

CARDOME

A ROMANCE OF KENTUCKY

By ANNA C. MINOQUE

CHAPTER XX—CONTINUED

"You are acquainted with the young lady?" asked Morgan of Hal. "It is evident that none of the male members of the house are at home. She will be alarmed at the thought of the enemy so near, whom, naturally, she will judge by the specimen she saw; so I wish you to go to her and assure her that she and her property are as safe as if her father's regiment, instead of Morgan's, were encamped at her door."

Hal saluted and went forward. The girl stood motionless in the yard by her gray horse, watching the approaching officer. As he drew near she slipped her right hand into her pocket, and in the next instant Hal saw her aiming a pistol at the horse's small, shapely head. "Don't shoot him!" cried out the young lieutenant, authoritatively. Then, remembering himself: "Oh, I beg your pardon! I mean, please wait a minute. We don't want your horse. That fellow was our Lucy, Lucy, don't you know me? It's Hal, and in his confusion the Confederate officer blushed like a girl. She did not stir, however, nor give him greeting, until he had conveyed to her Morgan's message. Then the little weapon was slipped into her pocket, and she extended her hand, girlish gladness at seeing her friend showing on her lovely face.

"I thought Morgan had sent you for Dan," she said, a ripple of laughter running over her tones, "and so I was going to shoot him."

"I never thought you had so much nerve, Lucy," replied Hal, mentally remarking how pretty Lucy Menefee had grown.

"I don't know that I ever gave you reason to think me a coward," she flashed back. "I certainly would be one, if I were to let strangers have my dear old Dan. When did you come?"

"I just arrived," said he, smiling. "When do you leave?" she asked. "A soldier seldom can answer that question," said Hal.

"And don't you know to what place you are going? Oh! I'm glad I'm not a man, for I'd hate to be a soldier!"

He would have liked to ask why her brother was not in the Union ranks, but gallantly forbore, and instead inquired for her aunt's health. "She is just the same," replied the girl.

"Is Miss Mattie well?" he asked. "She was when last we heard from her. You know that she was married, didn't you?"

"Why, no!" returned Hal, and the surprise in his voice annoyed the spirited Kentucky maiden.

"And why shouldn't she marry?" she flashed. "Did you think that she was wearing the willow for that contemptible Howard Dallas? Mattie wouldn't marry him when she found him out, if his plantation were covered with gold instead of blue grass. She never told any one why the engagement was broken, but I know. Maybe some folks thought it was his doing, but it wasn't. I've seen him down on his knees begging her to pardon him, but—"

At this juncture a red-turbaned negress appeared and, without deigning to glance at the young Confederate soldier, said:

"Miss Lucy, yoh aunt says yoh mus' come into de house right away."

"I will directly," replied the girl. "Yoh aunt says yoh mus' come in right away," persisted the woman.

"Won't you come in and see Auntie?" Lucy asked Hal. "She will be so glad. Papa is in business with his regiment," she went on, "and my brother is in Georgetown. He is rarely to see anyone now, so she finished pathetically, leading the way to the house, which in other days was so frequently the scene of gayer and pleasure. A tall, white haired lady, who since the death of Lucy's mother had ruled in her brother's house, rose from her easy-chair by the window as her niece spoke their visitor's name. She took the young man's hand in both hers, while she looked on his face with tear-filled eyes. She led him to the window, in a silence that strangely affected the hearted Hal Todd. While the tears fell from her eyes she searched his face, and not finding there something that she had expected, she glanced toward the girl, who hastened to explain that their visitor had just arrived from the South with his regiment.

"Ah! you have not been home, then?" she asked, the pitying expression deepening on her face. Hal replied that he had not, and changed from the subject by inquiring for her health. When the lady learned that a regiment of soldiers was encamped almost at her door, she announced a slave and gave orders that the best of the house provided should be sent to them. Hal accepted her invitation to remain for supper, and as he stretched himself on the sofa, while Lucy and her aunt were making their toilet, he half sighed for a speedy cessation of hostilities. "There's plenty of fun and excitement soldiering," he mused, "but a long night more ease and comfort in civil pursuits." And then he put to himself the old, old question: "Wonder when it's all done with, the thing settled one way or the other, will my father forgive me and Virginia and call us home again?"

That evening seemed to fly. The supper was over, and while down in

the camp among the trees the man lay on the grass enjoying the rest and holy quiet of the summer night, Hal sat in the old parlor, whispering foolish words to Lucy, or answering the occasional question put to him by her aunt. A clock somewhere struck ten, and reluctantly he arose.

"Must you go so soon?" asked Lucy; but hardly was the question spoken when a quick step sounded on the veranda. "O God! It's brother!" she whispered. "Come quickly!" and she caught Hal's arm and hurried him toward the dining-room, which was separated from the parlor by heavy portieres. "He's had supper, likely, and will go to bed soon; then I'll come and let you out," she said; and as she dropped the curtain her brother opened the door.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, throwing down his hat, "but I've had a ride! It's just ten, and I made the trip from Georgetown in forty minutes—how's that for travelling, Sis?" "Very good, if you're trying to kill your horse," she replied sharply, for she saw that he had taken too much wine.

"Had to make it, and I've got another ride before me to-night. You'll loan me Dan, won't you? My horse is about done up."

"No, I'll not loan you Dan," she declared, "and I think you are ready for bed than a ride, flashing on him a look of disgust from her bright eyes.

"I did not ask for your advice, little lady," he said. "But you did for my horse, and I gave you the advice gratis, with my refusal."

"I am not going to take a refusal, as I do not need your advice," he returned. "Dan is fatter than any of the other horses. We've got to make Lexington to-night, and it would take Tam O'Shanter's old Meg herself to outride John Morgan."

"Oh! are you going to ride a race with John Morgan?" she chimed. "Better wait until to-morrow, Charles, when you will be feeling better. You wouldn't look very well in Colonel Morgan's company to-night."

"I'll not wait until to-morrow," he said. "To-morrow I'll come back and will bring Ward and his men with me. We've got Morgan at last."

"Oh, indeed!" she exclaimed. "Do tell where he is."

"He's camped here in the woods, and intends remaining a few days to give his soldiers a rest in the Blue Grass land. But we, Dallas and I, have planned a longer rest for them in the Columbus pen; while those we can't induce to take lodging in Merion's Hotel, we'll give a neat little bed under the so-called wall!" he laughed heartily. "But I want some supper before I—"

"Yes, of course," she broke in nervously. "But tell me all about it first. How did you find out that Morgan is around here?"

"Why, one of the fellows deserted. He struck across the country for Georgetown and his way took him past the Park. As luck would have it, Miss Sears—a dented fine girl she is, and 'pon my word, Sis, I believe Dallas is letting his boat drift in her direction!—happened to be on the lawn. She began to talk to him, and when she found out he had left Morgan's company she took him into the house, and—well, Mrs. Powell attended to the rest of the business. She sent for Dallas, and he went to Georgetown to get me to ride over to Lexington with him to give the information to General Ward. You see, the 'Reds' have cut off all communication between us and Lexington, so the only way to get the message to Ward is by courier. Dallas is afraid to trust it to any one, and he said we must carry it ourselves."

"But you are not able to take that long journey," said his sister. "Suppose some of Morgan's men were to meet you on the way?"

"Not likely. They're not looking for danger in this vicinity. Anyhow, it's worth the risk. The government will reward us well for our share in the undertaking, if that rich prize is captured."

"Oh, it is the money you are after!" she exclaimed.

"It's what they are all after, honey," he returned, lightly.

"You are the first Menefee who ever adopted patriotism for what it might bring!" she flashed; but he only laughed, and said:

"Well, I must get some supper—why, what's that?" for Hal, knowing it was now time to leave, had suddenly thrown up the window, and it struck the upper sill with resounding noise.

"I'll see!" she cried, darting forward, then, pausing, with one hand holding back the portiere, she said to an imaginary servant:

"Was that you, Della? Run off and get Mr. Charles a cup of coffee."

"No, no, don't mind any coffee," countermanded Mr. Charles. "A glass of wine and a biscuit are all I've time for."

Hal made his way across the meadow at a rapid pace. A candle in Morgan's tent told him that their chief was still up, and to him the young lieutenant hastened. Clay Powell and several other officers were with the leader, for Morgan placed great confidence in his subordinates and frequently called upon them for advice. He listened attentively to the story the young man brought, while a slow smile played around his lips. When Hal ceased, he turned to Powell and asked:

"Ought I to send Captain McDowell and his newspaper force out against these doughty knights, to capture them and put them out of our way by translating them to Georgia?"

If in his brief life Hal Todd ever made a fervent prayer, it was that Clay Powell would acquiesce in Morgan's proposal. Many another man would have quickly seized the honorable opportunity of disposing of a relentless and unprincipled foe; but Clay Powell was above the ordinary man; he looked not to selfish ends, but to the general good, so he said:

"Since you honor me, sir, by asking for my opinion, I think that it is better to permit him to go to Lexington and bring out the Federal troops. This will be the second time that Mr. Dallas will have led them upon a wild-goose chase. They will come to look upon information from him as the villagers did upon the boy's cry when the wolves were really coming."

For another moment the smile hung around Morgan's lips; then all the stern lines began to appear, and he was the leader again. Hal knew that the golden moment thrust by Fate into Clay Powell's hands had been withdrawn, and involuntarily he sighed. An hour later the notes of the bugle brought the sleeping men to their feet. While they were hurriedly breaking camp, Hal rode across the meadow, and tying his horse to a tree on the lawn, went to the dining room window, which stood a girlish white-robed figure.

"He's gone," she said in a low voice, for her aunt was dozing in her chair in the moonlight.

"Did he take Dan?" asked Hal, smiling up into the face that looked so fair in the moonlight.

"No, he didn't," she replied. "If I want Dan killed, I'll do it myself."

"Shoot him, as you were going to do this afternoon?" laughed Hal.

"Oh, you don't think I would do it?" she questioned.

"Yes, I do," he said slowly. "I believe that, however hard it would be, you would do what you thought was best for whoever or whatever you love."

"I do love Dan," she said, turning from his too eloquent eye. "My brother-in-law gave him to me. And I would rather a thousand times have let that soldier have him this afternoon than that my brother should ride him to Lexington to-night at the bidding of that hateful Howard Dallas! Howard Dallas is trying to ruin my brother, because he hopes by it to give my sister pain. He will stop at nothing to accomplish his revenge. He gave the world the impression that he broke off the engagement between himself and Mattie. That was false. You remember that Miss Castleton and I were in the summer house? One day when she was here we were in the summer house, and she was talking to me about Mr. Dallas. Mattie was telling Miss Virginia how good and noble he was. I suppose she did like him then, and imagined he was good and noble. Miss Virginia told her not to place too much confidence in him, for she didn't know him well enough. I happened to look up from my book and caught sight of Howard Dallas hidden behind the vines near the door, listening to what they were saying."

"The next time he came, Mattie and I were on the veranda. He seemed to be out of humor. After a while he began to accuse my sister of not trusting him, and she said that Virginia had been warning Mattie against him. Mattie made an angry answer. He asked again if Miss Virginia had not told Mattie not to place such perfect faith in him. Mattie wanted to know how this had reached him. And then what do you think that base man said? That I had told him! Mattie began to scold me for tattling, but I wasn't going to be blamed for what I hadn't done. So I said: 'Mr. Dallas, you have told my sister a lie! You were listening at the door that morning Miss Virginia was here, for I saw you.' His face got red and white by turns. He tried to make out that I was telling an untruth to get out of the scolding. Poor Mattie! She didn't know which to believe. But as brother had seen Mr. Dallas come to the house that morning, and one of the little negroes had held his horse, all the evidence was on my side. He admitted, some days afterward, that what I said was true. He had come up in time to hear Mattie speak his name and had listened, to tease her with the nice things he thought he was going to hear about himself. What he heard instead had made him so angry that he went away without seeing me. He begged Mattie to forgive him, but she wouldn't. She couldn't, for you know what high notions she holds regarding a man's honor. Oh! I think that admission of his struck down all the love she ever entertained for him. He felt very bad, for I know he loved my sister. Why he should begin to pay attention to Miss Virginia so soon puzzled some folks; but I know why: he wanted to get her to intercede for him with Mattie. He always hoped that she would relent. When she began to keep company with Mr. Hinton, I used to feel a little bit sorry for Howard. But he deserved all that he received and more. Now," finished Lucy, "you know why I would sooner shoot Dan than let my brother ride to Lexington with that man, and why, although my father is a Union man, I am for the South? I can't possibly be on the same side with Howard Dallas!"

Hal laughed, and said: "How glad I am that he didn't come to the South!"

They talked on, foolishly enough, while in the wood below Morgan and his men were mounting and riding away. When some miles lay between them and the young lieutenant, Hal

announced that he must leave. Lucy sighed, for this meeting with her playmate and old comrade had fanned into love's own flame the sentiment that she had previously entertained for him.

"But you will come back?" she said, softly, after a silence more eloquent than many words.

"May I, Lucy?" he asked, fear and hope in his voice, and he took the white hand that rested on the wide sill.

"Yes," she said, softly, shyly. He clasped the hand to his breast, then whispered:

"Lucy's leaving to-night. It may be long, long years until I come back. Won't you kiss me just once, sweet girl?"

She laid her red lips on his, and as he folded her in his arms, he whispered:

"I'll keep that sweet kiss of yours, darling girl, until we meet again!" He mounted his horse and rode across the meadow; but as he reached the edge of the wood he stopped, appalled on finding that Morgan and his men were gone.

CHAPTER XXI

"Oh, what will Morgan say?" thought Hal, as the truth flashed upon him that the regiment was off on its wild ride to Lexington and he absent from his place by the leader's side. He turned his horse's head toward the lane which led through the Menefee plantation to the road beyond, intending to follow rapidly and overtake the command. But the road ran smooth and white through familiar scenes, and unwittingly he slackened his rein and the horse fell to from a hard gallop into an easy trot. Hal's newly found love was making glad his heart. He clung to his rich possession with his hearty, boyish enthusiasm, while, with the optimism of his nature, he began to give to his future that perfect peace and happiness not often permitted mortals to enjoy. The dangers of battle were before and around him, but he would pass them unscathed. Then, when the war was over, he would return and, forgiven by his father, would bring Lucy to Cardome. How his mother would welcome her new daughter, and how lovingly Lucy would fill her new place! He could see her, in imagination, sitting through the wide halls and old rooms, a song on her lips, and love light in her eyes. What happy hours there would yet be for her and him at Cardome! What star-lighted nights on the southern veranda, with the sound of music and dancing coming faintly from the white yard where the happy darters were congregated!

And then the horse stopped, and Hal, looking up, was conscious of a fierce stab of pain. Before him was Cardome's gateway, and it was closed! Never, to his knowledge, had an entrance to the old house been thus barred. Night and day, summer and winter, Cardome's gate, like its hospitality, was open to friend and stranger. What could it mean? He leaned forward in his saddle and peered anxiously over the lawn, but no gleam of light came to him from the pile of brick in the distance. The horse turned its neck and whinnied pathetically. Hal lifted the latch. The gate opened with a creaking noise that fell strangely loud and weird over the hush in folding the place. He would ride up and take one look at the house he dared not enter. Perhaps he would catch a glimpse of one of the servants or his mother.

The horse went over the sanded drive in a light canter, and true to the memory of other days turned when he reached the clump of young cedars and crossed the lawn to the southern veranda. He waited for his master to dismount, then, with his eyes turned toward the stable below, neighed impatiently. Dead silence reigned in the house, and though the night was far advanced the unbroken quiet fell on Hal's heart as unanswerable. There came to him an insistent longing to have it broken by a familiar voice, a wild desire to see a familiar face. There was only one upon whom he could call. Around his father's house he stole, as a thief might have done, until he came to a window that looked to the west, on whose wide sill he and Thomas used to rest little elbows while waiting for the splendor of winter sunsets; and the name most frequently on their lips then was spoken now, as he called softly: "Mother!"

But only the deep, dead silence was his answer. He was asleep, of course, so more loudly he called again: "Mother! Oh, mother!"

He thought he heard a sound in that dear, upstairs room, for imagination is ever ready to lend itself to desire, and he waited for the window to unclose. But no white hand unfastened the shutter, and again he called, now louder, stronger, for a tear was beginning to clutch at his heart:

"Oh, mother! Mother!"

Again he listened, longer: holding his breath that he might catch the first light fall of her foot on the floor. But there was only the unbroken stillness when the words died away. Then he lifted his voice, the despair of his heart finding vent in his piercing tones, as to that pitilessly closed window he cried once more: "Mother! Mother! Mother!"

When no answer came, like a man who has received his death-warrant and knows hope of reprieve is vain, Hal turned and with bowed head walked slowly back to the veranda, where his patient horse was standing. He threw the rein over his arm, and moving a few paces toward the rear

of the house, looked down on the white yard and white cabins of the "quarters." They, too, lay still, lifeless; but as he watched, one of the low doors was opened and a figure emerged. Reaching the white yard, the woman dropped on her knees and lifted supplicating arms toward heaven, while her agonized voice tore the stillness, as she cried, with the prophet of old:

"Have mercy on Thy people, O Lord! Have mercy on Thy people! And as Hal went toward her, Charity's words came to him, praying for her race:

"Hev mercy on Dy chillun, Lo'd! m'cy an' pity on Dy foolish chillun! Freedom will be thahs, but bought ez it is wif so menny precious lives, in de 'struction uv so menny happy homes, by de teahs an' broken hearts uv so menny women an' chillun' how holy a possession will it be to his misuse! Dey ah a foolish people, but mak' em' wise, O God, in Dy pity! An' w'en dey will not lie'n to de counsels uv dose Do' point'ez to de dah ruhahs, den hev m'cy on dem, O God! hev m'cy on Dy foolish people!"

"Aunt Charity!" cried Hal. The negress bounded to her feet, and clasping him to her breast wept over him in her joy and sorrow. They went to a bench that stood in the white yard, where, with her pitying eyes on his face, that looked so young and fair in the moonlight, she cried:

"My poor boy! My poor boy!"

"I'm all right," said he, "and I've something fine to tell you when I hear about the folks. How's father?"

"He's well, honey," she said. "But he yain't home now. He's ovah to Frankfort!"

"So that's the reason!" cried the boy, thinking of the closed window. "I was around at the house," he explained. "I wanted to see mother. I called several times under her window, and I thought it very strange that she couldn't hear me."

The old negress began to sway her fragile body, and as she wrung her hands she cried, through her fast falling tears:

"Oh! you'll have to call loud, loud, my honey, a-foh you'll wake your muthah! an' you'll have to wait long, long a fah she'll come to you! Oh, my honey! my honey! you ain't got no muthah now. She's gone, my dahlin'! Mis' Love, where she won't lie awake any more a-waitin' foh yoh ah! Tom; where she won't shed any more bitah, bitter tears—"

"Charity," cried Hal, "what do you mean? Mother isn't—" but he stopped, appalled before the awful word.

She took him to her breast as she used to do in his childhood days and said, softly:

"Yes, my dahlin' boy, you muthah's dead!"

"Dead!" His voice, as he repeated the word, tore through the heart of the summer night; the horse started, the sleepers in the cabins stirred restlessly, while all around it seemed there were a thousand voices giving back that dreadful word. He was so stunned by his loss to fully comprehend its significance, to feel any of that poignant sorrow that finds expression in sobs and tears; he could only lift himself from the woman's gentle clasp and repeat: "Dead!"

"Yes, my boy," cried the old woman, "Mis' Love's dead. She died three months ago. She was always grievin' in hah heart foh you an' Tom, but she bore up, hopin' foh de bes'; but aftah Miss Virginia was sen' away, she began to fall fas'. She nevah said a word, though. She b'lieved your fathah done what was right foh him to do; but she failed right long, an' when a fovah misery seized hah, she didn't have any strength. I knowed frum de fas' there was no savin' of hah, an' on my bent knees I pleaded with the Judge to sen' foh you an' Tom. Oh! I did beg foh my poor darlin' to have hah precious chillun with hah in hah las' hours on earth; but your fathah—Oh, honey, when he looked on hah dead face, he couldn't even then believe that she wuz gone, that she could leave her hah! An' he jus' kep' callin' an' callin' on hah tell we mos' 'stracted. He nevah thought she wuz goin' to die. Oh! he wouldn't hav' believed an angel if he'd come an' tole him so. An' then, my boy, they took your muthah an' laid hah out in the graveyard with hah othah little chillun. An' I don't cry any more, 'cause, honey, I know she's at res' in Heaven, with the othah chillun. They's be'n so long waitin' foh hah, honey, an' even if it is Heaven, they was lonesome foh hah, foh no little chillun evah hah a muthah like Mis' Love!"

"Mother!"

But only the deep, dead silence was his answer. He was asleep, of course, so more loudly he called again: "Mother! Oh, mother!"

He thought he heard a sound in that dear, upstairs room, for imagination is ever ready to lend itself to desire, and he waited for the window to unclose. But no white hand unfastened the shutter, and again he called, now louder, stronger, for a tear was beginning to clutch at his heart:

"Oh, mother! Mother!"

Again he listened, longer: holding his breath that he might catch the first light fall of her foot on the floor. But there was only the unbroken stillness when the words died away. Then he lifted his voice, the despair of his heart finding vent in his piercing tones, as to that pitilessly closed window he cried once more: "Mother! Mother! Mother!"

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of the house, looked down on the white yard and white cabins of the "quarters." They, too, lay still, lifeless; but as he watched, one of the low doors was opened and a figure emerged. Reaching the white yard, the woman dropped on her knees and lifted supplicating arms toward heaven, while her agonized voice tore the stillness, as she cried, with the prophet of old:

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"Have mercy on Thy people, O Lord! Have mercy on Thy people! And as Hal went toward her, Charity's words came to him, praying for her race:

"Hev mercy on Dy chillun, Lo'd! m'cy an' pity on Dy foolish chillun! Freedom will be thahs, but bought ez it is wif so menny precious lives, in de 'struction uv so menny happy homes, by de teahs an' broken hearts uv so menny women an' chillun' how holy a possession will it be to his misuse! Dey ah a foolish people, but mak' em' wise, O God, in Dy pity! An' w'en dey will not lie'n to de counsels uv dose Do' point'ez to de dah ruhahs, den hev m'cy on dem, O God! hev m'cy on Dy foolish people!"

"Aunt Charity!" cried Hal. The negress bounded to her feet, and clasping him to her breast wept over him in her joy and sorrow. They went to a bench that stood in the white yard, where, with her pitying eyes on his face, that looked so young and fair in the moonlight, she cried:

"My poor boy! My poor boy!"

"I'm all right," said he, "and I've something fine to tell you when I hear about the folks. How's father?"

"He's well, honey," she said. "But he yain't home now. He's ovah to Frankfort!"

"So that's the reason!" cried the boy, thinking of the closed window. "I was around at the house," he explained. "I wanted to see mother. I called several times under her window, and I thought it very strange that she couldn't hear me."

The old negress began to sway her fragile body, and as she wrung her hands she cried, through her fast falling tears:

"Oh! you'll have to call loud, loud, my honey, a-foh you'll wake your muthah! an' you'll have to wait long, long a fah she'll come to you! Oh, my honey! my honey! you ain't got no muthah now. She's gone, my dahlin'! Mis' Love, where she won't lie awake any more a-waitin' foh yoh ah! Tom; where she won't shed any more bitah, bitter tears—