

The Hastie Girls

[a sample, first 3 chapters]

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HYACINTH PUBLISHING

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HYACINTH PUBLISHING

Dedicated to my sister, Fiona, my source of inspiration

1 LONDON, JUNE 1961

It was only a weekend trip home and it had taken Belle Hastie over an hour to pack. She'd picked out all possible clothing ensembles for different weather forecasts. If worst came to worst, shopping would be on the menu—and that wasn't such a bad thought.

Belle picked up the photo which stood next to her bed. It had been taken with Mummy's brand-new Brownie Kodak camera: The summer of 1958, at home in Eden House, when life was full of potential.

But this trip home wasn't because it was all bliss back there, her mother was worried about Emily.

No one would have ever thought there'd be a day when Belle would have to agonize about her angelic twin Emily—the diplomat in any tempest. Of course, everything had changed a year ago. Nothing surprised Belle anymore; she just wanted a renewed relationship with her sister, like it used to be.

This weekend was Belle's chance; Emily's fiendish husband was out of town. Time together—it had been too long—and then Emily would remember who she was.

The pink material caressed Belle's cheek. She folded the blouse with reverence; Emily would be pleased with it. Clothes

buoyed Belle's mood, but Emily required more than a pretty pink blouse—she needed a new life.

The happy photo of Belle and her twin, taken that summer before it all began, only pronounced the current life changes as dire. Then there was her sister's wedding photo . . . the menace. She shoved it in the drawer. Somehow, she'd get the good days back. Perhaps that's why she hadn't gone home more since their marriage—she detested him. He'd taken all that was pure and manipulated it to his advantage. Of course, Belle's loyal sister would never go against what God had joined together, but if only she'd realize that God would never condone a pact between an angel and a devil. Belle had to stop—she was a mad woman. But the mere thought of this beast and her sister . . .

Ironic that Belle's immediate solution lay in the same drawer with the framed threat. She yanked it open and wolfed down the chocolate bar.

Belle placed her identical red shirt next to Emily's pink one with a little less care. Her boyfriend had claimed that red brought out her personality and accentuated her darker features. More like her wild appearance—at least today. Her auburn hair curled more with each year. She was only twenty—a miracle if a brush would venture through it at forty.

The bread in the kitchen was dry, the last of the loaf. Her chocolate would suffice for breakfast this morning. Belle shut the case and kicked her books under the bed. They'd be forgotten over the weekend. This time was for her sister. Belle locked the front door and looked ahead.

Her feet echoed along the sidewalk. The bag lady was in the way, Belle moved to the side.

"Give us some change, Miss."

Belle threw her a coin. Everyone needed to be loved. Maybe she should give Emily's husband a chance, but better yet, maybe she should take hold of her emotions. People could change, that's what all those Sunday school lessons had preached.

The train whistled seconds before it rounded the bend and came into view. Belle's hair swayed behind her, and the oil-

scented breeze was short-lived. She unclenched her hands and picked up her suitcase.

Funny she'd never noticed that habit till she saw photos of herself—her hands were always little balls.

Her eyes darted to the back of the train where there were numerous available spots. She'd doze in the rear with her cardigan as a suitable pillow.

Belle closed her eyes and images of her sister filled her mind. She begged her dreams to produce a contented Emily, but they were all the same, just different scenarios. Emily was trapped in a sinking boat and Belle had to save her, but she didn't know how to swim. Emily was sick with a dreaded disease, but Belle knew no cure.

The train halted; she was halfway to her childhood home in the northern hills. Please be all right, Emily.

Belle bent down, grabbed a novel out of her bag, and wiped her cheeks. The train had attracted a few more passengers, but no one could see her at this angle—an emotional fool. She placed the book on her lap and found her own hands a more substantial muse for the moment.

2 WETHERVALE, NORTHUMBERLAND, JUNE 1961

Emily tied her blonde hair back. She leaned closer to the mirror. So maybe she did have dark shadows under her eyes. Perhaps her Swiss-ancestral features had become prominent as of late, but it was all part of marriage. Her husband would deem these as signs of a good wife. She worked hard and it showed.

She splashed the soapy water on her face. The lilac-scented suds were the only remnant of her past. The tap groaned. Emily stood still, she waited. Today would be different, Belle would be across the table from her in a few short hours. Life had always been perfect with Belle.

The churn from deep within began—if she could just control this. She reminded herself that today would be an escape, but nothing seemed to work anymore. Her knees hit the bathroom checkered tiles abruptly.

Emily's blue eyes darted around the bathroom. Distractions—please anything. But the tumultuous orb rose and the wretched convulsions from the pit of her stomach began.

Her eyelids closed; imagination may work. She and Belle ran through the fields and the Northumberland wind across the moors awakened the lifeless heather. The green hills would go on for miles, but the rhythmic motion of something so simple

broke up the eternal landscape. The vastness had sometimes overwhelmed her as a child, but something uncomplicated within reach, such as the heather, had always calmed her. Not today.

The gurgle of the toilet resonated behind her, and Emily shut the bathroom door. The kitchen still held the aroma of sausage and scrambled eggs. What a waste of a good meal—all flushed away now. She touched the kitchen table, it was wet. Sweet mother, she'd done more than stop by and cook a hearty breakfast. Time with Elizabeth Hastie was limited now, but one day things would be better: Emily's husband wouldn't demand so much.

Emily reached for a drying plate, it slipped. Shattered porcelain chips spread across the floor. She grabbed a piece, it sliced her finger, and blood trickled down. He just doesn't realize; it was his upbringing.

The phone rang and she jumped. She wrapped a tissue around her finger. "Hello," Emily said.

"Hello, darling."

"This is a surprise, I thought you'd call Monday night."

"A pleasant surprise I hope," her husband said.

"Of course."

"Mum's feeling better, so I'll be home sooner."

Emily fell into the chair next to the phone. Fortunately, she'd already cleaned the house from top to bottom since Belle was going to spend the weekend here, but now it was ruined.

"I'll have tea ready by five then," Emily said.

"That soon and Mum would end my life, but I'll be home Wednesday instead of the following Monday."

Emily stood and rearranged the flowers on the phone table. "I'll look forward to it." The entire weekend uninterrupted . . .

"I assume you'll have a quiet weekend then."

Here it was. "Yes, just the usual." A white lie wasn't a sin and Belle's company was the usual, at least two years ago. She wouldn't clutter his mind with her details, he had so much to think about, and besides all would be in its proper place when he returned.

* * *

Emily shook her foot, the pebbles rolled out of her sandals. She breathed in, the air was light, but by the end of summer the dense humidity would arrive. This outing was an unusual treat; Eden House had been the farthest she'd gone in the last year, and even that wasn't so often anymore.

Emily passed Mrs. McNeal's boutique, she waved. The Wethervale church, so stoic with its gray stone and growing ivy, chimed its bells. This village had been paradise to her as a child and now would be her home forever. Observers may claim that the price of familiarity within the town walls had been too dear, but she just needed to control her anxiety when it came to events that she could have never foreseen.

Her dainty watch agreed with the church's chime, a solid guarantee that she was on schedule. Belle should be well on her way from London by now.

The bus to Carlisle, Cumberland was full for a summer morning. She stepped on, tucked her hair behind her ear, and all eyes watched her. Emily looked down.

Belle had suggested they meet in Carlisle first for midday dinner. After all, the Edwardian Hotel boasted the finest food in all of Cumberland and its surrounding areas.

The countryside swept past. The stone fences around the individual farms patterned the lush hills. Emily's chest rose up and down calmly. The bus ride had worked better than the imaginary heather. It wasn't much longer until she'd see Belle.

The other passengers had exited in the town center of Carlisle, she was the last one. The bus halted. She'd been stopped in the middle of nowhere, or at least it appeared that way. To her left was the country lane with a farmhouse set back from the road and to her right, a forest of green with an almost undetectable pathway to the Edwardian Hotel. Farther up was a more prominent driveway which erased the sentiment of abandonment . . . but this way was far prettier.

Emily walked through the grove of trees.

The protected walk was only five minutes, and then the grandiosity of what was hidden behind the greenery appeared.

The Edwardian Hotel seemed brighter this time—not a surprise since it was evening over a year ago when she was here last. She bent and smelled the flowers. They were bulbs that spring when her husband brought her to the restaurant to propose.

“Emily!” Belle had arisen from a hidden bench.

Emily breathed in her sister’s auburn hair. She lost her voice for a moment.

“We’ll have a splendid time this weekend,” Belle said.

Emily’s hand squeezed Belle’s. “I can’t believe you’re here—it seems so long.” Emily held her throat, clearing her voice.

“I know.” Belle said.

The sisters walked the steps together and entered the hotel. A French woman showed them to their seat.

“She certainly likes to wiggle her bottom,” Belle said. “A bit old to move that thing around so much.”

Emily giggled. “Stop, Belle . . . you always do this to me.”

“That’s what sisters are for.”

Emily leaned over to Belle. “This is the same woman that waited on us when I was proposed to. She helped him pull the whole engagement surprise together.”

Belle’s hazel eyes were deeper now, more mature than when they were children. “Must have been romantic.” Her modern sister, pursuing her dreams in London, now finally sat across the table from her again.

“It was, and a year now—hard to believe,” Emily said.

The waitress reappeared and handed them menus. “You look familiar.” Her bright red lips parted and exposed her yellow teeth that matched her fake hair color.

Emily sat tall. “Yes, I was proposed to, at this very spot, just over a year ago.”

“Of course. It’s hard to forget such a beautiful face.” She smiled again; her age betrayed by deep creases on her forehead. “It’s best that it didn’t work out. I mean, I remember him very well, only because he comes in every week. Even today for breakfast this morning, I believe.” She placed the buns and

butter on the table as she continued. "This new woman that he's with, she doesn't hold a candle to you, dear. You were far too pretty for him anyhow."

Emily wouldn't look at Belle. "No, that's not right." Her mind was heavy, she had to focus on a clear thought: the heather again, with its swish of hope. Emily's hand went to her blonde hair and tucked it out of the way.

The French woman was silent and still.

"My sister's been married for a year, you've confused him with someone else," Belle said.

The waitress gasped and stood motionless for a moment—just leave woman—and then finally she wiggled her bottom away.

"Confused French woman." Emily picked up the menu. "I'm sure Mummy is so excited to see you, Belle."

Belle said nothing.

Emily put the menu down and picked up the one in front of her sister. "Take a look at the delicious food." Maybe the sun was in Belle's eyes. "I'll have the waitress shut the curtains—"

"So, you're not going to acknowledge what that woman said." Belle's voice was strangled.

"You even said she was wrong. I think I'll have salad."

"But he comes to Carlisle once a week—Tuesdays, when you call me." Belle's voice had grown more forceful. "And where is he now?"

"Yes, he tutors on Tuesdays, Belle, and currently he's visiting his mother."

"Really? And have you ever gone with him?"

"Belle, please—"

Belle stared, then picked up her menu and slumped back. "Just one word and I'll obliterate him out of your life."

"Leave it alone."

Her sister grew silent again and then responded. "I have to go to the ladies' room, be back in a minute." Belle disappeared and reappeared.

She smiled and ordered a ham sandwich when the waitress came by.

"I'll have salad," Emily said.

When the waitress put the ham sandwich in front of Belle, she said, "You two must be twins, you'd be identical if you had the same hair color."

"Yes, we are," Belle said.

The woman leaned closer; her breath was stale. Emily tilted her head to the side—to get some space.

"This man comes in on Tuesdays around five." The waitress put the salad on the table and then turned and left. "And he and his friend are staying in room 203."

The china plate made such a bang when it was placed in front of her. Emily's blue eyes lifted.

Belle's lips were pursed but her hazel eyes were sad.

"It's just a mix-up. I'm sure it's not him." Emily dove into her salad knowing it would exit the same way it went in.

3 WETHERVALE, SUMMER 1958—THREE YEARS PRIOR

The long grass moved back and forth—in sudden spurts—in the high country near Eden House. The wind whispered intensely through the windows, and then calmness prevailed—almost as if it had been in her dreams.

Her long blonde hair ruffled; Emily's blue eyes stared up.

"Don't worry, you'll have a wonderful time today," Belle patted her sister's hand.

Emily turned. "You always know when I'm awake." For some odd reason, even when Belle seemed in the depth of slumber, she would awaken when Emily's mind was alert.

Belle's hazel eyes fought to open wider. "The agony of the what ifs is worse."

"I'm just nervous." No—it was more than that. Perhaps her whole future depended on this. Ian could be the one—the one that would love her and create a happy life in the only village she'd ever known.

"You're a worry wart. I'm sure Alice hasn't set you up with a toad." Belle touched her sister's disheveled hair. "Besides, there are plenty of others beyond these Northumberland hills."

"Sorry if I woke you," Emily said.

Belle rolled back over and resumed her rhythmic breathing.

It had to be about five am, it was still dark outside. Yes, this was an irreligious hour to discuss what Ian may be like—and even more so on a Saturday morning. He sounded perfect though. It was her shyness, and the fact that she was so inexperienced that concerned her. There may be hundreds of men out there, but that was just it, she didn't want a man from out there, unlike her sister. She'd be eighteen next year, the critical age. Some girls would go off to university or to work. Work wouldn't be dreadful as a temporary measure, but it was marriage—a family and home—that pulled at her. She would be a failure if there wasn't a valid reason to stay in the village, especially when her gregarious sister was off in pursuit of her dreams. And the last thing she'd allow herself to turn into was a bitter maid like Miss Urwin.

The clock defined the silence. Perhaps if she counted the tick-tocks, she'd be able to go back to sleep. She lost her place, had to start again.

She shifted her position, this time she'd count in French.

The morning shadows transformed her dresser into a hidden stranger. It was bright enough to see the bedroom clock: seven o'clock. Her mum and dad would be downstairs by now, but she had heard no sounds at six. French counting must have worked.

Emily slid her feet into the slippers with the hole and left the other indistinguishable pair for her sister.

"Don't get up so soon, Emily," Belle said.

"Go back to sleep." Emily centered the blanket on her sister who'd now rolled to the middle of the bed.

"I can smell breakfast." Belle poked her head out of her cocoon.

"I'm sure Mummy's made mounds of food." Emily wrapped her nightgown around her and headed downstairs towards the common coal fire.

The big grandfather clock at the bottom of the stairs was a reminder that it was her turn to dust today. Not that it seemed necessary; it still shone from the polish two days ago. Elizabeth

always thought it best to start with the clock; she claimed that it gave one a first impression of the cleanliness of Eden House.

Emily admired her mother, and thus took her advice as foolproof. Why Belle would sometimes do just the opposite didn't seem worth the contentious banter between mother and daughter. That's what made Belle different from her though, and that's why they were the best of friends.

Emily opened the door to the main living area. The blast of warmth caught her suddenly. Belle was now just behind her, still half asleep. The whole bed to herself mustn't have been enough; Elizabeth's breakfasts tended to be more alluring.

The table was adorned with fried tomatoes and eggs, sausage, bacon, and warmed toast in its silver rack. A nibble on a piece of toast was the only thing that seemed doable this morning.

"Good morning, my roses." Alexander Hastie sat on his preferred chair and read the local morning paper. His trousers were snug around his belly. Belle had confided to her the night before how their dad's trousers were being hitched up higher every day and soon would be wrapped under his armpits.

The girls pecked their father's ginger hair and Emily touched the few strands of white—lovable father.

"A good night's rest?" Alexander put the paper aside.

"Yes, thank you." It wasn't the full truth, but she could never explain her silly anxieties over a boy she hadn't even met yet.

* * *

"They should be here in a minute; I don't know if you have time to plait my hair." Emily's stomach rumbled; a half slice of toast hadn't sufficed. Tomorrow she would be back to sausage, tomatoes, and eggs.

"Plenty of time." Belle pulled the hairbrush out of the drawer. "You didn't eat a thing for breakfast. I almost thought it was an exam morning with all the nerves and no appetite."

"I know, I'll make up for it tonight," Emily said.

"Your hair's easy to manage." Belle tied a yellow ribbon at the bottom of the plait to match Emily's checkered blouse. She

touched Emily's shoulders. "You look lovely, you don't have anything to worry about."

"Yes, Ian will be impressed." Their cousin—with her head cocked to the side and arms crossed—leaned against the door frame.

The sisters turned towards the bedroom door.

"We didn't even hear the front bell." Emily stood, held her stomach. If only Alice had set up Belle also . . .

"I see you've graduated to a larger bra, I'm impressed," Belle said.

"I knew it wasn't my imagination." Alice squeezed her chest.

"Oh yes, you're much more voluptuous than even two months ago." Belle bent down to pick up a dropped ribbon, suppressing a laugh.

Emily hadn't the heart to tell Alice that her mature and thicker strap was noticeable through her blouse. Then again, she'd probably worn the blouse on purpose—an announcement to the world of her womanhood. That was Alice's style.

Alice flopped herself on the bed and wiped her mouth with the back of her hand.

"So, what'd you nick from Mummy's pantry?" Belle said.

"We came through the back-kitchen door." Alice rolled over and rested her head on her hands. "I hope Aunt Lizzie didn't mind, not as formal I know, but I had to sample a shortbread biscuit." Alice pulled a crumb out of her hair. "This will be a grand time, Emmy."

Emily nodded her head.

"Are you worried? You seem so quiet." Alice said.

"I'm always quiet."

"Not with me and Belle you're not. You don't need to be nervous about Ian, he's a true gentleman, and I think he likes your type: gorgeous, refined, and quiet. Wouldn't go for someone like me, I think I scare him."

"That's probably true." Belle elbowed her cousin and grinned.

“Y’know I just attract boys like Alan—easy to be in charge of,” Alice said, elbowing back.

“Let’s go see these boys.” Belle stood at the bedroom door.

Emily’s stomach lurched.

“They’re filled with tea and biscuits by now. I complied with your mum’s wishes and came to fetch Emily.”

Belle left the bedroom and Alice bounded behind her.

Emily walked down the stairs; the scent of lemon polish lingered. She rounded the corner and entered the front living room.

Here are a few reviews about this book:

Satisfying, dramatic, poignant and moving

I took this book with me everywhere I went. I could not wait to see what would happen next in the dramatic lives of these sisters. Fox's descriptive writing takes you to another place and time. A complete escape but with a resounding familiarity as far as the coming of age themes anyone can relate to. I would really like to see her do a sequel to this or possibly even go farther back to the early 1900's to glimpse the lives and adventures of their parents. I think I have found a new favorite author who has mastered the craft of a gripping drama with the right touch of humor and beautiful pastoral descriptions while keeping it clean compared to the path some authors take to lessen and distract from the storyline with over-done profanity, violence etc. – *M. Sutton*

Captivating and authentic

Jaycee has written an authentic book about life in the fifties in the north of England. It is a captivating and inspiring novel which is refreshing to read in this day and age. The story resonated with me as I grew up in the north of England in the forties and fifties. It was hard to put the book down and I look forward to the sequel. – *M. Dodd*

Loved the story of two loyal sisters

I couldn't put down the book, once I started it. I was immediately drawn to the different sisters. Each was so fun to read and follow their individual responses and their different lives. The loyalty of each sister made me want to buy a copy and send to my own sister. These two girls support each other through thick and thin. I loved the spunk of Belle. I can easily picture her in my head. Emily was so engaging that I found myself thinking...these sisters can accomplish anything. Please tell me you have more of their stories available. – *D. Jones*

If you are interested in reading more about the journey of these sisters, follow this link:

<https://www.amazon.com/Hastie-Girls-Coming-Age-Journey-ebook/dp/B09WZGYCXL>

If you have questions for the author, please email Jaycee at authorjayceefox@gmail.com.

This ebook will be available at a discounted price from June 10th/2022 - June 12th/2022, starting at \$0.99.

The print version will be available July 2022, and the sequel, *Never Forget*, in the Fall of 2022.