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The Battle for the Cedars.

BY PRESSLY W. MORRIS.

CONTINUED.

"I DO not know," was the answer.
"What did he want?" Evans continued.

Evans was rarely so curious about strangers; but something seemed to prompt him to ask questions about Victor.

"He was merely making some inquiries about the Cashel suit," said Douglass.

"What did he say about that?"

The clerk hesitated, for he did not like Evans, and had no desire to utter a sentence that would benefit him any; but he concluded that nothing could be made out of the words of the stranger that would advantage Evans.

"He appeared to rejoice at the way the suit was decided," Douglass said.

"It appears to me, that, whoever he may be," cried Evans angrily, "he is meddling with other people's affairs."

Then the lawyer added meaningfully,—"He may have cause for sorrow yet, Douglass. The end of this matter is not reached, you know. It will be very singular if an estate like Cashel's can be wrested from its rightful owner with impunity."

It was seldom that Evans talked so much to Douglass, for he was conscious in his evil heart that the clerk did not like him; but the stranger's interest in the Cashel suit had angered him, and for the moment he had half forgotten all this.

He attended to the business that had brought him to the office,—the looking-over of some musty documents,—and left the court house.

Victor returned to his hotel.
"My curiosity is satisfied," he said to himself, as he walked along. "It is best, I suppose, that the case went as it did. This is but the beginning. There are clouds gathering over that villain's head of which he does not dream; and in good time they will overwhelm him too. At present, I am satisfied to watch this case. I must behold her to assure myself that she is a Cashel. I believe I can tell the true metal."

"At what time is the next train for Baltimore due?" Victor asked the clerk, when he reached the hotel again.

"Not till half-past seven o'clock," was the reply.

It was some time to wait; but the hours passed, and Victor found himself moving toward Baltimore once more.

On the morning of the next day Victor entered Mr. Wylie's office. He proposed to pursue his inquiries about the new claimant to the Cashel estate a little farther. Doubtless Mr. Wylie or Mr. Oldham would inform him where Miss Cashel could be found, and he would make it convenient to call upon her.

Some day his interest would be explained.

Mr. Wylie was in, but Victor found it somewhat difficult to state what he wished. Talking to Mr. Wylie was not like questioning an officer of the court, who would be expected to answer all business inquiries freely.

"My name is Victor," he managed to say at length; and, understanding that you are the attorney for the plaintiff in the suit of Cashel *versus* Cashel, I have come to you to inquire if you will be kind enough to inform me where I can find her."

Mr. Wylie glanced at the speaker's face. There was nothing there to give him fright for his client; on the contrary, the face before him wore an expression frank and pleasant, and was evidently the face of an honest and noble man.

"Miss Cashel is with some friends in

the country," Mr. Wylie said; "but she is known by another name. It is her request that I keep her identity as much of a secret as possible till this case is settled. If I should direct you where to find her, her secret would be betrayed. But, Mr. Victor, I am her attorney; and if you have anything of importance to communicate, I will listen to it gladly. Of course, under the circumstances, I am forced to conclude that you have some object of importance in view in wishing to see Miss Cashel."

Victor realized at that moment that his position might be misunderstood. It had not entered his mind before that Mr. Wylie might be suspicious of him. He had an object in view in wishing to see Miss Cashel; but he did not desire to state it at that time.

"I have nothing to communicate at present," he returned to Mr. Wylie. "Of course I cannot expect you to do otherwise than obey her request."

Then he added, after a moment's pause,—

"I am aware, Mr. Wylie that it seems ridiculous that I should be searching for Miss Cashel, and yet refuse to state why I wish to behold her. You will pardon me for my absurdity. The truth is, I have heretofore only thought of my desire to look upon her, and have not considered my errand here in its ridiculous light."

"Are you acquainted with Mr. Lionel Cashel, the defendant in this case?" Mr. Wylie inquired.

Again the same expression came into Victor's eyes that had entered them when Douglass, the clerk, had asked him a similar question.

"I know him," he said coldly. The keen lawyer did not fail to see the gleam in the man's eyes, and he felt doubly assured that his client had nothing to fear from him.

"He likes not Cashel, and so conversely, for that reason, if no other, is a friend to us," was Mr. Wylie's thought.

"When will the case be tried again?" inquired Victor.

"In December," was the answer.

"At Richmond?"

"At Richmond."

"I intended to be present at the first trial," Victor continued; "but I was kept away by business affairs. Good-day, Mr. Wylie."

And Victor bowed himself out of the lawyer's office.

"That man appears to take a strange interest in this case," muttered Mr. Wylie. "It cannot be a mere blind hatred of Cashel that influences him; for, if I am any judge of human nature, he is not the man to cherish anything of that kind. To say the least, his conduct is singular; and there is some mystery hidden under all this."

Frequently, after that, did the lawyer think of Victor, and that interview.

"I have made a fool of myself," mused Victor, as he hastened away from the attorney's office. "Strange that I did not think what a predicament I would be in when Wylie should question me as to my object—as I ought to have considered that he most assuredly would. I am not sorry that I did not discover her whereabouts. How would I have felt calling on a strange young lady, and unable to give a reason for my visit? Truly, I have been decidedly thoughtful."

And thus, for the time, at least, Victor's quest ended.

Meantime, Barbara Lindsley had returned to her friends in Virginia.

Victor called at the residence of Mrs. Holland, in Baltimore, and, inquiring for her, was told whither she had gone.

Victor was sorry that he could not see Miss Lindsley immediately; but still he had room for pleasurable feelings, for he had laid his plans to be much in the vicinity of The Cedars for some time at least.

What drew this man thither so frequently? It seemed as though it must be some strange, powerful influence.

To return to Barbara.

There were still some guests at De Vere's when she arrived,—among them, Vincent Sherwood.

A day or two passed, and during those passing days Barbara watched Victoria and Vincent Sherwood. She came to the conclusion that there were pretty strong evidences of a pair of lovers.

"Has Mr. Sherwood proposed yet?"

Barbara asked, when she was alone with Victoria once.

Victoria blushed.
"Why, no!" she exclaimed. "What put that idea in your mind, Barbara?"

"Am I blind?" cried Barbara, still in the same light tone. "My dear, the gentleman is certainly bewitched by your loveliness. If he has not proposed yet, he will before long, or I am very much deceived with tokens."

Victoria concluded that she could match Barbara's rallery.

"Do you know, Barbara," she said, "that that rich Mr. Cashel has not been here since you left? What does that mean? What am I to infer was the attraction that brought him here?"

A pained expression came into Barbara's face, and Victoria, glancing up, saw it.

"Mr. Cashel has been ill the greater portion of the time," she said; "and of course, for that reason, he could not visit us."

"Yes, very ill," said Barbara musingly.

Victoria only caught the last two words, and took them for a question.

"Mr. Cashel has been very sick, indeed," she said; "nigh unto death." There was a silence, and then Barbara changed the subject of conversation.

Robert De Vere and Vincent Sherwood came in the parlor, where the girls were.

"Where have you two been hiding?" cried Robert. "Vincent and I have been searching in every direction for both of you."

"We have been here for some time," Victoria replied.

"Not for any great time, sis," Robert returned. "It has not been ten minutes since we looked in here. You were not here then."

"What have you on hand that demands our urgent attention?" Barbara inquired.

"We want to take a gallop after dinner," Robert replied. "Do you consent?"

"To be sure," said Barbara. "I delight in nothing more than horseback-riding."

Victoria acquiesced, and so the matter was arranged.

The young people still remained in the parlor, and in the course of their conversation Vincent Sherwood referred to the master of The Cedars.

"I hear that his suit has gone against him," said Robert De Vere. "You remember, Miss Lindsley, that we had some conversation about it once."

Barbara murmured some reply, in so low a tone that it was scarcely audible.

"I must confess that I did not expect this result," Robert added.

"And a woman is to own that magnificent estate," cried Vincent Sherwood.

"In truth, she will be a queen."

"I intended to witness the suit," Robert said to Barbara. "But circumstances called me to Richmond, and I did not return till after the time it was all over, as I supposed. I had to depart shortly after you did, Miss Lindsley, but I made my return much sooner."

"Cashel has not been here since his convalescence," said Sherwood. "I suppose we can look for him shortly."

"I dare say," Robert replied.

"I suppose I am a little premature in speaking of the queen of the Cashel possessions," Vincent continued. "Cashel would certainly appeal the case. If he has given it up, I suppose he is in no humor to visit his neighbors."

"He has not given it up yet," Robert De Vere said. "I understand he carries it to the Court of Appeals."

Barbara Lindsley had placed herself at the piano.

"Listen!" cried Victoria gayly, interrupting. "Barbara is going to play."

Barbara did play, and Cashel and his suit were forgotten by her hearers, as they listened to the delicious sounds evoked by the music of her touch.

The twilight thickened into darkness. The two girls sat still, the heart of one running over with happiness, the other happy for her friend's sake, yet with a touch of pain at her heart in wondering what the future would bring forth for her.

There was no need of a forged will. The master of The Cedars had discovered one that was genuine, with Herbert Cashel's true signature affixed, and attested by the proper witnesses. It bequeathed to his nephew, Oscar Cashel, son of the devious only brother, John Cashel, and his heirs, to have and hold forever, all of the great Cashel estate, personal and real property, tenements, hereditaments, and so forth.

It was no wonder that the master of The Cedars rejoiced with wild triumph, for this will would settle forever the great suit of Cashel *versus* Cashel. He had feared defeat, but now he would gain an overwhelming victory over Wylie and his client! This will assured him the possession of The Cedars and all the property of the late Herbert Cashel!

It was not strange that such a simple thing should cause quite a struggle in his mind, for Victor, the brave, noble, great-hearted Victor, knew that he loved this woman.

Who can fathom or explain the impulses of love? Love is diffident! Love stumbles where reason walks erect! Love takes fright at nothing!

But when, an hour later, Barbara returned from her ride, she found Victor waiting for her in the parlor at De Vere's.

Nothing lover-like occurred in the pleasant hour that followed. They were friends! Victor felt that he had no right to presume on aught else.

"As it now is I am sure of her friendship," he thought. "I cannot afford to permit that, yet, for the bare possibility of her love. Perhaps some day I may speak, but now I must keep silent, for I am nothing but a wanderer, defrauded out of my name even, as it were."

When Barbara went to her room after Victor's departure, she found Victoria there. Twilight was gathering, and the young girl sat in the shadows.

Barbara knelt by her side.
"Pet," she murmured softly, drawing Victoria's head toward her.

To her surprise, a damp face touched hers.

"What! my darling is weeping," Barbara cried.

A faint sob was the answer.
"Victoria, what ails you?" asked Barbara kindly.

"Dear Barbara, I am very happy," murmured Victoria, with another sob.

"Wherefore, pet?"
Victoria was silent.

"Tell me, Victoria?"
"He—he—loves"—Victoria commenced hesitatingly.

"Go on darling."
"He loves me!"

"Mr. Sherwood?"
"Yes."

"He has told you so?"
"Yes."

"And, darling, you love him?"
"With all my heart!"

Victoria spoke more freely now that her secret was out.

"He asked me to be his wife, and I have promised."

Barbara rose to her feet, and took the fair golden head in her arms. She bent over Victoria, and kissed her tenderly.

"Heaven bless you, sweet!" Barbara whispered.

Victoria spoke more freely now that her secret was out.

For many minutes the man could do nothing but rave out his rejoicings, stopping only to run his eye over the precious document occasionally; but at length he opened the one remaining paper, thick, and, like the will, somewhat yellow with age. As he read it, his face paled.

It was nothing that could take away from him the Cashel fortune; but it was a narrative that could influence an honorable man to but one course; a narrative that only the basest of villains could disregard and hide away. The story of the marriage of Herbert Cashel, and loss of his wife and child at sea. The man finished reading the paper, and then with a curse, stuck it away in the secret drawer. The will he placed in his breast. He pushed the drawer, and it closed with a sharp click, hiding its secret story from all the world, save one man,—that man the one who would be the last of all to give a clue to it!

On that night, the rest of the master of The Cedars was disturbed and broken. Visions of terror flitted across his dreams, and in imagination the will that he had discovered was taken violently from him, by some avenging power. He rose in the morning feverish and unrefreshed. Still, he exulted in the possession of the will, and after he had eaten his breakfast felt better physically. In the evening Evans returned. As usual, the master of The Cedars shut himself and the lawyer in the library.

"Well?" he inquired deliberately.

He did not intend to announce his discovery immediately. It could do no harm to know whether or not Evans would go as far as he had bargained. It would be something of a triumph to let the attorney proclaim that he had forged a will, and then inform him that his work of crime was all needless. He fancied that this would give him something of a hold on Evans.

"All right," Evans replied to that one interrogative word.

There was an expression in the lawyer's face, half fear, half triumph. He had completed his task but it was so very lately done, that the realization of his crime remained present before him; time had not hardened him to the contemplation of it. Oppositely, however, he could not forget the wrong value of his work.

"Where is the document?" asked the master of The Cedars.

Evans drew forth a leather-bound wallet, and from it took a paper, which he gave to his client.

"Very well done," said the master of The Cedars after he had glanced over it.

Evans flushed slightly at the words of praise. He had lost his sleep in preparing that paper, and he was glad that it suited. Besides, how much depended on its being well executed.

"But I have something that will answer the purpose better," continued the master of The Cedars, a gleam of triumph coming in his face as he drew forth the true will of Herbert Cashel.

Evans took it, but could only stare at it in a meaningless sort of way for a time.

"What is it?" he asked presently.

"What does it seem to be?"

"Another will,—Herbert Cashel's. What is the need of two? It is your work?"

"It is his own! a genuine document," cried the master of The Cedars.

"Genuine!" echoed Evans. "I do not comprehend."

"I mean that this is the will of the late Herbert Cashel, signed with his signature, and attested by the proper witnesses, as you can certainly perceive by examination. Evans the suit is ours beyond a doubt!"

Evans understood at last, and trembled a little. His first sensation was one of disappointment. Vanished forever was his hold on the rich man before him! His mine of wealth had taken to itself wings and flown away!

But the second thought of Evans cheered him. After all, there would be great peril in attempting to use the forged will. Now all danger was gone, and he and his client were sure of their case; and the winning of it would be a great triumph for him as an attorney. His fee would be a fat one, as well, in addition. To be continued.