

CARDOME

A ROMANCE OF KENTUCKY

By ANNA C. MINOUE CHAPTER VIII

"The fate at the Park the day after to-morrow," said Bessie; "what next?"

She was out on the southern veranda with Virginia, Hal, and Thomas. Their easy chairs were drawn back a few feet from the railing, across which the sun was beginning to pour its burning, yellow rays.

"You are an inveterate tramp," remarked Hal. "Simply to exist under such atmospheric conditions calls up all the vitality that the rest of us possess, while you are ready to count on your fingers the fetes and parties and dances to be given in the neighborhood. For my own personal comfort, I am glad to say that after Mrs. Powell's fate there is nothing else unless you will accompany me skiff riding on the Elkhorn."

Bessie treated her cousin to a smile of superior knowledge and replied: "Where is the picnic on the Fourth of July? The trip to the Blue Lick Springs? After that—"

"The deluge!" replied Hal. "Bessie never saw a girl with such a capacity for enjoyment. You are like a butterfly, continually on wing. Now, why are you not a staid, quiet person like Virginia?"

"Oh! I know you are a Northern, why are you not a staid, quiet person like Virginia? And why, when you sit out here on these blustering days, are not your fingers employed in the useful and necessary work of embroidering handkerchiefs, as are hers? Obviously your domestic training has been sadly neglected. Up North, now—"

But Bessie threw up her hands tragically, saying: "Spare me! Inflict upon my defenceless head any of your foolish talk, but spare me that tale of horror. My last governess was a Northern lady, and I know everything the young ladies 'up North' do and do not do, say and do not say, think and do not think. Have I left Alabama to find that torture of my school days at Cardome? Then—"

"What tragic step will you take, dear?" asked Hal, with solicitude. "Go and stay at the Park," she said, laughing.

"I know how you dislike the subject of the industry of Yankee girls," said Hal, "when you contemplate such a change."

"Or how much she likes Miss Sears," put in Virginia, smiling. "Oh! I blow the wind that way?" questioned Hal, in surprise. "Tell us, Bess, about Miss Fortunata, as Tom calls her."

"I wish you would not quote me like that, Hal," said his brother, with quiet dignity.

"Why not, Thomas?" asked Hal, bending his eyes solemnly on his brother. "Did you not so christen her as we, with Phil, formed a committee of reception to welcome the Ohio Cinderella?"

"It was a remark made on the spur of the moment," said Bessie. "As was Captain's 'veni, vidi, vici,' and both spoken for immortality," said Hal. "Throughout all time when men would tell of a girl brought from nobody knows where, and cares less, to inherit property that belongs to somebody else, they will say, 'A Miss Fortunata, to quote the great Thomas Todd, Junior,'" and he sent his winning smile across the sun-lighted space to his brother, who answered it with a low half-laugh.

"If it were to reach her ears it might offend her," said Tom. "If she were sitting where Virginia is, and Bess and I were blotted from sight, and she heard those words, don't you know what she would do? She would lift her heavy eyelids and, looking at you with the slow, dull stare, would say: 'I could not feel offended at you, Mr. Todd!'"

A warmth showed on Thomas's forehead, for Miss Sears had sentimentally made such a remark the day of the dinner party as they had stood together on the veranda steps for a few minutes not seeing Hal, who, with his feet on the railing, was indulging in his solitary cigar and after-festival thoughts.

"Miss Fortunata is not a person to take, but one to give offence," Hal went on. "She told Phil she had heard in Cincinnati that country editors in Kentucky were paid subscriptions in blackberries and corn-meal, and asked him what he did with the surplus. Whereupon I informed her that as Kentucky editors rarely include those items in their bill-of-fare they passed them on to the men in Cincinnati who supply their paper and ink."

"You were very rude," said Bessie, with a reproving frown. "Of course I was," admitted Hal. "But I was rewarded as then, for the first time, I caught something like a gleam of comprehension in her eyes. I shouldn't be surprised if down in Miss Fortunata's heart, if she possesses such an organ, there is registered a neat little vow to get even with me some day."

"I can't understand your dislike of her," said Bessie. "She is a very amiable young lady. You must be as nice to her, Hal, as you are to me, for she asked me to be her friend, and I promised her I would."

"You will live to regret that promise," said Hal. "Then turning his head, he added: 'What in the name of the wonderful is going on in the office to-day? Father must be having another birthday party down there for himself. Here are more visitors; and one is Judge Allison, who certainly is not coming for legal advice.'"

"A political gathering," remarked Thomas, turning his eyes lingeringly toward the small brick office before which stood a line of horses. He would take what he felt to be his place, behind those closed doors, and have voice in those secret discussions. In this hour, when every strong and earnest man was needed, how bitter was the reflection that he must stand apart, quell the ambition and enthusiasm of his heart, and spend these days, fraught with solemn meaning, like any unthinking, self-satisfied, drawing-room idler, because his years wanted a few of manhood! He thought of the fiery young Clay hurrying through the hall, with an impatience against the fate that had sent him a few years later into the world.

He had studied the critical situation of the times in its Northern view, had familiarized himself with the opinions of the great Eastern statesmen, had availed himself of every opportunity of associating with men of thought, had garnered up their words, weighed them in the scale of his own judgment and rated them according to their merit. He had come hurrying with the full determination of entering immediately upon his career, only to find that his youth was against him. It did not matter that his mind had the maturity of thirty, since his years by actual count were only twenty. His thoughts were off, until recalled by Hal's exclamation:

"Why, there's Phil!" and turning his eyes toward the drive, he saw the young Frankfort editor riding up in a hard gallop, his bay mare swathed in sweat.

"What is the meaning of all this, Tom?" asked Bessie, suddenly. He started at the sound of his name, and the shadow softened somewhat on his face as his eyes met the speaker's.

"It is the sign that foretells the storm, Bessie," he replied gravely, and Virginia looked up from her embroidery to assure herself it was indeed the boy Thomas who had spoken. "A storm," he went on, "that has been threatening us for years. In the logical course of events it can not be quelled, nor much longer delayed, and when it comes—"

"When it comes," cried Hal, springing to his feet, his eyes shining, "that bright sword our father earned at Buena Vista has been unsheathed to defend the cause of justice!"

"No, Hal," said Virginia, softly and sadly. "Your father's sword goes not to the son who espouses the cause of the South."

"Virginia," he cried, in boyish incredulity, "what do you mean? That my father is an enemy of the South?" and for once in their long years of companionship, Virginia met an angry light from the blue eyes.

"Out of the Union, yes," she replied; and the gleam of anger left his eyes for one of sad astonishment.

After a pause he said: "Then the sword will be borne by neither of his sons," and the tones seemed to have grown old.

There was another silence, during which Thomas looked at his brother yearningly. Then he rose and said, slowly and solemnly: "Yes, my brother, it will!"

Hal stepped back and gazed like one fascinated on the speaker. Virginia rose quickly, for in that moment there was a prophecy in her heart of the horror of a future hour, and laid her hand on Hal's arm, saying, as she looked from one brother to the other:

"Boys, how foolish is such talk! There are some things that must not even be thought of by you two, and this is one of them. See, you have quite spoiled Bessie's gay anticipations of the fete at the Park. This is certainly most unchivalrous in you! Bessie, turning to the subdued girl, who seemed to have wilted under the intense feeling of the moment, "I think we should punish these young gentlemen by forbidding them henceforth a chair, or even standing-room on our veranda in the mornings."

Whatever stab he had received from the knowledge thus hurled at him by his brother, Hal instantly drew over it the covering of his light, airy nature. He laid his hand above his heart, saying to Virginia, with mock gravity:

"Most humbly do I crave your pardon, my sweet friend, and by my honor as a Todd and a Kentuckian, I swear I shall no more offend too such gracious ladies."

Bessie looked up at him reproachfully. "I have heard almost nothing since coming to Cardome," she said, half-tearfully, "but this awful talk. Maybe some of those terrible things will come true—mamma says they will—but why talk about them? Won't they be bad enough when they are here, without adding misery to them by anticipation? If the wrong man is elected we shall have war—mamma says so—and then—" looking around, with tears in her bright eyes, "this may be our last summer at Cardome. Why spoil it for all our after-lives?"

"Bessie," asked Thomas, "if you know it was written in the book of fate that Cardome must perish by fire to-morrow, could you be happy to-day?" He looked on her questioningly for a moment, and when she did not answer, went down the steps and crossed the lawn, strange emotions surging over his heart.

"I do declare I believe our Thomas is growing political," said Hal, lightly. "Now, I wouldn't be a politician for half Scott County. Think what a weight of care it is on a fellow. I must ask father to look up another profession for Tom. What do you say, Bess?"

But the girl's gaiety could not thus be restored, and after a time she excused herself and stole into the library to gaze plyingly from one of its wide, low windows at Thomas, who was pacing the drive under the shadow of the pine trees.

"You will not desert me?" Hal asked of Virginia, drawing his chair to her side and beginning to examine her embroidery. Then he added: "I went over to Willow-wild yesterday afternoon."

"To see Mr. Powell?" questioned Virginia, her eyes fixed intently on her work.

"It is a marvel to me they do not die of melancholia in that place," began the boy. "Mr. Davidson keeps only two slaves, a man and a woman. The house is shut up, except a few rooms, and the lawn is a tangle of weeds, flowers and young shrubs. It is a picture of desolation; and the gentleman himself wears one of the saddest faces I have ever seen. He is a strange person. I could not feel at ease in his presence. I wish you knew him and could tell me what to think of him."

"Why didn't you ask Mr. Powell for an opinion?" remarked she with a smile.

"Oh, Powell says he is a fine gentleman; but what else would you expect him to say of his host?"

Hal was silent for a moment, then said, dropping his voice: "You know that picture mother has of Bessie, taken when she was a baby? I saw one like it on Mr. Davidson's desk."

Virginia laid down her work and looked at her informant in surprise, but almost immediately she smiled, saying:

"Babies pictures are generally very much alike, except to the mother of the sitters. You must certainly have made a mistake."

Hal shook his head, though he made no reply.

"But this is not all," he began. "Here is another surprise; Mrs. Powell has invited Clay and Mr. Davidson to visit her. They are going over this afternoon and will remain until after the fete. Now, isn't that a circumstance! And won't people wonder what the old lady is up to?"

Instantly over Virginia's mind flashed the words of her waiting woman: "I've never seen my de dem wooden han, an' hit was de debil's work!" What did she mean by asking Clay Powell to visit her at the Park? Had her conscience begun to torment her, and would she make atonement to the son for her great wrong to the father? or was that wrong to be repeated on the unsuspecting?

As the two sat there in thought the sound of many voices was borne to them, and glancing toward the broken up, stormily perhaps, for while some were standing talking loudly, others had mounted their horses, and were riding hurriedly away, with moodily bent heads. The Judge remained on the veranda until all, save two, had departed; then, with them, he turned toward the house. Whatever had been the nature of the meeting and its results, twenty years seemed to have been struck from the appearance of Judge Todd. His figure was more erect, his head more proudly lifted, his face pale with an undulant blue gleam from the fearless blue eyes. By the side of this magnificent, determined form, Philip McDowell, tired and rejected, made sharp contrast, while Howard Dallas, wearing his grace and height with his easy, undisturbed manner, appeared a feeble specimen of manhood. As they neared the house, seeing Virginia, the Judge smiled, and as he came up the steps, he said:

"Virginia, will you order some luncheon for Phil? He insists that he does not want any, and I am equally convinced that one who rode from Frankfort under such a sun, and must make as quickly the return trip, needs something to sustain the inner man. I know he will not be so ungallant as to refuse hospitality from your hands, my dear. Howard stays for dinner with us."

Virginia led the way down the wide hall to the breakfast room, and after ordering a cup of coffee, motioned Phil to one of the chairs near the long table. The blinds were lowered to shut out the strong light, and the cool shadows were rich with the fragrance that came from the bowl of June roses set on the table. No murmurous sound of country life disturbed the stillness. Peace, rest and serenity seemed to dwell there, and the tired man, as he took his chair, felt the day's weight of care slip from him. And with such a scene he always associated Virginia. Her presence was like a cool hand laid on a fever-burned forehead. He resigned himself to its influence. He could not see her face clearly in the shadows, but he knew so well its lineaments, its varying expression, that were sight to be stricken from his eyes it could never grow dim nor be forgotten.

It so happens in life that there are souls set apart from the world in which they dwell, stilling them to have no share in it, take no active part in its great tragedies or pitiful farces, but are like the mock spectators of a stage. Such a soul was Philip McDowell's, and early he had come to realize this and had accepted it with the calm of a fatalist. He was here, and the purpose which had sent him he dared not question. It was right, he knew, else it had not been done. One duty was his—to follow straight, without murmur, without rebellion, without questioning, the line an unseen Hand had marked out; and his guide over that

way, his strength, his succor, was conscience.

He had never denied to himself that he loved Virginia Castleton, but he knew that he had no more part in her life than the cedar, standing sentinel on some lonely hilltop, has in the green and murmurous company of the distant level woodland.

But the knowledge that would have saddened the heart of another man, made his more tenderly true to the object of his devotion. There is an abundance of love in the world, but friendship, as we have too bitterly learned, is a rarer quality. And though love may be all-enfolding, though it would bear the hurts to save the beloved from them, though it is capable of heroic sacrifices, it is without a tyrant, ever demanding more than it can give. Friendship says not, "Lo, I give thee so much, give me the same in return, with usury!" but pours out itself plenteously, without exactions, without expectations. Many men had given her love, on finding that she had none for them had not hesitated to break every tie of family association or social intercourse; so it was natural that Virginia Castleton should cling to the friendship of Phil McDowell as a vine to its wall.

"Why must you leave us so soon?" she questioned. "I half believe Cardome has lost its charm for you," she finished, playfully.

"Ah, not that, Virginia!" he said. "Do you not know what it would mean to spend this summer day at Cardome? Set this quiet, cool room, then, against my hot little office, with its noise, its heat, its social waves. Noises of feet of great voices—oh, the hateful noise of voices! But duty, once we have sworn her fealty, is a jealous mistress, stern and unrelenting in her demands."

"But generous in her rewards," said Virginia, and he felt her approving smile through the shadows. "I am not blaming you," she went on, "but I want you to be prudent. The sun is intensely hot—why didn't you drive over?"

"Because I had to come, and must return, more quickly than a carriage travels, besides, I did not care to make two horses take the journey when one would do. Ladybird knows the road so well she can scarcely consider it much of a trip, if it is true that frequent repetition lessens the difficulties of every performance."

Here the slave entered with the tray. As she raised the blinds a shower of yellow light fell over the room, putting the cool shadows to flight and kissing Virginia's chestnut hair into gold.

"I will pour the coffee," said Virginia to the girl; adding, "Tell Ned to bring around Mr. McDowell's horse in half an hour. Yes," she interposed, against Phil's protesting gesture, "you must take that much rest. Has not this been a trying morning on you? You look almost ill."

"All mornings, and days, of late are trying," he answered. "My position is becoming full of care, anxiety, and unrest. The destiny of the nation, I believe, will be determined by the events of this year, and newspapers, in a great measure, will shape the events. A man may feel little gravity in the situation when called upon to put forth his individual opinion; but how carefully must he weigh each word, how great a restraint must be put on himself, when he is the mouthpiece of a party—of that portion of the public represented by this paper! It is a grave responsibility. A thoughtful man never lightly assumes it; an honest man can not, unless certain that he has his finger on the pulse of the people and is capable of accurately gauging its beats. But consider the painful difficulties of the situation when a man is called to express, as if he confirms them, views which he is not yet prepared to adopt! I would not shrink from any of the responsibilities of my position, but I must first be fully convinced that the cause I am called upon to uphold is right before I can uphold it."

There was a deep fold on the white brow, which until recently showed so smooth and fair; and all the misgivings and fears and terrors of that unknown future seemed to clutch at Virginia's heart. Was there no hope for her escape from them? School boys could not meet without calling up the spectre of approaching strife; if men gathered in social intercourse, they would unconsciously glide back to the thoughts of solemn hours; even friends could not go a little apart for a moment's rest but a shadowy hand would appear, pointing to a time of cruel separation. Phil looked up suddenly, and on meeting Virginia's comprehending, sorrowful eyes, started guiltily.

"What a recompense I am making you!" he exclaimed.

"My friend," she said, quietly, "do not you, too, fall into the fault of other men and apologize to a woman, when, forgetting their audience, they give expression to thoughts about the grave, approaching crisis. It is not reasonable in man or just to women. Though our sex debars us from actively participating in your work, remember, while we gain nothing more than we have from its success, in its failure we are the greater losers."

And all the way over that long, hot, dusty road, lying between Cardome and Frankfort, those solemn words went with Phil McDowell.

TO BE CONTINUED

There is but one road to lead us to God—humility.

THAT OLD DRAWER

By REV. P. H. D.

More than forty years have passed since I was ordained priest and I resent the imputation that I am getting old; it is true that I am most willing to permit some of the younger men to do the work of preaching, hearing confessions, and the like; but that is because I don't want to interfere with their zeal.

After all has been said, is it not quite true that age is purely a relative term? I have seen persons who were not fifty years of age who were old men and pardon the personal vein—I am nearer to seventy than to sixty, and I assure you that I am not old. Some one told me that one of the surest signs of approaching old age was when one on the same evening told the same story twice; if that be the recognized test I am yet in the infant class. I have however, quite recently remarked a habit of saying in the course of conversation: "When I was a young priest, etc.," and I wonder if that be any sign of approaching years. As I might be tempted to give myself away in this matter I will change the subject.

I have a habit twice a year of cleaning out a drawer in my desk. It is one of those long deep drawers arranged to hold account books and from the outside having the appearance of two drawers. To-day is my semi-annual cleaning-up day, and as I sit in my study there is a fire in my grate, and the combination of a good fire, useless papers and an empty drawer as a result of the judicious destruction of these papers seems a very happy coincidence. I am going to do the right thing to-day and commit to the flames a heap of useless trash. Yet it is not true that I have in days past burned papers which all too late I found were of use to me?

On the top of the pile of papers I find a package carefully tied and as I open it and spread out the leaves so that I may find what it is about, I find written at the top of the first page: The Twelfth Promise. I can't destroy this I am sure, for it is a simple story of one of the strange experiences of my early days in the priesthood. I smooth out the pages and arrange them in order, and then reach into my desk and pull out a large envelope and carefully place the manuscript in it. I sit there while thinking over the story, which is as fresh in my mind to-day as it was thirty odd years ago, and as I am recalling it I take out the papers and hardly thinking of what I am doing I read them over word for word. I know that I am not going to put this story into the grate, so I dive down into the drawer and find another document. I smile; for the first thing that I see is the name of a celebrated bank burglar, who had a national, if not an international reputation—Big Frank. This enterprising artist was in the habit of always bringing his offering to the Sacred Heart. She was not a robust girl, though I do not remember that she was ever sick while I was there until the time which I am to tell of. She often asked me strange questions about her favorite devotion and she could not understand how any Catholic could doubt that our Lord had made the twelve promises to Blessed Margaret Mary, and when I told her that the question and answer would always bring her offering to the Sacred Heart. She was not a robust girl, though I do not remember that she was ever sick while I was there until the time which I am to tell of. She often asked me strange questions about her favorite devotion and she could not understand how any Catholic could doubt that our Lord had made the twelve promises to Blessed Margaret Mary, and when I told her that the question and answer would always bring her offering to the Sacred Heart. 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