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THE ROONEY WILL

BY

FRANK H. SWEET

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THE lawyer—a dry little man—said it was the strangest will he had ever helped to draw up. He felt he owed an apology to the relatives of the deceased for its peculiar phraseology. But they must please understand that he was not to blame. He had begged the testator to allow the terms to appear in the ordinary legal forms. He had argued, got angry even, but in vain. The stubborn old gentleman insisted on wording the will in his own way.

The deceased man's nearest relative was old Tom Gaynor, who, it was said, fully expected to come in for the bulk of the hoard. A proud, hard man was Tom, wealthy as wealth goes in rural Ireland, but as grasping of the penny as if he had nothing. The pride born of his wealth was shown in the way he treated suitors for the hand of his pretty daughter, Kitty. Decent, well to do farmers came seeking her, but old Tom would have none of them. It was said he was waiting till the possession of Rooney's money brought some of the big graziers of the neighborhood to his door, hat in hand, looking for Kitty.

Pretty Kitty, however, had already made her own choice, which by a certain lovable perversity was none other than Frank Murtagh, the very poorest of her suitors, himself also a relative of John Rooney. When his parents died John had taken him in and reared him as his own son. It was said that the two men had failed to hit it off together in later years. Frank was a merry, light hearted blade, and it was a matter of popular conjecture that his easy going ways had alienated whatever affection old Rooney may have entertained for him originally, and in the scale of expectations he was put down at a very low altitude.

But all suspense on this important matter would soon be at an end, for the lawyer, having cleared his throat, now commenced to read the will:

"I, John Rooney, sound of mind, do herewith make this my last will and testament. To that sorra-may-care rascal, Frank Murtagh, I bequeath the house and land about it on condition that he does not sell it for less than £200 for the far field and £500 for the house and near field, and, as this is about six times its value, he is not likely to get anybody fool enough to buy it of him. And I give my old clothes—not a thing more—to that niggard, Tom Gaynor"—

All eyes were turned on Tom, who, strange to say, took his treatment with perfect composure, except for a slight flush at the testator's personal reference. The lawyer gave a discreet cough and went on:

"He treated me like a dog when I was poor and fawned on me when he thought I had grown rich. And there's my old bamboo stick, that I used for many years, I leave to Frank Murtagh to belt ("my apologies, but belt is the —er—extraordinary word the testator insisted on using," mournfully protested the lawyer)—belt Tom Gaynor off these premises and lands if he dares to show his face on them. This duty I enjoin solemnly on Frank Murtagh,

HE DRAGGED THE VESSEL OUT OF THE HOLE.

and if he fails to perform it everything I have left him goes to Cooldara chapel. And now I've bequeathed every penny I was possessed of, and much good may it do those that have got it."

And so the peculiar will came to an end. Astonishment gripped the room. Not a small amount of their wonder was expended on the calm way old Tom Gaynor had met the shattering of his expectations he was known to have entertained for Rooney's hoard.

But they would have ceased to wonder had they been privileged to know what was passing in Tom Gaynor's mind at that moment. On his way home he had paused at the road gate of one of Frank's fields and stood looking toward a hillock on the top whereof flourished a small tree.

"I'm too knowing for ye, John Rooney," said he. "I can see ye now—God be good to ye—as I saw ye that night six months ago dhragging the big iron pot and burying it close to that tree there, and there it is now, with the American money in it safe and sound for me when I like to go for it," and he gave a chuckle. "I'll go take a look to see the exact spot where the ould lad buried it."

Forgetting the terms of the will that warned him under penalties off the land, he crossed the gate. Frank, however, had perceived the movement from the kitchen window and, mindful of his testamentary obligations, snatched up the bamboo stick and charged down upon Tom, who thereupon regained the right side of the gate with alacrity. Frank was full of apologies for the harsh duty that had been imposed on him, but Tom made light of the matter, merely turning it to account to say a few indulgently sarcastic remarks about the queer, eccentric nature of old John Rooney. All the time his eye glittered on the hillock.

Now, though the hiding place of the treasure was known to Tom, there was one great difficulty still in the way of its acquisition. To enter a man's field and take something out of it was nothing short of theft. Therefore while the field belonged to another Tom was debarred by the most elementary principles of honesty from at-

HE MADE A FIERCE BLOW AT TOM.

taching the treasure. The only resource left, then, was to wheedle Frank into selling the valuable piece of land.

The realization of this project was made easy by the appearance that evening of Frank Murtagh, bent on asking Tom to give him Kitty. When they were wrapped in the secrecy of the parlor Tom craftily introduced his scheme. He was aware of Frank's circumstances, he went on to say, and how small was the amount of ready money old John Rooney had left him to carry on the work of the farm. Knowing this, he felt certain he would not be able to sleep o' nights if Frank's position was not made easier. He had thought the matter over and evolved a very good idea. It was to buy the far field of Frank—yes, even at the prohibitive price old Rooney had put upon it.

Frank, sorely in need of money, met the offer with mingled wonder and delight.

When the matter was arranged Frank took occasion to venture his proposal for Kitty. Tom's good humor at once evaporated. He shook his head severely.

"Don't let that idea into your head, my boy," said he. "Ye're no match for her. 'Tis one of them big graziers Kitty will be getting. No, no; thry somewhere else." Then, anxious to avoid offending Frank, he added in a softer tone: "Ye see, Kitty's only a young girl yet. She won't be on for marrying these years. An', sure, haven't you time enough yourself too? Musha, what hurry's on ye to get yerself spanchelled? Mebbe in a year or two ye'll be betther off than ye are now. Then come to me an' we'll talk about Kitty."

The day he entered into possession of the field was a great day for Tom. When all were abed that night he took a spade from the stable and cautiously made his way to the hillock where he had seen old John Rooney burying the iron pot. Feeling round the brow of the hill, he found the loose scraws of earth and knew that the treasure could not be more than two feet away from him. Seizing his spade, he commenced excavating with feverish eagerness. In a very short time—two minutes perhaps—the spade struck metal. Bending, he groped for the handle of the pot and, seizing it, dragged the vessel out of the hole. The mouth of the pot was merely covered with rough sacking, but with admirable self restraint Tom determined to refrain from making acquaintance with the contents till he had reached the friendly haven of his own kitchen.

With a cool deliberation, remarkable when the occasion is considered, Tom lit a lamp when he had placed the pot on the floor. Then he bent down and with just a slight trembling of the fingers proceeded to untie the rope that bound the sacking. The knot was presently loosened; it fell away, off came the sacking, and Tom's eyes glared vacantly at—stones.

"It must be underneath," he muttered hoarsely.

But when the contents were strewn on the floor nothing was shown but stones mingled with sand and ashes.

"The villain—the old schaming rogue! Full of tricks he always was!" muttered Tom, and that was all he said during the half hour he sat staring wildly at the heap, occasionally turning, with a start, to hear in the chirrup of a cricket the jeering cackle of old John Rooney.

Presently he rose, cleared the rubbish into the yard and went to bed.

Next morning the first poignancy of his disappointment was passed. Indeed, the matter that stood most prominently in his mind was the loss of the £200 he had paid for the field. But on further thought he was able to relieve his depression by the conclusion that he would have small difficulty in coaxing the amount from easy going Frank and so restore affairs to their original condition.

With this purpose in view he set out to call on Frank, quite forgetting the warning in the will and the bamboo stick.

Frank, too, appeared to have permitted his testamentary duties to slip his memory, for he bade the old man welcome and haled him to the parlor with every demonstration of respect. The object of Tom's visit filled him with delighted speculation. Was it something about Kitty? Had Tom repented of his harsh opposition?

His heart leaped wildly, but grew calm enough again when Tom referred with mournful air to the matter of the purchase of the field as the reason of his call.

The mention of Kitty was enough for Frank. Up he jumped and, going to the press in the corner, extracted from a little box the check just as Tom handed it to him.

Tom's eyes glittered as he crushed it into his pocket.

"You're a thoroughbred, Frank," said he, "and if I can do anything for ye, my boy, command me."

"Give me Kitty, then," said Frank, promptly seizing the opportunity.

Good humor instantly fled the old man's face. It became hard, flinty. But, conscious that he owed Frank something for the ready return of the check, he resorted to diplomatic evasion to smooth over the incident.

"Before I answer that let me ask you a question," he said.

"Well?"

"Have you ever made a search for Rooney's money that he got by the American uncle?"

"Indeed I did. I searched everywhere in the house, but not a thrace of it could I find."

"But it must be somewhere, Frank. Ould John couldn't have taken it away with him."

"That's thrue."

"Well, now, just listen to this. If you find that money I'll give you Kitty."

Frank's eyes rolled wildly in the excitement of the prospect this remark opened out to him. In one of these revolutions they encountered the bamboo stick. A chill struck him, for he was at once reminded of the duty imposed by the will, which left him no alternative but to "belt" out of the house the man whom it was his best interest to propitiate. But, though his soul girded at the task, the bamboo drew him as if the very spirit of old John Rooney possessed it.

"Sorry I am, Tom Gaynor, but ye must get out of this," he said, leaping to his feet and running to the corner. "Remember what the will said, man. You're to be belted out of this place every time ye come into it. Be off now, if you plaze. Quick, man! Sure it's not my fault, but it can't be helped anyway."

Frank purposely fumbled with the stick to allow Tom to collect faculties grievously scattered by the abrupt outburst.

"Are ye gone?" cried Frank, waving the bamboo menacingly as he swung around, just in time to see old Tom's coattails disappear through the door.

Down along the path sped Tom, with Frank not a yard behind, improving his position gradually by way of demonstrating that there was no deception in his effort. To give further evidence of his determination to carry out his testamentary obligations, he made a fierce blow at Tom just as he flew through the gate. The blow missed Tom, as indeed it was intended to do, but struck the gate with terrific force.

Now in safe territory, Tom drew up, gasping for breath, while Frank gazed ruefully at the bamboo broken across the middle.

"Begor, I've done for ould Rooney's bamboo," said he. "But what's this here?" gazing closely at the slit. "It's hollow within, and there's something in it. What can it be?" he added, pulling out a long tube of papers.

"There's more of them here up the hollow," he said, throwing the papers on the ground and proceeding to further investigation. "This is something ould Rooney hid here, I'll hould ye. What can it mane, I wondher?"

"Mane!" cried Tom, who had picked up the roll and opened it. "What can it mane!" with a hoarse shout. "It manes that these are bank notes for £50 apiece; aye, and here are more for £100."

The pair stood and gasped their astonishment.

"The American legacy," whispered Frank when he had caught his breath.

"That's just what it is," returned Tom, vaulting from trembling excitement to genial enthusiasm. "Frank, my boy, I congratulate ye. Ye're the richest man in the county this minyet."

"And—and"— murmured Frank.

Old Tom saw the question in the young man's eyes and cut his hesitation short with a laugh.

"Don't throuble to say another word," he said. "Kitty's yours, my boy, and my big blessing on ye both."

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