



DOROTHY AND MATHILDE;

OR,
THE UNCLE'S WILL.

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CHAPTER IV.

Deep in the recesses of a vast and gloomy library at Hardinge Hall, Dr. Emslie waited to receive them, to introduce the children of his adoption to their ancestral seat, with which he was familiar long ago, in the days when the deceased Mr. Hardinge had exercised bachelor hospitality to his friends. When the first emotion of pleasure on greeting them were over, like a second Dorzie Sampson, the worthy scholar found difficulty in tearing himself away from the beloved apartment, where, in the midst of an ocean of literature, he was accustomed to dive and plunge with unflagging zeal and ever new delight. After conversing with Mathilde, even she failed to absorb the undivided attention of her guardian, the temptation of such a library being too strong for the affection and anxiety of Dr. Emslie to withstand. And Mathilde, finding there was no hope of detaching him from his favorite studies, or of engaging his attention to the lighter and more frivolous pursuits of her young brother, patiently, day by day, passed silent hours by his side, employed with her work, books or writing. He often, however, laid aside the volume he was reading, to gaze along and intently on the lovely pallid face, which ever returned his inquiring look with a sweet smile of perfect resignation, accompanied by such words as: 'I am quite happy; I am well contented; I am at peace.' It would have formed a beautiful picture, with the dark oak panelling, and the purple heavy hangings on the background, when a ray of sunlight streamed through stained glass windows on the white figure of the saintly looking woman, and that of her faithful guardian, withered and attenuated, as he read aloud quotations from ancient writers.

'Mathilde, my love,' said the doctor softly, after he had indulged in the contemplation of his companion for an unusual space, wiping his spectacles, putting them on again, then taking them off and adjusting them more to his satisfaction, after another process of cleansing.—'Mathilde, my love, I am inclined to come to the conclusion that the greatest mystery in our nature is the impossibility of perfectly realizing that we ourselves must die, even although we make it our daily duty to reflect on death, and to be ready for our call. It is easy to say, and it frequently is said, that death is inevitable, and must come to all; but to feel the actual consciousness that this busy world will go on as busily for ages after we are no more, as it did during the ages before we were born; that our bodies shall be imprisoned in dreary separation from our souls; and that our spirits shall awake to consciousness amidst a scene unutterably wonderful, where we shall for ever and ever exist; all this bursts upon our thoughts with the awe and astonishment attending the idea of a general doom, not as something coming specially home to the business and bosom of the individual.'

'This, dear father,' replied Mathilde—addressing her guardian by the endearing appellation he liked so well to hear from her lips—'may be true in general; but for me I feel no unwillingness to recognize the great fact of death, nor can I even comprehend very distinctly unwillingness in others. Who would wish to live over again one moment of the past which we have left behind us? Who would not wait and watch and look forth into the gray dawn, to see if the day comes not? Do you not think that our earthly pilgrimage, when reviewed hereafter, will seem like one short hour long ago, passed, and but dimly remembered? Long, laborious, full of sorrow as it often is, then it will dwindle down to a remote point, like the very least of the far off stars. There are, indeed, reasons of deep terror and mortal anguish connected with our thoughts of death; it is inscrutable and of dread aspect, but it may be resolutely grappled with, until at length we regard it as a familiar truth. Oh, my father! if I could but look forward to eternity with but half the yearning wherewith I yearned for an earthly future, how thrice happy and blessed should I be! Often in the still and cloudless night, when there is no voice of living thing, when there is not a whisper of leaf or waving bough, not a breath of wind, not a sound upon earth or in air, and when overhead is the blue sky radiant with innumerable stars, then I hear sweet voices far away, which whisper: 'Come!' and the angel music penetrates my soul and I weary for the moment when I may step over the boundary, and explore the limitless space beyond.'

'Your peculiar turn of mind, my ever dear child, may authorize the indulgence I should as readily say there is a time for all things—a time to think, and a time to unbend from thinking: a

time to mourn, and a time to rejoice; a time to live, and a time to die,' said Dr. Emslie, half-choked by some inward emotion, as he added: 'We are so constituted, that while this mortal coil is around us, we desire to keep those we love as long as possible on earth. It is not natural to speak of parting without a pang. Mathilde, my love, let us go forth into the sunshine.'

Whenever such conversation took place between the worthy doctor and Mathilde, which they not unfrequently did, it always happened that the doctor broke down first, and becoming agitated or uneasy, desired to change the subject; while Mathilde, calm and collected, but tenderly pitying the emotion his affection for her alone occasioned, cheerfully obeyed the summons which led them out into the fresh air.— There were many desolate chambers at Hardinge Hall, much of ruin and decay, which the hand of the spoiler, Time, had wrought; but the cunning fingers of art had also been busy there in former generations, which sculptures, mouldings of exquisite workmanship, arabesques, and fan-like fittings sufficiently attested. Many and close were the hills around, which eastward shot the wide valley in, the sea waves beating beyond; the grounds were extensive and diversified, but neglect and desolation marked the scene. There was wonderful scope for the display of taste, for renovation and alteration; but neither Dr. Emslie nor Mathilde noticed these things when they passed through the valley, over the hills to the sea shore. Yet she was the young mistress of all this fair domain, the sole undisputed owner; her perception of the beautiful was allowedly exquisite, her means to effect the suggestions afforded by such perceptions, ample. Why, then, did Mathilde's eyes never linger with interest on the gray walls of Hardinge, or the terraced slopes beyond? Why did she carelessly pass them over without an inquiring look, and press forward to the lovely point over the hills, whence a view could be obtained of the sun sinking into the ocean?

Silently the two watched the departing luminary, Dr. Emslie standing bareheaded, the skies above one vast cathedral dome. Mathilde's lips moved, but at first no sound was audible.— When roused by her companion's voice from the deep reverie into which she was plunged, and lingering ere they retraced their homeward steps in the deepening twilight, she musingly ejaculated:

'As the evening sun sets, so sets our sun of hope. Slowly it sinks amid folding clouds; and the song of birds, the sound of evening bells, the fragrance of sweet blossoms load the cool air, and the rustling leaves make music to the ear; while over the valley falls the purple mist, which, like shadows gathering round a human heart, from transparent and faint outlines deepen into form, and herald the approach of night—and such a night is mine!'

CHAPTER V.

It was as it some distressing and vexatious dream had passed over them, when Mr. Cheyne and his daughter relapsed into their former tranquil and monotonous habits, undisturbed by the presence of strangers. Yet the stern reality of every day life was oftentimes oppressive. Where was Frank Capel, the hopeful, the joyous? where were the anticipations of a happy future? where was the charm of the old sunny garden? Frank Capel was abroad, whither Sir John had managed to remove him, ostensibly on the diplomatic mission formerly alluded to; the aspect of the future was blank and discouraging—all the golden visions flown; and as to the dear old garden, it had ceased to shed tranquility on the oppressed spirits grappling with heavy pecuniary difficulties. With minds pre-occupied, the memory of Mathilde and Gervase began imperceptibly to fade into a dim mist like sort of obscurity—the mention of their names, or discussion of their affairs, being tacitly avoided by the inmates of Deepdean.

Months wore slowly away, and the unanswered epistles from Hardinge altogether ceased. Gervase had written twice or thrice—by no means a light task for him, who could more ably wield a sword than a pen. In his first letter, the young man mentioned that in compliance with Mathilde's earnest request, he deferred for the present indulging his desire to obtain a commission in the army; in the second, Gervase stated that Dr. Emslie was still on a visit with them, which he was very glad of, as 'Hardinge was a dreadful dull, stupid place—a fit abode only for bats and owls; and as for the garden, as they called it,' concluded the writer, 'that Deepdean beats it all hollow!' Mr. Cheyne desisted writing; Dorothy had no desire to commence a correspondence with her cousins; and so, as has already said, the letters remained unanswered. The delicate bloom on poor Dorothy's cheek faded away altogether, and she unwillingly drooped before her agonized father's eyes. Sometimes she reproached herself bitterly for not having achieved the sacrifice of self

—to save and shield her beloved parent from distress and anxiety in his old age. These reproaches tortured her mind unavailingly; and although Mr. Cheyne tried to smile, and to bear up unconcernedly, in order to reassure her—for he read her sufferings, silent as she was—yet he could not conceal the havoc which the last few months had wrought in his own appearance. The clear eyes were dimmed, the firm, erect gait tottering and uncertain, while even the once favorite haunt, the once favorite author, had ceased to interest.

Heavy liabilities, harassing debts, and the harassing technicalities of law, had now reached their long procrastinated climax, yet Mr. Cheyne could not bring himself to ask Mathilde for assistance. He had thought of it, but his soul revolted from the effort. It must come spontaneously from her, that pale, mysterious, silent woman; but then she was unacquainted with the circumstances of Mr. Cheyne, nor knew it was with him an hour of need—a struggle to keep the ancestral shelter of Deepdean over his white head, for the few years more he had to live, even in the natural course of events.

There was a hush, a lull, though not a break was to be discerned in the heavy leaden skies. When the clouds did disperse, when the sunshine did pierce through the gloom, it was as if the storm burst cleared away, after Death had struck a victim down. A large packet, addressed in the well-known and peculiar penmanship of Dr. Emslie, arrested Dorothy's steps one morning as she entered the breakfast room; it was black-edged, and sealed with the same sombre hue. It was the prelude of the storm music. A prophetic anticipation of something awful impending sent the blood back to Dorothy's throbbing heart; anxiously she watched her father, as with eager trembling hands he broke the seal. An exclamation escaped him, and he handed the packet to his daughter, saying: 'Read it—read it, my dear: my eyes fail me.'

It was from Dr. Emslie to Mr. Cheyne, and nearly in substance as follows, allowing for rather abrupt phraseology: 'It is my painful duty to inform you of the decease of Mathilde Hardinge, daughter and heiress of the late Samuel Hardinge. She expired instantaneously on Tuesday, being in the act of reading aloud to me from a favorite author a passage touching on eternity. She had lived in preparation and expectation of this event for some years; I, in my medical capacity, having considered it expedient to inform her of the fatal nature of a heart disease under which she labored, though without frequent pain or bodily prostration. The symptoms of disease were of a decided character, but of slow growth and progress. Several eminent brother physicians were consulted, when the conclave unanimously agreed in their opinion.— There was no hope—none! It was a long time, a very long time, before I could make up my mind as to what course ought to be pursued; whether we ought to allow the dear girl to live in false hope, or to prepare her for the solemn change which we knew must happen momentarily, and might happen ere another day had waned.— When I decided on the right course, I gently, carefully, and tenderly revealed the truth. I suffered more than Mathilde, sweet child; and were I to live a thousand years, and ten thousand added to that, the memory of that painful scene never could be eradicated from my mind. Though she cared not much for life—for sorrow and she had been well acquainted—yet she was unprepared to die; and the idea of death—a near and sudden death—was frightfully appalling.— We prayed God to avert sudden death from us; and in her case the unspeakable horrors attendant on it were mercifully averted, because she received due warning. I may say she lived with Death beside her: she felt his icy breath, his cold touch, until he lost his terrors; and I do earnestly believe that without one mortal pang she ceased to breathe. In compliance with her entreaties, the secret of the tenure on which she held existence from day to day, hour to hour, minute to minute, remained undivulged.'

I am aware that the temporal concerns of the late Mathilde Hardinge are admirably and carefully adjusted for the benefit of your daughter Dorothy; the dear deceased having rejoiced that it was in her power to restore one half of the lost fortune to her who had once expected to inherit the whole.

I consider it an especial boon that I was permitted to be near her at the moment of her death. A few days previously she had mentioned to me her desire that immediately after her dissolution, yourselves should be made acquainted with the event through the medium of my pen. Gervase Hardinge is immersed in deep grief; but the elasticity of youthful spirits and fine health will, with God's blessing, soon, I think, restore him to complacency. Sorrowing, but not shocked or overwhelmed—I not having reckoned on Mathilde Hardinge sojourning

among us for even so lengthened a period as she did—I remain your servant to command.

EPhRAIM Emslie, M.D.

Dorothy's voice faltered as she read, and bursting into tears she exclaimed: 'O, father, how cruelly we have misjudged poor Mathilde; and now she has gone from us, and we can make her no amends!'

'The end, indeed, has proved that we have judged her harshly, Dorothy, my dear,' responded Mr. Cheyne, greatly agitated; 'but read that passage again in Doctor Emslie's letter which touches on the fortune.'

Dorothy tearfully complied, sobbing as she read. 'I parted with this angel in suspicion and coldness, and she death doomed—expecting momentarily the summons—and yet planning everything for my happiness! O father, would that I could bring her back. How differently would I treat her!' cried Dorothy.

'My dear child,' interrupted Mr. Cheyne gravely, 'do not say that again: we may go to her, she cannot come to us; nor would she if she could, depend upon it.' Long and hysterically Dorothy Cheyne wept on her father's shoulder; the old man was composed, though he often repeated in a low voice: 'Poor Doctor Emslie, poor Doctor Emslie, she was to him as an only daughter.'

'How could we be so blind, father,' whispered Dorothy, when the violence of her emotions began to subside, 'as not to solve the mystery which, as a halo, enveloped Mathilde? She was so different from all others, that our blindness seems stupidity now.'

'Ah, my dear girl,' replied Mr. Cheyne soothingly, 'we always think an enigma easy when it is solved.'

'And do you not remember, father,' continued Dorothy musingly, 'on parting every night, how invariably poor Mathilde bade each of us farewell, as if the night might never, for her at least, break again into day? and once when we were alone, and the hour of retiring arrived, she threw such unusual gravity into so commonplace an occurrence as a daily "good night," that, jestingly, I inquired her reason for so doing.— Our short nights of darkness are typical of our long dreamless night of rest, which we all must enter into. Are we any of us sure of seeing another sunrise when we seek this short night's repose?' she replied.

'No, indeed, not sure, Mathilde,' said I carelessly; 'but people don't often die in their beds suddenly and unexpectedly.' 'May God avert such a fate from you,' whispered Mathilde; and the words are engraved on my heart, father—so solemn, sad, and thrilling they were. And yet—yet, foolish creature that I was—a suspicion of the truth never entered my brain—not the remotest idea of the terrible reality.

'Nor did she wish you to entertain a remote idea of the truth,' said Mr. Cheyne, endeavoring to lead his daughter's thoughts from the distressing subject. 'Your deductions were perfectly natural, my dear, though we should be careful how we judge others. In due course of time we shall receive formal notification of the settlement of the deceased's affairs no doubt, alluded to by the excellent doctor. Cheer up, my love, happiness is yet in store for you, if I am not mistaken.'

'And all through thy instrumentality, angel Mathilde!' murmured Dorothy, as she sought the solitude of her chamber.

Mr. Cheyne was right in his supposition; for when Sir John Capel heard that Mathilde had bequeathed half the fortune to Gervase, and half to Dorothy Cheyne, merely stipulating that they should follow the dictates of their own inclinations as regarded a matrimonial choice, he immediately recalled his son from exile; and as Mr. Cheyne and himself had always been on the best terms, 'thanks,' Sir John said, 'to his diplomacy,' there was no unpleasant apologetical or exculpatory scenes to go through between the heads of the two families—Sir John truly declaring that he had always admired and coveted Dorothy for a daughter-in-law, and that he rejoiced 'prudence permitted the realization of his wishes.'

Mr. Cheyne—simple-hearted, amiable, and benevolent—joyfully gave his dutiful and beloved daughter to Frank Capel, who, with gratitude unspokeable, received the priceless treasure of her hand.

Gervase entered the army, and in process of time attained both rank and laurels. He often visited Deepdean when his military avocations permitted; and espousing a rich heiress, and his martial fire cooling down, he eventually settled at Hardinge Hall, which it had been Mathilde's wish her brother should retain. The quaint old garden at Deepdean flourished for many years in pristine splendor, Frank, declaring there was not another like it in the three kingdoms. A fair troop of children in alter-times enlivened the trim greensward alleys, and sported like water nymphs beside the sparkling fountains; nor was the venerable squire ever heard to complain that his meditations were disturbed. On the con-

trary, Evelyn's heavy folios were unwontedly neglected, and the fairy creatures became so obstreperous in their mirth in his presence, and with his assistance, that their staid nurse declared 'Squire Cheyne encouraged them in rebellion.' His capacious pockets were always stored with sugar plums, besides being perfect reservoirs for all descriptions of juvenile property—torn pictures, battered balls, headless dolls, and tailless horses. But grandpapa's especial favorite and chum was a gentle little girl, who best liked to saunter slowly hand-in-hand with the old man sagely inquiring the names of flowers and shrubs, and whose name was Mathilde. Dr. Emslie did not long survive his beloved ward, bequeathing the bulk of his moderate fortune to charitable institutions. On the site where Hardinge Hall formerly frowned, a gay modern villa smiles in the sunshine; and few persons would notice with any unusual degree of interest a plain marble tablet in Hardinge church, which simply records the name and age of Mathilde Hardinge, who sleeps beneath. *Requiescat in pace.*

THE END.

THE FOUR PICTURES.]

At the back of one of the largest and finest streets at the west-end of London ran a mews, where the carriages and horses of the great folks who lived in the grand street used to come to their stables. Over one of those stables were two small but comfortable rooms, in which lived the family of John Green, who was coachman to the Earl of Belmont. John Green's family consisted of his wife and one little daughter, whose name was Patty. One fine morning, her mother called to Patty to help her sort out all the clean linen she had washed in the course of the week (for Mrs. Green was a landlady, by which she helped her husband to earn a living for themselves and child), and to place it in the different clothes-baskets that stood around, that she might deliver them to the several families she washed for.

'Come, Patty, dear, what are you thinking of, idling there, instead of bustling about and helping me?' said her mother.

But Patty did not hear her; for she was lost in thought, her chin leaning on her hand, her elbow propped on the ironing-board against which she leaned, and her eyes fixed on the back of the stately mansion opposite.

'Patty, do you hear me?' repeated her mother.

'This time Patty started and turned round.—'Yes, mother.' And then she bestirred herself, and began to arrange the linen in heaps, and carry them carefully to her mother to place in the baskets.

'What have you been thinking about, Patty, dear?' asked her mother.

'Why, I was thinking, mother, what a shame it is that I have to work so, and you have to work so, instead of our making a holiday and taking pleasure. It is my birthday, and I think it is very hard to be obliged to work on my birthday, especially when I see the young lady at the great house opposite doing just as she likes all day, singing and amusing herself, and going out in the carriage, and never having any work to do, even on common days, much less on a birth day.'

'How do you know she has no work to do, Patty? Most likely, she has a great many hard lessons to learn, and that I'm sure must be hard work; besides, if she were not so rich as to be able to do as she likes, and sing, and go out in her carriage, what should we do? for her father is the Earl of Belmont, who gives your father money for being his coachman; and if your father did not earn his living by driving her carriage, you might have no dinner to eat to-day, for all it's your birthday day.'

Patty went on helping her mother in silence, after heaving a deep sigh; but presently looking out of the window, and seeing the carriage being driven out of the mews by her father, to take the young lady on an airing, the tears sprang into her eyes as she exclaimed, 'Oh, what would I give if I could but have a ride in a carriage for once on my birthday!' The bright May sun shone in at the window, and made small rainbows of the tears which sparkled on poor little Patty's cheeks, and thus cast a light on the 'First Picture.' Let us turn to the second.

In a large, pleasant room on the second floor of the Earl of Belmont's house, its windows filled with green house plants, and set wide open to receive the air of May, which wafted the sweet fragrance of the flowers into the apartment, sat a lady and a little girl. The former was at a table from which breakfast had been recently removed, and which was now strewn with books and drawing materials; the latter lounged in an arm-chair near the window, amusing herself with carefully smelling the blossoms of the geraniums and heliotropes, and sometimes plucking one off, as she petulantly answered the lady's entreaties that she would commence her lessons.