









"Oh! time of promise, hope, and innocence, Of trust, and love,  
and happy ignorance! Whose every dream is heaven, in whose fair  
joy Experience yet has thrown no black alloy."

**– THOUGHTS OF A RECLUSE**



## **PREFACE**

Some years have now elapsed since my little heroine "ELSIE DINSMORE" made her début into the great world. She was sent out with many an anxious thought regarding the reception that might await her there. But she was kindly welcomed, and such has been the favor shown her ever since that Publishers and Author have felt encouraged to prepare a new volume in which will be found the story of those years that have carried Elsie on from childhood to womanhood—the years in which her character was developing, and mind and body were growing and strengthening for the real work and battle of life.

May my readers who have admired and loved her as a child find her still more charming in her fresh young girlhood; may she prove to all a pleasant companion and friend; and to those of them now treading the same portion of life's pathway a useful example also, particularly in her filial love and obedience.

**M.F.**



## CHAPTER I.

It is a busy, talking world.

—**ROWE.**

"I think I shall enjoy the fortnight we are to spend here, papa; it seems such a very pleasant place," Elsie remarked, in a tone of great satisfaction.

"I am glad you are pleased with it, daughter," returned Mr. Dinsmore, opening the morning paper, which John had just brought up.

They—Mr. Dinsmore and Elsie, Rose and Edward Allison—were occupying very comfortable quarters in a large hotel at one of our fashionable watering-places. A bedroom for each, and a private parlor for the joint use of the party, had been secured in advance, and late the night before they had arrived and taken possession.

It was now early in the morning, Elsie and her papa were in his room, which was in the second story and opened upon a veranda, shaded by tall trees, and overlooking a large grassy yard at the side of the building. Beyond were green fields, woods, and hills.

"Papa," said Elsie, gazing longingly upon them, as she stood by the open window, "can't we take a walk?"

"When Miss Rose is ready to go with us."

"May I run to her door and ask if she is?—and if she isn't, may I wait for her out here on the veranda?"

"Yes."

She skipped away, but was back again almost immediately. "Papa, what do you think? It's just too bad!"

"What is too bad, daughter? I think I never before saw so cross a look on my little girl's face," he said, peering at her over the top of his newspaper. "Come here, and tell me what it is all about."

She obeyed, hanging her head and blushing. "I think I have some reason to be cross, papa," she said; "I thought we were going to have such a delightful time here, and now it is all spoiled. You could never guess who has the rooms just opposite ours; on the other side of the hall."

"Miss Stevens?"

"Why, papa; did you know she was here?"

"I knew she was in the house, because I saw her name in the hotel book last night when I went to register ours."

"And it just spoils all our pleasure."

"I hope not, daughter. I think she will hardly annoy you when you are close at my side; and that is pretty much all the time, isn't it?"

"Yes, papa, and I'll stick closer than ever to you if that will make her let me alone," she cried, with a merry laugh, putting her arm round his neck and kissing him two or three times.

"Ah, now I have my own little girl again," he said, drawing her to his knee and returning her caresses with interest: "But there, I hear Miss Rose's step in the hall. Run to mammy and have your hat put on."

Miss Stevens' presence proved scarcely less annoying to Elsie than the child had anticipated. She tried to keep out of the lady's way, but it was quite impossible. She could scarcely step out on the veranda, go into the parlor, or take a turn in the garden by herself, but in a moment Miss Stevens was at her side fawning upon and flattering her—telling her how sweet and pretty and amiable she was, how dearly she loved her, and how much she thought of her papa too: he was so handsome and so good; everybody admired him and thought him such a fine-looking gentleman, so polished in his manners, so agreeable and entertaining in conversation.

Then she would press all sorts of dainties upon the little girl in such a way that it was next to impossible to decline them, and occa-

sionally even went so far as to suggest improvements, or rather alterations, in her dress, which she said was entirely too plain.

"You ought to have more flounces on your skirts, my dear," she remarked one day. "Skirt flounced to the waist are so very pretty and dressy, and you would look sweetly in them, but I notice you don't wear them at all. Do ask your papa to let you get a new dress and have it made so; I am sure he would consent, for any one can see that he is very fond of you. He doesn't think of it; we can't expect gentlemen to notice such little matters; you ought to have a mamma to attend to such things for you. Ah! if you were my child, I would dress you sweetly, you dear little thing!"

"Thank you, ma'am, I daresay you mean to be very kind," replied Elsie, trying not to look annoyed, "but I don't want a mamma, since my own dear mother has gone to heaven; papa is enough for me, and I like the way he dresses me. He always buys my dresses himself and says how they are to be made. The dressmaker wanted to put more flounces on, but papa didn't want them and neither did I. He says he doesn't like to see little girls loaded with finery, and that my clothes shall be of the best material and nicely made, but neat and simple."

"Oh, yes; I know your dress is not cheap; I didn't mean that at all: it is quite expensive enough, and some of your white dresses are beautifully worked; but I would like a little more ornament. You wear so little jewelry, and your father could afford to cover you with it if he chose. A pair of gold bracelets, like mine for instance, would be very pretty, and look charming on your lovely white arms: those pearl ones you wear sometimes are very handsome—any one could tell that they are the real thing—but you ought to have gold ones too, with clasps set with diamonds. Couldn't you persuade your papa to buy some for you?"

"Indeed, Miss Stevens, I don't want them! I don't want anything but what papa chooses to buy for me of his own accord. Ah! there is Miss Rose looking for me, I must go," and the little girl, glad of an excuse to get away, ran joyfully to her friend who had come to the veranda, where she and Miss Stevens had been standing, to tell her that they were going out to walk, and her papa wished to take her along.

Elsie went in to get her hat, and Miss Stevens came towards Rose, saying, "I think I heard you say you were going to walk; and I believe, if you don't forbid me, I shall do myself the pleasure of accompanying you. I have just been waiting for pleasant company. I will be ready in one moment." And before Rose could recover from her astonishment sufficiently to reply she had disappeared through the hall door.

Elsie was out again in a moment, just as the gentlemen had joined Rose, who excited their surprise and disgust by a repetition of Miss Stevens' speech to her.

Mr. Dinsmore looked excessively annoyed, and Edward "pshawed, and wished her at the bottom of the sea."

"No, brother," said Rose, smiling, "you don't wish any such thing; on the contrary, you would be the very first to fly to the rescue if you saw her in danger of drowning."

But before there was time for anything more to be said Miss Stevens had returned, and walking straight up to Mr. Dinsmore, she put her arm through his, saying with a little laugh, and what was meant for a very arch expression, "You see I don't stand upon ceremony with old friends, Mr. Dinsmore. It isn't my way."

"No, Miss Stevens, I think it never was," he replied, offering the other arm to Rose.

She was going to decline it on the plea that the path was too narrow for three, but something in his look made her change her mind and accept; and they moved on, while Elsie, almost ready to cry with vexation, fell behind with Edward Allison for an escort.

Edward tried to entertain his young companion, but was too much provoked at the turn things had taken to make himself very agreeable to any one; and altogether it was quite an uncomfortable walk: no one seeming to enjoy it but Miss Stevens, who laughed and talked incessantly; addressing nearly all her conversation to Mr. Dinsmore, he answering her with studied politeness, but nothing more.

Miss Stevens had, from the first, conceived a great antipathy to Rose, whom she considered a dangerous rival, and generally avoided, excepting when Mr. Dinsmore was with her; but she always interrupted a tête-à-tête between them when it was in her power to do so without being guilty of very great rudeness. This, and the covert sneers with which she often addressed Miss Allison had not escaped Mr. Dinsmore's notice, and it frequently cost him quite an effort to treat Miss Stevens with the respectful politeness which he considered due to her sex and to the daughter of his father's old friend.

"Was it not too provoking, papa?" exclaimed Elsie, as she followed him into his room on their return from their walk.

"What, my dear?"

"Why, papa, I thought we were going to have such a nice time, and she just spoiled it all."

"She? who, daughter?"

"Why, papa, surely you know I mean Miss Stevens!"

"Then why did you not mention her name, instead of speaking of her as she? That does not sound respectful in a child of your age, and I wish my little girl always to be respectful to those older than herself. I thought I heard you the other day mention some gentleman's name without the prefix of Mr., and I intended to reprove you for it at the time. Don't do it again."

"No, sir, I won't," Elsie answered with a blush. "But, papa," she added the next moment, "Miss Stevens does that constantly."

"That makes no difference, my daughter," he said gravely. "Miss Stevens is the very last person I would have you take for your model; the less you resemble her in dress, manners, or anything else, the better. If you wish to copy any one let it be Miss Allison, for she is a perfect lady in every respect."

Elsie looked very much pleased. "Yes, indeed, papa," she said, "I should be glad if I could be just like Miss Rose, she is always kind and gentle to everybody; even the servants, whom Miss Stevens orders about so crossly."

"Elsie!"

"What, papa?" she asked, blushing again, for his tone was reproving.

"Come here and sit on my knee; I want to talk to you. I am afraid my little daughter is growing censorious," he said, with a very grave look as he drew her to his side. "You forget that we ought not to speak of other people's faults."

"I will try not to do it any more, papa," she replied, the tears springing to her eyes; "but you don't know how very annoying Miss Stevens is. I have been near telling her several times that I did wish she would let me alone."

"No, daughter, don't do that. You must behave in a lady-like manner whether she does or not. We must expect annoyances in this world, my child; and must try to bear them with patience, remembering that God sends the little trials as well as the great, and that He has commanded us to 'let patience have her perfect work.' I fear it is a lack of the spirit of forgiveness that makes it so difficult for us to bear these trifling vexations with equanimity. And you must remember too, dear, that the Bible bids us be courteous, and teaches us to treat others as we ourselves would wish to be treated."

"I think you always remember the command to be courteous, papa," she said, looking affectionately into his face. "I was wondering all the time how you could be so very polite to Miss Stevens; for I was quite sure you would rather not have had her along. And then, what right had she to take your arm without being asked?" and Elsie's face flushed with indignation.

Her father laughed a little. "And thus deprive my little girl of her rights," he said, softly kissing the glowing cheek. "Ah! I doubt if you would have been angry had it been Miss Rose," he added, a little mischievously.

"Oh, papa, you know Miss Rose would never have done such a thing!" exclaimed the little girl warmly.

"Ah! well, dear," he said in a soothing tone; "we won't talk any more about it. I acknowledge that I do not find Miss Stevens the most agreeable company in the world, but I must treat her politely, and show her a little attention sometimes; both because she is a lady

and because her father once saved my father's life; for which I owe a debt of gratitude to him and his children."

"Did he, papa? I am sure it was very good of him, and I will try to like Miss Stevens for that. But won't you tell me about it?"

"It was when they were both quite young men," said Mr. Dinsmore, "before either of them was married: they were skating together and your grandfather broke through the ice, and would have been drowned, but for the courage and presence of mind of Mr. Stevens, who saved him only by very great exertion, and at the risk of his own life."

A few days after this, Elsie was playing on the veranda, with several other little girls. "Do you think you shall like your new mamma, Elsie?" asked one of them in a careless tone, as she tied on an apron she had just been making for her doll, and turned it around to see how it fitted.

"My new mamma!" exclaimed Elsie, with unfeigned astonishment, dropping the scissors with which she had been cutting paper dolls for some of the little ones. "What can you mean, Annie? I am not going to have any new mamma."

"Yes, indeed, but you are though," asserted Annie positively; "for I heard my mother say so only yesterday; and it must be so, for she Miss Stevens told it herself."

"Miss Stevens! and what does she know about it? what has she to do with my papa's affairs?" asked Elsie indignantly, the color rushing over face, neck, and arms.

"Well, I should think she might know, when she is going to marry him," returned the other, with a laugh.

"She isn't! it's false! my" – but Elsie checked herself and shut her teeth hard to keep down the emotion that was swelling in her breast.

"It's true, you may depend upon it," replied Annie; "everybody in the house knows it, and they are all talking about what a splendid match Miss Stevens is going to make; and mamma was wondering if you knew it, and how you would like her; and papa said he thought Mr. Dinsmore wouldn't think much of her if he knew how

she flirted and danced until he came, and now pretends not to approve of balls, just because he doesn't."

Elsie made no reply, but dropping scissors, paper, and everything, sprang up and ran swiftly along the veranda, through the hall, upstairs, and without pausing to take breath, rushed into her father's room, where he sat quietly reading.

"Why, Elsie, daughter, what is the matter?" he asked in a tone of surprise and concern, as he caught sight of her flushed and agitated face.

"Oh, papa, it's that hateful Miss Stevens; I can't bear her!" she cried, throwing herself upon his breast, and bursting into a fit of passionate weeping.

Mr. Dinsmore said nothing for a moment; but thinking tears would prove the best relief to her overwrought feelings, contented himself with simply stroking her hair in a soothing way, and once or twice pressing his lips gently to her forehead.

"You feel better now, dearest, do you not?" he asked presently, as she raised her head to wipe away her tears.

"Yes, papa."

"Now tell me what it was all about."

"Miss Stevens does say such hateful things, papa!"

He laid his finger upon her lips. "Don't use that word again. It does not sound at all like my usually gentle sweet-tempered little girl."

"I won't, papa," she murmured, blushing and hanging her head. Then hiding her face on his breast, she lay there for several minutes perfectly silent and still.

"What is my little girl thinking of?" he asked at length.

"How everybody talks about you, papa; last evening I was out on the veranda, and I heard John and Miss Stevens' maid, Phillis, talking together. It was moonlight, you know, papa," she went on, turning her face toward him again: "and they were out under the trees and John had his arm round her, and he was kissing her, and telling her how pretty she was; and then they began talking about Miss

Stevens and you, and John told Phillis that he reckoned you were going to marry her — "

"Who? Phillis?" asked Mr. Dinsmore, looking excessively amused.

"Oh, papa; no; you know I mean Miss Stevens," Elsie answered in a tone of annoyance.

"Well, dear, and what of it all?" he asked, soothingly. "I don't think the silly nonsense of the servants need trouble you. John is a sad fellow, I know; he courts all the pretty colored girls wherever he goes. I shall have to read him a serious lecture on the subject. But it is very kind of you to be so concerned for Phillis."

"Oh, papa, don't!" she said, turning away her face. "Please don't tease me so. You know I don't care for Phillis or John; but that isn't all." And then she repeated what had passed between Annie and herself.

He looked a good deal provoked as she went on with her story; then very grave indeed. He was quite silent for a moment after she had done. Then drawing her closer to him, he said tenderly, "My poor little girl, I am sorry you should be so annoyed; but you know it is not true, daughter, and why need you care what other people think and say?"

"I don't like them to talk so, papa! I can't bear to have them say such things about you!" she exclaimed indignantly.

He was silent again for a little; then said kindly, "I think I had better take you away from these troublesome talkers. What do you say to going home?"

"Oh, yes, papa, do take me home," she answered eagerly. "I wish we were there now. I think it is the pleasantest place in the world and it seems such a long, long while since we came away. Let us start to-morrow, papa; can't we?"

"But you know you will have to leave Miss Rose."

"Ah! I forgot that," she said a little sadly; but brightening again, she asked: "Couldn't you invite her to go home with us and spend the winter? Ah! papa, do! it would be so pleasant to have her."

"No, my dear, it wouldn't do," he replied with a grave shake of the head.

"Why, papa?" she asked with a look of keen disappointment.

"You are too young to understand why," he said in the same grave tone, and then relapsed into silence; sitting there for some time stroking her hair in an absent way, with his eyes on the carpet.

At last he said, "Elsie!" in a soft, low tone that quite made the little girl start and look up into his face; for she, too, had been in a deep reverie.

"What, papa?" she asked, and she wondered to see how the color had spread over his face, and how bright his eyes looked.

"I have been thinking," he said, in a half hesitating way, "that though it would not do to invite Miss Rose to spend the winter with us, it might do very nicely to ask her to come and live at the Oaks."

Elsie looked at him for a moment with a bewildered expression; then suddenly comprehending, her face lighted up.

"Would you like it, dearest?" he asked; "or would you prefer to go on living just as we have been, you and I together? I would consult your happiness before my own, for it lies very near my heart, my precious one. I can never forgive myself for all I have made you suffer, and when you were restored to me almost from the grave, I made a vow to do all in my power to make your future life bright and happy."

His tones were full of deep feeling, and as he spoke he drew her closer and closer to him and kissed her tenderly again and again.

"Speak, daughter, and tell me what you wish," he said, as she still remained silent.

At last she spoke, and he bent down to catch the words. "Dear papa," she whispered, "would it make you happy? and do you think mamma knows, and that she would like it?"

"Your mamma loves us both too well not to be pleased with anything that would add to our happiness," he replied gently.

"Dear papa, you won't be angry if I ask another question?"

"No, darling; ask as many as you wish."

"Then, papa, will I have to call her mamma? and do you think my own mamma would like it?"

"If Miss Allison consents to take a mother's place to you, I am sure your own mamma, if she could speak to you, would tell you she deserved to have the title; and it would hurt us both very much if you refused to give it. Indeed, my daughter, I cannot ask her to come to us unless you will promise to do so, and to love and obey, her just as you do me. Will you?"

"I will try to obey her, papa; and I shall love her very dearly, for I do already; but I can not love anybody quite so well as I love you, my own dear, dear father!" she said, throwing her arms around his neck.

He returned her caress, saying tenderly, "That is all I can ask, dearest; I must reserve the first place in your heart for myself."

"Do you think she will come, papa?" she asked anxiously.

"I don't know, daughter; I have not asked her yet. But shall I tell her that it will add to your happiness if she will be your mamma?"

"Yes, sir; and that I will call her mamma, and obey her and love her dearly. Oh, papa, ask her very soon, won't you?"

"Perhaps; but don't set your heart too much on it, for she may not be quite so willing to take such a troublesome charge as Miss Stevens seems to be," he said, returning to his playful tone.

Elsie looked troubled and anxious.

"I hope she will, papa," she said; "I think she might be very glad to come and live with you; and in such a beautiful home, too."

"Ah! but everyone does not appreciate my society as highly as you do," he replied, laughing and pinching her cheek; "and besides, you forget about the troublesome little girl. I have heard ladies say they would not marry a man who had a child."

"But Miss Rose loves me, papa; I am sure she does," she said, flushing, and the tears starting to her eyes.

"Yes, darling, I know she does," he answered soothingly. "I am only afraid she loves you better than she does me."

A large party of equestrians were setting out from the hotel that evening soon after tea, and Elsie, in company with several other little girls, went out upon the veranda to watch them mount and ride away. She was absent but a few moments from the parlor, where she had left her father, but when she returned to it he was not there. Miss Rose, too, was gone, she found upon further search, and though she had not much difficulty in conjecturing why she had thus, for the first time, been left behind, she could not help feeling rather lonely and desolate.

She felt no disposition to renew the afternoon's conversation with Annie Hart, so she went quietly upstairs to their private parlor and sat down to amuse herself with a book until Chloe came in from eating her supper. Then the little girl brought a stool, and seating herself in the old posture with her head in her nurse's lap, she drew her mother's miniature from her bosom, and fixing her eyes lovingly upon it, said, as she had done hundreds of times before: "Now, mammy, please tell me about my dear, dear mamma."

The soft eyes were full of tears; for with all her joy at the thought of Rose, mingled a strange sad feeling that she was getting farther away from that dear, precious, unknown mother, whose image had been, since her earliest recollection, enshrined in her very heart of hearts.