

# A Man To His Mate

By J. ALLEN DUNN

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## LUND AND CARLSEN.

Synopsis.—Littering on the San Francisco water front, John Rainey, newspaper reporter, is accounted by a giant blind man, who asks Rainey to lead him aboard the sailing schooner Karliuk. In the cabin they find Captain Simms and a man named Carlens. 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 Karliuk 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. Carlens, who is a physician as well as first mate, drugs Rainey. Awakening from his stupor, Rainey finds himself at sea. Carlens 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 Karliuk, tells him he distrusts Carlens, and suggests a "partnership." Rainey tells him how Carlens is strutting up trouble over the division of the gold. Carlens draws a gun on Rainey, who overpowers him. Tamada, the mysterious Japanese cook, declares himself neutral.

## CHAPTER VI—Continued.

"All right, sir," Rainey answered, getting a thrill at this first actual intimation of the meeting. Hansen, it seemed, was not to be one of the representatives of the seamen. And Carlens had been smart enough to forestall Lund's demand for Rainey by taking some of the wind out of the giant's sails and doing the unexpected. Unless the hunters had suggested that Rainey be present. But that was hardly likely, considering that he was to be left out of the deal.

"In just what capacity are you calling this conference?" Lund asked, when Carlens notified him in turn. "The skipper ain't dead, is he?"

"I represent the captain, Lund," replied the doctor. "He entirely approves of what I am about to suggest to you and the men. In fact I have his signature to a document that I hope you will sign also. It will be greatly to your interest to do so. I am in present charge of the Karliuk."

"You ain't a regular member of this expedition," objected Lund stolidly. "Neither am I a member of the crew, just now. But the skipper's my partner in this deal, signed, sealed and recorded. Afore I go to enny meetin' I'd like to have a talk with him personally. That's fair enough, ain't it?"

Several of the hunters had gathered about, and Lund's question seemed a general appeal. Carlens shrugged his shoulders.

"If you had your eyesight," he said almost brutally, "you could soon see that the skipper was in no condition to discuss matters, much less be present."

"Here's my eyesight," countered Lund. "Mr. Rainey here. Let him see the skipper and ask him a question or two?"

"What kind of a question? I'm asking as his doctor, Lund."

"For one thing if he's read the paper you say he signed. I want to be sure of that. An' I don't make it enny of your bizness, Carlens, what I want to say to my partner, by proxy or otherwise. Second thing, I'd like to be sure he's still alive. As for your standin' as his doctor, all I've got to say is that you're a d-d pore doctor, so far as the skipper's concerned, ennyway."

The two men stood facing each other, Carlens looking evenly at the giant, whose black glasses warded off his glance. It was wasting looks to glare at a blind man. Equally to sneer. But the bout between the two was timed now, and both were casting aside any veneer of diplomacy, their enmity manifesting itself in the raw. The issue was growing tense.

Rainey fancied that Carlens was not entirely sure of his following, and relied upon Lund's indignant refusal of terms to back up his plans of getting rid of him decisively.

## CHAPTER VII.

### The Show-Down.

"Rainey can see the skipper," said Carlens carelessly.

"All right," said Lund. "Will you do that Rainey? Now?" And Rainey, with a feeble fancy that the giant had one of his blind eyes at him, held the black lenses were deceiving him.

He went below immediately and tapped on the door, a little surprised to see the girl appear in the opening. The drawn expression of her face, the strained faint smile with which she greeted him, the hopeless look in her eyes, started him.

"I wanted to see your father," he said in a low voice.

She told him to enter.

"He is in a stupor," she said. "He has been that way since last night, following a collapse. I can barely find his pulse, but his breath shows on this."

She produced a small mirror, little larger than a dollar, and held it before her father's lips. When she took it away Rainey saw a trace of moisture.

"Carlens cannot rouse him?" he asked.

"Cannot—or will not," she answered in a voice that held a hard quality for all its despondency.

"Lately the doctor has seemed uncertain. He talks of perverted nerve functions, and he has obtained a tremendous influence over father."

"You heard what he said when—the night he tried to shoot you? You see, I am trusting you in all this, Mr. Rainey. I must trust some one. If I don't I can't stand it. I think I shall go mad, sometimes. The doctor has changed. It is as if he was a dual personality—like Jekyll and Hyde—and now he is always Hyde. He said last night that he could save father or—that he would let father die. I told him it was sheer murder! He laughed. He said he would save him—for a price."

She stopped, and Rainey supplied the gap, sure that he was right.

"If you would marry him?"

The girl nodded. "Father will do anything he tells him. I sometimes think he tortures father and only relieves him when father promises what he wants. Otherwise I could not understand. Last night father asked me to do this thing. He told me he looked upon the doctor as a son, that it would make him happy for me to marry him—now. That he would perform the ceremony. That he did not think he would live long and he wanted to see me with a protector."

"It was horrible. What shall I do?"

"Miss Simms," said Rainey, "your father is not in his right mind or he would see Carlens as you do, as I do. Carlens' brain is turned with the lure of the gold. If he marries you, I believe it is only for your share, for what you will get from your father. It cannot be right to do a wrong thing. No good could come from it. But—something may happen this morning. I cannot tell you what. I do not know, except that Lund is to face Carlens. It may change matters."

"Lund," she said scornfully. "What can he do? And he accused my father of deserting him. I—"

A knock came at the door, and it started to open. Carlens entered.

"Ah," he said. "I trust I have not disturbed you. I had no idea I should interrupt a tete-a-tete. Are you satisfied as to the captain's condition, Mr. Rainey?"

Rainey went on deck, raging but impotent. He told Lund briefly of the talk between him and Peggy Simms, and described the general symptoms of the skipper's strange malady. It was nine o'clock, an hour to the meeting. He went down to his own room and sat on the bunk, smoking, trying to piece up the puzzle. If Carlens was a potential murderer, if he intended to let Simms die, why should he want to marry the girl? He thought he solved that issue.

As his wife Carlens would retain her share. If he gave her up, it would go into the common purse. But, if he expected to trick the men out of it all, that would be unnecessary. Did he really love the girl? Or was his lust for gold mingled with a passion for possession of her? He might know that the girl would kill herself before she would submit to dishonor. Perhaps he knew she had the means!

One thing became paramount—to save Peggy Simms. Lund might fight for the gold; Rainey would battle for the girl's sanctity. And, armed with that resolve, Rainey went out into the main cabin.

Carlens took the head of the table. Lund faced him at the other end. All six of the hunters, as privileged characters, were present, but only three of the seamen, awkward and diffident at being aft. The nine, with Rainey, ranged themselves on either side of the table, five and five, with Rainey on Lund's right. The girl was not present. Yet her share was an important factor.

Lund sat with folded arms. His great body relaxed. Now that the table was set, the cards all dealt, and the first play about to be made, the giant shed his tenseness. Even his grim face softened a trifle. He seemed to regard the affair with a certain amount of humor, coupled with the sweet of a gambler who loves the game whether the stakes are for death or dollars.

Carlens had a paper under his hand, but deferred its reading until he had addressed the meeting.

"A ship," he said, "is a little community, a world in itself. To its safety every member is a necessity, the lookout as much as the man at the wheel, the compass as well as the navigator. And, when a ship is engaged in a certain calling, those who are called upon as experts in that line are equally essential with the rest. Each man's responsibility being equal, his reward should be also equal.

"Payment for all services comes on this voyage from an uncertain amount of gold that Nature, mother of us all, and therefore intending that all her children shall share her heritage, has washed up on a beach from some deep-sea vein and thus deposited upon an uncharted, unclaimed island. It is discovered by an Indian, the discovery is handed on to another."

"Mennin' me," Lund seemed to be enjoying himself. Despite the fact that Carlens was presiding and most evidently assumed the attributes of leader, despite the fact that ten of the twelve at the table were arrayed against him, with the rest of the seamen behind them, Lund was decidedly enjoying himself.

"Share and share alike," he said. "I've got yore drift, Carlens. Let's get down to brass tacks. The idea is to divvy the gold into equal parts, ain't it? How does she split? There's twenty-five souls aboard. Does that mean you split the heap into a hundred parts an' each one gets four?"

"No," it was Deming who answered. "It don't. The Jap don't come in, for one."

"A cook ain't a brother?"

"Not when he's got a yellow skin," answered Deming. "We'll take up a collection for Sandy. Rainey ain't in on the deal. We split it just twenty-two ways. What have you got to say about it?"

His tone was truculent, and Carlens did not appear disposed to check him. He appeared not quite certain of the temper of the hunters.

"You figger were all equal aboard," said Lund slowly, "leavin' out Mr. Rainey, Tamada an' Sandy. You an' me, an' Carlens an' Harris there"—he

nodded toward one of the seaman delegates who listened with his slack mouth agape, scratching himself under the armpit—"are all equal?"

Deming cast a glance at Harris and, for just a moment, hesitated.

Harris, squinting under the look of Deming, which was aped by the sudden scrutiny of all the hunters, found speech: "How in h—ll did you know I was here?" he demanded of Lund. "I ain't opened my mouth yet!"

"That ain't the truth, Harris," replied Lund composedly. "It's allus open. But if you want to know, I smelled ye."

There was a guffaw at the sally. Carlens' voice stopped it.

"I'll answer the question, Lund. Yes, we're all equal. The world is not a democracy. Harris, so far, hasn't had a chance to get the equal share that belongs to him by rights. That's what I meant by saying that the Karliuk was a little world of its own. We're all equal on board."

"Except Rainey, Tamada an' Sandy. Seems to me yore argumint's got holes in 't, Carlens."

"We are waiting to know whether you agree with us?" replied Carlens. His voice had altered quality. It held the direct challenge. Lund accepted it.

"I don't," he answered dryly. "There ain't enny one of you my equal, an' you've showed it. You had to band together in a pack, like a flock of sheep, with Carlens for sheepherder. I'm talking," he went on in a tone that suddenly leaped to thunder. "None of you have got the brains of Carlens, becuz he had to put this scheme inter yore needles. Deming, you know d—d well you play better poker than the rest, an' you agreed to this bezuz you figger you'll win most of the gold afore the yuzke is over. The rest of you suckers listened becuz some one tells you you are gold to get morrow. An' what's rightly comin' to you."

"This gold is mine by right of discovery. I have my ship through back

luck, an' I make a deal whereby the skipper gets the same as I do, an' the ship, which is the same as his daughter, gets almost as much. You members offered a share on top of yore wages if you wanted to take the chance—two shares to the hunters. It was d—d liberal, an' you grabbed at it. I got left on the ice, blind on a breakin' floe, an' you sailed off an' grabbed a handful or so of gold, enough to set you crazy."

"What in blazes would you know what to do with it, enny of you? Split it all along the Barb'ry coast, or gamble it off to Deming. Is there one of you 'ud have got off their floe an', blind as I was, turned up agin' me? Not one of ye. An' when I did show you got some becuz you'd figgered there 'ud be more with me away."

"A fine lot of skunks. You can take yore d—d bit of paper an' light yore pipes with it, for all of me. To h—ll with it!"

"Shut up!" His voice topped the murmurs at the table. Carlens sat quiet, sometimes licking his lips gently, listening to Lund as he might have listened to the rantings of a melodramatic actor. But Rainey sensed that he was making a mistake. He was letting Lund go too far. The men were listening to Lund, and he knew that the giant was talking for a specific purpose. Just to what end he could not guess. The big booming voice held them, while it lashed them.

"Equal to me? Bah! I'm a man. You're a lot of fools. Talk about me bein' blind. It was ice-blind got me. Then ophthalmology matterin' up my eyes. It's gold-blind's got you. You're cave-fish, a lot of blind suckers."

He leaned over the table pointing a massive square finger, thatched with red wool, direct at Carlens, as if he had been leveling a weapon.

"Carlens' a fake! He's got you hipped. He thinks he's boss, becuz he's the only navigator of yore crowd. I ain't overlooked that card, Carlens. That ain't the only string he's got on ye. Nor the three shares he expects to pull down. He made you pore suckers fire off all yore shells; he found out you ain't got a gun left among you that's enny more use than a club. He's got a gun an' he showed you how he could use it. He's sittin' back larfin' at the bunch of you!"

The men stirred. Rainey saw Carlens' grin disappear. He dropped the paper. His face paled, the veins showed suddenly like purple veins in dirty marble.

"I've got that gun yet, Lund," he snarled.

Lund laughed, the ring of it so confident that the men glanced from him to Carlens nervously.

"You're a fake, Carlens," he said. "And I've got yore number! To h—ll with you an' yore pop-gun. You ain't even a doctor. I saw real doctors ashore about my eyes. Niphalpepsia, they call snow-blindness. I'll let you never hear of it. You're only a woman-conning dope-shooter! Else you'd have known that niphalpepsia ain't permanent! I've bin gettin' my sight back ever since I left Seattle. An' now, d—n you for a molly-headed, slimy-souled fakir, stand up an' say you're my equal!"

He stood up himself, towering above the rest as they rose from their chairs, tearing the black glasses from his eyes and flinging them at Carlens, who was forced to throw up a hand to ward them off. Rainey got one glimpse of the giant's eyes. They were gray-blue, the color of agateware, hard as steel, implacable.

Carlens swiped aside the spectacles and they glittered on the floor as he leaped up and the automatic shone in his hand. Lund had folded his arms above his great chest. He laughed again, and his arms opened.

In an instant Rainey caught the object of Lund's speechmaking. He had done it to enrage Carlens beyond endurance, to make him draw his gun. Giant as he was, he moved with the grace of a panther, with a swiftness too fast for the eye to register. Something flashed in his right hand, a gun, that he had drawn from a holster slung over his left breast.

The shots blended. A red blood showed between Carlens' eyes. He slumped down into his chair, his arms clutched the table, his gun falling from his nervous hand, his forehead striking the wood like the sound of an auctioneer's gavel. Lund had beaten him to the draw.

Lund, no longer a blind Samson, with contempt in his agate eyes, surveyed the scattering group of men who stared at the dead man dully, as if gripped by the exhibition of a miracle.



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"You murderer!" she cried. "Lund grinned at her, but there was no laughter in his eyes."

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