

but hardly dreamt that matters financial would turn out as badly as they did, or that the mere fact of his breaking away from the religion of his father and adopting the Catholic faith would have played such havoc with his erstwhile hopeful prospects as an advocate. And still he had been happy, so frankly, deliciously happy with his dear Cynthia that, despite their poverty, not for all the wealth of the world would he have wished himself free again. In his bachelorhood Hugh Grandison had been nominally a Protestant, in reality nothing; but since he adopted his new religion, new to him, but old and steadfast and great as Christianity itself, a strange, wonderful peace had grown up in his heart, for which he thanked his Maker every day and night of his life.

The memory of all this flashed through his mind as he sat in Aunt Helen's parlor on that dreary November day, a little stunned and shaken by what he had just listened to. If Cynthia had been only well and strong! But for a long time after her baby's birth she had been weak and ailing, and now that there was the prospect of another life coming to share their own, he felt not a little anxious in her regard. She needed careful watching and nursing, the best of medical attention and advice, strengthening tonics, change of air, good food, and sometimes he feared that, despite all his earnest adjurations, she was inclined to neglect herself in the latter respect, preferring to save the money for some household requisite or for some little 'surprise' for himself.

Dear Cynthia! dear girl! And all the while her cheeks grew thinner and paler, her eyes more big and wistful. If only he could take her away somewhere for a time, away from the cares of the house, from all the petty anxieties and pitiful economies, some haven of fresh air and good food and quiet, dreamless sleep where she might rest and grow strong! How much even a few of Aunt Helen's crisp banknotes might have done for them now. 'Oh, Aunt Helen,' he thought, miserably, 'you little knew how cruel you were going to be!'

His eyes rested with mingled fascination and dislike on the great old chair on the other side of the fireplace. There was no mistaking it, 'the old arm chair' in which his aunt had spent the greater part of her later enfeebled years. Even in his childhood, he remembered now, that same old chair had always fascinated him somehow, with its great high back and deep embrasure, and its four handsome legs of old black mahogany, revised in the shape of eagle's claws with the bird's hooked beak and glittering eyes above, and wide, richly carved wings spread out on either side. It was a handsome and no doubt valuable chair, despite its solid gloominess of aspect. But at that moment he felt he hated and abhorred it.

What would Cynthia say or think when it was carried home to her, their one at present available legacy and asset out of all that Aunt Helen had possessed? But, of course, he knew she would say nothing. She would be just as sweet, perhaps, only a little more loving and tender with him than before. And yet she must feel disappointed if only for his sake, poor girl. Though he never discussed his aunt's wealth or the matter of its likely disposal with her, she could not be without knowing he had expectations. Of course the matter of his marriage had caused disunion for a time, but ever since the birth of Baby Helen, whom they had named after her, Hugh had noticed a very great softening in his old aunt's attitude towards her recreant nephew.

This made his present disappointment only the keener; he shrank from going home to meet Cynthia's questioning gaze. And so it happened that when he did get back from his work a full hour later than usual, he found the hateful old armchair already arrived before him.

To his poignant embarrassment and regret Cynthia was frankly enraptured with it.

'What a beautiful old chair!' she cried. 'Did anyone ever see such handsome legs and wonderful carving?'

'And such lovely horse-hair covering,' Hugh said with a grim smile of sarcasm.

'Oh, that part of it can be easily remedied,' Cynthia nodded, unconsciously paraphrasing the words of Aunt Helen's will. 'Still, even as it stands, it's a beauty. I'm sure it is worth at least ten pounds, my dear.'

'If I thought it was,' said Hugh, in somewhat unnecessary savage tones, 'I'd sell it to-morrow.'

'I think I should rather keep it—especially as it was your aunt's favorite chair,' she began.

'I am very glad you like it so much,' he said bitterly, and letting his face fall in his hands, 'especially as it's about all of Aunt Helen's property we are very likely to possess.'

Cynthia's lids quivered a second, and the lines of her pretty mouth took a downward curve. She said nothing, however, but went over and laid a soft arm tenderly about her husband's shoulder.

'Is that why you are so cross?' she asked, stooping to plant a kiss on the top of his head just above the brows where his hair began latterly to show prematurely grey.

'Am I cross, dear?' he asked penitently. 'I am sorry. But you see—I was thinking chiefly of you.'

'I am all right, Hugh,' she said with well-feigned cheerfulness, though there was a perceptible tremor in her voice. 'The only thing I am sorry for, Hugh, if you had not married me this would not have happened.'

'You are not sorry, dear, that I married you, are you?' he asked in tones of exceeding tenderness. 'I am not, anyhow. And after all, why should I quarrel with Aunt Helen's disposition of her property? She warned me what would happen if I displeased her, and I went into the thing with eyes wide open. I chose the greater treasure of the two, and I am deeply thankful to possess her.' His arms went lovingly about her, and he laid his cheeks caressingly against hers.

'And still,' he went on, in half-regretful tones, 'I did hope Aunt Helen had forgiven me. I could see she was clearly taken with you from the first day you met, and she was immensely pleased to have baby called after her and to be asked to stand sponsor to her grand-niece. I felt sure there were tears in her eyes on the day of the christening, as she sat before the fire with baby in her lap.'

'If she had lived a little longer she might have altered her will again in your favor. Probably she hardly realised she was dying in the end. But anyhow'—with a half sigh—'we have each other and baby, and that is nearly everything. And we must only make the best of things—and of the old armchair!' she finished, with a wan smile.

That Cynthia intended to put the latter part of her intention into speedy practice was abundantly evident when Hugh returned a few evenings later and found her struggling with a hammer, some brass-headed nails, a length of pink ball-fringed gimp, and several yards of chintz adorned with an old-world pattern of roses and lilies and carnations.

'It's pretty, Hugh, isn't it?' she asked brightly, holding up the chintz for him to see. 'I thought the old-fashioned pattern would harmonise best with the carving. It cost twenty-five cents a yard, and I think it's the best I can do until later on, when we can afford to have it properly upholstered. That would mean a matter of several dollars, I expect, or perhaps more. The only thing that worries me about this chair,' she declared with a pucker between her brows, a little later after Hugh had duly admired the pattern and eaten his frugal dinner, 'is that it feels so hard and uncomfortable just here,' pointing to a spot high up in the back of the chair. 'One would think it was stuffed with brown paper, and I'm afraid it must have felt very hard and uncomfortable indeed for poor old Helen's head.'

'I hadn't noticed,' Hugh said, with indifference, the truth being that he felt such a spite against the same old chair that thus far he had consistently refused even to sit in it.

'There's something there, whatever it is, and I'm going to have it out,' Cynthia said with sudden determination, as with scissors and hammer she removed some of the brass-headed nails and dust-laden black gimp edging and drew back at length a portion of the