Writing Back Reader

NBE3U, Writing Back. NBE3U, Writing Back, Writing Back Reader

Public domain texts by three Indigenous writers of a century ago: E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake), Mohawk; Zitkála-Šá (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin), Yankton Dakota; and Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa), Santee Dakota; with one sonnet by Duncan Campbell Scott for comparison. Texts follow the original editions, lightly modernized in typography. Excerpts are marked […].

Historical voices

Johnson, Zitkála-Šá and Eastman are historical writers (they died in 1913, 1938 and 1939). We read them as historical context: Indigenous writers who answered settler audiences a century ago. The course's contemporary voices are First Nations, Métis and Inuit creators chosen by the teacher.

Zitkála-Šá (Yankton Dakota) and Charles Eastman (Santee Dakota) wrote in the United States. Dakota homelands cross today's border, and Eastman spent his boyhood in exile in Manitoba after the U.S.–Dakota War of 1862. Their accounts of U.S. boarding schools are context for, not the same as, Canada's residential school system.

A note on language

Historical texts use the words of their time, including terms now considered offensive (for example, “Red-skin,” “savage,” “squaw,” “half-breed,” “Eskimo”). We quote accurately when analysing, explain why these terms are harmful, and use today's terms (First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Indigenous, or the specific Nation) in our own words. Readers may say “[skip]” instead of reading a slur aloud.

Care

This course discusses colonization, residential schools and their effects. Some students and families carry this history personally. Support: Hope for Wellness Help Line (for Indigenous people across Canada, 24/7, by phone or online chat at hopeforwellness.ca; English and French, with Cree, Ojibway and Inuktut on request at certain times), 1-855-242-3310; Kids Help Phone, 1-800-668-6868 or text 686868; 9-8-8 Suicide Crisis Helpline (call or text 988); National Indian Residential School Crisis Line, 1-866-925-4419.

Text	Used in
Johnson, “A Cry from an Indian Wife” (1885)	Lessons 1, 2
Johnson, “The Cattle Thief” (The White Wampum, 1895)	Lesson 3
Riel at his sentencing, as reported (1885)	Lesson 2
Johnson, “A Red Girl's Reasoning” (1893)	Lesson 4
Johnson, “As It Was in the Beginning” (1899)	Lesson 5

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Text	Used in
Zitkála-Šá, from “Impressions of an Indian Childhood” (1900)	Lesson 6
Zitkála-Šá, from “The School Days of an Indian Girl” (1900)	Lessons 7, 8
Zitkála-Šá, from “An Indian Teacher Among Indians” (1900)	Lesson 9
Eastman, from Indian Boyhood (1902), chapters 1 and 12	Lessons 10, 11
Scott, “The Onondaga Madonna” (1898)	Lesson 11
Zitkála-Šá, “America's Indian Problem” (1921)	Lesson 12

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A Cry from an Indian Wife

E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake). Written in 1885; from Flint and Feather (1912).

My forest brave, my Red-skin love, farewell; We may not meet to-morrow; who can tell What mighty ills befall our little band, Or what you'll suffer from the white man's hand? Here is your knife! I thought 'twas sheathed for aye. No roaming bison calls for it to-day; No hide of prairie cattle will it maim; The plains are bare, it seeks a nobler game: 'Twill drink the life-blood of a soldier host. Go; rise and strike, no matter what the cost. Yet stay. Revolt not at the Union Jack, Nor raise Thy hand against this stripling pack Of white-faced warriors, marching West to quell Our fallen tribe that rises to rebel. They all are young and beautiful and good; Curse to the war that drinks their harmless blood. Curse to the fate that brought them from the East To be our chiefs—to make our nation least That breathes the air of this vast continent. Still their new rule and council is well meant. They but forget we Indians owned the land From ocean unto ocean; that they stand Upon a soil that centuries agone Was our sole kingdom and our right alone. They never think how they would feel to-day, If some great nation came from far away, Wresting their country from their hapless braves, Giving what they gave us—but wars and graves. Then go and strike for liberty and life, And bring back honour to your Indian wife. Your wife? Ah, what of that, who cares for me? Who pities my poor love and agony? What white-robed priest prays for your safety here, As prayer is said for every volunteer That swells the ranks that Canada sends out? Who prays for vict'ry for the Indian scout? Who prays for our poor nation lying low? None—therefore take your tomahawk and go. My heart may break and burn into its core, But I am strong to bid you go to war. Yet stay, my heart is not the only one That grieves the loss of husband and of son; Think of the mothers o'er the inland seas; Think of the pale-faced maiden on her knees; One pleads her God to guard some sweet-faced child That marches on toward the North-West wild. The other prays to shield her love from harm, To strengthen his young, proud uplifted arm. Ah, how her white face quivers thus to think, Your tomahawk his life's best blood will drink. She never thinks of my wild aching breast, Nor prays for your dark face and eagle crest Endangered by a thousand rifle balls, My heart the target if my warrior falls. O! coward self I hesitate no more; Go forth, and win the glories of the war. Go forth, nor bend to greed of white men's hands, By right, by birth we Indians own these lands, Though starved, crushed, plundered, lies our nation low... Perhaps the white man's God has willed it so.

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The Cattle Thief

E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake). From The White Wampum (1895) and Flint and Feather (1912). Lines 30 to 35 describe violence against a body.

They were coming across the prairie, they were galloping hard and fast; For the eyes of those desperate riders had sighted their man at last— Sighted him off to Eastward, where the Cree encampment lay, Where the cotton woods fringed the river, miles and miles away. Mistake him? Never! Mistake him? the famous Eagle Chief! That terror to all the settlers, that desperate Cattle Thief— That monstrous, fearless Indian, who lorded it over the plain, Who thieved and raided, and scouted, who rode like a hurricane! But they've tracked him across the prairie; they've followed him hard and fast; For those desperate English settlers have sighted their man at last.

Up they wheeled to the tepees, all their British blood aflame, Bent on bullets and bloodshed, bent on bringing down their game; But they searched in vain for the Cattle Thief: that lion had left his lair, And they cursed like a troop of demons— for the women alone were there. "The sneaking Indian coward," they hissed; "he hides while yet he can; He'll come in the night for cattle, but he's scared to face a man." "Never!" and up from the cotton woods rang the voice of Eagle Chief; And right out into the open stepped, unarmed, the Cattle Thief. Was that the game they had coveted? Scarce fifty years had rolled Over that fleshless, hungry frame, starved to the bone and old; Over that wrinkled, tawny skin, unfed by the warmth of blood. Over those hungry, hollow eyes that glared for the sight of food.

He turned, like a hunted lion: "I know not fear," said he; And the words outleapt from his shrunken lips in the language of the Cree. "I'll fight you, white-skins, one by one, till I kill you all," he said; But the threat was scarcely uttered, ere a dozen balls of lead Whizzed through the air about him like a shower of metal rain, And the gaunt old Indian Cattle Thief dropped dead on the open plain. And that band of cursing settlers gave one triumphant yell, And rushed like a pack of demons on the body that writhed and fell. "Cut the fiend up into inches, throw his carcass on the plain; Let the wolves eat the cursed Indian, he'd have treated us the same." A dozen hands responded, a dozen knives gleamed high, But the first stroke was arrested by a woman's strange, wild cry. And out into the open, with a courage past belief, She dashed, and spread her blanket o'er the corpse of the Cattle Thief; And the words outleapt from her shrunken lips in the language of the Cree, "If you mean to touch that body, you must cut your way through me." And that band of cursing settlers dropped backward one by one, For they knew that an Indian woman roused, was a woman to let alone. And then she raved in a frenzy that they scarcely understood, Raved of the wrongs she had suffered since her earliest babyhood: "Stand back, stand back, you white-skins, touch that dead man to your shame; You have stolen my father's spirit, but his body I only claim. You have killed him, but you shall not dare to touch him now he's dead. You have cursed, and called him a Cattle Thief, though you robbed him first of bread— Robbed him and robbed my people—look there, at that shrunken face, Starved with a hollow hunger, we owe to you and your race. What have you left to us of land, what have you left of game, What have you brought but evil, and curses since you came? How have you paid us for our game? how paid us for our land? By a book, to save our souls from the sins you brought in your other hand. Go back with your new religion, we never have understood Your robbing an Indian's body, and mocking his soul with food. Go back with your new religion, and find—if find you can— The honest man you have ever made from out a starving man. You say your cattle are not ours, your meat is not our meat; When you pay for the land you live in, we'll pay for the meat we eat. Give back our land and our country, give back our herds of game; Give back the furs and the forests that were ours before you came; Give back the peace and the plenty. Then come with your new belief, And blame, if you dare, the hunger that drove him to be a thief."

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Louis Riel at His Sentencing, as Reported

From The Story of Louis Riel: The Rebel Chief (Toronto, 1885), attributed to J. E. Collins, an author hostile to Riel. Riel spoke in Regina on August 1, 1885; these are a reporter's summaries of his words, not his own sentences. See Lesson 2.

He said that if he had to die for what had taken place, it would be a consolation to his wife and to his friends to know that he had not died in vain. In years to come people will look at Manitoba and say that Riel helped the dwellers of those fertile plains to obtain the benefits they now enjoy.

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A Red Girl's Reasoning

E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake). First published 1893; from The Moccasin Maker (1913).

“Be 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 dispositioned, 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 Frenchiness 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

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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.

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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.

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“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

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the length of her apartment. There was something panther-like in those restless footfalls, a meaning velvetyness 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

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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 rumpled 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.”

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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.

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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.

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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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As It Was in the Beginning

E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake). First published 1899; from The Moccasin Maker (1913). The story ends in a killing; read with care.

They account for it by the fact that I am a Redskin, but I am something else, too—I am a woman.

I remember the first time I saw him. He came up the trail with some Hudson's Bay trappers, and they stopped at the door of my father's tepee. He seemed even then, fourteen years ago, an old man; his hair seemed just as thin and white, his hands just as trembling and fleshless as they were a month since, when I saw him for what I pray his God is the last time.

My father sat in the tepee, polishing buffalo horns and smoking; my mother, wrapped in her blanket, crouched over her quill-work, on the buffalo-skin at his side; I was lounging at the doorway, idling, watching, as I always watched, the thin, distant line of sky and prairie; wondering, as I always wondered, what lay beyond it. Then he came, this gentle old man with his white hair and thin, pale face. He wore a long black coat, which I now know was the sign of his office, and he carried a black leather-covered book, which, in all the years I have known him, I have never seen him without.

The trappers explained to my father who he was, the Great Teacher, the heart's Medicine Man, the "Blackcoat" we had heard of, who brought peace where there was war, and the magic of whose black book brought greater things than all the Happy Hunting Grounds of our ancestors.

He told us many things that day, for he could speak the Cree tongue, and my father listened, and listened, and when at last they left us, my father said for him to come and sit within the tepee again.

He came, all the time he came, and my father welcomed him, but my mother always sat in silence at work with the quills; my mother never liked the Great "Blackcoat."

His stories fascinated me. I used to listen intently to the tale of the strange new place he called "heaven," of the gold crown, of the white dress, of the great music; and then he would tell of that other strange place—hell. My father and I hated it; we feared it, we dreamt of it, we trembled at it. Oh, if the "Blackcoat" would only cease to talk of it! Now I know he saw its effect upon us, and he used it as a whip to lash us into his new religion, but even then my mother must have known, for each time he left the tepee she would watch him going slowly away across the prairie; then when he was disappearing into the far horizon she would laugh scornfully, and say:

"If the white man made this Blackcoat's hell, let him go to it. It is for the man who found it first. No hell for Indians, just Happy Hunting Grounds. Blackcoat can't scare me."

And then, after weeks had passed, one day as he stood at the tepee door he laid his white, old hand on my head and said to my father: "Give me this little girl, chief. Let me take her to the mission school; let me keep her, and teach her of the great God and His eternal heaven. She will grow to be a noble woman, and return perhaps to bring her people to the Christ."

My mother's eyes snapped. "No," she said. It was the first word she ever spoke to the "Blackcoat." My father sat and smoked. At the end of a half-hour he said:

"I am an old man, Blackcoat. I shall not leave the God of my fathers. I like not your strange God's ways—all of them. I like not His two new places for me when I am dead. Take the child, Blackcoat, and save her from hell."

* * * * *

The first grief of my life was when we reached the mission. They took my buckskin dress off, saying I was now a little Christian girl and must dress like all the white people at the mission. Oh, how I hated that stiff new calico dress and those leather shoes. But, little as I was, I said nothing, only thought of the time when I should be grown, and do as my mother did, and wear the buckskins and the blanket.

My next serious grief was when I began to speak the English, that they forbade me to use any Cree words whatever. The rule of the school was that any child heard using its native tongue must get a slight punishment. I never understood it, I cannot understand it now, why the use of my dear Cree tongue could be a matter for correction or an action deserving punishment.

She was strict, the matron of the school, but only justly so, for she had a heart and a face like her brother's, the "Blackcoat." I had long since ceased to call him that. The trappers at the post called him "St. Paul," because, they told

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me, of his self-sacrificing life, his kindly deeds, his rarely beautiful old face; so I, too, called him “St. Paul,” thought oftener “Father Paul,” though he never liked the latter title, for he was a Protestant. But as I was his pet, his darling of the whole school, he let me speak of him as I would, knowing it was but my heart speaking in love. His sister was a widow, and mother to a laughing yellow-haired boy of about my own age, who was my constant playmate and who taught me much of English in his own childish way. I used to be fond of this child, just as I was fond of his mother and of his uncle, my “Father Paul,” but as my girlhood passed away, as womanhood came upon me, I got strangely wearied of them all; I longed, oh, God, how I longed for the old wild life! It came with my womanhood, with my years.

What mattered it to me now that they had taught me all their ways?—their tricks of dress, their reading, their writing, their books. What mattered it that “Father Paul” loved me, that the traders at the post called me pretty, that I was a pet of all, from the factor to the poorest trapper in the service? I wanted my own people, my own old life, my blood called out for it, but they always said I must not return to my father’s tepee. I heard them talk amongst themselves of keeping me away from pagan influences; they told each other that if I returned to the prairies, the tepees, I would degenerate, slip back to paganism, as other girls had done; marry, perhaps, with a pagan—and all their years of labor and teaching would be lost.

I said nothing, but I waited. And then one night the feeling overcame me. I was in the Hudson’s Bay store when an Indian came in from the north with a large pack of buckskin. As they unrolled it a dash of its insinuating odor filled the store. I went over and leaned above the skins a second, then buried my face in them, swallowing, drinking the fragrance of them, that went to my head like wine. Oh, the wild wonder of that wood-smoked tan, the subtilty of it, the untamed smell of it! I drank it into my lungs, my innermost being was saturated with it, till my mind reeled and my heart seemed twisted with a physical agony. My childhood recollections rushed upon me, devoured me. I left the store in a strange, calm frenzy, and going rapidly to the mission house I confronted my Father Paul and demanded to be allowed to go “home,” if only for a day. He received the request with the same refusal and the same gentle sigh that I had so often been greeted with, but this time the desire, the smoke-tan, the heart-ache, never lessened.

Night after night I would steal away by myself and go to the border of the village to watch the sun set in the foothills, to gaze at the far line of sky and prairie, to long and long for my father’s lodge. And Laurence—always Laurence—my fair-haired, laughing, child playmate, would come calling and calling for me: “Esther, where are you? We miss you; come in, Esther, come in with me.” And if I did not turn at once to him and follow, he would come and place his strong hands on my shoulders and laugh into my eyes and say, “Truant, truant, Esther; can’t we make you happy?”

My old childhood playmate had vanished years ago. He was a tall, slender young man now, handsome as a young chief, but with laughing blue eyes, and always those yellow curls about his temples. He was my solace in my half-exile, my comrade, my brother, until one night it was, “Esther, Esther, can’t I make you happy?”

I did not answer him; only looked out across the plains and thought of the tepees. He came close, close. He locked his arms about me, and with my face pressed up to his throat he stood silent. I felt the blood from my heart sweep to my very finger-tips. I loved him. O God, how I loved him! In a wild, blind instant it all came, just because he held me so and was whispering brokenly, “Don’t leave me, don’t leave me, Esther; my Esther, my child-love, my playmate, my girl-comrade, my little Cree sweetheart, will you go away to your people, or stay, stay for me, for my arms, as I have you now?”

No more, no more the tepees; no more the wild stretch of prairie, the intoxicating fragrance of the smoke-tanned buckskin; no more the bed of buffalo hide, the soft, silent moccasin; no more the dark faces of my people, the dulcet cadence of the sweet Cree tongue—only this man, this fair, proud, tender man who held me in his arms, in his heart. My soul prayed his great white God, in that moment, that He would let me have only this. It was twilight when we re-entered the mission gate. We were both excited, feverish. Father Paul was reading evening prayers in the large room beyond the hallway; his soft, saint-like voice stole beyond the doors, like a benediction upon us. I went noiselessly upstairs to my own room and sat there undisturbed for hours.

The clock downstairs struck one, startling me from my dreams of happiness, and at the same moment a flash of light attracted me. My room was in an angle of the building, and my window looked almost directly down into those of Father Paul’s study, into which at that instant he was entering, carrying a lamp. “Why, Laurence,” I heard him exclaim, “what are you doing here? I thought, my boy, you were in bed hours ago.”

“No, uncle, not in bed, but in dreamland,” replied Laurence, arising from the window, where evidently he, too, had spent the night hours as I had done.

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Father Paul fumbled about a moment, found his large black book, which for once he seemed to have got separated from, and was turning to leave, when the curious circumstance of Laurence being there at so unusual an hour seemed to strike him anew. “Better go to sleep, my son,” he said simply, then added curiously, “Has anything occurred to keep you up?”

Then Laurence spoke: “No, uncle, only—only, I’m happy, that’s all.”

Father Paul stood irresolute. Then: “It is—?”

“Esther,” said Laurence quietly, but he was at the old man’s side, his hand was on the bent old shoulder, his eyes proud and appealing.

Father Paul set the lamp on the table, but, as usual, one hand held that black book, the great text of his life. His face was paler than I had ever seen it—graver.

“Tell me of it,” he requested.

I leaned far out of my window and watched them both. I listened with my very heart, for Laurence was telling him of me, of his love, of the new-found joy of that night.

“You have said nothing of marriage to her?” asked Father Paul.

“Well—no; but she surely understands that—”

“Did you speak of marriage?” repeated Father Paul, with a harsh ring in his voice that was new to me.

“No, uncle, but—”

“Very well, then, very well.”

There was a brief silence. Laurence stood staring at the old man as though he were a stranger; he watched him push a large chair up to the table, slowly seat himself; then mechanically following his movements, he dropped on to a lounge. The old man’s head bent low, but his eyes were bright and strangely fascinating. He began:

“Laurence, my boy, your future is the dearest thing to me of all earthly interests. Why you can’t marry this girl—no, no, sit, sit until I have finished,” he added, with raised voice, as Laurence sprang up, remonstrating. “I have long since decided that you marry well; for instance, the Hudson’s Bay factor’s daughter.”

Laurence broke into a fresh, rollicking laugh. “What, uncle,” he said, “little Ida McIntosh? Marry that little yellow-haired fluff ball, that kitten, that pretty little dolly?”

“Stop,” said Father Paul. Then with a low, soft persuasiveness, “She is white, Laurence.”

My lover started. “Why, uncle, what do you mean?” he faltered.

“Only this, my son: poor Esther comes of uncertain blood; would it do for you—the missionary’s nephew, and adopted son, you might say—to marry the daughter of a pagan Indian? Her mother is hopelessly uncivilized; her father has a dash of French somewhere—half-breed, you know, my boy, half-breed.” Then, with still lower tone and half-shut, crafty eyes, he added: “The blood is a bad, bad mixture, you know that; you know, too, that I am very fond of the girl, poor dear Esther. I have tried to separate her from evil pagan influences; she is the daughter of the Church; I want her to have no other parent; but you never can tell what lurks in a caged animal that has once been wild. My whole heart is with the Indian people, my son; my whole heart, my whole life, has been devoted to bringing them to Christ, but it is a different thing to marry with one of them.”

His small old eyes were riveted on Laurence like a hawk’s on a rat. My heart lay like ice in my bosom.

Laurence, speechless and white, stared at him breathlessly.

“Go away somewhere,” the old man was urging; “to Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal; forget her, then come back to Ida McIntosh. A union of the Church and Hudson’s Bay will mean great things, and may ultimately result in my life’s ambition, the civilization of this entire tribe, that we have worked so long to bring to God.”

I listened, sitting like one frozen. Could those words have been uttered by my venerable teacher, by him whom I revered as I would one of the saints in his own black book? Ah, there was no mistaking it. My white father, my life-long friend who pretended to love me, to care for my happiness, was urging the man I worshipped to forget me, to marry with the factor’s daughter—because of what? Of my red skin; my good, old, honest pagan mother; my confiding French-Indian

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father. In a second all the care, the hollow love he had given me since my childhood, were as things that never existed. I hated that old mission priest as I hated his white man's hell. I hated his long, white hair; I hated his thin, white hands; I hated his body, his soul, his voice, his black book—oh, how I hated the very atmosphere of him.

Laurence sat motionless, his face buried in his hands, but the old man continued, "No, no; not the child of that pagan mother; you can't trust her, my son. What would you do with a wife who might any day break from you to return to her prairies and her buckskins? You can't trust her." His eyes grew smaller, more glittering, more fascinating then, and leaning with an odd, secret sort of movement towards Laurence, he almost whispered, "Think of her silent ways, her noiseless step; the girl glides about like an apparition; her quick fingers, her wild longings—I don't know why, but with all my fondness for her, she reminds me sometimes of a strange—snake."

Laurence shuddered, lifted his face, and said hoarsely: "You're right, uncle; perhaps I'd better not; I'll go away, I'll forget her, and then—well, then—yes, you are right, it is a different thing to marry one of them." The old man arose. His feeble fingers still clasped his black book; his soft white hair clung about his forehead like that of an Apostle; his eyes lost their peering, crafty expression; his bent shoulders resumed the dignity of a minister of the living God; he was the picture of what the trader called him—"St. Paul."

"Good-night, son," he said.

"Good-night, uncle, and thank you for bringing me to myself."

They were the last words I ever heard uttered by either that old arch-fiend or his weak, miserable kinsman. Father Paul turned and left the room. I watched his withered hand—the hand I had so often felt resting on my head in holy benedictions—clasp the door-knob, turn it slowly, then, with bowed head and his pale face wrapped in thought, he left the room—left it with the mad venom of my hate pursuing him like the very Evil One he taught me of.

What were his years of kindness and care now? What did I care for his God, his heaven, his hell? He had robbed me of my native faith, of my parents, of my people, of this last, this life of love that would have made a great, good woman of me. God! how I hated him!

I crept to the closet in my dark little room. I felt for the bundle I had not looked at for years—yes, it was there, the buckskin dress I had worn as a little child when they brought me to the mission. I tucked it under my arm and descended the stairs noiselessly. I would look into the study and speak good-bye to Laurence; then I would—

I pushed open the door. He was lying on the couch where a short time previously he had sat, white and speechless, listening to Father Paul. I moved towards him softly. God in heaven, he was already asleep. As I bent over him the fullness of his perfect beauty impressed me for the first time; his slender form, his curving mouth that almost laughed even in sleep, his fair, tossed hair, his smooth, strong-pulsing throat. God! how I loved him!

Then there arose the picture of the factor's daughter. I hated her. I hated her baby face, her yellow hair, her whitish skin. "She shall not marry him," my soul said. "I will kill him first—kill his beautiful body, his lying, false heart." Something in my heart seemed to speak; it said over and over again, "Kill him, kill him; she will never have him then. Kill him. It will break Father Paul's heart and blight his life. He has killed the best of you, of your womanhood; kill his best, his pride, his hope—his sister's son, his nephew Laurence." But how? how?

What had that terrible old man said I was like? A strange snake. A snake? The idea wound itself about me like the very coils of a serpent. What was this in the beaded bag of my buckskin dress? This little thing rolled in tan that my mother had given me at parting with the words, "Don't touch much, but some time maybe you want it!" Oh! I knew well enough what it was—a small flint arrow-head dipped in the venom of some strange snake.

I knelt beside him and laid my hot lips on his hand. I worshipped him, oh, how, how I worshipped him! Then again the vision of her baby face, her yellow-hair—I scratched his wrist twice with the arrow-tip. A single drop of red blood oozed up; he stirred. I turned the lamp down and slipped out of the room—out of the house.

* * * * *

I dream nightly of the horrors of the white man's hell. Why did they teach me of it, only to fling me into it?

Last night as I crouched beside my mother on the buffalo-hide, Dan Henderson, the trapper, came in to smoke with my father. He said old Father Paul was bowed with grief, that with my disappearance I was suspected, but that there was no proof. Was it not merely a snake bite?

They account for it by the fact that I am a Redskin.

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They seem to have forgotten I am a woman.

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The Big Red Apples

Zitkála-Šá (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin). From "Impressions of an Indian Childhood," Atlantic Monthly (1900); American Indian Stories (1921).

The first turning away from the easy, natural flow of my life occurred in an early spring. It was in my eighth year; in the month of March, I afterward learned. At this age I knew but one language, and that was my mother's native tongue.

From some of my playmates I heard that two paleface missionaries were in our village. They were from that class of white men who wore big hats and carried large hearts, they said. Running direct to my mother, I began to question her why these two strangers were among us. She told me, after I had teased much, that they had come to take away Indian boys and girls to the East. My mother did not seem to want me to talk about them. But in a day or two, I gleaned many wonderful stories from my playfellows concerning the strangers.

"Mother, my friend Judewin is going home with the missionaries. She is going to a more beautiful country than ours; the palefaces told her so!" I said wistfully, wishing in my heart that I too might go.

Mother sat in a chair, and I was hanging on her knee. Within the last two seasons my big brother Dawee had returned from a three years' education in the East, and his coming back influenced my mother to take a farther step from her native way of living. First it was a change from the buffalo skin to the white man's canvas that covered our wigwam. Now she had given up her wigwam of slender poles, to live, a foreigner, in a home of clumsy logs.

"Yes, my child, several others besides Judewin are going away with the palefaces. Your brother said the missionaries had inquired about his little sister," she said, watching my face very closely.

My heart thumped so hard against my breast, I wondered if she could hear it.

"Did he tell them to take me, mother?" I asked, fearing lest Dawee had forbidden the palefaces to see me, and that my hope of going to the Wonderland would be entirely blighted.

With a sad, slow smile, she answered: "There! I knew you were wishing to go, because Judewin has filled your ears with the white man's lies. Don't believe a word they say! Their words are sweet, but, my child, their deeds are bitter. You will cry for me, but they will not even soothe you. Stay with me, my little one! Your brother Dawee says that going East, away from your mother, is too hard an experience for his baby sister."

Thus my mother discouraged my curiosity about the lands beyond our eastern horizon; for it was not yet an ambition for Letters that was stirring me. But on the following day the missionaries did come to our very house. I spied them coming up the footpath leading to our cottage. A third man was with them, but he was not my brother Dawee. It was another, a young interpreter, a paleface who had a smattering of the Indian language. I was ready to run out to meet them, but I did not dare to displease my mother. With great glee, I jumped up and down on our ground floor. I begged my mother to open the door, that they would be sure to come to us. Alas! They came, they saw, and they conquered!

Judewin had told me of the great tree where grew red, red apples; and how we could reach out our hands and pick all the red apples we could eat. I had never seen apple trees. I had never tasted more than a dozen red apples in my life; and when I heard of the orchards of the East, I was eager to roam among them. The missionaries smiled into my eyes and patted my head. I wondered how mother could say such hard words against him.

"Mother, ask them if little girls may have all the red apples they want, when they go East," I whispered aloud, in my excitement.

The interpreter heard me, and answered: "Yes, little girl, the nice red apples are for those who pick them; and you will have a ride on the iron horse if you go with these good people."

I had never seen a train, and he knew it.

"Mother, I am going East! I like big red apples, and I want to ride on the iron horse! Mother, say yes!" I pleaded.

My mother said nothing. The missionaries waited in silence; and my eyes began to blur with tears, though I struggled to choke them back. The corners of my mouth twitched, and my mother saw me.

"I am not ready to give you any word," she said to them. "Tomorrow I shall send you my answer by my son."

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With this they left us. Alone with my mother, I yielded to my tears, and cried aloud, shaking my head so as not to hear what she was saying to me. This was the first time I had ever been so unwilling to give up my own desire that I refused to hearken to my mother's voice.

There was a solemn silence in our home that night. Before I went to bed I begged the Great Spirit to make my mother willing I should go with the missionaries.

The next morning came, and my mother called me to her side. "My daughter, do you still persist in wishing to leave your mother?" she asked.

"Oh, mother, it is not that I wish to leave you, but I want to see the wonderful Eastern land," I answered.

My dear old aunt came to our house that morning, and I heard her say, "Let her try it."

I hoped that, as usual, my aunt was pleading on my side. My brother Dawee came for mother's decision. I dropped my play, and crept close to my aunt.

"Yes, Dawee, my daughter, though she does not understand what it all means, is anxious to go. She will need an education when she is grown, for then there will be fewer real Dakotas, and many more palefaces. This tearing her away, so young, from her mother is necessary, if I would have her an educated woman. The palefaces, who owe us a large debt for stolen lands, have begun to pay a tardy justice in offering some education to our children. But I know my daughter must suffer keenly in this experiment. For her sake, I dread to tell you my reply to the missionaries. Go, tell them that they may take my little daughter, and that the Great Spirit shall not fail to reward them according to their hearts."

Wrapped in my heavy blanket, I walked with my mother to the carriage that was soon to take us to the iron horse. I was happy. I met my playmates, who were also wearing their best thick blankets. We showed one another our new beaded moccasins, and the width of the belts that girdled our new dresses. Soon we were being drawn rapidly away by the white man's horses. When I saw the lonely figure of my mother vanish in the distance, a sense of regret settled heavily upon me. I felt suddenly weak, as if I might fall limp to the ground. I was in the hands of strangers whom my mother did not fully trust. I no longer felt free to be myself, or to voice my own feelings. The tears trickled down my cheeks, and I buried my face in the folds of my blanket. Now the first step, parting me from my mother, was taken, and all my belated tears availed nothing.

Having driven thirty miles to the ferryboat, we crossed the Missouri in the evening. Then riding again a few miles eastward, we stopped before a massive brick building. I looked at it in amazement, and with a vague misgiving, for in our village I had never seen so large a house. Trembling with fear and distrust of the palefaces, my teeth chattering from the chilly ride, I crept noiselessly in my soft moccasins along the narrow hall, keeping very close to the bare wall. I was as frightened and bewildered as the captured young of a wild creature.

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The Land of Red Apples

Zitkála-Šá (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin). From "The School Days of an Indian Girl," Atlantic Monthly (1900); American Indian Stories (1921).

There were eight in our party of bronzed children who were going East with the missionaries. Among us were three young braves, two tall girls, and we three little ones, Judewin, Thowin, and I.

We had been very impatient to start on our journey to the Red Apple Country, which, we were told, lay a little beyond the great circular horizon of the Western prairie. Under a sky of rosy apples we dreamt of roaming as freely and happily as we had chased the cloud shadows on the Dakota plains. We had anticipated much pleasure from a ride on the iron horse, but the throngs of staring palefaces disturbed and troubled us.

On the train, fair women, with tottering babies on each arm, stopped their haste and scrutinized the children of absent mothers. Large men, with heavy bundles in their hands, halted near by, and riveted their glassy blue eyes upon us.

I sank deep into the corner of my seat, for I resented being watched. Directly in front of me, children who were no larger than I hung themselves upon the backs of their seats, with their bold white faces toward me. Sometimes they took their forefingers out of their mouths and pointed at my moccasined feet. Their mothers, instead of reproving such rude curiosity, looked closely at me, and attracted their children's further notice to my blanket. This embarrassed me, and kept me constantly on the verge of tears.

I sat perfectly still, with my eyes downcast, daring only now and then to shoot long glances around me. Chancing to turn to the window at my side, I was quite breathless upon seeing one familiar object. It was the telegraph pole which strode by at short paces. Very near my mother's dwelling, along the edge of a road thickly bordered with wild sunflowers, some poles like these had been planted by white men. Often I had stopped, on my way down the road, to hold my ear against the pole, and, hearing its low moaning, I used to wonder what the paleface had done to hurt it. Now I sat watching for each pole that glided by to be the last one.

In this way I had forgotten my uncomfortable surroundings, when I heard one of my comrades call out my name. I saw the missionary standing very near, tossing candies and gums into our midst. This amused us all, and we tried to see who could catch the most of the sweetmeats.

Though we rode several days inside of the iron horse, I do not recall a single thing about our luncheons.

It was night when we reached the school grounds. The lights from the windows of the large buildings fell upon some of the icicled trees that stood beneath them. We were led toward an open door, where the brightness of the lights within flooded out over the heads of the excited palefaces who blocked our way. My body trembled more from fear than from the snow I trod upon.

Entering the house, I stood close against the wall. The strong glaring light in the large whitewashed room dazzled my eyes. The noisy hurrying of hard shoes upon a bare wooden floor increased the whirring in my ears. My only safety seemed to be in keeping next to the wall. As I was wondering in which direction to escape from all this confusion, two warm hands grasped me firmly, and in the same moment I was tossed high in midair. A rosy-cheeked paleface woman caught me in her arms. I was both frightened and insulted by such trifling. I stared into her eyes, wishing her to let me stand on my own feet, but she jumped me up and down with increasing enthusiasm. My mother had never made a plaything of her wee daughter. Remembering this I began to cry aloud.

They misunderstood the cause of my tears, and placed me at a white table loaded with food. There our party were united again. As I did not hush my crying, one of the older ones whispered to me, "Wait until you are alone in the night."

It was very little I could swallow besides my sobs, that evening.

"Oh, I want my mother and my brother Dawee! I want to go to my aunt!" I pleaded; but the ears of the palefaces could not hear me.

From the table we were taken along an upward incline of wooden boxes, which I learned afterward to call a stairway. At the top was a quiet hall, dimly lighted. Many narrow beds were in one straight line down the entire length of the wall. In them lay sleeping brown faces, which peeped just out of the coverings. I was tucked into bed with one of the tall girls, because she talked to me in my mother tongue and seemed to soothe me.

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I had arrived in the wonderful land of rosy skies, but I was not happy, as I had thought I should be. My long travel and the bewildering sights had exhausted me. I fell asleep, heaving deep, tired sobs. My tears were left to dry themselves in streaks, because neither my aunt nor my mother was near to wipe them away.

The Cutting of My Long Hair

The first day in the land of apples was a bitter-cold one; for the snow still covered the ground, and the trees were bare. A large bell rang for breakfast, its loud metallic voice crashing through the belfry overhead and into our sensitive ears. The annoying clatter of shoes on bare floors gave us no peace. The constant clash of harsh noises, with an undercurrent of many voices murmuring an unknown tongue, made a bedlam within which I was securely tied. And though my spirit tore itself in struggling for its lost freedom, all was useless.

A paleface woman, with white hair, came up after us. We were placed in a line of girls who were marching into the dining room. These were Indian girls, in stiff shoes and closely clinging dresses. The small girls wore sleeved aprons and shingled hair. As I walked noiselessly in my soft moccasins, I felt like sinking to the floor, for my blanket had been stripped from my shoulders. I looked hard at the Indian girls, who seemed not to care that they were even more immodestly dressed than I, in their tightly fitting clothes. While we marched in, the boys entered at an opposite door. I watched for the three young braves who came in our party. I spied them in the rear ranks, looking as uncomfortable as I felt. A small bell was tapped, and each of the pupils drew a chair from under the table. Supposing this act meant they were to be seated, I pulled out mine and at once slipped into it from one side. But when I turned my head, I saw that I was the only one seated, and all the rest at our table remained standing. Just as I began to rise, looking shyly around to see how chairs were to be used, a second bell was sounded. All were seated at last, and I had to crawl back into my chair again. I heard a man's voice at one end of the hall, and I looked around to see him. But all the others hung their heads over their plates. As I glanced at the long chain of tables, I caught the eyes of a paleface woman upon me. Immediately I dropped my eyes, wondering why I was so keenly watched by the strange woman. The man ceased his mutterings, and then a third bell was tapped. Every one picked up his knife and fork and began eating. I began crying instead, for by this time I was afraid to venture anything more.

But this eating by formula was not the hardest trial in that first day. Late in the morning, my friend Judewin gave me a terrible warning. Judewin knew a few words of English; and she had overheard the paleface woman talk about cutting our long, heavy hair. Our mothers had taught us that only unskilled warriors who were captured had their hair shingled by the enemy. Among our people, short hair was worn by mourners, and shingled hair by cowards!

We discussed our fate some moments, and when Judewin said, "We have to submit, because they are strong," I rebelled.

"No, I will not submit! I will struggle first!" I answered.

I watched my chance, and when no one noticed, I disappeared. I crept up the stairs as quietly as I could in my squeaking shoes,—my moccasins had been exchanged for shoes. Along the hall I passed, without knowing whither I was going. Turning aside to an open door, I found a large room with three white beds in it. The windows were covered with dark green curtains, which made the room very dim. Thankful that no one was there, I directed my steps toward the corner farthest from the door. On my hands and knees I crawled under the bed, and cuddled myself in the dark corner.

From my hiding place I peered out, shuddering with fear whenever I heard footsteps near by. Though in the hall loud voices were calling my name, and I knew that even Judewin was searching for me, I did not open my mouth to answer. Then the steps were quickened and the voices became excited. The sounds came nearer and nearer. Women and girls entered the room. I held my breath and watched them open closet doors and peep behind large trunks. Some one threw up the curtains, and the room was filled with sudden light. What caused them to stoop and look under the bed I do not know. I remember being dragged out, though I resisted by kicking and scratching wildly. In spite of myself, I was carried downstairs and tied fast in a chair.

I cried aloud, shaking my head all the while until I felt the cold blades of the scissors against my neck, and heard them gnaw off one of my thick braids. Then I lost my spirit. Since the day I was taken from my mother I had suffered extreme indignities. People had stared at me. I had been tossed about in the air like a wooden puppet. And now my long hair was shingled like a coward's! In my anguish I moaned for my mother, but no one came to comfort me. Not a soul reasoned quietly with me, as my own mother used to do; for now I was only one of many little animals driven by a herder.

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Iron Routine

This section describes the death of a classmate.

A loud-clamoring bell awakened us at half-past six in the cold winter mornings. From happy dreams of Western rolling lands and unlassoed freedom we tumbled out upon chilly bare floors back again into a paleface day. We had short time to jump into our shoes and clothes, and wet our eyes with icy water, before a small hand bell was vigorously rung for roll call.

There were too many drowsy children and too numerous orders for the day to waste a moment in any apology to nature for giving her children such a shock in the early morning. We rushed downstairs, bounding over two high steps at a time, to land in the assembly room.

A paleface woman, with a yellow-covered roll book open on her arm and a gnawed pencil in her hand, appeared at the door. Her small, tired face was coldly lighted with a pair of large gray eyes.

She stood still in a halo of authority, while over the rim of her spectacles her eyes pried nervously about the room. Having glanced at her long list of names and called out the first one, she tossed up her chin and peered through the crystals of her spectacles to make sure of the answer “Here.”

Relentlessly her pencil black-marked our daily records if we were not present to respond to our names, and no chum of ours had done it successfully for us. No matter if a dull headache or the painful cough of slow consumption had delayed the absentee, there was only time enough to mark the tardiness. It was next to impossible to leave the iron routine after the civilizing machine had once begun its day’s buzzing; and as it was inbred in me to suffer in silence rather than to appeal to the ears of one whose open eyes could not see my pain, I have many times trudged in the day’s harness heavy-footed, like a dumb sick brute.

Once I lost a dear classmate. I remember well how she used to mope along at my side, until one morning she could not raise her head from her pillow. At her deathbed I stood weeping, as the paleface woman sat near her moistening the dry lips. Among the folds of the bedclothes I saw the open pages of the white man’s Bible. The dying Indian girl talked disconnectedly of Jesus the Christ and the paleface who was cooling her swollen hands and feet.

I grew bitter, and censured the woman for cruel neglect of our physical ills. I despised the pencils that moved automatically, and the one teaspoon which dealt out, from a large bottle, healing to a row of variously ailing Indian children. I blamed the hard-working, well-meaning, ignorant woman who was inculcating in our hearts her superstitious ideas. Though I was sullen in all my little troubles, as soon as I felt better I was ready again to smile upon the cruel woman. Within a week I was again actively testing the chains which tightly bound my individuality like a mummy for burial.

The melancholy of those black days has left so long a shadow that it darkens the path of years that have since gone by. These sad memories rise above those of smoothly grinding school days. Perhaps my Indian nature is the moaning wind which stirs them now for their present record. But, however tempestuous this is within me, it comes out as the low voice of a curiously colored seashell, which is only for those ears that are bent with compassion to hear it.

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Retrospection

Zitkála-Šá (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin). From "An Indian Teacher Among Indians," Atlantic Monthly (1900); American Indian Stories (1921).

Leaving my mother, I returned to the school in the East. As months passed over me, I slowly comprehended that the large army of white teachers in Indian schools had a larger missionary creed than I had suspected.

It was one which included self-preservation quite as much as Indian education. When I saw an opium-eater holding a position as teacher of Indians, I did not understand what good was expected, until a Christian in power replied that this pumpkin-colored creature had a feeble mother to support. An inebriate paleface sat stupid in a doctor's chair, while Indian patients carried their ailments to untimely graves, because his fair wife was dependent upon him for her daily food.

I find it hard to count that white man a teacher who tortured an ambitious Indian youth by frequently reminding the brave changeling that he was nothing but a "government pauper."

Though I burned with indignation upon discovering on every side instances no less shameful than those I have mentioned, there was no present help. Even the few rare ones who have worked nobly for my race were powerless to choose workmen like themselves. To be sure, a man was sent from the Great Father to inspect Indian schools, but what he saw was usually the students' sample work made for exhibition. I was nettled by this sly cunning of the workmen who hookwinked the Indian's pale Father at Washington.

My illness, which prevented the conclusion of my college course, together with my mother's stories of the encroaching frontier settlers, left me in no mood to strain my eyes in searching for latent good in my white co-workers.

At this stage of my own evolution, I was ready to curse men of small capacity for being the dwarfs their God had made them. In the process of my education I had lost all consciousness of the nature world about me. Thus, when a hidden rage took me to the small white-walled prison which I then called my room, I unknowingly turned away from my one salvation.

Alone in my room, I sat like the petrified Indian woman of whom my mother used to tell me. I wished my heart's burdens would turn me to unfeeling stone. But alive, in my tomb, I was destitute!

For the white man's papers I had given up my faith in the Great Spirit. For these same papers I had forgotten the healing in trees and brooks. On account of my mother's simple view of life, and my lack of any, I gave her up, also. I made no friends among the race of people I loathed. Like a slender tree, I had been uprooted from my mother, nature, and God. I was shorn of my branches, which had waved in sympathy and love for home and friends. The natural coat of bark which had protected my oversensitive nature was scraped off to the very quick.

Now a cold bare pole I seemed to be, planted in a strange earth. Still, I seemed to hope a day would come when my mute aching head, reared upward to the sky, would flash a zigzag lightning across the heavens. With this dream of vent for a long-pent consciousness, I walked again amid the crowds.

At last, one weary day in the schoolroom, a new idea presented itself to me. It was a new way of solving the problem of my inner self. I liked it. Thus I resigned my position as teacher; and now I am in an Eastern city, following the long course of study I have set for myself. Now, as I look back upon the recent past, I see it from a distance, as a whole. I remember how, from morning till evening, many specimens of civilized peoples visited the Indian school. The city folks with canes and eyeglasses, the countrymen with sunburnt cheeks and clumsy feet, forgot their relative social ranks in an ignorant curiosity. Both sorts of these Christian palefaces were alike astounded at seeing the children of savage warriors so docile and industrious.

As answers to their shallow inquiries they received the students' sample work to look upon. Examining the neatly figured pages, and gazing upon the Indian girls and boys bending over their books, the white visitors walked out of the schoolhouse well satisfied: they were educating the children of the red man! They were paying a liberal fee to the government employees in whose able hands lay the small forest of Indian timber.

In this fashion many have passed idly through the Indian schools during the last decade, afterward to boast of their charity to the North American Indian. But few there are who have paused to question whether real life or long-lasting death lies beneath this semblance of civilization.

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Hakadah, “The Pitiful Last”

Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa). From Indian Boyhood (1902), chapter 1 (excerpts).

WHAT boy would not be an Indian for a while when he thinks of the freest life in the world? This life was mine. Every day there was a real hunt. There was real game. Occasionally there was a medicine dance away off in the woods where no one could disturb us, in which the boys impersonated their elders, Brave Bull, Standing Elk, High Hawk, Medicine Bear, and the rest. They painted and imitated their fathers and grandfathers to the minutest detail, and accurately too, because they had seen the real thing all their lives.

We were not only good mimics but we were close students of nature. We studied the habits of animals just as you study your books. We watched the men of our people and represented them in our play; then learned to emulate them in our lives.

No people have a better use of their five senses than the children of the wilderness. We could smell as well as hear and see. We could feel and taste as well as we could see and hear. Nowhere has the memory been more fully developed than in the wild life, and I can still see wherein I owe much to my early training.

Of course I myself do not remember when I first saw the day, but my brothers have often recalled the event with much mirth; for it was a custom of the Sioux that when a boy was born his brother must plunge into the water, or roll in the snow naked if it was winter time; and if he was not big enough to do either of these himself, water was thrown on him. If the new-born had a sister, she must be immersed. The idea was that a warrior had come to camp, and the other children must display some act of hardihood.

I was so unfortunate as to be the youngest of five children who, soon after I was born, were left motherless. I had to bear the humiliating name “Hakadah,” meaning “the pitiful last,” until I should earn a more dignified and appropriate name. I was regarded as little more than a plaything by the rest of the children.

[…]

The woman to whom these words were spoken was below the average in stature, remarkably active for her age (she was then fully sixty), and possessed of as much goodness as intelligence. My mother’s judgment concerning her own mother was well founded, for soon after her death that old lady appeared, and declared that Hakadah was too young to live without a mother. She offered to keep me until I died, and then she would put me in my mother’s grave. Of course my other grandmother denounced the suggestion as a very wicked one, and refused to give me up.

The babe was done up as usual in a movable cradle made from an oak board two and a half feet long and one and a half feet wide. On one side of it was nailed with brass-headed tacks the richly-embroidered sack, which was open in front and laced up and down with buckskin strings. Over the arms of the infant was a wooden bow, the ends of which were firmly attached to the board, so that if the cradle should fall the child’s head and face would be protected. On this bow were hung curious playthings—strings of artistically carved bones and hoofs of deer, which rattled when the little hands moved them.

In this upright cradle I lived, played and slept the greater part of the time during the first few months of my life. Whether I was made to lean against a lodge pole or was suspended from a bough of a tree, while my grandmother cut wood, or whether I was carried on her back, or conveniently balanced by another child in a similar cradle hung on the opposite side of a pony, I was still in my oaken bed.

This grandmother, who had already lived through sixty years of hardships, was a wonder to the young maidens of the tribe. She showed no less enthusiasm over Hakadah than she had done when she held her first-born, the boy’s father, in her arms. Every little attention that is due to a loved child she performed with much skill and devotion. She made all my scanty garments and my tiny moccasins with a great deal of taste. It was said by all that I could not have had more attention had my mother been living.

Uncheedah (grandmother) was a great singer. Sometimes, when Hakadah wakened too early in the morning, she would sing to him something like the following lullaby:

[…]

The Dakota women were wont to cut and bring their fuel from the woods and, in fact, to perform most of the drudgery of the camp. This of necessity fell to their lot, because the men must follow the game during the day. Very often my

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grandmother carried me with her on these excursions; and while she worked it was her habit to suspend me from a wild grape vine or a springy bough, so that the least breeze would swing the cradle to and fro.

She has told me that when I had grown old enough to take notice, I was apparently capable of holding extended conversations in an unknown dialect with birds and red squirrels. Once I fell asleep in my cradle, suspended five or six feet from the ground, while Uncheedah was some distance away, gathering birch bark for a canoe. A squirrel had found it convenient to come upon the bow of my cradle and nibble his hickory nut, until he awoke me by dropping the crumbs of his meal. My disapproval of his intrusion was so decided that he had to take a sudden and quick flight to another bough, and from there he began to pour out his wrath upon me, while I continued my objections to his presence so audibly that Uncheedah soon came to my rescue, and compelled the bold intruder to go away. It was a common thing for birds to alight on my cradle in the woods.

My food was, at first, a troublesome question for my kind foster-mother. She cooked some wild rice and strained it, and mixed it with broth made from choice venison. She also pounded dried venison almost to a flour, and kept it in water till the nourishing juices were extracted, then mixed with it some pounded maize, which was browned before pounding. This soup of wild rice, pounded venison and maize was my main-stay. But soon my teeth came—much earlier than the white children usually cut theirs; and then my good nurse gave me a little more varied food, and I did all my own grinding.

After I left my cradle, I almost walked away from it, she told me. She then began calling my attention to natural objects. Whenever I heard the song of a bird, she would tell me what bird it came from, something after this fashion:

“Hakadah, listen to Shechoka (the robin) calling his mate. He says he has just found something good to eat.” Or “Listen to Oopehanska (the thrush); he is singing for his little wife. He will sing his best.” When in the evening the whippoorwill started his song with vim, no further than a stone’s throw from our tent in the woods, she would say to me:

“Hush! It may be an Ojibway scout!”

Again, when I waked at midnight, she would say:

“Do not cry! Hinakaga (the owl) is watching you from the tree-top.”

I usually covered up my head, for I had perfect faith in my grandmother’s admonitions, and she had given me a dreadful idea of this bird. It was one of her legends that a little boy was once standing just outside of the teepee (tent), crying vigorously for his mother, when Hinakaga swooped down in the darkness and carried the poor little fellow up into the trees. It was well known that the hoot of the owl was commonly imitated by Indian scouts when on the war-path. There had been dreadful massacres immediately following this call. Therefore it was deemed wise to impress the sound early upon the mind of the child.

Indian children were trained so that they hardly ever cried much in the night. This was very expedient and necessary in their exposed life. In my infancy it was my grandmother’s custom to put me to sleep, as she said, with the birds, and to waken me with them, until it became a habit. She did this with an object in view. An Indian must always rise early. In the first place, as a hunter, he finds his game best at daybreak. Secondly, other tribes, when on the war-path, usually make their attack very early in the morning. Even when our people are moving about leisurely, we like to rise before daybreak, in order to travel when the air is cool, and unobserved, perchance, by our enemies.

As a little child, it was instilled into me to be silent and reticent. This was one of the most important traits to form in the character of the Indian. As a hunter and warrior it was considered absolutely necessary to him, and was thought to lay the foundations of patience and self-control. There are times when boisterous mirth is indulged in by our people, but the rule is gravity and decorum.

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First Impressions of Civilization

Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa). From Indian Boyhood (1902), chapter 12 (excerpts). Two paragraphs of the uncle's speech, which include a racist idea about enslaved Black Americans, are omitted.

I WAS scarcely old enough to know anything definite about the “Big Knives,” as we called the white men, when the terrible Minnesota massacre broke up our home and I was carried into exile. I have already told how I was adopted into the family of my father’s younger brother, when my father was betrayed and imprisoned. We all supposed that he had shared the fate of those who were executed at Mankato, Minnesota.

Now the savage philosophers looked upon vengeance in the field of battle as a lofty virtue. To avenge the death of a relative or of a dear friend was considered a great deed. My uncle, accordingly, had spared no pains to instill into my young mind the obligation to avenge the death of my father and my older brothers. Already I looked eagerly forward to the day when I should find an opportunity to carry out his teachings. Meanwhile, he himself went upon the war-path and returned with scalps every summer. So it may be imagined how I felt toward the Big Knives!

On the other hand, I had heard marvelous things of this people. In some things we despised them; in others we regarded them as wakan (mysterious), a race whose power bordered upon the supernatural. I learned that they had made a “fireboat.” I could not understand how they could unite two elements which cannot exist together. I thought the water would put out the fire, and the fire would consume the boat if it had the shadow of a chance. This was to me a preposterous thing! But when I was told that the Big Knives had created a “fire-boat-walks-on-mountains” (a locomotive) it was too much to believe.

“Why,” declared my informant, “those who saw this monster move said that it flew from mountain to mountain when it seemed to be excited. They said also that they believed it carried a thunder-bird, for they frequently heard his usual war-whoop as the creature sped along!”

Several warriors had observed from a distance one of the first trains on the Northern Pacific, and had gained an exaggerated impression of the wonders of the pale-face. They had seen it go over a bridge that spanned a deep ravine and it seemed to them that it jumped from one bank to the other. I confess that the story almost quenched my ardor and bravery.

Two or three young men were talking together about this fearful invention.

“However,” said one, “I understand that this fire-boat-walks-on-mountains cannot move except on the track made for it.”

Although a boy is not expected to join in the conversation of his elders, I ventured to ask: “Then it cannot chase us into any rough country?”

“No, it cannot do that,” was the reply, which I heard with a great deal of relief.

I had seen guns and various other things brought to us by the French Canadians, so that I had already some notion of the supernatural gifts of the white man; but I had never before heard such tales as I listened to that morning. It was said that they had bridged the Missouri and Mississippi rivers, and that they made immense houses of stone and brick, piled on top of one another until they were as high as high hills. My brain was puzzled with these things for many a day. Finally I asked my uncle why the Great Mystery gave such power to the Washechu (the rich)-sometimes we called them by this name—and not to us Dakotas.

“For the same reason,” he answered, “that he gave to Duta the skill to make fine bows and arrows, and to Wachesne no skill to make anything.”

“And why do the Big Knives increase so much more in number than the Dakotas?” I continued.

[…]

“The greatest object of their lives seems to be to acquire possessions—to be rich. They desire to possess the whole world. For thirty years they were trying to entice us to sell them our land. Finally the outbreak gave them all, and we have been driven away from our beautiful country.

“They are a wonderful people. They have divided the day into hours, like the moons of the year. In fact, they measure everything. Not one of them would let so much as a turnip go from his field unless he received full value for it. I understand that their great men make a feast and invite many, but when the feast is over the guests are required to pay for what they have eaten before leaving the house. I myself saw at White Cliff (the name given to St. Paul, Minnesota) a

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man who kept a brass drum and a bell to call people to his table; but when he got them in he would make them pay for the food!

“I am also informed,” said my uncle, “but this I hardly believe, that their Great Chief (President) compels every man to pay him for the land he lives upon and all his personal goods—even for his own existence—every year!” (This was his idea of taxation.) “I am sure we could not live under such a law.

“When the outbreak occurred, we thought that our opportunity had come, for we had learned that the Big Knives were fighting among themselves, on account of a dispute over their slaves. It was said that the Great Chief had allowed slaves in one part of the country and not in another, so there was jealousy, and they had to fight it out. We don’t know how true this was.

“There were some praying-men who came to us some time before the trouble arose. They observed every seventh day as a holy day. On that day they met in a house that they had built for that purpose, to sing, pray, and speak of their Great Mystery. I was never in one of these meetings. I understand that they had a large book from which they read. By all accounts they were very different from all other white men we have known, for these never observed any such day, and we never knew them to pray, neither did they ever tell us of their Great Mystery.

“In war they have leaders and war-chiefs of different grades. The common warriors are driven forward like a herd of antelopes to face the foe. It is on account of this manner of fighting—from compulsion and not from personal bravery—that we count no coup on them. A lone warrior can do much harm to a large army of them in a bad country.”

It was this talk with my uncle that gave me my first clear idea of the white man.

I was almost fifteen years old when my uncle presented me with a flint-lock gun. The possession of the “mysterious iron,” and the explosive dirt, or “pulverized coal,” as it is called, filled me with new thoughts. All the war-songs that I had ever heard from childhood came back to me with their heroes. It seemed as if I were an entirely new being—the boy had become a man!

“I am now old enough,” said I to myself, “and I must beg my uncle to take me with him on his next war-path. I shall soon be able to go among the whites whenever I wish, and to avenge the blood of my father and my brothers.”

I had already begun to invoke the blessing of the Great Mystery. Scarcely a day passed that I did not offer up some of my game, so that he might not be displeased with me. My people saw very little of me during the day, for in solitude I found the strength I needed. I groped about in the wilderness, and determined to assume my position as a man. My boyish ways were departing, and a sullen dignity and composure was taking their place.

The thought of love did not hinder my ambitions. I had a vague dream of some day courting a pretty maiden, after I had made my reputation, and won the eagle feathers.

One day, when I was away on the daily hunt, two strangers from the United States visited our camp. They had boldly ventured across the northern border. They were Indians, but clad in the white man’s garments. It was as well that I was absent with my gun.

My father, accompanied by an Indian guide, after many days’ searching had found us at last. He had been imprisoned at Davenport, Iowa, with those who took part in the massacre or in the battles following, and he was taught in prison and converted by the pioneer missionaries, Drs. Williamson and Riggs. He was under sentence of death, but was among the number against whom no direct evidence was found, and who were finally pardoned by President Lincoln.

When he was released, and returned to the new reservation upon the Missouri river, he soon became convinced that life on a government reservation meant physical and moral degradation. Therefore he determined, with several others, to try the white man’s way of gaining a livelihood. They accordingly left the agency against the persuasions of the agent, renounced all government assistance, and took land under the United States Homestead law, on the Big Sioux river. After he had made his home there, he desired to seek his lost child. It was then a dangerous undertaking to cross the line, but his Christian love prompted him to do it. He secured a good guide, and found his way in time through the vast wilderness.

As for me, I little dreamed of anything unusual to happen on my return. As I approached our camp with my game on my shoulder, I had not the slightest premonition that I was suddenly to be hurled from my savage life into a life unknown to me hitherto.

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When I appeared in sight my father, who had patiently listened to my uncle's long account of my early life and training, became very much excited. He was eager to embrace the child who, as he had just been informed, made it already the object of his life to avenge his father's blood. The loving father could not remain in the teepee and watch the boy coming, so he started to meet him. My uncle arose to go with his brother to insure his safety.

My face burned with the unusual excitement caused by the sight of a man wearing the Big Knives' clothing and coming toward me with my uncle.

"What does this mean, uncle?"

"My boy, this is your father, my brother, whom we mourned as dead. He has come for you."

My father added: "I am glad that my son is strong and brave. Your brothers have adopted the white man's way; I came for you to learn this new way, too; and I want you to grow up a good man."

He had brought me some civilized clothing, At first, I disliked very much to wear garments made by the people I had hated so bitterly. But the thought that, after all, they had not killed my father and brothers, reconciled me, and I put on the clothes.

In a few days we started for the States. I felt as if I were dead and traveling to the Spirit Land; for now all my old ideas were to give place to new ones, and my life was to be entirely different from that of the past.

Still, I was eager to see some of the wonderful inventions of the white people. When we reached Fort Totten, I gazed about me with lively interest and a quick imagination.

My father had forgotten to tell me that the fire-boat-walks-on-mountains had its track at Jamestown, and might appear at any moment. As I was watering the ponies, a peculiar shrilling noise pealed forth from just beyond the hills. The ponies threw back their heads and listened; then they ran snorting over the prairie. Meanwhile, I too had taken alarm. I leaped on the back of one of the ponies, and dashed off at full speed. It was a clear day; I could not imagine what had caused such an unearthly noise. It seemed as if the world were about to burst in two!

I got upon a hill as the train appeared. "O!" I said to myself, "that is the fire-boat-walkson-mountains that I have heard about!" Then I drove back the ponies.

My father was accustomed every morning to read from his Bible, and sing a stanza of a hymn. I was about very early with my gun for several mornings; but at last he stopped me as I was preparing to go out, and bade me wait.

I listened with much astonishment. The hymn contained the word Jesus. I did not comprehend what this meant; and my father then told me that Jesus was the Son of God who came on earth to save sinners, and that it was because of him that he had sought me. This conversation made a deep impression upon my mind.

Late in the fall we reached the citizen settlement at Flandreau, South Dakota, where my father and some others dwelt among the whites. Here my wild life came to an end, and my school days began.

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The Onondaga Madonna

Duncan Campbell Scott. From Labor and the Angel (1898). Read critically: see Lesson 11.

She stands full-throated and with careless pose, This woman of a weird and waning race, The tragic savage lurking in her face, Where all her pagan passion burns and glows; Her blood is mingled with her ancient foes, And thrills with war and wildness in her veins; Her rebel lips are dabbled with the stains Of feuds and forays and her father's woes.

And closer in the shawl about her breast, The latest promise of her nation's doom, Paler than she her baby clings and lies, The primal warrior gleaming from his eyes; He sulks, and burdened with his infant gloom, He draws his heavy brows and will not rest.

Scott (1862–1947) was a well-known poet and, from 1913 to 1932, the senior official of the federal Department of Indian Affairs, which ran the residential school system.

America's Indian Problem

Zitkála-Šá (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin). From American Indian Stories (1921). The essay continues with long quotations from a 1915 report on the U.S. Indian Bureau, not included here.

The hospitality of the American aborigine, it is told, saved the early settlers from starvation during the first bleak winters. In commemoration of having been so well received, Newport erected "a cross as a sign of English dominion." With sweet words he quieted the suspicions of Chief Powhatan, his friend. He "told him that the arms (of the cross) represented Powhatan and himself, and the middle their united league."

DeSoto and his Spaniards were graciously received by the Indian Princess Cofachiqui in the South. While on a sight-seeing tour they entered the ancestral tombs of those Indians. DeSoto "dipped into the pearls and gave his two joined hands full to each cavalier to make rosaries of, he said, to say prayers for their sins on. We imagine if their prayers were in proportion to their sins they must have spent the most of their time at their devotions."

It was in this fashion that the old world snatched away the fee in the land of the new. It was in this fashion that America was divided between the powers of Europe and the aborigines were dispossessed of their country. The barbaric rule of might from which the paleface had fled hither for refuge caught up with him again, and in the melee the hospitable native suffered "legal disability."

History tells that it was from the English and the Spanish our government inherited its legal victims, the American Indians, whom to this day we hold as wards and not as citizens of their own freedom loving land. A long century of dishonor followed this inheritance of somebody's loot. Now the time is at hand when the American Indian shall have his day in court through the help of the women of America. The stain upon America's fair name is to be removed, and the remnant of the Indian nation, suffering from malnutrition, is to number among the invited invisible guests at your dinner tables.

In this undertaking there must be cooperation of head, heart and hand. We serve both our own government and a voiceless people within our midst. We would open the door of American opportunity to the red man and encourage him to find his rightful place in our American life. We would remove the barriers that hinder his normal development.

Wardship is no substitute for American citizenship, therefore we seek his enfranchisement. The many treaties made in good faith with the Indian by our government we would like to see equitably settled. By a constructive program we hope to do away with the "piecemeal legislation" affecting Indians here and there which has proven an exceedingly expensive and disappointing method.

Do you know what your Bureau of Indian Affairs, in Washington, D.C., really is? How it is organized and how it deals with wards of the nation? This is our first study. Let us be informed of facts and then we may formulate our opinions. In the remaining space allowed me I shall quote from the report of the Bureau of Municipal Research, in their investigation of the Indian Bureau, published by them in the September issue, 1915, No. 65, "Municipal Research," 261 Broadway, New York City. This report is just as good for our use today as when it was first made, for very little, if any, change has been made in the administration of Indian Affairs since then.

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Contemporary voices: choosing texts

For the Then and Now seminar, pair a historical writer with a text by a contemporary First Nations, Métis or Inuit creator; across the seminar groups, include First Nations, Métis and Inuit creators. Titles only: these texts are under copyright and are not included. Choose from your board's approved resources, preview for content (several include residential schools, violence, sexual content or grief), add local creators where you can, and learn about each creator in their own words.

Creator	Text	Form and themes
Richard Wagamese (Ojibwe, Wabaseemoong Independent Nations)	Indian Horse (novel, 2012)	Residential school, hockey, healing
Waubgeshig Rice (Anishinaabe, Wasauksing First Nation)	Moon of the Crusted Snow (novel, 2018)	Speculative: a northern community after collapse
Michelle Good (Cree, Red Pheasant Cree Nation)	Five Little Indians (novel, 2020)	Five survivors after residential school
Tanya Talaga (Anishinaabe, Fort William First Nation)	Seven Fallen Feathers (nonfiction, 2017)	Thunder Bay, education, justice
Thomas King (Cherokee and Greek descent)	“Borders” (short story, 1993)	Identity, citizenship, the border
Tomson Highway (Cree, Barren Lands First Nation)	The Rez Sisters (play, 1986)	Community, humour, dreams
Drew Hayden Taylor (Ojibwe, Curve Lake First Nation)	Plays and essays	Humour, identity, stereotypes
Louise Bernice Halfe – Sky Dancer (Cree, Saddle Lake)	Burning in This Midnight Dream (poetry, 2016)	Residential school, memory, Cree language
Rita Joe (Mi'kmaw)	“I Lost My Talk” (poem)	Residential school and language
Cherie Dimaline (Métis, Georgian Bay)	The Marrow Thieves (novel, 2017)	Speculative: survival, language, dreams
Katherena Vermette (Red River Métis, Winnipeg)	A Girl Called Echo (graphic novels, 2017–)	Métis history through a teen's eyes
Chelsea Vowel (Métis)	Indigenous Writes (nonfiction, 2016)	Essays on terms, myths and issues
Marilyn Dumont (Cree and Métis)	A Really Good Brown Girl (poetry, 1996)	Identity, family, Métis experience
Norma Dunning (Padlei Inuk)	Annie Muktuk and Other Stories (2017)	Short stories: northern life, humour, identity
Mitiarjuk Nappaaluk (Inuk, Nunavik)	Sanaaq (novel; Inuktitut 1984, English 2014)	An Inuit family's life and change
Zacharias Kunuk (Inuk, Igloolik)	Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner (film, 2001)	Feature film in Inuktitut
Alethea Arnaquq-Baril (Inuk, Iqaluit)	Documentary films (for example, on Inuit tattoos and the seal hunt)	Documentary
Tanya Tagaq (Inuk)	Animism (album; Polaris Music Prize, 2014)	Music: Inuit throat singing reimagined

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