SISTERS

By KATHLEEN NORRIS

Author of "Josselyn's Wife"

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THIS STARTS THE STORY

octor Strickland, his two daugh- s, Alix and Cherry, and his niece, e, live together in the California ds, and Peter Joyce, their ibor, comes and goes at will. and Peter marry. Cherry gets atisfied with married life in spite oney and servants. She visits and Peter. Cherry receives a letter from Martin. She hints to and Peter a plan of divorce. r came home one day to find ry standing in the doorway. They d long and earnestly at each r and then Cherry quietly moved y. From that time Peter finds thoughts dwell on her and he is med. Alix is unaware of this ition. Cherry recites to Alix Peter and "the passionate lines her voice linger in Peter's mind a sort of faint incense for hours."

AND HERE IT CONTINUES

"S lovely," said Cherry in the gar- den that night, when he spoke to about it, "but it's not Shakespeare, urse," she surprised him by adding. y had developed, he thought, she ared nothing for Shakespeare years Immediately she began the immor- phrases:

ut the name that is mine enemy, art thyself, though, not a Mon- tague. * * *

* And for that name which is no part of thee all myself!

er's heart began to thump again. were alone in the garden; it was tonight, warm and starry.

ow that you and I are brother and " Cherry said, after a silence, "tell t went across my mind once, and I didn't think of it for years. But e, was it me with whom you were fancied you were in love, all those ago?"

looked innocently up at him in the , and laughed. Peter did not speak few seconds.

s, it was always you!" he said briefly.

erry laughed again, a little amused exultant laugh. But immediately topped laughing, and said, vexedly: was a fool to ask you that! I don't why I did.

st sheer egotism—and I hate n who dwell on their own foolish ve affairs, too!"

er, as ashamed as she of the nt's weakness, laughed, too.

u could hardly call it that!" he ted, mildly.

u could hardly call it anything!" greed, in relief. "Does Alix know?" sked, quickly.

ere wasn't much to tell," he re- d her, as they went back to the through the ranks of wet wall- rs and roses.

thing!" she said again, quickly. when they entered the house he strangely disturbed to see a look omething like shame, something sed and embarrassed on her usually little face, and to realize that she conscientiously avoiding his eyes.

she and Alix had gone to bed he own the little red volume that was ed "Romeo and Juliet," and found core of lines that she had quoted. marveled that the same words could on the printed page so bare and so rich and full in Cherry's voice nder the stars.

next day she talked in a troubled, tain way of going back to Red , and he knew why. But Alix was hast at the idea, and Peter, who losing Doctor Strickland's estate, o careful to depart early in the ngs, and return only late at night, he little alarm, if it was that, died

Martin's plans were uncertain, Cherry might be needed as a wit- n the will case, if Anne's claims proved unjustified, so that neither nor Cherry could find a logical ment with which to combat Alix's ts against any change.

next time that Cherry went into Alix did not go, and Peter, sitting deck of the early boat with her, her again to have luncheon with Immediately a cloud fell on her nd he saw her breast rise quickly. er," she asked him, childishly, straight into his eyes, "why we tell Alix about that?"

r tried to laugh and felt himself to tremble again.

ut what?" he stammered.

ut our having been three hours ch last week?"

y—I don't know!" Peter said, nervously.

was silent, and they parted with- y further reference to meeting for But every time he was sum- to the telephone Peter felt a of expectation, and at noon his swam suddenly before his eyes the lovely voice was really ad- g him. She was at the ferry, y said; she had finished shopping, as going home.

at's fine!" Peter said, quite as he have said it a month ago. But s shaking as he went back to his

t night, when Alix had gone to e entered the sitting room suddenly Cherry hunting for a book. She ropped on one knee, the better to a low shelf, and was wholly ed in the volume she had chanced n.

en she heard the door open she , and immediately became very She did not speak as Peter came nd beside her.

erry——" he said in a whisper, ce close to hers. Neither spoke for a while.

rry was breathing hard, Peter was ous only of a wild whirling of and senses.

y remained so, their eyes fixed, breath coming as if they had been g, for endless seconds.

u remember the question you asked s morning?" Peter said. "Do you ber? Do you remember?"

rry, her cold fingers still holding ce in the book she had been read- vent blindly to the fireplace.

hat?" she said, in the merest

"What?"

cause," Peter said, following her, t of heady madness making him conscious of that need to hear from own lips that she knew, "because I answer that question honestly!" attered not what he said, or what s trying to express; both were en- d in the flame of their new rela- p; surprise and terror were ng even the strange joy of their ery.

must go home—I must go back to tomorrow!" Cherry said, in a ered undertone, as if half to her- "I must go home to Mart tomor- I—let's not—let's not talk!" she off in quick interruption, as he have spoken. "Let's—I'd rather I—where is my book? What was g? Peter—Peter——"

t a minute!" Peter protested. "Cherry—I want to speak to will you wait a minute?"

was halfway to the door; now she , and looked back at him with ened eyes. Peter did not speak at there was a moment of absolute .

In that moment Alix came in. ad said good-night half an hour ; she was in her wrapper, and her ll over one shoulder in a rumpled

Cherry, sick with fright, faced a sort of horror, unable to realize, moment, that there was nothing ing in her attitude or Peter's, and g in her sister's unsuspicious soul e significance to what she saw in ase. Peter, more quickly recover- lf-control, went toward his wife, saw neither clearly, her eyes full of tears, and she had a paper hand.

te," she said. "Cherry! Look at

Look at this!"

held the paper out to them, but it ather at her that they looked, as se gathered near the hearth again. happened to finish my novel!" Alix "and I reached for Pad's old Bible been there on the shelf near my ver since I was married, and I've read it, too! But look what was there all this time!"

hat is it?" Cherry asked, as Peter, udden and violent revulsion of feel- ook the paper and bent toward the to read it.

George!" he said, suddenly, his still running over the half sheet. eorge, this is wonderful!"

Uncle Vincent's receipt to dad at three thousand that is making trouble"

exulted to the still bewildered Cherry. "It's been there all this time—and Cherry," she added, in a voice rich with love and memory, "that's what he meant by saying it was in Matthew. Don't you remember? Doesn't it mean that, Pete? Isn't it perfectly clear?"

"It means only about $50,000 for you and Cherry," Peter answered. "Yes sir, by George—it's perfectly clear! He paid it back—every cent of it, and got his receipt! H'm—this puts rather a crimp in Little's plans—I'll see tomorrow. This calls off his suit——"

"Really, Pete!" Alix asked, with dancing eyes. "And it means that you can keep the old house, Cerise," she exclaimed, triumphantly, "and we can be together part of the year anyway! Oh, come on, everybody, and sit down, and let's talk and talk about it! Let me see it again—'in recognition of all claims against the patent extinguisher aforementioned'—sit down, Pete, it's only 10 o'clock! Let's talk. Aren't you simply wild with joy, Cherry?"

But she told Peter later that she had been surprised at Cherry's quietness; Cherry had looked pale and abstracted, and had not seemed half enthusiastic enough.

"Though very probably," mused Alix, "it brought back dad's death, and saddened her in that way, and more than that, I know she is worried all the time about feeling as she does toward Martin, and perhaps he'll feel that she ought to put this into some horrible mining scheme!" Cherry is not mercenary, I'll say that for her."

"What will you do with all yours?" Peter asked.

"I wish we three could go about the world together," Alix answered. "I'd love to see Japan and India—I'd like to see burning-ghats on the sacred Gunga!" she added, cheerfully. "But I don't know—money doesn't buy you much!" she yawned. "Perhaps I'll go to some old ladies' home, and give each of the old girls $100 a quarter—wouldn't they have fun, buying scarfs and wool and caps?"

"Their families would immediately remove them, for the revenue," Peter suggested. He was grinning at her; he felt suddenly the wholesomeness and safety of her absurdity and originality. He liked the characteristic earnestness with which, in the very act of snapping off her bedroom light, before going out to the sleeping porch, she widened her eyes at him, and frowned in concentrated thought.

"Then I'll give them $50 a quarter!" she decided. "Just enough to buy them some little things, you know, brass teakettles, flannel underwear, whatever they wanted! Presents—they must always want to be making Christmas presents." And she yawned again. "Shut your door, Pete, if you read," she said. "The light shines against the trees, and it's right in my eyes!" But ten minutes later he heard her call through the door, "Or I could give it on condition that they stayed in the home and didn't let their families get it!" and grinned again over his book.

After that there was silence, and gradually the little sounds of the summer night made themselves heard again. Alix's light was out. Cherry came, trailing her thin wrapper, to the porch bed opposite her sister's bed and slipped into it with only a brief good-night. But Peter read on deep into the first hours of the morning.

Kow Yu, flinging the striped blue tablecloth over the porch table the next day at the noon hour, and clinking knifes and forks, was questioned by his master.

"You go catchem 'nother plate, Kow!" Peter said.

"Missy no come!" Kow answered, unruffled. "Him say no can come!"

"Cherry!" Peter shouted. "Did Alix say she wasn't coming to lunch?"

"N-n-not to me!" Cherry answered from the garden. She came up to the porch, with her hands full of short-stemmed roses.

"Him go fiend house," Kow elucidated. "Fiend heap sick!"

"Mrs. Garvin?" Cherry questioned. "Did she stay at Mrs. Garvin's for lunch? Perhaps it's the Garvin baby," she added to Peter. "She said she was going to stop in!"

"I'll find out!" Peter was conscious that everything was beginning to tremble and thrill again, as he went to the telephone. "Why, yes," he said, coming back to the porch, "the baby arrived just before she got there, and they were all upset. She's in her glory, of course. Says that she'll be home to supper, even if she goes back!"

"Oh!" Cherry said, in a small voice. She sat down at the table, and shook out her napkin. Peter sat down, too, and, as usual, served. Kow came and went, and a silence deepened and spread and grew more and more terrible every instant.

It was a Sunday, foggy and overcast, but not cold. The vines about the porch were covered with tiny beads of moisture; among the bushes in the garden little scarfs and veils of fog were caught, and from far across the ridge the droning warning of the fog horn penetrated at regular, brief intervals.

"Cherry," Peter said, suddenly, when the silent meal was almost over, "will you talk about it?"

"Talk——?" she faltered. Her voice thickened and stopped. "Oh, I would rather not!" she whispered, with a frightened glance about.

"Listen, Cherry!" he said, following her to the wide porch rail, and standing behind her as she sat down upon it. "I'm sorry! I'm just as sorry as I can be. But I can't help it, Cherry. And I would like—I do think it would be wiser, just to—to look the matter squarely in the face, and—and perhaps discuss it for a few minutes, and then end it."

She gave him a fleeting glance over her shoulder, but she did not go away. Peter sat down behind her on the rail, and she turned to face him, although her troubled eyes were still averted.

"Cherry," he said then, "I'm as surprised as you are—I can't tell you when it—it all happened! But it—" Peter folded his arms across his chest, and with a grimly squared jaw looked off into the misty distance—"it is there," he finished.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" Cherry whispered, on a breath of utter distress. "I'm so sorry! Oh, Peter, we never should have let it happen—our caring for each other! we never should have allowed ourselves to think—to dream—of such a thing! Oh, Peter, I'm so sick about it," Cherry added, incoherently, with filling eyes. "I'm just sick about it! I know—I know that Alix would never have permitted herself to—I know she wouldn't!"

He was close to her, and now he laid his hand over hers.

"I care——" he said, quite involuntarily, "I have always cared for you! I know it's madness—I know it's too late—but I love every hair of your beautiful head! Cherry—Cherry——!"

They had both gotten to their feet, and now she essayed to pass him, her face white, her cheeks blazing. He stopped her, and held her close in his arms, and after a few seconds he felt her resisting muscles relax, and they kissed each other.

For a full dizzy minute they clung together, arms locked, hearts beating madly and close, and lips meeting again and again. Breathless, Cherry wrenched herself free, and turned to drop into a chair, and breathless, Peter stood looking down upon her. About them was the silence of the dripping garden; all the sounds of the world came muffled and dull through the thick mist.

Then Peter knelt down beside her chair, and gathered her hands together in his own, and she rested her forehead on his, and spent and silent, leaned against his shoulder. And so they remained, not speaking, for a long while. Kow clinked dishes somewhere in a far-away kitchen, and the fog-horn boomed and was still—boomed and was still. But here on the porch there was no sound.

"Cherry, tell me that you care for me a little?" Peter said after awhile, and he felt as if he met a new Cherry, among all the strange new Cherries that the last bewildering week had shown him, when she answered passionately:

"Oh, Peter—Peter—if I did not!"

He tightened his fingers about her own, but did not answer, and it was presently Cherry who broke the brooding, misty silence again.

"What shall we do?" she asked, in a small, tired voice.

Peter abruptly got to his feet, took a chair three feet away, and with a quick gesture of his hand and toss of his head, flung back his hair.

(CONTINUED TOMORROW)

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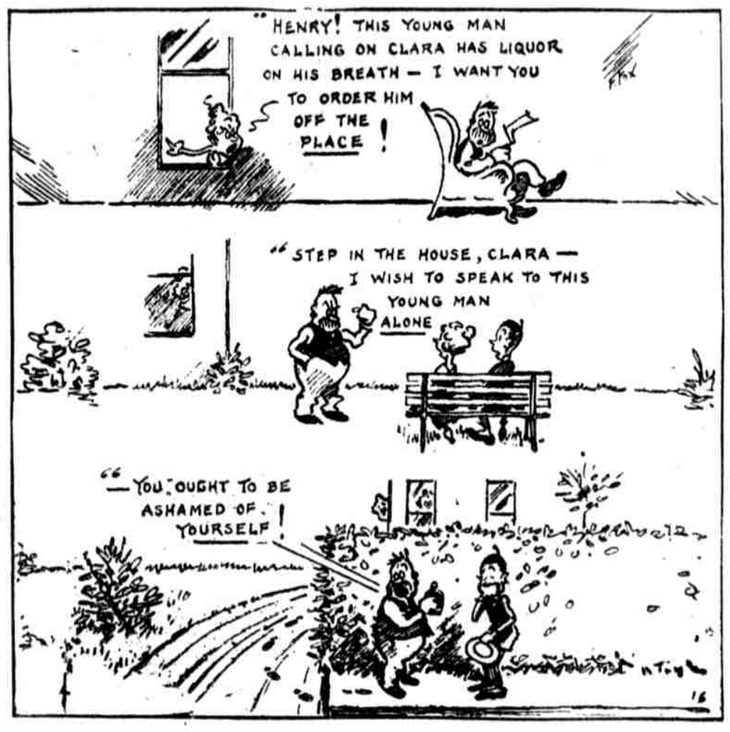

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