

The Strumpet Sea

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

CHAPTER XVII—Continued.

When she ended, Mat Forbes spoke. "Ma'am, I'm not saying you're right or wrong; but we've got to go on." "We've got to look at it straight," he pointed out. "We can ask Mr. Corran to go back; but if he won't, why he's the Captain. We can't make him, unless we know for sure."

To attempt to compel him in any way, or even to disobey his commands, was an action tainted with mutiny; and Mat, as the whispered discussion proceeded, repeatedly pointed this out.

"He says Cap'n Corran was killed. He's logged it that way; and he can't go back on that, if it's true or not. He's got to stick to it; and short of handling him, there's nothing we can do."

"But I know he's lying," Mary pleaded. "I know Cap'n Corran's alive." She felt Corran's eyes upon her; and she appealed to him. "Don't you, Corran?"

Corran was a long moment in replying; and before he spoke, his eyes swung from her to George. "Reverence," he asked gravely, "what do you say? Are you for going back?"

"Yes."

"Would you be thinking to satisfy the young lady, so she'll know he's dead? Is that maybe it?"

"No. No, I'm sure he's alive. He's hurt, maybe. If he weren't, he'd have come to the boats. But I think he's surely alive."

"Then it's knowing he's alive that you'll want to go back and get him?"

"Yes, certainly."

Corran stood up, and turning to the mate, said simply: "Mr. Forbes, if himself here says go back, then I say go. If he said no, I'd say no; but we'll do what he's wanting."

Mat Forbes nodded. "Yes, certainly. I'd say go back, if we'd anything to go on. But it's hard to say to Peter that he's got to go back without knowing something."

"There's a way to know," Corran told him quickly. "Gee was with them ashore. Whatever happened, Gee knows. Gee's hated Cap'n Corran, and talked killing ever since the Cap'n had him flogged. Maybe he was in this, maybe not; but whatever happened, he knows about it."

This was, clearly, true. If Peter had lied about Richard's movements on shore at Hoakes Bay, Gee must know it. Mary whispered earnestly: "Yes, yes! Don't you see, Mr. Forbes? Gee must know."

CHAPTER XVII

A half hour later Corran reported that Gee, after some "persuading," had given him enough information to justify turning back.

Mat then led the way into the common room aft, and he moved with a certain heedlessness, careless of the noise he might make. There he lighted one of the hanging lamps, and Corran lighted another; and Mat turned toward the door of the Captain's cabin where Peter was asleep.

But before he could touch the door, it opened and Peter faced them. He stared from one to the other. There were six men and Mary, against him alone.

Peter must have read their faces; and guilt for a moment flickered in his so plainly every man there could see it. He leaped backward and slammed the door shut; but before he could bolt it, Corran's weight against it forced it open and three Peter headlong against the cabin wall, and Corran after a moment's struggle pinned him helpless there.

Then Peter, his voice cracking, asked in a sharp panic: "What is this, anyway? What's the matter?"

Mat Forbes said: "Bring him out here, Mr. Corran."

"What's the matter?" Peter demanded. "What is this, mutiny?"

Mary, watching him almost with sympathy, thought again that his beard was like a mask behind which his eyes flickered. Peter cried: "Blast you, get out of here, back where you belong!"

Mat Forbes spoke almost gently. "Mr. Corran, we're going back to Hoakes Bay to find Cap'n Corran."

"Find him?" Peter wetted his dry lips. "He's gone."

"We'll have a try, anyway."

"You can't find him. I told you what happened to him!"

Mat said: "We're going back to have a look, and Gee tells a different story."

"Gee?" This was Peter.

"Yes. He says you told him to say a lion killed Cap'n Corran; but he says Cap'n Corran never came out of the tussocks on the way up the ridge."

"He's a liar!"

"Not Gee. He wasn't lying. He knew it wasn't safe to."

"Then you scared him. A scared ducky will say anything you want him to. I tell you he's lying."

"We'll go back and see for sure." Mat asked almost pleadingly: "Will you go along, sir? Or do we have to iron you?"

bore him sidewise and down. The heavy revolver clattered against the edge of the drawer, was jerked by his fall from Peter's hand. Mat Forbes picked it up. Corran held Peter flat, twisted him on his stomach, dragged him to his feet.

Peter was stony silent now. Mat Forbes turned to Mary. "You and Mr. McAusland move in here, into these cabins," he said briefly. "I'll iron him to the mizzenmast."

Later Mat came to speak to her. He was white with strain, but his voice was calm and steady.

"He's secured," he said. "I've left Mr. Corran with him, and the door's bolted between. You'll be safe here. I'll go call the watch and wear ship, make back for Hoakes Bay. We'll be there, with luck, soon after day. Mr. McAusland can take the Cap'n's cabin. You have yours."

It was upon Mat Forbes that the responsibility for the Ventura and those aboard her now fell. Half persuaded by Mary, and then convinced by Gee's enforced confession, he had accepted the necessity of leading what was technically a mutiny. He had not read that treason never prospers, since if it succeeded then none dare call it treason; but he understood quite clearly the implications of his own position. If Richard were found, dead or alive, Mat's action would be justified. If Richard were not found, then he and

As matters developed, one other man stayed aboard the Ventura. After the anchor was down, since the wind was freshening, Mat ordered the sails all furled. This meant sending the men aloft. Hurd, the little Cockney, descending afterward, in some way fell the last few feet to the deck. He landed on his feet; but he howled with pain, and when he tried to stand he could not. Apparently he had broken a bone in his ankle, or suffered a severe sprain; certainly he would be of no use ashore.

So when the boats put off, twelve men went in them; or rather, eleven men and Tommy Hanline. Corran commanded one boat, Big Pip the other. Seven men and Mary were left aboard. Hurd was in the fore-castle, Gee and Peter in irons below, George in his bunk in the Captain's cabin, Willie Leeper in his galley, and Mat and Rannels and Mary on deck to watch the boats depart.

Rannels, like the other harpooners, was by the etiquette of the ship restricted in his movements, forbidden to come to the after house except on business. So while the boats moved away from the vessel's side, he stood alone in the waist. Mary and Mat were together by the rail just forward of the after house. They saw the boats land and saw the men haul them high and dry.

It occurred to Mat to inspect Peter's irons. He called to the harpooner: "Take a look at Gee, Rannels." The other man went obediently toward the fore hatch, and Mat descended into the cabin with Mary. He slid back the bolt on the door between the common room and the main cabin. Peter sat there at the table, his hands in front of him, the irons on his wrists passed through the loop of chain around the mizzen; and he met Mat's eyes, but he did not speak. Mat closed the door and bolted it again. When he turned, Mary stood in the doorway of the Captain's cabin; and George was on his feet inside the cabin, facing her, and coughing a little.

Mat Forbes felt rather than saw a shadow pass along the skylight over his head. He looked up sharply at the skylight, too late to see anything; and then he took the revolver out of his belt and cocked it and stepped quickly toward the companionway.

He started to ascend. Mary came to the foot of the companionway; and his feet were level with her shoulders, his head just emerging from the companion, when she heard the crack of the smashing blow that felled him.

The revolver, without being discharged, dropped out of his hand and clattered down to her feet. Mat slumped forward limply on his face, his body sprawling on the deck, his legs hanging down the companionway. Rannels shouted something; and she looked up and saw the harpooner, his face red with excitement, grab Mat by the collar. Mary snatched the revolver from the floor; but Rannels hauled Mat out of sight before she could shoot. On deck someone came running aft. George crossed to her side, took the weapon from her. Looking up, he whispered: "What happened?"

She was strangely not excited. "Rannels killed Mat!" she told him simply. Through the companion above them they could see the sky, the rain-filled clouds, the after rail. They heard Rannels speaking.

"Watch the companion," he panted, his voice thick. "I'll go get him loose, and Gee. You stay here, and if anybody shows a head, bust 'em."

Mary did not know Hurd was aboard. She looked at George and saw, with a quickening respect and admiration, that he was calm; that strength had run into him to meet this emergency. He said: "Go get the guns out of the rack and load them. I'll watch here, in case they try to come down."

She said from across the cabin by the arms rack: "It's locked. The guns are locked in."

"Can you break it open?"

"No! I don't see how."

"Then find the bomb gun."

She turned to look for that huge and awkward weapon. Someone tried the bolted door between; and Peter called to them sharply: "Mary, let me in."

George said strongly: "No, Peter."

"You sick fool, I'll break down the door." Peter's voice cracked as it was likely to in moments of emotion.

"I'll shoot you if you do!" George retorted. He made a sign to Mary to hurry; his lips shaped the words: "Bomb gun!"

Peter was whispering to Rannels in the main cabin. George and Mary could hear the murmur, but no words. Mary found the bomb gun, as heavy as a small cannon. Luckily it was loaded. The voices in the main cabin could no longer be heard; and there was no sound on the deck above their heads. She asked George: "Will that bomb explode if it hits anything?"

"I don't know," he admitted. "I don't know how they work." He grinned doubtfully. "Richard said the back end of a gun like this does as much damage as the front, but it's better than nothing; and if that bomb hits anyone, even if it doesn't explode, they'll know it!"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

those who had supported him in making Peter captive were simply mutineers, damned not only by the laws but by all the tradition of the sea.

So, for their salvation, Richard must be found. Mat, on the way back to Hoakes Bay, questioned Gee. The Negro repeated that he and Richard and Peter started through the tall tussock grass up toward the pond where the geese had lighted; that they entered the grass abreast, and became separated in its maze; and that when he emerged at the upper border of the grass, he was first, and Peter presently appeared, but Captain Corran did not. Beyond that, he swore in beseeching terror, he knew only what the mate had told him.

"Believed what he told you, did you?" Mat demanded.

"Yes, suh."

Mat said evenly: "You're a liar! There wasn't any beach in the tussocks, nor any sea lions. You knew well enough nothing like that happened to the Cap'n in there." With one strong motion he ripped Gee's shirt off his back. "Get a boat spade, Rannels," he directed. "Cut a hole through his small, cut the truth out of him!"

Rannels said with a relish: "Take my knife. It's nicked, and dull, and jagged as a saw; but you can hack a couple of rib chops out of him with it."

At the fearful picture Rannels' words evoked, Gee surrendered altogether and damned Peter beyond denial. He said the mate had given him a pearl, and promised him a rich reward later, if he would tell the tale and stick to it.

Gee appeared to have no more to tell, but Mat had no remaining doubt of Peter's guilt. Yet even so it was necessary that Richard be found, alive or dead, for final proof. Mat had no intention of evading the issue. If Richard were not found, he must release Peter and return him to command, and himself submit to the arrest that would follow when the Ventura reached Stanley.

But if Richard were found, then the situation would be in Richard's hands. So he must be found. Mat decided that when they came to anchor again in Hoakes Bay, he would send Corran to command and direct the search ashore. Corran was wise and strong. Mat himself, clearly, had better stay on board the Ventura. Someone must keep an eye on Peter, and on Gee; for the two prisoners and the ship herself were the key to the situation.

So Mat would stay aboard. He meant to send ashore as many men as possible, to prosecute the search for Richard with the best chance of success. George clearly could not go. His strength would not permit it. Mary would wish to stay with her husband.

Pastel Wools, Silks Outstanding In Spring Materials for M'Lady

By CHERIE NICHOLAS



A SEASON of perfectly fascinating colorful wools and woolknits is with us, so prepare to yield to temptation to the limit of your clothes budget. The little pastel wool dresses called "classics" because of the sculptural simplicity of their styling, are ideal for immediate wear. Don one of these neat, sweetly tailored frocks, so refreshingly springlike in color, and you will find yourself buoyantly taking an entirely new outlook on life.

In regard to costume suits, the big news is that of woollens keyed to the dominate note in prints, the two going fifty-fifty in an ensemble technique. This flair for combining print silk with wool in related color is one of those fashion gestures that bids fair to develop into a far-flung vogue as the season progresses.

Capes have dashed into the limelight of fashion dramatically and importantly. Yes, indeed, capes are just about to "steal the show" this spring, the smartest being full length. Some are of soft wools in beige or cinnamon or navy, if you please. The light-colored wools have blended fur collars, while the navy versions take on a military aspect after the manner of officers' capes. At any rate, fashion is making a dramatic play on capes, both in pastel wool weaves and navy.

Another highlight in fashion's realm is that of woolknits in pastels and rich dark colors. Many of the wool knits can scarcely be told from

woven wools, and they are styled to perfection in jacket dresses, sweaters, coats and ensembles. Note the casual little frock above to the left in the picture. A frock of this type is almost a necessity for a young gad-about who takes week-end trips and who is "dated" for informal daytime affairs. Fashioned of light blue jersey, it has a basque top with scalloped edges, and the jersey is gored in soft flattering lines for skirt fullness.

Important background for jewels is the beautiful evening sweater shown to the right above. It is in strawberry pink wool chenille yarn. The ribbed drape at the hips with front zipper closing and the long sleeves make it particularly new and smart.

The pretty dress below to the left in the group is a cream beige wool. Its gathered neckline, front plume effect and jewel buttons are outstanding style points.

Plaid and striped woollens promise to be better than ever this season. Their coloring will be, for the most part, pastel. An interesting color note about the smartest of plaids is that so many feature the new yellows and golden hues. The clever tweed spectator suit which you see on the seated figure claims distinction in that it goes in for voguish yellow and gold, patterned with cream beige. The make-up of the costume-entire includes, in addition to the beautifully cut jacket a yellow woolknit sweater and a matching felt hat.

(Released by Western Newspaper Union.)

Cravat Silk



With m'Lady's present flair for accessories to match her hat milliners are turning more and more to beautiful silk weaves as likable media for their creations. For the postillion hat and matching jacket ensemble pictured, Lilly Dache, noted for high artistry in hat design, uses men's bright cravat silk diagonally in a most effective manner.

Dinner Dress

For an unusual dinner dress, have one made of heavy white silk crepe with long, full skirt and long sleeves gathered into the wrist. Over this wear a tight little velvet or velveteen sleeveless bodice laced peasant fashion with gold or silver cord. It is a dress that can go anywhere and will stand out in a crowd for its youthful distinction.

Red Shoes

Red shoes are important footwear news. They are showing them in leading stores to wear with smart looking navy suits.

Lots of Color in Sight

On Spring Style Horizon

Look to your colors! You can align yourself with the pastel enthusiasts or you can go colorfully South American. There is a convincing argument in favor of either.

Speaking of the lighter colors, of course you will want at least one, if not several, of the perfectly charming and most flattering pastel wool frocks. Chapters could be written about these fascinating frocks.

A favorite decorative touch for these pastels is the trapunto quilted effect.

When it comes to the startling South American color technique, not even the rainbow or the whole color spectrum is exceeded in the bright hues of red, yellow, purple and blue that are amazingly combined in daring contrast.

There is also a decided showing of vivid russet, brown, tangerine and similar shades in the new color schemes for spring. Lots of purple is used with cerise.

Emphasis is noted on beige this spring, and chamois is a smart new color for coats.

Gibson Girl Sailor Hat

Becomes Fashion 'First'

Well look what's just arrived! None other than the jaunty Gibson Girl sailor hat come to life. Milliners tell you they are "the latest" and that for the fashion "first" you will be seeking for midseason and spring. Wear it atop your pompadour a la Gibson girl, and don't forget the perky little veil that must go with it. Ever so chic tied under the chin.

Chinese Influence

New spring coats and jackets often reflect Chinese influence. Very smart are hip-length coolie jackets, either quilted all over or made of colorful cloth in the new and favored beiges.

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Star Gazers
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