

Sisters

KATHLEEN NORRIS



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(Continued from last week.)

"Oh, I don't know. She got mad at him, perhaps. Or perhaps she is a champion of this Woods woman. They had some quarrel—how do I know? But you can see that she is mad, and this is the way she gets even."

"Cherry, at least do Martin the justice to ask him about it!" Alix pleaded.

Her sister seemed not to hear her. The misery in her beautiful eyes made Alix's heart sink.

"And that," Cherry said in a whisper, "is my husband!"

She paused, staring down at the table, one hand supporting her forehead, the other wandering idly among the breakfast things. Her look was sadder and far away. Alix, standing, watched her distressfully, through a long minute of silence.

"Well!" Cherry said lifelessly, looking up at her sister with dulled eyes. "What now? It's still 'for better or worse,' I suppose?"

Alix sat down, and for a moment covered her face with a tight-pressed hand. When she took it away there was new serenity and resolution in her tired face.

"No," she said, with a great sigh, "I think perhaps you're right! He hasn't—he should have no claim on you now!"

"Alix," Cherry demanded, "would you forgive him?"

"Perhaps I wouldn't," Alix said, after thought.

"Perhaps you wouldn't!" Cherry echoed, incredulously.

"Well, I'm not very good," Alix said, hesitatingly. "But a vow is a vow, you know. If it was limited, then my fulfillment of it would be limited, I suppose. Of course," she added, honestly, "I'm talking for myself only!"

"And you would quietly forgive and—?" Alix demanded the little sister, in bitter scorn.

"I say I hope I would!" Alix corrected her. "Even if this is true"—she added, with a glance at the lavender letter—"still, I suppose the rule of forgiving seventy times seven times—"

Cherry interrupted her with a burst of bitter and rebellious weeping.

"Oh, my God, what shall I do!" she sobbed, with her bright head dropped on her arm.

"Don't cry, Cherry, Cherry!" Alix said, her own tears brimming over. She came to kneel beside her sister, and they locked their arms about each other, and their wet cheeks touched.

"Don't cry, dear!" she said, tenderly. "It'll all come straight, somehow, and we'll wonder why we took it so hard! Now listen to me, Sis, as soon as Cherry had somewhat regained her composure. "We'll ascertain about this letter; that's only fair. If Martin denies it—"

"Of course he'll deny it!" Cherry interrupted, from the bitter knowledge she had of him.

Alix again felt daunted for a second by the sheer ugliness and sordidness of the matter, but she returned to the charge bravely.

"Suppose we get Peter to ask him," she suggested suddenly. "Peter has a wonderful way of getting the truth out of people!" Poor Cherry, the very mention of his name makes her wince. Alix thought, watching her sister sorrowfully. "If Martin can convince Peter that it is not true, then that makes all the difference in the world," she added, aloud. "Then you tell Martin frankly that you have the old house ready to live in, and you want to live there. He—"

"He'll never agree to that!" Cherry said, shaking her head. "But if this is true?" she asked, again indicating the letter.

"Then tell him that unless he agrees absolutely to a separation," Alix said, "you will get a divorce!"

"And live here, alone, under that sort of a cloud?" Cherry said, with watering eyes. "Oh, well!" she said, rising, and going toward the door. "It's horrible—horrible—horrible—whatever I do! What is your idea—that we should dine, and go to the Orpheum tonight as if nothing had happened, and let all this wait until you can ask Peter to cross-examine Martin?"

"I wonder if Martin would tell me? Why couldn't I pretend that I opened that letter by mistake and frighten him into admitting it, if it's true?" Alix said.

"You could," Cherry admitted, lifelessly. "But you may be sure it is true enough!" she added.

"Then leave it to me!" Alix said. "And don't feel too sad, Cherry. You're young, and life may take a turn that changes everything for you. You always have Peter—Peter and me, back of you!"

"Alix, you're the best sister a girl ever had!" Cherry said, passionately, putting her hand on Alix's shoulder. "I wish I were as big as you are! And he's made me so wretched," whispered Cherry, with trembling lips.

"That sometimes I've been sick of life! But I will investigate this letter, and if it's not true, I'll try again. Alix! I'll go away with him, if he wants me to, or I'll live here—and study French—and go to lectures with you—"

"You darling!" Alix said, with an aching heart.

That night it was simply managed that Martin should be next to Alix, in the loge at the theater, and she began to question him seriously at once. All through the strange, unnatural day that followed her night of vigil she had been planning what she should say to him, but she and Cherry had not spoken of the subject again.

Cherry had dressed herself with her usual dainty care, and now, with the violets Alix had given her spraying in a great purple bunch at her breast, and her blue eyes ringed and thoughtfully under her soft little feathered hat, she was so arrestingly lovely that Alix was well aware of the admiring glances from all sides to which she was so superbly indifferent.

"Martin," she began, "I read a letter intended for Cherry this morning. I—I open all the mail!"

She had to repeat it twice before he realized that there was something behind her earnest and significant tone. Then she saw him stop twisting his program, and veer about toward her. She murmured a question.

"Do I what?" he asked, in an undertone instantly lowered.

"Do you know a girl named Hatty Woods?" Alix repeated, cautiously.

"Perfectly!" he answered, looking at his folded program.

"Peter, I've been thinking—about our plan, I mean! Martin plans to go on Monday. But something has happened since I saw you this morning, something that makes a difference! I had a letter, a letter from some woman, a Hatty Woods—she's notorious in Red Creek—and this Joe King crowd that he went with—I don't know who wrote the letter, or why she wrote," she said, hastily, as Peter interpolated a question. "And I don't care! As far as Martin goes, I am free now; what is justice to Martin, and kindness to Martin, will never count with me any more!"

Peter wasted no words.

"He goes Monday," he said. "We can go Sunday. This is Thursday night. Your suitcase I checked again yesterday? Was it only yesterday?"

"That's all!"

"We would have been on the train tonight, Cherry, flying toward New Orleans!"

Her small hand gripped his in the darkness.

"If we only were!" he heard her breathe.

He turned to her, so exquisite in her distress. Her breast was rising and falling quickly.

"Patience, sweetheart!" he said. "Patience for only a few days more! Tomorrow I'll make the arrangements. Sunday is only two days off."

Their eyes met in a wild rush of triumph and hope.

"This time we shall do it!" Peter said.

"Oh, Peter—you'll never be sorry?" she whispered.

"Sorry! My dearest child, when you give your beauty and your youth to a man almost twice your age, who has loved you all your life—do you think there is much chance of it?"

"Why shouldn't it be one of the happy—marriages?" said Cherry after a silence.

"It will," he answered, confidently. "As the weeks become months, and the months become years, and the beauty and miracle of it go on and on, we will think that what we feel for each other now is only the shadow—the dream!"

"Shall I just let Martin think I am quietly going away with him on Monday?" she asked, after a silence in which she was deeply thinking.

"Does he know you had that letter?" Peter said.

"No; Alix is going to speak to him about it." Cherry outlined the talk that she and her sister had had at breakfast.

"Then I shouldn't bring up the question at all," Peter decided, quickly. "It would only mean an ugly and unnecessary scene. It's much wiser to let him continue to think that you don't know anything about it, and to let Alix think that you are ignoring the whole thing!"

"Until Sunday!" she whispered.

"Until Sunday." Peter glanced at Martin and Alix, who were talking together absorbedly, in low tones. "My little sweetheart, I'll make all this misery up to you!" he whispered. Her little hand was locked in his for the rest of the evening.

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Morning came, a crystal autumn morning, and life went on. If there was any change at the cabin it was a change for the better. Alix, who had been silent and troubled for a little while, was more serene now, as usual concerned for the comfort of her household, and as usual busy all day long with her poultry and pigeons, her bee-keeping, stable, and dogs. Peter was his courteous, gentle, interested self, more like the old Peter, who had always been occupied with his music and his books, than like the passionately metamorphosed Peter who had

me! That will do good! If this poor girl, this Hatty—"

"I tell you to leave Hatty out of it!" Martin said. "The best thing you can do is to let the whole thing alone!"

But she saw that he was both nervous and apprehensive, and she knew that the inference she and Cherry had drawn from the letter was a true one.

"Does Cherry know anything of this?" Martin presently muttered.

"Do you want her to?" Alix asked, pointedly.

He shrugged his shoulders with a great assumption of indifference.

"If she wants to have it all dragged to light, why, she can go ahead!" he remarked, carelessly. "I'm not stopping her!"

"At least I think you ought to let Cherry lead her own life after this!" Alix countered with spirit.

"Live in your old house, eh?" he asked, resentfully, as he flipped the pages of his program with a big thumb and stared at it with unseeing eyes.

"What does she want to live there for?"

"The fact remains that she does," Alix persisted.

"Yes, and have just as good a time as if she never had been married at all!" he said.

"You know—"

Alix was beginning the denial that she had given him so confidently last night, but she interrupted herself, and stopped short. The conviction rushed upon her in an overwhelming wave that she had no right to repeat that denial now that the last dreadful twenty-four hours had changed the whole situation, and that she herself had better reason to suspect Cherry than either Martin or his gossiping aunt. She sat sick and silent.

Meanwhile, Cherry and Peter had their first opportunity to speak to each other alone. To both the thirst for speech was a burning necessity, and it was with an almost dizzy sense of relief that Cherry turned to him with her first words.

"Peter, I don't dare say much! Can you bear me?"

"Perfectly!" he answered, looking at his folded program.

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been so changed by love for Cherry. Martin, satisfied with the general respects and consideration with which he found himself surrounded, accepted life placidly enough; perhaps he had been disturbed by the advent of the letter, perhaps he was willing to let the question of an adjustment between Cherry and himself rest. It amused him to help get the house ready for a tenant, and from the fact that Cherry talked no more of living there, and made no comment upon his frequent reference to their departure on Monday, he deduced that she had come to her senses.

Cherry, too, was less unhappy than she had been. By avoiding Peter, by refraining even in words and looks from the companionship for which she so hungered, by devoting herself to Alix, she managed to hold her feelings in leash. Even though Alix found that the knowledge of the secret they shared without ever mentioning it between them like a screen, the sisters, busy about the house, had wonderful hours together.

CHAPTER XVII.

Saturday came, a perfect day that filled the little valley to the brim with golden sunshine. Alix, driving alone to the mountain cabin, stared in the morning freshness at the blue overhead and said aloud, "Oh, what a day of gold!"

The dog, sitting beside her on the front seat, flapped his tail in answer to her voice, and she laughed at him. But the laugh was quickly followed by a sharp sigh.

"Saturday," she mused, "and Martin expects Cherry to go with him on Monday! Expects her to go back with him to a life of misery for her, existence with a man she hates! Oh, Cherry—my little sister!—there can be no happiness for you there! And Peter! Peter is left behind to me, who cannot comfort him or still the ache that is tearing his heart! My two loved ones, and what can I do to help them!"

She had come up to the cabin to do the usual last little daily fussing among the ducks and chickens and to bring Peter, if Peter had not gone into town, back with her to Cherry's house. They had all dined in the old Strickland house the night before, and because of a sudden rainfall had decided to spend the night there, too. The Chinese boy who had been helping the sisters with their housecleaning had been persuaded to cook the dinner and get breakfast, and the evening about the fire place had been almost too poignantly sweet.

But suddenly, at about ten o'clock, Peter had surprised them all by getting to his feet. He was going up to the cabin, he said—must go, in fact. He would rather walk, please, he told Alix, when she offered to drive him up in the car. Bewildered and a little apprehensive, she let him go. To Cherry, who seemed to feel suddenly sad and uneasy, Alix laughed about it, but she was secretly worried herself, and immediately after breakfast the next morning decided to run up to the cabin in the car and assure herself that everything was right there.

Cherry, who had not slept and who was pale, had come out to the car, her distracted manner increasing Alix's sense that something was gravely amiss. She started on her trip with a heavy heart, but the half-hour's run soothed her in spite of herself, and now she reached the cabin in a much more cheerful mood.

Peter was nowhere about, and as she plunged into the work of house

cleaning, she found a note pinned to the door. It was from Alix, and it said: "I'm at the cabin. I'll be home in an hour. I'll be home in an hour. I'll be home in an hour."

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The KITCHEN CABINET

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The free use of soups and fresh vegetables is wise for those persons who have a tendency to overindulgence in eating.—Jordan.

MORE ABOUT CANDY MAKING

Most candies are made from fondant or fudge mixture. Fudge, as it is

known, has more often chocolate or maple flavor. A delightful change is made by adding candied cherries to a beautiful white fudge, favoring with almond.

Fudge Foundation.—

Take two cups of granulated sugar, one-third of a cup of white corn syrup, one-half cup of milk and one tablespoonful of butter. Boil to the soft-ball stage. Set away to become slightly cool, then add flavor and any desired nuts or fruit. If chocolate fudge is desired, a square or two of chocolate or an equal quantity of cocoa should be added when put on to cook.

Fondant.—Put two cups of granulated sugar and one cup of water into a saucepan, stir until the sugar is dissolved, then add one-eighth of a teaspoonful of cream of tartar. Cook very gently without stirring. As sugar begins to form around the sides of the pan, wipe down with a brush dipped in water, or with a small rag fastened to a skewer. As soon as the syrup makes a soft ball in cold water pour out carefully on a large buttered platter or marble slab. Do not drain the dish, as one or two grains of sugar will form a chain which will spoil the whole mass. Cool until it can be dented with the finger, then work from the edge toward the center until it can be kneaded like bread. After it is blended to a creamy mixture, put away, covered with waxed paper, until ready to make up into bonbons. It is much better to make fondant in small quantities than to risk spoiling a large amount of material. Be sure to make fondant on a bright, clear day. If the fondant crusts over when cooled, add a little water and boil again.

Peanut Candy.—Shell one pound of freshly roasted peanuts and roll until like coarse crumbs. Boil for eight minutes, from the time the bubbles appear, two pounds of brown sugar and twelve level tablespoonfuls of butter. Stir in the nuts and pour at once into a greased pan. Mark off in squares before it gets too hard. This is the best of peanut candies. Other nuts may be used if desired.

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