stepped out of the contest. So Joseph Colt went below and took possession of his official quarters. Mr Trotter alone deigned to applaud the election — after it had been made.

To these quarters presently he inducted Mademoiselle Clarice. "There, miss," he said, "that room's yours, and the bolt you see at the back of the door I fixed up out of a crowbar. I guess you'll be a sight safer there than anywhere else on this packet."

"Oh, Joe, you are good to me."

"I'm just doing what any American would, Miss Clarice."

"More, far more."

"Not at all. You must see for yourself that I am remembering all the time that I am behaving as an engaged man should. I have always Miss Collier of Boston at the back of my mind."

"And for that matter I, too, am, of course, faithful to the dear memory of Monsieur le Brun, to whom I also am affianced."

"But I thought the gentleman's name was le Sage. Well, never mind, miss. Anyway, each knows the other's engaged, and that's the main thing. Now I'm an American, and you're a lady, and you're just now in a blistering fix, and I want to say right here that I'm going to see you safe out of it. And that's the job I'm going to attend to next."

"But surely, Monsieur Joe, the Emperor has named you his chief Escape Agent, and your duty is first and foremost towards him?"

Major Colt pulled at his square black whisker. "I guess the Emperor Bonaparte must wait a bit."

"And there's your own promotion to be thought about. You will never reach that marshal's bâton, my Major, if you lose thought of it for even one little moment."

"That bâton," said Colt stubbornly, "is in store for the present, and there, if you please, we'll leave it for the present. Miss, I want to warn you particularly about that man Ali, who calls himself Pedro. He's no Spaniard any more than I am a Mohawk. He's a Moor right through to the finger—nails, and though I'm sure you've too much sense to have any use for bigamists of his description, I've seen you smile at him in a way that's given the creature obvious pleasure."

"Why, dear Joe, I must smile at someone, and he's the least detestable of the bunch. Now there's that hateful captain, for instance; you cannot say that I smiled more than twice at Captain Hernando de Soto, as he calls himself." Major Colt rubbed vexedly at his blue—black chin. "I don't see why you need smile at any of them. You know what they are. Mr Satan out for a week—end from down below would be reliable and a gentleman compared

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with any one of the gang. And yet you can laugh at them, and throw pleasant, easy words. My Land! For ten sous I believe you'd kiss that Ali."

"Dear Mary! and why not? Is it your prim Miss Collier of Boston who has taught you that all kisses leave a taste?"

"Miss Collier," began Colt, "holds that a kiss is only permissible between engaged people;" but when, in answer to Clarice's shrill laughter, he would have added his own adherence to these views, the conversation was ended and changed to something of the suddenest. From overhead came the crash and concussion of guns, and almost simultaneously there was added to this the din of shot striking their own vessel.

"That calls me to deck," said Colt. "I'd hate to be killed on a ship like this, but I guess if some of us don't fight there's the alternative of being hanged as pirates. You'll excuse me, miss, for what I'm going to do, but fighting here's not part of your job at anyrate, so I'll just keep you out of mischief's way." With which he slipped out of the cabin, and hasped the door on the outside, in spite of Clarice's shrill and scathing disapproval.

On deck the scene was none of the most encouraging. A night, black and starless, hung over the sea. The watch of the picaroon had, it appeared, seen the other vessel a bare two cables' length away, and had forthwith fired into her without measuring her size. But the stranger travelled with guns loaded, and must have had linstocks smouldering in tubs alongside of them. She returned the shot almost before the flashes had left the enemy's guns.

The pirates from below poured out on deck, and for a moment showed a very lively panic. The other vessel — a heavily sparred brig they made her out to be — had gone about, and was brazenly coming after them. They were men of a dozen nations and tongues, and Captain Hernando de Soto's vitriolic Portuguese, though well intentioned, reached the inner feelings of but few of them. The renegade, Pedro Ali, a man full of hot courage, was for accepting battle. "The brig trimmed deep," said Ali, "and promised rich pickings." But, "Let us get away," pleaded others; and presently pistols began to crack between these two parties, and there was every man fighting a neighbour for his own hand.

Now inside Major Joseph Colt there were lungs of brass, and, indeed, the envious freely said that he had fairly shouted his way up out of the ranks of the French army, and then on up through the commissioned grades. He had been cradled on a frontier where the Indian warwhoop was common music, and in the warmth of action no one could deny that he had the knack of putting a certain terrifying ferocity into his yell.

He yelled here; moreover, he backed his words with a hail of blows from an ash belaying pin on all who attempted to fight with him or with anyone else till presently he was left gnashing and shouting in the middle of an empty circle.

"Shoot the American," said somebody.

"Just you dare!" snarled Colt. "I'll kill the man that shoots me."

No one laughed, and what is more to the point, no one pulled a trigger.

"Now," said Colt, "who wants hanging? Speak up quick, please. There's the hangman so close astern that you can hear the creaking of his gear if you listen, and I tell you my neck tickles already."

Once more uprose a yammer of voices, and once more Colt yelled them into silence. "Looks as if he could make a right smart speech," said Trotter. "Let's hear what he's to say."

"You lunk-headed scum, that's a British brig-o'-war you've run foul of. That's the Frolic that patrols round Cabrera in the Balearic Islands to keep the French prisoners from escaping."

"What! You know her?" gasped Captain de Soto.

"My Land!" shouted the exasperated American, "how could I tell you her name if I didn't? John Bull Meadey's her captain, and he'll hang every son-of-a-dog here if he takes the felucce, and try us afterwards. Want to ask any more fool questions?"

Apparently they did not. The great majority of them might not understand the tall Westerner's words, but his gestures bit home, and the glare of his fierce dark face from beside a battle-lantern brought back discipline. Captain and mates screamed their orders, and the crew jumped to duty without help from the flying belaying pins. The felucce bore away till she had both of the brig's masts in one in the dimness behind her, and then with her own great lateens goosewinged, and half of her crew aft on the poop to bring her by the stern, she fled like some great scared seafowl down wind into the night.

Long after they had congratulated themselves on having shaken off Captain J.B. Meadey's pursuit, that worthy man rounded the Frolic to, and with a promise to each of his gun captains who made a miss of three dozen at the

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gangway next morning, let loose the whole of his starboard broadside into the darkness. Two trundling round-shot from the carronades smashed into the crowd on the pirate's poop, and killed five men there by way of leavetaking.

The escape, and the demise of their friends, had small enough effect on the spirits of the survivors when the Mediterranean sun rose next morning into a pleasant turquoise sky to warm their bodies; and as in the course of the day they overtook and captured a small wine ship out of Valencia, by nightfall they were roaring songs in twenty different tongues, and firing off the felucce's guns at intervals by way of accompaniment. The unspeakable Trotter had daubed his face black with a paste of gunpowder and water, and lurched about howling that he was the devil.

It was whilst this concert was at its height that Major Colt again went down to see Clarice.

For a minute, when he had thrown open the door, the thin little woman glowered at him in tight-lipped fury.

Then: "You savage," she hissed, "you American savage to dare to chain me up here whilst brave men are on deck standing shot."

But Colt was not to be intimidated even by her. "Brave men do you call them? Say mad dogs, and you'll be nearer the mark."

"Oh, poof! You do not understand a little soldierly enthusiasm. To me it would have been nothing. Monsieur the Major, whilst I was viviandière with the French armies, I have seen the sack of Saragossa, yes, and the sack of four other cities, and know what even French soldiers can do. These boys here would not terrify me half so much as did the lonely blackness of this cabin. Major Colt, you forget, the light went out."

"The darkness doesn't appear to have hurt you, miss, and I tell you again it has been no place for you on deck. I don't guess, I know. Once whilst I was trading cutlery to a Mohawk tribe 'way out West by the Great Lakes, they lifted the scalp of a business rival who represented a firewater firm, and drank his samples. Well, miss, if I compared those Indians to wild beasts, it would be insulting to beasts. But I say to you straight, I'd rather be there than here as an insurance proposition."

"Poof! I tell you. The cher Pedro Ali would be my escort. I am sure he would be most gallant."

"That blighted renegade," said Colt grimly, "has been making such remarks about you already that I have had to attend to him."

"What did he say?"

"He said you must be lonely down below alone, and proposed to come down and comfort you. The rest of the beastly crew cheered him on."

"The brutes!" said Mademoiselle Clarice with a shiver.

"Precisely. But they kept the ring fairly enough whilst he and I had it out."

"So you dissuaded him, my Joe?"

"I set him off to swim home if he can find the way."

"You killed him?"

"To be exact, I flung him overboard."

The little woman's eyes brightened. She put out a slim brown hand and reached up and patted the tall American on the shoulder. "Once when I was on the stage I acted in a play of the classic time. There was a knight in it, and the knight fought for his ladylove and rescued her. Did you ever fight for Miss Collier of Boston, dear Joe?"

"Miss Collier," snapped Major Colt, "occupies far too ladylike a position ever to want fighting about. If you'd taught school yourself, Miss Clarice, you'd have felt the dignity of it."

"And Miss Collier also writes history?" suggested Clarice sweetly.

"She does. She is writing a book on the 'Conduct of the European Wars,' and from time to time I send her a batch of material."

"I can picture her, this Boston miss, so prim and accurate, that never kisses any except her dear fiancé that is away from her so savage America, and, therefore, cannot be kissed at all. Dear Mary! what an image of a perfect woman! Now I am different; I could not stand up stiff and demure and sharp-voiced to teach school, nor could I sit in dull patience and write out history that was sent to me. No, myself I am small, and I am thin, but I am very full of hot blood. Once I was an actress till the greatest man on earth bid me cease acting. So now I take my pleasure as you take yours, my Joe, in making history for others to write about."

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Major Colt pulled vexedly at his square black whisker. "I am afraid, miss, that you and I are of too different temperaments to have much in common. I am afraid you will never appreciate Miss Collier as I do." He took out the joints of his long pipe and screwed them together, and fitted on the bowl. "But we're getting away from the matter in hand. With permission I'm going away to find a bunk now to have a smoke and a sleep, and see if that won't show me a way out of the bad mess we're in. I just want to ask one favour, miss."

"Well?"

"Keep yourself snug behind a barred door till I come again."

"If it will make you rest more soundly, mon brave, I promise. And here is something to direct your night thoughts. You told me once that Mademoiselle Collier (after teaching you Euclid) had sent you to Europe to 'get on.'"

Major Colt sheathed his knife, and repocketed the plug from which he had been shredding tobacco. "Yes," he admitted, "that is so."

"Then be ambitious here. You are not safe as purser. Meadey would hang a pirate's purser without a qualm if he caught him, and he could do no more to a pirate captain. Be ambitious, dear Joe. Send de Soto after Ali, and be captain yourself, and then you can best give directions about how to save our necks."

"I don't know," said Colt, fumbling for his flint and steel. "I want to be quit of this ship, not captain of her. Besides, I hated Ali, and de Soto isn't such a bad sort of cut-throat. I noticed he was civil to yourself."

The vivandière shrugged. "Oh, if Monsieur the Major must deal tenderly with all my admirers, it will be hard to give so much as a rough word to any of this crew. Captain de Soto certainly did kiss me with much tenderness when we parted."

Major Joseph Colt blew on his smouldering tinder with such violence that it flamed extravagantly. "I've no right to interfere with your tastes in kissing, I know, miss, but I'll see to it that de Soto at anyrate ceases from troubling in that direction. I bid you good-night," he snapped, and gave an angular bow, and stalked away, puffing volumes.

Overhead the drunken crew danced madly and filled the warm night with their shoutings. And punctuating the whole were occasional pistol shots, and now and then a scream.

The 'tween decks of the lurching felucce were full of noise and smells, and they had small allowance of head-room. Colt had to bend almost double as he walked, and Clarice leaned out of her cabin doorway and watched his tall stooping figure with a tender eye. "If it were not for thoughts of that ridiculous stiff school-mistress in Boston (wherever that may be), I'd like to tell my hero that I shall die of sheer terror if I have to stay in this awful ship much longer. But whilst he continues to speak of her, never shall he learn it. Dear Mary! What a thickness is this bar he has fitted to my door. How he cares for me! Well, never girl needed care more."

* * * * *

Once more through the gloom of that night the drunken crew sighted a sail, fired into her and again caught a tartar. Major Joseph Colt awoke to the bellow of guns. He was refreshed with a four hours' sleep, and after satisfying himself that Clarice was safe, he went cautiously out on deck.

The stranger was a big barque of nationality undistinguishable, but she was heavily armed and heavily manned; moreover, her guns were admirably served. The pirates fought with a savage ferocity, and some considerable skill with weapons. But discipline was not theirs. Twice they stopped their fire to clear the decks, and many wounded went over into that black night sea with the dead, so that full space might be left to fight the guns. But the barque held steadily to her distance and poured in a merciless fire, and then of a sudden the wind dropped.

There was nothing for it now but to fight the felucce till she sank, and this her crew with shouts prepared to do. It was probable the barque would take no notice of an offer to surrender; and even if they were granted quarter for the moment, it would be merely to spare them for an inevitable hanging in the near future. Sailormen of honest extraction had a short way with pirates in the crude year 1810.

As purser, Major Joseph Colt had no fighting station; but it was not in the nature of the man, when battle was lit, to keep aloof from the entertainment. The blood in his veins ran scalding hot, and it was the itch for a fight that had driven him to Europe, quite as much as the "get on" advice of Miss Patience Collier. So after his first eruption on deck, he employed himself for awhile in carrying wounded men down the hatchways. But presently, when a powder-monkey dropped, he found himself handing ammunition; and next he thrust himself in to lay and aim one

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of the broadside guns, vice a Moorish gun-captain, who was hopelessly incompetent.

Splinters flew, and round shot hummed around him, but Colt's iron coolness was unruffled, and his gun was the best fought in the ship.

Then came the dropping of the wind, and the pirate's desperate resolve to die fighting; and it was there that Major Colt's genius for success was forced to show itself. He left his gun, jumped up on the break of the poop, and by sheer weight of lung, even in the midst of that furiously-contested action, got himself attention.

"Who wants to die?" he shouted above the din of firing. He had a heavy flint-lock pistol in either hand, held muzzle up, ready to drop into instant use, and there was a look in his grim, dark eyes that got the attention of the men who were even then prepared to glare unawed into the face of death.

"You may be ready to quit the earth, you scum, and I daresay it is the best thing that could happen to most of you. But I'm not. I've got a lot of work mapped out for me on ahead, and I can't afford to die and leave it. My Land! no. So I'll just have to save your blackguard necks along with my own, whether I like it or not. Now attend to me, you gun-captains. You all see that big white splinter mark on the barque's water-line there, just abaft of 'midships? I want all of you to lay your guns on to that, and lay them true. You're to fire when I give the word, and not before or after. Any gun-captain who misses his aim I'll pistol with my own hand, and promote the number two of that gun to be captain. So turn-to again, you no-nation swine, and fight for your dirty necks."

The guns were loaded, run out, laid; Colt bawled an order to fire, and the felucce reeled to the shock of the discharge. The barque also reeled, and white splinters sprang in bristles from an ugly wound in her side.

The pirates sponged their guns, reloaded, clapped on to the breech-tackles, and ran them out. But the barque's crew fired no more, applying themselves instead with a sudden industry to pumps and bucket-chains, and Major Colt saw that it was wisdom to accept the involuntary armistice.

"Hold your fire," he ordered, and when one gun barked in spite of his prohibition, he dropped a pistol on to the man who pulled the lanyard, and shot him through the head. "That's my cure for a hound who didn't know that discipline had arrived on board here. There are more pills from the same box if any others of you want doctoring. I guess we'll quit this neighbourhood before that brig fellow has cured his stomach ache, and can attend to us again."

De Soto came across the poop. "I thank you for your help," he said. "That lesson was needed."

"Say 'sir' when you address me."

De Soto's hand slid to his belt, and he promptly found himself looking down the barrel of Major Colt's pistol.

"I shall be very pleased to serve under you, sir."

"I thought you would be. Now see to it that you don't play any monkey tricks, or you'll get it quick and sudden where the chicken got the axe." Major Colt raised his voice again. "Men and officers! There's been a new election of captain on this packet, and the officer who's promoted gets the job because he's the best man on board. Anybody dispute that?"

No one did. Indeed, the American's demeanour so jumped with their fancy, that they gave him what they intended for a cheer, each pirate of them shouting in his native mother tongue.

"Mark, I don't want to be captain of your old iniquity shop. But you made me so frightened I just had to elect myself. I've worn a scalp so long that I've grown to like it, and I tell you I've never before felt it so loose as it's been since I've travelled in your undesirable society. I just hate this pirating idea; but if it's got to be, I'm going to have it run on sound, safe commercial lines. Fall-to at those sweeps, you. Mr de Soto, stave every liquor cask there is on board, and then see the decks swabbed up and holy-stoned. For the future I wish this ship kept as clean as one of those blasted British men-o'-war, and for that I hold you responsible."

* * * * *

Now a gap occurs here in the records that have been placed at my disposal; but to a certain extent this can be bridged from hints let drop here and there in the context. It is pretty plain that for the moment neither of the Escape Agents saw a way to get back to the work which Bonaparte had given them on Cabrera; and so the best was made of the alternative. The felucce was sailed towards the Eastern Mediterranean, because, as Major Colt stated, all Greeks and Turks were pirates themselves anyway, and so it was no robbery to play the pirate amongst them. And amongst the islands of Greece she plied with industry her nefarious trade. At the end of that time she sailed back west for the Balearics, carefully dodging the English cruisers, which were just then strung out across the Mediterranean for the especial benefit of the French.

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It is rather laughable to think of the means taken to induce this crew of hopeless rascals to lend their services to the cause of Emperor Bonaparte, for which no single man of them cared one jot; and the key to the whole mystery may be given in the one word discipline. Scattered over the face of the seas in the year 1810 were many thousands of men who earned a precarious livelihood by following the industry of pirating, and without exception these had all tried honest seafaring first, and thrown it over because the smallness of the profits and the heaviness of the discipline irked them. They thirsted for gold easily won, for women slaves, for wild drinking bouts; and all their brains and thews were turned to reach these ideals. Beyond these they asked for nothing. A short life, and a wet and merry one, was their motto. Discipline they scoffed at, and openly told their captains that Jack was as good as his master. As for holy-stoning decks, or keeping their vessels dandified, they would as soon have thought of carrying a chaplain.

Enter then upon such a society, Joseph Colt, United States subject, with ideas of his own upon tidiness and discipline, and a strong enough personality to see to it that his theories were carried into practice. "You're a sickening lot of swine to start upon," he informed his crew with grim emphasis; "but my Land! I'll make you into the most efficient pirates in the Eastern Mediterranean before I'm through with you. You shall never throw it in my teeth that you were hanged as nobodies."

Accordingly he practised them with cutlass and small arms, drilled them at the great guns, exercised them at sail drill, landing drill, boarding, skirmishing, scouting, in fact made them perfect in all the manoeuvres which could possibly occur to the mind of a major of French infantry, with an Indian training, suddenly promoted to a sea captaincy. Between whiles he made them holystone, paint, scrub, and polish, and he beat loiterers over the head with a brass pistol butt. He seldom went below, still more seldom slept. He sat for the most part on the after skylight, smoking at a long, many-jointed pipe, and looking grim, and black, and savage. The crew feared him more than anything on earth or sea, and hated him and their sad hard lot with a hate that was almost pathetic.

"How long?" was the question Clarice put to him every day, and his reply was always: "As short a time as I can make it."

Once when they had taken a prize, and she was more than usually anxious to be gone from the horrors of her present situation, "My Land! miss," he snapped out, "do you think I forget what I came to Europe for? I'm tickled to think there's a marshal's bâton somewhere in store for me, and if I don't soon get to work trying for it again, I guess Emperor Bonaparte will forget I'm in the contest."

In the meanwhile they appear to have been taking ships, easing them of money, food, valuables, and ammunition, treating their crews and passengers with a fine courtesy, and then letting them go little harmed. Colt would permit no liquor to be looted, neither would he allow his crew to go ashore at any port to spend their money in a regulation piratical debauch. And the pirates, worn thin with hard work, clicked their dry tongues, patted the useless gold in their pockets, and swore that if this were piracy, then a moral life was the life for them.

To his crew, then, in this chastened mood, Major Joseph Colt at last made a proposal.

They all had money saved now. How would it suit them to settle down ashore, each man as a respectable householder?

Some of them looked glum; the rest grinned; they thought they were to be treated to a specimen of Major Colt's grisly humour.

"Beg pardon, Captain," said Trotter, "is this the South Seas you've got in view?"

"France."

Mr Trotter passed two fingers tenderly round his neck, to hint that the very idea made him feel the twitch of the rope.

"I can dump you down in France, and guarantee that the old record against each of you shall be wiped clean. On terms. I know quite well you'll be up to your old iniquities again twenty hours after you've landed, but that's no concern of mine. As I say, I can set you ashore free men, on terms. Question is, do you want to hear now?"

There was no doubt that they did. In spite of the new discipline, they fairly yelled for information; and when they were told that a free pardon could be earned by anything so ridiculously easy as lifting a cargo of Cabrera prisoners from under the noses of Captain Meadey and H.B.M.S. Frolic, their enthusiasm knew no bounds. Heavens! how sick they were of being hard-driven, thirsty outlaws.

Major Colt was quick to catch their mood before the rebound. They were lying at somebody else's anchor and cable in a bay at the back of Zante, waiting for the passing trader. They did not trouble to weigh. They manned

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halyards, and the great lateens were mastheaded. The stolen cable was slipped and went to join its anchor on the sea floor; and as the huge triangular sails filled and drew, that rascally crew danced and sang from sheer light-hearted joy. Honesty fairly oozed from them. Just outside they came upon a currant boat, romping home light, her cargo sold, and its price in good red gold (so they told themselves) in her cabin locker. They ran down close and wished the scared Greeks good voyage and profitable commerce. For themselves, they said, they had gone out of the business.

Now in their present reckless mood, the pirates (so sick were they of sober piracy) would have attacked Captain Meadey's Frolic herself had they been so ordered. And, indeed, Colt had no little trouble to hold them in hand till a moonless night would give him the weather he needed. But till that date occurred he was resolute in keeping Cabrera out of sight, even from his mast-trunks; and so to fill in time ran to Alcludia Bay in Majorca for wood and water.

It was here, during one of his brief snatches of sleep, that Clarice deserted, leaving in her place a letter. His brown cheeks grew sallow as he read it:

"DEAR JOE, — The trouble is, how are we to let those so ragged prisoners on Cabrera know that they must stand in readiness the instant we come for them? You could do it, or I could. But you cannot leave your detestable ship, or, to be exact, I dare not be left on her without you. Oh, mon cher, I am an amazing coward. So I will make my way to the island. Remember I can swim there if the need arrives; and when the dark nights come, and you see three camp fires in a triangle, with the point towards the beach, that is where the passengers will be awaiting. So come there also for your comrade —

CLARICE.

P.S. — Could your Miss P. C., of 2907 Pilgrim Avenue, Boston, swim back to an island where those detestable Spaniards had threatened to kill her already?"

Now the crew of the felucce had little love for Major Joseph Colt, as has already been plainly stated; indeed, he imagined them to be mere callous brutes, who could carry no affection for anyone except themselves; and so it came to him as somewhat of a shock to learn that they had in a way set up the vivandière as their goddess. It seemed she had told Trotter, who was in the boat's crew that had set her ashore, something of the nature of her errand, and Trotter spread the news. The crew were on fire. Sooner than Meadey or the Spaniards, yes, or the beastly French prisoners should so much as hurt the little finger of Mademoiselle Clarice, they were ready to cut the throats of every living soul in the Mediterranean.

In fact their mood jumped with his most intimate desires; but still there was need for patience till the time came. However willing the felucce's desperate crew might be, Colt knew quite well they were no match for the hateful Frolic.

But time and the moon move on at their own pace. The date arrived as set forth in the calendar. The felucce moved out of harbour. Night came away moonless, starless, and blessedly thick with a drizzle of rain. Major Colt ran his vessel down the Majorcan coast, and into the strait between it and Cabrera. Three tiny crumbs of light threw him the longed-for signal.

He ran in towards the Cabreran rocks, and cast off two fisher boats he had in tow. They rowed off softly into the wet darkness and faded out of sight. He dared show no light, not even the glow of a pipe to guide them back, and he stared after them into the gloom, and was torn with the most heavy anxiety; but in an hour's time they returned to him, full of shaggy, half-naked men, who had once been conquering French soldiers.

There was no Clarice with them.

Again they went off, and again returned. It was not till the third boat load came off that she rejoined.

The felucce had been lying with stripped masts in the trough, so as not to court inspection; but now word was passed, and the great lateens soared aloft with eager speed. The boats were cast adrift. The felucce sprang out on her race for France and the Eagles.

The vivandière came up to Major Colt on the poop.

"Come aboard, Captain," she said, saluting.

"I saw you. I couldn't come down to the gangway to meet you. I am a little upset." He gripped her hand and looked down at her with something in his black eye that made her thrill.

But she took his mood lightly as usual.

"Dear Mary! Major Colt, but I thought you were going to kiss me!"

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He sighed heavily. "I fear it would not be right to go so far as that. You see, my comrade, I am an engaged man."

Trotter came up to them grinning, and saluting: "This crew wishes to say, miss, how very happy they are to see you safe and sound amongst them once more. Captain, you'll make a good story out of this for that young lady in Boston. I'll send the crew's account of it myself if you like." He saluted again and went forward.

"You've no idea, miss," said Colt gloomily, "how little things do get distorted as they drift across the Western Ocean, even when you feel sure they're just a private matter of your own. We are taking back to the Emperor one hundred and three of his soldiers, and of our forty-seven scoundrels on the felucce, when they have had their spree, I daresay as many as forty will be glad enough to enlist. It would look very pleasant printed in a history book, with one's name tacked on; but I guess, miss, we'll have to suppress it."