

Stories about Halifax.

NO. 1.

MY SISTER AND SARAH BELMONT.

I.

Sarah was not the prettiest girl in Halifax, but no one received more attention. She was not clever, she did not always dress well, and she never read books; but she had that manner which seems to be born with many Nova Scotian girls, and which makes them "take." She was bright, good-humoured, and amusing; she could adopt herself to anyone, and any circumstances; she rarely said anything unkind; and she had a bright and ready smile.

She could not compare either in beauty or intelligence with my sister Hildegard, who was tall, dark, dignified, and preeminently a lady. One sometimes doubted if Sarah were *quite* a lady; she was occasionally a little vulgar, and always a little volatile. Still, she never wanted partners at dances or at the rink; she went to all the sleighing and tobogganing expeditions; she sang in the Orpheus, and she acted in all the amateur theatricals. Her name was coupled with those of various eligible young men,—Capt. Rankin, Mr. Sterling, Colonel Gibson—Lea, and others; "Gossip" had even announced in the *Mail* her engagement to the Hon. Philip Egerton, the A. D. C., but the report was afterwards contradicted.

In short, Sarah Belmont was as much admired as if she had been pretty; and when I made up my mind to marry, I at once thought of her. Not very decidedly at first, partly because I was not sure that I should ever love her, and partly because I doubted if she would ever marry me. She cared for me, I knew that. But I was only a civilian, and, at that time, not very well off.

Still, I thought of marriage. My sister Hildegard and I were alone in the world, and there was every probability that she would not be with me long. Major de Brie had not yet proposed, but there was no mistaking his intentions—and Hildegard loved him.

II.

I quite expected to hear of my sister's engagement after the dance at Mount Amelia. The crisis seemed, to be at hand; and I never saw Hildegard more grandly beautiful than she was that night. Sarah, too, was prettily attired and looking so well that I almost decided to propose to her.

With this thought in mind, I slipped quietly away (after I had taken the youngest Miss Primrose to her mother) and found a corner in which to meditate and make up my mind. It was a bay window, and curtains screened me from the drawing-room.

I could not help hearing the conversation which took place just beyond the curtains almost as soon as I had sat down. The voices were my sister's and Sarah Belmont's. The first words were trivial; then Sarah said quite coolly:

"Do you want Major de Brie, Hildegard?"

"Do I *want* him?" said my sister in a tone of mingled dignity and surprise. "What do you mean, Sarah?"

"I mean do you want him for yourself—to marry him. Because if you do not," she went on in the same cool tone, as if it were a new bonnet she was buying. "I think I would take him."

My sister was dumb with astonishment, but Sarah continued.

"I wouldn't for anything interfere, you know, Hildegard. I think it is dishonorable for one girl to try and spoil another's chances, especially when there are so many men. But they are not all equal to Major de Brie, that is looking at him all round. But if you want him, Hilda dear, just say so. You can have him."

"I don't know why you should think I want him, Sarah," my sister began in a voice that tried to be firm and was only proud.

"Precisely," Sarah broke in, "but I never did think so. Your means there is no reason why you should marry until you are quite ready. Still I thought it only fair to ask you before doing so; and now that I am sure you don't care, I think I will take him."

"Oh, yes, take him," my sister said hastily, in a voice of the bitterness was lost on Sarah, who only glided away with a saying, "Thanks, awfully," over her shoulder as she went.

III.

My sister never knew that I had heard that conversation. We drove home from Mount Amelia she was very quiet, and a sad, for she had seen how quietly and with what success a campaign was opened. Miss Belmont had begun at once without any apparent effort on her part, she had made de Brie principal partner throughout the rest of the evening.

It was the beginning of a long game, for I had resolved the spot to marry Sarah Belmont if I could. She was not my ideal wife, I despised her—but I was determined that possible de Brie should not be separated from my sister's happiness was dearer to me than my own.

To do Sarah justice she never seemed to exert herself to attract de Brie. She had that art, so perfect in Nova Scotian, of bringing everything she wished to pass without any intention on her part. She did nothing that I could see to him, and yet de Brie was more and more by her side; while sister was at home forgotten.

No one could have been kinder to me than Sarah was at that time. Her tenderness was evident, and even when de Brie present she never gave me the cold shoulder, as some girls said to do to civilians, when their chosen soldiers come upon the scene. For aught I could detect she was as bright and amiable with me as with him; and when I made my proposal I knew that I had the advantage that she loved me.

IV.

It was the evening of the Artillery picnic across the A. The sun had just set; the sea was motionless; the warm air filled with the shrill hum of the woodland things awakening the night. Maplewood, Emscote and Oaklands were just visible in the deepening twilight. Sarah and I were sitting alone on a large rock, at whose base the sea was "lapping" faintly. We spoke little when I said softly:

"Sarah, will you be my wife?"

She raised her eyes, which, as I could see even in the twilight, were brimming with tears.

"No, Arthur," she said simply.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because I am engaged to Major de Brie."

My heart sank for Hildegard.

"Since when?" I asked.

"Just now. He asked me only an hour ago. O Arthur—"

But she could not go on. She broke down with a sob. She had ruined Hildegard's happiness, and she had deliberately turned her back upon her own.

V.

The wedding took place after Christmas, and Hildegard was bridesmaid. My sister never faltered, and no one suspected that she suffered. I alone know why she has never married.

And I alone know why since Sarah de Brie came home a year from India, pale, worn, poor, a widow with three children, my sister has been her truest and firmest comforter.

ARTHUR DROMHEAD

He: "I love you more than tongue can tell."

She (thoughtfully): "Suppose you put it in writing, George."