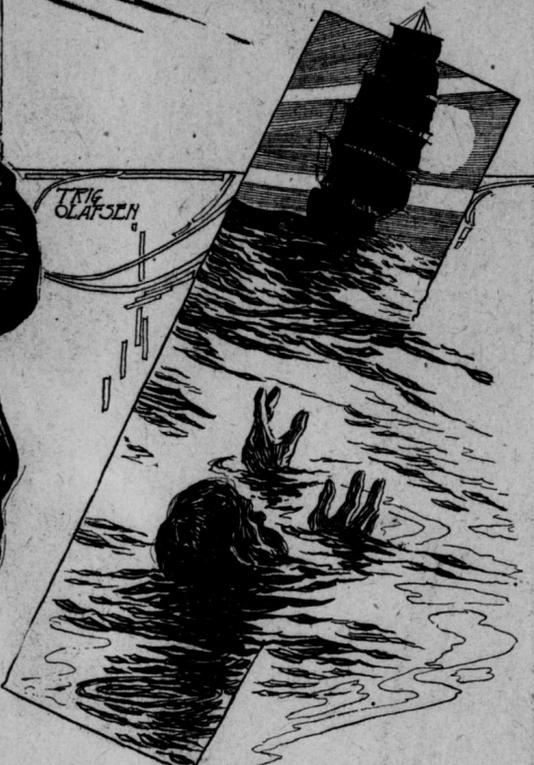


THE SAGA OF TRIG OLAFSEN

THE SWIMMING MATE

BY ALBERT SONNICHSEN
Author of
DEEP SEA VAGABONDS



HE FELL AND A MINUTE LATER WAS SHOUTING IN THE SHIP'S WAKE

If you have knocked about Honolulu much you will have heard of Trig Olafsen. But perhaps you are a stranger there. Then go down to the docks some Sunday morning when the seamen are loafing about the gangways and ask. They will sing you the saga of Trig Olafsen. It will come couched in language hideously profane, but no matter, you will learn all about Trig Olafsen.

Perhaps, if they are in a good humor, they will tell you of Trig Olafsen's long swim with liberal criticism of the ways of Providence in preserving the morally unfit. For Olafsen's notoriety as a hard case bucko mate equals his fame as a swimmer.

If you should ever meet Trig Olafsen you will understand why he is feared. Big of body, arms like thorns, gnarled and hairy; a lionlike head on a bull neck, a tawny mustache drooping over ponderous jaws and hair of the most fiery hue—such a man is Trig Olafsen. Sailors on the West Coast will rule or be ruled. Trig Olafsen has never been ruled in spite of many efforts on the part of insubordinate crews to subdue him. A crowd of Irishmen tried it once on the Island Queen, but Trig piled into them and smote with the mighty arm of his Viking forefathers. Those were the days when Dave Kalakaua's banner floated from the palace towers and from the galls of a dozen good sailing ships. Trig Olafsen was mate of the Hawaiian bark Aloha, then in the sugar, lumber and coal trade—coal from Australia to Honolulu, thence to San Francisco with sugar and back to Australia with Puget Sound lumber.

From a sailor's point of view this was an ideal run, and the Aloha was a first rate ship for living and easy to handle, but her crews invariably left at the end of each passage. Few made a full trip. As they didn't stop to collect their wages, the owners found it profitable to retain Trig Olafsen in their service. But on one trip they almost lost him.

The Aloha had cleared the doldrums and had barely caught the northeast trades. It happened in the morning watch, about 5 o'clock. The yards were braced sharp up on the port tack, and if the Aloha was making her course, that was about all. The mate, sniffing the wind, to take prompt advantage of any favorable change, kept faithful watch by the weather mizzen rigging. The men were just taking coffee when the breeze hailed aft a trifle. Instead of waiting until they had finished, Olafsen gave the order to square

in a bit at once. "Slack away your spanker sheet," he ordered next. A man did so, but the block on the boom jammed. The mate leaped over the railing to overhaul the sheet. Suddenly it cleared, and the boom shot out with a jerk to leeward. The mate had been leaning against the boom, so naturally he went with it, but not having wings he fell, and a minute later was shouting in the ship's wake.

The mate's watch was made up partly of Melbourne larrikins and partly of Frisco roughs, an unwholesome mixture. Olafsen had not been very courteous to them on the trip, and they remembered it now of all times. The ship was making a good six knots, and even had the helmsman brought her up into the wind it would have taken a good hour to pick up the mate. But the wheel remained un-

shifted and the Aloha sailed straight on, the men coiled up the ropes and soon the shouts astern died out in the hiss of the wake.

But it wasn't to save trouble that they paid no heed. An hour later the man at the wheel cast loose a life buoy and roared out: "Man overboard!"

The captain came on deck, all hands were called, the ship was hove to and a boat lowered. They spent an hour hunting, but of course it wasn't likely that they would find a man dropped six miles astern.

A week after the Aloha came into Honolulu and officially reported her mate lost at sea. The Aloha hauled up alongside the railroad dock and began discharging her cargo of coal. The crew were employed on deck manipulating burlap and whips and driving winches, while the Kanakas filled the buckets below. By Saturday you could no longer jump down the hatchways to the top of the cargo.

It was nearly noon. The men expected to knock off early and were in

pretty good humor, laughing and handjive jokes with one another.

Suddenly there came a crash—a bucket dropped on deck, almost driving through the planks and nearly killing big Steve at the burton. The man driving the for'd winch stood stiff, his face the color of a snake's belly, his eyes bulging. The others were about to swear at him, but following his rigid gaze, horror likewise stiffened them. Complete stillness had come over the busy scene. All eyes were fixed on something on the dock.

Picking its way through the line of freight cars on the wharf came the towering figure of the "drowned" mate—Trig Olafsen. The apparition leaped clear of a coal pile and landed at the foot of the gangway. The cabin boy, cleaning the gangway brass, looked up, gave a frightened scream and bolted down into the cabin.

Only one man about there had never seen the mate's big figure, and he was the dock watchman. As he did not see anything particularly ghastly in it this first time, and besides, had a pretty clear conscience, he took no part in

the panic that followed. He is the only one capable of giving a concise, impartial account of what happened—the

I have heard the watchman tell the story several times, and he always tells it in a humorous vein. To him it was extremely funny. You see, he did not know the mate should have been dead ten days.

Trig Olafsen came up the gangway, his head thrown up like a lion smelling fresh meat. The plank quivered beneath his ponderous tread. His huge mustache trailed back over his set jaws, his hair bristled and his big hairy arms were swollen and bare to the elbows, for he had thrown off his hat and coat on the dock. He paused at the top for just one moment, then, with a roar like breakers on a reef, he bounded to the deck.

The watchman says he never saw such a wild scramble—it couldn't be compared to the panic at Walkiki, when the tiger got loose in the circus menagerie. Not only the ship but the whole island was much too small for the Aloha's crew just then.

The ghost seized a capstan bar from the rack at the break of the poop and charged amidships. Five of the men leaped overboard and swam frantically across the harbor to the mail dock. Two fled to the rigging and the rest sprang to the dock, a drop of nearly ten feet. Up the track they pelted, Trig Olafsen after them, hurling the capstan bar ahead of him, picking it up again when he got to it, and roaring out blood-curdling oaths in Norse and English all the while.

Here the watchman became hysterical and saw no more until Olafsen reappeared on the deserted deck, roaring and fuming among the empty coal buckets and using most unghostly language. Then the skipper came up from below and staggered against the skylight, white as a water-soaked corpse.

"What in de name of de Flying Dutchman's figurehead ye starin' at me like dat for?" roared Trig Olafsen.

He really didn't swear by the Flying Dutchman's figurehead; it was something decidedly more expressive than that.

The captain recovered—no drowned man could swear like that, but Trig Olafsen, in flesh and blood.

The skipper and the mate approached each other, but what they said the watchman could not hear. Finally both went below into the cabin.

None of the mate's watch came aboard that night. The men of the other watch came straggling aboard toward dusk. They had no guilty consciences to keep them away. The others made for the hills up by the Fall and were captured by the police next day and brought aboard in irons. The mate himself conducted the hunt, but lodged no complaint against them—he only wanted them with him on the passage to Frisco.

Of course he left Honolulu on the Aloha as mate. The record of that passage is lost to authentic history, but occasionally you meet a sailor who will tell you that there really is a hell, because he has been there. The port watch of the Aloha reached Frisco alive that passage, but they were carried ashore on stretchers aboard the marine hospital launch. Nor was Trig Olafsen ever heard to complain of having gone unavenged. He always refers to that passage with a big complaisant smile that sends his two-lip whiskers up like bull horns.

Now to his story. He only tells it when he is drunk. He weeps and laughs by turns, but you do neither—you listen, spell-bound. And after he has finished you know why the Vikings of old ruled the sea.

He begins by swearing at the spanker sheet block. Never trust a spanker sheet block when it jams. You can't depend on it; it's treacherous, he says. It usually takes five beers to bring him through a treatise on its proper management. About then he will plunge into his story, as he plunged into the tropical sea that dark morning.

When he rose he saw the Aloha's stern fading into the darkness. "Haul in on your fore braces," he roared, expecting to hear the shouts of the blocks and the rattle of blocks and cordage. But he heard only the lapping of the still seething wake about him, and then suddenly he realized the truth. The stern light dwindled and at last danced far away, a mere speck.

I can see him yet as he described that moment. The dark pupils of his pale-blue eyes spread, and those big mustaches stood straight out as though he had a stick between his clenched teeth.

"De hounds," he grinds, "dey will leave me—fenne brand—mig—dey will leave me. Not even a lifebelt dey throw me—but I kan swim—by God—I kan swim—and I vhill not sink—by God. Hey, you lubbers!" Here he roars as he did in the water. "You hear me, you damned dogs! I kan swim, and I swim clear to hell before I gives up! I vill swim to Honolulu, and if I can't tow my blasted carcass dat far—I swim in spirit. I vill haunt you—on de night watches—I will haunt you till you yump overboard!"

He doesn't say so, but you know that he peeled off his clothes and struck out after the ship. His powerful jaw is set, and the muscles under his ears are like huge walnuts. When he sees the bark, by the light of the breaking dawn, miles ahead, and they have hove her to. As he mounts the crest of a wave he sees a boat put off. Here he usually laughs.

"By gum—it was funny. You know—dat damn skipper—he tink he find me. Dey hunt all over—and I vas six miles astern—ha, ha, ha, ha—it was funny. I don't even know 'Vas de use? I jost larfs and larfs—vay out dere in de water."

And he goes off into another spasm of merriment. Here he pauses, nor does he resume until he has disposed of two more beers. His mustache droops again, the fierce glare returns into those sea-gray eyes.

"Den dey brace up de foreyards again and go on. You see, dey goes on, velle I swims after, six—seven—eight miles astern. You tink I vill drown? No much. I kan swim—clear to Honolulu—or hell. I doesn't care vitch—only I gets to dose fellers. I wants to meet

dem again. "But ain't dot the worst ting you ever heard of, to leave a shipmate to drown in a smooed sea? You'd you do dat to your worst enemy?"

Here he waxes sentimental and slobbers through a dissertation on the ethics of shipmate fellowship. He wants you to understand he never hit a fellow when he was down, especially a shipmate.

"Would you see a fellow drop overboard and not raise the cry? No, you wouldn't—not even if it was the Chinese cook."

A few more drinks wash away the tears. Again he bristles.

"But I gets even wid dem! I will not drown—I will not—I will not!"

He fairly roars this, and Trig's roar is a few keys lower than a bull's bellow.

"No! I vill swim after dot gang of larrikins till I lays my paws on dem. You bet!"

On he goes. With him you see the white sails fade out on the horizon, and with him you are alone in the great circle. Drunk as he is, he speaks distinctly now, carefully articulates each word. Have you ever been out in a small boat alone with the sun, a clear horizon and land a thousand miles away! No! He ha, ha, it's a sensation that sets the entrails wringing within you.

"But think, then," he continues, pointing a huge gnarled forefinger at you, "think, then—how would you feel without a boat in midocean, with a clear horizon about you? How would you feel then?"

You know—with his eyes looking into yours. You know you would throw up your hands and sink. But no—not with that fiery heat in you that burns in your very bowels. You would swim—swim—swim!

You are always with him—with him as he treats water, or strikes out, or floats, looking up into the blue cloudless sky. You see the froth in his fiery hair, the spume in his tawny mustache, sometimes floating about his mouth like a seaweed, and those huge white limbs moving under water. And you see that broad, square chin beat against the wavelets like the prow of a Viking pirate ship. So he fought, ten long hours—fought while the sun climbed up the center of the metallic dome of the heavens and began to descend again, and the screaming gulls circled about his head and even lighted near by.

Here he pauses once more, and tells you he sank—only for a second, mind you, but he sank. A picture flashed before him. He saw the men of his watch strolling about the streets of Honolulu. He saw them in the drinking shops leaning against the bars. He heard them telling how he had drowned and they chuckled and ogled one another. He saw big Steve grin as he said:

"Poor sucker, we'd 'a' picked him up if we could." "Sink! Never! He could swim—a thousand miles. He could swim in spite of hell itself."

He must have been a fearsome sight then, shooting up again above the surface like a sea demon, shouting vengeance. Never! He will swim—swim—swim—swim!

By this time he is pretty drunk. If he were an ordinary man you would say he was nervously unstrung. But Trig Olafsen has no nerves, so he's only beastly drunk. But still you feel the thrill of fire in that last spurt.

Here he gets maudlin and funny at once and you can't quite make out what happened. You know he saw the forefalls of a square-rigged ship, but he doesn't tell how he got aboard it. Figuratively speaking, he slobbers and falls all over the captain and boss of the Galaret. Then he laughs again.

"You know, dey ask me, 'Vas you come from?' Ha, ha, ha, ha! I tell dem I vas in a whale's belly like Yona. Ha, ha, ha, ha! I don't tell dem nothing till next day."

By this time he is too drunk to tell more, but you have the tale. You look at the huge, drunken brute before you—ugly, uncouth, heroic, drunk—and in spite of all a thrill of admiration comes over you.

And you feel that the Vikings must have been just such heroic brutes.

(Copyright, 1908, by Albert Sonnichsen.)

BUYING A CALIFORNIA REDWOOD---By Dorothea Moore

"Life is far better fun than people dream who fall asleep among the chimney stacks and telegraph wires."—R. L. Stevenson.

OVER three years ago a tired man left his office in San Francisco to gather dust and his clients to compromise and went a-fishing. When he came back—quite made over—the told strange tales of the cold thin trout streams of the Northern redwoods. Also in his perfectly American and lawyerlike way he quietly consulted the Government maps—very good ones, too—and haunted the dingy land offices to such purpose that a year later he surprised and charmed his family by carrying them off sectionally to the forests of Mendocino, where they not only acquired merit in the joys of camp living but the beginning of a title to some acres of glorious virgin forest.

Five years of life in the semi-tropics of California teaches one forever the blessedness of a tree. Its inestimable value in the semi-arid landscape; its breath of coolness; its benign shelter.

possible and at sacrifice one must own a few Sequoias—if only to put one tiny barrier before the ruthless ax-man, who, with the Eastern millionaire at his broad back, is buying and burning and cutting everywhere over the splendid coast woods of California.

To the idea of "an investment" we were perfectly cold, but as a tree of one's own we glowed. For we had come safely but wholly ingloriously through the stages of real estate, oil stocks and gold certificates no richer except in hopes deferred and some philosophy.

But as neither native nor adopted Californian thinks twice of distances, to go one hundred and twenty-five miles for a summer camp, with the forest primeval thrown in, seemed rather a privilege than a burden. Homestead requires the proper filing of applications in the land offices; the speedy building of a cabin and the sleeping upon the claim not less often than twice a year until the purchase at the end of fourteen months, or five years the claim is fully established with no other cost than this implies. Naturally one's full intention at first is to "buy in," as the phrase goes, for one cannot travel always to one spot, for one's leisure and the law permits of no substitute sleepers. Prices range from \$2 to \$7 an acre, as the land has different values and is apt to be worth much more if one can afford to await the coming of the rail-

roads even if chosen merely as investment. It was therefore with hearts at rest both commercially and esthetically that our mutual minds were made up to visit for its first holding down a bit of redwood forest on the Indian River—after it has decided to let go its dignity and become a creek.

How deliciously, adorably alike are all real "country towns" everywhere. So full of the good, plain, common American life as far from outer poetry as it is full of inner worth.

Arranging with one of the wood wagons going out empty at dawn to take us and our possible penates, we spend the active hours of the afternoon gathering them to a central point for greater ease in the morning, our tinied things having been cannily purchased in the city and sent by freight rails fitted to campers' purses and ideas.

Each of the quartet has a light down quilt, fully protected by a canvas cover, sewed firmly but provisionally into a sleeping bag which can be turned out in the sun during the daylight. These, with a bale of clean straw make the bedding, especially as we need fear no rain. Nails, hinges, a lock and one or two modest sets of "lights," as they are called, are all the purchases for the cabin-to-be, as the rest will be found what their woodcraft tells them is a "good shake tree" and in a few hours the little wilderness abode in the clean primeval woods will be ready, as sim-

ple and beautifully complete as if a Ruskin himself had had the supervising. For how can one commit crimes with just an ax and a straight, smooth redwood tree? All the psychology of the occasion demands and gets simplicity.

As we leave the railroad town at 6 o'clock, our big horses, delighted no doubt at so light a load, but not to be surprised out of the strong, quiet pace to which they are used, we have all the long, bright day before us. And we ask nothing better than this slow circling of the flank of the mountain, around us fields glowing in the thousand rich browns of a California summer and each mile opening fresh vistas of far wooded ranges as tenderly blue and tremulous as the tiny bluettes of the roadside. Before we have quite left the open foothill country we hear the bells ringing on the arched yokes of the approaching teams, warning us that we must meet at the "turnout."

plentifully placed along this splendid county road.

By noon we are near the "top of the hill." We still have the brilliant, glowing mahogany of the madrone—the slender tan oak, high-ankled and soft-skinned as an Eastern birch. Still there are abundant wild flowers, purple and white and gold. Oh, gold of all tints! And then at last the sequoia—a very prince royal of trees. The long, straight stem, gray in shade and glowing in sunshine, rising with such slender distinction to the sky. The few feathery

branches at the top and the great spreading base, where the roots take deep hold on the good earth as the tall-plumed head swings and sways in the upper air, the very aristocrat of trees—strong, clean and high bred.

There are very few of us who would give up our bread and butter, even if it came by way of a lumber mill. And there are lumbermen now here and there, more thickly as the knowledge of true forestry grows, who can be trusted to cut and forest their timber as scientifically as does Germany, who long ago learned her costly lesson.

The mill within sound of whose saws our first stay was made was run on the wickedly wasteful plan of stumpage for revenue only, and was creating desolation and blackness all about. Fortunately it was but a small concern. The work is slow and difficult, the way out with the cut timber hard and long, so that as yet the transgressor had been able to ruin little more than one section of the finest trees.

But quite apart from the abhorred traffic in trees, what courage and grit it had taken all these wilderness years. We heard by and by all about it. Now the dark-eyed little wife—pretty still—has a comfortable house, with a convenience or two to boot; now when she cooks for nineteen men she has competent help; now her two fat brown boys have a real goat and cart, and for a while every winter go to town to school.

But, oh, the years gone by! when she came with only her husband, drawn over the mud with an ox team. When after a day of mighty tasks the weary man took his lantern and worked until midnight at road-making that fortune might come to meet them; days of illness, of cruel anxiety, of accident far from surgeon or nurse—all this had been a daily part of the past of these two brave and loving people.

A day and night at the camp of the Three Trees, where, were, indeed, all the comforts of home—stoves, lamps, mirrors and cupboards—made us only the more eager to get clear away by the lonely, lovely trail to the deep brown pools of the tiny Indian River, where was to be our own Camp of Comfort.

With tender old memories of fishing days on the "brown stream" of White-face and about Chocorua one could not promise not to take out a trout or two, but the deer might come upon us, unafraid, and even the cats and foxes might keep house at respectful distance and the chipmunks have the freedom of the hearth.

The trail winding so as to make a good five miles of what the laziest crow could fly in one was almost of the picnic variety for ease until one reached the last half mile of underbrush. Here new trail had to be made, both for man and beast. The forest is neither damp nor dark, but kindly, warm and cheery, with open glades full of flowers and long grass. The trail rises sharply from the

mill settlement and follows round the shoulder of the mountain into valley after valley where, between the trunks of the redwoods, we can see clearings and purple ranges, and at last the sea itself for a moment beyond miles of serried growth as yet too remote for any but the hunter. We are even here not to be without neighbors, for twice in the five miles we come upon small cabins waiting, closed and clean, for their summer owners to come and make them alive again.

In a very short time our two skilled woodsmen make a trail to the spot chosen for the house—a sunny opening twenty yards from a big pool. Here we slept and at dawn returned upon our way, this being but a beginning to be carried out at a later visit.

Thus ended the quest of our first redwood. We came back to the city to dream of it all the days and nights of the six months which must pass until we go again. For our "homestead" is now legally established and needs only perseverance and time to settle its permanency. And now we are waiting for the 1st of November—for then we shall make the dearest of joys out of a duty and must go up once more.

The next visit will see the house completed and the time of real residence begin. Three straight trees about my bed. Sunset and stars and solemn dawn. I feel God's great world swinging on. DOROTHEA MOORE.