

The Strumpet Sea

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

CHAPTER I

To sign a crew is one thing; to keep all hands aboard till sailing time is another. At dusk, Captain Keen moved the Sunset from the wharf out into the stream to wait for the morning tide. She was a full-rigged ship of three hundred and forty-seven tons burden, bound for the Fiji Islands to load with sandalwood for Chinese and Indian ports; but she was under charter to the Mission Board to carry certain freight and passengers from San Francisco to Honolulu and to the Marquesas, on the way. "I want to give the men overnight to sober off before the missionaries come aboard, Mr. Chase," Captain Keen told the mate as the ship swung to her anchor. "And another thing. As long as they're with us, I'll have no going ashore at Honolulu, or at the Islands, nor any native girls coming on the ship at all."

The Reverend John Gale and Mrs. Gale were returning to their post in Micronesia after a year's leave at home; and the Reverend George McAusland went to serve his apprenticeship with them. McAusland was not a young man as years go, but his training for the ministry was only just concluded. He was rather small, and decidedly thin. He was, actually, thirty-eight years old. John Gale, since they met a day or two before, had studied his new assistant. He had some misgivings. McAusland seemed full of a restless earnestness; but the old minister knew that too much zeal could be as dangerous as too little.

Aboardship, Mrs. Gale went to her cabin to settle her belongings there; but John Gale and McAusland stayed on deck to watch the business of departure.

"What decided you to become a missionary?" Gale asked.

"Why, sir, at the Seminary I read a great deal about the mission to the Sandwich Islands, and—I want to be like the men who led that work. They did so much, and everyone loved them." McAusland added humbly: "I want to help people, and—to be loved. I'm pretty clumsy about it, though; about making friends."

The other suggested: "The trick is to like people. People like a man who seems to like them." He asked: "But what turned you toward the ministry, at your age?"

McAusland answered frankly: "I'd killed a man, in Nevada City, in the mines." There may have been surprise in the older man's quick glance, and an unspoken question, for the other explained: "I suppose I don't look like a—man of violence; but I lost my temper. He was drunk, and shooting at me, and I threw a pickaxe at him. It hit him in the head."

John Gale thought he would have to readjust his estimates of this young man. "Wasn't that—just an accident?" he suggested reassuringly.

"I suppose a man is responsible even for his accidents," McAusland insisted. "He had no family. There was nothing I could do directly; but I wanted to find some way to atone."

Captain Keen, one eye on his ship, joined them with some casual word. McAusland walked forward to watch them cat and fish the anchor, and John Gale looked after him, and after a moment he smiled and asked the Captain:

"Would you take that young man for a"—he hesitated, using McAusland's own phrase—"a man of violence?"

The Captain said wisely: "There's never any knowing. The quietest little man I ever knew killed four Malay pirates with a cap's bar."

"He and I are going to work together, these next years," John Gale explained. "I'm trying to find out what sort of man he is."

Captain Keen said: "You'll find out, presently. Being shut out on the same ship with a man, you come to know him. The sea strips him down, wears him down till what's inside him shows through."

The old minister nodded; and during the days that followed, while the Sunset took her peaceful way across the peaceful sea, he sometimes thought that McAusland was no more than an enthusiastic boy. The first morning at sea, he himself came on deck to find the other bare-footed, his sober black trousers rolled up his thin shins, pushing a holystone up and down the plank under the instruction of the sailor with the parrot. The sailor's name was Corkran; and the two were laughing together at McAusland's awkwardness. The parrot watched George too, its head cocked, and presently it nipped Corkran's ear and said wheedlingly: "Mighty pretty. Mighty pretty!"

Corkran laughed and clapped McAusland on the shoulder. "There, Reverence!" he said. "That's Pat's way of saying he takes to you."

The friendship between these two developed rapidly. Corkran was an able seaman, above the level of his fellows in the forecastle; and he did his work so cheerfully and completely that he had certain tacit privileges. Whenever he was on deck, he and George were apt to be together. McAusland was intensely curious about ship's business. He

worked under Corkran's instruction to learn the knots and bends and hitches, and how to seize and splice and serve.

John Gale, observing the friendship between McAusland and Corkran, tried to understand its basis. He saw that when they were together, George was always the listener.

The mate called Corkran to some duty; and George, turning, saw John Gale near them, and stopped beside him. "Corkran's a strange man," he said, and he colored in a slow way. "Most men are ashamed of their vices, but he brags about his. He's simply an animal."

The older man suggested: "You can't always judge men by the way they talk, George."

"I suppose not," McAusland laughed uncertainly. "And—I like him, in spite of what he is," he admitted. "I don't know why."

One late afternoon, George, under Corkran's instruction, was learning to put an eye-splice in a discarded piece of eight-inch cable when the masthead man sighted the first distant peaks above Honolulu. George laid down spike and maul and swarmed aloft to see for himself; and when presently he descended,



She looked after him, her eyes sobered by hurt.

dropping from the ratlines the last six or eight feet to the deck, he stepped on the marlinspike where he had left it. It rolled under him; and the result was a severely sprained ankle. John Gale bandaged the hurt; but in the morning when they were anchored McAusland was too lame to walk. The Sunset worked in harbor overnight while Captain Keen lighted off the freight consigned to the Honolulu mission but Mr. and Mrs. Gale went to lodge with friends ashore, and they urged George, despite his lameness, to come along. When George decided to stay aboard, Mrs. Gale thought he was shyly relieved at having a valid excuse for avoiding a casual meeting with many strangers.

Ashore, she and her husband found that two other passengers would board the Sunset here. One was Joseph Neargood, a tall young Marquesan convert trained in the college at Oahu, going now to take his place in the native mission at Fatuhiva. The other was Mary Doncaster. Her father and mother had established themselves twenty years ago on one of the smaller northern islands of the Marquesas group, which Ephraim Doncaster called Gilead. Mary was born there a year later, and lived there till when she was ten years old they sent her home to New Bedford to school. Now she was returning to them; and John Gale, when he had talked with her, approved Mary mightily. He and Mrs. Gale agreed between themselves that it would be good for McAusland to have the girl's company aboard the Sunset during the rest of the voyage to Gilead. When they were all rowed out to the ship next afternoon a little before sailing time, the old man looked forward to watching McAusland's face light with pleasure at first sight of Mary; but George was not on deck to greet them, and John Gale found him in his bunk with a slight temperature, presumably from the pain of his hurt.

George did not come to supper, so he did not see Mary till next morning. John Gale had told him she was aboard, but—afraid of saying too much—he said only: "She's the daughter of Ephraim Doncaster, the missionary at Gilead." George inattentively expected Mary to be like a younger edition of Mrs. Gale. Mrs. Gale was pretty as paper flowers under a glass case, with a pale and delicate beauty that would not disturb a man; but Mary was mightily disturbing, beautiful not with youth alone but already ripely. The ship's carpenter had fashioned a crutch for George out of a mop-handle and a block of timber cut to fit the minister's shoulder socket. When George hobbled out into the cabin, the others were all ready at table, Mary sitting with her back to him; but John Gale greeted George as he appeared, and

Mary turned to look up at him. The sun from the skylight fell full upon her countenance as she turned, and George stopped like a struck man, shaken and trembling. She thought he would fall, and she rose quickly to help him, slim and yet warmly round in her tight bodice above loose full skirts of sober stuff. The button at her throat was unfastened; and George as his eyes fell before hers saw her smooth white throat. She touched his arm, steadying him; and John Gale spoke her name and his, and she said:

"Here, I'll help you. Sit here."

George said defensively: "I'm all right." He freed himself and sat down; but his arm where she had touched it burned long after her fingers were removed. He sat beside her at the table with Captain Keen at the head, but he could not look at her. He ate briefly, a little, with trembling hands, silent, so that his silence oppressed them all. Afterward he took refuge in his cabin again; and when next day, his ankle quickly healing, he was able to hobble on deck, he walked himself behind an intense dignity.

But if he was afraid of Mary, he was attracted to Joseph Neargood. The Marquesan was youthfully impressed by his own consecration to the Mission work in which he would presently assume a place. McAusland, his own life committed to lead the Island people to Christianity, saw in Neargood a fine example of what could be done in that direction.

The Sunset was five days out of Honolulu; and the day was lovely and serene, with a light steady breeze and a long easy swell so that the breast of ocean rose and fell as sweetly as the bosom of a sleeping woman. Two sailors on a stage slung over the side forward were scraping and painting, and Mary Doncaster and Mrs. Gale stood by the rail above the catheads, idly watching the men and watching the porpoises under the bow. Now and then as they talked together the sound of Mary's laughter rang out pleasantly. Captain Keen, near the two missionaries aft, cocked his head that way and chuckled.

"We'll be sorry to say good-bye to Miss Doncaster," he remarked. "The girl has an honest, friendly sound in her laughing."

Mary and the others were coming aft toward them; and George, always apt to avoid Mary, went forward along the other side of the deck. She looked after him, her eyes sobered by hurt; and a moment later, when Mrs. Gale and Joseph Neargood had gone below, she smiled and said to John Gale:

"I saw you talking with poor Mr. McAusland."

He chuckled. "Now I wonder why you call him 'poor.'"

"But isn't he? He might have so many things, but he's afraid to take them."

"Afraid?"

"Well, at least sort of ashamed, and shy."

"Ashamed of what?" The old man watched her with a lively interest. "Ashamed of—life, perhaps." The girl's cheeks were bright. "Don't you know people like that? Old maids who insist that there's something sinful in loving and marrying? People who persuade themselves that the things they want to do and don't dare do are really wrong; and who think everyone else is wicked for doing them?"

He spoke in an affectionate amusement. "So wise so young!"

"I'm not so awfully young," Mary assured him. "I'm nineteen. Remember I lived on Gilead till I was ten, and the Island girls start having babies when they're not much older than that."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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Washington Digest

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Advocates of Both Policies Want to Protect the U. S.; Economist Forecasts New Tax Policies; Roosevelt Holds Press Conference.

By BAUKHAGE

(Released by Western Newspaper Union.)

The steel-engraving days have come to Washington; bare, black tree-limbs etched against the bright high-light of the clouds; the lagoon and the river beyond, a molten gray; the monument, the porticos of the White House, sharp white.

And the shape of things to come is being etched deeper into the consciousness of the capital, too.

America is starting down a strange road. Ahead is a fork. Shall we let the team choose or does the driver know?

One thing seems to be certain. The driver knows where he wants to go. So do the horses. Back home, back to the world of things we understand. The familiar gateway that takes us up the lane to the barn; the warm light in the dining room window, the friendly smoke curling up the chimney.

The world we know! You hear that phrase often these days. The job is to get back to it. There are two roads. One is the hard way, the way that leads so near war that the hardest hesitate. It means throwing all we have with Britain, banking on her victory, insisting on absolute defeat of the totalitarian powers.

The other is the easier way. A short cut to our own backyard. Close the gates. Bar the door, lock the windows, learn to live within ourselves if we can and let a new, mad world wag on outside.

Which is the President's way? There is no doubt that Mr. Roosevelt considers that his election meant that his foreign policy has been endorsed. He knows, of course, that even the people who endorsed it don't quite know what that policy is. But they do realize that it means aid to Britain short of war and they must sense that there is the risk that we may not be able to stop short of war.

Many Disagree On Foreign Policy

Inside the government, as well as outside, there are those who do not agree with this policy. They believe that while we must do everything to build our own defenses, our effort should be to bring about some kind of peace between Britain and Hitler and let Europe settle its own problems, because, as H. G. Wells put it, if the war goes on, the destruction of property, of life, cities and institutions will be so great that our civilization itself will be destroyed.

But those who think they know the President's mind say that he feels that civilization as we know it and want it can be saved only if Britain with the aid of the United States breaks the power of totalitarianism, liberates the occupied democracies and helps lead the world back along the known paths which we have traveled. That belief and the assumption that it is the policy of which the majority of Americans approved in the last election and to which all Americans will submit, is the backbone of the President's policy now taking concrete shape.

Another thing is certain: From now on you will hear far less from the New Dealers who are the mouthpieces of the so-called reform measures. Their voices will be drowned out by the voices of the men running the defense commission; the secretaries of war and the navy; of the military advisors and the diplomats.

The President has frequently said it was the administration's purpose to "hold the social gains" rather than to try to advance the ball. He is now demonstrating this. The "quarterback," as the President used to call himself, is now more interested in the "quarterback," and the fact is.

That seems to be the picture which is slowly being etched into the background of Washington as the third term is about to begin.

Financial Experts Exchange Views

A new figure has appeared recently in Washington who is conducting a highly interesting shadow show in which conflicting viewpoints within the administration and outside, play highly exciting roles.

The man is tall, quiet, Milton Harrison, one-time familiar as a discreet lobbyist in congressional corridors, now editor and publisher of the Savings Bank Journal.

He is gifted with an implicit sense of humor as well as a keenly ana-

Farm Income

Farm cash income is declining seasonally, but the total compares favorably with 1939 figures. Total from marketings and government payments in the last quarter of the year may be slightly larger than in the fourth quarter of 1939. Total for the full year is tentatively estimated at 9.0 billion dollars, compared with 8.5 billion in 1939.

lytical mind and has taken particular enjoyment in arranging a series of roundtables where experts can emphatically disagree.

The roundtable follows an excellent dinner at a Washington hotel and sometimes the meetings last well after midnight. The speakers are exceedingly free and frank in their speech. The press in general is not invited but certain special writers are. They can't quote the speakers except with consent and confirmation of text. The men chosen to take part are selected because of their sharply conflicting views. They include such figures as Rexford Tugwell, the first-term New Deal undersecretary of agriculture; Jerome Frank, now head of the Securities Exchange commission and also one of the early crusaders of NRA days and others like Robert Garner, president of the Guaranty Trust of New York, and conservative bankers and economists.

Mr. Harrison enjoys the hot arguments and whether or not the participants benefit from each other's views, many excellent points are brought out in such of the debate as is permitted to reach the public.

At a recent meeting of this group, to which I was invited, Mordecai Ezekiel, economic advisor to the secretary of agriculture, said:

"Industry faces these alternatives: It can continue to take very large profits whenever it gets into high activity. But, if so, it must be prepared for large government expenditures to provide buying power necessary to keep the economy going, or heavy taxes to redistribute the national income. Otherwise, industry can help labor unions and the government to work out some system by which a greater share of national production will go direct to wage earners or direct to consumers."

This statement gives a broad hint of administration tax policies.

There is a chance, many believe, that before the boom which is ahead has a chance to explode, some such a system will be worked out by co-operation of men picked from government, industry and labor—and if Mr. Ezekiel has his say, with agriculture having its voice as well.

Roosevelt Holds Press Conference

At a recent White House press conference I thought the President looked very weary. Instead of the usual chit-chat with the first arrivals while the rest of the reporters are filing into the oval office in the executive wing of the White House, he sat silent, nervously playing with a paper.

I thought of the remark of a friend a few minutes earlier as we made our way up the winding drive under the dripping White House elms. It was a dour day, conducive to pessimism. He said:

"I wonder how much longer he will keep this up?"

He meant how much longer would the President continue holding these semi-weekly meetings with the press. I couldn't help recalling Woodrow Wilson. He introduced the idea of these meetings where any member of the press can ask the Chief Executive any question he wants to. And yet Mr. Wilson gladly seized upon the excuse of the war to abandon his press conferences.

As I stood looking at Mr. Roosevelt, his hair much grayer now, I could see the lines of care which the presidency burns into any active incumbent that that thankless post and I felt that he, too, might like to dodge these sessions.

But by the time the conference was over, I was ready to change my mind. I heard his tired voice acquire its old ring and I watched the glint in his eye when he had parried an embarrassing query, noted the deliberate assurance with which he told an apt parable to illustrate a point he wanted to drive home. Mr. Roosevelt may not love the newspapers but I doubt if he is ready to abandon this informal contact with their representatives, no matter how much an inconvenience it may be, or how difficult it is to get over his side of the story to men not only trained to analyze every word, but ready to see some hidden meaning in every look and every gesture as well.

Martin Dies wanted a million-dollar appropriation to pursue his investigation of "fifth column" activities. It was rumored that he planned to take over certain work done by the trained operators of the department of justice and that he would ask congress to vote him special powers.

That is why the President in his letter to Mr. Dies emphasized the line between the investigative powers of congress under the Constitution and the functions of the executive departments.

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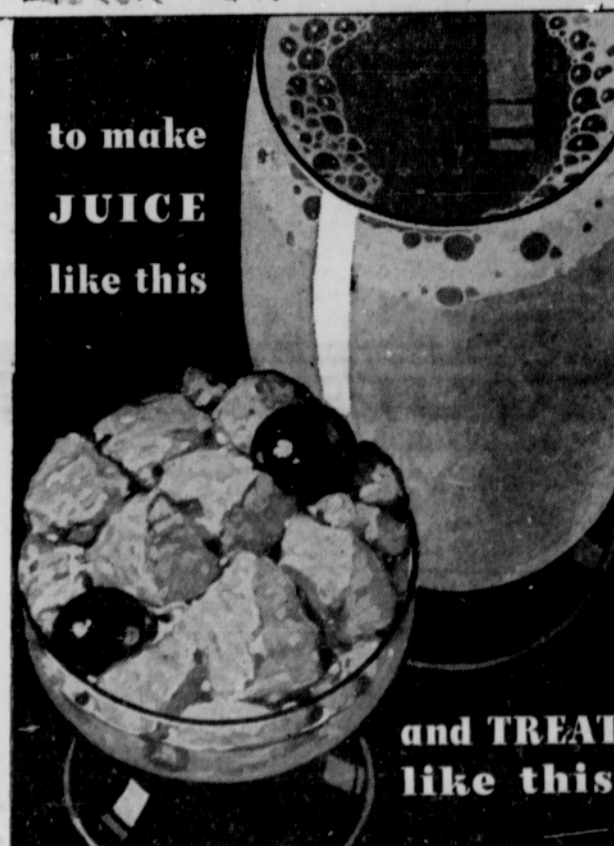
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