

King Charles

Kitty's Conquest



Charles King

Kitty's Conquest

«Public Domain»

King C.

Kitty's Conquest / C. King — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

PREFACE	5
CHAPTER I	6
CHAPTER II	11
CHAPTER III	15
CHAPTER IV	19
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	29

Charles King Kitty's Conquest

PREFACE

The incidents of this little story occurred some twelve years ago, and it was then that the story was mainly written.

If it meet with half the kindness bestowed upon his later work it will more than fulfil the hopes of

THE AUTHOR.
February, 1884.

CHAPTER I

It was just after Christmas, and discontentedly enough I had left my cosy surroundings in New Orleans, to take a business-trip through the counties on the border-line between Tennessee and northern Mississippi and Alabama. One sunny afternoon I found myself on the "freight and passenger" of what was termed "The Great Southern Mail Route." We had been trundling slowly, sleepily along ever since the conductor's "all aboard!" after dinner; had met the Mobile Express at Corinth when the shadows were already lengthening upon the ruddy, barren-looking landscape, and now, with Iuka just before us, and the warning whistle of the engine shrieking in our ears with a discordant pertinacity attained only on our Southern railroads, I took a last glance at the sun just disappearing behind the distant forest in our wake, drew the last breath of life, from my cigar, and then, taking advantage of the halt at the station, strolled back from the dinginess of the smoking-car to more comfortable quarters in the rear.

There were only three passenger-cars on the train, and, judging from the scarcity of occupants, one would have been enough. Elbowing my way through the gaping, lazy swarms of unsavory black humanity on the platform, and the equally repulsive-looking knots of "poor white trash," the invariable features of every country stopping-place south of Mason and Dixon, I reached the last car, and entering, chose one of a dozen empty seats, and took a listless look at my fellow-passengers, – six in all, – and of them, two only worth a second glance.

One, a young, perhaps very young, lady, so girlish, *petite*, and pretty she looked even after the long day's ride in a sooty car. Her seat was some little distance from the one into which I had dropped, but that was because the other party to be depicted was installed within two of her, and, with that indefinable sense of repulsion which induces all travellers, strangers to one another, to get as far apart as possible on entering a car, I had put four seats 'twixt him and me, – and afterwards wished I hadn't.

It *was* rude to turn and stare at a young girl, – travelling alone, too, as she appeared to be. I did it involuntarily the first time, and found myself repeating the performance again and again, simply because I couldn't help it, – she looked prettier and prettier every time.

A fair, oval, tiny face; a somewhat supercilious nose, and not-the-least-so mouth; a mouth, on the contrary, that even though its pretty lips were closed, gave one the intangible yet positive assurance of white and regular teeth; eyes whose color I could not see because their drooping lids were fringed with heavy curving lashes, but which subsequently turned out to be a soft, dark gray; and hair! – hair that made one instinctively gasp with admiration, and exclaim (mentally), "If it's *only* real!" – hair that rose in heavy golden masses above and around the diminutive ears, almost hiding them from view, and fell in braids (not braids either, because it *wasn't* braided) and rolls – only that sounds breakfasty – and masses again, – it must do for both, – heavy golden masses and rolls and waves and straggling offshoots and disorderly delightfulness all down the little lady's neck, and, landing in a lump on the back of the seat, seemed to come surging up to the top again, ready for another tumble.

It looked as though it hadn't been "fixed" since the day before, and yet as though it would be a shame to touch it; and was surmounted, "sat upon," one might say, by the jauntiest of little travelling hats of some dark material (don't expect a bachelor, and an elderly one at that, to be explicit on such a point), this in turn being topped by the pertest little mite of a feather sticking bolt upright from a labyrinth of beads, bows, and buckles at the side.

More of this divinity was not to be viewed from my post of observation, as all below the fragile white throat with its dainty collar and the handsome fur "boa," thrown loosely back on account of the warmth of the car, was undergoing complete occultation by the seats in front; yet enough was visible to impress one with a longing to become acquainted with the diminutive

entirety, and to convey an idea of cultivation and refinement somewhat unexpected on that particular train, and in that utterly unlovely section of the country.

Naturally I wondered who she was; where she was going; how it happened that she, so young, so innocent, so be-petted and be-spoilt in appearance, should be journeying alone through the thinly settled counties of upper Mississippi. Had she been a "through" passenger, she would have taken the express, not this grimy, stop-at-every-shanty, slow-going old train on which we were creeping eastward.

In fact, the more I peeped, the more I marvelled; and I found myself almost unconsciously inaugurating a detective movement with a view to ascertaining her identity.

All this time mademoiselle was apparently serenely unconscious of my scrutiny and deeply absorbed in some object – a book, probably – in her lap. A stylish Russia-leather satchel was hanging among the hooks above her head, – evidently her property, – and those probably, too, were her initials in monogram, stamped in gilt upon the flap, too far off for my fading eyes to distinguish, yet tantalizingly near.

Now I'm a lawyer, and as such claim an indisputable right to exercise the otherwise feminine prerogative of yielding to curiosity. It's our business to be curious; not with the sordid views and mercenary intents of Templeton Jitt; but rather as Dickens's "Bar" was curious, – affably, apologetically, professionally curious. In fact, as "Bar" himself said, "we lawyers *are* curious," and take the same lively interest in the affairs of our fellow-men (and women) as maiden aunts are popularly believed to exercise in the case of a pretty niece with a dozen beaux, or a mother-in-law in the daily occupations of the happy husband of her eldest daughter. Why need I apologize further? I left my seat; zig-zagged down the aisle; took a drink of water which I didn't want, and, returning, the long look at the monogram which I *did*.

There they were, two gracefully intertwining letters; a "C" and a "K." Now was it C. K. or K. C.? If C. K., what did it stand for?

I thought of all manner of names as I regained my seat; some pretty, some tragic, some commonplace, none satisfactory. Then I concluded to begin over; put the cart before the horse, and try K. C.

Now, it's ridiculous enough to confess to it, but Ku-Klux was the first thing I thought of; K. C. didn't stand for it at all, but Ku-Klux *would* force itself upon my imagination. Well, everything *was* Ku-Klux just then. Congress was full of them; so was the South; – Ku-Klux had brought me up there; in fact I had spent most of the afternoon in planning an elaborate line of defence for a poor devil whom I knew to be innocent, however blood-guilty might have been his associates. Ku-Klux had brought that lounging young cavalryman (the other victim reserved for description), who – confound him – had been the cause of my taking a metaphorical back seat and an actual front one on entering the car; but Ku-Klux couldn't have brought *her* there; and after all, what business had I bothering my tired brains over this young beauty? I was nothing to her, why should she be such a torment to me?

In twenty minutes we would be due at Sandbrook, and there I was to leave the train and jog across the country to the plantation of Judge Summers, an old friend of my father's and of mine, who had written me to visit him on my trip, that we might consult together over some intricate cases that of late had been occupying his attention in that vicinity. In fact, I was too elderly to devote so much thought and speculation to a damsel still in her teens, so I resolutely turned eyes and tried to turn thoughts to something else.

The lamps were being lighted, and the glare from the one overhead fell full upon my other victim, the cavalryman. I knew him to be such from the crossed sabres in gold upon his jaunty forage cap, and the heavy army cloak which was muffled cavalier-like over his shoulders, displaying to vivid advantage its gorgeous lining of canary color, yet completely concealing any interior garments his knightship might be pleased to wear.

Something in my contemplation of this young warrior amused me to that extent that I wondered he had escaped more than a casual glance before. Lolling back in his seat, with a huge pair of top boots spread out upon the cushion in front, he had the air, as the French say, of thorough self-appreciation and superiority; he was gazing dreamily up at the lamp overhead and whistling softly to himself, with what struck me forcibly as an affectation of utter nonchalance; what struck me still more forcibly was that he did not once look at the young beauty so close behind him; on the contrary, there was an evident attempt on his part to appear sublimely indifferent to her presence.

Now that's very unusual in a young man under the circumstances, isn't it? I had an idea that these Charles O'Malleys were heart-smashers; but this conduct hardly tallied with any of my preconceived notions on the subject of heart-smashing, and greatly did I marvel and conjecture as to the cause of this extraordinary divergence from the manners and customs of young men, – soldiers in particular, when, of a sudden, Mars arose, threw off his outer vestment, emerged as it were from a golden glory of yellow shelter-tent; discovered a form tall, slender, graceful, and erect, the whole clad in a natty shell-jacket and riding-breeches; stalked up to the stove in the front of the car; produced, filled, and lighted a smoke-begrimed little meerschaum; opened the door with a snap; let himself out with a bang; and disappeared into outer darkness.

Looking quickly around, I saw that the fair face of C. K. or K. C. was uplifted; furthermore, that there was an evident upward tendency on the part of the aforementioned supercilious nose, entirely out of proportion with the harmonious and combined movement of the other features; furthermore, that the general effect was that of maidenly displeasure; and, lastly, that the evident object of such divine wrath was, beyond all peradventure, the vanished knight of the sabre.

"Now, my lad," thought I, "what have you done to put your foot in it?"

Just then the door reopened, and in came, not Mars, but the conductor; and that functionary, proceeding direct to where she sat, thus addressed the pretty object of my late cogitations (I didn't listen, but I heard):

"It'll be all right, miss. I telegraphed the judge from Iuka, and reckon he'll be over with the carriage to meet you; but if he nor none of the folks ain't there, I'll see that you're looked after all right. Old Jake Biggs'll be there, most like, and then you're sure of getting over to the judge's to-night anyhow."

Here I pricked up my ears. Beauty smilingly expressed her gratitude, and, in smiling, corroborated my theory about the teeth to the most satisfactory extent.

"The colonel," continued the conductor, who would evidently have been glad of any excuse to talk with her for hours, "the colonel, him and Mr. Peyton, went over to Holly Springs three days ago; but the smash-up on the Mississippi Central must have been the cause of their not getting to the junction in time to meet you. That's why I brought you along on this train; 'twasn't no use to wait for them there."

"Halloo!" thought I at this juncture, "here's my chance; he means Judge Summers by 'the judge's,' and 'the colonel' is Harrod Summers, of course, and Ned Peyton, that young reprobate who has been playing fast and loose among the marshals and sheriffs, is the Mr. Peyton he speaks of; and this must be some friend or relative of Miss Pauline's going to visit her. The gentlemen have been sent to meet her, and have been delayed by that accident. I'm in luck;" so up I jumped, elbowed the obliging conductor to one side; raised my hat, and introduced myself, – "Mr. Brandon, of New Orleans, an old friend of Judge Summers, on my way to visit him; delighted to be of any service; pray accept my escort," etc., etc. – all somewhat incoherent, but apparently satisfactory. Mademoiselle graciously acknowledged my offer; smilingly accepted my services; gave me a seat by her side; and we were soon busied in a pleasant chat about "Pauline," her cousin, and "Harrod," her other cousin and great admiration. Soon I learned that it was K. C., that K. C. was Kitty Carrington; that Kitty Carrington was Judge Summers's niece, and that Judge Summers's niece was going to visit Judge Summers's niece's uncle; that they had all spent the months of September and

October together in the north when she first returned from abroad; that she had been visiting "Aunt Mary" in Louisville ever since, and that "Aunt Mary" had been with her abroad for ever so long, and was just as good and sweet as she could be. In fact, I was fast learning all my charming little companion's family history, and beginning to feel tolerably well acquainted with and immensely proud of her, when the door opened with a snap, closed with a bang, and, issuing from outer darkness, re-entered Mars.

Now, when Mars re-entered, he did so pretty much as I have seen his brother button-wearers march into their company quarters on inspection morning, with an air of determined ferocity and unsparing criticism; but when Mars caught sight of me, snugly ensconced beside the only belle on the train, the air suddenly gave place to an expression of astonishment. He dropped a gauntlet; picked it up; turned red; and then, with sudden resumption of lordly indifference, plumped himself down into his seat in as successful an attempt at expressing "Who cares?" without saying it, as I ever beheld.

Chancing to look at Miss Kitty, I immediately discovered that a little cloud had settled upon her fair brow, and detected the nose on another rise, so said I, —

"What's the matter? Our martial friend seems to have fallen under the ban of your displeasure," and then was compelled to smile at the vindictiveness of the reply:

"*He!* he has indeed! Why, he had the impertinence to speak to me before you came in; asked me if I was not the Miss Carrington expected at Judge Summers's; actually offered to escort me there, as the colonel had failed to meet me!"

"Indeed! Then I suppose I, too, am horribly at fault," said I, laughing, "for I've done pretty much the same thing?"

"Nonsense!" said Miss Kit. "Can't you understand? He's a Yankee, — a Yankee officer! You don't suppose I'd allow myself, a Southern girl whose home was burnt by Yankees and whose only brother fought all through the war against them, — you don't suppose I'd allow myself to accept any civility from a Yankee, do you?" and the bright eyes shot a vengeful glance at the dawdling form in front, and a terrific pout straightway settled upon her lips.

Amused, yet unwilling to offend, I merely smiled and said that it had not occurred to me; but immediately asked her how long before my entrance this had happened.

"Oh, about half an hour; he never made more than one attempt."

"What answer did you give him?"

"Answer! — why! I couldn't say much of anything, you know, but merely told him I wouldn't trouble him, and said it in such a way that he knew well enough what was meant. He took the hint quickly enough, and turned red as fire, and said very solemnly, 'I ask your pardon,' put on his cap and marched back to his seat." Here came a pretty little imitation of Mars raising his chin and squaring his shoulders as he walked off.

I smiled again, and then began to think it all over. Mars was a total stranger to me. I had never seen him before in my life, and, so long as we remained on an equal footing as strangers to the fair K. C., I had been disposed to indulge in a little of the usual jealousy of "military interference," and, from my exalted stand-point as a man of the world and at least ten years his senior in age, to look upon him as a boy with no other attractions than his buttons and a good figure; but Beauty's answer set me to thinking. I was a Yankee, too, only she didn't know it; if she had, perhaps Mars would have stood the better chance of the two. I, too, had borne arms against the Sunny South (as a valiant militia-man when the first call came in '61), and had only escaped wearing the uniform she detested from the fact that our regimental rig was gray, and my talents had never conspired to raise me above the rank of lance-corporal. I, too, had participated in the desecration of the "sacred soil" (digging in the hot sun at the first earthworks we threw up across the Long Bridge); in fact, if she only knew it, there was probably more reason, more real cause, for resentment against me, than against the handsome, huffy stripling two seats in front.

He was a "Yank," of course; but judging from the smooth, ruddy cheek, and the downiest of downy moustaches fringing his upper lip, had but just cut loose from the apron-strings of his maternal West Point. Why! he must have been at school when we of the old Seventh tramped down Broadway that April afternoon to the music of "Sky-rockets," half drowned in stentorian cheers. In fact, I began, in the few seconds it took me to consider this, to look upon Mars as rather an ill-used individual. Very probably he was stationed somewhere in the vicinity, for loud appeals had been made for regular cavalry ever since the year previous, when the Ku-Klux began their devilment in the neighborhood. Very probably he knew Judge Summers; visited at his plantation; had heard of Miss Kitty's coming, and was disposed to show her attention. Meeting her on the train alone and unescorted, he had done nothing more than was right in offering his services. He had simply acted as a gentleman, and been rebuffed. Ah, Miss Kitty, you must, indeed, be very young, thought I, and so asked, —

"Have you been long in the South since the war, Miss Carrington?"

"I? Oh, no! We lived in Kentucky before the war, and when it broke out mother took me abroad. I was a little bit of a girl then, and was put at school in Paris, but mother died very soon afterwards, and then auntie took charge of me. Why, I only left school last June!"

Poor little Kit! her father had died when she was a mere baby; her mother before the child had reached her tenth year; their beautiful old home in Kentucky had been sacked and burned during the war; and George, her only brother, after fighting for his "Lost Cause" until the last shot was fired at Appomattox, had gone abroad, married, and settled there. Much of the large fortune of their father still remained; and little Kit, now entering upon her eighteenth year, was the ward of Judge Summers, her mother's brother, and quite an heiress.

All this I learned, partly at the time, principally afterwards from the judge himself; but meantime there was the rebellious little fairy at my side with all the hatred and prejudice of ten years ago, little dreaming how matters had changed since the surrender of her beloved Lee, or imagining the quantity of oil that had been poured forth upon the troubled waters.

CHAPTER II

The "Twenty minutes to Sandbrook" had become involved in difficulty. Interested in my chat with Kitty, I had failed to notice that we were stopping even longer than usual at some mysterious locality where there was even less of any apparent reason for stopping at all. All without was darkness. I pushed open the window, poked out my head, and took a survey. All was silence save the hissing of the engine way ahead, and one or two voices in excited conversation somewhere near the baggage-car and by the fence at the roadside. Two lights, lanterns apparently, were flitting rapidly about. I wondered at the delay, but could assign no cause in reply to the natural question Miss Kit asked as I drew in my head.

Mars opened his window as I closed mine, looked out a moment, then got up, gave himself a stretch, and stalked out; this time without slamming the door; a bang would have been too demonstrative in that oppressive silence. In one minute he came back with a quick, nervous step, picked up a belt and holster he had left at his seat, and, without a glance at us, turned sharply back to the door again. As he disappeared, I saw his hand working at the butt of the revolver swung at his hip. Something was wrong. I knew that the Ku-Klux had been up to mischief in that vicinity, and the thought flashed upon me that they were again at work. Looking around, I saw that three of our four fellow-passengers had disappeared. They were ill-favored specimens, for I remembered noticing them just before we stopped, and remarked that they were talking earnestly and in low tones together at the rear end of the car. The other passenger was an old lady, spectacled and rheumatic. Without communicating my suspicions to my little charge, I excused myself; stepped quietly out; swung off the car, and stumbled up the track toward the lights.

A group of six or eight men was gathered at the baggage-car. About the same number were searching along the fence, all talking excitedly. I hailed a brakeman and asked what was the matter.

"Ku-Klux, sir! Tried to rob the express! There was two of them in mask jumped in with their pistols and belted the agent over the head and laid him out; but afore they could get into the safe, the baggage-master, Jim Dalton, came in, and he yelled and went for 'em. We was running slow up grade, and they jumped off; Jim and the conductor after them; that's why we stopped and backed down."

"Which way did they go?" I asked.

"Took right into the bush, I reckon. That lieutenant and another feller has gone in through here, and Bill here says he seen three other fellers light out from the back car, – the one you was in, sir. That's enough to catch them if they're on the trail."

"Catch them!" I exclaimed. "Those three men in our car were of the same gang, if anything, and that makes five to our four."

"Yes, by G – d!" said another of the party, a sturdy-looking planter; "and what's more, I believe they've got a ranch in hereabouts and belong to Hank Smith's gang. There ain't a meaner set of cut-throats in all Dixie."

"Then, for heaven's sake, let's go in and hunt up our party!" said I, really apprehensive as to their safety. Three or four volunteered at once. Over the fence we went, and on into the pitchy darkness beyond. Stumbling over logs and cracking sticks and leaves, squashing through mud-holes and marshy ground, we plunged ahead, until a minute or two brought us panting into a comparatively open space, and there we paused to listen. Up to this time I had heard not a sound from the pursuit, and hardly knew which way to turn. Each man held his breath and strained his ears.

Another minute and it came, – well on to the front, – a yell, a shot, another shot, and then, – "This way!" "This way!" "Here they are!" The rest was drowned by our own rush, as we once more plunged into the thicket and on towards the shouts. All of us were armed in one way or another, – it is rare enough that any man goes otherwise in that section of the country, – and to me there was

a terrible excitement about the whole affair, and my heart came bounding up to my throat with every stride.

One or two more shots were heard, and on we kept until, just as every man was almost breathless and used up, we were brought to a sudden stop on the steep bank of a bayou that stretched far to either side of our path, right and left, completely barring farther progress.

In blank amazement, and utterly at a loss what to do, we were gazing stupidly in one another's faces, as one after another we gathered on the brink, when there came a sudden exclamation from the midst of us, – "Who's that?" I jumped, thanks to startled nerves, and looked around.

A dark form came creeping slowly up the bank, and a weak voice said, —

"Don't shoot, fellows. I'm all right, but they nigh onto finished me, and they've got Hank Smith away anyhow."

We crowded around him with questions; but he was faint and sick and the blood was streaming from a cut on his forehead. A long pull at a flask tendered by some sympathetic soul in the group revived him enough to tell his experience.

"Me and the lieutenant took out through the open until we had to take to the bush. Didn't see the conductor nor Jim anywhere, but we gained on the Kluxers. Pretty soon we heard 'em busting through the bushes and heard 'em holler. I got blowed, but the lieutenant, he went ahead like as though he'd done nothing but jump since he was a pup. I never seen such a kangaroo. He got clean out of sight, and all of a sudden I heard him holler; and then came a couple o' shots; and pretty quick I came upon him and another cuss just more than going for one another in the bushes. The Yankee had him under, though, and had winged him on the run. When I came up he says to me, says he, 'You look out for this man now. He can't hurt you, but if he squirms, you put a hole in him. I'm going on after the others.' So on he went, and I took a look round. I'd sat down on the cuss to make sure I had him, and my pistol at his ear. He was lyin' right here a-glarin' up at me, and the moment I got a good, square look at his face, d – n my eyes if it wasn't Hank Smith! Then I began to feel bully; and just then I heard some other fellows running up, and thought it was our crowd, so I yelled out that I was here and had Hank Smith all right; and he kinder grinned; and they hollered 'bully' too; and next thing I knew one of 'em ran up and fetched me a wipe over the head and rolled me off down the bank, and there I've been mud-hugging ever since.

"I was stunned, but knew enough to lie quiet, and they got into some kind of a boat and went paddling off across the creek; but Hank was groaning and cussing so that I couldn't hear nothing but him. He swore by all that was holy that he'd have that Yank's heart's-blood before the month was out, and I tell you the lieutenant had better keep his eye peeled or he'll do it."

So we had lost him after all! It was too bad! and so said the conductor and baggage-master when they rejoined us a few minutes after, bringing with them the cavalryman, all three out of breath, covered with mud and scratches, and the latter looking very white and saying but little. I noticed that his handkerchief was bound tightly round his left hand, and divined the cause at once. My respect for Mars was rising every minute. He took a pull at the flask, looked revived, and as we all turned moodily back to the train, I asked him about his hurt. "Nothing but a clip on the hand," said he; "but I suppose it bled a good deal before I noticed it, and made me a little faint after the row was over. I suspected those fellows who were in our car; in fact, had been sent up to Corinth to look after one or two just such specimens, and was on my way back to my troop by this train. If that man was Hank Smith, as they seem to think, I would almost rather have lost my commission than him." Mars's teeth came together solidly as he gave vent to this sentiment, and his strides unconsciously lengthened so that I had to strike an amble to keep up.

By this time we had worked our way back into a comparatively open space again, and could see the dim lights of the train several hundred yards off. The rest of our little party kept crowding around us and offering my young hero cordial expressions of sympathy for his hurt, and, in homely phrase, many a compliment on his plucky fight. Mars took it all in a laughing sort of way, but was

evidently too disgusted at the escape of his bird to care to talk much about anything. Nevertheless, before we got back to the train I gave him my name, and, as an old friend of Judge Summers's, whom I presumed he knew, trusted that I might meet him frequently, and that we might become better acquainted.

"Thank you, Mr. Brandon," he answered; "I have heard the judge speak of you, and am sorry I did not know sooner who you were. My name is Amory."

"Have you been long in the South?" I asked.

"No, sir; only a month or two. In fact," – and here something like a blush stole up to the young fellow's cheek, – "I only graduated in this last class – '71 – from the Academy, and so have seen but little of any kind of service."

"You're soldier all over, at any rate," thought I, as I looked at the erect, graceful figure beside me; and wondered – my thoughts suddenly reverting to Miss Kitty – how a young girl could find it in her heart to snub such a handsome fellow as that, Yank or no Yank.

A few strides more brought us to the train, where Amory, whose gallantry had already been noised abroad among the passengers, was immediately surrounded by an excited group of non-combatants, while I jumped into our car to see how my little *protégée* had fared during our absence. She looked vastly relieved at my reappearance, having of course learned the true state of affairs soon after our sudden departure. I told her briefly what had happened, taking rather a mischievous delight in dilating upon Mars's achievement, and affecting not to notice the expression of mingled contempt and incredulity that promptly appeared in her pretty face. Mars himself did not reappear: he had gone into the baggage-car to bathe his hand and accept the eager attentions of one or two Africans, native and to the manner born, who were vying with one another in brushing off the dirt from his snugly-fitting uniform. He was still surrounded by a knot of passengers and train-hands when I went forward to see how he was getting along, which I did when the train started, but we exchanged a cordial grip of the hand; and parted with the promise of meeting at "the judge's," or the cavalry camp, a few miles beyond, within the next two or three days.

The whistle for Sandbrook was just beginning as I rejoined Miss Kitty, and, after a vigorous life of at least two minutes, wound up in a dismal whine as we rolled in among the lights at the station. Yes, there they were, ready and waiting for us. The genial, gray-haired old judge and Miss Pauline herself, his only and devoted daughter, in whose arms Miss Kit was rapturously enfolded the instant she hopped from the platform. There, too, was old Jake Biggs, whom the conductor had mentioned as mademoiselle's escort in case no one else appeared, – Jake and his boon companion, his faithful old horse, "Bob," so named in honor of General Lee. Jake was an old colored servant of the Summers family, and had followed his "young massa," Harrod Summers, all through the war; had seen him rise from subaltern to colonel; had nursed him through wounds and illness; and at last when the war was over, and Harrod, who had gone forth with the enthusiasm and ardor of a boy, returned to his father's home, old Jake contentedly followed him, and settled down in one of the few log cabins that remained on the almost ruined estate of the Summers'. Jake was a "free nigger" now, but the world to him was wrapped up in old associations and "Mars' Harrod." No such soldier ever had lived as his "cunnel," no such statesman as the judge; no such belle as Missy Pauline. And Jake not only would not leave them, but in a vague and chivalric manner he stumbled about the premises, lording it over the young niggers and making mighty pretence at earning an independent livelihood for himself by "doin' chores" around the neighborhood, and in hauling loads from the depot to the different plantations within a few miles' radius of Sandbrook. He had managed to scrape up a dilapidated cart and harness somewhere or other, and poor old Bob furnished, greatly to his disgust, the draft and motive power. Having been a fine and spirited saddle-horse in his younger days, Bob had naturally rebelled at the idea of coming down to the level of the plantation mules, and had shown something of his former self in the vigorous and determined remonstrance which resulted on the occasion of Jake's first experiments with the harness; but beyond a temporary dislocation

of buckles, straps, and dash-board, and a volley of African anathemas and "Whoa da's" from his master, poor old Bob's rebellion had accomplished nothing, and he had finally settled down into a resigned and dreamy existence, and went plodding about the vicinity with the asthmatic cart at his heels, a victim to the vicissitudes of war.

Jake was a pet of mine, and had amused me very much on the occasion of my first visit to the judge's, and that's why I tell so long a rigmarole about him. He stood there, a little aloof from the "quality folks," grinning and bowing, and making huge semicircular sweeps with his battered old hat, in his anxiety to do proper honor to the judge's guests.

I had a chance to receive my especial welcome while Miss Kit was being almost devoured by her relatives; and presently the baggage was all pitched off; the train moved on with a parting whoop; Mars appeared at the rear door and gave me a farewell wave of the hand; and then, leaving to Jake and Bob the responsible duty of transporting the young lady's trunks, we four – Miss Summers and Miss Kit, the judge and I – were duly ensconced in the comfortable old carriage, and went jolting off homeward.

Mr. Summers and I had much to talk about, and finding it impossible to get a word in edgewise with the two young ladies, who were fondling, fluttering, cooing, and chattering on the back seat in the most absorbed manner imaginable, we gradually drifted off into our law business and let them gossip away and exchange volleys of news and caresses.

The judge was deeply interested in my account of the adventure with the Ku-Klux, and much concerned about Amory's hurt.

I learned from him of the desperate and lawless character of the men who were generally believed to be the prominent members of the gang, and the perpetrators of the dastardly outrages that had been so recently inflicted both upon the negroes and the whites. The people were terrified beyond expression; several had been driven from the country; several had been shot down in cold blood. A defenceless girl who had been sent down from the North as teacher of the freedmen's school, had been dragged from her bed at midnight and brutally whipped by some cowardly ruffians. The sheriff, who had arrested one of the suspected parties, was threatened in an anonymous letter with death if he failed to release his prisoner within twenty-four hours. He called upon the citizens for assistance, but none was given, for the Union people were too few. A dozen men in mask surrounded his house the next night; his wife heard the strange noise, and went to the door; opened it, and was shot dead in her tracks. The jail was forced, the prisoner released and spirited off beyond the limits of the State.

All this was going on, when, to the great joy of peace-loving people, and undisguised anger of the unreconstructed, a troop of United States cavalry came suddenly to the scene. Several arrests of known murderers and marauders were made; and, until that very evening, nothing more had been heard of the dreaded Ku-Klux. Indeed, it was by some persons believed that their organization was broken up, and nothing but the positive testimony of one of their own neighbors, the man to whom Amory had turned over his prisoner, would induce the citizens generally to believe that Hank Smith himself was concerned in the attempted robbery of the express car. The cavalry had been there just about a month when this affair took place.

CHAPTER III

Miss Kitty's tongue had been far from idle all the time that the judge and I had been talking over these matters, but it was only just before we reached our destination that I heard her telling Miss Summers of the events of the evening. The moment she mentioned that our lieutenant was hurt, Miss Pauline started and exclaimed, —

"Oh, Kitty! You don't mean it! What *will* Major Vinton say?"

"Who is Major Vinton?" said Miss Kit.

"Major Vinton is the commanding officer of the cavalry, and Mr. Amory is one of his lieutenants. Father knows them both very well, and the major is with us almost every day," was the answer.

Miss Kit's eyes must have been as big as saucers when she heard that. I couldn't see, but knew it when she exclaimed, in tones almost horror-stricken, —

"Oh, Pauline! Do you mean to tell me that uncle and you receive Yankee officers! I wouldn't have believed it!"

"You don't know him, Kitty," was Miss Summers's quiet answer. "I believe that we owe father's life to him, and I know that, but for him, none of us could have remained here. He is a thorough gentleman, and you'd like him if you only knew him as we do. As for Mr. Amory, he is only a boy, to be sure; but the major says he is a fine officer, and I know that he is a real nice fellow."

Miss Kit relapsed into amazed silence; the judge added some few gentle words of reproof for her treatment of the youngster; and I was smiling to myself over the whole affair, when we drove up to the main entrance of their once beautiful home. A tall, soldierly-looking man opened the door, exchanged a word of greeting with Miss Summers as he assisted the ladies to alight, and then, as they scurried away up the stairs, I was introduced to Major Vinton.

Now, though we had never met before, the major's name was by no means unfamiliar. We were both New Yorkers; both had struggled through Columbia, and had many a wrestle with Anthon and Drisler; both had rushed to arms in heroic style and tramped off for Washington at the first call for troops. But I had speedily tramped back again; while he remained, chose the cavalry arm of the service, fought his way up to the command of his regiment; and when, in 1865, his services were no longer needed, sheathed his sabre; put aside his well-worn regimentals; tried hard to interest himself in some civil pursuit; took a brief tour abroad, returned just as the new organization of the regular army was being made, and meeting one night a joyous bevy of his old comrades, regular and volunteer, with whom he had fought over every field from Bull Run to Five Forks, the old fire was fanned into a blaze, and in one week he found himself a successful candidate for a captaincy of cavalry. The "major" came afterwards "by brevet," and Vinton had settled down into contentedly following the old life, though in a less exciting time and exalted capacity. He greeted me in a frank, warm-hearted way; and we were in the midst of a comparison of notes as to old college names, when the judge interrupted us with, —

"Vinton, Mr. Brandon brings important news, which I think you ought to know at once." So once again the story of our little adventure was told.

The major listened attentively and never interposed a word; but his brow darkened and his face set when I came to Amory's wound and Hank Smith's parting threat. The instant I finished he turned to a servant, saying, —

"Be good enough to tell my orderly to bring the horses round at once."

In vain the judge begged him to stay and have supper, or at least some little refreshment. The major said, very quietly, that he must be off to camp at once; asked me one or two more questions in a business-like way; and the moment the horses came, bade us good night, swung into saddle, and followed by his orderly, disappeared at a rapid trot. The judge and I stood listening on the portico

until the hoof-beats died away, and then returned to the blaze of the great wood-fire in the sitting-room. The young ladies came fluttering down-stairs. Supper was announced. Miss Pauline looked inquiringly around as we walked into the next room, where a bounteous table was spread.

"Where is Major Vinton, father?"

"Gone back to camp, dear. He asked me to present his excuses to you, but he was obliged to leave as soon as he heard of this affair."

I fancied that a shade of disappointment settled on Miss Summers's face, but she merely answered, "Indeed, I'm very sorry," and busied herself with the tea and coffee.

Miss Kit looked immensely relieved, and immediately became radiant; – chattered like a little magpie, – in fact, was as charming and bewitching as possible; but it was already late; good-nights were soon exchanged; and, tired out, the household went to sleep.

Next morning when we assembled in the breakfast-room, our little heroine looked fresher, prettier, and *tinier* than the day before. This time her hair was "fixed," and that was the only point that in my eyes was no improvement. All day long the judge and I roamed about the premises or pored over the cases he had on hand. All day long the young ladies laughed, chatted, flitted about from one room to another, played and sang. No news came from the camp. Late in the afternoon, when we were all standing on the portico, a solitary trooper came cantering up the road along which the major had disappeared the night before. Without knowing why, I found my eyes turning upon Miss Summers. She was listening abstractedly to Miss Kit's account of a visit to the Mammoth Cave, but *her* eyes were fixed upon the horseman as he rapidly neared the gate, – neared it, and, never drawing rein or checking speed, rode stolidly past on the road to Sandbrook depot. The wistful, almost eager light faded from her soft brown eyes; the full lip quivered one little bit; but quickly rallying, she plunged into a blithe wordy skirmish with her cousin about some alleged flirtation of the summer previous.

Evening came, and with it Harrod Summers and Mr. Peyton; both making much over Miss Kit; both bemoaning the accident which had prevented their meeting; and both apparently pleased to know that "Mr. Brandon was *so* kind and attentive." I had known Harrod slightly before, as he was away much of the time of my previous visit; but I knew him to be his father's son, a man to be honored and respected. Of Peyton, the less said the better. He was a rash, foolhardy, and, I feared, criminally reckless boy, a violent "reb" and unsparing hater of every Yankee. I had heard grave stories concerning his connection with some of the acts of violence committed upon the Union-loving people in the vicinity, and had noticed the troubled look on the judge's face every time his name was mentioned. I knew that he had been arrested, and that there was strong presumptive evidence as to his guilt; but he had been immediately bailed out and released. After this occurrence, the judge had managed to persuade him to take a trip to Havana and New Orleans; but the moment he heard of Miss Kitty's projected visit he came hurrying back. They were second cousins, and had met abroad. Rumor had it that Peyton had offered himself; that Miss Kit had a girlish fancy for him; that his suit promised favorably until Aunt Mary became suddenly aware of this nice little family arrangement, and, being a woman of the world, and possessed of a keen sense of what constituted the eligible and ineligible in a young man, swooped remorselessly down upon the blissful pair; hustled Master Ned into immediate exile; and, gathering her one chicken under the shadow of her protecting wing, bore her in triumph away to a realm uninfested with dangerous young men. Miss Kit is said to have shed bitter tears one week; sulked the next; pouted another; to have made a vigorous and romantic attempt at pining in all three; but the effort was too much for her; and, being wisely left to herself, it was not long before Peyton and his escapades were to her matters of serene indifference.

Not so with him, however. To do him justice, Peyton was probably very much in love; and at all events had a very correct idea of the unlimited benefits to be obtained through the medium of Miss Kit's solid bank account. He was no fool, if he was a reprobate; and was as handsome

and naughty a wolf as could be found infesting Southern sheepfolds; and here he was, primed and ready to renew the attack. The judge didn't like it; Miss Summers didn't; nor Harrod; nor I; but it only took a few hours to convince us all that our beauty had just enough feminine mischief in her to enjoy the prospect of another flirtation with her old flame; and so to all but Peyton and to her, the evening passed gloomily enough. The judge retired to his library; Miss Summers played soft, sad music at the piano; and Harrod and I smoked cigar after cigar upon the porch.

Ten o'clock came and still the pair were cooing away in the corner; Kitty's low, sweet, bubbling laugh floating out through the open casement to where we sat. Miss Summers closed her piano abruptly; came out to our nook on the portico; and, declining the offer of a chair, stood leaning her hand upon her brother's shoulder.

Harrod looked fondly up at her for a moment or two as she gazed out towards the gate; then a teasing smile played about his mouth as he asked, —

"Anybody been here to-day, Paulie?"

"No-o-o-o! That is, nobody to speak of."

"No major, then?"

Pauline looks squarely down into her brother's eyes as she answers, "No major, if you refer to Major Vinton." A little heightened color, perhaps, but that's all. She is as brave as Harrod and not easy to tease.

Harrod turns to me: "Do you think he has gone after those men with his troop, Mr. Brandon?"

"I don't know, colonel; he said nothing about it, but rode off immediately. I shouldn't wonder, though; for the judge tells me he is over here almost every day."

"Ye-e-es?" (inquiringly.) "How is that, Paulie?"

Paulie has no reasons to allege; probably he wouldn't come if he didn't want to.

"True enough," Harrod suggests; "and still less unless he knew he was welcome. He is awfully proud, isn't he, Paulie?"

"Indeed, Harrod, I don't know; but he is welcome, and any man who has rendered us the service he has in protecting our father against the fury of that mob on court-day, ought to be welcome among us!" — Color rising and a perceptible tremor of the hand on Harrod's shoulder. He takes it gently and leans his cheek lovingly upon it as he looks up at the flushing face, whose dark eyes still gaze unflinchingly into his own.

"You are right enough, dear, and you know I agree with you. He *is* a noble fellow, Brandon, and I hope you'll meet and know him better. Father's decision against two or three Ku-Klux raised a terrible row here; and as he attempted to leave the court-house with one or two friends the mob hooted him; and even his long residence among these people would not have saved him. They call him traitor and Yankee now. Well, father tried to speak to them, but they wouldn't listen. A few more friends gathered round him; a blow was struck; and then the mob charged. Shooting ensued, of course, and two of their own men were badly wounded, while father and his party of six barred themselves in the court-house. Old Jake Biggs dashed out to camp, luckily meeting Major Vinton on the way, and in five minutes from the time the first shot was fired, and before those howling devils could break down the door, Vinton darted at a gallop into their midst, — not a soul with him but his orderly, — rode up to the door as though he were built of cast iron, and then turned squarely and confronted the whole mob. There's only one thing on earth these people are afraid of, Brandon: they don't care a fig for law, sheriffs, or marshals, but they would rather see the devil than the Federal uniform. And for ten minutes Vinton and his one man kept that mob at bay; and then young Amory with half the troop came tearing into town, and if the major hadn't checked them, would have gone through that crowd in ten seconds.

"The mob skulked off; but they hate father and the cavalry most bitterly, and would wreak their vengeance if they dared. I was away in Mobile at the time, and knew nothing about the affair

until next day, when my sister's telegram came; but the sheriff never tires of telling how the major rode into that crowd; and how mad Mr. Amory was because Vinton stopped his charge."

"No wonder you all think so much of him, colonel," I answered. "He comes of a noble old race, and whether as enemy or friend you cannot fail to respect him; and I'm glad to see a cordial feeling springing up between our sections in this way. I would to God it were more general!"

"Ah, Brandon, it is not the soldiers, not the men who did the fighting, who are bitter now. Our enemies in the North are the men who sat at home wondering why your Army of the Potomac didn't move. Your enemies are those who never felt the shock of Northern arms. We would have had peace long ago could the soldiers have been allowed to make the terms."

And so we sat and talked, until the clocks throughout the house were chiming eleven, and then Miss Summers declared we must retire. The corner flirtation was broken up; Peyton and Miss Kit exchanging a lingering and inaudible good-night at the stairs. Harrod and I closed and bolted doors and windows. Peyton stuck his hands in his pockets and walked nervously up and down the hall buried in thought until we had finished our work; and then, on receiving Colonel Summers' somewhat cold intimation that it was time to go to bed, wished us a sulky "pleasant dreams," took his candle and disappeared.

Harrod waited until he was out of hearing and then said to me, "They are all out of the way now, Brandon, and I want to see you one moment. It is a hard thing to say of one's own kinsman, but Peyton can't be trusted in this matter. Here is a letter that was left for father at the post-office in town, but I have opened and withheld it, knowing that it would only cause him unnecessary trouble. I'm worried about it, and had hoped that Vinton would have come over to-day; we're safe enough with him and his men."

Saying this he handed me the letter. I had seen them before; Ku-Klux anonymous rascalities, — a huge, coarse, brown envelope, directed in a sprawling hand to the "Honerable Judge Summers," and embellished in red ink with numerous death's-heads, K. K.'s, and in the upper left-hand corner a flaming scroll, on which appeared in bold relief the words "Blood! Death! Liberty!" The whole affair was ludicrous enough in appearance, and, throwing it to one side, I read the inclosure. It began with the usual "Death to Traitors," and wound up, after one or two incoherent "whereases" and "therefores," by informing the judge that if he remained in that vicinity twenty-four hours longer "all the damned Yankees this side of hell couldn't save him," and intimating that the lives of the Federal officers upon whom he relied "weren't worth their weight in mud."

Harrod and I sat for some time talking over this elegant document, and decided that nothing should be said until we could see Major Vinton on the following day. The camp was six miles away, and on the outskirts of the county-seat where the court-house row had taken place; and Sandbrook was nearly as far in the opposite direction. He anticipated no danger for that night; but such had been the reckless nature of the Klan, that we agreed it best to be on the safe side and to look well to our arms; then we parted, each to his own room.

CHAPTER IV

It was a clear, starlit night and very mild, almost warm, in fact; and having spent my Christmas but a few days before amid the orange groves and magnolias of Louisiana, I had prepared myself for something more wintry on the borders of Tennessee; but up to that time my overcoat had been insupportable.

The combined effects of half a dozen cigars and the conversation just concluded with Harrod Summers had banished all desire for sleep. In fact, if I must confess it, I was nervous and ill at ease. The room seemed close and stifling, so I opened both window and door to secure the full benefit of the cool night-air, and then proceeded to make myself comfortable. First pulling off my boots and insinuating my feet into an easy old pair of slippers, I took the boots to the door and deposited them noiselessly in the hall, where small Pomp, the "general utility" man of the household, could find and black them in the morning. A dim light was burning on a little table in the hall, and I noticed Mr. Peyton's boots at his door, the door next to mine, and on the same side of the hall. We were quartered in what was known as the east wing, a one-storied addition to the main building, containing four sleeping apartments for the use of the judge's guests; the floor, as is generally the case in these Southern houses, being elevated some eight or nine feet above the ground.

Peyton and I were the only occupants of the wing that night; the rooms of the rest of the household being in the main building. It occurred to me, therefore, that the hall lamp was unnecessary there; and so I crossed over, took it from its table, and was returning with it to my own room, when I heard a long, shrill, distant whistle. It came from the direction of the woods on the eastern side of the plantation, so far away, in fact, that save in the dead of night it probably would have failed to attract attention. Involuntarily I stopped short in my tracks, listening; and involuntarily, too, I looked at Peyton's door. It was closed, but the transom above it was open, and all was darkness within. No sound had come from his room before, and I supposed him asleep; and now, as if in corroboration of that supposition, he began to snore; rather a louder and more demonstrative snore than would have been natural from so sudden a start, I thought afterwards. Meantime, I stood still a minute and listened. The whistle died away, and there was no answer or repetition; the snoring continued; I moved on into my room; closed and bolted the door; put my lamp on the bureau; took out my revolver and carefully examined it; then turned down the light until nothing but a mere glimmer was left; crouched down by the open window, and looked out. The stillness was so intense that the ticking of my watch and the loud beating of my heart seemed insupportable. Leaning out from the casement, I could see that Peyton's window, too, was open, and that there was a little shed of some kind beneath it, whose roof reached up to within about five feet of the window-sill. Garden-tools were probably stored there, as I had noticed a few spades and a wheelbarrow during the day. Peyton was still snoring, though less loudly.

I listened for ten minutes more, and still no sound came from the direction in which I had heard the whistle, save the distant neigh of a horse and the occasional barking of dogs. Yet my nerves were upset. That whistle *must* have been a signal of some kind, and, if so, what did it portend? At last, being unable to arrive at any conclusion, I determined to lie down and think it over; and so, taking off coat and waist-coat, and putting on a loose wrapper, I threw myself upon the bed. It must have been after midnight then, yet I could not sleep, and at the same time thinking was an effort. I found myself listening intently for every sound, and holding my breath every time the distant bark of a dog or the lowing of cattle was heard.

An hour passed; nothing further happened; and I began to feel drowsy at last and to regard myself as the easiest man to scare in the whole county. Soon after, I must have fallen into a doze; an uneasy, fitful slumber it must have been, too; for the very next thing I knew I found myself sitting bolt upright; every nerve strained; and listening with beating heart to the same signal whistle; only

this time, though low and cautious, it was nearer; and, unless I was vastly mistaken, came from a little clump of trees just beyond the eastern fence. Harrod's big Newfoundland, who always slept on the porch in front of the house, and seldom, if ever, barked or made any disturbance at night, came tearing around to our side, growling fiercely, and evidently excited and alarmed.

Something was up, that was certain; and immediately I began to wonder what ought to be done. The call was not repeated; all was soon quiet again. "Blondo" had given one or two low, short barks; scouted through the grounds about the house; and returned to the southern front again. After one or two moments' consideration he had given another, a sort of interrogatory bark, as though he expected a reply; and then, with a dissatisfied sniff at hearing nothing further, slowly returned to his usual post. Blondo's nerves were better than mine. I thought over the matter ten minutes longer in the most undecided manner imaginable. Harrod had plainly intimated that he suspected Mr. Peyton of complicity with the Ku-Klux or I would have awakened him; as it was, I was possessed with the idea that he ought to know nothing of our suspicions, nothing of the anonymous letter (from us, at least), and in no manner or way be admitted to confidence. Rather hard on Peyton, to be sure; but there *was* something about him I didn't like, something besides the mere fact that I saw he didn't like me, and – What was that! There *could* be no mistake! I plainly saw through my open window a sudden gleam of light among the leaves of the oak-tree on the other side of the garden-walk. It was as though the light had been momentarily thrown upon it from a bull's-eye lantern and instantly withdrawn. More than that, the light was thrown upon it from this side. Thoroughly aroused now, I stole noiselessly from the bed; took my revolver; and, making the least possible "creak" in turning the key, I slowly opened my door, and on tiptoe and in stocking feet crept out into the hall. My plan was to go and arouse Harrod.

Without closing my door I turned stealthily away; and, as a matter of course, stumbled over one of my boots. There they were, right at the door, just where I had left them, and visible enough for all practical purposes in the dim light that came from my open doorway and the window at the end of the hall. It was clumsy and stupid of me. I looked towards Peyton's door, wondering if the noise, slight as it was, had awakened him. No more snoring, at all events. I took a step or two towards his room to listen, looked carefully down to see that I didn't stumble over his boots too, and then stopped short.

Peyton's boots were no longer there.

For a moment I could not realize it; then I stole closer to the door, and the door that I knew was tightly closed when I came up-stairs was now unlatched and partly open. The conviction forced itself into my mind that my next-door neighbor was up to some of his old devilment, and that that signal whistle had some connection with the mysterious disappearance of his boots. Peeping through the partly-opened door, I could see the bed, its coverlet undisturbed, its pillows smooth and untouched. That was enough to embolden me, and at the same time make me mad. All that snoring was a counterfeit for *my* benefit, was it? I opened the door and looked in: no signs of its late occupant; Ned Peyton had gone.

Sorely puzzled what to do next, I sidled out again; sneaked out, I might as well say, for that's the way I felt; and leaving his door as I found it, returned to my own room and took post at the window. Curiously enough, the discovery of Peyton's absence and his probable connection with the mysterious signals without, had had a wonderful effect in restoring me to confidence and endowing me with a fabulous amount of pluck and courage. The idea of summoning Harrod was abandoned; the thing to be done now was to find out what my amiable next-door neighbor was up to; and, if possible, to do so without letting him know that his nice little game was detected.

A clock somewhere in the hall struck three while I was pondering over the matter. Ten minutes afterwards there came a stealthy step on the garden-walk, and the figure of a man emerged from behind an old arbor near the oak-tree. It was Peyton, of course, although the light was too uncertain to admit of my recognizing him until he came nearer.

I crouched down lower, but kept him in view. Cautiously and slowly Master Ned tiptoed it up to the little tool-house under his window; swung himself carefully up to the roof; crept on all-fours until he reached the top; and then, making very little noise, clambered into his window and disappeared from view. A moment or two after, I heard him softly deposit his boots in the hall; close and bolt his door; and soon after tumble into bed. Evidently, then, we had nothing further to fear for that night at least; and in fifteen minutes I was sound asleep.

At breakfast the next morning the household generally put in a late appearance. Peyton established himself at Miss Kitty's side and monopolized her in the most lover-like manner. Immediately afterwards the pair sallied forth for a walk. Miss Summers looked very anxiously after them until they disappeared in the shrubbery, and then turned to Harrod with an appealing look in her eyes.

"I don't know what to do, Harrod. I didn't imagine the possibility of his coming back here when we invited Kitty."

"Don't worry about it, Pauline. Mr. Brandon and I are going to drive over to the cavalry camp this morning, and this afternoon I'll have a talk with Ned. How soon can you get through your talk with father?" he suddenly asked, turning to me.

"Twenty minutes at most will be long enough," I answered; so he sent off to the stable to order the carriage.

The judge and I strolled slowly around the house, planning the course to be pursued in the prosecution of the men who had been arrested under the "enforcement act." As we sauntered along the garden-walk on the eastern side, I naturally glanced up at my window and Peyton's. A coarse brown envelope was lying right at the door of the little tool-house, the very place where he had clambered to the roof the night before. "We lawyers are curious," and, without interrupting the judge's conversation, I "obliqued" over to the left; picked up the envelope; dropped it carelessly into my pocket; and went on talking without having attracted the judge's attention to the movement.

After the judge had returned to his study, and before Harrod was ready, I had an opportunity of investigating this precious document. It only needed a glance to assure me that it was just such another envelope as the one which inclosed the Ku-Klux letter to the judge that Harrod had shown me, and that fact was sufficient to remove any scruples I might have had as to reading its contents. The envelope bore no mark or address. The inclosure was as follows:

"Captain Peyton:

"Dear Sir, – The Yankee major, with forty of his men, went off in a hurry late last night, leaving the lieutenant and about ten men in camp. They're after Hank and the crowd, but we got notice in time, broke up the ranch, and scattered. Hank's wound is pretty rough; he played a d – d fool trick in trying to get that express money, and the boys all think he'd been drinking again. Three of us took him over the Big Bear in Scantwell's boat, and on up to Chickasaw. He sent me back from there to see you and tell you to watch out for every chance to get word to him. He'll be at Eustice's, across the Tennessee, until his arm is well; and then he's coming back to get square with the Yank who shot him. The lieutenant has got an infernal bad cut on the left hand, and can't do nothing for the next week. Look out for signal any night about two o'clock. Burn this.

"Yours respectfully,

"Blackey."

Here was a pretty piece of villainy. I thought earnestly whether to show it immediately to Harrod and make a full *exposé* of Peyton's complicity with the affair; but, before I could decide, the carriage came; and with the driver listening to every word that was said, it was out of the question. It was scandalous enough as it stood without letting the servants know of it. We talked a good deal

about their general performances, but in no way alluded to the latest developments of the Klan as we drove rapidly along. Neither expected to find Major Vinton there at camp; but I had reason to know that Amory would be on hand, and had determined to give him immediate information as to the whereabouts of Smith that he might send out a party to secure him.

Sure enough, only one or two soldiers were to be seen when we drove up, but a corporal took us to Amory's tent. He sprang up from the little camp-bed in which he was lounging and reading; gave us a cordial welcome; and, in reply to our questions, stated that the major had gone out with three days' rations and nearly all the men, hoping to hunt up and capture the gang. A United States marshal was with him, who felt certain that he could guide him to the very point on the bayou where the fight had taken place. He had started about three o'clock on the previous morning, just as soon as rations could be cooked, and was determined to hunt them to their holes.

"I expect him back every hour, and am disgusted enough at being ordered to stay behind; but he and the doctor both forbade my going, so here I am playing the invalid." His arm was still in a sling and the hand closely bound.

We sat and chatted for some twenty minutes. Amory inquired after "the young ladies" very calmly; made no allusion to Miss Kitty's snub; accounted for his non-appearance the day before by saying that the doctor had insisted on his remaining quiet in his tent; and so neither Harrod nor I saw fit to make any apology for our troublesome little heroine. She was worrying all of us now, – innocently enough perhaps, but sorely for all that.

Harrod turned the subject to Hank Smith; and, finding that Amory had not heard of his threat as related by the man whom his friends had "fetched a wipe over the head," repeated it to him, and warned him to be on his guard. Mars took it coolly enough; expressed his readiness to welcome Hank and his adherents to hospitable graves; and, except that his teeth came as solidly together as they had when alluding to the ruffian's escape two nights previous, displayed no symptoms of the slightest emotion at the prospect of losing a quart or two of "heart's-blood" within the month.

Presently Harrod drove off to the village to make some necessary purchases, promising to return for me within an hour. Then I lost not a moment in giving Mars my information about Hank Smith; where he was to be found, etc., but without mentioning Peyton's connection with the affair or stating how the news came into my possession. He asked, of course, but I gave a good reason for declining to name the person who had volunteered the news, at the same time assuring him of my belief in its truth.

Mars was all ablaze in a minute. Chickasaw was at least twelve miles away and to the north. Vinton's plan, and the marshal's, was to go south-west, should they find the ranch abandoned, and search a number of suspected points in Tishomingo and Prentiss Counties. All the gang by this time knew that there was a hunt going on, and, at the cry of "Yanks coming," had scattered in every direction. Smith thought himself safe across the Tennessee, and would probably have only one or two men with him. Amory was fairly excited this time anyhow, and in ten minutes had made up his mind; gave his orders to a non-commissioned officer, wrote a letter to Major Vinton, with instructions to deliver it immediately upon the return of the troop to camp, and before Harrod Summers' return, had vaulted lightly into saddle, waved me a laughing good-by, and trotted off at the head of a little squad of five dragoons, – all the men he could possibly take. I watched them till they disappeared from view on the road to the Tennessee and then sat me down to wait for Harrod.

The corporal who had shown us to Amory's tent was on "sick-report" he said, with chills and fever. He, with three or four others, remained in charge of camp, and I amused myself listening to their talk about their officers and the Ku-Klux. An old darky on a mule came in to sell chickens, and after him, a seedy-looking fellow on a shaggy pony, – he "didn't want nothing in particular, unless it was to know when the captain'd be back."

The corporal was non-committal, – didn't know. The seedy party shifted around in his saddle, and, after profuse expectoration, "reckoned that the lieutenant warn't much hurt nohow."

"Why so?" says the corporal.

"Cause he's off so quick again."

"That don't prove anything," says the dragoon.

"Whar's he gone to?" says Seedy.

"Don't know."

"Ain't gone far, I reckon; didn't take no rations, did he?"

"Don't know."

"I kind of wondered *why* he took the north road *fur*, if he wanted to catch the captain, 'cause I knew *he* was out towards Guntown."

"*How* did you know?"

"Well, I heard so, that's all."

The corporal looks steadily at Seedy, and is apparently suspicious. Seedy turns his quid over with his tongue and looks all around. He's a bad hand at extracting information, at all events. At last he makes another venture.

"Wish I knew how far up the north road the lieutenant went. I've got some business up towards the Tennessee. I belong to a missionary society hereabouts, and yet I don't like to take that long ride alone."

I hear the corporal mutter a rather unflattering comment on *that* statement; and it occurs to me that there is more of the odor of bad whiskey than sanctity about the member of the missionary society. He reminds me of Mr. Stiggins; and Mr. Stiggins makes one more attempt.

"Whar am I most like to catch the boys by dinner-time?"

"Don't know."

The member looks incredulous and indignant; and after a long survey of every object in range about the camp, turns his dejected steed slowly around and shambles off, with the parting shot, —

"Reckon you never *did* know nothin', did you?" To which the corporal responds, —

"No; and if I *did*, I wouldn't tell you, Johnny."

Stiggins strikes a canter on reaching the main road, and disappears on the trail of the cavalry. Presently Harrod returns, greatly surprised at Amory's sudden expedition, and curious as to the source from which he derives his information. I hardly know what to say, but finally get out of it by the explanation that it was all "confidential," and that I could say nothing on the subject until his return.

On the drive home we come suddenly upon the troop itself, looking tired and dusty, but returning from the two days' trip to Tishomingo partially successful, and with six rough-looking specimens of "corn-crackers" footing it along between the horsemen. They found no trace of Smith, the marshal tells us, as the men go filing by; but, after all, their luck has been good, and six of the worst characters are now securely under guard.

The major, he tells us, had stopped at Judge Summers's, and expected to find us there; so we whip up and hurry on.

A brisk drive brings us to the plantation in a very few minutes. As we rattle up to the doorway, Harrod catches sight of Mr. Peyton lounging on the portico by the open window of the parlor, for once in his life paying little or no attention to Miss Kitty, who is seated on the old wicker-work sofa, some distance from him, pouting and puzzled.

Harrod warns me to say not a word of Lieutenant Amory's expedition until Peyton is out of the way. Old Jake detains him a moment about "dis yer Hicks's mule done broke into the *gyarden* las' night," and I move on into the house.

In the parlor are the judge, Major Vinton, and Pauline; the first listening, the second narrating, the third as complete a contrast to Miss Kit as can be imagined. Vinton rises and greets me. He looks dusty, tanned, and travel-stained, but more soldierly than ever in his dark-blue jacket and heavy boots. After Harrod's entrance he resumes his story, — he was telling of the capture of the

Ku-Klux, – talking frankly and as though none but friends were near. Harrod shifts uneasily in his chair and glances nervously towards the window. Peyton is invisible, but, beyond doubt, there, and a listener.

It is vain to attempt to warn the major; by this time Peyton knows the whole story, knows who had aided the troops in their search, knows just how the evidence was procured which led to the arrest of the six victims, and doubtless his black-list is swelled by the addition of several names destined to become the recipients of Ku-Klux attentions.

Lunch is announced, and we all sit down at the table, Peyton and Kit coming in from the porch and endeavoring to ignore Major Vinton, a circumstance which apparently renders him no uneasiness whatever. He talks constantly with Pauline, and never gives a glance at the pair. Harrod and I are nervous. I watch Peyton closely, and it requires no penetration to see that not a word of Vinton's is lost on him.

Suddenly there comes the clatter of hoofs on the ground without; the clank of a cavalry sabre, and, a moment after, the ring of spurred heels along the hall. A servant announces the major's orderly; and, begging the major not to rise, the judge directs that the trooper be shown in.

Just as I thought, it is Amory's letter.

"Sergeant Malone said that it was to be given the major directly he returned. Them was the loot'nant's orders, and he told me to ride right over with it, sir," says the orderly. And, apologizing to Miss Summers, the Major opens it and begins to read.

I glance at Harrod; his eyes are fixed on Peyton; Peyton's furtively watching Vinton. Another minute and Vinton has risen to his feet; an eager, flashing light in his eyes, but his voice steady and calm as ever, as he says, —

"Gallop back. Tell Sergeant Malone to send me a dozen men, armed and mounted at once, and you bring my other horse." Away goes the orderly, and then in reply to the wistful look of inquiry in Pauline's eyes, the major says, —

"I must be off again. Amory has obtained information as to the whereabouts of Smith and some of his gang, and has started after them, but with only five men, too few to cope with such desperadoes. He has four hours the start of me now, and 'twill be nearly five before my men can get here; but I must reach him before he attempts to recross the Tennessee."

I cannot be mistaken in Peyton's start of astonishment. Instantly his face turns pale; the secret is out, his complicity perhaps detected. Lunch is forgotten, and we all rise and leave the table. Harrod manages to whisper a caution to the major to say nothing more while Peyton is near, whereat Vinton looks vacant and aghast. Five minutes more and Peyton and Kitty are missed, – gone out for a walk, the servant says. Then Harrod explains, and Vinton looks as though biting his own tongue off close to the roots would be the most congenial and exhilarating recreation that could be suggested. He is annoyed beyond expression, but it is too late now. Peyton is off; no one knows which way, and in half an hour all the real or supposable Ku-Klux in the county will know of the danger that threatens them; know, too, how small a force young Amory has taken with him in his hurried raid to the Tennessee; and, ten to one, if he succeed in capturing Smith, he cannot attempt to recross the river without having to fight his way through.

All this is canvassed in the anxious council that ensues. No time is to be lost; he must be reinforced at once. Harrod orders out his two horses; old Jake is hastily summoned and told to bring up his charger, "Bob"; and while the horses are being saddled, Vinton decides on his plan. He and Harrod are to gallop on after Amory; old Jake to ride down to meet the troopers, with orders to make all speed possible to the Tennessee. I am possessed with an immediate thirst for human gore, and want to go with the major; but there is no other horse, and I couldn't ride without shaking myself to pieces and capsizing every hundred yards or so if there were. To me, therefore, is assigned the cheerful duty of remaining at the plantation and watching Peyton's movements should he return.

Just before the horses are brought around, Kitty comes back, alone. She looks white and scared, and hurries up the steps as though anxious to avoid us, but Harrod intercepts and leads her to one side. She grows paler as he questions and talks to her; and suddenly bursts into tears, and rushes past him into the house.

"He's gone, by heaven!" says Harrod, as he rejoins us. "Kitty says he took the overseer's horse and galloped off towards the north."

"Here, Jake," says Vinton, "waste no time now; ride as though the devil chased you. Tell Sergeant Malone to follow as fast as he can. Don't spare the horses!"

Jake makes a spring; lights on his stomach on old "Bob's" withers; swings himself round; and barely waiting to get his seat, makes vigorous play with both heels on his pet's astonished ribs, and with a "Yoop, da!" our Ethiopian aide-de-camp clatters away. Then comes a hurried and anxious leave-taking with Pauline and the judge, and in another minute our two soldiers trot out to the road. We watch the gallant forms till the riders disappear, and then turn silently away. Pauline's eyes are dim with tears, and she seeks her own room.

That was a wretched afternoon and evening. Kitty never appeared. Pauline came down to tea and tried to entertain me during the long hours that dragged slowly away; but we started at every sound, and when midnight came she retired altogether. We had hoped for news, but none reached us.

The judge dozed fitfully in his easy-chair, but I was too much excited to feel the least drowsiness; so, cigar in mouth, I strolled out to the gate and gazed longingly up the dim, shadowy vista through the woods where lay the road to the Tennessee along which our first news, good or bad, must come.

Two o'clock came first, and I was then reading, in a distracted style, in the library. The clocks had barely ceased striking when my eager ears caught the sound of hoof-beats rapidly nearing us. Down went the book; and in a minute I was at the gate, just in time to meet the horseman, a corporal of Vinton's troop.

"We've got the Ku-Klux all right, sir," he says, as he reins in his jaded steed, "but we had to fight half the county. The lieutenant's wounded, and so is Monahan, one of the men, sir. They are bringing them here, and I'm to ride right on for the doctor."

Off he goes before I can ask more. Pauline meets me as I return to the hall. She is pale as death and her whole frame shakes as she says, "Tell me everything, Mr. Brandon."

"Harrod and Vinton are safe; Amory and one of his men are hurt, and they are bringing them here," I answer.

She saw by my face that there had been a fight. What her woman's heart craved, was to know that those she loved were safe, unhurt, and returning to her. Then the next minute she is all sympathy, all tenderness, even, for our boy *sabreur*; and she occupies herself with preparations for his reception and nursing.

While we are talking, who should come noiselessly down the stairs but Kitty, dressed in a loose blue wrapper; her lovely hair falling down her back and thrown from her temples and forehead, her eyes red with weeping. Pauline's heart is full, and the sight of this sorrowing little object is too much for her; she opens her arms and takes her to her heart, and Kitty's sobs break out afresh.

"I *know* that something has happened," she cries; "*do* tell me. You all think I care for Ned Peyton, but I *don't*— I *don't*! And he was frightful to-day, and — and — if he did what he said he was going to do I'll never speak to him again."

Pauline tries to comfort and soothe her, but I want to know what Peyton's threat was; and have the unblushing hard-heartedness to ask.

"He declared that he would raise forty men and kill every man Lieutenant Amory had with him. He frightened me so that I did not know what to do. Oh, Paulie, *what* has happened?"

"We don't know yet, Kitty. Harrod is bringing Mr. Amory here. He was wounded, and there has been a fight, but we hope it was not serious."

Poor little Kit starts back in horror, and then sobs harder than ever. It is impossible to comfort the child. She is possessed with the idea that in some way or other she has been instrumental in bringing the affair about. She is terrified at learning the part Peyton has played, and bitterly reproaches herself for the uneasiness her flirtation had caused us all. She is the most abject little penitent I ever saw, and her distress is something overpowering to a susceptible old bachelor. In the course of an hour she is persuaded to return to her room, but not without the interchange of multitudinous embraces and kisses, – Pauline, of course, being the party of the second part.

It is nearly daybreak when Harrod arrives, convoying a rusty old carriage which he has obtained somewhere along the Tennessee; and from this our young soldier is tenderly lifted by two of his troop and carried to the room opposite mine in the wing. Poor fellow! it is hard to recognize in the pallid, blood-stained, senseless form the gallant young officer of the night on the train.

While the doctor was examining his hurts and dressing the wounds, Harrod gave me a hurried account of what had happened. Amory had reached the Tennessee about two in the afternoon, and, leaving his horses on the south bank in charge of one man, crossed quickly and completely took "Eustice's" with its precious garrison of desperadoes by surprise. Luckily, Smith had but two of his gang with him. They hardly had time to think of resistance. Hank was found stretched out in bed and swearing cheerfully over the unexpected turn of affairs, but had sense enough to acknowledge that his Yankee adversary "had the drop on him," and surrendered at discretion. Securing him and his two chums, but leaving the other inmates of "Eustice's" unmolested, Amory in less than an hour and a half landed his party once more on the south bank, and, after procuring food for his men and horses and resting another hour, started on the back-track about five in the evening; moving slowly, as his horses were jaded and his three prisoners had to foot it.

Their road was bordered by thick woods, and ran through an almost uninhabited tract. Hank was suffering apparently a great deal of pain from the fever of his wound, and, after sullenly plodding along about a mile, began showing signs of great distress. He was offered a horse, but declared that riding would hurt him just as much, and finally stopped short, swearing that "Ef you un's expects to git me to yer d – d camp this yer night you've got to do a heap of toting." Finding that he was really weak and sick, Amory was too soft-hearted to insist; and so a brief halt was ordered while one of the men went in search of a farm-wagon. Just at night-fall a horseman came cantering rapidly up the road, at sight of whom the prisoners exchanged quick, eager glances of intelligence, and attempted to spring to their feet and attract his attention. No sooner, however, had he espied the party than he stopped short; reined his horse about; and, digging spur into him, disappeared at a gallop into the shadows of the forest.

The whole thing was so sudden that no pursuit was made. Ten minutes after, there came the distant sound of a shrill, prolonged whistle, and Amory, thoroughly aroused, ordered a mount and immediate start.

Strange to say, Hank moved on with great alacrity. No man ever rose from so brief a rest so thoroughly invigorated. Once or twice more the same whistle was heard, but nothing could be seen, as darkness had set in.

Silently and anxiously the little party moved on, Amory riding several yards in advance, peering cautiously about and listening eagerly to every sound. All of a sudden from thick darkness came blinding flashes, – the ringing reports of musketry and pistols, and the regular old-time rebel yell.

Amory reeled. His horse reared wildly, and then, with a snort of terror, plunged down the road; his rider dragging over his side.

Of the next five minutes, none of the men could give a collected account. The sergeant had done his duty well, however; had kept his men together; and, what with superior discipline and

the rapid fire from their magazine carbines, his little party proved too plucky for their assailants. There was a sound of scrambling and scattering among the shrubbery and of clambering over the rail-fence by the roadside. The fire suddenly ceased and the troopers were masters of the situation. During the excitement, one of the prisoners had managed to crawl off; while Hank and the other specimen adopted the tactics of throwing themselves flat on their faces. The soldiers were eager to pursue and capture some of the band; but the sergeant was wary and cautious; kept them on the defensive; secured his two remaining prisoners; and was just about ordering a search for their lieutenant, when the well-known and welcome voice of the major was heard down the road, and in a moment he and Harrod dashed up to the spot. Then came eager inquiries and the search for Amory; and presently a cry from one of the men announced that he was found. Hurrying to the spot, they discovered him, bleeding, bruised, and senseless, by the roadside; one deep gash was cut on his forehead, from which the blood was oozing rapidly; a bullet-hole and a little red streak in the shoulder of his jacket told where one at least of the ambuscading villains had made his mark; while the moan of pain that followed when they strove tenderly to raise him from the ground proved that our boy was suffering from still other injuries; but for all that, thank God! alive, perhaps safe.

It was long before the men could find a farm-house; longer still before they came in with the lumbering old rattletrap of a carriage which their major had directed them to secure at any cost; and all this time poor Amory lay with his head on Vinton's lap, utterly unconscious of the latter's grief, of his almost womanly tenderness; but at last they were able to lift him into the improvised ambulance; and while the troopers, now reinforced by the small party which had followed Vinton, took charge of the prisoners, with orders to turn them over to the marshal at Sandbrook, the others drove carefully and slowly homewards, and so once more Mars was in our midst, – now our pet and hero.

All night long we watched him. All next day he tossed in feverish delirium; and when night came, Vinton and Pauline were bending over him striving to soothe and calm the boy in his restless pain. He spoke but little. Muttered words, half-broken sentences, incoherent all of them, were the only things we could win from him. He knew none of us; though he appeared to recognize Vinton's voice better than any. At last, late in the evening, when the doctor had forced an anodyne between his set teeth, Amory's muscles relaxed, he threw his unwounded arm wearily over his face and murmured, "I give up, – I'm whipped."

Vinton could hardly help smiling. "He thinks himself in one of his old cadet fights," said he. "Those fellows at West Point settle all difficulties with their fists, and this youngster was eternally in some row or other; he'd fight the biggest man in the corps on the slightest provocation."

We were all wearied with watching, and it was a glad sight when our pugilistic patient dropped off into a deep sleep. Vinton had to go back to camp to look after his men. Harrod was tired out and had sought his room. I had agreed to sit by Amory's bedside until midnight, as they had expelled me from the sick-room and made me sleep all morning "on account of age." Pauline was just giving a smoothing touch to the pillows when the door softly opened and who should come in but Kitty.

Yes, Kitty, our rampant little rebel Kit, who but a few days before had seen fit to snub our wounded boy simply because he was a "Yank" and wore the uniform which Uncle Sam has condemned his men-at-arms to suffer in. But how changed was Kitty now! Once or twice during the day she had stolen to the door or waylaid Pauline in the halls, always with a white, tear-stained, anxious face and a wistful inquiry as to how Mr. Amory was doing; then she would creep lonely and homesick back to her room; probably have a good long cry; and then down-stairs again for still another and later bulletin.

She had smoothed back her soft golden hair now; bathed away all but a few traces of the tears that had flown so copiously during the last thirty-six hours; and in her simple yet daintily-fitting dress, looked more womanly, more gentle and attractive, than I had ever seen her.

Walking quietly up to us, she put her little white hand on Pauline's shoulder, saying, —

"You go now, Paulie; it's my turn. You've all been working here and *must* be tired and sleepy. I'm going to play nurse now." And for a minute the corners of the pretty mouth twitch, and the soft-gray eyes fill, as though our little heroine were again on the verge of a relapse into lamentation. Pauline's arm is round her in an instant, and she draws her close to her bosom as she says, —

"It is just like you, darling; I knew you would want to come." And then follows the invariable exchange of caresses so indispensable among tender-hearted young ladies on such occasions. Not that I disapprove of it. Oh, no! Only one can hardly expect to be "counted out" from all participation in such ceremonies and yet stand by and look on with unmoved and unenvying complacency.

Ten minutes more and Pauline has gone, with a good-night to both. The judge comes in and bends with almost fatherly interest over the sleeping boy; and as Kitty seats herself quietly by the bedside, goes round and kisses her, saying, "You are more like your dear mother to-night than I ever saw you."

Kit looks up in his face without a word, but in affection that is eloquent in itself. Then her little hand busies itself about the bandage on Amory's forehead, and my occupation is gone. Leaving her to attend to that, the judge and I seat ourselves at the open fireplace, waking and dozing alternately.

The doctor pronounced him better when he came next morning to dress the wounds. Mars spent most of the time in sleeping. Never did patient meet with care and attention more tender, more constant. Either Pauline or Kit was at his bedside. The old judge would come in with every hour or so. Vinton galloped over from camp and spent the afternoon; and as for myself, I was becoming vastly interested in helping Kitty, when, as bad luck would have it, old Jake brought me what he termed a "tallygraff" when he came back from Sandbrook late at evening with the mail; and the tallygraff sent me hurrying back to Holly Springs by first train the following day.

It was with no satisfaction whatever that I bade them all adieu; though my heart lightened up when the doctor reported our "sub" improving. We all thought he recognized Vinton when the latter arrived in the morning to drive over with me.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.