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THE STORY

PROLOGUE.—While despondent over the enforced hiding of her fiance, Jim Dallas, slayer in self-defense of Homer Parkinson, member of an influential family, Sybil Saunders, popular actress, is engaged to play Viola in a charity performance of "Twelfth Night" on Gull Island, on the Maine coast. In the company are Sybil's bosom friend, Anne Tracy; Anne's brother Joe, young wastrel; and Aleck Stokes, an actor infatuated with Sybil.

CHAPTER I.—After the play, which is a big hit, Wally Shine, official photographer, learns something of the jealousy, professional and otherwise, existing in the company.

CHAPTER II.—Hugh Bassett, director of the play, and Anne Tracy's fiance, tells Joe he has heard he is spying on Sybil in an effort to learn the whereabouts of Jim Dallas and earn the reward offered by the Parkinson family. The boy's denial is not convincing.

CHAPTER III.—Joe Tracy is arranging for a vacation trip. To Anne he betrays his enmity toward Sybil. Stokes tells Sybil he has news of Jim Dallas, and to secure the necessary privacy they arrange to meet in a small summer house near the main building.

CHAPTER IV.—The sound of a pistol shot startles the assembled company. Investigation shows a revolver has been taken from a desk in the library. Flora, Stokes' wife, bursts in with the announcement that Sybil has been shot and her body carried off by the swift tide that races by the island.

CHAPTER V

THE moon had risen and hung on the edge of the sky like a great disk of white paper. Anne saw the others running this way and that along the edge of the Point. A boat was pushing out from the dock, Stokes in it, and, caught by the current, it shot down the gleaming surface of the channel. There were cries in men's voices and Stokes' answer, bell-clear, from the water. Then Shine ran by her, back to the house, grim-visaged, with staring eyes.

She ran on through the pine wood up the path beyond. Mrs. Cornell met her, tried to speak with chattering teeth, but ended in a scream and fell upon her shoulder. Over her head Anne saw Bassett flying down the slope to the wharf. Then presently boats moving out from Hayworth. They sped back and forth, up and down, swift black shapes that seemed to be executing some complicated maneuvers along the glittering track of moonlight. She was aware of Bassett's figure leaving the wharf and racing to the house, of Shine thudding by and calling:

"They're here already! I got some one on the wire and I told him to go like hell."

Miss Pinkney's voice answered him from the edge of the Point, where she stood like a black basalt statue:

"Oh, they're here, all right. Every feller that has a boat's out. But it's no use; no one who's ever got caught in that current's been found."

Shine muttered an invocation and came to a stop. They all stood speechless staring at the boats—the boats looking for Sybil who half an hour ago was alive like themselves and now was—where?

As soon as he saw the fleet in operation Bassett ran to the house. He had to find Flora and get fuller information from her before he called up the police, and not seeing her outside, he supposed she was still there. The great room was almost dark. He felt for one of the standard lamps and pulled the string. The gush of light fell directly over her, close to him, sunk in an armchair, as still as if she, too, had ceased to live. He had expected difficulties in getting a coherent statement from her, but she told him what she had seen, briefly and clearly, as if she had known he was coming and was ready for him.

She had skirted the island and come to that part of the path which faced the point. A hollow intervened, extending to the water's edge in a mass of shelving rock. Across this hollow she saw Sybil appear on the end of the Point, coming up from the opposite side, and almost immediately heard the shot. Sybil had thrown up her arms, staggered forward, and gone over the bluff. It all happened in a flash and Flora, though describing herself as dazed, had run down the path into the hollow and out on the rocks, thinking she could catch her. But she saw the body go swirling by—far out of her reach, caught and borne along in the current. She had watched it, stunned, then had come to her senses and staggered back to the shore—and ran to the house. On the way there she had seen no one and heard nothing.

Bassett left her and went to the library to call up Forestville, the county seat. It was the starting point for hunting parties to New Brunswick, and Bassett, a sportsman in his leisure hours, had stayed there several times assembling his guides and gear. On his last trip, two years ago, trouble with a guide had brought him in contact with the sheriff, Abel Williams. Over legal wrangling they had struck up a friendship, and he remembered Williams as a man of some capacity, straight and fair-minded. If he was still in office it would simplify matters; to start out with confidence in the director would be a vital gain. He waited, the receiver against his ear, a foot drumming on the carpet, then a deep and growling voice hummed along the wire. It was Abel Williams.

Williams would be down as soon as he could, with Mr. Rawson, the district attorney—an hour and a half or two hours, the roads being bad. The shore people had been told it was an accident—that's all right, couldn't hold an inquest anyway without a body, and it was a good thing to keep 'em off. Better not let anything come out till they had got the situation in hand— easy to fix at that end, as the United American Press man was off fishing. They'd do a good deal better if the press was held off for a spell. Seeing where the island was and that there was no one on it but their own crowd, it would be possible to keep things out of the public eye till they had the work well started.

Bassett looked at his watch—nearly eight—probably two hours to wait. The best thing he could do was to get them together and keep them as quiet as he could. As he went down the path his mind collected and marshaled in order the facts he would have to present. They had all been in the house except Stokes on the balcony and Flora walking round the island. Stokes eaten into by a hopeless love, Flora on fire with jealousy and hate—passions that make for murder. "God, what's going to be the end of this?" he groaned to himself.

He found them in a group near the pine grove, excitedly conferring together. Stokes had just returned with the electric torch and they were preparing to search the ground for footprints. Bassett brought their activities to an end and shepherded them to the house. With dragging feet and lowered heads they trailed up the path and filed into the living room.

Here, under the radiance of the lights, they looked at one another as if expecting to see startling changes, and fell groaning into chairs, or sat, stiff and upright, with rigid muscles. Bassett had told them when the authorities might be expected, and as the hour drew near, dread of the drama in which they found themselves stilled their tongues. The sea breeze freighted with the acrid odors of uncovered mud and seaweed, blew through the room. Bassett rose and closed the garden door, and eyes shifted to him, hung on his hand as it slid the bolt.

He crossed to where Anne was sitting by the entrance. She had her back to the room and was looking out at the lights of Hayworth dotting the shore. He stood behind her chair and put his hand on her shoulder. Her fingers stole up and rested on his, icy cold. He bent till his head was close to hers and whispered:

"Bear up. Thank God this can't touch you in any way."

Her fingers pressed an answer but she said nothing.

Shine came toward them. "Those fellers were lucky who got off this afternoon. I might have gone with them if I'd had the sense."

Anne answered this time:

"Yes, they were more fortunate than we are."

Mrs. Cornell, between sobs, spoke up:

"But even if we were here they can't suspect us. We've got alibis, we're all accounted for. We were all in—"

She realized where she was going and stopped. There was a portentous silence. Shine almost shouted, pointing out at the channel:

"The tide's falling fast. They can't get into the dock here. How will they make a landing?"

Bassett answered:

"In a cove at the upper end of the island. They've a dock there for low water. They have to make a detour, that's all."

Flora, who had been sitting with her hand over her eyes, dropped it and sat erect. Her breath came from her in a loud exhalation that was almost a groan. Every pair of eyes shifted to her, watchful, questioning, apprehensive.

"Do you feel ill, Flora?" said Bassett, moving to her side.

"No—no," she looked wildly about. "But this waiting—it's so awful."

Miss Pinkney suggested a glass of water, but Flora waved a hand as if pushing it away. Stokes rose and moved to a seat beside her.

"They'll be here soon, now."

She sank back and closed her eyes. Her husband bent a somber, sidewise look toward her, then laid his hand on one of hers. Her own turned and the thin fingers twined like clinging roses about his.

"It won't be hard," he reassured. "Just give them a clear account of what you saw."

She waved the other hand in front of her face, like a person in unendurable pain, who makes a vague distracted gesture for silence.

Anne spoke from the door:

"There's a light moving out from the shore."

The statement shook them. There was a simultaneous stir of feet and bodies, a heave of labored breaths.

Bassett went to the entrance. "Yes—that's a launch. They're coming. I must go to meet them."

He looked over the company, the haggard faces all turned toward him. Some of them wore an expression of yearning appeal as if he was their only source of strength in this devastating hour.

"Now, remember, there's nothing to get scared or rattled about. They'll ask you questions, and what you must do is to answer them accurately—not what you think or imagine but what you know. Keep that in the front of your minds. The clearer you are in your statements the quicker you'll get through. And please stay here, just as you are. They'll probably want to see you right off."

A benumbed silence followed his departure. Anne moved from the door to a chair nearer the others. Stokes withdrew his hand from Flora's and straightened himself, jerking down his waistcoat and craning his neck up from his collar. The low rippling murmurs of the receding tide were singularly distinct. Suddenly the shrill whistle of a launch pierced the night outside. Mrs. Cornell leaped as if the sound had been a weapon that had stabbed her.

"Oh!" she cried, "why do they do that? Isn't Sybil being murdered enough to stand?"

"For God's sake, keep your mouth shut," Stokes flung at her, glaring.

The savage quality in his voice penetrated Mrs. Cornell's encasing terrors. She shrank and slid the look of a frightened animal at Shine. Then the silence settled and they sat like those who have looked upon the head of Medusa.

Bassett on the wharf in the cove watched the launch approaching over the glistening floor of water. As it grated against the boards he heard his name in a deep-throated bass voice, and the big body of the sheriff climbed over the side. A rough padded hand grasped his, and, "Well, Mr. Bassett, the law's got us together again," was growled into his ear.

Two more figures followed him. One was Rawson, the district attorney, whom the vivid light revealed as a man much younger than Williams, tall and narrow-shouldered, with a lean New England visage and a pair of horn spectacles astride a high-bridged nose. The other was disposed of with a casual hand-wave and a murmur of "Patrick," brought, it was explained, to take charge of the causeway. Rawson, it appeared, knew Gull Island well, having been there several times on legal business for Mr. Driscoll.

As they walked back Bassett told his story. He noticed that the younger man's questions were sharp and to the point, and before they had gone half way he realized that Rawson was of a much higher grade of education and intelligence than his coadjutor. A smart chap, he thought, and felt his burden lightened — they could do good teamwork.

Williams observed, with a grim relish:

"You couldn't have a murder committed in a better place than this—better for us. Once you're on here it's a d—d hard business getting off. These folks are as good as in prison. Now, Mr. Bassett, just where does that causeway lie?"

The channel stretched before them, a shining expanse, ripple-creased, summits of rock emerging. The receding water was like a silver veil being slowly withdrawn, its delicate tissue torn by sharp-edged projections. Bassett pointed beyond the wharf.

"There! Below the water there are steps cut in the rock that lead

(Continued on Page Seven)

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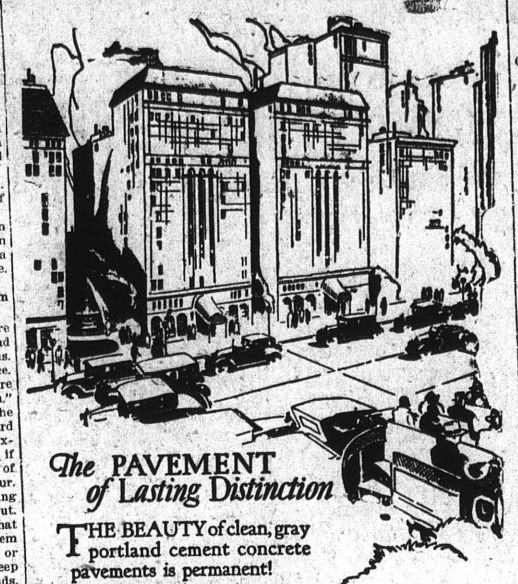

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