

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DYING DUTCHMAN. HARRY MAKES A TRADE.

A TRAGEDY.

Hardly had Tom and her captor reached the shelter of the jungle, when two men appeared. They were hurrying away from the caravansary and were soon beyond sight.

Till now, Tom was unconscious as to who her captor was; but now, in a low whisper, he said:

"Tom, Oh, thank God that I happened to see you when you left the trader's tent. I knew that you were in there with the women and I was waiting for an opportunity to rescue you, when I saw you leave the tent, and I hastened here to head you off. If you had got away without my seeing you, there's no telling what might have happened, or when I would have found you again."

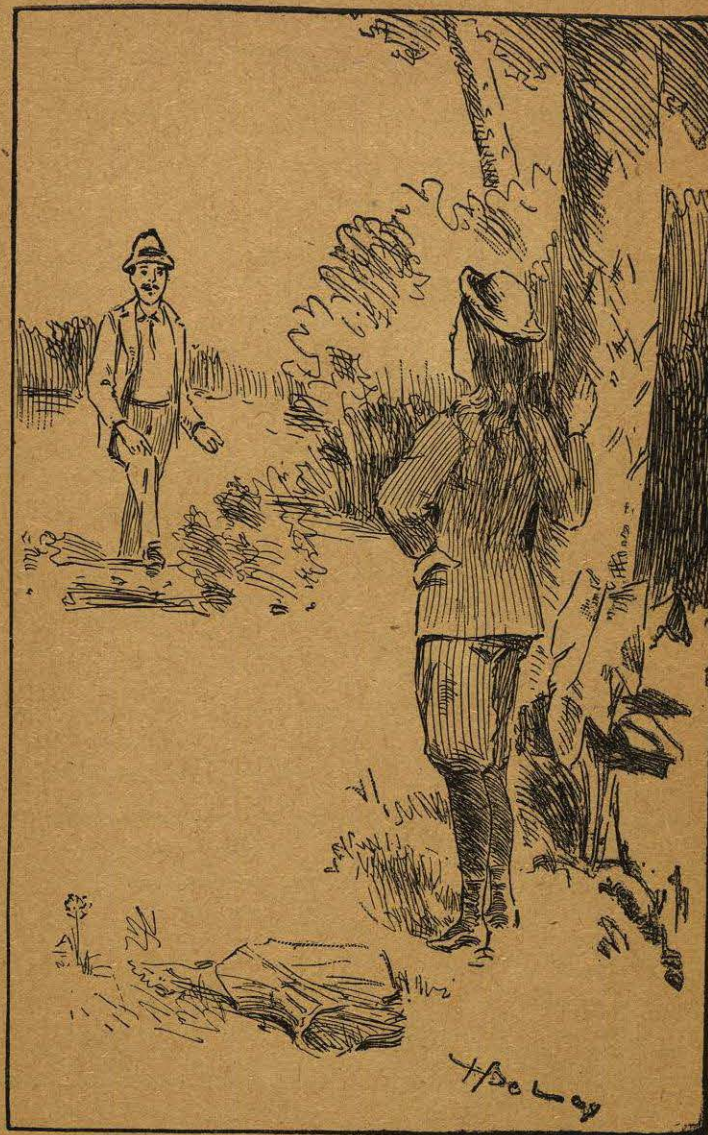
"O Harry," murmured the girl, clasping her bare arms about her lover's neck and returning the warm kisses which he pressed upon her red lips. "Oh, thank God that it was you instead of those two men who just passed, that caught me."

"Do you know who they were, Tom?" asked Harry.

"Yes; they are the two Dutchmen that Jante brought with him from the Kafir village. One of them is old Fritz Wagonblast. He used to live at Kimberly and he worked for father a while. They have got our diamond—"The Star of Kimberly."

"Ah, I know him—he is trading, or has been, with

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HE FOUND QUITE A RESPECTABLE-LOOKING BOY AWAITING HIM. P. 138.

the natives up here. They will strike out for the coast. Do you know the other one's name?"

"No, I don't know what his name is. Fritz called him Joe."

"Well, it don't make any difference; they've got the diamond and we will follow them—they can't escape us. No, by the gods, they shall not have it, Tom."

"Let them have it, Harry, darling, it has been a curse to us. Oh, I wish that we had never found it—it has been the cause of all our trouble. Do you know, Harry, there is a story connected with that stone? I heard Loffden telling Fritz and Oden about it. He said that it was stolen and lost up there in the mountains some twenty-five years ago. It's been a curse to everybody that has ever had anything to do with it. Let them have it, Harry."

"No, Tom, I swear they shall not have it," he said, resolutely. "They are making for the coast and that's just where we want to go, so come; let's after them."

Nearly all the rest of the night they tramped on following the caravan trail which led to the coast. Along toward morning they left the road and went out into the woods to rest a while.

"We'll be safe here, Tom, I think," said Harry; "so lie down a while and rest." And lying down together in the shelter of a dense thicket, they slept for a couple of hours when Harry, awakening just as the sun was rising above the hill tops, arose, and for a few moments stood gazing down upon the fair little creature sleeping so peacefully.

"Oh," he said, regretfully, "it's too bad, but we must

be going. Tom, Tom," he called, shaking her gently. "Come Tom, my poor little girl; wake up, I know you are tired and sleepy, but we must go. Tom, can't you wake up?"

"Oh," she sighed, turning over and stretching her weary limbs. "Oh, I'm so sleepy." But she got up; and rubbing her sleepy eyes till she got them fairly open, she announced that she was ready for breakfast.

"Luckily, Tom, I made a raise of some dried meat and some bread yesterday, so we won't have to fast this morning. My, but I've got an appetite like a young hyenna," said Harry, producing his stock of provisions.

"Me too," laughed Tom. "I never was so near starved in all my life," she declared, devouring her share of the breakfast in a manner that did not belie her words.

"Tom," said Harry, meditatively, "will you let me make a boy out of you?"

"Make a boy of me! What more do I need? My clothes come as near being like yours as you can fix them; all the difference is the color. Mine are white—no they ain't, but they were once—and my sleeves arn't quite so long."

"Sleeves," interrupted Harry, scanning her critically, "I fail to see anything of the kind."

"I don't care," she ejaculated; "they are sleeves just the same—they are a little short I know, and my—my—"

"Pants," laughed Harry. "That's what we call 'em."

"Well, they only come to my knees, but that's an

advantage, so I don't care. I look as well as you do, so there."

"Better, Tom, better—lot's better. But you are getting your arms and—and shoulders pretty badly sunburned."

"Oh, I don't care for that, but they are getting so sore—but I can't help it, I suppose. If it hadn't been for my hair, I would have been burned to a blister yesterday."

"And there's just where the trouble is, Tom; your hair—no boy would have such a head of hair. We must—"

"O Harry!" cried poor Tom in dismay, for she understood now what he was driving at. "O my hair, my hair!" she wailed, and drawing her beautiful golden hair, which hung far below her waist in a mass of shining gold about her shoulders, she burst into tears.

"There, there, Tom, don't cry," coaxed Harry. "We won't cut it off. No, no, little girl, it's too pretty to lose, besides it protects you. It don't matter, Tom, if people do know that you are a girl; we couldn't disguise you anyway. Just let 'em look if they want to; it won't do them any particular good, nor you any harm. If they knew what we know, they wouldn't wonder, Tom, that we are a little short of clothes."

"Oh, I am so glad," cried the girl, joyously. "I don't care if people do laugh at me, if I can only keep my hair."

"Keep it, Tom, and let them laugh if they want to. It hides your bare shoulders and is almost as good as a coat. But come, Tom, let's be off again," said Harry.

And so they took up their weary march toward the sea-coast which, as they learned from some natives, was some sixty miles distant.

Several times during the day, they learned by inquiry that the two Boors were not far in advance of them, and were making for Port Orange.

Along toward evening they stopped for a few hours to rest, and then set out upon their march again.

As they were passing through a dark wood, walking arm in, talking of—no, no, I won't tell; that is, I promised not to tell, because it was a delicate subject and not particularly interesting to other than they. But I say, as they were passing the deepest and darkest part of the wood, they were suddenly brought to a standstill by hearing an unearthly groan almost beneath their feet.

"O!" screamed Tom, for just then a hand reached out in the darkness and grasped her ankle.

In an instant Harry was upon the man, for man it was, and had grasped him by the throat.

"O Got!" groaned the poor wretch. "O Got, I'm kilt, I'm kilt!"

"Mynheer Fritz," cried Tom, "is that you?"

"Yah, yah. O Got, O missie, I'm kilt!" he groaned.

"Who killed you, man?" asked Harry.

"O mine Got, I'm kilt, I'm kilt!" he groaned.

"Who killed you, Ohm Fritz?" asked the girl, pityingly.

"O mine Got im himmel! I'm kilt, und he's got de tiamondt. O mine Got, mine Got, I'm kilt!"

"Ah, Tom," said Harry, "I see through it all now.

That fellow that was with him has murdered him for the diamond."

"Yah, yah, he got de tiamondt und kilt me, und robt me! O mine Got, I'm kilt, I'm kilt!"

"Who was it with you, Fritz? What was his name?" asked Harry.

"O mine Got, I'm kilt, I'm kilt!" groaned the Dutchman.

"And he's got the diamond has he?" queried Harry.

"Yah, yah, he stole him. O mine Got in himmel! He stole him, he stole him und kilt me," he groaned.

"Serves you right," declared Harry.

"O mine Got, mine Got, I'm kilt, I'm kilt," groaned the dying man.

"Come, Tom, there's no use of wasting time here," declared Harry. "We can't do anything for him—besides I wouldn't if I could. He tried to kill me and he robbed you and then sold you for a slave, after promising to let you go if you would give him the diamond. Come on, Tom," he said, taking her hand and dragging her away.

"O Harry, it's too bad to leave him to die here alone," cried the tender-hearted girl.

"I know it, Tom, but we can't do anything for him, so let's go."

It was long after midnight when they left the dying man and again took up their weary march. For several hours they tramped on and then, just as day was breaking, they turned from the road and entered the forest and lay down to rest.

When Harry awoke, after an hour's refreshing sleep.

the sun was well up and he was nearly starved; so waking up his little companion, they set out on their march again, munching their scanty breakfast as they went along.

They were nearing the coast now, for the country was settled some, and occasionally they saw people in the fields at work.

"I wonder," said Harry, "if we can't trade for a suit of clothes for you, Tom. See that boy over there herding sheep, he's just about your size, Tom; let's go and see if we can't trade with him."

"What have we got to trade? We haven't got so much as a penny between us, and you certainly can't spare any of your clothes," said Tom.

"But you can, Tom. We'll banter him for a trade anyhow, come along."

"O Harry, don't make fun of me," cried Tom, reproachfully.

"I arn't making fun of you, Tom. Come on, let's try him," he urged.

"No, no; he won't trade with us. I can't—I don't want to—I—we ain't got anything to trade," persisted Tom, too bashful to make the attempt.

"I will trade one of my revolvers," said Harry. "But he won't trade unless you will let him have your clothes to wear till he gets home—don't you see, Tom? He hasn't got but one suit on I venture, and perhaps nowhere else either—these Boors are not very well heeled in the clothes line. Come on."

"I won't do it. You go and I will stay here till you come back," agreed Tom, reluctantly.

"All right, here goes," laughed Harry. "I'll bet you a new dress that I trade with him"; and he set out on his errand.

In the course of a half hour, Tom, who had been lying in the shade awaiting the result of Harry's trading, was no little amused and considerably confused at the reappearance of Harry who, with a look of triumph, threw a pair of home-spun, home made pants and a shirt of the same stripe at her feet.

"There," he laughed, "tell me I'm no trader. They are brand new, too, so the boy said; and he never wore them before to-day—they are his Sunday clothes, for to-day is Sunday."

"It's wicked to trade on Sunday," said Tom.

"Can't help it, Tom; but hurry and put them on or you'll get sun-burned. Just whistle when you are ready," said Harry, and he turned and walked away out of sight.

In a few minutes, Tom called that she was ready.

"See if I am all right, Harry."

"Y-e-s," he said, turning her around. "They fit you just splendid—couldn't be better. Now, if you had a new pair of shoes and a hat, you would be fixed."

"Oh, I don't mind a hat—I don't wear it one-half the time when I am at home; and my shoes are good enough. Oh, I am 'fixed,' as you call it. But dear me! they feel awful uncomfortable," she complained.

"Fashion is a tyrant," said Harry. "It would be lot's more comfortable if we didn't have to wear clothes, like those Zulu Kafirs."

"Come, come; you ain't half so anxious about the boy; hurry up and carry him the clothes."

"All right; you fix up while I am gone," he said, as he set out to carry the boy his clothes.

When Harry returned he found quite a respectable looking boy awaiting him.

"Well, now we are ready," he exclaimed, "so let's be off. It's only five miles further to Port Orange. Two hours and we'll be there; then we'll get a passage on board some vessel and will soon reach the Cape, and then, Tom—"

"O Harry!" cried Tom, joyously. "Then we will be home. It seems almost a year since I left home. Do you know how long it has been?"

"No, I don't know," replied Harry. "I have lost all track of time; but it must be nearly two months, or will be by the time we get home."

By the time they get back! Ah, could they have looked into the future and seen what was in store for them, their steps would not have been so light, their hearts would not have bounded so joyously at the glad prospect that their suffering was about over, that they would soon be home again. But the future was not revealed. Perhaps we ought to feel thankful that we cannot see what is in store for us, that we cannot look into the future, unless all of the darker part could be concealed, revealing only the pleasant side of the story—but then, here's a point: Could they have foreseen what was in store for them, they would never have ventured upon that remarkable and fateful excursion to the mountains; consequently this story would never have been written—a great loss, surely.

However, our friends arrived at the Port in due time

and, with light hearts, repaired to the Sailor's Home, a sort of tavern and the only one which the town afforded.

"We'll have a good, square meal, Tom," said Harry, and his mouth "watered" at the thought.

"But how will we get it, Harry," queried Tom, "we haven't a penny, nor anything to trade."

"We'll have it just the same," he declared. "Here, here's a tavern; come on and I'll show you."

On entering the bar-room which was pretty well filled at the time, and before going ten feet, they came face to face with the Dutchman who aided old Fritz in robbing them of the diamond and afterward murdered him and left him on the road in the woods alone to die, where Tom and Harry had found him.

For an instant both men stood and glared upon each other and then, quick as lightning, two revolvers flashed, two reports rang out, followed by a wild, agonized shriek from the Dutchman who, throwing up his hands, fell back upon the floor, dead. At the same time, Harry staggered forward and, before little Tom could catch him, fell prone across the body of the Dutchman.

With a wild, frightened cry, poor Tom sprang forward and kneeling beside her stricken lover, tried to raise him.

"O my God," she wailed, "he is dead, he is dead!" And weeping most bitterly, the poor child called upon the people to help her carry him to a place where she could lay him down and have his wound attended to if he was not dead.

In a moment he was taken to another room and laid upon a lounge, while water and restoratives were brought.
