## CAP'N ERI

By JOSEPH C. LINCOLN

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fered pipe.

(Continued from last week)

thing to do with the scheme. He wasn't going to be a "cheap guy fisherman;" he was going into the navy. The captain did not attempt to urge him, neither did he preach or patronize. He simply leaned back in the rocker and began spinning sailor yarns. He told of all sorts of adventures in all climates and with all sorts of people. He had seen everything under the sun apparently, and, according to him, there was no life so free and void of all restraint as that of an able seaman on a merchant ship, or, preferably, on a fisherman, but one point he made clear, and that was that unless the applicant had had previous training his lot was likely to be an unhap- lines." py one.

"Of course," he said as he rose to go, reappeared with the heavy cod lines up so's you could be ready when 'twas time to ship, but long's you don't want to, why, it's all off."

"I'll go with you, cap," said Josiah, Watch me." whose eyes were shining. "Good! That's the talk! You might as well sign articles right away. Wait ing and lively. The captain, watching till I git 'em ready."

He brought pen, ink and paper and proceeded to indite a formidable docu-



"I'll go with you, cap." ment to the effect that "Josiah Bartlett. able seaman," was to ship aboard the catboat Mary Ellen for a term of two months. Wages, \$5 a month. "You see," he said, "I've put you

what you'll be when I git through with you. Now sign." So Josiah signed, and then Captain

Eri affixed his own signature with a flourish.

back of the "able seaman" with a thump that brought water into the eyes of that proud youth. "You're my man, shipmate. We sail tomorrer mornin' at 4, rain or shine. I'll call you at ed. "You promised not to touch me, quarter of. Be ready." "You bet, old man!" said Josiah.

Captain Perez met his friend as they came out of the parlor.

"Now, Eri," he whispered, "be easy as you can with him, won't you?" The captain answered in the very words of his crew. "You bet!" he said fervently and

slept better that night. CHAPTER XIV.

ROMPTLY at a quarter to 4 the next morning Captain Eri rapped on the parlor door. Josiah, who had been dressed since 3, appeared almost instantly. They walked down to the shore together, and the captain's eyes twinkled as he noted the elaborate roll in the boy's

The Mary Ellen was anchored between the beaches, and they rowed off to her in a dory. It was pitch dark and cold and raw. Lanterns showed on two or three of the other boats, near by, and as Josiah and the captain pulled up the eelgrass covered anchor a dim shape glided past in the blackness. It was the You and I, bound out. Ira Sparrow was at the helm, and he hailed the Mary Ellen, saying something about the weather.

"It'll be kind of ca'm for a spell," replied Captain Eri, "but I wouldn't wonder if we had some wind 'fore night. Here, you, fo'mast hand," he added, turning to Josiah, "stand by to git the canvas on her."

It was after sunrise when they reached the ledge where codfish most do congregate. The land was a mere yellow streak on the horizon. The stiff easterly blow of the day before had left tumbled on the seat which encircled a smooth, heavy swell that, tripping over the submerged ledge, alternately tossed the Mary Ellen high in air and dropped her toward the bottom. It was cold, and the newly risen December sun 'did not seem to have much warmth in it. Anchor over the side, the captain proposed breakfast.

The "able seaman" did not feel very hungry, but he managed to swallow a hard boiled egg and a sandwich and then, just to show that he had reached the dignity of manhood, leaned back against the side of the cockpit, lit a cigarette and observed cheerfully, whitecaps on their crests. The sun "This is hot stuff, ain't it, cap?"

Captain Eri wiped the crumbs from his mouth, leisurely produced his pipe and proceeded to fill it with tobacco shaved from a chunky plug.

"What d' you smoke them things for?" he asked contemptuously, referring to the cigarette. "Nobody but dudes and sissies smoke that kind of

---truck. Here, take this plpe and smoke like a man." Josiah looked askance at the prof-

"Oh, no," he said magnanimously, "you'll want it yourself. I'll git along with these things till I git ashore, then I'll buy a pipe of my own,"

"Never you mind 'bout me. I've got two or three more below there someeres. Take it and light up."

The "able seaman" took the reeking, nicotine soaked affair, placed it gingerly between his teeth, held a match to the bowl and coughingly emitted a cloud of ill smelling smoke. The pipe wheezed and gurgled, and the Mary Ellen rocked and rolled. "Now, then," said Captain Eri,

"we've sojered long enough. Go below and bring up the bait bucket and the Josiah staggered into the little cabin,

"it was my idea to sort of train you and the bucket of mussels and watched while the captain "baited up." "All ready!" said the skipper. "Two lines apiece, one over each side.

The cod bit almost immediately, and for ten minutes the work was excitfrom the corner of his eye, noticed that

his assistant's pipe was wheezing less regularly and that his lines were thrown over more and more listlessly. At length he said: "Haven't stopped smokin' so quick, have you? What's the matter-gone out? Here's a match." "I guess I've smoked enough for now. I can't fish so well when I'm smokin'."

"Bosh! If you want to be a reel sailor you must smoke all the time. Light

Reluctantly the boy obeyed and puffed with feverish energy. Also he swallowed with vigor. The cod smelled fishy; so did the bait, and the catboat rolled and rolled. Suddenly Josiah pulled in his lines and took the pipe from his lips. "What's the matter?" inquired the

watchful skipper.

"I-I guess I won't fish any more, cap. Kind of slow sport, ain't it? Guess I'll go in there and take a

"I guess you won't! You shipped to fish, and you're goin' to fish. Pick up them lines."

The boy sullenly turned toward the cabin door. "Aw, go chase yourself!" he said contemptuously. A minute after, when he picked himself up from the heap of slimy fish in the bottom of the boat, he saw the captain standing solidly on one cowhide shod foot, while down as able seaman 'cause that's the other was drawn easily back and rested on its toe. When Josiah recovered his breath the burst of bad language with which he assailed his com- p'tic'lar about that. panion did credit to his street bringing up. It was as short as it was fierce, however, and ended amid the cod and the mussels from the overturned bait bucket. But, as the captain said afterward, he was "spunky"

and rose again, incoherent with rage. "You-you-I'll kill you!" he shriekyou lyin' old"-

He tried to get out of the way, but didn't succeed, and this time merely sat up and sobbed as Captain Eri said in even tones:

"No. I'm not lyin'. I promised not to lay a hand on you in anger, that's all. Fust place, I don't kick with my hands, and, second place, I ain't anwent away whistling. Captain Perez gry. Now, then, pick up them lines." The "able seaman" was frightened.

This sort of treatment was new to him. He judged it best to obey now and "get square" later on. He sulkily picked up the cod lines and threw the books everboard. Captain Eri, calmly resuming his fishing, went on to say: "The fust thing a sailor has to l'arn is to obey orders. I see you've stopped smokin'. Light up." "I don't want to."

"Well, I want you to. Light up."

"I won't. Oh, yes, I will!" He eyed the threatening boot fearfully and lit the awful pipe with shaking fingers. But he had taken only a few puffs when it went over the side, and it seemed to Josiah that the larger half of himself went with it.

Well, 'twas a dreadful forenoon for Josiah, one not to be forgotten. The boat rolled unceasingly, his head ached, and pulling the heavy cod made his back and shoulders lame; also he was wet and cold. The other boats scattered about the fishing grounds pulled up their anchors and started for home. but Captain Eri did not budge. At noon he opened his lunch basket again and munched serenely. The sight of the greasy ham sandwiches was too much for the "able seaman." He suf-

fered a relapse and when it was over the cockpit and, being completely worn out, went fast asleep. The captain watched him for a minute or two, smiled in a not unkindly way and, going into the cabin, brought out an old pea jacket and some other wraps with which he covered the sleeper. Then he

went back to his fishing. When Josiah awoke the Mary Ellen was heeled over on her side, her sail as tight as a drumhead. The wind was whistling through the cordage, and the boat was racing through seas that were steel blue and angry, with was hidden by tumbling, dust colored clouds. The boy felt weak and strangely humble. The dreadful nausea was

Captain Eri, standing at the tiller, house up the shore, a mile or se above regarded him sternly, but there was the suspicion of a twinkle in his eye. "Want to smoke again? Pipe right there on the thwart."



"You-you-I'll kill you!"

"No: thank you, sir." It was some time before anything more was said. Josiah was gazing at the yellow sand cliffs that on every tack grew nearer. At length the captain again addressed him.

"Perez ever tell you bout our fust v'yage? Never did, hey? Well, I will. you know."

And then Captain Eri began a tale that caused the cold shivers to chase themselves from Josiah's big toe to the longest hair on his head. It was the story of two boys who ran away shipped aboard an Australian sailing packet, and contained more first class horrors than any one of his beloved dime novels. As a finishing touch the narrator turned back the grizzled hair on his forehead and showed a three inch scar, souvenir of a first mate and a belaying pin. He rolled up his flannel shirt sleeve and displayed a slightly misshaped left arm, broken by a kick from a drunken captain and badly set by the same individual.

"Now," he said in conclusion, "I cal' late you think I was pretty hard on you this mornin', but what do you figger that you'd have got if you talked to a mate the way you done to me?"

"Don't know. S'pose I'd have been

"Well, you would, mighty nigh, and that's a fact. Now, I'll tell you somethin' else. You wanted to enlist in the navy, I understand. You couldn't git in the navy, anyway; you're too young. But s'pose you could, what then? You'd never git any higher'n a petty officer, 'cause you don't know enough. The only way to git into the navy is to go through Annapolis and git an education. I tell you, education counts. Me and Perez would have been somethin' more'n cheap fishin' and coastin' skippers if we'd had an education. Don't forgit that."

"I guess I don't want to be a sailor, anyway, sir. This one trip is enough

for me, thank you." "Can't help that. You shipped 'long with me for two months, and you'll sail with me for two months, every it over again." time I go out. You won't run away again neither. I'll look out for that. You'll sail with me, and you'll help clean fish, and you'll mind me, and you'll say 'sir.' You needn't smoke if you don't want to," with a smile. "I ain't

"Then," went on the captain, "when the two months is up you'll be your own master again. You can go back to Web Saunders and Squealer Wixon and Ily Tucker and their tribe, if this: You can go to school for a few years more and behave yourself, and then, if I've got any influence with the | bang on a share and share alike idee congressman from this district-and sort of b'lieve I have, secondhanded. at any rate-you can go to Anomotic and learn to be a navy officer. That's my offer. You've got a couple of

months to think it over in." tack and stood in for the narrows, the stock in it, but I guess 'twas real have route which the captain had spoken of sense after all. Anyhow it brought you as the "short cut." From where Josiah sat the way seemed choked with lines of roaring, frothing breakers that nothing could approach and keep above water. But Captain Eri steered the Mary Ellen through them as easily as a New York cab driver guides his vehicle through a jam on Broadway, picking out the smooth places and avoiding the rough ones until the last bar was crossed and the boat entered the sheltered waters of the bay.

"By gum!" exclaimed the enthusiastic "able seaman." "That was great-er-sir!

"That's part of what I'll l'arn you the next two months," said the captain. "'Twon't do you any harm to know it when you're in the navy neither. Stand by to let go anchor!"

CHAPTER XV. F Josiah expected any relaxa- paper. "Tain't one you'd see every day tion in Captain Eri's stern nat'rally, you know." discipline he was disappointed, for he was held to the strict letter of the "shipping articles." The captain even went to the length of transferring Perez to the parlor cot and of compelling the boy to share his own room. This was, of course, a precaution against further attempts at running away. Morning after morning the pair rose before daylight and started for the fishing grounds. There were two or three outbreaks on the part of the "able seaman," but they ended in but one way, complete submission After awhile Josiah, being by no means dull, came to realize that when he behaved like a man he was treated like one. He learned to steer the Mary Ellen and to handle her in all weathers. Also his respect for Captain Eri

developed into a liking. Captain Perez was gratified and d ighted at the change in his grandnephew's behavior and manners, but his mind was too much occupied with another subject just at this time to allow him to be overinterested. The other subject was Miss Patience Davis.

Miss Davis, her visit with her brother being over, was acting as companie to an old lady who lived in a little the station. This elderly female, whose name was Mayo, had a son who kept a grocery store in the village and was herefore, obliged to be away all day

Patience found Mrs. Mayo's crotchets a bit trying, but the work was easy and to her liking, and she was, as she said, "right across the way, as you might say, from Luther." The "way" referred to was the stretch of water between the outer beach and the main-

And Captain Perez was much interested in Miss Patisice-very much so. indeed. His frequent visits to the so big and strong, and we put it off Mayo homestead furnished no end of until he got so he couldn't pass the amusement to Captain Eri and also to examination. When the insurance Captain Jerry, who found poking fun | money come I took it to Jedge Briar, a at his friend an agreeable change from | mighty good friend of Jubal's and mine the old programme of being the butt | and the one that held the mortgage on himself. He wasn't entirely free from | the house, and I told him I wanted to this persecution, however, for Eri more | pay off the mortgage with it, so's I'd than once asked him, in tones the sarcasm of which was elaborately veiled, If his matchmaking scheme had got | gage was costin' me only 6 per cent, tired and was sitting down to rest, to | and why didn't I put the money where which the sacrifice would reply stoutly, "Oh, it's comin' out all right; you | that would pay me eight or ten per wait and see." But in his heart Captain Jerry knew | said. I asked him to invest it for me,

better. He had been wise enough to and he put it into the Bay Shore Land say nothing to his friends concerning | company, where most of his own was.' his interviews with Elsie and Ralph, but apparently the breaking off be- the captain. "He did, hey! Well, I tween the pair was final. Hazeltine | had some there, too, and so did Perez. called occasionally, it is true, but his stays were short, and at the slightest | didn't." inclination shown by the older people to leave the room he left the house. There was some comment by Eri and Him and me run away to sea together, Mrs. Snow on this sudden change, but they were far from suspecting the real reason. Elsie continued to be as reticent as she had been of late. Her school work was easier now that Josiah was no longer a pupil.

There were presents, of course, but the planned festivities were omitted owing to a change in John Baxter's condition. From growing gradually better he now grew slowly, but surely, worse. Dr. Palmer's calls were more frequent, and he did not conceal from Mrs. Snow or the captains his anxiety. They hid much of this from Elsie, but she, too, noticed the change and was evidently worried by it. Strange to sav. as his strength ebbed the patient's mind grew clearer. His speech, that in his intervals of consciousness had heretofore dealt with events of the past, was now more concerned with recent hap- made up my mind there was no use penings, but Captain Eri had never cryin' over spilt milk and that I must heard him mention the fire.

and Captain Eri were together in the sickroom. The rest of the household was absent on various errands-Captain Perez paying a visit to the life saver's sister and Elsie staying after school to go over some examination papers. Captain Baxter was apparent-

"Let me see," said Mrs. Snow musingly in a low tone. "I've been here now two, three, over four months. Seems longer somehow."

"Seems almost as if you'd always been here," replied Captain Eri. "Queer how soon we git used to a change. don't know how we got along afore, but we did some way or other, if you call it gittin' along," he added, with a shrug. "I should hate to have to try

"It's always seemed funny to me, remarked the lady, "that you men, all sailors and used to doin' for yourselves, should have had such a time when you come to try keepin' house." "It does, don't it? I've thought of

that myself. Anybody 'd think we was the most shif'less lot that ever lived but we wa'n't. Even Jerry-an' he' the wust one of the three when i comes to leavin' things at wese endsalways had a mighty neat vessel and had the name of makin' his crews to the mark. I honestly b'lieve it come c us bein' on shore an' runnin' the she If there'd been a skipper, a feller to boss things, we'd have done better, but when all hands was boss nobody fe. like doin' anything.

"Now, take that marryin' idee." went on. "I laughed at that a goo The catboat swung about on her final | deal at fust and didn't really take an. down here, and what we'd done was out you when John was took sick don't know. You've been so might; good and put up with so many thingthat must have fretted you like tin nation, and the way you've managed-

> The whole souled admiration in the captain's voice made the housekeeper blush like a girl.

"Don't say a word, Cap'n Eri," she protested. "It's been jest a pleasure to me, honest. I've had more comfort and-well, peace, you might say, sence I've been in this house than I've ha afore for years. . I don't know what you must think of me answerin' an advertisement for a husband that way. It makes me 'shamed of myself when I think of it, I declare. And in that kind of a paper too."

"I've wondered more times than a few how you ever got a hold of that

Mrs. Snow paused before she answered. Then she said slowly: "Well, I'm s'prised you ain't asked that afore. I haven't said much about myseif sence I've been here, for no p'tic'lar reason that I know of except that there wasn't much to tell and it wasn't a very interestin' yarn to other folks. My husband's name was Jubal

"You don't say!" exclaimed the captain. "Why, Jerry used to know him." "I shouldn't wonder. Jubal knew a lot of folks on the Cape here. He was a good husband-no better anywheres -and he and I had a good life together long as he was well. I've sailed a good many v'yages with him and I feel pretty nigh as much at home on the water as I do on land. Our trouble was the same that a good many folks have—we didn't cal'late that fair weather wouldn't last all the time, that's all. "It wasn't his fault any more than 'twas mine. We saved a little money, but not enough, as it turned out. Well, he was took down sick and had to give up goin' to sea, and we had a little place over in Nantucket and settled down on it. Fust along, Jubal was

able to do a little farmin' and so on,

and we got along pretty well, but by

and by he got so he wa'n't able to

work, and then 'twas harder. What

little we'd saved went for doctor's bills

and this, that and t'other. He didn't

like to have me leave him, so I couldn't earn much of anything, and fin'lly we come to where somethin' had to be done right away, and we talked the thing over and decided to mortgage the house. The money we got on the mortgage lasted until he died.

"He had a little life insurance, not enough, of course, but a little. He was plannin' to take on more, but somehow it never seemed as if he could die, he have the house free and clear. But the jedge advised me not to, said the mort-'twas likely to be a good investment cent? Then I'd be makin' money, he

"Sho! I want to know!" broke in Precious few fam'lies on the Cape that

"Yes, he thought 'twas the safest and best place he knew of. The officers bein' sons of Cape people and their fathers such fine men, everybody said 'twas all right. I got my dividends reg'lar for awhile, and I went out nussin' and did sewin' and got along reel well. I kept thinkin' some day I'd be able to pay off the mortgage and I was about to answer when she was in-Christmas was rather a failure. put away what little I could toward it, but then I was took sick and that money went, and then the land company went up the spout."

The captain nodded. The failure of the company had brought poverty to hundreds of widows. Mrs. Snow's case was but another instance.

"Let me see," said the lady; "where was I? Oh, yes; the land company's failin'. Well, it failed, and the insurance money went with it. It was discouragin', of course, but I had my bed. house, except for the mortgage, and I had my health again, and, if I do say it, I ain't afraid of work, so I jest git along and begin to save all over One afternoon in January Mrs. Snow | again. Then Jedge Briar died, and his nephew up to Boston come into the property. I was behind in my payments a little, and they sent me word they should foreclose the mortgage. and they did."

"Well, I swan! The mean sculpins! Didn't you have nobody you could go to-no relations nor nothin'?"

"I've got a brother out in Chicago. but he married rich, and his wife doesn't care much for her husband's relations. I never saw her but once. and then one of the first things she asked me was if it was true that there was more crazy people in Nantucket than in any other place of its size on earth, and afore I could answer she asked me what made 'em crazy, I told her I didn't know unless it was answerin' city folks' questions. She didn't like that very well, and I have not heard from Job-that's my brother -for a long time. All my other near relations are dead.

"So they foreclosed the mortgage and gave me notice to move out. I packed my things and watered my flowers-I had quite a pretty flower garden-for the last time and then come in and set down in the rocker to wait for the wagon that was goin' to move me. I got to thinkin' how proud Jubal and me was when we bought that house, and how we planned about fixin' it up, and how our baby that died was born in it and how Jubal himself had died there and told me that he was glad he was leavin' me a home at any rate, and I got so lonesome and discouraged that I jest cried; I couldn't help it. But I've never found that cryin' did much good, so I wiped my eyes and looked for somethin' to read to take up my mind. And that Chime paper was what I took up.

"You see, there'd been a big excursion from Boston down the day before



"Fire !"

and some of the folks come down my way to have a sort of picnic. Two of 'em, factory girls from Brockton they was, come to the house for a drink of water. They were gigglin', foolish enough critters, but I asked 'em in and they eat their lunches on my table. They left two or three story papers and that Chime thing when they went Here, in the corner. / Ah, ha! Ah, ha!

"Well, I looked it over and almost the first thing I saw was that adverdisement signed 'Skipper.' It didn't read like the other trashy things in there and it sounded honest, and all of Captain Erl. "Hush, John! Be still!" a sudden it come over me that I'd answer it. I was lonesome and tired and Mrs. Snow soothingly, laying her hand sort of didn't care, and I answered it on the sick man's forehead. Somehow right off without waitin' another min- the touch seemed to quiet him. His ute. That's all there is to tell. When eyes lost their fire and he muttered

I come here to be nousekeeper I wrote the folks that's takin' care of my furniture-they're reel kind people; I was goin' to board there if I had stayed in Nantucket-to keep it till I come back. There! I meant to tell you this long ago, and I don't know why I haven't."

The captain knew why she hadn't. It was easy to read between the lines the tale of the year of disappointment and anxiety. Such stories are not easy to tell, and he respected the widow more than ever for the simple way in which she had told hers.

"That land company bus'ness," he said, "carried off a good lot of Cape Cod money. I never saw but one man that I thought was glad it busted, and that was old Caleb Weeks, over to Harniss. The old man was rich, but closer'n the bark of a tree-he'd skin a flea for the hide and taller-and used to be a hard case into the bargain. One time they had a big revival over there and he got religion. The boys used to say what caught Caleb was the minister's sayin' salvation was free. Well, anyhow, he got converted and j'ined the church. That was all right, only while the fit was fresh he pledged himself to give \$500 to help build the new chapel. When he cooled down a little he was sorry, and every time they'd hint at his comin' down with the cash he'd back and fill and put it off for a spell. When the land company went up he was the only happy one in town, 'cause he said he'd lost all his money. Course, under the circumstances, they couldn't ask him to pay, so he didn't. From what I hear he lost as much as

They both laughed, and Mrs. Snow "Land of love!" exclaimed the captain. "That was awful. Hadn't I bet-

"Eri," said a weak voice. "Eri." The captain started, turned sharply and saw the sick man watching him, his eyes fixed and unwavering. "Eri," said John Baxter again, "come

Mrs. Snow hurried to her patient, but the latter impatiently bade her let him alone.

"Not you," he said. "I want Eri." Captain Eri stooped down beside the

"What is it, John?" he asked. "Eri, s'pose God called you to break man's law and keep his, what would

The captain glanced anxiously at the housekeeper. Then he said soothingly: "Oh, that's all right, John. Don't worry 'bout that. You and me settled that long ago. How are you feelin'

"I know, I know," with the monotonous persistence of those whose minds are wandering-and then clearly once more, "Eri, I've been called."

"Ssh-h! That's all right, John; that's all right. Don't you want Mrs. Snow to fix your piller? P'raps you'd lay a little easier, then. Now, Mrs. Snow, if you'll jest turn it while I lift him. So: tnat's better now, ain't it, shipmate, hey?"

But the sick man muttered an unintelligible something, and relapsed once more into the half doze, half stupor that was his usual state.

Captain Eri sighed in relief.

"That was queer, wa'n't it?" he ob-"He's had two or three of those spells in the last day or two," was the

answer. The captain wondered what his friend might have said during those "spells," but he was afraid to inquire. Instead he asked, "What did the doc-

tor say when he was here this morn-"Nothin' very hopeful. I asked him plain what he thought of the case, and he answered jest as plain. He said Cap'n Baxter had failed dreadful in the last week, and that he wouldn't be s'prised if he dropped off most any time. Then again he said he might live for months."

"I never saw him so restless afore," commented Captain Eri anxiously. "He was so last night."

"Did Elsie see him?" "No. I was alone here, and she was asleep in the next room. I got up and shut the door."

The captain glanced keenly at the housekeeper, but her face was placid and inscrutable. He shifted uneasily, and then said: "Elsie's late tonight. ain't she? I wonder what's keepin'

"School work, I s'pose. She's workin' harder'n she ought to, I think." "Fire!"

The word was shouted, and the room rang with it. John Baxter, whose weakness had hitherto been so great that he could not turn himself in bed, was leaning on his elbow and pointing with outstretched finger to the open stove door. "Fire!" he shouted again. "It's blazin'! It's burnin'! It's wipin' the plague spot from the earth. I hear

you, Lord! I'm old, but I hear you, and your servant's ready. Where will it be tomorrer? Gone! Burnt up! And the ways of the wicked shan't prevail." They forced him back on the pillow, but he fought them fiercely for a moment or two. After they thought they had quieted him he broke out again, talking rapidly and clearly.

"I hear the call, Lord," he said. "I thank thee for showin' it to me in your book. 'And they burnt all their cities wherein they dwelt, and all their goodly castles, with fire.' With fire! With

'Ssh-h! There, there, John! Don't talk so," entreated the captain.

"Where's the kerosene?" continued the old man. "And the matches? Now softly, softly. The shavin's. It's dark. 'And all their goodly castles with fire!' Now, Web Saunders, you wicked man! Now! Burn! I've done it, Lord! I've

"Hush!" almost shouted the agonized "There, there, Cap'n Baxter," said

## "Weak Heart"

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absently that he was fired. Then the eyes closed and he lay still, breathing beavily.

ter go for the doctor?" "I don't think so, unless he gits worse. He had jest such a turn, as I

told you, last night. "Did he talk like he did jest now?"

"Jest the same." "'Bout the same things?"

"Yes." The captain gasped. "Then you knew!" he said.

"That he set the billiard room afire? Yes. I've always rather suspicioned that he did, and last night, of course,

made me sure of it." "Well, well! You haven't said nothin' 'bout it to anybody?" "Of course not."

"No: course you haven't. You must excuse me-I'm kind of upset, I guess. Dear, dear! Did you think I knew it?" "I sort of guessed that you did." "Well, I did. I've known it ever

sence that night he was found. He had his coat on when I found him, and 'twas all burnt, and there was an empty kerosene bottle in his pocket. I hid the coat and threw the bottle away and turned him so he was facin' toward the saloon 'stead of from it. And I lied when I told the doctor that he was jest as he fell. There, the murder's out! Now, what do you think of

"Think? I think you did exactly

"You do?" "I sartinly do."

"Well, I snum! I've been over that thing time and time again, and I've felt like I was sort of a firebug myself sometimes. I've heard folks layin' it to fust one and then the other and cal-'latin' that Web did it himself to git the insurance, and all the time I've known who really did do it and haven't said anything. I jest couldn't. You see. John and me's been brothers almost. But I didn't s'pose anybody else

would see it the same way." "Cap'n Eri, do you s'pose I blame you for tryin' to keep your best friend out of trouble that he got into by bein' -well-out of his head. Why, land of mercy! He ain't no more to be held responsible than a baby. You did what I'd have done if I'd been in your place, and I respect you for it."

The captain's voice shook as he an-"Marthy Snow," he said, "you're the kind of woman that I'd like to have had for a sister."

It was perhaps a half hour later when Captain Eri started for the schoolhouse to bring Elsie home. John Baxter had not wakened and Mrs. Snow said she was not afraid to remain alone with him. The thaw had turned to a light rain and the captain carried an umbrella. It was dark by this time and when he came in sight of the schoolhouse he saw a light in

the window. One of the scholars-a by no means brilliant one, whose principal educational achievement was the frequency with which he succeeded in being "kept after school"-was seated on the fence, doing his best to whittle it to pieces with a new jackknife. "Hello, sonny!" said the captain.

"Miss Preston gone yit?" "No, she ain't," replied the boy, continuing to whittle. "She's up there. Mr. Saunders is there too."

"Saunders? Web Saunders?" "Yup. I see him go in there a little while ago."

Captain Eri started toward the schoolhouse at a rapid pace, then he suddenly stopped, and then as suddenly walked on again. All at once he dropped his umbrella and struck one hand into the palm of the other with

When he reached the door he leaned the umbrella in the corner and walked up the stairs very softly indeed.

CHAPTER XVI. HAT enterprising business man, Mr. Web Saunders. opened the door of his renovated billiard room a little later than usual the next morning. It was common report about the village that Mr. Saunders occasionally sampled the contents of some of the "origpackages" which, bearing the name and address of a Boston whole sale liquor dealer, came to him by express at irregular intervals. It was also reported, probably by unreliable total abstainers, that during these

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