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THE MAKING OF A MASTER

THE MATE, stretched comfortably on the sun-baked deck, raised her head from the cushion, and gave me the long, appraising look that meant she was going to say something very nice or else that she was going to give me Hell. I felt it coming. Yet I did not quite know what it was. She had already remarked that the older and funnier and bonier I looked, the less clothes I seemed to wear. So that wasn't it.

"Why don't you relax and enjoy the sail?" (So it was that one.) "You've trimmed and started your sheets twenty times in the last ten minutes. We aren't racing. We aren't going anywhere. Yet you're hunched up over that tiller trying to squeeze the last ounce of speed out of the boat."

I grinned. I gave her the answer that was as familiar to her as her complaint to me.

"When you ride your horse, do you ride him or do you let him carry you as a passenger?"

That struck 'tween wind and water. When she rides, she rides, forcing her mount to perfect gaits, collecting him, getting him up to the bits, breathing her will into him by niceties of hands and seat and aids. The passenger on a horse is anathema to her.

I think it is because I am never content to be a passenger in my own boat, that sailing has been my constant delight for more than half a century. The passenger can enjoy fully the tang of the air,

the benignity of the sunlight, the refreshment of the spray, and the glory of the motion. He can feast his eyes and his soul on the abundant beauty that is inseparable from sailing. But if he is only a passenger, these things will some day pall. He will want a change of scene. He will spend his vacation in the mountains or take up golf. Many sailors remain passengers to the end of their sailing careers. It does not matter that they hold the helm, give the orders and pay the bills. If they are content with less than perfection, or if they lack the perception that tells when their boat is giving less than her best, they are passengers. They never become the Master.

For the term "Master" implies mastery of the ship. Mastery of the crew is incidental. In the old days a purely military personage was often in command of all on board the vessel. The Master commanded the vessel herself. A Master never tires of his task. He is a perfectionist who demands the utmost from his vessel and from himself. All his life he is struggling to improve his ship's performance and his own knowledge and skill. But no life is long enough to learn it all. If he lives to be a thousand, he can keep on learning.

At first, knowledge tumbles at one in bewildering profusion. Later it comes more slowly. At length one's increment of knowledge and skill arrives in small packages, each a precious gem to be savored and cherished. One discovers to his own amazement little things that should have been obvious for years. For his ship is a willing slave that will do a routine job often better than her passenger skipper may demand. But she will not give her utmost save to an understanding and unrelenting Master. The spur and whip are required occasionally but not often. The light touch on the helm, the sensitive trim of spars and rigging, the sympathetic perception of what is bothering her, these are the things that arouse her soul and make her give.

To coax that hidden utmost out of a responsive ship is the everlasting aim of the Master. And he seems, in most cases, to attain it at only two stages in his career. First, as a beginner, after a period of inept bungling, there may come, by the Grace of God, a spell of really good sailing. The landlubber realizes what sailing can be like; and since he has achieved it once, he