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THE WATERS OF CONTRADICTION

BY ANNA C. MINOGUE

Author of "Cardome," "Borrowed From the Night"

CHAPTER III—CONTINUED

She was an inspiring little creature, and, despite the turbulence of her nature and a certain and not always agreeable power of bending things and persons to her will, she would win for her cause followers, and thereafter count upon their loyalty. She now succeeded in awaking their determination to surpass the other class, and they began work with good will. When again the bright banner of victory floated over the child, by the teacher's increasing their lesson, Arthur sought to carry dissatisfaction into her ranks, by openly on the playground and secretly in the school-room, taunting them with being led by a Yankee. Miss Cora caught a whisper not intended for her ears, and then she knew the time had come to act. Before the assembled school she briefly recounted the difficulty, told why she had divided the class, and followed up her words with the revelation of the present effort to destroy the well-won reputation of the school efficiency in this branch of study.

"And this is your loyalty to the traditions of your school!" she exclaimed, her cold eyes passing from the face of one offender to the other. "Because the strangers who have come in are trying to help you to maintain the fair fame of the school of your fore-fathers, and are succeeding, you would destroy it. If this is the strength of your devotion to your traditions, here or elsewhere, the strangers will have no trouble in overthrowing them. But one tradition shall not be destroyed while I rule here—the tradition of Stanton School for efficiency in every study taught in it. And the first offender against this intention of mine will be expelled."

That was all she said, but they knew she meant it, and Arthur's second attempt was frustrated. But Miss Cora realized well that the snake had only been scotched, and beheld with pain the ever-increasing inharmony among her pupils. The words that now came ringing to her from the playground had grown so frequent they had ceased to cause her surprise; but, as she listened to them that Friday, they appeared more bitter than before. The voice of Lucy beat on her ears like the resonant strokes of a deep-hearted bell, and well she knew they were directed toward Arthur Stanton.

"They will have to fight it out," she said wearily. It seemed that the other pupils had reached the same conclusion, for the adherents of neither side offered any assistance.

"I say you didn't play fair!" cried Arthur, and the listening woman wondered how long that intense hate and fierce wrath could be held within bounds.

"You stole it—like the Yankees always do. You are nothing but thieves and robbers, anyhow!"

"I didn't steal it!" cried Lucy. "And you are lying when you say I did! And if Yankees are thieves, Rebels are liars, and I'd rather be a thief day than a liar—so I would!"

"Don't dare call me a Rebel and a liar, or I'll—I'll—" cried the boy, choking with rage.

"Rebel! Liar! Rebel! Li—"

The word was not finished, for, forgetting every instinct of the chivalry of his race, the maddened boy leaped across the intervening space and struck the little girl a cruel blow in the face.

"Coward!" cried a voice like finely tempered steel, as Jasper Long bounded forward and delivered a stinging blow to Arthur. That the defender of the hated one, and the denouncer of himself, should come from one of his own class, and that one the boy whom he had called his friend, as for generations the families had been friends, was for a moment more staggering to Arthur than the stroke he had received. His surprise passed soon, however, and then a fight followed, which left Miss Cora wondering, as she tried to reach and seperate them, if our civilization is as deeply rooted after all the centuries. The sympathizers sprang to the defense, boys fought girls and girls fought each other, in the general conflict which swiftly ensued.

"For goodness sake! Dick! Eddie! Paul! help us keep the little savages from killing each other!" cried Annabelle, bounding from her grassy throne and starting toward the belligerents. With their assistance, and that of Carry and Emma, hastily summoned from their meditative walk, Miss Cora finally restored peace, and the army of fighters was marshalled into the school-room, where the remainder of the recitation hour was spent in sullen silence, while the teacher, sitting before her desk, sought in every chamber of her mind for a solution of the problem.

As she meditated, Miss Cora bestowed an occasional glance upon the principals in the fight. Lucy's face still wore its angry flush, her eyes still sparkled with an angry light. Anger seemed to scintillate from the quivering little body, and the looks she flung across the room at her antagonists were filled with hate.

Sylva was crying silently behind her geography. The earliest lesson her mother had imparted was the lack of gentility displayed by the contentious. Ladies, said that aristocratic monitor, considered it beneath them to enter into a quarrel, and they scornfully ignored all occasions leading to it. And she had not quarrelled but actually had fought, and there was not even the excuse of an exasperating occasion for her conduct. She scarcely knew what the dispute was about. All she was conscious of was that it was between Lucy and Arthur, and Lucy had called him names. It was in Arthur's cause she had forever disgraced herself, and he had not recognized her partnership by so much as a glance. She has stolen timid looks at him across the top of her geography, and always found his eyes fixed on space, while his pale face grew paler under the strain of his emotions.

It was that face, those eyes, that added to the trouble of the young teacher. She could not fathom their meaning, and their strangeness filled her with alarm. Had they displayed the wrath of Lucy or the shame of Sylva, she would have known how to deal with her turbulent pupils; but under the inscrutable whiteness of Arthur's face, the deep silence of his eyes, she felt baffled.

The only undisturbed one in the room was Jasper Long. He had led the band into the school-room, and on taking his seat had brought out his books and was soon deeply engrossed in their study. He had done his duty as he saw it in striking Arthur, but since his teacher thought otherwise, there was no sense in rebelling, and to-morrow's lessons might as well be studied now as in the evening. Not once did he lift his soft dark eyes to send a glance of reproach to Sylva, or of sympathy to Lucy.

As the minutes passed it was to the quiet boy Miss Cora found her eyes and her thoughts oftenest turning. It was so unlike him to go against a friend, and she could not recall that he had ever shown any great partiality toward Lucy. Of all the little girls he had seemed the most attached to Milly, when her devotion to Annabelle permitted her to mingle with the other children. And yet it was he who had sprung to the defense of the little girl. It was splendid. Though opposed to fighting, Miss Cora felt her blood tingle as she recalled the instant where Jasper's well-directed blow sent Arthur staggering across the playground. Arthur deserved it, and, if the general conflict had not followed, she would not have punished the boy. Even now she was inclined to temper his punishment, but refrained because it would necessitate an action on the incident on her part, and Miss Cora was not yet prepared to act. She felt instinctively that this life in the school was but the prefiguration of what was to come, when her pupils were men and women, and she desired that her part in it, at least, should be guided by prudence. Moreover, it was not the time when passion ruled the little minds around her to try to reason with them. She would wait until it had cooled, until they had had an opportunity themselves to reflect on their conduct, before approaching the subject.

CHAPTER IV

"I see my son chose more wisely than even I imagined in selecting you for the teacher of Stanton School."

Thus said Mrs. Stanton the following morning, sitting alone with Miss Cora in the school-room, while without the few early-arrived pupils wondered the cause of this visit from Arthur's grandmother.

Milly, alarmed by the fight, had run home crying, and in the suppressed excitement of the afternoon, had not been missed, until the little recess failed to bring her to Annabelle's side. As she was speeding across the back yard on the way to the log house blessed by the protecting presence of her mother, she encountered the younger Mrs. Stanton, a frail little woman, whom, grief, as if to make up for the cruelty of fate in thrusting it into her life, had made only fairer and more interesting. By her the flying child was stopped and questioned concerning her tears and absence from school. Hearing she had been frightened away by the fight the young widow laughed prettily and said she feared Milly did not come of fighting blood.

"But he hit Arthur, and—and—and—it hurt me, too!" sobbed the child.

"Who hit Arthur?" asked Mrs. Stanton.

"Jasper Long," she answered.

"Jasper Long!" repeated the widow, while a faint color came into her cheeks, for Jasper's uncle had been stopping his horse of late quite frequently at Stanton Hall, and she wondered if the gossip of the neighborhood could have had anything to do with the quarrel on the playground. "Why did Jasper strike Arthur, Milly?" she then asked.

"I don't know, ma'am. I wasn't playing with them. I was sitting up with Annabelle," said Milly.

Young Mrs. Stanton spent uncomfortable hours, until 4 o'clock sent home her son. She met him on the walk, and when her question brought the startling answer, "Because I hit Lucy Frazier," she drew back, exclaiming:

"You struck a little girl! O Arthur! Arthur! what would your father say!

"But she called me a Rebel and—and a liar!" he cried, chokingly.

Without another word, she bade him go to his grandmother and tell her all, for early the younger Mrs. Stanton had realized that she was not equal to the task of directing the last of the Stantons. Though she had borne him, he was in part a stranger to her, and believing it were better for the boy if he were solely in his grandmother's charge, she did not turn away from the delicately offered attention of Jasper Long's uncle, even though she had loved her soldier-husband and fondly treasured his memory. She was not able to deal with complicity of character. Her husband, in this particular, had been a sore trial to her, while the knowledge that she could not understand him, had detracted from the happiness he had found in their brief wedded life, as it might have marred it, had sufficient time for it to develop been allowed.

The story her grandson told her, sent Mrs. Stanton across the fields to the school-house at an early hour the following morning, and on hearing the young teacher's reason for having taken no step in the matter, it was then the elder lady exclaimed:

"I see my son chose more wisely than even I imagined in selecting you for the teacher of Stanton School!"

Miss Cora could not prevent the little blush that stole into her cheeks at the compliment, although she hated herself for it. A teacher ought to be superior to such vanity, she held.

"I do not want to interfere with you in any way, Miss Austin," continued Mrs, Stanton, "but I had a talk with Arthur yesterday evening. He knows he did wrong and he is willing to make amends. He will publicly apologize to the little girl to-day, but he wanted me to come over and tell you. He said he could not do that."

"Publicly, Mrs. Stanton?" repeated the little teacher, as before her rose the white face and fixed eyes of the boy. "Is that necessary? It was only a playground quarrel."

"That is true, and still, Miss Austin, we must not forget we are in a period of transition," said Mrs. Stanton. "Everywhere around us we see the old order changing. There are some things we must keep at any cost. One of these is the chivalry of the South. While our men hold our women in the old chivalrous regard, our homes are preserved, and while our homes stand, our State stands."

"I do not quite agree with you there, Mrs. Stanton," said the young woman, her eyes travelling past the calm face to the group of playing boys and girls outside the door. "There is, as you say, change everywhere, and it is as bound to affect the home and the State as any other of our institutions. Not to ask for change in these two presupposes perfection in them. Good as are our American homes and government, they are still a long way off from perfection, and they are not going to reach it by being kept stationary. Nor do I view the chivalry of man to woman as you do. It is the last relic of another transitional period; that period when the beauty of right had begun to dawn upon the dim mind of the race—in Europe, I should add, for we may not know but it may elsewhere in other times have known a similar experience. That newly-born truth was weak and required defense, and we find the bravest and best of the men of that time riding about redressing human wrongs. They do not do so now for that truth guides the race. And so we find that this chivalry to woman is nothing more than the implication of belief in her weakness, calling for defense. With the story of these four years of war still fresh in our minds, we know that in strength, and courage and lofty patriotism woman stands the equal of the strongest, the bravest, the most patriotic of men. Now my ideal of the perfect relationship between man and woman is that in which he recognizes her as a human being like himself; as she is, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, neither his superior nor his inferior, demanding not his veneration and needing not his protection—simply a woman, the other part of the human family. Of course," she finished quickly, while the color crept into her cheeks, for it was rarely she expressed her views, "I do not object to Arthur offering an apology to Lucy, but it ought to be because he struck her, not because he struck a girl—the same apology he would offer to Jasper had he stood in Lucy's place."

Mrs. Stanton stood aghast. Never in her fifty years of life had she heard such heretical doctrine preached. As she gazed on the girl before her, noted the new strength, the new determination, the new will to do and dare, and there rose before her mental vision the picture of her daughter-in-law, the last product of the old time, she knew she was listening to the announcement of the new truth, even as those who stood in the dawn of the Chivalrous Age had heard it; and though it meant the destruction of all her ideals, her soul was courageous enough to hail it.

"I will not say you are not right, Miss Austin," she said slowly. "But I am an old woman, and to the old, old things are best. We may view Arthur's apology in a different light, still both of us think it is a good thing to do."

When she was gone, Miss Cora began her restless pacing of the floor. She was experiencing in anticipation the humiliation that would be the proud boy's, when he stood before the school to acknowledge his fault and ask the pardon of the hated stranger. If it were Sylva now—but well she knew that it would never have happened with Sylva. The school had assembled when Arthur, wearing the white face and set gaze of the day previous, entered the room, and advanced to the desk where the teacher sat.

"Do you still wish to apologize to Lucy?" she asked in low tones, and he knew by her words that it rested solely with himself whether or not he should follow the counsels of his grandmother. One brief moment he hesitated, then he said:

"Yes, ma'am."

"Very well," she said, and tapped on the desk with her pencil. "Children, Arthur has something to say to you,"

He turned his face, as white now as it would be in death, and fixing his blue eyes on Lucy Frazier, said, in tones quiet but distinct:

"I am sorry I struck you yesterday, Lucy and caused the fight. I ask you and Miss Cora, and all of you, to pardon me."

Miss Cora waited an instant, thinking some of the older pupils might make an acknowledgment of the words, but there was only silence, except for something like a sob from the place where Lucy sat; then she said:

"We accept your apology, Arthur. It was a manly act. I trust your companions will profit by the example you have given them, and always remember that while it is natural to resent an insult, it indicates a supreme victory over one's self to acknowledge one's fault and apologize for it."

Mechanically Lucy took up her book, but instead of the pages before her, she saw only Arthur Stanton's face, instead of the murmur of voices around her, she heard only his words, and through the crucial moments that followed, hate of the boy died in her breast, and grey-cloaked remorse crept into its place.

It was she who had done wrong, she cried, woman-like, now that the irrevocable was a fact, taking all the blame to herself. Her one wish had been to triumph over him, and when she had succeeded she had made her victory all the bitterer for him. She had missed no opportunity of antagonizing him and grasped every means of humiliating him which the school-room and playground presented. And she had deliberately driven him to this last humiliating act, and counted all her triumphs as nothing compared with that of making him strike her.

And now he had brought all her triumphs to naught, for he had conquered her hate for him, and while her feelings toward him had undergone this change, she felt his had also been affected. There was a dissimilarity in the change, however. Instead of hate, he now entertained for her indifference, and she smartingly realized that the bitterest hate were preferable to his perfect indifference. It put her out of his life completely. She might cause her class to outdistance his by every page in the spelling-book, and he would not notice it; she might win her game unfairly on the playground, and he would not know it. There would be no more of the quarrels which were more desirable with him than the most harmonious association with others. She had no more part in the things that concerned him. It is little wonder that presently Lucy obtained permission to leave the room, and, free from the eyes of others, she should crouch at the foot of the old apple tree and weep in her young sorrow.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE BEAUTIFUL DAY

By Mary H. Kennedy, in the Magnificat

Billy-Boy had thought that Sister Felice understood. He puckered his scant brows in desperation.

"But—but—"

Again Sister Felice disappointed him. She did not attempt to finish or even to fill the speech. Then he looked more closely at her—she was crying! Pretty Sister Felice of the merry brown eyes and flashing smile! Billy-boy was aghast.

"I—I love you, all right," he managed to say.

Sister Felice's tears rolled faster down her round, flushed cheeks. Billy-boy watched them, at first with fascination, then with horror. Finally he went nearer to her.

"I do want a mother and a father," he explained stoutly. "I do—but I won't say it any more—I shall just think it." He gazed apprehensively at her.

"Maybe I won't even think it except on Sundays."

This was the supreme sacrifice. It was accepted as such. Sister Felice swept him into her arms. Billy-boy did not squirm. He considered that he owed a debt to Sister Felice. He acknowledged to himself, too, that "being loved" was not the worst thing in the world. He candidly admitted to himself that if Sister Felice's collar wasn't quite so stiff and uncomfortable to rest against he would enjoy it.

"You are discontented, Billy-boy!"

He sat up suddenly. "I am not!" he answered hotly. But he did not face Sister Felice. He kept his eyes fixed in a steady glance away from her.

"But, Billy-boy, you say all the time that you want a mother and a father, and last night in your sleep you repeated it twice."

"I am not ac—accountable for things I say in my sleep."

Sister Felice laughed. "Oh, Billy-boy! I don't want you to leave us."

The situation was becoming more difficult. Sister Felice had always understood before.

"I don't want to leave you," he began. "I love you, Sister Felice. I love Mother, Gertrude, too, and Sister Lucy, and Sister Bernard, and Sister Clara, and—and I like all the rest." How hard it was to explain! "And I love Robert Emmet and Johnny Red-head and Johnny Black-head and the others. I don't want to want to leave you. I try not to want to want to go. But, Sister Felice, I can't help it if I want a mother and a father. I do want them. You see—you see—there's a difference. A mother and a father—well, a mother and a father—"

He stopped suddenly. He never had known a mother and a father. How foolish for him to dare to attempt a description of either! He waited for Sister Felice to speak. Then, he realized that he must go on.

"You see—you see here—we have to get up at 7 and say our prayers at 7:30 and eat our breakfast at 8 and study at 9 and play at 10:30 and eat our dinner at 12.

"Why, Billy-boy!"

Oh, Sister Felice was queer to-day!

"And so on and so on every week," he went on doggedly. "We have lots of time for play and fun, Sister Felice,—I'm not finding fault. Everybody is good to us and we have good things to eat, but—but I want a mother and a father! I want to get up at 5 o'clock yesterday and 10 to-day and 7 o'clock to-morrow and—and I want to eat when I want to and go to bed when I want to—"

"Oh, Billy-boy! As if mothers and fathers did not oblige their little boys to follow certain rules and regulations! You know they do."

It was true. He did know it. Hadn't he visited Lawrence Hoban in his new home with his new father and mother? And hadn't Tony McCullough said that his father and mother were strict? He winked back a rebellious tear.

"But—I'd rather have a father and mother with rules than rules without a father and mother." Then, despite his heroic endeavors, the tears came in streams. Sister Felice held him close.

"I understand now, Billy-boy, and we will find a mother and a father together!" The tears were dried quickly.

"Oh, Sister Felice, a mother with nice eyes, and a father with strong arms, with a big house with wide bannisters and a rain barrel?"

"All of that, Billy-boy, and maybe more."

"Maybe more!" The vision opened for him was stupendous.

"I won't say another word about it, Sister Felice," he promised solemnly. "And—well, no, I guess I can't say I won't think about it."

"You need not, dear."

"And when a mother and a father come to look for a boy, will you let me speak with them?"

"I shall."

This was the old Sister Felice! He kissed her.

"I will be here a long time yet, Sister Felice. You know I am awfully homely."

"You are not!"

But Billy-boy laughed. "I'd rather be ugly. Then—then if they choose me I'll know it isn't for my looks. They will really want me."

"Oh, Billy-boy!" Sister Felice put him down gently. He watched her leave the room. He could not quite understand Sister Felice sometimes. Perhaps he should not have told what he did. Still, he had to be truthful And until today he had thought that she understood.

Up here in this little tower room where Billy-boy had been banished for distraction at prayers, thinking was easy. It was supposed to be a punishment—this isolation from the crowd of boys playing in the fragrant orchards below the window. But Billy-boy loved the place. The tiny room contained only a chair, a couple of pictures, and a small statue of the Blessed Virgin.

One of the pictures was the Holy Family. The other was of St. Aloysius praying. The statue was of white marble. Billy-boy thought it had the sweetest face of any statue at Holy Angels'. He always asked to be permitted to say good night to it. He felt that he could pray better before it too. Down in the study-hall it was sometimes hard to keep your whole attention—as you should—on what you were saying to God and His Blessed Mother.

Just because he found this not easy was the cause of his trouble this afternoon. When Sister Bernard had said, "And now we will mention our intention," Billy-boy had exclaimed, "I want a mother and a father!" in a very loud voice, too, for he had expected the other boys to join in. Instead, confusion had reigned and Billy-boy had been banished.

This wanting a mother and a father had not always been such a passion with Billy-boy. He did not remember thinking about it until he was five and a half. Until then he had not realized that there were any mothers in the world except those like Mother Gertrude. He was thoroughly annoyed to discover that once upon a time he had possessed a different mother—and a father! It was a long, long time ago, however, for Sister Felice had told him that when he was a tiny baby she had found him lying in a basket on the doorstep of Holy Angels'.

Billy-boy loved to hear about this. He often begged Sister Felice to tell him the story of the morning when she found him. He wondered and wondered how it all had happened. Of course, his father and mother had died,—mothers and fathers never gave up their little boys in any way except this. Didn't they come to Holy Angels' for other little boys when their own went to Heaven?

Once there had popped into Billy-boy's head the idea of the possibility of their being a mothers' and fathers' home where little boys could go and pick out their own particular kind of mother and father.

However, when he had asked Sister Felice about it she had said there was no such place. Billy boy thought there ought to be and he intended to build one when he grew up.

He remembered quite clearly the day that he discovered there were other kinds of mothers besides Mother Gertrude. He was playing in the orchard with the other boys when suddenly the oldest boy in the crowd began to shout madly, "Hey, fellows! A mother and a father! A mother and a father!"

No doubt such a scene had taken place before but this was the first Billy-boy recalled. Immediately, all of the boys, with the exception of the littlest ones, had rushed to the front of Holy Angels' where Billy-boy caught his breath sharply even now—there stood the biggest, loveliest automobile he had ever seen, and getting out of it were a man and a woman. Billy-boy did not pay much attention to the man, but the woman— What beautiful eyes she had! And, oh, how very soft and sweet her voice was!

The two had come among the boys and the Billy-boy said that the man was a "regular fellow" with a smiling face. He had talked with Billy-boy, too, but the woman had scarcely looked at him. She went immediately to Tony and took him away. Billy-boy had thought it strange that she had not noticed the other boys but he was soon told the reason.

"He was the prettiest," Johnny Redhead confided to him.

The prettiest! Billy-boy scoffed at the explanation. But later he had been forced to acknowledge that there was something in it. Every time a mother and a father visited Holy Angels' they chose the best-looking boy. Those who remained were homely. Johnny Redhead and Johnny Blackhead—so called by Billy-boy to distinguish them—were very homely. Billy-boy had remarked this to them once. Johnny Blackhead had cried. Johnny Redhead had replied cooly that he thought Billy-boy had nothing on them! Then they had shaken hands. Johnny Redhead was a mighty fine fellow! If Billy-boy had been a mother he would have chosen him quick.

And there was Robert Emmet—he too was funny-looking; but he was a dandy pal, even if he did have to lie in the sun-room all the time because he had crooked legs and a soft spine. Bill-boy loved Robert Emmet. He did not want him to go away, but he thought he needed a mother more than any other boy at Holy Angels'. He was the only really cripple at the house and he had to be alone a lot.

One day, Billy-boy had insisted upon Sister Felice's mentioning Robert Emmet to a mother and a father. They had become slightly interested, too, and had gone upstairs to see him. Billy-boy had followed them and had waited in the hall for the verdict. In a moment the two had come out and the watching little boy had been glad that they hadn't chosen Robert Emmet, for the woman was red-faced and angry and the man had asked Sister Felice if she thought they kept a hospital.

Billy-boy had hoped that Robert Emmet hadn't noticed their bad manners, but when he went into the sun-room his pal's face was streaked with tears and he was shaking from head to foot. And although Sister Felice had told him that Mother Gertrude hadn't let the visitors have any boy, Billy-boy did not even think of mothers and fathers for a long time after that happened.

When Lawrence Hoban, though, was taken by a big jolly-faced father and a little twinkling-eyed mother, and when Billy-boy had spent a day with them all in the new home, the old longing returned with increased fervor.

It had been a new experience for him, this visit, and he had never forgotten its joys—the long, wide bannisters down which they slid, the big rain-barrel where they fished, the fat cook who allowed them to cut all sorts of funny little animals out of her cookie dough. Best of all was "Mother," who had played the piano and sung for them, and "Father," who had demonstrated that he could take the place of umpire, first, second, and third basemen, and the field positions—all in the same game. Oh, every little boy should have a home and a father and a mother!

From that day Billy-boy had prayed and prayed and hoped and hoped that the next father and mother would choose him. But now he was seven and almost a half and he was still at Holy Angels'. He did not want to want to leave the home, as he had explained to Sister Felice. However, the feeling was there and he did want a mother and a father. He did!

When morning came Billy-boy was surprised to find himself in his own little bed in the dormitory.

"You were asleep—"

"Oh, Sister Felice, why didn't you wake me up?" Billy-boy was contrite. Poor Sister Felice who had so much to do all the day long! But Sister Felice only smiled. And she it was whom he must leave!

Billy-boy was thoroughly ashamed of himself and tried hard not to let the thought enter his mind that perhaps today a mother and a father might visit Holy Angels'. It was not right to want to go away from dear Sister Felice. For the moment Billy-boy rebelled strongly against the thought.

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