

THE HEIR OF WAST- WAYLAND: A TALE

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MARY HOWITT

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HEIR OF WAST-WAYLAND.

A Tale.

BY MARY HOWITT.



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THE HEIR OF WEST-WAYLAND.

CHAPTER I.

As travelers from distant points, unconscious of each other's existence, set forth in the morning with one common object in view—the reaching a certain hostel at night, or the visiting some spot of interest, so occurs it daily in the great journey of life. At one and the same moment various individuals, as yet unknown to each other, are drawn together by circumstance, or destiny, toward one common meeting point.

These meeting points are curious; we advance toward them as if with our eyes shut; we seldom know when they will occur, and still less how much they may involve. From them arise the most momentous incidents of our lives; often sad enough, often strange enough; often completely altering the after course of our existence, and exercising an influence which extends beyond time—into eternity.

I am about to make you *clairvoyant* with regard to three such unconscious groups of pilgrims on the every-day journey of life. You shall see them all in their various places of abode, on one particular evening in April, and you will then perceive how they are all advancing unconsciously toward each other, and toward one object, literally and metaphorically, toward a certain lauded estate, called West-Wayland in the North of England. Here, having once arrived, like the travelers at the hostel, they shall remain together for a period, and then, as by an irresistible fate, be again separated, as if to the four winds of heaven; for there are separations which divide more completely than half the globe—while the influences which brought them thither shall remain in their effects forever.

Our first little group consists of but two women, Mrs. Mildmay, and her daughter Honour. They are sitting in a small but neat room looking upon the sea at Hastings; the tide is out, the slant rays of the setting sun light up the beach, and the sea, and the low gray rocks which rise above the level of the low-water sands, with a golden radiance. It is a lovely evening, warm and balmy as June, and many people are out picking up shells and pebbles, and enjoying the finest sunset of what has hitherto been a late and ungenial season. Even the poor invalid, with his close wrappings and his anxious attendants, had ventured forth, either to pace slowly, or to be drawn in his wheeled chair along the sun-illuminated esplanade. The two ladies, however, of whom I have spoken, both of whose countenances wore the quiet and subdued expression of sickness and sorrow, seemed indisposed to leave their little room this evening, fine though it was. The mother sat on the sofa at her needlework; the daughter in her little bow window apparently gazing on the lovely sunset and the groups of people on the beach below.

The feelings of both mother and daughter were much alike at this moment; each had a communication to make, and each felt reluctant to make it; we fear so much to distress those we love, we avoid touching upon painful subjects even when the poignancy of the pain is past; so sacred to the affectionate heart are the feelings of the beloved.

The daughter's eyes were fixed on the objects without, but her thoughts were not employed by them. The mother glanced up from her work from time to time, with that sick, sinking sensation which every anxious spirit knows so well. A writing-desk stood open on the table before her, and she thought painfully of certain papers within it, the contents of which must be communicated; and now the time was come when that communication could be no longer delayed. She had so often put off this painful duty, she must put it off no longer. She thought over the weary words she would use; how she would try to soften that which was hard, how she would endeavor to cast a cheerful coloring over what she too well knew was dark and dispiriting; and above all, how she would never reveal to what an extent she herself had suffered.

She made two or three attempts to speak, but her tongue or her heart failed her, and perhaps she might have deferred her communication till the morrow--till the morning; that her daughter might at least have one more quiet night's rest, as she had so

often done before, had not Honour herself risen from her seat, and placing herself by her mother's side, said in a low, but firm tone of voice :

"I have long wished to have some talk with you about many things, dearest mother. I wish you really to understand and to believe that there is no longer any need for anxiety on my account. I have been now for some time quite reconciled to things as they are. I acknowledge that it requires a great effort, perhaps also a great amount of suffering, before we can submit to adverse circumstances, but the effort is not beyond our strength; and then, when once we are submissive, there comes great peace of mind, and new paths are opened to us, and new sources of pleasure which fully compensates for what we have lost. When once, dearest mother, we attain to this state of submission and faith, we are not only contented, but we see that every thing is ordained for the best, and that if we had the ordering of our own destiny we should make blundering work of it, and have but little cause to rejoice, after all. I have come to see this, dear mother, very clearly, and now I beseech of you to have confidence in me. Do not wear that sad, anxious look which is not natural to your countenance, and which distresses me much more than any of those old troubles which at one time so completely occupied me, and worse than that, made me apparently forget you. Pardon me, dear mother, for all this! The worst of such trials as mine, is, that they are so self-absorbing. And now I want really to convince you that I see all these things very differently to what I did. I am no longer unhappy. I shall no longer be selfish."

"My dear child," said her mother, interrupting her, "do not be so unjust to yourself. You have not been selfish; you have behaved heroically. You have had a great trial to bear, and thank God! he has enabled you to bear it."

"Yes, indeed he has," continued Honour, who was anxious to resume the conversation which it had required a great effort to commence, "and your goodness also, and your patience with me, have done much—have many a time strengthened me when otherwise I must have sunk. And there is no one in this world so true and kind as yourself, and so worthy of my living for. I see this, I know this now; and now I feel it as my greatest blessing and privilege to be a life-long companion to you, to be able to devote myself entirely to you, and to my duties as a daughter—to making you happy: and I know, dearest mother, that in so doing I shall be happier than I ever have been, or ever should have been."

Happy in another way—in a way that God has appointed for me, and not myself; and that is much better, for God is wiser—oh, so very much wiser than we! Will it not be so, dear mother; shall we not be very happy together?"

Honour paused and gazed into her mother's face with her large, beautiful eyes full of emotion, though not of tears. Tears, however, were in the mother's eyes as she lifted the trembling hand which she pressed to her lips, and Honour continued:

"But, mother dear, you must promise me one or two things: firstly, you must cease to be anxious about me, for indeed, as I told you before, there is no cause for anxiety on my account. It is only while the mind is wavering and tossed about that we are unhappy; only while a single regret remains, a single longing after that which God has forbidden to us, are we unhappy; but when the mind is calm, is submissive, when we can conscientiously say, 'I have given up all; thy will and not mine be done,' then that which was dark becomes light, the difficult becomes easy, and the uncertain assured; then there is nothing left but to advance straight forward in peace, and even perhaps in great joy. This is what I feel at present, and you, dearest mother, must feel it with me, and you must still strengthen me as you have hitherto done; and more than this, you must cease to be anxious for me, for that you are so I can see plainly enough. Yes, dear mother, you press my hand; you confess it; you have not faith in me; you have seen so much weakness in me that you can not believe in my strength. Ah! what can I do to prove to you that I am contented, that I am happy! Believe this, my mother. There is, therefore, no need for anxiety; nothing but happiness lies before us—happiness in our united affection, in our friendship, in our love for each other, for there is nothing in this world to compare with the affectionate, comiding intercourse of mother and daughter; there is no friendship, no love like it. Yes, of this I feel sure: a new life lies before us, a better life than the old one, because it will be so much truer; and if I can only see you looking as care-free as you used to do, then, indeed, I shall be happy; very, very happy!"

"But then, dear mother," continued she, in a tone of less exultation, "I have to ask from you a sacrifice; perhaps it is selfish, but I hope not—I think not. Do not let us return to Northbridge. There is something very painful to me in the thought of returning thither. There we should again fall into the old routine; and seeing the same people, and living among

the same old scenes, would recall daily and hourly old associations to keep alive old habits; habits of mind, trains of thought I mean, from which I must dis sever myself if I would live up to the new and better knowledge which I have acquired. The trials which God ordains for us we must bear, be they ever so painful, but those of which I speak are not his trials; we *may* put them from us; it is a duty which we owe to ourselves."

"I do not wish," continued she, after a pause, "to meet Frederick's—Mr. Horrock's friends," said she, correcting herself, and with a peculiar tone of voice, which her mother well understood; "it would be very painful and unpleasant. Therefore I have thought if you would consent, and if it were not asking too great a sacrifice, that we would not return to Northbridge at all. Let us go abroad for the summer; let us quite change the scene, and you will see how I shall rise above that which has made me so unhappy: and what a beautiful new life will begin for us both. I mean from this time to put myself, as it were, to school again; in fact we are scholars all our life long; but I mean literally what I say. I shall study hard; I shall read none but solid, improving works, so that I may strengthen my mind, so that the heart may not run riot in very idle fancies, as women's foolish hearts too often do. 'Love in idleness' has a deeper meaning than people think, therefore I will not be idle. I will work hard, and give a purpose to my life, and in this way I shall be very happy. I feel something of this impiousness already; and this I believe seriously, that there is nothing better for us than to have to overcome some enemy—some weakness or besetting sin; for if we seek in sincerity to overcome, strength is given to us, and one victory over ourselves insures us many others. In this way there is no fear of sliding backward, because at every step forward additional strength is given for the next. Is it not so, beloved mother?"

"Bless you, my child!" said the mother in reply, "bless you for these words, for this assurance of strength; but have you ever thought that God in his wisdom may see meet to try you still further, to lay yet other burdens upon you—upon us both?"

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Honour, with a flushing cheek; "what new trial is there? for such your words imply. Tell me all. Let me know the worst. It can not be so very severe since you are spared to me."

Honour looked into her mother's face, and it seemed to her as if that beloved countenance had at once become twenty years older;