

JEFF'S TREASURE

E. P. Roe

Table of Contents

<u>JEFF'S TREASURE</u>	1
<u>E. P. Roe</u>	1
<u>CHAPTER I. ITS DISCOVERY</u>	1
<u>CHAPTER II. ITS INFLUENCE</u>	4

JEFF'S TREASURE

E. P. Roe

This page copyright © 2002 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

- CHAPTER I. ITS DISCOVERY
- CHAPTER II. ITS INFLUENCE

CHAPTER I. ITS DISCOVERY

Jeff, the hero of my tale, was as truly a part of the Southern Confederacy as the greater Jeff at Richmond. Indeed, were it not for the humbler Jeff and the class he represented, the other Jeff would never have attained his eminence.

Jeff's prospects were as dark as himself. He owned nothing, not even himself, yet his dream of riches is the motive of my tale. Begarded as a chattel, for whom a bill of sale would have been made as readily as for a bullock, he proved himself a man and brother by a prompt exhibition of traits too common to human nature when chance and some heroism on his part gave into his hands the semblance of a fortune.

Jeff was a native Virginian and belonged to an F.F.V. in a certain practical, legal sense which thus far had not greatly disturbed his equanimity. His solid physique and full shining face showed that slavery had brought no horrors into his experience. He had indulged, it is true, in vague yearnings for freedom, but these had been checked by hearing that liberty meant "working for Yankees" appalling news to an indolent soul. He was house-servant and man-of-all-work in a family whose means had always been limited, and whose men were in the Confederate army. His "missus" evinced a sort of weary content when he had been scolded or threatened into the completion of his tasks by nightfall. He then gave her and her daughters some compensation for their trials with him by producing his fiddle and making the warm summer evening resonant with a kind of music which the negro only can evoke. Jeff was an artist, and had a complacent consciousness of the fact. He was a living instance of the truth that artists are born, not made. No knowledge of this gifted class had ever suggested kinship; he did not even know what the word meant, but when his cheek rested lovingly against his violin he felt that he was made of different clay from other "niggahs." During the day he indulged in moods by the divine right and impulse of genius, imitating his gifted brothers unconsciously. In waiting on the table, washing dishes, and hoeing the garden, he was as great a laggard as Pegasus would have been if compelled to the labors of a cart-horse; but when night came, and uncongenial toil was over, his soul expanded. His corrugated brow unwrinkled itself; his great black fingers flew back and forth over the strings as if driven by electricity; and electric in effect were the sounds produced by his swiftly-glancing bow.

While the spirit of music so filled his heart that he could play to the moon and silent stars, an audience inspired him with tenfold power, especially if the floor was cleared or a smooth sward selected for a dance. Rarely did he play long before all who could trip a measure were on their feet, while even the superannuated nodded and kept time, sighing that they were old. His services naturally came into great demand, and he was catholic in granting them his mistress in good-natured tolerance acceding to requests which promised many forgetful hours at a time when the land was shadowed by war. So it happened that Jeff was often at the more pretending residences of the neighborhood, sometimes fiddling in the detached kitchen of a Southern mansion to the shuffle of heavy feet, again in the lighted parlor, especially when Confederate troops were quartered near. It was then that his strains

JEFF'S TREASURE

took on their most inspiring and elevated character. He gave wings to the dark-eyed Southern girls; their feet scarcely touched the floor as they whirled with their cavaliers in gray, or threaded the mazes of the cotillon then and there in vogue.

Nor did he disdain an invitation to a crossroads tavern, frequented by poor whites and enlisted men, or when the nights were warm, to a moonlit sward, on which he would invite his audience to a reel which left all breathless. While there was a rollicking element in the strains of his fiddle which a deacon could not resist, he, with the intuition of genius, adapted himself to the class before him. In the parlor, he called off the figures of a quadrille with a "by-ye-leave-sah" air, selecting, as a rule, the highest class of music that had blessed his ears, for he was ear-taught only. He would hold a half-washed dish suspended minutes at a time while listening to one "ob de young missys at de pianny. Dat's de way I'se pick up my most scrumptious pieces. Dey cyant play nuffin in de daytime dat I cyant 'prove on in de ebenin';" and his vanity did not lead him much astray. But when with those of his own color, or with the humbler classes, he gave them the musical vernacular of the region rude traditional quicksteps and songs, strung together with such variations of his own as made him the envy and despair of all other fiddlers in the vicinity. Indeed, he could rarely get away from a great house without a sample of his powers in this direction, and then blending with the rhythmical cadence of feet, the rustle of garments, would be evoked ripples of mirth and bursts of laughter that were echoed back from the dim pine-groves without. Finally, when with his great foot beating time on the floor and every muscle of his body in motion, he ended with an original arrangement of "Dixie," the eyes of the gentlest maiden would flash as she joined the chorus of the men in gray, who were scarcely less excited for the moment than they would have been in a headlong cavalry charge.

These were moments of glory for Jeff. In fact, on all similar occasions he had a consciousness of his power; he made the slave forget his bondage, the poor whites their poverty, maidens the absence of their fathers, brothers, and lovers, and the soldier the chances against his return.

At last there came a summer day when other music than that of Jeff's fiddle resounded through that region. Two armies met and grappled through the long sultry hours. Every moment death wounds were given and received, for thick as insects in woods, grove, and thicket, bullets whizzed on their fatal mission; while from every eminence the demoniacal shells shrieked in exultation over the havoc they wrought.

Jeff's home was on the edge of the battlefield, and as he trembled in the darkest corner of the cellar, he thought, "Dis yer beats all de thunder-gusts I eber heered crack, run togedder in one big hurricane."

With the night came silence, except as it was broken by the groans and cries of wounded men; and later the contending forces departed, having accorded to the fallen such poor burial as was given them when life was cheap and death the chief harvester in Virginia.

For a day or two Jeff's conscience was active, and the memory of the resolutions inspired by the din of war gave to his thin visage a preternatural seriousness. Dishes were washed in such brief time and so thoroughly, and such havoc made in the garden-weeds that the world might make a note of Jeff's idea of reform (to its advantage). In the evening his fiddle wailed out psalm-tunes to the entire exclusion of its former carnal strains.

It must be admitted, however, that Jeff's grace was like the early dew. On the third evening, "Ole Dan Tucker" slipped in among the hymns, and these were played in a time scarcely befitting their character. Then came a bit of news that awakened a wholly different train of thought and desire. A colored boy, more venturesome than himself, was said to have picked up some "Linkum" money on the battlefield. This information shed on the wild wooded tract where the war trumpet had raged the most fiercely a light more golden than that of the moon then at its full; and Jeff resolved that with the coming night he also would explore a region which, nevertheless, had nameless terrors for him.

JEFF'S TREASURE

"Ef dere's spooks anywhere dey's dereaway," he muttered over his hoe; "but den, ki! dey woan 'fere wid dis yer niggah. What hab I'se got ter do wid de wah and de fighten an de jabbin'? De spooks cyant lay nufnn ter me eben ef ole marse an' de res' am a—fighten ter keep dere slabs, as folks say."

Having thus satisfied himself that the manes of the dead thousands could have no controversy with him, Jeff mustered sufficient resolution to visit the field that night. He took no one into his confidence, fearing if he discovered treasures of any kind he could not be left in undisturbed possession. During the day the rudiments of imagination which made him a musician had been conjuring up the possible results of his expedition.

"De ting fer dis cullud pusson ter do is ter p'ramberlate ter de Linkum lines. Ki! I doan wan' what drap outen OUR sogers' pockets. I kin git Virginny leaf widouten runnin' 'mong de spooks arter it. De place fer a big fine is whar de brush is tick and de Linkum men crawl away so dey woan be tromp on. Who knows but I kin fine a place whar a ginral hide hisself? Ob cose if he hab a lot of gole he'd stick it in de bush or kiver it right smart, so dat oders moun't get it foh he could helf hisself."

Jeff thought he had reasoned himself into such a valorous state that he could walk across the deserted battlefield with nonchalance; but as he entered on a deeply shadowed dirt—road long since disused to any extent, he found strange creeping sensations running up and down his back. The moonlight filtered through the leaves with fantastic effects. A young silver poplar looked ghastly in the distance; and now and then a tree out off by a shot looked almost human in its mutilation.

He had not gone very far before he saw what appeared to be the body of a man lying across the road. With a sudden chill of blood he stopped and stared at the object. Gradually it resolved itself into a low mound in the dim light. Approaching cautiously, he discovered with a dull sense of horror that a soldier had been buried where he had fallen, but covered so slightly that the tumulus scarcely more than outlined his form.

"Ob cose I knowed I d hab ter see dese tings foh I started. What I such a fool fer? De Feds nor de Yanks am a—gwine ter bodder me if I am' steppin' on 'em or ober 'em." And he went scrupulously on the other side of the road.

By and by, however, he came to a part of the wood—lane where men had fallen by the score, and bodies had been covered in twos, threes, and dozens. His head felt as if his very wool were straightening itself out, as he wound here and there and zigzagged in all directions lest he should step on or over a grave. A breeze stirred the forest as if all the thousands buried in its shades had heaved a long deep sigh. With chattering teeth Jeff stopped to listen, then, reassured, continued to pick his tortuous way. Suddenly there was an ominous rustling in a thicket just behind. He broke into a headlong flight across and over everything, when the startled grunt of a hog revealed the prosaic nature of this spook. Scarcely any other sound could have been more reassuring. The animal suggested bacon and hominy and hoe—cake, everything except the ghostly. He berated himself angrily:

"Ki! you niggah! dat ar hog got mo' co'age dan you. He know he hab nuffin mo' ter do wid de spooks dan you hab. De run ain' far, and when I gits ober dat de spooks on de side dis way cyant cross arter me;" and he hastened toward the spot where he supposed the Federals had been massed the most heavily, crossing an open field and splashing through a shallow place in the river, that their ghost—ships might be reminded of running water.

On the further slope were the same sad evidences of poor mortality, graves here and there and often all too shallow, broken muskets, bullet perforated canteens and torn knapsacks the debris of a pitched battle. Many trees and shrubs were so lacerated that their foliage hung limp and wilting, while boughs with shrivelled leaves strewed the ground. Nature's wounds indicated that men had fought here and been mutilated as ruthlessly.

For a time nothing of value rewarded Jeff's search, and he began to succumb to the grewsome associations of the place. At last he resolved to examine one more thicket that bordered an old rail—fence, and then make a long

JEFF'S TREASURE

detour rather than go back by the graveyard road over which he had come. Pushing the bushes aside, he peered among their shadows for some moments, and then uttered an exclamation of surprise and terror as he bounded backward. There was no mistake this time; he had seen the figure of a man with a ray of moonlight filtering through the leaves on a ghastly bullet-hole in his temple. He sat with his back against the fence, and had not moved after receiving the shock. At his feet, dropped evidently from his nerveless hand, lay a metal box. All had flashed almost instantaneously on Jeff's vision.

For some moments he was in doubt whether to take to his heels homeward or reconnoitre again. The soldier sat in such a lifelike attitude that while Jeff knew the man must be dead, taking the box seemed like robbing the living. Yes, worse than that, for, to the superstitious negro, the dead soldier appeared to be watching his treasure.

Jeff's cupidity slowly mastered his fears. Cautiously approaching the figure, he again pushed aside the screening boughs, and with chattering teeth and trembling limbs, looked upon the silent guardian of the treasure, half expecting the dead man to raise his head, and warn him off with a threatening gesture. Since the figure remained motionless, Jeff made a headlong plunge, clutched the box, then ran half a mile without thinking to look back.

Not for his life would he cross the battlefield again; so it was late when by wide circuit he approached the dwelling of his mistress. His panic had gradually subsided, and as he noted familiar objects, he felt that he was beyond the proper range of the unjust spirits of the dead.

The soldier he had left sitting against the fence troubled him, it is true; and he was not quite sure that he was through with one so palpably robbed. That he had not been followed appeared certain; that the question of future ownership of the treasure could be settled was a matter of superstitious belief. There was only one way he must hide the box in a secret nook, and if it remained undisturbed for a reasonable length of time, he might hope for its undisturbed enjoyment. Accordingly he stole into a dense copse and buried his booty at the foot of a persimmon-tree, then gained his humble quarter and slept so late and soundly that he had to be dragged almost without the door the next morning before he shook off his lethargy.

CHAPTER II. ITS INFLUENCE

With the exception of aptitude which enabled Jeff to catch and fix a tune in his mind with a fair degree of correctness, his mental processes were slow. Moreover, whether he should ever have any trouble with "spooks" or not, one thing was true of him, as of many others in all stations of life, he was haunted by the ghost of a conscience. This uneasy spirit suggested to him with annoying iteration that his proceedings the night before had been of very unusual and doubtful character. When at last fully awake, he sought to appease the accusing voice by unwonted diligence in all his tasks, until the fat cook, a devout Baptist, took more than one occasion to say, "You'se in a promisin' frame, Jeff. Ef I'se ony shoah dat yer hole out long anuff ter get 'mersed, I'd hab hopes on yer, but, law! yer'll be a-fiddlin' de debil's tunes 'fo' de week is out. I'se afeared dat dere must be an awful prov'dence, like a battle or harricane, onst a week, ter keep yer ser'ous;" and the old woman sniffed down at him with ill-concealed disdain from her superior spiritual height.

Jeff was as serious as could have been wished all that day, for there was much on his mind. Perplexing questions tinged with supernatural terrors tormented him. Passing over those having a moral point, the most urgent one was, "S'pose dat ar soger miss him box an come arter it ternight. Ki! If I go ter see, I mont run right on ter de spook. I'se a-gwine ter gib 'im his chance, an' den take mine." So that evening Jeff fortified himself and increased the cook's hope by a succession of psalm-tunes in which there was no lapse toward the "debil's" music.

Next morning, after a long sleep, Jeff's nerves were stronger, and he began to take a high hand with conscience.

"Dat ar soger has hab his chance," he reasoned. "Ef he want de box he mus' 'a' com arter it las' night. I'se done bin

JEFF'S TREASURE

fa'r wid him, an' now ter–night, ef dat ar box ain' 'sturbed, I'se a–gwine ter see de 'scription an' heft on it. Toder night I was so 'fuscated dat I couldn't know nuffin straight."

When all were sleeping, he stole to the persimmon–tree and was elated to find his treasure where he had slightly buried it. The little box seemed heavy, and was wholly unlike anything he ever seen before.

"Ob cose it's got money in it," Jeff reasoned. "Nuffin else 'ud be done up to tight and strong. I'se woan open it jes' yet, feared de missus or de colored boys 'spec' someting. Ki! I isn't a–gwine ter be tied up, an' hab dat box whip out in me. I'll tink how I kin hide an' spen' de money kine of slowcution like." With this he restored the prize to its shallow excavation and covered it with leaves that no trace of fresh earth might be visible.

Jeff's deportment now began to evince a new evolution in mental and moral process. The influence of riches was quite as marked upon him as upon so many of his white brothers and sisters, proving their essential kinship. To–day he began to sniff disdainfully at his menial tasks; and in the evening "Ole Dan Tucker" resounded from his fiddle with a rollicking abandon over which the cook groaned in despair, "Dat ar niggah's 'ligion drop off ob 'im like a yaller pig from de bush. 'Ligion dat's skeert inter us hain't no 'count anyhow."

During the next few days it was evident that Jeff was falling from grace rapidly. Never had he been so slow and careless in his tasks. More than once the thought crossed his mind that he had better take his box and "cut stick" for Washington, where he believed that wealth and his fiddle would give him prominence over his race. For prudential and other reasons he was in no haste to open the box, preferring rather to gloat over it and to think how he could spend the money to the greatest advantage. He had been paying his court to a girl as black as himself on a neighboring plantation; but he now regarded that affair as preposterous.

"She ain' good nuff fer me no mo'," he reasoned. "I'se a–gwine ter shine up ter dat yeller Suky dat's been a–holdin' her head so high ober ter Marse Perkins's. I'se invited ter play ober dar ter– night, an' I'll make dat gal open her eye. Ki! she tinks no culled gemmen in dese parts fit ter hole a cannle when she braid her long straight ha'r, but when she see de ribbin I kin git her ter tie dat ha'r up wid, an' de earrings I kin put in her ears, she larf on toder side ob her face. 'Fo' I go I'se a–gwine ter buy dat ar gole ring ob Sam Milkins down at de tavern. S'pose it does take all I'se been sabin' up, I'se needn't sabe any mo'. Dat ar box got nuff in it ter keep me like a lawd de rest ob my life. I'd open it ter–night if I wasn't goin' ter Marse Perkins's."

Jeff carried out his high–handed measures and appeared that evening at "Marse Perkins's" with a ring of portentous size squeezed on the little finger of his left hand. It had something of the color of gold, and that is the best that can be said of it; but it had left its purchaser penniless. This fact sat lightly on Jeff's mind, however, as he remembered the box at the foot of the persimmon–tree; and he stalked into the detached kitchen, where a dusky assemblage were to indulge in a shuffle, with the air of one who intends that his superiority shall be recognized at once.

"Law sakes, Jeff!" said Mandy, his hitherto ebon flame, "yer comes in like a turkey gobbler. Doesn't yer know me?"

"Sartin I know yer, Mandy. You'se a good gal in you'se way, but, law! you'se had yer spell. A culled gemmen kin change his min' when he sees dat de 'finity's done gone."

"Look here, Jeff Wobbles, does yer mean ter give me de sack?"

"I mean ter gib yer good–ebenin', Miss Mandy Munson. Yer kyant 'spec' a gemmen to be degaged in de music an' a gal at de same time," replied Jeff, with oppressive gravity.

JEFF'S TREASURE

"Mister Johnsing, I'se tank yer fo' yer arm," said Mandy to a man near, with responsive dignity. "Yer wait on me here, an' yer kin wait on me home. I'se 'shamed on mysef dat I took up wid a lout dat kin do nuffin but fiddle; but I was kine ob sorry fer him, he sich a fool."

"Go 'long," remarked Jeff, smiling mysteriously. 'Ef yer knowed, yer 'ud be wringin' yer han's wuss dan yer did at de las' 'tracted meetin'. Ah, Miss Suky, dat you?" and Jeff for the first time doffed his hat.

"Wat's in de win', Jeff, dat yer so scrumptious an' bumptious like dis ebenin'?" Suky asked a trifle scornfully.

"Wen de 'freshments parse 'roun', I'se 'steem it a oblergation ter me ef yer'll let me bring yer de cake an' cider. I'se sumpin fer yer. Gemmen an' ladies, took yer places," he added in a stentorian voice; "I ax yer' sideration fer bein' late, cose I had 'portant business; now,

"Bow dar, scrape dar; Doan hang about de doah. Shine up ter de pretty gals. An,' lead 'em on de floah"

his fiddle seconding his exhortation with such inciting strains that soon there was not a foot but was keeping time.

Suky observed that the musician had eyes for her only, and that toward all others he maintained his depressing superiority. In vain did Mandy lavish tokens of favor on "Mister Johnsing." Jeff did not lose his sudden and unexpected indifference; while the great ring glistening on his finger added to the mystery. There were many whispered surmises; but gradually the conjecture that he had "foun' a heap ob Linkum money" was regarded as the best explanation of the marked change in his bearing.

Curiosity soon became more potent than Jeff's fiddle, and the "'freshments" were hurried up. So far from resenting this, Jeff put his violin under his arm and stalked across the improvised ball-room to Miss Suky, oblivious of the fact that she had a suitor on either side.

"Gemmen," he remarked with condescension, "dis lady am degaged ter me durin' de 'freshments period,'" and he held out his arm in such a way that the massive ring glittered almost under Suky's nose. The magnet drew. His arm was taken in spite of the protests of the enamored swains.

"Permit me de suggestion," continued Jeff, "dat ter a lady ob yer 'finement, dis place am not fit ter breve in. Wha's mo', I doan 'cline ter hab dese yer common niggahs a-whisperin' an' a- pintin' an' a-'jecturin' about us. Lemme yet yer a seat under de lite ob de risin' moon. De dusk'll obscuatate yer loveleness so I'se dar' tell all de news."

Suky, mystified and expectant, but complacent over another conquest, made no objections to these whispered "suggestions," and was led to a seat under the shadow of a tree. A chorus of not very flattering remarks broke out, ceasing as suddenly when Jeff returned for a portion of the cake and cider.

"Mister Wobbles, yer's prettin' on high de airs ter-night," Suky remarked, with an interrogation point in her voice.

"Here's ter de health ob Mrs. Wobbles," he answered, lifting the cider to his lips.

"I'se no 'jections ter dat. Who is she ter be?" replied Suky, very innocently.

"It's not my 'tention ter go funder and far' wuss. Dis am a case wha de presen' company am not 'cepted."

"No, not axcepted jes' yet, Mr. Wobbles, if yer'se 'dressin' yer remarks ter me. Yer is goin' on jes' a little too far."

"P'raps a little far; but yer'll soon catch up wid me. Yer'se a lady dat got a min' ob her own, I hope?"

JEFF'S TREASURE

"It's mine yet, anyhow."

"An' yer kin keep as mum as a possum w'en de cawn is in de milk?"

"Dat 'pends."

"Obcose it does. But I'll trus' yer; yer ain' de one ter bite yer own nose off. Does yer see dat ar ring, Suky? Law! how pretty dat look on yer degaged finger!"

"'Tain' dar yet."

"Lemme put it dar. Ki! wouldn't dey look an' gape an' pint in dar yonder w'en yer come a-sailin' in wid dat ring on?"

"Yes; dey tink me a big fool ter be captivated by a ring brass, too, like anuff."

"No, Suky, it's gole yallow gole, di 'plexion ob yer own fair han'. But, law! dis ain' nuffin ter what I'se 'll git yer. Yer'se shall hab rings an' dresses an' jules till yer 'stinguish de oder gals like de sun put out de stars."

"What yer foun', Jeff Wobbles?"

"I'se foun' what'll make yer a lady if yer hab sense. I'se gib yer de compliment ob s'lecting yer ter shar' my fine if yer'll lemme put dis ring on yer degaged finger."

"Yer doan say nuffin 'bout lub in dis yer 'rangement," Suky simpered, sidling up to him.

"Oh, dat kind ob sent'ment 'll do fer common niggahs," Jeff explained with dignity. "I'se hurd my missus talk 'bout 'liances 'twixt people of quality. Ki! Suky, I'se in a'sition now ter make a 'liance wid yer. Yer ain' like dat low gal, Mandy. What Mister Johnsing ebber hab ter gib her but a lickin' some day? I'se done wid dat common class; I may fiddle fur 'em now an' den, jes' ter see dem sport deysefs, while I'se lookin' on kin' ob s'perior like, yer know. But den, dey ain' our kin' ob folks. Yer'se got qulities dat'll shine like de risin' moon dar." Then in a whisper he added, "De Linkum sogers is off dar ter the east'erd. One night's trabel an' dey'd sen' us on ter Washin'on. Onst yer git dar, an' hab all de jules an' dresses dat I gib yer, dar's not a culled gemmen dereaway but 'ud bow down ter yer."

Here was a dazzling vista that Suky could not resist. Her ideas of freedom, like those of Jeff, were not very exalted. At that period, slave property in the vicinity of the Union lines was fast melting away; and scarcely a night elapsed but some one was missing, the more adventurous and intelligent escaping first, and others following as opportunity and motive pointed the way. The region under consideration had not yet been occupied by the Federals, and there was still no slight risk involved in flight. Suky did not realize the magnitude of the project. She was not the first of her sex to be persuaded by a cavalier and promised gold to take a leap into the dark.

As a result of Jeff's representations the "'liance" was made there and then, secrecy promised, and an escape to Washington agreed upon as soon as circumstances permitted Suky's mind, I regret to say, dwelling more on "gemmen bowing down" to her than on the devotion of the allied suitor.

No lady of rank in Timbuctoo could have sailed into the kitchen ball-room with greater state than Suky now after the compact had been made, Jeff supporting her on his arm with the conscious air of one who has taken the prize from all competitors. With the assurance of a potentate he ensconced himself in the orchestra corner and called the dancers to their feet.

JEFF'S TREASURE

But the spirit of mutiny was present. Eager eyes noted that the ring on his bow-hand was gone. Then it was seen glistening on Suky's hand as she ostentatiously fanned herself. The clamor broke out, "Mister Johnsing," incited by Mandy and the two swains between whom Suky had been sandwiched, leading the revolt against Jeff's arrogance and success.

There were many, however, who had no personal wrongs to right, and who did not relish being made a cat's-paw by the disaffected. These were bent on the natural progression and conclusion of the dance. In consequence of the wordy uproar the master of the premises appeared and cleared them all out, sending his own servants to their quarters.

Jeff nearly came to grief that night, for a party of the malcontents followed him on his homeward walk. Suspecting their purpose, he dodged behind some shrubbery, heard their threats to break his head and smash his fiddle, and then went back to a tryst with Suky.

That sagacious damsel had been meditating on the proposed alliance. Even in her rather sophisticated mind she had regarded a semblance of love as essential; but since Jeff had put everything on such superior grounds, she felt that she should prove herself fit for new and exalted conditions of life by seeing to it that he made good all his remarkable promises. She remembered that he had not yet opened the box of money, and became a little sceptical as to its contents. Somebody might have watched Jeff, and have carried it off.

True, she had the ring, but that was not the price of her hand. Nothing less than had been promised would answer now; and when she stole out to meet Jeff she told him so. Under the witching moonlight he began to manifest tendencies to sentiment and tenderness. Her response was prompt: "Go 'long! what dese common niggah ways got ter do wid a 'liance? Yer show me de gole in dat box dat's de bargain. Den de 'liance hole me fas', an' I'll help yer spen' de money in Washin'on. We'll hab a weddin' scrumptious as white folks. But, law sakes! Jeff Wobbles, 't ain' no kin' ob 'liance till I see dat gole an' hab some ob it too!"

Jeff had to succumb like many a higher-born suitor before him, with the added chagrin of remembering that he had first suggested the purely businesslike aspect of his motive.

"Berry well; meet me here ter-morrer night when I whistle like a whip-o'-will. But yer ain' so smart as yer tink yer are, Suky. Yer'se made it cl'ar ter me dat I'se got ter keep de han'lin' ob dat gole or you'll be a-carryin' dis 'liance business too far! If I gib yer gole, I expec' yer ter shine up an be 'greeable-like ter me ebbery way yer know how. Dat's only fa'r, doggoned ef it ain'!" and Jeff spoke in a very aggrieved tone.

Wily Suky chucked him under the chin, saying: "Show me de color ob de gole an' de 'liance come out all right." Then she retired, believing that negotiations had proceeded far enough for the present.

Jeff went home feeling that he had been forewarned and forearmed. Since her heart responded to a golden key only, he would keep that key and use it judiciously.

During the early hours of the following night Jeff was very wary and soon discovered that he was watched. He coolly slipped the collar from a savage dog, and soon there was a stampede from a neighboring grove. An hour after, when all had become quiet again, he took the dog and, armed with an axe, started out, fully resolved on breaking the treasure-box which he had been hoarding.

The late moon had risen, giving to Jeff a gnome-like aspect as he dug at the root of the persimmon-tree. The mysterious box soon gleamed with a pale light in his hand, like the leaden casket that contained Portia's radiant face. Surely, when he struck the "open sesame" blow, that beauty which captivates young and old alike would dazzle his eyes. With heart now devoid of all compunction, and exultant in anticipation, he struck the box, shaving off the end he held furthest from him. An "ancient fish-like smell" filled the air; Jeff sank on the ground

JEFF'S TREASURE

and stared at sardines and rancid oil dropping instead of golden dollars from his treasure-box. They scarcely touched the ground before the dog snapped them all up.

The bewildered negro knew not what to think. Had fish been the original contents of the box, or had the soldier's spook transformed the gold into this horrid mess? One thing, however, was clear he had lost, not only Suky, but prestige. The yellow girl would scorn him, and tell of his preposterous promises. Mandy had been offended beyond hope, and he would become the laughing-stock and byword of all the colored boys for miles around.

"Dar's nuffin lef fer me but ter put out fer freedom," he soliloquized; "ki! I'se a-gwine ter git eben wid dat yallar gal yet. I'll cut stick ter-morrer night and she'll tink I 'sconded alone, totin' de box wid me, and dat she was too sharp in dat 'liance business."

So it turned out; Jeff and his fiddle vanished, leaving nothing to sustain Suky under the gibes of her associates except the ring, which she eventually learned was as brazen as her own ambition.

Jefi wandered into the service of a Union officer whose patience he tried even more than that of his tolerant Southern mistress; but when by the camp-fire he brought out his violin, all his shortcomings were condoned.