CHAPTER XLIII

We who are aft, besieged in the high place, are stronger in numbers than I dreamed until now, when I have just finished taking the ship's census. Of course Margaret, Mr. Pike, and myself are apart. We alone represent the ruling class. With us are servants and serfs, faithful to their salt, who look to us for guidance and life.

I use my words advisedly. Tom Spink and Buckwheat are serfs and nothing else. Henry, the training-ship boy, occupies an anomalous classification. He is of our kind, but he can scarcely be called even a cadet of our kind. He will some day win to us and become a mate or a captain, but in the meantime, of course, his past is against him. He is a candidate, rising from the serf class to our class. Also, he is only a youth, the iron of his heredity not yet tested and proven.

Wada, Louis, and the steward are servants of Asiatic breed. So are the two Japanese sail-makers--scarcely servants, not to be called slaves, but something in between.

So, all told, there are eleven of us aft in the citadel. But our followers are too servant-like and serf-like to be offensive fighters. They will help us defend the high place against all attack; but they are incapable of joining with us in an attack on the other end of the ship. They will fight like cornered rats to preserve their lives; but they will

not advance like tigers upon the enemy. Tom Spink is faithful but spirit-broken. Buckwheat is hopelessly of the stupid lowly. Henry has not yet won his spurs. On our side remain Margaret, Mr. Pike, and myself. The rest will hold the wall of the poop and fight thereon to the death, but they are not to be depended upon in a sortie.

At the other end of the ship--and I may as well give the roster, are: the second mate, either to be called Mellaire or Waltham, a strong man of our own breed but a renegade; the three gangsters, killers and jackals, Bert Rhine, Nosey Murphy, and Kid Twist; the Maltese Cockney and Tony the crazy Greek; Frank Fitzgibbon and Richard Giller, the survivors of the trio of "bricklayers"; Anton Sorensen and Lars Jacobsen, stupid Scandinavian sailor-men; Ditman Olansen, the crank-eyed Berserk; John Hackey and Arthur Deacon, respectively hoodlum and white slaver; Shorty, the mixed-breed clown; Guido Bombini, the Italian hound; Andy Pay and Mulligan Jacobs, the bitter ones; the three topaz-eyed dreamers, who are unclassifiable; Isaac Chantz, the wounded Jew; Bob, the overgrown dolt; the feeble-minded Faun, lung-wounded; Nancy and Sundry Buyers, the two hopeless, helpless bosuns; and, finally, the sea-lawyer, Charles Davis.

This makes twenty-seven of them against the eleven of us. But there are men, strong in viciousness, among them. They, too, have their serfs and bravos. Guido Bombini and Isaac Chantz are certainly bravos. And weaklings like Sorensen, and Jacobsen, and Bob, cannot be anything else than slaves to the men who compose the gangster clique.

I failed to tell what happened yesterday, after Mr. Pike emptied his automatic and cleared the deck. The poop was indubitably ours, and there was no possibility of the mutineers making a charge on us in broad daylight. Margaret had gone below, accompanied by Wada, to see to the security of the port and starboard doors that open from the cabin directly on the main deck. These are still caulked and tight and fastened on the inside, as they have been since the passage of Cape Horn began.

Mr. Pike put one of the sail-makers at the wheel, and the steward, relieved and starting below, was attracted to the port quarter, where the patent log that towed astern was made fast. Margaret had returned his knife to him, and he was carrying it in his hand when his attention was attracted astern to our wake. Mike Cipriani and Bill Quigley had managed to catch the lazily moving log-line and were clinging to it. The Elsinore was moving just fast enough to keep them on the surface instead of dragging them under. Above them and about them circled curious and hungry albatrosses, Cape hens, and mollyhawks. Even as I glimpsed the situation one of the big birds, a ten-footer at least, with a ten-inch beak to the fore, dropped down on the Italian. Releasing his hold with one hand, he struck with his knife at the bird. Feathers flew, and the albatross, deflected by the blow, fell clumsily into the water.

Quite methodically, just as part of the day's work, the steward chopped down with his knife, catching the log-line between the steel edge and the rail. At once, no longer buoyed up by the Elsinore's two-knot drag

ahead, the wounded men began to swim and flounder. The circling hosts of huge sea-birds descended upon them, with carnivorous beaks striking at their heads and shoulders and arms. A great screeching and squawking arose from the winged things of prey as they strove for the living meat. And yet, somehow, I was not very profoundly shocked. These were the men whom I had seen eviscerate the shark and toss it overboard, and shout with joy as they watched it devoured alive by its brethren. They had played a violent, cruel game with the things of life, and the things of life now played upon them the same violent, cruel game. As they that rise by the sword perish by the sword, just so did these two men who had lived cruelly die cruelly.

"Oh, well," was Mr. Pike's comment, "we've saved two sacks of mighty good coal."

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Certainly our situation might be worse. We are cooking on the coal-stove and on the oil-burners. We have servants to cook and serve for us. And, most important of all, we are in possession of all the food on the Elsinore.

Mr. Pike makes no mistake. Realizing that with our crowd we cannot rush the crowd at the other end of the ship, he accepts the siege, which, as he says, consists of the besieged holding all food supplies while the besiegers are on the imminent edge of famine.

"Starve the dogs," he growls. "Starve 'm until they crawl aft and lick our shoes. Maybe you think the custom of carrying the stores aft just happened. Only it didn't. Before you and I were born it was long-established and it was established on brass tacks. They knew what they were about, the old cusses, when they put the grub in the lazarette."

Louis says there is not more than three days' regular whack in the galley; that the barrel of hard-tack in the forecastle will quickly go; and that our chickens, which they stole last night from the top of the 'midship-house, are equivalent to no more than an additional day's supply. In short, at the outside limit, we are convinced the men will be keen to talk surrender within the week.

We are no longer sailing. In last night's darkness we helplessly listened to the men loosing headsail-halyards and letting yards go down on the run. Under orders of Mr. Pike I shot blindly and many times into the dark, but without result, save that we heard the bullets of answering shots strike against the chart-house. So to-day we have not even a man at the wheel. The Elsinore drifts idly on an idle sea, and we stand regular watches in the shelter of chart-house and jiggermast. Mr. Pike says it is the laziest time he has had on the whole voyage.

I alternate watches with him, although when on duty there is little to be done, save, in the daytime, to stand rifle in hand behind the jiggermast,

and, in the night, to lurk along the break of the poop. Behind the chart-house, ready to repel assault, are my watch of four men: Tom Spink, Wada, Buckwheat, and Louis. Henry, the two Japanese sail-makers, and the old steward compose Mr. Pike's watch.

It is his orders that no one for'ard is to be allowed to show himself, so, to-day, when the second mate appeared at the corner of the 'midship-house, I made him take a quick leap back with the thud of my bullet against the iron wall a foot from his head. Charles David tried the same game and was similarly stimulated.

Also, this evening, after dark, Mr. Pike put block-and-tackle on the first section of the bridge, heaved it out of place, and lowered it upon the poop. Likewise he hoisted in the ladder at the break of the poop that leads down to the main deck. The men will have to do some climbing if they ever elect to rush us.

I am writing this in my watch below. I came off duty at eight o'clock, and at midnight I go on deck to stay till four to-morrow morning. Wada shakes his head and says that the Blackwood Company should rebate us on the first-class passage paid in advance. We are working our passage, he contends.

Margaret takes the adventure joyously. It is the first time she has experienced mutiny, but she is such a thorough sea-woman that she appears like an old hand at the game. She leaves the deck to the mate and me;

but, still acknowledging his leadership, she has taken charge below and entirely manages the commissary, the cooking, and the sleeping arrangements. We still keep our old quarters, and she has bedded the new-comers in the big after-room with blankets issued from the slop-chest.

In a way, from the standpoint of her personal welfare, the mutiny is the best thing that could have happened to her. It has taken her mind off her father and filled her waking hours with work to do. This afternoon, standing above the open booby-hatch, I heard her laugh ring out as in the old days coming down the Atlantic. Yes, and she hums snatches of songs under her breath as she works. In the second dog-watch this evening, after Mr. Pike had finished dinner and joined us on the poop, she told him that if he did not soon re-rig his phonograph she was going to start in on the piano. The reason she advanced was the psychological effect such sounds of revelry would have on the starving mutineers.

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The days pass, and nothing of moment happens. We get nowhere. The Elsinore, without the steadying of her canvas, rolls emptily and drifts a lunatic course. Sometimes she is bow on to the wind, and at other times she is directly before it; but at all times she is circling vaguely and hesitantly to get somewhere else than where she is. As an illustration, at daylight this morning she came up into the wind as if endeavouring to go about. In the course of half an hour she worked off till the wind was directly abeam. In another half hour she was back into

the wind. Not until evening did she manage to get the wind on her port bow; but when she did, she immediately paid off, accomplished the complete circle in an hour, and recommenced her morning tactics of trying to get into the wind.

And there is nothing for us to do save hold the poop against the attack that is never made. Mr. Pike, more from force of habit than anything else, takes his regular observations and works up the Elsinore's position. This noon she was eight miles east of yesterday's position, yet to-day's position, in longitude, was within a mile of where she was four days ago. On the other hand she invariably makes nothing at the rate of seven or eight miles a day.

Aloft, the Elsinore is a sad spectacle. All is confusion and disorder. The sails, unfurled, are a slovenly mess along the yards, and many loose ends sway dismally to every roll. The only yard that is loose is the main-yard. It is fortunate that wind and wave are mild, else would the iron-work carry away and the mutineers find the huge thing of steel about their ears.

There is one thing we cannot understand. A week has passed, and the men show no signs of being starved into submission. Repeatedly and in vain has Mr. Pike interrogated the hands aft with us. One and all, from the cook to Buckwheat, they swear they have no knowledge of any food for'ard, save the small supply in the galley and the barrel of hardtack in the forecastle. Yet it is very evident that those for'ard are not starving.

We see the smoke from the galley-stove and can only conclude that they have food to cook.

Twice has Bert Rhine attempted a truce, but both times his white flag, as soon as it showed above the edge of the 'midship-house, was fired upon by Mr. Pike. The last occurrence was two days ago. It is Mr. Pike's intention thoroughly to starve them into submission, but now he is beginning to worry about their mysterious food supply.

Mr. Pike is not quite himself. He is obsessed, I know beyond any doubt, with the idea of vengeance on the second mate. On divers occasions, now, I have come unexpectedly upon him and found him muttering to himself with grim set face, or clenching and unclenching his big square fists and grinding his teeth. His conversation continually runs upon the feasibility of our making a night attack for'ard, and he is perpetually questioning Tom Spink and Louis on their ideas of where the various men may be sleeping--the point of which always is: Where is the second mate likely to be sleeping?

No later than yesterday afternoon did he give me most positive proof of his obsession. It was four o'clock, the beginning of the first dog-watch, and he had just relieved me. So careless have we grown, that we now stand in broad daylight at the exposed break of the poop. Nobody shoots at us, and, occasionally, over the top of the for'ard-house, Shorty sticks up his head and grins or makes clownish faces at us. At such times Mr. Pike studies Shorty's features through the telescope in an

effort to find signs of starvation. Yet he admits dolefully that Shorty is looking fleshed-up.

But to return. Mr. Pike had just relieved me yesterday afternoon, when the second mate climbed the forecastle-head and sauntered to the very eyes of the Elsinore, where he stood gazing overside.

"Take a crack at 'm," Mr. Pike said.

It was a long shot, and I was taking slow and careful aim, when he touched my arm.

"No; don't," he said.

I lowered the little rifle and looked at him inquiringly.

"You might hit him," he explained. "And I want him for myself."

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Life is never what we expect it to be. All our voyage from Baltimore south to the Horn and around the Horn has been marked by violence and death. And now that it has culminated in open mutiny there is no more violence, much less death. We keep to ourselves aft, and the mutineers keep to themselves for'ard. There is no more harshness, no more snarling and bellowing of commands; and in this fine weather a general festival

obtains.

Aft, Mr. Pike and Margaret alternate with phonograph and piano; and for'ard, although we cannot see them, a full-fledged "foo-foo" band makes most of the day and night hideous. A squealing accordion that Tom Spink says was the property of Mike Cipriani is played by Guido Bombini, who sets the pace and seems the leader of the foo-foo. There are two broken-reeded harmonicas. Someone plays a jew's-harp. Then there are home-made fifes and whistles and drums, combs covered with paper, extemporized triangles, and bones made from ribs of salt horse such as negro minstrels use.

The whole crew seems to compose the band, and, like a lot of monkey-folk rejoicing in rude rhythm, emphasizes the beat by hammering kerosene cans, frying-pans, and all sorts of things metallic or reverberant. Some genius has rigged a line to the clapper of the ship's bell on the forecastle-head and clangs it horribly in the big foo-foo crises, though Bombini can be heard censuring him severely on occasion. And to cap it all, the fog-horn machine pumps in at the oddest moments in imitation of a big bass viol.

And this is mutiny on the high seas! Almost every hour of my deck-watches I listen to this infernal din, and am maddened into desire to join with Mr. Pike in a night attack and put these rebellious and inharmonious slaves to work.

Yet they are not entirely inharmonious. Guido Bombini has a respectable though untrained tenor voice, and has surprised me by a variety of selections, not only from Verdi, but from Wagner and Massenet. Bert Rhine and his crowd are full of rag-time junk, and one phrase that has caught the fancy of all hands, and which they roar out at all times, is: "It's a bear! It's a bear! It's a bear!" This morning Nancy, evidently very strongly urged, gave a doleful rendering of Flying Cloud. Yes, and in the second dog-watch last evening our three topaz-eyed dreamers sang some folk-song strangely sweet and sad.

And this is mutiny! As I write I can scarcely believe it. Yet I know Mr. Pike keeps the watch over my head. I hear the shrill laughter of the steward and Louis over some ancient Chinese joke. Wada and the sail-makers, in the pantry, are, I know, talking Japanese politics. And from across the cabin, along the narrow halls, I can hear Margaret softly humming as she goes to bed.

But all doubts vanish at the stroke of eight bells, when I go on deck to relieve Mr. Pike, who lingers a moment for a "gain," as he calls it.

"Say," he said confidentially, "you and I can clean out the whole gang. All we got to do is sneak for'ard and turn loose. As soon as we begin to shoot up, half of 'em'll bolt aft--lobsters like Nancy, an' Sundry Buyers, an' Jacobsen, an' Bob, an' Shorty, an' them three castaways, for instance. An' while they're doin' that, an' our bunch on the poop is takin' 'em in, you an' me can make a pretty big hole in them that's left.

What d'ye say?"

I hesitated, thinking of Margaret.

"Why, say," he urged, "once I jumped into that fo'c's'le, at close range, I'd start right in, blim-blam-blim, fast as you could wink, nailing them gangsters, an' Bombini, an' the Sheeny, an' Deacon, an' the Cockney, an' Mulligan Jacobs, an' . . . an' . . . Waltham."

"That would be mine," I smiled. "You've only eight shots in your Colt."

Mr. Pike considered a moment, and revised his list. "All right," he agreed, "I guess I'll have to let Jacobs go. What d'ye say? Are you game?"

Still I hesitated, but before I could speak he anticipated me and returned to his fidelity.

"No, you can't do it, Mr. Pathurst. If by any luck they got the both of us . . . No; we'll just stay aft and sit tight until they're starved to it . . . But where they get their tucker gets me. For'ard she's as bare as a bone, as any decent ship ought to be, and yet look at 'em, rolling hog fat. And by rights they ought to a-quit eatin' a week ago."