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BONEFISHING—By ZANE GREY

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AFTER two years I returned to Long Key, and found that the absence had only endeared the place to me. The only change I noted was the growth of the smaller coconut palm trees along the beach. They were small then, and now they soared over my head, giving only a glimpse of the blue-green sea out over the dazzling white streaks of coral sand.

The day was cool, the fag end of a norther, name of which was memorable to me. A rather brisk wind blew from the east and dull gray clouds massed on the horizon. Only small lakes of blue sky shone through. The sea was all shades of green—light and yellowish near shore, cobalt and marine green out a way, and in the distance dark bottle green shading to blue, with glints of white on the level horizon line where the sunlight caught the waves of the reef. A lonely gull soared in the wind and a pelican sailed low down over the water. Far out at sea two freight steamers showed hull down, headed south, leaving trails of smoke floating behind.

I walked along the beach. How familiar! How thrilling the long, white, winding shore line, with its fringe of leaning wind-swept palms, and the crawling edge of the sea pushing its foam and grass up on the sand! I always loved this shore. It always is lonely. Any time I could go out and walk along and find loneliness. That was part of its charm. Then there were the low plashing shallow music of the waves, the rustle of the wind in the palms—a sound I never forgot—and the soft sweet salty scent that breathed from over the water, and the sense of openness and freedom, and the long ragged line of seaweed washed up at last full tide, and the shells and sponges and coral, and the bamboo nuts from foreign shores, and the pieces of driftwood, stranded and buried on the sand.

I seemed to take all in at a glance, in a deep breath, conscious that I could not recall my sensations. I wanted to relax, to rest, to lie still under the sky, in the face of the wind, lulled by the music of the shore. Thoughts and memories began to impinge upon my peace, and I tried to efface them. This—whatever it was—was what I needed. This shore was medicine to my body and soul.

Only one little bird crossed my sight, a tiny brown, fleck-breasted creature, uttering a low plaintive note. There were no crabs, no Portuguese men-of-war, no fish—not even any of the leaping sand lily, usually so abundant in the seaweed. All these inhabitants of the shore require the sun. They resemble human beings—slaves of the great giver of light and life. I noted that all the coconuts were small and mostly dark green. A few were coloring, as also were a few of the long drooping palm leaves, most graceful and beautiful of leaves. No trails of ghost or hermit crabs showed on the white sand—another proof that a norther had lately chilled the island.

I WONDERED—as I sat on a log—would my old giant shadow me there, as everywhere else. My discontent—my yearning for loneliness—my driving passion to seek, to find! I bade him come to haunt my steps! He and I alone would walk together and know the rapture of a lonely shore. But it was infinitely good to be back there. I could not tell just why. Old and beloved places are best. The new ones call and beckon on, and entice like the Lorelei, but they are not tried and true. I could find Long Key profitable without any other virtue save this winding white shore line.

For miles off this shore the water was shallow, so at low tide weedy and tawny islands appeared. And thus was presented a singular contrast to the heaving blue Pacific. It was restful here. The Pacific impressed with its mighty volume; its long swell, so suggestive of the deeps; its boom and crash on the rocky shores.

So I meant to rest and walk and lie and dream along the shore of my coral island. I would forget so much. Alas, that I must forget! I would learn again to remember what my noble resolves were. I would feel sun and wind, and the sweet wet salt spray. I would watch the myriads of water creatures. I would dream—of the past—of the future—of my own struggle, so inexplicable and tragic, and of those created stories of my

imagination—children of my fancy. And so I would once more grow well in body and mind.

Next to the desert, Long Key ranked second to the places that had inspired me in my literary development.

On this visit to Long Key I brought my friend Wiborn with me. He had become a trail partner of mine, along with my brother, R. C., and we were eager to put him up against the incomparable bonefish of the coral reefs.

I have paid tribute elsewhere to Wiborn's skill and daring as a lone angler. But in addition to his salt-water feats he has an enviable record as a fly caster, and is an expert in the art of taking salmon, rainbow and steelhead on the lightest and most delicate of tackle. This is one reason why I wanted so much to see him try out the wary and powerful bonefish—than which, in my estimation, there is no greater fish in the world.

LONE ANGLER listened to my stories and to my extravagant claims with that tolerance and kindliness and interest characteristic of this ideal angler. But I could tell that he made allowance for my impulsive and emotional nature, for what he attributed to my love of beauty and adventure, and did not take my opinion of bonefish with entire seriousness. It must be a great fish; yes, of course—but there were others! He did not say this. I just divined how his mind worked. And that made me keen as a whip to show him. For there is no fish yet discovered that is comparable to a bonefish, taking into consideration all its qualities—gameness,

endurance, speed, strength, cunning, wariness, finickiness, incomprehensibility, beauty, color and edibility.

"But," said my friend deprecatingly, "if you take this bonefish with a bait!"

The old high-class objection of the effete, delicate and lofty fly-fisherman! To use a bait on a hook is a crude and low-browed method of angling.

"LISTEN," I replied. "There is no one more capable than myself of appreciating that fly-fishing is the highest art. It is the supreme test of a fisherman's graduation—of his development. But, strange to say, bonefishing requires all your delicate skill and finesse—all that a fly caster is master of—and a good deal more. Best of all, it adds to the intelligent reasoning and cunning of the matured man the wonderful thrills of boyhood. I think that is the secret. No great fly-fisherman goes back to the uttermost of boyhood's instincts when he pursues his favorite sport. It is hardly a boyhood sport. It has all the elements of long study and experience. Fly-fishing was never born in any boy. But bonefishing requires all this intelligence. Any kind of fishing is merely an expression of the primitive instincts in man. Fly-fishing gets farther away from the primitive than any other kind. It is the highest type of angling. Bonefishing would take the old salmon angler and make of him a boy. He could not help himself. That must be the strange

allurement in bonefishing. I don't believe it has ever been told before. And I mean to prove it to you."

Entirely aside from enjoyment of beautiful Long Key and the possibility of matching Lone Angler against fish too much for him, it was well for me to get back to the white, hot days, the winding

shore line of coral and coconut palms and the sweet soft scent of the sea.

I had caught cold in California and could not shake it. In New York I added a touch of influenza. And when I got to the warm sun of Long Key it was none too soon.

Fishing, in spite of my ravings, was only an incidental thing with me, as I hope these pages will prove. Probably I would never fish or hunt again if I did not feel justified in red-blooded actions for the sake of bodily and mental health. These pursuits prolong youth, and the thrill of boyhood is one of the necessities of my work.

Lone Angler was much interested and quite amused at my extraordinary attention to detail in the matter of rigging tackle to catch the elusive bonefish. I showed him my way, which he used once, and after that he proceeded to tie on sinkers and hooks after his own pleasure. Naturally I was too proud ever to instruct him twice. Naturally, likewise, I expected him to have all kinds of bad luck, and was tickled at the prospect.

An unusual number of bonefish along shore stimulated me to instant action, despite the fact that I was not quite well. But I concluded if I did not get wet I could safely risk it.

ARISING tide is best for bonefish. They come in on the shoals to feed on shells and crabs. So our first attempts were made along the beach, in places where we saw the dark green shapes of our quarry moving like shadows over the coral. I stationed Lone Angler in the second-best place I could find and bade him cast his bait out. I anticipated some fun. But he cast that bait out like an old hand at the game. R. C. said, "You want to look out for this Wiborn. He's a fox. He can do anything."

"Well, I entertain some fear of him, I must confess," was my reply. "But there doesn't live on this beautiful earth a man who can catch bonefish successfully right at first. You watch! We're going to have fun with Lone Angler."

I made my own cast at a safe distance from my companions, and settled down comfortably to rest and wait and watch. Nothing so contemplative as bonefishing! I saw more in an hour than I could write in a week. I had five strikes and hooked two bonefish, both of which broke my line. The last one was a whale. By that time the tide was well in and I could not see distinctly, the water being now two feet deep, but I saw enough to bring me to my feet, excited and thrilling. A large bonefish, rather tawny—green in color and showing the characteristic checkering on his back—was nosing round my bait. I just caught the shadow of him near where my bait ought to be. My sensations were utterly out of proportion to what a rational being would have felt. The thrill augmented. My nerves tingled. I felt a strange commotion in my breast. And I could scarcely refrain from jerking. For often bonefish have the bait without making the slightest strain or vibration of the line. For me it is the hardest thing in the world to wait. In this instance, however, I did so and was rewarded by the almost imperceptible tug. My blood fairly gushed over me as I struck. The line strung taut, the rod bent double. And the bonefish, after an instant of quivering, shot seaward swift as a bullet. This run is always the great peril as well as the thrill of bonefishing. At five hundred feet, which seemed to screech out of my reel, he broke my line.

LONE ANGLER came up the beach to me, and he was quite excited.

"What was that you hooked?" he queried. "I didn't know there were big fish came in so close. Was it one of those five-foot barracuda you showed me?"

I looked at him with what serenity I was master of, and said:

"My ethical and dreaming friend, that was a bonefish. Probably seven pounder. No larger!"

No pen of mine could do justice to the expression of his face. But he did not voice his incredulity. And just then R. C. wandered up to us.

"Say, chief, you got tangled up with one, didn't you?" he inquired beamingly. "I saw that run. Some fish! I had one on, but he didn't like the feel of the hook."



"We're Off!" Zane Grey at the Right

Upon inquiring of Lone Angler we ascertained that nothing had happened to him except that when he had reeled in his line he found his bait gone. Whereupon I asked him if he remembered that I had told him bonefish often bit imperceptibly. He replied that he recalled some such remark of mine, but had not believed it. R. C. strolled off, having a great laugh to himself. My natural impulse then was to give Lone Angler another earnest dissertation on the strange maneuvers of bonefish, but fortunately I was able to hold my tongue. I knew I had him. If he had taken me on my word I could have spared him so much amaze, incredulity and pain. But I vowed I would not tell him another thing.

Next day I ventured going out in my canoe. That is the ideal way to stalk bonefish. We had not gotten far from our cottage when I espied half a dozen bonefish in the clear shallow water. We let down anchors at each end of the canoe and made our casts in the direction of the fish. They disappeared as if they had dissolved. Then we composed ourselves, in the hope they would come back from wherever they had gone.

THE afternoon passed. Hours seem like moments out under the blue sky and on the water. Meanwhile the tide came in. From time to time as I stood up to cast I espied other bonefish, and I knew we stood a good chance of getting a bite. Also I had a queer idea that I was going to fall out of the canoe. The little waves rocked us gently and when I swung to cast I could not help overbalancing myself. Upon one of the occasions Wiborn said facetiously: "Is it not incumbent upon a bonefisherman to be very quiet and immovable?"

"Yes, it is. I told you that several times. Why do you ask?"

"You kicked the bait pail twice, thumped the paddle on the bottom of the canoe—and your action in casting reminded me of Buckholtz when he broke the college record for pole vaulting."

"It is not quite always possible for a fellow to live up to his knowledge," I observed. "Accidents are bound to happen, you know."

So the time passed pleasantly. The tide grew to flood and the little waves increased gradually. I was watching a pelican when suddenly Lone Angler gave a hard jerk, nearly upsetting the canoe. I never said a word. He wound in his hook. Bait gone! Then he turned to me.

"I thought you said you couldn't feel these bonefish bite."

"Some of the time you can't," I replied. "Haven't you discovered that yet?"

"Well, that fellow all but yanked my rod out of my hands. Whew!" He shook his head soberly and thoughtfully, as if pondering the inception of an idea. But evidently he refused to credence. Once he asked me: "Are you sure all these fish that bite are bonefish?"

"No. But in this shallow water the other fish are too small for consideration. Blowfish, trunkfish, snappers on the coral shoals are always little."

By and by it was time for us to stop for that day. The sun was setting, the warmth of the day had passed, the tide was full and the trade wind had begun to blow cool and steady. We reeled in.

THEN as I got up to step to the stern of the canoe, for the first time that day I forgot to be careful; I forgot that I knew I was going to fall out. I made a careless, unbalanced step. The canoe lurched. I began to sway and wave my arms in frantic endeavor to regain my balance. Lone Angler, the sardonic idiot, called out: "If you have to fall, do it gracefully!"

For many years I had been at home in a canoe. My confidence had been my undoing. I made strenuous efforts not to fall because I feared a wetting might aggravate my cold. But the more contortionist motions I went through the more equilibrium I lost, until I actually fell backwards, going under while my crooked knees held to the gunwale. But they slipped off and I sank in three feet of water till my back hit the sand. It took a moment for me to move.

When I got to the surface and opened my eyes and spat out a lot of salt water there was Lone Angler in convulsions. He simply roared. What I should have done was to flip over the canoe. But all I could think of was to ask him how he had kept it from capsizing.

"I—was here—first," he howled. "Used to—live in—canoe!"



A Bit of the Long, White, Winding Shore Line With its Fringe of Wind-Swept Palms

Later he told me he had seen my head go under with my mouth wide open, and the bubbles had come up blub—blub—blub.

Last night there was no vivid sunset, just a smoky cloudy flare of yellow low down in the west. It was cool at twilight, and when darkness came a three-quarter moon shone behind the gray clouds.

I did not walk on the beach. I stood a while on the platform of my cottage and looked into the shadows of the palm grove. The place was deserted. The wind in the leaves made a strange continuous sound, not unlike the foaming of water. Across the white patches of moonlit coral moved the dark shadows of the leaves. For some reason I did not analyze I did not want to watch them or stand there. So I went to bed. And being extremely fatigued I soon went to sleep.

About midnight I awoke. No sound of wind or sea! It was absolutely dead silence, and wonderful in its penetrating quality. Through my open door I could see the dim opaque gloom that seemed neither of night or day. I lay awake for hours. I could not get back to sleep. The fever and cough, aided by unwelcome thoughts, kept me awake. But at length, towards dawn, I fell asleep again. When I awoke the wind was again blowing and the light was gray. It brightened. I did not feel well, but I arose, dressed and went out. Clouds obscured the sunrise, only a dull pale gold showing.

The day turned out fine. Flood tide came about 7:30. The easterly wind was not strong or cold, and towards noon it dropped. Most of the clouds rolled away, and then it grew sunny and warm, making some approach to a perfect Long Key day.

A FULL moon shone tonight, soaring high and white in a cloudless sky. The grove of coconut palms seemed such an exquisite place that I must shun it. Indeed there were graves under the whispering trees. A faint breeze swayed the long, drooping leaves, swinging them to and fro across the radiant face of the moon and casting spectral shadows across the white blanched coral sand. High on the tips of the topmost plumes there were silver glints of moonlight. The whisper seemed of the past. Out there the sea, too, was white over its shallow bed of coral, and it was plashing against the beach, in soft continuous beat. A lonely cricket chirped out of the shadows.

Nature was wonderful, inexhaustibly enchanting, manifoldly mystifying, strange and raw and romantic, but it was not all satisfying. Only the recluse or the hermit could find it so. The poet feels his rapture on the windy hill or the lonely shore, but he could not express it if he were a Crusoe lost on his island. Crusoe was absorbed in details of existence which for him must have been haunting and thrilling. But while he lived them he could hardly have been fascinated by the beauty and mystery and tragedy of Nature.

ONE day we had the canoe and two skiffs towed to the upper end of Long Key, where there was a wide coral shoal and a mangrove swamp.

We anchored my motor boat, Betty Zane, just off the reef and drew lots for who should have the canoe.

R. C. was the lucky man, and he and Mrs.

R. C., gorgeously equipped with tackle and lunch, paddled off first.

About that time I saw a skiff inshore on the shoal and made out a man poling it around, evidently in search of bonefish. This was a calamity. If R. C. had not already gotten off I would have suggested that we try another place, where there had not been any other fellow ranting round scaring all the fish. Bone-fishing makes an angler desire to get the ocean all to himself. It is dreadful to contemplate

some selfish fisherman hooking a giant bonefish right under your eyes.

The Wiborns took one skiff and I, with Captain Sid, my Avalon boatman, and Dalrymple took the other. We rowed in on the shoal toward the mangroves. The tide was about half in, making us rather late for a start. R. C. waited for us several hundred yards inshore. When we got near the canoe he hailed us: "Say, there's one of those Matacombe bonefishermen."

Matacombe fisherman was a name to make us curious and envious, for surely weird and wonderful tales had emanated from that island. A colony of bonefishermen spent the winter there. They were an exclusive aggregation, and some of them, we were told, had been coming there for over twenty years. Now artists are envious and I envied any man who had been lucky enough to fish for bonefish all that time. How many did he catch? How big? What did he know? I had never seen a Matacombe angler at work.

I was rowing the skiff, and when R. C. hailed me I turned round to take a look at

the Matacombe fisherman. He appeared to be an old man, rather stout, and he sat high up in a revolving chair, facing the bow.

The Matacombe boatman appeared to be throwing particles of bait out around his boat. If he was chumming it surely was a new idea for us. Suddenly the stout man gave a hard jerk.

He reeled in, to find his bait gone. Then he handed his rod back to the boatman. This rod was long and heavy, such a rod as Lone Angler or R. C. would have used for sailfish. The next move that interested us was for the Matacombe angler to reach down beside him and pick up another rod.

We saw him get five bites, two on one rod and three on the other, without connecting with his quarry. Upon the sixth, however, he hooked a fish. Thereupon he stood up to fight it. This gave us ample opportunity to see the tackle he used. The rod was long, black and white, and so stiff that it bent but little. The reel did not appear to be large, or to have one-third the line we used. When the bonefish got away perhaps a hundred feet on his first run the angler hauled back with all his might. I held my breath. Something would break. But it did not. Then in the next few minutes, scarcely more than five, that angler stopped several more rushes and whipped the bonefish within one hundred feet of the boat. This bonefish had only one chance and that was to tear out the hook. I saw the boatman lift it in a net and it looked to be a large fish, close to eight pounds. The next thing that happened was the angler saw us, and did not make another cast there. The boatman poled away across the shoals.

I HAD been standing up and I saw bonefish on the shoals.

"Spread out, you ginks," I ordered. "I think the Matacombe fisherman left something behind. Anchor in a good place and hang there."

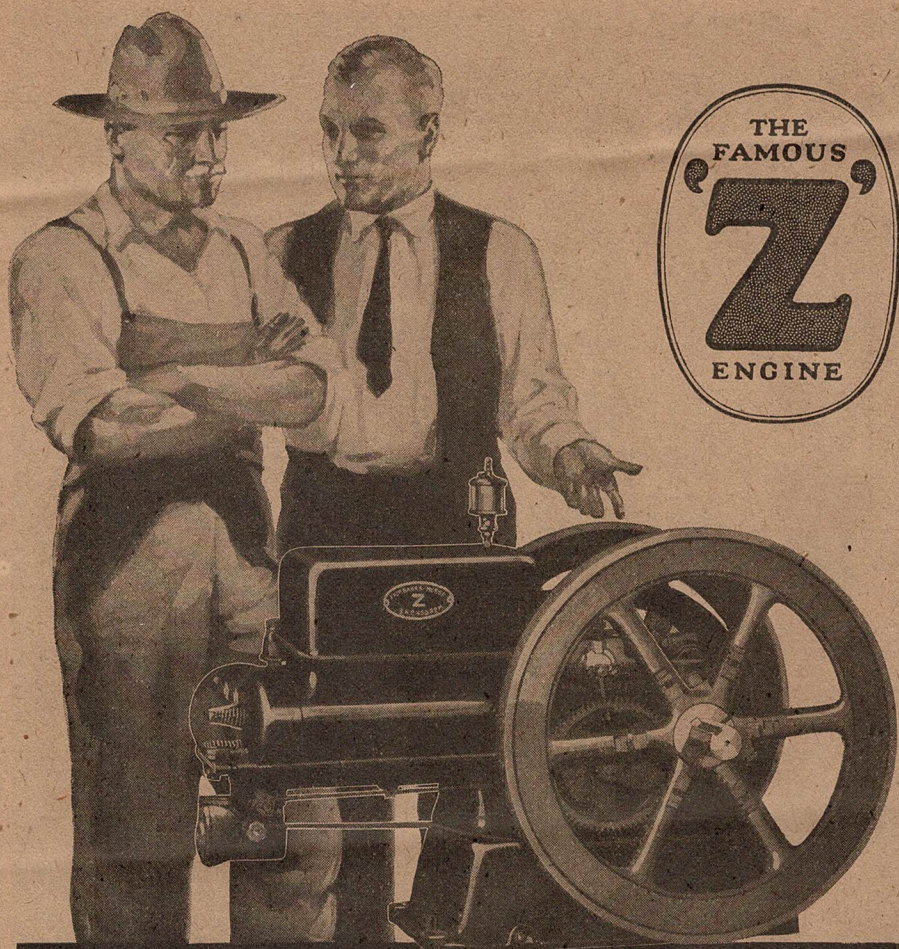
I kept the oar seat and cast from there. Dalrymple occupied the stern and Captain Sid the bow. Right off, the latter got a bite and missed hooking the fish. Whereupon he grew tremendously excited and intense. Captain Sid had hooked quite a number of bonefish and had positively become obsessed. Now he is the finest engineer in the world, and also a good boatman for swordfish at Catalina, but he knows nothing about small fish. He thought, however, that he knew a great deal. It was funny then to see him hook a fast, game bonefish that shot out for green water.

I had to stand up behind Captain Sid and yell at him while he had this bonefish on. It was a wonderful exhibition of how not to handle one. He did exactly what I told him not to do. The bonefish was swift, savage, heavy and tireless. I would have lost him half a dozen times. He fouled the line for Captain Sid and then obligingly swam back the right way to get it off. He got slack line until I grew hoarse yelling at

(Continued on Page 34)



Fisherman's Luck



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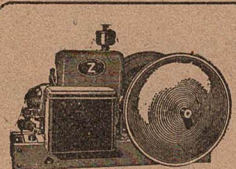
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Mrs. Preeny's Change of Heart

ONE day last week Mrs. Joe Preeny's sister-in-law and her family came to the Preeny home at about four o'clock in the afternoon, and they stayed and stayed until suppertime arrived. The Preeny children began showing signs of hunger, but Mrs. Preeny didn't mention supper. Darkness came on and still Mrs. Preeny made no move to put supper on the table, and finally the sister-in-law left. When the Preenys were seated at the table Mrs. Preeny began talking about the past and asked Joe if he remembered the big crowd they had for dinner a few months after they married.

"I know how proud I was when I counted the guests and found that I had fed fourteen, the largest number that had ever been fed at one meal in a Preeny home, not counting the dinner given by Aunt Lucy, who claimed to have fed twenty-seven at one meal before she left Grayson County. I remember how happy I was while washing the dishes for the second table, and at the time I was foolish enough to think that the whole family would be singing my praises.

"But that was twenty years ago and in that twenty years I have learned something. If I ever cook for that many people again I will be running a hotel and I'll be well paid for it. It hurt me tonight to let Bessie's children go away from this house hungry, but I know

Bessie, and I know exactly what was running through her mind. She felt that if she would stay here long enough she would get supper for that bunch and not have to cook anything at home; but she is just as able to cook as I am. When I go to see people I leave before mealtime, but Bessie won't leave as long as she thinks there is a chance to get anything to eat. I saw her look toward the pot of dumplings when she went into the kitchen to give Keeton a drink."

One neighbor says she has learned that the best way to manage a husband is to look nice.

It looks as though it is difficult to get ahead in the world, in spite of the fact that you meet up with somebody every few days who can save you money on something.

One day last week when neighbors saw Tom Preeny go to the well for water they went over to see what was the matter with Mrs. Preeny.

May Preeny can't see any reason for getting up early; the postman doesn't come until eleven o'clock anyway.

Mrs. Will Preeny doesn't allow her children to eat between meals and all the relatives resent it.

Some people always have a good time just because they go ahead and have it.



"I Saw Her Look Toward the Pot of Dumplings When She Went to Give Keeton a Drink"

Bonefishing

(Continued from Page 9)

Sid to wind the reel fast. At the end of a perfectly distracting period the bonefish came in tired and swam under the boat, round one anchor, then the other. By dint of heroic work on my part we saved him, and at last I soured the landing net under him. He was a beauty, over seven pounds, and assuredly the ruin of Captain Sid. He put on another bait and cast out in the same place, wild eyed, oblivious of all else.

A little while after that, as I stood up to make a cast I saw roily clay-colored patches in the water. This was made by bonefish poking their noses into the marl, digging for tiny crustaceans. Old bonefishermen call this "bonefish mud," and it is what they look for when stalking the game. A cast into that muddy water invariably brings a bite.

"Hurry. Cast round here. See—bonefish working," I said to my comrades, and in a moment we all had a bait in.

Just what I feared actually happened. At once we all had good hard bites and we all hooked bonefish. What actually followed could not be described. My fish ran straight out. Dalrymple's crossed my line and Captain Sid's ran under both of ours. That was a terrible moment. It seemed full of excited yells—whizzes—zips—thumps, splashes and snaps. Out of that mêlée we saved our rods.

Through all this excitement and disaster we had forgotten about the Wiborns and the R. C.'s. But now when the fish had deserted us we found opportunity to watch them. From their dejected postures I gathered that bonefish had given them a wide berth. R. C. was asleep against a back rest and his wife naturally was following his example. Wiborn was hunched down in his skiff, as if dreaming of his lone angling days. Probably this close proximity to us took the thrill out of life. Mrs. W., however, appeared really to be fishing. Afterward she confided to me she had seen a bonefish steal her husband's bait, and she had felt a couple of tugs at her own.

All at once I saw her start, lean slightly forward and grow intent on her line.

Manifestly she said something to Lone Angler, for he came out of his trance.

"Say—look!" I called to my comrades.

"Don't miss this." Suddenly she jerked hard. And when the rod whipped down I knew she had hooked a big fish. I called loudly to Mrs. Wiborn:

"Stand up! Let him run!"

She stood up all right, but from that nodding rod I knew she was thumbing the reel too hard. Lone Angler stood up also, and from his gestures I knew he was talking fast. It was not difficult to see that the perfect harmony of the Wiborn family had been temporarily disrupted. I hoped she would let the fish have his run out, instead of holding him hard and making him turn toward the boat. But the latter was exactly what happened. The fish must have come in like a streak. Mrs. W. performed miracles reeling in the slack. When the fish got near the boat, probably at sight of it, he turned so powerfully and swiftly that he made a boiling splash on the surface. And he shot round Lone Angler's end of the boat. Why Wiborn did not fall down to get out of the way of the line I never knew. But he was waving his arms and shouting. The bonefish got his head pointed away and all might have been well if only Mrs. W. had not shut down hard on the reel.

"Let him run!" I yelled with all the power of my lungs.

But she would not. The rod went down, shaking under the strain, and suddenly it flew up—straight. Mrs. W. nearly lost her balance. The line had broken. Then husband and wife—these angling comrades for so many years—stood in the boat and faced each other. It was an affecting spectacle. Then Lone Angler raised his arm and slammed his rod—no, it was my rod—down in the boat. Both hands were extended toward her, not in appeal but in a most poignant vehemence. She lost her statuesque immobility. . . . And now I must draw a veil over this tragic scene.

(TO BE CONCLUDED)