

The Strumpet Sea

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

CHAPTER XII—Continued

Mary felt herself tighten warily. "Pearls? Who says so?" "I'm naming no names, ma'am. I have to sleep amongst 'em. A man has to sleep sometime, and it's easy to slide a knife into a man asleep."

"You're trying to scare me!" "I'm scared myself, ma'am," he insisted. "I was in a ship once that came near mutiny, and you could smell it coming days before. It was wanting to get ashore to the gold fields that was the trouble then; and it's pearls they're talking now. Pearls as big as chestnuts. And they're saying that barrel of ambergris would make the man rich that had it safe ashore."

"But I don't believe a word of all that about pearls, Corkran," she declared. "If Cap'n Corr had any pearls aboard, I guess I'd know it! And nobody with any sense would want that bad-smelling stuff in the barrel; so if that's all you're worrying about..."

He looked at her briefly. He said in a flat tone, grave again: "It's not all, if you want the rest of it. Ma'am, I've served many's the year at sea, and I never did see a mate playing lickspittle and 'polish your boots, mister' with his men that harm didn't come of it in the end."

Mary's pulse leaped. She knew suddenly that she had thought this same thing, without knowing her own thought, as she watched Peter day after day about the ship.

She tried to persuade herself thereafter that Corkran was afraid of shadows; but she could not forget his uneasiness, and a day or two later she repeated part of what he had said to Richard. She did not quote Corkran's criticism of Peter, but she told Richard about the pearls.

He was interested in the pearls, but he did not ask where she had hidden them; and he made light of Corkran's fears. "Men are bound to talk when they've nothing else to do," he said.

Since the day he killed the whale, he and Mary had drawn happily together, finding pleasure in this new companionship, each at ease with the other. His confident dismissal of her fears reassured her; and their talk turned at random now, turned back to the years in New Bedford. Mary laughed at a sudden memory and said:

"You know, Richard, I really hated you for a while when we were children."

"Me?" "Yes. When Peter gave you my letter."

He looked at her in a puzzled way. "What letter, Mary?" "Forgotten, have you?" She smiled.

He shook his head. "I guess I'm dumb. What was in the letter? Who was it to?"

She looked away from him, absurdly hurt and unhappy because he had forgotten; but then she remembered that Peter said Richard kept her letter, that he even read it aloud to people, and laughed at it with them. She turned away from him, her eyes suddenly hot with tears; and he saw them and caught her arm and protested:

"Here, wait a minute, Mary. Listen..."

Then he stopped, for George was just emerging from the cabin companion close beside them, seeing her crimson, with tears in her eyes and Richard's hand restrainingly upon her arm.

If George was disturbed by what he had seen he did not show it. He kept them together in talk with him a while. When Richard presently left them, Mary tried to make some explanation, but George stopped her.

"You don't need to explain to me, Mary," he said, gently and honestly. "I'm beginning to get hold of myself. There's a jealous devil in me. I hate to have any man look at you. I've made you unhappy because of it more than once; but I'm whipping it. I know you and Cap'n Corr are old friends; but I know there's nothing else."

She was so grateful to him that thereafter she loved him more and more.

Richard told them one morning at breakfast his plan to cruise a while on the right whale grounds among the islands off the South American coast, and perhaps fill their casks before refitting to round Cape Horn homeward bound.

Mary and George went on deck together. The day was fair, and for the season—early spring in these latitudes—mild enough; the wind light. Mary saw broad streaks of yellowish red upon the water to starboard where the great schools of brit were near the surface; and a moment later a black back showed and twin spouts rose straight as fountains. Richard himself was in the main rigging, watching the whales now so near the ship that voices aboard were hushed and whispering.

"Mr. Forbes, you play loose boat and stay clear," he directed. "The mate and I will fasten if we can. Tommy, go aloft and keep your eye peeled if they sound. Ready the boats."

Peter said, to no one in particular: "Where's Feik?" Without waiting for an answer, he dropped down into the after 'tween decks to find him. A moment later he came on deck again.

"He's sick, Dick," he said. "Corkran will take Feik's place. Mr. Forbes, lend Borst to the mate's boat. You can manage without him," replied Richard.

Peter protested: "Blast it, Dick, I don't want to tackle a whale with a green man."

"I think Corkran knows his business," Richard said curtly. "Lower away."

He turned toward the boats, not waiting for any further word; but George moved quickly toward him, caught his arm. "Cap'n, may I go with Mr. Forbes?"

Richard looked down at him, grinned and clapped George on the



"Ah-h!" For the boat yonder was in the air.

shoulder. "Go ahead, man," he agreed. "Mr. Forbes, mind you keep clear."

And a moment later the three boats were in the water. Mary from the rail above them called softly down:

"Good luck, George!" George grinned happily; and Corkran, bending the tub line to the box warp, looked up at her and nodded in a cheerful reassurance.

The boats stepped their masts and under sail crossed the Venture's bow. Richard took the lead, Peter close behind him, Mat Forbes bearing away beyond them to keep clear.

Isaiah, beside Mary at the rail, looked after them in muttering wrath.

"Like as not young Starn-all give Feik something to sicken him a-purpose! He'll always stay astern the lighter if he can, when it's time to lower."

"He and Richard are different, aren't they?" Isaiah exploded scornfully: "Why wouldn't they be?"

"Well, after all, they're brothers." "Act like brothers, do they?" he demanded. She turned to him in astonishment, and he said triumphantly: "Well, they ain't!"

"You mean, not at all?" "Not a mite!" he assured her. "But—they must be!" She was wholly bewildered; and her incredulity, working on his anger, drove him to a loquacity he would regret. He said stubbornly:

"Must be or not, they ain't Cap'n Ira'd ought to know! Here the night he died, Ira told Richard that Pete wa'n't even his own son! Me and Hiram was there and heard him. Old Ira told Richard he'd heir everything, only a dollar to Pete."

Realizing he had said too much, he pointed across the water; said: "The boats will be on 'em in a minute now."

Mary, turning to look, found herself shocked and confused by this incredible intelligence; but as the distance between boats and whales narrowed, she forgot what Isaiah had said in the excitement of the imminent encounter.

Mary saw Big Pip in the bow of Richard's boat half a mile away drive home a harpoon.

backed off, the sail and mast came down. Richard and Big Pip were changing ends. Isaiah cackled in shrill glee.

"Never saw Pip mux it before. They don't take to that! Look at him cut for 'em!" And then suddenly, in a long, whistling sigh: "Ah-h!"

For the boat yonder was in the air. Then the bow seemed for no reason to break off in small fragments; and then men and boat were in the sea, lost in a shuddering confusion of torn water and flying flukes and a great black body swinging to and fro.

She had forgotten Peter. She saw his boat now, the sail down, the oars springing. He was at the steering oar, leaning on, making the boat swerve toward the fighting whale. Mat Forbes, well away from them, was racing toward the fight. Peter's boat shot in alongside the black bulk. She saw Corkran in the bow erect, the harpoon ready.

She had an instant's pride in Peter. This time at least he had not failed! Then she saw Corkran drive home one iron and then another.

Mary saw then that Corkran was in fact lancing, his shoulders pivoting like a boxer's as he drove the keen shaft home. The whale in the instant after these new irons struck him had rolled a little, giving Corkran a chance; and he was bold to seize it. She saw the thrust; and a moment thereafter, above that turbulence of foam and flukes, she saw a red flag of blood like a fountain playing.

Isaiah cackled in a sort of gleeful wonder: "Got him first jab! Say, that Corkran won't ever go ashore t'wind-ard!"

Then the whale drove away, on the surface, thrashing flukes, breaching half out of water, its spoutholes streaming blood like a crimson banner. Mary watched the men in the water. Mat's boat reached them and began to pick them up, pulling man after man over the side. All of them. Saved! A great relief swept her; and she held hard to Isaiah's arm.

Isaiah said disgustedly: "Blast! That whale's sunk."

Her eye swept the water in all directions and saw nowhere a spout, no glistening back, nothing but Mat's boat yonder now full of men, and Peter's bobbing on an empty sea.

"Corkran went in too high with that lance," Isaiah said, and spat. "Can't blame him. He had to work fast. But he went in over the shoulder blade. Right whale's got an air bladder same as a fish. You let the air out and down it goes."

He looked at her sidewise. "There's times I talk more'n I'd ought to," he admitted awkwardly. "Like telling you about the mate not being Cap'n Ira's son. Richard told me not to, and he'd give me fits if he found out I did; but it's so. Cap'n Ira married a widow woman, and the mate was her young 'un. She wouldn't marry him only if he'd tell folks Pete was his. They kep' anybody from knowing, somehow." He added: "But I'd oughtn't to've told you. I was kind of worked up at Pete for trying to get out of lowering."

She said reassuringly: "I won't tell anyone. It's not our business, is it. Does Peter know?"

"He ain't supposed to." He cackled with a relish. "It's going to be some surprise to that young smelt when he hears the will read out. I'd admire to be there to see."

The boats were near; and they moved to the rail. Mat was ahead, Peter some distance behind, towing the stove boat; and Peter was standing up, using the long steering oar instead of the tiller which he might sensibly have preferred for this peaceful return to the ship. Richard faced forward, and he seemed to droop in a discouraged, broken fashion. Mary lifted her hand and called to them, a greeting without words. The boat came alongside, and she called: "Was it fun, George? Are you hurt, Richard?"

George grinned happily, and Richard shook his head. "I'm all right. Sassnet's ankle's twisted. The flukes just ticked me on the arm. But if it hadn't been for Peter it would have been bad. The whale was ugly."

Yet she saw then that he was more seriously hurt than he had said. He was needing help to reach the deck. His left arm appeared to be of little use to him; and he was white with pain.

Mat said: "You'd best get into some dry clothes and see how bad that arm is."

Richard nodded and went aft, and Mary looked after him, wishing to follow him; but George was beside her, flushed, full of talk, trembling with the excitement of the past few minutes. She heard him telling her what he had seen, and tried to listen, and caught broken phrases.

"One so near we could have hit him with our oars... Peter didn't hesitate this time." And then she heard him say: "Losing his boat will make Richard a little more human. Not quite so sure of himself."

She wished to say loyally that an accident might happen to anyone; but instead she spoke of Peter. "I'm glad Peter killed the whale. He's been feeling so badly about Uncle Tom."

"It was Corkran who killed it," he reminded her.

(TO BE CONTINUED)



LUKE TWITCHELL ON INDUCTION

Dear Elmer: Well, I am in the army, but I won't be much help to it for a long time on account of being all worn out by the physical examination. I had an idea it was easy to get into a war today, but I find it is almost impossible. I can't make out yet whether I was being examined for the army or for a Mister America contest.

My great-great-grandfather fought at Bunker Hill when he had flat feet, a complete set of false teeth and one glass eye. Always I have the idea that what counts is how a man can fight and not what shape his teeth are in or whether he has had his tonsils out, but do I learn different!

Even when I was examined for life insurance it wasn't so tough. Five times I try to explain to the doctors getting into the army wasn't my idea anyhow, and that I showed up because Uncle Sam invited me, and why treat me like I was trying to put something over? What was I drafted for, anyhow, a war or a screen test?

What gets me is the way they go over my teeth. Say, ain't it enough I should lick Hitler without being expected to eat him? They poke around my uppers and lowers like they suspected I was using somebody else's



teeth and they find trouble I didn't even know I had with 'em. If my teeth don't give me no trouble, why should they worry the United States army in a time like this? I will lay you two to one that Napoleon's teeth were punkeroo and I think I read a piece once what said Julius Caesar, George Washington, U. S. Grant and most of the Green Mountain boys didn't see their dentists twice a year, either.

They go over my eyes, too, like they thought they was examining a guy who was making an application to become a watch inspector. I have been wearing glasses for a couple of years and I don't have no trouble getting around in civilian clothes, so what makes 'em so worried I won't be able to recognize an enemy army when I see it?

All my life I have no complaints about my ears, but these fellows at the induction look 'em over, make tests and shake their heads as if they thought they were the kind of ears that MIGHT wear out too early in life. When I think it is all over they go over my feet, which are in swell shape like most Americans on account nobody in this country uses feet any more. Everybody either drives an auto or is a hitch-hiker. Their feet are good now, but wait until they have been doing army patrol six months!

Well, anyhow, I barely get in on account I am six points short of being the Perfect Man and once had asthma. Yours for a war anybody can get into, —Luke.

WOMEN AND DEFENSE
("E. V. McCollum of Johns Hopkins told the meeting that the women of America could help in the defense program by seeing that their menfolks got proper food.")—News item.)

Ladies, would you help defense? Would you make your country stronger? Feed your menfolks with more care—Do not serve that hash much longer!

Do you want our coastline safe From the batterings of Dover? Have a heart and do not chirp, "Honey, this was just left over."

Are you for preparedness? Do you want the future sunny? Cut that old line, "Sorry, but We're just having cold cuts, honey!"

In this business of leasing war supplies to England, Elmer Twitchell hopes we don't wind up with nothing but a mortgage on a couple of smoke screens.

Well, nobody can say our defense program hasn't a lag to stand on.

SIMILES
As unconvincing as a bald magician. As well spaced as a banquet menu. —Martin Ragaway.

HOW TO SEW

by Ruth Wyeth Spears



You can see by this that I rather favor working without a frame though I know perfectly well that it is more efficient to work with one. Almost all professionals have frames that rest on a permanent base. I have sketched here the type of frame that most amateurs use. You can buy the corner clamps at the hardware store and put the frame together quickly. It may be the size of your rug or smaller. If it is smaller, just part of the rug is stretched on the frame at one time.

TWO of the nicest hook rugs I have were made without a frame. Many rug makers like to work this way so that they may turn the work as they do different parts of the design. Then, too, whenever rug hookers meet there is sure to be an exchange of treasured bits of colored fabrics. In no time at all a rug making group is meeting and it is difficult to carry a frame when one goes visiting. It is often difficult to find space to put a frame away in a small house or apartment, too.

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ASK ME ANOTHER ?

A Quiz With Answers Offering Information on Various Subjects

- The Questions**
1. What is the population of Greece?
 2. What standards are used by the Bureau of the Census in computing the number of illiterates in the country?
 3. Under what conditions may a private in the U. S. army wed?
 4. What does a panegyric piece of writing do?
 5. "Now God be praised, I die happy" are the dying words of what general?
 6. President Andrew Johnson escaped impeachment by how many votes?
 7. Does the moon, when it is half full, shed half as much light on the earth as it does when it reaches the full stage?
 8. Which is the world's largest flower?
 9. Of sheep, cattle, deer, antelope, goats and swine, how many of them are cloven-hoofed animals?
 10. How much horsepower is developed by the hydroelectric plant at Niagara Falls?

- The Answers**
1. The population of Greece is 6,204,684.
 2. The Bureau of the Census rules that any person 10 years of age or older who cannot read or write in any language is an illiterate.
 3. With his commanding officer's permission.
 4. A panegyric piece of writing elaborately praises.
 5. James Wolfe (after his victory at Quebec).
 6. One. The vote was 35 to 19; a two-thirds majority was necessary for conviction.



Evil Thought
Multitudes think they like to do evil; yet no man ever really enjoyed doing evil since God made the world.—Ruskin.

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The splendors that belong unto the fame of earth are but a wind, that in the same direction lasts not long.—Dante.



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