

Storm Country Polly

by Grace Miller White

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CHAPTER XIV—Continued.

"Good 'nough for 'er!" gasped Polly, tensely, rolling her hands in her apron. "An' she yelled so hard you could've heard her near to Ithaca, Poll," moaned Larry. "Me an' Lye gagged 'er."

"Holy smut!" fell from Pollyop, as the picture his words had made burned itself across her mind. "Her man's been gone all day to Cortland," continued the squatter in a monotone. "Lye found out Old Miss Robertson's been tryin' to reach hold of him."

"Hope she don't!" interjected Polly. "Not till we get done with his woman. Are you goin' to tote her over here?" The man nodded.

"Don't dare to till later, when the squatters is in bed," he answered, slapping on his cap. "If—if you change your mind, Poll, come along over; an' I'll cut 'er loose an' let 'er go."

A harsh sound, something like a chuckle of malicious satisfaction, slipped through Polly's lips and stopped the man at the door.

"That ain't no ways likely, Larry," she said huskily. "Bring 'er here, an' when I'm done with her, she'll have to be took."

She caught Bishop by the arm, whirling him around. "An' listen, Larry," she continued with cruel emphasis, "an' all the time keep rememberin' how Betty wailed her life into the grave, an'—an' that Old Marc done it."

Overcome by the words she had thrown at him so deliberately, Bishop flung away, and the girl, quaking at what was about to happen, heard him running along the shore toward his shack.

It seemed to Polly Hopkins that every minute was an hour long, and every second filled with intolerable anxiety. Would the soft-hearted Larry repent and surrender the prize she longed to get her fingers on?

In extreme nervousness she went from one thing to another, never finishing what she began. She paced the hut floor until she was dripping wet with apprehensiveness. She had no means of knowing when Lye and Larry would come; so she dared not stir from the shack.

Many times she shoved aside the window blind and looked out. But the world outside was wrapped in a white silence. She could not even glimpse the peaked roof of a fisherman's hut, for between her and the Silent City was a flowing curtain of snow, the flakes falling like feathers from an open bag.

Larry would keep his word, she told herself over and over. She was glad it was such a night! The better could the squatters carry out their death plan.

Unnoticed by the girl, the wood burned to embers in the stove, and the hut grew colder by degrees. In one of her half hours of measuring the shanty's length, she halted, breathing on her frost-bitten fingers. She drew about her shoulders the blanket which had covered Wee Jerry in his hut days.

Her mind brought back to the baby away off in some unknown place, she cried weakly as she replenished the fire. Had the wicked ones of the earth made Jerry forget Daddy Hopkins who up in Auburn was ignorant of his whereabouts? Many times Polly had taken up her pencil to write him of the child, but it always dropped from her fingers before it reached the paper. Daddy could not do anything, and she would not add to his heavy burden.

She was at the stove, her cold, stiff fingers spread over it, when the sound of footsteps outside sent her heading to the door. Appallingly terrified, she dragged it open.

Then, in deadening silence, Lye Braeger and Larry Bishop carried a large bundle through the doorway and threw it down on Polly's bed.

Heavy-lidded, the girl gazed upon it, her eyes widening in joy, joy at the thought of Old Marc's misery; joy at the thought of getting even. The frightful emotion that surged through her bore relation only by contrast to the delights of a few months back, when her willing legs had trotted the country over to help every one that needed her. It wasn't the same Polly at all. This Polly lifted her foot and kicked the bundle none too lightly.

"We had a h—l of a time gettin' 'er here, Poll," growled Lye Braeger. "Outside it's like if a million crazy devils was howlin' over the hills. But we brought 'er just the same! Now do what you like with 'er, brat!"

White teeth gleamed through the maniacal smile that parted the girl's lips. At last! She had not lived through interminable days for nothing!

"Scout out, you!" she ordered, waving her hand at them, "an' keep a watch about till I get done!" Braeger made for the door as if anxious to be gone; but Larry Bishop held to the spot where he stood. "She's a woman, Polly Hopkins," he muttered, his eyes turning from the out to the rigid girl, "if she is Old

Marc's wife. He's home too, so Lye says!"

"What do I care where the pup is?" she thrust in vehemently. "'Course she's a woman! So be it; an' so were your dead Betsy."

Then she stamped her foot temptuously. "Get out of here an' watch for MacKenzie an' his folks," she snapped. "It's about time he were stormin' the Silent City, I'm thinkin'."

Roughly she shoved the men out into the blizzard and closed the door. Then she stood with her back to it, deep sobs racking her body.

Now as she had almost died, and Wee Jerry too, so would Marcus MacKenzie. The vicious hope that she could see him writhe in his grief took possession of her.

Distraughtly she placed the bar across the door, making sure it was locked. Then, creeping to the cot, she gazed down at the wet bundle. There, where she had helped Oscar Bennett over dark rough places into the light of Eternity, lay the dearest dear of her bitterest enemy.

She uttered an exclamation when she saw a lifting shudder go over the thing on the bed. A smile flitted across her face, and her hands came together convulsively.

Slowly she knelt down and unwrapped the thick blanket; and Evelyn MacKenzie was staring out at her, dull eyed and terrified. A dark rag completely filled her mouth; and Polly grinned at her.

"Do you know what squatters do to chickens they swipe from you rich folks?" she asked huskily.

Although she could not speak, Evelyn heard and understood. She closed her eyes, her face going drabber in the flickering light, but at a sound the weary lids flew open again.

Polly had stepped to the wood-box and was picking up the ax. She brought it forward, and smiling the same sinister smile, showed it to the pallid girl.

"This" was all she said, tapping the handle.

Evelyn struggled; and Polly laughed, a wicked laugh, no more like the ripple which Daddy Hopkins had loved to hear than the bark of a wolf is like the lark's morning song.

Tears rose into Evelyn's eyes and rolled down her cheeks. The smile faded slowly from Polly's face. Ever had excruciating agony touched her; like a sunbeam through a rift in a storm cloud, the old Polly leaped up to take heed of another's hurt. This feeling she crushed down; but she put the ax on the floor and squatted beside the bed.

Scarcely had she done this before a loud knock came on the door. She threw the blankets over Evelyn and went swiftly forward and lifted the bar.

"Larry Bishop thrust the upper half of his body into the room. "Old Marc an' his gang are in the Silent City lookin' for his woman," he whispered hoarsely.

"Where's Lye?" came in a hiss from the squatter girl.

"Off up the road watchin'," returned Bishop. "What'd you do to 'er, brat?"

"Come in," said Polly, in an undertone, grasping the end of his scarf and pulling him through the doorway.



"This" Was All She Said, Tapping the Handle.

"an' if MacKenzie comes here, yappin' for his woman, laugh at him—laugh, an' laugh till your sides split, Larry." She closed the door, pushed Bishop into a chair, and then deliberately crawled into bed beside Evelyn. Upon the inert figure of the bound girl she piled two pillows.

Then she and Larry waited, scarcely breathing, until voices seemed to come through the clapboards from every direction. A rush of feet brought Bishop bolt upright.

"Keep settin'," breathed Pollyop. "They'll be stoppin' here fast enough!"

Of a sudden the door burst open, and Marcus MacKenzie, covered with snow, entered. With him were two of his neighbors and several squatters.

Polly enjoyed a glimpse of Old Marc's agonized face; then she grinned at him.

"What's the matter, mister?" she asked, showing an expanse of even white teeth. "What do you mean by bustin' into my house like this, sir?"

MacKenzie threw a glance from the girl to the squatter in the chair.

"My wife's gone!" he cried in desperation. "I—I—"

"So? Now is she?" broke in Polly, smiling wider. "You don't say! Well, golly me! That's too bad. Some other feller run off with 'er—mebbe!"

And when she saw him trying to master his emotion, forcing back the heavy groans that interfered with his efforts to answer, she laughed. Never before had she been reckless in his presence. She knew this was one time Marcus MacKenzie did not want to fight. He needed the help of the squatters to search the Storm country for his wife—his bride, the very apple of his eye.

He did not look at all like the flashing-eyed enemy of her people. All at once he had changed from a cynical, handsome man of the world to a pleading, pale-faced husband.

Just then the wind shook the shanty violently; and over his big frame passed shudder after shudder.

"She's been gone, oh God, I don't know how long," he groaned aloud, the haggard expression deepening in the lines about his mouth as he spoke. "I'll give—I'll give more money than any of you ever saw—" He flung around on Bishop and thrust out an importunate hand.

Larry had been watching him covertly, in moody silence. When Marcus addressed him directly, he threw back his head and let out loud malevolent sounds more like the howls of hyenas than the laugh of a human being; and Polly Hopkins joined in again, too, dreadful sounds that made her thin, lovely face look odd.

"This is a queer place to come for your woman," she taunted MacKenzie. "To a squatter's shack, huh? I didn't know before that rich women came to the Silent City, least of all, youn."

MacKenzie took a step toward her. "Oh, I was sure she wasn't here," he thrust in eagerly. "But I want help—the aid of every one of you. Money," he cried again, convulsively. "Money, do you hear? Money, I said—"

Polly was witnessing just the picture that she had been holding in her mind's eye for many days.

"Money can't buy everything, mister," she jeered at him. "Mebbe your woman's in the snow. Tomorrow's Thanksgiving day. Mebbe you'll miss 'er if she ain't home with you. Scout out of here. Don't be luggin', Old Marc, or she might freeze to death somewheres. It's a bad night."

The last statement, true to every word, brought a deep sob from MacKenzie's throat. It was immediately followed by more of the bitter laughter.

So changed was Polly of the Silent City that the gaping squatters who did not know what was going to happen wondered at her. They knew her no longer as Polly, the love-liss, or as Polly of the Sun.

A low rumble sounded in the girl's throat. She coughed, then flung out: "I said, it's a bad night! Scout out, mister, an' look for your d—n lily-livered woman somewheres else."

Uttering an oath, MacKenzie fled, followed by his companions, leaving Larry Bishop staring at the pale squatter girl.

CHAPTER XV.

There was gloomy silence in the shanty until the horses' hoofs could be heard no longer in the snow outside. Larry Bishop crouched low in Jeremiah's rocking chair, pulling in nervous tension at his fingers until the joints cracked. He shot Polly Hopkins a furtive glance but dropped his thick lids before the unearthly expression in the girl's eyes. She had lost the look of heavenly compassion that had given cheer to the squatters.

As his mind went back to the spring days when she had so often smiled comfort into his own aching heart, he breathed a deep sigh. The sound of his breath, catching in his throat, brought Polly scrambling from the cot.

Unmindful of the morose squatter, she began pacing the floor, holding icy fingers to her aching temples.

"Best take the pillows off 'er, Poll," muttered Bishop. "She'll smother if you don't."

The girl paused and threw him a glance over her shoulder. "Get out of here, you Larry," she bade him in fierce emphasis. "She'd better smother than get what's comin' to 'er. You an' Lye hang around a while till I call you. When I'm done with 'er, you'll have to sink her in the lake."

Staggering to his feet, Larry brushed away the water that had gathered in glistening drops upon his brow.

"God, kid," he growled, "you don't seem human no more. It's all so d—d terrible I'm gettin' haunted. If you change your mind, Poll, an' not kill 'er—"

A gurgling noise came from under the pillows on the cot, and as if an unseen hand were pushing her forward, Pollyop strode to the bed and jerked away the small feather ticks.

Evelyn's eyes sought out the squatter man in mute pleading. Polly laughed; and gray with horror at her merciless attitude, Larry slunk to the door.

"I guess this ain't none of my business," he mumbled, and opening it, he fled as if pursued by a vindictive spirit of the Storm country.

Again with swift, long strides the girl went to the door and barred it. Then with utmost deliberation she lighted several other candles and set them in different parts of the hut until a flood of light was diffused through the room.

A long deep sigh fell from her lips as she finished her task. She wanted to see every wave of pain that shot across Evelyn MacKenzie's pallid face; and that was why she approached the cot and stood looking down upon the twisted figure.

All she had endured through the rich girl's perfidy swept over her like a tidal wave. Out of the dark dream



He Fled as if Pursued by a Vindictive Spirit of the Storm Country.

of Jerry's going she could hear through the moaning willows the weird last cries of the baby. The memory almost drew a shriek from her. Then she rolled the living bundle from the bed and propped it into a sitting position.

As wickedly deliberate as her every act had been, so did she lift the ax from the floor.

"Like a chicken," she taunted, smiling down into Evelyn's haggard face. Evelyn struggled, and a muffled sound came from back of the gag in her mouth.

While Polly contemplated her, an emotion she used to know so often rose within her, and tugged at her heart until the hurt made her clutch at her side. She dropped down and ran her fingers under the heavy cord with which the girl was bound.

"Rope's hurtin' you, huh?" she queried.

An affirmative bob of her head was the only answer Mrs. MacKenzie could give.

"I'll unlo 'em a bit," said Polly sulkily. "Loosenin' up a few strings don't say you won't get what's comin' to you."

With her strong, white teeth and deft fingers she untied the heavy knots that pinioned the slender arms.

"Did the squatters give you anything to eat?" she asked, rocking back on her heels. "If you was in Larry's hut so long with that thing in your mouth, then I bet you're hungry!"

It was scarcely perceptible, the negative shake that followed this question.

"If you've got to die you might as well go on a full belly," ended Polly, getting up.

She took a piece of hard bread and poured some hot water on it. Watching Evelyn frowningly, she beat them together with a tin spoon. Of course, the stuff was tasteless without sugar! Polly knew it very well, because that was what she had for supper every night.

She turned away from the cup in her hand and went to a small cupboard over which hung a flimsy curtain. Back behind a few odd dishes she had hidden a little sugar one of the squatter women had given her. She had kept it against Daddy Hopkins' home-coming and for Jerry, too—perhaps. With woeeful, in-caught sobs, she poured half of it into the cup. Then she crossed to Evelyn and picked up the ax.

"I'm goin' to take this rag out of your mouth," she said, "an' mind you don't squeal, or I'll send you double-quick to your first man. Now hold still! This'll hurt a bit!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

The Kitchen Cabinet

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"Life, let us cherish while yet the taper glows And the fresh flow'et pluck ere it close; Why are we fond of toil and care? Why choose the rankling thorn to wear?"

MORE GOOD THINGS

A most appetizing salad and one very appropriate for picnic occasions is:

Herring and Potato Salad.—Take one cupful of herring cut in dice, three cupfuls of cooked diced potatoes, one teaspoonful of onion juice, two table

spoonfuls of minced green peppers, four tablespoonfuls of olive oil, three tablespoonfuls of vinegar, a dash of paprika and a few grains of salt. Make a French dressing of oil and vinegar and let the fish and potato stand in it for an hour. Then combine the fish, potato and pile the mixture upon the platter, surrounded with shredded cabbage mixed with a salad dressing. Sprinkle with chopped green peppers and garnish with whole herring.

Turban of Smoked Salmon.—Take one and one-fourth cupfuls of minced smoked salmon, three-fourths of a cupful of soft bread crumbs, four tablespoonfuls of butter, pepper, two eggs, one tablespoonful of minced parsley and a few drops of onion juice. Soak the salmon to remove the excess of salt, then mince fine. Cook the crumbs and milk together to a smooth paste, add butter, parsley and a few drops of onion juice and turn over the fish. Beat the egg yolks, add to the mixture and fold in the stiffly beaten whites. Turn into a ring mold, surround by boiling water and bake until firm, about twenty-five minutes. Unfold and fill the center with well-seasoned string beans and serve with a cream or egg sauce.

Fish Batter Cakes.—Take one-half cupful of shredded codfish, one cupful of pastry flour, two-thirds of a cupful of water, two egg yolks, one-half tablespoonful of melted butter and two egg whites. Freshen the fish. Put the flour into a bowl, add the water, gradually beating well, then the codfish. Beat the yolks, add, then add the stiffly beaten whites. Add the melted butter and drop by tablespoonfuls into hot fat. Have the fat hot enough to brown a cube of bread in sixty seconds.

"The best portion of a good man's life—his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness."

SOMETHING GOOD TO EAT

A tasty dish, if well cooked, is broiled or pan-broiled calf's heart. Cut it in thin slices, and if to be pan-broiled, add a little butter; cook well on both sides, spread generously with butter, season with salt and pepper, and serve hot. If broiled, cover with butter as it is placed on the hot platter.

Brown Fricassee of Sheep's Tongues.—Take four sheep's tongues, wash and cover with boiling water, then simmer for two hours. Cool and remove the skin, cut in halves lengthwise, sprinkle with salt and pepper and put away in a cold place until the next day. Boil the tongues in flour, fry in butter with a little onion until a rich brown. Add flour to the pan, after removing the meat (with some of the stock in which the tongue was cooked) to prepare the gravy; season well with salt, pepper and a little lemon juice. Serve with boiled rice, all piping hot.

Oatmeal Date Cakes.—Take one cupful of sugar, two-thirds of a cupful of shortening, two eggs, one-half cupful of sour milk, one cupful of chopped dates, one teaspoonful each of cinnamon and soda, one-fourth of a teaspoonful of nutmeg, one-fourth of a teaspoonful of lemon rind, one and one-half teaspoonfuls of salt, one-fourth teaspoonful of cloves, one cupful of walnut meats, two cupfuls of rolled oats and two and one-half cupfuls of flour. Mix and drop by teaspoonfuls on a buttered sheet. If the rolled oats are browned slightly in the oven, then ground, the cakes will be more tasty and wholesome.

Fruit and Nut Filling for Cake.—Take one cupful of raisins and one-half cupful of nuts chopped and mixed, one-half cupful of shredded coconut, and one egg white. Mix well and add to the egg white. Spread over the cake a layer of jelly, then put on the filling. Frost and decorate with halves of walnuts.

Pineapple Delight.—Take one small can of pineapple and one-half pound of marshmallows; soak the marshmallows in the pineapple juice until soft. Just before serving add one-half pint of whipped cream and the pineapple cut in bits. Chill and serve.

Honey Angel Cake.—Sift one and one-half cupfuls of flour four times, add one teaspoonful of cream of tartar and sift again. Beat the whites of eleven eggs until stiff, add one and one-half cupfuls of honey, beat lightly, add flour and beat until it is put into the pan. Bake in a moderate oven.

Nellie Maxwell

Canny Youngster.
Helen and Edith were invited to a party, and as it was quite a distance for them to go alone it was decided to let Helen's brother Donald go with them. His mother told him if they asked him to stay he could, provided they phoned and told her. Donald took the girls to the door, and said: "My mother said I could stay and eat, too, provided you phoned and told her about it."

Cheerful Minds.
We are prone to think of contentment and happiness as things afar-off which require much striving for, while all the time they may be close at hand if we will but keep our eyes and minds open. True entertainment means cheerfulness of mind and nothing can foster that more than little moments of happy contact with other cheerful minds.

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Nature's Wonderful Power.
Beside the moist clods the slender flags arise filled with the sweetness of the earth. Out of the darkness under—that darkness which knows no day save when the plowshare opens its chinks—they have come to the light.

Yonder a steam-plov pants up the hill, groaning with its own strength, yet all that strength and might of wheels, and piston, and chains, cannot drag from the earth one single blade like these. Force cannot make it; it must grow—an easy word to speak or write, in fact full of potency.—Richard Jefferies, in "Out of Doors."

How Many Stars?
We think of the multitude of stars and would in all probability say that on a clear, frosty, moonless night we see millions of them. In reality, on such a night, if we leave out the faintly luminous Milky way, we see fewer than 3,000 distinct stars. In the whole starry sphere, of which we see only half of any given time, there are only a score of first-magnitude stars, beginning with Sirius, the brightest of them, and including stars like Orion's right shoulder and left knee, Betelgeux and Rigel, Vega and Arcturus.

Ascribed to Unknown Race.
Pits or shallow wells for the collection of oil were found in the United States by the earliest explorers, and are believed to have been the work of that race which lived here before the Indians came from Asia or Northern Africa, or wherever they did come from. The belief is that these pits for oil were dug by those unknown and unaccountable people who built mounds in the Ohio and Mississippi valleys, worked lead ores in Kentucky and mined copper in the Lake Superior region.

Worthy of All Honor.
A tool is but the extension of a man's hand, and a machine is but a complex tool. And he that invents a machine, augments the power and the well-being of mankind.—Henry Ward Beecher.

Destructive Volcanic Outburst.
Rising to a height of 13,000 feet, only a few miles from Kilauea, is the great volcano of Mauna Loa, which has intermittent eruptions, the last one of great violence beginning in October, 1919, and continuing for five months, the flow coming from a split in the mountain far down upon its flank. The black rolls of treacle lava flowed for miles through the sand flats, forests and bare rock slopes, finally emptying into the sea, where giant clouds of steam rose day and night. Myriads of sea fish were killed by the boiling water.