

Stratemeyer Edward

**At the Fall of Port Arthur:
or, A Young American in the
Japanese Navy**



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PREFACE

"At the Fall of Port Arthur" is a complete tale in itself, but forms the third volume in a line issued under the general title of "Soldiers of Fortune Series."

The story relates primarily the adventures of Larry Russell and his old-time sea chum, Luke Striker, already well known to the readers of my "Old Glory Series." Larry and Luke are aboard of their old ship, the *Columbia*, bound from Manila to Nagasaki, with a cargo designed for the Japanese Government. This is during the war between Russia and Japan, and when close to the Japanese coast the schooner is sighted by a Russian warship and made a prize of war.

As prisoners both Larry and Luke see something of life in the Russian navy. When close to Vladivostok, the Russian warship falls in with several ships of the Japanese fleet, and after a thrilling sea-fight surrenders with her prize. This brings Larry and Luke before Admiral Togo, and as Larry's brother Ben, with their mutual friend, Gilbert Pennington, is already in the Japanese army, Larry enters the Japanese navy and Luke follows suit. The siege and bombardment of Port Arthur are at their height; and the particulars are given of many battles both on the sea and on land, leading up to the ultimate surrender of that brave Russian commander, General Stoessel, and the fall of the city. By this surrender the Japanese obtained many thousands of prisoners of war, hundreds of cannon, with large quantities of ammunition, and several scores of vessels, useful for either fighting purposes or as transports. Moreover, this victory placed the entire southern portion of Manchuria under Japanese control, giving the army untrammelled use of the railroad running from Port Arthur to Liao-Yang, a city on the road to Mukden, captured some time before, as already related in another volume of this series, entitled "Under the Mikado's Flag."

As I have mentioned in a previous work, it is as yet impossible to state what the outcome of this terrific conflict will be. So far victory has perched largely upon the standard of Japan. The Russian navy has been practically shattered and its army fought to a standstill. The cost of the war has been tremendous to both countries. Countless thousands of lives have already been sacrificed. Would that peace were soon at hand!

Again I thank my young friends for their appreciation of my former stories. May the present tale fulfill every reasonable expectation.

Edward Stratemeyer

CHAPTER I

LARRY AND HIS FRIENDS

"Unless I miss my guess, Luke, we are going to have a storm."

"Jest what I was thinking, Larry. And when it comes I allow as how it will be putty heavy," replied Luke Striker, casting an eye to the westward, where a small dark cloud was beginning to show above the horizon.

"Well, we can't expect fine weather all the time," went on Larry Russell, inspecting the cloud with equal interest. "We want some wind anyway," he added. "We are not making this return trip to Nagasaki nearly as fast as we made the trip to Manila."

Luke Striker, a bronzed and weather-beaten Yankee sailor, rubbed his chin reflectively. "I was jest thinking o' the day I spied the old *Columbia* in Manila harbor," he said, meditatively. "Tell ye, Larry, the sight 'most struck me dumb. 'The *Columbia*,' sez I to myself. An' then I thought I must be a-dreamin'. I wanted to find this ship ag'in in the worst way."

"The ship certainly seems like a home to me, Luke – and I reckon she always will seem that way. I've traveled a good many miles in her, since I first struck her at Honolulu in the Hawaiian Islands," responded Larry Russell.

"Yes – both of us have. But we never took no trip like this afore – carryin' a cargo for the Japanese Government, with that government at war with Russia." Luke Striker lowered his voice. "What's the outlook? Does the old man reckon to fall in with a Russian warship afore we can reach Nagasaki?"

"Hush, Luke; you mustn't mention our cargo," came from Larry Russell, hastily.

"I ain't mentionin' it to anybody but you."

"Captain Ponsberry is in hopes that we shall not meet any Russian warships."

"But what if we do?"

"Then we shall have to show our heels as best we can."

"A sailing vessel can't show much o' a pair o' heels to a man-o'-war."

"That is true."

"I suppose, if the *Columbia* was overhauled by a Russian warship, they'd consider us a prize of war; wouldn't they?" continued the old Yankee sailor.

"They would, unless Captain Ponsberry could get out of it in some way."

"How do you think he might get out of it?"

"Well, you must remember that our cargo doesn't belong to the Japanese Government yet. We are carrying it from Manila to Nagasaki for the Richmond Importing Company. The Russians would have to prove their case against us before they could claim the schooner as a legitimate prize of war."

"I see. Well, I reckon as how them Russians would do 'most anything to square accounts with the Japs. So far, accordin' to my notions, they have been losin' ground right along in this war."

"Yes, and they'll lose more before the Japs are through with 'em, Luke. But that storm is coming up fast," went on Larry Russell, with another examination of the black cloud. "I'll have to tell the captain. If we don't shorten sail it may do us some damage."

With the last-mentioned remark Larry Russell walked aft, toward the companionway of the *Columbia*, a staunch three-masted schooner that hailed from Gloucester. He was second mate of the craft and as such it was now his duty to inform Captain Nat Ponsberry that a storm was approaching.

To those of my young friends who have read "Under Dewey at Manila" and other volumes of the "Old Glory Series" Larry Russell needs no introduction. He was one of three brothers, who, left in the charge of a miserly step-uncle, had thought it best to go away from home and seek fortune in various parts of the globe. Larry had drifted to San Francisco and then to Honolulu, where he had

fallen in with Captain Nat Ponsberry and the *Columbia*, as already mentioned. He, with his sailor friend, Luke Striker, had been cast away, and while adrift on the Pacific had been picked up by the Asiatic Squadron under Commodore (afterward Admiral) Dewey, to serve with honor during the memorable battle of Manila Bay.

Since those days a great many things had occurred to the Russell boys. Ben, the oldest of the three, had served as a young volunteer in Cuba during the advance on Santiago, and as an officer with the army in the Philippines, and Walter, the third brother, had served in the navy in Cuban waters and elsewhere. In the meantime the miserly step-uncle had reformed, and now thought "his three boys," as he called them, "the best young fellers in all America, barrin' none!"

Larry Russell was a natural sailor, and when his term in the navy came to an end he could not bear to think of giving up the sea. He heard that his old ship was bound for a trip to Japan and other ports, and at once communicated with Captain Ponsberry, with the result that he became second mate of the schooner, the first mate being, as of old, Tom Grandon, a personal friend of Captain Ponsberry.

At this time Walter Russell had gone into business, and was doing remarkably well. But Ben was doing nothing, and Larry persuaded his oldest brother to come aboard the ship at Manila, for the trip to Nagasaki and Port Arthur. This was just at the outbreak of the war between Russia and Japan, but the brothers at that time knew nothing about the tremendous conflict so close at hand.

The *Columbia* was carrying a cargo for the Richmond Importing Company, represented in Japan and China by Gilbert Pennington, who had served with Ben Russell in our army in Cuba and the Philippines. From Manila Gilbert had gone to China, to fight the Boxers, as already described in "On to Peking," the first volume of this "Soldiers of Fortune Series." With the end of the Boxer conflict, Lieutenant Pennington, as he had then become, turned from war to business, and soon made a number of business transactions which were highly gratifying to the company that he represented.

When the *Columbia* arrived at Nagasaki, Captain Ponsberry learned that the war had begun and that to get to Port Arthur – a Russian stronghold in Manchuria – was out of the question. While he was awaiting orders Gilbert Pennington appeared on the scene. Gilbert had had great difficulties in getting away from Port Arthur, having been suspected by the Russian officials of being a spy. He wished to know at once if the ship's cargo was safe.

"As safe as when we left home," had been Captain Ponsberry's reply.

"Good!" answered the young agent, and then he wished to know if anything had been done about selling the goods. Captain Ponsberry replied that he had been ordered to do nothing until he received word from Gilbert. This suited the young representative; and the upshot of the matter was that the cargo, instead of going to a Russian port, was sold to the Japanese Government at a price considerably above the ordinary market value.

Gilbert Pennington was enthusiastic about joining the Japanese army for a campaign in Manchuria and he imparted a large share of this enthusiasm to Ben Russell. As a result both enlisted and became captains in a special command, under a Major Okopa, who could speak very good English. The part of the army to which they were assigned landed at Chinampo, in Korea, and in the second volume of this series, called "Under the Mikado's Flag," I related the particulars of the crossing of the Yalu River and of the many skirmishes and battles leading up to the terrific ten-days' contest before Liao Yang. During these fights Ben and Gilbert did their full duty as officers, and when the Russians retreated to the North both were well content to take a much-needed rest. But additional struggles were still in store for them, as will be learned in the pages which follow.

At first Larry Russell had been inclined to follow his brother and his friend Gilbert into the Japanese army. But Captain Ponsberry did not wish to lose his services as a second mate, and when it was decided that the *Columbia* should make a quick run to Manila and back, for another cargo for the Japanese Government, he made up his mind to stick to the ship.

The run to Manila from Nagasaki was made without special incident, and, once at the main seaport of the Philippines, Captain Ponsberry lost no time in getting on board the cargo the Richmond

Importing Company had ready for him. The cargo was a valuable one and it was calculated that if rightly sold it would yield the company a profit of five or six thousand dollars.

"You have got to take care and not run into any Russian warship," said the agent of the company at Manila. "If you do you may have a whole lot of trouble in explaining matters to the Russian commander's satisfaction. I see by the reports that the Russians have already held up several English and South American ships."

"I shall keep a sharp lookout for 'em," was Captain Ponsberry's reply.

"And another thing, Captain," went on the agent, in a lower tone; "you want to watch your crew."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't like the looks of two or three of them. For all you know they may be more than willing to expose you – if you fall in with the Russians. Can you trust your first and second mates?"

"I can! They are as honest as myself."

"Then caution them to keep an eye on the hands. One of those fellows looks like a Russian to me – the chap with the heavy black beard."

"You mean Semmel. He says he is a Pole and that he hates the Russians."

"Humph! Well, I saw him talking to a lot of Russians night before last. And when they passed a Jap the whole crowd jeered at the little brown man."

"Semmel, too?"

"Yes."

"Then I shall watch him," answered Captain Ponsberry, decidedly.

"Do, but don't let him know it. Some of these foreign sailors are ugly when they find out they are being suspected."

"Trust me to manage him," returned the commander of the *Columbia*; and there the talk on the subject came to an end.

CHAPTER II

A STORM ON THE PACIFIC

Larry found Captain Ponsberry working over a chart on the cabin table, laying out the course of the ship. The commander of the *Columbia* was a bluff, hearty individual and he and the young second mate thought a great deal of each other.

"Well, what is it?" asked the captain, looking up quickly.

"I came to report that a storm is coming up from the west," answered Larry.

"Humph! I was afraid we'd catch it sooner or later. Is it close up yet?"

"It's coming up pretty fast."

Captain Ponsberry said no more, but threw down his parallel rulers and his pencil. Catching up his cap, he mounted to the deck, and the young second mate followed at his heels. The captain gave a long look to the westward and then a gaze around the remainder of the horizon.

"Tell Cal Vincent to call all hands to shorten sail!" he called out to Larry. "Tell 'em to tumble up quick, too – that storm ain't none too far off for comfort!"

Larry passed the word to Cal Vincent, who was the boatswain of the *Columbia*, and soon the whistle piped up shrilly, and those who were below or in the fore-castle, came on deck in a hurry. Already the wind was freshening, ruffling up the whitecaps in all directions. The sky, that had been so blue a short while before, became leaden, and the depths of the ocean took on a somber hue. The barometer indicated a great and immediate change.

"Lay aloft there, men!" cried Captain Ponsberry. "Our sails are mostly new and we don't want them ripped up if we can help it. Skip along there, Peterson!" The latter words to a big sailor who was moving across the deck at a snail's pace.

The sailor addressed, scowled. It was not his watch on deck and he hated to have his midday nap disturbed.

"Got a nail in ma boot," he said.

"Well, haul it out – after the sails are trimmed," returned the captain, and then turned to another hand: "Sommel, what's the matter with you?" This to the suspicious-looking sailor with the heavy black beard.

"Nodding," grumbled Sommel, and turned away sulkily.

"Then get a move on, or we may lose a stick as well as a sail," and there followed a perfect volley of orders in a tone that none of the sailors misunderstood. Up to the yards they crawled like so many monkeys, and soon the creaking of halyard blocks was heard, as the topsails came down. The jib and flying jib were also taken in, and a little later the main-course and the mizzen-course.

"Reckon we can stand the fore-course for a little while longer," said Captain Ponsberry to Tom Grandon. "What do you think?"

"We can, unless it comes quicker nor it is coming now," returned the first mate.

"Well, keep an eye on the wind and reef her as soon as it begins to look nasty," said Captain Ponsberry, and returned to the cabin, to finish his nautical calculations.

The *Columbia* had left the last of the Philippines behind and was headed north through the China Sea toward the lower extremity of Formosa. She was not as new a ship as when Larry had first boarded her at Honolulu, for since that time she had seen half a dozen years of hard service. But Captain Ponsberry was a careful man and believed in making repairs as soon as they were needed, so there was small danger of her opening her seams or going to pieces even in the stiffest of blows. She leaked a little – the best of ships do that – but a short pumping every morning kept the water at the bottom of the well.

As second mate, it was Larry's duty to see that everything on the deck was "ship-shape," and this was especially necessary when a storm was coming up. He made a tour of the ship, his keen eyes taking in every detail.

As it happened, an hour before he had set the sailor Semmel to work stowing away some odds and ends of rope. He had supposed that this task was long since finished, but now he found the ropes scattered about as before.

"See here, Semmel," he called out, "why didn't you stow away those ropes as I told you?"

"Stow dem away in a leetle vile," answered the sailor with the heavy beard.

"You'll stow them away now," returned Larry, sharply. He did not at all fancy the manner of the hand he was addressing. "I told you to do it an hour ago. We don't want anything loose on deck when this storm hits us."

"Vincent kicked de ropes out dare," growled Semmel. "I had noddin' to do mit 'em."

"That isn't here or there. I told you to stow them away, and I want you to do it. If you don't, I'll have to report you to the captain."

"Oh, I do him!" grumbled Semmel, but he glared at Larry as if he wished to chew the young second mate up. "You put all dare vork on me, hey?" he added, after a pause.

"You've got to do your share of it."

"Humph!" Semmel seemed on the point of saying more, but shut his teeth and began to arrange the ropes in proper order. Larry watched him for a moment and then walked away. As soon as his back was turned the sailor shook his fist at the young second mate.

"You vait!" he muttered. "Chust vait, you Jankee rat!"

The sky kept growing darker, and soon came a puff of wind much heavier than any that had gone before. The *Columbia* had been moving over the waves on an even keel, but now she gave a sudden lurch to starboard.

"Reckon it's time to take them reefs in the fore-course," said Grandon to Larry, and soon the sailors were at work on the sheets, leaving just sufficient canvas up to make the schooner mind her helm. It was hard work, for the sudden gusts made the sail snap and crack like a whip.

So far it had not rained a drop, but now came a sudden downpour, the drops "as big as hen's eggs," to use Luke Striker's manner of describing them. Then came a flash of lightning out of the western sky, followed by a rumble of thunder.

"This is going to be an old-time storm," was Larry's comment, as he met Luke Striker near the forecastle. "I'll have to get my oilskin out."

Luke already had his raincoat on and soon the young mate was similarly provided. Wind and rain were increasing, and presently there came a flash of lightning and a clap of thunder that made everybody jump. The thunder brought Captain Ponsberry to the deck in a hurry.

"Did that hit us?" he questioned, looking around anxiously.

"No, sir, but it was pretty close," replied Grandon.

"Is everything secure?" went on the commander, to Larry.

"Yes, sir."

It was difficult to converse further, for the wind was now whistling through the rigging, driving the rain in sheets across the deck. All had to hold fast for fear of being swept overboard. On every side the sea was lashing itself into a foam and the waves were growing higher and higher. At one instant the *Columbia* would seem to be riding on top of a mountain, the next she would sink down and down into the trough of the sea.

"Well, Larry, how do you like this?" questioned Captain Ponsberry, as he took a position beside the second mate.

"Oh, I don't mind it at all," was the cheery answer. "I used to mind the storms, but I've got used to them."

"This isn't a plaything we are getting."

"Oh, I know that – you can see it by the way the wind is driving us. But we are not near any land, are we?"

"No."

"Then we'll be sure to outride it. I feel I can bank on the old *Columbia* for almost anything."

At this Captain Ponsberry laid an affectionate hand on his second mate's shoulder.

"Reckon you love the old craft about as well as I do," he said.

"I don't know about that – you've been on board so many more years than myself. But to me she is a second home."

"I see. Well, let us hope we get through with this trip in safety."

"Don't you imagine we'll do it?" questioned Larry, quickly.

"Certainly. But you must remember that we may have trouble if we fall in with any Russian warship." Captain Ponsberry lowered his voice. "Did you have trouble with Semmel?"

"A little. I ordered him to coil up some ropes and he didn't obey me right away. But he stowed them away afterwards."

Captain Ponsberry drew a long breath. "The more I see of that chap the less I like him."

"I never liked him from the start," answered Larry, frankly. "But you'll have to give him credit for being a good all-round sailor."

"There is no doubt but what he is that, Larry. But he has a bad eye."

"What do you think he could do to harm us?"

"Nothing – unless we fell in with a Russian warship. In that case, if he was a Russian sympathizer, he might expose the fact that while we are carrying a cargo for the Richmond Importing Company the goods are really meant for the Japanese Government."

"Does he know that?"

"I'm not sure, one way or the other. What I am afraid of is, that he may know a good bit more nor we suspect."

"I see." The young second mate mused for a moment. "I'll tell you what I'd do, if I thought he was going to play me foul – and we fell in with a Russian warship. I'd clap him below decks, out of sight until the warship went on her way again."

"That's easily said; but I can't make him a prisoner unless I can prove something against him."

"You can lock him up if he is sulky and won't obey orders."

"Yes, that is true. Still – Phew!"

The captain broke off short, for a vivid streak of lightning flared all over the upper masts of the ship. The thunder-clap was as sharp as it was deafening, and for the moment all on board thought the *Columbia* had surely been struck. Then came a downpour which made even the boldest of the sailors seek shelter.

"That was closer than I like," was Larry's comment, after it was ascertained that the ship was unharmed.

"Most knocked me overboard," came from Luke Striker. "Gosh! reckon my hair's singed," and he put up his hand and ran his fingers through his grayish locks. "Don't want another like that nohow!"

A few minutes later came another flash of lightning, but this was to the eastward, showing that the center of the storm had passed them. The wind was apparently going down, but the sea was as angry as ever and would be for hours to come.

Luke had retired to the fore-castle with several other sailors. Larry's watch on deck was also at an end, and he was just on the point of going below, when from the west came a curious humming sound which made the young second mate pause. The humming increased, and then of a sudden the *Columbia* was caught in a hurricane blast that threw her far over on her side.

"Help!" Larry heard, in the voice of Captain Ponsberry. "Somebody help me, quick, or I'll go overboard!"

CHAPTER III

LARRY LEARNS SOMETHING

The accident which had happened to Captain Nat Ponsberry was certainly a curious one, although similar to that which once cost the life of a young officer in our navy.

When the hurricane blast reached the *Columbia*, the captain was in the act of slipping on a lined raincoat, – a big affair, with long sleeves and an extra high collar. One arm was in the coat and the other was going down the sleeve when it caught in the lining. At that instant the shock threw the captain across the deck and almost over the railing. He caught at the railing with his free hand, but his other hand remained a prisoner in the coat sleeve, while the garment itself stuck in a bunch across his shoulders.

"Help!" he roared again. He tried to pull himself up, and to free the hand in the sleeve, but found both impossible.

Larry did not wait for a second cry for assistance. He knew the captain so well that he felt the officer would only call when in dire peril. He ran out on the slippery deck in double-quick order.

"Hullo, where are you?" he yelled.

"Here! Help!"

The young second mate caught sight of the captain not a moment too soon. Another lurch of the *Columbia* had thrown him completely over the rail, and there he clung with one hand, while the spray was flying all over him.

Not waiting to count the possible cost, Larry slid rather than ran to the rail. Years before he had learned a trick which now stood him in good stead. He wound his legs around the under rail, catching the upper one with his left hand. Then he clutched Captain Ponsberry by the tangled-up arm.

"On deck there!" he yelled. "Throw a rope this way, and hurry up about it!"

"What's the trouble?" came from Tom Grandon, who had been in another part of the ship and had not heard the captain's cry.

"The captain is almost overboard. Throw us a rope."

Tom Grandon was quick to act. The rope came whizzing toward Larry, and in a twinkling he had it around his body and also around the captain.

"Haul in!" he called, and Grandon and two sailors did so. Over the rail came Captain Ponsberry, still fighting to release the tangled-up arm. In a moment more all danger was past.

"Well, how in the world did this happen?" questioned Grandon.

"Tell ye – soon as I can git free o' this consarned coat!" spluttered Captain Ponsberry, and he gave the garment a jerk that ripped one of the sleeves completely in half. "Did ye ever see sech foolishness?" he added. And then he told how the lurch of the ship had carried him over the rail just when he could use but one hand. "After this I reckon I'll put on my coat afore I go on deck," he concluded.

"It was a lucky thing that Larry heard you cry out," said the first mate. "I was at the wheel, helping Groot."

"That's right, Tom." The captain turned to the youth. "Larry, you're a brave one, and always was. I ain't going to forget this!"

"Oh, don't say anything about it," came from the young second mate, modestly. "I know you'd do as much for me, if I needed it."

"Well, I would, an' there's my hand on it," cried Captain Ponsberry, heartily, and gave Larry a grip that made him wince.

The storm kept up for the remainder of the day. But its worst fury was spent, and during the night the wind went down to nothing more than a stiff breeze, which was just what was wanted. All of the sails were again set; and the schooner resumed her course as before.

Before leaving Manila Larry had purchased a number of newspapers printed in that city in English. So far he had had no chance to look the sheets over, but now came two days in which there was little to do, and he spent several hours in devouring the news, while he also let his friend Luke do some reading.

"Tell ye what, this 'ere war between Russia and Japan is goin' to be a big thing," said Luke, after reading an account of the first fights on land and on sea. "It ain't goin' to be no such short affair as our little rumpus in Cuby."

"You are right, Luke; this war is going to be a long and bitter one."

"Who is goin' to win, do you think?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Russia is a vast country, with millions of people and with an immense army and navy. I suppose she can put five times as many men in the field as Japan can."

"But them Japs know how to fight."

"Indeed they do – they have proved that already. And what is to their advantage, they are closer to Korea and Manchuria than Russia is. They can get on the fighting ground quicker, – which counts for a good deal."

"How those Russians must have been astonished when the Japanese warships sailed into 'em at Port Arthur last February. I don't believe they were expecting an attack."

"Hardly, for war had just been declared. But you wouldn't have caught Uncle Sam napping like that, Luke."

"Right ye are, lad; it ain't his style. An' then to see how them Japs have been a-blowin' up the Russian warships ever since. They must have a fine navy."

"Yes, and good gunners, too. I was told in Nagasaki that quite a few American gunners were on their ships – fellows who served under Dewey at Manila and under Sampson and Schley off Cuba."

"I believe you, lad. When a feller gits it in his bones to fight on a warship there ain't no life on a merchantman goin' to satisfy him. Some jackies would rather fight nor eat – you know that as well as I do."

"Well, I shouldn't mind doing some fighting myself. You know I was on a stand about going with Ben and Gilbert Pennington."

"Where do you reckon they are now?"

"In Manchuria, I suppose, fighting as hard as they can. I thought I would get a letter from them before we left Manila, but nothing came."

"I suppose the mails are all upset, on account of the war," put in Cal Vincent, who sat nearby, sewing a button on his shirt. "If you'll remember, Nagasaki was in a big state of excitement while we were there last."

"Did they say anything about any Russian warships bein' in these parts?" questioned Luke.

"No."

"It would be strange if we did fall in with them."

"Which puts me in mind," came from the boatswain, and then he gazed around to see if any other persons were near. "Semmel says he ain't no Russian, but it's dollars to doughnuts he is," he continued, in a lowered tone.

"Have you discovered anything new?" demanded Larry.

"Yes and no. Last night I overheard him and Peterson talking in a suspicious kind of a way. I didn't catch much, for they talked partly in English and partly in a foreign language. But I am sure they are favoring Russia, and Semmel said something about doing something to harm Japan."

"I don't see how they could do anything on board of this ship," came from Luke.

"You didn't hear anything definite?"

"Can't say that I did," answered the boatswain.

"We had better watch them closer than ever."

"All right; I'll do my share," responded Vincent, and Luke Striker said the same.

That very afternoon Larry had another quarrel with the sailor with the long beard. Semmel had a bucket of dirty water which he was carrying to the ship's side. As Larry passed he pretended to stub his toe and allowed some of the dirty water to flow over the young second mate's foot.

"Semmel, what did you do that for?" cried Larry, indignantly.

"Canno help dat," said the sailor. "I slip."

"You did it on purpose!"

"Oh, no!" And the sailor grinned wickedly.

"I say you did. If you try anything like that again, I'll make it warm for you. Get a swab and clean the deck up at once!"

As Semmel sauntered off, and while Larry was stamping the water from his shoe, Captain Ponsberry came up. He had seen the trick played from a distance.

"What did you tell Semmel?" he questioned, sharply.

"Told him to swab the deck up. I think he slopped the dirty water over me on purpose."

"Just my idea of it. I'll tell him what I think of it." And striding after the bearded sailor Captain Ponsberry gave him a lecture not to be readily forgotten.

"I won't have any of your dirty underhanded work aboard of my ship," he concluded. "Either you'll behave yourself, or I'll put you in irons."

"In irons!" ejaculated Semmel, scowling viciously.

"That is what I said and that is what I mean. Ever since you came on board you have been acting in this same dirty fashion and I want it stopped. Now swab up that deck, and see that you make a first-class job of it. For two pins I'd make you black Russell's shoes."

"No black nobody's shoes," growled Semmel, but in such a low tone that Captain Ponsberry could not hear him. He cleaned the deck in his own ugly, independent manner, muttering imprecations against both Larry and the captain in the meantime.

As a matter of fact, even though he had denied it to Captain Ponsberry and others, Ostag Semmel was really a Russian by birth, having been born and raised in the seaport of Kolaska. He had been drafted into the army, but not wishing to serve under a military rule which is unusually severe, he had run away to sea and become a sailor.

Life on the ocean suited Semmel very well and he would have remained away from Russia had it not been for the fact that a rich uncle had died leaving him a property valued at two thousand dollars – a small fortune in the eyes of a man of this Russian's standing. He wished to go back to claim his inheritance, but feared to do so, for he knew that once on Russian soil he would be arrested for desertion, and might be sent to a military prison for a great number of years.

From a friend in Manila he had heard of something which interested him greatly. This was the news that another deserter from the Russian army had been pardoned for his offense because he had taken home with him important news concerning the movements of a certain Japanese warship.

"If I could only do as well," he told himself, over and over again, and then, when he signed articles for the *Columbia's* trip, he listened eagerly to some talk he overheard about the ship's cargo. When he began to suspect the truth – that the cargo was meant for the Japanese Government – his eyes glistened cunningly.

"If I can only let Russia know of this!" he reasoned. "All will go well with me. If I can only let Russia know!"

CHAPTER IV

THE RUSSIAN SAILOR'S PLOT

Captain Ponsberry's stern manner made Ostag Semmel wild with hatred, and when he went back to the forecabin after swabbing up the deck he was in a fit mental condition for almost any dark deed.

For a good half-hour he lay in his bunk in a corner, brooding over his ill-luck and wondering what he could do to revenge himself upon both the master of the schooner and Larry. Larry he especially disliked – the very open-heartedness of the young second mate made him long to do the lad harm.

At the end of the half-hour another sailor came in. It was Carl Peterson, his close friend. Peterson was a burly tar who had visited nearly every quarter of the globe. He loved to drink and carouse, and was ever ready to lend a hand in any excitement that offered. There was a rumor that he had once led a mutiny on a Danish merchant vessel, but this he denied, laying the blame entirely on others.

"Is that you, Peterson?" demanded Semmel, in his native tongue, for he knew that the other could speak Russian fluently.

"Yes," came in a rough voice from Peterson. He gave a coarse laugh. "A fine job you made of it, to pour dirty water over Russell and then have to swab up the deck for it."

"Who told you of that?"

"Didn't I see it with my own eyes – and heard what the captain said, too."

"Bah! It makes me sick!" growled Semmel. "I am sick of the ship – the crew – everything!"

Peterson gave a short toss of his head, which was covered with a shock of fiery red hair. "What are you going to do about it? Even if the captain treats you like a dog, what shall you do, Ostag Semmel? He thinks we are all curs – door mats to wipe feet on!"

"He shall find out that I am neither a dog nor a door mat!" muttered the bearded Russian. "By my right hand I promise you that!"

"Talk is cheap – it takes wind to make the mill go," answered Peterson. To an outsider it would have been plain to see that he was leading Semmel on, in an endeavor to find out what was in his companion's mind.

"It will not end in talk."

"Bah! I have heard that before."

"I have been thinking," went on Ostag Semmel, slowly. "Can I trust you?"

"You know you can."

"You do not love the captain – do not love that Russell?"

"Do I act as if I did?"

"Good! Now, how many on board of this ship?"

"Fourteen men, counting in ourselves."

"You count fairly. Fourteen, how many are our friends?"

"Postnak and Conroy, at least."

"Then we are four, so far. Now, what of Groot and Shamhaven and Jack Wilbur?"

"Groot is a good fellow and a man who wishes to make money."

"And Shamhaven will do almost anything for money – he once told me so. He took a sailor suit from a store in Manila without paying for it."

"I know that too. The tailor was rich and didn't need the money," and Peterson gave another coarse laugh.

"Then we are six – to stand up for our rights. And Jack Wilbur will make seven – just half the number on the ship."

"How can we count that Wilbur in? He is a Yankee."

"He is a weakling and we can manage him, – and I think we can manage some others, too – when we get that far."

"How far do you mean?" demanded Peterson, although he knew about what was coming.

"Is anybody else near here?"

"No," and Peterson took a careful look around.

"Supposing we seize the ship – in the name of the Russian Government? They have a Japanese cargo on board, the captain cannot deny it. We can take the ship, sail her to some Russian port, and win both prize money and glory. Is it not a grand scheme?"

"Ha, that is fine!" Carl Peterson's eyes glowed voraciously. "Ostag, you are a man after my own heart! We might become rich!"

"Then you like the plan?"

"Yes – providing we can make it work. But it is a big undertaking. If we were caught we might swing from a yardarm for it."

"We can make it work – I have another plan for that. I have thought it out completely. We can – but more later," and Ostag Semmel broke off abruptly, as several sailors entered the forecabin. A little later he began to complain in broken English to a sailor named Jack Wilbur that he was suffering from a severe stomach ache.

"Sorry to hear on it," said Wilbur, who was a very mild foremast hand. "Anything I can do for you?"

"I dink not," answered Semmel. "I dink de poor grub ve git mak me feel pad."

"Didn't notice that the grub was poor," answered Wilbur.

"Very poor – not so goot as py my las' ship," answered Semmel. "Some grub here not fit to eat."

It was soon noised around that Semmel was not feeling well and that he had complained that the food dealt out at noontime had made him sick. As soon as Captain Ponsberry heard of this he went to interview Jeff, the colored cook, who, as of old, was singing gayly to himself among the pots and pans of the ship's galley.

"Wasn't nuffin de mattah wid dat grub, Cap'n Ponsberry," exclaimed Jeff, after hearing what the commander of the ship had to say. "It was jess as good as we always has."

"Was it thoroughly cooked?"

"Yes, sah – I don't 'low nuffin to go from dis yere galley 'less it am well cooked."

"Are your pots and kettles clean?"

"Yes, sah – yo' can see fo' yourself, sah."

The captain did see, and moreover he knew that Jeff was usually a careful and conscientious culinary artist who always gave the men the best his stock afforded.

"Well, be careful of what you cook and how you cook it after this," said Captain Ponsberry.

"Would yo' mind tellin' me, sah, who is kicking, sah?" asked Jeff, respectfully.

"Semmel says he was made sick by what he ate."

"Huh, dat scab!" grunted Jeff. "He ain't no 'count at all, he ain't!" And the cook turned away in disgust.

"It looks to me as if Semmel was trying to make trouble all around," said Tom Grandon, when he and the captain and Larry talked the matter over.

"I never liked that man from the first time I clapped eyes on him," came from Larry. "He's a sneak – and worse."

"I shall watch him pretty closely after this," said Captain Ponsberry. "One discontented fellow like him can upset the whole ship if he sets out to do it."

"They can't complain of the grub," went on the first mate. "It's as good as on any merchantman, and better than the law requires."

"I guess it was the deck-swabbing that gave him the stomach ache," said Larry, and this made the captain and Grandon smile.

The next day when the sailors sat down to their dinner two or three of them sniffed suspiciously at the food they were eating.

"This don't taste just right to me," said Shamhaven. "The meat tastes decayed."

"And the vegetables ain't much better," put in Conroy, – a sturdy Irish-American, who was one of the best seamen on the schooner.

"Dat dinner am fust-class," cried Jeff. "I ain't gwine to stand yere an' see you growlin' at it."

"It certainly tastes a bit off, Jeff," put in Jack Wilbur. "Taste it yourself."

The cook did so, and his face looked doubtful for a moment.

"Guess dat needs a little salt an' pepper," he said, slowly. It did not taste nearly as good as he had anticipated.

As there was nothing else to do, and they were hungry, the men ate the meal, grumbling to themselves as they did so. Luke said but little and ate sparingly, and his example was followed by Cal Vincent.

The captain, Grandon, and Larry ate in the cabin and the dinner served to them was first-class in every particular.

"Guess Jeff is spreading himself, just to show what he can do," remarked Larry to the first mate, after he had finished his repast.

"It's very good, Larry," answered Tom Grandon.

By the middle of the afternoon three of the men were complaining of feeling sick and all attributed their ailments to what they had eaten for dinner.

"Ha! vat I tole you?" cried Semmel. "Didn't I say de grub vos pad? Not maybe you belief me, hey?"

"I shan't stand for any more poor grub," came from Shamhaven. "If I can't get good stuff I'm going to the captain about it."

The sickness of the hands worried Captain Ponsberry greatly and he opened up his medicine chest and gave them such remedies as he thought were best.

At supper time Jeff was extra cautious in selecting and preparing the food. Nevertheless, the men who ate of it were suspicious and more than half the meal went to waste. The captain was very thoughtful, but said little or nothing.

On the following day the wind died down utterly and it was exceedingly warm. With nothing to do, the majority of the hands gathered at the bow to talk of matters in general, and the food in particular. Semmel and Peterson were of the number, and both did all in their power to magnify the outrage, as they termed it.

"Der captain don't haf any right to gif us such grub," said Semmel. "It vos against der law."

"On some ships there would be a mutiny over this," added Peterson.

Larry overheard a part of the conversation and it set him thinking. Luke Striker also grew suspicious.

"Unless I am mistaken, this is some of Semmel's work," said Larry to the old tar. "He is doing his level best to make trouble on the ship."

"Well, he better mind his business," grumbled Luke. "I don't reckon the captain will stand fer any underhanded work."

Without appearing to do so, Larry continued to keep his eyes on Semmel, and about an hour before dinner he saw the bearded sailor approach the cook's galley and look inside. Jeff was below, getting a case of canned goods. With a swift movement, Semmel stepped into the galley, raised the

lid of a big pot full of stew that was on the stove, and sprinkled something over the food. Then he hurried out and sneaked forward once more.

"The rascal!" murmured Larry. "So this is his game. I wonder what he put into that pot?"

For the moment the young second mate thought to confront Semmel and demand an explanation. Then he changed his mind and hurried for the cabin, to tell the news to Captain Ponsberry.

CHAPTER V

SIGNS OF A MUTINY

"I've found out something important, Captain Ponsberry," said Larry, as he entered the cabin. "I now know what's the matter with the grub." To all salt-water sailors food is grub and nothing else.

"Well, what is the matter with it?" questioned the master of the *Columbia*, quickly.

"It's being doctored, that's what's the matter."

"Doctored?"

"Yes, sir, – doctored by Semmel, too."

"Will you explain what you mean, Larry?" demanded the captain, intensely interested.

"I just saw that rascal go into the cook's galley. Jeff wasn't there, and Semmel took the lid off of a big pot on the stove and sprinkled something inside."

"What!" Captain Ponsberry leaped to his feet "Are you certain of this?" he demanded.

"I am – for I saw it with my own eyes."

"What was that stuff he put into the pot?"

"I don't know."

"Did he touch anything else?"

"No. He was in a tremendous hurry and wasn't in the galley more than a minute at the most."

"The scoundrel!" Captain Ponsberry clenched his fists. "Larry, you are positive you are making no mistake?"

"I saw the thing done just as I told you. The stuff was in a bit of white paper. When he went forward he threw the paper overboard."

"Did anybody else see this?"

"I don't think so. But – "

At that moment came a knock on the cabin door and Luke Striker appeared.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, touching his cap. "But I've got something important to report."

"What is it, Striker?"

"I jess see that air Semmel go in and out o' the cook's galley."

"That is just what I am reporting!" cried Larry. "Did you see what he did, Luke?"

"No. He wasn't in there only a minit. It looked suspicious to me, though – with all hands gittin' sick from the grub."

"This is all the evidence I want," said Captain Ponsberry. "We'll soon make an end of this. Larry, send Semmel to me."

The young second mate left the cabin with Luke and both hurried toward the bow, where Semmel and Peterson were conversing in low tones.

"The captain wants to see you at once," said Larry to the bearded sailor.

His tone was so sharp it made Semmel start.

"Vat he vants?" he queried.

"Go and find out for yourself."

"Maybe you git me in droubles, hey?" and the bearded sailor scowled.

"I reckon as how you're gittin' yourself into trouble," drawled Luke, dryly.

"You keep your mouf shut!" cried Semmel. "I no talk to you, no!"

"The captain wants you to report; are you going to do so or not?" demanded Larry.

"Sure I go," answered Semmel, with a toss of his head, and he slouched toward the stern. His manner was so aggressive that Larry picked up a belaying pin before following him.

Captain Ponsberry had just appeared on deck. He had armed himself with a short club, – a sure sign to those who knew him that something unusual was in the wind. His face was stern and forbidding, and all hands gathered around to see what was the trouble.

"Semmel, I want to have a talk with you," he said, in a loud voice, as the bearded sailor came up. To this the sailor nodded but did not answer.

"I want to know what you were doing in the cook's galley a short while ago."

"De cook's galley?" The sailor acted as if he was puzzled. "I no go by de galley, captain."

"You were in the galley and you put something into the stew-pot. What was it?" thundered Captain Ponsberry. "Tell me the truth, or I may take it into my head to break every bone in your body!" And he shook his club in the sailor's face.

"I put noddings in de pot," cried Semmel. "I no go in de galley – I no been in de galley two, tree days. It is a lie!"

"I saw you go in," came from Luke.

"And so did I," added Larry. "And I saw you sprinkle something into the pot."

"What, did dat good-fo'-nuffin furiner put somet'ing in ma eatin'?" shrieked Jeff, who had come up. "Oh, – yo' – yo' – "

"Never mind, Jeff, I'll attend to this," interrupted the captain.

"Yes, sah, but dat monkey-faced – "

"Never mind now – fall back there," added the captain, and the cook fell back, but shook his fist at Semmel.

"I not in de galley," reiterated the bearded sailor. "Russell an' Striker no tell de truth."

"It is true," cried Larry.

"Thet's so, an' you can't squirm out o' it," broke in Luke. "I saw ye as plain as day."

"I want to know what you put into that stew-pot?" continued Captain Ponsberry.

"I no go near de galley. I – "

"I know you went into the galley and I know you put something into the stew. For the last time I ask you, what was it?"

For reply Ostag Semmel simply shrugged his shoulders.

"Are you going to tell me the truth?"

"I reckon the truth ain't in him," grumbled Luke, under his breath.

"I say noddings more," came sourly from the bearded sailor.

"Put that man in irons," commanded Captain Ponsberry, turning quickly to Larry and Grandon. "If he won't talk now, perhaps he'll talk after he has spent a day in the brig."

"Vat! you put me in irons!" shrieked Semmel. "You no got right to do dat, no!"

"Haven't I?" answered Captain Ponsberry, in a voice that cut like a whip. "I'd like to see anybody dispute over it. Larry, Tom, do as I command."

"Yes, sir," answered Larry, and ran off to get a pair of handcuffs while Tom Grandon stationed himself beside Ostag Semmel, belaying pin in hand.

"You no mak me a prisoner!" fumed the bearded sailor. "You got no right!"

He continued to rave, saying that it was a plot against him, because he had been the first to complain about the vile food served to the hands; that he had not been near the galley and that the captain, Grandon, and Larry knew it. He even appealed to the other sailors to stand by him, and several came forward to argue with Captain Ponsberry. But the master of the schooner was obstinate and would not listen.

"I know what I am doing, men," he said, quickly but firmly. "He is a scoundrel and a spell in the brig will do him good. After this I reckon you'll find the grub all right."

"I no like – " began Peterson, once more.

"You shut up, Peterson, or I'll put you in the brig with Semmel," cut in the captain, and Peterson fell back with the rest, but with a brow that was dark and distrustful.

By this time Larry had returned with the handcuffs and despite the resistance he offered, Ostag Semmel was made a prisoner. Then the first and the second mates led him to the schooner's brig, – a narrow, V-shaped room in the bow of the boat, usually used for storing lanterns and oil. The smell in the closet – for it was nothing else – was far from pleasant, and a day in the brig usually made a prisoner repent and promise to do better.

"I mak trouble for dis!" growled Semmel, as the door was closed and bolted on him. "I mak trouble, yes! You got no right to do dis, no!"

"And you haven't any right to doctor the grub," answered Larry, and then he and Grandon walked away.

"That fellow is a first-class villain, to my way of reasoning," was the first mate's comment. "I believe he'd do almost anything to get square for this."

After Ostag Semmel had been placed in the brig Captain Ponsberry called all hands to him once more and related what Luke and Larry had seen. The stew was inspected, but nothing suspicious could be seen about it.

"If any of you want to try that stew you may do so," said the captain. "Of course, if Semmel didn't touch it there can be nothing in it that can hurt you." But all, even to Peterson, declined to even taste the food. It was one thing to think Semmel innocent but quite another to run the risk of being made sick or poisoned. In the end the stew was dumped overboard and Jeff prepared an entirely new dinner for all hands.

"You must keep close watch on all of the men," said the captain to Larry and Grandon, when quietness had been restored. "Semmel was the worst of the lot, but I do not like the way Peterson and one or two others are acting."

"I don't see what they can do," answered Larry.

"They might start a mutiny," came from the first mate.

"Would they dare go as far as that?"

"Sometimes sailors get strange notions, and the old Harry himself can't stop them," said Captain Ponsberry. "A thing that in itself doesn't amount to much will start them off, and they'll imagine that everything is going wrong. When I was a lad, on board the *Mary Eliza*, Captain Snapper, we had a mutiny just because the coffee wasn't right."

"Yes, and I can remember that they had a mutiny on the old brig *Chesterfield* because Captain Roe's wife brought a cross-eyed yellow cat on board," added Grandon. "Not a man would hoist a sail until that feline was put ashore. And when, two months later, the brig lost her foremast in a gale, the sailors said it was on account of that same cat, she having scratched the mast before she was taken away!"

"Well, I hope we don't have a mutiny," said Larry. "I'd like to suggest something, Captain Ponsberry," he went on, to the master of the *Columbia*.

"Fire ahead, Larry."

"You know we can trust Luke Striker. Why not have him report just what the other hands are doing?"

"That's an idea, and I will act on it. Yes, I'd trust Striker as quick as I'd trust you. If there is to be trouble we certainly want to know of it as soon as possible," concluded the captain.

CHAPTER VI

THE FIGHT FOR THE SHIP

The day to follow was Sunday, and contrary to expectations, it passed quietly. As there was hardly any wind, the old *Columbia* made slow progress, and the sailors had little or nothing to do. As was his usual habit, Larry read his Bible, and Captain Ponsberry held a short church service, which less than half the crew attended.

"It's plain to see that the men are sulky," said Tom Grandon, towards evening. "We are certain to hear something from them shortly."

Luke had been told to report anything unusual, but it was not until after dark that he sought out Captain Ponsberry.

"I ain't got much to say," said the old tar. "But to my mind Peterson, Groot, and Shamhaven are doin' a powerful lot of confabbin'. More'n that, I saw Peterson cleaning up a pistol he's got."

"Are any of the other hands armed?"

"I ain't seen no other shootin'-irons," answered Luke.

The captain had expected to interview Semmel once more, but found the fellow so surly he gave up the attempt. As the brig was so hot and uncomfortable, the master of the schooner had the door fixed so it could be left open several inches, with a chain at the bolt to keep it from going further.

At four o'clock Monday morning Peterson came on duty, followed by Shamhaven and some others. All made their way to the bow and began to talk in a low but earnest fashion. Then Peterson went below, to where Semmel was still confined in the brig.

"We are ready to move now," said he, in Russian. "What do you think?"

"Let me out and I will show you what I think," growled Ostag Semmel. "The captain is a dog – and Grandon and Russell are dogs, too!"

Peterson was prepared to unlock the chain which held the brig door and did so. Then he handed a pistol to the Russian.

"The captain and Russell are in their staterooms," said Peterson. "Only Grandon is on deck, with Vincent and with the men we can trust to help us."

"We can't trust Vincent."

"I know that."

"Where is Striker?"

"Asleep in his berth."

But on this score Carl Peterson was mistaken. Luke had pretended to go to sleep, but he was now in a corner on deck, watching with keen eyes all that was occurring. Presently he saw Semmel in company with Peterson hurry towards the bow, and he felt that the time for action had arrived.

"Hi, Mr. Grandon!" he called out, running up to the first mate.

"What is it, Striker?"

"They've released Semmel and they are arming themselves."

"You don't say!" Tom Grandon was stunned for the instant. "Tell the captain and Russell of this at once!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Rushing down the companionway, Luke entered the cabin and knocked on the door of Captain Ponsberry's stateroom.

"Wake up, captain!" he called, loudly. "Wake up! There is going to be trouble putty quick, to my way o' thinkin'!"

"What has gone wrong now?" demanded the master of the *Columbia*, as he hurried into his clothes and armed himself. "Where is Grandon?"

"On deck; he sent me to tell you. They have set Semmel free and some of 'em are arming themselves."

"A mutiny!" roared Captain Ponsberry. "Striker, you'll stand by me, of course?"

"That I will, sir – to the end."

"Good. I know Vincent will do the same. Do you know anything about the others?"

"I think you can count on Jeff the cook."

"What of Wilbur?"

"He's so weak-kneed I don't know what he'll do," answered Striker.

By this time Larry was out of his stateroom. With his door ajar he had heard all that had been said.

"Oh, Luke, do you think they'll try to seize the ship?" he gasped.

"Don't know what they'll do. They're a plumb crazy lot," growled the old tar. "It was a mistake to take such fellers as Semmel and Peterson and Shamhaven aboard."

"That is true, but when Devine and Larson got sick and went to the hospital at Manila I had to get somebody," answered Captain Ponsberry. He brought out several pistols. "Here, Larry, take one of these, and a cutlass, too, and you, Striker, can arm yourself likewise."

There was no time to answer, for the master of the schooner was already striding through the cabin in the direction of the companionway. An instant later came a yell from the deck, followed by heavy footsteps and then the report of a pistol.

"Drive dem to de cabin!" came in the voice of Semmel. "Drive dem along, kvick!" And then followed another yell and the sounds of half a dozen blows.

"Below there!" came in Tom Grandon's voice. "Help! help!"

"I'm coming!" called up Captain Ponsberry.

"Don't you dare to step on deck, captain!" yelled down the voice of Shamhaven. "Don't you dare to do it!" And the sailor appeared, pistol in hand, at the top of the companionway.

"Shamhaven, what does this mean?" demanded the master of the *Columbia*.

"It means that we have taken possession of the ship, that's what it means," came from Groot.

"Of you come up here, you maybe git killed," put in Ostag Semmel. "You stay down dare, you hear?" And then, as the captain started to mount the stairs, he threw down a belaying pin. In the semi-darkness the captain did not see the object, and it struck him on the top of the head, rendering him partly unconscious.

Larry and Luke were close behind their leader and both were alarmed to see him go down, uttering a deep groan as he did so.

"Is he killed?" questioned the young second mate.

"I don't know," was the old tar's response. "Shall we go up?"

"Keep back there!" was the call from above. "Put a step on those stairs and it will be the worse for you!"

At that moment came a cry from Cal Vincent. The boatswain had been attacked from behind and was given no chance to defend himself. Then came a roar from Jeff, who came rushing toward the companionway as if all the demons of the deep were behind him.

"Sabe me! sabe me!" he screamed. "Da is gwine to pirate de ship! Sabe me!" And then he came plunging down headlong, directly on top of Larry, Luke, and the prostrate captain.

This unexpected coming of Jeff sent the young second mate and the old tar flat on Captain Ponsberry, and for the moment there was a struggle all around. In the meantime some sailors on the deck began to drag a heavy hatch toward the stairs. Soon this was placed in position, and then those below were virtually prisoners.

"Oh my, sabe me!" groaned Jeff once more, as he managed to get on his feet in the cabin, followed by Larry and Luke. "Don't you let dem swing me from de yardarm!"

"Jeff, where are Grandon and Vincent?" demanded Larry.

"I dunno, sah – dead, I guess," answered the cook. "Oh, dis am de awfulest t'ing wot I eber heard tell ob!" he added, woefully, and wrung his hands.

The lantern in the cabin was turned up and Larry gave his attention once more to Captain Ponsberry, who was now opening his eyes.

"Oh, my head!" came with a shiver. "My head!"

"I'm glad they didn't kill you," said Larry, kindly. "Luke, help me carry him into the cabin. We'll put him on the couch."

This was done, and they did what they could to make the master of the schooner comfortable. But it was a good half-hour before Captain Ponsberry could sit up and do any rational thinking.

On deck all had become suddenly quiet. Occasionally those below could hear a footstep near the companionway, showing that one or more of the mutineers were on guard. The hatch shut off the view on deck, and the windows in the ceiling of the cabin were also boarded over from the outside.

"They have us like rats in a trap," said Larry, bitterly.

"And for all we know Vincent and Grandon are both dead," returned Luke Striker, soberly. "I must say, lad, we seem to be in a bad way and no mistake."

"Dey'll throw us overboard, I know dey will!" groaned Jeff, who was almost white with terror. "I neber see sech goin's-on in all ma life!"

To fight the mutineers further was, just then, out of the question, and Larry turned his attention again to Captain Ponsberry. At last the captain seemed fully to comprehend what had occurred. He once more moved toward the companionway, pistol in hand.

"You can't get out that way, sir," said Larry. "They have placed the fore hatch over the stairs."

"And they are armed, too," put in Luke. "Be careful, sir, or they'll shoot you down."

"And this on my own ship!" came bitterly from the master of the *Columbia*. "That is what I get for treating the dogs better than they deserve. Where are Grandon and Vincent?"

"Either shot down or taken prisoners. They called for help, and that was the last we heard of them."

"And are all the others in this dastardly plot?"

"I reckon they are," answered Luke. "Them foreigners, Semmel an' Peterson, must have stirred 'em up powerfully."

Still weak from the blow received, Captain Ponsberry sank down once more on the cabin couch. There was a lump as big as a walnut on the top of his head, and he had Jeff bathe it with water and then with witch-hazel, which made it a trifle more comfortable.

A short while later came a sudden wild song from the deck of the schooner, followed by a clinking of glasses.

"They are treating themselves to grog," said Luke. "I suppose, now they have the run of things, they'll drink all they want of the stuff."

"More than likely," returned the captain. "Well, it is their turn just now – perhaps before long it will be my turn!" And he smiled significantly.

CHAPTER VII

THE MUTINEERS IN POSSESSION

As my old readers know, both Captain Ponsberry and Luke Striker were Yankees to the backbone, and it galled them exceedingly to see the schooner in the hands of a number of mutineers, and especially foreigners.

"We've got to git the ship back, no two ways on it," growled the old tar. "Captain, I'm willin' to fight to the end, if ye give the word."

"And I'll fight, too," said Larry, promptly.

"Don't you go fo' to fight dem rascallions!" whined Jeff. "Yo' will all be killed suah!"

"I would like to know what has become of Grandon and Vincent," came from Captain Ponsberry. "As we stand now, we are but four to seven or eight. If we could get Grandon and Vincent to aid us we would be six against them."

"Perhaps all the hands are not in the mutiny," suggested Larry. "Why not try to sound them?"

"I was thinking of doing that."

A little later Captain Ponsberry called up the companionway. At first nobody paid any attention to him, but presently the hatch was shoved aside a few inches and Ostag Semmel looked down. Behind him was Shamhaven.

"Semmel, what does this mean?" asked the captain, as calmly as he could.

"It means dat ve haf de ship," replied the Russian, with a grin.

"You are carrying matters with a very high hand. Where are Grandon and Vincent?"

"I not tell you dat."

"We had a right to mutiny," said Shamhaven. "The grub wasn't fit to eat and was getting worse every day."

"That's a tale gotten up for the occasion, Shamhaven, and you know it. Semmel doctored the food to make you dissatisfied."

"Well, we don't think so," grumbled the sailor. "I don't think so, and Groot and the others don't either."

"Has Jack Wilbur joined you?"

"Certainly he has," was Shamhaven's ready reply, but his look belied his words.

"Ve are all pount to stick togedder," said Semmel. "You might as vell gif up – der sooner der petter for you!"

"I don't propose to give up, you rascal."

"Ton't you call me a rascals, no!" shouted Ostag Semmel. "I vos now der captains, yes, do you hear? Captain Semmel!"

"Bosh!" put in Luke Striker, in disgust. "Why ye ain't fit to be the skipper 'f a canal-boat!"

"If you try to navigate the ship you'll sink her on the rocks," put in Larry.

"You had better consider what you are doing, Shamhaven," went on the master of the *Columbia*. "Remember, if I regain possession of the schooner I can make it go hard with you."

"You no get dare schooner again, not much!" came from Peterson, who had just come up, followed by Jack Wilbur.

"Wilbur, are you in this?" demanded the captain. "If you are, I must confess I didn't think it of you."

"I ain't goin' to eat poor grub," answered Wilbur, lamely.

"The grub is all right and you know it. It was doctored up by Semmel, and I –"

"You stop dat talk!" roared Semmel, and then he added: "Maybe you gif in after you are goot an' hungry, hey?"

"What, do you want to starve us out?" cried Larry.

"You see – chust vait!" answered the Russian, and with this the hatch was again put in place and the conference came to an end.

Captain Ponsberry was fairly boiling with wrath, but even so he realized that prudence is often the better part of valor.

"There is no use of trying a rush to the deck," he said. "Those rascals would surely shoot us down. Just now some of them are in the humor for anything."

"Perhaps we can do something to-night," suggested Larry.

"They talk about starving us out," said Luke. "Ain't there nothin' to eat here?"

An inspection was made of the cabin pantry, which brought to light some preserves, some pickles, a pot of cheese, and a tin of fancy crackers.

"About enough for one meal," said Captain Ponsberry, grimly.

"And a pretty slim one at that," added Larry. "But I say, captain," he added, suddenly, "isn't there a door leading from the back of the pantry down into the hold?"

"There was once – but I had it nailed up years ago, for we never used it."

"If we can open that, we might get something from the hold."

"Going to eat machinery?" demanded Luke.

"No – canned goods, Luke; I know Jeff had some placed there, for he didn't have room in his store-room."

"Dat am a fac'," put in the cook. "I'se got lots ob t'ings in dat dar hold."

"Then that settles the starving question," said Captain Ponsberry. "I've got a small saw and a hammer down here somewhere. We can use them on the door."

"And that gives me another idea," went on Larry. "The hatch covering over the companionway belongs to the fore hatch. If we can reach that opening from here, why can't we steal on deck when we get the chance and try to make the mutineers prisoners?"

"Eureka!" shouted Luke. "That's the talk, Larry. Fer your years you've got a wonderfully long head on ye. We'll make 'em prisoners or chuck 'em overboard!"

"The idea is worth considering," said the captain. "But we must be careful."

A search was made and the hammer, small saw, and also a chisel were found. Then they cleaned out the pantry, took down several shelves, and thus uncovered the small door which had been nailed up.

"Don't make any noise, or they'll suspect that we are up to something," said Captain Ponsberry.

"Let Jeff rattle some dishes," said Larry, and while he and Luke worked on the door, the cook began to handle the dishes in such a rough manner that several were broken. He also tried to sing a couple of verses of his favorite song, "My Gal Susannah!" but his voice was so shaky that the effort was, artistically, a failure, although it added to the noise, which was all that was desired.

"They're pretty happy down there," said Wilbur to Shamhaven, as he listened to the sounds.

"Oh, they're putting on a front," growled Shamhaven. "They'll sing a different tune when their stomachs are empty."

"I don't know about this mutiny," went on the weak-kneed sailor, nervously.

"Oh, it's all right and you needn't to worry, Wilbur. If we stick together we'll make a couple of thousand apiece out of this game."

"But what shall we do if we fall in with a Russian warship?"

"Semmel has that all fixed. He'll expose the captain and state that the *Columbia* is carrying a cargo for the Japanese Government, and that he took possession in the name of the Czar. With this war on they won't ask too many questions so long as they can give the Japs a black eye."

"I see. But supposing we fall in with a Japanese warship?"

"Then Semmel is going to turn the command over to me and I'll tell them that the cargo was really meant for the Japanese Government but that Captain Ponsberry, just before we left Manila,

sold out to the Russian agents and was going to Vladivostok. I'll add that we refused to go to the Russian port after signing for Nagasaki, and all of the men can back me up. That will put the captain and his friends in limbo and give us some prize money. Oh, we'll come out ahead, don't you worry," concluded Shamhaven, confidently.

The day passed slowly and the mutineers held several meetings, to settle upon just what they were going to do. But all had been drinking more than was good for them and the conferences ended in nothing but talk. Semmel was the accepted leader, but it was plain to see that Shamhaven objected strongly to playing a secondary part, and Peterson also wanted a large "finger in the pie."

As they worked with care, it was a good hour and a half before Larry and Luke managed to take down the door leading into the hold. Even when this was done they found on the other side several heavy cases of machinery almost impossible to budge.

"We can pry those out of the way," said the captain.

"A foot or so will do it," returned Larry. "Then I think I can crawl over the top."

They continued the work, and a little later the young second mate was able to squeeze his way to the top of the cargo in that vicinity.

"Be careful, Larry," warned the captain. "If a case should shift with the ship you might get a crushed leg. You had better take a candle along."

"I will, sir."

Luke was as anxious to get into the hold as the young second mate, and he too squeezed his tall, lank form through the opening. Guided by the faint light of the candle, they crawled over a number of cases of machinery and war goods until they drew close to the middle of the ship.

"Here we are!" cried Larry, in a low voice, and pointed to some cases of canned goods. "Beans, corn, tomatoes, salt pork, condensed milk – we won't starve just yet, Luke."

"An' here are some barrels o' flour," added the old tar. "No, they can't starve us nohow now."

They had brought the chisel and hammer along, and with extra caution opened some of the cases. Taking with them all the goods they could carry, they returned to the cabin.

"This is splendid!" cried Captain Ponsberry. "With this stuff on hand we can hold the cabin indefinitely."

"How is I gwine to cook?" questioned Jeff.

"Over the two lanterns, Jeff. It will be slow work, but our time is our own. Luckily there are pots and tins in the pantry."

"All right, sah."

"Of course, I am hoping that we shall not have to stay here long," went on the captain. "But it is best to be prepared."

That those on deck might not see the cooking going on, one of the staterooms was cleaned out and Jeff went to work in this. In the meantime Semmel called down the companionway once more.

"Are you gettin' hungry?" he asked.

"Tell him yes," whispered Larry.

"Why?" questioned the captain, in an equally low tone.

"Then he'll think we are getting ready to come to terms and he won't watch us so closely."

"I see." Captain Ponsberry raised his voice. "Yes, we are hungry," he called up. "What are you going to send us, something good?"

"Ve send noddings. Maybe you talk business soon, hey?" continued the rascally Russian.

"Perhaps."

"How soon?"

"Well, perhaps to-morrow morning."

"Not before dot, hey?"

"No."

"All right den; you can go on an' starve so long!" growled Ostag Semmel, and went away. A moment later he met Shamhaven.

"What did he say?" asked the latter, anxiously.

"He comes to terms to-morrow!" answered the Russian, triumphantly.

CHAPTER VIII

TURNING THE TABLES

The meal which Jeff prepared put all in the cabin in better humor, and as soon as it was over a council of war was held.

It was decided to wait until darkness had set in, and then try to gain the deck of the ship by way of the fore hatch. In the meantime the door to the companionway was to be locked and barred, so that the mutineers could not attack them very well from that direction, should a running fight ensue.

As Jeff would be of no use in a struggle he was delegated to remain in the cabin, to make as much noise as possible, singing and talking to himself, so that the mutineers might not suspect what was taking place.

Each member of the party armed himself both with a pistol and a cutlass, and Larry led the way as before, candle in hand. It was easy for Luke to follow him, but rather difficult for the captain, who was more portly.

"Reckon as how ye shouldn't have eaten so much, captain," chuckled the old tar, as he helped Captain Ponsberry through a particularly narrow place.

"True, Striker," was the answer. "But you be careful that you don't slip into some slit between the cases and go out of sight."

They soon gained the spot where the canned goods had been found. They had now to climb over some machinery that reached nearly to the top of the hold, and then over a varied collection of boxes and barrels and bags. On the bags lay some of the old sails of the ship and several coils of discarded rope.

They were just approaching the open fore hatch when they saw a rope ladder let down. Instantly Larry uttered a warning and put out the light.

"Somebody is coming down," he whispered.

It was the sailor Wilbur, who had been sent to get some canned goods for cooking purposes. He came down the rope ladder with a lantern slung over one arm.

"We'll make him a prisoner!" cried Captain Ponsberry. "And let us do it as quietly as we can, so as not to disturb those on deck."

The others understood and crouched back in the darkness. Then, as Wilbur passed them, the captain caught him from the back and Larry clapped a hand over the fellow's mouth.

"Oh!" spluttered Wilbur, but that was as far as he got.

"Not a word! Not a sound, Wilbur!" said Captain Ponsberry, earnestly.

The sailor understood, and being a craven at heart he almost collapsed. It was an easy matter to take one of the old ropes and tie his hands behind him. Then Captain Ponsberry confronted the mutineer, making a liberal exhibition of his pistol as he did so.

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