

THE RED CLOUD CHIEF

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RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA

AN OLD MAN'S LOVE.

BY ANTHONY TROLLOPE,
Author of "Doctor Thorne," "Frank Farson
Age," "In the Poplars," "Phineas Finn,
the Irish Member," "The Warden,"
"Barchester Towers," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XVIII.—CONTINUED.

"I am as good as my word."

"I don't know about that, Gordon."

"But I do, and I won't hear any asseveration to the contrary. I offered you the shares for a certain price, and you rejected them."

"I did not do that."

"You did do that—exactly. Then there came up in my mind a feeling that I might probably wish to change my purpose."

"And I am to suffer for that?"

"Not in the least. I then told you that you should still have the shares for the price named. But I did not offer them to any one else. So I came home—and you chose to come with me. But before I started, and again after, I told you that the offer did not hold good, and that I should not make up my mind to sell till after I got to England."

"We understood that you meant to be married."

"I never said so. I never said a word about marriage. I am now going back, and mean to manage the mire myself."

"Without asking me?"

"Yes; I shall ask you. But I have two-thirds. I will give you for your share ten per cent, more than the price you offered me for each of my shares. If you do not like that, you need not accept the offer; but I don't mean to have any words about it."

Mr. Fitzwaller Tookey's face became longer and longer, and he did in truth feel himself to be much aggrieved within his very soul. There were still two lines of conduct open to him. He might move the stern man by a recapitulation of the sorrow of his circumstances, or he might burst out into passionate wrath, and lay all his rancor to his partner's doing. He might still hope that in this latter way he could rouse all Kimberley against Gordon, and thus creep back into some vestige of property under the shadow of Gordon's misfortunes. He would try both. He would first endeavor to move the stern man to pity. "I don't think you can imagine the condition in which you are about to place me."

"I can't admit that I am placing you anywhere."

"I'll just explain. Of course I know that I can tell you everything in strict confidence."

"I don't know it at all."

"Oh, yes; I can. You remember the story of my poor wife?"

"Yes; I remember."

"She's in London now."

"What? She got back from the Portuguese settlement?"

"Yes. She did not stay there long. I don't suppose that the Portuguese are very nice people."

"Perhaps not."

"At any rate they don't have much money among them."

"Not after the lavish expenditure of the diamond-fields," suggested Gordon.

"Just so. Poor Matilda had been accustomed to all that money could buy for her. I never used to be close-fisted with her, though sometimes I would be tight."

"As far as I could understand, you never used to agree at all."

"I don't think we hit it off. Perhaps it was my fault."

"You used to be a little free in your way of living."

"I was, I confess that I was so. I was young then, but I am older now. I haven't touched a B. and S. before eleven o'clock since I have been in London above two or three times. I do mean to do the best I can for my young family." It was the fact that Mr. Tookey had three little children board-ing out in Kimberley.

"And what is the lady doing in London?"

"To tell the truth, she's at my lodgings."

"Oh—huh!"

"I do admit it. She is." She is indifferent to the gentelman in the Cape Town penal settlement?"

"Altogether, I don't think she ever really cared for him. To tell the truth, she only wanted some one to take her away from me."

"And now she trusts you again?"

"With dear, yes—completely. She is my wife, you know, still."

"I suppose so."

"That sacred tie has never been severed. You must always remember that. I don't know what your feelings are on such a subject, but according to my views it should not be severed roughly. When there are children, that should always be borne in mind."

"The children should be borne in mind."

"Just so. That's what I mean. Who can look after a family of young children so well as their young mother? Men have various ways of looking after their mother. To this John Gordon gave his ready assent, and was anxious to bear in what way his assistance was to be asked in again putting Mr. and Mrs. Tookey, with their young child, into a safe position on their feet. There are men, you know, stand-off sort of fellows, who think that a woman should never be forgiven."

"It must depend on how far the husband has been in fault."

"Exactly. Now these stand-off sort of fellows will never admit that they have been in fault at all. That's not my case."

"You drink a little."

"For the matter of that so did she. When a woman drinks she gets herself to bed somehow. A man gets out upon a spree. That's what I used to do, and then I would talk about me rather recklessly. I have no doubt Matilda did get it sometimes. When there has been a kind of thing, forgive and forget is the best thing you can do."

"I suppose so."

"And then the Fields there isn't the same sort of prudish life which is accustomed to in England. Here in London a man is nowhere if he takes his wife back. Nobody knows her, because there are plenty to know of another sort. But there things are not quite so strict. Of course she oughtn't to have gone off with Atkinson—a vulgar, low fellow, too."

"And you oughtn't to have licked her."

"That's just it. It was fit for it. I think. That's the way I look at it. At any rate we are living together now, and so one can say we're not man and wife."

"There'll be a deal of trouble saved in that—ay."

"A great deal. We are man and wife, and can begin again as though nothing

had happened. No one can say that black's the white of our eye. She'll take to those darling children as though nothing had happened. You can't conceive how anxious she is to get back to them. And there's no other impediment. That's a comfort."

"Another impediment would have upset you rather."

"I couldn't have put up with that." Mr. Fitzwaller Tookey looked very grave and high-minded as he made the assertion. "But there's nothing of that kind. It's all open sailing. Now, what are we to live upon, just for a beginning?"

"You have means out there."

"Not as things are at present, I am sorry to say. To tell the truth, my third share of the old Stick-in-the-Mud is gone. I had to raise money when it was desirable that I should come with you."

"I did not do that."

"You did do that—exactly. Then there came up in my mind a feeling that I might probably wish to change my purpose."

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"Yes. She did not stay there long. I don't suppose that the Portuguese are very nice people."

"Perhaps not."

"You will say."

"I don't think I would."

"Why should you interfere?"

"I don't think you ought. Especially as I have taken the trouble to concern what I am going about."

"I can guess," said Mary.

"You ought not to guess in such a manner. You ought not to have it on your mind at all. I told you that I would do to you, you know."

"Or if you give me the agency in the same terms, it would be the same thing. I don't care a straw for Poker & Dodge."

"I care not."

"But you find me as true as steel."

"What little good I did at the Fields I did by looking after my own business."

"Then what do you propose?" Let Poker & Dodge have them, and I shall be able to keep you from the sun name."

"To this mild appeal Mr. Tookey had been brought by the manner in which John Gordon had scratched his head. "I think you are right," said Joshua. "I have got the money down, and when I have arranged the sale, will undertake to give me the agency at one per cent on the whole take for three years certain. That'll be £1,000 a year, and its odd if I can't find my self again in that time," Gordon stood silent, scratching his head.

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