

A Man To His Mate

By J. ALLEN DUNN

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"HE IS DEAD!"

Synopsis.—Loitering on the San Francisco waterfront, 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. Carlsen shows his skill with the pistol and Lund does some astonishing shooting "by sound." Sundry, the ship's boy, is swept overboard and is rescued by Rainey, who thus wins Peggy's admiration. The captain gets worse. Sundry tells how Carlsen is stirring up trouble over the division of the gold. Carlsen draws a gun on Rainey, who overpowers him. Tamada, the mysterious Japanese cook, declares himself neutral. Lund, his sight restored, kills Carlsen.

CHAPTER VII—Continued.

"It's all right, Miss Simms," he said. Just killed a skunk. Rainey, got that un' an' attend to the young lady, will you?"

The girl stood in the doorway of her father's cabin, her face frozen to horror, her eyes fixed on Lund with epulsion. As Rainey got the automatic, slipped it into his pocket, and went toward her, she shrank from him. But her voice was for Lund.

"You murderer!" she cried.

Lund grinned at her, but there was laughter in his eyes.

"We'll thrash that out later, miss," he said. "Now, you men, jump forward, all of you. Deming, unlock that door, ump! Equals, are you? I'll show you who's master on this ship. Wait!"

His voice snapped like the crack of whip and they all halted, save Deming, who sullenly fitted the key to the lock of the corridor entrance.

"Take this with you," said Lund, placing in Carlsen's sagging body. When you get tired of his company, throw him overboard. Jump to it!"

The nearest men took up the body of the doctor and they all fled forward, silently obedient to the man who ordered them.

The girl shuddered. Rainey saw that Lund was exhilarated by his victory, that the primitive fighting brute was prominent. Carlsen had tried to shoot first, goned to it; his death was deserved; but it seemed to Rainey that Lund's exhibition of savagery was unnecessary. But he also saw that Lund would not heed any protest that he might make, he was still swept on by his course of action, not yet complete.

"I'll borrow Carlsen's sextant," said Lund. "Nigh noon, an' 'erbout time I get our reckonin'." He went into the doctor's cabin and came out with the instrument, tucking it under his arm as he went on deck.

The girl wheeled into her father's room and shut the door. Rainey heard the click of the bolt on the other side. He listened for a moment, but heard nothing within the skipper's cabin. The swift rush of events was still a jumble. Slowly he went up the companionway to the deck.

CHAPTER VIII.

Honest Simms.

Lund greeted Rainey with a curt nod. Hansen was still at the helm. The crew on duty were standing about them, their eyes on Lund. They had found a new master, and they were sowed, eager to do their best.

"I'll show this crew they've got a skipper aboard," said Lund. "How's the cap'n?"

Rainey told him.

"We'll see what we can do for him," said Lund. "He's better off without that fakir, that's a cinch. Called me a murderer," he went on with a good-humored laugh. "Got spunk, she has, and she's a trim bit. A slip of a gal, but she's game. An' good-lookin', eh, Rainey?"

He smiled as if the prospect suited him. A suspicion leaped into Rainey's brain. Lund had said he would not see a decent gal harmed. But the man was changed. He had fought and won, and victory shone in his eyes with a glitter that was immune from sympathy, for all his air of good-nature.

He had said that a man under his skin was just an animal. His apparel! the girl struck Rainey with surprise. "To the victor belongs the

spoils." Somehow the quotation persisted. What if Lund regarded the girl as legitimate loot? He might have talked differently beforehand, to assure himself of Rainey's support.

And Rainey suddenly felt as if his support had been uncalled upon, a frail reed at best. Lund had not needed him; would he need him, save as an aid, not altogether necessary, with Hansen aboard, to run the ship?

He said nothing, but thrust both hands into the side pockets of the pilot coat he had acquired from the ship's stores. The sudden touch of cold steel gave him new courage. He had sworn to protect the girl. If Lund, seeming more like a pirate than ever, with his cold eyes sweeping the horizon, his bulk casting Rainey's into a dwarf's by comparison, attempted to harm Peggy Simms, Rainey resolved to play the part of champion.

He could not shoot like Lund, but he was armed. He felt the mastery of the man. And he felt incompetent beside him. Lund held the power of life and death, not by brute force alone. He was the only navigator aboard, with the skipper seriously ill. As such alone he held them in his hand, once they were out of sight of land.

"Hansen," said Lund, "Mr. Rainey'll relieve you after we've eaten. Come on, Rainey. You ain't lost yore appetite, I hope. Watch me discard that spoon for a knife an' fork. I don't have to play blind man enny longer."

Food did not appeal to Rainey. It was Lund's demeanor that gripped him. The giant dismissed Carlsen as unceremoniously as he might have flipped the ash from a cigar, or tossed the stub overboard.

"I've got to tackle those hunters," Lund said. "I expect trouble there, sooner or later. But I'm goin' to lay down the law to 'em. If they come clean, well an' good, they get their original two shares. If not, they don't get a plugged nickel. An' Deming's the one who'll stir up the trouble, take it from me. I'd jest as soon it was war. I don't see as we can help the skipper much 'less we try reverse treatment of what Carlsen did—if we know what that was. If he gits worse she'll let us know, I reckon. See you later."

Rainey took the dismissal and went up to the relief of Hansen. He did not mention what had happened until the Scandinavian referred to it indirectly.

"They put the doc overboard, sir, soon's Mr. Lund an' you bane go below."

It seemed a summary dismissal of the dead, without ceremony. Yet, for the rite to be authentic, Lund must have presided, and the sea-burnal service would have been a mockery under the circumstances. It was the best thing to have done. Rainey felt, but he could not avoid a mental shiver at the

thought of the man, so lately vital, his brain alive with energy, sliding through the cold water to the ooze to lie there, sodden, swinging with the sub-sea currents until the ocean scavengers claimed him.

"All right, Hansen," he said in answer, and the man hurried off after his extra detail.

Lund came up after a while, and Rainey told him of the fate of Carlsen's body.

"I figured they'd do about that," commented Lund. "They savvy he'd aimed to make suckers out of 'em, an' they dumped him. But they ain't on our side, by a long sight. That Deming is a better man than I thought. He's the main groovch among 'em. Said if I hadn't had a gun he'd have tackled me in the cabin. Meant it, too, though I'd have smashed him. He's sore becuz I w'd he warn't my equal. I told him if he wanted to try it out, I'd accom-

modate 'em. He didn't take it up, an' they'll let him about it. He'll pack a grudge. I ain't afraid of their knifin' me, not while the skipper's sick. They need me to navigate."

"This might be a good chance for me to handle a sextant," suggested Rainey casually.

Lund shook his head, smiling, but his eyes hard.

"Not yet, matey," he said. "Not that I don't trust you, but for me to be the only one, jest now, is a sort of life insurance that suits me to carry. They might figger, if you was able to navigate, that they c'd put the screws on you to carry 'em through, with 'em out of the way. I don't say they could, but they might make it hard for you, an' you ain't got quite the same stake in this I have."

Here was cold logic, but Rainey saw the force of it. Hansen came up early to split the watch and put their schedule right again, and Lund went below with Rainey. Lund ordered Tamada to bring a bottle and glasses, and they sat down at the table. Rainey needed the kick of a drink, and took one.

As Lund was raising his glass with a toast of "Here's to luck," the skipper's door opened and the girl appeared. She looked like a ghost. Her hair was disheveled and her eyes stared at them without seeming recognition. But she spoke, in a flat, toneless voice.

"My father is dead! I—" she faltered, swayed and seemed to swoon as she sank toward the floor. Rainey darted forward, but Lund was quicker and swooped her up in his arms as if she had been a feather, took her to the table, set her in a chair, dabbed a napkin in some water and applied it to her brows.

"Chafe aer wrists," he ordered Rainey. "Undo that top button of her blouse. That's enough; she ain't got no corsets. She'll come through. Plumb worn out. That's all."

He handled her, deftly as a nurse would a child. Rainey chafed the slender wrists and bent her palms, and soon she opened her eyes and sighed. Then she pulled away from Lund, bending over her, and got to her feet. "I must go to my father," she said. "He is dead."

They followed her into the cabin and Lund bent over the bunk.

"Looks like it," he whispered to Rainey. Then he tore open the skipper's vest and shirt and laid his hand on his chest. The girl made a faint motion as if to stop him, but did not hinder him. She was at the end of her own strength from weariness and worry. Lund suddenly raised his head.

"There's a flutter," he announced. "He ain't gone yet. Get Tamada an' some brandy."

With the dose there came signs of revival, a low moan from the skipper. The girl flew to his side. Tamada, standing by with the bottle, stepped forward, handed the brandy to Rainey, and rolled up the lid of an eye, looking closely at the pupil.

"I study medicine at Tokyo," he said.

"Why didn't ye say so before?" demanded Lund. It did not occur to any of them to doubt Tamada's word. There was an air of professional assurance and an efficiency about him that carried weight. "What can you do for him? There's a medicine chest in Carlsen's room."

"I was hired to cook," said Tamada quietly. "I should not have been permitted to interfere. It is not my business if a white man makes a fool of himself. Now we want morphine and hypodermic syringe."

Tamada rolled up the captain's sleeve. The flesh, shrunken, pallid, was closely spotted with dot-like scars that showed livid, as if the captain had been suffering from some strange rash.

Lund whistled softly. Rainey, too, knew what it meant. The skipper had been a veritable slave to the drug. Carlsen had administered it, prescribed it, used it as a means to bring Simms under his subjection.

"How much d'ye suppose he took at once?" Lund asked the Japanese in a low voice.

"Fifteen grains, I think. Maybe more. Too much! Always too much drug in his veins. Much worse than opium for man."

"Carlsen's work," growled Lund. "Increased the stuff on him till he couldn't do without it. Made him a slave to dope an' Carlsen his boss. He deserved killin' jest for that, the skunk."

Rainey frantically searched through the medicine chest and, finding only five tablets marked Morphine 1 gr. in a bottle, sought elsewhere in vain. And he could find no needle. But he ran across some automatic cartridges and put them in his pockets before he hurried back.

"This is not enough," said Tamada. "And we should have needle. But I dissolve these in galley." And he hurried out. The girl had slipped down on her knees beside the bed, holding her father's hand against her lips, her eyes closed. She seemed to be praying.

Tamada administered the morphine. The beneficial results were apparent. The dry, frightfully sallow skin had changed and Simms was breathing freely, while Tamada, feeling his

pulse, nodded affirmatively to the girl's questioning glance.

"We'll have to put in to Unalaska," Rainey said. "There are doctors there." The girl turned toward Lund. He smiled at the intensity of her gaze and pose.

"I play fair, Miss Peggy," he said. "Rainey, change the course."

The Karluk came about as Rainey reached the deck and gave his orders. Then he returned to the cabin. The captain had opened his eyes.

"Peggy!" he murmured. "Carlsen, where is he? Lund! Good God, Lund, you can see?"

"Keep quiet as you can," said Tamada. "Something in his voice made the skipper shift his look to the Japanese."

"Where's Carlsen?" he asked again. "He can't come now," said Tamada. "Under the urge of the drug the skipper's brain seemed abnormally clear, his intuition heightened."

"Carlsen's dead?" he asked. Then, shifting to Lund: "You killed him, Jim?"

Lund nodded.

"How much morphine did you give me?"

"Five grains."

"It's not enough. It won't last. There isn't any more?" he flashed out, with sudden energy, trying to raise himself. "I'll be gone in an hour or two. Got to talk while this lasts. Jim—about leavin' you that time. I could have come back. I had words about



The Girl Had Slipped Down on Her Knees Beside the Bed.

with Hansen. He knows. But the gale was bad, an' the ice. It wasn't the gold, Jim. I swear it. I had the ship an' crew to look out for. An' Peggy, at home.

"I might have gone back sooner, Jim, I'll own up to that. But it wasn't the gold that did it. An'—I didn't hear what you shouted, Jim. The storm came up. We were frozen by the time we found the ship. Numb."

"Jim, this trouble hit me the day after we left the doe. Not sciatia, at first, but in the head. I couldn't think right. I was just numb in the brain. An' when it cleared off, it was too late. The ice had closed. We couldn't go back. I read up in my medical book, Jim, later, when the sciatia took me."

"Had to take to my bunk. Couldn't stand. I had morphine, an' it relieved me. Took too much after a while. Had to have it. Got better in San Francisco for a bit. Then Carlsen prescribed it. Morphine was my boss, an' then Carlsen, he was boss of the morphine. Seemed like—seemed like—"

His voice was weaker when he spoke again. They came closer to catch his whispers.

"Carlsen—mind wasn't my own. Peggy—I wasn't in my right mind, honey. Not when—Carlsen—he was angel when he gave me what I wanted—devil—when he wouldn't. Made me—do things. But he's dead. And I'm going. Never reach Unalaska. Peggy—forgive. Meant for best—but—not in right mind. Jim—it wasn't the gold. Not Peggy's fault—anyway."

"She'll get hers, Simms," said Lund. "Yours too."

The skipper's eyes closed and his frame settled under the covers. The girl flung herself on the bed in uncontrollable weeping. Lund raised his eyebrows at Tamada, who shrugged his shoulders.

"Better get out o' here," whispered Lund. He and Rainey went out together. In a few minutes Tamada joined them, his face sphinxlike as ever.

"He is dead," he said.

Rainey and Lund went on deck. The schooner thrashed toward the volcano, the bearing-mark for Unalaska, hidden behind it. They paced up and down in silence.

"But the girl, too, had a weapon. He hugged that thought."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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