

CHAPTER XI

But I could not sleep. I took more cream of tartar. It must be the heat of the bed-clothes, I decided, that excited my nerves. And yet, whenever I ceased struggling for sleep, and lighted the lamp and read, my skin irritation decreased. But as soon as I turned out the lamp and closed my eyes I was troubled again. So hour after hour passed, through which, between vain attempts to sleep, I managed to wade through many pages of Rosny's *Le Termite*--a not very cheerful proceeding, I must say, concerned as it is with the microscopic and over-elaborate recital of Noel Servaise's tortured nerves, bodily pains, and intellectual phantasma. At last I tossed the novel aside, damned all analytical Frenchmen, and found some measure of relief in the more genial and cynical Stendhal.

Over my head I could hear Mr. Mellaire steadily pace up and down. At four the watches changed, and I recognized the age-lag in Mr. Pike's promenade. Half an hour later, just as the steward's alarm went off, instantly checked by that light-sleeping Asiatic, the *Elsinore* began to heel over on my side. I could hear Mr. Pike barking and snarling orders, and at times a trample and shuffle of many feet passed over my head as the weird crew pulled and hauled. The *Elsinore* continued to heel over until I could see the water against my port, and then she gathered way and dashed ahead at such a rate that I could hear the stinging and singing of the foam through the circle of thick glass beside me.

The steward brought me coffee, and I read till daylight and after, when Wada served me breakfast and helped me dress. He, too, complained of inability to sleep. He had been bunked with Nancy in one of the rooms in the 'midship-house. Wada described the situation. The tiny room, made of steel, was air-tight when the steel door was closed. And Nancy insisted on keeping the door closed. As a result Wada, in the upper bunk, had stifled. He told me that the air had got so bad that the flame of the lamp, no matter how high it was turned, guttered down and all but refused to burn. Nancy snored beautifully through it all, while he had been unable to close his eyes.

"He is not clean," quoth Wada. "He is a pig. No more will I sleep in that place."

On the poop I found the *Elsinore*, with many of her sails furled, slashing along through a troubled sea under an overcast sky. Also I found Mr. Mellaire marching up and down, just as I had left him hours before, and it took quite a distinct effort for me to realize that he had had the watch off between four and eight. Even then, he told me, he had slept from four until half-past seven.

"That is one thing, Mr. Pathurst, I always sleep like a baby . . . which means a good conscience, sir, yes, a good conscience."

And while he enunciated the platitude I was uncomfortably aware that that

alien thing inside his skull was watching me, studying me.

In the cabin Captain West smoked a cigar and read the Bible. Miss West did not appear, and I was grateful that to my sleeplessness the curse of sea-sickness had not been added.

Without asking permission of anybody, Wada arranged a sleeping place for himself in a far corner of the big after-room, screening the corner with a solidly lashed wall of my trunks and empty book boxes.

It was a dreary enough day, no sun, with occasional splatters of rain and a persistent crash of seas over the weather rail and swash of water across the deck. With my eyes glued to the cabin ports, which gave for'ard along the main deck, I could see the wretched sailors, whenever they were given some task of pull and haul, wet through and through by the boarding seas. Several times I saw some of them taken off their feet and rolled about in the creaming foam. And yet, erect, unstaggering, with certitude of weight and strength, among these rolled men, these clutching, cowering ones, moved either Mr. Pike or Mr. Mellaire. They were never taken off their feet. They never shrank away from a splash of spray or heavier bulk of down-falling water. They had fed on different food, were informed with a different spirit, were of iron in contrast with the poor miserables they drove to their bidding.

In the afternoon I dozed for half-an-hour in one of the big chairs in the cabin. Had it not been for the violent motion of the ship I could have

slept there for hours, for the hives did not trouble. Captain West, stretched out on the cabin sofa, his feet in carpet slippers, slept enviably. By some instinct, I might say, in the deep of sleep, he kept his place and was not rolled off upon the floor. Also, he lightly held a half-smoked cigar in one hand. I watched him for an hour, and knew him to be asleep, and marvelled that he maintained his easy posture and did not drop the cigar.

After dinner there was no phonograph. The second dog-watch was Mr. Pike's on deck. Besides, as he explained, the rolling was too severe. It would make the needle jump and scratch his beloved records.

And no sleep! Another weary night of torment, and another dreary, overcast day and leaden, troubled sea. And no Miss West. Wada, too, is sea-sick, although heroically he kept his feet and tried to tend on me with glassy, unseeing eyes. I sent him to his bunk, and read through the endless hours until my eyes were tired, and my brain, between lack of sleep and over-use, was fuzzy.

Captain West is no conversationalist. The more I see of him the more I am baffled. I have not yet found a reason for that first impression I received of him. He has all the poise and air of a remote and superior being, and yet I wonder if it be not poise and air and nothing else. Just as I had expected, that first meeting, ere he spoke a word, to hear fall from his lips words of untold beneficence and wisdom, and then heard him utter mere social commonplaces, so I now find myself almost forced to

conclude that his touch of race, and beak of power, and all the tall, aristocratic slenderness of him have nothing behind them.

And yet, on the other hand, I can find no reason for rejecting that first impression. He has not shown any strength, but by the same token he has not shown any weakness. Sometimes I wonder what resides behind those clear blue eyes. Certainly I have failed to find any intellectual backing. I tried him out with William James' Varieties of Religious Experience. He glanced at a few pages, then returned it to me with the frank statement that it did not interest him. He has no books of his own. Evidently he is not a reader. Then what is he? I dared to feel him out on politics. He listened courteously, said sometimes yes and sometimes no, and, when I ceased from very discouragement, said nothing.

Aloof as the two officers are from the men, Captain West is still more aloof from his officers. I have not seen him address a further word to Mr. Mellaire than "Good morning" on the poop. As for Mr. Pike, who eats three times a day with him, scarcely any more conversation obtains between them. And I am surprised by what seems the very conspicuous awe with which Mr. Pike seems to regard his commander.

Another thing. What are Captain West's duties? So far he has done nothing, save eat three times a day, smoke many cigars, and each day stroll a total of one mile around the poop. The mates do all the work, and hard work it is, four hours on deck and four below, day and night with never a variation. I watch Captain West and am amazed. He will

loll back in the cabin and stare straight before him for hours at a time, until I am almost frantic to demand of him what are his thoughts. Sometimes I doubt that he is thinking at all. I give him up. I cannot fathom him.

Altogether a depressing day of rain-splatter and wash of water across the deck. I can see, now, that the problem of sailing a ship with five thousand tons of coal around the Horn is more serious than I had thought. So deep is the Elsinore in the water that she is like a log awash. Her tall, six-foot bulwarks of steel cannot keep the seas from boarding her. She has not the buoyancy one is accustomed to ascribe to ships. On the contrary, she is weighted down until she is dead, so that, for this one day alone, I am appalled at the thought of how many thousands of tons of the North Atlantic have boarded her and poured out through her spouting scuppers and clanging ports.

Yes, a depressing day. The two mates have alternated on deck and in their bunks. Captain West has dozed on the cabin sofa or read the Bible. Miss West is still sea-sick. I have tired myself out with reading, and the fuzziness of my unsleeping brain makes for melancholy. Even Wada is anything but a cheering spectacle, crawling out of his bunk, as he does at stated intervals, and with sick, glassy eyes trying to discern what my needs may be. I almost wish I could get sea-sick myself. I had never dreamed that a sea voyage could be so unenlivening as this one is proving.