

## CHAPTER XX.

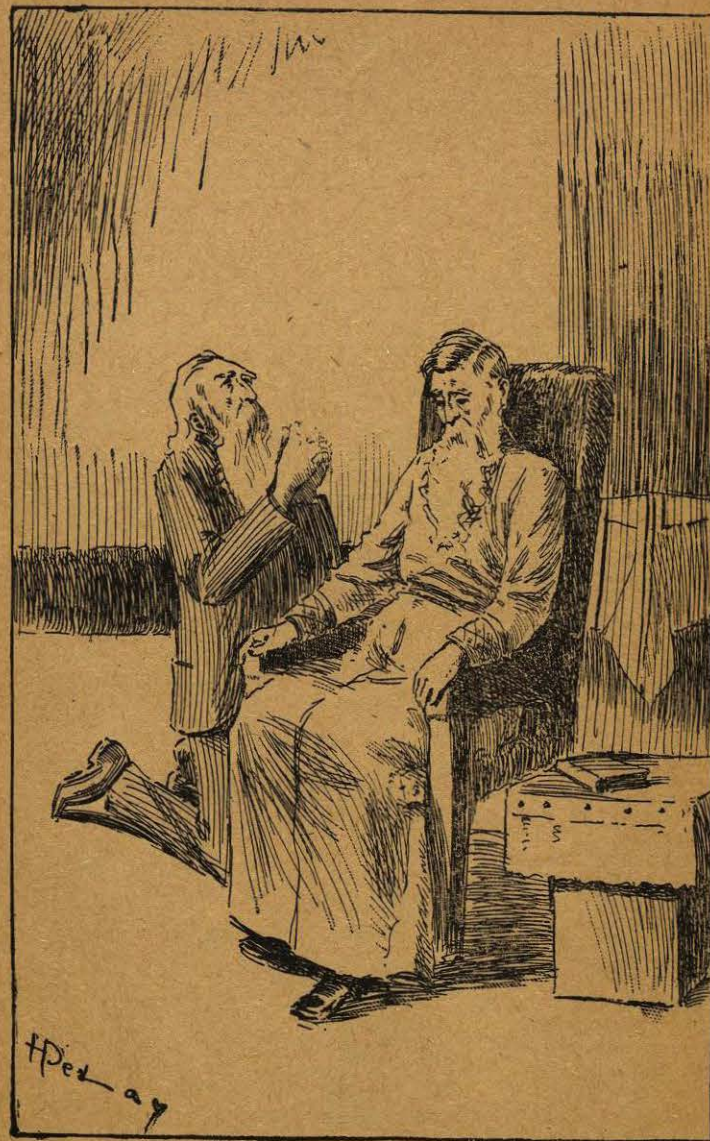
### TO-MORROW.

Two months had passed, and still no news, not even a word had reached the anxious, and now almost despairing inmates at Aunt Jane's.

Two long, dreary months of anxiety, of uncertainty, of dread; still not a word of any kind of the missing had come to dispel the uncertainty—that would at once and for all settle to a certainty the fate of little Tom and her lover.

The two old men who had lived, for seventeen years, such bitter enemies, had become firm and inseparable friends. Both equally loved little Tom and brave, young Harry, and were inconsolable at the loss of them. Though James Winterstine had three other daughters, one of which was still at home, not one of them would fill the place left vacant by the absence of little Tom—his boy, as he called her. While to the old hermit, she had come like a ray of sunshine, bursting through the darkness of night, and dispelling the gloom which had hovered about his lonely old heart for so many years. Bringing, as she did, a feeling of peace and hope to his weary heart, comfort and rest to his old age. For he had, since his first meeting with little Tom and Harry, whom he had since learned, was his own son, laid plans for the future—plans which would have made her the happy mistress of a peaceful and

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THE OLD HERMIT, KNEELING DOWN BESIDE THE GRIEF-STRICKEN FATHER,  
PRAYED THAT GOD WOULD YET RESTORE THEIR CHILDREN. P. 157.

and happy home, where he, as the father of young Harry—her husband—could pass the remainder of his days in peace and comfort, made his loss doubly severe.

Two months had passed, and not a word concerning the fate of the *children* had come. Everything that they could do had been done.

Two months since the day that happy, light-hearted little Tom and her lover had rode away upon that fateful excursion to the mountains had passed and, before the fire that had blazed so cheerily upon the hearth upon this memorable evening, sat the two old, sorrowing friends—James Winterstine and Henry Lovell.

Aunt Jane sat in her corner, knitting, while Lucy was deeply absorbed in the soul-harrowing tragedy of the latest French novel.

Suddenly the sound of hasty footsteps was heard, then came a loud knock at the door and, without waiting for an invitation, the door was pushed open and the visitor entered, and stood before the inmates.

"They are coming!" he cried, excitedly. "They left Port Orange three days ago on the ship Cape Town. She will reach the Cape to-day and to-morrow they will be here." Heartily, almost incoherently, he delivered his message.

No answer was expected, so the messenger boy, bowing low, took his departure.

The father's head drooped a little lower, while tears of joy coursed down his furrowed cheeks; yet he spoke not a word.

Aunt Jane's knitting dropped from her trembling

fingers, while Lucy's French novel closed with a low, rustling sound and dropped listlessly upon her lap.

The old hermit, rising slowly from his chair and kneeling before the weeping father, raised his trembling voice to God in thanksgiving for the good news, that the children still lived, and would soon be home.

"To-morrow they will be here. O, thank God, thank God!" sighed the father.

"But," says the philosopher, "to-morrow is a day that never comes."

The morrow dawned bright and beautiful. It was a fitting day for the home-coming of the long lost wanderers, but they did not come. The long day came to a close and, with evening, came a message.

The two old men were sitting before the fire; Aunt Jane was in her corner, but she was not knitting; Lucy was in her accustomed place, but the French novel was lying upon the table, untouched; when, again, as upon the previous evening, a loud knock upon the door startled them and, as before, without waiting an answer to his summons, the messenger entered.

For a moment, and as though the sad news which the messenger brought, had cast its shadows before, a hushed and almost breathless silence pervaded the room. All seemed to feel, in that brief, silent period, that the weight of some terrible sorrow was about to fall upon them.

At last, and in a voice that trembled with emotion, the messenger said—

"Mr. Winterstine, I have been sent to bring you the sad news that the ship upon which Miss Winterstine and

Mr. Lovejoy took passage, was lost. I—ahem—I—I received the telegram to-night—not a soul was saved—all went down. She struck on the rocks and went down in deep water. Some natives upon the island saw her when she struck, and some thirty or more bodies were found the next morning by a passing steamer, but not a living person was left to tell the tale," said the messenger, and with bowed head he turned and left the room.

For half an hour, not a word was spoken. The grief-stricken father sank back in his chair; his hoary head drooped upon his bosom, but not a word did he utter.

Aunt Jane had followed Lucy's example and retired to her own room.

Again the old hermit arose slowly and kneeling down beside the grief-stricken father, prayed that God would yet restore their children to them.

The days dragged their weary lengths along till a month had passed since the sad news had first reached them, yet the first news, that not a soul had survived to tell the tale of that ill-fated ship and her doomed crew and passengers, remained undisputed. She had struck upon the rocks in that awful tempest and gone down with all on board.

They had heard the story of their appearance at Port Orange and the tragical meeting of Harry and the Boar. They had left the same day, scarcely four hours after entering the town, upon the ill-fated ship, Cape Town. That was the last seen of the ship and her freight of human beings.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### ADRIFT ON THE OCEAN.

Down beneath the seething, rushing billows the unfortunate lovers were dragged by the demon-arms of the angry sea. But Harry Lovejoy was not one to despair; but, struggling with all his giant strength, he finally gained the surface of the mad waters.

"Tom, Tom," he cried, with his lips close to her ear, "speak, Tom, are you hurt?"

"No, no," she answered feebly, half choked by the salt-water, "I think not, Harry; are you?"

"No, I am all right. Cling close to me, so I can have my hands free, and keep your head above water," he said.

"O Harry! what do you suppose has happened to all those people? Do you think they are all drowned?"

"I don't know, Tom, perhaps some of them will escape."

"Oh, isn't it awful Harry? There were over fifty people aboard altogether. But what do you think, Harry, is there any hope for us?" asked Tom,

"Yes, yes, of course there is, Tom. I was shipwrecked here at this same place less than a year ago, and drifted away to sea just as we are drifting now, and I escaped, you see."

"Yes, but we may not be so fortunate this time, Harry."

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"IT LOOKS LIKE A BOAT, TOM; LET'S SWIM TO IT." P. 161.

"Well, what is to be will be, and there's no help for it. Everything is right and all for the best, if we could only understand it, Tom."

"I don't know about that, Harry; I would rather be at home now than here; wouldn't you?"

"Well, yes, I rather think I would, but fate decreed that we should be here and under the very conditions that we are in, and so we are here. There is no dodging it, Tom, we will have to accept our fate as it comes, be it life or death. If we are to die, we will die; and if we are to live, we will live in spite of all creation. Nothing can change our fate. A man's life is given him, with all the ups and downs included, and he must live it."

"Don't you believe that any one can die or be killed before the natural end of their life?"

"No, I don't."

"You believe that every one has a fixed time to live, and they must live that long, and no longer?"

"Yes, I do."

"You are a fatalist, you don't believe in any such thing as chance?"

"No, I don't believe in any such thing as chance. What is to be, will be."

"And is that why you never give up or get discouraged, or why you are never afraid?" asked Tom.

"It may be," he answered.

"Then you think that our fate is already settled and nothing can change it?"

"Nothing can change it, Tom."

"Not even God? Don't you believe that God will hear

our prayers and will answer them? Don't you believe it does any good to pray?"

"I don't know, Tom, just what I believe about that. I have heard people pray—I have heard you pray, Tom, and I believe if God would hear and answer anyone's prayers, He would yours; but whether those prayers were heard or answered, I can't say. I believe, Tom, that that ship we sailed on was fated to go down—that was to be her last trip. I don't believe that any amount of prayers could have saved her. God knew what was best and He had written her destiny. If there was as many as one person on board whose allotted time had not arrived, that person, I believe, would escape."

"Oh, I don't know, Harry. I don't believe that so many people could be brought together by mere chance that were all destined to die at the same time."

"I don't believe in chance, Tom; besides they may not all die—some may be spared. We are not dead yet."

"We have a very good prospect of being dead before long though," said Tom.

"I don't think so. I wouldn't take a considerable for our chances yet. That makes me think, Tom—what did you do with that diamond of yours?" asked Harry.

"Don't mention it, Harry!" cried Tom with a shudder.

"Oh, I hope we are rid of it."

"But what did you do with it?"

"I dropped it in my bunk when I got up," she answered.

Thus drifting away to sea, Harry sought to cheer and

encourage his little companion by idle talk and encouraging words.

On, on, they drifted. The storm had passed and the stars came out in all their splendor. Beautiful indeed was the night fast drawing to a close. Already, the gray dawn of morning began to light up the eastern sky.

On, on the swift current bore the helpless victims. The sun, like a great, red ball of fire, was just peeping above the water-bound horizon when, off to the right of them, the dim outlines of some small, dark object was seen.

"Look, look, Harry," cried Tom, "what is it?"

"It looks like a boat, Tom; let's swim to it," replied Harry.

In a few moments they were before the object.

"It's Captain Marlin's little yawl," said Harry, as they climbed into the boat; "and it's most full of water, but I guess that we can bale it out."

"There," ejaculated Harry, loosening the rope that bound them closely and firmly together, "that don't release you from your contract, nor me from mine—it don't separate us, we are just the same; it allows us a little more liberty, that's all."

Now to bale out the water. There's a locker in the bow of the boat and there ought to be a bucket there—yes, there is," he said, as he opened the locker and glanced within. "That's luck; now we'll soon have a comfortable place to rest."

In a few minutes the water was baled out and the little

boat with its two occupants danced merrily away over the rippling surface of the great Indian ocean.

Away, away, all day and all night. On, still on, till three days had passed, still no sign of land, nor a sail had appeared to break the dreary monotony of that vast expanse of boundless water, or to cheer and bring a ray of hope to their almost hopeless and desponding hearts.

The day was fast drawing to a close—it had been a day of suffering, of agony both of body and mind, suffering that must be endured to be understood—suffering that had, at last, conquered little Tom. Strong, brave, indomitable, little Tom, had yielded and for two or three hours had lain in her lover's arms unconscious of her sufferings and of her surroundings.

The sun which had appeared as a great red ball sweeping majestically through the heavens throughout all that long and awful day of suffering, was slowly sinking below the ocean-bound horizon when little Tom, aroused from her unconsciousness, opened her great, wondering eyes and looked up into the agonized face of her lover.

"O Harry," she moaned, "let's go now, let's die and end our suffering. There's no hope for us, Harry. Take me in your arms and kiss me good-bye, then let us lie down together in the sea. It will be all over in just a little while. They say, Harry, that it don't hurt much to drown."

"Wait till another day, Tom, and then—yes, I will, I will do it, Tom—I will!"

"O Harry, I can't wait—I can't!" moaned the poor girl.

"Perhaps we won't have to, Tom," said Harry, "for there's going to be a storm."

"Tie ourselves together, Harry, so we can't get separated. Let us die in each other's arms—I can die happy then."

"Yes, yes—if we must die, Tom, we will die together," he said; and taking the rope he lashed themselves closely and firmly together. Then lying down in the boat, they awaited the coming of the storm.

The gray and red glare of evening had given way to Egyptian darkness. Not a star, not a visible thing in all that vast expanse of blackness, not even one another could be seen. Not a sound save the low moan of the sea, disturbed that awful, monotonous stillness. It was a silence as of death, a darkness as of eternity.

On swept the coming storm. It was an awful night. Great pillars of clouds came sweeping on across the placid waters toward the little boat with its two helpless occupants, seemingly without a breath of air stirring behind it. On swept the great, black columns, on and above them and resting upon them, came the rushing storm.

"Look, look!" cried the girl in a low, feeble tone, pointing to the rushing tempest towering high above them. For a moment it paused and rested as if to gain renewed strength, renewed fierceness for the awful work which it had to do, seemingly held up by the awful blackness beneath; for a moment only did it hesitate, and then burst forth in all its demon fury. Flash after flash of long, red tongues of chain-lightning, licking with their fire tongues the lips of the storm, then darted

down into the seething waters. The thunder too, which had been muttering so angrily heretofore, began to crack with all the vengeful, pent-up fury of heavy ordnance. Bowing like the belly of a sail or a huge net, the storm reached out its terrible arms and circled around and beyond them, folding them in his awful deadly embrace. Then came the mad rush of waters, driven on with the fury of an avalanche, by the whirling fury of wind and rain and catching the little boat, lifted it from the water and hurled it, with the fury of a thousand demons, into the very heart of that awful, hissing, boiling caldron of sea and storm.

"O God!" groaned Harry, as he felt himself and little Tom caught up and hurled from the boat and raised upon the crest of a mighty billow and then, as if caught up in the arms of the storm, they were hurled into space. For one awful moment—though it seemed an age to him—they were borne upon the wings of the tempest—tempest! Oh, what a feeble word!—and then, as if by some kind providence, dropped lightly upon the sloping sands of a small island.

On swept the storm as quickly as it came, and then the stars came out and looked down with pitying eyes upon the pale faces of the two unconscious castaways as they lay bound firmly together, not only by the strong bands of manilla rope, but by the yet still stronger bonds of love.

The storm had passed away and, as if in atonement for the awful havoc which He had wrought, the God of the sea and the storm stretched forth His hand and all nature rested in silent, peaceful repose—silent save for

the low, sad moan of the sea which, in a low, minor key, seemed to sing a requiem to the hopeless, unconscious waifs.

Morning dawned and the bright, warm sun looked down into the pale faces of the waifs. Its warm rays kissed the pale, sweet lips of little Tom, while the soft, sea breeze sweeping over the island stealing sweet perfume from the myriads of tropic flowers, toyed playfully with the wet golden tresses of little Tom and fanned her drenched, sodden garments to dryness and warmth. Again the warm sun slanted his rays across her pale, sweet face and pried gently at her drooping lids. For a moment there was a hesitating quiver, as if yet in doubt, then the lids raised slowly and the great, blue eyes looked wonderingly about for a moment, and then rested upon the pale, death-like face of her lover, whose cold cheek had rested against her own.

"O my God, O my God," she moaned, "he is dead, he is dead!"

O the agony of that poor young heart! Lying there, bound to her unconscious lover with strong ropes and unable to move or to free herself, for every effort only convinced her of her utter helplessness, of her doom, the poor girl murmured:

"Thank God I die in his arms. Poor Harry," she murmured, "O how you have suffered for me. But it is all over now." And nestling close to the cold, still form, poor little Tom cried—cried till sleep or unconsciousness came to her relief.

Again the soft sea-breeze toyed with her golden curls; the warm sun-beams kissed her sweet, pale lips and the sad sea-waves moaned—"Gone—gone—"