

RAISING THE PEARL

CHAPTER I.

CAPTAIN SAMMY'S OFFER.

I'D risk the chances of raising her if she was ours, and it wouldn't be such a very hard job, after all. She must be within ten feet of low-water mark, and the water there at ebb-tide can't be more than four feet deep."

This remark was made by the eldest of three boys who were standing on the shore of Hillsboro' Bay, about half a mile from the little town of Tampa, in the State of Florida; and it referred to a small steam-yacht, the spars and smoke-stack of which were just visible above the surface of the water.

These boys, Darrell Evans, his brother Charley, and his cousin, Robert Hayes, were New York boys, who had been permitted to accompany Mr. and Mrs. Evans in the latter's search for health, with the agreement that they should continue their studies while there as regularly as if they had remained at school.

Tampa had been selected by the physicians as the place where the invalid should spend the winter, and the boys on their arrival were greatly disappointed at finding that they were not on the coast, where they could realize their dreams of turtle-fishing and sponge-gathering.

On the second day after their arrival one of the boys of the town had told them of a famous little steam-yacht which Captain Sammy Basset owned, but which had been run on a rock, a short distance from the town, and sunk.

Captain Sammy, whom this boy represented as being a surly, ill-tempered old sea-captain, who had lost one leg by a pressing invitation from a shark, had not done anything toward raising his property from her watery resting-place, and had even been heard to say that she might lie there until she went to pieces, for all he cared about her.

Of course the boys were very anxious to see the craft, even though they could have no idea that they would ever own her, and on the first opportunity they visited the spot where she lay, regardless of the heat, which, even in November, was uncomfortable.

From what it was possible to see of the boat beneath the water she was evidently not large, but appeared to be the exact size of their idea of a craft for their own sailing. It seemed a shame that so beautiful a boat should be left to

go to pieces, more especially since the boy who had first given them information regarding her told them that the only injury she had sustained was a hole that had been stove in her bow.

"It's a shame to let such a handsome boat stay there, when a little work would make her as good as new;" and there was a very perceptible shade of envy in Charley's tones as he spoke.

"Don't you suppose we could buy her?"

"There is only one thing that would prevent us, Bobby, and that is the money," laughed Dare. "I don't think this party has got more than ten dollars in cash, and that amount wouldn't buy the paddle-boxes."

"Perhaps Captain Sammy would let us have her cheap, since he says he won't do anything toward raising her, and we might get father to buy her for us," suggested Charley; but he did not speak as if he had any very great belief in such a possibility.

"That boy who told us about her said that Captain Sammy was a regular old shark himself, so I guess there isn't very much chance that he would sell her unless we should pay him all she is worth;" and Dare shook his head sadly at the thought that the owner of such a beautiful craft should be such an illiberal citizen.

The boys were so deeply engaged in conversation that they had not noticed the approach of a short, fat man, with a wooden leg, who was

stumping along the beach at a furious rate, as if he was thoroughly angry with himself and every one around him.

"Now, then, what mischief are you boys up to? Thinking of burning my boat?" he growled, rather than said, as he reached the yacht-admiring group; and his presence there was so unexpected that the boys started as if they had really been meditating some act of mischief.

"Well, why don't you answer me?" he demanded, furiously, as the boys were still too much surprised by his appearance to speak. "Tell me what you're doing here;" and the little man jammed the wooden stick that served him as leg into the sand much as if he was trying to make a passage through which he could go when he was ready to take his departure.

"We came here to look at the yacht, sir," replied Dare, angry that the little man should speak in such a way, and conscious that they were doing no wrong. "We surely can't do any mischief to a sunken boat."

"I don't know about that," was the fierce reply, and the one-legged man began to grow red in the face, as if making every exertion to keep his anger within bounds. "We'll see whether you could or not, after you tell me what you came here for."

"We came to look at the yacht."

"Well, what were you going to do then?"

"I'm sure I don't know, sir," replied Dare, with a smile, as he began to think that the greater portion of Captain Sammy's ferocity might be assumed.

The little man bored at the hole in the sand in an impatient way, and then asked, speaking each word with a jerk of the head, as if it was only by a muscular effort that he could utter it, "Well, now that you've seen the yacht, what are you goin' to do about it?"

"I don't suppose we can do anything about it," replied Dare, with a laugh; "but we can't help thinking that it is too bad to let such a nice boat lie there under the water."

"So you set yourself up to tell Captain Sammy Basset what he shall do, eh?" and the little man appeared to grow furious again. "If you think that craft ought to be floated, why don't you bear a hand and do it?"

"We'd be glad to if she was ours," said Charley, eagerly, as a sudden hope came to him that perhaps, after all, some bargain might be made with the owner.

"So you couldn't do it for the sake of helping any one else, eh?"

"Indeed we could and would, if you wanted us to," replied Dare, quickly, for he had no idea of being considered selfish even by this queer-acting stranger.

"Well, I don't want you to help me," snapped

Captain Sammy, "and I suppose I can do as I want to with my own property, even if she does go to pieces. But I don't see why you boys should have come away out here just to look at a sunken boat, for even if she was afloat and ready to sail, you wouldn't know where to go with her, if she was yours."

"Indeed we should," said Charley, quickly; "we should sail straight for the Caloosahatchee River, and go through that into Lake Okecho-bee, in order to get into the Everglades."

"What do you know about the Everglades, and why do you want to go there?" snarled Captain Sammy, at the same time seating himself on the sand, as if he intended the conversation should be a long one.

"We don't know very much about them, and perhaps that is the reason why we are so anxious to go. I have read that scientific men think the entire lower portion of the State was originally formed of coral reefs, and that in the Everglades the forms of the reefs can still be seen."

"And the hunting is so good there!"

"And the fish so plenty!" Charley and Bobby added, eagerly.

"I guess it is the hunting and fishing rather than any scientific question that causes you to want to go there!" and as Captain Sammy spoke he came very near smiling—an act so entirely

out of keeping with his supposed character, that had any of the village boys seen it they might have been seriously alarmed.

Dare thought it best not to contradict the little man, for in his guessing he had come too near the truth to admit of any denial.

"Now, look here"—and Captain Sammy assumed a stern air again—"are you boys so foolish as to believe you could float that yacht if she belonged to you?"

"I believe we could," was Dare's decided answer. "I don't exactly know how we should go to work to do it; but I am sure that we could get it done in time."

"She is forty feet long."

"Larger boats than she have been raised from a greater depth."

"She is ten feet wide."

"Then it would be easier to raise her than if she was narrow."

"And she has a ten-horse-power engine on board."

"A good deal of that could be taken out at low water."

"Then her port bow is stove in, and in repairing that it will be necessary to put nearly a new bottom on."

"But one of the boys told us that she was flat, so it would not be such a hard job."

Captain Sammy looked at Dare a moment, as

if he was angry with him for making light of all his objections, and then said, in a musing way, which raised Charley's hopes very high, "There couldn't be a better boat built to cruise around Florida in than that same little *Pearl* that lies under the water there. She can steam eight miles an hour, only draws fifteen inches of water, and can stand a pretty heavy sea, which is more than you can say for some larger craft."

"Is her name the *Pearl*?" asked Bobby, his eyes growing larger, and his desire to own such a boat growing more intense, as Captain Sammy spoke of the good points of the sunken steamer.

"The *Pearl*, of Tampa Bay," continued the little man. "I built her at odd jobs, thinking it would be handy to have a steam craft to run around in, for I own a good many turtling and sponging schooners, and have to run back and forth a good deal. But I found that there was nothing like the motion of a sailing craft, and when a greenhorn, who had borrowed the *Pearl*, sunk her there, I didn't care so very much."

"How much would you sell her for, just as she lies?" asked Dare, forgetting the remark he had made a short time before as to the finances of the party.

"I ain't trying to sell her," said Captain Sammy, with another show of anger; "and I haven't said I wanted to; but if you boys have

got pluck enough to raise and repair her, you shall use her as long as you stay in Florida."

"Do you mean that?" asked Dare, in surprise; and Charley gave Bobby such a vigorously triumphant poke with his elbow as to make that young gentleman's ribs sore for some hours after.

"Of course I meant it, or else I shouldn't have said it. But mind what I say: if you don't do the work in shipshape way I shall take a reef in my offer."

Not one of the three boys could overcome his surprise at the little captain's proposition in time to thank him for it, for as soon as he had spoken he arose and hobbled rapidly off, as if he feared they might attempt to detain him.

When he was some distance away he turned around and shouted, loudly,

"Remember that the job has got to be done properly, or I shall back out of the bargain, even if you have floated her;" and then he started off at full speed again, while the three boys appeared much as if they thought they had dreamed of instead of heard Captain Sammy's offer.