

AMER POLLY TAKES THE AIR.

A little wicker basket rolls along the pavement walk, and at the sight, the young and old begin to laugh and talk, and wave fair hands and kisses throw, and cry: "Look here! See there! This way it comes!"—and all because Sweet Polly takes the air!"

The newboys run and shout with glee, and follow on behind, The coachman and the footman gaze As if they had a mind To do the same—the good old priest Stands still with solemn stare, And down the shady avenue Sweet Polly takes the air!

From every window shines a head Of chattering, golden hair, And every door glows bright with throng Of merry boys and girls, The butler and the maid forget To work—as on the stair The peep and pry, with curious eye, When Polly takes the air!

And all the while sweet Polly sits In dainty gown and hat, And smiles on one she loves the best, Her pretty Maltese cat— And softly coos, when pussy purrs, Without a thought or care How all the town turns upside down When Polly takes the air!

—Zitella Cooke, in *Youth's Companion*.



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CHAPTER XX.

A GLIMPSE OF HOPE.

Le Fevre never released his hold on my collar till we were out of sight of the house, among the cane. I think that I held back a little.

"Come along," he said brusquely. "I'm as much stirred up as you are about it; but I've got my senses, and you've lost yours. You want to do something desperate and foolish."

"Let me go!" I cried. "I'll kill him."

"Come along, I say, you young idiot! What good would it do to kill him? That would only make things worse for you and the girl. You want to help her, don't you?"

"I'll die before I leave her here in that man's power! I would—"

"Yes, I know how you feel. I've got some feeling myself on the subject. I've got a plan, too; but I tell you flatly, Dorr Jewett, if you don't come along with me and quit your crazy notion of taking the girl out of the house by force, with those roughs standing between, I'll go my own way, and leave you to your destruction."

His words calmed me; I ceased to resist, and followed him as he strode through the cane. His hopeful words, his strong confidence in himself put new life into me; I leaned on him as upon a human providence.

He never stopped till he reached the edge of the great swamp, more than a quarter of a mile back of the house. It was overgrown with scrub oak and cypress; festoons of Spanish moss, ivy, and other parasites ran from tree to tree; where the heat had dried the edges of the swamp for many rods, a thick growth of palm bushes had sprung up. A serpent wriggled in at our approach, and a cloud of ravenous mosquitoes gave us a warm greeting.

"We shan't be overheard here," said my companion. "I'll make a smoke to save us from being devoured alive."

He lit a cigar and consumed it with short, emphatic puffs. I watched his face anxiously, and saw that his square under-jaw was set, and that he was thinking hard. Suddenly he put the question to me:

"What do you think of me, anyway, Dorr Jewett?"

A little disconcerted by the abruptness of the question, I presently answered, and told him the exact truth:

"When I first came here, I thought you were rough and cruel to the negroes. Afterward I found out that you were more rough than cruel; and still later, I have known you for a good friend."

"Yes; that's pretty near the truth. Before I tell you my plan, I want you to know enough about me to understand that I am not coming to your help blindfolded. I know the risk, and I'll face it; and you must know it. I told you I was born in Pennsylvania. Ten years and more, I've been in Louisiana. I came down here with a head full of the horrors of slavery, as it had been pictured to me. I suppose the real thing strikes different people from the north in different ways; some might have seen all that I've seen, and be confirmed in their notions of the institution. I haven't been. Contact with the negro in this state, where there are as many of him as there is of the white man, has made me believe that a condition of slavery is a good thing, the only thing for him."

"But Coralie—"

"Hold on; I'm coming to her. Such has been my opinion. In a single day I am brought face to face with the ugliest aspect of the whole problem. I've heard of such things as this. I never knew any such personally. I have supposed that the facts must be distorted and exaggerated. Now, there is no mistake. We know what has happened on this plantation. I won't sicken you by reminding you of what may happen. You'd say, I would say, almost every planter in the La Fourche would agree, that the treatment which that beautiful white girl—I tell you it just as it is—is likely to receive at the hands of her own kin, her half-brother, just as you heard him threaten it—is more brutal. Sir, it is damnable!"

He stamped his foot in his excitement.

"And the law would permit it?"

"The law would ask just one question: Was her mother a slave? We know what the answer would be in this case. Nothing else would be regarded."

"Must we submit to such a monstrous condition of law?" I cried.

He looked fixedly at me.

"Boy, you've got spirit; you need to be guided, but you've the true stuff. The girl's safety and deliverance are a

thousand times more to you than to me; yet hang me if the fix she's in don't appeal to me in a way that I can't stand. And if you ask me if we shall submit to have Coralie sent to New Orleans and sold like a horse to a condition worse than death I say no! by the good mother that bore me, I won't!"

I pass the words I said to him, the thanks I tried to give him. He cut them all short.

"Never mind that, Dorr. I'm with you, heart and hand; you be guided by me, and we'll save her or—"

He stopped.

"Perhaps you didn't know that if you are caught trying to abduct a slave in Louisiana they'll send you to the Baton Rouge penitentiary for a term of years."

"I did not know it, and don't care for it. Tell me what we shall do."

His own excited feelings found relief in a laugh at my eager recklessness. Rapidly he laid his plans before me. I considered it as he spoke, and saw that it offered a chance of success.

He said that men of the class of Conrad Bostock and his companions, upon such an occasion as this, would be very sure to spend the night over the wine bottle and cards. He proposed to communicate stealthily with Coralie through the faithful house servants, and after midnight get her quietly out of the house and drive to Donaldsonville, taking carriage and ponies from the place. He knew that the Cotton Queen stopped at Donaldsonville about daylight, going up, and that to-morrow was her day. We would go far enough to reach the vicinity of a railroad, short of any of the cities where we might be overtaken by telegraph, and then go ashore.

"We can throw off the pursuit in this way," he said. "We can land at some obscure wood station. It must be this side of Baton Rouge, if the Queen stops there, for there the telegraph can overhaul us, and we will strike across the country to some equally obscure railroad station. I'll defy them to find us when we are clear of the river. I have plenty of money; that and a little adroitness will carry us safe through to Canada within a week."

"Le Fevre, you're a noble fellow. If I ever—"

"Don't bother yourself," he laughed. "We're not there yet."

A convulsion of mirth seized him. He sat down in the grass and shook with laughter.

"You needn't fear I'm going crazy, Dorr. But suppose anyone had said to me three days ago: 'Wash Le Fevre, you think you're a good deal of a southern man, now, don't you? And you think slavery is about the thing for the nigger, don't you? Well, next week you'll be trying to run off a slave to Canada.' Suppose any man had said that to me! I'd be struck him, if he was as big as a mountain. And now look at me!"

"Circumstances change all of us."

"They do, indeed. Now to work. I'll go and feel round among the house people, keeping carefully out of sight. Go into the shade, and stay there till you hear from me. I don't want you with me yet; you're too rash. I'll send one of the slaves out here with something to eat. Here's some cigars; these confounded skeeters would eat you up alive."

CHAPTER XXI.

FLIGHT AND PURSUIT.

In these concluding chapters of my narrative, many details must be omitted. The stress and suspense of the situation at which we have now arrived in its progress are acting upon me somewhat as the real scenes of thirty years ago affected me, and I must go rapidly forward to the close.

It may therefore be said that the skill and management of Le Fevre, with the friendly aid of the house servants, put in successful operation the initiative of the plan of escape that he had devised. A little after midnight Coralie and I were in a carriage that had been brought by roundabout plantation road some distance above the house. Le Fevre took the reins, and drove rapidly toward Donaldsonville.

He had judged rightly as to what the occupation of Conrad Bostock and his boon companions was likely to be on this night. A good account of their roosters, and of the manner in which Coralie's flight was discovered, was afterward furnished to me by one of the negro women who listened in trepidation at the parlor door, anxious for some hint as to what was to become of herself and "the people" of the plantation. The negroes had heard the rumor that the "new maussa" intended to sell them all, and let the

"Dey done gone to Don'son," screamed the frightened woman.

Conrad Bostock, irritated but not apprehensive, started for the door and flung it open. Best tried to get away, but he sprang after her and seized her by the arm.

"What are you doing here, you wench?" he demanded, shaking her by the shoulder.

The woman hesitated.

"Aha!" said Gardette. "Tell me, you black scarecrow—or I'll cut your heart out!"

"How long ago?"

"About an hour, maussa."

"Who went with them?"

"O maussa—"

"Tell, you wench—or I'll cut your throat!"

One of the men handed him a knife. The woman cried and begged.

"Tell me the truth, then, or you die!"

"Missy Coral went wiv 'em. Dey're all goin' to die nawf."

With an oath the infuriated master flung the woman off, and rushed for the stables, followed by his companions. Everything on wheels was hopelessly disabled.

"Who did this?" he thundered, to the trembling negro in charge.

"Maussa Le Fevre, sah. I begged him not—but he done would do it."

"Where's the other horses—and the mules?"

"He done turn 'em all outen de cane."

"Go catch them—quick!"

"I'll try, maussa—but de night dark, an' it takes long time to find 'em."

With a blow of his fist, the enraged master knocked the unoffending negro against the side of the stable, and returned to the house for a consultation with his friends. It was agreed that nothing better could be done than to wait for the morning boat up the bayou.

Three hours after daylight they were at Donaldsonville. Jumping ashore, they learned that the Cotton Queen, an hour late, had left twenty minutes before.

"Run to the telegraph office, Gardette," cried Bostock. "Send full particulars to the officers at Baton Rouge, and tell them to arrest and detain the party. Sign my name."

The new proprietor had discovered the repository of the wine, and a dozen dusty bottles had been brought up.

When sufficient of their contents had been drunk to make the party merry, cards were produced, and gambling commenced. There seemed to be plenty of money among them, and the game was continued with varying success till midnight, when Conrad was largely the winner.

The bottle had circulated freely, and the depraved men were ready for any-

thing that would yield new excitement.

"Two thousand dollars against that girl!" Gardette shouted.

"Done!" said Bostock.

The cards were dealt, and the others stood close by the table to watch the game. Gardette lost.

"Another chance!" he demanded.

This time Gardette won.

"The girl is mine!" he shouted, exultingly.

"We'll play again," Conrad clamored.

"O, no. I'm content. You've won enough, to-night, to stop."

"You'll play again, the girl against two thousand dollars, or you'll fight!"

the other insisted.

Both were inflamed with wine, and the excitement of gaming, which is greater than that of wine. Pistols were drawn, and one or both would have fallen; but at this moment their companions intervened and persuaded Gardette, for the sake of peace, to consent to one more game.

It was played with the same stakes. Gardette lost. With an oath, he swallowed another glass, and said:

"This is a good deal like a farce, Con. Here we've been playing for the girl for the last hour, and as the game turns, you'll keep her. But suppose I'd won at the end?"

"Then you'd take her."

"Maybe you couldn't deliver her."

"Why not?"

"I don't know; I'm only talking. But I happened to think, while the game was going on, and it was doubtful who'd be her master, what a silly

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