

**The Mutiny of the Elsinore**

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## CHAPTER I

From the first the voyage was going wrong. Routed out of my hotel on a bitter March morning, I had crossed Baltimore and reached the pier-end precisely on time. At nine o'clock the tug was to have taken me down the bay and put me on board the Elsinore, and with growing irritation I sat frozen inside my taxicab and waited. On the seat, outside, the driver and Wada sat hunched in a temperature perhaps half a degree colder than mine. And there was no tug.

Possum, the fox-terrier puppy Galbraith had so inconsiderately foisted upon me, whimpered and shivered on my lap inside my greatcoat and under the fur robe. But he would not settle down. Continually he whimpered and clawed and struggled to get out. And, once out and bitten by the cold, with equal insistence he whimpered and clawed to get back.

His unceasing plaint and movement was anything but sedative to my jangled nerves. In the first place I was uninterested in the brute. He meant nothing to me. I did not know him. Time and again, as I drearily waited, I was on the verge of giving him to the driver. Once, when two little girls--evidently the wharfinger's daughters--went by, my hand reached out to the door to open it so that I might call to them and present them with the puling little wretch.

A farewell surprise package from Galbraith, he had arrived at the hotel

the night before, by express from New York. It was Galbraith's way. Yet he might so easily have been decently like other folk and sent fruit . . . or flowers, even. But no; his affectionate inspiration had to take the form of a yelping, yapping two months' old puppy. And with the advent of the terrier the trouble had begun. The hotel clerk judged me a criminal before the act I had not even had time to meditate. And then Wada, on his own initiative and out of his own foolish stupidity, had attempted to smuggle the puppy into his room and been caught by a house detective. Promptly Wada had forgotten all his English and lapsed into hysterical Japanese, and the house detective remembered only his Irish; while the hotel clerk had given me to understand in no uncertain terms that it was only what he had expected of me.

Damn the dog, anyway! And damn Galbraith too! And as I froze on in the cab on that bleak pier-end, I damned myself as well, and the mad freak that had started me voyaging on a sailing-ship around the Horn.

By ten o'clock a nondescript youth arrived on foot, carrying a suit-case, which was turned over to me a few minutes later by the wharfinger. It belonged to the pilot, he said, and gave instructions to the chauffeur how to find some other pier from which, at some indeterminate time, I should be taken aboard the Elsinore by some other tug. This served to increase my irritation. Why should I not have been informed as well as the pilot?

An hour later, still in my cab and stationed at the shore end of the new

pier, the pilot arrived. Anything more unlike a pilot I could not have imagined. Here was no blue-jacketed, weather-beaten son of the sea, but a soft-spoken gentleman, for all the world the type of successful business man one meets in all the clubs. He introduced himself immediately, and I invited him to share my freezing cab with Possum and the baggage. That some change had been made in the arrangements by Captain West was all he knew, though he fancied the tug would come along any time.

And it did, at one in the afternoon, after I had been compelled to wait and freeze for four mortal hours. During this time I fully made up my mind that I was not going to like this Captain West. Although I had never met him, his treatment of me from the outset had been, to say the least, cavalier. When the *Elsinore* lay in Erie Basin, just arrived from California with a cargo of barley, I had crossed over from New York to inspect what was to be my home for many months. I had been delighted with the ship and the cabin accommodation. Even the stateroom selected for me was satisfactory and far more spacious than I had expected. But when I peeped into the captain's room I was amazed at its comfort. When I say that it opened directly into a bath-room, and that, among other things, it was furnished with a big brass bed such as one would never suspect to find at sea, I have said enough.

Naturally, I had resolved that the bath-room and the big brass bed should be mine. When I asked the agents to arrange with the captain they seemed non-committal and uncomfortable. "I don't know in the least what it is

worth," I said. "And I don't care. Whether it costs one hundred and fifty dollars or five hundred, I must have those quarters."

Harrison and Gray, the agents, debated silently with each other and scarcely thought Captain West would see his way to the arrangement. "Then he is the first sea captain I ever heard of that wouldn't," I asserted confidently. "Why, the captains of all the Atlantic liners regularly sell their quarters."

"But Captain West is not the captain of an Atlantic liner," Mr. Harrison observed gently.

"Remember, I am to be on that ship many a month," I retorted. "Why, heavens, bid him up to a thousand if necessary."

"We'll try," said Mr. Gray, "but we warn you not to place too much dependence on our efforts. Captain West is in Searsport at the present time, and we will write him to-day."

To my astonishment Mr. Gray called me up several days later to inform me that Captain West had declined my offer. "Did you offer him up to a thousand?" I demanded. "What did he say?"

"He regretted that he was unable to concede what you asked," Mr. Gray replied.

A day later I received a letter from Captain West. The writing and the wording were old-fashioned and formal. He regretted not having yet met me, and assured me that he would see personally that my quarters were made comfortable. For that matter he had already dispatched orders to Mr. Pike, the first mate of the *Elsinore*, to knock out the partition between my state-room and the spare state-room adjoining. Further--and here is where my dislike for Captain West began--he informed me that if, when once well at sea, I should find myself dissatisfied, he would gladly, in that case, exchange quarters with me.

Of course, after such a rebuff, I knew that no circumstance could ever persuade me to occupy Captain West's brass bed. And it was this Captain Nathaniel West, whom I had not yet met, who had now kept me freezing on pier-ends through four miserable hours. The less I saw of him on the voyage the better, was my decision; and it was with a little tickle of pleasure that I thought of the many boxes of books I had dispatched on board from New York. Thank the Lord, I did not depend on sea captains for entertainment.

I turned *Possum* over to Wada, who was settling with the cabman, and while the tug's sailors were carrying my luggage on board I was led by the pilot to an introduction with Captain West. At the first glimpse I knew that he was no more a sea captain than the pilot was a pilot. I had seen the best of the breed, the captains of the liners, and he no more resembled them than did he resemble the bluff-faced, gruff-voiced skippers I had read about in books. By his side stood a woman, of whom

little was to be seen and who made a warm and gorgeous blob of colour in the huge muff and boa of red fox in which she was well-nigh buried.

"My God!--his wife!" I darted in a whisper at the pilot. "Going along with him? . . . "

I had expressly stipulated with Mr. Harrison, when engaging passage, that the one thing I could not possibly consider was the skipper of the *Elsinore* taking his wife on the voyage. And Mr. Harrison had smiled and assured me that Captain West would sail unaccompanied by a wife.

"It's his daughter," the pilot replied under his breath. "Come to see him off, I fancy. His wife died over a year ago. They say that is what sent him back to sea. He'd retired, you know."

Captain West advanced to meet me, and before our outstretched hands touched, before his face broke from repose to greeting and the lips moved to speech, I got the first astonishing impact of his personality. Long, lean, in his face a touch of race I as yet could only sense, he was as cool as the day was cold, as poised as a king or emperor, as remote as the farthest fixed star, as neutral as a proposition of Euclid. And then, just ere our hands met, a twinkle of--oh--such distant and controlled geniality quickened the many tiny wrinkles in the corner of the eyes; the clear blue of the eyes was suffused by an almost colourful warmth; the face, too, seemed similarly to suffuse; the thin lips, harsh-set the instant before, were as gracious as Bernhardt's when she moulds



sound into speech.

So curiously was I affected by this first glimpse of Captain West that I was aware of expecting to fall from his lips I knew not what words of untold beneficence and wisdom. Yet he uttered most commonplace regrets at the delay in a voice provocative of fresh surprise to me. It was low and gentle, almost too low, yet clear as a bell and touched with a faint reminiscent twang of old New England.

"And this is the young woman who is guilty of the delay," he concluded my introduction to his daughter. "Margaret, this is Mr. Pathurst."

Her gloved hand promptly emerged from the fox-skins to meet mine, and I found myself looking into a pair of gray eyes bent steadily and gravely upon me. It was discomfiting, that cool, penetrating, searching gaze. It was not that it was challenging, but that it was so insolently business-like. It was much in the very way one would look at a new coachman he was about to engage. I did not know then that she was to go on the voyage, and that her curiosity about the man who was to be a fellow-passenger for half a year was therefore only natural. Immediately she realized what she was doing, and her lips and eyes smiled as she spoke.

As we moved on to enter the tug's cabin I heard Possum's shivering whimper rising to a screech, and went forward to tell Wada to take the creature in out of the cold. I found him hovering about my luggage,

wedging my dressing-case securely upright by means of my little automatic rifle. I was startled by the mountain of luggage around which mine was no more than a fringe. Ship's stores, was my first thought, until I noted the number of trunks, boxes, suit-cases, and parcels and bundles of all sorts. The initials on what looked suspiciously like a woman's hat trunk caught my eye--"M.W." Yet Captain West's first name was Nathaniel. On closer investigation I did find several "N.W's." but everywhere I could see "M.W's." Then I remembered that he had called her Margaret.

I was too angry to return to the cabin, and paced up and down the cold deck biting my lips with vexation. I had so expressly stipulated with the agents that no captain's wife was to come along. The last thing under the sun I desired in the pet quarters of a ship was a woman. But I had never thought about a captain's daughter. For two cents I was ready to throw the voyage over and return on the tug to Baltimore.

By the time the wind caused by our speed had chilled me bitterly, I noticed Miss West coming along the narrow deck, and could not avoid being struck by the spring and vitality of her walk. Her face, despite its firm moulding, had a suggestion of fragility that was belied by the robustness of her body. At least, one would argue that her body must be robust from her fashion of movement of it, though little could one divine the lines of it under the shapelessness of the furs.

I turned away on my heel and fell moodily to contemplating the mountain of luggage. A huge packing-case attracted my attention, and I was

staring at it when she spoke at my shoulder.

"That's what really caused the delay," she said.

"What is it?" I asked incuriously.

"Why, the Elsinore's piano, all renovated. When I made up my mind to come, I telegraphed Mr. Pike--he's the mate, you know. He did his best. It was the fault of the piano house. And while we waited to-day I gave them a piece of my mind they'll not forget in a hurry."

She laughed at the recollection, and commenced to peep and peer into the luggage as if in search of some particular piece. Having satisfied herself, she was starting back, when she paused and said:

"Won't you come into the cabin where it's warm? We won't be there for half an hour."

"When did you decide to make this voyage?" I demanded abruptly.

So quick was the look she gave me that I knew she had in that moment caught all my disgruntlement and disgust.

"Two days ago," she answered. "Why?"

Her readiness for give and take took me aback, and before I could speak

she went on:

"Now you're not to be at all silly about my coming, Mr. Pathurst. I probably know more about long-voyaging than you do, and we're all going to be comfortable and happy. You can't bother me, and I promise you I won't bother you. I've sailed with passengers before, and I've learned to put up with more than they ever proved they were able to put up with. So there. Let us start right, and it won't be any trouble to keep on going right. I know what is the matter with you. You think you'll be called upon to entertain me. Please know that I do not need entertainment. I never saw the longest voyage that was too long, and I always arrive at the end with too many things not done for the passage ever to have been tedious, and . . . I don't play Chopsticks."