

# **The Will and the Man**

**by M. McDonnell Bodkin, 1850-1933**

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"MR. CARVAL, I want you to be quite frank with me."

"I could not be otherwise if I tried, Miss Wingfield."

"We'll see. To begin with, you may put aside your airs and graces. You're not in love with me, nor I with you, nor likely to be. This is a business talk for our mutual advantage."

She drew a cosy armchair to the fire and dropped down luxuriously amongst its velvet cushions.

It chanced that his face was in the light and hers in the shade. Mabel Wingfield, in the glory of her stately loveliness, need not fear the most searching sunlight that ever shone out of the heavens. Still, possibly she had her own reasons for the arrangement. With her bright brown eyes fixed on Adrian Carval's face she went on: "You are rich, Mr. Carval?"

"Moderately, Miss Wingfield."

"Yet you would like to marry money?"

"Naturally, Miss Wingfield."

"That's straight. Well, I can help you, and I will, if you will help me. You are very fond of Connie Burke?"

"Is this a confessional, Miss Wingfield?"

"If you wish to call it so. I'll take my turn in a moment. You promised to be quite frank, you know."

"And I will. Miss Burke is a charming girl, pretty, clever, vivacious, but—"

"She has no fortune?"

"Precisely."

"That's your mistake; that's where my information comes in. This is a very handsome place, Mr. Carval, this Forland Chace, where we are fortunate enough to be guests."

"Very, Miss Wingfield, and very handsome of Sir William Hood to ask me down to his party and to give me the opportunity to meet so many pleasant friends."

He bowed gracefully in her direction, but she took no heed of the challenge.

With her eyes still fixed on his face she went on slowly:

"Forland Chace, with its priceless pictures and art treasures and its broad acres, is the sole property of Miss Constance Burke—one of the wealthiest heiresses in England."

"You're chaffing!" he answered lightly, but he was quivering with excitement.

"I'm in sober earnest. You know, I presume, how the place and estate came—or were supposed to have come to Sir William Hood. No? Then I must tell you in as few words as I can.

"Old Nathaniel Burke, who died a year ago, was an eccentric bachelor—ail old bachelors are more or less; he was more. His favorite cousin, Miss Constance Burke, lived with him at Forland Chace. It was generally taken for granted that she was to be his heiress. Indeed, the old man himself made no secret of the fact that he had signed a will in her favor.

"But during the last year of his life he grew to be a confirmed invalid, and a hospital nurse. Miss Honor Murphy, had to be got to help Miss Burke to look after him."

"Miss Honor Murphy! Not the good-looking, lively, red-headed girl that is staying here now?"

"The same. She is a lady by birth, you see, and Sir William owes her a kindness, as you shall hear. Old Nathaniel fell desperately in love with his nurse."

"I'm not surprised. I've a kind of fancy for the girl myself."

"His was more than fancy. He was mad about her, wanted to marry her right away; to leave her every rood of land and every farthing of money he had in the world."

"And she?"

"Laughed at him good-humoredly, told him she would have to leave the place if he went on talking such nonsense, and she would be sorry to go. Then he begged she wouldn't leave him, and promised good behavior, and cried like a child, I'm told.

"From that time forward he sank rapidly. The eccentric old bachelor, Nathaniel Burke, died, I do believe, of that rare complaint—a broken heart.

"He may possibly have suspected that Miss Connie Burke influenced the nurse, with whom she was very intimate, to refuse him. Anyhow, when he died no will was found. Miss Connie was left comparatively penniless, and Forland Chace, with its heirlooms and acres went to his heir-at-law, Sir William Hood, who had already, as you know, a magnificent house and property of his own at Sherwood."

"So much I knew already." Adrian Carval answered carelessly, when she paused for an instant. "The worse luck for Miss Burke and her future husband, whoever he may chance to be."

"That is only the first chapter of my story, the prologue, to make what follows plain. Now I am coming to the exciting part." Her eyes were intent on his face. "This morning I had a letter from Mr. Weatherwise, who was Nathaniel Burke's solicitor and is mine, and my very good friend as well. He tells me—Are you listening, Mr. Carval?"

"With both ears, Miss Wingfield."

"He tells me that the missing will has been found amongst the documents in Mr. Burke's box in the office. He sent me a copy. It is very short—a mere scrap of paper. *'I will and bequeath all I die possessed of to my beloved cousin and adopted daughter, Miss Constance Burke.'*"

"Why did he write to you, Miss Wingfield?" There was no mistaking Mr. Carval's interest now.

"My story provokes that question. He wished to get Miss Burke's address to communicate with her direct—wants her for a client, I dare say—and knows she is my very dear friend." There was a mocking emphasis on the word "friend." "He suggests that meantime I might break the matter gently to Sir William, to whom no doubt it will be a disappointment."

"What do you mean to do about it?"

"Nothing for the present. I will give you four days' law."

"Me!"

"Yes, you, to pay your disinterested court to the unconscious heiress."

"It's no use, Miss Wingfield. Sir William's son and heir, the eminent King's Counsel, is in love with Miss Connie and she with him, if I'm any judge of such matters. I'm too late in the field."

"A mere passing fancy," she answered so hotly that Carval started with a sudden inkling of the truth. "I have made up my mind," she went on with quiet determination, "that Mr. Robyn Hood, K.C., shall not marry Connie Burke."

"May I ask why?"

"Certainly, but I needn't tell you. Think what you like—I don't care what you think. Isn't it enough for you that our interests are the same—that I can help you while you help me? Listen, I've spoiled their love-making up to this, and I'll spoil it to the end."

"One day nearly a week ago I watched them spooning in the garden. She was shy and distant. Oh, I know that sort of shyness! But I saw her pluck a little monthly rose—the only blossom on the bush—shake the snow from its petals, and after a moment drop it quite carelessly on the path. He picked it up, of course. He thought she didn't see him, but I knew she did. So I stole the rose from his room—he must have thought she reclaimed it—and dropped the poor little bud beside a half-smoked cigar in a passage where she could not help seeing it as she passed."

"Since then they have been cold and distant, a very pretty lover's quarrel as it stands, and I don't want it made up."

There was a moment's pause. Her cheek flushed, she hesitated as if there were something she wanted yet did not like to say. Then she went on in a hard voice:

"I'd better tell you everything, Mr. Carval, that you may understand. Since then some foolish little notes have passed between them, or rather, tried to pass. But they never reached, you understand. I needn't go into details. Miss Connie fancies herself slighted; she is hurt and haughty. This is your chance; now is the acceptable hour. You have only to speak and conquer."

"You flatter me, Miss Wingfield."

"No mock modesty, if you please. You are good-looking— oh, you know that better than I can tell you; you men are vainer than women—and you have a plausible tongue of your own. You are a most admirable love-maker. I have had experience, you know."

There was a note of mocking raillery in her voice and smile.

He answered as lightly:

"It is not kind to recall defeat on the brink of—"

"Of victory? I have said it. *Faint heart never won fair lady*. Yours is not faint, and the lady is—some people think—fair. *Little hand hath muckle gold*, as the song goes. It is a stake worth playing for. When I next visit Forland Chace, Adrian Carval shall welcome me as host."

"There shall be no other guest so welcome," he answered, and so the bargain was made between them.

"Pardon me, Miss Burke, if I seem obtrusive; I cannot bear to see you weep!"

By careful watching, Adrian Carval had managed to come upon Miss Connie Burke "accidentally" as she lay bundled up in a great leathern chair in a corner of the huge, unfrequented library sobbing as if her heart would break.

"I don't want your sympathy, Mr. Carval," she snapped out, "and I'm not crying." It was a bold statement with the tears still wet on the flushed cheeks, but she made it defiantly, with the blue eyes kindling behind the tears.

"I am glad I was mistaken," he answered softly; "I thought I heard you sobbing as I came in for a book. Once again I humbly ask your forgiveness."

He looked so shy, so abashed, so sad for her sake that she took pity on him. She was a mere child in the frank, impetuous truthfulness of her nature.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Carval," she said meekly; "I was very rude to you just now, and it was a fib to say I was not crying. Oh, I'm very miserable."

The tears gushed again to her eyes. With soft brown hair disheveled, with cheeks flushed and tear-stained, and eyelids red with weeping she looked a very picture of misery. A very pretty picture all the same, as Adrian Carval thought complacently. But in his eyes and voice there was only the deepest sympathy.

"I would give the world that I could comfort you," he said tenderly.

"But you cannot! you cannot! no one can. Oh, go away, please, and leave me to myself."

But he only came a step closer and took the little hand that hung by her side very gently in his own. It was soft, cold, and limp as a dead bird.

"Forgive me," he whispered again, with the light of passion in his deep blue eyes, with the thrill of passion in his low, rich voice. "I feel it is mean, unmanly, to speak at such a time, but I am not master of myself. I love you, Miss Burke; surely you must have seen that I love you with every fiber of my body—with every thought of my soul. Give me the right to comfort you."

She snatched her hand away and stood at gaze like a startled fawn.

"Oh! don't speak to me like that! You don't mean it, and it hurts me to hear it!"

"With all my heart I mean it."

"But I am as poor as a church mouse—do you know that, Mr. Carval? I have not a farthing of my own in the world, and they say that you—"

"That I love money? Say it out, Miss Burke; I can never be angry with you." His voice was that of a man deeply wounded. "I love money, it is true, that I may lavish it on those I love. Without you all the wealth in the world were mere dross to me."

"But I don't love you, Mr. Carval; I can never love you!"

"I will not ask your love; I only ask the right to keep on loving you. Your love may come in time; if not, your friendship is more to me than the love of all the women in the world besides."

"But it is impossible—cannot you see it is impossible?"

He grew grave of a sudden. "Miss Burke," he said slowly, "if you tell me you love another I will trouble you no more. I will not even ask his name. Indeed, I need not ask his name. Pardon me; I should have guessed before. How could I have hoped against—"

Slighted love and maiden pride stung her to sudden revolt.

"Stop! stop!" she cried, before he could speak the name she saw forming itself on his lips. "It is not that! it is not that! indeed, you are wholly wrong. Mr. Carval," she went on desperately, before he could speak again, "I will marry you on your own terms if you will have me."

"Have you!" he cried in ecstasy, "you are welcome to me as sight to the blind; as new life to the dying; as Heaven to the saint! My whole life is too short to show my love and gratitude." He raised the little cold hand and kissed it passionately. If he had claimed her lips reaction and revulsion would have ruined his hopes, but Adrian Carval knew the game and forbore.

THAT evening in the drawing-room he whispered in Mabel Wingfield's ear:

"You may send your letter; the sooner the better." She understood and that night wrote Mr. Weatherwise.

The conspirators were only just in time. Next day it chanced that the same moody restlessness had sent Connie Burke and the son of the house, Mr. Robyn Hood, K. C, along the same lonely walk by the edge of the running stream the frost had chained. They met in the white silent woods through which the winter sun with its red edge on the horizon sent a rosy glow.

She would have passed him with a word and nod, but he blocked the way.

"Miss Burke," he asked abruptly, "why are you angry with me? What have I done?"

"Nothing, nothing," she answered hastily. "Do let me pass."

"First you will forgive me?" he pleaded. "I cannot tell you how I grieve to have even unconsciously offended."

He looked so handsome and so honest, pleading humbly to her, with the glow of the setting sun on his manly figure and frank, young face, that there came a gush of sudden tenderness that frightened her. Her heart beat hard and fast; her lips trembled.

"Indeed, indeed, I am not angry!" she faltered. "I am sorry if I have made you think so. You are right, Mr. Hood. Let us both forgive and forget, and part friends."

She held her hand out timidly.

He caught and held it.

"Forgive, but not forget," he cried. "I could never forget you, Connie, if I lived for a thousand years. Don't say the word *part*; we must not part! Oh, Connie, you can have no notion how much I love you! All the world is nothing to me in comparison. I hoped—forgive me, darling—I hoped you cared for me a little. Tell me I may keep that hope, that I may keep this hand forever as my very own?"

He fondled it softly in both of his, but with heightened color she snatched it from his clasp.

"Mr. Hood," she began.

"Call me Robyn for this once," he pleaded.

"I cannot, I dare not!" she cried desperately; "I'm engaged to be married to Mr. Carval!"

She hid her face in her hands and burst into a passion of weeping, swaying as if she would fall.

For a moment he stood like one stunned, and the color left his cheeks.

"Carval!" he gasped out. "It is not true—it cannot be true! And you love him, Connie—you love Adrian Carval and not me?"

Only her sobs answered.

"Do you love him, Connie?" he insisted. "Say that you love him and I will go away and trouble you no more."

Her silence emboldened him. He slipped his arm about her trembling form and drew her hands softly from her blushing face. Half unconsciously she nestled closer in his arms; their eyes met and he kissed her.

The next moment she tore herself from his clasp.

"Oh! how could you!" she wailed. "Do you want to kill me with shame. I have promised him. I have promised him, and as Heaven is above me I swear I will keep my word. Let me go for God's sake! let me go!"

With that she slipped past him and fled lightly, swiftly as a bird down the walk, leaving him standing alone in the gray gloaming.

ALL night Connie Burke lay awake, weeping and planning. A thousand thoughts chased each other through her restless brain. But she was not wholly without hope. She would throw herself, she resolved, on the generosity of Adrian Carval, and implore her release. She even formed beforehand the words of her appeal. As they passed before her mind in confused procession, ever shifting and changing, she slowly fell away from all conscious thoughts in a peaceful sleep.

But the morning dawning bright and clear to others, brought new complications to trouble her, riveting her chains.

"Any letters, Maria?" she said sleepily from her pillows to the maid who came in with the hot water.

"One, miss," Maria answered, and handed her an official blue envelope addressed in formal hand to "Miss Constance Burke."

Miss Constance Burke—it may be noted in passing—always read her letters in bed.

Having sufficiently tantalized her curiosity with the address and seal and postmark, she tore open the envelope.

*Dear Madam:*

*We beg to inform you that we have just discovered the last will and testament of your cousin and our client, the late Mr. Nathaniel Burke, of Forland Chace, duly signed and attested. By this will he bequeaths to you all his real and personal property of which he dies possessed, including the family seat and lands of Forland Chare. We beg to enclose copy of the will, and remain, madam,*

*Your obedient servants,  
J.W. Weatherwise & Son.*

For a moment after she had dropped the letter on the quilt all other thoughts in her mind were submerged in blank surprise. Then, after a little, various conflicting feelings began to struggle through.

The first she recognized was keen regret. It would have been so pleasant to have given back the inheritance to Robyn Hood—herself with it. But now she realized that this sudden wealth stood between her and her heart's desire. She could not beg release from Carval. The wealthy heiress could not—for very shame and honor's sake—desert the man who had loved, wooed, and won her as a pauper. She was little more than a child. Let that be the excuse that the new-made mistress of Forland Chace buried her face in the pillows and bewept her good fortune.

SIR WILLIAM HOOD took the news like a gentleman, and congratulated his cousin on her splendid inheritance, and offered her cousinly and kindly counsel as to the management of her business.

The Christmas guests at Forland Chace, as the tidings were buzzed about amongst them, contrasted his courteous serenity under this sudden stroke of ill-fortune with the sulkiness of a son. But there was at least one person amongst them who guessed what Robyn Hood's real feelings were and how little in his present mood the loss of the estate had troubled him. She had guessed his real grief the moment the engagement had—as the phrase goes—been "given out."

"Mr. Hood," cried Nurse Murphy suddenly one morning, when by chance she came upon him moping over a book in the library, "are you going to let Connie Burke marry that mercenary cad, Adrian Carval?"

A fine-looking young woman was Nurse Murphy—tall, strong, and graceful, with a wealth of glossy, dark-red hair coiled in thick ropes at the back of her shapely head, and the dazzling complexion that so often goes with dark-red hair.

He looked at her for a moment in silence, bewildered at the abrupt question.

"What can I do about it, Miss Murphy?"

"What can you do about it! I like that!" She did not look as if she liked it. "Do something—do anything you like: but don't let the sweetest girl in the world marry that handsome cur. You're fond of her and she's fond of you and there you sit and sulk, instead of doing something to stop it. He only cares for her fortune."

"You're not quite fair to him, Miss Murphy. He didn't know of her fortune when he asked her."

"Not know!" she answered scornfully; "you bet he did, or he would not have asked her. I know him. Not fair to him, indeed! Fair to the man who is going to steal your girl from you? Oh, I'm ashamed of you! All's fair in love and war, Mr. Hood."

"You think so? Then there is a plan we might try! Will you help me?"

"With all my heart; for Connie's sake mind you, not yours. I could have had this fortune myself. I suppose you have heard that? I'm as poor as a church mouse, but I refused for her sake. I got him—old Nat Burke, I mean—to make the will in her favor. Now what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to help me to commit forgery."

He said it slowly, with his eyes fixed on her face. But she never hesitated for a moment.

"Forgery!" she cried impetuously, "manslaughter, if you like; I'd drown him in the lake with my own hands. Oh, how I hate a mean man! Go on with your plan."

"You know old Nathaniel's handwriting?"

She nodded.

"I have heaps and heaps of love-letters of his."

"Could you imitate his signature?"

"Like my own."

"All right then. We must between us forge a new will for him dated later than the other, wholly in your favor. I know the book Connie is reading in the library—a big Shakespeare, a great favorite of old Nat's. We'll stick the forged will between the leaves where she must find it. Of course Connie—Miss Burke, I mean—"

"Stick to Connie."

"Of course Connie will tell everyone at once of her great discovery—Adrian Carval first of all. If he is what you take him to be, he'll back out of the engagement, and then—"

Her Irish blue eyes danced with delight and devilment.

"Oh, we'll take the 'then' for granted!" she cried impetuously. "The plan is first-rate, and it's bound to come off all right. There's more fun in it than you can guess; but you'll find out later on. Now I'll run and fetch the letters and we'll go to work at once. There will be no one here for two hours at least."

All that afternoon Miss Murphy was specially civil to Mr. Carval, and lured him out for a long skate alone on the lake.

"What a bright, jolly girl she is!" he thought as he went to bed that night, "and deuced fond of me, too! I can see that with half an eye. It's a shame she's a pauper."

THE next morning he had a note—his first from Miss Burke—a very strange kind of little love-letter.



*Dear Mr. Carval:*  
*I would be very grateful if you could meet me this morning in the library*  
*before breakfast.*  
*Yours, ever faithfully,*  
*C. Burke.*

He found her waiting for him in the library, holding an official-looking paper. She was strangely excited—he could see that at a glance—though she strove hard to conceal her excitement. Her bosom rose and fell quickly; her color came and went.

"My dear Miss Burke!" he began soothingly.

But she broke in on his smooth speech with sharp impatience.

"Read this!" she cried, "before you speak. I found it last night in the book that I was reading, and I thought it right to send for you and show it to you at once."

She gave him the paper with a hand that trembled, and he took it and read it silently twice over before he mastered its contents, yet it was very simple. This new will was almost in terms the same as the other; the name Honoria Murphy was substituted for Constance Burke, and the date was six months later. That was all. For a long minute there was dead silence between them.

"So it is the other girl after all," his angry thoughts ran. "What a fool that witch Mabel Wingfield has made of me! Is there no way out of this hole, no way out?"

But his nimble wits rallied to meet the emergency. When he spoke again it was as master of himself and of the situation.

"Miss Burke," he said very courteously, but there was now no trace of fervor in his voice, "I am deeply grieved at this for your sake, and, if I may say so, for my own. It makes something I had to say to you more difficult. It renders me liable to misconstruction by any one less generous than yourself."

"Go on! say it, say it!" she cried impatiently, for she guessed what was coming.

"Miss Burke, when I had the honor to ask your hand in marriage you may remember you told me that you could never love me."

"I remember it well, and I meant it," she answered, the light of hope kindling in her eyes. "Go on!"

"Those words of yours have troubled me ever since. I felt it was cruel and selfish to press my claims upon your pity, for your happiness, believe me, is dearer to me than my own. I felt I had a duty to discharge, no matter at what cost to my own feelings. I had determined when I got your note this morning to discharge it. The paper that I have just read makes my task unfortunately harder, but the duty remains the same. You, at least, I know will not misunderstand me. Miss Burke, I will not claim you as a loveless bride. I release you from your generous promise."

She threw up her hands with a sudden gesture of joy and freedom. Then she dropped him a long, sweeping, mocking curtsy.

"Mr. Carval, I thank you!"

"I trust you understand my motives?" he said.

"Oh, quite! quite! Now you may go."

The careless scorn in her voice stung through his self-control as he slunk from the room.

AN hour later Robyn honestly confessed the trick they had played, and confessed that it was an heiress that he wooed before he claimed her love and had his claim allowed.

"I wonder what further mischief Honor has in her head?" Connie said when they settled down at last to coherent conversation.

They soon learned that.

As they strolled down a remote walk by the lake's edge, they came suddenly on another couple to all appearance similarly circumstanced. Adrian Carval would have slunk quietly by, but Honor Murphy left his arm and ran to her friend and clasped Connie's hand in both her own.

"Congratulate me, my dear!" she cried unblushingly, "I am engaged to be married to Mr. Carval. It's a secret, but I couldn't keep it from you, of course. Oh, he wrote me such a lovely, lovely letter! I shall always treasure it, saying he was glad I was poor; that he loved me, and had always loved me for myself alone!"

"But you told him about the will, Honor, of course?"

"You mean the second will, dearest, the bogus will, leaving me everything, which Mr. Hood and I concocted and put in the book for you to find? Oh, no, of course not. Where was the use? He never heard of any will, you know, he thought that you were the heiress all the time, and he gave you up and your fortune, he swore, for love of poor little me. He does not care in the least for money, do you Adrian, darling?"

But Adrian had heard enough. The whole horrid plot broke on him like a thunderbolt. He turned at once and fled down the walk, pursued by a peal of mocking laughter, in which Honor's voice rang clear above the rest.

THE damages in the great breach of promise case, "Murphy v. Carval," were laid at £2,000; but the case was settled out of court for £1,000, which Nurse Murphy handed over to her hospital.

