



Jack Tier

or, the Florida Reef



Part 2: Chapter 1

The night has been unruly: where we lay,
Our chimneys were blown down: and, as they say,
Lamentings heard i' the air; strange screams of death;
And prophesying, with accents terrible,
Of dire combustion, and confused events,
New hatched to the woful time.

—Macbeth.

It is seldom that man is required to make an exertion as desperate and appalling, in all its circumstances, as that on which Harry Mulford was now bent. The night was starlight, it was true, and it was possible to see objects near by with tolerable distinctness; still, it was midnight, and the gloom of that hour rested on the face of the sea, lending its solemn mystery and obscurity to the other trying features of the undertaking. Then there was the uncertainty whether it was the boat at all, of which he was in pursuit; and, if the boat, it might drift away from him as fast as he could follow it. Nevertheless, the perfect conviction that, without some early succour, the party on the wreck, including Rose Budd, must inevitably perish, stimulated him to proceed, and a passing feeling of doubt, touching the prudence of his course, that came over the young mate, when he was a few yards from the wreck, vanished under a vivid renewal of this last conviction. On he swam, therefore, riveting his eye on the “thoughtful star” that guided his course, and keeping his mind as tranquil as possible, in order that the exertions of his body might be the easier.

Mulford was an excellent swimmer. The want of food was a serious obstacle to his making one of his best efforts, but, as yet, he was not very sensible of any great



loss of strength. Understanding fully the necessity of swimming easily, if he would swim long, he did not throw out all his energy at first, but made the movements of his limbs as regular, continued, and skilful as possible. No strength was thrown away, and his progress was in proportion to the prudence of this manner of proceeding. For some twenty minutes he held on his course, in this way, when he began to experience a little of that weariness which is apt to accompany an unremitted use of the same set of muscles, in a monotonous and undeviating mode. Accustomed to all the resources of his art, he turned on his back, for the double purpose of relieving his arms for a minute, and of getting a glimpse of the wreck, if possible, in order to ascertain the distance he had overcome. Swim long in this new manner, however, he could not with prudence, as the star was necessary in order to keep the direct line of his course. It may be well to explain to some of our readers, that, though the surface of the ocean may be like glass, as sometimes really happens, it is never absolutely free from the long, undulating motion that is known by the name of a "ground swell." This swell, on the present occasion, was not very heavy, but it was sufficient to place our young mate, at moments, between two dark mounds of water, that limited his view in either direction to some eighty or a hundred yards; then it raised him on the summit of a rounded wave, that enabled him to see, far as his eye could reach under that obscure light. Profiting by this advantage, Mulford now looked behind him, in quest of the wreck, but uselessly. It might have been in the trough, while he was thus on the summit of the waves, or it might be that it floated so low as to be totally lost to the view of one whose head was scarcely above the surface of the water. For a single instant, the young man felt a chill at his heart, as he fancied that the wreck had already sunk; but it passed away when he recalled the slow progress by which the air escaped, and he saw the certainty that the catastrophe, however inevitable, could not yet have really arrived. He waited for another swell to lift him on its summit, when, by "treading water," he raised his head and shoulders fairly above the surface of the sea, and strained his eyes in another vain effort to catch a glimpse of the wreck. He could not see it. In point of fact, the mate had swum much further than he had supposed, and was already so distant as to render any such attempt hopeless. He was fully a third of a mile distant from the point of his departure.

Disappointed, and in a slight degree disheartened, Mulford turned, and swam in the direction of the sinking star. He now looked anxiously for the boat. It was time that it came more plainly into view, and a new source of anxiety beset him, as he could discover no signs of its vicinity. Certain that he was on the course, after making a due



allowance for the direction of the wind, the stout-hearted young man swam on. He next determined not to annoy himself by fruitless searches, or vain regrets, but to swim steadily for a certain time, a period long enough to carry him a material distance, ere he again looked for the object of his search.

For twenty minutes longer did that courageous and active youth struggle with the waste of waters, amid the obscurity and solitude of midnight. He now believed himself near a mile from the wreck, and the star which had so long served him for a beacon was getting near to the horizon. He took a new observation of another of the heavenly bodies nigh it, to serve him in its stead when it should disappear altogether, and then he raised himself in the water, and looked about again for the boat. The search was in vain. No boat was very near him, of a certainty, and the dreadful apprehension began to possess his mind, of perishing uselessly in that waste of gloomy waters. While thus gazing about him, turning his eyes in every quarter, hoping intently to catch some glimpse of the much-desired object in the gloom, he saw two dark, pointed objects, that resembled small stakes, in the water within twenty feet of him. Mulford knew them at a glance, and a cold shudder passed through his frame, as he recognised them. They were, out of all question, the fins of an enormous shark; an animal that could not measure less than eighteen or twenty feet in length.

It is scarcely necessary to say, that when our young mate discovered the proximity of this dangerous animal, situated as he was, he gave himself up for lost. He possessed his knife, however, and had heard of the manner in which even sharks were overcome, and that too in their own element, by the skilful and resolute. At first, he was resolved to make one desperate effort for life, before he submitted to a fate as horrible as that which now menaced him; but the movements of his dangerous neighbour induced him to wait. It did not approach any nearer, but continued swimming back and fro, on the surface of the water, according to the known habits of the fish, as if watching his own movements. There being no time to be wasted, our young mate turned on his face, and began again to swim in the direction of the setting star, though nearly chilled by despair. For ten minutes longer did he struggle on, beginning to feel exhaustion, however, and always accompanied by those two dark, sharp and gliding fins. There was no difficulty in knowing the position of the animal, and Mulford's eyes were oftener on those fins than on the beacon before him. Strange as it may appear, he actually became accustomed to the vicinity of this formidable creature, and soon felt his presence a sort of relief against the dreadful solitude of his situation. He had been told by seamen of instances, and had once witnessed a case himself, in which a shark had attended a



swimming man for a long distance, either forbearing to do him harm, from repletion, or influenced by that awe which nature has instilled into all of the inferior, for the highest animal of the creation. He began to think that he was thus favoured, and really regarded the shark as a friendly neighbour, rather than as a voracious foe. In this manner did the two proceed, nearly another third of a mile, the fins sometimes in sight ahead, gliding hither and thither, and sometimes out of view behind the swimmer, leaving him in dreadful doubts as to the movements of the fish, when Mulford suddenly felt something hard hit his foot. Believing it to be the shark, dipping for his prey, a slight exclamation escaped him. At the next instant both feet hit the unknown substance again, and he stood erect, the water no higher than his waist! Quick, and comprehending everything connected with the sea, the young man at once understood that he was on a part of the reef where the water was so shallow as to admit of his wading.

Mulford felt that he had been providentially rescued from death. His strength had been about to fail him, when he was thus led, unknown to himself, to a spot where his life might yet be possibly prolonged for a few more hours, or days. He had leisure to look about him, and to reflect on what was next to be done. Almost unwittingly, he turned in quest of his terrible companion, in whose voracious mouth he had actually believed himself about to be immolated, a few seconds before. There the two horn-like fins still were, gliding about above the water, and indicating the smallest movement of their formidable owner. The mate observed that they went a short distance ahead of him, describing nearly a semi-circle, and then returned, doing the same thing in his rear, repeating the movements incessantly, keeping always on his right. This convinced him that shoaler water existed on his left hand, and he waded in that direction, until he reached a small spot of naked rock.

For a time, at least, he was safe! The fragment of coral on which the mate now stood, was irregular in shape, but might have contained a hundred feet square in superficial measurement, and was so little raised above the level of the water as not to be visible, even by daylight, at the distance of a hundred yards. Mulford found it was perfectly dry, however, an important discovery to him, as by a close calculation he had made of the tides, since quitting the Dry Tortugas, he knew it must be near high water. Could he have even this small portion of bare rock secure, it made him, for the moment, rich as the most extensive landholder living. A considerable quantity of sea-weed had lodged on the rock, and, as most of this was also quite dry, it convinced the young sailor that the place was usually bare. But, though most of this sea-weed was dry, there were portions of the more recent accessions there that still lay in, or quite near to the water, which formed



exceptions. In handling these weeds, in order to ascertain the facts, Mulford caught a small shell-fish, and finding it fresh and easy to open, he swallowed it with the eagerness of a famishing man. Never had food proved half so grateful to him as that single swallow of a very palatable testaceous animal. By feeling further, he found several others of the same family, and made quite as large a meal, as, under the circumstances, was probably good for him. Then, grateful for his escape, but overcome by fatigue, he hastily arranged a bed of sea-weed, drew a portion of the plant over his body, to keep him warm, and fell into a deep sleep that lasted for hours.

Mulford did not regain his consciousness until the rays of the rising sun fell upon his eye-lids, and the genial warmth of the great luminary shed its benign influence over his frame. At first his mind was confused, and it required a few seconds to bring a perfect recollection of the past, and a true understanding of his real situation. They came, however, and the young man moved to the highest part of his little domain, and cast an anxious, hurried look around in quest of the wreck. A knowledge of the course in which he had swum, aided by the position of the sun, told him on what part of the naked waste to look for the object he sought. God had not yet forsaken them! There was the wreck; or, it might be more exact to say, there were those whom the remaining buoyancy of the wreck still upheld from sinking into the depths of the gulf. In point of fact, but a very little of the bottom of the vessel actually remained above water, some two or three yards square at most, and that little was what seamen term nearly awash. Two or three hours must bury that small portion of the still naked wood beneath the surface of the sea, though sufficient buoyancy might possibly remain for the entire day still to keep the living from death.

There the wreck was, however, yet floating; and, though not visible to Mulford, with a small portion of it above water. He saw the four persons only; and what was more, they saw him. This was evident by Jack Tier's waving his hat like a man cheering. When Mulford returned this signal, the shawl of Rose was tossed into the air, in a way to leave no doubt that he was seen and known. The explanation of this early recognition and discovery of the young mate was very simple. Tier was not asleep when Harry left the wreck, though, seeing the importance of the step the other was taking, he had feigned to be so. When Rose awoke, missed her lover, and was told what had happened, her heart was kept from sinking by his encouraging tale and hopes. An hour of agony had succeeded, nevertheless, when light returned and no Mulford was to be seen. The despair that burst upon the heart of our heroine was followed by the joy of discovering him on the rock.



It is scarcely necessary to say how much the parties were relieved on ascertaining their respective positions. Faint as were the hopes of each of eventual delivery, the two or three minutes that succeeded seemed to be minutes of perfect happiness. After this rush of unlooked-for joy, Mulford continued his intelligent examination of surrounding objects.

The wreck was fully half a mile from the rock of the mate, but much nearer to the reef than it had been the previous night. "Could it but ground on the rocks," thought the young man, "it would be a most blessed event." The thing was possible, though the first half hour of his observations told him that its drift was in the direction of the open passage so often named, rather than toward the nearest rocks. Still, that drift brought Rose each minute nearer and nearer to himself again. In looking round, however, the young man saw the boat. It was a quarter of a mile distant, with open water between them, apparently grounded on a rock, for it was more within the reef than he was himself. He must have passed it in the dark, and the boat had been left to obey the wind and currents, and to drift to the spot where it then lay.

Mulford shouted aloud when he saw the boat, and at once determined to swim in quest of it, as soon as he had collected a little refreshment from among the seaweed. On taking a look at his rock by daylight, he saw that its size was quadrupled to the eye by the falling of the tide, and that water was lying in several of the cavities of its uneven surface. At first he supposed this to be sea-water, left by the flood; but, reflecting a moment, he remembered the rain, and hoped it might be possible that one little cavity, containing two or three gallons of the fluid, would turn out to be fresh. Kneeling beside it, he applied his lips in feverish haste, and drank the sweetest draught that had ever passed his lips. Slaking his thirst, which had begun again to be painfully severe, he arose with a heart overflowing with gratitude—could he only get Rose to that narrow and barren rock, it would seem to be an earthly paradise. Mulford next made his scanty, but, all things considered, sufficient meal, drank moderately afterward, and then turned his attention and energies toward the boat, which, though now aground and fast, might soon float on the rising tide, and drift once more beyond his reach. It was his first intention to swim directly for his object; but, just when about to enter the water, he saw with horror the fins of at least a dozen sharks, which were prowling about in the deeper water of the reef, and almost encircling his hold. To throw himself in the midst of such enemies would be madness, and he stopped to reflect, and again to look about him. For the first time that morning, he took a survey of the entire horizon, to see if anything were in sight; for, hitherto, his thoughts had been too much occupied with



Rose and her companions, to remember anything else. To the northward and westward he distinctly saw the upper sails of a large ship, that was standing on a wind to the northward and eastward. As there was no port to which a vessel of that character would be likely to be bound in the quarter of the Gulf to which such a course would lead, Mulford at once inferred it was the sloop-of-war, which, after having examined the islets, at the Dry Tortugas, and finding them deserted, was beating up, either to go into Key West, or to pass to the southward of the reef again, by the passage through which she had come as lately as the previous day. This was highly encouraging; and could he only get to the boat, and remove the party from the wreck before it sunk, there was now every prospect of a final escape.

To the southward, also, the mate fancied he saw a sail. It was probably a much smaller vessel than the ship in the north-west, and at a greater distance. It might, however, be the lofty sails of some large craft; standing along the reef, going westward, bound to New Orleans, or to that new and important port, Point Isabel: or it might be some wrecker, or other craft, edging away into the passage. As it was, it appeared only as a speck in the horizon; and was too far off to offer much prospect of succour.

Thus acquainted with the state of things around him, Mulford gave his attention seriously to his duties. He was chiefly afraid that the returning tide might lift the boat from the rock on which it had grounded, and that it would float beyond his reach. Then there was the frightful and ever-increasing peril of the wreck, and the dreadful fate that so inevitably menaced those that it held, were not relief prompt. This thought goaded him nearly to desperation, and he felt at moments almost ready to plunge into the midst of the sharks, and fight his way to his object.

But reflection showed him a less hazardous way of making an effort to reach the boat. The sharks' fins described a semicircle only, as had been the case of his single attendant during the night, and he thought that the shealness of the water prevented their going further than they did, in a south-easterly direction, which was that of the boat. He well knew that a shark required sufficient water to sink beneath its prey, ere it made its swoop, and that it uniformly turned on its back, and struck upward whenever it gave one of its voracious bites. This was owing to the greater length of its upper than of its lower jaw, and Mulford had heard it was a physical necessity of its formation. Right or wrong, he determined to act on this theory, and began at once to wade along the part of the reef that his enemies seemed unwilling to approach.

Had our young mate a weapon of any sort larger than his knife, he would have felt greater confidence in his success. As it was, however, he drew that knife, and was



prepared to sell his life dearly should a foe assail him. No sooner was his step heard in the water, than the whole group of sharks were set in violent motion, glancing past, and frequently quite near him, as if aware their intended prey was about to escape. Had the water deepened much, Harry would have returned at once, for a conflict with such numbers would have been hopeless; but it did not; on the contrary, it shoaled again, after a very short distance, at which it had been waist-deep; and Mulford found himself wading over a long, broad surface of rock, and that directly toward the boat, through water that seldom rose above his knees, and which, occasionally, scarce covered his feet. There was no absolutely naked rock near him, but there seemed to be acres of that which might be almost said to be awash. Amid the greedy throng that endeavoured to accompany him, the mate even fancied he recognised the enormous fins of his old companion, who sailed to and fro in the crowd in a stately manner, as if merely a curious looker-on of his own movements. It was the smaller, and probably the younger sharks, that betrayed the greatest hardihood and voracity. One or two of these made fierce swoops toward Harry, as if bent on having him at every hazard; but they invariably glided off when they found their customary mode of attack resisted by the shoalness of the water.

Our young mate got ahead but slowly, being obliged to pay a cautious attention to the movements of his escort. Sometimes he was compelled to wade up to his arms in order to cross narrow places, that he might get on portions of the rock that were nearly bare; and once he was actually compelled to swim eight or ten yards. Nevertheless, he did get on, and after an hour of this sort of work, he found himself within a hundred yards of the boat, which lay grounded near a low piece of naked rock, but separated from it by a channel of deep water, into which all the sharks rushed in a body, as if expressly to cut off his escape. Mulford now paused to take breath, and to consider what ought to be done. On the spot where he stood he was quite safe, though ankle-deep in the sea, the shallow water extending to a considerable distance on all sides of him, with the single exception of the channel in his front. He stood on the very verge of that channel, and could see in the pellucid element before him, that it was deep enough to float a vessel of some size.

To venture into the midst of twenty sharks required desperation, and Harry was not yet reduced to that. He had been so busy in making his way to the point where he stood as to have no leisure to look for the wreck; but he now turned his eyes in quest of that all-interesting object. He saw the shawl fluttering in the breeze, and that was all he could see. Tier had contrived to keep it flying as a signal where he was to be



found, but the hull of the schooner had sunk so low in the water that they who were seated on its keel were not visible even at the short distance which now separated them from Mulford. Encouraged by this signal, and animated by the revived hope of still saving his companions, Harry turned toward the channel, half inclined to face every danger rather than to wait any longer. At that moment the fins were all gliding along the channel from him, and in the same direction. Some object drew the sharks away in a body, and the young mate let himself easily into the water, and swam as noiselessly as he could toward the boat.

It was a fearful trial, but Mulford felt that everything depended on his success. Stimulated by his motive, and strengthened by the food and water taken an hour before, never had he shown so much skill and power in the water. In an incredibly short period he was half-way across the channel, still swimming strong and unharmed. A few strokes more sent him so near the boat that hope took full possession of his soul, and he shouted in exultation. That indiscreet but natural cry, uttered so near the surface of the sea, turned every shark upon him, as the pack springs at the fox in view. Mulford was conscious of the folly of his cry the instant it escaped him, and involuntarily he turned his head to note the effect on his enemies. Every fin was gliding toward him—a dark array of swift and furious foes. Ten thousand bayonets, levelled in their line, could not have been one-half as terrible, and the efforts of the young man became nearly frantic. But strong as he was, and ready in the element, what is the movement of a man in the water compared to that of a vigorous and voracious fish? Mulford could see those fins coming on like a tempest, and he had just given up all hope, and was feeling his flesh creep with terror, when his foot hit the rock. Giving himself an onward plunge, he threw his body upward toward the boat, and into so much shoaler water, at least a dozen feet by that single effort. Recovering his legs as soon as possible, he turned to look behind him. The water seemed alive with fins, each pair gliding back and forth, as the bull-dog bounds in front of the ox's muzzle. Just then a light-coloured object glanced past the young man, so near as almost to touch him. It was a shark that had actually turned on its back to seize its prey, and was only prevented from succeeding by being driven from the line of its course by hitting the slimy rock, over which it was compelled to make its plunge. The momentum with which it came on, added to the inclination of the rock, forced the head and half of the body of this terrible assailant into the air, giving the intended victim an opportunity of seeing from what a fate he had escaped. Mulford avoided this fish without much trouble, however, and the next instant he threw himself into the boat, on the bottom of which he lay panting with the



violence of his exertions, and unable to move under the reaction which now came over his system.

The mate lay in the bottom of the boat, exhausted and unable to rise, for several minutes; during that space he devoutly returned thanks to God for his escape, and bethought him of the course he was next to pursue, in order to effect the rescue of his companions. The boat was larger than common. It was also well equipped—a mast and sail lying along with the oars, on its thwarts. The rock placed Harry to windward of the wreck, and by the time he felt sufficiently revived to rise and look about him, his plan of proceeding was fully arranged in his own mind. Among other things that he saw, as he still lay in the bottom of the boat, was a breaker which he knew contained fresh water, and a bread-bag. These were provisions that it was customary for the men to make, when employed on boat duty; and the articles had been left where he now saw them, in the hurry of the movements, as the brig quitted the islets.

Harry rose the instant he felt his strength returning. Striking the breaker with his foot, and feeling the basket with a hand, he ascertained that the one held its water, and the other its bread. This was immense relief, for by this time the sufferings of the party on the wreck must be returning with redoubled force. The mate then stepped the mast, and fitted the sprit to the sail, knowing that the latter would be seen fluttering in the wind by those on the wreck, and carry joy to their hearts. After this considerate act, he began to examine into the position of the boat. It was still aground, having been left by the tide; but the water had already risen several inches, and by placing himself on a gunwale, so as to bring the boat on its bilge, and pushing with an oar, he soon got it into deep water. It only remained to haul aft the sheet, and right the helm, to be standing through the channel, at a rate that promised a speedy deliverance to his friends, and, most of all, to Rose.

Mulford glanced past the rocks and shoals, attended by the whole company of the sharks. They moved before, behind, and on each side of him, as if unwilling to abandon their prey, even after he had got beyond the limits of their power to do him harm. It was not an easy thing to manage the boat in that narrow and crooked channel, with no other guide for the courses than the eye, and it required so much of the mate's vigilance to keep clear of the sharp angles of the rocks, that he could not once cast his eyes aside, to look for the fluttering shawl, which now composed the standing signal of the wreck. At length the boat shot through the last passage of the reef, and issued into open water. Mulford knew that he must come out half a mile at least to leeward of his object, and, without even raising his head, he flattened in the sheet, put his helm down, and luffed close to the wind. Then, and then only, did he venture to look around him.



Our mate felt his heart leap toward his mouth, as he observed the present state of the wreck. It was dead to windward of him, in the first place, and it seemed to be entirely submerged. He saw the shawl fluttering as before; for Tier had fastened one corner to a button-hole of his own jacket, and another to the dress of Bidy, leaving the part which might be called the fly, to rise at moments almost perpendicularly in the air, in a way to render it visible at some distance. He saw also the heads and the bodies of those on the schooner's bottom, but to him they appeared to be standing in, or on, the water. The distance may have contributed a little to this appearance, but no doubt remained that so much air had escaped from the hold of the vessel, as to permit it to sink altogether beneath the surface of the sea. It was time, indeed, to proceed to the relief of the sufferers.

Notwithstanding the boat sailed particularly fast, and worked beautifully, it could not equal the impatience of Mulford to get on. Passing away to the north-east a sufficient distance, as he thought, to weather on the wreck, the young man tacked at last, and had the happiness to see that every foot he proceeded was now in a direct line toward Rose. It was only while tacking he perceived that all the fins had disappeared. He felt little doubt that they had deserted him, in order to push for the wreck, which offered so much larger, and so much more attainable prey. This increased his feverish desire to get on, the boat seeming to drag, in his eyes, at the very moment it was leaving a wake full of eddies and little whirlpools. The wind was steady, but it seemed to Mulford that the boat was set to leeward of her course by a current, though this could hardly have been the case, as the wreck, the sole mark of his progress, would have had at least as great a drift as the boat. At length Mulford—to him it appeared to be an age; in truth it was after a run of about twenty minutes—came near the goal he so earnestly sought, and got an accurate view of the state of the wreck, and of those on it. The hull of the schooner had, in truth, sunk entirely beneath the surface of the sea; and the party it sustained stood already knee-deep in the water. This was sufficiently appalling; but the presence of the sharks, who were crowding around the spot, rendered the whole scene frightful. To the young mate it seemed as if he must still be too late to save Rose from a fate more terrible than drowning, for his boat fell so far to leeward as to compel him to tack once more. As he swept past the wreck, he called out to encourage his friends, begging them to be of good heart for five minutes longer, when he should be able to reach them. Rose held out her arms entreatingly, and the screams of Mrs. Budd and Bidy, which were extorted by the closer and closer approach of the sharks, proclaimed the imminency of the danger they ran, and the importance of not losing a moment of time.



Mulford took his distance with a seaman's eye, and the boat went about like a top. The latter fell off, and the sail filled on the other tack. Then the young mariner saw, with a joy no description can portray, that he looked to windward of the fluttering shawl, toward which his little craft was already flying. He afterward believed that shawl alone prevented the voracious party of fish from assailing those on the wreck, for, though there might not yet be sufficient depth of water to allow of their customary mode of attack, creatures of their voracity did not always wait for such conveniences. But the boat was soon in the midst of the fins, scattering them in all directions; and Mulford let go his sheet, put his helm down, and sprang forward to catch the extended arms of Rose.

It might have been accident, or it might have been the result of skill and interest in our heroine, but certain it is, that the bows of the boat came on the wreck precisely at the place where Rose stood, and her hand was the first object that the young man touched.

“Take my aunt first,” cried Rose, resisting Mulford's efforts to lift her into the boat; “she is dreadfully alarmed, and can stand with difficulty.”

Although two of Rose's activity and lightness might have been drawn into the boat, while the process was going on in behalf of the widow, Mulford lost no time in discussion, but did as he was desired. First directing Tier to hold on to the painter, he applied his strength to the arms of Mrs. Budd, and, assisted by Rose and Bidy, got her safely into the boat, over its bows. Rose now waited not for assistance, but followed her aunt with a haste that proved fear lent her strength in despite her long fast. Bidy came next, though clumsily, and not without trouble, and Jack Tier followed the instant he was permitted so to do. Of course, the boat, no longer held by its painter, drifted away from the spot, and the hull of the schooner, relieved from the weight of four human beings, rose so near the surface again as to bring a small line of its keel out of water. No better evidence could have been given of the trifling power which sustained it, and of the timely nature of the succour brought by Mulford. Had the boat remained near the schooner, it would have been found half an hour later that the hull had sunk slowly out of sight, finding its way, doubtless, inch by inch, toward the bottom of the Gulf.

By this time the sun was well up, and the warmth of the hour, season, and latitude, was shed on the sufferers. There was an old sail in the boat, and in this the party dried their limbs and feet, which were getting to be numb by their long immersion. Then the mate produced the bag and opened it, in quest of bread. A small portion was given to each, and, on looking farther, the mate discovered that a piece of boiled ship's beef had



been secreted in this receptacle. Of this also he gave each a moderate slice, taking a larger portion for himself, as requiring less precaution. The suffering of the party from hunger was far less than that they endured from thirst. Neither had been endured long enough seriously to enfeeble them or render a full meal very dangerous, but the thirst had been much the hardest to be borne. Of this fact Bidy soon gave audible evidence.

“The mate is good,” she said, “and the bread tastes swate and refreshing, but wather is a blessed thing. Can you no give us one dhrap of the wather that falls from heaven, Mr. Mulford; for this wather of the saa is of no use but to drown Christians in?”

In an instant the mate had opened a breaker, and filled the tin pot which is almost always to be found in a boat. Bidy said no more, but her eyes pleaded so eloquently, that Rose begged the faithful creature might have the first drink. One eager swallow went down, and then a cry of disappointment succeeded. The water was salt, and had been put in the breaker for ballast. The other breaker was tried with the same success.

“It is terrible to be without one drop of water,” murmured Rose, “and this food makes it more necessary than ever.”

“Patience, patience, dearest Rose—patience for ten minutes, and you shall all drink,” answered the mate, filling the sail and keeping the boat away while speaking. “There is water, God be praised, on the rock to which I first swam, and we will secure it before another day’s sun help to make it evaporate.”

This announcement quieted the longings of those who endured a thirst which disappointment rendered doubly hard to bear; and away the boat glided toward the rock. As he now flew over the distance, lessened more than one-half by the drift of the wreck, Mulford recalled the scene through which he had so painfully passed the previous night. As often happens, he shuddered at the recollection of things which, at the moment, a desperate resolution had enabled him to encounter with firmness. Still, he thought nothing less than the ardent desire to save Rose could have carried him through the trial with the success which attended his struggles. The dear being at his side asked a few explanations of what had passed; and she bowed her head and wept, equally with pain and delight, as imagination pictured to her the situation of her betrothed, amid that waste of water, with his fearful companions, and all in the hours of deep night.

But that was over now. There was the rock—the blessed rock on which Mulford had so accidentally struck, close before them—and presently they were all on it. The mate took the pot and ran to the little reservoir, returning with a sweet draught for each of the party.



“A blessed, blessed thing, is wather!” exclaimed Bidy, this time finding the relief she sought, “and a thousand blessings on _you,_ Mr. Mulford, who have niver done us anything but good.”

Rose looked a still higher eulogy on the young man, and even Mrs. Budd had something commendatory and grateful to say. Jack Tier was silent, but he had all his eyes about him, as he now proved.

“We’ve all on us been so much taken up with our own affairs,” remarked the steward’s assistant, “that we’ve taken but little notice of the neighbourhood. If that isn’t the brig, Mr. Mulford, running through this very passage, with stunsails set aloft and aloft, I don’t know the *Molly Swash* when I see her!”

“The brig!” exclaimed the mate, recollecting the vessels he had seen at the break-of-day, for the first time in hours. “Can it be possible that the craft I made out to the southward, is the brig?”

“Look, and judge for yourself, sir. There she comes, like a race-horse, and if she holds her present course, she must pass somewhere within a mile or so of us, if we stay where we are.”

Mulford did look, as did all with him. There was the *Swash*, sure enough, coming down before the wind, and under a cloud of canvas. She might be still a league, or a league and a half distant, but, at the rate at which she was travelling, that distance would soon be past. She was running through the passage, no doubt with a view to proceed to the Dry Tortugas, to look after the schooner, Spike having the hope that he had dodged his pursuers on the coast of Cuba. The mate now looked for the ship, in the north-western board, believing, as he did, that she was the sloop-of-war. That vessel had gone about, and was standing to the southward, on a taut bowline. She was still a long way off, three or four leagues at least, but the change she had made in her position, since last seen, proved that she was a great sailer. Then she was more than hull down, whereas, now, she was near enough to let the outline of a long, straight fabric be discovered beneath her canvas.

“It is hardly possible that Spike should not see the vessel here in the northern board,” Mulford observed to Tier, who had been examining the ship with him. “The lookout is usually good on board the *Swash*, and, just now, should certainly be as good as common. Spike is no dawdler with serious business before him.”

“He’s a willain!” muttered Jack Tier.

The mate regarded his companion with some surprise. Jack was a very insignificant-looking personage in common, and one would scarcely pause to give him a second look,



unless it might be to laugh at his rotundity and little waddling legs. But, now, the mate fancied he was swelling with feelings that actually imparted somewhat more than usual stature and dignity to his appearance. His face was full of indignation, and there was something about the eye, that to Mulford was inexplicable. As Rose, however, had related to him the scene that took place on the islet, at the moment when Spike was departing, the mate supposed that Jack still felt a portion of the resentment that such a collision would be apt to create. From the expression of Jack's countenance at that instant, it struck him Spike might not be exactly safe, should accident put it in the power of the former to do him an injury.

It was now necessary to decide on the course that ought to be pursued. The bag contained sufficient food to last the party several days, and a gallon of water still remained in the cavity of the rock. This last was collected and put in one of the breakers, which was emptied of the salt water in order to receive it. As water, however, was the great necessity in that latitude, Mulford did not deem it prudent to set sail with so small a supply, and he accordingly commenced a search, on some of the adjacent rocks, Jack Tier accompanying him. They succeeded in doubling their stock of water, and collected several shell-fish, that the females found exceedingly grateful and refreshing. On the score of hunger and thirst, indeed, no one was now suffering. By judiciously sipping a little water at a time, and retaining it in the mouth before swallowing, the latter painful feeling had been gotten rid of; and as for food, there was even more than was actually needed, and that of a very good quality. It is probable that standing in the water for hours, as Rose, and her aunt, and Biddy had been obliged to do, had contributed to lessen the pain endured from thirst, though they had all suffered a good deal from that cause, especially while the sun shone.

Mulford and Tier were half an hour in obtaining the water. By the end of that period the brigantine was so near as to render her hull distinctly visible. It was high time to decide on their future course. The sail had been brailled when the boat reached the rock, and the boat itself lay on the side of the latter opposite to the brig, and where no part of it could be seen to those on board the *Swash*, with the exception of the mast. Under the circumstances, therefore, Mulford thought it wisest to remain where they were, and let the vessel pass, before they attempted to proceed toward Key West, their intended place of refuge. In order to do this, however, it was necessary to cause the whole party to lie down, in such a way as to be hid by the inequalities in the rock, as it was now very evident the brig would pass within half a mile of them. Hitherto, it was not probable that they had been seen, and by using due caution, the chances of Spike's overlooking them altogether amounted nearly to certainty.



The necessary arrangements were soon made, the boat's masts unstepped, the party placed behind their covers, and the females comfortably bestowed in the spare sail, where they might get a little undisturbed sleep after the dreadful night, or morning, they had passed. Even Jack Tier lay down to catch his nap, as the most useful manner of bestowing himself for a couple of hours; the time Mulford had mentioned as the period of their stay where they were.

As for the mate, vigilance was his portion, and he took his position, hid like all the rest, where he could watch the movements of his old craft. In about twenty minutes, the brig was quite near; so near that Mulford not only saw the people on board her, who showed themselves in the rigging, but fancied he could recognise their persons. As yet, nothing had occurred in the way of change, but, just as the *Swash* got abreast of the rock, she began to take in her studding-sails, and that hurriedly, as is apt to occur on board a vessel in sudden emergencies. Our young man was a little alarmed at first, believing that they might have been discovered, but he was soon induced to think that the crew of the brigantine had just then begun to suspect the character of the ship to the northward. That vessel had been drawing near all this time, and was now only some three leagues distant. Owing to the manner in which she headed, or bows on, it was not a very easy matter to tell the character of this stranger, though the symmetry and squareness of his yards rendered it nearly certain he was a cruiser. Though Spike could not expect to meet his old acquaintance here, after the chase he had so lately led her, down on the opposite coast, he might and would have his misgivings, and Mulford thought it was his intention to haul up close round the northern angle of the reef, and maintain his advantage of the wind, over the stranger. If this were actually done, it might expose the boat to view, for the brig would pass within a quarter of a mile of it, and on the side of the rock on which it lay. It was too late, however, to attempt a change, since the appearance of human beings in such a place would be certain to draw the brig's glasses on them, and the glasses must at once let Spike know who they were. It remained, therefore, only to await the result as patiently as possible.

A very few minutes removed all doubt. The brig hauled as close round the reef as she dared to venture, and in a very short time the boat lay exposed to view to all on board her. The vessel was now so near that Mulford plainly saw the boatswain get upon the coach-house, or little hurricane-house deck, where Spike stood examining the ship with his glass, and point out the boat, where it lay at the side of the rock. In an instant, the glass was levelled at the spot, and the movements on board the brig immediately betrayed to Mulford that the boat was recognised. Sail was shortened on board



the *Swash*, and men were seen preparing to lower her stern boat, while everything indicated that the vessel was about to be hove-to. There was no time now to be lost, but the young man immediately gave the alarm.

No sooner did the party arise and show themselves, than the crew of the *Swash* gave three cheers. By the aid of the glass, Spike doubtless recognised their persons, and the fact was announced to the men, by way of stimulating their exertions. This gave an additional spur to the movements of those on the rock, who hastened into their own boat, and made sail as soon as possible.

It was far easier to do all that has been described, than to determine on the future course. Capture was certain if the fugitives ventured into the open water, and their only hope was to remain on the reef. If channels for the passage of the boat could be found, escape was highly probable, as the schooner's boat could sail much faster than the brig's boat could row, fast as Mulford knew the last to be. But the experience of the morning had told the mate that the rock rose too near the surface, in many places, for the boat, small as it was, to pass over it; and he must trust a great deal to chance. Away he went, however, standing along a narrow channel, through which the wind just permitted him to lay, with the sail occasionally shaking.

By this time the *Swash* had her boat in the water, manned with four powerful oars, Spike steering it in his own person. Our young mate placed Tier in the bows, to point out the deepest water, and kept his sail a rap full, in order to get ahead as fast as possible. Ahead he did get, but it was on a course that soon brought him out in the open water of the main passage through the reef, leaving Spike materially astern. The latter now rose in his boat, and made a signal with his hat, which the boatswain perfectly understood. The latter caused the brig to ware short round on her heel, and boarded his foretack in chase, hauling up into the passage as soon as he could again round the reef. Mulford soon saw that it would never do for him to venture far from the rocks, the brig going two feet to his one, though not looking quite as high as he did in the boat. But the *Swash* had her guns, and it was probable they would be used rather than he should escape. When distant two hundred yards from the reef, therefore, he tacked. The new course brought the fugitives nearly at right angles to that steered by Spike, who stood directly on, as if conscious that, sooner or later, such a rencounter must occur. It would seem that the tide was setting through the passage, for when the boat of Mulford again reached the reef, it was considerably to windward of the channel out of which she had issued, and opposite to another which offered very opportunely for her entrance. Into this new channel, then, the mate somewhat blindly ran, feeling the necessity of getting



out of gun-shot of the brig at every hazard. She at least could not follow him among the rocks, let Spike, in his boat, proceed as he might.

According to appearances, Spike was not likely to be very successful. He was obliged to diverge from his course, in order to go into the main passage at the very point where Mulford had just before done the same thing, and pull along the reef to windward, in order to get into the new channel, into which the boat he was pursuing had just entered. This brought him not only astern again, but a long bit astern, inasmuch as he was compelled to make the circuit described. On he went, however, as eager in the chase as the hound with his game in view.

Mulford's boat seemed to fly, and glided ahead at least three feet to that of Spike's two. The direction of the channel it was in, brought it pretty close to the wind, but the water was quite smooth, and our mate managed to keep the sail full, and his little craft at the same time quite near the weatherly side of the rocks. In the course of ten minutes the fugitives were fully a mile from the brig, which was unable to follow them, but kept standing off and on, in the main passage, waiting the result. At one time Mulford thought the channel would bring him out into open water again, on the northern side of the reef, and more than a mile to the eastward of the point where the ship-channel in which the *Swash* was plying commenced; but an accidental circumstance prevented his standing in far enough to ascertain the fact. That circumstance was as follows:

In running a mile and a half over the reef, in the manner described, Mulford had left the boat of Spike quite half a mile astern. He was now out of gun-shot from the brig, or at least beyond the range of her grape, the only missile he feared, and so far to windward that he kept his eye on every opening to the southward, which he fancied might allow of his making a stretch deeper into the mazes of the reef, among which he believed it easiest for him to escape, and to weary the oarsmen of his pursuers. Two or three of these openings offered as he glided along, but it struck him that they all looked so high that the boat would not lay through them—an opinion in which he was right. At length he came abreast of one that seemed straight and clear of obstacles as far as he could see, and through which he might run with a flowing sheet. Down went his helm, and about went his boat, running away to the southward as fast as ever.

Had Spike followed, doubled the same shoal, and kept away again in the same channel as had been done by the boat he chased, all his hopes of success must have vanished at once. This he did not attempt, therefore; but, sheering into one of the openings which the mate had rejected, he cut off quite half a mile in his distance. This was easy enough for him to accomplish, as a row-boat would pull even easier,



near to the wind, than with the wind broad on its bow. In consequence of this short cut, therefore, Spike was actually crossing out into Mulford's new channel, just as the latter had handsomely cleared the mouth of the opening through which he effected his purpose.

It is scarcely necessary to say that the two boats must have been for a few minutes quite near to each other; so near, indeed, did the fugitives now pass to their pursuers, that it would have been easy for them to have conversed, had they been so disposed. Not a word was spoken, however, but Mulford went by, leaving Spike about a hundred yards astern. This was a trying moment to the latter, and the devil tempted him to seek his revenge. He had not come unarmed on his enterprise, but three or four loaded muskets lay in the stern-sheets of his yawl. He looked at his men, and saw that they could not hold out much longer to pull as they had been pulling. Then he looked at Mulford's boat, and saw it gliding away from him at a rate that would shortly place it another half mile in advance. He seized a musket, and raised it to his shoulder, nay, was in the act of taking aim at his mate, when Rose, who watched his movements, threw herself before Harry, and if she did not actually save his life, at least prevented Spike's attempt on it for that occasion. In the course of the next ten minutes the fugitives had again so far gained on their pursuers, that the latter began to see that their efforts were useless. Spike muttered a few bitter curses, and told his men to lay on their oars.

"It's well for the runaway," he added, "that the gal put herself between us, else would his grog have been stopped for ever. I've long suspected this; but had I been sure of it, the Gulf Stream would have had the keeping of his body, the first dark night we were in it together. Lay on your oars, men, lay on your oars; I'm afeared the villian will get through our fingers, a'ter all."

The men obeyed, and then, for the first time, did they turn their heads, to look at those they had been so vehemently pursuing. The other boat was quite half a mile from them, and it had again tacked. This last occurrence induced Spike to pull slowly ahead, in quest of another short passage to cut the fugitives off; but no such opening offered.

"There he goes about again, by George!" exclaimed Spike. "Give way, lads—give way; an easy stroke, for if he is embayed, he can't escape us!"

Sure enough, poor Mulford was embayed, and could see no outlet by which to pass ahead. He tacked his boat two or three times, and he wore round as often; but on every side shoals, or rocks that actually rose above the surface of the water, impeded his course. The fact was not to be concealed; after all his efforts, and so many promises of success, not only was his further progress ahead cut off, but equally so was retreat.



The passage was not wide enough to admit the hope of getting by his pursuers, and the young man came to the conclusion that his better course was to submit with dignity to his fate. For himself he had no hope—he knew Spike’s character too well for that; but he did not apprehend any great immediate danger to his companions. Spike had a coarse, brutal admiration for Rose! But her expected fortune, which was believed to be of more amount than was actually the case, was a sort of pledge that he would not willingly put himself in a situation that would prevent the possibility of enjoying it. Strange, hurried, and somewhat confused thoughts passed through Harry Mulford’s mind, as he brailed his sail, and waited for his captors to approach and take possession of his boat and himself. This was done quietly, and with very few words on the part of Spike.

Mulford would have liked the appearance of things better had his old commander cursed him, and betrayed other signs of the fury that was boiling in his very soul. On the contrary, never had Stephen Spike seemed more calm, or under better self-command. He smiled, and saluted Mrs. Budd, just as if nothing unpleasant had occurred, and alluded to the sharpness of the chase with facetiousness and seeming good-humour. The females were deceived by this manner, and hoped, after all, that the worst that would happen would be a return to their old position on board the *Swash*. This was being so much better off than their horrible situation on the wreck, that the change was not frightful to them.

“What has become of the schooner, Mr. Mulford?” asked Spike, as the boats began to pass down the channel to return to the brig—two of the *Swash*’s men taking their seats in that which had been captured, along with their commander, while the other two got a tow from the use of the sail. “I see you have the boat here that we used alongside of her, and suppose you know something of the craft itself.”

“She capsized with us in a squall,” answered the mate, “and we only left the wreck this morning.”

“Capsized!—Hum—that was a hard fate, to be sure, and denotes bad seamanship. Now I’ve sailed all sorts of craft these forty years, or five-and-thirty at least, and never cap-sized anything in my life. Stand by there for’ard to hold on by that rock.”

A solitary cap of the coral rose above the water two or three feet, close to the channel, and was the rock to which Spike alluded. It was only some fifty feet in diameter, and of an oval form, rising quite above the ordinary tides, as was apparent by its appearance. It is scarcely necessary to say it had no other fresh water than that which occasionally fell on its surface, which surface being quite smooth, retained very



little of the rain it received. The boat was soon alongside of this rock, where it was held broadside-to by the two seamen.

“Mr. Mulford, do me the favour to step up here,” said Spike, leading the way on to the rock himself. “I have a word to say to you before we get on board the old *Molly* once more.”

Mulford silently complied, fully expecting that Spike intended to blow his brains out, and willing the bloody deed should be done in a way to be as little shocking to Rose as circumstances would allow. But Spike manifested no such intention. A more refined cruelty was uppermost in his mind; and his revenge was calculated, and took care to fortify itself with some of the quibbles and artifices of the law. He might not be exactly right in his legal reservations, but he did not the less rely on their virtue.

“Hark’e, Mr. Mulford,” said Spike, sharply, as soon as both were on the rock, “you have run from my brig, thereby showing your distaste for her; and I’ve no disposition to keep a man who wishes to quit me. Here you are, sir, on terrum firm, as the scholars call it; and here you have my full permission to remain. I wish you a good morning, sir; and will not fail to report, when we get in, that you left the brig of your own pleasure.”

“You will not have the cruelty to abandon me on this naked rock, Captain Spike, and that without a morsel of food, or a drop of water.”

“Wather is a blessed thing!” exclaimed Biddy. “Do not think of lavin’ the gentleman widout wather.”

“You left me, sir, without food or water, and you can fit out your own rock—yes, d—e, sir, you left me under fire, and that is a thing no true-hearted man would have thought of. Stand by to make sail, boys; and if he offer to enter the boat, pitch him out with the boat-hooks.”

Spike was getting angry, and he entered the boat again, without perceiving that Rose had left it. Light of foot, and resolute of spirit, the beautiful girl, handsomer than ever perhaps, by her excited feelings and dishevelled hair, had sprung on the rock, as Spike stepped into the boat forward, and when the latter turned round, after loosening the sail, he found he was drifting away from the very being who was the object of all his efforts. Mulford, believing that Rose was to be abandoned as well as himself, received the noble girl in his arms, though ready to implore Spike, on his knees, to return and at least to take her off. But Spike wanted no solicitation on that point. He returned of his own accord, and had just reached the rock again when a report of a gun drew all eyes toward the brig.



The *Swash* had again run out of the passage, and was beating up, close to the reef as she dared to go, with a signal flying. All the seamen at once understood the cause of this hint. The strange sail was getting too near, and everybody could see that it was the sloop-of-war. Spike looked at Rose, a moment, in doubt. But Mulford raised his beloved in his arms, and carried her to the side of the rock, stepping on board the boat.

Spike watched the movements of the young man with jealous vigilance, and no sooner was Rose placed on her seat, than he motioned significantly to the mate to quit the boat.

“I cannot and will not voluntarily, Captain Spike,” answered Harry, calmly. “It would be committing a sort of suicide.”

A sign brought two of the men to the captain’s assistance. While the latter held Rose in her place, the sailors shoved Harry on the rock again. Had Mulford been disposed to resist, these two men could not very easily have ejected him from the boat, if they could have done it at all; but he knew there were others in reserve, and feared that blood might be shed, in the irritated state of Spike, in the presence of Rose. While, therefore, he would not be accessory to his own destruction, he would not engage in what he knew would prove not only a most harassing, but a bootless resistance. The consequence was that the boats proceeded, leaving him alone on the rock.

It was perhaps fortunate for Rose that she fainted. Her condition occupied her aunt and Bidy, and Spike was enabled to reach his brig without any further interruption. Rose was taken on board still nearly insensible, while her two female companions were so much confused and distressed, that neither could have given a reasonably clear account of what had just occurred. Not so with Jack Tier, however. That singular being noted all that passed, seated in the eyes of the boat, away from the confusion that prevailed in its stern-sheets, and apparently undisturbed by it.

As the party was sailing back toward the brig, the lighthouse boat towing the *Swash*’s yawl, Jack took as good an observation of the channels of that part of the reef as his low position would allow. He tried to form in his mind a sort of chart of the spot, for, from the instant Mulford was thus deserted, the little fellow had formed a stern resolution to attempt his rescue. How that was to be done, however, was more than he yet knew; and when they reached the brig’s side, Tier may be said to have been filled with good intentions, rather than with any very available knowledge to enable him to put them in execution.

As respects the two vessels, the arrival of Spike on board his own was not a moment too soon. The Poughkeepsie, for the stranger to the northward was now



ascertained to be that sloop-of-war, was within long gun-shot by this time, and near enough to make certain, by means of her glasses, of the character of the craft with which she was closing. Luckily for the brig she lay in the channel so often mentioned, and through which both she and her present pursuer had so lately come, on their way to the northward. This brought her to windward, as the wind then stood, with a clear passage before her. Not a moment was lost. No sooner were the females sent below, than sail was made on the brig, and she began to beat through the passage, making long legs and short ones. She was chased, as a matter of course, and that hard, the difference in sailing between the two crafts not being sufficiently great to render the brigantine's escape by any means certain, while absolutely within the range of those terrible missiles that were used by the man-of-war's men.

But Spike soon determined not to leave a point so delicate as that of his own and his vessel's security to be decided by a mere superiority in the way of heels. The Florida Reef, with all its dangers, windings, and rocks, was as well known to him as the entrances to the port of New York. In addition to its larger channels, of which there are three or four, through which ships of size can pass, it had many others that would admit only vessels of a lighter draught of water. The brig was not flying light, it is true, but she was merely in good ballast trim, and passages would be available to her, into which the Poughkeepsie would not dare to venture. One of these lesser channels was favourably placed to further the escape of Spike, and he shoved the brig into it after the struggle had lasted less than an hour. This passage offered a shorter cut to the south side of the reef than the main channel, and the sloop-of-war, doubtless perceiving the uselessness of pursuit, under such circumstances, wore round on her heel, and came down through the main channel again, just entering the open water, near the spot where the schooner had sunk, as the sun was setting.

