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BY CAPT. FRANK H. SHAW.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Stubb's Final Effort.

(Continued)

"But a chap needs matches," he thought again. "Once I've got them the way's clear." He roiled himself painfully from the mattress, and stood shakily upright. The daylight filtered in through various cracks and crannies; outside the strong breeze rustled cheerfully, telling of miles lunged astern—telling to Stubb's shortened miles ahead and a tribunal of justice. He began to stumble about the place by the winch and the boiler. He groped everywhere, only to meet with disappointment.

"Chips" used to keep a box of matches in here," he said, "but the old times he might have left some."

He opened the door of the fire-box with difficulty, and searched the ashes with his eyes. Then those eyes brightened suddenly, he put forth one hand, and withdrew it—it held a match-box—Swedish—satisfying—grainy and half-empty, but still containing several of the "handstickers." He tried one with shaking fingers; it fluffed into light and burned satisfactorily.

"It settles the—," he thought cruelly, and began to unpick the knot of the lashing that held the cover of the ventilator down securely.

It was a long task, requiring endless rests, but he had much time before him. The slightest sound outside—he had grown to recognize the steps of the three who moved about the decks these days—sent him back, apparently asleep, to his mattress, but as soon as silence reigned he was again at his task. He succeeded in removing the canvas cap, but the stout wooden plug held him at bay for long. Even this, however, succumbed eventually, and before the night fell the ventilator-shaft yawned wide.

"I'll waken at midnight," he thought—he could not speak by reason of his injury—"and that'll give me a clear six hours. They don't trouble me much at night." He carefully deposited the matches in his pocket, placed the canvas cap in position to hide the missing plug, and lay down to sleep, in spite of his pain. Leigh looked in at eight bells, and heard his studied snores with something of a shudder. All had gone beyond their wildest dreams so far—the weather had been propitious, they had managed the steering between them, and though the strain was great, they had that in their hearts that bore them up as on wings of light.

Stubb's awoke by instinct at midnight, for no bells were run on deck. He groped his way towards the ventilator, fearful to strike a match lest its gleam should be seen aft, took off the cover, and then crawled into the wide shaft. It was torturing work—he suffered from agonising spasms of pain, but he persisted defiantly. The man's reason was tottering, he saw only red before his eyes. A great need had come upon him to kill and kill, that he might be saved the misery of the gallows. What matter if he went up in a whirlwind of fire?—he would have his revenge on that smooth-faced whipper-snapper who had foiled him in his planning.

He dropped with a thud on a pile of cases and bales, and struck a match cautiously. He was in the Zoroaster's 'tween-decks—not far away aft was a stout wooden bulkhead, through the interstices of which showed thick felt. It was the magazine, as ordained by regulation for the carriage of explosives. The Zoroaster was carrying out four hundred tons of ammunition to Sydney—enough powder to destroy a fleet.

Down there in the musty closeness sounds from the deck could not be heard, and his agony made him unconscious of the sudden heave and lift of the ship. A squall was bearing down out of the west, and Alleen and Leigh stood together at the helm, keenly watchful. Stubb's looked carefully about him. For one moment an idea

of escape came to his wilding brain. He dismissed as futile as a scrubby tree forward disclosed a huge bulkhead which he could never hope to pass. He was entirely unconscious of the fate of his fellow-mutineers, but it had occurred to him that if he could make his way to the deck he might find a weapon in the fore-castle, and so complete the work he had begun. Some of the men must have escaped, and he knew where he could get port, if only he could get free and take the ship to port. But that bulkhead stopped him, and he was compelled to fall back on his original plan.

He struck another match and another seeking for something that would readily catch fire. A package of goods surrounded with tattered paper offered a solution, with frenzied fingers he tore the coverings clear. The magazine was some thirty feet away from him, but he would not blow it up at once. He would condemn those on deck to a long horror of waiting, and so he carefully carried the tinder to a remote corner of the hold. He slipped down between two bales, and crawled along a little way, seeking still for something on which the fire would take good hold. Then he piled the paper together against a case of woollen goods, struck another match, and lit the heap. It blazed up yellowly, a scorching breath dazed him. He tried to turn, but the bales held him fast. The Zoroaster gave a great lurch, and a loose bale that had been poised for days on the edge of the cases about him, thundered down on his legs and waist, and pinned him beneath its weight.

Mad panic seized him instantly—he could see the creeping line of fire steadily growing away from him. He tried to reach out his hands and beat it out, but it laughingly eluded his attempt, and gained a hold just beyond the limits of his reach. Then, making fearful sounds, he turned and tried to free himself of the weight on his legs. In vain—his strength was departing from him fast; the drain of blood from his wound, coupled with his recent exertions, had rendered him weak as a little child. He strove frantically, wriggled in anguish, but neither could he displace the down-pinning bale nor reach the hissing line of fire that crept along the edges of the case in front of him. Smoke poured into his nostrils acridly, his wounds smarted excruciatingly. He sobbed, he hurled himself forward, only to be held back by the unyielding bale—and still the fire curled on.

It was gaining its grip now—he could hear the crackle of burning wood. Desperately he tried to scream, but only uncouth sounds escaped from his open throat. He stared feverishly at the growing fire, until the smoke scorched his eyeballs, and then he tried to feel its progress on his cheek. But presently his head drooped forward, and a tongue of fire hissed his cheek cruelly. He recoiled with a curious sound—the flame kissed him again. He fought terribly, but could not move, and with every effort he felt his strength fleeing from him. His head was encircled with a halo of fire that seemed to set his brains a-scorching. Once more his head drooped forward; this time it did not lift

again, and the fire crackled with a jubilant note.

Leigh sniffed suspiciously as day broke ahead. The squall was past long since; Alleen had gone into the chart-room to sleep. He looked along the deck fixedly, and his senses told him that something was wrong. But he was not an alarmist, and he strove to compose his fears. Once more a backdraught of air brought an acrid smell to his nostrils. He sniffed again, his face growing whiter and a curious line deepening beside his nostrils. A curl of blue smoke was floating out of the donkey-house door.

"It must be the steward, lighting the galley fire," he said to himself confidently. "Of course, that's it, but I don't remember seeing him come on deck." No, it certainly could not be the steward—that was evident, for there was that functionary slipping up the companionway and appearing on the poop.

"Did you put the galley fire out last night, steward?"

"Yes, sir. I surely put 'im out. For why?"

"Nothing 'bout ferret and tell me where that smoke comes from. And don't make a fuss, for Heaven's sake!"

A hundred thoughts chased through his brain, whilst the steward was away. The men down below in the fore-peak—they had been strangely quiet—had given but little trouble, yet—had not this very quietness covered a vague menace? Daily he and the steward had carried food and water to the mutineers, Leigh standing over the hatch with a loaded revolver in his hand, whilst the steward lowered the victuals down in a bucket of rope. Leigh was not the man to trust the rascals further than he could see them. They had been very quiet, but he had not taken sufficient precautions. Why only to-day, if all went well, he was going to release them and set them to work, driving them below as soon as they had performed their appointed tasks. But now—he should have searched each man—for it was quite within the bounds of possibility that they had set fire to the ship in malice, hoping thus to have still one more chance before they were lodged in gaol.

The steward had examined the creacks of the donkey-house door, and came back flying.

"I 'ink de ship on fire, sar!" he cried hoarsely. "De donkey-house smokin' good and hot."

"Take this wheel a bit. Watch what you're about." The steward had learnt a little of the mechanical part of steering, for he had been compelled to take his turn at the work within the last fortnight. Leigh handed the wheel to him, and ran lightly along the deck, the keys of the donkey-house ready to hand. He flung open the door, and fell back before the pouring smoke that volleyed forth. Then, holding his breath, he dashed in again. He saw the thick smoke from the open ventilator, but even then the full meaning of it did not strike his brain. He never connected Stubb's with the matter, for he said that Stubb's was a dying man. But there was the smoke, gushing forth horribly, forcing him back to the deck. It was impossible to stay longer in the room—he groped about for a plug to stop the ventilator, but found nothing. Out on deck again, clapping the doors to with a mad instinct to keep the new enemy within bounds—only to find other ventilators spouting largely, and the smoke hang like a cloud over all the fore-deck.

(To be continued)

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Section 3:—It shall be unlawful for any person under the full age of eighteen years to drive, or use for payment, hire or reward, whether direct or indirect any carriage, cart, truck, express wagon, sleigh, slide, catamaran, or other horse drawn vehicle prima for hire or for any commercial purpose within the limits of the City of St. John's; and any person under eighteen contravening the provisions of this section, or any person paying, hiring, employing, or rewarding such person, shall upon conviction thereof, forfeit and pay for every offence a sum not exceeding ten dollars."

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