



*Lives threatened by the plunging of a mean whale, the harpooner and the second mate drop their fierce rivalry*

# Javelin of Death

By CAPTAIN DINGLE

“WANT any more?”  
“No, damn your eyes! You’ve got me now, but I’ll take my time and get you for this!”

The fight had been looming up all the cruise, and it came off at last after a weary day when the *Narwhal* had cut-in three whales. Tired and

hungry men gladly allowed a smoking supper of doughnuts fried in whale oil to grow cold in order to watch that battle of giants; and now that the second mate, Radley, lay in a crumpled heap at the feet of Peters, the harpooner, the crowd moved regretfully toward the forecandle scuttle, sorry it was so soon over.

The harpooner stepped aside and walked aft, bent upon his own supper. The fight over, he was not the man to nurse the cause of it any further.

He had barely passed the try-works when a boy's shout of warning rang in his ears. He turned swiftly, glimpsed running figures and vaguely saw his late antagonist fumbling at the fife-rail. Then a crushing blow on the head felled him, and he pitched headlong to the deck as an iron belaying-pin clattered against the brick base of the try-pots.

When Peters sat up, his head ringing like a released spiral spring, a mob of men surged around him, and in the middle they bustled and thumped Radley until he faced his victim.

Something of the fear of death clouded the second mate's scowling visage. He looked anxiously toward the poop as if he hoped for help to come from that direction. It was his own watch on deck; the other officers, harpooners, carpenter, and the rest of the afterguard were at supper. The poop was deserted except for the lone figure at the wheel. A growing rumble of anger among the men sent a shiver down his spine. Peters got up stiffly.

"Let him go, fellows," he said, looking hard into the eyes of Radley. "He'll remember what he's done after a bit, and he won't enjoy the smell of himself."

Both excellent whalemén, it was more professional jealousy than anything else that had set Radley and Peters by the ears. Nantucket had bred them both, and they had held high records in the whalingest of whaling communities while sailing in separate ships.

There was, too, a reason for Peters' refusal to exact penance for the second mate's treacherous attempt on him. To complain to the skipper about that unseamanlike end to a sailorly scrap might mean that Radley would be disgraced, for the *Narwhal's* skipper had his own downright ideas on man's dealings with man. He was in the whaling business to make a quick competence, and a warring, simmering crew was a serious obstacle in his way.

There was no doubt that he would punish Radley's action by disgracing him, and that must inevitably finish the rivalry that already had the ship divided into hot factions. There would be no chance of Peters losing his place at the head of the *Narwhal's* expert whalemén; nobody else was anywhere near Radley; no man could hope to

overtake the big harpooner's lead.

And that was the great reason which prompted Peters to heap coals of fire on the second mate's head. He would not accept an advantage won by reason of another man's blind anger. He had made no mistake, either, when he said that Radley would not admire himself when he cooled off and remembered what he had done.

**T**HE harpooner came on deck after supper, lighted his pipe at the galley and took his customary seat on the spare topmast in the port waterways. Here he always sat when neither on watch nor asleep. For one thing it was immediately beneath the davits of his own boat; for another thing it was also the resting place—when rest was possible—of his son, the youngster whose shout had warned him of the belaying-pin too late to dodge.

Here Peters strove daily to make a sailor and a whaleman of the boy, and success was coming. Already the young sapling promised to outgrow the parent tree. Wiry, whalebone and whipcord like his father, young Eph Peters already pulled number two oar in the second mate's boat, and, but for the close rivalry between them and the mate's boat of which his father was harpooner, would have before now had his chance with the "iron."

"Yer head hurt much, dad?" asked Eph, sitting in his accustomed place.

"Don't hurt, son. My head's too blame tough to crack as easy as that. But you hollered too late. Might have missed me if I hadn't turned 'round. Forget it. How fur have ye got with them hitches an' knots?"

"I ain't done no hitches ner no knots this watch. What d'ye think I am? Think I kin fool with pieces o' rattlin' stuff an' whale-line while I'm thinkin' of that Radley dog? Just wait till we're fast to a whale. I'll let a hole through him wi' the spare harpoon!"

"If you do, son, I'll hang you up myself!" said Peters very slowly and very quietly. "You'll do your bit the same as always, and never forget that Mr. Radley's second mate o' this ship, an' officer in charge o' your boat. And you ain't going to forget that Mr. Radley and me's nip an' tuck fer high boat this cruise, an' I ain't going to have it said that my son helped me to beat his own

boat by playin' the dog. Git on with your larin', son, and likely you'll be a harpooner yet afore the cruise's up."

To a sailor composed of bone and red blood, humiliation hurts more than a score of husky physical wallopings, and Mr. Radley was a man of that kind. He took his supper alone, undergoing all the bitterness of self-reproach. It was not in him to immediately realize the true sportsmanship underlying Peters' refusal to make capital out of the flying belaying-pin; rather it seemed to him a deliberate assertion of superiority on the part of an inferior. The idea obsessed him, until long before a wakeful watch below was up he had taken to himself the role of the aggrieved party, and his mood was one of surly, smoldering anger, wholly foreign to him in his normal condition.

Thus, when the skipper saw him in the early morning, for the first time since the combat, and demanded to know the cause of his battered and bruised face, Radley told part of the story only, and that part calculated to arouse sympathy toward himself and official displeasure toward Peters. He led the skipper to believe that the harpooner had led the whole watch, or more particularly Peters' boat crew, in an unprovoked attack upon him.

Fully aware of the intense rivalry between the two men, the skipper was inclined to attribute the whole thing to that cause and to judge any such offense as leniently as possible. But, being human, he could not help being influenced slightly by the first version of the story told to him. The other man's version would have to be strongly stated to overcome first impressions. Besides, Mr. Radley was second officer of the ship; Peters was only a member of the afterguard, ex officio as it were by reason of being a harpooner.

"We'll settle this matter in the forenoon watch, Mr. Radley," the skipper said. "You were saying that young Peters is almost ready to have a chance with the 'iron,' weren't you?"

"He's as fit right now as his father is, sir," returned Radley, his eagerness cropping out in spite of himself.

"Then maybe we'll shift your harpooner into the mate's boat, and give the youngster his chance with you. If this business started as you say it did, it won't do any harm to give Peters a lesson by

keeping him on board the ship next time we lower away."

**I**N whaler fashion the captain and mates ate breakfast at a first table, the harpooners, carpenter, sailmaker, and cooper coming into a second sitting when the others were through. The ship was under cruising rig, jogging serenely through the placid waters of the northwestern Pacific with three lookouts aloft, the tension of momentary expectation pervading all hands.

The smell of whale was in the air. The fires under the try-pots were never cold for many daylight hours together on the Bonin grounds.

Harpooners overhauled irons and lines, seeing that the harpoons were ready to hand in the crotch on the starboard bow of their boats, assuring themselves that each tub of line was snugly coiled ready for running. Seamen looked to oars, to make quite sure that none had been cracked or sprung in the previous day's service.

Peters worked over a bent and twisted soft iron harpoon head by the forward crane of his boat; young Eph, to his wondering surprise, was given a similar job at his own boat, right across the deck from his father.

From time to time the youngster glanced across as if unable to restrain his impatience to impart his great hope to his parent. Everything pointed to his getting the chance he had dreamed of, the hurling of his first harpoon at a living target.

The carpenter made the rounds of the boats, handing each harpooner the deadly bomb-lance that is reserved for dire extremity. This horribly efficient weapon, when hurled into the side of the whale, nearly always means the end of the chase; for a charge of explosive is carried in the head, a trigger is set which is tripped by the whale's own skin on entering, and in an instant an eruption takes place inside the leviathan that rarely misses a vital part.

Peters had the old whaleman's dislike for such a weapon. He decidedly preferred to turn his fish fin-out by the orthodox methods, and used the deadly tool under silent protest.

Aft on the short poop the mates were clustered, looking at each other inquiringly, and from each other to the companionway by which the skipper must emerge from the cabin. It was

apparent that something was afoot apart from the daily routine, and Radley revealed his knowledge of the business by his nervous aloofness.

Presently the skipper stepped out of the companionway, spoke to his officers, and immediately the mate roared out:

“All hands muster aft! Bear a hand now!” and evinced utter astonishment at his own order.

Blankly the men looked at each other as they trooped aft and clustered in a milling mob at the break of the poop. Young Peters alone grinned, for he was now certain that promotion was afoot, and he blushed boyishly at the thought that he was the most likely candidate, else why had he been told off to do a harpooner’s job. Who the unlucky man to be disgraced was bothered him but little.

Peters hung on the edge of the crowd, still fingering his harpoon-head, as mystified as his mates at the unheard-of departure from sea custom. Neither punishment, promotion, nor any other matter of ship’s business that he knew of called for a muster of all hands at two bells in the forenoon watch on the whaling grounds. There was never time for such things; even at that moment any or all of the three lookouts might set the ship in a frenzy of action by a long-drawn “Blo-oo-ow, ah blo-oo-ow!”

“Men,” began the captain, holding up a hand, “an assault has been committed by one officer on another. Those men who saw the trouble from the beginning, stand over to starboard; the rest may carry on with their jobs.”

The men who had seen the fight—and they numbered the entire ship’s company forward except the helmsman—shuffled uneasily and looked disconcertedly at the officers. Radley’s bruised face flushed a shade deeper beneath the tan, and he avoided the men’s direct gaze.

Peters started as the words were uttered, and an angry flush suffused his powerful countenance while he sharply scrutinized every man around him. To him, the captain’s speech meant that some busybody had carried the tale of the second mate’s hot-headed and unmanly act right to the fountain of authority, and he boiled at the thought.

He flashed a glance at young Eph, recalling the youngster’s heated talk; but Eph looked as surprised as the rest, though he could not and did not try to hide his pleasurable anticipation of promotion. What puzzled the boy was, who was to

be disgraced for his benefit? Then, suddenly, through his mind flashed the joyful thought that Radley was to be punished, thanks to the unknown tale-carrier, and one of the harpooners would be moved up into the place of the third mate, who, of course, would fill Radley’s vacant berth. The harpooner could scarcely be any other than his father, and he, Eph, would achieve his ambition of filling the old man’s shoes to complete the family triumph.

“Now men, shake a leg,” repeated the skipper impatiently, for not a man had moved over. “I want the men who manhandled Mr. Radley. If I have to find them out myself, I shall make their punishment something to remember. Step out now.”

If the crowd were uneasy before, they were stupefied now. Dumbly, with open mouths, they stared at the harpooner, who in turn stared in titter unbelief in his own ears at the skipper.

Not a man there but had guessed he was expected to bear witness against the second mate; truly, their only scruple would be that Peters did not want the unpleasant business known to the captain at all. But “The men who had manhandled Mr. Radley!” And they were to be punished! That put another complexion on the matter, and a deep growl rumbled around the crowd.

Peters, still dumfounded, fingered his harpoon nervously and started toward the ladder, bound to have his doubts set right.

“Stay down there, Peters!” the skipper said, and extended a flat palm toward the ladder.

The growl threatened to burst into furious remonstrance at the obvious twist the skipper had gotten into his yarn. The two men who had led in hustling Radley after the belaying-pin left his hand stepped aside and began calling off names of those who had so willingly lent a hand. The muttering subsided; a heavy silence hung over the clustered men in the waist. Then, pipe-like and clear, far overhead, from fore and main crow’s nest simultaneously rang the electrifying hail—

“A-ahblo-oo-ow!”

“Where away?” The skipper’s mind was set on whales now; not all the black eyes and bruised noses in the whaling industry could distract his attention from his legitimate business.

“Lone bull down to th’ sou’west!”

“Lower away!” pealed the order, given by the

skipper and echoed by the first mate as that important officer sprang to his own boat.

If but one boat were to be lowered, it must be his, of course. Peters swiftly clapped his iron on to the shaft and leaped to the bulwarks in readiness.

"You'll stay aboard this time," the skipper called to the chief mate. "Mr. Radley and the third mate will be enough; you will be third boat, if it's wanted."

For a moment the mate looked aggrieved; then he grinned. If he always had gone out with his own boat, he would have been in the contest for high catch, and on a level with his harpooner; but the skipper sometimes took a notion to chase a whale himself, and on those occasions he replaced the mate.

So, while Peters always went along to hurl the harpoon, only a percentage of the boat's catch fell to the credit of the chief mate. Therefore it was only his pride that suffered a little when he was ordered to stay for possible third boat. Peters saw the order from a different angle. He had refrained from taking advantage of Radley's mean action, from a sportsman's motive; he saw the result now. The second mate had not felt the same scruples.

Peters stood moodily watching the chase from the bulwarks by his boat, cold rage in his heart. The mate walked aft with a philosophical air and took the place of the skipper who was on his way aloft with binoculars to watch and direct the chase.

The boats had sailed on leaving the ship, and as long as the sails were visible it was evidence that they had not yet got fast to the whale. Then first one sail was lowered and rolled up, and in a few minutes the other followed, and Peters' interest in the boats smothered his personal feelings. He glanced aloft to the main crow's nest and saw the skipper intently watching the maneuvers of the boats.

Presently a hail carried down, and the mate sprang to alert attention.

"Lower away!" ordered the skipper. "The third mate's in trouble!"

Peters hesitated while the boat's crew jumped to the tackles.

"In with you!" cried the mate, springing into the stern-sheets of the boat, and the harpooner silently took his place.

"Shove off! Give way!" And the boat was thrust clear while a couple of hands stepped the mast and set the spritsail.

Away she sped, and the breeze that was barely sufficient to move the sluggish old whaleship heeled the boat down to the rail and drove her through the sparkling seas with a boiling spout of spray at her stem.

"What's the trouble, Peters?" sang out the mate, as the first two boats rose into plainer view.

"Fighting whale, sir! Third mate's boat's busted, and Radley looks to have his hands full."

"Better have the bomb-lance handy then. That's the stuff for mean whales!" advised the mate, and edged his boat a bit to windward.

**T**HE whale sounded just as the harpooner caught a glimpse of his black bulk, and the boat was luffed to stop her way until the place where he reappeared was discernible. Then the tub-oarsman sang out:

"There's the third mate's boat, down to loo'ard, sir. She's awash, and there's some men hanging onto her!"

The helm was shifted, and the boat buzzed down to assist, but the third mate was a real whaleman and could endure several more hours in the water if only the whale that put him there were safely ironed.

"We're all right for a while," he hailed. "Better get fast, or you'll lose him. Radley ain't got him yet!"

"Blo-oo-ow!" shouted Peters, with an arm outflung toward the far side of the second mate's boat.

The blunt snout of an enormous cachalot rose from the water, and in a moment it was plain that Radley had an iron in him, for the boat gradually pulled up closer to the whale.

Then Peters' announcement that it was a fighting whale was amply justified. Without warning, gathering way like a torpedo boat, the whale charged fair at his tormentor and the chief mate's crew held their breath.

Peters fixed his eyes upon a slight, springy figure in the bows of the threatened boat, and his grim face relaxed. Eph bent to his bow oar like a veteran; the onrush of the murderous cachalot left him as cool as even his father and mentor could have wished him to be.

A wild shout of warning pealed out as the boat backed off and let the whale charge by a scant oar's length away. The slackened whale-line fouled the oars. Eph's ash loom was flung high in the air, and the youngster himself was hurled over the side of the steeply heeling boat, a turn of the line about his shoulders.

Stoic that he was, Peters uttered no sound, simply flashing a look of appeal to his officer. Then he straightened up and stared at the scene of disaster with incredulous eyes.

As the writhing line snatched Eph from his thwart, seemingly to certain death, Radley left his hold on the steering oar, seized the boat-knife, and in a flash dived straight into the swirling froth that surged over the boy's disappearing form. The boat, heeling giddily to the strain of the snarled line, suddenly righted; the line hung down slack; then two heads broke water together, and a howl of defiance to the whale burst forth as four pairs of steel-muscled arms hauled Eph and Radley aboard.

The thing had taken little time. The men were back at the oars, as if nothing uncommon had happened, when a shot from the mate's boat warned them that the whale was coming again. It was high time to step in if the mate was to strike a blow, and he set his oars in motion.

"Great Jonah! See that thar' whale!" gasped the Bowman, glancing over his shoulder.

Again the furious whale bore down on the second mate's boat, and Radley stood up to take a desperate chance with the lance. But the cachalot has a frontal piece impervious to the sharpest blade. The long lance struck, fell back into the water, and in an instant the great blunt head crashed into the boat, smashing it to loose staves and tossing all hands broadcast.

"Give way! Oh, crack your backs!" urged the mate, and a running string of encouraging oaths then came through the clenched teeth of Peters, himself a cracking, swollen-veined bunch of straining sinew.

Once more the whale turned and charged at the fragments of the boat and burst among the planks and oars and swimming men like a mad bull through a paper fence. A malignant devil had taken charge of him and he sought out men from the wreckage with fiendish cleverness.

Around him the sea rolled and tumbled, great

clouds of spray wreathing him as in a mist. But through the mist objects flashed at intervals, and Radley could be seen, farflung in the crash, now swimming frantically to get out of the track of the monster.

Skillfully maneuvering, the mate swept his boat around until the whale presented a fair mark for the harpooner. Then he saw what had been hidden before. On the whale's streaming back, hanging on desperately to the shaft of a planted iron, was young Peters, and his white face shone out like an ivory mask against the gleaming black hide.

"My God, Peters!" groaned the mate as the boat surged near. "You can't plant that bomb-lance without—"

The harpooner looked round swiftly, and his grim face paled. The one comprehensive glance showed him Eph's body, covering the vital area of black skin beneath which beat the whale's mighty heart; showed him, much nearer, the agonized face of Radley, fair in the monster's path. And, while the picture flashed through his brain, he reformed that other picture, of a snarled line, a boat-knife, and a son snatched from death.

With silently moving lips, he stood erect in the bows, never waiting for the customary "Stand up and give it to him!" His knee was braced solidly against the thigh-board in the bows, the long, dynamite-headed bomb-lancer was balanced in a hand as steady as a lighthouse. Intuitively the oars hung poised, ceasing their forward impulse, awaiting the order to back water which would come for lightning obedience in a moment.

"Can you? Oh, can you?" breathed the mate.

The harpooner gave no sign.

The rushing shape of the maddened whale flashed past the stem of the motionless boat. Ten fathoms in front of his wicked snout floundered Radley, breathless and weakened, and a fear of death was on his set face, yet he fought stubbornly in the face of the end.

A hissing intake of the breath was heard as Peters stiffened; then like the javelin of fate his weapon was launched, fair at the vital spot of the whale. The iron sank deep into the massive side, six inches from Eph's body, and the ensuing explosion deadened the groan that burst from the harpooner.

"Starn—oh, starn all!" cried the mate, and

the oars bit deep to back the boat out of the stricken whale's flurry. One oar was idle. Peters flung aside the coils of the lance warp, swept the churning waters with a swift scrutiny, and plunged overboard into the turmoil.

"There's Mr. Radley, sir!" shouted the bowman, as the second mate's head emerged from the welter.

A sweep of the steering oar brought the boat round, and the spent and sickened officer was dragged into the boat. Every eye then fastened upon the mate in mute inquiry as he scanned the littered waters about the expiring whale for trace of Peters. There seemed no hope of Eph having escaped, for, with the stroke of the lance, the whale's flurry had started.

"There's Peters! And he's got Eph!" whooped the mate, but he added, beneath his breath, "What's left of Eph, I guess!"

Silently the oars moved again, and the harpooner was taken up, gasping painfully from bursting lungs. But there was a lot left of Eph, and it was but a moment before the harpooner was satisfied of the happy circumstance. Eph spoke to him. A wan smile flashed across Peter's face; then he turned to the gunwale and became deathly sick.

"I threw myself off when I saw that lance coming," explained Eph, when the mate had set a weft as a mark on the dead whale and the boat was pulling away to pick up the third mate and his crew. "Mighty close, 'twas, though. I felt that ol'

whale heave up!"

When the whale was fast alongside the *Narwhal*, and the crew went to dinner preparatory to commencing cutting-in, Peters sought out the skipper and made a request.

"Eph got fast to that fish, sir, and it wasn't his fault he didn't kill his first whale. The boy's got the stuff in him, and I want you to give him his chance right along now. Won't you let me change boats with him? I'd like to have him along with the mate until he's toughened a bit."

"You want to change into Mr. Radley's boat, eh?" mused the skipper, peering hard into the harpooner's face. "What's the idea? You don't want to start anything with him again, do you?"

"I never started anything with Mr. Radley, cap'n, and I'm not likely to after this day. I want to settle our differences for all time. We're about nose and nose on the catch now, and if we're both in the same boat we'll finish that way. Won't be any cause to start anything then."

The skipper nodded. He had heard from one of the ship-keepers while the boats were away the truth of the previous day's fight, and he had a suitable discipline in mind for the second mate. He was about to say so, when Radley came up with hand extended to Peters and a shamefaced smile on his face. The harpooner gripped that hand as if he meant what the grip implied, and the skipper turned away with a satisfied smile.