

## CHAPTER L

In the past twenty-four hours many things have happened. To begin with, we nearly lost the steward in the second dog-watch last evening. Through the slits in the ventilator some man thrust a knife into the sacks of flour and cut them wide open from top to bottom. In the dark the flour poured to the deck unobserved.

Of course, the man behind could not see through the screen of empty sacks, but he took a blind pot-shot at point-blank range when the steward went by, slip-sloppily dragging the heels of his slippers. Fortunately it was a miss, but so close a miss was it that his cheek and neck were burned with powder grains.

At six bells in the first watch came another surprise. Tom Spink came to me where I stood guard at the for'ard end of the poop. His voice shook as he spoke.

"For the love of God, sir, they've come," he said.

"Who?" I asked sharply.

"Them," he chattered. "The ones that come aboard off the Horn, sir, the three drowned sailors. They're there, aft, sir, the three of 'em, standin' in a row by the wheel."

"How did they get there?"

"Bein' warlocks, they flew, sir. You didn't see 'm go by you, did you, sir?"

"No," I admitted. "They never went by me."

Poor Tom Spink groaned.

"But there are lines aloft there on which they could cross over from mizzen to jigger," I added. "Send Wada to me."

When the latter relieved me I went aft. And there in a row were our three pale-haired storm-waifs with the topaz eyes. In the light of a bull's-eye, held on them by Louis, their eyes never seemed more like the eyes of great cats. And, heavens, they purred! At least, the inarticulate noises they made sounded more like purring than anything else. That these sounds meant friendliness was very evident. Also, they held out their hands, palms upward, in unmistakable sign of peace. Each in turn doffed his cap and placed my hand for a moment on his head. Without doubt this meant their offer of fealty, their acceptance of me as master.

I nodded my head. There was nothing to be said to men who purred like cats, while sign-language in the light of the bull's-eye was rather

difficult. Tom Spink groaned protest when I told Louis to take them below and give them blankets.

I made the sleep-sign to them, and they nodded gratefully, hesitated, then pointed to their mouths and rubbed their stomachs.

"Drowned men do not eat," I laughed to Tom Spink. "Go down and watch them. Feed them up, Louis, all they want. It's a good sign of short rations for'ard."

At the end of half an hour Tom Spink was back.

"Well, did they eat?" I challenged him.

But he was unconvinced. The very quantity they had eaten was a suspicious thing, and, further, he had heard of a kind of ghost that devoured dead bodies in graveyards. Therefore, he concluded, mere non-eating was no test for a ghost.

The third event of moment occurred this morning at seven o'clock. The mutineers called for a truce; and when Nosey Murphy, the Maltese Cockney, and the inevitable Charles Davis stood beneath me on the main deck, their faces showed lean and drawn. Famine had been my great ally. And in truth, with Margaret beside me in that high place of the break of the poop, as I looked down on the hungry wretches I felt very strong. Never had the inequality of numbers fore and aft been less than now. The three

deserters, added to our own nine, made twelve of us, while the mutineers, after subtracting Ditman Olansen, Bob and the Faun, totalled only an even score. And of these Bert Rhine must certainly be in a bad way, while there were many weaklings, such as Sundry Buyers, Nancy, Larry, and Lars Jacobsen.

"Well, what do you want?" I demanded. "I haven't much time to waste. Breakfast is ready and waiting."

Charles Davis started to speak, but I shut him off.

"I'll have nothing out of you, Davis. At least not now. Later on, when I'm in that court of law you've bothered me with for half the voyage, you'll get your turn at talking. And when that time comes don't forget that I shall have a few words to say."

Again he began, but this time was stopped by Nosey Murphy.

"Aw, shut your trap, Davis," the gangster snarled, "or I'll shut it for you." He glanced up to me. "We want to go back to work, that's what we want."

"Which is not the way to ask for it," I answered.

"Sir," he added hastily.

"That's better," I commented.

"Oh, my God, sir, don't let 'm come aft." Tom Spink muttered hurriedly in my ear. "That'd be the end of all of us. And even if they didn't get you an' the rest, they'd heave me over some dark night. They ain't never goin' to forgive me, sir, for joinin' in with the afterguard."

I ignored the interruption and addressed the gangster.

"There's nothing like going to work when you want to as badly as you seem to. Suppose all hands get sail on her just to show good intention."

"We'd like to eat first, sir," he objected.

"I'd like to see you setting sail, first," was my reply. "And you may as well get it from me straight that what I like goes, aboard this ship."--I almost said "hooker."

Nosey Murphy hesitated and looked to the Maltese Cockney for counsel. The latter debated, as if gauging the measure of his weakness while he stared aloft at the work involved. Finally he nodded.

"All right, sir," the gangster spoke up. "We'll do it . . . but can't something be cookin' in the galley while we're doin' it?"

I shook my head.

"I didn't have that in mind, and I don't care to change my mind now. When every sail is stretched and every yard braced, and all that mess of gear cleared up, food for a good meal will be served out. You needn't bother about the spanker nor the mizzen-braces. We'll make your work lighter by that much."

In truth, as they climbed aloft they showed how miserably weak they were. There were some too feeble to go aloft. Poor Sundry Buyers continually pressed his abdomen as he toiled around the deck-capstans; and never was Nancy's face quite so forlorn as when he obeyed the Maltese Cockney's command and went up to loose the mizzen-skysail.

In passing, I must note one delicious miracle that was worked before our eyes. They were hoisting the mizzen-upper-topsail-yard by means of one of the patent deck-capstans. Although they had reversed the gear so as to double the purchase, they were having a hard time of it. Lars Jacobsen was limping on his twice-broken leg, and with him were Sundry Buyers, Tony the Greek, Bombini, and Mulligan Jacobs. Nosey Murphy held the turn.

When they stopped from sheer exhaustion Murphy's glance chanced to fall on Charles Davis, the one man who had not worked since the outset of the voyage and who was not working now.

"Bear a hand, Davis," the gangster called.

Margaret gurgled low laughter in my ear as she caught the drift of the episode.

The sea-lawyer looked at the other in amazement ere he answered:

"I guess not."

After nodding Sundry Buyers over to him to take the turn Murphy straightened his back and walked close to Davis, then said very quietly:

"I guess yes."

That was all. For a space neither spoke. Davis seemed to be giving the matter judicial consideration. The men at the capstan panted, rested, and looked on--all save Bombini, who slunk across the deck until he stood at Murphy's shoulder.

Under such circumstances the decision Charles Davis gave was eminently the right one, although even then he offered a compromise.

"I'll hold the turn," he volunteered.

"You'll lump around one of them capstan-bars," Murphy said.

The sea-lawyer made no mistake. He knew in all absoluteness that he was

choosing between life and death, and he limped over to the capstan and found his place. And as the work started, and as he toiled around and around the narrow circle, Margaret and I shamelessly and loudly laughed our approval. And our own men stole for'ard along the poop to peer down at the spectacle of Charles Davis at work.

All of which must have pleased Nosey Murphy, for, as he continued to hold the turn and coil down, he kept a critical eye on Davis.

"More juice, Davis!" he commanded with abrupt sharpness.

And Davis, with a startle, visibly increased his efforts.

This was too much for our fellows, who, Asiatics and all, applauded with laughter and hand-clapping. And what could I do? It was a gala day, and our faithful ones deserved some little recompense of amusement. So I ignored the breach of discipline and of poop etiquette by strolling away aft with Margaret.

At the wheel was one of our storm-waifs. I set the course due east for Valparaiso, and sent the steward below to bring up sufficient food for one substantial meal for the mutineers.

"When do we get our next grub, sir?" Nosey Murphy asked, as the steward served the supplies down to him from the poop.



"At midday," I answered. "And as long as you and your gang are good, you'll get your grub three times each day. You can choose your own watches any way you please. But the ship's work must be done, and done properly. If it isn't, then the grub stops. That will do. Now go for'ard."

"One thing more, sir," he said quickly. "Bert Rhine is awful bad. He can't see, sir. It looks like he's going to lose his face. He can't sleep. He groans all the time."

\* \* \* \* \*

It was a busy day. I made a selection of things from the medicine-chest for the acid-burned gangster; and, finding that Murphy knew how to manipulate a hypodermic syringe, entrusted him with one.

Then, too, I practised with the sextant and think I fairly caught the sun at noon and correctly worked up the observation. But this is latitude, and is comparatively easy. Longitude is more difficult. But I am reading up on it.

All afternoon a gentle northerly fan of air snored the Elsinore through the water at a five-knot clip, and our course lay east for land, for the habitations of men, for the law and order that men institute whenever they organize into groups. Once in Valparaiso, with police flag flying, our mutineers will be taken care of by the shore authorities.

Another thing I did was to rearrange our watches aft so as to split up the three storm-visitors. Margaret took one in her watch, along with the two sail-makers, Tom Spink, and Louis. Louis is half white, and all trustworthy, so that, at all times, on deck or below, he is told off to the task of never letting the topaz-eyed one out of his sight.

In my watch are the steward, Buckwheat, Wada, and the other two topaz-eyed ones. And to one of them Wada is told off; and to the other is assigned the steward. We are not taking any chances. Always, night and day, on duty or off, these storm-strangers will have one of our proved men watching them.

\* \* \* \* \*

Yes; and I tried the stranger men out last evening. It was after a council with Margaret. She was sure, and I agreed with her, that the men for'ard are not blindly yielding to our bringing them in to be prisoners in Valparaiso. As we tried to forecast it, their plan is to desert the Elsinore in the boats as soon as we fetch up with the land. Also, considering some of the bitter lunatic spirits for'ard, there would be a large chance of their drilling the Elsinore's steel sides and scuttling her ere they took to the boats. For scuttling a ship is surely as ancient a practice as mutiny on the high seas.

So it was, at one in the morning, that I tried out our strangers. Two of

them I took for'ard with me in the raid on the small boats. One I left beside Margaret, who kept charge of the poop. On the other side of him stood the steward with his big hacking knife. By signs I had made it clear to him, and to his two comrades who were to accompany me for'ard, that at the first sign of treachery he would be killed. And not only did the old steward, with signs emphatic and unmistakable, pledge himself to perform the execution, but we were all convinced that he was eager for the task.

With Margaret I also left Buckwheat and Tom Spink. Wada, the two sail-makers, Louis, and the two topaz-eyed ones accompanied me. In addition to fighting weapons we were armed with axes. We crossed the main deck unobserved, gained the bridge by way of the 'midship-house, and by way of the bridge gained the top of the for'ard-house. Here were the first boats we began work on; but, first of all, I called in the lookout from the forecastle-head.

He was Mulligan Jacobs; and he picked his way back across the wreck of the bridge where the fore-topgallant-yard still lay, and came up to me unafraid, as implacable and bitter as ever.

"Jacobs," I whispered, "you are to stay here beside me until we finish the job of smashing the boats. Do you get that?"

"As though it could fright me," he growled all too loudly. "Go ahead for all I care. I know your game. And I know the game of the hell's maggots

under our feet this minute. 'Tis they that'd desert in the boats. 'Tis you that'll smash the boats an' jail 'm kit an' crew."

"S-s-s-h," I vainly interpolated.

"What of it?" he went on as loudly as ever. "They're sleepin' with full bellies. The only night watch we keep is the lookout. Even Rhine's asleep. A few jolts of the needle has put a clapper to his eternal moanin'. Go on with your work. Smash the boats. 'Tis nothin' I care. 'Tis well I know my own crooked back is worth more to me than the necks of the scum of the world below there."

"If you felt that way, why didn't you join us?" I queried.

"Because I like you no better than them an' not half so well. They are what you an' your fathers have made 'em. An' who in hell are you an' your fathers? Robbers of the toil of men. I like them little. I like you and your fathers not at all. Only I like myself and me crooked back that's a livin' proof there ain't no God and makes Browning a liar."

"Join us now," I urged, meeting him in his mood. "It will be easier for your back."

"To hell with you," was his answer. "Go ahead an' smash the boats. You can hang some of them. But you can't touch me with the law. 'Tis me that's a crippled creature of circumstance, too weak to raise a hand

against any man--a feather blown about by the windy contention of men strong in their back an' brainless in their heads."

"As you please," I said.

"As I can't help pleasin'," he retorted, "bein' what I am an' so made for the little flash between the darkneses which men call life. Now why couldn't I a-ben a butterfly, or a fat pig in a full trough, or a mere mortal man with a straight back an' women to love me? Go on an' smash the boats. Play hell to the top of your bent. Like me, you'll end in the darkness. And your darkness'll be--as dark as mine."

"A full belly puts the spunk back into you," I sneered.

"'Tis on an empty belly that the juice of my dislike turns to acid. Go on an' smash the boats."

"Whose idea was the sulphur?" I asked.

"I'm not tellin' you the man, but I envied him until it showed failure. An' whose idea was it--to douse the sulphuric into Rhine's face? He'll lose that same face, from the way it's shedding."

"Nor will I tell you," I said. "Though I will tell you that I am glad the idea was not mine."

"Oh, well," he muttered cryptically, "different customs on different ships, as the cook said when he went for'ard to cast off the spanker sheet."

Not until the job was done and I was back on the poop did I have time to work out the drift of that last figure in its terms of the sea. Mulligan Jacobs might have been an artist, a philosophic poet, had he not been born crooked with a crooked back.

And we smashed the boats. With axes and sledges it was an easier task than I had imagined. On top of both houses we left the boats masses of splintered wreckage, the topaz-eyed ones working most energetically; and we regained the poop without a shot being fired. The forecastle turned out, of course, at our noise, but made no attempt to interfere with us.

And right here I register another complaint against the sea-novelists. A score of men for'ard, desperate all, with desperate deeds behind them, and jail and the gallows facing them not many days away, should have only begun to fight. And yet this score of men did nothing while we destroyed their last chance for escape.

"But where did they get the grub?" the steward asked me afterwards.

This question he has asked me every day since the first day Mr. Pike began cudgelling his brains over it. I wonder, had I asked Mulligan Jacobs the question, if he would have told me? At any rate, in court at

Valparaiso that question will be answered. In the meantime I suppose I shall submit to having the steward ask me it daily.

"It is murder and mutiny on the high seas," I told them this morning, when they came aft in a body to complain about the destruction of the boats and to demand my intentions.

And as I looked down upon the poor wretches from the break of the poop, standing there in the high place, the vision of my kind down all its mad, violent, and masterful past was strong upon me. Already, since our departure from Baltimore, three other men, masters, had occupied this high place and gone their way--the Samurai, Mr. Pike, and Mr. Mellaire. I stood here, fourth, no seaman, merely a master by the blood of my ancestors; and the work of the Elsinore in the world went on.

Bert Rhine, his head and face swathed in bandages, stood there beneath me, and I felt for him a tingle of respect. He, too, in a subterranean, ghetto way was master over his rats. Nosey Murphy and Kid Twist stood shoulder to shoulder with their stricken gangster leader. It was his will, because of his terrible injury, to get in to land and doctors as quickly as possible. He preferred taking his chance in court against the chance of losing his life, or, perhaps, his eyesight.

The crew was divided against itself; and Isaac Chantz, the Jew, his wounded shoulder with a hunch to it, seemed to lead the revolt against the gangsters. His wound was enough to convict him in any court, and

well he knew it. Beside him, and at his shoulders, clustered the Maltese Cockney, Andy Fay, Arthur Deacon, Frank Fitzgibbon, Richard Giller, and John Hackey.

In another group, still allegiant to the gangsters, were men such as Shorty, Sorensen, Lars Jacobsen, and Larry. Charles Davis was prominently in the gangster group. A fourth group was composed of Sundry Buyers, Nancy, and Tony the Greek. This group was distinctly neutral. And, finally, unaffiliated, quite by himself, stood Mulligan Jacobs--listening, I fancy, to far echoes of ancient wrongs, and feeling, I doubt not, the bite of the iron-hot hooks in his brain.

"What are you going to do with us, sir?" Isaac Chantz demanded of me, in defiance to the gangsters, who were expected to do the talking.

Bert Rhine lurched angrily toward the sound of the Jew's voice. Chantz's partisans drew closer to him.

"Jail you," I answered from above. "And it shall go as hard with all of you as I can make it hard."

"Maybe you will an' maybe you won't," the Jew retorted.

"Shut up, Chantz!" Bert Rhine commanded.

"And you'll get yours, you wop," Chantz snarled, "if I have to do it



myself."

I am afraid that I am not so successfully the man of action that I have been priding myself on being; for, so curious and interested was I in observing the moving drama beneath me that for the moment I failed to glimpse the tragedy into which it was culminating.

"Bombini!" Bert Rhine said.

His voice was imperative. It was the order of a master to the dog at heel. Bombini responded. He drew his knife and started to advance upon the Jew. But a deep rumbling, animal-like in its sound and menace, arose in the throats of those about the Jew.

Bombini hesitated and glanced back across his shoulder at the leader, whose face he could not see for bandages and who he knew could not see.

"'Tis a good deed--do it, Bombini," Charles Davis encouraged.

"Shut your face, Davis!" came out from Bert Rhine's bandages.

Kid Twist drew a revolver, shoved the muzzle of it first into Bombini's side, then covered the men about the Jew.

Really, I felt a momentary twinge of pity for the Italian. He was caught between the mill-stones, "Bombini, stick that Jew," Bert Rhine commanded.

The Italian advanced a step, and, shoulder to shoulder, on either side, Kid Twist and Nosey Murphy advanced with him.

"I cannot see him," Bert Rhine went on; "but by God I will see him!"

And so speaking, with one single, virile movement he tore away the bandages. The toll of pain he must have paid is beyond measurement. I saw the horror of his face, but the description of it is beyond the limits of any English I possess. I was aware that Margaret, at my shoulder, gasped and shuddered.

"Bombini!--stick him," the gangster repeated. "And stick any man that raises a yap. Murphy! See that Bombini does his work."

Murphy's knife was out and at the bravo's back. Kid Twist covered the Jew's group with his revolver. And the three advanced.

It was at this moment that I suddenly recollected myself and passed from dream to action.

"Bombini!" I said sharply.

He paused and looked up.

"Stand where you are," I ordered, "till I do some talking.--Chantz! Make

no mistake. Rhine is boss for'ard. You take his orders . . . until we get into Valparaiso; then you'll take your chances along with him in jail. In the meantime, what Rhine says goes. Get that, and get it straight. I am behind Rhine until the police come on board.--Bombini! do whatever Rhine tells you. I'll shoot the man who tries to stop you.--Deacon! Stand away from Chantz. Go over to the fife-rail."

All hands knew the stream of lead my automatic rifle could throw, and Arthur Deacon knew it. He hesitated barely a moment, then obeyed.

"Fitzgibbon!--Giller!--Hackey!" I called in turn, and was obeyed. "Fay!" I called twice, ere the response came.

Isaac Chantz stood alone, and Bombini now showed eagerness.

"Chantz!" I said; "don't you think it would be healthier to go over to the fife-rail and be good?"

He debated the matter not many seconds, resheathed his knife, and complied.

The tang of power! I was minded to let literature get the better of me and read the rascals a lecture; but thank heaven I had sufficient proportion and balance to refrain.

"Rhine!" I said.

He turned his corroded face up to me and blinked in an effort to see.

"As long as Chantz takes your orders, leave him alone. We'll need every hand to work the ship in. As for yourself, send Murphy aft in half an hour and I'll give him the best the medicine-chest affords. That is all. Go for'ard."

And they shambled away, beaten and dispirited.

"But that man--his face--what happened to him?" Margaret asked of me.

Sad it is to end love with lies. Sadder still is it to begin love with lies. I had tried to hide this one happening from Margaret, and I had failed. It could no longer be hidden save by lying; and so I told her the truth, told her how and why the gangster had had his face dashed with sulphuric acid by the old steward who knew white men and their ways.

\* \* \* \* \*

There is little more to write. The mutiny of the Elsinore is over. The divided crew is ruled by the gangsters, who are as intent on getting their leader into port as I am intent on getting all of them into jail. The first lap of the voyage of the Elsinore draws to a close. Two days, at most, with our present sailing, will bring us into Valparaiso. And then, as beginning a new voyage, the Elsinore will depart for

Seattle.

\* \* \* \* \*

One thing more remains for me to write, and then this strange log of a strange cruise will be complete. It happened only last night. I am yet fresh from it, and athrill with it and with the promise of it.

Margaret and I spent the last hour of the second dog-watch together at the break of the poop. It was good again to feel the Elsinore yielding to the wind-pressure on her canvas, to feel her again slipping and sliding through the water in an easy sea.

Hidden by the darkness, clasped in each other's arms, we talked love and love plans. Nor am I shamed to confess that I was all for immediacy. Once in Valparaiso, I contended, we would fit out the Elsinore with fresh crew and officers and send her on her way. As for us, steamers and rapid travelling would fetch us quickly home. Furthermore, Valparaiso being a place where such things as licences and ministers obtained, we would be married ere we caught the fast steamers for home.

But Margaret was obdurate. The Wests had always stood by their ships, she urged; had always brought their ships in to the ports intended or had gone down with their ships in the effort. The Elsinore had cleared from Baltimore for Seattle with the Wests in the high place. The Elsinore would re-equip with officers and men in Valparaiso, and the

Elsinore would arrive in Seattle with a West still on board.

"But think, dear heart," I objected. "The voyage will require months. Remember what Henley has said: 'Every kiss we take or give leaves us less of life to live.'"

She pressed her lips to mine.

"We kiss," she said.

But I was stupid.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Oh, the weary, weary months," I complained. "You dear silly," she gurgled. "Don't you understand?"

"I understand only that it is many a thousand miles from Valparaiso to Seattle," I answered.

"You won't understand," she challenged.

"I am a fool," I admitted. "I am aware of only one thing: I want you. I want you."

"You are a dear, but you are very, very stupid," she said, and as she

spoke she caught my hand and pressed the palm of it against her cheek.

"What do you feel?" she asked.

"Hot cheeks--cheeks most hot."

"I am blushing for what your stupidity compels me to say," she explained.

"You have already said that such things as licences and ministers obtain in Valparaiso . . . and . . . and, well . . . "

"You mean . . . ?" I stammered.

"Just that," she confirmed.

"The honeymoon shall be on the Elsinore from Valparaiso all the way to Seattle?" I rattled on.

"The many thousands of miles, the weary, weary months," she teased in my own intonations, until I stifled her teasing with my lips.