

All For One Guinea - Gold.

Chapter 1

Charlotte Berry placed the journal she'd recently begun on the small shelf then gripped the edge of the cot, timing her move to the Calliope's pitch and roll. Her feet touched the deck, cold water immediately sloshing around her ankles, filling the shoes she hadn't taken off to lay on the cot. Nor had she undressed. Everything from the clothes she wore to the rough blanket and mattress was somewhere between damp or dripping wet. She ignored the biting cold, the myriad rancid smells and odours that permeated everything. All combined with a noise like a hundred howling screaming banshees fighting over which one would tear them apart. As part of this tune, the hull creaked and groaned, stays sang under strain, the sails whip cracked, blocks squealed and screeched and concerned voices screamed and shouted commands. Yet there was something about it all that she'd grown to love.

For three days she'd remained ensconced in a cabin no longer than the cot in which she had to lay. The only other furniture a tiny table and chair, above which were two small shelves fitted to the thin bulkhead partition, on one of which she'd placed the small black leather book she used as her journal. This left barely enough room to stand and dress, not that she needed to, having to dress into damp clothes was worse than keeping them on. She braced against the door, timing her move.

For a moment Charlotte wondered why she felt no fear. Mrs Havelock, her guardian for the duration of the voyage wretched and groaned at ever slight movement and because of the storm, had been given a sedative by her husband, thankfully a doctor. Charlotte felt the Calliope pitch up steeply and then, just for a moment she took pleasure in the feeling of being almost weightless, almost suspended in the air. as the deck fell away, She opened the door as the Calliope hit the trough and stepped into the narrow

companionway, bracing against the panelling as the Calliope rolled hard over.

His Majesty's ship Calliope, a fifth rated frigate, appeared to be a well found ship. She had to be to survive the force of the storm. If only the same could be said of her crew, though it wasn't the ordinary seamen that gave Charlotte cause for concern. They all appeared to know their business. Her conflict was with the officers, Captain Scuthern, for his superior, condescending attitude and Major Tristan Percival for his unwanted assumption that she found him in any way attractive.

She braced herself, one hand each side of the narrow companionway, finally reaching the door leading to the main deck. Despite Scuthern's order that she remain below the miserable conditions had driven her to seek a breath of fresh air, even if just for a moment.

The companionway door opened to the main deck, part concealed by steps leading to the quarterdeck. She raised her head to look. Scuthern was there holding a stay for balance, talking to the First Lieutenant, Mister Nail, another hard man difficult to like. Then Major Percival appeared, black cape flying in the wind, his red marine coat soaked by spray. She ducked back in case he should look her way.

"Have a care Miss Berry."

She almost jumped where she stood, then saw the one officer she'd come to like and trust. Mister Prothero, Calliope's sailing master, had a round, chubby face that seemed to always hold a smile no matter what occurred. He smiled now, his cheeks reddened by the wind, spray dripping from the sowester on his head.

"I will Mister Prothero. I just need some air." "Here," he handed her a canvass cape. "If you go forward be sure to hold tight to the safety lines."

"Thank you."

"Mr Prothero, the Captain considers letting a reef out of the storm jib for'ard may serve to counter the sea on the quarter bow." The call from the quarterdeck drew Mr Prothero back to his duties and he was gone after a brief excuse me.

Charlotte, not wanting to be seen by Captain Scuthern and especially not wanting the company of Major Percival, followed Mr Prothero forward. He moved more swiftly though, dancing across the twisting and pitching deck

with practiced ease while she sought a handhold before every step. He was soon lost in the gloom, caused either by the hour or the low cloud. Charlotte struggled to decide whether it was evening or morning, the Calliope was in a world of its own, in a time of its own.

The bow rose, climbing on a wave, then pitched down to crash and shudder in the bottom of the following trough, forcing her to hang on to a nearby stay. Was trying to follow forward a mistake? Each wave washed across the deck sweeping around her ankles. Wind driven spindrift seemed to find every crevice in the cloak Prothero had given her. She shivered with the cold but determined to continue, to face the challenge and not surrender to fear and trepidation.

She fought forward finally reaching a point just forward of the fore mast, where the motion was even more violent, the howl of the wind a cacophony of noise, yet she was enthralled, excited to a degree she hadn't thought possible, all fear, if any, swept away by this challenge to the sea and nature itself. Yet despite the challenge, she felt that this was where she belonged.

Her mind flashed back to Scuthern mocking her for the interest she showed in learning the workings of a ship at sea, for seeking to understand the purpose behind the maze of lines, sheets, stays and tackles that harnessed the wind to drive a ship across the sea. Men like Captain Scuthern, Major Percival and others believed that, as a mere woman, she should stick to those tasks it was a woman's duty to perform. Major Percival emphasising a woman's duty was to marry keep home and raise children, his stare revealing some hidden desire she could only speculate on. She shuddered at the thought of what this might be. There was only one man she wanted despite having used him and lost him to gain what she wanted most of all, to return home.

The memory churned in her mind as she released one hand from its grip on a stay to push her soaking wet hair from her face, trying to clear her thoughts. At that moment the Calliope pitched more violently than before, lifted on a huge fast moving wave. Charlotte felt herself tossed upwards, the force snatching her remaining hold on the rail. Then the deck fell away, the Calliope twisting aside, leaving her suspended. Only she wasn't suspended. She started to fall, the deck beneath her feet replaced by broiling ocean.

Charlotte flailed failing to find any handhold. The sea closed over her head,

her hand just finding a ropes end as the wave passed but leaving her dangling, spluttering for air. She clung on knowing to let go was to die. The Calliope rolled, submerging her once more. The sea lifted her as if offering her back. She got both hands on the rope, her scream lost in the howl of the wind. The Calliope rolled again, the sea took her in its grasp and smashed her against the wooden hull as if deliberately trying to break her grip. She spun around, bashing again and again against the wooden hull, knocking the wind from her lungs, her mouth filling with brine. Her head crashed against the wooden strake running around the hull. She saw stars and felt her grip slacken, her strength failing, unable to hold on. Then something was gripping her wrists. There was a wrenching pain in her shoulders, as if her arms were being torn from their sockets. *Is this what it is to die?* she thought.

Yet again her body crashed into the Calliope's unbending side, her head banged on the rail. She found herself hauled like a wet fish across the deck and fought the stars flashing across her vision while grabbing for anything, for any handhold that would stop her falling, but she wasn't falling. Someone was speaking but she couldn't make out the words. They sounded so distant yet whoever it was held her in a tight grip around her waist. Charlotte began to feel her arms and legs again, bringing increasing pain, her legs unable to hold her weight as whoever he was half carried her to shelter under the forepeak.

"Have a care, Miss." His grip slackened, but she nearly fell so he grabbed her tight, guiding to lay on the deck. She opened her eyes but there was no sense in the spinning world she saw. Then she heard shouted words, angry, followed by commands. She knew the voice. Not him! Then she felt herself being supported, carried, a tumult of movement, more angry voices, not knowing who or to why. Charlotte surrendered to the blackness calling her name.

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The Raven's foremost canon fired, followed in quick succession by the next and the next. The canon sprung back halted by their stops. One of each gun crew rammed the swab down the barrel. Once swabbed another of the gun crew inserted a powder bag. The man with the swab reversed his pole to ram the bag home, by which time the man who'd inserted the bag had turned, picked up another ball ready to insert as the ram came clear. The ball was then

rammed home followed quickly by a pad of wadding. Meanwhile the gun captain had primed the flintlock and made it safe. The gun crews turned to the hauls. The cannons rolled forward, smoke from the previous broadside still hiding their target, but she was there. The cannon fired.

There was blood on the deck. La Santa Santiago's crew was no match for the men of the Raven. The cheer began in the Raven's tops then spread down. Henry Finch watched as La Santa's mainmast started to fall, tearing the shrouds and yards of the foremast as it went. His gunners had earned the guinea he'd promised each of them if they brought down La Santa's mast. Sinking her would have been easier, but he wouldn't rest until he was sure the person he'd been told was aboard was dead.

That thought made Henry Finch turn and look to the other vessel standing some six miles off the Raven's quarter. The Morrigan, Arthur O-Neil's ship, almost equal to the Raven in size and number of guns, supposedly fighting for the same cause, but there was something about O-Neil that Henry Finch didn't trust. It was O-Neil who'd informed him that *she* would be aboard La Santa Santiago. Based on a rumour admittedly. Something overheard by chance, O-Neil said when telling. Though O-Neil also knew that such would force him to act against the Governor's orders. But if *she* was aboard, the Governor could go to hell as far as Henry Finch was concerned. He turned his gaze back to La Santa.

"Bring her close," Finch ordered the man on the wheel. "Grapples. Prepare to board. You know who I want alive. Kill the rest if they refuse to yield."

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Arthur O-Neil, also known as Don Arturo, watched dispassionately as the Raven's crew swept over La Santa. He could imagine La Santa's master watching, wondering why the captain he knew as Don Arturo, a privateer in the service of General Calatrava, did nothing to help. Perhaps La Santa's master would realise that he and his crew were being sacrificed to good cause. With luck Finch would be killed, though O-Neil doubted luck would stretch that far. Though this act would drive a rift between Finch and Sir Richard Hampton, Governor of Jamaica.

Both Finch and O-Neil were privateers, both hired by Hampton to combat the growing piracy in the region, which they both were before agreeing to take

the Hampton's gold. Though they were both playing a double game, Finch also serving the Priest and his rebellion against the General's rule, O-Neil serving the General. But as an Irishman, O-Neil hated the English and General Calatrava had a scheme in hand, one that, if brought to fruition, would strike a blow against the British Empire and avenge all that the British had done to Ireland. One task in this process was to get Henry Finch out of the way and luring him into attacking La Santa served that purpose. O-Neil laughed to himself. He'd known exactly the bait to use. And of course, the Governor would have to be informed of what Finch had done. O-Neil took one last look at the devastation inflicted on La Santa then issued orders for the Morrigan to brace up and turn on the wind.