



TAMADA.

Synopsis.—Littering on the San Francisco water front, John Rainey, newspaper reporter, is accosted by a giant blind man, who asks Rainey to lead him aboard the sailing schooner Karluk. In the cabin they find Captain Simms and a man named Carlsen. Simms recognizes the blind man, calling him Jim Lund. Lund accuses Simms of abandoning him, blind, on an ice floe, and denounces him. Simms denies the charge, but Lund refuses to be pacified. He declares his intention of accompanying the Karluk on its expedition north, where it is going in quest of a gold field which Lund has discovered. Peggy, Simms' daughter, is aboard, and defends her father. Carlsen, who is a physician as well as first mate, drugs Rainey. Awakening from his stupor, Rainey finds himself at sea. Carlsen informs him he has been kidnapped. He offers Rainey a share of the gold, and Rainey is forced to declare himself satisfied. Lund gives him a brief account of a former expedition of the Karluk, tells him he distrusts Carlsen, and suggests a "partnership." Rainey to act as Lund's "eyes." Rainey is made second mate. Captain Simms is ill and the navigation is entirely in the hands of Carlsen. At the latter's suggestion a shooting match is waged and the seal hunters exhaust their ammunition. Carlsen shows his skill with the pistol and Lund does some astonishing shooting "by sound." Sandy, the ship's boy, is swept overboard and is rescued by Rainey, who thus wins Peggy's admiration. The captain gets worse. Sandy tells how Carlsen is stirring up trouble over the division of the gold. Carlsen draws a gun on Rainey, who overpowers him.

CHAPTER V—Continued.

He talked in a low voice, but it rumbled like the distant roar of a bull. Rainey looked at the indomitable jaw that the beard could not hide, at the great barrel of his chest, the bough-like arms, the swelling thighs and calves, and responded to the suggestion that Lund could rise in Berserker rage and sweep aside all opposition.

"Carlsen says that the skipper's life is in his hands," he said. "What do you make of that?"

"I don't know what to make of it," answered Lund. "If it is, God help the skipper! I reckon he's in a bad way. Anyhow, he's out of it for the time being, Rainey."

"There's the girl," said Rainey. "I don't believe she wants to marry Carlsen."

"If she does," said Lund, "she ain't the kind we need worry about. If you're interested about the gal, Rainey, an' I tell you are, I'm tellin' you what Carlsen'll marry her if it suits his book. If it don't, he won't. An' if he wins out, he'll take her without botherin' about prayer-books an' ceremonies. I know his breed. All men are more or less selfish an' shy on morals, in stonks more or less wide, but that Carlsen's just plain skunk. I'm no saint, but, so long as I can keep wiggle, there ain't enny hunter or seaman goin' to harm a decent gal. That's another way they ain't my equal, Rainey. Savvy? Nor is Carlsen. There ain't enough real manhood in that Carlsen to grease a skillet. How about it, Rainey; are you lined up with me?"

"Just as far as I can go, Lund. I'm with you to the limit."

Lund brought down his hand with a mighty swing and caught at Rainey's in mid-air, gripping it till Rainey bit his lips to repress a cry of pain.

"You've got the guts!" cried the giant, checking the loudness of his voice abruptly. "I knew it. It ain't all goin' to go as they like it. Watch my smoke. Now, then, keep out of Carlsen's way all you can. He may try an' pick a row with you that'll put you in wrong all around. Go easy an' speak easy till land's sighted."

"What do you think Carlsen's game is, if it goes through?"

"He's fox enough to think up a dozen ways. Run the schooner ashore somewhere in the night. Wreck her. Git 'em in the boats with the gold. In a side of a week, Deming an' one or two others would have won it. Then—he'd have the only gun—he'd shoot the lot of 'em an' say they died at sea. He ain't got enny more warm blood than a squid. Or he might land, and accuse 'em all of piracy. What do we care about his plans? He ain't goin' to put 'em over."

Rainey had to relieve Hansen. He left Lund primed for resistance against Carlsen, against all the crew, if necessary, resolved to save the girl, but, as Lund stayed below and the time slid by, his confidence oozed out of him, and the odds assumed their mathematical proportion.

What could they do against so many? Back he held firm in his determination to do what he could to go down with the forlorn hope.

The Karluk was bowling along northward toward landfall and the crisis between Lund and Carlsen at good speed. The weather had subsided and the half gale now served the schooner instead of hindering her. Rainey turned over the wheel to a seaman and paced the deck. Lund's mysterious hints were unsatisfactory. He could not believe them without some basis, but the giant would never go further than vague talk of a "joker" or card up his sleeve. And they would need more than one card, Rainey thought.

He wondered whether they could win over Hansen, who had spoken for Lund against the skipper, and had then kept his counsel. But he dismissed Hansen as an ally. The Scandinavian was too cautious, too apt to consider such things as odds. Sandy was useless, aside from his good-will. He was cowed by Deming, scared of Carlsen, too puny to do more than he had done, give them warning.

Tamada? Would he fight for the share of gold he expected to come to him? Lund had described him as neutral. But, if he knew that he was to be left out of the division? At any rate, Tamada might provide him with a weapon, a sharp-bladed vegetable knife if nothing better. He could not class Tamada as an unimportant factor. There was no question to Rainey but that Tamada was, by caste, above his position as sealer's cook. It was true that a Japanese considered no means menial if they led to the proper end.

Was that end merely to gain possession of his share of the gold, or did Tamada have some deeper, more complicated reason for signing on to run the galley of the Karluk? Somehow Rainey thought there was such a reason.

CHAPTER VI.

Tamada Talks.

It was an hour from the third meal of the day. Tamada was juggling the food for three messes, and he was doing it with the calm precision of one who has every detail well mapped out and is moving on schedule. The boy Sandy was not there, probably engaged in laying the table for the hunters' mess, Rainey imagined.

Tamada regarded him with eyes that did not lack a certain luster, as a slobbery might hold it, but which, beneath their hooded lids, revealed



"You Are Not Hating Me Because You Are Californian and I Japanese," He Said.

Neither interest, nor curiosity, nor friendliness, they belonged in his unwrinkled face, they were altogether neutral. Yet they seemed covertly to suggest to Rainey that they might, on occasion, flame with wrath or hatred, or show the burning light of high intelligence.

"Tamada," he queried, "you think I am your friend, that I would rather help you than otherwise?"

"I think that—yes?" answered the Japanese without hesitation and without servility. "You are not hating me because you are Californian and I Japanese," he said. "I know that."

There was little time to spare, and there was likelihood of interruption, so Rainey plunged into his subject without introduction.

"They promised you a share of this treasure, Tamada?" he asked.

"They promised me that, yes."

"They do not intend to give it to you. You may have guessed this, but I am sure of it. I, too, am promised some of the gold, but they do not intend to give it to me. They will offer Mr. Lund only a small portion of what was originally arranged, the same amount as the rest of them are to get. He will refuse that tomorrow, when a meeting is to be called. Then there will be trouble. I shall stand with Mr. Lund. If we win you will get your share, whether you help us or not. If you help us I can promise you at least twice the amount you were to get."

"How can I help you? If this is to be talked over at a meeting I shall not be allowed to be present. I do not think it will help you for me to join. I do not see how you can win. If you can show some way out I will do what I can. But I like to see way out."

He mollified the bald acknowledgment of his neutrality with a little bow and a hissing-in-breath. Back of it all was a will that was inflexible, thought Rainey.

"If we lose, you lose," he went on lamely. He had come on a fool's errand, he decided.

"I think I shall get my money," said Tamada. The Oriental gave a swift smile, that held no mirth, no friendship, rather, a sardonic appreciation of the situation, without rancor.

"They are very foolish," he said. "They make me cook, they eat what I serve. They say Tamada is very good cook. But he is Jap, d—n him. Suppose I put something in that food, that they would not taste? I could send them all to sleep. I could kill them. I could do it so they never suspect, but would go to their beds—and never get up from them. It would be very easy. Yet they trust me."

The statement was so matter-of-fact that Rainey felt his horror gather slowly as he stared at the impassive Oriental.

A thought suddenly flashed over him. Was Tamada in league with Carlsen? Had he mistaken his man? Did Carlsen plan to have Tamada undertake a wholesale poisoning to secure the gold himself, providing the drugs? Was it a friendly hint from the Japanese?

When Rainey's watch was ended and he was closeted with Lund in the latter's cabin, the giant promptly quashed all discussion of Tamada's attitude.

"I'll put no trust in any slant-eyed, yellow-skinned rice-eater," he announced emphatically. "They're against us, race an' religion. They want California, or rather, the Pacific coast, an' they think they're goin' to git it. They're no more akin to us than a snake is a conkin to an eel. They're not of our breed, an' you can't mix the two. I'll have no deal with Tamada, beyond gettin' dope out of him. If he helped us it'd be only to further his own end. Not that he can do much—unless—"

He lowered his voice to a husky whisper.

"There's one thing may slip in our gold-gettin', matey," he said—"the Japanese. I doubt if this island is set down on American or British charts. But I bet it is on the Japanese. They don't know of the gold, or it wouldn't be there. Rightly, the island may belong to Russia, but, since the war, Russia's in a bad way, an' enny-thing loose from the mainland'll be gobbled by Japan."

"What the Japs grab they don't let go of. If they should suspicion us of gettin' gold off enny island they'd trump up to call theira, if they found gold on us at all, it'd be all off with us an' the Karluk. We'd be dumped inside of some Jap prison an' the schooner confiscated."

"An' if things go right with us, an' we ever sight the smoke of a Jap gun-boat comin' our way, the first thing I'll be apt to do will be to scrag Tamada or he'll blow the whole proposition, whether we've got the gold aboard or not. Even if he didn't want to tell becos of his own share, they'd git it out of him what was after."

"Ever play much at cards?" he went on. "Play for yore last red when you don't know where to turn for another, an' have all the crowd thinkin' you're goin' broke as they watch the play? An' then you slap down a card they've all overlooked an' larf in the other chap's face?"

"That's what I'm goin' to do with Carlsen. I've got that kind of a card, matey, an' I ain't goin' to spoil my fun by tellin' even you what it is, though you're my partner in this gamble. It's a trump, an' Carlsen's overlooked it."

Lund chuckled hugely as he mixed himself some whisky and water. Rainey refused a drink. He was nervous, bothering over what the outcome might be, and how he might handle himself. He was not at all sure of his own grit. There was a nasty doubt as to his own prowess and his own courage that kept cropping up. And that state of mind is not a pleasant one.

Rainey went over and over the situation as a squirrel might race around the bars of his revolving cylinder, and came to only one conclusion, the inevitable one, to let the matter develop itself. Lund's winning card he had bothered about until his brain was tired. When he turned in at last, despite his determination to follow Lund's admonition concerning sleep, it would not come to him.

He was awakened at half-past seven, got a cup of coffee after dressing warmly, and went on deck. Carlsen and the girl had preceded him. Lund stood at the rail with his beak of a nose wrinkled, snuffing toward the icy crags that were spouting a dazzle of white flame, set about with smaller, sudden flares of ruby, emerald and sapphire.

Tamada appeared and announced breakfast.

"You'll be coming later, Rainey?" asked Carlsen. "You and Lund?"

He started for the companionway and the girl followed. As she passed the wheel Rainey spoke to her:

"I am sorry your father is so ill, Miss Simms," he said.

She looked at him with eyes that were filled with sadness, that seemed liquid with tears bravely held back.

"I am afraid he is dying," she answered in a low voice. "Thank you for your sympathy. I—"

She stopped at some slight sound that Rainey did not catch. But he saw the face of Carlsen framed in the shadow of the companion, his mouth open in a wolf grin, and the man's eyes were gleaming crimson. He held up a hand for the girl. She passed down without taking it.

Lund came over to Rainey.

"Clear weather, they tell me?" he said. "That's unusual. Fog off the Aleutians three hundred an' fifty days of the year, as a rule. Soon as we sight land, which'll be Unalaska or thereabouts, Carlsen will have the course changed. There's a considerable fleet of United States revenue cutters at Unalaska, an' Carlsen won't pull ennything until we're well west of there. He's pretty cocky this mornin'."

There had always been a certain rollicking good-humor about Lund. This morning he was grim, his face, with its beak of a nose and aggressive chin beneath the flaming whiskers, and

There had always been a certain rollicking good-humor about Lund. This morning he was grim, his face, with its beak of a nose and aggressive chin beneath the flaming whiskers, and



Lund Stood at the Rail With His Beak of a Nose Wrinkled.

his whole magnificent body gave the impression of resolve and repressed action. Rainey fancied whimsically that he could hear a dynamo purring inside the giant's massiveness. He had seen him in open rage when he had first denounced Honest Simms, but the serious mood was far more impressive.

The big man stepped like a great cat, his head was thrust slightly forward, his great hands were half open. One forgot his blindness. Despite the unsightly black lenses, Lund appeared so absolutely prepared and, in a different way, fully as confident as Carlsen. A certain audacious assurance seemed to ooze out of him, to permeate his neighborhood, and a measure of it extended to Rainey.

Carlsen, before he went below, had sent a man into the fore-spreaders, and now he shouted, cupping his hands and sounding his news as if it had been a call to arms:

"Land-ho!"

"What is it?" called Rainey back.

"High peak, sir. Dead ahead! Clouds on it, or smoke."

He came sliding down the halcyards to the deck as Lund said: "That'll be Makushin. Now the fun'll commence."

From below the sailors off watch came up on deck, and the hunters, the latter wiping their mouths, fresh from their interrupted breakfast, all crowding forward to get a glimpse of the land. Minutes passed before Carlsen came on deck. He had not hurried his meal.

"I'll take her over, Rainey," he said briefly.

Rainey and Lund were barely seated before the heeling of the schooner and the scuffle of feet told of Lund's prophesied change of course. Rainey looked at the telltale compass above his head.

"Heading due west," he told Lund. "West it is," said the giant. "More coffee, Tamada. Fill your belly, Rainey. Get a good meal while the eatin' is good."

Although it was Hansen's watch below, Rainey found him at the wheel instead of the seaman he had left there. Carlsen came up to him smiling.

"Better let Hansen have the deck, Mr. Rainey," he said. "We're going to have a conference in the cabin at four bells, and I'd like you to be present."

"The shots blended. Lund stood there erect, uninjured. A red blotch showed between Carlsen's eyes."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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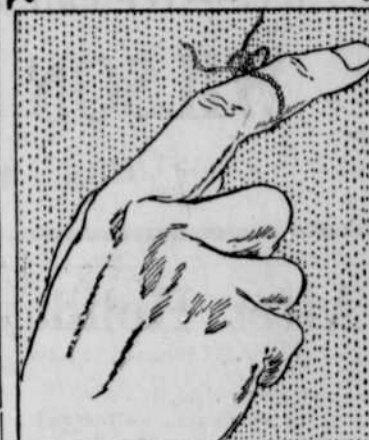
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