THE OLD MAN'S WILL.

"I MAY write to you, Alice, mayn't I?" Alice shook her head. "Better not," she said; "much better not." Still the denial was faint.

"But I shall write," said the young man warmly; "it is all the comfort I have. I don't ask you to write to me, but I will write to you, and—"

"He would be angry," said Alice, shaking her head; "no, you really musn't."

"All right," said the sailor, with a warm sunny smile: "to your sister then—all right. I know you'll go and ask her for a letter sometimes. Good-by, darling—one kiss."

The kiss was given hurriedly and surreptitiously, and the sailor sprang from the landing-stage into a boat that was waiting alongside, and presently the oars were flashing in the sunshine as she made rapidly for a bark lying in the stream. Alice stood and watched the receding boat, watched it till it reached the ship and was hauled up on the davits. Presently the cheery song of the sailors was heard over the water, the clink of the windlass, as they hauled the anchor home. Then she shook out her sails and departed. A shore-boat, however, had put off from the ship at the very last moment, and came slowly against the tide towards the land. It reached the landing-stage, and a wizened elderly man landed and came up the stairs.

"Well, Alice," he said, "well, you've waited a long time for Dicky—good girl, good girl! Now, my birdie, we'll go home to our little cage."

Alice sighed and put her hand in his arm and they went off, he with a springy shambling gait, meant to be sprightly and juvenile; she with a slow lifeless step that yet kept pace with him.

Richard Toft, the ship-owner, who had just landed, was seventy years old or more, and he had married Alice Graham, who was only nineteen. But then Toft was the richest man in the port of Melford Regis, and everybody said she had done well for herself. There had been some silly love-passages between her and William Black, the son of Widow Black, of Woodbine Cottage, but he was only a mate in one of Richard's ships, and could never have made a home for her, to say nothing of the misery of marrying a sailor, and being a widow, as it were, for four years out of five. Now it wasn't in the course of nature that Dicky Toft should live forever; and then if she played her cards well, what a happy woman she might be! She would have to play her cards, mind you, for she was a poor girl when she married, and Dicky had kept all his money at his own disposal; but then what fool like an old fool? and a pretty girl, like Alice, ought to be able to wind him round her little finger.

Certainly Mr. Toft was wonderfully proud of his wife, and with good cause, for she was one of the prettiest girls in Melford. To be sure, after her marriage she seemed to fade a little, whilst Dicky seemed to grow young and green again, and responded to all the raillery of which he was the subject as archly and wickedly as any grizzled old monkey on a perch.

Nothing was too good for Alice in Mr. Toft's opinion. He bought her shawls from the Indies, beautiful muslins and silks that would stand on end; he gave her jewels too, and decked her out with chains and trinkets and earrings, till she grew ashamed of her splendor.

By and by, Willie Black came home from a long voyage, and one of the first to welcome him and invite him to his house was Mr. Toft, the ship-owner. He had heard all about this little love affair, but he had such confidence in his wife—she was such a jewel, so devoted to him—he was anxious that his rival should see how completely she had forgotten.

"You brought him yourself," said Alice in her own heart, looking rather hardly at her husband, as he toiled up the steep hill that led to their house, panting and shaking, but refusing to acknowledge that he was tired. "I had schooled myself to be content, and with your own hand you shattered all my good resolves."

"Let us stay here for a moment," said Mr. Toft, "and admire this pleasant view. Oh, I'm not tired—no, no—not at all; but see the ship standing out to sea. She's a capital sailer, eh? ah, yes."

Her sails were spread out far in the distance, rosy with the beams of the setting sun, but a chilly mist was creeping up, and presently the glow vanished and the white sails were blotted out, disappearing in the great vague world of mist and sea and shadow.

"Why, what's the matter, Alice?" said Mr. Toft, turning sharply round. "Tears! Ah, well, yes, yes, we know—a little hysterical, eh? Don't excite yourself, dearest. My dear poppets, we will walk home very quietly, and then we will have tea in our little nest."

She followed her lord and master slowly up to their home on Lookout hill; it was a pleasant little villa with a fine garden.

Things went on quietly enough at Lookout villa for another couple of years. Mrs. Toft had not been blessed by children, as Richard had hoped, and the old man was a good deal crestfallen thereat; still he lived in hope and seemed fonder than ever of his young wife. By and by the rumor went about that he had sent for Lawyer Emlyn to make his will—he had always been very stubborn against making wills; and presently, when Mrs. Emlyn toiled up Lookout hill to visit Mrs. Toft—the Emlyns had never visited before at that house—and sometime after invited her to spend a quiet evening in the High street, everybody shrewedly surmised how the will was made and judged that the property disposed of was not inconsiderable.

Meantime the Peruvia, the good ship that had sailed away that fine summer's evening, had been heard of more than once. She had not been spoken, however, later than the last of October, when she had left Kurachee, with the northeast monsoon for the Red Sea, intending to come home by Suez and the Mediterranean. Any day she might return, any day might witness William Black striding up Lookout hill; any one of the white-winged ships that dotted the horizon might be the one ship that heartsore Alice was secretly longing to see. He had been very good; he had not written to her sister—she had forbidden him to do so, and he had obeyed her; and yet if he knew how she longed to hear he was safe—after all, it was better not.

Mr. Toft was breaking a little, people said. He was no longer as active as he had been only a short year since. He rarely came down into the town now, and when he did it was pitiable to see him toiling back up the hill, making believe that the ascent was not painful to him. He had been used to come each morning to the reading-room; but now he had given that up, and had the *Times* sent up to him on the next day after publication.

One summer evening—her husband had been poorly all day, and Alice had been constantly occupied in attending to him, but now he had gone off to sleep—she put on her things and went down into the town to make a few purchases, intending to spend half an hour with Mrs. Emlyn, to enjoy a gossip with that lively conversable lady.

Down the hill she went, the cool sea-breeze fanning her parched cheeks. The evening was divine, and the sea was stretched before her in long golden swathes, the murmur of it sounding gently in her ears. Ships were stirring, some outward-bound were heaving at their anchors, and the well-remembered sailor's song came softly over the waters: some homeward-bound were making for their anchoring-grounds with full-bellied sails. She strained her eyes, and fancied that now this and now that might be the long-expected Peruvia. But no, there would be no doubt then; her heart would tell her at once, "That is William's ship!"

The sun was getting low, and she hastened quickly down the hill. She met sundry towns-people she knew by sight, and nodded to them a good-natured greeting; they turned and looked at her, and watched her down the hill. "How rude people are getting," she thought. "There was a time when these would all have touched their hats to the wife of the ship-owner."

At each shop she visited she noticed something strange about the people. Mr. Meagre, the draper, came out of his little box and stared at her, and Mrs. Meagre's stony visage appeared over the glass door, sternly regarding her. It was the same at the other shops, everybody looked queer.

"Imagination," she told herself. "I feel altogether strange, and I find my own feelings reflected in other people's faces. Here comes Mrs. Emlyn."

Mrs. Emlyn came up to her and looked at her with vacant unrecognizing gaze.

"Mrs. Emlyn," she cried, "how fortunate I am to meet you!"

The lady gathered together her skirts and passed coldly on.

"Oh, what have I done—what is the matter?" cried Alice. She felt faint and giddy; something dreadful had happened. The air grew heavy and thick; all the houses in the red, quaint High street seemed to blink at her; the sky was brassy and dull above her. She was as if in a dream, when the last trumpet seems to sound, and the universe quakes around. But it was nothing, it could be nothing; Mrs. Emlyn was often queer.

But she turned round and made her way home. Her husband was awake and crying for her like a sick child. She could do nothing to-night, but in the morning she would go down into the town and get to the bottom of this mystery, if it were a mystery, and not all a delusion.

Next morning Mr. Toft was better—much better; cheerful and chirrupy. He had his breakfast in bed, however, and Alice took it up to him. He was quite affectionate over his toast, and loving over his egg; and by noon he was down stairs in the sitting-room grumbling that the *Times* hadn't come.

"It is here now, Richard," said his wife, bringing him the great broadsheet. She left him to his paper and went on her way about household matters. By and by she heard a strange sound in the parlor as if somebody had fallen. She ran into the room; Mr. Toft was on the floor in a heap against his easy chair. He had fallen into a fit; the paper was scrunched up in his hand.

A strange pang shot through her. Grief, remorse, expectation, a flash of hope that would not be repressed. In a moment she was herself again. She laid him gently along the floor, rang the bell violently for assistance, undid his necktie and the front of his shirt, chafed his temples and hands. Servants came, and she sent off for the doctor. She moistened his lips with brandy. He revived.

Strangely he shrank away from her—would not suffer her to touch him; the gardener had come in to help, and, with his assistance, the old man made his way to his bedroom.

Alice was wounded and amazed; but she had heard of sick people suddenly taking fancies against those whom they loved best. She went to the door to see if the doctor was coming. Mr. Emlyn, the lawyer, was walking quickly up the hill, a newspaper under his arm. He looked sternly at her as he approached.

"I must see Mr. Toft," he said, as he reached the door.

"You cannot see him; he is very ill," said Alice.

The window of Mr. Toft's room was open, and he must have heard Mr. Emlyn's voice.

"Show Mr. Emlyn up," he cried, in harsh shrieking tones. Come here, sir—come here!"

Mr. Emlyn pushed his way in, and up the staircase; Alice was too frightened to forbid him. The gardener presently came in for pens and ink, took them up to his master, and then waited at the bottom of the stairs.

"You had better go to your work again, Thomas, said Alice; "we can manage without you now."

"Master said I was to stay here."

She said nothing more, but when into the sitting-room, and waited and watched in dull bewildered expectation. Then she heard Mr. Emlyn's voice:

"Thomas, come up, and bring one of your fellow-servants."

There was a trampling up-stairs and then down; after that Mr. Emlyn came out of her husband's room; he left the house forthwith without speaking to Alice. Then the doctor came; he too was shown up-stairs. By and by he came down into the room where Alice was. He took her kindly by the hand.

"My dear Mrs. Toft, prepare yourself for bad news."

"Is he very ill?" gasped Alice.

"Yes, very ill; nay, he is dead."

After that the days passed like a dream till the day of the funeral. She wished to to follow him to the grave—for he had been very good to her, she thought; and now that he was gone her mind misgave her that she had been faithless to him, not in deed, but in heart—but this was forbidden by those who had the management of affairs.

A relation of Mr. Toft had turned up, a nephew, a lanky rawboned youth, with a long neck and a tuft of red hair on his chin; and this Ephraim Toft was the chief mourner. Mr. Emlyn also was at the funeral, and when they returned they went into the parlor and drank wine, and afterwards sent for Mrs. Toft to hear the will read.

He was a solemn courteous man, this Emlyn, with a full resounding voice, and he read out the terms of the will distinctly and sonorously. It was difficult to repress a feeling of elation as he rolled over the list of Mr. Toft's possessions, and ended with the clause that left his wife sole legatee and executrix. How, through the gloom of this day, bright vistas of the future gleamed and shone!

"Ahem! there is a codicil," said Mr. Emlyn; and bit by bit the codicil undid all that the will had done. The lanky nephew uncoiled himself and glowered and blinked with amazement and delight. There was but one bequest to Alice—a copy of the *Times* of——June, of the day previous to the old man's death.

They left her to herself for a while, and she tried to grasp what all this meant. The lawyer had politely handed to the widow her legacy, the copy of the *Times*. What could it mean?

Ah, yes, it was dreadful, this poverty, after wealth had seemed within her grasp. But still there was youth and hope; and William—yes, she might think of him now, fully and freely. She carried no burden of gratitude, she was bound to no respectful memory of the dead. She was free now, and perhaps William was close at hand. Well, she would read this *Times*.

Presently she clasped her hands to her forehead, and, with strained and horror-struck eyes, read this paragraph:

DERELICT AT SEA.—A pathetic incident is narrated by the master of the steamship Suez, just arrived at Liverpool. It appears that in the Indian Ocean she met with a dismasted vessel apparently abandoned by the crew. A boat was sent to board her, when the following sight met the eyes of the officer. The main and upper decks had been swept clean by the sea, the bulwarks were carried away and every vestige of the spars and rigging. No living being was found on board, but in the captain's cabin was the body of a young man with golden hair and beard, much decomposed. A letter was lying on the table, which was brought away by the boat's crew, and we are requested to give it in full, as it may lead to the identification of the ship: "Dearest Alice—How often have I thought of our last parting, and longed once more to clasp you in my arms! Love like ours is never to be parted, let the sulky old centenarian do as he please. I write to you at your sister's, as you desired me, No. 10 Bond street, Melford Regis. How well I remember the happy hours we have spent there! I am in command of the ship now." The rest of the letter is illegible except the words, "Come to me, your loving William Black." The body was sunk in the sea, the vessel left to its fate, and the steamer continued her course.

That night, as the sun was setting, lighting up with golden flames the broad estuary of Melford, the tide was at its full, and white-winged ships were floating in upon its bosom, a young girl appeared on the farthest extremity of the landing-stage, and poising herself for a moment, and taking a last long look at all the beautiful scene around, cast herself into the waters, which closed around her with a sullen ripple. Once and once again a white arm was seen at the surface; boats put out, and men with ropes shouted and gesticulated from the shore; but it was of no use, the sea claimed its own, and still hoards in its hidden treasury the bones of William and Alice.

A Good Turtle Dog.

"If anybody has seen a black and tan dog answering to the name of Judge, going down the street in company with a hard-shell turtle that won't answer to anything and certainly won't answer to tackle, as the dog will tell you if you can only get him to stop long enough, please to halt the eloping pair, as they are the property of the editor of this paper. We are fondly attached to the dog on account of his vagabondish Bohemianish habits. He knows every dog in town by name, and is on speaking terms with nine-tenths of the dogs that come in under the wagons, and he knows more of the inhabitants of this vicinity than the tax collector does. The turtle is a more recent acquisition. It was placed in the backyard yesterday, and the dog spent an hour and a half trying to induce it come out of its shell and be comfortable. The old iron clad maintained his reserve however, until the dog crammed his nose against the forward part and commenced to sniff. The pair seemed to come to some sort of an understanding at once, for the dog made an impetuous remark on a very high key and then they both started on a trip together. The dog was last seen sauntering along like a whirlwind and the turtle staying right by him. We should be sorry to lose the dog now as he has acquired another important and valuable quality. He knows more about turtles than any other dog in the country, and it's mighty hard to find a real good turtle-dog.

☞ An eminent professor in one of our colleges, recently remarked to the senior class that, if it was necessary for them to spit so much, he wished they would bring spittoons to the recitation room. Accordingly, at the next recitation, in marched the sedate seniors, each bearing a spittoon, which, as they sat down, were deposited at their feet. The professor, not in the least disconcerted, patiently conducted them through the lesson, and at its close said: "I am very glad, gentlemen, to see that you are so attentive to my wishes; and, as there is some danger of your spittoons being broken or lost between recitations, you may carry them to your rooms at such times, bringing them with you when you come to recite again." It is needless to remark that the members of the class saw that the point of their joke was most decidedly in favor of him of the spectacles and lore.

☞ In Newark, last week, Margaret Kernan, aged 15, was arrested for stealing three loaves of bread. In the Police Court she burst into tears, and said that she had taken the bread to feed her little sisters who were at home starving; also that her parents were dead, and that she and her brother had supported the other children, four in number, until they were thrown out of employment. Detective McManus was sent to investigate, and on visiting her home found the children not only starving but with very little clothing and no fuel, the room in which they huddled together presented a wretched appearance and altogether they were in a pitiful state of destitution. Justice Mills discharged the prisoner, and relief was at once afforded.

☞ Among the thousands who wear Alpaca cloth very few know what it is made of. The alpaca goat is a species of the llama, whose home is in the mountains of Peru. It lives on the coarest fare, the scanty herbage of the rocks, and has a beautiful wavy coat of light chestnut brown wool, which is nearly a foot in length, very soft and elastic, and nearly as fine as that of a Cashmere goat. This is sheared off and sent to England, where it is sorted, woven, dyed, steamed, tinged and turned into the market.

☞ A colony of wasps built their nest last summer in a church offensively near the choir. The sexton being appealed to, he said, "I'll fix the rascals," and proceeded to burn the wasps out. The next day, while gazing at the ruins of the church, the sexton was heard to remark, "I knew I could fix the rascals, but I'am sorry the church went along with 'em incidentally."

☞ A sensation preacher, assuming a dramatic attitude, exclaimed, in a startling, agonizing tone, 'What is that I see there?' Here a little woman in black cried out in a shrill treble tone, "It's nothing but my little black dog; he won't bite anybody."