

Sisters

by KATHLEEN NORRIS



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(Continued from last week.)

"No," he said, patiently and perfunctorily, "you wanted—Cherry—to say—good-by—to—those—people—who—were—sailing! That was all. She wrote it; it got there in time, I guess. Anyway, I heard the girl say to rush it to the boat!"

"Oh!" Alix said. "Oh—" she added. Her tone betrayed nothing, but she was thoroughly at sea. "Did I ask Cherry to say good-by to any one?" she asked herself, going back to the beginning of the long day. Instinct warned her that nothing would be gained by sharing her perplexity with Martin. "I give you my word that she hasn't been five minutes alone with any one but Peter and me!" she said, frankly, looking into Martin's eyes. "Now, are you satisfied?"

"Sure, I'm satisfied!" he answered. "I'll take your say-so for it." He yawned. "Trouble with Cherry is she hasn't enough to do!" he finished sapiently.

"I'm a poor person with whom to discuss Cherry!" Alix hinted, with an unsmiling nod for good-night.

And she looked at Cherry's corn-colored head, ten minutes later, with a thrill of maternal protectiveness. Cherry was evidently asleep, buried deep under the blue army blankets. But Alix did not get to sleep that night.

She did not even undress. For it was while sitting on the side of her bed, ready to begin the process, that through her excited and indignant and whirling thoughts the first suspicion shot like a touch of flame.

"I'll tell Peter all this when Martin has gone," Alix decided. "He'll be furious—he adores Cherry—he'll be furious—he thinks that there is no one like Cherry—"

The words she had said came back to her, and she said them again, half-aloud, with a look of pain and almost of fear suddenly coming into her eyes.

"Peter adores Cherry—"

And then she knew. Even while the sick suspicion formed itself, vague and menacing and horrible, in her heart, she knew the truth of it. And though for hours she was to weigh it and measure it, to remember and question and compare all the days and hours that she and Peter and Cherry had been together; from the moment the thought was born she knew that it was to be with her an accepted fact for all time to come.

For a few seconds Alix felt ill, dazed, and shocked almost beyond enduring. She sat immovable, her eyes fixed, her body held rigid, as a body might be in the second before it fell after a bullet had cleanly pierced the heart.

Then she put her hand to her throat, and looked with a sort of terror at the silent figure of Cherry. Nobody must know—that was Alix's first clear thought. She was breathing hard, her breast rising and falling painfully, and the blood in her temples began to pound; her mouth was dry.

With a blind instinct for solitude she went quickly and silently from the sleeping porch, and into the warm sitting room. For a few minutes Alix stood, with one foot on the chain that linked the old brass fire dogs, her elbow on the mantel, and her cheek resting against her arm.

"No," she whispered, almost audibly, "no—it can't be that! It can't be that!"



"No," She Whispered. "No, It Can't Be That!"

Cherry and Peter—Oh, my God! Oh, my God, it has been that, all the time, that, all the time—and I never knew it—I never dreamed it!

"It's Peter and Cherry! They have come to care for each other—they

loved a man more than I love you, my dear!" She remembered some of his half-laughing, half-fretful reproaches, when he had told her that she loved him much as she loved Buck, and that, in these respects, she was no more than a healthy child. "I may be a child," said Alix, feeling that a dry flame was consuming her heart, "but a child can love! My dear—my dear—" "I wish I could cry," she said suddenly, finding herself sitting on a log where low oaks met the forest and the open meadows. "But now we must face this thing sensibly. What is to be done? They must not know that I know, and in some way we must get out of this tangle. Even if Peter were free, Cherry would not be free," she decided, "and so the only thing to do is to help them, until it dies away."

No suspicion of the truth stabbed her, although she remembered Martin and his strange tale of a message and wondered about it a little in her thoughts. To whom had Cherry been sending that telegram if not to Peter? And if to Peter, why had she not simply telephoned? Because she had known that Peter was not in his office, because she had been going to meet him somewhere. But where? Well, at the boat. Martin had heard her tell the boy that he must catch the boat.

Alix did not guess the truth. But she guessed enough to make her feel frightened and sick. She could not suppose that Cherry and Peter had planned to go away on that boat together, because at most her thoughts would have grasped the idea of one or two days' absence only, and they had given her no warning of that. But until this instant the thought of the passionate desire that enveloped them had not reached her; she had imagined Cherry's feeling for Peter to be something only a little stronger than her own.

Now she thought of Cherry's beauty, her fragrance and softness, the shine in her blue eyes and the light on her corn-colored hair, and knew that life for them all, of late, had been mined with frightful danger.

"Cherry would be disgraced, and Martin—Martin would kill her, if he found her out! . . . Oh, my little sister! She would be torn apart; she is so reckless, she would do anything—she would be a public scandal, and the papers would have her pictures—"

Dad's little yellow-headed Charley! Oh, Dad," she said, looking up into the dark, "tell me what to do! I need you so! Won't you somehow tell me what to do?"

Silence and darkness. But even in that gloom Alix could tell the fog was lifting, and a sudden sweep of breeze, like a tired breath, went over the tops of the redwoods.

Steadily came the change. The darkness, by imperceptible degrees, lifted. "Light!" Alix whispered, awestruck. And a few moments later she added, "Dawn!"

It was dawn indeed that was creeping into the valley, and as it brightened and deepened and warmed momentarily, Alix felt some of the peace and glory of it swelling in her tired heart. She was still sitting on the log, dreamily watching the expanding beauty of the new day, when there was a crashing in the underbrush behind her, and with joy, and with twigs and dried brown grasses on his wet coat, Buck came bounding out of the forest, and leaped upon her.

"Bucky!" she faltered, as he stood beside her, his quick tongue flashing ecstatically, close to her face, every splendid muscle of his body wriggling with eager affection. "Did you miss me, old fellow? Did you come to find me?"

She had not cried during the long vigil of the night, when a storm had raged in her heart, and had left her weak and sick with dread. But there was peace now, and Alix locked her arms about the dog's shoulders, and laid her face against his satiny head, and cried.

CHAPTER XVII.

When Cherry came out to breakfast, a few hours later, she found Alix already at the porch table. Alix looked pale, but fresh and trim; she had evidently just tubbed, and she wore one of the plain, wide-striped gingham dresses that were extremely becoming to her rather boyish type.

She looked up, and nodded at Cherry composedly. Cherry always kissed her sister in the morning, but

she did not today. She felt troubled and ashamed, and instinctively avoided the little caress.

"No men!" she asked, sharing her grapefruit with her maid.

"Peter had to go to San Rafael with Mr. Thomas in his car, to do something about the case," Alix explained. "I drove them down, and at the last minute Martin decided to go. So I marketed, and got the mail, and came back, and the understanding is that we are to meet them at the St. Francis for dinner, at six, and go to the Orpheum."

"Is it almost ten?" Cherry said sleepily, gazing in surprise at the clock that was visible through the open door. "I'm terribly ashamed! And when did you get up, and silently make your bed, and hang up your things?"

"Oh, early!" Alix answered, non-committally. "I had a bath, and this is my second breakfast!"

Cherry, who was reading a letter, made some inarticulate sound that made Alix look at her in quick concern.

"Cherry, what is it?" she exclaimed. For answer Cherry tossed her the letter, written on a thick sheet of lavender paper, which diffused a strong odor of scent.

"Read that!" she said, briefly.

Fearfully, Alix picked up the perfumed sheet, and read, in a coarse and sprawling, yet unmistakably feminine handwriting, the following words:

"Dear Mrs. Lloyd: Perhaps you would not feel so pleased with yourself if you knew the real reason why your husband left Red Creek? It was because of a quarrel he had with Hatty Woods."

"If you don't believe it you had better ask him about some of the parties he had with Joe King's crowd, and where they were on the night of Aug. 28, and if he knows anybody named Hatty Woods, and see what he says. Ask him if he ever heard of Bopp's hotel and when he was in Sacramento last. If he denies it, you can show him this letter."

There was no signature.

Alix, who had read it first with a bewildered and suspicious look, read it again, and flushed deeply at the sordid shame of it. She laid it down and looked in stunned conviction at her sister.

"Cherry, who was breathing hard, raised her head, rested her chin on her hands, elbows on the table, and stared at Alix defiantly.

"There!" she said, almost with triumph. "There! Now, is that so easy? Now, am I to just smile and agree to say 'Certainly, Martin.' Of course, Martin, dear! Now you see—now you see! Now, am I to bear that," she rushed on, her words suddenly violent. "And go on with him—as his wife—when a common woman like that—"

"Cherry, dear! Alix said, distressedly.

"Ah, well, you can't realize it; nobody but the woman to whom it happens can!" Cherry interrupted her, covering her face with her hands. "But let him say what he pleases now," she added, passionately, "let him do what he pleases—I'll follow my own course from today on!"

Alix, watching her fearfully, was amazed at the change in her. Cherry's eyes were blazing, her cheeks pale. Her voice was dry and feverish, and there was a sort of frenzy in her manner that Alix had never seen before. To bring sunny little Cherry to this—to change the radiant, innocent child that had been Cherry into this bitter and disillusioned woman—Alix felt as if the whole world were going mad, and as if life would never be sane and serene again for any one of them.

"Cherry, do you believe it?" she asked.

Cherry, roused from a moment of brooding silence, shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

"Of course I believe it!" she answered.

"But, darling, we don't even know who wrote it! We have only this woman's word for it—"

"Oh, look at it—look at it, Alix!" Cherry burst forth. "Do decent men have letters like that sent to their wives? Is it probable that a good man would do anything to rouse some busybody woman to write such a letter about him?"

"Well, but who is she, and what do you suppose she wrote it for?" Alix wondered.

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THE KITCHEN CABINET

Don't idly dream! Great deeds await your doing. Deeds that will live, and you in them may live. Noble your thoughts, each day your strength renewing. Be you but true, that strength your faith shall give. Life striving round you bids you, then awaken; Look where the future grandly stands in view; In God press onward! Be your trust ne'er shaken. Don't idly dream, but do!

—George Burdsey.

TEMPTING SWEETMEATS

This is the season of the year when all who enjoy candies will turn to their own cherished recipes and prepare some at home. No candy bought in the shops tastes like that which has been made in the home by your own hand. The following will be useful to add to the collection already at hand:

Molasses Taffy.—Boil together one quart of New Orleans molasses and two spoonfuls of sugar for five minutes. Add two spoonfuls of vinegar and a tablespoonful of butter. Boil until it cracks when dropped into cold water. Take from the fire, stir in one-quarter of a teaspoonful of soda and pour out to cool. When cool enough to handle flavor and pull.

Coffee Fudge.—Take one cupful of strong coffee, two cupfuls of sugar, one tablespoonful of butter, one cupful of hickory nut meats and one-half teaspoonful of almond extract. Stir the coffee, sugar and butter together and boil until it reaches the soft ball stage when dropped into cold water. Take from the fire, add the almond extract, let cool and beat until it begins to get stiff, stir in the nuts—pecans may be used. Spread in a well buttered pan. Mark off in squares before the candy is too hard.

Pecan Fudge.—Take one cupful of water, two cupfuls of sugar, a pinch of cream of tartar, one cupful of pecan meats, one teaspoonful of vanilla, two tablespoonfuls of butter and three tablespoonfuls of fondant. Dissolve the sugar in the water, add the cream of tartar and boil until it reaches the soft ball stage. Add the butter, fondant, chopped nuts and extract. Beat until it begins to stiffen then pour quickly into buttered tins. When cold wrap in waxed paper.

Nellie Maxwell

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Riddles
How long did Cain hate his brother? As long as he was able. Why is the sun like a good loaf? Because it's light when it rises. Why is a camel a most irascible animal? Because he always has his back up.

What is the difference between a light in a cave and a dance in an inn? One is a taper in cavern and the other is a caper in a tavern. When does a man impose on himself? When he taxes his memory. Why cannot a thief easily steal a watch? Because he must take it off its guard.

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