

Partners of the Tide

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

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As the boy ate he looked about the room. It was a big room, with a low ceiling, spottily whitewashed. The floor on the floor was partially covered with braided rag mats with carpet centers. On the window shades were wonderful tinted pictures of castles and mountains. The table was black walnut, and there were five rush seated chairs, each in its place against the wall and looking as if it were glued there. The sixth of the set he occupied. Then there was the chintz covered rocker and another rocker painted black, with a worn picture of a ship at sea on the back. There was another chair over the face of the tall wooden clock in the corner. This craft was evidently the Flying Dutchman, for every time the clock ticked it rolled heavily behind a fence of tin waves, but didn't advance an inch. On the walls were several works of art, including a spatter work motto, a wreath made of seashells under a glass and an engraving showing a boat filled with men, women and children rowed by a solemn individual in his shirt sleeves, moving over a placid sheet of water toward an unseen port.

"Cap'n Titcomb," remarked Bradley, whose bashfulness was wearing off, "came over in the coach with me to-night."

The effect of this announcement was remarkable. Miss Prissy looked at



Bradley shook the extended hands.

ter. From its closely shut front door snow covered box hedges in parallel lines defined the path to the front gate, also locked and fastened and, like the front door, only used on occasions. There was a large tumble-down barn, with an empty rippen back of the house and a henhouse and yard in the rear of the barn.

Next door to the left—on the right was a vacant field—was a small story and a half cottage, separated from the Allen household by a board fence. One of the boards in this fence had fallen down, and as Bradley, wading in Miss Prissy's wake, passed this opening he saw a girl, apparently about his own age open the back door of the house next door and look out at him. He wanted to ask who she was, but didn't feel well enough acquainted with his guide to do so just yet.

Just as the dozen hens and lonesome looking rooster were fed—Miss Prissy informed him that by and by looking after the poultry would be one of his duties—Miss Tempy's voice was heard calling excitedly from the kitchen door.

"Prissy," she screamed—"Prissy, come in the house quick! He's comin'! The cap'n's comin'!"

"My land!" exclaimed the elder sister wildly, and, her dignity forgotten, she almost ran to the house, followed by Bradley, who didn't understand the cause of the excitement.

"Oh, my sakes," ejaculated Miss Tempy as they entered the kitchen, "what made him come so early? You'll have to see him first, Prissy. I've got to fix my hair."

Miss Prissy rushed into the sitting room, wheeled a chair into place, set a tidy straight, laid the photograph album exactly in the center of the table instead of two inches from the edge and patted her own hair with her hands, dodging in front of the big gilt framed mirror as she did so. Then, as a smart knock sounded on the dining room door, she assumed her "company" smile and marched sedately to receive the visitor.

It was Captain Titcomb who had knocked, and after cleaning the snow from his boots on the "scraper" he entered the house, bearing two packages wrapped in brown paper.

"Well, Prissy," said the captain, laying down the packages to shake hands, "how'd you do? Didn't expect to see me in this port just now, did you?"

"No, indeed, Cap'n Titcomb," was the reply. "But we're real glad to see you all the same. Come right in. Take your things off. Bradley said he rode down with you in the coach last night. Dreadful storm we had, wasn't it? How's your health nowadays? Walk right into the sittin' room. You must excuse the looks of things. I've been sweepin'."

There was a good deal more, but when Miss Prissy stopped for breath the captain, who had thrown his cap and overcoat on a chair, replied that the storm was bad, that his health was good and that the room looked "first rate," so far as he could see. Then he held out his hand to the boy, who had seated himself on a chair close to the door, and said cheerily:

"Mornin', Brad. Well, how are you after your shake up last night? Wan't seasick after I got out, was you?"

Bradley grinned bashfully and stammered that he was "all right."

"Good! We had a rugged trip comin' over, Prissy. The old coach rolled so I felt like goin' on deck and shortenin' sail. Your new boy here's goin' to make a good sailor, I can see that. Where's Tempy?"

"Oh, she's upstairs for a minute. She'll be right down," answered Miss Prissy carelessly. "Tell me what brought you home so unexpected."

"Sprung a leak and had to lay the old hooker up for repairs. That's a specialty of my owners—repairs. They'd rather patch up for a hundred years than build new vessels. I—Brad, fetch me them bundles out of the dinin' room."

Bradley obediently brought the brown paper parcels, and the captain handed one of them to Miss Prissy, saying: "Here's a little somethin' I picked up, over to New York, Prissy. I thought you might like it. I ain't got much use for such things myself."

The lady took the package and began to untie the string in a nervous manner, blushing a little as she did so.

"I know it's somethin' nice, Cap'n Ezra. You do buy the nicest things. It's real kind of you to remember me this way. Oh, ain't that pretty!"

The package contained a Japanese silk fan, with ivory sticks and a red tassel. Miss Prissy opened it and spread it out in her lap, exclaiming over its beauty, her face the color of the tassel.

"Oh, it ain't nothin'," said the captain. "I did a favor for a friend of mine that's skipper of a barkentine jest home from Hongkong, and he gave it to me. He had some stuff he'd brought for his daughter, and the duty on it would have been pretty expensive, so I fixed—but never mind that. I thought maybe you'd like it to carry to church in the summer time or somethin'. Why, hello, Tempy! How'd you do?"

The younger sister entered the room, her poplin rustling and every curl in place. She gushingly shook the captain's hand and said she was so glad to see him.

"Oh, Tempy," cried Miss Prissy, "jest look at this lovely fan Cap'n Titcomb

brought me! Did you ever see anything so pretty?"

Miss Tempy exclaimed over the fan, but somehow her enthusiasm seemed a little forced. It may be the captain noticed this; at any rate, he picked up the second parcel and handed it to her, saying:

"Here's a little somethin' I brought for you, Tempy. I don't know's you'll like it, but—"

Miss Tempy's present also was a fan precisely like the other except that the tassel was pink. Miss Prissy's interest in her sister's gift was intense, but when it was discovered that in no important point were the fans dissimilar and that neither was better than its mate both of the ladies appeared to be a trifle disappointed, although they tried not to show it.

"We're so glad you've come, cap'n," said Miss Prissy, after the fans were laid on the table. "We've got so many things to talk to you about, and we want to ask your advice. Bradley, don't you think you'd like to go out into the dinin' room a little while?"

The boy, acting upon this decided hint, went into the dining room, and Miss Prissy shut the door after him.

"Now, Cap'n Titcomb," she began, "I s'pose you were awfully surprised to hear we'd took a boy to bring up? Well, you ain't any more surprised than we are to think we should do such a thing. But it seemed as if we jest had to or else give up bein' Christians altogether. I'll tell you how it was."

And she did tell him, beginning with the exact relationship between Bradley's mother and the Allens, expatiating upon the shiftlessness of the boy's father and how he "never saved a cent," nor even took out an insurance policy to provide for his son in case of his own death.

"But, mercy me," she exclaimed, lifting her hands, "what on earth we'll do with a boy is more'n I know. What shall we do?"

"Bring him up in the way he ought to go, I guess," replied the captain calmly. "Send him to school first thing. How is he off for clothes?"

"Hain't got any that are fit for anything but the rag bag," replied Miss Prissy with decision. "And that's an-



"Here's a little somethin' I brought for you, Tempy."

other thing. Who's goin' to buy 'em for him? I'm sure I don't know what a boy needs to wear any more than a cat."

"I'll buy his fit out, if you want me to," said the captain. "Take him down to Weeks' store right now, if you say the word."

"Oh, I wish you would. You pay Mr. Weeks, and I'll pay you."

They pressed the captain to stay for dinner, or at least to return for that meal, but he declined, promising, however, to dine with them before he went back to his vessel.

"Come on, Brad," he said, entering the dining room; "you and me's goin' on a cruise downtown."

Bradley put on the shabby overcoat and cap for the last time and walked down to the back gate and along the sidewalk with the captain.

Meanwhile Miss Tempy, seated in the rocker by the window and holding a fan in each hand, was examining them with the greatest care.

"Prissy," she said at last in a solemn tone, "they're jest exactly alike."

"Yes," said her sister, with a stifled sigh, "they're jest alike."

CHAPTER III.

"IN 'Weeks' store" was to be found an assortment of wares ranging from potatoes and razors to molasses and ladies' dress goods. Somewhere within this extensive range was a limited supply of what Mr. Weeks' advertisement in the Item called "Youths, Men's and Children's Clothing in Latest Styles at Moderate Prices." The styles were "late"—about a year late—and the prices were moderate when the lengthy period of credit given to customers is taken into consideration.

Captain Titcomb, exchanging greetings with the half dozen loungers by the stove, whose business there was, as Mr. Weeks himself said, "to swap bad tobacco smoke for heat," passed to the rear of the store, followed by Bradley. There he proceeded to select an entire outfit for the boy calculated to clothe him in successive layers from the skin outward. When the pile of garments on the counter was complete the captain and Mr. Weeks entered into a lengthy argument concerning price. There was a "Sunday hat" involved in the transaction, and about this piece of headgear the battle waged fiercest.

"It's too much money, Caleb," said the captain finally. "I guess I'll try the New York store. Tom Emery's always treated me fair enough, and I'll give him a chance. Come on, Brad."

"I'll take off a quarter on the suit," conceded the storekeeper, who was loath to see so much custom go to a rival.

"No," was the reply, "that ain't enough to amount to anything. Tell

you what I'll do, Caleb. Throw in that Sunday hat and I'll take the lot and pay you cash for it and run my risk of gittin' the money."

So the bargain was concluded on that basis. Bradley retired to the back room and emerged clothed in his new garments and tremendously conscious of the fact. The captain said he looked so fresh that you could "smell the paint on him."

"Say, Caleb," said "Squealer" Wixon after Captain Titcomb and his protegee had left the premises, "did Ez tell you who that boy was?"

"No, he didn't. I hinted two or three times, but he wouldn't say."

"Well, I'll tell you. 'Twas the old maids' boy—Ben Nickerson's son. Barney said he brought him over in the coach last night."

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed the chopfallen Mr. Weeks. "Well, if that ain't enough to— Ez made me throw in a hat that was wuth a dollar 'n a ha' 'cause he said he'd pay cash for everything and take his chance of gittin' his money back. And Prissy and Tempy always pay cash for everything. Reg'lar Titcomb trick!"

The loafers about the store roared with delight.

"Oh, I tell you," remarked "Squealer," "you've got to keep your weather eye peeled when you're dealin' with Cap'n Ez. He'll have you, head and scales, if you ain't careful."

"That's all right," grumbled "Bluey" Bachelor, "but he'll git fetched up all standin' some of these days. You can call him smart if you want to, but it's pretty risky smartness, most folks think. You notice his schooner's always makin' record trips, and he's always havin' presents give him and all that. How many presents did you have give to you, Cap'n Jabez, when you was runnin' a coaster?"

"Not a one," indignantly replied the person addressed, Captain Jabez Bailey. "Not a one. What I got I had to work for."

It may be that Captain Jabez overworked during his sea experiences. Certainly no one in Orham had known him to do a stroke of work since he retired to live on his wife's earnings as a dressmaker.

"Well," commented Captain Eri Hedge, who was not a member of the circle, but had dropped in to buy some tobacco, "I like Cap'n Ez. He does love to git the best of a bargain, and he's a 'driver' on a vessel, and perhaps he likes to shave the law pretty close sometimes. Ez is a reg'lar born gambler for takin' chances, but I never knew him to do a mean trick."

"What do you call that game he put up on the old maids?" asked "Squealer." "You knew 'bout that, didn't you, Jabez? Seems Prissy and Tempy wanted to sell that little piece of cran-b'ry swamp of theirs 'cause it didn't pay them to take care of it and keep it in shape. Prissy told Seth Wingate about it, and Seth said he didn't want it, but that he'd give them so and so—a fair price, consid'rin'. Well, they was goin' to sell it to Seth, but Ez comes home 'bout that time, hears of the deal and goes to Prissy and buys it for \$50 mor'n Seth offered. And inside of three months along comes that Ostable company and buys all that land for their big swamp. They say Titcomb made more'n a hundred dollars out of that deal. If you don't think that's a mean trick, Cap'n Eri, you ask Seth Wingate what he thinks of it."

"I know about that," said Captain Eri calmly, "and I think it was jest another case of Ez's takin' chances, that's all. Seth's growlin' is only sour grapes. Ez knew the Ostable folks was talkin' 'bout layin' out a big swamp over here some time or other. He jest bought the Allen piece and run his risk. You notice Prissy and Tempy ain't findin' no fault. They think he's the only man in town. Fact is, he is the only man, outside of the minister, that they'll have any dealin' with. Queer pairin' off that is—Ez and the minister!" he chuckled.

"Oh, women's fools, anyhow," snorted Captain Jabez savagely. "Ez Titcomb always could wind 'em 'round his fingers. He's been next door to keepin' company with more girls'n a few in this town since he was old enough to leave school, but he don't go fur enough to git engaged or nothin' like that. Minute there's any talk that he's likely to git married to one of 'em away goes Ez, and that's the end of that courtin'. And yet, spite of their talk 'bout his bein' slick and hints that he's tricky they're always havin' up to a feller, 'How smart Cap'n Titcomb is,' and 'Why don't you make money same as Cap'n Ezry?' 'Nough to make an honest man sick."

Captain Eri made his purchases and went home, but the others continued to dissect Ezra Titcomb's character, and the general opinion seemed to be that he would "bear watchin'."

Meanwhile the captain, unconscious of all this, piloted Bradley to the corner of the road upon which the Allen sisters lived, and there left him with a message to the effect that he (the captain) would call next day. Then he sought his room at the "Traveler's Rest," there to read the paper of the day before, while the boy, with his big bundle of old clothes and new "extras," walked homeward alone.

TO BE CONTINUED.]

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"Young gentlemen," lectured the eminent instructor, "you are old enough now to put away the childish and trivial amusements that sufficed for you when you were younger. Learn a lesson from the dumb brutes and even from the reptiles. When they arrive at maturity they comport themselves with a certain dignity."

"It isn't so with the rattlesnake, professor," objected the young man with the bad eye. "The older he grows the more rattles he plays with."—Chicago Tribune.

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