

## HOW SAMMY WENT TO CORAL-LAND

# Chapter 4: On to Coral-Land

by Emily Paret Atwater

*For him who goes a-traveling  
Upon the stormy sea,  
A tried and trusty pilot  
Is the safest company.*

“And did the Pilot really take good care of Sammy?” asked Bob, anxiously, as he and Eleanor took their places on the little balcony with grandma, and eagerly awaited the continuation of the ocean story.

“I don’t believe he did,” said his sister positively. “I just know that old Pilot was a hypocrite like the Hermit-Crab and ate up poor Sammy the first chance he got.”


“Time will show,” said the old lady as she snipped her silk with her silver scissors. “It is a very bad plan to read the last chapter of a book first.”

As for the Pilot, he had his weaknesses and faults like all people and all fish, and what they were we will find out as we go along.

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Bright and early the next morning Sammy bade farewell to his friends at the ledge, and in company with his guide started forth on his long journey to Coral-Land. All the Star-Fishes and Sea-Urchins assembled to see him off, and wish him a safe and prosperous voyage. Even the Hermit peered cautiously out from his cave, and waved an adieu with one claw. But his crafty eyes had a wistful expression as though he said to himself, “My what a fool I was to let that fellow escape!”

“Speaking of sharks,” remarked the Pilot, as he and his companion glided easily through the water, “many unjust things have been said about me because I am sometimes seen with the White Shark. They say a fish is always known by the company he keeps, but I think it is very unfair to judge me in that way, particularly as I never stayed with the shark because I liked him. I knew him for a heartless and ferocious monster who would attack anything that came in his way, and I was a good



deal afraid of him. I only went with him as a matter of convenience to myself. But it was commonly supposed that I accompanied him as a guide in order to show him the best feeding places, and tell him what dangers to avoid, and that was how I got my name of the Pilot-Fish. But the real reason was that I got better food when in company with the White Shark than any other way.

“Our usual plan was to follow some ship, which we often did for weeks, or months at a time, for a great deal of nice fish food is always thrown overboard from vessels; and as the White Shark only cared for the big pieces, all the tender little morsels fell to my lot. I lived well in those days, but I had to give up the job after awhile, the nervous strain was too great.

“You see the White Shark that I was with then was a very big fellow, (fully thirty feet long), and just as strong and ugly as he was big. Once, down in the tropics where he usually lives, I saw him break a man’s leg with one stroke of his tail. His temper was awful, and he would stop at nothing when angry. He had enormous jaws, with six rows of flat teeth, and to see him turn on his side, and open those jaws was enough to give you cold chills for a week.

“The good food that we got from our ship usually kept the White Shark in a fairly good humor, but, knowing him as I did, I was well aware that if the food should happen to run short, he would not hesitate to make a meal off of me; and although I am an excellent swimmer, and stood a good chance of being able to escape (else I should have never been there at all), still there was always a possibility of something unpleasant happening, and it got to be rather wearing.

“So, one day when we were following a particularly promising vessel, I made an excuse to stay behind, while the White Shark went on alone, and when he and the ship were both out of sight, I took the opportunity to escape. Since then I have carefully avoided the society of all sharks, but what I have learned about them and their ways has been of great benefit to me, and will be a help to us now, since they prefer the warm waters of the tropics, and that is where we are bound. However, you may trust me to keep as far out of their course as possible.

“We will need to keep a sharp lookout for the Blue Shark, whom you have already had the pleasure of meeting, and we may catch a glimpse of the Hammer-headed



Shark, a terribly fierce monster with a head shaped like a hammer.

“But the enemy that I dread most of all is the Sword-Fish, so named from the long sword-shaped snout on his upper jaw. This sword is very strong, and so sharp that it will easily pierce a boat. The White Shark is bad enough, but the Sword-Fish is even worse. His aim is unerring, and his disposition so fierce that he will attack anything that comes in his path, large or small. I saw one once that measured twenty feet, but that was from a safe distance, for I make it a rule to give them all a wide berth.


“Then there is the Saw-Fish, whose long snout has teeth on both sides like a saw, and his company is not desirable either.

“Fortunately for us the Sea-Wolf prefers the northern ocean, and fortunate it is for the northern fish that he is a slow swimmer, else the next census would show a decided decrease in the fish family. The Sea-Wolf has a tremendous appetite, and his huge jaws, armed each with six rows of teeth, can easily crush the toughest shell-fish, of which food he is very fond. They are often to be seen over seven feet long, and being desperate fighters they are almost as much dreaded as the Sword-Fish.”

With these, and many other stories of the fish world the Pilot beguiled the tedium of the journey. He told about the famous Sucking-Fish, or Remora, which has a wonderful flat apparatus on its head by which it sticks to any object, fish, rock, or ship to which it attaches itself, and once fixed it is impossible to make it loose its hold. The natives in Africa use this fish to catch turtles with. They tie a long, stout string to the Remora, and throw the fish overboard. When the Remora finds a turtle it presses its head tightly against it, sticks fast, and both are hauled up together. Sometimes the Remora will lift a turtle weighing many pounds.

Another of the Pilot's favorite yarns was about the Torpedo-Fish which makes its home in the Mediterranean Sea, and which possesses powerful electric batteries with which it paralyzes its prey.

Altogether the Pilot was a most interesting companion, his knowledge of the sea was both useful and entertaining, and the sharp outlook that he kept more than once saved them from unsuspected danger. To this watchfulness Sammy owed his escape from the Sea-Devil. This treacherous creature makes its home in the mud, which it stirs up in order the better to conceal itself. While thus hidden, it waves



about in the cloudy water two long, slender feelers, which to an unwary fish look like some tempting article of food. Feeling decidedly hungry Sammy was darting towards this apparently delicious meal, when the Pilot interfered and explained the nature of the bait which was meant to attract him within reach of the Angler hidden in the mud.

Truth to tell our hero often went hungry during his somewhat lengthy journey, for, in spite of his other most admirable qualities, the Pilot-Fish was very greedy. Few indeed were the morsels that fell to poor Sammy's share when his guide had finished his meals, and the young salmon had occasion more than once to wish that he had driven a sharper bargain. But, although he was growing thin, he comforted himself with the reflection that they were quickly nearing the promised land, where the Pilot assured him delicious food of all kinds abounded.


For now the water was growing warmer, more and more brilliant were the fish and ocean plants, and strange and beautiful rocks, like fairy castles rose up from the bed of the ocean.

One morning they saw a strange sight. Away off in the distance the surface of the water was dark with some large moving substance.

"It is a school of Flying-Fish," said the Pilot. "Wait here and you will see them leap."

As he spoke the vast body sprang into the air, and the sun gleamed brightly on beautiful blue bodies, and silver wings, as the fishes sailed off in different directions. It was a wonderful sight, but lasted only for a moment, then splash, splash, one after another fell back into the water, while the sea-gulls circling near seemed to utter a scream of derision. Again and again, by hundreds at a time, the beautiful fish leaped and sailed, only to fall back as before.

"They cannot really fly, you know," explained the Pilot, "for they are not able to raise themselves in the air after their first leap, and can only sail for a few feet on a level. And those things that look like wings are simply very large Pectoral fins, which can support them for awhile in the air. And a very silly practice the whole thing is too. Those fish would be a great deal better off if they only kept to their own element, and stayed pretty well under water. As it is they are in constant danger, for the sea-gulls are



always watching for them above, and the Bonito beneath. And that reminds me that it would be safer for us to dive below, for the Bonito is always to be met following the Flying-Fish, and he is not particular, (being always hungry) as to what kind of fish he dines on. His usual plan is to follow the Flying-Fish, keeping near the surface, and when the fish he has picked out drops, the Bonito has his reward. He is a clever fish, and being a rapid swimmer, is fond of following vessels, like myself. The presence of the Flying-Fish proves that we are nearing our destination, and after a few more miles our journey will be over.”

This was a cheering thought, and the two companions swam gaily along in the best of spirits. Sammy would have liked to stop occasionally to examine some particularly interesting object, but his guide hurried him on. “For,” said he, “this is by far the most dangerous part of our voyage. The most vicious of our enemies lurk outside of Coral-Land waiting for a chance to grab the tourist, but, once inside that long reef that you see some distance ahead, and we are safe. I have a special entrance known to myself alone, and no very large fish, or shark can get through it. I only hope that we can reach it without being seen.”

But it was a vain hope. No sooner were the words uttered, than some instinct caused the Pilot to glance hastily behind him, and there, well in the rear to be sure, but moving towards them with uncomfortable swiftness, were two large, dark moving bodies.


“Sharks!” cried Sammy in terror.

“Sword-Fish!” said the more experienced Pilot. “Follow me and swim for your life!”

Away he darted, heading in a straight line for the high reef, away darted Sammy after him, and on came the murderous Sword-Fish. Faster and faster swam the pursued, and faster and faster the pursuers. On they came, nearer, nearer and still nearer, their huge shapes and cruel swords suggesting a fearful death.

Sammy’s strength was almost gone, his fins were growing weaker, and he swam more and more slowly, while the mouth of the monster nearest him watered in eager anticipation.

But the dauntless Pilot still kept on his course, and showed no sign of weakening. Straight at the large reef, now very near, he dashed, and then, just as destruction seemed certain, he swerved to the right and disappeared from view in a mass of weeds



that grew out from the rock. With one last desperate effort Sammy followed, the weeds closed behind him, and passing quickly through a small hole in the reef, he lay, quivering, exhausted, but safe on the other side.

Furious at their disappointment the Sword Fishes rushed at the reef, striking it again and again with their sharp swords in a vain attempt to pierce, or batter down the rock. Then they swam wildly about looking for an entrance large enough for them to pass through, but none was to be found, for the high, circular reef shut in the lagoon where the two refugees lay, like a wall.

At length, tired out with their exertions, the two Sword-Fish gave up the chase, and being in a very ill-temper, and having no one else to vent it on, they began to quarrel with each other.

“It’s all your fault anyway,” snarled Slasher, the biggest and crossdest fish. “How often have I told you to take my advice in these matters! We should have kept further under water, as I suggested in the first place, then we would not have been seen so soon. I’ve no patience with your stupidity!”

“Stupid yourself!” snapped his brother Jabber. “You know as well as I do that it is much the best plan to keep on a straight line with the prey we are hunting. We can’t half see if we are far above or below. If you hadn’t splashed so loudly with your tail—”

“I didn’t splash with my tail,” retorted Slasher angrily.

“You did,” insisted Jabber.

“I say I didn’t!”

“I say you did!”

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“Well, well,” said grandma, as she paused to gather up her fancy work, “everybody knows that a family quarrel is the worst kind of quarrel. But in this case the dispute had a speedy ending, for the two brothers fiercely attacked each other, and right there and then they fought a terrible duel, which only ended with the death of both combatants, for each died pierced through the body with his brother’s sword.

“So perished the two dreaded sentinels of Coral-Land, and Sammy was at his journey’s end.”