

MARTHA G. BROWNE



AN ACCOUNT OF A  
FEMALE  
SLAVE

# **Account Of A Female Slave**

**Martha Griffith Browne**

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# **Account Of A Female Slave**

## **Chapter I.**

*THE OLD KENTUCKY FARM--MY PARENTAGE AND EARLY TRAINING--DEATH OF THE MASTER--THE SALE-DAY--NEW MASTER AND NEW HOME.*

I WAS born in one of the southern counties of Kentucky. My earliest recollections are of a large, old-fashioned farmhouse, built of hewn rock, in which my old master, Mr. Nelson, and his family, consisting of a widowed sister, two daughters and two sons, resided. I have but an indistinct remembrance of my old master. At times, a shadow of an idea, like the reflection of a kind dream, comes over my mind, and, then, I conjure him up as a large, venerable-looking man, with scanty, gray locks floating carelessly over an amplitude of forehead; a wide, hard-featured face, with yet a kindly glow of honest sentiment; broad, strong teeth, much discolored by the continued use of tobacco.

I well remember that, as a token of his good-will, he always presented us (the slave-children) with a slice of buttered bread, when we had finished our daily task. I have also a faint reminiscence of his old hickory cane being shaken over my head two or three times, and the promise (which remained, until his death, unfulfilled) of a good "thrashing" at some future period.

My mother was a very bright mulatto woman, and my father, I suppose, was a white man, though I know nothing of him; for, with the most unpaternal feeling, he deserted me. A consequence of this amalgamation was my very fair and beautiful complexion. My skin was no perceptible shade darker than that of my young mistresses. My eyes were large and dark, while a profusion of nut-brown hair, straight and soft as the whitest lady's in the land, fell in showery redundancy over my neck and shoulders. I was often mistaken for a white child; and in my rambles through the woods, many caresses have I received from wayside travellers; and the exclamation, "What a beautiful child!" was quite common. Owing to this personal beauty I was a great pet with my master's sister, Mrs. Woodbridge, who, I believe I have stated, was a widow, and childless; so upon me she lavished all the fondness of a warm and loving heart.

My mother, Keziah the cook, commonly called Aunt Kaisy, was possessed of an indomitable ambition, and had, by the hardest means, endeavored to acquire the rudiments of an education; but all that she had succeeded in obtaining was a knowledge of the alphabet, and orthography in two syllables. Being very imitative, she eschewed the ordinary negroes' pronunciation, and adopted the mode of speech used by the higher classes of whites. She was very much delighted when Mrs. Woodbridge or Miss Betsy (as we called her) began to instruct me in the elements of the English language. I inherited my mother's thirst for knowledge; and, by intense study, did all I could to spare Miss Betsy the usual drudgery of a teacher. The aptitude that I displayed, may be inferred from the fact that, in three months from the day she began teaching me the alphabet, I was reading, with some degree of fluency, in the "First Reader." I have often heard her relate this as quite a literary and educational marvel.

There were so many slaves upon the farm, particularly young ones, that I was regarded as a supernumerary; consequently spared from nearly all the work. I sat in Miss Betsy's room: with book in hand, little heeding anything else; and, if ever I manifested the least indolence, my mother, with her wild ambition was sure to rally me, and even offer the tempting bribe of cakes and apples.

I have frequently heard my old master say, "Betsy, you will spoil that girl, teaching her so much." "She is too pretty for a slave," was her invariable reply.

Thus smoothly passed the early part of my life, until an event occurred which was the cause of a change in my whole fate. My old master became suddenly and dangerously ill. My lessons were suspended, for Miss Betsy's services were required in the sick chamber. I used to slyly steal to the open door of his room, and peep in, with wonder, at the sombre group collected there. I recollect seeing my young masters and mistresses weeping round a curtained bed. Then there came a time when loud screams and frightful lamentations issued thence. There were shrieks that struck upon my ear with a strange thrill; shrieks that seemed to rend souls and break heart-strings. My young mistresses, fair, slender girls, fell prostrate upon the floor; and my masters, noble, manly men, bent over the bowed forms of their sisters, whispering words which I did not hear, but which, my mature experience tells me, must have been of love and comfort.

There came, then, a long, narrow, black box, thickly embossed with shining brass tacks, in which my old master was carefully laid, with his pale, brawny hands crossed upon his wide chest. I remember that, one by one, the slaves were called in to take a last look of him who had

been, to them, a kind master. They all came out with their cotton handkerchiefs pressed to their eyes. I went in, with five other colored children, to take my look. That wan, ghastly face, those sunken eyes and pinched features, with the white winding sheet, and the dismal coffin, impressed me with a new and wild terror; and, for weeks after, this "vision of death" haunted my mind fearfully.

But I soon after resumed my studies under Miss Betsy's tuition. Having little work to do, and seldom seeing my young mistresses, I grew up in the same house, scarcely knowing them. I was technically termed in the family, "the child," as I was not black; and, being a slave, my masters and mistresses would not admit that I was white. So I reached the age of ten, still called "a child," and actually one in all life's experiences, though pretty well advanced in education. I had a very good knowledge of the rudiments, had bestowed some attention upon Grammar, and eagerly read every book that fell in my way. Love of study taught me seclusive habits; I read long and late; and the desire of a finished education became the passion of my life. Alas! these days were but a poor preparation for the life that was to come after!

Miss Betsy, though a warm-hearted woman, was a violent advocate of slavery. I have since been puzzled how to reconcile this with her otherwise Christian character; and, though she professed to love me dearly, and had bestowed so much attention upon the cultivation of my mind, and expressed it as her opinion that I was too pretty and white to be a slave, yet, if any one had spoken of giving me freedom, she would have condemned it as domestic heresy. If I had belonged to her, I doubt not but my life would have been a happy one. But, alas! a different lot was assigned me!

About two years and six months after my old master's death, a division was made of the property. This involved a sale of everything, even the household furniture. There were, I believe, heavy debts hanging over the estate. These must be met, and the residue divided among the heirs.

When it was made known in the kitchen that a sale was to be made, the slaves were panic-stricken. Loud cries and lamentations arose, and my young mistresses came often to the kitchen to comfort us.

One of these young ladies, Miss Margaret, a tall, nobly formed girl, with big blue eyes and brown hair, frequently came and sat with us, trying, in the most persuasive tones, to reconcile the old ones to their destiny. Often did I see the large tears roll down her fair cheeks, and her red lip quiver. These indications of sympathy, coming from such a lovely being, cheered many an hour of after-captivity.

But the "sale-day" came at last; I have a confused idea of it. The ladies left the day before. Miss Betsy took an affectionate leave of me; ah, I did not then know that it was a final one.

The servants were all sold, as I heard one man say, at very high rates, though not under the auctioneer's hammer. To that my young masters were opposed.

A tall, hard-looking man came up to me, very roughly seized my arm, bade me open my mouth; examined my teeth; felt of my limbs; made me run a few yards; ordered me to jump; and, being well satisfied with my activity, said to Master Edward, "I will take her." Little comprehending the full meaning of that brief sentence, I rejoined the group of children from which I had been summoned. After awhile, my mother came up to me, holding a wallet in her hand.



The tear-drops stood on her cheeks, and her whole frame was distorted with pain. She walked toward me a few steps, then stopped, and suddenly shaking her head, exclaimed, "No, no, I can't do it, I can't do it." I was amazed at her grief, but an indefinable fear kept me from rushing to her.

"Here, Kitty," she said to an old negro woman, who stood near, "you break it to her. I can't do it. No, it will drive me mad. Oh, heaven! that I was ever born to see this day." Then rocking her body back and forward in a transport of agony, she gave full vent to her feelings in a long, loud, piteous wail. Oh, God! that cry of grief, that knell of a breaking heart, rang in my ears for many long and painful days. At length Aunt Kitty approached me, and, laying her hand on my shoulder, kindly said:

"Alas, poor chile, you mus' place your trus' in the good God above, you mus' look to Him for help; you are gwine to leave your mother now. You are to have a new home, a new master, and I hope new friends. May the Lord be with you." So saying, she broke suddenly away from me; but I saw that her wrinkled face was wet with tears.

With perhaps an idle, listless air, I received this astounding news; but a whirlwind was gathering in my breast. What could she mean by new friends and a new home? Surely I was to take my mother with me! No mortal power would dare to sever us. Why, I remember that when master sold the gray mare, the colt went also. Who could, who would, who dared, separate the parent from her offspring? Alas! I had yet to learn that the white man dared do all that his avarice might suggest; and there was no human tribunal where the outcast African could pray for "right!" Ah, when I now think of my poor mother's form, as it swayed like a willow in the tempest of grief; when I remember her bitter cries, and see her arms thrown frantically toward me, and

hear her earnest--oh, how earnest--prayer for death or madness, then I wonder where were Heaven's thunderbolts; but retributive Justice will come sooner or later, and He who remembers mercy now will not forget justice then.

"Come along, gal, come along, gather up your duds, and come with me," said a harsh voice; and, looking up from my bewildered reverie, I beheld the man who had so carefully examined me. I was too much startled to fully understand the words, and stood vacantly gazing at him. This strange manner he construed into disrespect; and, raising his riding-whip, he brought it down with considerable force upon my back. It was the first lash I had ever given to me in anger. I smarted beneath the stripe, and a cry of pain broke from my lips. Mother sprang to me, and clasping my quivering form in her arms, cried out to my young master, "Oh, Master Eddy, have mercy on me, on my child. I have served you faithfully, I nursed you, I grew up with your poor mother, who now sleeps in the cold ground, I beg you now to save my child," and she sank down at his feet, whilst her tears fell fast.

Then my poor old grandfather, who was called the patriarch slave, being the eldest one of the race in the whole neighborhood, joined us. His gray head, wrinkled face, and bent form, told of many a year of hard servitude.

"What is it, Massa Ed, what is it Kaisy be takin' on so 'bout? You haint driv the chile off? No--no! Young massa only playin' trick now; come Kais' don't be makin' fool of yourself young massa not gwine to separate you and the chile."

These words seemed to reanimate my mother, and she looked up at Master Edward with a grateful expression of face, whilst she clasped her arms tightly around his knees,

exclaiming, "Oh, bless you, young master, bless you forever, and forgive poor Kaisy for distrusting you, but Pompey told me the child was sold away from me, and that gemman struck her;" and here again she sobbed, and caught hold of me convulsively, as if she feared I might be taken.

I looked at my young master's face, and the ghastly whiteness which overspread it, the tearful glister of his eye, and the strange tremor of his figure, struck me with fright. I knew my doom. Young as I was, my first dread was for my mother; I forgot my own perilous situation, and mourned alone for her. I would have given worlds could insensibility have been granted her.

"I've got no time to be foolin' longer with these niggers, come 'long, gal. Ann, I believe, you tole me was her name," he said, as he turned to Master Edward. Another wild shriek from my mother, a deep sigh from grandpap, and I looked at master Ed, who was striking his forehead vehemently, and the tears were trickling down his cheeks.

"Here, Mr. Peterkin, here!" exclaimed Master Edward, "here is your bill of sale; I will refund your money; release me from my contract."

Peterkin cast on him one contemptuous look, and with a low, chuckling laugh, replied, "No; you must stand to your bargain. I want that gal; she is likely, and it will do me good to thrash the devil out of her;" turning to me he added, "quit your snuffling and snubbing, or I'll give you something to cry 'bout;" and, roughly catching me by the arm, he hurried me off, despite the entreaty of Master Ed, the cries of mother, and the feeble supplication of my grandfather, I dared to cast one look behind, and beheld my mother wallowing in the dust, whilst her frantic cries of "save my child, save my child!" rang with fearful agony in

my ears. Master Ed covered his face with his hands, and old grandfather reverently raised his to Heaven, as if beseeching mercy. The sight of this anguish-stricken group filled me with a new sense of horror, and forgetful of the presence of Peterkin, I burst into tears: but I was quickly recalled by a fierce and stinging blow from his stout riding-whip.

"See here, nigger (this man, raised among negroes, used their dialect), if you dar' to give another whimper, I'll beat the very life out 'en yer." This terrific threat seemed to scare away every thought of precaution; and, by a sudden and agile bound, I broke loose from him and darted off to the sad group, from which I had been so ruthlessly torn, and, sinking down before Master Ed, I cried out in a wild, despairing tone, "Save me, good master, save me--kill me, or hide me from that awful man, he'll kill me;" and, seizing hold of the skirt of his coat, I covered my face with it to shut out the sight of Peterkin, whose -red eye-balls were glaring with fury upon me. Oath after oath escaped his lips. Mother saw him rapidly approaching to recapture me, and, with the noble, maternal instinct of self-sacrifice, sprang forward only to receive the heavy blow of his uplifted whip. She reeled, tottered and sank stunned upon the ground.

"Thar, take that, you yaller hussy, and cuss yer nigger hide for daring to raise this rumpus here," he said, as he rapidly strode past her.

Gently, Mr. Peterkin," exclaimed Master Edward, "let me speak to her; a little encouragement is better than force."

"This is my encouragement for them," and he shook his whip.

Unheeding him, Master Edward turned to me, saying, "Ann, come now, be a good girl, go with this gentleman, and be an obedient girl; he will give you a kind, nice home; sometimes he will let you come to see your mother. Here is some money for you to buy a pretty head-handkerchief; now go with him."

These kind words and encouraging tones, brought a fresh gush of tears to my eyes. Taking the half-dollar which he offered me, and reverently kissing the skirt of his coat, I rejoined Peterkin; one look at his cold, harsh face, chilled my resolution; yet I had resolved to go without another word of complaint. I could not suppress a groan when I passed the spot where my mother lay still insensible from the effects of the blow

One by one the servants, old and young, gave me a hearty shake of the hand as I passed the place where they were standing in a row for the inspection of buyers.

I had nerved myself, and now that the parting from mother was over, I felt that the bitterness of death was past, and I could meet anything. Nothing now could be a trial, yet I was touched when the servants offered me little mementoes and keepsakes. One gave a yard of ribbon, another a half-paper of pins, a third presented a painted cotton head-tie; others gave me ginger-cakes, candies, or small coins. Out of their little they gave abundantly, and, small as were the bestowments, I well knew that they had made sacrifices to give even so much. I was too deeply affected to make any other acknowledgment than a nod of the head; for a choking thickness was gathering in my throat, and a blinding mist obscured my sight. I did not see my young mistresses, for they had left the house, declaring they could not bear to witness a spectacle so revolting to their feelings.

Upon reaching the gate I observed a red-painted wagon, with an awning of domestic cotton. Standing near it, and holding the horses, was an old, worn, scarred, weather-beaten negro man, who instantly took off his hat as Mr. Peterkin approached.

"Well, Nace, you see I've bought this wench to-day," and he shook his whip over my head.

"Ya! ya! Massa, but she ha' got one goot home wid yer."

"Yes, has she, Nace; but don't yer think the slut has been cryin' 'bout it!"

"Lor' bless us, Massa, but a little of the beech-tree will fetch that sort of truck out of her," and old Nace showed his broken teeth, as he gave a forced laugh.

"I guess I can take the fool out en her, by the time I gives her two or three swings at the whippin'-post."

Nace shook his head knowingly, and gave a low guttural laugh, by way of approval of his master's capabilities.

"Jump in the wagon, gal," said my new master, "jump in quick; I likes to see niggers active, none of your pokes 'bout me; but this will put sperit in 'em", and there was another defiant flourish of the whip.

I got in with as much haste and activity as I could possibly command. This appeared to please Mr. Peterkin, and he gave evidence of it by saying,--

"Well, that does pretty well; a few stripes a day, and you'll be a valerble slave;" and, getting in the vehicle himself, he

ordered Nace to drive on "pretty peart," as night would soon overtake us.

Just as we were starting I perceived Josh, one of my playmates, running after us with a small bundle, shouting, -

"Here, Ann, you've lef' yer bundle of close."

"Stop, Nace," said Mr. Peterkin, "let's git the gal's duds, or I'll be put to the 'spence of gittin' new ones for her."

Little Josh came bounding up, and, with an affectionate manner, handed me the little wallet that contained my entire wardrobe. I leaned forward, and, in a muffled tone, but with my whole heart hanging on my lip, asked Josh "how is mother?" but a cut of Nace's whip, and a quick "gee-up," put me beyond the hearing of the reply. I strained my eyes after Josh, to interpret the motion of his lips.

In a state of hopeless agony I sat through the remainder of the journey. The coarse jokes and malignant threats of Mr. Peterkin were answered with laughing and dutiful assent by the veteran Nace. I tried to deceive my persecutors by feigning sleep, but, ah, a strong finger held my lids open, and slumber fled away to gladden lighter hearts and bless brighter eyes.

## **Chapter II.**

### *A VIEW OF THE NEW HOME.*

THE young moon had risen in mild and meek serenity to bless the earth. With a strange and fluctuating light, the

pale rays played over the leaves and branches of the forest trees, and flickered fantastically upon the ground! Only a few stars were discernible in the highest dome of heaven! The lowing of wandering cows, or the chirp of a night-bird, had power to beguile memory back to a thousand vanished joys. I mused and wept; still the wagon jogged along. Mr. Peterkin sat half-sleeping beside old Nace, whose occasional "gee-up" to the lagging horses, was the only human sound that broke the soft serenity! Every moment seemed to me an age, for I dreaded the awakening of my cruel master. Ah, little did I dream that that horrid day's experience was but a brief foretaste of what I had yet to suffer; and well it was for me that a kind and merciful Providence veiled that dismal future from my gaze. About midnight I had fallen into a quiet sleep, gilded by the sweetest dream, a dream of the old farm-house, of mother, grandfather, and my companions.

From this vision I was aroused by the gruff voice of Peterkin, bidding me get out of the wagon. That voice was to me more frightful and fearful than the blast of the last trump. Springing suddenly up, I threw off the shackles of sleep; and consciousness, with all its direful burden, returned fully to me. Looking round, by the full light of the moon, I beheld a large country house, half hidden among trees. A white paling enclosed the ground, and the scent of dewy roses and other garden flowers filled the atmosphere.

"Now, Nace, put up the team, and git yourself to bed," said Peterkin. Turning to me he added, "give this gal a blanket, and let her sleep on the floor in Polly's cabin; keep a good watch on her, that she don't try to run off."

"Needn't fear dat, Massa, for de bull-dog tear her to pieces if she 'tempt dat. By gar, I'd like to see her be for tryin' it;"



and the old negro gave a fiendish laugh, as though he thought it would be rare sport.

Mr. Peterkin entered the handsome house, of which he was the rich and respected owner, whilst I, conducted by Nace, repaired to a dismal cabin. After repeated knocks at the door of this most wretched hovel, an old crone of a negress muttered between her clenched teeth, "Who's dar?"

"It's me, Polly; what you be 'bout dar, dat you don't let me in?"

"What for you be bangin' at my cabin? I's got no bisness wid you."

"Yes, but I's got bisness wid you; stir yer ole stumps now."

"I shan't be for troublin' mysef and lettin' you in my cabin at dis hour ob de night-time; and if you doesn't be off, I'll make Massa gib you a sound drubbin' in de mornin'."

"Ha, ha! now I'm gots you sure; for massa sends me here himsef."

This was enough for Polly; she broke off all further colloquy, and opened the door instantly.

The pale moonlight rested as lovingly upon that dreary, unchinked, rude, and wretched hovel, as ever it played over the gilded roof and frescoed dome of ancient palaces; but ah, what squalor did it not reveal! There, resting upon pallets of straw, like pigs in a litter, were groups of children, and upon a rickety cot the old woman reposed her aged limbs. How strange, lonely, and forbidding appeared that tenement, as the old woman stood in the doorway, her short and scanty kirtles but poorly concealing her meagre

limbs. A dark, scowling countenance looked out from under a small cap of faded muslin; little bleared eyes glared upon me, like the red light of a heated furnace. Instinctively I shrank back from her, but Nace was tired, and not wishing to be longer kept from his bed, pushed me within the door, saying--

"Thar, Polly, Massa say dat gal mus' sleep in dar."

"Come 'long in, gal," said the woman. and closing the door, she pointed to a patch of straw, "sleep dar."

The moonbeams stole in through the crevices and cracks of the cabin, and cast a mystic gleam upon the surrounding objects. Without further word or comment, Polly betook herself to her cot, and was soon snoring away as though there were no such thing as care or slavery in the world. But to me sleep was a stranger. There I lay through the remaining hours of the night, wearily thinking of mother and home. "Sold," I murmured. "What is it to be sold? Why was I sold? Why separated from my mother and friends? Why couldn't mother come with me, or I stay with her? I never saw Mr. Peterkin before. Who gave him the right to force me from my good home and kind friends?" These questions would arise in my mind, and, alas! I had no answers for them. Young and ignorant as I was, I had yet some glimmering idea of justice. Later in life, these same questions have often come to me, as sad commentaries upon the righteousness of human laws; and, when sitting in splendid churches listening to ornate and worldly harangues from holy men, these same thoughts have tingled upon my tongue. And I have been surprised to see how strangely these men mistake the definition of servitude. Why, from the exposition of the worthy divines, one would suppose that servitude was a fair synonym for slavery! Admitting that we are the descendants of the

unfortunate Ham, and endure our bondage as the penalty affixed to his crime, there can be no argument or fact adduced, whereby to justify slavery as a moral right. Serving and being a slave are very different. And why may not Ham's descendants claim a reprieve by virtue of the passion and death of Christ? Are we excluded from the grace of that atonement? No; there is no argument, no reason, to justify slavery, save that of human cupidity. But there will come a day, when each and every one who has violated that divine rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," will stand with a fearful accountability before the Supreme Judge. Then will there be loud cries and lamentations, and a wish for the mountains to hide them from the eye of Judicial Majesty.

The next morning I rose with the dawn, and sitting upright upon my pallet, surveyed the room and its tenants. There, in comfortless confusion, upon heaps of straw, slumbered five children, dirty and ragged. On the broken cot, with a remnant of a coverlet thrown over her, lay Aunt Polly. A few broken stools and one pine box, with a shelf containing a few tins, constituted the entire furniture.

"And this wretched pen is to be my home; these dirty-looking children my associates." Oh, how dismal were my thoughts; but little time had I for reflection. The shrill sound of a hunting-horn was the summons for the servants to arise, and woe unto him or her who was found missing or tardy when the muster-roll was called. Aunt Polly and the five children sprang up, and soon dressed themselves. They then appeared in the yard, where a stout, athletic man, with full beard and a dull eye, stood with whip in hand. He called over the names of all, and portioned out their daily task. With a smile more of terror than pleasure, they severally received their orders. I stood at the extremity of

the range. After disposing of them in order, the overseer (for such he was) looked at me fiercely, and said:

"Come here, gal."

With a timid step, I obeyed.

"What are you fit for? Not much of anything, ha?" and catching hold of my ear he pulled me round in front of him, saying,

"Well, you are likely-looking; how much work can you do?"

I stammered out something as to my willingness to do anything that was required of me. He examined my hands, and concluding from their dimensions that I was best suited for house-work, he bade me remain in the kitchen until after breakfast. When I entered the room designated, par politesse, as the kitchen, I was surprised to find such a desolate and destitute-looking place. The apartment, which was very small, seemed to be a sort of Pandora's Box, into which everything of household or domestic use had been crowded. The walls were hung round with saddles, bridles, horse-blankets, &c. Upon a swinging shelf in the centre of the room were ranged all the seeds, nails, ropes, dried elms, and the rest of the thousand and one little notions of domestic economy. A rude, wooden shelf contained a dark, dusty row of unclean tins; broken stools and old kegs were substituted for chairs; upon these were stationed four or five ebony children; one of them, a girl about nine years old, with a dingy face, to which soap and water seemed foreign, and with shaggy, moppy hair, twisted in short, stringy plaits, sat upon a broken keg, with a squalid baby in her lap, which she jostled upon her knee, whilst she sang in a sharp key, "hushy-by-baby." Three other wretched children, in tow-linen dresses, whose brevity of skirts made

a sad appeal to the modesty of spectators, were perched round this girl, whom they called Amy. They were furiously begging Aunt Polly (the cook) to give them a piece of hoe-cake.

"Be off wid you, or I'll tell Massa, or de overseer," answered the beldame, as their solicitations became more clamorous. This threat had power to silence the most earnest demands of the stomach, for the fiend of hunger was far less dreaded than the lash of Mr. Jones, the overseer. My entrance, and the sight of a strange face, was a diversion for them. They crowded closer to Amy, and eyed me with a half doubtful, and altogether ludicrous air.

"Who's her?" "whar she come from?" "when her gwyn away?" and such like expressions, escaped them in stifled tones.

"Come in, set down," said Aunt Polly to me, and, turning to the group of children, she levelled a poker at them.

"Keep still dar, or I'll break your pates 'wid dis poker."

Instantly they cowered down beside Amy, still peeping over her shoulder, to get a better view of me. With a very uneasy feeling I seated myself upon the broken stool, to which Aunt Polly pointed. One of the boldest of the children came up to me, and, slyly touching my dress, said, "tag," then darted off to her hiding-place, with quite the air of a victress. Amy made queer grimaces at me. Every now and then placing her thumb to her nose, and gyrating her finger towards me, she would drawl out, "you ka-n-t kum it." All this was perfect jargon to me; for at home, though we had been but imperfectly protected by clothing from the vicissitudes of seasons, and though our fare was simple, coarse, and frugal, had we been kindly treated, and our

manners trained into something like the softness of humanity. There, as regularly as the Sunday dawned, were we summoned to the house to hear the Bible read, and join (though at a respectful distance) with the family in prayer. But this I subsequently learned was an unusual practice in the neighborhood, and was attributed to the fact, that my master's wife had been born in the State of Massachusetts, where the people were crazy and fanatical enough to believe that "niggers" had souls, and were by God held to be responsible beings.

The loud blast of the horn was the signal for the "hands" to suspend their labor and come to breakfast. Two negro men and three women rushed in at the door, ravenous for their rations. I looked about for the table, but, seeing none, concluded it had yet to be arranged; for at home we always took our meals on a table. I was much surprised to see each one here take a slice of fat bacon and a pone of bread in his or her hand, and eat it standing.

"Well," said one man, "I'd like to git a bit more bread."

"You's had your sher," replied Aunt Polly. "Mister Jones ses one slice o' meat and a pone o' bread is to be the 'lowance."

"I knows it, but if thar's any scraps left from the house table, you wimmin folks always gits it."

"Who's got de bes' right? Sure, and arn't de one who cooks it got de bes' right to it?" asked Polly, with a triumphant voice.

"Ha, ha!" cried Nace, "here comes de breakfast leavin's, now who's smartest shall have 'em;" whereupon Nace, his comrade, and the three women, seized a waiter of

fragments of biscuit, broiled ham, coffee, &c., the remains of the breakfast prepared for the white family.

"By gar," cried Nace, "I've got de coffee-pot, and I'll drink dis;" so, without further ceremony, he applied the spout to his mouth, and, sans cream or sugar, he quaffed off the grounds. Jake possessed himself of the ham, whilst the two women held a considerable contest over a biscuit. Blow and lie passed frequently between them. Aunt Polly brandished her skimmer-spoon, as though it were Neptune's trident of authority; still she could not allay the confusion which these excited cormorants raised. The children yelled out and clamored for a bit; the sight and scent of ham and biscuits so tantalized their palates, that they forgot even the terror of the whip. I stood all agape, looking on with amazement.

The two belligerent women stood with eyes blazing like comets, their arms twisted around each other in a very decided and furious rencontre. One of them, losing her balance, fell upon the floor, and, dragging the other after her, they rolled and wallowed in a cloud of dust, whilst the disputed biscuit, in the heat of the affray, had been dropped on the hearth, where, unperceived by the combatants, Nace had possessed himself of it, and was happily masticating it.

Melinda, the girl from whom the waiter had been snatched, doubtless much disappointed by the loss of the debris, returned to the house and made a report of the fracas.

Instantly and unexpectedly, Jones, flaming with rage, stood in the midst of the riotous group. Seizing hold of the women, he knocked them on their heads with his clenched fists.

"Hold, black wretches, come, I will give you a leetle fun; off now to the post."

Then such appeals for mercy, promises of amendment, entreaties, excuses, &c., as the two women made, would have touched a heart of stone; but Jones had power to resist even the prayers of an angel. To him the cries of human suffering and the agony of distress were music. My heart bled when I saw the two victims led away, and I put my hands to my ears to shut out the screams of distress which rang with a strange terror on the morning air. Poor, oppressed African! thorny and rugged is your path of life! Many a secret sigh and bleeding tear attest your cruel martyrdom! Surely He, who careth alike for the high and the low, looks not unmoved upon you, wearing and groaning beneath the pressing burden and galling yoke of a most inhuman bondage. For you there is no broad rock of Hope or Peace to cast its shadow of rest in this "weary land." You must sow in tears and reap in sorrow. But He, who led the children of Israel from the house of bondage and the fetters of captivity, will, in His own inscrutable way, lead you from the condition of despair, even by the pillar of fire and the cloud. Great changes are occurring daily, old constitutions are tottering, old systems, fraught with the cruelty of darker ages, are shaking to their centres. Master minds are everywhere actively engaged. Keen eyes and vigilant hearts are open to the wrongs of the poor, the lowly and the outcast. An avenging angel sits concealed 'mid the drapery of the wasting cloud, ready to pour the vials of God's wrath upon a haughty and oppressive race. In the threatened famine, see we nothing but an accidental failure of the crops? In the exhausted coffers and empty public treasury, is there nothing taught but the lesson of national extravagance? In the virulence of disease, the increasing prevalence of fatal epidemics, what do we read? Send for the seers, the wise men of the nation, and bid them



translate the "mysterious writing on the wall." Ah, well may ye shake, Kings of Mammon, shake upon your tottering throne of human bones! Give o'er your sports, suspend your orgies, dash down the jewelled cup of unhallowed joy, sparkling as it is to the very brim. You must pay, like him of old, the fearful price of sin. God hath not heard, unmoved, the anguished cries of a down-trodden and enslaved nation! And it needs no Daniel to tell, that God hath numbered your Kingdom and it is finished."

As may be supposed, I had little appetite for my breakfast, but I managed to deceive others into the belief that I had made a hearty meal. But those screams from half-famished wretches had a fatal and terrifying fascination; never once could I forget it.

A look of fright was on the face of all. "They be gettin' awful beatin' at the post," muttered Nace, whilst a sardonic smile flitted over his hard features. Was it not sad to behold the depths of degradation into which this creature had fallen? He could smile at the anguish of a fellow-creature. Originally, his nature may have been kind and gentle; but a continuous system of brutality had so deadened his sensibilities, that he had no humanity left. For this, the white man is accountable.

After the breakfast was over, I received a summons to the house. Following Melinda, I passed the door-sill, and stood in the presence of the assembled household. A very strange group I thought them. Two girls were seated beside the uncleared breakfast table, "trying their fortune" (as the phrase goes) with a cup of coffee-grounds and a spoon. The elder of the two was a tall, thin girl, with sharp features, small gray eyes, and red-hair done up in frizettes; the other was a prim, dark-skinned girl, with a set of nondescript features, and hair of no particular hue, or "just any color;"

but with the same harsh expression of face that characterized the elder. As she received the magic cup from her sister, she exclaimed, "La, Jane, it will only be two years until you are married," and made a significant grimace at her father (Mr. Peterkin), who sat near the window indulging in the luxury of a cob-pipe. The taller girl turned toward me, and asked,

"Father, is that the new girl you bought at old Nelson's sale?"

"Yes, that's the gal. Does she suit you?"

"Yes, but dear me! how very light she is--almost white! I know she will be impudent."

"She has come to the wrong place for the practice of that article," suggested the other.

"Yes, gal, you has got to mind them ar' wimmen," said Mr. Peterkin to me, as he pointed toward his daughters.

"Father, I do wish you would quit that vulgarism; say girl, not gal, and ladies, not women."

"Oh, I was never edicated, like you."

"Educated is the word."

"Oh, confound your dictionaries! Ever since that school-marm come out from Yankee-land, these neighborhood gals talk so big, nobody can understand 'em."

### **Chapter III.**

*THE YANKEE SCHOOL-MISTRESS--HER PHILOSOPHY--  
THE AMERICAN ABOLITIONISTS.*

THE family with whom I now found a home, consisted of Mr. Peterkin and his two daughters, Jane and Matilda, and a son, John, much younger than the ladies.

The death of Mrs. Peterkin had occurred about three years before I went to live with them. The girls had been very well educated by a Miss Bradly, from Massachusetts, a spinster of "no particular age." From her, the Misses Peterkin learned to set a great value upon correct and elegant language. She was the model and instructress of the country round; for, under her jurisdiction, nearly all the farmers' daughters had been initiated into the mysteries of learning. Scattered about, over the house, I used to frequently find odd leaves of school-books, elementary portions of natural sciences, old readers, story-books, novels, &c. These I eagerly devoured; but I had to be very secret about it, studying by dying embers, reading by moon-light, sun-rise, &c. Had I been discovered, a severe punishment would have followed. Miss Jane used to say, "a literary negro was disgusting, not to be tolerated." Though she quarrelled with the vulgar talk and bad pronunciation of her father, he was made of too rough material to receive a polish; and, though Miss Bradly had improved the minds of the girls, her efforts to soften their hearts had met with no success. They were the same harsh, cold and selfish girls that she had found them. It was Jane's boast that she had whipped more negroes than any other girl of her age. Matilda, though less severe, had still a touch of the tigress.

This family lived in something like "style." They were famed for their wealth and social position throughout the

neighborhood. The house was a low cottage structure, with large and airy apartments; an arching piazza ran the whole length of the building, and around its trellised balustrade the clematis vine twined in rich luxuriance. A primrose-walk led up to the door, and the yard blossomed like a garden, with the fairest flowers. It was a very Paradise of homes; pity, ah pity 'twas, that human fiends marred its beauty. There the sweet flowers bloomed, the young birds warbled, pure springs gushed forth with limpid joy--there truly, "All, save the spirit of man, was divine." The traveller often paused to admire the tasteful arrangements of the grounds, the neat and artistic plan of the house, and the thorough "air" of everything around. It seemed to bespeak refined minds, and delicate, noble natures; but oh, the flowers were no symbols of the graces of their hearts, for the dwellers of this highly-adorned spot were people of coarse natures, rough and cruel as barbarians. The nightly stars and the gentle moon, the deep glory of the noontide, or the blowing of twilight breezes over this chosen home, had no power to ennoble or elevate their souls. Acts of diabolical cruelty and wickedness were there perpetrated without the least pang of remorse or regret. Whilst the white portion of the family were revelling in luxury, the slaves were denied the most ordinary necessities. The cook, who prepared the nicest dainties, the most tempting viands, had to console herself with a scanty diet, coarse enough to shock even a beggar. What wonder, then, if the craving of the stomach should allow her no escape from downright theft! Who is there that could resist? Where is the honesty that could not, under such circumstances, find an argument to justify larceny?

Every evening Miss Bradly came to spend an hour or so with them. The route from the school to her boarding-house wound by Mr. Peterkin's residence, and the temptation to talk to the young ladies, who were emphatically the belles

of the neighborhood, was too great for resistance. This lady was of that class of females which we meet in every quarter of the globe,--of perfectly kind intentions, yet without the independence necessary for their open and free expression. Bred in the North, and having from her infancy imbibed the spirit of its free institutions, in her secret soul she loathed the abomination of slavery, every pulse of her heart cried out against it, yet with a strange compliance she lived in its midst, never once offering an objection or an argument against it. It suited her policy to laugh with the pro-slavery man at the fanaticism of the Northern Abolitionist. With a Judas-like hypocrisy, she sold her conscience for silver; and for a mess of pottage, bartered the noble right of free expression. 'Twas she, base renegade from a glorious cause, who laughed loudest and repeated wholesale libels and foul aspersions upon the able defenders of abolition--noble and generous men, lofty philanthropists, who are willing, for the sake of principle, to wear upon their brows the mark of social and political ostracism! But a day is coming, a bright millennial day, when the names of these inspired prophets shall be inscribed proudly upon the litany of freedom; when their noble efforts for social reform shall be told in wondering pride around the winter's fire. Then shall their fame shine with a glory which no Roman tradition can eclipse. Freed from calumny, the names of Parker, Seward and Sumner, will be ranked, as they deserve to be, with Washington, Franklin and Henry. All glory to the American Abolitionists. Though they must now possess their souls in patience, and bear the brand of social opprobrium, yet will posterity accord them the meed of everlasting honor. They, "who sow in dishonor shall be raised in glory." Already the watchman upon the tower has discerned the signal. A light beameth in the East, which no man can quench. A fire has broken forth, which needs only a breath to fan it into a flame. The eternal law of sovereign

right will vindicate itself. In the hour of feasting and revelry the dreadful bolt of retribution fell upon Gomorrah.

## **Chapter IV**

### *CONVERSATION WITH MISS BRADLY--A LIGHT BREAKS THROUGH THE DARKNESS.*

I HAD been living with Mr. Peterkin about three years, during which time I had frequently seen Miss Bradly. One evening when she called (as was her custom after the adjournment of school), she found, upon inquiry, that the young ladies had gone out, and would not probably be back for several hours. She looked a little disconcerted, and seemed doubtful whether she would go home or remain. I had often observed her attentively watching me, yet I could not interpret the look; sometimes I thought it was of deep, earnest pity. Then it appeared only an anxious curiosity; and as commiseration was a thing which I seldom met with, I tried to guard my heart against anything like hope or trust; but on this afternoon I was particularly struck by her strange and irresolute manner. She turned several times as if to leave, then suddenly stopped, and, looking very earnestly at me, asked, "Did you say the girls would not return for several hours?"

Upon receiving an answer in the affirmative, she hesitated a moment, and then inquired for Mr. Peterkin. He was also from home, and would probably be absent for a day or two. "Is there no white person about the place?" she asked, with some trepidation.

"No one is here but the slaves," I replied, perhaps in a sorrowful tone, for the word "slave" always grated upon my