

Partners of the Tide

JOSEPH C. LINCOLN Author of "Cap'n Ez"

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Night and they were fast to a big wharf, with lights all about them; lights piled, row after row, up to meet the stars; lights fringing the river or moving up and down across it; lights in the arching curve of the bridge that Bradley had seen so often in pictures; whistles sounding, bells ringing, distant shoutings and the never ceasing undercurrent of hum and roar that is New York, breathing steadily and regularly.

On the following morning Captain Titcomb left the schooner and after an hour or two returned with a sharp-eyed man, who smoked continuously, although the wharf signs about in six inch letters that no smoking was allowed, and who said little, but looked at a great deal. Bradley learned from the cook, who had been along the way, that the man was a partner in some friends, very mellow and inclined to be confidential, that the sharp-eyed man was Mr. Williams, the junior member of the firm that owned the Thomas Doane and half a dozen other coasters.

Mr. Williams and the captain had a long conversation in the cabin, and after it was over the skipper was a bit out of temper, and his orders were unusually crisp and sharp.

On one memorable evening the captain, having previously whispered to Bradley to put on his "Sunday togs," sent the boy on an errand to a cigar store near the wharf and told him to wait there "for further orders." In a little while he himself came into the store, commanded Bradley to "lay alongside and say nothing," and the pair walked briskly across the city to the elevated railway station. Then they rode uptown, had a six course dinner in a fancy restaurant, where an orchestra played while you ate, and then went to the theater to see a play called "The Great Metropolis." It was all real to Bradley, and he thrilled, wept and laughed alternately.

On the way down in the elevated he said, with a whimsical smile, "Brad, I calculate if the old maids knew I took you to the theater they'd think you were skinned a greased pole to perdition, wouldn't they?"

Bradley smiled also as he answered: "No, sir. I guess they'd think if you did it 'twas all right."

Captain Titcomb grinned, but he made no comment on the reply. All he said was: "Well, Orham's Orham, and New York's New York, and the way things look depends considerable on which end of the spryglass you squint through. Anyhow, p'raps you'd better not put this cruise down in the log."

But Bradley did put it down in the log—that is to say, he wrote a full account of this the greatest evening of his life, in his next letter to the sisters. His habit of scrupulous honesty still clung to him, and he did not evade or cover up. If he did a thing it was done because he thought it right, and other considerations counted for little.

Occasionally like the theater trip and Bradley was the "hand." With every voyage, sometimes to Portland, to Portsmouth, to Boston, and of course, to New York, the boy learned new things about his chief officer and to understand him better.

He learned why it was that the captain received so many presents and was considered such a "slick article." His acquaintance among seafaring men and shipowners was large, and he was always ready to do little favors. Sometimes a captain had a favor from a foreign cruise had hidden away two or three pieces of silk or jewelry or even, in one case, a piano, that were intended for gifts to the folks at home and to the cost of which the custom house duty would be an uncomfortable addition. Then Captain Titcomb visited that ship purely as a social function, and when he came away the jewelry or silk came with him. In the piano affair it was bribery pure and simple, with the addition of a little bullying of an inspector who had made a few snags before that the captain knew of.

Bradley touched his cap. "How are things going up at the office?" he asked.

"Plumb to the devil," was the short reply. Then, glancing up at the young man's face and looking hurriedly away again, he added: "Come aft. I want to talk to you."

Seated in the dingy cabin, the captain took a cigar from his pocket, bit off the end with a jerk and smoked in great puffs. Bradley waited for him to speak. The skipper's ill-humored and obvious discontent had come upon him the afternoon of the day the Thomas Doane reached port and had grown steadily worse. Each morning Captain Titcomb had spent at the office of Williams Bros., and when he returned to the schooner he had done little but smoke, scowl and pace the deck. The second mate was worried, but he asked no questions.

"Brad," said the captain, looking at the shabby carpet on the cabin floor, "we're goin' to have a new mate."

Bradley was surprised. "If Mr. Bailey's goin' to leave?" he asked. "The old first mate had been as much a part of the Thomas Doane as her mainmast."

"They've given him the Arrow, the new schooner. He's not to be here."

the schooner again. Captain Titcomb had said that he was pleased with him and hinted at a steady rise in wages and promotion later on. He was earning his living now—it cost little to live—and he sent home a few dollars to the old maids every now and then.

His first home coming was a great event. The supper that first night was almost equal in the amount of food on the table to his dinner with the captain at the New York restaurant. In fact, Bradley, released from salt junk and fo'castle grub, ate so much that he suffered with the nightmare and groaned so dimly that the alarmed sisters pounded on his chamber door, and Miss Tempy insisted that what he needed was a dose of "Old Dr. Thomas' Discovery"—her newest patent medicine—and a "nice hot cup of pepper tea."

There was no music during the meal, but the old maids talked continuously. The hemming and the shawl industry were bringing in some money, though not yet what Miss Tempy anticipated, and they had had a windfall in the shape of a contribution from the Sampson fund.

"We're all the children father had," said the older sister. "The letter said that there was money due us from the fund and that we was entitled to a check every year, most a hundred dollars. Now, I know about the Sampson thing, but I thought 'twas charity for poor people, and Tempy and me have got to livin' on charity—not yet, I hope. But it seems, 'cordin' to the letters I had from 'em, that the money belonged to us, so."

"So we get a check every once in awhile," cried Miss Tempy. "And how they knew and wrote jest at this time 'twas miraculous, that's what it is—miraculous!"

Bradley thought of his conversation with Captain Titcomb and the affair did not seem so miraculous, but he knew the captain would not wish him to explain and so said nothing.

CHAPTER VII

THE Thomas Doane was at her dock in New York, and Bradley, now twenty years old and a "sure enough" second mate, was on her deck watching the forecast hands clearing up the coal dust that begrimed everything. The schooner had carried coal for over a year now, and her latest occupation had not improved her appearance. She was old enough before and patched and mended enough, and to turn her into a coaler seemed a final humiliation. Captain Titcomb had felt it keenly, and his disgust was outspoken.

"Well, by crimestee!" he had ejaculated, when his flatfooted rebellion had been smothered by another raise in salary. "I used to dream about commandin' a Australian clipper some day or nother, but I never dreamed that I'd come to be skipper of a coal hod at that. Blessed if it ain't enough to make the old man—dad, I mean—turn over in his grave. Come on, Brad. Let's go to the theater. I want to forget it."

The captain had another project in his mind, a sort of secret hobby he hinted at every little while, but never told. These hints usually followed a particularly disagreeable trip or when the rickety Thomas Doane behaved even more like a cantankerous old maid than was her wont. Then, when he and Bradley were alone, the captain would wake from a day dream to say: "Brad, I git more and more sick of this bein' somebody else's errand boy every minute. Some of these days I'm goin' to take a whack at somethin' different, and I have a notion what it will be too. I guess likely I may ask you to come in with me. I b'lieve it's a good notion. Tell you 'bout it some day."

Bradley had grown tall and broad during his term of cruising. He had learned self-reliance, and his voice had a masterful ring. When he went back to Orham nowadays the old maids took special delight in having him escort them to church, and Miss Tempy's eyes during the sermon were often fixed upon him thru upon the minister. The money that he sent the sisters amounted to something now, and he had an account in the savings bank.

Now, as he stood by the rail, with his hands in his pockets, he heard a step on the wharf behind him and turned to see Captain Titcomb jump from the stringpiece, catch the shroud and swing aboard. The captain's usually scowled face had a scowl on it, and he was plainly not happy.

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"I thought so, too, but I missed my reck'lin' it seems. Williams—he ain't the man his brother was—he wants me to wait till the other one—the four-master, is off the ways. Then I can have her if I want her."

"But she won't be ready for six months, though I guess from what I hear she'll be worth waitin' for. Who'll have the old Doane then?"

"Captain Titcomb crossed his legs, but didn't answer. Instead, he asked: 'Brad, how would you like to sail under my flag? You and him got 'long first rate. I wouldn't wonder if I could git you the second mate's berth on the Arrow. She's brain 'new and clean, not like this hencoop. And he kicked at stateroom door with emphasis."

Bradley did not hesitate. "I guess if you can stand the hencoop 'gain," he said decisively. "I'd rather wait with you, thank you."

"I don't know's you'd better. Look here. And for the first time the captain raised his eyes. "You know I wouldn't try to influence you if 'twan't for your own good. I honestly think 'twould be better for you if you sailed on the Arrow."

"Oh, because Bailey's a good man, and an A1 sailor?"

"He isn't half the sailor you are nor half the man either."

"Much obliged. I'll stand for the sailor part, but I ain't so sure about the rest. Brad, sometimes I wish I hadn't stuck so close to 'owners' orders and had took a few observations on my own hook. Maybe then—"

"You're hard for an old fog to learn new tricks. I 'b'pose I'm a fool to worry. Money's 'bout all there is in this world, ain't it?"

"A good many folks seems to think it is."

"And other folks don't think any less of 'em for it. Well, I've laid my course, and I'll stick to it till all's by. Brjd, will you, as a favor to me, chuck up your berth here and ship 'board the Arrow?"

"Cap'n Ez, if you want me to quit this packet you'll have to leave me overboard; that's all!"

The skipper looked at the clear eyes and the firm jaw of the young six footer opposite.

"That goes, does it?" he asked.

"That does, Cap'n Ez, you've been the best friend I've ever had, except the old maids and—maybe one more. I don't want you to think I'm not ambitious, because I am. I'm just as anxious to make something of myself as you can be to have me, but I've made up my mind, and for the present anyway, while you sail a vessel I sail with you—unless you really order me to quit."

The older man hesitated. "Well," he said after two or three puffs at the cigar, "I ought to order p'raps, but I'll be hanged if I can—Brad Nickerson, I think as much of you as I would of a son, and your good opinion is worth—I don't b'lieve you know how much it's worth to me. But—Shake hands, will you?"

Puzzled and troubled, Bradley extended his hand, and the captain clasped it firmly in his own. For a moment it seemed that he was about to say something more, but he did not. Giving the second mate's hand a squeeze, he dropped it and settled back in his chair, smoking and apparently thinking hard. As he thought his lips tightened, and the scowl settled more firmly between his brows. Five minutes of silence, and then the skipper threw the half finished cigar into a corner and rose to his feet. His tone was sharp, and there was no trace of the feeling so recently manifested.

"We sail tomorrow mornin'," he said, stepping to the companion ladder. "The new first mate'll be here tonight. His name's Burke."

Bradley did not move. "Just a minute, Cap'n Ez," he faltered. "You—you I know it's none of my business, but—Well, you understand, I guess. You're in trouble—anybody can see that. Won't you let me help you out?"

The captain paused with his foot on the ladder. "My troubles are my own," he answered, without looking back.

By 9 o'clock the signs of drunkenness were so plain that even the first mate had to admit the fact. Only a very few of the men were strictly sober. One of these was the big Swede, Swensen. Ordinarily, this man had stuck to Captain Titcomb's schooner every voyage since one trip on which the skipper had knocked the fight out of him. The novelty of a good sound thrashing was, apparently, just what the giant had needed, and for the man who had "kicked" him he entertained tremendous respect and almost love.

"Cap'n Ez, he knock the tar out of me," said Swensen. "He stand no foolin'. He's a man. Hey?"

"He liked Bradley, too, and had presented the latter with a miniature model of a three masted schooner in a bottle, beautifully done and such "putterin'" work that it was a wonder how his big, clumsy fingers could have made it.

But though Swensen and the Portuguese cook and one or two more were sober, the rest of the crew were not. Mr. Burke confessed as much to Bradley.

"They've got rum with 'em, all right," he whispered. "But we'll be to Boston tomorrow, and there ain't no use startin' a row all daylight. Then some of these smart Ales'll find out who's who in a hurry or my fist don't weigh what it used to. Better not say nothin' to the skipper," he added. "No use to worry him."

It was odd advice from a mate, but as Bradley could see, to the astonishment of the latter, there was no need of telling Captain Titcomb. It was plain enough that the latter knew his crew's condition and deliberately ignored it. Men stumbled past him, and he looked the other way. Simple orders were bungled, and he did not reprove. Only once that evening did his wrath blaze out in the old manner. A sailor was ordered by him to do something and instead of the dutiful "Aye, aye, sir," he replied with a muttered curse.

The next instant Captain Burke's fist was between his eyes, and he fell, to

swore profusely and laughed loudly at his own jokes. He seemed to know his business, and as the captain would have said, "caught hold" at once.

They sailed the next morning, and by the time the tug left them, Bradley fancied that he noticed a difference in the state of affairs aboard the schooner. The usual rigid discipline seemed to be lacking. There was no rebellion or sign of mutiny, but merely a general shiftlessness that Mr. Burke did not seem to notice. Strange to say, Captain Titcomb did not notice it either, or, if he did, said nothing. Bradley did not interfere. He had not forgotten the advice to "obey orders and ask no questions."

There was a good wind and a smooth sea, and the captain drove the Thomas Doane for all she was worth. By the afternoon of the following day they were in Vineyard sound. Bradley's suspicions had by this time come to be almost certainties. For two or three saliors to show signs of drunkenness on the first morning out of port was nothing strange, but to have these symptoms more pronounced the evening of the second day was proof that there were bottles in the fo'castle. But Captain Titcomb, usually the first to scent the presence of these abominations and to punish their owners, now, apparently, was unaware of their presence. And the first mate, too, either did not see or did not care.

Bradley was standing by the fo'castle just at dusk that evening when a sailor bumped violently into him in passing. The second mate spoke sharply to the offender, and the answer he received was impudent and surly.

"Here you," exclaimed Bradley, seizing the man by the shoulder and whirling him violently around. "Go you know who you're talking to. Speak to me again like that, and I'll break you in two."

The man—he was a new hand—mumbled a reply to the effect that he "hadn't meant to say nothin'."

"Well, don't say it again. Stand up. You're drunk. Now, where did you get your liquor?"

"Ain't got none, sir."

"You're a liar. Stand up or you'll lie down for a good while. Anybody with a nose could smell rum if you passed a mile to wind'ard. Where did you get it?"

The sailor began a further protestation, but Bradley choked it off and shook him savagely. The first mate, hearing the scuffle, came hurrying up.

"What's the row, Mr. Nickerson?" he asked.

"This man's drunk, and I want to know where the rum came from."

Mr. Burke scowled fiercely. "Look here," he shouted, "is that so? Are you drunk?"

"No, sir."

"You're mighty close to it. Why— and here the first mate swore steadily for a full minute. "Do you know what I'd do to a man that brought rum aboard a vessel of mine? I'd use his blankety-blank hide for a spare top and feed the rest of his carcass to the dogfish. Git out of here, and remember I'm watchin' you sharp."

He gave the fellow a kick that sent him flying, and, turning to Bradley, said in a confidential whisper: "Ain't it queer how a shore drunk'll stick to a man? I've seen 'em come aboard so full that they stayed so for a week afterward."

"I think they've got the liquor down for'ard here."

"I guess not. If I thought so, I'd kill the whole—half dozen descriptive adjectives—"not. They can't play with me, blank, blank, blank."

But in spite of Mr. Burke's fierce denials Bradley wasn't satisfied. He believed that if the first mate had had him alone he would have found the liquor. However, he thought if neither the skipper nor Mr. Burke cared it was none of his business. But he was uneasy nevertheless.

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be jerked to his feet again and back to the rail with the skipper's hand twisted in his shirt collar.

"Hang you," said the captain between his teeth. "I'll—I swear I'll—"

Mr. Burke came running and whispered eagerly in his commander's ear. Captain Titcomb's arm straightened, and the sailor was thrown across the deck.

"Go for'ard," roared the skipper, "and if you want to live you keep out of my sight! I can't help it, Burke. I've got some self-respect left yet."

That was all, and Bradley waddled. Under such circumstances accidents were bound to occur. But the one that did occur was serious. Bradley was below when it happened. He usually took the first watch, but tonight Captain Titcomb said he would take it, and Mr. Burke would stay up with him for awhile. So the second mate turned in. He was awakened by a racket on deck and the sound of voices and footsteps on the companion ladder. Opening his stateroom door, he saw four men descending the ladder, carrying a fifth in their arms.

"What's the matter?" asked Bradley. "Who's hurt?"

"It's the skipper," replied one of the men in a frightened voice. "He fell and hurt his head. He—"

Bradley sprang into the cabin and saw Captain Titcomb unconscious and with the blood running from an ugly cut on his forehead.

"For God's sake!" he began, but was interrupted by Burke, who, with a very white face, was descending the ladder.

"Hush up!" commanded the first mate. "Don't make a row. Tain't nothin' serious, I guess. Jest cussed foolishness. Put him on the locker there, you."

This is what had happened. The schooner was passing out of the sound, and as the night was black and hazy, they were using the lead frequently. The Thomas Doane had a high after deck, and to reach the waist one must descend a five foot ladder. A sailor, not too sober, had thrown the lead and in passing aft with the line had fouled it at the ladder. Captain Titcomb, losing his temper at the man's clumsiness, had run toward him, tripped in the line and pitched head first over the fellow's shoulder to the main deck. The sailor's body had broken the fall some what, but the skull was not fractured, but it was bad enough.

The cook, who had helped bring the captain into the cabin, lingered after the first mate had gone. Bradley questioned him about the accident.

"Thoma, he done it," said the cook. "The line, she git mess up by the—"

"He was drunk," broke in Bradley. "He's been drunk all the afternoon. Isn't that so?"

The cook looked hastily at the ladder, then at the captain. Then, nodding emphatically, he whispered: "Ya-as, sir. They most all drunk. I never seen so much drink on schooner— not on Cap'n Titcomb's schooner, anyway, and I sail with him for five year."

But Bradley would not go to bed. He was worried about the captain and even more worried about the schooner. He did not like Mr. Burke, and he was by no means sure—judging by what he had seen—that the mate knew how to handle a crew. About 2 o'clock he decided to go on deck.

Bradley leaned on the rail and looked over the water toward where the shore should be. As he stood there he saw not more than two miles away and ahead of the schooner the twinkling of a light. Then it disappeared again. He walked aft. One of the new hands was at the wheel, and there was a distinct smell of rum in the vicinity.

"Who gave you that course?"

"Mr. Burke, sir."

Bradley was standing by the fore-sheets, looking over the side. He started when Bradley touched his arm.

"Excuse me, Mr. Burke," said the second mate. "Where are we?"

"Turned the Rip an hour or so ago." Burke's tone was distinctly unpleasant. "I couldn't sleep, so I came on deck a minute. Isn't she pretty close in? I thought I saw the Skakit light just now."

"Saw nothin'! Skakit light's away off yonder. Water enough here to float a Cunarder. What's the matter with you? 'Fraid I ain't on to my job? When I want your help I'll ask for it. I've sailed these waters when you was a kid."

"Well, I didn't mean to—"

"Then shut up! You go below and tend to the skipper."

Bradley bit his lip and turned away. If Burke was right, he had no business to interfere. If he wasn't right, the Thomas Doane was shavin' the skin off together too close. He went below, found Captain Titcomb sleeping quietly and a little later came on deck again to lean on the rail amidst a big, sure leomed close beside him. It was Swensen, and he obviously wanted to speak.

"Well, Swensen," said Bradley, "what is it?"

The Swede leaned forward and shaded his mouth with his hand, whispering hoarsely: "Mr. Nickerson, you know 'bout the first mate? He all right? What?"

Bradley had been brought up to discourage familiarity with men before the mast.

he fully realized the danger of interfering with a superior officer, but Captain Titcomb was not in command, and here was Swensen's testimony to back his own that the schooner was running too close to the dangerous Cape Cod beaches. The course she was on was taking her still closer in, and the fog was growing thicker.

This time Burke was standing by the man at the wheel. He swore when the second mate approached and snarled. "Well, what's the matter now?"

"Mr. Burke, are you sure that wasn't the Skakit light I saw? Swensen says he's seen it twice and not more than a mile and a half away. If that's so, we are running into shoal water. Hadn't I better try soundings?"

In a blast of profanity Burke assigned both Bradley and Swensen to the lowest level in the brimstone furnace.

"Go below!" he yelled. "Go below and stay below, or I'll find out why!" Then, as if he realized that he was showing too much temper, he added in a milder tone: "It's all right, Nickerson. We're three mile offshore, and Skakit's astern of us. Go below. Ain't the skipper enough to make me nervous without you shovin' your ear in?"

And then from somewhere forward came a frightened yell and the sound of some one running. Swensen came bounding up the ladder from the main deck.

"Breakers ahead!" he shouted. "Breakers ahead! Put her over! Keep her off, quick!"

Burke's face went white and then crimson.

"Breakers be hanged!" he cried. "Keep her as she is!"

But the Swede was darning up and down. There were confused cries forward and other men came running.

"Starboard your helm!" bellowed Swensen. "Put her over! You can hear 'em! Listen!"

He held up both hands to enforce silence, and for a moment every soul on deck stood listening. The waves clicked along the schooner's side, the wind sang in the rigging, and the masts creaked. And then another sound grew, as it were, into Bradley's ears—a low, steady murmur, now rising, now sinking. He sprang toward the wheel.

"Put her over!" he shouted. "There are breakers! Starboard your helm! Starboard!"

"Keep her as she is!" bellowed Burke, bending forward with his fists clinched. "Don't turn a spoke!"

"But, for heaven's sake, Mr. Burke, are you crazy? We'll be ashore in ten minutes!"

The first mate's eyes shone in the dim light. His teeth showed white between his opened lips.

"By glory," he gasped chokingly, "I'll show you who's running this craft! Keep her as she is!"

Bradley forgot his duty as second officer, forgot that half the crew were watching him, forgot everything except that his best friend lay helpless at a berth below, while his schooner was being run into certain destruction. He leaped to the wheel, and the mate leaped to meet him.

Bradley stooped as he sprang forward, and it was lucky for him that he did so. Burke's fist whizzed past his ear, and the next moment the two mates were clinched and struggling in the little space between the deck house and the after rail. Bradley did not attempt to strike; his sole idea was to get to the wheel. Therefore he merely warded off the furious blows aimed at his head and struggled silently, but the one sided fight could not last long. Burke gradually backed his opponent to the rail, and then without turning his head he shouted:

"Thoma, pass me a handspike. Live with you!"

The man Thoma—he was half drunk and naturally stupid—obediently placed the handspike in the first mate's hand.

"Now then!" panted Burke. "By—"

And then Bradley struck—a half arm uppercut—right under the ugly, protruding chin. Burke's teeth clicked together; he seemed to rise from the deck and fall backward at full length almost under the feet of Swensen.

Bradley shoved the sailor from the wheel, and gave the latter a shove. The schooner shivered, turned slowly the boom swept across her deck, and she heeled over on the other tack, with her nose pointing well away from the beach and toward the open sea.

Burke lay still for an instant, spread-eagled on the deck; then he rose to his feet. Bradley stooped and picked up the handspike. The first mate glared at the man who had knocked him down. Also he looked respectfully at the handspike. But if he had been angry before he was crazy now.

"You mutineer!" he shouted, with an oath between every word. "Just wait a minute! I'll show you how I treat mutineers!"

He ran to the cabin companion and jumped down. Bradley, trying to appear calm before the crew, glanced at the sails and then out over the side. Suddenly, so close that their ear drums throbbled with it, there boomed out of the dark a thundering, shaking roar, that swelled to a shriek and died away—the voice of the great steam foghorn of the Skakit light.

"Ugh!" muttered Swensen. "We yos that near!"

Burke came bounding up the companion ladder. Something bright and shiny gleamed in his hand.

"Now, then," he cried, "we'll see what!"