

# CARMICHAEL: by Anison North

A picture of farm home life in Canada faithfully reproduced by a writer who knows it. The disputed "line fence" has been the cause of many a bitter feud, and the settlement of this particular feud makes a most interesting story. Copyrighted. All rights reserved, including that of translation into foreign languages.

My father half rose from the table, and my mother ventured to remonstrate with him.

"Come, Robert, eat yer cakes," she said, in the conciliating tone by which I ever knew that some important matter was at stake. "Don't pay too much attention to the child. What does a child know about sich things?"

But my father, without a word, reached for his hat.

With that, old Chris who has been cramming the pancakes into his mouth with a speed that betokened some unusual agitation of mind which required an outlet in some species of manual labour, found voice.

"Sit down, man, sit down," he sputtered in his rich, strong voice. "What on airth do ye want to go rammin' yer head into barn doors before they're opened fer ye, for? Dash it, man, sit down, 'n' eat yer supper, 'n' don't be suspectin' mischief so it comes between you 'n' yer stomach!"

But my father was already out of the door and was striding off down the little path with a decision that meant something must happen.

"He's off now to see about it," said my mother, half fretfully, "'n' not three bites of his cakes in his mouth! Why couldn't ye hold yer tongue"—to me—"till after supper?"

With that my mother, with her usual facility, dismissed the subject; but Chris sat for the rest of the meal, with a troubled look on his face. As for me, I could not well make out what such a disturbance could all be about, and as soon as Chris went out after supper I seized the opportunity to question him.

"What's the matter, Chris?" I said. "Why did father get so angry and go off without his supper?"

But Chris would vouchsafe me no satisfaction.

"Grant that an empty stomach 'll be all that 'll come out of it," he muttered, going on to attend to his chores.

As for the pale little teacher, she had spoken not a word at all, and shortly after the dishes had been cleared away, with a cover or two left for my father, she went away upstairs to her room.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE QUARREL BY THE ELDERBERRY BUSHES

It was almost dark before I saw anything of my father again, although, feeling that I had been in some way responsible for the trouble, I watched for him anxiously. When I came at last upon him it was unexpectedly, at the great clump of elderberry bushes which grew close by the road, at the line fence between Carmichael's farm and ours.

I had been sent on an errand to Mrs. Might's, and was hurrying back with all speed; for a thunderstorm was muttering in the southwest, and I had all the fear of a nervous, highly-wrought child of the great storms which sometimes swept over our hill country, crashing from wood to wood, and setting the little rills a-rushing like mad things down the hillsides and over the roads.

Just as I ascended the little rise in the road at the ending of Carmichael's farm, the sound of a loud and angry voice arrested my attention.

Looking to the point whence it came I saw first my father. He was standing very still, close to the tall bushes, now in full bloom, with both hands on the

fence, head thrown back, and that indescribable look about eyes and mouth which was always there when he had come to an irrevocable decision; but his face was as white, almost, as the great discs of bloom shining above his head, against the green leaves.

Upon the other side of the fence, and this was the sight that struck terror to my soul, was the huge, burly form of Henry Carmichael, his hat on the back of his head, his big fist describing sledge-hammer blows on the top fence-rail by way of punctuation to his words.

His great voice was raised to its highest pitch—why is it that people in a temper invariably speak loudest those words which, in saner moments, they would be most shamed to say at all?—and every word cut the air to my ear so that I stopped, my heart almost ceasing to beat, my feet afraid to move.

"You black-faced hypocrite!" he was shouting, accompanying the opprobrium with a torrent of oaths, "You whited sepulchre with yer prayers, 'n' yer tenth to church, 'n' yer skulkin' dirty heart full o' suspicion of every body! D'ye think I took yer timber?—Me, that wouldn't have a smell of you or yours on the place?—Ye dirty little"—stopping as though stuck for words sufficiently descriptive of my father's villainess—"If ye weren't sich a blank little insignificant rat I'd mop the dirt with ye! Only good soil's too good to be fouled with ye! The like o' you, to go thievin' men's characters, 'n' then go accusin' them like a saint o' stealin' yer dirty trash!"

My father had listened without moving a muscle, but at the first pause he spoke.

"Ye know well, Henry Carmichael," he said in clear, even tones, "that I came straight to you when I had anything to say. Ye needn't think ye'll scare me with all yer bluster. I came only when I had good reason."

"Then, by Heaven, ye'll prove what ye say!" shouted Carmichael, shaking his fist in my father's face.

But my father neither shifted an inch, nor changed one tone of his cold, haughty voice.

"There's a thing called circumstantial evidence," he said, "which is powerful enough fer many a man to have been hung on it."

For an instant Carmichael stood like a statue, glaring at my father, and half leaning forward like an animal about to spring. I saw his hands clench, and the frozenness of my terror was broken.

"Oh, father, father!" I cried, and the ground scarcely seemed to touch my feet as I flew to him.

He took me in his arms, and I threw mine about his neck, sobbing wildly.

The first sound distinguishable as my terrified excitement abated somewhat, was Carmichael's voice, but how changed.

"For Heaven's sake, Mallory," it was saying, "the little lass is scared out of her wits. Carry her home."

"No," returned my father, placing me on the ground, I'll have it out with you, Carmichael, here and now. You'll make the little lass no excuse to get rid o' me. Here now, Peggie, stop cryin' and run off home."

When my father commanded there was no disobeying; but I clung to him for a moment, still sobbing. Then I rubbed my eyes with my apron and dared to take a look at Carmichael. He was leaning on the fence looking down at me, and something in his face emboldened me to speak.

"But ye'll not strike father?" I said.

"Strike yer father?" he answered, "No, child, no; I wouldn't strike yer father. Ye poor little mite, don't think that."

Reassured, I could wait no longer, and again my feet flew over the fence, across the fields, up the stairs and into my own room where, kneeling at the open window I could still see the two men by the elderberry bushes.

I have since thought, sometimes, that if grown people understood the abject terror with which little children listen to a fierce quarrel, they would be very careful about permitting them to be witnesses to it. To the child there is something unnatural in angry words and gestures, something terrifying, as in floods and hurricanes. Being neither old enough nor experienced enough to detect the vast number of trivialities which, after all, are mixed in with most storms of this nature, he looks on the whole occurrence as a great calamity. There must have been some terrible cause for such angry looks and words; there will surely be some terrible outcome to it all. And he, in his helplessness, what can he do but look cowering-ly on?

But it is so easy for us to forget the thoughts and emotions of childhood. Looking at life from the eyes of maturity we never stop to think that the hillocks which appear to us are the Himalayas of the child-world; and so we go on heedlessly, all unmindful of the little feet that must climb, and the little hearts that so often tremble.

I suppose I was not long at the window that evening, for when I left it the green light had not all departed from the fields and the hills; but it seemed to me hours and hours in which I knelt there watching my father and Carmichael, with the cloud from the southwest all shot intermittently with the quick, tremulous glow of the lightning, ever rising above their heads, and the low mutter of the thunder growing every moment more distinct.

I remember, too, the sickening dread which overwhelmed me lest my father and his enemy should not have left off their quarrelling before it had come very close. Had not Elijah called down fire from Heaven to convince wicked men? And could any of those men of the olden time have been more wicked than this Henry Carmichael whose blasphemous words were still in my ears? True, there was now no prophet to call down fire from the skies or bears from the wood, but might not the lightning be just a more modern and convenient method of dispensing punishment on occasion?

It was comforting at least to think that my father had never used such wicked language, and that consequently he stood a good chance of escape, but then, poor Dick! Was not Henry Carmichael his father? And at the thought of how Dick would feel when his father was brought in all blackened and burned by the lightning my tears flowed afresh.

At last, unable to bear the suspense longer, I left my post by the window and went to look for old Chris. He was sitting, as usual when his work was done, at the end of the stoop, and to-night was busy smoothing with sandpaper a new axe-handle that he had made. I crept around behind him so he would not know that I had been crying.

"Chris," I said, "do you think it's going to be a very bad storm?"

It was my usual question when a thunder storm was approaching, and, had my voice sounded as usual, would by no means have surprised Chris. As it was, however, he drew me around and looked in my face.

"Why, dash it, little girl," he said, "cryin', were ye? Why, no, I thinks it's goin' to pass right by to the south'ard of us. Ye ain't so scared as that o' the thunder, are ye?"

"But don't you think it's coming up near to—to where father 'n' Mr. Carmichael are?" I said.

He glanced across the field, then, taking up his axe-handle again, began rubbing it vigorously.

"Pity it wouldn't," he said, "'n' give 'em both a pair o' wet jackets! The 'dea o' two men standin' there yammerin' over what neither one 'll give in to, 'n' nobody knows about!"

"But it's an awful storm." Do you think father 'll be caught?" I insisted.

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