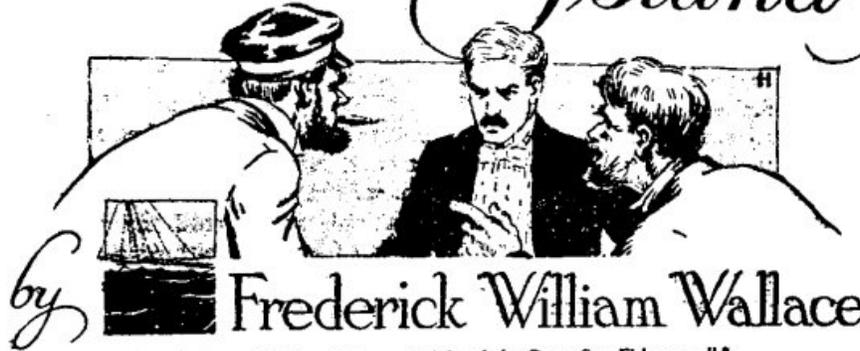


Off Decker's Island



Frederick William Wallace
Author of "Blue Water—A Tale of the Deep Sea Fishermen."*

MR. CLARENCE DE HOUTEN, member of an aristocratic New England family, showed evidences of being worried.

As a Newport social light, a dilettante, club-man and a member of the idle rich, Mr. De Houten was outraging all the ethics of his "set" by allowing carking care to furrow his patrician brow. However, anxiety is not the prerogative of the working class, and De Houten had every right to wear the rueful countenance.

When a man is married to an expensive wife who prefers buying her gowns in Paris to shopping on Fifth Avenue; when the said encumbrance is touring Europe with a daily flood of unpaid bills informing her husband of her whereabouts. And hubby has a number of unpaid obligations of his own coming to roost, there is no occasion for uproarious mirth.

Mr. De Houten was by no means exuberant in spirits as he wended his steps in the direction of the yacht club landing.

An urgent summons to produce twenty thousand dollars in cold cash by a certain date or face poverty, social ruin, and unenviable notoriety in the Sunday magazines is

sufficient to dampen any man's optimistic view-point on the smoothness of life.

"Put me aboard the *Carmencita*," he growled to the man in charge of the yacht club's tender at the landing float, and stepping into the launch, Mr. De Houten was soon puttering out among the fleet of anchored pleasure craft. A few minutes later he clambered wearily up the accommodation ladder of a beautiful schooner yacht of a hundred tons.

"Send Captain Dillon to my room," he said to the uniformed deckhand at the gangway, and as the sailor saluted and turned to execute the order, the yacht owner swung down into the elaborate quarters sacred to himself.

At the saloon sideboard, he poured himself out a good stiff whisky from the swinging decanter, and ignoring the soda siphon, absorbed the liquor neat.

"That's better," he murmured, and placing the glass on the tray again, he turned to greet the yacht's master.

"Oh, ah, Dillon. Step inside here a moment and close the door."

The bronzed Nova Scotian sailing master obeyed, and De Houten motioned him

to a chair.

“Sit down,” he said. “I want to talk to you in private.”

The other nodded wonderingly and twirled his uniformed cap with the nervous apprehension of a man about to be dismissed.

“Is the yacht all ready for a cruise?”

“Yes, sir,” replied the captain. “If the steward has all his truck aboard we can be standin’ out inside an hour, sir.”

De Houten stared hard at the man seated before him and hesitated for a space before speaking.

“I wonder if I can trust you, Dillon,” he said after a pause.

The sailor raised his eyebrows in surprise. “I don’t see any reason why ye wouldn’t, sir.”

“You’ve been well paid for your work aboard here, haven’t you, Dillon? You haven’t been rushed to any way? I’ve always been a considerate employer, haven’t I?”

(“He’s found out about that overhauling rake-off or the graft I got from the sail-maker,” thought the captain. “Here’s where I get my walkin’ orders.”)

Aloud, he replied: “Yes, sir, you’ve been a good man to work for, sir.”

“Um!” Mr. De Houten tapped the arm of his chair with nervous fingers, and his face betrayed signs of perplexity. After an awkward pause, during which the captain searched his memory for the person likely to have informed the owner of his little grafts, the latter upset his calculations by broaching what was on his mind.

“Now, look here, Dillon,” he said firmly. “I’m going to take a chance and trust you. I think you can be trusted—”

“I hope so, sir,” murmured the other with an air of virtue.

“Very well, then, I’ll take the chance. Now, Dillon, I’m in a hole—a bad hole—financially. If you help me out, I’ll promise you a thousand dollars and my recommendation for a steady job. If you don’t,

well, there’s nothing doing and you lose your position as master of this yacht.”

“How’s that, sir?”

“It’s this way,” continued the owner. “I’ve got to raise the sum of “twenty thousand dollars by the first of September to tide me over a little deal. To put it bluntly, I can’t get the money. Everything I own, except this yacht, is mortgaged to the hilt, and I can’t raise a dollar from my best friend.

“This vessel cost me fifty thousand dollars, but I can’t sell her for half that amount, nor can I sell her at all at this time of the year. She’s insured for thirty thousand, and I paid the premium for the last four years without a claim. Now, I’m going to try and realize on it. D’y’ understand?”

Captain Dillon stared at the other vaguely. “I—I can’t say as I do, sir. I don’t know much about them business games.”

“Then I’ll have to elucidate for your erudite understanding. I can’t sell this craft. She’s insured for thirty thousand against loss by fire, perils of the sea, act of God, piracy and all that sort of thing, y’know. If she should be lost I’ll get thirty thousand dollars. Now d’ye see?”

The yacht master smiled knowingly.

“I got ye, sir. If she should be lost you’d git the insurance o’ thirty thousand—”

“Aye,” interrupted the owner, “and you’d get a thousand dollars and a sure recommendation for a good job. How does it look to you, Dillon?”

It evidently looked all right to Captain Daniel Dillon, and employer and employee waxed quite fraternal over the whisky decanter and fifty-cent panatelas while discussing ways and means.

“This here American coast ain’t a good place for such a job,” said Captain Daniel. “Too many beach patrols, life-savers an’ revenue cutters pokin’ about ready to lend a helpin’ hand to vessels in distress.

“Up whar I come from—the Cape Shore o’ Novy Scotia—is a grand spot for

wreckin'. Plenty o' ledges, plenty o' fog, an' plenty o' currents an' tides to set a feller off'n his course. The Cape Shore's the place, sir, an' if ye'll leave it to me, I'll pile the *Carmencita* on a nice handy ledge whar she'll make a beautiful wreck—"

"Then, Captain Dillon, I'll thank you to get under way for a two-weeks' cruise to the Cape Shore."

And feeling greatly relieved, Mr. Clarence De Houten retired to write a few letters, while his captain proceeded to get everything in readiness for the voyage.

With a fair wind, the *Carmencita* made a fast run-off from Newport to the northern edge of Brown's Bank.

Twenty-four hours of light airs and calms ghosted her to a spot where Seal Island light blinked at them in the darkness of a murky August evening. The following night, if all went well, the beautiful schooner would be pounding to pieces on the "nice handy ledge" selected by Captain Dillon. Mr. De Houten before he left had passed the word around his friends that he was just making a short cruise up the Nova Scotia coast to Halifax.

No guests were invited, and aboard the *Carmencita* the owner, Captain Dillon and a colored steward berthed aft, while the mate, boatswain, a Japanese cook, and eight Americanized Swedes and Norwegians who formed the schooner's crew, berthed forward.

Thus, it will be seen, De Houten and his skipper were thrown very much together.

It sounds like an easy proposition to make away with a vessel, but Dillon found it a trifle more difficult than he bargained for. In piling the vessel up he had to make due allowance for a safe get-away for himself and the others.

He had to land her on a spot where she would break up quickly and be a total loss before the insurance company could salvage or tow her off. He also had to make the stranding appear as being something beyond

his control, or the Marine Inquiry would have something to say on his seamanship and cancel his license as a coasting master; and above all the scheme would have to be carried out without in any way raising the suspicions of the crew.

The more Captain Dillon thought over the matter the colder his feet became. The thousand dollars promised him seemed very large while the yacht was lying at anchor in Newport harbor, but off Seal Island it seemed an utterly disproportionate amount when the manifold difficulties were considered.

Every knot the *Carmencita* logged on her voyage to the eastward conjured up new obstacles in the sailing master's imagination, and he retailed them to his employer.

"Confound it, man!" ejaculated the latter testily. "It should be easy enough to carry out. All you have to do is run her on some rock or sand bank. Any fool can do that—"

"Kin they?" said Dillon. "I don't know about that. We got to be careful to put her ashore in a spot where we can all git away in the boats, or there'll be a drownin' scrape on my conscience. I got to work it so's the mate an' the crew don't git wise an' talk afterward.

"There'll be an investigation over the wreck, an' I got to frame things up so's the blame' inspector don't cotton that it was a done job. Sounds easy, don't it?"

"Then thar's the weather to consider. I ain't chancin' puttin' her on the beach in a heavy sea where a boat wouldn't live—"

"Have you any plans then?" interrupted the other. "When do you intend pulling the trick off?"

"Wal, that's hard to say. But if this breeze 'll stiffen up a little from the south'ard I'll run in among the Cape Shore Islands to-night an' put her on some ledge handy to a place whar the boats can make a landing. We'll see how the wind is, an' if thar's any southing in it I'll turn the trick in my watch after midnight."

The captain picked up his cap and went on deck leaving De Houten alone.

II.

As Dillon had hoped the wind freshened from the southward, and before midnight the watch took the light sails in, leaving the schooner under mainsail, foresail, forestaysail and jib.

At twelve Captain Dillon came on deck and relieved the mate. It was a dark, starless sight with a fresh breeze blowing, and the beautiful vessel was logging an even eight knots through a smooth sea.

Dillon had spent the best part of the evening poring over a chart of the Cape Shore Ledfes and he had decided to take a chance and put the vessel on Henniker's Reef—a shoal water ledge four miles off shore and an underwater menace responsible for many wrecks.

Logging eight knots under four lowers, the *Carmencita* would be up to the spot by two in the morning.

At one the schooner passed Cobtown Harbor fairway buoy, nearly seven miles west by south from Henniker's Reef.

Dillon had laboriously figured out the set of the tide in the vicinity, and he gave the wheelman a course which was a full point less than what it should have been. With careful steering, no shift in the wind, and an accurate allowance made for the abnormal tide set at the time and place, the *Carmencita* should strike before four bells.

The investigation remained an obsession in the skipper's mind, and he was particular about giving the course. The wheelman would not forget it, and Dillon trusted to the Inquiry Court for an easy reprimand in not allowing enough to counteract the set of the tide.

At half-past one Mr. De Houten came on deck and gazed apprehensively around.

The tense waiting had made him nervous, and he shivered as he stared out into the darkness through which the schooner was storming.

"Godfrey! but it's dark," he muttered to the skipper, standing aft of the wheel-box. "Are the boats all clear for lowering?"

"Yep!" grunted Dillon, puffing away at his pipe. "I got the covers off'n the gig an' the yawl. I only hope there ain't no accidents," he added gloomily.

Mr. De Houten thought of that twenty thousand dollar debt and it nerved him.

"There isn't much of a sea on," he encouraged. "We should be able to get clear all right. When are we due to strike?"

"'Bout two o'clock, I cal'late."

Dillon went aft and looked into the dial of the taffrail log, which showed clear in the light streaming from the open companionway. Coming forward again, he glanced at the clock in the gangway and gave a perceptible start.

"We're due now!" he whispered hoarsely. "Git a grip o' somethin' an' look out for fallin' spars!"

Both men were in little short of a nervous panic, and the perspiration stood out on their foreheads in clammy beads. The suspense was agonizing, and De Houten was inwardly cursing himself for suggesting such an adventure. A few feet away from them the stolid, unsuspecting Swede at the wheel was calmly chewing his quid and watching compass and sails.

An apparently interminable minute passed, and De Houten felt ready to faint.

"God Almighty!" he rasped. "When's she going to hit?"

Dillon wiped the perspiration off his brow with a trembling hand, and stared into the darkness ahead.

"Lord, sir, I don't know!" His mouth had become so dry that he was scarcely able to articulate the words.

Swash! The schooner side-wiped a heavy swell and both conspirators gave a jump which caused the Swede at the wheel to

glance over in their direction.

"Mind yer steerin'!" snarled Dillon savagely, and the man almost swallowed his quid in surprise.

After a space of about five minutes, during which Mr. De Houten felt that Hades would have no terrors for him, the skipper ground out an oath and looked in at the gangway clock.

"Jupiter!" he growled huskily. "Somethin's wrong, somewhere." And he walked forward.

"Seen anythin'?" he snapped at the lookout lolling over the heel of the bowsprit.

"Not'ing, sir," answered the man. "T'ought Ay saw der breakers to windward a while ago, sir, bud Ay tank was only breakin' sea—"

"How long ago—an' how fur off?" yelled the other.

"Ay guess about ten minutes, sir—'bout two cable's length off de wedder bow."

When he reported the fact to the yacht owner, De Houten gave a nervous laugh.

"You're a h—— of a navigator!" he said. "You've missed them altogether."

"Wal, don't let that bother ye, sir," replied Dillon sullenly. "Thar's plenty more reefs an' ledges 'round this here place. I kin put her on one o' them inside half an hour."

"Not if I know it," said De Houten hastily. "At least, not to-night. I've had enough for a spell. I'm all unstrung. Wait till to-morrow. I'm going to turn in."

"What 'll I do with the schooner?"

"Anything you like, as long as you don't wreck her. Head her off-shore or into a harbor. Good night."

If Mr. De Houten reckoned on having a calm, undisturbed slumber after his harrowing ordeal, he was destined to be mistaken. Captain Dillon had got the *Carmencita* in among a regular nest of Cape Shore ledges, and the southerly breeze stiffened toward dawn and kicked tip a wild sea.

The tide was running strong, and the schooner did some frantic plunging in the rips, swinging round the shoal spots.

The lookout had sighted breakers ahead three times before daylight, and the schooner was swung off in time to avoid a real nasty wreck. All hands were called to work ship, and De Houten was treated to another hair-raising experience when the Half Moon Ledges were cleared by a very narrow margin.

Dillon was not an extraordinarily nervy sailor, but he certainly dragged sail on the *Carmencita* to weather the Half Moons, and the process did not soothe his owner's already jarred equilibrium.

"Is she all right now?" he enquired anxiously of his skipper when the welter of white water had faded astern.

"She won't be all right till we're twenty mile off shore an' away from this cussed coast," grunted the much worried sailor. "The glass is fallin' for a breeze from the southward—"

"Get into harbor then."

"No, siree! No pokin' for harbor 'round here in a southerly. We'll heave-to off-shore an' run in again when th' wind hauls."

Pale and half seasick, Mr. De Houten was assisted into his bunk by the colored steward about six in the morning. Paler and wholly seasick, he remained there until noon next day while the schooner rode out a nasty August breeze under foresail and forestaysail.

While under the depressing influence of *mal-de-mer*, the yacht owner cared little whether he lived or died. Impending ruin and a social downfall were to him things of no account, and when Dillon came in with a wild plan to bore holes in the schooner's hull and scuttle her there and then, Mr. De Houten cursed him and his scheme in language which would have gained him a job as a boss stevedore anywhere.

Toward evening the sea had eased off a bit and the wind veered to the westward. Mr. De Houten felt a little better, and when Dillon

came to his stateroom he was ready to listen to him.

"I bin a thinkin', sir," said the skipper hopefully. "I ain't much on them wreckin' jobs, but I have a cousin livin' on the Cape Shore what has a long head on him, an' maybe he can help us out.

"He's a fishin' skipper—name o' Decker, sir—an' he'd do anythin' for a dollar or so. He's full of all kinds o' dodges an' devil's tricks, an' I'll bet he can fix us up—"

"Where is he now?"

"He's livin' on a place called Decker's Island, which lies 'bout forty mile no'west from here."

"Are you sure he's at home? Perhaps he's away fishing."

"Oh, no, he ain't away. He'll have his vessel hauled up now, gittin' her ready for haddockin'."

De Houten pursed his lips' doubtfully. "I'm not at all in favor of getting too may persons in this barratry business. First thing I know I'll be getting blackmailed—"

The yacht master laughed.

"You don't need to worry about Tom Decker, sir," he said. "He's bin mixed up in a dozen queer jobs, an' ye'll never hear a word from him. He never double-crossed a friend in his life. Ye could tell every soul on Decker's Island what ye planned doin' with th' *Carmencita*, an' nary a word 'ud come back to ye. They're all professional wreckers an' smugglers."

The other was about to say something when a calendar pad on the writing table caught his eye. The date shown brought forcibly to his mind that he had just an even ten days before keeping a certain disagreeable appointment in New York City when twenty thousand dollars would be needed to stave off certain disagreeable consequences.

His whole body grew suddenly clammy at the thought, and he was quick to act.

"Get to Decker's Island then as quick

as you know how," he ordered.

III.

THE *Carmencita* was lying at anchor off Decker's Island just inside the Little Decker—an islet lying to the southward which afforded protection to the craft hailing from the isolated fishing settlement.

Surrounded by a maze of ledges and sunken reefs, Decker's Island, to the gossips of the mainland say, was inhabited by certain astute families who had been quick to see the advantages of the locality when coastwise and other shipping fouled the various danger spots.

No Decker's Island family was poverty-stricken. For people engaged in such humble pursuits as boat fishing and lobstering, the islanders boasted of homes and furnishings which would have done credit to a summer colony of American "rusticators."

Closeted with Mr. De Houten and Captain Dillon in the owner's stateroom aboard the yacht was a sturdy, bronzed individual about thirty years of age. All three were smoking cigars and the stranger was listening to Mr. De Houten with the ghost of a smile upon his swarthy, strong-lined face.

"Now, Captain Decker," the yacht owner was saying, "I've told you the situation, and I want your assistance. First of all, I'd like to know what you expect for pulling off the job?"

Decker puffed slowly at his cigar, and blew a wreath, of smoke before replying. Glancing with an appraising eye at the rich furnishings of the yacht, he answered calmly:

"Wal, y'know, it's quite a job, but if you'll give me five hundred dollars and the privilege o' strippin' this here craft afore she goes ashore, I'll tackle it"

"You'll be sure to make a proper total loss wreck out of her?" enquired De Houten anxiously.

"She'll be kindlin' wood twelve hours after she hits."

"Is there going to be any danger in the

business?"

"None whatever—an' it'll be a thorough, seamanlike job."

De Houten nodded, and Dillon grinned in satisfaction.

"I told ye," remarked the latter, "that Cap' Decker 'ud fix ye up."

"All right, then, Captain Decker," said the owner. "Now let me hear your plans before I guarantee anything. I'm not hankering for another night waiting for the schooner to strike a rock. You'll have to work it different from Dillon's nerve-shaking trick."

Decker laughed. "Yes, sir, I cal'late you had a scary session."

"No, I won't work it thataways. Maybe, when ye came in between the two islands here, ye noticed that ledge lyin' to the eastward o' th' Little Decker? Yes, the one with th' long breakers runnin' over it. It's called the Southeast Breaker Ledge 'round these parts, an' the craft what hits it never gits away again."

"When the tide's on the ebb it'll be lyin' 'bout half-a-mile dead astern o' this craft. The tide sets through here pow'ful strong, an' all as ye need to do is to part yer cable an' ye'll be on it in less'n fifteen minutes."

"No matter how calm it is, thar's always a breakin' sea pilin' over that ledge 'count o' the heavy set o' the tides. Slack water's the only time ye kin git anywheres near it."

"All we got to do is slip yer anchor cable some night when the tide's runnin' strong ebb, an the Sou'east Breaker 'll do the rest."

"That sounds mighty good," said De Houten, "but how will we square off the crew? They're liable to cotton to something."

"I'll soon fix them," answered Decker lightly. "I'll git a clam bake goin' ashore, an' we'll see that all the yacht's crew are invited. You can give 'em all permission to go, but don't you go among them a tellin' them to go

ashore. Let 'em ask ye first. Then they can't say they was got out of the way a purpose."

It was Decker—Decker the "downy"—who framed up all the minute details. They seemed but trifling, insignificant items to a landsman, but the minutiae of seamanship assumes glaring aspects when under the searching questionings of marine insurance surveyors and wreck commissioners.

Thirty thousand dollars was at stake, and the least bungle meant severe penalties to all concerned, for insurance companies are particular.

"The tide 'll serve us best day after tomorrow," said Decker after a lengthy discussion. "It'll be runnin' strong ebb 'bout nine o'clock at night."

"I'll go ashore an' git this clam bake racket under way, an' I'll make arrangements for me and another feller to bring out a motor boat an' git some o' them s'loon fittin's an' brass-work ashore afore we let her adrift on th' ledge."

"Now, rest easy an' leave it to me!"

When the redoubtable Decker departed, the yacht owner looked at the calendar and shuddered.

"That'll leave me seven days to get back to New York and square the other thing. Lord, I'll be gray-headed before Angelina comes back from Europe!" he muttered.

Two very pretty Nova Scotia girls had visited the *Carmencita*, and after they had departed for the shore, the mate and the boatswain respectfully approached Mr. De Houten, lolling aft in a wicker deck-chair.

"Permission for all hands to go ashore to a clam bake to-night?" repeated the *Carmencita's* owner when the two made the request. "Certainly, men, certainly! Take the launch, all of you, but see and be aboard in time to get under way tomorrow morning at eight o'clock. We're going to start for Halifax

then, so run along and enjoy yourselves—all hands.”

The Jap cook and the colored steward were graciously ordered to prepare some fancy cakes and French pastry for the feast and to join the crew and assist the islanders in the entertainment.

Needless to say, they were delighted to go.

Decker, seated at supper in his home, chuckled to himself at the easiness of it all, and glanced out of the window to where the tall sparred *Carmencita* was lying.

“Um!” he murmured to himself. “This is the easiest thing I’ve struck for a dog’s age. Nawthin’ to do but slip a shackle an’ rake in five hundred cold iron dollars and a couple dory loads o’ valuable fittin’s. Oh! it’s too good. It’s too—Sufferin’ Judas Iscariot!”

He dropped a cup of coffee with a crash and glared out of the window with a string of muttered oaths.

“What’s the matter, Tom?” anxiously enquired his wife, rising from her chair.

“Nawthin’, m’dear,” replied the captain hastily, sopping up the tablecloth with his napkin. “Nawthin’ at all. This blame coffee burnt my mouth, that’s all.”

He got up from the table a minute later and went outside.

“Damn him!” he growled savagely. “Why’n Tophet sh’d he poke in here on *this* night of all nights? Let him stay, though I’ll dish him—sure’s my name’s Tom Decker!” And he shook his fist at a small, slate-colored steamer which had just come to an anchor astern of the schooner yacht.

It was the Government Fishery cutter *Ariel*, commanded by William Murray—an official for whom Decker had but little use, owing to his vigilance in endeavoring to thwart several smuggling and vessel-looting enterprises of the islander.

Ten minutes later Decker and big Bill Westhaver pattered out to the *Carmencita* in the latter’s motor boat and clambered aboard.

It was seven o’clock, and all the yacht’s complement, with the exception of Mr. De Houten and Captain Dilton, had gone ashore.

Down in the cabin Captain Decker give vent to his feelings.

“That interferin’ scum astern of us has pretty well jigged our plans for to-night,” he snarled. “Thar ain’t agoin’ to be a chanst to git a blame’ thing off’n this hooker, fur ten chances to one the skipper o’ that iron kettle’ll be over t’ pay ye a visit to-night—” Decker paused suddenly, and a beatific smile spread over swarthy features. De Houten, whose spirits had dropped as low as the barometer in a West India hurricane, looked at the fisherman with an air of hope.

Decker thumped the table with his fist.

“It’s all right, Mr. De Hooter!” he said with a grim laugh. “Everything’ll go nicely in spite o’ the cutter.”

Turning to Dillon he gave that worthy some instructions which caused him not a little surprise.

“Take yer dingey, Cap, an’ pull over to the cutter,” he said. “Ask for Captain Murray, present yer compliments, and invite him and his mate to come over to the yacht here an’ jine you an’ Mr. De Hooter in a smoke and a friendly drink.

“Pull over now, but don’t come back too quick. Ask Murray some questions ’bout navigatin’ the coast an’ keep him off for ’bout half an hour. That’ll give me’n Bill Westhaver time to git things ready.

“Go ahead now!”

IV.

FORWARD on the *Carmencita*, Decker and Westhaver were working like Trojans in the darkness.

“Here’s a fine coil o’ three-inch manila we can take,” whispered Westhaver.

“All right. Make it fast to the line an’ drop it overboard easy. Don’t make a splash. Tie all them blocks an’ bull’s-eyes together

an' drop 'em too. We can easy drag for all that gear afterward an' pick it up. Too bad we can't strip that s'loon."

While Westhaver was removing valuable gear from the forward part of the yacht and dropping it overboard into the harbor, Captain Decker was silently wrestling with the *Carmencita's* ground tackle.

The yacht was riding to her starboard anchor, and Decker knocked out the pin of the thirty fathom shackle. After making a stout piece of rope fast to the cable link forward of the shackle he paid the cable out of the hawse pipe and took a turn of the rope around the windlass.

The inboard end of the chain was thrust through the hawse pipe and dangled overboard, while all the strain of the anchor came upon the piece of rope.

Giving the stout manila a slash with a knife which cut through one of the strands, Decker smiled grimly.

"As soon as th' tide sets hard agin her in an hour's time, she'll part that or I'm a Dutchman," he muttered. And with a sigh of satisfaction he proceeded to range all the chain of the port anchor, which was catheaded, forward of the windlass. "What in blazes are ye monkeyin' with that chain for?" growled Westhaver.

"Wait an' see," answered the other. "Nawthin' like preparin' for everythin'. How've you got on?"

"Not so bad. Got more'n a dozen good blocks, two or three gratin's, all the cook's aluminum galley gear, some brass fittin's, the fore sheet an' all the heads'l halliards unrove an' over the sides—not countin' the stuff what was in the bosun's locker —Hist! Here comes the dingey."

"Come on, then! Git down aft as quick's ye can—"

Westhaver glanced at the riding light of the Fishery cruiser, and clutched Decker by the arm.

"Say," he muttered apprehensively,

"that blame' hooker's dead astern of us. We're agoin' to foul her when we break adrift—"

"Wal, what ef we do? She can't stop us. We'll give her a wipe as we pass her—that's all. Tide's on the ebb now an' the wind's with the tide. We'll fetch the Southeast Breaker easier'n steerin' for it under sail.

"Too bad we couldn't ha' got a chanst at lootin' that saloon. Thar's a fine mahogany sideboard in it that would ha' come in fine for the wife's dinin'-room—not to mention them clocks an' silver eatin' gear.

"Go easy, now," he added, "an' set down with Mister De Hooter as ef ye'd been thar for an hour."

Commander Murray and Chief Officer Kerr of the *Ariel* looked somewhat surprised when they entered the *Carmencita's* palatial saloon to see Decker and Westhaver hobnobbing with the wealthy American yachtsman.

The cutter's commander had no reason to love Decker, as the latter was a man whom the government official hoped to catch red-handed in some looting or smuggling venture in the near future. He had chased the wily fishing skipper many a time, but somehow or other Decker had always eluded him.

Needless to state the antipathy was mutual.

With a curt nod to the two fishermen, Murray and his chief officer shook hands with the smiling and genial De Houten, and forgetting for the nonce their personal and official differences, the six men waxed congenial over cigars and whisky.

Decker, though anxious, was feeling too happy to cause a row with Murray. No! Poor Murray would have troubles of his own in a very short time, and while the others were chatting, the "downy" one puffed at his cigar and made a mental calculation of the amount of damage a hundred-ton schooner drifting with a strong wind and tide would do to the anchored cutter.

"She'll dint him some an' maybe carry

away a boat or so," he reflected. "Won't he catch it from the Marine Department when he sends in his report—an' him aboard here drinkin'! Yes, 'drinkin' will sound good—drinkin' an' smokin' aboard th' craft what breaks adrift an' damages his vessel!

"I cal'late I got him dead to loo'ard this time. He won't be so cussed ready to hang around Decker's Island so much. Suspicious swab—"

He paused in his ruminations and looked across at Westhaver. The yacht had given a perceptible shudder and from under the run Decker imagined he heard the sullen trickle of water.

De Houten, Dillon and the two government officials were engaged in discussing pilotage of the Nova Scotia coast.

Crash!

The men in the *Carmencita's* cabin were thrown to the floor as the yacht reeled to a sudden shock. The lamps went out and there came a smashing of glass and crockery from the pantry.

"God Almighty! What's happened?" yelled De Houten.

"Some craft's run us down!" shouted Murray and Decker together, and in the darkness the occupants of the saloon made a rush for the gangway.

"Clear the way, you clumsy hound!" roared Decker, who was half way out of the companionway and struggling with the big bulk of Westhaver, and doing his best to keep from laughing outright at the other's efforts to get past.

Behind them, Murray and Kerr were endeavoring to force their way up the narrow exit, with De Houten and Dillon engaged in the same object.

Decker released his grip on Westhaver and gave him a mighty shove up the steps, and in a trice the six men were on deck.

The fishing skipper gave a hasty glance into the darkness and clutched Westhaver by the arm in a grip that made the

big man wince.

"Holy Mackerel!" he hissed. "*The cutter's adrift too!*"

It was as Decker had said. A scant cable's length from the rapidly drifting yacht the small government steamer was swinging idly towards the line of surf piling over the Southeast Breaker Ledge!

Commander Murray and the mate had noticed it, too, and they were screaming to the cutter's crew to let go an anchor.

Decker made no move for a space and after casting an eye at the surf he caught the commander's arm and shouted:

"Come for'ard an' help me save this craft from goin' on the ledge! If she hits we'll all be dead men. Westhaver! Git yer boat alongside so's we kin jump in an' git clear. Come on, cap!"

The distracted Murray did not know what to do, but instinctively he ran forward with Decker to the catheaded port anchor.

"The chain's all ranged, I think," trawled the fisherman as he cast off the ring stopper and shank painter. Grabbing the handspike, he shouted a "Stand clear!" and pried the flukes off the rail.

"We're too late! She's agoin' to hit!" he roared as the chain thundered out through the port hawse. "Jump for the boat, cap', or we'll be gone coons!"

Westhaver had the engine going, and when Decker and Murray piled aboard he slipped the painter and headed off from the doomed schooner.

"We sh'd ha' snubbed that chain," cried Decker to the cutter's skipper. "We've paid out too much. See! She's struck—"

"Oh, my yacht! My beautiful yacht!" wailed De Houten hypocritically wringing his hands. "Fifty thousand dollars gone—"

"Damn an' blast yer yacht!" snarled the commander. "The Canadian government's lost a valuable cutter through this night's work, an' I've prob'ly lost my job! An' all through a lubberly yachtsman what couldn't

anchor his vessel properly—”

“Run over toward the cutter, Bill!” cried Decker a little anxiously. “We’ll hev to try an’ pick up the crew.”

Both the cutter and the yacht could be discerned as black spots in the white welter of surf tumbling over the ledge. They were on, all right, and daylight would show two more victims to the credit of the Southeast Breaker.

“Hi-yi!” The hail came out of the darkness, and Decker’s heart lightened when he made out the cutter’s yawl crowded with men.

“Are ye all there?” yelled the commander.

“Aye! We all got clear jest afore she went on.”

“How is it ye couldn’t fetch her up with the other anchor?”

“The blame’ chain warn’t shackled on, sir, an’ we didn’t git time to do anythin’. We was all below when that there yacht broke adrift, an’ we had t’ git the yawl out. I was tryin’ to git that chain shackled on, but she was a makin’ for that blame’ ledge so fast that I hed t’ skin out. We did all we could, sir.”

As the two boats made for the Island wharf, there were four members of the shipwrecked crews whose sorrowful faces belied their real feelings. De Houten felt that his troubles were over; Dillon thought of the thousand dollars and the good job, while Decker and Westhaver almost howled with glee at the plight of the cutter.

At home late that night Decker threw himself down on a sofa and laughed until the tears ran down his cheeks.

“Oh, my, but it’s too good!” he gasped at last. “What a pity I darsent tell the yarn to the boys. They’d never git over it. Five hundred and a raft o’ gear comin’ to me, an’ Bill an’ th’ cutter a total wreck on th’ Breaker!”

And he went into another silent paroxysm.

The manifold advantages of strict attention to detail came out when Captain Murray sent in his report:

The insurance company and the Wreck Commissioner could find nothing wrong with the simple, seamanlike statement of the informal investigation held at Decker’s Island by the cutter’s commander:

On the night of August 23 about 9.30 P.M., the American schooner yacht *Carmencita*, Clarence De Houten of New York, owner, and Daniel Dillon, also of New York, master, while anchored off Decker’s Island, N. S., parted her cable during a strong ebb tide.

While adrift, she collided with the Dominion Government Fisheries Protection cruiser *Ariel*, William Murray, commander, and caused her to part her cable also. Both craft drifted onto the Southeast Breaker Ledge and became total wrecks.

On the *Carmencita* an attempt was made to anchor the vessel before she drifted too far. The port anchor was let go, but the scope of chain allowed failed to fetch her up before reaching the breakers.

A similar attempt was made aboard the cutter, but the time was too short to allow of saving the vessel, and no steam was available owing to fires being drawn for boiler cleaning.

So ran the gist of the report, and before the cross-examination of the official inquiry, held some time later, the witnesses testified to the events of the evening just as they had happened.

The crew of the yacht could give no evidence, but Commander Murray and Chief Officer Kerr of the lost cutter were able to prove a clear case for the *Carmencita*. Both the commander and Thomas Decker described how they had tried to save the yacht by letting go the port anchor.

The insurance company paid without demur, and Dillon was exonerated with a caution to examine ground tackle in future before anchoring in currents and tide-riding anchorages. Commander Murray of the cutter was also found blameless, but received a reprimand similar to Dillon’s regarding anchors.

Captain Decker took a trip to New

York some weeks later and fixed up a little outstanding business with Mr. De Houten. The latter had overcome his financial embarrassment and was viewing life with the serenity of a man who had never known care.

“No, Captain Decker,” he was saying. “I do not think I shall take up yachting again. My nerves won’t stand it. By the bye, I want to ask you something. Why did you let go that anchor? You surely didn’t want to save the vessel?”

The other smiled and twirled his dark mustache.

“I did that so’s not to save her,” he said.

“Explain!”

“Wal, ye wanted a total wreck made o’ that yacht. She was a wooden craft an’ pretty light, an’ might ha’ bumped clean over that ledge. To stop that I ranged enough chain to that port anchor to keep her right in the breakers when I let it go. I cal’late it kept her, for thar warn’t much of her left by next mornin’.”

When the wily fisherman departed De Houten recalled a line of Bret Harte’s anent Chinamen:

“For tricks that are dark—the sailormen of Decker’s Island are peculiar!” he paraphrased with a seraphic smile.