

# The Rudder



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# For the Love of a Boat

By K. STANFORD JONES

**T**HIS is a story about a little boat. The whole reason for the tale lies in the boat, for without her, the search, the purchase and the sail back home, I would have no story to tell. I write for the enjoyment I get in reliving the adventures that befell the little sloop and ourselves. The story is about a Bahamian sloop and Bahamian islands.

I had never been to the lands just the other side of the mighty Gulf Stream, but from friends and books I had conjured up a cruising paradise. The long line of cays and reefs, the clear, or rather crystal clear water, the gleaming white beaches, the unimaginable beauty of the coral and the sea gardens that lie under the surface. I enjoyed these things. But I also have seen the fury and violence of summer squalls that drove a wall of water ahead of them over the shallow banks and could founder a good size vessel if caught unawares. When the wind slacks off I have had to battle a mosquito horde that would rival New Jersey's own. And sometimes the currents can be tricky.

"Stand up in your seat, Richy, and look down. That's the Gulf Stream below us. It's easier to cross this way and only takes about fifteen minutes."

We both watched in silence the deep blue water under our wings. Richy pressed his nose to the window, trying to look straight down.

"We'll have plenty of time to see it when we cross back over," I said. "We'll have our own boat by then."

Pan American's DC-6 made the trip to Nassau in fifty minutes and it was worth every minute of it. When we made the long circle around the island of New Providence I felt that I was looking down on a sailor's heaven. The tiny native craft anchored off the market, the careened boats at all angles on the shining sand, and the brilliant colors of the town and the harbor made us anxious to land and sample for ourselves a bit of old Nassau. There was a gay Calypso band at the airport and a gratuitous tot of rum for all hands. The customs officials were kind and quick. We had arrived.

Now in the search for a boat the main thing is to look for one. There were three of us in the search—Charlie, an old sailing friend from Long Island (up near New York), my eight year old son Richard and myself. Charlie, a boat crank from way back, was only too eager to spend a little time in the Bahamas, with the fascinating task of looking at boats in the bargain. We tramped the length of Bay Street in Nassau, then hired a car and drove around the island. I found nothing that I wanted. Nothing that quite fitted my idea of a wholesome little sloop could be found. I think most boat owners will understand the odd ideas that crop up in a man's head when he tries to envision a boat and then goes out to look for her. A diligent search of the southern coast of Florida had failed to turn her up, so what could have been more logical than to seek her in the locale that had originally built such craft—saucy, sweet sheered, clipper bowed little ships, that did not

draw too much water and had a lot of space aboard. Even the native smacks at the market did not have what I wanted and the best of them were sad looking. The Bahamian is poor and what little money he makes in bringing his produce to market must go to clothe and feed his family. There is not much to spend on his boat. The little boats lay in the harbor seeming to float on air, so clear is the water. Their decks were covered with conch shells, fish, chickens, Coca-Cola crates and junk. The whole collection taken together is picturesque, in detail it is sad and bedraggled. I had never seen so many holes in one mainsail as some of the island boats had. They sail them until all that is left is the bolt rope.

We made the trip to the Out Islands on the Stede Bonnet, a former war boat built at Nassau. She was a rugged vessel, but she creaked and groaned in true wooden boat fashion when driving into a steep head sea outside the harbor. The captain told me it was unusually rough for the time of the year. All the previous trips had been calm. I did not feel well so I went to bed early. Charlie, that old Long Island Sound sea dog, did not feel too well either, but he felt worse when he lay down so he stayed up all night and talked to the watch. Richy felt fine and ran up and down the decks until I hauled him below.

Man-O-War Cay, the land of William Albury and William Lee, the home of good boat building in the Bahamas. If ever I found my boat it would be here, I felt. Aboard the Stede Bonnet we had met Lewis Albury, a nephew of Uncle Will and himself a boat builder on Man-O-War. His son was coming over in a dinghy to Hopetown, where we lay discharging cargo, to pick him up. Would we like to come over with him? We certainly would. The trip took almost an hour and a half. With five people aboard and all the luggage she was literally loaded to the gunwales. We talked about boats and the islands, and then boats again. The original inhabitants were Lucayan Indians noted, I believe, for their peaceful and kindly ways. They would have to go some to beat the present day islanders.

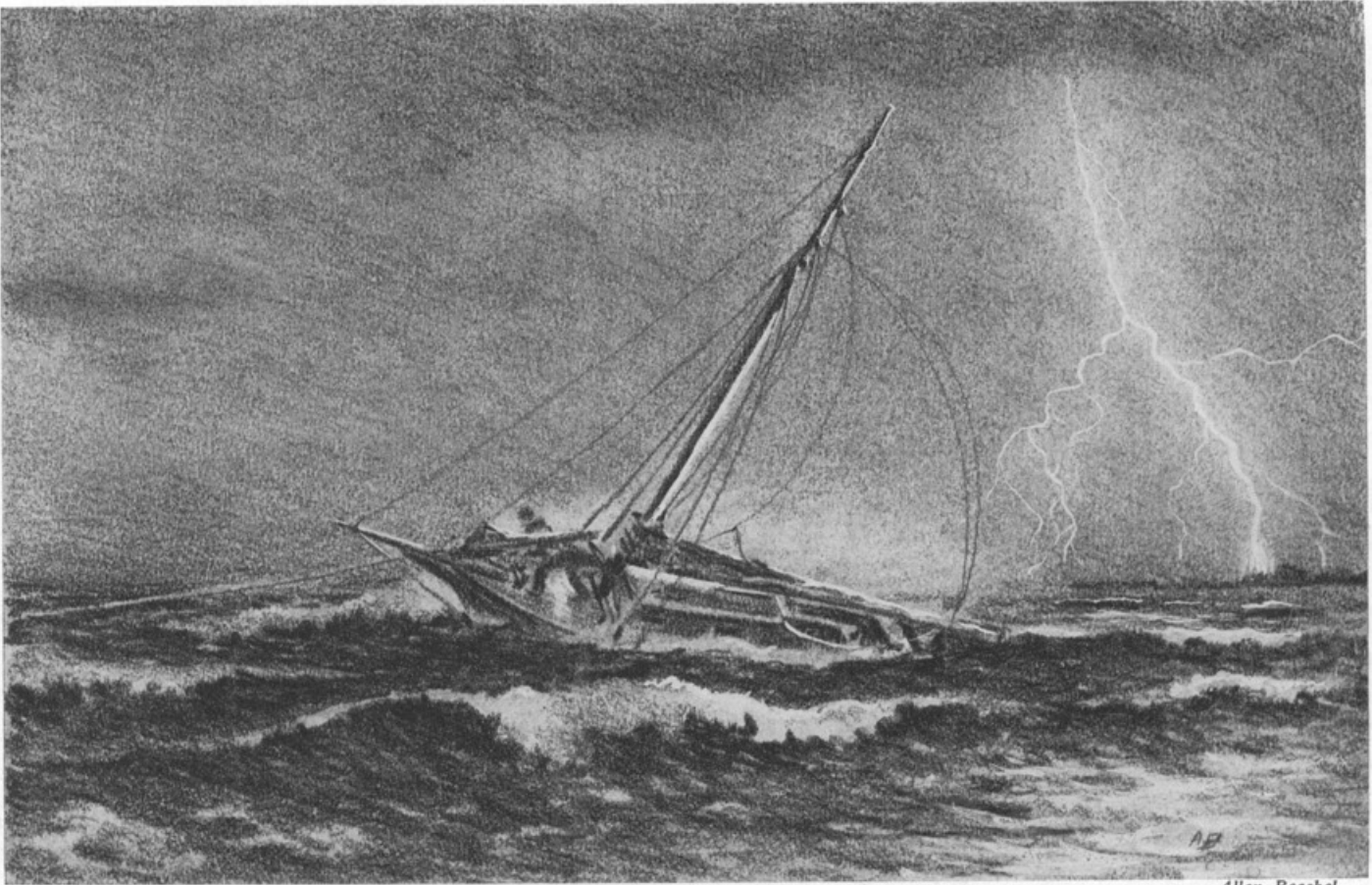
As we motored into the harbor the choppy water was left at the inlet and every detail on the bottom could be seen plainly, even a few tin cans, unfortunately left by some thoughtless yachtsman, but they were rare and the harbor bottom was clean and neat as a front yard should be. So intent was I on such wonders that I almost missed her. It was Charlie who had the good fortune to gaze on her first. Even his voice was low pitched.

"There's a sweet little one, Ken." I looked up and there she was! Even unpainted and with dirty sails I could see that this was the boat. Very casually I asked Lewis who owned her.

"Maurice Albury just bought her off of the brigadier general from Hopetown." His eyes were twinkling when he added, "I think she might be for sale."

We rounded up to the town dock and soon had the gear ashore, stacked in a corner. Again Lewis came to





Allen Beechel

our help and found a little bungalow that we could rent. "The American people are moving out today," he said, "and you folks can move right in." Luck? I'm afraid so. I had not given a thought to where we would stay. There are no motels in the Out Islands. We moved right into the three rooms, brand new cedar shingled outhouse and all. The water supply is by rainfall and we had a cistern out back full of tadpoles, but we were assured that they ate the mosquitoes and did the water no harm.

After going to the little store and buying food for supper we walked back down to the wooden dock to look at the sloop again. She looked just as pert and saucy as I thought she did. There were a dozen or so children swimming off the dock and Richy joined them while Charlie and I went hunting Maurice Albury. We found him standing outside his small boat shop for dinghy building looking at us. Word spreads fast and I guess he knew that I liked his little boat and even that I wished to purchase her. I sauntered over to him, introduced Charlie and myself and talked about boats. He is a wonderful dinghy builder and had four of them completed, awaiting shipment to the States. I told him I was looking for a small Bahama sloop something like his and smugly waited for him to name his price.

"Well, Mr. Jones," he replied, "I'd like to sell you my boat, but you see, I just got her m'self and me and my boy have kinda been figurin' to use her ourselves. You know, fer fishin' and meeting the tradin' boat and such. And my boy would be awful disappointed if I was to sell her right off. I'm sure sorry, like I say, but you know how—" His voice trailed off or maybe I blacked out. Either way it was bad. I almost felt like crying. He went on, "I reckon there might be some other ones like her around though I can't likely say where.

Maybe over to Marsh Harbor, but I don't recall any over there either."

His voice droned, stopped and I realized I had to say something quickly so I smiled, cursed him inwardly and said, "Okay, Maurice, that's okay. I know how you feel. I'll look around the islands and see what gives. So long for now. I'll see you later." I shook hands again and left him saying how sorry he was, but he was not one-half as sorry as I was.

The next two days we hired a little dinghy with an air cooled engine and shook our way to a few of the outlying cays. We found nothing. Not only were there no boats to be seen, but none of the natives knew of any. The gloom in our little cottage was deep. Tomorrow the Stede Bonnet would arrive on her return voyage to Nassau and we had to go aboard if we wanted to leave that week. I sat and brooded over our failure. The fact that it was raining all the time did nothing to raise my spirits. Only little Richy was really having a time.

We packed our gear and trekked down to the dock, said good-by to the friends we had made. Norman Albury, the sailmaker and unofficial Grover Whalen of Man-O-War, was on hand to wish us luck. I saw Maurice working on a little boat by the dock and went over to shake hands.

"I'm awful sorry, Mr. Jones, but like you say—" he began.

"Maurice, don't feel so bad," I interrupted. "If you don't want to sell her I can't blame you." I stood on the dock, glaring down at the culprit and wondering how he dared refuse and knowing full well how he could. I would not have sold her either. "Maurice," I said slowly, "would you stand up for a minute?"

He stood up in the boat and I knelt on the dock

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## LOVE OF A BOAT (Continued from page 17)

so our faces were together and gave him my final offer. Before I could move back he had jumped up on the dock and kneeling beside me, scribbling on the boards. I watched while he figured out the price in English pounds. When he finished he nodded his head shortly and said, "Yep. Wait'll I speak with my boy." And he was gone.

I told Charlie to hold everything and Maurice soon was back with a big smile. "Okay, Mr. Jones, she's yours. My boy didn't want to sell her, but with the money I can build us another one, at least partially. And seeing as how you want her so bad, why—"

"Maurice," I said weakly, "why didn't you just say that you'd sell her for a price three days ago and save me all the gray hair I have now?"

We spent the next three days working on her. And days of wonder they were. We went swimming and boating, hiking and visiting, talking and watching, and we worked on our little sloop. Actually all she needed was a canvas spray shield on both sides of the cabin in preparation for the Gulf Stream.

There are no marine hardware stores on the islands. Charts, compass, stove, water casks, all the items we wished to buy were unobtainable. However, Bob Jeffries of the ketch *Vagabond* was in port and turned over to us without a moment's hesitation most of the things we needed. We had never met Bob until that day and I shall never cease to wonder at the generosity of sailmen to their less fortunate brethren.

We left our friends on Man-O-War around noon of a wonderful day. I felt like something out of Nordoff and Hall when leaving a tropical isle and the natives waving aloah or something. We sailed along, looking down through nothing at the clean sand and colorful sea life. The world seems a clean and wholesome thing to all men when they have a trim little ship, a fair wind and smooth water.

I shall not go into detail about what happened next. They would be meaningless to those who have never cruised Abaco waters. Harry Etheridge knows whereof I speak and as we were using his *Cruising Guide to the Bahamas* for our only chart I wish he had touched a little more on the north coast of Little Abaco. But as he himself says, only native craft travel these waters and they are not well charted. I had always maintained (while using one of our Coast and Geodetic masterpieces) that cruising without a chart might be interesting and educational. I have since changed my mind.

We had been beating along the coast of Little Abaco all afternoon trying to make the eastern end before sundown, but the breeze died when we still had a mile or so to go. I sculled her inshore under the lee of a little cay about three hundred feet in diameter and we anchored for the night. Tired and burned from hard sailing in the hot summer sun, I just heaved the anchor and lay down. At least I think I lay down. I cannot remember. But I do recall the mosquitoes. They drove me out of the cabin, out of the cockpit and overboard. Charlie was swatting and yelling to move her offshore a little further. Richy was wrapped up in a blanket, hollering like mad. So I swam out to the anchor, picked it off the bottom and splashed wildly to keep from being bitten. When a little way out they stopped attacking, why I do not know, but it was a relief.

Charlie and I were sitting in the cockpit smoking, talking about bugs, when we noticed a dark cloud on the horizon. There had been dark clouds around the horizon the whole trip so we did not think much about it except that we wished we could have made the tip of Little Abaco and gotten into the lee. It was dark by then, but we could not sleep. Richy, sacked in the corner, was a picture of contentment. We could hear thunder muttering in the distance and a little wind had sprung up, giving the boat a pleasant rocking motion and a lilting gurgle around the sides. Charlie got up and went outside. His voice sounded awe struck when he said, "It's black out here."

I crawled after him and looked around. It was black. Suddenly lightning streaked down and the thunder made me duck. I went forward to let out all the line we had. As it was not over eight or ten feet deep we had a scope of about ten to one. We felt secure. Nothing could move us with all that line out. Then far away we heard a thin whistle, a hard and vicious sounding whine. "I think that's wind, Ken," Charlie said, and he sounded worried.

"Probably is, but we've got plenty of line out. It can't be a hurricane. Even so I read somewhere that with sufficient ground tackle a small boat can ride out most anything."

I don't think Charlie heard me finish. The whine had become a violent wind. We crawled below to get out of its clutch just as the little sloop lurched over to her decks and started tossing like the proverbial cork. I have never felt anything like the way she bounced. Yet soon we began to feel at ease. I worried about chafe and could picture the anchor line sawing at the bobstay. I was just going on deck when we heard the rain. Rain would shut off the wind so let it come in buckets so long as the wind

stopped. That was how we felt when the heavens opened up, but the wind did not stop.

Richy stirred restlessly and my scalp began to tingle. Charlie could not seem to light his cigarette. The screaming became a roaring. Then it struck! We were laid over so far that the seas came into the cockpit before she could round into the new wind. The boat shook from truck to keel with a jarring that I thought would jolt her loose from the nails, and she did not stop shaking. No longer did she bob her transom up and down, but instead lay over with a sickening list and moved in surges.

I woke the boy and got him into a lifejacket. Lightning showed the anchor line streaming off to windward. I could see the beach right under our stern before the light went and even as the thunder clapped we smashed onto the coral shore. The seas swept completely over the boat, lifting and pounding her down again and again. All I could think of was to put on shoes. I remembered about storybook people who had their feet cut to ribbons. Charlie wrapped Richy in a blanket, I grabbed some more and we made for high ground. I thrashed my way up a little hill and beat out a cave in the bushes. Charlie came after me lugging Richy. We crawled in and lay huddled together, the rain beating down, the wind making a mockery of our protection. Cold and miserable, we lay there most of the night. Richy, between Charlie and me, became warm and fell asleep. How I envied him. I could hear the beating of the seas on the rock even above the wind and gave up all chances for my little boat. Only when the wind died down and a few brave stars shone through did I stop praying and start to hope.

That, in itself, is a useless expedient. What saved the little sloop was the fact that she had gone aground at the peak of high water and because of the abnormally high storm tide she had been swept over the worst of the coral. The ebb soon took the water out from under her and except for being twenty feet from the water on the next high tide, a busted worm shoe and some planks a little scuffed she was undamaged. Her shoal draft of two feet helped. A deeper vessel would not have escaped the coral. The anchor flukes had actually straightened out under the strain.

Had we only known, there is a cut through the middle of Little Abaco where we could have gone in and found a good anchorage in any wind. Even the chart does not show it. I had to swim across it when I walked back to the native settlement to get help. I often wonder if a Bahamian would receive the same generous help I got if he were over in the States. They are a most gracious people.

The balance of the voyage was all a cruise should be with clear beautiful blue skies, clouds so white they looked faked and pinned to the heavens. The little boat seemed to know her way through and around the shallows and little uncharted cays on the north side of Grand Bahama. The Gulf Stream was at her best for a little twenty foot open sloop to crawl over at four knots, and probably less. Port Everglades was a welcome sight. I did away with three chocolate sodas and three hamburgers. Charlie had three more potent drinks and I bought Richy a malted milk every day for the next two weeks. The Inland Waterway to Miami was the usual headache for a sailboat without an engine, but nobody complained of head winds or bridges after what we had been through.

Now, at Dinner Key Richy and I are happy. Charlie has gone back to Long Island Sound and is not happy. Best of all, the little sloop is having a fine time, tied up to a real dock and painted up like a little lady.



## DELTA CRUISE (Continued from page 15)

worst sea I have ever seen on a river. While we gassed up several skippers of boats that come along with us to the marina came over and made kind remarks about how our little boat made such good weather of it. This added an extra glow to our already pleased expressions over the cruise.

Of course one should not come to the delta and make a hurried trip as we did. It was plain to be seen that weeks would not be enough. Leisure is needed to savor the region to the fullest. We had not even come close to some of the nicest parts such as Steamboat Slough to the north. Limited by time as we were, our brief taste of the fascination of the winding channels was enough to make us want to go back again and risk, as has happened, succumbing completely to the spell of the delta.



*Wilfrid O. White and Sons, Inc.*, Boston, Mass., manufacturers of navigational equipment, have elected W. Gordon White president, succeeding his father, the late Wilfrid O. White, founder of the Company. Robert E. White was elected executive vice president and treasurer.