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Elsie's Motherhood

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Imprint

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"Sweet is the image of the brooding dove!
Holy as heaven a mother's tender love!
The love of many prayers and many tears,
Which changes not with dim declining years —
The only love which, on this teeming earth,
Asks no return for passion's wayward birth."

MRS. NORTON.

PREFACE.

In compliance with the expressed desire of many of Elsie's friends and admirers, the story of her life is continued in this, the fifth volume of the series.

When about to undertake its preparation the suggestion was made to the author that to bring in the doings of the Ku Klux would add interest to the story, and at the same time give a truer picture of life in the South during the years 1867-68 in which its events take place.

The published reports of the Congressional Committee of Investigation were resorted to as the most reliable source of information, diligently examined, and care taken not to go beyond the facts there given as regards the proceedings of the Klan, the clemency and paternal acts of the Government, or the kindly, fraternal feelings and deeds of the people of the North toward their impoverished and suffering brethren of the South.

These things have become matters of history: vice and crime should be condemned wherever found; and naught has been set down in malice; for the author has a warm love for the South as part and parcel of the dear land of her birth.

May this child of her brain give pain to none, but prove pleasant and profitable to all who peruse its pages, and especially helpful to young parents,

M. F.

Chapter First.

"Meantime a smiling offspring rises round,
And mingles both their graces. By degrees
The human blossom blows, and every day,
Soft as it rolls along, shows some new charm,
The father's lustre, and the mother's bloom."
—Thomson's Seasons

"Mamma! Papa too!" It was a glad shout of a chorus of young voices as four pairs of little feet came pattering up the avenue and into the veranda; then as many ruby lips were held up for the morning kiss from the children's dearly loved father.

They had already had their half hour with mamma, which made so sweet a beginning of each day, yet she too must have a liberal share of the eagerly bestowed caresses; while Bruno, a great Newfoundland, the pet, playfellow, and guardian of the little flock, testified his delight in the scene by leaping about among them, fawning upon one and another, wagging his tail, and uttering again and again a short, joyous bark.

Then followed a merry romp, cut short by the ringing of the breakfast bell, when all trooped into the house, Harold riding on papa's shoulder, mamma following with Elsie, Eddie and Vi; while Dinah, with Baby Herbert in her arms; brought up the rear.

The children had been very gay, full of laughter and sweet innocent prattle, but a sudden hush fell upon them when seated about the table in the bright, cheerful breakfast parlor; little hands were meekly folded and each young head bent reverently over the plate, while in a few simple words which all could understand, their father gave God thanks for their food and asked his blessing upon it.

The Ion children were never rude even in their play, and their table manners were almost perfect; made the constant companions of

cultivated, refined parents—whose politeness springing from genuine unselfishness, was never laid aside, but shown on all occasions and to rich and poor, old and young alike—and governed with a wise mixture of indulgence and restraint, mildness and firmness, they imitated the copies set before them and were seldom other than gentle and amiable in their deportment, not only toward their superiors, but to equals and inferiors also.

They were never told that "children should be seen and not heard," but when no guests were present, were allowed to talk in moderation; a gentle word or look of reproof from papa or mamma being quite sufficient to check any tendency to boisterousness or undue loquacity.

"I think we should celebrate this anniversary, Elsie," remarked Mr. Travilla, stirring his coffee and gazing with fond admiration into the sweet face at the opposite end of the table.

"Yes, sir, though we are rather late in thinking of it," she answered smilingly, the rose deepening slightly on her cheek as delicately rounded and tinted as it had been ten years ago.

Little Elsie looked up inquiringly. "What is it, papa? I do not remember."

"Do you not? Ten years ago to-day there was a grand wedding at the Oaks, and your mamma and I were there."

"I too?" asked Eddie.

"Yes, course, Eddie," spoke up five year old Violet, "grandpa would 'vite you and all of us; and I b'lieve I 'member a *little* about it."

"Me too," piped the baby voice of Harold, "me sat on papa's knee."

There was a general laugh, the two little prattlers joining in right merrily.

"I really don't remember that part of it, Harold," said papa, while wee Elsie—as she was often called by way of distinguishing her from mamma, for whom she was named—shook her curly head at him with a merry "Oh, you dear little rogue, you don't know what

you are talking about," and mamma remarked, "Vi has perhaps a slight recollection of May Allison's wedding."

"But this one at the Oaks must have been before I was born," said Elsie, "because you said it was ten years ago, and I'm only nine. O, mamma, was it *your* wedding?"

"Yes, daughter. Shall we invite our friends for this evening, Edward?"

"Yes, wife; suppose we make it a family party, inviting only relatives, connections and very intimate friends."

After a little more discussion it was decided they would do so; also that the children should have a full holiday, and while their mother was giving orders and overseeing the necessary preparations for the entertainment, papa should take them all in the roomy family carriage and drive over to the Oaks, Roselands, Ashlands and Pinegrove to give the invitations. Beside these near friends only the minister and his wife were to be asked; but as Adelaide and her family were at this time paying a visit to Roselands, and Lucy Ross was doing the same at her old home, and all the younger generation except the mere babies, were to be included in the invitation, should all accept it would be by no means a small assemblage.

Early hours were named for the sake of the little ones; guests to come at six, refreshments to be served at eight, and the Ion children, if each would take a nap in the afternoon, to be allowed to stay up till nine.

How delighted they were: how the little eyes danced and sparkled, and how eagerly they engaged to fulfill the conditions, and not to fret or look cross when summoned at nine, to leave the drawing-room and be put to bed.

"O, mamma, won't you wear your wedding dress?" cried little Elsie; "do, dear mamma, so that we may all see just how you looked when you were married."

Elsie smiled, "You forget, daughter, that I am ten years older now, and the face cannot be quite the same."

"The years have robbed it of none of its beauty," said Mr. Travilla.

"Ah, love is blind," she returned with a blush and smile as charming as those of her girlhood's days. "And the dress is quite out of date."

"No matter for that. It would gratify me as well as the children to see you in it."

"Then it shall be worn, if it fits or can be altered in season."

"Veil and all, mamma," pleaded Elsie, "it is so beautiful—Mammy showed it to me only the other day and told me you looked so, *so* lovely; and she will put the orange blossoms in your hair and on your dress just as they were that night; for she remembers all about it."

The children, ready dressed for their drive, were gathered in a merry group on the veranda, Eddie astride of Bruno, waiting for papa and the carriage, when a horse came cantering up the avenue, and Mr. Horace Dinsmore alighted and stepped into their midst.

"Oh, grandpa, what you turn for?" cried Harold in a tone of disappointment, "we was dus doin to 'vite you!"

"Indeed!"

"Yes, grandpa, it's a 'versary to-day" explained Vi.

"And mamma's going to be married over again," said Eddie.

"No, no; only to have a party and wear her wedding dress," corrected Elsie.

"Papa, good morning," cried their mother, coming swiftly through, the hall, "I'm so glad, always so glad to see you."

"I know it," he said, pressing a fatherly kiss on the sweet lips, then holding her off for an instant to gaze fondly into the fair face. "And it is ten years to-day since I gave Travilla a share in my treasure. I was thinking of it as I rode over and that you should celebrate this anniversary at your father's house."

"No, no, Dinsmore, you must be our guest," said Travilla, coming out and shaking hands cordially with his old friend. "We have it all arranged,—a family gathering, and Elsie to gratify us by wearing

her bridal robes. Do you not agree with me that she would make as lovely a bride to-day as she did ten years ago?"

"Quite. I relinquish my plan for yours; and don't let me detain you and these eager children."

"I thank you: I will go then, as the invitations will be late enough with all the haste we can make."

The carriage was at the door and in a trice grandpa and papa had helped the little ones in: not even Baby Herbert was left behind, but seated on his mammy's lap crowed and laughed as merrily as the rest.

"Ah, mamma, you come too!" pleaded the little voices, as their father took his place beside them. "Can't mammy and Aunt Dicey and the rest know what to do without you to tell them?"

"Not this time, dears; and you know I must make haste to try on the dress, to see if it fits."

"Oh, yes, mamma!" and throwing a shower of kisses, they drove off.

"A carriage load of precious jewels," Elsie said, looking after it as it rolled away: "how the ten years have added to my wealth, papa."

She stood by his side, her hand on his arm, and the soft sweet eyes lifted to his were full of a content and gladness beyond the power of words to express.

"I thank God every day for my darling's happiness," he said low and tenderly, and softly smoothing her shining hair.

"Ah, it is very great, and my father's dear love forms no small part of it. But come in, papa, I want to consult you about one or two little matters; Edward and I rely very much upon your taste and judgment."

"To Roselands first," was Mr. Travilla's order to the coachman.

The old home of the Dinsmores, though shorn of the glory of its grand old trees, was again a beautiful place: the new house was in every respect a finer one than its predecessor, of a higher style of architecture, more conveniently arranged, more tastefully and handsomely furnished; lawns, gardens and fields had become neat

and trim as in the days before the war, and a double row of young, thrifty trees bordered the avenue.

Old Mr. Dinsmore now resided there and gave a home to his two widowed and impoverished daughters—Mrs. Louise Conly, and Mrs. Enna Johnson—and their families.

These two aunts loved Elsie no better than in earlier years: it was gall and wormwood to them to know that they owed all these comforts to her generosity; nor could they forgive her that she was more wealthy, beautiful, lovely and beloved than themselves. Enna was the more bitter and outspoken of the two, but even Louise seldom treated her niece to anything better than the most distant and frigid politeness.

In a truly Christian spirit Elsie returned them pity and compassion, because of their widowhood and straitened circumstances, invited them to her house, and when they came received them with kindness and cordiality.

Her grandfather had grown very fond of her and her children, was often at Ion, and for his sake she occasionally visited Roselands. Adelaide's presence had drawn her there more frequently of late. The invitation Mr. Travilla carried was to the grandfather, three aunts and all their children.

Adelaide and Enna were in the drawing-room when the Ion carriage drew up at the door.

"There's Travilla, the old scalawag: how I hate him! Elsie too, I presume," exclaimed the latter, glancing from the window; "I'll leave you to entertain them," and she hastily left the room.

Adelaide flashed an indignant look after her, and hurried out to meet and welcome the callers. Mr. Travilla had alighted and was coming up the steps of the veranda.

"How d'ye do. I'm *very* glad to see you," cried Adelaide, extending her hand, "but where is Elsie?"

"Left at home for once," he answered gayly, "but I come this morning merely as her ladyship's messenger."

"But won't you come in; you and the children?"

"Thanks, no, if you will permit me just to deliver my message and go; for I am in haste."

Mrs. Allison accepted the invitation for herself and children with evident pleasure, engaged that her sisters would do the same; then went to the carriage window for a moment's chat with the little ones, each of whom held a large place in her warm heart. "Aunt Addie," said Elsie in an undertone, "mamma's going to wear her wedding dress to-night, veil and all."

"Is she? why that's an excellent idea. But don't tell it anywhere else that you go; it will be such a nice surprise to the rest if we can keep it a secret."

"That was a good suggestion of Aunt Addie's," Mr. Travilla remarked as they drove down the avenue. "Suppose we carry it out. How many of you can refrain from telling what mamma is to wear to-night? how many can I trust to keep a secret?"

"All of us, papa!" "Me, papa, me, I won't tell," cried the little voices in chorus.

"Yes, I believe I can trust you all," he answered in his bright cheery way. "Now on to the Oaks, Solon, then to Pinegrove, Springbrook, and Ashlands. That will be the last place, children, and as our hurry will then be over, you shall get out of the carriage and have a little time to rest before we start for home."

Re-entering the house Mrs. Allison went to the family sitting-room where she found both her sisters and several of the younger members of the household. "So they have asked for us?" exclaimed Louise in a tone of vexation, "at such an unreasonable hour too. Well," with a sigh of resignation, "I suppose we must show ourselves or papa will be displeased: so wonderfully fond of Elsie as he has grown of late."

"As well he may," returned Adelaide pointedly; "but Elsie is not here nor has any one inquired for you."

"No, I presume not," interrupted Enna with a sneer, "we are not worth inquiring for."

Indignation kept Adelaide silent for a moment, she was sorely tempted to administer a severe and cutting rebuke. But Enna was

no longer a child, and controlling herself she calmly delivered Mr. Travilla's message.

"Oh, delightful! Cousin Elsie always does give such splendid parties, such elegant refreshments!" cried Virginia and Isadore Conly, girls of ten and twelve, "mamma, you'll never think of declining?"

"No, your grandfather wouldn't like it," said Louise, as anxious as her daughters to enjoy the entertainment, yet glad to save her pride, by putting her acceptance on the score of pleasing her father.

"And you'll go too, and take us, mamma, won't you?" anxiously queried

Molly Percival, who was between her cousins in age.

"Of course I'll go; we all want our share of the good things, and the pleasure of seeing and being seen," answered Enna, scorning Louise's subterfuge; "and if you and Dick will promise to make me no trouble, I'll take you along. But Bob and Betty may stay at home, I'm not going to be bothered with them,—babies of five and three. But what shall we wear, Lu? I do say it's real mean in them to give us so short a notice. But of course Elsie enjoys making me feel my changed circumstances. I've no such stock of jewels, silks and laces as she, nor the full purse that makes it an easy matter for her to order a fresh supply at a moment's warning."

"You have all, and more than the occasion calls for," remarked Adelaide quietly; "it is to be only a family gathering."

Chapter Second.

"Though fools spurn Hymen's gentle powers,
We, who improve his golden hours,
By sweet experience know
That marriage, rightly understood,
Gives to the tender and the good
A paradise below."
—Cotton

Mr. Allison had fully kept his promise to Sophie, and Ashlands was again the fine old place it had been prior to the war. The family, consisting of the elder Mrs. Carrington, a young man, named George Boyd, a nephew of hers who had taken charge of the plantation, Sophie and her four children, had now been in possession for over a year.

Sophie, still an almost inconsolable mourner for the husband of her youth, lived a very retired life, devoting herself to his mother and his orphaned little ones.

Mrs. Ross, expecting to spend the fall and winter with them, had brought all her children and a governess, Miss Fisk, who undertook the tuition of the little Carringtons also during her stay at Ashlands, thus leaving the mothers more at liberty for the enjoyment of each other's society.

It was in the midst of school-hours that the Ion carriage came driving up the avenue, and Philip Ross, lifting his head from the slate over which he had been bending for the last half hour, rose hastily, threw down his pencil and hurried from the room, paying no attention to Miss Fisk's query, "Where are you going, Philip?" or her command, "Come back instantly: it is quite contrary to rules for pupils to leave the school-room during the hours of recitation, without permission." Indeed he had reached the foot of the staircase

before the last word had left her lips; she being very slow and precise in speech and action, while his movements were of the quickest.

"What now is to be done in this emergency?" soliloquized the governess, unconsciously thinking aloud. "Miss Gertrude Ross," turning to a girl of nine whose merry blue eyes were twinkling with fun, "follow your brother at once and inform him that I cannot permit any such act of insubordination; and he must return instantly to the performance of his duties."

"Yes ma'am," and Gertrude vanished; glad enough of the opportunity to see for herself who were the new arrivals. "Phil," she said, entering the drawing-room where the guests were already seated, "Miss Fisk says you're an insubordination and must come back instantly."

"Gertude," said her mother, laughing "come and speak to Mr. Travilla and your little friends. Why yes, Phil, to be sure; how came you here when you ought to be at your lessons?"

"Because I wanted to see Elsie Travilla," he answered nonchalantly.

"Yes, but you should have asked for permission. I ought to send you back."

"But you won't, ma, you know that as well as I do. I'll not go back a step while Elsie stays."

"Well, well, it seems you are bound to have your own way, as usual,"

Lucy answered, half laughing, half sighing, then resumed her talk with Mr. Travilla.

Seeing that the little Travillas had listened to this colloquy in blank amazement, she felt much mortified at Phil's behavior, and on receiving the invitation threatened to leave him at home as a punishment. But this only made matters worse: he insisted that go he would, and if she refused permission he should never, never love her again as long as he lived. And she weakly yielded.

"Lucy," said her mother, when the guests were gone, and the children had left the room, "you are ruining that boy."

"Well, I don't see how I can help it, mamma how could I bear to lose his affection?"

"You are taking the very course to bring that about; it is the weakly indulged, not the wisely controlled, children who lose, first respect, and then affection for their parents. Look at Elsie's little family for instance; where can you find children ruled with a firmer hand, or more devotedly attached to their parents?"

Eddie was at that moment saying to his father, "Papa, isn't Phil Ross a very, *very* naughty boy, to be so saucy and disobedient to his mamma?"

"My son," answered Mr. Travilla with gentle gravity, "when you have corrected all Eddie Travilla's faults it will be time enough to attend to those of others." And the child hung his head and blushed for shame.

It was Mr. and Mrs. Horace Dinsmore who did the honors at Ion early in the evening, receiving and welcoming each bevy of guests, and replying to the oft repeated inquiry for the master and mistress of the establishment, that they would make their appearance shortly.

Elsie's children, most sweetly and becomingly dressed, had gathered about "Aunt Rosie," in a corner of the drawing-room, and seemed to be waiting with a sort of intense but quiet eagerness for the coming of some expected event.

At length every invited guest had arrived. All being so thoroughly acquainted, nearly all related, there was an entire absence of stiffness and constraint, and much lively chat had been carried on; but a sudden hush fell upon them, and every eye turned toward the doors opening into the hall, expecting—they knew not what.

There were soft foot-falls, a slight rustle of silk, and Adelaide entered followed by Mr. Travilla with Elsie on his arm, in bridal attire. The shimmering satin, rich, soft lace and orange blossoms became her well; and never, even on that memorable night ten years ago, had she looked lovelier or more bride-like; never had her husband

bent a prouder, fonder look upon her fair face than now as he led her to the centre of the room, where they paused in front of their pastor.

A low murmur of surprise and delight ran round the room, but was suddenly stilled, as the venerable man rose and began to speak.

"Ten years ago to-night, dear friends, I united you in marriage. Edward Travilla, you then vowed to love, honor and cherish till life's end the woman whom you now hold by the hand. Have you repented of that vow? and would you be released?"

"Not for worlds: there has been no repentance, but my love has grown deeper and stronger day by day."

"And you, Elsie Dinsmore Travilla, also vowed to love, honor and obey the man you hold by the hand. Have you repented?"

"Never, sir; never for one moment." The accents were low, sweet, clear, and full of pleasure.

"I pronounce you a faithful man and wife: and may God, in his good providence, grant you many returns of this happy anniversary."

Old Mr. Dinsmore stepped up, kissed the bride and shook hands with the groom. "Blessings on you for making her so happy," he said in quivering tones.

His son followed, then the others in their turn, and a merry scene ensued.

"Mamma, it was so pretty, *so* pretty," little Elsie said, clasping her arms about her mother's neck, "and now I just feel as if I'd been to your wedding. Thank you, dear mamma and papa."

"Mamma, you are so beautiful, I'll just marry you myself, when I'm a man," remarked Eddie, giving her a hearty kiss, then gazing into her face with his great dark eyes full of love and admiration.

"I too," chimed in Violet. "No, no, I forget, I shall be a lady myself: so I'll have to marry papa."

"No, Vi, oo tan't have my papa; he's dus' my papa always," objected Harold, climbing his father's knee.