

# Partners of the Tide

By JOSEPH C. LINCOLN  
Author of "Cap'n Ed"

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## CHAPTER I.

**W**AS you callin' to buy one of them turnovers, bub?" casually inquired Mr. Clark, ceasing to gaze at his steaming boots, which were planted against the bulging center of the station stove, and turning toward the boy at the lunch counter.

"Yes, sir," said the boy. He had taken off one worn mitten and held a five cent piece clutched tightly in his red fist.

The station agent wrapped the pastry in a piece of newspaper and handed it to his customer.

The boy, a youngster of about twelve years of age, with a freckled face and a pair of bright gray eyes, took his "turnover" to the setting in the corner of the waiting room and began to eat.

He had on a worn cloth cap with an attachment that could be pulled down to cover the ears and a sturdy overcoat of man's size, very much too large for him.

As he munched the greasy crust and the thin layer of "evaporated" apple he looked around him with interest.

The station itself was like the average railway building on Cape Cod. Except for the sign "Harniss" that hung outside it might have been the station at Wellmouth, which he had seen so often.

Battered settees around the walls; lithographs of steamers, time tables and year old announcements of excursions and county fairs hung above them; big stove set in a box of sawdust—all these were the regulation fixtures.

Regulation also were the "refreshments" on the counter at the side—"turnovers" arranged in a row under a glass cover, with a dinky "Washington" pie under another cover and jars of striped stick candy, with boxes of "jaw-breakers" and similar sweets between.

It was snowing hard, and in the dusk of the winter evening the flakes rustled against the windows as if unseen old ladies in starched summer gowns were shivering in the storm and crowding to get a peep within.

The air in the shut waiting room smelled of hot stove, sawdust, wet clothing and Mr. Clark's cigar. To this collection of odors of kerosene as the station agent lit the big lamps in their brackets on the wall.

From outside came the sounds of creaking wheels and stamping horses, the stamping muffled by the snow which covered the ground.

The door opened, and a big man with a face of which gray whiskers and red nose were the most prominent features came stamping and puffing into the room. He jerked off a pair of leather gloves, plucked from them down Mr. Clark's neck inside his collar, tossed a long whip into the corner and, holding his spread fingers over the stove, began to sing "Whoa, Emma!" with enthusiasm.

asked: "When's the Nickerson boy comin' over from Wellmouth?"

"Why, today, come to think of it. He was to come up on the afternoon train from Wellmouth and go to Orham with me tonight. You ain't seen nothin'?"

The station agent interrupted him with a sidelong movement of the head. "Huh?" queried Mr. Small. Then he, in company with Mr. Clark and Mr. Bodkin, turned toward the corner of the waiting room.

The boy who had bought the apple "turnover," having finished the last crumb of that viand, had turned to the window and was looking out through a hole he had scraped in the frost on the pane. He had shaded his face with his hands to shut out the lamplight, and, though he must have heard the conversation, his manner betrayed no interest in it.

Mr. Small interrogated the station agent by raising his eyebrows. The agent whispered, "Shouldn't wonder," and added, "He came on the up train this afternoon."

"Hey, boy," said Mr. Clark, who never let consideration for other people interfere with his own curiosity, "what's your name?"

The boy turned from the window and, blinking a little as the light struck his eyes, faced the group by the stove. His freckled cheeks glistened as the light shone upon them; but, as if he knew this, he pulled the big sleeve of the overcoat across his face and rubbed them dry.

"What's your name, senny?" said the stage driver kindly.

"Nickerson," said the boy in a low tone.

"I want to know. Your first name ain't Bradley, is it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sho, well, there now! Guess you're goin' to ride over with me then. I drive the Orham coach. Hum, well, I declare!" And Mr. Small pulled his beard in an embarrassed fashion.

drawn by four sleepy horses, stood waiting.

Captain Titcomb followed, his overcoat flapping in the wind.

"Here, Barney," he observed, "have a cigar to smoke on the road. Have one. Dan? Here, Lon; here's a couple for you and Ike. Who's the little feller?" he added in a whisper to the station agent.

"Ben Nickerson's boy from Wellmouth. He's comin' down to Orham to live with the old maids. They've adopted him."

"The old maids? Not the old maids! Not Prissy and Tempy?"

"Yup. All right, Barney; I'm comin'."

The station agent hurried away to help the driver with the captain's sea chest, and its owner, apparently overcome with astonishment, climbed mutely into the coach, where his fellow passenger had preceded him.

The old vehicle rocked and groaned as the heavy chest was strapped on the racks behind. Then it tipped again as Mr. Small climbed clumsily to the driver's seat.

"All ashore that's goin' ashore!" shouted Mr. Small. "So long, Dan. Git dap, Two-forty!"

The whip cracked, the coach reeled on its springs, and the whole equipage disappeared in the snow and blackness.

The boy, Bradley Nickerson, had never ridden in a stagecoach before, and after ten or fifteen minutes of jolt and rattle he decided that he never wanted to ride in one again.

Suddenly Captain Titcomb, who had been silent so far, spoke.

"Heavy sea on tonight," he observed. "Pears to be Barney'd better take a reef. She's rollin'—considerable."

The boy laughed and said, "Yes, sir."

night, Miss Tempy. Snow's lettin' up a little mite. Guess 'twill be clear by mornin'.

The plump lady closed the door behind him just in time to shut out the opening notes of the "Sweet By and By." Then she dropped the book into the staple, wound the leather strap carefully about the wallet, placed the latter in a compartment of a tall chest of drawers in the corner, turned the key upon it and put the key under the alabaster candlestick on the mantel.

Then she turned to the boy, who, holding his carpet bag with both hands, still stood uneasily in front of him.

"Bradley," said the plump lady—she was dressed in some sort of black material that rustled and wore a lace collar, jet earrings and a breastpin with a braided lock of hair in the center of it.

"Bradley, we're real glad to see you. I'm Miss Priscilla; this is my sister, Miss Tempy."

"Yes, Bradley," concluded "Miss Tempy," "we're real glad to see you." She was the younger of the two and was gowned in what the boy learned later was her "brown poplin." Her hair was not worn plain, like her sister's, but had a little bunch of curls over each ear. She also wore a hair breastpin, but her earrings were gold.

Bradley shook the extended hands, Miss Prissy's red and dimpled and Miss Tempy's thin and white, with two old fashioned rings on the fingers.

"Won't you—won't you set down?" Bradley reluctantly obeyed, stepping gingerly across the spotted oilcloth and taking as long strides as possible. It did not add to his comfort to see Miss Tempy shake the melting snow into the center of the rope mat, fold the latter carefully together and disappear with it into the kitchen.

Miss Prissy piloted him to the chintz covered rocker by the big "airtight" stove. Then she proceeded to unlace the patched brogans, commenting in an undertone upon the condition of the stockings beneath.

"I'm 'fraid," said Bradley fearfully, "that I've got some snow water on your floor, ma'am."

"Don't tell me," commanded Miss Prissy. "Go right over to the stove this minute."

Bradley obediently obeyed, stepping gingerly across the spotted oilcloth and taking as long strides as possible. It did not add to his comfort to see Miss Tempy shake the melting snow into the center of the rope mat, fold the latter carefully together and disappear with it into the kitchen.

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cluding a spafier 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 tonight."

The effect of this announcement was remarkable. Miss Prissy looked at Miss Tempy, and the latter returned the look. Strange to say, both colored.

"Cap'n Titcomb?" faltered Miss Prissy. "Cap'n Ezra Titcomb?"

"Yes, ma'am. He talked to me 'most all the way. I liked him first rate."

"Why—why, I do declare! I didn't know the cap'n was expected, did you, Tempy?"

"No, I'm sure I didn't!" exclaimed the flustered younger sister. "Did he—did he tell you why he was comin', Bradley?"

"No, ma'am, but I heard him tell the man that drove the coach that he had shore leave for a week 'cause his schooner was laid up for repairs. He said he knew you, though, and that he was comin' round to see me tomorrow."

This remark caused quite as much embarrassment and agitation as that concerning the captain's presence in the coach. The two ladies again glanced hurriedly at each other.

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Miss Prissy. "And the settin' room not swept and the windows not washed! I'll have to get up early tomorrow mornin'! I'm so glad I fixed that ruffe on my alpaca," she added in an absent-minded soliloquy.

"And I must finish that tidy for the sofa," said Miss Tempy nervously. "I've only got a little more to do on it, thank goodness! Prissy, I'm goin' to put an iron on. I want to press my other collar. Did—the cap'n say anything more about me—us, I mean?"

"No, ma'am, he didn't," replied the boy. "He jest asked about me and told stories and talked."

Miss Tempy seemed a little disappointed and made no comment. Her sister, too, was silent. Presently Bradley yawned. He tried to hide it, but Miss Prissy, coming out of her trance, saw him.

"My sakes," she exclaimed, "what are we thinkin' of, keepin' you up this way? It's after 9 o'clock. Let me get the lamp. Tempy, you do up that soapstone for his feet."

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"What's your name, senny?"



Bradley shook the extended hands.

Boston with the vague idea that some time or other it might get to Provincetown, came coughing and panting round the curve and drew up at the station platform. Only one passenger got out at the Harniss station, and he, stopping for a moment to hand his trunk check to the station agent, walked briskly into the waiting room and slammed the door behind him.

"Hello!" he hailed, pulling off a buckskin glove and holding out a big hand to the stage driver. "Barney, how's she headin'?"

Wellmouth—gave me a sandwich at the depot 'fore I started, ma'am, and I bought a turnover at Harniss."

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