

# Sisters

**KATHLEEN NORRIS**



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Downstairs, the doctor sat on, thinking, and his face was grave. He was thinking of little Cherry's good-night kiss, half an hour ago. She had rested against his arm, and he had held her there, but what had been the thoughts behind the blue eyes so near his own? He realized with a great rush of fear that some man had kissed Cherry tonight, had held her against a tobacco-scented coat, and that the girl was a woman, and an awakened woman at that. Cherry—kissed a man! Her father's heart wince away from the thought.

Young Lloyd and Peter had walked home with her. But if Anne was right in her suddenly suspicious of Lloyd's intentions, then it must have been Peter who surprised little Cherry with a sudden embrace.

And as he came to his conclusions a certain relief crept into the old man's heart, Peter was an odd fellow; he was ten years too old for the child. But Peter was a lover of books and gardens and woods and music, after all, and Peter's father and this old man musing by the fire had been "Lee" and "Paul" to each other since boyhood. Peter might give Cherry a kiss as innocently as a brother; in any case, Peter would wait for her, would be all consideration and tenderness when he did win her.

Cherry, he reflected fearfully, was as pretty as her mother had been at eighteen, with the same rounded chin and apricot cheeks, and the same shimmering innocent blue eyes with a film of corn-colored hair blown across them. She had the strange, the indefinable quality that without words, almost without glances, draws youth toward youth, draws admiration and passion, draws life and all its pain. Her father for the first time tonight formulated in his heart the thought that she might be happily married.

Married—nonsense! Why, what did she know of life, of submission and courage and sacrifice? It would be years, many years, before the snowy frills, and the pale gold head, and the firm, brown little hand would be ready for that!

Not many hours after he went slowly up to bed morning began to creep into the little valley. Alix, at her early bath, heard quail calling, and looked out to see the last of the fog vanishing at eight o'clock, and to get a wet rush of fragrance from the Persian lilac, blooming this year for the first time. At half-past eight she came out into the garden, to find her father somewhat ruefully studying the tumbled ruins of the yellow banksia rose. The garden was still wet, but warming fast; she picked a plume of dark and perfumed heliotrop, and began to fasten it in his coat lapel while she kissed him.

"We'll never get that back on the roof, my dear boy," Alix said maternally.

Her father pursed his lips, shook his head doubtfully. The rose, a short week ago, had been spreading fanlike



"Hello, old Bumpy-doodles!" Said Alix, Burying Both Hands in His Feathered Collar.

branches well toward the ridge-pole, a spray and a half above their heads. But the great wind of yesterday that had ended the spring and brought in the summer had dragged it from its place and there it, a jumble of ornamental leaves and frost-chillous of creamy blossoms, across the path and the steps of the porch. Alix intuitively turned it a nose spray, and stood biting her thumb.

Her attention was attracted by the setter puppy who came cautiously gambling toward her. "Hello, old Bumpy-doodles!" she said with rich affection, kissing the dog's silky head, and holding both hands in his feathered collar. "Hello, old Buck!"

"Alexandra, for heaven's sake stop handling that brute!" said Peter

tones. "I came with Lloyd and Cherry as far as the bridge, then I cut up the hill. Why?" he asked sharply.

"What's up?"

"Nothing's up," Doctor Strickland said slowly. "But I think Lloyd admires—or is beginning to admire—her," he said.

"Who—Cherry?" Peter exclaimed, with distaste and incredulity in his tone.

"You don't think so?" the doctor, looking at him wistfully, asked eagerly.

"Why, certainly not!" Peter said, his face very red. "She's much younger than Anne and Alix—"

"It doesn't always go by that," the doctor suggested.

"No, I know it doesn't," Peter answered in his quick, annoyed fashion. "I should be sorry," Cherry's father admitted.

"Sorry!" Peter echoed impatiently. "But it's quite out of the question, of course! It's quite out of the question. She—she wouldn't consider him for an instant," he suddenly decided in great satisfaction. "You mustn't forget that she has something to do with it! Very fastidious, Cherry. She's not like other girls!"

"That's true—that's true!" Doctor Strickland agreed, in great relief. They turned back toward the garden, in time to meet Alix and several dogs streaming across the clearing. Over the girl's shoulder was coiled the great rope; she leaped various logs and small bushes as she came, and the dogs barked madly and leaped with her. Breathless, she stumbled and fell into her father's arms, and both men had the same thoughts, one that made them smile upon her tomboyishness indulgently: "If this is twenty-one—eighteen is three long years younger and less responsible!" (To be Continued.)

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