

## CHAPTER XVI.

### UNSUCCESSFUL PLOTTING

AS might be expected, Dare was in a very unenviable frame of mind regarding Tommy's presence on the *Pearl*. He knew that the proper thing for him to do was to tell the little man the exact state of the case, and not attempt to deceive him in any way. But he feared to do this, because of the consequences to the pirate.

Captain Sammy was justly angry with Tommy for having wrecked the boat, and there was no doubt but that he would inflict some terrible punishment upon him because of it in case he should meet him. If he should know that Tommy had secreted himself on board the *Pearl*, thinking to take a pleasant trip in the steamer without the knowledge of its owner, the little man would be still more incensed, and thoughts of the revenge he might take made Dare shudder.

To his mind it would have been the very extreme of cruelty to expose Tommy's presence to the man whom he had wronged, and yet he was unable to form any plan which he thought would

be likely to succeed for secretly putting the boy on shore.

It was a long time before he could get to sleep that night, and even then he awoke at short intervals, his fears being so great that sleep could not overcome them.

It could not be possible that Tommy, the boy who had voluntarily brought Captain Sammy's wrath upon his head, and who had for the second time placed himself in his enemy's power, suffered nearly as much that night as did Dare, who was perfectly innocent.

When daylight came Dare was the first to respond to the little man's call, but he could not look him fully in the face, because of the knowledge that he was deceiving him, and the fear that his secret could be read in his countenance.

Dare was anxious to tell the other boys of Tommy's presence there; but it seemed as if Captain Sammy was trying to prevent him from getting an opportunity to speak with them, for at no time, during the work of getting under way, could he find a chance to speak with either one of his companions alone.

He did succeed, however, in throwing some bread and cold meat under the berth where Tommy lay concealed, but he had no chance to speak to the self-made prisoner.

The fire in the furnace had been banked on

the night before, and the work of getting up steam occupied but a short time; in fact, so quickly was it done, that the little craft was ploughing her way through the waters of Sarasota Bay before Captain Sammy had breakfast ready.

That meal was eaten, as was the dinner the day before, first by the little captain, Charley, and Bobby, and then by Rogers and Dare.

It was during this meal, and while the little man was in the pilot-house, that Dare hoped to be able to tell one or both of his companions of what he had learned; but he did not dare to trust Rogers with the secret, and he could not speak to either of the boys without danger that the engineer would overhear him.

After Dare took up his position in the pilot-house again Captain Sammy remained in the bow, even though the channel was so deep and wide that there was no necessity for his directing the helmsman, and it seemed to the anxious Dare that he was on the lookout for something.

Through the bay, past Sarasota Key to Chaise's Key, the little steamer continued her course in what might have been called an inside channel; but here the water-way, protected by keys, came to an end, and the yacht was run through Casey Pass to the clear waters of the Gulf.

Then the course was down past the coast,

within about a mile of the shore; and when they had run for a few miles Captain Sammy surprised Dare greatly by telling him to give the signal to stop the engine.

Wonderingly Dare obeyed. Then, when the little steamer lay almost motionless on the water, the little man explained to Dare and the other boys, who had come rushing out in the greatest excitement to learn the meaning of the sudden stop:

"I want to try and get a turtle or two, so that we can change our bill of fare a little, and I reckon we sha'n't have to row around here very long without finding one."

Then he ordered the tender made ready, while he went below and took, from right in front of where Tommy was lying in fear and trembling, a single-pronged harpoon that he had stowed away there.

While he was below Dare had an opportunity of telling Charley and Bobby, in a very hurried way, of the cause of the previous night's disturbance.

Their surprise—and, in Bobby's case, fear—was written so plainly on their faces when Captain Sammy came on deck, that it was a wonder he did not suspect something was wrong. He probably would have done so had he not been so deeply engaged in the business of getting a turtle for dinner.

It was while Captain Sammy was making the boat ready that a sudden thought occurred to Dare. If he could arrange matters so that Rogers and Bobby should go in the boat with Captain Sammy, there would be a possibility that he might, in case the chase led the party any distance from the steamer, run the *Pearl* in close to land, and set Tommy ashore.

Of course he had no idea what the boy would do there, so far from home; his only thought was to get him out of the dangerous position in which he had placed himself.

"Now, who's going with me? I can't take but two;" and Captain Sammy looked around, as if he expected that each one would be eager to accompany him.

Dare had no idea of going if he could avoid it, and Charley and Bobby were so dazed by the strange news they had heard, that they paid no attention to the question.

It was while all three stood silent that Rogers said,

"I should like to go, if the boys don't care to, for it has been some time since I have been on that kind of a lark."

"You can, of course; but I thought the boys would be just crazy for it," said Captain Sammy, in surprise at the indifference displayed by the crew.

Dare realized that it was necessary for him

to say something, in order that their singular behavior might not excite suspicion, and he said, in a hesitating way,

"If you would take Mr. Rogers and Bobby with you it would give Charley and me a chance to see how we could handle the steamer alone, and we could come after you whenever you were ready to come on board."

"All right," said the little man, as he motioned the others to get into the boat; but it was quite plainly to be seen that he thought the affair very strange, despite this apparently plausible excuse.

As soon as the boat left the steamer Dare and Charley went below, where they found the pirate had already emerged from his concealment, and was in the engine-room, eating at a rapid rate. From his hiding-place he had heard the conversation on deck, and, as soon as the sounds told that the small boat had started, he made a frantic rush for the eatables.

In a brief, hurried way Dare told Tommy what he proposed to do, and asked him if he would be willing to go on shore at any point where it would be possible to land him.

"I'll go anywhere, no matter what kind of a place it is, jest so's I'm clear of him," said Tommy, speaking rather indistinctly, because of the quantity of food in his mouth.

Thus assured that the party whom they wanted

to aid was willing to be helped, the boys went on deck, in order that they might keep watch of the boat, so as to take the first opportunity of landing the fugitive.

They could see Captain Sammy standing in the bow of the tender, with his harpoon raised ready for throwing, as if he already saw his prey, while Bobby and Rogers were steadily pulling away from the *Pearl*.

"If they keep on at that rate it won't be long before we can get Tommy ashore," said Dare, with a feeling of relief. "You go into the engine-room, so as to be all ready, and I will give the signal the moment it is safe."

Charley did as he was requested, and Dare went into the pilot-house. Five minutes later he rang the bell to go ahead.

The little boat was fully a mile and a half in advance of the steamer, and it seemed certain that they could reach the shore without their intentions being discovered until after it was too late to capture Tommy.

"Don't run too fast at first," shouted Dare through the speaking-tube. "I'll follow them a little way, and when I head her for the shore you put all steam on."

"Ay, ay!" shouted Charley in return, and Dare devoted all his attention to steering the *Pearl* in such a way as to make it appear that he was only sailing for the pleasure of the thing.

Suddenly he saw Captain Sammy throw the harpoon, and in another moment the boat dashed ahead with increased speed, showing that the iron was fast in a turtle, which was dragging the boat along at a rapid rate.

It seemed to Dare that the time had come for him to put his plan into execution, and he headed the boat directly for the shore.

"Now start her up!" he shouted to Charley, and an instant after the little craft leaped through the water at a rate which told that every ounce of steam had been applied.

For just one moment, and only one, Dare felt sure that he would be successful. Then Captain Sammy's boat was whirled suddenly around, as if the turtle had made up his mind to travel in another direction, and dashed along within fifty yards of the shore at right angles with the course of the *Pearl*.

"Slow down!" Dare shouted to Charley; and as the steamer's speed was slackened he saw Captain Sammy waving his hand for him to approach.

"It's all up now!" shouted Dare to the engine-room, "Captain Sammy's coming right for us, and you'll have to hide Tommy again."

Between turtle-power and steam-power the two boats came together very rapidly, and by the time they were within hailing distance Captain Sammy succeeded in passing a rope around



one of the turtle's flippers, and thus making him a prisoner.

"You did the thing just right," said Captain Sammy, as he came on board, "and if you should go turtling all the rest of your life you never could handle a boat as near right as you have this one."

But Dare thought that he had done anything else but handle the boat correctly, and again his fears beset him lest Captain Sammy should take it into his head to look under his berth.