

Storm Country

Polly

by Grace Miller White

Illustrated by R.H. Livingstone.

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CHAPTER XV—Continued.

With her eyes on the agonized face, she drew gently at the corners of the rag stuffed into Evelyn's mouth. When it came out, Evelyn gave a deep groan and her cramped jaws settled rigidly.

"I'm goin' to feed you now," said Polly. "There ain't no hurry, 'cause we got all night."

Then some minutes passed in silence while the squatter girl, bit by bit, forced the pap between Mrs. MacKenzie's teeth.

"Now drink the water," she urged gently. "It's warm an' got sugar in it."

As if in a trance, she got up and placed the cup on the table. She put a stick of wood into the stove and, turning, caught Evelyn's eyes upon her. Then she sat down and considered the unhappy girl who had been delivered up to the justice of the Storm country.

Neither of them spoke. One of them was praying dully to herself, and Polly Hopkins was recounting mentally all the evil deeds of Evelyn and her haughty husband, Marcus MacKenzie. It was necessary to keep Daddy's grief ever before her mind and listen with the ears of her tortured spirit to Jerry's shrieks to be able to keep on with the gruesome thing she had undertaken.

"You ain't goin' to die till I tell you something, Miss," she broke forth, finally. "It ain't news to you, but I just got to make you understand why I'm putting you in the lake."

Weakness kept Evelyn from answering. Her eyes rolled up toward the shanty roof, then shut at the thought of the icy waters of Cayuga.

"I can't hurt your wicked man 'cept in through you," went on Pollyop. "We squatters are goin' to learn him a lesson he won't forget as long as he's in this world. You can bet your boots on that!"

As if in support of the terrible words, the shanty shook, rattling the loosened bits of tin on the roof. At the ghastly sound Evelyn began to cry.

"I know just how your man'll feel," continued Pollyop, a bitter smile distorting her lips into a grimace of pain, "an' so does Larry Bishop. Larry's woman an' baby died when Old Marc sent him up to Auburn, an' the best of me cracked when he grabbed Jerry right out of my arms."

Both girls sobbed loudly. Then Pollyop cleared her throat and wiped her face.

"An' your man railroaded my daddy to Auburn," she gasped, "after plantin' something on him he didn't do; an' you, every one of you, knew it."

Her voice rose to a high-pitched scream as she remembered the last scene in the county jail.

"God, wasn't it awful?" she cried. "An' you— She leaned over and grasped Evelyn's arm. "You could 'a' let me go to Auburn if you'd 'a' tried, but you didn't. An' then—then you said you didn't give me that dress. You're all liars—an'an—sneaks, you money folks be."

Her hand reached out and touched the ax, but she withdrew it as if an adder had been under her fingers. She was not yet able to do the deed which she had longed to do and thought would be a joy. Her head sagged forward, and again came Jeremiah's weeping face before her.

"If you'd 'a' seen my daddy in the Ithaca jail, maybe you'd be able to think what I'm goin' to do is all right. Yep, all right!" she rasped.

Then she went on hoarsely, faltering as she described the horrors that all her loved ones had gone through. Her voice choked and became silent as she thought of Robert. She could not force her tongue to say a word about him, although her heart throbbled bitterly as his name came to her lips.

"Money!" she whispered brokenly, lifting her head. "Did you hear your man say money to us squatters as if cash'd pay for Larry's woman an' Jerry an' my daddy? You heard, didn't you?"

Evelyn's head sagged forward, and a spasm passed over her face as her eyes closed. She looked as if she had died. Polly Hopkins had seen death enter the Silent City many a time; and her heart-strings tightened.

"Are you gone?" she questioned in a hissing whisper.

The other girl's lids lifted slowly, and never had Pollyop seen such an expression in human eyes in all her life.

"Not yet," dropped from the blue lips, "and—and—oh, Pollyop, I'm so afraid to die. I don't know how! Oh, God, help me; I feel so sick."

"Daddy were sick, too," shot back Polly, "an' Jerry's turned up his toes by this time! I ain't heard a word from him since he was took away. Maybe I could 'a' seen him if you hadn't made your cousin believe I were a bad woman! What d'you know

about babies, an' how cunnin' an' sweet they are? You're as wicked as h—! Ithaca'll be better off when you're food for the fishes. I'm glad your man'll live, though. Lordy, how I laughed when he busted into the shanty. And there was you right beside me! Huh? Wasn't it a good joke on Old Marc?"

The speaker held Evelyn's stare, the chestnut eyes glittering as the question was fairly spat out.

"I can't die, Pollyop!" groaned Evelyn, her head drooping against the cot. "Oh, Polly dear, listen—please—"

Polly reached out for the ax.

"Don't you dare 'Polly dear' me," she gritted convulsively, "or I'll hit you with this!"

"God!—Jesus!" came from between Evelyn's chattering teeth. "No, don't pick it up! Don't! Oh, I want to tell you something, Polly Hopkins."

"Then fire ahead," Polly grumbled sullenly.

She withdrew her fingers from the ax-handle and leaned her chin in the palm of her hand.

Evelyn, straightened up and bent forward, her eyes swimming with tears.

"Polly," she gasped, "Pollyop, in the summer God's going to send me a little baby. Oh, Polly—"

The squatter girl scrambled up as the speaker dropped back, terrified at the exultant fire in the brown eyes and the awful smile that crept across Polly's face.

"Glory be to God in the sky!" she cried. "Two of you belongin' to Old Marc goin' with one swipe of the ax."

She wheeled around and paced the length of the shanty. Old Marc's baby! Old Marc's woman! Both to go out of his life forever! And by her hands—hers, Polly Hopkins' hands!

She lifted them up, those slender, brown fingers, and looked at them against the candlelight. But a few months ago they had been the most willing fingers in all the county! But tonight—Marc's baby! Evelyn's baby!

Like a hive of bees, the joy of dissipating the home of Marcus MacKenzie buzzed through her brain. No sound came from the girl on the floor, for Evelyn MacKenzie had given up all hope. The squatter girl was crazy. No human being could entertain such a ghastly purpose and be in his right mind!

Presently she called Polly's name faintly, and then again; because Polly gave her no heed, she cried louder: "Pollyop, my feet hurt so! I can't bear it!"

Polly paused, leaned against the wall and glared at her.

"I'm glad they do that," she muttered. "You can't hurt anywhere too much to suit me!"

Then something gave way behind her, and wheeling around, she found herself staring into the face of "The Greatest Mother in the World," Daddy's dust-covered coat which had hidden the picture all the past weeks lay at her feet.

As she looked, the glare left Polly's eyes. The serious face that had once smiled at her, the smile that had been a benediction for herself and Daddy Hopkins, was there no longer. Rather was there an expression of sorrow. Death rested in the nurse's arms, but from her whole reverent attitude the sense of protection swept out at Polly Hopkins.

Then suddenly she heard a man's voice. It seemed to drift into the hut through every crevice and crack.

"And you're the Littlest Mother in the World," came plainly to her.

Like one struck, she stood rooted to the spot. Evelyn MacKenzie over there against the bed faded from her mind. Old Marc's imaged face went away as if it had never seered her vision. Over and over the delightful words Robert had spoken to her rushed into her ears and stamped themselves in golden fire on her memory.

"I love you, Polly," touched her like a caress, and, "You're my little girl," fell upon her like the tender hand of Granny Hope's God.

"The Greatest Mother in the World," whispered Pollyop; and then something hard and hateful within her broke, and the flood-tides of love came pouring in. As when a dam bursts, the pent-up waters sweep away all the accumulated rubbish in the old, unused channels, so was the squatter girl's heart cleansed of every unlovely emotion. To her uplifted vision "The Greatest Mother in the World" smiled again in benediction; and beyond her, dim in the background, appeared a wrinkled, toothless smile, and Polly heard Granny Hope's withered lips saying:

"Love's the hull thing, brat. Just love, an' love, an' keep on lovin'."

Full of the tenderest compassion, Pollyop turned swiftly, and at the sight of her flashing, radiant face,

Evelyn fainted, toppled forward and rolled almost under the bed.

The squatter girl bounded to her side, her frantic fingers tearing loose the ropes that Larry and Lye Braeger had made secure around Evelyn's body. They fell away, leaving the girl but a little heap on the floor.

Tears streamed over her dark lashes as Pollyop gathered the limp head of Evelyn MacKenzie into her arms. And then she prayed as Granny Hope had taught her to pray. "Our Father which art in heaven," The rest of the petition slipped from her mind, and she quoted with chattering teeth, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

Her strong arms lifted Evelyn and as she rolled over on the cot, Polly Hopkins stood up and cried:

"Underneath Old Marc's woman are your everlasting arms, God dear!"

CHAPTER XVI

"Can you speak to me?"

Pollyop's voice was as tender as when she had repeated heavenly promises to the sad ones of the Silent City and had taught them that love was ever present.

Evelyn gazed at her electrified. The brown eyes were softly luminous. The lips which only a little while ago were strained and blue now were scarlet and fraught with sympathy. What wonderful thing had happened? Pollyop had taken the rope off her feet and hands. She could wriggle a little, although her flesh hurt dreadfully when she tried it.

Prompted by the attempted movement, Pollyop dropped to her knees and began to chafe the injured ankles.

"I'm goin' to give you back to your man," she said, quaking. "But you got to swear to him I swiped you, an' not any squatter men. He'll jail me forever, maybe, but I don't care about that. I love Larry an' Lye Braeger too much to haul 'em into this."

Then her face fell beside Mrs. MacKenzie's, and she wept hysterically. Evelyn's fingers clutched at the chestnut curls.

"Pollyop, oh, Polly, darling!"

This was all she could say, for she, too, was weeping even more wildly than the other. In the presence of such divine unselfishness, the petals of her withered soul seemed to lift and open, as she groped for a broader understanding.

"Granny Hope learned me a lot of things," came up to Evelyn brokenly. "She always said, Granny Hope did,



"I'm Afraid of Everybody," Gasped Evelyn.

that love was stronger'n hate an' I must just pray your man wouldn't be so wicked to us squatters."

The glistening brown head rolled back and forth in consuming agony.

"Don't, Polly darling," Evelyn begged. "Don't, it's all right now. And my husband will—"

Polly sat up, brushing back damp ringlets from her brow.

"He won't do nothin' to help me," she shot out. "Nothin' at all! First, I know him better'n you do. Then next, I wouldn't ask him. 'Cause— 'cause I'm that bad, I ought to be without my Daddy Hopkins an' my Jerry baby." Her voice rose in wild appeal. "But, God dear, how much I want 'em. Oh, how I want 'em!"

The words cut into Evelyn's heart with the keenness of physical pain. Only a little while before she had stood alone at the brink of the grave. There had been no hope that the summer would bring a helpless wee thing to hold her close to Marcus. But now— Her thoughts whirled. So great was her faith in Polly Hopkins that she knew in a little while she would be back in her husband's arms.

The attack of weeping over, Pollyop arose and beat again into pap the hard bread and hot water. This time she took all the sugar left in the cupboard. Daddy would not be home for over two years, and Baby Jerry probably never, and she—she wouldn't be in the shanty long. Groaning, she whipped the spoon so fiercely that some of the contents of the cup splashed on the floor.

"It ain't very toothsome," she said, coming back to the cot; "but the hut's cold, an' you need a lot of warm'n' up. I'm goin' now an' get your man. You get this hot pap into your stomach while I'm gone."

Evelyn waved the cup away, holding out a shaking hand.

"I don't want you to go without me, Pollyop," she cried. "Please, don't leave me here alone. I'm terribly scared, I—"

The grave young squatter contemplated her for the space of twenty seconds, perhaps.

"You're afraid of the fishermen, ain't you, Miss?" she asked. "Well, you've got a right to be! Larry's different from the rest, though he was as willin', up to this night, to chop off your head, as me. But Larry's heart's soft and kind, Larry's is."

"I'm afraid of everybody," gasped Evelyn. "Everybody but you, Polly. Please, take me with you, or—let me stay till morning."

A slight shake of Pollyop's head brought Evelyn to a sitting position, but pain-racked bones and nerves laid her back again.

"There," interjected the other girl. "You can see how hard it'd be to get you through the snow to your man's house. You'd die before you got there. I'm blest if you wouldn't. No, I got to go alone, Miss."

Noting the fear in Mrs. MacKenzie's eyes, she bent over the cot.

"Will you believe something I'm goin' to tell you, Eve?" she said in a wheedling tone.

"Surely I will, Polly," answered Evelyn, wiping her eyes, "but I'm so afraid, so awfully afraid."

"That's no lie," replied Pollyop impetuously, "an' as I said, you got a right to be scared of the squatters. Why, only this afternoon I hated you an' Old Marc as hard as the rest of the Silent City folks—more, maybe! But—but what I was really goin' to tell you is this. If I lug you along with me, you won't have no baby in the summer. That's God's truth I'm tellin' you, too."

Evelyn lowered her lids, and a painful flush mounted to her hair.

"You're wantin' the little thing, ain't you?" demanded Polly, her voice vibrant with emotion. "Now, be a big woman, an' stay while I'm gone, will you? I'll promise to hustle for all I'm worth."

Mrs. MacKenzie's timid glance ran around the room.

"I suppose so," she whimpered, "but what if some of your people came here?" She shuddered and went on hurriedly: "Polly, what're you going to say to Marcus?"

"I don't know yet," mumbled Pollyop, "but I'll bring him back. Oh, I got it! Say, I'll stick you away in Granny Hope's coop-hole. No squatter'd think to go in there, even if he comes in. Here! I'll help you."

Tenderly she coaxed and begged, but without avail, and patiently Polly sat down on the side of the cot.

"Miss Eve," she took up in low tones, "I'm goin' to tell you something Granny Hope told me. Now, you want to get home to your man, don't you?"

"Yes, yes, oh, so bad, Pollyop," cried Evelyn, "but I can't stay here alone! I can't! I can't!"

She did not think then of the many days and nights the other girl had passed by herself in the same little shack.

"Maybe it does seem so, Eve," said Polly Hopkins. "But, honey, when I'm done you'll be thinkin' different. Now, listen: don't you know way down in your insides that your man's nearly sufferin' his life away?"

Evelyn burst forth into weeping afresh.

"Of course I know it, Polly," she sobbed, "but—"

"An' you want him to be walling all night till daybreak, not knowin' whether you're in the land of the livin' or not, huh?"

This was a solemn question asked by a very solemn-eyed girl.

"Another thing," continued Polly. "When it comes daybreak, there'll be a lot of squatters about. They come every day to this hut. I'd have to leave you then, wouldn't I? Tonight it's stormin', an' most of 'em are in bed. I could run as fast as a rabbit an' be back in a jiffy. Can't you screw up your courage an' let me go?"

This long statement Evelyn thought over for a few moments. Then:

"Perhaps I could, if—"

"I know you can," interrupted Pollyop. "Now, listen; Granny Hope said anything you want you can have out of love's own heart for the askin'."

"But I'm such a wicked girl," moaned Evelyn dismally.

"So be it," returned Pollyop promptly. "We're both rotten bad, God knows, but never mind all that now. I got to get Old Marc; an' the only way you can help is to stay quiet while I'm out for him. Now, lean on me an' I'll stow you away in the rubbish room till I get back."

Ashamed to make further appeals to the girl who was showing more spirit than she had ever thought possible for any girl to show, Evelyn allowed Pollyop to pick her up and stand her on the floor.

Then the weak leaned on the strong, and when Polly Hopkins tucked the blankets about Evelyn, she whispered: "Granny said prayers in this room all last year an' way on till she died. 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want!' Granny said was one of the best to keep in mind."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Looking Ahead.

Wedmore—What's the idea of giving your fiancée a cigarette case? Does she smoke?

Gayboy—Oh, no, but she's just about due to break off and send my presents back, and I can use it myself.

Ways of the Sex.

When a young man asks a girl for her photograph she immediately classifies him as a matrimonial possibility.—Boston Transcript.

CAPES FOR SUMMER WEAR; FROCKS FOR GIRL GRADUATES

A DEBUTANTE in the world of fashion has had its picture made and is herewith presented. It is something very new and simple. In a cape for summer wear, and makes its entry in the company of other pretty clothes for outdoor—with every chance to become a favorite. It has taken up with the whim for yarn trimmings and looks as if it were knitted instead of woven. There are points that will count in its favor, for Fashion has her eyes glued upon

ney diplomaward, and one of their great days is dawning. Commencement are about to be staged. They prove the most engrossing subject in the minds of everybody concerned, with what shall I wear, uppermost among the details under discussion.

Having made a little journey of research long before Commencement day peeped over the horizon, the style reporter gathers that the first thing for the girl graduate to decide is the matter of silhouette. She is to choose



Something New and Simple.

knitted things just now and it looks as if there were small chance of distracting her attention from them.

There are several fabrics that might be used for a cape of this kind, as wool or silk jersey cloth, tweed, spongee, ratine and the heavier crepes. It is merely an oblong piece of goods shirred across the back and shoulders and joined to a narrow flat scarf. The loop fringe and cross stitch band that trim it are done in wool yarn.

Some very pretty and practical capes of tweed are finished with a blinding of ribbon and there are many plain tweed capes that make just the

between the piquant and demure bouffant skirt.

If the maid elects to be picturesque in a full skirt she may join it to a rather snug bodice with sleeves a little shorter than elbow length. In necklines there are the square, "V" shaped, and bateau lines to be selected according to their becomingness, and in materials organdie, taffeta, or other crepe weaves insure the success of this style. They all lend themselves to narrow ruffles and puffs, to cordings and shirings, and narrow ribbons seem to be made for them. How sufficient unto itself organdie is, may be gathered from the pretty frock pictured, in



Quaint and Graceful.

right sort of accompaniment for spring street frocks. Crepe de chine and heavier crepes and silks are promoted for long afternoon and evening wraps, and reveal the cape in many modifications. These are usually lined with crepe de chine in a contrasting color, as black and gray or blue lining. Dark brown crepe de chine is sponsored by great names in capes and cape wraps for summer afternoons.

Girls in the class of '22 have nearly reached the end of the long jour-

which the skirt is just one ruffle after another, each edged with a little frill. The bodice is finished in the same way, and even the short sash is made of organdie. The variety in these organdie frocks is endless, and those of taffeta are built on the same lines.

Julie Bottomley