

## CHAPTER XXVII

We are now south of Rio and working south. We are out of the latitude of the trades, and the wind is capricious. Rain squalls and wind squalls vex the Elsinore. One hour we may be rolling sickeningly in a dead calm, and the next hour we may be dashing fourteen knots through the water and taking off sail as fast as the men can clew up and lower away. A night of calm, when sleep is well-nigh impossible in the sultry, muggy air, may be followed by a day of blazing sun and an oily swell from the south'ard, connoting great gales in that area of ocean we are sailing toward--or all day long the Elsinore, under an overcast sky, royals and sky sails furled, may plunge and buck under wind-pressure into a short and choppy head-sea.

And all this means work for the men. Taking Mr. Pike's judgment, they are very inadequate, though by this time they know the ropes. He growls and grumbles, and snorts and sneers whenever he watches them doing anything. To-day, at eleven in the morning, the wind was so violent, continuing in greater gusts after having come in a great gust, that Mr. Pike ordered the mainsail taken off. The great crojack was already off. But the watch could not clew up the mainsail, and, after much vain sing-singing and pull-hauling, the watch below was routed out to bear a hand.

"My God!" Mr. Pike groaned to me. "Two watches for a rag like that when half a decent watch could do it! Look at that preventer bosun of mine!"

Poor Nancy! He looked the saddest, sickest, bleakest creature I had ever seen. He was so wretched, so miserable, so helpless. And Sundry Buyers was just as impotent. The expression on his face was of pain and hopelessness, and as he pressed his abdomen he lumbered futilely about, ever seeking something he might do and ever failing to find it. He pottered. He would stand and stare at one rope for a minute or so at a time, following it aloft with his eyes through the maze of ropes and stabs and gears with all the intentness of a man working out an intricate problem. Then, holding his hand against his stomach, he would lumber on a few steps and select another rope for study.

"Oh dear, oh dear," Mr. Pike lamented. "How can one drive with bosuns like that and a crew like that? Just the same, if I was captain of this ship I'd drive 'em. I'd show 'em what drive was, if I had to lose a few of them. And when they grow weak off the Horn what'll we do? It'll be both watches all the time, which will weaken them just that much the faster."

Evidently this winter passage of the Horn is all that one has been led to expect from reading the narratives of the navigators. Iron men like the two mates are very respectful of "Cape Stiff," as they call that uttermost tip of the American continent. Speaking of the two mates, iron-made and iron-mouthed that they are, it is amusing that in really serious moments both of them curse with "Oh dear, oh dear."

In the spells of calm I take great delight in the little rifle. I have already fired away five thousand rounds, and have come to consider myself an expert. Whatever the knack of shooting may be, I've got it. When I get back I shall take up target practice. It is a neat, deft sport.

Not only is Possum afraid of the sails and of rats, but he is afraid of rifle-fire, and at the first discharge goes yelping and ki-yi-ing below. The dislike Mr. Pike has developed for the poor little puppy is ludicrous. He even told me that if it were his dog he'd throw it overboard for a target. Just the same, he is an affectionate, heart-warming little rascal, and has already crept so deep into my heart that I am glad Miss West did not accept him.

And--oh!--he insists on sleeping with me on top the bedding; a proceeding which has scandalized the mate. "I suppose he'll be using your toothbrush next," Mr. Pike growled at me. But the puppy loves my companionship, and is never happier than when on the bed with me. Yet the bed is not entirely paradise, for Possum is badly frightened when ours is the lee side and the seas pound and smash against the glass ports. Then the little beggar, electric with fear to every hair tip, crouches and snarls menacingly and almost at the same time whimpers appeasingly at the storm-monster outside.

"Father knows the sea," Miss West said to me this afternoon. "He understands it, and he loves it."

"Or it may be habit," I ventured.

She shook her head.

"He does know it. And he loves it. That is why he has come back to it. All his people before him were sea folk. His grandfather, Anthony West, made forty-six voyages between 1801 and 1847. And his father, Robert, sailed master to the north-west coast before the gold days and was captain of some of the fastest Cape Horn clippers after the gold discovery. Elijah West, father's great-grandfather, was a privateersman in the Revolution. He commanded the armed brig *New Defence*. And, even before that, Elijah's father, in turn, and Elijah's father's father, were masters and owners on long-voyage merchant adventures.

"Anthony West, in 1813 and 1814, commanded the *David Bruce*, with letters of marque. He was half-owner, with Gracie & Sons as the other half-owners. She was a two-hundred-ton schooner, built right up in Maine. She carried a long eighteen-pounder, two ten-pounders, and ten six-pounders, and she sailed like a witch. She ran the blockade off Newport and got away to the English Channel and the Bay of Biscay. And, do you know, though she only cost twelve thousand dollars all told, she took over three hundred thousand dollars of British prizes. A brother of his was on the *Wasp*.

"So, you see, the sea is in our blood. She is our mother. As far back as we can trace all our line was born to the sea." She laughed and went

on. "We've pirates and slavers in our family, and all sorts of disreputable sea-rovers. Old Ezra West, just how far back I don't remember, was executed for piracy and his body hung in chains at Plymouth.

"The sea is father's blood. And he knows, well, a ship, as you would know a dog or a horse. Every ship he sails has a distinct personality for him. I have watched him, in high moments, and seen him think. But oh! the times I have seen him when he does not think--when he feels and knows everything without thinking at all. Really, with all that appertains to the sea and ships, he is an artist. There is no other word for it."

"You think a great deal of your father," I remarked.

"He is the most wonderful man I have ever known," she replied. "Remember, you are not seeing him at his best. He has never been the same since mother's death. If ever a man and woman were one, they were." She broke off, then concluded abruptly. "You don't know him. You don't know him at all."