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Patty At Home

BY CAROLYN WELLS

AUTHOR OF TWO LITTLE WOMEN SERIES, THE MARJORIE SERIES, ETC.

1904

To My very good friend, Ruth Pilling

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CHAPTER I

THE DEBATE

In Mrs. Elliott's library at Vernondale a great discussion was going on. It was an evening in early December, and the room was bright with firelight and electric light, and merry with the laughter and talk of people who were trying to decide a great and momentous question.

For the benefit of those who are not acquainted with Patty Fairfield and her relatives, it may be well to say that Mrs. Elliott was Patty's Aunt Alice, at whose home Patty and her father were now visiting. Of the other members of the Elliott family, Uncle Charley, grandma, Marian, and Frank were present, and these with Mr. Fairfield and Patty were debating a no less important subject than the location of Patty's future home.

"You know, papa," said Patty, "you said that if I wanted to live in Vernondale you'd buy a house here, and I do want to live here,—at least, I am almost sure I do."

"Oh, Patty," said Marian, "why aren't you quite sure? You're president of the club, and the girls are all so fond of you, and you're getting along so well in school. I don't see where else you could want to live."

"I know," said Frank. "Patty wants to live in New York. Her soul yearns for the gay and giddy throng, and the halls of dazzling lights. 'Ah, Patricia, beware! the rapids are below you!' as it says in that thrilling tale in the Third Reader."

"I think papa would rather live in New York," said Patty, looking very undecided.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," exclaimed Frank, "let's debate the question. A regular, honest debate, I mean, and we'll have all the arguments for and against clearly stated and ably discussed. Uncle Fred shall be the judge, and his decision must be final."

"No," said Mr. Fairfield, "we'll have the debate, but Patty must be the judge. She is the one most interested, and I am ready to give her a home wherever she wants it; in Greenland's icy mountains, or

India's coral strand, if she chooses."

"You certainly are a disinterested member," said Uncle Charley, laughing, "but that won't do in debate. Here, I'll organise this thing, and for the present we won't consider either Greenland or India. The question, as I understand it, is between Vernondale and New York. Now, to bring this mighty matter properly before the house, I will put it in the form of a resolution, thus:

"RESOLVED, That Miss Patty Fairfield shall take up her permanent abode in New York City."

Patty gave a little cry of dismay, and Marian exclaimed, "Oh, father, that isn't fair!"

"Of course it's fair," said Mr. Elliott, with a twinkle in his eye. "It doesn't really mean she's going, but it's the only way to find out what she is going to do. Now, Fred shall be captain on the affirmative side, and I will take the negative. We will each choose our colleagues. Fred, you may begin."

"All right," said Mr. Fairfield "As a matter of social etiquette, I think it right to compliment my hostess, so I choose Mrs. Elliott on my side."

"Oh, you choose me, father," cried Marian, "do choose me."

"Owing to certain insidious wire-pulling I'm forced to choose Miss Marian Elliott," said Uncle Charley, pinching his daughter's ear.

"If one Mrs. Elliott is a good thing," said Mr. Fairfield, "I am sure two would be better, and so I choose Grandma Elliott to add to my collection of great minds."

"Frank, my son," said Uncle Charley, "don't think for a moment that I am choosing you merely because you are the Last of the Mohicans. Far from it. I have wanted you from the beginning, and I'm proud to impress your noble intellect in my cause."

"Thank you, sir," said Frank, "and if our side can't induce Patty to stay in Vernondale, it won't be for lack of good strong arguments forcibly presented."

"Modest boy!" said his mother, "You seem quite to forget your wise and clever opponents."

In great glee the debaters took their places on either side of the library table, while Patty, being judge, was escorted with much ceremony to a seat at the head. An old parlour-croquet mallet was found for her, with which she rapped on the table after the manner of a grave and dignified chairman.

"The meeting will please come to order," she said, "and the secretary will please read the minutes of the last meeting."

"The secretary regrets to report," said Frank, rising, "that the minutes of the last meeting fell down the well. Although rescued, they were afterward chewed up by the puppy, and are at present somewhat illegible. If the honourable judge will excuse the reading of the minutes, the secretary will be greatly obliged."

"The minutes are excused," said Patty, "and we will proceed at once to more important business. Mr. Frederick Fairfield, we shall be glad to hear from you."

Mr. Fairfield rose and said, "Your honour, ladies, and gentlemen: I would be glad to speak definitely on this burning question, but the truth is, I don't know myself which way I want it to be decided. For, you see, my only desire in the matter is that the wise and honourable judge, whom we see before us, should have a home of such a character and in such a place as best pleases her; but, before she makes her decision, I hope she will allow herself to be thoroughly convinced as to what will please her. And as, by force of circumstance, I am obliged to uphold the New York side of this argument, I will now set forth some of its advantages, feeling sure that my worthy opponents are quite able to uphold the Vernondale side."

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed Frank, but Patty rapped with her mallet and commanded silence.

Then Mr. Fairfield went on:

"For one thing, Patty has always lived in a city, and, like myself, is accustomed to city life. It is more congenial to both of us, and I sometimes fear we should miss certain city privileges which may not be found in a suburban town."

"But we have other things that you can't get in the city," broke in Marian.

"And I am very sure that they will be enthusiastically enumerated when it is your turn to speak," said Mr. Fairfield, smiling.

"The gentleman has the floor," remarked Patty, "the others will please keep their seats. Proceed, Mr. Fairfield."

So Mr. Fairfield proceeded:

"Other advantages, perhaps, will be found in the superior schools which the city is said to contain. I am making no allusion to the school that our honourable judge is at present attending, but I am speaking merely on general principles. And not only schools, but masters of the various arts. I have been led to believe by the assertions of some people, who, however, may be prejudiced, that Miss Fairfield has a voice which requires only training and practise to rival the voice of Adelina Patti, when that lady was Miss Fairfield's age."

"Quite true," said the judge, nodding gravely at the speaker.

"This phenomenal voice, then, might—mind; I say might—be cultivated to better purpose by metropolitan teachers."

"We have a fine singing-master here," exclaimed Frank, but Patty rapped him to silence.

"What's one singing-master among a voice like Miss Fairfield's?" demanded the speaker, "and another thing," he continued, "that ought to affect you Vernondale people very strongly, is the fact that you would have a delightful place to visit in New York City. Now, don't deny it. You know you'd be glad to come and visit Patty and me in our brown-stone mansion, and we would take you around to see all the sights, from Grant's tomb to the Aquarium."

"We've seen those," murmured Frank.

"They're still there," said Mr. Fairfield, "and there will probably be some other and newer entertainments that you haven't yet seen."

"It does sound nice," said Frank.

"And finally," went on Mr. Fairfield, "though I do not wish this argument to have undue weight, it certainly would be more convenient for me to live in the city. I am about to start in business there, and though I could go in and out every day, as the honourable gentleman on the other side of the table does, yet he is accustomed to it, and, as I am not, it seems to me an uninteresting performance. However, I dare say I could get used to a commutation ticket, and I am certainly willing to try. All of which is respectfully submitted," and with a bow the speaker resumed his seat.

"That was a very nice speech," said the judge approvingly, "and now we would be pleased to hear from the captain gentleman on the other side."

Uncle Charley rose.

"Without wishing to be discourteous," he said, "I must say that I think the arguments just set forth are exceedingly flimsy. There can be no question but that Vernondale would be a far better and more appropriate home for the young lady in question than any other spot on the globe. Here we have wide streets, green lawns, fresh air, and bright sunshine; all conducive to that blooming state of health which our honourable judge now, apparently, enjoys. City life would doubtless soon reduce her to a thin, pale, peaked specimen of humanity, unrecognisable by her friends. The rose-colour in her cheeks would turn to ashen grey; her starry eyes would become dim and lustreless. Her robust flesh would dwindle to skin and bone, and probably her hair would all fall out, and she'd have to wear a wig."

Even Patty's mallet was not able to check the burst of laughter caused by the horrible picture which Uncle Charley drew, but after it had subsided, he continued: "As to the wonderful masters and teachers in the city, far be it from me to deny their greatness and power. But the beautiful village of Vernondale is less than an hour from New York; no mosquitoes, no malaria; boating, bathing, and fishing. Miss Fairfield could, therefore, go to New York for her instructions in the various arts and sciences, and return again to her Vernondale home on a local train. Add to this the fact that here she has relatives, friends, and acquaintances, who already know and love her, while, in New York, she would have to acquire a whole new set, probably have to advertise for them. As to the commuting gentleman: before his first ticket was all punched up, he would be ready to vow that the commuter's life is the only ideal existence. Having thus offered unattackable arguments, I deem a decision in our favour a foregone conclusion, and I take pleasure in sitting down."

"A very successful speech," said Patty, smiling at her uncle. "We will now be pleased to hear from the

next speaker on the affirmative side. Mrs. Charles Elliott, will you kindly speak what is on your mind?"

"I will," said Mrs. Elliott, with a nod of her head that betokened Fairfield decision of character. "I will say exactly what is on my mind without regard to which side I am on."

"Oh, that isn't fair!" cried Patty. "A debate is a debate, you know, and you must make up opinions for your own side, whether you think them or not."

"Very well," said Aunt Alice, smiling a little, "then it being thoroughly understood that I am not speaking the truth, I will say that I think it better for Patty to live in New York. As her father will be away all day at his business, she will enjoy the loneliness of a big brown-stone city house; she will enjoy the dark rooms and the entire absence of grass and flowers and trees, which she hates anyway; instead of picnics and boating parties, she can go to stiff and formal afternoon teas; and, instead of attending her young people's club here, she can become a member of the Society of Social Economics."

With an air of having accomplished her intention, Aunt Alice sat down amid great cheers and handclappings from the opposite side.

Patty looked a little sober as she began to think the Vernondale home would win; and, though for many reasons she wished it would be so, yet, at the same time, she realised very strongly the attractions of life in New York City.

However, she only said:

"The meeting will please come to order, in order to listen to the opinions of Miss Elliott."

Marian rose with great dignity, and addressed the chair and the ladies and gentlemen with true parliamentary punctiliousness.

"Though personally interested in this matter," she began, "it is not my intention to allow my own wishes or prejudices to blind me to the best interests of our young friend who is now under discussion. Far be it from me to blight her career for the benefit of my own unworthy self, but I will say that if Patty Fairfield goes to live in New York, or anywhere except Vernondale, I think she's just the horriest, meanest old thing on the face of the earth! Why, I wouldn't *let* her go! I'd lock her in her room, and poke bread and water to her through the keyhole, if she dared to think of such a thing! Go to New York, indeed! A nice time she'd have, hanging on straps in the trolley-cars, and getting run over by automobiles! The whole thing is so perfectly absurd that there's no earthly chance of its ever coming to pass. Why, she *wouldn't* go, she couldn't be *hired* to go; she wouldn't be happy there a minute; but if she *does* go, I'll go, too!"

CHAPTER II

THE DECISION

"Hooray for our side!" cried Frank, as Marian dropped into a chair after her outburst of enthusiasm.

"Oh, I haven't finished yet," said Marian, jumping up again. "I want to remark further that not only is Patty going to live in Vernondale, but she's going to have a house very near this one. I've picked it out," and Marian wagged her head with the air of a mysterious sibyl. "I won't tell you where it is just yet, but it's a lovely house, and big enough to accommodate Uncle Fred and Patty, and a guest or two besides. I've selected the room that I prefer, and I hope you will furnish it in blue."

"The speaker is a bit hasty," said Patty as Marian sat down again; "we can't furnish any rooms before this debate is concluded; and, though we deeply regret it, Miss Elliott will be obliged to wait for her blue room until the other speakers have had their speak."

But Patty smiled at Marian understandingly, and began to have a very attractive mental picture of her cousin's blue room next her own.

"The next speaker," announced the judge, "will be Mrs. Elliott, Senior,—the Dowager Duchess. Your Grace, we would be pleased to hear from you."

"I don't know," said Grandma Elliott, looking rather seriously into the smiling faces before her, "that I

am entirely in favour of the country home. I think our Patty would greatly enjoy the city atmosphere. She is a schoolgirl now, but in a year or two she will be a young woman, and one well deserving of the best that can be given to her. I am city-bred myself, and though at my age I prefer the quiet of the country, yet for a young girl I well know the charm of a city life. Of course, we would all regret the loss of our Patty, who has grown to be a part of our daily life, but, nevertheless, were I to vote on this matter, I should unhesitatingly cast my ballot in favour of New York."

"Bravo for grandma!" cried Frank. "Give me a lady who fearlessly speaks her mind even in the face of overwhelming opposition. All the same, I haven't spoken my piece yet, and I believe it is now my turn."

"It is," said Patty, "and we eagerly await your sapient and authoritative remarks."

"Ahem!" said Frank pompously, as he arose. "My remarks shall be brief, but very much to the point. Patty's home must be in Vernondale because we live here. If ever we go to live in New York, or Oshkosh, or Kalamazoo, Patty can pick up her things and go along. Just get that idea firmly fixed in your heads, my friends. Where we live, Patty lives; whither she goeth, we goeth. Therefore, if Patty should go to New York, the Elliots will take up bag and baggage, sell the farm, and go likewise to New York. Now I'm sure our Patty, being of proper common-sense and sound judgment, wouldn't put the Elliott family to such inconvenience,—for moving is a large and fearsome proposition. Thus we see that as the Mountain insists on following Mahomet whithersoever she goeth, the only decently polite thing for Mahomet to do is to settle in Vernondale. I regret exceedingly that I am forced to express an opinion so diametrically opposed to the advices of Her Grace, the Dowager Duchess, but I'm quite sure she didn't realise what a bother it would be for the Elliots to move. And now, having convinced you all to my way of thinking, I will leave the case in the hands of our wise and competent judge."

"Wait," said Uncle Charley; "I believe the captains are usually allowed a sort of summing-up speech, are they not?"

"They are in this case, anyway," said Patty. "Mr. Elliott will please go ahead with his summing-up."

"Well," said Uncle Charley, "the sum of the whole matter seems to be that we all want Fred and Patty to live here because we want them to; but, of course, it's only fair that they consult their own wishes in the matter, and if they conclude that they prefer New York, why,—we'll have another debate, that's all."

Uncle Charley sat down, and Mr. Fairfield rose. "I have listened with great interest to the somewhat flattering remarks of my esteemed fellow members, and have come to the conclusion that, if agreeable to Her Judgeship, a compromise might be effected. It would seem to me that if a decision should be arrived at for the Vernondale home, the Fairfields could manage to reap some few of those mysterious advantages said to be found in city life, by going to New York and staying a few months every winter. This, too, would give them an opportunity to receive visits from the Elliott family, which would, I'm sure, be a pleasure and profit to all concerned. With this suggestion I am quite ready to hear a positive and final decision from Her Honour, the Judge."

"And it won't take her long to make up her mind, either," cried Patty. "I knew you'd fix it somehow, papa; you are the best and wisest man! Solomon wasn't in it with you, nor Solon, nor Socrates, nor anybody! That arrangement is exactly what I choose, and suits me perfectly, I do want to stay in New York sometimes, but I would much rather live in Vernondale; so the judge hereby announces that, on the merits of the case, the question is decided in the negative. The Fairfields will buy a house in Vernondale, and the judge hopes that they will buy it quick."

"Three cheers for Patty and Uncle Fred," cried Frank, and while they were being given with a will, Marian flew to the telephone, and, when the cheers subsided, she was engaged in a conversation of which the debating club heard only one side.

"Is this you, Elsie?"

"What do you think? Patty's going to stay in Vernondale!"

"Yes, indeed, perfectly gorgeous."

"Just this evening; just now."

"I guess I am! I'm so glad I don't know what to do!"

"Oh, yes, of course she'll keep on being president."

"No, they haven't decided yet, but I want them to take the Bigelow house."

"Yes; wouldn't it be fine!"

"Oh, it isn't very late."

"Well, come over early to-morrow morning, then."

"Good-by."

"Elsie Morris is delighted," said Marian, as she hung up the receiver, "and Polly Stevens will just dance jigs of joy when she hears about it. I'd call her up now, only I'm afraid she'd break the telephone trying to express her enthusiasm; she flutters so."

"You can tell her about it to-morrow," said Frank, "and now let's talk about where the house shall be. Would you rather buy or build, Uncle Fred?"

"Perhaps it would be better to rent," said Mr. Fairfield. "Suppose my fickle daughter should change her mind, and after a visit in the city decide that she prefers it for her home."

"I'm not fickle, papa," said Patty, "and it's all arranged all right just as it is; but I don't want a rented house, they won't let you drive tacks in the walls, or anything like that. Let's buy a house, and then, if you turn fickle and want to move away, we can sell it again."

"All right," said Mr. Fairfield obligingly, "what house shall we buy?"

"I know just the one," cried Marian; "guess where it is."

"Would you, by any chance, refer to the Bigelow house?" inquired Frank politely.

"How did you know?" exclaimed Marian. "I only heard to-day that it is for sale, and I wanted to surprise you."

"Well, next time you have a surprise in store for us," said Frank, "don't announce it to Elsie Morris over the telephone."

"Oh, did you hear that?"

"As a rule, sister dear, unless you are the matron of a deaf and dumb asylum, you must expect those present to hear your end of a telephone conversation."

"Of course," said Marian; "I didn't think. But, really, wouldn't the Bigelow house be fine? Only a few blocks away from here, and such a lovely house, with a barn and a conservatory, and a little arbour in the garden."

Patty began to look frightened.

"Goodness, gracious me!" she exclaimed; "I don't believe I realise what I'm coming to. I could take care of the little arbour in the garden; but I wonder if I could manage a house, and a barn, and a conservatory!"

"And go to school every day, besides," said her father, laughing. "I think, my child, that at least until your school days are over, we will engage the services of a responsible housekeeper."

"Oh, papa!" cried Patty, in dismay, "you said I could keep house for you; and Aunt Alice has taught me lots about it; and she'll teach me lots more; and you know I can make good pumpkin pies; and, of course, I can dust and fly 'round; and that's about all there is to housekeeping, anyway."

"Oh, Patty," said Aunt Alice, "my lessons must have fallen on stony ground if you think that's all there is to housekeeping."

"That's merely a figure of speech, Aunt Alice," replied Patty. "You well know I am a thoroughly capable and experienced housekeeper; honest, steady, good-tempered, and with a fine reference from my last place."

"You're certainly a clever little housekeeper for your age," said her aunt, "but I'm not sure you could keep house successfully, and go to school, and practice your music, and attend to your club all at the same time."

"But I wouldn't do them all at the same time, Aunt Alice. I'd have a time for everything, and everything in its place. I would go to school, and practise, and housekeep, and club; all in their proper proportions—" Here Patty glanced at her father. "You see, if I had the proportions right, all would go well."

"Well, perhaps," said Mr. Fairfield, "if we had a competent cook and a tidy little waitress, we could get along without a professional housekeeper. I admit I had hoped to have Patty keep house for me and preside at my table, and at any rate, it would do no harm to try it as an experiment; then, if it failed, we could make some other arrangement."

"I guess I do want to sit at the head of our table, papa," said Patty; "I'd just like to see a housekeeper there! A prim, sour-faced old lady with a black silk dress and dangling ear-rings! No, I thank you. If I have my way I will keep that house myself, and when I get into any trouble, I will fly to Aunt Alice for rest and refreshment."

"We'll all help," said Marian; "I'll make lovely sofa-pillows for you, and I'm sure grandma will knit you an afghan."

"That isn't much towards housekeeping," said Frank. "I'll come over next summer and swing your hammock for you, and put up your tennis-net."

"And meantime," said Uncle Charley, "until the house is bought and furnished, the Fairfield family will be the welcome guests of the Elliotts. It's almost the middle of December now, and I don't think, Miss Patty Fairfield, that you'll get your home settled in time to make a visit in New York *this* winter; and now, you rattle-pated youngsters, run to bed, while I discuss some plans sensibly with my brother-in-law and fellow townsman."

CHAPTER III

THE TEA CLUB

"Well I should think you'd better stay in Vernondale, Patty Fairfield, if you know what's good for yourself! Why, if you had attempted to leave this town, we would have mobbed you with tar and feathers, or whatever those dreadful things are that they do to the most awful criminals."

"Oh, if I had gone, Polly, I should have taken this club with me, of course. I'm so used to it now, I'm sure I couldn't live a day, and know that we should meet no more, as the Arab remarked to his beautiful horse."

"It would be rather fun to be transported bodily to New York as a club, but I'd want to be transported home again after the meeting," said Helen Preston.

"Why shouldn't we do that?" cried Florence Douglass. "It would be lots of fun for the whole club to go to New York some day together."

"I'm so glad Patty is going to stay with us, I don't care what we do," said Ethel Holmes, who was drawing pictures on Patty's white shirt-waist cuffs as a mark of affection.

"I'm glad, too," said Patty; "and, Ethel, your kittens are perfectly lovely, but this is my last clean shirt-waist, and those pencil-marks are awfully hard to wash out."

"I don't mean them to be washed out," said Ethel, calmly going on with her art work; "they're not wash drawings, they're permanent decorations for your cuffs, and are offered as a token of deep regard and esteem."

The Tea Club was holding a Saturday afternoon meeting at Polly Stevens's house, and the conversation, as yet, had not strayed far from the all-engrossing subject of Patty's future plans.

The Tea Club had begun its existence with lofty and noble aims in a literary direction, to be supplemented and assisted by an occasional social cup of tea. But if you have had any experience with merry, healthy young girls of about sixteen, you will not be surprised to learn that the literary element had softly and suddenly vanished away, much after the manner of a Boojum. Then, somehow, the social interest grew stronger, and the tea element held its own, and the result was a most satisfactory club, if not an instructive one.

"But," as Polly Stevens had said, "we are instructed all day long in school, and a good deal out of school, too, for that matter; and what we need most is absolutely foolish recreation; the foolisher the better."

And so the Saturday afternoon meetings had developed into merely merry frolics, with a cup of tea, which was often a figure of speech for chocolate or lemonade, at the close.

There were no rules, and the girls took pleasure in calling themselves unruly members. There were no dues, and consequently no occasion for a secretary or treasures. Patty continued to be called the president, but the title meant nothing more than the fact that she was really a chief favourite among the girls. No one was bound, or even expected to attend the meetings unless she chose; but, as a rule, a large majority of the club was present.

And so to-day, in the library at Polly Stevens's house, nine members of the Tea Club were chattering like nine large and enthusiastic magpies.

"Now we can go on with the entertainment," said Lillian Desmond, as she sat on the arm of Patty's chair, curling wisps of the presidential hair over her fingers. "If Patty had gone away, I should have resigned my part in the show and gone into a convent. Where are you going to live, Patty?"

"I don't know, I am sure; we haven't selected a house yet; and if we don't find one we like, papa may build one, though I believe Marian has one all picked out for us."

"Yes, I have," said Marian. "It's the Bigelow house on our street. I do want to keep Patty near us."

"The Bigelow house? Why, that's too large for two people. Patty and Mr. Fairfield would get lost in it. Now, I know a much nicer one. There's a little house next-door to us, a lovely, little cottage that would suit you a lot better. Tell your father about it, Patty. It's for sale or rent, and it's just the dearest place."

"Why, Laura Russell," cried Marian, "that little snip of a house! It wouldn't hold Patty, let alone Uncle Fred. You only proposed it because you want Patty to live next-door to you."

"Yes; that's it," said Laura, quite unabashed; "I know it's too little, but you could add ells and bay-windows and wings and things, and then it would be big enough."

"Would it hold the Tea Club?" said Patty. "I must have room for them, you know."

"Oh, won't it be fun to have the Tea Club at Patty's house!" cried Elsie. "I hadn't thought of that."

"What's a home without a Tea Club?" said Patty. "I shall select the house with an eye single to the glory and comfort of you girls."

"Then I know of a lovely house," said Christine Converse. "It's awfully big, and it's pretty old, but I guess it could be fixed up. I mean the old Warner place."

"Good gracious!" cried Ethel; "way out there! and it's nothing but a tumble-down old barn, anyhow."

"Oh, I think it's lovely; and it's Colonial, or Revolutionary, or something historic; and they're going to put the trolley out there this spring,—my father said so."

"It is a nice old house," said Patty; "and it could be made awfully pretty and quaint. I can see it, now, in my mind's eye, with dimity curtains at the windows, and roses growing over the porch."

"I hope you will never see those dimity curtains anywhere but in your mind's eye," said Marian. "It's a heathenish old place, and, anyway, it's too far away from our house."

"Papa says I can have a pony and cart," said Patty; "and I could drive over every day."

"A pony and cart!" exclaimed Helen Preston. "Won't that be perfectly lovely! I've always wanted one of my own. And shall you have man-servants, and maid-servants? Oh, Patty, you never could run a big establishment like that. You'll have to have a housekeeper."

"I'm going to try it," said Patty, laughing. "It will be an experiment, and, of course, I shall make lots of blunders at first; but I think it's a pity if a girl nearly sixteen years old can't keep house for her own father."

"So do I," said Laura. "And, anyhow, if you get into any dilemmas we'll all come over and help you out."

The girls laughed at this; for Laura Russell was a giddy little feather-head, and couldn't have kept house for ten minutes to save her life.

"Much good it would do Patty to have the Tea Club help her keep house," said Florence Douglass.

"But we'll all make her lovely things to go to housekeeping with. I shall be real sensible, and make her sweeping-caps and ironing-holders."

"Oh, I can beat that for sensibleness," cried Ethel Holmes. "I read about it the other day, and it's a broom-bag. I haven't an idea what it's for; but I'll find out, and I'll make one."

"One's no good," said Marian sagely. "Make her a dozen while you're about it."

"Oh, do they come by dozens?" said Ethel, in an awestruck voice. "Well, I guess I won't make them then. I'll make her something pretty. A pincushion all over lace and pin ribbons, or something like that."

"That will be lovely," said Laura. "I shall embroider her a tablecloth."

"You'll never finish it," said Patty, who well knew how soon Laura's bursts of enthusiasm spent themselves. "You'd better decide on a doily. Better a doily done than a tablecloth but begun."

"Oh, I'll tell you-what we can do, girls," said Polly Stevens. "Let's make Patty a tea-cloth, and we'll each write our name on it, and then embroider it, you know."

"Lovely!" cried Christine. "Just the thing. Who'll hemstitch it? I won't. I'll embroider my name all right, but I hate to hemstitch."

"I'll hemstitch it," said Elsie Morris. "I do beautiful hemstitching."

"So do I," said Helen Preston. "Let me do half."

"Ethel and I hemstitch like birds," said Lillian Desmond. "Let's each do a side,—there'll be four sides, I suppose."

"Well, the tea-cloth seems in a fair way to get hemstitched," said Patty. "You can put a double row around it, if you like, and I'll be awfully glad to have it. I'll use it the first Saturday afternoon after I get settled."

"I wish I knew where you're going to live," said Ethel. "I'd like to have a correct mental picture of that first Saturday afternoon."

"It's a beautiful day for walking," said Polly Stevens. "Let's all go out, and take a look at the Warner place. Something tells me that you'll decide to live there."

"I hope something else will tell you differently, soon," said Marian, "for I'll never give my consent to that arrangement. However, I'd just as lieve walk out there, if only to convince you what a forlorn old place it is."

"Come on; let's go, then. We can be back in an hour, and have tea afterwards. I'll get the key from Mr. Martin, as we go by."

Like a bombarding army the Tea Club stormed the old Warner house, and once inside its Colonial portal, they made the old walls ring with their laughter. The wide hall was dark and gloomy until Elsie Morris flung open the door at the other end, and let in the December sunshine.

"Seek no farther," she cried dramatically. "We have crossed the Rubicon and found the Golden Fleece! This is the place of all others for our Tea Club meeting, and it doesn't matter what the rest of the house may be like. Patty, you will kindly consider the matter settled."

"I'll consider anything you like," said Patty; "and before breakfast, too, if you'll only hurry up and get out of this damp, musty old place. I'm shivering myself to pieces."

"Oh, it isn't cold," said Laura Russell; "and while we're here, let's go through the house."

"Yes," said Marian; "examine it carefully, lest some of its numerous advantages should escape your notice. Observe the hardwood floors, the magnificent mahogany stair-rail, and the lofty ceilings!"

The old floors were creaky, worm-eaten, and dusty; the stair-rail was in a most dilapidated condition, and the ceilings were low and smoky; so Marian scored her points.

"But it is antique," said Ethel Holmes, with the air of an auctioneer. "Ah, ladies, what would you have? It is a fine specimen of the Colonial Empire period, picked out here and there with Queen Anne. The mantels, ah,—the mantels are dreams in marble."

"Nightmares in painted wood, you mean," said Lillian.

"But so roomy and expansive," went on Ethel. "And the wall-papers! Note the fine stage of complete dilapidation left by the moving finger of Time."

"The wall-papers are all right," said Patty. "They look as if they'd peel off easily. Come on upstairs."

The chambers were large, low, and rambling; and the house, in its best days, must have been an interesting specimen of its type. But after a short investigation, Patty was as firmly convinced as Marian that its charms could not offset its drawbacks.

"I've seen enough of this moated grange," cried Patty. "Come on, girls, we're going back to tea, right, straight, smack off."

"There's no pleasing some folks," grumbled Ethel. "Here's an ancestral pile only waiting for somebody to ancestralise it. You could make it one of the Historic Homes of Vernondale, and you won't even consider it for a minute."

"I'll consider it for a minute," said Patty, "if that will do you any good, but not a bit longer; and as the minute is nearly up, I move we start."

CHAPTER IV

BOXLEY HALL

After consultation with various real estate agents, and after due consideration of the desirable houses they had to offer, Mr. Fairfield came to the conclusion that the Bigelow house, which Marian had suggested, was perhaps the most attractive of any.

And so, one afternoon, a party of very interested people went over to look at it.

The procession was headed by Patty and Marian, followed by Mr. Fairfield and Aunt Alice, while Frank and his father brought up the rear. But as they were going out of the Elliotts' front gate, Laura Russell came flying across the street.

"Where are all you people going?" she cried. "I know you're going to look at a house. Which one?"

"The Bigelow house," said Marian, "and I'm almost sure Uncle Fred will decide to take it. Come on with us; we're going all through it."

"No," said Laura, looking disappointed, "I don't want to go; and I don't want the Fairfields to live in that house anyway. If they would only look at that little cottage next-door to us, I know they'd like it ever so much better. Oh, please, Mr. Fairfield, won't you come over and look at it now? It's so pretty and cunning, and it has the loveliest garden and chicken-coop and everything."

"I don't want a chicken-coop," said Patty, laughing; "I've no chickens, and I don't want any."

"Our chickens are over there most of the time," said Laura.

"Then, of course, we ought to have a coop to keep our neighbours' chickens in," said Mr. Fairfield; "and if this cottage is as delightful as Miss Russell makes it out, I think it's our duty at least to go and look at it. If the rest of you are willing, suppose we go over there first, and then if we *should* decide not to take it, we'll have time to investigate the Bigelow afterward"

Marian looked so woe-begone that Patty laughed.

"Cheer up, girl," she said; "there isn't one chance in a million of our taking that doll's house, but Laura will never give us a minute's peace until we go and look at it; so we may as well go now, and get it over."

"All right," said Marian; and Patty, with her two girl friends on either side of her, started in the direction of the cottage.

But when they reached it, Mr. Fairfield exclaimed in amazement. "That little house?" he said. "Oh, I

see; that's the chicken-coop you spoke of. Well, where is the house?"

"This is the house," said Laura; "but, somehow, it does look smaller than usual; still, it's a great deal bigger inside."

"No doubt," said Frank. "I've often noticed that the inside of a house is much larger than the outside. Of course, we can't all go in at once, but I'm willing to wait my turn. Who will go first?"

"Very well, you may stay outside," said Laura. "I think the rest of us can all squeeze in at once, if we try."

But Frank followed the rest of the party, and, passing through the narrow hall, they entered the tiny parlour.

"I never was in such a crowded room," said Marian. "I can scarcely get my breath. I had no idea there were so many of us."

"Well, you're not going to live here," said Laura. "There's room enough for just Patty and her father."

"There is, if we each take a room to ourself," said Mr. Fairfield. "You may have this parlour, my daughter, and I'll take the library. Where is the library, Miss Russell?"

"I think it has just stepped out," said Frank; "at any rate, it isn't on this floor; there's only this room, and the dining-room, and a kitchen cupboard."

"Very likely the library is on the third floor," said Marian; "that would be convenient."

"There isn't any third floor," explained Laura. "This is what they call a story-and-a-half house."

"It would have to be expanded into a serial story, then, before it would do for us," said Mr. Fairfield. "We may not be such big people, but Patty and I have a pretty large estimate of ourselves, and I am sure we never could live in such a short-story-and-a-half as this seems to be."

"Indeed, we couldn't, papa," said Patty. "Just look at this dining-room. I'm sure it's only big enough for one. We would have to have our meals alternately; you could have breakfast, and I would have dinner one day, and the next day we'd reverse the order."

"Come, look at the kitchen, Patty," called out Frank; "or at least stick your head in; there isn't room for all of you. See the stationary tubs. Two of them, you see; each just the size of a good comfortable coffee-cup."

"Just exactly," said Patty, laughing; "why, I never saw such a house. Laura Russell, what were you thinking of?"

"Oh, of course, you could add to it," said Laura. "You could build on as many more rooms as you wanted, and you could run it up another story and a half, and that would make three stories; and I do want you to live near me."

"We're sorry not to live near you, Miss Laura," said Mr. Fairfield; "but I can't see my way clear to do it unless you would move into this bandbox, and let us have your roomy and comfortable mansion next door."

"Oh, there wouldn't be room for our family here," said Laura.

"But you could build on a whole lot of rooms," said Frank, "and add enough stories to make it a skyscraper; and put in an elevator, and it would be perfectly lovely."

Laura laughed with the rest, and then, at Mrs. Elliott's suggestion, they all started back to the Bigelow house.

"Now, this is something like," said Marian, as they went in at the gate and up the broad front walk.

"Like what?" said Frank.

"Like a home for the Fairfields. What shall you call it—Fairfield Hall, Fairfield Place, or what?"

"I don't know," cried Patty, dashing up the veranda steps. "But isn't it a dear house! I feel at home here already. This big piazza will be lovely in warm weather. There's room for hammocks, and big chairs, and little tables, and everything."

Inside, the house proved very attractive. The large square hall opened into a parlour on one side and a library on the other. Back of the library was a little conservatory, and beyond that a large, light dining-room with an open fireplace.

"Here's a kitchen worth having," said Aunt Alice, who was investigating ahead of the rest; "and such convenient pantries and cupboards."

"And this back veranda is great," said Frank, opening the door from a little hall.

"Oh, yes," said Patty; "see the dead vines. In the summer it must have honeysuckles all over it. And there's the little arbour at the foot of the garden. I'm going down to see it."

Marian started to follow her, but Laura called her back to show her some new attraction, and Patty ran alone down the veranda steps, and through the box-bordered paths to the little rustic arbour.

"Goodness!" she exclaimed, as she reached it. "Who in the world are you?"

For inside the arbour sat a strange-looking girl of about Patty's own age. She was a tall, thin child, with a pale face, large black eyes, and straight black hair, which hung in wisps about her ears.

"I'm Pansy," she said, clasping her hands in front of her, and looking straight into Patty's face.

"You're Pansy, are you?" said Patty, looking puzzled. "And what are you doing here, Pansy?"

"Well, miss, you see it's this way. I want to go out to service; and when I heard you was going to have a house of your own, I thought maybe you'd take me to work for you."

"Oh, you did! Well, why didn't you come and apply to me, then, in proper fashion, and not sit out here waiting for me to come to you? Suppose I hadn't come?"

"I was sure you'd come, miss. Everybody who looks at this house comes out to look at the arbour; but there hasn't been anybody before that I wanted to work for. Please take me, miss; I'll be faithful and true."

"What can you do?" asked Patty, half laughing, and half pitying the strange-looking girl. "Can you cook?"

"No, ma'am, I can't cook; but I might learn it. But I didn't mean that. I thought you'd have a cook, and you'd take me for a table girl, you know; and to tidy up after you."

"I do want a waitress; but have you had any experience?"

"No, ma'am," said the girl very earnestly, "I haven't, but I'm just sure I could learn. If you just tell me a thing once, you needn't ever tell it to me again. That's something, isn't it?"

"Indeed it is," said Patty, remembering a certain careless waitress at Mrs. Elliott's. "Have you any references?"

"No," said the girl, smiling; "you see, I've never lived anywhere except home, and I suppose mother's reference wouldn't count."

"It would with me," said Patty decidedly. "I think your mother ought to know more about you than anybody else. What would she say if I asked her?"

"She'd say I was careless and heedless and thoughtless, and didn't know anything," replied the girl cheerfully; "and I am that way at home, but I wouldn't be if I worked for you, because I want to be a waitress, and a good one; and you'd see how quick I'd learn. Oh, do take me, miss. You'll never be sorry, and that's sure!"

This statement was accompanied by such decided gestures of head and hands that Patty was very nearly convinced to the contrary, but she only said, "I'm sorry, Pansy,—you said your name was Pansy, didn't you?"

"Yes, miss,—Pansy Potts."

"What an extraordinary name!"

"Is it, miss? Well, you see, my father's name was Potts; and mother named me Pansy, because she's so fond of the flower. You don't think the name will interfere with my being a waitress, do you?"

"Not so far as I'm concerned," said Patty, laughing; "but, you see, I shall be a very inexperienced

housekeeper, and if I have an inexperienced waitress also, I don't know what might happen."

"Why, now, miss; it seems to me that that would work out just right. You're a young housekeeper, but I expect you know just about what a waitress ought to do, and you could teach me; and I know a lot about housekeeping, and I could teach you."

The sincerity in Pansy's voice and manner impressed Patty, and she looked at her closely, as she said:

"It does seem good proportion."

"It is," said Pansy; "and you've no idea how quickly I can learn."

"Can you?" said Patty. "Well, then, learn first to call me Miss Patty. It would suit me much better than to hear you say 'miss' so often."

"Yes, Miss Patty."

"And don't wring your hands in that absurd fashion, and don't stand first on one foot and then on the other, as if you were scared out of your wits."

"No, Miss Patty."

Pansy ceased shuffling, dropped her hands naturally to her sides, and stood in the quiet, respectful attitude that Patty had unconsciously assumed while speaking.

Delighted at this quick-witted mimicry, Patty exclaimed:

"I believe you will do. I believe you are just the one; but I can't decide positively, now. You go home, Pansy, and come to-morrow afternoon to see me at Mrs. Elliott's. Do you know where I live?"

"Yes, Miss Patty," and, with a respectful little bob of her head, Pansy Potts disappeared, and Patty ran back to the house.

"Well, chickadee," said Mr. Fairfield, "I have about decided that you and I can make ourselves comfortable within these four walls, and, if it suits your ladyship, I think we'll consider that we have taken the house."

"It does suit me," said Patty. "I'm perfectly satisfied; and I have taken a house-maid."

"Where did you get her?" exclaimed Frank. "Do they grow on trees in the garden? I saw you out in the arbour with one."

"Yes," said Patty; "I picked her off a tree. She isn't quite ripe, but she's not so very green; and I think she'll do. Never mind about her now. I can't decide until I've had a talk with Aunt Alice. I'm so glad you decided on this house, papa. Oh, isn't it lovely to have a home! It looks rather bare, to be sure, but, be it ever so empty, there's no place like home. Now, what shall we name it? I do like a nice name for a place."

"It has so many of those little boxwood Hedges," said Aunt Alice, looking out of the window, "that you might call it The Boxwood House."

"Oh, don't call it a wood-house," said Uncle Charley.

"Call it the wood-box, and be done with it," Frank.

"I like 'Hall,'" said Patty. "How is Boxwood Hall?"

"Sounds like Locksley Hall," said Marian.

"More like Boxley Hall," said Frank.

"Boxley Hall!" cried Patty. "That's just the thing! I like that."

"Rather a pretentious name to live up to," said Mr. Fairfield.

"Never mind," said Patty. "With Pansy Potts for a waitress, we can live up to any name."

And so Patty's new home was chosen, and its name was Boxley Hall.

CHAPTER V

SHOPPING

As Boxley Hall was a sort of experiment, Mr. Fairfield concluded to rent the place for a year, with the privilege of buying.

By this time Patty was sure that she wished to remain in Vernondale all her life; but her father said that women, even very young ones, were fickle in their tastes, and he thought it wiser to be on the safe side.

"And it doesn't matter," as Patty said to Marian; "for, when the year is up, papa will just buy the house, and then it will be all right."

Having found a home, the next thing was to furnish it; and about this Mr. Fairfield was very decided and methodical.

"To-morrow," he said, as they were talking it over at the Elliotts' one evening, "to-morrow I shall take Patty to New York to select the most important pieces of furniture. We shall go alone, because it is a very special occasion, and we can't allow ourselves to be hampered by outside advices. Another day we shall go to buy prosaic things like tablecloths and carpet-sweepers; and then, as we know little about such things, we shall be glad to take with us some experienced advisers."

And so the next day Patty and her father started for the city to buy furniture for Boxley Hall.

"You see, Patty," said her father after they were seated in the train, "there is a certain proportion to be observed in furnishing a house, about which, I imagine, you know very little."

"Very little, indeed," returned Patty; "but, then, how should I know such things when I've never furnished a house?"

"I understand that," said Mr. Fairfield; "and so, with my advantages of age and experience, and your own natural good taste, I think we shall accomplish this thing successfully. Now, first, as to what we have on hand."

"Why, we haven't anything on hand," said Patty; "at least, I have a few pictures and books, and the afghan grandma's knitting for me; but that's all."

"You reckon without your host," said her father, smiling. "I possess some few objects of value, and during the past year I have added to my collection in anticipation of the time when we should have our own home."

"Oh, papa!" cried Patty; "have you a whole lot of new furniture that I don't know about?"

"Yes," said Mr. Fairfield; "except, that, instead of being new, it is mostly old. I had opportunities in the South to pick up bits of fine old mahogany, and I have a number of really good pieces that will help to make Boxley Hall attractive."

"What are they, papa? Tell me all about them. I can't wait another minute!"

"To begin with, child, I have several heirlooms; the old sideboard that was your grandfather Fairfield's, and several old bureaus and tables that came from the Fairfield estate. Then I have, also, two or three beautiful book-cases, and an old desk for our library; and to-day we will hunt up some sort of a big roomy table that will do to go with them."

"Let's make the library the nicest room in the house, papa."

"It will make itself that, if you give it half a chance, though we'll do all we can to help. But I'm so prosaic I would like to have special attention paid to the comforts of the dining-room; and as to your own bedroom, Patty, I want you to see to it that it fulfills exactly your ideal of what a girl's room ought to be."

"Oh, I know just how I want that; almost exactly like my room at Aunt Alice's, but with a few more of the sort of things I had in my room at Aunt Isabel's. I do like pretty things, papa."

"That's right, my child, I'm glad you do; and I think your idea of pretty things is not merely a taste for highfalutin gimcracks."

"No, I don't think it is," said Patty slowly; "but, all the same, you'd better keep pretty close to me when I pick out the traps for my room. Do you know, papa, I think Aunt Isabel wants to help us furnish our house. She wrote that she would meet us in New York some time."

"That's kind of her," said Mr. Fairfield; "but, do *you* know, it just seems to me that we'll be able to manage it by ourselves. Our house is not of the era of Queen Isabella, but of the Princess Patricia."

"That sounds like Aunt Isabel. They always called me Patricia there. Don't you think, papa, now that I'm getting so grown up, I ought to be called Patricia? Patty is such a baby name."

"Patty is good enough for me," said Mr. Fairfield. "If you want to be called Patricia, you must get somebody else to do it. I dare say you could hire somebody for a small sum per week to call you Patricia for a given number of times every day."

"Now, you're making fun of me, papa; but I do want to grow up dignified, and not be a silly schoolgirl all my life."

"Take care of your common sense, and your dignity will take care of itself."

After they crossed the ferry, and reached the New York side, Mr. Fairfield took a cab, and they made a round of the various shops, buying such beautiful things that Patty grew fairly ecstatic with delight.

"I do think you're wonderful, papa," she exclaimed, after they had selected the dining-room furnishings. "You know exactly what you want, and when you describe it, it seems to be the only possible thing that anybody could want for that particular place."

"That is a result of decision of character, my child. It is a Fairfield trait, and I hope you possess it; though I cannot say I have seen any marked development of it, as yet. But you must have noticed it in your Aunt Alice."

"Yes, I have," said Patty; "she is so decided that, with all her sweetness, I have sometimes been tempted to call her stubborn."

"Stubbornness and decision of character are very closely allied; but now, we're going to select the furniture for your own bedroom, and if you have any decision of character, you will have ample opportunity to exercise it."

"Oh, I'll have plenty of decision of character when it comes to that," said Patty; "you will find me a true Fairfield."

Aided by her father's judgment and advice, Patty selected the furnishings for her own room. She had chosen green as the predominant colour, and the couch and easy-chairs were upholstered in a lovely design of green and white. The rug was green and white, and for the brass bedstead with its white fittings, a down comfortable with a pale green cover was found. The dainty dressing-table was of bird's-eye maple; and for this Mr. Fairfield ordered a bewildering array of fittings, all in ivory, with Patty's monogram on them.

"And I want a little book-case, papa," she said; "a little one, you know, just for my favourite books; for, of course, the most of my books will be down in the library."

So a dear little book-case was bought, also of bird's-eye maple, and a pretty little work-table, with a low chair to match.

"That's very nice," said Patty, with an air of satisfaction, "for, though I hate to sew, yet sometimes it must be done; and with that little work-table, I think I could sew even in an Indian wigwam!"

Patty hadn't much to say regarding the furniture of her father's bedroom, for Mr. Fairfield attended to that himself, and selected the things with such rapidity and certainty that it was all done almost before Patty knew it.

"Now," said Mr. Fairfield, "there are two guest-chambers to be furnished; the one you call Marian's room, and the other for the general stranger within our gates."

Marian's room was done up in blue, as she had requested, and the other guest-room was furnished in yellow.

It was great fun to pick out the furniture, rugs, and curtains for these rooms; and Patty tried very hard to select such things as her father would approve of, for she dearly loved to have him commend her taste and judgment.

As they were sitting at luncheon, Mr. Fairfield said: "This afternoon, I think, we will devote to pictures. I'm not sure we will buy any, but we will look at them, and I will learn what is your taste in art, and you will learn what is mine."

"I haven't any," said Patty cheerfully. "I don't know anything about art and never did."

"You still have some time, I hope, in which to learn."

"I've time enough, but I don't believe I could learn. The only pictures I like are pretty ones."

"You *are* hopeless, and that's a fact," said Mr. Fairfield. "Of all discouraging people, the worst are those who like pretty pictures!"

"But I'm sure I can learn," said Patty, "if you will teach me."

"You are more flattering than convincing," said Mr. Fairfield, "but I will try."

And so after luncheon they visited several picture shops, and Mr. Fairfield imported to his daughter what was at least a foundation for an education in art.

Back in Vernondale, Patty confided to Marian that she had had a perfectly lovely time all the morning, but the afternoon wasn't so much fun. "In fact," she said, "it was very much like that little book we had to study in school called 'How to Judge a Picture.'"

The following Saturday another shopping tour was undertaken. This time Aunt Alice and Marian accompanied the Fairfields, and there was more fun and less responsibility for Patty.

Her father insisted upon her undivided attention while Mrs. Elliott selected table-linen, bed-linen, towels, and other household fittings; but, as these things were chosen with Fairfield promptness and decision, Patty had nothing to do but admire and acquiesce.

"And now," she remarked, after they had chosen two sets of china and a quantity of glass for the dining-room; "now, if you please, we will buy me some tea-things to entertain the Tea Club."

"We will, indeed," said Mr. Fairfield, and both he and Aunt Alice entered into the selection of the tea-table fittings with as much zest as they had shown in the other china.

Dainty Dresden cups were found, lovely plates, and a tea-pot, and cracker-jar, which made Marian and Patty fairly shriek with delight.

A three-storied wicker tea-table was found, to hold these treasures, and Mr. Fairfield added the most fascinating little silver tea-caddy and tea-ball and strainer.

"Oh," exclaimed Marian, made quite breathless by the glory of it all, "the Tea Club will never want to meet anywhere except at your house, Patty."

"They'll have to," said Patty. "I don't propose to have them every time."

"Well, you'll have to have them every other time, anyway," said Marian.

After the fun of picking out the tea-things, it was hard to come down to the plainer claims of the kitchen, but Aunt Alice grew so interested in the selection of granite saucepans and patent coffee-mills that Patty, too, became enthusiastic.

"And we must get a rolling-pin," she cried, "for I shall make pumpkin pies every day. Oh, and I want a farina-kettle and a colander, and a *bain-marie*, and a larding-needle, and a syllabub-churn."

"Why, Patty, child!" exclaimed her father; "what are all those things for? Are you going to have a French *chef*?"

"No, papa, but I expect to do a great deal of fancy cooking myself."

"Oh, you do! Well, then, buy all the contraptions that are necessary, but don't omit the plain gridirons and frying-pans."

Then Aunt Alice and Patty put their heads together in a most sensible fashion, and ordered a kitchen outfit that would have delighted the heart of any well-organised housekeeper. Not only kitchen utensils, but laundry fittings, and household furnishings generally; including patent labour-saving devices, and newly invented contrivances which were supposed to be of great aid to any housewife.

"If I can only live up to it all," sighed Patty, as she looked at the enormous collection of iron, tin,

wood, and granite.

"Or down to it," said Marian.

CHAPTER VI

SERVANTS

"I did think," said Patty, in a disgusted tone, "that we could get settled in the house in time to eat our Christmas dinner there, but it doesn't look a bit like it. I was over there this afternoon, and such a hopeless-looking mess of papering and painting and plumbing I never saw in my life. I don't believe it will *ever* be done!"

"I don't either," said Marian; "those men work as slow as mud-turtles."

The conversation was taking place at the Elliotts' dinner-table, and Uncle Charley looked up from his carving to say:

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good, and the slower the mud-turtles are, the longer we shall have our guests with us. For my part, I shall be very sorry to see pretty Patty go out of this house."

Patty smiled gaily at her uncle, for they were great friends, and said:

"Then I shall expect you to visit me very often in my new home,—that is, if I ever get there."

"I can't see our way clear to a Christmas dinner in Boxley Hall," said Mr. Fairfield; "but I think I can promise you, chick, that you can invite your revered uncle and his family to dine with you there on New Year's day."

There were general exclamations of delight at this from all except Patty, who looked a little bewildered.

"What's the matter, Patsie?" said her uncle. "Don't you want to entertain your admiring relatives?"

"Yes," said Patty, "of course I do; but it scares me to death to think of it! How can I have a dinner party, when I don't know anything about anything?"

"Aunt Alice will tell you something about something," said her father; "and I'll tell you the rest about the rest."

"Oh, I know it will be all right," said Patty, quickly regaining confidence, as she looked at her father. "If papa says the house will be ready, I know it will be, and if he says we'll have a dinner party on New Year's day, I know we will; and so I now invite you all, and I expect you all to accept; and I hope Aunt Alice will come early."

"I shall come the night before," said Marian, "so as to be sure to be there in time."

"I'm not sure that any of us will be there the night before," said Mr. Fairfield, laughing. "I've guaranteed the house for the dinner, but I didn't say we would be living there at the time."

"That's a good idea," said Aunt Alice; "let Patty entertain her first company there, and then come back here for the reaction."

"Well, we'll see," said Patty; "but I'd like to go there the first day of January, and stay there."

By some unknown methods, Mr. Fairfield managed to stir up the mud-turtle workmen to greater activity, and the work went rapidly on. The wall-papers seemed to get themselves into place, and the floors took on a beautiful polish; bustling men came out from the city and put up window-shades, and curtains, and draperies; and, under Mr. Fairfield's supervision, laid rugs and hung pictures.

The ladies of the Elliott household organised themselves into a most active sewing-society.

Grandma, Aunt Alice, Marian, and Patty hemmed tablecloths and napkins with great diligence, and even little Edith was allowed to help with the kitchen towels.

Everybody was so kind that Patty began to feel weighed down with gratitude. The girls of the Tea Club made the tea-cloth that they had proposed, and they also brought offerings of pin-cushions, and doilies and centre-pieces, until Patty's room began to look like a booth at a fancy bazaar.

One Saturday morning, as the sewing-circle was hard at work, little Gilbert came in carrying a paper bag, which evidently contained something valuable.

"It's for you, Patty," he said. "I brought it for you, to help keep house; and its name is Pudgy."

Depositing the bag in his cousin's lap, little Gilbert knelt beside her. "You needn't open it," he cried; "it will open itself!"

And, sure enough, the mouth of the bag untwisted, and a little grey head came poking out.

"A kitten!" exclaimed Patty; "a Maltese kitten. Why, that's just the very thing I wanted! Where did you get it, Gilbert, dear?"

"From the milkman," said Gilbert proudly. "We always get kitties from him, and I telled him to pick out a nice pretty one for you. Do you like it?"

"I love it," said Patty, cuddling the little bunch of grey fur; "and Pudgy is just the right name for it. It's the fattest little cat I ever saw."

"Yes," said Gilbert gravely; "don't let it get thin, will you?"

"No, indeed," said Patty; "I'll feed it on strawberries and cream all the year round!"

That same afternoon Patty and Aunt Alice started out on a cook-hunting expedition. A Cook's Tour, Frank called it; and the tourists took it very seriously.

"Much of the success of your home, Patty," said Aunt Alice, as they were going to the Intelligence Office, "depends upon your cook; for she will be not only a cook, but, in part, housekeeper, and overseer of the whole place. And while you must, of course, exercise your authority and demand respect, yet at the same time you will find it necessary to defer to her judgment and experience on many occasions."

"I know it, Aunt Alice," said Patty very earnestly; "and I do want to do what is right. I want to be the head of papa's home, and yet there are a great many things that my servants will know more about than I do. I shall have to be very careful about my proportion; but if you and papa will help me, I think I'll come out all right."

"I think you will," said Aunt Alice, but she smiled a little at the assured toss of her niece's head.

The Intelligence Office proved to be as much misnamed as those institutions usually are, and varying degrees of unintelligence were shown in the candidates offered for the position of cook at Boxley Hall; though, if the applicants seemed unsatisfactory to Patty, in many cases she was no less so to them.

One tall, rawboned Irishwoman seemed hopefully good-tempered and capable, but when she discovered that Patty was to be her mistress, instead of Mrs. Elliott, as she had supposed, she exclaimed:

"Go 'way wid yez! Wud I be workin' for the likes of a child like that? No, mum, I ain't no nurse; I'm a cook, and I want a mistress as has got past playing wid dolls."

"I hope you'll find one," said Patty politely; "and I'm afraid we wouldn't suit each other."

Another Irish girl, with a merry rosy face and frizzled blonde hair, was very anxious to go to work for Patty.

"Sure, it will be fun!" she said. "I'd like to work for such a pretty little lady; and, sure, we'd have the good times. Could I have all me afternoons out, miss?"

"Not if you lived with me," said Patty, laughing. "My house is large, and there's a great deal of work to be done by somebody. I think my cook couldn't do her share if she went out every afternoon."

Many others were interviewed, but each seemed to have more or less objectionable traits. One would not come unless she were the only servant; another would not come unless Patty kept five. Most of

them showed such a decided lack of respect to so young a mistress that Aunt Alice began to despair of finding the kind, capable woman she had imagined. They went home feeling rather discouraged, but when Patty told her troubles to her father, he only laughed.

"Bless your heart, child," he said; "you couldn't expect to engage a whole cook in one afternoon! It's a long and serious process."

"But, papa, you said we'd be all settled and ready by the first of January."

"Yes, I know, but I didn't say which January."

"Now, you're teasing," said Patty; but she ran away with a light heart, feeling sure that somehow a cook would be provided.

That evening, according to appointment, Pansy Potts appeared for inspection. The whole Elliott family was present, and observed with much interest the strange-looking girl.

But, though ignorant and awkward, Pansy was not embarrassed, and, seeming to realise that her fate lay in the hands of Mrs. Elliott, Mr. Fairfield, and Patty, she addressed herself to them.

Her manner, though untrained, showed respectful deference, and her expressive black eyes showed quick perception and clever adaptability.

"She is all right at heart," thought Mr. Fairfield to himself, "but she knows next to nothing. I wonder if it would be a good plan to let the two girls help each other out."

"Have you ever waited at table, Pansy?" he asked, so pleasantly that Pansy Potts felt encouragement rather than alarm.

"No, sir; but I could learn, and I would do exactly as I was told."

"That's the right spirit," said Mr. Fairfield "I think perhaps we'll have to give you a trial."

"But don't you know anything of a housemaid's duties?" inquired Aunt Alice, who was a little dubious in the face of such absolute ignorance. "For instance, if the door-bell should ring, what would you do?"

"I would have asked Miss Patty beforehand, ma'am, and I would do whatever she had told me to."

"Good enough!" exclaimed Mr. Fairfield. "I think you'll do, Pansy; at any rate, you'll have nothing to unlearn, and that's a great deal."

So the waitress was engaged, and it was not long after this that a cook "dropped from the skies," as Patty expressed it.

One afternoon a large and amiable-looking coloured woman appeared at Mrs. Elliott's house, with a note from Mrs. Stevens recommending her as a cook for Patty. As soon as Patty saw her she liked her, but, remembering previous experiences, she said:

"Do you understand that you are to work for me? I'm a very young housekeeper, you know."

"Laws, missy, dat's all right. Til do de housekeepin' and you can do de bossin'. I reckon we'll get along mos' beautiful."

"That sounds attractive, I'm sure," said Patty, laughing. "What is your name?"

"Emancipation Proclamation Jackson," announced the owner of the name proudly.

"That's a big name," said Patty; "I couldn't call you all that at once."

"Co'se I shouldn't expect it. Mancy, mos' folks calls me, and dat's good enough for me; but I likes my name, my whole name, and it does look beautiful, wrote."

"I should think it might," said Aunt Alice. "Can you cook, Mancy?"

"Oh, yas'm, I kin cook everything what there is to cook, and I can make things besides. Oh, they won't be no trouble about my cookin'. I know dat much!"

"Are you a good laundress?" asked Aunt Alice.

"Yas'm, I am! Ef I do say it dat shouldn't, you jes' ought to see de clothes I sends up! Dey's jes' like druvven snow. Oh, dey won't be no trouble about de laundry work!"

"And can you sweep?" said Patty.

"Can I sweep? Law, chile, co'se I kin sweep! What yo' s'pose I want to hire out for, ef I can't do all dem things? Oh, dey won't be no trouble about sweepin'!"

"Well, where *will* the trouble be, Mancy?" said Patty.

"Dey moughtn't be any trouble, miss," said the black woman earnestly; "but if dey is, it'll be 'count o' my bein' spoke cross to. I jes' nachelly can't stand bein' spoke cross to. It riles me all up."

"I don't believe there will be any trouble on that score," said Patty, laughing. "My father and I are the best-natured people in the world."

"I believe yo', missy; an' dat's why I wants to come."

"There will be another servant, Mancy," said Aunt Alice; "a young girl who will be a waitress. She is ignorant and inexperienced, but Very willing to learn. Do you think you could get along with her?"

"Is she good-natured?" asked Mancy.

"I don't know her very well," said Patty; "but I think she is. I'm sure she will be, if we are."

"Den dat's all right," said Mancy. "I kin look after you two chilluns, I 'spect, and get my work done, too. When shall I come?"

"The house isn't quite ready yet," said Patty; "but I hope to go there to live on New Year's day."

"I think we'd be glad of Mancy's help a few days before that," said Aunt Alice.

And so, subject to Mr. Fairfield's final sanction, Mancy was engaged. And now Patty's whole establishment, including Pudgy the cat, was made up.

CHAPTER VII

DIFFERING TASTES

A few days before the close of the old year, Patty sat at her desk in the library of Boxley Hall.

She was making lists of good things to be ordered for the feast on New Year's day; and, as it was her first unaided experience with such memoranda, she wore an air of great importance and a deeply puckered brow.

Mancy, with her arms comfortably akimbo, stood before her young mistress ready to suggest, but tactfully chary of advice.

They were not yet living in the new home, but all the furniture was in place, the furnace fire had been started, and the palms arranged in the little conservatory.

So Patty spent most of her time there, and some of the Elliotts were usually there with her.

But this morning she was alone with Mancy, struggling with the all-important lists.

"I'll make the salad myself," she remarked, as she wrote "olive oil" on her slip of paper.

"Yas'm," answered Mancy, rolling her eyes with an expression of dubious approval. "Does yo' know how, missy?"

"Oh, yes," said Patty confidently; "I can make most beautiful salad dressing. Only it does take quite a long time, and I shall have a lot to do Thursday morning. Perhaps I'd better leave it to you this time, Mancy. Can you make it?"

"Laws, yes, honey; and yo'd better leave it to me. Yo'll have enough to do with yo' flowers and fixin's, and dressin' yourself up pretty. I'll 'tend to the food."

"Well, all right, Mancy; I wish you would. And, now, just help me with this list. I'll read it to you, and see if you think of anything that I've forgotten."

"Yas'm," said Mancy, who was most anxious to help, but who had already learned that Patty was a little inclined to resent unasked advice.

They were deep in the fascinating bewilderments of grocers' and greengrocers' wares, when Pansy Potts appeared in the doorway.

"Miss Patty," she said, "I've done all the things you told me to do; and I watered the palms, and I've poked around that bunchy rosebush, but I'm 'most sure it's going to die; and now, if you please, when can I be let to fix up my own room?"

"Sure enough, Pansy," said Patty; "we must get at that room of yours, and we'll fix it up as pretty as we can."

"Mine, too," said Mancy; "I wants my room fixed up nice. I fetched a lot of pictures to liven it up some, but I reckon I ain't got no time to put 'em up to-day."

"Oh, yes, you have, Mancy," said Patty, rising; "and, anyway, we'll go right up and look at those rooms; then I can tell what we need to get for them."

"Mine won't need anything," said Pansy, "except what's in it already, and what I've got to put in it myself. I brought my decorations over this morning."

"Oh, you did?" said Patty. "Well, bring them along, and we'll all go upstairs together."

"I'll get mine, too," said Mancy, shuffling toward the kitchen.

The servants' rooms were in the third story. They had been freshly papered and neatly and appropriately furnished, though Patty had not, as yet, added any pictures or ornaments.

And, apparently, she would have no occasion to do so; for, as she went up to these rooms, she was immediately followed by their future occupants, each of whom came with her arms full of what looked like the most worthless rubbish.

"What *is* all that stuff, Pansy?" exclaimed Patty, as she beheld her young waitress fairly staggering under her load.

"They're lovely things, Miss Patty, and I hope you don't mind. This is a hornet's nest, and this is a branch of an apple tree, with a swing-bird's nest on it."

"A branch! It's a big limb,—a bough, I should call it. What *are* you going to do with it?"

"I thought I'd put it on the wall, Miss Patty. It makes the room look outdoorsy."

"It does, indeed! Put it up, if you like; but will you have room then to get in yourself?"

"Oh, yes," said Pansy cheerfully; "and I've got a big tub over home that I want to bring; it has an orange tree planted in it."

"With oranges on?"

"Oh, no, not oranges; indeed, it hasn't any leaves on, but I think maybe they'll come."

"It must be beautiful!" said Patty. "But if it hasn't any leaves on, it's probably dead."

"Oh, no, Miss Patty, it isn't dead; and it had leaves a-plenty, but my little brother he picked the leaves all off. That's one reason I wanted to come here, so's to get my orange tree away from Jack."

"Well, bring it along," said Patty good-naturedly. "What else are you going to have? A grape-vine, I suppose, trained over the headboard of your bed."

"No, Miss Patty, I haven't got no grapevine, but I've got a wandering-jew-vine in a pot, that I want to set on the mantel."

"All right," said Patty, "bring your wandering-jew, and let him wander wherever he likes. You'll have to keep your door shut, or he'll wander out and run downstairs. What's in that bag?"

"Rocks, Miss Patty."

"Rocks? What in the world are you going to do with those?"

"I'm going to make a rockery, ma'am, by the window. They're just beautiful. Miss Powers has one in her parlour, and I always wanted one, but mother wouldn't let me have it, 'cause she says it clutters."

"But, what is it?" said Patty. "How do you make it?"

"Oh, you just pile the stones up in a heap, and you stick dried grasses, and autumn leaves and things, in them; and, if ever you have any flowers, you know, you stick them in, too."

"I see; it must be very effective; and sometimes I can give you flowers for it, I'm sure."

"Thank you, Miss Patty; I hope you will. Oh, I'll be so glad to have it; I've been saving these stones for it for years. You see, they're beautiful stones."

Pansy Potts was on her knees arranging the stones, many of which were jagged pieces of quartz shining here and there with mica scales, into a symmetrical pile, which somehow had the effect of a Pagan altar.

"Well," said Patty, as she watched her, "I don't think you'll need any of the decorations I expected to give you."

"Oh, Miss Patty," said Pansy earnestly, "please don't make me have pictures, and pincushions, and vases, and all those things; I like my own things so much better."

"You shall fix your room just as you choose," said Patty kindly; "and if I can help you in any way, I'll be glad to do so. How are *you* progressing, Mancy?"

Patty stepped across the hall to her cook's room, and found its stout occupant rather precariously perched on a chair, tacking up a picture. She had evidently improved her time, for many other pictures were already in place, and, what is unusual in either a public or private art-gallery, the pictures were all exactly alike. They were large, very highly coloured, unframed, and, in fact, were nothing more or less than advertisements of a popular soap. The subject was a broadly-grinning old coloured woman, washing clothes, that were already snow-white, in a sea of soapsuds.

"For goodness' sake, Mancy!" exclaimed Patty. "Who said you might drive tacks all over these new walls, and where did you get all those pictures of yourself?"

"They does favour me, don't they, missy?" exclaimed Mancy, beaming with delight, as she took another tack from her mouth, and pounded it into place. "I got 'em from de grocer man, and co'se I has to tack 'em, else how would dey stay up?"

"But you have so many of them."

"Laws, chile, only a dozen; youse got mo'n that on the libr'y wall."

"But ours are different; these are all alike."

"Co'se dey's all alike! I des nachelly gets tired of lookin' at different pitchers. It 'stracts my head."

"I should think these would distract your head. I feel as if I were in a kinetoscope."

"Does that mean art-gal'ry?"

"Not exactly; but tell me, Mancy, did you get all these pictures because they looked like you? And was the grocer willing to give you so many?"

"Yas'm. But I 'spects I'll hab to confess a little about dat, Miss Patty. You see, I dun tole him I was gwine t' work for yo', and dat's huccome he guv 'em to me."

"That's all right, Mancy. After he gets that long order we made out this morning, I'm sure he'll feel he was justified in favouring us; but get down out of that chair. In the first place, you'll fall and break your neck, and if you don't, you'll break the chair. Get down, and I'll tack up the rest of your pictures."

"Thank you, missy, do; and I'll hand you the tacks. There's only six more, anyhow. I 'llowed to have three over the mantel, and two over that window, and one behind the door."

"But you can't see it; that door is usually open."

"No'm; but I'll know it's there jes' the same."

"All right; here goes, then," and soon Patty had the rest of the gaudy lithographs tacked into their designated places.

"Now, Mancy," she said, as she jumped down from the chair for the last time, "you don't want any other pictures, do you? It would interfere with the artistic unities to introduce any other school."

"Laws 'a' massy, chile; I don't want to go to school! Miss Patty, sometimes you does cert'nly talk like a Choctaw Injun. Leastways, *I* can't understand you."

"It doesn't really matter," said Patty, "and we're even, anyway; for I can't understand why *you* want those fearful posters in your room, instead of the nice little pictures I had planned to give you."

"Oh, yes; I knows yo' nice little pictures! with a narrow black ban', jes' about the size ob a sheet of mo'nin' paper! No, thank you, missy, no black-bordered envelopes hanging on my wall! Give me good reds and yallers and blues; the kind you can hear with yo' eyes shut. That is, ef yo' don't mind, missy. Ef yo' does, I'll take 'em all right slam-bang down."

"No, no, Mancy; it's all right. In your own room I want you to have just exactly what you want, and nothing else. Now, let's go and see how Pansy's getting along."

The rockery was completed, and was a most imposing structure. Wheat ears and dried oats were sticking out from between the stones, and pressed autumn leaves added a touch of colour. At the base of the rockery were a large pink-lined conch-shell and several smaller shells. On the walls were various branches of different species of vegetation; among others a tangle of twigs of the cotton plant, from which depended numerous bolls.

Pansy was struggling with a lot of evergreen boughs, which she was trying to crowd into a strange-looking receptacle.

"How do you like it, Miss Patty?" she asked, as Patty stood in the doorway and gazed in.

"I like it very much, for you, Pansy," replied Patty. "If this is the kind of room you want, I'm very glad for you to have it; only, I don't know whether to call it 'First Course in Mineralogy,' or 'How to Tell the Wild Flowers,'"

CHAPTER VIII

AN UNATTAINED AMBITION

To say that Boxley Hall was in readiness for the party would be stating it very mildly. It was overflowing,—yes, fairly bursting with readiness.

New Year's day was on Thursday, and Patty had decreed that on that day none of the Elliotts should go to Boxley Hall until they came as guests.

Dinner was to be at two o'clock, and in the morning Patty and her father went over to their new home together.

"Just think, papa," said Patty, squeezing his hand as they went along, "how many times we have walked—and run, too, for that matter—from Aunt Alice's over to our house; but this time it's different. We're going to stay, to live, really to *reside* in our own home; and whenever we go to Aunt Alice's again, it will be to visit or to call. Oh, isn't it perfectly lovely! If I can only live up to it, and do things just as you want me to."

"Don't take it too seriously, Pattikins; I don't expect you to become an old and experienced housewife all at once. And I don't want you to wear yourself out trying to become such a personage. Indeed, I shall be terribly disappointed if you don't make ridiculous mistakes, and give me some opportunity to laugh at you."

"You are the dearest thing, papa; that's just the way I want you to feel about it; and I think I can safely promise to make enough blunders to keep you giggling a good portion of the time."

"Oh, don't go out of your way to furnish me with amusement. And now, how about your party to-day? Is everything in tip-top order?"

"Yes, except a few thousand things that I have to do this morning, and a few hundred that I want you to do."

"I shall see to it, first, that the carving-knife is well sharpened. It's the first time that I have carved at my own table for a great many years, and I want the performance to be marked by grace and skill."

"It will be, if you do it, papa; I'm sure of that," and by this time they had reached the gate, and Patty was skipping along the path and up the steps, and into the door of her own home.

Mancy and Pansy Potts were already there, and, to a casual observer, it looked as if there was nothing more to do except to admit the guests.

Patty had set the table the day before, and, to the awestruck admiration of Pansy Potts, had arranged the beautiful new glass and china with most satisfactory effects. Pansy had watched the proceedings with intelligent scrutiny and, when it was finished, had told Patty that the next time she would be able to do it herself.

"You'll have a chance to try," Patty had answered, "for in the evening we'll have supper, and you may set the table all by yourself; and I'll come out and look it over to make sure it's all right."

But, as Patty had said, there was yet much to be done on Thursday morning, even though there were eight hands to make the work light.

Boxes of flowers had arrived from the florist's, and these had to be arranged in the various rooms; also, a few potted plants in full bloom had come for the conservatory, and these so delighted the soul of Pansy Potts that Patty feared the girl would spend the whole day nursing them.

"Come, Pansy," she called; "let them grow by themselves for a while; I want your help in the kitchen."

"But, oh, Miss Patty, they're daisies! Real white daisies, with yellow centres!"

"Well, they'll still be daisies to-morrow, and you'll have more time to admire them then."

Patty's ambitions in the culinary line ran to the fanciful and elaborate confections which were pictured in the cook-books and in the household periodicals; especially did she incline toward marvellous desserts which called for spun sugar, and syllabubs, and rare sweetmeats, and patent freezing processes.

For her New Year's dinner party she had decided to try the most complicated recipe of all, and, moreover, intended to surprise everybody with it.

Warning her father to keep out of the kitchen on pain of excommunication, she rolled up her sleeves and tied on a white apron; and with her open book on the table before her, began her proceedings.

Pansy Potts was set to whipping cream with a new-fangled syllabub-churn, and Mancy was requested to blanch some almonds and pound them to a paste in a very new and very large mortar.

Though the good-natured Mancy was more than willing to help her young mistress through what threatened to be somewhat troubled waters, yet she had the more substantial portions of the dinner to prepare, and there was none too much time.

As Patty went on with her work, difficulties of all sorts presented themselves. The cream wouldn't whip, but remained exasperatingly fluid; the sugar refused to "spin a thread," and obstinately crystallised itself into a hard crust; the almonds persisted in becoming a lumpy mass, instead of a smooth paste; and the gelatine, as Patty despairingly remarked, "acted like all possessed!"

But, having attempted the thing, she was bound to carry it through, though it was with some misgivings that she finally poured a queer and sticky-looking substance into the patent freezer.

Pansy Potts had declared herself quite able to accomplish the freezing process; but, as she was about to begin, she announced in tragic tones that the extra ice hadn't come.

"Oh!" exclaimed Patty, in desperation, "everything seems to go wrong about that dessert! Well, Pansy, you use what ice there is, and I'll telephone for some more, right away."

But when Patty called up the ice company she found that their office was closed for the day, and, hanging up the receiver with an angry little jerk, she turned to find her father smiling at her.

"I see you have begun to amuse me," he said; "but never mind about my entertainment now, Puss; run away and get dressed, or you won't be ready to receive your guests. It's half-past one now."

"Oh, papa, is it so late? And I have to get into that new frock!"

"Well, scuttle along, then, and make all the haste you can."

Patty scuttled, but during the process of making all the haste she could, she very nearly lost her temper.

The new white frock was complicated; the broad white hair-ribbons were difficult to tie; and, as it was the first time that she had made a toilette in her new home, it is not at all surprising that many useful or indispensable little articles were missing.

"Pansy," she called, as she heard the girl in the dining-room, "do, for mercy's sake, come up and help me. I can't find my shoe-buttoner, and I can't button the yoke of this crazy dress without it."

Pansy came to the rescue, and just as the Elliott family came in at the front gate, Patty completely attired, but very flushed and breathless from her rapid exertions—flew downstairs and tucked her arm through her father's, as he stood in the hall.

"I'm here," she said demurely, and trying to speak calmly.

"Oh, so you are," he said. "I thought a white cashmere whirlwind had struck me. I *hope* you didn't hurry yourself."

"Oh, no!" said Patty, meeting his merry smile with another. "I just dawdled through my dressing to kill time."

"Yes, you look so," said her father, and just then the doorbell rang.

"Oh, papa," cried Patty, her eyes dancing with excitement, "*isn't* it just grand! That's the first ring at our own doorbell, our *own* doorbell, you know; and hasn't it a musical ring? And now it will be answered by our own Pansy."

Without a trace of the hurry and fluster that had so affected her young mistress, Pansy Potts, in neat white cap and apron, opened the door to the guests.

Patty nudged her father's arm in glee, as they noted the correct demeanour of their own waitress, and then all such considerations were drowned in the outburst of enthusiasm that accompanied the entrance of the Elliotts. The younger members of the family announced themselves with wild war-whoops of delight, and the older ones, though less noisy, were no less enthusiastic.

"I like Cousin Patty's house," announced Gilbert, sitting down in the middle of the floor. "I will stay here always. Where is the Pudgy kitty-cat?"

"I'll get her for you, right away," said Patty. "She is fatter than ever; but, first, let me make grandma comfortable."

Taking Mrs. Elliott's bonnet and wraps, Patty led the old lady to a large easy-chair, and announced that she must sit there for a few moments and rest, before she made a tour of inspection around the house.

Grandma Elliott had not been allowed in the new house while it was being arranged, lest she should take cold, and so to-day it burst upon her in all its glory. By this time Frank and Marian were investigating the conservatory, and little Edith was announcing that Cousin Patty had a "Crimson Gambler."

"She means Crimson Rambler!" exclaimed Patty; "or, as Pansy calls it, 'that bunchy rosebush.'"

Although the guests had been invited to a two-o'clock dinner, yet when the clock hands pointed to nearly three, the meal had not been announced.

There was so much to be talked about that the time did not drag, but Aunt Alice looked at Patty a little curiously.

Patty caught the glance, and excusing herself, went out into the kitchen.

"Mancy!" she exclaimed; "it's almost three o'clock. Why don't you have dinner?"

"Well, honey, yo' took so much of my time mashin' your old nuts dat my work got put behind. Dinner'll

come on after a while; it's mos' ready."

Patty went back to the parlour, laughing.

"If anybody can hurry up Mancy," she said, "they're welcome to try it. I didn't realise it was so late, and I'm awfully sorry; but I guess we'll have dinner pretty soon, now."

"Don't be sorry we're going to have it soon," said Frank; "none of the rest of us are, I assure you."

Although served about an hour late, the dinner was a great success. It had been carefully planned; Mancy's cooking was beyond reproach, and Pansy Potts proved a neat-handed and quick-witted, if inexperienced, Phyllis.

Encouraged by the general excellence of the courses, as they succeeded one another, Patty began to hope that her gorgeous dessert would turn out all right after all.

Seated at the head of her own table, she made a charming little hostess, and many a glance of happy understanding passed between her and the gentleman who presided at the other end.

"I say, Patty, it's right down jolly, you having a house of your own," said Frank.

"Except that we miss you awfully over home," added Uncle Charley.

"I don't see how you can," said Patty, smiling; "as I took breakfast there this morning, you haven't yet gathered round your lonely board without me."

"No, but we shall have to," said Uncle Charley, "and it is that which is breaking my young heart."

"Well, *this* is what's breaking *my* young heart," said Patty, as she watched Pansy Potts, who was just entering the room with a dish containing a most unattractive-looking failure.

"I may as well own up," she said bravely, as the dessert was placed in front of her. "My ambition was greater than my ability."

"Don't say another word," said Aunt Alice. "*I* understand; those spun-sugar things are monuments of total depravity."

Patty gave her aunt a grateful glance, and said, "They certainly are, Aunt Alice; and I'll never attempt one again until I've made myself perfect by long practice."

"Good for you, my Irish Pat," said Frank; "but, do you know, I like them better this way. There's an attraction about that general conglomeration that appeals to me more strongly than those over-neat concoctions that look as if they had sat in a caterer's window for weeks."

But, notwithstanding Frank's complimentary impulses, the dessert proved uneatable, and had to be replaced with crackers and cheese and fruit and bonbons.

CHAPTER IX

A CALLER

It was quite late in the evening before the Elliotts left Boxley Hall; but after they had gone, Patty and her father still lingered in the library for a bit of cosey chat.

"Isn't it lovely," said Patty, with a little sigh of extreme content, "to sit down in our own library, and talk over our own party? And, by the way, papa, how do you like our library; is it all your fancy painted it?"

"Yes," said Mr. Fairfield, looking around critically, "the library is all right; but, of course, as yet it is young and inexperienced. It remains for us to train it up in the way it should go; and I feel sure, under our ministrations and loving care, it will grow better as it grows older."

"We've certainly got good material to work on," said Patty, giving a satisfied glance around the pretty room. "And now, Mr. Man, tell me what you think of our first effort at hospitality? How did the dinner

party go off today?"

"It went off with flying colours, and you certainly deserve a great deal of credit for your very successful first appearance as a hostess. Of course, if one were disposed to be critical—"

"One would say that one's elaborate dessert—"

"Was a very successful imitation of a complete failure," interrupted Mr. Fairfield, laughing. "And this is where I shall take an opportunity to point a moral. It is not good proportion to undertake a difficult and complicated recipe for the first time, when you are expecting guests."

"No, I know it," said Patty; "and yet, papa, you wouldn't expect me to have that gorgeous French mess for dinner when we're all alone, would you? And so, when could we have it?"

"Your implication does seem to bar the beautiful confection from our table entirely; and yet, do you know, it wouldn't alarm me a bit to have that dessert attack us some night when you and I are at dinner quite alone and unprotected."

"All right, papa, we'll have it, and I'm sure, after another trial, I can make it just as it should be made."

"Don't be too sure, my child. Self-confidence is a good thing in its place, but self-assurance is a quality not nearly so attractive. I think, Patty, girl," and here Mr. Fairfield put his arm around his daughter and looked very kindly into her eyes; "I think every New Year's day I shall give you a bit of good advice by way of correcting whatever seems to me, at the time, to be your besetting sin."

Patty smiled back at her father with loving confidence.

"But if you only reform me at the rate of one sin per year, it will be a long while before I become a good girl," she said.

"You're a good girl, now," said her father, patting her head. "You're really a very good girl for your age, and if I correct your faults at the rate of one a year, I don't think I can keep up with the performance for very many years. But, seriously, Pattikins, what I want to speak to you about now is your apparent inclination toward a certain kind of filigree elaborateness, which is out of proportion to our simple mode of living. I have noticed that you have a decided admiration for appointments and services that are only appropriate in houses run on a really magnificent scale; where the corps of servants includes a butler and other trained functionaries. Now, you know, my child, that with your present retinue you cannot achieve startling effects in the way of household glories. Am I making myself clear?"

"Well, you're not so awfully clear; but I gather that you thought that ridiculous pudding I tried to make was out of proportion to Pansy Potts as waitress."

"You have grasped my meaning wonderfully well," said her father; "but it was not only the pudding I had in mind, but several ambitious attempts at an over-display of grandeur and elegance."

"Well, but, papa, I like to have things nice."

"Yes, but be careful not to have them more nice than wise. However, there is no necessity for dwelling on this subject. I see you understand what I mean; and I know, now that I have called your attention to it, your own sense of proportion will guide you right, if you remember to follow its dictates."

"But do you imagine," said Patty roguishly, "that such a mild scolding as that is going to do a hardened reprobate like me any good?"

"Yes," said her father decidedly, "I think it will."

"So do I," said Patty.

Next morning at breakfast Patty could scarcely eat, so enthusiastic was she over the delightful sensation of breakfasting alone with her father in their own dining-room.

Very carefully she poured his coffee for him, and very carefully Pansy Potts carried the cup to its destination.

"I didn't ask Marian to stay last night," slid Patty, "because I wanted our first night and our first breakfast all alone by ourselves."

"You're a sentimental little puss," said her father.

"Yes, I think I am," said Patty. "Do you mind?"

"Not at all; if you keep your sentiment in its proper place, and don't let it interfere with the somewhat prosaic duties that have of late come into your life."

"Gracious goodness' sakes!" said Patty; "that reminds me. What shall I order from the butcher this morning?"

"Don't ask me," said Mr. Fairfield. "I object to being implicated in matters so entirely outside my own domain."

"Oh, certainly," said Patty; "that's all right. I beg your pardon, I'm sure. And don't feel alarmed; I'll promise you shall have a tip-top dinner."

"I've no doubt of it, and now good-bye, Baby, I must be off to catch my train. Don't get lonesome; have a good time; and forget that your father scolded you."

"As if I minded that little feathery scolding! Come home early, and bring me something nice from the city. Good-bye."

Left to herself, Patty began to keep house with great diligence. She planned the meals for the day, made out orders for market, gave the flowers in the vases fresh water, and looking in at the conservatory, she found Pansy Potts digging around the potted daisies with a hairpin.

"Pansy," she said kindly, "I'm glad to have you take care of the flowers; but you mustn't spend all your time in here. Have you straightened up in the dining-room yet?"

"No, ma'am," said Pansy; "but these little daisies cried so loud to be looked after that I just couldn't neglect them another minute. See how they laugh when I tickle up the dirt around their toes."

"That's all very well, Pansy," said Patty, laughing herself; "but I want you to do your work properly and at the right time; now leave the daisies until the dining-room and bedrooms are all in order."

"Yes, Miss Patty," said Pansy, and, though she cast a lingering farewell glance at the beloved posies, she went cheerfully about her duties.

"Now," thought Pansy, "I'll telephone to Marian to come over this afternoon and stay to dinner, and stay all night; then we can arrange about having the Tea Club to-morrow. Why, there's the doorbell; perhaps that's Marian now. I don't know who else it could be, I'm sure."

In a few moments Pansy Potts appeared, and offered Patty a card on a very new and very shiny tray.

"For goodness' sake, who is it, Pansy?" asked Patty, reading the card, which only said, "Miss Rachel Daggett."

"I don't know, Miss Patty, I'm sure. She asked for you, and I said you'd go right down."

"Very well; I will," said Patty.

A glance in the mirror showed a crisp fresh shirt-waist, and neatly brushed hair, so Patty ran down to the library to welcome her guest.

The guest proved to be a large, tall, and altogether impressive-looking lady, who spoke with a great deal of firmness and decision.

"I am Miss Daggett," she said, "and I am your neighbour."

"Are you?" said Patty pleasantly. "I am very glad to meet you, and I hope you will like me for a neighbour."

"I don't know whether I shall or not," said Miss Daggett; "it depends entirely on how you behave."

Although Patty was extremely good-natured, she couldn't help feeling a little inclined to resent the tone taken by her guest, and she returned rather crisply:

"I shall try to behave as a lady and a neighbour."

"Humph!" said Miss Daggett. "You're promising a good deal. If you accomplish what you've mentioned, I shall consider you the best neighbour I've ever experienced in my life."

Patty began to think her strange guest was eccentric rather than impolite, and began to take a fancy to the somewhat brusque visitor.

"I live next-door," said Miss Daggett, "and I am by no means social in my habits. Indeed, I prefer to let my neighbours alone; and I am not in the habit of asking them to call upon me."

"I will do just as you like," said Patty politely; "call upon you or not. It is not my habit to call on people who do not care to see me. But, on the other hand, I shall be happy to call upon such of my neighbours as ask me to do so."

"Oh, people don't have to call upon each other merely because they are neighbours," said Miss Daggett; "and that's why I came in here to-day, to let you understand my ideas on this matter. I have lived next-door to this house for many years, and I have never cared to associate with the people who have lived in it. I have no reason to think that you will prove of any more interest to me than any of the others who have lived here. Indeed, I have reason to believe that you will prove of less interest to me, because you are so young and inexperienced that I feel sure you will be a regular nuisance. And I would like you to understand once for all, that you are not to come to me for advice or assistance when you make absurd and ridiculous mistakes, as you're bound to do."

At first Patty had grown indignant at Miss Daggett's conversation, but soon she felt rather amused at what was doubtless the idiosyncrasy of an eccentric mind, and she answered:

"I will promise not to come to you for advice or warning, no matter how much I may need assistance."

"That's right," said Miss Daggett very earnestly; "and remember, please, that your cook is not to come over to my house to borrow anything; not even eggs, butter, or lemons."

"I'll promise that, too," said Patty, trying not to laugh; though she couldn't help thinking that her first caller was an extraordinary one.

"Well, you really behave quite well," said Miss Daggett; "I am very much surprised at you. I came over here partly to warn you against interfering with myself and my household, but also because I wanted to see what you're like. I had heard that you were going to live in this house, and that you were going to keep house yourself; and, though I was much surprised that your father would let you do such a thing, yet I can't help thinking that you're really quite sensible. Yet, I want you to understand that you are not to borrow things from my kitchen."

"I am glad that you think I'm sensible," said Patty, looking earnestly at her visitor, toward whom she felt somehow drawn in despite of her queer manners. "And I'll promise not to borrow anything from you under any circumstances."

"That is all right," said Miss Daggett, rising; "and that is all I came to say to you. I will now go home, and if I ever feel that I want you to return this call, I will let you know. Otherwise, please remember that I do not care to have it returned."

Patty showed her guest to the door, and dismissed her with a polite "Good-bye."

"Well!" she exclaimed to herself, as Miss Daggett walked out of the front gate with an air of stalwart dignity. "That's a delightful specimen of a caller, but I hope I won't have many more like that. She's a queer kind of a neighbour, but somehow I rather think if I saw her more I should like her better."

CHAPTER X

A PLEASANT EVENING

Marian came to dinner, and Frank came with her. As he announced when he entered, he had had no invitation, but he said he did not hesitate on that account.

"I should think not," said Patty. "I expect all the Elliott family to live at my house, and only go home occasionally to visit."

So Frank proceeded to make himself at home, and when Mr. Fairfield arrived a little later and dinner

was served, it was a very merry party of four that sat down to the table.

As Patty had promised her father, the dinner was excellent, and it was with a pardonable pride that she dispensed the hospitality of her own table.

"What's the dessert going to be, Patty?" asked Frank. "Nightingales' tongues, I suppose, served on rose-leaves."

"Don't be rude, Frank," said his sister. "You're probably causing your hostess great embarrassment."

"Not at all," said Patty; "I am now such an old, experienced housekeeper, that I'm not disturbed by such insinuations. I'm sorry to disappoint you, Frank, but the dessert is a very simple one. However, you are now about to have a most marvellous concoction called 'Russian Salad.' I was a little uncertain as to how it would turn out, so I thought I'd try it tonight, as I knew my guests would be both good-natured and hungry."

"That's a combination of virtues that don't always go together," said Mr. Fairfield. "I hope the young people appreciate the compliment. To be good-natured and hungry at the same time implies a disposition little short of angelic."

"So you see," said Marian, "you're not entertaining these angels unawares."

"Bravo! pretty good for Mally," said Frank, applauding his sister's speech. "And if I may be allowed to remark on such a delicate subject, your salad is also pretty good, Patty."

"It's more than pretty good," said Marian. "It's a howling, screaming, shouting success. I am endeavouring to find out what it's made of."

"You can't do it," said Mr. Fairfield. "I have tried, too; and it seems to include everything that ever grew on the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth."

"Your guesses are not far out of the way," said Patty composedly. "I will not attempt to deny that that complicated and exceedingly Frenchified salad is concocted from certain remainders that were set away in the refrigerator after yesterday's dinner."

"Who would have believed it?" exclaimed Frank, looking at his plate with mock awe and reverence.

"Materials count for very little in a salad," said Marian, with a wise and didactic air. "Its whole success depends on the way it is put together."

"Now, that's a true compliment," said Patty; "and it is mine, for I made this salad all myself."

After dinner they adjourned to the library, and the girls fell to making plans for the Tea Club, which was to meet there next day.

"I do think," said Marian, "it's awfully mean of Helen Preston to insist on having a bazaar. They're so old-fashioned and silly; and we could get up some novel entertainment that would make just as much money, and be a lot more fun besides."

"I know it," said Patty. "I just hate bazaars; with their everlasting Rebeccas at the Well, and flower-girls, and fish-ponds, and gipsy-tents. But, then, what could we have?"

"Why, there are two or three of those little acting shows that Elsie Morris told us about. I think they would be a great deal nicer."

"What sort of acting shows are you talking about, my children; and what is it all to be?" asked Mr. Fairfield, who was always interested in Patty's plans.

"Why, papa, it's the Tea Club, you know; and we're going to have an entertainment to make money for the Day Nursery—oh, you just ought to see those cunning little babies! And they haven't room enough, or nurses enough, or anything. And you know the Tea Club never has done any good in the world; we've never done a thing but sit around and giggle; and so we thought, if we could make a hundred dollars, wouldn't it be nice?"

"The hundred dollars would be very nice, indeed; but just how are you going to make it? What's this about an acting play?"

"Oh, not a regular play,—just a sort of dialogue thing, you know; and we'd have it in Library Hall, and Aunt Alice and a lot of her friends would be patronesses."

"It would seem to me," said Frank, "that Miss Patty Fairfield, now being an old and experienced housekeeper, could qualify as a patroness herself."

"No, thank you," said Patty. "I'm housekeeper for my father, and in my father's house, but to the great outside world I'm still a shy and bashful young miss."

"You don't look the part," said Frank; "you ought to go around with your finger in your mouth."

"Why didn't you tell me sooner?" said Patty. "I shall begin to cultivate the habit at once."

"Do," said Marian; "I'm sure it would be becoming to you, but perhaps hard on your gloves."

"Well, there's one thing certain," said Patty:

"I would really rather put my finger in my mouth than to crook out my little finger in that absurd way that so many people do. Why, Florence Douglass never lifts a cup of tea that she doesn't crook out her little finger, and then think she's a very pattern of all that's elegant."

"I know it," said Marian. "I think it's horrid, too; it's nothing but airs. I know lots of people who do it when they're all dressed up, but who never think of such a thing when they are alone at home."

"I wonder what the real reason is?" said Patty thoughtfully.

"It is an announcement of refinement," said Mr. Fairfield, falling in with his daughter's train of thought; "and, as we all know, the refinement that needs to be announced is no refinement at all. We therefore see that the conspicuously curved little finger is but an advertisement of a specious and flimsy imitation of aristocracy."

"Papa, you certainly do know it all," said Patty. "I haven't any words by me just now, long enough to answer you with, but I quite agree with you in spirit."

"That's all very well," said Frank, "for a modern, twentieth-century explanation, but the real root of the matter goes far back into the obscure ages of antiquity. The whole habit is a relic of barbarism. Probably, in the early ages, only the great had cups to drink from. These few, to protect themselves from their envious and covetous brethren, stuck out their little fingers to ward off possible assaults upon their porcelain property. This ingrained impulse the ages have been unable to eradicate. Hence we find the Little Finger Crooks upon the earth to-day."

"What an ingenious boy you are," said Patty, looking at her cousin with mock admiration. "How did you ever think of all that?"

"That isn't ingenuity, miss, it's historic research, and you'll probably find that Florence Douglass can trace her ancestry right back to the aforesaid barbarians."

"I suppose most of us are descended from primitive people," said Marian.

And then the entrance of Elsie Morris and her brother Guy put an end to the discussion of little fingers.

"I'm so glad to see you," said Patty, welcoming her callers. "Come right into the library, you are our first real guests."

"Then I think we ought to have the Prize for Promptness," said Elsie, as she took off her wraps. "But don't you count Frank and Marian?"

"Not as guests," replied Patty; "they're relatives, and you know your relatives—"

"Are like the poor," interrupted Frank, "because they're always with you."

"Then, we are really your first callers?" said Guy Morris.

"No, not quite," said Patty, laughing. "I spoke too hastily when I said that, and forgot entirely a very distinguished personage who visited me this morning."

"Who was it?"

"My next-door neighbour, Miss Daggett."

"What! Not Locky Ann Daggett!" exclaimed Elsie, laughing merrily.

"It was Miss Rachel Daggett. I don't know why you call her by that queer name," said Patty.

"Oh, I've known her ever since I was a baby, and mother always calls her Locky Ann Daggett, and grandmother did before her. You know Locky is a nickname for Rachel."

"I didn't know it," said Patty. "What an absurd nickname."

"Yes, isn't it? How did you like her?"

"It isn't a question of liking," answered Patty. "She doesn't want me to like her. All she seemed to care about was to have me promise not to interfere with her."

"Oh, she's afraid of you," said Guy. "You don't seem so very terrifying, now, but I suppose when you're engaged in the housekeeping of your house you're an imposing and awe-inspiring sight."

"I dare say I am," said Patty; "but my neighbour, Miss Daggett, I'm sure, would be imposing at any hour of the day or night."

"She's a queer character," said Elsie. "Have you never seen her before?"

"No; I never even heard of her until she sent up her card."

"Why, how funny," said Marian; "I've always heard of Locky Ann Daggett, but I never knew anything about her, except that she's very old and very queer."

"She's a sort of humourous character," said Guy Morris; "strong-minded, you know, and eccentric, but not half bad. I quite like the old lady, though I almost never see her."

"No; she doesn't seem to care to see people," said Patty. "She seems to have no taste for society. Why, I don't suppose she'd care to take part in our play, even if we invited her."

"Oh, what about the play?" said Elsie. "Have you really decided to have a play, instead of that stupid old fair?"

"We haven't decided anything," said Patty, "we can't until the club meets to-morrow."

"Oh, do have a play," said Frank, "and then us fellows can take part. We couldn't do anything at a bazaar, except stand around and buy things."

"And we're chuck-full of histrionic talent," put in Guy. "You ought to see me do Hamlet."

"Yes," said Frank, "Guy's Hamlet is quite the funniest thing on the face of the earth. I do love comedy."

"So do I," said Guy, "I just love to play a side-splitting part like Hamlet."

"Then you may have a chance," said Marian, "for one of the plays we're thinking about—and it isn't exactly a play either—brings in a whole lot of tragic characters in a humourous way. It's a general mix-up, you know: Hamlet, and Sairy Gamp, and Rip Van Winkle, and Old Mother Hubbard, and everybody."

"Yes, that's a good one," said Marian; "it's called 'Shakespeare at the Seashore.'"

"The name is enough to condemn that piece," said Mr. Fairfield; "not one of you can say it straight."

And sure enough, though numerous attempts were made, and much laughter ensued, none entirely successful.

CHAPTER XI

PREPARATIONS

With the instincts of a true hostess, Patty had slipped from the room unobserved, and had held a short Confab with her two trusty servitors in the kitchen.

"But, Miss Patty," expostulated Mancy, "dey ain't nuffin' fit to set befo' dem fren's ob yo's. Dey ain't nuffin' skacely in de house, ceptin' some bits ob candies an' cakaroons le' from yo' las' night's supper."

"Well, that's all right," said Patty; "let Pansy arrange those nicely on the dining-room table. Use the silver dishes, Pansy, and fix them just as I told you."

"Yes, Miss Patty," said Pansy, "but there aren't very many left."

"Well, then, Mancy, I'll tell you what: you make us a nice pot of chocolate, and fix us some thin bread and butter, and cut up some of the fruit cake to put with those little fancy cakes; won't that do?"

"Yas'm, I spec' so; but it's a mighty slim layout, 'specially for dem hearty young chaps. But you go 'long, honey, I'll fix it somehow."

And, sure enough, she did fix it somehow; for when, a little later, Patty invited her young friends out into the dining-room, the thin bread and butter had doubled itself up into most attractive and satisfying chicken-sandwiches, and there was also a plate of delicious toasted crackers and cheese.

Mr. Fairfield added a box of candy which he had brought home from New York, and the unpretentious little feast proved most enjoyable to all concerned.

"I should think you would feel all the time as if you were acting a play yourself, Patty," said Elsie Morris, taking her seat at the prettily laid table.

"I do," said Patty as she took her own place at the head; "it's awfully hard to realise that I am monarch of all I survey."

"But you have someone to dispute your right," said her father.

"And I'm glad of it," said Patty. "Whatever should I do living here all alone just with my rights?"

"By her rights, she means her cousins," put in Frank.

"Yes," said Patty; "they're about as right as anything I know."

And so the evening passed in merry chaff and good-natured fun; and at its close the young guests all went away except Marian, who was going to spend the night at Boxley Hall.

After her cousin had gone upstairs to her pretty blue bedroom, Patty lingered a moment in the library for a word with her father.

"How am I getting along, papa?" she said. "How about the proportion to-night?"

"The market seems pretty strong on proportion to-day, Patty, dear; your housekeeping is beginning wonderfully well. That little dinner you gave us was first-class in every respect, and the simple refreshments you had this evening were very pretty and graceful."

"Don't praise me too much, papa, or I'll grow conceited."

"You'll get praise from me, my lady, just when you deserve it, and at no other time. Now, skip along to bed, or you'll have too great a proportion of late hours."

With a good-night kiss Patty went singing upstairs, feeling sure that she was the happiest and most fortunate little girl in the world.

So impressed was she with her realisation of this fact that she announced it to Marian.

Marian looked at her curiously.

"You *are* fortunate in some ways," she said; "but the real reason you're always so happy, I think, is because of your happy disposition. A great many girls with no mother or brother or sister, who had all the care and responsibility of a big house, and whose father was away all day, would think they had a pretty miserable life. But that never seems to occur to you."

"No," said Patty contentedly; "and I don't believe it ever will."

The next morning Patty devoted all her energy to getting ready for the Tea Club. She declined Marian's offers of help, saying:

"No, I really don't need any help. If I can keep Pansy out of the conservatory, we three can accomplish all there is to be done; so you go and sit by the library fire, and toast your toes and read, or play with the cat, or do whatever you please. Remember, whenever you come here, you're one of the family."

So Marian went off by herself and played on the piano, and read, and had various kinds of good times, scrupulously keeping out of the way of her busy and preoccupied cousin.

"Now, Pansy," said Patty, as she captured that culprit in the conservatory, and led her off to the kitchen, "I want you to try especially hard to-day to do just as I want you to, and to help me in every possible way."

"Can I fix the flowers, Miss Patty?" said Pansy Potts, her eyes sparkling with delight.

"Where are there any flowers to fix? You've fussed over those in the conservatory until you've nearly worn them all out."

"Oh, Miss Patty, they're thriving beautifully. But I mean that big box of flowers that just came up from the flower man's. He said Mr. Fairfield sent it."

"Oh!" exclaimed Patty, "did papa really send me up flowers for the Tea Club? How perfectly lovely! I meant to order some myself, but I know his will be nicer."

By this time Patty was diving into the big box and scattering tissue paper all about.

"They're beautiful," she exclaimed, "and what lots of them! Yes, Pansy, you may arrange them; you really do it better than I do. Keep all the pink ones for the dining-room, and put the others wherever you like. Now, Mancy," she went on, "we'll discuss what to eat."

"Yas'm, and I s'pose it'll be some ob dem highfalutin fandangoes ob yo's, what nobody can't eat."

"You guessed right the very first time," said Patty, smiling back at the good-natured old cook, whose bark was so much worse than her bite. "You see, Mancy, this is my own party, and so I can have just what I like at it. Not even papa can object to the things that I have for my own Tea Club."

"Dat's so, chile, but co'se yo' knows you'se mighty likely to spoil dem good t'ings befo' yo' get 'em made."

"Oh, I don't think I will this time," said Patty, with that assured little toss of her head which always meant perfect confidence in her own ability.

Mancy said nothing, but grunted somewhat doubtfully as Patty went on to describe the beautiful things she intended to have.

"I want rissoles," she said, as she turned over the cookery-book, and looked in the index for R. "They're awfully good."

"What's dem, missy? I never heard tell of 'em."

"I forget what they are," said Patty, "but we had them at Delmonico's one day, when papa and I were there at lunch, and I remember thinking then they'd be nice for the Tea Club. They were either some little kind of a cake, or else a sort of croquette. Either would be nice, you know. Why, they're not here. What a silly book not to have them in! Oh, well, never mind, here's 'Richmond Maids of Honour.' We used to have those at Aunt Isabel's, and they're the loveliest things. I'll make those, Mancy; and while I'm doing it you make me some wine jelly and some Bavarian cream, and then I can put them together with *marrons* and candied cherries and whipped cream and things, and make a Royal Diplomatic Pudding."

"Pears like yo's makin' things fine enough for a weddin'," growled Mancy.

"Well, now, look here, last night you thought the things I had for my evening company were too plain, and now you're grumbling because they're too fancy."

"Laws, honey, can't you see no diffunce 'tween plain bread and butter and a lot of pernicketty gimcracks that never turns out right nohow?"

A haunting doubt regarding the proportion between her elaborate plans and the simple Tea Club hovered round Patty's mind, but she resolutely put it aside, thinking to herself, "I don't care, it's my first function, and I'm going to have it just as nice as I can."

Patty always felt particularly grand and grown up when she used the word *function*, and now that she had mentally applied it to the Tea Club meeting, that simple affair seemed to take on a gigantic amplitude and fairly seemed to cry out for elaborate devices of all sorts.

"Never you mind, Mancy," she said, "you just go ahead and do as I tell you. Get the jelly and cream

ready, and I'll do the rest."

"But ain't yo' gwine to have no solidstantial kind o' food?"

"Oh, yes, of course. I want a *croustade* of chicken and club-sandwiches."

"Humph," said Mancy, her patience giving out at this, "ef yo' does, yo'll hab to talk English."

Patty laughed. "You must get used to these names, Mancy, because these are the kind of things I like. Well, you just boil a couple of chickens, and cut them up small, and see that there are two loaves of bread ready, those long round, crimplly ones, you know, and then I'll put it all together and all you'll have to do is to brown it. And I'll show you how to make the club-sandwiches after lunch. You might as well learn once for all, you know. There's bacon in the house, isn't there?"

"No, dey ain't; is yo' fren's gwine stay ter breakfus'?"

"Oh, no, I'd want the bacon for the club-sandwiches. Don't worry, Mancy, they'll all come out right."

"Dey mought and den again dey moughtn't," grumbled the old woman, but undaunted Patty went on measuring and weighing with a surety of success that is found only in the young and inexperienced.

At one o'clock Marian walked out into the kitchen.

"Good gracious, Patty Fairfield," she exclaimed, "what are you doing? And what are all those things? Do you expect the Democratic Convention to be entertained here, or are you going to give the Sunday-school a picnic? And are we never to have lunch? I'm simply starving!"

Patty turned a flushed face to her cousin, and looked dazed and bewildered.

"Two and five-eighths ounces of sugar," she said, "spun to a thread; add chopped nuts and the well-beaten whites of six eggs; brown with a salamander. Marian, I haven't any salamander!"

The tragic tone of Patty's awful avowal was too much for Marian, and she dropped into a kitchen chair and went off into peals of laughter.

"Patty," she cried, "you goose! What are you doing? Just making up the whole recipe-book, page by page? I believe you're crazy!"

"It's for the Tea Club," exclaimed Patty, "and I want things to be nice."

"H'm," said Marian, "and *are* they nice?"

She glanced at some of the completed delicacies on the table, and Patty, seeing the look, turned red again, but this time it was not the effect of the kitchen range.

"Well," she said, "some of them aren't quite right, but I think the others will be."

"And I think you're working too hard," said Marian kindly. "You come away with me now, and rest a little bit; and, Mancy, you put a little lunch for us on the dining-room table, won't you? Just anything will do, you know."

CHAPTER XII

A TEA CLUB TEA

Patty rebelled at being overruled in this manner, but Marian had some Fairfield firmness of her own, and taking her cousin's arm led her to the library and plumped her down upon the couch in a reclining position, while she vigorously jammed pillows under her head.

"There, miss," she announced, "you will please stay there until luncheon is announced."

"But, Marian," pleaded Patty, seeing that resistance was useless, "I've such a lot of things to do, and the girls will be here before I get them all done."

"Let them come," said the hard-hearted Marian, "it won't hurt them a bit, and you've got enough

things done now to feed the Russian army."

"But they're not finished," said Patty, "and they'll spoil standing."

"You'll more likely spoil them by finishing them. Now you stay right where you are."

So Patty rested, until Pansy came and called them to a most appetising little lunch spread very simply on the dining-table.

The two hungry girls did full justice to it, and then Patty said:

"Now, Marian, you're a duck, and you mean well, I know; but this is my house and my tea-party, and now you must clear out and leave me to fix it up pretty in my own way."

"All right," said Marian, "I rescued you once, now this time I'll leave you to your fate; but I'll give you fair warning that those Tea Club girls would rather have a few nice little things like we had at lunch, than all those ridiculous contraptions that you've got out there half baked."

"Oh me, oh me!" sighed Patty, in mock despair. "Nobody appreciates me; nobody realises or cares for my one great talent. I believe I'll go and drown myself."

"Do," said Marian, "drown yourself in that tub of wine-jelly, for it will never stiffen. I can tell that by looking at it."

"Bye, bye," said Patty, pushing Marian out of the dining-room, "run along now, and take a little nap like a good little girl. Cousin Patty must set the table all nice for the pretty ladies."

"Goose!" was the only comment Marian vouchsafed as she walked away.

Then Patty, with the assistance of Pansy Potts, proceeded to lay the table. Elaborate decoration was her keynote and she kept well in tune. Along the centre of the table over the damask cloth, she spread a rich lace "runner" and over this, crossed bands of wide, pink, satin ribbon ran the entire diagonal length of the table. In the centre was a large cut-glass bowl of pink roses, and at each corner slender vases of a single rose in each. Also single roses with long stems and leaves were laid at intervals on the cloth. Asparagus fern was lavishly used, and pink-shaded candles in silver candlesticks adorned the table. Small silver dishes of almonds, olives, and confectionery were dotted about, and finger-bowls with plates were set out on the side-table.

Certainly it was all very beautiful, and Patty surveyed it with feelings of absolute satisfaction.

"We will have tea at five o'clock, Pansy," she said, "and just before that, you light the candles and fill the glasses and see that everything is ready."

"Yes, Miss Patty," said Pansy, who adored her young mistress, and who was especially quick in learning to do exactly what was expected of her.

The afternoon was slipping away, and Patty suddenly discovered that she had only time to get dressed before the girls would arrive.

So she announced to Mancy that she must finish up such things as were not finished, and without waiting to hear the old woman's remarks of disapproval, Patty ran up to her room.

There she found that Marian had kindly laid out her dress and ribbons for her, and was ready to help do her hair.

"You're a good old thing, Marian," she said, as she dropped into a chair in front of her toilet mirror, "I'm as tired as a bicycle wheel, and besides, I do love to have somebody do my hair. Sometimes Pansy does it, but to-day she's too busy."

"Taking days as they go," said Marian in an impersonal manner, "I don't think I ever saw a more busy one than to-day has seemed to be. The Tea Club does seem to make a most awful amount of fluster in a new house."

"Yes, it *is* exacting, isn't it?" said Patty, who caught her cousin's eye in the mirror and looked very demure, though she refused to smile.

"There are some of the girls coming in at the front gate now," said Marian as she tied the big white bow on Patty's pretty, fluffy hair.

"Didn't I time this performance just right?"

"You did indeed," said Patty, and kissing her cousin, she ran gaily downstairs.

How the Tea Club girls did chatter that afternoon! there was so much to see and talk about in Patty's new home, and there were also other weighty matters to be discussed.

The proposed entertainment was an engrossing subject, and as various opinions were held, the arguments were lively and outspoken.

"You can talk all you like," said Helen Preston, "but you'll find that a bazaar will be the most sensible thing after all. You're sure to make a lot of money, and the boys will help, and we all know exactly what to do and how to go about it."

"It may be sensible," said Laura Russell, "but it won't be a bit of fun. Stupid, poky, old chestnut; nobody wants to come to buy things, they only come because they think they have to. Now if we had a play—"

"Yes," said Elsie Morris, "a play would be the very nicest thing. I've brought two books for us to look over. One's that Shakespeare thing, and the other is called 'A Reunion at Mother Goose's.' It's awfully funny; I think it's better than the Shakespeare."

"I think Mother Goose things are silly," said Ethel Holmes. "Who wants to go around dressed up like Little Bo-peep, and say 'Ba, ba, black sheep,' all the time?"

"Yes, or who wants to be Red Riding Hood's wolf and eat up Mary's little lamb?"

"Oh, it isn't like that; it's a reunion, you know, and all the Mother Goose children are grown up, and they talk about old times."

"It does sound nice," said Patty, "let's read it."

They read both the plays, and so interested were they in the reading and discussing them that before they knew it the afternoon slipped away, and Pansy Potts came in to announce that the tea was ready.

"Goodness," cried Patty, "I forgot all about it! Come on, girls, we can discuss the play just as well at the table."

"Yes, and better," said Elsie.

Such a shout of exclamation as went up from the Tea Club girls when they saw Patty's table.

"Why didn't you tell us there was to be a wedding?" said Ethel, "and we would have brought presents."

"Is it an African jungle?" said Laura, "or is it only Smith's flower store moved up here bodily?"

"I think it looks like a page out of the *Misses' Home Guide*" said Polly Stevens. "You ought to have this table photographed, it would take the first prize! But where are we going to eat? Surely you don't expect us to sit down at this Louis XIV. gimcrack?"

"Nonsense," said Patty. "I fixed it up pretty because I thought it would please you. If you don't like it —"

"Oh, we like it," cried Christine Converse, "we love it! We want to take it home with us and put it under a glass case."

"Stop your nonsense, girls," said Marian, who had noticed Patty's rising colour, "and take your places. It's a beautiful party, and a lot too good for such ungrateful wretches! If you can read writing, you'll find your names on your cards."

"I can read writing," said Lillian Desmond, "but not such elegant gold curlycues as these. Won't you please spell it out for me, Miss Fairfield?"

"Oh, take any place you choose," said Patty, laughing good-naturedly. She didn't really mind their chaff, but she began to think herself that she had been a little absurd.

Then Pansy brought in the various dishes that Patty had worked so hard over, and perhaps you will not be surprised to learn that they were almost uneatable, or, at least, very far from the dainty perfection they ought to have shown.

On discovering this, the girls, who were really well-bred, in spite of their love of chaffing, quite changed their manner and, ignoring the situation, began merrily to discuss the play.

But as the various viands proved a continuous succession of failures, Patty became really embarrassed and began to make apologies.

"Don't say a word," said Marian; "it was all my fault. I insisted on spending the day here, and I nearly bothered the life out of my poor cousin. Indeed, I carried her off bodily from the kitchen just at a dozen critical moments."

"No, it wasn't that," said honest Patty, "but I did just what I'm always doing, trying to make a lot of things I don't know anything about"

"Well," said Elsie, "if you couldn't try them on us girls, I don't know who you could try them on; I'm more than willing to be a martyr to the cause, and I say three cheers for our noble President!"

The cheers were given with a will, and Patty's equanimity being restored, she was her own merry self again, and they all laughed and chatted as only a lot of happy girls can.

And that's how it happened that when Mr. Fairfield reached home at about six o'clock he heard what sounded like a general pandemonium in the dining-room. As he appeared in the doorway he was greeted by a merry ovation, for most of the Tea Club members knew and liked Patty's pleasant and genial father.

Then the girls, realising how late it was, began to take their leave. Marian went with them, and Patty, after the last one had gone, returned to the dining-room, to find her father regarding the table with a look of comical dismay.

It was indeed a magnificent ruin. Besides the dishes of almost untasted delicacies, the flowers had been pushed into disarray, one small vase had been upset and broken; owing to improper adjustment the candles had dripped pink wax on the table-cloth; and the ice cream, which Pansy had mistakenly served on open-work plates, had melted and run through.

Patty didn't say a word, indeed there was nothing to say. She went and stood very close to her father, as if expecting him to put his arm around her, which he promptly did.

"You see, Pitty-Pat," he said, "it wouldn't have made any difference at all—not *any* difference at all, *except* that I have brought my friend Mr. Hepworth, the artist, home to dinner; and you see, misled by the experiences of last night, I promised him we would find a tidy little dinner awaiting us."

"Oh, papa," cried Patty, "I *am* sorry. If I had only known! I wouldn't have failed you for worlds."

"I know it, my girl, and though this Lucullus feast does seem out of proportion to a young misses' Tea Club, yet we won't say a word about that now. We'll just get snow shovels and set to work and clear this table and let Mancy get a simple little dinner as quickly as she can."

"But, papa," and here Patty met what was, perhaps, so far, the hardest experience of her life, "I forgot to order anything for dinner at all!"

"Why, Patty Fairfield! consider yourself discharged, and I shall suit myself at once with another housekeeperess!"

"You are the dearest, best, sweetest father!" she exclaimed. "How can you be so good-natured and gay when my heart is breaking?"

"Oh, don't let your heart break over such prosaic things as dinners! We'll crawl out of this hole somehow."

"But what can we do, papa? It's after six o'clock, and all the markets are shut up, and there isn't a thing in the house except those horrible things I tried to make."

"Patty," said her father, struck by a sudden thought, "to-morrow is Sunday. Do you mean to say you haven't ordered for over Sunday?"

"No, I haven't," said Patty, aghast at the enormity of her offence.

Mr. Fairfield laughed at the horror-stricken look on his daughter's face.

"I always thought you couldn't keep house," he said, with an air of resignation. "On Monday I shall advertise for a housekeeper."

"Oh, please don't," pleaded Patty. "Give me one more trial. I've had a good lesson, and truly I'll profit by it. Let me try again."

"But you can't try again before Monday, and by that time we'll all be dead of starvation."

"Of course we will," said Patty despairingly. "I wish we were Robinson Crusoes and could eat bark or something."

"Well, baby, I think you *have* had a pretty good lesson, and we can't put old heads on young shoulders all at once, so I'll help you out this time, and then, the next time you go back on me in this heartless fashion, I'll discharge you."

"Papa, you're a *dear*! But what can we do?"

"Well, the first thing for you to do is to go and brush your hair and make yourself tidy, then come down and meet Mr. Hepworth; and then we'll all go over to the hotel for dinner. Meanwhile I'll call in the Street Cleaning Department to attend to this dining-room."

CHAPTER XIII

A NEW FRIEND

"Patty," said her father, a week or two later, "Mr. Hepworth has invited us to a tea in his studio in New York tomorrow afternoon, and if you care to go, I'll take you."

"Yes, I'd love to go; I've always wanted to go to a studio tea. It's very kind of Mr. Hepworth to ask us after the way he was treated here."

Mr. Fairfield laughed, but Patty looked decidedly sober. She still felt very much crestfallen to think that the first guest her father brought home should be obliged to dine at the hotel, or at a neighbour's. Aunt Alice had invited them to dinner on that memorable Sunday, and though she said she had expected to ask the Fairfields anyway, still Patty felt that, as a housekeeper, she had been weighed in the balances and found sadly wanting.

According to arrangement, she met her father in New York the day of the tea, and together they went to Mr. Hepworth's studio.

It gave Patty a very grown-up feeling to find herself amongst such strange and unaccustomed surroundings.

The studio was a large room, on the top floor of a high building. It was finished in dark wood and decorated with many unframed pictures and dusty casts. Bits of drapery were flung here and there, quaint old-fashioned chairs and couches were all about, and at one side of the room was a raised platform. A group of ladies and gentlemen sat in one corner, another group surrounded a punch bowl, and many wise and learned-looking people were discussing the pictures and drawings.

Patty was enchanted. She had never been in a scene like this before, and the whole atmosphere appealed to her very strongly.

The guests, though kind and polite to her, treated her as a child, and Patty was glad of this, for she felt sure she never could talk or understand the artistic jargon in which they were conversing. But she enjoyed the pictures in her own way, and was standing in delighted admiration before a large marine, which was nothing but the varying blues of the sea and sky, when she heard a pleasant, frank young voice beside her say:

"You seem to like that picture."

"Oh, I do!" she exclaimed, and turning, saw a pleasant-faced boy of about nineteen smiling at her.

"It is so real," she said. "I never saw a realer scene, not even down at Sandy Hook; why, you can fairly feel the dampness from it."

"Yes, I know just what you mean," said the boy; "it's a jolly picture, isn't it? They say it's one of Hepworth's best."

"I don't know anything about pictures," said Patty frankly, "and so I don't like to express definite opinions."

"It's always wiser not to," said the boy, still smiling.

"That's true," said Patty, "I only did express an opinion once this afternoon, and then that lady over there, in a greenish-blue gown, looked at me through her lorgnette and said:

"Oh, I thought you were temperamental, but you're only an imaginative realist."

"Now, what could she have meant by that?" said the boy, laughing. "But you're very imprudent. How do you know that lady isn't my—my sister, or cousin, or something?"

"Well, even if she is," said Patty, "I haven't said anything unkind, have I?"

"No more you haven't; but as I don't see anyone just now at leisure to introduce us, suppose we introduce ourselves? They say the roof is an introduction, but I notice it never pronounces names very distinctly. Mine is Kenneth Harper."

"And mine is Patricia Fairfield, but I'm usually called Patty."

"I should think you would be, it suits you to a dot. Of course the boys call me Ken. I'm a Columbia student."

"Oh, are you?" said Patty. "I've never known a college boy, and I've always wanted to meet one."

"Well, you see in me a noble specimen of my kind," said young Harper, straightening up his broad shoulders and looking distinctly athletic.

"You must be," said Patty; "you look just like all the pictures of college boys I've ever seen."

"And I flattered myself that my beauty was something especial and individual."

"You ought to be thankful that you're beautiful," said Patty, "and not be so particular about what kind of beauty it is."

"But some kinds of beauty are not worth having," went on young Harper; "look at that man over there with a lean pale face and long lank hair. That's beauty, but I must say I prefer a strong, brave, manly type, like this good-looking chap just coming toward us."

"Oh, you do?" said Patty. "Well, as that good-looking chap happens to be my father, I'll take pleasure in introducing you."

"I am glad to see you, sir," said Kenneth Harper, as Patty presented him to her father, "and I may as well own up that I was just making remarks on your personal appearance, which accounts for my blushing embarrassment."

"I won't inquire what they were," said Mr. Fairfield, "lest I, too, should become embarrassed. But, Patty, my girl, if we're going back to Vernondale on the six-o'clock train, it's time we were starting."

"Oh, do you live in Vernondale?" inquired Kenneth. "I have an aunt there. I wonder if you know her. Her name is Daggett—Miss Rachel Daggett."

"Indeed I do know her," said Patty. "She is my next-door neighbour."

"Is she really? How jolly! And don't you think she's an old dear? I'm awfully fond of her. I run out to see her every chance I can get, though I haven't been much this winter, I've been digging so hard."

"She *is* a dear," said Patty. "I've only seen her once, but I know I shall like her as a neighbour."

"Yes, I'm sure you will, but let me give you a bit of confidential advice. Don't take the initiative, let her do that; and the game will be far more successful than if *you* make the overtures."

Patty smiled. "Miss Daggett told me that herself," she said; "in fact, she was quite emphatic on the subject."

"I can well believe it," said Kenneth, "but I'm sure you'll win her heart yet."

"I'm sure she will too," said Mr. Fairfield, with an approving glance at his pretty daughter; "and whenever you are in Vernondale, Mr. Harper, I hope you will come to see us."

"I shall be very glad to," answered the young man, "and I hope to run out there soon."

"Come out when we have our play," said Patty; "it's going to be beautiful."

"What play is that?"

"We don't know yet, we haven't decided on it."

"I know an awfully good play. One of the fellows up at college wrote it, and so it isn't hackneyed yet."

"Oh, tell me about it," said Patty. "Papa, can't we take the next later train home?"

"Yes, chick, I don't mind if you don't; or, better still, if Mr. Harper can go with us, I'll take both of you children out to dinner in some great, glittering, noisy hotel."

"Oh, gorgeous!" cried Patty. "Can you go, Mr. Harper?"

"Indeed I can, and I shall be only too glad. College boys are not overcrowded with invitations, and I am glad to say I have no other for to-night."

"You'll have to telephone to Emancipation Proclamation, papa," said Patty, "or she'll get out all the bell-ringers, and drag the river for us."

"So she will," said Mr. Fairfield. "I'll set her mind at rest the first thing."

"That's our cook," explained Patty.

"It's a lovely name," observed Kenneth, "but just a bit lengthy for every-day use."

"Oh, it's only for Sundays and holidays," said Patty; "other days we contract it to Mancy."

Seated at table in a bright and beautiful restaurant, Patty and her new friend began to chatter like magpies while Mr. Fairfield ordered dinner.

"Now tell me all about your friend's play," said Patty, "for I feel sure it's going to be just what we want"

"Well, the scene," said Kenneth, "is on Mount Olympus, and the characters are all the gods and goddesses, you know, but they're brought up to date. In fact, that's the name of the play, 'Mount Olympus Up to Date.' Aurora, you know, has an automobile instead of her old-fashioned car."

"But you don't have the automobile on the stage?"

"Oh, no! Aurora just comes in in her automobile rig and talks about her 'bubble.' Mercury has a bicycle; he's a trick rider, and does all sorts of stunts. And Venus is a summer girl, dressed up in a stunning gown and a Paris hat. And Hercules has a punching-bag—to make himself stronger, you know. And Niobe has quantities of handkerchiefs, dozens and dozens of them; she's an awfully funny character."

"Oh, I think it would be lovely!" said Patty. "Where can we get the book?"

"I'll send you one to-morrow, and you can see if you like it; and then if you do, you can get more."

"Oh, I'm sure the girls will all like it; and will you come out to see it?"

"Yes, I'd be glad to. I was in it last winter. I was Mercury."

"Oh, can you do trick work on bicycles?"

"Yes, a little," said Kenneth modestly.

"I wish you'd come out and be Mercury in our play."

"Aren't you going ahead rather fast, Patty, child?" said her father. "Your club hasn't decided to use this play yet."

"I know it, papa, and of course I mean if we *do* use it; but anyway, I'm president of the club, and somehow, if I want a thing, the rest of the girls generally seem to want it too."

"That's a fine condition of affairs that any president might be glad to bring about. You ought to be a college president."

"Perhaps I shall be some day," said Patty.

The dinner hour flew by all too quickly. Patty greatly enjoyed the sights and sounds of the brilliant, crowded room. She loved the lights and the music, the flowers and the palms, and the throngs of gaily

dressed people.

Kenneth Harper enjoyed it too, and thought he had rarely met such attractive people as the Fairfields.

When he took his leave he thanked Mr. Fairfield courteously for his pleasant evening, and promised soon to call upon them at Boxley Hall.

They reached home by a late train, and Patty went up to her pretty bedroom, with her usual happy conviction that she was a very fortunate little girl and had the best father in the world.

CHAPTER XIV

THE NEIGHBOUR AGAIN

Kenneth Harper did send the book, and, as Patty confidently expected, the girls of the club quite agreed with her that it was the best play for them to use.

At a meeting at Marian's, plans were made and parts were chosen. The goddesses were allotted to the members of the club, and the gods were distributed among their brothers and friends.

Guy Morris, being of gigantic mould, was cast for Hercules, and Frank Elliott for Ajax. When Patty told the girls that Kenneth Harper could do trick riding on a bicycle, they unanimously voted to invite him to take part in their entertainment.

It was decided to have the play about the middle of February, and the whole Tea Club grew enthusiastic over the plans for the wonderful performance.

One morning Patty sat in the library studying her part. She was very happy. Of course, Patty always was happy, but this morning she was unusually so. Her housekeeping was going on smoothly; the night before her father had expressed himself as being greatly pleased with the system and order which seemed everywhere noticeable in the house. It was Saturday morning, and she didn't have to go to school.

Moreover, she was very much interested in the play and in her own part in it, and had already planned a most beautiful gown, which the dressmaker, Madame LaFayette, was to make for her.

Patty's part in the play was that of Diana, and her costume was to be a beautiful one of hunter's green cloth with russet leather leggings and a jaunty cap. Being up-to-date, instead of being a huntress she was to represent an agent of the S.P.C.A.

This suited Patty exactly, for she had a horror of killing live things, and very much preferred doing all she could to prevent such slaughter. Moreover, the humour of the thing appealed to her, and the funny effect of the huntress Diana going around distributing S.P.C.A. leaflets, and begging her fellow-Olympians not to shoot, seemed to Patty very humorous and attractive.

This Saturday, then, she had settled down in the library to study her lines all through the long cosey morning, when, to her annoyance, the doorbell rang.

"I hope it's none of the girls," she thought. "I did want this morning to myself."

It wasn't any of the girls, but Pansy announced that a messenger had come from Miss Daggett's, and that Miss Daggett wished Miss Fairfield to return her call at once.

Patty smiled at the unusual message, but groaned at the thought of her interrupted holiday.

However, Miss Daggett was not one to be ignored or lightly set aside, so Patty put on her things and started.

Although Miss Daggett's house was next door to Boxley Hall, yet it was set in the middle of such a large lot, and was so far back from the street, and so surrounded by tall, thick trees, that Patty had never had a really good view of it.

She was surprised, therefore, to find it a very large, old-fashioned stone house, with broad veranda

and steps guarded by two stone lions.

Patty rang the bell, and the door was opened very slightly. A small, quaint-looking old coloured man peeped out.

"Go 'way," he said, "go 'way at once! We don't want no tickets."

"I'm not selling tickets," said Patty, half angry and half amused.

"Well, we don't want no shoelacers, nor lead pencils, nor nuffin! You *must* be selling something."

"I am not selling anything," said Patty. "I came over because Miss Daggett sent for me."

"Laws 'a' massy, child, why didn't you say so before you spoke? Be you Miss Fairfield?"

"Yes," said Patty; "here's my card."

"Oh, never mind the ticket; if so be you's Miss Fairfield, jes' come right in, come right in."

The door was flung open wide and Patty entered a dark, old-fashioned hall. From that she was led into a parlour, so dark that she could scarcely see the outline of a lady on the sofa.

"How do you do, Miss Daggett?" she said, guessing that it was probably her hostess who seemed to be sitting there.

"How do you do?" said Miss Daggett, putting out her hand, without rising.

"I'm quite well, thank you," said Patty, and her eyes having grown a little accustomed to the dark, she grasped the old lady's hand, although, as she told her father afterwards, she was awfully afraid she would tweak her nose by mistake.

"And how are you, Miss Daggett?"

"Not very well, child, not very well, but you won't stay long, will you? I sent for you, yes, I sent for you on an impulse. I thought I'd like to see you, but I'd no sooner sent than I wished I hadn't. But you won't stay long, will you, dearie?"

"No," said Patty, feeling really sorry for the queer old lady. "No, I won't stay long, I'll go very soon; in fact, I'll go just as soon as you tell me to. I'll go now, if you say so."

"Oh, don't be silly. I wouldn't have sent for you if I'd wanted you to go right away again. Sit down, turn your toes out, and answer my questions."

"What are your questions?" said Patty, not wishing to make any rash promises.

"Well, first, are you really keeping that big house over there all alone by yourself?"

"I'm keeping house there, yes, but I'm not all alone by myself. My father's there, and two servants."

"Don't you keep a man?"

"No; a man comes every day to do the hard work, but he doesn't live with us."

"Humph, I suppose you think you're pretty smart, don't you?"

"I don't know," said Patty slowly, as if considering; "yes, I think I'm pretty smart in some ways, and in other ways I'm as stupid as an owl."

"Well, you must be pretty smart, because you haven't had to borrow anything over here yet."

"But I wouldn't borrow anything here, anyway, Miss Daggett; you specially asked me not to."

Miss Daggett's old wrinkled face broke into a smile.

"And so you remember that. Well, well, you are a nice little girl; you must have had a good mother, and a good bringing-up."

"My mother died when I was three, and my father brought me up."

"He did, hey? Well, he made a fairly good job of it. Now, I guess you can go; I'm about tired of talking

to you."

"Then I will go. But, first, Miss Daggett, let me tell you that I met your nephew the other day."

"Kenneth! For the land's sake! Well, well, sit down again. I don't want you to go yet; tell me all about him. Isn't he a nice boy? Hasn't he fine eyes? And gentlemanly manners? And oh, the lovely ways with him!"

"Yes, Miss Daggett, he is indeed a nice boy; my father and I both think so. His eyes and his manners are fine. He says he wants to come out to see you soon."

"Bless his heart, I hope he'll come! I do hope he'll come."

"Then you like to have him come to see you?" said Patty, a little roguishly.

"Yes, and I like to have you, too. Land, child! you mustn't mind my quick ways."

"I don't mind how quick you are," said Patty; "but when you tell me to be sure and not come to see you, of course I don't come."

"Oh, that's all right," said Miss Daggett, "that's all right; I'll always send for you when I want you."

"But perhaps I can't always come," said Patty. "I may be busy with my housekeeping."

"Now, wouldn't that be annoying!" said Miss Daggett. "I declare that would be just my luck. I always do have bad luck."

"Perhaps it's the way you look at it," said Patty. "Now, I have some things that seem like bad luck, at least, other people think they do; but if I look at them right—happy and cheerful, you know—why, they just seem like good luck."

"Really," said Miss Daggett, with a curious smile; "well now, you *are* a queer child, and I'm not at all sure but I'd like to have you come again. Do you want to see around my house?"

"I'd like to very much, but it's so dark a bat couldn't see things in this room."

"But I can't open the shades, the sun would fade all the furniture coverings."

"Well, then, you could buy new ones," said Patty; "that would be better than living in the dark."

"Dark can't hurt anybody," said Miss Daggett gloomily.

"Oh, indeed it can," said Patty earnestly. "Why, darkness—I mean darkness in the daytime—makes you all stewed up and fidgety and horrid; and sunshine makes you all gay and cheerful and glad."

"Like you," said Miss Daggett.

"Yes, like me," said Patty; "I am cheerful and glad always. I like to be."

"I would like to be, too," said Miss Daggett.

"Do you suppose if I opened the shutters I would be?"

"Let's try it and see," said Patty, and running to the windows, she flung open the inside blinds and flooded the room with sunshine.

"Oh, what a beautiful room!" she exclaimed, as she turned around. "Why, Miss Daggett, to think of keeping all these lovely things shut up in the dark. I believe they cry about it when you aren't looking."

Already the old lady's face seemed to show a gentler and sunnier expression, and she said:

"Yes, I have some beautiful things, child. Would you like to look through this cabinet of East Indian curiosities?"

"I would very much," said Patty, "but I fear I can't take the time this morning; I have to study my part in a play we're going to give. It's a play your nephew told us about," she added quickly, feeling sure that this would rouse the old lady's interest in it.

"One of Kenneth's college plays?" she said eagerly.

"Yes, that's just what it is. A chum of his wrote it, and oh, Miss Daggett, we're going to invite Mr. Harper to come to Vernondale the night of the play, and take the same part that he took at college last

year; you see, he'll know it, and he can just step right in."

"Good for you! I hope he'll come. I'll write at once and tell him how much I want him. He can stay here, of course, and perhaps he can come sooner, so as to be here for one or two rehearsals."

"That would be a good help. I hope he will do that; he could coach the rest of us."

"I don't know just what coach means, but I'm sure Kenneth can do it, he's a very clever boy; he says he can run an automobile, but I don't believe it. Run away home now, child, I'm tired of having company; and besides I want to compose my mind so I can write a letter to Kenneth."

"And will you leave your blinds open till afternoon?" said Patty, who was beginning to learn her queer old neighbour.

"Yes, I will, if I don't forget it. Clear out, child, clear out now; run away home and mind you're not to borrow anything and you're not to come back till I send for you."

"All right," said Patty. "Good-bye, and mind, you're to keep bright and cheerful, and let the sunlight in all the time."

CHAPTER XV

BILLS

Patty's plans for systematic housekeeping included a number of small Russia-leather account books, and she looked forward with some eagerness to the time when the first month's bills should come in, and she could present to her father a neat and accurate statement of the household expenses for the month.

The 1st of February was Sunday, but on Monday morning the postman brought a sheaf of letters which were evidently bills.

Patty had no time to look at these before she went to school, so she placed them carefully in her desk, determined to hurry home that afternoon and get her accounts into apple-pie order before her father came home. After school she returned to find a supplementary lot of bills had been left by the postman, and also Mancy presented her with a number of bills which the tradesmen had left that morning.

Patty took the whole lot to her desk, and with methodical exactness noted the amounts on the pages of her little books. She and her father had talked the matter over, more or less, and Patty knew just about what Mr. Fairfield expected the bills to amount to.

But to her consternation she discovered, as she went along, that each bill was proving to be about twice as large as she had anticipated.

"There must be some mistake," she said to herself, "we simply *can't* have eaten all those groceries. Anybody would think we ran a branch store. And that butcher's bill is big enough for the Central Park menagerie! They must have added it wrong."

But a careful verification of the figures proved that they were added right, and Patty's heart began to sink as she looked at the enormous sum-totals.

"To think of all that for flowers! Well, papa bought some of them, that's a comfort; but I had no idea I had ordered so many myself. I think bills are perfectly horrid! And here's my dressmaker's bill. Gracious, how Madame LaFayette has gone up in her prices! I believe I'll make my own clothes after this; but the market bills are the worst I don't see how we *could* have eaten all these things. Mancy must be a dreadful waster, but it isn't fair to blame her; if that's where the trouble is, I ought to have looked after it myself. Hello, Marian, is that you? I didn't hear you come in. Do come here, I'm in the depths of despair!"

"What's the matter, Patsie? and what a furious lot of bills! You look like a clearinghouse."

"Oh, Marian, it's perfectly fearful! Every bill is two or three times as much as I thought it would be, and I'm so sorry, for I meant to be such a thrifty housekeeper."

"Jiminetty Christmas!" exclaimed Marian, looking at some of the papers, "I should think these bills *were* big! Why, that's more than we pay a month for groceries, and look at the size of our family."

"I know it," said Patty hopelessly. "I don't see how it happened."

"You are an extravagant little wretch, Patty, there's no doubt about it."

"I suppose I am; at least, I suppose I have been, but I'm not going to be any more. I'm going to reform, suddenly and all at once and very thoroughly! Now, you watch me. We're not going to have any more fancy things, no more ice cream from Pacetti's. Why, that caterer's bill is something fearful."

"And so you're going to starve poor Uncle Fred?"

"No, that wouldn't be fair, would it? The economy ought to fall entirely on me. Well, I've decided to make my own clothes after this, anyway."

"Oh, Patty, what a goose you are! You couldn't make them to save your neck, and after you made them you couldn't wear them."

"I could, too, Marian Elliott! Just you wait and see me make my summer dresses. I'm going to sew all through vacation."

"All right," said Marian, "I'll come over and help you, but you can't make any dresses this afternoon, so put away those old bills and get ready for a sleigh ride. It's lovely out, and father said he'd call for us here at four o'clock."

"All right, I will, if we can get back by six. I want to be here when papa comes home."

"Yes, we'll be back by six. I expect Uncle Fred will shut you up in a dark room and keep you on bread and water for a week when he sees those bills."

"That's just the worst of it," said Patty forlornly. "He's so good and kind, and spoils me so dreadfully that it makes me feel all the worse when I don't do things right."

A good long sleigh ride in the fresh, crisp winter air quite revived Patty's despondent spirits. She sat in front with Uncle Charley, and he let her drive part of the way, for it was Patty's great delight to drive two horses, and she had already become a fairly accomplished little horsewoman.

"Fred tells me he's going to get horses for you this spring," said Uncle Charley. "You'll enjoy them a lot, won't you, Patty?"

"Yes, indeed—that is—I don't know whether we'll have them or not."

For it just occurred to Patty that, having run her father into such unexpected expense in the household, a good way to economise would be to give up all hopes of horses.

"Oh, yes, you'll have them all right," said Uncle Charley, in his gay, cheery way, having no idea, of course, what was in Patty's mind. "And you must have a little pony and cart of your own. It would give you a great deal of pleasure to go out driving in the spring weather."

"I just guess it would," said Patty, "and I'm sure I hope I'll have it."

She began to wonder if she couldn't find some other way to economise rather than on the horses, for she certainly did love to drive.

Promptly at six o'clock Uncle Charley left her at Boxley Hall, and as she entered the door Patty felt that strange sinking of the heart that always accompanies the resuming of a half-forgotten mental burden.

"I know just how thieves and defaulters and forgers feel," she said to herself, as she took off her wraps. "I haven't exactly stolen, but I've betrayed a trust, and that's just as bad. I wonder what papa will say?"

At dinner Patty was subdued and a little nervous.

Mr. Fairfield, quick to notice anything unusual in his daughter, surmised that she was bothered, but felt sure that in her own time she would tell him all about it, so he endeavoured to set her at her ease by chatting pleasantly about the events of his day in the city, and sustaining the burden of the conversation himself.

But after dinner, when they had gone into the library, as they usually did in the evening, Patty

brought out her fearful array of paper bugbears and laid them before her father.

"What are these?" said Mr. Fairfield cheerily. "Ah, yes, I see. The 1st of the month has brought its usual crop of bills."

"I do hope it isn't the usual crop, papa; for if they always come in like this, we'll have to give up Boxley Hall and go to live in the poor-house."

"Oh, I don't know. We haven't overdrawn our bank account yet Whew! Pacetti's is a stunner, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Patty, in a meek little voice.

"And Fisher & Co. seem to have summed up quite a total; and Smith's flower bill looks like a good old summer time."

"Oh, papa, please scold me; I know I deserve it. I ought to have looked after these things and kept the expenses down more."

"Why ought you to have done so, Patty? We have to have food, don't we?"

"Yes; but, papa, you know we estimated in the beginning, and these old bills come up to about twice as much as our estimate."

"That's a fact, baby, they do," said Mr. Fairfield, looking over the statements with a more serious air. "These are pretty big figures to represent a month's living for just you and me and our small retinue of servants."

"Yes; and, papa, I think Mancy is rather wasteful. I don't say this to blame her. I know it is my place to see about it, and be careful that she utilises all that is possible of the kitchen waste."

Patty said this so exactly with the air of a *Young Housekeeper's Guide* or *Cooking School Manual*, that Mr. Fairfield laughed outright.

"Chickadee," he said, "you'll come out all right. You have the true elements of success. You see where you've fallen into error, you're willing to admit it, and you're ready to use every means to improve in the future. I'm not quite so surprised as you are at the size of these bills; for, though we made our estimates rationally, yet we have been buying a great many things and having a pretty good time generally. I foresaw this experience at the end of the month, but I preferred to wait and see how we came out rather than interfere with the proceedings; and another thing, Patty, which may comfort you some, is the fact that I quite believe that some of these tradespeople have taken advantage of your youth and inexperience and padded their bills a little bit in consequence."

"But, papa, just look at Madame LaFayette's bill. I don't think she ought to charge so much."

"These do seem high prices for the simple little frocks you wear; but they are always so daintily made, and in such good taste, that I think we'll have to continue to employ her. Dressmakers, you know, are acknowledged vampires."

"I like the clothes she makes, too," said Patty, "but I had concluded that that was the best way for me to economise, and I thought after this I would make my own dresses."

"I don't think you will, my child," said Mr. Fairfield decidedly. "You couldn't make dresses fit to be seen, unless you took a course of instruction in dressmaking, and I'm not sure that you could then; and you have quite enough to do with your school work and your practising. When did you propose to do this wonderful sewing?"

"Oh, I mean in vacation—to make my summer dresses."

"No; in vacation you're to run out of doors and play. Don't let me hear any more about sewing."

"All right," said Patty, with a sigh of relief. "I'm awfully glad not to, but I wanted to help somehow. I thought I'd make my green cloth costume for Diana in the play."

"Yes, that would be a good thing to begin on," said Mr. Fairfield. "Broadcloth is so tractable, so easy to fit; and that tailor-made effect can, of course, be attained by any well-meaning beginner."

Patty laughed. "I know it would look horrid, papa," she said, "but as I am to blame for all this outrageous extravagance, I want to economise somewhere to make up for it."

"And do you call it good proportion to buy a great deal too much to eat and then go around in botchy, home-made clothes to make up for it?"

"No," said Patty, "I don't believe it is. What can I do? I want to do something, and I don't—oh, papa, I *don't* want to give up those horses that you said you'd buy."

"Well, we'll fix it up this way, Patty, girl; we'll just pay off all these bills and start fresh. The extra expense we'll charge to experience account—experience is an awfully high-priced commodity, you know—and next month, while we won't exactly scrimp ourselves, we'll keep our eye on the accounts and watch them as they progress. As I've told you before, my darling, I don't expect you to become perfect, or even proficient, in these things all at once. You will need years of experience before the time can come when your domestic machinery will run without a flaw, if, indeed, it ever does. Now, never think of these January bills again. They are things of the past. Go and get your play-book, and let me hear you speak your piece."

CHAPTER XVI

A SUCCESSFUL PLAY

Mr. Hepworth came again to visit Boxley Hall, and while there heard about the play, and became so interested in the preparations that he offered to paint some scenery for it.

Patty jumped for joy at this, for the scenery had been their greatest stumbling-block.

And so the Saturday morning before the performance the renowned New York artist, Mr. Egerton Hepworth, walked over to Library Hall, escorted by a dozen merry young people of both sexes.

As a scenic artist Mr. Hepworth proved a great success and a rapid workman beside, for by mid-afternoon he had completed the one scene that was necessary—a view of Mount Olympus as supposed to be at the present date.

Though the actual work was sketchily done, yet the general effect was that of a beautiful Grecian grove with marble temple and steps, and surrounding trees and flowers, the whole of which seemed to be a sort of an island set in a sea of blue sky and fleecy clouds.

At least, that is the way Elsie Morris declared it looked, and though Mr. Hepworth confessed that that was not the idea he had intended to convey, yet if they were satisfied, he was. The young people declared themselves more than satisfied, and urged Mr. Hepworth so heartily to attend the performance—offering him the choicest seats in the house and as many as he wanted—that he finally consented to come if he could persuade his friends at Boxley Hall to put him up for the night. Patty demurely promised to try her best to coax her father to agree to this arrangement, and though she said she had little hope of succeeding, Mr. Hepworth seemed willing to take his chances.

At last the great day arrived, and Patty rose early that morning, for there were many last things to be attended to; and being a capable little manager, it somehow devolved on Patty to see that all the loose ends were gathered up and all the minor matters looked after.

Kenneth Harper had been down twice to rehearsals, and had already become a favourite with the Vernondale young people. Indeed, the cheery, willing, capable young man couldn't help getting himself liked wherever he went. He stayed with his aunt, Miss Daggett, when in Vernondale, which greatly delighted the heart of the old lady.

The play was to be on Friday night, because then there would be no school next day; and Friday morning Patty was as busy as a bee sorting tickets, counting out programmes, making lists, and checking off memoranda, when Pansy appeared at her door with the unwelcome announcement that Miss Daggett had sent word she would like to have Patty call on her. Unwelcome, only because Patty was so busy, otherwise she would have been glad of a summons to the house next-door, for she had taken a decided fancy to her erratic neighbour.

Determining she would return quickly, and smiling to herself as she thought that probably she would be asked to do so, she ran over to Miss Daggett's.

"Come in, child, come in," called the old lady from the upper hall, "come right up here. I'm in a

terrible quandary!"

Patty went upstairs, and then followed Miss Daggett into her bedroom.

"I've decided," said the old lady, with the air of one announcing a decision the importance of which would shake at least two continents, "I've decided to go to that ridiculous show of yours."

"Oh, have you?" said Patty, "that's very nice, I'm sure."

"I'm glad you're pleased," said the old lady grimly, "though I'm not going for the sake of pleasing you."

"Are you going to please your nephew, Mr. Harper?" said Patty, not being exactly curious, but feeling that she was expected to inquire.

"No, I'm not," said Miss Daggett curtly. "I'm going to please myself; and I called you over here to advise me what to wear. Here are all my best dresses, but there's none of them made in the fashions people wear nowadays, and it's too late to have them fixed over. I wish you'd tell me which one you think comes nearest to being right."

Patty looked in amazement at the great heap of beautiful gowns that lay upon the bed. They were made of the richest velvets and satins and laces, but were all of such an antiquated mode that it seemed impossible to advise anyone to wear them without remodeling. But, as Miss Daggett was very much in earnest, Patty concluded that she must necessarily make some choice.

Accordingly, she picked out a lavender moiré silk, trimmed with soft white lace at the throat and wrist. Although old-fashioned, it was plain and very simply made, and would, Patty thought, be less conspicuous than the more elaborate gowns.

"That's just the one I had decided on myself," said Miss Daggett, "and I should have worn that anyway, whatever you had said."

"Then why did you call me over?" said Patty, moved to impatience by this inconsistency.

"Oh, because I wanted your opinion, and I wanted to ask you about some other things. Kenneth is coming to-night, you know."

"Yes, I know it," said Patty, "and I am very glad."

This frank statement and the clear, unembarrassed light in Patty's eyes seemed to please Miss Daggett, and she kissed the pretty face upturned to hers, but she only said: "Run along now, child, go home, I don't want company now."

"I'm glad of it," Patty thought to herself, but she only said: "Good-bye, then, Miss Daggett; I'll see you this evening."

"Wait a minute, child; come back here, I'm not through with you yet."

Patty groaned in spirit, but went back with a smiling face.

Miss Daggett regarded her steadily.

"You're pretty busy, I suppose, to-day," she said, "getting ready for your play."

"Yes, I am," said Patty frankly.

"And you didn't want to take the time to come over here to see me, did you?"

"Oh, I shall have time enough to do all I want to do," said Patty.

"Don't evade my question, child. You didn't want to come, did you?"

"Well, Miss Daggett," said Patty, "you are often quite frank with me, so now I'll be frank with you, and confess that when your message came I did wish you had chosen some other day to send for me; for I certainly have a lot of little things to do, but I shall get them all done, I know, and I am very glad to learn that you are coming to the entertainment."

"You are a good girl," said Miss Daggett; "you are a good girl, and I like you very much. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Patty, and she ran downstairs and over home, determined to work fast enough to make up for the time she had lost.

She succeeded in this, and when her father came home at night, bringing Mr. Hepworth with him, they found a very charming little hostess awaiting them and Boxley Hall imbued throughout with an air of comfortable hospitality.

After dinner Patty donned her Diana costume and came down to ask her father's opinion of it. He declared it was most jaunty and becoming, and Mr. Hepworth said it was especially well adapted to Patty's style, and that he would like to paint her portrait in that garb. This seemed to Mr. Fairfield a good idea, and they at once made arrangements for future sittings.

Patty was greatly pleased.

"Won't it be fine, papa?" she said. "It will be an ancestral portrait to hang in Boxley Hall and keep till I'm an old lady like Miss Daggett."

When they reached Library Hall, where the play was to be given, Patty, going in at the stage entrance, was met by a crowd of excited girls who announced that Florence Douglass had gone all to pieces.

"What do you mean?" cried Patty. "What's the matter with her?"

"Oh, hysterics!" said Elsie Morris, in great disgust. "First she giggles and then she bursts into tears, and nobody can do anything with her."

"Well, she's going to be Niobe, anyway," said Patty, "so let her go on the stage and cut up those tricks, and the audience will think it's all right."

"Oh, no, Patty, we can't let her go on the stage," said Frank Elliott; "she'd queer the whole show."

"Well, then, we'll have to leave that part out," said Patty.

"Oh, dear!" wailed Elsie, "that's the funniest part of all. I hate to leave that part out."

"I know it," said Patty; "and Florence does it so well. I wish she'd behave herself. Well, I can't think of anything else to do but omit it. I might ask papa; he can think of things when nobody else can."

"That's so," said Marian, "Uncle Fred has a positive genius for suggestion."

"I'll step down in the audience and ask him," said Frank.

In five minutes Frank was back again, broadly smiling, and Mr. Hepworth was with him.

"It's all right," said Frank. "I knew Uncle Fred would fix it. All he said was, 'Hepworth, you're a born actor, take the part yourself'; and Mr. Hepworth, like the brick he is, said he'd do it."

"I fairly jumped at the chance," said the young artist, smiling down into Patty's bright face. "I was dying to be in this thing anyway. And they tell me the costume is nothing but several hundred yards of Greek draperies, so I think it will fit me all right."

"But you don't know the lines," said Patty, delighted at this solution of the dilemma, but unable to see how it could be accomplished.

"Oh, that's all right," said Mr. Hepworth merrily. "I shall make up my lines as I go along, and when I see that anyone else wants to talk, I shall stop and give them a chance."

It sounded a little precarious, but as there was nothing else to do, and Florence Douglass begged them to put somebody—anybody—in her place and let her go home, they all agreed to avail themselves of Mr. Hepworth's services.

And it was fortunate they did, for though the rest of the characters were bright and clever representations, yet it was Mr. Hepworth's funny impromptu jokes and humorous actions in the character of Niobe that made the hit of the evening. Indeed, he and Kenneth Harper quite carried off the laurels from the other amateurs; but so delighted were the Vernondale young people at the success of the whole play that they were more than willing to give the praise where it belonged.

Perhaps the only one in the audience who failed to appreciate Mr. Hepworth's clever work was Miss Rachel Daggett. She had eyes only for her beloved nephew, with an occasional side glance for her pretty young neighbour.

After the entertainment there was a little dance for the young people; and Patty, as president of the club, received so many compliments and so much congratulation that it's a wonder her curly head was

not turned. But as she walked home between her father and Mr. Hepworth, she declared that the success of the evening was in no way consequent upon her efforts, but depended entirely on the talents of the two travelling comedians from the city.

CHAPTER XVII

ENTERTAINING RELATIVES

Spring and summer followed one another in their usual succession, and as the months went by, Boxley Hall became more beautiful and more attractively homelike, both inside and out. Mr. Fairfield bought a pair of fine carriage horses and a pony and cart for Patty's own use. A man was engaged to take care of these and also to look after the lawn and garden.

Patty, learning much from experience and also from Aunt Alice's occasional visits, developed into a sensible and capable little housekeeper. So determined was she to make the keeping of her father's house a real success that she tried most diligently to correct all her errors and improve her powers.

Patty had a natural aptitude for domestic matters, and after some rough places were made smooth and some sharp corners rounded off, things went quite as smoothly as in many houses where the presiding genius numbered twice Patty's years.

With June came vacation, and Patty was more than glad, for she was never fond of school, and now could have all her time to devote to her beloved home.

And, too, she wanted very much to invite her cousins to visit her, which was only possible in vacation time.

"I think, papa," she said, as they sat on the veranda one June evening after dinner, "I think I shall have a house party. I shall invite all my cousins from Elmbridge and Philadelphia and Boston and we'll have a grand general reunion that will be most beautiful."

"You'll invite your aunts and uncles, too?" said Mr. Fairfield.

"Why, I don't see how we'd have room for so many," said Patty.

"And, of course," went on her father, "you'd invite the whole Elliott family. It wouldn't be fair to leave them out of your house-party just because they happen to live in Vernondale."

Then Patty saw that her father was laughing at her.

"I know you're teasing me now, papa," she said, "but I don't see why. Just because I want to ask my cousins to come here and return the visits I made to them last year."

"But you didn't visit them all at once, my child, and you certainly could not expect to entertain them here all at once. Your list of cousins is a very long one, and even if there were room for them in the house, the care and responsibility of such a house party would be enough to land you in a sanitarium when it was over, if not before."

"There are an awful lot of them," said Patty.

"And they're not altogether congenial," said her father. "Although I haven't seen them as lately as you have, yet I can't help thinking, from what you told me, that the Barlows and the St. Clairs would enjoy themselves better if they visited here at different times, and I'm sure the same is true of your Boston cousins."

"You're right," said Patty, "as you always are, and I don't believe I'd have much fun with all that company at once, either. So I think we'll have them in detachments, and first I'll just invite Ethelyn and Reginald down for a week or two. I don't really care much about having them, but Ethelyn has written so often that she wants to come that I don't see how I can very well get out of it."

"If she wants to come, you certainly ought to ask her. You visited there three months, you know."

"Yes, I know it, and they were very kind to me. Aunt Isabel had parties, and did things for my

pleasure all the time. Well, I'll invite them right away. Perhaps I ought to ask Aunt Isabel, too."

"Yes, you might ask her," said Mr. Fairfield, "and she can bring the children down, but she probably will not stay as long as they do."

So Patty wrote for her aunt and cousins, and the first day of July they arrived.

Mrs. St. Clair, who was Patty's aunt only by marriage, was a very fashionable woman of a pretty, but somewhat artificial, type. She liked young people, and had spared no pains to make Patty's visit to her a happy one. But it was quite evident that she expected Patty to return her hospitality in kind, and she had been at Boxley Hall but a few hours before she began to inquire what plans Patty had made for her entertainment.

Now, though Patty had thought out several little pleasures for her cousins, it hadn't occurred to her that Aunt Isabel would expect parties made for her.

She evaded her aunt's questions, however, and waited for an opportunity to speak alone with her father about it.

"Why, papa," she exclaimed that evening after their guests had gone to their rooms, "Aunt Isabel expects me to have a tea or reception or something for her."

"Nonsense, child, she can't think of such a thing."

"Yes, she does, papa, and what's more, I want to do it. She was very kind to me and I'd rather please her than Ethelyn. I don't care much for Ethelyn anyway."

"She isn't just your kind, is she, my girl?"

"No, she isn't like Marian nor any of the club girls. She has her head full of fashions, and beaux, and grown-up things of all sorts. She is just my age, but you'd think she was about twenty, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, she does look almost as old as that, and she acts quite as old. Reginald is a nice boy."

"Yes, but he's pompous and stuck-up. He always did put on grand airs. Aunt Isabel does, too, but she's so kind-hearted and generous nobody can help liking her."

"Well, have a party for her if you want to, chicken. But don't take the responsibility of it entirely on yourself. I should think you might make it a pretty little afternoon tea. Get Aunt Alice to make out the invitation list; she knows better than you what ladies to invite, and then let Pacetti send up whatever you want for the feast. I've no doubt Pansy will be willing to attend to the floral decoration of the house."

"I've no doubt she will," said Patty, laughing. "The trouble will be to stop her before she turns the whole place into a horticultural exhibit."

"Well, go ahead with it, Patty. I think it will please your aunt very much, but don't wear yourself out over it."

Next morning at breakfast Patty announced her plan for an afternoon tea, and Aunt Isabel was delighted.

"You dear child," she exclaimed, "how sweet of you! I hate to have you go to any trouble on my account, but I shall be so pleased to meet the Vernondale ladies. I want to know what kind of people my niece is growing up among."

"I'm sure you'll like them, Aunt Isabel. Aunt Alice's friends are lovely. And then I'll ask the mothers of the Tea Club girls, and my neighbour, Miss Daggett, but I don't believe she'll come."

"Is that the rich Miss Daggett?" asked Aunt Isabel curiously; "the queer one?"

"I don't know whether she's rich or not," said Patty. "I dare say she is, though, because she has lovely things; but she certainly can be called queer. I'm very fond of her, though; she's awfully nice to me, and I like her in spite of her queerness."

"But you'll ask some young ladies, too, won't you?" said Ethelyn. "I don't care very much for queer old maids and middle-aged married ladies."

"Oh, this isn't for you, Ethel," said Patty. "I'll have a children's party for you and Reginald some other day."

"Children's party, indeed," said Ethelyn, turning up her haughty little nose. "You know very well, Patty, I haven't considered myself a child for years."

"Nor I," said Reginald.

"Well, I consider myself one," said Patty. "I'm not in a bit of hurry to be grown-up; but we're going to have a lovely sailing party, Ethelyn, on Fourth of July, and I'm sure you'll enjoy that."

"Are any young men going?" said Ethelyn.

"There are a lot of boys going," said Patty. "But the only young men will be my father and Uncle Charley and Mr. Hepworth."

"Who is Mr. Hepworth?"

"He's an artist friend of papa's, who comes out quite often, and who always goes sailing with us when we have sailing parties."

Aunt Alice was more than willing to help Patty with her project, and the result was a very pretty little afternoon tea at Boxley Hall.

"I'm so glad I brought my white crêpe-de-chine," said Aunt Isabel, as she dressed for the occasion.

"I'm glad, too," said Patty; "for it's a lovely gown and you look sweet in it."

"I've brought a lot of pretty dresses, too," said Ethelyn, "and I suppose I may as well put on one of the prettiest to-day, as there's no use in wasting them on those children's parties you're talking about."

"Do just as you like, Ethelyn," said Patty, knowing that her cousin was always overdressed on all occasions, and therefore it made little difference what she wore.

And, sure enough, Ethelyn arrayed herself in a most resplendent gown which, though very beautiful, was made in a style more suited to a belle of several seasons than a young miss of sixteen.

Patty wore one of her pretty little white house dresses; and Aunt Alice, in a lovely gray gown, assisted her to receive the guests, and to introduce Mrs. St. Clair and her children.

Among the late arrivals was Miss Daggett. Her coming created a sensation, for, as was well known in Vernondale, she rarely attended social affairs of any sort. But, for some unknown reason, she chose to accept Patty's invitation, and, garbed in an old-fashioned brown velvet, she was presented to Mrs. St. Clair.

"I'm so glad to see you," said the latter, shaking hands effusively.

"Humph!" said Miss Daggett. "Why should you be glad to see me, pray?"

"Why, because—because—" Mrs. St. Clair floundered a little, and seemed really unable to give any reason.

"Because you've heard that I'm rich and old and queer?" said Miss Daggett.

This was exactly true, but Mrs. St. Clair did not care to admit it, so she said: "Why, no, not that; but I've heard my niece speak of you so often that I felt anxious to meet you."

"Well, I'm not afraid of anything Patty Fairfield said about me; she's a dear little girl; I'm very fond of her."

"Why do you call her little girl?" said Mrs. St. Clair. "Patty is in her seventeenth year; surely that is not quite a child."

"But she is a child at heart," said Miss Daggett, "and I am glad of it. I would far rather see her with her pretty, sunshiny childish ways than to see her like that overdressed little minx standing over there beside her, whoever she may be."

"That's my daughter," said Mrs. St. Clair, without, however, looking as deeply offended as she might have done.

"Oh, is it?" said Miss Daggett, sniffing. "Well, I see no reason to change my opinion of her, if she is."

"No," said Mrs. St. Clair, "of course we are each entitled to our own opinion. Now, I think my daughter more appropriately dressed than my niece. And I think your nephew will agree with me," she added, smiling.

"My nephew!" snapped Miss Daggett. "Do you know him?"

"Oh, yes, indeed; we met Mr. Harper at a reception in New York not long ago, and he was very much charmed with my daughter Ethelyn."

"He may have seemed so," said Miss Daggett scornfully. "He is a very polite young man. But let me tell you, he admires Patty Fairfield more than any other girl he has ever seen. He told me so himself. And now, go away, if you please, I'm tired of talking to you."

Mrs. St. Clair was not very much surprised at this speech, for Patty had told her of Miss Daggett's summary method of dismissing people; and so, with a sweet smile and a bow, the fashionable matron left the eccentric and indignant spinster.

CHAPTER XVIII

A SAILING PARTY

After Aunt Isabel had gone home, Patty devoted herself to the entertainment of her young cousins. And they seemed to require a great deal of entertainment—both Ethelyn and Reginald wanted something done for their pleasure all the time. They did not hesitate to express very freely their opinions of the pleasures planned for them, and as they were sophisticated young persons, they frequently scorned the simple gaieties in which Patty and her Vernondale companions found pleasure. However, they condescended to be pleased at the idea of a sailing party, for, as there was no water near their own home, a yacht was a novelty to them. At first Ethelyn thought to appear interesting by expressing timid doubts as to the safety of the picnic party, but she soon found that the Vernondale young people had no foolish fears of that sort.

Fourth of July was a bright, clear day, warm, but very pleasant, with a good stiff breeze blowing. Patty was up early, and when Ethelyn came downstairs, she found her cousin, with the aid of Mancy and Pansy, packing up what seemed to be luncheon enough for the whole party.

"Doesn't anybody else take anything?" she inquired.

"Oh, yes," said Patty, "they all do. I'm only taking cold chicken and stuffed eggs. You've no idea what an appetite sailing gives you."

Ethelyn looked very pretty in a yachting suit of white serge, while Patty's sailor gown was of more prosaic blue flannel, trimmed with white braid.

"That's a sweet dress, Ethelyn," said Patty, "but I'm awfully afraid you'll spoil it. You know we don't go in a beautiful yacht, all white paint and polished brass; we go in a big old schooner that's roomy and safe but not overly clean."

"Oh, it doesn't matter," said Ethelyn; "I dare say I shall spoil it, but I've nothing else that's just right to wear."

"All aboard!" shouted a cheery voice, and Kenneth Harper's laughing face appeared in the doorway.

"Oh, good-morning!" cried Patty, smiling gaily back at him; "I'm so glad to see you. This is my cousin, Miss St. Clair. Ethelyn, may I present Mr. Harper?"

Immediately Ethelyn assumed a coquettish and simpering demeanour.

"I've met Mr. Harper before," she said; "though I dare say he doesn't remember me."

"Oh, yes, indeed I do," said Kenneth gallantly. "We met at a reception in the city, and I am delighted to see you again, especially on such a jolly occasion as I feel sure to-day is going to be."

"Do you think it is quite safe?" said Ethelyn, with what she considered a charming timidity. "I've never been sailing, you know, and I'm not very brave."

"Oh, pshaw! of course it's safe, barring accidents; but you're always liable to those, even in an automobile. Hello! here comes Hepworth. Glad to see you, old chap."

Mr. Hepworth received a general storm of glad greetings, was presented to the strangers, and announced himself as ready to carry baskets, boxes, rugs, wraps, or whatever was to be transported.

Mr. Fairfield, as general manager, portioned out the luggage, and then, each picking up his individual charge, they started off. On the way they met the Elliott family similarly equipped and equally enthusiastic, and the whole crowd proceeded down to the wharf. There they found about thirty young people awaiting them. All the girls of the Tea Club were there; and all the boys, who insisted on calling themselves honorary members of the club.

"It's a beautiful day," said Guy Morris, "but no good at all for sailing. The breeze has died down entirely, and I don't believe it will come up again all day."

"That's real cheerful, isn't it?" said Frank Elliott. "I should be inclined to doubt it myself, but Guy is such a weatherwise genius, and he almost never makes a mistake in his prognostications."

"Well, it remains to be seen what the day will bring forth," said Uncle Charley; "but in the meantime we'll get aboard."

The laughing crowd piled themselves on board the big schooner, stowed away all the baskets and bundles, and settled themselves comfortably in various parts of the boat; some sat in the stern, others climbed to the top of the cabin, while others preferred the bow, and one or two adventurous spirits clambered out to the end of the long bowsprit and sat with their feet dangling above the water. Ethelyn gave some affected little cries of horror at this, but Frank Elliott reassured her by telling her that it was always a part of the performance.

"Why, I have seen your dignified cousin Patty do it; in fact, she generally festoons herself along the edge of the boat in some precarious position."

"Don't do it to-day, will you, Patty?" besought Ethelyn, with a ridiculous air of solicitude.

"No, I won't," said Patty; "I'll be real good and do just as you want me to."

"Noble girl!" said Kenneth Harper. "I know how hard it is for you to be good."

"It is, indeed," said Patty, laughing; "and I insist upon having due credit."

As a rule the Vernondale parties were exciting affairs. The route was down the river to the sound; from the sound to the bay; and, if the day were very favourable, out into the ocean, and perhaps around Staten Island.

Patty had hoped for this most extended trip today, in order that Ethelyn and Reginald might see a sailing party at its very best.

But after they had been on board an hour they had covered only the few miles of river, and found themselves well out into the sound, but with no seeming prospect of going any farther. The breeze had died away entirely, and as the sun rose higher the heat was becoming decidedly uncomfortable.

Ethelyn began to fidget. Her pretty white serge frock had come in contact with some muddy ropes and some oily screws, and several unsightly spots were the result. This made her cross, for she hated to have her costume spoiled so early in the day; and besides she was unpleasantly conscious that her fair complexion was rapidly taking on a deep shade of red. She knew this was unbecoming, but when Reginald, with brotherly frankness, informed her that her nose looked like a poppy bud, she lost her temper and relapsed into a sulky fit.

"I don't see any fun in a sailing party, if this is one," she said.

"Oh, this isn't one," said Guy Morris good-humoredly; "this is just a first-class fizzle. We often have them, and though they're not as much fun as a real good sailing party, yet we manage to get a good time out of them some way."

"I don't see how," said Ethelyn, who was growing very ill-tempered.

"We'll show you," said Frank Elliott kindly; "there are lots of things to do on board a boat besides sail."

There did seem to be, and notwithstanding the heat and the sunburn—yes, even the mosquitoes—those happy-go-lucky young people found ways to have a real good time. They sang songs and told stories and jokes, and showed each other clever little games and tricks. One of the boys had a camera and he took pictures of the whole crowd, both singly and in groups. Mr. Hepworth drew caricature portraits, and Kenneth Harper gave some of his funny impersonations.

Except for the responsibility of her cousin's entertainment, Patty enjoyed herself exceedingly; but then she was always a happy little girl, and never allowed herself to be discomfited by trifles.

Everybody was surprised when Aunt Alice announced that it was time for luncheon, and though all were disappointed at the failure of the sail, everybody seemed to take it philosophically and even merrily.

"What is the matter?" said Ethelyn. "Why don't we go?"

"The matter is," said Mr. Fairfield, "we are becalmed. There is no breeze and consequently nothing to make our bonny ship move, so she stands still."

"And are we going to stay right here all day?" asked Ethelyn.

"It looks very much like it, unless an ocean steamer comes along and gives us a tow."

Aunt Alice and the girls of the party soon had the luncheon ready, and the merry feast was made. As Frank remarked, it was a very different thing to sit there in the broiling sun and eat sandwiches and devilled eggs, or to consume the same viands with the yacht madly flying along in rolling waves and dashing spray.

The afternoon palled a little. Youthful enthusiasm and determined good temper could make light of several hours of discomfort, but toward three o'clock the sun's rays grew unbearably hot, the glare from the water was very trying, and the mosquitoes were something awful.

Guy Morris, who probably spent more of his time in a boat than any of the others, declared that he had never seen such a day.

Mr. Fairfield felt sorry for Ethelyn, who had never had such an experience before, and so he exerted himself to entertain her, but she resisted all his attempts, and even though Patty came to her father's assistance, they found it impossible to make their guest happy.

Reginald was no better. He growled and fretted about the heat and other discomforts and he was so pompous and overbearing in his manner that it is not surprising that the boys of Vernondale cordially disliked him.

"As long as we can't go sailing," said Ethelyn, "I should think we would go home."

"We can't get home," said Patty patiently. She had already explained this several times to her cousin. "There is no breeze to take us anywhere."

"Well, what will happen to us, then? Shall we stay here forever?"

"There ought to be a breeze in two or three days," said Kenneth Harper, who could not resist the temptation to chaff this ill-tempered young person. "Say by Tuesday or Wednesday, I should think a capful of wind might puff up in some direction."

"It is coming now," said Frank Elliott suddenly; "I certainly feel a draught."

"Put something around you, my boy," said his mother, "I don't want you to take cold."

"Let me get you a wrap," said Frank, smiling back at his mother, who was fanning herself with a folded newspaper.

"The wind is coming," said Guy Morris, and his serious face was a sharp contrast to the merry ones about him, "and it's no joke this time. Within ten minutes there'll be a stiff breeze, and within twenty a howling gale, or I'm no sailor."

As he spoke he was busily preparing to reef the mainsail, and he consulted hurriedly with the sailors.

At first no one could believe Guy's prophecies would come true, but in a few moments the cool breeze was distinctly felt, the sun went under a cloud, and the boat began to move. It was a sudden squall, and the clouds thickened and massed themselves into great hills of blackness; the water turned dark and began to rise in little threatening billows, the wind grew stronger and stronger, and then without

warning the rain came. Thunder and lightning added to the excitement of the occasion, and in less than fifteen minutes the smooth sunny glare of water was at the mercy of a fearful storm.

The occupants of the boat seemed to know exactly how to behave in these circumstances. Mrs. Elliott and the girls of the party went down into the little cabin, which held them all, but which was very crowded.

Guy Morris took command, and the other boys, and men, too, for that matter, did exactly as he told them.

Ethelyn began to cry. This was really not surprising, as the girl had never before had such an experience and was exceedingly nervous as well as very much frightened.

Mrs. Elliott appreciated this, and putting her arm around the sobbing child, comforted her with great tact and patience.

The storm passed as quickly as it came. There had been danger, both real and plentiful, but no bad results attended, except that everybody was more or less wet with the rain.

The boys were more and the girls less, but to Ethelyn's surprise, they all seemed to view the whole performance quite as a matter of course, and accepted the situation with the same merry philosophy that they had shown in the morning.

The thermometer had fallen many degrees, and the cold wind against damp clothing caused a most unpleasant sensation.

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good," said Guy. "This breeze will take us home, spinning."

"I'm glad of it," said Ethelyn snappishly; "I've had quite enough of the sailing party."

Frank confided to Patty afterward that he felt like responding that the sailing party had had quite enough of her, but instead he said politely:

"Oh, don't be so easily discouraged! Better luck next time."

To which Ethelyn replied, still crossly, "There'll be no next time for me."

CHAPTER XIX

MORE COUSINS

Patty was not sorry when her Elmbridge cousins concluded their visit, and the evening after their departure she sat on the veranda with her father, talking about them.

"It's a pity," she said, "that Ethelyn is so ill-tempered; for she's so pretty and graceful, and she's really very bright and entertaining when she is pleased. But so much of the time she is displeased, and then there's no doing anything with her."

"She's selfish, Patty," said her father; "and selfishness is just about the worst fault in the catalogue. A selfish person cannot be happy. You probably learned something to that effect from your early copybooks, but it is none the less true."

"I know it, papa, and I do think that selfishness is the worst fault there is; and though I fight against it, do you know I sometimes think that living here alone with you, and having my own way in everything, is making me rather a selfish individual myself."

"I don't think you need worry about that," said a hearty voice, and Kenneth Harper appeared at the veranda steps. "Pardon me, I wasn't eavesdropping, but I couldn't help overhearing your last remark, and I think it my duty to set your mind at rest on that score. Selfishness is not your besetting sin, Miss Patty Fairfield, and I can't allow you to libel yourself."

"I quite agree with you, Ken," said Mr. Fairfield. "My small daughter may not be absolutely perfect, but selfishness is not one of her faults. At least, that's the conclusion I've come to, after observing her pretty carefully through her long and checkered career."

"Well, if I'm not selfish, I will certainly become vain if so many compliments are heaped upon me," said Patty, laughing; "and I'm sure I value very highly the opinions of two such wise men."

"Oh, say a man and a boy," said young Harper modestly.

"All right, I will," said Patty, "but I'm not sure which is which. Sometimes I think papa more of a boy than you are, Ken."

"Now you've succeeded in complimenting us both at once," said Mr. Fairfield, "which proves you clever as well as unselfish."

"Well, never mind me for the present," said Patty; "I want to talk about some other people, and they are some more of my cousins."

"A commodity with which you seem to be well supplied," said Kenneth.

"Indeed I am; I have a large stock yet in reserve, and I think, papa, that I'll ask Bob and Bumble to visit me for a few weeks."

"Do," said Mr. Fairfield, "if you would enjoy having them, but not otherwise. You've just been through a siege of entertaining cousins, and I think you deserve a vacation."

"Oh, but these are so different," said Patty. "Bob and Bumble are nothing like the St. Clairs. They enjoy everything, and they're always happy."

"I like their name," said Kenneth. "Bumble isn't exactly romantic, but it sounds awfully jolly."

"She is jolly," said Patty, "and so is Bob. They're twins, about sixteen, and they're just brimming over with fun and mischief. Bumble's real name is Helen, but I guess no one ever called her that. Helen seems to mean a fair, tall girl, slender and graceful, and rather willowy; and Bumble is just the opposite of that: she's round and solid, and always tumbling down; at least she used to be, but she may have outgrown that habit now. Anyway, she's a dear."

"And what is Bob like?" asked her father. "I haven't seen him since he was a baby."

"Bob? Oh, he's just plain boy; awfully nice and obliging and good-hearted and unselfish, but I don't believe he'll ever be President."

"I think I shall like your two cousins," said Kenneth, with an air of conviction. "When are they coming?"

"I shall ask them right away, and I hope they'll soon come. How much longer shall you be in Vernondale?"

"Oh, I think I'm a fixture for the summer. Aunt Locky wants me to spend my whole vacation here, and I don't know of any good reason why I shouldn't."

"I'm very glad; it will be awfully nice to have you here when the twins are, and perhaps somebody else will be here, too. I'm going to ask Nan Allen."

"Who is she?" inquired Mr. Fairfield.

"Oh, papa, don't you remember about her? She is a friend of the Barlows, and lives near them in Philadelphia, and she was visiting them down at Long Island when I was there last summer. She's perfectly lovely. She's a grown-up young lady, compared to Bumble and me—she's about twenty-two, I think—and I know Kenneth will lose his heart to her. He'll have no more use for schoolgirls."

"Probably not," said Kenneth; "but I'm afraid the adorable young lady will have no use for me. She won't if Hepworth's around, and he usually is. He's always cutting me out."

"Nothing of the sort," said Patty staunchly. "Mr. Hepworth is very nice, but he's papa's friend,"

"And whose friend am I?" said young Harper.

"You're everybody's friend," said Patty, smiling at him. "You're just 'Our Ken.'"

Miss Nan Allen was delighted to accept an invitation to Boxley Hall, and it was arranged that she and the Barlow twins should spend August there.

"A month is quite a long visit, Pattikins," said her father.

"Yes, but you see, papa, I stayed there three months. Now, if three of them stay here one month, it will be the same proportion. And, besides, I like them, and I want them to stay a good while. I shan't get tired of them."

"I don't believe you will, but you may get tired of the care of housekeeping, with guests for so long a time. But if you do, I shall pick up the whole tribe of you and bundle off for a trip of some sort."

"Oh, papa, I wish you would do that. I'd be perfectly delighted. I'll do my best to get tired, just so you'll take us."

"But if I remember your reports of your Barlow cousins, it seems to me they would not make the most desirable travelling companions. Aren't they the ones who were so helter-skelter, never were ready on time, never knew where things were, and, in fact, had never learned the meaning of the phrase 'Law and order'?"

"Yes, they're the ones, and truly they are something dreadful. Don't you remember they had a party and forgot to send out the invitations? And the first night I reached there, when I went to visit them, they forgot to have any bed in my room."

"Yes, I thought I remembered your writing to me about some such doings; and do you think you can enjoy a month with such visitors as that?"

"Oh, yes, papa, because they won't upset *my* house; and, really, they're the dearest people. Oh, I'm awfully fond of Bob and Bumble I And Nan Allen is lovely. Nobody can help liking her. She's not so helter-skelter as the others, but down at the Hurly-Burly nobody could help losing their things. Why, I even grew careless myself."

"Well, have your company, child, and I'll do all I can to make it pleasant for you and for them."

"I know you will, you dear old pearl of a father. Sometimes I think you enjoy my company as much as I do myself, but I suppose you don't really. I suppose you entertain the young people and pretend to enjoy it just to make me happy."

"I am happy, dear, in anything that makes you happy; though sixteen is not exactly an age contemporary with my own. But I enjoy having Hepworth down, and I like young Harper a great deal. Then, of course, I have my little friends, Mr. and Mrs. Elliott, to play with—so I am not entirely dependent on the kindergarten."

The Barlow twins and Nan Allen were expected to arrive on Thursday afternoon at four o'clock, and everything at Boxley Hall was in readiness for the arrival of the guests.

"Not that it's worth while to have everything in such spick-and-span order," said Patty to herself, "for the Barlows won't appreciate it, and what's more they'll turn everything inside out and upside down before they've been in the house an hour."

But, notwithstanding her conviction, she made her preparations as carefully as if for the most fastidious visitors and viewed the result with great satisfaction after it was finished.

She went down in the carriage to meet the train, delighted at the thought of seeing again her Barlow cousins, of whom she was really very fond.

"I wish Aunt Grace and Uncle Ted were coming, too," she said to herself; "but I suppose I couldn't take care of so many people at once. It would be like running a hotel."

The train had not arrived when they reached the station, so, telling the coachman to wait, Patty left the carriage and walked up and down the station platform.

"Hello, Patty, haven't your cousins come yet?"

"Why, Kenneth, is that you? No, they haven't come; I think the train must be late."

"Yes, it is a little, but there it is now, just coming into sight around the curve. May I stay and meet them? Or would you rather fall on their necks alone?"

"Oh, stay, I'd be glad to have you; but you'll have to walk back, there's no room in the carriage for you."

"Oh, that's all right. I have my wheel, thank you."

The train stopped, and a number of passengers alighted. But as the train went on and the small

crowd dispersed, Patty remarked in a most exasperated tone:

"Well, they didn't come on that train. I just knew they wouldn't. They are the most aggravating people! Now, nobody knows whether they were on that train and didn't know enough to get off, or whether they missed it at the New York end. What time is the next train?"

"I'm not sure," said Kenneth; "let's go in the station and find out."

The next train was due at 4.30, but the expected guests did not arrive on that either.

"There's no use in getting annoyed," said Patty, laughing, "for it's really nothing more nor less than I expected. The Barlows never catch the train they intend to take."

"And Miss Allen? Is she the same kind of an 'Old Reliable'?"

"No, Nan is different; and I believe that, left to herself, she'd be on time, though probably not ahead of time. But I've never seen her except with the Barlows, and when she was down at the Hurly-Burly she was just about as uncertain as the rest of them."

"Is the Hurly-Burly the Barlow homestead?"

"Well, it's their summer home, and it's really a lovely place. But its name just expresses it. I spent three months there last summer, and I had an awfully good time, but no one ever knew what was going to happen next or when it would come off. But everybody was so good-natured that they didn't mind a bit. Well, I suppose we may as well drive back home. There's no telling when these people will come. Very likely not until to-morrow."

Just then a small messenger boy came up to Patty and handed her a telegram.

"Just as I thought!" exclaimed Patty. "They've done some crazy thing."

Opening the yellow envelope, she read:

"Took wrong train. Carried through to Philadelphia. Back this evening. BOB."

"Well, then, they can't get here until that nine-o'clock train comes in," said Kenneth, "so there's no use in your waiting any longer now."

"No, I suppose not," said Patty; "I'm awfully disappointed. I wish they had come."

An east-bound train had just come into the station, and Patty and Kenneth stood idly watching it, when suddenly Patty exclaimed:

"There they are now! Did you ever know such ridiculous people?"

CHAPTER XX

A FAIR EXCHANGE

"We didn't have to go to Philadelphia after all," explained Bob, after greetings had been exchanged. "We found we could get off at New Brunswick and come back from there."

"Why didn't you find out that before telegraphing?" laughed Patty.

"Never once thought of it," said Bob, "You know the Barlows are not noted for ingenuity."

"Well, they're noted for better things than that," said Patty, as she affectionately squeezed Bumble's plump arm.

"We wouldn't have thought of it at all," said honest Bob, "if it hadn't been for Nan. She suggested it."

"Well, I was sent along with instructions to look after you two rattle-pated youngsters," said Nan, "and so I had to do something to live up to my privileges; and now, Bob, you look after the luggage, will you?"

"Let me help," said Kenneth. "Where are your checks, Miss Allen?"

"Here are the checks for the trunks, and there are three suit-cases; the one that hasn't any name on is mine, and you tell it by the fact that it has an extra handle on the end. I'm very proud of that handle; I had it put on by special order, and it's so convenient, and it is identification besides. I didn't want my name painted on. I think it spoils a brand-new suit-case to have letters all over it."

"We'll find them all right; come on, Barlow," said Kenneth, and the two young men started off.

They returned in a few moments with the three suit-cases, Bob bringing his own and his sister's, while Kenneth Harper carefully carried the immaculate leather case with the handle on the end. These were deposited in the Fairfield carriage. Patty and her guests were also tucked in, and they started for the house, while Kenneth followed on his wheel.

"Come over to-night," Patty called back to him, as they left him behind; and though his answer was lost in the distance, she had little doubt as to its tenor.

"What a nice young fellow!" said Nan. "Who is he?"

"He's the nephew of our next-door neighbour," said Patty; "and he's spending his vacation with his aunt."

"He's a jolly all-round chap," said Bob.

"Yes, he's just that," said Patty. "I thought you'd like him. You'll like all the young people here. They're an awfully nice crowd."

"I'm so glad to see *you* again," said Bumble, "I don't care whether I like the other young people or not. And I want to see Uncle Fred, too. I haven't seen him for years and years."

"Oh, he's one of the young people," said Patty, laughing; "he goes 'most everywhere with us. I tell him he's more of a boy than Ken."

As they drove up to the house, Bumble exclaimed with delight at the beautiful flowers and the well-kept appearance of the whole place.

"What a lovely home!" she cried. "I don't see how you ever put up with our tumble-down old place, Patty."

"Nonsense!" said Patty. "I had the time of my life down at the Hurly-Burly last summer."

"Well, we're going to have the time of our life at Boxley Hall this summer, I feel sure of that," said Bob, as he sprang out of the carriage and then helped the others out.

"I hope you will," said Patty. "You are very welcome to Boxley Hall, and I want you just to look upon it as your home and conduct yourselves accordingly."

"Nan can do that," said Bumble, "but I'm afraid, if Bob and I did it, your beautiful home would soon lose its present spick-and-span effect."

"All right, let it lose," said Patty. "We'll have a good time anyhow. And now," she went on, as she took the guests to their rooms, "there'll be just about an hour before dinner time but if you get ready before that come down. You'll probably find me on the front veranda, if I'm not in the kitchen."

Bob was the first one to reappear, and he found Patty and her father chatting on the front veranda.

"How do you do, Uncle Fred?" he said. "You may know my name, but I doubt if you remember my features."

"Hello, Bob, my boy," said Mr. Fairfield, cordially grasping the hand held out to him. "As I last saw you with features of infantile vacancy, I am glad to start fresh and make your acquaintance all over again."

"Thank you, sir," said Bob, as he seated himself on the veranda railing. "I didn't know you as an infant, but I dare say you were a very attractive one."

"I think I was," said Mr. Fairfield; "at least I remember hearing my mother say so, and surely she ought to know."

Just then Bumble came out on the porch with her hair-ribbon in her hand.

"Please tie this for me, Patty," she said. "I cannot manage it myself, and get it on quick before Uncle Fred sees me."

"But I am so glad to see you, my dear Bumble," said Mr. Fairfield, "that even that piece of pretty blue ribbon can't make me any gladder."

Bumble smiled back at him in her winning way, and Patty tied her cousin's hair-ribbon with a decided feeling of relief that in all other respects Bumble's costume was tidy and complete.

"Where's Nan?" she inquired; "isn't she ready yet?"

"Why, it's the funniest thing," said Bumble, "I tapped at her door as I came by, but she told me to go on and not wait for her, she would come down in a few minutes."

Just as Pansy appeared to announce dinner, Nan did come down, and Patty stared at her in amazement. Bob whistled, and Bumble exclaimed:

"Well, for goodness gracious sakes! What are you up to now?"

For Nan, instead of wearing the pretty gown which Bumble knew she had brought in her suitcase, was garbed in the complete costume of a trained nurse. A white piqué skirt and linen shirt-waist of immaculate and starched whiteness, an apron with regulation shoulder-straps, and a cap that betokened a graduate of St. Luke's Hospital, formed her surprising, but not at all unbecoming, outfit.

Nan's roguish face looked very demure under the white cap, and she smiled pleasantly when Patty at last recovered her wits sufficiently to introduce her father.

"Nan," she said, "if this is really you, let me present my father; and, papa, this is supposed to be Miss Nan Allen, but I never saw her look like this before."

"I am very glad to meet you, Miss Allen," said Mr. Fairfield, "and though we are all apparently very well at present, one can never tell how soon there may be need of your professional services."

"I hope not very soon," said Nan, laughing; "for my professional knowledge is scarcely sufficient to enable me to adjust this costume properly."

"It seems to be on all right," said Patty, looking at it critically; "but where in the world did you get it? And what have you got it on for? We're not going to a masquerade."

"I put it on," said Nan, "because I couldn't help myself. I wanted to change my travelling gown, and when I opened my suit-case this is all there was in it, except some combs and brushes and bottles."

"Whew!" said Bob. "When I picked up that suit-case I wasn't quite sure I had the right one. You know I went back for it after we left the train at New Brunswick, and you said it was the only one in the world with a handle on the end."

"I thought it was," said Nan, "but it seems somebody else was clever enough to have an end-handle too, and she was a trained nurse, apparently."

"Many of the new suit-cases have handles on the end," said Mr. Fairfield, "though not common as yet I have seen a number of them. But just imagine how the nurse feels who is obliged to wear your dinner gown instead of her uniform."

"I hope she won't spoil it," exclaimed Bumble. "It was that lovely light blue thing, one of the prettiest frocks you own."

"I can imagine her now," said Bob: "she is probably bathing the brow of a sleepless patient, and the lace ruffles and turquoise bugles are helping along a lot. In fact, I think she's looking rather nice going around a sick-room in that blue bombazine."

"It isn't bombazine, Bob," said his sister; "it's beautiful, lovely light-blue chiffon."

"Well, beautiful, lovely light-blue chiffon, then; but anyway, I'm sure the nurse is glad of a chance to wear it instead of her own plain clothes."

"But her own plain clothes are not at all unpicturesque, and are very becoming to Miss Allen," said Mr. Fairfield. "But haven't your trunks come?" he added, as they all went out to dinner.

"No," said Bob; "Mr. Harper and I investigated the baggage-room, but they weren't there."

"Oh, call him Kenneth," said Patty. "You boys are too young for such formality."

"I may be," said Bob, "but he isn't. He's a college man."

"He's a college boy," said Patty; "he's only nineteen, and you're sixteen yourself."

"Going on seventeen," said Bob proudly, "and so is Bumble."

"Twins often are the same age," observed Mr. Fairfield, "and after a few years, Bob, you'll have to be careful how you announce your own age, because it will reveal your sister's."

"Pooh! I don't care," said Bumble. "I'd just as lieve people would know how old I am. Nan is twenty-two, and she doesn't care who knows it."

"You look about fifty in those ridiculous clothes," said Patty.

"Do I?" said Nan, quite unconcernedly. "I don't mind that a bit, but I don't think I can keep them at this stage of whiteness for many days. Can anything be done to coax our trunks this way?"

"We might do some telephoning after dinner," said Mr. Fairfield. "What is the situation up to the present time?"

"Why, you see it was this way," said Bumble. "When the carriage came to take us to the station, the trunks weren't quite ready, and mamma said for us to go on and she'd finish packing them and send them down in time to get that train or the next."

"And did they come for that train?"

"No, they didn't, and so, of course, they must have been sent on the next one; but even so, they ought to be here now, because, you know, we went on through and came back."

"But how did you get your checks if your trunks weren't put on the train?"

"Oh, the baggageman knows us," explained Bob, "and he gave us our checks and kept the duplicates to put on our trunks when they came down to the station. He often does that."

"Yes," said Bumble, "we've never had our trunks ready yet when the man came for them."

"Nan's was ready," put in Bob, who was a great stickler for justice, "but, of course, hers couldn't go till ours did. Oh, I guess they'll turn up all right."

They did turn up all right twenty-four hours later, but the exchange of suit-cases was not so easily effected.

However, after more or less correspondence between Nan and the nurse who owned the uniform, the transfer was finally made, and Nan recovered her pretty blue gown, which certainly bore no evidence of having been worn in a sickroom.

"But I bet she wore it, all the same," said Bob. "She probably neglected her patient and went to a party that night just because she had the frock."

CHAPTER XXI

A GOOD SUGGESTION

August at Boxley Hall proved to be a month of fun and frolic. The Barlow cousins were much easier to entertain than the St. Clairs. In fact, they entertained themselves, and as for Nan Allen, she entertained everybody with whom she came in contact. Mr. Fairfield expressed himself as being delighted to have Patty under the influence of such a gracious and charming young woman, and Aunt Alice quite agreed with him. Marian adored Nan, and though she liked Bumble very much indeed, she took more real pleasure in the society of the older girl.

But they were a congenial crowd of merry young people, and when Mr. Hepworth came down from the city, as he often did, and Kenneth Harper drifted in from next-door, as he very often did, the house party at Boxley Hall waxed exceeding merry.

And there was no lack of social entertainment. The Vernondale young people were quite ready to provide pleasures for Patty's guests, and the appreciation shown by Nan and the Barlows was a decided and very pleasant contrast to the attitude of Ethelyn and Reginald.

Sailing parties occurred often, and these Nan enjoyed especially, for she was passionately fond of the water, and dearly loved sailing or rowing.

The Tea Club girls all liked Nan, and though she was older than most of them, she enjoyed their meetings quite as much as Bumble, Marian, or Patty herself.

Bob soon made friends with the "Tea Club Annex," as the boys of Patty's set chose to call themselves. Though not a club of any sort, they were always invited when the Tea Club had anything special going on, and many times when it hadn't.

One afternoon the Tea Club was holding its weekly meeting at Marian's.

"Do you know," Elsie Morris was saying, "that the Babies' Hospital is in need of funds again? Those infants are perfect gormandisers. I don't see how they can eat so much or wear so many clothes."

"Babies always wear lots of clothes," said Lillian Desmond, with an air of great wisdom. "I've seen them; they just bundle them up in everything they can find, and then wrap more things around them."

"Well, they've used up all their wrappings," said Elsie Morris, "and they want more. I met Mrs. Greenleaf this morning in the street, and she stopped me to ask if we girls wouldn't raise some more money for them somehow."

"Oh, dear!" said Florence Douglass. "They just want us to work all the time for the old hospital; I'm tired of it."

"Why, Florence!" said Patty. "We haven't done a thing since we had that play last winter. I think it would be very nice to have some entertainment or something and make some money for them again. We could have some summery outdoorsy kind of a thing like a lawn party, you know."

"Yes," said Laura Russell, "and have it rain and spoil everything; and soak all the Chinese lanterns, and drench all the people's clothes, and everybody would run into the house and track mud all over. Oh, it would be lovely!"

"What a cheerful view you do take of things, Laura," said Elsie Morris. "Now, you know it's just as likely not to rain as to rain."

"More likely," said Nan. "It doesn't rain twice as often as it rains. Now I believe it would be a beautiful bright day, or moonlight night, whichever you have the party, and nobody will get their clothes spoiled, and the lanterns will burn lovely, and you will have a big crowd, and it would be a howling success, and you'd make an awful lot of money."

"That picture sounds very attractive," said Polly Stevens, "and I say let's do it. But somehow I don't like a lawn party—it's so tame. Let's have something real novel and original. Nan, you must know of something."

"I don't," said Nan. "I'm stupid as an owl about such things. But if you can decide on something to have, I'll help all I can with it."

"And Nan's awful good help!" put in Bumble. "She works and works and works, and never gets tired. I'll help, too; I'd love to, only I'm not much good."

"We'll take all the help that's offered," said Elsie Morris, "of any quality whatsoever. But what can the show be?"

No amount of thinking or discussion seemed to suggest any novel enterprise by which a fortune could be made at short notice, and at last Nan said: "I should think, Patty, that Mr. Hepworth could help. He's always having queer sorts of performances in his studio. Don't you know the Mock Art exhibition he told us about?"

"Oh, yes," said Patty; "he'd be sure to know of something for us to do; and I think he's coming out with papa to-night. I'll ask him."

"Do," said Elsie; "and tell him it must be something that's heaps of fun, and that we'll all like, and that's never been done here before."

"All right," said Patty. "Anything else?"

"Yes; it must be something to appeal to the popular taste and draw a big crowd, so we can make a lot of money for the babies."

"Very well," said Patty; "I'll tell him all that, and I'm sure he'll suggest just the right thing."

Mr. Hepworth did come down that night, and when the girls asked him for suggestions he very willingly began to think up plans for them.

"I should think you might make a success," he said, "of an entertainment like one I attended up in the mountains last summer. It was called a 'County Fair,' and was a sort of burlesque on the county fairs or state fairs that used to be held annually, and are still, I believe, in some sections of the country."

"It sounds all right so far," said Patty. "Tell us more about it."

"Well, you know you get everybody interested, and you have a committee for all the different parts of it."

"What are the different parts of it?"

"Oh, they're the domestic department, where you exhibit pies and bed-quilts and spatter-work done by the ladies in charge."

"Of course, these exhibits aren't real, you know, Patty," said her father; "and you girls would probably be tempted to put up gay jokes on each other. For instance, that rockery arrangement of Pansy's might be exhibited as your idea of art work."

"I wouldn't mind the joke on myself, papa," said Patty, "but it might not please Pansy. But we can get plenty of things to exhibit in the domestic department. That will be easy enough. I'll borrow Miss Daggett's pumpkin bed-quilt to exhibit as my latest achievement in the line of applied art, and I'll make a pie and label it Laura Russell's, which will take the first prize; but what other departments are there, Mr. Hepworth?"

"Well, the horticulture department can be made very humorous, as well as lucrative. At this fair I went to, the ladies had a beautiful table full of pin-cushions and other gimcracks, in the shape of fruits and vegetables."

"Oh, yes," said Bumble, "I know how to make those. I can make bananas and potatoes and Nan can make lovely strawberries."

"And I can make paper flowers," said Bob, "honest, I can! Great big sunflowers and tiger lilies, and you can use them for lampshades if you like."

"Yes, the horticulture booth will be easy enough," said Nan. "I'll help a lot with that. Now, what else?"

"Then you can have an art gallery, if you like. Burlesque, of course, with ridiculous pictures and statues. I know where I can borrow a lot for you in New York."

"Gorgeous!" cried Patty, clapping her hands. "What a trump you are! What else?"

"A loan exhibition is of real interest," said Mr. Hepworth. "If you've never had one of those here, I think one or two of your members could arrange a very effective little exhibit by borrowing objects of interest from their friends about town."

"I'm sure of it," said Patty. "Miss Daggett has lovely things, and so has Mrs. Greenleaf, and Aunt Alice, and lots of people. We'll let Florence Douglass and Lillian Desmond look after that. It's just in their line."

"And then you must have side shows, you know; funny performances, like 'Punch and Judy,' and a fortune-telling gipsy. And then all the people who take part in it must wear fancy or grotesque costumes. And the great feature of the whole show is a parade of these people in their eccentric garb. Some walk, while others ride on decorated steeds, or in queer vehicles. Of course, there's lots of detail and lots of work about it, but if you go into the thing with any sort of enthusiasm, I'm sure you can make a big success of it."

They did go into the thing with all sorts of enthusiasm, and they did make a big success of it.

The Tea Club girls declared the scheme a fine one, and the Boys' Annex announced themselves as ready to help in any and every possible way. Committees were appointed to attend to the different departments, and as these committees were carefully selected with a view to giving each what he or

she liked best to do, the whole work went on harmoniously.

The site chosen for the county fair was the old Warner place. As this was still unoccupied, it made a most appropriate setting for the projected entertainment. When Mr. Hepworth saw it he declared it was ideal for the purpose, and immediately began to make plans for utilising the different rooms of the old house.

A loan exhibition was to be held in one; and, as Patty had foreseen, many old relics and heirlooms of great interest were borrowed from willing lenders around town. In another room was the domestic exhibition, and in another the horticultural show was held.

One room was devoted to amusing the children, and contained a Punch and Judy show, fish pond, and various games.

There was a candy kitchen, where white-capped cooks could make candy and sell it to immediate purchasers.

It had been decided to hold the fair during the afternoon and evening of two consecutive days. As Nan had prophesied, these days showed weather beyond all criticism. Not too warm to be pleasant, but with bright sunshine and a gentle breeze.

At three o'clock the grand parade began, and the spectators watched with glee the grotesque figures that passed them in line.

Patty, whose special department was the candy kitchen, was dressed as the Queen of Hearts who made the renowned tarts. Mr. Hepworth had designed her dress, and though it was of simple white cheese-cloth, trimmed with red-and-gold hearts, it was very effective and becoming. She wore a gilt crown, and carried a gilt sceptre, and rode in her own little pony cart, which had been so gaily decorated for the occasion that it was quite unrecognisable. Kenneth Harper, as the Knave of Hearts, who wickedly stole the tarts, sat by her side and drove the little chariot.

Nan was dressed as a gipsy. She had a marvellous tent in which to tell fortunes, and in the parade she rode on a much-bedecked donkey.

Marian was a dame of olden time, and Bumble was a Japanese lady of high degree.

There were quaint and curious costumes of all sorts, each of which provoked much mirth or admiration from the enthusiastic audience.

After the parade, the fair was announced open, and the patrons were requested to spend their money freely for the benefit of the hospital.

So well did they respond that, as a result of their efforts, the Tea Club girls were able to present Mrs. Greenleaf with the sum of five hundred dollars toward her good work.

CHAPTER XXII

AT THE SEASHORE

Toward the end of August the Barlows' visit drew toward its close. Although Patty was sorry to have her cousins go, yet she looked forward with a certain sense of relief to being once more alone with her father.

"It's lovely to have company," she confided to her Aunt Alice one day, "and I do enjoy it ever so much, only somehow I get tired of ordering and looking after things day after day."

"All housekeepers have that experience, Patty, dear," said Aunt Alice, "but they're usually older than you before they begin. It is a great deal of care for a girl of sixteen, and though you get along beautifully, I'm sure it has been rather a hard summer for you."

So impressed was Mrs. Elliott with these facts that she talked to Mr. Fairfield about the matter, and advised him to take Patty away somewhere for a little rest and change before beginning her school year again.

Mr. Fairfield agreed heartily to this plan, expressed himself as willing to take Patty anywhere, and suggested that some of the Elliotts go, too.

When Patty's opinion was asked, she said she would be delighted to go away for a vacation, and that she had the place all picked out.

"Well, you are an expeditious young woman," said her father. "And where is it that you want to go?"

"Why, you see, papa, the 1st of September, when Bob and Bumble go home from here, Nan isn't going back with them; she's going down to Spring Lake. That's a place down on the New Jersey coast, and I've never been there, and she says it's lovely, and so I want to go there."

"Well, I don't see any reason why you shouldn't," said Mr. Fairfield. "It would suit me well enough, if Nan is willing we should follow in her footsteps."

"I'm delighted to have you," said Nan, who was in a hammock at the other end of the veranda when this conclave was taking place.

"I wish we could go with the crowd," said Bob, who was perched on the veranda railing.

"I wish so, too," said Bumble; "but wishing doesn't do any good. After that letter father wrote yesterday, I think the best thing for us to do is to scurry home as fast as we can."

So the plans were made according to Patty's wish, and a few days after the Barlow twins returned to their home, a merry party left Vernondale for Spring Lake.

This party consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Elliott and Marian, Mr. Fairfield, Patty, and Nan.

They had all arranged for rooms in the same hotel to which Nan was going, and where her parents were awaiting her.

Marlborough House was its name, and very attractive and comfortable it looked to the Vernondale people as they arrived about four o'clock one afternoon in early September.

Mr. and Mrs. Allen proved to be charming people who were more than ready to show any courtesies in their power to the Fairfields, who had so kindly entertained Nan.

Although an older couple than the Elliotts, they proved to be congenial companions, and after a day or two the whole party felt as if they had known each other all their lives. Acquaintances ripen easily at the seashore, and Patty soon came to the conclusion that she was beginning what was to be one of the pleasantest experiences of her life.

And so it proved; although Mr. Fairfield announced that Patty had come down for a rest, and that there was to be very little, if any, gaiety allowed, yet somehow there was always something pleasant going on.

Every day there was salt-water bathing, and this was a great delight to Patty. The summer before, at her uncle's home on Long Island, she had learned to swim, and though it was more difficult to swim in the surf, yet it was also more fun. Nan was an expert swimmer, and Marian knew nothing of the art, but the three girls enjoyed splashing about in the water, and were never quite ready to come out when Aunt Alice or Mrs. Allen called to them from the beach.

In the afternoons there were long walks or drives along the shore, and the exercise and salt air soon restored to Patty the robust health and strength which her father feared she had lost during the summer.

In the evening there was dancing—sometimes hops, but more often informal dancing among the young people staying at the hotel. All three of our girls were fond of dancing, and excelled in the art, but Patty was especially graceful and skillful.

The first Saturday night after their arrival at Marlborough House, a large dance was to be held, and this was really Patty's first experience at what might be termed a ball.

She was delighted with the prospect, and her father had ordered her a beautiful new frock from New York, which proved to be rather longer than any she had as yet worn.

"I feel so grown up in it," she exclaimed, as she tried it on to show her father. "I think I'll have to do up my hair when I wear this grand costume; It doesn't seem just right to have it tied up with a little girl hair-ribbon."

"Patty, my child, I do believe you're growing up!" said her father.

"I do believe I am, papa; I'm almost seventeen, and I'm taller than Aunt Alice now, and a lot taller than Marian."

"It isn't only your height, child, you always were a big girl. But you seem to be growing up in other ways, and I don't believe I like it I was glad when you were no longer a child, but I like to have you a little girl, and I don't believe I'll care for you a bit when you're a young woman."

"Now, isn't that too bad!" said Patty, pinching her father's cheek. "I suppose I'll have to suit myself with another father—I'm sure I couldn't live with anybody who didn't like me a bit. Well, perhaps Uncle Charley will adopt me; he seems to like me at any age."

"Oh, I'll try and put up with you," said her father, kissing her. "And meantime, what's this talk about piling up your hair on top of your head. Is it really absolutely necessary to do so, if you wear this frippery confection of dry-goods?"

"Oh, not necessary, perhaps, but I think it would look better. At any rate, I'll just try it."

"Well, you don't seem to be standing with very *reluctant* feet," said her father. "I believe you're rather anxious to grow up, after all; but run along, chicken, and dress your hair any way you please. I want you to have a good time at your first ball."

As Frank Elliott and Kenneth Harper and Mr. Hepworth came down to Spring Lake to stay over Sunday, the party of friends at Marlborough House was considerably augmented. When the young men arrived the girls were lazily basking on the sand, and Nan was pretending to read a book to the other two. Only pretending, however, for Patty kept interrupting her with nonsensical remarks, and Marian teased her by slowly sifting sand through her fingers onto the pages of the book.

"I might as well try to read to a tribe of wild Indians as to you two girls," said Nan at last. "Don't you *want* your minds improved?"

"Do you think our superior minds *can* be improved by that trash you're reading?" said Patty. "I really think some of your instructive conversation would benefit us more greatly."

"You're an ungrateful pair," said Nan, "and you don't deserve that I should waste my valuable conversation upon you. And you don't deserve, either, that I should tell you to turn your heads around to see who's coming—but I will."

Her hearers looked round quickly, and saw three familiar figures coming along the board walk.

"Goody!" cried Patty, and scrambling to her feet, she ran with outstretched hands to meet them.

She didn't look very grown up then, in her blue-serge beach dress and her hair in a long thick braid down her back, and curling round her temples in windblown locks; but to Mr. Hepworth's artist eye she looked more beautiful than he had ever seen her.

Kenneth Harper, too, looked admiringly at the graceful figure flying toward them across the sand, but Frank shouted:

"Hello, Patty, don't break your neck! we're coming down there. Where's Marian?"

"She's right here," answered Patty; "we're all right here. Your mother's up on the veranda. Oh, I'm so glad to see you! This is the loveliest place, and we're having the beautifullest time; and now that you boys have come, it will be better than ever. And there's going to be a hop tonight! Isn't that gay? Oh, how do you do, Mr. Hepworth?"

Though Patty's manner took on a shade more of dignity in addressing the older man, it lost nothing in cordiality, and he responded with words of glad greeting.

Hearing the laughter and excitement, Aunt Alice and Mrs. Allen came down from the veranda to sit on the sand by the young people. Soon Mr. Fairfield and Mr. Allen and Mr. Elliott, returning from a stroll, joined the party.

The newcomers produced divers and sundry parcels, which they turned over to the ladies, and which proved to contain various new books and magazines and delicious candies and fruits.

"It's just like Christmas!" exclaimed Patty. "I do love to have things brought to me."

"You're certainly in your element now, then," said Mr. Fairfield, looking at his daughter, who sat with a fig in one hand and a chocolate in the other, trying to open a book with her elbows.

"I certainly am," she responded. "The only flaw is that I suppose it's about time to go in to dinner. I wish we could all sit here on the sand forever."

"You'd change your mind when you reached my age," said Mrs. Allen. "I'm quite ready to go in now and find a more comfortable chair."

Later that evening Patty, completely arrayed for the dance, came to her father for inspection.

"You look very sweet, my child," he said after gazing at her long and earnestly; "and with your hair dressed that way you look very much like your mother. I'm sorry you're growing up, my baby, I certainly am; but I suppose it can't be helped unless the world stops turning around. And if it's any satisfaction to you, I'd like to have you know that your father thinks you the prettiest and sweetest girl in all the country round."

"And aren't you going to tell me that if I only behave as well as I look, I'll do very nicely?"

"You seem to know that already, so I hardly think it's necessary."

"Well, I'll tell it to you, then; for you do look so beautiful in evening clothes that I don't believe you *can* behave as well as you look. Nobody could."

"I see your growing up has taught you flattery," said her father, "a habit you must try to overcome."

But Patty was already dancing down the long hall to Aunt Alice's room, and a few moments later they all went down to the parlours.

When Kenneth first saw Patty that evening, he stood looking at her with a funny, stupefied expression on his face.

"What's the matter?" said Patty, laughing. "Just because I'm wearing a few extra hairpins you needn't look as if you'd lost your last friend."

"I—I feel as if I ought to call you Miss Fairfield."

"Well, call me that if you like, I don't mind. Call me Miss Smith or Miss Brown, if you want to—I don't care what you call me, if you'll only ask me to dance."

"Come on, then," said Kenneth; and in a moment they were whirling in the waltz, and the boy's momentary embarrassment was entirely forgotten.

CHAPTER XXIII

AMBITIONS

"There!" said Kenneth, after the dance was over, "you look more like your old self now."

"I haven't lost any hairpins, have I?" said Patty, putting up her hands to her fluffy topknot.

"No, but you've lost that absurd dressed-up look."

"I'm getting used to my new frock. Don't you like it?"

"Yes, of course I do. I like everything you wear, because I like you. In fact, I think I like you better than any girl I ever saw."

Kenneth said this in such a frank, boyish way that he seemed to be announcing a mere casual preference for some matter-of-fact thing.

At least it seemed so to Patty, and she answered carelessly:

"You *think* you do! I'd like you to be sure of it, sir."

"I am sure of it," said Ken, and then, a little more diffidently: "Do you like me best?"

"Why, yes, of course I do," said Patty, smiling, "that is, after papa and Aunt Alice and Marian and Uncle Charley and Frank and Mancy and Pansy—and Mr. Hepworth."

Patty might not have added the last name if she had not just then seen that gentleman coming toward her.

He looked at Patty with an especial kindness in his eyes, and said gently:

"Miss Fairfield, may I see your card?"

Patty flushed a little and her eyes fell.

"Please don't talk like that," she said. "I'm not grown up, if I am dressed up. I'm only Patty, and if you call me anything else I'll run away."

"Don't run away," said Mr. Hepworth, still looking at her with that grave kindness that seemed to have about it a touch of sadness. "I will call you Patty as long as you will stay with me."

Then Patty smiled again, quite her own merry little self, and gave him her card, saying:

"Put your name down a lot of times, please; you are a beautiful dancer, and I like best to dance with the people I know best."

"I wish I had a rubber stamp," said Mr. Hepworth; "it's very fatiguing to write one's name on every line."

"Oh, good gracious!" cried Patty, "don't take them all. I want to save a lot for Frank and Ken—"

"And your father," said Mr. Hepworth.

"Papa? He doesn't dance—at least, I never saw him."

"But he did dance that last waltz, with Miss Allen."

"With Nan? Well, then, I rather think he can dance with his own daughter. Don't take any more; I want all the rest for him, and please take me to him."

"Here he comes now. Mr. Fairfield, your daughter wishes a word with you."

"Papa Fairfield!" exclaimed Patty, "you never told me you could dance!"

"You never asked me; you took it for granted that I was too old to frisk around the ballroom."

"And aren't you?" asked Patty teasingly.

"Try me and see," said her father, as he took her card.

The trial proved very satisfactory, and Patty declared that she must have inherited her own taste for dancing from her father.

The evening passed all too swiftly. Pretty Patty, with her merry ways and graceful manners, was a real belle, and Aunt Alice was besieged by requests for introductions to her niece and daughter. But Marian, though a sweet and charming girl, had a certain shyness which always kept her from becoming an immediate favourite. Patty's absolute lack of self-consciousness and her ready friendliness made her popular at once.

Mr. Fairfield and Nan Allen were speaking of this, as they stood out on the veranda and looked at Patty through the window.

"She's the most perfect combination," Miss Allen was saying, "of the child and the girl. She has none of the silly affectations of young-ladyhood, and yet she has in her nature all the elements that go to make a wise and sensible woman."

"I think you're right," said Mr. Fairfield, as he looked fondly at his daughter. "She is growing up just as I want her to, and developing the traits I most want her to possess. A frank simplicity of manner, a happy, fun-loving disposition, and a gentle, unselfish soul."

Meantime Patty and Mr. Hepworth were sitting on the stairs.

"Now my cup of happiness is full," remarked Patty. "I have always thought it must be perfect bliss to sit on the stairs at a party. I don't know why, I'm sure, but all the information I have gathered from art and literature have led me to consider it the height of earthly joy."

"And is it proving all your fancy painted it?" asked Mr. Hepworth, who was sitting a step below.

"Yes—that is, it's almost perfect."

"And what is the lacking element?"

"Oh, I wouldn't like to tell you," said Patty, and Mr. Hepworth was not quite certain whether her confusion were real or simulated.

"May I guess?" he asked.

"Yes, if you'll promise not to guess true," said Patty. "If you did, I should be overcome with blushing embarrassment."

"But I am going to guess, and if I guess true I will promise to go and bring you the element that will complete your happiness."

"That sounds so tempting," said Patty, "that now I hope you *will* guess true. What is the missing joy?"

"Kenneth Harper," said Mr. Hepworth, looking at Patty curiously.

Without a trace of a blush Patty broke into gay laughter.

"Oh, you are ridiculous!" she said. "I have *you* here, why should I want him?"

"Then what is it you do want?" and Mr. Hepworth looked away as he evaded her question.

"Since you make me confess my very prosaic desires, I'll own up that I'd like a strawberry ice."

"Well, that's just what I'm dying for myself," said Mr. Hepworth gaily; "and if you'll reserve this orchestra chair for me, I'll go and forage for it. It looks almost impossible to get through that crowd, but I'll return either with my shield or on it. Unless you'd rather I'd send Harper back with the ice?"

"Do just as you please," said Patty, with a sudden touch of coquetry in her smiling eyes; "it doesn't matter a bit to me."

But though a willing messenger, Mr. Hepworth found it impossible to accomplish his errand with any degree of rapidity, and when he returned, successful but tardy, he found young Harper waiting where he had left Patty.

"She's gone off to dance with Frank Elliott," explained the boy cheerfully, "and she said you and I could divide the ices between us."

"All right," said the artist; "here's your share."

The next morning Patty, Nan, and Marian went down to the beach for a quiet chat.

"Let's shake everybody," said Patty, "and just go off by ourselves. I'm tired of a lot of people."

"You're becoming such a belle, Patty," said Nan, "that I'm afraid you'll be bothered with a lot of people the rest of your life."

"No, I won't," said Patty. "Lots of people are all very well when you want them, but I'm going to cultivate a talent for getting rid of them when you don't want them."

"Can you cultivate a talent, if you have only a taste to start with?" said Marian, with more seriousness than Patty's careless remark seemed to call for.

"If you have the least little scrap of a mustard-seed of taste, and plenty of will-power, you can cultivate all the talents you want," said Patty, with the air of an oracle, "Why, what do you want to do now, Marian?"

Marian's ambitions were a good deal of a joke in the Elliott family. At one time she had determined to become a musician, and had spent, unsuccessfully, many hours and much money in her endeavours, but at last she was obliged to admit that her talents did not lie in that direction. Later on she had tried painting, and notwithstanding discouraging results, she had felt sure of her artistic ability for a long time, until at last she had proved to her own satisfaction that she was not meant to make pictures; and

now, when she asked the above question in a serious tone, Patty felt sure that some new scheme was fermenting in her cousin's brain.

"What's up, Marian?" she said. "Out with it, and we'll promise to help you, if it's only by wise discouragement."

"I think," said Marian, unmoved by her cousin's attitude, "I think I should like to be an author."

"Do," said Patty; "that's the best line you've struck yet, because it's the cheapest. You see, Nan, when Marian goes in for painting and sculpture and music, her whims cost Uncle Charley fabulous sums of money. But this new scheme is great! The outlay for a fountain pen and a few sheets of stamps can't be so very much, and the scheme will keep you out of other mischief all winter."

"It does sound attractive," said Nan. "Tell us more about it. Are you going to write books or stories?"

"Books," said Marian calmly.

"Lovely!" cried Patty. "Do two at once, won't you? So you can dedicate one to Nan and one to me at the same time; I won't share my dedication with anybody."

"You can laugh all you like," said Marian; "I don't mind a speck, for I'm sure I can do it; I've been talking to Miss Fischer, she's written lots of books, you know, and stories, too, and she says it's awfully easy if you have a taste for it."

"Of course it is," said Patty; "that's just what I told you. If you have a taste—good taste, you know—and plenty of will-power and stamps, you can write anything you want to; and I believe you'll do it. Go in and win, Marian! You can put me in your book, if you want to."

"Willpower isn't everything, Patty," said Nan, whose face had assumed a curious and somewhat wistful look; "at least, it may be in literature, but it won't do all I want it to."

"What do you want, girlie?" said Patty. "I never knew you had an ungratified ambition gnawing at your heart-strings."

"Well, I have; I want to be a singer."

"You do sing beautifully," said Marian. "I've heard you."

"Yes, but I mean a great singer."

"On the stage?" inquired Patty.

"Yes, or in concerts; I don't care where, but I mean to sing wonderfully; to sing as I feel I could sing, if I had the opportunity."

"You mean a musical education and foreign study and all those things?" said Patty.

"Yes," said Nan.

"But after all that you might fail," said Marian, remembering her own experiences.

"Yes, I might, and probably I should. It's only a dream, you know, but we were talking about ambitions, and that's mine."

"And can't you accomplish it?"

"I don't see how I can; my parents are very much opposed to it. They hate anything like a public career, and they think I sing quite well enough now without further instructions."

"I think so, too," said Patty. "I'd rather hear you sing those quaint little songs of yours than to hear the most elaborate trills and frills that any prima donna ever accomplished."

"Your opinion is worth a great deal to me, Patty, as a friend, but technically, I can't value it so highly."

"Of course, I don't know much about music," said Patty, quite unabashed; "but papa thinks so too. He said your voice is the sweetest voice he ever heard."

"Did he?" said Nan.

"What is your ambition, Patty?" said Marian, after a moment's pause. "Nan and I have expressed ourselves so frankly you might tell us yours."

"My ambition?" said Patty. "Why, I never thought of it before, but I don't believe I have any. I feel rather ashamed, for I suppose every properly equipped young woman ought to have at least one ambition, and I don't seem to have a shadow of one. Really great ones, I mean. Of course, I can sing a little; not much, but it seems to be enough for me. And I can play a little on the piano and on the banjo, and I suppose it's shocking; but really I don't care to play any better than I do. I can't paint, and I can't write stories, but I don't want to do either."

"You can keep house," said Marian.

Patty's eyes lighted up.

"Yes," she said; "isn't it ridiculous? But I do really believe that's my ambition. To keep house just perfectly, you know, and have everything go not only smoothly but happily."

"You ought to have been a *chatelaine* of the fourteenth century," said Nan.

"Yes," said Patty eagerly; "that's just my ambition. What a pity it's looking backward instead of forward. But I would love to live in a great stone castle, all my own, with a moat and drawbridge and outriders, and go around in a damask gown with a pointed bodice and big puffy sleeves and a ruff and a little cap with pearls on it, and a bunch of keys jingling at my side."

"They usually carry the keys in a basket," observed Marian; "and you forgot to mention the falcon on your wrist."

"So I did," said Patty, "but I think the falcon would be a regular nuisance while I was housekeeping, so I'd put him in the basket, and set it up on the mantelpiece, and keep my keys jingling from my belt."

"Well, it seems," said Nan, "that Patty has more hopes of realising her ambition than either of us."

"Speak for yourself," said Marian.

"I think I have," said Patty. "I have all the keys I want, and I'm quite sure papa would buy me a falcon if I asked him to."

CHAPTER XXIV

AN AFTERNOON DRIVE

The next Saturday Mr. Fairfield proposed that they all go for a drive to Allaire.

"What's Allaire?" said Patty.

"It's a deserted village," replied her father. "The houses are empty, the old mill is silent, the streets are overgrown; in fact, it's nothing but a picturesque ruin of a once busy hamlet."

"They say it's a lovely drive," said Nan. "I've always wanted to go there."

"The boys will be down by noon," said Mr. Elliott, "and we can get off soon after luncheon. Do you suppose, Fred, we can get conveyances enough for our large and flourishing family?"

"We can try," said Mr. Fairfield. "I'll go over to the stables now and see what I can secure."

On his return he found that Hepworth, Kenneth, and Frank had arrived.

"Well, Saturday's children," he said, "I'm glad to see you. I always know it's the last day of the week when this illustrious trio bursts upon my vision."

"We're awfully glad to burst," said Frank; "and we hope your vision can stand it."

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Fairfield; "the sight of you is good for the eyes. And now I'll tell you the plans for the afternoon."

"What luck did you have with the carriages, papa?" asked impatient Patty.

"That's what I'm about to tell you, my child, if you'll give me half a chance. I secured four safe, and more or less commodious, vehicles."

"Four!" exclaimed Marian. "We'll be a regular parade."

"Shall we have a band?" asked Nan.

"Of course," said Kenneth; "and a fife-and-drum corps besides."

"You won't need that," said Patty, "for there'll be no 'Girl I Left Behind Me.' We're all going."

"Of course we're all going," said Mr. Fair-field; "and as we shall have one extra seat, you can invite some girl who otherwise would be left behind."

"If Frank doesn't mind," said Patty, with a mischievous glance at her cousin, "I'd like to ask Miss Kitty Nelson."

They all laughed, for Frank's admiration for the charming Kitty was an open secret.

Frank blushed a little, but he held his own and said:

"Are they all double carriages, Uncle Fred?"

"No, my boy; there are two traps and two victorias."

"All right, then, I'll take one of the traps and drive Miss Nelson."

"Bravo, boy! if you don't see what you want, ask for it. Miss Allen, will you trust yourself to me in the other trap?"

"With great pleasure, Mr. Fairfield," replied Nan; "and please appreciate my amiability, for I think they're most jolty and uncomfortable things to ride in."

"I speak for a seat in one of the victorias," said Aunt Alice; "and I think it wise to get my claim in quickly, as the bids are being made so rapidly."

"I don't care how I go," said Patty, "or what I go in. I'm so amiable, a child can play with me to-day. I'll go in a wheelbarrow, if necessary."

"I had hoped to drive you over myself," said Mr. Hepworth, who sat next to her, speaking in a low tone; "but I'll push you in a wheelbarrow, if you prefer."

"You go with me, Patty, in one of the traps, won't you?" said Kenneth, who sat on the veranda railing at her other side.

Patty's face took on a comical smile of amusement at these two requests, but she answered both at once by merrily saying:

"Then it all adjusts itself. Mr. and Mrs. Allen and Mr. and Mrs. Elliott shall have the most comfortable carriage, and Marian and Mr. Hepworth and Ken and I will go in the other."

That seemed to be the, best possible arrangement, and about three o'clock the procession started.

Patty and Marian took the back seat of the open carriage, Mr. Hepworth and Kenneth Harper sat facing them.

As Marian had already become very much interested in her new fad of authorship, and as under Miss Fischer's tuition she was rapidly developing into a real little blue-stocking, it is not strange that the conversation turned in that direction.

"I looked in all the bookshops in the city for your latest works, Miss Marian," said Mr. Hepworth, "but they must have been all sold out, for I couldn't find any."

"Too bad," said Marian. "I'm afraid you'll have to wait until a new edition is printed."

"You're not to tease Marian," said Patty reprovingly. "She's been as patient as an angel under a perfect storm of chaff, and I'm not going to allow any more of it."

"I don't mind," said Marian. "I think, if one is really in earnest, one oughtn't to be annoyed by good-natured fun."

"Quite right," said Kenneth; "and ambition, if it's worth anything, ought to rise above comment of any sort."

"It ought to be strengthened by comment of any sort," said Mr. Hepworth.

"Of any sort?" asked Marian thoughtfully.

"Yes, for comment always implies recognition, and that in itself means progress."

"Have you an ambition, Mr. Hepworth?" said Patty suddenly. "But you have already achieved yours. You are a successful artist."

"A man may have more than one ambition," said Mr. Hepworth slowly, "and I have *not* achieved my dearest one."

"I suppose you want to paint even better than you do," said Patty.

"Yes," said the artist, smiling a little, "I hope I shall always want to paint better than I do. What's your ambition, Harper?"

"To build bridges," said Kenneth. "I'm going to be a civil engineer, but my ambition is to be a bridge-builder. And I'll get there yet," he added, with a determined nod of his head.

"I think you will," said Mr. Hepworth, "and I'm sure I hope so."

Then the talk turned to lighter themes than ambition, and merry laughter and jest filled up the miles to Allaire.

All were delighted with the place. Aside from the picturesque ruined buildings and the eerie mysterious-looking old mill, there was a novel interest in the strange silent air of desertion that seemed to invest the place with an almost palpable loneliness.

"I don't like it," said Patty. "Come on, let's go home."

But to Marian's more romantic imagination it all seemed most attractive, so different was her temperament from that of her sunshiny, merry-hearted cousin.

At last they did go home, and Patty chattered gaily all the way in order, as she said, to drive away the musty recollections of that forlorn old place.

"How did you like it, Nan?" she asked, when they were all back at the hotel.

"I thought it beautiful," said Nan, smiling.

That evening there was a small informal dance in the parlours. Not a large hop, like the one given the week before, but Patty declared the small affair was just as much fun as the other.

"I always have all the fun I can possibly hold, anyway," she said; "and what more can anybody have?"

Toward the close of the evening Mr. Fairfield came up to Patty, who was sitting, with a crowd of merry young people, in a cosy corner of the veranda.

"Patty," he said, "don't you want to come for a little stroll on the board walk?"

"Yes, of course I do," said Patty, wondering a little, but always ready to go with her father. "Is Nan going?"

"No, I just want you," said Mr. Fairfield.

"All right," said Patty, "I'm glad to go."

They joined the crowd of promenaders on the board walk, and as they passed Patty's favourite bit of beach she said:

"That's where we girls sit and talk about our ambitions."

"Yes, so I've heard," said Mr. Fairfield. "And what are your ambitions, baby?"

"Oh, mine aren't half so grand and gorgeous as the other girls'. They want to do great things, like singing in grand opera and writing immortal books and things like that."

"And your modest ambition is to be a good housekeeper, isn't it?"

"Well, yes, papa; but not only that. I was thinking about it afterward by myself, and I think that the housekeeping is the practical part of it—and that's a good big part too—but what I really want to be is a lovely, good, *womanly* woman, like Aunt Alice, you know. I don't believe she ever wanted to write books or paint pictures."

"No she never did," said Mr. Fairfield, "and I quite agree with you that her ambitions are just as high and noble as those others you mentioned."

"Well, I'm glad you think so, papa, for I was afraid I might seem to you very small and petty to have all my ambitions bounded by the four walls of my own home."

"No, Patty, girl, I think those are far better than unbounded ambitions, far more easily realised, and will bring you greater and better happiness. But don't you see, my child, that the very fact of your having a talent—which you certainly have—for housekeeping and home-making, implies that some day, in the far future, I hope, you will go away from me and make a home of your own?"

"Very likely I shall, papa; but that's so far in the future that it's not worth while bothering about it now."

"But I'm going to bother about it now to a certain extent. Do you realise that when this does come to pass, be it ever so far hence, that you're going to leave your poor old father all alone, and that, too, after I have so carefully brought you up for the express purpose of making a home for me?"

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" said Patty, who was by no means taking her father's remarks seriously.

"Do? Why, I'm going to do just this. I'm going to get somebody else to keep my house for me, and I'm going to get her now, so that I'll have her ready against the time you leave me."

Patty turned, and by the light of an electric lamp which they were passing, saw the smile on her father's face, and with a sudden intuition she exclaimed:

"Nan!"

"Yes," replied her father, "Nan. How do you like it?"

"Like it?" exclaimed Patty. "I *love* it! I think it's perfectly gorgeous! I'm just as delighted as I can be! How does Nan like it?"

"She seems delighted too," said Mr. Fairfield, smiling.

THE END

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