

CHAPTER III

Quite chilled through, I was immediately struck by the warm comfort of the cabin. All the connecting doors were open, making what I might call a large suite of rooms or a whale house. The main-deck entrance, on the port side, was into a wide, well-carpeted hallway. Into this hallway, from the port side, opened five rooms: first, on entering, the mate's; next, the two state-rooms which had been knocked into one for me; then the steward's room; and, adjoining his, completing the row, a state-room which was used for the slop-chest.

Across the hall was a region with which I was not yet acquainted, though I knew it contained the dining-room, the bath-rooms, the cabin proper, which was in truth a spacious living-room, the captain's quarters, and, undoubtedly, Miss West's quarters. I could hear her humming some air as she bustled about with her unpacking. The steward's pantry, separated by crosshalls and by the stairway leading into the chart-room above on the poop, was placed strategically in the centre of all its operations. Thus, on the starboard side of it were the state-rooms of the captain and Miss West, for'ard of it were the dining-room and main cabin; while on the port side of it was the row of rooms I have described, two of which were mine.

I ventured down the hall toward the stern, and found it opened into the stern of the *Elsinore*, forming a single large apartment at least thirty-

five feet from side to side and fifteen to eighteen feet in depth, curved, of course, to the lines of the ship's stern. This seemed a storeroom. I noted wash-tubs, bolts of canvas, many lockers, hams and bacon hanging, a step-ladder that led up through a small hatch to the poop, and, in the floor, another hatch.

I spoke to the steward, an old Chinese, smooth-faced and brisk of movement, whose name I never learned, but whose age on the articles was fifty-six.

"What is down there?" I asked, pointing to the hatch in the floor.

"Him lazarette," he answered.

"And who eats there?" I indicated a table with two stationary sea-chairs.

"Him second table. Second mate and carpenter him eat that table."

When I had finished giving instructions to Wada for the arranging of my things I looked at my watch. It was early yet, only several minutes after three so I went on deck again to witness the arrival of the crew.

The actual coming on board from the tug I had missed, but for'ard of the amidship house I encountered a few laggards who had not yet gone into the forecabin. These were the worse for liquor, and a more wretched, miserable, disgusting group of men I had never seen in any slum. Their

clothes were rags. Their faces were bloated, bloody, and dirty. I won't say they were villainous. They were merely filthy and vile. They were vile of appearance, of speech, and action.

"Come! Come! Get your dunnage into the fo'c's'le!"

Mr. Pike uttered these words sharply from the bridge above. A light and graceful bridge of steel rods and planking ran the full length of the *Elsinore*, starting from the poop, crossing the amidship house and the forecastle, and connecting with the forecastle-head at the very bow of the ship.

At the mate's command the men reeled about and glowered up at him, one or two starting clumsily to obey. The others ceased their drunken yammerings and regarded the mate sullenly. One of them, with a face mashed by some mad god in the making, and who was afterwards to be known by me as Larry, burst into a guffaw, and spat insolently on the deck. Then, with utmost deliberation, he turned to his fellows and demanded loudly and huskily:

"Who in hell's the old stiff, anyways?"

I saw Mr. Pike's huge form tense convulsively and involuntarily, and I noted the way his huge hands strained in their clutch on the bridge-railing. Beyond that he controlled himself.

"Go on, you," he said. "I'll have nothing out of you. Get into the fo'c's'le."

And then, to my surprise, he turned and walked aft along the bridge to where the tug was casting off its lines. So this was all his high and mighty talk of kill and drive, I thought. Not until afterwards did I recollect, as I turned aft down the deck, that I saw Captain West leaning on the rail at the break of the poop and gazing for'ard.

The tug's lines were being cast off, and I was interested in watching the manoeuvre until she had backed clear of the ship, at which moment, from for'ard, arose a queer babel of howling and yelping, as numbers of drunken voices cried out that a man was overboard. The second mate sprang down the poop-ladder and darted past me along the deck. The mate, still on the slender, white-painted bridge, that seemed no more than a spider thread, surprised me by the activity with which he dashed along the bridge to the 'midship house, leaped upon the canvas-covered long-boat, and swung outboard where he might see. Before the men could clamber upon the rail the second mate was among them, and it was he who flung a coil of line overboard.

What impressed me particularly was the mental and muscular superiority of these two officers. Despite their age--the mate sixty-nine and the second mate at least fifty--their minds and their bodies had acted with the swiftness and accuracy of steel springs. They were potent. They were iron. They were perceivers, willers, and doers. They were as of

another species compared with the sailors under them. While the latter, witnesses of the happening and directly on the spot, had been crying out in befuddled helplessness, and with slow wits and slower bodies been climbing upon the rail, the second mate had descended the steep ladder from the poop, covered two hundred feet of deck, sprung upon the rail, grasped the instant need of the situation, and cast the coil of line into the water.

And of the same nature and quality had been the actions of Mr. Pike. He and Mr. Mellaire were masters over the wretched creatures of sailors by virtue of this remarkable difference of efficiency and will. Truly, they were more widely differentiated from the men under them than were the men under them differentiated from Hottentots--ay, and from monkeys.

I, too, by this time, was standing on the big hawser-bitts in a position to see a man in the water who seemed deliberately swimming away from the ship. He was a dark-skinned Mediterranean of some sort, and his face, in a clear glimpse I caught of it, was distorted by frenzy. His black eyes were maniacal. The line was so accurately flung by the second mate that it fell across the man's shoulders, and for several strokes his arms tangled in it ere he could swim clear. This accomplished, he proceeded to scream some wild harangue and once, as he uptossed his arms for emphasis, I saw in his hand the blade of a long knife.

Bells were jangling on the tug as it started to the rescue. I stole a look up at Captain West. He had walked to the port side of the poop,

where, hands in pockets, he was glancing, now for'ard at the struggling man, now aft at the tug. He gave no orders, betrayed no excitement, and appeared, I may well say, the most casual of spectators.

The creature in the water seemed now engaged in taking off his clothes. I saw one bare arm, and then the other, appear. In his struggles he sometimes sank beneath the surface, but always he emerged, flourishing the knife and screaming his addled harangue. He even tried to escape the tug by diving and swimming underneath.

I strolled for'ard, and arrived in time to see him hoisted in over the rail of the Elsinore. He was stark naked, covered with blood, and raving. He had cut and slashed himself in a score of places. From one wound in the wrist the blood spurted with each beat of the pulse. He was a loathsome, non-human thing. I have seen a scared orang in a zoo, and for all the world this bestial-faced, mowing, gibbering thing reminded me of the orang. The sailors surrounded him, laying hands on him, withstraining him, the while they guffawed and cheered. Right and left the two mates shoved them away, and dragged the lunatic down the deck and into a room in the 'midship house. I could not help marking the strength of Mr. Pike and Mr. Mellaire. I had heard of the superhuman strength of madmen, but this particular madman was as a wisp of straw in their hands. Once into the bunk, Mr. Pike held down the struggling fool easily with one hand while he dispatched the second mate for marlin with which to tie the fellow's arms.

"Bughouse," Mr. Pike grinned at me. "I've seen some bughouse crews in my time, but this one's the limit."

"What are you going to do?" I asked. "The man will bleed to death."

"And good riddance," he answered promptly. "We'll have our hands full of him until we can lose him somehow. When he gets easy I'll sew him up, that's all, if I have to ease him with a clout of the jaw."

I glanced at the mate's huge paw and appreciated its anaesthetic qualities. Out on deck again, I saw Captain West on the poop, hands still in pockets, quite uninterested, gazing at a blue break in the sky to the north-east. More than the mates and the maniac, more than the drunken callousness of the men, did this quiet figure, hands in pockets, impress upon me that I was in a different world from any I had known.

Wada broke in upon my thoughts by telling me he had been sent to say that Miss West was serving tea in the cabin.