

## CHAPTER X

That evening the three men of us had dinner alone, with racks on the table, while the *Elsinore* rolled in the calm that had sent Miss West to her room.

"You won't see her for a couple of days," Captain West told me. "Her mother was the same way--a born sailor, but always sick at the outset of a voyage."

"It's the shaking down." Mr. Pike astonished me with the longest observation I had yet heard him utter at table. "Everybody has to shake down when they leave the land. We've got to forget the good times on shore, and the good things money'll buy, and start watch and watch, four hours on deck and four below. And it comes hard, and all our tempers are strung until we can make the change. Did it happen that you heard Caruso and Blanche Arral this winter in New York, Mr. Pathurst?"

I nodded, still marvelling over this spate of speech at table.

"Well, think of hearing them, and Homer, and Witherspoon, and Amato, every night for nights and nights at the Metropolitan; and then to give it the go-by, and get to sea and shake down to watch and watch."

"You don't like the sea?" I queried.

He sighed.

"I don't know. But of course the sea is all I know--"

"Except music," I threw in.

"Yes, but the sea and all the long-voyaging has cheated me out of most of the music I oughta have had coming to me."

"I suppose you've heard Schumann Heink?"

"Wonderful, wonderful!" he murmured fervently, then regarded me with an eager wistfulness. "I've half-a-dozen of her records, and I've got the second dog-watch below. If Captain West don't mind . . ." (Captain West nodded that he didn't mind). "And if you'd want to hear them? The machine is a good one."

And then, to my amazement, when the steward had cleared the table, this hoary old relic of man-killing and man-driving days, battered waif of the sea that he was, carried in from his room a most splendid collection of phonograph records. These, and the machine, he placed on the table. The big doors were opened, making the dining-room and the main cabin into one large room. It was in the cabin that Captain West and I lolled in big leather chairs while Mr. Pike ran the phonograph. His face was in a blaze of light from the swinging lamps, and every shade of expression was

visible to me.

In vain I waited for him to start some popular song. His records were only of the best, and the care he took of them was a revelation. He handled each one reverently, as a sacred thing, untying and unwrapping it and brushing it with a fine camel's hair brush while it revolved and ere he placed the needle on it. For a time all I could see was the huge brute hands of a brute-driver, with skin off the knuckles, that expressed love in their every movement. Each touch on the discs was a caress, and while the record played he hovered over it and dreamed in some heaven of music all his own.

During this time Captain West lay back and smoked a cigar. His face was expressionless, and he seemed very far away, untouched by the music. I almost doubted that he heard it. He made no remarks between whiles, betrayed no sign of approbation or displeasure. He seemed preternaturally serene, preternaturally remote. And while I watched him I wondered what his duties were. I had not seen him perform any. Mr. Pike had attended to the loading of the ship. Not until she was ready for sea had Captain West come on board. I had not seen him give an order. It looked to me that Mr. Pike and Mr. Mellaire did the work. All Captain West did was to smoke cigars and keep blissfully oblivious of the Elsinore's crew.

When Mr. Pike had played the "Hallelujah Chorus" from the Messiah, and "He Shall Feed His Flock," he mentioned to me, almost apologetically,

that he liked sacred music, and for the reason, perhaps, that for a short period, a child ashore in San Francisco, he had been a choir boy.

"And then I hit the dominie over the head with a baseball bat and sneaked off to sea again," he concluded with a harsh laugh.

And thereat he fell to dreaming while he played Meyerbeer's "King of Heaven," and Mendelssohn's "O Rest in the Lord."

When one bell struck, at quarter to eight, he carried his music, all carefully wrapped, back into his room. I lingered with him while he rolled a cigarette ere eight bells struck.

"I've got a lot more good things," he said confidentially: "Coenen's 'Come Unto Me,' and Faure's 'Crucifix'; and there's 'O Salutaris,' and 'Lead, Kindly Light' by the Trinity Choir; and 'Jesu, Lover of My Soul' would just melt your heart. I'll play 'em for you some night."

"Do you believe in them?" I was led to ask by his rapt expression and by the picture of his brute-driving hands which I could not shake from my consciousness.

He hesitated perceptibly, then replied:

"I do . . . when I'm listening to them."

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My sleep that night was wretched. Short of sleep from the previous night, I closed my book and turned my light off early. But scarcely had I dropped into slumber when I was aroused by the recrudescence of my hives. All day they had not bothered me; yet the instant I put out the light and slept, the damnable persistent itching set up. Wada had not yet gone to bed, and from him I got more cream of tartar. It was useless, however, and at midnight, when I heard the watch changing, I partially dressed, slipped into my dressing-gown, and went up on to the poop.

I saw Mr. Mellaire beginning his four hours' watch, pacing up and down the port side of the poop; and I slipped away aft, past the man at the wheel, whom I did not recognize, and took refuge in the lee of the wheel-house.

Once again I studied the dim loom and tracery of intricate rigging and lofty, sail-carrying spars, thought of the mad, imbecile crew, and experienced premonitions of disaster. How could such a voyage be possible, with such a crew, on the huge Elsinore, a cargo-carrier that was only a steel shell half an inch thick burdened with five thousand tons of coal? It was appalling to contemplate. The voyage had gone wrong from the first. In the wretched unbalance that loss of sleep brings to any good sleeper, I could decide only that the voyage was doomed. Yet how doomed it was, in truth, neither I nor a madman could

have dreamed.

I thought of the red-blooded Miss West, who had always lived and had no doubts but what she would always live. I thought of the killing and driving and music-loving Mr. Pike. Many a haler remnant than he had gone down on a last voyage. As for Captain West, he did not count. He was too neutral a being, too far away, a sort of favoured passenger who had nothing to do but serenely and passively exist in some Nirvana of his own creating.

Next I remembered the self-wounded Greek, sewed up by Mr. Pike and lying gibbering between the steel walls of the 'midship-house. This picture almost decided me, for in my fevered imagination he typified the whole mad, helpless, idiotic crew. Certainly I could go back to Baltimore.

Thank God I had the money to humour my whims. Had not Mr. Pike told me, in reply to a question, that he estimated the running expenses of the *Elsinore* at two hundred dollars a day? I could afford to pay two hundred a day, or two thousand, for the several days that might be necessary to get me back to the land, to a pilot tug, or any inbound craft to Baltimore.

I was quite wholly of a mind to go down and rout out Captain West to tell him my decision, when another presented itself: Then are you, the thinker and philosopher, the world-sick one, afraid to go down, to cease in the darkness? Bah! My own pride in my life-pridelessness saved Captain West's sleep from interruption. Of course I would go on

with the adventure, if adventure it might be called, to go sailing around Cape Horn with a shipload of fools and lunatics--and worse; for I remembered the three Babylonish and Semitic ones who had aroused Mr. Pike's ire and who had laughed so terribly and silently.

Night thoughts! Sleepless thoughts! I dismissed them all and started below, chilled through by the cold. But at the chart-room door I encountered Mr. Mellaire.

"A pleasant evening, sir," he greeted me. "A pity there's not a little wind to help us off the land."

"What do you think of the crew?" I asked, after a moment or so.

Mr. Mellaire shrugged his shoulders.

"I've seen many queer crews in my time, Mr. Pathurst. But I never saw one as queer as this--boys, old men, cripples and--you saw Tony the Greek go overboard yesterday? Well, that's only the beginning. He's a sample. I've got a big Irishman in my watch who's going bad. Did you notice a little, dried-up Scotchman?"

"Who looks mean and angry all the time, and who was steering the evening before last?"

"The very one--Andy Fay. Well, Andy Fay's just been complaining to me

about O'Sullivan. Says O'Sullivan's threatened his life. When Andy Fay went off watch at eight he found O'Sullivan stropping a razor. I'll give you the conversation as Andy gave it to me:

"Says O'Sullivan to me, "Mr. Fay, I'll have a word wid yeh?"

"Certainly," says I; "what can I do for you?" "Sell me your sea-boots,

Mr. Fay," says O'Sullivan, polite as can be. "But what will you be

wantin' of them?" says I. "'Twill be a great favour," says O'Sullivan.

"But it's my only pair," says I; "and you have a pair of your own," says

I. "Mr. Fay, I'll be needin' me own in bad weather," says O'Sullivan.

"Besides," says I, "you have no money." "I'll pay for them when we pay

off in Seattle," says O'Sullivan. "I'll not do it," says I; "besides,

you're not tellin' me what you'll be doin' with them." "But I will tell

yeh," says O'Sullivan; "I'm wantin' to throw 'em over the side." And

with that I turns to walk away, but O'Sullivan says, very polite and

seducin'-like, still a-stroppin' the razor, "Mr. Fay," says he, "will you

kindly step this way an' have your throat cut?" And with that I knew my

life was in danger, and I have come to make report to you, sir, that the

man is a violent lunatic.'

"Or soon will be," I remarked. "I noticed him yesterday, a big man muttering continually to himself?"

"That's the man," Mr. Mellaire said.

"Do you have many such at sea?" I asked.



"More than my share, I do believe, sir."

He was lighting a cigarette at the moment, and with a quick movement he pulled off his cap, bent his head forward, and held up the blazing match that I might see.

I saw a grizzled head, the full crown of which was not entirely bald, but partially covered with a few sparse long hairs. And full across this crown, disappearing in the thicker fringe above the ears, ran the most prodigious scar I had ever seen. Because the vision of it was so fleeting, ere the match blew out, and because of the scar's very prodigiousness, I may possibly exaggerate, but I could have sworn that I could lay two fingers deep into the horrid cleft and that it was fully two fingers broad. There seemed no bone at all, just a great fissure, a deep valley covered with skin; and I was confident that the brain pulsed immediately under that skin.

He pulled his cap on and laughed in an amused, reassuring way.

"A crazy sea cook did that, Mr. Pathurst, with a meat-axe. We were thousands of miles from anywhere, in the South Indian Ocean at the time, running our Easting down, but the cook got the idea into his addled head that we were lying in Boston Harbour, and that I wouldn't let him go ashore. I had my back to him at the time, and I never knew what struck me."

"But how could you recover from so fearful an injury?" I questioned.

"There must have been a splendid surgeon on board, and you must have had wonderful vitality."

He shook his head.

"It must have been the vitality . . . and the molasses."

"Molasses!"

"Yes; the captain had old-fashioned prejudices against antiseptics. He always used molasses for fresh wound-dressings. I lay in my bunk many weary weeks--we had a long passage--and by the time we reached Hong Kong the thing was healed, there was no need for a shore surgeon, and I was standing my third mate's watch--we carried third mates in those days."

Not for many a long day was I to realize the dire part that scar in Mr. Mellaire's head was to play in his destiny and in the destiny of the Elsinore. Had I known at the time, Captain West would have received the most unusual awakening from sleep that he ever experienced; for he would have been routed out by a very determined, partially-dressed passenger with a proposition capable of going to the extent of buying the Elsinore outright with all her cargo, so that she might be sailed straight back to Baltimore.

As it was, I merely thought it a very marvellous thing that Mr. Mellaire should have lived so many years with such a hole in his head.

We talked on, and he gave me many details of that particular happening, and of other happenings at sea on the part of the lunatics that seem to infest the sea.

And yet I could not like the man. In nothing he said, nor in the manner of saying things, could I find fault. He seemed generous, broad-minded, and, for a sailor, very much of a man of the world. It was easy for me to overlook his excessive suavity of speech and super-courtesy of social mannerism. It was not that. But all the time I was distressingly, and, I suppose, intuitively aware, though in the darkness I couldn't even see his eyes, that there, behind those eyes, inside that skull, was ambuscaded an alien personality that spied upon me, measured me, studied me, and that said one thing while it thought another thing.

When I said good night and went below it was with the feeling that I had been talking with the one half of some sort of a dual creature. The other half had not spoken. Yet I sensed it there, fluttering and quick, behind the mask of words and flesh.