

OLOFF THE PIRATE SERIES

8. Falcon in the Crow's Nest



GERRIE RADLOF

FALCON IN THE CROW'S NEST

by

GERRIE RADLOF

and

translated, proof-read and edited by
PIETER HAASBROEK

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by Gerrie Radlof

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SUMMARY

The Indian Ocean teems with danger and intrigue in Falcon in the Crow's Nest. Admiral Pierre de la Fonte, a rising star in the French navy, finds his mission to replace a controversial governor derailed when pirates seize the new governor and his daughter, the captivating Rynette du Bois. Honor-bound, de la Fonte sets out to rescue them, only to find himself ensnared in a web of pirate schemes far more complex than he imagined.

The most fearsome of these schemes is Oloff the Pirate. Oloff holds Rynette and her father for ransom. He is also the man set to take a message from the infamous Admiral of Deelen Bay, threatening war for protection fees. Caught between his duty to his nation, his growing feelings for Rynette, and the ruthless machinations of the pirate world, de la Fonte is forced into a difficult choice. Comply with the pirates' demands or risk Rynette's life. As de la Fonte grapples with this dilemma, Rynette finds herself a pawn in a dangerous game. Amidst ship battles, Rynette discovers a surprising connection to captain Black Freek that makes her question everything she knows about her past. Her heart becomes ensnared by a pirate who may be more than he seems.

But who is Oloff, really? Is he merely a ruthless pirate or a pawn of the Admiral of Deelen Bay. His every move seems to be dictated by a hidden agenda, a dangerous game with deadly consequences. Betrayal lurks at every turn, and shifting alliances blur the line between hero and villain. As the French fleet sails towards Pirates' Bay, it becomes clear that nothing is as it seems.

EXTRACT

A few minutes later, she left the dining room. In the passage in front of the door where they had carried her father, she lingered for a moment, and then she walked on. After she had closed the door behind her, she threw herself onto the couch in her sleeping cabin. With large, tearless eyes, she stared at the opposite bulkhead.

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8. FALCON IN THE CROW'S NEST

Chapter 1

Admiral Pierre de la Fonte stood against the railing of the flagship of the French fleet of six ships. He ground his teeth. The knuckles of his fingers showed white as he clenched the wooden railing.

Barely a mile from the fleet, the two ships sailed away with billowing sails. They were the Seewraak and the Jansje Meer of Oloff the Pirate, the most powerful and feared of all pirates on the Indian Ocean, and he, Admiral Pierre de la Fonte, stood powerless while this coveted prey sailed further and further away from him.

Then he fixed his gaze on the small boat that was being rowed closer to the flagship. In the stern of the skiff sat a young girl, and in front of her, wrapped in a white sheet, lay the corpse of her father.

Admiral de la Fonte turned his gaze to the mass of rock that rose from the sea like a beacon half a mile to his right. It was far from the regular sea routes, but he knew the place was called Beacon Island. Directly in front of him was a fissure between the cliffs that led to a tranquil bay, Pirates' Bay. Here, a pirate captain commonly known as Black Freek had established himself.

Six weeks ago, Admiral de la Fonte was peacefully en route to Pondicherry, the seat of the French governor in India. The current governor-general, Monsieur Joseph Dupleix, had in recent months appropriated too much power for himself and had clashed with the desires of the French court. He had been informed that he would be replaced by Bernhardt du Bois, and Admiral De la Fonte had been sent after him with the fleet to ensure that the changeover took place without resistance.

The small fleet had had favorable winds behind them, and Admiral De la Fonte had decided to sail up the east coast of Africa before crossing the Indian Ocean. He had called at Zanzibar, and here his voyage took a sudden turn. A few days before his arrival there, a letter had been delivered to the sultan's palace to be posted to France. This letter was handed to De la Fonte. By virtue of his position, he had opened it because he had been informed that it had been brought there by pirates, and that it would most likely be a ransom demand.

And so it was. Black Freek, the ruler of Pirates' Bay, had intercepted and sunk the ship on which Bernhardt du Bois and his daughter Rynette were en route to India. He had taken the nobleman and his daughter prisoner and was now demanding a fabulous ransom for their freedom. Pierre de la Fonte was a young man. He had rapidly risen in the navy, since his father was a powerful nobleman in France. He had immediately decided to tackle the task on his own, and as soon as he had established that the pirate ship had only departed a few days before, he had given chase.

During the night, he had arrived here at Beacon Island. He had arranged his ships in a fan formation before the gate and waited for dawn. He would have sailed in, but two things had made him decide against it. Firstly, he was informed by the boatswain, who was busy gauging the depth, that there were rock points below the sea surface. Secondly, they could ascertain from here that a fierce battle was raging inside Pirates' Bay, and De la Fonte was careful enough not to stick his nose into matters, the extent of which was completely unknown to him.

Barely half an hour later, two magnificent ships sailed out through the gate. At first glance, it must have been clear to them that the French fleet had completely surrounded them.

Then the coup de grace was delivered. The two privateer ships nonchalantly informed the fleet that they had Bernhardt and Rynette du Bois on board. The French must clear the way so that there was an opening for the pirate ships to pass through, or else the girl would also die, because the new governor-general of India was already dead.

For a moment, Admiral De la Fonte wrestled with this problem. The greatest honor would befall the man who succeeded in capturing or killing the dreaded Oloff, to whom he had determined the two ships belonged. But Oloff had Rynette du Bois in his power, and it was to free her and her father that Pierre de la Fonte had come here. Reluctantly, and with helpless fury, he had to comply with the pirates' request. A few of his ships sailed closer to the flagship, and a ship's boat was lowered to receive the corpse and the prisoner. The boat was met halfway by pirates, and Rynette and her deceased father were handed over.

Now De la Fonte stood and watched as the two privateer boats sailed

away from him. They were already out of range, and he had already decided with his expert eye that none of his ships would be able to catch up with the fleeing pirates.

De la Fonte took his hands off the railing. He balled his fists and then stuck them in the large pockets of his three-quarter coat. Like a dispirited caged animal, he paced back and forth across the deck, and then he awaited the ship's boat.

He himself helped to get Rynette du Bois on board. When she stood before him, he stared at her in amazement for a few seconds. Accustomed to the most beautiful of the fair sex at the court of France, he now came to the conclusion that he saw before him a young lady, the likes of whom he had never encountered before. Despite the fine red veins in the whites of her eyes, like those of someone who had wept bitterly, her dark brown eyes were calmly fixed on him. The dark circles around them did not detract from the perfection of her soft, slightly pale skin. Her fine, but aristocratic nose above the lightly trembling lips accentuated the nobility of her countenance, on which the deprivations of her abduction and the loss of her father had been unable to leave traces. Finally, he bowed deeply. With uncovered head, he said quickly, "Admiral Pierre de la Fonte, at your service, Miss du Bois."

She looked at him silently for a moment while the corpse of her father was brought on board. He could not be much older than thirty-five years. His sharp eyes and strong facial features contradicted the rich and ostentatious decorations on his admiral's uniform.

She nodded in acknowledgement of his greeting. Then she looked anxiously at her father's corpse.

"We will bury him at sea today, Miss," De la Fonte said in a subdued tone. "My deepest condolences."

Again, she nodded. She had not yet uttered a word.

"It would seem as though we arrived on the scene just in time?" De la Fonte resumed. "I assume that Captain Oloff..." He restrained himself when he involuntarily wanted to interject a few adjectives. "That he took you prisoner as part of his spoils?"

Again, she just nodded. He thought that she was tense and that confused emotions were making her uncertain of herself. He would have expected her to be quite relieved now that she was in safe hands.

“But I am being impolite!” he suddenly exclaimed. “Allow me to show you to your cabin. When you have rested and are so inclined, I would be delighted to invite you to enjoy breakfast with me.”

She followed him across the deck. They went into the quarterdeck, and he led her to a luxurious cabin in the admiral’s quarters. Afterwards, he went back on deck and conversed for a moment with the captain of the flagship. They decided to wait there until he had received full details from Rynette du Bois. He felt hesitant to sail into Pirates’ Bay.

She made her appearance at breakfast. He pulled out the chair for her when she sat down. He had arranged for them to be alone.

“You would naturally want to know why I and my fleet arrived here?” Before she could answer, he told her briefly how he had received the letter in Zanzibar and had come here in all haste. He felt that it would put her more at ease if he kept talking for the time being. “It looked as if a fierce battle was taking place in there?” he concluded. “I must tell you that I have no idea what happened and that it was quite a shock when I was so casually addressed by that pirate, Oloff. Perhaps you would do me the favor of explaining.”

“Of course, Admiral,” Rynette du Bois answered calmly, and there was a trace of melancholy in her soft voice that softened Pierre de la Fonte’s heart and made him realize for the first time in his life that ambition and status were not everything in the world.

“Black Freek,” she hesitated and then continued while looking him steadily in the eyes. “Black Freek intercepted the ship on which Father and I were en route to India. He took us prisoner and wanted a large ransom. He forced me to write that letter myself, but last night, this Captain Oloff, as they call him, suddenly descended on Pirates’ Bay. He shot Black Freek’s ships to pieces and took me and my father along with other spoils. It was when he saw that your fleet was blocking the gate that he used me to escape. Fortunately, or unfortunately, he was aware of Father’s identity and thought that he could reach an agreement with you for his own safety and freedom.”

Pierre de la Fonte sat silently for a while. It was as he had already inferred. For this girl’s life, he had let slip through his fingers the greatest opportunity that any man could be offered to achieve world fame, he had let Oloff the Pirate get away.

But when he looked at her again while she was busy nibbling at her food, he suddenly felt that it had been worthwhile. He had known many girls, but he had never loved one, and from the moment that he had seen the beautiful Rynette, Pierre had realized that a large part of his life was behind him and that a brand-new part lay before him.

“You say that Black Freek’s ships and Pirates’ Bay as a whole have been virtually destroyed?”

She nodded. She did not look up and did not elaborate on her answer.

“In that case, we will immediately continue our voyage to Pondicherry. We will have to go and inform Monsieur Duplex that your father will not be taking up his post. I will also have to take a report back to France. And I hope that it will not inconvenience you to accompany me. There isn’t really a choice.”

“Of course, Admiral. I understand.”

A few minutes later, she left the dining room. In the passage in front of the door where they had carried her father, she lingered for a moment, and then she walked on. After she had closed the door behind her, she threw herself onto the couch in her sleeping cabin. With large, tearless eyes, she stared at the opposite bulkhead.

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Eventually, Oloff had succeeded in destroying Pirates' Bay. During the attack, her father had been killed. Outside, the French fleet had been waiting for them, and Oloff had had to hand her over to save his own life.

And on his deathbed, her father had told her that she was only his adopted daughter! From a snippet here and there, she had come to the realization that she was in reality Black Freek's daughter!

With these secrets, she had to enter her future, the wife of a pirate, the daughter of a pirate. She who had grown up in the finest civilization, in the greatest luxury at the court of France, she with the status of a noble lady, Oloff's wife and Black Freek's daughter!

On the edge of the perpendicular cliffs, at the foot of which gigantic breakers crashed over the fragmented rock blocks, Black Freek sat huddled like one of the black sea-divers. The spray beat against his dark bearded face, and his black eyes were drawn into slits. Through the mist before him, he beheld the six ships of the French fleet.

Far to his right sailed the Seewraak and the Jansje Meer. They were the ships of Oloff the Pirate, Oloff who had escaped with Rynette du Bois and her father.

It had still been dark when the attack on Pirates' Bay had been launched. Black Freek's ships had been destroyed in one fierce blow. When the battle had started on shore and Black Freek had realized that the odds against them were overwhelming, he had fled. He had clambered up at the only place where one could get to the top of the rock mass from the cliffs. From here, he had seen in the light of the flames of his burning ships how the settlement in Pirates' Bay was reduced to rubble.

It had been difficult to discern who their attackers were. But at daylight, he had seen the French fleet and assumed that it was them. Not far from there were Oloff's two ships. He had seen the ships' boats being rowed to each other, and he could make out that a girl was being transferred from one to the other.

It would be Rynette du Bois. Black Freek had enough imagination to infer that Oloff, whose ships had been at hand to get away with Rynette and her father, had also been trapped by the French. He cackled with laughter. Then Oloff had also been taken in after all!

Now he fixed his attention on the fleet. Only when the sails were

unfurled and they sailed away stately in an easterly direction did Black Freek climb wearily down the cliffs. A boat was bobbing along a rock ledge. He used this to row ashore.

Among the smoldering ruins, the survivors walked around aimlessly. Black Freek called to a few of his officers, and after hours of deliberation, they started to build screens for shelter and went to the food supplies to determine how long they would be able to hold out here.

Black Freek's fleet had been destroyed, except for the ship of one of his captains, Valkenharm. Valkenharm had left Pirates' Bay the previous day with a message for the admiral of Deelen Bay, the main seat of the pirate community of the Indian Ocean. Valkenharm should return within a week or so, and then Black Freek would take his revenge.

Years ago, he had been a respected citizen of England. He had married a noblewoman, and they had had one little girl. Then he had been falsely accused of murder and sentenced to death. He had escaped, only to discover that his wife had not been able to endure the shame and the sorrow, and that she had taken her own life. He could not find his daughter anywhere. This second setback had made him harbor a grudge against the whole world.

As a pirate, he had eventually landed in Deelen Bay. He had quickly risen until he had two ships of his own, but he had become dissatisfied with the heavy-handedness of the giant of a man who called himself the Admiral of Deelen Bay and who had established himself as the sole ruler of the pirate nest on the west coast of Madagascar.

With a few captains who had been willing to follow him, Black Freek had come to entrench himself here in Pirates' Bay, a hundred miles north of Madagascar. From here, his ships had sailed out over the sea and had returned with rich cargoes of spoils. He had been successful, and his treasures had increased rapidly. Everyone had accepted that there was only one for whom Black Freek had to stand back, Captain Oloff. Oloff who had taken Rynette from him, the girl who had the eyes of his wife, who could just as well have been his own daughter.

He walked to the cliffs behind the place where his house had stood. Here, his huge treasures were walled up in caves.

With this, he would be able to buy as many ships as he might ever need.