

#### MR. MIDSHIPMAN EASY

"When you first entered the service, Easy," said Captain Sawbridge, "I thought that the sooner the service was rid of you the better; now that you have left it, I feel that it has lost one who, in all probability, would have proved a credit to it."

"Many thanks, sir," replied Jack; "but how can I be a midshipman with eight thousand pounds a year?"

"I agree with you that it is impossible. But dinner is serving; go into the after-cabin and the steward will give you all you require."

Our hero, whose face and hands were not a little grimed with the gunpowder, washed himself, combed out his curly black hair, and found all the party in the fore-cabin. Gascoigne, who had not been asked in the forenoon, was, by the consideration of Captain Sawbridge, added to the number. Before dinner was long off the table, the first lieutenant reported that it was necessary to turn the hands up, as they were close to the anchorage. The party, therefore, broke up sooner than otherwise would have been the case; and as soon as the *Latona's* sails were furled Captain Sawbridge went on shore to acquaint the governor with the results of the action. He asked Jack to accompany him, but our hero, wishing to be with Gascoigne, excused himself until the next day.

"And now, Easy," said Gascoigne, as soon as the captain had gone over the side, "I will ask permission to go on board with you—or will you ask?"

"I will ask," replied Jack; "a gentleman of fortune has more weight with a first lieutenant than a midshipman."

So Jack went up to the first lieutenant, and with one of his polite bows hoped, "if duty would permit, he would honour him by coming on board that evening with some of his officers, to see the *Rebiera* and to drink a bottle or two of champagne."

The first lieutenant, as the *Rebiera* was anchored not two cables' lengths from him, replied, "That as soon as he had shifted the prisoners and secured the gunboat, he would be very glad;" so did three or four more of the officers, and then Jack begged as a favour, that his old friend, Mr. Gascoigne, might be permitted to go with him now, as he had important packages to entrust to his care to England. The first lieutenant was very willing, and Gascoigne and our hero jumped into the

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boat, and were once more in all the confidence of tried and deserved friendship.

"Jack, I've been thinking of it, and I've made up my mind," said Gascoigne. "I shall gain little or nothing by going home for my promotion; I may as well stay here, and as I have served my time and passed, my pay is now of little consequence. Will you take me with you?"

"It was exactly what I was thinking of, Ned. Do you think that Captain Sawbridge will consent?"

"I do; he knows how I am circumstanced, and that my going home was merely because I was tired of looking after the *Aurora*."

"We'll go together and ask him to-morrow," replied Jack.

"At all events, you'll have a more gentlemanly companion than Mr. Oxbelly."

"But not so steady, Ned."

The first lieutenant and officers came on board, and passed a merry evening. There's nothing passes time more agreeably away than champagne, and if you do not affront this regal wine by mixing him with any other, he never punishes you the next morning.

#### CHAPTER XXXIX

*A council of war, in which Jack decides that he will have one more cruise.*

AS Captain Sawbridge did not return on board that evening, Easy went on shore and called upon him at the governor's, to whom he was introduced, and received an invitation to dine with him. As Gascoigne could not come on shore, our hero took this opportunity of making his request to Captain Sawbridge, stating that the person he had with him was not such as he wished and could confide everything to; that is, not one to whom he could talk about Agnes. Jack, as he found that Captain Sawbridge did not immediately assent, pressed the matter hard. At last Captain Sawbridge, who reflected that Gascoigne's interest hereafter would be much greater through his friend Easy, than any other quarter, and that the more the



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friendship was cemented the more advantageous it might prove to Gascoigne, gave his consent to our hero's wish, who called on board of the *Latona* to acquaint Gascoigne and the first lieutenant of Captain Sawbridge's intentions, and then went on board of the *Rebiera* and ordered Mesty to come with his portmanteau on shore to the inn, that he might dress for dinner. Gascoigne, now considered as not belonging to the *Latona*, was permitted to accompany him; and Jack found himself looking out of the window at which he had hung out his trousers upon the memorable occasion when the boatswain had to follow his own precept, of duty before decency.

"What scenes of adventure I have passed through since that," thought Jack; "not much more than four years ago, then not three weeks in the service." Whereupon Jack fell into a deep reverie, and thought of the baboon and of Agnes.

The repairs of the *Latona* were all made good by the next day, and Gascoigne, having received his discharge-ticket, went on board of the *Rebiera*. The gunboat was put into the hands of the agent, and shortly afterwards purchased by Government. The *Rebiera's* crew did not, however, obtain their prize-money and share of the head-money, for she had seventy men on board, until their return, but, as they said, they had broken the ice and that was everything. Moreover, it gave them confidence in themselves, in their vessel, and in their commander. Our hero weighed a short time after the *Latona*, having first taken leave of Captain Sawbridge, and committed to his care a letter to Dr. Middleton.

Once more behold the trio together—the two midshipmen hanging over the taffrail, and Mesty standing by them. They had rounded Europa Point, and with a fine breeze off the land were lying close-hauled along the Spanish shore. Mr. Oxbelly was also walking near them.

"When I was cruising here it was very different," observed Jack; "I had a vessel which I did not know how to manage, a crew which I could not command, and had it not been for Mesty, what would have become of me!"

"Massa Easy, you know very well how to get out of scrapes, anyhow."

"Yes, and how to get into them," continued Gascoigne.

"And how to get others out of them too, Ned."

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"No more of that, Hal, an thou lovest me," quoted Gascoigne. "I have often wondered what has been the lot of poor Azar."

"The lot of most women, Ned, in every country—prized at first, neglected afterwards—the lot she might have had with you."

"Perhaps so," replied Ned, with a sigh.

"Massa Easy, you get ebrybody out of scrape; you get me out of scrape."

"I do not recollect how, Mesty."

"You get me out from boil kettle for young gentlemen—dat devil of a scrape."

"And I'm sure I've got you out of a scrape, Mr. Oxbelly."

"How so, Mr. Easy?"

"How so!—have I not prevented your quarrelling with your wife every night?"

"Certainly, sir, you have been the means. But do you know when we were engaging the other day, I could not help saying to myself, 'I wish my wife was here now, holding little Billy at the hatchway.'"

"But at night, Mr. Oxbelly."

"At night!—why, then I'm afraid I should have wished her home again—it's astonishing how comfortably I sleep now every night. Besides, in this climate it would be intolerable. Mrs. Oxbelly is a very large woman—very large indeed."

"Well, but now we must hold a council of war. Are we to run up the coast, or to shape a course direct for Palermo?"

"Course direct, and we shall take nothing, that is certain," said Gascoigne.

"If we take nothing we shall make no prize-money," continued Oxbelly.

"If we make no prize-money the men will be discontented," said Easy.

"If no ab noting to do—it will be d—d 'tupid," continued Mesty.

"Now then the other side of the question. If we steer for Palermo, we shall be sooner there and sooner home."

"To which I reply," said Gascoigne, "that the shorter the cruise is, the less I shall have of your company."

"And I shall have to sleep with Mrs. Oxbelly," continued Oxbelly.



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"Hab fine ship, fine gun, fine men, and do noting," cried Mesty. "By de power, I no like dat, Massa Easy."

"You want eight months of coming of age, Jack," observed Gascoigne.

"It won't make a difference of more than three or four weeks," said Mr. Oxbelly; "and the expenses have been very great."

"But——"

"But what, Jack?"

"Agnes."

"Agnes will be better defended going home by men who have been accustomed to be in action. And, as for her waiting a little longer, it will only make her love you a little more."

"Sleep single a little longer, Mr. Easy, it's very pleasant," said Mr. Oxbelly.

"That's not very bad advice of yours," observed Gascoigne.

"Stop a little, Massa Easy," said Mesty, "you know dat very good advice."

"Well then," replied Jack, "I will, as I am quite in the minority. We will work up the whole coast—up to Toulon. After all, there's something very pleasant in commanding your own ship, and I'm not in a hurry to resign it—so that point's decided."

The *Rebiera* was steered into the land, and at sunset they were not four miles from the lofty blue mountains which overhang the town of Malaga. There were many vessels lying at the bottom of the bay, close in with the town; the wind now fell light, and the *Rebiera*, as she could not fetch the town, tacked as if she were a merchant vessel standing in, and showed American colours, a hint which they took from perceiving three or four large vessels lying in the outer roads, with the colours of that nation hoisted at the peak.

"What is your intention, Jack?" said Gascoigne.

"I'll be hanged if I know yet. I think of working up to the outer roads, and anchoring at night—boarding the American vessels, and gaining intelligence."

"Not a bad idea; we shall then learn if there is anything to be done, and if not we may be off at daylight."

"The pratique boat will not come off after sunset."

"And if they did, we could pass for an American, bound to

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Barcelona or anywhere else—the outer roads where the vessels lie are hardly within gunshot."

Mesty, who had resumed his sailor's clothes, now observed, "What we do, Massa Easy, we do quickly—time for all ting, time for show face and fight—time for hide face, crawl, and steal."

"Very true, Mesty, we'll crawl this time, and steal if we can. It's not the warfare I like best of the two."

"Both good, Massa Easy; suppose you no steal board of polacca ship, you not see Missy Agnes."

"Very true, Mesty. 'Bout ship, Mr. Oxbelly."

"Mr. Oxbelly not good for boat service," observed Mesty, showing his teeth.

It was dark before the *Rebiera* was anchored in the outer roads, a cable's length astern of the outermost American vessel. One of her quarter-boats was lowered down, and Gascoigne and our hero pulled alongside, and, lying on their oars, hailed, and asked the name of the vessel.

"So help me Gad, just now I forget her name," replied a negro, looking over the gangway.

"Who's the captain?"

"So help me Gad, he gone on shore."

"Is the mate on board?"

"No, so help me Gad—he gone shore, too."

"Who is aboard then?"

"So help me Gad, nobody on board but Pompey—and dat me."

"Good ship-keepers, at all events," said Jack. "A ship in the outer roads with only a black fellow on board! I say, Pompey, do they always leave you in charge of the vessel?"

"No, sar; but to-night great pleasure on shore. Eberybody dance and sing, get drunk, kick up bobbery, and all dat."

"What, is it a festival?"

"So help me Gad, I no know, sar."

"Is there any one on board of the other vessels?"

"Eberybody gone on shore. Suppose they have black man, he stay on board."

"Good-night, Pompey."

"Good-night, sar. Who I say call when captain come on board?"



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"Captain Easy."

"Captain He-see, very well, sar."

Our hero pulled to another ship, and found it equally deserted; but at the third he found the second mate with his arm in a sling, and from him they gained the information that it was a great festival, being the last day of the carnival; and that every one was thinking of nothing but amusement.

"I've a notion," said the mate, in reply, "that you're American."

"You've guessed right," replied Jack.

"What ship, and from what port?"

"Rhode Island, the *Susan and Mary*," replied Gascoigne.

"I thought you were north. We're of New York. What news do you bring?"

"Nothing," replied he, "we are from Liverpool last."

A succession of questions was now put by the American mate, and answered very skilfully by Gascoigne, who then inquired how the markets were?

It was necessary to make and reply to all these inquiries before they could ask apparently indifferent questions of American traders; at last Gascoigne inquired—

"Do you think they would allow us to go on shore? the pratique boat has not been on board."

"They'll never find you out if you are off before daylight; I doubt if they know that you are anchored. Besides, from Liverpool you would have a clean bill of health, and if they found it out they would not say much; they're not over particular, I've a notion."

"What are those vessels lying in-shore?"

"I guess they have olive-oil on board, the chief on 'em. But there are two double latteens come in from Valparaiso the day before yesterday, with hides and copper. How they 'scaped the British I can't tell, but they did, that's sure enough."

"Good-night, then."

"You won't take a glass of sling this fine night with a countryman?"

"To-morrow, my good fellow, to-morrow; we must go on shore now."

Our hero and Gascoigne returned on board the *Rebiera*, consulted with Oxbelly and Mesty, and then manned and

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armed the two quarter and stern boats. They thought it advisable not to hoist out their long-boat; no firearms were permitted to be taken, lest, going off by accident or otherwise, an alarm should be given. Our hero and Mesty proceeded in the first boat, and pulled in for the town; Gascoigne shortly after in the second, and the boatswain in the jolly-boat followed at some distance.

There was no notice taken of them; they pulled gently down to the landing-place, which was deserted. There was a blaze of light, and the sounds of revelry in every quarter on shore; but the vessels appeared equally deserted as the American ones in the offing.

Finding themselves unobserved, for they had taken the precaution to pull only two oars in each boat, they dropped gently alongside one of the double-masted latteen vessels, and Mesty stepped on board. He peeped down in the cabin, and perceived a man lying on the lockers; he came up in his stealthy manner, closed the hatch softly, and said, "All right." Jack left Gascoigne to take out this vessel, which he did very successfully, for it was very dark; and although there were sentries posted not far off, their eyes and ears were turned towards the town, listening to the music.

A second vessel, her consort, was boarded in the same way, but here they found a man on deck, whom they were obliged to seize and gag. They put him down in the cabin, and Mesty, with another boat's crew, cut her cables, and swept her gently out towards the American vessels. One more vessel was required, and Jack, pulling two oars as usual, saluted a galliot heavily laden, but of what her cargo consisted was not known. In this vessel they found two men in the cabin playing cards, whom they seized and bound, and cutting her cables were obliged to make sail upon her, as she was much too large to sweep out. As they were making sail, they, however, met with an interruption which they did not expect. The crew belonging to the vessel, having had enough amusement for the evening, and intending to sail the next morning, had thought it right to come off sooner than the others; it was then about midnight or a little later, and while some of Jack's men were aloft, for he had six with him, Jack, to his annoyance, heard a boat coming off from the shore, the men in her singing a chorus. The galliot was at that time just under



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steerage way, her topsails had been loosed and her jib hoisted, but the former had not been sheeted home, for the three men below could not, in the dark, find the ropes. The other three men were on the fore-yard loosing the foresail, and Jack was undetermined whether to call them down immediately, or to allow them to loose the sail, and thus get good way on the vessel, so as to prevent the boat, which was loaded with men, from overtaking them. The boat was not more than twenty yards from the galliot, when, not finding her where they left her, they pulled to the right, and lay on their oars. This gave a moment of time, but they very soon spied her out. "Carambo!" was the exclamation—and the head of the boat was pulled round.

"Down, my lads, in a moment by the swifters," cried Jack. "Here's a boat on board of us."

The men were in a few seconds on deck, and the others, who had now sheeted home the topsails, hastened aft. The vessel soon gathered way, but before that her way was sufficient the boat had pulled under the counter, and the Spaniards, letting their oars swing fore and aft, were climbing up, their knives in their teeth. A scuffle ensued, and they were thrown down again, but they renewed their attempt. Our hero, perceiving a small water or wine cask lashed to the gunwale, cut it loose with his cutlass, and with one of the men, who was by his side, pushed it over and dropped it into the boat. It struck the gunwale, stove a plank, and the boat began to fill rapidly; in the meantime the galliot had gained way—the boat could not longer be held on, from its weight, and dropped astern with the men in it. Those who were half in and half out were left clinging to the gunwale of the vessel, and as they climbed up were secured, and put down in the cabin. Fortunately, no firearms having been used on either side, the alarm was not given generally, but the sentry reported fighting on board one of the vessels, and the people of the guard-boat were collected, and pulled out; but they only arrived in time to see that the galliot was under way, and that the two other vessels from Valparaiso were not in their berths.

They hastened on shore, gave the alarm; the gunboats, of which there were three at the mole, were ordered out, but half the crew and all the officers were on shore, some at balls, others drinking at taverns or posadas. Before they could be collected,

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all three vessels were alongside of the *Rebiera*; and not aware that anything had been discovered, our hero and his crew were lulled in security. Jack had gone on board, leaving fourteen of his men on board the galliot—Gascoigne had done the same—Mesty still remained on board his vessel; and they were congratulating themselves, and ordering the men on board to the windlass, when they heard the sound of oars.

"Silence!—what is that?" exclaimed Oxbelly. "The gunboats or row-boats, as sure as I'm alive!"

At this moment Mesty jumped up the side.

"Massa Easy, I hear row-boat not far off."

"So do we, Mesty. Gascoigne, jump into the boat—tell the men in the prizes to make all sail right out, and leave us to defend their retreat—stay on board of one and divide your men."

"Dat all right, Massa Easy. Mr. Gascoigne, be smart—and now, sar, cut cable and make sail; no time get up anchor."

This order was given, but although the men were aloft in a moment and very expeditious, as the *Rebiera* payed her head round and the jib was hoisted, they could perceive the boom of the three gunboats pulling and sailing not five cables' length from them. Although rather short-handed, topsails, courses, and top-gallant sails were soon set, the men down to their quarters, and the guns cast loose, before the gunboats were close under their stern. Then Jack rounded to, braced up, and the *Rebiera* stood across them to the westward.

"Why the devil don't they fire?" said Jack.

"I tink because they no ab powder," said Mesty.

Mesty was right—the ammunition chests of the gunboats were always landed when they were at the mole, in case of accidents which might arise from the crew being continually with cigars in their mouths, and in the hurry they had quite forgotten to put them on board.

"At all events, we have powder," said Jack, "and now we'll prove it. Grape and canister, my lads, and take good aim."

The commanders of the gunboats had hailed each other, and agreed to board the *Rebiera*, but she now had good way on her, and sailed faster than they pulled. A well-directed broadside astonished them—they had no idea of her force; and the execution done was so great, that they first lay on



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their oars and then pulled back to the mole with all speed, leaving the *Rebiera* in quiet possession of her prizes, which had already gained two miles in the offing.

The *Rebiera*, as soon as Jack perceived that the gunboats had retreated, was put before the wind, and soon closed with her captures, when she was hove-to till daylight with the three vessels in company. Gascoigne returned on board, prize-masters were selected, and Jack determined to keep them all with him, and take them to Palermo.

CHAPTER XL

*In which there is another slight difference of opinion between those who should be friends.*

THE two latteen vessels proved of considerable value, being laden with copper, hides, and cochineal. The galliot was laden with sweet-oil, and was also no despicable prize. At daylight they were all ready, and, to the mortification of the good people of Malaga, sailed away to the eastward without interruption.

"Me tink we do dat job pretty well, Massa Easy," observed Mesty, as he laid the breakfast-table.

"Nothing like trying," replied Gascoigne; "I'm sure when we stood into the bay I would have sold all my prize-money for a doubloon. How do I share, Jack?"

"Only as one of the crew, Ned, for you are a supernumerary, and our articles and agreement for prize-money were signed previous to our sailing."

"I ought to share with Mr. Oxbelly's class by rights," replied Gascoigne.

"That would be to take half my prize-money away. I shall want it all, Mr. Gascoigne, to pacify my wife for giving her the slip."

"Ah, very well; I'll get all I can."

For ten days they ran down the coast, going much too fast for the wishes of the crew, who were anxious to make more money. They seized a fishing-boat and put on board of her the four prisoners, which they had found in the vessels,

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and arrived off Barcelona, without falling in with friend or foe. The next morning, the wind being very light, they discovered a large vessel at daylight astern of them to the westward, and soon made her out to be a frigate. She made all sail in chase, but that gave them very little uneasiness, as they felt assured that she was a British cruiser. One fear, however, came over them, that she would, if she came up with them, impress a portion of their men.

"As certain as I'm here, and Mrs. Oxbelly's at Southsea," said Oxbelly, "they'll take some of the men—the more so as, supposing us to be a Spanish convoy, they will be disappointed."

"They will hardly take them out of the prizes," observed Easy.

"I don't know that; men must be had for his Majesty's service somehow. It's not their fault, Mr. Easy—the navy must be manned, and as things are so, so things must be. It's the king's prerogative, Mr. Easy, and we cannot fight the battles of the country without it."

"Yes," replied Gascoigne, "and although, as soon as the services of seamen are no longer wanted, you find that there are demagogues on shore who exclaim against impressment, they are quiet enough on the point when they know that their lives and property depend upon sailors' exertions."

"Very true, Mr. Gascoigne, but it's not our fault if we are obliged to take men by force; it's the fault of those who do not legislate so as to prevent the necessity. Mrs. Oxbelly used to say that she would easily manage the matter if she were Chancellor of the Exchequer."

"I daresay Mrs. Oxbelly would make a very good Chancellor of the Exchequer," replied Gascoigne, smiling; "one thing is certain, that if they gave the subject half the consideration they have others of less magnitude, an arrangement might be made by which his Majesty's navy would never be short of men."

"No doubt, no doubt, Mr. Gascoigne; but, nevertheless, the king's prerogative must never be given up."

"There I agree with you, Mr. Oxbelly; it must be held in case of sudden emergency and absolute need."

"We'll argue that point by-and-by," replied Jack; "now let us consult as to our measures. My opinion is, that if I made