

The Foster Brother;

—OR—
The Orphan of the Wreck.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT KENNETH AND THE FISHERMEN FOUND

ON THE ROCKS.
This judicious mode of proceeding had a good effect, for though he was drawing very near, the maniac did not stir, but sat with his attention divided between the child and Kenneth. The latter fortunately remembered that in his pocket were a few sweet biscuits, a stock of which he usually carried there for the delectation of his own little girl, and bringing forth one of these, he held it up in hand, smiling still as he went forward. He had come quite close now, and still the man did not move, but gazed at Kenneth as steadily as his restless eyes would permit, and seeing nothing but pity and kindness on the youth's face, he permitted him to hold the biscuit forward. The little fellow, who had at length ceased to cry, had also been steadily watching Kenneth's approach, and at sight of the biscuit stretched forth a fat, chubby hand to take it. No sooner had his little fingers closed on it than he put it to his mouth and ate greedily, his protector watching him as he did so with evident satisfaction.

Kenneth could only gaze in wonder at the child's marvellous beauty—on his plump rosy cheeks, his dimpled chin, his bright blue eyes, his glossy curling hair of a rich golden hue, and the extreme prettiness and delicate refinement of his features. As an artist Kenneth noticed these things at one intuitive glance, and all the more because of the contrast between the face of the child and that of the man which was bent over it.

What a terrible face that was, with fear and horror stamped upon it, till they gave it a look not human and yet a gleam of humanity did at first moments struggle through the vacancy of the smile, face as he saw with what eager satisfaction the child devoured the food which had been given him—giving token that the last link which bound him to humanity had not been wholly severed, though alas! the chain in its entirety had been grievously, if not hopelessly, shattered.

The child having with ravenous eagerness devoured the biscuit, Kenneth took another from his pocket and held it up in his hand, when instantly the little chubby arm was stretched forth to grasp it. "Come to me and you shall get it," said Kenneth, in his pleasant, musical voice.

The little fellow stretched out both arms in response, and the maniac, after some moments of dubious hesitation, allowed Kenneth to take him in his arms and sit down with him on the rock, where he crouched down at their feet and jibbered with rapid and unintelligible volubility. The second biscuit was eaten with the same voracity as the first, and, during the few moments taken by the child to consume it, Kenneth was busy thinking how he would proceed in the endeavour to get the man into the boat, and so on. A great caution he knew would be requisite to effect this object, for, were the maniac's fears again excited, he might in his frenzy pounce again upon the child, and leap with him into the sea. With- out being a large-sized man, he was firmly knit, and the strength inspired by madness would be such as their utmost efforts could not cope with.

As they sat thus, the others looking on from a little distance, Kenneth cast stealthy glances at the maniac, to notice how he was comporting himself, and to his satisfaction saw that he had become quiet, his features had grown calmer, the burning brightness in his eyes had faded, and a dull, drowsy film had gathered over his pupils as he was going to sleep.

As for the child, he had nestled close into Kenneth's bosom, and seemed satisfied to remain there.

"And what is your name, my dear little fellow?" asked Kenneth, in a whisper, bending down till his face touched the child's, but cold cheek.

"Georgy," lisped the child, in reply.

"Georgy—ah, indeed. And who is that?" continued Kenneth.

"Dat's Walley."

"Walley?" repeated Kenneth, unable to understand this name as he had done the child's own.

"Yes, Walley."

"Is Walley papa?"

"No, Dat's Walley."

This was all the information that could be elicited, for though Kenneth asked more questions about the ship and the wreck, the little fellow was unable to answer him. He longed to ask him about the dead lady, but his heart failed him, for he doubted not she was the child's mother, and he feared to evoke a burst of infantile grief.

Making a quiet signal for the fishermen, he rose with the child in his arms and moved away in the direction of the boat. The maniac rose too, and gazed searchingly into the other's smiling face.

"Come," said Kenneth; "come and I will carry Georgy."

Without a desire of remonstrance, the man obeyed, and kept close by Kenneth's side till they reached the spot where the boat was fastened. The youth slid down and stepped into the cockpit, the maniac following him, and seating himself beside him near the bow, quiet and docile.

Drowsiness was increasing upon him, and Kenneth saw that in a very short time he would be fast asleep.

Some minutes elapsed; then the face of Dan Kirdy was seen peering over the ledge with an expression of silent inquiry.

"Hush!" counselled Kenneth. "Make no noise; he is almost asleep."

Dan nodded, and waited where he lay for a minute or two more, by which time the maniac's head had dropped upon his breast, his eyes closed, and his stentorian breathing proclaimed that slumber was begun.

Kenneth removed some of the wrappings which still enveloped the child, and spread them gently over his naked shoulders.

"Now he whispered, 'get the men to carry the body into the boat, and we shall make for the beach.'"

Dan nodded again and vanished, and at the end of ten minutes the fishermen reached the spot, bearing the dead body, which in silence they lifted over the side and laid in the bottom of the boat.

This proceeding did not disturb the sleep of the maniac; but the child who was also going to slumber in Kenneth's arms, roused up, and, at the sight of the pale, up-turned face, he uttered a sharp, wailing cry, and exclaiming, "Oh, ma'ma!" he struggled to descend. Kenneth gently tried to restrain him, but he only struggled the more, and fearful lest his noise should arouse the sleeper, he set him down, when, with another cry, he threw himself on the breast of the dead, flung his little arms round the cold neck, and kissed again and again the pale passive lips; that, alas, could not return the endearing caress.

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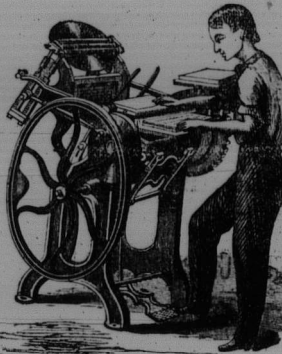
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