

The Strumpet Sea

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

CHAPTER XXI—Continued

"That one left New Bedford no longer ago than yesterday, ma'am. Or it might just be the day before. We're near home."

Mary nodded, dreaming. "We've been a long time shipmates, Mr. Corkran."

"Aye, ma'am, since the day you came aboard at Honolulu. And I was shipmates with himself before that." His eyes were warm. "There was a fine one! Oh, he was a sore trouble to himself, but fair and fine for all that. I loved that little man."

"He'd be proud of you now. You've changed, Mr. Corkran." She smiled. "You were a pagan, once, you know."

"Well, the sea has a way with a man," he reminded her. "It'll make him or mar him, one way and another. Give it long enough and it will show you what's inside him, every time. Look at Peter Corr, for one, ma'am, and himself for another. Not but what I knew from



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the first that himself was a man under all."

After a little, she asked: "Corkran, what do you think Peter meant to do?"

"Meanness, ma'am. Any kind that offered. He was one would do anything for loot, if he could find the spine for it, or get other men to take the risk for him. No knowing now what all was in his black mind. It's sure he tried to talk Reverence himself into killing the Cap'n. With the Cap'n dead, all else would be in Peter's hands. He would have figured so."

"Do you think he meant Cap'n Corr to fall into the pit that day?"

"Like as not! He'd been up there his own self the day before, after pig; and he must have seen many traps of the like sort in the tussocks. While we were hunting the Cap'n, we found a dozen pits like that one, or less, or maybe bigger; and there was a pig that had fresh fallen in, squealing and grunting in one of them. Aye, the mate might have meant it; but more like he just hoped it. If he'd seen the Cap'n standing on the very lip of the pit, I doubt he'd have had the heart to push him in. It was a trouble to that one that he had not the insides in him to do all the black things he could think of that he'd like to do. He's dead, rest him; but he was a bad one while he lived." He said in sober judgment: "Let that one be for-

got by every decent man forever Amen. Himself is the fine one to remember, and us be the better for remembering."

"I always will," she whispered.

"Aye," Corkran looked at her wisely; but then he said in a new tone: "Himself knew more than most, ma'am. A wise one, that. He knew always more than you might think."

"Well, for one thing, I'm meaning it was a fair fine word he said, to bid me go back and find Cap'n Corr that night; and a brave strong one he was to say it. If he had not bid me go, I'd not have gone; and well he knew it, for well he knew I was his man. And if I'd not gone, Mat Forbes would not. So it was himself sent us back to fetch the Cap'n, and him knowing what he knew about the true thing between the two of you. Aye, it was a grand fine thing for him to do."

She said quietly: "In my arms, at the last, he kept telling me that everything was all right."

"Aye, he would. A man, that." There was a movement aft and he looked that way. Richard had come on deck. Her eyes followed Corkran's, and rested on Richard, and Corkran added quietly beside her: "That was what himself meant, when he told you everything was right. I tell you, he knew."

"Did he, surely?" she asked. "Aye. He knew. When he told me we must go back, he paid the Cap'n a great compliment, ma'am; and yourself too. But you've deserved it, both of you."

She looked at him for a long moment. "How have we deserved it?" she asked slowly.

He smiled at her. "Has the Cap'n said yet one word to you of the thing you're both thinking every minute that you live?"

"No, Corkran."

He touched her arm. "That's how you've deserved the way himself rated you. But—let you not wait too long, nor the Cap'n either. Himself would not want you to wait longer than a fair decent time; and that you've done." And when she did not speak, he said quietly: "Be not uneasy, ma'am. If the Cap'n has not yet said his mind—and his heart—he will."

She met his eyes honestly, smiling a little. "Yes," she said. "I know he will. When we're home." Her eyes were warm and deep. "I know what he will say, Corkran."

"Aye," he assented. "And what you'll say, I'll be bound." He chuckled. "Not that words will be mattering to either one of you."

Richard came toward them, his eyes quickening on Mary as he drew near; but before he reached them, Big Pip called from the cross-trees: "Land ho, Cap'n!" Richard looked up, and Big Pip swung his arm to point. "Dead ahead!" he cried.

A great shout rose, and men went swarming into the rigging to see for themselves the dim blue line on the horizon. Corkran moved forward; but Richard stayed with Mary, and he looked down at her, not speaking. The parrot on Corkran's shoulder watched them standing together, their eyes embracing, forgetting all the world. Head on one side, the bird drawled: "Mighty pretty."

Corkran lifted the parrot down, held it in front of him so that it would not see them. "And why not," he said in mild chiding; "and what right has a bird like you to peek and peer at them? Himself would have it as it is. Whose business is it anyway, but his, and theirs? Hush you, and let be." (THE END)



THE PAPERS OF PRIVATE PURKEY

Dear Ma—

Everything is about the same here in camp, especially the weather which has been of two kinds all winter bad and worse and anybody who gets drafted this spring instead of in midwinter like I did is getting a great break. My feet have taken so much abuse they are unconscious, and don't believe that stuff about this being a machine war as I have never seen so much walking done in peace or war. From my experience I think I have been drafted in a bunions derby.

Nothing makes the boys so sore up hear as when they get a paper and read about all them strikes and walkouts around the country. Every time I here about those guys with nice warm jobs who go home every night to home-cooked chow and yet squawk about the hours and the pay it gives me a pain you know where. Believe me if I was out of the army and had a job where I could quit every night and not saloot nobody I would mow down anybody who tried to sell me the idea I was not getting a square deal.

Well, I am getting used to spending all my time in a uniform now but it is no cinch after being used to having three suits in different colors, one with patched pockets and one with cuffs on the pants all my life. Gee, ma, it would feel swell to get into a white shirt, striped necktie and Sunday suit once in a while. In the army you have to wear the same suit Sunday you wore all week.

I can be transferred to a tank corps if I want to but I don't know whether I would like it much. The work looks too confining and while I would like to get into a serviss that would be easier on my feet a tank aint my idea of no pleasure kar. A friend of mine was in the tanks and he says it is like going to war in a safe. A tank is like a taxi with no springs and with all the upholstering done by a scrap iron man. I guess I would be safer from stray bullets in a tank but I do not think I will sign up unless I thumb a ride and see for myself how it is. Before a soldier joins a tank corps the least the government should do is give him a demonstrashun.

How is the defense program coming on back home? I see where some Washington witnesses say the country is short of planes, guns, tanks and everything. As the old gag goes, this is a fine time to tell me, heh, ma?

I wish the government would turn the whole thing over to Henry Ford. He is the father of quantity production and the mother too, I guess. All you have to give him is a monkey rench a few nuts and a general idea what the war needs and he will turn it out so fast that Uncle Sam will not only have enough planes, tanks and guns for 1941 and 1942 but will be giving previews of the 1943 models.

Do not worry about me as my few is a little better and I am getting used to chilblains. After all I was lucky not to get send with them boys to New Fundlind.

Love,
Oscar.

APPEAL TO REASON
Driver, driver, spare that horn!
Particularly when
You fear eight seconds of delay,
Or, at the outside, TEN!

Italy seems to have developed to a high point the quick-detachable general.

Add similes: as dull as ice hockey to a visitor from London.

LAMENT IN BAD RHYME
I do not know the reason,
But the fact is
When hubby looks at me he
Talks of taxes. —R. P.

Money may be the root of all evil, says R. Roelofs Jr., but it is still the main basis of a good defense.

SONG FROM THE SIDELINES
I'm lost in admiration
Of virile folks like these
Who leap from snowy mountaintops
Upon a pair of skis;
Who skate with zest on icy ponds
And have a tibia cracked
But I'll just stand upon my feet—
I like myself intact!
—Frances M. Miller.

Gene Tunney is now in service at Pensacola. Speaking of defense, nobody ever knew more about it than Gene.

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Queer Oaths
Three Indian women who were witnesses in a case at Port Arthur danced past the judge instead of taking the oath. This, according to their religion, bound them to speak the truth. If they then lied, they would incur the wrath of their ancestors. In British courts Moslems swear on the Koran, and Sikhs on the Bhagvad Gita, their equivalent of the Bible. When a Chinese takes the oath he raises a saucer above his head and smashes it to the floor, saying as the fragments fly: "If I tell a lie, may my soul be shattered, like that saucer, into a thousand fragments."

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Whether to see life as it will give us much consolation, I know not; but the consolation drawn from truth, if any there be, is solid and durable; that which may be derived from error, must be, like its original, fallacious and fugitive.—Samuel Johnson.

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He that is proud of riches is a fool. For if he be exalted above his neighbors because he hath more gold, how much inferior is he to a gold mine! — Jeremy Taylor.

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Lips are no part of the head, only made for a double-leaf door for the mouth.—Lily.

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If you seek truth, you will not seek to gain a victory by every possible means; and when you have found truth, you need not fear being defeated.—Epictetus.

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Vices Become Manners
What once were vices, are now the manners of the day.—Seneca.

Light for All
Those having lamps will pass them on to others.—Plato.

THE SMOKY YEARS

By Alan Le May

Dusty King had been murdered—Dusty, who had been like a father to Bill Roper. Then Roper—who had been a respectable man—turned "outlaw" to "get even."

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