

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE FAREWELL DINNER.

BY the arrangement which Captain Sammy had made the entire portion of the last day they were to remain in Tampa was to be spent with him.

The steamer sailed for Cedar Keys—at which point they were to take the cars for Fernandina, leaving there in a steamer—at four o'clock in the afternoon, and an early dinner was to be served, in order that they might have as much of the afternoon as possible in which to visit for the last time the little steamer which had been their home for so many days.

It lacked fully ten minutes of the time appointed when Dare knocked at the door of Captain Sammy's home, which was immediately opened by Tommy.

They were almost too much surprised for words at the pirate's changed appearance. His hair was combed neatly, his face was perfectly clean, and his costume was that of a particularly neat sailor out for a holiday. White flannel

trousers and shirt with blue collar and cuffs, in the corners of which was worked white stars, gave to the once disreputable-looking boy the neatest possible appearance.

Captain Sammy could be seen in the adjoining room, dressed with the same scrupulous neatness; but he was too busily engaged about something to be able to stop to speak, or even scold.

But the room in which they had been ushered was the most wonderful of anything they had seen in the State, for it was as full of odd little things as an overstocked museum. The mantelpiece fairly bristled with whales' teeth, sharks' teeth, and alligators' teeth; each corner of the room was completely filled with sprays and branches of coral, while every available inch of space on the walls was covered with pictures of all kinds of possible and impossible looking vessels.

A stuffed bird was standing on his head under one of the windows, as if it had been frightened at the many strange things around, and had assumed that attitude in sheer desperation. The model of a vessel, possibly the same one Captain Sammy had commanded, stood against an enormous turtle-shell, and at one end of the room lay at least a bushel of shells of almost every conceivable variety.

Bits of rope, in which were tied all kinds of

curious knots, complicated blocks, and odds and ends of every description littered the room, save directly under the mantel-piece, where stood what the visitors thought was the most beautiful article of all.

This was neither more nor less than a trim little schooner, about six feet long, rigged in the most perfect manner, with neither a block nor a line missing or out of place.

Captain Sammy entered the room just as the boys were gazing at the vessel, and a grim look of satisfaction came over his face as he observed the visitors' admiration of this, which was probably his favorite article among all the curiosities.

"Can she sail, Captain Sammy?" asked Dare.

"That she can," replied the little man, enthusiastically; "she can live in almost any weather; an' I've seen more lives saved through the craft that this one's the model of than I ever saw lost, which is sayin' a good deal. Sail? why, that 'ere craft could turn a square corner, if anybody that knew how much twice two was could get on board of her. Sail? why, she could get clean away from the wind, an' have to lay-to till it caught up with her."

Captain Sammy patted the sides of the little craft as if it was some living thing that could understand his caresses, and then, glancing up at the clock, he rushed off to the kitchen in the greatest possible haste.

Master Tucker seemed to take naturally to this great change in his surroundings, and, in answer to Dare's questions, he told them that Captain Sammy had announced his intention of regularly adopting him. The little man had already visited Mrs. Tucker, and, by promising to contribute a certain amount each month toward her support, had induced her to consent to the plan.

Therefore Tommy was to begin to attend school on the following Monday, and he would persist that all the changes in his circumstances were wholly due to the boys, who had shown him by example that true pleasure and right-doing go hand in hand.

All this conversation, which was broken in upon from time to time by their admiration of the schooner, had occupied them so long that when it was finished Captain Sammy popped his head in at the door and shouted, as if he thought they were miles away,

"Shipmates, ahoy! All hands to dinner!"

They went into the kitchen, where Captain Sammy, with evident pride, gave them seats at a table that seemed almost groaning under the weight of evidences of his skill as cook. Turtle, which was cooked in every imaginable way, was the principal dish, and in addition to it were fish, fowl, and fruit sufficient for at least a dozen hungry men.

It was Captain Sammy's purpose to have them partake of everything on the table; and so strictly did he carry it out, that even when Bobby had eaten so much that he had serious doubts as to whether he could walk home, or would be obliged to get the others to roll him along like a barrel, the little man glared at him so fiercely that he ate another turtle-steak and two more oranges, through fear of personal violence.

And it was a jolly time; for when the little man was not scolding or frowning at his guests because they did not eat more he was brimful of fun, and told stories until their heads were as full of the wonders of the sea as their stomachs were with food.

"Now," said Captain Sammy, after he was satisfied that full justice had been done to his feast, and the table looked as if it had been swept by an invading army, "I'm downright sorry that you're goin' away, for I'd counted on having you here with my pirate for a long time yet. I'd made up my mind that we'd all go out turtle-fishing in May, and that would have been rare sport, where all you would have to do would be to walk up to an old turtle, after she'd laid her eggs, an' tilt her over on her back."

Even though the boys did not speak their faces showed so plainly how sad they were at not being able to participate in such glorious sport, that Captain Sammy added, quickly,

"If it can't be done this year it can another, an' whenever you come you know you'll be welcome here. The pirate an' I shall stay right on this spot till my old bones are laid away like a bale of sponges, to make 'em ready for the great Captain, who won't ask where I hail from, only wantin' to know if I sailed close by his compass. It was Tommy here," and the little man laid his hand affectionately on the boy's shoulder, "who saved my old life when it wasn't hardly worth the saving, an' he an' I'll be together as long as I stay in this world; an', next to him, it was you who saved me, for if it hadn't been for you he wouldn't have been where he was. I ain't much on talkin', lads, but my heart is in the right place, an' all I can say is, that jest so long as I've got a roof over my head, or a deck under my feet, jest so long I'll give you up three-quarters of it, an' be glad of the chance."

Captain Sammy's eyes were getting suspiciously red, and when he finished speaking he arose hastily from the table and went out on the veranda, where the boys found him shortly after, sending up great clouds of tobacco-smoke in the most furious manner.

After that the *Pearl* was visited for the last time, and, with hearts heavy at leaving this strangely-assorted couple, whom they had learned to like so well, the last adieus were

spoken, and the boys were on the steamer bound for home.

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Although Dare, Charley, and Bobby had fully intended to visit Florida during the following winter, circumstances prevented, and it was not until last year that they succeeded in so doing.

Then they went by the way of Jacksonville; and, although they had never seen that beautiful winter resort, they did not remain there an hour longer than was necessary.

There was but one place in Florida they were anxious to reach, and but two persons they particularly wanted to see. That place was Tampa, and those persons Captain Sammy and his pirate Tommy.

They started on the first train that left Jacksonville for Cedar Keys, and there they were so fortunate as to land an hour before the time for the mail-steamer to start for Tampa.

They had given no intimation of their intended visit, answering Tommy's last letter without once mentioning the subject that for five years had lain so near the pirate's heart—their visit to him since he had become a steady, honest boy.

Therefore there was no familiar face to greet them as they landed from the steamer, and they were all the better pleased that it was so, for the surprise would be the more complete.

During the five years they had been absent from Tampa they had by no means forgotten the way to Captain Sammy's house, and when they approached it they were thoroughly well pleased at seeing such evidences as told that the "family" were at home, and unaware of their presence.

Captain Sammy's familiarly gruff voice called out "Come in!" in response to their knock, and, opening the door, they saw the little captain leaning back in his favorite chair, smoking, while seated at the table was Tommy Tucker Basset—he having long since been legally adopted by Captain Sammy—reading aloud from one of the little man's favorite authors.

It was a hearty greeting that both the occupants of the cottage gave them, and the three weeks they spent there were as full of enjoyment as Captain Sammy and his pirate—as he would still persist in calling him, very much to Tommy's confusion—could fill them.

Although they did not attempt to reach the Everglades again, they took many a cruise in the *Pearl*, which looked as bright and new as if she had just been built; and when at last their visit was ended Captain Sammy and Tommy took them up to Cedar Keys in the yacht.

"Come soon again," said the little man, as they parted at the railroad-station. "I don't tell you not to forget us, for that I know you never will,

and you may be sure that we shall never forget you, for my pirate learned what pleasure there was in leading an upright, God-fearing life when you boys came down here and took the job of raising the *Pearl*. Good-bye!"

THE END.