

Goldfrap John Henry

The Ocean Wireless Boys on War Swept Seas



John Goldfrap

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Wilbur Lawton

The Ocean Wireless Boys on War Swept Seas

CHAPTER I

THE GOLD SHIP

The newspapers announced in large type that the *Kronprinzessin Emilie*, the crack flyer of the Bremen-American line, was to carry from the United States to Germany the vast sum of \$6,000,000 in bullion. On her sailing day the dock, from which she was to start on what destined to prove the most eventful voyage ever made since men first went down to the sea in ships, was jammed with gaping crowds. They interfered with the passengers, and employees of the company had to jostle their way among them as best they could.

The thought of the vast fortune stowed within the tall, steel sides of the liner had attracted them, although what they expected to see of it was difficult to imagine. But just as a crowd will gather outside a prison where some notorious malefactor is confined, feasting their eyes on its gray walls without hope of seeing the lawbreaker himself, so the throngs on the *Kronprinzessin Emilie's* pier indulged their curiosity by staring at the colossal casket that held such an enormous fortune.

Among those who had to win their way through the crowd almost by main force, were two tanned, broad-shouldered youths carrying suitcases and handbags.

"My, what a mob, Jack!" exclaimed one of them, elbowing himself between a stout man who was gazing fixedly at the vessel's side – and showed no disposition to move – and an equally corpulent woman whose mouth was wide open and whose eyes bulged as if she almost expected to see the ship gold-plated instead of black.

"Yes, gold's a great magnet even if it is stowed away inside the specie room of a steamer," replied Jack Ready. "We ought to feel like millionaires ourselves, Bill, sailing on such a ship."

"A sort of vacation *de luxe*," laughed Bill Raynor. "What a chance for the buccaneers of the old days if they could only come to life again. Then there would be real adventure in sailing on the *Kronprinzessin*."

"I guess we've had about all the adventure we want for a time, Bill," replied Jack, as they finally gained the gang-plank and two white-coated, gilt-buttoned stewards grabbed their hand baggage. "The Pacific and New Guinea provided what you might call 'an ample sufficiency' for me in that line."

"We earned this holiday, that's one thing sure," agreed Bill, "and the best part of it is that the sale of those pearls gave us enough funds for a holiday abroad without putting too much of a crimp in our bank accounts."

He referred to the pearls the boys' native chums in the Pamatou Islands in the South Pacific had presented them with, after their narrow escape from death in the sea-cave and the subsequent wreck on a coral reef, during the memorable Pacific voyage and adventures, which were described in detail in the volume of this series which immediately preceded the present book. This volume was called, "The Ocean Wireless Boys on the Pacific."

In the first book of this series, which was called "The Ocean Wireless Boys on the Atlantic," we were introduced to Jack Ready, then the young wireless operator of the big tank steamer *Ajax*. His chum, Bill Raynor, was a junior engineer of that craft. A strong friendship sprang up between the two lads, which their subsequent adventures on that voyage cemented into a lasting affection.

Jack also won the approval of Jacob Jukes, head of the great shipping combine that owned the *Ajax* and a vast fleet of craft, both passenger and freight, besides, by his masterly handling of a difficult situation when the millionaire shipping-man's yacht burned in mid-Atlantic.

This incident, and others which proved that the young wireless man was level-headed and cool, even in the worst emergency, resulted in his being transferred to the passenger service on board the West Indian service craft, the *Tropic Queen*. The thrilling events that accompanied the vessel's last voyage were set forth in the second volume of the Ocean Wireless Boys series, entitled, "The Ocean Wireless Boys and the Lost Liner."

Still another book related how Jack and his chum took to the seas again on different vessels, only to be reunited in the strangest manner. "The Ocean Wireless Boys of the Iceberg Patrol," as this was named, told something of the work of the craft detailed by Uncle Sam to the duty of patrolling northern seas, sending wireless warnings of icebergs to trans-Atlantic liners – a work of infinite usefulness which, had it been instituted earlier, might have averted the loss of the *Titanic*, the greatest marine disaster in the history of the world. This was followed by an account of the exciting Pacific adventures already referred to.

The boys, and their employer, Mr. Jukes, agreed with them, and felt that after their experiences in the South Seas with the millionaire's expedition in search of his lost brother, they had earned a holiday; and their determination to tour Europe was the outcome.

But even as they stepped on board the "Gold Ship," the machinery of war was beginning to rumble in Europe, and before many hours had passed, the storm of well-nigh universal war was destined to begin. Of this, of course, they had no inkling, as they busied themselves in establishing their belongings in their main-deck cabin. These preparations had hardly been completed when the siren boomed warningly, and a tremor ran through the big vessel. As she backed out of her pier, the brass band began to play and the crowds on the decks, and on the docks, waved wildly, cheered and shouted last messages which, by no possibility, could have been heard above the din.

"Well, off at last, Jack," said Raynor, entwining Jack's elbow in his own as the two leaned, side by side, on the railing, bidding good-bye to New York's wonderful skyscraper skyline as it slid past. "How does it feel to be a passenger?"

Jack's eyes sought the lofty wireless aerials swung far above them between the two masts.

"It feels mighty odd to think of somebody else sending out the T. R." he said slowly, naming the wireless method of saying "Good-bye," on sailing.

"Well, I never saw such a fellow!" exclaimed Raynor. "For goodness' sake forget your everlasting coherers and keys and converters and the rest of them and enjoy taking life easy. But – hullo!" he broke off, "there's someone we know."

Approaching them was a dapper little man, with a neat black moustache and dressed in a careful, almost dignified manner.

"Why, it's Raymond de Garros, that French aviator we saved from the sea off Florida when we were on the old *Tropic Queen*!" exclaimed Jack.

"That's the man. But what in the world is he doing here? I thought he was in France organizing an aeroplane corps for the army."

"So did I. The newspapers have had several despatches about his work. But we shall soon find out about the reason for his being on board."

A minute later they were warmly shaking hands with the little Frenchman, who, with many gesticulations and twirlings of his moustache, assured them how glad he was to "greet zee two brave boys zat save my life from zee sea."

"You're the last person we expected to see," said Jack, when first greetings were over. "We didn't even know you were in America."

The little Frenchman shrugged his shoulders and looked about him uneasily. Then he buttonholed the boys confidentially.

"No one know zat I am here but my government," he said in low tones.

"You are on a secret mission of some kind?" asked Jack.

“Can I trust you to keep somethings to yourselves if I tell you what I am do in Amerique?” asked the aviator.

“Of course, but if you don’t wish – I didn’t mean to appear inquisitive,” Jack hastened to say.

“Zat is all right, my friend!” exclaimed de Garros. “You save my life. I should be ungrateful if I seemed secretive wiz you. I have been in Amerique buying and shipping aeroplanes to France from one of your manufacturers.”

“But I thought France already had a powerful air fleet,” said Bill.

The little aviator’s next words were astonishing to the boys, who shared the common impression about the French strength in the air.

“Before many days are past we shall need all and more aeroplanes than we have,” he said. “I wish we had twice as many. But I can say no more now. But my advice to you is to watch zee wireless closely. You are going abroad on pleasure?”

“Yes, we thought we’d earned a vacation,” said Jack.

The little Frenchman’s rejoinder was a shrug and a smile.

“Your vacation may be what you Americans call a ‘strenuous one,’” he said meaningly, and with an emphasis the boys could not fathom. “By the way, on board this ship I am Jules Champion. There are reasons for my real name being unknown for the present. *Au revoir*, I go to arrange my luggage. We shall meet again.”

And he was gone, leaving the boys to exchange puzzled glances.

CHAPTER II

WAR IS DECLARED!

“Vell, Yack Retty, you yust like to hang aroundt undt see me vurk, hein?”

Hans Poffer, the yellow-haired, red-cheeked wireless operator of the *Kronprinzessin Emilie* asked the question, on the afternoon of the third day out. Jack had discovered in young Poffer an acquaintance he had made in Antwerp when he was on board the *Ajax*, and had renewed the friendship, to Poffer’s great delight, for the German wireless man had had trouble with his instruments the first day out which Jack had adjusted for him.

Since that time Jack, to Bill Raynor’s amusement, had spent most of his time in the wireless room enjoying, as Poffer put it, “watching me work.” But there was another reason beside his deep-seated interest in everything appertaining to his profession that made Jack haunt the *Kronprinzessin*’s wireless coop. De Garros, with whom he had had several conversations since their meeting on board, had repeatedly told him to be on the lookout for something “that would before long come over the wires.” Once, in discussing the boys’ plans for amusing themselves in Europe, the aviator had said meaningly, “if you ever get there.” But what he meant by these words he had steadfastly refused to explain, telling Jack that he would find out in good time.

“Me, if I gedt idt a holliday,” said Poffer, after greeting Jack a day later, “I go by as far away from der vireless as I couldt gedt idt. I gedt sick undt tired hearing idt all day ‘tick-tick’ undt sending idt all day der same ‘tick-tick’ alretty. Donner! I’m hungry again. Holdt idt mein key a minute vile I gedt idt mineself a bite.”

The stout German slipped his wireless “ears” from his head and extended them to Jack, who, good-naturedly, took them. Then he made off for his cabin where he kept constantly a stock of provisions to satisfy his appetite between meals.

“Well, I’m a fine chump,” smiled Jack, as he slipped into Hans’ vacant chair. “No wonder Bill says I’m crazy. Off for a holiday and the first thing I know I find myself back on the job. Hullo, here’s a message coming. K. P. E., that’s our call. Funny sort of sending, too. Doesn’t sound like a commercial operator.”

Jack crackled out a reply.

“This is the *Kronprinzessin Emilie*,” he flashed back; “what do you want?”

“Tell your captain to lie to in his present position till further orders,” came the reply.

“Well, I like your nerve,” flashed back Jack, thinking somebody was trying to play a wireless joke on him. “Don’t you know we are carrying the European mails from New York? You stick around where you are and we may bump into you on the way back again.”

“Never mind about that. Obey orders at once,” came back brusksly.

“Say, never mind that comedy,” implored Jack. “I’m busy. Ring off.”

“No trifling there, young man,” was flashed back. “This is the British cruiser *Essex*. We want to overhaul you.”

“But you can’t stop a mail steamer.”

“In this case we can. War has been declared by England upon Germany and Austria. Lay to or it will be the worse for you.”

A step sounded behind Jack. He turned quickly, thinking it was someone who wanted to send a message, in which case he was anxious to “cut out” the man he thought was playing a senseless joke on him. The newcomer was de Garros.

“Ah, sitting at zee wire, eh? I suppose our always hungry Teutonic friend iz taking ze light lunch somewhere. Ah, any news? I saw you working ze key as I came in.”

“No news since I came on,” said Jack, carelessly. “I was just trying to convince some deep sea joker that he couldn’t fool me.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, somebody just flashed a message to the ship that they were the British cruiser *Essex* and that war had been declared between England and Germany and – ”

He got no further. De Garros’s hands flew out and seized his shoulders.

“Zat was no joke, *mon ami*,” he exclaimed; “it was zee truth.”

“The truth? How do you know?” asked the naturally astonished Jack.

“It has been in zee air for months in diplomatic circles. I thought zee declaration would have come before this. It was for that that I was in Amerique buying aeroplanes.”

“What, is France in this, too?” demanded the astonished Jack.

“Yes, and Russia also. Russia declared war two days ago. Then came France, zee second member of zee Triple Entente, as zee is called, and now, as was expected, comes England to help against the German barbarians.”

“But how did you know all this?” demanded Jack. “There was nothing in the papers when we left New York, but something about a row between Austria and Servia.”

“Which caused all the trouble,” came the reply; “or, rather, zee match to zee powder. But zee ask me how I know zee declaration of war of Russia and France. I am not the only man on zee ship zat does. Captain Rollok, he knows, zee officers know, like me zey have been getting wireless messages in code. Zey have been warned to look out for English cruisers in case England joined France and Russia. Zis Gerrman ship with six million dollars in gold on board would be a fine prize for Great Britain. My friend, before many hours have passed, you are going to have some excitement.”

“Great gracious, then that message wasn’t a joke and that British cruiser may overhaul us and take all that bullion?”

“If she can catch us, – yes. She will also make prisoners of the Germans on board and take the ship to an English port.”

“What had I better do?”

“Here comes young Poffer now. Tell him of zee message and get it to zee captain at once. If we are caught we may be delayed indefinitely and zee haste is imperative with me at zee present time.”

The German wireless man entered the cabin, gnawing at a huge pretzel. At Jack’s information of the message that had come, he dropped it to the floor in his astonishment and stood staring for a moment.

“Himmel!” he exclaimed, when he found his voice. “Englandt is go var midt Yarmany! Undt a Briday sheep chase us. *Ach du lieber*, if they catch us, Hans Poffer goes by a prison yet midt nudding to eat but bread undt vater – ”

“Never mind about that now,” interrupted Jack quickly; “take that information to Captain Rollok at once. Take it yourself. Don’t give it to a steward. If the passengers knew of this, there’d be a panic in a jiffy.”

Poffer, still with his mouth and eyes wide open, hurried off on his errand.

“Captain Rollok will probably come back himself,” declared de Garros, “and vee will be ordered out of the cabin. Ve had better go now. But vee must not say a word of zees till zee time comes. Vee have more as two thousand passengers on board and if zey zink a warship chase us, —*sacre!*”

CHAPTER III ON DECK ONCE MORE

Jack was lolling in a deck chair fifteen minutes later, still digesting the astonishing news that had come out of space, when a deck steward approached him and, with an air of caution, leant over the lad and said:

“Captain Rollok would like to see you in the wireless room at once, please.”

“Now what’s up?” wondered Jack, as greatly astonished by this message, he made his way to the radio cabin. “I guess I’m in for a call down for sitting in at the key. Poor Poffer, I’ll see that he doesn’t get into trouble if I can help it, and as for me – I’m a passenger now and captains have no terrors for me.”

These thoughts occupied him as far as his destination. Within the cabin were Captain Rollok, a giant of a man, with a fresh complexion and huge blond beard, one of his officers and Hans Pollak, the latter looking in fear of his life as the big captain berated him, in German, with force and vigor. As Jack entered the cabin, the great bulk of the captain swung round on him.

“So you are de young mans who sits in at der vireless vile dis cabbage-head goes stuffing himself midt pretzels, is it?” he demanded, with what appeared great severity, but with an underlying twinkle in his eyes.

Jack contented himself with nodding and a brief admission that he had taken Poffer’s place at the key while the latter refreshed himself. He half-expected an outburst from the big German but, to his astonishment, the captain clapped him on the back with a force that almost knocked him off his feet.

“*Ach, du lieber!*” he exclaimed; “it was goot dot you vod dere, uddervise dis foolish Poffer would haf left der key anyway undt dot British cruiser would have overhauled us. Now I got a proposition to make to you. You are a vireless man. Our second operator is sick undt idt is necessary dot dere is someones at der vireless all of der time. Vill you take der chob?”

Jack hardly knew what to say. The proposal had come so abruptly that he found it hard to make up his mind.

“You would want me to help out all the way to Europe?” he asked.

“We are not going to Europe,” was the reply. “I am going to run back for der American coast undt try to dodge capture. Six million dollars is a big enough prize to make der search for us pretty active. I don’t believe dere would be a chance for us to reach der udder side.”

“Well,” said Jack, after some consideration, “I guess my holiday is off anyhow, and I might as well get down to work now as later on. All right, Captain, you can count on me.”

“Goot for you. I vill see dot you are no loser by idt,” said the big German, and so Jack, by a strange combination of undreamt-of circumstances, became the wireless man of the “gold ship,” whose subsequent adventures were destined to fill the world with wonder.

Poffer’s hours of duty ended at dinner time that evening, and by the time Jack sat down at the key, it was dark. No more word had come from the British cruiser, and so far the *Kronprinzessin’s* course had not been altered. A hasty message in cipher had been sent to the offices of the line in New York, but so far no orders to turn back had come through the air.

However, Jack had not been on duty an hour before the expected command came. The passengers strolling and sitting about the decks were suddenly aware that the big ship was slowing up and being turned about. The incredulous ones among them were speedily convinced that this was actually the case when it was pointed out that the moon, which had been on the starboard side of the ship in the early evening, was now to be seen off the port quarter.

Rumors ran rife throughout the great steel vessel. There had been an accident to the machinery, there were icebergs ahead, some plot against the security of the gold in the specie room had been discovered – these, and even wilder reports, were circulated. The captain and the other officers were besieged for explanations, but none were forthcoming, for the time being.

Shortly before midnight, however, the captain in person entered the smoking room with a telegram in his hand.

“Gentlemen,” he announced to those assembled there, “I am sorry to say that war has been declared between England and Germany, Great Britain siding against my Vaterland mit France and Russia.”

He held up his hand to quell the hub-bub that instantly broke loose. When a measure of quiet was restored, he resumed:

“It is therefore impossible for the voyage of this ship to continue. As you have observed, her course has been altered. We are on our way back to America.”

“To New York?” demanded a score of voices.

The captain shook his head.

“New York will be watched more carefully than any other port on the Atlantic coast,” he said. “I have not yet decided for what I will make; but I ask you all to take the situation philosophically and try to quiet any alarm among the lady passengers.”

The turmoil of questions and answers and excited conversation broke out again, and in the midst of it the captain’s broad form disappeared through the doorway. A few moments later, Raynor was in the wireless room after a fruitless search for his chum in other parts of the ship.

“Say, what are you doing sitting at that key?” he demanded. “Have you gone to work for the ship?”

“Looks that way, doesn’t it?” smiled Jack.

“Did you know that we are running away from British cruisers?” asked Raynor, breathlessly.

“Knew it before the ship was turned around,” said Jack, calmly. “But I couldn’t have told even you about it at the time. It was confidential. But there’s no reason why you shouldn’t hear it all now,” and he launched into a narration of the events just passed which had had such a strange culmination. He was in the midst of it, when one of the junior officers of the ship appeared.

He told the boys they would have to close the door of the wireless room and cover the ports. Not a ray of light must be visible about the ship, he informed them. In the darkness even the glow of a single port-light might give a clue as to the whereabouts of their quarry to the lurking British cruisers. In the passengers’ quarters of the great ship, similar orders were issued. Stewards went about blanketing portholes and turning out all unnecessary lights. By ten o’clock, except in the “working” quarters of the ship, – and there, they were carefully concealed, as in the wireless room, – there was not a light on board.

In order to insure obedience to his orders, the captain had had the cabin lights disconnected from the dynamos at that hour. On the darkened decks, little groups of timid passengers, who refused to go to bed, huddled and talked in low tones, constantly gazing seaward to catch sight of a tell-tale searchlight which would tell of pursuit or interception.

Through the darkness, the great ship was driven at top speed without warning lights of any description. Watches were doubled, and on the bridge, the unsleeping captain kept vigil with his anxious officers.

Through the long hours, Jack sat unwinkingly at his key. But it was not till the sky was graying the next morning that anything disturbed the silence of the air. Then came a break in the monotony. The British cruiser *Essex* was speaking to the *Suffolk*. But the messages were in code and told nothing except that Jack caught the name of the liner and knew the radio talk between the warships concerned her.

At breakfast time the passengers assembled in the saloon, for the most part anxious and haggard after sleepless nights. The captain spoke encouragingly, but even his words had little effect. Every one on board felt and showed the strain of this blind racing over the ocean with watchful naval bulldogs lying in wait ready to pounce on the richest prize afloat on the seven seas.

CHAPTER IV

ICEBERGS AHEAD!

That night a dense fog fell. But the pace of the fleeing liner was not slackened by a fraction of a knot. Without running lights, and with darkened decks and cabins, she raced blindly onward through the smother, facing disaster if she struck an obstacle. The passengers, already nerve-racked for the most part, almost beyond endurance, named a committee which was sent to the captain to protest against the reckless risk he was taking in ploughing ahead at top speed through the blinding mist.

They returned with a report that the captain had refused to slacken speed. With reckless fatalism, it appeared, he was prepared to lose his ship in a disaster rather than run the chance of its capture by cruisers of the country with which his ruler was at war. A new feeling, one of indignation, began to spread through the big ship. Little knots gathered and angrily censured the captain's action. Some even visited him in person, but while he was polite to all, he firmly refused to reduce speed or display lights.

This was the condition of affairs when Jack came on duty accompanied by Bill Raynor, who had agreed to share his lonely vigil, for, from being one of the most sought out places on the ship, the wireless room was now deserted by the passengers, for strict orders had been given against the sending or receiving of any wireless messages lest the watching cruisers should get definite information of the liner's whereabouts and pounce upon her.

There was little for Jack to do under this "ukase" but to lean back restfully in his chair, with the receivers over his ears on the lookout for what might be coming through the air. He and Raynor chatted, discussing the wild flight of the "gold ship," intermittently, as the hours passed. But suddenly Jack became alert. Out in the dark, fog-ridden night, two ships were talking through the air. They were, as he learned after a moment of listening, the *Caledonian* of the English Anchor Line and the *Mersey*, which also flew the British flag.

The young wireless man listened for a time and then "grounded" with a grave face.

"What's up now?" asked Raynor, noticing this. "If it's the cruisers, I don't mind, for only the Germans and Austrians would be held as prisoners. I'd kind of like to be 'captured,' as a novelty."

"This trouble's worse than cruisers," rejoined Jack, in sober tones.

"What is it then?"

"Icebergs," said Jack, sententiously.

"Icebergs at this time of the year?" asked Bill, incredulously, for bergs are rare in August on the usual steamer lanes, though occasionally seen.

"That's what," rejoined Jack; "the *Caledonian* was telling the *Mersey*. She says they are sown thick to the northwest of us. You've got to remember that we're a long way to the north of the usual steamer tracks now, so it's not surprising that the 'growlers' are about."

"No, but it's mighty unpleasant," said Raynor. "What are you going to do?"

"Tell the captain about it at once," said Jack, decisively, rising and putting on his cap.

"I hope he puts on the brakes when he hears about it," commented Bill. "I'm not particularly nervous, but going full speed ahead through the fog into a field of bergs doesn't just exactly feel good."

"I'm only glad that the passengers don't know about it," said Jack. "They're scary enough now. If they knew about the bergs, I firmly believe some of them would have to be put in strait jackets."

"Yes, about the only cool ones on board are the Americans and the English," declared Bill. "I heard to-day that a party of American millionaires got together in the smoking room and laid plans to make an offer to buy the ship and run her across anyhow."

"That sounds like the American spirit all right," chuckled Jack. "What became of the idea?"

“The captain told them the ship was not for sale,” said Bill, “even if they offered to throw in the millions in the specie room.”

Jack found Captain Rollok and his officers in anxious consultation in the former’s cabin.

“Ha, so you haf the news, is it?” demanded the captain, as Jack entered.

“Yes, and not very good news, I’m sorry to say,” said Jack. “The *Caledonian* has just been telling the *Mersey* that there are icebergs ahead.”

The officers exchanged glances. They all looked at the captain. Evidently some orders were expected, with the greatest peril the sea holds lying ahead of the racing vessel.

One of them, – Second Officer Muller, who had the watch, – put his anxiety into words.

“Is it that you will change the course or reduce speed, Captain?” he inquired.

The big, bearded captain turned on him like a flash. He raised his massive fist and brought it down on the table with a crash that bade fair to split the wood.

“We keep on as we are going!” he exclaimed. “Rather than let this ship get into the hands of the English, I’ll send her to the bottom.”

“But the passengers!” exclaimed Jack; “surely – ”

“Herr Ready,” said the captain, “I am in command of this ship. The orders are full speed ahead.”

CHAPTER V

A CLOSE SHAVE

Bill Raynor received Jack's news with a shrug.

"I'm not surprised, to tell you the truth," he said. "I've met a good many Germans in the course of my sea-going years, and that's usually their idea, – rather sink the ship than give it up."

"But the fearful danger, Bill," protested Jack. "At any moment there may come a crash and –"

"We've got iceberg detectors," said Bill, "and maybe they'll sound the whistle and locate a big berg by the echo."

"They won't sound any whistle to-night," declared Jack. "That skipper is determined not to give any cruiser the least inkling of his whereabouts. I'm going to take a run on the deck, the wireless bell will call me if something comes. Want to join me?"

"All right. But it's not much of a night for a stroll outside."

"Anything's better than sitting in that cabin waiting for you-don't-know-what to happen."

"You're getting nervous, Jack."

"Not so much for my own sake as at the thought of all these thousands of tons of steel being raced through this fog at a twenty-four knot clip and icebergs ahead. It's sheer madness."

"Well, the captain's word is law at sea, so it's no use protesting. We must hope for the best."

The upper decks were deserted except for the boys. On the lower deck the passengers huddled in the darkness behind canvas screens erected to prevent any chance ray of light from filtering out. It was an uncanny feeling this, of speeding through an impenetrable pall of blackness with the thought of the iceberg warning ever and anon recurring to both lads, though they tried to talk of indifferent subjects.

The hours wore on and the fog did not lighten. Chilled to the bone, although it was August, Jack and Bill had about decided to turn in when there came a sudden sharp cry from the lookout forward. Involuntarily, Bill clutched Jack's arm. The strain had affected them both more than they cared to admit.

Suddenly, dead ahead of them, as it seemed, there reared, seen white through the mist, a monstrous spectral form. It towered above the steamer's masts and appeared to their alarmed imaginations to hang like an impending cliff above the ship.

From the bridge came quick shouts. Orders were given and harshly echoed. Somewhere down on the passenger decks, a woman screamed. Then came cries of consternation. The next moment there was a slight shock and a long, shuddering grind passed along the vessel's side. The mountainous ice mass appeared to sheer off, but in reality the ship was swinging clear of it. By a miracle she had escaped with a mere graze of her side. At diminished speed, she continued on her course.

"Phew, what a narrow escape!" exclaimed Jack, as the fog shut in about the monster berg they had sheered.

"I thought we were goners, sure," declared Bill, soberly. "A little of that sort of thing goes a long way. I – Hark!"

From the lower decks there now came the confused noise of a frightened crowd. Now and then, above, could be heard the shrieks of an hysterical woman. Sharp, authoritative voices belonging, as the boys guessed, to the officers, who were trying to quiet the panic-stricken throngs, occasionally sounded above the babel.

"They're coming this way!" cried Jack suddenly, as a rush of feet could be heard making for the ascents to the boat deck, where the wireless coop was situated. "Bill, we'll be in the middle of a first-class panic in a minute."

“Yes, if that crowd gets up here among the boats, there’s going to be the dickens popping,” agreed Bill. “What will we do?”

“Run into the wireless room. In the drawer of the desk by the safe there are two revolvers. One’s mine and the other belongs to Poffer. Get them on the jump.”

It did not take Bill long to carry out his errand, but in even the short time that he had been absent, the forefront of the terrified crowd from below was almost at the head of the companionway leading from the promenade to the boat deck. Jack had stationed himself at the head of it.

“Keep cool, everybody,” he was shouting; “there is no danger.”

“The *Titanic!*” shrieked somebody. “We’ve hit an iceberg. We’ll sink like her.”

“The boats!” shouted a man. “We’ll lower ’em ourselves. We’re sinking!”

In the gloom Jack could see the man’s face, round and white, with a big yellow mustache.

The fellow shoved two women, wedged in the throng, aside, and addressed himself to Jack, who stood at the head of the companionway.

“Let me pass, you!” he bellowed, seemingly mad with fear. “I want a place in the first boat. I –”

Jack felt Bill slip a revolver into his pocket. But he did not remove the weapon, the time had not yet come for its use.

“Stop that noise,” he told the yellow-mustached man bluntly. “Ladies and gentlemen,” he went on, “there’s no danger. We merely grazed the berg. Thank heaven the ship was swung in time to save her.”

“Don’t believe him,” shrieked the terrified man. “Stand to one side there. The boats!”

He made a rush for Jack and struck heavily at the young wireless operator. But before his blow landed, Jack had crouched and the next instant his fist shot out like a piston rod. The fellow staggered back, but could not fall because of the pressure of humanity behind him.

It is difficult to say what might have happened had there not been cooler heads in the crowd. Reassured by Jack’s cool manner, these began quieting the more timid ones. Just then, too, Captain Rollok and some of his officers appeared. All carried drawn revolvers, for a disorganized rush on the boats would have meant that scores of women would have been trampled and many lives lost in the confusion.

The captain’s firm, stern tones completed the work Jack and Bill had begun. He assured the passengers that an examination had been made and that no damage had been done. He also promised thereafter to run at a more moderate speed. Gradually, the excited crowd calmed down, and some sought their cabins. The greater part, however, elected to remain on deck throughout the night.

The next morning the fog had somewhat cleared and the break-neck speed of the ship was resumed. Jack was just resigning the key to young Poffer when the doorway was darkened by a bulky figure. It was that of a big, yellow-mustached man, whom Jack recognized instantly as the man who had led the panic of the night before, and whom he had been forced to deal with summarily.

He furiously glared at Jack, and the boy noticed that under his left eye was a dark bruise, a memento of the previous night.

“What did you mean by striking me last night?” he began angrily. “I demand your name. I will have you discharged.”

“My name is Ready,” answered Jack calmly, “and as far as having me discharged is concerned, I’m afraid that will be impossible. You see I’m here in what you might call an extra-official capacity.”

“Bah! don’t be impudent with me, boy. I am Herr Professor.”

“Oh, a barber,” smiled Jack, amiably.

The yellow-mustached man fairly growled. His light blue eyes snapped viciously.

“I am Herr –”

“Oh, yes, I see you’re here,” responded Jack calmly. “You seem to be in rather a bad temper, too.”

“Boy, I will see that you are punished for this. I am a gentleman.”

“Really, it would be as hard to tell it on you this morning as it was last night,” responded Jack, in quite unruffled tones.

“Be very careful, young man. I have already told you I am Herr Professor.”

“Oh, don’t hang out the barber pole again,” begged Jack.

The other shot a glance full of venom at the perfectly cool youth before him. Then, apparently realizing that there was nothing to be gained from indulging in tirades, he turned abruptly on his heel and strode to the door. On the threshold he paused.

“I am going to report your conduct to the captain at once,” he said. “You will find out before long what such gross impertinence to a passenger means.”

“I shouldn’t advise you to tell him about your behavior last night, though,” observed Jack.

“Why not?”

“Because from what I’ve observed of him, he is a rather hot-tempered man and he might feel inclined to throw you out of his cabin – and it’s quite a drop from there to the promenade deck.”

“You will hear more of this,” snarled the infuriated man; but at Jack’s parting shot he made off, looking very uncomfortable.

Poffer regarded Jack with a look in which admiration and awe were oddly blended.

“I dink you haf for yourself made idt troubles,” he remarked.

“Trouble! In what way?” demanded Jack. “The fellow is an arrant coward. He – ”

“Ah yah, dot is so, but den he is Herr – ”

“Gracious, have you got hair on your brain, too?”

“Yah,” was the innocent response. “He is a big Professor at a Cherman War College. He is a great man in Germany, der Herr Professor Radwig.”

“Well, Mr. Earwig, or whatever his name is, may be a great man as you say, Hans, my boy, but he is also a great coward. As for his threat to make trouble with the captain, that does not bother me in the least. To begin with, I’m only a volunteer, as it were, and in the second place, I’ll bet you a cookie or one of those big red apples you’re so fond of, that Mr. Earwig will avoid discussing the events of last night as much as he can. I’ve heard the last of him.”

But in this Jack was wrong. In days that lay ahead of the boys, they were to find that Herr Professor Radwig was ordained to play no unimportant part in their lives.

CHAPTER VI

SMOKE ON THE HORIZON

Late that afternoon Jack, who had just come on deck, was in time to notice an unusual thrill of excitement among the already overwrought passengers. On the northern horizon was a smudge of smoke, and a dark hull bearing down on them. Those who had glasses had already announced the other craft to be a warship, although, of what nation, it was as yet impossible to say.

Jack hurried to the wireless room. Young Poffer declared that he had received no wireless, nor intercepted any message which might have any bearing on the identity of the strange ship. On the bridge, the ship's officers were in excited consultation. The warship was drawing closer every moment. She was black and squat, with two fat funnels from which volumes of dark smoke rolled. At her bow was a smother of white foam showing the speed at which she was being pushed.

"Ach, now comes it!" exclaimed Poffer the next instant. He wrote rapidly and then handed the message to Jack. The wireless boy read:

"Heave to at once.

"Dutton, commanding His Majesty's ship *Berwick*."

"I'll take it forward right away!" exclaimed Jack. "You listen with all your ears for any more messages, Hans."

"You bet you my life I will undt den some," Hans promised. "Vot you dink, dey shoold us up, Jack?"

"I don't know. I suppose if we don't heave to, they will," said the wireless boy as he hurried off.

"Chust as I thought," declared Captain Rollok, after he had read the message.

"Shall I tell Hans to send back word we'll stop?" asked Jack.

"Stop! I wouldn't stop for der whole British navy," declared Captain Rollok vehemently.

He stepped to the engine room telegraph and set it violently over to "Full speed ahead." Then he picked up the engine-room telephone and gave orders to pile on every ounce of steam possible. The great ship quivered and then sprang forward like a grayhound from a leash. Clouds of black smoke rose from her funnels, deluging the decks with ashes as force draught was applied to the furnaces.

Jack hastened back to the wireless room. He found Poffer, pop-eyed and frightened looking.

"There's another cruiser coming up on the other side!" he exclaimed. "I just heard her talking to the *Berwick*."

"That's nice," commented Jack, as Bill Raynor and de Garros appeared in the doorway.

"Hullo, Bill," he continued. "You'll have a chance to be under fire now."

"What do you mean?" demanded young Raynor.

"Surely it is that the captain will stop?" asked the French aviator.

"Stop nothing," rejoined Jack. "He doesn't appear to care what he risks, so long as he saves his ship."

"I thought I felt her speeding up," said Bill. "So he's going to cut and run for it?"

"That's the size of it," responded Jack, while the Frenchman shrugged his shoulders.

"They are not understandable, these Germans," he commented.

"Here comes it anudder message," struck in Hans, holding up his hand to enjoin silence.

They all looked over his shoulder as he wrote rapidly.

"Your last warning. Heave to or take the consequences."

It was signed as before by the commander of the *Berwick*.

"My friends, this captain had better heed that warning," said de Garros. "Englishmen are not in zee habit of what zee call 'bluffing.'"

But when Jack came back from the bridge, whither he had sped at once with the message, it was to report the captain as obdurate as ever. His only comment had been to call for more speed.

“I guess he thinks we can show that cruiser a clean pair of heels,” said Raynor.

“That looks to be the size of it,” agreed Jack, “but he is taking desperate chances. Let’s go outside and see the fun.”

The cruiser was coming toward them on an oblique line now. From her stern flowed the red cross of St. George on a white field, the naval flag of England. They watched her narrowly for some minutes and then Jack exclaimed:

“Jove! I believe that with luck we can outrun her. The *Kronprinzessin* is the fastest ship of this line, and if her boilers don’t blow up we may be able to beat that cruiser out.”

“I hope so,” declared Raynor, fervently. “I’m not exactly a coward but I must say the idea of being made a target without having the chance to hit back is not exactly pleasant.”

“As I shall be in zee thick fighting not before very long, I might as well receive my baptism of fire now as any other time,” said the Frenchman. “I expect to be placed in charge of zee aviation corps, and I am told zee Germans have some very good aeroplane guns.”

“Look,” cried Bill, suddenly, “they are going to – ”

A white mushroom of smoke broke from the forward turret of the cruiser, followed by a screeching above their heads. Then came an ear-splitting report.

“Great guns! Where is this going to end?” gasped Bill, involuntarily crouching.

CHAPTER VII

A SHOT AT THE RUDDER

“*Ach Himmel!*” groaned Hans Poffer. “Suppose dey hit us vee – ”

He got no further. There was another burst of smoke, a quick, lightning-like flash and the same screech of a projectile. But this time, accompanying the sound of the report, was a sound of tearing metal and the ship shook as if she had struck on the rocks.

“The after funnel,” cried Jack, pointing to a jagged hole in the smoke stack.

“The next one may come closer,” choked out Bill rather shakily.

On the lower decks there was the wildest confusion. Women were fainting and the stewards and petty officers had all they could do to handle the frightened throngs. The striking of the funnel was the occasion for an angry and badly scared deputation to wait upon the captain and demand that he stop the ship at once.

But the deputation did not reach the bridge. They were met at the foot of the stairway leading to it by a polite but firm officer who informed them that under no circumstances would the captain tolerate any interference with his method of running the ship.

A third shot, which went wide, closely followed the one that had struck the after funnel. It flew high above them and caused Jack to observe:

“I don’t believe they mean to hit the hull, but only to scare the captain into heaving the boat to.”

“Looks that way,” agreed Bill, “and as for the scare part of it, I guess they’ve succeeded, so far as everybody is concerned but Captain Rollok and his officers.”

“We are gaining on zee cruiser without a doubt,” asserted de Garros, whose eyes had been fixed on the pursuing sea fighter for some minutes.

“Yes, but look, there comes another,” cried Jack, suddenly, pointing astern. “That must be the one Poffer heard signaling to the *Berwick*.”

“We’re in for it now,” said Bill. “I wish that pig-headed captain would heave to and let them take the gold and the Germans, if that’s all they are after.”

“Hullo!” exclaimed Jack, suddenly, as they all stood waiting nervously to see the next flash and puff from the cruiser’s turret. “I can see a gleam of hope for us. See what’s ahead!”

Ahead of them the sea appeared to be giving off clouds of steam as if it was boiling. As yet this vapor had not risen high, but it was rapidly making a curtain above the sunny waters.

“Fog!” cried Bill, delightedly.

“It cannot be too thick for me,” said de Garros.

“Perhaps Captain Rollok foresaw this and that was why he refused to halt,” said Jack. “Certainly, if we can gain that mist bank before we get badly injured, we’ll be all right.”

It was now a race for the thickening fog curtains. The cruisers appeared to realize that if the *Kronprinzessin* could gain the shelter of the mist, there would be but small chance of their capturing her. Increased smoke tumbling from their funnels showed that they were under forced draught. But as their speed increased so did that of the “gold ship.”

The gun boomed again on the *Berwick*, the foremost of the pursuers. The projectile struck the stern of the liner and knocked the elaborate gilt work wreathing, her name and port, into smithereens.

“Aiming at the rudder,” commented Jack. “That’s a good idea from their point of view.”

“But a mighty bad one from ours if they succeed in hitting it,” said Raynor, with a rather sickly laugh.

Two more shots, one of them from the second cruiser, flew above the fugitive liner and then the mist began to settle round her swiftly-driven hull in soft, cottony wreaths. In five minutes more the fog had shut in all about her.

Then ensued a game of marine blind-man's buff. Captain Rollok, having steamed at full speed some miles through the fog, – and this time there were no protests from passengers, – altered his course and deliberately steamed in circles.

“Hark!” exclaimed Jack, during one of these manœuvres. “What was that?”

Out in the fog somewhere they could hear a sound like the soft beating of a huge heart. It was the throbbing of another vessel's engines. To the fear of the chase now was added the peril of collision, for in the fog, dense as it was, the captain would not permit the siren to be sounded.

It was almost impossible to tell from which direction the sound was proceeding. It seemed to be everywhere. Was it another peaceful vessel like themselves, or a man-of-war? Much depended on the answer to this question.

All at once, with startling distinctness, a huge black bulk loomed up alongside them. Through the fog they caught a sudden glimpse of crowded decks and great guns projecting from grim-looking turrets. It was one of the British cruisers. By grim irony, the fog had delivered them into the hands of their pursuers.

“Great Scott, it's all off now!” cried Bill, as they simultaneously sensed the identity of the other craft.

CHAPTER VIII

LAND HO!

But the strange cruise of the *Kronprinzessin Emilie* was not destined to come to an end then, although, for an instant, it appeared so. Whether the Britisher was mutually astonished, and in the confusion the right orders were not given, or whatever the cause was, before they had more than glimpsed her grim, dogged outlines, she faded away in the fog and was blotted out.

“Phew! A few more close shaves like that and I’d be looking in the mirror to see if my hair hasn’t turned gray,” said Jack.

“I wonder they didn’t take some action,” commented Bill, “although I’m glad they didn’t.”

“Perhaps zey was so astonished zey forgot to fire zee gun,” suggested de Garros.

“I guess that was it,” agreed Jack, “but just the same it was a mighty lucky thing for us they didn’t come to their senses sooner.”

“Yes, this thing of playing tag in the fog gets on my nerves,” muttered Bill.

By nightfall, they had steamed through the fog belt, but every eye was anxiously turned astern as if their owners expected at any moment to see the ram-shaped bows of the black British sea bulldogs come poking put of the mist.

But nothing of the sort happened, however, though late that night, far to the eastward of their course, they could see the glowing fingers of the cruisers’ searchlights pointing in every direction across the sea. The next day passed without any untoward happenings, and when, the morning following, Jack gazed from the wireless coop he saw, in the first faint light of dawn, that they were steaming along a strange, unfamiliar, rugged coast.

By the time the passengers were astir, the outlines of the coast had become dotted with cottages and houses, and in the midst of breakfast they steamed into a harbor, and the anchor was dropped with a roar and a rumble. Like a flash, the tables in the saloon were deserted. There was a general rush for the deck.

“Why, that house over there looks just like my home at Bar Harbor,” cried one woman.

Ten minutes later her words were confirmed. It *was* Bar Harbor, Maine, into which the sorely-harried liner had taken refuge under the neutral protection of the Stars and Stripes. Not daring to run into New York or Boston, the captain had selected the world-famous summer resort as a harbor that the English cruisers would be the least likely to watch, and his judgment proved sound. And so ended the cruise of the “gold ship,” in whose strange adventures the boys were ever proud of having participated. An hour after the great liner’s arrival, she was almost deserted by her passengers who were choking the telegraph wires with messages.

The wireless disseminated far and wide the news of her safe arrival, and they learned, ashore, that for days the fate of the “gold ship” had been the puzzle of the country. All sorts of wild guesses had been printed as to her whereabouts. She had been reported off the coast of Scotland and again in the English Channel. One rumor had it that she had been captured, another that she had been sunk and most of those on board lost.

Not one of these guesses, however wild or probable, came within striking distance of the extraordinary truth of the “gold ship’s” flight across the war-swept seas. The day after their arrival, and while the town was still seething with excitement over the great liner’s presence in the harbor, Jack received a telegram at the hotel where he, Raynor and de Garros had taken up temporary quarters. The message was from Mr. Jukes and read as follows:

“Learned by the papers of your safe return. Kindly call at my office as soon as possible after your arrival in New York. Important.”

“What’s in the wind now?” exclaimed Jack to Bill Raynor, who was with him when he got the message.

“I haven’t the slightest idea,” said Raynor; “but I have a sort of notion in the back of my head that your vacation is over.”

“If you can call it a vacation,” laughed Jack.

“Well then, perhaps experience would be a better word,” substituted Bill, also laughing.

That evening, arrangements having been made about the shipment of their baggage to New York, the boys and the young French aviator obtained their tickets from an agent of the steamship company, for the line was bearing all expenses, and took a night train for home.

Almost as soon as they reached the city, Jack visited Mr. Jukes’ office.

“Thank goodness you’ve come, Ready!” he exclaimed as soon as he had shaken hands with the lad, upon whom, since their adventures in the South Seas, he strangely came to rely; “the *St. Mark* sails to-morrow for Europe. I don’t know yet, in the middle of this European muddle, just what ports she will touch at. That must be settled by her captain later on.”

“But Mullen is on the *St. Mark*,” began Jack. “I wouldn’t wish to usurp his job and – ”

“And anyhow, it’s your vacation,” interpolated the magnate. “I know all that, Ready, and depend upon it, you won’t suffer by it if you agree to my wishes. It isn’t exactly as wireless operator I want you to sail on the *St. Mark*, it’s on a personal mission in part. My son, Tom, is among the refugees somewhere in France. I don’t know where. I haven’t heard a word since this war started, but the last I know he was auto touring north of Paris. He may even have gone into Belgium, for that was a part of his plan.”

“And you want me to try to find him?” demanded Jack slowly.

“Yes, I know it’s a big job, but I know that if anyone can carry it through, you can. Expense is no object, spend all you like but find the boy. This suspense is simply killing his mother and worrying me sick.”

“I’m willing and glad to take the job, Mr. Jukes,” said the young wireless man, “but, as you say, it’s a big undertaking and has about one chance in a hundred of being successful. Besides, you may have heard of him and his whereabouts even before the *St. Mark* reaches Europe.”

“I’ll take my chances of that,” declared the millionaire. “It’s action that I want. The feeling that something has actually been done to find him.”

“On these conditions, I’ll go and do my best,” said Jack.

“Thank you, Ready, thank you. I knew you wouldn’t fail me. Now about funds. They tell me finances are all topsy-turvy over there now. Nobody can get any American paper money or travelers’ checks cashed. That may be Tom’s fix. You’d better take gold. Here.”

He drew a check book out of a drawer and wrote out a check of a size that made Jack gasp.

“Get gold for that,” he said, as he handed it over, “and when that’s gone, Linwood and Harding, of London, are my agents. Draw on them for what you need. And, by the way, is there anybody you want to take with you?”

“I was going to say, sir,” said Jack, “that for a task like this, Bill Raynor – ”

“The very fellow. I’ll never forget him in New Guinea. A splendid lad. But will he go with you?”

“I rather think he will,” rejoined Jack with a twinkle in his eye.

CHAPTER IX

A STRANGE QUEST

Readers of earlier volumes of this series will recall Tom Jukes, who, after being cast away when his father's yacht burned at sea, was found by Jack's clever wireless work. This was the youth, – he was about Jack's own age, – whom the wireless boy had been commissioned to find. Although the task appeared, as Jack had said, one almost impossible of accomplishment, still Jack was boy enough to be delighted at the prospect of traversing war-ridden Europe and possibly playing a part in the mightiest struggle of all time. As for Bill Raynor, he was wild with excitement at the idea. Uncle Toby Ready, when he was told of the intended trip, shook his head and muttered something about "playing with fire," but he was eventually won over and presented Jack with a dozen bottles of the Golden Embrocation and Universal Remedy for Man and Beast.

"If so be as you meet up with the Kaiser, or the King of England, or the Czar, just give 'em a bottle with my compliments," he said in bestowing the gift. "By the flying jib, it might be the means of building me up a big European trade. Think of it, Cap'n Toby Ready, P. O. H. R. H. – Physician in Ordinary to His Royal Highness. If you don't run across any of them skippers of state you can just distribute it around careless like, and draw special attention to the directions and to my address in case the prescription should require to be refilled."

Jack promised, but it is to be feared that the Golden Embrocation never got nearer Europe than the cabin of the square rigger *Jane Harding*, of Halifax, Nova Scotia, which happened to be in the Erie Basin unloading lumber. Captain Podsnap, of the *Jane Harding*, was an ardent admirer of, and believer in, Captain Toby's concoctions which, as the compounder boasted, never were known to do harm even where they didn't do good. To Captain Podsnap, therefore, Jack hied himself perfidiously and made over to him the gifts intended for ailing royalty.

The *St. Mark* was what is known as a "popular" ship. That is, she usually crossed with full cabins. But on the present trip there were a bare score of passengers in the first cabin, not many more in the second, while in the steerage were a couple of hundred travelers, mostly reservists of the various countries at war, returning to Europe to take up arms.

As they steamed down the harbor, the docks on each side of the river could be observed to be crowded with idle steamers of all sizes, from small freighters to huge four-funnelled liners. With smokeless stacks and empty decks, they lay moored to their piers, offering an eloquent testimonial to the almost complete paralysis of ocean traffic that marked the earlier days of the war. Off Tompkinsville, Staten Island, the dreadnought, *Florida*, swung at anchor, grim in her gray war paint, – Uncle Sam's guardian of neutrality. It was her duty to keep watch and ward over the port to see that no contraband went out of the harbor on the ships flying the flags of combatting nations and in other ways to enforce President Wilson's policy of "hands off."

With dipping ensign, the *St. Mark* slipped by, after a brief scrutiny by a brisk young officer. Then, down the bay she steamed, which the boys had traversed only a few days before on the hunted *Kronprinzessin*.

"Well, Jack, old fellow," observed Raynor, as Jack leaned back after sending a few routine messages of farewell and business of the ship, "off again on our travels."

"Yes, and this time, thank goodness, we're under Uncle Sam's flag, and that means a whole lot in these days."

"It does, indeed," agreed the other fervently, "but have you any idea what port we are bound for?"

"Not as yet. We are to get instructions by wireless, either from the New York or London offices."

“This a queer job we’ve embarked on, Jack,” resumed Raynor, after a pause in which Jack had “picked up” *Nantucket* and exchanged greetings.

“It is indeed. I only hope we can carry it through successfully. At any rate, it will give us an opportunity to see something of the war for ourselves.”

“It’s a great chance, but as to finding Tom Jukes, I must say I agree with you that a needle in a hay stack isn’t one, two, three with it.”

A heavily built man, dark bearded and mustached, entered the wireless cabin. He had a despatch ready written in his hand.

“Send this as soon as possible, please,” he said, handing it to Jack.

As his eyes met those of the young wireless man he gave a perceptible start which, however, was unnoticed by either of the boys. Raynor was paying no particular attention to the matter in hand and Jack was knitting his brows over the despatch. It was in code, to an address in New York and was signed Martin Johnson.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Johnson,” said Jack, “but we can’t handle this message.”

“Can’t? Why not?” demanded the passenger indignantly.

“Because it is in code.”

“What’s that got to do with it?”

“While the war lasts we have instructions not to handle code messages or any despatches that are not expressed in English that is perfectly plain.”

“That’s preposterous,” sputtered the passenger angrily. “This is a message on a business matter I tell you.”

“If you’ll write it out in English, I’ll transmit it,” said Jack; “that’s what I’m here for.”

The man suddenly leaped forward. He thrust a hand in his pocket and pulled out a roll of bills.

“Can I speak to you confidentially?” he asked, turning his eyes on Raynor.

“Anything you’ve got to say you can say before my friend,” said Jack.

“Then, see here – there’s a hundred dollars in that roll,” as he threw it on the desk, “forget that code rule a while and it’s yours.”

“Look here, Mr. Johnson,” said Jack coldly, “I’ve already told you what my orders are. As for your money, if it was a million it would be just the same to me.”

“Bah! You are a fool,” snapped the other, angrily snatching up the money and flinging out of the cabin, crumpling the code message in his hand.

“That infernal boy again,” he muttered, as he gained the deck outside. “This only makes another score I have to settle with him. These Americans, they are all fools. Well, Von Gottberg in New York will have to go without information, that’s all, if I can’t find some way of getting at the wireless.”

“Say, Jack,” asked Raynor, as the bearded man left the cabin, “did that fellow remind you of anybody?”

“Who, Johnson?” asked Jack idly. “Why yes, now that you come to mention it, there was something familiar about his voice and his eyes, but for the life of me I couldn’t place him.”

“Nor I, and yet I’ve a strong feeling that we’ve met him somewhere before.”

“Johnsons are as thick as blackberries,” commented Jack.

“Yes, but I don’t connect that name with this man. It was some other name altogether. Oh, well, what’s the use of trying to recall it – anyhow, Mr. Johnson, whoever he is, hasn’t got a very amiable temper. I thought he was going to swell up and bust when you refused that message.”

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