

An Account from the Slave Trade: Love Story of Jeffrey and Dorcas



Excerpt from *What Became of the Slaves on a Georgia Plantation? Great Auction Sale of Slaves* by Price M. Butler

Jeffrey, chattel No. 319, marked as a "prime cotton hand," aged 23 years, was put up. Jeffrey being a likely lad, the competition was high. The first bid was \$1,100, and he was finally sold for \$1,310. Jeffrey was sold alone; he had no incumbrance in the shape of an aged father or mother, who must necessarily be sold with him; nor had he any children, for Jeffrey was not married. But Jeffrey, chattel No. 319, being human in his affections, had dared to cherish a love for Dorcas, chattel No. 278; and Dorcas, not having the fear of her master before her eyes, had given her heart to Jeffrey. Whether what followed was a just retribution on Jeffrey and Dorcas, for daring to take such liberties with their master's property as to exchange hearts, or whether it only goes to prove that with black as with white the saying holds, that "the course of true love never did run smooth," cannot now be told. Certain it is that these two lovers were not to realize to consummation of their hopes in happy wedlock. Jeffrey and Dorcas had told their loves, had exchanged their simple vows, and were betrothed, each to the other as dear, and each by the other as fondly beloved as though their skins had been of fairer color. And who shall say that, in the sight of Heaven and all holy angels, these two humble hearts were not as closely wedded as any two of the prouder race that call them slaves?

Be that as it may, Jeffrey was sold. He finds out his new-master; and hat in hand, the big tears standing in his eyes, and his voice trembling with emotion, he stands before that master and tells his simple story, praying that his betrothed may be bought with him. Though his voice trembles, there is no embarrassment in his manner; his fears have killed all the bashfulness that would naturally attend such a recital to a stranger, and before unsympathizing witnesses; he feels that he is pleading for the happiness of her he loves, as well as for his own, and his tale is told in a frank and manly way.

"I loves Dorcas, young Mas'r; I loves her well an' true; she says she loves me, and I know she does; de good Lord knows I loves her better than I loves any one in de wide world--never can love another woman half as well. Please buy Dorcas, Mas'r. We're be good sarvants to you long as we live. We're be married right soon, young Mas'r, and de chillun will be healthy and strong, Mas'r, and dey'll be good sarvants, too. Please buy Dorcas, young Mas'r. We loves each other a heap--do, really true, Mas'r."

Jeffrey then remembers that no loves and hopes of his are to enter into the bargain at all, but in the earnestness of his love he has forgotten to base his plea on other ground till now, when he bethinks him and continues, with his voice not trembling now, save with eagerness to prove how worthy of many dollars is the maiden of his heart:

"Young Mas'r, Dorcas prime woman--A1 woman, sa. Tall gal, sir; long arms, strong, healthy, and can do a heap of work in a day. She is one of de best rice hands on de whole plantation; worth \$1,200 easy, Mas'r, an' fus'rate bargain at that."

The man seems touched by Jeffrey's last remarks, and bids him fetch out his "gal, and let's see what she looks like."

Jeffrey goes into the long room, and presently returns with Dorcas, looking very sad and self-possessed, without a particle of embarrassment at the trying position in which she is placed. She makes the accustomed curtsy, and stands meekly with her hands clasped across her bosom, waiting the result. The buyer regards her with a critical eye, and growls in a low voice that the "gal has good p'int." Then he goes on to a more minute and careful examination of her working abilities. He turns her around, makes her stoop, and walk; and then he takes off her turban to look at her head that no wound or disease be concealed by the gay handkerchief; he looks at her teeth, and feels of her arms, and at last announces himself pleased with the result of his observations, whereat Jeffrey, who has stood near, trembling with eager hope, is overjoyed, and he smiles for the first time. The buyer then crowns Jeffrey's happiness by making a promise that he will buy her, if the price isn't run up too high. And the

two lovers step aside and congratulate each other on their good fortune. But Dorcas is not to be sold till the next day, and there are twenty-four long hours of feverish expectation.

Early next morning is Jeffrey alert, and, hat in hand, encouraged to unusual freedom by the greatness of the stake for which he plays, he addresses every buyer, and of all who will listen he begs the boon of a word to be spoken to his new master to encourage him to buy Dorcas. And all the long morning he speaks in his homely way with all who know him, that they will intercede to save his sweetheart from being sold away from him forever. No one has the heart to deny a word of promise and encouragement to the poor fellow, and, joyous with so much kindness, his hopes and spirits gradually rise until he feels almost certain that the wish of heart will be accomplished. And Dorcas, too, is smiling, for is not Jeffrey's happiness her own?

At last comes the trying moment, and Dorcas steps up on the stand.

But now a most unexpected feature in the drama is for the first time unmasked: *Dorcas is not to be sold alone*, but with a family of four others. Full of dismay, Jeffrey looks to his master, who shakes his head, for, although he might be induced to buy Dorcas alone, he has no use for the rest of the family. Jeffrey reads his doom in his master's look, and turns away, the tears streaming down his honest face.

So Dorcas is sold, and her toiling life is to be spent in the cotton fields of South Carolina, while Jeffrey goes to the rice plantation of the Great Swamp.

And to-morrow, Jeffrey and Dorcas are to say their tearful fare-well, and go their separate ways in life, to meet no more as mortal beings.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Who was Jeffrey?

- A a slave
- B a slave owner
- C an auctioneer
- D "Chattel No. 278"

2. A critical moment in the account occurs when Jeffrey asked his new master to buy Dorcas. Why did Jeffrey ask his new master to buy Dorcas?

- A because she was a good worker
- B because he loved her
- C because he wanted to protect her
- D because they were married

3. Jeffrey's master agreed to buy Dorcas because he thought she would be a good worker. What evidence from the passage supports this conclusion?

- A "The buyer then crowns Jeffrey's happiness by making a promise that he will buy her, if the price isn't run up too high."
- B "She makes the accustomed curtsy, and stands meekly with her hands clasped across her bosom, waiting the result. The buyer regards her with a critical eye."
- C "Then he goes on to a more minute and careful examination of her working abilities. He turns her around, makes her stoop, and walk."
- D "'Young Mas'r, Dorcas prime woman--A1 woman, sa. Tall gal, sir; long arms, strong, healthy, and can do a heap of work in a day.'"

4. Read the following sentence from the passage: "Hat in hand, the big tears standing in his eyes, and his voice trembling with emotion, he stands before that master and tells his simple story, praying that his betrothed may be bought with him."

Based on this evidence, how was Jeffrey feeling?

- A angry
- B excited
- C proud
- D passionate

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A two slaves who were in love
- B an auction where slaves were sold
- C two slaves on a rice plantation
- D the wedding of two slaves

6. Read the following sentences: "We're be good sarvants to you long as we live. We're be married right soon, young Mas'r, and de chillun will be healthy and strong, Mas'r, and dey'll be good sarvants, too."

Why did the author write Jeffrey's dialogue this way?

- A to show how earnest Jeffrey was in his plea
- B to convey how much Jeffrey loved Dorcas
- C to express Jeffrey's status as a slave
- D to convey how Jeffrey sounded when he spoke

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Jeffrey's master agreed to buy Dorcas if the price does not get too high. _____, Jeffrey was overjoyed.

- A Initially
- B As a result
- C However
- D For instance

8. Why were Jeffrey and Dorcas forced to say a "tearful fare-well"?

9. Explain why Jeffrey’s master did not buy Dorcas.

10. Explain how the saying “the course of true love never did run smooth” relates to the passage.
