

A Red Girl's Reasoning

“**B**e pretty good to her, Charlie, my boy, or she'll balk sure as shooting.”

That was what old Jimmy Robinson said to his brand new son-in-law, while they waited for the bride to reappear.

“Oh! you bet, there's no danger of much else. I'll be good to her, help me Heaven,” replied Charlie McDonald, brightly.

“Yes, of course you will,” answered the old man, “but don't you forget, there's a good big bit of her mother in her, and,” closing his left eye significantly, “you don't understand these Indians as I do.”

“But I'm just as fond of them, Mr. Robinson,” Charlie said assertively, “and I get on with them too, now, don't I?”

“Yes, pretty well for a town boy; but when you have lived forty years among these people, as I have done; when you have had your wife as long as I have had mine—for there's no getting over it, Christine's disposition is as native as her mother's, every bit—and perhaps when you've owned for eighteen years a daughter as dutiful, as loving, as fearless, and, alas! as obstinate as that little piece you are stealing away from me to-day—I tell you, youngster, you'll know more than you know now. It is kindness for kindness, bullet for bullet, blood for blood. Remember, what you are, she will be,” and the old Hudson Bay trader scrutinized Charlie McDonald's face like a detective.

It was a happy, fair face, good to look at, with a certain ripple of dimples somewhere about the mouth, and eyes that laughed out the very sunniness of their owner's soul. There was not a severe nor yet a weak line anywhere. He was a well-meaning young fellow, happily disposed, and a great favorite with the tribe at Robinson's Post, whither he had gone in the service of the Department of Agriculture, to assist the local agent through the tedium of a long census-taking.

As a boy he had had the Indian relic-hunting craze, as a youth he had studied Indian archaeology and folk-lore, as a man he consummated his predilections for Indianology, by loving, winning and marrying the quiet little daughter of the English trader, who himself had married a native woman twenty years ago. The country was all backwoods, and the Post miles and miles from even the semblance of civilization, and the lonely young Englishman's heart had gone out to the girl who, apart from speaking a very few words of English, was utterly uncivilized and uncultured, but had withal that marvellously innate refinement so universally possessed by the higher tribes of North American Indians.

Like all her race, observant, intuitive, having a horror of ridicule, consequently quick at acquirement and teachable in mental and social habits, she had developed from absolute pagan indifference into a sweet, elderly Christian woman, whose broken English, quiet manner, and still handsome copper-colored face, were the joy of old Robinson's declining years.

He had given their daughter Christine all the advantages of his own learning—which, if truthfully told, was not universal; but the girl had a fair common education, and the native adaptability to progress.

She belonged to neither and still to both types of the cultured Indian. The solemn, silent, almost heavy manner of the one so commingled with the gesticulating Frenchness and vivacity of the other, that one unfamiliar with native Canadian life would find it difficult to determine her nationality.

She looked very pretty to Charles McDonald's loving eyes, as she reappeared in the doorway, holding her mother's hand and saying some happy words of farewell. Personally she looked much the same as her sisters, all Canada through, who are the offspring of red and white parentage—olive-complexioned, gray-eyed, black-haired, with figure slight and delicate, and the wistful, unfathomable expression in her whole face that turns one so heart-sick as they glance at the young Indians of to-day—it is the forerunner too frequently of "the white man's disease," consumption—but McDonald was pathetically in love, and thought her the most beautiful woman he had ever seen in his life.

There had not been much of a wedding ceremony. The priest had cantered through the service in Latin, pronounced the benediction in English, and congratulated the "happy couple" in Indian, as a compliment to the assembled tribe in the little amateur structure that did service at the post as a sanctuary.

But the knot was tied as firmly and indissolubly as if all Charlie McDonald's swell city friends had crushed themselves up against the chancel to congratulate him, and in his heart he was deeply thankful to escape the flower-pelting, white gloves, rice-throwing, and ponderous stupidity of a breakfast, and indeed all the regulation gimcracks of the usual marriage celebrations, and it was with a hand trembling with absolute happiness that he assisted his little Indian wife into the old muddy buckboard

that, hitched to an underbred-looking pony, was to convey them over the first stages of their journey. Then came more adieus, some hand-clasping, old Jimmy Robinson looking very serious just at the last, Mrs. Jimmy, stout, stolid, betraying nothing of visible emotion, and then the pony, rough-shod and shaggy, trudged on, while mutual hand-waves were kept up until the old Hudson Bay Post dropped out of sight, and the buckboard with its lightsome load of hearts deliriously happy, jogged on over the uneven trail.

She was “all the rage” that winter at the provincial capital. The men called her a “deuced fine little woman.” The ladies said she was “just the sweetest wildflower.” Whereas she was really but an ordinary, pale, dark girl who spoke slowly and with a strong accent, who danced fairly well, sang acceptably, and never stirred outside the door without her husband.

Charlie was proud of her; he was proud that she had “taken” so well among his friend, proud that she bore herself so complacently in the drawing-rooms of the wives of pompous Government officials, but doubly proud of her almost abject devotion to him. If ever human being was worshipped that being was Charlie McDonald; it could scarcely have been otherwise, for the almost godlike strength of his passion for that little wife of his would have mastered and melted a far more invincible citadel than an already affectionate woman’s heart.

Favorites socially, McDonald and his wife went everywhere. In fashionable circles she was “new”—a potent charm to acquire popularity, and the little velvet-clad figure was always the centre of interest among all the women in the room. She always dressed in velvet. No woman in Canada, has she but the faintest dash of native blood in her veins, but loves velvets and silks. As beef to the Englishman, wine to the Frenchman, fads to the Yankee, so are velvet and silk to the Indian girl, be she wild as prairie grass, be she on the borders of civilization, or, having stepped within its boundary, mounted the steps of culture even under its superficial heights.

“Such a dolling little appil blossom,” said the wife of a local M.P., who brushed up her etiquette and English once a year at Ottawa. “Does she always laugh so sweetly, and gobble you up with those great big gray eyes of her, when you are togetheah at home, Mr. McDonald? If so, I should think youah pooah brothah would feel himself terrible *de trop*.”

He laughed lightly. “Yes, Mrs. Stuart, there are not two of Christie; she is the same at home and abroad, and as for Joe, he doesn’t mind us a bit; he’s no end fond of her.”

“I’m very glad he is. I always fancied he did not care for her, d’you know.”

If ever a blunt woman existed it was Mrs. Stuart. She really meant nothing, but her remark bothered Charlie. He was fond of his brother, and jealous for Christie’s popularity. So that night when he and Joe were having a pipe, he said:

"I've never asked you yet what you thought of her, Joe." A brief pause, then Joe spoke. "I'm glad she loves you."

"Why?"

"Because that girl has but two possibilities regarding humanity—love or hate."

"Humph! Does she love or hate *you*?"

"Ask her."

"You talk bosh. If she hated you, you'd get out. If she loved you I'd *make* you get out."

Joe McDonald whistled a little, then laughed.

"Now that we are on the subject, I might as well ask—honestly, old man, wouldn't you and Christie prefer keeping house alone to having me always around?"

"Nonsense, sheer nonsense. Why, thunder, man, Christie's no end fond of you, and as for me—you surely don't want assurances from me?"

"No, but I often think a young couple—"

"Young couple be blowed! After a while when they want you and your old surveying chains, and spindle-legged tripod telescope kickshaws, farther west, I venture to say the little woman will cry her eyes out—won't you, Christie?" This last in a higher tone, as through clouds of tobacco smoke he caught sight of his wife passing the doorway.

She entered. "Oh, no, I would not cry; I never do cry, but I would be heart-sore to lose you Joe, and apart from that"—a little wickedly—"you may come in handy for an exchange some day, as Charlie does always say when he hoards up duplicate relics."

"Are Charlie and I duplicates?"

"Well—not exactly"—her head a little to one side, and eyeing them both merrily, while she slipped softly on to the arm of her husband's chair—"but, in the event of Charlie's failing me"—everyone laughed then. The "some day" that she spoke of was nearer than they thought. It came about in this wise.

There was a dance at the Lieutenant-Governor's, and the world and his wife were there. The nobs were in great feather that night, particularly the women, who flaunted about in new gowns and much splendor. Christie McDonald had a new gown also, but wore it with the utmost unconcern, and if she heard any of the flattering remarks made about her she at least appeared to disregard them.

"I never dreamed you could wear blue so splendidly," said Captain Logan, as they sat out a dance together.

"Indeed she can, though," interposed Mrs. Stuart, halting in one of her gracious sweeps down the room with her husband's private secretary.

"Don't shout so, captain. I can hear every sentence you uttah—of course Mrs. McDonald can wear blue—she has a morning gown of cadet blue that she is a picture in."

"You are both very kind," said Christie. "I like blue; it is the color of all the Hudson's Bay posts, and the factor's residence is always decorated in blue."

"Is it really? How interesting—do tell us some more of your old home, Mrs. McDonald; you so seldom speak of your life at the post, and we fellows so often wish

to hear of it all,” said Logan eagerly.

“Why do you not ask me of it, then?”

“Well—er, I’m sure I don’t know; I’m fully interested in the Ind—in your people—your mother’s people, I mean, but it always seems so personal, I suppose; and—a—a—”

“Perhaps you are, like all other white people, afraid to mention my nationality to me.”

The captain winced and Mrs. Stuart laughed uneasily. Joe McDonald was not far off, and he was listening, and chuckling, and saying to himself, “That’s you, Christie, lay ‘em out; it won’t hurt ‘em to know how they appear once in a while.”

“Well, Captain Logan,” she was saying, “what is it you would like to hear—of my people, or my parents, or myself?”

“All, all, my dear,” cried Mrs. Stuart clamorously. “I’ll speak for him—tell us of yourself and your mother—your father is delightful, I am sure—but then he is only an ordinary Englishman, not half as interesting as a foreigner, or—or, perhaps I should say, a native.”

Christie laughed. “Yes,” she said, “my father often teases my mother now about how *very* native she was when he married her; then, how could she have been otherwise? She did not know a word of English, and there was not another English-speaking person besides my father and his two companions within sixty miles.”

“Two companions, eh? one a Catholic priest and the other a wine merchant, I suppose, and with your father in the Hudson Bay, they were good representatives of the pioneers in the New World,” remarked Logan, waggishly.

“Oh, no, they were all Hudson Bay men. There were no rumsellers and no missionaries in that part of the country then.”

Mrs. Stuart looked puzzled. “No *missionaries?*” she repeated with an odd intonation.

Christie’s insight was quick. There was a peculiar expression of interrogation in the eyes of her listeners, and the girl’s blood leapt angrily up into her temples as she said hurriedly, “I know what you mean; I know what you are thinking. You were wondering how my parents were married—”

“Well—er, my dear, it seems peculiar—if there was no priest, and no magistrate, why—a—” Mrs. Stuart paused awkwardly.

“The marriage was performed by Indian rites,” said Christie.

“Oh, do tell me about it; is the ceremony very interesting and quaint—are your chieftains anything like Buddhist priests?” It was Logan who spoke.

“Why, no,” said the girl in amazement at that gentleman’s ignorance. “There is no ceremony at all, save a feast. The two people just agree to live only with and for each other, and the man takes his wife to his home, just as you do. There is no ritual to bind them; they need none; an Indian’s word was his law in those days, you know.”

Mrs. Stuart stepped backwards. “Ah!” was all she said. Logan removed his eye-

glass and stared blankly at Christie. "And did McDonald marry you in this singular fashion?" He questioned.

"Oh, no, we were married by Father O'Leary. Why do you ask?"

"Because if he had, I'd have blown his brain out to-morrow."

Mrs. Stuart's partner, who had hitherto been silent, coughed and began to twirl his cuff stud nervously, but nobody took any notice of him. Christie had risen, slowly, ominously—risen, with the dignity and pride of an empress.

"Captain Logan," she said, "what do you dare to say to me? What do you dare to mean? Do you presume to think it would not have been lawful for Charlie to marry me according to my people's rites? Do you for one instant dare to question that my parents were not as legally—"

"Don't, dear, don't," interrupted Mrs. Stuart hurriedly; "it is bad enough now, goodness knows; don't make—" Then she broke off blindly. Christie's eyes glared at the mumbling woman, at her uneasy partner, at the horrified captain. Then they rested on the McDonald brothers, who stood within earshot, Joe's face scarlet, her husband's white as ashes, with something in his eyes she had never seen before. It was Joe who saved the situation.

Stepping quickly across towards his sister-in-law, he offered her his arm, saying, "The next dance is ours, I think, Christie."

Then Logan pulled himself together, and attempted to carry Mrs. Stuart off for the waltz, but for once in her life that lady had lost her head. "It is shocking!" she said, "outrageously shocking! I wonder if they told Mr. McDonald before he married her!" Then looking hurriedly round, she too saw the young husband's face—and knew that they had not.

"Humph! deuced nice kettle of fish—and poor old Charlie has always thought so much of honorable birth."

Logan thought he spoke in an undertone, but "poor old Charlie" heard him. He followed his wife and brother across the room. "Joe," he said, "will you see that a trap is called?" Then to Christie, "Joe will see that you get home all right." He wheeled on his heel then and left the ball-room.

Joe *did* see.

He tucked a poor, shivering, pallid little woman into a cab, and wound her bare throat up in the scarlet velvet cloak that was hanging uselessly over her arm. She crouched down beside him, saying, "I am so cold, Joe; I am so cold," but she did not seem to know enough to wrap herself up. Joe felt all through this long drive that nothing this side of Heaven would be so good as to die, and he was glad when the little voice at his elbow said, "What is he so angry at, Joe?"

"I don't know exactly, dear," he said gently, "but I think it was what you said about this Indian marriage."

"But why should I not have said it? Is there anything wrong about it?" she asked pitifully.

“Nothing, that I can see—there was no other way; but Charlie is very angry, and you must be brave and forgiving with him, Christie, dear.”

“But I did never see him like that before, did you?”

“Once.”

“When?”

“Oh, at college, one day, a boy tore his prayer book in half, and threw it into the grate, just to be mean, you know. Our mother had given it to him at his confirmation.”

“And did he look so?”

“About, but it all blew over in a day—Charlie’s tempers are short and brisk. Just don’t take any notice of him; run off to bed, and he’ll have forgotten it by the morning.”

They reached home at last. Christie said goodnight quietly, going directly to her room. Joe went to his room also, filled a pipe and smoked for an hour. Across the passage he could hear her slippered feet pacing up and down, up and down the length of her apartment. There was something panther-like in those restless footfalls, a meaning velvetytness that made him shiver, and again he wished he were dead—or elsewhere.

After a time the hall door opened, and someone came upstairs, along the passage, and to the little woman’s room. As he entered, she turned and faced him.

“Christie,” he said harshly, “do you know what you have done?”

“Yes,” taking a step nearer him, her whole soul springing up into her eyes, “I have angered you, Charlie, and—”

“Angered me? You have disgraced me; and, moreover, you have disgraced yourself and both your parents.”

“*Disgraced?*”

“Yes, *disgraced*; you have literally declared to the whole city that your father and mother were never married, and that you are the child of—what shall we call it—love? certainly not legality.”

Across the hallway sat Joe McDonald, his blood freezing; but it leapt into every vein like fire at the awful anguish in the little voice that cried simply, “Oh! Charlie!”

“How could you do it, how could you do it, Christie, without shame either for yourself or for me, let alone your parents?”

The voice was like an angry demon’s—not a trace was there in it of the yellow-haired, blue-eyed, laughing-lipped boy who had driven away so gaily to the dance five hours before.

“Shame? Why should I be ashamed of the rites of my people any more than you should be ashamed of the customs of yours—of a marriage more sacred and holy than half of your white man’s mockeries.”

It was the voice of another nature in the girl—the love and the pleading were dead in it.

“Do you mean to tell me, Charlie—you who have studied my race and their laws for years—do you mean to tell me that, because there was no priest and no magistrate, my mother was not married? Do you mean to say that all my forefathers, for hundreds

of years back, have been illegally born? If so, you blacken my ancestry beyond—beyond—beyond all reason.”

“No, Christie, I would not be so brutal as that; but your father and mother live in more civilized times. Father O’Leary has been at the post for nearly twenty years. Why was not your father straight enough to have the ceremony performed when he *did* get the chance?”

The girl turned upon him with the face of a fury. “Do you suppose,” she almost hissed, “that my mother would be married according to your *white* rites after she had been five years a wife, and I had been born in the meantime? No, a thousand times I say, *no*. When the priest came with his notions of Christianizing, and talked to them of re-marriage by the Church, my mother arose and said, ‘Never—never—I have never had but this one husband; he has had none but me for wife, and to have you re-marry us would be to say as much to the whole world as that we had never been married before. [Fact.] You go away; I do not ask that *your* people be re-married; talk not so to me. I *am* married, and you or the Church cannot do or undo it.’”

“Your father was a fool not to insist upon the law, and so was the priest.”

“Law? *My* people have *no* priest, and my nation cringes not to law. Our priest is purity, and our law is honor. Priest? Was there a *priest* at the most holy marriage know to humanity—that stainless marriage whose offspring is the God you white men told my pagan mother of?”

“Christie—you are *worse* than blasphemous; such a profane remark shows how little you understand the sanctity of the Christian faith—”

“I know what I *do* understand; it is that you are hating me because I told some of the beautiful customs of my people to Mrs. Stuart and those men.”

“Pooh! who cares for them? It is not them; the trouble is they won’t keep their mouths shut. Logan’s a cad and will toss the whole tale about at the club to-morrow night; and as for the Stuart woman, I’d like to know how I’m going to take you to Ottawa for presentation and the opening, while she is blabbing the whole miserable scandal in every drawing-room, and I’ll be pointed out as a romantic fool, and you—as worse; I *can’t* understand why your father didn’t tell me before we were married; I at least might have warned you never to mention it.” Something of recklessness rang up through his voice, just as the panther-likeness crept up from her footsteps and couched herself in hers. She spoke in tones quiet, soft, deadly.

“Before we were married! Oh! Charlie, would it have—made—any—difference?”

“God knows,” he said, throwing himself into a chair, his blonde hair ruffled and wet. It was the only boyish thing about him now.

She walked towards him, then halted in the centre of the room. “Charlie McDonald,” she said, and it was as if a stone had spoken, “look up.” He raised his head, startled by her tone. There was a threat in her eyes that, had his rage been less courageous, his pride less bitterly wounded, would have cowed him.

“There was no such time as that before our marriage, for we *are not married now*. Stop,” she said, outstretching her palms against him as he sprang to his feet, “I tell you we are not married. Why should I recognize the rites of your nation when you do not acknowledge the rites of mine? According to your own words, my parents should have gone through your church ceremony as well as through an Indian contract; according to *my* words, *we* should go through an Indian contract as well as through a church marriage. If their union is illegal, so is ours. If you think my father is living in dishonor with my mother, my people will think I am living in dishonor with you. How do I know when another nation will come and conquer you as you white men conquered us? And they will have another marriage rite to perform, and they will tell us another truth, that you are not my husband, that you are but disgracing and dishonoring me, that you are keeping me here, not as your wife, but as your—your—*squaw*.”

The terrible word had never passed her lips before, and the blood stained her face to her very temples. She snatched off her wedding ring and tossed it across the room, saying scornfully, “That thing is as empty to me as the Indian rites to you.”

He caught her by the wrists; his small white teeth were locked tightly, his blue eyes blazed into hers.

“Christine, do you dare doubt my honor towards you? *you*, whom I should have died for; do you *dare* to think I have kept you here, not as my wife, but—”

“Oh, God! You are hurting me; you are breaking my arm,” she gasped.

The door was flung open, and Joe McDonald’s sinewy hands clinched like vices on his brother’s shoulders.

“Charlie, you’re mad, mad as the devil. Let go of her this minute.”

The girl staggered backwards as the iron fingers loosed her wrists. “Oh! Joe,” she cried, “I am not his wife, and he says I am born—nameless.”

“Here,” said Joe, shoving his brother towards the door. “Go downstairs till you can collect your senses. If ever a being acted like an infernal fool, you’re the man.”

The young husband looked from one to the other, dazed by his wife’s insult, abandoned to a fit of ridiculously childish temper. Blind as he was with passion, he remembered long afterwards seeing them standing there, his brother’s face darkened with a scowl of anger—his wife, clad in the mockery of her ball dress, her scarlet velvet cloak half covering her bare brown neck and arms, her eyes like flames of fire, her face like a piece of sculptured graystone.

Without a word he flung himself furiously from the room, and immediately afterwards they heard the heavy hall door bang behind him.

“Can I do anything for you, Christie?” asked her brother-in-law calmly.

“No, thank you—unless—I think I would like a drink of water, please.”

He brought her up a goblet filled with wine; her hand did not even tremble as she took it. As for Joe, a demon arose in his soul as he noticed she kept her wrists covered.

“Do you think he will come back?” she said.

“Oh, yes, of course; he’ll be all right in the morning. Now go to bed like a good little girl, and—and, I say, Christie, you can call me if you want anything; I’ll be right here, you know.”

“Thank you, Joe; you are kind—and good.”

He returned then to his apartment. His pipe was out, but he picked up a newspaper instead, threw himself into an armchair, and in a half-hour was in the land of dreams.

When Charlie came home in the morning, after a six-mile walk into the country and back again, his foolish anger was dead and buried. Logan’s “Poor old Charlie” did not ring so distinctly in his ears. Mrs. Stuart’s horrified expression had faded considerably from his recollection. He thought only of that surprisingly tall, dark girl, whose eyes looked like coals, whose voice pierced him like a flint-tipped arrow. Ah, well, they would never quarrel again like that, he told himself. She loved him so, and would forgive him after he had talked quietly to her, and told her what an ass he was. She was simple-minded and awfully ignorant to pitch those old Indian laws at him in her fury, but he could not blame her; oh, no, he could not for one moment blame her. He had been terribly severe and unreasonable, and the horrid McDonald temper had got the better of him; and he loved her so. Oh! He loved her so! She would surely feel that, and forgive him, and— He went straight to his wife’s room. The blue velvet evening dress lay on the chair into which he had thrown himself when he doomed his life’s happiness by those two words, “God knows.” A bunch of dead daffodils and her slippers were on the floor, everything—but Christie.

He went to his brother’s bedroom door.

“Joe,” he called, rapping nervously thereon; “Joe, wake up; where’s Christie, d’you know?”

“Good Lord, no,” gasped that youth, springing out of his armchair and opening the door. As he did so a note fell from off the handle. Charlie’s face blanched to his very hair while Joe read aloud, his voice weakening at every word:

“DEAR OLD JOE,—I went into your room at daylight to get that picture of the Post on your bookshelves. I hope you do not mind, but I kissed your hair while your slept; it was so curly, and yellow, and soft, just like his. Good-bye, Joe.

CHRISTIE.”

And when Joe looked into his brother’s face and saw the anguish settle in those laughing blue eyes, the despair that drove the dimples away from that almost girlish mouth; when he realized that this boy was but four-and-twenty years old, and that all his future was perhaps darkened and shadowed for ever, a great, deep sorrow arose in his heart, and he forgot all things, all but the agony that rang up through the voice of the fair, handsome lad as he staggered forward, crying, “Oh! Joe—what shall I do—what shall I do!”

It was months and months before he found her, but during all that time he had never known a hopeless moment; discouraged he often was, but despondent, never. The sunniness of his ever-boyish heart radiated with warmth that would have flooded a much deeper gloom than that which settled within his eager young life. Suffer? ah! yes, he suffered, not with locked teeth and stony stoicism, not with the masterful self-command, the reserve, the conquered bitterness of the still-water sort of nature, that is supposed to run to such depths. He tried to be bright, and his sweet old boyish self. He would laugh sometimes in a pitiful, pathetic fashion. He took to petting dogs, looking into their large, solemn eyes with his wistful, questioning blue ones; he would kiss them, as women sometimes do, and call them “dear old fellow,” in tones that had tears; and once in the course of his travels while at a little way-station, he discovered a huge St. Bernard imprisoned by some mischance in an empty freight car; the animal was nearly dead from starvation, and it seemed to salve his own sick heart to rescue back the dog’s life. Nobody claimed the big starving creature, the train hands knew nothing of its owner, and gladly handed it over to its deliverer. “Hudson,” he called it, and afterwards when Joe McDonald would relate the story of his brother’s life he invariably terminated it with, “And I really believe that big lumbering brute saved him.” From what, he was never to say.

But all things end, and he heard of her at last. She had never returned to the Post, as he at first thought she would, but had gone to the little town of B—, in Ontario, where she was making her living at embroidery and plain sewing.

The September sun had set redly when at last he reached the outskirts of the town, opened up the wicket gate, and walked up the weedy, unkept path leading to the cottage where she lodged.

Even through the twilight, he could see her there, leaning on the rail of the verandah—oddly enough she had about her shoulders the scarlet velvet cloak she wore when he had flung himself so madly from the room that night.

The moment the lad saw her his heart swelled with a sudden heat, burning moisture leapt into his eyes, and clogged his long, boyish lashes. He bounded up the steps—“Christie,” he said, and the word scorched his lips like audible flame.

She turned to him, and for a second stood magnetized by his passionately wistful face; her peculiar grayish eyes seemed to drink the very life of his unquenchable love, though the tears that suddenly sprang into his seemed to absorb every pulse in his body through those hungry, pleading eyes of his that had, oh! so often been blinded by her kisses when once her whole world lay in their blue depths.

“You will come back to me, Christie, my wife? My wife, you will let me love you again?”

She gave a singular little gasp, and shook her head. “Don’t, oh! don’t,” he cried piteously. “You will come to me, dear? it is all such a bitter mistake—I did not understand. Oh! Christie, I did not understand, and you’ll forgive me, and love me again, won’t you—won’t you?”

“No,” said the girl with quick, indrawn breath.

He dashed the back of his hand across his wet eyelids. His lips were growing numb, and he bungled over the monosyllable “Why?”

“I do not like you,” she answered quietly.

“God! Oh! God, what is there left?”

She did not appear to hear the heart-break in his voice; she stood like one wrapped in sombre thought; no blaze, no tear, nothing in her eyes; no hardness, no tenderness about her mouth. The wind was blowing her cloak aside, and the only visible human life in her whole body was once when he spoke the muscles of her brown arm seemed to contract.

“But, darling, you are mine—*mine*—we are husband and wife! Oh, heaven, you *must* love me, and you *must* come to me again.”

“You cannot *make* me come,” said the icy voice, “neither church, nor law, nor even”—and the vice softened—“nor even love can make a slave of a red girl!”

“Heaven forbid it,” he faltered. “No, Christie, I will never claim you without your love. What reunion would that be? But oh, Christie, you are lying to me, you are lying to yourself, you are lying to heaven.”

She did not move. If only he could touch her he felt as sure of her yielding as he felt sure there was a hereafter. The memory of the times when he had but to lay his hand on her hair to call a most passionate response from her filled his heart with a torture that choked all words before they reached his lips; at the thought of those days he forgot she was unapproachable, forgot how forbidding were her eyes, how stony her lips. Flinging himself forward, his knee on the chair at her side, his face pressed hardly in the folds of the cloak on her shoulder, he clasped his arms about her with a boyish petulance, saying, “Christie, Christie, my little girl wife, I love you, I love you, and you are killing me.”

She quivered from head to foot as his fair, wavy hair brushed her neck, his despairing face sank lower until his cheek, hot as fire, rested on the cool, olive flesh of her arm. A warm moisture oozed up through her skin, and as he felt its glow he looked up. Her teeth, white and cold, were locked over her under lip, and her eyes were as gray stones.

Not murderers alone know the agony of a death sentence.

“Is it all useless? all useless, dear?” he said, with lips starving for hers.

“All useless,” she repeated. “I have no love for you now. You forfeited me and my heart months ago, when you said *those two words*.”

His arms fell away from her wearily, he arose mechanically, he placed his little gray checked cap on the back of his yellow curls, the old-time laughter was dead in the blue eyes that now looked scared and haunted, the boyishness and the dimples crept away for ever from the lips that quivered like a child’s; he turned from her, but she had looked once into his face as the Law Giver must have looked at the land of Canaan outspread at his feet. She watched him go down the long path and through the picket

gate, she watched the big yellowish dog that had waited for him lumber up on to its feet—stretch—then follow him. She was conscious of but two things, the vengeful lie in her soul, and a little space on her arm that his wet lashes had brushed.

It was hours afterwards when he reached his room. He had said nothing, done nothing—what use were words or deeds? Old Jimmy Robinson was right; she had “balked” sure enough.

What a bare, hotelish room it was! He tossed off his coat and sat for ten minutes looking blankly at the sputtering gas jet. Then his whole life, desolate as a desert, loomed up before him with appalling distinctness. Throwing himself on the floor beside his bed, with clasped hands and arms outstretched on the white counterpane, he sobbed. “Oh! God, dear God, I thought you loved me; I thought you’d let me have her again, but you must be tired of me, tired of loving me too. I’ve nothing left now, nothing! it doesn’t seem that I even have you to-night.”

He lifted his face then, for his dog, big and clumsy and yellow, was licking at his sleeve.

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