

CHAPTER XLIV

Yes, it is certainly mutiny. Collecting water from the leaders of the chart-house in a shower of rain this morning, Buckwheat exposed himself, and a long, lucky revolver-shot from for'ard caught him in the shoulder. The bullet was small-calibre and spent ere it reached him, so that he received no more than a flesh-wound, though he carried on as if he were dying until Mr. Pike hushed his noise by cuffing his ears.

I should not like to have Mr. Pike for my surgeon. He probed for the bullet with his little finger, which was far too big for the aperture; and with his little finger, while with his other hand he threatened another ear-clout, he gouged out the leaden pellet. Then he sent the boy below, where Margaret took him in charge with antiseptics and dressings.

I see her so rarely that a half-hour alone with her these days is an adventure. She is busy morning to night in keeping her house in order. As I write this, through my open door I can hear her laying the law down to the men in the after-room. She has issued underclothes all around from the slop-chest, and is ordering them to take a bath in the rain-water just caught. And to make sure of their thoroughness in the matter, she has told off Louis and the steward to supervise the operation. Also, she has forbidden them smoking their pipes in the after-room. And, to cap everything, they are to scrub walls, ceiling, everything, and then start to-morrow morning at painting. All of which

serves to convince me almost that mutiny does not obtain and that I have imagined it.

But no. I hear Buckwheat blubbering and demanding how he can take a bath in his wounded condition. I wait and listen for Margaret's judgment. Nor am I disappointed. Tom Spink and Henry are told off to the task, and the thorough scrubbing of Buckwheat is assured.

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The mutineers are not starving. To-day they have been fishing for albatrosses. A few minutes after they caught the first one its carcass was flung overboard. Mr. Pike studied it through his sea-glasses, and I heard him grit his teeth when he made certain that it was not the mere feathers and skin but the entire carcass. They had taken only its wing-bones to make into pipe-stems. The inference was obvious: starving men would not throw meat away in such fashion.

But where do they get their food? It is a sea-mystery in itself, although I might not so deem it were it not for Mr. Pike.

"I think, and think, till my brain is all frazzled out," he tells me; "and yet I can't get a line on it. I know every inch of space on the *Elsinore*, and know there isn't an ounce of grub anywhere for'ard, and yet they eat! I've overhauled the lazarette. As near as I can make it out, nothing is missing. Then where do they get it? That's what I want

to know. Where do they get it?"

I know that this morning he spent hours in the lazarette with the steward and the cook, overhauling and checking off from the lists of the Baltimore agents. And I know that they came up out of the lazarette, the three of them, dripping with perspiration and baffled. The steward has raised the hypothesis that, first of all, there were extra stores left over from the previous voyage, or from previous voyages, and, next, that the stealing of these stores must have taken place during the night-watches when it was Mr. Pike's turn below.

At any rate, the mate takes the food mystery almost as much to heart as he takes the persistent and propinquitous existence of Sidney Waltham.

I am coming to realize the meaning of watch-and-watch. To begin with, I spend on deck twelve hours, and a fraction more, of each twenty-four. A fair portion of the remaining twelve is spent in eating, in dressing, and in undressing, and with Margaret. As a result, I feel the need for more sleep than I am getting. I scarcely read at all, now. The moment my head touches the pillow I am asleep. Oh, I sleep like a baby, eat like a navy, and in years have not enjoyed such physical well-being. I tried to read George Moore last night, and was dreadfully bored. He may be a realist, but I solemnly aver he does not know reality on that tight, little, sheltered-life archipelago of his. If he could wind-jam around the Horn just one voyage he would be twice the writer.

And Mr. Pike, for practically all of his sixty-nine years, has stood his watch-and-watch, with many a spill-over of watches into watches. And yet he is iron. In a struggle with him I am confident that he would break me like so much straw. He is truly a prodigy of a man, and, so far as to-day is concerned, an anachronism.

The Faun is not dead, despite my unlucky bullet. Henry insisted that he caught a glimpse of him yesterday. To-day I saw him myself. He came to the corner of the 'midship-house and gazed wistfully aft at the poop, straining and eager to understand. In the same way I have often seen Possum gaze at me.

It has just struck me that of our eight followers five are Asiatic and only three are our own breed. Somehow it reminds me of India and of Clive and Hastings.

And the fine weather continues, and we wonder how long a time must elapse ere our mutineers eat up their mysterious food and are starved back to work.

We are almost due west of Valparaiso and quite a bit less than a thousand miles off the west coast of South America. The light northerly breezes, varying from north-east to west, would, according to Mr. Pike, work us in nicely for Valparaiso if only we had sail on the *Elsinore*. As it is, sailless, she drifts around and about and makes nowhere save for the slight northerly drift each day.

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Mr. Pike is beside himself. In the past two days he has displayed increasing possession of himself by the one idea of vengeance on the second mate. It is not the mutiny, irksome as it is and helpless as it makes him; it is the presence of the murderer of his old-time and admired skipper, Captain Somers.

The mate grins at the mutiny, calls it a snap, speaks gleefully of how his wages are running up, and regrets that he is not ashore, where he would be able to take a hand in gambling on the reinsurance. But the sight of Sidney Waltham, calmly gazing at sea and sky from the forecandle-head, or astride the far end of the bowsprit and fishing for sharks, saddens him. Yesterday, coming to relieve me, he borrowed my rifle and turned loose the stream of tiny pellets on the second mate, who coolly made his line secure ere he scrambled in-board. Of course, it was only one chance in a hundred that Mr. Pike might have hit him, but Sidney Waltham did not care to encourage the chance.

And yet it is not like mutiny--not like the conventional mutiny I absorbed as a boy, and which has become classic in the literature of the sea. There is no hand-to-hand fighting, no crash of cannon and flash of cutlass, no sailors drinking grog, no lighted matches held over open powder-magazines. Heavens!--there isn't a single cutlass nor a powder-magazine on board. And as for grog, not a man has had a drink since

Baltimore.

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Well, it is mutiny after all. I shall never doubt it again. It may be nineteen-thirteen mutiny on a coal-carrier, with feeblings and imbeciles and criminals for mutineers; but at any rate mutiny it is, and at least in the number of deaths it is reminiscent of the old days. For things have happened since last I had opportunity to write up this log. For that matter, I am now the keeper of the Elsinore's official log as well, in which work Margaret helps me.

And I might have known it would happen. At four yesterday morning I relieved Mr. Pike. When in the darkness I came up to him at the break of the poop, I had to speak to him twice to make him aware of my presence. And then he merely grunted acknowledgment in an absent sort of way.

The next moment he brightened up, and was himself save that he was too bright. He was making an effort. I felt this, but was quite unprepared for what followed.

"I'll be back in a minute," he said, as he put his leg over the rail and lightly and swiftly lowered himself down into the darkness.

There was nothing I could do. To cry out or to attempt to reason with him would only have drawn the mutineers' attention. I heard his feet

strike the deck beneath as he let go. Immediately he started for'ard. Little enough precaution he took. I swear that clear to the 'midship-house I heard the dragging age-lag of his feet. Then that ceased, and that was all.

I repeat. That was all. Never a sound came from for'ard. I held my watch till daylight. I held it till Margaret came on deck with her cheery "What ho of the night, brave mariner?" I held the next watch (which should have been the mate's) till midday, eating both breakfast and lunch behind the sheltering jiggermast. And I held all afternoon, and through both dog-watches, my dinner served likewise on the deck.

And that was all. Nothing happened. The galley-stove smoked three times, advertising the cooking of three meals. Shorty made faces at me as usual across the rim of the for'ard-house. The Maltese Cockney caught an albatross. There was some excitement when Tony the Greek hooked a shark off the jib-boom, so big that half a dozen tailed on to the line and failed to land it. But I caught no glimpse of Mr. Pike nor of the renegade Sidney Waltham.

In short, it was a lazy, quiet day of sunshine and gentle breeze. There was no inkling to what had happened to the mate. Was he a prisoner? Was he already overside? Why were there no shots? He had his big automatic. It is inconceivable that he did not use it at least once. Margaret and I discussed the affair till we were well a-weary, but reached no conclusion.

She is a true daughter of the race. At the end of the second dog-watch, armed with her father's revolver, she insisted on standing the first watch of the night. I compromised with the inevitable by having Wada make up my bed on the deck in the shelter of the cabin skylight just for'ard of the jiggermast. Henry, the two sail-makers and the steward, variously equipped with knives and clubs, were stationed along the break of the poop.

And right here I wish to pass my first criticism on modern mutiny. On ships like the *Elsinore* there are not enough weapons to go around. The only firearms now aft are Captain West's .38 Colt revolver, and my .22 automatic Winchester. The old steward, with a penchant for hacking and chopping, has his long knife and a butcher's cleaver. Henry, in addition to his sheath-knife, has a short bar of iron. Louis, despite a most sanguinary array of butcher-knives and a big poker, pins his cook's faith on hot water and sees to it that two kettles are always piping on top the cabin stove. Buckwheat, who on account of his wound is getting all night in for a couple of nights, cherishes a hatchet.

The rest of our retainers have knives and clubs, although Yatsuda, the first sail-maker, carries a hand-axe, and Uchino, the second sail-maker, sleeping or waking, never parts from a claw-hammer. Tom Spink has a harpoon. Wada, however, is the genius. By means of the cabin stove he has made a sharp pike-point of iron and fitted it to a pole. To-morrow he intends to make more for the other men.

It is rather shuddery, however, to speculate on the terrible assortment of cutting, gouging, jabbing and slashing weapons with which the mutineers are able to equip themselves from the carpenter's shop. If it ever comes to an assault on the poop there will be a weird mess of wounds for the survivors to dress. For that matter, master as I am of my little rifle, no man could gain the poop in the day-time. Of course, if rush they will, they will rush us in the night, when my rifle will be worthless. Then it will be blow for blow, hand-to-hand, and the strongest pates and arms will win.

But no. I have just bethought me. We shall be ready for any night-rush. I'll take a leaf out of modern warfare, and show them not only that we are top-dog (a favourite phrase of the mate), but why we are top-dog. It is simple--night illumination. As I write I work out the idea--gasoline, balls of oakum, caps and gunpowder from a few cartridges, Roman candles, and flares blue, red, and green, shallow metal receptacles to carry the explosive and inflammable stuff; and a trigger-like arrangement by which, pulling on a string, the caps are exploded in the gunpowder and fire set to the gasoline-soaked oakum and to the flares and candles. It will be brain as well as brawn against mere brawn.

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I have worked like a Trojan all day, and the idea is realized. Margaret helped me out with suggestions, and Tom Spink did the sailorizing. Over

our head, from the jiggermast, the steel stays that carry the three jigger-trysails descend high above the break of the poop and across the main deck to the mizzenmast. A light line has been thrown over each stay, and been thrown repeatedly around so as to form an unslipping knot. Tom Spink waited till dark, when he went aloft and attached loose rings of stiff wire around the stays below the knots. Also he bent on hoisting-gear and connected permanent fastenings with the sliding rings. And further, between rings and fastenings, is a slack of fifty feet of light line.

This is the idea: after dark each night we shall hoist our three metal wash-basins, loaded with inflammables, up to the stays. The arrangement is such that at the first alarm of a rush, by pulling a cord the trigger is pulled that ignites the powder, and the very same pull operates a trip-device that lets the rings slide down the steel stays. Of course, suspended from the rings, are the illuminators, and when they have run down the stays fifty feet the lines will automatically bring them to rest. Then all the main deck between the poop and the mizzen-mast will be flooded with light, while we shall be in comparative darkness.

Of course each morning before daylight we shall lower all this apparatus to the deck, so that the men for'ard will not guess what we have up our sleeve, or, rather, what we have up on the trysail-stays. Even to-day the little of our gear that has to be left standing aroused their curiosity. Head after head showed over the edge of the for'ard-house as they peeped and peered and tried to make out what we were up to. Why, I

find myself almost looking forward to an attack in order to see the device work.