

OLOFF THE PIRATE SERIES

22. The Yellow Dragon



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THE YELLOW DRAGON

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SUMMARY

When Pascal da Gamba brings unsettling news to the notorious pirate Susa Bizerta, known as the Yellow Dragon, a chain of events is set in motion that will forever alter the fate of the Madeod clan. The Yellow Dragon's obsessive desire to claim his birth right, a birth right denied him because of his mixed heritage. That drives him to dark deeds, and when a potential union threatens his aspirations, he unleashes a tide of violence that will leave readers on the edge of their seats.

Caught in the crosshairs is Anna Madeod, a woman of fiery spirit and captivating beauty, who finds herself at the center of a dangerous game of power and betrayal. As the shocking truth about Bizerta's past is revealed, Anna becomes a pawn in a deadly struggle, forced to flee for her life while trying to unravel the mysteries that have haunted her family for generations. In her darkest hour, a surprising ally emerges. Oloff, a pirate with a checkered past, intercedes to save Anna from the Yellow Dragon's sinister plot. This enigmatic figure, driven by his own personal vendetta, reveals to her a truth that shatters everything she thought she knew about her family and the forces at play. Bound together by a shared danger and a growing attraction, Anna and Oloff embark on a perilous journey, seeking to expose the Yellow Dragon's treachery and reclaim what is rightfully theirs.

As Oloff and Anna draw ever closer to confronting the Yellow Dragon, they will discover that the greatest battles are fought within, and the price of victory may be higher than they ever imagined. But even as the odds seem stacked against them, both will realize there is far more at stake than power or revenge; it is survival, it is love, it is the very soul of the Hebrides that hangs in the balance.

EXTRACT

Suddenly she sat upright, and Oloff swung around to take her arm so that she would not possibly tip out of the nook. She looked up and smiled sheepishly.

“I didn’t know where I was at first.”

She stretched herself out. For the first time, Oloff saw her up close in the bright light. Whether she became aware of the sudden admiration in his eyes, he did not know, but a slight blush appeared on her cheeks, and she looked away from him. Yet it seemed to him as if there had also been a flicker in her gaze when she looked around a moment ago while their faces were barely a foot apart. Her red hair was deliberately smeared with dirt, but he had had the opportunity to wash his face before he left the inn the previous evening. He had often felt uncomfortable when girls or women looked at him like that. Apparently, they found his strong, regular features attractive. Although his physique appeared slender, he had broad shoulders, and he was covered in hidden muscles that only became visible with every movement but could tense up like steel when he wanted to use his full strength. Now he felt slightly stiff because he had been sitting in the same position for so long and did not want to move for fear of possibly waking Anna.

“I’m just going to look around a bit first, Anne,” he said softly.

“Wait here.”

22. The Yellow Dragon

Chapter 1

With a strong easterly wind behind it, the swift two-masted sloop shoots over the breakers at the mouth of the inlet, then glides across the calm waters of the harbor. The young captain stands by the railing. His neat figure contrasts sharply with the dirty, slovenly attire of the crew. His alert eyes are anxiously fixed on the stone castle high on the cliff above the deepest part of the inlet.

He is aware that the crew is watching him. They are waiting for the order to take in the sails. But Pascal da Gamba desires as much speed as possible until the very last moment. The helmsman swings wildly at the rudder to steer the sloop deftly between the dozen large ships that lie at anchor there.

Barely fifty paces from the wooden quay, Da Gamba sends the men up the masts. At a further command, a few of the men spring to work to lower the ship's boat.

From the inn near the beach, a stable boy comes running with a saddled horse. Lightly, Da Gamba swings into the saddle and kicks the animal hard in the flanks. With clattering hooves, the horse races away through the village at full speed.

The road winds up a densely overgrown ravine. On either side, the steep slopes rise. In several places along the inlet, it runs into perpendicular cliffs, and there are only two places by which the thin strip of beach and the village at the tip of the inlet can be reached overland. It is a natural fortress fortified by a series of batteries on both sides of the mouth of the inlet, and it is the headquarters of the notorious Susa Bizerta, the pirate known as the Yellow Dragon.

Halfway up the ravine, the road turns sharply to the left and cuts diagonally along the slope towards the front of the cliff. As if nature had intended to provide for the erection of an impregnable fort, the upper half of the cliff has been shifted to form a broad rock ledge. On this ledge, Bizerta has built his massive stone castle. The front parapet is level with the vertical precipice, and behind it, the courtyard stretches against the cliff. On the right, the ledge ends completely, but on the left, it continues for about a carriage width to where it joins the road against

the slope.

The horse's hooves clatter like gunshots on the smooth rock, and Da Gamba races through the large arch, which is the only entrance to the castle. In the backyard, he swings out of the saddle, and a stable boy rushes closer. Already, the captain hurries up the stairs to the main entrance. A porter in tasteful livery bows politely as he opens the door while Da Gamba is still running across the broad stone stoop.

Then his shoes sink into the thick carpet. Inside these stone walls, it is deathly quiet, for not a footstep is heard in the castle. Da Gamba comes to a standstill for the first time since he set foot on shore. However eager he may be to reach his leader and however urgent his message may be, he knows what the consequences will be if he storms into the presence of the mighty Bizerta unannounced.

With his own eyes, he had witnessed what had happened to one of the Yellow Dragon's servants when the poor fellow was so unwise as to simply push the door open and enter the room where Da Gamba and Bizerta were conversing. Bizerta had calmly inquired what the servant wanted, and when he was informed that the food was on the table, Bizerta had thanked him, pulled a loaded pistol from under his jacket, and shot him point-blank in the chest. Then he had nonchalantly continued the conversation while ringing a bell and summoning a few servants to remove the corpse. Da Gamba had not really enjoyed the meal that had been announced by the deceased, but Bizerta had devoured it with a healthy appetite.

That is why the young captain is now waiting. Bizerta's moods are unpredictable, and if Da Gamba finds him in one of his less cheerful states of mind, his fate will not be much different from that of the servant.

But already a footman has rushed past him. Just as the horse had been ready for him down in the harbor town, they had also been expecting him here and are not wasting a moment to ensure he reaches his destination.

The footman knocks politely. A hard but refined voice calls him inside. "Captain Pascal da Gamba to speak to you, Highness," announces the servant.

The captain has to suppress a smile. Since he was last here, Bizerta has

already elevated himself again. His servants must now address him as “Highness”, previously it was Excellency. One of these days, it will most likely be Your Majesty.

But he did not hesitate. He hastily enters the large sitting room. It is luxuriously furnished, and the wall coverings are rich and of the most expensive material. Bizerta lives like a king and rules his household with an iron hand.

“Ah, Pascal!” exclaims the Yellow Dragon in surprise, although Da Gamba knows all too well that Bizerta had been watching him through a telescope since he had sailed into the inlet. The large windows look out over the harbor. “I am delighted to see you!”

With a firm handshake, he asks the young captain to take a seat.

Bizerta’s complexion is yellow, like that of an Oriental. Although his cheekbones are slightly high, his eyes are round and cold like those of a snake. He is short of stature but has broad shoulders and strong arms and legs. His attire is almost extravagant. With his head tilted slightly to one side and his hands on his hips, he stands comfortably on the high, sharp heels of his shoes. He appears to be in a good mood.

“I came as quickly as possible,” explains Da Gamba after greeting him. “And what tidings do you bring?” Only now is the tension in the Yellow Dragon noticeable. Da Gamba feels relieved because Bizerta’s unconcerned friendliness had slightly unsettled him, he wanted to feel that the task he had carried out was of vital importance.

“It is as we heard, Susa,” he says, therefore, with exaggerated seriousness. He is only a young captain in Bizerta’s mighty privateer fleet, but he is one of the chosen few who may call the Yellow Dragon by his first name.

“What is as we heard?” The smile around Bizerta’s lips has disappeared. For Da Gamba, the room had suddenly become cold. “Graham MacKenzie is on his way,” he says slowly.

Bizerta’s facial muscles twitch. For a moment, he glares at the young captain as if the hatred that is rising up in him is directly aimed at him. Da Gamba flinches slightly.

“Then it is so!” the Yellow Dragon hisses through clenched jaws. With balled fists, he turns and walks to the window. His back is still turned to Da Gamba when the outburst comes. He hurls his anger at the wide

world. "Then this is how he tries to rob me of my inheritance and my birth right! Me!" he bellows, "me, Susa Bizerta, am his rightful heir! I am the future head of the Madeod clan. I will claim what is mine. Do you understand that!" Threateningly, Bizerta swings around as if Da Gamba had contradicted him.

But the young captain sits motionless. He keeps his expression stern, for he does not dare risk showing any emotion, lest he strike a wrong chord.

"I tell you he will not take my birth right from me!" Bizerta continues to scream. "He shoved me aside when I was a helpless baby, but now he will not succeed again. He, Evan Madeod, my own father, kicked my mother out of his house when I was an infant, me, his firstborn, his only son, his blood! He had roamed the world when he was a young man. Of the thousands of women he had met, he chose my mother.

But his parents did not want to approve the marriage, she was not good enough for a Madeod. And he, the weakling, denied the marriage and cast her aside!"

He hesitates, but still, Da Gamba says nothing. He knows the story. The Madeods are a proud family. Of all the Scottish clans, they are the strongest, to such an extent that they can even defy the throne. Of course, they would not readily want a chief with a Chinese wife.

"But I have returned," continues Bizerta ominously. "I approached him, and he denied that I was his son. But today, he fears me. I have a mighty fleet, and on the open sea, I have amassed a fortune. I have the entire coast in a stranglehold.

And that is not all, thinks Da Gamba. Bizerta's privateers hide in the rocky inlets on the west coast of the northernmost island of the Hebrides. From here, he strikes at the merchant ships, and here he returns again. With a network of spies, he has the entire coastal region in an iron grip.

"And why does Evan not try to drive me away?" Bizerta calms down slightly. "He has a guilty conscience. He fears me. He sits there inland, and he trembles when he hears of me." Again, he raises his voice. "And now? Now he wants to palm that daughter of his off on a MacKenzie. The MacKenzies are the largest clan on the Mainland. He wants to unite the two families because he is afraid of me, so afraid that he is keeping

his intentions secret. For he knows that as soon as I hear of it, I will crush him and take by force what is mine!”

Again he swings to the window. “And I am not ready yet. If it were not for that damned scum of the sea, that arch-traitor, Oloff the Pirate, I would today have had the wealth and power of the kingdom of Sarovia at my disposal.”

He stands for a long time now with bowed head. Da Gamba knows what bitter blow Oloff the Pirate had dealt Bizerta. He startles when Bizerta storms up to him and stops a pace in front of him, standing with his legs apart.

“We leave immediately, Pascal.” His tone is commanding. His musings, curses, and anger have left him. He is now the man who inspired awe and fear in his followers with his decisive and relentless action. “Every coastal town must be watched. I want to know when and where he comes ashore. I want to know what path he takes. You and fifty select men must accompany me. I think our friend Graham will try to pay his courtship visit with as little fuss as possible. He will want to slip unnoticed to the safety of my father’s castle.” Bizerta’s mouth corners curl downwards. “Safety! They may feel safe, surrounded by their loyal clansmen, but they will soon realize their mistake. Make arrangements.”

Da Gamba jumps up. He rushes out. Moments later, he is racing down the ravine.

Within an hour, he is riding at a trot on horseback alongside the luxurious carriage in which Susa Bizerta leans alone against the soft leather cushions. Behind them, fifty riders are thundering along the road.

Near the border of Evan Madeod’s vast estate, but still a good few hours’ journey from his castle, Bizerta and his company set up camp in a sheltered ravine. Guards are posted along the road in case messengers come looking for them, and the Yellow Dragon relaxes on the grass in front of his tent. The storm in him has subsided, and only the relentless determination to achieve his goal remains.

Early in the morning, two days after their departure, Bizerta receives word that Graham MacKenzie is on his way directly to Evan Madeod in a light carriage with only two outriders. Bizerta smiles

contemptuously. With Pascal and five other men, he rides to the inn in a village barely four kilometers further along the main road. They wait in the taproom. Here inland, there are few who will recognize him.

A light carriage stops in front of the inn. Through the window, Bizerta can see the young man inside. He is alone. The Yellow Dragon nods in satisfaction.

Graham MacKenzie springs nimbly out and enters the taproom. He inquires whether he is still on the right road to Evan Madeod and strikes up a conversation with the innkeeper. Bizerta does not listen.

At his leisure, he walks outside. The carriage is around the corner of the inn by the stable. Fresh horses are apparently being harnessed. Almost immediately, the opportunity presents itself for him to climb unnoticed into the vehicle, lift the seat of the front bench, and ascertain that there is enough space for him. He lies on his back and slides the cushion over him again. In his left hand, he has a pistol, in his right hand he holds a knife. MacKenzie will sit on the back bench so that he can look out of the window forward.

Ten minutes later, the coach body is rocking on the strong leather straps, and the iron-clad wheels grind through the sand tracks. Bizerta had listened carefully. MacKenzie had climbed in alone.

Two hours pass slowly. He hears the clatter of the horses' hooves and the rumble of the wheels as the carriage goes through a shallow ford, barely a kilometer from Evan Madeod's castle. At this point, they are hidden from the castle by a low hill.

"Halt or we shoot!" This is Da Gamba's loud command. The carriage comes to a stop. The coachman and the two outriders will not resist, for they are now staring into the barrels of six pistols.

Bizerta hears the shuffling here close to his ear. Naturally, MacKenzie is now peering out the window.

"You, inside the carriage," commands Da Gamba, "Stick your head and shoulders out of the window so that we can see what you are doing."

Bizerta does not wait any longer. Carefully, he lifts the long cushion above him. MacKenzie's attention is outside, and he will not notice the movement behind him.

Bizerta slips out. MacKenzie is leaning far over the window sill. "Where are you headed?" Da Gamba wants to know.

“To Evan Madeod,” the coachman answers, startled. “Who is all in the carriage?”

“Just a visitor, Mr. MacKenzie.”

“Oh.” Da Gamba sounds quite friendly. “We are looking for a bunch of highwaymen. We saw them in the area a while ago. You two!” he calls to the outriders, “We advise you to go ahead and scout. Do it immediately.” To reassure them, Da Gamba waves. “We are sorry that we had to stop you. Have a good journey.” Without further ado, he and the five pirates ride their horses into the woods.

With a sigh, MacKenzie sits back. When the knife blow strikes him from behind, Bizerta clamps his hand over the man’s mouth so that he cannot utter a sound. Then he presses the limp body into the corner so that he remains sitting upright. He takes a piece of paper out of his pocket and puts it in MacKenzie’s lap.

When the carriage moves off, he looks carefully out the window. The two outriders are riding a little ahead and are not looking back. Bizerta slips out of the door and dives behind a bush right next to the road. Here he lies defenseless until the carriage has disappeared over the crest of the hill. Then he smiles cheerfully and goes through the ford to the place where Pascal is waiting for him.