The ICE PILOT

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GARDEN CITY, N. Y., AND TORONTO

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DEDICATED TO

THE CAPTAIN OF THE *KARLUK*

SEASON 1897-8

The floes through which Stirling guided the ship became larger and higher

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CHAPTER I—THE COAST OF BARBARY

It was raining in San Francisco.

Over that Bagdad of the West a thin drizzling mist swept like some fine seiner's net; over the Bay a fog hung.

A man stood alone on the crest of Telegraph Hill. Below him the city stretched with its square-checked habitations; its long, blurred lanes of lights; its trolley cars creeping like glow-worms up and down the slippery inclines.

That evening the man had watched the sun go down in yellow splendour. He had seen the shadow of night chase the sunlight in a mad frolic beyond the edge of the world. He had noted—for his eyes were sharp—the fore-topsail of a windjammer cut a square nick out of the horizon, and come like a scared white thing through the Golden Gate.

Directly below the man a house, which was perched on the declivity, seemed to burst with drunken mirth and laughter. A woman's voice swung in tune with a tinkling piano. She sang an old chantey that whalers know:

> "'Rah for the grog—
> The jolly, jolly grog.
> 'Rah for the grog and tobacco.
> We've spent all our tin with the ladies, drinking gin,
> And across the briny ocean we must wan—der——"

The man shrugged his shoulders, clinked two silver coins together, and descended the hill to the Blubber Room, from whence the song had come.

The piano drummed out a noisy welcome when he opened and closed the door.

He took a seat at a table, removed his cap from his gray-sprinkled head, leaned back, and looked around the smoky interior of the Blubber Room. The figures of old salts, crimps, half-pay officers, and one square-jawed sailor loomed through the fetid air. A woman with carmined lips and a thin blue neck stood by a youth who played the piano.

It was all familiar to Stirling—known from the Clyde to the Golden Horn as Horace Stirling, the Ice Pilot. He had been in such dives before. He knew Number Nine, Yokohama, and the Silver Dollar at Manila.

Stirling had struck hard luck, chicken farming over Oakland way. His chickens died as sailors die of scurvy at Herschel Island, and he wanted to quit the shore.

The sea and the Arctic called, and he had little money left. There was a chance for adventure in the Blubber Room that night; rumour had it that a ship was outfitting for a passage to East Cape, Siberia, and the unknown land around the Pole.

Stirling possessed a countenance stamped with the seal of misfortune—a face with which destiny loves to toy, the face of a rover and a castaway, yet withal, a strong face which would remain strong to the very end.

His eyes were dark brown and wide-set. His nose was long and divided full; round cheeks blood-veined to a purplish tinge that spoke not only of wind and weather, of the sea and brine, but also of the lees and dregs of a wanderer's life.

The figure of him, sitting at the table, seemed blocked from sturdy oak.

He eyed the patrons of the Blubber Room and concluded that the adventure he sought for was far away from that noisy, smoke-filled dive. There was but one occupant who looked capable of a desperate enterprise—the sailor—and this man sat hunched in a chair as if he had been drinking heavily of temperance-time alcohol.

Stirling studied the sailor's face and found lines in it which were slightly familiar. It brought to his mind the Revenue Service and a second lieutenant whom he had met off the Little Diomede Island in Bering Strait.

Turning from his scrutiny of the sailor, Stirling looked at the door of the Blubber Room through which two men stepped who would have attracted attention anywhere.

These men, glistening from the rain, took seats at a table and called for a bottle of light wine. One man was a Yankee, by his nasal undertones and tobacco-stained goatee. The other man was half the weight of the first, thin, alert, with a well-trimmed Vandyke beard over which glittered a pair of eyes that resembled gimlets in their pointed intensity.

Upon both of these men lay the badge of the sea—in their gestures, their pea-jackets, and their peculiar habit of always leaning against something, which is acquired on decks of ships.

Stirling studied these men, watched them drink the wine, and saw that they had fallen under the hidden observation of the sailor who resembled a second lieutenant of the Revenue Service.

The Ice Pilot sensed adventure. He also ordered a bottle of light wine, and paid for it with his last dollar. He sipped the liquid slowly, pretended to be interested in the woman at the piano, and waited for something to happen.

He had not long to wait.

The two seamen rose from their table, tossed down coins, glanced meaningly toward the woman at the piano and the waiter who had served them wine, and went out from the Blubber Room.

Stirling looked at the sailor, who half-lifted himself from his chair, thought better of the action, dropped back, thrust his elbows on the table, and buried his face in his palms.

The woman's song rose and fell in the heated air, while the lamps flickered and almost went out. The piano's tinkling notes settled to a shrill tune that was a signal.

There followed swifter than Stirling could make note of the events, an oath from the waiter, a curse upon somebody, a loud banging of the piano, and a woman's penetrating scream.

A chair, a cuspidor, and part of a table hurtled across the Blubber Room; bottles struck the walls; the light went out when the lamps fell in a thousand pieces to the floor.

Stirling overturned his table, stumbled through the gloom, tripped over a body, went down on all fours, and crawled to the door. He raised himself and attempted to turn the knob, but it would not budge. He heard behind him the shrieks of the woman and the thud of many blows, then, after a minute's uproar, a match was lighted, shielded in a red palm, and its rays directed downward to the sawdust floor.

The Ice Pilot felt his heart throb in his staunch body. The woman, who had stood by the piano, lay face upward with the hilt of a seaman's knife protruding from her breast; carmine stained her neck and waist.

"Watch th' door an' windows!" a seaman cried. "Somebody's gone an' croaked Thedessa."

Accusing eyes glowed in the match's yellow light, and the Ice Pilot felt that he was the centre of suspicion. A hand was raised and a long finger pointed toward him.

He waited until someone lighted the wick of a smashed lamp, then stepping from the locked door he went to the woman and knelt by her side. Rising, he said, "I didn't kill her. I think the piano-player did."

"Maybe she ain't dead," said a voice that Stirling recognized as coming from the sailor.

The waiter took off his apron, closed one eye craftily, and, after a brutal laugh and a sharp glance around the circle of seaman, exclaimed:

"Aw, nobody killed her-she just fell on th' knife!"

Stirling sought for the piano-player who had vanished. He square-set his shoulders, clenched his fists, and cleared his throat.

"I'll go for the police," he said.

The waiter and a seaman grasped his sturdy arms. "Hol' on," they urged.

"Why should I hold on?"

The waiter eyed the woman on the floor.

"She's dead. Nobody knows who killed her. Let's all help carry th' body out to Meigg's Wharf an' set her afloat."

Stirling shook his head. He heard behind him the soft step of the piano-player who came from a door set near the piano.

"I'll swing for it," he said to the Ice Pilot, a whine in his voice. "Help me out of th' mess, matey. Let's set Thedessa adrift—she always wanted to float out to sea that way."

Stirling felt an urging glance from the sailor who resembled the second-lieutenant. He moved to this man's side and was going to question him when the wick of the lamp sputtered and went out.

Another wick was lighted and this was thrust in the mouth of a wine bottle, where it flared like a torch at sea.

"What d'ye say?" questioned the piano-player. "What does everybody say? Th' police will pinch us all for th' murder an' keep us in jail for weeks."

"You knifed that woman!" declared Stirling.

The piano-player blinked his pale lashes, then went to the door, drew a key from his pocket, and threw back the bolt of the lock. He looked out into the vale of mist and fog that stretched from Telegraph Hill to the waters of the Bay.

"Who'll help me carry Thedessa?" he queried.

A crimp, the waiter, and one or two seamen offered their services. Stirling hesitated, but again he felt the urge from the second-lieutenant, and agreed by nodding his head.

The piano-player, who knew the path, led the way with the woman's feet under his arm, the waiter and a seaman supporting Thedessa's head. Stirling and the sailor brought up the rear.

"My name is Eagan," said the sailor. "We'll go along and see what happens. It's th' best way out of a nasty jam."

"Were you in the Bering Strait three seasons ago?"

Eagan shook his head, clutched Stirling's arm, and guided him after the trio who had carried the woman out upon Meigg's Wharf and were lowering her into a Whitehall boat.

"No," he said to Stirling. "But I got something to say to you—after awhile. Something important."

The Ice Pilot hesitated on the stringer-piece of the wharf and looked toward the fog-covered Bay, but again Eagan guided him on. They seized hold of a painter that was hitched to a cleat, descended to the Whitehall boat, and cast loose from the wharf.

Thedessa lay in the stern of the boat where the piano-player and waiter sat with their heads close together. A seaman rowed skilfully, and the sharp-prowed boat cut through the short waves, swung, steadied, and made toward a dark mass on the surface of San Francisco Bay.

Stirling suddenly felt water around his boots. He glanced down and lifted his feet. He heard a cry from the piano-player.

"We're sinking! There's no plug in this boat!"

Eagan attempted to find the plug-hole. He rose with his hands dripping bilge muck. The man at the oars dug the blades deep into the bay, bent his back, and dug again as if his life were at stake.

Stirling climbed into the bow of the boat, stared through the fog, and heard a ship's bell striking. He motioned for the oarsman to row in that direction, and the light craft steadied upon the dark mass.

Reaching upward, the Ice Pilot warded off the boat and grasped a dangling line that ran over a ship's rail at the waist. He nudged Eagan and went hand-over-hand upward until one palm hooked the rail, then he turned his head and looked at the boat.

The piano-player, the waiter, and the woman—all three very much alive—were standing on the thwarts. Eagan and the other seamen had found lines up which they were climbing.

Stirling saw the woman draw a bent knife from her breast, toss it overboard, and wring the water from her skirts.

He heard her mocking song as the Whitehall boat merged in the fog, and finally was gone back toward Meigg's Wharf and the Blubber Room:

"It's 'rah for th' grog—

Th' jolly, jolly grog!
It's 'rah for th' grog an' tobacco!
For you've spent all your tin with th' ladies, drinkin' gin,
An' across th' brimy ocean you must wan—der——"

CHAPTER II—ON A MAN'S SEA

Breathing the invigorating night air, Horace Stirling climbed over the ship's rail, squared his shoulders, and started toward the poop steps. The consciousness that he had been shanghaied came to him; the sensation was a novel one.

He reached the weather steps. There he paused and swung, facing the after part of the ship. A group of seamen were gathered in the waist. They were receiving the shanghaied sailors who had been brought out in the Whitehall boat.

Stirling gathered in the details of the whaler and his jaw dropped in wonder, while his eyes softened with an appreciative glow. He had never sailed or steamed upon such a ship. She was complete and yachtlike, and her deck house extended fore and aft between the main and mizzenmast. It was such a cabin as one would expect to find on a government revenue cutter. A squat, drab funnel reared from a boat deck, and glowed through the mist like the end of a fat cigar.

Stirling turned and mounted the poop, to face two of the men with whom he had drunk in that tavern near the wharves. One thrust out a hamlike hand. "Remember me?" he said, with a twinkle in his eyes. "I'm Cushner who took the Anderson expedition to the mouth of the Lena River. You were ice pilot of the *Northern Lights* that season. You gammed us in Bering Strait. Remember?"

Stirling stared up into the big seaman's face, squinting his eyes in an attempt to recall a vague memory. Slowly the details of the Anderson expedition came back to him.

"You're Cushner!" he blurted out. "By the jumpin' bowheads, you are! Who's the little fellow?" Stirling motioned toward the second seaman who had descended the lee poop steps and started forward to where a knot of men were gathered about the corner of the deck house.

The big mate of the ship leaned over the quarter-deck rail and said: "He's Marr—Captain Marr of the Baffin Bay crowd. See, he's mixin' with th' men. No man leaves this ship, but you, out of the bunch. Sailors are scarce as bowheads in the western ocean these days."

"Do you need a pilot?"

"We certainly do! You can come if you want to."

"How about this ship?"

"She's the *Pole Star*. She once was called the *Alexander*. She was a Russian yacht. She's fitted out for whaling and trading. Good food and all that. The old man will be glad to sign you on a big lay. We're going right up in the ice."

"Who'll be the afterguard?"

"Well, you'll make one if you join us. There's Marr and Whitehouse, who just came by rail. That puts me back to second mate. Then there's Sanderson and Manley—third and fourth. Besides,

there's Maddox and Baldwin of the engine-room force. It's a good outfit. Fair play and money to be had."

Stirling rubbed his nose, lifted his eyes to the rigging, squared his shoulders, and turned toward Cushner. "How about all this?" he asked with a wide sweep of his arm. "Kind of queer, eh?"

"Well, no," drawled the big mate, tugging at his long beard. "No; not that I know of, Stirling. Everything's on deck as far as I can see. The old man is a part owner—it's a private venture. He and Whitehouse know their business. Just keep your tongue spliced and say nothing. The old man will be in the cabin at six bells. We'll talk to him then; if you want to go ashore, you can. If you stay, I'll promise you some fair game on a man's sea."

Stirling took a turn about the quarter-deck of the *Pole Star*, then came back to the rail and leaned over. Marr had disappeared.

A bell struck over the misted waters of the city, and was followed by others. A roar sounded to the westward, where the surf beat upon Seal Rocks and the entrance to the harbour. A salty gust stirred the standing rigging of the ship, and it filled the Ice Pilot's lungs with remembered calling. He braced his shoulders, lifted his head, and felt like a man who has shaken off a bad dream. He was going North again, on a good ship with a staunch crew.

Stirling turned toward the big mate, who stood under the shadow of a long, white whaleboat. "I'll join," the Ice Pilot said, simply. "Let's go below and see Marr. It's six bells and more. Like as not he and I can get along. I ain't a hard man to please. Only, this has got to be an honest voyage. I ain't in for anything downright crooked. It ain't my nature!"

"Mine, neither," said Cushner. "Come on!"

Stirling followed the second mate across the deck to an ornate companion close by the taffrail, and they descended by turning, in the manner of seamen the world over. Stirling removed his cap and stood rooted in the doorframe as his eyes gathered in the details of the cabin.

A soft electric cluster shone overhead, and walls and bulkheads were hung with draperies. The deck was covered with Persian carpets, while here and there—scattered in haphazard fashion—gleamed the tawny yellow pelts of wild animals.

Athwart the ship, from inner skin to inner skin, the cabin extended, with staterooms fore and aft of the companion stairway. The round portholes, covered with silken curtains, alone remained to tell that the room was upon a ship.

Stirling blinked his eyes, then opened them wide and drank in the details of wealth and luxury. He stared at shelves of morocco-bound books, their titles stamped in gold; he noted a baby-grand piano—the first he had ever seen—lashed with silken cords to the after bulkhead. Upon it music lay in well-bound sheaths.

Cushner advanced and gripped the Ice Pilot's elbow. "Come on," he whispered, pointing toward an alcove between two bookcases. "The captain is sitting there."

Half hidden by a portière, stretched three quarter length upon a divan, Marr reclined, deep in a book of modern verse. He lifted his legs and dropped them to the deck, laid the book down, and rose with a quick thrust of his hand toward Stirling. "Be seated," he said, clasping the Ice Pilot's hand with a nervous grip then indicating a long, cushioned seat.

Stirling followed the second mate's example and sat down on the nearest cushion, stretching out his long legs, hitching up his trousers, and fingering his cap. He raised his chin and met Marr's eyes, studying the clean-cut nostrils of the little captain. He gauged the mentality of the man, and thrashed the events of the night over in his mind as he held a steady poise.

"This is Horace Stirling!" blurted out Cushner, with a voice like a bull. "He's the best all-around whaler and ice pilot in the game. I didn't recognize him in that room in Frisco. We landed a bigger fish than we thought. I reckon he can go ashore if he wants to. We can't keep him unless he wants to stay."

"How about it?" asked Marr.

Stirling fingered his cap, but he had already made up his mind. The ship suited him, Cushner was a good mate, and the North called with all the strength of the wide places.

"I'll sign on," he said, simply. "Like as not I couldn't do better. I don't like the way you shipped part of your crew; outside of that, this suits me, if it's honest."

"The crew," said Marr, softly, "was a serious problem. I wanted a few more men, and just at the time I saw no other way to get them than by straight, old-time shanghaing. It worked!"

CHAPTER III—OVER THE QUARTER-DECK

The Ice Pilot placed the captain as he listened to the apology—Marr was of a nature to brook no excuse. He had determined upon sailing the *Pole Star* for a voyage of discovery and profit, and he had acted outside the law in order to obtain a crew. This was not unusual upon the Coast of Barbary. Stirling, as honest as a dollar, had seen the same method employed before, and he puzzled his brain for a deeper motive, which might be behind the little skipper's steel-gray eyes.

There seemed no fathoming the beard-hidden face of the captain, and Stirling leaned back, dropping his eyes to the rug at his feet, where he studied the polished points of his shore boots.

"We go with the tide at sunup," said Marr. "This is the reason, and the only one, that we took matters in our own hands and obtained a complete crew. Whalers must have a bad odour in these waters, from all indications."

Stirling glanced up. He nodded.

"We go North," continued Marr, rubbing his hands together. "North, for a season of seven months, to whale! Mr. Cushner knows who I am. The mate, Mr. Whitehouse, is ashore. He'll be out very soon, and he'll attest to my financial responsibility. Roth & Co. have outfitted the *Pole Star*. They know me! I'll take Mr. Cushner's word that you are a first-class ice pilot. You sign on with me and I'll see that you get a thousand dollars in minted gold when we drop anchor at Frisco. In addition to that bonus, I'll give you the lay of the mate—a one-twenty-fifth of the proceeds of the voyage. Is that satisfactory?"

Stirling considered the figures mentioned. The amount was at least a captain's share in the old days of whaling.

"That's handsome enough, captain," he said. "That suits me. But one thing—I'm plain spoken—is this ship going whaling, or something else? I want to know."

Marr smiled pleasantly. "Why did you ask?" he said, stroking his Vandyke beard with slender fingers.

"Only to know. You see, I can go ashore and sign on with one of Larribee's ships. Larribee knows me. I brought in many a head of bone for him."

"And you'll do the same for me!" exclaimed Marr, resting his hand on Stirling's shoulder. "Sign on and I'll promise you that there will be no regrets. All's honest and aboveboard. Whitehouse—Mr. Whitehouse is an English gentleman. He talks like a cockney, but that is an affliction. You'll get along with him. He's new to the Bering."

"I'll sign!" said Stirling, rising. "I'll have to get my dunnage bag. It's at Antone's, down by the ferry."

"We'll tend to that!"

Stirling turned toward Cushner. "Have you entirely outfitted?" he asked, professionally. "Got all of your whaling gear aboard?"

"We have! Six boats! A forehold chockablock and whale line and irons. Papers, everything, all right to clear. Some of the crew have been North before. The rest can learn. You and I can tend to that, eh?"

Stirling swept the cabin comprehensively. "Too fine a ship to buck the old floes with," he said, glancing down at the skipper.

"Nothing too fine for the North!" exclaimed Marr. "Write me out an order for your bag. I'll send Snowball, my cabin boy, with the dinghy."

Stirling scribbled an order on the back of a shipping master's card. He passed it over to Marr, who touched a button at the end of the piano. A negro, sleepy-eyed and curious, thrust a kinky head through an after doorway.

Marr stepped over the rugs and whispered his instructions. Stirling, whose ears were sharp, caught a command to wait on shore for somebody. This order was repeated.

The negro vanished, and Marr paced athwart the ship. Wheeling suddenly, he listened with his ear cocked toward the deck beams. A shuffling of feet sounded overhead as men sprang down from the rail. The bell in the wheelhouse struck seven times. It was echoed from forward.

"That's Whitehouse!" said the captain. "We'll all have a drink!"

The slide to the deck companion opened, and two men descended. One was a square block of a man, with long arms and a pair of bushy brows which thatched perpetually smiling eyes. He was Baldwin, the American engineer.

The second man held Stirling. "Mr. Whitehouse," Marr introduced, with a comprehensive chuckle as he nodded toward the English mate.

Whitehouse had the long, beaklike nose of the typical cockney, while his lips were thick and somewhat red. His tanned features and knotted hands, his quick manner and alert stride, spoke the Dundee and Grimsby whaler, who had sailed many seas and fastened to more than an ordinary number of bowhead whales.

"We're all here!" declared Marr. "Ship's completely outfitted with seamen and material. We'll drink to success!"

The little captain disappeared through an after doorway, returning with a tray and a bottle. Setting these down on a table, he drew forth a chart of the Arctic and Bering Sea.

"While we're drinking," he said, hardening his eyes, "let's look over the chart. You, Stirling, might help us out. Glad you're coming along."

Stirling upended a decanter and poured out a generous portion of brandy. He tasted this, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, then leaned forward over the chart. His finger traced a line from the Aleutians northward.

"There," he said, "is the first whaling ground—just the other side the islands. The ice will lie about here, and the bowhead can't go north till it opens. They're wise fish, but they can't get through any more than we can."

"How about the other whaling spots?" asked Marr.

"Well, captain," said Stirling, "after the Bering Strait, you'll find aplenty, there's Herald Island and Wrangel Land. There's Point Barrow—I've caught late whales at the Point. Then there's the lane between the grounded ice floes and the coast, all the way to the mouth of the Mackenzie River. I've wintered three times at Herschel Island, and we always got bone in the early spring when the ice broke."

Marr leaned over the chart and asked softly: "How is the whaling close to the Siberian shore? I've heard of catches in the Gulf of Anadir. I think it would be wise that we go there as soon as the ice permits."

Stirling glanced keenly at the little skipper, for he sensed a deeper motive in the question. The Gulf of Anadir was close indeed to Russia. It was a favourite sealing ground; few whales were to be found there. The season was generally too late to capture any bowheads on account of the ice barrier which held back the ships.

"I don't recommend it," he said, simply. "I've been there twice. First time was in the *Beluga*. We didn't fasten to anything that year. The second time was in the old *Norwhale*—Captain Gully commanding. We fastened to one head close by the Siberian shore. That was all. It's barren waters unless you can put the ship in early."

"Can't you do that?"

"Not always; sometimes. I've seen the pack ice so thick at the Pribilofs, or just north of St. Paul Island, that it was late in July when we broke through and reached Bering Strait. We got nothing but some trade stuff from the natives that season. It was too late to find bowheads; they'd taken the Northeast Passage and gone through to Baffin Bay."

"Just the same," said Marr, "I'd like to try for the Gulf of Anadir. Ever hear of Disko Island?"

Stirling narrowed his eyes. Disko Island was the very heart of the richest sealing ground in all the world—outside of the Pribilofs. It belonged to Russia, and around it were gunboats of England, Japan, and the United States.

"I know it well," he said, dryly. "There's plenty of seals there, but darn few bowheads!"

Marr glanced at Whitehouse, then his eyes travelled the circle and rested upon the chart. He followed Stirling's pointing finger.

"It's a blym shame!" blurted out the English mate. "It's an outrage that them Russians got all them nice little pelts. What's the 'arm in lookin' the island over? Who's going to bother now? Who's running Russia, anyway?"

"The Bolsheviki," said Marr. "What do you say we take a look at the island? Stirling can put us through the early ice. We'll skirt the Siberian shore afterward. I want to drop in at East Cape, they say trading is good there."

Stirling gripped a glass and raised it to his lips. He stared at the chart, then fastened a penetrating glance which bored into the little skipper's brain, and smiled faintly as Marr remained silent.

"I'm willing," he said. "I'll take you anywhere. We're all together. I see no harm in looking over Disko Island."

"All we want," said Cushner, rising, "is to follow the skipper, here, and keep our jaw tackle closed. He'll bring results!"

Stirling was watching Marr's face, which lightened perceptibly.

The captain of the *Pole Star* thrust his hand out, palm upward. "Well spoken," he said. "I'll guarantee good results!"

Marr rolled up the chart with a swift whirl of his hands, then rose and stared at Baldwin, who had remained silent.

"Have you everything aboard?" the little skipper asked.

"Yes; we're coaled. I can safely say the engine-room force is complete. Naturally we'll have to recoal at whatever point we can on the Siberian coast or at Unalaska. The bunkers are chockablock, but you know that ice work takes the steam. And coal is high; it'll be about twenty dollars a ton at Dutch Harbor or Point Barrow, if there's any there at all."

"Confounded little!" blurted Stirling. "There's an on-shore whaling station there and a missionary settlement. But"—the Ice Pilot paused and smiled at a memory—"there's a spot on the coast east of Point Barrow where we can dig out all the coal we need. I know it. I was there in the old *Northern Lights*, and I saw more coal than you could find in Pittsburgh. There's mountains of it hidden under the snow."

"That's fine!" Marr exclaimed. "We'll fill the bunkers there. Now everybody stand up and we'll drink a final toast to the success of our venture. What'll the toast be?"

"To a full hold of bone!" Stirling suggested.

Marr glanced at Whitehouse. The mate winked and stared at his glass. "I'd say," he muttered, "that there's a better toast. Let's all drink to success at Disko Island, where the seals are."

Stirling grew thoughtful. Again the subject of seals had come up, and he glanced from face to face about him. The circle of men who comprised the afterguard of the *Pole Star* would have supported most any desperate enterprise. None was a young man; all were experienced.

Stirling set down his glass. Marr had stepped toward the after bulkhead of the cabin, and rested his hand on the piano.

A slight bump, as if a small boat had touched the outer run of the ship, sounded, and this was followed by steps on the deck overhead. Voices echoed, and a low call drifted through the open portholes.

The captain turned with a quick jerk and glanced upward, his hand lifted for silence. There came a knocking on an after door. This knocking was repeated.

"Good-night, gentlemen!" Marr exclaimed. "Get to your bunks and turn in. I'll expect you at sunup. We'll sail then!"

Stirling followed the big second mate, who knew the run of the ship. As they stood at last in the waist where the shadow of the dark deck house lay across the planks, two riding lights shone through the mist, and a flare marked the cap of the rakish funnel. High steam was in the *Pole Star's* boilers.

"Who came aboard?" asked Stirling with directness.

Cushner gripped his palms, gulped, and stroked his long, pointed beard, then turned and stared at the low rail which was over the break of the quarter-deck.

"A passenger!" he said.

"A passenger?"

"Sure! Didn't you hear the voice? It was a woman's. At least, it sounded that way to me. They're always bad luck at sea."

"I've heard tell they are," said Stirling.

CHAPTER IV—ON THE SPARKLING SEA

The pall which lay around the *Pole Star* was like an ultramarine depth. The narrow circle of visible waters rose and fell sullenly, while aloft the taper spars merged into the mist. Now and then a grinding jerk of the anchor chain sent a vibrating shudder from stem to jack staff. Below the holystoned decks the watch snored, unaware that the tide hung at its flood and that a wan yellow sun was rising over the Coast Range like a paper lantern in a summer's garden.

Stirling moved restlessly, his eyes opened like a quiet child's, and he surveyed his cabin. The events of the night and the early morning rushed back to him, and he blinked as he caught a reflection of his face in a white-bordered mirror at the head of the bunk.

He sprang to the deck, ducked his head in a basin, tested the taps, then dried himself with a thick towel. Staring about, he found his clothes hanging from hooks on the ship's sheathing. Donning the clothes, he opened the door and strode out into an alleyway which led to the waist of the ship. He lifted his eyes to the mist as he emerged upon the damp planks and sniffed the morning air.

"Howdy!" exclaimed Cushner from a position at the rail. "About time you're risin'. We're going to yank the mudhook up as soon as Marr gives the order."

Stirling dropped his eyes and stepped to the mate's side. Staring over the rail, he raised his finger, sniffed for a second time, then declared: "She'll be clear by noon. This fog is light."

Cushner led the way forward to the ornate forecastle and Stirling glanced down through the open booby hatch, to where a row of bunks lined each side of the ship. In these bunks seamen slept with their arms over their faces and their legs extended. A molasses barrel was lashed to the heel of the foremast, and on top of this barrel stood a large pan of white bread. The entire forecastle struck Stirling as far too clean and too large for a whaler's. It was more like an expensive yacht's.

"Them's picked men!" said Cushner. "Some has been picked from the gutter and some from the boarding houses. I guess I'll wake them. It's time for both watches on deck."

The second mate lifted a belaying pin from the pinrail and pounded upon the deck like a policeman pounds on the pavement. "Rise and shine, lads!" he shouted, leaning over the companion's coaming. "We've got to pay Paddy Doyle for his boots. All out!"

Cushner listened and then repeated his tapping. "All hands on deck!" he called. "Step lively now, men! It's five bells an' th' tide is turning!"

Stirling heard protests from the sleepy crew; shoes flew across the forecastle, pans banged, growls and feeble protests rose as the two watches gathered together their clothes and attempted to dress in the dark.

"Coffee they get," said Cushner. "Coffee and eggs and plum duff and white bread and bully beef. They're lucky. In my day we chewed hardtack and drank bilge water. Whaling has changed!"

Stirling nodded, and raised his eyes to the rigging of the *Pole Star*, where spar varnish glistened from yards and masts, and snow-white canvas looped downward like lingerie on clotheslines. The running rigging was of new hemp. It all struck him as a dream as he turned and strode to the rail by the port-anchor davit.

"See here," he said to Cushner. "I doubt if there's a finer sea boat afloat, but how about the ice? She's sheathed, but with wood. She ought to have a steel plate forward."

The big second mate grinned. "She's a good ice ship, Stirling," he said, leaning over the rail and pointing downward. "That's teakwood and yew. There's nothing better, and it don't impede her speed to any extent. You ought to have been aboard coming up from Sandy Point—eleven point five for days at a stretch. She'll do thirteen under forced draft. She'll do two more knots with the wind abeam. That's six-day boat speed!"

Stirling shook his head. He had been accustomed to blunt-bowed whalers with solid planking forward and steel sheathing aft to the waist. It was the only construction he knew of which would stand the grind of the Northern ice floes.

"Take a look at the whaleboats!" said Cushner. "Simpkins, of Dundee, built them. They're mahogany trimmed. You don't often see that."

Stirling climbed the lee fore shrouds and grasped a white boat's rail where it swung from polished davits just aft the break of the forepeak, and peered inside. The whaling gear was all in place; he counted two tubs of whale line which was carefully protected by new tarpaulins. The oars were fully sixteen feet in length, and paddles were racked beneath the seats. A mast and boom—harpoons, lances, bomb guns, blubber spades, bailing dippers—lay in position between the centerboard well and the skin of the boat.

"Good equipment!" he declared, dropping to the deck with a light rebound. "They'll do. Wouldn't wonder if we have some sport this voyage. Last season was a bad one. It ain't natural for two bad years to run together. They take turns about—watch and watch."

"She's well outfitted, Stirling. Thar ain't no better ship going North this season. You ought to drop down into the engine room and see that triple-expansion dream. Baldwin and Maddox say it's one of the finest engines ever turned out of Clyde-bank. Russia bought good stuff in the early days. She had the money then!"

Stirling stared aft to the deck house, out of which sleepy-eyed Kanakas and boat steerers were appearing, then stepped to one rail and studied the swinging sheer of the *Pole Star*. He saw beyond the smoke of the cook's stovepipe the swinging lift of the quarter-deck. Upon this a figure strode from rail to rail. It was Marr.

"How about that woman?" The question dropped from Stirling's lips as he turned toward the Yankee second mate.

"Your guess is as good as mine. I didn't know Marr had any woman in view when he dropped anchor in this port. There's a kind of a law against women going North in whalers, ain't there?"

"The owners don't allow it! But then Marr is an owner. He could do anything."

Cushner stroked his beard. He twirled its point. "I heard voices on deck last night," he said with reserve. "I'm willin' to venture five plugs of tobacco that one was a woman's voice. Maybe she came out to say good-bye to the skipper. Maybe she didn't. Maybe it's his wife."

Stirling reached in the pocket of his pea-jacket and fished out a plug of select tobacco. "I don't often chew," he said, "but I'll bet this plug against another that it wasn't a woman's voice you heard."

"You're on!" exclaimed the mate. "It was a woman's voice. She went below, and she's aboard now. Time will fetch her out. Marr is as close-mouthed as an oyster. She's some relation; that's sure!"

Stirling pocketed the plug, folded his arms, and stood smiling before the big mate. He shook his head. "I'll win that plug," he said, sincerely. "I'm a simple man, Cushner. It don't stand to reason that Marr would bring a woman on a whaling trip. If he's figuring on going to Disko Island and the Siberian coast it would be dangerous. Those are desperate seas!"

"Here's the watches!" exclaimed the second mate. "Let's stir our stumps and get the ship out, smart-like. We'll forget the lady till you see for your own eyes. Likely she's pretty."

Stirling snorted, his mind running back to his only love affair. It was merged in the failure of a chicken farm over Oakland way. A widow had cast eyes at the farm until the chickens began to pass away. This widow had often dwelt upon the happiness of married life. Stirling, still in his late forties, had thought long and seriously over the matter. He was a man's man, and felt that women, and particularly dashing widows, belonged to another sphere. They were as much out of his life as the stars that floated in the heavens—as remote as the centre of the antarctic continent. He had sailed the Northern seas too long and far to allow his mind to dwell upon the land as a final anchorage to his ambitions.

He made his way aft to the wheel while the mate lunged forward and joined the group upon the forecastle head. Marr stood close by the binnacle, and just then turned to the wheelsman.

"Stand ready," he said, raising his eyes to Stirling's. "You take charge," he added, smiling faintly as the Ice Pilot shot a keen glance upward where the morning sun was breaking through the last of the mist. "The deck is yours, Mr. Stirling. Mr. Whitehouse will go forward and join Mr. Cushner."

Stirling squared his shoulders and braced his legs.

The little skipper, spick and span in blue pea-jacket and well-cut trousers, strode briskly to the quarter-deck rail and leaned over.

"Steam on the winch!" he shouted. "Lively now, men!"

A racking grind sounded, and the iron teeth of the winch swallowed the rusty chain like a giant biting a meal. The ship steadied in the tide which was flowing through the Golden Gate as the anchor lifted from the mud and silt of the bay.

"All's clear!" Cushner called over the whaleboats.

"Hard aport!" said Stirling, sensing the position. "Put her hard aport. Now up a spoke! More! Steady there!"

Marr reached for the engine-room telegraph, a bell clanged below, the single screw thrashed the water astern and the *Pole Star* rounded on a long arc, gliding down the bay to a position off Meigg's Wharf.

A pilot and the last papers were brought out in a revenue cutter as Stirling kept the ship under bare headway. The siren aft the funnel plumed into one short blast, and they were off on the first leg of the passage to the Arctic and the Bering Sea.

Foghorn and whistle sounded in cadence, and was answered from starboard and port. Once a bell rang directly ahead through the fog. The engines raced in reverse, and the *Pole Star* swung with her dainty jib boom groping through the fog like an antenna. She straightened under the pilot's directions.

The veil thinned, as the sun struck through, bringing out the clean-cut details of the yards and spars. A stagelike setting appeared. To port lay the city—hill after hill of close-packed habitations; to starboard reared the green slopes of the Coast Range and the higher land of Mount Tamalpais. Beyond and directly ahead the sun kissed the sparkling ocean.

The *Pole Star* glided under the frowning guns of the Presidio, and danced across the bar. The Cliff House and the seal rocks were thrown astern. The land of California sank to a low, black line after the pilot had been dropped upon the deck of a tossing kicker yacht.

CHAPTER V—INTO A PURPLE TWILIGHT

A breeze, fresh and gripping with the taste of brine, swept over the stern of the ship and filled the canvas which Cushner and Whitehouse ordered set. The anchor was brought inboard and lashed to the cleats close by the port cat. The crew, feeling their sea legs, brought out hose and swabs and started cleaning up the shore litter and dunnage, working to the old-time chantey: "'Rah for the grog—the jolly, jolly grog."

Stirling turned the wheel over to the quartermaster after Marr had indicated a compass point, then rolled across the quarter-deck and stood by the green starboard light of the ship, which was turned out. He felt the warm breath of the following wind, gulped the sea air, and squared his shoulders, casting a shrewd eye at the poop-deck log, which was outrigged from the starboard rail.

The land of California was a haze over the starboard quarter. It lifted in places like a cloud bank, and the cleft which marked the Golden Gate was crossed by the white water of the bar. The Ice Pilot smiled, as the simplicity of clean living came to him as a flood.

He turned away from the land vision and studied the ship. On what mission was she headed, he wondered? Upon what seas would they force the taper jib boom? What trade stuff and spoil would be crammed between the hatches? He revolved these questions over and over in his mind, and was in the grip of the unknown. The little dapper skipper, the woman's voice, the mention of Disko Island, and the seal rookeries, all wove their spell:

"Though I plow the land with horses,
Yet my heart is ill at ease,
For the wise men come to me now and then
With their sagas of the seas."

He quoted this verse as he pulled out a great silver watch, gathered in the log line, and timed fifty revolutions.

The *Pole Star* was striking out into the Pacific on her first leg at fourteen point three knots an hour.

"Somebody's pullin' the strings," Stirling said as he let the slack out of the line and replaced the silver watch. "Maybe the Mazeka girls of Indian Point," he added, striding to the poop rail.

He stared with idle interest at the crew which were still under the able tutelage of Whitehouse and Cushner. The British whaler had a voice like a costermonger, and "Blym me, yes" and "Heaven strike me pink" rolled up the wind and burst like shrapnel upon the poop.

Stirling narrowed his eyes, and indeed the sight of the two mates in sea boots and the ragged crew swarming along the waist was one to charm the heart of a sailor. It brought to his mind other voyages, and he recalled an expedition he had piloted to Point Barrow and the reaches of the Mackenzie. A younger son, with money to spend, had chartered a whaler and taken the Northern seas in search of new game. Game he had found in plenty: walrus, seals—both hair and fur—killer whales, bowheads, polar bears, and musk ox had fallen to the younger son's rifle or harpoon. The crew, however, had proved too strong a stench for polite nostrils. They were picked from the slums of the Barbary Coast.

The *Pole Star's* foremast hands and the most of the harpooners and boat steerers would have delighted the eyes of an ethnologist. Stirling studied them and called their breeds. One was a cockney, like the mate. Another was a blue-eyed Dane. Three Gay Island natives were mixed with two Kanakas. Two bore the high cheekbones of Swedes. Four, at least, were Frisco dock rats who had been gathered in by the boarding-house runners and promised an advance, little of which they secured.

Stirling searched the faces for the sailor whom he had seen in the Frisco room, but he was not in evidence. That sailor had impressed Stirling as far out of the ordinary. It was not only the polished fingernails and the resolute set to the jaw, but also the certain air which the seaman had carried that led to the deduction that he had at one time commanded other men.

Cushner mopped his face with the back of his sleeve and worked aft to the break of the poop on the starboard side where he glanced up at Stirling.

"Hello, old man!" he said, out of hearing of the busy crew. "What do you think of the *Pole Star* by now?"

"Good ship. Some crew, though."

The second mate mopped his brow for a second time, then squinted at a gang working down the deck with squeegees. "Eighteen hands before the mast," he said. "That ain't much for six boats. We'll need them all if we lower for bowheads."

"Where's the sailor who came out with me?"

"He's below!" This was said expressively, with a heavy wink. "I think he'll stay below for a watch or two. Somebody—maybe it was Marr—bounced a belaying pin over his figurehead. It'll heal in time."

"What did you make of the sailor?"

"Maybe a spy. Maybe a good man gone wrong."

"He recognized Marr in the Blubber Room!"

Cushner shook his head. "We'll watch that fellow like a killer whale. He'll walk straight under me and Whitehouse."

The second mate closed his jaws with a snap and glared forward, then was off with a rolling lurch to where a slight spot showed on the deck. Grasping a Gay Islander by the neck, he led him to the omission and pointed downward. Stirling heard the racking volley of exclamations as the native fell to work with vigour.

The *Pole Star* plunged on. She took the long, oily rollers of the North Pacific and parted them like a sharp knife going through frosting. She was logging fourteen knots with reserve steam. The fore, main, and mizzen sails filled and billowed and the foretopmast staysail and jib held the following wind. Whitehouse, casting an eye aloft, ordered the top-sails braced then sprang to the weather braces as the crew hauled manfully under the directions of Cushner.

Marr leaned over the canvas of the poop and rested his elbows on the light rail, searching the sea ahead with his glasses. He turned to the wheelsman. "How you heading?" he asked as the last yard was braced.

"Nor'west by north."

"Hold her northwest by north. Hold her steady!"

The ship drove through the day and into a purple twilight, and the land of California disappeared astern. It left to mark its position a low line of gray clouds upon which the sun gleamed and paled and died to darker hues.

CHAPTER VI—BY THE GREAT-CIRCLE ROUTE

The steady clanking of the triple-expansion engines driving the screw at a racing speed of one hundred and ten revolutions a minute, the glow over the drab funnel, the hiss of sea alongside—these all denoted that they were reaching for the far-off Aleutian and the pass that marked Dutch Harbor, where whalers and Yukon boats left the Pacific and entered the waters of the Bering Sea.

Stirling shared the mess with Cushner and Whitehouse and the two engineers. Marr had given orders that in no circumstances should he be disturbed in the after cabin. This order, communicated by the cockney mate, caused the conversation to veer from speculation to concrete suspicions.

Cushner rose from his meal with a nod toward Stirling. "Let's go on deck," he said, steadying himself by grasping the racks. "Let's have a smoke and turn about. Mr. Whitehouse has the watch till eight bells."

Stirling crammed a palmful of tobacco into a cord-wrapped pipe, clutched the second mate's arm, and led him to the waist of the ship, where they stood beneath the shadow of the starboard whaleboat.

"We're not wanted on the poop!" exclaimed Cushner.

"The wheel's there and the binnacle's there, and the log line's there," suggested Stirling, pressing his thumb down upon the glowing coals of his pipe. "We've got to go aft."

"'Only for duty,' that's what the old man said. What do you make of that? He wants the after part of the ship to himself."

"It's his ship, Cushner!"

The Yankee mate counted on his fingers. "There's only two aft," he said. "Two—the old man and Snowball, the cabin boy."

Stirling pulled on his pipe. "How about the woman you heard?" he asked, dryly.

"Maybe she's there, Horace. Maybe she is! Maybe that's his reason for wanting the quarter-deck to himself. He had two Gay Islanders rig up a screen between the wheel and the taffrail. All that's aft of the screen is the companion to the cabin and a bucket rack. Thar's just about room to turn about in. A nice little cubby place I'd call it."

Stirling thought the matter over, backing into the gloom and shading his eyes. The tip of the wheel, with one spoke, showed over the low canvas sail. Beside this spoke was the soiled tassel of the wheelman's cap. Aft rose the mizzenmast with its spotless canvas billowing forward like Carrara marble. The telltale on the top of the mast denoted a freshening south wind. The swing of the ship, the thrust of the screw, the song which sounded from forward where a group of seamen were gathered on the forecastle head—all these spoke of action and a driving force to Northern seas where hearts beat strong and staunch winds cut to the quick.

The Ice Pilot turned to Cushner, pressing the bowl of his pipe with his broad thumb. "We're making good time," he said, thoughtfully. "Five days of this and we'll sight our Aleutian landfall. I guess we'd better not worry about the cubby-hole aft and the woman. I never could understand them, anyhow."

Cushner laughed and clapped Stirling on the back. He withdrew a foot or more, spread his legs wide, and surveyed Stirling with mingled pride and calculation.

Cushner squinted as he drawled: "You're all right, old man! You ain't no clothing-store dummy or one of them smart ducks with spar-deck shoes and a gold lanyard to your watch chain; but you'll pass where they won't. You're a man—every inch of you! I've heard thar ain't no better, when it comes to ice work."

Stirling was silent. He dragged on his pipe.

"A woman's man," continued Cushner, "ain't for these seas or the seas we're agoing to. And by saying that I don't mean no disrespect for the skipper. I was with him coming round the Horn. A fighter, he is, and all that—but there's a polish to him I don't like. It ain't natural. He's like a polite boarding-house runner. Them's the sharks to look out for. They know more than we do!"

"We'll keep our jaw tackle chockablock!" said Stirling, tapping his pipe against the rail and cramming it into his side pocket. "We'll sail ship and tend to our duties. I'll get the crow's-nest up in the morning. You'll find me ready for anything—short of breaking the law of the three nations. I'll put the *Pole Star* where the old man says, but I won't raid no rookeries with him. I won't do that!"

The positive set to Stirling's jaw was a relief to Cushner. He nodded. "Me, too," he said, moving aft. "I'm willin' to whale or trade or go to the Pole with you in charge of th' ship."

Stirling went to his cabin, latched the sliding door which led to the starboard waist, and undressed slowly. He sank into a profound sleep, broken once by a dream of Frisco and the Coast of Barbary.

He awoke as the little marine clock above the bunk was striking seven bells, reached to a shelf and drew toward him a compass set in a leather binding. It was part of his possessions brought out in the dunnage bag from Antone's cigar store.

Steadying his compass by a crack at the head of the bunk, he made a shrewd calculation as to the direction the *Pole Star* was heading.

The course had been changed overnight. It was now northwest by west. The needle vibrated with the throbbing of the engines, but each time it settled back to the first point.

Stirling rose and dressed without haste, clapped his cap on his head, and strode through the doorway to the damp deck. Here he leaned over the starboard rail and glanced downward at the swift-running foam which seethed alongside the ship's planks, then raised his eyes and swept the horizon. It was pale to the eastward with the first rosy flush of dawn.

For a moment he remained in one position, then turned and stared aft with his eyes wide and intent. The gloom which shrouded the poop of the ship was lightened by the upward glow of an open companion, and a figure stood to the extreme port side of the quarter-deck. This figure was shrouded and muffled but the red reflection from the side light brought out some details.

Stirling gripped the rail and continued staring. It was Marr, no doubt, who had taken the position so near the wheelsman. There was that to the set of the head, however, which caused Stirling concern. Marr generally held his chin high. This head, as seen over the drab canvas, was dropped and thoughtful.

The wheelsman turned and touched his cap. Stirling heard part of a question, which concerned the course, and it was not answered. The figure started, half leaned away, then swung about and disappeared in the gloom of the smudge astern where the funnel smoke drifted and swirled.

The shaftlike light from the open cabin companion grew pale, then was blotted out by a descending figure. A slide closed with a loud slam, and the ship plunged on, leaving Stirling no wiser for his impressions. He turned with a half grumble and hurried forward.

Cushner was emerging from the deck house, having stolen a trip inside to the cook's galley, where coffee was always steaming.

"Good morning!" he exclaimed, recognizing Stirling's form on the deck. "Sun's clear and wind's abeam—almost. Light wind and a flowing sea. Good morning, I said!"

"Who changed the course?" asked Stirling, point-blank. "We're not headed right. We can't make Dutch Pass or anywhere near it on this tack. What does Marr mean?"

Cushner scratched his head, raised his hand, and pointed astern. "Whitehouse gave me the new course when the watches were changed," he said. "That's all I know. It's a long way from where we expected we were going, Stirling."

"Jumping bowheads, yes! It's toward the great-circle route. Another half point and we'll be on it. What does that mean, Cushner?"

"I'll be skull-dragged if I know!"

"The great-circle route leads to Japan and northern China. We'll sight Rat Island on this route, and miss the only good pass to the Bering by five hundred leagues. That ain't right!"

"Thar's a lot about this ship what ain't right!" declared the Yankee. "We're in the hands of Captain Marr."

Stirling reached for his pipe, gathered together a palmful of cut plug, struck a sulphur match on the rail at his side and held the flame to the bowl till it glowed. He drew in the smoke, then squared his jaw and clamped the amber stem.

"We'll keep our eyes open!" he said through white teeth. "I think I saw the woman on the poop. I think it was a woman. She wouldn't answer the man at the wheel. She had Marr's clothes on. That's mighty queer doings for a simple whaler bound after bowheads and trade stuff!"

Cushner thrust out a calloused hand. "Put it there," he said. "We'll see this voyage through and find out what's wrong if it takes three seasons. I'm just almighty curious to know!"

CHAPTER VII—DRIFTERS AND DERELICTS

Stirling kept a careful record of the changes given in the course of the *Pole Star*, and found that the little skipper was reaching for the true great-circle route to Yokohama. This was checked by Cushner, who was a good rule-of-thumb navigator.

They kept their observations from Whitehouse. The mate was a frugal soul who spent much of his time driving the crew over the decks or keeping them polishing the brass work with a sand-and-paste preparation which was homemade and cheap.

"Hit keeps 'em from thinking of their troubles," he had declared to Stirling. "Now that the skipper has taken charge of the poop, there isn't much for them to do."

Stirling bided his time and kept a close watch on the quarter-deck. He often saw Marr striding from port to starboard and back again directly aft the wheelsman, though the canvas that had been rigged shut off most of the view of the taffrail and the jack-staff. A position in the crow's-nest, however, was a fair one to observe the after part of the *Pole Star*. From this coign of vantage Stirling watched developments with eyes which had been sharpened by suspicion and a determination to find out the truth about the unknown woman.

Cushner climbed up through the lubber's hole on the third day of the outbound passage, lifted himself over the edge of the crow's-nest, and dropped down beside Stirling.

Their course had been changed a half point by Marr's orders. The wind was southerly and came over the port quarter in soft billows of warmth. It had been tempered by the Japan Current.

"Got a chew?" asked the second mate, resting his elbows on the edge of the crow's-nest and squinting aft to where the mizzen sail billowed, with the yard set sharply around.

Stirling passed over a plug. "Save me some," he said, slowly. "Go easy, Sam. I don't often use the weed, but I may have to do something desperate if Marr keeps changing his course. We're almost on the Japan route. Another half point will see the great-circle route. That takes us far up and out in the North Pacific. Wouldn't wonder if it was a rendezvous."

"What's that?" asked Cushner, clamping his huge jaws on the plug and parting his icicle-like beard for a second bite.

"A meeting-place. A gamming spot in the ocean!"

Cushner understood the last. "Gamming" was a term used only by whalers. It meant visiting another ship or being visited by the afterguard of a whaler.

"Maybe, Stirling. Maybe. Who could we gamm out in this ocean?" The second mate swept an arm to the northward. A wild waste of harrowed waters, stirred into whitecaps by the southern breeze, extended to a linelike horizon. There was no speck or sail to gladden the view. It appeared like a stretch which would reach infinity.

"How about seals?" continued Cushner.

"Ain't likely we're going after them," said Stirling.

Stirling turned and stared down upon the quarter-deck. The wheelsman—a Kanaka—hung on the spokes with his dark eyes glued into the binnacle; the canvas shield was too high to allow a view of the taffrail and the cabin companion. Once only Stirling saw moving shadows against the light, as if more than one body had passed from starboard to port. He frowned and turned away, as there was no way to discover the exact situation.

Cushner borrowed the plug of tobacco for a third bite, passing it back without thanks. He stared at Stirling, lifted one huge leg over the edge of the crow's-nest, waited till the ship steadied, and then was gone.

Stirling remained. He glance ahead over the wilderness of Northern waters, and the soft rush of their passage charmed him. The neat manner in which the whaler cleft the seas, the throbbing of the sweet-running engines, gladdened his heart, and he began to whistle a little tune of the West coast. After all, he decided, the world was not such a bad place for a man to fight in and conquer. He had made many mistakes. He should have commanded a ship instead of being an ice pilot. The chicken venture and the wiping out of his scanty fortune had been unfortunate. It had set him back five years in his ambitions.

His face lighted and grew resolute with the wine of living. He had a code, which was the code of right. He had always played fair with seamen and natives, and decided to see the voyage out, earn every penny he could, then try for a ship of his own. Whalers would stake him to almost anything. Marr might be open for an investment. The thing to do was to keep the little skipper's good will, and watch developments, which came fast enough.

On the seventh day after leaving the Golden Gate, a gleam of light was thrown upon the mystery of the great-circle passage.

Stirling, Cushner, and Whitehouse stood in the waist of the ship with nothing more to do than watch the crew lolling forward in indolent respite from their light labours.

The sun hung high in the south with gray clouds creeping up to it like a closing hand. The wind had veered to the south and west, and canted the whaler ever so slightly, as all yards were braced fore and aft.

"What is the exact position?" asked Stirling, turning toward Whitehouse, who had shot the sun and finished his figuring.

"I make it 49-52 and 179-58! We're near the Aleutians and close to the one hundred and eightieth meridian!"

Cushner glanced at the sun. "We're about that!" he said with Yankee shrewdness. "I can smell my position in these waters. I smell shore stuff—fish and moss."

"It comes down the wind!" snorted the cockney with a burst of disgust.

"All the same, I don't need no sextant. All I need is a lead line and experience."

Whitehouse gulped at this and worked his brows up and down like a gorilla, then turned toward the after part of the ship. "Seen the skipper?" he asked. "Seen the old man? 'E's been shaved —'e 'as! 'E looks fine—'e does!"

"Shaved?" exclaimed Stirling, wheeling and staring at the quarter-deck. "What do you mean? Has he taken off his beard?"

"You're blym well right, 'e 'as! I wouldn't know 'im! Looks like a regular, 'e does. All spick and span. 'E was askin' about our position not a bell ago. 'E's expectin' to meet with something on these seas. Likely it will be another ship!"

"You and he are rather thick," suggested Stirling.

"As thick as costermongers—once! Now 'e's retired from view like a loidy of the music 'alls. I don't know what to think."

The mate was evidently in earnest, and Stirling eyed him sharply, then turned away and stared at Cushner. The Yankee hitched up his beard and thrust it under the collar of his soiled pea-jacket—then started as he glared toward the poop.

"Old man wants you," he said. "He's callin' you, Mr. Whitehouse."

The cockney mate braced his shoulders and hurried aft to the poop steps on the weather side. He mounted them and disappeared behind the canvas where Marr had sauntered.

"What do you think?" asked Cushner.

"Nothing yet, Sam. Hold your jaw tackle. Where did you first meet with Whitehouse?"

"The same day you was shanghaied. He came across the States by rail. He brought two dunnage bags and a whacking accent with him. Had papers, all right. Said he'd been in the British navy. I asked him why he left."

"What did he say?"

"He said it was a mere matter of five thousand pounds. That's just what he said. That's money, isn't it?"

"Considerable money! I wonder if he is under obligations to Marr in any way?"

"Might be. Looks mighty like it. At that, the old man isn't telling anybody anything. He owns the ship. He's got a right to whale and seal and trade with the natives. Nothing's going to stop him doing that."

"Not if he goes after pelagic seals and keeps within the law."

"Why is he working in these waters?"

Stirling did not answer this question, but stared forward and directly at the watch on deck. He counted them, searching for the seaman who had put up the fight when brought aboard. He was not in evidence.

"I wonder," asked Stirling, with a pucker on his brow, "if Marr expects that crew to follow him in a lawless enterprise? Outside of three or four, I know them from hearsay. They're drifters. They expect nothing but an iron dollar. Larribee hasn't paid a whaling hand a cent over the legal dollar in five seasons. He figures the advance money and the stuff they draw from the slop-chest is enough for sea scum. He has no heart at all!"

"Dirty work!"

"It is," said Stirling, sincerely. "Particularly when they don't even get the advance money. The boarding-house keepers, crimps, and runners get that. They furnish a man with an outfit and a

dunnage bag. The outfit consists of a 'donkey's breakfast' for a mattress and a pair of pasteboard sea boots which will melt under the first hose. That's no way to send a man North!"

Cushner glanced at the Ice Pilot. He shook his head. "You're sticking up for poor Jack," he said. "That's no more than right. The laws are all for the owners and the boarding-house crimps. Poor Jack is friendless. What can he do?"

"There's seamen and seamen, Sam! There's the coasting crews and the deep-water bunch who know enough to get big wages and hold to the Union. The ones who suffer are boys like we got forward. They have no chance; they work eight months for an iron dollar and are cheated out of that!"

Cushner slanted his eyes forward. "They don't look as if they'd care what happened," he said. "Marr, or anybody else, could give them a good argument and they'd follow him to the end of the world. Five square faces of gin and tobacco would buy the whole fo'c's'le."

Stirling lifted his strong shoulders expressively. "You're partly right!" he admitted. "I wouldn't blame them, either. But you're here and I'm here, and we're going to see that this ship keeps within the law."

CHAPTER VIII—ON A LOWER BUNK

Suddenly Stirling ceased speaking and strode to the rail, glancing keenly under the shelter of his right palm.

"Speck in sight!" he called. "Looks like a ship headed this way! Make it out, Cushner?"

The second mate strained his eyes, then mopped them with his sleeve and tried again. "Not yet," he said. "You have fine sight. Where away?"

"About two points off the bow. There she is. See her? A brig, I think. See the smoke?"

Cushner nodded with a sudden jerk of his chin. "Just a smudge. She's hull down!"

It was a full half hour later before Stirling made out the Japanese flag which fluttered at the stern of the brig. He called out her nationality then swung and glanced toward the poop and the wheelman. Marr stood under the shelter of the rail with both elbows resting upon the canvas and a pair of twelve-diameter glasses focused ahead. He lowered these glasses, reached for the engine-room telegraph, and the throbbing of the *Pole Star's* screws died to a quiver. The yards were braced back and the whaler came up into the wind with scant headway. This brought the Japanese brig upon the starboard waist.

The funnel of the strange ship belched forth a volcano of smoke which could come only from Japanese coal. She wallowed across the sea and came up into the wind on the same tack as the *Pole Star* was headed.

A longboat was dropped awkwardly. Seamen to the number of four swarmed overside and waited for a fifth figure to descend a ladder lowered for his benefit. The boat sheered from the brig and danced across the waves under the swing of four oars which were smartly handled.

Penyan Maru was the name Stirling made out on the brig as it hove to a double cable's length away. A greater contrast to the *Pole Star* could not have been fashioned. Built in Japan before the war, the brig still carried some of the top-hamper which rightly belonged to a junk. Her yards were canted, her masts sloped forward instead of aft, her standing rigging was loose and weather-rotted.

Along the rail of the *Penyan Maru* ran a line of pigeon-blue boats which were too large for dories, too small for whaleboats. She bore the unmistakable evidence of a Japanese sealer, a vampire of the sea—as much an object of suspicion to every revenue cutter as a jailbird would be to a self-respecting policeman.

The four seamen who rowed the longboat lifted their oars smartly enough as they rounded under the starboard rail of the *Pole Star*. Whitehouse, on the poop, lowered a bosn's ladder, and up this climbed the figure of a man who would have attracted attention on any ocean.

He was fat and yellow; his moon-broad face was stabbed here and there with tiny bristles like the nose of a walrus; his slanted eyes glittered and beamed as he raised himself over the rail, took

Whitehouse's hand, and sprang to the deck of the *Pole Star*. He advanced to Marr's side with a rolling waddle, and the two men clasped in friendly grasp. It was evident to the watchers on the whaler that they were friends.

They stood a moment on the deck, then Marr pointed toward the north and east. The Japanese followed his direction, smiled blandly, and whispered something into the little skipper's ear. They went below by way of the cabin companion, the slide of which they closed after them.

Stirling glanced keenly at Cushner, walked to the rail, and leaned over with his eyes fixed upon the dingy sides and crazy rigging of the sealer. He dropped his glance and studied the four of a crew who were alongside the whaler's run, just aft the break of the poop. These seamen made no effort to communicate in any way with the crew of the *Pole Star*. They sat silently waiting for their master to return.

Cushner rolled to Stirling's side and leaned his elbows on the rail. He, too, glanced at the small boat and its contents.

"A sealer's crew," he said. "Them's Japanese sealers. See the rifles and the clubs. They ain't found in an ordinary boat. They're for pelagic sealing, or any other kind. Nice-lookin' outfit."

"Efficient and minding their own business!" declared Stirling.

"What did you think of the emperor who came aboard? He was welcome!"

Stirling turned and glanced toward the poop. "Sam," he said, "there's more things on these seas than we will ever know. That brig is a supply ship of some kind. If not that, it is going to meet us at some later date and take off our trade stuff."

"Also seal pelts."

"Yes; seal pelts if they're secured in an honest manner. I don't care where Marr disposes of his catch, as long as the catch is square and aboveboard!"

"Here comes the walrus again. Look how he's smiling. They must have had a nip of gin. Marr is rubbing his hands like as if he'd made a good bargain."

The Japanese waddled to the rail, climbed upward, and descended the ladder to the waiting small boat. Marr stood over him and cast off the painter, and the boat sprang away from the sheer of the *Pole Star*. It danced across the sea, vanished under the *Penyan Maru's* counter, and was hoisted aboard.

A plume of black Japanese coal smoke shot up from the rusty funnel. The yards were squared and the sealer wallowed toward the north and west, vanishing in a cloud of its own making.

A bell later Marr gave the order for a change of course and reached for the engine-room telegraph. The screw thrashed; the crew sprang to weather and lee braces. The *Pole Star* started back over the old pathway on the trackless ocean. Her compass point had been given as east.

It was a hushed company that gathered about the table that night in the steerage of the *Pole Star*. The change of course, the gamming by the Japanese sealer, the mystery of the skipper's actions —all these drove silence into the mates' hearts.

Stirling and Cushner soon departed and left the first and second engineer to their thoughts.

The two seamen, who had found a tie in common, strode to the forepeak of the whaler, lighted their pipes from the same match, and stared out over the dark velvet of the North Pacific.

Cushner dragged on his stem for a long five minutes. He was awakened to speech by the striking of the ship's bell forward when the lookout lifted a marlinespike from the belfry and chimed two short strokes, repeated by two more.

"Four bells!" declared the Yankee. "She's four bells, Stirling. Four bells, an' we're going back. Wouldn't wonder if we make California for our first landfall."

Stirling squared his shoulders, removed his pipe from his mouth, and stared at the glowing bowl. He pressed the coals down with his broad thumb, wheeled sharply, and glared aft. His face hardened as he made out a shadow on the poop, and tried to discern if it were Marr. A swing of the ship, the lowering of the mainsail at the sheet, blotted out his view.

He turned and gripped Cushner's arm. "We're not going to Frisco," said the Ice Pilot. "We're headed for Dutch Pass and the Bering Sea. We're a point south of the true course for that, but Marr is taking advantage of the drift."

"Why didn't he go through one of the outer straits? There's plenty by the Rat Group."

"Perhaps he wants to coal at Unalaska. He could take aboard fifty tons there."

"How about the ice?"

"It hasn't cleared yet. It lies about ten knots to the south'ard of the Pribilofs. It'll break up and clear within a week, though. It always does."

Cushner nodded. He held a wholesome respect for Stirling's ice knowledge. The pilot had no peer when it came to working through the loose floes or finding a lane to the northward. These lanes were both dangerous and deceptive, and many led to thicker floes and barren ice.

"We'll soon be in the ice?" asked the second mate.

"Five days, allowing for a day's stop at Unalaska. First comes the light floes and the whale slick. Afterward is the barrier line which stretches to the Pole. It starts to open and break. Through these lanes the whales go into the Arctic. There's usually a big jam at Bering Strait. The current sets east by north in summer and south by west in the fall. There are no bergs north of the Aleutians or west of Point Barrow. Leastwise, I never saw any!"

"People always talk about the bergs of the Arctic."

Stirling nodded. "I know that," he said with positive tones. "The reason is not hard to find. There's bergs where there's glaciers. There's any number of big fellows on the lower Alaskan coast. These bergs melt in the warm Japan Current. The harbour of Unalaska and the strait at Dutch Pass never freezes. That's on account of the same current."

"But the Arctic bergs, Stirling?"

"There's very few in the western Arctic. There's no glaciers along the Northern coast of Alaska and Canada. There's a few on the Siberian coast. The land is all low. The big floes—some of them a century old—resemble small bergs. That's the reason for the mistake made by Northern travellers."

Stirling turned and tapped his pipe against the rail then pocketed it and glanced aft. There was no sign on the poop of any watcher save the wheelsman, whose eyes were glued ahead.

Cushner yawned. "It's Whitehouse's watch," he said. "I'm going to turn in. Good-night!"

Stirling followed the second mate into the galley cabin, and climbed into his bunk with a tired glance at the compass point. The *Pole Star* was headed on the same course as given when they left

the Japanese sealer. The wind had veered and now swung from over the Aleutian Islands—fifty miles to the northward. It was slightly tempered with ice. Stirling closed his porthole and rolled over to sleep.

He was awakened at midnight, and the change in the watch, by Cushner. The second mate held a cautious finger over his mouth as he finished shaking Stirling's shoulder.

"Come on deck," the Yankee whispered. "Put on some clothes and hurry. I got to relieve Whitehouse."

Stirling rolled from his bunk, stood swaying on the deck, and drew on part of his clothes. He finished by buttoning a great sea coat about his sturdy form and clapping a cap down over his ears. Already the temperature had fallen to a marked degree. He emerged to the waist of the whaler and stood breathing great gulps of Arctic-tinged air which sent the wine of living through his veins. He felt more of a man than he had since his last venture in the Bering.

Cushner touched his elbow. "Come forward," the mate said, softly. "Get under the lee of the deck house and then the foresail. Don't make any noise."

The watch on deck had surged forward to the capstan, and some of the watch below were climbing up through the booby hatch. Others were gathered about the form of the sailor who had been in the Frisco room. He lay across the soiled planks of the forecastle, his arms stretched out, his legs extended and resting on the edge of a lower bunk.

Stirling brushed aside the seamen who had gathered about the booby hatch. The Ice Pilot descended backward and stood in the gloom of the forecastle. A single electric globe was hung over a molasses barrel at the heel of the foremast. Its light was far too pale to bring out the details.

"What happened?" asked Stirling, grimly.

A dock rat, who had been shamming sickness during the voyage, thrust out a frowsy head from the forepeak and said: "The crew beat him up. They say he's a government spy. They say he's goin' to queer the skipper's game with th' seals. He looks it—he does!"

Stirling stooped and felt of the sailor's wrist. He examined a bruise on the right temple then straightened and glanced up through the booby hatch toward Cushner.

"Go aft," he said, "and tell Mr. Marr to give you the medicine chest. Tell him that——What does this fellow call himself?"

"Eagan," said the dock rat; "Mike Eagan, so he says, Mr. Stirling."

"Tell Mr. Marr that a seaman named Eagan was struck by a block. Don't tell him what happened—yet. I'm going to look out for Eagan! If he represents the United States he has got to be protected north of 53° as well as south of that latitude!"

Cushner hurried aft and mounted the lee poop steps.

CHAPTER IX—THE POLAR BARRIER

Stirling had finished his examination of the seaman's wound by the time Cushner returned from aft with the medicine chest. This contained bandages and crude cures which had the merit of being overly strong.

The Ice Pilot washed the wound with heavy fingers and pressed on a pad of salve which was rank with iodoform and arnica. He glanced keenly at Cushner, as Eagan sat up and stared about the forecastle with bewildered eyes.

"What did the old man say?" asked Stirling.

"Not much! Said the crew of this ship looked able to dodge blocks."

Stirling stooped to Eagan. "Who struck you?" he inquired, feelingly.

The seaman pressed his left hand to the bandage, then eyed his fingers. He gathered his senses, frowned deeply, staring about the empty bunks, and up through the opening to the deck. Faces were pressed there, faces curious and hard.

"I wasn't struck!"

The seaman's voice carried the lie in its tones. "I fell down over a bucket," he continued. "Slipped, I guess. Must have hit the corner of the molasses barrel. It's deuced sharp, it is."

Stirling removed a small portion of salve from a can, spread it upon a piece of paper, and handed it to the seaman with steady fingers.

"You lie!" he said with clenched teeth. "You lie about falling down. Remember that it may happen again."

Eagan squared his jaw and glanced for a second time toward the booby hatch then he rubbed his hands together, reached and took the salve offered by Stirling.

"I'll tend to the next time," he said, huskily. "I'll tend to it! I don't need no afterguard to fight my battles. I can lick any three men of this crew, Mr. Stirling."

The Ice Pilot turned, strode across the rude planks of the forecastle, and mounted the ladder to the deck. Cushner removed the medicine chest from beneath his arm and started aft with it.

"Hold on," said Stirling. "Just a minute, Sam!"

The second mate turned.

"Don't say anything more to Marr. Just give him the chest and meet me in the waist. We'll have a smoke over this. That crew look as if they were in earnest. They'll murder Eagan if he don't keep his eyes peeled."

The mate bobbed his head and climbed the weather poop steps as Marr appeared at the side of the wheelsman and stared over the canvas rail. His eyes locked with Stirling's and were unable to

hold the Ice Pilot's accusing scrutiny. Already and before entering the Bering Sea, there was a full crop of suspicion and cross-purpose sowed upon the *Pole Star*.

Cushner moved to the rail as Marr disappeared in the gloom. The two seamen lighted pipes and stared out over the Northern sea. A nip was in the air, and the higher stars shone with frosty effulgence.

"I've got to take the poop," said Cushner, folding close his pea-jacket and glancing aft. "Whitehouse has gone into the galley. Marr won't stand for a watch alone; he'll probably go below."

Stirling shrugged his broad shoulders, pressed the bowl of his pipe, then blew upon his thumb with thoughtful air.

"I'm kinda summing things up, Sam. First the shanghai party; then the seaman who wanted to come aboard. Then, Sam, there's the mystery of the gamming by the Jap. All looks as if Marr has a fixed purpose. Looks like a crooked compass point to steer by!"

"Darn crooked!"

Stirling wound his strong fingers about the second mate's arm. "I'm a simple sailorman," he said, heavily. "I've sailed the Arctic and the Bering and the North Pacific, man and boy, for thirty years. I have no kith or kin. I've one star to guide. That's truth and right doing, Sam. It's over there!"

The Ice Pilot pointed along the leader stars of the Great Dipper and notched his fingernail on the lodestar. "That's my guide," he said. "I play square! I never made anything much by playing square, but I'm going to steer my course by that light point. Marr won't mislead me a quarter point."

"Spoken fair!" declared Cushner. "You can call on me."

The mate vanished in the gloom of the waist.

Stirling dragged on his pipe, held it out, tapped it against the rail and dumped the glowing coals overside with a sweeping motion. He paused at the door to his galley cabin. The ship was plunging eastward with her screw turning over at three-quarter speed. A soft halo capped the funnel, like the tip of an ashless cigar, and the throbbing shook the deck which was canted ever so slightly under the influence of the northeast wind.

"Headin' full and by," said Stirling. "We're making for Dutch Pass. I'll be glad to see the ice. Somehow or other that Bering always seemed like a man's sea."

The days which followed the assault upon Eagan were hard ones for the mixed crew of the *Pole Star*. The course of the whaler was into the teeth of a wind which swung over the watches from point to point.

The night between the spume-filled days revealed the stars overhead in all their Northern glory —steel pointed they seemed. Within them and over the Northern world a pale sheen glowed, and vanished and glowed again. This was the reflection of the aurora upon the great north barrier.

Fur coats, skin boots, woollen socks with moss filling, mittens, and watch caps were broken from the slop-chest and distributed to the crew.

At high noon of the third day from the gamming by the Japanese sealer, Stirling mounted to the crow's-nest, paused on its edge for a glance at the deck, then dropped down into a snug, far-swinging berth from which he had command of a hundred leagues of icy water.

He reached and secured a pair of twelve-diameter glasses which had been placed in a small chart rack, rested his elbows on the rim of the crow's-nest, and swept the horizon with keen eyes.

Mile by mile he searched for signs of whale slick or spout, but none showed, then he turned and squinted ahead. Two needlelike peaks showed well to the eastward. They were the highest points of the Aleutian group, and marked the pass through to the Bering Sea.

The day unrolled and lifted the archipelago up and into the Northern sky. It seemed a white-robed mountain chain—with each spire and crag forming the teeth of a giant saw. A rose light gleamed and reddened this barrier as the sun rimmed the Western world. The light paled to a flamingo and then to purple night as the ship drove on.

It was midnight, with Whitehouse and Marr standing watch on the poop, and Stirling and Cushner in the crow's-nest, when they reached the overhanging shadow of the pass to the Bering. The ship steadied, swung, then darted under the lee of a barren island; the strait with its score of sharp turnings lay ahead.

They passed the entrance to Dutch Harbor and Unalaska, raised the Rock of the Bishop, sheered and drove with all steam through the narrow outlet to the strait, entering at morning the waters of the Bering.

Stirling breathed, for the first time sure of sea room. Raising his glasses, he greeted the morning sun that slanted cold and bright along the arctic waters which rose and fell in slow gliding. He lowered his elbows and leaned far out over the crow's-nest edge, studying the small patches of spring ice through which the ship's sharp prow cut like a knife going through satin.

Floes, in the form of old "grandfathers," were passed to starboard and port. These had drifted with the current down through the Bering Strait and were destined to melt in the warm waters of the Japan Current. Some were small cakes, which had been formed that winter, and upon some of these arctic birds and hair seals sported.

A larger formation appeared ahead—part of the great North pack. Walrus and polar bear dove overside as the whaler bore down upon this floe, sheered, and entered a wide lane leading toward the north and east.

"Take the ship!" called Marr from the poop. "It's your ship from now on, Mr. Stirling."

The Ice Pilot leaned over the edge of the crow's-nest. "Where are you headin' for?" he asked with a stout laugh. "I don't know your compass point. You didn't tell me."

"Tie to the ice—the pack!" Marr had consulted the binnacle before giving the order.

Stirling chuckled like a big boy, turned in his narrow quarters, and crooked his elbows with the glasses clasped in his hands. He studied the currents and the drift of the lighter floes, sniffed the wind, then swung his eyes from northeast to northwest.

"Hard astarboard!" he called down to the quartermaster. "Put her hard astarboard."

"Hard astarboard," rolled up to the crow's-nest. "She's hard astarboard, sir!" the wheelsman corrected.

"Steady now. Steady! Over with it. Now steady. Port! Port! Hard aport! Stead-y thar!"

CHAPTER X—TO THE LAST DAY

The *Pole Star* threaded the ice floes like a dancer on a polished floor. She drove all that day north and east; she crashed through new ice; she dodged the ancient floes and worked into the pack and through the lanes under the masterful handling of the Ice Pilot, who sought no rest. Coffee was brought to him by the galley boy. With this, and now and then a drag from his pipe, he held down three watches until morning broke and revealed to the east the higher line of the barrier beyond which the ship could not go.

"Pack ahead!" he announced, turning and staring shrewdly toward Marr who stood with Cushner on the poop. "Yon's the North pack!"

Marr lifted his face and returned the stare, then dropped his eyes under the steady scrutiny and consulted Cushner.

Stirling swung and rimmed the white line without glasses. He knew it of old and knew that it was too early to find a lane leading north or east. The ancient floes were still cemented together in an unyielding mass. Upon them snow glistened, and pools of fresh water showed.

"Tie to the pack!" called Marr. "Pick out a place to get water. Find a hummock we can lash to. We'll lie here a while!"

Into a tiny bight of open water, sheltered on three sides by ancient ice, Stirling drove the *Pole Star*. Here she was lashed to a hummock by a hawser which three of the crew carried overside and hitched in a bowline of staunch hemp.

The seamen and boat steerers swarmed over the whaler's rail and stretched themselves by a swift run upon the ice. They caught a hose thrown to them and carried its end to a pool of fresh water which had been formed by melting snow.

The pump clanked, the deck tanks were filled, and the first engineer, assisted by the engine-room force, started work on a boiler which had three leaking tubes in the tube sheet. The smallest of their number crawled through the manhole and started clipping the scale, his tapping sounding throughout the ship.

Stirling descended from the crow's-nest, after a last glance toward the northeast. There floe ice, packed and cemented together, extended to the cold rim of the horizon, with no sign of lanes. The warm sun of the day and its work was undone each night by the freezing cold.

Cushner met Stirling at the rail, thrust out his broad hand, and smiled proudly.

"Fine ice work!" said the second mate. "I knew you could do it. Marr was watching you all the time!"

"Does he know anything about ice?"

"Thundering little! He's a Baffin Bay man, so he says. There's a lot of difference between the Bay and the Bering."

"Considerable! It's a question of currents, here. The pack is farther south than I ever saw it at this time of the year. That means an open season when it breaks. What do you make of the weather?"

The second mate glanced at the telltale on the cap of the mizzenmast. "Good," he said. "Wind's swinging to th' south'ard."

"That means a thaw, Sam."

"The ice is soft on top. See the water holes?"

Stirling nodded then turned and stared over the broken surface where the crew was moving. "There's hair seals aplenty," he said. "Too bad, Sam, them ain't fur seals. Maybe Marr would be satisfied to stay right here."

Cushner widened his eyes. "Still thinking of a raid?" he inquired, shrewdly.

"That, and other things. Look to the south'ard. Did you ever see better whaling ground? There's slick aplenty. My, how I'd like to lower for a bowhead! They're all along this ice."

"Nobody's raised any spouts, yet."

"They're there! They can't get north. The barrier holds them. It was just like this when we caught three big bowheads from the *Mary Foster*. Lowered four boats and fastened to three whales. That was a great day!"

The earnestness in Stirling's strong voice showed Cushner where his heart lay, and he glanced at the low-swinging sun which was going down on a long arc that marked the end of a Northern day.

"Good-night," he said. "Go turn in and forget bowheads. I don't think the old man is thinking about them. He's full of seals. He asked me a thousand questions about them. Darn sealing, says I! Whaling's a man's game! Many an old bowhead has fought back. Many a boat's been smashed by a bull whale—up here or in the South Pacific."

Stirling nodded his head in complete understanding, for he realized the call which was in the big mate's blood. He watched him disappear into the galley-house, then followed, after a glance about the deck. Many of the crew were still out upon the ice.

His cabin seemed strangely small and constricted, and he opened a porthole which overlooked the deck and rail and sea to the south. He examined his few possessions with wistful eyes—a bomb gun, brightly polished, standing in one corner of the cabin, a sextant and ancient chronometer resting upon a shelf, a Bowditch and well-thumbed almanac which comprised his library. His clothes were but few and worn.

He turned in, after undressing, snapping off his light and rolling over on his right arm. He drowsed with the music of the grinding floes in his ears, then heard a racking shiver which came from the north and east; it was the great North pack breaking along its entire length.

He awoke like a startled child. Cushner's pointed beard was thrust through the open porthole, and the second mate's wide-set eyes were intent and hard.

"Climb out of your bunk!" he said. "Get in your boots and join me on the ice. I'll be right by the hummock where the shore line is."

Stirling hastily dressed and wrapped a great sea coat, with shell buttons, about his form. He stepped out on the dark deck with firm stride, glancing intuitively aft as he threw one leg over the port rail, after rounding the deck house.

Nothing showed on the poop. A faint light, however, struck upward and brought out the lacery of the after standing rigging. This light vanished suddenly, then a companion hatch slammed.

Stirling dropped to the ice and crawled over its surface till he reached a towering hummock. Behind this Cushner was crouching, and the big mate laid a finger across his whiskered lips.

Stirling knelt upon the snow and listened. He heard the lapping of the waves as they ran up the shelving ice, with now and then a breaker which shot a white plume starward. The broken fragments of the southern floes ground together, and the night was filled with a thousand sounds which blended into a roar.

Then, and suddenly, there rose from the poop of the whaler a shaft of yellow light. A voice was raised, and the notes of a song drifted through the open portholes of the after cabin. Marr was singing:

"English there be and Portigee,
Who hang on the Brown Bear's flank,
And some be Scot, but the worst of the lot—
The boldest thieves be Yank!"

Cushner gripped Stirling's arm. "That's ain't all," he said with a deep warning. "Who is standing on the poop? Who's that in the shelter of the canvas, aft—right by the jack staff?"

Stirling peered out from behind the hummock, grasped the hawser, and drew himself forward. He pulled down his cap and opened wide his splendid eyes. Cushner was right. There was a figure on the poop, and this figure moved and came slowly across the planks to the rail which overlooked the waist of the whaler.

Glasses clinked in the cabin. Whitehouse joined his cockney accents to a song:

"Oh, I'm th' son of a gentleman,
For I takes m' whisky clear—
I takes m' whisky clear——"

The figure on the poop leaned over the rail. Stirling strained his ears; a sob racked the Arctic air, and the figure on the quarter-deck straightened with a convulsive shudder. Whitehouse's voice broke out afresh, and the song was drunken and masterful.

The form above the bold singer turned away from the rail of the ship and glided slowly aft. A yellow light shot upward as a companion was slowly opened, then this light was blotted out degree by degree; the companion hatch clicked shut.

Minutes passed. Neither man on the ice moved; both were deep in thought. The two facts were hard to gather to the brain: Marr and Whitehouse were in the cabin, drinking; another Marr had stood upon the quarter-deck. It was the little captain—line for line. In one thing only did it differ—the racking sob at the drunken levity below was from a woman's throat. It was a protest which she believed fell upon the Northern silences.

Stirling sprang to his feet with an icy glint in his blue eyes.

"We'll fathom that mystery," he told Cushner. "We'll fathom it if it takes to the last day of the voyage!"

CHAPTER XI—BENEATH THE SURFACE

The sun came up on a long slant, to swing its southern arc. Glancing from ice floe to ice floe, it seemed a cold bronze disk placed in motion by some Norseman of the Arctic wilds.

Stirling, haggard and with hot, fevered eyes, sat at the steerage table watching the light striking across a red-checked table cover and bringing out the rude details of the cabin.

He had not slept since seeing that strange figure on the quarter-deck of the whaler. He had sat erect throughout the morning watch, laying facts against facts, which seemed to dull and stupefy his sober senses.

At no time in his life had he believed in the supernatural. He did not share the beliefs, common to most seamen, that the sea held unfathomable mysteries. He had sniffed often at the tales told by old salts. Times without number he had pointed out that natural causes rule the happenings of this world. St. Elmo fire; the creaking of blocks in a calm; the dust on a dustless sea; the tapping that a bolt might make in a hollow spar—these were all phenomena which could be explained by science or good common sense.

The spectre on the poop of the *Pole Star* was as unexplainable as life itself. It bore the shape and form of Marr; it was not Marr, for the captain had been drinking and singing in the cabin. Stirling put trust in the sound of the human voice. It was one thing which could not easily be changed or disguised.

He rose, at six bells, with a slow shrug of his broad shoulders. He stood a moment with his hands gripping the racks, his face deeply lined with the ravages of a sleepless night. He held out his palm and stared at it; his fingers trembled uncontrollably. They always had been steady.

He made his way to the deck and stood by the rail which was nearest the great North pack. The cook, yawning, was making fire in the galley stove. A lone "anchor watch" pacing back and forth at the break of the forecastle head turned and stared at Stirling.

The air was cold with a snap of frost. A gale came from the south and west with a puff that ground the loose floes together. North, to the slaty horizon, stretched the broken surface of the ice field. It had a sound of its own—a grind and a creaking like a soul in agony.

Stirling rested his hands on the rail and stared downward. The whaler surged against the shelving ice, steadied, then surged back again. Seals peered curiously from the depths of the Bering. Some scrambled from the floes and plumped into the icy water. Walruses were upon the pack. They had broken through the thin ice formed overnight, and their whiskers and tusks were white with hoar frost.

Stirling stared aloft, then shuddered slightly and drew his great coat close about him. The ratlines and standing rigging, the downhauls and halyards formed a ghostly tapestry, like the

gossamer web of some forest glade.

He raised his hands, breathed upon them to secure circulation, slowly climbed the rail, and reached for the shrouds, and thrusting his feet through the chains he mounted until he reached the Jacob's ladder. Going over this he leaned far outboard, glanced down at the deck, then finished the climb to the crow's-nest which was coated with frost.

Some whim of the current had cleared the sea to the south and east. It was as if a broom had swept through the pile of a purple carpet. The floes which had broken from the main pack had been whisked southward to melt in the warm waters of the north Pacific. Occasionally, however, a hoary old "grandpa" went drifting by with its load of walrus and hair seals, while over them hovered gulls and other birds.

Stirling narrowed his eyes and searched long and carefully for some sign of another whaler. The season was an early one. Bowheads were to be expected in such waters; the whale slick which showed marked their feeding ground. He saw no sign of sail or smoke. A slight haze to the southward marked the smoky sea where the chilled waters of the Bering met the first warm current which seeped through the passes of the Aleutian Group.

Climbing from the crow's-nest, Stirling swung out over the ladder and smiled slightly as he saw a patient fisherman, in the shaggy form of a polar bear, all too intent upon the circular opening of a seal's hole through the ice.

A whiff of galley smoke and the rattle of falling ice from the shrouds disturbed the fisherman. He raised his yellow snout, blinked his tiny eyes, and was off with a lumbersome trot toward the shelter of higher hummocks in the east.

Cushner appeared like a giant who had slept without turning over. He lifted his long arms, stretched, pointed his icicle-sharp beard aloft, and held his mouth open as he stared at Stirling swinging down the shrouds.

"By the stars, old man!" he exclaimed. "You're an early bird. Ain't more than seven bells, if it's that. Raised any bowheads yet?"

Stirling sprang from the rail to the deck and rubbed his frosted hands. He stepped to Cushner's side and clapped him on the back. "Not yet!" he said. "No whales, but there's an ocean of fine slick. It's a whaling day if ever there was one."

"Waal," yawned Cushner. "Waal, I'll call the watches and get ready. We might as well drop away from the pack."

Without consulting Marr, the second mate gave the order to bring in the hawser and hoist easy canvas on the fore and main. The *Pole Star* sheered and drifted toward the southward. Stirling emerged from the galley house, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, felt the glow of the strong coffee he had drunk, then crossed the deck and mounted again to the crow's-nest where he took position to observe any signs of whales or white water.

The whaler was hove to, with her yards braced, and steam pluming from the pipe after the raking funnel; the boats were swung outboard; the gear was gone over and the water kegs filled.

Marr appeared at one bell. He glanced toward the distant pack, frowned slightly, then leaned over the rail of the quarter-deck. "Who gave the order to drop down here?" he asked Cushner.

The second mate stood erect in the starboard-waist boat. "I did," he said, slowly. "I thought, seeing as how there was whale slick, that we better get in position for lowering. We could only lower three boats where we were."

Marr motioned for Whitehouse, who sprang up the weather poop steps, and the two men went aft behind the canvas screen. Cushner glanced toward Stirling in the crow's-nest, and Stirling nodded. He seemed to say without words that he would stick by the second mate's statement.

Whitehouse appeared and glanced upward. "What d'ye make out?" he asked, pointing over the ship's rail. "'Ow's the sea to lee'ard?"

"Plenty of signs," said Stirling. "There's a sail far down toward that big floe. Looks like the first of the Frisco fleet. She's headin' for the ice. Likely there'll be more. Old 'Hank' Peterson and his *Beluga* always fasten around about here. That looks like the *Beluga's* fore-topsail. It's dirty enough!"

The *Beluga*, so it proved, tacked and went about with its long row of white boats showing clear and distinct in the Northern sunlight. Peterson was cruising over known ground. He drove the ship away from the pack and vanished through the smoke of the seas with the patches of his ancient sails allowing the last sight of him.

Another ship climbed up over the rim of the world. Smoke showed in a long slaty line, and soon was revealed the fine sheer and trim rig of a revenue cutter. Stirling lowered his glasses with a dry smile, and stared toward the whaler's poop. Marr stood there with feet braced and a telescope clapped to his eye.

The little skipper muttered vehemently as he wheeled swiftly and strode to the rail. "What ship's that?" he called up to Stirling.

"The United States revenue cutter *Bear*, Mr. Marr!"

The captain frowned, turned, and looked over the ice-dotted waters. "Which way is she heading now?" he asked.

"Same course. She's sizing us up. Likely she'll skirt the pack, back and forth, until she finds a lane to the east. She always does."

"How many cutters come North?"

"Usually three——the *Bear* and the *Wolverene* and the *Northern Star*."

Stirling's voice contained a shaded warning, as he leaned over the edge of the crow's-nest and watched Marr intently. The little captain was plainly disturbed. He coiled and uncoiled his well-manicured fingers, stroked his smooth chin, then went aft with a quick stride and disappeared through the cabin companion.

Cushner climbed up the fore shrouds and dropped alongside Stirling. Pinching the Ice Pilot's arm, he chuckled as he twirled the knob of the glasses and extended his arm outward.

"She's th' *Bear*, all right," he said after a careful glance. "She's giving us a good lookin' over. We're new to her. I reckon th' whaleboats will satisfy her. There's nothin' to excite suspicion."

The *Bear* slowly vanished into the mist, and a line of dark smoke marked her going.

Cushner laid down the glasses and exclaimed through his beard: "They ought to know you, old man!"

"Not in this rig," Stirling said. "Last time I saw the *Bear*, I was pilot of the *Mary Foster*. They gammed us the other side of St. Lawrence Island. They were looking for poachers. Somebody had raided the northeast point of St. Paul's, and three hundred bachelor seals were missing."

"Fair game, I say, when you do it out beyond the three-mile limit. It's just the same as highway when it's done on the rookeries."

"That's the way I think. Marr had better take warning. It would be a short shift to McNeal's Island and a long sentence if he tried anything."

Cushner climbed out of the crow's-nest and lowered himself to the deck. Standing by the rail he watched the crew who were alert to raise a spout. Whitehouse, at a suggestion from Marr, had offered ten plugs of tobacco and two square faces of trade gin for the first blow reported.

The morning passed without any sign of whales. At two bells in the afternoon watch a second whaler wallowed by and offered the signal that she had already fastened and cut in. A dark slab of muck tuck, or blubber, was dangling from her stumpy jib boom.

Stirling knew the ship as he knew the palm of his strong hand. She was the *Norwhale* out of Frisco. He called down her name and pointed out her aged captain to the crew of the *Pole Star*.

"The luckiest man in the North!" Stirling exclaimed. "Already fastened and lookin' for more. Keep your eyes peeled to lee'ard, boys. There's an ocean of slick and plenty of signs."

The sun was rolling into the west when a stir passed through the *Pole Star*. A voice forward had half shouted, then died to a whisper. One lookout pointed far down to the south and east; Stirling swung his glasses and studied the wide surface of the Bering. He saw a spout which proved to be waves dashed from the weather side of a floe, and sea gulls hovering over an oily patch. He tested the direction of the wind by holding his finger aloft, and stared at the telltale which draped from the mizzen top.

Clapping the glasses to his eyes, he swung about in a slow circle. Due south, he steadied and grew rigid. He saw the low bore of water which marked the presence of some animal beneath the surface. He closed his lips in a hard, firm line; his face cleared; his arms grew rigid as bars of steel. He waited with every muscle tense. Then, and suddenly, he lowered the glasses, leaned far out over the edge of the crow's-nest, and called loudly: "A blow! A blow! There she blows!"

CHAPTER XII—THE MANNER OF MAN

The ship shook with the running of many men. The mate sprang to the shrouds and shaded his eyes.

"Where away?" called up Cushner.

"Direct to the south'ard! Right over that floe! There she blows again. There she blows!"

For a second time a bore of white water showed. This was followed by a plume of soft spray which spurted up into the frosty air and vanished to leeward. The whale was rising for breath.

"All 'ands to the boats!" This order was given by Whitehouse who stood at the top of the lee poop steps.

There sounded a rush along the deck, and a snarl of excited men tumbled over each other in their haste to reach the boats. It was for all the world like being submarined in war time.

Stirling scowled down on the untrained crew, then glanced toward the little skipper. He feared that the noise would gally the quarry; a whale has remarkable hearing in certain circumstances. The Ice Pilot had known of failure to fasten with a harpoon on account of the striking of a paddle against the inner skin of a boat.

He called a warning and pointed toward the sea where last a spout had shown. The crew heeded this call, and stood silent by the falls of each boat.

"Lower away!" called out Whitehouse.

The boats splashed into the sea, the falls were loosened from their eyebolts in bow and stern, and long oars were thrust out as the crews swarmed downward.

Led by the second mate's boat, the tiny fleet swung like a covey of pigeons and ran before the wind with their single sails billowed out over the lee rails and their centerboards raised.

Skipping from sea to sea, as light as spindrift, they assumed a fanlike formation and closed about the position where the whale had been seen.

The leading boat, guided by Cushner, gained slightly and drew away, the big mate, with his white beard, standing erect in the stern. His hand was closed over the tiller, his eyes glued on a spot to leeward.

Stirling and Marr, who had remained as ship keepers, with the cook and engineers, watched the arena like spectators at a battle. The Ice Pilot had hastened to many bowheads and realized that Cushner had taken the proper direction and would most likely intercept the whale upon its next appearance.

A short wait followed, and Stirling fastened a small red flag to a signal halyard which could be raised from the crow's-nest. This was in the event that the whale was sighted from the ship. Two jerks would be the signal that the fleet should go to leeward; one jerk, into the wind.

Across the whale slick the mate's boat darted, then came up and held its position with sail flapping. Cushner drove farther to the south where he, too, brought his boat in the wind and waited.

Marr lowered his glass and stared up at the Ice Pilot. "It's time, isn't it?" the captain asked.

"Almost," replied Stirling. "That old bull's been down eighteen minutes."

The Ice Pilot replaced his watch and waited like a hunter in a jungle tree. His were the highest eyes on those waters. He swept them across the sea and somewhat ahead of Cushner's boat, then he stiffened and jerked up his flag. He held it at the masthead, then jerked again. The whale had showed white water not a cable's length from the second mate's boat.

"He's up!" called Stirling in his excitement. "Sam's right there!"

Cushner caught the signal from above the crow's-nest of the *Pole Star*. He swung his body and allowed the boat to run before the wind, peering under the bulging sail with its lifted boom. He pointed and pressed the tiller handle.

The harpooner of Cushner's boat was a giant Kanaka. He was whale wise, and had once been known to fasten to a whale over the sail of another boat. Stirling saw him reach downward, lift a heavy harpoon, with its bomb-gun attachment, and poise rigidly in the bow of the whaleboat. His bronzed arm was raised inch by inch. The small boat drove on and into the smothering plume of vapour which rose out of the sea and slick as the whale emerged and exhaled its breath.

Cushner's boat drove onward. The Kanaka straightened, drew back his arm, and then hurled the heavy harpoon down and into the waves as the whaleboat mounted the first of the bore set up by the passage of the monster.

The mast of the boat came down on the run, oars were thrust outboard, Cushner unshipped the tiller and hurried forward. The Kanaka passed him, stooped, and lifted up a long steering oar which he placed in the oarlock aft.

Stirling watched the second mate as he poised in the bow with a brass bomb gun under his arm and his eyes glued upon the coil of hemp which was floating on the surface of the sea. The whale had been struck, and it was sulking just below the boat, but had not yet sounded.

Seconds passed, while the watchers on the ship remained mute with expectancy. Then, and suddenly, the white boat swung, almost upsetting Cushner, and started into the wind with the speed of a swift launch. The whale had come to life, had recovered from the stunning blow of the harpoon and the bomb, and was "carrying the mail" for the great North pack, with the boat dragging after it.

Cushner motioned aft with the flat of his right hand, dashed the spray from his eyes, stooped, and felt of the whale line where it disappeared over the bow. He then straightened and motioned aft for a second time.

Stirling interpreted the signal. It was for the sheet tender to throw water into the tubs. Already smoke was rising from the round wooden butt in the bow about which the line was coiled.

The sheet tender, a Frisco dock rat, scooped a dipper overside, stumbled forward, and dashed sea water into the rapidly uncoiling hemp. He slipped as the boat swung over a wave, and the dipper flew from his hand, dropping into the larger of the two tubs.

There followed a leaping snarl of inch rope. A slender python seemed to reach and coil about Cushner in the bow, who flung up his arms and dropped the bomb gun. A noose fastened about his

waist, and he was drawn forward and downward as the whale surged onward. Fighting with all his giant strength, he went over and then into the depth of the sea.

"Heavens!" shouted Marr. "Did you see that, Stirling?"

The Ice Pilot was over the edge of the crow's-nest and down the rigging within the space of five seconds. He struck the deck and dashed aft. "He's done for!" he shouted. "Get up steam and hurry. There's only one chance."

Marr stared at the Ice Pilot. "Who's giving orders here?" he asked, cuttingly. "Let the fool take care of himself. He picked out that sheet tender."

Stirling gulped, then clenched his fists and held them out under the skipper's chin. He drew them back inch by inch. His emotion was a compelling thing. He could crush the little skipper with one blow, but held himself in hand and turned, his eyes filled with the fire of battle.

"Follow me!" he shouted to two of the engineers who stood in the waist. "Help lower the dinghy. The whale's coming to windward. I can get it!"

The tiny boat was lowered in clumsy fashion. Stirling shoved off and sat down to the oars. Over his shoulder he saw the sneering figure of the little skipper standing by the taffrail, but only bent his back and dug the oars deeper into the sea. He brought the boat directly into the pathway of the onrushing whale which had risen and was showing a bent harpoon in its foam-coiled hump.

Dropping the oars, Stirling sprang to the bow of the boat and lifted a bomb gun from its position on the starboard side. He cocked this, and waited, peering into the sea. He straightened, took aim, and fired a tonite bomb full into the mass which was rushing in his direction.

The acrid smoke from the gun drifted to leeward, and the low report of the bomb's explosion shook the sea. Particles of flesh flew upward, the whale milled and rose, then splashed down, with its giant flukes beating the surface of the water in a death flurry. The small boat was drawn into the vortex and as both engineers called a warning, Stirling opened a pouch under a seat, drew out another bomb and cartridge, fitted them to the breech of the gun, then waited grimly, tensely. He no longer resembled the placid pilot who had come aboard the whaler at Frisco.

The other boats of the fleet drove into the wind with their centerboards lowered and their sheets close drawn, waiting until the whale's efforts died, stroke by stroke. They took Stirling's signal to haul in on the line which was still fastened to Cushner's boat. Foot by foot it was drawn upward and coiled in the tubs. The whale was dead upon the bottom of the sea.

Stirling waited until the ship bore down upon the fleet and thrust her sharp prow over the spot where the quarry had sunk. He gave the order to rig the line over a yardarm and to attach it to a foreward winch. Steam was turned on and the stout hemp held, although it was drawn to pencil thinness. The carcass of the whale was sucked from the mud and silt and lifted surfaceward. Foot by foot—fathom by fathom—the line was scanned. There sounded a low cry, and a boat steerer pointed downward. Stirling and the engineers leaned over the rail of the dinghy.

They saw why the boat steerer had called their attention, and they blanched—strong men that they were. Then they stood erect and removed their caps.

Cushner's body, looped in a bight of the whale line, dangled before their eyes, all life throttled out by the whale's mad strength.

One thing showed the manner of man the second mate had been. He had drawn a long knife from a sheath on his belt and held this gripped firmly in his left hand. But it had not been used. The rope was unhacked. Cushner had preferred to go to his death, rather than sever the hemp and allow the whale to escape.

CHAPTER XIII—INTO THE ICE

They buried the second mate in the conventional sea manner, Marr reading the simple service from the Bible.

Stirling saw the sack-sewn body plunge into the icy waters of the Bering Sea, and replaced his cap when the last ripples had died. He turned and glanced upward at Marr, watching the skipper fold the Book and look over the rail. The whale lay alongside with only a slight hump to mark its bulk, and in the centre of this hump a harpoon had been thrust. The stout iron, of Swedish construction, was bent and twisted, and to it was fastened a bight of inch hemp which had held throughout the struggle.

Purple night was falling when Stirling had the whale's body in a position for cutting in. More irons had been driven home, lines were brought aboard and fastened to cleats, a strong hawser was passed about the giant flukes.

Cutting in a whale to Stirling was like peeling an apple. It had been one of the greatest joys the seas had granted to him. It was the culmination of months of preparation and searching. The value of a head of bone was well up in the thousands, and Stirling estimated the length of the whale to be all of seventy feet. The bone, therefore, being in proportion, he expected slabs from the upper jaw to reach fifteen feet.

The waist of the ship was cleared of riffraff and dunnage; a strong whale tackle was rigged between fore and mainmast, one line of this tackle being wound about the foreward winch. The other end was carried down the cutting-in stage and hitched to a slice of blubber which had been peeled from the whale's neck. This slice of blubber was called the blanket piece.

Kanakas climbed then over the slippery body and started work with blubber spades and axes. They severed the strip, as the winch was started, the whale rolled over and exposed an open cut which banded its neck. Into this the crew slashed until the backbone was reached. They then climbed aboard, after rigging a second line through a purchase in the upper jaw.

"Hoist away!" ordered Stirling. A watch tackle creaked, the line tightened, and the upper jaw of the monster came aboard and was swung over a spot in the waist, lowering to position when the tackle was slacked. The carcass, useless now, was cast adrift by cutting the lines. It drifted to leeward where it was soon surrounded by polar bears and screeching sea gulls.

Marr appeared at the quarter-deck rail and sent down a huge jug of whisky, which the crew shared with boisterous shouts. The skipper watched them, then shrugged his slight shoulders, glanced at the ice to the northward, and disappeared as Stirling gave the order to clear decks and cut the bone from the upper jaw.

This baleen, as it was called, had to be split from a white gristle by blubber spades and knives. The bone ran from sixteen feet in length down to little whiskers, and its value was all of five dollars a pound.

The last of the slabs was taken below to be stored in the forehold, and the great jaw, after the cook had removed a barrel of muck tuck, was hoisted overboard. This sank to the bottom of the Bering. The decks were then swabbed and squeegeed, and the watch on duty finished cleaning up. It was midnight before Stirling turned toward Whitehouse and reported that all was clear.

The cockney mate climbed from the dark poop, took a turn about the ship, ran his fingers over the planks and pinrails, and peered down the forehold.

Then he came to Stirling and asked: "'Ow much do you think that 'ead of bone will weigh?"

"All of twenty-two hundred pounds. It's as big as I ever cut in."

Whitehouse glanced aft. "The old man wasn't figurin' on that," he said, reflectively. "I think it was out of 'is calculations. 'E's just confided in me—not a watch below—that 'e is up North for trade stuff. Also, 'e said there's a firm of Dundee & Grimsby owners interested in the voyage. I thought all along 'e owned the ship."

Stirling studied the face of the mate in an endeavour to ascertain if he were speaking the truth. Whitehouse was far from stable in his statements.

"That's news," said Stirling. "I thought you, or somebody else, told me he was the sole owner."

"Maybe Cushner told you that."

"Maybe! It settles a point or two I was trying to fathom."

Stirling glanced at the poop, and in fancy he thought a figure appeared there. He stepped to one side of the galley house and stared aft. A shadow moved against the canvas screen, a light shot skyward, then was blotted out as the companion closed.

"Marr?" he asked, striding over to Whitehouse.

The mate grinned and reached in his pocket for a plug of tobacco. "Sure," he said. "W'o else could hit be? The old man is very irregular in 'is 'abits. Never saw any one like 'im. You never know where 'e is. All the time walking around."

Stirling crammed his hands into his pockets and turned away from the mate, but he paused at the door leading into the alleyway and his cabin.

Whitehouse, believing Stirling had passed inside, jerked his elbows, buttoned up his coat with care, smoothed down his hair, and otherwise spruced himself up. Then he started aft and mounted the poop steps, his whistle merging into a low song. Stirling heard it and wondered:

"England, oh, my England!
Gone for many a day;
I never knew I loved you
Until I sailed away."

The Ice Pilot raised his brows and closed his mouth in a firm line. The mate had revealed another side of his character. He had come down into the waist of the ship in order to make an inspection,

and was returning like a man who expected to meet with a cheerful welcome. Perhaps, decided Stirling, he had gone aft and below in order to create an impression. The impression could hardly be made upon Marr. That little skipper was no more interested in whaling than in cob fishing. He had treated the entire chase of the day as a diversion which would answer until the ice opened and allowed the *Pole Star* to drive northward toward some coast where bigger game was waiting.

The morning dawned, warm, gray, and cloud-shrouded. An east wind swung over the North pack and loosened the lighter floes. They drifted toward the south, as the seals gave the warning of the first breaking up of the ice, and loud reports were heard to windward.

Stirling rolled from his bunk and sniffed the air, pressed his face to a porthole, then rapidly dressed. Taking coffee from the galley boy, he hurried to the deck and stared about him. The ship was hove to in a position that commanded a view of the pack ice and the sea to the south and west.

Climbing hand over hand, Stirling reached the Jacob's ladder, and then the crow's-nest. He settled down and clapped the glasses to his eyes.

A voice rose from the quarter-deck, and increased in volume as Stirling still stared to leeward.

"Aloft, there!" Marr shouted, angrily. "Hey, you aloft!"

Stirling leisurely removed the glasses from his eyes and glanced downward. He said nothing.

"How's the ice?" asked the skipper, jerking his thumb toward the north and east. "What do you make of it?"

Stirling turned and lifted the glasses. "She's breaking," he called. "I see a few lanes to the east. This wind will clear things in a day or two. We can go then!"

Marr paced the deck, bringing up against the rail on the ice side of the ship. "We'll go now!" he shouted. "Right now, if there's any possible route open. I want to be at Indian Point within the week. Can you do it?"

"I can!" said Stirling. "I'm——"

"A blow!" called a foremast hand from the forepeak. "A blow! There she blows!"

Stirling turned and darted his eyes out over the sea to leeward. He squinted slightly and saw the white vapour of a huge whale's spout. He closed his lips and shaded his brow. Another blow showed to windward of the first. A school of bowheads was approaching an open lane to the north and the Arctic.

"Stand by the boats!" shouted Stirling, eagerly. "Call both watches and stand by!"

Marr stiffened in his position close by the rail, turned, and glided forward until he stood at the weather steps which led to the waist of the ship. He darted a savage glance out over the sea then fastened his eyes upon Stirling. "Countermand that order!" he shouted.

Stirling stared over the edge of the crow's-nest. "What's that?" he asked. "Don't you know there's whales to leeward? They're making for the ice. There's a——"

"I don't give a darn if there's a million whales. I told you what to do. Do it! I'm captain of this ship!"

"A blow!" repeated the foremast hand.

Marr reached and snatched up a brass belaying pin from the pinrail. He leaned forward after grasping the step rail with his left hand, and brandished the weapon out over the waist of the ship in

the direction of the cry. "'Vast that!" he snarled. "'Vast with you! There's no need of yelling your lungs out! This ship is going into the ice. D'ye get me?"

CHAPTER XIV—A WHISPERED WARNING

Stirling climbed over the edge of the crow's-nest and reached for a line. He dropped to the deck like a plummet, strode aft and mounted the poop, where Marr stood with the pin in his hand.

The hastily dressed crew had rushed aft and were gathered in the waist as Stirling thrust his jaw forward and locked glances with the little skipper. An explosion was brooding; the foremast hand, who had whaled for ten years, kept repeating, "A blow! A blow!"

"What d'ye mean?" snapped Marr. "What d'ye mean by coming up here without orders?"

Stirling's eyes flashed dangerously, the brown in them changing to hazel and red. His fists clenched into great balls of hate; he was seeing fire.

"What do I mean?" he asked. "Why, what do *you* mean? What's the answer to letting that school of whales escape? I never saw more in these waters."

Marr toyed with the belaying pin, lifted it, and swung his arm. "I don't intend to argue the case with you!" he declared. "I want my orders obeyed! I am in command of this ship. I order you to make for the ice. I command you to take me to Indian Point on the Siberian coast."

Stirling reached and clutched the belaying pin, wrenching it from Marr's hand with a half effort. Replacing it in the pinrail, he turned and stared at the crew. The little skipper had reached backward and clapped his hand on a hip pocket. Thinking better of this action, he hesitated.

"Men," said Stirling, "you're under the skipper's orders, as you know. I want you to take notice that he has forbidden you to lower for whales. You, Eagan, step up here!"

The seaman mounted the poop steps. "Eagan," said Stirling, laying his hand on the sailor's shoulder, "you are my witness that I've done all I could to earn a fair lay for the foremast hands and mates. From now on, we are embarked upon an unknown enterprise of doubtful character. I wash my hands of the voyage. I'll take orders until they conflict with the laws of these waters. After that I'll request Mr. Marr to place me ashore."

Eagan rubbed his unshaven chin, blinked, and swung toward Marr. "I'm with the skipper," Eagan said. "I think he's right. I would rather load up with trade stuff—and other things—than mess with those whales. I think the crew are with me in this."

Stirling stared about him blankly. He felt as if the planks of the ship were slipping from under his feet. Eagan, from all reports, was a government spy. Now he was siding with the captain and the wilder members of the crew who had most certainly laid him low at the beginning of the voyage.

"Repeat that!" sneered Marr, rubbing his hands. "Just turn and tell that to this crew. Tell them what you said. Tell them you're with me as well as they are. This man Stirling is trying to cheat us out of fair game. He'll be running a Sunday school, next. I know his breed—afraid of the law! What law is north of 53?"

"Heaven's law!" Stirling said, sincerely. "You won't raid the rookeries if I can prevent it. Don't you know that there's only one revenue cutter in these waters? Are you going to take advantage of that fact?"

Whitehouse came across the quarter-deck, clutched Marr by the arm, and drew the captain halfway toward the wheel and the companion skylight. They whispered there as Stirling shouldered Eagan to one side, saying cuttingly: "You're with them, too? I thought you were a man!"

The sailor flushed and glanced down at the deck, then turned toward the crew. "Fight it out yourself," he said as he climbed to the lower deck.

Stirling waited for Marr to come forward, glancing longingly over the slick-covered seas. In mockery, it seemed, the whales were sporting about the silent ship. One came so close to the bow that a dropped block on the forecastle deck startled it. It was gone with a defiant toss of black flukes, and the school started toward the ice.

Whitehouse finished whispering to the captain, glided to Stirling, and grasped his arm. "The old man says to get aloft and work into the ice. Says we'll whale later. The school's gone, anyway."

The peaceful ending to what Stirling had expected would lead to a general drawing of lines aboard the ship was more than he could stand. He turned and fastened upon Marr a glance of deep determination, his fingers coiling into knots.

"Remember," the Ice Pilot said, distinctly, "I'll always be on deck. I want no double crossing."

With this shot delivered through his white teeth, Stirling moved leisurely over the deck and as he descended to the waist, one of the crew hissed. He wheeled, reached out, grasped the man by the waist and neck, and threw him over his shoulder like a sack of meal.

"Any more?" he asked, grimly.

No man of them offered himself though Stirling waited with his glance taking in the rough circle. He dropped his fingers, moved slowly to the rail and up the shrouds he climbed till he reached the crow's-nest. Standing on the edge of this, he rimmed the ice pack from horizon to horizon.

"One bell!" he called down. "All hands stand by braces. Three of you come aloft and loosen sail."

The ship sprang with life. Whitehouse jerked the engine-room telegraph; the propeller thrashed astern; the sails dropped from the yards and were sheeted home. The taper jib boom swung toward the open lane to the north and east and ice floes ground under the stem.

For two watches Stirling remained aloft, calling down his orders in a strong voice. He knew the ice as few men were ever gifted to know it, and took advantage of all his experience. He held the course through the lane until, balked, he drove across a sea of slush and thin ice and crashed the way open to still another pathway to the north.

The Pribilofs, already green with moss and spring verdure, were sighted at sundown. A low shed marked the sealing station where the bachelor seals had been skinned in days gone by, and a flag flew from a pole at the side of the Commissioner's house. Its bars of white and red cheered Stirling. It was the emblem of his country in the Northern seas.

No other ships showed within the ice field; Stirling had taken chances lesser pilots feared. He drove north and east under steam and canvas, saving the ship from being crushed a score of times. He announced quietly upon the fourth day that East Cape lay ahead, and pointed over the bow. Marr, on the quarter-deck, clapped Whitehouse across the shoulders, and the mate grinned and danced over the planks.

The massive solemnity of the great headland, as it rose above the ice field, held every eye aboard the whaler. It was the farthermost point east and north of the Siberian continent. Near the foot of the Cape nestled a native village.

"Indian Point?" asked Marr, glaring upward at Stirling.

The Ice Pilot nodded as he guided the ship through the last of the shore ice and ordered the anchor dropped in a sheltered nook. The rattle of the chain in the hawser hole awoke echoes within the cliff; Indian canoes in the shape of hair-sealskin umiaks and kayaks darted out to meet them, and other boats flecked the Straits of Bering, coming down with the wind and current from East Cape.

The *Pole Star* was the first ship of the season, and the natives welcomed it with a great noise. Chiefs were hastily paddled out, and mounted the quarter-deck to gather about Marr and Whitehouse. Stirling attended to the throng which swarmed up the anchor chain and forepeak. Native girls, old women, men and children brought trade stuff of varied character—salmon, walrus tusks, small whalebone, carved idols, feather coats, skin caps, and hoods.

A large umiak appeared from the ice of the strait, and in its bow stood a chief, who called Stirling's name. The Ice Pilot reach over the rail and grasped the hand of the leader of the Diomede Islanders. They had brought the best of Mazeka boots, which are prized by whalers and the hunters of the North. These boots were sealskin moccasins, capped to full length with deerskin, watertight and warm.

"Plenty bone ashore," said the native chief, pointing at the igloos of Indian Point. "Plenty whales this season. Me catchum two."

Stirling smiled at the broad face of the Eskimo, then shook his head. "Plenty ships come soon," he said. "You sell to old Peterson. You remember, he pay big trade stuff. Don't take whisky."

The chief blinked shrewdly, dug deep within his fur parka, and brought forth a pipe, which he filled with a pinch of cut plug. Stirling offered a match, and the chief puffed and stared about the ship.

"New!" he said with brevity. "Fine ship. You own?"

Stirling shook his head and pointed toward the quarter-deck, where Marr was in conference with the Indian Point chiefs.

"He buy whalebone?" asked the Diomede Islander.

"I don't think so. You try old Peterson. Maybe he give you plenty."

"I want two whaleboats this year," said the shrewd native. "I want ten guns and whale lines. Next year I catch plenty whales."

Stirling recalled the method employed by the natives in capturing bowheads. They usually fastened from kayaks or umiaks and drove in as many irons as they could. To each iron was

fastened a skin line which terminated in a seal poke inflated with air. These, if in sufficient numbers, prevented the whale from sounding and allowed it to be finished with long, ivory-pointed lances.

Drunken natives staggered from the poop and swarmed about the waist and forepeak of the ship. Marr had distributed whisky for what trade stuff he needed. He bought three heads of bone for twelve kegs of alcohol and water mixed. This bone came out in umiaks and was stored with the other baleen in the forehold.

Time passed at the Point. Marr seemed in no great hurry to enter the Arctic, even going ashore and remaining overnight with the native chiefs. Sounds of their mirth and drunken carousing floated out.

Stirling chafed at the delay. The skipper was evidently waiting for some message from across the sea. Each ship which passed or dropped anchor at East Cape was gammed; each time the captain returned without word of his purpose. Five whalers went through to the summer whaling ground which extended all of the way to the mouth of the Mackenzie River and beyond.

A night came when the sun barely dipped below the western waters. Stirling had tried to sleep, but finally emerged to the deck with hot, fevered eyes. The air was heavy and sultry, and mosquitoes buzzed. They had been blown from off the Siberian tundra.

The pack long since had gone through the Straits and down the long reach of the Bering Sea. A group of natives slept on the forepeak of the *Pole Star*, while a single member of the crew walked slowly from port to starboard and back again, holding the anchor watch.

Some slight noise upon the quarter-deck caused Stirling to turn aft till he stood in the gloom of the galley cabin. He glanced keenly upward, to where the drab canvas of the rail showed, with a shadow behind it. A faint light shone from the open companion.

Then, and suddenly, he heard his name called. He started for the lee poop steps, then paused as a warning was whispered to him. He stared upward in rising perplexity. A white hand reached over the rail, its fingers uncoiled, and a dark object fell to the deck. There followed the sound of soft feet over the quarter-deck's planks and of the shutting of the cabin companion.

Stirling stooped and picked up the object. Unrolling it slowly, he blushed through his sea tan as he held out a tiny glove. It was such a glove as only a dainty woman could wear.

"By the jumping bowheads!" he exclaimed. "A pretty girl's aboard and she's noticed me. I wonder who she is?"

CHAPTER XV—OUT OF THE PORTHOLE

Pressing the glove within the pocket of his pea-jacket, Stirling strode to the waist of the *Pole Star*. From this position he glanced upward at the quarter-deck, which was deserted.

The soft aroma of the perfume struck to his nostrils and he searched his brain for the events which led up to the dainty offering tossed down to him.

Marr and Whitehouse knew the secret of the after cabin of the whaler. They never had given any sign that another shared the meals and splendid staterooms with them. This other had been brought upon the voyage against her will—Stirling remembered the sob, and the lone figure upon the poop when they had tied to the North pack. He pieced together the few observations he had made, and they all led to one conclusion: a dainty woman, who closely resembled the skipper in height and weight, was aboard the *Pole Star*. She had made the first advance to him. Others might follow.

He rounded the shadow of the galley house and stared at the frowning headland of Indian Point, then turned and glanced out over the waters of the Bering Strait. The ice had gone south from around the base of the headlands. The road to the Arctic was open.

He heard then, above the snoring of the natives who were sleeping upon the foreward deck, the low boom of a distant cannon. It was repeated. A ship of some kind was signalling to leeward.

Searching the sea, Stirling strained his eyes without discovering sign of smoke or sail. The night was starlit and strangely warm. The glimmering waters of the Bering to the southward hung like a burnished mirror. An early sun was starting to swing its upward arc, and a pink flush made visible the far-off land of Alaska.

Again the sound of cannon came to Stirling. It stirred the natives and brought the lone anchor watch around in his position. He stared at Stirling.

"A ship to leeward," said the Ice Pilot. "Keep your eyes peeled. She's a long ways off."

The seaman went to the rail and leaned over it. He was in that position when Stirling opened the door of his cabin and stepped inside. He switched on the light, removed the glove from his pocket, and touched it to his wide nostrils. He sensed the perfume with throbbing heart. Feeling the rush of blood to his face, he turned with a guilty start and placed the glove within an inlaid sextant box. The closing of the lid sealed his purpose to stand by the woman who was aft.

Morning dawned at an Arctic hour, and the white light crept through the open porthole of Stirling's cabin. He rose and dressed, emerging to the deck with a wide yawn. The striking bell told him that he had not slept more than two hours.

A seaman brushed by him and hurried forward to where the natives were standing on the higher coign of vantage which marked the forepeak. All eyes were turned out over the swiftly

running Strait, where a two-funnel light cruiser cutter plowed with a bone at her stem. She carried no flag, and the signals set to her bridge halyards were in an unknown code.

Whitehouse glided to Stirling's side. The mate was tensely agitated; he sputtered and stuttered. "Bly me," he said, "what's she doing 'ere?"

"Light cruiser," said Stirling, thoughtfully. "An American—or British. She's just this side the Diomedes. She did not see us."

Whitehouse twisted his loose lips into a purse, and stroked his long, red nose.

Stirling widened his eyes. A dark plume of smoke was all that remained to mark the ship. This plume stretched along the eastern horizon, then faded and paled in the sun's first rays.

Marr called from aft. Whitehouse turned with a guilty start, hurried along the weather side of the ship, and mounted to the poop.

He returned within a few minutes and touched Stirling on the arm. "Skipper wants to see you," he said. "It's blym important."

Stirling glanced about as he went aft. The ship lay deep within the shadow of the Point. Her deck forward was covered with natives and trade stuff. The crew had brought out all of their red underwear and slop-chest stuff in a search for bargains, and their voices were mingled with the clatter of native maids and hunters.

"What did you make of that cutter?" asked Marr as Stirling reached the poop.

"American or British. Going into the Arctic on some mission. I don't believe she saw us."

"How was that?" Marr was plainly nervous.

"We were well under the headland with no lights or canvas showing. We were in such a position that she could be seen without her seeing us. At least, that is my opinion, Mr. Marr."

The little captain toyed with the buttons of his pea-jacket. "That sounds reasonable," he said. "Why is she up here?"

"I don't know."

"Did you ever see cruisers up here before?"

"Only once. That was the old *Bainbridge*."

"What brought her to these waters?"

"Seal poachers!"

Stirling weighed his words and shot them directly at Marr, then watched their effect like a gunner watches a shot go home. Marr dropped his hand from his buttons and paled slightly.

"Did she get them?" he asked.

"She certainly did! She also removed Captains Jones and Priestly from the *Spouter* and the brig *Belvidere*. Both captains were trading whisky for bone; there is a law up here that men should not do that!"

Again Stirling watched the effect of his words. Marr had many barrels of cheap trade whisky aboard the *Pole Star*, and already had sent some ashore.

"That will be all," said the skipper with a quick frown. "You are too confounded personal! Haven't I a right to ask you a few questions? Who's captain of this ship?"

"Captains are not immune from certain laws. One law applies to all men. You cannot trade rotten whisky with natives. You cannot rob them of their bone for a barrel of water and alcohol. You cannot raid rookeries and get away with it. That cruiser is the answer. You have escaped so far. You may not be so lucky next time."

Marr wheeled with a vicious oath. "Get forward!" he said. "Get where you belong. You ought to join some of these canting missionary schools. There's one or two I'd like to drop you at."

Stirling paused on the first poop step and closed his fists, but opened them again and went on down to the deck, moving slowly forward to where the crew and natives were trading. He singled out the Diomede Islander who had disposed of most of his sealskin boots.

"When do you go back?" he asked, guardedly.

The native tapped the rail with his pipe and filled its bowl with a pinch of cut plug. He then broke off a match from a block and scraped it carefully upon the deck, straightened, and drew in five deep breaths before the tobacco was consumed, and he answered.

"Pretty soon, now," he said, replacing the pipe in his deerskin coat, and glancing through puffed eyes at the sea in the direction of the Lesser Diomede. "Me take umiak and trade stuff and wife and little ones and me go."

"Do you remember old Hank Peterson?"

"Me savvy him. All the same whaling captain."

"Big captain!" said Stirling, with a smile. "You see him this season?"

"Yes! Me see him. He always stops for boots."

"You give him something for me?"

"Yes; I give."

Stirling hurried into his cabin and tore a leaf from an ancient log book. Upon this he wrote a message to Peterson which he felt was certain to be delivered by the faithful Diomede chief.

The message concerned the Seal Islands and the danger of a raid being made against them.

Notify any revenue cutters or cruisers,

Stirling commanded.

The native chief took the scrap of paper, glanced about in caution, and crammed it into a bead-woven poke wherein were his most valuable possessions. "Me give 'em!" he declared, positively. "White captain, he get maybe day or two. Plenty whale ships come now."

Stirling was satisfied with his messenger. The chief departed from the *Pole Star's* side after bundling aboard his umiak all of his trade stuff and relatives. These last were seventeen in number, and the skin boat was deep enough in the sea to suggest that a catastrophe would happen before the Lesser Diomede was reached.

The last sight of the chief, however, was a reassuring one to Stirling. The faithful native had skilfully risen in the bow of the umiak, steadied his short legs, and taken out his beaded poke. This he waved overhead, being careful not to capsize the laden boat.

Stirling had answered by lifting his cap and holding it aloft, then the boat was paddled around a rocky point. Other umiaks and kayaks followed. Many of the natives went ashore, taking the stuff they had bought; the few that remained were aft with Marr. One was singing a drunken song which never before had been heard on land or sea.

Eagan stepped to Stirling's side as the last notes of this song floated down the deck.

"Booze!" said the seaman, laconically.

"Alcohol!" exclaimed Stirling. "These natives were all right until the white men came. They hunted and fished and lived simple lives."

Eagan smiled. "What are you going to do about this Siberian bunch?" he asked. "The U. S. A. has no jurisdiction over here."

"It has! Russia is not to blame. It isn't Russian whalers and traders who do the mischief."

"Forget the preaching," said Eagan with Frisco slang. "Keep your opinions to yourself, Stirling. The day for booze in the United States seems to be about over, anyway. Just now——"

The seaman's voice trailed off into silence. He thrust out a strong jaw, drilled Stirling with a meaning glance, then was gone with a swift turn across the deck.

Stirling was still thinking of the whisky; like all strong natures, he dwelt too long on one subject.

He moved to the rail and leaned his elbows upon the chains where they were spliced to the shrouds and standing rigging. He swept the native village with a painstaking glance; it was not the same as first he had known it. The igloos back in the valley, which was still crusted with winter snow, were few and small in dimensions. The frame shacks and rude tents of the summer village bore the certain stamp of neglect and carelessness. Dogs hunted about for scraps of meat. Children in trade calico played with a listless air. The umiaks and kayaks were patched and broken.

Stirling frowned. Other villages along the Siberian and Alaskan shores were similarly stamped. They had been touched and polluted by the influence of those whalers who found it easier to allow the natives to secure the whalebone than it was to go out to sea and get it.

A sharp command broke through Stirling's thoughts, and he turned from his view of the village. Marr stood at the weather poop steps.

The little skipper pointed toward the waist of the whaleboat. "Lower that!" he snapped. "You and Eagan and about two seamen drop up to East Cape. See if there's any bone there."

Stirling answered the skipper's command with a slow glance, moved not too hastily toward the whaleboat, and climbed inside. From this position, he called Eagan and two seamen who were idling on the forepeak.

The boat was cleared of lashings and lowered, with Stirling in the bow and Eagan in the stern, then the seamen came down the dangling falls and dropped aboard. They thrust out two long oars and shoved the whaleboat from the ship.

Stirling glanced at the telltale on the *Pole Star*, then motioned to up the single sail and lower the centerboard. The light craft sailed into the wind and canted far to leeward, gliding from the shadow of the headland as the sun swung over the shoulder of Siberia.

East Cape was reached soon after dark. Stirling sprang ashore and shouted; then repeated the call. Lights shone from the windows set in the summer shacks.

A pack of shaggy dogs, followed by three natives, came out and stared at the whaleboat. One dog crept down the beach and sniffed Stirling's native boots, then raised his snout and called a wolf's long howl of welcome.

A rude door was opened in the larger shack, and the chief stood revealed in the glow of the inner fire, about which native women were squatted. Stirling advanced and held out his hand, touching the chief on the shoulder. "You remember me," he said. "Me ice pilot of the *Beluga*. You got any whalebone to trade?"

The chief's face cleared, and he voiced a noisy welcome. He had no whalebone; furs he showed and also tusks. Some of these were carved with running men and spouting whales.

It was after dawn when Stirling gave the order to run out the whaleboat and make for the *Pole Star*. The chief, his family, and a score of natives waved a silent farewell, standing on the beach until the boat turned a ledge of rock and vanished into the smooth waters of the Strait.

Stirling was steering as the light boat swung under the *Pole Star's* stern and glided alongside. He glanced up at the overhanging poop where lights showed through the portholes. Out of one an arm reached and waved, and he heard a low-voiced warning. It was muffled and indistinct, but it was a girl's tones which warned. He had but time to swing the tiller when the boat scraped against the whaler's sheathing and Eagan caught a dangling fall.

CHAPTER XVI—FROM HIS POCKET

The Ice Pilot reached the deck by way of the chains in the waist, and saw that the entire crew had gathered between the galley house and the break of the poop.

Marr was with them. He wheeled, strutted over the planks, and planted himself before Stirling. "What did you find at East Cape?" he asked.

Stirling doubled his fists and stepped back. "Little or nothing," he said, glancing over the skipper's slight shoulder and meeting the eyes of the crew which seemed suddenly hostile. "Little or nothing," he repeated, simply. "There's pelts there and ivory, but no bone. I told them we had no whisky to trade."

"You did?"

Stirling flushed and backed to the rail. He heard Eagan drop to the deck beside him, and the seaman was followed by the two sailors who had made the trip to East Cape.

"I did!"

"Don't you know that this crew is trying to make an honest living? Don't you know that every brave man aboard gets a two hundredth lay of the bone we trade or capture? Why didn't you try the natives with a little whisky bait? You'd have found bone hidden in every igloo."

"Go yourself!" said Stirling. "I won't do your dirty work!"

Marr turned to the half-moon of menacing men. "You heard that," he said. "That's the kind of man this pilot is—all for himself. I told you we'd have to look out for him. We can't go on any further until he is taken care of."

The crew had reached some sort of agreement before Stirling arrived from East Cape; this much he saw with widening eyes, glancing from face to face. The Kanakas had been chosen for their loyalty to the little skipper. The boat steerers were Frisco dock rats who had the run of the steerage—an elevated position to them. The rest of the crew had scant hopes for anything save plunder and spoils in this life. They would have willingly followed Marr through the entire group of rookeries, starting at Disko Island and winding up at the Pribilofs.

Stirling reached and rested his hand on the pinrail, where were a dozen brass belaying pins. He lifted his hand, wound his fingers about the nearest, and raised it an inch or more. A tenseness of desperate right steeled his muscles; his jaw muscles hardened to balls, and his lips closed in a grim line.

Marr reached backward and clapped his palm over his right hip. The motion was a signal. The crew snarled in a running line of anger, advanced in a half-circle, and closed about Stirling. One held a sheath knife openly displayed in his hand.

"Kill the squealer!" he exclaimed. "Kill him! He's preventing us from getting what's coming on this voyage. Darn, says I, if I'll go to Frisco broke. What d'ye say, mates?"

"Hold on!" cried Stirling, raising his ponderous right fist. "The first man who tries anything gets this!"

Eagan stepped out from the rail a half step, and stood partly between Stirling and the little skipper. There was that written in the seaman's face which held every man upon the ship. His eyes glittered with high light, and his body rested on the balls of his feet as if to spring.

"A moment!" Eagan snapped in steeled tones. "This layout will lead to murder. Murder leads to swingin'. I don't want to swing. I'm with the skipper in every way. Get that?"

The crew glanced at each face before them—Stirling's strong, but uncertain; Eagan's masterful; Marr's openly sneering.

"We get it," a sailor answered back.

"Then, I suggest we all go slow. This Stirling has been cracking too much about whisky and seals. He's liable to see too much and say too many things afterward. You get me, don't you?"

"We get you."

"On the other hand," continued Eagan, "there's the danger of messing the whole voyage up. If we croak this fellow, it'll get out and we'll have to pay. If we maroon him anywhere along this coast, he'll find a way to signal that cruiser that went north, or the *Bear*."

"How about an island?" a boat steerer asked.

"That's it!" declared Eagan, dropping his hand. "We'll put him on an island after we get done with the little trip the captain has planned for us. That island will be in the North Pacific. We can pick out a nice, quiet one."

Stirling, with fist still ready for action, turned toward Eagan and exclaimed: "You're with them, eh?"

"Certainly; all the way! You're one against thirty—more than that, counting the engine-room force and the stokehold bunch. Put down that fist and get into your cabin; stay there and don't come on deck. Otherwise they're going to mop up the ship with you."

"I'll chance that——" started Stirling, advancing upon the crew, both fists now clenched.

He never hesitated in the charge. It was bull strong and intended to clear the way to the poop; men went over as ninepins; blows glanced from his shoulders. He reached the poop steps with arms twined about him, threw these off with a savage twist and squirm, and went up as a Kanaka harpooner seized his legs. Dragging slowly, he grasped the rail and bent his body.

It was then that a belaying pin flew across the waist of the ship, glanced from the quarter-deck rail, and struck Stirling in the temple. He rolled down the steps—the centre of a snarling pack of men—then lay quiet, with blood flowing from the wound in his head.

Eagan pulled off the pack and lifted him like a heavy sack of meal. "I'll put him in his cabin," he said with a grunt. "I'll watch him. Leave that part to me."

Marr turned and faced the crew. "Get the anchor up!" he ordered. "We'll drop down the wind and make for our landfall. Remember, we're looking for bowheads until I give other instructions."

Eagan laid Stirling on his bunk and went to work. He found water and a clean towel, bathed the swollen wound, leaned over, and shook Stirling into consciousness.

"Lay low!" he whispered. "Don't you know who I am?"

Stirling rolled, and pressed his hand to his eyes. "I don't know," he said, weakly. "Who are you?"

Eagan reached into his pocket and drew forth a gold badge. He held it before Stirling's swimming eyes.

"I am a Deputy Seal Commissioner," said the seaman.

CHAPTER XVII—INTO FORBIDDEN WATERS

The long Northern day died at last as the *Pole Star* drove south and west through the ice-flecked waters of the Bering Sea.

Night shaded overhead and the wind sank to a following breeze which flapped the sails on the polished spars. Steam was got up in the boilers, the screw thrashed, and the ship plunged on—her sharp stem cutting through the drift ice like a knife going through thin paper.

Into the upward swing of the Arctic sun the whaler steered. Fog drifted upon them, and when it lifted there was exposed a wide waste of sullen waters upon the surface of which seal and walrus sported. Once a killer whale attracted attention. Some of the green crew called "A blow!"

Marr knew better than this. He urged the ship on as if it were carrying the mail for Southern waters. He stood the watch with Whitehouse, and both seamen had received Eagan's report that Stirling was resting easily and was making no trouble.

They consulted as to the best course to pursue in regard to Stirling. Marr was for locking him securely in the chain-locker—this was a tiny space forward the forecastle. Whitehouse, who had taken a liking to Stirling, admiring his prowess with the ice and the conditions met in the Bering, suggested that Eagan should be left in charge of the captive and held responsible. Marr agreed, neither man suspecting that the sailor had any motive in staying near Stirling. Their first suspicion had been forgotten. Eagan had played a difficult part and won his point.

It was on the third day that the *Pole Star* entered, as dusk crept across the sky, the zone of danger where no ships were allowed at that season of the year, the strictest patrolled patch of water in the world. Seals of the fur-skin variety, which are so valuable and scarce, sported about.

Marr drove on with all lights shaded and a canvas cone capping the *Pole Star's* funnel and steam pipe. Orders had been given for each man to stand at position. Guns had been laid in the whaleboats, and great oak capstan bars took the place of the whaling gear.

An air of expectancy filled each sailor's breast; the die was cast, and they were close to the great game. Whaling was for old men and weaklings. Stories had been told in the forecastle and steerage concerning the sudden profits of a seal raid. MacLane was cited as an instance of desperate daring and tremendous enterprise, MacLane who had raided both the Copper Group and the Pribilofs in one season. He had brought his schooner into Seattle with her deck planks bulging from the salted skins beneath.

Eagan moved from Stirling's cabin to the forecastle and back again. He had secured a pair of rusty handcuffs with which he made great show of securing the Ice Pilot, where he lay on his back. Now and then one of the galley crowd peered in through the open porthole and reported to the sailors on deck.

A double lookout was maintained from forepeak and quarter-deck, and the horizon was closely scanned by Marr and Whitehouse. The rookeries lay close to the south and west and the ship had been driven toward the northeast point of St. Paul's Island.

Stirling sensed his position by the slowing of the screw and the direction of the slight wind and he reviewed the entire series of events since coming aboard the ship. His head had now cleared, and the slight swelling at the temple was going down under Eagan's skillful treatment.

The situation was desperate enough. Marr had taken the long chance and reached the waters about the rookeries. But two armed ships were known to be in the Bering Sea or the Arctic. One was the revenue cutter *Bear*; the other, the unknown cruiser which had driven through Bering Strait.

Stirling's anger boiled and simmered as he lay in a handcuffed position and waited for reports from Eagan, who had to be careful. There was scant chance of their ever capturing the ship. Two against forty offered little hope to dwell upon; another method than violence would have to be found.

Eagan came in at one bell before midnight, closed the door, pocketed the keys, then moved over to the porthole and glanced keenly out.

"How're we heading?" whispered Stirling.

"Southwest."

"Dead on St. Paul?"

"She's just been raised from aft. Marr and Whitehouse sent the word forward. The whole tribe of Kanakas, Gay Islanders, dock rats, and cinder-muckers—to say nothing of the two first-class engineers, who ought to know better—are itching to get at the seals. It will be as much as our lives are worth to interfere. Marr has them all worked up."

"Where's the *Bear*?"

"Heaven only knows! Seagraves, her captain, told me in Frisco that he had an entire ocean to guard. There's the Russian coast and the Kotzebue and Norton Sound."

"That other cruiser?"

"She's helping him out. Likely there's an expedition cast away in the Arctic. The *Kadik* was reported crushed. The cruiser may have gone through to pick up the survivors."

"Then Marr will succeed?" Stirling hinged himself upward and stared at Eagan.

"Looks that way." Eagan closed his fists and turned from the porthole. "Looks bad," he continued with hard eyes. "At that, Stirling, we've three or four hours yet. Much can happen in that time. The *Bear* may swing around St. Paul."

"Have you made no plans? The Commission must know that you are on this ship. They will be waiting for word from you."

Eagan smiled despite his doubts. "We're two," he said. "They don't suspect me, and I have a plan. I shall land at the rookeries and try to reach the guard. If I fail, then you can spike the ship in some manner till the *Bear* is reached by wireless."

Stirling raised his wrists and eyed the handcuffs.

"They're tight," he suggested. "Suppose you let them out a notch. Then, whatever happens to you during the raid, I'll be on deck and active. Who was it threw that belaying pin?"

"Whitehouse."

Stirling made a mental note for future guidance. "Now, Eagan," he continued, "you had better loosen the cuffs and leave me an automatic revolver. I hear the screw slowing. We're right off the rookery. Listen. That's the surf on the beach."

"Worse than that," said the government agent. "There's also the sound of seals barking. Hear them? I wouldn't wonder if they sense what is coming."

The seaman reached downward in the half-light and inserted a key in the handcuff lock. Stirling guided him with cool fingers, and soon the cuffs fitted loosely.

"Now the gun," said Stirling.

Eagan glided to the porthole, glanced shrewdly out, then returned to Stirling's side. "Take mine," the deputy said. "I won't need it. Hide it under your mattress."

The icy coolness in the man's tones steeled Stirling. He lay back as Eagan went across the cabin, opened the door, and stepped swiftly out upon the deck. A lock clicked.

An impending silence lay over the *Pole Star*. The shuffling of men on deck, the creak of blocks, the straining of falls, told of boats being lowered. Voices were muffled as a light anchor was dropped at the end of a whale line, serving to swing the ship and hold it toward the shelving shore.

Stirling caught the deep roar of the bachelor seals. In fancy he saw the boats glide across the water and grate upon the beach. He saw, in fancy again, the raised capstan bars and the shattered skulls of the prey.

A boat ground against the ship's side, a block creaked, a laugh rang and was stilled. Then footfalls sounded, and the porthole was darkened.

Whitehouse thrust his long nose through the opening and squinted toward Stirling. "You're there," the mate muttered. "Be blym quiet, let me tell you that. It'll all be over in 'alf a hour. Too bad you weren't with us, Stirling."

The Ice Pilot did not answer and the mate's face disappeared from the porthole. Another boat touched the ship's side. Bundles of pelts were dragged to the forehold and dropped downward. Hushed instructions were given to return to the rookery.

Stirling rolled over and felt for the gun under his mattress. Its cold barrel nerved him to rise and sit upon the edge of the bunk. He cocked the trigger and waited, his eyes toward the porthole, then turned and stared at the locked door.

"Time to be doing something," he said, simply. "They're ripping the rookeries wide open, without being discovered. Like as not they've overpowered the native guard. That'll go hard with them later."

He stood erect and worked one hand free from the cuff. Winding the chain about his wrist, he moved toward the porthole and peered out. A black velvet band stretched over the sea, and through it came stars as his eyes accustomed themselves to the view. He stared out over the ship's rail, to where he saw faint white spots which marked the drift ice. Beyond these was a silver running ripple.

The position of the ship with its whale-line anchorage was close to the hidden beach. Stirling sensed the slow rise of the waves, which marked shallow bottom. The idea came to him that if the

line were cut which led to the anchor, the *Pole Star* most certainly would go ashore. Once ashore, the crew would be unable to work her out in time to escape. Eagan could be expected to give some sort of alarm, and the guard on the other islands of the seal group would descend upon them.

"I'll chance it," said Stirling. "Here goes for the door and a rush to the anchor rope. I didn't hear them drop a chain."

He took one step away from the porthole. A gliding foot sounded outside upon the ship's planks, and he stood rigid, then leaned toward the bunk.

The footfall was repeated. It came closer to the corner of the galley house, and a voice sounded from somewhere forward. A rattle of oars swung up the slight breeze, and seals barked from the red shores of the rookery.

"Quiet!"

Stirling touched the side of his bunk with both hands, bent, and prepared to roll over. The handcuff chain clicked metallically.

"Quiet!" The sound was faint and came to him as a warning. He waited, his shoulders lifted with his deep breathing, his eyes fastened upon the velvet circle of the open porthole.

A face came slowly into view like the shadow of the moon crossing the disk of the sun, and Stirling dropped his jaw in wonderment. It was far too soft a face for any of the crew. The eyes that stared in at his were deep blue and trustful.

"Quiet!"

"Yes; yes," he answered, feeling a rush of blood to his cheeks.

"Take this quickly."

Stirling rose by straightening his legs and back and stepped over the floor of his cabin, his unshackled hand reaching out. He touched the edge of the porthole, and his fingers groped outside. They came in contact with a tiny pearl-handled revolver. He drew it in and wondered at its diminutive size.

"Quiet, Mr. Stirling!"

He tossed the revolver to his bunk and turned toward the porthole. A cupid's bow of red lips, through which shone white teeth that met in an even row, greeted him.

"What is it?" he asked, huskily. "What—who are you?"

A pink finger touched the lips so invitingly offered; golden-bronze hair, capped with a tam-o'-shanter, bobbed and moved away, then came again as the blue eyes searched about the gloom of the cabin.

A sound of more oars in locks struck up the wind; a voice warned from the quarter-deck; and a shuffle echoed along the deck in the lee of the galley house.

"Who—why did you come to me?"

The lips closed doubtfully and then opened. "You will know soon enough," said the girl. "I'm going now. Be careful, Mr. Stirling. Be very careful, for my sake. Don't do anything that would endanger your life—or the captain's."

"Are you the captain's——?"

Stirling never finished the question. A white pallor drove the colour from the girl's cheeks, and she was gone even as he stared out through the open porthole. Her footfalls sounded along the deck, died away aft, and there came then the heavier feet of a sailor. He rounded the corner of the galley house, peered over the rail to the north and east, and then strode by Stirling.

A heavy capstan bar was over his shoulder, an open knife gleamed from his belt, his jaw was set and thrust slightly outward. Stirling recognized in him one of the Frisco dock rats who had been most aggressive in the attack when Whitehouse had hurled the belaying pin.

Stirling turned and glanced at the panels of the door; they were not strong. He lifted his shoulder and faced about. He could break to freedom in one bull-like lunge; afterward would come the severing of the anchor line and the casting away of the ship.

He dwelt upon the exact situation and eyed the velvet beyond the porthole. The stars were paling. They had changed from white light points to yellow specks; they swam and danced in the morning's haze. An Arctic sun would soon be leaping the eastern horizon.

CHAPTER XVIII—WITH THE SPEED OF WIND

The girl had given him courage, since her tiny offering still lay upon the bunk. Unconsciously he reached for it and twirled the silver-plated barrel. It was fully loaded with six cartridges.

"Two guns," he said. "I'll go!"

He moved not too quickly to the door and bent down. The lock was on the inside, held by four small screws. He tested the bolt by pressing against a panel with his shoulder. A click sounded in the chamfer.

Searching his pocket with his freed hand, he touched a ten-cent piece, drew this out and eyed it. It would do as a screw driver, and he found the slot of the first screw. It turned easily enough then; rapidly he worked with every nerve alert. Boats arrived and pushed off from the side of the ship; the crew were busy in the forehold; a watch-tackle creaked; and coarse remarks rolled along the deck. The poachers were intent on getting the seal pelts stored below before morning.

Stirling removed the third screw from the lock, pocketed it and drew back for a last glance through the porthole. A streak of yellow and a flaming whorl had shot athwart the sky; dawn was breaking swiftly in the Arctic east. It presaged a cloudless day.

He returned to the door, after listening intently, and tore the loosened lock from the woodwork. Tossing this to the bunk, he strained with his fingertips, digging deeply into the nearest panel. The door slid open on noiseless guides, and a breath of salty air greeted him.

He felt to see if both revolvers were in his pockets, then, working rapidly, arranged a rude dummy in the bunk. This he formed out of a blanket and two southwesters, so that it resembled the sleeping form of a man. He stepped to the door with a dry chuckle of satisfaction, and went out on deck and close under the rail without being detected.

Raising his bare head, he glanced toward the island, with its looming shadows and rocky walls. Below these walls were the homes of the great bull seals and their mates. The animals had been disturbed, and their barking and roar blended with the sound of the waves on the sand.

Beyond, and to leeward of the bull herd, were richer rookeries where had gathered the bachelor seals and those denied the other homes. It was to this portion of the beach that Marr had guided his hunters, and they had made short work of most of the bachelor seals. They had plied capstan bars, while the Kanakas and Gay Islanders had done the skinning.

Stirling saw the white sheen of a whaleboat being paddled out to the ship. He reached into his pocket, removed the automatic which Eagan had given him, and crept on hands and knees toward the forepeak.

Five of the crew were below in the hold from whence a light struck upward and illuminated the standing rigging and spars of the ship. A voice called from the quarter-deck. It was Whitehouse who

stood there, Marr having gone ashore with the raiders.

Stirling watched his chance and stood erect. There seemed no way to fail. The ship swung with gentle tugging in the bight of a whale line that had been lashed to a small anchor. The double line showed distinctly from the position where he stood. He had but to rush forward, lean over, sever the line, and get back to the cabin before Whitehouse discovered that the ship was adrift.

The Ice Pilot turned and stared along the deck to where the mate's figure moved grotesquely behind the canvas rail. Two or three seamen had hurried aft to meet the outcoming boat, and they mounted the poop ladder on the weather side and joined Whitehouse.

Stirling reached the heel of the foremast after cautiously rounding the fore hatch. His eyes hardened as he lifted his hand, poised it before him, and took one step toward the capstan and the starboard-anchor davit to which the whale line had been fastened.

Then like a scarlet snake with myriad scales, there rose from the island a rocket which reached to the higher skies, curved, and burst into a star shower of green and blue lights. The flare from this rocket brought out the rookeries and the whaleboats; the dead, skinned seals; the crouched figures of the crew ashore. It bathed the entire ocean with sinister light; it struck a spike of terror into the raiders' hearts.

They threw down skinning knives and bludgeons. They charged down across the red sands and thrust out the boats, glancing back with blanched faces as they frantically rowed toward the ship.

Stirling heard Whitehouse roll out a string of oaths which were as lurid as the rocket's warning glare. A stout shout sounded from Marr, who was in the leading whaleboat. Fire doors were opened below deck, scoops grated across the stokehold plates, the first engineer climbed swiftly to the companion and sprang out on deck.

The seal raiders were discovered; the guards had been warned on the other islands of the group. A wireless message was even then flashing across the waters of the Bering Sea. The *Bear*, or some other ship, would be down upon them.

Stirling realized exactly what had happened, and his brain worked swiftly. There was yet time to cut the anchor lines, but this would be done by the returning crew. In no other way could they sheer the ship from the shore and make to open sea.

He stepped back, brushed against a seaman who had risen from the forehatch, and rounded the galley house before the startled sailor could detect who had pressed against him.

The door to the cabin was slightly open. Stirling thrust through his fingers and tugged, then slipped inside and closed the door. Still thinking clearly, he shoved the two guns under the mattress of his bunk, screwed the lock back in place, then lay down and replaced the cuff over his freed wrist.

A quiet smile wreathed his face as he listened to the sounds which floated in through the open porthole. Curses and commands mingled in a jargon; boats were hurriedly hoisted to their positions on the davits; seamen sprang to the decks and rushed forward.

A bell sounded in the engine room; the screw thrashed and bit deeply into the sea. The *Pole Star* swung, cleared the beach by a scant cable's length, and drove out toward the north and east.

A grim face darkened the porthole, and Marr's glance bored the gloom of the cabin until he discerned Stirling's form on the bunk.

"You're there!" he said, bitterly. "Well, you'll stay there for some time. You and that rat Eagan came near spoiling our plans."

Stirling did not answer the irate skipper, thinking an answer beneath him. It was plainly evident, however, that Eagan was out of the lives of the men aboard the *Pole Star*. He had awakened the entire Bering Sea against the poachers.

Driving rapidly, under all steam and a well-set foresail and main, the *Pole Star* lay the island of St. Paul over her counter as the sun brightened the waters of the Bering Sea to the eastward.

The alarm had been given; they were in great danger. Watchers on the island, including Eagan, would see the poacher going spars down before they laid aside their glasses. Its course would be given to the first government boat raised by wireless. It was more than probable that the *Bear* would take up the chase by noon.

Stirling felt the swift shift of helm which came at sunrise. Marr had realized his danger and had sheered toward the west at least two points. This course, by magnetic compass, would bring the ship broadside of Siberia and into the wide mouth of the Gulf of Anadir.

The galley boy, accompanied by Whitehouse, appeared at the cabin door as the ship's bell was struck eight times. The mate noticed the loose condition of the lock as he inserted his own key. He stepped inside and examined the screws which Stirling had hastily replaced, his glance shrewd and hard.

"You'll go aft!" he said in bitter tones. "We're not taking any chances with you from now on. It's a blym long woiy from here to the port we'll reach some doiy."

Stirling sat upright and reached for the food which the boy had brought on a tin tray. He drank the coffee, smiling as Whitehouse lingered in the open doorway.

The two men locked glances. Stirling's eyes held, steady and penetrating, but Whitehouse turned with a quick oath. "I'll be back," he said over his shoulder as he vanished from the opening.

The galley boy was gathering up the tins and cups when Marr appeared, followed by the mate. The little skipper looked somewhat the worse for the events of the night—his face was unshaven, a splotch of dried seal's blood showed on his cheek, one hand was bandaged, and his eyes were sunken and red-rimmed.

"Had your lock off," he said, as he clapped a hand to his side pocket and strode into the cabin. "Well, you didn't do much. Eagan did it all. At that we got enough seals to make expenses."

Stirling crossed his wrists and clicked the irons.

"Better release me," he said with sincere directness. "It'll go mighty hard, Marr, as it is. A little more and you will swing as sure as there is a law in this sea. I don't doubt that Eagan will manage to run you down. It isn't the time of MacLane and the others whom you have imitated."

"Confound you and Eagan—the stool! He don't know my course."

"He knows you gammed that Japanese sealer off Rat Island. That's almost enough to know. I'd advise you to swing to Dutch Pass, surrender to the port officer there, and get off light."

Marr whipped out a string of imprecations. "I'm a hard man!" he finished by saying. "I brook no interference. You'll go aft and into a strong room, where you'll stay for the balance of the voyage, eh, Mr. Whitehouse?"

"This cabin won't 'old 'im," the mate declared, fumbling with the lock. "E's too blym near the crew and the steerage. The starboard room aft the cross alleyway is the place for our friend here."

"It's too darned good!" exclaimed Marr. "Stand up, Stirling. We'll lead you to your new home."

Stirling was of two minds. There was scant chance for resistance as he twisted and untwisted the handcuff chain. He glanced about the cabin. The objects of personal value most certainly would be stolen by the crew or the galley crowd, and he prized a few of these beyond price.

"I want my things," he said in cool resignation. "Let me bundle up a few geegaws and I'll come along. It'll take me five minutes."

Marr tapped his side pocket suggestively. "Go ahead," he said, backing from the cabin and glancing meaningly toward Whitehouse. "Five minutes, you get. No more! Take off his cuffs."

The two seamen stood between the cabin door and the rail of the ship, and whispered each to the other, but Stirling could not catch their words. He stood erect, turned slowly, and reached under the mattress as Marr gripped Whitehouse by the arm and pointed toward the horizon.

Stirling's hands came away with the little revolver which the girl had passed in to him. This he thrust down between his collar and neck, and its chill sent a remembered thrill through his body.

Whitehouse stuck his head within the doorway. "Be deuced quick habout hit!" he snarled. "Get your traps and come along. There's a smudge o' smoke to windward."

"Glad of that!" said Stirling, stooping on one knee and reaching for his dunnage bag. "I hope it's the *Bear* or the *Corwin* or the cutter we saw going for the Arctic. She's about due back."

"Bally fine chance!" Whitehouse snickered. "More likely she's a blubber hunter tryin' out. It's more than likely."

Stirling knew better than this. No ships in the Bering whaled for oil; that pursuit was confined to Southern seas.

Marr was plainly nervous as he led Stirling toward the after part of the *Pole Star*, and kept glancing to the south and west. He halted on the poop steps and stared downward.

Whitehouse followed Stirling. The mate had motioned the crew to one side, and they had gathered in the waist, jeering as the trio passed them. They, too, were nervous. The smudge of smoke had widened to a splotch which streaked the horizon; a ship of some kind was dashing parallel to the course taken by the *Pole Star*.

The chase was on.

Stirling hitched his dunnage bag under his left arm and turned as he reached the quarter-deck. His eyes were the best upon the whaler, and he knew every ship that came into Bering Sea. He threw all his power into determining the nature of the fast-flying stranger, then he smiled slowly. She was the *Bear*. A vague sense of the position of the masts and the rake of the funnel told him that the redoubtable revenue cutter had received Eagan's message from St. Paul Island. She was coming with the speed of the wind, and was not more than seven knots astern.

Marr realized that Stirling had detected the name of the pursuer, and his face clouded. He shouted an order to the wheelsman, then sprang to the speaking tube which led down to the engine room. A volcano of smoke belched from the *Pole Star's* funnel. She swerved like a skater on ice, and the deck planks vibrated and trembled. A bellow of rage and defiance came from the crew at the change of course; they lined the rail and stared over the sparkling sea, shaking their grimy fists and calling down anathemas.

"Come on," cried Whitehouse into Stirling's ear. "Get down to your cabin. It'll be a blym long time before that revenue ship gets in range of us. I think we are the faster."

Stirling followed the mate through the cabin companion and down to an alleyway. At the starboard end of this Whitehouse inserted a key in a lock and slid open a door, motioning inside with a jerk of his thumb.

The Ice Pilot found himself in a small stateroom which was trimmed with maple and white tiling. He dropped his dunnage bag as the mate closed the door and turned the bolt, and his eyes roamed about the cabin.

The single porthole, set deep in the double skin of the ship, was brass-rimmed and no larger than a small dinner plate. It could be opened by turning two bronze wing screws, and the view through it was upon a patch of water, with swift-flowing ice darting by.

"Prison or palace?" he said as he turned and studied the cabin, swaying with the motion of the ship. The list was slightly to port. Some sail had been spread to catch a light breeze which had sprung up with the sun. The deck overhead resounded with gliding steps; Marr and the mate were doing everything possible to hold their speed.

The cabin's furnishings were yachtlike and serviceable. The bunk was covered with a hair mattress and an eiderdown counterpane. Over it were two brass racks for luggage and dunnage, and on the opposite wall a washbowl and towel rack could be folded into a seat. Pictures were strewed about, which were all marines painted by a decorator of merit.

Stirling glanced from one to the other. Tropic scenes brought to mind the incongruity of their latitude—the *Pole Star* was hustling from the equator as fast as steam could drive her. Her last course was toward the barren land of Siberia and the upper headland of the Gulf of Anadir. It was terra incognita to most seamen and all save a few whale-ships or traders.

Stirling examined the lock of his door. It was far stronger than the one in the galley cabin, and had been set within the wood and mortised so that only a small, flat keyhole showed.

He bent his head and listened. A step had glided along the alleyway. It was repeated in shuffling motion, going from starboard to port and back again across the ship. Whitehouse had left a seaman on guard.

Stirling stood erect and squared his shoulders, towering almost to the dunnage-racks over the white bunk. His eyes hardened as he glanced from the green-filled porthole to the door and back. The cabin was a secure prison, as Marr had said. It would require considerable ingenuity to escape from it. The sentry on guard was sure to be armed with one of the sealing rifles; he would be changed each watch.

The ship hurtled onward toward the Siberian coast. The screw thrashed astern, bit deeply into the waves, and thrashed again—each time the foam boiled astern the ship trembled and racked.

Bells clanged; shouts sounded; running feet were overhead; blocks creaked; the wind freshened and called for more canvas. The menace astern crept up to a four-mile range. A gun boomed across the wild waste of Northern waters. A shot fell to windward; another followed. Then, and slowly, the grip of the pursuer was shaken off. Superspeed, a fair wind, and a straining stokehold crew, made the slight difference.

Stirling frowned as he sensed that the *Bear* was being distanced. He opened the porthole glass and pressed his face to the aperture. He could see little save following seas and ice floes. The revenue cutter was somewhere astern. Her guns were silent; this meant that the range had increased to useless distance.

CHAPTER XIX—A TOAST FROM MARR

It was sundown and six bells upon the *Pole Star*, when the lock clicked, and Whitehouse entered.

"Well, old man," he said, boastfully, "we've turned the trick. Night's coming on and the *Bear* is 'ull down. This is a regular king's yacht—speed of the best, and seaworthy."

"It won't help you—in the end. How are you going to get out of the Bering?"

"I'll leave that to Captain Marr. I just dropped in to see if you 'ad been fed. I don't nurse any 'ard feelings. I forgive my enemies, I do."

In a way, Whitehouse spoke the truth. Stirling had always held a slight liking for the English mate, who was one of England's outcasts—one who had left his country for his country's good. He had the roving disposition of the British, forgave quickly, and hated only for a short period of time.

"You're about the best of the bunch," said Stirling, feeling his temple where the belaying pin had struck. "I hold being knocked out against you, but that is all. Why don't you play like a man, which you are, and prevail on Marr to abandon his useless expedition? The entire shipping world will be searching for him. You haven't as much chance of escaping as a thief in a crowded street."

"That's when the thief escapes," Whitehouse said.

"I'll take the regular galley mess of food," Stirling abruptly remarked.

The mate nodded. "All right," he said, backing to the door and standing in the alleyway. "All right, old man. No 'ard feelings?"

Stirling allowed the shadow of a smile to creep across his lips. He eyed the cockney with a calculating expression, thinking swiftly and to one point. "Where are we heading?" he asked.

"Siberia. We 'ave a nice little cove picked out."

"In the Gulf of Anadir?"

"There or thereabouts."

"Marr don't know that coast."

"The second engineer does. 'E was with the De Long expedition. Says it's a bloomin' fine shore all the woiy to the mouth of the Lena."

"Fine is right!" said Stirling with a smile, sitting down on his bunk and crossing his legs. "It's barren and death-haunted. One thing——"

Whitehouse paused with the key in his hand.

"There are revolutionists at that point," said Stirling. "Marr should be careful where he puts in."

"They won't bother us."

"I'm not so sure. They would cheat a cheater any time."

Whitehouse flushed. "A cheater?"

"That's what you and Marr are! Cheaters! You raided the rookeries. Your judge will be the retribution which governs all wrongdoing. Your own heart and soul rebel against what you have done."

Whitehouse disappeared from the opening, and Stirling could hear him giving instructions to the sentry. Footfalls sounded going up the companion and along the quarter-deck, and then the mate came back to the door and leaned against the chamfer. He rubbed his long red nose with a reflective finger.

"I'm in hit too bloomin' far to get out now, Stirling. I'll do my best by you. Do you want to get away at the mouth of the Anadir? I can fix that."

Stirling made a slow calculation on his fingers. He glanced upward toward the deck and furrowed his brows. "The Gulf," he said, dropping his glance and staring at Whitehouse, "is about three thousand miles from any sort of civilization. I think I'll stay on board—a prisoner."

The mate nodded good-naturedly and turned toward a Kanaka, who brought a tray upon which were two tins of stew and a steaming pot of coffee.

Stirling took these and set them at the end of the bunk. Whitehouse shrugged his shoulders, examined the lock with a smirk, and closed the door. The bolt clicked.

The Kanaka resumed his sentry duties, but Stirling had secured a good glance at him. He was an old Arctic Ocean harpooner, and had once sailed on a whaler which had been gammed by the Ice Pilot. He was the weak link in the chain, concluded Stirling. A native would be more likely to listen to reason than any member of the *Pole Star's* crew. There was a latent loyalty for the right in every Kanaka's breast. Many had been brought up by missionaries.

"With a dainty friend somewhere aft, and a sentry like that harpooner, I've a fighting chance," said Stirling, leaning over the savoury stew.

The pockets of his pea-jacket contained a few crumbs of tobacco and a pipe. He set down the tray with the empty tins upon the deck, leaned back, and lighted a match.

The puffs of smoke he blew toward the porthole were like salvos of shrapnel. The situation had cleared during the hours since leaving St. Paul Island and the rookeries. Whitehouse had become genial; the grumbling voices of the crew were more or less stilled; the little skipper was in a desperate position.

Stirling sensed the general direction of the swiftly driving poacher. The cant to port, the general steadiness of the wind in the Bering, the drifting floes—all these were points by which he guided his deductions.

Siberia and the open Gulf of Anadir should be reached by noon of the day to come. This would mean little less than twelve steaming hours. The Island of St. Lawrence lay some few leagues to the northward. The *Bear*, provided she had not given up the pursuit, might search the shores of that island. There were two native settlements on the western coast, and these were a likely refuge for poachers and those who lived beyond the law.

There came then to Stirling's straining ears the soft sound of a piano. He set his pipe on a rack at the head of the bunk and moved stealthily toward the door. Pressing his ear to the panel of this, he listened. He heard the shuffling of the sentry's feet, and above this sound lilted a thin, pure note

which could come only from a woman's throat. It rose, fell, and was raised once more into a remembered song:

"Whither, oh, splendid ship, thy white sails crowding,
Leaning across the bosom of the urgent West,
Thou fearest nor sea rising, nor sky clouding,
Whither away, fair rover, and what thy quest?"

Stirling breathed with deep intakes of close breath. He caught the swing of the words as if they were attuned to his own thoughts, and they steadied him in his determination to remain aboard the *Pole Star* and ascertain what manner of woman or girl lived in the after ship. She was related to Marr—that much was evident. He wondered if she were his wife, sister, or ward. One of the three would explain her being aboard. None would explain why she seemed to be almost a prisoner.

He listened for more music, and now and then the piano throbbed a vibrant note. At last it was still. There alone remained the swish of the waves, the creak of blocks, the sliding footfalls on the quarter-deck, to mark their passage.

The last light of day died from the surface of the waters, and the first bright star lay horizon down. It came up grandly out of the east and from the direction of Alaska, shining through the open porthole like an eye of promise. Stirling rose from the seat he had taken on the bunk and turned out the electric light. He leaned back and studied this star, finding solace and resolve in its white rays.

Daybreak, at the early hour of two bells, brought Stirling out of his dreams and into the grip of a coming dawn. He washed himself and glanced ruefully at his unshaven features, but there was no way to remedy the matter. Seamen in the Bering and Arctic often went for an entire season without shaving.

He thought of the girl and her song as he idled through the hour which followed. She had grown closer to him in some manner. It was as if there were two prisoners on one ship. Her voice had contained the vibrant note of anxiety. She had asked in a manner which he could fathom, where the tall poacher was going? She, too, was gripped by the mystery.

The first glimpse of the haze-surrounded sun, which rose over the Bering Sea, was the magnet that drew Stirling away from his thoughts of the girl and to the open porthole. The sea was specked and laced with drift ice and whale slick. Old "grandpas" floated by—grimy and honeycombed from the action of the brine. Walruses and seals dived from these ancient ice clusters. Birds wheeled away from the course of the fast-driving poacher.

The course had been changed overnight, this Stirling detected with a guilty start as he noted the position of the sun. They were now well within the Gulf of Anadir, and the ice which floated about had just been detached from the shore. Its surface was partly snow.

Seven bells brought the first glimpse of land to Stirling. A dark promontory lifted into the Arctic sky, and this was crowned with a hedge of Northern pines. Green moss grew down the folds of the headland. A tundra stuck out from the lower silt. They were skirting the wild coast of Anadir.

"Siberia," said Stirling. "What a land!" He turned from the porthole and studied the interior of the cabin. The little revolver which the girl had given to him was still within the grip of his garter. He reached downward and loosened it, examining its butt and silver-plated barrel. It was loaded.

He eyed the door leading to the alleyway, and pocketed the revolver as steps sounded outside.

Whitehouse shouted in through the keyhole: "Hold steady and wait, old man. I'll see that you're well fed by eight bells. No 'ard feelings, eh?"

Stirling did not answer. He moved about, however, and otherwise let the mate know that he was still aboard the ship.

Eight bells did not bring the promised food. Instead, the ship slowed down, and at last glided across the sea with her screw still.

The sound of running feet came to Stirling who sprang to the porthole and glanced out. They were rounding a rocky wall whose fissures gushed white from descending torrents of snow water. The ship ported, steadied in slow circling, and entered a mountain-encompassed harbour as lovely and as lonely as any in all the world.

Her taper yards scraped the stones to starboard and port, her keel once touched a sandy split, but she went on by the billowed pressure of the wind on the canvas. The way opened to a glen in solid granite and schist, and here the anchor chain was let go with a rusty clank. The stern swung, almost touching a narrow shelf, up from which an agile man could climb, or down to which he might lower himself.

A jubilant voice rolled throughout the sheltered ship. It came from Whitehouse, who had danced upon the quarter-deck planks in his glee. "All 'ands aft to spice the main brace!"

Stirling understood this last order. The crew, the engine-room force, the stokehold gang, and the steerage crowd were invited to empty a case of whisky.

Marr's toast to his fellow conspirators was given with a bold attempt to hold their confidence. "Drink hearty, mates!" he exclaimed. "Drink to the eternal confusion of the revenue cutters!"

Stirling hardly smiled, but scraped his pockets and found some few crumbs of tobacco. These he pressed into his pipe and lighted with a sulphur match. "I'll smoke to that promise," he said, simply. "A bear never lets go when its grip fastens."

CHAPTER XX—THE MOVING SHADOWS

Landlocked and secure, the crew of the *Pole Star* worked out the day by odd jobs about the deck. Stirling heard them swabbing down, and caught the cockney accent of the mate raised in cheerful encouragement as the skipper sent forward more grog.

The long Arctic day died slowly out over the waters of the Bering and the Gulf of Anadir. The waves which beat upon the rocky headlands, buttressing the tiny harbour, curled inward and ran with seething foam up a shelving beach.

Marr had made one trip to the outer sea. He returned and called Whitehouse to the poop. Their voices were raised incautiously, and Stirling heard the *Bear* mentioned. The boastful laugh which followed showed that the revenue cutter had gone by without being aware of the harbour's entrance. The view from the sea was one of solid rock and towering headland.

It was at five bells that Stirling heard steps within the alleyway. The sentry had been sleeping on duty, and he woke as Marr's voice broke the stillness of the ship. The lock of his door clicked, and Stirling switched on his electric light and waited, his breast exposed, showing the hairy massiveness of his shoulders and the supple muscles beneath.

Marr came in with cautious eyes, glanced about the cabin, stared at the porthole thoughtfully, then lifted his chin to Stirling. "How are things with you?" Marr asked. "Getting along all right?"

"As well as could be expected on this criminal ship!"

Marr frowned and sat down on the edge of the bunk. "Don't take it that way," he said, fingering the horn buttons of his natty pea-jacket. "Come over with us and see the thing through. We'll wait around here a few days more, then——"

The pause was suggestive. Stirling backed slowly to the skin of the ship and lowered his hands to his sides. "Then what?" he asked.

"Ah, there is a wide world to roam in. There are many ports of call."

Stirling clenched his fists; his eyes were levelled toward the assured skipper. "I think you had better get out of here!" Stirling said, sharply. "I don't want to listen to suggestions from you. Brave men do not raid the rookeries. They don't lock up a man for doing his duty."

Marr smiled, and Stirling studied him. The little skipper had come into the cabin for some reason other than the one he had stated; he was far too genial and condescending.

"What do you want with me?" the Pilot inquired. "Out with it and then leave. I'll trouble you to allow me this small space for myself. It's not much to ask."

"I want your good will, Stirling. The fact of the matter is this——"

Stirling saw the smile vanish from the skipper's lips, and the face which peered out from the shadow of the bunk was not nearly so assured.

"The fact is this," repeated Marr: "there's a person aboard who is interested in you. I have made the argument that you will join us sooner or later. I am going to make it to your interest to join us."

"Who do you mean?"

"That I can't say now! This person, however, believes that you will be very dangerous to my interests in the future. In other words, you are standing out for the foolish laws of the sea. If you persist in this stand, there can be only one finish to you."

"What finish is that?"

"You'll either be marooned on a barren island or tapped on the head and dropped overside. You can't expect to squeal on us."

"How about Eagan?"

"He saw and guessed too much, but he will not see what is coming. I have a plan to avoid the *Bear* and the other cutters. It will take us to strange seas and glorious coasts. We have seal pelts enough to make every man aboard rich; we can get more at Disko and Copper Island. All hands shall share alike, and spread to the four winds."

Stirling saw the drift of the little skipper's argument. He was offering a bribe for silence and coöperation. "I'll never change my views," he said, stoutly. "You can't get away with that raid or the pelts. Right will beat you. Public opinion is the strongest force I know. You have been moving contrary to it."

Marr rose from the bunk and glanced at the door, outside of which the sentry was pacing energetically back and forth. "You're doomed," whispered the skipper. "I gave you a chance. This person cannot help you. You'd better consider the matter carefully."

The captain's tone had changed; he was far too sure of himself to suit Stirling. It was possible that he would not be allowed to see the dawn.

"Who is this person who is interested in me?" asked Stirling with candour. "Whitehouse?"

"No; not the mate. You perhaps think he is your friend, but he is with me to the finish of this passage. The rest of the crew are with me. None of them wants a squealer somewhere ashore where he can harm us. They're all for sewing you in a sack and dropping you overboard."

Had the skipper snapped out his threats or otherwise acted in a bullying manner, Stirling would have felt less concern, but there was that in the icy tones and matter-of-fact statements which chilled red blood and caused a presentiment to reach and grip at the heart.

The two men stood in silence, then slowly turned and stared at each other. Marr's eyes were the first to drop. He raised them again with an effort. "I hate to finish you off," he said, without moving his lips, "but it's got to be done. I've posted a second sentry on the poop. Both have orders to shoot you down if you try to escape."

"Who is the person?" repeated Stirling, like a child with but one lesson.

Marr glided toward the door and stood in the opening.

"Who is the person?"

The little skipper leaned forward and hissed his words as he said: "You'll never see her! She wants me to spare you. I can't do it and live on this earth. You know too much!"

The door closed with a click. Marr was gone.

Stirling's brain grew numb, and as the hot blood rushed to his cheeks, he raised his hand and pressed his fingers against his throbbing temples. He stared at the door with every muscle tense and eager. It would be possible to break through to the alleyway. There, however, he would meet with the Kanaka sentry, and the native was far too stolid to be moved by a sudden rush.

The ship rocked slightly with the movement of the inner waves which had risen over the early hours of the night. A murmur came to Stirling's ears, and he crossed the cabin, pressing his face against the brass rim of the porthole. A rocky wall, seamed here and there with dark fissures, reared a barrier, while the *Pole Star* swung at her anchor chain with her stern toward the opening to the gulf.

Stirling heard the pacing of the sentry on deck, and above the sound of his sliding foot he sensed the voices of men aft of the canvas barrier. Marr and the mate were in whispered consultation.

Whitehouse allowed his voice to rise above its ordinary pitch. He was insisting upon some matter which was of vital importance to him, and *it concerned making away with the only spy in their midst*. Marr's answer was unheard by Stirling, but it quieted the mate as if a hand had smoothed out a difficulty with clever, cunning fingers. Marr was doubly dangerous. He held close control of his brain and tongue.

Stirling paced back and forth within the narrow confines of his cabin. He had measured the porthole with the span of his hand, and knew it was far too small for escape. It could not well be enlarged by any tool in his possession. He turned toward the door as a last resort. Its stout panels and heavy oaken planks called for super efforts, but they could be cut, providing the sentry dropped off into sleep. Stirling waited and listened for this to happen.

Midnight and eight bells found him crouched with his ear close to the lower starboard panel. The strength to right a wrong and fight to the bitter end had crept over him. He was a match for Marr and half of the others of the crew. He feared no five men aboard the ship if the fight were to be with fists.

A clean life and steady purpose had often accomplished wonders. He reviewed the entire situation, and summed it up in a slow, firm way. Marr and the mate and the others of the crew had taken a lesson from Eagan. They were in the poaching matter far too deeply to back out, since the spoil was 'tween decks, and was also waiting on the Copper Islands.

"Better snatch a delusion from a woman," said Stirling, grimly, "than deny a Bering Sea crew the right to poach."

He thought of Marr's parting words, the lack of venom in which showed that the end would come swiftly and after deliberate preparations. His one hope was the woman who had pleaded for his life. She had to be reckoned with—perhaps she was resourceful. Her eyes were wide ones and undying in their intensity.

Stirling moved toward the wall and reached for the electric light, then dropped his hand without turning it on. He found the bunk, searched under the seaweed mattress, and the cold thrill of the tiny revolver nerved him as he held it in the palm of his right hand. After all, he thought, there

was a man's life or two in the silver-plated barrel. A bold rush when the door was opened, a stream of lead, and the open deck might offer possibilities.

The night was dark. There was one fissure leading up from the shelving beach to the higher tableland. If he reached this he would be free. Siberia and a wide sky was the vaulting place for a possible revenge.

He stepped toward the porthole and pressed his forehead against the cold metal rim, his eyes slowly making out the details of the harbour and the shore. They grew keen and penetrating.

A gushing and tossing stream of creamy water issued from the face of the rock. It silvered down and flattened out where the waves lapped up a shelving shore. The roar of this waterfall was faint and musical, like a melody set in a dream.

Stirling remained at the porthole, looking toward the shore. His eyes grew intent, and now he made out details which had at first been overlooked. Crags and moss were apparent; a shelf grew from a dark line to a possible passageway for an agile man. He traced the course of this and saw that it vanished over the extreme edge of the highest cliff where the dark stone stood out against the star-scattered sky.

"I can climb that," he said with conviction. "That is a road to Siberia."

He listened as a sound floated from the quarter-deck. Steps were directly over him, and a shadow fell along the surface of the heaving waters, a shadow slight and elfin.

Dangling before his startled eyes, and partly blotting out the view of the open night, there had appeared an object which was fastened on the end of a loose line.

As it swung back and forth a foot scraped close to the ship's rail, and a low voice called with musical timbre.

Stirling reached out through the porthole and drew in the line. He untied the packet, which was knotted by a square knot, and waited. The line was drawn upward; a belaying pin creaked in the pinrail; the steps sounded again. Then they seemed to be aft.

Backing from the ship's skin, and feeling behind with his left hand, Stirling found the edge of the bunk and sat down with heavy thoughts. He toyed with the packet and weighed it by moving his right hand up and down in the gloom.

Unbinding it slowly, he scented for the first time the aroma of heliotrope. Once before he had detected that perfume. That was when the girl had appeared at the galley porthole and handed in the revolver.

He removed a lace handkerchief, thrust it into his shirt pocket, and smiled at the practical present which had been lowered from the poop. The offering was to the point and suggestive. He counted twenty-five tiny cartridges which most certainly were designed for the little silver-plated revolver.

"I like her," he said, thrusting the bullets within his shirt. "She's true blue and thinks of the right things. Likewise, she's a daughter of the sea!"

He rose and moved slowly toward the porthole. The outside now seemed nearer, for some reason; the friend on deck had warmed his blood. She was standing by in case of a blow.

The ship's bell was struck with a muffled marlinespike as Stirling stood in patient idleness. He counted the strokes, and heard a far closing of a hatch, sign that the anchor watch had changed. The sentry in the alleyway spoke to another who came to take his place. The new arrival tested the door and otherwise acted as if he would remain awake over the time allotted to his duties.

Suddenly, and in an unwarned manner, Stirling grew aware that ashore a shadow moved along the higher shelf of the cliff. This shadow was followed by a second and then a third. Men in ragged guise were descending the trail that led from the Siberian tableland to the land-locked harbour wherein lay the *Pole Star*.

The descending forms disappeared, as they entered a chasm in the rocky wall. They came into view again and stood upon a shelf which was directly over the taper jib boom of the ship. They pointed with swaying arms, first at the *Pole Star*, and then toward the open Gulf of Anadir. It was evident to Stirling that they never had been in the same locality before.

He drew upon his imagination as he tried to fathom the reason for the ragged visitors. They were not natives or Eskimos. Their matted hair and bold, staring eyes betokened Russians.

The leading figure issued a silent order by pointing upward, whereupon a man climbed the trail, disappeared in the chasm, and reappeared upon the shelf which marked the tableland. He vanished against the velvet of the sky, and a slow minute passed. There came then a score of heads over the edge, and a blurred mass of outcasts started down the pathway with the messenger leading them.

Stirling had seen enough to realize that the ship was in danger. Out of the barren land of Siberia figures had crept in an endeavour to reach the sea. They bore all the evidence of a terrible journey, and were in numbers sufficient to capture the ship.

No sound came from the deck of the poacher; the sentry at the door was leaning against the barrel of his rifle; the anchor watch slept profoundly. Fair game lay in the cove, and the hour was close when its enemies would strike.

"Let them come," said Stirling. "I'll not warn Marr. He brought it on himself."

CHAPTER XXI—THROUGH THE PORTHOLE

In a maze of doubt and resolution Stirling stared out over the dark harbour and saw that the band of outcasts had reached the shelving beach and were making preparations to swim to the ship.

He turned away and glanced toward the locked door. The sentry stirred restlessly; his gun's butt was lifted and dropped to the deck. A hacking cough sounded.

Steps glided across the poop from the forward rail to the cabin companion; a slide shot back; the sentry called and was answered. Then a key clicked in the lock of the door, and Marr stood in the gloom. Back of the little captain loomed two of the galley crowd. There was no mercy in their hard, level glances.

"Come on, Stirling," said the captain. "Step out and come with us. You're on trial. Search him, men."

Stirling backed step by step to the bunk, and secured the tiny revolver firmly in his palm. His broad thumb pressed through the trigger guard, and the feel of the cold metal decided him. He folded his arms, thrust the gun through to his skin, and allowed it to drop down.

The search, as Marr switched on the electric light, was done in haste. A Kanaka harpooner ran clumsy hands over Stirling's pockets. He turned and shook his head.

"Me find nothing."

"Bring him to the galley!" Marr ordered. "Watch him, too."

The sentry brought up the rear. Stirling breathed with deep intakes of the keen air as he crossed the quarter-deck and descended the lee-poop ladder. He entered the galley cabin with his head thrown back and his eyes blazing.

Whitehouse sat at the head of the table, and about the mate was gathered all of the afterguard and three of the crew. They had been drinking from square faces of gin. The empty bottles and glasses littered the sea racks; sour limes were scattered about.

The two engineers sat in one corner of the cabin with their feet sprawled along the deck and their eyes bleared and baleful. They had been loudest in calling for the death of Stirling, since the seal pelts within the forehold of the *Pole Star* constituted a king's ransom. Each man's share would be well up in the thousands. They saw no reason for taking the slightest chances.

Baldwin leered at the Ice Pilot and nudged his companion. "Shootin' is too good," Baldwin said. "I'd like to put the squealer in a fire box and turn on forced draft—if we had forced draft."

Stirling faced the two men with composure. The possession of the little revolver, the knowledge that a hungry, ragged horde was even then approaching the ship, held him confident. Much might happen within the space of minutes. The drunken afterguard would be no match for the outcasts.

Marr cleared his throat, moved to the door, and, closing it, turned with sudden fire and anger. "We've been talking all of an hour," he said, bitterly. "Time's up! It'll be daybreak before we do anything. We're all together in this. What do you say we take a vote and decide. There's just two things to do to him—cast him ashore, or drop him overboard."

"And if you drop that lad," said Whitehouse, "see that there is a blym big anchor spliced to 'is legs. 'E's a water dog, besides being a hard hitter. 'E's dangerous—'e his!"

"Him good man—dead!"

Stirling turned and faced a Kanaka harpooner. "What have I ever done to you?" he asked. "You know me. I've always treated you boys right. Remember the *Beluga* and the *Karluk* and the *Norwhale*? You forget easy. You've been filled with gin, and you are not yourself."

"Me like hear 'em talk," the Kanaka said, with a sheepish grin.

Marr saw the drift of affairs and assumed swift control. Stirling was well thought of among the natives of the Siberian shore and the islands of the Pacific. The simple-minded Kanakas could be easily influenced.

"Have done!" the little skipper exclaimed. "If you're all for marooning him, I'm satisfied. But ____"

The pause was doubly suggestive. Marr glanced at the two engineers and Whitehouse. "You know the consequences," Marr said. "This fellow will bob up some day with all our names and with two or three revenue men behind him. There's no getting away from that fact. It may be in Shanghai and it may be in Frisco."

"Or Liverpool," Whitehouse suggested. "I'm going to Liverpool and Birkenhead when I get the bloomin' pile from the pelties. What's to prevent 'im bobbin' hup there?"

"Nothing!" said Marr.

"Then let's take a deuced vote. I 'ate's to do hit, but I votes for walkin' the plank."

"Same here," said the two engineers in one voice.

"You, Crinko?"

The Kanaka's face softened as he leered at Marr, and the bronze of his sea-beaten features took on a yellowish tinge. He turned and smiled openly toward Stirling, who stood with folded arms and the weight of his body resting on the balls of his feet.

"Me like 'em," the native said. "Me no vote. He good man—sometimes."

Marr caught the note in the simple tones and frowned. He felt himself slipping. There were two more Kanakas in the cabin who would follow the big harpooner; the three together might prove troublesome.

"You're out!" Marr snapped. "Now the next. How do you vote, Slim?"

Slim was the leader of the stokehold and engine-room crew, which was entirely under the influence of the two engineers. Marr smiled as six cinder rats and oilers stood up from the seats they had taken about the table and voted for Stirling's death. Each man had reached for a drink of gin as his name was called.

"That almost settles it," whispered Whitehouse, drunkenly. "Old horse, you're gone. Hit's a 'ard, 'ard thing to do but we——"

"But you're not going to do it!" broke in Stirling, backing toward the door and crouching with his hand toward his right shoe. "You're only drunk and full of false courage!"

The blaze that sprang from Stirling's eyes simmered and darted across the smoke-filled room. Each man felt the sudden power that flashed at him; each leaned away for a second.

"Get back!"

Stirling crouched lower and shelved forward his massive shoulders. The bulk of him seemed to fill the room. He was more than a fighting match for the entire crew. They knew it with dawning intuition.

Marr slyly placed a cool hand within the inner pocket of his pea-jacket, and was drawing a gun when Stirling leaped the distance, hooked his right elbow, and uppercut with vicious force. The blow would have lifted the cabin deck. It hurled Marr over the table, and laid him across the planks where he dropped unconscious.

"Now the next!" shouted Stirling, backing away and lowering his fists to his knees. "The next! Come on!"

Baldwin, the engineer, watched the Ice Pilot's eyes, and in them he saw the dying fire of rage turn to cool calculation. It was like gazing at horizon-down ice, as the steely glint changed to cold gray. But the glance was over the heads of the seamen who leaned upon the table. It was toward on open porthole.

Some intuition, stronger than the desire to murder, swept the crew. They turned as one man and followed Stirling's steady gaze. They dropped their chins and stared out through the porthole.

"By the jumpin' bowheads!" Whitehouse screamed. "By Heaven, mates. Look! Look!"

Framed by the dull brass was the face of a whiskered Russian whose small eyes surveyed the cabin greedily. A crash sounded at the door, shouts rolled through the iron of the ship, and a grim struggle was begun at once. The *Pole Star* had been captured by revolutionists.

CHAPTER XXII—ALONE IN THE CABIN

The invaders, led by the same whiskered Russian who had peered through the porthole, swept around the deck and crashed through the door leading to the galley cabin.

It was a mad wave of victory for them. They brought surprise and determination as their allies, and were in great numbers. Already they had mopped up the anchor watch and some of the crew who had climbed from the forecastle.

Stirling, rooted to the spot where he had faced his accusers, for the first time in his life felt the grip of fear. He saw Whitehouse felled with a descending swing of a giant club, and the second engineer staggered toward the table with a knife through his breast.

A Kanaka harpooner, whose gin-dulled brain refused to act, dashed into the midst of the inpouring horde and went down, the centre of a wave of infuriated invaders. One hooked-nose boat steerer, noted for his mildness of manner, became crazed, snatched a harpoon from the wall of the cabin, and drove it through a Russian's neck. He, too, was downed and then killed with heavy clubs.

This resistance stemmed the wave of Russians for a moment. Marr shouted shrilly. He was answered by a Russian, who shouted instruction from the doorway. Stones were hurled through the length of the cabin; capstan bars were raised; the invaders faced the survivors, and prepared to charge Stirling and the little skipper who had found common cause in resistance.

Mechanically, Stirling reached downward and grasped the tiny revolver, though afterward he had no recollection of the action. The gun steadied his nerves as he glanced at it, and then into the peering faces gathered about the doorway and the after end of the cabin.

He fired with coolness, and six jets of flame flashed across the table and seared the faces before him. Russians went down as if poleaxed, others shouted in pain, and two backed away covering their faces with their arms.

Stirling reloaded the revolver with clumsy fingers. The action was new to him; the time was short. He wondered as he waited for coolness to return how it happened that the cartridges were in his breast, since the Kanaka had searched him in the after cabin. They had been overlooked.

Marr coughed in the acrid mist and shouted out through a porthole. He was answered by a Russian imprecation; a face peered in and a whale lance darted through the opening. It missed the skipper by inches.

He backed and touched Stirling's arm. "Kill them!" he cried. "Kill them, Stirling!"

The shout was a signal to the dock rats and sea scum who had crouched in the gloom of the cabin. They advanced with heads lowered and rude weapons snatched from the deck. One hurled a gin bottle into the face of a Russian who stood half in and half out of the door. This sign of defiance brought the wrath of the horde down upon the defenders. A jagged rock hurtled through the porthole

and crashed against the electric dome in the ceiling. The falling glass tinkled upon the table, and darkness blotted out Stirling's view of what followed. It was a press of mad men who would not be denied, and he fired without knowing whether he struck Russians or the remnant of the *Pole Star's* crew.

He stepped back and felt about with his left hand. His fingers touched a wall, and following this he came to the end of a table where he stumbled over the body of a Kanaka. Rising, he worked forward and found the knob of a door which led into the cook's kitchen. This door was locked, and he bunched his shoulders for a crashing blow.

The Russians had advanced in the gloom of the shambles and were feeling about for Marr and the others of the crew who had escaped their onslaught. Now and then a loud cry marked a victim. A Russian thrust inward the smoking end of a torch made out of rope yarn. It flared and died to a glow.

Stirling stepped away from the door, lowered his shoulder, and lunged forward with all the weight of his well-nourished body behind the blow. He rebounded, crouched, lunged for a second time, and the door splintered on the port side and tore loose from its chamfer.

Hurtling through to the kitchen and stumbling over an assortment of clanging pans, Stirling found the second door which led to the deck. This, also, was locked. He crashed his foot against a lower panel, and the wood splintered, making an opening sufficient to pass through. He crawled out like a determined bear and stood erect, his great chest rising and falling as he gulped the air of the night.

Chaos ruled the after part of the ship, and heavy blows sounded forward where the invaders were mopping out the forecastle. Bodies were hurtled overside, the last cries of doomed men echoing and reëchoing among the rocks of the shore and awakening the sea birds nested there.

A deep silence followed the slaying of the crew. Stirling crouched in the shelter of the galley house where the cook's pipe was thrust through the wall, then turned his eyes and stared aft.

The thought had come to him that the girl was alone in the cabin. Marr had been seen last fighting Russians who had invaded the galley room, and a show of resistance was still there. The lurking forms of men were about the door, but the waist of the ship seemed filled with men who had climbed aboard from out of the sea. These men were waiting for some signal.

It came with startling suddenness. Marr, the first engineer, and two seamen burst through the doorway, shouting defiance, and plunged straight for the poop and the shelter of the after cabins. One seaman and engineer were felled and dragged to death. Marr and the second seaman gained the poop steps, glanced forward, and vanished in the direction of the cabin companion.

This sally filled the ship with wild imprecations and cries, and Stirling was swirled in a maze of doubt. The quarter-deck was shadowed with climbing Russians; the forepeak and waist rocked with their feet as they searched about for survivors.

A thin tongue of flame from an after porthole burned through the night. A rapid hail of lead from a rifle spattered along the deck and splintered the woodwork. Marr had reached the ship's arsenal and was firing from the break of the poop into the Russian horde. The situation had changed during the period of seconds.

Before he had time to gauge the battle, Stirling heard the rush of men who were seeking safety behind the galley house and within the gloom of the whaleboats on the port side. He raised his revolver and emptied it along the deck. One shot went home; the others missed. He pocketed the weapon, faced about, and darted for the lee shrouds which led up to the crow's-nest. He then mounted the rail and climbed by the strength which was in his arms.

The vanguard of Russians leaped for his legs, but he drew himself up and worked toward the crow's-nest with beating heart. He reached the Jacob's ladder and went out instead of going through the lubber's hole. Here he turned and stared downward; the deck seemed far away; a whizzing belaying pin missed his head by many feet. He chuckled and touched his face with his hand. Blood was there from some unnoticed wound.

Whiskered faces showed through the gloom, and Stirling chuckled for a second time and climbed swiftly to the crow's-nest. Dropping inside, he pressed his chin to the edge of the nest and glanced toward the rocky wall which loomed over the ship. Other Russians were descending the trail that led to the shelving beach, and he watched a score more who were swimming through the dark waters of the harbour.

Suddenly all the fight went out of him, as water leaves a sponge. The odds were far too great—Marr and the seaman and the girl comprised the afterguard. They were well armed, but the invaders were in such number as to indicate the exodus of an army. They either had worked northward by land from Vladivostok, or, concluded Stirling, they had taken ships and been wrecked on the coast. This was a possibility, considering the remote locality of the Gulf of Anadir.

A call lifted upward from the dark side; Stirling turned away from the harbour view and looked downward. A revolutionist stood by the square outline of the after hatch, and he raised his arms.

Five Russians were climbing the starboard shrouds, each with a knife in hand. Each glared down at the man on the after hatch and then resumed climbing.

Stirling leaned farther out, steadied his revolver, sighted it in the half light, and blazed the night with a cone of leaping fire. He fired for a second time. One Russian let go his knife, spun on the ratlines, and dropped like a plummet to the deck below. The others hurried from their exposed position and crouched under the Jacob's ladder where a jack offered some shelter. Stirling waited for an open sight at these two.

The man near the hatch shouted an order. The two invaders grasped lines and slid to the deck. They landed clumsily and staggered for the gloom of the whaleboats. Stirling replaced his revolver in his pocket and sank back into the crow's-nest. The attack had steadied his nerves, and he felt secure for some time to come.

Dawn mantled the sky above the dark cliff's edge; a plume of flamingo red shot to the zenith, and the sun was peering over the Siberian tableland. It would not be long before the harbour would be illuminated sufficiently to reveal the state of chaos on the deck of the *Pole Star*.

The higher peaks of the mountains grew rosy and white. The light came on and down with pale shadowings, revealing the surface of the sea in ghastly detail. Seamen and Russians floated about like dead seals.

The deck was a shambles where Marr's lead had scattered the Russian horde. A hastily erected barricade at the after hatch prevented the little skipper from sweeping the entire deck. Behind this barricade the Russians crouched, and forward by the forecastle they swarmed in great numbers, having broken into the stores.

The men were crunching on ship's biscuits and drinking from square faces of gin.

CHAPTER XXIII—OVER THE STERN

From his lofty perch Stirling tried to count the number of revolutionists, and had reached two hundred and ten before he stopped counting. Others were ashore. A whaleboat had been lowered and paddled under the shelter of the ship to the beach. It returned with crude weapons and a ragged crew who could not swim, and they added their shouting to the turmoil as they fell upon the ship's stores and gin.

"Nice party," said Stirling. "I wonder how I'll get out of this."

His thoughts swung to the afterguard, a seaman of the lowest coast type. Stirling remembered him as a Frisco dock rat called "Slim." He had been too lazy to work—too handy with a knife, yet he alone of the crew had survived.

This seaman appeared suddenly and thrust his shoulders above the companion. Stirling leaned forward and watched him. There was that in his leer which spoke of deep drinking and a desire for revenge. He poised himself a moment, ducked as he sighted the revolutionists, then appeared with a brass bomb gun. It was of the type whalers use in finishing a whale, and was capable of great execution.

The gun went up to the seaman's shoulder; he squinted along the barrel and pressed the trigger. The bomb hurtled past the mainmast and exploded forward of the galley house on the starboard side of the ship, where three refugees were crouched. They seemed to spring up into the racking air and vanish. The ship rocked with shouts as the seaman loaded the gun and prepared for a second attempt.

Stirling realized that the last defenders had a weapon in a million. It was similar to the rifle grenades used in trench warfare, and against it the Russians were at a great disadvantage. They could not face eight ounces of tonite exploded in their midst.

Marr appeared alongside of the sailor, and he, too, carried a bomb gun. The shot he fired exploded against the break of the forepeak and missed the open forecastle companion. Its explosion racked the morning air and sent showers of splinters as high aloft as the crow's-nest.

Stirling watched the fight which followed. The revolutionists had one advantage: their number was sufficient to overcome any resistance, provided they were well led. They seemed, however, to lack a leader.

The Russian who had stood by the after hatch and directed operations had been struck by a splinter of ash from a whaleboat. He was carried below to the forecastle. The man who took his place crouched behind the mainmast and shouted his orders in a weak, squeaking voice.

The rush came at last and in straggling infiltration. The invaders seeped along the two rails and out from the barricade, then swarmed up the poop. Marr fired point-blank and dropped down the

cabin companion as a stone crashed against his breast. The seaman stood his ground and swung the bomb gun by the muzzle. He bowled over a trio of Russians, drew back, and then glanced downward.

The little skipper, pale and bleeding, had appeared for a moment, and motioned that he was going to close the companion slide. The seaman swirled the gun, braced himself, and drove it into the gathering knot of men at the quarter-deck canvas, then he turned and swiftly dived below. The companion hatch shut with a loud click.

Stirling counted his cartridges as the baffled Russians swarmed over the poop. He could hit a few of them with careful aiming, but he held his fire. There was always the chance that he, too, would be rushed. A squad of determined men could reach the crow's-nest if they ignored the cost to themselves.

The sun's rays brought out all the details of the night's fight. Unreal and ghastly seemed the deck of the ship. Stirling rubbed his eyes and glanced downward, to where the revolutionists had gathered in a knot forward of the galley house. The man who had stood near the hatch was speaking to them; his gestures were strained and dramatic. He pointed aloft.

Faces were turned upward and weapons were raised, but no man started for the rigging. The determined leader called for volunteers. He seemed to realize that the crow's-nest was a dangerous point of vantage and the tiny revolver in Stirling's hand was a potent argument. The Ice Pilot held it out and took aim. The leader ducked beneath the shelter of a splintered whaleboat. The other revolutionists were more stolid; they stared and brandished their weapons.

An hour passed with the invaders combing the ship for more gin and stores. Stirling lay back and pressed against the side of the crow's-nest. His eyes closed, but he opened them with a sudden start. It would not do to sleep while the Russians were alert; any minute might find them climbing the rigging.

Sounds floated upward which told that the ship's captors were cleaning up the deck and otherwise making preparations for her departure. They had nailed down the companion hatch which led to the after cabins, and two stood guard there with capstan bars. Others were below in the engine room, where the clang of doors sounded. Scoops grated across the aprons in the stokehold, and shrill calls came up the ventilators.

A smudge of smoke issued from the funnel, curled the masts, and rose straight upward in the Arctic air. Stirling coughed and stiffened himself; he leaned over the edge of the crow's-nest and watched for developments. It was evident that there was an engineer or two among the Russians.

The leader appeared through the engine-room gratings and stood by the handrail. He staggered slightly from the effects of the gin he had drunk, and he turned a weak chin aloft and sneered. His eyes swung downward and swept the harbour's entrance where it closed to a shelving rock about which the *Pole Star* would have to be steered in order to make for open sea.

The orders he gave were obeyed in listless manner; some of the Russians openly holding back and consulting. Three of them went to the falls of the starboard whaleboat and threw the lines from the cleats. The boat was lowered bow foremost, and almost filled as it struck the sea. A second boat, which had been used to bring the horde from the shore, rounded the *Pole Star's* bow and was rowed

alongside. The two boats, with the leader in the stern of the one which had been lowered, glided across the harbour and disappeared around the wall of rock.

Stirling wondered at this manœuvre, but had not long to wait. The leader's boat returned soon and the Russians crowded to the rail. Their leader came up a dangling falls and pointed toward the entrance, then gave a series of orders. The anchor chain was cleared of wreckage and steam plumed from a leak in the capstan engine. The clank of chain coming through the hawse was followed by the slow turning of the screw. A roar greeted this sign of departure, and was thrown back by the rocky walls.

Putting down the wheel, a Russian marine acted as pilot in a slovenly manner. The ship grazed the shore, scraped over a ledge of rocks, and swung too far for the entrance. It was backed by a quick reversal of the engines. A second try was more successful. The taper jib boom pointed down the narrow strait and sheered in time to meet the first rollers of the Gulf of Anadir.

Stirling was openly astonished at the ability shown by the Russians, in building steam in the boilers. One of their number understood engines and bells; he had even turned the globe valve which led to the capstan cylinder. This revealed that there were men in Siberia who had missed their calling.

The ship met the long-running rollers, swung a point toward the east, as near as Stirling could determine from the position of the sun, and drove on swiftly.

A cape jutted out into the Gulf of Anadir, and toward this headland the leader pointed as the speed increased and the propeller thrashed astern. Stirling shaded his eyes from the sun's glint and studied the cape. He saw the reason for the change of course. A wreck lay athwart two fanglike rocks over which surf beat. The skeleton of a giant ship marked how the revolutionists had been cast away.

The *Pole Star* neared this wreck and reversed her screw. The leader sprang to the forepeak and called a loud order. A whaleboat was lowered, and ten minutes later the Russians returned from the wreck with a chronometer and a sextant. These had been denied them when Marr had barricaded the cabin of the poacher.

Stirling felt the lack of sleep creep over his tired, aching muscles. He shook himself like a shaggy dog and forced his brain to remain awake. The creaking of the fall blocks, the clang of an engine-room bell, the throbbing of the propeller—all were so shiplike and real that he had difficulty in believing the ship was captured, pillaged, and now off for a new venture in Northern waters.

He widened his tired eyes and allowed them to stray over the deck which lay like a pointed seed below him. The Russians went about their duties with newborn vim and determination, as the leader stood at the canvas rail which overlooked the waist and called his orders. The lower sails were set to a western breeze. Under the influence of these and the steam, the *Pole Star* rapidly threw the dark coast of Siberia over her stern and drove for the Strait of Bering and the American shore.

CHAPTER XXIV—BEFORE THE WHEEL

Marvelling at the turn of events, Stirling groped about the crow's-nest and found his twelve-diameter glasses, which had been used in whale hunting. He turned their screw, adjusted the focus for his eyes, and swept the open Gulf of Anadir and the Bering beyond the jib boom. No sign of ship or sail showed. Ice was here and there in dotted specks, drifting with the great North current which would reverse its direction and flow back to the Arctic before the month was old.

Noon passed with the *Pole Star* changing its course degree by degree. Stirling dozed in an erect position. Each time he awoke it was with a guilty start. There was grave danger that some of the Russians would mount the shrouds, since they had already been along the yards. The canvas they had set billowed before the breeze and blotted out a full view of the deck.

Stirling thought of the girl who must be with the skipper and the Frisco dock rat. It was evident that Marr had received a crushing blow from the rock hurled by the Russian; the little skipper's face had been white and drawn as he barricaded the hatchway.

Stirling dwelt on thoughts of the girl in a dazed manner. He realized that the situation called for every ounce of his energies, yet he would have given a year of life for a nap in security.

Afternoon and six bells, which a Russian struck forward, brought sight of the open sea rimmed by a dark line to southward which marked the island of St. Lawrence. Stirling raised his glasses and swept the horizon to the north and east. He was on the point of lowering them from his eyes when a speck stood out with tiny distinctness. He focused for this speck, and pieced together detail by detail, with splendid sight. He smiled slightly as he dropped his hands to his sides and glanced down at the deck. The revenue cutter *Bear* had already sighted the *Pole Star*. She was bearing to the north so as to head off the ship. There seemed no escape, for the land on either coast ran into a funnel whose snout was the Bering Strait.

"Saved!" exclaimed Stirling. "I'm saved and she's saved. I think we are saved—the girl and I. But Heaven help the others on this unfortunate ship."

Sincerely hoping for capture, Stirling prayed silently, raising the glasses for a second sweep of the sea to the north and east. The speck had grown into a trailing pencil of smoke which lay athwart the slaty sky.

Glancing over the crow's-nest, Stirling watched the Russian leader on the poop. He saw a chart being unrolled like a huge rug, and two Russians followed a pointing finger. The leader rose from a crouched position and started to give an order to the wheelsman, then this order died in his throat. A cry rolled along the ship, and was repeated in guttural accents. The revolutionists gathered on the forepeak had discovered the smoke over the starboard rail, and pointed and muttered as they realized its import.

A bell clanged as the leader reached for the engine-room telegraph and set it for full speed. Seamen of doubtful ability swarmed aloft and started unfurling the upper canvas; three reached the fore-topgallant yard and went out on the footrope with clumsy feet.

They were so near to Stirling he could have shot them from the spars. The *Pole Star* canted and drove north along the meridian line, its course parallel to that of the fast-coming *Bear*.

The hour that followed was filled with mingled hopes and fears. The revenue cutter had been rated a speedy ship by whalers who knew it, but it was two knots slower than the *Pole Star*. This fact came home to Stirling with the force of a blow. The canvas which the Russians set had aided in the long running. The *Bear* was not closing the gap to any extent, but held doggedly on.

Stirling studied the distance, saw that it was a losing game, then reached in his pocket for the revolver. He could hit the wheelsman, who was standing on the poop, and this would cause the ship to sheer. He took slow aim. The shot he fired missed the wheelsman's head by inches; the second shot splintered a spoke; the third caught the wheelsman in the left shoulder. He released his hold and cried a warning.

The crew swarmed up the poop steps, glared toward the crow's-nest, and set about building a barricade before the wheel. This was done as Stirling ceased his firing; their number was too great to accomplish anything of lasting moment. The cartridges in the tiny gun were running low, and the bullets were of too small a calibre to slay save when they struck a vital spot.

A second idea came to him as he pocketed the gun. Reaching downward he searched for a knife, which should have been in the binocular case of the crow's-nest. With it he could cut the lines leading to all the sails on the foremast, which ran by the crow's-nest and up the topmast. The knife was missing!

"I'm beat!" he said. "The *Bear* will never catch us!"

CHAPTER XXV—IN THE GRIP OF THE UNKNOWN

The *Bear* had one fact in its favour: the two ships were driving for the Bering Strait. The Strait was less than forty miles from headland to headland, and between the two capes lay the Diomede Islands. It was possible that the *Bear* would head off the *Pole Star* before reaching the Arctic Ocean.

Stirling studied the situation with scant hope. The Russians, urged to desperation, had succeeded in getting every turn that was possible from the screw. Steam plumed in the pipe aft of the funnel; the ship throbbed and racked; the clang of doors and the lurid light which streamed from the engine-room companion and the open hatches told of frantic work by the leader who had a firm grip on the revolutionists.

The Diomede Islands rose out of the sea and stood with their rocky walls black against the sun. Far-off Cape Prince of Wales seemed a cloud bank of sombre aspect. Stirling climbed to the top of the crow's-nest and studied the picture. The fast-flying *Bear* had held her own. The distance between the two ships was not more than eight miles; this, however, was beyond range of the *Bear's* guns.

"A stern chase," he said, with a glance at the horizon ahead. "We'll make the Arctic."

The *Pole Star* crashed through light floe ice and sheered abeam of the Diomedes. She headed almost west by the compass, which course would bring her in sight of Herald Island and Wrangel Land.

Heavier ice fields loomed ahead, and Stirling watched them with concern. The Russian wheelsman peered over the barricade and took his orders from the leader; the ship ported and starboarded, then steadied with clumsy steering. The crash of ancient floes against her stem, and the grating as the ice slipped alongside, caused the revolutionists to cry aloud. They swarmed over the forepeak and pointed excitedly.

Stirling glanced aft. The *Bear* had not been so fortunate in choosing a passage through the ice, and had dropped back in the chase. He acted with sudden inspiration.

Leaning over the edge of the crow's-nest he cried: "Make for the open sea, you fools! Starboard three points! If you don't we'll all be crushed!"

The leader blinked upward and widened his small eyes. He was a gross man in a uniform of furs and sealskin boots stolen from the *Pole Star's* slop-chest. He turned to the wheelman after a quick squint toward the ice ahead.

The wheel was changed. The ship sheered, missed a heavy-floe formation, and entered a lane of drift ice.

"Steady!" shouted Stirling, feeling the wine of the game. "Hold her steady, there!"

He smiled despite the danger, for the act of giving commands and finding them obeyed showed that the Russians were new to ice work. They would most certainly wreck the ship and drown all on board. The century-old floes through which they glided had been detached from the polar pack, but once past these, a course held for the America shore would bring safety.

The *Bear* had not been as fortunate as the poacher. The ice between the Diomedes and Cape Prince of Wales was almost impassable, and the lieutenant in charge of the revenue cutter decided to take no chances. He reduced speed and struck for the Alaskan coast, since it was evident that this course would again intercept the poacher. Their place of meeting would be off Kotzebue Sound.

Stirling forgot the massacre aboard the *Pole Star*. He never had sided with the former crew; and the revolutionists, with their ignorance of the ice, were less to be feared. They had seized a ship, were running amuck, but at least had the virtue of motion. Their end might come in a score of ways, and it was to Stirling's interest to see that the ship remained afloat. There were the girl and Marr and the Frisco dock rat to consider.

Stirling's blood tingled at the excitement of the game; he breathed the refreshing air and raised his square shoulders. Open water and whale slick showed ahead, and beyond this the eastern horizon and the gray shadow of land. They were now plunging north by the compass, with a slight inclination toward the east. The course, he figured, should read northeast by north.

Lulled by the swaying and throbbing of the ship, he sensed a progression of true adventure. He had come North to whale. The whaling voyage had turned into an illicit sealing expedition. Now the revolutionists closely followed by the *Bear*, held the deck.

The low Arctic sun swung closer to the horizon. Within the purple haze astern came flashes of crimson light which died to lavender, and the lavender into velvet dusk. Night was falling upon the wild sea. It was well past ten o'clock. The revolutionists, busy at the fires and the gin, gave scant attention to the ship's bells.

Stirling dozed with his head against the rim of the crow's-nest, woke at odd times, and yawned. Sleep had overcome his stout frame. He peered down at the deck, saw that it was almost deserted, then lowered himself into the bottom of the nest and rested his chin on his drawn-up knees. Here he slumbered through the night.

Awaking with a start of surprise, he found that the day had dawned. He rose and stared out over the bow of the ship. Ice floes showed close to the port rail, and beyond these the open sea and the cold glint of the great North pack. He swung to starboard and studied the haze through which the sun was rising on a long slant. Land was there, and he made a swift calculation—the ship must be crossing the open Kotzebue Sound.

Out of the land mist as the sun veiled itself behind a cloud there emerged a leaping thing of well-sheeted canvas and belching funnels. The *Bear* had stolen a march on the poacher during the hours of the night, and a shot came skipping across the waves. It missed the *Pole Star's* stern by a scant cable's length. Another followed from the revenue cutter's bow gun, and this burst in the whaleboats that lined the starboard rail.

A roar of fright and defiance rolled upward to Stirling. The leader sprang from the galley house and dashed up the poop steps. A horde of his followers swarmed from the forecastle hatch and the

forehold, and some leaped down the engine-room companion. The funnel belched big clouds of smoke and the fire doors clanged. The *Pole Star* swerved toward the west and the open sea. This manoeuvre saved the revolutionists from certain capture.

Stirling waited with held breath and rigid lips. It was nip and tuck for the flying poacher, but gradually the distance between her and the cutter increased. The next shots fell short.

Men danced on deck and shook their fists toward the cutter, while the stokehold crew took turns in coming to the rail of their hatchway and raving at the *Bear*. They glanced aloft at the lone figure in the crow's-nest, but there was no malice in their expressions.

Stirling's blood tingled at the excitement of the game, and he lost his enmity for the Russians. They acted like children freed from bondage. They had fled from Vladivostok, been wrecked in the Gulf of Anadir, and were now on the second leg of their adventure. It led to the icy North and strange waters.

The ship plunged away from the coast and toward the North pack. Stirling realized that the *Bear* would follow to the bitter end, and he knew there was also another revenue cutter in the Arctic Ocean—the chances were slim for the Russians to escape, and the trap might be sprung at Point Barrow which juts far out into the Arctic.

Hurtling west, and then edging toward the north as the day advanced, the *Pole Star* avoided the pack and settled down to steady progress toward the American shore in the vicinity of Icy Cape.

The day unrolled with the cold sun swinging over the land and through the mists. The night, which came with slow shadowing, found Stirling weak and listless from lack of food and water, and he realized that an effort would have to be made to escape from the crow's-nest. The crew had drunk the entire store of gin and trade whisky, and they roamed the deck in groups, their attention fastened upon the low coast along which many Arctic whalers had been wrecked. The passageway between this coast and the grounded ice was narrow in places. A north-easter would crush the ship and drive it ashore.

The lane of ice-free waters widened as Cape Lisburne was passed. This lane often had been blocked by light floes, and Stirling studied the grounded pack to the west and north, coming to the conclusion that the season would be an extremely open one. Never before in his experience had he seen clearer steaming to the eastward.

Night came on with the *Pole Star* logging thirteen knots. The ship was surprisingly handled by the Russians, who worked more by intuition than from experience, but they had the sense of drift and direction. The *Bear* was left hull down in the flecked field astern, but still coming on grimly.

Walruses and seals were distributed by the wash of the ship; lone wolves howled from the shore; a polar bear lumbered over the ice as the *Pole Star* crashed through, staggered, and resumed its eastward course. The Russians on deck surged aft for fear of catastrophe. Surrounding the wheelman and the leader, they peered anxiously toward the after companion which was barricaded on the inside.

Streamers of yellow light shot athwart the eastern heavens, and this light brightened into a nebula of crimson. The aurora played and flickered and surged upward toward the zenith, while through it the pale stars shone. A moon rose and rolled along the lowland which lay between

Lisburne and Icy Cape. The Barren Country stood revealed in cold splendour, stretching to the ramparts of the Mackenzie River and the mountains at Fort Yukon.

A sense of motion came to Stirling, for he knew the waters. Never before, however, had he found the sea so open. The aged and grounded floes were well to the northwest, and had not been driven above the seven-fathom line. The lane they left for navigation was wide enough to float all the navies of the world, and only a great storm would close it behind the *Pole Star*.

Midnight found Stirling weary of the details of the voyage and weak from lack of food and water. A languor stole over his rugged frame; he yawned and attempted to sleep, but a clang of a fire door and a quarter-point swing of the ship awakened him to dull consciousness. He peered over the edge of the crow's-nest.

The deck below seemed a haven; there was food and water there. The way down would be short. He searched about for some sign of the Russians. Aside from the wheelman's head over the barricade and a towering leader standing by the weather rail of the quarter-deck, there was no one in sight.

The funnel, almost beneath shrouds, was crowned with a ring of fire, and a shift of wind now and then drove smoke upward. Stirling choked in this, tried to marshal the details of an escape, but felt his position was far too desperate to await daylight. The Russians were sleeping off the last of the gin. Their leader had given orders to drive for Point Barrow and take the chances to be met there.

Stirling widened his eyes and pressed his hand to his hot brow, studying the white lane of water which was bordered by ice on one quarter and the dark land upon the other. A providence had the ship in its grip. Small floes were avoided by no effort of the wheelman and thin ice, formed overnight, was ripped as satin by a knife.

Point Barrow was less than five hours' steaming ahead, and beyond the Point, with its whaling station and its native village, lay the open Sea of Beaufort and the unknown land of Keenan. It was a desperate sea into which to venture, and the horror of the short month came home to Stirling. He was facing cold, starvation, and isolation—a trinity of despair.

The stars paled as the slow dawn started creeping along the eastern heavens. The onward surge of the ship through the dream scene of flecked ice patches and mirrorlike water became a vision of unreality.

Stirling searched the way ahead, and recognized familiar landmarks from other voyages. The ribs of a whale ship showed high driven upon the tundra. This was the wreck of the *George M. Foster*, thrust ashore three seasons before by the pressure of the North pack.

Other wrecks marked the beach, showing where a fleet of whalers had attempted to gain the shelter of Point Barrow. A northwester had scattered them and laid their bones out upon the pale Arctic wilds. Men had died there from starvation and cold.

Native villages showed, with their summer huts gaunt and bare against the snow, and behind them igloos, fast melting in the warm air. Kayaks and umiaks dotted the beach; dogs came down to the shore and stared at the ship. A head was thrust through a tent's bark door, and a hand waved. Then afterward had come the rushing of dark forms along the tundra and the cries of natives.

The wheelsman held the centre of the course between the North pack and the sand spits. The leader, muffled to the eyes in sealskin, came out of the galley and glanced aloft. The orders he gave were for more steam, and the funnel belched forth smoke and driven cinders. The screw thrashed as the ship hurtled on into the brightening dawn.

Stirling climbed out of the crow's-nest, lowered his legs over its forward edge, and sat there with his hands gripping one of the downhauls. The sea ahead was polished and rippleless, the way to Point Barrow was open, and already the land had bent to the north and west. They were now rounding Alaska.

A shout rose from the dark deck, forms swarmed from the forecastle, and the ship took on churning life. The leader had sensed the danger to be met with at Point Barrow. A premonition had seized him that the *Bear* might have signalled by wireless to a waiting government boat.

Stirling divined that this would be the case, and pressed his palm against his head. The throbbing of the ship, felt at the masthead, drove a surge of nausea through his stout frame. The end was close at hand, unless they struck out to open sea, through the ice floes, and avoided the Point.

A misted sun rose in the north and east, directly before the taper jib boom of the *Pole Star*. It drove the last of the aurora from the sky, rose in a rolling eye of fire, and brought out all the details of the stretching Arctic wild.

To the north and west showed great floes, which had grounded upon the shallow land which marked the seven-fathom bank. Between these floes lanes appeared, filled with whale slick and sporting seals. They led to the true north and the solid pack below the cold horizon.

Swinging the helm with sudden intuition, the leader drove the ship down a wide lane and away from the shore. Stirling sensed this manœuvre was to avoid being sighted at the Point. The leader had spread a chart out upon the quarter-deck, and his thumb traced a course which would take him away from any possible pursuit; it would also be a venture into an unknown sea. Blond Eskimos and castaways from Franklin's expedition were supposed to people the polar shores of Banks and Keenan Land.

Stirling studied the ship's deck with eyes brightened by hunger and resolve. He sought for a place to descend—an opening which would allow him to reach the forehold where stores and water could be found.

The revolutionists were scattered from the forepeak to the break of the poop. Smoke showed from the galley stovepipe. The engine-room crew and stokehold crowd had redoubled their efforts in order to sheer the ship from the land. Word had been passed down that the *Bear* might signal the government people at Point Barrow, which was almost in sight.

Stirling glanced aft to where the Russian at the wheel was taking his orders from the leader who had sprung upon the weather rail and was holding to the mizzen shrouds.

The chance for escape from the crow's-nest had come. The mainsail hung from the main yard, and its flapping canvas would afford some slight shelter. Stirling weighed the opportunity and prepared to make the effort. The open main hatch invited with its glimpse of boxes and scattered trade stuff.

He lowered himself from the crow's-nest and stood on the jack above the Jacob's ladder. Here he was sheltered from a chance glance aloft. He poised himself, gathered together his remaining strength, then reached downward and grasped the ladder's top, his eyes slowly swinging aft. They rested on the barricade of canvas which had been erected forward of the cabin companion. A form moved behind this canvas, and the eastern light brought out the details. It was Slim, the Frisco dock rat, a ragged tam-o'-shanter capping his uncut hair.

With his face pressed over the edge of the canvas, Slim took in the details of the ship and the revolutionists and frowned. A second form moved close to his side and the girl glanced over the canvas, her eyes raised in tearful search of the crow's-nest. When they lighted upon Stirling, she beckoned with a white finger, then gave a heart-rendering, poignant call of distress.

CHAPTER XXVI—IN THE SUDDEN DARKNESS

The Ice Pilot had no way to answer the piercing call of the girl, yet the revolutionists might detect her presence at any moment. The leader was alert and kept sweeping the sea to port for a chance opening which would lead farther away from the land. He turned once toward the wheelsman, berated him in Russian for not putting the wheel over soon enough, as the ship narrowly escaped a heavy floe.

Again the girl beckoned as Stirling watched the two forms beyond the canvas barricade. This time she had lifted her pale face so that he could see her shoulders and arms. They were slight and childish, and tears glistened upon her cheeks. Her call was not to be denied, and Stirling lowered his legs, swung far out over the deck, hesitated in that position, and turned his head.

Slim, the sole survivor of the forecastle crew, was reaching downward, his back straining. He straightened up and staggered aft to the taffrail. The burden he carried froze Stirling in the act of descending the ladder, and an icy chill swept through the Pilot's body, which almost unnerved him. He wound his fingers about the ratlines and breathed deeply. The Arctic air seemed strangely quiet.

Slim reached the rail and lifted one leg to the top. He removed his tasselled cap, shifted his burden, turned and glanced at the girl, who had covered her eyes with her hands; then he raised the body he carried and hurled it astern of the fast-driving *Pole Star*.

Stirling watched the rude burial with straining eyes. Marr had been wounded by the rock which had struck his breast in the fight with the revolutionists, and the little skipper must have died some time after the blow. He, perhaps, had been nursed tenderly by the girl during the hours of the chase from the Gulf of Anadir. Her call showed that she feared Slim, who was now alone with her in the stern of the *Pole Star*.

Again Stirling stared at the girl. She removed her hands from her eyes, turned slowly, and grasped the edge of the canvas barricade. Her hair had fallen and she stood revealed as a frail creature in the grip of a strong man. She motioned with a flutter of her hand as she released her fingers from the canvas, then slowly sank to her knees, buried her face in her palms, and sobbed.

Slim turned from the taffrail, squared his shoulders with an upward jerk, and eyed the girl. He smiled cunningly, then came forward, glanced at the Russian leader in the shrouds, and tapped the girl on the arm.

Stirling started descending the shrouds with fevered energy. He reached the standing rigging and found a foothold in the ratlines, turned his chin, and glared aft like a shaggy bear. The girl and Slim had vanished down the companion and the noise they made in closing the companion slide had attracted the attention of the leader. His head was quarter faced away from view.

It was then that Stirling sprang to the deck, and dashed for the open main hatch. His way to the poop was barred by a group of revolutionists gathered at the port rail in the waist. They were watching the unfolding shore where it flattened out into Point Barrow. A cruiser cutter showed there, flags flying from her signal halyards, steam jetting from aft her funnel. She was balked, however, for a rampart of century-old ice formed a barrier between the lane in which she rode and the one through which the *Pole Star* was striking out to the north and west.

Stirling hesitated a moment at the hatch. He saw that the cutter had waited off the Point in expectancy of capturing the poacher. The chase might lead out from shore and into the pack ice which extended to the Pole.

A shout rolled along the deck from aft, and the leader turned in time to see the crouching figure by the main hatch. He called, and the Russians at the rail wheeled and started over the deck. Stirling reached in his pocket, brought forth the little silver-plated revolver, and jabbed it forward. The knot of men recoiled. Others swarmed out from the galley house and rounded it with careful steps, but they, too, held back.

Stirling laughed defiantly. He feared the croaking sound of his own voice, so parched and dry was his throat. He pocketed the revolver, grasped the edge of the hatch, swinging out and into the sheer. His feet crushed a box as he landed in the hold. He straightened himself, raised his arms, and, blinking in the sudden darkness, stumbled aft toward the lazaret, and the way to the cabin where the girl was quartered.

CHAPTER XXVII—IN THE PIT

The main hold was littered with a maze of boxes, bales, and bundles, the last made up of sealskins roughly bound, with salt sprinkled upon the fleshy side of the pelts. This precaution had been taken by Marr and Whitehouse on the day following the raid.

Stirling paused near where the deck beams allowed a narrow passage through to the lazaret, and under a hatchway which led to the galley house and the cook's quarters. He glanced around and allowed his eyes to accustom themselves to the darkness.

None of the revolutionists had dared follow him down through the main hatch. The sight of the revolver he had flashed at them was a stern reminder, and he felt of this weapon as he waited. He heard the steady clamp of the engines and the calls in Russian as the stokehold crew were urged to greater efforts.

The *Pole Star* was striking away from Point Barrow, and had sheltered herself in a long lane of ice reaching deep within the North pack. It would be fortunate, indeed, if this lane opened and allowed the ship through to the sea to eastward.

Stirling found a box in the lazaret which had been crashed open by a rude heel, and through the hole in this he drew out a double handful of hard and dry ship's biscuits. He munched on these, and glanced about for water. None was in sight. He found several empty gin cases from which the square faces had been removed; a dark corner of the lazaret was piled with small, strong boxes. The lower tier of these contained bottles of ginger ale and soda. He emptied three bottles of soda, waited a few minutes, and then started drinking the fourth.

The effect was magical. The ship's biscuits, whose food value is high, served to refresh his weary body, and he stared around with some interest in his surroundings.

A stout door, heavily barred by a crossbeam in the bulkhead, indicated the way to the stokehold and the after part of the ship. He moved through the gloom and tested this crossbeam. It could be lifted, but he paused to listen. Clanking doors and scraping shovels on the iron plates of the stokehold marked where the Russians were feeding the *Pole Star's* fires.

There was no way through to the cabin and the girl save by way of the stokehold and the engine room, and the deck was crowded with alert revolutionists.

Stirling dropped his hand into the side pocket of his pea-jacket and felt the cold assurance of the little revolver's steel. It nerved him as he drew out his hand and lifted the crossbar which the cook had placed in order to prevent a raid on the lazaret.

An opening showed, lurid with furnace fires and hot coals. Three Russians, stripped to the waist, were lounging in one corner of the stokehold, and all were smoking cigarettes made from cut

plug and tissue paper. Their attention was on a fourth Russian, who was watching the steam gauge above the central boiler.

Stirling widened the door by a steady pull with his fingers, and stared beyond the Russian to where an opening showed in the bulkhead. This opening marked the way to the engine room and the after part of the ship.

Bunker doors and slides showed to port and starboard, and the coal lay piled where the passers had shovelled it. A Russian tossed away his cigarette, seized a scoop shovel, and stepped to the after door of the forward furnace. The glare which filled the stokehold as he opened the door gave Stirling an opportunity.

Risking all on the venture, he flung wide the bulkhead door which led from the lazaret and dashed across the scattered coal, reaching the opening to a spare bunker on the starboard side of the hold before he was discovered. Then a Russian shouted a warning, and the chief of the stokehold crew swung from the furnaces and stared through the half light.

Stirling brushed aside the lunging form of a revolutionist, and struck a second Russian a swinging blow beneath the ear. Plunging on, he gained the door which led to the engine room as a slice bar was hurled in his direction.

He wheeled at the door and braced himself. The Russian he had struck was slowly rising from the iron plate before the spare bunker, and a form swung from the reflection of light which streamed out of an ash box and lunged forward. Stirling called a warning as he bent, twisted, and worked his way through the bulkhead door until he reached the alleyway which led to the engine room.

Flashing crank shafts and the polished glow of metal blinded him. Men were on the gratings and halfway up the ladder which led to the deck companion. Stirling dodged around the first and second intermediate cylinders, rested a hand on the huge low-pressure cylinder; then he dropped to one knee, squirmed beneath the tail shaft, and started crawling down the shaft alley.

The Russians had been too startled to prevent this manœuvre, but now they came aft with torches and pinch bars. The glow from the overhead sun which streamed through the deck light brought out the details of the shaft alley as far aft as the second coupling. Behind this was a narrow pit compressed on each side by heavy planking and sloping at the bottom into the fan-shaped overhang of the *Pole Star's* stern.

Stirling worked his way aft to the thrust bearings, which were three in number. Here the pit was dark and damp, and he turned and glanced forward. The faint light which marked the outlines of the shaft alley grew stronger as he waited.

A burly form moved within the gloom, then another man joined the first Russian. Hammer blows sounded, and the light vanished as if a shade had been drawn. Stirling, with every sense alert, guessed the reason for the darkness. The revolutionists in the engine room had brought aft a number of sheets of boiler plate, and these they had erected about the tail shaft where it entered the engine room.

A grim smile creased Stirling's lips as he waited. The way now was barred by three-eighth-inch iron; he was a prisoner in the pit.

CHAPTER XXVIII—THE THIRD DOOR

A faint sound from above echoed throughout the alleyway, and Stirling turned his head, listening with every sense alert. The sound was repeated, then footfalls grated on the deck planks. The clank of the engines and the whirling shaft drowned out further steps in the cabin.

Stirling reached toward the thrust bearings, measured the distance, and thought deeply. He was directly beneath the alleyway which extended from the staterooms to the after companion—the girl and Slim, the Frisco dock rat, were above him.

He touched the planks, feeling the seams between the inch-thick decking. He traced these seams and found that they ended in a coaming at each side of the shaft alley. These were secured to the deck beams by screws which in turn were covered by tree-nails. The barrier seemed impassable.

The throbbing of the screw, driven to its limit, had a lulling effect upon Stirling, who sank to his knees and crawled along the alleyway until his fingers touched a thrust block; sitting on this he dropped his head into his greasy hands and thought, his brain swirling in the maze of doubt and unreality.

He had no tool with which he could cut his way upward, and his problem was to get in communication with the girl so that a passage could be bored through the deck planks.

The polished shaft at his side attracted his attention and he felt of it, counting the revolutions. They were slightly faster than the beat of his pulse. The power of a thousand horses was there in that rod of steel, and he wondered vaguely if there was any way to turn it to account.

The covers for the thrust blocks and shaft bearings were firmly bolted down. He groped about and searched every corner of the alleyway, finding an inch bolt and a battered oil can. These he placed by the thrust block and continued the search.

A faint light from the engine room illuminated the forward end of the shaft alley, and he crawled to this opening and peered through. The low-pressure cylinder and the engine frame prevented further scrutiny, but the shadows that moved across the gratings above the cylinder marked the presence of the revolutionists. One, perhaps, was on guard.

Stirling thrust his fingers through the plate which had been nailed to prevent his escape. Straining, he saw that he could move the lower section of iron sheeting. An object under the after bearing of the engine had attracted his attention—a long strip of leather belting coated with grease and oil.

He moved the plate, and waited; then he crawled halfway through the opening and secured the belt, Backing carefully, he worked his way aft to the thrust block.

He now had a belt and a bolt and with these crude tools he intended boring through the planks over his head. The task was a painful one. He would have to arrange the belt so that it would run

under the shaft and over the bolt, which was turned by the shaft's power. Its corners might work through the plank.

He found that the bolt was too small in diameter to secure any result, and that the belt slipped and would not turn the shank. He laid the bolt down and picked up the oil can, whose shape suggested the solution of the problem.

Removing the oil spout by unscrewing it from the top of the can, he inserted the bolt in its place. The can turned freely with the bolt as an axle.

Stirling smiled through the grime upon his features. His mind had evolved a saw of the superior order, power driven and bound to be effective. He waited before he went on with the experiment.

The seething of the water told him that they were still hurtling through the lane of ice, and floes grated alongside. A shout echoed backward from the engine room, and the clank of steam-driven rods rose to a crescendo of effort. The *Pole Star* was striking out to open sea and the unknown waters to the north and east of Point Barrow.

The cutter cruiser had been distanced, and the *Bear* was a slow third in the chase. There was no way to tell where the pursuit would lead. Stirling thought dimly of the northeast passage and the way to Baffin Bay. Only madmen could effect such an enterprise.

Steps sounded above as Stirling toyed with the can, and he heard them going aft. Others followed; these were lighter. There came then the faint echo of a scuffle and the low cry of a woman, followed by a man's rude laugh as the light steps ran forward and a door slammed.

Stirling constructed the scene in his mind: The dock rat had seized the girl and embraced her, and she had torn herself from his grasp. The slamming door told that she had barricaded herself in the cabin. It was time to interfere. The inch-thick planks overhead formed the only obstruction, and he felt of them, then reached for the oil can.

The belt tightened over the polished shaft and over the rim of the can, which was at least three inches in diameter. The bolt acted as a rod, and the cutting edge as it touched the plank ground through for a quarter inch and then refused to work deeper.

Stirling saw the reason for this: The copper of the can had no abrasive edge. He lowered the can, drew out his revolver, and started nicking the metal. Each blow sounded like a hammer stroke in his straining ears, and he feared to dent the bottom of the can so freely that it could not be straightened. He pocketed the revolver and felt the edge. It was rough, at any rate.

The improvised saw now cut into the overhead plank as he pressed the bolt upward with straining arms. The belt slipped at times, but he waited and tried anew. The power which was in the tail shaft of the engines was sufficient for a thousand saws.

Dust and splinters dropped down upon his tense face, but he held on grimly with one determination mastering his thoughts: The girl was in danger. She was barricaded in her stateroom, and the dock rat was probably sitting by the great table in the main cabin—with a vast reservoir of gin and whisky from which to draw.

Stirling felt the edge of the can bite through the plank in one place. He lowered it and examined the opening. The belt had stretched under the strain and had permitted a cut of seven or

eight inches in length.

Crossing the belt, Stirling started a second cut at a right angle to the first, and worked on with his arms aching and growing numb from the strained position. The oil in the can had served for lubrication to the bolt, but when this oil dried, the bolt squeaked, and the can became hot.

He lowered it from the cut in the deck plank and the smell of hot oil in the shaft bearings gave him an idea. There was enough grease and oil packed with waste there to keep the bearings cool. He lifted a cover and dug out a handful of dripping packing, which he squeezed into the can. The bolt was now lubricated.

Though working in almost total darkness, he made rapid progress, and still no sound came from above. The dock rat probably was sleeping across the table; the girl had not moved in her cabin.

The first faint light which streamed through the crack he made steeled Stirling to renewed efforts. He enlarged the opening and stood erect.

The view was a limited one of an ornate ceiling stamped here and there with fresco and border designs. In the centre of this ceiling gleamed the frosty light from an electric dome. Three lamps burned, despite the fact that a soft glow was filling the splendid cabin. This glow came from the breaking dawn which made rosy the deck light and cabin companion.

Stirling removed his eye from the crack and felt the grooves he had cut in the planking. They were almost sufficient for his purpose. He trimmed a corner with his improvised saw, ran the saw through a deep cut till it severed the plank's edge, then pressed firmly upward. The trapdoor he had cut was held by only a few splinters.

He waited and reviewed his position. The revolutionists were busy with the engines and the furnaces, and their shouts came aft with muffled curses. The clang of a bell told that the leader had urged more steam, and the ship was hurtling through a sea free from ice. Stirling could hear no grating along the run.

He worked forward, guiding himself by the touch of the polished tail shaft. The barricade of iron plates was an effective barrier to a sudden rush. There was scant danger from the Russians. The sentry they had placed on guard stood high on the gratings overlooking the opening to the shaft alley. Stirling peered through a crack in the plates and watched him. He was looking intently at the two intermediate cylinders.

Working aft with careful steps, Stirling reached his trapdoor and listened. A sound of deep breathing came to him. Slim, the dock rat, was directly above, where he choked now and then, and his arms moved over the racks of the table. Then he was still—save for the drunken breathing which subsided almost to nothingness.

Stirling braced his shoulders against the planks, pressed his feet upon the shaft bearing, and strained with every muscle. A splintering noise sounded. A second thrust tore loose the last of the planks. They showered about him as he reached upward, rested his elbows on the edge, and sprang to the deck of the cabin.

Slim raised an arm, fell forward, lifted his chin, and turned it in a slow arc. His eyes blinked as Stirling lunged for him with a bearlike glide which was not to be denied. Strong fingers clasped

about the dock rat's throat; he was lifted from his chair and hurled across the floor of the cabin. Stirling was after him with a quick stride.

The struggle which followed was terrible in its intensity. Stirling had the strength given to outdoor men; he was unskilled, however, and faint from loss of sleep and food. Slim had learned boxing and wrestling along the San Francisco water front. He squirmed to his knees, twisted from Stirling's grip, and lowered his head for a rush. Stirling met this attack with a savage reaching of arms and a grunt as Slim uppercut with vicious strength. They fell into a clinch, they swayed and staggered about the cabin, overturning chairs and stools.

Stirling's clean living began to tell as the Ice Pilot recovered his wits and became more careful. Lunging blows straightened and became jabs, hugs gave place to standing exchange of blows. The dock rat leered from puffed eyes and searched about for a weapon. A brass bomb gun and a Remington rifle lay across the table. He dodged and reached for the bomb gun, his fingers closing over the barrel, when Stirling leaped the distance and wound his arms about Slim's waist.

The dock rat, catapulted through the air, crashed against the sheathing of the starboard wall. He managed to rise, but Stirling was over the planks and upon him with a vicious outthrust of his jaw. The madness of the struggle had completely mastered the Ice Pilot, who fought furiously.

Soon Slim lay still. Stirling, looking about for a cord or line, saw a tassel protruding from a curtain which covered the alleyway leading aft. Jerking this loose, he lunged swiftly to Slim's side, drew his arms behind him, and completed a sailor's job of tying and splicing from which no man could escape.

The dock rat opened one eye and moaned. Stirling drew back and glanced sternly at him, his bulk seeming to fill the cabin.

Slim closed his eyes and moaned for a second time. "Let me loose," he managed to say.

"Stay there!" Stirling said with a slow glance around.

The curtain attracted his attention. It had been partly wrenched from its pole by the drawing away of the cord. Beyond it lay the alleyway and the cabins of the after part of the ship. The girl's cabin was one of four.

"Which stateroom is the girl in?" he asked, leaning over Slim.

The sailor squirmed and dragged at his arms where they were bound, rolled over, and stared upward at the deck. A light streamed down from the barricaded companion, a light which heralded the rising of the sun. Stirling followed the dock rat's glance and studied the shadow, then wheeled swiftly and saw a tiny ship's clock set in the wall. A hasty calculation of time and shadow showed him that the *Pole Star* was driving east by true reckoning and north by compass. The variation was all of ninety degrees.

He listened to the progress of the ship as he waited for the dock rat to answer his question. The throbbing of the screw and the swift rush of water under the counter showed that the revolutionists were still extending their efforts. The great bight of sea beyond Point Barrow and off the mouth of the Mackenzie River was being crossed. The land ahead would be unknown territory, filled with danger and starvation.

Weakly Stirling turned; all the fight seemed to have left him, and he swayed as he glanced downward. The sailor had closed his lips in a hard line, and there was malice and calculation in his sharp, darting glances about the cabin.

Stirling shrugged his shoulders, dropped on one knee, and felt the cord. It was drawn sufficiently tight. Rising slowly, the Ice Pilot breathed deeply, feeling the aching muscles of his chest as they expanded; then he set in order the chairs and stools of the cabin and lifted the rifle until it swung in a natural manner under his right armpit.

"Stay right there!" he commanded as he glanced toward the sailor. He was surprised at the sound of his own voice, unnatural and falsely tuned.

Shaking his head with weariness, he advanced to the curtain, brushed it aside with his left hand, and strode down the alleyway, where four doors offered themselves. Each was closed. He knocked at the first, but there was no answer; it was the same with the second.

The third door proved to be that of the girl's room. He heard her stirring inside as he repeated the knock, then listened with bent head. He felt the room was sacred—he had known so little of women that they all were holy to him, and he told himself that he was committing a sacrilege.

He tapped again—this time lightly. A poignant sobbing greeted his ears.

He bent his head closer and said: "It's me. Don't be afraid. I'm Stirling—the Ice Pilot. I'm the one who was in the crow's-nest."

He strained his ears, and the sobbing ceased. A hand was on the latch; the door started to slide open.

"It's me," he repeated as the hand that pressed the door hesitated. "I'm all right," he added, with tired assurance. "I'm armed, and that sailor is taken care of—the one who insulted you."

The door slid open swiftly, and the girl stood framed in the aperture. Her hair was down her back, her wide eyes swollen from tears and distress.

He rested the rifle against his hip. "Are you all right?" he asked, sincerely. "Are you?"

"Yes—now, I am." The glance that lifted to his own was frank and shimmering with amazement. Stirling glanced over her shoulder full into a long cheval mirror, and recoiled as he looked at his own reflection. The oil and grease of the shaft alley, the week-old stubble of beard, the wan, red-rimmed eyes which shone from hollow sockets—these made a picture of desperate adventure.

"You'll have to excuse me," he said. "I didn't know I looked like this."

The girl smiled and extended her hand. "You came to me," she said, bravely. "That's what I wanted."

Stirling nodded and rubbed his chin with his palm, then turned and stared toward the curtain. Slim had rolled over and was hammering the cabin deck with his heels in an endeavour to escape the bonds around his wrists and elbows.

"I found him," said Stirling. "What do you say if we go in there—Miss—Miss——"

"Miss Marr—Helen Marr," she said, quickly, as she came gliding out of the door. "You see," she added, "I'm not a bit frightened—at you!"

CHAPTER XXIX—TO SEE IT THROUGH

Rough-garbed and soiled from his efforts, Stirling led the way aft to the large cabin of the *Pole Star*, then turned and held the curtain back for Helen Marr. He bowed as she passed through and stood staring at the prone form of the Frisco dock rat.

"I'll attend to him, miss," declared Stirling. "Did he insult you?"

The girl flushed slightly, but there was an assurance in her manner that bespoke the daughter of the sea. She braced her slight form by leaning against the table and turned to the Ice Pilot. "No; he didn't insult me," she said. "He couldn't. But he is not a gentleman and never can be one."

Stirling stepped over the deck and reached downward, coiled his arms about Slim, and raised him from the planks.

"Hold the curtain," he said, softly. "I'll put this fellow out of harm's way. There's a cabin just made for him, where we can feed him and watch him."

Helen Marr stared at Stirling as he shifted his burden, smiled slowly through the grime of his lips, and staggered with Slim through the curtain and down the alleyway to the cabin where Whitehouse and Marr had kept him prisoner.

He was back in three minutes with a key held between his fingers. "You take this," he said with concern. "Take it and keep it. I'm going to look around and find some water and a razor. I expect we're going to be together for some time, as the revolutionists are heading east. I don't want to frighten you with my appearance, Miss Marr."

"There's running water and razors in uncle's cabin."

Stirling stiffened and passed his hand over the stubble of his cheeks, removing his cap as he asked, "So he was your uncle?"

"Yes; Mr. Marr was my uncle. He brought me along on this trip because there was nobody to look after me ashore. I was at boarding school in Concord when he came for me."

Stirling glanced at the girl with open sympathy, and she returned his look, then blushed slightly, and moved away from the table. The key he had given her dropped to the deck. She recovered it and brushed back her hair as she rose.

"I'm sorry he died," Stirling managed to say. "I'm sorry. But I don't think he was doing right in bringing you North, and I don't think the seal raid was right. You see I'm plain-spoken. I'm not used to young ladies."

A laugh echoed through the cabin. "You're a sight!" said Helen Marr. "We'll get along. I don't fear anything at all now. Those awful Russians are afraid of you."

Stirling glanced at the barricaded deck light, and listened to the swift rush of the ship through the smooth sea. A slight chill was in the air, which spoke of ice fields to the north and east.

He dropped his glance and swept the cabin. The bomb gun on the table was a weapon in a thousand, and with it it would be possible to hold the cabin against a large number of men.

"The thing we have to find out," he said, "is how to stop the ship before we go too far. We're off Herschel Island now. Another day's mad steaming will wreck us sure. I don't want to see you wrecked."

The girl pointed toward an after doorway. "That's uncle's cabin," she said. "Go shave and fix yourself. Then we'll talk about things. I don't think being wrecked is so terrible."

Stirling shook his head and moved toward the cabin. He opened the door, turned, and glanced backward, then went inside with the girl's face stamped upon his memory. She was full of fire and youth, the voyage of the *Pole Star* had been an adventure for her. The death of Marr had not saddened her. He found soap and a razor resting behind the washstand, and with these started to make himself presentable.

Strength and youth came through his features as he scraped and hacked; simple in all his motions, he found himself for the first time in a great hurry. The girl had appealed with elfin charm, though he knew no more of women than landsmen know of the mysteries of the sea.

After he had finished shaving, a good wash in cold water, a swift parting of his hair, and a borrowed necktie from Marr's collection, caused him to smile at his reflection in the glass. He stood the proper figure of a man—four square to wind, weather, adversity, or the revolutionists.

The situation was desperate enough to call for all the strength of Stirling's mind and muscle. The ship was heading due east by the meridian, or north by magnetic compass, and the true Pole was being thrown over the ship's port waist like a sinister shadow. Ahead lay the Magnetic Pole and the land where Franklin and his brave men had perished in the search for the northwest passage.

Stirling looked from the mirror to the open porthole of the cabin, and saw the low-lying land which marked the American continent. The water was muddy and filled with driftwood, which indicated that Herschel Island and the mouth of the Mackenzie River were being passed.

"Our last wintering place," he said, with his face pressed to the porthole. "Yonder she is. There's scant chance from now on."

He turned and glanced about the cabin. A telltale compass over a brass-bound bunk showed that the course read north. It changed a point as the *Pole Star* swung and dashed by a field of ancient ice. Then the ship steadied, the engines clanked, and steps sounded overhead. The revolutionists had gathered for a consultation.

Stirling opened the door of the cabin, stepped out, and faced Helen Marr who stood by the baby-grand piano which was lashed to the after part of the bulkhead.

"We're off Herschel Island," he said, running his fingers over his face in anxiety. "I'm sorry for your sake. There are no winter quarters beyond the Island that I know of; it's all lowland and dangerous anchorage. We're in for it!"

The girl inclined her head and listened, then pointed upward. A wan, tired smile, that threw tiny wrinkles in the corners of her mouth, held Stirling's eyes. She seemed suddenly older to him, and he wondered at this change as he waited for her to speak.

"They are above," she said at last. "Do you think they are plotting to capture you?" Her voice had changed, and Stirling detected a note of concern. He looked up and caught her glance full upon his own. She bit her lip and flushed.

He tried to stammer an answer, but none came that fitted the question. A gulf had suddenly opened between them, and her eyes no longer held the shimmer they had once contained. She had stared at him as if he had been a ghost or spectre from another world, her manner suddenly grown cold.

"What did I do?" he exclaimed. "Why do you look at me that way?"

"Because—why, because I thought you were an old man. You're not!"

Stirling straightened, and he felt his heart throbbing. "I'm forty-six," he said. "That's old, isn't it?"

The girl's face dimpled; the lines vanished from her lips and left her openly frank and childish looking. "Forty-six?"

"Going on forty-seven."

"That isn't old. You look so different with a shave and a—wash. I'm going to make you promise one thing."

Stirling was ready to promise any number of things. "What is it?" he asked.

"That from now on you shave every day, and from now on we're—friends."

"I'll promise that!" said Stirling, heartily. "We two are going to see this thing through—as friends. You can trust me! We'll stand guard—watch and watch."

CHAPTER XXX—IN SWIFT SALUTE

"You're not going to kill anybody?" Helen Marr asked, after a moment's pause.

"Not unless they try to harm you," Stirling replied.

The girl raised her chin and thrust out her right hand. "I was always a wild creature," she said. "Father died soon after I was born, and mother let me run wild in Concord. Then uncle came from across the sea. He always liked me; once he took me to England on a voyage. It was a Boston ship he owned an interest in. I can reef and steer. I had a sloop in Maine—all one summer."

"Can you handle a rifle?"

"Yes. Only I don't want to kill anybody."

Stirling stepped to a gun rack on the starboard side of the cabin, went over the rifles racked there, and picked out a light gun which Marr had brought North for shooting seals.

"We'll load this," he said, laying it across the table. "It's yours in case of trouble. The revolutionists are getting into deep ice and the time is coming when they will call on me. I may have to take command of the ship. Otherwise——"

His pause was suggestive. Helen Marr stared out through the nearest porthole, then turned with a pucker showing at the corner of her mouth. "What were you going to say?" she asked.

"Otherwise we will be cast away in the land that Heaven forgot. There is nothing up here but death and starvation. There is no food or shelter; there is only cold and ice and desolation. It is almost all unexplored. Coronation Gulf, where we are heading, leads to Victoria Strait and Lancaster Sound. The passage was never made."

"But the Russians may make it. Isn't the season an open one?"

"So open that I fear we will go too far to turn back. There's coal enough aboard to take us to Baffin Bay."

"Uncle has been there."

"But not from this side of the world." Stirling glanced about the cabin and then stepped over to an ornate bookcase beneath which was a drawer filled with maps.

He unrolled a map and spread it across the table. "Come here," he said, nodding to the girl. "I'll show you where we are and where we're heading."

The girl stepped close to his side and leaned over the chart, following his pointing finger as he traced a course from Point Barrow to the mouth of the Mackenzie River. "From there," he said, "we may strike two ways. The most likely course is through Coronation Gulf, and then by Boothia Gulf, but there's another route to the eastward. It leads west by the compass and around this land." Stirling pressed his thumb on a maze of inlets and narrow straits. "If the revolutionists try that course we're cast away in the polar pack. It'll be all up with you and me."

The girl drew back the chart and raised her finger to her lips, almost pouting as she asked: "Are you afraid?"

Stirling stammered and rolled up the chart with a swift motion of his right palm. "Not exactly afraid," he said; "but with the crew on deck that we have, there is every chance of getting nipped."

"Nipped?"

"Yes! Caught in the ice and crushed. Many ships have had that happen. I remember the *Beluga* and the *Prince Charles* and the schooner *Rosy Enders*. They all were nipped to the eastward of Herschel Island. We're in the same waters."

"But wouldn't it be splendid if the Russians got through to Baffin Bay? Just think what the world would say. The Northwest Passage!"

"The Northeast," corrected Stirling, with a faint smile.

"Isn't there a big reward for going around the American Continent?"

"There was; I don't know about it now. The Norwegians did it in a little ship, but it took them years."

The girl moved across the cabin and pressed her face to the nearest porthole, then turned and found Stirling's eyes fastened upon her.

"I see lots of ice," she said, naïvely. "There's ice everywhere."

"Except ahead. We're going down a lane of open water between the floes and the shore. Cape Bathurst should soon be sighted."

The girl turned her head and glanced through the porthole. "I see land!" she exclaimed, with a quiver in her voice. "It doesn't look so terrible. There're green moss and trees—I think they are trees."

"Arctic pines," Stirling said. "It's No Man's Land on this side of the world. You stand watch with that Remington and I'll go look that sailor over. He must be hungry."

Stirling moved toward the curtain as the girl turned away from the open porthole and stepped to the table where the rifle lay. She lifted it, and frowned in perplexity as her fingers toyed with the trigger guard and cocking mechanism.

Suddenly she wheeled and laid down the rifle. "I couldn't shoot anybody," she said, staring across the cabin. "Nobody is going to bother us, now."

"I'm not so sure, Miss Marr. There's a time coming when the revolutionists will be in distress. Then there's Slim to reckon with. He might escape while I'm sleeping. You know I haven't slept for days—just a nap now and then in the crow's-nest and the shaft alley."

Stirling hurried to the dock rat's cabin and pressed open the door after inserting the key in the lock. Slim sat up and twisted his body.

"Nice way you've left me," he said, bitterly.

Stirling examined the bonds and smiled grimly, but he did not answer the sailor. He glanced about the cabin, saw that the porthole was fastened securely, then hurried back to the girl.

"Please get biscuits and water," he said. "That sailor is doing fine. If he doesn't keep it up I'll turn him over to the revolutionists."

"He was all right until after uncle died," Helen said. "Then he started drinking and saying things to me. I wasn't afraid of him, only——"

"Only," interrupted Stirling, "you should have kept that little revolver. I appreciated it, but you needed it worse than I did. Here it is."

Stirling dropped his hand into his pocket and brought out the little silver-plated gun. "Take it, please," he said, "and—will you get me some biscuits and water? I'll feed the sailor."

The girl hurried through an after doorway, opened some tins in a small pantry, and returned with a tray of crackers. She set these on the table, and drew a pitcher of water from the tap in the cabin.

Stirling studied her motions, and dreamed of a fairy or an elf. He was staring at the steps which led to the cabin companion as she offered him the pitcher of water. His eyes dropped, and his lips grew firm. "I'll be back soon," he said in a far-off voice. "You watch for the revolutionists. Fire that rifle if they attempt to get down."

The sailor took the offering with bad grace, as Stirling propped him up in the bunk and released one hand so that he could eat. He retied him securely as the last of the crackers was consumed between yellow teeth.

"Stay right there," said Stirling, as he closed the door. "Better keep mighty quiet, too," he added, sternly, as he drew the key from the lock.

The girl had climbed partly up the companionway steps, and she turned, drawing her skirts about her ankles as she saw Stirling coming from the forward alleyway.

"What's up there?" he asked, setting the empty pitcher and tray on the table. "Can you see anything, Miss Marr?"

"The leader and two other revolutionists are at the wheel," she said. "They are puzzled over something. I think the leader wants to steer toward the north."

The girl pointed at the port side of the ship, and Stirling shook his head. "That's west now," he said. "It's magnetic west. You see the directions are all changed. We're heading north by the compass. If he changes to the west it means that he is going to try and clear Banks Land. That'll lead us to Melville Sound. It may be open."

Helen Marr lifted her chin and beamed into Stirling's face. "There's sunshine on the ice," she said, pointing out through a starboard porthole. "See it? You should smile. I don't think we are in any danger."

Stirling caught the contagion of youth and high spirits. The season was so remarkable that he doubted his own senses, for the *Pole Star* was steaming at twelve knots through waters which were usually closed to all save the lucky ships in the whaling service. The progress from Point Barrow had been continuous. They had gone farther east than most Arctic expeditions, and the way north was clear save for small ice floes. It might be possible to reach Melville Sound and unknown straits leading to Baffin Bay.

The Ice Pilot bent his head and thought deeply, but the ship suddenly swerved, and he straightened. The sunshine now streamed through the after starboard portholes of the cabin, striking across the racks of the table and bringing out the details of the bookshelves and piano.

Helen Marr clapped her hands, ran to the porthole nearest the after bulkhead, and peered out, then turned with eyes of flame. "See," she said, "we're going north now—or west. There's open water and an open sea. Oh, I'm glad of it!"

Her slight body flitted to the piano. She drew down the cover and pulled out a stool. The music she played was familiar to Stirling:

"Whither, oh, splendid ship, thy white sails crowding,
Leaning across the bosom of the urgent West,
Thou fearest nor sea rising, nor sky clouding,
Whither away fair rover, and what thy quest?"

The girl turned on the revolving stool and glanced toward Stirling. "How do you like that?" she asked, blithely. "Do you want more?"

Stirling smiled and nodded, and her fingers strayed over the ivory keys for a moment. The song she sang was new to Stirling, but as he listened, he heard above the silver-running notes another sound. Steps came overhead; a shadow blotted out the glass of the deck light. The Russian leader had been attracted by the music, and he was joined by one of the revolutionists. The two Russians stood in rapt attention as Helen Marr sang to her own accompaniment:

"The fair wind blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free;
And we were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea."

The girl turned. "That's from the 'Ancient Mariner,'" she said. "I set it to music. I think it's appropriate, don't you, Mr. Stirling?"

"The silent sea part is," he said. "I shouldn't wonder if you sang the truth. Even the leader was interested. I wonder if he understands English?"

The two in the cabin stared up at the shadows on the deck light, and these shadows moved away as the girl rose from the piano stool and came across the deck.

"You had better go into the stateroom and get some sleep, Mr. Stirling," she suggested. "You look tired and worn. Sleep would do you a world of good. I'll stand guard."

Stirling climbed the companion steps and tested the barricade of oak timbers which Marr and Slim had fitted, then came down and went forward to the curtain. A second doorway, which was at the end of the alley, had been nailed shut with three-inch spikes, and there seemed no way for the revolutionists to break into the after part of the ship.

He moved the table over the hole he had cut in the deck, and upon this piled stools and a bookcase for a barricade.

"Let me know if anything happens," Stirling said, as he stepped toward Marr's stateroom. "Be sure and do that!"

The girl lifted the rifle and stood at attention. "Good-night!" she said. "Shut the door; I'll wake you if it's necessary."

CHAPTER XXXI—DANGER AND DOUBT

When Stirling awoke it seemed to him that he had passed through an ocean of dreams. He rolled over and blinked through leaden eyes at the porthole. Dawn was breaking across a wild waste of Northern waters; ice floes and ancient packs floated by; seals sported; whale slick showed in oily patches, and the sun glanced over the smooth surface of the sea. A ripple showed where the *Pole Star's* sharp stem was cleaving the surface.

Stirling rubbed his eyes and listened. The steady clank of the engines and the vibration of the tail shaft beneath him still continued. He glanced upward. The tiny, telltale compass overhead was pointing west. The ship was headed for the true pole!

"Madmen!" said Stirling, springing out of the bunk.

He emerged into the larger cabin to find that Helen Marr had vanished. The rifle lay across the table, and her knitted tam-o'-shanter was hanging from one corner of the piano; the deck light had been thrown open, and the companionway was unbarred.

Stirling strode through the curtain and tested the door which led to the sailor's cabin. It was locked. A bitter protest in Frisco slang greeted his query. He hesitated. The girl had eluded him in some manner. She had gone on deck.

He crossed the alleyway, cocked the rifle, and burst into the larger cabin. Up the steps which led to the companion he climbed with savage strength, and the light of dawning day and the gust of salty air which filled his lungs cleared his brain. He stared about the quarter-deck, then dropped the rifle's butt down upon his boot.

The girl, bareheaded and with ribbons flying, was sitting in a deck chair; near by were the Russian leader and two other revolutionists. They turned as she laughed buoyantly, but the leader frowned and reached for his pocket. Stirling raised the rifle and swung it under his arm.

"Good morning, Mr. Stirling," called the girl. "Come aft with me. These poor men are not our enemies. They're lost and want a pilot."

Stirling lowered the muzzle of the rifle, but still eyed the leader, and his lips grew hard and level with suspicion. He raised his shoulders slightly.

The girl saw the motion and sprang out of the deck chair with a cry. "They're only big boys!" she exclaimed. "I was playing the piano and singing—while you were sleeping. One song they liked, and the leader knocked on the glass and called to me. There were tears in his eyes. He's escaped from Siberia and wants to get to America. They all have escaped, Mr. Stirling. They wouldn't harm anybody!"

Stirling remembered the carnage when the revolutionists took the ship. But perhaps they had thought that the *Pole Star's* crew would resist and therefore had anticipated an expected attack. And

they seemed to have treated the girl with the attention due a princess. A cushion was at the foot of the deck chair; tea steamed in a kettle; crackers had been brought from the galley.

"I think you had better go below," said Stirling glancing at the girl's upturned face.

"Speak to them; they don't mean us any harm."

Stirling turned toward the leader, and the small eyes before him lightened where they had been filled with fear. A gross, hairy hand swept forward expressively.

"You don't know where you are?" asked Stirling, gesturing.

The man, apparently getting the sense of the Ice Pilot's question, shook his head.

"Do you want to go back?" Stirling pointed the rifle toward the jack staff and the stern of the ship.

The leader repeated his nod, then spoke to the two others, who, Stirling decided, also held office among the revolutionists. They lumbered to the rail and stared forward, raising their arms and pointing.

Stirling shaded his eyes from the rays of the sun which was swinging on a long slant over the sea, and saw ahead, and to starboard, the glint of horizon-down ice. He knew the reason—they were within thirty miles of Banks Land.

The sea was open to the magnetic west, where a hard line rimmed the surface. Gulls flew overhead, and the smoke of the furnaces blotted across the waters. The entire scene was one of desperate enterprise. They were steaming on an unknown ocean of danger and doubt, where no explorers had been able to penetrate. Only an open season, such as Stirling had never known before, permitted the *Pole Star's* progress.

With a mastering glance, he turned toward the leader, his head back, the cords of his neck showing like roots of some giant oak. Helen Marr seized his left hand and crept close up to him.

"I'll pilot this ship!" he said.

"Where?" asked Helen Marr.

"Through the Northeast Passage!"

CHAPTER XXXII—TO THE LAST DAY

As the sun rose above the ice-covered sea on the morning following Stirling's talk with the leader of the revolutionists, the ship was swung toward the magnetic north and driven within the opening which lies between Banks Land and Prince Patrick Island.

Banks Strait the passage was called, and it led from Beaufort Sea and the uncharted waters east of Keenan Land to Melville Sound and Barrow Strait. From the appearance of the ice and direction of the wind, Stirling decided to chance the passage. There was no way back!

He climbed the shrouds and dropped into the crow's-nest. The after deck, from the companion hatch to the taffrail, had been reserved by the revolutionists for Helen Marr and her steamer chair. She had conquered the Russians by her smiles and songs. They all stood in the presence of death and the unknown. The appearance of the sea; the strange tides and currents; the action of the compass at variance with the stars—all these drove the haunting desire of companionship within men's breasts. Old differences were forgotten in the face of despair.

Stirling took quiet charge of the ship. He gave the orders, which were partly understood by the leader, who, Stirling soon learned, really knew a fair amount of English, although at first he had been loath to disclose his knowledge, no doubt for strategic reasons. One or two others of the Russians had a smattering of English.

The *Pole Star* dodged in and out of ice floes and drifting packs which had been loosened by the unusual warmth. The way ahead was unknown and uncharted, and it was barely possible that the heavier ice had gone south and west with the current.

Gripped with the desire for research and discovery, Stirling made many notes in Marr's old log book. He held the crow's-nest until the sun rimmed the western waste of waters and ice; then descended to the deck as an open lane appeared before the course of the ship.

With his hand in his pocket he moved among the silent revolutionists, and they made way for him as he stepped across the waist of the ship and climbed the quarter-deck steps. Their attitude was one of respect. Had he not driven the *Pole Star* that day through a wilderness of drift ice which none of them believed passable? His hearty "Steady, port; hard aport—now starboard!" was a revelation in piloting.

The coffee he drank as Helen Marr appeared from the companion way cleared his brain. He tapped the log book and swept his hand over the sea to the north.

"All new!" he said, proudly. "We're about the first ship to make this passage. McClintock on a sledge was up here."

Helen Marr brushed the hair from her forehead and turned with the silver coffeepot in her hand. She pointed over the taper jib boom of the *Pole Star*. "I remember," she said, "a painting in an

old book, of Lady Franklin and Sir John Franklin sitting together in an old London room. The painting was called 'The Northwest Passage.'"

"He died down there," said Stirling, pointing toward the magnetic north. "See the glint of ice? The sun won't sink to-day, it will rim the world to the west and slowly rise."

The girl watched Stirling and stepped closer to his side. "Do you think we can get through to open sea?" she asked, turning her face up to his.

He shook his head. "I don't know," he answered. "We'll try! We're heading for Barrow Strait and Lancaster Sound. Both may be jammed with ice. If they are——"

Stirling's pause was suggestive. The girl shuddered and drew a coat about her shoulders, then set the coffeepot down on the deck and glided to the taffrail. A nip had come into the air, and it was no longer day or night. The sea birds rested upon the floes without motion; the seals and walrus watched the fast-gliding ship, then slipped into the water, and were gone. Desolation and death ruled the world above seventy-three.

Stirling waited until the girl came back. She picked up the coffeepot, and her eyes were filled with longing as she said:

"Go back and do what you can. There seems to be ice everywhere."

Stirling squared his shoulders and stepped briskly to the wheelsman. He bent there and consulted the binnacle, reached and took the chart which the leader held out to him. Its details were vague enough. Dots showed where land *might* be, and the soundings were in spots where explorers had lowered a lead line through the frozen surface.

"A bad place to be," Stirling said to the leader. "I think we are in for it from now on."

The leader thrust out his hands, and at that moment the ship struck a sunken ledge of ice. The bow sheered, and cries came from forward.

"Steady!" Stirling shouted into the wheelsman's ear. "Hold her steady, you, until I see!"

He leaped the planks and sprang down to the waist. He was up the weather shrouds and into the crow's-nest with the agility of a young boy, and his eyes swept the way ahead. The stretch of ice seemed interminable, since the long spit of sand which marked a portion of Prince of Wales Land had caused the floes to ground, and there seemed no way to the eastward. Stirling turned and stared aft over the stern of the ship. The way by which they had come was now blocked by floes.

"Nipped!" he said between strong white teeth. "We're nipped!"

With the binoculars he swept the entire ice-bound horizon. The sun was rising through the western mist, and appeared a ball of cold fire. The aurora played across the Northern heavens and leaped to the zenith. Through it shone the light points of the high swinging dipper and the overhead lodestar.

Stirling braced himself, pressed the glasses to his eyes for a second glance, then set them down. He leaned over the edge of the crow's-nest and called to the leader, who was at the wheel:

"Give her full speed and starboard the helm!"

The ship gained and churned forward. The jib boom swung off toward a lower shelf of ice, and the crash that followed as the stout sheathing cut through the floes drove the Russians to their knees. The foremast whipped like a willow rod. The girl cried a warning.

"Back her!" shouted Stirling. "Reverse, and try again!"

The manœuvre was repeated. The ice gave way; the *Pole Star* lunged on and cleared to an open lane. Beyond this lane was still another icy barrier.

Stirling attacked this with fury. He felt the grip of winter in the air, and tiny patches of new ice were forming despite the rising sun. The sea, once frozen, would lock them in the North for many winters. The one way out was to crush the floes ahead.

The ship grounded on a hidden sand bar which jutted from the nearest land to starboard. Stirling gave the order which cleared it, but only after an anxious half hour of backing and plunging forward. He mopped his brow. The ice had drifted around the point and was bearing down on the ship. This time there seemed no escape. Reluctantly he gave the signal to cease the attempt, and climbed from the crow's-nest down the rigging. They were ice-bound in Barrow Strait.

The ship swung her jib boom toward the land and began drifting ashore. Stirling paused at the rail long enough to order the anchor dropped, then went aft as the Russians cut the deck lashings and began lifting the anchor.

The rattle of the rusty chain through the hawser woke him to the terror of the situation. Steam plumed from aft the funnel, but the screw was still. The engine-room crowd had emerged from the companion and were staring at the wilderness of ice and snow. The sea water overside and around the *Pole Star* was scummed with a film of mush ice.

The leader offered Stirling the chart when he reached the quarter-deck, and as he took it, he removed his mittens, and breathed upon his fingers. They tingled as he tracked the course of the ship from the mouth of the Mackenzie, and studied all that the chart had to tell him of the strait ahead.

The position of the *Pole Star* was desperate. The formation of heavy ice would press her ashore, and a shift of current or advancing floes was sure to wreck the ship.

Stirling raised his eyes and rolled up the chart, then passed it back to the leader with a shrug of his broad shoulders. The Ice Pilot braced his legs against a step, and his eyes swept along the deck. The revolutionists had gathered in the waist, and some were pointing to the land which lay to starboard, where green patches of moss showed upon the lowland, but the hills were crusted with perpetual snow. The weather side of the ridge showed deep gullies filled with black ice from which streams of water had issued, and then frozen. There was no sign of life, save an Arctic bird which wheeled in the sky and started toward the southward.

Helen Marr glided across the deck and came to Stirling's side, glancing up at him with wonder breaking through the beauty of her eyes. She had donned a sealskin cap and long coat, and her red lips and crimson cheeks struck him with the force of an accusation. He lowered his glance and stared at the deck.

"Can't we go on?" she asked, a tremor in her voice.

"Not now, Miss Helen. Perhaps the ice barrier will open by night, the current is still in our favour, but it's the wind that counts. See, it is toward shore. That brings the ice."

The girl studied the drifting floes which were gathering about the whaler, like chicks about a mother hen. Beyond these floes came others, crashing and tumbling, driven by the northeast wind.

She turned toward the land, and her hand went up to shield her eyes from the glint of sun on ice. "What country is that?" she asked.

"That's Russel Island off Prince of Wales Land. If we could get around that point we might go on through Barrow Strait."

The girl bit her lip, wheeled suddenly, and stared down at the waist of the ship. The revolutionists had grown excited over their argument which was as to whether they should leave the ship before it was crushed by the gathering floes. They pointed toward the land and the sky beyond, where the haze marked still other land. Green spots showed close to shore—Arctic moss and tundra.

Stirling touched the girl on the shoulder. "I see them," he said. "They may decide to abandon the ship. Let's go below and boil some coffee. I'm going to wait until the wind shifts before I decide. They may want me to lead a landing party, but I'll stick to the ship."

"And me?"

"Yes; and you—to the last day of my life!"

CHAPTER XXXIII—A GRIM WARNING

The statement was made so fervently that Helen Marr blushed and did not answer as she followed the towering form of the Ice Pilot across the quarter-deck and down into the cabin, which was warm from the steam pipes which led from the boilers. The coffeepot was filled and placed over an alcohol stove, and she added some biscuits and marmalade to the meal.

Stirling had removed his cap, showing a slight sprinkle of gray in his hair, but his eyes spoke of youth and were strong with resolve. She raised her glance and smiled as she offered the coffee.

It came to her with force that he was no longer the aged, shaggy bear who had crawled up the trapdoor in the deck of the cabin. Her influence had been for good, and he reminded her of a faithful Viking who would shed his last drop of blood for her protection. The revolutionists were potentially dangerous, but she sensed with the intuition of woman that they feared Stirling.

He rose from the table and stood with his head close to the deck beams. "I'll go up now," he said, "and watch the ice. Your coffee was a fine bracer."

She, too, rose and followed him to the step leading to the deck companion. "Do you think the Russians will desert the ship?" she asked.

"They go to their death if they do. The land is impassable. It is five hundred miles to the nearest Hudson Bay post. Franklin and others could not cross that barren land. Nor can the revolutionists."

"But they are Russians and used to the cold."

Stirling shook his head and replaced his cap. "The ship is the only way out," he said, sincerely. "We must stick by it!"

He was halfway up the steps when she called to him. He turned and glanced down, his fingers on the combing of the hatch. His eyes widened as she lifted her face to his and pouted slightly.

"There's one thing we've forgotten," she said.

"What is that?"

"About the man from San Francisco, the one you locked in the cabin. Don't you think you should let him loose?"

Stirling caught the note of sympathy in her tones, but he shook his head.

"He will behave," she added, quickly. "I'm sure that he will. He is afraid of you."

Her eyes were wide and very blue.

"Please let him go," she asked. "I'm sure of him."

The Ice Pilot turned and strode across the cabin, brushed aside the curtain, and passed into the alleyway. Voices sounded as Helen Marr waited, then Slim appeared with one hand grasping the wrist of the other.

He leered through the half light of the cabin, and glanced up at the deck opening. "It's a fine way to——" he began, but Stirling silenced him with a glance.

"Get on deck!" the Ice Pilot commanded. "Get up and forward! The Russians won't kill you, they're too busy deciding whether to abandon the ship or not. You'll find food in the galley. Go now!"

Slim paused at the top of the steps and glared down, then ducked his unshaven face as Stirling moved toward the foot of the stairs and started upward. There was that in Stirling's face which brooked no excuses; his jaw was set with a fighting bulge at the point.

The deck was deserted, the wheel swung idle, and the *Pole Star* rose and fell with the ground swell which lifted the ice floes and packed them upon the shelving beach.

Stirling crossed the planks, after shutting the cabin companion hatch, and stood by the canvas rail, studying the excited knot of revolutionists in the waist below him. The leader had mounted a hatch and was speaking rapidly, pointing now and then to the menace of the ice gathering to the north and west.

The land over the starboard rail held a certain lure to ignorant minds, the green moss and lichens which showed being apparently a promise of greener things to the southward. But Stirling knew that this inference could not be made. The way to the American continent was ice strewn and bare of animals; a trail of death and starvation.

The Russians moved in a flock to the rail and studied the ice about the ship—already firm enough to support a man's weight. The low swinging sun had not warmed the air enough to prevent the sea from freezing, and floes and drift ice were being cemented in the laboratory of nature. The ship alone was free, but encompassed by a ring of spongy ice and snow.

The sky overhead was pale; light flurries of ice particles dropped down to the deck, while the Northern aurora played and shot streamers up to the zenith. The sun plunged into a heavy haze which seemed to rim the entire horizon, and the temperature fell. The barometer was steady at twenty-nine, point six. Stirling played for a shift of wind which alone would free the ship from the coming deadlock.

He waited, and watched the revolutionists. The dock rat emerged from the galley door and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, stared at the Russians and then toward the quarter-deck. He made no attempt to come aft, and the evil that was stamped in his face held Stirling rigid.

The leader shouted something in Russian, and a hoarse cheer broke from many throats. A decision had been reached in regard to abandoning the *Pole Star*. Russians to the number of a score sprang forward, ripped the battings from the fore hatch, and disappeared into the hold. Others ransacked the galley for food and clothes.

A rude sled was devised from part of a whaleboat and rope-yarn splicings. Upon this the leader climbed and pointed dramatically toward the low-lying land, slapped the chart with the back of his hand, and traced out an imaginary course. Stirling leaned far forward and watched him, amusement, mingled with pity sweeping over his strong face. He called, and then repeated the call. The leader lowered his chart and turned.

"You're going to your doom!" declared Stirling. "Abandon this ship and you are lost. There is no way to civilization by the land route!" He pointed a mittened finger toward the island and the magnetic north.

The leader flushed and struck the chart with a sharp blow, sprang from the sled, and hurried aft. Stirling met him with a cold smile. "I told you," he said, "that there is no way. No way! Do you understand that?"

"There is a——"

Stirling thrust the leader from the quarter-deck, then turned and strode to the companion. Pausing at the hatch, he glanced aloft. Ice had appeared upon the cap of the mizzenmast, the rigging was coated with frost, and the wind, from the north and east, held steadily. Its velocity was not more than eight miles an hour, and it showed signs of changing some time during the short Arctic night.

Stirling went below after sliding open the cabin hatch. Helen Marr stood by a landward porthole, and she turned and smiled at Stirling, but the smile died as she saw the sombre light in his eyes. "What happened?" she asked.

"They're going to abandon the ship. It means their death."

"Can't you stop them?" The girl had begun to believe that Stirling was strong enough to accomplish anything.

"It would be no use trying," he said, removing his cap and fingering it with fingers which tingled. "Their minds are made up. The leader thinks he can reach a Hudson Bay post. He does not know what I know——"

Stirling's voice trailed off into an expressive pause, as he thought of the grim tales he had heard of Banks Land and the Gulf of Boothia. Many trappers and explorers had laid their bones out on the Arctic wilds. The land was barren, extending to the white ramparts of the Mackenzie River on the south and west, and to the Hudson Bay on the east and north. It was without vegetation or animal life for nine months of the year, and the water courses were frozen over to the same dead level as the rest of the world. Only the white fox and the skulking wolf were to be seen, and these two animals were far too wary to be shot.

"They're lost if they leave the ship," said Stirling, waking from his thoughts. "We'll stay here and winter, if necessary. The ice may crush the *Pole Star*, but we can get enough provisions and fuel ashore to last out. It might be possible to work to the west next summer in a whaleboat. It all depends on the season. I never saw one so open as this one was, but there may never be another like it, Miss Marr."

The girl turned toward the porthole, and the cold breeze which cut through the opening brought colour to her cheeks and fanned her hair.

"Is there no chance of getting through to the open sea this summer?" she asked, shivering slightly and drawing her deerskin jacket about her slight waist.

"Yes, by Heaven; there is a chance!" Stirling's voice rose and filled the cabin. "There's a fighting chance, Miss Marr!"

She turned and stared at him, and her lips formed the question. He laid his cap on the table and opened his pea-jacket, breathing with giant gulps of suppressed emotion. Suddenly the air had

grown warm to him. "I can get through," he said, "if within a few hours the wind shifts to the south and west. That will clear Barrow Strait of ice. Once out of the Strait, the way is open to Baffin Bay through the Lancaster Sound."

Helen Marr clapped her hands, then wheeled with swishing skirts and stared out through the porthole. "The wind," she said, "is dying. Does that indicate anything?"

"Everything!"

"Then the Russians will stay?"

"No; they are going. I want a few to remain with us. That dock rat will, he's too lazy to try for the American continent. Perhaps there are others who will listen to reason, but the time is short. Maybe through the leader I can get the case stated to them, and ask for volunteers who are willing to wait for the wind to shift."

Helen Marr glided to the piano and lifted a sealskin coat from its stool. She thrust her arms into the sleeves of this as Stirling stepped forward with wonder written across his features.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"Going to see all of them and talk to them. I'm going to make myself understood in some way. Don't you see, Mr. Stirling, the matter is serious? If they go, there will be nobody but you and me to work the ship when the wind shifts. We couldn't do it alone."

"Well, it's worth trying," said Stirling. "I'll stand on the quarter-deck at the weather steps, and you go down to them. Try Slim first. The leader won't stay, but some of the younger Russians might."

The girl pressed a cap upon her head, gathered her hair into a knot, and ran up the stairs which led to the deck. Stirling picked up a rifle before he followed her. They stood in the frosty air and glanced forward. The Russians had lowered the sled and provisions to an ice floe which had grounded alongside the ship. More ice extended from the floe to the shore, and three of the revolutionists had already made the passage. They stood on the beach waving their arms.

The girl went down the quarter-deck steps and glided forward over the main hatch. She touched Slim on the arm, and the dock rat followed her forward to where the revolutionists were breaking out stores from the hold.

Stirling watched and waited. The Russians took time to listen to the girl's request, but most of them stared at each other dumbly. She pointed to the telltale on the mizzenmast, her arm swinging in a graceful circle and indicating that the wind would change. She finished her argument by springing to the weather rail and showing where the ice had cleared from the ship's side.

The magic of her voice and soft presence had its influence upon the Russians, and they gathered and surged, and separated into groups. Seven, after a shrewd glance toward the barren shore, moved with Slim to the galley where the leader had stationed himself. These seven raised their arms and turned toward Stirling.

"Come up!" shouted the Ice Pilot, gesturing to help make clear the meaning of the words.

Fear had gripped the hearts of every Russian aboard the *Pole Star*; the unknown sea and the frost which nipped to the bone had driven a panic within their breasts. The leader had stated that it

was possible to reach a Hudson Bay fort before the setting in of winter, and had added that the sea would soon be frozen and the ship crushed.

They believed this to be the case, and the seven which Helen Marr had persuaded to remain were in danger from their fellows. Mutiny might spread. The leader quickly shouted an order, and the boxes and cans were hurled overboard to the ice floe, the Russians following in a long line. They stood and glanced upward, their mouths agape, their whiskered faces white with hoarfrost.

"Good-bye!" shouted Stirling, waving the rifle. "Good-bye to you all!"

The leader snarled an answer and set about getting the load onto the sled where there was scant room for one half of the boxes and cans thrown overside. The remainder was left as the troop started across the floes and straggled to the beach. Here they turned and watched the ship as if loath to give it up.

The girl climbed swiftly to the quarter-deck to Stirling's side.

"Seven stayed," she said, breathlessly. "Seven, and the man from San Francisco. Didn't I do well?"

Stirling smiled down upon her and touched his cap. "Yes, little captain," he said, gallantly. "You did fine! Tell Slim and four of the squad—I guess you can make the Russians understand—to jump below and get steam on in the boilers. Tell the men to bank the fires when they get well started."

The girl touched her forehead with a regulation salute as she turned and smiled upward from the waist of the ship, then advanced upon the dock rat and the Russians by the galley door. The Russians understood her gestures if not her words, and Slim frowned and scratched his matted head, glancing from Russian to Russian. They had accepted him as their leader without question, but their sheeplike eyes strayed aft and fastened upon the grim figure of Stirling.

Four followed the sailor to the engine-room companion and went down the iron ladder. Soon sounds of fires being freshened by new coal came through the ventilators, and the ship surged and shook as if freeing itself.

Stirling motioned for the three Russians who remained by the galley, and they followed the girl to the waist of the ship. He leaned over the quarter-deck canvas and stared at them.

The girl climbed the steps and stood by his side. He shielded her with his body as they waited while the sun glided within the horizon haze. A frosty nip came with its disappearance, and the lines about Stirling's lips softened slightly. He turned from the girl and strode to the rail on the landward side of the ship, where she joined him, and they watched the Russians streaming in a long line over the snow-mantled island. The leader turned on the brow of an icy hill and waved farewell; then he was gone.

The wind died to a faint breeze which varied during the hours of semi-darkness while Stirling and the girl stood the watch. Ice creaked and splintered to the north and east; the aurora flamed and crimsoned the heavens, with cold light points dying beneath its glow. The moon rose with a double ring, revealing its position in the haze, and the far-off North pack groaned and whispered its grim warning of danger.

CHAPTER XXXIV—THROUGH THE DRIVING SNOW

Soon Stirling felt the girl's body close beside him, but she had said no word for hours. The glory of the Arctic night had held her spellbound; the beauty of the North enthralled her. She was in tune with the great wilderness of ice and snow.

Suddenly a soft gust of vapour-laden air swung over the island and pressed the ship toward the true north. This gust was repeated. The *Pole Star* tugged at her anchor chain, the floes parted to leeward, and a lane of open water showed. This led through the deeper part of Barrow Strait; it was the road to open sea and Baffin Bay.

A Russian forward sang out a warning, leaning over the forepeak rail and pointing toward the anchor chain.

"The wind has veered!" Stirling said, simply.

"From the south?" she asked.

"No; to the south and west, Miss Marr. We will have open water soon. See!"

Helen Marr moved slowly to the rail and stared with brimming eyes toward the white sheen of Russel Island, then turned impulsively. "Can't we save the Russians?" she asked.

"No," he answered. "They have gone, perhaps to their doom. At least there is nothing that we can do for them. For ourselves, we have chosen the right road. It leads into the open sea!"

It was midnight by the ship's clock in the cabin when Stirling climbed up the companion steps, glanced down at Helen Marr with an assuring nod, then strode out upon the deck and swung four-square to the task ahead of him.

The sun rimmed the world toward the true west, and through the opal haze, its glow brought out the details of the drifting ice which was being driven through Barrow Strait by the south wind.

Stirling made a note of this drift, and then moved toward the rail on the lee side of the ship. The lane of open water, which showed black against the floes and new ice, led toward the east and Melville Sound.

He measured the drift of a passing ice island, sniffed the air, raised his hand, then turned slowly and glided toward the wheel. Leaning over the canvas barricade he called down to the waist of the ship, and a form stirred in the galley's shadow. It was Slim.

"Get below!" snapped Stirling. "Get steam on the forward winch. We're going through the ice!"

This terse order rolled along the ship's deck, and brought the remaining Russians from the warmth of the forecastle. Slim shrugged his shoulders and slouched for the engine-room companion.

Steam soon plumed aft the funnel, when the banked fires were blown into glowing coals. The winch wheezed and groaned as a Russian unskilfully turned on the two-way cock. Stirling sprang to

the lee steps and dropped to the waist of the ship, going along the rail like a muffled bear in search of prey.

"Unshackle it!" he shouted into the Russian's ear. "The winch is too slow. Drive that pin from the anchor chain!"

Stirling pointed to where the chain passed through a hawse hole flush with the deck, and the Russian understood. He lifted a belaying pin from the rail and drove out the bolt. The anchor chain dropped overside as Stirling sprang back, glanced forward, then hurried toward the quarter-deck.

Swinging the wheel he reached and jerked the engine-room indicator for quarter speed. The engines started, the screw thrashed the new ice astern, and the *Pole Star* sheered from the island, driving forward toward the lane of dark water.

The sheathed prow cut sharply as Slim opened wide the main valve and shouted for more steam. The ship listed, righted, and held a course between rail-high floes until Stirling steadied the helm. The way was open down the strait.

Helen Marr came through the cabin companion and stood by the nearest deck light to Stirling, fearing to bother him or to call his name. Her face was flushed with the agony of the moment, as the grinding floes under the ship's counter threatened to rip the planks from the ribs. The swing of Stirling's body as he wrestled with the wheel was a compelling sight, and held her eyes as she waited. She breathed deeply of the Arctic air, and called to Stirling, but he did not hear her. His straining muscles stood out from his neck, and his shoulders lunged and contracted.

The ship plunged on, the funnel belching forth smoke and cinders, which starred the night like fireflies, and then fell hissing into the sea astern. The land on the starboard beam rose to a barrier below which the ice floes curled and eddied.

Stirling smashed through, with his unmittened hands gripping the spokes of the wheel. Ahead showed the silvery glint of the moon. Astern, the sun mellowed the Arctic world. About was death and cold, gripping horror.

It was the passage that Franklin in the *Erebus* and *Terror* had sought in vain, and it was open from sea to sea. Stirling realized this fact as he reached for the engine-room telegraph and set it for full speed. There was a chance to drive through before the wind shifted from the south, but he was attempting a thing that the world called impossible.

Four bells came with the *Pole Star* swirled in a white curtain of driving snow which had been born of the south wind. The moon showed as a silver disk directly over the frosted jib boom, and the sun had been blotted from the view.

Helen Marr moved timidly toward the straining form of the Ice Pilot. He felt her presence but did not swerve.

She whispered into his muffled ear: "Carry on!"

Stirling nodded and swung the spokes a quarter turn. They came back against the palm of his hand, and he peered through the snow. The moon had a double ring, and it awoke a verse from the girl who stood wrapped in her furs:

"That orbéd maiden, with white fire laden,

Whom mortals call the moon,
Glides glimmering o'er my fleece-lined floor,
By midnight breezes strewn."

Stirling turned his head slightly and smiled with the snow dripping from his lips. The girl glanced ahead and shuddered as a drifting cloud obscured the moon. The way was mantled with falling ice particles, and the ship's rigging showed up ghostlike. The muffled Russians on the forepeak moved about in the gloom like walruses that had climbed aboard.

The *Pole Star* hurtled on. Stirling sensed the true direction with the skill of a master pilot and dodged looming ice floes by fathoms. He swung the ship toward the magnetic west and reached for the high land which towered there, then sheered from this into the channel made by the inky waters. The *Pole Star* glided eastward along the meridian, and thrust her sharp stem through a lane of seething waves which marked the open reaches of Lancaster Sound.

The way to the south—north by the magnetic compass—was also open. Stirling sensed that it would be possible to drive through the Gulf of Boothia, and this route might take him to Hudson Bay and Hudson Strait. He chose the easterly passage and set his feet wide apart as the floes dashed down upon the staunch ship.

Helen Marr leaned over the wheel and watched the binnacle. The compass whirled and was never still. They were over the true magnetic pole, and north was south; only the sense of direction told Stirling the course to steer, but he held on grimly, with his jaw set to a block. The Russians on the forepeak shouted warnings, waves came over the jib boom and the forecastle, and the churning vortex of cross currents and storm dashed the ship like a chip in a whirlpool, while the snow fell in circling clouds.

The passage led to the lee of North Somerset Island, and a towering headland of basalt protected the ship from the fury of the south wind. A calm spot showed ahead, through which moonbeams shone.

Stirling released one hand from the wheel and pointed. "See," he said. "See, that is Somerset! We're heading for North Devon Island and Lancaster Sound. We are already in the Strait. I never knew it was open!"

Open it was, as the girl saw. The moon revealed the serrated outlines of the land to the southward, where the sharp teeth of the coast range, which buttressed the shore, stood out bare of ice or snow. It seemed a huge saw cutting across the top of the world.

Stirling breathed deeply and studied the compass, then sheered to the true north, crashed through a ledge of locked ice, and won the way to an open lane which led toward the east and Baffin Bay.

The girl turned as a light struck across the churning waters, and cried out as she saw the orange disk of the sun rising in the south. It had broken through the snow flurry. It revealed the land and Sound, which were coated in places with the recent snow, and brought out the flying clouds as they scudded before the south wind.

She reached and clasped Stirling's arm. "The sun!" she exclaimed. "See, our beacon! We shall win through to open sea!"

Stirling brought the wheel up and steadied it, smiling down into the girl's glowing face. She watched him as he braced his legs and threw back his head, then he turned away from her with a regretful jerk and leaned down over the binnacle. He straightened up again as she quoted:

"The sanguine sunrise with his meteor eyes
And his burning plumes outspread,
Leaps on the back of my sailing rack
When the morning star shines dead."

"The morning star," Stirling said. "It's up there!" He pointed toward the zenith, and Helen Marr followed the direction of his steady arm, widening her eyes in amazement as she noted the lodestar almost overhead. She waited for a cloud to pass and traced out the light points of the Great Dipper. She saw then that what she had taken for overhead was fourteen or fifteen degrees from the true vertical line.

"We're in about seventy-six degrees," she said, with certainty. "Almost to the Pole!"

Stirling unclasped one hand from the spokes of the wheel and touched the frosted glass over the binnacle compass. "Run your eyes along the south line and you'll be looking toward the Pole. It's a long way down there, Miss Marr. We're trying to work in the other direction."

The ship had covered the worst of the passage and the parting floes showed the road to open sea. Stirling had made no mark of time, but he realized dimly that Slim and the others who had gone below were getting the utmost out of the boilers. The screw thrashed at its best speed, and the smudge of smoke which drifted toward the north blotted out the view of North Devon Island along which the course had led them.

Stirling breathed for the first time, sure of himself. He turned and smiled at Helen Marr. "Cape Hay," he said, "is somewhere over there!"

The girl had never heard of Cape Hay, but shielding herself by the ice-coated shrouds of the mizzen rigging, she strained her eyes toward the south and east. Clouds showed beneath the silver reflection of the moon, and a darker line was below the clouds. It rose in one point to a headland.

She came back across the slippery deck and nodded. "I see it," she said into his ear. "It's a long way off, Mr. Stirling."

Stirling smiled and nodded toward the binnacle. "We're on the course," he said. "How about a little coffee, Miss Marr?"

She was gone across the quarter-deck and down the cabin companion in an instant.

Stirling opened two buttons of his pea-jacket and drew forth his great silver watch. It was running, but the hours which had passed were effaced from his memory. He had stood at the wheel for seven tricks, but the distant Cape was thirty miles away through the driving snow. The wind was shifting toward the west and abeam, and he knew that it would be nip and tuck if he were to gain the open waters of Baffin Bay.

CHAPTER XXXV—A MATTER OF MINUTES

The floes through which Stirling guided the ship became larger and higher. Old "grandpas" drifted by—their sides honeycombed by the action of the water. These floes had broken from the true pack and had come south through Smith Sound. Icebergs were to be expected, since the coast of Greenland was filled with glaciers. Stirling peered forward and searched the sea, momentarily expecting to glimpse a white barrier beyond which he could not go, but none showed as the watch lengthened.

The girl appeared with a steaming can of black coffee, and also biscuits and bread. Stirling set the can on the top of the brass binnacle hood and munched a biscuit, eying Helen Marr with concern. Dark circles showed upon her face, her lips had lost some of their blood, and tiny puckers ran from the corners of her mouth.

He moved the wheel and said to her, "Please get some sleep. You look tired, Miss Marr. I'll hold on!"

She laughed, drawing close her deerskin jacket, and reaching for the spokes. "Let me steer?" she asked. "It isn't so bad now. I can hold the course."

"Keep her steady, then!" said Stirling with a smile, releasing the spokes and staring at the compass. "Steady, she is, while I go forward. There's a lane of open water ahead somewhere. We must find it."

She nodded, stared at the binnacle, and the spokes moved slowly and in the right direction as Stirling crossed the deck and descended to the waist of the ship. He paused a moment at the galley house and glanced in. Two Russians stood by the stove, cooking a mess for the engine-room crew.

Stirling nodded and worked his way forward over the icy deck. He climbed up the weather shrouds and out and over the cross jack, dropping into the crow's-nest.

Floes were scattered over the waters of Lancaster Sound near where it reached Baffin Bay. The wind had driven a mass of ice up through Prince Regent Inlet, and its reaching fangs threatened to dash the ship ashore on North Devon Island.

Stirling with his binoculars swept the entire horizon. The wind had shifted a point over the hour, and now came from over the high plateau of Baffin Land, as it circled to the magnetic north and the true west. This would close Lancaster Sound so that no ship could drive a passage through.

Reaching forward, Stirling rested his elbows upon the edge of the crow's-nest and strained his eyes toward the opening which showed in the direction of Cape Hay and Baffin Bay. It was partly choked with ice, and a low berg loomed in the haze.

Turning, Stirling called down to Helen Marr, and the order he gave was to put the wheel up and then steady it. The new course was more toward the true south than the east, and was calculated

to head off the reaching arm of ice which threatened to close Lancaster Sound.

After a last glance over the wild waste of waters and snow-mantled lands, Stirling swung out of the crow's-nest and started toward the deck. Icicles and frozen patches of snow fell from the shrouds as the ship swerved and steadied on the given course. Stirling saw that the girl had avoided a floe by a skillful lift of the wheel.

This fact cheered him. He had a companion who was doing her best, a true friend to a sailorman who had broken through to a desperate sea. He went down the remainder of the shrouds and over the deck with his head lowered in thought. The chance to save the ship was slight, and it would call for all his cunning in ice work. The fangs were being bared for the final nip. Already the floes had thickened ahead.

"I'll take the wheel," he said as he stepped to her side. "You go below for an hour. Then I shall call you."

"Is there any danger?"

"We'll either be nipped within two hours, or we will gain the Northeast Passage. Baffin Bay lies ahead!"

"Then I'll stay on deck!" declared the girl. "I'll stay right by your side!"

Stirling took the wheel and set the course a point more toward the south. He was between the alternative of striking directly toward the swinging arm of ice which was closing the sound like a door, or seeking a narrow passage between the giant field and the forbidding coast near Cape Hay. He chose the latter.

The hour that followed drove the spike of fear into the Russians' hearts. The engine-room crew, led by Slim, left the fires in order to peer through the companion, and were forced back by the menace in Stirling's voice.

The ship met the giant floes, backed, reeled, and drove on, threading through the new ice and gaining open patches of water which closed behind. Bergs drifted down upon them, but Stirling avoided the shelving spires and worked toward the south and east.

Snow flurries blotted out all view; the wind swung from the true west to the north, and held in its grip the icy cold of winter. It struck through the girl's furs and chilled her body, as she walked back and forth along the quarter-deck watching Stirling, who seemed possessed with a Viking's rage at the elements gathered about. His one aim was to guide the ship between the Cape and the ice field. Open water still showed ahead of this narrow passage.

The *Pole Star* swirled in the current and ran down the wind which was now abeam. A leaden pall crept over the surface of the watery world, and the ice floes ground against the skin of the ship and obstructed the way. Stirling shaded his eyes from the snow and peered forward. The ice had gathered upon the spokes of the wheel, and a sleet drove from aft to forward.

Gripped by the majesty of their danger, the girl watched Stirling and prayed for deliverance. She knew that the reaching arm had overtaken the driving ship. It was a matter of minutes now whether they would gain the waters of Baffin Bay or be crushed between the floes and the rocky headland. A single screw's turn might decide the matter.

The ship staggered and swerved; a crash sounded as the sharp stem mounted a floe. The world seemed to the girl to spin, as Stirling reached downward, grasped the spokes, and lifted the wheel so that the staggering ship could turn from the land. He sheered in the moment of time, and the spars grated along the overhang of basalt.

Suddenly Stirling stiffened and rapidly twirled the wheel, leaned far over the spokes, and watched the waters ahead of the *Pole Star*. A rift showed through the floes, and toward this he steered. The last of the reaching ice sprang landward, leaped the distance, and drove its teeth toward the ship. It missed by a scant cable's length, and the crash and reverberation as this ice was dashed upon the shore woke Helen Marr from her prayers. She staggered to her feet, and stood swaying on the slippery deck. Stirling had swung and was staring at her, his strong face covered with a broad smile.

He turned the spokes by instinct as he continued to look at her. "Look," he said, pointing a steady finger aft. "Look, Miss Marr!"

She wheeled and looked over the taffrail of the *Pole Star*. Ice, piled upon ice, blocked the passage through which they had come. The roar of the great North pack was like a baffled horde held at bay. The ship plunged on and out into open water.

"Where are we?" she asked, pressing a hand to her forehead. "Where are we, Mr. Stirling?"

The Ice Pilot smiled, swung, steadied the wheel, and motioned over the wild world of tossing waves. "That's Baffin Bay!" he said. "We have made the Northeast Passage!"

CHAPTER XXXVI—ACROSS THE CABIN

Helen Marr glided to the canvas rail that overlooked the waist of the *Pole Star*, brushed the hair from her face, and wrung the water from her mittens.

Then she turned to Stirling with a high toss of her chin. "Are you going across?" she asked.

"To Greenland, miss."

"But why not south and—home?"

Stirling moved the wheel a spoke and blocked it with his knee, pointing toward the shores of Baffin Land.

The girl cried aloud as she saw the reason for the Ice Pilot's course. Ice backed by more ice was rushing northward; winter had arrived, and new floes and bergs were forming in the west. There was no route to the southward, and the ship held the only open lane.

"Greenland," she said with hesitancy. "But Greenland is as wild as that coast." She pointed over the *Pole Star's* quarter.

Stirling smiled and removed his knee from the wheel. He changed the course more to the true north, and the ship plunged on as Slim and the Russians realized that they had escaped from the white jaws of an icy death.

"Greenland," said Stirling, "is Heaven compared to Baffin Land. You shall see."

The girl hesitated and glanced at Stirling, who was consulting the binnacle, reaching an arm through the spokes of the wheel and wiping the glass with his bare fingers. A tiny light showed over the compass as the wheel moved with a slow lifting of the starboard rope.

The ship steadied, a halo of smoke and flame crowning the single funnel. Slim, the Frisco dock rat, was redeeming himself, and his voice rolled up through the ventilators as he urged the Russians in the stokehold to renewed efforts.

Stirling partly turned his face and watched the girl, who soon was gone over the quarter-deck with a faint nod backward. The closing companion slide told Stirling that she had been slightly offended by his preoccupied manner, and wondered at this as he stared with unseeing eyes out over the waters of Baffin Bay.

Hour after hour he guided the ship, a lone figure wrapped in thought and retrospection. He knew nothing of women; he felt that Helen Marr was as remote as the stars above him, and he had grown to look upon her as a companion—that was all. He feared to trust his mind to go more deeply into the matter.

The course he had chosen revealed the hand of a super-pilot. The grinding floes to leeward were blown by the wind in such a manner as to leave an open lane between them and the pack

which was rushing to fill the Bay. The last days of the open season had arrived; a week, at the most, would see the water frozen over and cemented into an icy lock which would hold until the next July.

There was a limit to his endurance—strong man as he was. A swerve of the ship—the running off a full point—brought the truth home to him that he had been asleep. He woke and gathered himself together with a shrug of his shoulders, only soon to doze again. The ship went off the course, crashed against a drifting floe, and a Russian called a warning from the forepeak.

Stirling stiffened and twirled the spokes in time to avoid an ice island of an acre's extent. He stared upward, as if in the heavens would be found inspiration, and the haze of sky and snow and whirling sleet allowed the faint light of the sun to penetrate its veil. He calculated the sun's position, and drew out his watch, remembering the drift of the currents in Baffin Bay. It might be necessary to take a lunar or solar observation before he reached the Greenland shore, which was more than a day's steaming to the eastward.

Grimly Stirling blocked the wheel, replaced his watch, rose on tiptoes, and called the Russian from the forepeak. Fortunately, this lookout had some slight knowledge of steering. He climbed the steps on the leeward side and touched his cap.

Stirling pointed at the binnacle. "Keep that course," he said. "Do you understand?"

The Russian grinned and grasped the spokes of the wheel. Stirling stepped back a foot or more and watched the jib boom of the ship as it hung steady above the dark waters, then staggered toward the cabin companion. Down this he went, paused irresolutely in the light which streamed from the deck cluster, then pitched across a divan which was between two closed portholes, and sank into the deepest slumber of his life.

He awoke as if his sleep had been but a moment. Every limb ached. He glanced upward and saw Helen Marr standing over him, her expression intent and compassionate. She opened her lips, but did not speak, and her eyes travelled over Stirling's features, then swung toward the table. A steaming pot of coffee stood there, and beside it were biscuits and potted beef.

Stirling staggered to his feet and felt around with his hands. His coat had been removed while he slept; a pillow lay where his head had been, and the divan was partly covered with a Navaho blanket.

He realized that she had covered him up, and he appreciated, too, her thoughtful attention in keeping warm the coffee.

Stirling stepped to the table and turned. "Thank you," he said.

She smiled with comradeship and came across the cabin. "I've been on deck," said she, pointing toward the cabin companion. "The sun is on the ice, and the Russian is still holding the course you gave him."

Stirling looked at his pocket; he had slept thirteen hours. Soon he began to eat, now and then glancing at the girl by his side. He finished without words and entered Marr's cabin. When he emerged, ten minutes later, his chin was clean shaven and his hair parted.

He crammed some tobacco into a cord-wrapped pipe, found his cap and coat, and turned toward her as he placed one foot on the steps leading to the cabin companion. "Are you coming up?" he asked.

"Do you want me to?"

Stirling smiled. "You're my first mate," he said. "You and I shall finish the passage to Greenland. We should reach Upernivik by midnight."

"Is that a port?" Her voice had taken on new strength as she watched him.

"Yes," he answered. "About the only place we can safely winter. Are you sorry I didn't try for Davis Strait and the North Atlantic?"

"You knew best," she declared, turning away from his level glance. "I shall be on deck in ten minutes," she added, softly.

Stirling thrust his head and shoulders above the cabin companion and studied the scene on the deck. The Russian drowsed at the wheel, with his body leaning over the spokes; the funnel was still mantled with a rolling cloud of smoke; two of the revolutionists stood forward by the break of the forecastle peak, keeping watch.

Crossing the icy planks, Stirling touched the Russian on the shoulder and motioned for him to go forward and get some sleep. Stirling's smile was so contagious that the Russian thrust out his hand impulsively, and Stirling grasped it with fervour.

He looked at the binnacle and then swept the sea, his eyes widening in calculation. The lane of open water stretched east and west across Baffin Bay. South, by the glint on the horizon haze, ice was gathered for the closing in of winter. Northward, bergs and floes showed, marshalled in squadrons and companies like soldiers preparing for a charge. The sky, seen through the falling snow, was leaden.

With some slight trepidation, Stirling awaited the coming of Helen Marr. She had acted strangely of late. They were to be thrown together during the ten months of winter at Upernivik; there would be no possible escape to a more civilized community.

Slim, the Frisco dock rat, appeared at the railing of the engine-room companion. He emerged to the deck and walked aft, his face grimy. Up the quarter-deck steps he came—on the leeward side, out of deference to Stirling.

Slim glanced forward, and swung his head as he reached the wheel. "Thought I'd sort of apologize," he said, thrusting out his hand. "I'm with you all the way now for what you did."

Stirling released his hand from the spokes and clasped the dock rat's fingers. "Keep up steam the way you have and I've no kick coming," said the Ice Pilot. "We should reach winter quarters by midnight."

Slim went forward and disappeared down the engine-room companion. The Russians on the forecastle head, who had seen the attitude of the two men, raised their arms and waved, then turned to faithful duty as lookouts. Peace had settled on the former poacher.

Stirling studied the back of one of these Russians as he waited for Helen Marr to appear. Ivan, he was called. It was Ivan, of the Russians from the province of the Don Cossacks, who had stood the long trick while Stirling slept. The Ice Pilot made a note of this.

CHAPTER XXXVII—THE CALLING BEACON

The companion slide opened suddenly and Helen Marr emerged from the cabin. She stood in furs and close-drawn cap as Stirling swung the wheel and looked at her. She surveyed the wild waste of dark waters with a thoughtful pucker on her brow before she came to his side. Then her eyes lifted to the faint light which streamed from the leaden vault of heaven. The sun was rimming the horizon behind the veil of mist.

For hours the two stood side by side, Stirling keeping the course with easy movements. The ship threaded in and out of small ice floes which were gathering by mutual attraction.

There was the smell of land in the air. The seals sported and dived before the dark form of the onrushing ship, and walrus and killer whales appeared within the lane of water. Birds wheeled and circled the frosted spars that moved through the mist.

Stirling sensed that they were nearing the shores of Greenland. He rose on tiptoe and peered ahead, where a darker mass, broken here and there by ice fields, came out of the haze. It was indented by fiords and inlets.

He turned to the girl. "No chance to take an observation," he said. "We're going to run a bit down the coast. I think I can make the headland at Upernivik. There should be lights there."

She nodded her head and fastened upon him the fine glance of a comrade to a comrade. "I'll steer," she suggested, holding out her hands.

Stirling shook his head slowly, leaned away from her, and bent over the binnacle, then changed the course of the *Pole Star* until the dark coast was over the port bow. Holding this course, he waited and strained his eyes for some sign of light.

He heard the beat of waves within the coves, a glacier separated, and the sound of the falling berg thundered far out to sea. The ship rocked and trembled in the swiftly running waves; then it steadied and crept closer to land. They glided like a dream thing in the shadow of a haven. An opal citadel took the place of the leaden vault, as the moon rose in the south and east and bathed the fast-flying clouds with a pale, unreal light. Through these clouds white stars shone and twinkled.

"We're near Upernivik!" said Stirling as midnight approached. "Keep a sharp lookout for lights, Miss Marr."

His voice troubled her, and his use of the "Miss Marr" instead of a more familiar name caused her to creep closer to the wheel.

"What are we going to do?" she asked, vaguely.

"Winter at Upernivik and go out in the spring."

"But won't that be many long months?"

"Nine or ten," said Stirling, rubbing his eyes with the back of his right hand and turning toward her. "There is nothing else to do," he added. "We can save the ship that way. The *Pole Star* belongs to you—now."

A flush swept over her cheeks, and she reached up her mittened hands, brushing her hair back from her ears. "Let the Russian steer," she suggested. "Let him steer and you and I can talk by the rail."

Stirling noted the course, then called forward. Ivan turned and hurried aft, coming over the break of the quarter-deck with his hand on his cap.

"Steady, as she is," said Stirling, releasing the spokes. "Watch for lights ashore. Upernivik—you understand?"

The Russian nodded. Helen Marr and the Ice Pilot moved aft and stood by the taffrail as the ship glided on with its jib boom parallel to the sombre Greenland shore.

The girl turned her face away from Stirling's and looked over the taffrail where the silver phosphorescence of the wake was broken in countless places by the reaching waves. The moon had emerged from the clouds, and it scudded along as if driven by silver sails, its rays illuminating the quarter-deck.

Stirling felt strangely troubled in the presence of the silent girl. He stepped back a foot, then came forward with the roll of the ship, as her hand reached out and rested upon the taffrail.

Through the citadel the *Pole Star* glided under half steam. A faint roar of running waters came from the shore, and there was the echoing of waves on the shelving beaches. The headland toward which the ship steered was rounded, and beyond, like a jewel in a locket, glistened a sapphire light.

"Upernivik!" said Stirling.

The girl nodded her head, turning away from the land and staring at the surface of Baffin Bay. Then her eyes fastened upon Stirling's and in them he read the secret of her silence. He flushed and raised his hand to his smooth-shaven chin, then lowered it and reached forward timidly.

"Look!" she said, suddenly.

Stirling stiffened his arm and turned. He saw the spire of a little church on the beach in the cove, where it showed against the snow of the hillside like a calling beacon.

"Starboard half a point," said Stirling to the wheelsman.

The Russian swung the wheel, and the girl still stared at the glistening spire, parting her lips to whisper:

"A house of worship—a church."

Stirling thrust out his hand and covered her fingers where they rested on the rail of the ship. She allowed them to remain there, and a glad warmth mingled and surged through their bodies.

The ship plowed on within the land ice which crunched under the sharp bow. Stirling glanced upward and saw the white spire against the dark clouds which had been driven across the snowy mountains of Greenland.

Then he clasped the girl's fingers as he drew her to him, and he felt her heated breath when their lips met.