THE SISTERS

He took her outstretched hand and held it. "Good-bye—if it must be so," he said. "You are really going away by the next mail?"

"Yes."

"And not coming back again?"

"I don't know."

"Well," he said, "you are rich, and a great lady now. I can only wish with all my heart for your happiness—I cannot hope that I shall ever be privileged to contribute to it again. I am out of it now, Miss Patty."

She left her right hand in his, and with the other put her handkerchief to her eyes. "Why should you be out of it?" she sobbed. "Your father is not out of it. It is you who have deserted us—we should never have deserted you."

"I thought you threw me over that day on the racecourse, and I have only tried to keep my place."

"But I have told you I never meant that."

"Yes, thank God! Whatever happens, I shall have this day to remember—that you came to me voluntarily to tell me that you had never been unworthy of yourself. You have asked me to forgive you, but it is I that want to be forgiven—for insulting you by thinking that money and grandeur and fine clothes could change you."

"They will never change me," said Patty, who had broken down altogether, and was making no secret of her tears. In fact, they were past making a secret of. She had determined to have no tender sentiment when she sought this interview, but she found herself powerless to resist the pathos of the situation. To be parting from Paul Brion—and it seemed as if it were really going to be a parting—was too heart-breaking to bear as she would have liked to bear it.

"When you were poor," he said, hurried along by a very strong current of emotions of various kinds, "when you lived here on the other side of the wall—if you had come to me—if you had spoken to me, and treated me like this then—"

She drew her hand from his grasp, and tried to collect herself. "Hush—we must not go on talking," she said with a flurried air; "you must not keep me here now."

"No, I will not keep you—I will not take advantage of you now," he replied, "though I am horribly tempted. But if it had been as it used to be—if we were both poor alike, as we were then—if you were Patty King instead of Miss Yelverton—I would not let you out of this room without telling me something more. Oh, why did you come at all?" he burst out, in a sudden rage of passion, quivering all over as he looked at her with the desire to seize her and kiss her and satisfy his starving heart. "You have been hard to me always—from first to last—but this is the very cruellest thing you have ever done. To come here and drive me wild like this, and then go and leave me as if I were Mrs. McIntyre or the landlord you were paying off next door. I wonder what you think I am made of? I have stood everything—I have stood all your snubs, and slights, and hard usage of me—I have been humbe and patient as I never was to anybody who treated me so in my life before—but that doesn't mean that I am made of wood or stone. There are limits to one's powers of endurance, and, though I have borne so much, I can't bear this. I tell you fairly it is trying me too far." He stood at the table fluttering his papers with a hand as unsteady as that of a drunkard, and glaring at her, not straight into her eyes—which, indeed, were cast abjectly on the floor—but all over her pretty, forlorn figure, shrinking and cowering before him. "You are kind enough to everybody else," he went on; "you might at least show some common humanity to me. I am not a coxcomb, I hope, but I know you can't have helped knowing what I have felt for you—no woman can help knowing when a man cares for her, though he never says a word about it. A dog who loves you will get some consideration for it, but you are having no consideration for me. I hope I am not rude—I'm afraid I am forgetting my manners, Miss Patty—but a man can't think of manners when he is driven out of his senses. Forgive me, I am speaking to you too roughly. It was kind of you to come and tell me what you have told me—I am not ungrateful for that—but it was a cruel kindness. Why didn't you send me a note—a little, cold, formal note? or why did you not send Mrs. Yelverton to explain things? That would have done just as well. You have paid me a great honor, I know; but I can't look at it like that. After all, I was making up my mind to lose you, and I thought I could have borne it, and got on somehow, and got something out of life in spite of it. But now how can I bear it?—how can I bear it now?"

Batty bowed like a reed to this unexpected storm, which, nevertheless, thrilled her with wild elation and rapture, through and through. She had no sense of either pride or shame; she never for a moment regretted that she had not written a note, or sent Mrs. Yelverton in her place. But what she said and what she did I will leave to the reader to conjecture. There has been too much love-making in these pages of late. Tableau. We will ring the curtain down.

Meanwhile Elizabeth sat alone when her work was done, wondering what was happening at Mrs. M'Intyre's, until her husband came to tell her that it was past 6 o'clock, and time to go home to dress for dinner. "The child can't possibly be with him," said Mr. Yelverton, rather severely. "She must be gossiping with the landlady."

"I think I will go and fetch her," said Elizabeth. But as she was putting on her bonnet, Patty came upstairs, smiling and preening her feathers, so to speak—bringing Paul with her.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A FAIR FIELD AND NO FAVOR.

When Mrs. Duff-Scott came to hear of all this, she was terribly vexed with Patty. Indeed, no one dared to tell her the whole truth, and to this day she does not know that the engagement was made in the young bachelor's sitting-room, whither Patty had sought him because he would not seek her. She thinks the pair met at No. 6, under the lax and injudicious chaperonage of Elizabeth; and, in the first blush of her disappointment and indignation, she was firmly convinced, though too well bred to express her conviction, that the son had taken advantage of the father's privileged position to entrap the young heiress for the sake of her thirty thousand pounds. Things did not go smoothly with Patty, as they had done with her sister. Elizabeth herself was a rock of shelter and a storehouse of consolation from the moment that the pair came up to the dismantled room where she and her husband were having a lovers' *tete-a-tete* of their own, and she saw that the long misunderstanding was at an end; but no one else except Mrs. M'Intyre (who, poor woman, was held of no account), took kindly to the alliance so unexpectedly proposed. Quite the contrary, in fact. Mr. Yelverton, notwithstanding his late experiences, had no sympathy whatever for the young fellow who had flattered him by following his example. The philanthropist, with all his full-blown modern radicalism, was also a man of long descent and great connections, and some subtle instinct of race and habit rose up in opposition to the claims of an obscure press writer to enter his distinguished family. It was one thing for a Yelverton man to marry a humbly-circumstanced woman, as he had himself been prepared to do, but quite another thing for a humbly-circumstanced man to aspire to the hand of a Yelverton woman, and that woman rich and beautiful, his own ward and sister. He was not aware of this strong sentiment, but believed his objections arose from a proper solicitude for Patty's welfare. Paul had been rude and impertinent, wanting in respect for her and hers; he had an ill-conditioned, sulky temper; he lived an irregular life, from hand to mouth; he had no money; he had no reputable friends. Therefore, when Paul (with some defiance of mien, as one who knew that it was a merely formal courtesy) requested the consent of the head of the house to his union with the lady of his choice, the head of the house, though elaborately polite, was very high and mighty, and—Patty and Elizabeth being out of the way, shut up together to kiss in comfort in one of the little bedrooms at the back—made some very plain statements of his views to the ineligible suitor, which fanned the vital spark in that young man's ardent spirit to a white heat of wrath. By-and-bye Mr. Yelverton modified those views, like the just and large-hearted student of humanity that he was, and was brought to see that a man can do no more for a woman than love her, be he who he may, and that a woman, whether queen or peasant, millionaire or pauper, can never give more than value for that "value received." And by-and-bye Paul learned to respect his brother-in law for a man whose manhood was his own, and to trust his motives absolutely, even when he did not underetand his actions. But just at first things were unpleasant.

Mrs. Duff-Scott, when they got home, received the blow with a stern fortitude that was almost worse than Mr. Yelverton's prompt resistance, and much worse than the mild but equally decided opposition of that punctilious old gentleman at Sea-view Villa, who, by-and-bye, used all his influence to keep the pair apart whom he would have given his heart's blood to see united, out of a fastidious sense of what he conceived to be his social and professional duty. Between them all they nearly drove the two high-spirited victims into further following the example of the head of the house—the imminent danger of which became apparent to Patty's confidante Elizabeth, who gave timely warning of it to her husband. This latter pair, who had themselves carried matters with such a very high hand, were far from desiring that Paul and Patty should make assignations at the Exhibition with a view to circumventing their adversaries by a clandestine or otherwise untimely marriage (such divergence of opinion with respect to one's own affairs and other people's being very common in this world, the gentle reader may observe, even in the case of the most high-minded people).

"Kingscote," said Elizabeth, when one night she sat brushing her hair before the looking-glass, and he, still in his evening dress, lounged in an arm-chair by the dressing-table, talking to her, "Kingscote, I am afraid you are too hard on Patty—you and the Duff-Scotts—keeping her from Paul still, though she has but three days left, and I don't believe she will stand it."

"My dear, we are not hard upon her, are we? It is for her sake. If we can tide over these few days and get her away all right, a year or two of absence, and all the new interests that she will find in Europe and her changed position, will probably cure her of her fancy for a fellow who is not good enough for her."

"I know Patty," she said, laying her hair brush on her knee and looking with solemn earnestness into her husband's rough-hewn but impressive face—a face that seemed to her to contain every element of noble manhood, and that would have been weakened and spoiled by mere superficial beauty—"I know Patty, Kingscote, better than anyone knows her except herself. She is like a little briar rose—sweet and tender if you are gentle and sympathetic with her, but certain to prick if you handle her roughly. And so strong in the stem—so tough and strong—that you cannot root her out or twist her any way that she doesn't feel naturally inclined to grow—not if you use all your power to make her."

"Poor little Patty!" he said smiling. "That is a very pathetic image of her. But I don't like to figure in your parable as the blind genius of brute force—a horny-handed hedger and ditcher with a smock, frock and bill-hook. I am quite capable of feeling the beauty, and understanding the moral qualities of a wild rose—at least, I thought I was. Perhaps I am mistaken. Tell me what you would do, if you were in my place?"

Elizabeth slipped from her chair and down upon her knees beside him, with her long hair and her dressing-gown flowing about her, and laid her head where it was glad of any excuse to be laid—a locality at this moment indicated by the polished and unyielding surface of his starched shirt front. "You know I never likened you to a hedger and ditcher," she said fondly. "No one is so wise and thoughtful and far-sighted as you. It is only that you don't know Patty quite yet—you will do soon—and what might be the perfect management of such a crisis in another girl's affairs is likely not to succeed with her—just simply and only for the reason that she is a little peculiar, and you have not yet had time to learn that."

"It is time that I should learn," he said, lifting her into a restful position and settling himself for a comfortable talk. "Tell me what you think and know yourself, and what, in your judgment, it would be best to do."

"In my judgment, then, it would be best," said Elizabeth, after a brief interval given up to the enjoyment of a wordless tete-a-tete, "to let Patty and Paul be together a little before they part. For this reason—that they *will* be together, whether they are let or not. Isn't it preferable to making concessions before they are ignominiously extorted from you? And if Patty has much longer to bear seeing her lover, as she thinks, humiliated and insulted, by being ignored as her lover in this house, she will go to the other extreme—she will go away from us to him—by way of making up to him for it. It is like what you say of the smouldering, poverty-bred anarchy in your European national life—that if you don't find a vent for the accumulating electricity generating in the human sewer—how do you put it?—it is no use to try to draw it off after the storm has burst."

"Elizabeth," said her husband, reproachfully, "that is worse than being called a hedger and ditcher."

"Well, you know what I mean."

"Tell me what you mean in the vulgar tongue, my dear. Do you want me to go and call on Mr. Paul Brion and tell him that we have thought better of it?"

"Not exactly that. But if you could persuade Mrs. Duff-Scott to be nice about it—no one can be more enchantingly nice than she, when she likes, but when she doesn't like she is enough to drive a man—a proud man like Paul Brion—simply frantic. And Patty will never stand it—She will not hold out—she will not go away leaving things as they are now. We could not expect it of her."

"Well? And how should Mrs. Duff-Scott show herself nice to Mr. Brion?"

"She might treat him as—as she did you, Kingscote, when you were wanting me."

"But she approved of me, you see. She doesn't approve of him."

"You are both gentlemen, anyhow—though he is poor. I would have been the more tender and considerate to him, because he is poor. He is not too poor for Patty—nor would he have been if she had no fortune herself. As it is, there is abundance. And, Kingscote, though I don't mean for a moment to disparage you—"

"I should hope not, Elizabeth."

"Still I can't help thinking that to have brains as he has is to be essentially a rich and distinguished man. And to be a writer for a high-class newspaper, which you say yourself is the greatest and best educator in the world—to spend himself in making other men see what is right and useful—in spreading light and knowledge that no money could pay for, and all the time effacing himself, and taking no reward of honor or credit for it—surely that must be the noblest profession, and one that should make a man anybody's equal—even yours, my love!"

She lifted herself up to make this eloquent appeal and dropped back on his shoulder again and wound her arm about his neck and his bent head with tender deprecation. He was deeply touched and stirred, and did not speak for a moment. Then he said gruffly, "I shall go and see him in the morning, Elizabeth. Tell me what I shall say to him, my dear."

"Say," said Elizabeth, "that you would rather not have a fixed engagement at first, in order that Patty may be unhampered during the time she is away—in order that she may be free to make other matrimonial arrangements when she gets into the great world, if she likes—but that you will leave that to him. Tell him that if love is not to be kept faithful without vows and promises, it is not love nor worth keeping—but I daresay he knows that. Tell him that, except for being obliged to go to England just now on the family affairs, Patty is free to do exactly as she likes—which she is by law, you know, for she is over three-and-twenty—and that we will be happy to see her happy, whatever way she chooses. And then let him come here and see her. Ask Mrs. Duff-Scott to be nice and kind, and to give him an invitation—she will do anything for you—and then treat them both as if they were engaged for just this little time until we leave. It will comfort them so much, poor things! It will put them on their honor. It will draw off the electricity, you know, and prevent catastrophes. And it will make not the slightest difference in the final issue. But, oh!" she added impulsively, "you don't want me to tell you what to do, you are so much wiser than I am."

"I told you we should give and take," he responded; "I told you we should teach and lead each other—sometimes I and sometimes you. That is what we are doing already—it is as it should be. I shall go and see Paul Brion in the morning. Confound him!" he added, as he got up out of his chair to go to his dressing-room.

And so it came to pass that the young press writer, newly risen from his bed, and meditating desperate things over his coffee and cutlet, received a friendly embassy from the great powers that had taken up arms against him. Mr. Yelverton was the bearer of despatches from his sovereign, Mrs. Duff-Scott, in the shape of a gracious note of invitation to dinner, which—after a long discussion of the situation with her envoy—Mr. Paul Brion permitted himself to accept politely. The interview between the two men was productive of a strong sense of relief and satisfaction on both sides, and it brought about the cessation of all open hostilities.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

PROBATION.

Mr. Yelverton did not return home from his mission until Mrs. Duff-Scott's farewell kettle-drum was in full blast. He found the two drawing-rooms filled with a fashionable crowd; and the hum of sprightly conversation, the tinkle of teaspoons, the rustle of crisp draperies, the all-pervading clamor of soft feminine voices, raised in staccato exclamations and laughter, were such that he did not see his way to getting a word in edgeways. Round each of the Yelverton sisters the press of bland and attentive visitors was noticeably great.

Mr. Yelverton looked round, and dropped into a chair near the door, to talk to a group of ladies with whom he had friendly relations until he could find an opportunity to rejoin his family. The hostess was dispensing tea, with Nelly's assistance—Nelly being herself attended by Mr. Westmoreland, who dogged her footsteps with patient and abject assiduity—other men straying about amongst the crowd with the precious little fragile cups and saucers in their hands. Elizabeth was surrounded by young matrons fervently interested in her new condition, and pouring out upon her their several experiences of European life, in the form of information and advice for her own guidance.

"Play us something, dear Miss Yelverton," said a lady sitting by. "Let us hear your lovely touch once more."

"I don't think I can," said Patty, falteringly—the first time she had ever made such a reply to such a demand. She got up and began to turn over some loose music that lay about on the piano. Her brother-in-law essayed to help her; he saw what an agony of suspense and expectation she was in.

"You know where I have been?" he inquired in a careless tone, speaking low, so that only she could hear.

"Yes"—breathlessly—"I think so."

"I went to take an invitation from Mrs. Duff-Scott."

"Yes?"

"I had a pleasant talk. I am very glad I went. He is coming to dine here to-night."

"Is he?"

"I do so like really interesting an intellectual young men, who don't give themselves any airs about it," she said to nobody in particular, when she strolled back to the drawing-room with her three girls; "and one does so very seldom meet with them!" She threw herself into a low chair, snatched up a fan, and began to fan herself vigorously. The discovery that a press writer of Paul Brion's standing meant a cultured man of the world impressed her strongly; she thought of him as a new son for herself, clever, enterprising, active-minded as she was—a man to be governed, perhaps, in a motherly way, and to be proud of whether he let himself be governed or not—danced tantalizingly through her brain. She felt it necessary to put a very strong check upon herself to keep her from being foolish.

She escaped that danger, however. A high sense of duty to Patty held her back from foolishness. Still she could not help being kind to the young couple while she had the opportunity; turning her head when they strolled into the conservatory after the men came in from the dining-room, and otherwise shutting her eyes to their joint proceedings. And they had a peaceful and sad and happy time, by her gracious favor, for two days and a half—until the mail ship carried one of them to England, and left the other behind.

CHAPTER XLIX.

YELVERTON.

Patty went "home," and stayed there for two years; but it was never home to her, though all her friends and connections, save one, were with her—because that one was absent. She saw "the great Alps and the Doge's palace," and all the beauty and glory of that great world that she had so ardently dreamed of and longed for; travelling in comfort and luxury, and enjoying herself thoroughly all the while. She was presented at Court—"Miss Yelverton, by her sister, Mrs. Kingscote Yelverton"—and held a distinguished place in the *Court Journal* and in the gossip of London society for the better part of two seasons. She was taught to know that she was a beauty, if she had never known it before; she was made to understand the value of a high social position and the inestimable advantage of large means (and she did understand it perfectly, being a young person abundantly gifted with common sense); and she was offered these good things for the rest of her life, and a coronet into the bargain. Nevertheless, she chose to abide by her first choice and to remain faithful to her penniless press writer under all temptations. She passed through the fire of every trying ordeal that the ingenuity of Mrs. Duff-Scott could devise; her unpledged constancy underwent the severest tests that, in the case of a girl of her tastes and character, it could possibly be subjected to; and at the end of a year and a half, when the owner of the coronet above-mentioned raised the question of her matrimonial prospects, she announced to him, and subsequently to her family, that they had been irrevocably settled long ago; that she was entirely unchanged in her sentiments and relations towards Paul Brion; and that she intended, moreover, if they had no objection, to return to Australia to marry him.

Young, and strong, and rich, with no troubles to speak of and the keenest appetites to see and learn, they had as good a time as pleasure-seeking mortals can hope for in this world; the memories of it, tenderly stored up to the smallest detail, will be a joy for ever to all of them. On their return to England they took up their abode in the London house, and for some weeks they revelled delightedly in balls, drums, garden parties, concerts and so on, under the supervision and generalship of Mrs. Duff-Scott; and they also made acquaintance with the widely-ramifying Whitechapel institutions. Early in thd summer Elizabeth and her husband went to Yelverton, which in their absence had been prepared for "the family" to live in again. A neighboring country house and several cottages had been rented and fitted up for the waifs and strays, where they have been made as comfortable as before, and were still under the eye of their protector; and the ancestral furniture that had been removed for their convenience and its own safety was put back in its place, and bright (no, not bright—Mrs. Duff-Scott undertook the task of fitting them up—but eminently artistic and charming) rooms were newly decorated and made ready for Elizabeth's occupation.

She went there early in June—she and her husband alone, leaving Mrs. Duff-Scott and the girls in London.

What an old house! She had seen such in pictures—in the little prints that adorned old-fashioned pocket-books of her mother's time—but the reality, as in the case of the Continental palaces, transcended all her dreams. White smoke curled up to the sky from the fluted chimney-stacks; the diamond-paned casements—little sections of the enormous mullioned windows—were set wide to the evening breezes and sunshine; on the steps before the porch a group of servants, respectful but not obsequious, stood ready to receive their new mistress, and to efface themselves as soon as they had made her welcome.

"It is more than my share," she said, almost oppressed by all these evidences of her prosperity, and thinking of her mother's different lot. "It doesn't seem fair, Kingscote."

"It is not fair," he replied. "But that is not your fault, nor mine. We are not going to keep it all to ourselves, you and I—because a king happened to fall in love with one of our grandmothers, who was no better than she should be—which is our title to be great folks, I believe. We are going to let other people have a share. But just for a little while we'll be selfish, Elizabeth; it is a luxury we don't indulge in often."

So he led her into the beautiful house, after giving her a solemn kiss upon the threshold: and passing through the great hall, she was taken to a vast but charming bedroom that had been newly fitted up for her on the ground floor, and thence to an adjoining sitting-room, looking out upon a shady lawn—a homely, cosy little room that he had himself arranged for her private use, and which no one was to be allowed to have the run of, he told her, except him.

She was placed in a deep arm-chair, beside a hearth whereon burned the first wood fire that she had seen since she left Australia—billets of elm-wood split from the butts of dead and felled giants that had lived their life out on the Yelverton acres—with her feet on a rug of Tasmanian opossum skins, and a bouquet of golden wattle blossoms (procured with as much difficulty in England as the lilies of the valley had been in Australia) on a table beside her, scenting the room with its sweet and familiar fragrance. And here tea was brought in—a dainty little nondescript meal, with very little about it to remind her of Myrtle street, save its comfortable informality; and the servant was dismissed, and the husband waited upon his wife—helping her from the little savoury dishes that she did not know, nor care to ask, the name of—pouring the cream into the cup that for so many years had held her strongest beverage, dusting the sugar over her strawberries—all the time keeping her at rest in her soft chair, with the sense of being at home and in peace and safety under his protection working like a delicious opiate on her tired nerves and brain.

This was how they came to Yelverton.

And then one day Elizabeth complained of feeling unusually tired. The walks and drives came to an end, and the sitting-room was left empty. There was a breathless hush all over the great house for a little while; whispers and rustlings to and fro; and then a little cry—which, weak and small as it was, and shut in with double doors and curtains, somehow managed to make itself heard from the attic to the basement—announced that a new generation of Yelvertons of Yelverton had come into the world.

Mrs. Duff-Scott returned home from a series of Belgravian entertainments, with that coronet of Patty's capture on her mind, in the small hours of the morning following this eventful day; and she found a telegram on her hall table, and learned, to her intense indignation, that Elizabeth had dared to have a baby without her (Mrs. Duff-Scott) being there to assist at the all-important ceremony.

"It's just like him," she exclaimed to the much-excited sisters, who were ready to melt into tears over the good news. "It is just what I expected he would do when he took her off by herself in that way. It is the marriage over again. He wants to manage everything in his own fashion, and to have no interference from anybody. But this is really carrying independence too far. Supposing anything had gone wrong with Elizabeth? And how am I to know that her nurse is an efficient person?—and that the poor dear infant will be properly looked after?"

"You may depend," said Patty, who did not grudge her sister her new happiness, but envied it from the bottom of her honest woman's heart, "You may depend he has taken every care of that. He is not a man to leave things to chance—at any rate, not where she is concerned."

"Rubbish!" retorted the disappointed matron, who, though she had had no children of her own—perhaps because she had had none—had looked forward to a vicarious participation in Elizabeth's experiences at this time with the strongest interest and eagerness; "as if a man has any business to take upon himself to meddle at all in such matters! It is not fair to Elizabeth. She has a right to have us with her. I gave way about the wedding, but here I must draw the line. She is in her own house, and I shall go to her at once. Tell your maid to pack up, dears—we will start to-morrow."

But they did not. They stayed in London, with what patience they could, subsisting on daily letters and telegrams, until the season there was over, and the baby at Yelverton was three weeks old. Then, though no explanations were made, they became aware that they would be no longer considered *de trop* by the baby's father, and rushed from the town to the country house with all possible haste.

"You are a tyrant," said Mrs. Duff-Scott, when the master came forth to meet her. "I always said so, and now I know it."

"I was afraid she would get talking and exerting herself too much if she had you all about her," he replied, with his imperturbable smile.

"And you didn't think that we might possibly have a grain of sense, as we you?"

"I didn't thing of anything," he said coolly, "except to make sure of her safety as far as possible."

"O yes, I know"—laughing and brushing past him—"all you think of is to get your own way. Well, let us see the poor dear girl now we are here. I know how she must have been pining to show her baby to her sisters all this while, when you wouldn't let her."

(To be continued.)

How to Remain Young.

Take frequent recreation.
Keep free of intense excitements.
Insist upon an abundance of regular sleep.
Preserve the feelings and habits of youth.
Keep a clear conscience and lead a life void of offence.