

CHAPTER XVI

No, the sea is not a gentle place. It must be the very hardness of the life that makes all sea-people hard. Of course, Captain West is unaware that his crew exists, and Mr. Pike and Mr. Mellaire never address the men save to give commands. But Miss West, who is more like myself, a passenger, ignores the men. She does not even say good-morning to the man at the wheel when she first comes on deck. Nevertheless I shall, at least to the man at the wheel. Am I not a passenger?

Which reminds me. Technically I am not a passenger. The *Elsinore* has no licence to carry passengers, and I am down on the articles as third mate and am supposed to receive thirty-five dollars a month. Wada is down as cabin boy, although I paid a good price for his passage and he is my servant.

Not much time is lost at sea in getting rid of the dead. Within an hour after I had watched the sail-makers at work Christian Jespersen was slid overboard, feet first, a sack of coal to his feet to sink him. It was a mild, calm day, and the *Elsinore*, logging a lazy two knots, was not hove to for the occasion. At the last moment Captain West came for'ard, prayer-book in hand, read the brief service for burial at sea, and returned immediately aft. It was the first time I had seen him for'ard.

I shall not bother to describe the burial. All I shall say of it is that

it was as sordid as Christian Jespersen's life had been and as his death had been.

As for Miss West, she sat in a deck-chair on the poop busily engaged with some sort of fancy work. When Christian Jespersen and his coal splashed into the sea the crew immediately dispersed, the watch below going to its bunks, the watch on deck to its work. Not a minute elapsed ere Mr. Mellaire was giving orders and the men were pulling and hauling. So I returned to the poop to be unpleasantly impressed by Miss West's smiling unconcern.

"Well, he's buried," I observed.

"Oh," she said, with all the tonelessness of disinterest, and went on with her stitching.

She must have sensed my frame of mind, for, after a moment, she paused from her sewing and looked at me.

Your first sea funeral, Mr. Pathurst?

"Death at sea does not seem to affect you," I said bluntly.

"Not any more than on the land." She shrugged her shoulders. "So many people die, you know. And when they are strangers to you . . . well, what do you do on the land when you learn that some workers have been

killed in a factory you pass every day coming to town? It is the same on the sea."

"It's too bad we are a hand short," I said deliberately.

It did not miss her. Just as deliberately she replied:

"Yes, isn't it? And so early in the voyage, too." She looked at me, and when I could not forbear a smile of appreciation she smiled back.

"Oh, I know very well, Mr. Pathurst, that you think me a heartless wretch. But it isn't that it's . . . it's the sea, I suppose. And yet, I didn't know this man. I don't remember ever having seen him. At this stage of the voyage I doubt if I could pick out half-a-dozen of the sailors as men I had ever laid eyes on. So why vex myself with even thinking of this stupid stranger who was killed by another stupid stranger? As well might one die of grief with reading the murder columns of the daily papers."

"And yet, it seems somehow different," I contended.

"Oh, you'll get used to it," she assured me cheerfully, and returned to her sewing.

I asked her if she had read Moody's *Ship of Souls*, but she had not. I searched her out further. She liked Browning, and was especially fond of

The Ring and the Book. This was the key to her. She cared only for healthful literature--for the literature that exposits the vital lies of life.

For instance, the mention of Schopenhauer produced smiles and laughter. To her all the philosophers of pessimism were laughable. The red blood of her would not permit her to take them seriously. I tried her out with a conversation I had had with De Casseres shortly before leaving New York. De Casseres, after tracing Jules de Gaultier's philosophic genealogy back to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, had concluded with the proposition that out of their two formulas de Gaultier had constructed an even profounder formula. The "Will-to-Live" of the one and the "Will-to-Power" of the other were, after all, only parts of de Gaultier's supreme generalization, the "Will-to-Illusion."

I flatter myself that even De Casseres would have been pleased with the way I repeated his argument. And when I had concluded it, Miss West promptly demanded if the realists might not be fooled by their own phrases as often and as completely as were the poor common mortals with the vital lies they never questioned.

And there we were. An ordinary young woman, who had never vexed her brains with ultimate problems, hears such things stated for the first time, and immediately, and with a laugh, sweeps them all away. I doubt not that De Casseres would have agreed with her.

"Do you believe in God?" I asked rather abruptly. She dropped her sewing into her lap, looked at me meditatively, then gazed on and away across the flashing sea and up into the azure dome of sky. And finally, with true feminine evasion, she replied:

"My father does."

"But you?" I insisted.

"I really don't know. I don't bother my head about such things. I used to when I was a little girl. And yet . . . yes, surely I believe in God. At times, when I am not thinking about it at all, I am very sure, and my faith that all is well is just as strong as the faith of your Jewish friend in the phrases of the philosophers. That's all it comes to, I suppose, in every case--faith. But, as I say, why bother?"

"Ah, I have you now, Miss West!" I cried. "You are a true daughter of Herodias."

"It doesn't sound nice," she said with a moue.

"And it isn't," I exulted. "Nevertheless, it is what you are. It is Arthur Symon's poem, The Daughters of Herodias. Some day I shall read it to you, and you will answer. I know you will answer that you, too, have looked often upon the stars."

We had just got upon the subject of music, of which she possesses a surprisingly solid knowledge, and she was telling me that Debussy and his school held no particular charm for her, when Possum set up a wild yelping.

The puppy had strayed for'ard along the bridge to the 'midship-house, and had evidently been investigating the chickens when his disaster came upon him. So shrill was his terror that we both stood up. He was dashing along the bridge toward us at full speed, yelping at every jump and continually turning his head back in the direction whence he came.

I spoke to him and held out my hand, and was rewarded with a snap and clash of teeth as he scuttled past. Still with head turned back, he went on along the poop. Before I could apprehend his danger, Mr. Pike and Miss West were after him. The mate was the nearer, and with a magnificent leap gained the rail just in time to intercept Possum, who was blindly going overboard under the slender railing. With a sort of scooping kick Mr. Pike sent the animal rolling half across the poop. Howling and snapping more violently, Possum regained his feet and staggered on toward the opposite railing.

"Don't touch him!" Mr. Pike cried, as Miss West showed her intention of catching the crazed little animal with her hands. "Don't touch'm! He's got a fit."

But it did not deter her. He was half-way under the railing when she

caught him up and held him at arm's length while he howled and barked and slavered.

"It's a fit," said Mr. Pike, as the terrier collapsed and lay on the deck jerking convulsively.

"Perhaps a chicken pecked him," said Miss West. "At any rate, get a bucket of water."

"Better let me take him," I volunteered helplessly, for I was unfamiliar with fits.

"No; it's all right," she answered. "I'll take charge of him. The cold water is what he needs. He got too close to the coop, and a peck on the nose frightened him into the fit."

"First time I ever heard of a fit coming that way," Mr. Pike remarked, as he poured water over the puppy under Miss West's direction. "It's just a plain puppy fit. They all get them at sea."

"I think it was the sails that caused it," I argued. "I've noticed that he is very afraid of them. When they flap, he crouches down in terror and starts to run. You noticed how he ran with his head turned back?"

"I've seen dogs with fits do that when there was nothing to frighten

them," Mr. Pike contended.

"It was a fit, no matter what caused it," Miss West stated conclusively.

"Which means that he has not been fed properly. From now on I shall feed him. You tell your boy that, Mr. Pathurst. Nobody is to feed Possum anything without my permission."

At this juncture Wada arrived with Possum's little sleeping box, and they prepared to take him below.

"It was splendid of you, Miss West," I said, "and rash, as well, and I won't attempt to thank you. But I tell you what-you take him. He's your dog now."

She laughed and shook her head as I opened the chart-house door for her to pass.

"No; but I'll take care of him for you. Now don't bother to come below. This is my affair, and you would only be in the way. Wada will help me."

And I was rather surprised, as I returned to my deck chair and sat down, to find how affected I was by the little episode. I remembered, at the first, that my pulse had been distinctly accelerated with the excitement of what had taken place. And somehow, as I leaned back in my chair and lighted a cigarette, the strangeness of the whole voyage vividly came to me. Miss West and I talk philosophy and art on the poop of a stately

ship in a circle of flashing sea, while Captain West dreams of his far home, and Mr. Pike and Mr. Mellaire stand watch and watch and snarl orders, and the slaves of men pull and haul, and Possum has fits, and Andy Fay and Mulligan Jacobs burn with hatred unconsumable, and the small-handed half-caste Chinese cooks for all, and Sundry Buyers perpetually presses his abdomen, and O'Sullivan raves in the steel cell of the 'midship-house, and Charles Davis lies about him nursing a marlin-spike, and Christian Jespersen, miles astern, is deep sunk in the sea with a sack of coal at his feet.