

THE WATERS OF CONTRADICTION

BY ANNA C. MINOGUE
Author of "Cardome," "Borrowed From the Night"

CHAPTER XI—CONTINUED

A passion of revolt took possession of the girl's heart. She was not one tamely to submit to injustice, and so she termed this interference with her inclinations. Arthur was and had long been the friend Jasper could never be. Companionship with him, even when in his worst mood, was more congenial than with any one she had ever known; and while she might be ready to make other sacrifices, she withheld this knowing she thereby preserved her own happiness. For this once, she told herself in the calm that followed, she would submit; afterward—

Recalling this determination, a blind rage seized her as she flung herself on the piazza bench that Sunday evening, while down the road sounded the feet of the departing horse, bearing Jasper to his home. With the power of decision in her own hands, she had deliberately chosen to continue to be the tool of her mother's dislike and ambition. Nothing could have been easier than for her to show Jasper she did not desire their acquaintance to pass the bounds their school days had established. He would have understood her and thanked her for the regard for him such an act showed. To the high-minded young man nothing could have been more painful than the thought that he was causing her unhappiness.

"He will come again," she told herself, while the beat of the horse's hoofs sounded on her ears like a knell, "and Arthur will not. Then I shall get angry some day and offend Jasper, and I shall lose both my friends. I wish I had gone to White Sulphur. They do not need me here as I imagined. Father wants no one but brother, and little sister is more mamma than I ever was or may hope to be. The only ones who really need me are Aunt Jenny and Uncle Major."

She broke into tears overwhelmed by the thought that only to the happiness of two old negroes was she necessary; for to youth the belief that the world revolves around it is the most vital of its superstitions. The pathetic thought recurred to her the following morning and sent her to the pantry to prepare a basket for her black friends.

"Aunt Jenny is getting very feeble," she said to her mother, "and not able to cook as she used to do."
"Why not send for Joe to carry down the basket?" said the mother.
"It is so warm for you to go."
"I do not mind the heat," said Lucy, trying on her garden hat. "And they like to see me."

"But you must not forget, Lucy," said Mrs. Frazier, "that you are no longer a little girl. What is permissible in a child may be questionable in a young woman."

"What is wrong in carrying a basket of food to two poor negroes?" cried Lucy in astonishment.
"Nothing in that," replied Mrs. Frazier quickly. "But have you not met Arthur Stanton there as you used to do in childhood?"

"Yes, but the meeting was purely accidental, as far as I am concerned," said Lucy, getting pale.
"I know that," said she. "Nevertheless, you should avoid the possible recurrence of those accidental meetings."

"You mean I should give up going to Aunt Jenny's," cried Lucy. "I can not do that, mamma! They need me—they love me—and long ago you told me to treasure affection no matter who offered it to me."
"Nor do I bid you to do differently," Mrs. Frazier hastened to reply. "I simply am pointing out to you that now prudence must guide your actions, where before inclination or the command of others directed them."

Lucy made no response, but took the basket and set forth. She read the suspicion her mother had tried to conceal, and could have laughed bitterly at the implication that Arthur Stanton cared sufficiently for her, Lucy Frazier, to trouble himself to seek her. But if he did! Her heart grew tremulously happy at the suggestion and the tears suffused her eyes, so tenderly sweet and precious was the thought that Arthur should care for her.

With it still holding her mind, she passed around the corner of the old house, and saw him standing by the door, his straw hat pushed back from the arched white forehead. The color deepened on Lucy's cheeks. Attributing her embarrassment to another cause, Arthur hastened to say:

"I don't suppose you saw anything of Joe on your way down the hill? Milly's mother is sick and I want to send him for the doctor."

Lucy had seen nothing of the boy, and entered the house to give the basket to Aunt Jenny, who was complaining audibly about "po' white trash being so much bother to other folks."

"Aunt Jenny is in a dreadfully bad humor, Lil' Miss," he then said, looking in on them. "You see I induced Uncle Major to go forth and try to locate Joe, and she thinks I want to kill her old man by sending him out in such a sun," and he laughed at the idea of heat affecting the old negro. "There is not a bit of Christian charity in all Aunt Jenny's body, and I don't know why you are so good to her. Now look at that nice fried chicken Lil' Miss has brought you, and the pie—cherry pie,

as I live, and made, I'll warrant, by her own little hands! I tell you, Aunt Jenny, you are blessed beyond your deserts in having such a Lil' Miss. You ought to show your gratitude to the good Lord by being kind to other poor wretches to whom Lil' Miss could not be induced to give a single thought."

"G'long, Marse A'thuh, an' quit yoh foolin' de ole woman!" she exclaimed. "Lil' Miss is good to folkses what is deservin', an' dem dat ain't, ain't got no claim on huh."

"How did you enjoy your drive?" inquired Arthur, smiling up at her as Lucy, having deposited the things on the table, came back to the door.

There was a change in his demeanor, so subtle another than the intuitive Lucy might have missed if it fell in with her own new mood and instead of the answer she would on another day have given him, she said, her words getting tangled in a soft laugh:

"An hour with Tennyson under the oak tree were more enjoyable."
"Tennyson—and no one else?" he asked, trying to catch the blue eyes resolutely fixed on the top of the pear tree.

"Well, if there were one to read him to you when your eyes got tired, of course that one would be an available part of the company, but not necessary, you understand?"
"I understand, thoroughly! And when will it next suit your pleasure to permit the willing reader to read you?" "Sweetest, eyes were ever seen!" he finished, half singing the quotation.

The eyes in question were now turned fully upon him, and their light would have made another shrink. He only looked up at them, and calmly said:

"The poet would not thus have written of the other woman's eyes, had he seen yours, Lil' Miss! And yet I have no reason to call them so. I could count on my fingers the times they have been 'sweetest eyes' when bent on me. For Jasper and Milly and Aunt Jenny and everybody they are such, but not for me."

"It is better to be singled out of the crowd even if for disfavor," she observed, but there was a smile lurking at the corners of her mouth, softening the indifference of her voice.

"But I desire not to be made the exception in this case," he answered. "I'd rather be a weed that Lucy regarded kindly, than a prince of the world if scorned by her. You don't believe me, I see, although I am bent on proving it to you. When are you going to answer my question?"

"Which question? You have asked me so many. You talk in interrogation marks. Here is Joe!"

"Rounded him up all right, Marse A'thuh," he exclaimed the old man as he came up leaning heavily on his stick. "Found him lyin' in de eldah patch fas' asleep, an' 'him promisin' Marse Frazier to have all dem bushes cut down for him today! Tell yoh, Marse A'thuh, ef something ain't done wif dese vor'fus nigahs, dey'll go wif de debil shor's yoh boh. Ketch me sleepin' in de eldah patch when I was his age! Ole Marse 'ud a-leathered my black back in good fashion. Times is changed, Marse A'thuh, times is changed, when a boy goes to sleep at his work, an' den grumbles at his ole gran'daddy foh wakin' him up to go foh de doctah foh a po'r sick woman."

"I ain't a grumblin' kaze of dat, bul de way you ax't me," said Joe, meekly. "I thought de young bull had broke loose an' was hookin me, de way yoh holered an' poked me wif yoh stick."

"I oughter wailed yoh wif de stick instaid us jus' pokin' yoh wif it," declared Uncle Major, dropping into the bench. "Go an' fetch me a ten-up wif watah, som, an' be shore yoh drop a red-hot coal in it. It's bad foh de system to drink cole watah when yoh's wahmed up wif a walk."

When Joe returned with the drink, Arthur dispatched him for the physician; then, turning to Lucy, he said:

"If your St. Elizabethan mission is finished, let us start, Lil' Miss! I have a mind to walk with you as far as the pivel bush. Do you remember the day," he began, as they went forward, "we played it was a castle, and the brook a mighty torrent which I had to cross to rescue you? You were held a prisoner in the green castle, you remember, watched by a grim uncle who was a king, and who had designs against your life, because of your right to the throne. I was a knight sent by another king to release you, and bring you in safety to him, as he desired to make you his bride. You were always high and mighty in your opinions of yourself, Lil' Miss."

"But you did not obey the order of your king, you remember? Milly came for you to go on an errand for your mother," remarked Lucy.

"And because you would obey a mother who was real indeed, instead of a king who was purely imaginary, the angry princess refused to come out of the green castle. The knight was so tortured by the thought that she might still be there, he could not sleep when he went to bed, and so he rose, dressed, and ran as fast as his feet could carry him up the dark valley haunted by Indians as the negroes said and as he in that hour firmly believed. When he came to the green castle and found it deserted he did not know whether to feel wholly glad or wholly angry, so he made a compromise, and when next the little princess met the gallant knight she was greatly perplexed by his mood."

"Did you really do that, Arthur?" asked Lucy, fixing her wondering eyes on him.

"I really did," he said, looking at her, unaware that his face had grown strangely tender, for the impulse was strong upon him to take the slender form in his arms and close the blue eyes with his kisses. Then, like a blow from a strong hand, came the recollection of the promise he had made to himself on the spot only the day before. He flung mood and recollection from him, and to escape from them, he plunged into a different subject.

"Milly's mother is very sick," he said. "I do not think there is any chance for her recovery. She thinks so herself, I fear. She asked that I should not go to town this morning, until after she had the opinion of the doctor. There seems to be something on her mind besides the condition of her health. There was always something peculiar about this woman to me. She gave me the impression of one whose conscience was troubling her. If that should be the case, it is a minister she needs, not a lawyer."

"Perhaps it is for the lawyer to decide if she need the minister," said Lucy, with constraint. She could not feel at ease in discussing Milly or her family with him. "Her father is failing, too," she added.

"I have always felt," he said, "it would be infinitely better for Milly if she were released from her care of them. She must find her position painful in the extreme, and if she were not burdened by that helpless couple, she could better it. But you have not answered my question, Lil' Miss," he broke off, not finding the subject interesting.

"Don't you think I can read Tennyson alone?" she asked, pulling a green twig from the bush.

"Yes, but it would be better if you didn't," he replied, laughing. "May I come up Wednesday evening and read to you on the piazza by the light of the moon?"

"You forget the vines," she said, with a little laugh that was so full of gladness it half-shamed the man.

"But I bring the light of memory with me," he said. "And I may come?"

She nodded, and he said:

"Give me your hand on it. And there will be no later engagement to disappoint me again?" he added, his hand still clasping hers.

"You don't understand," she faltered, trying to withdraw her fingers.

"Perhaps do, Lucy," he said, so gently that her hand lay quietly in his for a moment, for if Arthur understood and did not blame her, what did the efforts of her mother matter? Then they parted, but as Arthur went down the green valley, instead of feeling elation over the auspicious opening of his plans, he was lost in the memory of the moment when the suddenly stilled hand had lain in his.

CHAPTER XII

Arthur lingered on the rear veranda until he saw the doctor emerging from the sick woman's home, when he joined him. Declining the invitation to enter and rest before continuing his long journey through the country, the doctor said, in answer to Arthur's inquiry:

"She is pretty bad, my boy. I do not think she will be living this time tomorrow. And her husband will not be many months after her. The man has held out a little longer, because he felt he must, while the woman had the girl upon whom to depend. A very singular person is that daughter. I suppose you know her very well?"

"Yes," said Arthur, slowly, "very well."

"Then perhaps you can tell me if she has ever been seen to show any outward indication of the feeling presupposed in a woman with such a nature as hers?"

"I have always seen her self-contained," answered Arthur.

"If it should ever escape the bounds," said the doctor, and then passed effectively.

"It never will," said Arthur, well knowing the intense feeling the doctor was giving the girl had no foundation outside of his own mind.

A doubt of this belief came to him a little later, when the interview to which he was summoned by Milly's father was ended. As he entered the room, he saw the woman sitting upon the bed with pillows carefully propped around her. Her eyes wore a burning brightness, accentuating the deadly pallor of her skin. Her husband sat on a chair on the other side of the bed, but Milly was absent. Arthur took the place that had been the doctor's, and asked how she was now feeling.

"Very bad, Mr. Arthur," she said. "I have not long to live, sir, and I want to tell you about Milly."

"Yes," said Arthur, feebly, and then he realized that since the message had come of the sick woman's desire to see him, he had known that her words would be of Milly and he had shrunk from hearing them.

"I cannot die until I have told you about Milly," she continued. "You will then tell me if what I did was wrong, for I do not know. I am an ignorant mountain woman, and what looked right to me may be wrong to one who knows."

A MYSTERIOUS SICK CALL

The incident I am about to relate is a true one; it was told me by the priest to whom it occurred, although I am not giving his name nor that of the town where his church was situated.

In a certain large English town where poverty and destitution were rife, was a crowded court in which none but the most indigent lived. All the houses in it had a squalid, forlorn appearance; so apparently falling down and leaning one against the other as if for support, and most of them having broken windows; the missing glass being replaced, by many of the inmates, probably the more chilly ones, with brown paper or bits of rag. These houses were let to several families, each room being so over-crowded that it was a wonder fever and disease of every description were not more busy in supplementing what semi-starvation was daily doing—decreasing their number by death. Half clothed and sickly-looking children played listlessly on the doorsteps, or floated their mimic boats of wood or paper on the stream of dirty water which from time to time took its course down the center of the ally; but all the little ones were more or less weak and weary for active exertion. Hardly any but its inhabitants passed through the court. Even the costermongers seldom visited it, excepting perhaps on a Saturday night when they wished to get rid of their refuse stock. Poverty was too apparent to make a sale a likely event.

In a tiny attic of one of the houses, on a little truckle bed, lay a poor woman, old and sick. Her surroundings, poor as they were, were scrupulously clean, and the room tolerably airy, for being at the top of the house (the highest the court could boast of) its little open window let in air. Seated by the bedside on the only chair which the room possessed was a little girl, who from her size appeared seven or eight years of age, although she bore upon her face that look of premature age so noticeable amongst very poor children, more especially girls. On a rickety table standing near the bed were a few slices of dry bread and a cup containing some very weak tea, which the girl now and again held with evident solicitude to the woman's lips.

"Drink some yourself, Nellie," said she at last, with an effort, as if talking pained her.

"Oh, no, Grannie," replied the child, "I'm neither hungry nor thirsty. Don't you know that kind man at the milk shop gave me such a nice drink of milk this morning, when he bought those flowers of me. I wanted to bring it home to you, but he made me drink it."

"He saw you were tired, dear," the woman said; "but take a piece of bread with you when you go out, for you may get hungry before all your flowers are sold; and I'll try and sleep whilst you are away."

Upon this Nellie proceeded to tie up in bunches some cowslips, bluebells, and other field flowers, which were in a basin of water, and arranged them in a little shabby hand-basket. This done, she put on her fathered straw hat, and gently kissed the old woman, who was now asleep, she stole quietly out of the room.

A few weeks later a Catholic priest might have been seen returning to his home after an evening spent in making sick calls amongst the poor. His church was the only one in the town, and he was the sole priest.

He was tired and longing for a rest, so that his house-keeper's words when she opened the door were a little disappointing to him.

"That's another sick call for you, Father," said she, "and the young man who brought it said he hoped you would go soon."

"Of course, I'll go at once, then; but where is it?" inquired Father Browne.

"In Recket's Court, Father; the other end of the town."

"Oh, I know the court," said the priest, "I once visited an old man there, but he is dead, and I did not think there were any Catholics there now. Did the messenger say the sick was in danger of death?"

"No, Father, nor did he give a name," replied the house-keeper, referring to the slate on which she had written the address; "he only said there was a woman ill at No. 4 Recket's Court, and he hoped you would go soon."

In a short time Father Browne had left the house again, and was on his way to Recket's Court. The town was a very non-Catholic one and dissent was rampant in it, but even those who were the most bigoted in matters of religion felt a respect for the priest who was so universally known for his kindness and benevolence, not only to his own flock, but also to those outside the Church, so that many a hat was raised, and many a word of greeting spoken to him as he made his way along the streets.

It was spring time, but night was coming on, so that when he got to Recket's Court, which was devoid of lamps, he could not find the number he sought, and had to inquire of a man who was leaning against a door-post smoking his pipe.

"Oh! this is No. 4," replied he to the question.

"Then it was to this house I was sent for," said Father Browne. "Can you tell me who are Catholics here?"

"Catholics," echoed the man "there b'aint no Catholics here; leastways I don't know of none, nor if it come to that not of any other religion neither bit 'o' rest."

SIR THOMAS MORE AS MASS SERVER

The story is told that Blessed Thomas More, the Lord Chancellor of England in the days of Henry VIII, was accustomed, even as Chancellor, to serve the morning Mass in the church at Chelsea, and to take part in all the public celebrations in that church. One day the Duke of Norfolk came to Chelsea, and was surprised and even shocked to see the Lord Chancellor dressed in surplice and gown attending a procession. The Duke could not understand how a man in More's position could so lower himself.

"Why, you are dishonoring your office and the king's service by thus playing the parish clerk," said the Duke.

More's answer was worthy of the true Catholic that he professed to be: "It is the greatest of honors, my Lord, to serve the King of kings."—The Liguorian.

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