

The Secret of Lonesome Cove

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Title: The Secret of Lonesome Cove

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THE SECRET OF LONESOME COVE
BY
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THE CLARION, AVERAGE JONES, ETC.
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FRANK E. SCHOONOVER

At this, Sheriff Schlager stepped forward and loosened the hasps, preparatory to removing the cover. "The body has been left," said he, slipping the lid aside, "just as—" Of a sudden, his eyes stiffened. A convulsive shudder ran through his big body. He jammed the cover back, and, with fingers that actually drummed on the wood, forced the hasps into place.

"She's come to life!" cried a voice from the rear.

"No, no!" rumbled the sheriff. Whirling upon the medical officer, he whispered in his ear; not more than a single word, it seemed to the watchful Kent.

The doctor turned ghastly. "Gents," he said in a quavering voice to the amazed crowd, "the program will not be carried out as arranged. The—the—well, the condition of the deceased is not fitten—" He stopped, mopping his brow.

But Yankee curiosity was not so easily to be balked of its food. It found expression in Lawyer Adam Bain.

"That ain't the law, Doc," he said.

"I'm the law here," declared Sheriff Schlager, planting himself solidly between the crowd and the coffin. One hand crept slowly back toward his hip.

"Don't pull any gun on me," retorted the lawyer quietly. "It ain't necessary."

"You heard Doc Breed say the body wasn't fitten to be viewed," pursued the sheriff.

"That's all right, too. But the doc hasn't got the final word. The law has."

A quick murmur of assent passed through the room.

"And the law says," continued Bain, "that the body shall be duly viewed. Otherwise, and the deceased being buried without view, an order of the court to exhume may be obtained."

"Look at Breed," whispered Kent to Sedgwick.

The medical officer's lips were gray, as he leaned forward to pluck at the sheriff's arm. There was a whispered colloquy between them. Then Breed spoke, with a pitiful effort at self-control:

"Lawyer Bain's point is correct; undoubtedly correct. But the body must be prepared. It ought to 'a' been looked to last night. But somehow I—we—Will six citizens kindly volunteer to fetch the coffin back to my house?"

Ten times six offered their services. The box was carried out swiftly, followed by the variable hum of excited conjecture. Quickly the room emptied itself, except for a few stragglers.

CHAPTER V—ONE USE FOR A MONOCLE

Sedgwick, who had followed the impromptu cortège with his vision, was brought up sharply by the glare of a pair of eyes outside the nearest window. The eyes were fixed on his own. Their expression was distinctly malevolent. Without looking round, Sedgwick said in a low voice:

"Kent!"

No answer came.

"Kent!" said the artist a little louder.

“Huh?” responded a muffled and abstracted voice behind him.

“See here for a moment.”

There was neither sound nor movement from the scientist.

“An Indian-looking chap outside the window is trying to hypnotize me, or something of the sort.”

This information, deemed by its giver to be of no small interest, elicited not the faintest response. Somewhat piqued, the artist turned, to behold his friend stretched on a bench, with face to the ceiling, eyes closed, and heels on the raised end. His lips moved faintly. Alarmed lest the heat had been too much for him, Sedgwick bent over the upturned face. From the moving lips issued a musical breath which began its career softly as Raff’s *Cavatina* and came to an inglorious end in the strains of *Honey Boy*. Sedgwick shook the whistler insistently.

“Eh? What?” cried Kent, wrenching his shoulder free. “Go away! Can’t you see I’m busy?”

“I’ll give you something to think about. Look at this face of a cigar-store Indian at the window. No! It’s gone!”

“Gansett Jim, probably,” opined Kent. “Just where his interest in this case comes in, I haven’t yet found out. He favored me with his regard outside. And he had some dealings with the sheriff on the beach. But I don’t want to talk about him now, nor about anything else.”

Acting on this hint, Sedgwick let his companion severely alone, until a bustle from without warned him that the crowd was returning. Being aroused, Kent accosted one of the villagers who had just entered.

“Body coming back?” he asked.

“Yep. On its way now.”

“What occurred in the house where they took it?”

“Search me! Everybody was shut out by the sheriff and the doc. They had that body to theirselves nigh twenty minutes.”

At this moment the sheriff entered the hall, followed by Doctor Breed, who escorted the coffin to its supporting sawhorses. The meager physician was visibly at the fag end of his self-control. Even the burly sheriff looked like a sick man, as he lifted aside the coffin lid and spoke.

“There was reasons, neighbors,” said he, “why the corpse wasn’t suitable to be looked at. Nobody had seen it since last night. We’ve fixed it up as good as we could, and you’ll now please pass by as quick as possible.”

In the line that formed Kent got a place behind Elder Dennett, who had decided to take another look for good measure, as he said. The look was a productive one. No sooner had it fallen on the face of the dead than Dennett jabbed an indicatory finger in that direction and addressed the sheriff:

“Hey, Len! What’s this?”

“What’s what?” growled Schlager.

“Why, there’s a cut on the lady’s right cheek. It wasn’t there when I seen the corpse last night.”

“Ah, what’s the matter with your eyes?” demanded the sheriff savagely. “You want to hog the lime-light, that’s your trouble!”

This was evidently a shrewd lash at a recognized weakness, and the Elder moved on amid jeering

comments. But Sedgwick, whose eyes had been fixed upon Kent, saw a curious expression flicker and fade across the long-jawed face. It was exactly the expression of a dog that pricks up its ears. The next moment a titter ran through the crowd as a bumpkin in a rear seat called out:

“The dude’s eyes ain’t mates!”

Chester Kent, already conspicuous in his spotless white flannels, had made himself doubly so by drawing out a monocle and deftly fixing it in his right eye. He leaned over the body to look into the face, and his head jerked back the merest trifle. Bending lower, he scrutinized the unmanacled right wrist. When he passed on his lips were pursed in the manner of one who whistles noiselessly.

He resumed his seat beside Sedgwick. His eyes grew dull and melancholy. One would have thought him sunk in a daze, or a doze, while the procession filed past the unknown dead. His monocle, which had dropped from his eye as he turned from the coffin, dangled against his hand. Chancing to look down at it, Sedgwick started and stared. Kent’s knuckle, as seen through the glass, stood forth, monstrous and distorted, every line of the bronzed skin showing like a furrow.

The monocle was a powerful magnifying lens.

The sheriff’s heavy voice rose. “Any one here present recognize or identify the deceased?” he droned, and, without waiting for a reply, set the lid in place and signaled to the medical officer.

“Feller citizens,” began the still shaking physician, “we don’t need any jury to find that this unknown drowned woman—”

“The deceased was not drowned.” Emerging from his reverie, Chester Kent had leisurely risen in his place and made his statement.

“N-n-not drowned!” gasped the medical man.

“Certainly not! As you must know, if you made an autopsy.”

“No autopsy was necessary,” replied the other quickly. “There’s plenty of testimony without that. We’ve heard the witnesses that saw the drowned body on the grating it washed ashore on.”

“The body never washed ashore on that grating.”

A murmur ran through the crowd. “How do you figure that?” called a voice.

“On the under side of the grating I found a cocoon of a common moth. Half an hour in the water would have soaked the cocoon through and killed the insect inhabitant. The insect was alive.”

“How’d the grating get there, then?”

“Dragged down from the high-water mark on the beach. It was an old half-rotted affair such as no ship would carry. Ask Sailor Smith.”

“That’s true,” said the old seaman with conviction.

“You’re an expert, Mr. Smith. Now, was that grating large enough to float a full grown human body?”

“Why, as to that, a body ain’t but a mite heavier than the water. I should say it’d just barely float it, maybe.”

“Exactly; but plus several pounds of clothing, and some dead metal extra?”

“No.”

“The clothes would have been soaked, and handcuffs weigh something,” said Kent calmly.

“There might have been extra spars under the grating, that got pounded loose on the beach and washed away,” propounded the medical officer desperately.

“Look at the face,” said Kent with finality. “This is a bad coast. Most of you have seen drowned bodies. Did any one ever see an expression of such terror and agony on the face of one who came to death by drowning?”



Murder! echoed a voice from the doorway.

“No, by thunder!” shouted somebody. “He’s right.”

Others took up the cry. Clamor rose and spread in the room. The sheriff silenced it with a stentorian voice. “What are you trying to get at?” he demanded, facing Kent.

“The truth. What are you?”

Schlager’s eyelids flickered; but he ignored the counter-stroke. “Look out it don’t lead you where you won’t want to follow,” he returned, with a significant look at Sedgwick.

“This is as far as it has led me,” said Kent, in his clear even voice. “The body, already dead, was dragged down and soaked in the sea, and then lashed to the grating by a man who probably is or has been a sailor.”

“Then the deceased met death on shore, and presumably by violence,” said Lawyer Bain.

“It’s murder!” cried a woman shrilly. “Bloody murder! That’s what it is!”

“Murder!” echoed a voice from the doorway. Gansett Jim, his half-Indian, half-negro face alight with fury, stood there pointing with stiffened hand at Sedgwick. “Dah de murderer!”

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