

IN the TENTACLES



A mutiny and a fight against odds; the mate escapes in the night. He comes upon an ice-bound vessel—deserted save for a beautiful young girl temporarily insane from loneliness. What ensues constitutes one of the strangest and most thrilling stories imaginable.

By JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD

CHAPTER I

FOR a full half-minute not a word had fallen from Wainfield's lips—and seven men were waiting for him to speak. Opposite him, leaning half across the table, his huge hands clenched, his eyes still filled with the passion of murder, sat Blake. An hour before, those shapeless monsters of hands had cracked the Captain's neck; and by shifting his gaze a trifle Wainfield could see Van Horn's lifeless body huddled up close to the cabin wall, where Blake had flung it.

There were other silent forms in the cabin, stiffening where they had fallen, for Van Horn and he had put up a good fight to the last. There had been three against eleven—Van Horn, himself, and Gaunt, the loyal mate, who lay across the capstan with his head stove in. Of the eleven who had mutinied under Blake, four lay as dead as Van Horn.

Of the seven who lived, five bore marks of the terrific struggle and the defense of the cabin. Creele, the Swede, still groaned under his breath with the pain of a bullet through his arm. From the end of the table Cole, whose right arm swung a harpoon like a catapult, glared at him from out of one half-open eye. Across Blake's forehead there was a deep cut. It was Wainfield who had struck him as Van Horn's neck had snapped. It was Blake, who had saved

Wainfield's life by pulling Creele from his throat a few seconds later, and flinging up the knife-arm of Otto, the giant black.

It was Blake, more than the others, who was offering Wainfield a chance for life now. He knew this as his eyes traveled slowly from face to face. Eighteen months had changed them from men into beasts—eighteen months of the eternal grind of ice at the top end of the world, and of the gloom and loneliness that drive men mad. Eighteen months ago he had met these men and liked them. He had put strong faith in them. Van Horn had pointed to his crew with pride. "I never shipped a better lot," he had said. "With a little luck we'll bring back a record catch of oil and bone." And now Van Horn lay over there against the wall, his neck broken and a knife in his back. And, after all, it was Van Horn who was to blame.

Something of this thought must have shone in Wainfield's eyes as he faced Blake again. Blake, like Cole, hurled the harpoon because of his tremendous strength. It was his prowess and Cole's that accounted for seventy per cent of the oil and whalebone in the hold. He looked at Wainfield now. He went to speak. Then, suddenly, he turned to the others.

"Go out an' take a turn at the fresh air, mates," he commanded. "I'll finish this business with Wainfield."

of THE NORTH

Mr. Curwood knows what he is writing about—he is an accredited explorer of the Arctic regions for the Canadian government. And he has a unique gift for creating intensely dramatic yet entirely convincing situations. This story shows him at his best.



Author of "God's Country—and the Woman," the "Kazan" stories, etc.

Cole rose obediently and went to the door. Otto, the black cook, followed him. The others obeyed slowly. Last of all went Blake. He closed the battered and broken remnant of the door, and returned to Wainfield.

"I AINT quite as mad as them fools," he said, leaning over the table again. "They'd kill you, Wainfield. That's what they want to do. They're mad—mad as the white foxes that yap at us out of the darkness of the long night. They'd be at each other's throats now if it wasn't for the hope o' women. If the Cap'n hadn't shut down on the idee of having Eskimo women pass the winter with us—mebby this wouldn't have happened." He leaned farther over the table, and his eyes burned fiercely into Wainfield's. "It was his fault, damn 'im!" he cried. "We shipped for one winter, didn't we? An' here we are, froze in for a second, with that eight months of black hell ahead of us again. He said he'd tried to get out, but that the freeze came early. That was a lie. We turned on 'im, and there he is!" He pointed to the crumpled form of Van Horn against the cabin wall. "And you—what you going to do?" he demanded.

"You want me to navigate the ship when the break-up comes, and for that you'll give me life," said Wainfield.

"More than that," agreed Blake eager-

ly. "There's eighty thousand dollars in sperm an' bone under our feet, an' you'll divvy with the rest when we get out. Joe's lungs are froze an' he wont last through the winter. We can get rid of the black, an' that'll leave six, counting you. We'll make your share fifteen thousand if you stick."

"And if I don't?" asked Wainfield. Blake drew himself back with a sullen growl.

"You'll go along with Van Horn," he said. "Ten minutes an' you'll be one of us or die."

Wainfield rose and went to the one window that looked out over the sullen Arctic desolation. He was young. In him burned the desire to live. And yet he felt no oppression—none of the horrors of fear. Eighteen months of the Arctic had changed him, as it had changed the men who were waiting for his promise, or his life. He had lost the clean-cut alertness of the naval school. His shoulders were bent a little. His hair was long and shaggy. There were fine lines about his eyes, and still deeper lines at the corners of his mouth. Only his work, his indefatigable effort after data and scientific fact, had kept him from aging more than he had. And now, as he looked out through the window, an intense desire—an overwhelming longing—possessed him. Behind him was a pack of murderers, and eight months of the sickening gloom that

made men shriek at specters and curse God because there was no sun. Out there, a thousand miles away, was the beginning of trails that led homeward. Just now those trails did not seem so far away. Somewhere there were Eskimo. He knew that Blake and his horde would find them, and barter for their women as ten thousand of their sort had done in the years before them. And he could find them. At least there was the chance. And beyond those first Eskimo were other Eskimo, and still beyond those the homeward trails.

He turned to Blake.

"You know what I'm doing," he said, his head drooping despairingly, while his heart beat with an excitement which the other could not see. "When we get out, you fellows can lose yourselves. But I—the Department will investigate me, and want to know all about it. If I do this to save my life it won't hang me, but it'll put a black record across my name. You know there's a thing they call honor in the service. We're supposed to die for it. But I don't want to die. Probably I'll join you. But I want an hour or two in which to think it over. Send my supper to me here. Let me eat alone. And then—I'll answer you."

His voice was without emotion and without hope. It spoke surrender, and Blake rose from the table, an exultant grin on his red-bearded face.

"Mebby it wouldn't hurt your appetite if we moved the Cap'n," he suggested.

"No, leave Van Horn where he is," said Wainfield.

BLAKE went out. At the door, Wainfield listened to his voice as he explained to the men waiting outside. There was a shuffling of feet toward the cook's galley, and Wainfield sprang to Van Horn, and knelt down beside him. From the dead Captain's pocket he took certain papers, and from his walrus belt a small compass.

"I'm glad we didn't tell 'em of the Eskimo hunters we saw through the glasses this morning, Van Horn," he whispered. "I'm mighty glad of that. If they'll give me an hour's start—"

He stopped to listen at the door again.

He had shared this cabin with the captain, and his own things were at hand. With his papers and a few necessities he filled a small pack-sack, which he concealed under his bunk. The only weapon left him by the mutineers was a pocket knife. Last of all he found a half-pint bottle filled with seal oil.

Blake himself brought in the supper which he had asked for. There were a can of tongue, which Otto had opened, half a dozen ship's biscuit and a hunk of cheese. Blake made no remark. He went out. Sixty seconds later Wainfield had forced open the window. It took him another minute to get into his fur garments and thrust his scant provisions into one of the voluminous pockets of his coat. Then he dropped the pack-sack through the window, and followed it. Five seconds later he slipped like a shadow over the side of the ship. The last sound that came to him was a voice cursing in the cook's galley—Cole's voice. Swiftly he sped away from it into the face of illimitable gloom.

CHAPTER II

WHEN Wainfield looked back and saw the ship fading into an indistinct shadow, he paused to get his bearing. It was to the south and east that he and Van Horn had seen three Eskimo hunters a few hours before, and a string of dogs tugging at a laden sledge. "Keep it quiet," Van Horn had said. "If the men find there are Eskimo near us there'll be no holding them. They'll be off in a bunch for the women." He was glad now that Van Horn had advised silence. If he could overtake the hunters, his chance of escape would become almost absolute certainty. With dogs and men he could reach the Coppermine River to the east, or the Anderson to the west. He dropped behind an ice hummock, struck a match, and looked at his compass. Then he went on.

About him was the gray gloom of the Arctic eve—the twilight that presages for a fortnight or so the unchangeable Long Night. As yet day and night had not become completely submerged into one. There were five hours of the

twenty-four in which the stars faded from the sky. Those five hours, in Wainfield's mind, were still "day." The remaining nineteen were "night." And this was night. Its darkness was not the darkness of a Southern night. It was a whitish, ghostly pallor, in which one could see a fox a hundred yards away.

A little later, when the real night came, the gloom would not be quite so thick and smothering. A billion stars would then light up the frozen world—stars that never blinked or went out during the long months that drove reason from men's brains. Wainfield had studied those stars during the preceding winter. He had made copious notes about them and their effect. He was convinced that it was not the darkness that drove men to babble and made them die of the thing which no man has named. It was the stars, millions upon millions of them, white, unflickering, unchanging during their months of vigil—there always to meet the eyes, like living things whose souls burned in a white fire but whose silence and fixedness drove back reason. They were like the *drip, drip, drip* of a single drop of water on a man's skull. They were in the sky now, pale and lack-luster. Wainfield wished that it had been two weeks later. He could have seen an object the size of a man half a mile ahead of him then. He would not have required matches to see the points of his compass. Five times in the first hour he burned matches. Then he came to the trail.

His nerves shook, and he sat down and laughed when he saw what a small chance had marked the trail of the Eskimo hunters for him. There were no signs of sledge-runners or of feet on the ice. He had passed a dark object no larger than his hand. Then he went back, wondering. It was a chunk of frozen meat! The discovery set him glowing as if he had come into the heat of a warm fire. In that moment the terrors of endless space were broken for him. That trifle of walrus flesh, frozen as solid as the ice about him, had become more precious to him than all the treasures of the earth. It meant *home*.

He began searching for other signs

of the trail—something that he could follow. The circle he made grew wider and wider. At last he came to where the glare ice gave place to a crust that crunched underfoot, and there he found the hunters' trail leading into the south and east. He followed swiftly, paying no attention to the points of the compass. He had become accustomed to the moanings and strange whisperings in the air about him, the snapping strain of the ice-fields, the rumbling roar of great bergs splitting asunder ten miles farther north. But with these things, after a time, there came another sound that made him pause and face about. He knew that it was wind, and when he turned landward he almost ran, head and shoulders bent low over the trail.

Wainfield did not look at his compass again until he had climbed a huge gray mass, and down into a cup-like depression where the snow was soft, and over which the storm began to rage fiercely. He knew that he was on land. Through the little valley the Eskimo had gone, straight southeast. He gave up hope of following their trail farther in the storm, but thanked God he had reached the mainland and knew the direction they had taken. The fact that they had left the open ice for the coast assured him their igloos could not be far away, and he was confident that he could find them during the five-hour day. With his mittened hands he scooped out a shelter in the lee of a snowdrift, crawled into it, and for the first time since leaving the ship, lighted a match to look at his watch. He had been traveling five hours. He figured that he had made ten miles—perhaps twelve. As his nest became warm and comfortable from the heat of his body, he nibbled away a half of the frozen walrus meat. Then he settled back comfortably in his thick furs, and slept.

IT WAS day when he awoke—the raw, blue-gray twilight of day at the earth's end. He pulled himself out of his drift, stiff and half blind, and blinked about him. The storm had ceased. There was a padding of snow like a blanket of microscopic bullets underfoot, each particle an incohesive and flinty granule.

He had determined that the next few hours would settle matters, and knowing what endurance meant, he ate the remainder of the walrus meat, three of the biscuits, and a half of the cheese, and afterward quenched his thirst with snow as he walked. The coast was a rough and jagged line easy to follow. Several times he saw white hares and little red-eyed foxes that yapped at him from a distance. Once he saw a larger object, and for a few moments his heart beat faster, until he made out that it was a polar bear questing for a seal hole and his breakfast. One—two—three of the precious hours of day passed. A dozen times he turned aside to investigate bulges in the ice and snow that might have been igloos. At intervals he hallooed, and stood listening to the strange echoes of his own voice, hoping for an answer. The fourth hour passed, and the fifth came. Little by little the horizon began creeping in upon him, and at last a groaning cry burst from his lips, and he stood face to face with Night, with the stars glowing faintly above him again.

The memory of what happened after that, an eternity could not efface. It was a thing more terrible than fear that struck at his heart. It was the Arctic madness. Over the level spaces he ran until his knees wobbled under him. He shouted until his voice was only a husky cry. In those moments he would have fallen at Blake's feet—he would have clasped the huge black in his arms. It was not cowardice. Something had happened against which physical courage was futile—something which happens where there is endless space, an empty world—*aloneness*. He fought on, reckoning no space of time or distance, hour after hour, mile after mile, until at last sheer exhaustion drove him to scoop out a hollow in another drift.

It was scarcely sleep that he fell into. Incessantly he heard the yapping of the foxes. Three times he rose out of these hollows and struggled on, calling from every starlit peak, hallooing to the sea and the land, and listening until the drums of his ears seemed to crack. Again and again he fancied that he heard answers. The third time that he crawled out of his snow-shelter the stars

were beginning to fade away. Forty hours had passed since he left the ship, and it was the beginning of another day. Growing light was like a tonic. His head cleared a bit, and the spark of hope flared up again. It was then he discovered the last crumb of his food was gone. There remained only the seal oil—seven or eight ounces of it in the bottle. Thought of it was nauseous, but he knew what it did for the thick, animal-like bodies of the Eskimo hunters—and he gulped down one huge swallow of it.

The horizon cleared; the circle of light grew wider, and hour after hour he plodded on, scarcely realizing how slowly he traveled. Again the somber walls of night closed in, and with it came the dull realization that he was doomed to die. After that, sense of time, direction, even of existence passed from him. He wandered down a slope and out onto the ice fields. He continued to call; and now voices always answered. How many hours he pursued these voices no man would ever know. At last there came times when he was dragging himself forward on his hands and knees. Now and then he came very near to the voices, only to have them drift away, and laugh at him from a distance. And then, all at once, something leapt up inside him, bringing him to his knees from where he was crumpled down in the snow, opening his eyes wide—for the space of a second restoring him to reason. This time it was not the wind, not the ice, not the crackling echoes of the distant bergs—but a voice!

A voice! It was calling—calling—and floating nearer. He staggered to his feet, swayed there for an instant, and hallooed before his legs gave way under him again. The voice answered. It came nearer, and instead of replying to it, Wainfield hunched forward, sobbing like a baby. He fell on his face, still sobbing. The voice stopped over him. It spoke. Something touched him. And as reason left him, Wainfield knew one thing. It was not Blake's voice, or Cole's, or the huge black's. It was not an Eskimo's voice.

It was a woman's voice, and a woman's hand, that had come to him from out of the night. Close to him he felt

the presence, panting, sobbing, calling to him; and again and again he seemed to hear the words, as if whispered through a vast distance—

"Are you Borak? Are you Borak? Are you Borak—come back for me?"

CHAPTER III

LIGHT broke upon his eyes after what seemed to be a strange sort of dream. For a few moments he stared straight into the light, his scattered wits adjusting themselves, his numbed faculties returning to him swiftly. At first he thought it was the sun, as he had last seen it sinking in a red ball of flame below the ice; then a fire—and at last he knew that it was a lamp, a ship's lamp, hanging from a beam in the ceiling. He sat up. He was in a strange cabin, larger than any on Van Horn's ship. A great joy swept over him. He was saved. A miracle of chance had guided him.

He rose from the edge of the bunk on which he had found himself, and turned so that his eyes could take in the whole of the cabin. A startled cry broke from his lips, and he stared—stared unbelieving and wonder-struck, thrilled to his soul. Against the wall, full in the glow of the lamp, cringing back as if fearing an attack from him, stood a girl. To Wainfield she was startling, almost appalling, and yet the most wonderful thing he had ever seen. Her face was of waxen whiteness; her lips were parted, her breath came in quick, panting, frightened jerks. It was her eyes into which Wainfield looked. They were blue—blue as the deepest depths of the sea, and in them was a thing which made him shudder. And her hands reached to him, as if she implored mercy. Her lips moved.

"You are not Borak?" she moaned. "You are not Borak?"

"No, I am not Borak," replied Wainfield slowly and steadily. "I am Francis Wainfield, an officer in the United States navy. I was lost from a whaling ship. I am not Borak!"

He emphasized the last words. In the strange, beautiful eyes of the girl was the madness of the North. He saw

it, and he wondered where her keepers were—the others aboard the ship. He went toward her slowly, holding out his hands. "I am not Borak," he repeated gently, as if speaking to a child. "I am not Borak." She shrank back as he drew nearer, and then, slowly, the terror faded out of her face.

"No, you are not Borak," she whispered. "You are not Borak!" Her breath came faster. She came to him, raised her hands to his shoulders, and stared into his eyes. From his shoulder one of her hands crept to his cheek, and then her fingers stroked back his hair; and as she looked into his eyes her breath grew swifter and swifter, and in her throat were little moaning sounds. "You are not Borak—you are not Borak—" she sobbed. And then her arms clutched him tight; she crushed her face close to him, and on his breast Wainfield heard her sobbing over and over again, "You are not Borak—you are not Borak—you are not Borak!"

His arms had hung listlessly. Now they held her close. He stroked back her soft hair, and replied again and again, "No—no—no—I am not Borak! I am not Borak!"

She still clung to him, her arms grown tighter about his neck. He felt the swift beating of her heart, the warmth of her face, and a little fearfully, he looked toward the cabin door. There was sure to be an interruption soon. Those who cared for her would return. Probably she had stolen in to him unknown to them. Gently he drew her toward the cot, loosed her arms from about him, and sat down beside her, holding her hands tight. A marvelous change had swept over her. Her lips glowed. A pink flush had come into her cheeks. Her eyes were like stars. She was beautiful—beautiful as some of the visions that had come to him during the long polar night. She looked at him now as if he were a god, only held back by his grip on her hands. In her eyes was an unreasoning thing that turned his heart sick. She was not accountable. She was like a child. And he spoke to her now as he had talked to the little golden-haired sister who had died in his arms so many years ago.

"You are sick," he said. "You have

had a long illness, and you have had bad dreams. You must lie down, and let me care for you. I will not let Borak come near you—never."

She only looked at him as he made a pillow for her head. She lay down like a child, and like a child she held up her arms to him, and a thousand men could not have kept him from bending over her until he felt her arms clinging about him again, and her warm face against his own.

"No, you will not let Borak come," her lips whispered against his cheek. "You will kill him if he comes."

"Yes, I will kill him if he comes."

He freed himself again.

"You must sleep," he soothed. "I will stand just outside your door. No one shall awaken you."

Her eyes followed him to the door. She was looking at him as he went out, her face luminous with a strange worship, and a stifled groan fell from Wainfield's lips as he stood once more out under the pale glow of the Arctic stars.

CHAPTER IV

HE HAD begun to guess, and he did not walk out boldly, but lunged back cautiously in the shadow of the cabin. Was it Borak who had driven this girl mad? And who was Borak? Where was he? Was he aboard the ship? Close to him, partly frozen in the ice, he saw a short, thin bar of iron. He kicked it loose with his foot, and picked it up. Then he stepped out—and looked about him. It was only the ghost of a ship that met his eyes—a shroud of ice. Spars, ropes, cabin, the deck itself were smothered under it, and he knew that he had come to a ship without a crew. He made his way aft with the caution of an animal, the iron bar held rigidly in his hand. He could not guess what the deck held underfoot, for it was piled deep with frozen snow. Broken ropes, sheathed in crackling ice, hung down from the upper spaces, and rattled faintly, like castanets, in his face. Desolation—the spirit of the abandoned—hovered over the whole ship.

Wainfield's mind had grown clear, and his muscles were strangely alert.

He would not find a crew. He knew that. The mystery of its disappearance, the manner of end these men of the frozen ship had met, he did not try to guess. One word ran through his brain, repeating itself again and again, until even his lips were forming it—*Borak—Borak—Borak*. As vividly as if written in words of fire across the dark sky he guessed the terrible story. Borak was not gone. Borak—the man-brute—who had driven the girl to madness. He clenched the iron bar tighter.

He remembered now those faint, dream-like words that had borne themselves into his consciousness when first she had come to him in the night, "Are you Borak—come back for me?" Again he jumped at what seemed unquestionable fact. Borak was not on the ship. Something had taken him away. But she expected him to return.

In front of the galley door a path was worn ten inches deep in the snow and ice. The door itself opened easily. He entered, thrusting head and shoulders forward slowly, the iron bar poised to strike. He had made up his mind that he would ask no questions of Borak. He would strike the instant they came face to face.

After a few moments he could make out that the galley was empty. But warm air had filled his lungs. There was a fire in the stove, and he lighted a match, and then a lamp that stood on a table. A copper pot was simmering over the fire. The crew had eaten here, but now the long mess table was set for but one person—a single plate, a cup, a knife and fork and spoon. Close to these were a plate of biscuits and a can of beans freshly opened. In one corner leaned a rifle, and he possessed himself of it quickly. There were no cartridges in the chamber.

The odor that rose from the simmering pot brought him back to his sense of hunger. From it he fished out a chunk of meat on the end of the fork, and turned himself strong, black coffee from a second pot that had been drawn to the edge of the stove. Watching the door, he ate. When he had finished he picked up his iron bar, went out, and closed the door as he had found it.

In one other place he might find Bo-

rak—the crew's quarters. Perhaps he was sleeping. Everywhere he found ice, tons upon tons of it, unscarred by axe or pike. Borak was not below. All but the upper deck was sealed under impenetrable thicknesses.

Three times he walked around the ship, searching for a sign of Borak's presence. Then he returned to what had been the captain's cabin—and the girl. He entered softly and found her sleeping. Quietly he barred the door, turned down the light until the room was in half gloom, and arranged himself comfortably on a second cot. He did not intend to sleep. He would watch over her until she awoke. He found himself listening now—listening for the sound of another step, another voice. The iron bar lay close to his hand. Outside he could hear the moaning sweep of the Arctic wind. Against the window beat the fine shot of the North. Strange sounds crept through the frozen corpse of the ship, sounds that were like living things—haunting, terrifying, filled with shivering ghostliness. These things—and Borak—were what had driven her mad!

But the crew—where were the crew?

STILL asking himself that question, Wainfield fell asleep. Vainly he fought against exhaustion. How long he had slumbered he did not know, when something slowly drew him back into consciousness. It was not a sudden awakening. It was gentle, and indescribably sweet. Even before he opened his eyes he was trembling, half believing, and yet with the feeling of rising out of a dream. He opened his eyes. The light was turned a little higher. Something soft and warm clung about his neck. He turned a little, and his heart came up to choke the cry on his lips. The girl had come to him. She was kneeling beside his cot, her arms about him, her head on his breast, her glorious hair spread over him in a silken mantle. By her gentle breathing he knew that she was asleep. Little by little, through seconds that overwhelmed him, he drew her arms from about him and lifted back the caressing shimmer of her hair. Inch by inch he freed himself, crept over the end

of the cot, and stood breathing like one who had been long run. Tenderly he raised her until she lay where he had lain. And then he stood and looked down upon her. Like a child she had come to him. Like a child she had twined her arms about him. And like a child she lay there now—sleeping. She stirred. Her arms reached out, as if missing him. Her lips moved, and he bent over.

"I thought—I heard—Borak—" he heard her whisper. "I thought I heard Borak—at the door."

After that she was quiet. Francis Wainfield straightened. He seized the iron bar and faced the door, through which came the low moaning of the wind.

"My God—if Borak would only come!" he breathed.

CHAPTER V

OUT on the deck Wainfield stood for many minutes, listening to the strange sounds of the night and straining his ears to catch something that was human. He almost wanted to shriek out Borak's name, to call upon him to come from out of the gloom and meet him there face to face. His heart was filled with a mad passion and his fingers gripped the iron bar like tensely drawn steel cords. In that moment he would have killed Borak without questioning.

Twice again he walked slowly around the ship, watchful and listening. After that he reentered the cabin, and softly bolted the door behind him. The girl was still sleeping. She had moved slightly, so that her face was toward him, and he could see the soft fullness of her lips and the gentle stir of a tendril of hair moved by her breath.

He turned the light higher. Until now he had not examined the interior of the cabin. He had noticed a small stove, the two cots, and a table. His eyes traveled slowly around the four walls. Chiefly they were hung with garments—a man's and a woman's. On one of the walls was a large chart and a pair of binoculars, on another a long-barreled revolver rested in a rack. Ea-

gerly he examined this. There were no cartridges in the chamber. In one corner of the cabin was a heavy, copper-ribbed chest. These things, three or four chairs, and a litter of papers and books on the table were all that met his eyes.

He went to the table. It was a massive oak affair, bolted to the floor. One by one he looked at the books and papers. The books were chiefly fiction. The papers bore dates more than three years old.

He pulled out the heavy drawer in the table, and his eyes fell on a thick pile of manuscript. His heart beat faster as he lifted it out and saw that the writing was in a small, feminine hand. He read the first words, which were underscored—"The Diary of Rao Brown, Daughter of Captain Henry Brown, of the Whaling Ship Fortune, Begun this Seventh Day of May, Nineteen Hundred and Nine."

He dropped into a chair under the light, and his hands trembled as they clutched the precious manuscript. Here at last was the story! In this he would find at least a part of the terrible thing that had happened. He began to read. Swiftly his eyes ran over page after page, the beginning of that wonderful journey into "the land of the unknown,"—a young girl's emotions, her anticipations and dreams, her wonder-thoughts betrayed to paper. A hundred things he raced over—storm and sunset, visions that came to her under the stars, the passing of other ships, the first ice and the first wild thrill that came with the cry, "There she blows!" And then at last he came to the beginning of the thing he was after, and as he read he scarcely breathed.

As the terrible tragedy unfolded itself the writing became more and more changed, until in places it was almost illegible. Pen gave place to pencil, time moved swiftly, and there were breaks of days between the dates. For an hour Wainfield read, and the sweat stood out on his forehead. The last page fell from his tense fingers. He staggered up from his chair and went to the door, and a moaning cry burst from his lips, a cry that was half a laugh and half a sob. He unbarred the door and went out.

The cold wind struck his bare head and throat. The stars had gone out of the sky. The dawn of another short day was creeping up over the bleak edge of the world to the south and east.

WAINFIELD had almost forgotten how to pray. But strange words formed themselves on his lips now as he faced that banner of hope in the distant sky. And then he heard a sound, and turned about.

Rao stood in the open door, her wonderful hair streaming about her in the wind, her eyes shining, at first with fear, and then with gladness when she saw it was him. Before he moved she had come to him, clinging close to his breast, her lovely face lifted to him. Deep in his soul Francis knew that in this hour she was a creature of God, belonging to Him alone—a soul fluttering with the winds, helpless and sacred. And yet what he did he knew just as surely was neither sacrilege nor sin. His arms closed about her. Her lips came to him, and the thrill of their first wonderful kiss was like the sweet and exquisite passion that was born in the red blood of the first communion cup. She stroked his face gently.

"You did not let Borak come," she whispered. "I knew you would not let Borak come."

He took her face between his hands, and looked steadily into her eyes.

"Listen, Rao," he said slowly and clearly. "Borak is dead. Do you understand me? He is dead."

For a moment she looked at him strangely.

"Dead," she repeated after him. "Borak is dead." Her eyes turned questioningly about the ice-smothered ship. "Borak is dead," he heard her whispering under her breath. "Borak is dead."

"Yes, he is dead."

One of her little hands crept doubtfully to his. He led her back into the cabin. It was so cold that her hand was like ice, and he could feel her shivering. He had noticed bits of kindling and a scuttle of coal near the stove.

"I will build a fire," he said. "You sit here and watch me."

Obediently as a child she sat down in

the chair he placed for her. He began to whistle as he made preparations for the fire. Her eyes were upon him, watching him strangely. Never for an instant did they leave him. Her lips were moving, and Francis knew that she was whispering to herself over and over again the words, "Borak is dead, Borak is dead." It was a long time since he had whistled "Home, Sweet Home," but he whistled it now with all the fervor of the hope and gladness that was in him. Was it his imagination, he wondered, or did he catch for a moment the glow of something awakening and struggling in the blue depths of Rao's eyes? Was it the spark of returning reason that made her follow his every movement so fixedly, as if she were fighting to overcome a doubt? The thought—the hope that this was so—set him trembling. He did not disturb her. He did not even look toward her now. He whistled. The wood crackled cheerily. He piled on coal, and the quick-heating stove began to fill the cabin with a comfortable warmth.

Then, suddenly, he was seized with lip-cramp. His whistle became all at once a pathetic wheeze, and he started in to sing. His voice was filled with the choke of the ice. It was tuneless, cracked, worse than the last dying wheeze of his whistle. In spite of himself the humor of the situation swept upon him, and he laughed. It was his first laugh in many months. He caught himself, and faced Rao. Her eyes were shimmering. Her lips were parted. And then she, too, was laughing.

"Rao!" he cried, holding out his arms to her. "Rao!"

CHAPTER VI

WITH the fluttering timidness of a bird Rao came to him. In that space of a second or two Francis fought back the desire to take her close in his arms and kiss the lovely mouth that was smiling at him for the first time. He seized the hands that had crept again to his shoulders, and took her to a chair close to the table. With the pages of the manuscript between his fingers he sat down facing her. Again the strange questioning look was in her

eyes. But he knew that the thing he had seen in them a moment before could not have died completely out, and he drove straight to the heart of the tragedy whose written pages he held out before her as he spoke.

"I have read this, Rao," he said, struggling to speak naturally. "But you have not finished it. What happened after Borak died?"

For a moment she looked at him as if she had not heard. Then her lips moved.

"Borak—is dead?"

"Yes—he died a long time ago, Rao. Don't you remember that night he returned to the ship without your father and tried to hurt you in the cabin—this cabin? And how you fought, and cried out for help? And how the dogs that loved you so—Bruno, and Thor, and Wotan, and all the others—jumped upon him and tore him to pieces before he had harmed you? Don't you remember, Rao? And how you dragged him far out on the ice the next day, and covered him with snow? Where is Wotan, Rao? Where is Bruno? Where is Thor? Don't you know?"

The look in her eyes hurt him. But he knew that only through the torture of these things that had passed could she be awakened, and he drew a deep breath, and went on. Now that he had stirred something within her he went back to the beginning of things—home, the start from Buck's Harbor, the first days in the northern seas, and then winter. That first winter—the "winter of death!" Almost line for line he went over what she had written, painting for her vividly those weeks of helpless terror in which all but herself and five of the ship's crew had died of a strange fever—a fever that was blindness, and madness and a mysterious thirst with the thermometer at sixty below.

"And then one day the five that were left went out after fresh seal meat, and only Borak and your father came back. You remember that, Rao—how the ice split, and three were lost? One of them was little red-haired Duke, the boy who had a mother back at Buck's Harbor, Duke—little red-haired Duke—you remember him, Rao?"

Wainfield felt himself sweating. The

girl's eyes were torturing him. Deeper and deeper had grown that strange look in them, the fight to understand something which was not yet tangible, and yet something which seemed to fill her confused brain with a strange sense of torment and suffering. Her lips no longer moved. She made no effort to speak. Her eyes alone gave evidence that she heard him and was struggling to comprehend. Never did they leave his face, not once did their gaze falter or grow less steady. He jumped to the second winter—to Borak and her father. And then just one look, choking cry broke from her lips, and for a moment his heart stood still.

He leaned forward, all the power of his will concentrated upon her.

"They went out one day to hunt—Borak and your father. And Borak came back alone. You remember that, Rao? Borak killed your father—and came back alone. He wanted you, Rao. He found you here—in this cabin. But the dogs killed him—Bruno—Thor—Wotan. They were your dogs, and they killed Borak. Where are they, Rao? Where is Bruno? Where is Thor? Where is Wotan? You have been sick a long time, and I have come to take you home. We must take the dogs, too—the dogs that killed Borak. Rao—Rao—my God, do you remember?"

She was rising slowly from her chair, and he rose with her, his face tense and white as he waited. As gently as a child she came to him, a look that was wistful and pleading in her eyes, and her arms went up softly about him.

"Borak is dead—and you have come to take me home," she whispered. "Borak is dead—dead—and you are going to take me home."

That was all. He caught her close in his arms, and from his heart there burst one great half-sobbing cry of grief as he buried his face in the soft, loose masses of her hair.

CHAPTER VII

DAYS and weeks followed that morning in the cabin, days and weeks of a fight in which at times Francis found himself battling for mastery of himself. From that hour, Rao

surrendered herself to him so completely that with the new and wonderful joy of his possession there was always the sickening realization that he was accepting things which belonged to the mind and soul of a child. It was her faith in him, her complete assurance that no harm could come to her with him that seemed to breathe a kind of sanctity into what he did. He made the galley his sleeping quarters. Rao kept her own. But each morning she would come to him, put her arms up about his neck, and pout up her mouth to be kissed; and each night he went to his cot with the warm, sweet thrill of her lips filling him with the happiness that was half pain.

Day and night were measured now only by the passing of the hours. The last of day was gone, and the long night had fallen in a vast and encompassing pall. For half a mile about the ship—a mile when the air was cold and crystal clear—they lighted up the white world to human vision. Beyond that shut-in circle Wainfield could never see. This fact troubled him and filled with unrest the hours when he was compelled to sleep. He knew that Blake and his men would be roaming the ice-fields. They would travel close to the coast in search of Eskimos. If they stumbled upon the ship, all would be lost unless he saw them coming and was prepared.

There were no cartridges for the gun and revolver, and one night—there was still night and day by Francis' watch—Rao spoke of the "big white bears" that had prowled about the ship, and Francis knew that she had used the ammunition to frighten them away. He was sure there was plenty of ammunition aboard, and began to make a systematic exploration. By chopping down through four feet of ice he found the hatches, and a stair leading to the under-deck forward. It was here he discovered the powder room. Captain Brown had stocked it for emergencies. In it were five or six tons of giant powder and dynamite, and several cases of cartridges. A case of the latter Francis took.

HE FELT more secure after this. Rao's day and night he divided by the hours. She went to bed at nine, and

he knocked on her cabin door at six or seven. They had dinner at twelve and supper at six. He tried hard not to vary this routine. For himself there was neither day nor night. The fear of Blake and his horde was ever present with him, and he seldom closed his eyes for more than an hour or so at a time. He found that he required but little sleep, and he tried to secure this as much as possible while Rao was awake. If he felt his eyes growing heavy he would bundle Rao up thickly in furs and find a place for her on deck sheltered from the wind where she could "watch for the big white bears." Then he would sleep. And Rao would watch. Francis did not rouse her fears, except through the bears.

Each day as the weeks passed, he saw in her a slow and gradual change. At least once every twenty-four hours he repeated parts of the tragedy through which she had lived. Constantly he was painting pictures for her—pictures of the things that had been. As much as he could he varied these. He talked of Buck's Harbor, Maine; of the dogs, little red-haired Duke, and a hundred other things associated with the forgotten story of the ship. Little by little he could see that she was growing stronger. She realized that her father was dead, and that Borak had killed him. She knew that Borak was gone, and that the dogs had torn him to pieces. Again and again Francis watched her as she struggled to recall what had happened to Bruno and Wotan and Thor and their team-mates. He knew what had happened. Weakened by hunger, they had wandered out over the ice and had died. But he did not tell Rao this.

NO more joyous moment had ever come to him than that when she first called him Francis. Next to this was that other wonderful moment in the cabin when for the first time her low, sweet voice joined him in "Home, Sweet Home." After this it all came easier. She sang with him always, and he began to understand that their singing was the medicine which God was sending to clear her mind. The third week passed, and it seemed at times as though his heart would burst with its fullness

of hope and joy. She was beginning to remember. The dawn of reason was almost at hand.

Then, during one of those hours in which he was sleeping, she saw the "big white bear." Her voice roused him at the door and he rushed out, rifle in hand. The huge beast was not far distant, a whitish-gray blotch in the star-gloom. Francis had realized the necessity for fresh meat, but he had not gone forth to hunt, fearing that the sound of a shot might reach the ears of enemies prowling along the coast. He decided now to take a chance. He fired, and the bear crumpled down in its tracks. In another moment it was up, and moving swiftly off into the white night. Twice again Francis fired, and he knew that at least one of the two shots had struck.

Rao was breathing excitedly at his side. He turned to her. Never had he seen her face so white or her eyes so big and dark.

"I hit him, Rao!" he cried excitedly. "I don't believe he will get far away. I'll go after him. You stay here, and watch for me!"

He left her staring after him, and ran in the direction the wounded bear had taken, slipping fresh cartridges into the chamber of his rifle as he went. He found the trail easily. Quite soon it was spotted with blood. The telltale stains became larger and more frequent as he proceeded. Yet at the end of a quarter of an hour he had not come to the bear. A little farther on he stopped and looked back. The ship was out of his vision, fully a mile behind him. He went on. Another quarter of an hour, and he paused again. He had been running part of the time, and he knew that it would take him more than half an hour to return to the ship. The bear was still traveling steadily away.

With growing uneasiness, he turned back. He was afraid that he had already frightened Rao by remaining away so long, and he began to whistle cheerily as the ice-shrouded ghost of the ship loomed up ahead of him. Rao was not on deck to meet him. He went to her cabin. It was empty. From the cabin to the galley he ran. The galley was empty. He came out on deck.

"Rao!" he shouted. "Rao! Rao!"

He stood and listened for the answer which did not come, and his heart beat with a wild fear.

CHAPTER VIII

NOT until he had searched twice from end to end of the ship, calling her name a hundred times, did Francis quite give up hope of finding her aboard. At last he stood once more in the galley, overwhelmed with a sudden sickening dread. Rao was gone. During his absence of less than an hour and a half she had either wandered away from the ship, or had been taken from it. He could not believe that Blake and his men had found her. In that event they would have waited. He felt certain that she had started out to follow him and had become lost. It was the fact that she had gone beyond the reach of his voice that frightened him most. He had shouted—and she had not answered. Out on the vast open spaces of the polar ice she could die in a few hours.

Remembering what had happened once before, he filled the pockets of his coat with ship's biscuits, and again went on deck. A few hours before a half inch of fine snow had fallen, but for a long distance about the ship the wind had swept the ice clear of it. Believing that his chief hope of finding Rao quickly lay in his picking up her trail in this soft snow, he hurried swiftly over the glare surface. Fifteen minutes later he had found her footprints, wandering shoreward.

His breath came in a sobbing gasp of relief, and he began to trot over the clearly defined trail. A little farther on he stopped and shouted. Still there was no answer. Frequently he came to places where Rao had stopped, and he knew that she had paused to look about for him. Again and again he shouted—a mile from the ship—a mile and a half—and no answer came. Then he saw something in the starlit snow that froze him into silence and horror and his heart was as dead as a chunk of lead within him.

Other footprints had joined Rao's! At first he thought they were a bear's.

Then he saw that they were human. Two men had seen the girl, or her trail, and were creeping up behind her!

He ran now. A hundred yards farther on he stopped again. Over a space a dozen feet in diameter the snow was beaten with tracks. There had been a struggle. Here Rao had been overtaken and attacked. He found where she had fallen, and where her long loose hair had swept the snow. She had continued to struggle as they had dragged her away. A third man with dogs and sledge had joined the others a short distance ahead. From this point only the trails of dogs and men led on. Rao was on the sledge!

As he followed, his eyes searching the gray gloom ahead, something that was more than fear sent the blood racing through Wainfield's veins. These were Blake's men. Perhaps Blake himself was one of the three. He had killed—but never until now had he been filled with the desire to kill. He was filled with a consuming madness—to come within reach of the two-legged beasts who had laid their hands upon Rao, and kill them. They could not have gained much of a start, and they would have no time in which to harm Rao before he overtook them. He knew that he could travel faster than Blake or any of his men. And they were only three!

He snapped down the safety of his rifle as he ran. He had made up his mind that when he saw them he would leave the trail and in a sudden spurt come out ahead of them. He would lie on his face until they were near. Then he would shoot them down like so many of the little red-eyed foxes that had yapped at him along the shore. Now and then he paused for an instant to listen, hoping to hear the crack of a whip or the sound of a voice.

Minute after minute dropped behind him and over the smooth spaces he continued to run until he was panting for breath, yet he seemed to gain nothing. He was astonished at the speed which the men ahead of him were making. At the end of an hour the wind rattled in his throat and his legs ached. He had traveled six or seven miles in that time, and the trail was still cold ahead of him. Francis had taken a pride in his physi-

cal condition and power of endurance. Was it possible that Blake or any three of his men could beat him out?

He was about to urge himself on in a final spurt when his foot struck against something in the trail. He picked it up. It was one of the short, keenly barbed spears carried by Eskimo hunters; and for a few moments he sat down in the snow half laughing and half sobbing in his joy. He did not fear the Eskimo. At their village, which could not be far distant, he would not only reclaim Rao but would be able to secure dogs and native guides to take them eastward to the Coppermine. He went on, filled with new hope. The fact that the native hunters had taken Rao forcefully did not alarm him. He knew the ways of the little brown men who had come into contact with white men. They had grown shrewd. In Rao they had seen the strange madness. They would take her to their village, care for her, and when the white men came from the big ship which must be near, they would expect an ample reward for saving her from death on the ice.

For another hour the trail hung to the ice field. Then it swung shoreward and up over the first rim of land. After a little Francis heard what he thought was the yapping of distant foxes. A few minutes later he knew that it was the barking of dogs. Up over a snow-hill he stumbled and ran, and down in a cup of the land just beyond, close to a frozen white finger that reached in from the sea, he saw the Eskimo village. The dogs greeted him as he went down. From out of the half dozen igloos a score of fur-clad figures crawled and stared at him as he advanced. He hurried to them, and they gathered about him in stolid silence. No word of their usual greeting to the white man came from their thick lips. Amazement shone in their dull faces. Something in the strangeness of the situation made Francis grip the butt of his revolver. He looked about for a sign of Rao. He shouted her name. If she had been there she would have answered. But there was no reply. The circle of little brown men drew closer about him, with another circle of women and children and dogs crowding in from be-

hind. Then the chief man of the village came slowly from out of the circle, and spoke.

FRANCIS recalled all that he had learned of the Eskimo tongue. It was not a great deal, but he made them understand. It took the chief man some time longer to make Francis understand. He led him to the largest igloo, the entire population trailing behind them. Beside this igloo was a pile of something covered with skins. The chief man drew away the skins, revealing a dozen sacks of flour, bolts of cloth, boxes of tobacco and canned goods. His method of telling, Francis what had happened was painfully slow. But at last it was clear. Strange white men had come to the village to buy Eskimo wives for the winter. He showed Francis where they had gone through the ceremony of the wedding dance. The white men had paid well for their wives, and were to pay more. This was because—just as the white men were about to depart—three of the chief's hunters had returned with a white girl. The Big Man from the ship had claimed her, and was going to send back much more flour and tobacco. Evidently the chief man thought that Francis should be happy that all had ended so well, and that the white girl was safe with his people. He faced his tribe, and at the swift clack of his tongue, men and women joined in a weird sort of chant. In this moment of his blackest despair Francis realized there was but one thing to do. It would be impossible for him to make the Eskimo understand the situation. They believed that both he and Rao belonged to Blake's ship. He must fight alone.

He seized the chief man by the arm and led him to where a team of six dogs were already harnessed to a sledge. Then he placed his rifle on the snow and lay beside it his stock of cartridges. He pointed to the rifle and then to the dogs, signifying that he wanted to trade. With a strange sort of cry the chief clutched the rifle in his hands. His eyes burned exultantly. Never had a white man offered him such a treasure as this. The tribe clacked their amazement and joy. In that moment their chief had

become the richest and most powerful man in the world.

Five minutes later Francis was urging the team swiftly over Blake's trail. His one weapon was a revolver. And again his blood was running like fire with a mad desire to kill. Above all else he knew that he must lose no time. Rao was in the hands of men who would laugh at her prayers for mercy. They must not reach the ship ahead of him. If anything should happen—if he missed the trail on smooth ice, or if the dogs should balk at the commands of a new master, he would be too late to save her. But the dogs obeyed him. He encountered no glare ice. Mile after mile slipped away under the glow of the stars. He figured that probably Blake had a two hours' start of him. At the end of three hours he knew that he must be very close.

Then from out of the gray gloom ahead came a sound that drew him to a halt as quickly as he could stop the dogs. It was the whining yelp of a dog, nipped by another or lashed with a whip. Overturning his sledge, Francis divided the team and leashed the dogs to both ends of it. After that he ran on, his revolver in his hand. Ahead of him the ship grew slowly out of the night. It was not more than a quarter of a mile distant, and he approached it swiftly. No sound greeted him. Even the dogs were quiet in these moments when his heart was pounding like a drum, and his ears were strained to hear. He drew nearer, and saw a light. It came from the window in the big cabin where he and Van Horn had put up their last fight.

Clutching his revolver, he crept toward it.

CHAPTER IX

UNDER the window was an upheaved mass of ice. By crawling up this he could look in at the window and still be far enough away from it not to be seen from within. He heard voices—excited voices—but could not distinguish words. A moment later he was staring upon a scene that drew a sharp breath from between his tightly closed teeth.

Three-fourths of the big cabin was within his vision. About the table were gathered Blake and his men. Blake was hammering the table with his fist, and Francis could hear the low rumble of his voice. In a group at one side, gazing upon their white masters with dumb and wondering eyes, were the young Eskimo women. There were six. They had not yet cast off their fur garments. Some one moved from behind them, and for the first time he saw Rao. She was facing him, and beyond the men gathered about the table. She had thrown her hair back, and as she listened to what the men were saying Francis saw in her something that he had never seen before. She was not cringing. She was not afraid. Her eyes blazed. He could see her quick and passionate breathing and her tightly clenched little hands. She seemed taller. In her face, her eyes, and the poise of her body there was a new and wonderful thing that thrilled him until he no longer saw the others in the room, but only her. It was *reason*. At last the miracle had happened. Rao was no longer mad!

He wanted to shriek out her name, and with that cry send the bullets in his revolver crashing in among the men about the table. He controlled himself, and looked at them again. They were six to one, and all were armed. They were bending over the table. He leaned a little nearer the window, and saw that the huge black was shaking dice from a box. He saw Creele the Swede shake the same dice. And then, horror-stricken, his eyes turned again to Rao. She was leaning forward, her clenched hands pressed against her breast. In that moment Francis understood, and slowly he raised his revolver. Blake and his men were shaking dice for Rao!

Another instant and the mad heat in his brain would have made him fire. But Rao had taken a single step forward. She was looking over the hunched shoulders of the men—straight at the window. Her eyes were big and staring. Her lips had parted. For no more than a flash Francis took the desperate chance. He threw back his fur hood and leaned forward until his face

almost touched the glass. He saw rather than heard the sudden cry that fell from Rao's lips, and as Blake turned to look at the girl, he drew himself quickly back. Rao had staggered back against the wall, and now she was looking away from the window. She had seen him! She had recognized him! And she was hiding her discovery from the men!

IT WAS Blake who shook the dice last. And from the triumphant cry that came from his lips and the sullen quiet of the others Francis knew that Blake had won. The chief of the mutineers turned toward Rao, and for a moment she was hidden from Francis' vision. When he saw her again she was struggling in Blake's arms. Even then her eyes were turned toward the window, and in them he saw more than an appeal. It was a warning. Blake was dragging her to the door. He turned and said something to the other men, but Francis did not wait to see what happened after that, or try to hear. He knew that Blake was about to take Rao to his own cabin!

Swiftly and silently he climbed up over the rail of the ship, and concealed himself in the shadow of the deck-house. He heard the door open. He heard Blake's thick, exultant voice, the grumble of others, and then the door closed. Blake's steps were heavy and unsteady, and he was mumbling something in his beard. He passed within three steps of Francis, partly carrying and partly dragging Rao. She hung limply, as if unconscious. But as he crept up behind the man, Francis saw a pair of wide-open glorious eyes gazing straight at him through the night-gloom. With a dull thud his heavy revolver came down upon Blake's head and with a low cry the mutineer crumpled down in his tracks. Another moment and Rao was at his side—panting, alive, unhurt.

Neither uttered a word. With her hand in his, they ran to the edge of the ship and slipped down upon the ice. Not until they had reached the dogs did they stop. And then, sobbing for breath, Rao stood back a step and looked at Francis. She reached out

her arms to him, confessing everything—that the love she had given him as a child was his as a woman's, that through madness he had lived and was real. Her warm lips sought his in the star-glow that was now the soft sweet radiance of a paradise. For a space they were in each other's arms, the wild throbbing of their hearts speaking what their lips did not attempt to utter.

And then suddenly a tense shudder passed through them, and they listened. Men's voices came through the night—blaspheming, wondering, excited voices, and Francis sprang to the sledge and the waiting dogs.

CHAPTER X

FREE and with the endless spaces of the open ahead of him, and his heart tumultuous with the joy of knowing that Rao's mind had come from out of darkness, Francis felt like shouting back defiance to his enemies as the dogs straightened in their traces and sped like a gray streak into the south and east. Yet in spite of this feeling he knew that the real fight was still to come. He believed that he had only stunned Blake. Even though Blake and his men might not run too desperate risks for possession of Rao, Francis knew that they could not afford to let him live. As the witness of their crimes they would regard him as a deadly menace. They were six to one. Against those odds he felt confident of winning if he and Rao could reach their own ship first.

The thought came to Francis that he might return to the Eskimo village, explain as much as possible what had happened, and ask for assistance. In the next breath he realized the utter hopelessness of this. The Eskimos were now bound to Blake and his horde by the marriage sale of their women. Their words of fealty and friendship had been cemented by the wild rites of the tribe, and as these facts impressed themselves more and more upon him a deeper and more disturbing anxiety overshadowed his fear of the mutineers themselves. Against them he was sure that he could hold his own, single-

handed. But what if Blake should go to the Eskimos and urge them to join him? Could he fight twenty instead of six?

He said nothing of this to Rao. Three times in the flight to the ship he stopped the dogs, and Rao stood close-held in his arms as they looked back through the night and listened. And each time that he replaced her on the sledge she held up her lips to him, and the warm thrill of her kiss gave him fresh strength and courage. He had been traveling sixteen hours when at last they saw the white and ghostly fabric of the ship ahead of them. He had taken no rest. He had forgotten even to nibble at the hard biscuits in his pockets. His legs were filled with an excruciating ache.

Not until they stood once more in the ship's cabin, and the lamp was lighted, did Rao see what he had passed through. With a little cry she ran to him, and stroked his face, and sobbed things that he would never forget as long as he lived. She pulled off his thick coat and hood and made him sit down. He obeyed her without a protest. All at once his strength seemed to have gone from him. Strange lights flashed before his eyes, and for a few moments it seemed as though he must lie down and sleep. He heard Rao saying that she was going to the galley and would return in a few minutes with food and hot drink. She was gone.

He roused himself and turned to call her. But she had gone swiftly, and the door had closed behind her. Twice before he had experienced this curious stupor of utter exhaustion. The first time it had been after a bear hunt with Van Horn. The second time it had followed twenty-four hours without food on an exploratory trip. He was ashamed of himself now, and he rose to his feet. Rao—the girl—had gone to build a fire and prepare food! He laughed at the idea, and flung open the door. He stopped, and stared. Ten feet away stood Rao. She was facing the direction from which they had come, looking out into the night with wide-open, terrified eyes. He heard what she had heard—the yapping of dogs far out on the ice!

"They are coming!" she moaned. "Francis—Francis—they are coming!"

Instantly the old fighting blood was surging through his veins again. He fairly dragged Rao back into the cabin.

"I didn't expect them—quite so soon," he said, fighting to speak calmly. "I traded my rifle for the dogs, Rao. We must find another in the ammunition room. There surely are others." He was putting on her coat and hood as he spoke. He secured the lantern, and led her on deck again.

"Stand here—and watch," he said. "If they come near—if you can make them out plainly on the ice, run to the ammunition hold and call for me."

He did not wait for her answer but darted forward. A minute later he was in the ammunition room, the lighted lantern held above his head. Among the canisters of powder and cases of explosives he searched for a box that might contain rifles. He did not expect to find them. He believed if there had been other guns he would have found them in the cabins. It was not likely that there had been more than two or three aboard the whaler and these had been lost with the murdered captain and other members of the crew. He had spoken to Rao of guns, but it was another thing that had brought him to the ammunition room. Thought of the Eskimo had given him his inspiration, and now he set to work like a madman. Canister after canister of the powder he spilled out upon the floor. From other canisters he took off the caps. He stove in the head of a keg of giant powder and rolled the keg among the cases of dynamite. In ten minutes the ammunition room wanted only the touch of a spark to send the ship into eternity. On the steps of the short stair he heaped the powder, and when he climbed to the deck he carried a full canister with him.

Rao was where he had left her. In a moment he was at her side.

"I saw them—once," she whispered, clutching his arm. "Only for an instant, and they disappeared. They are out there—behind that mass of ice!"

"I have a plan," he told her swiftly. "It is the only thing that can save us—

now. Take this—and don't fire unless they are very close." He thrust his revolver into her hand. "If they give us five minutes more we are saved!"

HE ran back to where he had left the canister. From the ammunition-room stair to the side of the ship he left a thin black trail of powder. Over the side of the ship, where the ice shelved down from the rail, he left that same trail. Yard by yard he worked his way to smooth ice. Then he went faster, heading for an upheaved mass two hundred yards away. He had reached it, and had thrown down the empty canister, when from the ship came the rapid fire of Rao's revolver. Like the wind he sped back. He saw Rao at the rail, and shouted. In another moment she was coming toward him. He did not stop to question her when they met. With her hand in his, he turned and ran back to the upheaved mass of ice. Here he dragged her down until she was on her knees, staring into his face as if he had gone mad. He pointed back to the ship.

"My God—just in time!" she heard him breathe.

A dark figure had appeared on the deck. It was followed by a second, a third—four—five—and then a sixth.

"Blake is there," she heard him saying. "Blake—and all his gang—"

He was fumbling in his pocket, and she saw that what he brought forth was a package of matches. Then her eyes caught the oily glitter of the little black trail at their feet. She leaned forward, her fingers touched it, and a low cry broke from her lips as she turned to him and caught his arm. She understood now what he had done—what he was going to do, and suddenly she buried her face in her hands.

"God—means—that it should happen." He spoke close to her ear. "It's our one chance—our last!"

She did not hear the low hiss of the lighted match. Watching the moving figures Francis waited, the tiny flame sheltered in the cup of his hands. For himself alone he would not have done what he was about to do now. Single-

handed he would have fought, and died. It was for Rao that he must touch the powder. He leaned over. Nearer and nearer the point of flame came to the thin black trail. And then there was a sudden sputter, a streak of lightning-fire over the ice, and Francis caught Rao's head close against his breast, smothering her in his coat, burying his own face in the thick masses of her hair. The frozen world rocked under them. Explosion followed explosion. The night turned dark, and the stars were shut out by a terrible pall. Under the shelter of the upheaved ice he crushed Rao's body, covering it with his own, while about them crashed an avalanche of ice and timber. When it was over he lifted Rao, and looked. From where the ship had been, the black pall was slowly lifting. There was no longer a ship.

CHAPTER XI

A YEAR later the world read with more than scientific interest the reports of Professor John McTeague, who had gone into the north for the Smithsonian Institute. It was not scientific data that made him the most talked about explorer in America. With a great deal of detail he told of a terrific explosion which he and his party had heard south and east of Franklin Bay. They had traveled fifty miles to investigate, and by a miracle of chance had come upon a man and woman wandering over the ice, almost dead of exhaustion. It was the wonderful story of this man and woman on which McTeague's name rode to fame. At about this time Francis and Rao were not much interested. They had been married by the Bishop of Yukon, and somewhere up in the New Hampshire hills something had happened which made newspaper and magazine talk of small account. After mature deliberation, father and mother named him Francis Brown Van Horn McTeague Wainfield. He weighs ten pounds, and will probably live through it.