

Miss Annabel and Julia

Chapter 14

“Betty and Ruth, and Violet, Too”

Fiction by Angela Bauer

At dawn in the Philadelphia region on Sunday, 25 June 1933, the drizzle in the New York City Metropolitan Area had drifted in. It became chilly enough people needed winter coats to be comfortable outside.

Young and attractive at barely seventeen, Temporary Nanny Hannah Randall woke up at 5:30 A.M. Her first thought was that at least she did not have a hangover. Friday evening she consumed far too many Champaign cocktails. During the Saturday evening party Hannah only drank Shirley Temples. She traded a hangover for an upset tummy.

Hannah was raised as an only child in a conservative Irish Catholic family. Before Hannah's birth her mother Siobhan was a respected Nanny, a close friend of Clara Parsons. Hannah's father was a sergeant in the NYPD's Eleventh Precinct on Christopher Street in West Greenwich Village.

Realizing that getting drunk enough while on duty that she suffered a hangover was a sin, Hannah felt she had to attend Mass and make a confession.

Already that week Hannah had used two half-days off, so she was not entitled to take time off for church. Besides, Annabel had many activities scheduled.

At least Hannah was lucky in that her Supervising Nanny was on vacation and also staying at the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel. Hannah got up, put on a simple house dress and went to Clara Parsons' guest room.

After the party Friday night Clara had punished Hannah with twelve strokes of a rattan cane. This time Hannah was about to beg for Clara to

cover the care of Annabel long enough for Hannah to attend an early Mass and say her confession.

Clara Parsons actually had little to do that Sunday morning. Originally she would have been returning to Manhattan with Mr. Barclay, but he was remaining in Philadelphia. Clara had been told there is nothing to do anywhere in Pennsylvania on Sundays. Generously she agreed to nanny little Annabel that morning. Clara also gave Hannah money to take a taxi to and from church.

Hannah hurriedly dressed for church, complete with a small hat, flat shoes and no makeup. Downstairs in the hotel the concierge told her the name and location of the local parish church.

The taxi driver's name was Shamus O'Brien, so all Hannah needed to say was "Take me to Mass" and a few minutes later she was outside the correct church.

The first Mass would be in forty minutes. But a sign said that confessions would be heard starting in fifteen minutes. Hannah was first in line.

When an altar boy lowered the rope, Hannah stepped into the confessional. The shade was pulled so the priest could see her dimly. Hannah started in the usual way, "Bless me father, for I have sinned. It has been three weeks since my last confession..."

After she spilled out her confession, the priest talked to her sternly in a Manhattan accent, telling her to do the Stations and say twenty Hail Marias as acts of contrition.

But then he paused and added, "Hannah Randall, you have shamed your parents. Drinking to excess at your age! Your father Sergeant Liam Randall should belt the naughtiness out of you. If you were a student at our school, Mother Superior Mary Caroline would deal with you in a similar way!"

"Oh, Father, would she really be willing to punish me as I deserve to be punished?"

"My Child, while you attend Mass like a contrite lass, I will ask Mother Superior. After services, wait near the confession line. I will have an answer for you then, one way or the other.

"Now, go forth, do your acts of contrition and sin no more!"

All during Mass, Hannah was wriggling as if her derriere had already been punished. She rushed as rapidly as polite to stand near the confession line. Instead of an elderly priest, it was a handsome young curate who walked up and asked, "Are you after being Hannah Randall?" in an exaggerated brogue, which did not hide his real Manhattan accent.

“Are you ready, My Child? Mother Superior is willing to take the time to chastise you right now. She is strict, but very fair.”

“Excuse me, Father. Your voice is familiar. Did we meet before?”

“Yes, My Child. My late father, Niall MacAnally, was also a Sergeant at the Eleventh Precinct and a former partner to your good father. I’m Father Aiden MacAnally, after growing up in the building across the street from you before I left home for seminary six years ago. You must only have been eleven or so then. I recognized your voice.

“Hurry, My Child, Mother Superior, and her strap, are waiting for you.”

In the office of the church school’s Principal, Hannah was told to kneel in front of the desk on a low stool. Mother Superior Mary Caroline scolded Hannah harshly and lashed her many times with a strap even heavier than the belt her father used.

Hannah had restored her clothing but was still weeping as she hailed a taxi back to the hotel. She needed a bath before she could dress to take over the care of Annabel from Nanny Parsons.

They were finishing breakfast in the less expensive hotel restaurant. Annabel was eager to start rehearsing on the piano in the practice room. The rules were she could not start until 7:15 A.M. and could only play until 8:15 A.M. to give other guests a chance to use the piano.

As they waited for friendly Assistant Manager David Ramsey to unlock the practice room, Clara Parsons told Hannah that she had undressed Annabel upon her request and that her diaper was only sweaty.

Annabel had seen the note about being put to bed un-spanked, so she requested a ‘really good old-fashioned’ wallop and not some half-hearted paddy-whacking. “I used her ‘Girls’ Spanker’ and really let her have it. I tried to make up for those five years Miss Barclay would not let me punish Annabel!”

Then the girl was allowed to bathe herself. Clara had double-diapered her, pulled on a pair of PlayTex rubber panties and dressed her for breakfast and piano rehearsal.

To Hannah that sounded like a typical start of the day for Annabel.

About 7:30 A.M. her father Richard and his new wife Julia (who had adopted Annabel the previous week) arrived in the practice room followed by two room service waiters, with enough brunch/breakfast buffet to feed an army.

Having already eaten, Annabel only stopped playing the piano long enough to hug and kiss Richard and Julia, calling them ‘Daddy’ and ‘Mommy’.

Clara put a delicious portion of Eggs Benedict on a plate. She started for a distant table, but was asked by Julia to sit with her and Richard. Nothing was said about Hannah taking a hearty selection of food to a remote table.

“Nanny Parsons, as you know we will be nearly completely rebuilding Barclay Mansion on the inside. We cannot change the appearance of the outside along Park Avenue. Along the north and south alleys we can make minor alterations, especially for safety reasons. Since only office buildings can see the rear of the mansion, we will be making some significant changes which our architects assure us will fairly quickly appear to blend in, starting at the second floor.

“My personal concern is what we will do with all the under-utilized space on the Third and Fourth Floors.

“What I want to talk to you about is a plan forming in my head. Do you mind if we walk outside, so my husband can concentrate on Annabel’s playing and our conversation will not disturb her?”

Leaning in to whisper, Clara said, “Of course not, Julia.”

They decided the most private place to discreetly talk would be in Clara’s guest room. Julia summoned a bellboy. “Please give this note to my husband seated in the practice room.”

That note told Richard she would be in Clara’s room and to phone her when he was ready to leave the hotel.

By this time Clara was comfortable sitting in the presence of her employer and speaking directly, using first names.

The gist of Julia’s proposal was that the vacant two floors, consisting of over an acre of indoor space with twelve foot high ceilings, should be used for educational purposes. She wanted to establish a school, for adults, to teach the many specialized skills needed by first-class domestic service workers.

“Clara, I would like you to consider being in charge of the entire program, with a special concentration of training governesses, nannies and infant nurses. I have asked around and even have done some research through the store over several years. There is no such training available.

“You are still a young woman, less than twenty years my senior. You have a lifetime of practical experience raising the children of the wealthy. I believe that every young woman interested in becoming a very good governess, nanny or infant nurse would treasure learning from you.

“The late Mr. William R. Barclay supported my plan in theory, but there was absolutely no spare space within the store. Before his death it was not possible to have any commercial or professional offices in our portion of Park Avenue. Now, both of the corner buildings have more medical and law offices than residential tenants.

“My attorneys are certain, especially in these Depression times, that when correctly presented for regulatory approval, there will be no objection.

“The ‘Nanny Training’ is only the start. I want to make use of Mr. Merriman and Mr. Edwards to train chauffeurs. Then Mrs. Wilson could teach the management and cooking skills needed to feed large establishments. Housekeepers could also use a place where young men and women learn to be effective footmen and maids.

“At first, the ‘Nanny Program’ will be able to utilize a nursery, child’s room and a playroom we need anyway on the second floor. Later, if Richard and I expand our family and we actually do need a nursery and so on, we can replicate such rooms on the Third or Fourth floors. Perhaps we can build various styles of rooms, so those being trained will better fit into various families.

“If you agree, then I propose you be promoted to ‘Nanny Emeritus’ with a significant increase in salary and your own apartment. Of course you will never be shut out of Annabel’s life. You are her real mother who has nurtured her since she nursed teats and bottles.

“When Annabel starts school in September, all of us will see less of her at home. And as she matures we will progressively see even less of her. I will not stand still and keep her cooped up in our home as if she was a pet.

“Clara, may I speak bluntly?”

“By all means, Julia” Clara Parsons replied, fascinated.

“My sister-in-law Gertrude is beyond being an idiot! The first words out of her mouth to Richard the day I came to the mansion to do some serious work about the store take-over, were complaints that Annabel had lied about being sick. She claimed the child was out of control and she could not do anything to help.

“I had known about you since before Annabel was born. My reaction to Gertrude was wanting to say, ‘Gertrude, get the heck out of Nanny Parson’s way. She has successfully raised a lot of children. There is still time to bring Annabel around to being more considerate.’

“I noticed that despite throwing her tantrum, the second Russell announced that ‘Dinner is Served’ Annabel stopped her tantrum and acted like a polite young lady, walking to her chair. Only when Gertrude misbehaved did Annabel return to being rude.

“To me that could only mean that you had raised Annabel as best you could.

“Then in the two weeks between signing the papers and actually taking custody of Rogers’ of Philadelphia, I was appalled to learn that Gertrude had rarely allowed you to take Annabel to the Central Park Zoo.

She has never been to the Museum of Natural History just across the Park, or The Statue of Liberty. None of that is your fault.

“The problem is most wealthy families have frustrated spinster aunts interfering in the natural early childhood development of nieces and nephews. We cannot run training for those eccentric spinster aunts and the equivalent uncles, so what we can do is teach nannies to circumvent such interferences.”

Clara had been listening with rapped attention and took a couple of deep breaths before answering. “Julia, this is an ambitious plan. I see no reason why it cannot succeed. I am not sure I have the education necessary, but since you have faith in me, I am sure we can make this work.”

“Clara, we have time on our side. The Great Depression only seems to be getting worse, so we do not need to rush foolishly. As you know all of us will soon be moving a few blocks north into the Dyckman Mansion. The terms of our lease will not allow us to do any formal training in that building.

“Reconstruction of Barclay Mansion will last at least two, and possibly nearly three, years. During that time we can do a lot of planning. Please quietly think who you want to hire to help you form the program and run it day-to-day. I have tons of financial and business talent working for me at the store, so that need not worry you.

“While the interior of the mansion has no furnishings and is being carefully demolished, we need to make firm decisions what will happen on those vacant floors. Only during reconstruction can we install plumbing at an affordable price.

“So within the next few months we need a design for those floors. I am thinking a combination of meeting/classrooms on the inside since they are more effective without windows. Then along the exterior walls with existing windows we cannot alter, we construct samples of the rooms found in mansions, probably smaller and with lower ceilings. But when needed, the trainees can practice on the new First Floor with an expanded dining room and ballroom.”

At that point the phone rang. Clara answered. “Julia, your husband has decided both of you should take Annabel to the Rogers’ Mansion so she can play the piano as long and loudly as she wants.

“By your leave, may I stay here at the hotel? I admit I am feeling my years. Although this weekend I am frustrated by Hannah, she has the ingrained skills and youthful energy to keep ahead of even as active a child as Annabel.

“I am very glad you are giving her a second chance. She might have told you I gave her a serious caning after midnight Saturday morning. If I

had not done so, I could never hold up my head with her mother and father.

“I am sure Hannah learned her lesson and will prove worthy of our trust. Now this morning she went to mass to confess. She told me a Mother Superior took a strap to her as if she were a naughty school girl.

“Personally I think to make the best of the situation, we work Hannah as much as possible. Since Annabel wears day diapers on the trip, make sure today it is Hannah who changes them! I do not want to be mean to Hannah, but she must learn a hard lesson. Trust me, Julia, you have years to bond with Annabel. You still have years of diaper changing ahead of you.”

On this cheery note, Julia thanked Clara for the time and candid observations. Julia then went to her own room for a touch-up by Edna. She was pouring over the artwork and plot-plans from Walter Lockridge for the remodeling of Barclay Mansion when Annabel and Richard came for the trip to The Main Line.

Hannah re-stocked the diaper bag. She had checked Annabel’s diaper, which was barely damp. The girl asked to wait until they reached the Rogers’ Mansion because she so enjoyed being on that changing table. Hannah agreed using that made the entire diaper changing ritual so much easier.

Sam Schwartz was the fifth passenger. He was carrying a light-weight tripod, Richard’s Leica bag and also Annabel’s Brownie gadget bag.

From time to time John Merriman would be asked to slow down or even stop the Rolls Royce because either Annabel or Richard wanted to take a picture out of their open windows. Richard was on the left rear seat, Julia in the middle, and Annabel on the right rear seat. There was hardly any traffic and nobody was in a big hurry.

A block before reaching the Rogers’ property, John let Sam, Richard and Annabel out of the Rolls so they could walk and take pictures the rest of the way. That must have been a strange sight for neighbors: a girl and two men walking slowly, taking pictures while a classic Rolls Royce followed them at a snail’s pace.

Annabel noticed that Martha Pryor’s Rolls was no longer parked on the street. That pleased her, because she had not forgotten an encounter with Martha about lunch time before the signing ceremony.

Martha and Lenny Rogers had come to the mansion together for a visit. While Martha and Julia were talking privately in the rear garden, Annabel discovered Lenny playing the grand piano.

He was singing his Portuguese song, when Martha and Julia walked into the living room. As the song ended Annabel had a tiny tantrum

because she knew Lenny was singing at the adult ladies, not her. She had gone so far as to tell Martha she did not like her.

Martha responded, “Your pet name is ‘Lambie Pie’?”

Annabel answered, “People who like me call me that, Yes Ma’am.”

To which Martha responded, “Well, Annabel, I would like you just fine; preferably slowly roasted!” Martha paused for effect, and then added: “Now Scat!” making a cat’s hissing sound.

Julia explained after Martha and Lenny had left that Martha was one of her best older friends and that Martha was slightly jealous because Julia was married to Richard.

So, that Sunday morning on The Main Line, Annabel had not forgiven Martha and did not want to see her again.

As the two wandering photographers and their loyal assistant reached the walkway to the front door, Lenny came out to greet them. Julia and Hannah got out of the parked Rolls and joined in greeting Lenny. He gave her a chaste hug and heartily shook Richard’s hand, even putting his arm around Richard’s shoulder.

Looking past Lenny as he bent down to kiss Annabel’s hand, she saw a family approaching, walking toward their Rolls. There was a chubby light blonde girl shyly holding the right hand of a large black woman who was pushing an old-fashioned four-wheel baby carriage with her left hand. A couple of paces in front of the stroller, there was a tall handsome man about Richard’s age and a blonde woman about the same height as Julia, only younger in appearance. She was dressed well in an expensive casual summer frock, with a serious string of pearls around her neck.

Lenny called out a greeting to that family: “Hi Ruth and Gene, so glad you could stop by for brunch. This is the Barclay family from Manhattan I was telling you about. They just bought my family’s home.

“Richard and Julia, let me introduce you to Eugene and Ruth Hoffstadt. That is their daughter Betty. In the stroller is her baby brother William, with their nanny Violet,” Lenny said. Then turning to gesture to the Barclays, “Their daughter is named Annabel. I apologize that I do not know the names of their friends.”

Julia extended her right hand to Ruth, “My name is Julia. Glad to meet all of you. Yesterday when we toured Leonard’s home and signed the papers there was a lot of confusion. Miss Hannah Randall is Annabel’s Nanny. Mr. Samuel Schwartz is a photographer who works for our Manhattan store and is a good friend of our family.”

The gaggle meandered into the mansion. Annabel and Hannah stopped at the piano. “Mr. Rogers, may I play it now?”

“Sure, Annabel, we will be out back. There is a brunch buffet, so you and Hannah may eat when you like.”

The doorbell rang. It was John Merriman carrying the diaper bag. “Miss Randall, begging your pardon; I thought you would need this right away,” proffering the diaper bag to Hannah.

She thanked John for his consideration while accepting custody of the bag, the purpose of which was obvious.

Hannah walked back to the piano and put the bag on a nearby chair. “Lambie Pie, are you still dry enough to practice a little while? If you don’t mind, I would like to eat now?”

“Sure Nanny Randall, I will be fine for at least a half hour. I ate breakfast at the hotel, so I am more interested in the piano than food. I don’t need the toilet yet. When I do I’ll come to you.” Annabel returned to playing an exercise softly.

Young Betty was not much heavier than average for her age, just seven, but because she was short, she appeared to be pudgy. She was shy, so hid outside the open French doors, peering at Annabel in wonderment. Betty had never seen a girl play a piano like an adult. She had also never seen a girl so much older than herself with a nanny who carried such a prodigious diaper bag.

Her own Nanny Violet had been working for her mother’s family so long she had been her mother’s last nanny. Then Violet never left the family. Finally she became Betty’s nanny for as long as she could remember. When baby William was born about a year before, Violet also took care of him.

For Betty, having a baby brother was ideal. When they went anywhere, it was accepted that on the shelf under the baby carriage there would be a diaper bag. Little did strangers realize the diapers were for Betty as well as baby William!

Hannah encountered Violet at the long buffet table. William’s baby buggy was parked in shade within reach of a table. Violet invited Hannah to join her sitting and eating.

From their chairs Violet and Hannah could see how fascinated Betty was with Annabel, who was caught up in her own musical world and oblivious to her surroundings.

An advantage Hannah had going to school at The College of the City of New York (CCNY) on the west side of Central Park was that she had made friends with African American, as well as Cuban and Puerto Rican classmates. In her neighborhood on Morton Street between Seventh Avenue and Hudson Street, everyone was Irish. Until Hannah enrolled at CCNY, she had never even spoken to a black person.

“Hello, my full name is Violet Jackson. My family has worked for Miss Ruth Madison’s family since the end of The War Between The States. Probably before that I had ancestors belonging to them. I’ve been a maid or nanny all my life. What about you, Hannah?”

“Glad to meet you, Nanny Jackson. My full name is Hannah Randall, born in Manhattan. My mother Siobhan’s parents emigrated to New York from County Wicklow in Ireland the year before she was born. She was 13 when she started working as a nursery maid, she tells me quite often. She continued working as a nanny until after she was pregnant with me.

“My dad Liam Randall emigrated here from a different County Wicklow village when he was twenty-two because an uncle promised him a job as a New York City cop.

“He would never let me work, until now, because he has dreams of me being a success. All my life he pounded into me the notion that I must graduate from college. I am a student now and only just 17. Then a few weeks ago, as the summer break started, my mom’s best friend Nanny Parsons got me this job as her nursery maid. She has taken care of Annabel since she was born.

“I remember a year ago listening to my mom and Nanny Parsons talking about how a silly aunt had spoiled Annabel until the child was more than a handful. All I could think was how lucky I did not need to deal with her.

“According to Nanny, everything changed when Mr. Barclay married Miss Scott who was. She stopped the aunt from interfering, spanked the daylights out of Annabel a few times and made life better. Mrs. Barclay decided to bring the household staff back to full-strength.

“Sorry to be so boring yakking on about me. We are here because Mr. Barclay just bought Mr. Rogers’ store and now we are staying longer because he also bought this home.

“Now if you will excuse me, I am sure my little girl needs a diaper change. Yesterday she was fascinated by the large changing table in the nursery here, so at the hotel she begged me to wait to change her until we were here for brunch.”

From her secluded spot beside the open door, little Betty watched wide-eyed as the tall and beautiful Hannah approached Annabel, saying, “Lambie Pie, now is the time I should change you before you catch a nasty diaper rash. Afterwards, I want you to meet your new neighbor girl Betty, her baby brother William and their Nanny Jackson.”

Hannah took Annabel by her left hand, casually hoisted the diaper bag with her own left hand and climbed the stairs to the nursery. Unless Betty had seen the diaper bag and over-heard the conversation, she never would have guessed Annabel was diapered.

Betty's diaper was bulky, but she did not care. Because she still wet during the day in Kindergarten, Betty had to go to a special private girls' school for first grade where a nice lady changed the diapers of all her classmates.

Hannah left the diaper bag in the nursery. She led Annabel downstairs and past the piano, with Betty watching all the while. As they reached her, Hannah surprised Betty by also taking her hand in her free right hand.

All of them walked over to where Violet Jackson was seated beside William. He was sitting up in his carriage, being fed Pablum. Hannah made the introductions all around. She asked Violet if she could take the girls onto the back yard grass to play.

"Nanny Randall, just look out for the swimming pool down the hill. It doesn't have a fence."

"Thank you for the warning, Nanny Jackson. I will keep a close eye on the girls. Annabel will stay away from the pool because she knows I will spank her very hard if she dares to approach it. I am sure Betty is a sensible girl."

"Little Betty has her moments. She woke up cranky, which upset Mr. Hoffstadt. Mrs. Hoffstadt told me to wallop Betty. That did improve her deportment. Say, does Mrs. Barclay ever spank Annabel? Around here nearly all the spanking is done by us nannies, or the governesses of the older girls."

From the corner of her eye, Violet saw Betty deliberately lift her skirt in back to show off her diapers, which were not covered by rubber panties.

"Young Lady, I saw you do that! Your mother and I have scolded you about that many times. Get your backside over here this instant!" Violet ordered without raising her voice enough it would disturb the adults peacefully brunch and sipping Cream Gin Fizzes, also called Ramos Gin Fizzes. Well, except for Richard, who was only drinking iced tea.

Martha Pryor apparently had gotten up and dressed. She was sitting beside Lenny, flirting with him, Hannah noticed. So did Annabel, who had a crush on Lenny.

When Betty contritely toed-in near Violet, she obediently lifted the back of her skirt only just far enough to expose the portion of her upper thighs not covered by her diaper. Violet reached forward and gave each of those thighs several smacks apiece, just quietly enough only Ruth noticed.

"Now, Young Lady, follow all instructions from Nanny Randall. She will wallop you if you misbehave. If you need your diaper changed, Nanny Randall will take you up to the nursery and do that. Of course Annabel will be allowed to watch, since the two of you are playing together.

“Nanny Randall, when the time comes, there are a lot of clean diapers in the bag under the baby carriage. Thanks for letting me eat in peace!”

The afternoon drifted lazily along. Nanny Jackson never did climb the stairs to the nursery. When she changed Baby William she did so using a board which was part of the carriage. Very cunning!

Hannah did not need to spank either Annabel or Betty that afternoon. Over the next few years she did spank Betty many times. She also changed Betty’s diapers hundreds of times.

Annabel managed to get in quality piano practice, while Betty listened and watched, fascinated. Hannah changed both of the girls for their nap about 2:15 P.M. She had packed a long sleep shirt for Annabel. Nanny Jackson handed her one for Betty. Both girls slept beside one another on an upstairs bed near the nursery. Hannah woke them at 3:00 P.M. so Annabel could get in additional practice.

Because Sam Schwartz needed to catch a Pullman back to Manhattan, the brunch party broke up about 4:00 P.M.

Hannah had noticed that Martha Pryor smoked cigarettes almost constantly. So did Ruth. Her husband Gene, Lenny and Richard smoked much less.

Much to Hannah’s surprise, after Julia finished eating, she accepted a cigarette from Martha, who lit it for her. The rest of the afternoon, Hannah never saw Julia without a cigarette. She lit those herself without difficulty, using a lighter from her purse.

Despite it being 1933, Hannah was shocked about all the women smoking. That simply did not happen in her Irish neighborhood. Very few young women at CCNY smoked in public. Hannah had never even considered taking up smoking and she refused to date men who smoked.

Although Annabel had obediently taken her nap, by the time John Merriman stopped the Rolls Royce at The Bellevue-Stratford Hotel, Annabel had fallen fast asleep between her parents on the back seat. Richard carried his daughter to her room, where Julia took over from Hannah, undressing the girl, checking that her diaper was not very wet, and putting her down in bed for another nap.