

Partners of the Tide

By
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Author of "Cap'n Ez"

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It was mutiny, of course, mutiny pure and simple, but Bradley had gone too far to back out now.

"Take him below and lock him in his stateroom," he said. "Tell the doctor to see that he doesn't break out. Then come back to me. Yes, you may give me the revolver."

Swensen twisted the pistol from the first mate's hand and then, picking him up as he would a ten-year-old boy, started for the cabin. Burke struggled furiously and swore like a wild man, but he couldn't break away. The shouts grew fainter and then were muffled almost entirely by the closing of the stateroom door.

Bradley put the revolver in his pocket.

"Now, then, men," he said, "I'm skipper of this schooner for the rest of this voyage. Is there anybody here that doesn't understand it? No! All right. O'Leary, go forward on lookout. Peterson, leave the lead. Swensen," as the big Swede came up the ladder, "take the wheel and keep her as she lies."

All that morning until daybreak sent the fog rolling to the north in tumbled clouds the lead was going, and the crew were busy on the Thomas Doane. Bradley stood close at Swensen's elbow and edged her out, feeling his way with the lead and listening to the calls of the fog horns. The schooner's own foot power horn was kept tooting, and by and by, as they got out into the ship channel, it was answered by other horns and bells, some close aboard, some distant.

But by breakfast time it was clear and fine, and, before a cracking wind, the schooner walked along as if she realized her escape and was trying to show her gratitude. Through that day Bradley stood by the wheel, only leaving to eat a mouthful and to inquire after Captain Titcomb, who was much improved and beginning to ask questions. And just at dusk the gift dome of the Boston statehouse shone dimly in the dying light, and the Thomas Doane, resting from her labors, moved easily behind the tug up to her dock. She had made splendid time, but Bradley was far from happy. There was trouble coming, and he knew it.

He sent word to the cook ordering the latter to unlock the stateroom door and release the imprisoned first mate. A minute later the cook came on deck, his eyes shining with excitement.

"Mr. Burke, he got right into the skipper's room and shut the door," while the Portuguese, "and now they talk, talk, talk. And Mr. Burke he swear all the time."

When the first mate appeared he did not speak to any one, but jumped to the wharf and hurried away. A doctor was sent for and Captain Titcomb's wound was dressed. The physician said the injury was not serious. There was no concussion of the brain, and the patient would be all right in a couple of days.

Bradley didn't sleep much that night. Next morning the captain sent for him. When the second mate entered the stateroom he found the skipper sitting on the edge of the berth with a big bandage on his head, but looking very bright and like himself.

He seemed oddly embarrassed when Bradley came in. For a moment or two he did not speak. The second mate, who had expected a scolding rebuke and was prepared to meet it, was surprised at the mildness of the first remark.

"Now, then, Brad," said Captain Titcomb, "set down. What's this about you and the mate? Tell the whole yarn, first and last."

So Bradley told it just as it happened—the crew's behavior, his suspicions, the sighting of the light and what followed.

"Humph!" Captain Ezra nodded. "Yup, that's about what Burke said. Now, Brad, I s'pose you knew that Mr. Burke was your superior officer and that what he said was law for you, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir; but—"

"Never mind the 'buts' now. Taking command by force is serious—mighty serious."

"I did what I thought was right. Cap'n Ezra—what I believed you'd think was right. The schooner would have been aground in ten minutes if I hadn't."

"Well, s'pose she would. There'd have been no lives lost. Plenty of boats and a smooth sea."

But Mr. Burke knew she was headed for the shoals. He must have known it. The owners would have—

"What do you know about the owners and their affairs?"

"But the schooner?"

"She's a hulk, that's all—and insured."

The reply was an odd one, but the tone in which it was made was odder still. Strange things had happened during the past week; Captain Titcomb's silent humor, the interview the day before leaving New York, the

sudden change of mates, the skipper's studied indifference to the demoralization among the crew, Burke's frank determination to keep on the course set by him even after the proximity to the shoals had been proved beyond a doubt—all these were fingers pointing in one direction. Bradley, however, had not looked in that direction. But now the last wisp of fog blew away and he saw clearly.

"Cap'n Ez," he gasped, "Cap'n Ez! Were you going to wreck her on purpose?"

The captain shifted in his seat, but did not look at his companion.

"Orders are orders," he said. "Mr. Burke was your skipper—with me out of the way—and you ought to have minded him, just as I should my owners."

"Wreck a vessel for her insurance?" growled Bradley. "I didn't think you'd do it, Cap'n Ez. I didn't think you'd do it!"

The dismay, the griefed disappointment and horror in his friend's tone seemed to hurt Captain Titcomb sorely. He glanced at Bradley and then looked away again.

"I've heard all sorts of yarns about you in Orham," went on Bradley. "They say you're too smart and that you'll bear watching and all that. I've called those that said it liars, and I've stood by you through thick and thin. But now—what do you think they'd say if they knew of this? What do you think Miss Prissy and Miss Tempy would say? Why, they believe you're the best!"

The captain broke in testily. "Never mind all that," he said. "As for 'Swensen' and 'Jabe Bailey's' talk, I don't care a snap. And the old maids ain't exactly up to date in this world's way of looking at things. S'pose the old Doane was booked for thunderation by the shoal route—what of it? Mind, I only say s'pose. Better to go that way on a smooth night, with all hands saved, than to bust up in a squall and drown us all, as was likely to happen any minute. Nobody loses but the insurance folks, and they'd lose quick enough anyhow. Why, it's done a hundred times a year all along this coast. Member when the Bay Queen piled up on the beach off Setucket last summer? Everybody was as sartin as could be that 'twas done a-purpose, but you couldn't prove nothing. So with the Rhoda Horton and the Banner and any quantity more. S'pose—mind, I'm only s'posin'—that you'd got orders from your owners—orders, you understand—to do something you didn't like? S'pose you'd always stuck to owners' orders a good deal closer'n you had to the Bible? You talk a lot. So do other folks. But what would you have done?"

"I'd have been honest and said 'No.'"

"Humph!" Well, I guess you would. You're the nearest thing to an honest man that I've run across yet. Honesty is the best policy, they say. But was it honesty that made half the millionaires? Are Williams Bros. rich because they're always been honest? Josh Bangs is in the poorhouse, and he's the most honest critter in Orham, while his brother Sol is chairman of school committee, deacon in the church, has money in the bank and would skin the eye-teeth out of a down east horse jockey. Why?"

"Cap'n Ez," interrupted Bradley, "stop talkin' that way. You don't believe a word of it. I know you too well. The trouble with you is that everlasting 'owners' orders.' I almost think that that accident last night was as Miss Tempy would say, 'sent to keep you from doing something you'd be sorry for all the rest of your days.'"

The captain looked at the speaker oddly. "Then you callate," he said, "that I ought to thank God Almighty and a tipsy to-mast hand for saving what the book folks would call my honor? That's all right; only wait till Williams Bros. send me their thanks on a clean plate with gilt doads round the edges. Williams Bros. and your particular friend, Mr. Burke, ain't been heard from yet. My son, Well, Brad, I s'pose you'll be packin' up tonight anyway. An honest man, 'cordin' to your log, ain't needed on the Thomas Doane. I told you you ought to ship 'board the Arrow."

"I didn't ship on the Arrow because I'd rather be with you than anybody else on earth. I wouldn't sail with a rascal that would wreck a schooner, and I don't believe I know you're not a rascal. Oh, can't you see? It isn't myself I'm thinking about—it's you—yourself!"

The captain took his knife from his pocket and whittled a corner of the cabin table before replying. Then he said slowly:

"Much obliged, Brad. But what do you s'pose Williams Bros. will want me to do when they give me orders for this liner's next trip?"

"I don't know."

"S'pose those orders are the same as the last, what then?"

"Then say 'No,' like an honest man." Captain Ezra gave a short laugh. "Honesty, my son, is like diamonds sometimes—it's pretty, but it comes high. You turn in. I'm goin' to set up awhile and smoke."

Bradley reluctantly went to bed, but when he awoke, several hours later, he heard the captain stirring in his stateroom.

Next morning the skipper received a telegram.

"Williams Bros., havin' heard from friend Burke, want to have a little chat with the commander of the clipper Thomas Doane," he remarked to Bradley. "That doctor squiggle in my main-top with his physic stuff has made me feel A1 again. I'm goin' to New York tonight on the Fall River line."

And he went, leaving Mr. Burke in command of the schooner, a state of affairs not too delightful to Bradley. But the captain's stay was a short one. He was back on board early the second morning and called the second mate into the cabin.

"Well, Brad," he said, "I got my orders."

"Yes, sir," anxiously. "What were they?"

"'Bout the same as the last.'"

"And—what did you say?"

Captain Titcomb leaned over and deliberately knocked his cigar ash into the center of a carpet flower. Then he looked up quickly and answered, with a quizzical smile:

"If you want to know, I told Williams Bros. to go to blazes, and, honesty bein' the best policy, you and me out of a job!"

CHAPTER VIII.

BRADLEY asked Captain Titcomb, crossing the morning paper into folds and tossing it on the bed, "what are you plannin' to do now, our late lamented owners have committed financial suicide by cuttin' you off in the flower of your youth, so to speak?"

It was late the morning of the third day after the captain's return from his flying visit to New York. They had said goodbye to the Thomas Doane the previous forenoon and were now occupying a room in the United States hotel.

Bradley, who was sitting by the window, looking down upon the hats of the people in the narrow street, answered slowly: "I don't know. I've been waiting to find out what you intended doing."

The captain crossed his legs and tilting back in his chair.

"I callate," he observed, "that I could walk out of this gilded palace of luxury and run, afoot, of another skipper's berth inside of an hour. Not at my old wages, of course, but a pretty fair berth, all the same. But, fact is, Brad, I've had a kink in my main sheet for a considerable spell. I've had a notion that some day I was goin' to cut loose and cruise on my own hook."

You know I've hinted at it for over a year. Now, it looks as if this was my chance or never. Brad, how'd you like to be a wrecker?"

Bradley's face showed his absolute astonishment.

"Oh, I don't mean the line of wreckin' that is makin' your eyes stick out at this minute. Do you know Caleb Burgess, Cap'n Jerry's cousin?"

Yes, Bradley knew him. He owned a little schooner that fitted along the Cape Cod coast, picking up floating wreckage when it was of value, dragging for anchors, dredging for chains and ironwork lost by vessels in trouble and doing a sort of nautical old junk business.

"Well," went on the captain, "Caleb's gittin' old, and he'd like to sell out. Most folks think he's scratched a bare livin' from the shoals, but I happen to know that he's done a good deal better than that. The old man told me how much he had in the bank, and it wasn't to be sneezed at. Now, I could buy that schooner of his cheap. She isn't much, and money would have to be spent on her, but she'd go for a start. You understand, the wreckin' business I'd do wouldn't be anchor draggin' alone. There's money in a first class wreckin' plant on Cape Cod. Wreckin'! Why, they pile up there three deep every winter. Now, listen a minute, while I rise to blow."

Bradley listened, and the captain talked. He had evidently given much thought to this proposition, and his plans were ambitious. He believed that if a capable man bought the Lizzie—that was the name of the Burgess schooner—added to her equipment and sailed her himself he could build up a profitable business. The salvage of cargoes of stranded schooners and of the schooners themselves played a large part in his plans. One or two good sized jobs of this kind taken on a commission basis would bring in capital enough to warrant the purchase of a bigger vessel, fitted with auxiliary power, fitted with a diving equipment, derricks and the like.

"But wouldn't that take capital?"

"Sartin sure. But let me us—prove that the profit's there, and the capital'll be donated, like frozen potatoes at a minister's surprise party. Oh, I've thought it out! Now, here's—"

The captain's plan for Bradley's co-operation was, briefly stated, just this: He (Captain Titcomb) would provide the money for buying the Lizzie and whatever else was immediately necessary. Bradley would contribute his savings to the pile. They were to be partners on equal shares, but Bradley was to pay from his share of whatever profits might come from time to time the amount necessary to make his investment the equal of the captain's. No new move was to be made without the consent of both partners. It was a very generous offer, and Bradley said so.

"No generosity about it," protested Captain Ezra. "I'm lookin' out for myself, and need you, as the tippy man said to the lamp post. I tell you, honest, I shan't go into this thing unless you go in with me. Maybe it's a fool notion anyway. Well, there's a conclusion, 'now that I've unloaded my mind, we'll go down to the Cape this afternoon. I'll look round, and you take a week to think things over. In at the end of the week you can say 'Yes' or 'No.'"

They caught the 4 o'clock train for Orham.

The "old maids" were washing the supper dishes when Bradley surprised them by walking into the dining room. When the first shock was over the sisters were the most delighted pair in Orham. They insisted on preparing a brand new meal for their "boy," and no amount of protestation on his part could change their minds.

They were very curious to know why Bradley had come home so unexpectedly, and when they learned that he had left the Thomas Doane and not only that, but that the captain also had left, they asked one question after

another. Bradley simply said that the captain had other plans and that he couldn't tell what they were yet.

After supper they adjourned to the sitting room. Bradley was uneasy and several times glanced at the clock. After awhile he said that, if they didn't mind, he should like to go out for an hour or so. Of course, the sisters said, they "didn't mind," and he put on his hat and went.

Miss Prissy's shrewd guess wasn't far wrong. Bradley passed out of the Allen gate only to open the one of the side door apparently started a canine insurrection, for there was a tremendous barking and growling inside, and when old Mrs. Baker answered the knock the heads of Tuesday and Windfield, the only survivors of Gus' troop of pets, protruded from either side of her skirt. Both dogs and old lady were surprised and glad to see the visitor.

"Why, Bradley Nickerson!" exclaimed Mrs. Baker. "How do you do? Come right in, won't you? No, Gus! Sit in! Sit in! It's prays meetin' night, and she thought she'd go. Well, I'm sorry you won't step in and wait."

The Bakers attended the Baptist church, and thither walked Bradley, his hands in his pockets and his head full of the wrecking scheme.

It was nearly 9 o'clock, and the fence in front of the little church was ornamented by a row of Orham young men who were waiting for the meeting to come to an end.

Bradley joined the fence brigade and was hailed by half a dozen acquaintances, mostly old schoolfellows. He heard all the news and a lot more that might become news if it ever happened.

"Sam Hammond was down last month," so Hart Sears informed him. "Talk about duels! Say, Snuppy, wa'n't he a lulla-coder?"

"I should smile if he wa'n't," replied "Snuppy" Black. "Gold watch—and clothes! You never saw such clothes! Sam's working for the Metropolitan Wrecking company, and he must be getting rich. And he has a good time in New York. Member those yarns about the girls, 'Hawthorne'?"

Sears laughed and winked knowingly. "Sam's a great feller for girls," he observed. "He was chasin' 'em down here, I tell you. Gus Baker was the one he chased most, but Gus can keep him guessin'. He ain't the only one that's been runnin' after her—hey, Snup?" Then the whole row laughed uproariously.

Bradley somehow didn't enjoy the rest of the conversation. In the first place, he didn't relish the idea, so suddenly brought home to him, that "fellers" were running after Gus, and particularly he didn't care to have Sam Hammond among the runners. He had met Sam once or twice in New York.

A big chap he was, handsome and well dressed in a rather loud fashion and with a boastful knowledge of life about town. Bradley was not a prig, but saloons and after theater suppers had little attraction for him, even if his salary had been large enough to pay the bills. He had wondered idly how Sam could afford the "fun" he was always describing.

The melody in the vestry struck up "God Be With You Till We Meet Again," and the loungers on the fence began to move over toward the door. He went with them, standing a little way back from the entrance. The final verse of the hymn died away in deaf Mrs. Piper's tremulous falsetto. Then there was a hush as the benediction was pronounced, the door swung open, and, with giggles and a rustle of conversation, the worshippers began to emerge.

Bradley looked for Gus, and at last he saw her. She was talking to Mr. Langworthy, and the light from the bracket lamp in the entry shone upon her face. Again he decided, just as he had when he left her before going to sea, that she was pretty, but now he realized that hers was not a doll-like prettiness, but that there was character in her dark eyes and the expression of her mouth.

She came out and stood on the step, buttoning her glove. Two of the young fellows stepped out of the line toward her. She spoke to both of them and laughed. Then she caught sight of Bradley, who also had moved into the lamplight, and brushing past the rival pair of volunteer escorts, she held out

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"That's what you came here for, isn't it? I hope so, at any rate."

Bradley laughed and admitted that he guessed that was about it. Gus took his arm, and they moved down the path and down the rough stone steps to the sidewalk.

"Why, I haven't seen you for ages!" said Gus. "And you haven't written for nearly three weeks! Why did you come home now? You didn't expect to come home so soon, did you?"

Bradley explained why he had come home. Captain Titcomb had left the Thomas Doane, he said, and he had left with him. He didn't tell the real reason for the leaving, but hinted at dissatisfaction with the owners. To head off further questions on this ticklish subject he asked Gus what she had been doing that winter.

"Well," she said, "I graduated from high school, for one thing, and I'm keeping house for grandma. I guess that's about all."

"What's been going on in town? Any dances?"

"Yes, a few. I went to the Washington's birthday ball, but it wasn't much fun. Most of the floor committee were old, married people and about every other dance was 'Hull's Victory' or a quadrille. Round dances, you know, are wicked, especially if you don't know how to dance them."

"You wrote me you went to that Sam Hammond's been home, hasn't he?"

"Oh, yes. I went to the ball with him. He's a lovely dancer, and we walked whenever they played a waltz tune, no matter whether the rest were busy with a quadrille or not. But why don't you tell me what you are going to do now that you've given up your position?"

Bradley told her of Captain Titcomb's idea concerning the purchase of the Lizzie and the offer of partnership in the wrecking business. As he talked his growing interest in the plan became more evident, and he spoke of it as something already nearly decided upon. "What do you think of it?" he asked in conclusion.

"Why, I don't know," replied Gus. "If it all works out as the cap'n hopes it will be a fine thing. But isn't it rather risky? It means staying at home here in Orham, where people's ideas get into a rut, it seems to me. The cities seem so big and to have such chances for a man! You know yourself, Brad, that you've improved a lot since you went away."

"I haven't got a gold watch yet or any fine clothes, and my dancing wouldn't draw a crowd, I guess."

"Don't be silly. Sam is a good waltzer, and he has improved in his manners and in other ways. I shouldn't want you to settle down into nothing but a longshoreman. I guess I'm like Miss Tempy. I hoped you'd be captain of an ocean liner some of these days."

"Well, I don't mean to cramp myself to longshoreman size just because I stay in the village. It looks to me like a chance—a good chance—to be my own boss and make something of myself. I hoped you'd see it that way."

"Perhaps I shall when I get more used to it. Tell me more, please."

They had reached the little house, and, leaning on the gate under the big silver leaf tree, Bradley again went over the details of the new plan. Gus was interested and asked many questions, but to both of them the interview was not entirely satisfactory.

The old boy and girl, whole hearted exchange of confidences seemed to be lacking. To Bradley in particular as he turned away after saying "Good night," the consciousness of a difference in his relation with his old time "chum" was keen. She was interested in him and in his hopes and plans, but she had plans and hopes of her own, and perhaps he was not so much the central figure as he used to be.

Next day Bradley called on the captain. The latter had seen Caleb Burgess, and the Lizzie could be bought for a very reasonable sum. Captain Titcomb was also preparing a long table of figures showing the cost of what was needed to fit her up. They talked for over an hour, but Bradley was not yet ready to decide. He would take his full week, he said.

But by the end of the week his mind was made up. He was ready to take the chance that the captain offered. He told Gus so, and she agreed that perhaps he was doing right. He told the old maids and so knocked Miss Tempy's air castles into smithereens in a tremendous crash.

The partnership articles were signed. Bradley drew his money from the savings bank, and the Lizzie changed hands. The next month was a very busy one, for they were at work on the schooner every day refting and rigging. One noon of the fourth week the captain came down to the wharf with a Boston paper in his hand.

Bradley took the paper and saw on the page indicated the words: "Wreck on the Long Island Sound Bars. The Schooner Thomas Doane Lost. All Hands Saved." He glanced over the article, which briefly stated that the three masted schooner Thomas Doane, Burke master, had struck on the shoals off Long Island and would be a total loss. The crew, after trying in vain to save the vessel, had taken to the boats and reached shore in safety.

"I didn't believe they'd dare do it!" exclaimed Bradley. "We know, and they know we know."

"Who'll tell?" asked the captain shortly. "Not me, for I was in it as bad as the rest. Not you, for they know you and me were thicker'n' dies on a molasses stopper. No, 'twas 'Goody, Susan Jane,' so far as the old Doane was concerned, and I've been expectin' it. Well, I wasn't at the funeral, so let's forget it."

And apparently Captain Titcomb did forget it. A good many months were to pass before Bradley was again to hear his friend mention that subject.

CHAPTER IX.

IT was a May morning off Setucket Point. The Point itself was in the middle distance, with the lighthouse top shining black against the sky and the little cluster of fishing shanties showing brown amid the white sand dunes and green beach grass. The life saving station was perched on the highest of the dunes, and its cupola was almost as conspicuous as the lighthouse. The thick cloud, apparently of mosquitoes, hovering over the point was in reality the flock of mackerel gulls that are always hunting for sand eels on the flat. Low down across the horizon miles beyond was smeared the blue and yellow streak that marked the mainland of the Cape.

So the right, only half a mile away, but through the darker water that indicated the ship channel, a four masted schooner was moving swiftly, the sunshine flashing sparks from her cabin windows and marking high lights and shadows on her swelling canvas. Ahead of her, against the sky line, was the lighthouse that marked the turning point in the course. Behind, not quite so far away, was the other lighthouse that she had just passed. More schooners were following her, strung out in a long line, and others, bound in the opposite direction, were standing inshore or heading out to sea as they beat up.

In the face of the brisk wind an occasional steamer or an ocean tug with a low haunted a dingy strewn of smoke here and there amid the graceful schooners.

Along the edge of the channel and sprinkled amid the blue were patches of light green water where the waves ran higher and broke occasionally. There were the shoals—the "Razor-back," the "Boneyard" and the rest. If it were possible and fashionable to erect tombstones for lives lost at sea these hidden sand bars would bristle with them. Not a winter month that passes but vessels are driven ashore here, and the wicked tides and winds scatter their timbers far and wide. The Setucket life saving crew have few restful hours from October to May.

On the edge of one of these shoals, just over in deep water, a little schooner lay at anchor, rocking and plunging incessantly. Her sails were down, and only one man was aboard. Half a mile away, just where the tail of the shoal made out into the channel, two dories were moving slowly in parallel courses, trailing a rope between them. The schooner was the Lizzie; the man aboard her was Barney Small, once a stage driver, but now, forced out of business by the new railroad, back again at his old trade—wrecking. Captain Ezra Titcomb was rowing one dory and Bradley Nickerson the other. They were "anchor dragging."

The two dories moved slowly down the edge of the shoal, separated by a distance of perhaps a hundred yards. The line between them, weighted with a lead sinker at each end, was dragging along the bottom.

They were dragging for an anchor lost by the coasting schooner Mary D. a month before. She had been caught by the tide, and the chain had been let go with a run. One of the hands aboard—Hildredge by name—was an Orham man, and he had had the presence of mind to take the "ranger," which information he had sold to Captain Titcomb for a five dollar bill.

Bradley and the captain began rowing once more. They had gone but a little way when, slowly but surely, the dories began to draw nearer to each other. Bradley, looking over the side, saw that the "drag line" no longer hung straight down, but, tightly stretched by whatever was holding it on the bottom, led off diagonally astern.

They kept on rowing easily, and in a few minutes the pressure on the line had brought the dories side by side. Then Bradley passed his end of the rope to his partner, who began hauling in with care. By this operation the skipper's dory was soon brought directly over the spot where lay the hidden object. Bradley rowed his own boat alongside.

"Now, then," said Captain Titcomb, "let's see if she's got the right complexion."

He leaned over the side and, taking one end of the line in each hand, pulled them tight and saved vigorously back and forth, thus drawing a section of the rope again and again under the treasure trove below. Then he paid out one end of the line and hauled in the other until this section came to