

OLOFF THE PIRATE SERIES

11. The Black Seagull



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THE BLACK SEAGULL

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SUMMARY

In the treacherous waters of the Indian Ocean, where pirate havens thrive and fortunes are won and lost on the roll of a wave, a storm is brewing that will test the limits of loyalty, courage, and love. The Black Seagull plunges you into a world of swashbuckling adventure, where shadows hide deadly secrets, and the line between pirate and hero blurs with every cannon blast.

Captain Reedert Ferlo, a man of refined manners and chilling ambition, dreams of ruling the pirate stronghold of Deelen Bay. But his path to power is blocked by giants, and he's not afraid to spill blood to climb over them. When a dying sailor washes ashore, whispering tales of betrayal and destruction at the hands of the notorious Captain Oloff, Ferlo sees an opportunity to seize his destiny. Can he expose Oloff's treachery, or will his ambition lead him into a deadly trap?

Captain Oloff, feared and respected in equal measure, is a force of nature on the high seas. As the clash between Ferlo and Oloff escalates, innocent lives are caught in the crossfire, and the beautiful Rynette, a woman of noble spirit, finds her fate inextricably linked to the pirate captain she loves. Torn between loyalty and duty, she must risk everything to protect the man she cherishes, even if it means facing down a sea of enemies.

Against a backdrop of roaring cannons, clashing steel, and the intoxicating scent of salt and gunpowder, The Black Seagull weaves a tale of intrigue, betrayal, and unwavering love. But when a shocking discovery threatens to unravel everything, one question remains. Who will survive the coming tide, and what price will they pay for ambition's dark reward? Dive into The Black Seagull and discover what lies beneath the surface of Deelen Bay, before it's too late.

EXTRACT

His words were like music to his two friends. The large, bearded gunner, in particular, felt the blood coursing through his veins and his bulging muscles were tense. For him it was a wonderful order, because positive action was the most wonderful expression a person could have. The danger involved was not considered for a moment. They lived with it daily in any case. It was as natural a part of them as food and sleep. With fine judgment, Oloff struck the first guard in the stomach with a fist blow just when the man suddenly frowned as if he had realized that he did not know these guards. Oloff had stretched out his left arm far and struck hard. The fellow hunched over and Oloff's right hand shot past his face to grab the rifle from his hand. He caught it when the other man's fingers relaxed around it. The same movement flung the butt of the rifle over Oloff's shoulder, because he had grabbed it at the front of the barrel. He immediately drew back and hit the next guard over his chest and against his neck with the full length of the weapon. The fellow fell to the ground like an ox.

Only one of the guards, the one who was furthest from them on the other side of the gate, managed to get out a cry. Sias had given his first opponent a knockout blow, but was unable to reach that one in time. The cry, however, broke off abruptly, because suddenly the guard was staring down the barrel of the rifle that Oloff was aiming at him.

11. THE BLACK SEAGULL

Chapter 1

“There’s something floating on the water, Captain Ferlo,” sings the lookout from the crow’s nest.

Reedert Ferlo picks up the spyglass where it lies before him on the railing of the quarterdeck. With a quick glance up the mast, he establishes the direction the lookout indicates.

It looks like a piece of driftwood, but on top is a black bundle. It might be the form of a person.

“The sea is littered with pieces of masts and sails!” the lookout calls again. “There was a fierce battle here not long ago.”

Reedert surveys the vast, undulating water surface around them from the eastern horizon to the western horizon. As the lookout said, there had been a sea battle, but it could have taken place a day or a week ago. For the past few days, the weather had been calm and the wind had only playfully fluttered the sails. The wreckage pieces would therefore not have drifted far from each other.

“Change course, helmsman,” commands Ferlo. “Let’s see what’s floating on that wood.”

The Black Seagull is a privateer with scarcely thirty cannons. It is elegantly built and slices through the water at a fair speed with its slack sails.

Ferlo keeps the spyglass fixed on the object. At two hundred paces, it is perfectly clear to him that it is the body or the corpse of a person.

The helmsman turns diagonally against the light breeze so that The Black Seagull lies almost motionless next to the bobbing pieces of mast, which are still held together by the tattered sails. The large ripples caused by the rolling ship drift the wood with the body on it away from the side. A few of the crew have already climbed down the ladder and, from where they hang just above the waterline, they hook the rough raft closer.

“It seems to me he’s still alive, Captain!” reports Reedert anxiously. “We’d very much like to hear what he has to say.”

One of them jumps onto the piece of mast, but it rolls under his feet and with a scream he tumbles into the water. The others laugh and mock

him coarsely. The poor creature lying so still is almost dragged into the sea as well.

They succeed in picking him up, and because he is barely a skeleton, he is easily brought on deck.

Ferlo crouches next to him. The man is still breathing, but his eyes are now closed and he is apparently unconscious. It is clear that he has been without food for a long time, perhaps a week, possibly longer. His beard is matted together, his eyes are hollow and deep in their sockets, one of his arms is bare and it is thin, as if only the skin is stretched over the bone.

“Take him to the cabin next to mine,” requests Ferlo in that soft, half-polite manner that is so inappropriate in the company he constantly keeps. And yet the crew obey with an alertness and enthusiasm that one would not have expected.

Reedert Ferlo is of slender build. He is thirty-two years old. His features are fine and quite attractive, but his eyes are cold like his soft voice. There is not a man on The Black Seagull who has not yet realised what is hidden behind that cool gaze.

Ferlo only owns this single ship. It is seldom that he sails the open sea alone as a pirate captain. With The Black Seagull, he would not make much headway against the large and well-armed merchant vessels that sail the trade routes between Europe and the East here between the east coast of Africa and Madagascar.

Usually he offers his services to the powerful captains of Deelen Bay, and then he sails with their fleets and shares in the spoils. The young Reedert Ferlo is sought after among the pirate captains, because he is known as a man with a fine sense of judgment. In a fight, he is like the devil himself. He stops at nothing, he shows no mercy and he expects no mercy. And there are even some of them who fear him, because as soft as his voice is, so unfathomably deep is his merciless cruelty.

He follows the few pirates as they carry the man into the cabin. One of them is the so-called doctor on The Black Seagull and he begins to nurse the creature. Ferlo stands by the porthole and gazes silently out to sea as if he is unaware of what is happening around him. But when the man’s eyes suddenly flicker open, he is quickly at his side in a few strides, and yet as if he had not exerted himself at all.

“You can go,” he informs the others. “Too many of us might frighten him. I want to talk to him as one doesn’t know how much he will be able to speak, or for how long,” he adds in a subdued voice. Ferlo is alone with the stranger whom they have just rescued from the sea.

“I am a friend,” says Reedert calmly, but clearly. “Can you hear me?” The two bloodshot eyes are fixed on him. He imagines that the expression in them is intelligent, as if the man even recognizes him. “Yes,” it comes hoarsely and whispering.

“Who are you?” Ferlo then inquires, while bending lower to hear better. “Obregh... Captain Haak...”

“You are one of Captain Haak’s men?” Ferlo is intensely interested. Captain Haak is second only to the Admiral of Deelen Bay in the Indian Ocean. “Then you will know me,” he continues when he sees that his deduction is correct. “I am Captain Ferlo. I am your friend. What happened?”

“There... there was a battle. Haak is dead... ships all sunk.”

This news hits Ferlo like a punch. He stands up straight. Captain Haak dead! His fleet destroyed! Only an opponent with a fleet of warships would be able to do such a thing.

“Who?” he now inquires. “Who did it?”

“Oloff... Captain Oloff...”

Ferlo’s eyes narrow. He looks at the man with concern, not because he cares much whether the poor creature breathes his last here or not, but because he wants to extract as much information from him as possible. Now it seems as if the man is delirious. He must have been drifting around on the pieces of mast for a long time.

Oloff? The man is talking nonsense. Oloff and Haak are the two captains with the highest prestige in Deelen Bay. They occupy the honorary positions on either side of the Admiral at the large oval table where the court of Deelen Bay sits. Why would Oloff move against Haak and wipe him off the surface of the sea?

“Captain Oloff and Captain Haak are friends,” says Ferlo, emphasizing each word so that the other must understand him... “When they last left Deelen Bay, Captain Oloff sailed south and Captain Haak north. Why...?”

The man tries to shake his head. His lips tremble and his lower jaw moves as if he wants to speak, but cannot get the words out. He tries to stop Ferlo as if he is on the wrong track.

“No,” he finally gets out... he was on the Oosterprins. Haak had captured him.

Ferlo steps back from the bunk in disappointment. The man is talking incoherently. He is talking nonsense. Not a word of what he says can be accepted as the truth.

“Oloff escaped,” the man continues, to Reedert’s surprise. “Then his ships attacked... the Seewraak... Jansje Meer...”

“When was this?” Ferlo steps closer with renewed interest. If the man is delirious, he will continue to talk incoherently. Then he will not be able to repeat the same story. He will be able to test it easily.

“Week ago.”

“You say Haak captured Oloff first?”

“Yes, Oloff... He wanted to steal the Oosterprins... Haak’s prey.”

“I know,” says Ferlo and this statement satisfies him. He knows that Captain Haak left Deelen Bay to intercept the Oosterprins with its rich cargo. The man is therefore still in his right mind if he can remember these facts.

“You say Captain Haak is dead?”

“Yes.”

“He is dead because Oloff attacked him and destroyed his fleet.”

“Yes, he attacked in the night. Haak... had no chance.”

“Are there any more of you who survived the battle?”

“I... I don’t know... didn’t see... I think I’m the only one.”

A faint smile plays around the corners of Ferlo’s mouth. The expression in his eyes, however, does not change. The life of the man before him has no value for him, the information he has just received, does!

“Did Oloff simply let the ships sink?” he asks again.

“The spoils... he plundered everything first.” The man coughs haltingly.

“Water,” he asks so softly that Ferlo can barely hear him.

“In a moment,” he says coolly. “I’ll send you water in a moment,” he says coolly. “First, tell me if you know why Oloff did this.”

“Water,” the man repeats weakly on the bunk.

“I’m telling you that you’ll get it in a moment. Why did Oloff do it?”

“Water.”

Ferlo turns around, annoyed. This fellow is a pirate. He is one of the brotherhood of Deelen Bay. And yet there are thoughts swirling in Ferlo’s head that hold such possibilities for the future that he would not want this man to pass on his knowledge to anyone else.

Ferlo is only one of the minor captains in Deelen Bay. At the large oval table where their positions indicate their rank and status, he sits at the farthest point from the Admiral. Reedert Ferlo sees his future very clearly. The Admiral is old. The day will come when he is no longer there and then he, Reedert Ferlo, wants to sit in his chair.

At the moment, he is little more than a henchman for several of the larger captains. He is just returning from a raiding expedition in the north with Captain Markus Tarrog, Red Mark, as he is known, and the third captain in rank in Deelen Bay. But no, he corrects himself, now that Haak is no longer there, Red Mark will be second. Oloff is, of course, still first.

And if Ferlo’s suspicion that Oloff is stabbing his pirate brothers in the back and taking their prey is correct, and he can prove it, there will be at least one less obstacle on his path to the Admiralty of Deelen Bay.

But then he must keep this information to himself. It must be a weapon that he can use to his own advantage. Fortunately, he had strayed slightly from Red Mark’s fleet when he came across the floating figure. Red Mark will therefore know nothing of this.

But even less should Ferlo’s own crew know. The fellow must therefore not be allowed to live! If he recovers, he will retell his experience to everyone.

“I’ll send water,” he says curtly over his shoulder and walks to the door. He will simply lock the door from the outside. The creature will not be able to hold out for too long.

In the cabin door, he stops dead. It is as if something has touched him on the shoulder, but he knows that it is just his imagination. He turns around nonetheless and stares at the bunk.

The emaciated pirate is staring at the ceiling with wide open eyes. Ferlo walks slowly closer. He has seen death too many times not to recognize it now.

He smiles. The fellow is making things very easy for him.

He returns to the quarterdeck and orders that the body be removed. He informs his helmsman that the old man had nothing to say, he was too weak.

That afternoon, they rejoin Red Mark's fleet. That evening, Ferlo dines aboard the Red Whale, Red Mark's flagship. Here, too, he says nothing about the incident. He only says that they encountered a few pieces of driftwood with an old sailor on it, who died a moment after they rescued him, without saying a word. There was nothing about him by which they could identify him.

Two days later, they sight Deelen Bay. Reedert Ferlo's excitement grows. He had been out of the harbour for several weeks now, along with Red Mark, and he does not know whether Oloff has returned in the meantime.

But he was there when Oloff and Captain Haak left shortly after each other. Everyone knew that Haak was going to intercept the Oosterprins. It is clear to Ferlo that Oloff wanted to get ahead of him. For some reason, if the fellow who died had his facts straight, Oloff had gone on board the Oosterprins. He may have wanted to prepare for an attack by his own ships, but here Haak had in turn got ahead of him. He had taken Oloff prisoner, but Oloff had escaped and thereafter sent Haak, fleet and all, to the depths.

Despite the slight tension he feels, the corners of Ferlo's mouth crease into the only kind of smile he knows. There are some of his dreams that may come true much sooner than he had ever hoped.

Before him lies Deelen Bay in the evening sun that shines from the west on the south coast of Madagascar. At first glance, Ferlo notices that Oloff's two magnificent ships, the Seewraak and the Jansje Meer, are not anchored in the bay. Haak's ships are also not there. Even now, Ferlo can hardly believe that the dying man had told the truth, and from time to time he expects to discover that this knowledge that he cherishes so much, was only the creation of a feverish brain.

On either side of the harbour, ranges of hills run into the sea. They enclose the town like a large horseshoe. Large, flat sheds on the foreshore and clumsy buildings behind them provide accommodation for the multitude of pirates who come here to rest after their raids, recover from their wounds and seek pleasure. Many of them have

families who live in Deelen Bay. There is also a large slave camp that is constantly maintained, usually the crew of ships that are plundered by the pirates. Their task is to work the vast fields and orchards around Deelen Bay and to tend the cattle and small livestock. Deelen Bay is therefore a self-sufficient fortress that is resistant to the most powerful fleets and armies from the sea as well as from the land.

Ferlo is rowed ashore. He has no dependents ashore and smartens himself up in one of the large inns where he has a comfortable room. Afterwards, he walks with a light step to the Hanekraai tavern where the court of Deelen Bay meets. Only the captains and their officers, with their wives or companions, may gather here. There are many of them who greet him, but also many who ignore him, because in Deelen Bay hatred, envy, jealousy and resentment are very close to the surface.

The massive, bearded Admiral greets him heartily. It is young captains like Reedert Ferlo who will later have their own fleets and become the rulers of the Indian Ocean. It is men like him who will have to fill the Admiral's coffers in the future. For everyone who makes use of Deelen Bay, must pay large portions of their spoils as tax to the Admiral.

Red Mark is already there. He sits to the Admiral's right in Oloff's place. On his left, where Captain Haak usually sits, is someone else.

"Captain Markus tells me that you have had a successful few weeks!" the Admiral exclaims.

"You can say that again," answers Reedert with a slight bow that makes the others laugh, because they can never get used to the refined manners of this young captain.

"I wonder where Haak and Oloff are," says the Admiral then. "They have been away from here for quite some time."

"They may have had some bad luck," suggests Ferlo and he watches the faces around him closely.

"They!" bellows the Admiral. "The two most powerful captains that have ever lived! No way, they will most likely turn up shortly."

Reedert Ferlo knows better. Oloff will come, but not Haak.

Inconspicuously, he looks around the oval table that stands in front of the long counter against the back wall of the large hall. There are ten places between his and that of the Admiral.

The day will come, thinks Ferlo, while bringing a foaming mug of beer