

## The Little Sister

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It was a photograph, leaning against a pile of books. The face smiled out at Arbour and bewildered him with its likeness to Elinora. It was like—and not like. It had a less womanly beauty, a beauty more fragile, less conscious, less mellow. It was the beauty of one who still expects everything, to whom nothing is tried or determined. It was a face of wondering, of enchanting hesitation, of—youth! The girl was quite ten years younger than Elinora, but so strangely like that she might have been the Elinora of ten years ago, before he knew her. He caught up the picture in breathlessness, turned it in his hands and with sudden understanding saw the "With love, Linda," scrawled across the picture's back. This was Linda in Florence—Elinora's little sister, as she was wont to call her. But to him it was Elinora herself in the days for which he had been longing, the days before the world had touched her, in the youth when she had dreamed even as he dreamed now.

Almost without his knowledge he dropped to his knees before the desk, the picture in his hands, the girl's eyes meeting his own and seeming to answer them, dream for dream.

"Elinora," he said in an underbreath, "oh, God—Elinora!"

Without delay the Bannisters carried out their promises of festivity. The next week their house was filled with guests, and every night there were rival dinner-parties—one in the dining room and one in the ballroom—with a place laid at each table for Toby. There was a soiree, and there were daily garden-parties, and the field-party was a triumph. It was in September, but Toby pined for a May party at which he might wind a Maypole, so a Maypole was set up in the south pasture and wound by moonlight. And in all these delights Elinora was among the Bannisters' guests.

That week Arbour usually dined at the Bannisters', spending the evening in the smoking-room or on the verandah. At night he and Elinora would drive home in what she called the "really country moonlight," or beneath the soft drip of the road-side elms, and Arbour would listen quietly to her witty recital of things said and done. And always it was the surprise not less than the disappointment which bewildered him. It was such a surprising thing that Elinora should be failing him now, after they had once stood together in the charmed circle of the life which they had proposed. Deliberate treachery could hardly have disarmed him more than this unconscious apostasy of hers.

While he looked wistfully, in silence and with heart-ache, he found companionship. The picture of Linda lay on his desk in his study. When he shut himself away from the babel of the hours, the girl's face, with its eternal magic and questioning, solaced him, even though it set a seal upon his pain. For she had become to him Elinora—speaking to him with the voice of Elinora's youth, the youth which had belonged to others and in which he had had no part. Arbour wondered about Linda, wistfully recalled what Elinora had told him of her, listened hungrily when she read him scraps of Linda's letters—pleasant, gossipy letters, with a good bon-mot or two and a touch of pretty petulance at the winter fashions. Then he would go back to his study and year over the picture. She had been like this, Elinora had been like this—remote, wrapped in a world of realities which the Bannisters and their kind could never have penetrated.

At the Bannisters' all pleasant paths led at length to the Firefly cotillion. The ballroom was laced with wires and was to be splendid with little flowery points of light. The preparation had involved Elinora in daily journeys to the great house to advise and to suggest. She had looked forward with frank pleasure hardly abating when, on the night of the cotillion, she came home before dinner-time in a driving rain to find a note from her husband regretting that he could not accompany her. The mother of little Delia, one of Elinora's

tiny pensioners, was dying, the note explained briefly; and he would remain there as long as he was needed.

Elinora hesitated, glanced at the clock, and rang. Since her husband was unavoidably to be absent, she would not dine alone; she would dress at once and go back to the Bannisters'. In an hour she was on her way. The cottage of Delia's mother lay at a little distance beyond Green Hill, and remembering what the child's grief would be, Elinora for a moment considered driving there; but this she rejected because of her ball-gown. At the Bannisters' she stepped down at the lighted entrance with a thrill of pure childish delight.

Max Bannister was crossing the great, dim hall. He came swiftly toward her at the opening of the door, his face luminous.

"Elinora!" he cried gladly, and the name had not been on his lips since the long-ago night when he had last spoken it, like a caress.

Elinora stood still, a sudden fear in her eyes. There was no mistaking the look or the tone, throbbing with joy at the unlooked-for presence of her. Yet the next moment he was bowing gravely before her in the merest friendly courtesy. She gave him her cloak in silence, then chided herself for her imagining and smiled back her greeting.

In the drawing-room she was welcomed by acclamation and borne to a seat of honor. Patty and Toby, who were her slaves, hovered adoringly about her and made way for one after another of those whom the afternoon trains had brought down, and whom Elinora had last seen on her wedding day. Elinora had always been popular—as much for her enchanting pliancy, which antagonized nobody's pet beliefs, as for her positive charm, and she now received as tribute what really was largely the flattery which we accord to those who sympathize with us. Her sympathy was as universal as the mere assertions of other women.

Dinner was long and delightful, and at its close the elder Mrs. Bannister drew Elinora aside with a request. A Mrs. Neville, who was to have led the cotillion with Max had telegraphed her inability to come down. Everyone was hoping that Elinora would take her place.

So Mrs. Arbour and Max Bannister led the Firefly cotillion together. The beautiful intricate figure, danced in the changing colored lights with hoops and arches and swords of light held over the marching guests, made fairyland of the long gold room. Elinora was radiant. She had never been more beautiful, and when she stood alone in the room's centre with the glittering arch thrown from wall to wall above her, she was conscious of a quick little thrill of joy—such as had come to her in the mornings in the garden with John. Life was so good!

Logically her bondage to her moods would have given her, inevitably, some way to escape. Sometime she must have come to a mood which she would have understood herself. The moment might have been delayed for years, but to women like Elinora such a moment is not to be escaped. To a woman of less exquisite sensibilities it could have been precipitated by little short of, say, Max Bannister's voicing of that which she did not choose to see in his eyes. But what actually did happen was—since no tool is too insignificant for destiny to use—merely a little gossipy voice on the landing of the stairs as Elinora came down alone after the cotillion.

Pausing, as she reached the landing, to hear a clear contralto thrill from the music room, Elinora was conscious of someone speaking in a near recess of palms. At first she felt the words with impatience, only as thwarting her enjoyment of the song. Then a sentence sprang from the rest and seized upon her:

"A rector," the woman was saying clearly, "a fine young fellow who is to have a living in our parish next year. Ah,

yes, she is here without him. And every one is watching Max Bannister to-night. They were in love, everyone says, before she ever met John Arbour."

To Elinora the little soft gossipy voice was like a knife in her heart. If from the roses and the green of the butterfly-colored rooms a hand had been thrust out to stab her she could have been no more confounded. She went blindly down the staircase to where, below the stairs, a portiere screened a little closet called in courtesy the "den," and in this dim, deserted room she found refuge. To be in bondage to the mood of the moment and to have that mood suddenly desert one is a perilous business. All Elinora's poise, her experience of the world, even her innocence, were not proof against that. In a flash she saw herself as this soft-voiced, idle woman had seen her; and like the child whose new shoes have been muddied, she longed to throw herself, weeping passionately, upon a protecting breast. That is, she sprang up suddenly with a stifling longing to go to John.

On a sofa, piled with things untidily tumbled for that evening into the disused room, lay a golf-cape of Patty's. She caught it up and stepped through the long French window, open to the empty terrace. The rain had ceased and the stars were out friendly and near. A man dozing on the box of a carriage from the station and startled by her swift demand which brooked no refusal, touched his hat, automatically gathered up the lines, and turned his horses briskly down the drive.

To Arbour, sitting beside little Delia's bed, where the child moaned for her mother lying in such strange quiet in the next room, Elinora came like an apparition. Wary beyond belief in a vigil made still sadder by his own sadness Harbour lifted his eyes and saw Elinora in the dark of the mean little doorway, her glittering skirts caught about her, her roses unfaded on her breast. She came to him quietly and knelt beside little Delia's bed; and Arbour sank back in his chair at her gesture, and took her outstretched hand. "Elinora," he said almost without his knowledge, "have you come because—because—"

Arbour bent down and drew her to him. She slipped down at his feet and laid her cheek upon his hands.

After that, nothing could seem very wonderful to Arbour and Elinora. Thus it came to pass that upon their arrival home they received, almost as if it had been expected, the news that Linda had come. She had sailed unexpectedly with some American friends in Florence, and sat in the study, sleepily awaiting them.

Linda rose from before the fireplace and came to meet them—faultlessly gowned, radiant in her youth. And she was like Youth itself, all of soft color and tender coquetry and fine impatience. She gave John both her hands and many confidences, and put up her exquisite cheek to be kissed.

And Arbour listened. Elinora served Linda, hovered over her, smiled with her. Arbour listened, and in slow amazement he brought his mind to bear upon the truth. This was Linda, with her youth, with her scant knowledge of the world pretending prettily to surpass itself, and with no presage of that sophistication from which he shrank. This was Linda, in the high moment of her youth—the youth which Elinora had lost. Yet the ways of Linda and the glancing of her rapid, unseeing eyes suddenly seemed to Arbour like the mere trickle of some unavailing stream—a stream which can mirror no stars. And Elinora, with her child's moods and her childish vanity clinging to her, or falling from her as they had fallen to-night—Elinora was like a spirit risen from the dead of the crudities of Linda and her youth. And he had not known how to wait for her. Ah, he thought with humility, it was not he, but she, who could have cried the wistful reproach of: "Couldst thou not watch with me?"

When Linda had fluttered away to her room and Elinora came back to the study, Arbour took her in his arms.

"Forgive me—forgive me," he besought her, and kissed away the question in her eyes.



Sir Hamar Greenwood, Under-Secretary for Home Affairs, has been appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland, succeeding Ian MacPherson, resigned, who is made Minister of Pensions. Ireland's new Chief Secretary is Canadian born, having first seen light in 1870 in the town of Whitby, thirty miles east of Toronto, on the north shore of Lake Ontario. His father was a noted Canadian jurist. He received his education in Toronto, graduating with first honors in the law school of the Toronto University. He served in the war from 1914 to 1916, when he was detailed to the staff of Lord Derby, War Minister at that time. Sir Hamar has represented Sunderland in Commons since 1910. He was appointed Home Affairs Under-Secretary in 1919. His baronetcy dates from 1915.