

# SISTERS

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By  
**KATHLEEN  
NORRIS**

## 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 mail.

"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.

"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 somber and far away. Alix, standing, watched her distressedly, 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 forget!" 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, "that 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!"

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 thoughtful 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.

All hope died when she saw his face. "What about her?" he asked, almost inaudibly.

"Somebody wrote this letter about her," Alix started, quickly. "Who wrote you about her? What'd she say?" he demanded quickly.

"Just—I'll let you see it," she 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!"

"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!"

"Shh! 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.

(TO BE 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 dreaded 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, a Hatty Woods—she's the notorious one in Red Creek—and this Joe King crowd that he went with—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?"

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## THE FINANCE ACT UNCONSTITUTIONAL

HELD INVALID BY SUPREME COURT AND MUST BE RE-PASSED BY ASSEMBLY.

## CONSTERNATION IN HOUSE

Opinion of Supreme Court Read as Contained in Communication From Chief Justice Clark

Raleigh.

The municipal finance act as it has passed the house is unconstitutional and invalid, and it must go through both bodies again. Complying with a request from the senate, the supreme court rendered an opinion read at night session, holding that the act would be unconstitutional as passed.

The senate, upon receiving the opinion, immediately started the bill through again, and eighty-nine house members, a number sufficient to constitute a quorum, voted to remain in session at least through Monday night to insure proper passage again through that body of the measure.

The possibility of the act being unconstitutional was suggested in the senate after the bill had passed that body on second reading. An amendment exempting Madison county from the act, thereby, in the opinion of senators, making it a local and not a statewide measure, was assigned as the reason for its unconstitutionality.

The supreme court considered that the amendment alone would be hardly sufficient to render it invalid, but the failure of the house to read the amended bill over three times with a yea and nay vote on the second and third readings entered on the journal would invalidate it.

Senator Lunston Long read the opinion of the supreme court as contained in a communication from Chief Justice Clark. The senate took up immediately plans for starting the bill back through, and sent a communication to the house announcing the court's decision.

Consternation reigned in the lower body for a few minutes after the receipt of the announcement, and a debate, featured by biting and jocular remarks, occurred between a half dozen members.

No Chance for North Carolina. Washington (Special).—Chance of a North Carolinian being appointed on the interstate commerce commission disappeared. President Harding told Senator McKellar, of Tennessee, his intention is to reappoint the old man as their terms expire. If not, he will not appoint a southerner, demands from other sections having preference.

Representative Weaver urged the first assistant postmaster general to appoint Miss Bonnie Kate Reagan as postmaster at Weaverville. She is the first eligible. Mr. Weaver said if the department followed out its system he announced it could not fail to give her the job.

He made public the following list of eligibles for the office at Clyde: V. H. Byers, Work P. Haynes and Joel W. Shook. Mr. Weaver introduced a bill granting a \$30 pension to Levi J. Tipton, of Asheville.

Representative Doughton made public the eligibles for the Lenoir offices as follows: John D. Matheson, John C. Smith and A. M. B. Goodman.

Arguments in Automobile Case. Arguments in the case of C. J. Kelly, of Sanford; Major A. W. Hoffman, of New York; George Scott, former member of the automobile squad in New York; Frank Moran, of New York, and Harry Craig, of Germantown, Pa., charged with conspiracy in the sale of stolen automobiles, which has been on trial in federal court here for the past week, were begun, the taking of testimony having been concluded.

Postoffice Discontinued. The Postoffice Department gives notice that the postoffice at Navassa, Brunswick county, has been discontinued and that mail will go to Leland.

Delegates Can't Make Trip. Washington (Special).—Senator Overman, at the request of Leonard Tufts, extended an invitation through Secretary of State Hughes, to the members of the arms conference, to visit Pinehurst, but Mr. Hughes advised Senator Overman that owing to the pressing duties of the conference the delegates have found it impossible to accept invitations outside of Washington, and requests Senator Overman to express to Mr. Tufts the very deep appreciation of the delegates for his kind invitation.

To Hold Examinations. Washington (Special).—The civil service commission has been requested by the postoffice department to hold an examination for appointment of postmasters at Asheville and High Point.

On January 14 examinations will be held as follows: Badin, salary, \$2,100; Jackson, \$1,400; Lake Junaluska, \$1,100; Mayo-dan, \$1,500; Moncure, \$1,000; Montreat, \$1,500; Newland, \$1,100; Park-ton, \$1,200; Stantonburg, \$1,200.

## Contracts Let For Road Work.

Contracts were awarded for around \$1,310,000 of road work, principally in the sixth, eighth and ninth construction districts, by the state highway commission. The total length of highways to be constructed under the contracts is 100 miles, the types of road being asphalt, macadam and gravel.

Among the contracts awarded were the following: Burke County—Morganton to Glen Alpine, 5.24 miles of Topeka asphalt, Southern Dray company of Asheville, contractors, \$168,302.70; bridges also to this company, \$3,890.40.

Cleveland County—Shelby to Cleveland Springs, 1.90 miles of Topeka asphalt, Southern Paving company of Chattanooga, Tenn., \$54,814; bridges to Z. B. Weathers, Shelby, \$19,035.10. Mitchell County—Spruce Pine to Ledger, 7.04 miles of penetration macadam, Porter & Boyd of Charlotte, \$199,132; bridges to L. J. Chaudler, Virginia, Va., \$18,146.

Henderson County—Horseshoe to Transylvania line, 5.20 miles of gravel road, Southern Davis Construction company, of Greensboro, \$26,312.50; bridges to Asheville Construction company, \$8,607.90.

Rutherford County—Bridges over Mountain creek, Austin Brothers Construction company, \$5,215.80. Clay County—Haysville to Georgia state line, 5 miles of gravel road, E. A. Wilson company of Knoxville, \$33,283.60; bridges to W. T. Moore, Concrete Products company, \$16,048.50.

Macon and Swain Counties, between Topton and Almond, 17.84 miles of waterbound macadam, E. A. Wilson company, of Knoxville, \$284,070.30; bridges to Southern Dray company of Asheville, \$28,803.60.

Wilkes County—Wilkesboro to Miller's creek, 6 miles of hard surfaced highway, Porter & Boyd, Charlotte, \$110,349.80. Union County—Monroe towards Charlotte, on W. C. A. highway, 4.5 miles of Topeka asphalt, Redmon Construction company, \$112,604.80.

State Has Highest Birth Rate. Washington (Special).—North Carolina has the laudable distinction of having "the highest birth rate (31.7) for the white population of any other state for 1920," according to a census report issued. California had the lowest, with 18.3 per thousand population.

North Carolina stands third in the birth rate of colored people; she is exceeded by the District of Columbia, where the negro flourishes, and California, where Orientals are increasing.

The average birth rate from 23 states covered was 23.3 per thousand. North Carolina, therefore, is far ahead. The record for North Carolina was: White births, 57,054, and colored 24,353, for 1920, and 51,832 and 22,023 for 1919.

The birth rate for whites last year was 31.7 per thousand, and colored, 31.3. South Carolina's white birth rate last year was 28.8, and colored, 27.7.

Would Fix Limit at 39 Cents. Thirty-nine cents is set as the limit of which counties may go in levying taxes for the schools in a measure introduced in the house of representatives by Matthew of Bertie, to answer assaults that have been made upon the administration of the schools and to clarify the general educational situation. The bill stipulates that no mandamus will lie against the county commissioners to force that body to levy a tax in excess of the 39-cent limit.

Adopts New Plan. The State Board of Health, in session here, adopted as a permanent policy the piecemeal system which has been in operation by agreement between county and state health authorities for five months.

This, according to Dr. W. S. Rankin, state health officer, makes a radical change in the relation between the State Board of Health and the county health departments. The new policy, outlined by Dr. Rankin in a statement recently issued, is designed to more adequately insure the wise expenditure of funds by both the state and counties in public health work which is of mutual interest to both state and county and which is carried on largely through county officers. This change, he says, is also designed to develop a larger degree of local interest, responsibility and control in public health matters.

Forestry Experts to Meet. The eleventh annual convention of the North Carolina Forestry association will be held in Wilmington on Friday, January 27, 1922. The program is being arranged so that several of the most important forestry problems now before the people of the state, such as highway planting, county co-operation in forest fire prevention, state or federal forest control, etc., will be brought up for discussion by some of the leading authorities on these subjects.

Takes Charge Near East Relief. Morris A. Beale, assistant State director in North Carolina for the Near East Relief, has taken charge of the Raleigh headquarters of the organization. Claude W. Hooper, former State director here, has been made regional director with five states under his supervision. Mr. Hooper was in Raleigh on a visit to the local office. He was returning from Charleston, where he attended the meeting of governors this week to Richmond, Va., which is his headquarters now.

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John's Discouragement. Little John sat upon the stairs looking disconsolate. "What's the matter, Johnny?" asked Cousin Isabel kindly. "Well, you see, Cousin Isabel, they let me hold the baby on my knee, sometimes, though he can't even hold his head up straight. And they weigh him every single day, but since they began, it he's gained only two pounds and three ounces. And I've just been thinking that fellow'll be of any use on the team."

Real Dilemma. Parker—What's wrong? You look worried. Streeter—I am. I wrote two notes—one to my broker, asking him if he took me for a fool, and the other to Miss Golding, asking her if she would marry me. While I was out somebody telephoned "Yes," and I don't know which of them it was!"

The man who "also ran" in a political race usually has an empty purse as a souvenir.

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