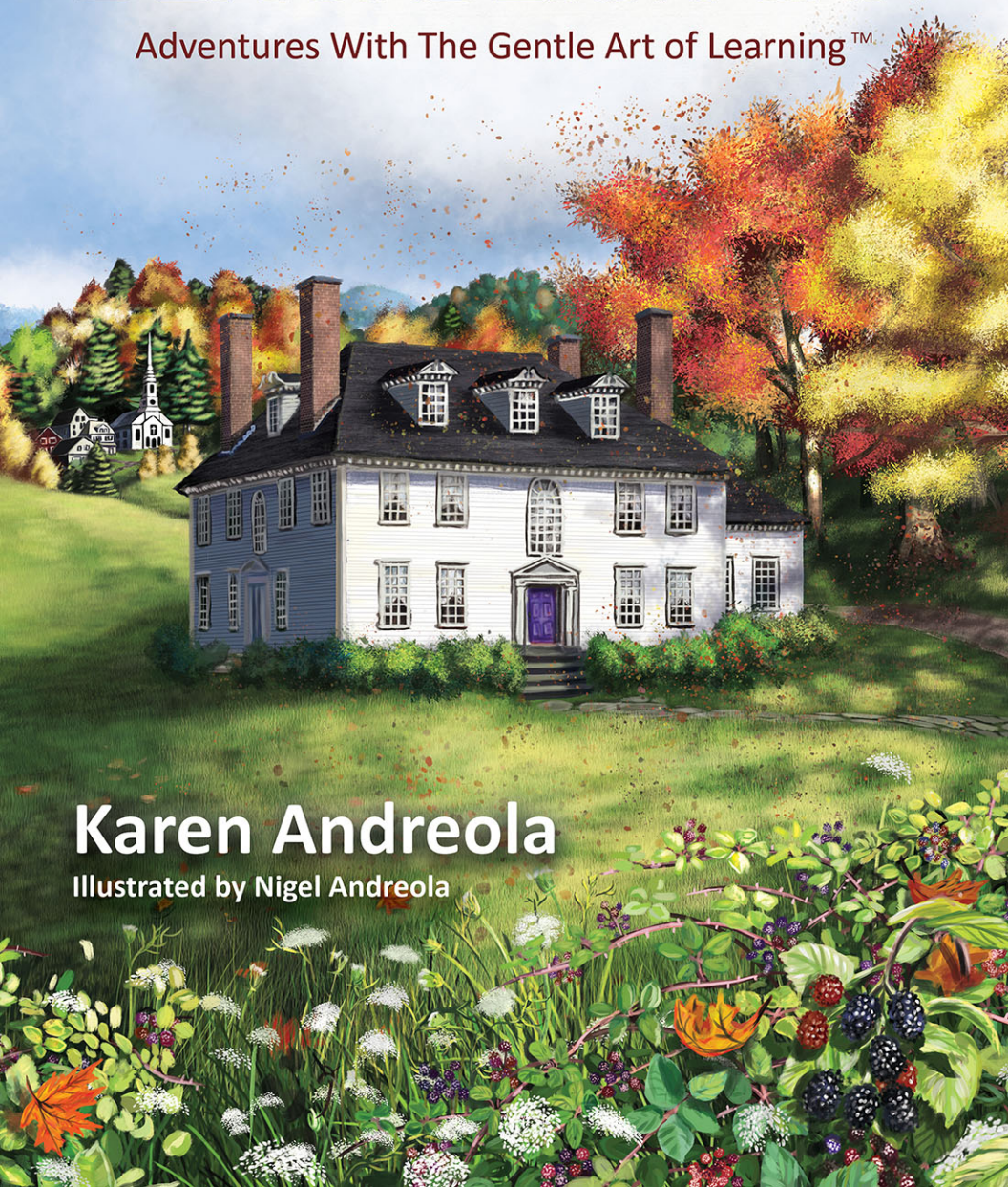


LESSONS AT BLACKBERRY INN

Adventures With The Gentle Art of Learning™



Karen Andreola

Illustrated by Nigel Andreola



A Story for Mother Culture®

Sequel to *Pocketful of Pinecones*

In *Lessons at Blackberry Inn*, life is seen through Carol's eyes, the eyes of a homemaker in the 1930s. Her busy days are spent teaching her children in the mornings and canning their bountiful harvest in the afternoons. Guests at Blackberry Inn appreciate Carol's delicious country meals served family style on the long table.

When her feet ache or her emotions begin to get the better of her, Carol's husband, Michael, has a calming effect. She is supported by his ongoing devotion. Therefore it is no surprise that when the pastor of the church asks a big favor of Carol, Michael has a heart-to-heart talk with her about her involvement. She is expecting their third child and he is concerned that she may be already doing too much.

As learning is not limited to the schoolbook, life's lessons impart wisdom to a variety of characters, both young and old, all living in the country village of Appleton.

Karen Andreola is best known for her books, *A Charlotte Mason Companion: Personal Reflections on the Gentle Art of Learning™* and *Mother Culture®: For a Happy Homeschool*. She home educated her three children K-12. Karen and her husband live in Pennsylvania.



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Gentle Art of Learning™*

Karen Andreola

ILLUSTRATED BY
NIGEL ANDREOLA



Charlotte Mason
Research & Supply
Company


Preface




I believe an author of children's fiction has a duty to describe the world as it ought to be, as it can be.

You might be thinking, "But this is a book for grown-ups, isn't it?"

Yes, it is. And in it I aim to demonstrate that the "idyllic principle" is also applicable to stories for grown-ups. For all fiction is useful chiefly to animate truth, to inspire some noble aim or sweet spirit. Therefore, it is for your enrichment that I have created scenes of faith, hope, patience, industry, trust, generosity, hospitality, parental love, and the love between a married man and woman—all of which are meant to quicken your heart. But please don't take the story too seriously. If you find anything silly, feel free to laugh. Laughter is medicine with good side effects.



Gone are the days when close friends lived within walking distance. Do you ever read as a remedy for feeling a bit lonely? I do. If we read fiction for its characters, then I invite you to make friends of my characters because I created them especially for mothers like you. In this story life is seen through Carol's eyes, the eyes of a homemaker in the 1930s. Those things that pertain to mother and home abound here. In fact, the forgotten value of homemaking fills every nook and cranny. May these pages inspire you to take part in what I call Mother Culture™, to nourish your soul, and to imbue your home with an atmosphere of love, beauty, purity, and good works.



This story also ministers with specific ideas for teaching children. Behind Carol's decisions is a teaching philosophy and a method that I call "The Gentle Art of Learning™." It is my interpretation of what can be found in *Home Education*, a book written in the nineteenth century by the British Christian, Miss Charlotte Mason. I first read *Home Education* in 1986 while living in England, borrowing an old copy through London's interlibrary loan program. Still in the beginning stages of teaching my young children, and with only a handful of books to help me, I was hungrily searching for ideas. In *Home Education* I found the specifics I was craving, and so does my main character, Carol. She finds the philosophy inspiring and tailors the method to fit her situation, her children, and her particular tastes, thus supplying you with an inside look at how one mother makes personal The Gentle Art of Learning.

Karen Andreola

Autumn 2008

My Liberty



*Bread and
butter, devoid
of charm in the
drawing room, is
ambrosia eaten
under a tree.*

Elizabeth von Antrim

The church bell had rung hours ago but I was still in bed. I was reading, taking in my last days of recuperation—doctor's orders. Expecting a child and being prone to miscarry, I had been confined to bed rest after a fall down the attic steps two weeks prior. By this time I had memorized every crack in the walls and the way the sun cast polka-dot shadows through the eyelet curtains every day at two o'clock. Outside my windows a pair of cardinals kept me daily company. They were hidden in the trees, but I recognized their distinct tweets, and though they were lacking in melody, I was comforted by their sweet and simple conversation.

I heard someone climbing the long staircase. It could have been one of the weekend guests here at Blackberry Inn, but it wasn't. It was Emma.

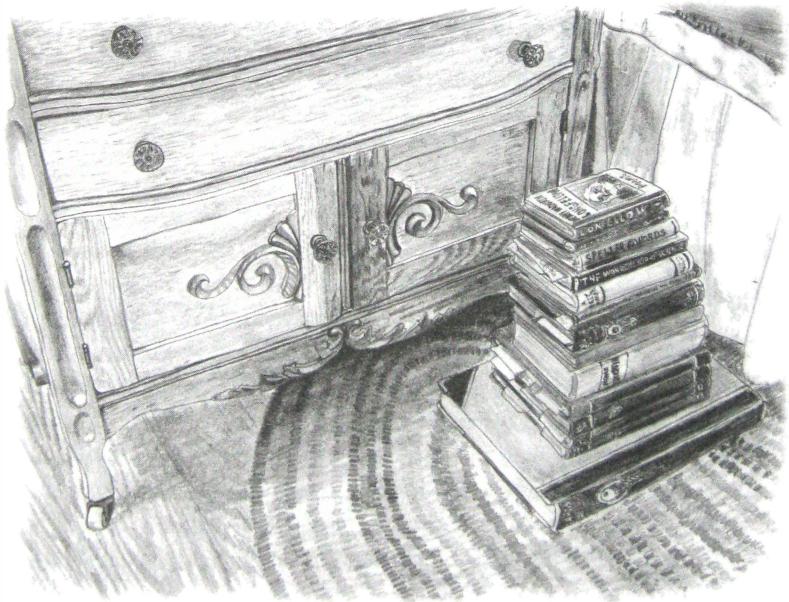
At her knock, I called, "Come in."

"You're looking well, Carol," she said. She placed a glass of lemonade and an envelope on my nightstand and then gently patted my shoulder.

"I'm feeling well, thank you," I said, returning her smile. I watched her sweep a few stray light brown and gray hairs away from her damp forehead and gracefully fasten them back in place.

"Did you walk home from church?" I asked.

"Yes, it's a beautiful Sunday for a walk and only just getting warm." Her mention of the outdoors drew her soft hazel eyes to the windows, where she immediately began fussing with the curtains, drawing them further open to make visible the wonders that lay beyond. The maples glowed bright green in the midday sun. "Michael



was still talking with the men when I set off, probably planning what the quartet will sing next," she added.

"Was it a good sermon?" I asked.

"Yes. Pastor Bingham preached on diligence, mostly out of the Psalms. He also quoted something from John Wesley. Let's see, what was it? Oh, yes. 'Though I am always in haste, I am never in a hurry.' I like that, don't you?"

"I've never heard that one," I said.

"Nor have I," she said. "Oh, and he threw in some Ben Franklin for good measure, for the children, I think. 'One today is worth two tomorrows; never leave till tomorrow what you can do today,' and the like."

"Hmm," I sighed, and lay quiet. Emma did one last bit of fussing. Bending over to the floor, she tidied the pile of books by my bed, stacking them in order—the largest at the bottom, the smallest at the top, forming a pyramid. As she straightened up, she asked, "Can I get you anything else, dear?"

The subject of the sermon still lingered in my thoughts. "No, thank you," I answered demurely. I felt a tinge of frustration. Emma and I always served the Sunday meal together. Now Emma was doing extra work while I remained in bed, yet her servant's heart voiced no hint of complaint.

"Now, Carol, I know what you're thinking."

"You do?" I asked, but she ignored this.

"You have *not* been idle. You've been keeping the baby safe. And you've been diligent even in bed. Just look at all these books you've been reading in preparation for teaching the children. You know how to use your time wisely." She carefully lifted my knitting out of its basket. "And look at this pretty sweater. What a lovely rose color!" I had been knitting a cardigan for my daughter, Emily, and was particular about my pinks. Emma held it up to admire it in the sunbeams that streamed in through the windows. It did look pretty in the sunlight, or was it Emma's encouragement that made me appreciate it more? I felt gratified. "You're nearly done," she said, returning it to its nesting place, leaving it with another of her affectionate pats.

"Oh yes," she continued, "I almost forgot. Dora sends her greetings. The note on the nightstand is from her. Michael and the children should be here any minute." The announcement to me seemed to reinforce her contentment with her decision to have us move in with her. Her words trailed behind her as she set off to do the proverbial "next thing."



I sipped my lemonade. The water comes up so cold from our deep well that no ice is needed to chill it. With a squeeze of lemon, a teaspoon of sugar, and a sprig of peppermint, it is welcome refreshment on warm days. As I sipped, I thanked God for His blessings, demonstrated to me through Mrs. Emma Cook, proprietor of Blackberry Inn, best friend to my mother in days gone by, my childhood Sunday school teacher—as well as everyone else's, and the adopted grandmother to my little boy and girl. Emma's generosity had been established by habit. I knew she often visited the widows and sick of our congregation. She had the rock-hard calves of a frequent walker and cyclist to prove it.



I gingerly opened the envelope, addressed to "Mrs. Michael Weaver" in neat Spenserian handwriting. Inside was a pretty invitation framed in orange marigolds, water-colored by Dora's hand, flowers apropos of the season. We rarely receive formal invitations out here in the country. Although Dora has willingly taken on country life by marrying my brother Bob and lives with him on Dad's old dairy farm, she was city-bred, and formal invitations were evidently in the blood. I was looking forward immensely to tea with Dora, and found intriguing the sentence about teaching my little Emily and me something new.



Michael and I were hired by Emma this July to be caretakers and assistant innkeepers of Blackberry Inn—a large white clapboard house nestled in the first ripples of wooded hills that touch the Appalachian

Mountains of New England. Although built on the edge of two hundred acres, Blackberry Inn is nevertheless a comfortable walking distance from the center of the village of Appleton. Appleton hasn't changed much. Here I was raised and here I had returned with my own family. Moving back here wasn't my idea; I suspected a conspiratorial effort on the part of my brother Bob, my husband Michael, and Emma. In fact, I found out only recently that for quite some time Michael has secretly harbored romantic notions of country living. In reality I know it is a life governed by the four seasons and requiring a strong back.



Twenty-five miles easterly, as the crow flies, is Bridgeton, a larger town that the people of Appleton call "the city," where Michael once held a position in the marketing department of a growing company. Bridgeton is where we met and started a family before disappointing circumstances led us here. But we've put the burdens that darkened



those days behind us. Our children, Donald and Emily, like our life in Appleton. They have made the otherwise neglected apple orchard behind the inn their expansive playground. Although I appreciated our life in Bridgeton, watching the children's energetic games, the calling, running, and climbing of country play, was helping me to accept our new life here.



I got up. I couldn't bear to be in bed any longer. Monday was to be my first day on my feet but after all I was only stealing a few hours of early liberty, I rationalized. I brushed my hair, fastening a hair comb on either side. That was all that could be done on short notice. After changing into something less wrinkled, I peeked in at the children's room. What a mess! "I'll tackle that later," I thought, "with their help."

Halfway down the stairs I met Michael. He looked handsome in his finely tailored brown suit, which blended with the darker brown of his hair.

"Carol, you're up!" he exclaimed, surprised.

"Yes, I know tomorrow is supposed to be my day up but..." His dark eyes conveyed "never mind," and he reached for my hand with the decorum of a gentleman leading me onto a dance floor, placing it in the crook of his elbow.

"Of course. Today is a beautiful day," he finished for me. We walked arm in arm toward the kitchen.

The children came bounding in. "Hi, Mommy!" they both called out. I gave them each a hug. "Hands washed?" I asked. Without a word they headed for the sink. I was happy to see that Donald let his younger sister go first, and I was content that not another reminder of manners was needed by me on that point.



Emma's dining room table was long and the meals longer, when guests liked to sit and talk. While Michael attended to the guests, I excused the children and myself from the table. I couldn't wait to sit

under a tree and feel the warm summer breeze on my face. We carried our blueberry pie outside to an oasis of shade. "Why does food taste more delicious when eaten outdoors?" I wondered. I lifted my head and squinted up at the bright blue sky. The lines of a familiar poem came to mind, the last stanza of Stevenson's "Summer Sun":

*Above the hills, along the blue,
Round the bright air with footing true,
To please the child, to paint the rose,
The gardener of the World, he goes.*

The more carefree days of August were quickly slipping away and September was at our doorstep. I had been planning my second year of home education, scribbling notes while in bed, but I wiped my school slate clean of those thoughts for this Sunday afternoon. Emily was setting up the croquet pins in the grass, so I knew what was coming. Donald took my hand and tugged. "Mom, do you want to play croquet with us? I'm green. Emily's yellow. You can be red again." Croquet was our Sunday game. Outdoors, Donald's sandy hair and frank dark eyes are a striking combination in a lad. Indoors, his hair, like my own, might be called "dirty blond," but in the sunshine it turns to gold.

"Yes, I'll be red again," I said. I followed willingly, making a point to ignore the state of the vegetable garden. It didn't take a close inspection to see that its luscious bounty was ready for more of Emma's and my painstaking preserving. This, too, I erased from my mental "to do" list so that I would not be hindered from savoring the afternoon.