

The SEA BRIDE

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

CHAPTER XL

Faith never asked herself whether Brander loved her; she had always known that—known it without admitting the knowledge, even in her thoughts. She loved him; body and heart and soul; her eyes yearned for his, her tongue to tell him what her heart was singing, her arms to embrace him.

She got up, at last, a little wearily. It was only a matter of minutes that she sat there, looking within herself. When she listened, now, she could hear Noll's voice, on deck, roaring in the old way. Once she heard Brander answer him from somewhere amidships. Again she caught the murmur of Dan's Tobey's tones.

Brander was her love; but Noll—Noll was her husband, and she his wife. Faith passed her hand across her eyes as if to wipe away these visions she had looked upon. Noll was her husband; her vows were his. She was his, and would be. Nothing he could do would make her less his in her heart, keeping, his life and hers could never take diverging paths. He was her charge, to strengthen, and guide, and support; his tasks were hers, his responsibilities were her responsibilities, his burdens must rest upon her shoulders.

But she did not deceive herself. Old Noll was dead, old Noll Wing who had mastered men for years on year. That Noll was dead; the Noll who lived was a weakling. But she was a part of the living Noll; and she was no weakling. So—

Her lips set faintly. Love Brander though she did, there was no place for him in her life. Her life was Noll's; her life belonged to Noll. Noll was failing; his flesh might live, but his soul was dead and his strength was gone. His task had fallen upon her.

Quite simply, in that moment, Faith promised herself that whatever happened, the Sally Sims should come safe home again; that no man should ever say Noll Wing had fallen in the end; that no man should ever make a jest of Noll's old renown. If Noll could not manage these things for himself, she would.

She began, suddenly, to cry. She locked herself in her cabin and wept bitterly for hours, but afterward bathing her eyes, freshening herself to meet Noll's eyes, she looked into the mirror and smiled and lifted her head.

"You can do it, Faith," she told herself. "You can do it, full as well as he." And then, more seriously: "You must do it, Faith Wing. You must bring the Sally safe home!"

When she stepped out into the after cabin, she saw the revolver still on the floor where Noll had left it. She picked it up to return it to its proper drawer.

But on second thought she changed her mind and took it and hid it in her trunk. A curious fall settled down upon the Sally Sims during the days after Noll's open accusation of Faith and his collapse before her steady courage. Apathy was in the air. They saw few whales, lowered for them without zeal, and missed more than one that should have been killed. There was a silence upon the ship, like the hush of listening men who wait to hear an expected call. This paralysis gripped every soul aboard—save Noll Wing alone.

Noll, in those last days, stalked his deck like a parody of the man he once had been. Faith had not within him a festive courage; he thought himself once more the master, as in the past. His heels pounded the planks; his head was high; his voice roared; there was a trembling about the pulse of him; there was a quaver in his voice.

He was like a child who plays at being a man. They humored him; the men and the mates seemed to enter into a conspiracy to fool him. They leaped to his bidding; they shrank from his curses as if desperate with fear; and Noll was so delighted with all this that he was perpetually good-natured and jovial.

He was, of course, drinking heavily and steadily; but the drink seemed to hearten him and give him strength. Certainly it made him lenient; for on three occasions when the men found a bottle forward and befuddled themselves with it, Noll only laughed, as if at a capital joke.

Faith wondered and was distressed, and watched to see how the liquor was being stolen. She was disturbed and alarmed; but Noll jested at her fears.

"A little of it never hurt a man," he told her boastfully. "Look at me, to see that! Let be, Faith. Let be."

When she protested, he overrode her; and to show his own certainty of himself, he did a thing that Noll, sober, would never have done. He had the rum drawn from the barrel in his storeroom, and served out to the men a ration daily. It amused him to see them half-fuddled with it. He forced it on them; and once, while Faith watched hopelessly, he commanded a hulking Cape Verde, the biggest man in the fore-cabin, to drink a bout with him. They took glass for glass, till the other was helpless as a log; and Noll waited his own prowess in the matter.

Dan's Tobey contented himself with watching the progress of the tragedy. He no longer stuck a finger in the pie. The captain was going—that was plain to any seeing eye.

Faith could do nothing; Brander could do nothing. Between these two no further word had passed; but there was no need. Coming face to face on deck, the day after Noll surprised them, their eyes met in a long steady glance. Their eyes met and spoke; and after that there was no need for words between them. There was a pledging of vows in that glance; there was also a renunciation. Both saw, both understood. Faith thought she knew Brander to the depths.

Neither in that moment, knew that Dan's Tobey was at hand; but the mate had seen, and he had comprehended. He slipped away, held his peace, considered.

Brander was fighting for Roy, to fulfill his pledge to Faith. He had set himself to win the boy's confidence and esteem; he applied himself to this with all the strength there was in him. Yet he was careful; he did not force the issue, he did not harass Roy with his attentions. He held off, let Roy see for himself, let him think. There were days when he thought he made progress; there were days when he thought the effort was a hopeless one. Nevertheless, he persisted.

Noll Wing's good-will in those days extended even to Brander. He offered Brander a drink one day. Brander refused and Noll insisted—and was still refused.

"Come, Brander," Noll said hotly, querulously. "Don't be stiff, man. It will warm you, do you good. You're needing warming. You're over cold and calm."

Brander shook his head, smiling. "Thanks, no, sir." "Damn it, man," Noll complained, "are you too proud to drink with the skipper?" Brander refused again; and Noll's brows gathered suspiciously.

"Why not?" "My wish, sir." "You've a grudge against me, I

remember. You stick with Mauder!" "No, sir." Noll swung out his hand. "Be off. Your sour face is too ugly for me to look at. Mauder's none so particular. He'll drink with me."

It was true; Mauder had more than once accepted drink from the captain. Noll, at these times, watched the one-eyed man furtively, almost appealingly. It was as if he sought to placate him and make a friend of him.

Mauder had a weak head; he was not one to stand much liquor. It dizzied him, and this amused Noll. That day, after Brander had refused him, Noll sent for Mauder, made the one-eyed man tipsy, and laughed at the jest of it.

Then, one day, this state of affairs came abruptly to an end. Noll went down into the storeroom to fill his bottle, and the spigot on the whiskey-barrel gasped and failed. The whiskey was gone.

Now Noll had given of the rum to the crew; he had exhausted that; but the whiskey he kept jealously. He knew there should be more—much more—gallons, at the least. He turned the handle of the spigot again, tipped the barrel, unable to understand. His bottle was half full, but no more came.

He frowned, puzzled his heavy head, tried to understand. He came stumbling up out of the storeroom at last, with the half-filled bottle in his hand; and the man's face was white. He sought Faith, held the bottle out to her.

"I say—" he stammered. "It's gone—gone!" "What is it, Noll?" Faith asked.

"The whiskey's gone." "Thank God!" Faith cried. He stared at her thickly. "Eh? You had a hand in it? You've stole it away?" "No."

He looked at her and knew she spoke the truth. He shook his head. "Some bound—" he whispered. "They've stole it!"

She questioned him; he had the shrewdness which occasionally characterized the alcoholic. He had kept some count of the whiskey used during the cruise; he had himself tilted the barrel two weeks before. It was then a quarter full. The thefts that had appeared in the fore-cabin could not account for the rest. There was still a considerable amount that must have been stolen, and that had not yet appeared.

"It's aboard here, by Jupiter!" he swore at last. "They've got it hid away. You Faith—"

She shook her head. "No," she said placatingly. "You'd not do that trick—not rob an old man. I've got to have it, Faith!" His eyes suddenly flickered with panic. "It's life, Faith, life! I've got to have it, I say."

He was right, she knew. There must still be a hidden store of the liquor aboard the Sally; to be doled out to the men by the thief in his own good time. And Faith knew enough of such matters to understand that Noll without the ration of alcohol to which he was accustomed would suffer torment, would be like a madman. The stuff must be found.

Noll was already trembling at the prospect of reprivation; he hurried to his breast the scant store that remained to him. Of a sudden, as if afraid that even this bottle to his lips, he gulped greedily. Before Faith could interfere, the last of it was gone.

That fierce draft put some strength and courage back into him. "I'll make them give it up, by Jupiter!" he swore. "Watch!"

He started for the deck, and Faith, afraid for him, followed quietly behind.

Passing through the main cabin, he roused to the officers who were asleep in their bunks.

"On deck, all hands! On deck, all hands!" They leaped out to obey him, not knowing what to expect. He reached the deck, still bellowing: "On deck all! On deck, every man of you!" Brander was amidships. "Rout out the dogs, Mauder," he added. "Fetch 'em aft!"

(To Be Continued Tomorrow)

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COUNTY OFFICIALS ON HIGHWAY TRIP

County Commissioners Clough and Busenbark, accompanied by District Attorney Cordon, left this morning for Portland, where they will attend the meeting of the state highway commission. Several matters relating to Douglas county roads are before the commission at the present time, and the county court is anxious to secure action on such projects.

NOTICE FOR BIDS

Notice is hereby given that the School Board of District No. 57, Gold Hill, Oregon, does this 21st day of August, 1930, publish notice asking for bids to purchase and install a steam heating plant for the school building and gymnasium, the two buildings to be heated from one heat unit. Plans and specifications are on file with the District Clerk at her office over the post office, Gold Hill, Oregon. Sealed bids will be accepted until 8 o'clock P. M. September 2nd, 1930. The Board reserves the right to accept or reject any and all bids.

FRANK CARTER, Chairman of Board. Attest: Bertha Coy, Clerk of School District No. 57.

Miss Gilbert Visits—Miss Madie Gilbert, who is employed in Portland, is spending a week's vacation here visiting with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. C. J. Gilbert, and with her sister, Mrs. Vernie Shrum.

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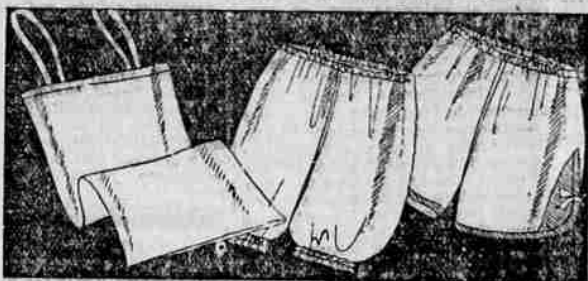
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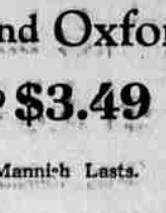
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