

The Strumpet Sea

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

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N. O. SERVICE

SYNOPSIS

George McAusland was 38 years old when he sailed from America to undertake his post as a missionary in the Fiji Islands. A crime he had committed in a fit of excitement had shattered all his confidence in himself. He felt forced to avoid pretty Mary Doncaster, who boarded the ship at Honolulu. She was en route to visit her parents, who were missionaries on Gilead Island. Mary was attracted by George's attempts to avoid her. One day George accidentally fell overboard. Mary unhesitatingly dove into the sea to rescue George, who falls in love with her. When the boat approached her home on Gilead Island, they learned that Mary's parents had both died. George volunteered to take charge of the mission and asked Mary to be his wife. She accepted his clumsy proposal, and they left the ship to live in her former home on the island. The scanty dress of the natives shocked George at first, but he soon became reconciled to their customs. Mary discovered that Corkran, a sailor friend of George's, had come there to help George and Mary if they needed him. Their peaceful life was interrupted one day when a ship stopped in the harbor in search of pearls. They see the pearl divers attacked and their schooner sunk by a pirate ship. The pirates head their boat toward the bay near their village. George sends Mary inland for safety and walks down to the beach, alone and defenseless, to meet the unwelcome visitors. Natives carry him back to Mary hours later, shot through the shoulder. Natives killed the pirates that night and set their boat afire. The boat was still burning when the long-awaited whaler, the Venturer, arrived.

CHAPTER VII—Continued

They sat together in the big room, near enough George to hear any movement he might make, or any sound. Mary said: "I'm sorry about Cap'n Corr, Peter."

"He's dying," he told her. "I'm pretty sure of that." He added: "Richard has been mate since your uncle was killed. I'm second, and Mat Forbes came aft to take my place. If Father dies, Richard will be captain."

She thought this was a curious thing for Peter to say. He seemed to feel that his father's prospective death was merely incidental to Richard's advancement. Thinking of Tommy, she suggested: "Tell me about Uncle Tom."

Peter hesitated. "Why, I did tell you," he said, after a moment. "I mean—all about it," she urged, and smiled. "If we don't talk we'll go to sleep, Peter."

"Well, it was a bowhead," Peter reluctantly explained. "We were on Japan. This was a lone bull. We all lowered, but we had a long pull; and we spread out, and when he came up to blow it was your uncle's boat was nearest. The whale was between him and me, Richard off to the windward. I put for the whale, and so did your uncle's boat; but he beat me by a little."

"With you so near!" she whispered ruefully. "Couldn't you do anything?"

"I wasn't close enough to do anything," Peter asserted, arguing as much with himself as with her. "The whale smashed them, and then he started looking for more trouble."

"Did you kill him?"

"No, I stayed to pick up the men."

"I don't see that there was anything you could have done, Peter."

"Blast it, there wasn't!" he cried. "I was too far away."

She nodded, shivering faintly at something in the man. "They were both killed? Did you get them?"

"No. They sank." He added: "Richard got an iron into him half an hour after, killed him."

"Richard?" She spoke her thought, not reflecting that he might think her word an implied criticism. "He's very brave, isn't he?"

Peter laughed angrily. "Dick hasn't brains enough to be afraid when he ought to," he said. "If you call that being brave! You always thought a lot of Richard!"

She smiled a little. "I certainly did! Of course, he never knew I existed; but I used to worship him from a distance."

He chuckled. "Remember that letter you wrote him when you were a young one?"

Her cheeks burned. "I didn't write it to him! It wasn't meant for him. It was just an old letter I read in a book, a love letter, and I thought it was sweet, so I copied it! You knew perfectly well it wasn't meant for Richard, Peter Corr!"

Peter touched her hand, leaning near her. "Poor kid! You were a great little girl, Mary. You know, you've grown up mighty beautiful." He leaned back again. "It's always griped me to hear Richard read that letter of yours to people and laugh about it. I know it wasn't any joke to you!"

She whispered in a sort of terror: "Does he read it to people?"

He chuckled. "Oh, yes, he kept it. He's got it now somewhere, probably."

She rose hurriedly, blindly escaping so he would not know her hurt. "I'll see how George is," she said, and took the lamp and went to the other room.

George was asleep, but she stood beside him for a while, deeply shaken, wishing to be alone. It seemed incredible that Richard could have made a jest of her letter. Some of the absurd phrases which once had seemed to her so beautiful returned to torment her. "I have ventured to disclose my excessive passion . . ."

"Oh, do not slight a passion so ardent . . ." "The tyrant love!" She was hot with shame. The letter was silly, of course. She knew that now; but it had seemed to her then like a wonderful poem . . .

CHAPTER VIII

She did not sleep that night. Sitting by George's bed, she had time to put all these new things in order in her mind. Uncle Tom dead. Captain Corr ill, dying, perhaps dead even now. Peter, with that vein of malicious humor in him still, that trick of teasing her in ways that hurt. Peter was uncomfortable about her uncle's death, as though he felt some doubts of his own conduct on that occasion. Tommy hated him. That was clear. Tommy blamed him; but Tommy was young, his emotions likely to overrule his judgment. Probably Peter deserved no blame at all.

But Mary thought most of all of Richard, somewhere outside the bay in the Venturer, probably watching his father die. Just as she watched beside George here. She would see him in the morning; and she was at once eager and uneasy, remembering that letter of which he had made a jest. She had found it in a book called "The Complete Letter Writer." It was headed: "A Young Man Seeks the Acquaintance of a Lady he Loves." She had thought it beautiful, had copied it, using Richard's name and her own, in a sort of make-believe, never meaning it to be seen by anyone.

And in school next day, she was reading it secretly behind the screen of her geography when Peter revolved over her shoulder and snatched it away.

After school was out she begged Peter to give the letter back to her; but he refused, insisting that he would deliver it to Richard, for whom it was intended. Mary prayed him not to, and secretly hoped he



"Poor kid! You were a great little girl, Mary—"

would. Maybe Richard would read it and come to her and take her in his arms!

But next day Peter brought her Richard's scrawled answer: "Dear Mary, don't be a little fool. Wait till you grow up, Dick."

She had cried then, and hated him; yet except for that cruel note he had always been, in a gruff, shy way, nice to her.

She was glad she would see him in the morning.

The Captain's cabin on the Venturer was on the starboard side, opening off the common room aft, into which the companionway descended. While Mary kept her vigil ashore, Richard Corr sat there all that night watching his father die.

It was clear to Richard that no medicines now could help his father; yet when he heard the boat alongside, he went to the foot of the companion to meet Ephraim Doncaster.

But only Mat Forbes descended. "Mr. Doncaster's dead, Mr. Corr," he said. "And so is Mrs. Doncaster. Your brother sent word their daughter Mary is there."

Richard dropped his eyes, seemed to consider this; but actually he was only conscious of the fact that his father was dying, and that Mat and every man aboard looked to him now for command and leadership.

Hiram Minick and Isaiah Cipples, carpenter and cooper, oldsters who had sailed with Captain Corr for many a voyage and who loved him, were here in the common room sharing his vigil, standing by; and Hiram crossed now to look in at the sick man. Richard asked Mat:

"My brother didn't come back himself?"

"No, he and Tommy stayed ashore."

"Well, there's nothing could be done anyway," Richard decided.

Ira Corr spoke, Isaiah and old Hiram heard him, and came to the cabin door; but Captain Corr looked only at his son. He asked:

"Where's Peter?"

"Ashore, Father. We're at Gilead. He's gone to get help for you."

"I'm past help, Dick," he said. "You'll be Cap'n by morning."

Richard had never lied to this old man. "I'll do the best I can, then," he said humbly.

"Look out for Peter."

"I'll take care of him."

"I mean, look out for him." Captain Corr repeated, in clear warning. "You're mine, but he's not, Dick. Not my son. His mother was

a widow woman," the old man said. "She made me claim him or she wouldn't marry me. I was young, wanted a woman any price at all; and for all I knew then, Peter'd make a man and a good son for me. I gave him and you alike always, Richard; but you're a man, and he's not. I knew that sure, after his first time at sea. The sea winnows a man, Richard; blows the chaff away and shows you what he is underneath. It didn't need that business of Tom Hanline to show me the inwardness of Peter. I knew before. I wasn't fooled," he said.

"So I cast him out. It's all in my will, Dick. Lawyer Ashburn's got it at home. A dollar to Peter that was never mine, and the rest to you that was always my own son."

Richard's pulse-beat choked him. Captain Corr's eyes were closed now; but the old man said softly:

"I could always brag about you, Dick."

He seemed to smile, but he did not speak again. He did not know when his father died, till Isaiah came at last to peer over his shoulder and to say:

"He's gone."

Richard looked down, and he saw this was true. His father was dead. He was Captain now.

He rose. He went on deck. He saw their position, said to Mat Forbes:

"Mr. Forbes, my father is dead. Keep her off and on. I'll be busy for a while."

He returned below. He went into the cabin and closed the door. Alone there, tender as a woman, he shaved his father's dead face, and dressed him in seemly garments. While he was alone with his father he had considered the problem which the old man's revelation presented.

There had been no chance to ask Captain Corr whether Peter knew the truth about himself; but Richard was sure he did not. Richard even thought Peter need never know.

When they reached New Bedford, he might go first to lawyer Ashburn and arrange for the destruction of the will—since he himself would be the only loser—and then he and Peter could share alike as legal heirs.

He fixed on this intention; but if the secret were to be kept, Isaiah and Hiram must be warned to silence. So he told them crisply that they were to forget what they had heard.

They assented, Hiram with a word, Isaiah more volubly.

George for much of the night had been restless and muttering in delirium; but toward morning he fell so deeply asleep that Mary leaned over him to make sure he was still breathing.

She was sticky hot, and she thought of the swimming pool that was cool and solitary. She took a towel and went down the path. The Venturer was moving into the bay; but there was time to be fresh and clean before Richard came ashore.

She slipped out of her clothes and swam lazily, like a seal, as often under water as not. Jarambo came seeking her to say the Venturer had anchored and a boat was approaching.

She told him to go meet them and help them land. When he was gone, she came out of the water, she dressed and turned toward the landing place.

She emerged from the jungle which cloaked the path in time to see Richard catch the rope Jarambo dropped to him; and a moment later, as the whaleboat lifted on the swell, he stepped nimbly ashore.

Mary had forgotten how tall Richard was; how tall and bronzed and dark. He carried a gun under his arm, and he wore a cap too small for him. His shirt was open, his lean hips tight in trousers that seemed too scant for his powerful thighs. He came striding up the path and she waited without moving, watching the way his feet seemed to grip the ground, the swelling muscles above his knees as he climbed. She thought, half smiling, how often two people thus drew together without speaking, each trying to decide when to call a word of greeting, or to lift a hand.

She said: "I've had a swim, it was so hot."

He said: "Felt good, I'll bet."

She offered him her hand. His was hard and heavy and firm. She asked for his father; and he said: "He died about daylight."

"I'm sorry."

He nodded. "Yes, he died."

The sun shone boldly. The Venturer, dingy, graceless, bluff of bow and stern, with draggled sails half-furled, lay to her short anchor in the bay.

Richard said: "Peter sent word your folks were dead too. You been here all alone, have you?"

"Not alone," she said. "My husband's with me. We took Father's and Mother's place."

"Husband?" She saw his pupils widen like a cat's. "Who's he?"

She smiled at the sudden question. "He's George McAusland, a missionary, a State of Maine man. He was on the Sunset. We came from Honolulu together. He's fine. You'll like each other."

He looked around as though trying to discover the answer to some obscure enigma. "Where is he?" he asked. "Where's Peter and Tommy? Where are the natives? What's wrong here?"

(TO BE CONTINUED)



REVOLT FROM A RADIO

Elmer Twitchell is suffering from what is coming to be known as "radio chills." He is beginning to shiver at the very sight of a radio. "Yes," admitted Elmer today, "I'm afraid of the darned thing. It used to be fairly peaceful; at least there was nothing about it to intimidate me. It was just a piece of furniture between the piano and the vestibule, or a table ornament with cigar ashes all around it."

"I may not have been overfond of it, but I considered it a good friend. It was a bit obstreperous at times but never savage. It was even safe for women and children to handle." Here Elmer looked nervously around and shed a few tears.

"The breakfast food, hair oil, chocolate bar and gasoline talks were annoying at times, but they never made my hair stand on end," continued Mr. Twitchell. "And the minute I heard some radio voice say: 'This is the Peter Pipp Almond Program' I didn't have to duck or have a battle for civilization hurled smack into my lap!"

"A few words about a tooth powder weren't a prelude to all the ghastly details of a bombing raid. About the worst I had to fear from the radio in the old days was some Hackensack Lady Duo or the voice of the man who urges radio fans to watch their innards and buy the Key to Vigor & Vim for \$1.50 before it goes to \$2.25."

"I could even ignore my radio and assume it was out of order and perfectly harmless. But then days is gone. It's now a constant menace. I have a feeling it can snap, snarl and bite me."

Elmer was plainly all upset. "It's become a thing of blitzkriegs and bombs and bullets. I'd just as soon have a tank in the room. In fact, I'd rather have a tank, provided it was wired for just the baseball scores and racing results."

"Having a radio is almost the same as going to war. It's worse in a lot of ways. In a war there are periods when you are too far back to know what's going on up front."

At this point Mr. Twitchell put on a gas mask, grabbed a gun and started crawling across the floor toward his radio set, using the other furniture for cover. "This is about time the wife tunes in on one of those programs," he whispered. Elmer had plainly gone nuts.

THAT'S MANHATTAN
Hi.— Let the bird students dery this one: During the wrecking of the Ninth avenue elevated, the welders' torches sent showers of yellow sparks to the street. Pigeons flew to the scene in flocks and pecked at each "kernel" until they became disillusioned. I saw it. —Yankee Clipper.

The cards some of those small countries are getting in the European new deal are coming from the bottom of the pact.

The General Society of Mayflower Descendants is out to preserve the colonial flavor of Plymouth, Mass. One home of a Pilgrim father, it is charged, has now become a hot-dog stand. First thing we know somebody will be trying to cart off Plymouth Rock to make an outdoor grill.

ZZAZZING UP THE WAR
The bishop of Chelmsford proposes that the doleful notes of the air siren be abandoned and that the air raid signal be a gay "cockadoodledoo, to sound the note of defiance and courage." It's the best suggestion of the war. How about patterning after the musical auto horn. Imagine the effect on Nazi fliers to be greeted with "Arrah Go On, You're Only Fooling."

SONG AFTER SEVEN
Night is a mother
Climbing the stairs,
Locking day's door
On sorrows and cares,
Drying hot tears,
Healing new scars,
Quieting fears,
Lighting blue stars.
—Gladys McKee.

The roof of the Capitol at Washington is being repaired. It seems there is an amusing theory that congressmen should be protected from wind, rain and snow.

Italy has a secret weapon. But it can't get it out of reverse.

A Chinese laundryman was the first man inducted into the draft army from New York. He was a hand laundryman. This should dispose of the idea that everybody thinks this is a war of machinery.

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THREE wire coat hangers, two old bath towels, some fine wire hair pins and needle and thread made this cunning woolly lamb. All the directions are in the sketch. The wire hangers are bent and bound together with hair pins to make the foundation. A ball of soft cloth is fastened inside the loop that forms the head, and is covered with a square of the toweling bound and sewn as shown. The rest of the body is all padded and shaped by winding and sewing four inch strips of the toweling, as shown.

Progressive Indians
Between the years 1841 and 1852, the Cherokee Indians living in and around Tahlequah, Indian territory, now a part of Oklahoma, established a national newspaper, a Masonic lodge, male and female seminaries that taught three foreign languages, French, Greek and Latin, and three temperance organizations, one of which was called the Cherokee Cold Water Army.—Collier's.

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Your Opinion
Public opinion is a weak tyrant compared with our own private opinion. What a man thinks of himself, that it is which determines, or rather indicates, his fate.—Henry David Thoreau.

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