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writes Mr. I. Whittemuth, of Manilla, Ont. "I suffered agonies with chapped and cracked hands. My thumbs were so badly cracked that they actually never healed up from one winter to the next. As I am a watchmaker, I found it very awkward to do fine work with my hands in such a state.

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OR,
The Game-Keeper's Hut

CHAPTER XI

READING THE WILL.

"But we know that your uncle was too just and acute a man to attempt to wrest fate to his own inclination; he only tried to guide it. He has proved his wisdom and justice by a stipulation which stamps him at once as a man of no common mind. He has left, so to speak, each of you free to decline or accept his fortune without depriving the other of his, or her, share of it. To Sir Cyril the first word is given. It is for him to say, when the whole matter has been laid before him, whether he will follow the course set out in the deed, and propose for your hand. Should he do so, and you accept, well and good, the money is secured to you both. Should you reject him, the fortune goes to the land, houses, gold. So much for your part in the matter; now comes his."

"Should he be mad enough to throw away such a chance of securing a beautiful and charming bride—forgive me if I am plain-speaking, my dear Miss Weston—and an immense, a princely fortune, should he do this, then the whole of the money, lands, houses and gold comes to you; to do with as you will—yours wholly and unconditionally; unfettered by a single claim or drawback.

"Such is the story which the deed sets forth, and such are its commands and requirements."

Mr. Burdon having paused, impressively looked at Edna. She was surprised and agitated—one moment pale, the next a vivid crimson. Aunt Martha, still holding her hand, crushed that hand one moment and patted and soothed it the next. Edward More sat and glanced at one and the other, dissatisfied with everything, and quite prepared to break out into lamentable complainings whichever way the matter should be settled.

Neither of the three spoke a word. Mr. Burdon, having waited to see if anyone felt inclined to speak, rose again, and stood with his back to the empty fireplace, and addressing Edna said:

"Practically, my dear young lady, the matter rests in your hands."

Edna started from a painful reverie and looked up with vague alarm.

Mr. Burdon, answering that look, added:

"Yes; for I am not indulging in a perhaps pardonable flattery when I assert that Sir Cyril, not being insane, is not likely to refuse either you or this immense fortune—certainly not both together. Therefore it rests with you whether you accept a husband, young, handsome, and a general favorite—"

Edward More granted audibly.

"A general favorite," repeated Mr. Burdon, emphatically, as if he would not be contradicted on that point.

"Of course any conjecture is at present premature, but I think I may answer for Sir Cyril; I think I am sufficiently in his confidence to promise that he will throw no obstacle in the way of the fulfillment of your uncle's wishes."

There was another pause.

"As I have said, the choice, if choice it can be called, rests with Sir Cyril, as it should do, very properly giving you two choices, if I may call them so; and I have dispatched a clerk, a special messenger, for Sir Cyril, that the preliminaries may be got through without any loss of time. I trust, I do trust, that we may succeed in finding Sir Cyril; his movements are just at present very uncertain."

"Very uncertain!" echoed Edward More, sardonically.

"May I ask if you have ever seen Sir Cyril?" asked Mr. Burdon.

Edna raised her eyes, half frightened, wholly troubled, and shook her head.

"No, I have not seen him," she said, in a low voice.

"No doubt you have heard of him?"

"Oh, no doubt!" echoed Edward More, again, with increased bitterness.

Edna looked from one to the other.

"Yes, I have heard of him," she said, and her face grew crimson.

"And heard no good of him?" granted Edward.

"We can't say that," broke in Mr. Burdon, quickly.

"As I have said, Sir Cyril is a general favorite and—and well, he has no worse enemy than himself."

"And that is enough to ruin him," added Edward, spitefully.

Edna looked with pained surprise at the malignant face of the speaker, and for the first time a gleam of pity for this Sir Cyril crossed her heart.

"Well, well," said Mr. Burdon, with a touch of impatience. "Brothers are inclined, too often, to judge each other too harshly. It is a pity Sir Cyril is not here to speak for himself. Meanwhile, my dear madam," he said—"that is, until he arrives—I think we had better suspend all decisions and even discussions. Where are you staying?"

"We are staying at Moffat's Hotel," answered Aunt Martha, nervously.

Mr. Burdon bowed and glanced at Edward.

"Is there anything else that we ought to say, Mr. More?"

Edward More shook his head.

"Except to hope that that precious brother of mine will be persuaded to put in an appearance. I don't suppose Miss Weston will be sorry to have the matter cleared up."

Edna looked up quickly, and her bright eyes flashed upon him with sweet indignation.

"I think," she said, with a little tremor in her voice, "that it could be settled now at this moment—"

Mr. Burdon stopped her with upraised hands.

"Softly, softly, my dear young lady! I cannot permit you to say what I think you were going to say. The choice, remember, rests in the first instance with Sir Cyril. Do not be hasty! I implore you to remember that the fate of an immense estate rests upon the issue of this question. Come, you will forgive me," he said, bending toward her with infinite respect; "indeed, I should never forgive myself if I allowed you to put yourself at a disadvantage, and believe me, you would be doing so if you expressed an opinion at this time."

Then as Edna hung her head and closed her lips, he ejaculated, irritably:

"I would give a hundred pounds if Sir Cyril were here now!"

As he spoke, almost before the words were out of his lips, there came a knock at the door, and the discreet clerk appeared in answer to the impatient "Come in!" and handed a card to Mr. Burdon.

No sooner had he glanced at it than he turned with a short laugh of surprise and satisfaction.

"See how rash it is to make monetary vows—or vows of any sort! Sir Cyril is here!"

"What!" exclaimed Edward, More, starting to his feet with a surprised scowl of repugnance; "do you mean to say he is here, in this house?"

"Yes," said Mr. Burdon, "and wishes to see me alone!"

Edna, pale and trembling, rose.

"Let us go, aunt!" she said, in a hurried whisper.

"Not yet," pleaded Mr. Burdon. "If you can be persuaded to stay until I return, I promise not to be long. Please let me persuade you. Come, my dear young lady, this is a matter of business as well as sentiment. I can understand and appreciate your feelings in the matter, but while I respect them, pray let me beg you to reflect on the lamentable results that would attend any mistake or misunderstanding. Give me five—ten—minutes!"

Edna sank back into her chair trembling visibly, but otherwise calm and self-possessed, and the lawyer hurried from the room.

CHAPTER XII

SIR CYRIL'S CHOICE.

"MY dear Sir Cyril!" exclaimed

Mr. Burdon, entering his chief clerk's room, into which Sir Cyril had been shown, "this is the luckiest coincidence in the world;" and he laughed a legal laugh of satisfaction, which died away rather suddenly as he came near enough to take his client's proffered hand and see his face.

"I—I—hope nothing has happened," he said, with an air of concern, "and that you are quite well."

"Nothing has happened, and I am quite well, thanks!" replied Cyril, with most unusual impatience.

"I am glad to hear it, Sir Cyril," responded Mr. Burdon, still eyeing with a covert scrutiny the pale, handsome face, with its strange, wan and weary look, so very strange upon the face of careless, light-hearted Sir Cyril.

"Singular!" thought the keen lawyer. "He is taking his bad luck to heart. Who would have thought it?"

Then he drew a chair to the table and seated himself.

"I'm glad to hear you are quite well, Sir Cyril. Candidly, you are not looking at all yourself—"

"And who the devil would?" said Cyril, with a mingled haughtiness and impatience so strange and uncommon to him that Mr. Burdon could not help staring. "You forget that your confounded clerk has been at my heels for the last three days, badgering me to get on, get on, and reach here. What on earth do you want with me? I thought, when I was here last, that I'd done with lawyers—that I had nothing left for the law to trouble itself about."

"So did I, Sir Cyril," replied Mr. Burdon, dryly, but still respectfully, "but it seems we were mistaken. Will you not take a seat?—and let me offer you—"

"Nothing," said Cyril, dropping in to a chair; then he leaned his head upon his hand for a moment, and Mr. Burdon sat too astonished to proceed to business.

"See here, Burdon," said Cyril, looking up suddenly, and frowning across the table, "I have come over to England very much against my will, and to this place, which I would have avoided, if I could have fought against a strange kind of impulse and attraction, and I am anxious to leave it again as quickly as possible. I don't wish to offend, but, there—there," and with a movement of his hand he swept away whatever explanations he was about to give.

"Your time is too valuable to waste on me; you have wasted quite enough already, Heaven knows! Now, what is this business?"

As he spoke he made a palpable attempt to give his attention, and succeeded in doing so—after a fashion.

Mr. Burdon bit his lip, puzzled and curious, but he knew the More peculiarities and idiosyncrasies too well to trifle with them, and proceeded to obey his client's direct injunctions.

"Well, Sir Cyril, I am quite ready; I hope I have never been dilatory where your interests are concerned. It was your interest that forced me to send my man for you, and I think you will be more ready to pardon me for the liberty after you have found my reasons for so doing than you appear to be now!"

Cyril, whose good humor no amount of ill luck and trouble could altogether destroy, looked up without the frown, and with a smile which was, however, very different from his old, light-hearted one.

"Forgive me, Burdon," he said; "as you see, I am rather knocked up—a good deal of travelling, and—that sort of thing; I am a little out of sorts, too; in fact, as you said, not quite myself. I know you mean well, you always have meant well to me and mine. Don't think I am ungrateful—don't think anything about me to-day; in fact, try, after I am gone, to forget that you have seen me. I shall leave England again to-night," he added, gloomily.

Mr. Burdon smiled with complacent satisfaction.

"I think not, Sir Cyril; I think not!" he said. "I've news that is good enough to keep most men at home, and I don't think even you will turn your back on it."

(To be Continued.)

Fads and Fashions.

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Emerald green velvet and wide bands of gold and silver are mysteriously combined to make a most charming wrap.

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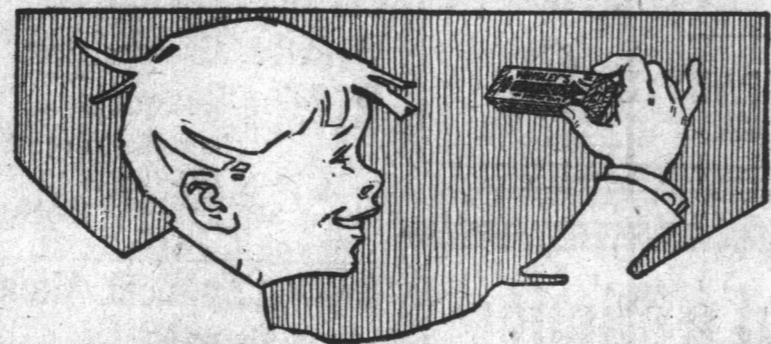
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