

Chattanooga

F.A. MITCHELL.
LATE U.S.A.

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"I don't want nuffit but sump'n ter eat. I can sleep at my aunt's, ober de hill."

"Waal, take hold hyar for a spell; I'm boiled." And she drew away from the stove and mopped her face.

Souri took hold and showed a pleasing aptitude at baking corn bread and boiling some coarse meat which simmered in a pot on the stove.

Presently the jailer came in, and taking some of the food lifted a trap door and lowered a meal to those below in the black hole.

"Hyar's a gal," said his wife, "ez hankers for do some cooken for me." "Ain't got nothin ter pay with."

"Don't want no pay," said Souri. "I've starved. Want sump'n ter eat."

"Waal, y' wou'd git much hyar," said the jailer, "but I reckon it's good nuff for niggers."

So Souri was allowed to help, but there was no understanding that her services should extend beyond the present moment.

She was leaning over the stove when Mark was brought back. He had just been sentenced, and there was a haggard, hopeless look on his face as he passed the girl without noticing her. He was put in his room, and it was hard for Souri to keep from following to tell him of her coming. Jakey came in with the party and went with Mark into his room.

In the afternoon Souri saw that she must make work for herself or there would be no excuse for her to stay about the place. So, without saying a word, she took a pail of water and a scrubbing brush and began to scrub the floor. Then she suggested to Mrs. Triggs that she sweep her bedroom. The woman concluded that, as it had not been swept for more than a month, Souri "mought's well" do it, especially as the girl seemed to be willing to do all this work for a little boiled meat and corn bread.

"Ye' don't look right smart, Miss Triggs," said Souri, after cooking the supper and eating her share, "'n I don' know whar I gwine 't git any breakfast less I come 'n cook fur y'."

Mrs. Triggs succeeded in getting her husband's consent to Souri coming back in the morning, and the man went out to the gate with her and told her if the guard did not pass her in to send for him.

She was at the jail bright and early and got in on telling the sentinel that she was Mrs. Triggs' servant. She cooked the breakfast, and when she saw Triggs about to carry Mark's meat and corn bread into his cell she offered to do it, but Triggs paid no attention to the offer and carried it in himself.

Then she asked Mrs. Triggs when she did her washing, and as the old woman had no regular time and not many clothes Souri offered to do what there was. When she went out to hang up the clothes to dry Jakey was in the yard. She called him to her and in a whisper made herself known. Jakey, who was wondering what had become of the message he had sent, was both overjoyed and astonished. He turned two or three somersaults on the ground and otherwise demonstrated his childishness to Mrs. Triggs, who at that moment appeared at a window, but not before Souri had told Jakey to inform Mark of her presence, and that she would try to get into his room as soon as she could be entrusted with a meal for him.

Again at noon she offered to take in his dinner, but without success. She was at her wits' end for an excuse to stay about till supper time, but thinking that Mrs. Triggs' wardrobe might need mending she offered to undertake the task, and spent the afternoon over the old woman's threadbare garments.

All this while Souri was thinking of a plan for Mark's escape. She learned that he was to be hanged in a few days and knew there was little time. The most natural plan under the circumstances occurred to her—a plan by which more prisoners have made their escape than any other one method—walking out before the guard in women's clothes. Souri determined, if she could secure an entrance into Mark's room at any time after dark, she would give him her dress and sunbonnet and leave him to make an attempt. Then she began to think over a plan to gain an entrance at a specified time.

In the evening her patience was rewarded. Mark's supper was standing on the stove. Triggs was not in the jail, and Mrs. Triggs went down the stairs outside to get something she wanted in the yard.

Souri caught up the supper and walked straight past the guard into Mark's room with it. Mark, who had been informed of her coming by Jakey, was expecting her. When he saw the mulatto girl he grasped her hand.

"Souri! God bless you!" he said in a low tone.

"I ain't got no time ter talk. I'm watchin' for a chance ter giv' y' my clothes ter go out with."

"But what would you and Jakey do?" he asked hurriedly.

"Th' ain't goen ter hang a boy or a gal. Pertend ter be sick ter morrow 'n ask fur some medicine. Mobbie they'll send me ter git it."

With that she went out. When Mrs. Triggs came in she was bending over the stove.

"Whar's the Yank's supper?" she asked.

"Oh, 'twas gitten cold, 'n I toted him in ter him."

Souri made herself so useful th she was permitted to stay about the

next day. She managed to keep an indifferent mien to all about her, but within there was a tempest. The next morning Mark was to swing, and preparations were being made for the purpose.

"If there war only time," thought Souri, "I mought help him away, but tomorrow" and no one being near to see her she wrung her hands. There seemed but little chance that, having only one evening to effect her plans, she would succeed. It could only be by good luck.

In the afternoon Mark began to moan. Triggs went in to see him and asked what was the matter. Mark told him that he was ill. As the afternoon wore away the prisoner groaned and moaned till Triggs went back to him, and Mark told him that he thought he was going to die. Mrs. Triggs carried in his supper, but he refused to eat.

"What y' got?" she asked.

"Cholera, I reckon."

"Good Lord!"

"I want some medicine," said Mark. "If you'll send the black girl for it I'll pay you and her well."

"Y' ain't got no money."

"Yes, I have, but y' don't know whar it is."

Mrs. Triggs reported the matter to her husband, who, fearing that the prisoner would not be in condition for the hanging which was to occur the next morning, consented. Mark was furnished with a scrap of paper and a pen, and wrote the name of a mixture he remembered for cholera morbus. Triggs told Souri to warn the druggist not to send poison, for he feared Mark might be intending to make way with himself to escape the gallows. She was furnished with money extracted from Jakey's boot and hurried to town.

When she came back it was quite dark. Only a faint line of light was left in the west. As she entered she met Triggs going out of the gate. She quickly mounted the staircase with her heart in her throat. As soon as she entered the building she saw that Mrs. Triggs was not there; she was in her room. Souri went on tiptoe to Mrs. Triggs' door and looked in. The woman was sitting on a chair by the window waiting her return. Souri went as quickly as she could go without being heard to the prisoner's room.

"Medicine," she said to the guard and passed in without waiting permission, leaving the door partly closed behind her.

"Here, quick! A burnt cork. Rub 't on yer face," she whispered.

Mark seized the cork and applied it. Souri stood in the corner with her back to him, and taking off her dress threw it to him. Mark took off his outer clothes and threw them to her. Each put on the other's garments, Mark pulling his head in the sunbonnet.

Looking the gratitude he did not dare to speak; pressing her hand and carrying it to his lips, Mark passed out.

The guard wondered why Souri looked so tall and strapping.

Going out of the door and down the stairs, Mark went to the gate and walked by the sentinel posted there, as Souri had often done.

The guard also noticed how tall she looked and called to her; but by this time Mark was well out of his reach and pretended not to hear. The sentinel, not thinking it worth while to follow and leave his post unprotected, let him go and thought no more about the matter.

CHAPTER XIII. FLOATING FOR LIFE.



She took the candle and led the way to the dining room above.

Mark had very little idea how long a time would elapse before it would be discovered that Souri was in his place and he had escaped. It might be a few minutes, it might be half an hour, it might possibly be a little longer, though of this he had little hope. He believed that within half an hour he would be pursued, and as he was well acquainted with the methods in vogue in the south at the time he knew he would be traced by bloodhounds.

He had been about the town enough to know the direction of the river and started toward it. During the day he had thought over what he would do in case Souri's ruse should be successful, and made up his mind that any delay in getting across the river would be fatal. He was at home in the water, and determined that he would not attempt to find a boat, but would plunge in and swim for his life. The width of the river at Chattanooga was only about three-quarters of a mile, and Mark did not regard this a great distance for a good swimmer. Once across the dogs would have to pick up the scent on the other side, and if he should permit the

current to carry him far down the stream the difficulty in doing so would be greatly increased.

Though Mark had been in prison but a few days the transition from dress to freedom was very grateful. It was a soft summer evening, and the larger stars had already begun to shine. Casting a glance to the right he saw a streak of light over Missionary ridge and knew that before long he would be at a disadvantage from the rising of a full moon. He walked briskly whenever any person was in sight, and when he thought that he was unobserved he ran. When he first left the jailyard his heart was in his throat. His agitation diminished as he proceeded, and in five minutes he had come down like one in a race to a concentration of all his faculties—a gathering of all his forces for the struggle between life and death before him. With these well in hand the dreaded scene of the morrow acted as a tremendous and effective stimulant.

No one of the few people who passed the strapping negro girl, whose face was hidden within the blue check sunbonnet, dreamed that a Union soldier was passing; that the scaffold was being cheated; that a messenger with the secret of one of the most important moves any Confederate general had made or was destined to make during the war was on his way north in the person of the negro woman hurrying on toward the river. And it was fortunate for the flying soldier they did not, or he would never even have got half a mile from the jail.

He sped onward, running and walking briskly alternately, till he came to a place where a board fence was capped by a narrow strip. He mounted it and walked as far as the fence extended, perhaps a hundred yards, hoping by this means to throw the dogs off the scent for a few minutes, and thus gain a little time. Then he jumped down and hurried forward. A man passed and called to him, but he paid no attention to the call, and the man stood looking after him, doubtless suspecting that the girl was a runaway slave.

At last the grateful sight of the river met his gaze. It cheered him and seemed to beckon him on to rest upon its bosom, or, as an alternative with the dreadful tragedy of the morning, to find oblivion beneath its surface. Between the river before him, and the jail, the dogs and the gibbet, for a time his feelings of hope and fear neutralized each other and left his faculties free to act with perfect coolness.

He stood for a moment beneath a low clump of trees on the bank listening and looking up and down the river. A boat was passing, and he felt it necessary to wait for it to go by. He lost five minutes, but it seemed half an hour. Then taking off his dress and shoes and sunbonnet he put the dress and the shoes in the bonnet and tied the strings around his neck, resting the bundle on his back. Going down to the margin, and again listening a moment to make sure he was not observed, he waded out as far as he could touch bottom, and then began to swim.

As it was midsummer he had expected to find the water warm. His expectations were realized to a reasonable degree, and he felt that he could remain in it a long while without being chilled. His plan was to drift down a considerable distance. He might be expected to swim across as rapidly as he could, and the current in this case would land him perhaps a mile below the town. Those who would follow him with dogs would doubtless track him to the river margin, then take the dogs across and endeavor to pick up the scent some distance below on the other side. Mark had weighed all these circumstances, and determined to drift down as far as possible, land at the mouth of a creek if he could find one, enter it and swim or walk up it in the water, thus rendering it difficult for the dogs to track him.

He swam slowly till he reached the middle of the river; then, floating with scarcely any motion of his hands and feet, he permitted himself to drift down with the current. A favorite way with him, when a boy, of resting in the water, had been to float on his back. Unmindful of the wetting he would give the clothes tied around his neck, he turned over and drifted with his arms spread beside him, his eyes turned directly to the sky.

It may seem singular that a man who was being carried from so dreadful a death should have thought of anything else. But Mark did not want to think of it. He had never been unmoved except after his sentence, with an almost certain execution before him, and felt it best to let his mind drift into other channels. Then danger is not, and was not, especially with Mark, to be compared with certain destruction. The soldier on the field of battle is a different man from one who awaits the bullets of a file of soldiers drawn up in line to take his life deliberately. Mark was a changed man from the moment he got into the river, for he then felt that he had a chance for his life.

In the position on his back he could only look upward at the stars. There was the great dome above him spangled with myriads of bright points and spanned by the "milky way." He had always been fond of the stars, and in order to divert his mind picked out some of his favorites and traced a few constellations with which he was familiar. In this way he diverted his mind until his nerves became quite steady.

His observations were suddenly checked by a sound. It was very faint, but enough to freeze the marrow in his bones. It was the distant bark of a dog. He listened and presently could hear more. Evidently there was a pack. They drew nearer. Then they ceased for awhile. Perhaps they had come to the place where he had walked on the fence. Then the barks began again, growing only slightly louder as they came, for Mark was floating rapidly from the point where he had entered the river.

He involuntarily turned over on his chest and struck out lustily. The current was swift; swimming would not add to his safety—it would only tax his strength and render him more liable to

recapture on the other shore. But swim he must. With the terrible sound of those dogs in his ears he could not lie idly on the water and leave the current to bear him onward.

Soon there came another cessation of sound from the dogs far above on the shore, and Mark judged that they had lost the scent at the place where he had entered the water.

Then he began to think of Souri and Jakey. What had they done to Souri when they had discovered her trick? Would they punish her? Would they treat the boy harshly? He was comforted with the thought that there would be nothing gained by this—it would not bring the prisoner back—but he muttered a prayer for the girl who had placed herself behind those prison bars, who had incurred the rage of his jailers to save him.

He heard no more of the dogs and floated on, swimming and resting alternately. The high bluffs of Moccasin point were before him on his right. An owl on their summit, watching the rising moon, occasionally gave a dismal hoot, the intervals being supplied by the melancholy whistling. The current bore him on around the point, carrying him in near the shore where he had passed the picket with the sleeping Jakey in his arms a few nights before. So close was he that he could see a man walking back and forth on the very beat of the oar he had passed. As he drifted away he saw the relief approach and the picket changed.

He was borne directly under Lookout mountain, and on down for a mile to a point where the river makes another bend. Here the bank was low, and as Mark was getting chilled he swam to the southern bank for rest. He laid himself down for a few moments on the dry ground, and then getting up walked back and forth rapidly, swinging his arms at the same time to restore circulation and fit him to endure a longer stay in the water. He looked about for some piece of wood on which he might float farther. There were logs of various sizes scattered around, but most of them were rotten. He was so much at home in the water that he was not disappointed on failing to find one suitable to his purpose.

Plunging in again he moved on down past the bluffs at the foot of the Raccoon mountains, swimming on his chest most of the time and keeping a lookout before him. He had not passed any boats, at least none near him, and did not fear this danger, but he wanted to keep his surroundings well in view in order to know his location. The moon was now well up, and he could see quite distinctly. Below and to his right a boat was putting out from the east shore. It was larger than an ordinary skiff, but as it was in a shadow he could not tell what kind of a craft it was. As it came over the river at right angles with the shore, and Mark was drifting toward it, he soon found that he was in danger of meeting it in the middle of the stream. The current was quite rapid, and before he was aware of it he was close to the boat. It was evidently a ferryboat, and Mark, who knew the location of Brown's ferry from the maps, judged that it was the boat belonging there.

But Mark was concerned with other considerations besides his location just then. He was too late to get out of the way unobserved by swimming aside. He made up his mind in a twinkling what to do. Drawing several long breaths he filled his lungs with air, and then putting his head down and his feet up he threw himself under water. He had often been beneath the surface for a considerable time, but never as long as now. He remained under as long as he thought he possibly could, and then staid awhile longer. When he came to light again the boat was a hundred yards above him and to the west of him.

Another mile brought him to an island. He remembered it on his map as William's island, and knew that it was about two miles long. He recalled the fact that the only creek flowing into the river in this vicinity entered it midway between the north and south end of this island, and on his right, if he remembered aright. He had about a mile to go to reach the mouth of this creek.

Striking out, he directed his course to the eastward of the island and swam very near to the east bank of the river. Along this he floated with scarcely a stroke, except to keep in close to the shore, watching eagerly for the mouth of the creek. Fortunately when he reached it he discovered it, and where he had supposed he would find it. With a few lusty strokes he was in it and soon at a place where he could rest in the water with his feet on terra firma.

But the knowledge that the dogs would soon be upon him prevented a rest of long duration. Perhaps a party would cross the neck of Moccasin point, thus cutting off a greater part of the long distance over which he had floated. The thought added new terror, and he began to wade and to swim alternately, as was necessary, up the creek. Presently he came to the crossing of a road. He drew himself up on to it and looked around. As a scout he had long been accustomed to keep his mind fixed on points along the paths he traveled, in order that he might know them again. As soon as he saw the little bridge—if it could be called a bridge—he knew that he was on the Chattanooga pike, over which he had passed a few days before, and at the junction of the creek running near the Fains' plantation.

Mark had not considered what he would do in case he should succeed in getting safely across the river. While in jail he felt that once out and across the Tennessee he would feel assured of safety. Now this had been accomplished, he began to realize that but half the battle had been won. Indeed there were more chances that he would be retaken than that he would ever reach the Union lines.

He wrung the water from his clothes and put them on, shielding his face with his sunbonnet, for though he had no mirror to inspect his features, he fancied they must be streaked with burnt cork softened by water. Then setting out toward the Fain plantation he deliberated what he should do

it was now between eleven and twelve o'clock—so Mark judged by the moon being on the meridian—and he knew that all the Fains were asleep. He reached the corner of the yard and was about to enter it when he heard a clattering of hoofs behind him. He had hardly time to vault the fence and crouch behind it when a troop of horsemen crossed the bridge over the creek. They drew rein on the latter side not a hundred yards away from him. Mark heard a voice:

"Lieutenant, take ten men and scour the bank of the river from this on to the next creek, where I will make another detail."

The lieutenant with his men broke away from the column, which moved forward, passing within fifty feet of where Mark lay crouching.

Mark was for a few moments so completely overcome by the narrowness of his escape that he seemed to have no power to move. If he had been five minutes later, his capture would have been almost certain, for they would likely have discovered him between the road and the river, which space they were evidently intending to scour.

He got up, and getting on the outside of the fence walked beside a portion of it which led back from the road, designing to enter the negro quarters in the rear. He feared that the dogs were loose in the yard, and that he would have trouble with them; he therefore stole along till he came to the nearest point to one of the negro cabins. A dog sleeping in the moonlight near the house gave a low moan. Mark paused a moment and listened; then entering the grounds he walked in a stooping posture, keeping one of the cabins between him and the dog. He wanted to reach the rear door.

Mark felt assured that unless he could be concealed in some place where searchers would not be likely to intrude he would be lost. He well knew that every foot of ground within five or ten miles of Chattanooga would be alive with people hunting for him. The negro cabins would not be safe, for no searching party would respect them. There was but one chance for him. He must effect an entrance into the Fain house, and that with the knowledge as to his true character of but one person—Laura Fain.

He reached the negro cabin and knocked.

"Who dar'?"

"Whar Uncle Dan'l sleep?"

"Nex' to de left."

Mark went as directed and called up Uncle Daniel. He heard a movement as of some one getting up, and presently the old man stood at the open door.

"Uncle, I've got a message fo' yo' young mistress."

"Ho' from?"

"De po' white man whar war hyar las' week wid de little brudder."

"Nice man, dat. Hab he got in trouble?"

"Nebber mind dat, uncle. Go in de house 'n wake up Missie Laura."

"Ain't got no key."

"Can't you wake up some one inside?"

"Why don't yo' wait till morrow?"

"Can't do dat no how. De message mus' be giben at once."

"Waal," said Daniel at last, "I do what I can fo' dat man; he berry fine gentleman ef he war po' white."

Mark followed the old man to the rear door of the basement. On the way a huge dog bounded at them, but seeing Daniel's fierceness ended in play. Daniel succeeded in waking a negro woman who slept within; the door was opened, and they stepped inside.

"Go tell Missie Laura a cullud gal want to speak to her right off. Say she got message from de man whar war hyar wid de little brudder," said Daniel.

"At dis time o' night?"

"Yas; de message mus' be deliberated right away," said Mark. "Don't wake no one but Missie Laura. Tread sedit."

The woman lighted a candle and went off with it grumbling, leaving Mark and Daniel in the dark. They waited for perhaps ten minutes, when they heard steps and saw the light returning. The negro woman was followed by Laura Fain, dressed in a wrapper. She knew Mark from the moment she saw him, but pretended only to see a negro girl.

"Hab message fo' yo', Missie Laura, but can't tell it to yo' widout dese niggers git away."

"Come with me."

She took the candle and led the way to the dining room above, leaving the two colored people below.

"Why in heaven's name did you come back here?"

"It was a choice between life and death. I escaped this evening from Chattanooga, where I was to be hanged to-morrow morning. Every place of concealment on this side of the river will be entered and searched. If concealed in this house, occupied by a family of white people and Confederates, I may not be found. Otherwise my recapture is certain."

She thought a moment, rubbing her palms together, as was her habit when excited. Then she called to the servants below:

"Go to bed, Uncle Daniel, and you, too, auntie. This girl is worn out with traveling, and I am going to fix a place for her to sleep."

Then turning to Mark she motioned him to follow her.

They went up two flights of stairs, stepping on tiptoe, and at last reached a landing from which a pair of steps led to a trap door.

"Go up there," she whispered.

Mark climbed the stairs, pushed the trap open and entered the inclosure of the roof. Before lowering the door he looked back to whisper a "God bless you," but all was dark. Laura had gone.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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WHITE HOUSE CIVILITIES. [From the Philadelphia Times.] It is an unwritten law of etiquette that the family of the outgoing president should receive the family of the incoming president at the White House on inauguration day, and immediately after the ceremonies at the Capital. President and Mrs. Cleveland made an exception and asked President elect and Mrs. Harrison to dine with them at the White House on the evening preceding the day of the inauguration. They did not, however, remain in the White House on inauguration day, and when President and Mrs. Harrison went there the employees and servants alone received them. President Harrison will observe the usual etiquette and will omit no courtesy. After the ceremonies at the capital Mr. Harrison will return to the White House, where Mrs. McKee will remain, and as the outgoing hostess, will assist him in receiving President and Mrs. Cleveland.