

## ADA DUNMORE;

OR. A MEMORABLE CHRISTMAS EVE.

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY,

BY MRS. LEPROHON,

Authoress of "Antoinette de Mirecourt;" "Armand Durand;" "Ida Beresford;" "The Manor House of de Villersac;" "Eva Huntingdon;" &c., &c.

## PART THIRD.

## CHAPTER I.

RETURNED from three years' pleasant wanderings in other lands, behold me installed in my new home at Ellerslie, for such was the name given by my husband's father to the tract of land in the neighbourhood of Toronto, which he had received in return for services rendered his majesty King George, whilst serving as Colonel in the —th foot. The house, built shortly after the acquisition of the property, was large and commodious, though somewhat pretentious in style, and furnished with the cumbersome stiffness of an earlier date. I eagerly declined Rupert's offer that it should be dismantled and fitted up in more modern style, for everything was in perfect order and preservation, and the outbuildings and grounds, though partaking also of the stiff, heavy style our ancestors affected, were most carefully kept.

How happy I was! With what a joyous feeling I used to waken to life each morning, health and happiness bounding through my veins, feeling that existence was blissful beyond all I once thought imagination could conceive or language express. In all my rides, drives, rambles, my husband was my constant companion, and we never experienced, even for an hour, that peculiar apathetic indifference which seems to creep over so many married people when alone, even, though in the main, sincerely attached to each other. No young betrothed—no newly wedded wife ever sought more eagerly, during the first months of domestic happiness, to gratify her heart's chosen than I did to please Mr. Ellerslie. The colours he preferred, the style of dress, or of wearing the hair which he admired, were always preferred by me at my toilette, and I sometimes almost grieved that I had no other means of showing my affection for one whose love for myself approached almost to idolatry.

Ah! it never crossed my mind at this time that there was something too engrossing in this love, innocent and lawful as it was. I never perceived that I was losing sight, each day more and more, of the Creator in His creature.

Basking in earth's sunshine, I thought but of the present. That future life, for which this should ever be a preparation, scarce won a thought from me; and even Rupert, so earnest in faith and practice when I first met him, was growing cold and lukewarm, learning like myself to follow in the flowery paths of pleasure, utterly forgetful that life to the true Christian has duties and heavy responsibilities.

Of course the neighbouring gentry called immediately upon us, and we were constantly invited out. Some of these invitations we accepted, for Rupert laughingly urged if we did not occasionally do so, people would say he was jealous of his charming young wife, and he would soon find himself stigmatized as a cruel domestic tyrant—a sort of modified Blue Beard. His wish was law to me, and we accordingly made our appearance abroad sufficiently often to preclude anything like remark.

On these occasions I had no cause to complain of lack of attention, but it was ever with a feeling of vivid relief I turned from the fashionable or foppish men who thought fit to surround me with their homage, to the solitary companionship of my husband, who had sought me out when I was a poor, discarded governess, and elevated me to the high and courted position I now held. How often, when the meaningless homage just alluded to was pushed somewhat far, remembering with a sudden flush akin to anger, how those butterflies of fashion would have ignored me in the day of my isolation and poverty, or perhaps persecuted me with attentions still more insulting than their neglect would have been, I have suddenly turned from them with a contemptuous look that must have awoke within them mingled wonder and irritation. Every idle compliment I received, every sarcastic rejoinder I uttered, would I repeat to Rupert when we were alone, and though these communications were generally received with jest and smile, there were times when he would suddenly draw me towards him and whisper in tones tremulous with deep feeling: "God bless you, my true-hearted wife."

There was but one secret chamber of my heart that was not laid bare to his gaze—but one passage of my past life that was not again and again recounted to him with the talkative frankness of a child, and that was the sad episode in which my poor brother had played so fearful a part. Heaven alone knew what my silence cost me, and had the oath exacted from me by my deceased father been less solemn and explicit, I would some time or other have yielded to the temptation that beset me occasionally with a violence that almost exceeded my strength, and throwing myself on my husband's breast, revealed all. That could not be, however, and nothing remained but to overlook as thoroughly as I could, the shadow that obscured a portion of my sunshine. Yes, there was another one too on which I rarely dwelt, lest it should acquire larger and more formidable proportions than it had yet attained.

Few evil qualities of the human heart are more rapid in growth when freely indulged in, and at the same time more fatal to human happiness than discontent; and aware of this, I resolutely ignored, as far as lay in my power, the very existence of this cloud—strove to forget that I was a childless wife. Not on my account did I grieve over this, for happiness filled up my life so completely as to leave me scarcely room for a sorrowful feeling, but it was for my beloved husband's sake that I grieved over it. He had never worried me with expressions of regret or disappointment, barely even expressed a wish in my presence that it were otherwise; but I, who studied him so closely, who loved him so well, had often noticed when he fancied himself unobserved, the wistful look in his eyes as he watched some proud father caressing his child, or the gentle tenderness with which he ever accosted any little one that came in his way.

Very unexpectedly one morning Mr. Ellerslie received a letter from his brother-in-law informing him that Mrs. Sherwin was in immediate danger from hemorrhage of the lungs, and requesting him to proceed to Elmsford without delay.

Much moved, for despite her wayward petulance of character and determined estrangement from ourselves since the period of our marriage, he had continued to cherish a sincere

affection for her, my husband determined on setting out at once. No mention of my name was made in the letter, beyond a polite hope on Mr. Sherwin's part that I was well, and conjecturing that I was still obnoxious to my sister-in-law, I at once saw that Mr. Ellerslie must go alone. The thought of this separation, the first that had yet marred the sunny course of our wedded life, was inexpressibly painful to me, and I was sitting dejectedly in my husband's dressing-room, watching the completion of his preparations for departure—he was to leave in another hour—when suddenly looking up from some papers which he was arranging, he drew me tenderly towards him, whispering:

"My darling! you must not look so down-hearted! The distance is comparatively short, and I need not say the time of separation will appear as long to me as to yourself. I must say that I, too, feel unreasonably sad at the prospect of parting, but what would our fashionable friends say if they overheard us? Why they would laugh at us both for a month to come. I would almost prefer the Blue-Beard imputation!"

The time of Mr. Ellerslie's absence lagged wearily, and I counted with feverish impatience the days that yet intervened between me and his return. A letter came—poor Mrs. Sherwin was very ill; then another message informed us that she was dead, and my husband would join me as soon as possible after the funeral.

I was sitting in my dressing-room some time after the reception of this last letter, feeling unusually languid and ill, when Dorothy entered and handed me an epistle addressed in irregular straggling letters to myself.

"A bare-footed lad has just left this morn'g. He wanted to see yourself, to give it into your own hands, he said, but I knew you were poorly, so I just told him to either leave it, or take it back with him. After a minute's thinking he handed it to me!"

"Some petition or begging letter, I suppose," was my weary rejoinder. "Put it down there, Dorothy, and I will look over it just now."

After a few moments, feeling with something like a twinge of remorse that I should not let it lie there because the writer was probably a petitioner, I took it up and negligently glanced over it. Alas! my indifference soon fled, and trembling in every limb, my cheek paling to a death-like whiteness, I read and re-read the letter. It contained but a few lines hastily scribbled in pencil, but the characters, not disguised like the address on the envelope, were but too well known to me. It ran thus:

"Dear Ada, I would see you once again before leaving Canada for ever. Meet me to-night, if possible, at ten o'clock in the thick grove at the back of the house, for I dare not venture there earlier lest I should be known. For the sake of olden times—of our early love—come Ada, come!"

It was from George, my poor, hapless brother, whom fancy had at one time pictured as dead—at another, as residing in some far distant lands. The reception of this note agitated me strangely, and for a time I felt so ill that I almost feared I would be unable to leave my room. The thought of this was perfectly unbearable, for time had in no manner weakened the warm sisterly love I had ever felt for the light-hearted manly boy, whose affection had been the only ray of sunshine that had ever brightened my gloomy childhood.

I suddenly remembered how providential—even under my actual circumstances the feeling seemed strange, unnatural to me—was Mr. Ellerslie's absence, for a secret visit to the grove at so late an hour of the evening would have been a feat almost impossible to accomplish had he been at home. And now, without danger of detection, I could meet poor George, utter the tender farewell words, probably the last we should exchange on earth, give him my father's dying message, all of which would serve to cheer him on his desolate path. Ah! why was his in such gloomy shadow, in such hopeless darkness, whilst mine lay in the brightest sunshine?

As the hours wore on, my feeling of sick lassitude in great part left me, but was succeeded by a nervous, feverish restlessness almost equally overwhelming. I ordered tea in my dressing-room, and after swallowing a cup, took my writing-case and proceeded to examine what money I possessed. I had over fifty pounds—my husband was always lavishly generous to me in money matters—and putting this sum into a beautiful little portemonnaie, one of Rupert's countless gifts, I slipped it into my pocket, determining to give it to poor George. I quieted the uneasy sensation this intention cost me, by the remembrance that Mr. Ellerslie had given me the money entirely for dress or pleasure, and I resolved to practise strict economy in my toilette-expenses for some time to come.

The hour drew nearer, I dismissed my maid for the night, telling her I would attend on myself—a thing I very frequently did, for I had learned the lesson thoroughly in early life—and then, at five minutes to ten, threw a large shawl over my shoulders, and with beating heart, stole down a side stairs that led to the grounds without meeting any member of the household. As I reached the coppice I saw by the starlight a tall slight figure in sailor costume emerge from amid the trees and draw near to me. I was quickly strained to a panting heart, whilst burning tears rained down on my face.

"Pardon me, my sister, for my selfish prayer, but I could not, oh! I could not bid farewell for ever to Canadian soil without seeing you once more. 'Tis for the last time!"

Ah! I forgot the criminal, the murderer in the brother, and wept with him and clung to him even as I had done in the olden days of my childhood!

He told me how, once arrived in New York, he had engaged as a common sailor on a vessel bound for Bermuda. Arrived there, crushed to the earth by remorse and grief, he had succeeded only in earning enough to support existence; frequent and severe fits of illness making even this difficult to accomplish. At length, weary of everything, he resolved to yield to the desire that haunted him night and day, to see Canada once more. He had worked his way home as a common sailor on board an obscure merchant vessel, and learning through some accidental channel my poor father's death, and my own marriage, as well as my place of abode, had ventured on the step of seeking an interview with me. I at once gave him a rapid sketch of all that had happened subsequent to his flight from Danville. Then he eagerly questioned me about myself and husband, and whether the latter were very kind to me, all of which questions I answered with an enthusiasm which seemed to impart deep happiness to my companion.

"Thank God! Ada! the usual Dunmore destiny has not been yours! Every night shall Rupert Ellerslie be mentioned in my unworthy petitions, and even should I forget to pray for myself, I shall not fail to pray for him!"

It was near midnight before I could tear myself away from him. Again and again I said farewell, yet still I lingered on. Once I passionately exclaimed:

"Why need you go at all, George? Remain here under a disguised name. Who would ever suspect that you are the George Dunmore whom men supposed they had seen buried in Danville church-yard?"

"Whoever would look at me, mention the name of Dunmore in my presence, would see my guilt at once in my conscious face. No, no, Ada, true, fond sister, it cannot be, and now, indeed, farewell!"

Here again a delay ensued, caused by my forcing on his acceptance the small purse I had previously prepared, and which he at first strenuously refused to take. Finally, seeing the grief and pain his refusal caused me, he unwillingly consented. The late moon had by this time risen, and though often cloud-obscured, her tremulous silvery light fell in long flickering lines on the fair expanse of wood and field that lay outstretched around us. All was profoundly still, hushed in its solemn quiet beauty, and together we slowly advanced to the edge of the wood, and emerged one step into the moonlight. I wished to see my brother once again, to have a more pleasant remembrance of him than the terrible night on which we had last met, had furnished me with, and I eagerly scanned his face as it bent sadly, tenderly towards mine.

Alas! alas! even by that deceptive light it was sadly changed. The fair hair still clustered in wavy masses round his head, but the cheeks were sunken and the face had grown strangely old. In a paroxysm of anguish I flung myself on his breast and sobbed and clung to him like a grieving child. After renewed tender farewells, he tore himself by a sudden effort from me and disappeared in the gloom of the wood.

## CHAPTER II.

Slowly, languidly, I dragged my steps back to the house, worn out in body and mind, and threw myself on my bed, where after a time I fell asleep. That sleep, however, proved anything but refreshing, for all sorts of unpleasant dreams haunted my slumbers, the prominent feature in all of them being danger to my brother of pursuit and discovery. Once it seemed to me I was again in the wood talking with George, when suddenly, without previous warning, I saw my husband within a few steps of us, wearing a stern dark look which boded no good to the luckless fugitive. In sharp imploring tones I exclaimed, "Oh, fly, dear George, at once!"

Terror, perhaps the echo of my own voice, awoke me, or was I not still under the influence of a dream, for there, close to me, a stern look on his rigid features such as I had never yet seen there, was Mr. Ellerslie. Without a word he turned away, but ere he could reach the door, collecting in some measure my bewildered senses, I was at his side. I would have thrown myself in his arms, but he kept me off, the stern look on his face never varying.

"My darling husband, what is the matter," I gasped.

"Enough, enough of this hateful mockery!" and his tones were so hoarse and changed, they seemed unknown to me. "There, on your dressing-table, is a letter that will explain all. Only for the necessity of placing it here where it might fall into no other hands than yours, only for the irresistible impulse that led me to take one last look on the face of her of whom I have made an idol more than a wife, we should never have met on this earth again."

"Do you want to drive me mad, Rupert Ellerslie?" I asked, feeling a death-like faintness stealing over me. "Explain yourself!"

"What! Acting to the last! I will speak out then. Listen! I witnessed your midnight interview in the wood with your tall curly-haired lover, saw you clinging to him, weeping in his arms. Oh God! that I should have lived to talk thus of my own dishonour!"

For a moment I was stunned, bewildered by this terrible shock. The difficulty of explanation, the solemn oath that sealed my lips, the improbability of my tale, even should I violate the latter, that the brother at whose interment he had himself attended with my unfortunate father and a crowd of fellow mourners, was identical with my companion of the previous night, all this rushed with despairing force upon me, and throwing myself at his feet, I wildly exclaimed:

"Oh my husband! Condemn me not unheard! All can yet be explained."

"Enough of this!" and he strove to disengage his hand which I had caught in mine with despairing energy. "Your own acts have judged and condemned you. Let me go!"

"No!" I almost screamed, "you shall not. By the memory of our wedded love I conjure you to give me a moment to collect my thoughts, to enter on explanations which will make all clear to you."

"Ah, I understand!" he interrupted, and for the first time there was an inflexion of mockery in his voice. "Yes, time to invent some plausible tale which may blind anew the husband who has been a dupe so long, but that is impossible now. He has unfortunately seen too much!"

"Rupert!" I resumed in the same frenzied tones of entreaty. "Pause for a while before you leave me! I can swear in the presence of that God whom we both revere that I have never wronged you even in thought."

He drew back from me with a sudden gesture of horror, and I, utterly crushed, blasted as it were by that terrible look, fainted at his feet.

When consciousness returned I was lying on the bed in my own room, the windows darkened—unbroken silence round me. Slowly the remembrance of all that had lately happened stole over me, and with it came a feeling of bitter, numbing, mental anguish, which I would have exchanged, oh how thankfully! for the most acute physical pain. Suddenly my ear detected a slight movement in the room, and with the thought that it might be my husband, a tide of tumultuous happiness surged up through my whole being. Ah, if it were indeed he, there was hope yet! For a moment I feared to speak lest I should dispel the blissful thought that had suddenly dawned on my misery, but suspense soon grew intolerable, and I faintly asked, "Who is that?"

"Me, ma'am—Dorothy! Are you better?"

Sick at heart with disappointment, I whispered "yes," and turned away my head. After a while I spoke again.

"Where is Mr. Ellerslie, and who placed me here? Speak the truth, Dorothy."

My voice, though low and constrained, was calm, and somewhat reassured, she rejoined:

"Some time ago, your room-bell rang, and coming up, I met the master, who said: 'Attend to Mrs. Ellerslie! You were