

Partners of the Tide

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Author of "Cap'n Ez"

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Except for your own me the writer as I'd begun to think you had—was how you was going to break it to the old maids. And now it's kind of broke itself as you might say."

Clara, standing in the doorway, with a shawl about her shoulders, smiled, but shook her head. "Yes," she said, "I should say it had. I guess the best thing I can do is to move back home right away. They'll never forgive me for letting you fall in love with me. Ezra, never in the world."

"Oh, I don't know," replied the captain hopefully. "That's where Brad'll help out. He can do more than anybody else to square you and me with Prissy and Tempy. Land of love! As that 1 o'clock!"

"Yes, it is. You must be going right away. I'd no idea 'twas so late."

The fog had entirely disappeared, and it was a clear, cold November night. The heavens were spattered thick with stars, and the horizon was dotted here and there with the sparks of lighthouses and lightships. Sleeping Orham lay still, and the surf hummed a restful lullaby.

"What was that?" asked Clara, pointing.

"What was what?"

"I thought I saw a queer light out on the water there. Yes, see, there it is again."

The captain put up his hand to shade his eyes from the rays of the lamp in the kitchen and looked in the direction she was pointing. Out beyond the strip of water at the foot of the long hill behind the house, beyond the point that divided it from the harbor, a speck of light glowed for an instant, flickered and went out.

"That's queer," he muttered. "That's off in the harbor, right by our moon-bine."

The speck of light reappeared, grew larger, puffed for an instant into a ruddy flame that lit up the masts and hull of a schooner lying at anchor.

"Lord A'mighty!" yelled Captain Titcomb. "It's the Diving Belle on fire!"

And from the darkness in the direction of the distant wharf came a faint shout, then another.

The captain plunged headlong for the back fence. "Call Brad!" he shouted. "Quick!"

Clara ran screaming into the house, and her companion vaulted the fence and dashed down the hill. The dead grass beneath his feet was wet and slippery. Blackberry vines caught him about the ankles, and tangled clumps of bayberry bushes tore his clothes as he scrambled through them. Once he fell head first into a sand pit, but the sand was soft and he was not hurt.

The Diving Belle was on fire! The Diving Belle was burning up! His brain repeated it over and over again. Then came the thought of what her loss would mean to Bradley and himself, and he groaned aloud.

He reached the foot of the hill and plowed through the soft sand of the beach. The tide was low, and he ran across the flats, splashing to his knees in the channels. As he climbed the bank by the bridge he heard some one running before him over the loose planks.

He crossed the bridge and panted up the second hill. As he reached its top the wind from the sea struck cold on his sweating forehead and brought to his ears the sound of shouting. There were lights in the upper windows of the houses he passed. Jonadab Wixon thrust a tumbled head from the window of his bedroom and bailed, asking what was the matter.

Captain Titcomb could see the cluster of buildings at the landing plainly now and the masts of the catboats alongside the wharf. The water of the harbor was black except in one spot. There the Diving Belle lay in a flickering halo of red light. Little jets of flame were shooting up from her hull amidships. The smell of burning wood came on the wind.

Len Mullett, the livery stable keeper, was just ahead, puffing and stumbling in the middle of the narrow road. He seized the captain by the arm as the latter overtook him.

"How'd—how'd—she git—afire?" he gasped.

Captain Titcomb did not answer. His eyes were fixed on the burning schooner, and he pushed Mr. Mullett out of the way and ran on.

Just as he reached the bend by Newcomb's fish house a huddle of men, some with overcoats and hats and others bareheaded and half dressed, rushed wildly around the corner of the building. The captain's shoulder struck the foremost man a blow in the chest that knocked him backward.

"Ugh! Ow!" grunted the man. Then he cried: "Hey? Is that you, Cap'n Ez?"

The captain was fighting his way through. "Let me by!" he shouted. "Get out of my way!"

Some obeyed, but others did not. There were confused cries of "Stop him!" "Don't let him go!" He was seized by the arm. The crowd closed about him.

"Don't let me go!" roared the captain, striking right and left. "Who'll stop me? Are you crazy? Parker, by thunder! Alvin Bearer, take your hands off me!"

But Alvin held tight. "Cap'n Ez," he pleaded, "listen! Listen just a minute! You mustn't go off to her. Ira, hold his other arm."

Overpowered and held fast, the bewildered captain gazed at the faces surrounding him. "For the Lord's sake!" he cried. "You cowards! Are you going to let her burn up without lifting a hand? What are you standing here for? Why ain't you aboard your ship, Alvin Bearer? Did you set her afire yourself? Let me go! I'll!"

He struggled frantically. "Cap'n Ez," pleaded Alvin, "listen to me. The dynamite's aboard—the dynamite!"

Captain Titcomb stopped struggling. The dynamite in the hold! He had forgotten it entirely. That was why no boats had put out to the burning vessel. That was what they were running away from.

"That's safe to stay here!" shouted some one from the outskirts of the rapidly growing crowd. "We'll be blown to silvers when she goes off. Git back to the hill!"

"Blow! Blow!" yelled the captain. "You're a coward and always was! But ain't there no men in this gang? Bearer! Sparrow! Ellis! Are you going to stand by and see me and Brad ruined? Who'll come with me and pitch the stuff overboard? We'll save her yet! Come on!"

They were wavering, some of them. Bearer was a brave man; so was Ellis. The two looked at each other.

"Come on, boys!" shouted the captain, getting one arm free and waving it. Then, as a new thought struck him: "What's the matter with you? Dynamite don't blow up in a fire. It burns like cord wood. Come on, you fools!"

They might have followed him then, but Captain Edward Taylor came up. A man of experience alongshore and one of the town's selectmen, his words carried weight. "Don't let him stir," he commanded. "Dynamite boxed in as he's got it in that hold is sure to explode, and he knows it. The least shock'll do it if he doesn't. Come back to the hill. Ez, you'll have to go with us."

That settled it. Fighting, pleading, swearing, Captain Titcomb was carried by main force along the road toward the hill by the bridge. Long tongues of flame were spouting from the Diving Belle's main hatch. Up in the village the schoolhouse bell was ringing.

"Don't let anybody go near the wharf!" ordered Captain Taylor. "Warn 'em as fast as—What's that?"

There was a scuffle on the road between two or three shouts, the sound of running feet.

Ira Sparrow rushed up the hill. His voice trembled. "We didn't see him in time!" he panted.

"Who?" asked several voices.

"Brad Nickerson. I'm afraid he's gone off to the schooner."

Captain Titcomb gave a spring that almost cleared him. The tears came into his eyes.

"For the Lord's sake," he begged, "are you going to let that boy kill himself? Then, bending forward, he shouted: "Brad, Brad! Don't go nigh her for your life! The dynamite's aboard!"

The crowd was still. Every one listened. There was no reply, but they heard the rattle of oars in a dory's rowlocks.

When Bradley came out of the kitchen after the "burglar" had made his confession he shook hands with Captain Eri, bade the latter a laughing good night and went up to his chamber. It was a long time before he fell asleep. He heard a steady hum of conversation from the old maids' room and knew the sisters were going over the astonishing events of the evening.

Once Miss Tempy came to his door to ask in a whisper if he knew just how old Captain Titcomb was. "Oh, about forty-eight or fifty," he answered, smiling to himself.

He had fallen into a dose and was dreaming a confused medley in which the sisters and he were chasing Sam Hammond from one room to another, while Gus locked the doors in front of them, when Clara's scream of "Fire!" rang through the house. He sat up in bed, not sure whether the cry was real or a part of the dream.

But the next moment he heard footsteps on the stairs. "Fire!" screamed Clara, rushing through the hall. "Oh, Brad, get up quick! The Diving Belle's all on fire!"

He was cool, surprisingly cool, as it seemed to him, when he thought of it afterward. His first move was to run to the window, open it and lean out. At first he saw nothing but the black night, the stars and the lights on the horizon. He noticed, too, how salty sweet the wind smelled as it blew from the flats at the foot of the hill. Then he saw the puff of flame on the schooner in the harbor.

Barefooted, bareheaded, dressed only in his trousers and shirt, but struggling into his jacket as he ran, he sprang down the stairs. The sisters caught at him and cried something or other, but he did not heed them. Clara called after him that Captain Titcomb had gone to the schooner. He stopped for an instant to ask her to house some of the neighbors and send them to the wharf. As he came out into the yard he noticed vaguely that there was a light in one of the rooms of the Baker cottage.

He took the same route that his partner had taken, but made better time. It was evident that the fire had been seen by others, for as he crossed the bridge the schoolhouse bell began to ring. It came to him like a flash, but too late, that he might have saved half the distance by taking one of the skiffs in the inlet and rowing straight out past the point.

There was a shouting crowd on the hill above the bridge, but he could see no boats about the Diving Belle and wondered why. Part of the crowd on the hill came running to meet him.

"Who's that?" shouted some one—Ira Sparrow, he thought.

Bradley did not answer. "Who is it?" cried Ira again. "Stop!"

The junior partner did not stop. "Squealer" Wixon got in his way and caught at his jacket. Bradley tripped him up, jumped the rail fence by the roadside and ran across the fields. He heard "Squealer" shouting his name.

The wharf was empty. Not a man was there. He reached the stringpiece, caught at the painter of one of the dories alongside, and, pulling the boat toward him, jumped in. Locking the oars were lying on the wharves. He picked them up and, with his knife, cut the painter.

And then he heard the captain's voice calling to him from the hill: "Brad, Brad! Don't go nigh her for your life! The dynamite's aboard!"

"Like his partner," Bradley had forgotten the oars in the rowlocks and sat motionless. The captain had stopped shouting. It was very still. He heard the bell ringing in the distance and the gurgle of the tide among the piles under the wharf. A whiff of smoke from the Diving Belle blew across his face, and he turned and looked at the schooner.

He remembered reading in the Boston Herald a month or so before of a wrecking vessel that had caught on fire off Long Island somewhere. She, too, had dynamite on board, and her skipper and the mate had saved her by throwing the explosive overboard. But they were on deck when the fire started. He looked at his own vessel, the schooner that he and the captain had longed for and worked for and petted like a baby. Then he set his teeth and began rowing.

The crackle of burning timber was plain as he scrambled over the Diving Belle's rail. The flames were pouring up from under the covering of the main hatch, and the smoke was rolling thick from the cabin companion.

He would have given anything for an ax, but the only one on board was in the wood box in the galley below. He caught up the boat hook that was in its rack by the bulwark and ran to the hatch.

He put the point of the hook under the heavy cover and began prying the latter loose. It gave a little, slipped back and then pulled over the cleats. With the hook he got a firm grip upon its edge and turned it over with a clatter. The smoke belched up in a cloud, but as it cleared he fell upon his knees and peered below.

The fire was almost amidships, among some loose planks and an empty tar barrel. These were burning fiercely, and the beams of the deck were blazing above them. But the dynamite chest was farther forward, beyond the bulkhead, which was only beginning to burn, and he could see there was just a chance of reaching it if he was quick. With the dynamite once out of the way help from the shore might save the schooner. He drew a long breath and put his hands on the edges of the hatch.

Then he heard a faint voice calling for help.

He thought for a moment that he must be going crazy, but the voice called again. "Help!" it wailed. "Somebody help!"

Bradley jumped to his feet and ran aft. The door at the head of the cabin stairs had been left open when the partners went home the previous night, but Bradley had pulled the sliding hatch shut. Now the hatch was pushed back as far as it would go, and the door was shut tight.

"Who is it?" shouted Bradley, stooping to the opening between the top of the door and the hatch. The dense smoke in his face made him cough.

"Help!" the voice came up through the smoke. "It's me—Hammond!"

The junior partner started back. "Hammond?" he repeated. "Hammond?" And then in a changed voice, "What are you doing aboard here?"

"I came after your things! You bet you came to set this fire!"

There was no reply for a moment, only a gasping, choking sound in the smoke. Then the voice began again. "Let me out!" it screamed. "I'm dying! Brad Nickerson, you want to murder me! Turn you, let me out! Oh, please, Brad! For God's sake, please!"

Bradley stood upright and looked about him. His beloved schooner and the sneaking enemy who had set her on fire and who was responsible for all his troubles—which? To force that cable door meant that the flames in the hold would have time to burn through the bulkhead, and then—He heaved a long sigh, and with that sigh he said goodby to the Diving Belle. He turned and rushed to the main hatch.

The prisoner in the cabin heard him go and screamed choking curses after him. But Bradley had gone only to get the boat hook. He came back with it and began the attack upon the door. That door was built of tough wood, almost new, and the captain's lock was new also. The boat hook only tore off splinters and chips. Finally the hook broke just where the iron joined the handle.

Sam had ceased to yell and beg his rescuer to hurry. His cries changed to coughs and strangling moans. Then he was silent altogether. Bradley, desperate, threw down the broken boat hook and ran about the deck hunting, by the light of the fire, for something heavy, something that would break that lock. He picked up the stout beam, re-enforced with iron, that they slung over the vessel's fore quarter when they hoisted heavy chains on board.

It was so clumsy that he could scarcely carry it, but he stepped back by the wheel to get a start and, running forward, threw it against the door. The double oak panels cracked lengthwise. Three times he hurled the battering ram, with his own weight behind it. At the fourth attempt the door burst inward and he fell on his face.

"Sam!" he shouted. "Sam, come on!" But Hammond did not answer. Shutting his eyes and holding his breath, Bradley descended the cabin stairs. Hammond was lying unconscious at their foot. The junior partner drew

him to the deck and away from the smoke. Then he shook and pounded him savagely. After a bit the fellow opened his eyes and gasped.

Then Bradley left him and ran to the main hatch. One glance showed him that the schooner was doomed and that the dynamite might explode at any moment. The thin bulkhead was a wall of flame and was shading like a sheet of paper in the fierce draft. Black smoke, powdered with sparks, was vomiting from the fore-castle. The Diving Belle was on fire from stem to stern.

Hammond yelled wildly from the after rail. "The dory's gone!" he shouted. "My dory's gone! Where's yours?"

Bradley had not stopped to fasten the dory when he boarded the schooner, and the boat had drifted away. Hammond, half drunk when he left the wharf, had bungled the knot with which his dory was fastened, and that, too, was gone.

"We'll have to swim!" cried Bradley. "Jump quick! She's going to blow up!"

Sam sobbed in sheer terror. "I can't make it!" he screamed. "I'm too weak. I'll drown."

"You've got to make it. Jump! I'll keep close behind you."

Hammond caught at a shroud, stepped upon the bulwark and stood there, turning a white face first toward the shore and then back at his companion. There was a muffled rumble from the hold. The bulkhead had fallen.

"Jump!" shouted Bradley. "Jump!" Sam threw up his arms and leaped from the stern. Bradley cast one glance over the poor Diving Belle, ran to the rail by the foremast and dived into the water.

At that moment, before his head appeared above the surface, there came a dull roar from the schooner's hold. She rocked like a rowboat among breakers. A flame burst from her hatch and a scalding stream of water poured from the top of her foremast, every rope of which caught fire. Her entire bow was a great torch that dipped now this way, now that.

Hammond, swimming for his life, yelled with fright. Bradley, caught in the waves made by the rocking of the Diving Belle, was for a moment unable to make any headway. Vaguely he wondered why he had not been killed. And then the foremast swung above his head and the noisy hoisting block in the fore-rigging snapped from its jutting tackle, shot out into the air and fell, striking him on the forehead.

He remembered almost nothing of what happened after that—nothing except fighting to keep afloat and the intense cold of the water.

Captain Titcomb on the hill had fought and struggled and pleaded to be allowed to go to his partner's aid. But Captain Taylor said, "Better one than two," and most of the others agreed with him. "Squealer" Wixon was going through the crowd, telling all who would listen that if he had not had some fellows at his house 'settin' up' playing cards the fire would not have been discovered. As the blaze grew brighter and Bradley could be seen running about the schooner's deck, Alvin Bearer volunteered to go with his skipper and attempt a rescue, but they would not let him try. In whispers people were asking one another how long it would last.

When Hammond appeared on deck there was a great commotion. No one knew who it was. But when he stood upon the rail, with the fire behind him, a dozen shouted his name. Captain Titcomb shouted it and swore. A moment later came the explosion.

Fifty men started for the wharf then, but the captain was far in the lead. He leaped into a dory and pushed off. The harbor was almost as light as day. In the center of the light the two figures in the water were splashing silhouettes.

And suddenly the captain, rowing frantically, was aware that another boat was nearer the schooner than his own. A small skiff, rowed by a bare-headed girl, had come from behind the point and was speeding with long, sure strokes toward the swimmers.

Hammond saw it. "Help!" he shouted, waving one arm. "Help! I'm drowning! Save me!"

The skiff was almost upon him. He reached out to grasp its side. But the rower, though she turned and looked directly into his face, did not stop. She kept straight on, past him.

And Captain Titcomb as he seized Sam Hammond by the coat collar saw Gus Baker lean from her skiff and drag to its low gunwale the helpless form of Bradley Nickerson.

Then, with a hiss and wrapped in a great white robe of steam, the Diving Belle dived to the bottom of the harbor.

CHAPTER XX

At 9 o'clock that morning Bradley, with his head bandaged, sat in the rocking chair by the window of his chamber, looking out. On the table beside him were medicine vials, teaspoons and a penicillin memorandum in Dr. Palmer's handwriting; also there were an emulsion bottle and a steaming pitcher of "pepper tea." These last were Miss Tempy's contribution. That lady herself, with a face whiter even than Bradley's own and with fingers that shook until holding a needle was next to an impossibility, was seated in a chair by the door, pretending to sew. Every now and then she looked up, seemed about to speak, and then, seeing the expression on the young man's face, remained silent. Occasionally she wiped her eyes with her handkerchief.

Bradley went to the Point that day in spite of his partner's protests and the old maids' pleadings and direful prophecies concerning his health. He

was kind, but so firm that any one saw there was no use arguing. Ira Sparrow took Bradley and Captain Titcomb to the Point in the Yau and I. Bearer, Ellis and some of the other men went with them. On the way Bradley and his partner discussed the situation. The work on the barge was going on as if nothing had happened.



"We'll stick to those who stick by us."

opened, although the news of the firm's loss had been telephoned to the life saving station early that morning. Barney Small met them as they climbed over the Freedom's rail. He was very sober and shook his employers' hands with silent sympathy.

"I told the boys to turn to," he said. "I didn't know what your plans was, but I want to quit till you said the word."

"Much obliged, Barney," said Bradley. "Call all hands aft. I want to talk to them."

The men came in groups, soot streaked and perspiring. They gathered in the waist, whispering to each other and glancing askance at Captain Titcomb and Bradley, who stood upon the raised deck by the wheel. In most of the grimy, sunburned faces there was a friendly concern. All looked embarrassed and awkward. When the whole crew was standing there, silently waiting, Bradley came forward.

"Fellows," he said, "when Cap'n Titcomb and I took the contract to get this barge off the shoals we risked every dollar we had. More than that, we mortgaged our new schooner to raise money to pay you with. She was raised last night, and as the cap'n said, there is no insurance. The little money we have on hand belongs to the people who took the mortgage. We couldn't pay you for another week's work. So, then, either we must give up the contract—which will ruin us and drive the firm out of the wrecking business for good—or we must come to you with another proposition. I think every man who has worked for us knows that we don't play favorites. Every fellow knows that he'll be treated fair so long as he does his work. But this I want to say: We'll stick to those who stick by us. We shan't forget our friends. And this is our proposition: To the men who will volunteer to help us get this barge afloat, we will pay \$4 a day instead of \$3, as you're getting now—when we float her and get our money. If we fail, you get nothing, and so do we. If we win, you win. We can float her if the weather holds good. What I'm asking is that you share our chances. It's up to you. What do you say?"

Bradley stopped and put his hands in his pockets. The men shuffled their feet and looked at each other. One or two of them whispered behind their hands. Then Barney Small snatched his rusty cloth cap from his head, tossed it to the deck and jumped upon it with both feet.

"Stage is ready for Orham, South Orham, West Harniss and Setueckit! Pint!" he shouted. "Git aboard! Come on, you lubbers! Have me and Brad and Cap'n Ez got to work her off alone!"

Alvin Bearer struck the ex-steward driver a resounding thump in the back. "You bet you ain't!" he cried. "I'm in!"

"Me, too!" said Ira Sparrow. "Present and accounted for," observed Bill Taylor. Ellis simply nodded and stepped forward. Others joined them by twos and threes.

Then Peter Myrick snatched to the front. "I dunno's I jest understand what the boss wants," he drawled, "but if there's anything me and Skeeticks can do, why—"

That settled it. There was a cheer, and the men began pushing each other out of the way to join the volunteers. In a few minutes there were only five who had not come forward.

(To be continued)

Make 1919 a Saving year.

KEEPING THE WATCH

One last word on hymn jokes: In a homely chat on favorite hymns the son and heir said he liked that one best where the little Jew boy stole the old gentleman's watch! The hymnal index was useless here, the reference took some searching for. Here it is, familiar to all:

The old man meek and mild,
The priest of Israel, slept;
His watch the Temple child,
The little Levite kept.

—London Chronicle.

Minard's Liniment Cures Colds, etc.