

Partners of the Tide

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"Don't you want me to attend to that dynamite?" asked the junior partner.

"No, no. I'll tend to it myself. Told you I would, didn't I?"

Bradley said it was time to change the subject. He looked across the ocean to the horizon. The air was clear and cold and the November sunlight lay upon the water with a steely metallic glitter that had no warmth in it.

"Wind to the south'ard," he observed, "and seems likely to hold that way. If it only holds fair long enough we'll win out yet."

"Where's that special weather bureau of ours?" asked the captain. "Ain't had a prophecy for two days or more." He stepped to the hatchway. "Hi, Peleg!" he shouted. "Peleg Myrick, ahoy!"

A distant voice from the hold replied that Peleg was aboard the Diving Belle.

"That's so," said Captain Titcomb. "So he is. Well, we'll see him later."

When the schooner again ran alongside the barge Mr. Myrick was summoned and clambered on board. The weather prophet had cold dust in his nostrils, in his mouth and in decorative smudges on his cheeks. As for his whiskers, the red and gray had disappeared; they were now a solid black.

"Peleg," observed the captain, "does Skeezicks know you when you get home nowadays?"

"Know me?" repeated the astonished owner of the dog that was just like a human. "Know me! Course he does."

"Well, I didn't know. You look so much like a cross between a ducky and a Kikkapoo Sagwa poddler in his war paint that I shouldn't think your mother'd know you, let alone a dog."

Mr. Myrick pondered. "Well, you see," he replied slowly, "mother, she's been dead for a considerable spell, and Skeezicks—"

"Skeezicks ain't. I see. That's the best reason I know of. Say, how about gates? Got any marked on the calendar?"

The prophet's dreamy gaze wandered momentarily to the sky.

"No," he drawled; "I don't call late there'll be a storm for the next week. After that—well, I don't know. I've been having a feelin' that the weather'd shift, but p'raps 'twon't. Still, I'm kind of scart—kind of scart of the week after next."

Captain Titcomb looked troubled. "Thunder," he muttered. "I swan I hope that ain't so."

Bradley looked at him in puzzled surprise.

"Now, honest, Cap'n Ez," he exclaimed, "you aren't worried because that hunk baked chap says—here, Peleg! Come back here a minute! Say, how do you get your tips on the weather?"

Mr. Myrick hesitated and looked troubled. "Waal," he replied, "I—I— you see, I don't gin'rally tell that, 'cause folks laugh at me; but, bein' as you're my boss, I s'pose I ought to tell you a little. You see, I jest sort of feel it in my bones."

"Any particular bones?"

"Why, my laig bones mostly. If a notheaster's comin', my right laig sort of aches, and if it's a sou'easter it'll fetch me in the left one. Then there's other—"

Bradley interrupted him by a roar of laughter. The prophet looked hurt.

"There!" he sighed. "I knew you'd laugh."

"All right, Peleg; trot along. There, Cap'n Ez, does that satisfy you?"

The captain laughed, too, but he shook his head.

"I don't know," he replied. "Them leg bones of Peleg's seem to have been pretty good barometers afore now. Well, what is to be will be, as the fellow with dyspepsy said when he tackled the mince pie. My, this won't do me for or for you either, Brad!"

They separated to plunge again into their work. But Bradley's hint about the dynamite still troubled Captain Titcomb's conscience. When the Diving Belle came back from her next trip to the beach he hailed Peleg and called him to him, said:

"Peleg, I've got a job for you. I want you to get out that dynamite we've got in the hold for'ard and take it ashore some'er."

Now, that dynamite was Mr. Myrick's particular dread. He was more afraid of it than he was of anything else on earth. The captain knew this, and that was why he always selected Peleg to bring up a stick of the stuff when the latter was needed. "It's the scared man that's always careful," said the skipper. "Peleg hangs to them sticks like a sucker to a barn door. He won't drop 'em unless his knee joints rattle loose altogether from nervousness."

When the weather prophet heard the captain's order the visible parts of his countenance turned white.

"Oh, my soul and body!" he gasped. "You don't want me to tech them pesky things, do you, Cap'n Ez? Git somebody else, do!"

"No," replied the skipper gravely. "I wouldn't trust nobody else. Tumble 'em out! Don't talk in that

careless kind of way, Cap'n Ez. What'll I do with 'em?"

"Oh, dig a hole and bury 'em; put 'em under your bunk in the shanty; feed 'em to Skeezicks, only git 'em out of the schooner some time pretty soon!"

"Will—will Sunday do?"

"Yes, yes! Whenever you have the time. Hi, Sam Hammond! What are you settin' there for? Git back to your engine."

Mr. Hammond was still with them, although his usefulness as a diver was gone owing to the temporary abandonment of the far venture. But because they anticipated returning to this work if the Freedom should be floated he was retained at his old wages and was now running one of the hoisting engines, a labor with which he was more or less familiar, although he considered it beneath him and shirked whenever he could.

This shirking irritated Captain Titcomb.

"Cousarn him!" he growled. "Let him either fish or cut bait, one or 't'other. If he's too good for the job, why, then, the job's too good for him. If I had my way we'd come to a settlement in about half a shake."

The majority of the men hired by the partners were intensely loyal and thoroughly optimistic. They knew the circumstances under which the contract had been taken and which they considered the possibility of failure for a moment. But Hammond was the head of a little coterie of pessimists, among whom were Henry Simmons and a few others from Orham and Lon Clark and Ike Bodku from Harniss. These croakers sneered at Captain Ezra when his back was turned and pretended to pity Bradley. When the pay envelopes were distributed they congratulated themselves loudly and wondered if this time was the last.

Bradley was aware of all this, because Barney told him, but he would not permit his partner to call Hammond to account. Sam should not have the opportunity of telling Gus that he was the victim of persecution by an unsuccessful rival—not if Bradley could help it, he shouldn't. Captain Titcomb understood, and so Sam was not reproved and grew more and more intolerable.

All day long the Freedom's deck was a whirl of industry. The captain and Bradley were always in the thick of it and were dog tired when 6 o'clock came. Then the cable was tightened and chocked, the watch was set and most of the crews were transferred in relays to the beach to eat supper in the shanty and shout, sing and play cards until bedtime. The partners, with Hammond, Barse and a few others, went up to Orham in the Diving Belle.

The old maids had been very solemn of late. When Bradley first told them that his firm had secured the biggest wrecking contract ever handled by Orham men they were jubilant. But then like Sam Busted, brimming over with a sort of living "extra"—with exaggerated reports of village opinion concerning that contract, and the sisters began to worry. Other callers, whose views were more weighty than Melissa's, came also, and now even Miss Prissy was nervously anxious.

Bradley went to bed early nowadays. On the night following the conversation with Peleg he took his lamp from the shelf soon after supper was cleared away. Captain Titcomb called, but remained only a little while.

As the young man rose from his chair Miss Prissy, who had been watching him over her glasses while pretending to mend some stockings, dropped the work in her lap and asked, "Bradley, how are you gettin' on down at the Point?"

"Tiptop," was the reply.

"Yes, you always say that, but are you gainin' as fast as you ought to? You don't think there's any—any chance of your not bein' able to git that vessel off, do you? Folks seem to think—"

Bradley laughed. "Has Melissa been today?" he interrupted.

"No, she hasn't, but Mr. Langworthy has. Oh, Bradley, we hear such dreadful things! Mr. Langworthy came here almost on purpose to try to git us to coax you to give it up 'fore it's too late. He says the whole town thinks you can't carry it through. Men that know all about wreckin' say—"

"Who says, the Jeremiah club?"

The Jeremiah club was Captain Titcomb's name for the daily gathering about the stove in Weeks' store.

"No, indeed! Men like Cap'n Jonadab Wixon and Mr. Wingate and lots more. They say that you've mortgaged your vessel and that if you fail you'll be ruined—absolutely ruined. They lay it all to Cap'n Ezra. Of course Tempy and me stand up for you and the cap'n and pretend we ain't a mite anxious; but, oh, Bradley, if any such awful thing should happen to you, to our boy, 't would break our hearts!"

Bradley felt a pang of reproach. Miss Prissy's eyes were wet, and the tears were running down Miss Tempy's cheeks. He was very grave as he answered.

"Miss Prissy," he said, "please don't worry. I know how people are talkin'; but, honestly and truly, I think we shall succeed. If we do, it means everything to us. If we don't—well, whatever happens, if God lets us live, you and Miss Tempy shall never suffer. I owe everything in the world to you. I'll promise you something else too. If we win out now, I'll never take another contract where the risk is as big as this. Now, good night, and, to please me, don't worry any more."

As he was leaving the room Miss Tempy said timidly: "Bradley, you don't go to prayer meetin', any more, Prissy and me pray for you every night. I hope you won't let your business crowd out your religion."

Bradley shook his head, answered hurriedly that he was working hard

nowadays and was tired and went up to his room. The last time he had been to prayer meeting Gus went with him. He had no wish to go there now and perhaps see her in Sam's company.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT that very moment Mr. Hammond, seated on the fence by the vestry door, was puffing at a cigar and talking in an unusually loud voice of New York and his experiences there. He seemed to be very happy, and his boisterous laughter penetrated even to the little company of worshippers on the settees inside.

When the meeting was over he threw away the stump of his cigar and shouldered himself into the front row of waiting swains by the door. As Gus came out he stepped forward to meet her and in doing so bumped against Mrs. Piper, who, looking the other way, had not seen him, and, being deaf, had not heard his step.

"Gracious sakes alive!" exclaimed the old lady, rubbing her shoulder. "Excuse me, Mr. Hammond. I didn't see you."

Sam nodded serenely. "Don't mention it," he shouted, winking over his shoulder at Georgiana Bailey. "You didn't hurt me a bit."

Georgiana giggled, and most of the young men grinned at the joke. Gus glanced hurriedly at Mrs. Piper and then at Hammond. She looked surprised and troubled.

Sam took her arm without asking permission and led her to the sidewalk. She still looked hurt.

"I'm afraid you hurt Mrs. Piper," she said. "What made you so rough?"

Her escort laughed. "I guess it won't be fatal," he observed. "If I'd managed to fracture that voice of hers so she couldn't sing, maybe the congregation would give me a vote of thanks."

Gus didn't reply. There was something in her companion's manner that made her recoil instinctively. She disengaged her arm from his, but he took it again and walked on, joking and laughing.

"What a crowd of jays there is in this town," he remarked after awhile, with a sneer—"enough to stock a dime museum."

He had always spoken patronizingly of the townspeople that she had not minded so much, coming from a city man, but heretofore he had not openly made fun of them. She resented the remark, but most of all the tone in which it was uttered.

"Why do you stay here, then?" she asked coolly.

"Why? I guess you know the reason all right. Don't you, Gus? Hey?"

He chuckled and bent down to look in her face. She shivered and drew away from him.

His hand upon her arm, the look he had just given her, his air of assumed proprietorship—above all, that new and vulgar something in his manner, as if the real soul of the man was showing for the first time—filled her with disgust.

She did not speak again until they reached the gate. Then she said, without looking at him, "Good night."

He put his hand over hers on the latch. "Oh, say," he exclaimed, with a laugh, "this isn't a square deal, Gus. Aren't you goin' to ask me in?"

She tried to snatch her hand away, but he held it fast and, leaning across the gate, threw his arm about her waist and drew her toward him.

"There!" he cried exultantly. "This is more like it. This is more like friends. Give us a kiss. You're too high and mighty to be the prettiest girl on the Cape."

She struggled from his grasp and stood panting. "Oh," she whispered, with a shudder, as she realized the truth—"oh, you've been drinkin'!"

He laughed foolishly and shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, what's one glass between friends?" he said. "I stopped into Web's a minute, and he set 'em up. First drink I've had since I left New York. Thought you was too sensible to have blue ribbon notions. Come; be more sociable, that's a good girl."

She was afraid of him now—not afraid of physical violence, but as she would have feared the contact with something loathsome and unclean. A sense of utter loneliness came over her. She longed for protection and help. She thought of Bradley. He would have helped her. She could have trusted him. But she had driven him out of her life, and this fellow—

"Go!" she cried. "Go!"

Sam ceased to smile. Other girls had told him to go, but never in that way or with such quivering lips. He began to realize that this was the end of his game. He had lost the prize. But he made one more effort.

"Oh, say," he cried, "don't get mad, Gus. I was only foolin'. Don't be such an old maid. Come here."

She turned on her heel and, without replying, walked toward the house. Hammond swore between his teeth, opened the gate, took one step in her direction and then stopped. He laughed a short, ugly laugh and nodded.

"You mean it, do you?" he asked. "Want me to clear out, hey? Well, don't you fool yourself that I don't know what ails you. You can't come the high moral game on me, my lady. You're whinny after that sneakin' Sunday school kid, Brad Nickerson, the fellow that didn't care enough about you to lift his hand, but stood still and let me walk off with his girl as if she was as common as dish-water. The whole town thinks you're going to marry me. What'll they say when I show 'em I'm done with you?"

He laughed again and put his hands in his pockets.

"I'm going," he said. "I'm going all right. You go to bed and dream about Brad. Dreams come true sometimes, they say. Maybe I'll dream about him too."

He pulled his hat over his eyes and walked rapidly away. Gus watched him go. Then she went into the house, threw herself into a chair beside the table and laid her head upon her arms.

Sam plunged straight on through the mud and wet grass until he reached the back door of the billiard room. Web Saunders came hurrying to see who it was that had knocked; only the tried and true were admitted at that door.

"Hello, Sam!" he exclaimed, with a look of relief. "Why, what's the matter?"

"Nothing," replied Hammond gruffly. "Where's that jug of yours, Web? I'm dying for another drink."

After cautioning his visitor against speaking so loud Mr. Saunders indicated the whereabouts of the jug. Sam poured out a liberal dose of the villainous cheap whisky and drank it forthwith. Then he poured out another.

He refused to go home that night, and Web put him to bed upon one of the settees in the little back room. And in that back room he stayed throughout the next day, drinking frequently, in spite of his friend's protests, and growing more ugly with every drink.

That next day, Friday, was wet and foggy, with occasional cold showers, but there was no wind worth men-

tioning, and the wreckers put in ten hours of the hardest kind of work. The Freedom had moved perceptibly in the sweep of the latest tides, and the partners were happy in consequence.

It was dark, though a few stars were showing dimly through the mist overhead when the Diving Belle entered Orham harbor that evening. Alvin Barse was at the helm, and he brought the schooner alongside the wharf. A half dozen men, the only members of the wrecking gang who returned to Orham at the end of the day's work, climbed over the stringpiece and departed for their homes in the village. Barse remained on board when the vessel ran out to her moorings to help his employers make snug for the night.

A few minutes later Bradley stood by the cabin door with a lantern in his hand. Alvin and the captain were forward. Suddenly the junior partner was aware that some one was standing beside him.

"Well, Cap'n Ez," he observed, "all ready to go ashore?"

There was no answer. He looked up into the face of Sam Hammond. The diver wore no overcoat. His stiff hat, battered and muddy, was pushed back on his head. His face under the tumbled, damp hair on the forehead was flushed and scowling, and his half shut eyes had an ugly glimmer. Even in the dim light of the lantern his condition was unmistakable.

Hammond's behavior in his native village had heretofore been of the best so far as this particular vice was concerned. Bradley was dumfounded.

"Hello, Sam!" he exclaimed. "Where'd you come from?"

"Off the wharf," was the gruff answer. "Where'd you think, you fool?"

It was evident that the fellow was spilling for a fight. Bradley, however, had no wish to quarrel with a drunken man, especially this one.

"All right, all right," he said mechanically. "I didn't see you come aboard; that's all. Want to see Cap'n Ez?"

"No, I don't want to see Cap'n Ez nor any other longshore thief but you. I want to go below and get my things."

"Your things?"

"Yes, my things—my oliskins and the rest of my stuff. I wouldn't leave 'em aboard this rotten tub another minute for a million dollars."

"Oh, very well," Bradley swung open the cabin door and started to lead the way with the lantern. Hammond shoved him aside.

"You can't see without the lantern. You'll have to go with me or wait till tomorrow morning."

"Give me that lantern," snarled Sam, making a grab for it.

Bradley held it out of reach.

"You're not fit to carry it," he said shortly.

"You mean mouthed sneak!" shouted Hammond. "I'm fit to fix you."

Bradley saw the blowing coming. He dropped the lantern and ducked. Next instant Sam was upon him, screaming and cursing. They tripped over the swinging door and fell to the deck. Alvin and Captain Titcomb came running from the fo'castle.

"What in the nation?"—cried the captain. "Here, quit that, you! Let him alone, Brad!"

Hammond yelled and fought as they dragged him to his feet. Finally, overpowered, he sobbed in maudlin fury.

"There, that'll do for you," observed the captain, clapping a big hand over his prisoner's mouth. "Crazy tight,

ain't he? Hold still, or, by the ever-lasted hooklocks, I'll heave you overboard! Where'd he come from?"

"Must have come aboard when we stopped at the wharf," replied Bradley. "He was dead set on taking the lantern and going below after his oliskins and stuff."

"Sooner trust a blind cripple with a lantern. Chuck his dunnage ashore to-morrow mornin'. Now, then," turning to Hammond, "will you walk to the dory or shall we carry you? Shut up! You've cussed enough."

He led the way to the side, holding Sam by the coat collar. Bradley followed.

"Oh!" exclaimed the skipper, stopping short. "Didn't shut that cabin door, did you, Brad? I've left that blasted key somewhere, and if that spring lock's snapped shut we'll be in a mess. No? Well, all right then."

They got into the dory and Bradley took up the oars. Barse sat on the bow thwart, while the captain reclined in the stern with Hammond, sprawling and muttering between his knees. They had nearly reached the beach when Sam gave a sudden spring and, with an oath, threw himself upon his enemy. Bradley fell backward. The dory heeled until the water lipped the rail.

"You would, would you?" grunted Captain Titcomb. "There!"

Seizing the struggling diver neck and crop, he whirled him bodily over the side.

"Now, then," panted the captain, "if you can't ride like a man, walk!"

Sam went into the cold water with a tremendous splash. It was not deep and he floundered to his feet, but the shock sobered him a little. He waded to the shore. Turning, he stretched out an arm with a shaking forefinger at the end of it. His rage almost choked him. He tried twice before he managed to speak clearly.

"I pay my debts," he gasped. "I pay my debts!"

"I've heard different," remarked the captain dryly. "But never mind, Sam; it's a good habit."

Hammond did not heed him. "I pay my debts," he repeated. "Do you hear that, Brad Nickerson? You dough-face! I've got your girl away from you already, and that ain't the end. I pay my debts, and, Brad Nickerson, I'll pay you!"

He stood for an instant pointing at the dory. Then he stepped back into the darkness. They heard his footsteps crunching the broken clam shells of the road.

"Seems to love you like a brother, don't he, Brad?" observed the captain as they were on their way uptown. "I judge from the drift of his entertainin' remarks that he's decided to chuck up his job with Titcomb & Nickerson. Well, I cal'late he'll resign by mutual consent, as the Irishman did when him and his boss told each other to go to blazes at the same time. I met one of the Metropolitan men when I was up to Boston, and he told me his folks fired Sam because he went on a howlin' spree, so I guess this little shindy was bound to come sooner or later. Kept pretty straight afore sence he's been to home, though, ain't he?"

Bradley did not answer.

Suddenly the captain slapped his thigh.

"Good land!" he exclaimed. "Brad, I've meant to tell you all day and forgot it. The Diving Belle's insured. I went down to Obed's after I left your house last night and we fixed it up. Five thousand dollars, and it went on at noon today—leastways, I s'pose it did. He was to telephone the insurance folks this mornin'."

"Good! I'm glad that's settled. It has worried me to think we weren't protected at all."

"Well, I told you I'd do it, didn't I? The only bitch was about that dynamite. But I fixed that. Give Obed to understand we'd took it ashore. We have, all but. I spoke to Peleg, and he'll have it off in a day or so."

Bradley stopped short. "You don't mean to tell me it hasn't gone yet?" he exclaimed. "Why, if anything should happen to the schooner with that stuff aboard the policy wouldn't hold for a minute. I've a good mind to go back now and take it off myself."

"Oh, don't be an old woman!" cried the captain testily. "What do you think's goin' to happen? I'll see to it tomorrow. Come on home."

The junior partner did not press the subject, but he made up his mind that if he lived until the next morning that dynamite should go ashore the minute the Diving Belle reached the Point.

At the gate of the Traveler's Rest they separated. "Coming round to the house by and by, cap'n?" asked Bradley.

The captain's manner changed. "I don't know," he answered gloomily. "I presume likely I may."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THERE was a mystery about the captain's visits to the big house. Up to the beginning of that week he had called on Tuesday and Friday evenings only and had remained until after 10 o'clock, joking, laughing and apparently enjoying himself. But now he came every night and seemed less talkative and more glum each time; also his calls grew shorter, and he went home as early as half past 8.

The sisters did not know what to make of it. It was pleasant and encouraging to have him come so often, but why didn't he stay longer? Miss Tempy thought he must be worrying over the big contract.

She asked Clara for her opinion, but Miss Hopkins seemed very indifferent. She used to come into the sitting room as soon as the work was done to listen to Captain Titcomb's stories, but of late she had gone straight to her own room. The old maids did not urge her to remain. They liked to have the captain to themselves.



"Oh, you've been drinkin'!"

On the afternoon of the previous Sunday Miss Tempy had taken a sudden notion to go over to the Methodist chapel and attend the Sabbath school concert. The chapel was on the road to Orham Port, a mile or more from the Allen home. Miss Prissy was not strong enough to go and, in fact, thought the walk too long for her delicate sister, but Miss Tempy, having made up her mind, went. She would have been glad of Clara's company, but the young lady had already gone out.

Miss Tempy had just reached the corner when she was surprised to see Captain Titcomb driving toward her in a buggy. She recognized the horse and carriage as being the best owned by Lem Mullett, the livery stable keeper; also she noticed that the captain looked particularly well dressed—spruced up, she told Miss Prissy afterward.

"Cap'n!" she called. "Cap'n Ezra!"

The captain was then almost directly opposite, but he did not seem to hear or see her. Instead he whipped up the horse and drove by faster than ever.

"Dear me!" thought Miss Tempy. "He must be gittin' absentminded. Workin' too hard, I guess. Cap'n Ezra!"

It is doubtful if the captain would have heard even then, but Josadab Wixon was coming down the road, and he also began to shout. Hailed thus, fore and aft, the absentminded one was obliged to believe to, and when Captain Jonadab pointed out Miss Tempy he turned his horse and drove back to where she was standing.

"Well, I do declare!" exclaimed the lady, smilingly conscious of a becoming new bonnet—one of the reasons for her desire to attend the concert. "I'm all out of breath callin' after you. I don't know what folks will think!"

"The captain didn't appear to care very much what folks might think. He was polite as usual, but seemed to be a trifle nervous and kept glancing up and down the road. Miss Tempy, unconscious of the nervousness, went gushingly on.

"What a lovely horse!" she cried. "I declare, it must be a pleasure to ride behind him. I do so like to ride with a nice, gentle horse like that. Father used to take Prissy and me drivin' with our Dexter when he was alive—father was alive, I mean—yes, and the horse, too, of course. I hope I haven't kept you. Was you goin' to see Bradley?"

"No, no," was the hasty answer. "I was jest—jest drivin' down the road a ways." Then, perhaps noticing that his friend was headed toward the village, he added: "I had a little errand down toward the Port. You're goin' uptown, I see, else I'd ask you to jump in."

"Why, how lovely!" exclaimed Miss Tempy. "I was goin' to the Port, too—down to the Methodist folks' concert. I only came this way 'cause I thought I'd stop at Mrs. Wingate's and see if she wouldn't go with me. Prissy was afraid the walk there and back would be too long for me, and, truth to tell, I was a little afraid of it myself. I didn't expect to ride, and with you, Cap'n Ezra! It'll be such a treat, because I shall feel perfectly safe with you drivin'."

The captain did not answer immediately. He was busy with the buckle that fastened the reins together. But the silence was only momentary.

"Good enough!" he cried. "I'll have you there in a jiffy."

He sprang out, assisted the lady into the buggy and then turned the horse's head into the road leading up the hill.

"Why, you're goin' the wrong way," Miss Tempy exclaimed. "You're goin' the wrong way, Cap'n Ezra!"

"Oh," replied the captain cheerfully, "that's all right! I thought we'd go round by the Neck road