

At the
Dry Tortugas
During the War



by **Emily Holder**

Part Five

The first of May another steamer arrived the North, bringing two hundred and eighty prisoners from the Army of the Potomac. It was discouraging, but the military prisons were overflowing at the North, and there was not time to investigate and sift them out, so those really deserving imprisonment, and those confined for trivial offenses, came together, a motley, sorry-looking crowd.

To our delight, another norther visited us, with the thermometer going down to sixty-seven degrees, We hailed each one as a reprieve, for we rarely had them so late, and each one shortened the long summer.

The birds came again and we went on the ramparts to hear them, as the noise distinctly reach us, and we could see the dark cloud they made as they hovered over Bird Key. At the same time we feasted on mutton and beef, brought by a supply boat, and it was the turtle season, too, so that we lived on the fat of the land for awhile.

The last of May the heat commenced in earnest, coming to stay, and our outings were all upon the water. We remained indoors until five, then the boats were out, and for three hours we enjoyed the sailing.

We made our first trip to Bird Key bringing away fully three hundred eggs. The workmen had long since discontinued their work on the fortifications, and the birds had undisputed possession of the island.

It was very exciting, the birds were in such vast numbers, paying very little attention to us until we shouted, when they would for a second cease their chatter, and with a simultaneous scream that was deafening, rise looking like a dark cloud hovering over the island, and then return to their nests, not for the purpose of covering their eggs, as the sun was the incubator, but they fed the little helpless things with fish most faithfully.

The seventh of June found us again on the way to Key West, leaving a party on the wharf who had regretfully said good-bye as taking two ladies away interfered sadly with our little society.



The trip was very tedious, for we were becalmed part of the night and all day, drifting, and the captain's account of a similar time when he drifted way beyond Key West and did not get back for two weeks, when he was greeted as a shipwrecked marine was not reassuring.

But the day wore on without a breath of wind; the sun was like glass reflecting the heat until our faces were blistered.

We saw no sail or steamer until just before dark one day, a tug came in sight, which we knew must be in search of us; in the course of half an hour it came alongside, and Captain McFarland's cheery voice called out to know if we wanted a line. When he came board our welcome must have been an assurance of our appreciation of his efforts. He said: "I concluded you must be drifting around somewhere in this part of the Gulf, and as there was no sign of a breeze we started out, not expecting to go more than half way, but the tug will take us in before midnight."

By eleven we reached the wharf to find the steamer Admiral in but the passengers were too worn out to go on her, and so waited for the Patapsco, which was expected in a few days. The next day found us comfortably settled at Captain McFarland's, as his family had gone North a few weeks before, and he had room for all the party, and the few days of waiting were very pleasant ones.

Mrs. Hook called in the morning, asking us all to the barracks to tea, and Captain Hook told us that she was going North with my sister and Mrs. Holgate.

Captain Hook was very earnest about it, although we could see that his wife was consenting very reluctantly to leave him, yet if she were going, the opportunity was one to be considered. I remember the evening as being exceptionally beautiful, and General Woodbury, who had joined us, proposed a walk on the piazza, during which he talked of his family, the life at Tortugas and its quiet happiness, in a way that, as I looked back upon it a few weeks later, seemed almost prophetic.

The next evening at Captain McFarland's we had an impromptu reception.

The Admiral and his staff, Mr. Butterfield, the British Consul, Doctor Van Riper, Captain Ralph Chandler, Captains McCauley and Bowers, Captain and Mrs. Hook, the Misses Furgerson and Bethel and Doctor Mitchel, in fact, all our friends came to say good-bye to my sister. It was long remembered as such a happy time, with no foreshadowing of the sorrow that was so soon to follow.

The next morning while we were at breakfast Captain and Mrs. Hook came in; he on his way to the Fort where he spent part of each day, and she to tell us that she had a



reprieve. She had promised faithfully that if Captain Hook would allow her to remain two weeks longer, until the next steamer, she would go willingly and there was a joy in her face that told its own story. Was it inspiration that had brought this change of plan? Certainly it was a kind Providence.

Mrs. Holgate and my sister left in the Patapsco that evening, and I went to Mrs. Hook to remain until the boat left for Tortugas the following night.

We had a quick trip down, and the following day the Nightingale came in bringing seventy more prisoners.

The Tortugas on her return trip brought the news that Captain Hook was stricken down with yellow fever and the Nightingale which came in two days later brought the sorrowful news that our dear friend whom I left as well as usual only one week before, had succumbed to that terrible disease that we had all felt in his condition, he bore a certain immunity from contracting.

Had Mrs. Hook gone North as was at first planned, her first news would have been of her husband's death, and perhaps in those days of irregular mails it might have been two weeks before the sad news reached her.

She went on the next steamer, but under what different circumstances.

Reports abroad of the havoc made by the increase of the epidemic, shut us off from the world again, and it was with dread that we saw the schooner Tortugas come in.

The break-bone fever made its appearance again with us.

The Colonel and his wife were among the first victims and few escaped; my son succumbed, then the Doctor, who could not give up to it, and who went about doing the best he could, obtaining a few hours' rest whenever the opportunity offered, until finally the whole island became one immense hospital.

The heat was intense, the silence oppressive beyond description; there were no soldiers for drill or parade and the gloom was indescribable.

We were all ill at the same time with no physician; five hundred at one time would scarcely cover the list of those ill with the fever; thirty out of one company and all its officers, while those who were able to move about looked like ghosts.

The mercury was one hundred and four degrees in the hospital. As each one rallied they would visit those still in bed; but no one seemed to gain vitality sufficient to throw off the feeling that we were in some horrible nightmare. The disease was very prostrating and for days we had only the stewards to depend upon who were hosts in themselves. My



husband's steward remained with us nights inside the Fort and the steward of the One Hundred and Tenth was invaluable in his skill, attention and kindness; but it was terrible beyond description, to be hemmed in by those high, literally red-hot brick walls with so much suffering sickness. I could look from my window and see the piazza, with beds brought out hoping for a breath of air to fan the burning brow and fever-parched lips; there was nothing to brighten the cloud of despair that seemed to encompass the island.

The mail school, Tortugas, came down but was put in quarantine for eight days. The yellow fever was raging with great fatality in Key West even the old acclimated residents succumbed to it. The ships put out to sea.

In the midst of all this, news reached us that General Woodbury and Captain McFarland were ill with the fever and the painful suspense waiting for the delayed sailing vessels added to our depression, for vessels avoided us; no steamer came near us except Captain Craven with his Monitor en route for Mobile. He spent all the time he could with us. Fortunately, it happened just after the Doctor's illness. Captain Craven brought all the latest news from Washington, but he seemed less cheerful than when he was with us before and talked constantly of his wife and children. Was it a premonition of the dark shadow hanging over him? He brought their pictures up for us to see and after the vessel had coaled he invited the Doctor and myself on board to lunch with him. I remember as we stood in the turret of the curious-looking half boat half sea monster, I said "If this should go down how could you escape?"

He replied, "We should run up this ladder and jump from the top of the turret." My heart gave a little shiver as I said, "I trust you will not be obliged to resort to that." He was ordered to the monitor Techumsah while a vessel that he was to be given the command of was being made ready, as the fight at Mobile was not expected to occupy much time.

We watched her steam out of the harbor and until it was a mere speck on the top of the water, our hearts heavy with a premonition of coming sorrow.

And it came, first, when the mail boat came in with the heart rending news of the death of our dear friend, General Woodbury.

Doctor Mitchel, who came down to visit us, was not well and looked worn and pale, but had he remained, we could not help feeling that he might have lived; yet, on the other hand, had he been taken with genuine yellow fever, at Tortugas, it might have been the spark that in our deplorable condition would have devastated the island.



He returned to Key West, finding that my husband was able to attend to the hospital and the next boat brought a note from Captain McFarland telling us that his work was ended in less than a week from the time he left us, just as his “leave” expired from his own, the British navy, and his resignation had been accepted from our army which came and was read to him within an hour of his death.

We began to dread the incoming of the mail, fearing what might come next. We were weak and depressed enough to be almost superstitious. The next news was the sad fate of Captain Craven. The Monitor was blown up in making the charge with Farragut in Mobile Bay; and so died one of the most chivalrous men of our navy. Captain Craven was a man of courtly presence, and his curtsey was the direct cause of his death. When the torpedo exploded beneath the Monitor, they felt her going and instinctively rushed for the turret, as he had told us he would do. As Craven reached the foot of the companion way, another man, I believe the pilot, reached it just behind him. The Monitor was then making the final plunge and there was time for one to spring out and only one. Craven stepped back, saying, “After you, sir”. The other sprang through the opening and the commander went down, caught in the whirl of waters that burst through the hatch.

All of these men were intimate and valued friends, and their deaths followed each other so rapidly, for it was not six weeks since the death of Captain Hook, that it was not strange that it was impossible to throw off the gloom which hung over us like a pall.

People finally began to rally but very slowly, and the lethargy we had fallen into from all this sorrow and sickness was hard to shake off. I remember going out sailing, to meet the Tortugas, on the ninth of September for the first time in three months.

After awhile the ladies began to visit, getting together with their sewing, gradually falling into their old habits in a quiet, subdued way; with the feeling one has after watching with sickness so long they tread and speak softly as though the object of their care was still with them. My husband now took the entire medical charge of the prisoners; his sympathies were aroused when he treated them during the illness of the regimental doctor, and he found them in a terrible condition from the effects of scurvy. His first inspection occupied five hours, and every corner of their quarters and every man was examined. He found nearly two hundred with the loathsome disease, many too ill to rally. Fortunately, the officers were only too glad to second any efforts he wished to make, and the idea of having some one specially interested in them was to them a ray of hope. He called for a new clean building, taking them out of the casemates and sent for all the limes



Key West could provide. He found in the commissary stores dessicated vegetables which the doctor should have given them before, had he understood the nature of the disease.

He sent men to the islands to gather parsley, which grew there in abundance; had it boiled as a vegetable and they ate it with vinegar, and soon new life was installed into the wretched miserable lot of men. Yet there were many to whom all this came too late. We were now in a deplorable condition. All vessels avoided us as though the island was a pest-house; the gunboats had been ordered away and our isolation was complete.

The coming in of the U. S. S. Galena, with its pleasant officers, seemed to be just the stimulus we needed to break the spell the events of the past summer had woven about us, and we made a desperate effort at sociability. The officers were entertained by those on the island, and a fishing party made up for all who wished to go out into the gulf. The officers of the Galena gave an entertainment on board ship. It was moonlight, so bright and clear that every rope and spar was visible, and the gaily decorated steamer made an exceedingly picturesque all room. It was an evening we looked back upon with extreme pleasure. The officers had left nothing undone, and we lingered into the small hours, rowing back in the soft, cool night, with the feeling that the cloud had lifted and this was a beginning of brighter days.

On the sixteenth of September a steamer arrived with seventy prisoners, and the news confirming the truth of the report of Sherman's characteristically modest dispatch; "Atlanta is ours and fairly won," on the second of September. Such news gave us hope that the end of the war might be near.

The first dress parade after so many weeks of quiet occasioned great excitement. All the ladies went out under the trees to show the soldiers their delight at their recovery and return to duty. On the eighteenth the Galena returned. Captain Wells and Doctor Wright took tea and spent the evening with us—a commonplace item to read, but to us then an event of importance.

The adjutant, Mr. Lowe, came over the morning following to ask us to join a party at Loggerhead, but we were engaged to dine on board the steamer—a greater pleasure, for it was almost like going from the island, where we had begun to feel the restraint of being prisoners in our own homes. I wondered if Captain Wells realized the pleasure he was giving us. Hardly, as he could not understand what the past four months had been to us; and as there was so little variety in the way of food, that even a Bermuda potato savored of feasting, and the very thought of cooking unlike our own, away from the inside of the sun-reflecting brick walls, was appetizing.



During the autumn, New Orleans steamers stopped occasionally at the island, and our three boats—Nonpareil, Tortugas and Matchless—kept us in communication with the outside world.

The nineteenth brought the steamer Merrimac with the news of the re-election of Lincoln, which gave great rejoicing. It brought a large mail and one hundred and thirty more prisoners. We could not but wonder what the people of the North considered the capacity of Fort Jefferson, bounded by the sea on all sides, but the new-comers were made comfortable, as it was cool weather.

The northers followed each other at short intervals. My husband went to Key West on business, and during his absence the mercury went down to fifty-four degrees, and people went about with their hands in their pockets and heads bent forward, as if they were breasting a northern snow storm.

The gulf took on a cold, leaden color, and every one felt the benefit of the bracing change of temperature.

The New Orleans steamer now brought a few prisoners whom we took great interest in, as we understood their confinement to be a temporary affair. They were cotton brokers, and one of them especially attracted our attention. He used to sit under the trees in front of our quarters, looking so sad and dejected that one day my son approached him. He found that the man had a little boy about his age, and it led to many conversations about him and his home which enlisted all his sympathies, and I had no doubt were equally helpful to the stranger.

Very much to our satisfaction, these last prisoners were sent back to New Orleans in a few weeks. Many of them committed to their misdemeanors through ignorance or unwillingness to submit to an over-bearing superior, who might have been a companion or neighbor, but who, invested with the brief authority, had not learned the art of using it wisely.

The doctor had such a nice appearing man (although they were all called boys) that I asked my house boy Ellsworth if he knew what crime the other had committed, as he was perfectly temperate and trustworthy. The reply was in the Yankee dialect peculiar to him: "Well you see he was in the first battle of Bull Run, and when the commanding officer gave the order to retreat, he never stopped 'till he got clear to Vermont; and you see, that was a leetle too fur." I understood. Desertion in the early part of the war was treated more leniently than in those later days, and he could well be content with his punishment.



After awhile I had to change “boys” again, and Ellsworth advised my taking a friend of his named Charley. Many of them, I imagined, enlisted under fictitious names. “Charley” was a great stout fellow, weighing two hundred, who proved to be a treasure in many ways. As he was rather modest, he consequently often astonished me with some new talent in his capacity of cook and housework generally. One day I surprised him sewing, and asked him the secret of his many accomplishments.

He told me that his mother had no daughter; that they lived in the country, and she had taught him to do almost everything, and he had found it of great service while in the army. He blushed like a girl, while he admitted that he could sew very well, but he preferred to do other things.

The Nightingale on her return trip brought General Newton and Doctor Cormick, with the colonel of the regiment, on their way to Cedar Key on a tour of inspection, and they invited my husband to accompany them. He had wished very much to go up the coast, and needed the change after such close confinement, so he joined the party, returning on the seventh of December, having had a delightful trip.

They brought us all the news of Sherman’s march to the sea, as far as Milledgeville, which he captured on the twenty-third of November. The excitement at the post was intense; the soldiers were wild with enthusiasm, for if the seaboard was ours, the cordon would soon be complete, and victory must be near. Nothing had given us such great courage as this news.

The first of the new year, 1865, we had a great deal of sickness in the form of chills, followed by attacks of fever. This may have been caused by having too many successive northers with rain, making it unhealthy, for the dampness was very apparent even in the houses, although at such times we kept fire on the hearth.

There had been rumors of a colored regiment being ordered to Tortugas, but no mention as a relief of the One Hundred and Tenth. We could not help being apprehensive and somewhat alarmed. From the manners of the officers, we knew they were anxious. Some surmised that it was to reinforce the guard over so many prisoners, and that the One Hundred and Tenth would not be disturbed.

My husband’s labor on behalf of the prisoners during the epidemic brought pleasing recognition from Washington, making him feel that we were not forgotten even if on the jumping off place of the nation.

He infused new life in both men and prisoners, inventing all kinds of devices for their occupation as so many workmen could not well be utilized. Realizing that there must be



some potent power used to rouse the men he resorted to amusement. Obtaining consent of Colonel Hamilton, he issued an order that every body that could sing a song, tell a story, dance a jig, perform tricks of any kind should report at his office the next morning. The motley forlorn, disconsolate-looking crowd that gathered the following day would have inspired an artist. They had no idea of anything pleasant for them, and were so wretched and hopeless they looked more as if they were going to an execution, than recruits as a nucleus of a theatrical performance.

The Doctor said it was most amusing to watch the expression of their faces as he began to divulge his scheme; and when they really understood that he was going to do something for their benefit, it was magical. Some who had crawled up the stairs as though they were literally on their last legs, before the conference was over had danced a hornpipe or a jig; other had shown their skill at gymnastics; songs were sung, and the talents displayed was almost an embarrassment of riches, while the crowd could scarcely be recognized as the moping, listless one that came in.

The Doctor told them they could form a minstrel troupe first, for which twenty-five cents admittance would be charged, the proceeds to be expended in better food and proper medicine. The result showed, however, that medicine would require a small part of the proceeds so great an effect had the mind upon the body. They went away talking and laughing, suggesting schemes and other men who could be brought into service, for it proved that there were men in the fort of every vocation—actors, trapeze performers and good singers, and the troupe that resulted from this small beginning was creditable for any amateur performance.

The Doctor was the manager, hearing all the rehearsals, so that everything was in good taste, and the result was a most satisfactory entertainment for everybody. One thing suggested another, and the outlook for many pleasant evenings for all the residents was inspiring. The energy and talent developed was quite overpowering, while the effect upon the health of these poor creatures was almost magical. A drop curtain was painted by the Doctor, which was a great success and very effective. It represented Loggerhead Light on the island; the lighthouse being made realistic by the means of pin holes, showing rays of light from a candle, notwithstanding it occasionally gave the effect of an revolving light, probably caused by the unsteadiness of the support of the candle behind the curtain.

The long expected Negro Regiment arrived the afternoon of the 26th of January, 1865, and was packed away in all the available places, one company being in the casemates back of our kitchen.



The officers were fine looking men and the privates stalwart healthy negroes, more like real African than any colored people I had ever seen before; they came from Mississippi and Louisiana. They were constantly frolicking and playing games and tricks upon each other, always apparently in the best of humor and evidently very proud of being soldiers.

We occasionally had an excitement which brought home to us our isolated condition. Some of the negro troops became insubordinate; one resisting arrest was shot and wounded near our cottage. One morning I heard the call "Corporal of the Guard Post number three" shouted in loud tones and taken up rapidly by the others. The guard went in response, and upon reaching the rampart found the sentinel looking down upon a man who was apparently standing in the water in the moat. He had attempted to escape by jumping from the port, evidently hoping to reach a vessel in the harbor; but he caught his feet in the tangled weeds growing on the bottom and was drowned, and then his body floated so that his head was out of water, giving him the appearance of standing in it.

In a black silk handkerchief tied around his neck, was found a roll of bills, which must have been sent to him. It was never found out if he had accomplices; his sudden death may have frightened the others and they dared not go to his rescue even, for fear of being discovered. He was an Italian who had enlisted in our army, and, singular to relate, his release came in the following day's mail.

The tardy news that came to us was that the Spring would develop events of importance. It was in the air, yet we heard nothing tangible, and we were as forgotten and let alone, as though we had never been considered of such great consequence in the beginning of the war.

On the eighth of February a steamer came in with a mail from Key West bringing orders for the Ninety-ninth Colored Regiment to go up the coast. A norther came again, laden with icy breath caught from the snowy fields in the North. After it had subsided, a steamer came and took part of the colored troops away, the remainder going on the Matchless, while the Albatross brought thirty-six more prisoners; they arrived in less numbers as the war dragged its weary days and months along.

The coming of the boat was the incident of the day, always rousing the never-failing interest, caused by our peculiar environment, for there was constantly with us the impression that something decisive had happened; the war might have ended a week before we could know anything about it. Even a fishing smack might have spoken a steamer and secured a paper or heard verbal news. Upon the arrival of the little steamer Ella Morse, on



the second of March, 1865, with the news of the occupation of Charleston by our troops on February the eighteenth, the excitement culminated in a general tumult of rejoicing.

We remembered the day when the news of the first gun fired upon Fort Sumter reached our little island; how excited, indignant, and incredulous the small band of officers, who had been sent down from Boston Harbor to protect us, were; and then to fill up the gap with all the horrors of a civil war, and think of the desolate hearths over the length and breadth of the land, whose sorrows would be opened afresh by all this rejoicing that came too late to bring their loved ones back, who had gone out in the pride of their youth and manhood to give their lives for their country, was heart-breaking in the midst of it all.

When we had guests from the various steamers we surprised and entertained them with all our theatrical stars, as we could announce a performance on very short notice. Some very good comic singers had been developed. One especially, who had served in that capacity in some small theater at the North, always proved a drawing card; and we listened to his funny songs again and again, not infrequently calling him before the tallow-candle footlights several times, when he would astonish us with something he had reserved for just such an occasion. When his time of imprisonment expired we gave him a benefit, and when his old hat, that had performed duty as part of his costume, was returned to him after the soldiers had started it through the “reserved” seats, it contained so many dollars that the comic song he gave in response was almost pathetic.

All this engendered good feeling, and the theater was a blessing in many ways. It had earned money enough to provide all the limes and sanitary food needed, that the hospital had not means or authority to provide, and the amusement had served a purpose that would satisfy a mine-cure scientist of today. It was an institution continued long after its necessity had ceased to exist, for healthful amusements have their uses in prevention as well as cures.

It is hard to understand without some experience the difficulties engendered by the conditions naturally prevailing in such a place as the Dry Tortugas. The soldiers were a class of people ranging from farmers to city boys, naturally restless from the confinement and inactive life incident to a long stay in the fort. The workmen in the engineer department were negroes and white men from New York, who were not the best by any means, especially during the war, as many came to escape the draft, and were worthless, reckless men as citizens. Then came the prisoners, including all kinds of men—good, indifferent, bad, and some dangerous.



My cook told me once, when I asked him about some of the prisoners who were constantly giving trouble, that in the steamer that brought them down they were overladen, packed like emigrants, and there were some who had given trouble all the way, yet not enough to warrant putting them in irons. But he had watched them, as their actions seemed suspicious, and in the night heard them through a thin board partition planning to bore holes in the ship, so that it would sink or partly wreck it, and in the confusion they were to seize the boats, as there were enough of them to manage the crew, and so escape. They were so reckless that they thought when near the Bahamas the chances might favor them. Some of them were murderers and the value of the lives of those on board ship, who would go down in such a case, counted nothing with them if they could only escape. But they were watched and finally suspicion was so strong against them they were imprisoned on board ship, and the other poor prisoners who had suffered mortal terror landed at Tortugas with feelings not easily described.

The influence such men would have under a long confinement, where there was not work enough to keep them from concocting mischief, on those who otherwise might have been fairly tractable, was always a dangerous element to counteract, and there was often insubordination in their manner, showing that the spark was only needed to create a disturbance not easily managed.

Kindness is a great power even with desperate men as many of those were, and my husband depended upon it mainly in his management of the prisoners. They knew he never carried a weapon of any kind and that he was afraid of them. A visitor once said to me in speaking of them, "I wonder you dare to stay here with nearly one thousand prisoners, so many of them desperate characters."

I replied that I had never thought of being afraid. I did not think our doors were ever locked, and even if there had been trouble I felt sure our family would have been protected, if for no other reason than my husband's kindness to them in their sickness and at all times.

There was one poor fellow who was always in trouble. He was simply mischievous in the first place, but was often used by bad men for their own misdeeds, while he bore the punishment as the principle culprit always. Now he was in the guardhouse; then out with a ball and chain, escaping in the most miraculous manner, for he was as supple and active as a monkey, and I think could no more, with his surroundings, have helped his petty thieving and other misdeeds than a monkey could refrain from his tricks.



What I am about to relate happened before my husband had medical charge of the prisoners and when he was voluntarily assisting. One day he found Harry Smith, as the prisoner called himself, in close confinement, chained to the floor. He had managed to slip through the iron bars, he was so small and agile, and had stolen articles of no value to himself, and destroyed and dropped them into the moat. As punishment they made a wheel of spokes without the tire, and put around his neck; when that was taken off he was chained to the wall. They could get no bracelets small enough to prevent his slipping his hands through them, and his tricks were monkeyish and provoking.

One day he wriggled himself through the bars. Near by, in the cool casemate, was stored a hogshead of molasses belonging to the commissary. He turned the spigot and let the fluid run, squeezing back into his cell again. When it was discovered he owned to what he had done and how—a performance that seemed impossible. He was chained as a last resort, but was taken sick and would have died if left much longer. My husband's sympathies were aroused, and he talked with the culprit a long time before he could see any evidence of feeling except sullen stubbornness. "He didn't care; everybody was against him, and it was no use. He would not promise anything better, for he should not behave if he was released."

But after an hour the man showed a ray of human feeling, a tear came to his eyes as he was questioned about his home and mother, and finally he promised he would make one more trial.

It resulted in Harry's being taken to the hospital where he was told the condition of his release, and that as long as he behaved he was to be under the Doctor's special care. He was nursed until he was well, then he was given the care of the Doctor's office, where he was in his special service, sleeping there. For weeks a more faithful, trusty, devoted servant could not be wished for. The officers had ceased to chaff my husband about his protZØgZØ and we really thought Harry could be trusted. Unfortunately for him the Doctor was obliged to go to Key West on business two months after Harry's promotion, and having made him promise all kinds of good behavior he left him.

The other prisoners had been jealous of Harry's good treatment, and when they found his protector had gone, they formed a conspiracy for his downfall which proved too much for him; they dared him to join them in breaking into the sutter's for whisky, and of course he was caught while the others escaped. It was with real grief and disappointment that Doctor found Harry in the guardhouse on his return.



Soon after that he escaped, taking a stepladder, floating and swimming to Loggerhead where he intended to take the sailboat belonging to the lighthouse and escape; he was caught and brought back to make another attempt later, when he with several others went to the bottom, as a gale came up so severe that the boat they left in could not possibly have weathered it.

Among the last prisoners were some notable characters. Some of them were said to be hotel burners who had tried that as a weapon of devastation in the North, in Chicago and other places. One of them was a ferocious looking man, six feet tall, black hair, unkempt, long beard, with black eyes under very heavy eyebrows. He wore a red flannel shirt open low on his chest, showing a strong muscular figure, trousers tucked in his high boots, altogether having the appearance of a bandit; and, besides, he was wanting in a certain respect of manner that most of the prisoners observed to the ladies and officers whom they met on the walks.

Of course curiosity was aroused, and we found that report said he was the son of Sir Roger Grenfell of England. He ran away from his family, had been through all kinds of vicissitudes of fortune; had lived in the wilds of Australia and South America; been in the filibustering warfare in Central America; was brought to this country by the excitement of our war, and finally sent to Fort Jefferson for a term of several years, and the spirit of defiance stood out like porcupine quills in every look and gesture.

He violated all rules and regulations, so was naturally often in the guardhouse, which meant doing police duty during the day, going about under a sergeant. It seemed as if he took pains to be conspicuous by his disorderly looks, and the more menial his duties the more one saw of him. He carried his broom over his shoulder with as lordly an air as though he was a Viking with his battle axe. He was so belligerent that a watch had to be kept over him, fearing his influence over other and weaker men; he had money, how procured no one knew. After being there some months he escaped on dark stormy night, and as the boat was never heard from it was supposed that they all perished. He had evidently bribed a soldier, as one was missing from the post, which roused the garrison when no response followed the call "Post number one, twelve o'clock, and all is well!"

Some year or two after, Colonel Hamilton received a letter from Grenfell's wife, who had been for some time keeping a boarding school for young ladies in Paris. She had not seen him for many years, and wished to know the truth concerning his fate. The rumors



concerning him were in the main correct, and it was perhaps a relief to know that his wild career was ended in no less terrible way than battling with the elements.

There was many a romance and tragedy, no doubt, imprisoned within those walls, could we have known the histories of many of the men.

During the first week of April, 1865, there were several vessels in, each with significant rumors, which kept us in a state of expectancy. The Catawba brought more prisoners, and on the twelfth, the Tortugas came in with another steamer and sixty prisoners and the news of the fall of Richmond, which we could scarcely credit. Sherman's march to the sea had been the exciting news that reached us in detached rumors, and in our excited condition, the intervening time, when we could hear nothing, was hard to fill in—certainly not always with patience.

On the twentieth of April, the steamer Corinthian brought news of Lee's surrender on the ninth, with his whole army. Two hundred guns were fired, and rejoicing was indulged in to the extent of our ability. There was great celebration in Key West. One hundred guns were fired, and there was an illumination, with a procession; even the secessionists lighted their candles and hung out the stars and stripes. One prominent citizen gave the excuse that he had no flag to unfurl, whereupon, a number of persons contributed and presented him with a Union flag, which he swung to the breeze over his store.

It was difficult to realize after the first delirium of excitement was over that the joyful news we had looked and prayed for so fervently each day of the past four years had really come, for nothing was changed in our surroundings, while at the North news was flashing all the time; there were no long breaks to be filled in, as with us, and our simple every-day life seemed very dull and stupid when we thought of the joyful times and scenes that were being enacted in the North.

But while in the midst of our rejoicing, never dreaming of anything but continued cheering news, the Ella Morse came in with the flag at half-mast and the terrible announcement of the tragedy at Washington.

The officers always went down to the wharf when the boats came in, to get the mail and to hear any strangling news that might come from the main land; it was our little outside bulletin. When I saw them walking up the path so subdued and quiet, I knew something terrible must have happened to so change the joyous attitude they had worn the past few days.

Soon I heard a gun fired in quick successive shots, and then saw officers and men scurrying towards the sallyport. I could hear angry voices and low mutterings, and



anxiously awaited the Doctor's return, which was delayed some half hour, when everything seemed quiet again. Then he came and told me of the sad news, and that the disturbance was caused by some of the prisoners attempting to cheer and rejoice over the death of the President, when the sentinel fired his gun, and the men were tied up. After that there was no further trouble with them.

Half-hour guns and flags at half-mast pronounced it a day of mourning, and a weight hung over us for days; we could not, if we would throw it off. Every joy and victory seemed dwarfed by this horrible act, and we could talk or think of little else.

Time dragged wearily. We heard of the great happenings ten days or two weeks after they had transpired, which, instead of satisfying us only created a desire for further news. We learned that General Sherman had reached the sea and turned north, and that Jefferson Davis had fled. A rumor came, no one knew how, that he was with a small party in the Everglades of Florida with Mallory, who knew the land and reefs, too, and that their plan must be to reach Havana. Orders were issued that no boats would be allowed to leave the mainland all along the coast. The general had gone up himself to reconnoitre, and the citizens of Key West felt positive that they were going to have their share in the excitement; certainly, no insignificant part of it, should they secure and hold as prisoner, the President of the Confederacy.

The first of May the S. S. Mississippi came in with news up to the 23rd of April, bringing some officers on parole belonging to the lost cause, on their way to New Orleans, and as there was to be a theatrical performance that evening they were invited.

The men were so bubbling over with good spirits and fun, they could not resist the opportunity of propounding a few rather combustible conundrums, slightly to my husband's discomfiture, as he knew nothing about it, for they were evidently by spontaneous inspirations caused by the presence of the strangers. One major left, but General Wilcox, a surgeon, and others remained, and when the Doctor explained the matter to them, they laughingly said, had they been the men, they could hardly have resisted the opportunity to fire a few harmless shots.

It was very pleasant to see the entire absence of any feeling of animosity, and they talked and chatted over matters with as much good humor as if they had not been trying to kill another a few months before.

One of the Confederate officers remarked that had it not been for a norther in the first of the war, attempts would have been made to take Fort Jefferson; and it could easily in



the very early days, have been accomplished without an armada. Whether they could have retained it must have been proven; no doubt, they could, with it and a few gunboats, have aided their blockade runners in taking cotton to Havana, that would have been of great assistance to them; but Captain Meigs put that out of their power, before they were ready for the second attempt.

Rumors reached us of great excitement in Key West. What it was about we could not learn, unless it was with reference to "Jeff Davis;" but on the 25th of May the S. S. Ella Morse came in, bringing the news of his capture on the tenth, near Quinville, Georgia.

Things were little changed at Fort Jefferson in the autumn, government at times sending down prisoners, thirty or forty at a time, while others were released, still keeping the number up in the hundreds; and as long as so many prisoners were confined there, it would require a large garrison, and would most likely be the last outlying post to be reduced or changed.

A company of the regular army, Fifth Artillery, had been sent down from the North, making a very pleasant addition to the post.

The summer had been a fairly healthy one, having acclimated troops there, and with the Doctor's strict discipline as health officers.

An excitement among the prisoners occasionally broke out in attempts to escape, but without success. The state prisoners, who had been sent down during the summer, naturally gave more anxiety than the others. Their arrival had caused considerable commotion, as the ordering of their sentence—"To the Dry Tortugas," was very unexpected.

The prison had been looked upon by most people at the North as a sort of Bastille set out in the ocean, and this was a culminating proof, when these prisoners were sent there, that it was not only considered a perfectly secure place, but that it was going to be continued as a prison, without reference to the ending of hostilities; and this prospect rendered it still more unpleasant for the officers in charge.

The state prisoners were now orderly, and with the exception of an attempt to escape by Doctor Mudd, they gave almost no trouble. The latter was very restless, and being a physician, there was not much that he could be called upon to do; hence he had more time to brood over his troubles than the others.

He asked my husband to send a long letter, which he gave him to read, to the New York "Herald"—a very sensational and untrue report of the treatment of the prisoners. He had imagined all sorts of indignities and persecutions, when, in fact, they were treated to



the same conditions and surroundings as the soldiers, with as good food as government could afford them. Those who had money could buy, as the soldiers did, anything they could get at the sutler's.

My husband took him into the hospital as a kind of assistant nurse, which seemed to modify matters somewhat, and for awhile things went smoothly.

While we were at dinner one day, the hospital steward came in in great haste, saying two men were thought to be dying.

The Doctor hurried to the hospital to find there two patients, whom he had left an hour before convalescent, in the greatest agony. Upon investigation, he found that the nurse had gone away for an hour, leaving Doctor Mudd in charge, with directions to give them some blue mass pills at a certain time, and when asked to get the bottle that he had taken them from, he brought one containing Spanish fly blister.

My husband was convinced that it was a simple blunder, and soon had the men under treatment that relieved the; but they were of one mind that an external blister was much easier to bear than an internal one, and Doctor Mudd lost his opportunity of being made nurse in the hospital, and was put at other duties.

The soldiers were inclined to think it an intentional act, but the Doctor convinced them after much talking that it could scarcely be; the object was wanting, as he lost instead of gained by it, but he guaranteed the opportunity should not offer again.

It was not long after when a steamer was being loaded with coal. Colonel Hamilton sent a message to the Doctor that Doctor Mudd was missing.

It was the custom always in loading and unloading the vessel to utilize the prisoners with the soldiers in such duties; then before the vessel sailed, the roll-call for the prisoners was read, each one answering to his name; they were in squads like the soldiers, so that it could be quickly accomplished.

Orders were issued for the prisoners to return to their quarters, and the soldiers were ordered out and a search made,

The coal was turned over in the vessel, and every part of it searched; but it was some little time before he was brought forth, smutty, discomfited and utterly crestfallen. He was of course put in confinement, more embittered than ever. He must have had assistance, and naturally we felt it was most likely from some one or more belonging to the steamer. As he was recovered, there was no investigation made, and no one comprised.



The doctor reasoned with him, telling him that the only way to make his imprisonment bearable was to behave as the others did—make the best of it.

Letters that the prisoners sent away had to be inspected, and I presume he had not written home on that account; but letters coming to them were delivered, though liable to be opened, as those were the understood regulations.

The youngest of the state prisoners so won upon the sympathies of the colonel's wife, by his illness and thorough submission, that she prevailed upon the colonel to put him at some duty more congenial. He was installed as a clerk in the office, and without doubt the young fellow had many a lunch from a home table the colonel knew nothing about, or was willing to trust the generous heart of his wife in her unmilitary insubordination.

I heard her remark one day: "I could not see that boy dying from homesickness and the want of a little care, when by management, which I alone am responsible for, it can be averted," and his appearance before many weeks bore evidence of kindly interest.

The others were older men and bore their imprisonment with stolid demeanor.

Spangler was a carpenter, and was sent one day with some other workmen to do a little work at our house.

I could not resist speaking to him. He said, with perfect good nature: "They made a mistake in sending me down here. I had nothing to do with Booth or the assassination of President Lincoln; but I suppose I have done enough in my life to deserve this, so I make the best of it." He was released with the others by Johnson's Christmas Proclamation Act, 1868, one of them having died from yellow fever after we left. During my absence in the summer, I lost my cook Charley. The first of September the island was visited by a cyclone, uprooting trees and throwing down some of the brick walls of the officers' quarters that were in process of construction, the rear walls falling on a house occupied by two officers who were sleeping in them at the time. One was killed instantly by the immense pile of brick that came crashing through the roof.

Charley roused the other officer and rescued him from his perilous position, but the danger from the remaining wall, standing in a tottering, perilous condition, was imminent. As the colonel could not order anyone to do so dangerous a thing as to climb up and pull it down, he called for volunteers, when, to the surprise of everyone, Charley, before they realized it, was half way up, calling for someone to throw him a rope, which they did amidst such cheers as Fort Jefferson had never heard before. When he came down



safely and the men had taken hold and pulled the trembling wall down, the colonel found Charley and told him to come to the office.

“Now,” he said, “what can I do for you?” Charley’s manhood came nearer yielding to the emotional than ever before, as he told his little romance, which I had known for some time, and had watched its growth and wondered how it would end, for I knew that Charley’s sentence was for ten years.

When Major McFarland moved his family to Tortugas, they brought a nurse girl whom Charley saw very often. He was generally to be found in Mrs. McFarland’s kitchen if not in mine. But the family and the girl sailed away, one day, and from then on Charley’s smiles were forced ones, brought occasionally by letters from New York.

Now was his time and the colonel appreciated Charley’s diffident attempts to tell the good his sweetheart would do him if he could only get away, for she had promised to wait for him; and it resulted in a document reaching the Secretary of War, which gave Charley his liberty.

He went directly to New York, married, and took his bride home to New Hampshire, and later we received a letter very full of happiness, signed by the husband and wife.

General Scott visited Key West, that winter, and gradually the troops from Texas and the Southern posts were called in; but Fort Jefferson served as a military prison for some years after the close of the war. Then it was almost deserted, and now-well, what it is now, will, I understand, be told in the following number by another surgeon’s wife, whose home is now by the blue waters of the outer reef.