

Her Grandfather's Ghost
by Mary Kyle Dallas

The heroine of this story was a Miss Rebecca Berry, who lived many years ago, and who in her old age used to tell it thus:

“My grandfather thought a great deal of me when I was a child. Whenever he was able to persuade my mother to let me leave home, I came to visit him. I was always glad to come, for no one ever humored me so much. The only thing that ever troubled me was that he constantly told me that I was to be his heiress.

“‘I shall leave everything I have in the world to you, Rebecca,’ he used to say.

“‘Oh! grandfather,’ I would reply, ‘don’t talk of dying. You may outlive all of us, and you can give me whatever you choose that I like; but I would not care to be rich if you were dead.’

“It seemed to me, in those days, as though people might live forever if they tried to do so, and will-making and anticipations of death I dreaded as things that were likely to bring the terrible end on prematurely.

“As long as grandfather said, ‘I shall leave you everything in my will,’ I did not feel so badly. But when one day—the first of a long visit that I paid him—he said: ‘Rebecca, my will is made, and you are a rich woman.’ I was almost frightened out of my senses. I cried long and bitterly and was miserable for days—however, comfort came to me at last, and grandfather never mentioned his will to me again.

“The making of it did not kill him. He lived for twenty years, though he was sixty when he made it—and all sorts of changes happened. My dear parents died, my brother went to India, my sister married and lived in France. I lived with grandfather, was past thirty years of age, and my cousin Gregory had come to the Berry House to live.

“Gregory was a man of forty years, slick and smooth and fair. I never liked him, though he was very polite and often praised my appearance and manners. He even offered himself to me, but I thanked him for the compliment and told him I had no ‘desire to change my condition.’

“After this I felt that he was angry with me, but he was always cross.

“Grandfather’s eyes were failing, and he needed an amanuensis and some one to look after the accounts, and Gregory was much about him. He was the son of grandfather’s eldest son, and had run through a large fortune. I do not know whether he hoped to be made heir of the property; but once as I sat at work on the porch I heard grandfather speaking to him in the library.

“‘Gregory,’ he said, ‘I have now settled upon you what ought to be ample provision for a bachelor; but my will is made, and Rebecca is my heiress. I made my will when she was a little child.’

“‘You have told me that before. I have no expectations,’ said Gregory; ‘and I thank you for your kindness.’

“‘But after, when I saw him walking in the garden, his lips were white and his eyes glittered like those of a cat.

“‘He came up to me when he noticed me and bowed, and said it was a pleasant evening, and then he spoke of the roses, and their perfume; but his lips were white all the while, and, at last, he said to me suddenly:

“‘Cousin Rebecca, do you remember old Jabez and Beulah Spinner, who were grandfather’s servants twenty-five years ago?’

“‘Yes,’ I said, wonderingly. ‘Yes, for I knew they kept accounts of kitchen expenses and read them to grandfather. Beulah was a housekeeper, Jabez a sort of steward.’

“‘Gregory walked on with me for a while without another word. Then he spoke again of the flowers and bade me good-day. He was going to take a long walk, he said, and was not to be expected back to supper.

“‘It was only a month after this that my grandfather died. I was all alone in the world now. I thought of nothing but my sorrow for long days, and when I was called to hear the reading of the will I could scarcely bring myself to do it. However, at last I went into the parlor in my black dress and sat down with the rest, and young lawyer Grace began the reading. His face was very grave. He also was in mourning. His father, who had been grandfather’s lawyer, was just dead, and he was doing what that father had expected to do on this occasion. But he looked surprised as well as sad, and as he read on I also felt astonished; for though I did not desire to win fortune by my poor grandfather’s death, he had always told me that I was his heiress, and now I heard that all my grandfather possessed was left to my cousin, Gregory Berry.

“‘The will was dated twenty-five years back, and was witnessed by Jabez and Beulah Spinner.

“‘Writer and witnesses were in their graves. There was no one to deny the authenticity of the will; but I knew how truthful my grandfather was, and how he loved me. I remembered the afternoon upon which Gregory questioned me concerning Beulah and Jabez Spinner, and I felt sure the will was a forgery and that he had destroyed the one my grandfather really left behind him. I believed this more positively when young Mr. Grace, taking me aside, said to me:

“‘Miss Rebecca, this is not what I expected. My father always led me to believe that you were Mr. Berry’s heiress; and although this will was in the very safe to which my father had a duplicate key, and where I knew the will should be found, I am puzzled.[’]

“‘And, indeed, much to my cousin’s wrath and indignation, Mr. Grace searched the house for a later will, emptying old desks and drawers and closets, and rummaging over old papers even in the garret. He spent two weeks thus—Gregory, white with rage all the while—and then gave up the hope, consoled with me, trusted my cousin would be generous, and left me. But Gregory only advised me to apply for a position as governess, and I did so; and now I began to know how

poor and desolate I was; forced, after my early youth was passed, to earn my bread in a stranger's house, rather than be dependent on cousin Gregory. My trunks were packed and I was reposing in my own room for the last time after weeping myself asleep, when I fancied that I felt a touch upon my hand, and sitting up in bed saw my grandfather standing at its foot. I was not frightened, but I grew very cold, and I cried out: 'Grandfather, is this a dream, or is all that has seemed to pass been a dream, and are you still living?'

"Then I thought he answered me:

"'Child, my soul passed from its earthly body as you know, but I am here nevertheless. It is a mystery—a great grace of God, of which I dare not say more. It grieved me to see my dearest one robbed by a rascal, and I have been permitted to return to you. I died so suddenly that I could not tell you where the will was bidden. The one that has been read is a forgery. Gregory wrote it. He also destroyed what he believed to be my will, but it was only a true copy of it.'

"'I suspected him a long while, and I removed my will from the safe, leaving the copy there. In the dead of the night, after they told him that I was no more, he opened the safe with his false key, and put his forged will in the place of that which he burnt. But all is really yours. Go to my library, take from the wall the picture which hangs between the western windows, remove the back, which is of wood, between that and the paper on which the painting is executed you will find the will. Then fly the house. Have friends about you ere Gregory knows what has happened.'

"Then a strange, faint light of which I had scarcely thought, or which I believed to be that of the moon, faded away. All was dark. Through the gloom my grandfather's voice seemed to say:

"'Adieu, Rebecca, we shall meet again.'

"And I fainted away. When I recovered I fancied that I had dreamt a wild dream or been temporarily insane. Nevertheless, as soon as I was dressed, I naturally went at once to the library and took the picture from its nail. I was about to withdraw the nails from its back when a step startled me, and Gregory stood before me; his face had an evil look. I feared him, but I had the presence of mind to say:

"'Cousin Gregory, I was coming to ask you if I might have this little picture. I am going away, you know, and I am so fond of it?'

"Gregory glanced at the little water-color sketch, and replied, quite graciously, that I might have it, and I hurried away to my room with my prize.

"In ten minutes I knelt, weeping and trembling, beside my bed. It appeared to me then that it actually had been the spirit of my grandfather which appeared to me, for I held his will in my hand.

"It was dated five years later than that which Gregory had forged, and there was no need of exposing him. He did not even know that I guessed what he had done.

“But he cursed me heartily ere his departure. However, curses come home to roost—they never hurt me. And his own life was very miserable.”

New York Ledger, November 2, 1878