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ESTABLISHED 1879

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satisfied.

A Fight on
The Eaglet

Story of an American
Privateer

By LOUISE LA ROSS

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The American privateer Eaglet cruising off Nova Scotia captured a British merchantman, Ellen Boyne, but the Eaglet's captain, not finding her cargo of sufficient value to make it worth his while to tow her into port or being prevented from doing so by the proximity of British cruisers, decided to burn her. The crew of the Boyne were taken aboard the Eaglet and a few days later were put ashore not far from Halifax.

When it became known what was to be done with them one of the Englishmen stepped up to the Eaglet's captain and said to him:

"I would like to join your crew, captain. I don't care much what flag I sail under. I've been a soldier in the British army, but deserted to get rid of a sergeant's wife who wanted to get me tangled up with her. Thus I took to the sea, and here I am. If I go ashore I might be recognized, for the regiment I deserted from is at Halifax. Besides, I would rather remain afloat."

"You don't look rugged enough to breast ocean storms," replied the captain, eying the youthful figure of the man, whose eyes were blue, hair flaxen and on whose rosy cheeks not the slightest sign of a beard had yet appeared. "How old are you?"

The man hesitated, then said that he didn't know; he had never known his parents and never had been told his age. "I can fight, captain," he added. "In the army I learned sword and bayonet exercise."

"What's your name?"

"Ralph Bronson."

"Well, you may stay with us if you like."

Ralph Bronson, leaving the captain, went straight to one of the American sailors and, with a pleased expression, said to him:

"It's all right, Jack; I'm to be one of you."

"Well, Ralph," replied the other, "since you don't wish to go I'm glad you're permitted to join us."

From the moment Ralph Bronson had come aboard the Eaglet he had striven to make friends with Jack Drury. Drury had neither encouraged nor repulsed the youngster's proffered friendship. The two were very different, Ralph being delicately organized, while Jack was a stalwart fellow and something of a leader among his fellow tars. "I don't see what the boy wants of me," he said to them, "unless it is protection, and he seems quite able to take care of himself."

One morning a ship was espied on the horizon, and the Eaglet's captain stood over to investigate her. He had a breeze which the ship had not, and by noon was near enough to her to make her out. He judged she was British, but could not tell. He fired a shot across her bow, whereupon she broke the blood red banner of England and, opening ports, ran out several guns. The Eaglet responded by breaking a flag on which there were a palmetto tree and a snake—the stars and stripes had not yet been adopted—and the fight commenced. When it ended by the British vessel striking her colors Jack Drury had taken a leadership and covered himself with glory, but he had lost his right arm and an eye. Ralph Bronson had kept beside him and when the crew of the privateer boarded the Britisher parried a blow of a cutlass which would otherwise have split his friend's skull. But just then Bronson was knocked senseless by a blow from a musket, and before he had regained consciousness Drury received the wounds that cost him his arm and an eye.

But Ralph was only temporarily disabled and during the next few months devoted himself when not on watch to nursing the hero. When Drury was able to be about again he appeared a very different man from what he had been. At first he was honored by his fellows, but the enthusiasm attending war heroes after they have become useless is short lived. Drury could not do a seaman's work, nor was he, thus disabled, fitted for an officer. He was invited by his captain to remain on board as scullion in the galley, and in this unwarlike position his glory faded.

Among a crew made up of heterogeneous elements it was natural that there should be enmities. Notwithstanding the affection the Eaglet's crew bore Drury there were several of them who hated him and one who, no sooner had Jack got about again after being disabled, began to show his spleen toward him. It was the old story of the sick lion. This man, Par-

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sons, had been thrashed by Drury and had suffered the ignominy of having his nose rubbed in the scupper. Upon Jack's disability he had made up his mind secretly to get his revenge. But he knew that with the whole crew behind his enemy he must continue to throw the responsibility of a quarrel upon him. He began by casting a slur on everything Jack said. One day when Parsons had virtually given Drury the lie the latter turned on him and said:

"See here, Parsons; this has been going on long enough. You have been trying to pick a fight with me and have succeeded. But you must be handicapped to meet my conditions. Bandage your left eye and tie your right arm behind your back and we'll settle the matter with cutlasses."

Parsons agreed, but the crew objected on the ground that Drury since the infliction of his wounds had never regained his general health and strength. But Drury would not listen to their objection, and a meeting was arranged. It must take place when the captain was in his bunk. He would not allow fighting among the crew, since he considered that such liberty would eventually cost him every man jack of them. The junior officers were not so particular, and if the captain could be eliminated their interference was not to be feared. So it was agreed that the affair should take place an hour before the coming aft of the midwatch, or 3 o'clock in the morning. At that hour in fair weather the captain was below asleep, and the second mate, who was in charge of the ship, had promised to accidentally fall asleep himself on the poop deck.

The night before the meeting was to take place Ralph Bronson stepped up to Parsons and said to him:

"Parsons, you're a dog to force a fight on a disabled man. Why don't you take a well one?"

"So you're going to chip into this affair, are you? We all know that you're tacked on to Drury and must be treated as he is treated. After I'm through with him I'll rub your nose in the scuppers."

"Just as Drury once served you."

Parsons, with a scowl, went off.

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Look Wise

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about his duties. Bronson was disappointed. He wished to pick a quarrel that he might take Drury's place. Going below, Ralph, who was to be his friend's backer in the fight, had a final talk with his principal, and it was arranged that he should awaken Jack in the morning.

At four bells Ralph went to Jack's bunk. Jack was sleeping quietly. Ralph stood looking at him for a few moments, then stole away on tiptoe, took up a cutlass and went on deck.

"What's the matter?" said Parsons as Ralph approached. "Has he backed out?"

"No; he's asleep. I've come in his stead."

"Oh, I don't want to fight a boy. I must have the man who challenged me."

"You'll fight me before you fight him, for I'm between you and him, and you can't get at him without going past me."

With that Bronson took up a position he had learned in the British army. Parsons went to him as he would attack a Malay pirate. Ralph stepped lightly aside. Parsons turned and brought his cutlass down over Ralph's head. Ralph received it on his own weapon. His arm was bared, his sleeve being rolled above the elbow. The arm was round, but there was a fair muscle on it. Parsons, angry at not being able to get at his enemy, thought little of caution and exposed his left side, and Ralph rammed his weapon clean through it. Parsons looked about him wildly for a few moments, the blood spouting out of his wound, then fell in a heap on the deck. Then Ralph Bronson toppled over too.

When Drury awoke and saw the sun shining in through a porthole he could not understand the situation. There was no one near him at the time of whom to ask questions. So, springing up, he got into his clothes and went on deck. Everything was peaceful. The crew were going about their duties, as usual. The only noticeable feature was a man on his knees swabbing a place on the deck. Drury went up to him and, seeing that the water in his bucket was red, became more mystified than ever.

"What are you doing?" he asked the man.

"Swabbing Parsons' blood."

"Parsons' blood?"

"Yes; he was killed in a fight this morning at three bells."

"Who fought him?" asked Jack, fairly agast.

"Ralph Bronson."

"Then," said Drury, "I'm going to kill Bronson."

But Bronson knew what his friend's first emotions upon knowing that he had been tricked would be and had gone into hiding.

Drury sought the boy, half minded to carry out his threat, but could not find him. Then Ralph's devotion began to dawn upon him, and he sought him to take his hand and gulp out his thanks. Still not finding him, he waited till it was time for Ralph to go on watch. Ralph did not appear. Then for the first time it occurred to him that at least mortally wounded. But a member of the crew reassured him, telling him that the boy had not received a scratch.

"Then what's he hiding from me for?" asked Drury.

"Dunno. After the fight they took him to the captain's cabin. The captain gave 'im a bunk by himself. That's all I know about it."

Drury fretted and fumed. At four bells in the afternoon an American ship appeared, coming right on the Eaglet's course. When she drew near she was spoken, and the Eaglet's captain went aboard of her. He returned with a bundle.

At six bells Drury received word that the captain wished to see him in his cabin. Drury hurried there and found not the captain, but Ralph Bronson in woman's clothes.

That's the end of the story. In a few days the Eaglet stopped at Newport, where Drury and the woman—whatever her name might be—went ashore and were seen no more on the privateer. Later a sum of prize money was paid to John Drury and Emma Bronson Drury in equal shares.

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