

## CHAPTER XLV

And what has happened to Mr. Pike remains a mystery. For that matter, what has happened to the second mate? In the past three days we have by our eyes taken the census of the mutineers. Every man has been seen by us with the sole exception of Mr. Mellaire, or Sidney Waltham, as I assume I must correctly name him. He has not appeared--does not appear; and we can only speculate and conjecture.

In the past three days various interesting things have taken place. Margaret stands watch and watch with me, day and night, the clock around; for there is no one of our retainers to whom we can entrust the responsibility of a watch. Though mutiny obtains and we are besieged in the high place, the weather is so mild and there is so little call on our men that they have grown careless and sleep aft of the chart-house when it is their watch on deck. Nothing ever happens, and, like true sailors, they wax fat and lazy. Even have I found Louis, the steward, and Wada guilty of cat-napping. In fact, the training-ship boy, Henry, is the only one who has never lapsed.

Oh, yes, and I gave Tom Spink a thrashing yesterday. Since the disappearance of the mate he had had little faith in me, and had been showing vague signs of insolence and insubordination. Both Margaret and I had noted it independently. Day before yesterday we talked it over.

"He is a good sailor, but weak," she said. "If we let him go on, he will infect the rest."

"Very well, I'll take him in hand," I announced valorously.

"You will have to," she encouraged. "Be hard. Be hard. You must be hard."

Those who sit in the high places must be hard, yet have I discovered that it is hard to be hard. For instance, easy enough was it to drop Steve Roberts as he was in the act of shooting at me. Yet it is most difficult to be hard with a chuckle-headed retainer like Tom Spink--especially when he continually fails by a shade to give sufficient provocation. For twenty-four hours after my talk with Margaret I was on pins and needles to have it out with him, yet rather than have had it out with him I should have preferred to see the poop rushed by the gang from the other side.

Not in a day can the tyro learn to employ the snarling immediacy of mastery of Mr. Pike, nor the reposeful, voiceless mastery of a Captain West. Truly, the situation was embarrassing. I was not trained in the handling of men, and Tom Spink knew it in his chuckle-headed way. Also, in his chuckle-headed way, he was dispirited by the loss of the mate. Fearing the mate, nevertheless he had depended on the mate to fetch him through with a whole skin, or at least alive. On me he has no dependence. What chance had the gentleman passenger and the captain's

daughter against the gang for'ard? So he must have reasoned, and, so reasoning, become despairing and desperate.

After Margaret had told me to be hard I watched Tom Spink with an eagle eye, and he must have sensed my attitude, for he carefully forebore from overstepping, while all the time he palpitated just on the edge of overstepping. Yes, and it was clear that Buckwheat was watching to learn the outcome of this veiled refractoriness. For that matter, the situation was not being missed by our keen-eyed Asiatics, and I know that I caught Louis several times verging on the offence of offering me advice. But he knew his place and managed to keep his tongue between his teeth.

At last, yesterday, while I held the watch, Tom Spink was guilty of spitting tobacco juice on the deck.

Now it must be understood that such an act is as grave an offence of the sea as blasphemy is of the Church.

It was Margaret who came to where I was stationed by the jiggermast and told me what had occurred; and it was she who took my rifle and relieved me so that I could go aft.

There was the offensive spot, and there was Tom Spink, his cheek bulging with a quid.

"Here, you, get a swab and mop that up," I commanded in my harshest manner.

Tom Spink merely rolled his quid with his tongue and regarded me with sneering thoughtfulness. I am sure he was no more surprised than was I by the immediateness of what followed. My fist went out like an arrow from a released bow, and Tom Spink staggered back, tripped against the corner of the tarpaulin-covered sounding-machine, and sprawled on the deck. He tried to make a fight of it, but I followed him up, giving him no chance to set himself or recover from the surprise of my first onslaught.

Now it so happens that not since I was a boy have I struck a person with my naked fist, and I candidly admit that I enjoyed the trouncing I administered to poor Tom Spink. Yes, and in the rapid play about the deck I caught a glimpse of Margaret. She had stepped out of the shelter of the mast and was looking on from the corner of the chart-house. Yes, and more; she was looking on with a cool, measuring eye.

Oh, it was all very grotesque, to be sure. But then, mutiny on the high seas in the year nineteen-thirteen is also grotesque. No lists here between mailed knights for a lady's favour, but merely the trouncing of a chuckle-head for spitting on the deck of a coal-carrier. Nevertheless, the fact that my lady looked on added zest to my enterprise, and, doubtlessly, speed and weight to my blows, and at least half a dozen additional clouts to the unlucky sailor.

Yes, man is strangely and wonderfully made. Now that I coolly consider the matter, I realize that it was essentially the same spirit with which I enjoyed beating up Tom Spink, that I have in the past enjoyed contests of the mind in which I have out-epigrammed clever opponents. In the one case, one proves himself top-dog of the mind; in the other, top-dog of the muscle. Whistler and Wilde were just as much intellectual bullies as I was a physical bully yesterday morning when I punched Tom Spink into lying down and staying down.

And my knuckles are sore and swollen. I cease writing for a moment to look at them and to hope that they will not stay permanently enlarged.

At any rate, Tom Spink took his disciplining and promised to come in and be good.

"Sir!" I thundered at him, quite in Mr. Pike's most bloodthirsty manner.

"Sir," he mumbled with bleeding lips. "Yes, sir, I'll mop it up, sir.

Yes, sir."

I could scarcely keep from laughing in his face, the whole thing was so ludicrous; but I managed to look my haughtiest, and sternest, and fiercest, while I superintended the deck-cleansing. The funniest thing about the affair was that I must have knocked Tom Spink's quid down his throat, for he was gagging and hiccoughing all the time he mopped and

scrubbed.

The atmosphere aft has been wonderfully clear ever since. Tom Spink obeys all orders on the jump, and Buckwheat jumps with equal celerity. As for the five Asiatics, I feel that they are stouter behind me now that I have shown masterfulness. By punching a man's face I verily believe I have doubled our united strength. And there is no need to punch any of the rest. The Asiatics are keen and willing. Henry is a true cadet of the breed, Buckwheat will follow Tom Spink's lead, and Tom Spink, a proper Anglo-Saxon peasant, will lead Buckwheat all the better by virtue of the punching.

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Two days have passed, and two noteworthy things have happened. The men seem to be nearing the end of their mysterious food supply, and we have had our first truce.

I have noted, through the glasses, that no more carcasses of the mollyhawks they are now catching are thrown overboard. This means that they have begun to eat the tough and unsavoury creatures, although it does not mean, of course, that they have entirely exhausted their other stores.

It was Margaret, her sailor's eye on the falling barometer and on the "making" stuff adrift in the sky, who called my attention to a coming

blow.

"As soon as the sea rises," she said, "we'll have that loose main-yard and all the rest of the top-hamper tumbling down on deck."

So it was that I raised the white flag for a parley. Bert Rhine and Charles Davis came abaft the 'midship-house, and, while we talked, many faces peered over the for'ard edge of the house and many forms slouched into view on the deck on each side of the house.

"Well, getting tired?" was Bert Rhine's insolent greeting. "Anything we can do for you?"

"Yes, there is," I answered sharply. "You can save your heads so that when you return to work there will be enough of you left to do the work."

"If you are making threats--" Charles Davis began, but was silenced by a glare from the gangster.

"Well, what is it?" Bert Rhine demanded. "Cough it off your chest."

"It's for your own good," was my reply. "It is coming on to blow, and all that unfurled canvas aloft will bring the yards down on your heads. We're safe here, aft. You are the ones who will run risks, and it is up to you to hustle your crowd aloft and make things fast and ship-shape."

"And if we don't?" the gangster sneered.

"Why, you'll take your chances, that is all," I answered carelessly. "I just want to call your attention to the fact that one of those steel yards, end-on, will go through the roof of your forecastle as if it were so much eggshell."

Bert Rhine looked to Charles Davis for verification, and the latter nodded.

"We'll talk it over first," the gangster announced.

"And I'll give you ten minutes," I returned. "If at the end of ten minutes you've not started taking in, it will be too late. I shall put a bullet into any man who shows himself."

"All right, we'll talk it over."

As they started to go back, I called:

"One moment."

They stopped and turned about.

"What have you done to Mr. Pike?" I asked.



Even the impassive Bert Rhine could not quite conceal his surprise.

"An' what have you done with Mr. Mellaire!" he retorted. "You tell us, an' we'll tell you."

I am confident of the genuineness of his surprise. Evidently the mutineers have been believing us guilty of the disappearance of the second mate, just as we have been believing them guilty of the disappearance of the first mate. The more I dwell upon it the more it seems the proposition of the Kilkenny cats, a case of mutual destruction on the part of the two mates.

"Another thing," I said quickly. "Where do you get your food?"

Bert Rhine laughed one of his silent laughs; Charles Davis assumed an expression of mysteriousness and superiority; and Shorty, leaping into view from the corner of the house, danced a jig of triumph.

I drew out my watch.

"Remember," I said, "you've ten minutes in which to make a start."

They turned and went for'ard, and, before the ten minutes were up, all hands were aloft and stowing canvas. All this time the wind, out of the north-west, was breezing up. The old familiar harp-chords of a rising gale were strumming along the rigging, and the men, I verily believe from

lack of practice, were particularly slow at their work.

"It would be better if the upper-and-lower top-sails are set so that we can heave to," Margaret suggested. "They will steady her and make it more comfortable for us."

I seized the idea and improved upon it.

"Better set the upper and lower topsails so that we can handle the ship," I called to the gangster, who was ordering the men about, quite like a mate, from the top of the 'midship-house.

He considered the idea, and then gave the proper orders, although it was the Maltese Cockney, with Nancy and Sundry Buyers under him, who carried the orders out.

I ordered Tom Spink to the long-idle wheel, and gave him the course, which was due east by the steering compass. This put the wind on our port quarter, so that the Elsinore began to move through the water before a fair breeze. And due east, less than a thousand miles away, lay the coast of South America and the port of Valparaiso.

Strange to say, none of our mutineers objected to this, and after dark, as we tore along before a full-sized gale, I sent my own men up on top the chart-house to take the gaskets off the spanker. This was the only sail we could set and trim and in every way control. It is true the

mizzen-braces were still rigged aft to the poop, according to Horn practice. But, while we could thus trim the mizzen-yards, the sails themselves, in setting or furling, were in the hands of the for'ard crowd.

Margaret, beside me in the darkness at the break of the poop, put her hand in mine with a warm pressure, as both our tiny watches swayed up the spanker and as both of us held our breaths in an effort to feel the added draw in the Elsinore's speed.

"I never wanted to marry a sailor," she said. "And I thought I was safe in the hands of a landsman like you. And yet here you are, with all the stuff of the sea in you, running down your easting for port. Next thing, I suppose, I'll see you out with a sextant, shooting the sun or making star-observations."