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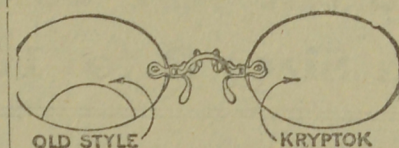
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"I shouldn't wonder if I understood it. I received your letter today from Concord," he said. "Come in. Don't." The remainder of the sentence was whispered, and the listeners on the sofa could not hear it. A moment later Captain Cy entered the sitting room, followed by his caller.

The latter was a stranger. He was a broad shouldered man of medium height, with a yellowish mustache and brown hair. He was dressed in rather shabby clothes, without an overcoat, and he had a soft felt hat in his hand. He carried himself with a swagger, and after his entrance there was a perceptible aroma of alcohol in the room.

He stared at the board of strategy, and the stare was returned in full measure. Bailey and Asaph were wildly curious. They, of course, connected the stranger's arrival with a mysterious letter and the captain's perturbation of the day.

But their curiosity was not to be satisfied, at least not then. "How are you, gent's?" hailed the newcomer cheerfully. "Like the looks of me, do you?"

Captain Cy cut off further conversation.

"Ase," he said, "this—er—gentleman and I have got some business to talk over. I know you're good enough friends of mine not to mind if I ask you to clear out. You'll understand—you will understand, boys, won't you?" he added almost entreatingly.

"Sartin sure!" replied Mr. Tidditt, rising hurriedly. "Don't say another word, Whit." And the mystified Bangs concurred with a "Yes, yes—why, of course! Didn't have nothin' that amounts to nothin' to stay for anyhow. See you tomorrow, Cy."

Outside and at the gate they stopped and looked at each other.

"Well!" exclaimed Asaph. "If that ain't the strangest thing! Who was that feller? Where'd he come from? Did you notice how Cy acted? Seemed to be holdin' himself in by main strength."

"Did you smell the rum on him," returned Bailey—"on that 'other chap, I mean? Didn't he look like a regular ne account to you? And, say, Ase didn't he remind you of somebody you'd seen somewheres—kind of, in a way?"

They walked home in a dazed state, asking unanswerable questions and making profitless guesses. But Asaph's final remark seemed to sum up the situation.

"There's trouble comin' of this, Bailey," he declared. "And it's trouble for Cy Whittaker, I'm afraid. Poor old Cy! Well, we'll stand by him, anyhow. I don't believe he'll sleep much tonight. Didn't look as though he would, did he? Who is that feller?"

"Mornin', Georgianna," said Captain Cy to his housekeeper as the latter unlocked the back door of the Whittaker house next morning. "I'm a little ahead of you this time."

Miss Taylor, being Bayport born and bred, was an early riser.

"Land sakes!" she exclaimed. "I should say you was! What in the world got you up so early? Ain't sick, are you?"

"No," replied the captain wearily. "I ain't sick. I didn't sleep very well last night, that's all."

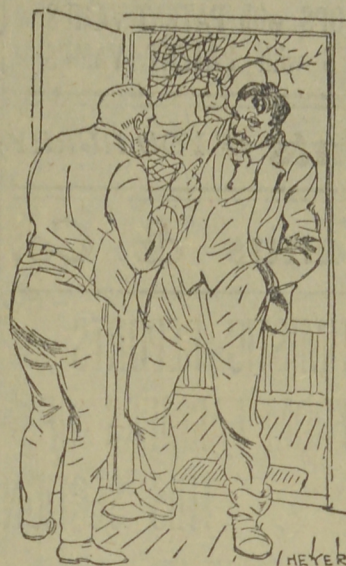
Georgianna looked sharply at him. His face was haggard, and his eyes had dark circles under them.

"Humph!" she grunted. "No, I guess you didn't. Looks to me as if you'd been up all night." Then she added an anxious query, "Tain't Bos'n—she ain't sick, I hope?"

"No. She's all right. I say, Georgianna, you put on an extra plate this mornin'. Got company for breakfast."

The housekeeper was surprised.

"For breakfast?" she repeated. "Land of goodness, who's comin' for breakfast? I never heard of company dromin' in for breakfast."



"COME IN. DON'T!"

"It's a—a friend of mine. Well, not exactly a friend, maybe. He's up in the spare bedroom."

"What's his name?"

"What difference does that make? I don't know's his name makes any odds about gettin' his breakfast for him."

"Oh!" she sniffed. "Is that the way you feel? All right! I can mind my own business, thank you." She flounced over to the range.

"I'm kind of out of sorts today," he said. "Got some headache. Why, his name is—yes, 'tis Smith, come to think of it—John Smith. Funny you should guess right, wan't it?"

The captain was in the dining room when Bos'n appeared.

"Good morning, Uncle Cyrus," she said. "You've been waiting, haven't you? Am I late? I didn't mean to be."

"No, no! You ain't late—early. If anything, breakfast ain't quite ready yet. Come here and set in my lap. I want to talk to you."

He took her on his knee. She looked up into his face.

"What's the matter, Uncle Cy?" she asked. "What makes you so sober?"

"Sober? If you ain't the oldest young one for eight years I ever saw! Why, I ain't sober. No, no! Say, Bos'n, do you like your school as well as ever?"

"Yes, sir. I like it better all the time."

"Do, hey? And that teacher woman—go on likin' her?"

The child nodded emphatically. "Yes, sir," she said. "And I haven't been kept after since that once."

"Sho, sho! Course you ain't! So you think Bayport's as nice as Concord, do you?"

"Oh, lots nicer! If mamma was only here I'd never want to be anywhere else. And not then, maybe, unless you was there too."

"Hum! Want to know! Say, Bos'n, how would you feel if you had to go somewhere else?"

"To live? Have we got to? I'd feel dreadful, of course. But if you've got to go, Uncle Cyrus, why?"

"Me? No; I ain't got to go anywhere. But 'twas you I was thinkin' of. Wouldn't want to leave the old man, hey?"

"To leave you—oh, Uncle Cyrus!"

She was staring at him now, and her chin was trembling.

"Uncle," she demanded, "you ain't going to send me away? Haven't I been a good girl?"

The captain's lips shut tight.

To be Continued

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