

THE WATERS OF CONTRADICTION

BY ANNA C. MINOGUE
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CHAPTER VII

Lucy's experience at the boarding school fulfilled her predictions, with the single exception that she did not die. Of what she suffered, however, she said nothing, and neither teachers nor school-mates knew the anguish she daily endured. She had learned too early the unhappy lesson that, while the world is ready enough to share our joys it is unresponsive to our sorrows; so deep in her young heart she hid that most pathetic of all griefs, the home-sickness of a child.

But it wrought a complete change in her, and the child who had led the games of the district school, whose voice rang the clearest in its laughter and who had impressed her personality upon her associates, now became silent and retiring, and only entered into the pleasures of the recreation hour when commanded to do so by her teachers. If she did not play, she studied. The mental occupation tended to absorb her mind, and she plunged into it for this purpose, at first, solely; then love succeeded, and all the happiness Lucy Frazier found in her boarding-school days was that which study afforded.

The academy was a young one and passing through its days of poverty and privation, in which the pupils had a share. The severest of these to Lucy, as time progressed, was the scarcity of readable books in the library. Of devotional books there were a plenty, and pious stories outnumbered the ones dealing with love and adventure. As an alternative from this religious plethora, Lucy turned to history. The long row of books looked formidable to her, but she was not to be daunted, and began the story of the ancient kingdoms of Assyria and Egypt. Fortunately the work was well written and soon to the thoughtful child became absorbingly interesting. She was prepared for hero-worship when the historian led her into Greece, and Athens became more to her than Washington, and the character of her sons the standard of human worth.

If she could only have lived in those days, she mused, as she sat alone in the orchard, when the waning light of the brief spring day prevented her from following the record of the youthful period of our civilization. If it were in that happy time, she mused, this gnarled tree against which she leaned her head might be the shade of a dryad, who, knowing her worshipful love, might deign to visit her; or a god or goddess might condescend to appear to her mortal eyes, and reward her devotion with the high gifts of which they were so lavish to their former favorites. Of course, the Sisters, over their praying devoutly in the chapel, would tell her her thoughts were all wrong. There were not, had never been, dryads and nymphs, mighty gods of war and peace and mightier goddesses to overthrow all schemes, mortal and divine. They were only the offerings of an artistic but wholly pagan people, and to wish to exchange her time of Christian enlightenment and salvation for one of idolatrous gloom was sinful. Thus the gentle nuns would have said, and they probably would have withdrawn her books, had they been aware of her ideas. These, however, Lucy wisely kept to herself, and consequently was left to inhabit her beautiful world of imagination.

Suppose there were some truth in it, after all? she asked herself, with her blue eyes on the red sky. Suppose in that beautiful Grecian land, in that far-off golden time, these creatures, half human, half divine, lived their glad, free life, subject only to the higher gods? that they walked among men, unseen by them, ready to minister to their mortal brother's needs when mortal help was unavailing? Ah! one must have walked very circumspectly, she thought, in those days, feeling the many unseen eyes viewing all one's actions; and securely, too, for when necessity arose and earnest appeal to them had been made, it had never proven unavailing. And then the romances of those days, when the world was young and experience was new. Now—the book slipped unheeded to the ground while her arms clasped her upworn knees, now, what was there? Then people fought for freedom from their glorious country; now they fought to liberate a lot of negroes. Then they led the conquered in their train, a glittering throng; now they degraded them by placing their former slaves over them in offices of authority. Then the hero could do anything he wanted, even to the cutting off of the tail of his dog, and be applauded; now he only maintained his place in popular esteem by behaving himself in the most orthodox fashion. Of course there was some romance left, and her mind turned lingeringly to the few novels on which the Sister Librarian kept her key securely turned. But what Rome and Athens spared had been worn threadbare by the Crusades, and only the ragged ends of it were left for those, not heirs of all the ages, in the opinion of this school girl, whose discontent with her enforced life of seclusion and wearing routine, had extended to the age in which she lived.

Except that the vacations sent her to the home she loved, it brought her little of joys belonging to her youth. The ties that had bound her to the young people of the neighborhood, had been loosened, if not severed,

and as far as congenial companionship was concerned, she was no better at home than in the convent.

All things, however, end fortunately. The end of Lucy's school days sent her home with a gold medal hanging from her neck, and gladness in her heart. It was a gladness mixed with sorrow, not for the days she was leaving behind her, but because the sweetest portion of her life had been returned to her. To those who thought they were securing her greatest good. But youth soon reassessed itself, and the knowledge that she should no more suffer exile, together with the freedom of the country, succeeded in restoring her buoyancy, if it could not entirely renew the old fawn-like wildness which had added more to the charm of her childhood than her grace and beauty. But the loss of that was a gain for these, and as she stepped across their threshold a few days after her return, Aunt Jenny and her old husband looked at her in dumb surprise and admiration.

"Yoh's shorely grow'd to be a p'tty gal, Lil' Miss!" exclaimed the woman, the first to recover speech. Lucy blushed at the compliment, but turned it quickly aside by saying:

"Guess what I've brought you, all the way from the city, Aunt Jenny?" "Wat's dat yoh's axin' an' ole woman like me to do, Lil' Miss?" she exclaimed, eyeing the packages in Lucy's arms exultantly. "It ain't evah a new dress, 'cause I don't need none, an' yoh Mammy give me a new aprun' to'ah day."

"That is what it is—a new dress!" cried Lucy, and she deposited a package on the bed of the woman's lap. "Law, now, Lil' Miss how did yoh 'spicion I wanted a new dress more thing on earth?" she exclaimed, nervously untying the string. "An' if 'tain't a fine red cashmere! Law, Majah! jes' look at dat! It's de finest dress I evah had in my life. Oh, yoh bressed chile! I see gwian to have it med up to be berrud in!" and she clasped the girl to her heaving bosom and repeatedly kissed her fair face.

"Why Aunt Jenny! she exclaimed, extricating herself from the smothering embrace. "If you say anything so greswome as that, I'll take it back right away. You are going to have it made up to wear while you are alive. And her's your present, Uncle Majah," she said, opening a box and disclosing a high hat for which, long ago, she had heard him express a wish.

"Lil' Miss! Yoh's a congarbur, shore!" he cried, delighted as a child. "Evah sense de day I los' my stove-pipe hat, dat ole Marse give me, when we was runnin' 'way from de Morgan Mese. I see wanted anothah wuss'n anything on earth. But I nevah 'spected to git it, tell I climbed de top uv Zion Hill."

"Did you expect to get it then?" asked Lucy, quietly bestowing a present upon the expectant General Joe Jerry, who was standing shyly at the door.

"Cose I does, Lil' Miss," he answered, putting on the new hat. "Does yoh think de Lo'd's gwian to have an ole bah-headed niggar walkin' up an' down dem golden stairs? No'm! An' de fus' thing Majah's ole woolly head boobin' 'foh de big white throne, is to odah one uv de angels to go an' buy him a stovepipe hat, right 'way."

A laugh that was good to hear followed the words. The girl and the two old people turned quickly to see a young, fair-headed man standing on the log step, just outside the door. A straw hat was in one hand, the other held a tin pail, which he now placed on the step. He did not speak, but stood looking on the surprised group, the laugh still on his face and in his eyes. These now met Lucy's and roved no more, until Aunt Jenny, all a-flutter, thrust her bulky form between the two, saying:

"Yoh's a wantin' something, Marse A'thuh?"

"Just a bucket of water, but that will wait. I want to see Uncle Majah's hat—and Lil' Miss."

the way I live, since grandmother died." "She teaches regularly now for Miss Cora in the little school-house. Do you remember when we used to do the teaching for her?" "Yes," she said, and a little sigh caught at her heart.

"They were good old times," said Arthur, from the height of his five-and-twenty years. "But we didn't know it."

"I did," said Lucy, decisively. "I was never so happy in all my life as at Stanton school."

"Notwithstanding the fights?" he cried, and again his rich, full laughter filled her ears.

"They were the best part of it," she chimed, "especially when you were my opponent."

"You hated me pretty well," he said, looking at her reminiscently. "And you returned the sentiment quite thoroughly," she retorted. "It was what you expected and wanted, wasn't it?" he asked.

"Expected it—perhaps," she said. "And wanted?" he urged.

"Does any one want to be hated?" she asked, turning her blue eyes wistfully upon him.

"But you said the best part of it was the quarreling with me," he observed. "We don't quarrel with people unless we hate them, and—"

"Oh, sometimes we do!" she said, interrupting him.

He shook his head disbelievingly. "I cannot agree with you," he said. "I never quarreled with Milly in all my life."

Lucy's laugh that followed was tinged with bitterness.

"That is because Milly would not quarrel with you—or any one," she explained. "She never even quarreled with her brother and sister. Where are they?"

"Oh, the sister married some one like herself, and the boy ran off. Her mother is in ill health and her father would have a hard time of it, if it were not for Milly. Miss Cora got the trustees to allow her a salary for teaching, and that helps him out."

It was different to reconcile the indifference of his voice and manner in speaking of Milly, with his admission of his regard for her, and Lucy felt puzzled. It seemed to her that Milly was exhibiting unusual bravery and devotion in giving up her life to the parents whom the other children had forsaken; but her thoughts were interrupted by reaching the little brook which ran around the foot of the hill.

"I missed my bridge this morning," she said, as they stopped.

"Uncle Majah made it for me long ago, so 'Lil' Miss wouldn't fall in an' git drowned."

"Lil' Miss doesn't need the bridge now," he said, stepping across the brook, and reaching out his hand to her. She took it and sprang across the silvery thread of water. Then once more they paused, and Arthur said:

"It must be nice to have nothing to do all day a day like this—but amuse yourself. See how different it is with me! I could not get anyone to help Milly's father with the clover hay, and so I had to turn farmer. My work in town is more profitable for me, but if he were to lose his part of the crop it would be a calamity. And so I must leave you now, and get back with that water I came after. Good-bye, Lil' Miss, and again he laughed speaking the name, and sprang across the brook. "Oh, by the way," he cried, stopping and looking after her, "are you as fond of stories, as you used to be? or have you grown sentimental and gone in for Byron and Moore? Because if you are still fond of stories, I've got quite a collection of them now, and I'd like to take up our reading where we left off."

"We left off in the middle of the Leatherstocking tales," she called back to him, on her way up the hill.

"Do you want to finish them?"

"Yes, don't you?" he called, and again his laugh filled her ears with its music. But she only laughed back at him.

To Lucy the meeting was quite an event, and under the memory of it and the influence of the Juneteenth of the year, she found her pessimistic views concerning the condition of present-day romance becoming modified. It might not be so entrancing as an encounter with young Alcibiades, with his fine scorn for public opinion, but unquestionably the meeting with Arthur was something to be recalled with pleasure, and its repetition something to look forward to.

He was just the same old Arthur, she told herself, with a swift stirring of the heart, as ready to quarrel and then laugh at it, as he had been in the days succeeding the fortunate ride on the sorrel colt. How manly he was, and how handsome and how good! To think of him stopping away from his law-office, and working in the hot field, in order to save

the hay! Ah, but whose hay? whispered the little demon that is never far from the ear of the happy. If it had belonged to another than Milly's father, would he have made this sacrifice? And what had he said about the old house not being so lonely, because of Milly? And what could Milly do to drive away loneliness from the heart and home of Arthur Stanton? She could not play, nor sing to suit his fastidious taste, and never had she been known to say a witty or clever word at school.

For Lucy had yet to learn that the deepest comfort allowed a human heart is to rest in the silence of a love, great enough to ask nothing in return, strong enough to hold itself ready for every demand made upon its pressure is no longer needed, and pure enough not to see the wrong done it by its object. Such a love probably never has sufficed all the requirements of its object, but it is often the hand of God stretched out to it in the darkness. Often it goes disguised under the name of friendship, and when friendship is perfect, it must partake of the nature of this love. The instances of such a friendship are so rare, however, they have been immortalized; while such a love is an experience known to many. It was this love which, from the first, Milly had felt for Arthur, and now she found it as the deep heart of a forest is to a man worn by the heat of noonday.

When the unexpected death of his grandmother coming immediately after his entrance upon his work as a lawyer, had left him alone at a time when most he needed her companionship, it was to Milly, instead of his mother or other friends, he had turned. She could give him none of the things he had lost when his grandmother died. Her words of comfort would have irritated him, as her words of encouragement would have been meaningless. She simply offered him peace from the turmoil of life, and rest when labor was proving too severe. Through she never entered the house while he was there, he knew her hands were busy in his absence; for no servant would so look after his comfort. Her care, partaking largely of the maternal, made his loss less sharp, and the sense of her nearness took the edge from his loneliness.

He accepted it all unthinkingly. Had he ever stopped to ask why Milly should make herself all this to him, and been driven to accept its logical answer, Arthur Stanton would have abandoned the home of his fathers, rather than accept a service which he could not repay in kind. He was more considerate of his tenants than his neighbors were of theirs, but it was because they were deserving; he would have said had he been questioned on the matter. Besides this they had lived at his door for years, he had been a playmate to their children, and he had ever seen his grandmother acting the part of a friend to them in their various troubles. Hence the meaning of his presence in the hay-field that day, that had caused Lucy so much concern.

But when he went back to the field, the thought of Lucy Frazier went with him, nor did he entirely get away from it all that day. When the evening shadows sent him down the long valley to the Hall, she seemed to walk beside him; and, as he passed it, he paused at the place she had lain that long past Sunday afternoon.

"What a daring creature she was to ride the unbroken colt!" he thought, continuing his walk, a smile on his lips. "She is the same Lucy, only prettier. She will cut a wide swathe, with her beauty and education, and her father's wealth back of her. Well, every dog must have his day, but gentlemen! it's hard for the dogs, whose days are over!"

His head dropped somewhat, and with his eyes on the ground, he went on until the stone wall separating the field from the orchard was reached. Then he looked up and saw Milly standing before the log house, the red light falling on her slight figure, and kindling the dark brown hair. He sent her a pleasant greeting, and continued his slow walk to the Hall.

But that night, instead of his law-studies, the many new novels and works of the poets recurred to his attention, and as he lingered with them, he wondered which one he would like, and would the vacation reading of their childhood ever be resumed.

With suspicious shrewdness Aunt Jenny noted that Arthur began to find a number of excuses for dropping in on her at unexpected times. She heaved a breath of relief when Lucy did not appear, and devoutly prayed that his frequent disappointments would cause him to abandon his visits, whose object she knew too well.

"Dah ain't no good gwian to come outer dah frien'ship," she reflected. "An' now dat ole Mis' is dead, an' my mutah's done took up wif uh new husband an' new chillun, I see got to be keertful uv Marse A'thuh."

But Aunt Jenny's precautions, however, well fortified by prayer, proved unavailing against Major's championship. Arthur and Lucy were young; it was natural they should enjoy each other's society, and he resolved to lead a so-called life for them. Besides, it afforded him a pleasure as natural to frustrate his wife's schemes against the companionship of the two, which schemes he was convinced, lack masculine foresight. Lucy's father was getting rich, and his influence was increasing. An alliance with his daughter would place Arthur in

a position which he might never attain by his own exertions; hence the best way he could prove his devotion to his old master's grandson was to bend every effort to bring this about.

Adroitly he gained Lucy's promise to accompany him on a certain day to the garden patch which her father had given him in one of the corn-fields, to see the tomatoes which he was raising, and which he hoped would secure the premium at the county fair that fall. Then, under the cover of darkness, he sought the Hall, and on plea of needing some chewing tobacco gained admission to Arthur's study, and incidentally gave notice of the prospective excursion on the following morning. The cornfield joined the clear meadow, and though the hay was safe in the tall ricks, and pressing duties awaited him in town, Arthur found it necessary to be in that portion of his estate at that time. Seeing them, neighborliness demanded that he should join them, and share in her surprise and admiration over the product of the garden plot, claimed by Major, but brought to its present state of growth by the industrious Joe. The inspection was soon over, and Lucy declaring she must return home, found herself abandoned by Uncle Major, who was employed with the weeds in the onion bed.

"G'long, Lil' Miss!" he cried, waving his spare arm in response to her call. "I see jus' got to pull up dese weeds an' he'p my po' boy, now dat I see down hyah. Reckun young Marse kin see you through de fies an' keep de snakes off'n yoh lil' feet bettah'n de ole man!" and, as he watched Lucy turning petulantly away from him, and caught the smile on Arthur's face, he chuckled to himself and said:

"De ole woman'll be maddah'n a wet hen when she sees 'em a-comin' down de hill, but ole Majah knows what he's a-doin'."

Lucy attempted to persuade Arthur that she was not afraid of snakes and could find her way out of the field quite easily, but he persisted in his intention to accompany her as far as the log house at least.

"But suppose I don't want you?" she fluffed, standing between the rows of Major's prize tomatoes, the well-remembered light of battle in her blue eyes.

"But you do want me!" he retorted, a different light showing for an instant in his.

"Oh! do I?" she returned, coldly. "Come on, then!" and she whirled around and headed for the path, but not until he had caught the sudden red that flamed into her cheeks.

Up the grassy path that led between the old rail fence and the waning palanx of the corn she went with feet so swift he was put to it to keep within arm's length of her. Seeing his opportunity slipping his grasp, he called out:

"O Lil' Miss look here!"

Safely beyond him, she paused and looked back over her shoulder.

"The mulberries are ripe, and I haven't eaten one for ages!" he cried, pointing toward the wide branches of a tree overspreading the path. She glanced from the tree to the speaker, and the penitent look on his face mollified her. After all, suddenly spoke up conscience, he had only told the truth.

"Neither have I!" she said, going back a few paces and watching him as he reached up a strong, brown hand for the bough.

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