

CHAPTER XLII

Mr. Mellaire was right. The men would not accept the driving when the Elsinore won to easier latitudes. Mr. Pike was right. Hell had not begun to pop. But it has popped now, and men are overboard without even the kindness of a sack of coal at their feet. And yet the men, though ripe for it, did not precipitate the trouble. It was Mr. Mellaire. Or, rather, it was Ditman Olansen, the crank-eyed Norwegian. Perhaps it was Possum. At any rate, it was an accident, in which the several-named, including Possum, played their respective parts.

To begin at the beginning. Two weeks have elapsed since we crossed 50, and we are now in 37--the same latitude as San Francisco, or, to be correct, we are as far south of the equator as San Francisco is north of it. The trouble was precipitated yesterday morning shortly after nine o'clock, and Possum started the chain of events that culminated in downright mutiny. It was Mr. Mellaire's watch, and he was standing on the bridge, directly under the mizzen-top, giving orders to Sundry Buyers, who, with Arthur Deacon and the Maltese Cockney, was doing rigging work aloft.

Get the picture and the situation in all its ridiculousness. Mr. Pike, thermometer in hand, was coming back along the bridge from taking the temperature of the coal in the for'ard hold. Ditman Olansen was just swinging into the mizzen-top as he went up with several turns of rope

over one shoulder. Also, in some way, to the end of this rope was fastened a sizable block that might have weighed ten pounds. Possum, running free, was fooling around the chicken-coop on top the 'midship-house. And the chickens, featherless but indomitable, were enjoying the milder weather as they pecked at the grain and grits which the steward had just placed in their feeding-trough. The tarpaulin that covered their pen had been off for several days.

Now observe. I am at the break of the poop, leaning on the rail and watching Ditman Olansen swing into the top with his cumbersome burden. Mr. Pike, proceeding aft, has just passed Mr. Mellaire. Possum, who, on account of the Horn weather and the tarpaulin, has not seen the chickens for many weeks, is getting reacquainted, and is investigating them with that keen nose of his. And a hen's beak, equally though differently keen, impacts on Possum's nose, which is as sensitive as it is keen.

I may well say, now that I think it over, that it was this particular hen that started the mutiny. The men, well-driven by Mr. Pike, were ripe for an explosion, and Possum and the hen laid the train.

Possum fell away backwards from the coop and loosed a wild cry of pain and indignation. This attracted Ditman Olansen's attention. He paused and craned his neck out in order to see, and, in this moment of carelessness, the block he was carrying fetched away from him along with the several turns of rope around his shoulder. Both the mates sprang away to get out from under. The rope, fast to the block and following

it, lashed about like a blacksnake, and, though the block fell clear of Mr. Mellaire, the bight of the rope snatched off his cap.

Mr. Pike had already started an oath aloft when his eyes caught sight of the terrible cleft in Mr. Mellaire's head. There it was, for all the world to read, and Mr. Pike's and mine were the only eyes that could read it. The sparse hair upon the second mate's crown served not at all to hide the cleft. It began out of sight in the thicker hair above the ears, and was exposed nakedly across the whole dome of head.

The stream of abuse for Ditman Olansen was choked in Mr. Pike's throat. All he was capable of for the moment was to stare, petrified, at that enormous fissure flanked at either end with a thatch of grizzled hair. He was in a dream, a trance, his great hands knotting and clenching unconsciously as he stared at the mark unmistakable by which he had said that he would some day identify the murderer of Captain Somers. And in that moment I remembered having heard him declare that some day he would stick his fingers in that mark.

Still as in a dream, moving slowly, right hand outstretched like a talon, with the fingers drawn downward, he advanced on the second mate with the evident intention of thrusting his fingers into that cleft and of clawing and tearing at the brain-life beneath that pulsed under the thin film of skin.

The second mate backed away along the bridge, and Mr. Pike seemed

partially to come to himself. His outstretched arm dropped to his side, and he paused.

"I know you," he said, in a strange, shaky voice, blended of age and passion. "Eighteen years ago you were dismasted off the Plate in the Cyrus Thompson. She foundered, after you were on your beam ends and lost your sticks. You were in the only boat that was saved. Eleven years ago, on the Jason Harrison, in San Francisco, Captain Somers was beaten to death by his second mate. This second mate was a survivor of the Cyrus Thompson. This second mate'd had his skull split by a crazy sea-cook. Your skull is split. This second mate's name was Sidney Waltham. And if you ain't Sidney Waltham . . . "

At this point Mr. Mellaire, or, rather, Sidney Waltham, despite his fifty years, did what only a sailor could do. He went over the bridge-rail side-wise, caught the running gear up-and-down the mizzen-mast, and landed lightly on his feet on top of Number Three hatch. Nor did he stop there. He ran across the hatch and dived through the doorway of his room in the 'midship-house.

Such must have been Mr. Pike's profundity of passion, that he paused like a somnambulist, actually rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand, and seemed to awaken.

But the second mate had not run to his room for refuge. The next moment he emerged, a thirty-two Smith and Wesson in his hand, and the instant he

emerged he began shooting.

Mr. Pike was wholly himself again, and I saw him perceptibly pause and decide between the two impulses that tore at him. One was to leap over the bridge-rail and down at the man who shot at him; the other was to retreat. He retreated. And as he bounded aft along the narrow bridge the mutiny began. Arthur Deacon, from the mizzen-top, leaned out and hurled a steel marlin-spike at the fleeing mate. The thing flashed in the sunlight as it hurtled down. It missed Mr. Pike by twenty feet and nearly impaled Possum, who, afraid of firearms, was wildly rushing and ki-yi-ing aft. It so happened that the sharp point of the marlin-spike struck the wooden floor of the bridge, and it penetrated the planking with such force that after it had fetched to a standstill it vibrated violently for long seconds.

I confess that I failed to observe a tithe of what occurred during the next several minutes. Piece together as I will, after the event, I know that I missed much of what took place. I know that the men aloft in the mizzen descended to the deck, but I never saw them descend. I know that the second mate emptied the chambers of his revolver, but I did not hear all the shots. I know that Lars Johnson left the wheel, and on his broken leg, rebroken and not yet really mended, limped and scuttled across the poop, down the ladder, and gained for'ard. I know he must have limped and scuttled on that bad leg of his; I know that I must have seen him; and yet I swear that I have no impression of seeing him.

I do know that I heard the rush of feet of men from for'ard along the main deck. And I do know that I saw Mr. Pike take shelter behind the steel jiggermast. Also, as the second mate manoeuvred to port on top of Number Three hatch for his last shot, I know that I saw Mr. Pike duck around the corner of the chart-house to starboard and get away aft and below by way of the booby-hatch. And I did hear that last futile shot, and the bullet also as it ricocheted from the corner of the steel-walled chart-house.

As for myself, I did not move. I was too interested in seeing. It may have been due to lack of presence of mind, or to lack of habituation to an active part in scenes of quick action; but at any rate I merely retained my position at the break of the poop and looked on. I was the only person on the poop when the mutineers, led by the second mate and the gangsters, rushed it. I saw them swarm up the ladder, and it never entered my head to attempt to oppose them. Which was just as well, for I would have been killed for my pains, and I could never have stopped them.

I was alone on the poop, and the men were quite perplexed to find no enemy in sight. As Bert Rhine went past, he half fetched up in his stride, as if to knife me with the sheath knife, sharp-pointed, which he carried in his right hand; then, and I know I correctly measured the drift of his judgment, he unflatteringly dismissed me as unimportant and ran on.

Right here I was impressed by the lack of clear-thinking on any of their

parts. So spontaneously had the ship's company exploded into mutiny that it was dazed and confused even while it acted. For instance, in the months since we left Baltimore there had never been a moment, day or night, even when preventer tackles were rigged, that a man had not stood at the wheel. So habituated were they to this, that they were shocked into consternation at sight of the deserted wheel. They paused for an instant to stare at it. Then Bert Rhine, with a quick word and gesture, sent the Italian, Guido Bombini, around the rear of the half-wheelhouse. The fact that he completed the circuit was proof that nobody was there.

Again, in the swift rush of events, I must confess that I saw but little. I was aware that more of the men were climbing up the ladder and gaining the poop, but I had no eyes for them. I was watching that sanguinary group aft near the wheel and noting the most important thing, namely, that it was Bert Rhine, the gangster, and not the second mate, who gave orders and was obeyed.

He motioned to the Jew, Isaac Chantz, who had been wounded earlier in the voyage by O'Sullivan, and Chantz led the way to the starboard chart-house door. While this was going on, all in flashing fractions of seconds, Bert Rhine was cautiously inspecting the lazarette through the open booby-hatch.

Isaac Chantz jerked open the chart-house door, which swung outward. Things did happen so swiftly! As he jerked the iron door open a two-foot hacking butcher knife, at the end of a withered, yellow hand, flashed out

and down on him. It missed head and neck, but caught him on top of the left shoulder.

All hands recoiled before this, and the Jew reeled across to the rail, his right hand clutching at his wound, and between the fingers I could see the blood welling darkly. Bert Rhine abandoned his inspection of the booby-hatch, and, with the second mate, the latter still carrying his empty Smith & Wesson, sprang into the press about the chart-house door.

O wise, clever, cautious, old Chinese steward! He made no emergence. The door swung empty back and forth to the rolling of the Elsinore, and no man knew but what, just inside, with that heavy, hacking knife upraised, lurked the steward. And while they hesitated and stared at the aperture that alternately closed and opened with the swinging of the door, the booby-hatch, situated between chart-house and wheel, erupted. It was Mr. Pike, with his .44 automatic Colt.

There were shots fired, other than by him. I know I heard them, like "red-heads" at an old-time Fourth of July; but I do not know who discharged them. All was mess and confusion. Many shots were being fired, and through the uproar I heard the reiterant, monotonous explosions from the Colt's .44

I saw the Italian, Mike Cipriani, clutch savagely at his abdomen and sink slowly to the deck. Shorty, the Japanese half-caste, clown that he was, dancing and grinning on the outskirts of the struggle, with a final

grimace and hysterical giggle led the retreat across the poop and down the poop-ladder. Never had I seen a finer exemplification of mob psychology. Shorty, the most unstable-minded of the individuals who composed this mob, by his own instability precipitated the retreat in which the mob joined. When he broke before the steady discharge of the automatic in the hand of the mate, on the instant the rest broke with him. Least-balanced, his balance was the balance of all of them.

Chantz, bleeding prodigiously, was one of the first on Shorty's heels. I saw Nosey Murphy pause long enough to throw his knife at the mate. The missile went wide, with a metallic clang struck the brass tip of one of the spokes of the Elsinore's wheel, and clattered on the deck. The second mate, with his empty revolver, and Bert Rhine with his sheath-knife, fled past me side by side.

Mr. Pike emerged from the booby-hatch and with an unaimed shot brought down Bill Quigley, one of the "bricklayers," who fell at my feet. The last man off the poop was the Maltese Cockney, and at the top of the ladder he paused to look back at Mr. Pike, who, holding the automatic in both hands, was taking careful aim. The Maltese Cockney, disdainful of the ladder, leaped through the air to the main deck. But the Colt merely clicked. It was the last bullet in it that had fetched down Bill Quigley.

And the poop was ours.

Events still crowded so closely that I missed much. I saw the steward, belligerent and cautious, his long knife poised for a slash, emerge from the chart-house. Margaret followed him, and behind her came Wada, who carried my .22 Winchester automatic rifle. As he told me afterwards, he had brought it up under instructions from her.

Mr. Pike was glancing with cool haste at his Colt to see whether it was jammed or empty, when Margaret asked him the course.

"By the wind," he shouted to her, as he bounded for'ard. "Put your helm hard up or we'll be all aback."

Ah!--yeoman and henchman of the race, he could not fail in his fidelity to the ship under his command. The iron of all his years of iron training was there manifest. While mutiny spread red, and death was on the wing, he could not forget his charge, the ship, the *Elsinore*, the insensate fabric compounded of steel and hemp and woven cotton that was to him glorious with personality.

Margaret waved Wada in my direction as she ran to the wheel. As Mr. Pike passed the corner of the chart-house, simultaneously there was a report from amidships and the ping of a bullet against the steel wall. I saw the man who fired the shot. It was the cowboy, Steve Roberts.

As for the mate, he ducked in behind the sheltering jiggermast, and even as he ducked his left hand dipped into his side coat-pocket, so that when

he had gained shelter it was coming out with a fresh clip of cartridges. The empty clip fell to the deck, the loader clip slipped up the hollow butt, and he was good for eight more shots.

Wada turned the little automatic rifle over to me, where I still stood under the weather cloth at the break of the poop.

"All ready," he said. "You take off safety."

"Get Roberts," Mr. Pike called to me. "He's the best shot for'ard. If you can't get 'm, jolt the fear of God into him anyway."

It was the first time I had a human target, and let me say, here and now, that I am convinced I am immune to buck fever. There he was before me, less than a hundred feet distant, in the gangway between the door to Davis' room and the starboard-rail, manoeuvring for another shot at Mr. Pike.

I must have missed Steve Roberts that first time, but I came so near him that he jumped. The next instant he had located me and turned his revolver on me. But he had no chance. My little automatic was discharging as fast as I could tickle the trigger with my fore-finger. The cowboy's first shot went wild of me, because my bullet arrived ere he got his swift aim. He swayed and stumbled backward, but the bullets--ten of them--poured from the muzzle of my Winchester like water from a garden hose. It was a stream of lead I played upon him. I shall never know how

many times I hit him, but I am confident that after he had begun his long staggering fall at least three additional bullets entered him ere he impacted on the deck. And even as he was falling, aimlessly and mechanically, stricken then with death, he managed twice again to discharge his weapon.

And after he struck the deck he never moved. I do believe he died in the air.

As I held up my gun and gazed at the abruptly-deserted main-deck I was aware of Wada's touch on my arm. I looked. In his hand were a dozen little .22 long, soft-nosed, smokeless cartridges. He wanted me to reload. I threw on the safety, opened the magazine, and tilted the rifle so that he could let the fresh cartridges of themselves slide into place.

"Get some more," I told him.

Scarcely had he departed on the errand when Bill Quigley, who lay at my feet, created a diversion. I jumped--yes, and I freely confess that I yelled--with startle and surprise, when I felt his paws clutch my ankles and his teeth shut down on the calf of my leg.

It was Mr. Pike to the rescue. I understand now the Western hyperbole of "hitting the high places." The mate did not seem in contact with the deck. My impression was that he soared through the air to me, landing beside me, and, in the instant of landing, kicking out with one of those

big feet of his. Bill Quigley was kicked clear away from me, and the next moment he was flying overboard. It was a clean throw. He never touched the rail.

Whether Mike Cipriani, who, till then, had lain in a welter, began crawling aft in quest of safety, or whether he intended harm to Margaret at the wheel, we shall never know; for there was no opportunity given him to show his purpose. As swiftly as Mr. Pike could cross the deck with those giant bounds, just that swiftly was the Italian in the air and following Bill Quigley overside.

The mate missed nothing with those eagle eyes of his as he returned along the poop. Nobody was to be seen on the main deck. Even the lookout had deserted the forecastle-head, and the *Elsinore*, steered by Margaret, slipped a lazy two knots through the quiet sea. Mr. Pike was apprehensive of a shot from ambush, and it was not until after a scrutiny of several minutes that he put his pistol into his side coat-pocket and snarled for'ard:

"Come out, you rats! Show your ugly faces! I want to talk with you!"

Guido Bombini, gesticulating peaceable intentions and evidently thrust out by Bert Rhine, was the first to appear. When it was observed that Mr. Pike did not fire, the rest began to dribble into view. This continued till all were there save the cook, the two sail-makers, and the second mate. The last to come out were Tom Spink, the boy Buckwheat, and

Herman Lunkenheimer, the good-natured but simple-minded German; and these three came out only after repeated threats from Bert Rhine, who, with Nosey Murphy and Kid Twist, was patently in charge. Also, like a faithful dog, Guido Bombini fawned close to him.

"That will do--stop where you are," Mr. Pike commanded, when the crew was scattered abreast, to starboard and to port, of Number Three hatch.

It was a striking scene. Mutiny on the high seas! That phrase, learned in boyhood from my Marryatt and Cooper, recrudesced in my brain. This was it--mutiny on the high seas in the year nineteen thirteen--and I was part of it, a perishing blond whose lot was cast with the perishing but lordly blonds, and I had already killed a man.

Mr. Pike, in the high place, aged and indomitable; leaned his arm on the rail at the break of the poop and gazed down at the mutineers, the like of which I'll wager had never been assembled in mutiny before. There were the three gangsters and ex-jailbirds, anything but seamen, yet in control of this affair that was peculiarly an affair of the sea. With them was the Italian hound, Bombini, and beside them were such strangely assorted men as Anton Sorensen, Lars Jacobsen, Frank Fitzgibbon, and Richard Giller--also Arthur Deacon the white slaver, John Hackey the San Francisco hoodlum, the Maltese Cockney, and Tony the suicidal Greek.

I noticed the three strange ones, shouldering together and standing apart from the others as they swayed to the lazy roll and dreamed with their

pale, topaz eyes. And there was the Faun, stone deaf but observant, straining to understand what was taking place. Yes, and Mulligan Jacobs and Andy Fay were bitterly and eagerly side by side, and Ditman Olansen, crank-eyed, as if drawn by some affinity of bitterness, stood behind them, his head appearing between their heads. Farthest advanced of all was Charles Davis, the man who by all rights should long since be dead, his face with its wax-like pallor startlingly in contrast to the weathered faces of the rest.

I glanced back at Margaret, who was coolly steering, and she smiled to me, and love was in her eyes--she, too, of the perishing and lordly race of blonds, her place the high place, her heritage government and command and mastery over the stupid lowly of her kind and over the ruck and spawn of the dark-pigmented breeds.

"Where's Sidney Waltham?" the mate snarled. "I want him. Bring him out. After that, the rest of you filth get back to work, or God have mercy on you."

The men moved about restlessly, shuffling their feet on the deck.

"Sidney Waltham, I want you--come out!" Mr. Pike called, addressing himself beyond them to the murderer of the captain under whom once he had sailed.

The prodigious old hero! It never entered his head that he was not the

master of the rabble there below him. He had but one idea, an idea of passion, and that was his desire for vengeance on the murderer of his old skipper.

"You old stiff!" Mulligan Jacobs snarled back.

"Shut up, Mulligan!" was Bert Rhine's command, in receipt of which he received a venomous stare from the cripple.

"Oh, ho, my hearty," Mr. Pike sneered at the gangster. "I'll take care of your case, never fear. In the meantime, and right now, fetch out that dog."

Whereupon he ignored the leader of the mutineers and began calling, "Waltham, you dog, come out! Come out, you sneaking cur! Come out!"

Another lunatic, was the thought that flashed through my mind; another lunatic, the slave of a single idea. He forgets the mutiny, his fidelity to the ship, in his personal thirst for vengeance.

But did he? Even as he forgot and called his heart's desire, which was the life of the second mate, even then, without intention, mechanically, his sailor's considerative eye lifted to note the draw of the sails and roved from sail to sail. Thereupon, so reminded, he returned to his fidelity.

"Well?" he snarled at Bert Rhine. "Go on and get for'ard before I spit on you, you scum and slum. I'll give you and the rest of the rats two minutes to return to duty."

And the leader, with his two fellow-gangsters, laughed their weird, silent laughter.

"I guess you'll listen to our talk, first, old horse," Bert Rhine retorted. "--Davis, get up now and show what kind of a spieler you are. Don't get cold feet. Spit it out to Foxy Grandpa an' tell 'm what's doin'."

"You damned sea-lawyer!" Mr. Pike snarled as Davis opened his mouth to speak.

Bert Rhine shrugged his shoulders, and half turned on his heel as if to depart, as he said quietly:

"Oh, well, if you don't want to talk . . . "

Mr. Pike conceded a point.

"Go on!" he snarled. "Spit the dirt out of your system, Davis; but remember one thing: you'll pay for this, and you'll pay through the nose. Go on!"

The sea-lawyer cleared his throat in preparation.

"First of all, I ain't got no part in this," he began.

"I'm a sick man, an' I oughta be in my bunk right now. I ain't fit to be on my feet. But they've asked me to advise 'em on the law, an' I have advised 'em--"

"And the law--what is it?" Mr. Pike broke in.

But Davis was uncowed.

"The law is that when the officers is inefficient, the crew can take charge peaceably an' bring the ship into port. It's all law an' in the records. There was the Abyssinia, in eighteen ninety-two, when the master'd died of fever and the mates took to drinkin'--"

"Go on!" Mr. Pike shut him off. "I don't want your citations. What d'ye want? Spit it out."

"Well--and I'm talkin' as an outsider, as a sick man off duty that's been asked to talk--well, the point is our skipper was a good one, but he's gone. Our mate is violent, seekin' the life of the second mate. We don't care about that. What we want is to get into port with our lives. An' our lives is in danger. We ain't hurt nobody. You've done all the bloodshed. You've shot an' killed an' thrown two men overboard, as

witnesses'll testify to in court. An' there's Roberts, there, dead, too, an' headin' for the sharks--an' what for? For defendin' himself from murderous an' deadly attack, as every man can testify an' tell the truth, the whole truth, an' nothin' but the truth, so help 'm, God--ain't that right, men?"

A confused murmur of assent arose from many of them.

"You want my job, eh?" Mr. Pike grinned. "An' what are you goin' to do with me?"

"You'll be taken care of until we get in an' turn you over to the lawful authorities," Davis answered promptly. "Most likely you can plead insanity an' get off easy."

At this moment I felt a stir at my shoulder. It was Margaret, armed with the long knife of the steward, whom she had put at the wheel.

"You've got another guess comin', Davis," Mr. Pike said. "I've got no more talk with you. I'm goin' to talk to the bunch. I'll give you fellows just two minutes to choose, and I'll tell you your choices. You've only got two choices. You'll turn the second mate over to me an' go back to duty and take what's comin' to you, or you'll go to jail with the stripes on you for long sentences. You've got two minutes. The fellows that want jail can stand right where they are. The fellows that don't want jail and are willin' to work faithful, can walk right back to

me here on the poop. Two minutes, an' you can keep your jaws stopped while you think over what it's goin' to be."

He turned his head to me and said in an undertone, "Be ready with that pop-gun for trouble. An' don't hesitate. Slap it into 'em--the swine that think they can put as raw a deal as this over on us."

It was Buckwheat who made the first move; but so tentative was it that it got no farther than a tensing of the legs and a sway forward of the shoulders. Nevertheless it was sufficient to start Herman Lunkenheimer, who thrust out his foot and began confidently to walk aft. Kid Twist gained him in a single spring, and Kid Twist, his wrist under the German's throat from behind; his knee pressed into the German's back, bent the man backward and held him. Even as the rifle came to my shoulder, the hound Bombini drew his knife directly beneath Kid Twist's wrist across the up-stretched throat of the man.

It was at this instant that I heard Mr. Pike's "Plug him!" and pulled the trigger; and of all ungodly things the bullet missed and caught the Faun, who staggered back, sat down on the hatch, and began to cough. And even as he coughed he still strained with pain-eloquent eyes to try to understand.

No other man moved. Herman Lunkenheimer, released by Kid Twist, sank down on the deck. Nor did I shoot again. Kid Twist stood again by the side of Bert Rhine and Guido Bombini fawned near.

Bert Rhine actually visibly smiled.

"Any more of you guys want to promenade aft?" he queried in velvet tones.

"Two minutes up," Mr. Pike declared.

"An' what are you goin' to do about it, Grandpa?" Bert Rhine sneered.

In a flash the big automatic was out of the mate's pocket and he was shooting as fast as he could pull trigger, while all hands fled to shelter. But, as he had long since told me, he was no shot and could effectively use the weapon only at close range--muzzle to stomach preferably.

As we stared at the main deck, deserted save for the dead cowboy on his back and for the Faun who still sat on the hatch and coughed, an eruption of men occurred over the for'ard edge of the 'midship-house.

"Shoot!" Margaret cried at my back.

"Don't!" Mr. Pike roared at me.

The rifle was at my shoulder when I desisted. Louis, the cook, led the rush aft to us across the top of the house and along the bridge. Behind him, in single file and not wasting any time, came the Japanese

sail-makers, Henry the training-ship boy, and the other boy Buckwheat. Tom Spink brought up the rear. As he came up the ladder of the 'midship-house somebody from beneath must have caught him by a leg in an effort to drag him back. We saw half of him in sight and knew that he was struggling and kicking. He fetched clear abruptly, gained the top of the house in a surge, and raced aft along the bridge until he overtook and collided with Buckwheat, who yelled out in fear that a mutineer had caught him.