



ON SHE TRUDGED, LEADING HIM.

P. 93.

CHAPTER XII.

TOM INTERCEDES FOR HER ENEMY

A NIGHT OF HORROR.

"Miserable wretch!" cried Harry, thrusting the cold muzzle of a revolver against the temple of the cowering villain who, stunned by his fall, was just recovering consciousness.

"Wretch, die like the dog that you are!"

"No, no!" cried Tom, seizing the hand that held the pistol. "Don't shoot him, please don't!"

"Curse him anyway!" cried the infuriated lover. "I ought to kill him! Oh, I will murder him! I will, I will! Curse him, I say!"

"O Harry," pleaded the girl, "please don't, I can't bear to see you kill him. O, I can't, I can't!"

"Where's the diamond, you black-hearted renegade?" demanded Harry, giving him a kick in the ribs that made him writhe in pain. "Speak, or by — I'll put a bullet through your villainous heart!" And he gave him another kick in a very tender place.

"O Harry!" cried the tender-hearted girl, pleadingly. "Don't, don't!"

"Darn him!" hissed the half crazed and infuriated Harry. "He shall give it up to you, or by thunder I'll kick the life out of him!" And he administered another kick, which was followed by a cry of pain. "Out with it,

darn you!" And he drew back his foot for another kick.

"Harry!" with quivering lips, while the tears filled her eyes. "O don't be so cruel, Harry!" And she stepped between the two men.

"Tom!" cried Harry, in such a fierce, passionate tone, for all the savage passion of his nature was so thoroughly aroused, that the poor, tender-hearted girl shrunk back in alarm before that fierce, awful fire that blazed from the infuriated man's eyes. "Tom, I swear by the Almighty, if he don't give it up with his own hand, I will kick him as long as a breath of life remains in his murderous carcass!" And he aimed another kick that caught him fairly in the middle.

"Darn you!" hissed the half crazed Harry, removing the handkerchief from his head and showing him the horrible wound across his temple where Loffden's bullet had struck him. "Darn you, I say!" And again he caught him full under the short ribs.

"O Harry, my darling Harry!" sobbed the poor girl, and her bare, white arms stole around his neck; and drawing his wounded head down, she pressed her quivering lips again and again to his hot, fevered cheek. "O don't kick him again, Harry, darling! Shoot him, Harry, if you will, but don't—O don't kill him so."

"Tom," said Harry, striving to control his passion, "see there," and he placed his finger upon that horrible gash which Loffden's bullet had given him and which had come so near ending his life; which, uncared for as it had been, presented a most shocking appearance, and still exposing the bare skull just above the right temple. "See, Tom; it was Silas Loffden gave me that. For-

give me, Tom, if I am cruel, for I can't help it. O my head!" he moaned. "O God! I could kill him, I will—I—" And again he raved like a maniac.

Poor Tom, in tears, plead with her lover to be calm, for she saw, with an awful fear at her heart, that his suffering was robbing him of reason.

"O Harry," she cried, "kill him, kill him! Oh, I could kill him; I will kill him!" cried the girl; for the sight of her wounded lover's suffering, and the thought that it was fast driving him mad, that he might yet die from its effects, drove her mad, transformed the gentle, tender-hearted girl into a veritable little fury. "O I will!" she fairly screamed, and before Harry could realize the sudden and unexpected change in the meek, gentle little Tom, she seized the heavy rifle which lay at Loffden's side and, thrusting it almost against the horrified wretch's heart, fired. But Harry was too quick for her; for, springing forward, he knocked the rifle aside and saved his enemy's life.

"Tom, Tom!" cried Harry, seizing the little fury in his strong arms and holding her fast. "Tom, Tom; for heaven's sake child, you are crazy!"

"Hold her, hold her!" cried Loffden, wildly; as the girl, struggling like a veritable little fury to free herself from her lover's arms, cried breathlessly:

"Let me go! Let me go! I'll kill him, I'll kill him!" And she struggled furiously again.

"Tom, Tom!" coaxed Harry. But it was no use; the meek, harmless, gentle little Tom, so tender-hearted that even one little unkind word or act would bring tears to her loving eyes, was bent upon murder; and it re-

quired all the strength of the great, noble-hearted boy to restrain her.

"Tom," he said, calmly now, for the girl's terrible passion had aroused his anxiety and cooled his anger by drawing his attention from Loffden to her, "Tom, Tom, you must not do so! I won't let you kill him!"

"I will, I will!" she panted, still struggling. "Let me go! Let me go!"

"Almighty!" cried Harry, tightening his arms about her till he fairly squeezed the breath out of the poor child, "Almighty, now; but I've a notion to let her kill you. Darn you, if I thought you had misused the girl, by act or even by insulting words, I would hold you while she tears your treacherous heart out!"

"I have not misused her, I have not offered her insult!" cried Loffden, imploringly. "Ask her if I have. Here, Tom, here's your diamond—I didn't know it was yours. Take it, Tom, and let me go and I will never bother you again. I didn't mean you any harm, Tom, I—"

"You lie, you hell-hound!" cried Harry. "You sought this little girl's ruin and would have accomplished it, too, as you did poor Gretchen's. Had that shot you gave me proved fatal—don't you deny it, don't you dare to offer any excuse—I know the story of Gretchen. I saw you raise your hand to strike her that night at the bridge, and I know her fate; and I know, could you have carried out your hellish design, that a worse fate, if possible, would have been this little girl's lot! O darn you!" he cried, "darn you!" and again, the infuriated lover fetched the cowering wretch such a kick under the short ribs of his left side, that he fell back with a groan and lay quite still.

"O Tom, I have killed him!" groaned Harry. "God forgive me if I have done wrong."

Tom was quiet now; and kneeling beside the prostrate form, and with hands clasped upon her throbbing bosom, she said in low, soft accents:

"You are not to blame, Harry; he has sought your life—he has sought my ruin," and her soft tones sunk to a low whisper; "and Harry, God is good, He will forgive us, for He knows that this night I would have been lost; and then—O Harry! God is good, He will forgive us, for he knows. But I won't tell you now, sometime I will—O thank God, you were not too late."

"Then he died with a lie on his lips, for he said that he offered you no insult," said Harry, wildly.

"God knows and He will forgive us, for He heard him; but you saved me Harry—sometime, I will tell you," mused the girl.

"O my head!" muttered the wounded man. "Ha, ha, I killed him, I killed him! Come, come, Tom, let's go home; they will miss us and Aunt Jane will scold—come, come, let's go! Where are we, Tom? Ah, I see—I know—O my head! Ha, ha," he laughed, wildly, and started off.

Poor Tom. With a feeling of awful fear at her heart, she realized that the terrible suffering of her wounded lover was fast robbing him of reason.

"What can I do, O what can I do?" she wailed, taking his hand in her's and leading him away. "O God," she prayed, "help me, guide me, that I may lead him away from his enemies!"

On, on, she trudged, leading him as though he was a child. Her only hope being to lead him away from his

enemies, to hide him till he should be sufficiently recovered to realize his condition, his danger; for she knew Jante was not dead. Terrible as the blow dealt him had been, she knew it was not sufficient to kill the hard headed negro. And then, perhaps, Loffden would not die; for he was not quite dead, she well knew, when they left him.

On, on they fled, till they reached the heavy timber. Here, sheltered from the beating storm, they sat down beneath the spreading branches of a great tree to rest.

"O my head, O my head!" moaned Harry, rocking himself to and fro in his agony.

"Harry, dear," pleaded poor Tom, "let me dress your wound, let me bathe your head with cold water, it will make you feel better."

"Ah, is it you, Tom?" and he pressed his hands to his aching head. "O this terrible dream! O Tom, my darling, my poor little Tom; they have stolen her away! O God!" he moaned, weeping bitterly.

Poor Tom, with aching heart, sat throughout all that long and awful night with her lover's head pillowed upon her lap, bathing his wound with the cool water which came rushing in torrents around them. O how thankful she was for that blinding, driving tempest that poured down upon them, drenching them to the skin and cooling that hot, fevered face and, at last, quenching that fever fire that raged within him.

Wild at times, and at times quite rational, though insensible to his surroundings, he finally settled down into a quiet and peaceful sleep.

Crouching down beside her wounded lover, the drenched and shivering little creature prayed God to spare his life—to give him back to her.

"O give him back to me!" she moaned, and bowing her head upon his bosom, she cried herself to sleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

FLIGHT.

The storm had passed and the warm sun shining down through the branches overhead kissed the pale cheek of little Tom, while the soft, perfumed breeze toyed with her golden curls and drank up the moisture from her drenched garments. Higher and higher crept the king of day, still the fugitives slept on. A parrot perched upon a limb overhead, tilted his head to one side and surveyed the sleeping pair with a curious, critical gaze. At last, seemingly satisfied as to the strange creatures, he ruffled up his feathers and screamed lustily in his harsh, shrill voice.

"O what a dream!" murmured Harry, opening his eyes and looking wildly about him. "O heavens!" he cried, as his gaze fell upon the golden tresses and sweet, pale face of little Tom, nestling so trustingly, so peacefully upon his shoulder. One arm had, unconsciously, stolen around his neck, while a sweet, peaceful smile played about her pale lips.

"Ah," mused Harry, "then it was not all a dream. Yes, I remember now; but where are we? Where are they? Poor, little Tom," he murmured, drawing her head closer, till his lips touched her arm. That warm, passionate kiss seemed to awaken in the bosom of the little sleeper, the memory of some sweet and happy dream; for a warm blush suffused her pale cheek and a glad, peaceful smile played about her lips.

(96)



"O HARRY, YOU FEEL BETTER NOW."

P. 97.

For a long time he lay quiet, for fear of moving, lest he should awaken the poor girl from her happy dream. Holding her close to his heart, with her soft, warm cheek resting so peacefully against his own, he passed, so it seemed to him, the happiest half hour of his life.

"O what a happy dream!" he murmured, for the fever had left him and he felt quite easy. "O what a happy dream!" and looking down into the great, wondering blue eyes of little Tom who, wide awake now, met his ardent, admiring gaze with that innocent, trusting look which spoke so plainly of the love and confidence which she placed in him.

"O Harry!" cried the girl joyously, as she arose and looked about them. "O Harry, you feel better now. Ah, you look so much better; that wild look has all left your eyes. O thank God!" she murmured. "He heard my prayer—He gave you back to me."

"Ah, I see, I see," said Harry. "I was out of my head. I was trying to study out where we are and how we came here, but I couldn't remember. The last I can remember, I was holding you to keep you from killing Loffden. You wanted to kill him, and it was about all I could do to hold you. You don't look as though you would hurt anything, but good Lord! I hope you will never get angry at me, if you are always that way when you are mad."

"Oh, I wanted to kill him, when I remembered how cruel he had been and how he had shot you; and I was so afraid that it would make you sick and you would die. O Harry, it made me mad—I guess I was mad—I never felt so before, and O, I hope I will never feel so again. I wanted to kill him—I couldn't help it."

"Yes, I remember it all now," said Harry. "I remember I was holding you when Loffden said something that made me mad. I can remember I kicked him and I thought he was dead; but I don't believe that I killed him. He said something about you, I don't remember what—perhaps I didn't understand him—but I thought perhaps that he had injured you. Oh, if I thought he had, I would go back and hunt him down and kill him!"

"No, no, Harry, you saved me. Thank God, you were not too late. But don't let's talk about that, Harry, it makes you mad—it will make your head hurt. Come, let's go and see if we can't find something to eat. I am almost starved."

Fortunately, game was plenty and Harry, being a good shot, soon bagged a brace of birds that made them a bountiful repast, such as it was; and good, indeed, did it taste to the half starved fugitives.

"Nothing but a little salt could make it better," declared Tom.

"It would improve the flavor a little," agreed Harry. "But I am satisfied and now, the next thing is, what are we going to do?"

"We must try to get back home just as soon as we can. Oh, poor papa will worry himself to death. Come, Harry, do you feel strong enough to walk? Take my arm—don't you remember when I helped you home once before?"

"Remember! Ah, yes, I will always remember that, Tom," replied Harry; and taking her arm in his, they set out again on their flight.

For three days they toiled on through the forests, and had almost persuaded themselves that they were out of

danger when, late in the evening, and just as they had finished their supper of fruit and roasted venison, they discovered Loffden with a score of blacks following their trail. Their pursuers had not seen them yet, but to slip away unseen by the keen eyed Kafirs, was altogether out of the range of possibilities. To run or to fight was the only thing left them to do. But to fight against such odds was, at best, but a hope of making them pay dearly perhaps for their victory; for the Kafirs were all well armed and are, universally, expert with the rifle.

"Tom," said Harry, taking a small revolver from his pocket, "take that and conceal it inside of your clothes where it will be safe and, if worse comes to worse, use it. Don't hesitate, but if you have to, do it quick—you understand—you know how to use it; you are a good shot and for God sakes, Tom, if you use it, don't miss. Promise me, Tom, that you will do it."

"I promise Harry," she answered, taking the pistol and concealing it within the bosom of her dress.

"Come," said Harry, taking her and setting out on a run.

In a moment the keen eyed Kafirs saw them and, with shouts of triumph, bounded away in pursuit. The Kafirs, so swift on foot, soon pressed them so hard that they were obliged to come to a stand. Choosing as favorable a position as possible among some large rocks and trees, they awaited the onset.

Loffden, who had not yet recovered from the severe punishment that he had received from the hand, or rather the foot of the infuriated Harry that awful night, was not able to keep up with the swift footed Kafirs, as he could not ride his horse out of a walk on account of

an injury which that last, terrible kick had done him; so when the Kafirs saw that the fugitives had, at last, come to a stand, they awaited the arrival of Loffden.

Darkness was fast gathering around them and, as Harry well knew, it was for this that they were waiting. Under cover of the darkness the wily Kafirs would crawl upon them and then, all together, would make a rush and over-power their powerful and dangerous opponent before he could have time to use the deadly and dreaded weapons which he carried.

"They mean to surprise us," Tom, said Harry, "but they are off; they'll find that we are here when they come. I noticed that Loffden acted as though he didn't feel just right. I guess I hurt him pretty bad. I'd like to get a shot at him, but he'll keep out of the way."

"O Harry," whispered poor little Tom, eagerly, breathlessly, her heart fluttering with the awful fear, as she thought, that perhaps her lover would be killed. "O Harry, I'm so afraid! Oh, what can we do against so many? Tell me, Harry, what to do; tell me what you will do, so I will know, for if they kill you, I will kill myself. I can't live without you. Tell me, Harry, just what to do."

"Don't kill yourself, Tom, unless you are compelled to do it. Better die, Tom, than to let Loffden have you; but you can kill him. But don't get discouraged, darling, there's hope yet—lot's of it. It looks bad to you—'tis bad, but not hopeless. No, Tom, I ain't ready to die—I ain't going to die for a good many years yet. I feel it, I know it; and so, whatever happens, don't get discouraged. And remember, Tom, as long as I live, and I shall live long after Silas Loffden is dead, no harm

shall come to you. Wherever you are, if they get you away from me to-night, I will be near; and rather than Silas Loffden shall ruin your life, I will kill you, and then myself. But I don't think you need to fear anything of that kind from him for some time, at any rate. If I ever get within gun shot of him again, he's a dead man."

For half an hour, all was still. Then the keen ears of young Lovejoy detected the unmistakable sound of their approaching enemy. Slowly, stealthily, the rustling sound drew near.