

The Guiding Eye.

(By Mrs. Denison.)

The day had been very dark and very dismal. The grief that Elsie Lawton had been called to bear would have been a burden enough in the most radiant sunshine, for since the early morning she had been sitting beside a dying mother. This dark, rainy day seemed to intensify her sorrow. Now and then the two or three neighbors who had come to 'help do the house up,' and otherwise lighten the cares of the suffering girl, presented themselves noiselessly at the door, and as noiselessly moved away. They all felt sorry for Elsie, so early orphaned. Her father had died when she was only six years old, and now her widowed mother was dying, and she, at the age of seventeen, was called to battle with the world alone.

'Seems such a pity!' said Cynthia Long, the gossip of the village, 'and she such a child, left with nothing. It'll take all the furniture to pay expenses, and then, I dun'no what we shall do with the poor child, 'less she's got relations somewhere.'

'Well, the Lord will provide,' said Mrs. Lydia Porter, who was well-to-do, and had no children.

For many hours Elsie's mother had lain in a stupor, and the girl sat there clasping her cold hand, her agony that silent, wrestling, kind, that leaves its mark upon the heart, never to be wholly effaced.

Suddenly the calm blue eyes opened.

'Elsie!' came in a firm voice.

'Here, mother! right by your side. Are you suffering?' asked the girl.

'No, dear—I have a blessed rest from pain. It is all I ask for—rest, rest!'

Elsie bent lower and kissed her.

'It is all right, Elsie—things seem so clear to me! I dreamed that my Saviour met me, and, oh! how beautiful he was! His touch gave me so much strength that I woke up as you see me. I have thought it all out. You must go to brother Harry—'He will guide thee with his eye.' Keep it always in mind—and remember I will love you right on, and wait for you in my new home. Write to your uncle as soon as I am gone,—and, I beseech you, live with the constant thought that his eye is on you, and as you are his child, he will guide you as no earthly hand or eye could do.'

Not long after, still with a smile on her lips, the soul took its departure—and Elsie was written motherless.

After the funeral her mother's directions were strictly followed, a letter was written, and in time an answer came from a far distant Western city, in which Uncle Harry said, 'Come.' So pretty, delicate Elsie set out for the house and family in which she was to be domiciled.

Her only anxiety was, to pay her own way. She had good abilities and a fair education; but in a strange city she realized that it would be difficult to procure a position. At all events she decided that she would not be a dependent upon the bounty of her uncle's family, but work with a will in order to pay her way.

It was night when she reached her place of destination. Her uncle received her with open arms, but his wife's reception was cool, though she had the grace to try to conceal her evident reluctance to the coming of her husband's niece.

'Uncle, I will pay my way,' she said after they had talked awhile.

She did. It was 'Elsie' here, and 'Elsie' there, by all the family from morning till night, till sometimes her uncle, ashamed of the constant demands that were made

upon her time, gave them a sharp rebuke, which only made matters worse for her, after he had gone.

Nevertheless, Elsie obeyed and scrupulously obeyed the orders devolving upon her. Her room was up two flights of stairs, a hall bedroom, which, nevertheless, seemed a little haven to her after the work of the day was over, and which she determined should be shared with no one. On the first day of her taking possession she had arranged all her little belongings to the best of her ability, and placed the picture of her mother where she could see it the first thing in the morning, and the last at night, when a furious stampede from the lower stairs startled her, and turning, there were the seven wild children, from the sturdy baby to twelve-year-old Caleb, including a pair of twins, standing inside the door, surveying her with curious glances.

'I say, ain't it jolly?' queried the eldest. 'Mamma was goin' to give you the room over the kitchen, but papa said no,—you should have the spare one.'

'You're going to dress my hair,' said Miss Belle, whose long thick braids of coarse red hair hung between a pair of high shoulders. 'It's awful hard for mother to get me ready for school in time—so you're to do it.'

'Can you cipher in fractions?' asked Tom, the nine-year-old. 'That's where I am, and mother won't show me how, she's awful cross! She says you will.'

'Yes, and you must hear all our lessons,' put in Anne, one of the twins. 'Mother says that's what you came for, and Tom is awful lazy—so is Caleb.'

Poor Elsie looked from one to the other in utter dismay. She was so astonished, she quite forgot that she had come upstairs not only to rest, but to have a good cry, and so relieve her burdened heart. She could only curiously regard this company of small Bedlamites, each intent upon securing her for his or her personal benefit. She loved children, but not one of these appealed to her affections, not even little Teddy, the baby, who looked like a little owl, with his big brown eyes and prim mouth. It seemed to her just then that it would be a heavy infliction to kiss him, even though he was a baby.

Just then and there she seemed to hear the voice of her dying mother, 'I will guide thee with mine eye.'

'It seems such strange guiding,' she whispered to herself—and then she said aloud:

'I tell you what, children, I'll do anything you want, in reason; if you'll go away and leave me alone. And you must never come up to my room when I want to be alone. Is it a bargain?'

Her voice was pleasant, her eyes smiling. The children looked at each other, then at Caleb, the eldest boy; but that little speech decided her status in the family, as far as the children were concerned, Caleb slunk out, looking a little ashamed. Belle twitched her long braid over her shoulder, and took the end of it between her teeth. The baby, who had been in a very undecided state of mind, now lifted his voice in a terrible howl, and the whole seven turned and ran out of the room, leaving Elsie sitting on the side of the bed, alternating between tears and laughter.

'I will guide thee with mine eye!'

'Oh, mother,' she cried bitterly, 'how can I be happy here?'

But the hardest trials are almost always softened by some ameliorating circumstances, and the one point of light in this region of darkness was Uncle Harry. Though

a man of but little force of character, ruled by wife and children more than was good for them all, Elsie's pretty, patient face, and sweet, obliging ways had made an impression upon him for good, and he took her part whenever in his judgment she seemed hard driven.

'Let your cousin alone,' he would say to the children, when they made a wall around her, each one insisting upon her services. 'Elsie, go and take your rest,' he would add—and then, turning to his wife, 'Julia, I wonder you can let them torment her so!'

'Nonsense,' she would reply, 'she didn't come here to live like a lady, but to work her way and pay her board. You don't suppose I'm going to keep a maid to wait upon her, do you? The children like her, and she likes the children; they get along very well together, if you don't interfere.'

'But she looks pale and worn out, and exerts herself too much. I don't want her to be a slave to me and mine,' he would say.

'And I don't want her at all,' his wife would mutter crossly.

'I wonder how long it'll last,' sighed Elsie, as she escaped one day to her room. 'I'm so tired of braiding hair, and washing faces, hearing blundering lessons, and running for them all! And, yet, I must not murmur. God has placed me here. I am not unkindly treated, I believe the children like me as a kind of upper servant. It may be best for me to give up the aspirations that have made life seem so beautiful. I will try to be happy, and I won't sit here and growl.'

Heretofore she had avoided the society of her uncle's wife. She was conscious of an antagonism between them, Neat and nice almost to fastidiousness herself, the untidy ways of the household, the lax habits of her aunt, the rough manners of the children, were a constant source of pain to her. Her uncle was different, more like her own sweet mother. She felt that she really added to his comfort, when he came home to a tidy room, a well set table, and, as far as she could make them so, polite and attractive children.

Still, she was conscious of needs and yearnings which she scarcely dared whisper to herself. Her little portfolio, which she rarely opened now, was rich with many a sketch carefully worked out in happier days, and though she never dreamed that there was anything wonderful in these little fancies, yet they were full of genius in spite of all their faults.

'I did think,' she sometimes sighed to herself, 'that God would guide me in some way to the realization of my dearest wishes, but there's no hope for me in this matter-of-fact household.'

'He will guide thee with his eye.'

The thought came as in a soft response. The girl started. It seemed almost as if her mother had whispered the words in her ear.

'I won't trouble myself about it any more,' she said, resolutely, placing her treasures away. 'I'll go straight downstairs and put it all out of my thoughts. What I do, I will do for his sake, and so it will be easy.'

She went down to the sitting-room to find her aunt suffering with a headache and the baby fretful. It was the work of a few moments to coax the child into good temper and a sound sleep, after which she moved softly about, tidying the room, with a touch here and there, making of the common place something to suit her fine taste, till it seemed to accede to all her demands for grace and order, and hardly to know itself in its new aspect.