

CHAPTER XXII.

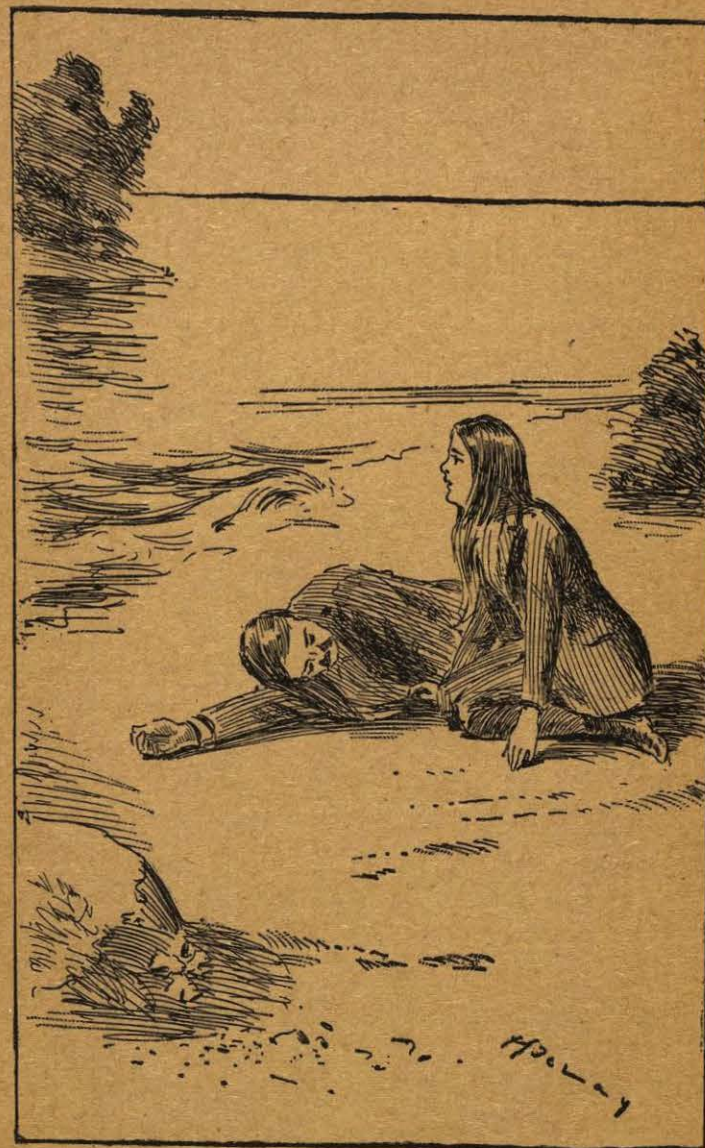
THE SEA CHEATED OF HIS VICTIM.

Slowly the great orb of day wheeled his course heavenward and bent his slanting rays across the sun-lit sea. The birds, gorgeous in their beautiful tints of purple and gold, greeted the new day with their glad songs of joy which filled the air with melody; while a parrot perched upon the swaying branch of a tall tree looked down upon the two strange creatures lying so still, so calm, and gave vent to his disapprobation in loud, shrill screams. Then a hare, hopping nimbly along the sandy beach paused, and for a moment sitting upon his hind feet gazed, with wide, wondering eyes upon the strange pair. A slight movement of one of the strange creatures, and tabby bounced away in fright; the parrot screamed and the birds, startled by the out-cry, ceased their singing.

"Ah," came in a low murmur from the lips of little Tom, as her eyes opened and she looked about her. Again her gaze rested upon the pale face of her lover, but now she saw a change; a slight color had stolen upon his cheeks and lips, and she knew that he lived. Again struggling with all her feeble strength, she managed to raise herself to her knees and whispered—

"O Harry, Harry! can't you speak? Wake up Harry!" she pleaded, shaking him gently.

Again she exerted all her feeble strength—she struggled at the ropes, at the buckles of her life preserver and—O



BUT THE SEA HAD BEEN CHEATED OF HIS VICTIMS.

joy! the buckle yielded, and the life-preserver loosened from its fastenings, fell to the ground, and she was free. But oh how faint and dizzy. For a moment, she swayed to and fro and everything seemed to fade from her sight—her head drooped upon her bosom and she fell across the body of her unconscious lover.

For a moment she lay quiet, then she struggled again to her knees and steadying herself with her hands, she looked about her.

“O how beautiful!” she murmured, as her gaze fell upon the landscape—the trees, the flowers and the sweet songs of the birds burst upon her confused hearing. “Oh, there must be water there,” she murmured; “yes, yes, I must—I will go!” she cried in desperation as she struggled to her feet; but again everything seemed to fade away from her sight, and she fell.

“O God, help me!” she wailed and again she strove. But this time, creeping upon hands and knees, she finally reached the great rocks beneath the spreading branches of a huge tree, beneath whose mossy sides issued a spring of cool, sparkling water.

With a glad cry, she arose to her feet as she saw the sparkling water, and staggered forward and fell. Her hands touched the water. Ravenously, almost fiercely, she scooped up the cool, life-giving water in her hands and conveyed it to her parched and bleeding mouth.

Again and again her eager, trembling hands carried the life-giving water to her parched lips; but famished and eager, almost crazed as she was, she remembered her unconscious companion.

“O Harry,” she moaned, as she looked about her in

the hope of finding something in which she could carry him some water. Almost at the very brink of the shining pool, was a pink and white sea-shell. Eagerly she took it and filling it with the cool water, she crept back to her lover.

"Harry, Harry," she cried joyously, holding the shell above his parched lips and pouring the precious liquid into his mouth.

Again and again she made the trip to the spring and back, bringing the life-giving water and pouring it into the parched and bleeding mouth of the unconscious lover.

At last, completely exhausted, she sank down beside her companion and resting her head upon his bosom, she fell asleep.

Again the gentle, perfumed, sea-breeze toyed with her golden tresses; the slanting sun-beams kissed her sweet, pale lips and the sad sea-waves moaned—"Lost, lost!"

But not long did our little heroine sleep, for the cruel pangs of hunger soon brought her back from dreamland to a consciousness of her real condition.

"O dear! O dear!" she groaned. "I am so hungry. I wonder if I can't find something to eat; some clams, some oysters or some kind of shell fish—there must be something of the kind along the beach. I will go and see"; and creeping slowly along the sandy shore, she soon discovered some clams. Gathering a few, she hastened back to her companion.

"Now," she said, "for a feast." And cracking the shells with a stone, she scooped out a fish and dropped it into Harry's mouth. It disappeared instantly. "Now

me," she said; and tipping her head back, and closing her eyes, she lowered one into her mouth—it went down. "Ugh," she sputtered with a shudder, "I don't like 'em." But like them or not, the operation was continued till a dozen was divided between them, giving two to Harry while she took one herself.

After finishing her feast, she lay down again and was soon fast asleep. Hour after hour passed, and still she slept.

The rising tide creeping slowly up the sandy beach, had almost reached them now. A little wave came in and bathed the feet of the unconscious Harry. The parrot, gorgeous in his coat of flaming red and green, surveyed the scene with a critical eye and, as if in warning to the unconscious strangers, screamed out in his shrill, harsh voice.

"What was that?" cried Tom, rubbing her eyes and sitting up, "I thought I heard some one scream."

Again the parrot screamed.

"Ah, it was you, was it master poll?" she said.

Another wave came rolling in and the spray flew into her face.

"O heavens!" she groaned, "the tide is rising. Harry, Harry! O my God, he will be drowned!"

Fiercely, desperately, she struggled in her vain effort to raise her companion. Little hope indeed was there that she, so weak that she could not stand alone, could raise him, a man of two hundred pounds weight, in her feeble arms.

Higher and higher crept the relentless waters.

Again she put forth all her feeble strength and raising

her companion's head, she rested his cold, pale cheek upon her soft, warm bosom.

On beyond them crept the silent tide. Higher and higher up around them, till the waves bathed her heaving bosom and dashed mercilessly into the face of her precious friend.

"O God, help me now!" she prayed, and again, almost beside herself with the awful fear which seized her heart, she struggled and strove to raise him. The water had come up around and over him and buoyed him up so that she could move him. With a glad cry of joy, she crept toward the shore, holding her lover's head above the water and following the rising tide.

On, on up the sandy beach, upon her knees in the water which came almost to her shoulders, crept the brave, dauntless girl, bearing her precious burden. At last, the tide turned, and with a feeling of inexpressible joy, the little heroine sunk down exhausted and helpless.

The warm sun soon dried their wet garments and brought a feeling of warmth and renewed strength to her wearied limbs. With her returning strength and renewed hope, she set out again in search of food.

Creeping slowly along the sandy shore, following the out-going tide, she succeeded in finding some shell-fish which had been left by the receding waters. Here, too, she found a cocoanut lying where the tide had left it. This was the best of all and, in childish eagerness, she picked it up and hurried back.

"Harry, Harry," she cried, "see what I have got!" but Harry did not hear her.

Cracking the shell with a stone, she held the milky

juice to his lips. How eagerly he drank. Nearly all she gave him, drinking but a little herself. Then taking out the white, sweet meat, she offered him some; but he could not eat it.

"O Harry," she said sadly, "can't you eat a little?"

But he could not—so weak, so exhausted and, as yet, showing no signs of consciousness, he made no effort to take the proffered food.

"Oh, he's too weak to eat it," she mused. "Ah, I have it," she cried, as a new thought occurred to her; and taking a mouthful, she chewed it up fine, and then, as a mother feeds her babe, she took it from her mouth and put it into his. "Ah, he can eat it that way," and so she fed him as much as she dared.

As night drew on, she lay down beside her companion and nestling closely to keep warm, for the night was quite cool, she slept till nearly morning. The gray of dawn was just appearing when she was aroused by the cold spray from the sea-waves dashing into her face.

Arising quickly, she saw at a glance, the danger that threatened them.

"Oh, if I could only carry him a little farther up the shore, just far enough to keep him out of the water. O I must!" she cried. "The wind is raising and the waves run so high that it will drown us here.

Tugging at him with all her might, she tried to drag him, but she could not do it.

"Harry, Harry!" she cried in her distress; "can't you wake up, darling?"

Slowly his eyes opened and he looked up into her scared, anxious face.

"O Harry," she cried, "the tide is rising and we will be drowned here; can't you help a little?" and again she strove to move him.

He looked anxiously up into her frightened face; his lips moved, but they uttered no sound—he could not speak. He made an effort as if trying to roll himself over, and with such a meaning look in his dark, gray eyes that Tom understood his meaning.

"Oh, I know, I know, Harry, what you mean now," she cried; and so, getting between him and the sea, she rolled him over and over and soon had him safe beyond the reach of the angry waves.

It was a hard task for her weak, little body, and by the time that she had reached a place of safety, she fell exhausted by his side.

But the sea had been cheated of his victims, and little Tom was happy.

Again the bright, warm sun just peeping above the crest of the waves, slanted his warm rays across the fair cheek and kissed the sweet lips, while the sea-breeze tossing the waves into foam, toyed with the golden curls and the sad sea-waves moaned, angrily now—Lost, lost!"



SHE STOOD AND WATCHED HIM TILL HE WAS OUT OF SIGHT. P. 179

CHAPTER XXIII.

TOM KEEPS HER PROMISE.

Safe above the reach of the waves at last, little Tom rested in peace. And so the time passed.

The first few days were days of doubt, of uncertainty; for Harry had received an injury that came near ending his life. But the faithful nursing and loving care of his little companion, finally triumphed over death and restored him to consciousness and hope. Tenderly, constantly, faithfully she nursed him and watched over him, feeding him as a mother would feed a sick child, she nursed him back to life.

Slowly, as the days of suffering passed, he grew stronger. First, with Tom's aid, he was able to sit up, and he could get about a little. But to-day, Tom was happy. Just thirty-five days had passed since the sea and storm had cast them upon their little island home. The day dawned bright and beautiful. It was one of those days when all nature seems to revel in the bountiful blessings of God.

Day after day, since Harry had sufficiently recovered to be able to walk, they had gone to the "look-out"—as they called the highest point upon the island—to fix their signal and to watch in the hope of seeing some passing ship.

Thirty-five days had passed since they were cast ashore upon the little island, still no sign of a sail had appeared.

Every day it had been the same; and to-day, walking arm in arm, they reached the "look-out" and stood for a few moments in silent admiration of the grand and beautiful picture spread out before them.

"O what a beautiful picture!" murmured Tom, looking away across the little island scarcely a half mile in its longest extent, and then glancing away to where the blue arch of the heavens touched the shining sea.

Sitting upon a moss-covered rock, with her dainty little hands folded in her lap, her long, golden hair flowing loosely about her slight, graceful form, gazing so intently, so earnestly across the sea, while a beautiful light illuminated her fair, young face, her eyes shone with a lustre such as poets are wont to describe as reflecting the love of a pure and innocent heart; while about her sweet, red lips played a smile which told of the love and happiness that filled her heart, she made a most beautiful picture.

But twice before had Harry seen that same indistinguishable look upon her face. Once, the day that they made that fateful excursion to the mountains, when he had told her of his love and asked her to be his wife; and again, when she was sitting by the open window at old Hans Grauerholtz. Harry had asked her then, what she was thinking of, but she had refused to tell him; and to-day as she sat there, that same heavenly expression lit up her face again.

Harry was looking at her—the most beautiful picture, he thought, that he had ever seen.

"Tom," he said, laying his hand gently upon her golden head, "Tom, what are you thinking of?"

"Won't tell you, Harry," she answered, and a tell-tale blush suffused her fair cheek.

"But why won't you tell me, Tom?"

"Oh, sometimes a girl's thoughts are too sacred for a man to know," she replied.

"Well, I am content; your thoughts are your own, Tom, so just continue to think as much and as long as you please," he said.

"I will tell you one thing, Harry, that I was thinking about. I read a story once about two young people that were shipwrecked and cast ashore on a small island where they lived for a long time. I don't know just how long it was that they stayed there before they were taken off, but I think it was about two or three years. I was thinking about them and wondering if we would have to stay here so long as they did there," she said, thoughtfully.

"Tell me about them, Tom," asked Harry.

"No, no," she replied, "I can't do it."

"Why not, Tom?" he asked.

"Oh, just because I—I—that's just what I was—I—I don't want to," she replied with stammering tongue, as blushing she drooped her eyes before his keen, searching gaze.

"Ah, well, perhaps I can guess then what you are thinking of. I think that I have read that same story, or something like it, myself. It was the story of a young lady and gentleman—they were, of course, lovers—and if I remember right, they got married while staying upon the island. Were you thinking of that, Tom?"

Were you thinking of it in regard to ourselves in any way?"

But Tom did not answer.

"Tom," said Harry, tenderly, "I wouldn't wrong you for all the world. I love you too well for that—I love you too dearly, too truly to think of such a thing; but Tom, did you ever think how long we may have to stay here, how long it may be before a ship may come here and take us off? We've been here a month—more than a month—we may have to stay here a year, perhaps longer. What shall we do, Tom? Shall we live here as we are now, as we have for the past month, or shall we do as those young people, whom you were thinking of, did? What do you say, Tom? What do you think about it?"

"Oh, I don't know, Harry," she answered. "I never thought of it till to-day. I don't know what to do—I don't know what to think. Give me time—wait a little while I try to think of it."

"You shall have all the time that you want, Tom. I won't urge you, but if you will keep your promise with me, Tom, I will be the happiest man in all the world. Do you remember, Tom, the day that we went up into the mountains—the day that you promised to be my wife? It was just four months ago to-morrow and we were to be married upon your birthday, the sixth of April—to-day is the fifth. Tom, to-morrow was to be our wedding day—will you keep your promise with me."

"O Harry, please don't ask me to answer now! We didn't expect this—if nothing had happened—"

"If nothing had happened, Tom, to-morrow you

would be my wife. This is the fifth of April, to-morrow is the sixth and is your birthday—was to be your wedding day too. Tom, will you keep your promise?" he pleaded earnestly.

"Oh, I don't know—I don't know what to do! I want to do right, God knows I want to do what is right! I wouldn't do it, Harry, if I thought it would be wrong. No, no, as dearly and as truly as I want to be your wife, I couldn't do it if I thought it would be wrong. Tell me, Harry, just what you think, for you understand better than I. Tell me, would it be wrong? And what would the people think of us? Tell me honestly, truly, Harry, for I know that you won't take advantage of me, a poor, helpless, little girl that loves and trusts you."

"Tom, as I live—thanks to your loving, faithful care in nursing me when I was sick, in bringing me back to life; and as I hope to live to make you happy and be happy myself, as I will be with you forever my little wife, I wouldn't wrong you, Tom. I don't believe that it would be wrong—how could it? Why should it be? We may have to stay here for a year, perhaps longer. Then again, a ship may come along to-morrow—we can't tell."

"Let me go away all alone by myself and think about it—I will tell you when I come back," she said.

"Oh, I hope some little fairy will whisper a word for me," pleaded Harry, as the girl turned away and left him.

In the course of half an hour, Tom came back, and walking straight up to Harry, her face radiant with smiles and blushes, her eyes beaming with the love-light

of a pure, young heart, she placed her little hands in his broad palms and said in her low, sweet voice:

"Harry, I will keep my promise—I will be your wife. Kiss me, Harry, and tell me that I am doing right."

"So help me God, Tom, I believe that you are doing right," said Harry, earnestly.

To-morrow! O how short a time! And yet much can be done in one short day—enough, even to change the destiny of a lifetime; enough to make or mar the happiness of a whole life.

To-morrow! Ah, little need had they for time in which to prepare; for, what had they to do?

Simply nothing but wait the coming of the happy time—nothing, nothing but wait. No bridal costume, no preparations, no invitations.

Ah, I forgot, there was one thing that they had to do. For several days past they had been engaged in building a new house—a very simple affair to be sure, still it had kept them busy for several days and yet it was not quite completed.

"We will finish our house," said Harry; and they went to work with light hearts to complete their task. There was but little to do and the day passed quickly by.

The next morning, bright and early, Harry was astir; and after finishing their breakfast, he took Tom's little hands and looking down into her happy, sparkling eyes, said:

"Tom, this is our wedding day and I am going to leave you alone to-day. We have hardly been out of sight of each other since we came here and I am going to leave you all alone to-day. I am going down to the

other end of the island and won't be back till about sunset, so good-bye, Tom."

"Good-bye!" she answered, and stood and watched him till he was out of sight.

"Ah," she mused, "there's one thing that I can do to prepare myself for your return, Harry. My clothes—Oh, they are so ragged and dirty—yes, yes, I will go down to the cove and wash my clothes and bathe—yes, I can be clean at any rate."

As the day was warm and pleasant, the task was both light and pleasant.

"There!" she exclaimed, after dressing, "I feel almost like a new girl; but O what a long day. I am so lonely—I wish Harry would come back. I never thought that I would miss him so much," she said, as she returned to her little house and busied herself with decorating the cosy little nest with shells and flowers.

The time passed quickly now, and almost before she thought of it, a light footstep sounded at the door and Harry's voice saying—

"Tom, may I come in?"

"No, no," she said, meeting him at the door with a welcome kiss. "Wait, Harry, till we—till—"

"All right, Tom," he laughed gayly, "I will wait *till*—for it won't be very long—not very.

"Come, are you ready?" he asked.

"Yes, I am ready," she murmured, taking his arm and allowing him to lead her away. Ah, how many have been led away—some to happiness and content, some to misery and woe; but I doubt if there are many that have or will be led away with a lighter heart, with purer

hope—hopes, too, that in after years were fully realized. Away, on up the steep side of the cliff he led her, till they reached the "lookout" where, for so many long, weary days little Tom had watched and waited for the ship that never came. But to-day they were going there for another purpose.

Happy little Tom! Never had a happier girl been led to the altar; never in a girl's bosom had awakened a purer, a nobler love than her's.

Smiling and blushing through her tears, she stood before her lover upon the "lookout," the happiest girl, she verily believed, in all the world.

"Tom," said Harry, "do you regret this?"

"No, Harry," she replied, "I do not."

"But those tears, Tom; why do you cry—why those tears?"

"It's nothing, Harry, believe me, I am happy. I don't regret the step I have taken. But tell me once more, Harry, that I am not doing wrong."

"You are not doing wrong—you can't do wrong in this. If I sin in leading you to this, then may punishment be upon me, but I believe that we are doing no wrong. May God deal with me as I do by you."

"Thank you, Harry, I ask no more."

"Ask what you will, little Tom—I will promise you anything you ask."

"Only this, Harry," she said, as she placed both her little hands in his and looked up into his kind, honest face. "Only this: that you will do by me as I do by you. Love me as a husband should love his wife, and in return I give you my poor little self. Take me to your

heart and let me live there always, and I will be the happiest girl in all the world."

"God is my witness, Tom, our vows are recorded in heaven, and God help me and you—they shall never be broken!"

"Never!" repeated Tom, "so long as I live, God help me. Kiss me now—your little wife—and take me home."

Happy, happy Tom!

