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and high praise—see next page ...

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—YA *Bookmark*

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—Mary Moffat in *Historical Novels Review Online*

ANNA'S WORLD



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Wim Coleman and Pat Perrin

CHIRON  BOOKS

Anna's World

A ChironBooks historical novel for young readers

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For Monse



1

1845—After the Bad Water

Anna sloshed the wet mop across the wide floorboards one last time. She had already swept and mopped the front porch and the rest of the big room. She had been helping her father in the store for as long as she could remember.

Glancing up, Anna saw Papa standing behind the wooden counter—his thick, reddish, curly hair slightly mussed as usual, his string tie on crooked, and three buttons of his vest undone. He was studying the open pages of his big account book. The late afternoon sunlight slanted in through the open front door, making his hair glow like a halo.

Papa looked a little tired, but pleased.

A good day for the store, Anna thought. Another good day, so we won't have to leave, after all.

She gazed contentedly about the room. In the center was a blackened iron wood stove—cold now because it was late spring. And just next to the stove, sitting on stools around the big wicker cracker barrel, were three familiar people.

There was bearded old Jacob Crowley, looking as much like a skinny white billy goat as ever, sucking thoughtfully on his long-stemmed pipe. He kept nodding as if in constant agreement, even when no one had said anything. Mr. Crowley could remember all the way back to the Revolutionary War

and had even fought with Daniel Shays in 1786 in the attack on Springfield.

But hadn't Jacob Crowley died from the bad water ...

... just like I almost died?

And there was short, round Erasmus Beaufort, his nose in a month-old Boston newspaper like always, getting fired up to express his opinion about something-or-other political and stirring up a hornet's nest of argument. He had a way, that man, of making his dearest friends want to throttle him.

But hadn't Erasmus Beaufort died, too ...

... just like I almost died?

The last was Seth Edwards—tall, broad-boned, and ruddy-skinned. He was dressed in his formal traveling clothes—a dark and grim-looking outfit, like his people were said to wear. But although Seth was a Shaker and lived in the nearby religious community of Goshen, he was never grim. As usual, he had an oversized smile spread across his big face, and he was looking straight at Anna.

Anna felt strangely relieved as she took in the scene—she didn't know just why. She wanted to rush toward Papa, leap up onto the counter and into his arms. But for some reason, she remained rooted to the spot.

“Papa,” she cried out.

Papa glanced up from his work at the sound of Anna's voice.

“Hello, Punkin,” he said pleasantly. “Maybe you can help me with some numbers. Eight times nine is sixty-four, isn't it?”

“Of course not!” giggled Anna. “It's seventy-two. Goodness, Papa, when are you ever going to learn your multiplication tables? And look at you! You're such a sight! Button up your vest, for goodness sake! And brush your hair!”

“In a minute,” said Papa. “Just let me get these figures right, first. Why don’t you hop on over here and help?”

Anna was about to break into a gleeful skip, when she felt wetness against the soles of her bare feet. She looked down and saw that she had turned over her bucket, spilling dirty water across the clean floor.

“Look at what she’s doin’,” growled Jacob Crowley.

“Don’t go spreadin’ that nasty old water in here, girl,” grumbled Erasmus Beaufort. “Ain’t we all seen too much water?”

“I didn’t mean to!” protested Anna.

Now dark, dirty water was gushing out of the bucket—far more than it could have ever held. The water was spreading across the entire floor, rising quickly, covering Anna’s toenails and then her ankles until the hem of her dress was soaked.

“Lord, she’s bringing another flood along!” snarled Jacob Crowley.

“You’re bad luck to us all, girl,” said Erasmus Beaufort, his voice rising in indignation. “Go away right now!”

“What are you standing around for?” asked Papa, apparently not noticing the water or the angry men. “I thought you were coming over here to help.”

“I am, Papa,” said Anna. “But—”

The cracker barrel floated up off the floor, then toppled over. Its checkerboard lid fell off and drifted away in the water. The biscuits tumbled out and began to float around in all directions. Jacob Crowley and Erasmus Beaufort were both red-faced with anger, but Seth Edwards still wore his broad, jovial grin, as if the water were nothing but some kind of grand joke.

“I’ve got no mind to go dying of typhoid again!” exclaimed Jacob Crowley.

“Nor me,” agreed Erasmus Beaufort. “Be off with you, girl! You’re nothing but sickness and death!”

The water had risen halfway up toward the counter top, but Papa still didn’t seem to notice. And Seth Edwards was chuckling heartily at the whole situation.

“Thirty-two divided by four is six, isn’t it?” asked Papa.

“Of course not, Papa,” said Anna, tears starting to roll down her cheeks. “It’s eight.”

“Well, help me out, won’t you?” replied Papa. “You know I’m no good at sixes and nines and eights and such.”

“I can’t, Papa,” sobbed Anna. “Mr. Crowley and Mr. Beaufort are right. I shouldn’t be here. I just bring dirty water and bad luck. I was even bad luck for Mama. She’d still be alive if it weren’t for my being born.”

“Anna, wait!” cried Papa, finally looking up in alarm.

But Anna turned slowly away in the waist-deep water. As she turned, the whole world became dark and cold and wet. She could hear Papa’s voice echoing through the darkness ...

“Come back!”

“Good-bye, Papa!” Anna wailed as the darkness closed in all around her. The water was up to her shoulders now, and it grew colder by the second. Her limbs became numb. Anna gasped. A feeling of terrible grief swept over her. She was all alone in the dark, and she was going to drown soon.

“No!” she wailed. “No!”

Now someone was pulling at her arm. Anna struggled with the unseen person. Something was wrapped around her, preventing her from getting away.

Then she heard a reedy, breathy voice, whispering loudly.

“Anna!”



2

Reflection in the Mirror

Anna's eyes snapped open. The darkness of the dream was replaced by a thin face, lit only by the dimmest of light. It was the pale, worried-looking face of Ruth Curtis.

"Anna, what is it?" asked Ruth, still in a whisper. "You cried out."

"It was just a nightmare," mumbled Anna. "I'm all right now. Go back to sleep."

Anna turned on her cot away from Ruth and closed her eyes.

"But what were you dreaming about?" asked Ruth.

Anna groaned and opened her eyes and stared at the wall. Ruth always wanted to know about her dreams. Ruth wanted to know about *everybody's* dreams!

"I dreamed about Papa," said Anna. "And Brother Seth. And muddy water." Then, with a knot in her stomach at the memory, she added, "And some dead people."

"Dead people?" asked Ruth. "You mean spirits?"

"No. Just dead people. It was a bad dream, that's all."

"If spirits are coming to you in your dreams, you mustn't ignore them, Anna. You've got to pay attention to what they're telling you. It's a gift."

"It's not a gift. And if it is, I don't want it."

“You can’t mean that.”

Anna could hear Betty Mathers shift on her cot across the room and groan loudly. Fortunately, there was no sound of protest from their fourth roommate, Beryl Thornton, who was sickly and needed her rest.

“What are you two carrying on about?” Betty asked with a whimper. “It’s not even dawn.”

“Nothing, Betty,” sighed Anna. “Go back to sleep. And you, too, Ruth. We’ll wake up Beryl.”

A silence fell. Anna didn’t hear Ruth move from beside the cot.

“You’ve got to tell me later,” whispered Ruth urgently.

“All right,” murmured Anna.

“Do you promise?”

“Go back to bed.”

To Anna’s relief, she heard Ruth shuffling across the floor. Then came a wooden creak as Ruth got back into her cot.

Anna closed her eyes, but she knew she couldn’t go back to sleep. She was afraid of slipping back into the nightmare. *What time is it?* she wondered. Was the dim gray light in the room from the moon, or was it nearing dawn? She knew the waking bell would ring at five, just before the sun came up.

She lay still for a long time, afraid to move because she didn’t want Ruth to know she was still awake. Pretty soon, Anna heard Betty snoring softly. A few moments after that, she could hear Ruth’s long, soft, sighing breaths. Ruth was asleep at last.

Anna rolled over in her cot as quietly as she could. She looked toward the window on the other side of the narrow room. Beyond the silhouetted roof of the nearby herb building, she could make out a patch of sky. It was no longer a deep night riddled with stars, but more of a gray-blue tinged with

pale streaks. The last stars were blinking away like snuffed-out candles.

Anna lay in her bed and stared at the slowly brightening sky, feeling lost and forlorn. She was no longer the skipping child who had helped out in her father's store. After the bad water had flooded Martindale, she'd been very ill with typhoid. Many others had died. Then her father had left her with the people called Shakers.

That had been two months ago. Anna was fourteen, and the Shakers considered her a woman. Although Anna was getting used to some of the changes her body was going through, she still felt like a young girl most of the time.

How long, she wondered, would she be in this awful place? How long would she have to share a room with these three young women with whom she had nothing in common? How long would it be before Papa came to take her back to Martindale, where she belonged? A month longer? Two months?

What if he *never* came for her?

What if she *never* got to go back to her real home?

Anna's head filled with memories—helping with accounts, taking inventory, making change for customers, sorting and giving out mail, talking to everybody who came along. The truth was, she wasn't much used to people her own age. She had spent most of her life talking to grown-ups.

"So do you think President Polk's going to get us into a war with Mexico, Mr. Craig?"

"I don't hardly know, little girl—and neither do you. And don't go telling me I should have voted for that rapscallion Henry Clay in the last election."

Papa had often proudly told anyone and everyone that Anna had a better head for politics than the mayor himself. Why, Mr. Craig had even given Anna a Liberty half dollar, just to leave him

alone about Mr. Polk's impending war! Amused at the memory, Anna reached over to where that same half dollar was tucked between her mattress and the wooden cot frame. Then she lay there, clutching the coin tightly in her hand. She wasn't supposed to have it here in Goshen—not in a place where no private property of any kind was allowed. Even so, Anna kept it hidden, and liked to comfort herself by holding it from time to time.

And comfort was something she often sorely needed. Here she was, in a room with young women who had no idea what Whigs or Democrats even were! For although the Shakers considered fourteen-year-old girls to be grown-ups, they frowned upon discussing the World's affairs.

Then another worry began to settle in.

Was there even a home to go home to?

Mr. Craig was dead from the typhoid. So were Mr. Beaufort and Mr. Crowley. So were more people than Anna could think of. Was Mayor Wolfit still alive? Anna wasn't even sure just who was left alive and who was dead. She'd been so sick herself, she hadn't known half of what was going on.

And an awful lot of the town itself had been swept away by the flood. The church was gone, and so were a score of businesses, and so were lots of homes and farms—Anna had no idea whose or how many. Papa's store had not been destroyed, but it had been a waterlogged wreck.

Would Martindale ever be the same again?

At last came the clanging of the morning bell. Anna was relieved. She wasn't much looking forward to another Shaker day, but anything was better than lying abed and fretting. She sat up in her cot and saw that her other roommates were awake.

Betty's face was turned toward Anna, her eyes wide with concern. Betty was the first Negro Anna had ever known. There

were no black folks back in Martindale, but a good many here among the Shakers. Some had been slaves who had come North to freedom. Others, like Betty, had always been free. Betty's parents lived in Concord and had decided that their daughter would find her fullest opportunities among the Shakers. The sight of that dark face sometimes startled Anna, even though she thought that Betty was really rather pretty.

Prettier than Ruth, anyway. Ruth's face was pale, drawn, and pinched, and her huge gray eyes were somewhat haunted-looking. To Anna, Ruth didn't seem quite of this world. But then, a lot of the older Shaker women also had an unearthly look about them, too.

Anna turned away from Ruth's penetrating gaze toward Beryl, whose eyes were barely open yet. *Poor Beryl!* Anna always thought upon seeing her in the morning. She was so frail, tiny, and sickly that Anna sometimes almost forgot she was there. Both Ruth and Beryl were several years older than Anna and Betty, but they were all women by Shaker standards.

"Good morning," said Anna in the brightest voice she could muster. "Did you all sleep well?"

"What about you?" asked Betty anxiously.

"I slept fine," replied Anna.

"But what about your dream?" added Ruth.

"Dream?" asked Anna.

"You woke us up, Anna," said Betty.

"Sorry," said Anna. "I don't remember."

Anna knew that neither Betty nor Ruth believed her, but it didn't matter. At least it would stop Ruth from asking a lot of nosy questions.

Anna tumbled off her cot and onto her feet. Betty was stretching and yawning herself awake. Ruth gave up staring wide-eyed

at Anna and dropped to her knees beside her bed. Betty, Beryl, and Anna then did the same. A moment of silent prayer was part of every morning's routine. Within fifteen minutes, the four girls had folded their sheets and blankets neatly on chairs at the foot of their beds and had gotten themselves dressed.

Anna took her turn at the plain, white porcelain wash basin. She splashed cold water on her face and reached blindly for the towel hanging above the sink. As she dried her face, she looked up into the tiny little rectangular mirror she shared with her roommates.

Just big enough for one face at a time, Anna often thought. The Shakers didn't think well of mirrors.

She could just make out her own features in the dim morning light. Even so, she could hardly believe this reflection was her own face. She could almost imagine she was looking at a picture of Ruth, instead. Or that she was seeing some stranger through a little window.

Back in Martindale, a big oval-shaped mirror with a fancy frame had hung in her bedroom. Anna had approved of the rounded cheeks and high graceful forehead that she had seen in that mirror. Papa had always told her she was pretty, and Anna had always believed him, because Papa would never lie to her.

In that big oval mirror, her skin had always looked pink and healthy. But in this tiny glass, she looked wan and thin. As she pulled the white Shaker cap down over her tightly braided hair, Anna leaned closer to the mirror. Yes, she was sure of it. Her cheeks looked sharp rather than rounded, and her eyes looked wide and pale and anxious-looking.

I'm starting to look like a Shaker woman.

The thought gave her a chill.