

SCUTTLED

By the

TITAN

CAPTAIN Robert McIntire of the Titan, the biggest mud-digging towboat in Boston harbor, jumped up from his berth in the pilot-house with a yell that could be heard across the stream.

"Hey, Pete!" he shouted, waving a morning paper about his head. "The northern liner Ionian's ashore in Scituate Shoal. Cap'n O'Hara drove her on last night in the fog. Remember O'Hara?"

"No," replied Pete, drowsily. "Let me sleep."

Bob reached over and gave his mate a hearty poke in the ribs. "You wake up! I want to talk to you."

Pete grunted, then sat up, rubbing his eyes.

"Look here, Pete, you must remember O'Hara! He's the fellow who lied so about us to the license board the time we poked the O'Brien into the ferry-boat. You remember that, I guess. Here, read that," and he handed Pete the paper, pointing to an article on the front page with his big forefinger.

Pete was wide awake in a second. He read the story slowly, spelling out the words with difficulty, then lit his pipe and smoked reflectively for a few minutes.

"Well," asked Bob, impatiently. "Can't you see a chance to square yards?"

"I'm-m-m, I see the game," Pete averred slowly. "But it'll be pretty rough off Scituate and a wet job, and O'Hara won't take no line from us if the maritime boats is around. And if he don't, or we smash up the Titan, ye'll lose your license and I'll lose me job."

"Who's talking about smashing up the Titan?" demanded Bob. "What about making a pot of money instead?"

"That's all right," his mate replied, "but you got to think of it! We might fool the cap'n, and if we did, the boss'd be tickled to death. Dunno but it's worth a try. The tang'll go. They're pretty well done up with work, but I guess they'll take a chance."

"Those maritime fellows are a lot of dubs anyway," declared Bob, "and they haven't a decent fast boat since the Jane Smith went to the war. We can get down to the shoal before they do anything; it's only 7 o'clock now. We've got all day."

The Titan had arrived in Boston harbor the night before, towing No. 2 Digger. All through the summer her digger had been working like dogs on a big job that had been promised by October, and as there was a big forfeit if the work was not completed on schedule time the whole outfit had been on the jump from morning till night, and sometimes all night, too. Now they were to help on widening Broad Sound, at which about all the dredging companies of the East had been put to work by the Government, and which bade fair to keep every one busy for the next year or two.

They had tied up at the dock, expecting to take the digger down the harbor at daylight. But the gale, before which they had rushed down the coast, had not yet entirely flattened out, and it was thought dangerous to anchor the digger so near the reefs, where the work was to be done. On this account the crew had been given a day's lay-off, which was just what they needed and which they were to spend in their bunks, turning in after breakfast.

The proposition to pull off the Ionian, however, put matters in another light, and, as Pete had declared, every one was in favor of trying. All of the men were well, for the most part, but the thought of the "bunche" they would get if successful outweighed all other considerations. If anything went wrong they would probably lose the job, but what's a dollar a day job when you balanced against a couple of hundred dollars salvage?

There were several reasons why Bob McIntire wanted to pull the Ionian off the shoal. In the first place, there was just enough uncertainty and danger about the job to appeal to him. He always liked to take chances and he knew no fear. In the second place, the project gave him a long-sought opportunity to make a grandstand play before his owners and get square with an enemy. He did not waste any time figuring out what would happen to him if he were unsuccessful or if he stoved up the Ionian, but he did know, and might well, what would be the result if he pulled her off.

After many years of plodding along as mate, "Bob" McIntire had got a big towboat, the Titan, from Black Bros., and things had gone along pretty smoothly. Once he came near plowing into another towboat, whose captain took more than his share of the channel, and once he just missed landing on a bad reef in the dark, but these "near wrecks," as he called them, really could not be counted against him.

"Joe" Black, the general manager of the company, had never forgotten the O'Brien episode, when "Bob" running one of the company's small tugs, had collided with a ferry boat and smashed things up generally. He did not like "Bob" and had given him the Titan under protest, and it was an open secret on the Ionian that he was soon to displace the young captain with an older and more experienced man.

"Bob" who was well aware of this, did not purpose losing his berth if he could help it. Long ago he had come to the conclusion that the only thing for him to do was to impress thoroughly upon his owners, and upon "Joe" Black in particular, that he was the smartest towboat captain in the harbor; in other words, he would make some great coup which would coin money for the company.

Although "Bob" had no idea how he was to accomplish this, he had long been watching for any opportunity that seemed promising. As he read the story in the paper it came to him in a flash that the Ionian, ashore on Scituate shoal, was the very opportunity.

If he could make the most of it he would not only win a big sum of money for his owners, for himself and for his crew, but he would make good in such a fashion that there would be an end of all talk of another captain for the Titan. And, incidentally, he felt that he could "put it all over" the man who, many years before, had been responsible for his loss of the O'Brien. "Worth a try? Well, I guess yes!" muttered "Bob."

"Goin' to phobe the officer?" "Pete" asked, as he supped. "Bob" stood in the pilot-house, waiting for the crew to cast off.

"No s-l-r-e-e!" replied "Bob" emphatically. "If we make a go of this they'll be so pleased that they'll never think of calling us down no asking permission, and if we don't, why, it's all off with us, anyway. Besides, if we call on them they might not let us go. The devil with 'em! We're owners today. Pete's owners as well as officers and crew! We're the whole thing! We're too busy to phone! We've got a man-sized job on our hands we have, and he laughed grimly as he signaled the engine-room to turn on his whistle preparatory to backing out from the wharf.

"Where ye bound, 'Bob'?" called Captain Jones of the Phantos, the other big tug of the company, as the Titan swung around and pointed for the lower bay. "Goin' to pull off the Ionian? I hear she's high and dry on Scituate Shoal!"

"Sure thing," replied "Bob" with a laugh.

"Good luck to ye." Then turning to his mate, Jones continued: "Darned if I don't believe he is. I know 'Bob' McIntire, and he's just the dare devil sort of a chap to try it. But he'll never do it! Fine boat he has now, but he'll lose her sure as shootin' if he goes off cruisin' by himself!"

Down in the bows of the Titan there was an air of excitement which the men, experienced though they were, could hardly suppress. "Bob" was a picked crew, tough to the nth degree. But hard, willing workers, ready to take any risk at any time and thoroughly reliable when asked. They knew that they were about to attempt a hard task, so they made their preparations carefully and conscientiously, as befitted men of parts. They overhauled the long hawsers, foot by foot, examined the shiny bits and put new stops on extra fenders. And as they worked they talked in low tones, discussing the probable outcome of the trip. These tough old seamen and deckhands gave little thought to the money that success would bring to their owners, but they did think with unconcealed joy of the many carousals that it would bring to them. "Bob" had told them what the portions would be and the mathematical of the crew had figured them all out with the stub of a pencil and an infinite amount of labor. They knew that even if they were lucky and pulled the steamer off it would be a long time before the matter could be settled and the money paid over, but, as old John Flynn remarked to his scowmate, "Bill" Maguire: "The drunk'll wait for us to collect it; there ain't no fear of the No. 1. End goin' dry for many years. And when it do come it'll be all the better for the wait." There was a philosopher among real mud diggers.

As the Titan poked her nose into the outer harbor and felt the breeze and the long swells rolling in from the bay, she bowed her head and courted politely. She knew them well, those swells, and pulled the steamer off in her steam box at her efforts to force her back and choke her draughts. "Not today," she murmured to herself, and steadily and good-naturedly she plugged along at a nine-knot clip. There were few vessels going out with the weather was as yet too unsettled. But every now and then a fisherman rushed by, covered with a cloud of canvas, lee rail awash, bound for what was reported a "fair sailing breeze" and an old acquaintance of Bob's, Captain Seymour, who stood with one hand on the wheel, the other gripping a huge corned beef sandwich. As his tidy nose went down into the hollow of a great sea, so close to the tug that you could have thrown a biscuit into her, he took his eye off the canvas and his teeth from the sandwich long enough to report a "fair sailing breeze" and a little lop outside—just "poung" for us, but a little too rough for harbor towboats"; all this with a series of winks and grins that spoke volumes for his sense of humor.

Through the main ship channel and down the coast, past Boston light, Nantasket, Mino's and the long line of deserted summer cottages, steadily steamed on the Titan.

Bob gave the wheel to Pete, who, glasses in hand, had climbed upon the pilot house, let out a yell.

"There's the Ionian!" he cried, and a whole bunch of tugs. Guess we're goin' late. One, two, three, five, seven, eight of 'em," he counted, "all lyin' 'bout half a mile inside."

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