

BORROWED FROM THE NIGHT

By ANNA G. MINGOS

CHAPTER XVIII

The next day Senor Rodrigo Martinez removed his unwelcome presence from the white house and took lodging at a newly established hotel in the town.

The closing of the college for the summer necessitated Teresa's visiting her pupils at their homes.

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OUT OF THE STORM

Rev. Richard W. Alexander in The Missionary

Not very long ago a zealous priest was speaking of the varied and wonderful ways of the Lord in bringing about unlocked for conversions to the Catholic Faith; conversions that seemed nothing short of miraculous, especially when the early prejudices and teachings of generations seemed to stand in the way like stone fortresses or iron-barred gates.

"Before I came here to take this parish," he said, "I was pastor in a small place in a certain part of Wisconsin. I had a neat little church, an average good congregation, and was hoping to be able soon to have a school built for the children, when I heard that the Catechism lesson, and gave them instructions on the sacraments. We had confirmation about every two or three years, and it was a good fifteen miles, journey to the city to get the bishop. Then I had to put him up for the night, and have his Mass, First Communion and confirmation" next morning.

"My horse was sick, so I wrote to a friend in the city—a banker—asking him (since he often offered his automobile) if he could come out on a certain day and take me in to see his Lordship. I received an immediate answer, and on the day designated, the 'machine' was at the door. We had a delightful drive, for it was an afternoon in late summer, and the atmospheric conditions were perfect. The scenery, as we passed hill and forest, and stream, with an occasional farmhouse peeping out, was charming.

"We enjoyed the ride thoroughly. I found the good bishop at home, made an appointment with him, and my friend promised his automobile to convey him to our church and back again. It was a little late when we started home, and we had gone about ten miles when the sky grew as black as ink, thunder rolled, and rain came down like the deluge. We stopped right in the middle of the highway, and let it pour down on the machine. It was a straight, rather rough road, and there was no way of getting to shelter. We made light of it for a while, but soon we were drenched, and saw to our dismay that the storm was a hurricane—no cyclone, if you will. Great branches of trees were torn off and were hurled on us. Leaves were whipped off the forest, and swept down the road. The gale tore at our curtains, which we had tried to fasten closely, between the flashes of lightning. I suggested leaving the machine and seeking some shelter. But my friend said it was better to stay in the open —for we heard the trees, struck by lightning, crash to the ground about us; and the incessant thunder kept us from hearing our own voices, unless we shouted in each other's ears.

"We were there fully an hour, but it seemed double that time. I confess I became apprehensive lest we would not be able to get home at all, when suddenly the wind slackened, the claps of thunder became more distant, and the lightning less vivid. The storm had spent itself—but still the rain poured down. The machine was sinking in the mud, up to the running board, and right ahead a great tree had fallen across the road, rendering our progress impossible.

"When we discovered this we were dismayed. What was to be done? My friend, who was younger and more of an optimist than I was, drew his coat collar about his ears, and advised me to do the same. We both plunged into the woods not far away, with little hope of finding anything, for we could neither advance nor go back, and the rain was still pouring down.

"Pretty wet proposition, isn't it?" I said my friend, mockingly. "Well, it's the worst experience I have ever had," I said, between the gust of wind that swept the falling leaves into my face.

"Where are we going?" he said in answer. "Indeed I don't know," I replied. "But just then, both at once, we saw a light gleaming ahead of us. 'Bravo!' he cried. 'There's a light! Now we have hope!'"

"And, very much encouraged, we both redoubled our speed, and soon found ourselves before a comfortable farm-house standing back from the road, with light streaming from the windows. We hastened to the door, which, in response to our repeated knocks, was opened by a slender young girl with a most prepossessing face—who drew back when she saw standing without, two men with caps pulled down on their faces, and beads dripping with rain.

"Come here, father!" she cried. "Instantly a sturdy farmer, his comfortable-looking wife, and two boys about twenty or twenty-two, loomed up from the interior of the house and blocked up the doorway. I tried to be courteous, standing in the rain. 'We've been caught in the storm, and our automobile is sunk in the mud on the road,' said I. 'Besides, a tree has fallen across the way, and we are not able to remove it. You see, we are soaking wet. Will you kindly give us shelter until the storm passes? Then if you are good enough to help us to raise the machine and remove the tree, we will pay you as generously as we can.'

"Come right in!" said the farmer heartily. "You are welcome, strangers. You have got into hard lines, sure. Martha put up an extra plate. Take off your wet coats, and come in to the fire. We're just sitting down to a late dinner. Come right in! Rachael (to the young girl), take their wet coats and hang them before the fire."

"Extremely grateful for this most unexpected greeting, we stepped inside the hospitable doors, and found ourselves in a large comfortable kitchen, where a blazing fire, and the good odor of a most appetizing meal greeted us. My friend was divested of his wet coat, and cap, and gloves by the farmer himself, who brought him right in. I gave my cap and coat to the young girl, Rachael, who smilingly took them, and urged me to go to the fire. My friend was talking to the farmer, the wife was bustling around, the boys stood and stared, while I was left somewhat in the shadow.

"I ran my hand through my disordered hair, arranged my Roman collar which had been covered by my coat, and looked down at my wet shoes, which were in a sorry condition. When I looked up it was because an ominous silence had fallen on the air. I turned round to see the farmer, his face growing red and stormy, looking full at my Roman collar.

"Are you a Romish Parson?" he rather shouted, than said, to me. "I am a Catholic priest, if that is what you mean," I said, pleasantly. "What of it?" he echoed. "Don't you know we are solid, hard-shelled Baptists? No infernal Papist has ever darkened our door before! Do you think I'll have a Popish priest at my table?"

"And he thumped his fist on the table till the dishes rang. 'I determined I would be pleasant. 'Well, now, Sir,' I said, 'it is too bad we were caught in that rain—too bad our machine stuck in the mud. Why, I was just thanking Providence for this unexpected hospitality, and silently invoking blessings on this fine household. Is there any reason why I should be so displeasing to you? I have never done you any harm.'

"Root, branch, and fibre, my family and I hate Papists! It's born in us, and in my ancestors! I never was so near to a Popish priest in my life, and no Papist parson will ever sit down in my house at the same table with me!" he shouted.

"The family stood aghast. My friend looked at me quite troubled. I saw that the poor man was struggling with the traditions of hospitality and the bigotry of a false religion.

"Well," I said, "there is nothing for us to do but go out into the storm. May we stay in the barn till daylight? I give you my word we are peaceable men," I said, smiling, and I moved towards the door.

"Oh, dad," said the young girl, "what are you thinking about?" "Hold on, father," said the eldest boy. "You wouldn't let the dogs out a night like this."

"My friend now spoke. "Sir," he said, my name is Mr. X—, I am a banker in the town of D—. This reverend gentleman is a friend of mine. If I don't mistake, I have seen you in the bank. Are you not Amos Wilton, and don't you remember seeing me before? Do I, or does my friend look like a man to deserve such language?"

"The farmer, on hearing these names, showed his discomfiture at once. With a muttered apology, he pointed out places at the table, and called to his wife to serve the dinner. Nothing more was said. I determined not to lose my good nature, and when we began the meal I started to talk on the topics of the day, addressing myself to the boys, to the girl, and at last, in the most pleasant manner, to Amos himself.

"Finally, under the influence of the good dinner, the warmth, and light he thawed, and although apparently ashamed of himself, joined in the conversation which my friend and I kept going. At the end of the meal he rose up like a man, and apologized awkwardly. "See here, strangers, you mustn't mind a man in a temper. I own I had no right to talk as I did. I hope you won't bear me any ill will. It's in the blood of the Wiltons to be down on the Catholics, and I ain't an exception."