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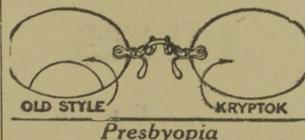
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CY WHITTAKER'S PLACE

Heman listened. He was on his knees beside the bed, his face buried in his arms, and his gray hair, the leonine Atkins hair, which he was wont to toss backward in the heated periods of his eloquence, tumbled and dragged. Captain Cy looked down at him.

"This whole business about Bos'n must be stopped," he said, "and stopped right off. You tell your lawyers to drop the case. Her dad is only hangin' around because you pay him to. He don't want her; he don't care



CAPTAIN CY LOOKED DOWN AT HIM.

what becomes of her. If you pay him enough he'll go, won't he, and not come back?"

The congressman raised his head. "Why, yes," he faltered; "I think he will. Yes, I think I could arrange that. But, Cyrus—"

The captain held up his hand. "I intend to look out for Bos'n," he said. "She cares for me more'n any one else in the world. She's as much to me as my own child ever could be, and I'll see that she is happy and provided for. I'm religious enough to believe she was sent to me, and I intend to stick to my trust. As for the money—"

"Yes, yes—the money?"

"Well, I won't be too hard on you that way, either. We'll talk that over after on. Maybe we can arrange for you to pay it a little at a time. You can sign a paper showin' that you owe it, and we'll fix the payin' to suit all hands. Tain't as if the child was in want. I've got some money of my own, and what's mine's hers. I think we needn't worry about the money part."

"God bless you, Cyrus! I"—

"Yes, all right. I'm sure your askin' for the blessin' 'll be a great help. Now, you do your part and I'll do mine. No one knows of this business but me. I didn't tell Everdean a word. He don't know why I hustled out there and back nor why I asked so many questions. And he ain't the kind to pry into what don't concern him. So you're pretty safe, I calculate. Now, if you don't mind, I wish you'd run along home. I'm—I'm used up, sort of."

Mr. Atkins arose from his knees. Even then, broken as he was—he looked ten years older than when he entered the room—he could hardly believe what he had just heard.

"You mean," he faltered—"Cyrus, do you mean that—that you're not going to reveal this—this—"

"That I'm not goin' to tell on you? Yup; that's what I mean. You get rid of Thomas and squelch that law case and I'll keep mum. You can trust me for that."

"But—but, Cyrus, the people at home? Your story in the Breeze? You're not?"

"No; they needn't know, either. It'll be between you and me."

"God bless you! I'll never forget!"

"That's right. You mustn't. Forgettin' is the one thing you mustn't do. And, see here, you're boss of the political fleet in Bayport; you steer the school committee now. Phoebe Daves ain't too popular with that committee. I'd see that she was popularized."

"Yes, yes; she shall be. She shall not be disturbed. Is there anything else I can do?"

"Why, yes, I guess there is. Speakin' of popularity made me think of it. That harbor appropriation had better go through."

A very faint tinge of color came into the congressman's chalky face. He hesitated in his reply.

"I—I don't know about that, Cyrus," he said. "The bill will probably be voted on in a few days. It is made up and"—

"Then I'd strain a pint and make it over. I'd work real hard on it. I'm sorry about that sugar river, but I calculate Bayport 'll have to come first. Yes, it'll have to, Heman; it sartin will."

The reference to the "sugar river" was the final straw. Evidently this man knew everything.

"I—I'll try my best," affirmed Heman. "Thank you, Cyrus. You have been more merciful than I had a right to expect."

"Yes, I guess I have. Why do I do it?" He smiled and shook his head. "Well, I don't know. For two reasons maybe—first, I'd hate to be responsible for tipplin' over such a sky towerin' idol as you've been to make ruins for Angle Phinney and the other black birds to peck at and caw over, and second—well, it does sound presumin', don't it? But I kind of pity you, say,

Heman," he added, with a chuckle, "that's a kind of distinction in a way, ain't it? A good many folks have hurrahed over you and worshiped you. Some of 'em, I guess likely, have envied you; but, by the big dipper, I do believe I'm the only one in this round world that ever pitied you! Goodby! The elevator's right down the hall."

It required some resolution for the Honorable Atkins to walk down that corridor and press the elevator button. But he did it somehow. A guest came out of one of the rooms and approached him as he stood there. It was a man he knew. Heman squared his shoulders and set every nerve and muscle.

"Good evening, Mr. Atkins," said the man. "A miserable night, isn't it?"

"Miserable, indeed," replied the congressman. The strength in his voice surprised him. The man passed on. Heman descended in the elevator and walked steadily through the crowded lobby and out to the curb, where his cab was waiting. The driver noticed nothing strange in his fare's appearance. He noticed nothing strange when the Atkins residence was reached and its tenant mounted the stone steps and opened the door with his latchkey. But if he had seen the dignified form collapse in a library chair and moan and rock back and forth until the morning hours he would have wondered very much indeed.

Meanwhile Captain Cy, coughing and shivering by the radiator, had been summoned from that warm haven by a knock at his door. A bell-boy stood at the threshold, holding a brown envelope in his hand.

"The clerk sent this up to you, sir," he said. "It came a week ago. When you went away you didn't leave any address, and whatever letters came for you were sent back to Bayport, Mass. The clerk says you registered from there, sir. But he kept this telegram. It was in your box, and the day clerk forgot to give it to you this afternoon."

The captain tore open the envelope. The telegram was from his lawyer, Mr. Peabody. It was dated a week before and read as follows:

Come home at once. Important.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE blizzard began that night. Bayport had a generous allowance of storms and gales during a winter, although, as a usual thing, there is more rain than snow and more wind than either. But we can count with certainty on at least one blizzard between November and April, and about the time when Captain Cy, feverish and ill, the delayed telegram in his pocket and a great fear in his heart, boarded the sleeper of the eastbound train at Washington, snow was beginning to fall in our village.

Next morning, when Georgianna came downstairs to prepare Bos'n's breakfast—the housekeeper had ceased to "go home nights" since the captain's absence—the world outside was a tumbled, driving whirl of white. The woodshed and barn, dimly seen through the smother, were but gray shapes, emerging now and then only to be wiped from the vision as by a great flapping cloth wielded by the mighty hand of the wind. The old house shook in the blasts, the window panes rattled as if handfuls of small shot were being thrown against them, and the carpet on the floor of the dining room puffed up in miniature billows.

To be Continued)

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