

# Partners of the Tide

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

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### CHAPTER XVII.

It was close to daybreak when the partners separated. They had planned and figured and estimated, and each now knew what his part in the great fight was to be. As he was leaving Bradley asked the captain how, in his opinion, Obed Nickerson had learned that they had the contract.

"Phoned the Salvage company," replied Captain Ez decidedly. "I'll bet on it. You see, Brad, this job's a big one, and the salvage folks might have figured there was sugar enough in it to drop a lump in friend Obed's teacup providin' he stirred up their spoon. Well, good night, or good mornin', rather. It's double or quits with us this time, son. For sartin, but if Titcomb & Nickerson do go under I'll be with colors flyin'."

Within the week Setneck Point, from a lonely gull haunted sand pit, inhabited only by the life saving crew and the lighthouse keeper and his family, became a small town, the population of which left each morning for the labor-back shore and returned at night to eat and sleep in the big shanty and those surrounding it.

Captain Titcomb saw the people at the Wellmouth bank and placed a mortgage on the Diving Belle. As the partners owned her free and clear, he was able to get her cost price, \$5,000.

Placards announcing that men were wanted at once and at \$3 a day and board were hung in the postoffices and railway stations in Orham, South Orham, West Harniss, Harniss Center, Wellmouth and other towns; also an advertisement appeared in the Item. The response was immediate. Work at good wages was scarce in the winter months, and men came from twenty miles away to obtain it.

The Diving Belle carried them down to the Point. There, under Barney Small's supervision, some set to work building extra buoys in the big shanty, slinging hammocks, putting up stoves—the partners bought five secondhand ranges—and fixing three neighboring abandoned fishing huts into habitable dwellings. The rest worked over the stranded coal barges, getting out the anchors, stripping her of all unnecessary ironwork and rigging and preparing to bring the coal from her hold and dump it overboard.

Security men were hired altogether, and to feed them it was necessary to buy large quantities of provisions. Captain Titcomb managed this part of the business, and the bargains he made with Caleb Weeks and other storekeepers were wonderful and in some cases not profitable for the sellers.

As Mr. Weeks said: "Ez Titcomb spent half the forenoon with me today, and afore he got through talkin' he'd tangled me up so with riggers that I don't know whether I sold him salt at a cent a pound or cornmeal at a dollar a barrel. I'll have to put in the rest of the day eatin' and addin' up, so's to know whether I've made money or lost it."

Soon the work on the Freedom was in full swing, and the great hull hummed like a beehive. Men were standing by the hatches and by the derricks. Men were working by the rail transferring ropes and ironwork to the Diving Belle. In the hold gales of men with faces sooty black except where the sweat streaked them with pallid channels were shoveling the coal into the big iron buckets that the creaking derricks lifted and swung over the side. The donkey engines puffed and whistled, the chains rattled, and ton after ton of good hard coal roared from the opening buckets and splashed into the tumbling waves of the channel.

The captain and Bradley, together for a moment, stood in the bows, where the heavy cable led, taut and rigid, from the windlass out to the submerged anchors. The Freedom had moved slightly in the last few days, and the partners were encouraged.

"By crimus, Brad," exclaimed Captain Titcomb, pointing with a grin on his grimy face, to the stout little Diving Belle just then shooting off to the Point with a load of strippings from the Freedom. "That's the little critter that has made it possible for us to handle this job. I don't know what we'd do for me or for you either, Brad."

They separated to plunge again into their work. But Bradley's hint about the dynamite still troubled Captain Titcomb's conscience. When the Diving Belle came back from her next trip to the beach he hailed Peleg and called him to him, said:

"the Diving Belle's hold. Captain Titcomb had promised to see that it was taken ashore, but he always forgot it. Bradley would himself have attended to the matter, but the captain seemed to take the offer as a personal reflection on his own management. It was the same with the insurance. Anything that the captain undertook to do he hated to give up to another."

"Don't you want me to attend to that dynamite?" asked the junior partner.

"No, no. I'll tend to it myself. Told you I would, didn't I?"

Bradley saw that it was time to change the subject. He looked across the ocean to the horizon. The air was clear and cold and the November sun

lay upon the water with a steely metallic glitter that had no warmth in it.

"Wind to the south'ard," he observed, "and seems likely to hold that way. If it only holds fair long enough we'll win out yet."

"Where's that special weather bureau of ours?" asked the captain.

"Ain't had a prophecy for two days or more," he stepped to the hatchway.

"Hi, Peleg," he shouted. "Peleg Myrick, ahoy!"

A distant voice from the hold replied that Peleg was aboard the Diving Belle.

"That's so," said Captain Titcomb. "So he is. Well, we'll see him later."

When the schooner again ran alongside the barge, Mr. Myrick was summoned and embarked on board. The weather prophet had coal dust in his nostrils, in his mouth and in decorative smudges on his cheeks. As for his whiskers, the red and gray had disappeared; they were now a solid black.

"Peleg," observed the captain, "does Skeezicks know you when you get home nowadays?"

"Know me?" repeated the astonished owner of the dog that was just like a human. "Know me! Course he does."

"Well, I didn't know. You look so much like a cross between a dandy and a Kickapoo Sagwa peddler in my own mind that I shouldn't think your mother'd know you, let alone a dog."

Mr. Myrick pondered. "Well, you see," he replied slowly, "mother, she's been dead for a considerable spell, and Skeezicks ain't, I see. That's the best reason I know of. Say, how about gales? Got any marked on the calendar?"

The prophet's dreamy gaze wandered mournfully to the sky.

"No," he drawled; "I don't callate there'll be a storm for the next week. After that—well, I don't know. I've been havin' a feelin' that the weather'd shift, but p'raps 'twon't. Still, I'm kind of sear'd-kind of sear'd of the week after next."

Captain Titcomb looked troubled.

"Thunder!" he muttered. "I swan I hope that ain't so!"

Bradley looked at him in puzzled surprise.

"Now, honest, Cap'n Ez," he exclaimed, "you aren't worried because that half baked chap says—here, Peleg! Come back here a minute! Say, how do you get your tips on the weather?"

Mr. Myrick hesitated and looked troubled. "Waal," he replied, "I—I— you see, I don't g'n'rally tell that, cause folks laugh at me; but, bein' as you're my boss, I s'pose I ought to tell you a little. You see, I jest sort of feel it in my bones."

"Any particular bones?"

"Why, my laig bones mostly. If a no'theater's comin', my right laig sort of aches, and if it's a sou'easter it'll fetch me in the left one. Then there's other."

Bradley interrupted him by a roar of laughter. The prophet looked hurt.

"There!" he sighed. "I knew you'd laugh."

"All right, Peleg; trot along. There, Cap'n Ez, does that satisfy you?"

The captain laughed, too, but he shook his head.

"I don't know," he replied. "Them leg bones of Peleg's seem to have been pretty good barometers afore now. Well, what is to be will be, as the fellow with dyspepsia had when he tackled the mince pie. My, this won't do for me or for you either, Brad!"

They separated to plunge again into their work. But Bradley's hint about the dynamite still troubled Captain Titcomb's conscience. When the Diving Belle came back from her next trip to the beach he hailed Peleg and called him to him, said:

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"Peleg, I've got a job for you. I want you to get out that dynamite



we've got in the hold for'ard and take it ashore some'eres."

Now, that dynamite was Mr. Myrick's particular dream. He was more afraid of it than he was of anything else on earth. The captain knew this, and that was why he always selected Peleg to bring up a stick of the stuff when the latter was needed. "It's the scared man that's always careful," said the skipper. "Peleg hangs to them sticks like a sucker to a barn door. He won't drop 'em unless his knee jints rattle loose altogether from nervousness."

When the weather prophet heard the captain's order the visible parts of his countenance turned white.

"Oh, my soul and body!" he gasped. "You don't want me to tech them pesky things, do you, Cap'n Ez? Git somebody else, do!"

"No," replied the skipper gravely. "I wouldn't trust nobody else. Tumble 'em out!"

"Tumble 'em out! Don't talk in that careless kind of way, Cap'n Ez. What'll I do with 'em?"

"Oh, dig a hole and bury 'em; put 'em under your bunk in the shanty; feed 'em to Skeezicks, only git 'em out of the schooner some time pretty soon!"

"Will—will Sunday do?"

"Yes, yes! Whenever you have the time, Hi, Sam Hammond! What are you settin' there for? Git back to your engine."

Mr. Hammond was still with them, although his usefulness as a diver was gone owing to the temporary abandonment of the tar venture. But because they anticipated returning to this work if the Freedom should be floated he was retained at his old wages and was now running as a laborer with which he was more or less familiar, although he considered it beneath him and shirked whenever he could.

This shirking irritated Captain Titcomb.

"Consarn him!" he growled. "Let him either fish or cut bait, one or t'other. If he's too good for the job, why, then, the job's too good for him. If I had my way we'd come to a settlement in about 'a' shake."

The majority of the men hired by the partners were intensely loyal and thoroughly optimistic. They knew the circumstances under which the contract had been taken and would not consider the possibility of failure for a moment. But Hammond was the head of a little coterie of pessimists, among whom were Henry Simmons and a few others from Orham and Lon Clark and Bobkin from Harniss. These croakers sneered at Cap'n Ez's when his back was turned and pretended to pity Bradley. When the pay envelopes were distributed they congratulated themselves loudly and wondered if this time was the last.

Bradley was aware of all this, because Barney told him, but he would not permit his partner to call Hammond to account. Sam should not have the opportunity of telling Gus that he was the victim of persecution by a headstrong man, let alone a dog.

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"Peleg, I've got a job for you. I want you to get out that dynamite

another contract where the risk is as big as this. Now, good night, and, to please me, be sure you don't worry any more."

As he was leaving the room Miss Tempy said timidly: "Bradley, you don't go to prayer meetin' any more. Prissy and me pray for you every night. I hope you won't let your business crowd out your religion."

Bradley shook his head, answered hurriedly that he was working hard nowadays and was tired and went up to his room. The last time he had been to prayer meeting Gus went with him. He had no wish to go there now and perhaps see her in Sam's company.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT that very moment Mr. Hammond, seated on the fence by the vestry door, was puffing at a cigar and talking in an unusually loud voice of New York and his experiences there. He seemed to be very happy, and his boisterous laughter penetrated even to the little company of worshippers on the settees inside.

When the meeting was over he threw away the stump of his cigar and shouldered himself into the front row of waiting swains by the door. As Gus came out he stepped forward to meet her and in doing so looking the other way, had not seen him, and, being deaf, had not heard his step.

"Gracious sakes alive!" exclaimed the old lady, rubbing her shoulder. "Excuse me, Mr. Hammond. I didn't see you."

Sam nodded serenely. "Don't mention it," he shouted, winking over his shoulder at Georgiana Bailey. "You didn't hurt me a bit."

Georgiana giggled, and most of the young men grinned at the joke. Gus glanced hurriedly at Mrs. Piper and then at Hammond. She looked surprised and troubled.

Sam took her arm without asking permission and led her to the sidewalk. She still looked back.

"I'm afraid you hurt Mrs. Piper," she said. "What made you so rough?"

Her escort laughed. "I guess it won't be fatal," he observed. "If I'd managed to fracture that voice of hers she couldn't sing, maybe the congregation would give me a vote of thanks."

Gus didn't reply. There was something in her companion's manner that made her recoil instinctively. She disengaged her arm from his, but he took it again and walked on, joking and laughing.

"What a crowd of jays there is in this town," he remarked after awhile, with a sneer—"enough to stock a dime museum."

He had always spoken patronizingly of the townspeople; that she had not minded so much, coming from a city man, but herefore he had not openly made fun of them. She resented the remark, but most of all the tone in which it was uttered.

"Why do you stay here, then?" she asked coldly.

"Why? I guess you know the reason all right. Don't you, Gus? Heey?"

He chuckled and bent down to look in her face. She shivered and drew away from him.

His hand upon her arm, the look he had just given her, his air of assumed proprietorship, something in his manner, as if the real soul of the man was showing for the first time—filled her with disgust.

She did not speak again until they reached the gate. Then she said, without looking at him, "Good night."

He put his hand over hers on the latch. "Oh, say," he exclaimed, with a laugh, "this isn't a square deal, Gus. Aren't you goin' to ask me in?"

She tried to snatch her hand away, but he held it fast and, leaning across the gate, threw his arm about her waist and drew her toward him.

"There!" he cried exultantly. "This is more like it. Give us a kiss. You're too high and mighty to be the prettiest girl on the Cape."

She struggled from his grasp and stood panting. "Oh," she whispered, with a shudder, as she realized the truth—"oh, you've been drinking!"

He laughed foolishly and shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, what's one glass between friends?" he said. "I stopped into Web's a minute, and he set 'em up. First drink I've had since I left New York. Thought you was too sensible to have blue ribbon notions. Come; be more sociable, that's a good girl."

She was afraid of him now—not afraid of physical violence, but as she would have feared the contact with something loathsome and unclear. A sense of utter loneliness came over her. She longed for protection and help. She thought of Bradley. He would have helped her. She could have trusted him. But she had driven him out of her life, and this fellow—

"Go!" he cried. "Go!"

Gus ceased to smile. Other girls had told him to go, but never in that way or with such quivering scorn. He began to realize that this was the end of his game. He had lost the prize. But he made one more effort.

"Oh, say," he cried, "don't get mad, Gus. I was only fooling. Don't be such an old maid. Come here."

She turned on her heel and, without replying, walked toward the house. Hammond swore between his teeth, opened the gate, took one step in the direction and then stopped. He laughed a short, ugly laugh and nodded.

"You mean it, do you? he asked. "Want me to clear you, hey? Well, don't you fool yourself that I don't know what all you. You can't come the highest moral game on my lady. You're whining after that sneaking Sunday school kid, Brad Nickerson, the fellow that didn't care enough about you to lift his hand, but stood still and let me walk off with his girl as if she was as common as dish-water. The whole town thinks you're going to marry me. What'll they say when I show 'em I'm done with you?" He laughed again and put his hands in his pockets.

"I'm going," he said. "I'm going all right. You go to bed and dream about Brad. Dreams come true sometimes, they say. Maybe I'll dream about him too."

He pulled his hat over his eyes and walked rapidly away. Gus watched him go. Then she went into the house, threw herself into a chair beside the table and laid her head upon her arms.

Sam plunged straight on through the mud and wet grass until he reached the back door of the billiard room. Web Saunders came hurrying to see who it was that had knocked; only the tried and true were admitted at that door.

"Hello, Sam!" he exclaimed, with a look of relief. "Why, what's the matter?"

"Nothing," replied Hammond gruffly. "Where's that jug of yours, Web? I'm dying for another drink."

After cautioning his visitor against speaking so loud Mr. Saunders indicated the whereabouts of the jug. Sam poured out a liberal dose of the villainous cheap whiskey and drank it forthwith. Then he poured out another.

He refused to go home that night, and Web put him to bed upon one of the settees in the little back room. And in that back room he stayed throughout the next day, drinking frequently, in spite of his friend's protests, and growing more ugly with every drink.

That next day, Friday, was wet and foggy, with occasional cold showers, but there was no wind worth men-

tioning, and the wreckers put in ten hours of the hardest kind of work. The Freedom had moved perceptibly in the sweep of the latest tides, and the partners were happy in consequence.

It was dark, though a few stars were showing dimly through the mist overhead when the Diving Belle entered Orham harbor that evening. Alvin Bearse was at the helm, and he brought the schooner alongside the wharf. A half dozen men, the only members of the wrecking gang who returned to Orham at the end of the day's work, climbed over the stropplage and departed for their homes in the village. Bearse remained on board when the vessel ran out to her moorings to help his employers make snug for the night.

A few minutes later Bradley stood by the cabin door with a lantern in his hand. Alvin and the captain were forward. Suddenly the junior partner was aware that some one was standing beside him.

"Well, Cap'n Ez," he observed, "all ready to go ashore?"

There was no answer. He looked up into the face of Sam Hammond. The diver wore no overcoat. His stiff hat, battered and muddy, was pushed back on his head. His face under the tumbled, damp hair on the forehead was flushed and scowling, and his half shut eyes had an ugly glimmer. Even in the dim light of the lantern his condition was unmistakable.

Hammond's behavior in his native village had heretofore been of the best so far as this particular vice was concerned. Bradley was dumfounded.

"Hello, Sam!" he exclaimed. "Where'd you come from?"

"Off the wharf," was the gruff answer. "Where'd you think, you fool?"

It was evident that the fellow was spoiling for a fight. Bradley, however, had no wish to quarrel with a drunken man, especially this one.

"All right, all right," he said meekly; "I didn't see you come aboard; that's all. Want to see Cap'n Ez?"

"No, I don't want to see Cap'n Ez nor any other longshore thief but you. I want to go below and get my things."

"Your things?"

"Yes, my things—my oilskins and the rest of my stuff. I wouldn't leave 'em aboard this rotten tub another minute for a million dollars."

"Oh, very well," Bradley started to open the cabin door and swung to lead the way with the lantern. Hammond shoved him aside.

"I'll go alone," he muttered.

"You can't see without the lantern. You'll have to go with me or wait till tomorrow morning."

"Give me that lantern," snarled Sam, making a grab for it.

Bradley held it out of reach.

"You're not fit to carry it," he said shortly.

"You mean, mouthed sneak!" shouted Hammond. "I'm fit to fix you."

Bradley saw the blow coming. He dropped the lantern and ducked. Next instant Sam was upon him, screaming and cursing. They tripped over the swinging door and fell to the deck. Alvin and Captain Titcomb came running from the fore-cabin.

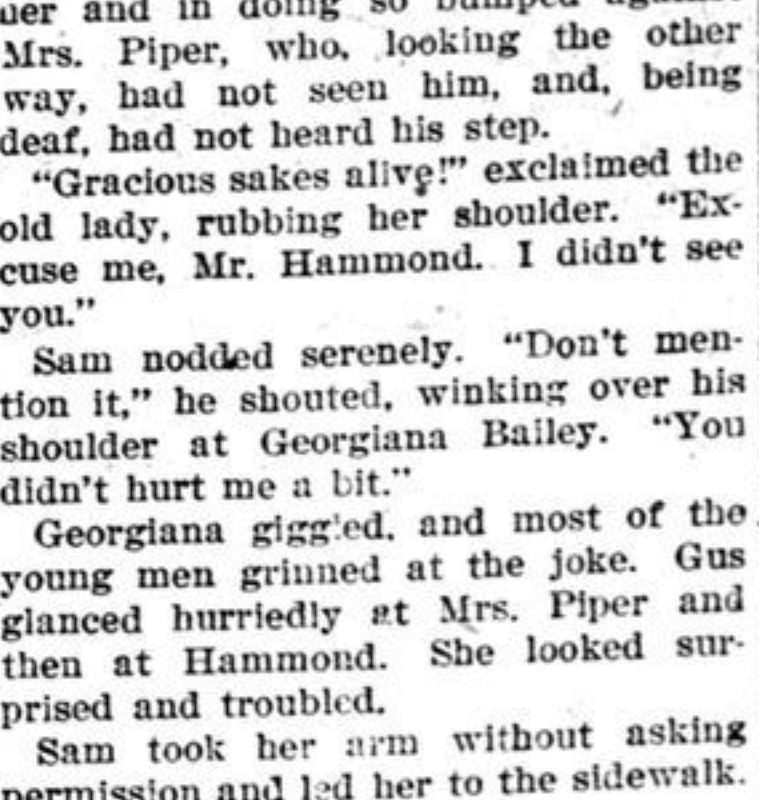
"What in the nation?" cried the captain. "Here, quit that you! Let him alone, Brad!"

Hammond yelled and fought as they dragged him to his feet. Finally, overpowered, he sobbed in maddening fury.

"There, that'll do for you," observed the captain, clapping a big hand over his prisoner's mouth. "Crazy tight, ain't he? Hold still, or by the everlastin' bookblocks, I'll leave you overboard! Where'd he come from?"

"Must have come aboard when we stopped at the wharf," replied Bradley. "He was dead set on taking the lantern and going below after his oilskins and stuff."

"Sooner trust a blind cripple with a lantern. Check his damage ashore tomorrow mornin'. Now, then," turning to Hammond, "will you walk to the dory or shall we carry you? Shut up! You've gussed enough."



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"Go!" he cried. "Go!"

Gus ceased to smile. Other girls had told him to go, but never in that way or with such quivering scorn. He began to realize that this was the end of his game. He had lost the prize. But he made one more effort.

"Oh, say," he cried, "don't get mad, Gus. I was only fooling. Don't be such an old maid. Come here."

She turned on her heel and, without replying, walked toward the house. Hammond swore between his teeth, opened the gate, took one step in the direction and then stopped. He laughed a short, ugly laugh and nodded.

"You mean it, do you? he asked. "Want me to clear you, hey? Well, don't you fool yourself that I don't know what all you. You can't come the highest moral game on my lady. You're whining after that sneaking Sunday school kid, Brad Nickerson, the fellow that didn't care enough about you to lift his hand, but stood still and let me walk off with his girl as if she was as common as dish-water. The whole town thinks you're going to marry me. What'll they say when I show 'em I'm done with you?" He laughed again and put his hands in his pockets.

"I'm going," he said. "I'm going all right. You go to bed and dream about Brad. Dreams come true sometimes, they say. Maybe I'll dream about him too."

ing Belle came back from her next trip to the beach he hailed Peleg and called him to him, said:

"Peleg, I've got a job for you. I want you to get out that dynamite

another contract where the risk is as big as this. Now, good night, and, to please me, be sure you don't worry any more."

As he was leaving the room Miss Tempy said timidly: "Bradley, you don't go to prayer meetin' any more. Prissy and me pray for you every night. I hope you won't let your business crowd out your religion."

Bradley shook his head, answered hurriedly that he was working hard nowadays and was tired and went up to his room. The last time he had been to prayer meeting Gus went with him. He had no wish to go there now and perhaps see her in Sam's company.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT that very moment Mr. Hammond, seated on the fence by the vestry door, was puffing at a cigar and talking in an unusually loud voice of New York and his experiences there. He seemed to be very happy, and his boisterous laughter penetrated even to the little company of worshippers on the settees inside.

When the meeting was over he threw away the stump of his cigar and shouldered himself into the front row of waiting swains by the door. As Gus came out he stepped forward to meet her and in doing so looking the other way, had not seen him, and, being deaf, had not heard his step.

"Gracious sakes alive!" exclaimed the old lady, rubbing her shoulder. "Excuse me, Mr. Hammond. I didn't see you."

Sam nodded serenely. "Don't mention it," he shouted, winking over his shoulder at Georgiana Bailey. "You didn't hurt me a bit."

Georgiana giggled, and most of the young men grinned at the joke. Gus glanced hurriedly at Mrs. Piper and then at Hammond. She looked surprised and troubled.

Sam took her arm without asking permission and led her to the sidewalk. She still looked back.

"I'm afraid you hurt Mrs. Piper," she said. "What made you so rough?"

Her escort laughed. "I guess it won't be fatal," he observed. "If I'd managed to fracture that voice of hers she couldn't sing, maybe the congregation would give me a vote of thanks."

Gus didn't reply. There was something in her companion's manner that made her recoil instinctively. She disengaged her arm from his, but he took it again and walked on, joking and laughing.

"What a crowd of jays there is in this town," he remarked after awhile, with a sneer—"enough to stock a dime museum."

He had always spoken patronizingly of the townspeople; that she had not minded so much, coming from a city man, but herefore he had not openly made fun of them. She resented the remark, but most of all the tone in which it was uttered.

"Why do you stay here, then?" she asked coldly.

"Why? I guess you know the reason all right. Don't you, Gus? Heey?"

He chuckled and bent down to look in her face. She shivered and drew away from him.

His hand upon her arm, the look he had just given her, his air of assumed proprietorship, something in his manner, as if the real soul of the man was showing for the first time—filled her with disgust.

She did not speak again until they reached the gate. Then she said, without looking at him, "Good night."

He put his hand over hers on the latch. "Oh, say," he exclaimed, with a laugh, "this isn't a square deal, Gus. Aren't you goin' to ask me in?"

She tried to snatch her hand away, but he held it fast and, leaning across the gate, threw his arm about her waist and drew her toward him.

"There!" he cried exultantly. "This is more like it. Give us a kiss. You're too high and mighty to be the prettiest girl on the Cape."

She struggled from his grasp and stood panting. "Oh," she whispered, with a shudder, as she realized the truth—"oh, you've been drinking!"

He laughed foolishly and shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, what's one glass between friends?" he said. "I stopped into Web's a minute, and he set 'em up. First drink I've had since I left New York. Thought you was too sensible to have blue ribbon notions. Come; be more sociable, that's a good girl."

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