

Two Pairs of Dark Eyes.

(By Sydney Dare, in 'Presbyterian Review.')

Mrs. Vernon received two letters in the morning mail. One of them was from her sister, living in a distant city, and its most important point was this:

'I am ordered to a sanitarium for several months, and desire to know if you will have the kindness to take charge of Marion during my absence. She is a dear, good child, and will not, I am sure, give you any trouble.'

The other letter was from the matron of an orphan asylum, and ran like this:

'My dear Madam: We have two or three little girls for adoption near the age you speak of. If you will do us the favor to call we shall be glad to have you see them.'

'Well, well,' mused the lady, 'it never rains but it pours. If I had known of Marian coming, I would have let the other matter wait. But what is the difference? Marian will be full of interest, and will make the house brighter for a strange little one. There need be no delay.'

So, when Marian, bringing with her sixteen years a breeze of youth and sweetness and overflow of spirits, was settled in the house, Mrs. Vernon told her of her new plan. Not at all dwelling on the loneliness which had darkened her life since four years before the light of her eyes and the joy of her heart had gone out from her widowed home. Not speaking of all the hopes and fears bound up in this experiment, only quietly saying:

'Marian, I'm going to have someone else here. Some one who will, perhaps, make the old house seem a little less dull. I am going this afternoon to visit an orphan asylum, with a view to taking a little girl for adoption. You would like to go with me?'

'Why—Aunt Emily!' In the dear girl's look of surprise her aunt could read all she would not express of realization of all this must mean. Mrs. Vernon made no reply to her exclamation, and she presently went on, her words tripping over each other in her confused desire to say, without saying too much, something which would tell of her astonishment and her sympathy.

'Dear Aunt Emily! Well, I'm so glad. Well—dear me, auntie—I'm sure it would be so nice for you—and help you, too—not to forget, you know, but— Well, well, how we shall love her—' observing in her lovingly anxious reading of her aunt's face that she was resolutely determined to put away the pathetic side of the affair. 'And you are going to take me—what fun it will be. To pick her out like a doll or something. O auntie, I hope—I hope—'

There were tears in the rattling voice, as after throwing her arms around her aunt, she made some excuse for getting out of the room.

But tears were set aside as they took the short journey to the orphan asylum in a neighboring city. Arrived there, they were shown into a small parlor, in which were the matron and half a dozen little girls of about six or seven years of age. She had chosen this way of placing them under observation, without making it evident to the little things that they were under close and interested criticism. Quietly the matron indicated the three whom she thought would please best, one being a sturdy, frank-faced little maide, giving in her well-formed features promise of future beauty, another with dancing blue eyes and fair curls,

who with fearless chatter at once made friends with the visitors.

Mrs. Vernon did not care for blue eyes—they were too like those which had closed years before, and her heart seemed to go out to the third, a quiet little thing who held shyly aloof from the strangers, and in whose dark eyes lay a sadness not rightly belonging with her years. The matron after a while dismissed the children, and they engaged in animated conversation.

'I like the jolly little thing, don't you, Aunt Emily?' began Marian.

'Very well, dear,' was the answer. 'But,' she added, to the matron, 'what is the matter with the little dark-eyed one? She has such a sad look.'

'Ah, poor little soul, there's good reason for that, though it isn't one child in a hundred that would take it so hard. She's one of twins—little beauties, ma'am, as like to each other as two peas. They didn't seem to have a wish except to be together. And a little while ago some one came and took the other one. I didn't let Bessie know when her sister was taken away, thinking it would be easier for her. But when I came to having to tell her—if ever there was a thing that seemed to have its heart broke it was that child.'

'Poor little thing!'

'Yes, ma'am, she looked straight at me, and never cried a tear. She don't seem to care for anything since. Never plays with the other children.'

'Do you know anything of her parents?'

'They came of a good lot. One of the sad stories we often hear. Mother was the daughter of a country preacher, and her kin were all dead, and they came to the city to find work, and something happened to the husband—railway accident or something—and she set out on her struggle all alone to support the two. Worked her life out on it, I suppose, for,' with a little motion of her hand, 'they're here.'

'Do you know who it was that took the other one?'

'I can find out by looking at the records. We always aim to keep track of our little ones. A good, honest sort of a body it was, ma'am, but I think she was taken more as a help than as the other child would be with you. And I heard she moved away afterwards, but it's likely her address is left here.'

'It's of no consequence. The little things will find happiness in their new lives, it is to be hoped. Don't you think, Marian,' she added, 'that we might manage to put some gladness into those pitiful little eyes?'

'Of course we could,' was the enthusiastic answer. 'She's so young—she'll soon forget.'

Fifteen minutes later the grave eyes were facing the two in the front seat of the carriage.

'She's to have other clothes?' Marian spoke in a lowered voice, as she took in disapprovingly the blue gingham and poke bonnet. 'Just as if,' venturing a glance at her aunt, as if in fear of approaching a sore subject, 'as if—as she would have if she were—your own little girl.'

'Exactly so, Marian. She is my own little girl. You must help me to select for her.'

'Of all the delightful things. Aunt Emily, I think it's more than lovely of you to let me into such a beautiful time. Little boots and things, and one of those cunning bonnets that ruffle round the face till it looks like a flower.'

She led the little stranger, as having returned home they entered a large store and went from counter to counter, rejoicing over dainty stockings and underwear, insisting with girlish delight, on having a large say-so in orders given for the making of some garments, the selection of others for immediate use, urging their being taken to the carriage, that there might be no delay in their reaching home.

Mrs. Vernon herself took her to the bath-room, the child to whom she intended giving as large and warm a place in her heart as could be given to anything in the present or future. Mothers who have caressed for the last time little limbs now laid away to their too early rest may imagine the feeling with which she ministered to the motherless child—with earnest prayer that two aching hearts might be healed by the new bond.

Marian was allowed the privilege of assisting in the robing. It would be difficult to say whether smiles or tears were nearest as she gave tender help, but with her usual chatter she beguiled what to her aunt, with real thankfulness for the presence of the lively girl, might have proved a trying occasion. A touch of the underlying pain came when Marian, having patted down and stood up and tied and hooked to her heart's content, led the child before a full-length mirror, saying:

'Now see our little girl.'

There was a slow glance, then with a wailing cry came the words: 'It's as if there were two of us.'

Suatching her hand from the kindly clasp, she rushed to a sofa, flung herself on it and sobbed as only children who have felt the stamp of sorrow on their lives can sob.

It was pitiful, the forlorn little figure turning away from those who could but be strangers to her, fighting out her sorrow alone. Mrs. Vernon gathered her in her arms, and she did not refuse the attempt at loving comfort.

The small stranger soon made her place in her new home. She was docile and obedient, showing pleasure in the pleasant things about her and a sweet, gentle gratitude for kindnesses done her. She was sent to a small kindergarten near, and was quietly interested, rather passively joining in the pursuits and plays of her companions. But with all, her adopted mother saw with a pain in her heart that there was little of the real buoyancy of happy childhood—that the look of sadness, sometimes disappearing for a time in some new interest, always came back to the soft eyes. Marian spoke of it half impatiently.

'I can't seem to really stir her up, auntie. She plays with me when I make her, and laughs a little, and does as I tell her, but she doesn't squeal and dance about and be a little witch, as such a mite ought to. She isn't glad, no matter what we do.'

'No, she is not glad,' Mrs. Vernon sorrowfully admitted. 'Perhaps we can make her so as time goes on.'

Something made her so in time. On an early closing-in autumn afternoon Bessie was so late in returning from school that her mother became alarmed. Just as a servant was about to go in search of the little one, she bounded into the house, so unlike what she had ever been seen before by her foster-mother as to fill her with surprise and delight. What could have occasioned the glowing cheeks, the beaming eyes and the dancing footsteps?

'Why, my little girl, you are so late.'