

## CHAPTER XXXVI

And no westing! We have been swept back three degrees of casting since the night our visitors came on board. They are the great mystery, these three men of the sea. "Horn Gypsies," Margaret calls them; and Mr. Pike dubs them "Dutchmen." One thing is certain, they have a language of their own which they talk with one another. But of our hotch-potch of nationalities fore and aft there is no person who catches an inkling of their language or nationality.

Mr. Mellaire raised the theory that they were Finns of some sort, but this was indignantly denied by our big-footed youth of a carpenter, who swears he is a Finn himself. Louis, the cook, avers that somewhere over the world, on some forgotten voyage, he has encountered men of their type; but he can neither remember the voyage nor their race. He and the rest of the Asiatics accept their presence as a matter of course; but the crew, with the exception of Andy Fay and Mulligan Jacobs, is very superstitious about the new-comers, and will have nothing to do with them.

"No good will come of them, sir," Tom Spink, at the wheel, told us, shaking his head forebodingly.

Margaret's mittened hand rested on my arm as we balanced to the easy roll of the ship. We had paused from our promenade, which we now take each

day, religiously, as a constitutional, between eleven and twelve.

"Why, what is the matter with them?" she queried, nudging me privily in warning of what was coming.

"Because they ain't men, Miss, as we can rightly call men. They ain't regular men."

"It was a bit irregular, their manner of coming on board," she gurgled.

"That's just it, Miss," Tom Spink exclaimed, brightening perceptibly at the hint of understanding. "Where'd they come from? They won't tell. Of course they won't tell. They ain't men. They're spirits--ghosts of sailors that drowned as long ago as when that cask went adrift from a sinkin' ship, an' that's years an' years, Miss, as anybody can see, lookin' at the size of the barnacles on it."

"Do you think so?" Margaret queried.

"We all think so, Miss. We ain't spent our lives on the sea for nothin'. There's no end of landsmen don't believe in the Flyin' Dutchman. But what do they know? They're just landsmen, ain't they? They ain't never had their leg grabbed by a ghost, such as I had, on the Kathleen, thirty-five years ago, down in the hole 'tween the water-casks. An' didn't that ghost rip the shoe right off of me? An' didn't I fall through the hatch two days later an' break my shoulder?"

"Now, Miss, I seen 'em makin' signs to Mr. Pike that we'd run into their ship hove to on the other tack. Don't you believe it. There wasn't no ship."

"But how do you explain the carrying away of our head-gear?" I demanded.

"There's lots of things can't be explained, sir," was Tom Spink's answer.

"Who can explain the way the Finns plays tom-fool tricks with the weather? Yet everybody knows it. Why are we havin' a hard passage around the Horn, sir? I ask you that. Why, sir?"

I shook my head.

"Because of the carpenter, sir. We've found out he's a Finn. Why did he keep it quiet all the way down from Baltimore?"

"Why did he tell it?" Margaret challenged.

"He didn't tell it, Miss--leastways, not until after them three others boarded us. I got my suspicions he knows more about 'm than he's lettin' on. An' look at the weather an' the delay we're gettin'. An' don't everybody know the Finns is regular warlocks an' weather-breeders?"

My ears pricked up.

"Where did you get that word warlock?" I questioned.

Tom Spink looked puzzled.

"What's wrong with it, sir?" he asked.

"Nothing. It's all right. But where did you get it?"

"I never got it, sir. I always had it. That's what Finns is--warlocks."

"And these three new-comers--they aren't Finns?" asked Margaret.

The old Englishman shook his head solemnly.

"No, Miss. They're drowneded sailors a long time drowneded. All you have to do is look at 'm. An' the carpenter could tell us a few if he was minded."

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Nevertheless, our mysterious visitors are a welcome addition to our weakened crew. I watch them at work. They are strong and willing. Mr. Pike says they are real sailormen, even if he doesn't understand their lingo. His theory is that they are from some small old-country or outlander ship, which, hove to on the opposite tack to the Elsinore, was run down and sunk.

I have forgotten to say that we found the barnacled cask nearly filled with a most delicious wine which none of us can name. As soon as the gale moderated Mr. Pike had the cask brought aft and broached, and now the steward and Wada have it all in bottles and spare demijohns. It is beautifully aged, and Mr. Pike is certain that it is some sort of a mild and unheard-of brandy. Mr. Mellaire merely smacks his lips over it, while Captain West, Margaret, and I steadfastly maintain that it is wine.

The condition of the men grows deplorable. They were always poor at pulling on ropes, but now it takes two or three to pull as much as one used to pull. One thing in their favour is that they are well, though grossly, fed. They have all they want to eat, such as it is, but it is the cold and wet, the terrible condition of the fore-castle, the lack of sleep, and the almost continuous toil of both watches on deck. Either watch is so weak and worthless that any severe task requires the assistance of the other watch. As an instance, we finally managed a reef in the foresail in the thick of a gale. It took both watches two hours, yet Mr. Pike tells me that under similar circumstances, with an average crew of the old days, he has seen a single watch reef the foresail in twenty minutes.

I have learned one of the prime virtues of a steel sailing-ship. Such a craft, heavily laden, does not strain her seams open in bad weather and big seas. Except for a tiny leak down in the fore-peak, with which we sailed from Baltimore and which is bailed out with a pail once in several

weeks, the Elsinore is bone-dry. Mr. Pike tells me that had a wooden ship of her size and cargo gone through the buffeting we have endured, she would be leaking like a sieve.

And Mr. Mellaire, out of his own experience, has added to my respect for the Horn. When he was a young man he was once eight weeks in making around from 50 in the Atlantic to 50 in the Pacific. Another time his vessel was compelled to put back twice to the Falklands for repairs. And still another time, in a wooden ship running back in distress to the Falklands, his vessel was lost in a shift of gale in the very entrance to Port Stanley. As he told me:

"And after we'd been there a month, sir, who should come in but the old Lucy Powers. She was a sight!--her foremast clean gone out of her and half her spars, the old man killed from one of the spars falling on him, the mate with two broken arms, the second mate sick, and what was left of the crew at the pumps. We'd lost our ship, so my skipper took charge, refitted her, doubled up both crews, and we headed the other way around, pumping two hours in every watch clear to Honolulu."

The poor wretched chickens! Because of their ill-judged moulting they are quite featherless. It is a marvel that one of them survives, yet so far we have lost only six. Margaret keeps the kerosene stove going, and, though they have ceased laying, she confidently asserts that they are all layers and that we shall have plenty of eggs once we get fine weather in the Pacific.

There is little use to describe these monotonous and perpetual westerly gales. One is very like another, and they follow so fast on one another's heels that the sea never has a chance to grow calm. So long have we rolled and tossed about that the thought, say, of a solid, unmoving billiard-table is inconceivable. In previous incarnations I have encountered things that did not move, but . . . they were in previous incarnations.

We have been up to the Diego Ramirez Rocks twice in the past ten days. At the present moment, by vague dead reckoning, we are two hundred miles east of them. We have been hove down to our hatches three times in the last week. We have had six stout sails, of the heaviest canvas, furled and double-gasketed, torn loose and stripped from the yards. Sometimes, so weak are our men, not more than half of them can respond to the call for all hands.

Lars Jacobson, who had his leg broken early in the voyage, was knocked down by a sea several days back and had the leg rebroken. Ditman Olansen, the crank-eyed Norwegian, went Berserker last night in the second dog-watch and pretty well cleaned out his half of the forecastle. Wada reports that it required the bricklayers, Fitzgibbon and Gilder, the Maltese Cockney, and Steve Roberts, the cowboy, finally to subdue the madman. These are all men of Mr. Mellaire's watch. In Mr. Pike's watch John Hackey, the San Francisco hoodlum, who has stood out against the gangsters, has at last succumbed and joined them. And only this morning

Mr. Pike dragged Charles Davis by the scruff of the neck out of the forecastle, where he had caught him expounding sea-law to the miserable creatures. Mr. Mellaire, I notice on occasion, remains unduly intimate with the gangster clique. And yet nothing serious happens.

And Charles Davis does not die. He seems actually to be gaining in weight. He never misses a meal. From the break of the poop, in the shelter of the weather cloth, our decks a thunder and rush of freezing water, I often watch him slip out of his room between seas, mug and plate in hand, and hobble for'ard to the galley for his food. He is a keen judge of the ship's motions, for never yet have I seen him get a serious ducking. Sometimes, of course, he may get splattered with spray or wet to the knees, but he manages to be out of the way whenever a big graybeard falls on board.