

When The Morning Comes In Heaven

A Novel Based on the Civil War Diaries of Sarah Morgan

by Vernanne Bryan

CHAPTER I

“Mattie!” Sarah giggled as she ran into the guest room and plopped herself on the end of her friend’s bed. “In three more days you shall be a bride! Tell me how you’re feeling now that it’s so close. Are you scared? Excited? Resolved? What?”

“Well, Sarah Morgan, I do love Jimmy and that shall make all the difference!” Mattie said flatly while propping up the pillows behind her so she could see better. “Are you ever going to marry, Sarah? You’ve left broken hearts everywhere you go.”

“Oh, pooh! No one has seriously asked me to marry,” Sarah grinned.

“That’s because you won’t let anyone ask for your hand. You always discourage them terribly in the end and they finally run away.”

“Better that then end up spending the rest of your life with someone you can’t bear. Do you think that you shall be able to bear James all of your life?”

“Sarah! What a question to be asking Mattie!” Miriam said as she came into the room, then hastened to join Sarah on the end of the bed. “Mattie, you shall be such a beautiful bride. I can hardly wait to see your gown.”

“Miriam will be married long before I, won’t you sister dear?” Sarah teased. “Now her beaus are truly smart to pick on *her* for a wife.”

Mattie and Miriam burst into fits of laughter much to Sarah’s annoyance.

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“Don’t be peeved, Sarah. Without the way you look at life, things would be terribly dull. Promise you’ll never change?” Mattie coaxed with twinkling mirth still in her eyes.

“Well, since you all get such fun out of me.” Sarah retorted, slipping from the bed to take a carefree whirl that billowed her full skirts. “I shall continue to be this careless happy child who dances through life, loving God’s whole world too much to love any particular one, that is outside my own family.” She suddenly stopped and turned. “What do you think secession will do to our world. Will the war go on forever and what will happen to all our friends in the U.S. Army that were stationed at the Arsenal?”

“They have been replaced by lovelier ones from the Louisiana militia, dearest heart. Jimmy’s talking about enlisting in the Louisiana Heavy Artillery. Don’t you think he will look handsome in his uniform?” Mattie gushed.

“Dashing!” agreed Miriam

“Dashing,” Sarah echoed, thinking how glad she was that Harry would not be here to endure all the changes going on around them. The Yankees had seized the Arsenal, even before the secession convention met, but some nice officers from Louisiana had been stationed there and they made lovely additions to their parties. Everyone got along famously. How could there ever be a long terrible war?

“What are you thinking about Sarah? You look so serious.” Mattie asked.

“Oh, nothing really important. I was just remembering one odd little party in March and how “silly willy”, you know who I mean, William McGimsey, made such a fool of himself and he had tried so hard to be agreeable, poor fellow.”

Sarah whirled again, then sat quickly so that her skirts flared about her.

“Are you going to leave us hanging in suspense or are you going to tell all.” Miriam begged.

“Well” Sarah blushed. “A lady really shouldn’t, especially since he was so obedient to my commands.”

“Oh come, Sarah, our lips are sealed.” Mattie begged.

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"I suppose I should have liked him, but he just talked on and on and I finally said, 'Say something new; something funny' because I was tired of the subject on which he had been expatiating all evening. Unfortunately I had taken a long ride with him before sunset, then he escorted me to Mrs. Brunot's and remained glued to my side and I really wasn't interested in his conversation. Then he commenced telling me about somebody who *knocked his shins* against something else. I only heard parts of it I was so bored and to my discredit, I showed it."

"You didn't!" Mattie laughed.

"I did! In fact I turned slightly and looked at him with all the contempt in my heart, curled my lip for an instance, then looked him straight in the eye, for I knew he could read what I was feeling!"

Miriam looked at Mattie and just shook her head.

"I thought if one fold of my dress had touched him then, I *know* I should have hated him! Wither, wither, wilt!" Sarah exclaimed in disdain.

"Oh Sarah! What did he do?" Miriam asked, her eyes aghast with disbelief.

"Well, he caught my expression and how he did shrink, knowing all along he had forfeited my good opinion and he stopped with an embarrassed laugh."

"Goodness, did you feel any remorse at all by treating him so?" Miriam queried.

Sarah grinned. "My vengeance stopped at the instant he felt it and I tried very hard to make him like himself again—oh dear, this has been so mean of me to tell it."

"That's alright, Sarah. We did coax it out of you. It's just going to take someone extremely exceptional and strong to capture your heart," Mattie consoled.

A concerned Sarah looked up at her friend in relief. "I think you are right. I also think I shall not find him in Baton Rouge. There are no boys here like the Morgan boys—with the exclusion of your Jimmy, of course, Mattie. Why are not the rest of the men as good, noble and true as they?"

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“You are indeed the most fortunate of women to be surrounded by such wonderful brothers.” Mattie agreed heartily, not feeling the least bit disloyal to her betrothed.

“Courage is what women admire above all things. Harry was courageous. It was stamped on every line on his face that all might see he was a man that did not know fear. Months after he died when our brother Jimmy passed a group of gentlemen in New Orleans, he heard them mention Harry’s name, and one said, ‘I saw him when he stood up, and I saw him fall, and I never saw as brave a man.’ Another responded, ‘That is the way with all the men of that family; they are as brave as can be, and those girls are not an inch behind them’ returned another.”

Mattie put her arm around Miriam whose eyes had sprung with tears as Sarah talked on with love shining in her own.

“No! There never was a braver man than Harry. New Orleans rung with the story of his death.” Suddenly Sarah frowned. “Men talked of his coolness, and applauded his bravery, while his broken hearted mother and sisters wept over him at home. Ah! Men admire everything that ends in breaking a woman’s heart!” Sarah sighed.

“Yes.” Mattie agreed soberly. “I think Jimmy is actually chafing to go to war. Did you see that old cartoon in the Vanity Fair? In it Mrs. Columbia and Uncle Sam are trying to mend the map at the Mason Dixon line. I don’t know why they called it a cartoon, except it was rendered as such. It certainly wasn’t funny.”

“And it certainly isn’t possible any longer since we all followed South Carolina and elected Jefferson Davis as our president. Mr. Davis was in even before Mr. Lincoln took office. It seems strange to no longer be part of the United States. Sometimes I think its wonderful and sometimes I think its so sad.” Miriam said, wiping the tears from her face with a lace handkerchief.

“Well, if Mr. Lincoln keeps his promise, we shall not remain a new nation for long.” Sarah added adamantly. “Harry lived to hear what happened at Fort Sumter and I know it concerned him greatly. He said that the Union and the Confederacy entered the

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war equal in every respect, but he worried that it wouldn't stay that way for long."

Suddenly the room grew silent with each young woman carrying her own thoughts of the difficulties at hand and what they would mean in a world that was changing on a daily basis. Sarah was the first to notice the gloomy pall that had come over them. She quickly jumped up and picked up a hair brush, tossing it in Mattie's unsuspecting lap.

"Enough of politics and talk of war! Mattie is only going to be a single woman for a few more days and we have lots of shopping to do! Get up you slugabed and brush out your long hair, for you shall not be able to wear it down about your shoulders much longer. Very soon you will be a young matron!" Sarah announced grandly, pulling the quilt off of Mattie and yanking at one bare foot until she squealed.

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Finally the ultimate extension of a little imagined hardship for Sarah and her family began to spin its ominous web. It also spelled disaster for the Confederacy in the West. The plans for Shiloh had taken most of the troops, stripping the Gulf ports of needed men. Convinced that the victorious Union forces would advance from the landward side down the Mississippi to capture the great seaport of New Orleans, the naval squadron was ordered to stay at Memphis rather than return to New Orleans. This was a strategic mistake, for the Union had arranged for an attack on the city from the sea. Flag Officer David G. Farragut commanding the West Gulf Blockading Squadron undertook the mission. Meanwhile, Major General Benjamin F. Butler gathered fifteen thousand troops at Ship Island off the delta of the Mississippi, while Farragut's fleet bombarded Forts Jackson and St. Phillips simultaneously holding the mouth of the river for an entire week. Losing only one ship in the effort, the fleet destroyed both forts and sank the defending rebel squadron.

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As Butler landed separately and marched overland to begin the occupation of this great Southern prize, the seaport of New Orleans, Farragut steamed upriver, taking Confederate ports as he went. Baton Rouge, Sarah's home, (*le baton rouge—the red stick*) would fall shortly after New Orleans.

Dearest Mattie, There is no word in the English language which can express the state in which we are all now, and have been for the last three days. Day before yesterday news came early in the morning of three of the enemy's boats passing the forts, and then the excitement commenced, and increased so rapidly on hearing of the sinking of eight of our gunboats in the engagement, the capture of the forts, and last night, of the burning of the wharfs and cotton in New Orleans, while the Yankees were taking possession, that today the excitement has reached almost the crazy point. I believe that I am one of the most self possessed in my small circle of acquaintance, and yet I feel such a craving for news from Miriam, and mother and Jimmy, who are in New Orleans at this moment.

Nothing can be heard positively, for every report except that our gunboats were sunk, and theirs coming up to New Orleans; has been contradicted, until we do not really know whether it is in their possession or not. We only know we had best be prepared for anything, so day before yesterday Lilly and I secured what little jewelry we had, that may yet be of value to us if we must run. I vow I will not move one step, unless forced away! I remain here, come what will.

This morning I went to see the cotton burning, a sight which was never before presented to my view, and probably never will be again. Wagons and drays and everything that could be driven, or rolled along were to be seen in every direction loaded with the bales, and taking them a few squares back, to burn on the commons. Negroes were running around cutting them open, piling them up, and setting fire to them, all as busy as though they hoped to obtain their salvation by fooling the Yankees.

Yesterday, Mr. Hutchinson and a Dr. Moffat stopped here to see me, but as I was not in, and they had but a moment to stay, they told their errand to Lilly. They wanted to tell me Jimmy was safe, that though he was sick in bed, he had sprung up and rushed

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to the wharf at the first tap of the alarm bell in New Orleans; but as nothing was to be done, he would probably be home with Mother and Miriam today—I have seen or heard nothing of them since, though. Jimmy's ship, the McRae went to the bottom of the harbor, with the others; he did not know if any one had escaped. God be praised Jimmy was ill and not on her! The boat he was appointed to is not yet finished, so for now he is saved.

Mr. Hutchinson was on his way further upriver, on some ship, going to join the others where the final battle on the Mississippi is to be fought, and had not time to sit down even; and I felt doubly thankful to him for his kindness, remembering that this was the very man Jimmy thrashed not a month ago on the McRae, and I was sorry I could not see him to thank him in person. Lilly was so excited that she gave him a letter I had written to deliver. Well! If the Yankees do get it, they will find only a crazy scrawl. Ah Mr. Yankee, if you had nothing in the world but your brothers, and their lives hanging on a thread, you would write crazy letters too! And if you want to know what an excited girl is capable of, call around, and I will show you the use of a small seven shooter, and large carving knife which vibrate between my belt, and pocket, always ready for use.

I will try to write to you as often as possible, Mattie. I hope all is well with you and your Jimmy. Love, Sarah.

The day had begun on an incredible note for Sarah. Last night she had received a dispatch that New Orleans was under British protection, therefore it supposedly could not be bombarded. But, whether true or not, this also meant that the enemy gunboats were probably going to be paying Baton Rouge a visit this very morning. Attempting to be worry free, Sarah felt compelled to attend church, however, she could not seem to maintain the quiet composure necessary for worship and anxiously slipped away before the service was over. She had a strange sensation that she was needed at home.

When at last she arrived home, she found her older sister Lilly wild with excitement, picking up hastily what articles of clothing were necessary and preparing for instant flight.

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“Sarah, thank God you are here! The Yankees have been sighted and the town is to be burned! We must run to the woods!” Lilly said breathlessly throwing garments about, then rushing around in circles trying to decide what to save of the family treasures.

“Never mind those, Lilly, just take what *you’ll* be needing!” Sarah called over her shoulder as she hurried up to her room.

If the house was to burn she had to make up her mind to run. Tying her treasure bag about her waist as a bustle, she filled a sack with a few necessary trifles and a few *unnecessary* ones. She hadn’t the heart to leave the prayer books her father had given his children. It was at that decisive moment, Lilly stood in the doorway.

“Are you ready, Sarah?”

“Let’s see, I have the carving knife and pistol,” Sarah responded while attempting to make a mental list.

“What’s all that?” Lilly asked impatiently, pointing to a great deal of paper piled on Sarah’s bed which was seemingly ready to ignite with matches lying on them.

“If the house must burn, I will make certain that so do these. I shall not leave my writings to the vast amusement of the Yankees!” Sarah stated with conviction.

Neither Lilly or Sarah knew at that moment they would wait all day into the late evening, for the Yankees who had still not come by sundown. The excitement died down then and Lilly tumbled in bed with a high fever as a consequence of her terror and exertions. Had Sarah not remained on the alert, she would have missed seeing Will Pinkney. She could not believe he was the same young gentle friend she had parted with months ago. His voice reached her softly through the night shadows before the gate.

“Will Pinkney, is that you?” she called, reaching for her pistol.

“Sarah Morgan—that you?” came a voice from the darkened street.

“Yes, Will, it’s me.”

He stepped into the light and Sarah immediately perceived he was not the Will Pinkney she had known before he left. He was so woebegone, subdued, care worn, and sad! *Where is the*

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devil-may-care, hearty, laughing, mischief loving Will, Sarah thought as she attempted to study his face.

“O Will, I would rather never have seen you at all, than find you so changed!”

The makings of a smile suddenly lit Will’s face.

“Now you quit that Sarah! You should be very glad to see me.”

“Come up on the porch and talk to me Will,” Sarah invited apprehensively, for his smile had died away and in the moments that followed she felt as if she was talking to Will’s ghost. He sat so still and spoke so softly, she had to concentrate very hard to take in everything he was saying.

“I tried to hold one side of the river as the Yankees passed” he said sadly, “but I was forced to retreat with my men as our cartridges gave out. You see, General Lowell, who was in command in New Orleans, evacuated us before the arrival of the Federal troops and he neglected to issue us more cartridges. We had to pass through the swamps. Imagine, Sarah, wading seven miles and a half up to our waists in water to escape. When we finally got to the edge of the swamp and I realized I had made it, I simply passed out from exhaustion. Two of my men woke me up. I wish I had never opened my eyes, because when I did, I learned that out of the five hundred men I started out with, only one hundred reached the edge of the swamp with me.”

He told this to Sarah in a quiet soul searching way, leaving her to guess at most of the other half of his story, while looking so broken that she thought her heart would burst.

“See my shoes, Sarah.”

Sarah glanced down and saw a thick clumsy pair of shoes. Her head jerked up in surprise.

“Know where I got these?”

She responded to the negative.

“An old Negro pulled them off of his very own feet and gave them to me. He saw me come out of the swamp barefooted.”

Tears began to fill Will’s eyes as he looked away. Hoping to distract his grief by redirecting his thoughts, Sarah asked, “How did you get here, Will?”

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“When we finally reached the Lafourche River, I seized a boat and landed here last night. I brought my wife and child with me.”

“Oh Will! Where are they? I must go to them,” she said compassionately.

“No Sarah. You can’t do that. She had to run off just as she was. I’m getting a carriage and taking her to my grandfather’s. Maybe when you are at Linwood you can call on them then at the hotel. I really shouldn’t have stopped to talk to you, but it was just so good to see a familiar face.” He stood slowly, taking the first weary step off the porch toward the gate.

Sarah rose and followed him. “What will happen to you now, Will?”

He turned in the night and a smile attempted to touch his lips. “I’m going to rejoin my men. We will march from Clinton to the Jackson railroad, then on to Corinth.”

She watched him disappear into the night thinking that it would be a long journey for men so dispirited. “But they will conquer in the end,” she said firmly to the darkness. *Beauregard’s army will increase rapidly at this rate, she thought, turning to go inside the house, the whole country is aroused, and every man who owns a gun, and many who do not, are on the road to Corinth. We will conquer yet! Ah! Will! How I wish I could have seen the same merry, good old face I looked goodbye at, a year ago, instead of this sad, careworn one! I’ll never see Will Pinkney again—Will that I liked, and who liked me so much; this is his ghost, for mine is dead. There is nothing to recall him, except the frank, cordial way in which he met me, and a shadow of a smile that died in an instant. When he comes back, and the war is over, I will see the same old Will again—only we will not meet again, I fear!*