

THE WATERS OF CONTRADICTION

BY ANNA C. MINOQUE
Author of "Cardome," "Borrowed from the Night"

CHAPTER VIII—CONTINUED

Young Philip Austin held much of his sensible aunt's contempt for caste distinctions, and he promptly laughed at her when Sylvia spoke derisively of the present democratic assembly...

"It won't do, Miss Sylvia," he laughed, "to entertain such notions in these days. You know as well as I do that Mr. Frazier is forging to the front everywhere, especially since he opened the new bank, and succeeded in getting the railroad to run through the town..."

"A Yankee Governor of Kentucky!" cried Sylvia, shuddering. "He is no more a Yankee than you are!" he returned. "His father was a Scotsman and of good old family, more prominent in their country than the Daltons ever were in this..."

"I don't believe it!" she said bluntly. "He turned Democratic when he came down here. What do we know of him or what he was before coming to Kentucky?"

"O nonsense, Miss Sylvia! Men don't change politics as quickly as women their friends. Every one knows where Mr. Frazier came from, and if you wish to find out his history, all you have to do is to write to some one in his home place..."

"What do you think I care about him—or who or what he was or is?" she exclaimed, the curl on her aristocratic red lips.

"Nothing, I dare say," he rejoined, carelessly. "But when you give false charges against me, you are my father's friend, and I set you right. Did you hear?" he added, "that Judge and Mrs. Devon invited Lucy to go with them and Stella to White Sulphur Springs this summer?"

Sylvia gasped, for in the little town, which was the social centre of the community, the Devons were the leaders. She gave no expression to her surprise, however, beyond the unavoidable silence; then she observed:

"I wonder what they see in her!" he asked. "A great deal, it seems," he rejoined. "Lucy is going to give a party for Stella before she leaves..."

"Did Lucy accept the invitation?" asked Sylvia, curiosity getting the better of contempt. "No, she said she did not think she should leave her parents this summer, having been absent so long at school. Think a nice thing for her to do, I think..."

"How virtuous!" she exclaimed. "Any one with discernment would know it is because she is ashamed of her lowly origin and lack of social training. If she were to find herself among the elite she would be made to realize the difference too sharply for her pride..."

"And you can like these Yankees, after all they have done to us?" she cried, the tears of mortification in her eyes. "There are no Yankees, no Rebels any longer, Miss Sylvia," he said. "We are all one now..."

into her own hands and drew from it some natural enjoyment.

The nearness of the delectable lunch basket to its all-perceiving guardian, prompted them to seek a distant place for its enjoyment. Screened by the row of elders that made a white and green fringe to the robe of the hill, they wandered on, until the passing of the ridge hid the players and brought them to a company of tall hickories, whose shade on the grass, the fugitives, seated on the grass, the luncheon spread on a cloth of elder leaves, they partook of it, and then, with the usefulness that distinguishes us in our disposal of the property of others, they left the remainder of the feast for the birds and such animals as would regale themselves on the food prepared by their brother man.

"I feel equal to climbing the hill, now, don't you?" he questioned. "I know up there we shall find wild roses, and I wish to pluck a garland for you, my lady! Come!"

Up they went, laughing and talking, unconscious of the bewilderment their absence was causing their companions, now seated around the picnic dinner.

When finally they came down the hill together they found the party on the eve of breaking up. For her own part of the company it seemed to the sharp-sighted girl not to have been wholly a satisfactory one; and she shrewdly guessed of the passage-at-arms between Arthur and Jasper, by their studied politeness toward each other. Milly's discomfort was painfully apparent, and the wicked light in Lucy's blue eyes was self-explanatory. The boys had been disagreeing, and Lucy had been primarily the cause of it.

"She always brought disturbance among us," commended Sylvia, as she made her brief farewells to Miss Cora and her guests, and then, still accompanied by Phil Austin, crossed to where the patient negro awaited her coming.

The preparation for departure left Lucy and Arthur alone for a moment the first time that afternoon. "Aren't congratulations in order, Lil' Miss?" he asked, with the light mocking inflection in his voice, a tone she perceived he kept for her alone.

"For what?" she inquired indifferently, lifting the drooping heads of the flowers she wore on her belt. "For your success—in playing croquet," he rejoined. "I warned you I would defeat you," she said.

"Doesn't your partner deserve some credit also?" he interrogated. "I have never seen Jasper play so well and behave so rudely."

"And I suppose both facts are due to his partner?" she flashed. "Not both," he said, and he smiled. She made no rejoinder. Her silence piqued him.

"Don't you want to know for which your partner deserves credit?" he asked. "Not sufficiently to inquire," she rejoined carelessly. "But your poor playing and equally bad manners can be accredited to no one but yourself."

"It is refreshing to get an opinion unsolicited, he said. "Instead of leaving it to be inferred," she retorted. For an instant the angry flash of the blue eyes of the speaker brought an answering light into the eyes upon which they were bent; then the young man looked across the field to where the noisy children were forming into a line under the direction of the younger teacher. As he saw Milly it occurred to him that he might have been more successful with the mallet had he had another partner, since she knew but little of the game. And she had not enjoyed herself at all, so conscious was she of her defeat. And he had given his friend Sylvia offense by forcing upon her the undesired company of his tenant's daughter. Altogether he had only himself to blame, and there was no further making matters worse after their antagonizing Lucy. He turned to her with anger gone from his eyes.

"And the opinion is correct," he said, with his sunny smile, and Lucy suddenly remembered the day he had apologized to her in the school. "It is singular," he continued, "the way certain circumstances will fall together to bring up the worst in us! One would think there were a conspiracy among them for that purpose. Have you ever thought about such things?" he finished, looking at her with eyes the clearer for the anger they had lately shown.

"No," said Lucy, feeling something within her rising as if to unfold those swiftly cleared eyes. "It is interesting, to me, at least. I've often puzzled long over it. Is there something in us that attracts those circumstances to us? or are they the natural result of the encounter of opposite characters? Now, if we had exchanged partners, would Jasper and I have found so much to antagonize us this afternoon?"

preluded the thought of any wish to join them. His step was slow, and his eyes were bent on the ground. Once, before reaching the bend in the road, Lucy looked back for a last glimpse of the old school, she said; but seeing instead the thoughtful walker, she turned quickly and went for a little way in silence.

At the gate that separated the lane leading to the Hall from the main road, Arthur paused, and for a full moment gazed after the pair, and the old, mastering desire to go forward and take Jasper's place by the girl's side held him fiercely. He broke from it, wondering at himself. Let Jasper walk home with Lucy Frazier, for assuredly he would not, were she ten times as fair, said pride; and desire, shorn of its strength, departed. He withdrew his eyes and the little school-house. The mystic light of the June evening was unfolding the land, and under it the familiar scenes took on an aspect of helplessness for the gazer, and in that helplessness he perceived that he and all the others were included.

The night, hiding the sunset sky, might bring to the still temple of learning none knew what tempests, and dangers as great and unavoidable might lurk for him and his companions of the afternoon within the securely folded cloths of the future. As the thought held his mind, the school door opened, and Milly stepped out upon the little wooden platform. She paused for a moment, her face turned to the hills, then she went down the steps across the yard, and, with her lithe, long strides, came swiftly toward the gate by which he stood waiting for her. He held it open for her, and after a few remarks concerning the afternoon's event, they walked on in the deep silence of nature and their own hearts, until their steps brought them to the Hall, which he entered, and she passed around to her humble home.

CHAPTER IX

Mrs. Frazier's invitations were the first intimation the community received of her intention to claim for her daughter a place in the society where those who were brought as a crowning piece of Yankee impudence was Mrs. Dalton, who declared she for one would refuse that claim. When, however, Sylvia repeated to her the information conveyed by young Austin, she modified her speech. No one could afford to ignore Mrs. Devon, while the Judge and her husband had long been warm friends. When the fortunes of war had made a mortgage on the plantation necessary, it was the Judge who had supplied the money, and remembered that half of it was still unpaid, and released from the debt as far as she ever shuddered at what might have resulted had Sylvia not been able to put her on her guard against offending the friends of his wife and daughter. The interest taken by Mrs. Devon in Lucy Frazier was no mystery to Mrs. Dalton, who knew that the Judge's wife claimed the North as her birthplace. On sectional feeling was bulwired this friendship for the Fraziers, although she doubted not it was cemented by her husband's political interests.

Arthur, however, was bound by no such personal considerations, and yet long after Mrs. Dalton had settled the matter satisfactorily for herself, he hesitated. Courtesy, policy, his own strong inclinations, prompted him to follow Mrs. Dalton's example, but pride stood over against these and forbade it. He could never set foot across the threshold of the intruder, though his dearest interests were to suffer by the refusal. The thoughts of Lucy pleaded against that decision. They reached out to yet long for him, the sweeter welcome than for him. The old lines were forever taken down, and the ancient dwellers on the land and the latest comer into it, stood on the same level. They had not dishonestly acquired their possessions, argued heart and head, and the money paid by them had helped the planters to hold their footing. If Frazier had not been here to buy his land, his grandmother might not have ended her days in comparative ease and plenty, and he might not still find himself in the home his fathers had founded. It was the fortunes of war, and why could he not accept it in the philosophic spirit of his neighbors? And it was to Lucy's home he should go—Lucy, with her tender blue eyes and the tender girl's heart—Lucy who might do with men what she would, were she not too true to stoop to the wiles her sex permitted.

Thus they pleaded, and half yielding to them he would take up his pen to send his acceptance to the invitation. But the act set him free from the chains of feeling, and the pen would drop from his fingers. In such a mood he went forth one evening, intending to fight the battle of indecision to the finish. Passing through the orchard, he saw Milly walking down the path, and as they came toward each other, he thought how perfectly the starlight harmonized with her peculiar beauty.

"I have been up to Aunt Jenny's," she said, for it was part of her life to tell him all things. "I wanted Joe to take a note to Lucy."

"I could have spared you the walk, if I had known it," he said, instantly deciding he, too, would go up to the old log house.

"Mrs. Frazier is going to give a big party," explained Milly, "and she sent me an invitation. In it was a note from Lucy saying she would look for me, and I must not dis-

appoint her. That was sweet in Lucy—so like her!" she added softly. "And you will not disappoint her?" asked Arthur, surprised at the interest with which he awaited her answer.

"It won't really be a disappointment for her," said Milly, unconsciously emphasizing the last word. "No," he said suddenly. "She won't really miss either of us, but it suits her fancy to lead us to believe she will."

"O, Arthur!" she exclaimed. "She will be disappointed if you are not there."

He laughed at her words, and then, passed on, but his heart had grown warmer hearing them. "She is true blue!" he cried to himself, thinking of Lucy. "No fear of her forgetting an acquaintance who chances to be poor and lowly."

Then the thought came to him: "If Lucy and I were to exchange places, what would she do in the matter?" Yes, what would Lucy, not less proud than himself, do if she stood in his position? He tried to imagine her sending his stereotyped words of refusal, but the picture did not show true of the girl he knew. He thought that in such a conflict in Lucy's heart, pride would lose to affection, because of her high truth. The thought drove him on, until, almost unconsciously, he came upon the log cabin, before which sat Uncle Major, wrapped in his long blue cloak.

"Good evening, Uncle Major!" he said. "G'd evenin', Marst A'thuh, g'd evenin'!" he answered. "When I fus' seed you, I thought mebbe 'twas a ghost comin' up de hollow."

"I almost forgot that we want Joe down at the house the first thing in the morning," said Arthur, wondering what employment he would give the willing boy when he came. "He can't come de fus thing," rejoined the old man, "kase he's got to go up to Mis' Frazier's wif a note from Miss Milly. She jus' fetched it up."

"Yes, I met Miss Milly on my way here, and she told me she had written declining the invitation to the big party," he answered carelessly, but knowing he was waiting for this rejoinder.

"Is dat what's in it?" he exclaimed. "It bothered me so I couldn't sleep, an' so I med Joe rise up an' go to de spring to fetch me a drink uv cool watah."

"Now you can sleep without waiting for the water," said Arthur, with his full laugh. "It was nice of Lil' Miss to remember her poor friends," he observed. "But then rich people can afford to do nice things."

"Po'r ur rich, it'd be de same wif Lil' Miss!" exclaimed the old negro, loyally. "Munny don't mek no difference wif dat bressed chile!"

"I'll warrant, Uncle Major," he began, "if Lucy were poor and she had a rich friend, and that friend would ask her to do something that would give that friend pleasure, and which Lucy herself would like to do if she were not poor, her pride would step in and say: 'No you can not do this.' Your Lil' Miss is as proud as Lucifer, Uncle Major."

"Much yoh knows 'bout Lil' Miss, ef yoh kin talk dah uv huh!" he exclaimed. "Lil' Miss is got de right so't uv pride, an' dat don't evah come in 'twixt friends, Marst A'thuh. An' if dey war friends, 'stead uv jus' kidding each o'thah kase dey went together, an' Lil' Miss war po'r, an' Miss Milly rich, an' Miss Milly sot huh 'paty, Lil' Miss wouldn't evah stop to think she ain't got no munny an' fine clo'es, but she jus' thinks huh friend 'wants huh, an' she gits ready an' goes. Dat's Lil' Miss! Proud 'nough when she oughter to, but nobody has any right to be proud wif friends, kase when people's friends, Marst A'thuh, deys come to one level."

in his intercourse with the daughter. As Lucy's friend, he would attend the party in the house of the man he regarded as an enemy. Lucy's friend owed it to her to do all in his power to add to her happiness; for in so doing, he also found his own.

And so it befel that Arthur's acceptance of the invitation was dispatched the following morning. Had Aunt Jenny known of the nightly visit to the loghouse, and the unconscious part played by her husband in deciding for Arthur Stanton, she would have seen in it another instance of the inscrutable working of the unseen power that had so long and steadily been employed against those of his race.

A MOTHER OLD AND GRAY

Two young men and a pretty girl, home for the Christmas holidays, were singing college songs. And because the mid-December weather was warm the window near the piano was open, and the sound of the music and the gay young voices floated out to the street beyond.

A little newsboy, his evening newspapers nearly all sold, pressed close to the low iron railing that enclosed the small grass plot in front of the house, and two men who were passing also paused and listened.

"I've a mother old and gray," sang one of the boys, "a mother old and gray, who needs me now." His clear young tenor rose higher and higher as he proceeded with the song and in the refrain he was joined by his brother and the girl, so that every word reached the listeners without. Then the song ceased for the nonce, as the boys began turning over a pile of music, and the girl, her fingers still pressing lightly on the keys, began to talk for want of something better to do.

The elder of the two men outside the window gave a short cynical laugh. "Very pretty," he said, "and they sang it well, but where are mothers old and gray? Some of them now-a-days dye their hair, and most of them wear hobbie skirts, lacey waists, high heels and have their hair done up as if they were twenty. They patronize the masseuse to try to ward off wrinkles, and the majority would be affronted if you called them old."

His companion, a young man, with a pleasant face, smiled, but still a little cynically. "It is true," he said. "The old-fashioned mother is almost a thing of the past. You look in vain for one who bears any resemblance to Whistler's portrait of his mother, which I saw in the Luxembourg last summer."

"Ah!" said the older man. "I have it! I know why Mona Lisa had that peculiar enigmatical smile! She saw, way down the ages, the modern old lady coming, and when she finally appeared on the scene, and became an established fact, Mona Lisa disappeared from the Louvre for very shame of her sex."

"Quite an idea, Arthur, why not make a novel out of it?" "A novel about the modern old lady? Pout! But about the mother old and gray—well! perhaps."

The two men passed on down the street, and the little newsboy was left alone. Wide eyed and wondering he had listened to the conversation, and understood not a word; but the song! Ah, that was different! It was beautiful. He must hurry and sell his papers so he could the sooner go home and tell his young mother something about an hour later he was scampering down Halstead Street, his papers sold and the money jingling in his pocket. It has been a good day, as the evening edition of the papers had some absorbing news, so he had more money than usual to take home.

Presently he had reached the corner of his street and, turning west, the tired but patient little boy hurried on several blocks further until he reached a tall tenement near the railroad tracks. Here in the midst of dust and cinders, with tall buildings keeping out the light, and the othah folks ain't like huhsef. An' when she fin's out dey ain't, ef dat pussen am one she likes, it's gwian to be a bad day foh huh, shore, de day she makes dat skivvry; fah Lil' Miss ain't got nobody to fall back on. She's jus' as much alone up dah in dat big house, Marst A'thuh, as yoh is down in de ole one. I know! I know!" and the old man shook his head, and looked far away toward the hills, silvered with the light of the rising moon.

"An' dey ain't nobody got a lovenor heart dan Lil' Miss," he finished, bringing back his dim eyes to the tense face beside him. "I believe you are right, Uncle Major," said Arthur slowly, and bidding the old man good night, he turned and retraced his steps home. He went like one in a dream. He had gone forth in uncertainty, and, meeting Milly, he had thought his doubt dispelled, but the result had not proven satisfactory. Quite different was the effect of the unconscious words of the old man. There was no case in the world of friendship, as he had said, it left them on one level. It mattered not that Alexander Frazier owned part of his father's property. His daughter and he, Arthur Stanton, were friends, and his ancient lineage and her newly acquired wealth, made no difference in their estate in the land of friendship. They were on one level. Pride might stand by him when he met her father, but it had no place

her own tears, a sweet face crowned with gray hair, a dress of soft black with a white shawl over the shoulders. The wrinkles on that dear face were lines that had been made by character as much as by age, lines of goodness, strength and sweetness. Why had she ever left her, her mother?

"And then she looked at Christopher and her own fierce mother love surged up in her heart. She had him, her son together they would fight the world and cling to each other, asking help from no one. Meanwhile Christopher was emptying the contents of a small pocket into his mother's lap. "Forty-seven cents," he said, "I did well to-day, mother."

She drew him to her and kissed him passionately. "You are a good boy, Chris. Run to the corner grocery store and get a loaf of bread and a pound of rice. I have some meat stewing on the stove that I bought on my way home from the factory, and there are some apples in the oven. We will have a little feast tonight."

The boy was gone almost as soon as she ceased speaking, and slowly, and as if in pain, his mother arose, folded her sewing and put it away, and began her preparation for the evening meal. Once or twice she clutched her side as a sharp pain pierced her like a knife, and although the day was comparatively warm, she shivered and drew closer to the tiny stove. Yes, she must have taken cold she thought, the factory where she worked, four blocks away, was close and hot, and coming out the previous day she had felt chilled by the sharp raw wind that blew across the city from Lake Michigan. She would go to bed early and drink some hot tea to try to break up her cold. So she made an effort to forget her pain of mind and body, and listened as they ate their supper, while Christopher, bright and happy, talked a ceaseless stream. And ever and anon, the little boy went back to the subject of the song which had so fascinated him.

"Some day you will be old and gray, mother," he said, "and then you will need me, and I will take care of you."

"Oh, Chris, I need you now and will need you always, always," she said.

In the middle of the night a very sleepy little boy was awakened by a voice that, even at that hour when he was only half awake, seemed harsh and rasping. And then how hot was the hand that had held his. But it was his mother's voice and she was talking.

"Christopher, I have such a cold, I am afraid I am going to be very ill, and I must talk to you now, while I can."

Wide awake now the little boy sat up in bed, and gazed anxiously at his mother's flushed, feverish face as it was turned toward him in the dim flickering candle light. "Listen, Christopher, very carefully. If I should be very sick I want you to go to my mother."

The little boy nodded, too startled to speak. "You will find \$10 in a little bag, sewed up in the foot of the mattress. Make an opening in the outside cover, it is just inside the ticking. I have been keeping it for a rainy day; tell nobody about it, but go to the Union Station. You know where the station is, and how to get there?"

"Yes, mother."

"Buy a ticket to Gould, Wisconsin. It will take you three or four hours to get there. When you get off the train ask some one to show you the way to the house of Joseph Carroll—that's my father—and ask my mother to come to me."

"Yes, mother."

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