

CHAPTER XXXVII

A wonderful event to-day! For five minutes, at noon, the sun was actually visible. But such a sun!--a pale and cold and sickly orb that at meridian was only 90 degrees 18 minutes above the horizon. And within the hour we were taking in sail and lying down to the snow-gusts of a fresh south-west gale.

Whatever you do, make westing! make westing!--this sailing rule of the navigators for the Horn has been bitten out of iron. I can understand why shipmasters, with a favouring slant of wind, have left sailors, fallen overboard, to drown without heaving-to to lower a boat. Cape Horn is iron, and it takes masters of iron to win around from east to west.

And we make easting! This west wind is eternal. I listen incredulously when Mr. Pike or Mr. Mellaire tells of times when easterly winds have blown in these latitudes. It is impossible. Always does the west wind blow, gale upon gale and gales everlasting, else why the "Great West Wind Drift" printed on the charts! We of the afterguard are weary of this eternal buffeting. Our men have become pulpy, washed-out, sore-corroded shadows of men. I should not be surprised, in the end, to see Captain West turn tail and run eastward around the world to Seattle. But Margaret smiles with surety, and nods her head, and affirms that her father will win around to 50 in the Pacific.

How Charles Davis survives in that wet, freezing, paint-scabbed room of iron in the 'midship-house is beyond me--just as it is beyond me that the wretched sailors in the wretched fore-castle do not lie down in their bunks and die, or, at least, refuse to answer the call of the watches.

Another week has passed, and we are to-day, by observation, sixty miles due south of the Straits of Le Maire, and we are hove-to, in a driving gale, on the port tack. The glass is down to 28.58, and even Mr. Pike acknowledges that it is one of the worst Cape Horn snorters he has ever experienced.

In the old days the navigators used to strive as far south as 64 degrees or 65 degrees, into the Antarctic drift ice, hoping, in a favouring spell, to make westing at a prodigious rate across the extreme-narrowing wedges of longitude. But of late years all shipmasters have accepted the hugging of the land all the way around. Out of ten times ten thousand passages of Cape Stiff from east to west, this, they have concluded, is the best strategy. So Captain West hugs the land. He heaves-to on the port tack until the leeward drift brings the land into perilous proximity, then wears ship and heaves-to on the port tack and makes leeway off shore.

I may be weary of all this bitter movement of a labouring ship on a frigid sea, but at the same time I do not mind it. In my brain burns the flame of a great discovery and a great achievement. I have found what

makes all the books go glimmering; I have achieved what my very philosophy tells me is the greatest achievement a man can make. I have found the love of woman. I do not know whether she cares for me. Nor is that the point. The point is that in myself I have risen to the greatest height to which the human male animal can rise.

I know a woman and her name is Margaret. She is Margaret, a woman and desirable. My blood is red. I am not the pallid scholar I so proudly deemed myself to be. I am a man, and a lover, despite the books. As for De Casseres--if ever I get back to New York, equipped as I now am, I shall confute him with the same ease that he has confuted all the schools. Love is the final word. To the rational man it alone gives the super-rational sanction for living. Like Bergson in his overhanging heaven of intuition, or like one who has bathed in Pentecostal fire and seen the New Jerusalem, so I have trod the materialistic dictums of science underfoot, scaled the last peak of philosophy, and leaped into my heaven, which, after all, is within myself. The stuff that composes me, that is I, is so made that it finds its supreme realization in the love of woman. It is the vindication of being. Yes, and it is the wages of being, the payment in full for all the brittleness and frailty of flesh and breath.

And she is only a woman, like any woman, and the Lord knows I know what women are. And I know Margaret for what she is--mere woman; and yet I know, in the lover's soul of me, that she is somehow different. Her ways are not as the ways of other women, and all her ways are delightful to

me. In the end, I suppose, I shall become a nest-builder, for of a surety nest-building is one of her pretty ways. And who shall say which is the worthier--the writing of a whole library or the building of a nest?

The monotonous days, bleak and gray and soggy cold, drag by. It is now a month since we began the passage of the Horn, and here we are, not so well forward as a month ago, because we are something like a hundred miles south of the Straits of Le Maire. Even this position is conjectural, being arrived at by dead reckoning, based on the leeway of a ship hove-to, now on the one tack, now on the other, with always the Great West Wind Drift making against us. It is four days since our last instrument-sight of the sun.

This storm-vexed ocean has become populous. No ships are getting round, and each day adds to our number. Never a brief day passes without our sighting from two or three to a dozen hove-to on port tack or starboard tack. Captain West estimates there must be at least two hundred sail of us. A ship hove-to with preventer tackles on the rudder-head is unmanageable. Each night we take our chance of unavoidable and disastrous collision. And at times, glimpsed through the snow-squalls, we see and curse the ships, east-bound, that drive past us with the West Wind and the West Wind Drift at their backs. And so wild is the mind of man that Mr. Pike and Mr. Mellaire still aver that on occasion they have known gales to blow ships from east to west around the Horn. It surely has been a year since we of the *Elsinore* emerged from under the lee of

Tierra Del Fuego into the snorting south-west gales. A century, at least, has elapsed since we sailed from Baltimore.

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And I don't give a snap of my fingers for all the wrath and fury of this dim-gray sea at the tip of the earth. I have told Margaret that I love her. The tale was told in the shelter of the weather cloth, where we clung together in the second dog-watch last evening. And it was told again, and by both of us, in the bright-lighted chart-room after the watches had been changed at eight bells. Yes, and her face was storm-bright, and all of her was very proud, save that her eyes were warm and soft and fluttered with lids that just would flutter maidenly and womanly. It was a great hour--our great hour.

A poor devil of a man is most lucky when, loving, he is loved. Grievous indeed must be the fate of the lover who is unloved. And I, for one, and for still other reasons, congratulate myself upon the vastitude of my good fortune. For see, were Margaret any other sort of a woman, were she . . . well, just the lovely and lovable and adorably snuggly sort who seem made just precisely for love and loving and nestling into the strong arms of a man--why, there wouldn't be anything remarkable or wonderful about her loving me. But Margaret is Margaret, strong, self-possessed, serene, controlled, a very mistress of herself. And there's the miracle--that such a woman should have been awakened to love by me. It is almost unbelievable. I go out of my way to get another peep into

those long, cool, gray eyes of hers and see them grow melting soft as she looks at me. She is no Juliet, thank the Lord; and thank the Lord I am no Romeo. And yet I go up alone on the freezing poop, and under my breath chant defiantly at the snorting gale, and at the graybeards thundering down on us, that I am a lover. And I send messages to the lonely albatrosses veering through the murk that I am a lover. And I look at the wretched sailors crawling along the spray-swept bridge and know that never in ten thousand wretched lives could they experience the love I experience, and I wonder why God ever made them.

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"And the one thing I had firmly resolved from the start," Margaret confessed to me this morning in the cabin, when I released her from my arms, "was that I would not permit you to make love to me."

"True daughter of Herodias," I gaily gibed, "so such was the drift of your thoughts even as early as the very start. Already you were looking upon me with a considerative female eye."

She laughed proudly, and did not reply.

"What possibly could have led you to expect that I would make love to you?" I insisted.

"Because it is the way of young male passengers on long voyages," she

replied.

"Then others have . . . ?"

"They always do," she assured me gravely.

And at that instant I knew the first ridiculous pang of jealousy; but I laughed it away and retorted:

"It was an ancient Chinese philosopher who is first recorded as having said, what doubtlessly the cave men before him gibbered, namely, that a woman pursues a man by fluttering away in advance of him."

"Wretch!" she cried. "I never fluttered. When did I ever flutter!"

"It is a delicate subject . . . " I began with assumed hesitancy.

"When did I ever flutter?" she demanded.

I availed myself of one of Schopenhauer's ruses by making a shift.

"From the first you observed nothing that a female could afford to miss observing," I charged. "I'll wager you knew as quickly as I the very instant when I first loved you."

"I knew the first time you hated me," she evaded.

"Yes, I know, the first time I saw you and learned that you were coming on the voyage," I said. "But now I repeat my challenge. You knew as quickly as I the first instant I loved you."

Oh, her eyes were beautiful, and the repose and certitude of her were tremendous, as she rested her hand on my arm for a moment and in a low, quiet voice said:

"Yes, I . . . I think I know. It was the morning of that pampero off the Plate, when you were thrown through the door into my father's stateroom. I saw it in your eyes. I knew it. I think it was the first time, the very instant."

I could only nod my head and draw her close to me. And she looked up at me and added:

"You were very ridiculous. There you sat, on the bed, holding on with one hand and nursing the other hand under your arm, staring at me, irritated, startled, utterly foolish, and then . . . how, I don't know . . . I knew that you had just come to know . . ."

"And the very next instant you froze up," I charged ungallantly.

"And that was why," she admitted shamelessly, then leaned away from me, her hands resting on my shoulders, while she gurgled and her lips parted

from over her beautiful white teeth.

One thing I, John Pathurst, know: that gurgling laughter of hers is the most adorable laughter that was ever heard.