

TWICE-A-MONTH

# Sea Stories Magazine

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# The Arrest of Captain Bangs



By  
Morgan Robertson

It is rare that a captain's actions on shipboard brings him in contact with the shore police. Detective Fitzgerald had never been to sea and didn't want to go, but, as the sergeant reminded him, "our wants are not considered in the cold, hard world." Since Captain Bangs was "wanted" by the police, it was up to Fitzgerald to become a seaman and get his man. Here's how he did it.

**D**ETEKTIVE FITZGERALD, of the Central Office, in San Francisco, wandered into the station house at ten in the morning in the tranquillity of mind coming off duty well performed—his man was landed, and in a cell—and was greeted by a vociferous call from the desk.

"What?" he demanded, when he faced the sergeant.

"Inspector Smith wants you. Get in there quick, and don't be chesty; for I'm thinking he'll take it out o' you."

Fitzgerald entered the office of the inspector, who glared at him over a polished desk loaded with documents.

"Fitzgerald," he asked sternly, "ever been to sea?"

"No, and don't want to be," answered Fitzgerald.

"Our wants are not considered in this cold, hard world. Can you box the compass?"

"I cannot."

"Know whether to go to windward

or to leeward o' the mate when you go aft to the wheel?"

"No. What are you giving me?"

"Know which side the main topsail halyards leads down?"

"Don't know anything about it, inspector. Are you stringing me?"

"Not a bit. You acknowledge, Fitzgerald, that you don't know a blame thing about ships and seamanship?"

"I acknowledge. I never saw the sea except when I came over with the old folks when I was a kid."

"You'll do. For I wouldn't send a man on this job who had been hammered and bullied and starved, as I have been, until he forgot that he was human. I've been to sea, Fitzgerald, in my young days, and the effects are still with me. I wouldn't go myself on this job, for I couldn't make good. D'you see? Irishman—like you—that I am, I had my manhood thumped out o' me by bucko mates and skippers, and even now I would be oppressed and stultified by

the sight and the sound and the contact with 'em. See, Fitzgerald? But you're young, and you're fresh, and you're Irish, and you're lacking in the sailor's respect for law that hangs him while it gives the skipper a gold chronometer—all for the same job. But, I've a case here that promises a reversal, and I'm interested. I want you to get Captain Bangs."

"Where is he, and what's he done?"

"Murdered one of his crew, if you want the legal explanation of my interest. Nearly murdered me, if you want the human explanation. He towed an ordinary seaman over the stern, just outside the three-mile limit, and when they pulled the seaman in he was daffy, and died in the hospital ashore here. The offense was committed on the high seas, but as the man died ashore, it came under the jurisdiction of the local authorities, and he was indicted by the grand jury, but had already sailed. He can't be extradited, because, though a Yankee skipper, he's in command of a Blue Noser, a Nova Scotia ship, and, again, though he cleared for Yokohama and a market, we don't know that he'll fetch. See?"

"You've got to catch him in some American port, or some colonial port, in the Philippines, Guam, or Alaska. Go down to the comptroller's office with this order and draw five hundred. Cable for more when you need it. Take your badge and your gun, and get that scoundrel. He knows he's wanted, and may dodge American soil for years, or until he thinks it's blown over, for he's controlling owner in the ship. But you get him. Take steamer passage for Yokohama, and ship with him, and when he touches an American port, or comes under the American flag, put the darbies on him, and bring him back. Go along with you, Fitzgerald."

"You mean I'm to become a sailor to get this man?"

"I do, and when you're a sailor you'll

have the necessary grouch. On with you, Fitzgerald, and learn fortitude, temperance, vegetarianism, and submission of the spirit. Ship 'fore the mast in a Blue Noser, commanded by a Yankee skipper and doubt the existence of a God. Then think it out and revise yourself. Get out o' this, and don't let me see you until you have Captain Jim Bangs, the worst bucko out o' Boston, who skinned me alive with a deck scraper when I was 'fore the mast with him in the old *Singapore*, twenty years ago. D'you hear me?"

The last words were roared at Fitzgerald, and he decamped. He had enough of human sympathy to be impressed by the inspector's description of Bangs, and on reading the data in the district attorney's office he was further impressed. Bangs, no doubt, deserved the gallows.

He learned further details at the Maritime Exchange, and with five hundred dollars in his pocket, the warrant of arrest, his badge, his pistol, and his Irish manhood to fortify him, Fitzgerald took steamer passage to Yokohama.

Arriving there, he reported his errand to the American consul, found small comfort, and loafed along the Bund, awaiting the arrival of Bangs, in the Nova Scotia ship *Waldemere*, and gleaning such gossip and tutelage as he could from the sailors he met.

He soon learned that to ship as a sailor he must look like one, and, to this end, provided himself with a cheap, ready-made suit, a sailor's canvas bag, and an outfit of sea clothing—oilskins, rubber boots, flannel shirts, etc. Further, that he needed "discharges," and these he bought of a broken-down old wreck, who had spent a lifetime in procuring them; but he gave back all but a few selected ones of a late date, which gave him the name of John Larsen, Able Seaman.

Fitzgerald was a well-formed, athletic, and well-favored young fellow of

thirty, keen of observation and judgment, quick of speech and action, and well equipped to master in a short time enough of a seaman's work to escape all but severe criticism. Yet, within one hour of his going aboard the *Waldemere*, two weeks later, as an A. B., he was thumped into unconsciousness by an irate first mate for the simple fault of coiling a rope down back-handed. He came to in the scuppers, but deferred rising until he had studied the problem.

Bangs, a mild-mannered gentleman of middle age, who grievously complained that half of his ingrate crew had deserted, had shipped Fitzgerald in the British consul's office on his discharges and representations, and had later repleted his crew with a dozen drugged men, who even now, while Fitzgerald was regaining his faculties, were unconscious in their bunks.

Fitzgerald had his badge, and his gun, and the warrant hung to a belt within his shirt, but it was no part of his plan to show them at present. The big, bluff-bowed, round-sterned Nova Scotian had only called at Yokohama for provisions and men, and was bound, in the same ballast, for Shanghai. This was not a colonial port, but there were steamers under the American flag running there from San Francisco, and an American consul, in whose office he hoped to catch Captain Bangs. So, he rose up, asked a shipmate about the coiling of ropes, and was instructed and laughed at; but he held his peace.

There were about twenty men in that crew, of various nationalities, and some unable to speak English, but the poorest of the lot was a better sailor than Fitzgerald, even though, in strength and intelligence, he topped them all. His discharges had fooled the skipper, but there was no passing of the test in the fore-castle. He was derided, ridiculed for his ignorance, and even pushed—a little too heavily—out of the way by a Swede.

Fitzgerald, realizing that his bodily comfort was at stake, and his mission in no danger from conflict with the men, thrashed the Swede, quickly and skillfully, without in any way interfering with the work going on. He thrashed—in the next watch below—one other critic, and proved to the understanding of all, that, though a poor sailor, he was yet able, of good courage and intelligence, and worth developing.

So the better element of the crew took to him, made him their friend, and tutored him—which tutelage saved him much friction with the afterguard. There were but three of these to deal with—for the two boatswains and carpenter were practically of the crew—the first mate that had floored him, who was a big-shouldered Scotchman, a second mate under him, but equally big-shouldered, abusive, and truculent, and Captain Bangs, the mild-mannered, middle-aged Captain Bangs, who had bewailed his troubles into his ear at the consul's office, but who had remained out of sight since then, until, with top-gallant sails coming in on the third morning out, he appeared on deck, no longer mild and gentlemanly, but purple-faced, drunk, and temporarily deranged. He pounced upon the man at the wheel, who was Fitzgerald.

"How're you headin' there, hey?" he demanded. "How you headin'?"

"Southwest by west, sir," answered Fitzgerald respectfully, and accurately, for boxing the compass had been his first lesson after rope coiling.

"You lie," yelled the skipper. "You're a point off your course."

True enough at the moment. The ship was swinging before a rising sea and gale, and the best steering could be no more than a balance between the yaws. She swung back, and a point the other way; but by this time the skipper had taken his eyes off the compass.

"I'm doing my best, sir," answered Fitzgerald mildly,

"Your best!" shrieked the madman—mad from drink, and the evil forces within him. "Your best won't do for my worst." He launched out his fist and struck Fitzgerald in the face.

Things went red before the eyes of Fitzgerald. The binnacle, the cro'jack, the two lines of rail leading forward, the house, masts, and deck fittings in sight, and the quivering form of the skipper—all took on the same crimson hue, and for a moment Fitzgerald went mad. He dropped the spokes, sent forth his fist, with the weight of his body behind, and caught the skipper on the chin.

Captain Bangs dropped like a log before the binnacle, and Fitzgerald, his environment taking on a more natural hue, seized the wheel, and ground it to port. But with all his strength, even though he hove the wheel hard over, he could not bring her back. She breached to in the trough, and amid slatting of canvas, and the shouts of the mate and crew, she lay, soggy and helpless, with no steerage way, and green seas rolling over one rail and on over the other.

Then the slatting upper topsails on all three masts went to ribbons, the mizzen royal mast went over the side, and the fore topmast staysail sheet parted at the clew, leaving the sail to flap like a flag until it went to pieces.

The mate—who had the deck—braced the fore yards, set the jib, and the ship payed off; then, with steerage way, Fitzgerald brought her back to her course, and the observing mate squared the fore yards, and sent men aloft to clear away the broken gear and the fluttering shreds of the topsails. And, this going on, he wandered back to the wheel to inquire of the helmsman, and noted the prostrate form of the skipper, just regaining life. He lifted him to his feet.

Captain Bangs glared at Fitzgerald, while the mate glanced sternly from one face to the other.

"He hit me," stammered Bangs wildly, as he felt of his sore chin. "He hit me Put him in irons. Get your irons, Mr. Bruce, and send another man to the wheel.

"Did you hit the captain?" asked the big mate, looking sternly into the tense face of Fitzgerald.

"I did. I forgave you for the first offense, because I was green. But when he hit me, I struck back—that's all."

Mr. Bruce lifted his voice. "A man aft here to the wheel," he called, and one of the crew separated himself from the rest and came. And Mr. Bruce, going to his room, returned with a pair of wrist irons by the time the man appeared.

"Up with your hands and take these," he commanded.

Fitzgerald, shocked, enraged, and helpless against the situation—with his mission in mind, obeyed. He had lost his temper, and made a mistake—which was fatal in good detective work.

Captain Bangs looked on until Fitzgerald was ironed, then he said:

"Trice him up on the after house by the end of the cro'jack buntlines. Let him swing until he gets the conceit out of him."

And so, Fitzgerald, with his mission still in mind, suffered himself to be led to the top of the after house and triced up with his feet just touching the deck when the craft was on an even keel, and his body crashing against the port or starboard rigging as she rolled. He stood it stoically, hoping that it would soon end, but acquiring, as the inspector had predicted, a good, wholesome "grouch."

At the end of an hour he was muttering curses upon the head of Bangs. At the end of two, he was offering mental prayers for deliverance to the whisky-soaked autocrat, stumping around the poop deck; but Fitzgerald made no oral plea, and at the end of three hours, he was unconscious, and

his body plunged and whirled, from rigging to mast and rigging, giving no sign that he felt, or thought, or resented.

Then, inert as a dead man, he was taken down, and, still ironed, lowered to the lazarette, where he lay until his senses returned—in the middle of the night, with his shipmates' voices sounding in his ears above, as they further shortened sail, and the screaming wail of the typhoon singing through the gear like the winter song of the kitchen chimney in his boyhood home.

Few men that go to sea escape the experience that Fitzgerald was undergoing, but few that go to sea do so for other than a living, which living depends upon the good will of the skipper, and a "discharge" at the end of the voyage which will secure further employment.

Fitzgerald was not so bound. He was a sailor, temporarily, with other objects in life than further employment, and all the bitterness of which his soul was capable arose in rebellion against his treatment. A few hours of fuming brought the reaction of tranquillity and deep-seated purpose—purpose in no way connected with the Golden Rule, but strongly involved in the old biblical doctrine of an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. Captain Bangs had hanged him by the wrists. Captain Bangs should hang by the neck. So decreed Fitzgerald, manacled, sore in every joint, and drenched with the wet, cold drift from the open hatch above. At breakfast time he was fed—with hard-tack and water—and he ate as would a famished wild beast in captivity.

It was the steward who fed him, and when the steward came again at dinner time, with more bread and water, Fitzgerald, sufficiently composed to be civil, asked him for liniment, witch-hazel, croton oil with water—anything from the medicine chest that would as-

suage the aches and pains in his shoulders coming from his tricing up.

The steward demurred. He dared not ask the captain, but would speak to the first mate, and if authority was granted, he would bring the remedies.

Fitzgerald, in his early life, had been a trained nurse in a criminal hospital, and he knew what he wanted; but he was somewhat surprised when, ten minutes after the steward had gone, the first mate dropped down the hatch and said:

"What d'ye want? Relief from the medicine chest?"

"Yes, sir," answered Fitzgerald sullenly. "Every bone in my body aches."

"All right. You shall have it; but don't make your request to the skipper. You did the blackguard up, and I wish that it was me—only. I couldn't afford it. See? I'm a mate, with a future."

"And I'm a sailor, with none."

"Right. Sing small for a few days, and I'll so represent things that he'll let you out; and, maybe, some day, when I see things clear, you'll have the satisfaction of seeing me do him up in better shape than you did. Meanwhile, say nothing. This is confidential, and I only talk this way because I see you're no ordinary man. He hit you at the wheel and you knocked him out. Never saw it done before by the man at the wheel."

He departed, and soon Fitzgerald received his remedies, which helped him to bodily comfort. But he was not released, and the mate visited him no more—not even through the long days and nights after the gale, while the ship made her offing, took on a pilot, anchored in the Woosung River, and filled up with a cargo of tea for Liverpool—a six weeks' count of time. And in this time his bread and water had reduced him to a dyspeptic wreck, which brought about a frame of mind conducive to amnesty when the captain, on the tow down the river, dropped into the lazarette, and offered him his liberty

and his chance to labor with the rest, on his avowal of penitence.

Fitzgerald was penitent—outwardly, and so avowed. He was released and put to work, so weak that he had trouble at times in keeping his legs; but it was noticeable that, while the second mate and the captain swore at him, maligned and ridiculed him, the big-shouldered first mate was kind to him. Once, when Fitzgerald had the wheel, he volunteered this much in the way of explanation:

"He didn't dare," he said, "to send you to jail in Shanghai, because he hit you at the wheel—dead against the law."

So, in the sweet and balmy breezes of the Pacific, Fitzgerald recovered his strength and his nerves; and whatever of resentment he had felt toward the big first mate melted away in the atmosphere of his sympathy and fellow feeling. The mate disliked the skipper, and so did he—much more.

But nothing material happened in the long passage around the Horn and up the two Atlantics to Liverpool. Fitzgerald developed into a first-class sailor, his natural intelligence aiding him in mastering seamanly problems that with the ordinary beginner requires years of service; and on the run up the Western Ocean, he had occasion to display skill of another kind.

His unofficial friend, the mate, broke his arm in a bad scramble with a green sea that swept the ship in the Bay of Biscay, and Fitzgerald was the man who set the broken bones, bound them tight in splints and plaster bands, and so prescribed and directed, that the mate lost but a few days from duty.

The still drunk and truculent skipper observed, passed a number of irrelevant and blasphemous remarks, and kicked Fitzgerald out of the mate's room when the job was done. All of which found mental note in the brains of Mr. Bruce and Fitzgerald.

At Liverpool the crew was "worked out"—that is, put to such hard, distasteful, and impossible tasks that the men shouldered their dunnage and jumped to the dock, leaving all the pay due them, rather than submit.

But one man did not go—Fitzgerald, the man who wanted Captain Bangs. He scraped hard paint from the topgallant crosstrees in zero weather; he scoured the copper at the water line on a stage so low that his feet were immersed. He scrubbed paint work with sand and canvas, when the sand froze to the canvas, and his knuckles bled from the friction, and he swabbed decks among stevedores that continually soiled them.

But he did not desert. He held on, and soon the skipper and the two mates gave it up, the first mate probably from sympathy; for his word went far, both with his inferior and his superior, and in a few days Fitzgerald, his purpose still unrevealed, was let alone, or given light tasks in the forecastle. And he was the only man left.

A new cargo came aboard—salt, machinery, bridge material, and farm implements for Montevideo—and when this was stowed, there came a new crew—a number of Liverpool Irishmen and outlawed Italians, Dutchmen, and "Sou'wegians," that promised trouble for the afterguard.

But the afterguard met the difficulty with almost success. Man after man was knocked down, and sometimes knocked out, and the crew finally adopted a working hypothesis, which, while it involved no surrender of their viewpoint, yet left them intact from physical tutelage or correction. Each side was ready for murder, and each side forebore to act.

And so installed, the ship crept down the Atlantic, drifted through the doldrums, and reached the southeast trades, with no one, forward or aft, out of commission, and Fitzgerald, the man with a mission, now the leading spirit in the

forecastle, and befriended by the mighty first mate.

Then there came the climax. The second mate knocked down an Irishman, who retaliated with a belaying pin, and, the fracas arousing the watch, other belaying pins were brought into use, while the skipper and two mates used their revolvers.

Fortunately for Fitzgerald, he was at the wheel, and immune from criticism. But his immunity did not extend beyond corporal punishment; in fact, he was the hardest worked man on board for a time, bandaging wounds, probing for bullets, and setting broken bones.

And among his patients was Captain Bangs, suffering from concussion of the brain, and wavering between life and death, while the ship sailed into the harbor of Montevideo.

Fitzgerald brought the skipper around in a manner that won praise from the surgeon who came aboard to repair damages, and in a few days Captain Bangs was able to go on shore and transact business—which business embraced the jailing of several members of his crew, and the stopping of liberty and money for the rest; for a fixed, hand-written clause in the articles that all had signed contained the proviso: "No money or liberty in foreign ports except at master's option."

This debarred Fitzgerald from leaving the ship—a grievous disappointment, for he had hoped to catch the skipper in the British consul's office, which at this port was also the American consul's office, and arrest him upon American soil. And his disappointment was not lessened by the angry attitude of the mate, who, when the skipper was ashore, berated him for a fool.

"For the dog might have died, and I'd got command if you hadn't been so almighty handy as a doctor," he said.

To which Fitzgerald could put in no defense except the logic of the Golden Rule, unknown to Mr. Bruce.

The ship sailed, with a cargo of hides, a new balance of crew, a rejuvenated skipper, and a sullen first mate, and sneaked and beat her way around Cape Horn without trouble of note.

But up in the roaring forties, when the wet, the cold, and the loss of sleep told heavily on the temper of all hands, and the whole crew on the fore yard wrestled for an hour in getting in the foresail, Captain Bangs and Mr. Bruce indulged in an argument as to which clew—the lee or the weather—should first be raised in the difficult operation of furling this sail.

In this argument Captain Bangs struck Mr. Bruce in the face, and Mr. Bruce in return planted his fist against the ribs of Captain Bangs with such force as not only to knock him down the poop steps headlong to the main deck, but to fracture a couple of ribs, the broken end of one puncturing his lungs. Captain Bangs, whining like a whipped child, was carried below.

Mr. Bruce, with thoughts of the penitentiary dominating his mind, assumed full command, and Fitzgerald, the embryo surgeon—skilled beyond his normal powers by the exigencies of the situation—was deputed to nurse the invalid.

Mr. Bruce, glaring hatefully into the face of Fitzgerald, so decreed.

"Give this dog his chance," he said; "but if he wants to die, let him die. I'll stand my share and take my medicine."

Fitzgerald, with little sympathy for the mate, and dominated solely by his own hatred and his mission, nursed the stricken skipper, while the ship, under the navigation of the mate, charged up the West Coast toward Callao, where she was bound.

Fitzgerald could do little, but that little he did. He drew the fractured bone away from the punctured lungs by pressure, massage, and the grip and pull of plaster bandages; and, little by little,



Captain Bangs regained health and activity. Then Fitzgerald resumed his work as a sailor, and bore the usual abuse of the skipper and the second mate, and even the first, who now held a secret grudge.

It worked out simply—very simply. Fitzgerald, as the ship sailed into Callao Harbor, was guilty of passing to windward of the disgruntled Mr. Bruce, and was promptly collared. Then, pressed against the rail by the officer, he listened to this:

"You dog, why didn't you let him die? Now, I've got to face-court proceedings."

"Let up," choked Fitzgerald. "Let up, or I'll do you. D'you hear?"

Mr. Bruce heard, but did not respond. He still choked Fitzgerald, and Fitzgerald used his strength. He shook off the officer, struck him in the face, and, in the ensuing conflict, Fitzgerald kneeled on the chest of his superior and hammered his face into a pulp before he was interrupted.

The interruption came from Captain Bangs, who, armed with a belaying pin, soon reduced Fitzgerald to a condition more helpless and harmless than that of Mr. Bruce. Whatever Captain Bangs may have felt toward Mr. Bruce, this was a case of a sailor assaulting an officer, and he acted according to the ethics of seafaring.

Fitzgerald, under the captain's pistol, stood quiet while Mr. Bruce, his face puffed and disfigured, with all the base and conflicting emotions of jealousy and hatred showing through the contusions, put the irons on him and led him to the lazarette. Once more was Fitzgerald confined, and in disgrace.

There he remained while the ship sought her anchorage, and her crew furled the canvas. Then Fitzgerald was brought up. He looked around the harbor. A few ships of various nationalities were there, with American schooners in

the coasting trade, a few tramps, and one man-of-war, a ram-bowed white cruiser showing the Stars and Stripes at the flagstaff on the stern. A small steam launch was creeping up to the *Waldemerc's* gangway, and Captain Bangs was speaking to the young officer in the stern sheets.

"I've a man here," he said, "that I want sent to jail, for assault upon my first officer. The whole thing is down in my official log. Will you take us ashore?"

"I can only take you aboard my ship," answered the ensign. "Bring your man down the gangway."

So, Fitzgerald, in irons, and enlivened by the vicious looks of the first mate, went down the steps, followed by Captain Bangs. He was placed in the stern sheets, next to the young officer in charge, and abreast of Captain Bangs. Above them all, on the flagstaff of the launch, floated the Stars and Stripes; and Fitzgerald, bruised and subdued, suddenly came to life. He worked his manacled hands around his waist, felt his badge, his money roll, and his gun; then said to Captain Bangs:

"Why not take these irons off, captain? I'm here, and can't get away."

"Sure," said the confident skipper. "you're under the American flag, and liable to the jurisdiction of America. Off with the darbies, of course. You'll get three months in jail at least."

And he kindly and considerably unlocked the irons on Fitzgerald's wrists.

Then, before the captain knew what was happening, Fitzgerald jerked the irons away from him, twisted his pistol out from beneath his shirt, leveled it in the face of Captain Bangs, and said sternly: "You're my prisoner. Up with your hands, or I'll shoot you dead."

Captain Bangs promptly raised his hands, while the ensign in charge of the launch demanded:

"What does this mean?"

"It means, sir," said Fitzgerald, "that I, a detective of the San Francisco police, have arrested Captain Bangs for the murder of Hans Hansen, one of his crew on the voyage from Hong-kong to San Francisco. He could not be extradited, but I've got him. This boat is under the American flag, and, under the law, is American soil. Keep your hands up, Bangs, while I put the darbies on you."

The amazed Captain Bangs made no resistance. In a flash Fitzgerald had snapped the irons on his wrists; then, deftly abstracting the key from his pocket, he said to the ensign:

"We will argue matters on board your ship, sir," he said. "I am a policeman, who shipped with this man to get him. *I have got him.* Any question of my amenability to punishment can be offset by my position as a policeman. Go ahead with your launch, sir, and we'll interview your superiors."

The ensign smilingly bowed his head, and while Bangs expostulated, the launch crept up to the gangway of the

cruiser. Fitzgerald and his protesting prisoner went up the ladder, where a stern-faced commander received them. To him Fitzgerald showed his shield, explained his mission, and read the warrant of his arrest. The commander listened quietly.

"You have got Captain Jimmy Bangs," he said, "on a charge of murder. Well, God bless you! I've heard of him for years. Become the guest of this ship and the government, sir. We sail for San Francisco in the morning, and you can take your man home under the flag."

Fitzgerald delivered his prisoner in San Francisco, and had only this to mar his sense of triumph. It was Inspector Smith's sarcastic remark: "You had him foul on several occasions. Why didn't you slay him as the Almighty directed? Now the scoundrel will only hang! I'm disappointed in you, Fitzgerald."

But a month later, when Fitzgerald was rated inspector, he hardly believed Smith.