

Dunn Joseph Allan

A Man to His Mate



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CHAPTER I

BLIND SAMSON

It was perfect weather along the San Francisco water-front, and Rainey reacted to the brisk touch of the trade-wind upon his cheek, the breeze tempering the sun, bringing with it a tang of the open sea and a hint of Oriental spices from the wharves. He whistled as he went, watching a lumber coaster outward bound. The dull thump of a heavy cane upon the timbered walk and the shuffle of uncertain feet warned him from blundering into a man tapping his way along the Embarcadero, a giant who halted abruptly and faced him, leaning on the heavy stick.

"Matey," asked the giant, "could you put a blind man in the way of finding the sealer schooner *Karluk*?"

The voice fitted its owner, Rainey thought – a basso voice tempered to the occasion, a deep-sea voice that could bellow above the roar of a gale if needed. For all his shoregoing clothes and shuffle, the man was certainly a sailor, or had been. All the skin uncovered by cloth or hair was weathered to leather, the great hands curled in as if they clutched an invisible rope. He wore dark glasses with side lenses, over which heavy brows projected in shaggy wisps of red hair.

Blind as the man proclaimed himself with voice and action, Rainey sensed something back of those colored glasses that seemed to be appraising him, almost as if the will of the man was peering, or listening, focused through those listless sockets. A kind of magnetism, not at all attractive, Rainey decided, even as he offered help and information.

"You're not fifty yards from the *Karluk*," Rainey replied. "But you're bound in the wrong direction. Let me put you right. I'm going that way myself."

"That's kind of ye, matey," said the other. "But I picked ye for that sort, hearin' you whistlin' as you came swingin' along. Light-hearted, I thinks, an' young, most likely; he'll help a stranded man. Give me the touch of yore arm, matey, an' I'll stow this spar of mine."

He swung about, slinging the curving handle of the stick over his right elbow as the fingers of his left hand placed themselves on Rainey's proffered arm. Strong fingers, almost vibrant with a force manifest through serge and linen. Fingers that could grip like steel upon occasion.

Rainey wonderingly sized up his consort. The stranger's bulk was enormous. Rainey was well over the average himself, but he was only a stripling beside this hulk, this stranded hulk, of manhood. And, for all the spectacled eyes and shuffling feet, there was a stamp of coordinated strength about the giant that bespoke the blind Samson. Given eyes, Rainey could imagine him agile as a panther, strong as a bear.

His weight was made up of thews and sinews, spare and solid flesh without an ounce of waste, upon a mighty skeleton. His face was heavy-bearded in hair of flaming, curling red, from high cheek-bones down out of sight below the soft loose collar of his shirt. The bridge of his glasses rested on the outcurve of a nose like the beak of an osprey, the ends of the wires looped about ears that lay close to the head, hairy about the inner-curves, lobeless, the tips suggesting the ear-tips of a satyr.

Mouth and jaw were hidden, but the beard could not deny the bold projection of the latter. About thirty, Rainey judged him. Buffeted by time and weather, but in the prime of his strength.

"Snow-blinded, matey," said the man. "North o' Point Barrow, a year an' more ago. Brought me up all standin'. What are you? Steamer man? Purser, maybe?"

"Newspaperman," answered Rainey. "Water-front detail. For the *Times*."

"You don't say so, matey? A writer, eh?"

Again Rainey felt the tug of that something back of the dark lenses, some speculation going on in the man's mind concerning him. And he felt the firm fingers contract ever so slightly, sinking into the muscles of his forearm for a second with a hint of how they could bruise and paralyze at will. Once more a faint sense of revulsion fought with his natural inclination to aid the handicapped mariner, and he shook it off.

"The *Karluk* sails to-morrow," he said.

"Aye, so – so they told me, matey. You've bin aboard?"

"I had a short talk with Captain Simms when she docked. Not much of a yarn. She didn't have a good trip, you know."

"Why, I didn't know. But – hold hard a minnit, will ye? You see, Simms is an old shipmate of mine. He don't dream I'm within a hundred miles o' here. Aye, or a thousand." He gave a deep-chested chuckle. "Now, then, matey, look here."

Rainey was anchored by the compelling grip. They stood next to the slip in which the sealer lay. The *Karluk's* decks were deserted, though there was smoke coming from the galley stovepipe.

"Simms is likely to be aboard," went on the other. "Ye see, I know his ways. An' I've come a long trip to see him. Nigh missed him. Only got in from Seattle this mornin'. He ain't expectin' me, an' it's in my mind to surprise him. By way of a joke. I don't want to be announced, ye see. Just drop in on him. How's the deck? Clear?"

"No one in sight," said Rainey.

"Fine! Mates an' crew down the Barb'ry Coast, I reckon. Sealers have liberties last shore-day. Like whalers. I've buried a few irons myself, matey, but I'll never sight the vapor of a right whale ag'in. Stranded, I am. So you'll do me a favor, matey, an' pilot me down into the cabin, if so be the skipper's there. If he ain't, I'll wait for him. I've got the right an' run o' the *Karluk's* cabin. I know ev'ry inch of her. You'll see when we go aboard. Let's go."

Rainey led him down the gangway to the deck of the sealer, still cluttered a bit with unstowed gear. Once on board, the blind man seemed to walk with assurance, guiding himself with touches here and there that showed his familiarity with the vessel's rig. And he no longer shuffled, but walked lightly, grinning at Rainey through his beard, with one blunt forefinger set to his mouth as he approached the cabin skylight, lifted on the port side. Through it came the murmur of voices. The blind man nodded in satisfaction and widened his grin with a warning "hush-h" to his guide.

"We'll fool 'em proper," he lipped rather than uttered.

The companion doors were closed, but they opened noiselessly. The stairs were carpeted with corrugated rubber that muffled all sound. Two men sat at the cabin table, leaning forward, hands and forearms outstretched, fingering something. One Rainey recognized as the captain, Simms – a heavy, square-built man, gray-haired, clean-shaven, his flesh tanned, yet somehow unhealthy, as if the bronze was close to tarnishing. There were deep puffs under the gray tired eyes.

The other was younger, tall, nervously active, with dark eyes and a dark mustache and beard, the latter trimmed to a Vandyke. Between them was a long slim sack of leather, a miner's poke. It was half full of something that stuffed its lower extremity solid, without doubt the same substance that glistened in the mouth of the sack and the palms of the two men – gold – coarse dust of gold!

Rainey felt himself thrust to one side as the blind man straddled across the bottom of the companionway, towering in the cabin while he thrust his stick with a thump on the floor and thundered, in a bellow that seemed to fill the place and come tumbling back in deafening echo:

"*Karluk* ahoy!"

The face of Captain Simms paled, the tan turned to a sickly gray, and his jaw dropped. Rainey saw fear come into his eyes. His companion did not stir a muscle except for the quick shift of his

glance, but went on sitting at the table, the gold in one palm, the fingers of his other hand resting on the grains.

"Jim Lund!" gasped the captain hoarsely.

"That's me, you skulking sculpin? Thought I was bear meat by this, didn't you, blast yore rotten soul to hell! But I'm back, Bill Simms. Back, an' this time you don't slip me!"

Jim Lund's face was purple-red with rage, great veins standing out upon it so swollen that it seemed they must surely burst and discharge their congested contents. Out of the purpling flesh his scarlet hair curled in diabolical effect. His teeth gleamed through his beard, strong, yellow, far apart. He looked, Rainey thought, like a blind Berserker, restrained only by his affliction.

"You left me blind on the floe, Bill Simms!" he roared. "Blind, in a drivin' blizzard with the ice breakin' up! If I didn't have use for yore carcass I'd twist yore head from yore scaly body like I'd pull up a carrot."

Lund's fingers opened and closed convulsively. Before Rainey the vision of the threatened crime rose clear.

"I looked for you, Jim," pleaded the captain, and to Rainey his words lacked conviction. "I didn't know you were blind. I heard you shout just before the blizzard broke loose."

Lund answered with an inarticulate roar.

"And there's others present, Jim. I can explain it to you when we're by ourselves. When you're a mite calmer, Jim."

Lund banged his stick down on the table with a smashing blow that made the man with the Vandyke beard, still silent, keenly observant, draw back his arm with a catlike swiftness that only just evaded the stroke. The heavy wood landed fairly on the filled half of the poke and caused some of the gold to leap out of the mouth.

"What's that I hit?" asked Lund. "Soft, like a rat." He lunged forward, felt for the poke, and found it, lifted it, hefted it, his forehead puckered with deep seams, discovered the open end, poured out some of the colors on one palm, and used that for a mortar, grinding at the grains with his finger for a pestle, still weighing the stuff with a slight up-and-down movement of his hand.

He nodded as he slipped the poke into a side pocket, and the cabin grew very silent. Lund's face was grimly terrible. Rainey could have gone when the blind man reached for the gold and left the ladder clear. He had meant to go at the first opportunity, but now he was held fascinated by what was about to happen, and Lund stepped back across the companionway.

"So," said Lund, his deep voice muffled by some swift restraint. "You found it. And yo're going back after more?" His forehead was still creased with puzzlement. "Wal, I'm going with ye, eyes or no eyes, an' I'll keep tabs on ye, Bill Simms, by day and night. You can lay to that, you slimy-hearted swab!"

His voice had risen again. Rainey saw the sweat standing out on the captain's forehead as he answered:

"Of course you'll come, Jim. No need for you to talk this way."

"No need to talk! By the eternal, what I've got to say's bin steamin' in me for fourteen months o' blackness, an' it's comin' out, now it's started! Who's this man, who was talkin' with ye when I come aboard?"

He wheeled directly toward the man with the Vandyke, who still sat motionless, apparently calm, looking on as if at a play that might turn out to be either comedy or tragedy.

"That's Doctor Carlsen. He's to be surgeon this trip, Jim," said Simms deprecatingly, though he darted a look at Rainey half suspicious, half resentful.

Rainey, on the hint, turned toward the ladder quietly enough, but Lund had nipped him by the biceps before Rainey had taken a step.

"You'll stay right here," said Lund, "while I tell you an' this Doc Carlsen what kind of a man Simms is, with his poke full of gold and me with the price of my last meal spent two hours ago. I won't spin out the yarn.

"I rescued an Aleut off a bit of a berg one time. There warn't much of him left to rescue. Hands an' feet an' nose was frozen so he lost 'em, but the pore devil was grateful, an' he told me something. Told about an island north of Bering Strait, west of Kotzebue Sound, where there was gold on the beach richer and thicker than it ever lay at Nome. I makes for it, gits close enough for my Aleut to recognize it – it ain't an easy place to forget for one who has eyes – an' then we're blown south, an' we git into ice an' trouble. The Aleut dies, an' I lose my ship. But I was close enough to get the reckonin' of that island.

"Finally I land at Seattle, broke. I meet up with the man they call Hardluck Simms. Also they called him Honest Simms those days. Some said his honesty accounted for his hard luck. I like him, an' I finally tell him about my island. I put up the reckonin', an' he supplies the *Karluk*, grub, an' crew.

"Simms' luck is still ag'in' him. The *Karluk* gits into ice, gits nipped an' carried north, 'way north, with wind an' current, frozen tight in a floe. It looks like we've got to winter there. Mind ye, I've given Honest Simms the reckonin' of the island. We go out on the ice after bear, though the weather's threatenin', for we're short of meat. An' we kill a Kadiak bear. Me – I'll never stand for the shootin' of another bear if I can stop it.

"I've bin havin' trouble with my eyes. Right along. I'm on the floe not eighty yards from Simms. No, not sixty! It was me killed the bear, an' we're goin' back to the schooner for a sled. I stayed behind to bleed the brute. All of a sudden, like it always hits you, snow-blindness gits me, an' I shouts to Honest Simms. I'm blind, with my eyeballs on fire, an' the fire burnin' back inter my brain.

"Along comes a Point Arrow blister. That's a gale that breeds an' bursts of a second out of nowhere. It gathers up all the loose snow an' ice crystals an' drives 'em in a whirlwind. Presently the wind starts the ice to buckin' an' tremblin' like a jelly under you, splitting inter lanes. You lose yore direction even when you got eyes. I'm left in it by that bilge-blooded skunk, blind on the rockin', breakin' floe, while he scuds back to the schooner with his men. That's Honest Simms! Jim Lund's left behind but Honest Simms has the position of the island."

"I didn't hear you call out you were blind, Lund. The wind blew your words away. I didn't know but what you were as right as the rest of us. The gale shut us all out from each other. We found the schooner by sheer luck before we perished. We looked for you – but the floe was broken up. We looked – "

"Shut up!" bellowed Lund. "You sailed inside of twenty-four hours, Honest Simms. The natives told me so later, when I could understand talk ag'in. D'ye know what saved me? The bear! I stumbled over the carcass when I was nigh spent. I ripped it up and clawed some of the warm guts, an' climbed inside the bloody body an' stayed there till it got cold an' clamped down over me. Waitin' for you to come an' git me, Honest Simms!

"That bear was bed and board to me until the natives found it, an' me in it, more dead than alive. Never mind the rest. I get here the day before you start back for more gold.

"An' I'm goin' with you. But first I'm goin' to have a full an' fair accountin' o' what you got already. I've got this young chap with me, an' he'll give me a hand to'ard a square deal."

Lund propelled Rainey forward a few steps and then loosened his grip. The captain of the *Karluk* appealed to him directly.

"You're with the *Times*," he said. All through the talk Rainey was conscious of the gaze of Doctor Carlsen, whose dark eyes appeared to be mocking the whole proceedings, looking on with the air of a man watching card-play with a prevision of how the game will come out.

"Mr. Lund is unstrung," said the captain. "He is under the delusion that we deliberately deserted him and, later, found the gold he speaks of. The first charge is nonsense. We did all that was possible in the frightful weather. We barely saved the ship.

"As for the gold, we touched on the island, and we did some prospecting, a very little, before we were driven offshore. The dust in the poke is all we secured. We are going back for more, quite naturally. I can prove all this to you by the log. It is manifestly not doctored, for we imagined Mr. Lund dead. If we had been able to work the beach thoroughly, nothing would tempt me into going back again to add to even a moderate fortune."

Lund had been standing with his great head thrust forward as if concentrating all his remaining senses in an attempt to judge the captain's talk. The doctor sat with one leg crossed, smoking a cigarette, his expression sardonic, sphinxlike. To Rainey, a little bewildered at being dragged into the affair, and annoyed at it, Captain Simms' words rang true enough. He did not know what to say, whether to speak at all. Lund supplied the gap.

"If that ain't the truth, you lie well, Simms," he said. "But I don't trust ye. You lie when you say you didn't hear me call out I was blind. Sixty yards away, I was, an' the wind hadn't started. I was afraid – yes, afraid – an' I yelled at the top of my lungs. An' you sailed off inside of twenty-four hours."

"Driven off."

"I don't believe ye. You deserted me – left me blind, tucked in the bloody, freezin' carcass of a bear. Left me like the cur you are. Why, you –"

The rising frenzy of Lund's voice was suddenly broken by the clear note of a girl's voice. One of two doors in the after-end of the main cabin had opened, and she stood in the gap, slim, yellow-haired, with gray eyes that blazed as they looked on the little tableau.

"Who says my father is a cur?" she demanded. "You?" And she faced Lund with such intrepid challenge in her voice, such stinging contempt, that the giant was silenced.

"I was dressing," she said, "or I would have come out before. If you say my father deserted you, you lie!"

Captain Simms turned to her. Doctor Carlsen had risen and moved toward her. Rainey wished he was on the dock. Here was a story breaking that was a *saga* of the North. He did not want to use it, somehow. The girl's entrance, her vivid, sudden personality forbade that. He felt an intruder as her eyes regarded him, standing by Lund's side in apparent sympathy with him, arrayed against her father. And yet he was not certain that Lund had not been betrayed. The remembrance of the first look in the captain's face when he had glanced up from handling the gold and seen Lund was too keen.

"Go into your cabin, Peggy," said the captain. "This is no place for you. I can handle the matter. Lund has cause for excitement; but I can satisfy him."

Lund stood frozen, like a pointer on scent, all his faculties united in attention toward the girl. To Rainey he seemed attempting to visualize her by sheer sense of hearing, by perceptions quickened in the blind. The doctor crossed to the girl and spoke to her in a low voice.

Lund spoke, and his voice was suddenly mild.

"I didn't know there was a lady present, miss," he said. "Yore father's right. You let us settle this. We'll come to an agreement."

But, for all his swift change to placability, there was a sinister undertone to his voice that the girl seemed to recognize. She hesitated until her father led her back into the cabin.

"You two'll sit down?" said the doctor, speaking aloud for the first time, his voice amiable, carefully neutral. "And we'll have a drop of something. Mr. Lund, I can understand your attitude. You've suffered a great deal. But you have misunderstood Captain Simms. I have heard about this from him, before. He has no desire to cheat you. He is rejoiced to see you alive, though afflicted. He is still Honest Simms, Mr. Lund."

"I haven't your name, sir," he went on pleasantly, to Rainey. "The captain said you were a newspaperman?"

"John Rainey, of the *Times*. I knew nothing of this before I came aboard."

"And you will understand, of course, what Mr. Lund overlooked in his natural agitation, that this is not a story for your paper. We should have a fleet trailing us. We must ask your confidence, Mr. Rainey."

There was a strong personality in the doctor, Rainey realized. Not the blustering, driving force of Lund, but a will that was persistent, powerful. He did not like the man from first appearances. He was too aloof, too sardonic in his attitudes. But his manner was friendly enough, his voice compelling in its suggestion that Rainey was a man to be trusted. Captain Simms came back into the cabin, closing the door of his daughter's room.

"We are going to have a little drink together," said the doctor. "I have some Scotch in my cabin. If you'll excuse me for a moment? Captain, will you get some glasses, and a chair for Mr. Lund?"

The captain looked at Rainey a little uncertainly, and then at Lund, whose aggressiveness seemed to have entirely departed. It was Rainey who got the chair for the latter and seated himself. He would join in a friendly drink and then be well shut of the matter, he told himself.

And he would promise not to print the story, or talk of it. That was rotten newspaper craft, he supposed, but he was not a first-class man, in that sense. He let his own ethics interfere sometimes with his pen and what the paper would deem its best interests. And this was a whale of a yarn.

But it was true that its printing would mean interference with the *Karluk's* expedition. And there was the girl. Rainey was not going to forget the girl. If the *Karluk* ever came back? But then she would be an heiress.

Rainey pulled himself up for a fool at the way his thoughts were racing as the doctor came back with a bottle of Scotch whisky and a siphon. The captain had set out glasses and a pitcher of plain water from a rack.

"I imagine you'll be the only one who'll take seltzer, Mr. Rainey," said the doctor pleasantly, passing the bottle. "Captain Simms, I know, uses plain water. Siphons are scarce at sea. I suppose Mr. Lund does the same. And I prefer a still drink."

"Plain water for mine," said Lund.

"We're all charged," said the doctor. "Here's to a better understanding!"

"Glad to see you aboard, Mr. Rainey," said the captain.

Lund merely grunted.

Rainey took a long pull at his glass. The cabin was hot, and he was thirsty. The seltzer tasted a little flat – or the whisky was of an unusual brand, he fancied. And then inertia suddenly seized him. He lost the use of his limbs, of his tongue, when he tried to call out. He saw the doctor's sardonic eyes watching him as he strove to shake off a lethargy that swiftly merged into dizziness.

Dimly he heard the scrape of the captain's chair being pushed back. From far off he heard Lund's big voice booming, "Here, what's this?" and the doctor's cutting in, low and eager; then he collapsed, his head falling forward on his outstretched arms.

CHAPTER II

A DIVIDED COMPANY

It was not the first time that Rainey had been on a ship, a sailing ship, and at sea. Whenever possible his play-hours had been spent on a little knockabout sloop that he owned jointly with another man, both of them members of the Corinthian Club. While the *Curlew* had made no blue-water voyages, they had sailed her more than once up and down the California coast on offshore regattas and pleasure-trips, and, lacking experience in actual navigation, Rainey was a pretty handy sailorman for an amateur.

So, as he came out of the grip of the drug that had been given him, slowly, with a brain-pan that seemed overstuffed with cotton and which throbbed with a dull persistent ache – with a throat that seemed to be coated with ashes, strangely contracted – a nauseated stomach – eyes that saw things through a haze – limbs that ached as if bruised – the sounds that beat their way through his sluggish consciousness were familiar enough to place him almost instantly and aid his memory's flickering film to reel off what had happened.

As he lay there in a narrow bunk, watching the play of light that came through a porthole beyond his line of vision, noting in this erratic shuttling of reflected sunlight the roll and pitch of cabin walls, listening to the low boom of waves followed by the swash alongside that told him the *Karluk* was bucking heavy seas, a slow rage mastered him, centered against the doctor with the sardonic smile and Captain Simms, who Rainey felt sure had tacitly approved of the doctor's actions.

He remembered Lund's exclamation of, "Here, what's this?" – the question of a blind man who could not grasp what was happening – and acquitted him.

They had deliberately kidnapped him, shanghaied him, because they did not choose to trust him, because they thought he might print the story of the island treasure beach in his paper, or babble of it and start a rush to the new strike of which he had seen proof in the gold dust streaming from the poke.

He had been willing to suppress the yarn, Rainey reflected bitterly, his intentions had been fair and square in this situation forced upon him, and they had not trusted him. They were taking no chances, he thought, and suddenly wondered what position the girl would take in the matter. He could not think of her approving it. Yet she would naturally side with her father, as she had done against Lund's accusations. And Rainey suspected that there was something back of Lund's charge of desertion. The girl's face, her graceful figure, the tones of her voice, clung in his still palsied recollection a long time before he could dismiss it and get round to the main factor of his imprisonment —*what were they going to do with him?*

There was a fortune in sight. For gold, men forget the obligations of life and law in civilization; they revert to savage type, and their minds and actions are swayed by the primitive urge of lust. Treachery, selfishness, cruelty, crime breed from the shining particles even before they are in actual sight and touch.

Rainey knew that. He had read many true yarns that had come down from the frozen North, in from the deserts and the mountains, tales of the mining records of the West.

He mistrusted the doctor. The man had drugged him. He was a man whose profession, where the mind was warped, belittled life. Captain Simms had been charged with leaving a blind man on a broken floe. Lund was the type whose passions left him ruthless. The crew – they would be bound by shares in the enterprise, a rough lot, daring much and caring little for anything beyond their own narrow horizons. The girl was the only redeeming feature of the situation.

Was it because of her – it might be because of her special pleading – that they had not gone further? Or were they still fighting through the heads, waiting until they got well out to sea before they disposed of him, so there would be no chance of his telltale body washing up along the coast for recognition and search for clues? He wondered whether any one had seen him go aboard the *Karluk* with Lund – any one who would remember it and mention the circumstance when he was found to be missing.

That might take a day or two. At the office they would wonder why he didn't show up to cover his detail, because he had been steady in his work. But they would not suspect foul play at first. He had no immediate family. His landlady lodged other newspapermen, and was used to their vagaries. And all this time the *Karluk* would be thrashing north, well out to sea, unsighted, perhaps, for all her trip, along that coast of fogs.

Rainey had disappeared, dropped out of sight. He would be a front-page wonder for a day, then drop to paragraphs for a day or so more, and that would be the end of it.

But they had made him comfortable. He was not in a smelly forecabin, but in a bunk in a cabin that must open off the main room of the schooner. Why had they treated him with such consideration? He dozed off, for all his wretchedness, exhausted by his efforts to untangle the snarl. When he awoke again his mouth was glued together with thirst.

The schooner was still fighting the sea – the wind, too, Rainey fancied – sailing close-hauled, going north against the trade. He fumbled for his watch. It had run down. His head ached intolerably. Each hair seemed set in a nerve center of pain. But he was better.

Back of his thirst lay hunger now, and the apathy that had held him to idle thinking had given way to an energy that urged him to action and discovery.

As he sat up in his bunk, fully clothed as he had come aboard, the door of his cabin opened and the doctor appeared, nodded coolly as he saw Rainey moving, disappeared for an instant, and brought in a draft of some sort in a long glass.

"Take this," said Carlsen. "Pull you together. Then we'll get some food into you."

The calm insolence of the doctor's manner, ignoring all that had happened, seemed to send all the blood in Rainey's body fuming to his brain. He took the glass and hurled its contents at Carlsen's face. The doctor dodged, and the stuff splashed against the cabin wall, only a few drops reaching Carlsen's coat, which he wiped off with his handkerchief, unruffled.

"Don't be a damned fool," he said to Rainey, his voice irritatingly even. "Are you afraid it's drugged? I would not be so clumsy. I could have given you a hypodermic while you slept, enough to keep you unconscious for as many hours as I choose – or forever."

"I'll mix you another dose – one more – take it or leave it. Take it, and you'll soon feel yourself again after Tamada has fed you. Then we'll thrash out the situation. Leave it, and I wash my hands of you. You can go for'ard and bunk with the men and do the dirty work."

He spoke with the calm assumption of one controlling the schooner, Rainey noted, rather as skipper than surgeon. But Rainey felt that he had made a fool of himself, and he took the second draft, which almost instantly relieved him, cleansing his mouth and throat and, as his headache died down, clearing his brain.

"Why did you drug me?" he demanded. "Pretty high-handed. I can make you pay for this."

"Yes? How? When? We're well off Cape Mendocino, heading nor'west or thereabouts. Nothing between us and Unalaska but fog and deep water. Before we get back you'll see the payment in a different light. We're not pirates. This was plain business. A million or more in sight."

"Lund nearly spilled things as it was, raving the way he did. It's a wonder some one didn't overhear him with sense enough to tumble."

"We didn't take any chances. Rounded up the crew, and got out. The man who's made a gold discovery thinks everybody else is watching him. It's a genuine risk. If they followed us, they'd

crowd us off the beach. I don't suppose any one has followed us. If they have, we've lost them in this fog.

"But we didn't take any risks after Lund's blowing off. He might have done it ashore before you brought him aboard. I don't think so. But he might. And so might you, later."

"I'd have given you my word."

"And meant to keep it. But you'd have been an uncertain factor, a weak link. You might have given it away in your sleep. You heard enough to figure the general locality of the island when Lund blurted it out. You knew too much. Suppose the *Karluk* fought up to Kotzebue Bay and found a dozen power-vessels hanging about, waiting for us to lead them to the beach? And we'd have worried all the way up, with you loose. You're a newspaperman. The suppression of this yarn would have obsessed you, lain on your reportorial conscience.

"I don't suppose your salary is much over thirty a week, is it? Now, then, here you are in for a touch of real adventure, better than gleaning dock gossip, to a red-blooded man. If we win – and you saw the gold —*you* win. We expect to give you a share. We haven't taken it up yet, but it'll be enough. More than you'd earn in ten years, likely, more than you'd be apt to save in a lifetime. We kidnapped you for your own good. You're a prisoner *de luxe*, with the run of the ship."

"I can work my passage," said Rainey. He could see the force of the doctor's argument, though he didn't like the man. He didn't trust the doctor, though he thought he'd play fair about the gold. But it was funny, his assuming control.

"Yachted a bit?" asked Carlsen.

"Yes."

"Can you navigate?"

Rainey thought he caught a hint of emphasis to this question.

"I can learn," he said. "Got a general idea of it."

"Ah!" The doctor appeared to dismiss the subject with some relief. "Well," he went on, "are you open to reason – and food? I'm sorry about your friends and folks ashore, but you're not the first prodigal who has come back with the fatted calf instead of hungry for it."

"That part of it is all right," said Rainey. There was no help for the situation, save to make the most of it and the best. "But I'd like to ask you a question."

"Go ahead. Have a cigarette?"

Rainey would rather have taken it from any one else, but the whiff of burning tobacco, as Carlsen lit up, gave him an irresistible craving for a smoke. Besides, it wouldn't do for the doctor to know he mistrusted him. If he was to be a part of the ship's life, there was small sense in acting pettishly. He took the cigarette, accepted the light, and inhaled gratefully.

"What's the question?" asked Carlsen.

"You weren't on the last trip. You weren't in on the original deal. But I find you doing all the talking, making me offers. You drugged me on your own impulse. Where's the skipper? How does he stand in this matter? Why didn't he come to see me? What is your rating aboard?"

"You're asking a good deal for an outsider, it seems to me, Rainey. I came to you partly as your doctor. But I speak for the captain and the crew. Don't worry about that."

"And Lund?" Rainey could not resist the shot. He had gathered that the doctor resented Lund. Carlsen's eyes narrowed.

"Lund will be taken care of," he said, and, for the life of him, Rainey could not judge the statement for threat or friendly promise. "As for my status, I expect to be Captain Simms' son-in-law as soon as the trip is over."

"All right," said Rainey. Carlsen's announcement surprised him. Somehow he could not place the girl as the doctor's fiancée. "I suppose the captain may mention this matter," he queried, "to cement it?"

"He may," replied Carlsen enigmatically. "Feel like getting up?"

Rainey rose and bathed face and hands. Carlsen left the cabin. The main room was empty when Rainey entered, but there was a place set at the table. Through the skylight he noted, as he glanced at the telltale compass in the ceiling, that the sun was low toward the west.

The main cabin was well appointed in hardwood, with red cushions on the transoms and a creeping plant or so hanging here and there. A canary chirped up and broke into rolling song. It was all homy, innocuous. Yet he had been drugged at the same table not so long before. And now he was pledged a share of ungathered gold. It was a far cry back to his desk in the *Times* office.

A Japanese entered, sturdy, of white-clad figure, deft, polite, incurious. He had brought in some ham and eggs, strong coffee, sliced canned peaches, bread and butter. He served as Rainey ate heartily, feeling his old self coming back with the food, especially with the coffee.

"Thanks, Tamada," he said as he pushed aside his plate at last.

"Everything arright, sir?" purred the Japanese.

Rainey nodded. The "sir" was reassuring. He was accepted as a somebody aboard the *Karluk*. Tamada cleared away swiftly, and Rainey felt for his own cigarettes. He hesitated a little to smoke in the cabin, thinking of the girl, wondering whether she was on deck, where he intended to go. Some one was snoring in a stateroom off the cabin, and he fancied by its volume it was Lund.

It was a divided ship's company, after all. For he knew that Lund, handicapped with his blindness, would live perpetually suspicious of Simms. And the doctor was against Lund. Rainey's own position was a paradox.

He started for the companionway, and a slight sound made him turn, to face the girl. She looked at him casually as Rainey, to his annoyance, flushed.

"Good afternoon," said Rainey. "Are you going on deck?"

It was not a clever opening, but she seemed to rob him of wit, to an extent. He had yet to know how she stood concerning his presence aboard. Did she countenance the forcible kidnapping of him as a possible tattler? Or – ?

"My father tells me you have decided to go with us," she said, pleasantly enough, but none too cordially, Rainey thought.

"Doctor Carlsen helped me to my decision."

She did not seem to regard this as a thrust, but stood lightly swaying to the pitch of the vessel, regarding him with grave eyes of appraisal.

"You have not been well," she said. "I hope you are better. Have you eaten?"

Rainey began to think that she was ignorant of the facts. And he made up his mind to ignore them. There was nothing to be gained by telling her things against her father – much less against her fiancée, the doctor.

"Thank you, I have," he said. "I was going to look up Mr. Lund."

The sentence covered a sudden change of mind. He no longer wanted to go on deck with the girl. They were not to be intimates. She was to marry Carlsen. He was an outsider. Carlsen had told him that. So she seemed to regard him, impersonally, without interest. It piqued him.

"Mr. Lund is in the first mate's cabin," said the girl, indicating a door. "Mr. Bergstrom, who was mate, died at sea last voyage. Doctor Carlsen acts as navigator with my father, but he has another room."

She passed him and went on deck. Carlsen was acting first mate as well as surgeon. That meant he had seamanship. Also that they had taken in no replacements, no other men to swell the little corporation of fortune-hunters who knew the secret, or a part of it. It was unusual, but Rainey shrugged his shoulders and rapped on the door of the cabin.

It took loud knocking to waken Lund. At last he roared a "Come in."

Rainey found him seated on the edge of his bunk, dressed in his underclothes, his glasses in place. Rainey wondered whether he slept in them. Lund's uncanny intuition seemed to read the thought. He tapped the lenses.

"Hate to take them off," he said. "Light hurts my eyes, though the optic nerve is dead. Seems to strike through. How're ye makin' out?"

Rainey gave Lund the full benefit of his blindness. The giant could not have known what was in the doctor's mind, but he must have learned something. Lund was not the type to be satisfied with half answers, and undoubtedly felt that he held a proprietary interest in the *Karluk* by virtue of his being the original owner of the secret. Rainey wondered if he had sensed the doctor's attitude in that direction, an attitude expressed largely by the expression of Carlsen's face, always wearing the faint shadow of a sneer.

"You know they drugged me," Rainey ended his recital of the interview he had had with the doctor.

"Knockout drops? I guessed it. That doctor's slick. Well, you've not much fault to find, have ye? Carlsen talked sense. Here you are on the road to a fortune. I'll see yore share's a fair one. There's plenty. It ain't a bad billet you've fallen into, my lad. But I'll look out for ye. I'm sort of responsible for yore trip, ye see, matey. And I'll need ye."

He lowered his voice mysteriously.

"Yo're a writer, Mister Rainey. You've got brains. You can see which way a thing's heading. You've heard enough. I'm blind. I've bin done dirt once aboard the *Karluk*, and I don't aim to stand for it ag'in. And I had my eyes, then. No use livin' in a rumpus. Got to keep watch. Got to keep yore eyes open.

"And I ain't got eyes. You have. Use 'em for both of us. I ain't asking ye to take sides, exactly. But I've got cause for bein' suspicious. I don't call the skipper *Honest* Simms no more. And I ain't stuck on that doctor. He's too bossy. He's got the skipper under his thumb. And there's somethin' funny about the skipper. Notice ennything?"

"Why, I don't know him," said Rainey. "He doesn't look extra well, what I've seen of him. Only the once."

"He's logey," said Lund confidentially. "He ain't the same man. Mebbe it's his conscience. But that doctor's runnin' him."

"He's going to marry the captain's daughter," said Rainey.

"Simms' daughter? Carlsen goin' to marry her? Ump! That may account for the milk in the cocoanut. She's a stranger to me. Lived ashore with her uncle and aunt, they tell me. Carlsen was the family doctor. Now she's off with her father."

His face became crafty, and he reached out for Rainey's knee, found it as readily as if he had sight, and tapped it for emphasis.

"That makes all the more reason for us lookin' out for things, matey," he went on, almost in a whisper. "If they've played me once they may do it ag'in. And they've got the odds, settin' aside my eyes. But I can turn a trick or two. You an' me come aboard together. You give me a hand. Stick to me, an' I'll see you git yore whack.

"I'll have yore bunk changed. You'll come in with me. An' we'll put one an' one together. We'll be mates. Treat 'em fair if they treat us fair. But don't forget they fixed yore grog. I had nothin' to do with that. I may be stranded, but, if the tide rises – "

He set the clutch of his powerful fingers deep into Rainey's leg above the knee with a grip that left purple bruises there before the day was over.

"We two, matey," he said. "Now you an' me'll have a tot of stuff that ain't doped."

He moved about the little cabin with an astounding freedom and sureness, chuckling as he handled bottle and glasses and measured out the whisky and water.

"W'en yo're blind," he said, ramming his pipe full of black tobacco, "they's other things comes to ye. I know the run of this ship, blindfold, you might say. I c'ud go aloft in a pinch, or steer her. More grog?"

But Rainey abstained after the first glass, though Lund went on lowering the bottle without apparent effect.

"So yo're a bit of a sailor?" the giant asked presently. "An' a scholar. You can navigate, I make no doubt?"

"I hope to get a chance to learn on the trip," answered Rainey. "I know the general principles, but I've never tried to use a sextant. I'm going to get the skipper to help me out. Or Carlsen."

"Carlsen! What in hell does a doctor know about navigation?" demanded Lund.

Rainey told him what the girl had said, and the giant grunted.

"I have my doubts whether they'll ever help ye," he said. "Wish I could. But it 'ud be hard without my eyes. An' I've got no sextant an' no book o' tables. It's too bad."

His disappointment seemed keen, and Rainey could not fathom it. Why had both Lund and Carlsen seemed to lay stress on this matter? Why was the doctor relieved and Lund disappointed at his ignorance?

As they came out of the stateroom together, later, Lund reeking of the liquor he had absorbed, though remaining perfectly sober, his hand laid on Rainey's shoulder, perhaps for guidance but with a show of familiarity, Rainey saw the girl looking at him with a glance in which contempt showed unveiled. It was plain that his intimacy with Lund was not going to advance him in her favor.

CHAPTER III

TARGET PRACTISE

The *Karluk* was an eighty-five-ton schooner, Gloster Fisherman type, with a length of ninety and a beam of twenty-five feet. Her enormous stretch of canvas, spread to the limit on all possible occasions by Captain Simms, was offset by the pendulum of lead that made up her keel, and she could slide through the seas at twelve knots on her best point of sailing – reaching – the wind abaft her beam.

After Rainey had demonstrated at the wheel that he had the mastery of her and had shown that he possessed sea-legs, a fair amount of seacraft and, what the sailors did not possess, initiative, Captain Simms appointed him second mate.

"We don't carry one as a rule," the skipper said. "But it'll give you a rating and the right to eat in the cabin." He had not brought up the subject of Rainey's kidnapping, and Rainey let it go. There was no use arguing about the inevitable. The rating and the cabin fare seemed offered as an apology, and he was willing to accept it.

Carlsen acted as first mate, and Rainey had to acknowledge him efficient. He fancied the man must have been a ship's surgeon, and so picked up his seamanship. After a few days Carlsen, save for taking noon observations with the skipper and working out the reckoning, left his duties largely to Rainey, who was glad enough for the experience. A sailor named Hansen was promoted to acting-quartermaster, and relieved Rainey. Carlsen spent most of his time attendant on the girl or chatting with the hunters, with whom he soon appeared on terms of intimacy.

The hunters esteemed themselves above the sailors, as they were, in intelligence and earning capacity. The forecastlemen acted, on occasion, as boat-steerers and rowers for the hunters, each of whom had his own boat from which to shoot the cruising seals.

There were six hunters and twelve sailors, outside of a general roustabout and butt named "Sandy," who cleaned up the forecabin and the hunters' quarters, where they messed apart, and helped Tamada, the cook, in the galley with his pots and dishes. But now there was no work in prospect for the hunters, and they lounged on deck or in the 'midship quarters, spinning yarns or playing poker. They were after gold this trip, not seals.

"'Cordin' to the agreement," Lund said to Rainey, "the gold's to be split into a hundred shares. One for each sailorman, an' they chip in for the boy. Two for the hunters, two for the cook, four for Bergstrom, the first mate, who died at sea. Twenty for 'ship's share.' Fifty shares to be split between Simms an' me."

"What's the 'ship's share'?" asked Rainey.

"Represents capital investment. Matter of fact, it belongs to the gal," said Lund. "Simms gave her the *Karluk*. It's in her name with the insurance."

"Then he and his daughter get forty-five shares, and you only twenty-five?"

"You got it right," grinned Lund. "Simms is no philanthropist. It wa'n't so easy for me to git enny one to go in with me, son. I ain't the first man to come trailin' in with news of a strike. An' I had nothin' to show for it. Not even a color of gold. Nothin' but the word of a dead Aleut, my own judgment, an' my own sight of an island I never landed on. Matter of fact, Honest Simms was the only one who didn't laff at me outright. It was on'y his bad luck made him try a chance at gold 'stead of keepin' after pelts."

"An' we had a hard an' tight agreement drawn up on paper, signed, witnessed an' recorded. 'Course it holds him as well as it holds me, but he gits the long end of *that* stick. W'en I read, or got it read to me, in the *Seattle News-Courier*, that the *Karluk* was listed as 'Arrived' in San Francisco, it was all I could do to git carfare an' grub money. If I hadn't bin blind, an' some of 'em half-way

human to'ards a man with his lights out, I'd never have raised it. I'd have got here someways, matey, if I'd had to walk, but I'd have got here a bit late. Then I'd have had to wait till Simms got back ag'in – an' mebbe starved to death.

"But I'm here an' I've got some say-so. One thing, you're goin' to git Bergstrom's share. I don't give a damn where the doctor comes in. If he marries the gal he'll git her twenty shares, ennyway. Though he ain't married her yet. And I ain't through with Simms yet," he added, with an emphasis that was a trifle grim, Rainey thought.

"The crew, hunters an' sailors, don't seem over glad to see me back," Lund went on. "Mebbe they figgered their shares 'ud be bigger. Mebbe the doc's queered me. He's pussy-footin' about with 'em a good deal. But I'll talk with you about that later. It's me an' you ag'in' the rest of 'em, seems to me, Rainey. The doc's aimin' to be the Big Boss aboard this schooner. He's got the skipper buffalood. But not me, not by a jugful."

He slammed his big fist against the side of the bunk so viciously that it seemed to jar the cabin. The blow was typical of the man, Rainey decided. He felt for Lund not exactly a liking, but an attraction, a certain compelled admiration. The giant was elemental, with a driving force inside him that was dynamic, magnetic. What a magnificent pirate he would have made, thought Rainey, looking at his magnificent proportions and considering the crude philosophies that cropped out in his talk.

"I'm in life for the loot of it, Rainey," Lund declared. "Food an' drink to tickle my tongue an' fill my belly, the woman I happen to want, an' bein' able to buy ennything I set my fancy on. The answer to that is Gold. With it you can buy most enny thing. Not all wimmen, I'll grant you that. Not the kind of woman I'd want for a steady mate. Thet's one thing I've found out can't be bought, my son, the honor of a good woman. An' thet's the sort of woman I'm lookin' for.

"I reckon yo're raisin' yore eyebrows at that?" he challenged Rainey. "But the other kind, that'll sell 'emselves, 'll sell you jest as quick – an' quicker. I'd wade through hell-fire hip-deep to git the right kind – an' to hold her. An' I'll buck all hell to git what's comin' to me in the way of luck, or go down all standin' tryin'. This is my gold, an' I'm goin' to handle it. If enny one tries to swizzle me out of it I'm goin' to swizzle back, an' you can lay to that. Not forgettin' them that stands by me."

Between Lund and Simms there existed a sort of armed truce. No open reference was made to the desertion of Lund on the floe. But Rainey knew that it rankled in Lund's mind. The five, Peggy Simms, her father, Carlsen, Lund and Rainey, ostensibly messed together, but Rainey's duties generally kept him on deck until Carlsen had sufficiently completed his own meal to relieve him. By that time the girl and the captain had left the table.

Lund invariably waited for Rainey. Tamada kept the food hot for them. And served them, Lund making good play with spoon or fork and a piece of bread, the Japanese cutting up his viands conveniently beforehand.

To Rainey, Tamada seemed the hardest worked man aboard ship. He had three messes to cook and he was busy from morning until night, efficient, tireless and even-tempered. The crew, though they acknowledged his skill, were Californians, either by birth or adoption, and the racial prejudice against the Japanese was apparent.

A week of good wind was followed by dirty weather. The *Karluk* proved a good fighter, though her headway was materially lessened by contrary wind and sea, and the persistence and increasing opposition of the storm seemed to have a corresponding effect upon Captain Simms.

He grew daily more irritable and morose, even to his daughter. Only the doctor appeared able to get along with him on easy terms, and Rainey noticed that, to Carlsen, the skipper seemed conciliatory even to deference.

Peggy Simms watched her father with worried eyes. The curious, tarnished look of his tanned skin grew until the flesh seemed continually dry and of an earthy color; his lips peeled, and more than once he shook as if with a chill.

On the eleventh day out, Rainey went below in the middle of the afternoon for his sea-boots. The gale had suddenly strengthened and, under reefs, the *Karluk* heeled far over until the hissing seas flooded the scuppers and creamed even with the lee rail. In the main cabin he found Simms seated in a chair with his daughter leaning over him, speaking to her in a harsh, complaining voice.

"No, you can't do a thing for me," he was saying. "It's this sciatica. I've got to get Carlsen."

As Rainey passed through to his own little stateroom neither of them noticed him, but he saw that the captain was shivering, his hands picking almost convulsively at the table-cloth.

"Where's Carlsen, curse him!" Rainey heard through his cabin partition. "Tell him I can't stand this any longer. He's got to help me. Got to. *Got to*."

As Rainey appeared, walking heavily in his boots, the girl looked up. Her father was slumped in his chair, his face buried on his folded arms. The girl glanced at him doubtfully, apparently uncertain whether to go herself to find Carlsen or stay with her father.

"Anything I can do, Miss Simms? Your father seems quite ill."

The hesitation of the girl even to speak to him was very plain to Rainey. Suddenly she threw up her chin.

"Kindly find Doctor Carlsen," she ordered, rather than requested. "Ask him to come as soon as he can. I – " She turned uncertainly to her father.

"Can I help you to get him into the cabin?" asked Rainey.

She thanked him with lips, not eyes, and he assisted her to shift the almost helpless man into his room and bunk. He was like a stuffed sack between them, save that his body twitched. While Rainey took most of the weight, he marveled at the strength of the slender girl and the way in which she applied it. Simms seemed to have fainted, to be on the verge of unconsciousness or even utter collapse. Rainey felt his wrist, and the pulse was almost imperceptible.

"I'll get the doctor immediately," he said.

She nodded at him, chafing her father's hands, her own face pale, and a look of anxious fear in her eyes.

"Mighty funny sort of sciatica," Rainey told himself as he hurried forward. He knew where Carlsen was, in the hunters' cozy quarters, playing poker. From the chips in front of him he had been winning heavily.

"The skipper's ill," said Rainey. "No pulse. Almost unconscious."

Carlsen raised his eyebrows.

"Didn't know you were a physician," he said. "Just one of his spells. I'll finish this hand. Too good to lay down. The skipper can wait for once."

The hunters grinned as Carlsen took his time to draw his cards, make his bets and eventually win the pot on three queens.

"I wonder what your real game is?" Rainey asked himself as he affected to watch the play. According to his own announcement Carlsen was deliberately neglecting the father of the girl he was to marry and at the same time slighting the captain to his own men. Carlsen drew in his chips and leisurely made a note of the amount.

"Quite a while yet to settling-day," he said to the players. "Luck may swing all round the compass before then, boys. All right, Rainey, you needn't wait."

Rainey ignored the omitted "Mister." He held the respect of the sailors, since he had shown his ability, but he knew that the hunters regarded him with an amused tolerance that lacked disrespect by a small margin. To them he was only the amateur sailor. Rainey fancied that the doctor had contributed to this attitude, and it did not lessen his score against Carlsen.

The captain did not make his appearance for that day, the next, or the next. The men began to roll eyes at one another when they asked after his health. Carlsen kept his own counsel, and Peggy Simms spent most of her time in the main cabin with her eyes always roving to her father's door.

Rainey noticed that Tamada brought no food for the sick man. Carlsen was the apparent controller of the schooner. Lund was quick to sense this.

"We got to block that Carlsen's game," he said to Rainey. "There's a nigger in the woodpile somewhere an' you an' me got to uncover him, matey, afore we reach Bering Strait, or you an' me'll finish this trip squattin' on the rocks of one of the Four Mountain Islands makin' faces at the gulls.

"I wish you c'ud git under the skin of that Jap. No use tryin' to git in with the crew or the hunters. They're ag'in' both of us – leastwise the hunters are. The hands don't count. They're jest plain hash."

Lund spoke with an absolute contempt of the sailors that was characteristic of the man.

"You think they'd put a blind man ashore that way?" asked Rainey.

"Carlsen would. In a minnit. He'd argy that you c'ud look out for me, seein' as we are chums. As for you, you've bin useful, but you can't navigate, an' you've helped train Hansen to yore work. You were in the way at the start, an' he'd jest as soon git rid of you that road as enny other. He don't intend you to have Bergstrom's share, by a jugful."

Lund grinned as he spoke, and Rainey felt a little chill raise gooseflesh all over his body. It was not exactly fear, but —

"They don't look on us two as *mascots*," went on Lund. "But to git back to that Jap. Forewarned is forearmed. He ain't over an' above liked, but they've got used to him goin' back an' forth with their grub, an' they sort of despise him for a yellow-skinned coolie.

"Now Tamada ain't no coolie. I know Japs. He's a cut above his job. Cooks well enough for a swell billet ashore if he wanted it. An' there ain't much goin' on that Tamada ain't wise to. See if you can't get next to him. Trubble is he's too damn' neutral. He knows he's safe, becoz he's cook an' a damn' good one. But he's wise to what Carlsen's playin' at.

"Carlsen don't care for man, woman, God, or the devil. Neither do I," he concluded. "An' I've got a card or two up my sleeve. But I'd sure like to git a peep at what the doc's holdin'."

The storm blew out, and there came a spell of pleasant weather, with the *Karluk* gliding along, logging a fair rate where a less well-designed vessel would barely have found steerage way, riding on an almost even keel. Simms was still confined to his cabin, though now his daughter took him in an occasional tray.

Except for observations and the details of navigation, Carlsen left the schooner to Rainey. They were well off the coast, out of the fogs, apparently alone upon the lonely ocean that ran sparkling to the far horizon. It was warm, there was little to do, the sailors, as well as the hunters, spent most of their time lounging on the deck.

Save at meal-times, Carlsen, for one who had announced himself as an accepted lover, neglected the girl, who had devoted herself to her father. Yet she seldom went into her cabin, never remained there long, and time must have hung heavily on her hands. A girl of her spirit must have resented such treatment, Rainey imagined, but reminded himself it was none of his business.

Lund hung over the rail, smoking, or paced the deck, always close to Rainey. The manner in which he went about the ship was almost uncanny. Except that his arms were generally ahead of him when he moved, his hands, with their woolly covering of red hair, lightly touching boom or rope or rail, he showed no hesitation, made no mistakes.

He no longer shuffled, as he had on shore, but moved with a pantherlike dexterity, here and there at will. When the breeze was steady he would even take the wheel and steer perfectly by the "feel of the wind" on his cheek, the slap of it in the canvas, or the creak of the rigging to tell him if he was holding to the course. And he took an almost childish delight in proclaiming his prowess as helmsman.

The booms were stayed out against swinging in flaws and the roll of the sea, and Lund strode back and forth behind Rainey, who had the wheel. The hunters were grouped about Carlsen, who, seated on the skylight, was telling them something at which they guffawed at frequent intervals.

"Spinnin' them some of his smutty yarns," growled Lund, halting in his promenade. "Bad for discipline, an' bad for us. He's the sort of fine-feathered bird that wouldn't give those chaps a first look ashore. Gittin' in solid with 'em that way is a bad steer. You can't handle a man you make a pal of, w'en he ain't yore rank."

"Carlsen's slack, but he's a good sailorman," said Rainey casually.

"Damn' sight better sailorman than he is doctor," retorted Lund. "Hear him the other mornin' w'en I asked him if he c'ud give me somethin' to help my eyes hurtin'? 'I'm no eye specialist,' sez he. 'Try some boracic acid, my man.' I wouldn't put ennything in my eyes *he'd* give me, you can lay to that. He'd give me vitriol, if he thought I'd use it. I wouldn't let him treat a sick cat o' mine. He's the kind o' doctor that uses his title to give him privileges with the wimmin. I know his sort."

Rainey wondered why Lund had asked Carlsen for a lotion if he did not mean to use it, but he did not provoke further argument. Lund was going on.

"He don't do the skipper enny good, thet's certain."

"Captain Simms seems to believe in him," answered Rainey. He wondered how much of Carlsen's increasing dominance over the skipper Lund had noticed.

"Simms is Carlsen's dog!" exploded Lund. "The doc's got somethin' on him, mark me. Carlsen's a bad egg an', w'en he hatches, you'll see a buzzard. An' you wait till he's needed as a doctor on somethin' that takes more'n a few kind words or a lick out a bottle."

There was a stir among the hunters. Lund turned his spectacled eyes in their direction.

"What are they up to now?" he queried. "Goin' to play poker? Wish I had my eyes. I'd show 'em how to read the pips."

Hansen came aft, offering to take the wheel.

"They bane goin' to shute at targets," he said. "Meester Carlsen he put up prizes. For rifle an' shotgun. Thought you might like to watch it, sir."

Rainey gave over the spokes and went to the starboard rail with Lund, watching the preparations between fore and main masts for the competition, and telling Lund what was happening. Carlsen gave out some shotgun cartridges from cardboard boxes, twelve to each of the six hunters.

"Hunters pay for their own shells," said Lund. "But they buy 'em from the ship. Mate's perkisite. They usually have some shells on hand for the rifles, but the paper cases o' the shotgun cartridges suck up the damp an' they keep better in the magazine in the cabin. What they shootin' at? Bottles?"

Sandy, the roustabout, had been requisitioned to toss up empty bottles, and those who failed cursed him for a poor thrower. A hunter named Deming made no misses, and secured first prize of ten dollars in gold, with a man named Beale scoring two behind him, and getting half that amount from Carlsen.

Then came the test with the rifles. The weapons were all of the same caliber, well oiled, and in perfect condition. As Lund had said, each of the hunters had a few shells in his possession, but they lacked the total of six dozen by a considerable margin.

Carlsen went below for the necessary ammunition while the target was completed and set in place. A keg had been rigged with a weight underslung to keep it upright, and a tin can, painted white, set on a short spar in one end of the keg. A light line was attached to a bridle, and the mark lowered over the stern, where it rode, bobbing in the tail of the schooner's wake, thirty fathoms from the taffrail where the crowd gathered.

Carlsen, returning, ordered Hansen to steer fine. He gave each competitor a limit of ten seconds for his aim, contributing an element of chance that made the contest a sporting one. Without the counting, each would have deliberately waited for the most favorable moment when the schooner hung in the trough and the white can was backed by green water. As it was, it made

a far-from-easy mark, slithering, lurching, dipping as the *Karluk* slid down a wave or met a fresh one, the can often blurred against the blobs of foam.

More bullets hit the keg than the can, and Carlsen was often called upon as umpire. But the tin gradually became ragged and blotched where the steel-jacketed missiles tore through. Beale and Deming both had five clean, undisputed hits, tying for first prize. Beale offered to shoot it off with six more shells apiece, and Deming consented.

"Can't be done," declared Carlsen. "Not right now, anyway. I gave out the last shell there was in the magazine. If there are any more the skipper's got them stowed away, and I can't disturb him."

"Derned funny," said Deming, "a sealer shy on cartridges! Lucky we ain't worryin' about thet sort of a cargo."

"Probably plenty aboard somewhere," said Carlsen, "but I don't know where they are. Sorry to break up the shooting. You boys have got me beaten on rifles and shotguns," he went on, producing from his hip pocket a flat, effective-looking automatic pistol of heavy caliber. "How are you on small arms?"

The hunters shook their heads dubiously.

"Never use 'em," said Deming. "Never could do much with that kind, ennyhow. Give me a revolver, an' I might make out to hit a whale, if he was close enough, but not with one o' them."

"Not much difference," said, Carlsen. "Any of you got revolvers?"

No one spoke. It was against the unwritten laws of a vessel for pistols to be owned forward of the main cabin. Beale finally answered for the rest.

"Nary a pistol, sir."

"Then," said Carlsen, "I'll give you an exhibition myself. Any bottles left? Beale, will you toss them for me?"

There were eight shots in the automatic, and Carlsen smashed seven bottles in mid-air. He missed the last, but retrieved himself by breaking it as it dipped in the wake. The hunters shouted their appreciation.

"Break all of 'em?" Lund asked Rainey. "Enny bottles left at all?"

He walked toward the taffrail, addressing Carlsen.

"Kin you shoot by *sound* as well as by sight, Doc?" he challenged.

"I fancy not," said Carlsen.

"If I had my eyes I'd snapshot ye for a hundred bucks," said Lund. "As it is, I might target one or two. Rainey, have some one run a line, head-high, an' fix a bottle on it, will ye? I ain't got a gun o' my own, Doc," he continued, "will you lend me yours?" Carlsen filled his clip and Lund turned toward Rainey, who was rigging the target.

"I'll want you to tap it with a stick," he said. "Signal-flag staff'll do fine."

Rainey got the slender bamboo and stood by. Lund felt for the cord, passed his fingers over the suspended bottle and stepped off five paces, hefting the automatic to judge its balance.

"Ruther have my own gun," he muttered. "All right, tetch her up, Rainey."

Rainey tapped the bottle on the neck and it gave out a little tinkle, lost immediately in the crash of splintering glass as the bottle, hit fairly in the torn label, broke in half.

"How much left?" asked Lund. "Half? Tetch it up."

Again he fired and again the bullet found the mark, leaving only the neck of the bottle still hanging. Lund grinned.

"Thet's all," he said. "Jest wanted to show ye what a blind man can do, if he's put to it."

There was little applause. Carlsen took his gun in silence and moved forward with the hunters and the onlookers, disappearing below. Rainey took the wheel over from Hansen and ordered him forward again.

"Given 'em something to talk about," chuckled Lund. "Carlsen wanted to show off his fancy shootin'. Wal, I've shown 'em I ain't entirely wrecked if I ain't carryin' lights. An' I slipped more'n one over on Carlsen at that."

Rainey did not catch his entire meaning and said nothing.

"Did you get wise to the play about the shells?" asked Lund. "A smart trick, though Deming almost tumbled. Carlsen got those dumb fools of hunters to fire away every shell they happened to have for'ard. If the magazine's empty, I'll bet Carlsen knows where they's plenty more shells, if we ever needed 'em bad. But now those rifles an' shotguns ain't no more use than so many clubs —*not to the hunters*. An' he's found out they ain't got enny pistols. *He's* got one, an' shows 'em how straight he shoots, jest in case there should be enny trubble between 'em. Plays both ends to the middle, does Carlsen. Slick! But he ain't won the pot. They's a joker in this game. Mebbe he holds it, mebbe not."

He nodded mysteriously, well pleased with himself.

"Don't suppose *you* brought a gun along with ye?" he asked Rainey. "Might come in handy."

"I wasn't expecting to stay," Rainey replied dryly, "or I might have."

Lund laughed heartily, slapping his leg.

"That's a good un," he declared. "It would have bin a good idea, though. It sure pays to go heeled when you travel with strangers."

CHAPTER IV THE BOWHEAD

Captain Simms appeared again in the cabin and on deck, but he was not the same man. His illness seemed to have robbed him permanently of what was left him of the spring of manhood. It was as if his juices had been sucked from his veins and arteries and tissues, leaving him flabby, irresolute, compared to his former self. Even as Lund shadowed Rainey, so Simms shadowed Carlsen.

The fine weather vanished, snuffed out in an hour and, day after day, the *Karluk* flung herself at mocking seas that pounded her bows with blows that sounded like the noise of a giant's drum. The sun was never seen. Through daylight hours the schooner wrestled with the elements in a ghastly, purplish twilight, lifting under double reefs over great waves that raised spuming crests to overwhelm her, and were ridden down, hissing and roaring, burying one rail and covering the deck to the hatches with yeasty turmoil.

The *Karluk* charged the stubborn fury of the gale, rolling from side to side, lancing the seas, gaining a little headway, losing leeway, fighting, fighting, while every foot of timber, every fathom of rope, groaned and creaked perpetually, but endured.

To Rainey, this persistent struggle – as he himself controlled the schooner, legs far astride, his oilskins dripping, his feet awash to the ankles, spume drenching and whipping him, the wind a lash – brought exultation and a sense of mastery and confidence such as he had never before held suggestion of. To guide the ship, constantly to baffle the sea and wind, the turbulence, buffeting bows and run and counter, smashing at the rudder, leaping always like a pack of yapping hounds – this was a thing that left the days of his water-front detail far behind.

And then he had thought himself in the whirl of things! Even as Simms seemed to be declining, so Rainey felt that he was coming into the fulness of strength and health.

Lund was ever with him. Sometimes the girl would come up on deck in her own waterproofs and stand against the rail to watch the storm, silent as far as the pair were concerned. And presently Carlsen would come from below or forward and stand to talk with her until she was tired of the deck.

They did not seem much like lovers, Rainey fancied. They lacked the little intimacies that he, though he made himself somewhat of an automaton at the wheel, could not have failed to see. If the girl slipped, Carlsen's hand would catch and steady her by the arm; never go about her waist. And there was no especial look of welcome in her face when the doctor came to her.

Carlsen seldom took over the wheel. Rainey did more than his share from sheer love of feeling the control. But one day, at a word from the girl, Carlsen and she came up to Rainey as he handled the spokes.

"I'll take the wheel a while, Rainey," said the doctor.

Rainey gave it up and went amidships. Out of the tail of his eye he could see that the girl was pleading to handle the ship, and that Carlsen was going to let her do so.

Rainey shrugged his shoulders. It was Carlsen's risk. It was no child's play in that weather to steer properly. The *Karluk*, with her narrow beam, was lithe and active as a great cat in those waves. It took not only strength, but watchfulness and experience to hold the course in the welter of cross-seas.

Lund, whose recognition of voices was perfect, moved amidships as soon as Carlsen and Peggy Simms came aft. There was no attempt at disguising the fact that the schooner's afterward was a divided company and, save for the fact of his blindness tempering the action, the manner of Lund's showing them his back and deliberately walking off would have been a deliberate insult.

Not to the girl, Rainey thought. At first he had considered Lund's character as comparatively simple – and brutal – but he had qualified this, without seeming consciousness, and he felt that Lund would never deliberately insult a woman – any sort of woman. He was beginning to feel something more than an admiration for Lund's strength; a liking for the man himself had, almost against his will, begun to assert itself.

They stood together by the weather-rail. It was still Rainey's deck-watch, and at any moment Carlsen might relinquish the wheel back to him as soon as the girl got tired. Suddenly shouts sounded from forward, a medley of them, indistinct against the quartering wind. Sandy, the roustabout, came dashing aft along the sloping deck, catching clumsily at rail and rope to steady himself, flushed with excitement, almost hysterical with his news.

"A bowhead, sir!" he cried when he saw Rainey. "And killers after him! Blowin' dead ahead!"

Beyond the bows Rainey could see nothing of the whale, that must have sounded in fear of the killers, but he saw half a dozen scythe-like, black fins cutting the water in streaks of foam, all abreast, their high dorsals waving, wolves of the sea, hunting for the gray bowhead whale, to force its mouth open and feast on the delicacy of its living tongue. So Lund told him in swift sentences while they waited for the whale to broach.

"Ha'f the time the bowheads won't even try an' git away," said Lund. "Lie atop, belly up, plain jellied with fear while the killers help 'emselves. Ha'f the bowheads you git have got chunks bitten out of their tongues. If they're nigh shore when the killers show up the whales'll slide way out over the rocks an' strand 'emselves."

Rainey glanced aft. Sandy had carried his warning to Carlsen and the girl, and now was craning over the lee rail, knee-deep in the wash, trying to see something of the combat. Peggy Simms' lithe figure was leaning to one side as she, too, gazed ahead, though she still paid attention to her steering and held the schooner well up, her face bright with excitement, wet with flying brine, wisps of yellow hair streaming free in the wind from beneath the close grip of her woolen tam-o'-shanter bonnet of scarlet. Carlsen was pointing out the racing fins of the killers.

"Bl-o-ows!" started the deep voice of a lookout, from where sailors and hunters had grouped in the bows to witness this gladiatorial combat between sea monsters, staged fittingly in a sea that was running wild. Rainey strained his gaze to catch the steamy spiracle and the outthrust of the great head.

"Bl-o-ows!" The deep voice almost leaped an octave in a sudden shrill of apprehension. Other voices mingled with his in a clamor of dismay.

"Look out! Oh, look out! Dead ahead!"

The enormous bulk of the whale had appeared, not to spout, but to lie belly up, rocking on the surface with fins outspread, paralyzed with terror, directly in the course of the *Karluk*, while toward it, intent only on their blood lust, leaped the killers, thrusting at its head as the schooner surged down. In that tremendous sea the impact would be certain to mean the staving in of something forward, perhaps the springing of a butt.

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