

THE WATERS OF CONTRADICTION

BY ANNA C. MINOQUE
Author of "Cardome," "Borrowed From the Night"
CHAPTER XII—CONTINUED

"The uncle then took the child, for there was no one else to care for it. All this trouble seemed to affect the mind of the father, who also believed his other son and daughter-in-law had brought about the death of the child's mother, to whom he was devoted. He thought they would send the child after its parents, in order that they would inherit all the property as the next of kin.

"No one liked the uncle, and consequently all believed the worst of him. I shared in the belief, and when one night the old gentleman came to our house and asked me to take the child out of the country, I was willing enough to do so, for I wanted to leave the place, but hitherto there had been no opportunity. The Ku-Klux were bad in those days, burning houses and driving people away. But they would never have molested us, for my husband gave offense to no one. Now, however, as the old grandfather and I had agreed upon it, for I knew my husband too well to let him into the secret, we began to receive threatening letters, ordering us to leave the mountains or bear the consequences. I pleaded with my husband to obey, but he laughed at me, saying it was a joke some of the boys were playing upon him. Then one night I woke up to find the house on fire. We saved our own lives and our children's, and that was all. My husband did not know what to do, and I said we must quit the wretched place, or the next time they would kill us outright. It was the work of the friends of the Union brother, I took care to point out, who wished to destroy all the sympathizers with the cause of the dead Confederate brother. They were fighting the war, in many places, a long time after peace was declared, I can tell you, Mr. Arthur. My husband knew this, and never suspected there was no foundation to my story.

"As we were shivering there in the cold and darkness, the grandfather came struggling up the path with the little child in his arms. He said he had discovered through his negro nurse, a plan of the unnatural foster parents to kill the baby, and he had stolen her and brought her to us for safe-keeping until he could get his property sold and take her to Mexico. "My husband never doubted the story, and believed the old man's surprise at our misfortune was sincere. We sat together on the log for a long time, talking of what it were best to do. The old man said he believed the time had come for us to quit the place. My husband was now convinced that he had enemies, who would complete his ruin, but he was willing to take the advice, but he had no money. The grandfather offered to give him enough to buy horses and a wagon and provide for our needs while on the trip, if we would take the baby with us and keep her until he could come for her. My husband did not want to have any hand in the matter, but I persuaded him. My words and the cries of the children finally overcame his scruples.

"All together we went to another village, and there we took the baby for a town in Ohio, where we bought horses and a wagon. The old man accompanied us for the day before our house had been burned he had left his son's home to go hunting, as had been his custom for years. No one would comment on his absence, nor would he be connected with the kidnapping. He directed us to go to Lexington, Ky., and wait there until he should come. Then he promised to settle us in a better home than the one we had lost for our part in saving the child. Oh, it was all carefully planned, but he reckoned with our fate. We reached Lexington in due time, and wrote to the grandfather, sending the letter to his lawyer, as he had advised, to prevent it from falling into his son's hands. The lawyer returned the letter, with the news that the old man had been drowned while coming home from a hunting trip in the mountains.

"Still I said nothing of my plotting with the old man to my husband for several years afterward. Believing fully the words of the grandfather, he said we must keep the child, even though we were so poor, until, however, to ignorance of the whereabouts of the old man's son and daughter, but to surprise at his stupidity in ever having accredited the girl standing before him with so lowly an origin. Familiar to him as was her face, why had he never seen that, except in its brownness, it was as totally unlike the man's and woman's she called her parents as was his own? Why had he never noticed the grace of her bearing and the inherent highbred expression of her countenance? How could he have been so dull of vision?

"Thus he questioned as he passed swiftly up the green valley, again on the quest of the useful Joe. On his return to the Hall, he saddled his horse and rode in all haste to his mother's new home. Absorbed as she was in the cares of her family, the sympathetic woman left all to return with her son. As they rode back together, Arthur related the strange story he had heard that morning, leaving the woman agast.

"But after the first moments of astonishment had passed, her acute mind darted immediately to the question which, at an earlier hour, had presented itself to him.

when our own children deserted us, and now stays on, working for us, lest she might bring sorrow to us."

Arthur's eyes were strangely drawn from the speaker to the woman propped up in bed, and he gazed at her as if fascinated. She was looking at her husband with an expression of great pity, pity for the blind. She half unclosed her lips to speak, then leaned back her head on the pillow and turned her eyes to Arthur. He read in them the absolute denial of the words just spoken, and he found himself groping in the darkness for the reason of Milly's great refusal. He felt the woman's unspoken denial was correct, that Milly, with her ancient inheritance of culture and refinement, could never have loved these crude, uncleanly mountaineers sufficiently to cause her to continue to call herself their daughter when once in possession of the knowledge of her birthright. If not love for them—what?

"And now, Mr. Arthur," continued the woman, her dull voice recalling him, "I have told you all. I wait for your judgment of me."

The words had a startling effect on the young man. In a flash he seemed to see what the life which this woman had aided in dragging her into had been for Milly. The long past days of childhood swept before him; he saw her the accepted daughter of these poor mountaineers, the sister of their unkempt children; he beheld her pathetic figure in the school-room and the playground, openly avoided or barely tolerated, and then looked upon her in her young girlhood, shut out from the society of the community, toiling for the pittance which was grudgingly given her, and devoting it and the labor of her hands, all her spare time and attention to the sick woman who had helped bring about her misfortune, and the feeble old man who had no claim upon her. And she, the equal, if not the superior, of those who had poured the bitterest drops into her cup of sorrow, and being such she had suffered the more deeply because of her ignorance of the truth.

"And all this had happened to Milly—Milly—his Milly, as he had unconsciously come to look upon her—Milly who had stepped into the breach when his grandmother's death had left him defenseless and who had silently held the place since, giving herself for him as she had done for these old people, Milly, with the quiet ways and low voice, and the wondrous eyes, with the expression of soul-pain ever meeting him from their unplumbed depths—Milly! This this woman had done this thing to Milly, and now asked him for his judgment of her action.

His introverted eyes now came back and fell on the face among the pillows. It made him leap to his feet.

"My God! She is dead!" he cried. He looked across the bed. The husband was on his knees, staring up at him.

"She read your judgment, Mr. Arthur, and it killed her," he said, in a dull, monotonous voice.

"My judgment?" he cried. "What is my judgment, man? Am I God? What did it matter? She can't be dead! She has only fainted. Milly! O Milly!"

The girl slipped in, and seeing the face on the pillow, went swiftly and noiselessly to the old man's side.

"Come, father," she said, half lifting him to his feet. He suffered it, and without a second glance at the woman, without a tear or a moan for the one she had grown up under as her mother, she led him away, leaving Arthur alone with the dead.

After a time that seemed insufferably long to Arthur, Milly returned. Her countenance had been disturbed by the uncontrollable grief of the old man and traces of it showed on her face and mien, but her voice held its customary quietness, as she said:

"Father wants Dave and Polly sent for. Do you think Joe will go?"

"I will attend to all that for you," said Arthur, conscious of the change in his attitude to the girl. He could not feel at ease in her presence, until he had grown accustomed to the facts revealed by the dead woman, and he welcomed the excuse for his immediate departure.

"You know how to reach them?" she asked, going with him to the door. "Dave lives in Alliston, and Polly is on Mr. Clay's farm," she hastened to say, as Arthur did not reply.

Arthur's hesitation was not due, however, to ignorance of the whereabouts of the old man's son and daughter, but to surprise at his stupidity in ever having accredited the girl standing before him with so lowly an origin. Familiar to him as was her face, why had he never seen that, except in its brownness, it was as totally unlike the man's and woman's she called her parents as was his own? Why had he never noticed the grace of her bearing and the inherent highbred expression of her countenance? How could he have been so dull of vision?

Thus he questioned as he passed swiftly up the green valley, again on the quest of the useful Joe. On his return to the Hall, he saddled his horse and rode in all haste to his mother's new home. Absorbed as she was in the cares of her family, the sympathetic woman left all to return with her son. As they rode back together, Arthur related the strange story he had heard that morning, leaving the woman agast. But after the first moments of astonishment had passed, her acute mind darted immediately to the question which, at an earlier hour, had presented itself to him.

"Why, when Milly heard this story, did she not return to her uncle, or at least make some effort to communicate with him?" she inquired.

Arthur moved somewhat uneasily on his saddle. He would like to have said that affection and devotion for her foster parents would not permit her to abandon them when they were so dependent upon her, but recollection of the expression on the face of the dying woman forbade the words.

"The old man thinks she loved them too well to leave them," he said.

"And what do you think?" she asked quickly, but it was unlike her son to give the opinion of another as a reason.

"Candidly, mother, I do not know what to think," he said slowly. "Milly was always beyond me. She is hopelessly so now. You remember her fastidiousness when she was a little girl regarding her toilet, and her love for pretty things, which characteristics marked her distinctly from her slovenly sister and careless mother? Nor has she parted with these as she has grown into womanhood. I have been thinking of many things concerning her since hearing her story, and among them is the marked preference Milly always showed, as a child, for the company of the people whom we now know were of her own class. When, as she grew older, she could not hope for this, she would have nothing less. Before Polly was married, Milly would always leave the place when her supposed sister's friends would visit her; and though it threw the entire care of their parents upon her, I know she was glad when the boy and girl went to homes of their own and thus relieved her of their society. She had never visited them, and their friends are strangers to her. She must have suffered because of their total lack of her own inborn refinement. Her life must often have been almost unbearable, if there were not a profound love for her parents to sustain her. And yet when she learned it was not the life into which she was born, when she knew wealth and position were waiting for her elsewhere, she voluntarily remained in that poor cabin home, with no society except that old ignorant man and woman, who had done her irreparable wrong. Can you understand it, mother?"

Mrs. Long did not answer his question, but her eyes were fixed searchingly on his face. Then she said: "It is strange Milly never said anything to you, after learning the truth concerning her birth."

Arthur rode on for a minute in deep thought; then he rejoined: "Milly never talked about herself."

"Was she ever invited to do so?" asked the mother, a smile dimpling the still fair face. "Is it not true, Arthur, it never occurred to you that Milly might have proved as interesting as, say, pretty Lucy Frazier?"

"I never thought about it," he answered somewhat coolly.

"And yet," insisted the mother, "you owe something to Milly."

"More than I can ever hope to repay!" he exclaimed, suddenly, for the veil seemed to drop from his eyes, and he saw all that she had been to him, and the slight return he had made for it. And she had done this for him knowing who she was, and met his indifference with the same composure as she had met the acceptance by her foster parents as their right of the sacrifice of her life.

Why? He turned his puzzled eyes toward his mother, and the perplexity on her face held him. "Arthur," she said quickly, "there may not be a word of truth in the old woman's story!"

"Why, mother!" he cried, in surprise. "What purpose could she have in telling me a fairy tale with her dying breath?"

"But does it appear plausible to you, out here in the clear daylight," she asked, leaning from her saddle and gazing at him intently. "The brothers might have hated each other; the father might have had suspicions against his son, and in the childishness of old age, might have wanted to put his grand-daughter beyond the reach of one he considered her enemy. But do you not think he would have taken some one, his lawyer for instance, into his confidence? That he would, at least, have left some paper where she was, before entrusting her to these people? But admitting that in his desire to absolve her place of concealment an absolute secret, would not the uncle and aunt, who were so devoted to the child, have taken every pains to find her? Would they not have known the child could not have been spirited away, and hence instituted a wide search for her kidnappers? They must have been aware of the father's dislike and suspicion, since he was the avowed adherent of the other son. Knowing this, would they not naturally have associated him with the disappearance of the child? Some one must have known of his visit to the mountain house, for it is always there that God sets an eye to witness every deed, that is directed against the good of another."

"The burning of the house must have attracted attention, and in the face of their well-known poverty, it must have struck some mind as strange, that its owners were able so soon and so speedily to take their departure. That they should do this on the very night of their loss, without saying farewell to friends or relatives, might be attributed to fear of their enemies; but that they could do so without attempting to dispose of their land, stock and crop, would plainly read their having a supply of

funds. Their departure and the disappearance of the child, occurring simultaneously, would surely be noted by some one. Once noted, once the suspicion had been born, it would assuredly have been accepted as truth, for that is characteristic of the human mind, under such circumstances. To follow them were the simplest of feats, for they had made no attempt to hide their tracks. And they would not have been across the borders of the State, before they would have been captured. No, Arthur, I must have something more for it than the old woman's word, before I accept this strange story—and I am not a lawyer!"

"Your conjectures are all good, mother," he admitted. "But what reason have you for thinking she would concoct such a story and tell it to me on her death-bed?"

"She leaned against the log wall with her hands pressed over her breast, while the fathomless dark eyes seemed to grow into twice their natural size under the awfulness of the thought. Mrs. Long regarded her in momentary silence, as she asked herself if she needed better proof of the truth of the story Arthur told than the attitude of the girl toward the dead. Not thus could a daughter have felt in this hour; not thus would have even spoken one who had loved the dead. Any feeling of sympathy she had experienced was now transformed into pity that one so young and so susceptible to this painful conception of the situation had had it thrust upon her alone in all its bare horror."

She said nothing further, but, turning to the duty before her, found that the hands of the girl had completed it. The dead woman already lay robed for the grave.

"Why, Milly, how have you done this?" gasped Mrs. Long, viewing the still figure in its soft black gown.

THE STAGE AND PUBLIC MORALS

Long ago it was admitted as an axiom, even by those influenced by purely utilitarian motives, that in business "honesty is the best policy." Repeated violations of the axiom have served only to prove its truth. Beginning from the bottom up with the question of the theatre, we may state the axiom, as common today, and the rich box office receipts which they often yield may seem to nullify its truth; but anyone with even a slight knowledge of our theatre and with any earnest wish for its permanency will see that whatever force these violations possess is Samsonian, that in uprooting the pillars of decency they destroy both themselves and the theatre. History has vindicated again and again the truth of the axiom. The theatre had to be resurrected from the rot of the Restoration.

There is no question as to the fact that our own stage has fallen to a pitifully low estate. It is not our purpose to enter into a discussion as to the causes thereof. But for its betterment and its eventual success it must keep one motto ever before its eyes: "decency is the best policy." This is the foundation stone of both business and artistic success. Many are the forces which have endeavored to bring home the importance of this truth to the manager, the actor, and the public. One of the most zealous and courageous is the Theatre Magazine which has made it an invariable rule to champion decency on the stage. The success of the magazine is but another evidence to the truth of the axiom.

We have been asked by the editor of The Theatre to state the aims and purposes of another agency which has taken up the work of defending public morals with regard to the theatre, viz.: The Catholic Theatre Movement. It may be stated at once that the Catholic Theatre Movement is not primarily interested in the theatre. Its first interest is the spiritual welfare of Catholics, adult and young, who look to it for information and guidance. The matter on which it gives its instruction and guidance is the theatre of the present day.

The theatre has been and always mostly; but I like rather to think it was by the narrow little path of love which she and I walked in together, when sometimes our feet were let loose from the other way. But, in whichever it was, we found Him, and sometimes we saw the gleaming of His sinless robe, and it brought us comfort. And I know He is not going to forget me entirely, now that I am alone. But I must wait in patience for His coming."

As he was speaking, with the unconscious poetry of the child of nature, they had been walking slowly toward the house. Mrs. Long, guiding his trembling steps. As she listened to the childlike expression of trust in the Supreme, and her eyes rested on his broken frame and lined face, now illumined by the light of faith as a storm-scarred crag glows under the radiance of the setting sun, she could understand why the woman he mourned should have loved him, and believed that the goodness of the child he would not claim and the friend he called his master might have its roots in something deeper and sweeter than the charity of the stranger.

The door stood closed, but was now opened by Milly, and Mrs. Long saw that the young face was ashen unto ghastliness. As she entered the room, and a swift glance around the house revealed the girl's occupation of preparing the dead mother against the coming of her children, she drew the trembling Milly to her bosom, as she cried:

"Milly, darling! Why didn't you wait for me?" "I did not know you were coming," she said, beginning to sob convulsively. "Arthur should have had sense enough to tell you he had gone for me," she exclaimed. "There now, Milly, don't cry, poor child! Go to

your room and lie down. You are completely worn out." "Oh, no," she answered. "I do not mind now that you are here. I oughtn't to have minded at all—but it was the first time, and the thought of her—alive, breathing, thinking, speaking two hours ago—and now—like that!"

It will be seen, then, that the Movement is directly concerned with Catholics. It is not an attempt to coerce anyone; even its own members are informed that the Bulletin Committee may approve plays which they will see fit to disapprove or vice versa. The Movement is composed of an executive board of which the director is the Right Rev. Monsignor Michael J. Lavelle, D. D.; the President, Mr. Edward J. Maguire. The Bulletin Committee, which is under the supervision of the Executive Board, publishes a small "Bulletin" every month. "These Bulletins are divided into 'Supplementary' and 'White List' Bulletins. The Supplementary Bulletin gives a detailed account of the story, plot, character of every new play. The members of the Bulletin Committee or their representatives see every play that is presented on the New York stage. That they may be absolutely free in framing their report they never accept free tickets from any theatrical management.

The "White List" Bulletin, published about every other month, gives a White List of plays which the Committee approves. In order to understand this White List one must remember the conditions for its formation which the Committee has imposed upon itself. In one of our first Bulletins, April, 1914, we stated: "The following conditions indicate the limitations of the list and its special application. "A play must not with regard to morals occupy debatable ground. "There should be a general agreement that a play is clean and wholesome. "The appeal should be simple and universal. "The play should be fit for theatregoers of all ages and suited to various tastes. "In framing a White List the Catholic Theatre Movement follows a line adopted by other movements, for example, the Parents League for the moral betterment of the theatre. "Because the White List is definite it has been the object of more discussion than any other work of the Theatre Movement. A discussion of abstract principles is always agreeable—and uninteresting. The application of these principles betrays differences, warm arguments, and at times irritation. It would be quite fruitless to enter into a long explanation of the application of its principles by the Committee to current plays. In some cases there is lengthy argument within the Committee itself. We never look, therefore, for entire agreement from outsiders. "Just as the public Commissioner of Licenses may demand the taking out of a sentence or a scene before he gives a movie his official approval, so the Committee may decide it necessary to refuse admission to the White List of a play, otherwise good and wholesome, because of an objectionable scene. But it may be said that the Committee never asks the impossible. It does not judge by a standard fitted for those who are following the more perfect way. The Christian counsel is not its guide: but the Christian law. And as our civilization and consequently our public morality was born of that law, it feels justified in asking for the support and approval of all right-minded men and women. "The Committee considers in its work that certain truths are self-evident." Marriage, for example, is an institution decreed by God for the dignity of husband and wife, the welfare of the family, the stability of the nation. A play that attacks marriage as an institution would never meet with our approval. "The dignity of the family itself: respect of children for parents; the obligations of parents toward their children—a play that would hold these truths up to odium would put itself outside the pale of our favorable judgment. "The approval of sex relationship outside of marriage: the defense of birth control which directly violates the commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill'; the free discussion of it: the tolerance of adultery in the exploitation of the "triangle": the defense of the criminal as being without personal responsibility; the justification of lying, or of theft, or of forgery or murder: the morbid sympathy with the innocent "Magdalene"—against all these the Catholic Theatre Movement uncompromisingly wages war. "They are all part of the drama of life," someone will object. Of course they are; and they may legitimately enter into the drama of the stage. But it makes all the difference of life and death as to which spirit presides at their introduction: the spirit of pessimism, of determinism, of sin, or the spirit of hope, of liberty and of virtue. "The Committee tries not to take itself too seriously. The primary aim of the theatre is to amuse and entertain. No objection may be registered against the presentation of a marriage disastrous in its consequences; nor of the ill-fated maiden who loved not wisely but too well, nor of the difficulties of lovers and of the married, nor of the lying and thieving villain, the deceitful lawyer or judge, nor even at the display of such vulgarity of action and language as we might well wish changed. The playgoer knows that stage villains are stage villains, nor is the lesson of any tragedy lost upon him. It is not against the portrayal of life that the Catholic Theatre Movement protests. It is against the preaching of principles in words and

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