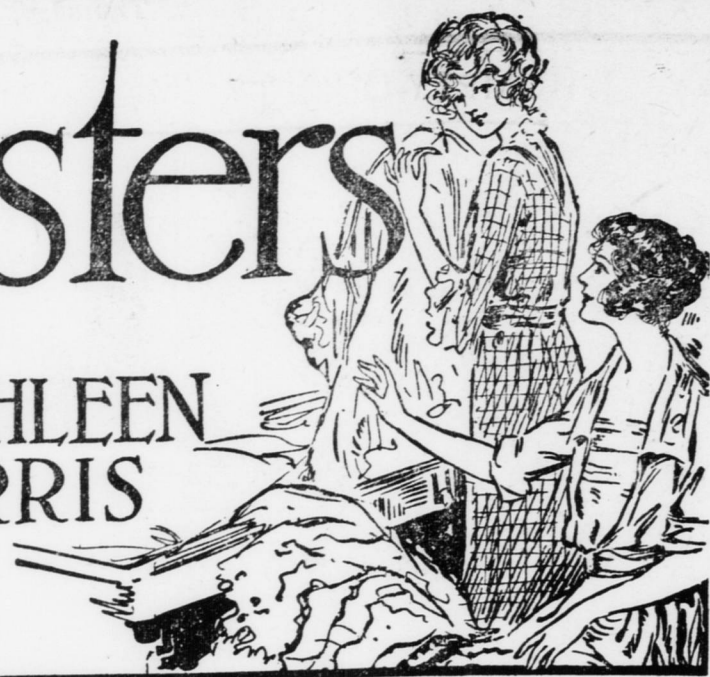


Sisters

KATHLEEN NORRIS

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(Chapter XVII Continued)

"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 hear me?"

"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 connecting his name with another 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.

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 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 stood between them like a screen, the sisters, busy about the house, had wonderful hours together.

CHAPTER XVIII.

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 old fireplace 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



"Where Mr. Peter Go Now?" She Asked.

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

and farmyard she supposed, without giving the matter a conscious thought that he had gone to the city.

"Mis' Peter not go train," Kow announced presently.

All Alix's vague suspicions awakened.

"Not go train?" she asked with a premonitory pang.

Kow made a large gesture, as indicating affairs disorganized.

"Him no go to bed," he further stated. "Boss come late. He walkin' on porch."

"He came in late and walked on the porch!" Alix echoed in a low tone, as if to herself. "Where Mr. Peter go now?" she asked. "He have some coffee?"

"No eat," the boy answered. He indicated the direction of the creek, and after a while Alix, with an icy heart, went to the bridge and the pool where Peter had first found Cherry only a few weeks ago.

He was standing, staring vaguely at the low and hissing stream, and Alix felt a great pang of pity when she saw him. He came to her smiling, but as Cherry had smiled, with a wan and ghastly face.

"Peter, you're not well?" Alix said. "I think—I am a little upset," he answered. They walked back to the house together. Alix ordered him to take a hot bath, and made him drink some coffee, when, refreshed and grateful, he came out to the porch half an hour later. They shared the little meal that was her luncheon and his breakfast.

He followed her to the car and got in the front seat beside her.

"You're awfully good to me," he said, briefly, when they were going down the long grade.

Alix did not answer immediately and he thought that she had not heard. She ran the big machine through the valley, stopped at the postoffice, and still in silence began the climb toward the old house. The roads were all narrow here, but she could have followed them in the dark, he knew, and he understood that it was not her driving that made her face so thoughtful and kept her eyes from meeting his.

"You say I'm good to you, Pete," she surprised him by saying suddenly. "I hope I am. For you've been very good to me, my dear. There's only one thing in life that I haven't got, and want. And that you can't, unfortunately, get for me."

He had flushed darkly, and he spoke with a little effort. "I'd like to try!" She ignored the invitation for a few minutes, and for an instant of panic he thought he saw her lip tremble. But when she turned to him, it was with her usual smile.

"It's only that I would like to have you—and Martin—and Cherry as happy as I am!" she said quickly. And a second later the mood was gone as she turned the car in at the home gate and exclaimed, "There's Cherry now!" "Martin's somewhere about," Cherry said as Peter joined her, and Alix stopped the car within conversational range.

Alix remarking that she would turn the car so that she might later start on the grade, disappeared, and the two were together again, after what a night—and what a day!—and that was all that mattered. They spoke confusedly, in brief monosyllables, and were silent, their eyes meeting only furtively and briefly.

"Can you walk up to the cabin with me?" Peter asked. "I want so much to speak to you. Everything's all arranged for tomorrow. All you have to think of is yourself. Now, in case of missing the boat again—which isn't conceivable, but we must be ready for anything!—I shall go straight to the club. You must telephone me there. Just go off tonight quietly, get as much sleep as you can, and keep your wits about you."

"Tell me our plans again," Cherry faltered.

"It's perfectly simple," he said, giving her an anxious face a concerned glance. "You are going to the Olivers'. I go in, in the morning, to get your suitcase and my own and get to the boat. I shall be there at half-past ten. You get there before eleven—you won't see me. But go straight on board and ask for Mrs. Joyce's cabin. Wait for me there!"

"But—suppose you don't come!" "I'll be there before you. It is better for us not to meet upstairs. But to be sure, I'll telephone you at Minna Oliver's at about nine o'clock tomorrow morning. I'll just tell you that I'm on my way and that everything is all right! Do you realize that by this time tomorrow we shall be out at sea," he added, "leaning on the rail—watching the Pacific race by—and belonging to each other forever and ever?"

The picture flooded her face with happy color. "It's tomorrow at last!" she said wonderingly as they walked slowly toward the house. "I thought it would never be. It's only a few hours more now."

"How will you feel when it's today?" he asked.

"Oh, Peter, I shall be so glad when it's all over, and when the letters are written, and when we've been together for a year," she answered fervently. "I know it will be all as we have planned, but—but if it were over!" They reached the side door now and

were mounting the three steps together.

"Be patient until tomorrow," he whispered.

"Oh," she said softly, "I shan't breathe until tomorrow."

Leaning across her to push back the light screen door, he found himself face to face with Alix. In the dark entryway Peter and Cherry had not seen her, had not heard her move. Peter cursed his carelessness; he could not remember, in the utter confusion of the moment, just what he and Cherry had said, but if it was of a betraying nature, they had betrayed themselves. One chance in a hundred that she had not heard!

Yet, if she was acting, she was acting superbly. Cherry had turned scarlet and had given him an open glance of consternation, but Alix did not seem to see it. She addressed Peter, but when he found himself physically unable to answer, she continued the conversation with no apparent consciousness of his stumbling effort to appear natural.

"There you are! Are we going to have any tennis? It's after two o'clock now."

"I had no idea it was so late," Peter said.

"I knew it was getting on," Cherry added, utterly at random.

"Go in and tell the boy we won't be back until tomorrow," Martin suggested to his wife.

"You could all come down here to sleep," Cherry said, "and have breakfast here!"

"I have to go into town rather early tomorrow," Peter remarked. "Porter's giving a breakfast at the Bohemian club."

"Why not walk up to the cabin?" Cherry suggested in a shaking voice. "I have to take the car up. You three walk! Come on, anybody who wants to ride!" Alix said.

"They can walk," Martin said, getting into the front seat. "Me for the little old bus!"

Cherry came out of the house with her hat on, and Buck leaped before her into the back seat. Alix watched her as she stepped up on the running board, and saw the color flicker in her beautiful face.

"I thought you were going to walk!" Peter said nervously. He had sauntered up to them with an air of indifference.

"Shall I?" faltered Cherry. She looked at Alix, who had not yet climbed into the car and was pulling on her driving gloves. Alix, toward whose face the dog was making eager springs, did not appear interested, so Cherry turned to Martin. "Walk with us, Mart?" she said.

"Nix," Martin said comfortably, not stirring.

"I'll be home before you, Pete, and wait for you," Alix said. She looked at him irresolutely, as if she would have added more, but evidently decided against it and spoke again only in reference to the dog. "Keep Buck with you, will you, Pete?" she said. "He's getting too lazy. No, sir!" she reproached the animal affectionately. "You shall not ride! Well, the dear old Bucky-boy, does he want to come along?"

And she knelt down and put her arms about the animal, and laid her brown cheek against his head.

"You old fool!" she said, shaking him gently to and fro. "You've got to stay with Peter. Old Bucky!"

Suddenly she was on her feet and had sprung into her place.

"Hold him, Pete!" she said. "Good-by, Sis dear! All right, Martin?"

The engine raged; the car slipped smoothly into gear and vanished. Peter and Cherry stood looking at each other.

"Give them a good start, or Buck will catch them," Peter said, his body swaying with the frantic jumping of the straining dog. But to himself he said, with a sense of shock: "Alix knows!"

Buck was off like a rocket when he finally set him free; his feathery tail disappeared between the columns of the redwoods. Without speaking, Cherry and Peter started after him.

"And now that we are alone together," Cherry said, after a few minutes, "there seems to be nothing to say! We've said it all."

"Nothing to say!" Peter echoed. "Alix knows," he said in his heart.

"Whatever we do, it all seems so wrong!" Cherry said with watering eyes.

"Whatever we do is wrong," he agreed soberly.

"But we go?" she said on a fluttering breath.

"We must go!" Peter answered. And again, like the ominous fall of a heavy bell-tongue, the words formed in his heart: "Alix knows. Alix knows."

He thought of the afternoon, only a few weeks ago, when Cherry's beauty had made so sudden and so irresistible an appeal to him, and of the innocent delight of their luncheons together, when she had first confided in him, and of the days of secret and intense joy that her mere nearness and the knowledge that he would see her had afforded him. It had all seemed so fresh, so natural, so entirely their own affair, until the tragic day of Martin's reappearance and the hour of agonized waiting at the boat for the Cherry who did not come. There had been no joyous self-confidence in that hour, none in the distressed hour at the Orpheum, and the hour just past, when Cherry's rarely displayed passion had wrung from him his last vestige of doubt.

But this was the culminating unhappiness that he should know, from Alix's brave and gentle and generous

look as they parted, that Alix knew he had, in the wild rush and hurry of his thoughts, no time now to analyze what their love must mean to her, but it hurt him to see on her happy face those lines of sternness and gravity, to see her bright and honest eyes shadowed with that new look of pain.

It was too late now to undo it; he and Cherry must carry their desperate plan to a conclusion now, must disappear and forget. They had tried, all this last dreadful week, they had both tried, to extinguish the flames, and they had failed. But to Peter there was no comforting thought anywhere. Wrong would be done to Martin, to Alix, to Cherry—and more than even these, wrong to himself, to the ideal of himself that had been his for so many years, to the real Peter Joyce.

"Listen, that's Buck!" said Cherry, as the dog's loud and violent barking reached them from beyond a turn in the twisting road. "He didn't catch them, then."

The next instant a woman came up the road, running and making a queer, whimpering noise that Cherry never forgot. She was a stranger to them, but she ran toward them, making the

(To Be Continued)

LEGAL NOTICE

NOTICE OF SALE OF VALUABLE REAL ESTATE

Under and by virtue of the power of sale contained in a deed of trust executed by W. F. Wiggins to R. R. Blanton, Trustee, the undersigned, and default having been made in the payment of the indebtedness secured by said deed of trust, and the holder of the indebtedness, S. A. Summey, having directed me to foreclose said deed of trust, I, R. R. Blanton, the undersigned trustee, will on the

Monday the 16th day of January, 1922, at 12:00 M;

in front of the court house door in Rutherfordton, N. C., offer for sale at public auction, for cash, the following piece, parcel or tract of land lying and being in Colfax Township, Rutherford County, State of North Carolina, being a part of the Martha L. Park's place, lying on the East side of the public road, adjoining the lands of William Walker and others and described by courses and distances as follows: BEGINNING at pointers on the road, Eliza Martin corner and runs thence with his line South 85 1/2 East 141 poles to a stone; his corner; thence with the old line South 1 West 36 poles to a stone; the old corner; thence with the old line North 86 West 113 poles to a post oak, old corner; thence North 12 poles to a stake or stone, William Walker's corner; thence with his line North 89 West 30 1/2 poles to a stone on the road; thence North 8 West 22 poles to the place of the BEGINNING, containing 26 1/2 acres more or less.

This the 16th day of December, 1921.

R. R. BLANTON, Trustee.

LAND SALE

Under and by virtue of a Deed of Trust and five notes given C. E. Huntley by T. S. Atkins and wife, and assigned to me, wherein one note for \$218.40 is past due, I will sell to the highest bidder at the court house door in Rutherfordton, N. C.,

on Monday, January 16, 1922

at 12 o'clock m., or within the legal hours of sale, one house and lot in the town of Forest City, N. C., near the graded school building, adjoining lands of Reinhardt's, Weathers', Huntley and others; bounded as follows: Beginning on a stake in Reinhardt's line, thence with said line north 13 east 555 feet to a pine knot on bank of branch; thence south 64 west up the branch as it meanders with Weathers' line 213 feet more or less to a stake in Weathers' line, thence south 12 1/2 west 420 feet to a stake; thence south 78 east 158 feet to the beginning, containing 1 83-100 acres more or less.

Terms of Sale: \$218.40 cash on day of sale; \$218.40 July 14, 1922; \$218.40 July 14, 1923; \$218.40 July 14, 1924; balance due and payable July 14, 1925, at 6 per cent interest on all deferred payments from January 16, 1922, with notes and approved security or Deed of Trust on said property, title withheld and bond given for double amount until the purchase price and interest is paid, then Deed will be given.

Interest payable annually.

T. C. McBRAYER, Assignee.

PROFESSIONAL CARDS

R. R. BLANTON Attorney Forest City, N. C. Office in Bank Building

J. A. WILKIE Insurance of All Kinds Real Estate Bought and Sold Forest City, N. C.

DR. FRANK R. WILKINS Dentist Over Moss-Reinhardt Furn. Store Next to P. O., Forest City, N. C.

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