

Partners of the Tide

JOSEPH C. LINCOLN

Copyright, 1905, by A. S. Barnes & Co. There was to be what the posters called "a grand select subscription ball" at the Orham town hall on the evening of Oct. 10. Gus had expressed a desire to go to the ball, and Bradley had subscribed—that is to say, he had paid \$2 for a ticket admitting "gent and two ladies."

He dressed for the affair when the evening came with no very pleasant anticipations. The relations between Gus and himself had not improved since the disagreement over Sam's visits. The partners were expecting a check from New Bedford in payment of the first shipment of tar, and as it was early when Bradley finished dressing, he determined to go down to the post-office before calling for Gus.

"Hello, Brad!" he exclaimed. "Got here, didn't you?" Then, glancing at the young man's face, he added: "Havin' a good time? Hope our stoppin' to talk didn't make any difference?" The answer was noncommittal. The subscription ball, extras and all, came to an end at 3 o'clock. By this time Bradley was once more repentant and humble. When Gus came out of the cloakroom he went to meet her, resolved to abase himself and plead for forgiveness.

"Gus," he stammered, "Gus—I-I—mayn't I walk home with you? You know I?" But as Bradley's anger had cooled, his fiancée had arisen. "Thank you," she answered, and every word was crusted with ice. "Mr. Hammond was gentleman enough to escort me here, and I presume he will see me home."

Bradley accompanied Miss Rogers to the parental gate. It wasn't a hilarious walk. The young lady said to her older sister later on: "Julia, I honestly believe he didn't speak one word from the time he left the hall till he said good night. I had to talk for two, or I should have gone to sleep on the way. He may be good looking enough, but Gus Baker can have him for all me. I'd as soon come home with a wooden Indian."

neglectful and selfish once before. What would she say now? He scarcely dared knock on the dining room door.

"Well, no, you haven't," answered the astonished Bradley dryly. "No, I presume likely it—er—must have slipped my mind. Well, I'll sell the box shares and put up what's needed to finish buyin' the Divin' Belle. You can pay off your part as we earn it. Is it a go?"

"All right," Bradley said finally. "I'll agree, of course. If you're willing to risk it, I ought to be." "Good! We'll take a day off tomorrow and go up to the Haven and look her over."

The partners started for Vineyard Haven in the early morning. The captain talked most of the way, for which Bradley was thankful. He didn't feel like talking. They found the Diving Belle lying at the wharf, and Captain Titcomb watched his companion's face as they stood on the stringpiece looking down at her.

"The waltz quadrille was the particular dance then going on. Bradley glanced over the crowded floor. He caught sight of Sam Hammond dancing with one of the Rogers girls. Opposite them in the set, he noted vaguely, were Captain Titcomb and Clara Hopkins.

He spoke with Captain Titcomb but once. That was during an interval between dances, when the captain, red-hot but smiling, came strolling toward him. "Hello, Brad!" he exclaimed. "Got here, didn't you?" Then, glancing at the young man's face, he added: "Havin' a good time? Hope our stoppin' to talk didn't make any difference?"

Bradley's objective point was the postoffice. He wanted to see Hardy and learn the particulars, but Captain Titcomb was there before him. They met at the door. The captain's eyes were shining.

"Come on, Brad!" he said. "I was jest goin' to send for you. I know all about it!" He told the story as they walked to the wharf in the pouring rain. It was as Rogers had said. The great barge, twin sister of the Liberty, was on her way from Boston to New York under tow. The storm had come up unexpectedly, and the hawser had parted. Now she was fast on the Razorback shoal.

"Crimester!" exclaimed the captain. "Won't she be a job? Brad, if you and me could only have the chance!" Alvin Bearse, who boarded nowadays at the house of a relative in Orham, was already on board the Diving Belle when the partners reached her.

That evening the train brought representatives of three large wrecking companies to Orham. The younger Mr. Cook came also. The partners saw him, but he would give them no satisfaction. "You must come to Boston tomorrow if you want to bid," he said. "But I tell you frankly, price isn't the only thing—we must be satisfied that the job can be carried through." It was evident that he didn't believe they could handle it.

But Bradley and the captain were certain they could handle it if the chance was given them. Seventy men, at least, would be needed, and to house and feed them was the problem. The Boston Salvage company had lighters and barges for this purpose and they had not. But there was the big shanty at the Point, the one in which the picnic had been held. Thirty men had lived and slept there before. By building new bunks and slinging hammocks twice that number at least could find room.

It was on the day following this robbery that Captain Titcomb began tinkering with the cabin door. This door and the sliding hatch above it had been fastened with a padlock. The captain's first move was to block the hatch so that it would slide back but a little way. Then he sawed and hammered away at the door.

himself and went out to paw over the directory. Inside of an hour I was on an electric car bound for Brookline and Cook's home.

"Pretty soon down comes Cook in a swallertail coat. He looked mad. 'Is it you?' he says. 'Didn't you get my message?' I told him I got it, but that 'twouldn't be fair to him to let that end H. Pretty soon young Cook come in, and he listened too."

"Finally the old man says, 'Well, Titcomb, what's your figger?' I told him what you and me had agreed on. He seemed surprised, I thought. Then he and his son went into the next room and talked. When they come back he says, 'Titcomb, you've got the perseverance of the devil or that partner of yours?' But you in good company, hey, Brad? 'Your price, I don't mind tellin' you,' he goes on, 'is lower than any one else has given. If you were a bigger concern I guess I'd give the job to you. Anyway, you come in and see me tomorrow.'"

"Well, this mornin' I was at his office when the doors opened. And there I set until after 2 this afternoon. A feller from the Salvage company come in while I was there, and so did one from the South Boston tug people. They went into Cook's room and come out agin. Finally the old man sent for me. He and his son were there together. 'Titcomb,' says he, 'I'm a fool, and I know it, but I'm goin' to let you try to get the Freedom clear. That want all he said. He went on to tell me that in givin' us the job he was riskin' a brand new vessel worth \$50,000. 'Mind,' he says, 'I b'lieve you can do it if anybody can, but I won't risk another cent. I won't pay by the day. I'll give you \$15,000 when she's off the shoal and a row to Boston, but I won't pay a red until she is. It's got to be a contract job, payment on delivery of the goods.'"

Bradley's face fell. "Of course that settled it," he said. "You couldn't accept, such an idiotic offer as that." Captain Ezra took his cigar from his mouth. "Well, Brad," he answered soberly, "that's what I did; I accepted it."

"Now, Cap'n Ez, look here! You and I have put almost our last copper into the new schooner. We've got practically no ready money. We must hire from seventy to a hundred men at \$3 a day and pay them every week. We must feed 'em. We must spend five or six thousand before then. Where's the money comin' from?"

figure there was sugar enough in him to drop a lump in friend Obed's tea-cup providin' he stirred up their spoon. Well, good night, or good mornin', rather. It's double or quits with us this time, son, for sartin, but if Titcomb & Nickerson do go under it'll be with colors flyin'."

Within the week Sateckit Pitt, from a lonely, gull haunted sand spit, inhabited only by the life saving crew and the lighthouse keeper and his family, became a small town, the population of which left each morning for the Razorback shoal and returned at night to eat and sleep in the big shanty and those surrounding it.

Captain Titcomb saw the people at the Wellmouth bank and placed a mortgage on the Diving Belle. As the partners owned her free and clear, he was able to get her cost price, \$5,000. Placards announcing that men were wanted at once and at \$3 a day and board were hung in the postoffice and railway stations in Orham, South Orham, West Harniss, Harniss Center, Wellmouth and other towns; also an advertisement appeared in the Item. The response was immediate. Work at good wages was scarce in the winter months, and men came from twenty miles away to obtain it.

The Diving Belle carried them down to the Point. There, under Barney Small's supervision, some set to work building extra bunks in the big shanty, slinging hammocks, putting up stoves and abandoned fishing huts inhabitable. The rest worked over the stranded coal barge, getting out the anchors, stripping her of all unnecessary ironwork and rigging and preparing to bring the coal from her hold and dump it overboard.

Seventy men were hired altogether, and to feed them it was necessary to buy large quantities of provisions. Captain Titcomb managed this part of the business, and the bargains he made with Caleb Weeks and other storekeepers were wonderful and in some cases not too profitable for the sellers. As Mr. Weeks said: "Ez Titcomb spent half the forenoon with me today, and afore he got through talkin' he'd tangled me up so with figgers that I don't know whether I sold him salt at a cent a pound or cornmeal at a dollar a barrel. I'll have to put in the rest of the day callin' him and addin' up, so's to know whether I've made money or lost it."

Soon the work on the Freedom was in full swing, and the great hull hunched like a beehive. Men were hauled by the hatches and by the derricks. Men were working by the rail transferring ropes and ironwork to the Diving Belle. Down in the hold gangs of men with faces sooty black except where the sweat streaked them with pallid channels were shoveling the coal into the big iron buckets that the creaking derricks lifted and swung over the side. The donkey engines puffed and whistled, the chains rattled, and ton after ton of good hard coal roared from the opening buckets and splashed into the tumbling waves of the channel.

The captain and Bradley, together for a moment, stood in the bows, where the heavy cable led, taut and rigid, from the windlass out to the submerged anchors. The Freedom had moved slightly in the last few days, and the partners were encouraged. "By crimester, Brad," exclaimed Captain Titcomb, pointing, with a grin on his grimy face, to the stout little Diving Belle just then shooting off to the Point with a load of strappings from the Freedom, "that's the little critter that has made it possible for us to handle this job. I don't know what we'd 'a done if we hadn't had her. See her go, will you? Flies round like a flea in a fryin' pan, don't she? You never put your money into anything better for the size than her, and don't you let that fact slip your mem'ry."

The new schooner had proved her worth twice over. Equipped, as she was, with the engine, she performed the part of a steam launch, a tug and a ferryboat. She had carried out and dropped the anchors in the channel; she took her owners and a few of the hands to and from Orham every night and morning; she was always ready and always useful. In fact, as the captain said, they could scarcely have handled the job without her.

Bradley, dirty and bareheaded, looked at the little vessel. "I shan't feel easy until we pay off that mortgage," he said. "And, another thing, you mustn't forget to see Obed and close that insurance deal. It worries me to think she is not protected at all."

"That's so. Fact is, I've been so everlastin' busy lately that I'd forgot to eat if I hadn't got in the habit of it. But I must settle that right off. The only thing that's kept it from gainin' through afore is on account of that dynamite in the hold. The papers are ready, Obed won't dicker until we take that stuff off; his company won't insure against explosives."

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"I know all that. We'll mortgage the Diving Belle and raise the cash. 'Are you out of your head?' We've been lucky so far and haven't had a failure. But failures are bound to come. Suppose we work on this barge for a month and then a heavy gale strikes."

"But, Brad, think of what it means to us if we make good."

"Cap'n Ez, we got that job because nobody else would take it that way. We can do it if anybody can, but nobody else would be fool enough to gamble against the Lord Almighty's weather. We'd be called fools from here to Provincetown."

CHAPTER XIV

THE next morning he was more miserable still, having had time to think it over. But he resolved that no one should guess his feelings from his appearance. Therefore he was, at the breakfast table, outwardly calm, although a little more quiet than usual.

CHAPTER XV

OCTOBER had been a month of exceptionally pleasant weather, and in the night of Nov. 1 Bradley woke to feel the old house trembling and to hear the rain thundering on the roof overhead and rattling against the windows.

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