

The SEA BRIDE

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

WHAT HAS HAPPENED BEFORE

Faith Kileup had always looked upon Captain Noll Wing of the whaler, Sally Sims, as a master and tower of strength, but shortly after their marriage he changed. Dissipation and old age were exacting their toll. The men of his crew no longer feared him. Faith was disillusioned. Dan'l Tobey, second mate, who loves Faith, vainly tries to discredit Noll before Faith. In a quarrel Noll kicks out the eye of Mauger, a member of the crew. Thereafter, he fears Mauger's vengeance. When the Sally Sims puts into a lonely island, Faith goes ashore. She meets an ex-convict named Brander, who goes with her to join Noll's crew. Dan'l takes an instant dislike to him. Faith's brother, Roy, also resents Brander. Dan'l comes upon Faith listening to Brander's singing and is consumed with jealousy. His intimates that Brander gossiped about Faith. Roy, raging, warns Brander to keep silent. Noll reprimands Brander for assisting Mauger. He strikes at Brander, who dodges the blow. The crew is stunned when Noll, admiring Brander's courage, taps him on the back and says: "Good man!"

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

CHAPTER XVIII.
It is rare to encounter a fighting whale, a creature that deliberately sets itself to destroy the attacking boats. The tragedies of the whale fisheries are more often mere accidents, slight mischances, matters of slight importance to the whale. A little, little thing, and men die!

This day, the day when Brander faced Noll Wing and went unscathed, was bright and fair, with a gently turbulent wind and a dancing sea. It was warm upon the waters; the sun burned down upon them and its glare and its heat were reflected from them. The skin of men's faces was scorched by it.
The men, tugging at the oars in the boats, averted and strove. The perspiration streamed down their cheeks, trickled along the straining cords of their necks, slid down their broad chests. Their shirts clung to them wetly; they welcomed the flying spray that lashed them now and then.
The pod of whales was perhaps five miles from the Sally when the boats were lowered; but the wind was favoring, and its pressure upon the sails helped them on for a space. When half the distance was covered, the oars around with the wind almost dead were discarded as the boats swung astern, and headed straight for the whales' lay.
Before they reached the basking, sporting creatures, the whales sounded. It was necessary for the men to sit idly and wait for a full half-hour before the first sport showed that the cachalots were back from their browsing in the ocean caves below. The boats swung around and headed toward them, sails pulling.
Mr. Hams boat was in the lead, for that is the right of the mate. The others were closely bunched behind him; and as they drew near the pod, they separated somewhat, so that each might strike a whale.

Dan'l Tobey went southward, where a lone bull lay with the waves breaking over his black bulk. Willis Cox and Tichel swung to the north of the mate, into the thick of the pod.
The mate marked down his whale—a fat cow that would yield full seventy barrels. He was steering; Silva, the harpooner, stood in the bow, his knee braced, ready with his irons. The men amidships prepared to bring down mast and sail at the word, and stow them safely away so that they might not hinder the battle that would come.
The boat drove smoothly on. Mr. Ham, looking north and south, saw that the others were drawing up abreast of him, so that they would strike the whales at about the same time. He thought comfort ably that with a little luck they would kill two whales, or perhaps three. That every boat should kill was too much to be hoped for. Then he gave his attention to his own prey. They slipped up on the basking cow from almost dead astern, slid alongside her, and Mr. Ham swung hard on the steering oar. The boat came around into the wind; he bellowed:
"Now, Silva, give her iron!"
The harpooner moved quick as light, for all the power of the thrust he put behind his stroke. He sank his first iron, snatched his second, and drove it home as the whale stirred; threw overboard the loose line coiled forward. The whale ran.
The sail came fluttering down mast and all; and the four men amidships rolled it awkwardly, stowed it along the gunwale. Silva and the mate, at the same time, were changing places in the boat. Silva, the harpooning done, would now come into his proper function as boat-steerer. It is the task of the mates to kill the whales.
The boat, half smothered in canvas, with Silva and Mr. Ham passing from end to end, and the whale-line already running out through the chock in the bow, was a pic-

ture of confusion thrice confounded.
In this confusion anything was possible, anything might happen. What did happen was humiliating and ridiculous.
When Silva struck home the harpoons, he flung overboard a length of line coiled by his knee. This slack line would allow the whale to run free while the sail was coming down and he and the mate were changing places. He threw it overboard—and failed to mark that one loop of it caught on the point of one of the spare irons in the rack with the lances, at the bow. He leaped for the stern and groped past Mr. Ham amidships.
The whale was running. As Mr. Ham reached the bow the line drew taut. The loop that had caught across the point of the harpoon was straightened like a flash.
Now a harpoon is shaped not like a needle, but like a slanting blade. It has a single barb; and the forward side of the barb is razor-edge. This razor edge cuts into the whale's blubber and flesh.

then the shank of the barb grips and holds. An edge that will cut blubber will also cut hemp. The loop of the whale-line was dragged firmly back along the three-inch blade and severed as if a knife had done the trick; and the whale was gone with two irons and thirty fathoms of line.
Mr. Ham and his boat bobbed placidly upon the water. The mate looked, saw what had happened, and spoke harshly to the men, the boat, the sea, and the departing whale. Then he looked about to see what might be done.
It was too late to think of getting fast to another whale. The pod was called; the great creatures were fleeing. After them went James Tichel in his boat, the spray sluicing up from her bows. Tichel was fast; the whale was running with him.
Mr. Ham looked from Tichel to the other boats. He saw Dan'l Tobey in distress. A whale had risen gently under them, opening the seams of their craft; and they

were half full of water and sinking. They had cut.
Willis Cox had hold of a whale, which had sounded. Mr. Ham saw Willis in the bow, watching the line that went straight down from the chock into the water. This line was running out like a whip-lash, though Willis put on all the strain it would bear without dragging the boat's bow under the waves. It ran down and down.
Mr. Ham rowed across and Willis called to him:
"Big fellow! But he's taken one tub."
"Give him to me," Mr. Ham said. Willis shook his head.
"I'd like to handle him. Get me the line from Mr. Tobey's boat. He's mine!"
Mr. Ham grinned.
"All right, if you're minded to work!" He swung quickly to where Dan'l and his men floated to their waists in water, the boat under them. "Tak'n' a swim?" he asked them.
Dan'l nodded.

"Just that. You cut, I see. Why was that, now?"
Mr. Ham stopped grinning and looked angry.
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