

SISTERS THREE

Chapter I.

"Mary's girls!" spoke a faint voice. "Mary's girls!"

The bed upon which the speaker lay faced the sunset. In the west the fires of day were dying. The flush of rose was slowly merging into saffron and pale green of an infinite purity. Gold in the sky, silver on the sea, and here and there a sail, white or fawn, as the case might be, of some small fishing craft putting forth across that luminous space of boundless shining water—a fitting emblem or so the silent watcher thought, of that other launching forth upon eternity's wide sea which his old friend, lying half-conscious upon his pillows, was so soon to experience.

"Did you speak, Richard?"

"I was dreaming, I think of the things which will be here after I am gone. Tom, am I dying—to-night?"

"My friend, I think so."

"I think so too. I am not sorry to go. Since I was stricken and my strength taken from me my life has not held me in close bonds. I am only sorry for one omission. I ought to have had Mary's girls here before, and I have not done so."

"Tell me of Mary's girls," said the doctor.

"Tom, you never reproached me about Mary and my treatment of her, but you did not approve."

"I must always regret family differences and estrangements. And I was very fond of Mary. I and my wife missed her sadly when she went. But to be sure, she was hot-headed in the matter of her marriage. There are always two sides to the shield. A little more patience on both sides—"

"I see that now very clearly that I was selfish towards Mary. I looked upon her presence here as something fixed, something I had a right to. You know that when young she had had an affair of the heart which went amiss, and she thought hers was broken, poor child, and that she would never marry. And I came to think so too—rule that idea out of our pleasant peaceful life here. And then when that occurred, which now I see was purely natural and to be expected, I was utterly dumfounded! And there were contributory circumstances also—"

"You mean that Aubrey Vere—that was his name, was it not?—was a guest at Gann Keep?"

"Yes, and Lebreton and I were never on friendly terms; and at that time there were many causes of friction. It was Mary's meeting him there—meeting him as she took the path through the plantation—which seemed a thing unbearable to me. Ah, Tom, how small and strange all these troubles of time seem with the great white light of eternity shining before us! And yet even now there are things which I would not have Mary's girls forget when they come here."

"Tell me of Mary's girls! After her marriage we lost sight of her. She ceased to write."

"I understand that. I had ceased to write to her. That being so, she would not write to any one else in Rockhaven. But from time to time she sent me a letter and sketched for me the main events of her year."

"You never told me this."

"No; I had resolved never to speak of Mary again—and I am an obstinate man. Also I thought that you were not quite in sympathy with me, Tom. I do not want any barrier raised between us by argument or difference of opinion."

"Was Mary's life with young Vere a happy one?"

"I believe so, in the main. Those handsome dashing men have their faults, but they are fascinating to women, and he always adored Mary. I think they were happy. But she died seven years ago, when her youngest child was about ten or eleven years old. After that things began to go amiss. He lost money."

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I missed Mary's letters, and through our lawyers I made guarded inquiries from time to time. Then just before that illness of mine a year and a half ago I heard that he had died suddenly and that his affairs were in the greatest confusion."

"I thought he had a fine property?"

"I believe he had. He ought to have made settlements upon Mary; but her hasty run-away marriage stopped all chance of that point being assured. And just when the time came that I ought to have stepped into the breach and found out how things were really going I was laid low by that stroke, and for six months I could neither write nor speak, and my brain even refused to act."

"But for a while you recovered?"

"I did; and I found out that the three girls with a faithful old servant had settled in London and that the lawyers were seeking to save something out of the property which had been almost ruined by Aubrey Vere's reckless extravagance. I wanted then to do something for the girls—to ask them here perhaps or make them some allowance—but I shrank from the effort of making up my mind; and then another stroke followed. It did not take my speech from me, but it deadened by energies, dulled my mind, left me supine and indifferent to the things of life, fearful of exertion or excitement or change. And so things have drifted on. My will has been made. All I have will be theirs; but I could not make up my mind to see them, to change the quiet monotony of my life. And now it is too late!"

The doctor bowed his head in assent. He knew that for his old friend the sands of life were fast running out. He had been in a critical condition for long. Any sudden exertion or excitement might have proved fatal. Quite well he understood how difficult it would have been for a man in this condition of health to reconstruct his whole scheme of life or make any sudden developments or changes in his method of solitary existence in his sea-girt home facing the sunset. This momentary accession of strength, enabling him to tell this tale to his friend before passing into silence, did not deceive Doctor Kingscot.

He gave the patient a drink of the cordial which stood near at hand. The old servant who waited on him in lieu of a trained nurse came and went, made up the bed, and brought in a shaded lamp; but the blinds of the windows which faced the west were not drawn down. There was a light yet in the west; the cloudless sky was of a serene purity exquisite to the eye, and already the light of a half-grown moon threw a track of burnished silver brightness across the smooth sea.

"Mary's girls will like my house," said the dying man.

"There are three of them, I think you said. Any son?" asked Doctor Kingscot.

"No; the eldest child was a boy, but he died in early childhood. This was Mary's chief sorrow in her married life. The girls all lived. The eldest must be two-and-twenty, the youngest is called Allardye, probably some name from the other side."

"Have they relatives of their father's who may be looking after them now?"

"I have never heard of any. Mary never mentioned any such in her letters. I know that he was an only child. I do not know whether they have kindred of their father's to look to; but you will learn all that when they come. I know that you will be good to them, Tom, for their mother's sake."

"For the sake of my old friend also I will do what I can for the girls. You believe they will come?"

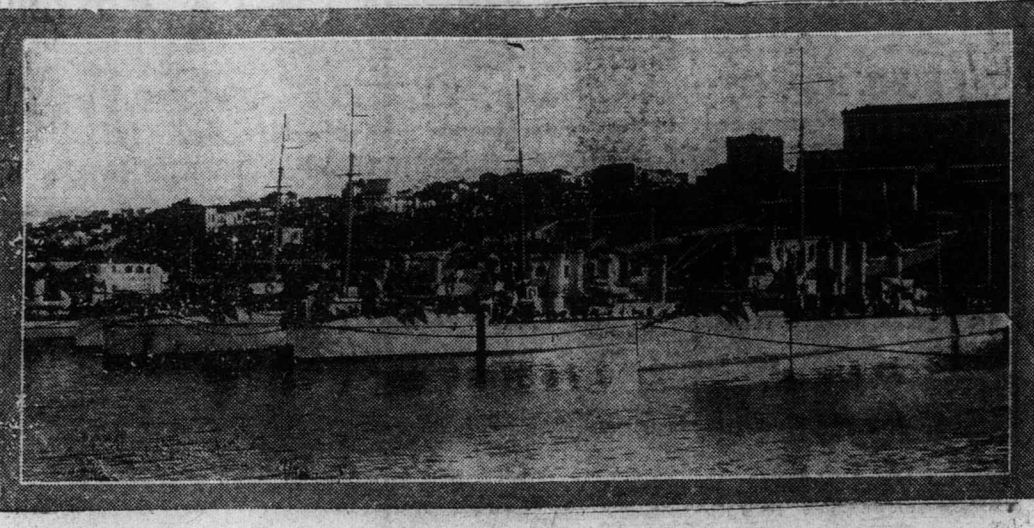
"I fancy so. The house will be theirs, and such fortune as I have to leave. It is nothing great, as you know; but it will suffice to keep them in comfort."

"Then they must settle matters as they will. I like to think of the old house passing to Mary's girls. I cannot tie millions round the necks of the young ones. It needs be. We of the old place must pass to strangers. But here the old man half-raised himself, and for a moment the fires of a headstrong youth seemed to blaze in the eyes which had been up till now dreamy and soft—"but I would not have it sold to young Gaston Lebreton, who will certainly wish to buy, if ever it comes into the market. Tom, tell them that! I have told them to guard the right of way—never to let it lapse; and I have warned them that the house on Sunset Crags is the Nabob's vineyard to the house of Lebreton, and to see that it never falls into their hands."

"Dick," said the doctor quietly, "do you not think that the hatchet might now be buried and that old-standing enmity between Gaston's Keep and Sunset Crags be suffered to drop into the limbo of forgetfulness? These girls know nothing of the matter; and indeed it is more a question of old sore memories and inherited antipathies than of any real grievance now."

But the dying man gripped his old friend's hand with a strength which was surprising. Even now the fires of the past had power to kindle the expiring embers for a brief while. "Tom, you do not understand. It is because I wish to protect Mary's girls that I lay these injunctions upon them—that I ask you to enforce them with your own words of counsel. Listen, Tom! There are three girls coming, and they must needs be handsome and good to look upon. You recollect how lovely Mary was; and young Vere was as handsome a man as ever I remember to

PIRAEUS AND ATHENS UNDER GUNS OF SIXTEEN BRITISH WARSHIPS.



The harbor of Piraeus showing Greek war vessels

have seen. Some of his wild blood was in their veins; and they may be daring and impulsive too. And Gaston Lebreton reigns at the Keep. He is twenty-four, handsome, and unmarried." For a moment he spoke of his past, and then, with a low-toned emphasis of manner which was full of pleading and significance, he added, "Let there be no mating betwixt Mary's girls and that son of John Lebreton. The father I can never, never forgive for his treatment of young Kildare—"

"Dick, I feel over that matter as deeply as you can do. I spoke my mind to Gaston at that time with as much force as you would have used in my place. But, remember, young Gaston had nothing to do with it. He was not even in the country. I can be sure that had he been here as I am now, he would have been as prompt to me that he needs it all very keenly. His father being dead, he cannot blame him or speak evil things of him; but I am as certain as I can be that had he been here at that terrible time James Kildare would not be serving his time as a convict now."

"Convict—that brave, fine, noble lad! Tom, the one thought of that time was to save him. And it was Lebreton's doing! All for the sake of a few beggarly hundreds! And he a man rolling in wealth! No, Tom, that cannot be forgiven."

"And he has gone to his account, taking his sins with him. But with that matter Gaston had no concern."

"His father's son, Tom—his father's son! And the Lebreton strain is very strong. See how it has kept its characteristics in you, and in these centuries! I would not have one of Mary's girls mate with a Lebreton. I am most anxious to safeguard them as far as it is possible, and so I have bidden them to stay in the room of way which has always made bad blood between us and them. No count young Gaston will take advantage—or try to—when I am gone, and then they will be free to do as they please."

"But Mary's girls should know how to fight!"

"For a short while there was silence in the room. The shadows grew thick in the corners. Upon the face of the dying man and his watcher the dim gray shadows seemed to gather and rest. The doctor's face was very grave and thoughtful; the one upon the pillow had relaxed and was wearing now an expression of singular tranquility and peace.

Suddenly his eyes opened and he slightly raised his hand, which the other took in a warm clasp.

"Tom, do not mistake me! Do not think that I pass away with thoughts of revenge or of enmity in my heart. That is not so. My spirit is at peace. Who am I that I should judge another? But I have Mary's girls to think for. If I meet Mary on the other side—as I trust I may—it will rejoice me to know that I have done what I could for them. I have tried to smooth their path and keep them from peril. Mary always understood me. With all my selfishness, with all my faults, she loved me. She will

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understand and know that I have done my best for them."

He lay still a long while with a smile upon his lips, and then, with a sigh as of mingled weariness and contentment, he turned half over towards his pillow as if he wished to sleep.

"Good night, Tom!" he said dreamily. "Good night, old friend!" They were the last words he spoke.

Chapter II.

Miss Willoughby walked slowly backwards and forwards in her big double drawing rooms overlooking Berkeley Square, the trees of which were just beginning to hang out little leaves of green which looked scarcely more than silver-gray.

Sunshine streamed in through the south windows, across boxes bright with spring blooms, and through curtains of pale amber tint, which shed a diffused brightness upon the costly furniture.

There were quantities of flowers in the room, and the air was almost heavy with their fragrance. But, although most of these were fresh and beautiful yet, it seemed as though the mistress of this splendid domain was not satisfied with her bower, for in a small boudoir beyond the inner drawing-room great piles of cut blossoms fresh from the country or the florist's could be seen. Miss Willoughby was waiting for something or somebody, for she looked frequently at the clock upon the chimney-piece, a marvellous production in tortoiseshell, ivory and gold. As the silver chimes rang out a fourfold peal upon eight musical bells, which was followed by a deep-toned, solemn boom which struck the heart, it appeared that Miss Willoughby walked straight towards the bell and only paused with her hand upon it because she heard a light, familiar sound upon the stairs outside.

The door, which stood ajar behind its silk-embroidered curtain, was softly opened, and a young girl entered with a rapid and airy tread.

"You are late. I am late."

"I am sorry, but we had some wonderful news by post this morning. Miss Willoughby, we shall soon be going away."

Miss Willoughby was a tall, imposing, handsome woman who could never see thirty again. But that was a matter which gave her no concern. She dressed with a stately dignity and richness which added to rather than detracted from her years. But Allardye Vere had never seen her in anything but black, and knew by this time that she had lost her only brother in the South African War—a loss which had cut to the heart, as it seemed, for since that time she had been a changed woman, and only during the last six months had her house been opened once again to that social life which before her loss she had followed with unwavering energy and pleasure.

"Going away, Allardye? For how long?"

"For ever and ever, I hope," said the girl in a voice of musical cadence which instantly struck the ear

as something singular and distinctive. "I should like to think that I should never see London again—never, never, so long as I live!"

"Child, what do you mean? You have never spoken like this before."

"There was no use," answered the girl, as she bent with a dreamy smile over a great bowl of flowers inhaling their scent, "(To be continued.)"

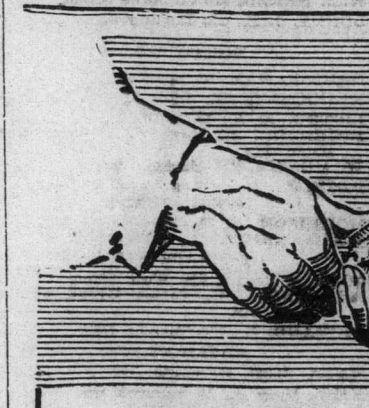
OLD WORLD NOTES

Four women and a man were charged in the London police court lately with dealing illicitly in cocaine. The Crown prosecutor pointed out that while the previous prosecutions were instituted under an Army Council Order, the matter had since been before the King and it was now sufficient to prove that the drug was supplied to any unauthorized person, and it was no longer necessary to prove that it was supplied to soldiers. In passing sentence, the magistrate said that while he felt some sympathy for the wretched women who were led into this trade, there could be none for the men who brought them into it and made them their catspaws in supplying to other people the means of indulging in what they knew to be a beastly and dangerous practice. The man was sentenced to six months' imprisonment with hard labor, and ordered to pay a fine of \$500. Three of the women were sent to prison for three months, and the other for two months.

Something of old London is recalled to mind by the announcement of the death of Mr. Samuel Twining. "Twining's, the tea dealers," has been a landmark in the Strand since it ceased to be known as Tom's coffee house, more than a couple of centuries ago, and since Temple Bar, almost at its doors, was demolished. It has been among the very few that are left to us. "Twining's Bank," which is one of its offshoots, originally occupied a small room adjoining the tea warehouses and its concerns for many years were entirely the concerns of the business and of the Twinkesbury family that founded it. Now the bank is one of the many component parts of Lloyd's Bank, but the "tea dealers" remains flourishing as an exotic, amid such apparently uncongenial surroundings.

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CANNING

Mrs. F. Anderson and son John were in Paris on Tuesday.

Mrs. James Given and little daughter, left the village on Friday morning for Toronto, where she will visit the Exhibition and be the guest of her sister, Mrs. Reading.

Mrs. David Chesney spent Wednesday very pleasantly at the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Elms, Government Road, visited the Toronto Exhibition on Friday and Saturday.

Mr. Ross has a number of men employed repairing a part of the dam which was damaged by the high water and ice last spring.

Mrs. Buckborough, of Brantford, is the guest of her mother-in-law here.

Quite a number from this village attended the funeral of the late Thomas Gaw, at Paris.

The public school opened on Tuesday after the summer holidays.

A number from here attended the funeral of the late Mr. Reading, Drumbo, on Monday. The funeral took place at Princeton.

Master John Anderson went to Paris on Tuesday to attend the High school. His many friends wish him good luck and all success.



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