

# **The Flaw**

**by**

**Beatrice Redpath**

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*Title:* The Flaw

*Date of first publication:* 1919

*Author:* Beatrice Redpath (1886-1937)

*Date first posted:* July 2, 2022

*Date last updated:* July 2, 2022

Faded Page eBook #20220705

This eBook was produced by: John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpcanada.net>

# THE FLAW

BY BEATRICE REDPATH

Arthur Dennison, glanced at the clock, impatient of the slowly-moving hands, then moved to the window and stood staring out into the street, luminous from the brilliance of the arc lamps shining on the snow. And again he commenced a long detour of the room, striving to curb his restless impatience. The door bell sounded sharply and he stood still, his attitude one of eager expectancy.

“Myra,” he exclaimed, and the next instant he held the girl’s two gloved hands in his, “I was afraid you had changed your mind—oh, you don’t know the suspense I’ve gone through in the last hour. I couldn’t have borne it if anything had happened to make you decide differently.”

He was helping her off with her furs and her coat while she stood, a little shy, a trifle diffident. It was so strange to be here! She glanced away from him, from his eyes that compelled and sought her glance, to the warm comfort of the room, observing as she always observed the minute details that combined to make up the whole. A shade of perplexity appeared in her face and he was immediately aware of it.

“What is it?” he whispered. “Aren’t you glad—glad to be here?” “Yes—yes, I’m glad,” she said with a firmness, as if a strong affirmation would make it true. For she wasn’t sure. It was different from what she had imagined, and yet she had imagined it in a thousand ways. He was just as she liked him to be, whimsical, half gay, half serious, and wholly kind. The fault did not lie wholly with him!

The house was just what she had expected. There was colour and warmth, books lying about, a piece of Japanese embroidery just where the walls demanded it should be, while a glimpse of fire pointed long thin fingers of light into the dusk of the halls. She felt as if she were drinking in the warmth, the colour and comfort of it all, through the pores of her skin. But all the time her mind was straining out to find the flaw, the thing that

disturbed her, that made her ill at ease. Perhaps she was too tired. She had said that this day, for the last time, she would go to the office in the customary way. She had been very nervous and the incessant click of the typewriter had jarred her nerves, already strained by the mental conflict which she had been undergoing. She had no compunction about what she was doing. She had battled too long, seen too much of suffering and the ruthless manner in which life inflicted pain, to have any thought for the conventionality that perhaps should have kept her at the office till the divorce was accomplished. But she was too tired to go on, too tired to resist his urging of her to abandon herself to his will. She had a right to happiness, she told herself repeatedly, and a love like theirs was big enough to thrust aside barriers, to break bonds, even to incur the sacrifice of another, if such should stand in the way of its fulfilment. Oh, she had told herself this too often to have any doubts concerning it.

The flaw was nowhere here; she must seek further.

“Where has she gone?” she asked suddenly, her dark blue eyes regarding him questioningly, as she took a chair beside the fire.

“Oh,” he said, startled, as if her direct question coming unexpectedly had bewildered him, “Nancy—she’s gone to her people till the affair is over. She’s going abroad afterwards—I thought I had told you.”

“Going abroad,” Myra repeated. “That always has such a broken sound. People go abroad when someone they are fond of dies—when they have failed—when they want to be alone to suffer. Do you think she feels that way?”

Arthur Dennison laughed a little awkwardly.

“You have such an imagination, dear,” he said. “You are always wondering how people feel. Most people don’t feel at all, you know. It’s only people like you and I—” and he leaned over the back of her chair and touched the fur about her neck. She stirred a little under his touch and thrust one hand deep in the upholstered side of the chair. She brought it up slowly, a silver point that glittered in the firelight on the tip of her finger.

“Her thimble,” she said, and her eyes sought the fire and she stared into the hot coals in silence.

“I’ve never seen her and you’ve told me so little about her,” Myra said, turning to him. “We’ve always talked about ourselves, haven’t we?”

“What else should we talk about?” he responded, with cheerful egotism.

“About her,” Myra insisted. “I feel I want to know about her.” And then, after a pause, “Tell me about her, please,” she repeated.

Arthur Dennison stared before him reflectively.

“That’s so difficult, dear,” he said. “There doesn’t seem much to tell. I can’t analyze people as you do. I can tell you the colour of her hair and her eyes, but that’s not what you want to know.”

“No, I want to know the woman; what she thinks, feels, and is.”

“How can I tell you?” he said, “I don’t know myself. We are fortunate if we know anyone in life—few of us do—and when we feel we do—it’s the true dream—the great vision—what you and I know—how few others.”

Myra rose and moved restlessly about the room.

“I know, dear,” she said, “but I want to know about her, and perhaps I can find out by myself. A woman’s instinct is surer than a man’s knowledge, anyway. This room was hers, wasn’t it? These are her books, her pictures. Strange she has left them all here.”

She moved here and there, touching things lightly, picking up a book to glance at the title, glancing at a photograph, touching a bowl of flowers, while Arthur Dennison sat following her with his eyes.

“What is this—whose child is this?” Myra asked at length, coming over to his chair with a small white frame in her hand.

An expression of pain crossed Arthur Dennison’s face as he took the frame in his hand.

“That is Jamie,” he said quietly. “He died when he was a year old—six years ago.”

Myra stood staring down at the picture of the child, her eyes wide with pity.

“I didn’t know,” she said. “You never spoke of him before—” She took the little frame back into her hands. “But she leaves it here,” she went on in bewilderment, “when she knows that another woman will be here.”

“She has forgotten it. I will send it to her to-morrow,” he said, but Myra’s hand closed over it.

“No, you won’t send it,” and now she sat down, her eyes fixed on a point of light on the brasses, her hands folded across the little frame.

“I think I know,” she said. “I think I know what I wanted to know. You must bring her back, for I can’t stay. Oh, don’t you see, dear—she cares. And she has the right. She has borne—she has suffered. It all seems to lie just in that,” she went on with wide, staring eyes; “those who have borne—those who have suffered—they have the right.”

“Myra,” he exclaimed, in startled protest, “it’s impossible. You and I—we care. She seems like a stranger compared to you. Myra,—oh, don’t be foolish, child. It’s destiny—you and I. It was meant, it was intended. She was only an incident. She is a stranger. Most people are—but you and I—the first time we met—your thought was my thought, your vision my vision, your desires were my desires. Oh, you and I are one in a thousand ways. When love comes like ours, everything must be overthrown. It is impossible what you say. You don’t know. She is cold, she is not you. Her pride is perhaps hurt, but that is all. I swear to you, child, she doesn’t care.”

“I think she does,” Myra answered slowly, “and now I know why I felt so strangely when I came in here. It was her books lying about, her sewing, her thimble that I picked up in the chair over there. Little ghosts crying out in protest—little ghosts—all the personal belongings that a woman usually cherishes. She does not forget them unless she is dumb with pain, unless nothing on earth counts but the one thing, unless she is crushed and heartbroken. The picture of her baby—oh, dear, I couldn’t. She has borne—she has suffered—she has the right—and she cares. You are wrong.”

He looked up to plead with her, to protest with the sole strength of his love, to cry out to her his need. Oh, theirs was the real vision, love intense, the incalculable desire! But in her face he saw the futility of it—she would listen to him, white-faced, as he pleaded, but in her eyes would be her purpose. He saw that she would not flinch from her resolve—and the words died on his lips, as he sat down, covering his face with his hands.

He did not hear her as she moved about the room, so intent was he on this shattering of his desire. Only the dull slam of the door aroused him at last to the void of the reality.

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *The Flaw* by Beatrice Redpath]