

Cap'n Warren's Wards

By Joseph C. Lincoln

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THE CAPTAIN'S PLANS FOR CELEBRATING CAROLINE'S BIRTHDAY GO ASTRAY.

Synopsis.—Atwood Graves, New York lawyer, goes to South Denboro, Cape Cod, to see Captain Elisha Warren. Caught in a terrific storm while on the way, he meets Cap'n Warren by accident and goes with the latter to his home. The lawyer informs Cap'n Warren that his brother, whom he had not seen for eighteen years, has died and named him as guardian of his two children, Caroline aged twenty, and Stephen, aged nineteen. The captain tells Graves he will go to New York and look over the situation before deciding whether he will accept the trust. The captain's arrival in New York causes consternation among his wards and their aristocratic friends. The captain makes friends with James Pearson, a reporter; then he consults with Sylvester, head of Graves' firm. The captain decided to accept his brother's trust. Sylvester is pleased, but Graves expresses disgust and dismay. Pearson calls and is surprised, for he had known the young Warrens and their father. Caroline asks the captain's aid for a servant whose father was hurt by an auto. The captain finds that Malcolm Dunn had caused the injury and makes him help in paying the sufferer's expenses until his death. Pearson tells the captain of a difference he had with Rogers Warren because he refused to help the latter in a shady transaction.

CHAPTER IX—Continued.

When Caroline returned her uncle told her of his visitor. She seemed unfeignedly pleased, but regretted that she had not been there. "He was such a friend of father's," she said, "that seeing him here would be almost like the old days. And so many of those whom we thought were his friends and ours have left us."

Stephen had never been very popular, and his absence at college still further reduced the number of young people who might be inclined to call. Their not calling confirmed Caroline's belief that she and her brother were deliberately shunned because of their change in circumstances, and she grew more sensitive and proudly resentful in consequence. Naturally she turned for comfort to those who remained faithful, the Dunns in particular. They were loyal to her. Therefore, with the intensity of her nature, she became doubly loyal to them. The rector of St. Denis dropped in frequently, and others occasionally, but she was lonely. She craved the society of those nearer her own age.

Pearson's coming, then, was psychologically apt. When he made his next call upon Captain Elisha to find the latter out, but his niece at home, she welcomed him cordially and insisted upon his waiting until her guardian returned. The conversation was at first embarrassing for the ex-reporter. She spoke of her father, and Pearson—the memory of his last interview with the latter fresh in his mind and painfully aware that she knew nothing of it—felt guilty and like a hypocrite. But soon the subject changed, and when the captain entered the library he found the pair laughing and chatting like old acquaintances, as, of course, they were.

Captain Elisha, paying no attention to his friend's shakes of the head, invited his niece to be present at the reading of the latest addition to what he called "mine and Jim's record book in sea yarn."

"It's really mine, you understand, Caroline," he observed, with a wink. "I'm silent partner in the firm—if you can call the one that does all the talkin' silent—and Jim don't do nothin' but make it up and write it and get the profits. Course, you mustn't mention this to him, 'cause he thinks he's the author and 'twould hurt his feelin's."

"He's quite right," declared Pearson emphatically. "If the thing is ever



"Jim, we've shipped a new second mate."

finished and published he will deserve all the credit. His advice had already remedied it. This uncle of yours, Miss Warren," he added, turning to her, "is like the admiral Kipling wrote about—he has 'lived more stories' than ever I could invent."

The captain, fearful that his niece might take the statement seriously, hastened to protest.

"He's just fooling Caroline," he said. "All I've done is set and talk and talk and talk. I've used up more of his time and the surroundin' air than you'd believe was possible. When I get next to salt water, even in print, it's time to muddle me, same as a dog in July. The yarn is Jim's altogether, and it's mighty interestin'—to me anyhow."

"I'm sure it will be to me also," de-

clared the young lady. "Captain Warren has told me all about it, Mr. Pearson, and I'm very eager to hear the new portion."

"There!" Captain Elisha slapped his knee. "There, Jim!" he exclaimed. "You hear that? Now you've got to read it, Anchor's ape! Heave ahead and get under way."

So because he could not well refuse the author reluctantly began to read and, as usual, his nautical friend to interrupt and comment. Caroline listened, her eyes twinkling. When the reading and the arguments were at an end she declared it was all splendid. "Just like being at sea oneself," she said. "I positively refuse to permit another installment to be submitted unless I am—on deck. That's the proper phrase isn't it, captain?"

"Aye, aye, ma'am. Jim, we've shipped a new second mate, and she's goin' to be with her salt. You hear me?"

She and the young man became better acquainted at each succeeding "literary clinic," as the latter called them. When Rodgers Warren first introduced him at their former home he had impressed her favorably, largely because of her desire to like any one whom her father fancied. She worshipped the dead broker, and his memory to her was sacred. She would have forgiven and did forgive any wrong he might have done her, even his brother's appointment as guardian, though that she could not understand. Unlike Stephen, who fiercely resented the whole affair and said bitter things concerning his parent, she believed he had done what he considered right. Her feeling against Captain Elisha had been based upon the latter's acceptance of that appointment when he should have realized his unfitness. And his living with them and disgracing them in the eyes of their friends by his uncouth country ways made her blind to his good qualities.

The Moriarty matter touched her conscience, and she saw more clearly. But she was very far from considering him an equal or other than what Mrs. Corcoran Dunn termed him, an "embarrassment," even yet. She forced herself to be kind and tolerant and gave him more of her society, though she did not accompany him on his walks or out of door excursions.

One evening while a clinic was in progress Mrs. Dunn and Malcolm called. The sharp eyed widow took in the situation at a glance. She determined to keep her eye on Mr. Pearson and find out more about him. His visits were not conducive to Malcolm's chances.

CHAPTER X.

"The Old Tyrant From Cape Cod." An important event was about to take place. At least, it seemed important to Captain Elisha, although the person most intimately concerned appeared to have forgotten it entirely. He ventured to remind her of it.

"Caroline," he said, "Sunday is your birthday, ain't it?"

His niece looked at him in surprise. "Yes," she answered, "it is. How did you know?"

"Why, I remembered, that's all. Graves, the lawyer man, told me how you and Stevie were, just time I met him. And his partner, Mr. Sylvester, gave me the date one day when he was goin' over your pa's will. You'll be twenty years old Sunday, won't you?"

"Yes."

It was late in the afternoon, and she had been out since 10 o'clock shopping with Mrs. Dunn, lurching downtown with the latter and Malcolm, and motoring for an hour or two. The weather for the season was mild and sunny, and the crisp air had brightened her cheeks, her eyes sparkled, her fur coat and cap were very becoming, and Captain Elisha inspected her admiringly before making another remark.

"My, my!" he exclaimed, after an instant's pause. "Twenty years old! Think of it! Bij's girl's a young woman now, ain't she? I call 'em to be proud of you too. He ought to have been. I presume likely he didn't forget your birthday."

He rose to help her with the heavy coat. As he lifted it from her shoulders he bent forward and caught a glimpse of her face.

"There, there!" he said hastily. "Don't feel bad, dearie. I didn't mean to hurt your feelin's. Excuse me, I was thinkin' out loud, sort of."

She did not answer at once, but turned away to remove her cap. Then she answered, without looking at him.

"He never forgot them," she said. "Course he didn't. Well, you see, I didn't forget either."

It was an unfortunate remark, inasmuch as it drew, in her mind, a comparison between her handsome, dignified father and his rude, uncultured brother. The contrast was ever present in her thoughts, and she did not need to be reminded of it. She made no reply.

"I was thinkin'," continued the captain, conscious of having made a mistake, "that maybe we might celebrate somehow, in a quiet way."

"No. I am not in the mood for—celebrations."

"Oh, I didn't mean fireworks and the town band, I just thought—"

"Please don't. I remember other birthdays too well."

They had been great occasions, those birthdays of hers, ever since she was a little girl. On the eighteenth she made her debut in society, and the gown she wore on that memorable evening was laid away upstairs, a cherished memento, to be kept as long as she lived. Each year Rodgers Warren took infinite pains to please and surprise his idolized daughter. She could not bear to think of another birthday, now that he had been taken from her.

Her guardian pulled his beard. "Well," he observed ruefully, "then my weak head's put my foot in it again, as the feller said. If I ain't careful I'll be like poor cracked Phlander Baker, who lives with his sister over at Denboro Center. The doctor told Phlander he was threatened with softenin' of the brain, and the sister thanked him for the compliment. You see, Caroline, I wrote on my own book and asked Stevie to come home Saturday and stay till Monday. I kind of thought you'd like to have him here."

"Oh, I should like that! But will he come? Has he written you?"

"Hey? Yes, I call 'em he'll be on deck. He's—er—yes, he's written me."

He smiled as he answered. As a matter of fact, the correspondence between Stephen and himself had been lengthy and voluminous on the part of the former and brief and businesslike on his own. The boy on his return to college had found "conditions" awaiting him, and the amount of hard work involved in their clearance was not at all to his taste. He wrote his guardian before the first week was over asserting that the whole business was foolishness and a waste of time. He should come home at once, he said, and he notified the captain that such was his intention. Captain Elisha replied with promptness and decision. If he came home he would be sent back, that was all. "I realize you've got a job ahead of you, son," wrote the captain, "but you can do it if you will. Fact is I guess you've got to. So sail in and show us what you're made of."

Stephen's answer was a five page declaration of independence. He refused to be bullied by any living man. He had made arrangements to come to New York on the following Monday, and he was coming. As to being sent back, he wished his uncle to understand that it was one thing to order and another to enforce obedience. To which he received the following note:

I can't stop you from coming, Steve, except by going to New Haven and holding you by main strength. That I don't propose to do for two reasons—first, that it is too much trouble, and second, that it ain't necessary. You can come home once in awhile to see your sister, but you mustn't do it till I say the word. If you do I shall take the car fare out of your allowance, likewise board while you are here and stop that allowance for a month as a sort of fine for mutiny. So you better think it over a spell. And if I was you I wouldn't write Caroline that I was coming or thinking of coming till I had my mind made up. She believes you are working hard at your lessons. I shouldn't disappoint her, especially as it wouldn't be any use. Your affectionate uncle,

ELISHA WARREN.

The result of all this was that Stephen, whose finances were already in a precarious condition, did think it over and decided not to take the risk. Also, conscious that his sister sided with their guardian to the extent of believing the university the best place for him at present, he tore up the long letter of grievance which he had written her and in that which took its place mentioned merely that he was "grinding like blazes," and the only satisfaction he got from it was his removal from the society of the "old tyrant from Cape Cod."

He accepted the tyrant's invitation to return for the week end and his sister's birthday with no hesitation whatever, and his letter of acceptance was so polite as to be almost humble.

He arrived on an early train Saturday morning. Caroline met him at the station, and the Dunns' car conveyed him to the latter's residence where they were to spend the day. The Dunns and Caroline had been together almost constantly since one evening when Malcolm and his mother interrupted the reading of the novel. The former,

while professing to be harassed by business cares, sacrificed them to the extent of devoting at least a part of each twenty-four hours to the young lady's society. She was rarely allowed to be alone with her uncle, a circumstance which troubled her much less than it did him. He missed the evenings which he had enjoyed so much, and the next consultation over the adventures of Pearson's "Uncle Jim" and his "Mary" seemed flat and uninteresting without criticism and advice.

The author himself noticed the difference.

"Rot!" he exclaimed, throwing the manuscript aside in disgust. "It's rot, isn't it! If I can't turn out better stuff than that I'd better quit. And I thought it was pretty decent, too, until tonight."

Captain Elisha shook his head. "It don't seem quite so shipshape somehow," he admitted, "but I guess likely it's 'cause my head's full of other things just now. I'm puzzled 'most to death to know what to get for Caroline's birthday. I want to get her somethin' she'll like, and she's got pretty nigh everything under the sun. Say, Jim, you've been workin' too hard yourself. Why don't you take tomorrow off and cruise around the stores helpin' me pick out a present. Come ahead—do!"

They spent the next afternoon in that "cruise," visiting department stores, jewelers and art shops innumerable. Captain Elisha was hard to please, and his comments characteristic. He finally selected a neck chain set with tiny emeralds.

Captain Elisha planned to surprise his niece with the gift at breakfast on the morning of her birthday, but, after reflection, decided to postpone the presentation until dinner time. The inevitable Dunns had taken upon themselves the duty of caring for the girl



They Spent the Next Afternoon in That "Cruise."

and her brother during the major part of the day. The yellow cat appeared at the door at 10 o'clock and bore the two away. Caroline assured her guardian, however, that they would return in season for the evening meal.

The captain spent lonely but busy hours until dinner time came. He had done some scheming on his own hook and, after a long argument with the cook, re-enforced by a small sum in cash, had prevailed upon that haughty domestic to fashion a birthday cake of imposing exterior and indigestible makeup. Superintending the icing of this masterpiece occupied some time. He then worried Edwards into a respectful but stubborn fury by suggesting novelties in the way of table arrangement. Another bestowal of small change quelled the disturbance. Then came by messenger a dozen American Beauty Roses, with Mr. Pearson's card attached. These the captain decided should be placed in the center of the festive board. As a centerpiece had been previously provided, there was more argument. The cook took the butler's side in the debate, and the pair yielded only when Captain Elisha again dived into his pocket.

"But I warn you, all hands," he observed, "that this is the last time. My right fist's got a cramp in it this minute, and you couldn't open it again with a cold chisel."

At last, however, everything was as it should be, and he sat down in the library to await the coming of the young people. The gold chain in its handsome leather case, the latter inclosed in the jeweler's box, was carefully laid beside Caroline's place at the table. The dinner was ready, the cake, candles and all—the captain had insisted upon twenty candles—was ready also. There was nothing to do but wait—and he waited.

Six-thirty was the usual dinner hour. It passed. Seven o'clock struck, then 8, and still Captain Elisha sat alone in the library. The cook sent word that the dinner was ruined. Edwards respectfully asked "What shall I do, sir?" twice, the second time being sent flying with an order to "Go for'ard and keep your hatches closed!" The nautical phraseology was lost upon the butler, but the tone and manner of delivery were quite understandable.

Several times the captain rose from his chair to telephone the Dunn house and ask the reason for delay. Each time he decided not to do so. No doubt there were good reasons. Caroline and her brother had been detained. Perhaps the automobile had broken down—the things were always breaking down just at the most inconvenient times, perhaps—* * * Well, at any rate, he would not phone just yet. He would wait a little longer.

A storm breaks about the captain's head as a result of the machinations of the Dunns. Read about it in the next installment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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