

CHAPTER XLVI

Four more days have passed; the gale has blown itself out; we are not more than three hundred and fifty miles off Valparaiso; and the *Elsinore*, this time due to me and my own stubbornness, is rolling in the wind and heading nowhere in a light breeze at the rate of nothing but driftage per hour.

In the height of the gusts, in the three days and nights of the gale, we logged as much as eight, and even nine, knots. What bothered me was the acquiescence of the mutineers in my programme. They were sensible enough in the simple matter of geography to know what I was doing. They had control of the sails, and yet they permitted me to run for the South American coast.

More than that, as the gale eased on the morning of the third day, they actually went aloft, set top-gallant-sails, royals, and skysails, and trimmed the yards to the quartering breeze. This was too much for the Saxon streak in me, whereupon I wore the *Elsinore* about before the wind, fetched her up upon it, and lashed the wheel. Margaret and I are agreed in the hypothesis that their plan is to get inshore until land is sighted, at which time they will desert in the boats.

"But we don't want them to desert," she proclaims with flashing eyes. "We are bound for Seattle. They must return to duty. They've got to, soon,

for they are beginning to starve."

"There isn't a navigator aft," I oppose.

Promptly she withers me with her scorn.

"You, a master of books, by all the sea-blood in your body should be able to pick up the theoretics of navigation while I snap my fingers.

Furthermore, remember that I can supply the seamanship. Why, any squarehead peasant, in a six months' cramming course at any seaport navigation school, can pass the examiners for his navigator's papers.

That means six hours for you. And less. If you can't, after an hour's reading and an hour's practice with the sextant, take a latitude observation and work it out, I'll do it for you."

"You mean you know?"

She shook her head.

"I mean, from the little I know, that I know I can learn to know a meridian sight and the working out of it. I mean that I can learn to know inside of two hours."

Strange to say, the gale, after easing to a mild breeze, recrudesced in a sort of after-clap. With sails untrimmed and flapping, the consequent smashing, crashing, and rending of our gear can be imagined. It brought

out in alarm every man for'ard.

"Trim the yards!" I yelled at Bert Rhine, who, backed for counsel by Charles Davis and the Maltese Cockney, actually came directly beneath me on the main deck in order to hear above the commotion aloft.

"Keep a-runnin, an' you won't have to trim," the gangster shouted up to me.

"Want to make land, eh?" I girded down at him. "Getting hungry, eh? Well, you won't make land or anything else in a thousand years once you get all your top-hamper piled down on deck."

I have forgotten to state that this occurred at midday yesterday.

"What are you goin' to do if we trim?" Charles Davis broke in.

"Run off shore," I replied, "and get your gang out in deep sea where it will be starved back to duty."

"We'll furl, an' let you heave to," the gangster proposed.

I shook my head and held up my rifle. "You'll have to go aloft to do it, and the first man that gets into the shrouds will get this."

"Then she can go to hell for all we care," he said, with emphatic

conclusiveness.

And just then the fore-topgallant-yard carried away--luckily as the bow was down-pitched into a trough of sea-and when the slow, confused, and tangled descent was accomplished the big stick lay across the wreck of both bulwarks and of that portion of the bridge between the foremast and the forecastle head.

Bert Rhine heard, but could not see, the damage wrought. He looked up at me challengingly, and sneered:

"Want some more to come down?"

It could not have happened more apropos. The port-brace, and immediately afterwards the starboard-brace, of the crojack-yard--carried away. This was the big, lowest spar on the mizzen, and as the huge thing of steel swung wildly back and forth the gangster and his followers turned and crouched as they looked up to see. Next, the gooseneck of the truss, on which it pivoted, smashed away. Immediately the lifts and lower-topsail sheets parted, and with a fore-and-aft pitch of the ship the spar up-ended and crashed to the deck upon Number Three hatch, destroying that section of the bridge in its fall.

All this was new to the gangster--as it was to me--but Charles Davis and the Maltese Cockney thoroughly apprehended the situation.

"Stand out from under!" I yelled sardonically; and the three of them cowered and shrank away as their eyes sought aloft for what new spar was thundering down upon them.

The lower-topsail, its sheets parted by the fall of the crojack-yard, was tearing out of the bolt-ropes and ribboning away to leeward and making such an uproar that they might well expect its yard to carry away. Since this wreckage of our beautiful gear was all new to me, I was quite prepared to see the thing happen.

The gangster-leader, no sailor, but, after months at sea, intelligent enough and nervously strong enough to appreciate the danger, turned his head and looked up at me. And I will do him the credit to say that he took his time while all our world of gear aloft seemed smashing to destruction.

"I guess we'll trim yards," he capitulated.

"Better get the skysails and royals off," Margaret said in my ear.

"While you're about it, get in the skysails and royals!" I shouted down.

"And make a decent job of the gasketing!"

Both Charles Davis and the Maltese Cockney advertised their relief in their faces as they heard my words, and, at a nod from the gangster, they started for'ard on the run to put the orders into effect.

Never, in the whole voyage, did our crew spring to it in more lively fashion. And lively fashion was needed to save our gear. As it was, they cut away the remnants of the mizzen-lower-topsail with their sheath-knives, and they loosed the main-skysail out of its bolt-ropes.

The first infraction of our agreement was on the main-lower-topsail. This they attempted to furl. The carrying away of the crojack and the blowing away of the mizzen-lower-topsail gave me freedom to see and aim, and when the tiny messengers from my rifle began to spat through the canvas and to spat against the steel of the yard, the men strung along it desisted from passing the gaskets. I waved my will to Bert Rhine, who acknowledged me and ordered the sail set again and the yard trimmed.

"What is the use of running off-shore?" I said to Margaret, when the kites were snugged down and all yards trimmed on the wind. "Three hundred and fifty miles off the land is as good as thirty-five hundred so far as starvation is concerned."

So, instead of making speed through the water toward deep sea, I hove the Elsinore to on the starboard tack with no more than leeway driftage to the west and south.

But our gallant mutineers had their will of us that very night. In the darkness we could hear the work aloft going on as yards were run down, sheets let go, and sails dewed up and gasketed. I did try a few random

shots, and all my reward was to hear the whine and creak of ropes through sheaves and to receive an equally random fire of revolver-shots.

It is a most curious situation. We of the high place are masters of the steering of the *Elsinore*, while those for'ard are masters of the motor power. The only sail that is wholly ours is the spanker. They control absolutely--sheets, halyards, clewlines, buntlines, braces, and down-hauls--every sail on the fore and main. We control the braces on the mizzen, although they control the canvas on the mizzen. For that matter, Margaret and I fail to comprehend why they do not go aloft any dark night and sever the mizzen-braces at the yard-ends. All that prevents this, we are decided, is laziness. For if they did sever the braces that lead aft into our hands, they would be compelled to rig new braces for'ard in some fashion, else, in the rolling, would the mizzenmast be stripped of every spar.

And still the mutiny we are enduring is ridiculous and grotesque. There was never a mutiny like it. It violates all standards and precedents. In the old classic mutinies, long ere this, attacking like tigers, the seamen should have swarmed over the poop and killed most of us or been most of them killed.

Wherefore I sneer at our gallant mutineers, and recommend trained nurses for them, quite in the manner of Mr. Pike. But Margaret shakes her head and insists that human nature is human nature, and that under similar circumstances human nature will express itself similarly. In short, she

points to the number of deaths that have already occurred, and declares that on some dark night, sooner or later, whenever the pinch of hunger sufficiently sharpens, we shall see our rascals storming aft.

And in the meantime, except for the tenseness of it, and for the incessant watchfulness which Margaret and I alone maintain, it is more like a mild adventure, more like a page out of some book of romance which ends happily.

It is surely romance, watch and watch for a man and a woman who love, to relieve each other's watches. Each such relief is a love passage and unforgettable. Never was there wooing like it--the muttered surmises of wind and weather, the whispered councils, the kissed commands in palms of hands, the dared contacts of the dark.

Oh, truly, I have often, since this voyage began, told the books to go hang. And yet the books are at the back of the race-life of me. I am what I am out of ten thousand generations of my kind. Of that there is no discussion. And yet my midnight philosophy stands the test of my breed. I must have selected my books out of the ten thousand generations that compose me. I have killed a man--Steve Roberts. As a perishing blond without an alphabet I should have done this unwaveringly. As a perishing blond with an alphabet, plus the contents in my brain of the philosophizing of all philosophers, I have killed this same man with the same unwaveringness. Culture has not emasculated me. I am quite unaffected. It was in the day's work, and my kind have always been day-

workers, doing the day's work, whatever it might be, in high adventure or dull ploddingness, and always doing it.

Never would I ask to set back the dial of time or event. I would kill Steve Roberts again, under the same circumstances, as a matter of course. When I say I am unaffected by this happening I do not quite mean it. I am affected. I am aware that the spirit of me is informed with a sober elation of efficiency. I have done something that had to be done, as any man will do what has to be done in the course of the day's work.

Yes, I am a perishing blond, and a man, and I sit in the high place and bend the stupid ones to my will; and I am a lover, loving a royal woman of my own perishing breed, and together we occupy, and shall occupy, the high place of government and command until our kind perish from the earth.