



The Last Voyage of the Karluk: A Survivor's Memoir of Arctic Disaster

William Laird McKinlay

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An astonishing narrative of disaster and perseverance, *The Last Voyage of the Karluk* will thrill readers of adventure classics like *Into Thin Air* and *The Climb*. In 1913, explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson hired William McKinlay to join the crew of the *Karluk*, the leading ship of his new Arctic expedition. Stefansson's mission was to chart the waters north of Alaska; yet the *Karluk*'s crew was untrained, the ship was ill-suited to the icy conditions, and almost at once the *Karluk* was crushed—at which point Stefansson abandoned his crew to continue his journey on another ship. This is the only firsthand account of what followed: a nightmare struggle in which half the crew perished, one was mysteriously shot, and the rest were near death by the time of their rescue twelve months later.

Written some sixty years after the fact, and drawing extensively on his own daily log, McKinlay's narrative of this doomed expedition is rendered with remarkable clarity of recollection, and with a combination of horror and a level of self-possession that, to modern eyes, may seem incredible. Like most of his companions, McKinlay was inexperienced, without a day's training in the skills essential to survival in the Arctic. Yet he and many of his fellow crewmen, with the help of an Eskimo family accustomed to such conditions, survived a year under the harshest of conditions, enduring 80-mile-per-hour gales and temperatures well below zero with only the barest of provisions and almost no hope of contact with civilization.

Nearly a century later, this remains one of the most compelling survival stories ever written—an extraordinary testament to man's overpowering will to live.



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