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The Campbell Milling Company, Limited, Toronto
ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL, President

Beautiful Cynthia;

Victory After Many Defeats.

CHAPTER XXV.
HER LADYSHIP'S RAGE.

Cynthia's face was scarlet; Lady Gwen looked at her piercingly.

"Why are you reddening like a barmaid?" she demanded. "Is there anything in what Percy says? Do you mean to tell me?"

Again the door opened. The footman announced Mr. Frayne. The eyes of the three persons in the room were fixed upon Darrel as if he had dropped from the ceiling or risen through the floor.

Her face rather pale and appeared anxious, and as he took in the signs of the battle and saw that something was wrong, he stopped and looked from one to the other with natural confusion.

"But it is at such moments that men like Darrel Frayne show the pluck that is in them. With just one loving, encouraging glance at Cynthia he looked steadily at Lady Gwen and said:

"I came to see you, Lady Westlake."

"So I perceive, sir," she broke in.

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her head erect, her eyes fixing on him laughtily; "but it does not follow that I will receive you. You should have left your card with my servant."

"No," said Darrel, very quietly, but with something in his voice, in the straightening of his lips, which made Cynthia's heart leap with a woman's admiration for the man whose purpose is strong and not to be thwarted. "I wanted to see your ladyship in a matter of importance. I understood that you were alone; I will come again, if you will permit me."

He bowed, and with another glance at Cynthia, turned to leave the room, but Lady Westlake stopped him as she had stopped Percy.

"I cannot imagine what business you can have with me, Mr. Frayne," she said; "but, whatever it may be, I prefer to hear it here—and as briefly as possible. Stay where you are, Percy. Mr. Frayne's business cannot be of so private a nature that you, my nephew, should not hear it. Now, sir, if you please?"

Darrel possessed a temper, and, but for Cynthia, it would have risen and displayed itself at this piece of insolence on the part of the terrible old woman. But he kept his temper down with an iron hand, for was he not contending for the most glorious prize in the world, his Cynthia, his sweet, the beautiful girl, who stood there, her eyes downcast, her brows drawn together with pain and indignation at the treatment he was receiving? He knew he must be calm.

"I have not the least objection to saying what I have come to say before the whole world. I have come to ask you to give me your niece for my wife, Lady Westlake," he said quietly. She stood perfectly still for a moment; it looked as if she were going to have a fit of some kind, for her face was drawn and looked like a mask, a very hideous one; her lips were stretched wide, showing her teeth; her eyes were fixed on Darrel as if he had the power, she would have stricken him dead at her feet.

Watching her, spellbound, they wondered if she would ever speak. But at last her mouth opened, and a weird sound that was like a laugh came from between her teeth.

"Very succinctly stated, sir!" she said. "My reply shall be as short and to the point. You ask me whether I will consent to my niece's marriage with you. My answer is 'No!' and I will add that I would rather see her dead here at my feet than your wife."

There was a moment's silence. Then Cynthia uttered a faint cry. She went to Darrel and took his hand, looked up into his face with an indescribable look, and then turned, still holding his hand, which he sure, grasped hers tightly, and confronted her aunt.

"Cynthia has shown what I wanted to tell you, Lady Westlake," said Darrel quietly. "I spoke to her last night at the ball, and told her that I loved her. It was because she consented to be my wife that I came here this afternoon. I do not know what I have done to displease you. I do not know why you refuse your consent, and so harshly—"

"Then permit me to tell you, Mr. Frayne," she said, her voice grating as it passed through her closed teeth. "This foolish girl, whose silly brain you have turned with your love-making, has just declined an offer from Lord Northam. You understand? But for you—"

"Northam," said Darrel, almost to himself, as if he had not heard the rest of the speech. "I did not know." He looked down at the white face beside him. "Cynthia?"

"Yes," she whispered, "he asked me, Darrel; but he understood, and was very kind and good. He was not angry. He promised to be my friend—"

Lady Gwen broke in between the lovers' murmured confidences. "You have received my answer, Mr. Frayne," she said insolently. "I do not give my consent to your marriage with my niece. I never will do so. I gather from your manner, which partakes of too much pretension for my fancy, that you were certain of being a welcome suitor. I confess I fail to understand why the son of an impetuous baronet—"

"Impetuous? My father?" said Darrel, not resentfully, but with genuine surprise.

try to part me from him. We can't be happy unless we are together—unless I am his—wife."

The old woman looked down at her ardent face, the quivering lips, the imploring eyes. It is just possible that at that moment the tier of blood asserted themselves, that the Griffin remembered her younger sister, whom she had loved, but who had passed out of her life when she married this girl's father.

A spasm of tenderness ran through the old world-worn frame, but, like Pharaoh, the Griffin hardened her heart.

She flung the imploring hands from her, drew herself erect, and extended a gnarled and shaking hand.

"Do as I tell you!" she croaked hoarsely. "Marry Lord Northam, and I will be your friend for life; I will leave you all my money—"

"I can't, I can't!" broke in Cynthia. "I love Darrel!"

"Then go to him!" cried the Griffin, in a terrible voice. "Go to him! I have nothing more to do with you. I picked you out of the mud; go back to it and wallow in it with him!"

Cynthia recoiled and remained motionless for a moment, then she went to Darrel, placed both her trembling hands on his shoulders, and looked up at him. To the credit of his manhood he forgot the eyes that were watching them, put his arms round her, and gathered her to him, and kissed her.

The sight infuriated the Griffin almost to madness. She raised her ebony stick as if she would actually strike them.

"Out of my sight!" she cried coarsely, almost unintelligibly. "I shall wait twenty-four hours to get out of my house, girl! I have done with you!"

She brought her stick to the ground, and leaning on it heavily, limped out of the room. There was a pause. Then Cynthia, still clinging to Darrel, said, scarcely knowing what she said:

"Oh, what shall I do?"

Percy closed his book and replaced it on the table softly. Everything was going beautifully for him. The girl who had supplanted him was ruined, an outcast. He was once again Lady Westlake's heir. He came forward slowly, his attitude, his face, expressive of the deepest sympathy.

"I am sorry to be present at so painful a scene," he said. "I am on Cynthia's side. I need scarcely say. Will you come with me, Mr. Frayne? It will be well for Cynthia to go to her room and rest. It has been a trying scene for her."

Cynthia drew apart from Darrel. "Yes, go with him, Darrel," she said. "Percy is very clever, and he is very kind. He may be able to help us."

Percy delicately and discreetly left the room and went into the hall, where he waited with a grave countenance but with a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes.

"Oh, it is terrible!" said Cynthia, as she clung to Darrel. "She will never consent; she will never forgive me! I must leave here in twenty-four hours—she said—that is a day, isn't it? What shall I do, Darrel, dear?"

"I don't know," he said, confused, bewildered; but he smiled down at her with a man's confidence, a man's self-reliance. "You are mine, and that's enough for me. I must think, consider—"

"Perhaps Percy will be able to think of something to help us," she said. "But don't grieve, Darrel. I am yours whatever happens, yours till death. Oh, Darrel, I love you better than ever! You were so brave, you were not frightened, you faced her—and all for my sake! I am not worth it!"

(To be continued.)

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