



himself into the kind of personal space that takes normal couples years to be comfortable sharing.

A flurry of questions flooded my mind. Can I smother him with a pillow if he snores? Who showers first? If his shampoo smells better than mine, can I use it? What if our laundry gets mixed up – can you just hand another man his underwear? Do we say goodnight, or just lie there wondering if the conversation is over? Who decides when the lights go out? What if I'm not done talking about my day?

Just then the dinner bell rang.

'I'm Stephen, by the way. Do you want to sit together?'

The dining saloon was lit like a French cafe and soft violin sounds sauntered between the tables. I had the yellowtail, Stephen ordered the pork belly. We both agreed on a reasonably priced Merlot. He told me he was an X-ray machine specialist and spent a few weeks a year servicing the island's hospital. He also loved planes and could name every type that flew in the great wars. I told him I was a travel journalist and that soon he'd be able to fly to St Helena instead of spending five days at sea.

'I like the boat,' he said, 'you meet interesting people.'

Later the captain came and asked us if we'd be joining the quiz that night.

'What do you say?' Stephen looked at me. 'Want to be on the same team?'

'Absolutely, we can call ourselves Cabin Fever.' That made Stephen laugh.

On the voyage I learnt that sometimes it's better to make stories than stay in and write them. And that it's always better to have dinner with someone before you sleep with them.

Tyson



## How to sleep with a stranger

What are the rules of engagement when you're alone, miles from land?

It finally happened. They finally landed a plane of tourists on St Helena's beleaguered runway. Now the island is officially just a six-hour flight away (read why you should go, on page 80). It got me thinking about the *RMS St Helena*. Until now it was the only way anyone could get to the island. As more planes land, the world's last-remaining mail ship will surely enter its twilight years, serving an ever-shrinking crowd of octogenarian Napoleophiles, gear-laden naturalists and wistful romantics who dream of sailing to the end of the Earth on a historical voyager.

I have never dreamed of sailing to the end of the Earth on anything. But being a travel journalist means that sometimes you get to do things other people dream of doing even though it's not something you dream of doing. It always feels horribly unfair, but it felt especially unfair when I left Cape Town on the *RMS St Helena* some years ago. Instead of absorbing the bucket-list voyage, I planned to use the five-day journey to finally get some writing done. I was positively giddy at the thought of all that time without email. I ignored the onboard activity list: quiz, bingo, deck cricket – not this time; I was going to hole up in my cabin, stare wistfully out of the porthole and pen masterpieces from my glorious isolation.

And so, when I got into my cabin, waiting for my bags to arrive, I began arranging a workspace. I was some way into deciding which font would best accentuate my rapier wit when a man arrived with my luggage. Only it wasn't my luggage. It was someone else's luggage. He checked the number on the door, nodded and put the bags down. Then he surveyed the cabin and the fold-out bunks and said, 'Do you like to be on the top or the bottom?'

'Sorry? There must be a mistake. This is my cabin. I'm here on the writer's package which guarantees solitude ... and wistfulness,' is what I might have said if I wasn't afraid of conflict, and also if there was such a package.

'The bottom, I guess. It's closer to the desk,' is what I did say. And that is all I said. For five awkward, silent minutes I just stood there watching him unpack, trying to remember the last time I spent five days bunking with someone I didn't know. Boarding school. Totally different – the rules for personal space in a group of boys are simple: there are none. It's bedlam.

The man in front of me was very much grown up already. He had a beard and a shirt that was tucked into his trousers by choice. Not only had this man scuppered my chances of literary acclaim, but he was about to thrust