

## CHAPTER XIII

For three days I did my own work and Thomas Mugridge's too; and I flatter myself that I did his work well. I know that it won Wolf Larsen's approval, while the sailors beamed with satisfaction during the brief time my régime lasted.

"The first clean bite since I come aboard," Harrison said to me at the galley door, as he returned the dinner pots and pans from the forecastle. "Somehow Tommy's grub always tastes of grease, stale grease, and I reckon he ain't changed his shirt since he left 'Frisco."

"I know he hasn't," I answered.

"And I'll bet he sleeps in it," Harrison added.

"And you won't lose," I agreed. "The same shirt, and he hasn't had it off once in all this time."

But three days was all Wolf Larsen allowed him in which to recover from the effects of the beating. On the fourth day, lame and sore, scarcely able to see, so closed were his eyes, he was haled from his bunk by the nape of the neck and set to his duty. He sniffled and wept, but Wolf Larsen was pitiless.

“And see that you serve no more slops,” was his parting injunction. “No more grease and dirt, mind, and a clean shirt occasionally, or you’ll get a tow over the side. Understand?”

Thomas Mugridge crawled weakly across the galley floor, and a short lurch of the Ghost sent him staggering. In attempting to recover himself, he reached for the iron railing which surrounded the stove and kept the pots from sliding off; but he missed the railing, and his hand, with his weight behind it, landed squarely on the hot surface. There was a sizzle and odour of burning flesh, and a sharp cry of pain.

“Oh, Gawd, Gawd, wot ’ave I done?” he wailed; sitting down in the coal-box and nursing his new hurt by rocking back and forth. “W’y ’as all this come on me? It mykes me fair sick, it does, an’ I try so ’ard to go through life ’armless an’ ’urtin’ nobody.”

The tears were running down his puffed and discoloured cheeks, and his face was drawn with pain. A savage expression flitted across it.

“Oh, ’ow I ’ate ’im! ’Ow I ’ate ’im!” he gritted out.

“Whom?” I asked; but the poor wretch was weeping again over his misfortunes. Less difficult it was to guess whom he hated than whom he did not hate. For I had come to see a malignant devil in him which impelled him to hate all the world. I sometimes thought that he hated even himself, so grotesquely had life dealt with him, and so monstrously.

At such moments a great sympathy welled up within me, and I felt shame that I had ever joyed in his discomfiture or pain. Life had been unfair to him. It had played him a scurvy trick when it fashioned him into the thing he was, and it had played him scurvy tricks ever since. What chance had he to be anything else than he was? And as though answering my unspoken thought, he wailed:

“I never ’ad no chance, not ’arf a chance! ’Oo was there to send me to school, or put tommy in my ’ungry belly, or wipe my bloody nose for me, w’en I was a kiddy? ’Oo ever did anything for me, heh? ’Oo, I s’y?”

“Never mind, Tommy,” I said, placing a soothing hand on his shoulder.

“Cheer up. It’ll all come right in the end. You’ve long years before you, and you can make anything you please of yourself.”

“It’s a lie! a bloody lie!” he shouted in my face, flinging off the hand.

“It’s a lie, and you know it. I’m already myde, an’ myde out of leavin’s an’ scraps. It’s all right for you, ’Ump. You was born a gentleman. You never knew wot it was to go ’ungry, to cry yerself asleep with yer little belly gnawin’ an’ gnawin’, like a rat inside yer. It carn’t come right. If I was President of the United Stytes to-morrer, ’ow would it fill my belly for one time w’en I was a kiddy and it went empty?”

“’Ow could it, I s’y? I was born to sufferin’ and sorrer. I’ve had more cruel sufferin’ than any ten men, I ’ave. I’ve been in orspital arf my bleedin’ life. I’ve ’ad the fever in Aspinwall, in ’Avana, in New

Orleans. I near died of the scurvy and was rotten with it six months in Barbadoes. Smallpox in 'Onolulu, two broken legs in Shanghai, pneumonia in Unalaska, three busted ribs an' my insides all twisted in 'Frisco. An' 'ere I am now. Look at me! Look at me! My ribs kicked loose from my back again. I'll be coughin' blood before eyght bells. 'Ow can it be myde up to me, I arsk? 'Oo's goin' to do it? Gawd? 'Ow Gawd must 'ave 'ated me w'en 'e signed me on for a voyage in this bloomin' world of 'is!"

This tirade against destiny went on for an hour or more, and then he buckled to his work, limping and groaning, and in his eyes a great hatred for all created things. His diagnosis was correct, however, for he was seized with occasional sicknesses, during which he vomited blood and suffered great pain. And as he said, it seemed God hated him too much to let him die, for he ultimately grew better and waxed more malignant than ever.

Several days more passed before Johnson crawled on deck and went about his work in a half-hearted way. He was still a sick man, and I more than once observed him creeping painfully aloft to a topsail, or drooping wearily as he stood at the wheel. But, still worse, it seemed that his spirit was broken. He was abject before Wolf Larsen and almost grovelled to Johansen. Not so was the conduct of Leach. He went about the deck like a tiger cub, glaring his hatred openly at Wolf Larsen and Johansen.

"I'll do for you yet, you slab-footed Swede," I heard him say to Johansen

one night on deck.

The mate cursed him in the darkness, and the next moment some missile struck the galley a sharp rap. There was more cursing, and a mocking laugh, and when all was quiet I stole outside and found a heavy knife imbedded over an inch in the solid wood. A few minutes later the mate came fumbling about in search of it, but I returned it privily to Leach next day. He grinned when I handed it over, yet it was a grin that contained more sincere thanks than a multitude of the verbosity of speech common to the members of my own class.

Unlike any one else in the ship's company, I now found myself with no quarrels on my hands and in the good graces of all. The hunters possibly no more than tolerated me, though none of them disliked me; while Smoke and Henderson, convalescent under a deck awning and swinging day and night in their hammocks, assured me that I was better than any hospital nurse, and that they would not forget me at the end of the voyage when they were paid off. (As though I stood in need of their money! I, who could have bought them out, bag and baggage, and the schooner and its equipment, a score of times over!) But upon me had devolved the task of tending their wounds, and pulling them through, and I did my best by them.

Wolf Larsen underwent another bad attack of headache which lasted two days. He must have suffered severely, for he called me in and obeyed my commands like a sick child. But nothing I could do seemed to relieve

him. At my suggestion, however, he gave up smoking and drinking; though why such a magnificent animal as he should have headaches at all puzzles me.

“’Tis the hand of God, I’m tellin’ you,” is the way Louis sees it. “’Tis a visitation for his black-hearted deeds, and there’s more behind and comin’, or else—”

“Or else,” I prompted.

“God is noddin’ and not doin’ his duty, though it’s me as shouldn’t say it.”

I was mistaken when I said that I was in the good graces of all. Not only does Thomas Mugridge continue to hate me, but he has discovered a new reason for hating me. It took me no little while to puzzle it out, but I finally discovered that it was because I was more luckily born than he—“gentleman born,” he put it.

“And still no more dead men,” I twitted Louis, when Smoke and Henderson, side by side, in friendly conversation, took their first exercise on deck.

Louis surveyed me with his shrewd grey eyes, and shook his head portentously. “She’s a-comin’, I tell you, and it’ll be sheets and halyards, stand by all hands, when she begins to howl. I’ve had the feel

iv it this long time, and I can feel it now as plainly as I feel the rigging iv a dark night. She's close, she's close."

"Who goes first?" I queried.

"Not fat old Louis, I promise you," he laughed. "For 'tis in the bones iv me I know that come this time next year I'll be gazin' in the old mother's eyes, weary with watchin' iv the sea for the five sons she gave to it."

"Wot's 'e been s'yin' to yer?" Thomas Mugridge demanded a moment later.

"That he's going home some day to see his mother," I answered diplomatically.

"I never 'ad none," was the Cockney's comment, as he gazed with lustreless, hopeless eyes into mine.