

**THE CHILD OF
THE ATLANTIC**

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The Child of the Atlantic by Charlotte Adams

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CHARLOTTE ADAMS

**THE CHILD OF
THE ATLANTIC**



"It is a Child!" exclaimed the Captain.

THE
CHILD OF THE ATLANTIC.

BY
CHARLOTTE ADAMS,
Author of "The Stolen Child," "Ben Howard,"
&c., &c.



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THE
CHILD OF THE ATLANTIC.

THE opening scene of the present tale was the wide bosom of the vast Atlantic ocean; on either side lay expanded the boundless sea, and in front the distant coast of Florida. The sun was just risen; his dazzling rays were dancing on the sparkling waves, and cheering the crew of a vessel, which, with all sail set, appeared making for the land. The ship, though small, was an excellent sailer, and appeared to be fitted for a service of some danger, for it was well appointed. But no present purpose of attack or defence seemed to be meditated; for the crew, with the exception of two men, lay extended asleep on the deck. The master, or captain, as he was styled, and the pilot, alone kept vigilant watch.

"If this breeze hold on some hours, we may hope to enter the Shark's-head long before night," said the captain.

"Before night, at any rate," answered the pilot.

"Anna," said the captain, "will think it long till our return."

"Women," rejoined the pilot, in a tone of indifference, "who share the fortunes of men engaged in hazardous pursuits like ours, should learn to control their impatience."

"My poor wife," said the captain, after a pause

of some moments, "has had too many lonely hours of late. I wish we were once at home again, and it should not be a trifle would take me away from her,—at any rate for some days."

"This Anna of yours," returned the pilot somewhat gruffly, "runs much in your head, I think; her wishes and her expectations seem to be matter of great consequence to you."

"And so they would be to you, Thompson, if she had been the only being for whom you had ever in the course of your life felt any love or interest."—So saying, the captain retreated a few steps, and folding his arms, remained with his eyes fixed towards that part of the distant shore near which he imagined was situated his temporary home.

At length his attention was arrested by a small dark object that was floating at a distance; and as the schooner neared it, he perceived that it was a boat, but apparently without any one to guide it, for no person appeared.

"Do you see yon craft, Thompson?" said the captain; "let us hail it:"—the men gave a shout, but no answer was returned, and presently coming close up, they slackened sail and took a survey of the little vessel that was thus far at sea without any one to direct its course.

"An empty boat," said Thompson, as he glanced at it, "washed from its moorings into the ocean; it is a crazy concern, and not worth our taking with us; we have boats enough at the creek."

"Not empty either, friend; look down into the bottom,—what lies there?"

"Whatever it is," replied Thompson, "it moves."

"It is a child!" exclaimed the captain, as an infant of about two years old raised itself in the boat, and turned its rosy face and laughing eyes upon the sailors.

"A child true enough," echoed Thompson; "a young mariner, and one who is like to have a short career, I judge, being at sea by himself."

"Bring the boat-hook," called the captain, "and draw to."

"What are you about, what are you going to do?" cried Thompson, as he saw the captain receive into his arms the infant, which a sailor handed out of the boat.

"What are you going to do; you are not surely intending to burden yourself with such an encumbrance?"

"The child would perish were we to leave it," replied the captain; "but I have little claim on the score of humanity, I only preserve its life that I may take it home to Anna; for since she lost her own little one she has drooped and pined, and this babe will be a companion to her in the lonely hours she so often has to pass."

The captain then desired food to be brought to the little boy, to quiet the cries which he uttered upon seeing himself surrounded by so many strange faces. The child appeared strong and healthy; and

it was evident from his dress that he did not belong to the poorer classes. The crew amused themselves in a variety of conjectures as to where the little stranger could have come from, and to whom he belonged. They asked him many questions, but could only gather from his little lisplings that he was called Charles, or some name of similar sound.

It was late in the day when the schooner reached the Shark's-head, and sailing a short distance up that river, entered a creek which led to one of the loveliest spots in East Florida. When the crew had reached the place of their destination, the captain took the child in his arms, and leaping with him on shore, bent his steps towards home. The place of his habitation lay about half a mile from the creek. It was a small, but pleasant house, surrounded by hickory trees, interspersed with the graceful cypress, round whose stems the sea-grape twined in rich profusion. Groves of pine were in the distance, and close at hand was a lake, from whose tranquil bosom rose a small island, covered with orange-trees, the delicious odour of whose blossoms was wafted towards him by the land-breeze, which had already set in.

When Harvey, (for that was the name of the captain,) had arrived within a few paces of his house, he observed his wife sitting under the shade of a large tree that overhung the building. A table, covered with a clean white cloth, was spread ready for the evening repast, and on it were already placed

a collection of the choicest fruits of the country. Anna herself was engaged in looking over, and folding and unfolding the little wardrobe of her lost child: her face was pale and sorrowful, and every now and then tears flowed down her cheeks. Harvey stood still a few moments to contemplate her; when, raising her head, she suddenly perceived her husband, and uttering an exclamation of joy, sprang forward to meet him.

"Look here," said Harvey, after he had embraced his wife, "look here; I have brought you a young companion, whom I picked up alone on the wide ocean. Will you like to have him?" continued he, as he held the infant towards her, who smiled and extended his little arms, as though he rejoiced to be again under the tender care of woman. Anna gladly welcomed the little stranger, and having expressed the pleasure she felt at receiving him, listened with interest to her husband's history of the manner in which the child had been found: at the same time she brought forth the supper, and prepared some suitable food for her little charge.

Harvey, notwithstanding his love for his wife, was a man of bad character. He indulged in lawless pursuits, and took no pains to control his violent passions. His wife was many years younger than himself, and besides the love which her various amiable qualities inspired him with, his interest in her had been strongly excited by the peculiarity of the circumstances under which he had first become