

THE SISTERS

"But—oh, surely he would never have come back to take the property of a murdered brother!" exclaimed Elizabeth, in a shocked voice.

"His brother was not murdered," Mr. Yelverton replied. "Many people thought so, of course—people have a way of thinking the worst in these cases, not from malice, but because it is more interesting—and a tradition to that effect survives still, I am afraid. But my uncle's family never suspected him of such a crime. The thing was not legally proved, one way or the other. There were strong indications in the position of the gun which lay by his side, and in the general appearance of the spot where he was found, that my uncle, Patrick Yelverton, accidentally shot himself; that was the opinion of the coroner's jury and the conviction of the family. But poor Kingscote evidently assumed that he would be accused of murder. Perhaps—it is very possible—some rough-tongued action of his might have caused the catastrophe, and his remorse has had the same effect as fear in prompting him to efface himself. Anyway, no one who knew him well believed him capable of doing his brother a mischief wilfully. His innocence was, indeed, proved by the fact that he married the lady who had been at the bottom of the trouble—by no fault of hers, poor soul!—after he escaped to London; and, wherever he went, he took her with him. She disappeared a few days after he did, and was lost as completely, from that time. The record and circumstances of their marriage were discovered; and that was all. He would not have married her—she would not have married him—had he been a murderer."

"Do you think not?" said Elizabeth. "That is always assumed as a matter of course, in books—that murder and—other disgraces are irreparable barriers between those who love each other, when they discover them. But I do not understand why. With such an awful misery to bear, they would want all that their love could give them so much more—not less."

CHAPTER XXV. OUT IN THE COLD.

Paul Brion, meanwhile, plodded on in his old groove, which no longer fitted him as it used to do, and vexed the soul of his benevolent landlady with the unprecedented shortness of his temper. She didn't know how to take him, she said, he was that cantankerous and "contrary"; but she triumphantly recognized the result that she had all along expected would follow a long course of turning night into day, and therefore was not surprised at the change in him. "Your brain is overwrought," she said, soothingly, when one day a compunctious spirit moved him to apologize for his moroseness; "your nervous system is unstrung. You've been going on too long, and you want a spell. You just take a holiday straight off, and go right away, and don't look at an ink-bottle for a month. It will save you a brain fever, mark my words." But Paul was consistent in his perversity, and refused to take good advice.

The next day he went to the Exhibition again, and again he saw Patty, with no happier result than before. She was standing amongst the carriages with Mr. Smith—popularly believed to have been for years on the look-out for a pretty, young second wife—who was pointing out to her the charms of a seductive little lady's phaeton, painted lake and lined with claret, with a little "dickie" for a groom behind; no doubt tempting her with the idea of driving such a one of her own some day. This was even more bitter to Paul than the former encounter. He could bear with Mr. Westmoreland, whose youth entitled him to place himself somewhat on an equality with her, and whom, moreover, his rival (as he thought himself) secretly regarded as beneath contempt; but this grey-bearded widower, whose defunct wife might almost have been her grandmother, Paul felt he could not bear, in any sort of conjunction with his maiden queen, who, though in such dire disgrace, was his queen always.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHAT PAUL COULD NOT KNOW.

It was a pity that Paul Brion, looking at Patty's charming figure in the daylight, could not have looked into her heart.

Nor was he the only one who misread her superficial aspect that night. Mrs. Duff-Scott, the most discerning of women, had a fixed belief that her girls, all of them, thoroughly enjoyed their first ball.

But she was wrong. She was mistaken about them all—and most of all about Patty.

And after she found out that she wanted Paul Brion, who was not there, her giddy became an excited restlessness, and her enjoyment of the pretty scene around her changed to passionate discontent. Why was he not there? She curled her lip in indignant scorn. Because he was poor, and a worker for his bread, and therefore was not accounted the equal of Mr. Westmoreland and Mr. Smith. She was too young and ardent to take into account the multitudes of other reasons which entirely removed it from the sphere of social grievances; like many another woman, she could see only one side of a subject at a time, and looked at that through a telescope. It seemed to her a despicably vulgar thing, and an indication of the utter rottenness of the whole fabric of society, that a high-born man of distinguished attainments should by common consent be neglected and despised simply because he was not rich. That was how she looked at it. And if Paul Brion had not been thought good enough for a select assembly, why had she been invited?

She had been dancing for some time before the intercourse with Mr. Smith, that so gratified Mrs. Duff-Scott, set in. The portly widower found her fanning herself on a sofa in the neighborhood of her chaperon, for the moment unattended by cavaliers; and, approaching her with one of the frequent little plates and spoons that were handed about, invited her favor through the medium of three colossal strawberries dined in sugar and cream.

"And so you don't care about being called," he remarked tenderly; "you, with these little fairy feet! I wonder why that is?" "Because I am not used to it," said Patty, leaning her white arms on the ledge in front of her and looking down at the

shining sea of heads below. "I have been brought up to other accomplishments."

"Music," he murmured; "and—and—" "And scrubbing and sweeping, and washing and ironing, and churning and bread-making, and cleaning dirty pots and kettles," said Patty, with elaborate distinctness.

"Ha-ha!" chuckled Mr. Smith. "I should like to see you cleaning pots and kettles! Cinderella after 12 o'clock, eh?" "Yes," said she; "you have expressed it exactly. After 12 o'clock—what time is it now?—after 12 o'clock, or it may be a little later, I shall be Cinderella again. I shall take off my glass slippers and go back to my kitchen." And she had an impulse to rise and run round the gallery to beg Elizabeth to get permission for their return to their own lodgings after the ball; only Elizabeth seemed to be enjoying her *l'etete* so much that she had not the heart to disturb her. Then she looked up at Mr. Smith, who stared at her in a puzzled and embarrassed way. "You don't seem to believe me," she said, with a defiant smile. "Did you think I was a fine lady, like all these other people?"

"I have always thought you the most lovely—the most charming—"

"Nonsense. I see you don't understand it all. So just listen, and I will tell you." Whereupon Patty proceeded to sketch herself and her domestic circumstances in what, had it been another person, would have been a simply brutal manner. She made herself out to be a Cinderella indeed, in her life and habits, a parasite, a syco-phant, a jay in borrowed plumage—everything that was sordid and "low," and calculated to shock the sensibilities of a "new rich" man; making her statement with calm energy and in the most terse and expressive terms. It was her penance, and it did her good. It made her feel that she was genuine in her worthiness, which was the great thing just now; and it made her feel, also, that she was set back in her proper place at Paul Brion's side—or, rather, at his feet. It also comforted her, for some reason, to be able, as a matter of duty, to disgust Mr. Smith.

But Mr. Smith, though he was a "new rich" man, and not given to tell people who did not know it what he had been before he got his money, was still a man, and a shrewd man too. And he was not at all disgusted. Very far, indeed, from it. This admirable honesty, so rare in a young person of her sex and charms—this touching confidence in him as a lover and a gentleman—put the crowning grace to Patty's attractions and made her irresistible. Which was not what she meant to do at all.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SLIGHTED.

Some hours earlier on the same evening, Eleanor, dressing for dinner and the ball in her spacious bedroom at Mrs. Duff-Scott's house, felt that she, at any rate, was arming herself for conquest.

Elizabeth came in to lace up her bodice—Elizabeth, whose own soft eyes were shining, and who walked across the floor with an elastic step, trailing her long robes behind her; and Eleanor vented upon her some of the fancies which were seething in her small head. "Don't we look like brides?" she said, nodding at their reflections in the glass.

"Or bridesmaids," said Elizabeth, believe.

The evening passed on. Mrs. Duff-Scott settled herself in the particular one of the series of boudoirs under the gallery that struck her as having a commanding prospect. The Governor came, the band played, the guests danced, and promenaded, and danced again; and Mr. Westmoreland was nowhere to be seen. Eleanor was beset with other partners, and thought it well to punish him by letting them forestall him as they would; and, provisionally, she captivated a couple of naval officers by her proficiency in foreign languages, and made various men happy by her graceful and gay demeanor. By-and-by, however, she came across her recalcitrant admirer—she came across her real lover—she came across him, bound to do some time. He was leaning against a pillar, his dull eyes roving over the crowd before him, evidently looking for some one. She thought he was looking for her.

"Well?" she said, archly, pausing before him, on the arm of an Exhibition Commissioner, with whom she was about to plunge into the intricacies of the lancers. Mr. Westmoreland looked at her with a start and in momentary confusion.

"Oh—er—" he stammered hurriedly, "here you are! Where have you been hiding yourself all the evening?" Then, after a pause, "Got any dances saved for me?"

"Saved, indeed?" she retorted. "What next? When you don't take the trouble to come and ask for them?"

"I am so engaged to-night, Miss Eleanor—"

"I see you are. Never mind—I can get on without you." She walked on a step, and turned back. "Did you send me a pretty bouquet just now?" she whispered, touching his arm. "I think you did, and it was so good of you, but there was some mistake about it—"

She checked herself in his face, and blushed violently. "Oh, it was not you!" she exclaimed, in a shocked voice, wishing the ball-room floor would open and swallow her up.

"Really?" he said, "I—I was very remiss—I'm awfully sorry." And he gave her to understand, to her profound consternation, that he had fully intended to send her a bouquet, but had forgotten it in the rush of his many important engagements.

She passed on to her lancers with a wan smile, and presently saw him, under those seductive fern tree-pineapples, with the person whom he had been looking for when she accosted him. "There's Westmoreland and his old flame," remarked her then partner, a club-frequenting youth who knew all about everybody. "He calls her the handsomest woman out—because she's got a lot of money, I suppose. All the Westmorelands are worshippers of the golden calf, father and son—and he's got the family eye to the main in her; can you? She's as round as a tub, and as swartly as a gipsy. I like women—"

—looking at his partner—"to be tall, and slender, and fair. That's my style."

This was how poor Eleanor's pleasure in her first ball was spoiled. I am aware that it looks a very poor and little episode, not worthy of a chapter to itself; but then

things are not always what they seem, and, as a matter of fact, the life histories of a large majority of us are made up of just such unheroic passages.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"WHITE ME AS ONE WHO LOVES HIS FELLOW MEN."

Presently Mrs. Duff-Scott, suitably enthroned, and with her younger girls already carried off by her husband from her side, saw Mr. Yelverton approaching her, and rejoiced at the prospect of securing his society for herself and having the tedious of the chaperon's inactivity relieved by sensible conversation. "Ah, so you are here!" she exclaimed cordially; "I thought balls were things quite out of your line."

"So they are," he said, shaking hands with her and Elizabeth impartially, without a glance at the latter. "But I consider it a duty to investigate the customs of the country. I like to look all round when I am about it."

"H—m—that's not saying much. You don't mean to tell me, I see. Talking of the country—look at Elizabeth's bouquet. Did you think we could raise lilies of the valley like those?"

He bent his head slightly to smell them. "I heard that they did grow hereabouts," he said; and his eyes and Elizabeth's met for a moment over the fragrant flowers that she held between them, while Mrs. Duff-Scott detailed the negligent circumstances of their presentation, which left it a matter of doubt where they came from and for whom they were intended.

"I want to find Mr. Smith," said she; "I fancy he can give us information."

"I don't think so," said Mr. Yelverton; "he was showing me a lily of the valley in his button-hole just now as a great rarity in these parts."

Then it flashed across Mrs. Duff-Scott that Paul Brion might have been the donor, and she said no more.

"Let us go and practise," he said, and straightway they passed down the room, threading a crowd once more, and went upstairs to the gallery, which was a primeval forest in its solitude at this comparatively early hour. "There is no reason why you should dance if you don't like it," he remarked; "we can sit here and look on." Then, when she was comfortably settled in her cushions under the fern trees, he leaned forward and touched her bouquet with a gesture that was significant of the unacknowledged but well-understood intimacy between them. "I am so glad I was able to get them for you," he said; "I wanted you to know what they were really like—when you told me how much your mother had loved them."

"I can't thank you," she replied.

"Do not," he said. "It is for me to thank you for accepting them. I wish you could see them in my garden at Yelverton. There is a dark corner between two gables of the house where they make a perfect carpet in April."

She lifted those she held to her face, and sniffed luxuriously.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PATTY CONFESSES.

A little group of their male attendants stood in the lobby, while Mrs. Duff-Scott and the girls put on their wraps in the cloak-room. When the ladies reappeared, they fell into the order in which Paul, unseen in the shadows of the street, saw them descend the steps to the pavement.

"May I come and see you to-morrow morning?" asked Mr. Yelverton of Elizabeth, whom he especially escorted.

"We shall be at Myrtle street, and we never receive any visitors there."

"At Myrtle street?" exclaimed the major, who also walked beside her. "Surely you are not going to run off to Myrtle street to-morrow?"

"We are going there now," said she, "if we can get in. Mrs. Duff-Scott knows."

But a full hour after their separation for the night, each one was as wide awake as she had been all day. Elizabeth was kneeling on the floor by her bedside, still half-dressed—she had not changed her attitude for a long time, though the undulations of her body showed how far from passive rest she was—when Patty, clothed only in her night-gown, crept in, making no noise with her bare feet.

"Elizabeth," she whispered, laying her hand on her sister's shoulder, "are you asleep?—or are you saying your prayers?" Elizabeth, startled, lifted up her head and disclosed to Patty's gaze in the candle-light a pale, and strained, and careworn face. "I was saying my prayers," she replied, with a dazed look. "Why are you out of bed, my darling? What is the matter?"

"That is what I want to know," said Patty, sitting down on the bed. "What is the matter with us all? What has come to us?" Nelly has been crying ever since I put the light out—she thought I couldn't hear her, but she was sobbing—and sobbing and sniffing under the bedclothes, and blowing her nose in that elaborately cautious way—"

"Oh, poor, dear child!" interrupted the maternal elder sister, making a start towards the door.

"No, don't go to her," said Patty, putting out her hand; "leave her alone—she is quiet now. Besides, you couldn't do her any good. Do you know what she is fretting about? Because Mr. Westmoreland has been neglecting her. Would you believe it? She is caring about it, after all—and we thought it was only fun. She doesn't care about him, she couldn't do that—"

"We can't tell," interrupted Elizabeth. "It is not for us to say. Perhaps she does, poor child!"

"Oh, she couldn't," Patty scornfully insisted. "That is quite impossible. No, she has got fond of this life that we are living now with Mrs. Duff-Scott—I have seen it, how it has laid hold of her—and she would like to marry him so that she could have it always. That is what she has come to. Oh, Elizabeth, don't you wish we had gone to Europe at the very first, and never come to Melbourne at all? Here Patty shaking, hysterical sob. "Everything seems to be going wrong with us here! It does not look so, I know, but at the bottom of my heart I feel it. Why did we turn aside to waste and spoil ourselves like this, instead of going on to the life that we had laid out—a real life, that we should never have had to be ashamed of?"

"Patty, dearest, there must be something the matter with you," her motherly elder sister cried, much distressed by this abnormal symptom. "Are you feeling ill? Don't frighten me like this."

The girl laid her head upon her sister's

shoulder, and there let herself loose from all restraint. "You know what is the matter," she sobbed; "you know as well as I do what is the matter—that it is Paul Brion who worries me so and makes me so utterly wretched."

"Paul Brion! He worries you, Patty—he makes you wretched?"

"You have always been delicate and considerate, Elizabeth—how you have never said anything—but I know you know all about it, and how spoiled I am, and how spoiled everything is because of him. I hate to talk of it—I can't bear even you to see that I am fretting about him—but I can't help it! and I know you understand. When I have had just one good cry," she concluded, with a fresh and violent burst of tears, "perhaps I shall get on better."

Elizabeth stared at the wall over her sister's head in dumb amazement, evidently not deserving the credit for perspicacity accorded to her. "Do you mean," she said slowly, "do you really mean—"

"No," said Patty, "he will never think I was so disgusting as to think that of him. But it is as bad as if he did. That at least was a great, outrageous, downright wrong, worth fighting about, and not the pitiful shabby thing that it appears to him."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE OLD AND THE NEW.

"My dear," she said, in desperation, "whatever you do, you must not begin to ask questions of that sort. We can never find out the answers, and it leads to endless trouble. God's ways are not as our ways—we are not in the secrets of His providence. It is for us to trust Him to know what is best. If you admit one doubt, Elizabeth, you will see that everything will go. Thousands are finding out that now-a-days, to their bitter cost. Indeed, I don't know what we are coming to—the general overthrow, I suppose. I hope I, at any rate, shall not live to see it. What would life be worth to us—any of us, even the best off—if we lost our faith in God and our hope of immortality? Just try to imagine it for a moment."

Elizabeth looked at her mentor, who had again risen and was walking about the room. The girl's eyes were full of solemn thought. "Not much," she replied, gravely. "But I was never afraid of losing faith in God."

When it was all over, Elizabeth put on her hat and walked back through the patterning rain to Myrtle street, heavy-hearted and heavy-footed, as if a weight of twenty years had been laid on her since the morning.

Patty, she said, when her sister, warmly welcoming her return, exclaimed at her pale face and weary air, and made her take the sofa that Eleanor had vacated, "Patty, let us go away for a few weeks, shall we? I want a breath of fresh air, and to be in peace and quiet for a little, to think things over."

"So do I," said Patty. "So does Nelly. Let us write to Sam Dunn to find us lodgings."

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN RETREAT.

"Is it possible that we have only been away for nine months?" murmured Elizabeth, as the little steamer worked its way up to the well-remembered jetty, and she looked once more on surf and headland, island rock and scattered township, lying under the desolate moorlands along the shore. "Doesn't it seem at least nine years?"

"Or ninety," replied Patty. "I feel like a new generation. How exactly the same everything is! Here they have all been going on as they always did. There is Mrs. Dunn, dear old woman!—in the identical gown that she had on the day we went away."

Reaching the crest of the bluff, or saucer, rather—in which Seaview Villa nestled, they uttered simultaneously an indignant moan at the spectacle of Mrs. Hawkins' devastations. There was the bright paint, and the whitewash, and the iron roof, and the fantastic trellis; and there was not the ivy that had mantled the eaves and the chimney stacks, nor the creepers that had fought so hard for existence, nor the squat veranda posts which they had boundlessly embraced—nor any of the features that had made old house distinct and characteristic.

"Never mind," said Patty, who was the first to recover herself. "It looks very smart and tidy. I daresay it wanted doing as unlike home as possible, now that it isn't home."

Mrs. Harris came out and warmly welcomed them in Mr. Brion's name.

Patty got a dog's-eared novel of Mayne Reid's from the book-case in her bedroom, and turned over the pages without reading them to look at the pencil marks and thumb stains; and Eleanor dozed and fanned herself; and Elizabeth sewed and thought. And then their host came home, riding up from the township on a fast and panting steed, quite thrown off his balance by emotion. He was abject in his apologies for having been deterred by cruel fate and conducting them in person to his house, and superfluous in expressions of delight at the honor they had conferred on him.

"And how did you leave my boy?" he asked presently, when due inquiries after their own health and welfare had been satisfied. He spoke as if they and Paul had all been living under one roof. "And when is he coming to see his old father again?"

Patty, who was sitting beside her host—in his pocket, Nelly declared—and was simply servile in her affectionate demonstrations, undertook to describe Paul's condition and circumstances, and she implied a family astonished of them which considerably astonished her sisters. She also gave the father a full history of the son's good deeds in relation to themselves—described how he had befriended them in this and that emergency, and asserted warmly, and with a grave face, that she didn't know what they should have done without him.

"That's right—that's right!" said the old man, laying her hand on his knee and patting it fondly. "I was sure he would—I knew you'd find out his worth when you came to know him. We must write to him to-morrow, and tell him you have arrived safely. He doesn't know I have got you, eh? We must tell him. Perhaps we can induce him to take a little holiday himself—I am sure it is high time he had one—and join us for a few days. What do you think?"

"Oh, I am sure he can't come away just now," protested Patty, pale with eagerness

and horror. "In the middle of the exhibition—and a parliamentary crisis coming on—it would be quite impossible!" "I don't know—I don't know. I fancy 'impossible' is not a word you will find in his dictionary," said the old gentleman encouragingly. "When he hears of our little arrangement, he'll want to take a hand, as the Yankees say. He won't like to be left out—no, no."

The polite old man looked as if he were scarcely equal to the weight of the honor and pleasure they conferred upon him. He was excessively happy. As the hours and days went on, his happiness increased. His punctilious courtesy merged more and more into a familiar and paternal devotion that took all kinds of touching shapes; and he felt more and more at a loss to express adequately the tender solicitude and profound satisfaction inspired in his good old heart by the sojourn of such charming guests within his gates. To Patty he became especially attached; which was not to be wondered at, seeing how susceptible he was and how lavishly she exercised her fascinations upon him. She walked to his office with him in the morning; she walked to meet him when he came hastening back in the afternoon; she read the newspaper (containing Paul's peerless articles) to him in the evening, and mixed his modest glass of grog for him before he went to bed. In short, she made him understand what it was to have a charming and devoted daughter, though she had no design in doing so—no motive but to gratify her affection for Paul in the only way open to her. So the old gentleman was very happy—and so were they.

"Let's see," he said one evening, a few days after their arrival; "I suppose you have been to the caves too often to care to go again?"

"No," said Elizabeth; "we have never been to the caves at all."

"What—living within half-a-dozen miles of them all your lives! Well, I believe there are many more like you. If they had been fifty miles away, you would have gone about once a twelvemonth."

"No, Mr. Brion; we were never in the habit of going sight-seeing. My father seldom left the house, and my mother only when necessary; and we had no one else to take us."

"Then I'll take you, and we will go to-morrow. Mrs. Harris shall pack us a basket for lunch, and we'll make a day of it. Dear, dear, what a pity Paul couldn't be here, to go with us!"

The next morning, which was brilliantly fine, brought the girls an anxiously-expected letter from Mrs. Duff-Scott. Sam Dunn, who was an occasional postman for the solitary house, delivered it, along with a present of fresh fish, while Mr. Brion was absent in the township, negotiating for a buggy and horses for his expedition. The fairy godmother had given but a grudging permission for this *villeggiatura* of theirs, and they were all relieved to have her assurance that she was not seriously vexed with them. Her envelope was inscribed to "Miss King," but the long letter enclosed was addressed to her dearest children—collectively, tenderly inquiring how they were getting on and when they were coming back—pathetically describing her own solitude—so unlike what it was before she knew the comfort of their companionship—and detailing various items of society news. Folded in this, however, was the traditional lady's postscript, scribbled on a small half-sheet and marked "private," which Elizabeth took away to read by herself. She wondered, with a little alarm, what serious matter it was that required a confidential postscript, and this was what she read:

"I have been thinking over our talk the other day, dear. Perhaps I spoke too strongly. One is apt to make arbitrary generalizations on the spur of the moment, and to forget how circumstances may alter cases. There is another side to the question that should not be overlooked. The believing wife or husband may be the salvation of the other, and when the other is honest and earnest, though mistaken, there is the strongest hope of this. It requires thinking of on all sides, my darling, and I fear I spoke without thinking enough. Consult your own heart—I am sure it will advise you well."

Elizabeth folded up the note, and put it into her pocket. Then—for she was alone in her own little bedroom—she sat down to think of it; to wonder what had reminded Mrs. Duff-Scott of their conversation the "other day,"—what had induced her to temporize with the convictions which then appeared so sincere and absolute. But she could make nothing of it. It was a riddle without the key.

Then she heard the sound of buggy wheels, hurried steps on the veranda, and the voice of Mr. Brion calling her.

"My dear," said the old man when she went out to him, speaking in some haste and agitation, "I have just met at the hotel a friend of yours from Melbourne—Mr. Yelverton. He says Mrs. Duff-Scott sent him up to see how you are getting on, and to report to her. He is going away again to-morrow, and I did not like to put off our trip, so I have asked him to join us. I hope I have not done wrong"—looking anxiously into her rapidly changing face—"I hope you won't think that I have taken a liberty, my dear."

(To be Continued.)

The Household Prize.

135 Adelaide St. W. Toronto, Ont.: "Your reliable preparation, St. Jacob's Oil, has proved a benefit to me in more ways than one. I have used it for quinsy (outward application) with very beneficial results, and for a case of rheumatism, where its action was swift and sure, and a perfect cure was performed. I consider it a remedy to be prized in every household."—THOS. PIERDON, with Johnson & Brown.

Righteous Indignation.

Mrs. Suburb—Why can't you come and do the washing as usual to-morrow? Washerwoman (angrily)—Cause I got ter stay to hum and mend th' childer's clothes—that's why. It's yer own fault, too, that ye can't get y'r washin' done this week, and ye've got to do it y'rself er go dirty." "My fault? how can it be?" "What business had ye to go an' put a barbed wire fence around y'r apple orchard I should like ter know?"

Rev. Father Huntington, of New York, preached in St. George's Church, Kingston, last evening.