CHAPTER XXXV

"What price tobacco?" was Mr. Mellaire's greeting, when I came on deck this morning, bruised and weary, aching in every bone and muscle from sixty hours of being tossed about.

The wind had fallen to a dead calm toward morning, and the Elsinore, her several spread sails booming and slatting, rolled more miserably than ever. Mr. Mellaire pointed for'ard of our starboard beam. I could make out a bleak land of white and jagged peaks.

"Staten Island, the easterly end of it," said Mr. Mellaire.

And I knew that we were in the position of a vessel just rounding Staten Island preliminary to bucking the Horn. And, yet, four days ago, we had run through the Straits of Le Maire and stolen along toward the Horn. Three days ago we had been well abreast of the Horn and even a few miles past. And here we were now, starting all over again and far in the rear of where we had originally started.

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The condition of the men is truly wretched. During the gale the forecastle was washed out twice. This means that everything in it was afloat and that every article of clothing, including mattresses and

blankets, is wet and will remain wet in this bitter weather until we are around the Horn and well up in the good-weather latitudes. The same is true of the 'midship-house. Every room in it, with the exception of the cook's and the sail-makers' (which open for'ard on Number Two hatch), is soaking. And they have no fires in their rooms with which to dry things out.

I peeped into Charles Davis's room. It was terrible. He grinned to me and nodded his head.

"It's just as well O'Sullivan wasn't here, sir," he said. "He'd a-drowned in the lower bunk. And I want to tell you I was doing some swimmin' before I could get into the top one. And salt water's bad for my sores. I oughtn't to be in a hole like this in Cape Horn weather. Look at the ice, there, on the floor. It's below freezin' right now in this room, and my blankets are wet, and I'm a sick man, as any man can tell that's got a nose."

"If you'd been decent to the mate you might have got decent treatment in return," I said.

"Huh!" he sneered. "You needn't think you can lose me, sir. I can grow fat on this sort of stuff. Why, sir, when I think of the court doin's in Seattle I just couldn't die. An' if you'll listen to me, sir, you'll cover the steward's money. You can't lose. I'm advisin' you, sir, because you're a sort of decent sort. Anybody that bets on my going over

the side is a sure loser."

"How could you dare ship on a voyage like this in your condition?" I demanded.

"Condition?" he queried with a fine assumption of innocence. "Why, that is why I did ship. I was in tiptop shape when I sailed. All this come out on me afterward. You remember seem' me aloft, an' up to my neck in water. And I trimmed coal below, too. A sick man couldn't do it. And remember, sir, you'll have to testify to how I did my duty at the beginning before I took down."

"I'll bet with you myself if you think I'm goin' to die," he called after me.

Already the sailors show marks of the hardship they are enduring. It is surprising, in so short a time, how lean their faces have grown, how lined and seamed. They must dry their underclothing with their body heat. Their outer garments, under their oilskins, are soggy. And yet, paradoxically, despite their lean, drawn faces, they have grown very stout. Their walk is a waddle, and they bulge with seaming corpulency. This is due to the amount of clothing they have on. I noticed Larry, to-day, had on two vests, two coats, and an overcoat, with his oilskin outside of that. They are elephantine in their gait for, in addition to everything else, they have wrapped their feet, outside their sea-boots, with gunny sacking.

It is cold, although the deck thermometer stood at thirty-three to-day at noon. I had Wada weigh the clothing I wear on deck. Omitting oilskins and boots, it came to eighteen pounds. And yet I am not any too warm in all this gear when the wind is blowing. How sailors, after having once experienced the Horn, can ever sign on again for a voyage around is beyond me. It but serves to show how stupid they must be.

I feel sorry for Henry, the training-ship boy. He is more my own kind, and some day he will make a henchman of the afterguard and a mate like Mr. Pike. In the meantime, along with Buckwheat, the other boy who berths in the 'midship-house with him, he suffers the same hardship as the men. He is very fair-skinned, and I noticed this afternoon, when he was pulling on a brace, that the sleeves of his oil-skins, assisted by the salt water, have chafed his wrists till they are raw and bleeding and breaking out in sea-boils. Mr. Mellaire tells me that in another week there will be a plague of these boils with all hands for'ard.

"When do you think we'll be up with the Horn again?" I innocently queried of Mr. Pike.

He turned upon me in a rage, as if I had insulted him, and positively snarled in my face ere he swung away without the courtesy of an answer. It is evident that he takes the sea seriously. That is why, I fancy, he is so excellent a seaman.

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The days pass--if the interval of sombre gray that comes between the darknesses can be called day. For a week, now, we have not seen the sun. Our ship's position in this waste of storm and sea is conjectural. Once, by dead reckoning, we gained up with the Horn and a hundred miles south of it. And then came another sou'west gale that tore our fore-topsail and brand new spencer out of the belt-ropes and swept us away to a conjectured longitude east of Staten Island.

Oh, I know now this Great West Wind that blows for ever around the world south of 55. And I know why the chart-makers have capitalized it, as, for instance, when I read "The Great West Wind Drift." And I know why the Sailing Directions advise: "Whatever you do, make westing! make westing!"

And the West Wind and the drift of the West Wind will not permit the Elsinore to make westing. Gale follows gale, always from the west, and we make easting. And it is bitter cold, and each gale snorts up with a prelude of driving snow.

In the cabin the lamps burn all day long. No more does Mr. Pike run the phonograph, nor does Margaret ever touch the piano. She complains of being bruised and sore. I have a wrenched shoulder from being hurled against the wall. And both Wada and the steward are limping. Really, the only comfort I can find is in my bunk, so wedged with boxes and

pillows that the wildest rolls cannot throw me out. There, save for my meals and for an occasional run on deck for exercise and fresh air, I lie and read eighteen and nineteen hours out of the twenty-four. But the unending physical strain is very wearisome.

How it must be with the poor devils for'ard is beyond conceiving. The forecastle has been washed out several times, and everything is soaking wet. Besides, they have grown weaker, and two watches are required to do what one ordinary watch could do. Thus, they must spend as many hours on the sea-swept deck and aloft on the freezing yards as I do in my warm, dry bunk. Wada tells me that they never undress, but turn into their wet bunks in their oil-skins and sea-boots and wet undergarments.

To look at them crawling about on deck or in the rigging is enough. They are truly weak. They are gaunt-cheeked and haggard-gray of skin, with great dark circles under their eyes. The predicted plague of sea-boils and sea-cuts has come, and their hands and wrists and arms are frightfully afflicted. Now one, and now another, and sometimes several, either from being knocked down by seas or from general miserableness, take to the bunk for a day or so off. This means more work for the others, so that the men on their feet are not tolerant of the sick ones, and a man must be very sick to escape being dragged out to work by his mates.

I cannot but marvel at Andy Fay and Mulligan Jacobs. Old and fragile as they are, it seems impossible that they can endure what they do. For

that matter, I cannot understand why they work at all. I cannot understand why any of them toil on and obey an order in this freezing hell of the Horn. Is it because of fear of death that they do not cease work and bring death to all of us? Or is it because they are slave-beasts, with a slave-psychology, so used all their lives to being driven by their masters that it is beyond their mental power to refuse to obey?

And yet most of them, in a week after we reach Seattle, will be on board other ships outward bound for the Horn. Margaret says the reason for this is that sailors forget. Mr. Pike agrees. He says give them a week in the south-east trades as we run up the Pacific and they will have forgotten that they have ever been around the Horn. I wonder. Can they be as stupid as this? Does pain leave no record with them? Do they fear only the immediate thing? Have they no horizons wider than a day? Then indeed do they belong where they are.

They are cowardly. This was shown conclusively this morning at two o'clock. Never have I witnessed such panic fear, and it was fear of the immediate thing--fear, stupid and beast-like. It was Mr. Mellaire's watch. As luck would have it, I was reading Boas's Mind of Primitive Man when I heard the rush of feet over my head. The Elsinore was hove to on the port tack at the time, under very short canvas. I was wondering what emergency had brought the watch upon the poop, when I heard another rush of feet that meant the second watch. I heard no pulling and hauling, and the thought of mutiny flashed across my mind.

Still nothing happened, and, growing curious, I got into my sea-boots, sheepskin coat, and oilskin, put on my sou'wester and mittens, and went on deck. Mr. Pike had already dressed and was ahead of me. Captain West, who in this bad weather sleeps in the chart-room, stood in the lee doorway of the house, through which the lamplight streamed on the frightened faces of the men.

Those of the 'midship-house were not present, but every man Jack of the forecastle, with the exception of Andy Fay and Mulligan Jacobs, as I afterwards learned, had joined in the flight aft. Andy Fay, who belonged in the watch below, had calmly remained in his bunk, while Mulligan Jacobs had taken advantage of the opportunity to sneak into the forecastle and fill his pipe.

"What is the matter, Mr. Pike?" Captain West asked.

Before the mate could reply, Bert Rhine snickered:

"The devil's come aboard, sir."

But his snicker was palpably an assumption of unconcern he did not possess. The more I think over it the more I am surprised that such keen men as the gangsters should have been frightened by what had occurred. But frightened they were, the three of them, out of their bunks and out of the precious surcease of their brief watch below.

So fear-struck was Larry that he chattered and grimaced like an ape, and shouldered and struggled to get away from the dark and into the safety of the shaft of light that shone out of the chart-house. Tony, the Greek, was just as bad, mumbling to himself and continually crossing himself. He was joined in this, as a sort of chorus, by the two Italians, Guido Bombini and Mike Cipriani. Arthur Deacon was almost in collapse, and he and Chantz, the Jew, shamelessly clung to each other for support. Bob, the fat and overgrown youth, was sobbing, while the other youth, Bony the Splinter, was shivering and chattering his teeth. Yes, and the two best sailors for'ard, Tom Spink and the Maltese Cockney, stood in the background, their backs to the dark, their faces yearning toward the light.

More than all other contemptible things in this world there are two that I loathe and despise: hysteria in a woman; fear and cowardice in a man. The first turns me to ice. I cannot sympathize with hysteria. The second turns my stomach. Cowardice in a man is to me positively nauseous. And this fear-smitten mass of human animals on our reeling poop raised my gorge. Truly, had I been a god at that moment, I should have annihilated the whole mass of them. No; I should have been merciful to one. He was the Faun. His bright, pain-liquid, and flashing-eager eyes strained from face to face with desire to understand. He did not know what had occurred, and, being stone-deaf, had thought the rush aft a response to a call for all hands.

I noticed Mr. Mellaire. He may be afraid of Mr. Pike, and he is a murderer; but at any rate he has no fear of the supernatural. With two men above him in authority, although it was his watch, there was no call for him to do anything. He swayed back and forth in balance to the violent motions of the Elsinore and looked on with eyes that were amused and cynical.

"What does the devil look like, my man?" Captain West asked.

Bert Rhine grinned sheepishly.

"Answer the captain!" Mr. Pike snarled at him.

Oh, it was murder, sheer murder, that leapt into the gangster's eyes for the instant, in acknowledgment of the snarl. Then he replied to Captain West:

"I didn't wait to see, sir. But it's one whale of a devil."

"He's as big as a elephant, sir," volunteered Bill Quigley. "I seen'm face to face, sir. He almost got me when I run out of the fo'c's'le."

"Oh, Lord, sir!" Larry moaned. "The way he hit the house, sir. It was the call to Judgment."

"Your theology is mixed, my man," Captain West smiled quietly, though I

could not help seeing how tired was his face and how tired were his wonderful Samurai eyes.

He turned to the mate.

"Mr. Pike, will you please go for'ard and interview this devil? Fasten him up and tie him down and I'll take a look at him in the morning."

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Pike; and Kipling's line came to me:

"Woman, Man, or God or Devil, was there anything we feared?"

And as I went for'ard through the wall of darkness after Mr. Pike and Mr. Mellaire along the freezing, slender, sea-swept bridge--not a sailor dared to accompany us--other lines of "The Galley Slave" drifted through my brain, such as:

"Our bulkheads bulged with cotton and our masts were stepped in gold--
We ran a mighty merchandise of niggers in the hold. . . "

And:

"By the brand upon my shoulder, by the gall of clinging steel,
By the welts the whips have left me, by the scars that never heal . . . "

And:

"Battered chain-gangs of the orlop, grizzled draughts of years gone by . . . "

And I caught my great, radiant vision of Mr. Pike, galley slave of the race, and a driver of men under men greater than he; the faithful henchman, the able sailorman, battered and grizzled, branded and galled, the servant of the sweep-head that made mastery of the sea. I know him now. He can never again offend me. I forgive him everything--the whiskey raw on his breath the day I came aboard at Baltimore, his moroseness when sea and wind do not favour, his savagery to the men, his snarl and his sneer.

On top the 'midship-house we got a ducking that makes me shiver to recall. I had dressed too hastily properly to fasten my oilskin about my neck, so that I was wet to the skin. We crossed the next span of bridge through driving spray, and were well upon the top of the for'ard-house when something adrift on the deck hit the for'ard wall a terrific smash.

"Whatever it is, it's playing the devil," Mr. Pike yelled in my ear, as he endeavoured to locate the thing by the dry-battery light-stick which he carried.

The pencil of light travelled over dark water, white with foam, that churned upon the deck.

"There it goes!" Mr. Pike cried, as the Elsinore dipped by the head and hurtled the water for'ard.

The light went out as the three of us caught holds and crouched to a deluge of water from overside. As we emerged, from under the forecastle-head we heard a tremendous thumping and battering. Then, as the bow lifted, for an instant in the pencil of light that immediately lost it, I glimpsed a vague black object that bounded down the inclined deck where no water was. What became of it we could not see.

Mr. Pike descended to the deck, followed by Mr. Mellaire. Again, as the Elsinore dipped by the head and fetched a surge of sea-water from aft along the runway, I saw the dark object bound for'ard directly at the mates. They sprang to safety from its charge, the light went out, while another icy sea broke aboard.

For a time I could see nothing of the two men. Next, in the light flashed from the stick, I guessed that Mr. Pike was in pursuit of the thing. He evidently must have captured it at the rail against the starboard rigging and caught a turn around it with a loose end of rope. As the vessel rolled to windward some sort of a struggle seemed to be going on. The second mate sprang to the mate's assistance, and, together, with more loose ends, they seemed to subdue the thing.

I descended to see. By the light-stick we made it out to be a large, barnacle-crusted cask.

"She's been afloat for forty years," was Mr. Pike's judgment. "Look at the size of the barnacles, and look at the whiskers."

"And it's full of something," said Mr. Mellaire. "Hope it isn't water."

I rashly lent a hand when they started to work the cask for'ard, between seas and taking advantage of the rolls and pitches, to the shelter under the forecastle-head. As a result, even through my mittens, I was cut by the sharp edges of broken shell.

"It's liquor of some sort," said the mate, "but we won't risk broaching it till morning."

"But where did it come from?" I asked.

"Over the side's the only place it could have come from." Mr. Pike played the light over it. "Look at it! It's been afloat for years and years."

"The stuff ought to be well-seasoned," commented Mr. Mellaire.

Leaving them to lash the cask securely, I stole along the deck to the forecastle and peered in. The men, in their headlong flight, had neglected to close the doors, and the place was afloat. In the flickering light from a small and very smoky sea-lamp it was a dismal

picture. No self-respecting cave-man, I am sure, would have lived in such a hole.

Even as I looked a bursting sea filled the runway between the house and rail, and through the doorway in which I stood the freezing water rushed waist-deep. I had to hold on to escape being swept inside the room. From a top bunk, lying on his side, Andy Fay regarded me steadily with his bitter blue eyes. Seated on the rough table of heavy planks, his sea-booted feet swinging in the water, Mulligan Jacobs pulled at his pipe. When he observed me he pointed to pulpy book-pages that floated about.

"Me library's gone to hell," he mourned as he indicated the flotsam. "There's me Byron. An' there goes Zola an' Browning with a piece of Shakespeare runnin' neck an' neck, an' what's left of Anti-Christ makin' a bad last. An' there's Carlyle and Zola that cheek by jowl you can't tell 'em apart."

Here the Elsinore lay down to starboard, and the water in the forecastle poured out against my legs and hips. My wet mittens slipped on the iron work, and I swept down the runway into the scuppers, where I was turned over and over by another flood that had just boarded from windward.

I know I was rather confused, and that I had swallowed quite a deal of salt water, ere I got my hands on the rungs of the ladder and climbed to the top of the house. On my way aft along the bridge I encountered the

crew coming for'ard. Mr. Mellaire and Mr. Pike were talking in the lee of the chart-house, and inside, as I passed below, Captain West was smoking a cigar.

After a good rub down, in dry pyjamas, I was scarcely back in my bunk with the Mind of Primitive Man before me, when the stampede over my head was repeated. I waited for the second rush. It came, and I proceeded to dress.

The scene on the poop duplicated the previous one, save that the men were more excited, more frightened. They were babbling and chattering all together.

"Shut up!" Mr. Pike was snarling when I came upon them. "One at a time, and answer the captain's question."

"It ain't no barrel this time, sir," Tom Spink said. "It's alive. An' if it ain't the devil it's the ghost of a drownded man. I see 'm plain an' clear. He's a man, or was a man once--"

"They was two of 'em, sir," Richard Giller, one of the "bricklayers," broke in.

"I think he looked like Petro Marinkovich, sir," Tom Spink went on.

"An' the other was Jespersen--I seen 'm," Giller added.

"They was three of 'em, sir," said Nosey Murphy. "O'Sullivan, sir, was the other one. They ain't devils, sir. They're drownded men. They come aboard right over the bows, an' they moved slow like drownded men. Sorensen seen the first one first. He caught my arm an' pointed, an' then I seen 'm. He was on top the for'ard-house. And Olansen seen 'm, an' Deacon, sir, an' Hackey. We all seen 'm, sir . . . an' the second one; an' when the rest run away I stayed long enough to see the third one. Mebbe there's more. I didn't wait to see."

Captain West stopped the man.

"Mr. Pike," he said wearily, "will you straighten this nonsense out."

"Yes, sir," Mr. Pike responded, then turned on the man. "Come on, all of you! There's three devils to tie down this time."

But the men shrank away from the order and from him.

"For two cents . . . " I heard Mr. Pike growl to himself, then choke off utterance.

He flung about on his heel and started for the bridge. In the same order as on the previous trip, Mr. Mellaire second, and I bringing up the rear, we followed. It was a similar journey, save that we caught a ducking midway on the first span of bridge as well as a ducking on the 'midship-

house.

We halted on top the for'ard-house. In vain Mr. Pike flashed his light-stick. Nothing was to be seen nor heard save the white-flecked dark water on our deck, the roar of the gale in our rigging, and the crash and thunder of seas falling aboard. We advanced half-way across the last span of bridge to the fore-castle head, and were driven to pause and hang on at the foremast by a bursting sea.

Between the drives of spray Mr. Pike flashed his stick. I heard him exclaim something. Then he went on to the forecastle-head, followed by Mr. Mellaire, while I waited by the foremast, clinging tight, and endured another ducking. Through the emergencies I could see the pencil of light, appearing and disappearing, darting here and there. Several minutes later the mates were back with me.

"Half our head-gear's carried away," Mr. Pike told me. "We must have run into something."

"I felt a jar, right after you' went below, sir, last time," said Mr. Mellaire. "Only I thought it was a thump of sea."

"So did I feel it," the mate agreed. "I was just taking off my boots. I thought it was a sea. But where are the three devils?"

"Broaching the cask," the second mate suggested.

We made the forecastle-head, descended the iron ladder, and went for'ard, inside, underneath, out of the wind and sea. There lay the cask, securely lashed. The size of the barnacles on it was astonishing. They were as large as apples and inches deep. A down-fling of bow brought a foot of water about our boots; and as the bow lifted and the water drained away, it drew out from the shell-crusted cask streamers of seaweed a foot or so in length.

Led by Mr. Pike and watching our chance between seas, we searched the deck and rails between the forecastle-head and the for'ard-house and found no devils. The mate stepped into the forecastle doorway, and his light-stick cut like a dagger through the dim illumination of the murky sea-lamp. And we saw the devils. Nosey Murphy had been right. There were three of them.

Let me give the picture: A drenched and freezing room of rusty, paint-scabbed iron, low-roofed, double-tiered with bunks, reeking with the filth of thirty men, despite the washing of the sea. In a top bunk, on his side, in sea-boots and oilskins, staring steadily with blue, bitter eyes, Andy Fay; on the table, pulling at a pipe, with hanging legs dragged this way and that by the churn of water, Mulligan Jacobs, solemnly regarding three men, sea-booted and bloody, who stand side by side, of a height and not duly tall, swaying in unison to the Elsinore's down-flinging and up-lifting.

But such men! I know my East Side and my East End, and I am accustomed to the faces of all the ruck of races, yet with these three men I was at fault. The Mediterranean had surely never bred such a breed; nor had Scandinavia. They were not blonds. They were not brunettes. Nor were they of the Brown, or Black, or Yellow. Their skin was white under a bronze of weather. Wet as was their hair, it was plainly a colourless, sandy hair. Yet their eyes were dark--and yet not dark. They were neither blue, nor gray, nor green, nor hazel. Nor were they black. They were topaz, pale topaz; and they gleamed and dreamed like the eyes of great cats. They regarded us like walkers in a dream, these pale-haired storm-waifs with pale, topaz eyes. They did not bow, they did not smile, in no way did they recognize our presence save that they looked at us and dreamed.

But Andy Fay greeted us.

"It's a hell of a night an' not a wink of sleep with these goings-on," he said.

"Now where did they blow in from a night like this?" Mulligan Jacobs complained.

"You've got a tongue in your mouth," Mr. Pike snarled. "Why ain't you asked 'em?"

"As though you didn't know I could use the tongue in me mouth, you old

stiff," Jacobs snarled back.

But it was no time for their private feud. Mr. Pike turned on the dreaming new-comers and addressed them in the mangled and aborted phrases of a dozen languages such as the world-wandering Anglo-Saxon has had every opportunity to learn but is too stubborn-brained and wilful-mouthed to wrap his tongue about.

The visitors made no reply. They did not even shake their heads. Their faces remained peculiarly relaxed and placid, incurious and pleasant, while in their eyes floated profounder dreams. Yet they were human. The blood of their injuries stained them and clotted on their clothes.

"Dutchmen," snorted Mr. Pike, with all due contempt for other breeds, as he waved them to make themselves at home in any of the bunks.

Mr. Pike's ethnology is narrow. Outside his own race he is aware of only three races: niggers, Dutchmen, and Dagoes.

Again our visitors proved themselves human. They understood the mate's invitation, and, glancing first at one another, they climbed into three top-bunks and closed their eyes. I could swear the first of them was asleep in half a minute.

"We'll have to clean up for'ard, or we'll be having the sticks about our ears," the mate said, already starting to depart. "Get the men along,

Mr. Mellaire, and call out the carpenter."