

Stormbound

by Laurence MacDonald

I had been a forty nine-er and a lucky one at that. Having made a small fortune in gold, that is to say, enough to put a substantial stake in a successful shipping business, my stock had risen and I was then a man who could spend time at leisure. Moreover, I had taken to sailing as a diverting amusement and, having become an accomplished boatsman, I made holidays for that purpose late in the summer of 1853. For the adventure I took passage to Florida, and thence onward aboard a schooner to the island of *New Providence* where I purchased a small oyster sloop; gaff-rigged and easily managed single-handed. From *New Providence* I set off south eastward with every hope of exploring islands and coastal features along the Bahamian archipelago.

I had been six days out when I met with trouble. That day I had set forth from a perfectly tranquil village harbor and, at sea, had made good use of the moderate wind, but late in the afternoon, a severe and fast approaching storm became manifest to the east and so I was obliged to seek shelter at once. To the southwest I discerned a small island and, it being about one league closer than any other land, I shook out my sail and would allow - and set a fast reach for it. The wind was now blowing way into a wide ribbon of foaming white surf. The waves stood a lighthouse tower, striped red and white, and I was thankful to see that this little lump of land could not be completely uninhabited.

I guided the sloop to the leeward of the islet and beached on a strip of sand where I dropped an anchor at the stern and drew a heavy rope to land, hoping that my efforts would be sufficient to secure her for the night. Then I tramped, wind-swept and wet - for heavy rain was already squalling across the place - in the direction of the lighthouse. Presently, I stood at the entrance to the tower that rose some sixty feet above me and pulled hard upon the bell rope. Before long the door swung away from me and there, framed in the dark portal, stood the Keeper.

He hastened me inside with a movement of one hand and with the other he closed the heavy door against the eddying gusts and locked it. The ground floor space was evidently used for storage, the curved brick walls were unpainted and around the room stood barrels and crates. In the center there hung a large weight whose cable emerged from a hole in the ceiling and of this he cautioned me to