

# CONFESSIONS of a MILLIONAIRE CRIMP

## MAN WHO HAS MADE A FORTUNE AS A WATERFRONT SHARK TELLS SOME OF THE SECRETS OF HIS STRANGE TRADE

By Hanna Astrup Larsen.

MY friend the boarding-master, otherwise known as the cleverest shanghaier on the waterfront, unfolded this tale to me. It was on a Sunday afternoon in his suburban home. There was sighing of summer breezes in the trees, flowers and vegetables in the garden, hens cackling in the yard; I believe there was also a horse and a cow, but they did not make their presence known. We had been discussing the charm of the pastoral life in contrast to the noise and grime of the city. I had seen curious galore, and had listened to my host reciting poetry in various languages, some of it of his own composition; I had been obliged to admit my ignorance of Spanish, but had somewhat redeemed myself by my knowledge of Scandinavian. Still this was not exactly what I came for. I had headed off numerous excursions into the field of religion and philosophy. I had crushed by sheer weight of dullness a dissertation on the Berling Sea question. Not that this was not interesting. It was. Still poetry, philosophy and international jurisprudence are subjects that anybody may dabble in, though perhaps, not with native intelligence, the pithiness of thought and language shown by this "waterfront shark." I wanted to hear him tell the story of his achievements from his own point of view. It is always so easy to get the other fellow's point of view. I had listened to my host dilating on the wonderful little grandson who is the apple of his eye, and had heard his faithful servant getting orders about some poor cripple, supported for years by this same "shark." How to reconcile this with certain other practices—but then I have long since abandoned any attempt to work things down to a logical basis. Life does not come in chunks of goodness or badness, but in such perplexing mixtures.

At last the old man reached the point: "If you offered me \$500 to shanghai a man, I don't see how I could do it, and if I can't do it, no one else can. Without any boasting or exaggeration, I can say that there is not a man in San Francisco who can beat me at my own trade. What I can't do with a sailor no one else can. If it was only to drug them and drag them on board, any fool could do that, but I tell you it takes a mighty smart man to ship sailors. I am the first one who reduced it to a science. How do I do it? Well, I don't care if I tell you, just so you don't put my name in the paper. I don't crave any newspaper notoriety. Some people don't want to be put in the papers, because they don't want the world to know how great and good they are, but I don't want the world to know how mean I have been. I hypnotize them. And then I know something about them. I have a weapon that very few boarding-masters have, because I have been to sea myself and know how a sailor reasons. When I stand on a street corner and look at the passing throng, I can tell a sailor at once. How do I know? How many times do I have to tell you that when a man has been in a business almost half a century, he learns something. I know he is a sailor, and usually I know his nationality. Then I speak to him in his own language. I can speak Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, French, German, Flemish, Russian and Scandinavian. He is willing enough to leave his ship usually. He most always has some grievance, and thinks anything good for a change when I have got him to take his clothes from the vessel, and he is in my boarding-house, then I have him landed. If I am hiring sailors for a ship going to China, I make him be-

lieve that he can better himself by going to China. If there is an Australian ship in want of sailors, I make him believe there is no place in the world like Australia. No, I don't care when I ship them, whether they will be well treated. That is their own lookout. Let them take their medicine. I took mine when I shipped before the mast, and there was no one asked me whether I liked it or not. "When there is a scarcity of men, I often catch hayseeds who have never been to sea and pass them off for sailors. I tell them how to walk, and how to carry themselves and how to answer, when the captain speaks to them. I know just about what questions he is going to ask, so that is easy. They tell him they are able seamen and he does not know any better before he gets out to sea, and finds himself with a crew of farmers.

### Landing a Hard One.

I said it is usually easy to get them to leave a ship, but we had a case once that was the worst I ever tried. It was about eight years ago, when it was so hard to get men that they offered \$100 for every one, and the sharks were scouring the waterfront gathering up everything in the way of a sailor that they could lay their hands on. Sharks, you understand, that is people like me. Sharks, crimps and shanghaiers, that's the fine names they give us. There were eight or nine ships out in the stream deserted by all their men, but there was one ship, a British vessel by the name of Langdale, that had just one man left. He was a London cookney, and he wanted to go home with the ship. Every runner on the waterfront had been after him, and he drank their beer and he drank their whisky, but he would not budge from the ship. At last it got to be kind of a point of honor with us who should get him. So one evening I followed him into a resort and sat down at a table near him, but with my back turned to him. The women of the place came and asked me to drink with them, but I said, "No, I am no ladies' man. Ask that gentleman over there what he will have." He said he would have beer. After a little while I told them again to ask the gentleman what he would have, and again he had beer. I repeated this three or four times, and I could see he was ready to burst with curiosity, but I was not going to speak to him. I wanted him to come to me. So, after a while, he came up to me, and I could see the beer was beginning to take effect. "Say, mahister," he said, "you are real kind to me." "I can speak cockney as well as anybody, and I said: 'That ain't nothing. I am a man that don't like to drink alone, and I don't want to drink with them blatherskites.' He sat down at my table, and after a while he asked: 'Say, mahister, might I ask what kind of business you are in?'"

I was a fine dresser in those days, and understand, and I had all my diamonds on. So I said: "Sit, I will tell you, but I don't want the people here to hear me. Come outside with me." I took him outside and made a great show of whispering to him, and I said very solemnly: "I am working for the London Medical and Surgical Institute." "The London Medical and Surgical Institute. What the bloody—"

"Sit, I go over in the country graveyards and dig up corpses and ship them to London for the young students to cut to pieces and see how we are fessically constituted." "Dig up corpses," says he; "so you are a bloody body-slasher, are you? Is there much money in it?"

"I get about three or four hundred for every one," says I, "but just now I am not making anything, because my partner is gone to Europe and I have not been able to find a good man in his place." I could see he started to do some thinking, and then he says: "Say, mahister, do you think I would do for this kind of work?" I looked him over kind of contemptuous, and I says: "You think you would like to go out in the graveyard at 1 o'clock in the night and dig up a corpse and run away with it? With officers in your heels? That takes nerve to do anything like that." "Nerve," says he, "I have got nerve like a bloody iron." "I might try you perhaps. Where are you staying?" "I knew well enough where he was staying. "Well," says he, "didn't I tell you I was a sailor? I have got my things on board the ship Langdale." "Well, then, you go and get them," says I, "and come with me."

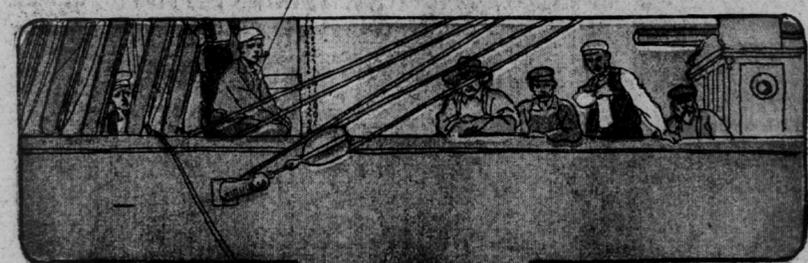
So he got his clothes, and came with me to my boarding-house, and I took him in to the bar. I whispered to him not to let the people in the house know what he was going to do, and behind his back I winked to my bartender. He was a smart man and caught on at once. I spent half a dollar or so on him—I am always real kind that way—and I told them to give him a good room. Still he did not know where he was, until in the morning, when he came down and saw my partner sitting on the table. He knew him before, and so he sings out and wants to know where he was. My partner was a hard, rough man, and he says: "This is a sailor's boarding-house." "Where is the blooming fellow that told me I was going to be a bloody body-slasher?" says the cockney. "He is one of my men," says my partner. "Now you are here you had better shp. I have got a fine ship here going to Australia, and you could not do better." "Both the bloody ship, I don't care where I go," said the cockney, and he went to Australia.

### Fishing for Suckers.

About the same time, I was walking along the waterfront with my eye peeled for anything that might come my way, when I saw three husky sailors painting the outside of a ship. There is three hundred dollars, thought I. Counting my chickens before they were hatched, I was. So I bought some fishing tackle and a cigar box full of bait same as the wharf fishers use, and I set down near them and began to fish. They were painting a while, and I could see that they were beginning to pay attention, says I. "The dern things won't bite," they were speaking about the fish, you understand. So I got to talking with them, and they told me they were sick and tired



"THE COUNT HAD PAPERS TO PROVE WHO HE WAS."



"I WANTED A STEADY MAN WHO PULLED A GOOD OAK."



"WANTED—A Good Boatman."



"I ASKED THEM WHY THEY DID NOT COME AND WORK ON SHORE."

he said they had better take their chests and go with me. I brought them to his place, and the rest was his lookout. He shipped them for a hundred dollars each, and I got twenty out of each hundred. "That is where my science comes in, offering them work on shore. Most runners tell the men they are going to get them a better ship, and sometimes the sailors know enough not to believe them, but I promise them a good job on shore, and they jump at it every time. When I see they are Norwegians, I offer them the job of pulling the boat for the house, because a Norwegian knows how to pull a boat, and that is work he likes. "I went to the man I was working for—I did not have my own place then—and I says to him, 'Charlie, you put on your best clothes and your plug hat and go and stand outside of the Palace Hotel.' That was where I had told them the railroad boss was staying. I took the fellows up there, and there was Charlie standing in the door playing with his heavy gold chain and looking as if he owned the place. I walked up to him as if I was afraid of him, and took off my hat when I spoke to him. "I asked him if he had work for the three men, and he looked at them in a way as if he was so far above them he could hardly see them. He said perhaps he could use them. Did they know how to paint? Then I put in a word real soft and said I had seen them painting on the ship. Every sailor knows how to paint, you know. Charlie told them he could give them work and took down their names. Then he asked if they had any place to stay, and when they told him no, he said they were staying on board the ship,

you must tell me the whole truth. I am not going into this business with my eyes shut. Then he told me the whole story. This young fellow was the had egg in a millionaire's family. He had traveled around in one place and another, and had sowed his wild oats. Now he had been living in the tenderloin of San Francisco for a while, and, as you may have heard, the denizens of them places know how to make a man part company with his money uncommonly fast. When he didn't have any more money, he took to forging checks on the family, and after a while the harvest of checks began to come to the East, a little too fast to be convenient even for that family. Therefore, he must go to sea to keep him out of harm's way. "Well, now," says I, "if I get that fellow to go to sea with his own free will, what is there in it for me?" "You get your \$40 advance, same as usual," says he. "Forty dollars advance?" says I. "Do you suppose I would tackle that geezra for \$40? My time is too valuable. Make it five hundred and then perhaps we can talk business." I got his promise of five hundred, and in the afternoon a carriage drove up to my place and my lord-stepsister told them to show him a good room, and he called for champagne. I told them to give him some iced cider, not that I did not have every kind of liquor you could think of in the house, but the sizer was good enough for the geezra, and he was too drunk to know the difference anyhow. I went to his room and said to him:

### Making Him Willing.

"I suppose you know why you are here? You have committed forgery, and the officers of the law are looking for you. You were brought here because no one would think of looking for gentlemen like you in a sailor's boarding-house." After I had him good and scared I left him to think it over while I went downstairs. I called two husky fellows and there, one an Irishman and one a big Swede, and I says to them: "Boys, I want you to be officers tonight, and if you do just what I tell you there is a double eagle in it for each of you." In the evening I was sitting with my fine gentleman in his room, and he was telling me a lot of stuff about his Countesses and Duchesses. Would you believe it, the low-down cur was talking about those women as a common rough man like me wouldn't talk if you was to cut his finger off. All of a sudden my man down below sings out, as I had told him to do, that there were two officers down below looking for me, made as if I was scared and whispered to the fellow, "Sh, they are after you."

Then I called down to my man: "What is the matter with them? Can't they come up here? I guess when I was down here I have got younger legs than I have." So they came upstairs, and I went out into the hall to talk to them. They were bawling at the top of their voices as I had told them to do. They said they had come to nab a fellow who had committed forgery; he had left the Palace Hotel in a carriage and had been traced down here. They were going to search the house for him. I asked them for their warrants and they wouldn't talk if they didn't have any. "What do you suppose?" said I. "Don't you think I know the points of the law? Do you think you can search my house without a warrant? But go prove to you how innocent I am. I will not stand on the points of etiquette. Here is one room. Here is another. You won't find anything wrong there." In the meantime I had gone in to my fine gentleman and told him to hide in the closet while they searched the room. He was all colors, and was so scared he did not know what he was doing. He didn't have sense enough left to know that if they had been real officers they would have looked in the closet. When they were gone I went in to him again, and he begged me to tell him what to do. He was all shivering with fear. "Well," says I, "it is no easy matter. They have their eye on this place now, and a gentleman like you can't stay here very long without attracting attention. Of course, they will watch all avenues of escape from the city by rail for a man of your importance, and they will not let you get through. I tell you one thing we might do, though I don't like to propose it, but it is the only thing I can think of. I can get you on board a ship, if you are willing to go as a common sailor."

He was ready to bless me for the scheme, and thought he could not get on board fast enough. I told him he could not go in his fine clothes, but that I would get him some from the baggage-room. I despised him so for his dirty talk and for being such a cowardly cur that I toggied him out in the worst old rags I could find, just to relieve my feelings. Of course, he was no more good as a sailor than in any other walk of life, so he soon managed to run away, and came back with a great yarn about to forging checks on the family, and how he had been shanghai'd. Any way, I got my \$500. I only wish I had made it five thousand.

### Rescue of Austrian Count.

Another time there was an Austrian count by name Maximilian shipped from this port. He had guest-through with his money same as the other fellow, and so he thought he would like to try the sea for a while. He shipped in the whaling bark Rainbow, Captain Coghan, and wrote home to his folks that he was going hunting at sea, and so he was, of course, no mistake about that. He told them he was going to stop at Honolulu, and the family telegraphed to the Austrian consul there to supply him with money and send him home. When the ship had anchored outside of Honolulu the consul came on board in his boat and asked the mate if the Count Maximilian was on board. "We have a man by the name of Maximilian," said the mate, "but he is called uncommonly no count." Then he yelled forward for them to send Max aft, and the count came in his dirty rags, but with all the fine manner of a real count. He had papers to prove who he was, so there was no doubt of that, and the consul sent him home.

Of course, we have a trust. Didn't you see it in The Call? It said how the smallest and newest trust in the biggest trust in the world squeal, when Rockefeller couldn't get men to man his vessels without coming to the boarding masters and paying for it. I have got the piece cut out; it is in my 'spectacle case. Here, you read it; my eyes aren't so good as they used to be. Yes, the captain of Rockefeller's ship made an awful howl because he had to pay me \$35 for each man. I told him that when his master could make half a million in a minute by raising the price of oil, he ought not to kick if I wanted to make a hundred in half an hour. When there is a man in the road blocking it, and there is only one road, what are you going to do about it? In this case the boarding masters are the road.

### Has Made His Million.

I am well satisfied. Life has brought me many good things. Do you know how much I have made in this business? A million and a quarter. I have made \$250,000 out of one single company. Once, I got a thousand dollars for one man. That sounds like a fish story, does it not? You see, it was when the steam whalers were beginning to compete with the sailing vessels, and each one was striving to outdo the other. I caught this one for the New Bedford people, and brought him on board one of their bark hunters after he had already gone on board another vessel. I sneaked past the watchman sitting on the poop with guns, one dark night, and persuaded the fellow to come with me and go back to the old-company. When I came to the office with him they were sitting up waiting for me and had made bets on whether I would get him or not. When I brought him they set up a howl, and we all went up town and had dinner. I know that I am at the top of my profession, and it is better to be a king among beggars than a beggar among kings. What is that? You would rather be at the bottom of a good profession than at the top of a bad one? That is because you are a fool, my lady. It is always best to be first, no matter what you are. But our profession is not so bad as you good people think. I am always good to my sailors, because I make my money on them, and the companies know that I always give them a square deal, if they want my services they have to pay me for it, that is all. I never do business with the unions. A man should always do business with some one that is not so smart as himself, and the unions are too smart. Must you go? Don't be in such a hurry. It is not often I get any one to talk to. Stay and have chicken dinner with me and my sailors. We are not so very polished, but we will treat you well.

When there is a man in the road blocking it, and there is only one road, what are you going to do about it? In this case the boarding masters are the road.

When there is a man in the road blocking it, and there is only one road, what are you going to do about it? In this case the boarding masters are the road.

When there is a man in the road blocking it, and there is only one road, what are you going to do about it? In this case the boarding masters are the road.

When there is a man in the road blocking it, and there is only one road, what are you going to do about it? In this case the boarding masters are the road.

When there is a man in the road blocking it, and there is only one road, what are you going to do about it? In this case the boarding masters are the road.

When there is a man in the road blocking it, and there is only one road, what are you going to do about it? In this case the boarding masters are the road.

When there is a man in the road blocking it, and there is only one road, what are you going to do about it? In this case the boarding masters are the road.

When there is a man in the road blocking it, and there is only one road, what are you going to do about it? In this case the boarding masters are the road.

When there is a man in the road blocking it, and there is only one road, what are you going to do about it? In this case the boarding masters are the road.

When there is a man in the road blocking it, and there is only one road, what are you going to do about it? In this case the boarding masters are the road.

When there is a man in the road blocking it, and there is only one road, what are you going to do about it? In this case the boarding masters are the road.

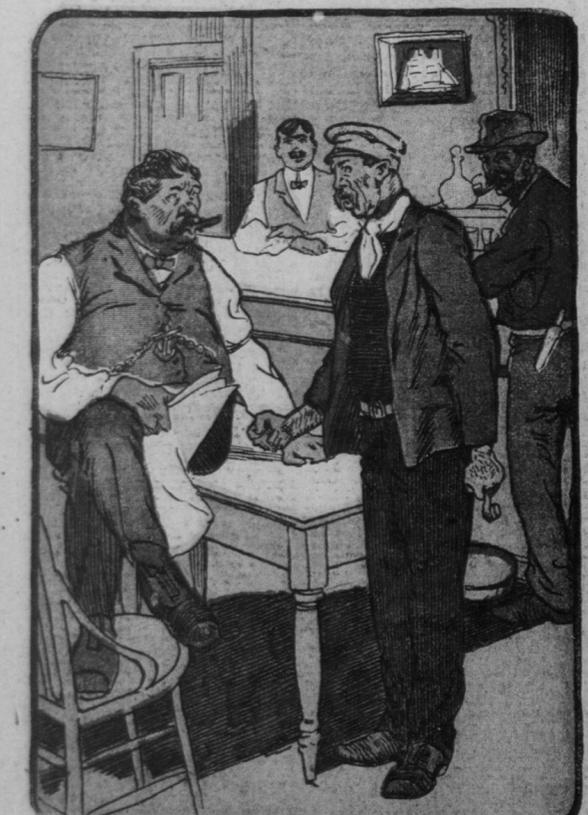
When there is a man in the road blocking it, and there is only one road, what are you going to do about it? In this case the boarding masters are the road.

When there is a man in the road blocking it, and there is only one road, what are you going to do about it? In this case the boarding masters are the road.

When there is a man in the road blocking it, and there is only one road, what are you going to do about it? In this case the boarding masters are the road.

When there is a man in the road blocking it, and there is only one road, what are you going to do about it? In this case the boarding masters are the road.

When there is a man in the road blocking it, and there is only one road, what are you going to do about it? In this case the boarding masters are the road.



"BOTHER THE BLOODY SHIP, I DON'T CARE WHERE I GO."



"I ASKED THEM WHY THEY DID NOT COME AND WORK ON SHORE."