



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PREDATORY MARRIAGES

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INTRODUCTION:¹

Current and evolving statistics confirm that our population is aging rapidly. With age and longevity can come an increase in the occurrence of medical issues affecting cognition, and, the executive functioning branch of the brain. Certain diseases and disorders, such as dementia in varying types and degrees, delirium, delusional disorders, Alzheimer's, related cognitive disorders and other conditions involving reduced functioning and capability, also can become more prevalent with age.² There are a wide variety of disorders that affect decisional capacity and in turn, may increase an individual's susceptibility to becoming vulnerable and dependent. Factors affecting decisional capacity can include, normal aging, disorders such as depression, which are often untreated or undiagnosed, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, psychotic disorders, delusions, debilitating illnesses, senility, drug and alcohol abuse, and addiction.³ These sorts of factors unfortunately invite the opportunity for abuse, and exploitation.

Civil marriages are solemnized with increasing frequency under circumstances in which one party to the marriage is decisionally incapable of understanding, appreciating, and formulating a choice to marry.⁴ Indeed, unscrupulous opportunists too often get away with preying upon those older adults with diminished reasoning ability purely for financial profit. An appropriate moniker for this type of relationship is that of the "**predatory marriage.**"⁵

This is not a term that is necessarily in common use, though it is gaining popularity through media references of late. Given that marriage brings with it a wide range of property and financial entitlements, it does effectively capture the classic situation when one person marries another of limited capacity solely in the pursuit of these financial advantages that come with the union of marriage.⁶

¹ Authored by Kimberly A. Whaley, Principal of WEL Partners. Paper and analysis updated herein October 2019.

² Kimberly Whaley *et. al*, *Capacity to Marry and the Estate Plan* (Aurora: Canada Law Book, 2010) at 70. <http://www.canadalawbook.ca>.

³ Kimberly Whaley *et. al*, *Capacity to Marry and the Estate Plan* (Aurora: Canada Law Book, 2010) at 1.

⁴ Kimberly Whaley *et. al*, *Capacity to Marry and the Estate Plan* (Aurora: Canada Law Book, 2010) at 1.

⁵ Kimberly Whaley *et. al*, *Capacity to Marry and the Estate Plan* (Aurora: Canada Law Book, 2010) at 1.

⁶ Kimberly Whaley *et. al*, *Capacity to Marry and the Estate Plan* (Aurora: Canada Law Book, 2010) at 70.

The overriding problem with such marriages is that they are not easily challenged. The current standard or factors to be applied for ascertaining the requisite “capacity to marry”, as developed at common law, are anything but rigorous. Consequently, requisite capacity is often found by a court, even in the most obvious cases of exploitation. Predatory and exploitive marriages are more likely than not, to withstand challenge because the common law has not kept pace with the reality of the current property rights legislative regime.

This paper is by no means exhaustive in its approach or content.⁷ The subject matter is broad, and a mere overview of some of the many developing patterns across Canada and beyond are considered, while focusing primarily on the specific challenges arising out of predatory relationships and the decisional capacity to marry.

CAPACITY AND PREDATORY MARRIAGES

1. WHAT IS CAPACITY?

In law, one is presumed capable unless and until such presumption is legally rebutted. Legal capacity is decision, time, and situation/context specific.⁸ The law prescribes decisional capacity requirements in different contexts. An overview of some of the related contexts in which decisional capacity is required include the following:

1. Giving instructions for and execution of a Will or trust. In other words, “testamentary capacity”;⁹

⁷ This paper is but a snapshot of the many critical issues, both legal and public policy related, arising from predatory relationships. Those interested in learning more about this topic may wish to refer to *Capacity to Marry and the Estate Plan*, Canada Law Book, co-authored by Kimberly Whaley et al., <http://www.canadalawbook.ca/Capacity-to-Marry-and-the-Estate-Plan.html>: Kimberly Whaley et al., *Capacity to Marry and the Estate Plan* (Aurora: Canada Law Book, 2010) at 70, and Albert H. Oosterhoff, “Predatory Marriages” (2013), 33 ETPJ 24, Kimberly Whaley and Albert H. Oosterhoff, “Predatory Marriages – Equitable Remedies” (2014), 34 ETPJ 269.

⁸ Kimberly Whaley et al., *Capacity to Marry and the Estate Plan* (Aurora: Canada Law Book, 2010) at 46

⁹ Testamentary capacity is set out in *Banks v. Goodfellow* (1870), L.R. 5 Q.B.D. 549 (Eng.Q.B.); *Murphy v. Lamphier* (1914) 31 OLR 287 at 318; and *Schwartz v. Schwartz*, 10 D.L.R. (3d) 15, 1970, CarswellOnt 243 [1970] 2 O.R. 61 (Ont.) C.A. affirmed (1971), 20 D.L.R. (3d) 313, [1972] S.C.R. 150, 1971 CarswellOnt 163 (S.C.C.)

2. Making other testamentary beneficiary dispositions legislatively defined;¹⁰
3. Contracting;¹¹
4. Managing property;¹²
5. Managing personal care;¹³
6. Granting or revoking an enduring/continuing power of attorney for property;¹⁴
7. Granting or revoking a power of attorney for personal care;¹⁵
8. Consenting to treatment decisions in accordance with the *Health Care Consent Act*;¹⁶
9. Gifting or selling property;¹⁷
10. Instructing a lawyer; and
11. Marrying.

The capacity required to grant a power of attorney for property differs from the capacity required to grant a personal care power of attorney or health care directive, which differs still from the capacity required to actually manage or direct the management of one's property or personal care.¹⁸ And, importantly, as the law currently stands, the decisional capacity to marry may exist despite incapacity in other legal decisions or matters.¹⁹

¹⁰ See for example in Ontario under the *Succession Law Reform Act*, RSO 1990, c S 26, "will" includes,
(a) a testament,
(b) a codicil,
(c) an appointment by will or by writing in the nature of a will in exercise of a power, and
(d) any other testamentary disposition. ("testament")

¹¹ *Hart v O'Connor* [1985] AC1000.

¹² *Substitute Decisions Act*, 1992, S.O. 1992, c.30, as amended, s. 6.

¹³ *Ibid.* s.45.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* s. 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* s.47.

¹⁶ *Health Care Consent Act*, 1996, SO 1996, c 2, Schedule A, section 41.

¹⁷ *Archer v. St. John*, 2008 A.B.Q.B. 9; *Pecore v. Pecore* [2007] 1 S.C.R. 795; *Re Beaney (Deceased)* [1978] 1 WLR 770 at 774; *Re Morris (Deceased), Special trustees for Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children v Pauline Rushin* [2000] All ER(D) 598.

¹⁸ Kimberly Whaley *et. al*, *Capacity to Marry and the Estate Plan* (Aurora: Canada Law Book, 2010) at 45

¹⁹ Kimberly Whaley *et. al*, *Capacity to Marry and the Estate Plan* (Aurora: Canada Law Book, 2010) at 45.

The relevant time period to determine requisite decisional capacity is the time at which the decision in issue is made.²⁰ Legal capacity can fluctuate over time.²¹ Capacity is situation-specific in that the choices that a person makes in granting a power of attorney or making a Last Will & Testament are considered by a court in its determination of capacity.²² For example, if a mother appoints her eldest child as an attorney under a power of attorney document, this choice may be viewed with less suspicion and concern for potential diminished capacity than if she appoints her recently-hired gardener.²³

While some refer to a “test” when speaking of the consideration of factors to be applied to determine requisite decisional capacity, it is important to note that this is a colloquial or lay term only. There is no “test” per se, but rather there are factors applied to determine requisite capacity, or a standard to be applied, in order to determine decisional capacity.

Assessing capacity is an imperfect science which further complicates its determination.²⁴ In addition to professional and expert evidence, lay evidence can also be determinative, if not more so in some situations.²⁵ The standard and reliability of the capacity assessment conducted varies and this too, can become an obstacle that may need to be overcome in determining capacity with some degree of compelling accuracy.²⁶

On this point, a 2011 English High Court of Justice, Queen’s Bench Division Judgment, *Thorpe v. Fellowes Solicitors LLP*,²⁷ concerning the capacity of a 77 year old Mrs. Hill to enter into a transaction to sell her home and pay the proceeds to her daughter resulted in the eventual claim brought by her son against Mrs. Hill’s solicitor for negligence in

²⁰ Kimberly Whaley *et. al*, *Capacity to Marry and the Estate Plan* (Aurora: Canada Law Book, 2010) at 46.

²¹ *Knox v. Burton* (2004), 6 E.T.R. (3d) 285, 130 A.C.W.S. (3d) 216 (Ont. S.C.J.) The Ontario Court of Appeal held that a cognitively impaired person can fluctuate between being capable and incapable of granting a power of attorney.

²² Kimberly Whaley *et. al*, *Capacity to Marry and the Estate Plan* (Aurora: Canada Law Book, 2010) at 48.

²³ Kimberly Whaley *et. al*, *Capacity to Marry and the Estate Plan* (Aurora: Canada Law Book, 2010) at 48.

²⁴ Kimberly Whaley *et. al*, *Capacity to Marry and the Estate Plan* (Aurora: Canada Law Book, 2010) at 48.

²⁵ Kimberly Whaley *et. al*, *Capacity to Marry and the Estate Plan* (Aurora: Canada Law Book, 2010) at 48.

²⁶ Kimberly Whaley *et. al*, *Capacity to Marry and the Estate Plan* (Aurora: Canada Law Book, 2010) at 48.

²⁷ *Thorpe v Fellowes Solicitors LLP*, [2011]EWHC 61 (QB), (21 January 2011)[*Thorpe*].

failing to check mental capacity, appreciate Mrs. Hill's vulnerability, susceptibility to influence, and, *inter alia*, properly investigate the sale transaction.

The Honourable Mrs. Justice Sharp found that there was no evidence of lack of capacity, nor, that the solicitor knew, or, ought to have known that Mrs. Hill had dementia. Her Honour stated in this regard:

A solicitor is generally only required to make enquiries as to a person's capacity to contract if there are circumstances such as to raise doubt as to his in the mind of a reasonably competent practitioner, see Jackson & Powell at 11-221 and by analogy Hall v Estate of Bruce Bennett [2003] WTLR 827. This position is reflected in the guidance given to solicitors in The Guide to the Professional Conduct of Solicitors (8th edition, 1999), which was in force at the relevant time, where it is said that there is a presumption of capacity, and that only if this is called into question should a solicitor seek a doctor's report (with client's consent) "However, you should also make your own assessment and not rely solely upon the doctor's assessment" (at 24.04).

In opening, the Claimant's case was put on the basis that Fellowes [the solicitors] ought to have been "more careful" with regard to the sale of the Property because Mrs. Hill was suffering from dementia and did not really know what she was doing. The relevant test where professional negligence is alleged however is not whether someone should have been more careful. The standard of care is not that of a particularly meticulous and conscientious practitioner. The test is what a reasonably competent practitioner would do having regard to the standards normally adopted in his profession: see Midland Bank Trust Co Ltd v Hett Stubbs and Kemp [1979] ch 384 at 403 per Oliver J at 403.

I should add (since at least part of the Claimant's case seemed to have suggested, at least implicitly, that this was the case) that there is plainly no duty upon solicitors in general to obtain medical evidence on every occasion upon which they are instructed by an elderly client just in case they lack capacity. Such a requirement would be insulting and unnecessary.²⁸

It should also be noted that despite clear academic acknowledgement within the legal and medical profession that the types of "decisional capacities" identified at law do not fall along a threshold-based hierarchy, in practice (including in cases discussed below²⁹)

²⁸ *Thorpe v Fellowes Solicitors LLP*, [2011] EWHC 61 (QB), (21 January 2011) at paras 75-77.

²⁹ See *Babiuk v. Babiuk*, 2014 SKQB 320 (CanLII), *Ross-Scott v. Potvin* 2014 BCSC 435 and *Devore-Thompson v. Poulian* 2017 BCSC 1289.

there nonetheless, appears to be a tendency to apply such a model.³⁰ While it is tempting to assume that requisite decisional capacity merely consist of a spectrum, with various decisions requiring higher or lower thresholds in terms of identifying the applicable criteria to ground a finding of incapacity, the reality is that the process at law is much more intricate.³¹

2. CAPACITY TO MARRY: Historical Context

Marriage vows often include promises to be exclusive, to stay together until death, and to provide mutual support.³² Yet, at the time of marriage, parties regularly, as a matter of course, fail to consider other relevant facets of the marital union; namely, the obligation to provide financial support, the enforced sharing of equity acquired during the marriage, and the impact it has on the disposition of one's estate.³³

Currently, in Canada, to enter into a marriage that cannot be subsequently voided or declared a nullity, there must be a minimal understanding of the nature of the contract of marriage.³⁴ No party is required to understand all of the consequences of marriage. The reason for this is that cases dealing with claims to void or declare a marriage a nullity on the basis of incapacity often cite long-standing classic English cases, such as *Durham v. Durham*,³⁵ which collectively espouse the following principle: “the contract of marriage is a very simple one, one which does not require a high degree of intelligence to comprehend.”³⁶ Current legal treatment is still unsettled and given the demographics of our population and those older adults affected by these predatory unions, the law is in immediate need of clarity whether that be legislatively or at common law.

³⁰ Kimberly A. Whaley, Kenneth I. Shulman & Kerri L. Crawford, “The Myth of a Hierarchy of Decisional Capacity: A Medico-Legal Perspective” (2016) *Advocates’ Q* Vol 45 No 4 at 395.

³¹ Kimberly A. Whaley, Kenneth I. Shulman & Kerri L. Crawford, “The Myth of a Hierarchy of Decisional Capacity: A Medico-Legal Perspective” (2016) *Advocates’ Q* Vol 45 No 4 at 419.

³² Kimberly Whaley *et. al*, *Capacity to Marry and the Estate Plan* (Aurora: Canada Law Book, 2010) at 50.

³³ Kimberly Whaley *et. al*, *Capacity to Marry and the Estate Plan* (Aurora: Canada Law Book, 2010) at 50.

³⁴ Kimberly Whaley *et. al*, *Capacity to Marry and the Estate Plan* (Aurora: Canada Law Book, 2010) at 50.

³⁵ *Durham v. Durham* (1885), 10 P.D. 80.

³⁶ *Durham v. Durham* (1885), 10 P.D. 80 at 82.

The Historical Development of Capacity to Marry

Several common themes appear to emerge from a comprehensive review of historical cases on the question of decisional and requisite capacity to marry. These themes are summarized here:

1. That the factors for determining the requisite decisional capacity to marry are equivalent to those of the requisite capacity to contract;
2. That marriage has a distinct nature of rights and responsibilities which must be able to be appreciated;
3. That the contract of marriage is a simple one, not requiring a high degree of intelligence to negotiate; and
4. That the factors for determining the requisite capacity to marry are the same as the factors for ascertaining requisite capacity to manage property; or even still that it requires both the requisite capacity to manage the person and property.

Marriage as a Civil Contract

From a review of the old English cases, there emerges a notion that the requisite capacity to marry is equivalent to the capacity to enter into a civil contract. Thus, for instance, in the case of *Lacey v. Lacey (Public Trustee of)*,³⁷ the marriage contract is described in the following manner:

Thus at law, the essence of a marriage contract is an engagement between a man and a woman to live together and to love one another as husband and wife to the exclusion of all others. It is a simple contract which does not require high intelligence to comprehend. It does not involve consideration of a large variety of circumstances required in other acts involving others, such as in the making of a Will. In addition, the character of consent for this particular marriage did not involve consideration of other circumstances normally required by other persons contemplating marriage - such as establishing a source of income, maintaining a home, or

³⁷ *Lacey v. Lacey (Public Trustee of)* [1983] BCJ No1016.

contemplation of children. Were the parties then capable of understanding the nature of the contract they were entering into?³⁸

As is evident from *Lacey v. Lacey*, historically, the contract of marriage was considered to be a “simple” one, perhaps relevant at the time and more in line with social norms of that day. This case and the result, is consistent with the 1885 case of *Durham v. Durham*, where Sir James Hannen stated:

*I may say this much in the outset, that it appears to me that the contract of marriage is a very simple one, which does not require a high degree of intelligence to comprehend.*³⁹

In the 1954 case of *In the Estate of Park, Deceased*,⁴⁰ Justice Singleton was faced with making a determination as to whether the deceased had the requisite capacity to marry. His articulation of how to determine the validity of marriage was as follows:

In considering whether or not a marriage is invalid on the ground that one of the parties was of unsound mind at the time it was celebrated the test to be applied is whether he or she was capable of understanding the nature of the contract into which he or she was entering, free from the influence of morbid delusions on the subject. To ascertain the nature of the contract of marriage a person must be mentally capable of appreciating that it involves the duties and responsibilities normally attaching to marriage.

This decision enumerated a number of other factors to consider but does not provide a definitive criterion to apply. Moreover, starting from the proposition that the contract of marriage is a simple one, Birkett L.J., contributed further as follows:

The contract of marriage in its essence is one of simplicity. There can be degrees of capacity apart from soundness of mind. It is understandable that an illiterate man, perfectly sound of mind, but not of high quality, might be able to understand the contract of marriage in its simplicity, but who,

³⁸ *Lacey v Lacey (Public Trustee of)* [1983] BCJ No 1016.

³⁹ *Durham v. Durham*, (1885), 10 P.D. 80 at p.82.

⁴⁰ *Estate of Park, Park v. Park* [1954] p. 112, C.A.; aff'g, *Park v. Park*, [1953] All E.R. Reports [Vol. 2] at 1411.

coming into a sudden accession of wealth, might be quite incapable of making anything in the nature of a complicated will, but degrees of unsoundness of mind cannot have much relevance to the question whether it is shown that a person was not mentally capable of understanding the contract into which he or she had entered.⁴¹

Karminski J., took the position that there is “a lesser degree of capacity ... required to consent to a marriage, than in the making of a Will.”⁴² In his view, the determination of a valid marriage is as follows:

- i. the parties must understand the nature of the marriage contract;*
- ii. the parties must understand the rights and responsibilities which marriage entails;*
- iii. each party must be able to take care of his or her person and property;*
- iv. it is not enough that the party appreciates that he is taking part in a marriage ceremony or that he should be able merely to follow the words of the ceremony; and*
- v. if he lacks that which is involved under heads (i), (ii) and (iii) the marriage is invalid...The question for consideration is whether he sanely comprehended the nature of the marriage contract.⁴³*

While the Court clearly struggled with developing an appropriate process for determining requisite decisional capacity to marry, it concluded that the capacity to marry is essentially equivalent to the capacity to enter into any binding contract.

The case of *Browning v. Reane*,⁴⁴ concerned a marriage between a woman, Mary Reane, who, at the time of her marriage was 70 years old; her husband 40. The case was heard after the wife had passed away. The court concluded that the marriage was legally invalid by virtue of the fact that the deceased had been incapable of entering into the marriage.

⁴¹ *Estate of Park, Park v. Park* [1954] p. 112, C.A.; aff'g, *Park v. Park*, [1953] All E.R. Reports [Vol. 2] at 1411.

⁴² *Estate of Park, Park v. Park* [1954] p. 112, C.A.; aff'g, *Park v. Park*, [1953] All E.R. Reports [Vol. 2] at 1425.

⁴³ *Estate of Park, Park v. Park* [1954] p. 112, C.A.; aff'g, *Park v. Park*, [1953] All E.R. Reports [Vol. 2] at 1417

⁴⁴ *Browning v Reane* (1812), 161 E. R. 1080, [1803-13] All E.R. Rep. 265.

In reaching this conclusion, the court addressed the concept of consent and observed the following:

A fourth incapacity is, want of reason; without a competent share of which, as no others, so neither can the matrimonial contract be valid. It was formerly adjudged that the issue of an idiot was legitimate, and, consequently, that his marriage was valid. A strange determination!

Since consent is absolutely requisite to matrimony; and neither idiots, nor lunatics, are capable of consenting to anything; and, therefore, the civil law judged much more sensibly, when it made such deprivations of reason a previous impediment, though not a cause of divorce if they happened after marriage. And modern resolutions have adhered to the reason of the civil law, by determining that the marriage of a lunatic, not be in a lucid interval, was absolutely void.” [Mr. Justice Blackstone]

*Here, then, the law, and the good sense of the law, are clearly laid down; want of reason must, of course, invalidate a contract, and the most important contract of life, the very essence of which is consent. It is not material whether the want of consent arises from idiocy or lunacy, or from both combined, nor does it seem necessary, in this case, to enter into any disquisition of what is idiocy, and what is lunacy. Complete idiocy, total fatuity from the birth, rarely occurs; a much more common cause is mental weakness and imbecility, increased as a person grows up and advances in age from various supervening causes, so as to produce unsoundness of mind. Objects of this sort have occurred to the observation of most people. If the incapacity be such, arising from either or both causes, **that the party is incapable of understanding the nature of the contract itself, and incapable from mental imbecility to take care of his or her own person and property, such an individual cannot dispose of her person and property by the matrimonial contract,** any more than by any other contract. The exact line of separation between reason and incapacity may be difficult to be found and marked out in the abstract, though it may not be difficult, in most cases, to decide upon the result of the circumstances, and this appears to be a case of that description, the circumstances being such as to leave no doubt upon my mind.⁴⁵*

This decision [as bolded] would later be reviewed and adopted by Ontario courts.

⁴⁵ *Browning v Reane* (1812), 161 ER 1080, [1803-13] All ER Rep. 265 at 1081.

The Distinct Nature of Marriage

There is yet another line of historical cases which suggest that marriage, as an institution, is distinct, and that decisional capacity to marry requires an appreciation of the duties and responsibilities that attach to the particular union. As such, in the case of *Durham, supra*, the question raised and answered by the court was, “whether or not the individual had capacity to understand the nature of the contract, *and* the duties and responsibilities which it creates?” [emphasis added].

The principle that it is necessary to understand and appreciate the responsibilities which marriage creates, above and beyond an understanding of the nature of marriage as a contract, was then echoed in the case of *Spier v. Spier*,⁴⁶ where Willmer J. stated:

*...it was not sufficient merely to be able to understand the words of the ceremony or even to know that the party was going through a ceremony. There must be capacity to understand the nature of the contract and the duties and responsibilities which it created, and from *Browning v. Reane*...**there must also be a capacity to take care of his or her own person and property**...But as pointed out in *Durham, supra*, marriage was a very simple contract which did not require a high degree of intelligence to contract; certainly it did not call for so high a degree of mental capacity as the making of a will.⁴⁷*

Notably, again, the Court seemed to expand its consideration even further and stated that “there must also be a capacity to take care of both his/her own person and property.”

The Simplicity of the Marriage Contract

As evinced by the decisions discussed, the courts historically viewed marriage not only as a mere contract, but a simple one at that. Paraphrasing the Court in *In the Estate of Park, supra*, “marriage is in its essence a simple contract which any person of either sex

⁴⁶ *Spier v. Benyen* (sub nom. *Spier Estate, Re*) [1947] W.N. 46 (Eng. P.D.A.); *Spier v. Spier* [1947] The Weekly Notes, at para. 46 per Willmer J.

⁴⁷ *Spier v. Benyen* (sub nom. *Spier Estate, Re*) [1947] W.N. 46 (Eng. P.D.A.); *Spier v. Spier* [1947] The Weekly Notes at 46.

of normal intelligence should readily be able to comprehend.”⁴⁸ The Court in *Hunter v. Edney*⁴⁹ held the very same view, stating: “no high intellectual standard is required in consenting to a marriage.”⁵⁰ Notably focusing on consent to the marriage as opposed to decisional capacity to enter into the contract of marriage.

Capacity to Marry Considered the Same as Capacity to Manage Property

An alternative view of the requisite decisional capacity to marry can be seen to be evolving in the jurisprudence as was referenced above in the cases of *Browning v. Reane*, and *Spier, supra*. The Court in *Browning v. Reane* stated that for a person to be capable of marriage, they must be capable of managing their person and their property. Similarly, in *Spier, supra*, the Court stated that one must be capable of managing their property, in order to be capable of marrying.

Concluding Summary

From a historical perspective, it is apparent that there is no single or complete definition of marriage, or, of the requisite decisional capacity to marry, or even what the consent to marry involves. Rather, on one end of the judicial spectrum, there is the view that marriage is but a mere contract, and a simple one at that. Yet, on the other end of the spectrum, several courts have espoused the view that the requirement to marry is not so simple; rather, one must be capable of managing one’s person or one’s property, or both, in order to enter into a valid marriage.

3. CAPACITY TO MARRY: Statutory Requirements

Some, but not all, provinces and territories in Canada have marriage legislation that contemplates the necessity of capacity in order to marry. For example, certain statutes prevent a marriage commissioner from issuing a license to, or solemnizing the marriage

⁴⁸ *Estate of Park, Park v. Park*, [1954] p. 112, C.A. affirming; *Park v. Park*, [1953] All E.R. Reports [Vol. 2] at 1411 at 1411.

⁴⁹ *Hunter v Edney*, (1881) 10.P.D. 93.

⁵⁰ *Hunter v Edney*, (1881) 10 PD 93 at 95-96.

of someone known, or with reasonable grounds believe an individual lacks mental capacity to marry,⁵¹ is incapable of giving a valid consent,⁵² or who has been certified as mentally disordered.⁵³

At a glance, in Manitoba, certain rigorous precautions exist. For instance, persons certified as “mentally disordered” cannot marry unless a psychiatrist certifies in writing that the individual is able to understand the nature of marriage and its duties and responsibilities.⁵⁴ In fact, a person who issues a marriage license or solemnizes the marriage of someone who is known to be certified as mentally disordered, will be guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to a fine.⁵⁵

Section 7 of Ontario’s *Marriage Act* prohibits persons from issuing a license to or solemnizing the marriage of any person who, based on what he/she knows, or has reasonable grounds to believe, lacks mental capacity to marry by reason of being under the influence of intoxicating liquor or drugs *or for any other reason*.⁵⁶

In British Columbia, under the *Marriage Act*, it is a criminal offence to issue a license for a marriage, or to solemnize a marriage, when the authority in question knows or has reason to believe that either of the parties to the marriage is mentally disordered or impaired by drugs or alcohol.⁵⁷ The B.C. legislation further provides that a caveat can be lodged with an issuer of marriage licenses against the issuing a license to persons named in the caveat.⁵⁸ Once lodged, the caveat prevents the issuing of a marriage license until the issuer has inquired about the caveat and is satisfied the marriage ought not to be

⁵¹ Section 7 of the Ontario *Marriage Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. M.3, provides: “No person shall issue a license to or solemnize the marriage of any person who, based on what he or she knows or has reasonable grounds to believe, lacks mental capacity to marry by reason of being under the influence of intoxicating liquor or drugs or for any other reason.”

⁵² *Marriage Act*, R.S.N.W.T. (Nu.) 1988, c. M-4 (Nunavut).

⁵³ *The Marriage Act*, CCSM c. M50 (Manitoba)

⁵⁴ *The Marriage Act*, CCSM c. M50, section 20.

⁵⁵ *The Marriage Act*, C.C.S.M. c. M50, sub-section 20(3).

⁵⁶ Section 7 of the Ontario *Marriage Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. M.3, provides: “No person shall issue a license to or solemnize the marriage of any person who, based on what he or she knows or has reasonable grounds to believe, lacks mental capacity to marry by reason of being under the influence of intoxicating liquor or drugs or for any other reason.”

⁵⁷ *Marriage Act*, RSBC 1996 chapter 282, section 35.

⁵⁸ *Marriage Act*, RSBC 1996, chapter 282, section 23.

obstructed, or the caveat is withdrawn by the person who lodged it.⁵⁹ However, there are no reported cases citing section 35 of the B.C. legislation, which suggests that offences under this legislation, if they occur, are not prosecuted. The writer has been told, however, by B.C. counsel that this provision is successfully used for protective purposes where predatory marriages are suspected. Discussion with lawyers in British Columbia suggests further, however, that the caveat system, although useful in theory, is not fully implemented; we understand that there is no centralized, searchable roster of caveats lodged in the province.

Where provincial or territorial legislation is silent on this issue of capacity and marriage (Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Yukon) common law dictates that a marriage may be found to be void *ab initio* if one or both of the spouses did not have the requisite capacity to marry.

As such, whether by statute or at common law, every province requires that persons have legal capacity in order to consent to, and therefore enter into a valid marriage.

In spite of the various legislation on commissioning a marriage, it appears there is no diligence in heeding the provisions as marriages continue to be convened where there is no apparent attention paid to capacity and consent.

4. CAPACITY TO SEPARATE, DIVORCE, & RECONCILE

Hand-in-hand with the analysis of whether an individual has the requisite capacity to marry, courts have also examined whether an individual has the requisite capacity to decide to separate, divorce or reconcile with a married spouse.

Capacity to Separate

2009 - AB v CD (British Columbia)

The question of the requisite capacity to separate was addressed in the British Columbia Court of Appeal case of *AB v CD*.⁶⁰ In that decision, the Court agreed with the

⁵⁹ *Marriage Act*, RSBC 1996, chapter 28, subsection 23(2).

⁶⁰ *AB v CD* 2009 BCCA 200, leave to appeal to SCC denied 2009 CanLII 57524 (SCC).

characterization of the different standards of capacity and the standard of capacity to form the intention to leave a marriage, set out by Professor Robertson in his text, *Mental Disability and the Law in Canada*.⁶¹ Professor Robertson's standard focuses on the spouse's overall capacity to manage his or her own affairs. This standard, which had also been relied upon by the lower court, is found at paragraph 21 of the Court of Appeal decision as follows:

Where it is the mentally ill spouse who is alleged to have formed the intention to live separate and apart, the court must be satisfied that that spouse possessed the necessary mental capacity to form that intention. This is probably a similar requirement to the requisite capacity to marry and involves an ability to appreciate the nature and consequences of abandoning the marital relationship.

The Court noted that this standard differs and is less onerous than that adopted in the English decisions of *Perry v Perry* and *Brannan v Brannan* which conclude that when a spouse suffers from delusions that lead to a decision to leave the marriage, that spouse lacks the requisite intent to leave the marriage. The Court of Appeal noted that it prefers Professor Robertson's characterization of capacity to that found in the older English cases, since it prioritizes the personal autonomy of the individual in making decisions.

In cases where capacity fluctuates or disappears altogether, courts have held that as long as a person had capacity at the time of separation from a spouse, and maintained the intention to remain separate and apart from the spouse while capable, then the entirety of the separation period could be counted for the purposes of a divorce, even if the person lost capacity during the period of separation.⁶²

In the British Columbia case of *Wolfman-Stotland v Stotland*,⁶³ the Court of Appeal concluded, based on the authorities, that capacity to separate is the same as the standard

⁶¹ Robertson, G., *Mental Disability and the Law in Canada*, 2nd ed., (Toronto: Carswell, 1994) at p. 214 [*Mental Disability and the Law in Canada*].

⁶² *MKO (by his litigation guardian) v MEC*, 2005 BCSC 1051.

⁶³ *Wolfman-Stotland v Stotland*, 2011 BCCA 175.

for the requisite capacity to marry, and that the “requisite capacity is not high, and is lower in the hierarchy than the capacity to manage one’s affairs.”⁶⁴

2014 - *Babiuk v. Babiuk (Saskatchewan)*⁶⁵

The Saskatchewan Court of Queen’s Bench, reviewed the requisite decisional capacity to separate, among other issues, in *Babiuk v Babiuk*.⁶⁶

An older adult (after being admitted to the hospital for injuries to her body) was certified incompetent to manage her estate pursuant to, *The Mentally Disordered Person’s Act*, RSS 1978, c M-14 (since repealed by SS 2014, c 24). The Public Guardian and Trustee became her statutory guardian for property. After being discharged from the hospital the older adult resided in a care home and refused any contact from her husband. During a review hearing for her Certificate of Incompetence the wife stated that she had been physically assaulted and intimidated by her husband during her life and that she was afraid of him. She wanted to remain in her care home, separate and apart from her husband. She said she was happy and safe, although she could not name the care home or its address, could not file a tax return on her own and, while she had some knowledge of her financial situation, it was limited.

The PGT brought a petition seeking a division of family property pursuant to *The Family Property Act*, and maintenance, pursuant to *The Family Maintenance Act*. The husband brought a motion seeking an Order prohibiting the PGT from pursuing a property claim on behalf of his wife. The husband argued that his wife would not want the family property to be divided. The wife however testified in an affidavit that while she forgets most things, she does not forget her life with her husband. She also stated that she would like to have half of her family property and have it managed by the PGT.

The Court noted that the wife may not be capable of managing her financial affairs, but that does not mean she is not capable of making personal decisions. The Court cited

⁶⁴ *Wolfman-Stotland v Stotland*, 2011 BCCA 175 at para 27.

⁶⁵ *Babiuk v Babiuk* 2014 SKQB 320.

⁶⁶ *Babiuk v Babiuk*, 2014 SKQB 320.

Calvert (Litigation Guardian of) v. Calvert (1997), 32 O.R. (3d) 281 (Div. Ct), at 294, aff'd (1998), 37 O.R. (3d) 221 (CA), leave to appeal refused [1998] SCCA No. 161:

Separation is the simplest act, requiring the lowest level of understanding. A person has to know with whom he/she does not want to live.

The Court in *Babiuk* concluded that:

In deciding issues of capacity, insofar as the law is able to, the appropriate approach is to respect the personal autonomy of the individual in making decisions about his or her life. . . There is evidence that [the wife] wants to live in the care home and not with [her husband], and that she wants her half of the family property.

. . .⁶⁷

The Court dismissed the husband's motion.

Capacity to Divorce

1997 – *Calvert (Litigation Guardian) v Calvert (Ontario)*

In *Calvert (Litigation Guardian of) v. Calvert (1997)*, 32 O.R. (3d) 281 (Div. Ct), at 294, aff'd (1998), 37 O.R. (3d) 221 (CA), leave to appeal refused [1998] SCCA No. 161, Justice Benotto compared the different standards of capacity – to marry, separate and divorce:

[57] Separation is the simplest act, requiring the lowest level of understanding. A person has to know with whom he or she does or does not want to live. Divorce, while still simple, requires a bit more understanding. It requires the desire to remain separate and to be no longer married to one's spouse. It is the undoing of the contract of marriage.

It appears that this Court arguably placed the threshold for capacity to divorce as somewhat higher than that for capacity to separate. It equates the threshold for capacity to divorce with the threshold for capacity to marry, consistent with the reasoning in *Durham*⁶⁸ and in *Park*.⁶⁹

[58] The contract of marriage has been described as the essence of simplicity, not requiring a high degree of intelligence to comprehend: *Park, supra*, at p.1427. If

⁶⁷ *Babiuk v. Babiuk* 2014 SKQB 320 at para.48.

⁶⁸ *Durham v Durham*, (1885), 10 P.D. 80 at 82.

⁶⁹ *Estate of Park, Park v. Park* [1954] p. 112, C.A.; aff'g, *Park v. Park*, [1953] All E.R. Reports [Vol. 2] at 1411.

marriage is simple, divorce must be equally simple. The American courts have recognized that the mental capacity required for divorce is the same as required for entering into marriage: *Re Kutchins*, 136 A.3d 45 (Ill., 1985).

As for the specifics of the factors to be applied in assessing capacity, Justice Benotto favourably referred to the evidence of an expert physician, Dr. Molloy, who outlined a case for the requisite factors for determining capacity:

[73] I found the evidence of Dr. Molloy very helpful. Although he, like Drs. Silberfeld and Freedman, did not see Mrs. Calvert, he provided useful analysis of the evidence and methodology for determining capacity. To be competent to make a decision, a person must:

1. understand the context of the decision;
2. know his or her specific choices; and
3. appreciate the consequences of these choices.

Put simply, the requisite factors for establishing the capacity to divorce, like the requisite criteria for the capacity to marry, and the requisite criteria for the capacity to separate, at common law, rightly, or wrongly, appears to be based on whether the person in question has an ability to appreciate the nature and consequences of the act, and in particular the fact that the act taken is legally binding. However, as the law on capacity to marry is evolving, so must the law on the capacity to divorce. This is an area warranted of tracking as the law continues to develop in light of the financial considerations raised in both marriage and divorce, the development of property rights and attendant legislative changes.

While this case appears to refer to a hierarchy of capacities, it is important to appreciate that capacity to marry does not fall lower on a fabricated hierarchy of decisional capacities. The fact that the capacity to marry has been viewed alternately by the courts as both incredibly simple and particularly complex, and the fact that significant property

rights in modern society attach to the marriage union, aptly illustrates that it is incorrect to conceptualize decisional capacity in hierarchical terms.⁷⁰

Capacity to Reconcile

In the recent decision, *Chuvalo v. Chuvalo*⁷¹ Justice Kiteley examined the issue of whether an individual had the requisite decisional capacity to reconcile with his wife.

2018 - Chuvalo v Chuvalo (Ontario)

George Chuvalo, was a legendary boxer who fought over 93 fights throughout his 22-year career. He is now in his 80s and suffers from significant cognitive decline.⁷² Over the last few years, Chuvalo's children have been in a legal battle with Joanne Chuvalo, their father's spouse. His children, in their capacity as his attorneys under powers of attorney, brought divorce proceedings against Joanne on behalf of George. Joanne, however, sought to reconcile and not divorce George in spite of the separation.

In January, 2018, a three-day hearing of an application was heard. The issue was whether George had the requisite capacity to decide to reconcile with Joanne.⁷³ At the outset of the hearing, the parties agreed that the evidence demonstrated that George lacked the requisite decisional capacity to instruct his counsel. As such, the Public Guardian and Trustee was appointed as his representative pursuant to rule 4(3) of the *Family Law Rules* (akin to a Litigation Guardian in estate proceedings).⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Kimberly A. Whaley, Kenneth I. Shulman & Kerri L. Crawford, "The Myth of a Hierarchy of Decisional Capacity: A Medico-Legal Perspective" (2016) *Advocates' Q* Vol 45 No 4 395 at 418.

⁷¹ *Chuvalo v Chuvalo* 2018 ONSC 311.

⁷² Mary Ormsby, "The Fight Over Boxing Legend George Chuvalo", *The Toronto Star*, November 3, 2017, online: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2017/11/03/the-fight-over-boxing-legend-george-chuvalo.html> ; Mary Ormsby, "George Chuvalo Lacks Capacity to Decide on His Marriage, Judge Rules", *The Toronto Star*, January 13, 2018, online: <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2018/01/13/george-chuvalo-lacks-capacity-to-decide-on-his-marriage-judge-rules.html>

⁷³ *Chuvalo v Chuvalo*, 2018 ONSC 311 at para 16.

⁷⁴ *Chuvalo v Chuvalo*, 2018 ONSC 311 at paras 4-5.

In her decision dated January 12, 2018, Justice Kiteley decided that George “does not have capacity to decide whether to reconcile” with Joanne and further noted that she need not decide whether he has the capacity to divorce.⁷⁵

Justice Kiteley relied on the expert opinion of Dr. Richard Shulman, a geriatric psychiatrist, and also referenced the opinion of Dr. Heather Gilley, a geriatrician. Dr. Shulman set out the legal criteria applicable to assessing whether an individual possesses the requisite decisional capacity to make a particular decision as follows:

1. The ability to understand information relevant to making the decision (for example relevant facts); and
2. The ability to appreciate the consequences of making or not making the decision (relevant to the context of the situation-specific nature of decisional capacities).

Dr. Shulman had assessed George and testified that earlier in the spring of 2017, he was able to understand and appreciate what he was doing, why he was doing it, and whether he wanted to do it, as far as the divorce proceedings were concerned. He explained that George had an adequate understanding of the fact that he was then separated and was pursuing a divorce, and he had consistently indicated that divorce, rather than reconciliation, was his preferred option.⁷⁶

Some months later, in November of 2017, Dr. Shulman again assessed George and noted that his cognitive ability had declined sharply and that he was at that time no longer able to “appreciate the consequences of his choices in regard to the matrimonial proceedings” which involve a “realistic appraisal of outcome and justification of choice.”⁷⁷ Justice Kiteley accepted the evidence and expert opinion of Dr. Shulman.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ *Chuvalo v Chuvalo*, 2018 ONSC 311 at paras. 16-17.

⁷⁶ *Chuvalo v Chuvalo*, 2018 ONSC 311 at para 34.

⁷⁷ “George Chuvalo Lacks Capacity to Decide on His Marriage, Judge Rules”; *Chuvalo v Chuvalo*, 2018 ONSC 311 at paras. 33, 35.

⁷⁸ *Chuvalo v Chuvalo*, 2018 ONSC 311 at paras.44-48.

Justice Kiteley began her analysis with a review of the decision in *Calvert v. Calvert*,⁷⁹ which dealt primarily with the issue of whether the applicant wife had the capacity to form the requisite intention to separate from her husband. In that case, the Court relied on the expert evidence of Dr. Molloy in finding that the applicant had the requisite capacity to separate from her husband. Dr. Molloy opined that to be competent to make a decision, a person must: understand the context of the decision; know his or her specific choices; and appreciate the consequences of the choices.⁸⁰

In addition, Her Honour considered and cited, *Banton v. Banton*⁸¹ and *Feng v. Sung Estate*,⁸² relying on the following principles: “an individual will not have the capacity to marry unless he or she is capable of understanding the nature of the relationship and the obligations and responsibilities it involves”;⁸³ and “a person must understand the nature of the marriage contract, the state of previous marriages, one’s children and how they may be affected.”⁸⁴

The Court concluded that the requirement for an individual to understand and appreciate the consequences of making, or, not making a decision to reconcile were consistent with the medical parameters outlined in Dr. Shulman’s report as well as the jurisprudence (referenced).⁸⁵

Justice Kiteley found that George expressed a wish to live with his wife, but explained that “there is no evidence that he understood whether there would be consequences to a decision to ‘live with’ his wife. Indeed, there are consequences such as changing the

⁷⁹ *Calvert (Litigation Guardian of) v. Calvert*, 1997 CanLII 12096 (ON SC), aff’d 1998 CarswellOnt 494; 37 OR (3d) 221 (CA), leave to appeal to SCC refused May 7, 1998.

⁸⁰ *Chuvalo v Chuvalo*, 2018 ONSC 311 at para 52.

⁸¹ *Banton v Banton*, 1998 CarswellOnt 3423, 1998 CanLII 14926, 164 DLR (4th) 176 (Ont Gen Div).

⁸² *Feng v Sung*, (2003) 1 ETR (3d) 296, 37 RFL (5th) 441 (Ont SCJ), aff’d 11 ETR (3d) 169, 2004 CarswellOnt 4512 (ONCA).

⁸³ *Chuvalo v Chuvalo*, 2018 ONSC 311 at para. 55.

⁸⁴ *Chuvalo v Chuvalo*, 2018 ONSC 311 at para. 56.

⁸⁵ *Chuvalo v Chuvalo*, 2018 ONSC 311 at para. 59.

financial status quo between them . . . There are other consequences such as the emotional impact if the attempted reconciliation fails.”⁸⁶

Two key paragraphs to examine in this decision are paragraphs 61 & 62:

....However, expressing a desire to live with his wife is just that. There is no evidence that he understood whether there would be consequences to a decision to “live with” his wife. Indeed, there are consequences such as changing the financial status quo between them; such as changing the date of separation for purposes of s. 8(2) of the *Divorce Act*. There are other consequences such as the emotional impact if the attempted reconciliation fails.

This court cannot rely on Mr. Chuvalo’s assertions that he wants to live with his wife as a basis on which to find that he is capable of making the decision to reconcile.

Justice Kiteley decided that Mr. Chuvalo did not have the requisite decisional capacity to reconcile. For if he reconciles, he needs to be able to foresee and understand the consequences of a reconciliation which involve not only emotional but financial consequences as well.

Counsel for Joanna submitted that there was no evidence that George ever intended to separate. The Court acknowledged that by finding that George Chuvalo lacked the capacity to decide whether to reconcile, it appeared to be implicit that there was a separation. Her Honour did not decide whether Chuvalo did separate from Joanna, and held that if it was at issue, it would be addressed in the future trial.

The consideration of determining the requisite capacity to reconcile is not an often-deliberated issue before the court. As noted above, a few cases have addressed the requisite decisional capacity to *separate* but none, until *Chuvalo*, have expressly addressed reconciliation purely from a cognitive assessment perspective.

Further Analysis: *Calvert*, Hierarchies’ and Capacity to Reconcile

⁸⁶ *Chuvalo v Chuvalo*, 2018 ONSC 311 at paras. 60-61.

This next section provides a few further comments on *Chovalo*, the oft-cited paragraph from the case of *Calvert*⁸⁷, discussed above and the capacity to reconcile.

First, in *Calvert*, referenced are the various “levels” for the capacity to separate, divorce, and marry within a hierarchical analysis. While it may be easier or instinctive to apply hierarchies to such analysis, a hierarchy delineating differing levels of decisional capacity does not exist. Rather different types of decisional capacity simply call for different standards to be applied.⁸⁸

Second, at first glance, it appears that in *Calvert*, Justice Bennoto finds capacity to separate is simply determining with whom one wants to, or does not want to, live. Finding that separation only requires the decisional capacity to decide with whom one wants to live is not in keeping with the *Molodovich*⁸⁹ factors – since reconciliation or separation does not necessarily involve living together – it is but one factor in a sea of other factors all of which have far reaching consequences. Separation, specifically determining the date of separation, has legal and financial consequences in the family law and statutory context, since it is used to determine the equalization of property, separation agreements that may be entered into and other domestic contractual arrangements or divorce decrees.

Justice Bennoto went on to find in *Calvert* that that there is a distinction between deciding with whom one wants to live and decisions with financial consequences; and concluding that financial matters require a “higher level of understanding”. The decision to separate inherently involves financial considerations and consequences as does marriage and divorce. The question of a higher or lower level or threshold is really dispelled by the decision itself that is being undertaken. Each decision has different factors to be applied in ascertaining requisite decisional capacity.

⁸⁷ *Calvert (Litigation Guardian of) v. Calvert (1997)*, 32 O.R. (3d) 281 (Div. Ct), at 294, aff'd (1998), 37 O.R. (3d) 221 (CA), leave to appeal refused [1998] SCCA No. 161

⁸⁸ See Kimberly A. Whaley, Kenneth I. Shulman, and Kerri L. Crawford, “The Myth of a Hierarchy of Decisional Capacity: A Medico-Legal Perspective”, *Adv. Q.*, Volume 45, No.4, July 2016.

⁸⁹ *Molodowich v. Penttinen*, 1980 CanLII 1537 (ON SC).

This must equally be true of the decision to reconcile. Neither separation, nor reconciliation, is simply about with whom one wants to, or does not want to, live. If it was then perhaps the factors to be applied in its determination would be the same. For George Chuvalo perhaps the question was more about where he wanted to live than with whom he wanted to live. There was notably, no discussion about personal care decisional capacity. Justice Kiteley clearly notes the distinction in her decision and she concludes that Ms. Chuvalo and Ms. O'Hara (her sister) could “form an opinion as to whether Mr. Chuvalo had the ability to decide where he wants to live” but it was only *the experts* who could express an opinion on Mr. Chuvalo's executive functioning and his cognitive ability to decide to reconcile.

Determining the requisite capacity to reconcile may be situation specific depending on the intentions and terms of the contemplated reconciliation. For example, it may involve living together, or living separate and apart for the purposes of the *Divorce Act*. In this case, Ms. Chuvalo removed Mr. Chuvalo from the long-term care facility in which he was residing and took him to her house. Few people willingly want to live in a long-term care facility. Living with Ms. Chuvalo was likely a happy alternative for him, but that is not the only consideration in determining the question of requisite decisional capacity (or desire) to reconcile with his wife.

Justice Kiteley looked at several cases and appropriately (in my view) applied the standard which is arguably developing in more recent case law. Perhaps the standard or factors to consider when determining the requisite decisional capacity to reconcile should be the same as applied in determining the capacity to marry (or marry again), which ought to include both factors of property and personal care management, as found in obiter by both the Honorable Justice Cullity in *Banton*, and again by the Honorable Justice Greer in *Sung*.

5. MARRIAGE & PROPERTY LAW: Consequences of a Predatory Marriage

To truly appreciate why predatory marriages can be so problematic, it is necessary to understand what financial and property entitlements are gained through marriage.

Put in context, it is also important to note that in many Canadian provinces (except British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec), marriage automatically revokes a Will or other testamentary document. An exception applies where there is a declaration in the Will that it is made specifically in contemplation of marriage.⁹⁰

This revocation of a Will upon marriage can raise serious consequential issues when a vulnerable adult marries but lacks the requisite capacity to make a new Will thereafter or even dies before a new Will can be executed.

For example, the vulnerable adult unaware or unable to make a new Will, will die intestate and the predator will likely inherit under provincial intestacy legislation. In Ontario, under the intestacy provisions of Part II of the *Succession Law Reform Act*,⁹¹ when a person dies intestate in respect of property and is survived by a married spouse and not survived by issue, the spouse is entitled to the property absolutely. Where a spouse dies intestate in respect of property having a net value of more than \$200,000.00 and is survived by a spouse and one child, the spouse is entitled to the \$200,000.00 absolutely (the “preferential share”) and the remaining assets are split ½ to the spouse and ½ to the child. If the deceased had more than one child, the spouse will get the preferential share of \$200,000.00, along with one third of the remaining estate funds.

Some provinces have now recognized this inequity as an issue and have enacted legislation to prevent revocation of Wills upon marriage. Marriage does not revoke a Will in Quebec. Alberta’s *Wills and Succession Act* came into force on February 1, 2012, and under that act marriage now no longer revokes a Will.⁹² British Columbia followed suit and on March 31, 2014, the new *Wills, Estates and Succession Act* (“WESA”) came into

⁹⁰ Marriage revokes a will in all provinces except, British Columbia, Alberta and Quebec. See the *Wills Act*, RSNB 1973, c W-9 (New Brunswick), *Probates Act*, RSPEI 1988, c P-21 (PEI), *Wills Act*, RSNL 1990, c W-10 (Newfoundland), *Succession Law Reform Act*, RSO c S 26 (Ontario), *The Wills Act*, CCSM c W 150 (Manitoba), *The Wills Act*, 1996, c W-14.1 (Saskatchewan), *Wills Act* RSNWT (Nu), 1988 c W-5 (Nunavut, Northwest Territories), and *Wills Act*, RSY 2002 c 230 (Yukon).

⁹¹ *Succession Law Reform Act*, RSO 1990, c. S. 26, ss.44-49.

⁹² *Wills and Succession Act*, SA 2010, c W-12.2.

force.⁹³ Under WESA, marriage now no longer revokes a Will. Ontario has not followed suit in spite of the advocacy that goes hand in hand with this article.

In addition to the testamentary consequences of marriage, in all Canadian provinces, marriage comes with certain statutorily mandated property rights as between spouses. For example, in Ontario, the surviving spouse is entitled to elect and apply to either take pursuant to the intestate succession provisions as set out in the *Succession Law Reform Act* (the “SLRA”), or to elect to receive an equalization payment pursuant to the Ontario *Family Law Act* (“FLA”).⁹⁴

There are legitimate and important policy reasons underlying this statutorily imposed wealth-sharing regime which has developed over time. Using the marital property provisions of Ontario’s *FLA* as an example, section 5(7) of the *FLA* sets out its underlying policy rationale as follows:

The purpose of this section is to recognize that child care, household management and financial provision are the joint responsibilities of the spouses and that inherent in the marital relationship there is equal contribution, whether financial or otherwise, by the spouses to the assumption of these responsibilities, entitling each spouse to the equalization of the net family properties, subject only to the equitable considerations set out in subsection (6).

Arguably however, this policy rationale does not really apply to a predatory marriage scenario, with the usual hallmarks including, situation, in which one party is significantly older than the other, holds the bulk, if not all of the property, wealth and finances in the relationship; where there are no children of the union; and where the other party offers little by way of financial contribution. Such a relationship is not, as the property legislation presumes, an equal contribution partnership, whether financial or otherwise.

As is apparent, in some provinces, the marital legislation is extremely powerful in that it dramatically alters the legal and financial obligations of spouses and has very significant consequences on testate and intestate succession, to such an extent that spouses are

⁹³ *Wills, Estates and Succession Act*, SBC 2009 c 13.

⁹⁴ *Family Law Act*, RSO 1990, c F.3

given primacy over the heirs of a deceased person's estate. For example, Ontario's *SLRA* permits, under Section 58, a spouse to claim proper and adequate support as a dependant of a deceased, whether married, or living common law. Interestingly, in the decision of *Blair v. Cooke (Allair Estate)*⁹⁵ Belleghem J. determined that two different women, simultaneously spouses of the deceased, were not precluded from both obtaining a support award from the Estate.

The inherent difficulty with a predatory marriage is in reconciling the injustice caused to the vulnerable and/or incapable person (and the legitimate heirs, if any), since such unions are not easily challenged because of common law developments. These common law factors employed to determine the requisite capacity to marry, have historically been set at a fairly low threshold. Common law precedent has simply not kept pace at all with the development of legislation that has been designed to promote and protect property rights.

6. PREDATORY MARRIAGES/CAPACITY TO MARRY: CROSS-CANADA LOOK AT MORE MODERN CASE LAW

Predatory marriages are on the rise world-wide, irrespective of country, ethnicity or culture. There is a pattern that has emerged that makes these types of unions easier to spot. Such unions are usually characterized by one spouse who is significantly advanced in age and, because of a number of potentially complicating factors, which range from the loneliness consequent upon losing a long-term spouse, illness, mental incapacity, or dependency, the person is vulnerable, and thus more susceptible to exploitation. These unions are frequently clandestine – with sudden or gradual isolation, alienation and sequestering from friends, family and loved ones being a tell-tale red flag that the relationship is not as it appears. The following cases address these issues of decisional capacity and the “capacity to marry” and involve similar fact situations: *Cadieux v. Collin-*

⁹⁵ *Blair v. Cooke (Allair Estate)* 2011 ONSC 498 (Can LII).

Evanoff,⁹⁶ *Hart v. Cooper*,⁹⁷ *Banton v. Banton*,⁹⁸ *Barrett Estate v. Dexter*,⁹⁹ *Feng v. Sung Estate*,¹⁰⁰ *Hamilton Estate v Jacinto*,¹⁰¹ *A.B. v. C.D.*,¹⁰² *Petch v. Kuivila*,¹⁰³ *Ross-Scott v. Potvin*,¹⁰⁴ *Juzumas v. Baron*,¹⁰⁵ *Elder Estate v. Bradshaw*,¹⁰⁶ and most recently, *Asad v. Canada (Citizenship and Immigration)*¹⁰⁷ *Devore-Thompson v. Poulain*,¹⁰⁸ *Hunt v. Worrod*,¹⁰⁹ *Chuvalo v. Chuvalo*,¹¹⁰ *Gosselin v Ramsay*,¹¹¹ and *Gill v Kaur*.¹¹²

1988 - *Cadieux v Collin-Evanoff (Quebec)*¹¹³

In *Cadieux v Collin-Evanoff*, a caregiver secretly married a 75-year-old man dying of colon cancer. She had known him for several years, he had dinner at her house regularly, and when he became ill she looked after him on a remunerated basis. Shortly before the marriage, the older adult executed a new Will leaving everything to his new caregiver wife (marriage does not revoke a Will in Quebec). His previous Will had left his estate to his brothers and sisters. He also executed a marriage contract containing a gift of a building in which the caregiver was a tenant and sold the family home for a price well below market value to someone the caregiver knew.

The older adult's family was not told of his marriage and the only witnesses to the marriage were the two people who had witnessed his new Will, one of whom who was the purchaser of the family home. While the Quebec Superior Court was not asked to address whether the older adult had the requisite capacity to marry, they did however set

⁹⁶ 1988 CanLII 524 (QCCA)

⁹⁷ 1994 CanLII 262 (BCSC).

⁹⁸ 1998 CarswellOnt 4688, 164 D.L.R. (4th) 176 at 244.

⁹⁹ 2000 ABQB 530 (CanLII).

¹⁰⁰ 2003 CanLII 2420 (ONSC)

¹⁰¹ 2011 BCSC 52 (CanLII).

¹⁰² 2009 BCCA 200.

¹⁰³ 2012 ONSC 6131.

¹⁰⁴ 2014 BCSC 435.

¹⁰⁵ 2012 ONSC 7220.

¹⁰⁶ 2015 BCSC 1266.

¹⁰⁷ 2017 CanLII 37077 (CA IRB).

¹⁰⁸ 2017 BCSC 1289.

¹⁰⁹ 2017 ONSC 7397.

¹¹⁰ 2018 ONSC 311.

¹¹¹ 2019 BCSC 1394.

¹¹² 2019 MBQB 68.

¹¹³ 1988 CanLII 524 (QC CA)

aside the new Will, as well as the marriage contract gift, on the grounds of lack of capacity and undue influence. This decision was upheld on appeal.

1994 - *Hart v. Cooper (British Columbia)*¹¹⁴

The case of *Hart v. Cooper* involved a 76-year-old man who married a woman 18 years his junior. The couple married in a civil marriage ceremony. As is generally the case, the marriage automatically revoked a Will the older adult had made six years prior, which named his three children as the beneficiaries of his Estate. His children challenged the validity of his marriage on the ground that their father lacked the mental capacity to contract a marriage. Allegations were also made of alienation by the new wife of their father.

Referring to the cases of *Durham v. Durham*, *Hunter v. Edney*, and *Cannon v. Smalley*, the British Columbia Supreme Court reiterated the classic historical determination of the requisite decisional capacity to marry. Factors which included and rely on the concept of marriage as a “*simple contract*”:

*A person is mentally capable of entering into a marriage contract only if he/she has the capacity to understand the nature of the contract and the duties and responsibilities it creates. The recognition that a ceremony of marriage is being performed or the mere comprehension of the words employed and the promises exchanged is not enough if, because of the state of mind, there is no real appreciation of the engagement entered into; Durham v. Durham; Hunter v. Edney (otherwise Hunter); Cannon v. Smalley (otherwise Cannon) (1885), L.R. 10 P.D. 80 at 82 and 95. But the contract is a very simple one - - not at all difficult to understand.*¹¹⁵

The Court then proceeded to describe the appropriate burden of proof as follows:

Where, as here, a marriage has, in form, been properly celebrated, the burden of proving a lack of mental capacity is borne by the party who challenges the validity. What is required is proof of a preponderance of evidence. The evidence must be of a sufficiently clear and definite character as to constitute more than a “mere” preponderance as is required in ordinary civil cases: Reynolds v.

¹¹⁴ 1994 CanLII 262 (BCSC).

¹¹⁵ *Hart v. Cooper*, 1994 CanLII 262 (BCSC) at 9.

Reynolds (1966), 58 W.W.R. 87 at 90-91 (B.C.S.C.) quoting from *Kerr v. Kerr (1952)*, 5 W.W.R. (N.S.) 385 (Man. C.A.).¹¹⁶

The Court in this case did not accept the medical evidence of the husband's incapacity and concluded that the burden of proof borne by the three children had not been discharged. The Court commented that there was no evidence proffered to suggest that the young wife ever profited financially from the current marriage or her previous marriages. Additionally, the Court found that the wife's motivation in marrying was not otherwise relevant to the determination of the husband's mental state at the time of the marriage ceremony. Accordingly, the marriage was upheld as valid, and the Will previously executed remained revoked.

It is difficult to determine from the written reasons in this case whether and to what extent the court considered the allegations of alienation and potentially predatory circumstances that the family asserted. No significant analysis was made by the Court of the allegations of alienation or whether the husband fully understood the financial consequences of marriage or the impact of marriage on his property rights. Consequently, the case makes no advancements in defining the "*duties and responsibilities*" that attach to a marriage contract, nor what must ultimately be understood by those entering into the contract of marriage. In a consistent application of the historical case law, *Hart v. Cooper* therefore, again, affirms the age-old principle that the contract of marriage is but a simple one.

1998 - *Banton v. Banton (Ontario)*¹¹⁷

When Mr. Banton was 84 years old, he made a Will leaving his property equally among his five children. Shortly thereafter, Mr. Banton moved into a retirement home. Within a year of moving into a retirement home, he met Muna Yassin, a 31-year old waitress who worked in the retirement home's restaurant. At this time, Mr. Banton was terminally ill with prostate cancer and was castrated. He was also, by all accounts, depressed.

¹¹⁶ *Hart v. Cooper*, 1994 CanLII 262 (BCSC) at 9.

¹¹⁷ *Banton v Banton*, 1998, 164 DLR (4th) 176 at 244.

Additionally, he was in a weakened physical state as he required a walker and was incontinent.

Yet, in 1994, at 88 years of age, Mr. Banton married Ms. Yassin at her apartment. Two days after the marriage, he and Ms. Yassin met with a solicitor who was instructed to prepare a Power of Attorney in favour of Ms. Yassin, and a Will, leaving all of Mr. Banton's property to Ms. Yassin. Identical planning documents were later prepared after an assessment of Mr. Banton's capacity to manage his property and to grant a Power of Attorney. However, in 1995, shortly after the new identical documents were prepared, a further capacity assessment was performed, which found Mr. Banton incapable of managing property, but capable with respect to personal care. Mr. Banton died in 1996.

Mr. Banton's children raised a number of issues before the Court, including the following: whether Mr. Banton had capacity to make Wills in 1994 and 1995; whether the Wills were procured by undue influence; and whether Mr. Banton had capacity to enter into marriage with Ms. Yassin.

Justice Cullity found that Mr. Banton did not have testamentary capacity to make the Wills in 1994 and 1995 and that the Wills were obtained through undue influence. In spite of these findings and the fact that the marriage to Ms. Yassin revoked all existing Wills, Cullity J. held that Mr. Banton did have the capacity to marry.

Justice Cullity reviewed the law on the validity of marriages, emphasizing the disparity in the standards or factors to determine requisite testamentary capacity, capacity to manage property, capacity to give a power of attorney for property, capacity to give a power of attorney for personal care and capacity to marry according to the provisions of Ontario's *Substitute Decisions Act, 1992*, SO 1992, c 30.¹¹⁸

Although Justice Cullity observed that Mr. Banton's marriage to Ms. Yassin was part of her "carefully planned and tenaciously implemented scheme to obtain control, and, ultimately, the ownership of [Mr. Banton's] property", he did not find duress or coercion

¹¹⁸ *Banton v Banton*, 1998, 164 DLR (4th) 176 at para.33.

under the circumstances. In his view, Mr. Banton had been a “willing victim” who had “consented to the marriage.”¹¹⁹ Having found that Mr. Banton consented to the marriage, the Court found it unnecessary to deal with the questions whether duress makes a marriage void or voidable, and, if the consequence is that the marriage is voidable, whether it can be set aside by anyone other than the parties.¹²⁰ In reaching this conclusion, Cullity J. importantly, drew a significant distinction between the concepts of “consent” and of “capacity,” finding that a lack of consent neither presupposes nor entails an absence of mental capacity.¹²¹

The Court commenced its analysis of requisite decisional capacity to marry with the “well-established” presumption that an individual will not have capacity to marry unless capable of understanding the nature of the relationship and the obligations and responsibilities it involves.¹²² In the Court’s view, however, the factors to be met are not particularly rigorous. Consequently, in light of the fact that Mr. Banton had been married twice before his marriage to Ms. Yassin and despite his weakened mental condition, the Court found that Mr. Banton had sufficient memory and understanding to continue to appreciate the nature and the responsibilities of the relationship to satisfy what the court described as “the first requirement of the test of mental capacity to marry.”

¹¹⁹ *Banton v Banton*, 1998, 164 DLR (4th) 176 at para.136.

¹²⁰ *Banton v Banton*, 1998, 164 DLR (4th) 176 at para.136. In Canadian law, a marriage may be either void or voidable. It is void if either party lacks capacity to marry, in which case anyone with an interest, such as a child of a previous marriage, or the personal representative has standing to attack the marriage on that ground. In contrast, undue influence and duress render a marriage voidable only. In this case, only the parties have standing to contest the validity of the marriage and only while both parties are living. Other interested persons lack standing, although not all courts seem to be aware of the distinction. See Oosterhoff, *Predatory Marriages*, *supra* at §3.2.

¹²¹ *Banton v Banton*, 1998, 164 DLR (4th) 176 at paras 140-41.

¹²² *Banton v Banton*, 1998, 164 DLR (4th) 176 at para 142.

Justice Cullity then turned his attention to whether or not, in Ontario law, there was an “additional requirement” for requisite mental capacity to marry:

*An additional requirement is, however, recognized in the English authorities that have been cited with approval in our courts. The decision to which its source is attributed is that of Sir John Nicholl in *Browning v. Reane* (1812), 161 E.R. 1080 (Eng. Ecc.) where it was stated:*

If the capacity be such ... that the party is incapable of understanding the nature of the contract itself, and incapable, from mental imbecility, to take care of his or her own person and property, such an individual cannot dispose of his or her person and property by the matrimonial contract, any more than by any other contract. at pp. 70-1

*The principle that a lack of ability to manage oneself and one's property will negative capacity to marry was accepted and, possibly extended, by Willmer J. in *Spier v. Bengen*, [1947] W.N. 46 (Eng. P.D.A.) where it was stated:*

There must be a capacity to understand the nature of the contract and the duties and responsibilities which it created, and ... there must also be a capacity to take care of his or her own person and property. at p. 46

In support of the additional requirement, Justice Cullity also cited *Halsbury* (4th edition, Volume 22, at para. 911) for “*capacity to marry at common law*”:

Whether a person of unsound mind was capable of contracting a valid marriage depended, according to ecclesiastical law to which the court had to have regard, upon his capacity at the time of the marriage to understand the nature of the contract and the duties and responsibilities created, his freedom or otherwise from the influence of insane delusions on the subject, and his ability to take care of his own person and property.

Justice Cullity however found that the passages quoted were not entirely consistent. In his view, Sir John Nicholl's statement in *Browning v. Reane* appeared to suggest both incapacity to manage oneself, as well as one's property was required for the requisite capacity to marry; whereas Willmer J.'s statement in *Re Spier* could be interpreted as treating incapacity to manage property, by itself, as sufficient to give rise to a finding of

incapacity to marry. Notably, Halsbury's statement was not precise on this particular question either.

In the face of this inconsistency in the jurisprudence, Justice Cullity looked to the old cases and statutes and found that implicit in the authorities, dating at least from the early 19th century, emphasis was placed on the presence (or absence) of an ability to manage oneself *and* one's affairs, including one's property. It is only with the enactment of the *Substitute Decisions Act* that the line between capacity of the person and capacity respecting property has been drawn more sharply. In light of the foregoing, His Honour made explicit his preference for the original statement of the principle of capacity to marry in *Browning v. Reane*. In his view, while marriage does have an effect on property rights and obligations, “to treat the ability to manage property as essential to the relationship would [...] be to attribute inordinate weight to the proprietary aspects of marriage and would be unfortunate.”

Despite articulating what would, at the very least, be a dual standard to be applied for determining decisional capacity to marry (one which requires a capacity to manage one's self *and* one's property) and despite a persuasive medical assessment which found Mr. Banton incapable of managing his property, Justice Cullity held somewhat surprisingly, that Mr. Banton did have the capacity to marry Ms. Yassin and declined to find the marriage invalid or void. Justice Cullity made this determination in spite of the fact that he found that at the time of Mr. Banton's marriage to Ms. Yassin, Mr. Banton's “*judgment was severely impaired and his contact with reality tenuous*.” Moreover, Justice Cullity made his decision expressly “on the basis of *Browning v. Reane*.” Notably, earlier in his reasons, Cullity J., stated that *Browning v. Reane* is the source to which the “*additional requirement*” is attributed, which requirement goes beyond a capacity to understand “*the nature of the relationship and the obligations and responsibilities it involves*” and, as in both *Browning v. Reane* and *Re Spier*, extends to capacity to take care of one's own person *and property*. That said, unfortunately there was no known expert evidence put forward to the court either in the form of retrospective or commensurate evidence on the concurrent of Mr. Banton's capacity to marry. Justice Cullity may not have had available

to him the evidence to consider any other result particularly given the restricting and limiting common law standard for determining capacity to marry. Perhaps with the appropriate evidence including if available, medical evidence there could have been a different outcome.

***2000 - Barrett Estate v. Dexter (Alberta)*¹²³**

In sharp contrast to the holding in *Banton*, in *Barrett v. Dexter* (“*Barrett*”) the Alberta Court of Queen's Bench declared the marriage performed between Arlene Dexter-Barrett and Dwight Wesley Barrett to be a nullity based upon a finding that Mr. Barrett lacked the legal capacity to enter into any form of marriage contract.

The case involved a 93-year-old widower, Mr. Dwight Barrett, who made the acquaintance of a woman almost 40 years his junior, Arlene Dexter-Barrett. They met in a seniors' club where Mr. Barrett was a regular attendee. In less than a year or so, Ms. Barrett began renting a room in Mr. Barrett's house. As part of the rental agreement entered into, Ms. Dexter was to pay \$100.00/month and do some cooking and cleaning of the common areas of the home.

Not long after she moved in, however, Mr. Barrett's three sons became suspicious of the increasing influence that Ms. Dexter was exerting over their father. In September of that year, only months after she had moved in, Mr. Barrett apparently signed a hand-written memorandum which gave Ms. Dexter the privilege of living in his home until one year after his death. The one-year term was later crossed out and initialed, giving Ms. Dexter the privilege of living in the home for the duration of her lifetime and at the expense of the Estate.

Mr. Barrett's withdrawals from the bank began to increase in both frequency and amount. Ms. Dexter then made an appointment with a marriage commissioner, and her daughter and son-in-law were to attend as witnesses. The marriage was not performed as the son-in-law apparently had a change of heart about acting as a witness. Ms. Dexter then made

¹²³ 2000 ABQB 530.

another appointment with a different marriage commissioner. On this occasion, the limousine driver and additional taxicab driver acted as witnesses. Mr. Barrett advised his granddaughter of the marriage when she came to visit him the day after the wedding. Mr. Barrett proceeded to draft a new Will, appointing his new wife as executor, and giving to her the house and furniture as well as the residue of his estate.

A capacity assessment was conducted shortly thereafter and Mr. Barrett's son brought an application to declare the marriage a nullity on the basis of lack of mental capacity to marry, or alternatively, that Mr. Barrett was unduly influenced by Ms. Dexter such that he was not acting of his own initiative.

In reviewing the evidence, the Court noted that at the time of the marriage, Mr. Barrett told the marriage commissioner that he believed the marriage was necessary in order for him to avoid placement in a nursing home (evidence of undue influence). There was evidence of alienation by Ms. Dexter, including removal by her of family pictures from Mr. Barrett's home and interference by her with planned family gatherings. Ms. Dexter was also accused of speaking for Mr. Barrett and advising him against answering his son's questions and of writing documents on Mr. Barrett's behalf.

Not only were all of the assessing doctors unanimous in their finding that Mr. Barrett lacked the capacity to marry, they also found that Mr. Barrett had significant deficiencies which prevented him from effectively considering the consequences of his marriage on his family and estate. On the issue of capacity to marry, one of the doctors, Dr. Malloy, opined that a person must understand the nature of the marriage contract, the state of previous marriages, and one's children and how they may be affected. Dr. Malloy testified that it is possible for an assessor or the court to set a high or low threshold for this measurement, but that in his opinion, "no matter where you set the threshold, Dwight [Mr. Barrett] failed".¹²⁴ In considering the evidence before it, the court cited a decision of the

¹²⁴ *Barrett Estate v. Dexter*, 2000 ABQB 530 (CanLII) at 71-2

Alberta Court of Appeal of *Chertkow v. Feinstein (Chertkow)*¹²⁵ which employed the factors set out in *Durham v. Durham*:

*What must be established is set out in Durham v. Durham (1885 10 P.D. 80) at p. 82 where it is stated that the capacity to enter into a valid contract of marriage is "A capacity to understand the nature of the contract, and the duties and responsibilities which it creates".*¹²⁶

According to the Court, the onus rests on the party who attacks the marriage to prove on a preponderance of evidence that a spouse lacked the capacity to enter into the marriage contract. Applying the law to the facts, the Court noted that while the opinions of medical experts were not determinative in and of themselves, and had to be weighed in light of all of the evidence, in this case the medical evidence adduced by the Plaintiff (the son in his role as estate trustee) established on an overwhelming preponderance of probability that Mr. Barrett lacked the mental capacity to enter into a marriage contract or any form of marriage on the date he married Ms. Dexter.

Although the Court did consider the evidence of the lay witnesses, relative to the medical evidence, the evidence given by the lay witnesses was weak. In fact, Ms. Dexter was the best lay witness. However, because she had a personal interest in the outcome of the case her evidence could not be accepted.

The Court ultimately held that the plaintiff had proved, on a balance of probabilities, that Mr. Baxter lacked the requisite capacity to marry. Consequently, the marriage was declared null and void and the court found it unnecessary to decide the issue of undue influence. More recent decisions as will be addressed below seemingly are more focused on the evidence and in particular medical evidence in the assessment of requisite decisional capacity. Unfortunately, in circumstances where there is often, isolation, alienation, sequestering, there is no medical evidence as the individual is purposely shielded from medical treatment as part of the careful plan to exploit in a fool proof result.

¹²⁵ *Chertkow v. Feinstein (Chertkow)*, [1929] 2 WWR 257, 24 Alta LR 188, [1929] 3 DLR339 (Alta. C.A.)

¹²⁶ *Durham v Durham*, (1885), 10 P.D. 80 at 82.

2003 - *Feng v. Sung Estate (Ontario)*¹²⁷

In 2003, five years post *Banton*, Justice Greer advanced the considering factors and application of the law in determining the requisite decisional capacity to marry in *Re Sung Estate*. Mr. Sung, then recently widowed, was depressed and lonely and had been diagnosed with cancer. Less than two months after the death of his first wife, Mr. Sung and Ms. Feng were quickly married without the knowledge of their children or friends. Ms. Feng had been Mr. Sung's caregiver and housekeeper when Mr. Sung was dying of lung cancer. Mr. Sung died approximately six weeks after the marriage. Ms. Feng brought an application for support from Mr. Sung's estate and for a preferential share of his intestate estate. Mr. Sung's children sought a declaration that the marriage was void *ab initio* on the ground that Mr. Sung lacked the capacity to appreciate and understand the consequences of marriage; or, in the alternative, on the basis of duress, coercion and undue influence of a sufficient degree to negative consent.

In rendering her decision, Justice Greer found that the formalities of the marriage accorded with the provisions of Ontario's *Marriage Act*. In addition, the Court found that the marriage was not voidable, as neither party took steps to have it so declared prior to Mr. Sung's death.¹²⁸ That said, Justice Greer was satisfied on the evidence in this case that the marriage of Mr. Sung and Ms. Feng was void *ab initio*.

In the Court's view, the evidence showed that Ms. Feng used both duress and undue influence to force Mr. Sung, who was in a vulnerable position, to marry her. Although Mr. Sung was only 70 years of age, he was both infirm and vulnerable and, the Court noted, Ms. Feng would have been very aware of his frail mental and physical health as a result of her nursing background. The Court also found that Ms. Feng was aware of Mr. Sung's vulnerability because Mr. Sung had agreed to help support Ms. Feng's son financially. It was suspicious that Mr. Sung, who had always been very close to his family, never told his children and his family about his marriage to Ms. Feng. Moreover, that Mr. Sung was

¹²⁷ 2003 CanLII 2420 (ONSC).

¹²⁸ *Feng v Sung*, 2003 CanLII 2420 (ONSC) at para 51.

under duress was evident from the fact that his health was frail and he feared that Ms. Feng would leave him if he did not marry her.

Justice Greer moreover stated, that had she not found that Mr. Sung was unduly influenced and coerced into his marriage, she would have been satisfied on the evidence that Mr. Sung lacked the requisite mental capacity to enter into the marriage. In reaching this conclusion, Justice Greer referred to *Banton* and the fact that Justice Cullity had referred to the principle set out in *Spier v. Bengen*, where “the court noted that the person must also have the capacity to take care of his/her own person and property.” Applying those principles, Greer J., found that the evidence was clear that, at the time of the marriage, Mr. Sung really could not take care of his person. Although Mr. Sung was capable of writing cheques, he was forced to rely on a respirator operated by Ms. Feng. As well, Ms. Feng was, around the time of the marriage, or shortly thereafter, changing Mr. Sung’s diapers.

The Court also adopted the factors for determining capacity to marry articulated by one of the medical experts, Dr. Malloy, in the case of *Barrett Estate, supra*: “...a person must understand the nature of the marriage contract, the state of previous marriages, one’s children and how they may be affected.”¹²⁹ Because Mr. Sung married Ms. Feng because he had erroneously believed that he and Ms. Feng had executed a prenuptial agreement (she secretly cancelled it before it was executed), Justice Greer found that Mr. Sung did not understand the nature of the marriage contract and moreover that it required execution by both parties to make it legally effective.

Accordingly, the marriage certificate was ordered to be set aside. A declaration was to issue that the marriage was not valid and that Ms. Feng was not Mr. Sung’s legal wife on the date of his death. In the result, the Will that Mr. Sung made in 1999 remained valid and was ordered to be probated.

¹²⁹ *Feng v Sung*, 2003 CanLII 2420 (ONSC) at para.62.

The decision of Justice Greer was appealed to the Court of Appeal primarily on the issue of whether the trial judge erred in holding that the deceased did not have the requisite capacity to enter into the marriage with Ms. Feng.¹³⁰ The Court of Appeal endorsed Justice Greer's decision, although it interestingly, remarked that the case was a close one.

2011 - Hamilton Estate v Jacinto (British Columbia)¹³¹

This British Columbia Supreme Court case is yet another decision involving some of the hallmarks of these predatory relationship situations; however, in this case, there was no marriage. The Court's analysis of the facts and issues is interesting from the perspective of the predatory aspects of the relationship, short of marriage. Predatory relationships can also profit from exploitation.

In this case, Mr. Hamilton was married for 59 years before his wife died in March 2001, at which time he was 81 years old. Within a few months of losing his wife, Mr. Hamilton embarked on a relationship with Ms. Jacinto who was approximately 30 years his junior. Mr. Hamilton, who lived in Washington State, would travel to visit Ms. Jacinto in Burnaby. The evidence before the Court was that at some point Ms. Jacinto and Mr. Hamilton contemplated marriage, though the marriage never took place.

In 2003, transactions took place that formed the subject matter of the action. Mr. Hamilton was the sole trustee and primary beneficiary of a trust that he set up. In that capacity, he arranged a line of credit, secured by property held in the name of the trust, and paid into the trust's bank account, money to fund the purchase of a house in Coquitlam, the title to which was registered in Mr. Hamilton and Ms. Jacinto's names as joint tenants with rights of survivorship. Moreover, to facilitate the purchase, Mr. Hamilton opened two bank accounts with Ms. Jacinto, and held jointly. At Mr. Hamilton's death in 2004, legal

¹³⁰ *Feng v. Sung Estate* [2004] O.J. No. 4496 (ONCA.).

¹³¹ *Hamilton Estate v. Jacinto*, 2011 BCSC 52 (CanLII).

ownership of the monies in the joint account passed to Ms. Jacinto by survivorship, and not to his estate.

Not surprisingly, Mr. Hamilton's children brought an action alleging, *inter alia*, that as the trustee of the trust, he lacked authority to purchase the property using trust assets. They alleged undue influence against Ms. Jacinto and a claim of resulting trust over the joint assets. They also made allegations of incapacity.

The Court considered whether or not Mr. Hamilton had authority to convert trust assets into non-trust assets. In this regard, the court had to determine Mr. Hamilton's authority as trustee under Washington State Law, the position of Ms. Jacinto, and the interpretation of the trust powers itself. The Court considered the argument of the children that Mr. Hamilton was a man in rapid physical and mental decline and their allegations that he was increasingly confused and forgetful in the last years of his life. There was a great deal of evidence of intent. The Court provided an in-depth analysis of the gratuitous transfer of property including the application of the doctrine of resulting trust to gratuitous transfers in *Pecore v. Pecore*.¹³²

Mr. Hamilton's children alleged that he was confused about his business affairs and had increasing difficulty in understanding them.

There was, however, a great deal of other evidence of independent witnesses. This evidence tended to refute the allegations that Ms. Jacinto was a "gold digger". Mr. Hamilton's solicitor was a witness. A number of independent witnesses testified that Mr. Hamilton had shared love and affection for Ms. Jacinto and spoke of their loving and intimate relationship. Relatives of Ms. Jacinto gave evidence. Mr. Hamilton's solicitor prepared a form of pre-nuptial agreement which had never been entered into, but also tended to refute the allegations of the children that the parties had not contemplated marriage. The Court also considered the conjugal nature of the relationship.

¹³² *Pecore v. Pecore* 2007 SCC 17 (CanLII).

With respect to undue influence, the Court found that Ms. Jacinto was not exploiting Mr. Hamilton or taking advantage of him in any way. Moreover, there was no evidence to draw an inference from the nature of their relationship that Ms. Jacinto exercised undue influence over Mr. Hamilton with respect to the property transactions.

The Court was satisfied that the intent of the gift to Ms. Jacinto had been proved and accepted her evidence with respect to the jointly held property. Although the Court noted there were issues of credibility, the issues had no bearing on the evidence given by Ms. Jacinto about the decision that the property be held in joint tenancy, nor as to the nature of their relationship. The Court also took into consideration the fact that the children knew about the real property that had been bought during Mr. Hamilton's lifetime and the possibility of the marriage. In its thorough analysis, the Court concluded that Mr. Hamilton intended to give a gift to Ms. Jacinto of an interest in joint tenancy in the real property and the joint accounts. The Court determined that Mr. Hamilton had given the gift freely; that it was an independent act, and one which he fully understood. Moreover, the Court determined that the presumption of resulting trust had been rebutted. The Court was satisfied that the gift was an act of love and an expression of affection. It dismissed and awarded costs to Ms. Jacinto.

***2012- Juzumas v. Baron (Ontario)*¹³³**

In *Juzumas v. Baron*, the plaintiff, a vulnerable adult, initially sought a declaration that his marriage to the defendant was a nullity and void *ab initio*, but he did not pursue this claim at trial; instead, he was granted a divorce/dissolution of the marriage. The resulting decision is therefore not a capacity to marry case *per se*, but the facts have all the hallmarks of a predatory marriage. Mr. Juzumas, an older adult, came into contact with an individual who, under the guise of “*caretaking*”, took steps to fulfill more of the latter part of that noun. The result: an older person was left in a more vulnerable position than that in which he was found.

¹³³ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220.

Mr. Juzumas, the plaintiff in this case, was 89 years old at the time the reported events took place, and of Lithuanian descent with limited English skills. His neighbor described him as having been a mostly independent widower prior to meeting the defendant, a woman of 65 years.¹³⁴ Once a “*lovely and cheerful*” gentleman, the plaintiff was later described as being downcast and “*downtrodden*”.¹³⁵ The defendant’s infiltration in the plaintiff’s life was said to have brought about this transformation. The financial exploitation, breach of trust, and precipitation of fear caused by the defendant, are the hallmarks of a predator.

The defendant “*befriended*” the respondent in 2006. She visited him at his home, suggested that she provide assistance with housekeeping, and eventually increased her visits to 2-3 times a week. She did this despite the plaintiff’s initial reluctance.¹³⁶ The defendant was aware that the plaintiff lived in fear that he would be forced to move away from his home into a facility. She offered to provide him with services to ensure that he would not need to move to a nursing home. He provided her with a monthly salary in exchange.¹³⁷

The defendant ultimately convinced the plaintiff to marry her under the guise that she would thereby be eligible for a widow’s pension following his death, and for no other reason related to his money or property.¹³⁸ She promised to live in the home after they were married and to take better care of him. Most important, she undertook not to send him to a nursing home, which he was so afraid of.¹³⁹ The plaintiff agreed.

The defendant testified that the plaintiff had suggested that they marry because of their mutual feelings of affection, romance, and sexual interest, but Justice Lang found otherwise.¹⁴⁰ The defendant, who had been married approximately 6-8 times (she could not remember the exact number), had previous “*caretaking*” experience: prior and

¹³⁴ *Juzumas v Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at para 1.

¹³⁵ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at paras 39 and 56.

¹³⁶ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at para 25.

¹³⁷ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at para 28.

¹³⁸ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at paras 26-28.

¹³⁹ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at para 28.

¹⁴⁰ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at para 27.

concurrent to meeting the plaintiff, the defendant had been caring for an older man who lived in her building. She had expected to inherit something from this man in addition to the pay she received for her services and was left feeling sour as she had not received anything. Justice Lang considered that this evidence indicated that the defendant was sophisticated in her knowledge of testamentary dispositions, and that she knew that an expectation of being named as a beneficiary to someone's Will on the basis that she provided that person with care is unenforceable.¹⁴¹

The day before their wedding, the soon-to-be newlyweds visited a lawyer who executed a Will in contemplation of their marriage. In spite of the obvious age gap and impending marriage, the lawyer did not discuss the value of the plaintiff's house (\$600,000) or the possibility of a marriage contract. And the lawyer did not meet with the plaintiff without the defendant being present.¹⁴²

After the wedding ceremony, which took place at the defendant's apartment, she dropped him off at a subway stop so that he would take public transit home alone.¹⁴³ The defendant continued to care for the plaintiff several hours a week and to receive a monthly sum of money from him.

Despite the defendant's promise that she would provide better care to the plaintiff if they married, the plaintiff's tenant and a neighbour, who were both found to be credible, attested that the relationship degenerated progressively. The tenant described the defendant, who had introduced herself as the plaintiff's niece, as "'abusive', 'controlling' and 'domineering'".¹⁴⁴

With the help of a plan devised over the course of the defendant's consultation with the lawyer who had drafted the plaintiff's Will made in contemplation of marriage, the defendant's son drafted an agreement which transferred the plaintiff's home to himself, not this mother, to financially protect her. The "agreement" acknowledged that the plaintiff

¹⁴¹ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at para 24.

¹⁴² *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at para 30.

¹⁴³ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at para 31.

¹⁴⁴ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at para 54.

did not want to be admitted to a nursing home. Justice Lang found that even if it had been shown to him, the plaintiff's English skills would not have sufficed to enable him to understand the terms of the agreement, and that the agreement did not make it clear that it entailed a transfer of the plaintiff's home.¹⁴⁵

The plaintiff, the defendant and her son attended the lawyer's office in order to sign an agreement respecting the transfer of the plaintiff's property. Justice Lang found that the lawyer was aware of the plaintiff's limited English skills; that his evidence indicated that the agreement had not been explained adequately to the client; that the plaintiff did not understand the consequences of the transfer of property; and moreover, that he was, in the court's words, "*virtually eviscerating the Will he had executed only one month earlier...*". Further, the lawyer did not meet with the plaintiff alone; and only met with the parties for a brief time.¹⁴⁶ Justice Lang found that the agreement signed by the plaintiff was fundamentally different from the agreement he had been shown by the defendant and her son at the plaintiff's home.¹⁴⁷

Perhaps most important, Justice Lang found that the lawyer did not appreciate the power imbalance between the parties. The lawyer appeared to be under the impression that the defendant, and not the plaintiff, was the vulnerable party.¹⁴⁸

The lawyer's notes indicated that the plaintiff was "cooperative" during the meeting. Justice Lang interpreted the lawyer's use of this word as indicating that the plaintiff was "acceding to someone else's direction," and not a willful and active participant to the transaction.¹⁴⁹ In addition, Justice Lang found that the plaintiff had been influenced by emotional exhaustion or over-medication at the time the meeting took place, based on evidence that the defendant may have been drugging his food as suspected by the plaintiff.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at paras 68-69.

¹⁴⁶ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at paras 79-84.

¹⁴⁷ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at para 84.

¹⁴⁸ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at para 88.

¹⁴⁹ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at para 91.

¹⁵⁰ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at paras 63 and 92.

Sometime after the meeting, the plaintiff's neighbour explained the lawyer's reporting letter to him, and its effect on of his property. With his neighbour's assistance, the plaintiff attempted to reverse the transfer by visiting the lawyer at his office on three separate occasions. Interestingly, when he would visit, a few minutes after his arrival, his "wife" would appear. The lawyer explained to the plaintiff that the transfer could not be reversed because it was "in the computer."¹⁵¹

In considering the transfer of property, Justice Lang applied and cited McCamus' Law of Contracts, which outlines a "*cluster of remedies*" that may be used "where a stronger party takes advantage of a weaker party in the course of inducing the weaker party's consent to an agreement."¹⁵² Justice Lang outlined the applicable legal doctrines of undue influence and unconscionability, stating: "*if any of these doctrines applies, the weaker party has the option of rescinding the agreement*"¹⁵³

Justice Lang found that a presumption of undue influence existed between the parties in this case as the relationship in question involved an older person and his caretaker. The relationship was clearly not one of equals. In such a case, the Court noted that the defendant must rebut that evidence by showing that the transaction in question was an exercise of independent free-will, which can be demonstrated by evidence of independent legal advice or some other opportunity given to the vulnerable party which allows him or her to provide "*a fully-informed and considered consent to the proposed transaction*."¹⁵⁴

As for the doctrine of unconscionability, Justice Lang stated that the doctrine "gives a court the jurisdiction to set aside an agreement resulting from an inequality of bargaining power."¹⁵⁵ The onus is on the defendant to establish the fairness of the transaction. These presumptions were not rebutted by the defendant in this case.

¹⁵¹ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at para 97.

¹⁵² *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at para 8 citing John McCamus, *The Law of Contracts* (2d) (Toronto: Irwin Law, 2012) at 378.

¹⁵³ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at para 8.

¹⁵⁴ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at para 11.

¹⁵⁵ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at para 13.

In addressing the defendant's claim of *quantum meruit* for services rendered, Justice Lang found that the period during which services were rendered could be distinguished as two categories: pre-marriage and post-marriage.

During the pre-marriage period, the defendant undertook to care for the plaintiff without an expectation or promise of remuneration, and persuaded the plaintiff to compensate her with a monthly income. Justice Lang found that no additional remuneration could be claimed for that period.

During the post-marriage period, Justice Lang found that the defendant had an expectation that she would be remunerated by the plaintiff, and that the plaintiff had agreed to do so.¹⁵⁶ For this period, Justice Lang calculated the value of the services rendered by the defendant by multiplying the number of hours she worked each week by an approximation of the minimum wage at that time. She adjusted her calculation to account for occasional decreases in hours worked, as well as the period of two months during which she found the defendant had been solely concerned with her own objectives, such that she could not have been caring for the plaintiff.¹⁵⁷ Justice Lang then subtracted the amount of money that had been paid to the defendant already by way of a monthly salary, and found that only a minimal sum remained.

Justice Lang then reviewed the equitable principle of restitution, which permits a court to “refuse full restitution or to relieve [a party] from full liability where to refrain from doing so would, in all the circumstances, be inequitable.”¹⁵⁸ In considering this principle, Justice Lang found that the defendant had “unclean hands” and that “the magnitude of her reprehensible behavior is such that it taints the entire relationship.”¹⁵⁹ As a result, Justice Lang found that the defendant was not entitled to any amount pursuant to her *quantum meruit* claim.

¹⁵⁶ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at para 129.

¹⁵⁷ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at para 128.

¹⁵⁸ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at para 141 citing *International Corona Resources Ltd. v. Lac Minerals Ltd*(1987), 44 DLR (4th) 592 (CA) at 66.

¹⁵⁹ *Juzumas v. Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7220 at para 142.

Substantial costs were awarded to the older adult plaintiff.¹⁶⁰

This case provides what is, in cases of financial abuse, a rarity: an uplifting ending. In this case, it is not a family member or acquaintance that brought the case before a court after the vulnerable adult's assets had already been depleted, but rather, the older adult who, with the help of his neighbor, was able to seek justice and reverse some of the defendant's wrongdoing. It is not every case of elder abuse that involves an older adult who is able to, or capable of, being present during court proceedings to testify. In addition to its review of the legal concepts that are available to remedy the wrongs associated with predatory marriages, this case demonstrates the usefulness of presenting the testimony of an older adult when it is possible and appropriate.

There is also an interesting post-script to this case. A solicitor's negligence claim¹⁶¹ arose from this case, but the claim was brought not by the victim, but by the perpetrator, the caregiver defendant, Ms. Baron. Ms. Baron and her son brought a claim against the lawyer who prepared the transfer of the house and the other legal documents. The lawyer conceded that his actions fell below the standard of care. Justice Gray noted that under the circumstances, the lawyer was clearly not in a position to represent both the caregiver and her son on one hand and Mr. Juzumas on the other. He was obliged to obtain separate representation for Mr. Juzumas. Furthermore, Justice Gray stated that it clearly would have been prudent to ensure that Mr. Juzumas understood what was going on given his limited language skills.

However, despite the lawyer's failure to meet the requisite standard of care, Justice Gray concluded that it was impossible to find that the breach of care caused any damages claimed by the plaintiffs. As clearly found by Justice Lang, the transfer of property from Mr. Juzumas to the caregiver's son was the product of a scheme perpetrated by the plaintiffs on an elderly and unwell man. It was the product of their undue influence. Even if the defendant lawyer had fulfilled his duty of securing separate representation for Mr.

¹⁶⁰ *Juzumas v Baron*, 2012 ONSC 7332.

¹⁶¹ *Baron v Mamak*, 2018 ONSC 2169.

Juzumas that would have simply prevented the transaction from occurring. The claim was dismissed.

2012- *Petch v Kuivila (Ontario)*¹⁶²

This decision highlights the effects of marriage on estate planning and specifically, the revocation of a Will by marriage. It also serves as a reminder of the correlation and consequences of predatory marriages and revocations of previous Wills not made in contemplation of marriage.

In 2003, the deceased designated his sister as the revocable sole beneficiary of his life insurance policy. In 2004, the deceased made a Will in which he named the respondent (his girlfriend at the time, later his wife) and his son as beneficiaries of that same insurance policy; that Will was not made in contemplation of marriage. In 2008, the deceased married the respondent. After the date of death, the applicant sister sought the insurance proceeds on the grounds that the deceased's marriage to the respondent revoked the designation in his Will.

Justice Macdonald made the following findings: the Will revoked the 2003 designation pursuant to the *Insurance Act*, the 2008 marriage revoked the 2004 Will pursuant to s. 15 of Ontario's *Succession Law Reform Act*, and the revocation by marriage did nothing to undo the previous revocation by Will. Therefore, the insurance proceeds were payable to the deceased's estate.

2013 - The “Internet Black Widow” Case (Nova Scotia)¹⁶³

While unreported, this case known as the “Black Widow” or “Internet Black Widow”, involves Melissa Ann Shepard who has had a long history with the law and with unsuspecting widowers.

¹⁶² 2012 ONSC 6131.

¹⁶³ The Canadian Press, “Internet Black Widow Melissa Ann Shepard signs a Peace Bond” CBC News (November 23, 2016) online: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/internet-black-widow-signs-peace-bond-1.3863909>

In 1991 Ms. Shepard was convicted of manslaughter and served 2.5 years after killing her husband on a deserted road near Halifax. Her husband was heavily drugged when she ran him over (twice) with a car.¹⁶⁴

After being released from jail, she met a man at a Christian retreat in Florida. They were married in Nova Scotia in 2000. A year later her husband's family noticed that his health was faltering, he had mysterious fainting spells, slurred speech, and was in and out of hospitals. Also, his money was starting to disappear. The second husband died in 2002 of a cardiac arrest. No one was charged with any criminal offence, although his family remains suspicious about his death.

In 2005, Shepard was sentenced to five years in prison for several charges stemming from a relationship she had with another man in Florida she met online, including grand theft from a person over 65, forgery and using a forged document.

In 2012 Shepard married another man, who had been her neighbour in a quiet retirement community. She had knocked on his door and told him she was lonely, and she had heard he was lonely too. A civil union ceremony was performed in the husband's living room, but the marriage was never certified by the province and was ruled invalid by Nova Scotia's Vital Statistics division as false information was provided on the marriage certificate. During a trip to Newfoundland after the wedding ceremony Shepard dissolved a cocktail of sedatives into her husband's coffee. Later, upon return to Nova Scotia, the husband tumbled out of bed and was hospitalized. Tests found tranquilizers in his blood.

Shepard was sentenced to three and a half (3.5) years in jail after pleading guilty to charges for administering a noxious substance and failing to provide the necessities of life for her then husband. She had originally been charged with attempted murder.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ CBC News "Internet Black Widow sentenced to 3 ½ years in jail" CBC News (June 11, 2013) online: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/internet-black-widow-sentenced-to-3-years-in-jail-1.1324946>

¹⁶⁵ CBC News "Internet Black Widow sentenced to 3 ½ years in jail" CBC News (June 11, 2013) online: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/internet-black-widow-sentenced-to-3-years-in-jail-1.1324946>

This is an extreme case of a predatory marriage, where the predator's intentions may have been more than just defrauding her victims or gaining financially from a marriage, but also of resorting to murder or attempted murder.

Shepard has since been released from prison and the Court noted that there is a high risk that she will reoffend. In 2016 she was rearrested for failing to abide by her parole conditions including accessing the internet, which she was prohibited from doing. Later those charges were dropped.¹⁶⁶

2014 - Ross-Scott v. Potvin (British Columbia)¹⁶⁷

The British Columbia case of *Ross-Scott v. Potvin* illustrates the difficulties of attacking the validity of a marriage after the death of the vulnerable adult. The only surviving relatives of the deceased (Mr. Groves) sought an order annulling his marriage on grounds of undue influence or, in the alternative, lack of capacity. They also argued that various *inter vivos* transfers and testamentary instruments were invalid on the same grounds. Justice Armstrong applied the common law factors for determining requisite capacity to marry and ultimately dismissed all of the claims, despite compelling medical evidence of diminished capacity and vulnerability.

Mr. Groves was a 77-year-old retired civil engineer when he married the Respondent, Ms. Potvin, who was then 56 years old. They were neighbours. Mr. Groves was reclusive and did not socialize; he met Ms. Potvin in 2006 when he delivered a piece of her mail that he had received by mistake. They married in November of 2009. Mr. Groves died a year later, in November of 2010.

The applicants were his niece and nephew, who lived abroad and had not seen the deceased for 25 years.

¹⁶⁶ Michael Tutton, "Nova Scotia prosecutors drop charges against 'Internet Black Widow' Melissa Shepard" *The Globe and Mail* (December 22, 2016) online: <https://beta.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/nova-scotia-prosecutors-drop-charges-against-internet-black-widow-melissa-shepard/article33416979/?ref=http://www.theglobeandmail.com&>

¹⁶⁷ 2014 BCSC 435.

In 2007, shortly after he had met Ms. Potvin, Mr. Groves instructed a solicitor to prepare a Will. It named one of the applicants, Nigel Scott-Ross, as the executor and trustee of his estate. The proposed Will split the estate equally between Nigel and his sister, the co-applicant. Mr. Groves contacted that solicitor four months later and said that he wanted to leave the Will for about six months.

In June of 2008, Mr. Groves contacted a new solicitor, instructed the new solicitor to prepare a new Will and executed the Will in the same month. The Will included a provision that granted his car, space heater, and rugs to Ms. Potvin, and divided the rest of his estate between the applicants and two charities.

Four months later, in October of 2008, Mr. Groves retained his third solicitor, Mr. Holland, and executed *another* Will which named Ms. Potvin as his executor and trustee, and divided the estate between the applicants, Ms. Potvin, and one charity. In July of 2009, Mr. Groves executed yet another Will that divided his estate in two equal shares; one share for Ms. Potvin and one for the applicants.

By September of 2009, Mr. Groves's health problems, which his doctor had first noted in 2007, had grown more serious.

In November of 2009, Mr. Groves and Ms. Potvin were married. They made no announcements or give public notice, and they took no pictures. Mr. Groves then put his car in Ms. Potvin's name, converted his bank accounts to joint accounts with her, and gave her \$6,000 to assist her with her mortgage.

When Mr. Holland learned of the marriage a few months later, he called Mr. Groves and informed him of the impact of the marriage on Mr. Groves's Will. Mr. Groves executed a new Will that gave the applicants \$10,000 each and left the rest of his estate to Ms. Potvin. Mr. Groves died in November of 2010.

Justice Armstrong's analysis of the capacity to marry relies primarily on *A.B. v C.D.*, *supra*, and in particular, the importance of autonomy discussed in it.¹⁶⁸ The medical evidence established that Mr. Groves suffered from cognitive impairments, anxiety, depression, and moments of delusional thinking.¹⁶⁹ Mr. Groves' family doctor asserted that Mr. Groves was incapable of "managing himself" in November of 2009.¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Justice Armstrong found that these conditions, diagnoses, and limitations did not evidence an inability on Mr. Groves' part to make an informed decision to marry Ms. Potvin.¹⁷¹ His Honour provided the following observation:

A person may be incapable of writing a cheque or making a deposit to a bank account and thus be described as being incapable of managing their financial affairs. Similarly, temporal delusions, depression, or anxiety may impact a person's ability to make other life decisions. But these factors do not necessarily impact a person's ability to consciously consider the importance of a marriage contract. Nor do they necessarily impact formation of an intention to marry, a decision to marry, or the ability to proceed through a marriage ceremony.¹⁷²

Mr. Holland, as well as Mr. Groves' accountant, financial advisor and marriage commissioner all gave evidence affirming that Mr. Groves was aware of the nature of the marriage. Of particular assistance was Mr. Holland's evidence; Mr. Holland was concerned about the appearance of elder abuse and he questioned Mr. Groves in detail about his relationship with Ms. Potvin a few weeks prior to the marriage. Mr. Groves was consistent in his assertions that he wanted to marry.

With respect to undue influence, the applicants relied on *Feng v. Sung Estate*. The evidence established that Mr. Groves was afraid of being admitted into care and believed that he could avoid that by marrying Ms. Potvin, who promised to assist him with asserting his autonomy and maintaining his comfort and care at home.¹⁷³ His family doctor asserted that Mr. Groves was susceptible to persuasion in 2009.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁸ *Ross-Scott v Potvin*, 2014 BCSC 435 at paras 46, 184.

¹⁶⁹ *Ross-Scott v Potvin*, 2014 BCSC 435 at para 186.

¹⁷⁰ *Ross-Scott v Potvin*, 2014 BCSC 435 at paras 94 and 95.

¹⁷¹ *Ross-Scott v Potvin*, 2014 BCSC 435 at para 186.

¹⁷² *Ross-Scott v Potvin*, 2014 BCSC 435 at para 20.

¹⁷³ *Ross-Scott v Potvin*, 2014 BCSC 435 at para 190.

¹⁷⁴ *Ross-Scott v Potvin*, 2014 BCSC 435 at para 95.

Regardless, Justice Armstrong found that there was no direct evidence that Ms. Potvin's influence over Mr. Groves supplanted his decision-making power on the issue of his decision to marry.¹⁷⁵ His Honour found that Ms. Potvin may have encouraged Mr. Groves in this regard, but there was no evidence that she exerted influence or force to compel him to do so.¹⁷⁶ His Honour explains his holding as follows:

I have concluded that the burden of proof regarding a challenge to a marriage based on a claim of undue influence is the same as the burden of proving a lack of capacity. The plaintiffs must provide the defendant's actual influence deprived Mr. Groves of the free will to marry or refuse to marry Ms. Potvin. The plaintiffs have failed to meet the burden of proving that Mr. Groves was not able to assert his own will.¹⁷⁷

Justice Armstrong also dismissed the claims that Mr. Groves' testamentary dispositions and *inter vivos* transfers were invalid by reason of undue influence.¹⁷⁸ His Honour applied *Hyrniak v. Maudlin*, 2014 SCC 7 and concluded that a summary trial, with a record of affidavit evidence and cross-examination transcripts, was a suitable forum for the disposition of the claim.¹⁷⁹ The action was dismissed with costs to Ms. Potvin.¹⁸⁰

2015 - Elder Estate v. Bradshaw (British Columbia)¹⁸¹

This case reminds us that despite a rise in the injustices faced by these challenging predatory incidents, not all such older adult / younger caregiver (or romantic partner) situations are as sinister as they may first appear and each situation must be adjudicated on its own particular facts and evidence.

The older adult in this case was a Mr. Elder. He was 80 years old when he died suddenly on July 20, 2011. He was single, had never married, and never had children. He had a sister with whom he had been close. In 2006 Mr. Elder had hired a housekeeper, Ms. O'Brien, (who was twenty-five years younger than Mr. Elder) to assist him around his

¹⁷⁵ *Ross-Scott v Potvin*, 2014 BCSC 435 at para 190.

¹⁷⁶ *Ross-Scott v Potvin*, 2014 BCSC 435 at para 190.

¹⁷⁷ *Ross-Scott v Potvin*, 2014 BCSC 435 at para 240.

¹⁷⁸ *Ross-Scott v Potvin*, 2014 BCSC 435 at para 227, 280, and 281.

¹⁷⁹ *Ross-Scott v Potvin*, 2014 BCSC 435 at para 300.

¹⁸⁰ *Ross-Scott v Potvin*, 2014 BCSC 435 at para 302.

¹⁸¹ 2015 BCSC 1266.

house and eventually her role changed to that of caregiver. She would assist him with a variety of chores, drive him to appointments and to the bank, fill out cheques for him to sign when he needed to pay bills, etc.

In 2008 Mr. Elder had been diagnosed as having memory loss, functional impairment, and “dementia - likely a mixed vascular Alzheimer type.”¹⁸² He was placed on medication and in 2009 he “seemed to improve immensely” and he remained stable until 2011 when his confusion increased for a short time after his sister’s death in March of 2011.

On April 2, 2011 he executed a new Will (the “2011 Will”) in which he left everything to his caregiver, unlike his previous will in which he left everything to his sister and then his three nephews should she predecease him. He also appointed the caregiver as his attorney under a power of attorney for property.

The caregiver had suggested in 2011 that they buy a home together. They searched for and found a house that they wanted to purchase, where Mr. Elder would live in a bedroom on the first floor and the caregiver would live in the basement. The caregiver testified that Mr. Elder was “chuffed” about it and really excited. Mr. Elder agreed to pay for 2/3 of the house and the caregiver 1/3. Mr. Elder deposited \$120,000.00 into a joint account with the caregiver for this purpose. However, Mr. Elder died before the house could be bought. After his death, the caregiver used the money to purchase the house herself.

The nephews challenged the validity of the 2011 Will alleging: lack of testamentary capacity, undue influence, and coercion by the caregiver. They also sought the return of the \$120,000.000. One nephew testified that his uncle told him that he and the caregiver might be getting married and moving in together, but he did not really want to marry, because he was not the marrying type. This nephew also testified that the uncle was confused when he called to say his mother (Mr. Elder’s sister) had died and that Mr. Elder

¹⁸² *Elder Estate* 2015 BCSC 1266 at para.38.

only wanted to talk about the movie he was watching and that he was rambling and incoherent. The nephew didn't think he grasped what he was telling him.¹⁸³

Admittedly, there were some facts surrounding the execution of the 2011 Will and power of attorney that were a cause of concern:

- The caregiver referred Mr. Elder to the law firm. Mr. Elder had not met the lawyer before and it was a different lawyer than the one who drafted his previous will.
- The caregiver called and set up the appointment.
- A note made by one of Mr. Elder's outreach workers stated that Mr. Elder was confused about a phone message from a lawyer's office and was not sure why they were calling. Mr. Elder asked the worker to listen to the message, and she called the lawyer's office to confirm that he had to come in and sign his new will and POA.
- The caregiver brought Mr. Elder to the law office and first met with the solicitor and Mr. Elder together.

However, the solicitor also took necessary precautions:

- The solicitor met with the older adult alone and confirmed his instructions that he wanted the caregiver to receive his entire estate and not his nephews.
- He confirmed the reason why Mr. Elder did not want his nephews to inherit: he had not seen his nephews in 15-20 years.
- The solicitor "looked for signs of undue influence" and "saw none".¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ *Elder Estate* 2015 BCSC 1266 at para. 81.

¹⁸⁴ *Elder Estate* at para.16.

- An assistant had taken down information on the relationship between Mr. Elder and the caregiver when the caregiver called to set up the appointment. The solicitor went over this information and confirmed it with Mr. Elder when they were alone.¹⁸⁵
- The solicitor’s opinion was that Mr. Elder was of sound mind and capacity. The solicitor had asked Mr. Elder a series of questions¹⁸⁶ to test his lucidity and awareness and “if he had been even a bit suspicious of his capacity he would have contacted Mr. Elder’s doctor as was his practice in such cases”.¹⁸⁷
- The solicitor however did not ask about the value of the estate. Justice Meiklem noted that:

The omission to inquire about the value of the estate is not insignificant, because learning it was in the range of \$500,000.00 at the time may have triggered some additional discussion, **but the omission itself is not a suspicious circumstance sufficient to rebut the presumption of validity.**¹⁸⁸ [emphasis added]

Justice Meiklem found there was no evidence that the caregiver played any role in conveying the wishes to the solicitor or in influencing Mr. Elder to have a new will prepared and that there were “[n]o suspicious circumstances surrounding the preparation of the 2011 Will that are sufficiently well-grounded to rebut the presumption of validity.”¹⁸⁹

Justice Meiklem also reached the same conclusion in respect of whether there were suspicious circumstances tending to show that Mr. Elder’s free will was overborne by acts of coercion or fraud:

While **there may be a “miasma of suspicion” arising out of the lack of kinship** between Ms. O’Brien and Mr. Elder and the circumstance of his early dementia combined with an ostensible relationship of dependency with her as a caregiver,

¹⁸⁵ *Elder Estate* at paras. 15-17.

¹⁸⁶ Unfortunately the decision does not describe the questions.

¹⁸⁷ *Elder Estate* at para. 18.

¹⁸⁸ *Elder Estate* at para. 19.

¹⁸⁹ *Elder Estate* at para. 23.

there is no evidence of any coercive act or course of conduct on the part of Ms. O'Brien in respect of the preparation of the 2011 Will.¹⁹⁰[emphasis added]

However, the Court concluded that “the evidence relating to the diagnosis of early dementia and medical services interactions concerning memory loss and functional decline” and Mr. Elder’s “moderate dementia” raised a “specific and focussed suspicion that [was] sufficient to rebut the presumption of validity” of the will.¹⁹¹ Therefore, the burden then shifted to Ms. O'Brien to prove Mr. Elder had testamentary capacity.

While no formal capacity assessment was completed, his doctor had a great deal of geriatrics experience and he performed three psychogeriatric assessments on Mr. Elder that supported the caregiver’s case. Furthermore, large portions of the responding expert report tendered by the nephews were ruled inadmissible. Based on this medical evidence and testimony, Justice Meiklem held that “the preponderance of evidence” showed that “as of April 27, 2011, when he executed the 2011 Will, Mr. Elder met the test for testamentary capacity set out in the *Banks [v. Goodfellow]* case”.¹⁹²

Undue Influence / Coercion

The nephews argued that by the time the 2011 Will was made, Ms. O'Brien had moved from housekeeper to primary caregiver, and, upon the death of Mr. Elder’s sister, became his main source of emotional and physical support. They submitted that the caregiver made a plan, driven by her need to secure new accommodation for herself, to obtain the funds from their uncle. Furthermore, just losing his sister made Mr. Elder even more dependent upon the caregiver. Justice Meiklem saw things differently:

The defendants’ theory of Ms. O'Brien forming and carrying out a step-by-step plan is quite simply unsupported by the evidence. . . **It is a theory which is based solely on the defendants’ original suspicions arising from the overview of the circumstance of a younger housekeeper/caregiver benefitting from the will of an aged man.**[emphasis added]¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ *Elder Estate* at para. 24

¹⁹¹ *Elder Estate* at para. 25 and 28.

¹⁹² *Elder Estate* at para. 87.

¹⁹³ *Elder Estate* at para. 95.

Numerous witnesses, including a financial advisor, real estate agent, home care workers, and doctors provided testimony in this case that supported the caregiver's position.

A financial advisor interviewed Mr. Elder in June of 2011, since she had concerns about Mr. Elder and the caregiver planning to take joint title to the house. Her specific concerns were with his age and possible elder abuse. She testified that he appeared physically frail but was "with it" mentally and was excited about the house purchase. He was the "majority" talker and was "spunky". He was very clear that it was not a romantic relationship but he also stated that he did not know what he would do without the caregiver. The financial advisor saw no red flags. Mr. Elder also told the financial advisor that he did not want his nephews to have any part of the house.¹⁹⁴ It is unclear from the decision whether the financial advisor met with Mr. Elder alone or if the caregiver was present as well.

The real estate agent who showed the home they eventually decided to purchase also testified that Mr. Elder was active and a leading participant in viewing of the new property and in the decision to make an offer to purchase.¹⁹⁵

Justice Meiklem was impressed with the caregiver and her testimony:

Ms. O'Brien impressed me, not only as being a credible witness as to her testimony, but as a person of generous character, who genuinely liked and respected Mr. Elder. **Her evidence that she loved him like a grandfather rang true. She was deferential to him rather than dominant, which was supported by the evidence of numerous witnesses.** When her own health prevented her from attending as necessary, she compiled a detailed list of instructions for her friend Mr. Rainbow to take her place. . . .**Ms. O'Brien's relationship with Mr. Elder and the potential for undue influence was scrutinized frequently by the institutional service providers, Ms. Krantz [a case manager with the geriatric mental health team], Ms. Heron [an outreach worker], Ms. Hutton [a home care manager], Dr. Fawcett [his doctor], and to a lesser extent, but in a focussed way, by Mr. Thompson [the drafting lawyer], Mr. Laurie [real estate agent],**

¹⁹⁴ *Elder Estate* at para. 43.

¹⁹⁵ *Elder Estate* at para. 44.

and Ms. Gibb [financial advisor]. All these witnesses were specifically looking for evidence of undue influence and saw none.¹⁹⁶

Certainly Ms. O'Brien had legitimate influence over Mr. Elder, which is evidenced by her proposing the joint house purchase, but there is no evidence that she coerced him into doing something he did not want to do or that was not his own choice. In respect of the will, he actually rejected her advice that he did not need to change his will.[emphasis added]¹⁹⁷

Justice Meiklem found that the nephews did not establish undue influence or coercion on the part of Ms. O'Brien in respect of the 2011 Will.

Inter vivos Gift of \$120,000.00

The nephews argued that the caregiver was in a fiduciary relationship with Mr. Elder because she was his caregiver and attorney, and that this was sufficient to raise a presumption of undue influence. Justice Meiklem disagreed:

The generic label “caregiver” does not necessarily denote a fiduciary relationship or a potential for domination. . . **The nature of the specific relationship must be examined in each case to determine if the potential for domination is inherent in the relationship.**¹⁹⁸

. . . It is undoubtedly true that Mr. Elder was becoming more dependent upon Ms. O'Brien as time passed and it is reasonable to infer that she became a more significant part of his life after the death of his sister Georgina . . . **but taking into account their individual natures, and the development of the relationship, I do not find that the potential for domination of his will inhered in that relationship.** . . .¹⁹⁹

Justice Meiklem concluded that had he found the relationship was sufficient to raise a presumption of undue influence, he would have found the presumption to have been rebutted on the preponderance of evidence and that the caregiver did not exercise any undue influence over Mr. Elder.

¹⁹⁶ *Elder Estate* at para. 98.

¹⁹⁷ *Elder Estate* at para. 99.

¹⁹⁸ *Elder Estate* at para. 108.

¹⁹⁹ *Elder Estate* at para. 111.

2017 – Asad v Canada (Federal)²⁰⁰

While this case is not a classic predatory marriage case, it is another example of a vulnerable individual forced into a marriage so that the spouse could gain an advantage. The advantage in this case was obtaining permanent resident status in Canada.

A 32-year-old man, who was born in Pakistan but came to Canada when he was 14, had “obvious mental developmental deficits” and was in receipt of Ontario Disability Support Program benefits. He could take care of his personal needs such as dressing and washing himself, but he could not purchase his own clothes or food. His parents handled all of his money and when he would use the telephone, he had a pre-programmed phone with one button to push.

He married a woman in Pakistan in an arranged marriage in 2008. The wife applied for a permanent resident visa in 2011. The visa officer was not satisfied that the marriage was genuine and not entered into primarily for the purpose of immigration. The officer also had concerns about the husband’s capacity to marry. The husband appealed to the Immigration Appeal Division.

On appeal, the Panel Member Andrachuk adopted Member Dolin’s words in two previous immigration cases (*Khela v Canada (Citizenship and Immigration)*, 2008 CanLII 74722 (CA IRB) and *Karthigesu v Canada (Citizenship and Immigration)*, 2010 CanLII 96515 (CA IRB) dealing with the requisite capacity to marry:

In Canada a lack of mental capacity will render the marriage void *ab initio*. The requirement that one understand the nature of marriage is a manifestation of the basic requirement in contract law that a person should have the appropriate degree of mental functioning in order to be held accountable. However, the case law with respect to capacity to marry suggests that the standard is quite low. The courts have suggested that it does not require a high degree of intelligence to comprehend the significance of marriage. Mr. Justice Lowry of the Supreme Court of British Columbia [in *Hart v. Cooper, supra*] has summarized the standard as follows:

²⁰⁰ 2017 CanLII 37077 (CA IRB).

A person is mentally capable of entering into a marriage contract only if he or she has the capacity to understand the nature of the contract and the duties and responsibilities it creates. The recognition that a ceremony of marriage is performed or the mere comprehension of the words employed in the promises exchanges is not enough if, because of the state of mind, there is no real appreciation of the engagement entered into: *Durham v Durham*; *Hunter v Edney* (otherwise *Hunter*); *Cannon v Smalley* (otherwise *Cannon*)(1885), LR 10 PD 80 at 82 and 95. **But the contract is a very simple one – not at all difficult to understand** (emphasis added).²⁰¹

Member Andrachuk in *Asad* noted that, “while the case law may suggest that the standard to be met in considering capacity to consent to marriage is low, **it is not insignificant** as the appellant has to understand the nature of the marriage contract and responsibilities it creates.”²⁰²[emphasis added].

Member Andrachuk found that the appellant had no sense of what responsibility in marriage entailed. He testified that he does not know what the word “responsibility” means. Member Andrachuk described him as a “pleasant, well-cared for young man who is totally dependent on his family . . . He cannot ever imagine that he could cope without his immediate family. He appeared to have no concept that marriage should be the primary relationship in his life.” Further Member Andrachuk found that the appellant did not understand family planning or the prospect of having children: “I find that the appellant does not understand the basics of what marriage entails. He stated that he slept with his wife but he may have meant it literally . . . Family planning is an essential aspect of marriage, and yet the appellant does not understand what is happening.”²⁰³

Member Andrachuk found two basic faults with the evidence of the psychologist expert hired by the appellant’s family: 1) she derived most of her information from the father; and 2) her conclusions dealt mainly with how the appellant would be able to adapt or behave in a marriage rather than the appellant’s capacity at the time of his marriage and whether he entered into the marriage with his full and informed consent.

²⁰¹ *Asad* 2017 CanLII 37077 (CA IRB) at para.20.

²⁰² *Asad* 2017 CanLII 37077 (CA IRB) at para.21.

²⁰³ *Asad* 2017 CanLII 37077 (CA IRB) at para. 38.

Member Andrachuk concluded that the appellant did not have the mental capacity to give valid consent to his marriage based on the following findings: he believed that his marriage was primarily for his wife to take care of him; he gave very limited responses to what marriage means other than that as he is alone he is to marry; his reasons for marrying was that all of his siblings were married; he did not understand the concept of responsibility; when asked what would he do if he had children, he just managed to say that he would play with them and nothing else. Further he did not consider what the implications were in marrying a foreign national.

As under Canada's laws the marriage was not valid, the applicant "wife" was not a member of the appellant's family and could not be sponsored to Canada. In the alternative Member Andrachuk found that the marriage was entered into primarily for the purpose of acquiring status and was not genuine.

Capacity to marry has also been examined in two more recent immigration cases, ***Butt v Canada* 2018 CanLII 107593 (CA IRB)**, and ***Thiyagarajh v Canada*, 2018 CanLII 54723 (CA IRB)**.

In *Butt*, the wife sponsored her husband for immigration to Canada. The visa officer refused the application, one reason being that it was "unusual for a divorced older woman to marry a younger man in Pakistani culture". On appeal, the Minister pleaded that as the wife was "functioning intellectually within the extreme low range of intelligence, the question arises as to whether [she] has the mental capacity to consent to the marriage."²⁰⁴ Medical evidence was presented, including a "psychological assessment" which concluded that the wife had "significant cognitive difficulties" and that multiple and noteworthy challenges in her testimony were evident due to her speech impediment and extremely low intellectual functioning. Member Cheung noted that:

The case law addressing the capacity to marry suggests that the requisite degree of intelligence is quite low to comprehend the significance of marriage (*Feng v Sung Estate*): there must be the "capacity to understand the nature of the contract and the duties and responsibilities it creates", and there has to be a "real

²⁰⁴ *Butt v Canada* 2018 CanLII 107593 (CA IRB) at para 13.

appreciation of the engagement entered into”, that said, “the contract is a very simple one – not at all difficult to understand.” (*Hart v Cooper*).²⁰⁵

Member Cheung found that the wife’s testimony throughout the hearing demonstrated a “solid appreciation” of the nature of the marriage relationship and the responsibilities that flow from the marriage. Although her testimony was halting at time due to her speech impediment she gave adequate answers to questions related to topics such as the consummation of the marriage, the age gap between her and her husband, the reason for the delay in sponsorship, their communications after the marriage, and their future plans. Member Cheung concluded that the wife had “the capacity to enter into the marriage, as she is able to appreciate the nature of the marriage contract and the responsibilities flowing therefrom.” The appeal was allowed.

In *Thiyagarajah*, Member Osunde concluded that a husband had the mental capacity to consent to marry, despite the Minister’s attempt to challenge the legal validity of the marriage on the basis that the husband lacked the requisite capacity to marry due to his “mental impairment”. The husband had a congenital condition which resulted in impaired mental function from childhood. For example, he could not tell the date; he could sometimes go shopping by himself; and was able to take the bus on short trips. He lived with his parents and did some part time work cleaning.

Member Osunde started the analysis noting that the fact that the husband suffered from a mental impairment was not in and of itself sufficient to arrive at the conclusion that he lacked the mental capacity to enter into the marriage. Member Osunde then quoted the oft-cited case law that the “marriage contract is a very simple one – not at all difficult to understand” and examined the evidence of the husband: he knew that once they were married it meant that they live together; he knew you couldn’t marry someone else once you were married; he testified that he gave money to his wife and that she sends him birthday cards and that they “help each other”; and it was his decision to get married. He

²⁰⁵ *Butt v Canada* 2018 CanLII 107593 (CA IRB) at para 14.

also testified that if they had a child, he would help raise the child by “changing diapers and bathing it”.

Master Osunde concluded that the evidence was:

sufficient to demonstrate that the [husband] understood to a reasonable degree what he was getting into when he got married to the applicant and their obligations towards each other . . . I find on a balance of probabilities that he has discharged the onus on him to establish that he had the mental capacity to consent to the marriage with the applicant.

While the immigration cases are not exactly on point with predatory marriage cases (here the applicants are trying to prove their own capacity to marry) it is interesting to note the factors and evidence that the appeal board examines to determine capacity to marry. However, it appears that the conclusion that the contract of marriage is a “simple one” continues to prevail.

***2017 - Devore-Thompson v. Poulain (British Columbia)*²⁰⁶**

The British Columbia Supreme Court set aside a marriage based on the lack of requisite decisional capacity to marry and declared the marriage void *ab initio*. This claim was brought by a family member after the death of the incapacitated party. The Court also set aside two Wills based on the testator’s lack of testamentary capacity. This lengthy decision had been the first case since the 2014 case of *Ross-Scott v. Potvin*²⁰⁷ to provide further ammunition on remedying the now out of date common law treatment of decisional capacity to marry. A few cases have followed suit and are reviewed below.

Ms. Walker was an older adult, who had been previously married and divorced, and had no children. She thought of her sister’s children as her own. She was a strong independent woman until she was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease in 2005. According to those close to her, Ms. Walker’s condition progressively deteriorated in the years following her diagnosis, to the point where she forgot how to use utensils and a phone,

²⁰⁶ *Devore-Thompson v. Poulain*, 2017 BCSC 1289 [Devore].

²⁰⁷ 2014 BCSC 435.

could no longer cook, forgot who people were, and could not clean or care for herself. Ms. Walker, however, refused to acknowledge her declining health and insisted on remaining independent. Her niece, the Plaintiff in this case, loved her aunt dearly and increasingly assisted her aunt to live independently as long as possible.

In early 2007 Ms. Walker saw Dr. Maria Chung who prepared a consultation report. The report recommended that Ms. Walker's driver's license be revoked before she injured herself or others. Dr. Chung continued to care for Ms. Walker after the initial consultation and provided evidence at the trial.

Following Dr. Chung's advice, Ms. Walker made a new Will as of February 16, 2007 and appointed her niece as her attorney under a power of attorney for property. As of May 17, 2007, Ms. Walker also signed a representation agreement appointing her sister and her niece as her representatives under the *Representation Agreement Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 405, giving them each independent authority to make health and personal care decisions on her behalf.

Her affairs were in order and everything was settled. Or so the niece thought. It was discovered later (discussed below) that Ms. Walker had executed a new Will in 2009 and granted new powers of attorney.

On September 14, 2010, A Certificate of Incapability was issued pursuant to s. 1(a) of the *Patients Property Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996 c. 349, declaring Ms. Walker incapable of managing her legal and financial affairs. The Public Guardian and Trustee (PGT) was appointed committee of the estate. Ms. Walker died on December 26, 2013.

The "Predatory" Relationship

Unknown to Ms. Walker's caring niece, while Ms. Walker's health was deteriorating significantly she was being "preyed on"²⁰⁸ by a younger man for financial gain.

²⁰⁸ *Devore* at para.4.

Ms. Walker met this man, Mr. Floyd Poulain in 2006 at the local mall when he asked her for five dollars (and her address and phone number, so he could return the money). Ms. Walker and Mr. Poulain went on to have dinner together and this began Mr. Poulain's "campaign".²⁰⁹

Unbeknownst to her family and friends, Mr. Poulain took Ms. Walker to a lawyer in 2009 to execute a new Will. The lawyer testified at the trial but had to rely on his "sparse notes" as he could not recall the meeting. His notes indicated that Mr. Poulain remained with Ms. Walker while she was meeting with the lawyer. The evidence demonstrated that the 2009 Will was prepared from handwritten notations to the 2007 Will. The notations were in Mr. Poulain's handwriting. The notes struck out the appointment of Ms. Walker's friend as executor, and inserted "Floyd S. Poulain". Mr. Poulain also struck out the gift of Ms. Walker's car to her nephew with the instruction "omit" (as Mr. Poulain had already taken over Ms. Walker's car). There was also a note "to make power of attorney Floyd S. Poulain."

Madame Justice Griffin, in her decision, noted "*I find there to be a high probability that Ms. Walker sat in front of [the lawyer] and pretended to know what was going on by nodding and smiling a lot and saying very little. Others noted her smiling a lot and Ms. Walker was quite determined not to let on that she was having cognitive difficulties.*"²¹⁰ Justice Griffin found difficulty placing any weight on the evidence provided by the lawyer; noting that nothing in his evidence suggested that based on his standard practices he was able to detect Ms. Walker's testamentary capacity.

Shortly thereafter, the niece became aware that Ms. Walker had placed her condominium up for sale, even though she had previously asserted that she enjoyed living in her condo. The family intervened, and the listing was cancelled. Ms. Walker's actions were likely prompted by Mr. Poulain. Around this time Ms. Walker also became highly suspicious of

²⁰⁹ Devore at paras. 255 & 329.

²¹⁰ Devore at para. 294.

family members, including her niece who had been assisting her the most. Mr. Poulain was reportedly fueling her suspicions.

Ms. Walker and Mr. Poulain were married in June of 2010. Ms. Walker did not inform any of her family members that she intended to marry Mr. Poulain. In fact, she had said that she did not intend to remarry. The marriage caught her close family members and her treating physician completely off guard. Mr. Poulain testified that it was her idea.

Mr. Poulain was unable to recall any material details of the wedding under cross-examination; including who the witnesses were (they were supplied by the marriage commissioner). There was one photograph produced at trial where Ms. Walker and Mr. Poulain were together and her facial expression was vacant. The marriage commissioner's evidence was unhelpful on the issue of whether Ms. Walker had capacity to marry as he could not remember the marriage ceremony and does hundreds of ceremonies. He had "no practice of testing for capacity" (the Court noted that "it is not suggested he should have") and simply asks the parties to say "I do not" and "I do" to the standard questions.²¹¹

Justice Griffin noted it was likely that Ms. Walker was prompted on what to say at the ceremony and went along with it and the fact that the marriage ceremony took place is of little help in determining capacity.

When Dr. Chung learned about the marriage from the niece, she made an urgent referral to the PGT stating her opinion that Ms. Walker was incapable of entering into a marriage relationship. Dr. Chung continued to be of the opinion, at the trial of this matter, that Ms. Walker was not capable of consenting to marriage and not capable to sign the 2009 Will.

After the marriage, Mr. Poulain and Ms. Walker consulted another lawyer at the same office where her 2009 Will was executed. This second lawyer's file was produced at trial but the lawyer was not called as a witness. The file suggests that the lawyer was told Ms. Walker had had a stroke but was not advised of her Alzheimer's diagnosis. The file also

²¹¹ *Devore* at para. 303.

indicated that the consultation was about obtaining greater access to Ms. Walker’s bank account. The lawyer wrote a letter to her bank seeking information about Ms. Walker’s account balance and why she was not permitted to access her account. Ms. Walker’s niece (her attorney under the power of attorney for property) had put a \$500 withdrawal limit on her account as all of Ms. Walker’s bills were automatically deducted from her bank account. There was no need for Ms. Walker to obtain large sums of cash. Justice Griffin observed that this evidence pointed to “concerted efforts by Mr. Poulain to try to get access to Ms. Walker’s funds at Scotiabank post-Marriage: repeated contact with [the lawyer]; approaching the Scotiabank; and approaching another bank”.²¹²

When the niece learned of the involvement of the second lawyer she informed the lawyer of her power of attorney and her suspicions of Mr. Poulain. Nevertheless, the lawyer “pressed on for a while” including preparing a new power of attorney appointing Mr. Poulain as Ms. Walker’s attorney. The authenticity of this document was at issue since the niece claimed that she was with Ms. Walker until 4:00 p.m. on the date it was purportedly signed and Ms. Walker never mentioned an appointment with a lawyer. It wasn’t until the PGT office communicated with the lawyer that he wrote a letter to Mr. Poulain concluding that he ought not to represent Mr. Poulain.

The day after the new power of attorney was purportedly signed, Ms. Walker had a fall in her condominium and was taken to the hospital. A note was found after Ms. Walker was in hospital in which Mr. Poulain had written “will you please go over to the bank and withdraw \$40,000. . . it is really really important”.²¹³

Mr. Poulain claimed that he had no knowledge of Ms. Walker’s health condition and that he never observed anything out of the ordinary in her behaviour. He testified that even in September of 2010 when Ms. Walker was admitted to the hospital, she was fine, there was no change in her memory or other cognitive function from the time that he knew her.

²¹² *Devore* at para. 252.

²¹³ *Devore* at para. 253.

The Court nevertheless found that the evidence showed a consistent campaign by Mr. Poulain to try to get access to Ms. Walker's funds post-marriage:

I find it likely on the evidence that Mr. Poulain had long been fanning the fire of Ms. Walker's anxiety and paranoia by suggesting that the plaintiff was unfairly restricting her access to her own money, and that the intensity of these efforts increased after the Marriage.²¹⁴

Justice Griffin provided a thorough review of the evidence before her and ultimately concluded that Ms. Walker did not have the requisite decisional capacity to marry and as such the marriage to Mr. Poulain was *void ab initio*. Her Honour also found that, based on the evidence, Ms. Walker did not have capacity to execute a Will in 2009 or even in 2007, leaving the question of Ms. Walker's estate open for further inquiry.

Justice Griffin began her analysis by noting that the starting point is "the notion that a marriage is a contract. Similar to entering into any other type of contract, the contracting parties must possess the requisite legal capacity to enter the contract."²¹⁵ Referring to *Hart v. Cooper*, [1994] B.C.J. No. 159 (B.C.S.C.) at paragraph 30, Justice Griffin confirmed that "a person is mentally capable of entering into a marriage contract only if he or she has the capacity to understand the nature of the contract and the duties and responsibilities it creates."

Relying on *Wolfman-Stotland*, which in turn referred to *Calvert (Litigation Guardian of) v. Calvert* (1997), 32 O.R. (3d) 281 (Ont. Gen. Div.), *aff'd* (1998), 37 O.R. (3d) 221 (Ont. C.A.), leave to appeal refused [1998] S.C.C.A. No. 161 (S.C.C.), Justice Griffin observed:

the common law has developed a low threshold of capacity necessary for the formation of a marriage contract. The capacity to marry is a lower threshold than the capacity to manage one's own affairs, make a will, or instruct counsel. . . the capacity to marry requires the "lowest level of understanding" in the hierarchy of legal capacities. . . The authorities suggest that the capacity to marry must involve some understanding of with whom a person wants to live and some understanding

²¹⁴ *Devore* at para. 262.

²¹⁵ *Devore* at para. 43.

that it will have an effect on one's future in that it will be an exclusive mutually supportive relationship until death or divorce.²¹⁶

Relying on the evidence presented at trial, Justice Griffin concluded:

[343] As of the date of the marriage ceremony, Ms. Walker was at a stage of her illness where she was highly vulnerable to others. She had no insight or understanding that she was impaired, did not recognize her reliance on Ms. Devore-Thompson [the niece] and Ms. Devore-Thompson's assistance, and was not capable of weighing the implications of marriage to Mr. Poulain even at the emotional level.

[344] The fact that Ms. Walker told some people that she had married Floyd Poulain does not overcome all of the evidence as to her disordered thinking. This does not mean she had any understanding of what it means to be married.

[345] It is also clear that Ms. Walker's mental capacity had diminished to such an extent that by 2010 she could not have formed an intention to live with Mr. Poulain, or to form a lifetime bond. She did not understand, at that stage, what it meant to live together with another person, nor could she understand the concept of a lifetime bond.

[346] Ms. Walker did not have a grip on the reality of her own existence and so could not grip the reality of a future lifetime with another person through marriage.

[347] I find on the whole of the evidence, given her state of dementia, Ms. Walker could not know even the most basic meaning of marriage or understand any of its implications at the time of the Marriage including: who she was marrying in the sense of what kind of person he was; what their emotional attachment was; where they would be living and whether he would be living with her; and fundamentally, how marriage would affect her life on a day to day basis and in future.

[348] I conclude that Ms. Walker did not have the capacity to enter the Marriage.

[349] Since I have concluded that Ms. Walker did not have the capacity to enter the Marriage, the Marriage is void *ab initio*. Because the Marriage is void *ab initio*, s. 15 of the *Wills Act* does not apply and, therefore, the Marriage does not revoke the prior wills.

With respect to the 2009 Will, the Court concluded that the circumstances surrounding the document were suspicious and held, based on the evidence presented, that Ms.

²¹⁶ *Devore* at para. 46-48.

Walker did not have testamentary capacity at the time the 2009 Will was purportedly signed.

The niece sought an order propounding the 2007 Will should she succeed on other issues. The original copy of the 2007 Will was unavailable. Forgoing the technical Probate Rules, Madam Justice Griffin found that here too the practical and first issue to be decided was whether the deceased had capacity to make a Will. Relying on preceding evidence, her Honor concluded that on a balance of probabilities Ms. Walker lacked capacity to execute the 2007 Will. The Court declined to determine the future of Ms. Walker's estate as it had not been asked to do so.

The question of capacity with respect to marriage will, no doubt, often be more complicated than it was in this case as the niece's evidence was strong, with several credible witnesses. Nevertheless, this is a strong precedent for future claims to set aside predatory marriages for lack of capacity.

This case is also a reminder of the important role that lawyers play in protecting vulnerable older adults with diminished capacity, and in this instance, the evidence indicated that the lawyers failed to follow best practices. The testimony regarding the preparation of the 2009 Will and 2010 power of attorney suggested that no inquiries were made of the deceased's capacity. Instead, notations made by a party, with a vested interest in the changes to the Will, were accepted as instructions.

***2017 - Hunt v. Worrod (Ontario)*²¹⁷**

Hunt v Worrod examines the requisite decisional capacity to enter into a marriage contract.

In this decision, Kevin Hunt, father of two adult sons, was severely injured in an ATV accident and sustained a catastrophic brain injury. Before his accident, Mr. Hunt was involved with Ms. Worrod in an on-again and off-again relationship. Three days after Mr.

²¹⁷ *Hunt v. Worrod* 2017 ONSC 7397.

Hunt returned home from the hospital he disappeared. He did not have his medications with him. When his sons tracked him down at a hotel (by obtaining particulars from his credit card) they learned that Ms. Worrod had made arrangements to marry Mr. Hunt and that the wedding had already taken place. The police were called, and they released Mr. Hunt into the care of his sons. The sons brought an application, and one of the issues that the Court was required to consider was whether Mr. Hunt had the capacity to marry Ms. Worrod and if not, whether the marriage was *void ab initio*?

Justice Koke started the court's analysis by citing *Ross-Scott v. Potvin* 2014 BCSC 435:

A person is capable of entering into a marriage contract only if he or she has the capacity to understand the nature of the contract and duties and responsibilities it creates. The assessment of a person's capacity to understand the nature of the marriage commitment is informed, in part, by an ability to manage themselves and their affairs. Delusional thinking or reduced cognitive abilities alone may not destroy an individual's capacity to form an intention to marry as long as the person is capable of managing their own affairs.²¹⁸

Justice Koke recognized the need to balance Mr. Hunt's autonomy and the possibility that he did not fully appreciate how marriage affected his legal status or contractual obligations.²¹⁹ Justice Koke went on to conclude that a finding by a Court that an individual has capacity to marry, as set out in *Ross-Scott v. Potvin*, requires that that person "entering into a marriage contract understand the duties and responsibilities which a marriage creates *and* have the ability to manage themselves and their affairs" [emphasis in the original].²²⁰

Justice Koke thoroughly examined the significant amount of evidence dealing with the issue of capacity presented at trial. This evidence came both in the form of expert medical testimony and medical reports as well as the oral testimony of lay witnesses. A number of medical professionals had found that prior to the marriage and shortly after, Mr. Hunt demonstrated the following severe cognitive and physical impairments, among others:

²¹⁸ *Ross-Scott v. Potvin*, 2014 BCSC 435 at para.177.

²¹⁹ *Hunt v. Worrod* 2017 ONSC 7397 at paras. 10-11.

²²⁰ *Hunt v. Worrod* 2017 ONSC 7397 at para. 83.

- Significant impairments to his executive functioning, such as his ability to make decisions, organize and execute tasks;
- A neurologically based lack of awareness of his deficits and impairments, making it difficult for him to experience fully what is happening around him as well as to infer consequences of events which might jeopardize his personal safety;
- He demonstrated little emotional reactivity as well as apathy, demonstrated by a lack of initiation and motivation;
- He should not be left alone and continued to need supervision for safety reasons as well as to remind him to take his medications;
- His driver's license was revoked;
- He had difficulty initiating conversation and needed cuing to provide additional information; and,
- He had limited range of motion in his left shoulder, difficulties with balance, some residual left neglect, and his ability to walk was impaired when he performed more than one task at a time.

Justice Koke found that the evidence of the lay witnesses called by the sons supported the opinion of the medical experts as to Mr. Hunt's cognitive and physical impairments.

Before his release from the hospital, Mr. Hunt was assessed by Bill Sanowar, a capacity assessor on two separate occasions. On August 5 2011, Mr. Sanowar found Mr. Hunt to be incapable of managing his property. On October 19, 2011, five days before the marriage, Mr. Sanowar found Mr. Hunt to be incapable of making personal care decisions with respect to the areas of health care, nutrition, shelter, and safety.

After reviewing this extensive medical evidence, and evidence from the sons, Mr. Hunt, Ms. Worrod, and others, Justice Koke concluded that Mr. Hunt did not have the requisite capacity to marry and declared the marriage to be *void ab initio*.

Unlike the majority of predatory marriage cases which make it to trial, this case is markedly different since Mr. Hunt is not an older person and he is still living. This meant that, while clearly vulnerable, a consideration of his personal autonomy and his safety and wellbeing in the future was necessary.

Due to the nature and extent of Mr. Hunt's injuries from his accident, extensive medical evidence for the period surrounding the marriage was available to the Court. Of particular importance were the contemporaneous capacity assessments with respect to property and personal care that had been conducted and were available to the Court. This is unusual, as predatory marriage cases often involve an older adult who may not require regular medical attention. As a result, there is often limited medical evidence from the period surrounding the marriage available.

Alienation is another common element of predatory marriages, where the unscrupulous opportunist chooses to wedge him or herself in between the older adult and their friends and family. While Ms. Worrod did attempt to alienate Mr. Hunt from his sons and influence his actions, since the sons are his guardians, they were able to do what they could to protect him and continue to make decisions in his best interest.

In its costs decision,²²¹ the Court made a bold move, invoked its inherent jurisdiction and awarded costs against both Ms. Worrod and Legal Aid Ontario ("LAO"), who was funding Ms. Worrod's litigation. The application judge concluded that by failing to adequately monitor and assess the merits of the defence it was funding, LAO engaged in an abuse of process.

However, on appeal, the Court of Appeal for Ontario set aside the award of costs against Legal Aid. Family law associations intervened in the appeal, telling the panel of appeal judges that "this precedent will cause a chill in the availability of legal aid funding" and "a reduction in the number of lawyers willing to accept legal aid certificates."²²² The Court of Appeal concluded that the lower court had "misconstrued the role of LAO." As "a non-

²²¹ *Hunt v Worrod*, 2018 ONSC 2133.

²²² *Hunt v Worrod*, 2019 ONCA 540 at para 28.

party, LAO's conduct must be viewed in the context of its statutory mandate the decision to fund a litigant is driven by LAO's statutory mandate and associated funding criteria, not by the prospect of economic return to LAO."²²³ Please note, that at the time of writing, a leave to appeal motion was in the process of being filed.

2019 – *Gosselin v Ramsay*²²⁴ (*British Columbia*)

While there was no marriage in this case, the Court was asked to examine the validity of a “gift” of property by an elderly widower to his new love interest and her son. The older adult, Roland, through his litigation guardians (his daughter and son-in-law) brought an application to have the defendants convey their interest in the property back to Roland. At the time of the hearing, Roland was in the hospital, unaware of his surroundings and of the court proceedings.

After the death of his wife, Roland went through a period of profound loneliness, grief, and depression. Later it was determined that he was also suffering from the early stages of Alzheimer's.

Shortly after his wife's death, he met a woman named Darlene through a mutual friend. Darlene was unemployed and lived in a trailer with her unemployed adult son. Darlene and Roland's relationship became intimate and a few months later, according to Darlene, she moved into his home and they were in a committed relationship which lasted two more years. Roland attempted to introduce Darlene to his daughter and grandchildren, but the daughter made it clear to him that Darlene was not welcomed at any family events. The ill will was mutual and recorded phone calls revealed Darlene disparaging the daughter and claiming that the daughter just wanted to put Roland “in a box”.²²⁵ Roland stopped contact with his daughter. Roland was heavily reliant upon Darlene for “companionship and intimacy”.

²²³ *Hunt v Worrod*, 2019 ONCA 540 at para 38.

²²⁴ *Gosselin v Ramsay*, 2019 BCSC 1394.

²²⁵ *Gosselin v Ramsay*, 2019 BCSC 1394 at paras 112 & 127.

When a geriatric nurse attended Roland's home, Darlene was not present, and the home was in serious disarray. There was nothing indicating the presence of another person living with Roland or assisting with his day to day needs. Further, neighbours also testified that Darlene did not live with Roland but visited him. Roland's inability to manage on his own was clear. Roland was diagnosed with early onset dementia. He was prescribed medication to slow the progress but there was no evidence that anyone oversaw Roland's intake of the medicine. He became significantly more dependant upon Darlene once his drivers' licence was taken away and his illness progressed.

Roland had accumulated great wealth over his lifetime and according to his daughter was a frugal man. However, Roland purchased a property, which according to Darlene was a gift to herself and her son. Roland's brother Richard, his attorney under a power of attorney for property, convinced the real estate agent to put the contract for purchase and sale into the names of all three, not just Darlene and her son and the lawyer handling the transaction was instructed to draw up a mortgage encumbering the one-third interest of each of Darlene and her son for two thirds of the purchase price. Darlene testified that Roland only did this as Richard intervened and influenced Roland to do this. Roland wanted the property to be a gift.

Roland then made a new Will. Previously his estate was split between his two daughters. The new Will benefited Darlene and her son, and his four grandchildren, making his daughters minor beneficiaries.

Roland attended at another lawyer's office and instructed him to transfer his 1/3 interest in the property to Darlene and her son and to discharge the mortgage. Darlene and her son then attended to sign the documents. The stated consideration was "one dollar and natural love and affection". The lawyer testified that he reviewed the implications of the transfer with Roland, recorded his observations in a memo that Roland "did not have a good relationship with his daughters" and that he conceded Roland had short-term memory loss but otherwise appeared "healthy".²²⁶ Roland was able to speak "very clearly

²²⁶ *Gosselin v Ramsay*, 2019 BCSC 1394 at para 89.

and answered my questions directly”. The memo confirmed that Roland wanted the property to be a “gift” and that he wanted to “forgive the mortgage.”²²⁷

Shortly after the transfer was made, Darlene decided to end the relationship with Roland, explaining that Roland did not respect her “me time”. Roland did not want the relationship to end.

The daughter then visited her father and found the house in disarray. Her father showed her his banking and legal documents and according to the daughter, he claimed he did not remember signing the transfer documents and asked her to “help him fix the documents”. The daughter then took her father to a new lawyer to execute a new Will, power of attorney document and representation agreement. However, Roland told this new lawyer that the transfer of the property to Darlene and her son was a “gift and he expected nothing in return”.²²⁸ The lawyer was confident that Roland had the necessary capacity to instruct her and to understand the changes he sought to his Will, power of attorney and representation agreement. The daughter was not present in the room.

The Court concluded that it was satisfied on the evidence that Roland could not testify on his own behalf and, much like the situation of a deceased person, it was permissible to rely upon hearsay evidence in an effort to establish or determine his intentions as it related to the purchase of the property.²²⁹ However, the Court also held that the statements made to his daughter, Darlene, and Darlene’s son were less reliable given their interests in the outcome of the litigation and approached their evidence as to Roland’s intention “with caution” and gave their evidence, “little weight”. The Court placed much more weight on the lawyers who testified.

One of the claims brought by Roland (through his litigation guardian) was a claim in equity, arguing that the transfer of property for “one dollar and natural love affection” was akin to

²²⁷ *Gosselin v Ramsay*, 2019 BCSC 1394 at para 90.

²²⁸ *Gosselin v Ramsay*, 2019 BCSC 1394 at para 118

²²⁹ *Gosselin v Ramsay*, 2019 BCSC 1394.

a gratuitous transfer which gave rise to the presumption of resulting trust. Equity presumes bargains, not gifts.

The Court found that based on the evidence, it was likely that Darlene never lived with Roland and that there was no common-law spouse or marriage-like relationship between them; therefore, the presumption of advancement did not arise. As Darlene and her son were “strangers” at law, the presumption of resulting trust arose, as per *Pecore v Pecore* 2007 SCC 17. However, the Court concluded that:

on balance, despite the seller’s remorse. . . I am satisfied that Roland, since sometime in the spring of 2015, intended to purchase Darlene and [her son] a home in Kamloops near him. The gift was not completed in June, upon the home’s purchase because of the intervention of Richard Gosselin who prevailed upon Roland to change the structure of [the property’s] ownership. The statements to [the last lawyer] on December 4 arose out of anger and reflect, in my view, a change of heart - intention - from Roland’s views on October 9 when the transfer occurred. . . . While no doubt Darlene and [her son] were enriched by the transfer and Roland was deprived, there is a juristic reason: donative intent. That intent negates an essential element of the creation of a constructive trust.²³⁰

Roland, through his litigation guardians, also argued that the transfer was a result of undue influence.

The Court found that the relationship between Darlene and Roland was the type that gives rise to the presumption of undue influence. At the time of the transfer, Roland was heavily dependent upon Darlene (and her son) for companionship and assistance to meet his needs for independent living.

The question was then, according to the Court, did Roland enter into the transaction as a result of his own “full, free and informed thought”?²³¹ The Court found that, although some of Darlene’s motives regarding her relationship with Roland were “likely self-interested” this was insufficient to undermine the conclusion that his decision to gift the property was the product of “full, free and informed thought.”:

²³⁰ *Gosselin v Ramsay*, 2019 BCSC 1394 at paras 177-178.

²³¹ *Gosselin v Ramsay*, 2019 BCSC 1394 at para 225, citing *Geffen* at 379.

While I find, in particular, Darlene’s motivation might well have been less than that of a loving partner in the assistance she provided to Roland, once I determined that Roland brought both the legal capacity and his free will to bear upon the decision to make a gift, the character of the donee(s) does not invalidate the gift or make it voidable in equity.²³²

Through conversations with the real estate agent, friends of Roland, and the defendants, Roland “made clear his intention to place the home in their names without any restriction or safeguards relating either to his future care or any revisionary interest in the event the friendship between he and the defendants failed.” The lawyer who conducted the transfer, “made all the proper inquiries and was satisfied that Roland was acting independently, understood the nature of the transaction he was instructing the lawyer to perform and gave a plausible explanation for why it was doing it knowing, as he did, that it would upset his relatives.” Accordingly, the action was dismissed.

6. INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON PREDATORY MARRIAGES

Professor Albert Oosterhoff’s article, “Predatory Marriages”, provides an excellent review of international efforts to address the harms done by predatory marriages. He found that in the U.S.A., very few states have retained the revocation-upon-marriage provisions in their probate legislation.²³³ Professor Oosterhoff also found that some states permit a relative to contest the validity of a marriage by an incapacitated elderly family member before the death of that family member, and in Texas, their legislation permits post-death contests.²³⁴

Below is a recent American case. While it did not culminate in marriage, it clearly involved a predatory relationship and the court examines it from the unique perspective of federal tax rules:

²³² *Gosselin v Ramsay*, 2019 BCSC 1394 at para 241.

²³³ Albert Oosterhoff, “Predatory Marriages” (2013) 33 ETPJ 24 at p 54.

²³⁴ Albert Oosterhoff, “Predatory Marriages” (2013) 33 ETPJ 24 at p 57.

Alhadi v. Commissioner of Internal Revenue (United States)²³⁵

In this 2016 U.S. tax case a caregiver defrauded an older adult of over \$1 million under the guise of providing “caregiving” services. The Commissioner of Internal Revenue posited that the \$1 million were proceeds of undue influence and elder abuse and wanted the caregiver to pay tax on the funds and pay a fraud penalty. The caregiver alleged they were nontaxable gifts or loans. The case addressed the issue of what is “undue influence” as a matter of federal tax law and how it affected donative intent.²³⁶

The older adult, Dr. Arthur Marsh, was born in 1915, had never married, and lived very frugally resulting in over \$3 million in his retirement fund. In 2007 his health declined dramatically and he could no longer care for himself in his second floor apartment. The much younger Ms. Angelina Alhadi met Dr. Marsh when he was in the hospital and offered to provide homecare services for him. Very quickly Ms. Alhadi took advantage of this new relationship. Dr. Marsh agreed to pay her \$6000.00 a month (even though the going rate was \$3750.00) and also gave her \$1000.00 a month for his groceries (even though he only needed about \$400 a month in food and his tiny fridge only fit about \$50 worth). She began to pressure Dr. Marsh to pay for her mortgage payments. By the end of November 2007 Dr. Marsh had written cheques totaling over \$400,000.00. Ms. Alhadi spent this money on paying off her ex-husband, and paying for furniture, landscaping and \$73,000.00 on a new pool “complete with a spa and therapeutic turtle mosaic”. When she presented Dr. Marsh with an invoice of \$22,000.00 for digging the hole for the pool, Dr. Marsh responded “Who the hell is going to pay it?” However, Dr. Marsh relented and paid it, later saying he felt he had to “because the work was already done and he had to accommodate his caregiver”.

Ms. Alhadi increasingly kept him isolated from his friends and started to manipulate him emotionally, telling him four or five times a day that she “loved” him and tried to pressure him into marrying her and moving in with her. She would cry in front of him about how she

²³⁵ 2016 TC Memo 74, United States Tax Court, Docket No. 17696-10, April 21, 2016.

²³⁶ *Alhadi* 2016 TC Memo 74, United States Tax Court, Docket No. 17696-10, April 21, 2016 at para. 26.

was struggling financially and worried about how she was going to survive and provide for her children. A neuropsychiatrist, Dr. Mueller, who had interacted with Dr. Marsh testified that there was a “real, if sad, emotional bond between Dr. Marsh and Ms. Alhadi. . . Dr. Marsh wanted to rescue her, wanted to be a good person, and wanted to feel loved for the rest of his days on earth.” Dr. Marsh told Dr. Mueller that it was “impossible to imagine how it feels being 90 years old and feeling loved for the first time”.²³⁷

Ms. Alhadi no longer let his niece or other family members speak to him, telling them that Dr. Marsh was sleeping or unavailable whenever they called. Also, Ms. Alhadi was not keeping up her caregiving duties. The house was filthy with “trails of ants”, food on the floor that was rotten, greasy pots and pans and the apartment was stained with urine as Dr. Marsh could not get to the bathroom on time.

In the summer of 2008 Ms. Alhadi told Dr. Marsh that she had “won” a cruise and wanted him to come along with her. She left him sitting alone in the sun while she went off with her children. Later, it was discovered that Dr. Marsh had paid for the whole cruise (\$25,000.00) even though he did not remember writing the cheque.

By the end of 2008 Dr. Marsh had written cheques to Ms. Alhadi totaling nearly \$800,000.00. Then she pressured him even more and got him to sign five more cheques each for \$100,000.00. This is when her financial abuse was discovered. The mutual fund company found Dr. Marsh’s account activity to be suspicious and called to express concern. The company records all of its phone calls. In the background Ms. Alhadi could be heard yelling, cajoling, and threatening Dr. Marsh that he was going to get her in trouble if he didn’t admit that he wrote the cheques. The mutual fund company refused to honor the cheques and sent a letter to Dr. Marsh explaining why. However, Dr. Marsh was homebound and completely at the mercy of Ms. Alhadi. Ms. Alhadi intercepted the mail.

²³⁷ *Alhadi* 2016 TC Memo 74, United States Tax Court, Docket No. 17696-10, April 21, 2016 at para. 28, footnote 6.

Ms. Alhadi then took Dr. Marsh to a lawyer, trying to get a power of attorney in her favour. The lawyer refused to get involved. Dr. Marsh told the lawyer that Ms. Alhadi was pressuring him to name her in his will and that he needed a separate trust for her so that his family members wouldn't be able to interfere. The lawyer refused and the Public Guardian filed a petition to put Dr. Marsh under a temporary conservatorship.

Dr. Marsh died in February 2009 and at the funeral Ms. Alhadi tried to “crawl in the coffin” and “was screaming”.

The trustee of a trust that Dr. Marsh had created several years earlier (as a substitute for a will) settled a suit brought against Ms. Alhadi, but recovered only \$310,000.00 in cash. She had lost her house to foreclosure and had spent the rest of the money, gave it away, or rendered it untraceable. When the trust filed its tax returns it noted the money paid to the caregiver Ms. Alhadi, which she did not claim on her tax return. This is when the IRS got involved.

The Tax Court found that Ms. Alhadi exercised undue influence on Dr. Marsh and that all the money she received from him was taxable to her. While non-family taxpayers in “generous-elder” cases who rely on their own testimony can succeed in proving that a transfer was a gift, the issue is one of fact and the burden of proof rested on Ms. Alhadi. She did not meet this burden as all she had was uncorroborated testimony and the word “gift” written on the memo lines of some of the cheques. Furthermore, there was medical evidence that Dr. Marsh had dementia and suffered from cognitive decline, including poor short term and long-term memory, was unable to perform simple arithmetic, and demonstrated persistent deficiencies in visuospatial analysis. These problems made him vulnerable. California (where Dr. Marsh resided) has codified its definition of undue influence as:

- The use of a confidence or (real or apparent) authority for the purpose of obtaining an unfair advantage over someone;
- Taking an unfair advantage of another's weakness of mind; or

- Taking a grossly oppressive and unfair advantage of another’s necessities or distress.²³⁸

For the specific purpose of elder abuse, California law defines undue influence as the “excessive persuasion that causes another person to act or refrain from acting by overcoming that person’s free will and results in inequity”.²³⁹

The Tax Court found Ms. Alhadi exerted undue influence over Dr. Marsh:

She was in a confident relationship with Dr. Marsh as his sole caregiver. He relied on her just to get downstairs, to go to the doctor, to be fed, and even to bathe. Dr. Marsh was in extremely poor health; he suffered from heart problems, hearing and vision loss, a broken hip, and dementia, among other handicaps. Ms. Alhadi knew all of this. She used her relationship with Dr. Marsh to isolate him from his family and financial advisers and to wring money out of him . . . We also can’t close our eyes to Dr. Marsh’s emotional life. Ms. Alhadi preyed on his loneliness.

The Court also found Ms. Alhadi liable for self-employment tax and held that her tax returns were fraudulent.

Oliver (Deceased) & Oliver (Australia)²⁴⁰

Like Canada, Australia has also struggled to balance the autonomy of vulnerable adults with the necessity of protecting them from predatory marriages. Unlike Canada, Australia has met this challenge by legislating the factors required to determine capacity to marry. However, Australia’s legislation is somewhat limited in that it requires the marrying parties to have the mental capacity to understand the effect of the *ceremony*, not an understanding of the nature of marriage as an institution with all its consequences.²⁴¹ Some scholars have suggested that the legislation would be more effective if it required the understanding of the property consequences of marriage, yet judicial comment in

²³⁸ Cal. Civ. Code sec 1575 (West 1982)

²³⁹ Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code sec. 15610.70 (West 2014)

²⁴⁰ *Oliver (Deceased) & Oliver* [2014] FamCA 57 (AustLII).

²⁴¹ *Marriage Act 1961* (Cth) subsection 23B(1)(d); see also Jill Cowley, “Does Anyone Understand the Effect of ‘The Marriage Ceremony’? The Nature and Consequences of Marriage in Australia” [2007] SCULawRw 6; (2007) 11 Southern Cross University Law Review 125.

Australia suggests that few people, if any, truly understand all the consequences of marriage.²⁴²

In a recent decision in New South Wales, *Oliver v. Oliver*, Australia's Family Court declared that the April 2011 marriage between the 78 year-old Mr. Oliver (deceased), and the 49 year-old Mrs. Oliver was invalid.²⁴³ In doing so, the court reviewed the common law factors for capacity to marry as it developed in England and the subsequent enactment of the statutory factors in Australia. While the relevant legislation and common law factors differ from those applied in Canada, the facts, described below, are instantly recognizable as those of a predatory marriage.

Mr. Oliver had suffered alcohol-related capacity issues dating back to 2001. His first wife, Mrs. E, had also suffered from alcohol-related dementia, and in 2004 the New South Wales Guardianship Tribunal considered the issue of Mrs. E's guardianship and held that Mr. Oliver lacked the capacity to manage Mrs. E's affairs.

Mrs. E died in August of 2010. The Respondent attended the funeral as the daughter of a friend of Mr. Oliver, and she referred to Mr. Oliver as "Uncle." Although Mr. Oliver's daughter had made arrangements for Mr. Oliver to receive in-home care from a community organization, the Respondent later cancelled that service. Mr. Oliver had previously granted a power of attorney to his son-in-law, Mr. H., but the Respondent made arrangements to assist Mr. Oliver with his financial affairs. Mr. H had not begun to exercise his authority as an attorney for property, but in January and February of 2011, Mr. Oliver became increasingly suspicious of Mr. H and accused him of wanting to take all his money and control his life.²⁴⁴

From February 2011 to April 2011, the Applicant (Mr. H's daughter and Mr. Oliver's granddaughter), tried on numerous occasions to speak with Mr. Oliver, but the Respondent always answered the phone. The Applicant was rarely able to speak with

²⁴² Cowley, *ibid.* at p. 170 – 171.

²⁴³ *Oliver (Deceased) & Oliver* [2014] FamCA 57, para 213 (cited to AustLII).

²⁴⁴ *Oliver (Deceased) & Oliver* [2014] FamCA 57, at paras 39 and 40.

him. However, in late February or early March of 2011, Mr. Oliver did come to the phone and told the Applicant he was getting married. The Applicant said, “How are you getting married? I didn’t even realize you had a girlfriend.” Mr. Oliver said, “Neither did I.”²⁴⁵ The Respondent then took the phone and advised that they would be married in June of 2011.²⁴⁶

In February of 2011, the Respondent took Mr. Oliver to see his general practitioner, Dr. G, who certified that the deceased was of sound mind and capable of making rational decisions about his affairs.²⁴⁷ A few days later, the respondent and Mr. Oliver attended the office of a solicitor and executed a Will in contemplation of marriage (but not conditional on the marriage taking place) that named the solicitor his Executor and left his entire estate to the Respondent.²⁴⁸ The Respondent moved in with Mr. Oliver the next day.

The Respondent and Mr. Oliver were married in April of 2011, not June, as the Respondent previously told Mr. Oliver’s relatives. None of Mr. Oliver’s family were invited or notified; only the Respondent’s sister and parents attended. In her testimony the Respondent had no explanation as to why Mr. Oliver’s relatives were not invited. The ceremony celebrant, Mrs. Q, gave evidence that Mr. Oliver stated he was pleased to be getting married.

In May of 2011, three weeks after the wedding, Mr. Oliver fell in his home, fractured his hip, and was hospitalized. The social worker, Mrs. U, assessed Mr. Oliver and noted his dementia and vulnerability. Mrs. U spoke with the Respondent twice. The Respondent initially informed Ms. U that Mr. Oliver had no relatives other than a niece living out of state, and had no attorney for property. Mrs. U recommended that the New South Wales Public Trustee and Guardian be appointed as Mr. Oliver’s guardian of property. The New South Wales Public Trustee and Guardian was so appointed in August of 2011.

²⁴⁵ *Oliver (Deceased) & Oliver* [2014] FamCA 57, at para 25.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.* at para 73.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.* at para 74.

The Applicant commenced her application under section 113 of the Family Law Act 175 just prior to Mr. Oliver’s death for a declaration about the validity of the marriage. She argued that Mr. Oliver was mentally incapable of understanding the nature and effect of the marriage ceremony as provided for in section 23B (1)(d)(iii) of the Act. The Act further provides standing to the Applicant to make the Application.²⁴⁹ Mr. Oliver died in September of 2011. The Respondent did not inform Mr. Oliver’s family.

The court had the benefit of an expert’s report that reviewed Mr. Oliver’s voluminous health records and provided an opinion, summarized by the court, as follows:

As to whether the deceased was capable of understanding the nature of the contract (marriage) that he was entering into, free from the influence of morbid delusions, upon the subject Dr Z says that is a difficult question to answer. There was clear evidence of long-standing cognitive impairment prior to April 2011, which may have influenced the deceased’s capacity in this regard. Dr Z notes:

... in relation to the specific issue of “morbid delusions”, information provided by his family suggests he was experienced delusions and paranoia through December 2010 into the New Year, including his belief sometimes that his first wife, [Ms E], was still alive and also his belief that Mr [H] was being too controlling of his money. Moreover, there is a long history documented in hospital notes of paranoid delusions and treatment for these, dating back to 2001, especially during times of delirium. As such, it is possible (but I cannot be certain) that [the deceased] was experiencing some degree of delusions around this time and that this might have influenced his thinking, especially if he had certain inaccurate beliefs about some family members and if he was being unduly influenced by them.²⁵⁰

The Court observed that the English common law factors for determining capacity to marry had been supplanted by the statutory factors in the *Marriage Act 1961* (Cth), as amended, and noted the following:

On the face of it the English common law test and the Australian statutory test are different, particularly because of the Australian test requiring that

²⁴⁹ *Oliver* at paras 5 and 6; There is no similar legislation that confers standing on anyone to contest the validity of a marriage. However, the common law allows persons with an interest to contest the validity of a marriage for lack of capacity, but not for undue influence or duress. See further footnote 9380, *supra*.

²⁵⁰ *Oliver* at para 185.

for a valid consent a person must be mentally capable of understanding the effect of the marriage ceremony as well as the nature of the ceremony. ...

In the 32 years since the legislative test has applied, there has not been a plethora of decisions of the Australian courts as to its interpretation. There are only 2 reported decisions that I was referred to and I located no others. ... The current test of “mentally incapable of understanding the nature and effect of the marriage ceremony” was applied in both cases.

...
It is clear from the authorities that the law does not require the person to have such a detailed and specific understanding of the legal consequences. Of course if there were such a requirement, few if any marriages would be valid.²⁵¹

...
The Court reviewed judicial commentary on capacity to marry in Australia, and in particular, Justice Mullane’s application of the authorities in *Babich & Sokur and Anor*, as follows:

*... it is in my view **significant that the legislation not only requires a capacity to understand “the effect” but also refers to “the marriage” rather than “a marriage”**. In my view taken together those matters require more than a general understanding of what marriage involves [emphasis added]. That is consistent with consent in contract being consent to the specific contract with specific parties, consent in criminal law to sexual intercourse being consent to intercourse with the specific person, and consent to marriage being consent to marriage to the specific person.²⁵²*

In *Babich*, Justice Mullane held that the vulnerable adult in question had a general understanding of “a” marriage, but she was incapable of understanding the effect her marriage would have on *her*.²⁵³

In *Oliver*, Justice Foster found that Mr. Oliver may have been aware that he was participating in a marriage ceremony to the Respondent, or at least some sort of ceremony with the respondent, but nothing more.²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ *Oliver (Deceased) & Oliver* [2014] FamCA 57, at paras 244, 245, 246

²⁵² *Oliver (Deceased) & Oliver* [2014] FamCA 57, at para 202, citing para 255 of *Babich & Sokur and Anor* [2007] FamCA 236 (cited to AustLII).

²⁵³ *Babich & Sokur and Anor* [2007] FamCA 236 (cited to AustLII) at para 256.

²⁵⁴ *Oliver (Deceased) & Oliver* [2014] FamCA 57 at para 210

7. PREDATORY MARRIAGES: CONSIDERATION OF EQUITABLE AND OTHER REMEDIES

Since contesting the validity of a marriage on the ground of incapacity is an imperfect approach, it has become apparent to the authors as advocates, that there is a need to explore other potentially available rights and remedies to react to what is actually happening in today's society. Recent cases have awarded equitable and common law remedies in cases of financial elder abuse,²⁵⁵ but so far such remedies have not yet been applied in Canada in cases of predatory marriages.

The purpose of this section is to consider other grounds, including equitable grounds, upon which a court has the jurisdiction to set aside a predatory marriage as a nullity, that is, to declare it void *ab initio*, as if it never happened, and also to remedy the wrongs caused by a predator spouse.

Two Forms of Nullity (void vs voidable) and Divorce

Before we examine the types of potential equitable remedies, this section will provide a brief overview of the difference between a marriage that had been declared void *ab initio*, a voidable marriage, and a divorce.

2019 – *Gill v Kaur*²⁵⁶ (Manitoba)

While also not a predatory marriage situation, this case canvasses the law on the distinction between a nullity of a marriage, and divorce as well as the two forms of nullity which are relevant when seeking a remedy in a predatory marriage case.

²⁵⁵ See for example: *Gironda v. Gironda*, 2013 ONSC 4133, additional reasons 2013 ONSC 6474 – undue influence; *Fowler Estate v. Barnes*, 1996 CarswellNfld 196 (SC TD) – undue influence and rescission; *Granger v. Granger*, 2016 ONCA 945, reversing 2015 ONSC 1711, 9 E.T.R. (4th) 281, and 2015 ONSC 6238 – unjust enrichment, undue influence, and equitable compensation; *Servello v. Servello*, 2015 ONCA 434, 9 E.T.R. (4th) 169, affirming 2014 ONSC 5035 – undue influence, failure to provide independent legal advice, *non est factum*, and mistake, as well as the maxim that he who comes into equity must come with clean hands, and denial of a claim for contribution; *Danilova v. Nitiyuk*, 2017 ONSC 4016 – damages for breach of fiduciary duty; *Stewart v. Stewart*, 2014 BCSC 766 – unjust enrichment with equitable set-off; *Waruk v. Waruk*, 1996 CarwellBC 2463 (C.A.) – injunctive relief.

²⁵⁶ 2019 MBQB 68.

In *Gill v Kaur*, a husband brought a petition for annulment a few months after his marriage. The petitioner was a Canadian citizen, while his wife was a citizen of India, visiting her sister on a form of visa. The marriage was arranged and after the civil ceremony, they were to have the marriage solemnized at a Sikh temple in the presence of family. This did not take place. The husband was seeking an annulment on the grounds that his wife did not tell him of a prior engagement, and that she and her family were deceitful, arranging the marriage solely for immigration purposes. The husband also argued for an annulment on the ground that there was no consummation of the marriage.

For clarity a decree of “nullity is not a divorce by another name.” Citing the case of ***Lowe v A.A.* 2018 ONSC 3509**, the Court confirmed that a divorce is based on a cause arising after a valid marriage has come into existence. A decree of nullity is based on a cause existing at the time of the marriage (prior existing marriage, incapacity to marry, etc.).

While a decree of divorce dissolves the marriage as from the date when the decree becomes absolute (*ex nunc*), a decree of nullity, depending on the ground of annulment, either declares that there never was a valid marriage, or it dissolves it with retroactive effect (*ex tunc*).

Citing from *Lowe*, the Court noted that a nullity will be granted in two situations:

- 1) **Where there is no valid existing marriage from the very outset.** In this situation, the marriage is considered void ab initio, meaning “from the beginning.” A marriage that is void *ab initio* is considered never to have taken place. A decree of nullity is purely declaratory and is not legally required in order to end the marriage because the marriage is void already. Even though a void marriage requires no formal declaration by the court, it is likely wiser to get a judicial decree to avoid future problems.²⁵⁷ Examples of such marriages are where:
 - a. One or both parties is married to another person at the time of marriage;

²⁵⁷ *Lowe v A.A.* 2018 ONSC 3509 at para 44.

- b. One or both parties did not consent to the marriage, or lacked the mental capacity to consent;
- c. The parties are related within prohibited degrees;
- d. One or both of the parties is under the age of majority at the time of marriage; and
- e. The marriage ceremony was incomplete.

2) **Where the marriage was validly entered into but the cause for ending the marriage existed from the very outset.** This marriage is considered voidable. A voidable marriage is considered to be a valid marriage, with all its rights and consequences, unless and until a decree of nullity is made. On a decree of nullity, the marriage is erased “as if it had never existed”. Examples of such marriages are where:

- a. The marriage was entered into for fraudulent purposes;
- b. Consummation of the marriage is impossible because of a lack of capacity; or there is a wilful refusal of a party to consummate the marriage, for instance, due to repugnance;²⁵⁸

The Court rejected the husband’s petition for an annulment. On the evidence, the parties had the capacity and consented to the marriage. The Ontario Court of Appeal in *Iantsis (falsely called Paptheodorou) v Paptheodorou*, 1970 CanLII 438 ONCA made clear that validity of marriage is unaffected by one or both parties entering into a marriage for the sole purpose of affecting the immigration status of one party.

With respect to the lack of consummation the Court concluded that “in the absence of evidence of impotence” non-consummation “provides no basis for the declaration he seeks”. Citing the text *Canadian Family Law*: “Impotence, which is the inability to consummate the marriage, renders the marriage voidable. Canadian law draws a distinction between the inability to consummate a marriage and willful refusal to do so. It

²⁵⁸ Citing *Sahibalzubaidi v Bahjat* 2011 ONSC 4075.

is impotence, not willful refusal that constitutes a ground for annulment of marriage in Canada.”

Therefore, in the context of a predatory marriage, if the victim lacked capacity to enter into the marriage then the marriage itself was void *ab initio* and is considered never to have existed in law and therefore no legal consequences can arise from it.

The Doctrine of Undue Influence

The equitable doctrine of undue influence is often relied on, to set aside a Will or *inter vivos* gifts that was procured by undue influence. The doctrine of undue influence is an equitable principle used by courts to set aside certain transactions when an individual exerts such influence on the grantor or donor that it cannot be said that his/her decisions are wholly independent.

We propose that the same doctrine, if proved, may be used to set aside a predatory marriage. While the older adult may not be giving actual gifts to the predatory spouse, the consequence of the marriage effectively results in a gift to the predator. In *Ross-Scott v. Potvin*,²⁵⁹ discussed above, the only surviving relatives of the deceased, Mr. Groves, sought to have his marriage annulled on grounds of undue influence and lack of capacity. Justice Armstrong applied the common law factors for determining requisite capacity to marry and ultimately dismissed all of the claims, despite compelling medical evidence of diminished capacity and vulnerability. With respect to undue influence, Justice Armstrong had this to say:

I have concluded that the burden of proof regarding a challenge to a marriage based on a claim of undue influence is the same as the burden of proving a lack of capacity. The plaintiffs must prove the defendant’s actual influence deprived Mr. Groves of the free will to marry or refuse to marry Ms. Potvin. The plaintiffs have failed to meet the burden of proving that Mr. Groves was not able to assert his own will.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ 2014 BCSC 435

²⁶⁰ *Ross-Scott v Potvin* 2014 BCSC 435 at para 240.

While the evidence was not sufficient for the Court to find undue influence in this situation, if proved, the undue influence doctrine should be available to set aside a predatory marriage.

The Doctrine of Unconscionability

The doctrine of unconscionability is typically used to set aside a contract that offends the conscience of a court of equity. However, unconscionability is not restricted to the law of contracts. And, while it is closely related to undue influence, they are separate and distinct. A claim of undue influence attacks the sufficiency of consent. Unconscionability arises when unfair advantage is gained by an unconscientious use of power by a stronger party against a weaker. In order to be successful, such a claim will need proof of inequality in the position of the parties arising out of ignorance, need or distress of the weaker party, which left him or her in the power of the stronger party and proof of substantial unfairness of the bargain. This creates a presumption of fraud which the stronger party must rebut by proving that the bargain was fair, just and reasonable.²⁶¹

A predatory marriage can be characterized as unconscionable where one party takes advantage of a vulnerable party, on the ground that there is an inequality of bargaining power and accordingly it would be an improvident bargain if the predator would be entitled to all of the spousal property and financial benefits that come with marriage.²⁶²

Using a Statute as an Instrument of Fraud

The principle that one may not use a statute as an instrument of fraud should also be available as a tool to combat the unfair consequences of predatory marriages. In the context of trusts of land, the *Statute of Frauds*²⁶³ provides that a declaration or trust of

²⁶¹ *Morrison v. Coast Financial Ltd.* (1965), 55 D.L.R. (2d) 710 (B.C.C.A.), at p. 713. See also the case of *Smith v. Croft* 2015 CanLII 3837 (ONSCSM) where the Ontario Small Claims Court set aside a transaction as unconscionable where a neighbour purchased an antique truck valued at \$18,000 from an elderly neighbour with dementia for \$2000.00.

²⁶² See *Juzumas v. Baron* 2012 ONSC 7220, *Morrison v Coast Finance Ltd.*, 1965 CarswellBC 140 (S.C.J.)

²⁶³ (1677), 29 Car.2.c.3, s.7. and see RSNB 1973, c.S-14, s.9; RSNS 1989, c 442,s5; RSO 1990, c.S.19, s.9.

land is void unless it is proved by writing, signed by the maker. If it is not in writing and the beneficiary seeks to have it enforced, the transferee may claim to hold title absolutely and defend the proceedings by relying on the Statute. However, equity will not allow the Statute to be used as an instrument of fraud and the court will direct that the property is held on a constructive trust for the beneficiary if the oral express trust is proved. A marriage is also based on, and sanctioned by, legislation.²⁶⁴ The predator relies on the statutes to enforce his or her claim. However a predator spouse's claim is fraudulent because the predator persuaded his or her spouse by devious means to enter into the marriage. A court of equity should not allow the statute to be used in this way, and should restore the property the predator received to the rightful heirs.

No One Shall Profit from His or Her Own Wrongdoing

Instead of the remedy of attacking the validity of the marriage itself, another tool that could reasonably be applied in attacking the injustice of predatory marriages is challenging the predator spouse's right to inherit from the older adult's estate either under a will or under legislation. Seeking a declaration that the predator spouse is barred or estopped from inheriting is a remedy based in public policy. "No one shall profit from his or her own wrongdoing" is a principle that is applied in cases in which a beneficiary, who is otherwise sane, intentionally kills the person from whom the beneficiary stands to inherit under the deceased's will, on the deceased's intestacy, or otherwise. Canadian courts have found that the property does pass to the beneficiary, but equity imposes a constructive trust on the property in favour of the other persons who would have received the property.²⁶⁵ It is also clear that a beneficiary will not inherit if the beneficiary perpetrated a fraud on the testator and as such obtained a legacy by virtue of that fraud,²⁶⁶ or where a testator was coerced by the beneficiary into making a bequest.²⁶⁷ The comparable common law

²⁶⁴ See, e.g., *Marriage Act*, R.S.A. 2000, c. M-5; R.S.B.C 1996, c. 282; C.C.S.M., c. M50; S.N.L. 2009, c. M-1.02; R.S.N.B. 2011, c. 188; R.S.N.W.T. 1988, e. M-4; R.S.N.W.T. (Nu.) 1988, c. M-4; R.S.O. 1990, c. M.3; R.S.P.E.I., 1988, c. M-3; R.S.Y. 2002, c. 146; *Solemnization of Marriage Act*, R.S.N.S. 1989, c. 436.

²⁶⁵ *Lundy v. Lundy* 1895 24 SCR 650.

²⁶⁶ *Kenell v. Abbott* 31 E.R. 416].

²⁶⁷ *Hall v. Hall* (1868) L.R. 1 P.& D. 48].

principle is *ex turpi causa non oritur actio*, i.e., a disgraceful matter cannot be the basis of an action. It is discussed below.

Two New York decisions provide a compelling analysis of these concepts and their applicability to predatory marriages and relied upon them. The facts in *In the Matter of Berk*,²⁶⁸ and *Campbell v. Thomas*,²⁶⁹ are quite similar. In both cases a caretaker used her position of power and trust to secretly marry an older adult when capacity was an issue. After the older person's death, the predator spouse sought to collect her statutory share of the estate (under New York legislation surviving spouses are entitled to the greater of 1/3 of the estate or \$50,000). The children of the deceased argued that the marriage was "null and void" as their father lacked capacity to marry. The court at first instance held that even if the deceased was incapable, under New York estate legislation the marriage was only void from the date of the court declaration and as such, not void *ab initio*. The predatory spouse maintained her statutory right to a share of the estate.

In both appeal decisions (released concurrently) the court relied on a "fundamental equitable principle" in denying the predator's claims: "no one shall be permitted to profit by his own fraud, or take advantage of his own wrong, or to found any claim upon his own iniquity, or to acquire property by his own crime." This principle, often referred to as the "Slayer's Rule", was first applied in New York in *Riggs v. Palmer*,²⁷⁰ to stop a murderer from recovering under the Will of the person he murdered. Pursuant to this doctrine, the wrongdoer is deemed to have forfeited the benefit that might otherwise flow from his wrongdoing. New York courts have also used this rule to deny a murderer the right to succeed in any survivorship interest in his victim's estate.

The court recognized that while the actions of the predatory spouses were not as "extreme" as those of a murderer, the required causal link between the wrongdoing and the benefits sought was, however, even more direct. A murdering beneficiary is already

²⁶⁸ *In the Matter of Berk*, 71 A.D. 3d 710, NY: Appellate Div., 2nd Dept., 2010; *Matter of Hua Wang*, 2018 N.Y. Misc. LEXIS 2578 (Surr. Ct. Kings Cty., 2018)..

²⁶⁹ *Campbell v. Thomas*, 897 NYS2d 460 (2010).

²⁷⁰ *Riggs v. Palmer*, 115 N.Y. 505,511 [1889].

in a position to benefit from his victim's estate when he commits the wrongdoing, but it was the wrongdoing itself (the predatory marriage) that put the spouse in a position to obtain benefits. The court held that the predator spouse should not be permitted to benefit from this wrongful conduct any more than a person who coerces his way into becoming a beneficiary in a Will.²⁷¹

Arguably, such an approach ought to be available in Canada to defend/attack against these predatory entitlements and this principle should also be used to invalidate a predatory marriage.

The Matter of Berk is still ongoing since this initial court case. The latest decision came out in June 2018,²⁷² where the Surrogate Court of New York found that based upon the credible evidence, the "petitioner knew that decedent was mentally incapacitated at the time of their marriage, and entered into marriage with decedent to obtain the pecuniary benefits of said marriage at the expense of the beneficiaries."

Further the Surrogate Court found that:

even if the petitioner was competent, the co-executors have proven by the preponderance of the credible evidence that petitioner exercised undue influence over decedent to induce him to marry her for the pecuniary benefits that became available by virtue of being decedent's spouse, at the expense of the beneficiaries. Thus, through her wrongdoing, petitioner has forfeited her right to take the elective share of decedent's estate as decedent's surviving spouse.

²⁷¹ In one subsequent decision in *The Matter of Berk*, the court determined the standard and burden when relying on the equitable doctrine that one should not profit from her wrongdoing: the children of the deceased bear the burden of proving wrongdoing by a preponderance of evidence: See *Matter of Berk*, 133 AD 3d 850 (2015) and 2016 NY Slip Op 76663(U). In May of 2017 the Surrogate Court barred the wife from testifying at trial. At issue was a New York statute colloquially called the "Dead Man's Statute" which bars testimony from individuals with a pecuniary interest in the estate from testifying. See *Matter of Berk*, 2488/2006 and Amaris Elliott-Engel "Testimony of Wife Barred in Surrogate Court Case", New York Law Journal (May 19, 2017) online: <http://www.law.com/newyorklawjournal/almID/1202786791972/>

²⁷² *Matter of Hua Wang (Berk)* 2018 NY Slip Op 51016(U) Decided on June 27, 2018 Surrogate's Court, Kings County Ingram, J.

Unjust Enrichment

The principle of unjust enrichment is well developed in Canadian law, initially largely in the context of co-habitational property disputes. To be successful in unjust enrichment, one must satisfy a three-part test:

1. the defendant was enriched;
2. the plaintiff suffered a corresponding deprivation; and
3. the enrichment was not attributable to established categories of juristic reason, such as contract, donative intent, disposition of law, or other legal, equitable or statutory obligation.²⁷³

In the New York case of *Campbell*, the Appellate Division noted also that because the predatory spouse altered the older adult's testamentary plan in her favour, equity will intervene to prevent the unjust enrichment of the wrongdoer predator spouse.²⁷⁴ The principle of unjust enrichment should also be used to invalidate a predatory marriage in Canada and restore the property to the rightful heirs. The existence of the marriage should not be considered to be a juristic reason to deny relief, since the marriage was motivated by the wrongful desire to obtain control of the older adult's property.

Civil Fraud / Tort of Deceit

An approach based in fraud, either common law fraud or equitable/constructive fraud is also worthy of consideration. In the usual predatory marriage situation, the predator spouse induces the older adult to marry by perpetrating a false representation that the marriage will be a "real" marriage (which the predator spouse knows is false, a trick, a misrepresentation). The older adult relies on the representation, marries the predator spouse, and suffers damage as a result (either through money given to the predator spouse, or through the various rights that a spouse takes under legislation, which deprives the older adult of significant property rights. A case could be fashioned so that

²⁷³ See *Becker v. Petkus* (1980), 117 D.L.R. (3d) 257, [1980] 2 SCR 834 (SCC); *Garland v. Consumers' Gas Co.* (2004), 237 D.L.R. (4th) 385 (S.C.C.).

²⁷⁴ *Campbell v. Thomas*, 897 NYS2d 460 (2010).at p.119.

the predator's behavior meets the required elements to qualify and succeed in an action of civil fraud as a result of the following:

- 1) A false representation made by the defendant;
- 2) Some level of knowledge of the falsehood of the representation on the part of the defendant (whether through knowledge or recklessness);
- 3) The false representation caused the plaintiff to act (inducement); and
- 4) The plaintiff's actions resulted in a loss.²⁷⁵

Canadian jurisprudence has many decisions analyzing civil fraud/tort of deceit in the context of marriage in "immigration fraud" cases where one spouse falsely represents that he/she is entering into a "true" marriage when in fact the marriage was entered into simply to attain Canadian residency.²⁷⁶ The Courts have been reluctant to set aside this type of marriage as a fraud.

In *Ianstis v. Papatheodorou*,²⁷⁷ the Ontario Court of Appeal confirmed that civil fraud will not usually vitiate consent to a marriage, *unless* it induces an operative mistake. For example, a mistake as it relates to a party's identity, or that the ceremony was one of marriage.²⁷⁸ This case has been cited with approval many times and continues to be considered as the leading case.²⁷⁹ The Courts' reluctance to find that civil fraud will vitiate consent to a marriage appears to have prevented opening the floodgates to more litigation.²⁸⁰ Alleging fraud when one party to the marriage has character flaws not anticipated by the other is not something the court wishes to advance as is evinced by the following select comments of the Court:

²⁷⁵ *Bruno v. Hyrniak* 2014 SCC 8 at para. 21

²⁷⁶ See for example *Torfehnejad v. Salimi* 2006 CanLII 38882 (ONSC) upheld 2008 ONCA 583; *Grewal v. Kaur* 2011 ONSC 1812; *Raju v. Kumar* 2006 BCSC 439; and *Ianstis v. Papatheodorou* [1971] 1 O.R. 245 (C.A.)

²⁷⁷ *Ianstis v. Papatheodorou* [1971] 1 O.R. 245 (C.A.)

²⁷⁸ *Ianstis v. Papatheodorou* [1971] 1 O.R. 245 (C.A.) at pp. 248 and 249

²⁷⁹ See *Torfehnejad v. Salimi* 2006 CanLII 38882 (ONSC) upheld 2008 ONCA 583; *Grewal v. Kaur* 2011 ONSC 1812; *Raju v. Kumar* 2006 BCSC 439; and *Ianstis v. Papatheodorou* [1971] 1 O.R. 245 (C.A.).

²⁸⁰ *Ianstis v. Papatheodorou* [1971] 1 O.R. 245 (C.A.)

[23] “First, on a principled approach it may be difficult to differentiate immigration fraud from other types of fraud. In *Grewal v. Sohal* 2004 BCSC 1549 (CanLII), (2004), 246 D.L.R. (4th) 743 (B.C.S.C.) the fraud consisted of the defendant fraudulently representing his marital intentions for immigration purposes and fraudulently representing that he did not have an alcohol or drug addiction. **One can think of many other misrepresentations such as related to education, health or assets that might induce a decision to marry and which could be made fraudulently. If a fraud as to fundamental facts that ground the decision to marry is generally a ground for annulment, this certainly raises the spectre of an increase in the volume of costly litigation.**

[24] Even assuming that the law can logically extend to permit annulment on the basis of immigration fraud and not on other grounds of fraud, it remains that this may simply promote increased and expensive litigation. [emphasis added]²⁸¹

The Court’s message is, effectively, “*caveat emptor*” – the spouses ought to have conducted their due diligence before marriage.²⁸² Predatory marriages are easily distinguishable from immigration fraud cases if for no other reason than that a person under disability may and likely is not, for many obvious reasons, in a position to conduct any due diligence.

Although it may be difficult for an older spouse to have a marriage set aside on the grounds of civil fraud/tort of deceit, he/she may be able to seek and receive damages for the fraud perpetrated. The case of *Raju v. Kumar*,²⁸³ involved a wife who was awarded damages for civil fraud in an immigration fraud case where the court notably stated:

[69] “The four elements of the tort of deceit are: a false representation, knowledge of its falsity, an intent to deceive and reliance by the plaintiff with resulting damage. [. . .]

[70] I find the defendant misrepresented his true feelings towards the plaintiff and his true motive for marrying her order to induce her to marry him so he could emigrate to Canada. I find the plaintiff married the defendant relying on his misrepresentations of true affection and a desire to build a family with her in Canada.

[71] The defendant’s misrepresentations entitle the plaintiff to damages resulting from her reliance on them.”

²⁸¹ *Grewal v. Kaur* 2009 CanLII 66913 (ONSC) at paras. 23-24

²⁸² *A.A.S. v. R.S.S.*, 1986 CanLII 822 (BC CA) at para. 25.

²⁸³ *Raju v. Kumar* 2006 BCSC 439

The Court limited damages to those incurred for the wedding (cost of the reception, photos and ring), supporting the groom's immigration to Canada (including his application, immigration appeal and landing fee) and the cost of her pre- and post-marriage long distance calls.²⁸⁴

In *Juzumas*, discussed above, had the older adult continued with his claim for an annulment of his marriage and the Court was open to allowing a claim of fraud in this context, the older adult would have had to prove that the predator spouse knowingly made a false representation to the older adult, with an intent to deceive him and on which he relied, causing him damage. It could be argued that the predator spouse falsely represented to Juzumas that she would look after and care for him. Juzumas relied on that representation when he chose to marry her and he suffered damages. It is unlikely that a claim in civil fraud could be made out in *Banton supra*, unless it was raised before the older adult passed away.

Ex Turpi Causa Non Oritur Actio

The legal principle, *ex turpi causa*, acts as a defence to bar a plaintiff's claim when the plaintiff seeks to profit from acts that are "anti-social"²⁸⁵ or "illegal, wrongful or of culpable immorality"²⁸⁶ in both contract and tort. In other words, a court will not assist a wrongdoer to recover profits from the wrongdoing. Arguably a Court should not assist a predatory spouse to recover the benefits from a marriage that was obtained through the predator's

²⁸⁴ *Raju v. Kumar* 2006 BCSC 439 at para. 72. See also the use of *RKS v. RK* 2014 BCSC 1626, where the Court dismissed a claim alleging the tort of deceit. A wife alleged that she was induced into marrying her husband on false representations that he was heterosexual, while in fact he was not. The wife also sought an annulment of the marriage citing non-consummation. The Court dismissed the claim and refused to grant an annulment as there was no evidence that the groom or groom's family made any false representations to either the bride or her family with an intent to deceive the plaintiff into marrying him. Prior to the wedding the plaintiff and her family had asked many questions about the defendant's background, his education, his financial situation and the kind of woman he was looking to marry. The Court found that the wife's claim for damages for the tort of deceit had to fail as it found that the husband never made any representations, prior to the wedding, about his sexual orientation. Furthermore, the wife could not prove with medical or other evidence that the marriage was not consummated. The husband testified that it had been consummated. The Court denied the wife's claim for an annulment and granted a divorce instead.

²⁸⁵ *Hardy v. Motor Insurer's Bureau* (1964) 2 All E.R. 742.

²⁸⁶ *Hall v. Hebert* 1993 2 S.C.R. 159.

devious, unscrupulous and anti-social means. The unscrupulous predator should not be entitled to financial gain arising from the “anti-social” or “immoral” act of a predatory marriage. A predatory spouse alters an older adult’s life and testamentary plan by claiming entitlements in the same manner as if he/she coerced the testator to add his/her name to a Will.

Non Est Factum

Non est factum is the plea that a deed or other formal document is declared void for want of intention and has been used to set aside contracts when a party signs a document with a fundamental misunderstanding about the nature or effect of the document.²⁸⁷

Non est factum is a defence developed in common law and not the court of equity. However, it could be applicable to a predatory marriage situation when the predator attempts to enforce some right arising from the marriage and the victim entered into the marriage with a fundamental misunderstanding about the nature or effect of executing the marriage document.

Lack of Independent Legal Advice

The older adult in predatory marriages is often deprived of the opportunity to seek and obtain independent legal advice before marrying. Lack of independent legal advice is an oft-considered factor in the setting aside of domestic contracts. Whether such arguments could be extended to set aside the marriage itself is a consideration worthy of a court’s analysis.

²⁸⁷ *Marvco Colour Research Ltd. v. Harris*, 1982 CanLII 63 (SCC), [192] 2 SCR 774.

Courts have consistently held that “*marriage is something more than a contract*”.²⁸⁸ Thus, there could well be judicial reluctance to extend contract law concepts and use them as a vehicle to set aside actual marriages, as opposed to simply setting aside marriage contracts. It is unclear whether such arguments extend to parties other than those to the marriage. If the victim dies, such arguments may be difficult to pursue. However, parties such as children of the older adult are impacted by the union. This is a different approach to that of cases where capacity is challenged on the grounds of incapacity and the marriage is then declared to be void *ab initio*, since these unions can be challenged by other interested parties.²⁸⁹

CONCLUSIONS

In the absence of clear legislation defining the requisite decisional capacity to marry, the common law remains unclear. In Canada, *Banton* and *Re Sung Estate* cite *Browning v. Reane* and *Re Spier*, which both suggest that the requisite capacity to manage one’s person *and/or* one’s property, or both are a component for determining the requisite capacity to marry. These cases and other very recent cases including *Hunt*, appear to be moving in the direction of developing an appropriate consideration of factors for ascertaining the capacity to marry—one which best reflects and accords with the real-life financial implications of death or marital breakdown on a marriage in today’s ageing society.

Still, it would appear that our courts continue to be haunted by the old judicial adage that “the contract to marry is a very simple one.” We see this approach in *Ross-Scott v. Potvin* and most recently in *Devore-Thompson v Poulain*.

Australian case law seems to suggest that statutory factors for determining the capacity to marry can be a useful tool in cases of elder abuse, but such legislation should

²⁸⁸ See *Ciresi (Ahmad) v. Ahmad*, 1982 CanLII 1228 (ABQB); *Feiner v. Demkowicz (falsely called Feiner)*, 1973 CanLII 707 (ONSC); *Grewal v. Kaur*, 2009 CanLII 66913 (ONSC); *Sahibalzubaidi v. Bahjat*, 2011 ONSC 4075; *Iantsis v. Papatheodorou*, 1970 CanLII 438 (ONCA); *J.G. v. S.S.S.*, 2004 BCSC 1549; *Torfehnejad v. Salimi*, 2006 CanLII 38882 (ONSC) at para. 92; and *Hyde v. Hyde and Woodmansee* (1866), L.R. 1 P.&D. 130 (H.L.).

²⁸⁹ *Ross-Scott v. Potvin* 2014 BCSC 435 at para. 73

specifically reference the marrying parties' understanding of the property consequences of marriage. Indeed, the *Oliver* case illustrates the value of the capacity provisions in Australia's *Marriage Act*.

The consequences of Canada's ongoing deference to the common law factors are as puzzling as they are problematic from a social perspective and a public policy perspective. Essentially, this means that a person found incapable of making a Will may revoke his/her Will through the act of marriage. As well, in refusing to require that a finding of capacity to manage property forms a prerequisite to a finding of capacity to marry gives free reign to would-be (predatory) spouses to marry purely in the pursuit of a share in their incapable spouse's wealth, however vast or small it may be. After all, as stated, a multitude of proprietary rights flow from marriage.

Until our factors to determine the requisite capacity to marry are refined, so that they adequately take into consideration the financial implications of marriage, all those with diminished decisional capacity will remain vulnerable to exploitation through marriage. This is likely to become an ever increasing and pressing problem as an unprecedented proportion of our society becomes, with age, prone to cognitive decline. It is to be hoped that we will see some of the suggested equitable approaches gaining some traction in the near future.

Where should the law go from here? While many provinces and states have abolished the "revocation-upon-marriage" provisions in their succession or probate statutes, this is merely one small step towards the development of a more cohesive approach to preventing financial abuse through predatory marriages.

There are many further developments could potentially assist in the remedy of the wrongs done by these unions including, to mention but a few: by creative legislative reform which could prevent these marriages from taking place; by introducing legislated caveats to prevent the issuance of a marriage license and the solemnization of marriage in cases where capacity is lacking, which British Columbia has done; and by making marriage commissioners more accountable. These marriages perpetrated under false and



fraudulent, deceitful pretences rob our elderly of their dignity and their intended heirs, of the gifts for their loved ones.

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