

# The Thickness of a Warp

HOW WES DOUGHTY AND CHARLEY BAKER, RIVAL STRIKERS  
OF SWORDFISH, DECIDED AN EVENTFUL WAGER

By Elmer Brown Mason

THE Applegar and the Mary Ann were both on the port tack, riding sails and foresails full, engines running sweetly, and with but a quarter of a mile of blue Gulf Stream water between them. Ahead of the Applegar a swordfish was finning up. Another vessel—a Portuguese out of Gloucester—was after it. Indeed, the other boat's striker had plainly indicated that he considered it his fish by pointing at it with his pole.

Young Captain Wes Doughty, who did his own striking, laughed to himself in the stand on the bowsprit of the Mary Ann. What did old Captain Pepper Jackson care for a Portuguese's claim to a fish?

Sure enough, Captain Jackson swung across the Gloucester man's bow, and Wes could hear over the calm sea the calls of the mastheader putting the Applegar "on" the fish. Then something happened—Captain Pepper's engine went dead.

The swordfish was going away fast, and Wes Doughty saw that the Applegar could not catch it under sail alone. Then he had an inspiration. Why not iron it himself for Captain Jackson? What more natural, indeed, since Captain Jackson was Eva Jackson's father?

"Take it!" he called over his shoulder.

"Port a leetle!" came from the mastheader, and then: "Steady!"

The helmsman pointed the Mary Ann toward where the rakish fin and tail showed above the surface, and in ten minutes Wes had the fish ironed.

"Swing back ter the Applegar!" he shouted astern.

As the Mary Ann surged abreast of Captain Jackson's vessel, Wes came down from the bowsprit.

"Ironed yer fish fer ye, cap'n!" he called. "Drop a dory an' haul it. Ye c'n

send back my barrel an' warp when it's 'greeable ter ye."

"Ye're a damned liar!" came furiously over the water. "Ye stole my fish, that's what ye done, ye—"

Astonishment struck Wes Doughty dumb. So this was the thanks he got for his kindness! Then he saw the reason. One of his own dories, towing astern, had been dropped when the barrel was thrown overboard, and even then Ed Gooms was hauling the fish.

The young captain turned to blast his own crew, but suddenly it came over him that they could not be expected to read his mind. It was any one's fish when the Applegar broke down—that is, disregarding the Portuguese, who, of course, wasn't to be considered.

There was nothing in the whole incident worthy of more than a passing thought. The crew of the Mary Ann laughed at Captain Pepper and snickered a little at Wes himself. All it amounted to was that a notoriously cranky skipper had vented his resentment on the nearest object, which happened to be his would-be benefactor.

Wes should have forgotten it ten minutes afterward—but he didn't. In some way his pride was hurt. It bothered him all the way to Boston, where he sold at top price. It bothered him all the way back to Dingley's Island, where he had gone to "ice up" at Goddard's. It bothered him now, as he set the tongs firmly about one great cake of ice after another and rocked back on his heels to keep the guide ropes taut until their three hundred pounds of dead weight was directly over the open hatchway of the Mary Ann.

"Danged old fool!" he said aloud, trying to get rid of his obsession by words.

Dan Beard, the cook, stuck his head up

from the forecandle and waved a slice of watermelon. Captain Doughty noted, with disapproval, that Dan was still as drunk as he had been in Boston. The cook bit savagely at the slice of watermelon, missed it by a full foot, looked up reproachfully, and declaimed:

"When glash ish high an' still a risin',  
Safely resh the careful wise un.  
When glash ish low an' fallin' fash,  
Soundly sleeps a careless assh.

"Thash what the 'Coast Pilot' sez," he announced with gravity. Then, shaking his finger to emphasize his words, he added: "Ye mind 'at, Wes Doughty! Ye mind 'at!" and popped back into the forecandle like a rabbit into its burrow.

Captain Doughty glowered at the spot where the cook had been, and then glanced forward to where Frank Gilliam, the engineer, lay with his head on a coil of warp, and the small barrel to which the rope was attached clasped in his arms. And Frank had assured him only an hour before that he hadn't drunk "enough to physic a snipe"!

Well, that came of paying off in Boston; but it was the custom for a skipper to pay off where he sold. Also, by selling in Boston, he got twenty-three cents a pound for his swordfish—two hundred and ninety-nine dollars for each man on board—while the vessels that sold in Portland, the Applegar among them, had to be content with nineteen cents.

"Hold the ice, Wes!" came from the deck of the Mary Ann. "They got to pack in the cracks."

Captain Doughty mopped his forehead and sat down on an empty oil barrel; but his mind refused to sit and rest with him. With the cessation of physical labor, his thoughts whirled on faster than ever. He lived over again, for the thousandth time, the blow to his pride.

Still, what did it matter, after all, if old Pepper Jackson had laid it to him that he had stolen a fish from the Applegar, when he really hadn't? Folks would laugh at him, of course, for trying to do a kindness to the spleeny old fool. That was where he had gone wrong—going out of his way to do a kindness.

"Ain't 'at the Applegar comin' ter ice?" the man on the deck asked, shaking his eyes and gazing to the south.

"T's so. What uv it?" Wes Doughty returned truculently.

"Oh, nothin'," the man answered in offended tones, and pointedly changed the subject. "Guess we'll all be goin' ter the dance ter Long Island ter-night. It's gittin' ready ter blow."

As the Mary Ann cast off from Goddard's dock, the Applegar slid smoothly into her berth. Old Captain Jackson ran to the low bulwarks and shouted after the departing vessel:

"Ye damned fish thief, ye!"

Doughty did not turn his head, although he could feel his cheeks reddening through the tan of the Banks. It was Dan Beard who howled back an answer:

"No use ye gittin' a trip o' fish ef ye're goin' ter sell 'em fer nex' ter nothin'. Nineteen cents ter Po'tland, whar ye sell, an' we git twenty-three cents ter Boston. How 'bout it, Cap'n Pepper? How 'bout it, ye old sea hog?"

## II

WES DOUGHTY'S mood changed as the Mary Ann tore up the bay toward Portland, every inch of canvas drawing and the engine going. The cook had said exactly what he would have liked to say himself, what he would have said if Captain Jackson had not been Eva Jackson's father.

The northwester that was threatening would keep him from sailing for the fishing banks that afternoon. It would keep him at anchor at Long Island, since there was nothing to be gained by bucking bad weather. Well, that would give him an opportunity to see Eva, and to take her to the dance.

He felt his heart leap at the prospect, and then as suddenly go into low. If Charley Baker, who had succeeded to his old job as striker on the Applegar, had arrived first, Eva would have gone with him. Had she not gone with Charley when the Applegar came back from the initial sword-fishing trip of the season? Wes remembered how he had attempted to reproach her, and her answer:

"Well, you warn't here."

It would be different this time. The Mary Ann would be in at Long Island long before Captain Jackson's vessel. Wes would make things clear between them at the dance. Either Eva was going with him, or she wasn't.

The Mary Ann suddenly lost way, and the steady roar of the engine died to agonized hiccups.

"What's come to her?" Wes Doughty called angrily.

Frank Gilliam stuck his head up from the engine room, perfectly sober now that his engine was concerned.

"She's slipped a cog, an' the rotor in the timer's all wee-wahey, consarn her!" he said disgustedly. "Take a couple o' hours ter fix her up."

The engine was not yet running when Captain Doughty ordered the anchor let go off Long Island. The Applegar had passed him half an hour before, and was swinging at her mooring with all sails neatly stowed.

The crew of the Applegar had only had half an hour in which to disseminate the news of the trip, but, as Wes Doughty went toward the home of his married sister, with whom he lived, Uncle Ez Parker barred his way.

"Hear tell ye be strikin' agin fer Cap'n Jackson, Wes!" The old man cackled delightedly at his own witticism. "'Tain't nowise right or proper ter strike fer the Applegar whilst ye're on 'nother vessel, seems ter me!"

Wes glowered, but passed on without a word. Why was it, he asked himself angrily, that what he had meant as a favor should first gain him a tongue-lashing, and then ridicule? Probably the story of Captain Pepper laying it to him that he had stolen a fish from the Applegar, when he had tried really to give the old man one, was going into legend, to be told at the store along with the exploits of Big Bat, out of Boston.

Doughty shivered at the thought, then stiffened with annoyance. Captain Pepper Jackson himself, with Charley Baker at his elbow, stood in the roadway.

The young captain made to pass with a muttered greeting, but the older man stopped him with a raised finger.

"Ye tell 'at drunk cook o' yourn 'at I aim ter gut him like a cod, soon 's he gits sober!" he announced truculently. "I ain't tew old ter do it. Sea hog, hey? I'll sea hog him, consarn—"

"Dan didn't mean no harm," Doughty interrupted, glad that the conversation had not taken a personal turn. "He wuz a leetle mite—"

"Sea hog, he called me! Sea hog! I ain't never stole a fish from nob'dy, like some I cud name!"

"I didn't aim ter steal no fish from ye, Cap'n Jackson," Doughty said earnestly.

"I aimed ter iron 'at fish fer ye, yer engine hev'n' broke down, an'—"

"Mebbe ye did, but I didn't git the fish," the older man replied waspishly. "I misdoubt ye 'tended me ter, since yer own dory was haulin' it. Charley cud hev ironed it, anyways, under sail. 'Tain't none uv yer business ter iron my fish fer me."

"Charley'd hev missed it, no doubt o' 'at," Doughty said insultingly.

Captain Jackson, as Eva's father, was safe from him, but there was no reason why he should not, in his turn, insult some one else.

"I ain't missed a fish — leastwise not when I been put on it right — this hull trip!" Charles Baker said wrathfully.

"I ain't missed none, no matter how I wuz put on," Doughty retorted.

"Ye mean ye got a fish every time ye struck?"

"'At's what I mean."

"Guess ye didn't strike, then, 'less ye wuz sure. Punched 'em all under the bow, mebbe," the other man sneered.

"I ironed every fish we set eyes on," Doughty stated with maddening calmness, and made as if to pass on.

Charley Baker was stung to a challenge.

"I'll bet ye share ag'in' share, next trip, I don't strike as many times as ye do 'ithout gittin' a fish!"

"Every time ye strike an' don't git a fish ter count ag'in' ye? Ef 'at's what ye mean, it's a bet," Doughty accepted instantly.

"'At's what I mean, consarn ye!" The striker of the Applegar turned to Captain Pepper. "Ye'll keep tally o' me, an' be jedge o' the bet?"

"I'll 'blige ye," the old man agreed, "ef it's 'greeable ter Wes."

"Suits me. We c'n choose who ye've a mind ter keep tally o' me on the Mary Ann," Doughty said, and turned on his heel.

This was much better than he could have hoped, he told himself, as he shuffled up the road in his sea boots. At least there was nothing to laugh at in a bet. It would quite overshadow the humorous tale of his unfortunate attempt at kindness.

He opened the door, without knocking, and stepped into his sister's kitchen.

"'Lo, Wes! Hear ye hed words 'ith Cap'n Pepper," she greeted him.

"'Lo, Emma! Warn't nothin'."

"What did ye share?"

"Two ninety-nine."

"Two ninety-nine! Ye mus' hed a good trip o' fish. Well, Eva Jackson's goin' ter the dance 'ith Charley Baker, so I s'pose ye won't be goin'?"

She looked at him with needle-sharp curiosity. Wes stared back at her without answering, and then went toward his room, his head in a whirl. Eva going to the dance with Charley Baker! She *must* have known that the Mary Ann was coming in! With Charley Baker! There must be some mistake!

An hour later, as Wes settled back in a red plush chair at the barber's, and let his head lie on the rest, he was conscious that he was an object of deep interest. Uncle Ez, who was getting his weekly shave, addressed him through the lather that covered the old man's face.

"Hear ye aim ter beat Charley Baker out o' his share, next trip, since he done ye out o' Eva," he tactfully remarked.

Captain Doughty bristled.

"What's Eva got ter do 'ith it?"

"Nothin', I 'lowed, but thar's them as says she's part o' the bet—ye git her back ef ye win."

"She ain't. Why shud she be?"

"No reason, I 'low," drawled Uncle Ez.

"Be ye goin' ter the dance?"

"Mebbe I am."

"Tain't nothin' ter me pessonal," the old man said, with exasperating calmness; "ceptin' it's kinder interestin' ter know who ye'll take!"

### III

It was pride alone that drove Doughty to the dance, that evening—pride and the intention of showing Eva Jackson just how much he cared. He took his place among the unattached males at the end of the hall, and plunged at once into a highly technical discussion of a new type of engine. Thence the conversation drifted inevitably to the bet.

Doughty realized that he was regarded with new respect—more even than was due him as the youngest and most successful captain in the swordfishing fleet. Other bets had been made, and Wes derived a mild glow at finding the Mary Ann favorite over the Applegar. The world began to look less dark to him. He even let his eyes follow Eva Jackson, as she went gracefully through the mazes of the Boston Fancy and Hull's Victory.

He told himself that Eva did not look

very happy. Then he realized his own fatuousness. Of course she was happy! Why shouldn't she be? That she looked entirely adorable he did not permit his thoughts to admit, but he felt it, just the same.

On a sudden impulse, born of bravado, since he was sure that every one was watching him, he crossed over boldly to her for a fox trot—that walking dance introduced by summer rusticators so that they needn't stop talking.

"Ye got here late," she said immediately, in a low voice. "I—I didn't know the Mary Ann wuz comin' ter-night. Heard ye sold ter Boston."

"Engine broke," he answered, conscious of a shortness of breath not due to the dancing. "See ye got someb'dy ter bring ye, jus' the same," he added.

"I'd 'a' waited fer ye ef I'd known ye wuz comin'," she replied, her voice almost a whisper.

Wes's heart missed several beats, and he fell out of step. Then his masculine pride reasserted itself.

"Ye hadn't oughta gone with Charley Baker, ef—ef ye're goin' 'ith me. I kinder thought ye wuz, though I see now I wuz mistook."

"I never said I wuz goin' 'ith ye, Wes," she parried weakly, but he could feel her tremble in his arms.

"Well, ye be!" he stated with sudden resolution. He lost step again, and drew her down on the bench that ran the length of the hall. "Tell me, be ye?"

"Yes," she agreed, and looked bravely up into his eyes. "Didn't ye know I wuz—soon 's ye said ye wanted me, I mean?"

"Course I did," replied Wes. The whole world glowed about him, and he entirely forgot that a moment before he had thought her lost. "We'll git married come winter. I've laid by some money, o' course, an' the next trip o' fish 'll bring me—"

He stopped in the middle of the sentence, remembering his bet.

"Oh-h-h!" she sighed happily. "Oh-h-h! An' it ain't so 'bout ye bettin' an' gamblin', is it? It ain't so ye bet yer share in a hul trip o' fish 'at ye wuz a better striker than Charley Baker, an'—an' 'at the winner o' the bettin' got me?"

"Did he tell ye 'at?"

Wes was fighting for time.

"No, but he asked cud he go 'ith me," Eva babbled on happily. "He said he wuz

goin' ter git double share out o' the next trip. I heared the rest—oh, some'eres. I don't hold 'ith bettin'. Ye didn't make a bet, did ye, Wes?"

"Well, now! Well, now!" Doughty was torn between the desire to justify himself and the feeling that he ought to tell the truth to the girl he had just asked to marry him. "I *did* make a bet. Ye see, I wuz kinder jawed inter it by yer paw."

Eva was sitting upright now, her eyes blazing.

"An' ye ask me ter go 'ith ye after 'at?"

"There warn't nothin' real wrong ter it. 'Twarn't as we say—an' I'm sure ter win. Charley ain't no striker like me!"

For a moment the girl gazed at him wide-eyed. Then she spoke:

"I *hate* ye, Wes Doughty—I jus' *hate* ye, more'n I loved ye! Makin' a bet 'bout me, jus' like I wuz a trip o' fish! I won't never speak ter ye no more 's long 's I live. I'll go 'ith Charley—jus' ter hurt ye!"

"But ye warn't in it, Eva!" Wes explained desperately. "It wuz only—"

But the girl was scurrying across the dance hall floor, while people were staring at him.

Wes rose to his feet and shouldered his way roughly through the dancers to the door. A red mist of rage enveloped him. He would get his hands on Charley, and—but Charley was not outside. Wes turned back to reënter the hall. Dan Beard, the cook, blocked his way.

"Ye go in there an' bring Charley Baker out ter me!" Doughty ordered fiercely. "I aim ter settle 'ith him!"

"Pleased ter 'blige," Dan agreed enthusiastically. "Want I shud bring Cap'n Pepper, too?"

"Ye do 's I bid ye," Doughty said between clenched teeth.

But there was disappointment written on Dan's face when he returned.

"Charley says he won't fight ye till after the bet," he explained. "Then, when he's got yer share, he'll fix ye right. Might hev said he'd stole yer girl, too, seein' the proud way he looks 'ith her settin' nigh him," Dan added tactfully. "Want I shud go an' kick him in the slats an' drag him out here ter ye?"

But Doughty's rage had passed in the roaring down of his world about him. He felt weak, beaten.

"Go git the crew tergether," he directed. "We'll sail at the flood."

"But there's a fair jedgment o' wind," Dan objected, wonder in his eyes. "Blow a jug inside out!"

"Do as I bid ye," Captain Doughty snapped.

In spirit he was already on the Mary Ann, driving her, driving her.

#### IV

FOR ten hours of howling wind and roaring sea Captain Doughty drove the little Mary Ann toward the highlands of George's Bank. Then the wind began to fall and the sea to flatten out. Turning the wheel over to one of the crew, he went forward to the forecandle.

While he fought the sea, he had been too busy for thought. Every wave was a foe to be conquered and left behind. Every blast of wind had to be judged for a sudden luff, if too strong, and then the little Mary Ann had to be straightened back into her course. Mind and body were both in the struggle. There was nothing of time gone by or time to come that mattered; all of him was dedicated to the present.

But now, relaxed in the narrow berth that was so like a coffin, the seas beating against the single plank that separated him from its fury, thoughts, fragments of sentences, came crowding and jostling in on him in spite of his weariness.

"I won't never speak to ye no more 's long 's I live!" "I'll go 'ith Charley!" "Didn't ye know I wuz—soon 's ye said ye wanted me?"

Wes shifted in his narrow prison, groaned aloud, and settled lower on his pillow. The Mary Ann was riding easier now. Why did Dan Beard dance about with a slice of watermelon in each hand? They were at sea, weren't they? Yet here was Eva coming to him with outstretched arms. There had been some trouble—he couldn't quite remember what, but she was looking up into his face.

"Wes! Wes! Wes!" she whispered, and her arms went around his neck.

Captain Doughty smiled in his sleep.

It was night when he woke to the call:

"Your watch, cap'n!"

The Mary Ann was riding on an even keel, and through the open hatchway stars shone. Slipping into his boots, Doughty climbed the short companion ladder to the deck, and gazed about him. The wind had sunk to near a calm and the color of the water told him that he was on George's



Bank. For a moment he studied the night, and then called down into the forecandle:

"Take in jumbo an' mainsail! We'll jog 'long till mornin'."

The engine stilled, a triangular riding sail replaced the mainsail, and the Mary Ann slipped slowly along through the night.

Doughty stood at the wheel, his legs braced far apart, one hand on the spokes. The sea was bathed in the calm that follows storm. A flock of white hags rose from under the bow of the vessel and planed a hundred yards, to light again in the cradle of a wave. A Mother Carey's chicken struck the riding sail and fluttered to the deck, whence, since it was unable to rise from so flat a surface, Wes picked it up and cast it back into the air. A school of blackfish came across the stern not ten feet away, their great black forms rolling to the surface with a windy *pough, pough, pough*, and sinking back beneath the sea.

Doughty glanced at the binnacle light and spun the spokes of the wheel to starboard, letting it come back slowly. Peace had come to him. After all, this was his real home. Why should anything else bother him? Why should he worry over what was ashore three hundred miles away? He had all the sea to sail—great swordfish against which to pit his skill—

The morning found a sea of deep sapphire beneath a cloudless sky. There was not a ripple, barely a ground swell beneath the keel of the little vessel. Doughty busied himself replacing the bibble line on his pole, pounding its pike end straight, and looking over the darts to see that their points were sharp and that they would fit snugly onto the pike.

Dan Beard, who tended warp as well as cooked, rerigged the line and pulley, running from the forestays to the stand on the end of the bowsprit, that carried out the darts to the striker. Then he arranged the little barrels along the side, carefully coiling the hundred fathoms of warp attached to each, that there might be no danger of its tangling or flipping about a man's foot when a swordfish was taking it out.

Swordfish seldom fin up before the sun is high. It was half past eight when the Mary Ann was under way, her engine hitting six knots, the mastheader at the top of the foremast, and the rest of the eight men of the crew, save the helmsman, the cook, and Wes, clustered on the yards.

Fair as was the day, ideal as were all

circumstances for fishing, but a single swordfish finned up before the sun went down. Followed three days of fog, through which the Mary Ann jogged, over a rough sea, toward the Gully, between George's Bank and Brown Bank. They spoke no one until the fourth day, when it scaled up in the evening. There were ten other vessels in sight when the sun goose-egged on the horizon—promise of a clear day to follow.

"There's the Mineola, the Alice N. Wilson, the Lafayette, and the Sybil," Dan said, leaning his bare arms on the nested dories and gazing out through the clear moonlight, "Where thar's Gloucester vessels, thar's fish—ain't no denyin' 'at. Ef thar ain't the ol' Applegar, consarn her—an' the Willard an' Lochinvar comin' up behind her. Leastwise, I reckon it's the Lochinvar—her topmast don't set right. All Po'tland seems to be here. Do ye 'low ye'll speak Cap'n Pepper, Wes?" he concluded impertinently.

"'Low not," Captain Doughty answered shortly.

"Well, I'm goin' visitin' ter the Applegar," Dan announced, "ef ye don't hev no 'jection."

Wes turned on him.

"C'n ye swim?"

"Sure I c'n swim!" the cook answered, then added suspiciously: "Why?"

"Go 'head, then! I jus' wanter ter know, 'cause Cap'n Pepper's liable ter plug ye overboard, an' I'd hate ter lose a cook—callin' ye sich."

As the laughter subsided, a dory bumped against the side of the Mary Ann, and Captain Tolman of the Sphinx, out of Marblehead, came aboard.

"Heard 'round the fleet ye been doin' considerable bettin', Wes," he opened the conversation.

"It's a sayin' not to believe all ye hear," Captain Doughty answered shortly, and changed the subject. "How many fish ye got?"

"Only sixty-eight, an' I been out nigh ter three weeks. I'm goin' in ter-morrer—my ice is failin'. How many ye got?"

"Seven. Six is babies—don't run eighty, even, not talkin' uv a hundred."

"There's twenty babies in mine, too. Don't know what's come ter fish this year; but I got one monster—mus' scale four hundred."

"I got one 'at 'll scale leetle mite more'n

'at—mebbe four fifty," Wes answered. "Where were you in the fog? Here or up ter the highlands?"

"Here or here'bouts. Steamer come close ter me—one o' them thar rum runners. The Ida J. got hit up nigh George's Shoal, an' had ter go in. Lost her main boom, an' was leakin' some."

"Anyb'dy but ye got a trip o' fish?"

"No, 'low not. None o' 'em been out long. They all come after 'at last breeze o' wind."

Conversation languished, and the two captains looked out over the moonlit water in unembarrassed silence.

One of the numerous currents that twist through the Gully—that strange fifteen-mile-wide valley in the sea between George's Bank and Brown Bank—had carried the Mary Ann to within a hundred yards of the Applegar. As Wes let his eyes rest on Captain Pepper's vessel, he visualized Charley Baker, as happy as he himself was miserable. Then he caught himself up sternly. Perhaps Charley wasn't entirely happy. He might have missed a fish.

There was a sudden commotion on the deck of the Applegar.

"What's happenin' yan?" Captain Totman queried.

"Catchin' a shark, mebbe," Wes suggested, and rose to his feet, the better to look.

There was a howl of rage, and furious words came over the water:

"Sea hog—consarn ye—gut ye wide open!"

This was followed by a splash.

"'At old fool hez threw Dan overboard an' cast off his dory," Wes said wrathfully.

The dripping figure of a man climbed over the side of the drifting dory, shook his fist, shouted a volley of abuse back at the Applegar, and then bent to the oars. Wes met the cook as he climbed onto the deck.

"Did they lay hands on ye, Dan?" he asked.

"No, sir!" Dan answered, with spirit. "Not a one o' 'em teched me—not a one!"

"How come ye in the water?"

"I plugged overside," Dan explained calmly. "One thing an' 'nother led ter ol' Pepper sayin' he'd throw me overboard. Mebbe 'twas 'cause I ast him did he 'low he'd git more'n three cents fer his trip o' fish this time. He says he'd throw me overboard. I says I bet he wouldn't. He says he bet me ten dollars he'd do it now. I sez I take his bet—an' plugged overside.

'Low I ain't goin' back fer 'at bet, though. It c'n wait!"

"Go dry ye out," Doughty said, uncertain whether to laugh or to feel hurt in his dignity as captain of the Mary Ann.

Dan fired a parting shot as he popped down the hatchway.

"The Applegar shud hev hied nineteen fish, but Charley Baker missed one!"

The weather held good, the next morning, and the fish were finning up. The Mary Ann had nine by noon, and ironed twelve more at the slack, circling around an anchored halibutter's dories while they hauled trawl.

The Applegar was never far away, so that the mastheader checked the number of fish it got—thirteen—and noted that Charley Baker made no misses.

Then the tide turned, filling the Gully with rips and swirling currents that made the sea look like a piece of crazy patchwork. Not another fish finned up. Twice the mastheader put the vessel "on," only to yell down, a moment later:

"All right—a shark!"

He had seen the fin, straighter than that of a swordfish, and the wake kicked up by the steady flip of the shark's tail under water.

Once the Mary Ann came smack upon a great greenish shark sleeping on the surface, and only just in time did Wes restrain himself from slapping it with the reverse end of his pole, remembering that every strike that did not put the dart into a swordfish would count against him.

The fleet numbered twenty-two sail, next morning. Fish were finning up all day around the anchored halibutter, but there were too many vessels for any one of them to get a large number. Still, the Mary Ann had three of her four dories continually out.

Late in the afternoon Dan got caught in the warp. It was his own fault, of course. He raised a foot from the deck as he picked up a handful of the hundred-fathom length to toss it overboard, to be followed by its keg. The warp whipped about his ankle. He managed to jerk just enough slack between him and the fish to take a turn around a cleat, so that the strain of the monster on the other end parted it. Had he gone into the sea, his one chance of life lay in a dory cutting the line between him and the towing fish.

Doughty came down from the bowsprit,

the better to curse the cook for his carelessness, and then rushed back at a warning cry from the mastheader. The swordfish was close ahead, and Doughty had barely time to pick up his pole before the Mary Ann was on top of it—and his hasty stroke missed it!

That night all the fleet knew that Wes Doughty and Charley Baker were tied with one miss apiece.

## V

THE Mary Ann did not lie to that night, but jogged slowly on as darkness fell. Wes had fifty fish in the hold for a week's work. The entire swordfishing fleet, apparently, would soon be concentrated in the Gully. He took a fisherman's chance on what he had seen. Every swordfish ironed, that day, had been headed north. To the north Captain Doughty guided his vessel.

At the captain's watch, at midnight, the Mary Ann lay to. There was phosphorescence in the water, and several large sharks passed back and forth around the little vessel, not daring to approach too close, yet held by the smell of the dressed swordfish in the hold. The stars looked very near to Doughty as he leaned against the nested dories, smoking his pipe. There was a soft mood on him—a feeling of freedom, now that he had left the rest of the fleet behind.

He caught himself thinking of Eva—of the flash of wrath that had succeeded her softness, of the fire in her eyes. She certainly could speak out when she wanted to! Why not, since she was old Pepper's daughter? Charley Baker would have his hands full!

Wes checked this line of thought sternly, and guided his mind into other channels.

The bet would probably be a tie, now. He didn't intend to miss any more fish, and Charley Baker was a careful soul. It was lucky for Charley that he had a good mastheader to put the vessel exactly "on." Wes had noticed that he never flung his pole, but only punched the fish directly under the bow.

After all, it would be just as well if the bet did result in a tie. Charley would need all his money, if he were going to be married. Eva liked pretty clothes.

Wes Doughty sighed helplessly. Why would his thoughts always come near to Eva? Well, his watch was over.

There was no other vessel in sight, next morning, when the crew of the Mary Ann

broke out the forward hatch to fill with ice and stow away the swordfish of the day before, left on deck all night to get rid of the body heat. Wes took his place on the bowsprit, and the engine started.

The topmasts of another schooner pierced the mystery of the horizon. The mastheader's voice put an end to Wes's speculation as to its identity. A swordfish was finning up dead ahead—two swordfish—no, three!

"Stabb'rd a leetle," came from up above. "Steady! Port! Hard a port!"

Wes drove at the fish, aiming near but not at the backbone. There was a thud, as of a buckshot striking against taut leather, that told him the fish was ironed. He hauled in his pole by the bibble line, reached behind him for the dart that hung ready in a sling, and shoved it upon the pike of the pole, looping the warp in a leather strap halfway up its length, and catching it in a clasp on the edge of his stand, so as to keep it from trailing in the water.

Hardly had he rerigged when the Mary Ann was on the second fish. The third was less than a hundred yards away. Three dories were out, and the fourth was swung overside five minutes later, as another fish was ironed.

"Stabb'rd!" shouted the mastheader. "All the swordfish in the world is dead ahead!" he called down to Doughty. "Seven—no, eight, nine—"

There were swordfish everywhere. Doughty waved the mastheader away from two small fins to pursue two huge ones. No attempt was made to pick up the dories. The brilliant red kegs from the Mary Ann dotted the sea, twisting about in circles, bobbing beneath the surface, or trailing away to the south—the direction in which a swordfish nearly always goes when ironed.

"Ain't no more bar'ls," Dan called finally.

The Mary Ann began to pick up her dories. No sooner was the fish strapped to one of them swung aboard the schooner than the boat was turned loose after another wildly gyrating keg.

Blue barrels began to appear floating among the red ones. Wes recognized them as belonging to the Applegar. He watched the vessel long enough to see Charley punch down from the bowsprit; then another fish claimed his attention.



For three hours the chase went on as hotly as at the beginning. Flocks of hags hovered over the waves, and sharks circled about the hauling dories. The mastheader was hoarse from calling his directions when at last there came a lull.

Doughty flexed the muscles of his right arm, sore from darting the heavy pole, and glanced at the Applegar, a hundred and fifty yards to the north.

Charley Baker was getting ready to iron a fish. Wes, as a fellow professional, recognized that it was a difficult shot, since the fish was coming straight at the Applegar's striker.

At just the right moment he punched down. The pole must have hit the backbone a glancing blow, as it forced the dart through the swordfish, for it broke off short. There was another fish fifty yards ahead, and Charley yelled:

"Pole! New pole!"

The warp tender lost his head, dropped the coil of warp he was about to throw overboard, and, picking up a new pole, ran out to the bowsprit.

The rest was like a picture flashed across the silver screen. The warp ran out furiously, caught, and went into a tangle. Captain Pepper Jackson left the wheel of the Applegar and ran forward, cursing. He threw the keg overboard, and reached to untangle the warp when a loop of it whipped about his thighs. He had time only to twist his hands into the rope between himself and the fish when he was overboard, towing toward the Mary Ann, the trailing barrel drawing the warp tight about his hips.

There was no dory at the moment near either vessel that might have cut the warp ahead of the old captain's tensely straining arms. Had not the fish been "boned," it would have sounded at once, dragging him fathoms deep. The clutch of neither of those desperate hands dared relax long enough to draw a knife. Captain Pepper Jackson was doomed!

The picture flashed before Doughty's eyes.

"Put me on him!" he heard his own voice call, and the Mary Ann swung to the north.

Even then Wes did not know what to do. Jump with a knife at that thin warp, and try to cut it above those pitiful clenching hands? There was not one chance in a million!

Captain Pepper was only ten yards away, coming like a motor boat.

"Steady!" called the mastheader, and instinctively Doughty raised his pole.

With the feel of it, brain and hand suddenly correlated. If he could cut even a strand of the warp with the dart, it would part!

There was no time for thought. The towing man was clearing the bow of the Mary Ann. Doughty let drive with all his strength at the thin line beyond the twisted hands.

For a breath he thought that he had struck Captain Pepper himself as the old man went beneath the water. Then a voice yelled:

"Fish gone down!"

A head popped up above the sea, the schooner swept on, and the helmsman hauled Captain Pepper up over the stern.

Doughty could think of nothing to say to the white-faced, dripping old man who stood swaying, one hand on the wheel to steady himself, the other still holding the clean-cut end of warp, while Ed Gooms slashed the rest free from about his hips.

"Well, 'at's once I struck an' didn't git no fish!" he managed at last.

"Low 'at's so," Captain Pepper agreed unsteadily. "Wudn't be no surprise ter me ef Charley held ye ter 'at. I'm 'bliged ter ye, jus' same. Yes, I'm 'bliged ter ye!"

"Warn't nothin'," Doughty answered stiffly. "Sorry I ain't got a dory ter take ye ter the Applegar, mine all bein' out. Here comes one uv yourn, though."

And that was all.

Twilight came down on the sea at the end of the most profitable day Captain Doughty had ever known. There were forty great swordfish, their swords cut off and their tails and fins trimmed away, filling the deck of the Mary Ann from stem to stern. Six men were deftly cleaning them, while the sea all about was fluttering with Mother Carey's chickens—the butter-flies of the deep—and grim sharks circled to snap at the offal as it went overboard. They were busy on the deck of the Applegar, too, but men on both vessels paused in their tasks as the two little schooners drifted close together, and Captain Pepper hailed:

"How many ye got, Cap'n Doughty?"

"Forty, ter-day," Doughty answered. It was the first time Captain Jackson had

ever given him his title. "How many ye git, cap'n?"

"Thirty-two, ter-day; but I mean how many ye got in all?"

"Ninety, Cap'n Jackson."

"I got eighty-eight. D'ye aim ter sail ter-night?"

"Thinkin' 'bout so doin'," Doughty answered.

"Wa-all, I 'low I'll stay till I git me a couple more fish. Ye'll git a good price, Wes."

The two vessels began to drift apart. Dan called out over the water:

"Ye miss any fish, Charley?"

"None I struck at," came back the prompt answer.

"Then the bet's a tie," Dan howled over the rapidly broadening space, "less ye miss one uv 'em two fish Cap'n Pepper wants. Ye've hed *some* luck!"

"I seed Wes strike once ter-day when he didn't iron no fish," Charley called back vindictively. "Ye'll mind what the bet was!"

"Ye damned, thievin', short lobster sellin' sea lawyer!" Dan howled. "Ye—"

But the Applegar had drifted out of hearing.

## VI

NEXT day, with a half gale behind her, the Mary Ann blew into Portland. Captain Wes Doughty tied up at Commercial Wharf after the fastest trip he had ever made from the Banks. He got top price for his fish. The shares were three hundred and seventeen dollars per man, even with one-fifth to the vessel and a share to the engine.

The crew were paid off and departed for Long Island—with the exception of Dan. He had acquired a bottle of White Mule, together with two questionable friends, who claimed to be fishermen, but whose hands were slim, and whose jargon smacked of the poolroom. Doughty unceremoniously sent them about their business, threw the half empty bottle overboard, and placed the cook—none too gently—in his bunk on the Mary Ann.

After that there was nothing for him to do. Of course, he might have caught the late boat to Long Island, an hour from Portland, but what was the use? The Mary Ann would be reprovisioned in the morning, and would sail for Goddard's in the afternoon, to ice up for another trip.

Besides, the crew would have spread the story of his rescue of Captain Pepper. It seemed to him that he could actually hear Uncle Ez's drawling voice:

"Heard ye gone inter the life savin' business, Wes!"

A voice at his side put an end to the imaginary one.

"Is this Captain Doughty?"

"Low 'tis," Wes answered suspiciously.

"I'm a reporter from the *Times-Dispatch*. Hear you rescued a man who got tangled in a rope that a swordfish pulled overboard. Can you tell me something about it?"

"No," said Doughty shortly, and shouldered his way past.

He dined at the hotel that fishermen patronize, and then went to a movie. The light hurt his eyes, and he could not follow the play. It dealt with a love affair in high society, and the heroine was not in the least like Eva.

Back in his room at the hotel, sleep would not come to him, though it was long past the time when he would have set the watches on the Mary Ann. His three-quarter-size bed seemed as broad as the whole Atlantic, and the sheets were slippery. What would Eva have to say of his rescue of her father? She would put it down to his feelings for her, no doubt.

"Well, I'd hev done the same fer any man—even a Portygee," Wes said aloud.

Then there was the matter of the bet. Would he have to surrender his share to Charley Baker? Would Captain Pepper, judge of the bet, so rule?

Even if he lost, what did money matter to him? He had nothing to save for now. One more day, and he would be out to sea again. The Mary Ann was the nicest, most wholesome vessel on the Banks. It must be nearly time for his watch. Dan would call him, though.

Doughty lingered in the barber chair, the next morning, as long as possible. He even submitted to a facial massage, which left the administrator rubbing his finger tips. Then, automatically, Wes's feet carried him to Commercial Wharf. He did not go up the street that led out upon the dock, however, but followed the water along a narrow path, past ancient buildings with rickety stairs climbing precariously up their fronts. From halfway along he could see the topmasts of several fishing schooners.

He quickened his step. Other sword-fishermen must have got in during the night.

"Wes!" A voice spoke his name softly, and then again: "Wes!"

Doughty stopped, his heart rising into his throat. Eva was standing under one of the rotting stairways.

"What ye doin' here, Eva?" he asked breathlessly.

"I been waitin' fer ye—been waitin' a long time."

There was a sob in the words.

"Fer me?"

"Yeah. I—I come ter 'pologize; but ef ye're goin' ter be spleeny—"

A great light had dawned on Wes Doughty. He took one step forward and gathered Eva into his arms.

There was no one on the old rotting wharf to disturb the two lovers. Somehow both their tongues became loosened, and they both talked at the same time—with intervals.

Half an hour went past. Then Eva suddenly raised her head and gazed sharply up the dock.

"That sounds just like paw," she said suspiciously. "The Applegar must 'a' come in."

"Sounds like a cat fight," Wes contributed. "'Low we bes' go see inter it."

As they drew nearer, the uproar increased in volume. Words and sentences were distinguishable:

"Not a damned cent d'ye get, ye smart Aleck—not a damned cent!" said the voice of Captain Pepper Jackson.

"Ye give me my share, my two hundred thirty dollars," shrieked Charley Baker. "Ye know ye made me miss them two las' fish! Ye yawed the vessel a purpose jus's I struck!"

"Ye're right I did, ye sea lawyer!" howled Captain Pepper. "I staid ter the Banks jus' ter make ye miss them two fish, so's Wes Doughty cud rub yer nose in the dirt. Come an' git yer share ef ye dast!" the old man taunted, waving a wad of bills in his striker's face.

Charley Baker snatched at them, missed, and struck at Captain Pepper. The next moment he went off the dock, hitting the water with a resounding splash. Wes Doughty blew on his fist and turned to the old man.

"'Low I win 'at air bet?" he queried.

"By the thickness uv a warp!" Captain Pepper answered, and shoved the bills into his hand.

---

### AMERICA'S DESTINY

On rock foundations by the Fathers laid  
With tireless toil of virile brain and brawn,  
Our stalwart nation, deepening, broadening out,  
Faces the future with augmented power,  
Impervious to winds and waves of time.

Though petty policies and verbal tilts—  
Foes to the wisdom of all high debate—  
Oft mar the dignity which should prevail  
When the great councils of the nation meet,  
Yet these are transient, and must flash and fade  
Like the heat lightning from a summer sky.

America's majestic arms infold  
People of every creed and every clime,  
And her deep-throated voice, through stress or storm,  
Reaches the utmost boundaries of the globe.

Therefore with head erect and fetterless feet  
She marches 'on, triumphant, proud, supreme,  
To meet the destiny of years unborn!

*William Hamilton Hayne*