

Death of a Beautiful Girl Horrifies Man

NEETAH

By

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The choppy waves on Moose Lake were slapping the rock-bound shore. Far to the west, a timber wolf howled and was answered by the northern village dogs.

It took Cayuse Charley quite a while to realize the girl in his arms was dead—but he did. He had never experienced such horror!

He hadn't killed her, he hadn't hurt her and how she died remained a complete mystery to the trader. But there was no mystery to the fact that she was actually dead—no doubt whatsoever.

Her name was Neetah Birch, part Athabaskan Indian, Eskimo, Russian, French, and Scandinavian.

Charley shuddered and it would have been easy for him to go to pieces—but he couldn't afford that.

Neetah lived in a cabin very close to the trading post. She was the daughter of a very strict parents. However, she had been sneaking over to the trading post at night for months now. She would open her bedroom window, climb a dog fence and enter the back door of the store. Charley had given her money and food for her clandestine visits. But now she was dead—poor girl.

Sudden revulsion made Charley let her go. She fell back heavily, her hair fluffing out on the pillow, a dead girl without expression on her face nor in those once pretty eyes.

Cayuse Charley was a pretty hard character. He had served with the Arizona Rangers, worked for the Hudson's Bay Co., was a bush pilot and wireless telegrapher. But the immediate situation unnerved him. He wanted to scream—but he didn't dare.

If he was found with a dead Native girl in his bed, what would happen to him? He wanted to protect the girl and her family. He hadn't killed her. She had just died, perhaps from a heart attack. Charley thought that slipping away from the shadow of the strict parents to be with him might have been a great strain.

Cayuse had another girl and he surely didn't want her to know that he and Neetah had been carrying on a love affair. He did not want anyone to know, not even if he could manage it!

"I have to get her back into her own bed in her cabin," he groaned.

Neetah had been too beautiful to last—she didn't last—she was dead! Cayuse Charley shivered.

In order to get to his store, Neetah had climbed out her bedroom window, climbed over a dogfence, walked across a foot bridge over a tiny stream, but this was a very short distance between the two houses.

Charley was a strong man. He carried the dead girl Boy Scout fashion. The tiny bridge across the creek was once the roof support of a

Mormon church. When the Native people laid it across for a bridge, they claimed that only the virtuous could walk across that creek and the guilty would be given just reward.

Cayuse and Neetah had crossed the tiny bridge many times—but what about tonight!

Outside, the moon was shining brightly—eerily. The mute dogs in the village began to howl louder and louder. The wolves yonder toward the Alaska Range answered their sled dog cousins in a wild, plaintive confusion of howls.

Cayuse Charley negotiated the foot bridge and then he was up against the dog fence. The dogs tied up within the fence knew him and paid little attention. Instead, they howled at the moon and in answer to the wolves.

The man laid the dead Native girl on the grass, went to his tool shed and got a hammer to remove some pales from the fence so he could put the body through the opening.

He picked up the body and to his horror, there was a perfect imprint of the girl on the dewy grass. He then pushed the remains of beautiful Neetah through the fence.

When he came to the cabin, he easily raised the window. He then hoisted and shoved the body inside but in doing so, part of the night clothes of the girl disengaged. Someone stirred in the next room. He hurriedly placed Neetah in her bed and hastily retreated.

In his haste, Cayuse Charley picked up the disengaged garment and took it with him. He also forgot to close the window. As he dashed, he tripped and fell hard, impaling himself on a long nail of one of the pales he had taken off. The wound must have struck an artery because the blood spurted out when he pulled himself off the nail. He pressed Neetah's night garment against his wound.

"I must die also," Cayuse Charley thought, "for I talked her into coming over to see me!" And then the man began to sob.

In the morning, an old couple found Cayuse Charley bleeding to death in his yard. He had crossed the foot bridge again alright but his tracks were plainly visible on the dewy grass leading from the girl's window toward his store.

In his agony, Cayuse kept repeating, "I killed the poor girl—I killed her!"

Neetah's parents were satisfied with the trader's admission. They surmised that he had tried to attack the girl and had taken part of her night clothes off and then the daughter had died of utter terror of fright. He had come in through the window. There was no doubt of that.

There is a story in that northern village that Cayuse Charley had turned into a dog and if he had, perhaps Neetah also had become one of the dogs in the village.

There is also a story that an old medicine woman knew for some reason the real story behind the tragedy but she has strangely kept her peace.