

ENGLAND GALAXY

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MILBRIDGE VILLAGE

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PER BY THE MERIDEN

GRAVURE CO.

Captain from Milbridge

by John Paul Heffernan

Matters would come to a head this morning, the captain knew, and it was a pity he might have to be a little rough, what with a fine passage behind him and landfall and Hong Kong less than twenty-four hours ahead. Safety of his ship was always the master's prime consideration, so if there was a mutiny brewing that morning he would be as tough as the situation demanded.

The ship's bell sounded three sharp double strokes and the captain looked carefully at his large silver watch. Six bells. Seven o'clock, as landlocked folks would put it. Ever considerate of the ship's company, he had not ordered a muster of the crew until eight bells when the watch would be changing. The first mate had the key to the arms locker, but nothing would be issued to the officers and loyal members of the crew unless the master saw an immediate need. He preferred to handle the matter himself.

Meanwhile, in his own calm way, he would enjoy a fine morning at sea, around him and part of him all the sights and sounds he had known since boyhood. The wind was dead

astern, and there was no thumping of canvas overhead as there would have been had not the wind been steady, like a great, strong hand pushing firmly against the sails while the morning sun tinted the tall pyramids of canvas with crimson and gold. And the only sounds were the hundred voices of the ship's stout timbers, the hum of rigging and the hiss of the sea curling away from the forefoot. Up forward the vessel's dolphin striker dipped rhythmically into the meeting swells, scattering rainbows along her bows.

Astern were the trackless miles of the East China Sea, and unseen to port lay Formosa as the ship drove steadily through the Taiwan Strait toward Hong Kong and a few days' layover while she unloaded and then went up to Canton to load tea, porcelain, silks, teak, and camphorwood. Better than six feet tall, with dark brown hair and eyes that had the blue of deep water in them, the captain smiled slightly behind his curly beard when he heard a light step behind him. Without turning his head he said: "Good morning, Edgar."

