

# The DAY of the DUEL

## THE ARBITRAMENT OF ARMS

(A TRUE STORY)



THE SURGEONS RAN TO HIM.



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WAVING of brilliant colors, laughing faces and bright eyes began through Rue les Droits de l'Homme when the late afternoon sun flooded Valette in orange and gold. The massive, brooding battlements of the Maltese citadel took warmth to their sombre surfaces. Curtains were drawn aside in balcony windows. Vendors began to cry their wares. The hum of stirring street life rose in pitch and volume as a tempering breeze circled through the purple shadows, bringing the city to its real awakening for the day.

The two midshipmen from the American war vessel that had been lying for two weeks past in the harbor below drifted leisurely through the throng. Malta had not ceased to be a source of ever new wonder and delight to them, and as they walked they were alert to note every quaint detail of color, form and sound.

"Why do you hear to the right, Bainbridge?" asked O'Connor, the elder of the two, suddenly, as the other edged into the press. "It is more comfortable to stay with the procession on this side."

"You forget," said Bainbridge, with a laugh. "I must have the daily bottomline from 'Neste, my little flower girl—mine, I said, O'Connor." O'Connor frowned but offered no further objection. They tacked through the crowd and reached the outer fringe of the traffic to the right, close to the row of booths, where graceful, dark skinned Maltese maidens offered fruits, flowers, sweets and shells for sale.

They drew up at one of these booths, piled high with rich and fragrant blossoms of the islands, a wild riot of hues and scents. At the side of the stand stood 'Neste, who greeted them gayly, waving a slim hand at O'Connor and nodding with more familiarity to Bainbridge. Hers was the purest type of Maltese beauty, with soft, pleading Oriental eyes, delicate features and trim figure. With light, caressing touch she began to select their flowers herself, drolling the two young men in her broken phrases of English.

"No, Captain," she said, shaking her head decidedly at O'Connor, who sought to do his own selecting without reference to her; "I will give what shall be for you. Perhaps, now, a prickly pear, eh?" It was 'Neste's invariable plan, and not a bad one, to address all naval men as captain. She triumphed with it once more, for O'Connor gave over his clumsy effort with a short laugh.

"Here is for you, Captain Bainbridge," she went on, and held out a single white rosebud twined with a sprig of green.

"But what am I to do with it, 'Neste?" asked the boy in mock despair. "Carry it in my hands? I must, for I have no skill in wearing it."

It was the daily comedy. He would not hear her protests and so she must leave her booth and fasten the flower in his lapel herself, while he made no disguise of his admiration for her, and her olive cheeks took just the faintest flush. She wove three pendants, almost velvet black, for O'Connor.

"Because you look dark at me," she said, trying to imitate his disapproving mien. But he made no offer that she fasten his flowers into place, and she handed them to him with a little toss. As O'Connor moved away, after paying her, Bainbridge leaned toward the stand and whispered a phrase. Then he hurried after his companion. O'Connor had turned in time to see the incident.

They walked in silence through the city's busiest thoroughfare for some minutes. O'Connor was occupied with thoughts that made his only serious face in all that bewildering, shifting kaleidoscope. Bainbridge, with a smile upon his lips, paid no attention to the other's abstraction, finding employment in amused observation of costumes, houses and the figures of the streets. O'Connor's words came without warning.

"You're here meeting that girl," he said, and his mouth was set for opposition. The younger man turned to him, quick color sweeping to his handsome face.

"What's that to you?" he asked sharply. "Nothing to me, so far as she is concerned. But everything, so far as you are."

"Explain, please."

"Perhaps you haven't heard that Cochran, the English Secretary, has filed a prior claim," said O'Connor.

"That's all nonsense," returned Bainbridge, impatiently.

O'Connor took him up readily, as one who has planned for his speech. "Now look here, Joe, I'm not going to quarrel with you, but you ought to know the common report that Cochran is mixed up with this woman in some way. For Heaven's sake don't go and start a flirtation with her. What do you know about these people? They're three-quarters Arab and you can't understand them, nor they you. Cochran lives here. If he wants to make a fool of himself over a flower girl he knows how to manage it. Let him. I know you mean no harm, but he won't have trouble if you go on."

"What business is it of Cochran's, or yours, either?" returned the boy, hotly. "And she's not Arab, she's half Italian."

O'Connor could have smiled at the inconsequential defence had the affair not seemed too weighty. Meanwhile he was not exactly sure of the ground he stood upon. Joseph Bainbridge was to him as a brother and he meant to give advice whether or not it was asked or desired.

"Answer me plainly, Joe. You don't think you're in love with the girl, do you?"

"No, of course not."

"Well, then, don't you see what a light you're putting yourself in? There's only one construction

these people will put upon your actions, and only one Cochran will put upon it. Don't go any further with it, Joe. I don't quite understand myself what Cochran's interest is, but probably it's not much to his credit. It's no place for you, Joe."

"I'm quite capable of attending to my own affairs," said Bainbridge stiffly.

"Oh, very well. If you feel that way there's nothing more to say. I think I'll return to the landing."

**The Charm of 'Neste.**  
They parted with salutes and Bainbridge went on alone. The boy was a little uncomfortable. He had met the girl, had strolled among the shops and along the harbor with her. She attracted him and he saw no reason why he could not meet and admire a young woman here on the same footing that he would at a home port. 'Neste had the prettiest face and the nearest ankle in Malta, and if he chose to play sentiment before her, according to the ancient privilege of the mariner, why, what harm and whose affair? He decided that O'Connor was merely presuming on his two years' advantage in age. As for Cochran, a thin faced, arrogant person, whom he had met once or twice, he refused to believe that this or any other man had a right to say who should and who should not be the flower girl's admirer. But how had O'Connor learned so much? That puzzled him a little, for, while not ashamed of his attention to 'Neste, he had certainly not advertised it.

An hour after dark he waited for her on one of the narrow, precipitate streets down near the harbor. She was a little late, but presently she glided toward him, wrapped in a shawl or mantle of dark shade. He could not quite see her face in the faint light from a lamp over a doorway, but there was an air of uneasiness in her manner and her voice as she answered his gallant welcome. She glanced back over the way she had come.

"One would think you were afraid of something," he said, ruffled a little at her preoccupation. She spoke softly and he missed the usual tone of banter.

"And if I am, Captain?"

"Oh, if you are it does not become you."

"We cannot meet again here," she began hurriedly.

"Even now somebody sees us. Come, there is a house I know."

"But why should you be afraid?" he said, surprised and uneasy.

"I tell you, some one comes after me in the street here; I feel him."

He did not relish the situation; it seemed artificial, overstrained, to him. He sought to pass it off. "You are dreaming, 'Neste. Who would follow? Come. Let us climb to the Rue les Droits de l'Homme, where the lights are and every one can see us if they want to. Let them look. There's too much mystery about this to suit me."

She shrank back in terror when he caught her arm. "No, no, Captain! You do not know. It would be bad, very bad, for me and for you."

"What is this all about, 'Neste?" he cried, quite losing his patience. It was strange enough that O'Connor should have seen fit to warn him about the girl herself was acting as if they were engaged in some dark intrigue, eluding watchful and jealous guardians, like the figures in some penny romance. The boy's healthy mind resented the introduction of such a note into his relations with her.

She was peering at his vexed face intently. She did not answer for some minutes. "It is sure you know, Captain, what you have done, coming here, many times," she said, as one stating an evident fact.

"What I have done? No, I don't. What harm was there in it?" He had struck the centre of the matter there. She moved away from him and drew her shawl closer.

"Ah! Then it is true that you are a child," she said, her voice rising scornfully. "Yes, I think so. You not understand. You think 'Neste has not many, many who beg for a smile, a word. Oh no. You think she must be glad only to talk with you, like a child. I tell you some one comes after me, but you not understand. I tell you there are men, not children, who follow 'Neste. You cannot play with her like a boy."

Her fierce, tense words shocked him, revealing an attitude wholly foreign and strange. It was true that he could not understand all. But he saw, dimly, that his position was a false one, that he had taken steps which, to this girl's Eastern mind, meant things he had not dreamed of. It was his error. He knew now what O'Connor had meant.

Ordinarily the boy would have been angered by a taunt as to his youth. But from her it merely served to measure the distance between her point of view and his own. Hers was an atmosphere of intrigue, of mystery, of passions alien to him. He had merely treated her as he would some laughing, friendly, sensible fair one at home. His impulse was to drop the affair instantly. But one thing detained him. If it should chance to be true, as she had intimated, that she had run some danger in meeting him in this harmless way he must stand by her. It was absurd, of course, but he must clear that point.

**Did Not Understand Her.**  
"You are right, 'Neste," he said, slowly. "I was a child, as you mean it. I thought only to pass a pleasant hour with you, nothing more. Still, if there has been a misunderstanding somewhere that may make trouble I will offer all necessary explanations."

Her laugh was still sharper this time, but it did not sting him as she meant it should. If he did not understand her neither did she understand him. She had no conception of his motives.

"Run away, little child," she said. "It is goodbye, then, eh? I think you better go first; there is a big man coming now." And with this last thrust before he could detain her she glided away into one of the alleys that opened near at hand. He looked up the street, following her parting gesture. There was a figure moving there. It stopped under a light for a second, then it, too, passed out of sight into an alley.

The officers from the war vessel had purchased seats in the little theatre for the operatic performance the next evening. They were rowed ashore at dusk, resplendent in their glittering, close fitting uniforms, and climbed the endless stone stairs toward the upper town in chatting groups. Bainbridge was with O'Connor. He had found occasion to restore his old relations with the older man.

O'Connor had welcomed the move, though nothing had passed between them as to the cause of their difference, accepting the other's advances as a tacit admission that he had been right in his interference the day before.

They occupied adjoining seats in the theatre and at the close of the first act passed out into the miniature lobby for a breath of air. As they came through the doors a group of men at the left parted suddenly and a tall, thin featured man moved toward them. They did not notice him until, in passing, he jostled roughly against Bainbridge. The midshipman looked up quickly and recognized Cochran. He was about to protest, but the Englishman did not look back. Bainbridge was indignant.

"Did you see him?" he asked O'Connor.

"Yes; but it was probably an accident."

They walked slowly back and forth on the short promenade, falling into a discussion of political affairs at home. They did not see that Cochran was approaching again. Once more the Englishman jostled Bainbridge, thrusting him savagely with his shoulder and splashing the boy half way around. There was no possible explanation for it this time other than deliberate intention. There had been ample space for Cochran's passage. To make his purpose still plainer he stood sneering at Bainbridge openly.

**Seasoned for a Scrimmage.**

The boy, for all his slight weight, was clean muscled. The hard training of the sea had seasoned and toned him, and he was as light on his feet as some little wild animal of the woods. Before O'Connor could catch his arm he stepped directly in front of Cochran and drove his right fist into the Englishman's face. Cochran staggered back and fell awkwardly. Bainbridge stood ready to renew the attack when the other should rise, mouth firm set and eyes aglow with battle. But O'Connor and others of the officers who had been attracted by the uproar swept upon him and hustled him to one side.

Cochran rose slowly with the assistance of friends who had thronged about him. The crowd in the lobby had parted, some were pressing about one, some about the other of the antagonists. Across the open space toward the Americans presently walked a tall, elderly man of dignified appearance. His mission was obvious and O'Connor, after a few words with Bainbridge, went into the auditorium and returned with Stephen Decatur, who was then a lieutenant. Bainbridge had expressed the desire that Decatur act for him in the affair, and after a few words of explanation with Decatur he consented. He approached the elderly man and bowed. His bow was returned and the two walked to the street door, where they engaged in conversation.

There was no further disturbance during the evening, and on the way to the landing Decatur informed Bainbridge that he would meet Cochran's second for final arrangements on the following day. On the vessel once more O'Connor drew Decatur aside and gave him the history of the affair as he understood it.

"I've heard from some of the English officers here that Cochran has been almost out of his senses about the girl for months. He keeps a watch upon her at her flower stand and several men who have been friendly with 'Neste have been warned to keep away. I don't know what the relations are between him and the girl, nor does it matter. But this I do know—Joe quit her last night. I think he saw the truth in what I told him. And from early this morning until into this afternoon Lieutenant Cochran has been practicing with a pistol on the shore side of the harbor."

"Is Joe handy with firearms?" asked Decatur.

"Never shot at a mark in his life, sir."

"That explains a few things," said Decatur, peering the deck. "This second of Cochran's put in a subtle suggestion that I fix the distance at twelve paces. Probably Cochran supposed that Joe would challenge him on the spot when he jostled him. That would have left him free to set his own distance, which, as I gather from the wily second, is twelve paces. How did you learn this?"

"Two of the men on shore here saw him when they walked out in the morning and again in the afternoon."

Decatur met Cochran's second, Captain Overly, by appointment, at one of the hotels the following afternoon. They exchanged formal greetings and began at once a discussion of the preliminaries.

"My principal will fight with pistols, sir," said Decatur. Overly bowed and rubbed his hands.

"That is satisfactory, Lieutenant. At the usual distance, I suppose."

"I hardly know whether you would call it the usual distance, sir, but he will fight at four paces." The other started up in amazement and alarm.

"Four paces! Four! Why, my dear sir, that is nothing short of murder. Does your principal know nothing of these affairs? The meeting is to settle a point of honor, I take it, and the purpose is not butchery."

"My principal has been advised in this matter by me," returned Decatur, coldly. "As to the purpose of the meeting, my principal, as the challenged party, has decided that his own interests demand an opportunity for full satisfaction."

"But, my dear Lieutenant, I recognize, of course, that your principal is well within his rights. Still, I must insist that four paces leaves little or nothing to marksmanship or skill and everything to mere chance."

"Such is my understanding of it. I am glad to see that your judgment confirms my own. Now, Captain, as to the word of command"—And Decatur led the irritated Overly on to the remaining clauses of the agreement. It was decided that the duel should take place early the following morning at a certain point on the shore about five miles from Valette.

**First on the Ground.**

Bainbridge, with O'Connor, Decatur and a surgeon, left the vessel just at dawn. They were rowed outside the harbor and along the coast to a small bay, where they were able to make a landing. They found themselves the first on the ground, and during the interval of waiting Decatur talked with his midshipman principal.

"I did the best I could for you, Joe, in the distance. If you were further apart he would pick you off and you'd stand not the slightest chance. At four paces you are as good as he is."

"All I want is some kind of a fair chance at him, sir," said Bainbridge. He was cool, and his young, smooth face was set resolutely. Decatur looked him over approvingly.

"You'll do. I might have named outlasses, but he has inches over you in reach, besides a tougher frame. With your nerve as steady as it is now you can hit him. Here they come."

Cochran appeared overland with Overly and a military surgeon. The group halted near a clump of prickly pears a short distance off and the two seconds advanced to the middle of the ground. After salutations they proceeded to pace the distance with great care. When the marks were fixed the weapons, furnished by Decatur, were loaded. They were strong, heavy weapons of large calibre, carrying a three-quarter of an ounce ball. The barrels were rather shorter than was usual, a feature appropriate to close quarters.

As the principals moved toward their marks the members of both parties watched their actions and appearance closely. Cochran's face was his usual dead white, his eyes were steady and his steps deliberate. "A dangerous opponent," was O'Connor's quick comment to Decatur. Bainbridge appeared confident and at ease. His eyes flashed for a moment as they met those of his antagonist, and his friends knew that he would give a good account of himself that day.

"Now, gentlemen," said Decatur, when both were in position. "The word will be, 'One, two, three, fire, stop.' You will be at liberty to discharge your weapons at any time during the utterance of the five syllables. No shot may be fired after the word 'stop.' It is understood that a blow having passed the meeting shall continue until one is unable to continue, or both are disabled."

The weapons were handed to the duellists and the seconds stood aside. Decatur, who had won the right by toss, was to give the signal.

"Are you ready?" he asked. The sun was just rising and the keen rays cut sharply along the sparse vegetation of the stretch on which they stood, throwing long shadows from each figure. There was no tree to break the simple setting of sea and sky and sweeping hill. A light breeze made its gentle touch felt. Joseph Bainbridge took one swift, comprehensive glance about him. There was no fear in it, only the tribute from youth to life that had been sweet.

"Ready," he said.

"Ready," echoed Cochran, more hoarsely. His lips were drawn back a little into the faintest shadow of a smile.

"One—"

"Two—"

At the first word both men had brought their pistols to a level. At the second Cochran fired and the heavy report set the quills to swirling far down the shore. Bainbridge did not move.

"Three—"

The weapon of Bainbridge spoke. All eyes were turned upon Cochran, but his smile grew into a laugh on his lips. Both shots had gone wide. The men retained their places while the seconds reloaded. Cochran humming a tune under his breath and pausing to squint his eyes unconsciously at his adversary. He still bore the marks of the midshipman's blow on his face. Bainbridge, however, felt a relaxation of the tension he had been under and was aware of a sudden increase in confidence. The handling of his pistol and the knowledge that another man as well as he might miss at that distance gave him on ease he had missed before. Once more the weapons were handed to the duellists, who stood as close that each might count the other's breaths three more Decatur began.

"Are you ready?"

"Ready," they answered in unison.

"One—"

Two—three—fire! Then Bainbridge fired. Cochran threw up both arms, spun violently on his right heel and pitched over backward. The surgeons ran to him and raised him. They found that the bullet had passed through his head, killing him almost instantly.

Bainbridge walked for the last time through Rue les Droits de l'Homme three days after just before the vessel was to leave. He looked for 'Neste, but another girl stood back of her flower stand. He hesitated a moment, then addressed her in English. She shook her head. He tried French with better results.

"Neste. Oh, yes, she was well, or should be. Then Monsieur had not heard, not just the day before she had come away with a fat Spanish olive merchant. They had asked for Sicily. Would Monsieur like a bouquet? A white rosebud? Here."