CHAPTER IX

I did not sleep well. To begin with, I read late. Not till two in the morning did I reach up and turn out the kerosene reading-lamp which Wada had purchased and installed for me. I was asleep immediately--perfect sleep being perhaps my greatest gift; but almost immediately I was awake again. And thereafter, with dozings and cat-naps and restless tossings, I struggled to win to sleep, then gave it up. For of all things, in my state of jangled nerves, to be afflicted with hives! And still again, to be afflicted with hives in cold winter weather!

At four I lighted up and went to reading, forgetting my irritated skin in Vernon Lee's delightful screed against William James, and his "will to believe." I was on the weather side of the ship, and from overhead, through the deck, came the steady footfalls of some officer on watch. I knew that they were not the steps of Mr. Pike, and wondered whether they were Mr. Mellaire's or the pilot's. Somebody above there was awake. The work was going on, the vigilant seeing and overseeing, that, I could plainly conclude, would go on through every hour of all the hours on the voyage.

At half-past four I heard the steward's alarm go off, instantly suppressed, and five minutes later I lifted my hand to motion him in through my open door. What I desired was a cup of coffee, and Wada had been with me through too many years for me to doubt that he had given the

steward precise instructions and turned over to him my coffee and my coffee-making apparatus.

The steward was a jewel. In ten minutes he served me with a perfect cup of coffee. I read on until daylight, and half-past eight found me, breakfast in bed finished, dressed and shaved, and on deck. We were still towing, but all sails were set to a light favouring breeze from the north. In the chart-room Captain West and the pilot were smoking cigars. At the wheel I noted what I decided at once was an efficient. He was not a large man; if anything he was undersized. But his countenance was broad-browed and intelligently formed. Tom, I later learned, was his name--Tom Spink, an Englishman. He was blue-eyed, fair-skinned, well-grizzled, and, to the eye, a hale fifty years of age. His reply of "Good morning, sir" was cheery, and he smiled as he uttered the simple phrase. He did not look sailor-like, as did Henry, the training-ship boy; and yet I felt at once that he was a sailor, and an able one.

It was Mr. Pike's watch, and on asking him about Tom he grudgingly admitted that the man was the "best of the boiling."

Miss West emerged from the chart-house, with a rosy morning face and her vital, springy limb-movement, and immediately began establishing her contacts. On asking how I had slept, and when I said wretchedly, she demanded an explanation. I told her of my affliction of hives and showed her the lumps on my wrists.

"Your blood needs thinning and cooling," she adjudged promptly. "Wait a minute. I'll see what can be done for you."

And with that she was away and below and back in a trice, in her hand a part glass of water into which she stirred a teaspoonful of cream of tartar.

"Drink it," she ordered, as a matter of course.

I drank it. And at eleven in the morning she came up to my deck-chair with a second dose of the stuff. Also she reproached me soundly for permitting Wada to feed meat to Possum. It was from her that Wada and I learned how mortal a sin it was to give meat to a young puppy. Furthermore, she laid down the law and the diet for Possum, not alone to me and Wada, but to the steward, the carpenter, and Mr. Mellaire. Of the latter two, because they ate by themselves in the big after-room and because Possum played there, she was especially suspicious; and she was outspoken in voicing her suspicions to their faces. The carpenter mumbled embarrassed asseverations in broken English of past, present, and future innocence, the while he humbly scraped and shuffled before her on his huge feet. Mr. Mellaire's protestations were of the same nature, save that they were made with the grace and suavity of a Chesterfield.

In short, Possum's diet raised quite a tempest in the Elsinore teapot, and by the time it was over Miss West had established this particular contact with me and given me a feeling that we were the mutual owners of

the puppy. I noticed, later in the day, that it was to Miss West that Wada went for instructions as to the quantity of warm water he must use to dilute Possum's condensed milk.

Lunch won my continued approbation of the cook. In the afternoon I made a trip for'ard to the galley to make his acquaintance. To all intents he was a Chinese, until he spoke, whereupon, measured by speech alone, he was an Englishman. In fact, so cultured was his speech that I can fairly say it was vested with an Oxford accent. He, too, was old, fully sixty--he acknowledged fifty-nine. Three things about him were markedly conspicuous: his smile, that embraced all of his clean-shaven Asiatic face and Asiatic eyes; his even-rowed, white, and perfect teeth, which I deemed false until Wada ascertained otherwise for me; and his hands and feet. It was his hands, ridiculously small and beautifully modelled, that led my scrutiny to his feet. They, too, were ridiculously small and very neatly, almost dandifiedly, shod.

We had put the pilot off at midday, but the Britannia towed us well into the afternoon and did not cast us off until the ocean was wide about us and the land a faint blur on the western horizon. Here, at the moment of leaving the tug, we made our "departure"--that is to say, technically began the voyage, despite the fact that we had already travelled a full twenty-four hours away from Baltimore.

It was about the time of casting off, when I was leaning on the poop-rail gazing for'ard, when Miss West joined me. She had been busy below all

day, and had just come up, as she put it, for a breath of air. She surveyed the sky in weather-wise fashion for a full five minutes, then remarked:

"The barometer's very high--30 degrees 60. This light north wind won't last. It will either go into a calm or work around into a north-east gale."

"Which would you prefer?" I asked.

"The gale, by all means. It will help us off the land, and it will put me through my torment of sea-sickness more quickly. Oh, yes," she added, "I'm a good sailor, but I do suffer dreadfully at the beginning of every voyage. You probably won't see me for a couple of days now. That's why I've been so busy getting settled first."

"Lord Nelson, I have read, never got over his squeamishness at sea," I said.

"And I've seen father sea-sick on occasion," she answered. "Yes, and some of the strongest, hardest sailors I have ever known."

Mr. Pike here joined us for a moment, ceasing from his everlasting pacing up and down to lean with us on the poop-rail.

Many of the crew were in evidence, pulling on ropes on the main deck

below us. To my inexperienced eye they appeared more unprepossessing than ever.

"A pretty scraggly crew, Mr. Pike," Miss West remarked.

"The worst ever," he growled, "and I've seen some pretty bad ones. We're teachin' them the ropes just now--most of 'em."

"They look starved," I commented.

"They are, they almost always are," Miss West answered, and her eyes roved over them in the same appraising, cattle-buyer's fashion I had marked in Mr. Pike. "But they'll fatten up with regular hours, no whiskey, and solid food--won't they, Mr. Pike?"

"Oh, sure. They always do. And you'll see them liven up when we get 'em in hand . . . maybe. They're a measly lot, though."

I looked aloft at the vast towers of canvas. Our four masts seemed to have flowered into all the sails possible, yet the sailors beneath us, under Mr. Mellaire's direction, were setting triangular sails, like jibs, between the masts, and there were so many that they overlapped one another. The slowness and clumsiness with which the men handled these small sails led me to ask:

"But what would you do, Mr. Pike, with a green crew like this, if you

were caught right now in a storm with all this canvas spread?"

He shrugged his shoulders, as if I had asked what he would do in an earthquake with two rows of New York skyscrapers falling on his head from both sides of a street.

"Do?" Miss West answered for him. "We'd get the sail off. Oh, it can be done, Mr. Pathurst, with any kind of a crew. If it couldn't, I should have been drowned long ago."

"Sure," Mr. Pike upheld her. "So would I."

"The officers can perform miracles with the most worthless sailors, in a pinch," Miss West went on.

Again Mr. Pike nodded his head and agreed, and I noted his two big paws, relaxed the moment before and drooping over the rail, quite unconsciously tensed and folded themselves into fists. Also, I noted fresh abrasions on the knuckles. Miss West laughed heartily, as from some recollection.

"I remember one time when we sailed from San Francisco with a most hopeless crew. It was in the Lallah Rookh--you remember her, Mr. Pike?"

"Your father's fifth command," he nodded. "Lost on the West Coast afterwards--went ashore in that big earthquake and tidal wave. Parted

her anchors, and when she hit under the cliff, the cliff fell on her."

"That's the ship. Well, our crew seemed mostly cow-boys, and bricklayers, and tramps, and more tramps than anything else. Where the boarding-house masters got them was beyond imagining. A number of them were shanghaied, that was certain. You should have seen them when they were first sent aloft." Again she laughed. "It was better than circus clowns. And scarcely had the tug cast us off, outside the Heads, when it began to blow up and we began to shorten down. And then our mates performed miracles. You remember Mr. Harding--Silas Harding?"

"Don't I though!" Mr. Pike proclaimed enthusiastically. "He was some man, and he must have been an old man even then."

"He was, and a terrible man," she concurred, and added, almost reverently: "And a wonderful man." She turned her face to me. "He was our mate. The men were sea-sick and miserable and green. But Mr. Harding got the sail off the Lallah Rookh just the same. What I wanted to tell you was this:

"I was on the poop, just like I am now, and Mr. Harding had a lot of those miserable sick men putting gaskets on the main-lower-topsail. How far would that be above the deck, Mr. Pike?"

"Let me see . . . the Lallah Rookh." Mr. Pike paused to consider. "Oh, say around a hundred feet."

"I saw it myself. One of the green hands, a tramp--and he must already have got a taste of Mr. Harding--fell off the lower-topsail-yard. I was only a little girl, but it looked like certain death, for he was falling from the weather side of the yard straight down on deck. But he fell into the belly of the mainsail, breaking his fall, turned a somersault, and landed on his feet on deck and unhurt. And he landed right alongside of Mr. Harding, facing him. I don't know which was the more astonished, but I think Mr. Harding was, for he stood there petrified. He had expected the man to be killed. Not so the man. He took one look at Mr. Harding, then made a wild jump for the rigging and climbed right back up to that topsail-yard."

Miss West and the mate laughed so heartily that they scarcely heard me say:

"Astonishing! Think of the jar to the man's nerves, falling to apparent death that way."

"He'd been jarred harder by Silas Harding, I guess," was Mr. Pike's remark, with another burst of laughter, in which Miss West joined.

Which was all very well in a way. Ships were ships, and judging by what I had seen of our present crew harsh treatment was necessary. But that a young woman of the niceness of Miss West should know of such things and be so saturated in this side of ship life was not nice. It was not nice

for me, though it interested me, I confess,--and strengthened my grip on reality. Yet it meant a hardening of one's fibres, and I did not like to think of Miss West being so hardened.

I looked at her and could not help marking again the fineness and firmness of her skin. Her hair was dark, as were her eyebrows, which were almost straight and rather low over her long eyes. Gray her eyes were, a warm gray, and very steady and direct in expression, intelligent and alive. Perhaps, taking her face as a whole, the most noteworthy expression of it was a great calm. She seemed always in repose, at peace with herself and with the external world. The most beautiful feature was her eyes, framed in lashes as dark as her brows and hair. The most admirable feature was her nose, quite straight, very straight, and just the slightest trifle too long. In this it was reminiscent of her father's nose. But the perfect modelling of the bridge and nostrils conveyed an indescribable advertisement of race and blood.

Hers was a slender-lipped, sensitive, sensible, and generous mouth--generous, not so much in size, which was quite average, but generous rather in tolerance, in power, and in laughter. All the health and buoyancy of her was in her mouth, as well as in her eyes. She rarely exposed her teeth in smiling, for which purpose she seemed chiefly to employ her eyes; but when she laughed she showed strong white teeth, even, not babyish in their smallness, but just the firm, sensible, normal size one would expect in a woman as healthy and normal as she.

I would never have called her beautiful, and yet she possessed many of the factors that go to compose feminine beauty. She had all the beauty of colouring, a white skin that was healthy white and that was emphasized by the darkness of her lashes, brows, and hair. And, in the same way, the darkness of lashes and brows and the whiteness of skin set off the warm gray of her eyes. The forehead was, well, medium-broad and medium high, and quite smooth. No lines nor hints of lines were there, suggestive of nervousness, of blue days of depression and white nights of insomnia. Oh, she bore all the marks of the healthy, human female, who never worried nor was vexed in the spirit of her, and in whose body every process and function was frictionless and automatic.

"Miss West has posed to me as quite a weather prophet," I said to the mate. "Now what is your forecast of our coming weather?"

"She ought to be," was Mr. Pike's reply as he lifted his glance across the smooth swell of sea to the sky. "This ain't the first time she's been on the North Atlantic in winter." He debated a moment, as he studied the sea and sky. "I should say, considering the high barometer, we ought to get a mild gale from the north-east or a calm, with the chances in favour of the calm."

She favoured me with a triumphant smile, and suddenly clutched the rail as the Elsinore lifted on an unusually large swell and sank into the trough with a roll from windward that flapped all the sails in hollow thunder.

"The calm has it," Miss West said, with just a hint of grimness. "And if this keeps up I'll be in my bunk in about five minutes."

She waved aside all sympathy. "Oh, don't bother about me, Mr. Pathurst. Sea-sickness is only detestable and horrid, like sleet, and muddy weather, and poison ivy; besides, I'd rather be sea-sick than have the hives."

Something went wrong with the men below us on the deck, some stupidity or blunder that was made aware to us by Mr. Mellaire's raised voice. Like Mr. Pike, he had a way of snarling at the sailors that was distinctly unpleasant to the ear.

On the faces of several of the sailors bruises were in evidence. One, in particular, had an eye so swollen that it was closed.

"Looks as if he had run against a stanchion in the dark," I observed.

Most eloquent, and most unconscious, was the quick flash of Miss West's eyes to Mr. Pike's big paws, with freshly abraded knuckles, resting on the rail. It was a stab of hurt to me. She knew.