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## DOROTHY AND MATHILDE; OR, THE UNCLE'S WILL.

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### CHAPTER II.

To most young women, Mathilde's position at Deepdean would have been a most trying one.—An unwelcome guest—an inferior in every sense of the word—forced upon unknown relatives, and robbing them of an inheritance, unless indeed the inclinations of Gervase and Dorothy inclined them to matrimony, which on one side at least seemed unlikely. But it was difficult for any of the inmates at Deepdean to say in what her influence consisted—in what way her presence seemed to shed over them a peculiar peace and sunshine—not of this world certainly, for Mathilde was unworshipful in the strictest sense of the term. The deathly pallor of her countenance startled and pained Dorothy, until Mathilde assured her it was a habitual pallor, unaccompanied by pain or prostration of strength. Her features were small and pleasing, but it was the air of perfect repose and placidity which rendered it so refreshing to survey them. Perhaps the large dark eyes which illumined these features with a soft and moonlight kind of radiance, added to the beholder's pleasure. The repose was heavenly—so serious, so gracious—it was impossible not to believe that this gentle woman communed often and much with a higher world. How such a depth of seriousness, such a sad gravity, did not partake in the least of morbidness, or chill those with whom Mathilde was thrown into contact, can only be accounted for by her total forgetfulness of self—by her unremitting, winning kindness, to all within her sphere—by her undeviating truthfulness, grace, and love. That some over ruling secret principle swayed and governed her every thought, word, and action, was obvious. One might have supposed her manner to be the expression of suffering, either past or present, or that some extraordinary revelation of futurity had been vouchsafed to this meek daughter of earth; but conjectures were as vain as they were dim and vague. The most matter-of-fact minds, however, succumbed before her to some unowned and mystic influence; and people of the world with unwillingness admitted that, in Mathilde's presence, their all too long pursuit seemed to dwindle into nothingness. She always managed to lead them away from the grovelling earth; and they intuitively felt that, although she was in the world, performing all practical duties, she was not of it. Dorothy was puzzled to account for her own sensations when Mathilde, with simple, affectionate earnestness, took her hand and said: 'Do not regard me as an ill-omened bird, Cousin Dorothy, but rather as the swallow, bringing summer-weather on the wing, that will soon take flight again for summer lands.' Dorothy vainly tried to utter common-places, but the words died away in the effort, for Mathilde's eyes were fastened on her face.—Mathilde silently awaited her speech; and angry with herself, angry with her own unaided placid cousin, poor Dorothy burst into a paroxysm of tears. Mathilde allowed her to weep unrestrainedly for a while, then passing her arm tenderly round her drooping form, she said in a low sweet voice:—'I know all you must feel towards me, but for your good father's sake, cheer up; it is your duty to render his home as happy as circumstances permit. Believe me, Cousin Dorothy, I feel for you.'

These words were heartfelt and heart-spoken; and they went straight to poor weeping Dorothy's little throbbing heart: she began to think how impossible it would be to absolutely hate Mathilde. As to the great love of which Dr. Em she had written, that was quite another matter; but that some very extraordinary fascination lurked around this new found relative was certain. Mathilde was at ease, tranquil and graceful, while constraint, which she could not shake off, chained Dorothy to silence and reserve.—Gervase, on the other hand, presented such a striking contrast to his sister, that Dorothy almost forgot his claim, and soon began to laugh and talk with him unrestrainedly. He was like a great overgrown school boy, very awkward, but with a fine handsome face, ruddy cheeks, white teeth, and smiling blue eyes. Gervase seemed quite afraid of Dorothy at first, very much, as if he dreaded a whipping; but by degrees, they became the best friends in the world, for morose, indeed, must that creature have been who could have resisted the good nature and infectious gaiety of the hobbledeher. To his sister, Gervase looked up as to a superior being, and it was quite touching and beautiful to behold his brotherly affection, whilst she, on her part, regarded him with unceasing solicitude and earnestness; gently, oh, so very gently, curbing his hilarious spirits, and keeping him in chains of roses within the bounds of conventional propriety. As to Gervase, he did not look more than seven-

teen; and Dorothy, although two years his junior, felt so much seniority, and so much experience and self-possession, that she soon began to regard him as a mere boy, quite forgetting that he was nearly twenty-one, and, according to her uncle's will, her future husband.

It was not long before Gervase confided to Dorothy, whom he had learned to designate as his 'fair coz,' the first wish of his heart—which was to enter the army, and to see service. This wish had strengthened with his growth, but Dr. Einsie had not encouraged or fostered it, and Mr. Hardinge had lived in uncertainty regarding his children's ultimate prospects, always procrastinating till to-morrow what ought to have been done to-day. Dorothy listened to the martial visions of her good-humored cousin, and her sympathies were all enlisted in his favor; and the sympathy and smiles together proved so genial and charming to the raw youth, that his increasing show of fondness for Cousin Doll at length quite perplexed the latter, nor was her perplexity lessened when one day Gervase blundered out something about what he would do when they were 'spliced.'

'What do you mean, Gervase, by being spliced?' innocently demanded the simple Dolly.

'Oh! what a goose you are, Cousin Doll,' replied Gervase laughing: 'don't you know what spliced means? Why, it means married, to be sure. You and I am to be married whenever I am of age, you know; and when I'm off soldiering, I shall leave Matty to take care of you.'

Poor Dorothy was not confused by this process of wooing, but she was startled and dismayed; with difficulty she articulated: 'But Gervase, you have never asked me yet if I wish to marry you; suppose I do not, what then?'

Gervase looked at her in blank surprise, ejaculating: 'Why, cousin Dorothy, I thought it was a settled thing before we came here. I thought you'd be a fine lady—airified and all that, and I was terribly afraid of you at first. I am always afraid of fine misses. But when I found you such a nice, smiling, good-natured little creature'—here he sidled towards Dorothy, and endeavored to pass his arm round her waist, but Dorothy in her turn edged off—'why, then, I was all right and comfortable, and made my mind easy, and determined to say nothing to any one until the time arrived when we could be married all quietly and nicely; and now you are for a put off, Cousin Doll. I declare it is very unkind of you; that it is.'

Dorothy could scarcely refrain from laughing at this pathetic appeal, but striving to look serious she merely rejoined: 'This is a grave subject, Gervase, and involves other interests than ours. We will not pursue it at present.'

'Very well, very well, Dorothy, dear, just as you like, that's what Mathilde said when I alluded to our marriage the other day. Do you know, Cousin Doll, that, between ourselves, if I didn't know for a certainty that Matty loves me, and isn't selfish, I should really begin to believe she wasn't altogether so much in favor of our coming together as she ought to be; not that she ever said so, in a direct way, but that in her manner there is something or another which I cannot make out, but which seems to express a wish that you and I, Dorothy dear, should not have much to say to one another. I cannot make it out, because Mathilde, I'm certain, does not care for the fortune; and you know that if we don't marry, and that soon, it all goes to her—Hardinge Hall and all! I've heard that Hardinge Hall is a fine old place; what rare doings we would have there. Hey, Cousin Dorothy, hey.'

'When you return from the wars victorious! hey, Cousin Gervase!' cried Dorothy, laughing and running away.

Now, although Dorothy laughed and mimicked Gervase, yet she felt the truth of what he said, for she, too, had become impressed with the indefinable conviction, that Mathilde was averse to her union with Gervase. There was a spice of obstinacy or Tony Lumpkin self-willedness about the lad, which required much humoring and management; and if he had found out that his sister wished to lead or sway him on such a grave question, he would have been resolute to have his own way, if only for the purpose of showing that he was 'every inch a man.' Therefore Mathilde was very cautious, very gentle, in all her proceedings with her brother; and yet he was so unconsciously accustomed to watch her looks, to read their meaning, and to depend on her advice, that he had intuitively gained the knowledge disclosed in his conversation with Dorothy—the knowledge that Mathilde disapproved of the condition which kept the fortune from herself. Dorothy felt that Mathilde read her secret heart. Frank Capel had paid one of the formal visits, which were not prohibited, in company with Sir John, when Mr. Cheyne, with courteous and gratified demeanor, received both father and son. The visit was a lengthened one; luncheon was eaten, the garden viewed and commended; and Frank, the moment he beheld Ger-

vase, lost all his previous hauteur, and entered into a friendly alliance with the delighted youth, who declared Frank Capel to be the best fellow in the world.

But Mathilde was present also. She afterwards spoke of Frank to Dorothy—and it was sufficient: from that time henceforth, she silently watched and waited; she had a painful and harassing part to act, and on Dorothy's faithfulness and constancy only to rely. If Dorothy was true to Frank, then the fortune would be hers. Who might read the secrets of Mathilde's heart, or penetrate the dark mysterious shadows which shrouded them? When Dorothy, with woman's fine tact, found that Mathilde endeavored furtively to impress her mind with a sense of the misery she would entail on herself by marrying Gervase, whom she could not love or respect with the love and respect a wife ought to feel for her husband, then were Dorothy's suspicions aroused, and she began to doubt Mathilde almost to despise her—saying to herself: 'Can it be, with so heavenly an exterior, that the interior is filled with mammon-worship?'

Sir John Capel gave a general invitation to Gervase to visit at Capel House—a licence which the youth was not slow to avail himself of, as he had no companions of his own sex; and in Frank Capel and his young brothers, George and Adolphus, he found congeniality in many respects, particularly in the latter—Frank very cavalierly turning him over to them whenever the martial youth bored him too much. Smilingly he encouraged Gervase to talk of Cousin Dorothy.—Frank had no fears now; and from having been prepared to hate his rival, the sudden revulsion of feeling caused by his appearance and manner almost ripened into a sentiment of affection. Gervase confided to Frank that he wasn't quite sure of Dorothy; she was a kind little soul, but still he wasn't quite sure whether she meant to take him. Frank smiled, but held his peace. Mr. Cheyne had not thought it necessary to enlighten either Gervase or Mathilde on the matter of Frank's attachment to his daughter. Gervase would have groped his way blindly on till dooms day; Mathilde read the secret at a glance.

In the meanwhile, who would have imagined that the quiet greenwood bower in Deepdean Valley contained within its bosom such conflicting interests and opinions—such elements of pain and pleasure, of romance and reality? Still did Mr. Cheyne pace undisturbedly the sequestered nooks of the pleasant garden; still did he pore over the pages of Evelyn, and lament the degeneracy of modern taste; but the squire was more aged, more bent than of yore; the lines in his fine old face were deepening, and his sighs were frequent and audible, as he gazed round his beloved ancestral domain. He had received many letters of late—many which amazed and perplexed him sorely, despite all his efforts to treat them lightly; and when Dorothy pressed to know the contents, to divide his anxiety or to sympathize in his sorrows, he maintained a silence that alarmed and surprised her, accustomed as she was to be the sharer in all her dear father's joys and griefs. But too truly poor Dolly guessed what these business like letters portended, with such large blue envelopes and such large red seals. Her father, too, always tied them together with pink tape, and deposited them in a safe corner of his old escritoire, as if glad to put them out of his sight. Alas! poor gentleman, he could not so easily put them out of his mind.—And by stealth Dorothy gained the information, that unless she became the wife of her cousin Gervase, and consequently the sharer of Mr. Hardinge's property, it was more than probable that Mr. Cheyne's creditors would rebel, and the accumulated debts of the family fall on his herd with ruinous force. Dorothy could not comprehend the business terms of the lawyer's epistles, but she comprehended enough to know that, even if her father weathered the storm during his lifetime, she must be left destitute and homeless. But for him only did she feel anxiety; once assured of her beloved father's wellbeing during his term of life, she felt no care on her own account. He never alluded to her union with her cousin Gervase, but endeavored to keep from her knowledge the burden of sorrow that chased sleep from his heavy eyes. This generosity went to Dorothy's tender heart, and often she wept alone, and besought the All-Merciful to guide her in the best way.

Mathilde kept much in her own chamber, and seldom came forth until evening, when, it being summer time, she sought the garden, and rarely quitted it until twilight deepened and the moon and stars shone forth. Mathilde had never intruded on Dorothy's withheld confidence by attempts at intimate communion, such as female friends sometimes like to indulge in; but yet Dorothy was sensible of an unseen power, wielded by no common hand, which influenced Gervase, and kept all his demonstrations towards herself in abeyance. Dorothy began to hate her own, silent cousin—to feel an awe of her, which she could not account for; and more than once she

almost determined to spite Mathilde by wedding Gervase off hard. But then, again her womanly and better feelings predominated; and she revolted from the indecency, as well as the deadly sin, of swearing obedience and love at the altar to one, when her heart, if not her plighted troth, was another's.

Thus things continued, when Gervase attained his twenty-first year. There were no rejoicings, no feasting, to celebrate the day, but congratulatory words and kind smiles from the several members of the domestic circle, who all seemed tacitly to unite in passing it over with as little remark as possible. Dorothy often wondered to herself in the following allotted six months would be allowed to pass over in this dreamy and mysterious way; and if Mathilde, in the same sort of fashion, would quietly glide into the golden heaps awaiting her at the end. 'What other reason can she have for not wishing Gervase to marry me, than that she covets the thousands herself?' said Dorothy musingly; but she mused in the garden, where the trim holly hedges offered no response, and the question remained unanswered even by echo. Yet it was almost impossible to believe that sordid avarice swayed the grave recluse, whose striking loveliness of person, lofty expression, and winning gentleness of demeanor, conveyed a far different impression. The avowed predisposition of Gervase for military pursuits gained ground in a wonderful ratio since his appearance at Capel House. George and Adolphus Capel were destined for the same 'glorious routine,' as Gervase designated it; and Frank Capel told him, that his figure and face could only be shown to advantage in gold-facings and a plumed cap. Gervase was, in short, 'soldiering in,' the peasants declared; and he had taken possession of an old broadsword of Mr. Cheyne's, with which he harked and hewed at the quickest hedges in by places, as he said, for the sake of practice. Those who forgot the attraction of a red coat, would have taken him to be a most blood-thirsty youth, from his always avowing how much he 'longed to fight in good earnest'; an avowal which his broad, good-natured face completely belied. Dorothy began to think that soldiering had driven splicing out of her cousin's simple head; and, despite her anxiety and wretchedness on her father's account, she could scarcely refrain smiling at the somewhat ludicrous position in which she stood. For it seemed probable that, if she contemplated securing the fortune and Gervase together, she must turn wooer, and remind the tardy youth of time being on the wing. However, it was unjust to Gervase to suppose that he had not his own boyish code of honor; he had no objection to becoming the fair Dorothy's husband within the given time, provided he might be permitted to follow the bent of his own inclinations afterwards, and not be bored beforehand. Yet he lingered, unwilling to speak—half ashamed, half not caring to hear Dolly say, 'No'; for a fortune was a fortune, urged Gervase wisely; and better kept in one's own hands than supposed to glide into another's, even though that other was Mathilde.

Mr. Cheyne, patient and inert as he most assuredly was, was yet a gentleman—a gentleman of high and sensitive principles—and moreover, a doting father; and when he considered the time fully ripe for speech, speak plainly he did, coming speedily to the point, and to a clear understanding with the young folks. 'My child,' he said, addressing Dorothy, 'the time has now arrived when it is necessary for you to come to a decision respecting the condition prescribed in your late Uncle Hardinge's will relative to a marriage with your cousin Gervase. Is it your intention to comply with that condition? I have had speech with your cousin, and he is eager to fulfil it forthwith. I must convey your final answer to him.'

'O father! what am I to do?' murmured Dorothy, weeping. 'What are your wishes, dear father? By them I will abide, if—if I can.'

Here a fresh burst of weeping checked further words, and Mr. Cheyne, looking commiseratingly on the bowed hly, impressively said: 'My wishes, my beloved child, are solely for your happiness, temporal and eternal. If you can love your cousin Gervase—if there is no reservation in your mind respecting him—then, assuredly, it seems to my short-sightedness best for your temporal welfare to espouse him. But perish the future rather than you should be sworn, Dorothy Cheyne! Your sainted mother would gaze down from heaven reprovingly upon me, were I to urge you to commit this great sin against God. To him I commend my fatherless girl, when it pleases Him to summon me home.' Mr. Cheyne had spoken with unwonted energy and decision, but his voice faltered, and the tears stood in his eyes, when he added in a lower voice: 'And now, Dorothy, my dear child, in His name I entreat, nay, I command you, to give me a candid answer.' Throwing herself into her father's arms, the

trembling girl whispered: 'I will stay with you, father. Tell Mathilde the fortune is hers!'

A half-sigh, stifled by strong resolution, broke from Mr. Cheyne; the hope of years was annihilated. He spoke not, but silently embracing his agitated daughter, endeavored to assume a composure he was far from feeling; and never had Mr. Cheyne felt his powers of endurance and forbearance more sorely taxed, than when called upon to perform the duties of a courteous and kind host to the grave Mathilde, whose lovely countenance lit up with an expression of delight when informed of Dorothy's decision.—This unusual animation excited and annoyed the old squire to a great degree, and unconsciously he ejaculated—for he had acquired a habit of speaking much to himself: 'My poor beggared girl! it is bitter to see a stranger step into the golden slippers you expected to wear!'

A gentle tap on the shoulder caused him to start, and looking round he beheld Mathilde's pale face close to his shoulder, her dark eyes intently regarding him, while softly the words fell from her lips, as she placed a hand impressively on his arm: 'It is true that I rejoice at Dorothy Cheyne's noble resolve; but judge me not harshly for this. We are told not to judge, lest we be judged.' With impressive sweetness she spoke, and Mr. Cheyne was fairly puzzled. He had always regarded Mathilde with emotions of curiosity and interest, but she so completely baffled conjecture, that in this instance, as in many others, the worthy old man contented himself with merely gallantly bowing, and apologizing for his bad habit of thinking aloud. Yet the wan face and the dark speaking eyes haunted him when alone, and he vainly wished that he could comprehend Mathilde's character and motives of action.

As to Gervase, he loudly and clamorously expressed his chagrin and disappointment when his cousin's final rejection was communicated to him by Mr. Cheyne; yet he stood in the somewhat ludicrous predicament of not wishing to exhibit his disappointment before Mathilde, declaring to Mr. Cheyne, with boyish earnestness, that he had not a farthing of his own in the world to purchase a commission with, so now he must look to Matty, and trust to her liberality.

### CHAPTER III.

There was an evident and palpable accession of affectionate regard in Mathilde's demeanor towards poor Dorothy after these events.—Mathilde sought Dorothy's society, but she was received with coldness—for human nature was not proof against this corroborator of the suspicion of mercenary motives. Dorothy would not barter her own faith: but this was no reason why she should not feel a jealous pang at Mathilde's carrying off the thousands she had lost. Mathilde's assiduous kindness she attributed to self-complacency and triumph; Mathilde's gentle meekness and endurance of suspicion, to a consciousness of selfishness and duplicity. But Mathilde was persevering, and not to be easily cast aside; and Dorothy, with a pang of self-reproach, marked the patient sweetness so ill required, and a rare and silent terr, the only reproof Mathilde gave way to. Dorothy's opinion began to waver, for she had a tender heart; her reserve by degrees relaxed; and when Mathilde spoke of herself, of her past history, Dorothy no longer turned a deaf ear.—Imperceptibly this interest in Mathilde deepened, as general discussions were abandoned, and more of the heart history laid open. Many such conversations recurred, and Dorothy with conflicting emotions listened to the recital of her sorrows.

'I owe you some recompense, cousin,' the latter proceeded mournfully, 'for the disappointment you have endured; and as I wish you to cherish my memory with some degree of pity and affection when we separate, a narrative of my simple history may perhaps sufficiently account for my regarding a marriage of convenience with dismay, and explain my wish to prevent your union with my dear and only brother, when your heart is in the keeping of another. We become strangely, luminously clear-sighted, Dorothy Cheyne, when our lamp is lit by experience and observation! Your decision on the side of truth and constancy won my love and respect. Even if you had acted differently it was my intention to have interfered, in order to save you both; although, in that case, this confidence on my part would never have been obtruded on your ear. The fortune is mine, and I have wept with joy and gratitude to know that it is so. You marvel at my words! Yes, I have wept with joy and gratitude to know it is mine! I repeat it! To know that my only brother is saved the life-long wretchedness of receiving false vows, and polluting the holy altar with the presence of a perjured bride! I was once a gay and thoughtless girl—far gayer, far more thoughtless than you, fair Dorothy; for there is an air of quaint and old-fashioned sweet demureness about you, such as there is over the dear old garden itself. I have told you that a fond mother's ca-