

Cutlass Empire.

By F. Van Wyck Mason

Synopsis: Things happen fast in the life of Harry Morgan, pirate-to-be. Escaping with his life from a frustrated Royalist rebellion against Cromwell in Bristol Town, he is shipwrecked and comes ashore on a West Indian island along with Enoch Jackman, a girl named Kate Fyne and others. They are joined by ragged hunters, then set upon by Spaniards who slay all but Morgan and Jackman. Now go on with the story—

CHAPTER SIX

ON A TORRID afternoon of late April, 1659, the little landlocked harbor of Cayona was sheltering but a handful of ships. Only a few uncommonly energetic persons had remained sufficiently awake to observe the appearance of a small, sturdy vessel standing straight in toward that narrow channel affording access to Cayona harbor.

Presently the stranger, a ketch by her rig, hoisted a yellow and green flag as, from her starboard beam, sprouted a soft blossom of grayish smoke. A second gun, it sounded like a heavy quiver, then sent its report reverberating across Cayona's wide yellow beach, beyond a triple row of palm thatch huts, and on among the vivid green hills beyond.

Upon a crag dominating Cayona—town and harbor alike—stood a fort built by the Englishman Elias Watts, and his 150 hard-bitten followers. Within its battlements an unwhirled activity manifested itself.

They were in no vast hurry in acknowledging the Free Guilt's salute; she was too well known about Cayona in particular, and Tortuga in general.

"Well," grunted the gun captain, "if this ain't a surprise. 'Tis the first time in near two years Harry Morgan's returned in the same vessel. Me, I was a-figgerin' this cruise 'd capture himself a real ship—"

HIS COMPANION, naked save for a pair of ragged petticoats, breeches, shooed a sun-baked head. "Now did yer, really? I didn't. Why? 'Cause 'Arry Morgan ain't ready to. Yer don't find 'im tyking just any gallowes bait in 'is crew. E's the careful one, 'is 'Arry. Remember, Roddy, when first 'e made the beach here?"

The master gunner swung over to replenish a charcoal fire kept continually alight for the benefit of those slow matches with which the cannons were touched off.

"Aye, that I do. I was there and seen 'im, that fellow Jackman and four men roll out o' a warped old gig, and damned nigh to starvation they were."

Out from the disorderly dwellings lining Cayona's crescent-shaped beach was spewed an unsavory mass of humanity. "Free Guilt's back!" "What's the news?" "Avvons-nous gagne?"

Roused from a month long somnolence, the little settlement shook itself awake. For over a week now all Tortuga had been anticipating a return of that little armada of retaliation launched by the Brethren of the Coast against the Spaniards of Hispaniola.

Watts, who claimed authority under Lieutenant-Governor Brayne of Jamaica—although he had never been seen to produce any documents in support of such claim—had granted British colonial commissions to sundry French, Dutch and English captains as reprisal for a piece of Spanish treachery.

A glow of excitement rippled along the beach when into the Free Guilt's longboat tumbled a company of about 15 men. Despite the earlier impressions the expedition must have been a success.

In the humid gloom of the guard room before the Governor's residence Colonel Chamlet Arundel, late of the Royalist Cavalry, fingered drooping, carefully curled mustaches.

"Robert!" the Deputy-Governor bawled over his shoulder.

"Fetch this rogue Morgan to me directly."

A SENSE of pleasurable anticipation, not unmixed with anxiety, seized the Deputy-Governor.

Of all the buccaner captains, old or young, frequenting Tortuga, only Morgan might rightly be mentioned in the same breath as Edward Manvelt, that wily and sagacious veteran freebooter, privateer and occasional pirate.

"Odds blood, Governor!" Morgan paused a moment, his chunky frame quite filling the low stone doorway. "I am curs'd glad and honored to greet you. A week ago I'd have deemed such a privilege most unlikely."

Arundel extended a liberally begrimed hand. The Deputy-Governor's pale green eyes flickered over this sturdy, bandy-legged young fellow who must be nearing the twenty-fifth year of his life.

The two men clasped hands, then, at Arundel's waved invitation, Morgan flung himself into an armchair and thrust yellow-stockinged legs well out before him.

"Well, Harry, well? Speak up man! It hasn't been easy for us here in Cayona gnawing our nails and wondering how you made out. I esteem you gave the Dons a trouncing."

Morgan's prominent black eyes hardened and his jaw went out. "Aye, we won a victory of a sort, I suppose."

"Of a sort?" You failed of taking Santiago?" Deputy-Governor's voice quivered.

"No. We carried out our purpose after a fashion, but 'twas the most slovenly conceived affair."

"You won some treasure? Some slaves?"

"Aye, but less than half of what we should have fetched away."

ARUNDEL said sharply, "Well, sir, what happened? Give me a strict account, understand?"

Morgan first grinned impudently to assert his independence, then in measured but brisk tones described the buccaner expedition against Santiago de Hispaniola. Beside Morgan the officer had been Captain Con Dabrona, Captain Humphrey Dobson and Captain Jonas Reekes.

"Damme! I know all about the start of your cruise," Arundel broke in impatiently. "Get to the main point. How far from the sea does S'Jago lie?"

"Above 15 leagues, or 45 miles if you prefer it that way."

"I presume you stripped the town?"

"To the very bone, your Excellency. But despite my every effort the other captains would not keep their men in hand; by consequence they caroused like utter fools."

"Sink me! Had I commanded in full at Santiago I'd have handled matters differently. We would have taken the town and got away in three days' time instead of a week."

"And what will be Governor Watts' share?"

Morgan laughed harshly. "Exactly 5,000 pieces-of-eight."

A mestizo slave, half white and half Indian, appeared, stooped low to pass the guard room door because of the small and carefully corded bale carried on one shoulder.

"What's this?" Arundel got up, pulled the sweat-soaked fabric of his pantaloons free.

"A few trinkets I've fetched back for Henrietta, your lovely wife—and her sisters."

Arundel's watery eyes glistened. Loot for Henrietta eventually meant loot for him; on Tortuga, as almost everywhere else in the world of 1659, no woman was eligible to hold property in her own right. "Hold hard, you!" he directed, once the mestizo had commenced to untie the rawhide lashings. "Harry, why not convey gifts to a cooler spot? Besides, the ladies will enjoy a viewing of their unwrapping!"

DAUGHTERS OF ELIAS WATT IN NO great hurry Susan moved over to the bed, mechanically inspected the garments laid out upon its light green counterpane.

So it was Harry Morgan's vessel that had cast its anchor in the harbor this afternoon? La! And her brother-in-law, Chamlet Arundel, said Harry had been

elect a captain—quite an honor for so young a man.

If only Dick Hurburt were possessed of more ambition. But he wasn't. Dick was just a lovable, lusty, well-built soldier fit only to breed more soldiers before getting himself killed in battle.

Still lost in thought, Elias Watts' tall second daughter stepped first into a bottom petticoat of very fine white lawn, then tied on a pale pink satin one decorated by two deep flounces.

"A plague on Harry Morgan!" she muttered softly.

A quick rap at the door preceded Lucy's appearance as a smaller and blond replica of herself. Both girls had inherited Elias Watts' wide mouth firm chin and long straight nose.

"Get a hurry on, you vain baggage," Lucy pleaded, fidgeting with an elaborate tortoise shell and lace fan Mr. Jackman had fetched back from his last cruise.

There was no doubt, Susan was deciding, that the lanky new Englishman had fallen desperately in love with little Lucy just about as quickly as he had clapped eyes on her.

By the time the young ladies descended to a minute courtyard enclosed by the Governor's residence dusk was falling.

Susan smiled on recognizing the seated figure of her father. Already enjoying the cool of the evening breeze were Colonel Arundel, Captain Morgan and Jackman; all three seated in chairs of woven cane.

DESPITE a demurely downcast gaze, Susan sensed Morgan's eyes upon her and flushed at the strong, almost impertinent intensity of his regard.

"Is not much," Morgan belittled, once Fernando's knife commenced to flash through the cords and wrappings. "I fear our attack on Santiago was none-to-well executed."

A smothered gasp escaped Susan and her sister when the fading light revealed half a dozen shawls and mantillas, delicate as spider webs but bright as humming birds.

Morgan reseated himself and perhaps a trifle too casually invited, "Pray make a selection, ladies. I trust you will find something to meet your tastes."

Susan almost ran to bend over the small mound of booty, then dark eyes dancing, she tried one after another of the gold-mounted tortoise-shell combs in her hair until she found one that suited her.

Immensely pleased, Morgan said, "And now, Mistress Lucy, it's your turn."

Lucy shook her head and dimpled at the same time. "My thanks, Captain Morgan. What with Henrietta's presents and Su-

small, narrow affair, was empty. No matter; she would find the rose come morning. After pressing the cool metal leaves to his lips Harry Morgan reached through the bars and tossed in his gift.

A pang, as sharp as that of an arrow piercing his body, shot through him at the sound of a man's voice saying, "God above! What was that?"

Instantly, came Susan's velvety soft voice: "Sh-h, darling, someone will hear you. 'Tis only some little object fallen from my dresser."

Then, he saw them sitting embraced on a settee.

"But I heard a noise," he heard the man's hoarse whisper insist. "Nothing would blow over there's no wind."

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