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CAPN ERI
(Continued from page two)



"That's it, pull hard!"

"Yes, but hens don't squawk this
time of night 'bout they have some
reason to. It's that fox come back;
that's what 'tis."

Miss Patience earlier in the evening
had related a harrowing tale of the
loss of two of Mrs. Mayo's best Leg-
horns that had gone to furnish a Sun-
day meal for a marauding fox. As the
said Leghorns were the pride of the
old lady's heart, even the impending
proposal was driven from Miss Davis'
mind.

"Oh, Perez, you don't s'pose 'tis the
fox, do you?"

"Yes, ma'am, I do! Where's the
gun?"

"There 'tis, behind the door, but there
ain't a mite of shot in the house. Abner
been goin' to fetch some from the
store for I don't know how long, but
he's always forgot it."

"Never mind. I'll pound the critter
with the butt. Come quick, and bring
a lamp."

The noise in the hen yard continued,
and when they opened the door it was
louder than ever.

"He's in the henhouse," whispered
Miss Patience. "He must have gone
in that hole at the side that had the
loose board over it."

"All right," murmured the captain.
"You go round with the lamp and open
the door—that'll scare him—and I'll
stand at the hole and thump him when
he comes out."

So, shielding the lamp with her apron,
the guardian of Mrs. Mayo's outraged
Leghorns tiptoed around to the hen-
house door, while Captain Perez, brand-
ishing the gun like a club, took up his
stand by the hole at the side.

Without the lamp the darkness was
pitchy. The captain, stooping down to
watch, saw something coming out of
the hole—something that was alive and
moved. He swung the gun above his
head and, bringing it down with all
his might, knocked into eternal oblivion
the little life remaining in the finest
Leghorn rooster.

"Consume it!" yelled the executioner,
stooping and laying his hand on the
victim. "I've killed a hen!"

Just then there came a scream from
the other side of the henhouse, follow-
ed by a crash and the sound of a fall.
Running around the corner, the alarm-
ed Perez saw his ladylove stretched
upon the ground, groaning dismally.

"Great land of Goshen!" he cried.
"Pashy, are you hurt?"

"Oh, Perez!" gasped the fallen one.
"Oh, Perez!"

The pitiful appeal had such an effect
upon the captain that he dropped upon
his knees and, raising Miss Davis' head
in his hands, begged her to say she
wasn't killed. After some little time
she obligingly complied and then, hav-
ing regained her breath, explained the
situation.

What had happened was this: The
fox, having selected his victim, the
rooster, had rendered it helpless and
was pushing it out of the hole ahead
of him. The captain had struck the
rooster just as Miss Patience opened
the door, and the fox, seizing this
chance of escape, had dodged by the
lady, upsetting her as he went.

"Well," she said, laughing, "there's
no great harm done. I'm sorry for the
rooster, but I guess the fox had fixed
him anyway. Oh, my soul and body,
look there!"

Perez turned, looked as directed and
saw the henhouse in flames.

The lighted lamp, which Miss Pa-
tience had dropped as she fell, lay
broken on the floor, and the blazing
oil had run in every direction. The
flames were making such headway
that they both saw there was practi-
cally no chance of saving the building.
The frightened hens were huddled in
the farthest corner gazing stupidly at
the fire.

"Oh, those poor Leghorns!" wailed
Miss Patience. "Those hens Mrs.
Mayo thought the world of and left
me to look out for! Last thing she
asked me was to be sure they was fed.
And now they'll be all burned up!
What shall I do?"

times, the captain's language and the
compliments he paid the hens becom-
ing more picturesque every moment.

At length he announced, "That's all,
thank goodness!" and began to climb
through the window. This was a diffi-
cult task, for the window was narrow
and, in spite of what Captain Eri had
called his "inly rubber" makeup, Cap-
tain Perez stuck fast.

"Catch hold of my hands and haul,
will you, Pashy?" he pleaded. "That's
it; pull hard! It's gittin' sort of snug
in behind here. I'll never complain
at havin' cold feet ag'in if I git out of
this. Now, then! Ugh! Here we be!"

He came out with a jerk, like a cork
out of a bottle, and roared on the ground
at his lady's feet.

"Oh, Perez," she exclaimed, "are you
hurt?"

"Nothin' but my feelin's," growled the
rescuer, scrambling upright.

The captain's face was blackened,
and his clothes were scorched, but his
spirit was undaunted.

"Pashy," he said, "do you realize
that if we don't git, help this whole
shebang, house and all, will burn
down?"

"I wouldn't swear that I didn't.
Look how that thing's blazing! There's
the barn to other side of it and the house
'tother side of that."

"But can't you and me put it out?"

"I don't dare risk it. No, sir! We've
got to git help, and git it in a hurry
too!"

"Won't somebody from the station
see the light and come over?"

"Not in this fog. You can't see a
hundred foot. No, I've got to go right
off. Good land! I never thought! Is
the horse gone?"

"No, the horse is here. Abner took
one of the store horses to go to Harniss
with, but he did take the buggy and
there's no other carriage but the old
carryall, and that's almost tumbled to
pieces."

"I was callin' to go horseback."

"What! And leave me here alone
with the house afire? No, indeed! If
you go, I'm goin' too."

"Well, then, the carryall's got to do,
whether or no. Git on a shawl or
somehin' while I harness up."

It was a frantic harnessing, but it
was done in a hurry, and the ram-
shackle old carryall, dusty and cob-
webbed, was dragged out of the barn,
and Horace Greeley, the horse, was
backed into the shafts. As they drove
out of the yard the flames were roar-
ing through the roof of the henhouse
and the lath fence surrounding it was
beginning to smolder.

"Everything's so wet from the fog
and the melted snow," observed the
captain, "that it'll take some time for
the fire to git to the barn. If we can
git a gang here we can save the house
easy and maybe more. By mighty!"

He ejaculated. "I tell you what we'll
do. I'll drive across the ford and git
Luther and some of the station men to
come right across. Then I'll go on to
the village to fetch more. It was 7
when I looked at the clock as we came
in from washin' dishes, so the tide
must be still goin' out and the ford
jest right. Git dap!"

"Hurry all you can, for goodness
sake! Is this as fast as we can go?"

"Fast as we can go with this ever-
lastin' Noah's ark. Heavens, how them
wheels squeal!"

"The axles ain't been greased for I
don't know when. Abner was goin' to
have the old carriage chopped up for
kindlin' wood."

"Lucky for him and us 'tain't chopped
up now. Git dap, slow poke! Better
chop the horse up, too, while he's 'bout
it."

The last remark the captain made
under his breath.

"My gracious, how dark it is! Think
you can find the crossin'?"

"Got to find it; that's all. 'Tis dark,
that's a fact."

It was. They had gone but a few
hundred yards, yet the fire was already
merely a shapeless, red smudge on the
foggy blackness behind them. Horace
Greeley pounded along at a jog and
when the captain stepped him with the
end of the reins broke into a jerky
gallop that was slower than the trot.

"Stop your hoppin' up and down!"
commanded Perez, whose temper was
becoming somewhat frayed. "You
make me think of the walkin' bear on a
steamboat. If you'd stop tryin' to fly
and go straight ahead we'd do better."

They progressed in this fashion for
some distance. Then Miss Davis, from
the curved depths of the back seat,
spoke again.

"Oh, dear me!" she exclaimed. "Are
you sure you're on the right track?
Seems 's if we must be abreast the
station, and this road's awful rough."

Captain Perez had remarked the
roughness of the road. The carryall
was pitching from one hummock to
another, and Horace Greeley stumbled
once or twice.

"Whoa!" commanded the captain.
Then he got down, lit a match, and,
shielding it with his hands, scrutinized
the ground. "I'm kind of 'traid," he
said presently, "that we've got off the
road somehow. But we must be 'bout
opposite the crossin'. I'm goin' to drive
down and see if I can find it."

He turned the horse's head at right
angles from the way they were going,
and they pitched onward for another
hundred yards. Then they came out
upon the hard, smooth sand, and heard
the water lapping on the shore. Cap-
tain Perez got out once more and
walked along the strand, bending for-
ward as he walked. Soon Miss Pa-
tience heard him calling.

"I've found it, I guess," he said, com-
ing back to the vehicle. "Anyhow, it
looks like it. We'll be over in a few
minutes now. Git dap, you!"

Horace Greeley shivered as the cold
water splashed his legs, but waded
bravely in. They moved farther from
the shore and the water seemed to
grow no deeper.

"Guess this is the crossin' all right,"
said the captain, who had cherished
some secret doubts. "Here's the deep
part comin'. We'll be across in a jiffy."

The water mounted to the hubs, then
to the bottom of the carryall. Miss
Davis' feet grew damp and she drew
them up.

"Oh, Perez!" she faltered, "are you
sure this is the ford?"

"Don't git scared, Pashy! I guess
maybe we've got a little to one side of
the track. I'll turn round and try
again."

But Horace Greeley was of a differ-
ent mind. From long experience he
knew that the way to cross a ford
was to go straight ahead. The bottom
of the carryall was awash.

"Port your helm, you lubber!"
shouted the driver, pulling with all his
might on one rein. "Heave to! Come
'bout! Jibe! Consume you! Jibe!"

Then Horace Greeley tried to obey
orders, but it was too late. He en-
deavored to touch bottom with his fore
legs, but could not; tried to swim with
his hind ones, but found that impos-
sible; then wallowed wildly to one side
and snapped a shaft and the rotten
whiffletree short off. The carryall
tipped alarmingly and Miss Patience
screamed.

"Whoa!" yelled the agitated Perez.
"Yast heavin'! Belay!"

The animal, as much frightened by
his driver's shouts as by the water,
shot ahead and tried to tear himself
loose. The other sun warped and rotten
shaft broke. The carryall was now
floating, with the water covering the
floor.

"No use; I'll have to cut away the
wreck or we'll be on our beam ends,"
shouted the captain.

He took out his jackknife and, reach-
ing over, severed the traces. Horace
Greeley gave another wallow and, find-
ing himself free, disappeared in the
darkness amid a lather of foam. The
carryall, now well out in the channel,
drifted with the current.

"Don't cry, Pashy," said the captain,
endeavoring to cheer his sobbing com-
panion. "We ain't shark bait yet. I've
shipped aboard of 'most every kind of
craft, but blessed if I ever expected to
be skipper of a carryall!"

But Miss Patience, shut up in the
back part of the carriage like a water
nymph in her cave, still wept hysteric-
ally, so Captain Perez continued his
dismal attempt at facetiousness.

"The main thing," he said, "is to keep
her on an even keel. If she teters to
one side you teter to 'tother. Drot that
fox," he ejaculated. "I thought
when Web's place burned we'd had
fire enough to last for one spell, but it
never rains but it pours."

"Oh, dear," sobbed the lady. "Now
everything'll burn up and they'll blame
me for it. Well, I'll be drowned any-
way, so I shan't be there to hear 'em.
Oh, dear, dear!"

"Oh, don't talk that way. We're
driftin' somewhere, but we're spin-
nin' round so I can't tell which way.
Judas," he exclaimed, more soberly,
"I remember now. It ain't but a little
past 7 o'clock and the tide's goin' out."

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