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CAP'N ERI Continued from page two) to appear at ease and not succeeding. The electrician looked them over one by one. Then he gave a short laugh. "You sneaks!" he said, and turned again to the testing apparatus. He began slowly to turn the regulating screw on the recorder. He had given it but a few revolutions when the point of the little glass siphon that had been tracing a straight black line on the sliding tape moved up and down in curving zigzags. Hazel-tine turned to the operator. "Palmer," he said curtly, "answer that call." The man addressed seated himself at the table, turned a switch and clicked off a message. After a moment the line on the moving tape zigzagged again. Ralph glanced at the zigzags and bit his lip. "Apologize to them," he said to Palmer. "The three men at the end of the room glanced at each other. This evidently was not what they expected. Steps sounded on the stairs, and Peters hurriedly entered. "The old man's comin'," he said. Mr. Langley, the superintendent of the station, had been in the company's employ for years. He had been in charge of the Cape Cod station since it was built, and he liked the job. He knew cable work, too, from A to Z, and though he was a strict disciplinarian, would forgive a man getting drunk occasionally sooner than condone carelessness. He was eccentric, but even those who did not like him acknowledged that he was "square." He came into the room, tossed a cigar stump out of the window and nodded to Captain Eri. "How are you, Captain Hedge?" he said. Then, stepping to the table, he picked up the tape. "Everything all right, Mr. Hazel-tine?" he asked. "Hello! What does this mean? They say they have been calling for two hours without getting an answer. How do you explain that?" It was very quiet in the room when the electrician answered. "The recorder here was out of adjustment, sir," he said simply. "Out of adjustment! I thought you told me everything was in perfect order before you left this morning." "I thought so, sir, but I find the screw was too loose." "That would account for the call not reaching us." "Too loose! Humph! The superintendent looked steadfastly at Hazel-tine, then at the operators and then at the electrician once more. "Mr. Hazel-tine," he said at length, "I will hear what explanations you may have to make in my office later on. I will attend to the testing myself. That will do." Captain Eri silently followed his young friend to the back door of the station. Hazel-tine had seen fit to make no comment on the scene just described, and the captain did not feel like offering any. They were standing on the steps when the big operator, McLoughlin, came out of the building behind them. "Well," he said gruffly to the electrician, "shall I quit now or wait until Saturday?" "What?" "Shall I git out now or wait till Saturday night? I suppose you'll have me fired." Then Hazel-tine's pentup rage boiled over. "If you mean that I'll tell Mr. Langley of your cowardly trick and have you discharged—No! I don't pay my debts that way. But I'll tell you this—you and your sneaking friends: If you try another game like that—yes, or if you so much as speak to me other than on business while I'm here—I will fire you—out of the window. Clear out!" "Mr. Hazel-tine," said Captain Eri a few moments later, "I hope you don't mind my sayin' that I like you first rate. Me and Perez and Jerry ain't the biggest bugs in town, but we like to have our friends come and see us. I wish you'd drop in once 'n awhile." "I certainly will," said the young man, and the two shook hands. That vigorous handshake was enough of itself to convince Ralph Hazel-tine that he had made at any rate one friend in Orham. And we may as well add here that he had made two. For that evening Jack McLoughlin said to his fellow conspirators: "He said he'd fire me out of the window, me, mind you! And, by thunder, I believe he'd have done it too. Boys, there ain't any more 'con' games played on that kid while I'm around, Parker or no Parker. He's white, that's what he is!" CHAPTER V. CONVERSATION among the captains was for the next two days confined to two topics, speculation as to how soon they might expect a reply from the Nantucket female and whether or not Mr. Langley would discharge Hazel-tine. On the latter point Captain Jerry was decided. "He won't be bounced," said the captain. "Now you just put that down in your log. Langley ain't a fool, and he can put two and two together as well as the next fellow. If I thought there was any need of it I'd just drop him a hint myself, but there ain't no use in that. I wish you could hear that youngster talk to that McLoughlin critter. 'Twould have done you good. That boy's all right.'" Captain Jerry was alone when the expected letter came. He glanced at the postmark, saw that it was Nantucket and struck the note behind the clock. 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Captain Jerry hadn't spoken since they left home and walked gloomily ahead with his hands in his pockets. Mr. Web Saunders, fat and in his pink striped shirt sleeves, sat upon the steps of his saloon as they went by. He wished them an unctuous good evening. The responses from the three captains was not enthusiastic, but Mr. Saunders continued to talk of the weather, the fishing and the cranberry crop until a customer came and gave them a chance to get away. The train was nearly an hour late this evening, owing to a hot box, and the "ex-seafaring man" and his two friends peered anxiously out at it from around the corner of the station. The one coach stopped directly under the lights, and they could see the passengers as they came down the steps. Two or three got out, but these were men. Then came an apparition that caused Captain Jerry to gasp and clutch at Perez for support. Down the steps of the car came a tall, coal black negro, and in her hand was a canvas extension case, on the side of which was blazoned in two inch letters the fateful name, "M. B. Snow, Nantucket." Captain Eri gazed at this astounding spectacle for full thirty seconds. Then he woke up. "Godfrey damn!" he ejaculated.

"Black! Black! Run! Run for your lives 'fore she sees us!" This order was superfluous. Captain Jerry was already halfway to the fence and going at a rate which bid fair to establish a record for his age. The others fell into his wake, and the procession moved across country like a stampede. They climbed over stone walls and splashed into meadows. They took every short cut between the station and their home. As they came in sight of the latter Captain Perez's breath gave out almost entirely. "Heave to!" he gasped. "Heave to, or I'll founder! I wouldn't run an other step for all the darkies in the West Indies." Captain Eri paused, but it was only after a struggle that Captain Jerry was persuaded to halt. "I shan't do it, Eri!" he vowed wildly. "I shan't do it! There ain't no use askin' me! I won't marry that black woman! I won't, by thunder!" "There, there, Jerry!" said Captain Eri soothingly. "Nobody wants you to. There ain't no danger now. She didn't see us." "Ain't no danger! There you go again, Eri Hedge! She'll ask where I live and come right down in the depot wagon. Oh, Lordy, Lordy!" The frantic sacrifice was about to bound away again when Captain Eri caught him by the arm. "I'll tell you what," he said, "we'll say for Eldredge's shanty and hide there till she gets tired and goes away. Praps she won't come, anyhow." The deserted fish shanty, property of the heirs of the late Nathaniel Eldredge, was situated in a hollow close to the house. In a few moments the three were inside, with a sawhorse against the door. They heard the rattle of a heavy carriage, and, crowding together at the cobwebbed window, saw the black shape of the depot wagon rock past. They waited, breathless, until they saw it go back again up the road. "Did you lock the depot room door, Perez?" asked Captain Eri. "Course I didn't. Why should I?" It was a rather senseless question. Nobody locks doors in Orham except at bedtime. "Humph!" grunted Captain Eri. "She'll see the light in the dinin' room and go inside and wait, more'n likely. Well, there's nothin' for us to do but to stay here for awhile, and then if she ain't gone one of us 'll have to go up and tell her she won't suit and pay her fare home, that's all. I think Jerry ought to be the one," he added mischievously, "he bein' the bridegroom, as you might say." "Me?" almost shouted the frantic Captain Jerry. "You go to grass! You fella got me into this scrape, and now let's see you git me out of it. I don't stir one step." They sat there in darkness, the silence unbroken, save for an occasional chuckle from the provoking Eri. After a long while they heard some one whistling. Perez went to the window to take an observation. "It's a man," he said disappointedly. "He's been to our house too. My land, I hope he didn't go in! It's that feller Hazel-tine; that's who 'tis." "Is it?" exclaimed Eri eagerly. "That's so; 'tis! Let's give him a hail." Before he could be stopped he had pulled the sawhorse from the door, had opened the latter a little way and, with his face at the open, was whistling shrilly. The electrician looked up and down the dark road in a puzzled sort of way, but evidently could not make up his mind from what quarter the whistles came. "Mr. Hazel-tine!" hailed the captain in what might be called a whispered yell or a shouted whisper. "Mr. Hazel-tine! Here, on your lee bow, in the shanty." The word "shanty" was the only part of the speech that brought light to Ralph's mind, but that was sufficient. He came down the hill, left the road and plunged through the blackberry vines to the door. "Who is it?" he asked. "Why, hello, captain! What on earth—" Captain Eri signaled him to silence, and then, catching his arm, pulled him into the shanty and shut the door. Captain Jerry hastened to set the sawhorse in place again. "Mr. Hazel-tine," said Captain Eri, "let us make you acquainted with Cap'n Perez and Cap'n Jerry, shipmates of mine. You've heard me speak of 'em." Ralph, in the darkness, shook two big hands and heard whispered voices express themselves as glad to know him. "You see," continued Eri in a somewhat embarrassed fashion, "we're sort of layin' to, as you might say, waitin' to git our bearin's. We ain't out of our heads. I tell you that 'cause I know that's what it looks like." The bewildered Hazel-tine laughed and said he was glad to hear it. "I—I—I don't know how to explain it to you," the captain stammered on. "Fact is, I guess I won't jest yit, if you don't mind. It does sound so pesky riddle-lous, although it ain't what you understand it. What we want to know is, have you been to our house and is there anybody there?" (Continued next week)

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