

THE WATERS OF CONTRADICTION

BY ANNA C. MINOGUE

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

CHAPTER II—CONTINUED

For several years the position had been held by a young man, who carried a Normal school certificate neatly framed in his trunk. It was an open secret that the trustees of the town school had sought to secure his services, but, true to the tradition of his fathers to maintain the high standing of the school at any cost, the soldier head of Stanton Hall, who had returned at the close of the war dying from a disease contracted by his privations and exposures, had made up the difference in the salaries out of his own depleted purse, that the school might not lose the services of the skilled instructor.

The teacher, however, had sought a wider and more remunerative field for his talents, and again the duty devolved upon the sick man of securing a successor. Rumor had been busy with the name of Cora Austin. From the little school in the corner of the country, she had steadily advanced to better paying and more centrally located ones, and everywhere praise of her discipline and ability was recorded. Sorely against his mother's will, Captain Stanton attended the Teachers' Institute day after day to satisfy himself that, should he engage the young woman, he would make no mistake.

"I know, mother," he would say, "that I am an exhausting my small stock of vitality, but it is for a good cause. It is the last teacher I shall select for Stanton school, the last, for I shall select, for I fear we shall not be able to hold the Hall until Arthur is grown. In view of all this, it must be that the last teacher we have placed in the school we built, shall be worthy of us and its well-earned reputation. The institute will last only two more days, and for both of them, Miss Austin has been assigned special work. So far she has shown great thoroughness in her methods of ordinary teaching. I am anxious now to see how she approaches the special studies."

"It would not be a bad choice," observed his mother. "Her brother and cousins were in our army."

"Not as we were, however," he answered. "The Austins opposed us in theory and practice, since the beginning of the Commonwealth. And more than any of them, Miss Cora Austin. But she is a gentlewoman. The feelings of our children will never suffer under her, and neither will the feelings of the Yankees, who are swarming in upon us. And this is right. The ideal instructor is the one broad enough to recognize the right of each individual to his opinion and belief, just enough to give him opportunity to express and uphold them, and great enough to refrain by action, open or hidden, from engraving his own opinion and belief upon the mind of the student. All this, I am inclined to think, Miss Cora is."

He attended the two meetings, engaged the girl for the ensuing term, but before it began, the gallant Captain and last member of Stanton Hall, he was led to sleep with his fathers in the family graveyard on the hill. Miss Cora fulfilled the expectations of her patron, and because of this and the fact that Captain Stanton had engaged her, she had been constantly reapointed.

It was in the middle of the third term, when their new home ready, the Fraziers moved from the town. School was in progress that October morning, when Miss Cora's attention was drawn from her class in Second Arithmetic by the opening of the door. She turned and saw a white-aproned little figure standing in the aisle, a satchel on one arm and a dinner basket on the other.

"It's a Yankee girl," whispered Sylvia Dalton to Jasper Long, but loud enough for Arthur Stanton to hear.

The hate of the name which was born with him, for the day that Captain Stanton knew he had an heir was also the one on which he learned of Lee's surrender, leaped up in a red flame into his eyes, and with it still kindling them, he looked upon the little stranger now advancing at the teacher's invitation.

"What is your name?" asked Miss Cora, wondering whence her new pupil had come.

"Lucy Frazier," replied she, and somehow the listening children caught a defiant note in the bell-like voice, while it seemed she swept them with an angry light in her blue eyes; for she had felt the hatred of it upon the many.

"Oh, yes!" said Miss Cora, remembering the new house. "Hang your bonnet and basket on that hook, Lucy, and take this seat. I shall examine you when I have finished this class."

With deliberation and supreme indifference, knowing the gaze of all was upon her, Lucy followed the instructions of the teacher, and, going to the place assigned to her, opened her spelling book, and affected to be deeply engrossed in the study of the formidable column of words; but between her eyes and the letters she seemed to see two pairs of eyes, one blue and flashing like her own, the other soft and dark and tender.

"He is mean, I know it," she thought of the blue-eyed boy, and then surreptitiously glancing over

the top of the book and meeting the dreamy brown eyes of Jasper Long, the sense of relief having been brought into the situation made itself felt in her anxious little heart.

The examination of Lucy did not consist of much time. Education was not such an elaborate affair in those days. A feeling akin to dismay ran over the room when the teacher announced that Lucy would go into the big spelling-class, for that branch of study was held in commendable esteem in Stanton school, and proficiency in it gave one rank among the pupils.

"It isn't fair!" she is only in Second Arithmetic, the same as us," whispered Sylvia to Jasper. "It will make Arthur angry."

"What's it to Arthur?" asked Jasper, busy himself with the pages of the Arithmetic which was the trial of his young life.

"Because he's there, too," she explained. "And if ever the Yankees were to turn him down—Oh!"

"What would happen?" he asked, fixing his wondering eyes on her vivacious little face.

"Jasper, are you talking?" asked Miss Cora, in her authoritative voice.

"Yes, ma'am," confessed he.

"Then take your spelling-book and stand on the floor," commanded Miss Cora, and, as he obeyed, and Lucy's lifted gaze beheld the boy with the soft dark eyes, the swift sympathy that rose in her breast sent its message across the room to him, beyond the unretaxed voice of the teacher drew her attention to her own affairs.

CHAPTER III

Miss Cora was a constant student but not all her lessons were learned in books. She studied human nature in the making in the children committed to her care, and the playground was her favorite place of observation. Standing in the doorway, her graceful, well-poised figure leaning against the sill, it was her custom to watch them as they played, or walked up and down the white road which ran past the school house, edged by its low, cool stone walls.

Two of the older girls were now sauntering along its white way, with arms around each others waists and the teacher's eyes followed them somewhat regretfully. They were the feminine David and Jonathan of the school, and their friendship, which had stood the test of many a term, was now threatened with interruption, for one, whose way hair fell in a golden shower down her back, was to leave, in a few months, with her family for the West.

"I wish Emma were not going away," repeatedly thought Miss Cora, gazing after the pair. "I do not know what Carry will do without her next year. But perhaps she will not come back. That would be a pity. I should like to see her finish her botany and algebra at least."

Her gaze wandered from the finish to a knoll overlooking the playground, and a little frown showed on her tranquil brow.

"Annabelle is at it again!" she thought, her eyes resting on a girl of sixteen years of age, seated on the grass with several boys, some two or three years older, gathered around her. Beside her, her head resting against Annabelle's shoulder, was a lithe girl, with long brown curls framing a delicately beautiful face.

"She's spoiling Milly," mentally commented the young teacher, "as well as interfering with the boy's studies. It isn't her fault, of course, that they like her, but the child would not approach her without her invitation. I do not see why Annabelle finds making a pet of one of the little girls essential to her happiness. Last year it was Sylvia, and it nearly broke her heart when she found her self set aside for another—and such another!"

For Milly was a puzzle to the mistress of Stanton School, and her perplexity was shared in lesser degree by her pupils. Her parents—or the man and woman who called themselves such—had drifted into the locality, with their few belongings piled in a wagon drawn by a pair of skinny horses. The condition of the vehicle and the animals told of a long journey, and when the man spoke of the West Virginia mountains and the home he had lost through the revenge of certain neighbors, his story was not discredited.

Sorely in need of some one to cultivate her land, Mrs. Stanton offered the stranger and his family one of the abandoned negro cabins. Gladdened by the prospect of a home and employment, the stranger unpacked his wagon and entered upon his new duties. He appeared a man beaten by adversity, and something of a fellow-feeling prompted Mrs. Stanton to give him every opportunity her slender means permitted. But disaster seemed to dog his footsteps, and for every gain there straightway appeared a corresponding loss, until even in a locality overshadowed by misfortune he was marked as a victim of adversity. There was, however, about the silent man a stolid determination not to be defeated, and after every blow they saw him once more struggling to regain his feet.

Besides Milly he had two other children, a boy and a girl, both older and both bearing so strong a resemblance to their parents, and so totally unlike the delicately-featured youngest child, that, in the minds of others than Miss Cora, there existed a doubt of her parentage. The two older children of the West Virginian were noticeable in the school for their unkempt and neglected appearance, while Milly, though no better clad, was always clean and neat. This

evidence of partiality on the mother's part made Miss Cora the kinder to the other two, but later she learned it was entirely due to Milly's own persistence that she came to school with a well-washed face and mended frocks.

"Milly's that particular," complained her sister in her hour's confidence with the teacher, "that she's bothersome. Why, Miss Cora, she'll go out and gather sycamore leaves and turn 'em wrong side up and set her plate on 'em, pretending they're a tablecloth, when she eats her dinner. And she just makes Mammy wash every stitch of her clothes on Saturday, and starch 'em up good and stiff and iron 'em on Sunday so's she can have 'em nice and clean for Monday to come to school in. And she makes me wash her face every morning and curl her hair and then she goes to the looking-glass Miss Stanton gave Mammy, and if she finds I haven't done it just so she'll holler and cry and Mammy'll make me do it over again to hush her up. She's a whole lot of trouble to us all, but Mammy says it isn't going to hurt us to humor her a little. She thinks maybe she'll grow out of being finicky after a while."

Miss Cora thereupon began to inculcate the gospel of neatness to this pupil, but she found it was time wasted. The older sister was well satisfied with her condition, and a change would have been as undesirable as were Milly's notions. The sketch given of the little girl's instinctive reaching out for the better things of life, appended to the school, as it afterward appeared to Annabelle, who had not hesitated to drop her pet of the former year and give her place to the child of the poor stranger.

"I can't help it, Miss Cora," declared the candid girl, when the teacher expostulated with her for her partiality, which was the cause of much jealousy among the smaller children. "She is such a pretty child and she does so love pretty things. Why, I gave her a piece of ribbon the other day and she actually cried. I wrote Mammy about her, and she told me I might bring Milly home with me some Friday."

"I do not think you ought to do that," Annabelle said. "It will only make her own home that much more distasteful when she comes back."

"But I've already asked her," said Annabelle, who lived in the adjoining county and was stopping with a relative in order to attend Miss Cora's school. "The visit will bring something into her life and give her something to think about."

"That is why I object," observed Miss Cora. "She will think too much about it. She may grow unhappy."

"Oh, I don't think so," said Annabelle, with the assurance of sixteen. "She is a sensible little thing. When her sister and brother get angry and fight because the others taunt them with their poverty and call them names, Milly just laughs. She says she cannot help it that her father is poor. God made him so. I couldn't be that sensible if I tried."

"Still, Annabelle, I wish you would not make so much over her," enjoined Miss Cora. "You keep her with you during recreation, when she should be playing, just as you keep Dick and Paul and Eddie. It isn't healthy," finished Miss Cora, finding no other word ready under the wicked little light that flashed into the girl's eyes, before they were hidden by the quickly lowered lids.

The interview over, Annabelle turned away, pitying poor Miss Cora, who had no little girls and big boys to love her more than making mud pies and playing ball.

"Miss Cora says you must play with the other little children, Milly, and not hang around me," said the virtuous Annabelle, as, dismissed for the noon lunch and recreation the day following the interview, the little army filed out of the low door. Milly's face grew sad and the tears sprang into the liquid brown eyes, but she made no protest.

Miss Cora says you and Paul and Eddie must do likewise," she observed demurely to Dick Johnson.

"Well, let's play 'King-king-cat-a-go,'" said the ready Dick. "She has no objection to our playing together, has she?"

"No, but I have," pouted Annabelle, walking majestically to her favorite seat on the green knoll, while the other members of the larger class secretly narrowed and as secretly hoped their surmise was correct. There she sat in solitary splendor while the boys moped and Milly vainly tried to obey the teacher's decree. For two days the miserable situation lasted, but when Friday dawned and Dick remembered that the evening would send his boyish love to her distant home, he threw obedience to the wind, and a bold approach to the green knoll of whom Annabelle sat, with a book in his hand, pretended to be reading.

His example was speedily followed by his two rivals, and when Milly's never-long distracted eyes sought her patron, and beheld the return of her fellow-worshippers, she abandoned her half-finished playhouse and hastened to her old place by the queen's side.

It must be affinity on the part of the child," observed Miss Cora, "and simple human nature with the boys; and against both a teacher's advice is powerless. It would be better if the boys were at college, but their parents cannot afford that now, and

so I shall have to do the best I can for them. If Dick could only get Annabelle out of his thoughts, there is nothing he could not do in the way of study. I fear I have here a foreshadowing of his life. He will always be led by the heart, and the head is a far better guide," concluded the young philosopher.

Her musing was interrupted by a familiar sound from the playground, where a number of the other pupils were engaged in a game of Prisoner's Base. In the center of the well-worn plot stood Lucy Frazier, her blue sunbonnet hanging down her back, her face flushed and her eyes flashing. Every gaze was fixed on her, and it seemed to the watching teacher as if the very rays of the sun were all focused on the defiant, angry child, as she hurled her words of scorn at her opponents, who evidently had sought to deprive her of her victory in the game.

Miss Cora, swiftly reviewing the past, realized in that moment that ever since the coming of Lucy the tranquility of the playground had been more frequently and sometimes tragically interrupted, while in the school room a feeling of antagonism had sprung up and was developing a strength which at times, alarmed her. She could not say when it had come into existence, but she had no difficulty in recalling its first appearance.

Whether she knew instinctively Arthur Stanton's weakness or whether her liking for words was natural and must develop itself, from the time she entered the spelling class at Stanton School, Lucy was predominated by the desire to excel the others in that particular study. When she lifted her little face from the foot of the class, which place, as the latest comer, had been assigned to her, and saw Annabelle and Dick, Emma and Carry, the other older boys and girls as well as several of her own age standing before her, she experienced a strange sinking of heart, hitherto unknown in her childish experience. Suppose she should never get past the foot? And what more likely with all those learned boys and girls ahead of her? But when, after the first recitation, she found she had changed places with the boy above her, her spirits shook off their heaviness. It speedily returned, however, when Sylvia, with petty spitefulness, told her she had only turned down Eddie Ware, who had never received a headmark in his life.

Bravely Lucy took her place above Eddie Ware the next morning, and when as the days passed, they saw her coming steadily up the line, she maintained by the new little girl, spelling, however, was only a division of their studies, and they did not give it the absorbing attention of Lucy. There was one exception, however, Arthur Stanton. There was an old tradition in the school that the Stantons had been its best students, especially excelling in spelling, and now that so little else of their past belonged to them, there was a passionate desire in the heart of the boy to preserve their reputation as scholars.

With a diligence that was pathetic, he had striven to succeed in his studies, and when he was promoted this term to the higher spelling class, his feet went swiftly over the home-made path to acquaint his grandmother with the fact. So it was with a feeling akin to dismay that he beheld the admission of the little Yankee and watched her steadily advance toward his place near the head of the class, which he had maintained by the most arduous study. A sense of approaching defeat at her hands took possession of him, and thought of such a catastrophe threw him into a frenzy of anger. He plunged into the study with a feverish interest, and its result sent him steadily forward until he stood at the head of the class. As steadily the detested little girl gained on him, until the conclusion of the lesson one day saw her standing next to him.

With dull, sickening throbs of heart and a face ashy pale, he approached the ordeal the next morning. Lucy took her position with certainty showing in her flashing blue eyes. Seeing this, he realized that she knew his deadly fear, and was even then rejoicing in the anticipation of her triumph. The reflection intensified his hatred of her. When such intense feeling exists, it is impossible that the atmosphere shall not be disturbed by it, and every child in the room, down to Milly, patiently spelling her way through the lesson in her first reader felt that something unusual was about to happen.

Five times Miss Cora's eyes had been turned upon him, as she gave him a word, and five times Lucy had waited, with shining eyes and flushed face, for one cruel little letter to escape and swing open the door of her victory; and five times, with a deep breath of relief, Arthur saw her disappointed. Then fell the sixth word from the lips of the unsuspecting teacher. A simple word enough, and when her "Next!" followed his spelling of it, the cold sweat broke on his ashen brow.

"Correct, Lucy! Go up head!" said Miss Cora, smiling at the little girl; when Arthur, with the muttered exclamation, "I'll never stand next below a Yankee!" drew her attention to him, as he deliberately walked to the foot of the class.

Miss Cora read the meaning of it all in a moment, but being a gentlewoman as well as a wise teacher, she made no comment on the action and continued the lesson. From that

day, with a pride that was as pathetic as his diligence had been pathetic, Arthur made no effort to succeed in spelling. He began then systematically to lessen Lucy's triumph, by demoralizing the class, and, as he had his sympathizers, some actuated by his own sentiments, others by indolence, he so well succeeded that even Eddie Ware would have had no difficulty in holding Lucy's place, had he made sufficient effort to try.

At first Miss Cora was puzzled over the deterioration of her spelling class, and when the explanation dawned upon her mind, she was, at first, at a loss how to deal with her refractory pupils. Finally she announced her intention of dividing the class, leaving Arthur and his political sympathizers together, while Lucy and the remainder constituted the second division. Immediately the interest of the boy and his friends was renewed. With the intuition which was singularly well developed in her, Lucy grasped the meaning of the division, and, as the teacher vouchsafed no explanation, she was included in the scorn which the child entertained for her companions. It was not her idea of the way in which defeat should be met; but she resolved her class should not fall behind even though she had the strategists to captain.

"They want to beat us, and Miss Cora is trying to help them," she communicated to the most promising of her company. "All because of Arthur Stanton. I reckon she is afraid his grandmother mightn't like for him to be turned down, and she wants to keep on her good side. But we'll show her, won't we?"

TO BE CONTINUED

THE VACANT CHAIR

I.

Another Christmas was about to shed its silken showers of peace and joy upon the awaiting world, and old John Farrelly's older heart was mournful of it.

It was not that John Farrelly's outlook upon the gay and gracious season was dimmed by a natural sadness, or that gloom and mournfulness had fixity of tenure in his soul. For eleven months of the year, he was normal, but the month of Christmas covered his spirit with sadness and his mind seemed to put out its light. There were neighbors who recalled old John as the jolliest fellow in the parish—on the whole of Munster, if it went to that—but that was many years ago. Usually he was a quiet, reserved man, with a high reputation for an honesty that was, if anything, a bit too rigid and unbending, but around the radiant time of Christmas he grew sullen and unwilling to have company.

Not everybody knew the reason—quite a goodly number were unaware of it, and had to be content with their own deductions. These latter put it down to eccentricity, or advancing years, and were perfectly content with that. Yet the old man's depression was not of a cross-grained type. He sat moodily enough by his own fireside when Christmas was near at hand, but his sorrow was patient and silent. If friends did happen to drop in, he bade them sit down and smoked and chatted with them. It had a softening effect on the neighbors to recollect that his chief and constant visitors were the children roundabout with whom he evidently was a tried and trusted favorite.

To those who could not solve the mystery of this Christmas lack of cheerfulness, old John's attitude was inexplicable. In the first place, he was the most prosperous farmer in all that fertile part of the country and was widely noted for his great "luck" with his crops and stock. No one ever heard of blight showing itself among his potatoes, of an untoward accident to one of his farm animals. His wife had died nearly two generations ago, but, as the neighbors said, death was the will of God, and every house in the world was bound to be visited by it.

He had seven sons, six of whom were known to be happily and prosperously married in that and the adjoining parishes. The older folk of the district recognized the intimate connection between old John's grief, at a season when everyone else was happy, and John's missing seventh son. They guessed too, that the sudden going away from his father's home of young Tom Farrelly had something to do with that curious old chair where nobody was ever allowed to sit. What Tom Farrelly's banishment and the strange domestic relic had in common, no one, however, rightly knew.

Save for his servants, old John lived absolutely alone in his fine homestead. He had worked hard for his six boys and had succeeded in putting them all in the way of comfort and wealth. Despite the advice of friends, he had over and over again refused to surrender his own farm to any of the six, sternly declining even to give a reason further than that he had already provided excellently for them. For some time, the sons quarreled bitterly, but the father denied the dispute by making a will in favor of his youngest boy, if alive, or his direct heirs, if any. It was remarked in every corner of the parish, that, from the very moment the terms of the will became public property, not one of his sons, or their wives, or children, ever sought to darken the door of the industrious old man, who was thus left to drag out his years in loneliness.

It was only a week or so before each Christmas that the old chair was brought from the bedroom where it had been throughout the year, to

the inner side of the kitchen fireplace. There in front of the old man, the strange uncouth relic rested until, after Christmas Day, when it was put back into its retreat for another twelvemonth. The mystery of this curious piece of furniture was deepened by the fact that nobody at such times was ever permitted to sit down upon it. If anybody, unawares, or forgetful of the circumstances, attempted to use it, old John courteously drew it aside and pointed to another seat.

Twenty years ago this Christmas, the neighbors calculated, young Tom Farrelly had gone from home, leaving his father, as everybody saw, a much changed man. There was no doubt of their having parted in anger, though the reason never became rightly apparent. Old John Farrelly sternly warded off all inquiries on the delicate subject and was never known to mention even the name of his son. It was certain, however, that his whereabouts were uncertain, for he had never sent a letter and nobody had ever chanced to hear of him. Kathleen O'Sullivan, with whom Tom was known to be a bit in love, had emigrated to America, the very week before, and had not since been heard of. But Kathleen was the child of a very poor man, and Tom of a very "strong" farmer, so that any suggestion of a secret marriage before leaving, or after landing on a foreign shore, was generally scouted with indignation.

At all events the parish was preparing for the season of peace and goodwill, and the farm-houses were bright with red berried holly, and the children already were fingering the toys. The carelessness of Christmas was beginning to shine in every eye, and the fraternal spirit of these divine days was apparent on land and water.

And all the time, attended only by his housekeeper, old John Farrelly sat brooding before the kitchen fire of his fine homestead, with the grumbling of the wind down the chimney and the crooning of the sea, not far away, inspiring him to moody thoughts. The ancient clock kept up its dismal tick all day; the creamy tide advanced in foamy columns on the invaded beach and retreated in regular order; the sun glared with his fiery eye until eventually caused it to be bloodshot; the warmed earth shivered and got cold; yet old John Farrelly sat there near the glowing turf sods, his aged head supported by his trembling hands, and his dimmed eyes staring opposite at the vacant chair.

II.

It was the forenoon of Christmas Eve. The little shops of the tiny village were besieged by the happy children, especially when old John Farrelly was seen in the main street. He spent a few shillings in the purchase of sweets and similar delicacies, and after transacting some routine business, turned towards home.

On the way he was wished the compliments of the season by all who chanced to see him, and more than one invited him to have some refreshment in honor of the season. Though reserved and self-centred, he was a man who was thought a great deal of, because he had a name of being a neighbor who was able and willing to help another out of his trouble. He declined all offers of hospitality and hurried up the road until he came to the gate opening into his lonely abode. It was more lonely now, for he had given permission to his old housekeeper and the other servants to spend a few days with their relatives.

He walked moodily up the gravelled path, lifted the latch, and entered the kitchen. It was a great, wide one, with a big hearth at the end of it. It showed all the outward signs of comfort and snugness, and assuredly looked as if it were intended only for people with easy, good-natured minds. It seemed to tell you that it was a kitchen for the young and merry, not for the aged and whimpering. The owner of it sat on a straw-bottomed chair at one side of the fire, and slowly began to fill his pipe. Opposite him was the chair he would have nobody sit upon. When he lit his pipe, his eyes fell longingly on it. There was nothing at all extraordinary in the appearance of the chair. It was a common kitchen chair of plain white deal and bore every manifestation of having seen better days. Age and usage would long ago have figured it to the interior of the fire were it not supported and patched to prolong its length of life. The wooden stays showed signs of a boy's penknife, and on the seat were rudely carved the initials "T. F." The sight of these two letters were constant reminders of his absent son, and, as he looked now at them for the thousandth time, his heart was crying.

Twenty years ago his beloved boy had sat opposite him on that ancient chair, and for that boy's sake he had fondly preserved it as a household relic. Tom was barely twenty then. While his brothers were dull and dour fellows, Tom was all life, all nerve, all gaiety. He was the only one of the family who had taken after his mother—rest her soul!—and Kate Farrelly was as handsome and as jolly a woman as ever priest joined at the altar. She gave up her life that Tom should have his; and thus it was, the neighbors would tell you, he got all the good qualities and physical graces of his poor mother.

Twenty years ago, this very day as the father's conscience gratefully reminded him, the brown-haired, sinewy youth had bravely admitted he was in love, and though the girl of his boyish heart was a poor man's daughter he had made up his mind to marry her. Though Kathleen

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