

# The Strumpet Sea

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

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## CHAPTER XIV—Continued

Then George spoke her name behind them, and she turned in quick guilty dismay; and George saw her confusion and his cheek paled. She went toward him, forced herself to speak casually.

"Well, they're gone, almost out of sight now . . ."

George nodded. "I think I'll go below." He seemed hoarse. "I'll try to take a nap."

He turned away. Mary, after a moment's doubt, went with him.

He did not protest when she followed him; but neither did he look around. He walked rapidly aft to the companion, descended before she overtook him. At the foot of the companionway she found that he had stopped to wait for her; and when she faced him he asked a flat question.

"Mary, what were you and Richard talking about?"

He cried wretchedly: "Oh, I'm sorry, Mary! I don't want to be this way! But I've seen you so often lately talking to him, and if I come near you, you stop. I try not to notice. I try as hard as I can. But—I can't help it, Mary."

Desperate to reassure him, and to stop his questions, she remembered the pearls. "Richard's worried," she said. "There were some pearls in a packet in his desk, and they've been stolen."

"Pearls? Where did Richard get them?"

"They were mine." Once begun, she must tell him everything; but at her word, his hand tightened on her arm.

"Where did you get them, Mary?" "Jarambo gave them to me the day we left Gilead."

"Jarambo?" His eyes cleared with relief. "I suppose he'd had them for years. Probably dove for them himself. Was that it?"

"No," she said. "I think I know what happened." She told him the truth, or her best guess at what the truth might be; she related now at last the massacre at the island, and the burning of the ship.

"They had killed Augur, you know," she reminded him. "I suppose these were his pearls, and they got them, and Jarambo found them on their schooner."

He sat down, shaken by what he heard, fumbling for solid ground again. "Our islanders slaughtered those men?"

"Yes!" She said. "But they did it because they loved you, George."

After a moment he cried in a sudden strength: "Mary, I'm glad they did! The world's better without them."

"Yes."

"Mary, why didn't you tell me all this before?"

"You were so ill."

"Did Cap'n Corr know about the massacre?"

"Yes."

"Does anyone else aboard know?" "Corkran knew, of course. He's probably told everyone. And they all saw the smoke from the burning schooner before they reached the island."

He nodded briefly, said in a slow scorn of himself: "Everyone knew but me, but no one told me."

"I knew how unhappy it would make you."

He laughed shortly. "I know now where I stand with you all. You think me a weak woman of a man, who has to be guarded and cajoled and shielded, protected from the truth."

"Please, George."

He shook his head. "Oh, I suppose I'll be all right when I've thought it over; but it's pretty hard to find yourself so contemptible in the eyes of other men!" He went to his own cabin and shut the door behind him, shutting her out.

When he appeared for supper, he seemed to be himself once more. They were all cheerful at the supper table. Peter did most of the talking, as he was apt to do. Since that day when he killed the whale which had broken Richard's arm, he was exuberantly sure of himself, inclined to condescend.

At dark that night, the weather changed; the wind came more southerly, and it stiffened, and was cold. Richard shortened sail a little, stayed on deck most of the night watching his ship, using as much wind as he wisely could, extracting from the half gale all it would safely give. The weather got no worse next day, but it got no better; and Richard drove her carefully that day and the days that followed.

## CHAPTER XV

George coughed more and more; but in spite of Mary's urgings, he went on deck every day, refusing to be coddled, interested in this westward passage of the Horn which they were approaching; and he asked Richard many questions.

"We're all right," Richard assured him. "The only thing I don't want to hit is fog. We're apt to see icebergs any time. I'm shortening sail at night. As long as it stays clear, we can see ice a long way from the crosstrees, and we can tell pretty well before dark if there's any ice ahead of us. And the nights are short. That helps."

He himself now kept the deck during the brief hours of darkness, not going below at all, sleeping in the daytime. Their course was by this

time southeasterly, and Richard took every opportunity to catch the sun, or to take a lunar.

They sighted the Diego Ramirez Rocks one morning an hour after breakfast; and Mary put on her coat and went up the companion and found Richard exuberant as a triumphant boy in the knowledge that his calculations had been accurate. The men forward were shouting instead of talking, their voices high-pitched with triumph, knowing that presently they would turn at last northeasterly for the long run home.

"Now, I'll snatch a wink, Mr. Forbes," Richard told Mat. "Call me when we come abeam of the Rocks."

So he and Peter went below with George and Mary; and Richard stripped off his great sea coat.

Mary said: "You're dead for sleep, Richard. Go lie down."

He nodded. "I could sleep three days in a row," he agreed. He went into his cabin and closed the door behind him.

Mary made George lie down in his bunk for warmth's sake, and covered him over. She returned to her own cabin, and drifted off to sleep. Later she roused a little; heard Peter say in the common room outside her door:

"I tell you you're wrong. But anyway, watch yourself. Dick will

blow you to pieces. He keeps a gun in the top drawer."

She sat up in swift alarm. As her feet touched the floor, she heard Peter go on deck again; and then George opened her door.

He grasped her arm, his fingers crushing it so that she uttered a low cry of pain. She looked up into his face and saw it twisted and convulsed by some terrific passion; and she whispered in a quick terror: "George! What's the matter?"

He said harshly, "Come out here! I want to talk to you and Captain Corr."

Holding her, he wrenched open the door of Richard's cabin; and Richard asleep in the bunk opened his eyes, his head rising from the pillow, and then his whole body rose as he came to his feet in a sharp alarm, steadying himself with his good hand.

"What's wrong?" he asked. He brushed past them into the common room, leaped toward the companion, thinking only of the ship, thinking her in danger.

When Richard, emerging from the cabin, brushed him aside, George had lurched toward the desk; and before Richard reached the foot of the companionway, George dragged open the top drawer of the desk and lifted out of it the heavy old revolver always kept there. At his cry, his command, Richard turned and saw the weapon leveled at him firmly. For a moment he did not move, staring in a bewildered astonishment; but then, his concern still for his ship, he said curtly:

"I'll be back!" And he went up the companionway.

Mary began to understand what was coming; to foresee the content of the next half hour. She heard, as though far away, voices over their heads; but she did not look up. She stared at George as though he were a stranger seen for the first time; and she waited for Richard to return as for a rescuer.

When he descended the companionway, he closed the scuttle behind him, shutting them in. He stopped at the foot of the ladder, looking from one of them to the other. George had turned, stood braced now with his feet wide apart, his back to the desk. The Venturer, quartering the seas, was combining a pitch and a roll in an exasperating motion, slithering upward at an angle, poisoning, lurching down again.

George had put on some composure. He was steadier now, and quieter. He backed against the desk, still holding the revolver, and faced them both; and he spoke in crisp, slow tones. He said evenly: "I want this business between you stopped, today, now."

Richard stared at him; he looked helplessly at Mary. "I'm so tired I'm dumb," he said, speaking to her, not to George. "Maybe it's because I'm short of sleep. I don't know what he's talking about."

But Mary knew. So many incidents out of the past came now to enlighten her. This man facing them with a weapon in his hands was the same George who could not endure the thought of leaving her with Joseph Neargood at Gilead. He was the same George who could not see Fritz Augur give her a pearl. He was the same George who was forever tormented by a devil of jealousy. It did not occur to her to wonder why the passion in him had thus suddenly come to a head. Certainly he had lost control of himself.

She moved toward him, said pleadingly: "George, you're sick. Let me put you to bed. Please!"

"I'm sick to death," he told her. "Sick of you! Don't touch me. I've shut my eyes to your wantonness long enough."

His word stopped her like a blow. Richard protested gravely: "George, you're talking in circles. If you've got anything to say, say it. What's on your mind?"

"I'm talking about you and Mary making love to each other all the time," George told him; and his own rage choked him, and he coughed, bending double, clutching at his chest, his face dark with lack of breath before he could speak again. "Do you think I'm blind?" he challenged them.

"I think you're crazy!" "I'm crazy, am I?" George visibly fought to control himself; to speak impassively. "Oh, I don't blame you so much. Why wouldn't you make love to her, when she begs for it? Captain Corr. leave her alone. No matter what she says. Because if you ever touch Mary again, or speak to her, I'll kill you."

Richard said miserably: "Man, you're sick!"

"Maybe I am. But I'm not too sick to pull a trigger. I've killed as big a man as you, with a pickaxe, and he had a gun! Don't you touch Mary again, or speak to her. 'Speak to her?' Richard echoed. "Why, sure I will; and I'll touch her too if it comes that way. Have some sense! Why wouldn't I?"

George cried explosively: "Because you're in love with her, and she with you!" But on his own words, a paroxysm of coughing swept him, bent him, silenced him. He dropped the revolver on the desk, clutching at his chest with both hands. It was long before he could speak again.

Through that long moment Richard looked at Mary, and Mary looked at Richard. Before the moment ended, each knew.

It was true! While their eyes met in that long exchange like a revelation, like vows exchanging, these two forgot George, racked and helpless by the desk. His words unlocked at last a long-closed door. What he said was true, and while their eyes held now, they both knew it! They knew that they had loved each other always, and would love each other always. They had not guessed the truth before; but they knew it now forever, beyond doubt, beyond change, beyond forgetting.

Each thought wonderingly: This was blind not to know then that this was true.

But now they knew. Now they knew; and the knowledge was a grief, deep and terrible and hopeless. Their eyes held hard, till George recovered; and they did not know he had recovered till he crossed to thrust at Mary with a movement like a blow, to break the bridge of their exchanging glasses, and to cry, pitifully furious:

"Don't! Stop! You shan't even look at him!"

She spoke in a panic of haste, desperately denying, as much to persuade herself as her husband.

Mary whispered: "George, George it isn't true!" She looked at Richard again. She knew it was true, knew he knew. "It isn't, please!" she cried like a prayer.

George faced her, challenged: "So it's not true?"

"Of course not!"

He lifted one hand, brushed it past her like a scornful blow. "You're a liar!"

Mary begged: "George, please!"

He swung to her, staring at her narrowly. "You want me to believe you don't love him?" he demanded.

"I don't, George."

He grinned mockingly. He slipped his arm through hers. "All right," he said. "I believe it. I believe you. You're my wife, and you love me. Is that true?"

"Yes, yes, yes."

"You love me with all your heart?"

"Yes."

"And soul?"

"Yes."

"Fully and completely and passionately?"

"Yes, yes, you know I do."

He had begun this catechism in tones derisive; but under her earnestness, his derision faded. He was so lost without her, wanted so much to believe her, that he began to do so.

She saw with a slow rising hope that he did begin to believe her; and she thought fear would live with her always now, fear lest he discover the truth. She thought: All my life I'll have to lie to him, pretend, make him believe I love him. If he knew I don't, he would die.

(TO BE CONTINUED)



## A LETTER TO MR. DISNEY

Dear Walter Disney:

I have just read in the papers that you do not think a child could possibly be scared by any of the weirder effects in your new picture, "Fantasia," particularly by the episodes in "Night on Bald Mountain," and while you may be right, what about the grownups? I give you my word, Walt, that the scenes in that episode had me creepy for days and I still ain't sleeping well. If that comes under the head of entertainment, then a great idea for the Follies would be a night in a morgue.

You are a genius in my book, Walter, and nobody is even a close second to you in movie entertainment, but it would be okay by me and, I think, most movie fans, if



you would cut out a tendency to go in for the creepy stuff. You could throw out the entire night on Bald Mountain and do the nerve doctors and psychopathic ward attendants a great favor.

I know this is supposed to interpret a musical composition for drums, bass fiddles, cymbals, horse pistols, dynamite caps and saxophonists with the D.T.'s, but if it does so, then Moussorgsky should have stayed in bed where he could never make the hair of a movie fan stand on end, man or boy.

"Fantasia" is a beautiful thing full of what the critics call enchantment, but a smart spectator will grab his hat and make for the nearest exit when the Bald Mountain stuff starts. It is nothing but 20 minutes of skeletons, ghosts, fliberty-gibbets and assorted apparitions flying across the screen like they were fugitives from Hades, and I mean the basement not the mezzanine floor. A skeleton rates at the bottom of the list for purposes of public entertainment, anyhow, even if it is a quiet, dignified unassuming skeleton. And when a skeleton turns out to be a jitterbug acting as if it was being auditioned for a ballet it is no good to nobody nohow, even with the Philadelphia Symphony orchestra as sponsor.

The episode should be retitled "Heebie-Jeebies in Technicolor."

Give them skeletons two weeks' notice, Walt, and give Bald Mountain back to Hitler, where it must have come from.

Yours for fewer goose pimples, with sound.

Elmer Twitchell.

## BACK HOME STUFF

(In the other world war.)

"Don't Talk War" signs hung behind the bars of all the cafes in town . . . The town's best-known saloon owner, who for years had worn his mustache Kaiser style, suddenly found himself in a spot . . . There were German spy scares every day . . . A fellow dropped into the local newspaper office from the New York Tribune to promote a fund for "Marjorie's Battleship" . . . There was talk of meatless days and heatless nights . . . Nearly every war bulletin mentioned Von Kluck's left wing . . . The Kaiser had promised the troops Christmas dinner in Paris . . . President Wilson aroused a storm of editorial comment by declaring "There is such a thing as being too proud to fight" . . . Remember?

## BROKEN GENTLY

At six, complete with cheek of tan, He wished to be a fireman.

At ten ambition took a hop— He prayed to own a candy shop.

At oh so sweet sixteen his heart Ached to play an actor's part.

At twenty, spirits all aglow He hoped to own a Wall Street Co.,

And now that he's reached forty-eight He wishes he could hibernate!

—Richard Avedon.

## DO YOU REMEMBER—

Away back when all school teachers were above suspicion of being enemies of the American way of life?

These are times when the fellow who rose from neuboy to millionaire capitalist wishes he could reverse the trip.

The football rules committee made numerous changes at its recent January meeting, but still did nothing toward the most needed reform of all: a rule making touchdowns by officials illegal.

Harry James says it looks as if Mussolini was the type of man who could keep his chin up only in the newsreels.

# HOW TO SEW

by Ruth Wyeth Spears



the sketch shows how the two pieces of the slip cover were made.

NOTE: You will find more illustrations for making over dining room chairs, old rockers and armchairs in Mrs. Spears' Books 5 and 6. Also directions for designing and making rugs; hooked, braided and crocheted. Each book has 32 pages of illustrated directions. Send order to:

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IF A CHAIR is all legs, angles and curves in the wrong places, a slip cover may do as much for it as a becoming frock will do for an awkward girl. The right color, a dash of style, fabric cut to bring out graceful lines and cover defects, and presto—a new personality for the ugly duckling!

That was the treatment given a set of old chairs like the one shown here. A two-piece frock was planned to repeat tones in the wall paper of the room in which the chairs were to be used. The bold stripes of the putty tan, green and wine red material gave just the right contrast with the flowered pattern on the wall. Narrow green fringe was used for edging and

## AROUND THE HOUSE

Grease the measuring cup before measuring syrup or molasses and it will not stick to the sides of the cup.

A window box of seasoning herbs is handy for winter cooking.

Ivy grows best in water in the house and in a glass vase through which light may reach roots.

If rubber gloves are sprinkled on the inside with corn starch or powder they will slip on more easily.

To revive frozen house plants, set in a cold closet in which the temperature is near the freezing point and let plants thaw out slowly.



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