



Jack Tier

or, the Florida Reef



Part 2: Chapter 7

The screams of rage, the groan, the strife,
The blow, the grasp, the horrid cry,
The panting, throttled prayer for life,
The dying's heaving sigh,
The murderer's curse, the dead man's fixed, still glare,
And fear's and death's cold sweat—they all are there.

—Matthew Lee.

It was high time that Captain Spike should arrive when his foot touched the bottom of the yawl. The men were getting impatient and anxious to the last degree, and the power of Señor Montefalderon to control them was lessening each instant. They heard the rending of timber, and the grinding on the coral, even more distinctly than the captain himself, and feared that the brig would break up while they lay alongside of her, and crush them amid the ruins. Then the spray of the seas that broke over the weather side of the brig, fell like rain upon them; and everybody in the boat was already as wet as if exposed to a violent shower. It was well, therefore, for Spike that he descended into the boat as he did, for another minute's delay might have brought about his own destruction.

Spike felt a chill at his heart when he looked about him and saw the condition of the yawl. So crowded were the stern-sheets into which he had descended, that it was with difficulty he found room to place his feet; it being his intention to steer, Jack was ordered to get into the eyes of the boat, in order to give him a seat. The thwarts were crowded, and three or four of the people had placed themselves in the very bottom of the little craft, in order to be as much as possible out of the way, as well



as in readiness to bail out water. So seriously, indeed, were all the seamen impressed with the gravity of this last duty, that nearly every man had taken with him some vessel fit for such a purpose. Rowing was entirely out of the question, there being no space for the movement of the arms. The yawl was too low in the water, moreover, for such an operation in so heavy a sea. In all, eighteen persons were squeezed into a little craft that would have been sufficiently loaded, for moderate weather at sea, with its four oarsmen and as many sitters in the stern-sheets, with, perhaps, one in the eyes to bring her more on an even keel. In other words, she had twice the weight in her, in living freight, that it would have been thought prudent to receive in so small a craft, in an ordinary time, in or out of a port. In addition to the human beings enumerated, there was a good deal of baggage, nearly every individual having had the forethought to provide a few clothes for a change. The food and water did not amount to much, no more having been provided than enough for the purposes of the captain, together with the four men with whom it had been his intention to abandon the brig. The effect of all this cargo was to bring the yawl quite low in the water; and every sea-faring man in her had the greatest apprehensions about her being able to float at all when she got out from under the lee of the *Swash*, or into the troubled water. Try it she must, however, and Spike, in a reluctant and hesitating manner, gave the final order to “Shove off!”

The yawl carried a lugg, as is usually the case with boats at sea, and the first blast of the breeze upon it satisfied Spike that his present enterprise was one of the most dangerous of any in which he had ever been engaged. The puffs of wind were quite as much as the boat would bear; but this he did not mind, as he was running off before it, and there was little danger of the yawl capsizing with such a weight in her. It was also an advantage to have swift way on, to prevent the combing waves from shooting into the boat, though the wind itself scarce outstrips the send of the sea in a stiff blow. As the yawl cleared the brig and began to feel the united power of the wind and waves, the following short dialogue occurred between the boatswain and Spike.

“I dare not keep my eyes off the breakers ahead,” the captain commenced, “and must trust to you, Strand, to report what is going on among the man-of-war’s men. What is the ship about?”

“Reefing her top-sails just now, sir. All three are on the caps, and the vessel is laying-to, in a manner.”

“And her boats?”



“I see none, sir—ay, ay, there they come from alongside of her in a little fleet! There are four of them, sir, and all are coming down before the wind, wing and wing, carrying their luggs reefed.”

“Ours ought to be reefed by rights, too, but we dare not stop to do it; and these infernal combing seas seem ready to glance aboard us with all the way we can gather. Stand by to bail, men; we must pass through a strip of white water—there is no help for it. God send that we go clear of the rocks!”

All this was fearfully true. The adventurers were not yet more than a cable’s length from the brig, and they found themselves so completely environed with the breakers as to be compelled to go through them. No man in his senses would ever have come into such a place at all, except in the most unavoidable circumstances; and it was with a species of despair that the seamen of the yawl now saw their little craft go plunging into the foam.

But Spike neglected no precaution that experience or skill could suggest. He had chosen his spot with coolness and judgment. As the boat rose on the seas he looked eagerly ahead, and by giving it a timely sheer, he hit a sort of channel, where there was sufficient water to carry them clear of the rock, and where the breakers were less dangerous than in the shoaler places. The passage lasted about a minute; and so serious was it, that scarce an individual breathed until it was effected. No human skill could prevent the water from combing in over the gunwales; and when the danger was passed, the yawl was a third filled with water. There was no time or place to pause, but on the little craft was dragged almost gunwale to, the breeze coming against the lugg in puffs that threatened to take the mast out of her. All hands were bailing; and even Bidy used her hands to aid in throwing out the water.

“This is no time to hesitate, men,” said Spike, sternly. “Everything must go overboard but the food and water. Away with them at once, and with a will.”

It was a proof how completely all hands were alarmed by this, the first experiment in the breakers, that not a man stayed his hand a single moment, but each threw into the sea, without an instant of hesitation, every article he had brought with him and had hoped to save. Bidy parted with the carpet-bag, and Señor Montefalderon, feeling the importance of example, committed to the deep a small writing-desk that he had placed on his knees. The doubloons alone remained, safe in a little locker where Spike had deposited them along with his own.

“What news astern, boatswain?” demanded the captain, as soon as this imminent danger was passed, absolutely afraid to turn his eyes off the dangers ahead for a single instant. “How come on the man-of-war’s men?”



“They are running down in a body toward the wreck, though one of their boats does seem to be sheering out of the line, as if getting into our wake. It is hard to say, sir, for they are still a good bit to windward of the wreck.”

“And the *Molly*, Strand?”

“Why, sir, the *Molly* seems to be breaking up fast; as well as I can see, she has broke in two just abaft the forechains, and cannot hold together in any shape at all many minutes longer.”

This information drew a deep groan from Spike, and the eye of every seaman in the boat was turned in melancholy on the object they were so fast leaving behind them. The yawl could not be said to be sailing very rapidly, considering the power of the wind, which was a little gale, for she was much too deep for that, but she left the wreck so fast as already to render objects on board her indistinct. Everybody saw that, like an overburthened steed, she had more to get along with than she could well bear; and, dependent as seamen usually are on the judgment and orders of their superiors, even in the direst emergencies, the least experienced man in her saw that their chances of final escape from drowning were of the most doubtful nature. The men looked at each other in a way to express their feelings; and the moment seemed favourable to Spike to confer with his confidential sea-dogs in private; but more white water was also ahead, and it was necessary to pass through it, since no opening was visible by which to avoid it. He deferred his purpose, consequently, until this danger was escaped.

On this occasion Spike saw but little opportunity to select a place to get through the breakers, though the spot, as a whole, was not of the most dangerous kind. The reader will understand that the preservation of the boat at all, in white water, was owing to the circumstance that the rocks all around it lay so near the surface of the sea as to prevent the possibility of agitating the element very seriously, and to the fact that she was near the lee side of the reef. Had the breakers been of the magnitude of those which are seen where the deep rolling billows of the ocean first meet the weather side of shoals or rocks, a craft of that size, and so loaded, could not possibly have passed the first line of white water without filling. As it was, however, the breakers she had to contend with were sufficiently formidable, and they brought with them the certainty that the boat was in imminent danger of striking the bottom at any moment. Places like those in which Mulford had waded on the reef, while it was calm, would now have proved fatal to the strongest frame, since human powers were insufficient long to withstand the force of such waves as did glance over even these shallows.



“Look out!” cried Spike, as the boat again plunged in among the white water. “Keep bailing, men—keep bailing.”

The men did bail, and the danger was over almost as soon as encountered. Something like a cheer burst out of the chest of Spike, when he saw deeper water around him, and fancied he could now trace a channel that would carry him quite beyond the extent of the reef. It was arrested, only half uttered, however, by a communication from the boatswain, who sat on a midship thwart, his arms folded, and his eye on the brig and the boats.

“There goes the *Molly*’s masts, sir! Both have gone together; and as good sticks was they, before them bomb-shells passed through our rigging, as was ever stepped in a keelson.”

The cheer was changed to something like a groan, while a murmur of regret passed through the boat.

“What news from the man-of-war’s men, boatswain? Do they still stand down on a mere wreck?”

“No, sir; they seem to give it up, and are getting out their oars to pull back to their ship. A pretty time they’ll have of it, too. The cutter that gets to windward half a mile in an hour, ag’in such a sea, and such a breeze, must be well pulled and better steered. One chap, however, sir, seems to hold on.”

Spike now ventured to look behind him, commanding an experienced hand to take the helm. In order to do this he was obliged to change places with the man he had selected to come aft, which brought him on a thwart alongside of the boatswain and one or two other of his confidants. Here a whispered conference took place, which lasted several minutes, Spike appearing to be giving instructions to the men.

By this time the yawl was more than a mile from the wreck, all the man-of-war boats but one had lowered their sails, and were pulling slowly and with great labour back toward the ship, the cutter that kept on, evidently laying her course after the yawl, instead of standing on toward the wreck. The brig was breaking up fast, with every probability that nothing would be left of her in a few more minutes. As for the yawl, while clear of the white water, it got along without receiving many seas aboard, though the men in its bottom were kept bailing without intermission. It appeared to Spike that so long as they remained on the reef, and could keep clear of breakers—a most difficult thing, however—they should fare better than if in deeper water, where the swell of the sea, and the combing of the waves, menaced so small and so deep-loaded a craft with serious danger. As it was, two or three men could barely keep the boat clear, working incessantly, and much of the time with a foot or two of water in her.



Josh and Simon had taken their seats, side by side, with that sort of dependence and submission that causes the American black to abstain from mingling with the whites more than might appear seemly. They were squeezed on to one end of the thwart by a couple of robust old sea-dogs, who were two of the very men with whom Spike had been in consultation. Beneath that very thwart was stowed another confidant, to whom communications had also been made. These men had sailed long in the *Swash*, and having been picked up in various ports, from time to time, as the brig had wanted hands, they were of nearly as many different nations as they were persons. Spike had obtained a great ascendancy over them by habit and authority, and his suggestions were now received as a sort of law. As soon as the conference was ended, the captain returned to the helm.

A minute more passed, during which the captain was anxiously surveying the reef ahead, and the state of things astern. Ahead was more white water—the last before they should get clear of the reef; and astern it was now settled that the cutter that held on through the dangers of the place, was in chase of the yawl. That Mulford was in her Spike made no doubt; and the thought embittered even his present calamities. But the moment had arrived for something decided. The white water ahead was much more formidable than any they had passed; and the boldest seamen there gazed at it with dread. Spike made a sign to the boatswain, and commenced the execution of his dire project.

“I say, you Josh,” called out the captain, in the authoritative tones that are so familiar to all on board a ship, “pull in that fender that is dragging alongside.”

Josh leaned over the gunwale, and reported that there was no fender out. A malediction followed, also so familiar to those acquainted with ships, and the black was told to look again. This time, as had been expected, the negro leaned with his head and body far over the side of the yawl, to look for that which had no existence, when two of the men beneath the thwart shoved his legs after them. Josh screamed, as he found himself going into the water, with a sort of confused consciousness of the truth; and Spike called out to Simon to “catch hold of his brother-nigger.” The cook bent forward to obey, when a similar assault on his legs from beneath the thwart, sent him headlong after Josh. One of the younger seamen, who was not in the secret, sprang up to rescue Simon, who grasped his extended hand, when the too generous fellow was pitched headlong from the boat.

All this occurred in less than ten seconds of time, and so unexpectedly and naturally, that not a soul beyond those who were in the secret, had the least suspicion it



was anything but an accident. Some water was shipped, of necessity, but the boat was soon bailed free. As for the victims of this vile conspiracy, they disappeared amid the troubled waters of the reef, struggling with each other. Each and all met the common fate so much the sooner, from the manner in which they impeded their own efforts.

The yawl was now relieved from about five hundred pounds of the weight it had carried—Simon weighing two hundred alone, and the youngish seaman being large and full. So intense does human selfishness get to be, in moments of great emergency, that it is to be feared most of those who remained, secretly rejoiced that they were so far benefited by the loss of their fellows. The Señor Montefalderon was seated on the aftermost thwart, with his legs in the stern-sheets, and consequently with his back toward the negroes, and he fully believed that what had happened was purely accidental.

“Let us lower our sail, Don Esteban,” he cried, eagerly, “and save the poor fellows.”

Something very like a sneer gleamed on the dark countenance of the captain, but it suddenly changed to a look of assent.

“Good!” he said, hastily—“spring forward, Don Wan, and lower the sail—stand by the oars, men!”

Without pausing to reflect, the generous-hearted Mexican stepped on a thwart, and began to walk rapidly forward, steadying himself by placing his hands on the heads of the men. He was suffered to get as far as the second thwart or past most of the conspirators, when his legs were seized from behind. The truth now flashed on him, and grasping two of the men in his front, who knew nothing of Spike’s dire scheme, he endeavoured to save himself by holding to their jackets. Thus assailed, those men seized others with like intent, and an awful struggle filled all that part of the craft. At this dread instant the boat glanced into the white water, shipping so much of the element as nearly to swamp her, and taking so wild a sheer as nearly to broach-to. This last circumstance probably saved her, fearful as was the danger for the moment. Everybody in the middle of the yawl was rendered desperate by the amount and nature of the danger incurred, and the men from the bottom rose in their might, underneath the combatants, when a common plunge was made by all who stood erect, one dragging overboard another, each a good deal hastened by the assault from beneath, until no less than five were gone. Spike got his helm up, the boat fell off, and away from the spot it flew, clearing the breakers, and reaching the northern wall-like margin of the reef at the next instant. There was now a moment when those who remained could breathe, and dared to look behind them.



The great plunge had been made in water so shoal, that the boat had barely escaped being dashed to pieces on the coral. Had it not been so suddenly relieved from the pressure of near a thousand pounds in weight, it is probable that this calamity would have befallen it, the water received on board contributing so much to weight it down. The struggle between these victims ceased, however, the moment they went over. Finding bottom for their feet, they released each other, in a desperate hope of prolonging life by wading. Two or three held out their arms, and shouted to Spike to return and pick them up. This dreadful scene lasted but a single instant, for the waves dashed one after another from his feet, continually forcing them all, as they occasionally regained their footing, toward the margin of the reef, and finally washing them off it into deep water. No human power could enable a man to swim back to the rocks, once to leeward of them, in the face of such seas, and so heavy a blow; and the miserable wretches disappeared in succession, as their strength became exhausted, in the depths of the Gulf.

Not a word had been uttered while this terrific scene was in the course of occurrence; not a word was uttered for some time afterward. Gleams of grim satisfaction had been seen on the countenances of the boatswain and his associates, when the success of their nefarious project was first assured; but they soon disappeared in looks of horror, as they witnessed the struggles of the drowning men. Nevertheless, human selfishness was strong within them all, and none there was so ignorant as not to perceive how much better were the chances of the yawl now than it had been on quitting the wreck. The weight of a large ox had been taken from it, counting that of all the eight men drowned; and as for the water shipped, it was soon bailed back again into the sea. Not only, therefore, was the yawl in a better condition to resist the waves, but it sailed materially faster than it had done before. Ten persons still remained in it, however, which brought it down in the water below its proper load-line; and the speed of a craft so small was necessarily a good deal lessened by the least deviation from its best sailing, or rowing trim. But Spike's projects were not yet completed.

All this time the man-of-war's cutter had been rushing as madly through the breakers, in chase, as the yawl had done in the attempt to escape. Mulford was, in fact, on board it; and his now fast friend, Wallace, was in command. The latter wished to seize a traitor, the former to save the aunt of his weeping bride. Both believed that they might follow wherever Spike dared to lead. This reasoning was more bold than judicious notwithstanding, since the cutter was much larger, and drew twice as much water as the yawl. On it came, nevertheless, faring much better in the white water than



the little craft it pursued, but necessarily running a much more considerable risk of hitting the coral, over which it was glancing almost as swiftly as the waves themselves; still it had thus far escaped—and little did any in it think of the danger. This cutter pulled ten oars; was an excellent sea boat; had four armed marines in it, in addition to its crew, but carried all through the breakers, receiving scarcely a drop of water on board, on account of the height of its wash-boards, and the general qualities of the craft. It may be well to add here, that the Poughkeepsie had shaken out her reefs, and was betraying the impatience of Captain Mull to make sail in chase, by firing signal-guns to his boats to bear a hand and return. These signals the three boats under their oars were endeavouring to obey, but Wallace had got so far to leeward as now to render the course he was pursuing the wisest.

Mrs. Budd and Bidy had seen the struggle in which the Señor Montefalderon had been lost, in a sort of stupid horror. Both had screamed, as was their wont, though neither probably suspected the truth. But the fell designs of Spike extended to them, as well as to those whom he had already destroyed. Now the boat was in deep water, running along the margin of the reef, the waves were much increased in magnitude, and the comb of the sea was far more menacing to the boat. This would not have been the case had the rocks formed a lee; but they did not, running too near the direction of the trades to prevent the billows that got up a mile or so in the offing, from sending their swell quite home to the reef. It was this swell, indeed, which caused the line of white water along the northern margin of the coral, washing on the rocks by a sort of lateral effort, and breaking, as a matter of course. In many places, no boat could have lived to pass through it.

Another consideration influenced Spike to persevere. The cutter had been overhauling him, hand over hand, but since the yawl was relieved of the weight of no less than eight men, the difference in the rate of sailing was manifestly diminished. The man-of-war's boat drew nearer, but by no means as fast as it had previously done. A point was now reached in the trim of the yawl, when a very few hundreds in weight might make the most important change in her favour; and this change the captain was determined to produce. By this time the cutter was in deep water, as well as himself, safe through all the dangers of the reef, and she was less than a quarter of a mile astern. On the whole, she was gaining, though so slowly as to require the most experienced eye to ascertain the fact.

“Madame Budd,” said Spike, in a hypocritical tone, “we are in great danger, and I shall have to ask you to change your seat. The boat is too much by the stern, now we’ve



got into deep water, and your weight amidships would be a great relief to us. Just give your hand to the boatswain, and he will help you to step from thwart to thwart, until you reach the right place, when Bidy shall follow.”

Now Mrs. Budd had witnessed the tremendous struggle in which so many had gone overboard, but so dull was she of apprehension, and so little disposed to suspect anything one-half so monstrous as the truth, that she did not hesitate to comply. She was profoundly awed by the horrors of the scene through which she was passing, the raging billows of the Gulf, as seen from so small a craft, producing a deep impression on her; still a lingering of her most inveterate affectation was to be found in her air and language, which presented a strange medley of besetting weakness, and strong, natural, womanly affection.

“Certainly, Captain Spike,” she answered, rising. “A craft should never go astern, and I am quite willing to ballast the boat. We have seen such terrible accidents today, that all should lend their aid in endeavouring to get under way, and in averting all possible hamper. Only take me to my poor, dear Rosy, Captain Spike, and everything shall be forgotten that has passed between us. This is not a moment to bear malice; and I freely pardon you all and everything. The fate of our unfortunate friend, Mr. Montefalderon, should teach us charity, and cause us to prepare for untimely ends.”

All the time the good widow was making this speech, which she uttered in a solemn and oracular sort of manner, she was moving slowly toward the seat the men had prepared for her, in the middle of the boat, assisted with the greatest care and attention by the boatswain and another of Spike’s confidants. When on the second thwart from aft, and about to take her seat, the boatswain cast a look behind him, and Spike put the helm down. The boat luffed and lurched, of course, and Mrs. Budd would probably have gone overboard to leeward, by so sudden and violent a change, had not the impetus thus received been aided by the arms of the men who held her two hands. The plunge she made into the water was deep, for she was a woman of great weight for her stature. Still, she was not immediately gotten rid of. Even at that dread instant, it is probable that the miserable woman did not suspect the truth, for she grasped the hand of the boatswain with the tenacity of a vice, and, thus dragged on the surface of the boiling surges, she screamed aloud for Spike to save her. Of all who had yet been sacrificed to the captain’s selfish wish to save himself, this was the first instance in which any had been heard to utter a sound, after falling into the sea. The appeal shocked even the rude beings around her, and Bidy chiming in with a powerful appeal to “save the missus!” added to the piteous nature of the scene.



“Cast off her hand,” said Spike reproachfully, “she’ll swamp the boat by her struggles—get rid of her at once! Cut her fingers off, if she wont let go!”

The instant these brutal orders were given, and that in a fierce, impatient tone, the voice of Biddy was heard no more. The truth forced itself on her dull imagination, and she sat a witness of the terrible scene, in mute despair. The struggle did not last long. The boatswain drew his knife across the wrist of the hand that grasped his own, one shriek was heard, and the boat plunged into the trough of a sea, leaving the form of poor Mrs. Budd struggling with the wave on its summit, and amid the foam of its crest. This was the last that was ever seen of the unfortunate relict.

“The boat has gained a good deal by that last discharge of cargo,” said Spike to the boatswain, a minute after they had gotten rid of the struggling woman—“she is much more lively, and is getting nearer to her load-line. If we can bring her to that, I shall have no fear of the man-of-war’s men; for this yawl is one of the fastest boats that ever floated.”

“A very little now, sir, would bring us to our true trim.”

“Ay, we must get rid of more cargo. Come, good woman,” turning to Biddy, with whom he did not think it worth his while to use much circumlocution, “your turn is next. It’s the maid’s duty to follow her mistress.”

“I know’d it must come,” said Biddy, meekly. “If there was no mercy for the missus, little could I look for. But ye’ll not take the life of a Christian woman widout giving her so much as one minute to say her prayers?”

“Ay, pray away,” answered Spike, his throat becoming dry and husky, for, strange to say, the submissive quiet of the Irish woman, so different from the struggle he had anticipated with her, rendered him more reluctant to proceed than he had hitherto been in all of that terrible day. As Biddy kneeled in the bottom of the stern-sheets, Spike looked behind him, for the double purpose of escaping the painful spectacle at his feet, and that of ascertaining how his pursuers came on. The last still gained, though very slowly, and doubts began to come over the captain’s mind whether he could escape such enemies at all. He was too deeply committed, however, to recede, and it was most desirable to get rid of poor Biddy, if it were for no other motive than to shut her mouth. Spike even fancied that some idea of what had passed was entertained by those in the cutter. There was evidently a stir in that boat, and two forms that he had no difficulty, now, in recognizing as those of Wallace and Mulford, were standing on the grating in the eyes of the cutter, or forward of the foresail. The former appeared to have a musket in his hand, and the other a glass. The last circumstance admonished him that all that



was now done would be done before dangerous witnesses. It was too late to draw back, however, and the captain turned to look for the Irish woman.

Biddy arose from her knees, just as Spike withdrew his eyes from his pursuers. The boatswain and another confidant were in readiness to cast the poor creature into the sea, the moment their leader gave the signal. The intended victim saw and understood the arrangement, and she spoke earnestly and piteously to her murderers.

“It’s not wanting will be violence!” said Biddy, in a quiet tone, but with a saddened countenance. “I know it’s my turn, and I will save yer sowls from a part of the burden of this great sin. God, and His Divine Son, and the Blessed Mother of Jesus have mercy on me if it be wrong; but I would far radder jump into the saa widout having the rude hands of man on me, than have the dreadful sight of the missus done over ag’in. It’s a fearful thing is wather, and sometimes we have too little of it, and sometimes more than we want—”

“Bear a hand, bear a hand, good woman,” interrupted the boatswain, impatiently. “We must clear the boat of you, and the sooner it is done the better it will be for all of us.”

“Don’t grudge a poor morthal half a minute of life, at the last moment,” answered Biddy. “It’s not long that I’ll throuble ye, and so no more need be said.”

The poor creature then got on the quarter of the boat, without any one’s touching her; there she placed herself with her legs outboard, while she sat on the gunwale. She gave one moment to the thought of arranging her clothes with womanly decency, and then she paused to gaze with a fixed eye, and pallid cheek, on the foaming wake that marked the rapid course of the boat. The troughs of the sea seemed less terrible to her than their combing crests, and she waited for the boat to descend into the next.

“God forgive ye all, this deed, as I do!” said Biddy, earnestly, and bending her person forward, she fell, as it might be “without hands,” into the gulf of eternity. Though all strained their eyes, none of the men, Jack Tier excepted, ever saw more of Biddy Noon. Nor did Jack see much. He got a frightful glimpse of an arm, however, on the summit of a wave, but the motion of the boat was too swift, and the water of the ocean too troubled, to admit of aught else.

A long pause succeeded this event. Biddy’s quiet submission to her fate had produced more impression on her murderers than the desperate, but unavailing, struggles of those who had preceded her. Thus it is ever with men. When opposed, the demon within blinds them to consequences as well as to their duties; but, unresisted, the silent influence of the image of God makes itself felt, and a better spirit begins to



prevail. There was not one in that boat who did not, for a brief space, wish that poor Bidly had been spared. With most, that feeling, the last of human kindness they ever knew, lingered until the occurrence of the dread catastrophe which, so shortly after, closed the scene of this state of being on their eyes.

“Jack Tier,” called out Spike, some five minutes after Bidly was drowned, but not until another observation had made it plainly apparent to him that the man-of-war’s men still continued to draw nearer, being now not more than fair musket-shot astern.

“Ay, ay, sir,” answered Jack, coming quietly out of his hole, from forward of the mast, and moving aft as if indifferent to the danger, by stepping lightly from thwart to thwart, until he reached the stern-sheets.

“It is your turn, little Jack,” said Spike, as if in a sort of sorrowful submission to a necessity that knew no law, “we cannot spare you the room.”

“I have expected this, and am ready. Let me have my own way, and I will cause you no trouble. Poor Bidly has taught me how to die. Before I go, however, Stephen Spike, I must leave you this letter. It is written by myself, and addressed to you. When I am gone, read it, and think well of what it contains. And now, may a merciful God pardon the sins of both, through love for His Divine Son. I forgive you, Stephen; and should you live to escape from those who are now bent on hunting you to the death, let this day cause you no grief on my account. Give me but a moment of time, and I will cause you no trouble.”

Jack now stood upon the seat of the stern-sheets, balancing himself with one foot on the stern of the boat. He waited until the yawl had risen to the summit of a wave, when he looked eagerly for the man-of-war’s cutter. At that moment she was lost to view in the trough of the sea. Instead of springing overboard, as all expected, he asked another instant of delay. The yawl sank into the trough itself, and rose on the succeeding billow. Then he saw the cutter, and Wallace and Mulford standing in its bows. He waved his hat to them, and sprang high into the air, with the intent to make himself seen; when he came down the boat had shot her length away from the place, leaving him to buffet with the waves. Jack now managed admirably, swimming lightly and easily, but keeping his eyes on the crests of the waves, with a view to meet the cutter. Spike now saw this well-planned project to avoid death, and regretted his own remissness in not making sure of Jack. Everybody in the yawl was eagerly looking after the form of Tier.

“There he is on the comb of that sea, rolling over like a keg!” cried the boatswain.

“He’s through it,” answered Spike, “and swimming with great strength and coolness.”



Several of the men started up involuntarily and simultaneously to look, hitting their shoulders and bodies together. Distrust was at its most painful height; and bull-dogs do not spring at the ox's muzzle more fiercely than those six men throttled each other. Oaths, curses, and appeals for help, succeeded; each man endeavouring, in his frenzied efforts, to throw all the others overboard, as the only means of saving himself. Plunge succeeded plunge; and when that combat of demons ended, no one remained of them all but the boatswain. Spike had taken no share in the struggle, looking on in grim satisfaction, as the Father of Lies may be supposed to regard all human strife, hoping good to himself, let the result be what it might to others. Of the five men who thus went overboard, not one escaped. They drowned each other by continuing their maddened conflict in an element unsuited to their natures.

Not so with Jack Tier. His leap had been seen, and a dozen eyes in the cutter watched for his person, as that boat came foaming down before the wind. A shout of "There he is!" from Mulford succeeded; and the little fellow was caught by the hair, secured, and then hauled into the boat by the second lieutenant of the Poughkeepsie and our young mate.

Others in the cutter had noted the incident of the hellish fight. The fact was communicated to Wallace, and Mulford said, "That yawl will outsail this loaded cutter, with only two men in it."

"Then it is time to try what virtue there is in lead," answered Wallace. "Marines, come forward, and give the rascal a volley."

The volley was fired; one ball passed through the head of the boatswain, killing him dead on the spot. Another went through the body of Spike. The captain fell in the stern-sheets, and the boat instantly broached-to.

The water that came on board apprised Spike fully of the state in which he was now placed, and by a desperate effort, he clutched the tiller, and got the yawl again before the wind. This could not last, however. Little by little, his hold relaxed, until his hand relinquished its grasp altogether, and the wounded man sank into the bottom of the stern-sheets, unable to raise even his head. Again the boat broached-to. Every sea now sent its water aboard, and the yawl would soon have filled, had not the cutter come glancing down past it, and rounding-to under its lee, secured the prize.

