

SISTERS

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By
**KATHLEEN
NORRIS**

"WHAT A MESS—MESS—MESS!"

"No," she whispered to herself, almost audibly, "no—it can't be that! It can't be 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 have come to care for each other," she said to herself, her thoughts rushing and tumbling in mad confusion as she tested and tried the new fear. "It must be so. But it can't be so!" Alix interrupted herself in terror, "for what shall we do—what shall we do! Cherry in love with Peter. But Peter is my husband—he is my husband. . . . Peter, who has always been so good to me—so generous to me—and it was Cherry all the time."

"Poor Cherry!" the older sister said aloud. "Poor little old Cherry—life hasn't been very kind to her! She and Peter must be so sorry and ashamed about this! And Dad would be so sorry; of all things he wanted most that Cherry should be happy! Perhaps," thought Alix, "he realized that she was that sort of a nature, she must love and be loved, or she cannot live! But why did he let her marry Martin, and why wasn't he here to keep me from marrying Peter? What a mess—mess—mess we've made of it all!"

"Cherry would be disgraced, and Martin—Martin would kill her, if he found her out! . . . Oh, my little sister! She would be town talk; 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 Charity! 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?"

Indeed, it is a "mess." For Alix is Cherry's older sister. And Peter is Alix's husband. And Cherry is married to Martin. And Alix loves both Peter and Cherry. And Martin and Cherry are drifting apart. And Dad is dead and can't help any of them.

So Alix tries the only way she can see out of the mess. It works for her, but for the others the results are unexpected. But who shall say not for the best?

Kathleen Norris, as everyone knows, is a California authoress who has proved her ability to handle big stories like this. "Sisters" is a good example of the type of stories that has given her so large and friendly a public.

CHAPTER I.

Cherry Strickland came in the door of the Strickland house, and shut it behind her, and stood so, with her hands behind her on the knob, and her slender body leaning forward, and her bosom rising and falling in deep, ecstatic breaths. It was May in California, she was just eighteen, and for twenty-one minutes she had been engaged to be married.

She hardly knew why, after that last farewell to Martin, she had run so swiftly up the path, and why she had flashed into the house, and closed the door with such noiseless haste. There was nothing to run for! But it was as if she feared that the joy within her might escape into the moonlight night that was so perfumed with lilacs and the scent of wet woods. She was afraid that it was all too wonderful to be true, that she would awaken in the morning to find it only a dream, that she would somehow fall short of Martin's ideal—somehow fall him—somehow turn all this magic of moonshine and kisses into ashes and heartbreak.

She was a miser with her treasure, already; she wanted to fly with it, and to hide it away, and to test its reality in secret, alone. She had come running in from the wonderland down by the gate, just for this, just to prove to herself that it would not vanish in the commonplaceness of the shabby hall, would not disappear before the everyday contact of everyday things.

Dad was in the sitting room, with the girls. The doctor's house was full of girls. Anne, his niece, was twenty-four; Alix, Cherry's sister, three years younger—how staid and unmarried and undesired they seemed tonight to panting and glowing and glorified eighteen! Anne, with Alix's erratic help, kept house for her uncle, and was supposed to keep a sharp eye on Cherry, too. But she hadn't been sharp enough to keep Martin Lloyd from asking her to marry him, exulted Cherry, as she stood breathless and laughing in the dark hallway.

An older woman might have gone upstairs, to dream alone of her new joy, but Cherry thought that it would be "fun" to join the family, and "act as if nothing had happened!" She was only a child, after all.

Consciously or unconsciously, they had all tried to keep her a child, these three who looked up to smile at her as she came in. One of them, rosy, gray-haired, magnificent at sixty, was her father, whose favorite she knew she was. He held out his hand to her without closing the book that was in the other hand, and drew her to the wide arm of his chair, where she settled herself with her soft young body resting against him, her slim ankles crossed, and her cheek dropped against his thick silver hair.

Alix was reading, and dreamily scratching her ankle as she read; she was a tall, awkward girl, younger far at twenty-one than Cherry was at eighteen, pretty in a gipsyish way, untidy as to hair, with round black eyes, high, thin cheekbones marked with scarlet, and a wide, humorous mouth that was somehow droll in its expres-

sion even when she was angry or serious.

Anne, smiling demurely over her white sewing, was a small, prettily made little woman, with silky hair trimly braided, and a rather pale, small face with charming and regular features. Anne had "admirers," too, Cherry reflected, looking at her tonight, but neither she nor Alix had ever been engaged—engaged—engaged!

"Aren't you home early?" said Dr. Strickland, rubbing his cheek against his youngest daughter's cheek in sleepy content. He was never quite happy unless all three girls were in his sight, but for this girl he had always felt an especial protecting fondness. He had followed her exquisite childhood with more than a father's usual devotion, perhaps because she really had been an exceptionally endearing child, perhaps because she had been given him, a tiny crying thing in a basket, to fill the great gap her mother's going had left in his heart.

"Mr. Lloyd had to take the nine o'clock train," Cherry answered her father dreamily, "and he and Peter walked home with me!" She did not add that Peter had left them at his own turning, a quarter of a mile away.

"I thought he wasn't going to be at Mrs. North's for dinner," Anne observed quietly, in the silence. She had been informally asked to the Norths for dinner that evening herself, and had declined for no other reason than that attractive Martin Lloyd was presumably not to be there.

"He wasn't," Cherry said. "He thought he had to go to town at six. I just stopped in to give them Dad's message, and they teased me to stay. You knew where I was, didn't you—Dad?" she murmured.

"Mrs. North telephoned about six, and said you were there, but she didn't say that Mr. Lloyd was," Anne said, with a faint hint of discontent in her tone.

Alix fixed her bright, mischievous eyes upon the two, and suspended her reading for a moment. Alix's attitude toward the opposite sex was one of calm contempt, outwardly. But she had made rather an exception of Martin Lloyd, and had recently had a conversation with him on the subject of sensible, platonic friendships between men and women. At the mention of his name she looked up, remembering this talk with a little thrill.

His name had thrilled Anne, too, although she betrayed no sign of it as she sat quietly matching silks. In fact, all three of the girls were quite ready to fall in love with young Lloyd, if two of them had not actually done so.

Cherry had not been at home when Martin first appeared in Mill Valley, and the older girls had written her, visiting friends in Napa, that she must come and meet the new man.

Martin was a mining engineer; he had been employed in a Nevada mine, but was visiting his cousin in the valley now before going to a new position in June. In its informal fashion, Mill Valley had entertained him; he had tramped to the big forest five miles away with the Stricklands, and there had been a picnic to the mountain-top,

everybody making the hard climb except Peter Joyce, who was a trifle lame, and perhaps a little lazy as well, and who usually rode an old horse, with the lunch in saddle-bags at each side. Alix formulated her theories of platonic friendships on these walks; Anne dreamed a foolish, happy dream. Girls did marry, men did take wives to themselves, dreamed Anne; it would be unspeakably sweet, but it would be no miracle!

It was just after that mountain picnic that Cherry had come home; on a Sunday, as it chanced, that was her eighteenth birthday, and on which Martin and his aunt were coming to dinner. Alix had marked the occasion by wearing a loose velvet gown in which she fancied herself; Anne had conscientiously decorated the table, had seen to it that there was ice cream, and chicken, and all the accessories that make a Sunday dinner in the country a national institution. Cherry had done nothing helpful.

On the contrary, she had disgraced herself and infuriated Hong by deciding to make fudge the last minute. Hong had finally relegated her to the laundry, and it was from this limbo that Martin, laughing joyously, extricated her, when, sticky and repentant, she had called for help. It was Martin who untied the checked brown apron, disentangling from the strings the silky gold tendrils that were blowing over Cherry's white neck, and Martin who opened the door for her sugary fingers, and Martin who watched the flying little figure out of sight with a prolonged "Whew-w-w!" of utter astonishment. The child was a beauty.

Her eighteenth birthday! Martin had been shown her birthday gifts; books and a silver belt buckle and a gold pen and stationery and handkerchiefs. A day or two later she had had another gift; had opened the tiny Shreve box with a sudden hammering at her heart, with a presage of delight. She had found a silver-topped candy jar, and the card of Mr. John Martin Lloyd, and under the name, in tiny letters, the words "Oh, fudge!" The girls laughed over this nonsense appreciatively, but there was more than laughter in Cherry's heart.

From that moment the world was changed. Her father, her sister, her cousin had second place, now, Cherry had put out her innocent little hand, and had opened the gate, and had passed through it into the world. That hour was the beginning, and it had led her surely, steadily, to the other hour tonight when she had been kissed, and had kissed in return.

"So—we walk home with young men?" mused the doctor, smiling. "Look here, girls, this little Miss Muffet will be cutting you both out with that young man, if you're not careful!"

Alix, deep in her story, did not hear him, but Anne smiled faintly, and faintly frowned as she shook her



She Found a Silver-Topped Candy Jar and the Card of Mr. John Martin Lloyd.

head. She considered Cherry sufficiently precocious without Uncle Lee's ill-considered tolerance.

He would have had them all ways a child himself. He had never made money in his profession; he and his wife and the two tiny girls had had a hard enough struggle sometimes.

Anne and her own father had joined the family eight years ago, in the same year that the Strickland patent fire extinguisher, over which the doctor had been putting for years, had been sold. It did not sell, as his neighbors believed, for a million dollars, but for perhaps one-tenth of that sum. It was enough, and more than enough, whatever it was. After Anne's father died it meant that the doctor could live on in the brown house under the redwoods, with his girls, reading, fussing with a new invention, walking, consulting with Anne, laughing at Alix, and spoiling his youngest-born.

It was a perfect life for the old man; it was only lately that he began uneasily to suspect that they would some day want something more, that they would some day tire of empty forest and blowing mountain ridge, and go away from the shadow of Mt. Tamalpais, and into the world.

Anne, now—was she beginning to fancy this young Lloyd? Dr. Strickland was surprised with the fervor with which he repudiated the thought. This young engineer, who had drifted already into a dozen different and distant places, was not the man for staid little Anne.

"What did you want to see Mr. Lloyd about tomorrow, Dad?" Cherry interrupted his thoughts to ask.

"The rose vine. What did he say about coming over, Cherry?" Cherry remarked, between two rending yawns, that Mr. Lloyd was coming over tomorrow at ten o'clock, and Peter, too.

"Peter won't be much good!" Alix commented. Cherry looked at her reproachfully.

"You're awfully mean to Peter, lately!" she protested. Her father gave her a shrewd look, with his good-night kiss, and immediately afterward both the younger girls dragged their way up to bed.

Alix and Cherry shared a bare, woody-smelling room tucked away under brown eaves. The walls were of raw pine, the latticed windows, in bungalow fashion, opened into the fragrant darkness of the night. The beds were really bunks, and above her bunk each girl had an extra berth, for occasional guests. There was scant prettiness in the room, and yet it was full of purity and charm. The girls, like all their neighbors, were hardy, bred to cold baths, long walks, simple hours, and simple food. In the soft western climate they left their bedroom windows open the year round; they liked to wake to winter damp and fog, and go downstairs with blue finger-tips and chattering teeth, to warm themselves with breakfast and the fire.

Alix rolled herself in a gray army blanket, and was asleep in some sixty seconds. But Cherry felt that she was floating in seas of new joy and utter delight, and that she would never be sleepy again.

Downstairs Anne and the doctor sat staidly on, the man dreaming with a knotted forehead, the girl sewing. Presently she ran a needle through her fine white work with seven tiny stitches, folded it, and put her thumb into a case that hung from her orderly workbag with a long ribbon.

"Wait a minute, Anne," said the doctor, as she straightened herself to rise. "This young Lloyd, now—what do you think of him?"

She widened demure blue eyes. "Should you be sorry if I—liked him, Uncle Lee?" she smiled.

The old man rumbled his silver hair restlessly.

"That's the way the wind blows, eh?" he asked kindly.

"Well—you see how much he's here! You see the flowers and books and notes. I'm not the sort of girl to wear my heart on my sleeve," Anne, who was fond of small conversational tags, assured him merrily. "But there must be some fire where there's so much smoke!" she ended.

"You're not sure, my dear?" he asked, after some thought.

"Oh, no!" she answered. "It's just a fancy that persists in coming and going." She got to her feet, saying brightly, "Well! we mustn't take this too gravely—yet. It was only that I wanted to be open and above-board with you, uncle, from the beginning. That's the only honest way."

"That's wise and right!" her uncle answered, in the kindly, absent tone he had used to them as children, a tone he was apt to use to Anne when she was in her highest mood, and one she rather resented.

"Cherry, now—" he asked, detaching her for a moment. "She—you don't think that perhaps Peter admires her?"

"Peter!" Anne echoed amazedly, and stood thinking.

Peter was more than thirty years old, thin, scholarly, something of a solitary, the sweet, dreamy, affectionate neighbor who had shared the girls' lives for the past ten years. For some reason she could not, or would not, define, Anne liked the idea of Cherry and Peter falling in love—

"Somehow one doesn't think of Peter as marrying anyone—" she said slowly, still trying to grasp the thought.

"You darling—you little exquisite beauty!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Cold Comfort.

The maiden of forty or so was upset. Said she to a younger friend: "Kate talks so outrageously. Yesterday she told me I was nothing but a hopeless old maid." "That's pretty frank," exclaimed her friend. "Still, it's better than having her tell lies about you."

TORTURES NURSE, PLEADS AMNESIA

Eighteen-Year-Old Boy Is Arrested as He Tries to Escape Over Back Fence.

New York.—Pleading that he does not remember anything since about eight o'clock Saturday night, Frank Conway, an eighteen-year-old student at Erasmus high school in Brooklyn, on Sunday was held without bail following a spectacular arrest on a charge of torturing Miss Ethel Stewart, twenty years old, a nurse, for more than an hour in her room to force her to tell the hiding place of jewels and money which he insisted she possessed.

The nurse, a student at the Long Island College hospital, lives on the third floor of the nurses' home in an



"I Know You Have \$600 and Jewels."

exclusive Columbia Heights section of Brooklyn. She was bound, gagged and beaten by the young man. He struck her on the head with the butt of a revolver and fled through a window by which he had entered, and climbed down a fire escape. Miss Stewart's screams attracted a score of nurses as well as priests attached to St. Charles Roman Catholic church, in the rear of the nurses' home. A policeman captured Conway as he leaped over back fences.

At four o'clock Sunday morning Miss Stewart was awakened by the sound of some one fumbling at the catch of her window, which opens on an iron fire escape leading to the rear yard. Frightened, she lay still as the man entered. He switched on the electric lights and, holding a revolver within a few inches of her face, said: "If you make a sound I will shoot your head off. I want the \$600 and your diamonds. I know you have them here."

Shaking with fright, the girl whispered that all the money she had was \$10 and that she had no jewels.

"You are a liar!" she says the man whispered. Dragging the pillow from beneath her head he ripped its case into strips, with which he bound Miss Stewart's hands and feet. He then gagged her with a towel and started to search for the money. Time and time again he returned to the bed, the police say, slapped the girl's face and demanded she tell him where her valuables were hidden.

"I know you have \$600 and jewels worth \$1,200 more. I'll kill you if you don't give up," he is alleged to have said.

After an hour of intermittent torture the burglar, who removed the gag each time he demanded the money, losing patience, suddenly struck the girl on the head with the butt of the revolver. As she sank back on the bed Miss Stewart screamed again and again.

Druggist Sold Prune Juice for Whisky. Washington.—Whisky bought on prescription for sick people has in some instances been adulterated with water and prune juice, or other liquids and sold at the price charged for pure liquor, according to complaints made to prohibition enforcement agents. The commissioner warns he will act if such methods continue.

Locked Mischievous Monkey in Jail. Woodbury, N. J.—The county jail has a new occupant, a man-size monkey. Warden Mager is ready to give it up to anybody who wants a monkey of that kind. Surrogate F. D. Pedrick, the owner of the animal, who had the beast locked up on a disorderly conduct charge, is anxious to be rid of it.

Wife-Beater Is Flogged in Court by Judge

Santa Ana, Cal.—Flogging with a rawhide was the punishment meted out in open court to Juan Torres at his own request when he pleaded guilty to beating his wife. Justice J. B. Cox administered three lashes on to Torres' back, raising three large welts.

So many girls paint now that you rarely find one who can hold the mirror up to nature.

The unsinkable ship is being built in pairs in the British navy—perhaps for the last time.

Gabrielle D'Annunzio is married. Oh, well, what could he do? Italy refused to fight with him.

"But" is the greatest word in the diplomatic dictionary. As, for instance, "black is white, but—"

It's hard to understand these men who throw a fit about the government throwing out the unfit.

The peak of rents is believed to have been reached. The peak is when a tenant has a look in.

It was an open winter, but the coal dealer is writing letters to try and make it a hard summer.

How could a man say with flowers what he feels like saying when he is digging out dandelions?

Improved Lawn Mower.

A lawn mower that will successfully cut the grass on the incline of a terrace and that will not require its operator to pull it up and down, nor run up and down the grass bank himself, is described in Popular Mechanics Magazine. In construction the new device does not differ greatly from the old-style lawn mower. Instead of the stationary handle, the new machine has a pivoted handle set on a toothed quadrant. By lifting a stop pin from between the teeth of the quadrant, and setting it to the desired point, the mower is brought into an angular position relative to the operator, so that he can cut a lengthwise swath on the slope without leaving the ground level.

The Preface to a Touch.

Mr. Goodsole—"Cadger tells a pitiful hard-luck story." Mr. Pstunge—"Yes, it's quite a touching tale."

Adequate Reason.

Alice—"How do you know you love George?" Virginia—"Because Gladys wants him."—Toledo Blade.

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If a man could read his own biography it would surprise him more than anybody else.

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A Nebraska Case

Mrs. Robert Holm, 5th St., Humboldt, Neb., says: "I was taken with lame back and was almost down with it. I had sharp shooting pains through the small of my back that felt like knife thrusts. I had dizzy spells and had to be helped to walk. My kidneys acted too often. Doan's Kidney Pills relieved me, making me feel like a different woman."

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