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PATTY BLOSSOM

by

CAROLYN WELLS

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Patty Blossom

CHAPTER I

SAM BLANEY

"Patty, Patty, pit-a-pat,
Grinning like a Chessy Cat,

if you don't stop looking so everlasting cheerful, I'll throw something at you!"

"Throw," returned Patty, as her grin perceptibly and purposely widened to the full extent of her scarlet lips.

"All right!" and Elise threw a sofa cushion and another and another, following them up with a knitted afghan, a silk slumber robe, and then beginning on a pile of newspapers.

Patty, who was lounging on a broad divan, protected her face with a down pillow, and contentedly endured the avalanche.

Then, as the enemy's stock of missiles gave out, she sat up, flinging the impedimenta right and left, and her smiling face and tumbled curls triumphantly braved further assault.

"It's snowing like the very dickens," Elise declared, disconsolately.

"I don't see any snow," and Patty shut her blue eyes tight.

"Of course you don't, you old goose! If a roaring Bengal tiger stood in front of you, with full intent of eating you at once, you'd shut your eyes and say, 'There isn't any tiger there.' That is, if you had time to get the words out before you slipped down his throat."

Leisurely, Patty got up, shook her rumpled skirts, and walked to the window.

"It does look like snow," she observed, critically eyeing the landscape.

"Look like snow!" cried Elise; "it's a blizzard, that's what it is!"

"Well, doesn't a blizzard look like snow? It does to me. And I don't know anything nicer than a whole long day in the house. I'm having the time of my life."

Patty threw herself into a big armchair, in front of the blazing log fire, and contentedly held out her slippered feet to the glowing warmth.

"But we were going to play tennis, and——"

"My dear child, tennis will keep. And what's the use of growling? As you remark, it is a young blizzard, and we can't possibly stop it, so let's make the best of it, and have what is known in the kiddy-books as Indoor Pastimes."

"Patty, you're enough to exasperate a saint! You and your eternal cheerfulness!"

"All right, anything to please," and Patty assumed a doleful expression, drew down the corners of her mouth, and wrung her hands in mock despair.

"Isn't it mean," she wailed; "here's this horrid, hateful old snowstorm, and we can't go outdoors or anything! I'm mad as a hornet, as a hatter, as a wet hen, as a March hare, as a—as hops, as—what else gets awful mad, Elise?"

"I shall, if you continue to act like an idiot!"

"My good heavens!" and Patty rolled her eyes toward the ceiling, "there's no pleasing her—positively *no* pleasing her! What to do! What to do!"

But Elise's face had cleared up, and as she looked from the window, she smiled gaily.

"He's coming!" she cried, "Sam's coming!"

Patty hastily adjusted her dignity and sat up with a formal air to greet the visitor, while Elise scrabbled up the sofa cushions and newspapers.

The girls were down at Lakewood. Patty was the guest of Elise, whose family had taken a cottage there for the season. That is, it was called a cottage, but was in reality an immense house, most comfortably and delightfully appointed. Patty was still supposed to be convalescing from her recent illness, but, as a matter of fact, she had regained her health and strength, and, though never robust, was entirely well.

The invitation to Pine Laurel, as the house was called, was a welcome one, and the elder Fairfields

were glad to have Patty go there for a fortnight or so. She had arrived but the day before, and now the unexpected snowstorm had spoiled the plans for tennis and other outdoor affairs. Though it was late November, it was early for such a tempestuous snowstorm, and the weather-wise ones opined that it was a mere swift and sudden flurry.

Patty, with her usual adaptability to circumstances, didn't care much, and felt pretty sure the storm would depart as quickly as it had gathered. She was quite willing to stay indoors a day or two if need be, and could easily amuse herself in many ways. Not so Elise. She was impatient and impetuous, and was always greatly put out if her plans went awry. But the diversion of an unexpected guest roused her to animation and she poked the logs to a brighter blaze by way of welcome.

After the sound of stamping and whisking off snow in the hall, a young man came into the pleasant sun-parlour where the girls were.

It was with difficulty that Patty concealed her amazement as she looked at him. He was of a type that she had heard of, but had never before chanced to meet.

Mechanically, she went through the formalities of the introduction, and sat staring at him, without realising that she was doing so.

"Well," said Sam Blaney, at last, "what about it? Do I get a blue ribbon?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" and Patty blushed at her rudeness. "You see, you er—you reminded me of somebody I have met——"

"No, you mean I remind you of somebody you never have met, but are glad to discover at last."

Patty laughed outright, for the words so definitely expressed her state of mind. Thus encouraged, she continued to look at him.

Blaney was not so extraordinary of appearance, but he presented the effects of the class known as artistic. His thick, fair hair, while it could scarcely be called long, was a trifle longer than the conventional cut. His collar, while not Byronic, was low, and he wore a Windsor tie, of a sickly, pale green. He was a big man, but loose-jointed and ungainly of build. His manners were careless, and his voice was low and soft. He had big grey eyes, which seemed especially noticeable by reason of enormous tortoise-rimmed glasses, whose long, thick bows hooked over his ears.

"You are a poet," Patty said, decisively, after a smiling survey; "and you are right, I have always wanted to know a live poet."

"I hope," said Blaney, in a mournful way, "that you don't agree with those wiseacres who think the only good poet is a dead poet."

"Oh, goodness, no!" said Patty, quickly. "But most of the poetry with which I am familiar was written by dead men—that is, they weren't dead when they wrote it, you know——"

"But died from the shock?"

"Now you're making fun of me," and Patty pouted, but as Patty's pout was only a shade less charming than her smile, the live poet didn't seem to resent it.

"Doubtless," he went on, "my work will not be really famous until after I am dead, but some day I shall read them to you, and get your opinion as to their hopes for a future."

"Oh, do read them to Patty," exclaimed Elise; "read them now. That's the very thing for a stormy day!"

"Yes," Patty agreed; "if you have an Ode to Spring, or Lines on a Blooming Daffodil, it would be fine to fling them in the teeth of this storm."

"I see you're by way of being a wag, Miss Fairfield," Blaney returned, good-naturedly. "But you've misapprehended my vein. I write poems, not jingles."

"He does," averred Elise, earnestly. "Oh, Sam, do recite some—won't you?"

"Not now, Lady fair. The setting isn't right, and the flowers are too vivid."

Patty looked at the two large vases of scarlet carnations that stood on the long, massive table in the middle of the room. She had thought them a very pleasant and appropriate decoration for the snowy day, but Blaney's glance at them was disdainful.

"He's an affected idiot!" she exclaimed to herself. "I don't like him one bit!"

"Please like me," said the poet's soft voice, and Patty fairly jumped to realise that he had read her thought in her face.

"Oh, I do!" she said, with mock fervour, and a slight flush of embarrassment at her carelessness. "I like you heaps!"

"Don't be too set up over that," laughed Elise, "for Patty likes everybody. She's the greatest little old liker you ever saw! Why, she even likes people who don't like her."

"Are there such?" asked Blaney, properly.

"Yes, indeed," Patty declared; "and I can't help admiring their good taste."

"I can't either," and Blaney spoke so seriously, that Patty almost gasped.

"That isn't the answer," she smiled; "you should have contradicted me."

"No," the poet went on; "people who don't like you show real discrimination. It is because you are so crude and unformed of soul."

But Patty was too wise to be caught with such chaff.

"Yes, that's it," she said, and nodded her curly head in assent.

"You say yes, because you don't know what I'm talking about. But it's true. If you had your soul scraped and cleaned and properly polished, you would be well worth liking."

"Go on! go on!" cried Patty, clapping her hands. "Now I know you're the real thing in poets! That's the way I thought they would talk! Say more."

But Blaney turned sulky. He scowled at Patty, he threw a reproachful glance at Elise, and the atmosphere suddenly charged with gloom.

Patty felt that it was her fault and that she had perhaps gone too far. The man was Elise's guest and it wasn't right to make fun of him, if he did sound foolish. So, ignoring the past conversation, Patty smiled, and said, "It is too bad about the storm, isn't it? We had expected to have such a fine tennis game today. You play, of course?"

It was a chance shot, but Patty felt pretty sure that such a big, muscular chap would be fond of outdoor sports and, as it turned out, he was. Moreover, it would be a grumpy poet, indeed, who wouldn't relent under the magic of Patty's smile.

"Yes, I do," he replied, animatedly, and then the talk turned to the game, and the chances of the storm abating and play being possible in a day or two.

"Hello, Blaney," said Roger Farrington, coming into the room. "How's everything?"

"All right, Farry. How goes it with you?"

"Fine. I say, girls, are you game for a little two-cent sleigh ride in the storm? As soon as it stops snowing, the flakes will melt like morning dew, and, if we catch a ride at all, it must be immejit. How about it?"

"I'd love to go!" cried Patty, her eyes sparkling. "I haven't had a sleigh ride in ages——"

"And no telling when you will again," said Roger. "But it's blowing great guns, and snowing fast. You're sure you want to go?"

"Course we do," insisted Elise. "Shall we get our things now?"

"Not quite yet. I'll have to telephone Mr. Livery Man for a rig. This otherwise well-stocked outfit that we're inhabiting doesn't have such a thing on the premises as a sleigh. I'll go and see about it."

"Can't we stop and pick up Alla?" suggested Elise.

"No," and Sam Blaney shook his head decidedly. "My sister wouldn't think of putting her nose out-of-doors on a day like this. I'm surprised that you will, Miss Fairfield."

"Oh, I'm a tough pine knot. I may not look the part, but I assure you wind and weather have no

terrors for me."

"That's so," put in Elise. "Patty looks like a chaff which the wind driveth away, but it would be a pretty strong old wind that could do it."

"You can't tell by looks; my sister looks like a strong, hearty girl, but she's as fragile as a spring crocus."

"There's nothing fragiler than that," Patty remarked; "I've often tried to keep the flimsy little things for a few hours, and even in water they droop and peak and pine all to pieces."

"That's just like Alla," said Blaney. "She's psychic, you see——"

"Oh, is she!" cried Patty. "I've always wanted to know a real psychic.
Mayn't I meet her?"

"Indeed you may, she'll be pleased. Will you come round to the studio today, while we're out sleighing?"

"No, not today," said Elise, positively. "Roger wouldn't stand for it. He'll want to put in all the time there is on the road. And he's going to New York tonight, I think."

"Oh, yes," and Blaney remembered. "Let's see, his wedding day is—when is it?"

"Not till the fifteenth of December. But he and Mona have so much to look after and attend to, that he spends most of his time on the road between here and New York."

"Isn't Mona coming down here while I'm here?" asked Patty.

"She promised to," Elise replied, "but Mona's promises are not to be implicitly depended on just now. She's getting married with all her time and attention."

"Well, a wedding like hers is to be does take a lot of planning. And Mona's looking after everything herself. She's a genius at that sort of thing, but it seems as if she ought to have some one to help her,—some relative, I mean."

"Her father's a big help," said Roger, who had returned just in time to hear Patty's remark.

"Yes, I know it, but I mean a woman relative."

"I know," agreed Roger. "You're right, in a way. But Mona is so accustomed to managing for herself that I'm pretty sure a meddling relative would bother her to death."

"Probably would," agreed Patty. "Do we go sleigh-ridy, Roger?"

"We do. The fiery steeds will be here in fifteen minutes. Get warm wraps, for it's blowing like blazes. Shall we go 'round by your studio, Sam, and drop in on Alla?"

"No, please. I don't want to seem inhospitable, but I've decided I want Miss Fairfield to see the studio first under proper conditions. I want Alla to know when she's coming and——"

"And have her hair frizzed. I get you. All right. We'll drive 'round the lake, and see how the going is, and then decide whether to keep on, or go to some friend's for a cup of tea."

"You mustn't think my sister is a fuss," said Blaney to Patty, as she started to leave the room. "But you know the artist soul likes to have the stage rightly set for an important scene."

"Yes," said Patty, a little puzzled.

"Yes. And your advent at my studio is a most important scene——"

"Why?" asked Patty, bluntly.

"Because you're important. In fact, I may say you're the most important person I have ever seen."

"Really? But if you say things like that, you'll make me vain."

"You can't well be vainer than you are."

Patty looked up in sudden anger at this speech, but Blaney's eyes were quietly amused, and his soft voice was so innocent of offence, that Patty was uncertain what attitude to assume, and to save the necessity of a reply she ran from the room and upstairs to get ready for the ride.

CHAPTER II

A STUDIO PARTY

As Roger had predicted, the snow departed as quickly as it came, and two days after their sleigh ride there was scarcely a vestige of white on the ground. Tennis was again possible and a great game was in progress on the court at Pine Laurel. Patty and Roger were playing against Elise and Sam Blaney, and the pairs were well matched.

But the long-contested victory finally went against Patty, and she laughingly accepted defeat.

"Only because Patty's not quite back on her game yet," Roger defended; "this child has been on the sick list, you know, Sam, and she isn't up to her own mark."

"Well, I like that!" cried Patty; "suppose you bear half the blame, Roger. You see, Mr. Blaney, he is so absorbed in his own Love Game, he can't play with his old-time skill."

"All right, Patsy, let it go at that. And it's so, too. I suddenly remembered something Mona told me to tell you, and it affected my service."

"What is it?" asked Elise. "Anything of importance?"

"Yes; it's this: Mona has decided to sell Red Chimneys, and Philip Van Reypen thinks it a good plan to buy it for the Children's Home."

"For gracious' sake!" exclaimed Patty. "That *is* news! Why doesn't Phil tell me about it?"

"That's just it. He's coming down here tomorrow to talk it over with you. Mona's coming too, you know, and you can all have a powwow."

"All right," and Patty wagged her head, sagaciously. "It's not a bad idea at all. I knew Mr. Galbraith was thinking of selling the Spring Beach place, and it would be a fine house for the kiddies."

"And are you running a Children's Home?" asked Sam Blaney, as they all strolled back to the house, and paused on the wide veranda.

"Too cool for you out here, Patty?" asked Elise.

"Not a bit of it. I love the outdoors. Somebody find me a sweater and a rug, and I'll be as happy as a clam."

Roger brought a red silk sweater from the hall, and a big, soft steamer rug, and proceeded to tuck Patty up, snugly.

"Yes," she said, turning to Blaney, and answering his inquiry, "I am supposed to be organising a Children's Home, but all the hard work is done for me, and I only say yes or no, to easy questions. You see, a dear old friend of mine left me a sum of money for the purpose, and I want to prove a trustworthy steward. But we're not going to do anything definite until Spring, unless, as Red Chimneys is in the market, it seems advisable to secure it while we can."

"Goodness, Patty," said Elise; "you talk like a Board of Managers!"

"That's what I am; or, rather, I'm Manager of the Board. Is Philip coming tonight, Roger?"

"Yes, he'll be here for dinner. And Mona, too. I say, Blaney, we'll bring 'em along to your party, eh?"

"Of course. Alla will be delighted to have them. No matter if we're crowded. You see, Miss Fairfield, our place is small, but our welcome is vurry, vurry large——" Blaney waved his long arms, as if including the whole world in his capacious welcome.

"You're vurry, vurry kind," returned Patty, unconsciously imitating his peculiar pronunciation. "I'm just crazy to see your studio. It seemed as if the time would never come. And I want to meet your sister, too. I know it will be a lovely party. I've never been to a real Bohemian Studio party."

"Oh, we don't call it Bohemian, because, you see, it *is* Bohemian. Only make-believe Bohemians call themselves so. You'll learn to distinguish the difference."

"I hope so. I've always wanted to know what Bohemianism really is."

"We'll show you tonight. What are you going to wear?"

"My goodness, I don't know. I hadn't thought about it. Also, I've never been asked a question like that before."

"Ah, but it means so much! If your gown should be out of key——" Blaney rolled up his eyes and spread his hands, as if the thought were too appalling for words.

Patty giggled. "I hope it won't be," she said. "But, tell me, what is the key? Maybe I can strike it."

"The key," and the poet looked thoughtful, "ah, yes, I have it! The key will be saffron and ultramarine."

Patty gasped. "Oh, I haven't a frock to my name in those colours!"

"But you can harmonise,—yes, harmonise. You will, won't you? If you didn't, I couldn't bear it."

"Oh, then I'll harmonise, yes, I promise you I will. I'll find something that won't make a discord. But can you dictate to all your guests like this?"

"Alas, no! Would that I might! And now I must go. Alla will be wanting me."

"What is he, anyway?" said Patty, as after his adieux, the poet swung away, with his queer, loping gait.

"Bats in his belfry," returned Roger, laughing. "He's the real thing in high-art souls,—if you get what I mean."

"Oh, I don't know," demurred Patty; "I think he's sincere."

"You do! Well, he may be, for all of me. But if he is, give me base deception, every time! Don't you fall in love with him, Patty, Van Reypen wouldn't stand for it."

"I don't know what Mr. Van Reypen has to say about it," returned Patty, with a heightened colour. "And remember, Roger, not everybody is so absorbed in loving and being loved as you are!"

Patty's roguish smile was affectionate as well, for she was fond of Roger, and also of Mona, and she was deeply interested in their love affair. Their engagement had been a short one, and now that the wedding day was so near, the whole Farrington family could think or talk of little else. And as a house guest and a dear friend, Patty, too, was enthusiastic and excited about the preparations.

And then Roger went off to the train to meet Mona, and Philip, who came down at the same time, and Elise disappeared and Patty sat alone, in the falling dusk, snugly tucked in her rugs, and feeling very lazy and comfortable and happy.

Her thoughts drifted idly from one subject to another, and presently she heard a step beside her, and felt her hand taken in somebody's warm clasp.

"Philip!" she cried, starting up.

"Yes, my girl, and so glad to see you again. How are you?"

"Fine. This splendid air and luxurious living has made me all well again."

"That's good. But it's too late for you to be out here. Come on in the house."

"Yes, I will. Did Mona come?"

"Yes, we came down together. How that girl is improving!"

"What do you mean? She always was a fine character."

"Yes, but she has so much more—er—sweetness and light."

"That's so. I've noticed it ever since she's been engaged."

"Well, don't you put on any more sweetness and light when you get engaged. I simply couldn't stand it! You're chock-a-block full of it now!"

"Don't worry. Besides, I've no intention of being engaged. What's the use, if I'm sweet and light enough now?"

"You're going to announce your engagement in just fifteen days from now, my lady. Why, that will be Farrington's wedding day! By Jove, what an idea! We'll announce it at their wedding!"

"We'll do nothing of the sort. You take too much for granted."

"Well, you promised——"

"I know what I promised. But the fifteenth is a long way off yet."

"That may be, but it's bound to get here. Come in the house now. It's too damp for you out here."

They went in, and found Mona and Elise chattering like two magpies, with Roger trying to get in a word edgeways.

"Hello, Patty," cried Mona, springing up to greet her. "My, how fine you're looking! Lakewood agrees with you all right. And Patty, the bridesmaids *are* going to sing, after all. Will you be home in time for one or two rehearsals?"

"Yes, indeed. I'll come up whenever you want me, Mona."

"Good girl. Now I must go and dress for dinner. I'd no idea we'd get here so late; and Roger says there's a party on for tonight."

"Yes," laughed Patty; "and it's a party you have to get keyed up to,—I mean your gown."

"What are you talking about?"

"Come along and I'll tell you."

The two girls went off together, and half an hour later Elise found them in Patty's room, still talking and no beginning made in the matter of dressing.

But later, when the young people left the house to go to the Studio party, they were resplendent of costume. Patty had told the other girls what Mr. Blaney had said, and though they scoffed at it, they agreed not to wear anything that might be too desperately inharmonious.

Mona was in white, declaring that that could offend nobody. Elise wore pale yellow, for the same logical reason. Patty had on a gown of soft chiffon, of old-gold colour, which, she said, was the nearest to saffron she had ever had or ever hoped to have.

"I don't like the word saffron," she declared; "somehow it makes me think of camomile tea."

"Naturally," said Roger; "I believe they're both yarbs. Blaney might call this affair a Saffron Tea, and have done with it."

But the gown was most becoming to Patty. The dull old-gold tints sets off her fair skin, and her bright gold hair, piled high, was topped with a gold and amber comb. Round her throat was an old-fashioned necklace of topazes, lent her by Mrs. Farrington. Altogether, she looked, Philip declared, positively Burne-Jonesey, and he called her the Blessed Damosel.

When at last they entered the Studio of the Blaney brother and sister, Patty blinked several times, before she could collect her senses. It was very dimly lighted, and a strange, almost stifling sense of oppression came over her. This was caused by the burning of various incense sticks and pastilles which gave out a sweet, spicy odour, and which made a slight haze of smoke. Becoming a little accustomed to the gloom, Patty discerned her host, amazingly garbed in an Oriental burnoose and a voluminous silk turban. He took her hand, made a deep salaam, and kissed her finger-tips with exaggerated ceremony.

"My sister, Alla," he said, "Miss Fairfield."

Patty looked up to see a tall, gaunt woman smiling at her. Miss Blaney, like her brother, was long, lanky and loose-jointed, and seemed to desire to accentuate these effects. Her ash-coloured hair was parted and drawn loosely down to a huge knot at the back of her neck. A band of gilt filigree was round her head at the temples, and was set with a huge green stone which rested in the middle of her forehead. Long barbaric earrings dangled and shook with every movement of her head, and round her somewhat scrawny neck was coiled an ugly greenish serpent of some flexible metal formation. For the rest, Miss Blaney wore a flowing robe of saffron yellow, a most sickly shade, and the material was frayed and worn as if it had been many times made over. It hung from her shoulders in billowy folds, and the wearer was evidently proud of it, for she continually switched its draperies about and gazed admiringly at them.

"Frightfully glad to see you," this weird creature was saying, and Patty caught her breath, and murmured, "Oh, thank you. So kind of you to ask me."

"I feel sure I shall adore you," Miss Blaney went on; "you are *simpatica*,—yes, absolutely *simpatica*."

"Am I?" and Patty smiled. "And is it nice to be *simpatica*? It doesn't mean a simpleton, does it?"

"Oh, how droll! My dear, how droll!" and Miss Blaney went off in contortions of silent laughter. "Just for that, you must call me Alla. I always want droll people to call me by my first name. And your name is ——"

"Patty."

"Impossible! You can't be named that! Incredible! *Ooh*!"

Alla ended with a half-breathed shriek.

"Oh, well," said Patty, hastily, "my name is really Patricia, though no one ever calls me that."

"I shall call you that. Patricia! Perfect! You couldn't have been better dubbed. No, not possibly better dubbed. Patricia, ah, Patricia!"

Patty edged away a little. She began to think her hostess was crazy.
But Alla went on:

"And my brother, Patricia, do you not adore him?"

"Well, you see, I've only seen him a few times. I can't quite agree that I adore him, yet."

"But you will. As soon as you have heard his poems, you will put him on a pedestal, yes, on a high pedestal. And tonight you will hear him read his wonderful lines. What a treat you have in store!"

And then new arrivals claimed Miss Blaney's attention, and Patty turned aside. She found Philip waiting for her, his eyes dancing with amusement.

"What is it all?" he whispered; "a bear garden?"

"Hush, Phil, don't make me laugh. Did you ever see anything like it?"

"Well, I've been to Studio jinks, but they were to this as moonlight unto sunlight and as water unto wine! Shall I take you home?"

"No, indeed! I want to see the fun. I've never been to a Studio jinks,—or whatever you call it, and I want to live and learn."

"All right, Patty. You shall stay as long as you like, but I'll wager that inside of an hour you'll be begging me to get you out of it."

"All right, if I do, I shall expect you to take me away. Let's look at the room."

They sauntered about, and finally sat down on a Turkish divan, which proved much lower than they had anticipated.

"What an uncomfortable thing!" said Patty, "but sit here a minute, while I look round."

From the ceiling hung Moorish-looking lamps, which gave almost no light, and, were of rather dilapidated appearance. The furniture, too, was not only antique, but wabbly-legged and here and there tied up with strings or leather thongs. Statuettes were about, broken and dusty; jugs and bowls of dull brass and copper; rickety screens; enormous unframed photographs, warped and faded, but bearing splashing and unintelligible autographs; and draperies of all sorts, from old shawls to tattered ecclesiastical robes.

"I see what Mr. Blaney meant by the key of saffron," said Patty, sagely. "Everything is that colour because of the accumulation of dust and dirt! I don't believe this place has ever had a good house-cleaning!"

"Oh, Patty, my dear child! Don't thus expose your ignorance! Bohemia never cleans house! The very thought is sacrilege!"

"Why is it? Some of this old brass stuff would be lovely if it were cleaned up. And look at that copper kettle! It's positively blue!"

"But that's what they want, dear," said Van Reypen, smiling at her. "Howsumever, I'm glad you don't like it. We won't model our home on a Bohemian plan."

"And look at the people," went on Patty, in an awe-struck whisper. "Some of them are decent, like our crowd,—but look at that girl in orange!"

The girl in question wore a costume of flame-coloured woolen material that was indeed striking. Her black hair was in two long braids, and she was carrying a small musical instrument that Philip said was a zithern.

"I don't know," he went on, "but I fancy she will play a sort of accompaniment to our host's poems. They generally work it that way."

"Stop making fun, Phil," reproved Patty; "perhaps the poems will be lovely,—with musical setting."

"Perhaps," said Philip.

CHAPTER III

PHILIP OBJECTS

The place became crowded. The two rooms occupied by the guests were small, and the party was a large one. Though not greatly attracted by the unusual sights and strange people, Patty was interested and curious. She wanted to see the affair in its entirety, and was glad when Sam Blaney came over to where she sat by Philip on the divan.

"I've come to carry you off," Blaney said to her; "you must mingle with the crowd, if you want to become one of us."

"I'd like to mingle a little," Patty replied, "but I can't hope to become one of such a talented bunch as this."

"They're not all so talented," Blaney assured her, as he led her away, leaving Philip a bit moody and disapproving.

"It's their clothes that astound me," said Patty. "Why do they wear such queer rigs? Almost like a masquerade or fancy-dress ball. You, for instance; why do you wear this Oriental robe and turban?"

"Now that you ask me, I don't believe I know! But it's habit, I think. Yes, that's it, it's just habit. We who possess higher intellect than our fellows must differentiate ourselves in some way from them, and how else but by a difference of raiment?"

"Well, that does explain it, but why such queer raiment? Why not beautiful garments instead of eccentric ones?"

"Ah, that's just it! They are beautiful, only you're not of sufficient intelligence to appreciate their beauty."

"What!" cried Patty, scarcely able to believe she had heard aright, "I'm not intelligent enough——"

"Oh, don't get miffed. Your natural intelligence is all right, you've plenty of it. But it needs education,—bending in the right direction, you know. And I'm going to educate you. You're the most promising subject I've ever seen. I'll make a priestess of you,—a shining light,—a prophetess——"

Patty giggled. "If I'm a priestess I may as well be a prophetess, I suppose. When do these lessons begin?"

"Now. They have begun. You are unconsciously absorbing this atmosphere. You are involuntarily becoming more and more of our cult,—of our inspirations. You are evolving,—you don't realise it, but you are evolving——"

"I shall be revolving, if I don't get some fresh air! Why must you have these incense things smoking,

not to mention some of the guests smoking also, and, incidentally, that Moorish lamp is smoking badly! I *am* absorbing your atmosphere, and it is choking me!"

Patty was in earnest, though she spoke lightly. The unpleasant air filled her lungs, and she wanted pure oxygen.

"Oh, all right," and Blaney laughed, indulgently. "You can't expect to achieve all at once. Come, we'll step out on the veranda for a whiff of outdoors, and then come back for the program."

"There's to be a program?"

"Oh, yes. Most wonderful work, by genius itself. Now, please, Miss
Fairfield, don't resist the influence."

They were out on the tiny veranda that graced the Blaney's dwelling. The stars shone down through the pure winter air, and Patty felt as if she had been rescued from a malarial swamp. But Blaney was impressive. His deep, soft voice persuaded her against her will that she was pettish and crude to rebel at the unwholesome atmosphere inside. "You don't understand," he said gently. "Give us a fair trial. That's all I ask. I know your inner nature will respond, if you give it its freedom. Ah, freedom! That's all we aim for,—all we desire."

Through the window, Patty heard the sound of weird strains of music.

"Come on," she cried, "I do want to see this thing through. If that's the program beginning, take me in. I want to hear it."

They returned to the Studio, and Blaney found two seats which commanded a view of the platform. The seats were uncomfortable, being small wooden stools, and the air was still clouded with smoke of various sorts. But, determinedly, Patty prepared to listen to the revelations that awaited her. She had long had a curiosity to know what "Bohemia" meant, and now she expected to find out. They were nowhere near their own crowd. In fact, she couldn't see Elise or Mona, though Philip was visible between some rickety armour and a tattered curtain. Very handsome he looked, too, his dark, and just now gloomy, face thrown into relief by the "artistic" background.

"Apparently, Mr. Van Reypen is not enjoying himself," Blaney commented, with a quiet chuckle. "He's not our sort."

This remark jarred upon Patty, and she was about to make a spirited retort, when the music began.

A girl was at the piano. Her gown, of burlaps, made Patty think it had been made from an old coffee sack. But it had a marvelous sash of flaming vermilion velvet, edged with gold fringe, and in her black hair was stuck a long, bright red quill feather, that gave her an Indian effect.

"I think her gown is out of key," Patty whispered, "and I am sure her music is!"

Blaney smiled. "She is a law unto herself," he replied, "that is an arbitrary minor scale, played in sixths and with a contrary motion."

Patty stared. This was a new departure in music and was interesting.

"Note the cynicism in the discords," Blaney urged, and Patty began to wonder if she could be losing her mind or just finding it.

The performance concluded and a rapt silence followed. It seemed applause was undesired by these geniuses.

Philip stirred, restlessly, and looked over at Patty. She looked away, fearing he would silently express to her his desire to go home, and she wanted to stay to see more.

The girl who had played glided to a side seat, and her place was taken by another young woman, who presented an even more astonishing appearance. This time, the costume was of a sort of tapestry, heavily embroidered in brilliant hued silks. It was not unbeautiful, but it seemed to Patty more appropriate for upholstery purposes than for a dress.

The lady recited what may have been poems, and were, according to Blaney's whispered information, but as they were in some queer foreign language, they were utterly unintelligible.

"What was it all about?" Patty asked, as the recitations were at last over.

"My dear child, couldn't you gather it all,—all, from the marvellous attitudinising,—the wonderful

intoning——"

"'Deed I couldn't! I've no idea what she was getting at, and I don't believe you have, either."

"Oh, yes, it was the glory of a soul on fire,—an immolation of genius on the altar of victory——"

"That sounds to me like rubbish," and Patty smiled frankly into the eyes of the man addressing her.

"Not rubbish, Miss Fairfield. Oh, what a pleasure it will be to enlighten your ignorance! To teach the eyes of your soul to see, the heart of your soul to beat——"

Again, it was the voice of the man that commanded her attention. The tones of Sam Blaney's speaking voice were of such a luring, persuasive quality that Patty felt herself agreeing and assenting to what she knew was nonsense.

But now Van Reypen was striding toward them. Patty saw at a glance that Phil was at the end of his rope. No more of this nonsense for him.

She was right. As Blaney's attention was diverted for a moment, Phil said, "Patty, you're going right straight out of this. It's no place for you! I'm ashamed to have you here. Get your wraps, and we'll go, whether the Farringtons are ready or not. We can walk over to Pine Laurel,—it isn't far. Come."

"I won't do it!" Patty returned, crisply. "The idea, Phil, of your ordering me around like that! I want to stay, and I'm going to stay. You can go, if you like; I'll come home with Roger and the girls."

"But I don't like it, Patty, and I don't like to have you here.
It's—it's——"

"Well, what is it? I think it's great fun, and I'm going to see it out."

"Even if I ask you not to? Even if I beg you to go——"

"Even if you beg me on your bended knees! You're silly, Phil. It can't be wrong if the Farringtons stand for it."

"It isn't exactly wrong,—not *wrong*, you know,—but, well,—it's cheap."

"Oh, fiddlesticks! I like it. I don't mind it's being cheap, I'm tired of expensive things and glad of a change."

"Oh, I don't mean that way," and Van Reypen looked genuinely distressed. "I wouldn't care how poor people were, if they were——"

"Respectable?"

"No, not that, these people are respectable, of course. But,—sincere, that's what I mean. This bunch are fakirs, they pretend to brains and knowledge and wisdom that they don't possess."

"And I suppose you do! Have you got all the knowledge and wisdom in the world?"

"At least I don't pretend to have the knowledge that I haven't!"

"But you pretend to have a whole lot of authority over me that you haven't! I tell you, Phil, I'm not going to be ordered about by you! I came to this party because I wanted to see it, and I'm going to stay till it's over, and you can do what you like."

"All right, then," and Phil looked grave. "I'll go away for a time, and I'll return and escort you home. What time shall I come back?"

"You needn't come back at all. I'll go home with Elise, or if not, I daresay Mr. Blaney will see that I get home safely. Won't you?" she added, turning to the resplendent figure nearby.

"Won't I what?" he asked gaily. "But the answer is yes, to anything you may ask. Even to the half of my kingdom, and then the other half. To be sure, my kingdom is small, and half of it is my sister's, but you can command it all."

"Oh, no, nothing so great as that! Merely to see me back to my rooftree in safety, if I outstay my escort."

"You're going to outstay everybody. Why, the fun hasn't begun yet.
Don't dream of going home now!"

"I won't," and Patty turned deliberately away from Philip and began to chat with a group of guests to whom she had previously been introduced.

"Join our ranks," said one vivacious young girl. "We're the intelligent idiots, perhaps the wisest sages of our time. We're having a symposium of souls——"

"Miss Fairfield isn't interested in souls yet," interrupted Blaney, "she's not unnaturally starving to death. The feast is unusually delayed tonight."

"It's coming now," announced Alla. "To the food, all!"

Philip was nowhere to be seen, nor did Patty see the Farringtons near her, but feeling glad of the hint of refreshments, she followed where Blaney led. Soon, she found herself ensconced on a divan, heaped with pillows, and many people were offering her strange-looking dishes.

"*Chili con carne*?" said one, "or common or garden Welsh Rabbit?"

"I never tasted the Chili stuff," laughed Patty, "but I love Welsh Rabbit. I'll take that, please."

But, alas, the Welsh Rabbit Patty had in mind was a golden, delectable confection, light and dainty of character. She was served with a goodly portion of a darkish, tough substance, of rubbery tendencies and strong cohesive powers.

In vain she essayed to eat it; it was unmanageable, and, to her taste, positively inedible. Yet the others were apparently enjoying it, so she made valiant efforts to consume her own.

"Fine, isn't it?" said Alla, with enthusiasm, "why, you're not eating any! You don't like it! Take this away, Sam, and bring Miss Fairfield some of the Tamale stuff."

And then, the Rabbit was succeeded by a concoction so much worse, that Patty was appalled at the mere sight and odour of it.

"Oh, please," she said, hastily, "if I might be excused from eating anything tonight. You see, the perfume of the incense burning is so unusual for me, that it makes me a little—er, headachy. Don't think me a silly, will you?"

Patty's wheedlesome air won them all, and they took away the highly-spiced, and strongly-flavoured dish. Then Blaney came with a small cup of thick, muddy-looking coffee.

"Just the thing for you," he declared, "set you up in a jiffy! Real Egyptian, no Turkish business. Just the thing for you!"

Patty gratefully accepted the coffee, but one taste was enough! It was thick with pulverized coffee grounds, it was sickishly sweet, and it was strong and black enough to please the blackest Egyptian who ever desired that brand.

"Thank you," she said, hastily handing the cup back. "It is so—so powerful, a little is quite enough. I'm sure that is all I want."

The others sipped the muddy fluid with apparent relish, and Patty began to wonder if she wished she had gone home with Philip. At any rate she was glad he would return for her, and she hoped it would be soon.

She asked where the Farringtons were.

"In the other room, I think," said Alla. "We'll find them after supper. Here are the sweetmeats now. You must try these."

The sweetmeats were Oriental, of course. There was Turkish Delight and other sticky, fruity, queer-looking bits, that seemed to Patty just about the most unappetising candies she had ever seen.

She refused them, a little positively, for she dreaded being persuaded to taste them, and it was hard to refuse the insistence of the guests who offered them.

"You'll learn," said Miss Norton, the pianist of the program. "It took me a long time to acquire the taste. But I've got it now," she added, as she helped herself bountifully to the saccharine bits.

Supper over, it was rumoured about that now Blaney would himself read from his own poems. A rustle of enthusiasm spread through the rooms, and Patty could easily see that this was the great event

of the evening. She was glad now that she had stayed, for surely these poems would be a revelation of beauty and genius.

There was a zithern accompaniment by the girl in orange, but it was soft and unobtrusive, that the lines themselves might not be obscured.

Standing on the little platform, Blaney, in robes and turban, made a profound salaam, and then in his melodious voice breathed softly the following "Love Song ":

"Thy beauty is a star—
A star
Afar—
Ay,—far and far,
Ay, far.
And yet, a bar,—
A bar
Is between thee and me!
Thee and me——
Thee and me!"

The voice was so lovely that Patty scarcely sensed the words. With the haunting accompaniment, the whole was like a bit of music, and the words were negligible.

But in the hush which followed, Patty began to think that after all the words didn't amount to much. However, everybody was raving over the performance, and begging for more.

"Did you care for it?" Blaney asked of Patty, with what seemed to be a great longing in his eyes.

Unwilling to seem disappointed, she replied, "Oh, yes, it was most significant."

"I thank you," he said, his eyes alight with pleasure, "you have used the right word!"

As Patty had spoken the first noncommittal word that came into her head, she was thankful it proved acceptable!

CHAPTER IV

PATTY STAYS LATE

"It is so delightful to have you one of us, Patricia," said Alla, waving her long arms about. "This place is a Cosmic Centre, you know, and now that you belong to us, you must be here much of the time."

"But I'm only in Lakewood for a fortnight," said Patty, smiling at her;
"I go back to New York soon."

"So do we. That is, we go in a few months. But we claim you. You shall return and visit us here, and we shall be much together in the city. Oh, we have adopted you, and now you are ours, isn't she, Sam?"

"Indeed, yes," returned Blaney, enthusiastically; "never was such a rare soul added to our circle. Priestess Patricia, our star soul!"

Patty was flattered at the attention she was receiving. She didn't quite understand what a star soul meant, but she knew she held an elevated position among these highly intellectual people, and it dazzled her.

"I have always had an ambition," she admitted, "for something bigger and better than my social butterfly life, and with you I hope to achieve it. But I am ignorant,—you must teach me."

"We will," promised Miss Norton, "I shall take you in hand as my special charge. May I call on you tomorrow, and bring you some books to study?"

Patty hesitated. When she was a house guest she never made engagements without consulting her hostess. But she wanted to see and know more of this new venture, so she said, "I can't promise. But if I

find I can receive you, may I not telephone or send you some message?"

"Yes, indeed," acquiesced Miss Norton, gladly.

Then the conversation drifted to the tendencies of modern art, and the expression of one's ego, and the influence of the aura, and a lot of subjects that were to Patty as so much Greek. But she was fascinated by the discourse, and resolved to read and study the books that should be given her, until she, too, could discuss intelligently these great subjects.

The talk was deliberate. Each wise and weighty opinion advanced was thoughtfully considered and argued, and Patty listened, striving to comprehend the jargon. Time passed rapidly, and, at last, she realised that most of the guests had gone, and there remained only about a half dozen of the most talkative ones.

Sam Blaney himself was the conversational leader. He went off on long tirades, and though Patty strove to follow his theories, they seemed to her vague and incomprehensible. She found herself getting sleepy, though she would have indignantly repudiated such an idea.

Another man, Mr. Griscom, slightly differed in opinions with Blaney and the debates between the two were raptly listened to by the others.

A chiming clock struck two.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Patty, "it can't be two o'clock! Where are the others? Where is Elise?"

"They've gone, long ago," said Blaney, smiling. "You know you said I might take you home, and so I told the Farringtons I would do so.

"But I didn't mean to stay as late as this! Why, I had no idea it was after twelve! Oh, please, Mr. Blaney, take me home at once. What will Mrs. Farrington think? I've never stayed anywhere so late before,—alone,—I mean."

"You're not alone, Patricia, dear," said Alla, surprised at Patty's evident alarm. "You're ours now, you know, and we will care for you and protect you. Sam will take you home, and if you fear Mrs. Farrington's reproaches, I will go with you and explain."

"Oh, not that," and Patty smiled. "I don't fear her, you know. I'm not a child, and I can do as I like. But it is not my custom to stay later than the people I came with."

"But all your customs will change now. We are a law unto ourselves. Bohemians are free of conventions and rules. Simply tell Mrs. Farrington that you have joined our circle and you will henceforth be governed by our ideas and customs. As you say, you are not a child, you can do as you like."

"Of course you can," said Mr. Griscom. "I'm going that way, I'll take you home, if you like."

"Thank you," said Patty, "but I have accepted Mr. Blaney's escort."

"That's right," said Blaney, heartily. "Oh, there'll be no trouble,—no trouble at all. I'll take Miss Fairfield home, and if any comments are made, they'll be made to me."

Patty felt uneasy. She didn't know exactly why, for she had done nothing wrong, but it was so very late, and she wondered what the Farringtons would think of her.

She got her wraps and Alla kissed her good-bye.

"Dear little Patricia," she said, affectionately. "It is all right. It seems unaccustomed, I know, but you are ours now, and your friends must get used to it."

It was only a few blocks to walk over to Pine Laurel, and Patty started off with Sam Blaney.

"You're anxious, Miss Fairfield," he said, kindly, "and I'm sorry. Can I help at all? I assure you I had no thought of your staying with us longer than you wished. Shall I go in and explain to your friends?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Blaney," Patty said, after an instant's thought. "I think, if you please, I would rather you would not come in. If I am 'scolded,' I'd rather stand it alone."

There were lights in the Farrington house when they arrived. At sound of their steps on the veranda, the door opened, and Roger appeared. "That you, Patty?" he said, pleasantly; "Hello, Blaney, will you come in?"

"No, thanks; just brought Miss Fairfield home. She seemed to enjoy her evening."

"That's good," returned Roger. "Good night, then, if you won't come in."

Roger closed the door, and with his hand still on the knob, whispered to Patty: "You're going to catch it from Phil! But I'll stand by you."

Patty's eyes flashed. She resented the idea of Van Reypen's authority, and she was tired and bothered. But Roger's kindly attitude comforted her, and she smiled at him.

"Good night, Roger," she said, aloud. "Thank you for waiting up for me. I'm tired, and I'll go straight to my room. The girls have gone up, I suppose."

"Wait a moment, Patty," and Van Reypen appeared in the doorway from the sun-parlour, where the two men had been sitting, "wait a moment, I want to speak to you."

"Not tonight, Phil, please. I'm very tired."

"You ought to be tired! Staying till all hours with that bunch of trash! I'm ashamed of you!"

Patty was thoroughly angry. It took a good deal to make good-natured Patty angry, but when her temper was roused, it meant a tempest. Also, she was worn out mentally and physically and, more than all, she resented Philip's assumption of authority.

Her blue eyes flashed, and a spot of pink came into each cheek, as she replied: "It is not of the slightest interest to me whether you are ashamed of me or not! You are in no way responsible for my actions and you have no right to reprove or criticise me. I may have broken the conventions of hospitality, but that is between me and Mrs. Farrington. Your opinion of me means nothing to me whatever! Good night, Roger."

Patty held out her hand to Roger, who took it for a moment, with a smiling good night, and then, with the air of an offended queen, Patty swept upstairs and entered her own room.

There she found Mona and Elise, one asleep on the couch, the other rubbing her eyes as she sat up in a big easy-chair.

"Goodness, Patty!" said Mona, looking at the clock, "what *have* you been up to?"

Elise blinked and shook herself awake. "We had to wait up to see you," she said, "so we waited here."

"I see you did," returned Patty, lightly. "And now your wait is over, and you've seen me, shall us say good night?"

"Not much we won't!" declared Elise, now broad awake. "Tell us
everything about it! What did you do there all this time? What did
Phil say? Who brought you home? Do you like that crowd? How can you?
They bore me to death! Oh, Patty, you're going to cry!"

"I am," declared Patty, and the tears gathered thickly in her eyes. "I'm all in, and I'm down and out, and I'm mad as hops, and I'm tired, and I *am* going to cry. Now, if you've any sense of common humanity, you'll know enough to go away and let me alone!"

"Can I help?" asked Mona, looking commiseratingly at Patty.

"No," and Patty smiled through the fast-flooding tears. "I never need help to cry!"

"Come on, then," and Mona took Elise by the arm and led her away, as they heard Patty's door locked behind them.

Now, most girls would have thrown themselves down on the pillows to have their cry out, but Patty was too methodical for that. "I can't cry comfortably in this rig," she said to herself, beginning to take off the chiffon gown.

And it was with tears still unshed that she finally sat at her dressing-table plaiting her hair for the night.

"And after all," she remarked to her reflection in the mirror, "I only want to cry 'cause I'm tired and worn out and—yes, and mad! I'm mad at Philip, and I'm going to stay mad! He has no right to talk to me like a Dutch uncle! My own father never spoke to me like that! The idea! I just simply, plain won't stand it, and that's all there is about that!"

And so, after Patty was snugly in bed, cuddled beneath the comforting down coverlet, she let herself go, and cried to her heart's content; great, soul-satisfying sobs that quieted her throbbing pulses and exhausted her strained nerves, until she fell asleep from sheer weariness.

And next morning she awoke, smiling. Everything looked bright and cheery. The sun shone in at her windows, and as she felt somebody pinching her toes through the blankets, she opened her eyes to see Mona sitting on the edge of the bed and Elise just coming in at the door. Mrs. Farrington followed, and Patty sat up in bed with a smiling welcome for all.

"Hello, you dear things!" she cried. "You first, Mrs. Farrington. I want to 'fess up to you. I was baddy girl last night, and I stayed at the party much later than I meant to, or than I knew, until I suddenly realised the time. Am I forguv? Oh, do say yes, and *don't* scold me!"

Pretty Patty possessed herself of the lady's hand and looked so penitent and so wheedlesome that Mrs. Farrington was disarmed.

"Why, of course, dear; it was not really wrong, but young girls ought to be home by midnight at latest, I think,—and too, ought to come home with their own people."

"I know it, Mrs. Farrington, I do know it. I have been brought up right—honest, I have. But it was a special occasion, you see, and, too, my own people ran off and left me."

"Oh, now, Patty," began Elise, "Sam said you sent word for us to do so."

"Well, I didn't exactly do that, but I did want to stay longer. Oh, Mrs. Farrington, you've no idea how interesting those psychic souls are——"

"What!"

"Yes, they're psychic, you know——"

"And what are psychics,—clearly, now, Patty, what *are* psychics?"

"Why, they're——they're——"

"Yes, go on."

"Well, they're—why, they're *psychics*! That's what they are."

"Patty, you're an irresistible little goose!" and Mrs. Farrington bent down to kiss the pretty, flushed face, and then laughingly declared she had no more time to waste on psychics, and trailed away.

"Now, tell us all about it, Patsy," said Elise. "I shan't let you get up till you do."

"There's not much to tell, Elise; but I liked to learn about the things they were talking about and so I stayed later than I should have. But since your mother is so lovely about it, I don't care what any one else says."

"Oh, pshaw,—your staying late,—that was nothing. But what did they do over there so interesting? I can't see any sense in their talk."

"I can't see much myself, and that's why I want to learn. I'm awfully ignorant of higher ethics,—and—things like that."

"Higher ethics? H—m. Is it sort of Uplift ideas?"

"No, not that exactly."

"Fudge, you don't know what it is, 'exactly,' and between you and me, I don't think you have the glimmer of a ghost of an idea what it is all about! Now, have you?"

"If I had, I couldn't make you understand! You're antagonistic. You have to be receptive and responsive and——"

"Patty, you're a goose! A silly idiot of a goose! But such a dear, pretty little goose, that with all your faults we love you still! Now, I'll scoot, and you get dressed, for we're going somewhere today."

"Where?"

"Never you mind, Miss Curiosity. Just put on a house dress and come down to breakfast, and you'll find out."

Elise ran away, but Mona lingered.

"Patty," she said, a little gravely, "Philip is terribly upset about last night."

"I don't care if he is, Mona. He has no right to be. He has no authority over me."

"What! When you've become engaged to him?"

"I'm not engaged to him at all."

"He says you are."

"Did he really say that, Mona?"

"Not in so many words, but he implied that there was an understanding between you."

"Understanding! I hate that word,—used that way! There's a misunderstanding between us, if there's anything!"

"But you're going to be engaged to him, aren't you, Patty?"

"No, I don't think so. Not after last night. Why, he was horrid,
Mona, after I came home. He scolded me, and I wouldn't stay to listen.
I ran upstairs."

"Oh, Patty, I wish you'd make up with him, and be friends again, and be engaged to him, and announce it at my wedding."

"Did he say all that to you last night? Did he make those delightful plans, and talk them over with you and Roger?"

"Don't look so furious. It just came about, you see. We were sitting there, waiting for you to come home, and Phil was saying how he adores you, and how he wanted your promise, but he had to wait a certain time before you would say positively. And, of course, we were talking about my wedding, and I said it would be nice to announce your engagement then, it's always so picturesque to announce one wedding at another——"

"I'm sorry I can't oblige you, Mona, but if you want an engagement announced at your wedding I'm afraid you'll have to get some other girl. You can keep the same man, if you like!"

"Oh, Patty, don't be cross with me! It wasn't my fault!"

"That's so, Mona,—I'm a pig! Forgive me, dear. Now, to make up, I'll tell you just how it is. I have told Philip that I'd give him my answer in about two weeks. And that will be your wedding day. But my answer is to be yes, only if he succeeds in teaching me to love him by that time. And I don't mind telling you, that the way he talked to me last night doesn't exactly further his cause!"

"But, Patty, he was angry, you know, and jealous of those foolish
Blaney people."

"They're not foolish,—and I can't bear men who are jealous. Now, Mona, girlie, you 'tend to your own suitor. You've quite enough to do in the next two weeks, without dipping your pretty little fingers in my pie."

"Yes," sighed Mona, "I have."

CHAPTER V

AT RED CHIMNEYS

When Patty entered the dining-room, she found the rest already at breakfast.

"'Scuse me for being late," she said, as she took her place, "but I was up late last night."

She smiled gaily at Philip, whose somewhat frowning face relaxed into an answering smile.

"Never mind that, Patty," said Mona, "listen to what we're planning. Philip thinks it would be a good idea to buy Red Chimneys for the Kiddies' Home, and we're going to motor over to Spring Beach today to look at it."

"Fine! but why go to look at it? We all know exactly what it looks like——"

"Yes, Patty," said Philip, "but there are several matters to see about. I know the house, generally speaking, but I want to look it over with the idea of a Home in mind. Count up the rooms, get measurements and so forth, to present in my report to the Board of Managers."

"All right, I'd like to go. I think it would be fun. Lunch at the hotel, I suppose."

"Yes, or take something with us and picnic at the house."

"Oh, that's lots nicer, don't you think so, Elise?"

"Well, you see, Patty, it doesn't matter to me which you do, as I'm not going. I'm sorry, but I've some engagements today that I must keep, so, if you don't mind, I'm going to ask to be left at home."

"All right, then it's up to us. What say, Mona? Picnic sandwiches?"

"Yes, and some Thermos stuff,—soup and chocolate. That will give us more time to look over the house. There are some things I want to see about, if it's to leave my possession forever."

"Why don't you keep it, Mona? Why wouldn't you and Roger like it for a summer home?"

"We talked it over, and I'm rather tired of the place. And Roger prefers going to different places each year. Father told me I could have the house, and do what I liked with it, sell it or keep it. But if they want it for this Home arrangement, I think I'll be rather glad to let it go."

The quartet started off in high spirits at the prospect of a jolly day. The big limousine was most comfortable and well equipped. An ample luncheon was stowed away in hampers, and a skilful and careful chauffeur drove them at a speedy gait. It was a glorious, clear, cold, sunshiny day, and the open windows gave them plenty of fresh air.

Patty, enveloped in furs, nestled in one corner of the wide back seat, and Mona was in the other. The two men faced them. Not a word had passed between Patty and Philip about the night before, and Patty wondered if he intended to let the matter go by without further reference.

"You see it's this way," Philip began, addressing Patty; "I haven't really had an opportunity of telling you about it yet. We don't want to do anything much in the matter of the Home before Spring. But as Mona's house is in the market, and as it seems like an ideal place to have for the children, I thought we'd better look into it, and, if advisable, buy it and then wait a few months before doing anything further."

"I think so, too, Phil," Patty agreed. "I counted up the rooms and it will easily accommodate twenty or twenty-five kiddies, and that's as many as we can take care of, isn't it?"

"I think so; for the present, anyway. And you know, Patty, all you have to do is to approve or disapprove of the purchase, and what you say, goes."

"What an important personage you are, Patty," said Roger. "Your lightest word is law."

"It won't be a light word," and Patty looked serious. "I shall consider the matter carefully, and with all the wisdom and forethought I can find in my brain. This matter was left to me as a trust, and I'm not taking it lightly, I can tell you. This purchase of a house is a permanent move, not a trifling, temporary question. And unless the place is the very right place,—righter than any other place,—why, we don't want it, that's all."

"Bravo, Patty!" and Philip looked at her, admiringly. "You've got a lot of good sense and judgment under that fur headpiece of yours."

"Fur headpiece!" cried Patty; "my new chinchilla toque! This is my dearest possession, if you please."

"It looks dear," observed Roger. "I believe that chinchilla animal is quite expensive."

"It is indeed," declared Mona, "my travelling suit is trimmed with it."

"Travelling suit?" asked Patty, innocently, "are you going away?"

"She says so," Roger answered for her. "She says she's going to——"

"Hush!" cried Mona, "isn't that just like a man! Why, you mustn't tell where you're going on your wedding trip! It isn't done."

"No, of course not," chimed in Patty; "but, all the same, after you reach Palm Beach, let us know, won't you?"

"I will," declared Roger, "but, do you know, it seems as if the time would never come!"

"Nice boy," said Mona, approvingly; "doesn't he make pretty speeches,
Patty?"

"Lovely. You'll have a beautiful time on your trip. I 'most wish I was going with you?"

"Come on, Patty," said Philip, "let's make it a double affair. How about it?"

"No, thank you. I haven't any suit trimmed with chinchilla."

"You've a whole chinchilla coat on now," said Mona. "You could wear that."

"What! get married in old clothes! No-sir-ee! The best part of a wedding is the trousseau. That's the only thing that would ever persuade *me* to take the fatal step."

"It is fun," agreed Mona. "Oh, Patty, my green velvet came home yesterday! It's simply wonderful! The tunic, you know——"

"Help! help!" cried Roger. "You girls have got us penned in here where we can't get away, but if you're going to talk about bias ruffling and side gores, I shall jump out the window! I warn you."

"You can't stop 'em, old man," said Van Reypen, gravely, "they've got to go through with that green velvet, now they've begun on it. Proceed, Mona. The tunic was trimmed with peplum, wasn't it? and the bodice was cut *en train*——"

"You don't deserve to know," Mona told him, "and as for Roger, he'll see enough of that green velvet, poor man! It's so beautiful, I expect to wear it on every possible occasion."

"All right, dear," said Roger, rolling his eyes in mock devotion.
"Whatever you say, goes, my queen, my—y que—ee—n!"

"Even if I wear a rig like Alla Blaney wore last night?" asked Mona, laughing.

"Well, I must draw the line somewhere, and I should say that was the very place! If you elect to appear in a scarecrow costume of that type, I shall send you back to your father."

"No danger," and Mona shook her head. "Why do people want to make themselves such frights?"

"Their dress interprets their souls," said Van Reypen, sarcastically, "and their souls are frights."

"Nothing of the sort, Phil," flared out Patty; "I'd like you to remember those people are my friends."

"Well, my dear, if you choose to have friends with souls like frights, it is, of course, your privilege; but you must allow me to express my opinion of them."

"And so you may,—but not to me."

"Very well; consider I was talking to Mona,—which I really was."

"Then continue to talk to her, for I don't want to talk to you."

"All right, pretty Patty,—pretty little sunny-faced Patty,—all right."

Philip's voice was teasing and his smile was irritating, and Patty was angry at him anyway, yet she couldn't help laughing at his speech, for she looked as cross as a thunder cloud, and she knew it. That is, as near to the crossness of a thunder cloud as Patty Fairfield could manage. Her cheeks were reddened by the cold wind and her blue eyes always looked bluer in a frosty atmosphere. And now, as an uncontrollable smile parted her scarlet lips, and her white teeth gleamed, and her dimples came into view, Patty justified Philip's term of "pretty Patty," but she quickly concealed her smile by sinking her chin deep into the great fur collar of her coat.

"Wasn't it a crazy party?" Mona went on, not realising she was on a dangerous subject. "They all took

themselves so seriously."

"Why shouldn't they?" said Patty, coming up out of her fur cave; "it might be better if we all took ourselves more seriously,—such a lot of triflers and sillyheads as we are!"

"And such a lot of piffle-peddlers and hard-boiled eggs as they are!" said Philip, fairly snorting in disgust.

"Oh, very well!" and Patty sank again into the chinchilla cavern.

Roger touched Mona's foot with his own, and gave her an urgent, significant glance, as he said, with a determination to change the subject, "We'll just about get to Red Chimneys in time for luncheon. Shall we have our picnic before we explore the house? I'm as hungry as three bears and a hunter."

"So'm I," agreed Van Reypen, taking the cue. "What's in the hampers?
Unless something pretty substantial, I vote we go to a hotel to feast."

"No," said Mona, "that wouldn't be half as much fun. It's the picnicking that's so jolly. If you agree, Patty," she added, for if Patty had any intention of sulking, there would be little fun in a picnic.

But Patty Fairfield was no spoilsport. She was annoyed at Philip, but that was no reason for her to make the others uncomfortable, and she responded gaily, "Oh, yes, the picnic is lots more fun. But will the house be warm enough?"

"Yes," Mona answered, "we telephoned down last night for Mr. Bates, the caretaker, to make some fires, and we can pile logs in the big hall fireplace till we roast alive. We can have the feast in the hall, if the dining-room is chilly."

But they found the whole house fairly warm and distinctly cheery and homey-looking. Bates had aired and dusted it, and had built fires and altogether the beautiful rooms looked so attractive, that Mona declared she was half inclined not to give it up, after all.

"We could rent it some years, Roger," she said, "and live in it some years, if we wanted to."

"Just as you say, Mona," he replied; "it's your house. Wait until spring to decide, if you prefer."

"All right," said Van Reypen, "but I fear we must decide on the house we buy before that. For we want to get the place we're to have in order as soon as Spring pokes her nose in."

"We'll have luncheon first," Mona decided, "and then discuss the matter."

The men opened the hampers, and the girls set the table in the great hall, near the roaring wood fire that filled the enormous fireplace. Salads and sandwiches, carefully packed, were in faultless condition, and the numerous Thermos bottles held hot soup, coffee, and chocolate. A small freezer of ice cream appeared from somewhere, and a box of confectionery contented the girls while the men smoked after the repast.

"It's this way," said Roger, at last, when they had talked over the whole thing thoroughly, "Mona and I are considering our future,—yes, even our old age! And, so, there are some points that we want to discuss alone. Therefore, and wherefore, my friends,—my future wife and I will, if you please, go apart by ourselves for a bit of confidential chat."

"Good gracious, Roger," said Patty, "anybody would think you two were married already!"

"Same as," Roger retorted; "especially in matters of real estate, and future dwelling-houses and such things. But, really, what I'm going to do, is, to try to persuade, cajole, or coerce Mona into selling the place; for I know she doesn't really want it, only today, in the glamour of this firelight glow, it seems attractive to her. So, I must needs convince her of my superior judgment."

The two went off, laughing, and Philip sat down again beside Patty.

"How happy they are together," he said, musingly.

"Yes; I'm thoroughly glad for them. I never saw a pair better suited to one another. Roger adores the ground Mona walks on, yet he knows just how to manage her——"

"Do you think a man ought to 'manage' the woman he loves?"

"If necessary, yes. At least he should know how to."

"And do you think I know how to manage you?"

"I don't want to be managed,—I can manage myself," Patty smiled, roguishly. "But since you ask me, Phil, no, I don't think you do know how to manage me,—not the least little mite!"

"Teach me then, dear. I'll do just what you say."

"All right. First, you must not scold me if I like people whom you don't like."

"Oh, hang! I had forgotten all about those bumptious lumps! Why remind me?"

"Because it's a case in point. If you care for me, you must care for the things or people that I care for."

"But, Patty,—since you've brought up the subject, let's have it out. You *can't* like those humbugs,—those fake brainsters,—those sap-head pharisees——"

"Phil, suppose you stop calling them names, which mean nothing, and tell me just what it is you have against them."

"There's everything against them, Patty, and nothing for them. They pretend to wisdom, knowledge, and genius that they don't possess. They fake up a lot of patter talk and pass it off for philosophy, or psychology, or lord knows what! And there isn't an ounce of brains in the whole fool bunch of them! That's what makes me mad! They fool you into believing their drivel is wisdom, and it isn't!"

"How do you know? You haven't such a lot of that sort of knowledge yourself."

"What sort of knowledge?"

"Soul lore——"

"Patty! Don't you ever use the word *soul* in the silly way they do! You have a soul, of course,—an immortal soul. But they don't mean that. By soul, they mean a puffball of hifalutin ideas, of nonsense about the occult and psychic, and all that balderdash. Oh, Patty, my little girl, *don't* let those idiot people carry away your common sense and your plain everyday sanity! Don't, I beg of you!"

"Look here, Phil," and Patty stared at him, thoughtfully; "I'm to give you an answer to a certain question in about a fortnight, I believe."

"You are, my Blessed Darling! To be exact, on the fifteenth of December, this present month, you are to admit,—blushingly, if you like, but unequivocally,—that I'm the one man in the world for you."

"Don't be too sure. Do you suppose I *can* love a man who differs so in opinion on this matter of—of psychology——"

"Yes, you blessed goose! You sure can! For, you see, this poppycock,—I beg your pardon,—this poppychology is but a flash in the pan, a rift in the lute, a fly in the ointment. Ahem, I'm getting poetical now! Well, in a short space of period, you will have forgotten all this rubbish,—er,—soul-rubbish, you know,—and you'll be thinking only of how glad you are that you love me and I love you,—just as Mona and Roger are, in these blissful days before their marriage. Oh, Patty, you are going to marry me, aren't you, dear? I can't stand it, if you say no."

Patty looked at him, and a troubled expression filled her blue eyes.

"I don't know, Philip. Honestly, I don't know. But it seems to me if I am going to love you such a lot two weeks from now, I ought to care more than I do now."

"Oh, that's all right, darling. It'll come all at once. Why, some day, you'll suddenly discover you love me with every bit and corner of your dear little blessed heart, and you'll wonder that you only just realised it."

"I don't know, Philip. I hope it *will* be like that—but I don't know."

"Don't worry about it, dear, it will be all right," and Van Reypen smiled into the anxious eyes upraised to his.

CHAPTER VI

"Of course I could do it," Patty agreed, "and I will, if you say so, Elise. I don't care a lot about it, but if everybody is going in for the game, I am, too."

"Yes, do, Patty; it's just in your line, and you can do it a whole lot better than that girl did last year,—you know whom I mean, Ethel."

"Yes, Ray Rose——"

"Ray Rose," said Patty, "what a pretty name!"

"Pretty girl, too," said Ethel Merritt, who was calling at Pine Laurel. "Also, she isn't going to like it any too well to have Miss Fairfield take her part."

"Oh, is it her part?" asked Patty; "then I won't take it."

"Yes, you will. It's all right. Nobody wants her and everybody wants you."

The subject under discussion was a "Society Circus" to be performed by the young people of Lakewood, and of great interest to all concerned.

It was a few days after the Spring Beach trip. Mona had gone back home and Philip also, and Roger was in New York. Elise was greatly enthusiastic over the circus plan, and was managing committees, and arranging details in her usual capable fashion. The affair was a charity benefit under the auspices of a philanthropic society that gave some such entertainment every winter. Patty, always ready for any gaiety, was preparing to take part, though the scheme was a new one to her. She had never been in a society circus, and wanted the matter thoroughly explained.

"It isn't much to explain, Miss Fairfield," Ethel said; "you see, everybody is an animal or a clown or a bareback rider, or something that belongs to a circus. Bob Riggs is ringmaster, and they all obey him. He's awfully funny, and whatever he has to do with, is sure to be a success."

"Tell me more about my part," said Patty; "how do I dress?"

"Well, you see, you're Mlle. Hooperino, and you do fancy dancing and jump through paper hoops——"

"What! Oh, I can't do that!"

"Yes, you can; Bob will show you how. Why, anybody who dances as you do, can do anything of that sort. And your costume is anything you like, in the way of tulle skirts, lots of 'em, and a satin bodice, laced up, you know, and a dinky little cap, and,—oh, anything you think fetching and attractive."

"It sounds fun," Patty agreed, "but what about Miss Rose? I don't want to disappoint her; will she feel annoyed?"

"She sure will! But never mind that. As soon as Bob saw you dance the other night, he said you were the one for the part. You must do it."

"And Ray Rose hasn't been asked this year," put in Elise. "She can't resent your taking what she never had."

"She will, though," declared Ethel. "She looks upon that part as hers, and she won't like Miss Fairfield's having it one bit. But that doesn't matter. What Bob says, goes; and that's all there is about that!"

They talked over the costumes and dances until every question was settled, and Ethel went away with Patty's promise to do what was requested of her.

"But I don't like it," Patty demurred, "on account of that Rose girl.
What is she like, Elise?"

"Oh, she's the jolliest thing in the world. She won't get mad at you,—she isn't that sort. But I know what she will do. She'll try to 'get even,' you know,—do something to pay you out for stealing her glory."

"What'll she do?"

"Oh, I don't know. Some practical joke, like as not. She's a sort of kid, although she's nineteen years old."

"All right, if she's that sort, I'm not afraid of her. I thought she was haughty and sarcastic."

"Oh, no, nothing like that. She's full of mischief and awfully good-natured. But she'll resent Bob's putting you in her place. Don't think of it, Patty. It's all a trifle. She'll have some other part, just as good."

"Very well, I'll turn me thinks toward me frock. What say to pale blue tulle, with silver lace by way of trimmin's?"

"Fine! And after you get yours all planned will you help me with mine?"

"Will I! I live but for that! You, my Elise, must wear corn colour, or, say, maize colour, and poppies."

"Yes, now that you speak of it, that's just what I want. Shall us ask
Philip down, Patty?"

"No; I'd like to have one time of my life without his revered presence."

"Look here, Patty, between you and me and the circus, aren't you expecting to be the eventual Mrs. Philip?"

"Oh, Elise, don't bother me about such far-away eventualities."

"All right, I won't, 'cause I know all about that. You're trying him out, and if he passes his exams, you're going to say yes, pretty soon, now."

"Good gracious! I believe my loving friends know more about my affairs than I do myself!"

"If we didn't we wouldn't know much! You are the most wabbly-hearted person I ever knew! Say, Pats, what did you do to big Bill Farnsworth to send him flying off out West again?"

"I?" and Patty opened her blue eyes wide at Elise.

"Yes, you, you saucer-eyed doll! One day, he was shining brightly all over the place, and the next, he was like a thunder cloud, and departed straightway for the wild and woolly."

"Oh, well, Elise, I can't feel sure that it's precisely your affair; but, as you show a polite interest, I don't mind telling you that we quarrelled."

"About Philip Van Reypen."

"Clairvoyant! Well, if you will have it so,—yes."

"Oh, Patty, then you do like Phil better than Mr. Farnsworth!"

"Do I?"

"You must! or you never would have sent one away because of the other. And, Patty, you did just right. Phil Van Reypen is worth a dozen of that Western giant. He's nice, Mr. Farnsworth is, but Philip is so much more—oh,—aristocratic and—and smart-looking, you know."

"Bill is smart enough," said Patty, thoughtfully.

"I don't mean smart in the sense of clever, but——"

"I know; you mean well-dressed and fashionable."

"Yes, and correct-mannered, and generally all round a gentleman."

"Bill Farnsworth is a gentleman."

"Of course. But not the polished type Philip is. He's an aristocrat."

"Oh, fiddlestrings. I'm sick and tired of hearing that Phil Van Reypen is an aristocrat! If I were an aristocrat, I'd try to hide it! Anyway, I wouldn't advertise it all the time!"

"Patty! you ought to be ashamed of yourself! Phil doesn't advertise it!"

"Well, he doesn't employ you to do it for him, either, so you may as well stop it. I know all about Phil's aristocracy. And it's all right. I never said it wasn't. But a man has got to be something more than an aristocrat before I can fall desperately in love with him. And I must be desperately in love with the man I promise to marry."

Patty spoke seriously, and her blue eyes took on a violet light as she looked out of the window and far away to the sky beyond the pine trees.

"Of course, you must, Patty. Every girl feels that way. But when Phil adores you so, how can you resist him?"

"Now, now, Elise, don't ask leading questions. And, also, let's turn the tables. When a certain nice young man that I wot of, so adores you, how can you resist him?"

"I don't know that I shall," replied Elise, blushing.

"Oho! Bad as that, eh? Now I see why you're so interested in my affairs of the heart. Misery loves company."

"But I'm not miserable."

"No, of course not. Howsumever, if you insist on asking Philip Van down to the circus, I shall advise asking one Mr. Kit Cameron."

"You're a day behind the fair! I've asked him and he can't come."

"Too bad. But, just for that, I won't have Phil, either. Then we can both be heart-whole and fancy free."

"All right. Bob Riggs has taken a large and elegant notion to you, and I am engaged in the pleasant pastime of subjugating Hal Merritt, so we shan't want for rustic swains."

"As if we ever had! But as for me, this circus business seems a piece of work, and I must apply myself to it, or rejoice in a failure at the eventful moment."

"You're right. Let's go over to Mme. Beauvais' and see about her making our costumes."

"Come on, we'll go now."

The next few days the girls devoted all their time to their costumes and to rehearsals for the circus. It was a more elaborate affair than Patty had anticipated, and the men who were to represent animals had marvellous suits of fur that closely imitated the real thing in wild beasts.

A bear, who was ordinarily Jack Fenn, captivated Patty from the first, and when she proposed to dance with him, Bob Riggs caught at the idea.

"Capital!" he cried, "just the thing, Miss Fairfield. Hit of the evening, I assure you. Come, begin your rehearsal at once."

It was not easy, for the bear costume made its wearer clumsy and he awkwardly tripped and nearly upset Patty. But she good-naturedly tried the steps over and over until they began to do better.

"It'll right itself after a few more rehearsals," she said, encouragingly. "Come over to the Farringtons' mornings, and we'll get a little extra practice."

Fenn did so, and, as they perfected the dance, all who saw it prophesied it would be the hit of the whole affair.

And everybody was pleased save and except Ray Rose. She had taken quietly enough the substitution of Patty for herself as *première danseuse*, and had even said she preferred the part that had been assigned her. But when the Bear dance began to be talked about with such enthusiasm, she commenced to find fault.

"How did you happen to worm yourself into my place, Miss Fairfield?" she said at a rehearsal. "Did you make up this Bear foolery?"

"I'm afraid I did, Miss Rose," returned Patty, smiling. "You've no criticism to make, have you?"

"None, except that I wanted that part that Mr. Riggs saw fit to give you, and I'm madder'n hops 'cause I haven't got it."

"Why, I'll give it to you," and Patty smiled at the pouting girl.

"Oh, you can't do that now, it's too late."

"Why didn't you tell me sooner that you wanted it?"

"Never s'posed you'd give it up, or I would have. But I'll get even with you!"

"Now, don't talk like that, for it wasn't my fault that Mr. Riggs selected me for the part."

"Well, it was your fault that you took it, and it will be my fault if I don't make you pay for it!"

"Is this a threat?"

"It most certainly is. What are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing at all,—unless it is carried out. Then I shall defend myself to the best of my ability. I'm good-natured,—and I am told you are,—but I've no intention of being annoyed unjustly, and you'll find that out, Miss Ray Rose! By the way, what a pretty name you have."

"Do you like it? It's really Ramona, but I've always been called Ray. I like you a lot, Miss Fairfield, and I'd be sorry to annoy you, but,—well, perhaps because I do like you so much,—I warn you, I'm going to get ahead of you on this circus program, if I can."

"You're a little goose," said Patty, laughing outright at the determined face and snapping black eyes of Ray Rose. "I do believe you want to cut up some trick on me, because I stole your part, or it seems to you I did, and yet, you rather like me, and hate to do it, after all."

"How did you know?" cried Ray Rose, astonished. "That's exactly what was in my mind! Well, honest, if I can conquer my desire to get even with you, I'll let you alone. But I feel pretty sure I shall do your act myself."

"You are the queerest girl I ever saw!" and Patty looked her astonishment. "Your frankness and your slyness together are the funniest combination! Just for your queer cleverness, I give you permission to get my place from me if you can! But don't forget I offered it to you."

"That's nothing. Bob Riggs wouldn't let me take it. But if I get it in some way that he can't help himself, remember that you told me I might."

Patty was greatly amused at this conversation, but as other and more important matters quickly demanded her attention, she promptly forgot the whole matter.

The circus proper was to be an evening entertainment, but in the afternoon of the same day, the entire cast of characters marched up and down the streets as an advertisement, hoping to attract attention and rouse curiosity to such an extent that the attendance at the evening performance would be large.

The animals presented a fearsome sight. Lions, bears, tigers, monkeys, a giraffe and a donkey, were followed by clowns, acrobats, trapeze performers, and jugglers.

Patty, as *première danseuse*, rode in a gilded chariot drawn by four gaily caparisoned white horses. She sat enthroned on a high seat, and waved smiling greetings as she passed.

Ray Rose, in Pierrette costume, was gay and good-natured, and chummed up with Patty, in evident forgetfulness of any ill-feeling.

"She's all right," Patty said to Elise, as they went home after the parade, and prepared to rest up a little before the evening performance.

Patty had no sooner reached her room than she was called to the telephone. The speaker was Ray Rose.

"Excuse me, Miss Fairfield, but I do want to speak to you a minute. I think my Pierrette act would be a whole lot prettier, if I had a few Highland Fling steps in it, don't you?"

"I do," Patty replied, after a moment's consideration. "Put them in after the one-step movement."

"Yes, that's what I meant. May I run over to your house a minute, and will you show me about the Fling? It won't take a jiffy."

"Yes, of course. Will you come right away?"

"I will. But, oh, pshaw,—I'm all dressed in my Pierrette rig; wouldn't you,—couldn't you come here instead? I'll send the car, it won't take any time at all."

"Why, yes, I can come over, and I will, if you want me to so much." Patty ran to tell Elise she was going, but Elise was not in her room, so Patty went downstairs to look for her. Before she saw Elise, or

indeed any one else, the Rose car came, a little runabout, with only the chauffeur.

Flinging a motor coat from the hall-rack around her, Patty ran out the door and jumped into the car.

In a moment she was at Ray Rose's house, and the girl herself stood smiling in the doorway.

"Good for you!" she cried, "you're a duck! Come right up to my room."

Patty followed Ray, who ran lightly up stairs, and threw open the door of her bedroom.

"What a lovely room!" Patty exclaimed, as she entered a dainty nest all pink and white.

"Yes, isn't it?" agreed Ray, and they stepped inside. "Sit down a minute," she went on, "I want to get another scarf. I'll be right back."

Patty threw herself into a low wicker chair, and, gently closing the door behind her, Ray disappeared.

CHAPTER VII

A CLEVER PLAN

Patty waited, thinking over the coming performance and mentally rehearsing her part. It was not really difficult, but it was tricky, for unless she sprang through the paper-covered hoops at just the right moment, it would be an awkward blunder. However, after many rehearsals, she felt pretty sure of herself, and looked forward with pleasure to the fun.

She glanced round Ray's room. It was full of attractive odds and ends in addition to its furniture and regular appointments, which were of the most elaborate description. Rising, Patty examined some of the pictures and ornaments, and became so engrossed, that the minutes flew by unnoticed. On the dressing-table was a silver-framed clock, and a tinkling chime rang out from it, before Patty had given a thought to the hour. Quarter-past seven! And the performance was scheduled for half-past eight. She had waited there for Ray nearly fifteen minutes. It was very queer. What could have detained her?

Patty waited restlessly for five minutes longer, and then determined to go in search of Ray. She turned the doorknob, but the door would not open! Like a flash the explanation came to her. She was locked in! Ray had done it, in fulfilment of her threat to "get even" with Patty.

The summons over there had been a blind, to trick her into the room, and now she was locked in!

Patty smiled at the silly ruse. The matter couldn't be serious,—she could certainly get out some way, and get home in time to don her costume and get to the circus, even if a little late. Unwilling to cause unnecessary disturbance, she looked round the room to note the exits. There was but one other door and that led to a dressing-room, which in turn had a door opening into a bathroom. That was all. No more doors were to be seen. The windows had no balconies, and being on the second floor, there was no chance of escape thereby.

Patty looked around for a telephone, but saw none. She thought such an elaborate household would have many of them, but realised that Ray probably had a sitting-room or boudoir in addition to these rooms and her telephone would be there. Patty knew the girl was an only child of doting parents, and that she was spoiled and pampered to an inordinate degree.

Patty considered. Doubtless Mr. and Mrs. Rose were not at home, or, if they were, they would not answer a call, for Ray would have looked after that. The servants, likewise, must have been ordered not to release Patty, for Ray Rose was not one to do anything by halves, and if she had planned to get Patty over there, she had also planned to keep her there.

It was ridiculous, it was maddening,—but it was true. Patty was locked in a room and could not get out. She hadn't heard a key turn, but it must have done so. Peeping in the keyhole, she could see that the key was in the lock, from the hall side.

Endeavouring to use her ingenuity, Patty tried to turn the key from her side by means of a button-hook, a nail file, a hairpin, and a glove stretcher. Needless to say her attempts were unsuccessful.

"I've heard of turning a key in its own lock," she mused, but she found the feat impossible of

achievement.

Again the chiming little timepiece reminded her that another quarter hour had flown.

"Half-past seven!" she thought. "My dear Miss Fairfield, you have got to do something pretty quick! Get busy! What would your favourite heroes of wild romance do to get out of such a fix as this?"

When Patty was baffled, she always talked to herself. But her appeals to herself or her ingenuity did no good, and after a thorough search for a means of exit, she concluded to call out. She felt it was an undignified thing to do, and, too, she felt it would do no good, but there was no other course to pursue, that she could see.

So she called, gently at first, and then more loudly, but, as she had anticipated, there was no response. Going close to the door, she called again and again, and then concluded it was useless.

She threw herself into an easy chair, thoroughly angry with Ray Rose, and chagrined at herself for being led into such a trap.

"I might have known there was some trickery," she thought, "when that girl called me over here at the last minute. And she was so sweet and friendly today, it should have put me on my guard. Elise warned me, but I never dreamed of anything like this. However, now is no time to worry over that, I must get out,—that's what I must do, get out!"

But it seemed hopeless. The case was so simple, that there was no opportunity for ingenious schemes. There she was, in the beautiful room, with the only exit to the house, the hall door, securely locked. The door was of solid mahogany, the knob and lock of a most secure firmness. Had it been a light or flimsy door, Patty would have rattled and shaken it, but this door was solid as a rock. Either, she would have to think up some clever plan, and that quickly, or spend the entire evening there in solitude. Her quick mind took in these alternatives, and she thought that if no idea presented itself soon, she would succumb to the inevitable, and quietly settle down for the evening. There were pleasant-looking books about, soft couches and pillows, convenient reading-lamps, and even a box of chocolates on a table. Matters might be worse, thought philosophical Patty. But she hated to give up,—to acknowledge herself beaten.

Once again she opened a window, and looked out. It was on the side of the house, and toward the rear.

The house was not set back far from the street; indeed, the sidewalk was not more than forty feet from the window out of which Patty leaned. An idea came to her, and going quickly to the table she found a sheet of paper and a pencil. There was no desk in the room, and she felt herself lucky to find these things at all. She hastily scribbled a note, but she made it urgent and definite. Then she looked around for a missile which she could throw to the street. There were few things that were available, and she finally selected a heavy hairbrush as the best. It was of ivory and bore a bold monogram, as did the rest of Ray's toilet appointments, but Patty took it unhesitatingly, as she had reached the limit of her patience and consideration.

She tied the note firmly to the brush, and leaning far out of the window, waited for a promising passer-by. At last, a young man came along, and Patty deftly threw the brush so that it landed at his very feet. Practice at basketball and other such sports had made her accurate of aim and as the astonished man saw the brush, he naturally picked it up.

Patty watched him take off the note and read it, by the light of the street electric, and after a swift gaze at the house, he started off at a brisk pace.

"H'm," said Patty to herself, "not so worse, Miss Fairfield, not so worse! The axe is laid at the root of the tree!"

Glancing at the clock, she sat down to wait. It was twenty minutes to eight, but her heart beat high with hope. If she could outwit Ray Rose it would be great fun, and she would "pay back" the mischievous girl in her own coin.

At ten minutes to eight, the door of the room opened a little way. A servant of the Rose household put her head in, and said, "This woman wishes to see you, Miss Fairfield," and Sarah, a maid from the Farringtons', stood in the doorway.

"Come in, Sarah," said Patty. "Close that door!" she said to the Rose servant, so peremptorily, that the order was obeyed at once.

"Quick!" whispered Patty, and Sarah tore off her long cloak and bonnet and veil, and Patty as quickly

put them on. Then she took the small basket Sarah had brought, and standing near the door, said, in a clear voice: "You may go now, Sarah. Tell Miss Elise not to look for me this evening."

"Yes, Miss Patty," Sarah responded, and then, as the servant outside opened the door, Patty slipped through, turning her face so that it might not be seen. The Rose servant, thinking Sarah had come out, relocked the door quickly, that the prisoner might not escape, and Patty went demurely downstairs, and out at the back door, without let or hindrance. Once in the street, she fairly flew to the hall where the circus performance was to be given, for she well knew that Ray Rose had probably already secured her dancing costume from Elise by some plausible bit of trickery.

It was but a few moments after eight when Patty walked into the dressing-room of the amateur performers.

"For gracious' sake, Patty, where *have* you been?" cried Elise, who was sitting before a mirror, making up her face. "Nobody could find you anywhere!"

"Here I am, all right," said Patty, blithely. "Where's Ray Rose?"

"In the next room. Where's your costume? Ray came over and got it from the house."

"Oh, she did, did she? All right."

Patty went into the next room, where several girls sat in their stage costumes, and all with warm wraps around them. Ray Rose was completely enveloped in a long cloak that covered her from neck to feet.

"Hello, Ray," said Patty, pleasantly; "I'll take my costume now, as I want to get dressed in it."

If ever there was a surprised looking girl it was Ray at that moment.
She stared at Patty as at an apparition.

"Where—where did you come from?" she stammered.

"Oh, I ran over from your house. Your room is lovely, Ray, but I got awfully tired of it. Now, you get yourself out of my skirts, and hand them over to me. But first, you go and telephone to your household to let Sarah, the Farringtons' maid, out of your room, where she may yet be locked in, for all I know."

Ray looked bewildered, and Patty, whose eyes were shining with righteous indignation, took her by the arm, and marched her to the telephone. Patty herself called up the Rose house, and then, thrusting the receiver into Ray's hand, said, "Give your order, and be quick about it."

"Let the girl out of my room," said Ray, through the transmitter. "It isn't Miss Fairfield in there now, it's one of the Farrington maids. Let her go home."

Patty took the receiver from Ray and hung it up, and then marched her to the dressing-room, and divested her of her long cloak.

"Why, Ray Rose!" cried Elise, "if you haven't got Patty's dress on, yourself! What are you up to?"

"Never mind, Elise," said Patty, "help us change, there isn't much time. Ray made a mistake."

Without a word, Ray took off Patty's voluminous tulle skirts in which she was arrayed, and handed them over to their rightful owner. As fast as she received them, Patty put them on, and in ten minutes, was herself clothed in her rightful property.

Meantime Ray had no costume to wear.

"Where's your Pierrette rig?" asked Patty.

"Over home," said Ray, disconsolately.

"Go and telephone for them to send it over, if you want it," said
Patty. "Put on your long cloak, and telephone."

Ray looked at her dubiously for a moment, and then said, "No, I won't.
I'll go home and stay home,—that's what I'll do!"

"Go ahead," said Patty, blithely, who didn't feel she really owed the girl any further consideration. "And next time you try to get even with anybody, pick out some one who'll let you *stay* even!"

"You're a hummer!" said Ray, in unwilling admiration. "How did you do it?"

"I'll tell you some other time," and Patty laughed in spite of herself at the admiration on Ray's countenance. "If you're going to get your costume over here and get into it, you want to hustle."

"Time enough," returned Ray, carelessly. "My stunt is the sixth on the program, so there's lots of time."

This was true, so Patty turned all her attention to reddening her pink cheeks, while the other girls gathered around in desperate curiosity.

"What does it all mean?" asked Ethel Merritt. "Do tell us, Miss
Fairfield. Why did Ray wear your dress?"

"Ask her," said Patty, smiling. "It was a whim of hers, I guess. It made me a little bother, but all's well that ends well."

"You are the good-naturedest old goose!" cried Elise, who had an inkling of what was inexplicable to the others.

"Might as well," said Patty, serenely. "She's a hummer, Ray Rose is.
She sure is a hummer!"

And then Patty pronounced herself finished and turned from the mirror for inspection.

"Lovely!" approved Elise, "if you admire strongly-marked features!"

Patty's cheeks and lips were very red, her eyebrows greatly darkened, and her face thickly coated with powdered chalk.

"It's awful, I know," she agreed, "but in the strong lights of the stage and the footlights too, you have to pile it on like that."

"Of course you do," said Ethel. "Mine looks the same."

Laughingly gaily, the girls went to take their places on the stage.
Bob Riggs, the ringmaster, was there and assigned them their places.

Patty's performance was near the beginning of the program. She did a solo dance, first, a lovely fancy dance that she had learned in New York, and then she did the grotesque and humorous dances called for by the occasion. The one that necessitated springing, head first, through hoops covered with light, thin paper, she did very prettily, striking the taut paper with just the right force to snap it into a thousand shreds.

Her act was wildly applauded by the enthusiastic audience, and would have been several times repeated but for the scarcity of hoops.

Later came her grotesque dance with Bruin Boru, the wonderful dancing bear. Jack Fenn was very funny in his bear-skin costume, and he pawed and scraped as he ambled ludicrously about, and kept time to the music with mincing steps or sprawling strides.

This number was the hit of the evening, and Ray Rose had longed to perform it herself. But her plan fell through, and in her pretty Pierrette costume she did a very pleasing song and dance, but her eyes rested longingly on Patty's frilly skirts.

The last number was a chariot race. The chariots were of the low, backless variety, peculiar to circus performances, indeed they had been procured from a real circus.

Patty and Ethel Merritt drove two of these, and Bob Riggs and Jack Fenn the other two.

But there was no such mad race as is sometimes seen at the real circuses. The two men drove faster, but Patty and Ethel were content to fall behind and bring up the rear. In fact, it was in no sense of the word a race, but merely a picturesque drive of the gorgeous chariots by the gay drivers.

As Patty swept round the small arena for the last time, she beckoned to Ray Rose, who sat, a little disconsolately, near the edge of the stage platform.

"Get in!" Patty whispered, as she slowed down, and, obeying without question, Ray jumped from the stage, right into the chariot, which was large enough to hold both girls.

"Grab the reins with me!" Patty cried, and Ray did, and the final triumphant circuit was made with two laughing drivers holding the ribbons, to the deafening applause of the hilarious audience.

Bob Riggs, from his own chariot, pronounced the entertainment over, and then the performers and audience mingled in a gay crowd, dancing and feasting till the small hours.

"I'm sorry," said Ray, penitently, to Patty, as soon as she had a good chance. "I was a wretch, and you're an angel to speak to me at all."

"I am," agreed Patty, calmly. "Not one girl in a dozen would forgive you. It was a horrid thing to do, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself and you are. I know that. But I choose to forget the whole affair, and I only ask you never to treat anybody else so meanly."

"I never will," promised Ray Rose. "I think you have cured me of that childish trick of 'getting even.'"

"Yes, till next time," said Patty, laughing.

CHAPTER VIII

A REAL POEM

"It's simply absurd of you, Patty," said Elise, as they reached home after the circus, "to let Ray Rose off so easily. She cut up an awfully mean trick, and she ought to be made to suffer for it."

"Now, now, Elise, it's my own little kettle of fish, and you must keep out of it. You see, it makes a difference who does a thing. If Ray Rose were an intimate friend of mine, I should resent her performance and make a fuss about it. But she is such a casual acquaintance,—why, probably I shall never see her again after I go away from Lakewood,—and so I consider it better judgment to ignore her silly prank, rather than stir up a fuss about it."

"I don't agree with you, you're all wrong; but tell me the whole story.
What did she do?"

"You see, she was determined to do that hoop dance, and the only way she could think of, to get me out of it, was to get me over to her house and lock me up there. It was a slim chance I had of getting out, but I managed it. She called me over by telephone, and then locked me in her bedroom. How did she get my clothes?"

"Sent a maid over here, saying that you were at her house and wanted your costume sent over. I thought you were helping her, in your usual idiotic 'helping hand' way, and I sent the dress and all the belongings."

"Well, of course, I knew nothing about all that. So, I suppose the little minx dressed herself and put on the long cloak and walked off. She is boss in her own home, I know that, and, as I learned later, her father and mother were out to dinner, so she ordered the servants to pay no attention to any call or disturbance I might make. I sized it up, and I felt pretty sure no screaming or yelling or battering at the door would do any good, so I pondered on a move of strategy. But I couldn't think of anything for a long time, and had just about made up my mind to spend the evening there, when I made one desperate attempt and it succeeded. I wrote a note to Sarah to come over there and say she had to give me a certain medicine at that hour, or I would be ill. And I told her to wear a thick veil and a long cloak. She did all this, and I just slipped into her cloak and hat and veil and came out the door in her place, leaving her behind. They thought it was Sarah who came out, of course."

"Fine! Patty, you're a genius! How did you get the note to Sarah?"

"Tied it to Ray's hairbrush and threw it at the feet of a young man who was going by. On the outside I wrote, 'Please take this quickly to Sarah Moore at George Farrington's,' and gave the address. I added, 'Hurry, as it is a matter of tremendous importance!' And I'd like to know who that young man was."

"Where's the hairbrush?"

"Sarah brought it back with her, and left it where it belongs. I knew it might be broken or lost, but I could have replaced it, so I took that chance. And nothing else seemed just right to throw."

"But, Patty, it was an awful thing for Ray to do to you."

"Oh, don't fuss, Elise. Consider the circumstances. I had given her permission, in a sort of way, to

keep me from that stunt if she could, and she had said, 'If I do, remember you said I might.' So you see, she was within her rights, in a way, and beside, I tell you I don't want to stir up a hornets' nest about it. The incident is beneath notice; and, do you know, I can't help admiring the girl's daring and ingenuity."

"Oh, you'd admire a Grizzly Bear, if he succeeded in eating you up!
You're a good-natured goose, Patty."

"Maybe. But I know the difference between a foolish prank and a real offence, that must be resented. You're the goose, Elise, not to see how silly it would be to raise a row against a girl who means nothing to me, and whom I shall never see again after this visit is over."

"All right, Pattikins, have it your own way. Ray Rose is a sort of law unto herself, and she has lots of friends who would take her part."

"It isn't that, exactly. If I wanted to raise the issue, I'm sure my side of the matter would be the side of right and justice. But it isn't worth my time or trouble to take it up. And, then, I did tell her to go ahead and outwit me, if she could, so there's that on her side. Now, Elise, about going home. I must go soon, for I want to be in New York a week before the wedding, and you do, too."

"Yes, I do. Suppose we stay down here for the skating party day after tomorrow, and then go to New York the day after that."

"I think so. Your mother will be going up about then, and the days will fairly fly until the fifteenth. It seems funny to think of Roger being married, doesn't it? He's such a boy."

"I know it. Mona seems older than he, though she isn't."

"A girl always seems older than a man, even of the same age. I want to have 'a shower' for Mona before the wedding."

"Oh, Patty, a shower is so—so——"

"So chestnutty? I know it. But Mona wants it. Of course she didn't say so right out, but I divined it. It isn't that she wants the presents, you know, but Mona has a queer sort of an idea that she must have everything that anybody else has. And Lillian Van Arsdale had a shower, so Mona wants one, and I'm going to give it for her."

"All right. What kind?"

"Dunno yet, but something strikingly novel and original. I shall set my great intellect to work on it at once, and invite the people by notes from here, before I go back to New York."

"All right, my lady, but if you don't get to bed now, you'll be pale and holler-eyed tomorrow, and that will upset your placid vanity."

"Wretch! As if I had a glimmer of a trace of a vestige of that deadly sin!"

The girls were very busy during the last few days of Patty's stay in Lakewood. There were many matters to attend to in connection with the approaching wedding. Also, Patty had become a favourite in the social circle and many parties were made especially for her.

And the day before their departure, Elise gave a little farewell tea, to which were bidden only the people Patty liked best.

The Blaneys were there, and, capturing Patty, Sam took her from the laughing crowd and led her to a secluded alcove of the veranda. It was a pleasant nook, enclosed with glass panes, and filled with ferns and palms.

"Sit thee down," said Blaney, arranging a few cushions in a long low wicker chair.

"I'm glad to," and Patty dropped into the seat. "I do think teas are the limit for tiring people out."

"You oughtn't to waste yourself on teas. It's a crime," and Blaney looked positively indignant.

"What would be the proper caper for my indefatigable energy?"

"You oughtn't to be energetic at all. For you, just to *be*, is enough."

"Not much it isn't! Why, if I just be'd, and didn't do anything else, I should die of that extreme bored feeling. And, it isn't like you to recommend such an existence, anyway."

"I shouldn't for any one else. But you, oh, my lily-fair girl, you are so beautiful, so peerless——"

"Good gracious, Mr. Blaney, what has come over you?" Patty sat up straight, in dismay, for she had no intention of being talked to in that vein by Sam Blaney.

"The spell of your presence," he replied; "the spell of your beauty,—your charm, your——"

"Please don't," said Patty, "please don't talk to me like that! I don't like it."

"No? Then of course I'll stop. But the spell remains. The witchery of your face, your voice——"

"There you go again! You promised to stop."

"How can I, with you as inspiration? My soul expands,—my heart beats in lilting rhythms, you seem to me a flame goddess——"

"Just what is a flame goddess?" interrupted Patty, who wanted to giggle, but was too polite.

"I see your soul as a flame of fire,—a lambent flame, with tongues of red and yellow——"

And now Patty did laugh outright. She couldn't help it. "Oh, my soul hasn't tongues," she protested. "I'm sure it hasn't, Mr. Blaney."

"Yes," he repeated, "tongues, silent, untaught tongues,—but with unknown, unvoiced melodies that await but the torch of sympathy to sound, lyrically, upon the waiting air."

"Am I really like that? Do you think I could voice lyrics, myself? I mean it,—write poetry, you know. I've always wanted to. Do you think I could, Mr. Blaney?"

"I know it. Unfolding one's soul in song is not an art, as some suppose, to be learned,—it is a natural, irrepressible expression of the inner ego, it is a response to the melodic urge——"

"Oh, wait a minute, you're getting beyond me. What do all these things mean? It's so much Greek to me."

"But you want to learn?"

"Yes; that is, I'm interested in it. I always did think I'd like to write poetry. But I don't know the rules."

"There are no rules. Unfetter your soul, take a pencil,—the words will come."

"Really? Can you do that, Mr. Blaney? Could you take a pencil, *now*,—and just write out your soul, and produce a poem?"

Patty was very much in earnest. Sam Blaney looked at her, the eager pleading face urged him, the blue eyes dared a refusal, and the hovering smile seemed to doubt his ability to prove his own proposition.

"Of course I could!" he replied. "With you for inspiration, I could write a poem that would throb and thrill with the eternal heart of the radiance of the soul's starshine."

"Then do it," cried Patty; "I believe you, I thoroughly believe you, but I want to see it. I want the poem for myself. Give it to me."

Slowly Blaney took a pencil and notebook from his pocket. He sat gazing at her, and Patty, fairly beaming with eager interest, waited. For some minutes he sat, silent, almost motionless, and she began to grow restless.

"I don't want to hurry you," she said, at last, "but I mustn't stay here too long. Please write it now, Mr. Blaney. I'm sure you can do it,—why delay?"

"Yes, I can do it," he said, "but I want to get the highest, the divinest inspiration, in order to produce a gem worthy of your acceptance."

"Well, don't wait longer for that. Give me your second best, if need be,—only write something. I've always wanted to see a real, true poet write a real true poem. I never had a chance before. Now, don't dare disappoint me!"

Patty looked very sweet and coaxing, and her voice was earnestly pleading, not at all implying doubt of his ability or willingness.

Still Blaney sat, thoughtfully regarding her.

"Come, come," she said, after another wait, "I shall begin to think you can't be inspired by my presence, after all! If you are, genius ought to burn by this time. If not, I suppose we'll have to give it up,—but it will disappoint me horribly."

The blue eyes were full of reproach, and Patty began to draw her scarf round her shoulders and seemed about to rise.

"No, no," protested Blaney, putting out a hand to detain her, "a moment,—just a moment,—stay, I have it!"

He began to scribble rapidly, and, fascinated, Patty watched him. Occasionally he glanced at her, but it was with a faraway look in his eyes, and an exalted expression on his face.

He wrote fast, but not steadily, now and then pausing, as if waiting for the right word, and then doing two or three lines without hesitation. Finally, he drew a long sigh, and the poem seemed to be finished.

"It is done," he said, "not worthy of your acceptance, but made for you. Shall I read it to you?"

"Yes, do," and Patty was thrilled by the fervour in his tones.

In the soft, low voice that was one of his greatest charms, Blaney read these lines:

"I loved her.—Why? I never knew.—Perhaps
Because her face was fair; perhaps because
Her eyes were blue and wore a weary air;—
Perhaps . . . perhaps because her limpid face
Was eddied with a restless tide, wherein
The dimples found no place to anchor and
Abide; perhaps because her tresses beat
A froth of gold about her throat, and poured
In splendour to the feet that ever seemed
Afloat. Perhaps because of that wild way
Her sudden laughter overleapt propriety;
Or—who will say?—perhaps the way she wept."

The lovely voice ceased, and its musical vibrations seemed to hover in the air after the sound was stilled.

"It's beautiful," Patty said, at last, in an awed tone; "I had no idea you could write like that! Why, it's real poetry."

"You're real poetry," said Blaney, simply, as he put the written paper in his pocket.

"No, no," cried Patty, "give it to me. It's mine. You made it for me and it's mine. Nobody ever made a real poem for me before. I want it."

"Oh, nonsense, you don't want it."

"Indeed I do. I must have it."

"Will you promise not to show it to anybody?"

"'Course not! I'll show it to everybody!"

"Then you can't have it. I'm sensitive, I admit, but I can't bear to have the children of my brain bruited to the world——"

"I haven't a notion what bruited means, but I promise you I won't do that. I'll keep it sacredly guarded from human eyes, and read it to myself when I'm all alone. Why, Mr. Blaney, it's a wonderful poem. I've simply got to have it, and that's all there is about that!"

"I give it to you, then, but don't,—please don't show it to the hilarious populace. It is for you only."

"All right. I'll keep it for me only. But I haven't half thanked you for it. I do appreciate it, I assure you, and I feel guilty because I underrated your talent. But perhaps it is because I saw you do it, that I care so very much for it. Anyway, I thank you."

Patty held out her hand in genuine gratitude, and, taking it gently, Blaney held it a moment as he

said, "I claim my reward. May I come to see you in New York?"

"Yes, indeed, I'll be awfully glad to have you. And Alla must come, too. I'll make a party for you as soon as the wedding is over. Will you be at that?"

"At the reception, yes. And I shall see you there?"

"Of course. I say, Mr. Blaney, why don't you write a wedding poem for Miss Galbraith? She'd love it! She wants everything for her wedding that can possibly be procured."

"No. A poem of mine cannot be ordered, as from a caterer!"

"Oh, forgive me! I didn't mean that. But, I thought you might write one, because I asked you."

"No, Miss Fairfield. Anything you want for yourself, but not for others. A thousand times no! You understand?"

"Yes, of course. I oughtn't to have asked you. But I'm so delighted with this poem of mine, that I spoke unthinkingly. Now, I must run away; Elise is beckoning frantically, and I daresay the guests are taking leave of me, and I'm not there! Good-bye, Mr. Blaney, until we meet in New York. And thank you more than I can say for your gift, your ever-to-be treasured gift."

"It is my privilege to have offered it and for me to thank you for the opportunity."

CHAPTER IX

A SHOWER

"If you ask me," Patty said to Nan, "I think these 'shower' affairs are ridiculous. All the girls who are coming today will give Mona a wedding present, so why add a shower gift?"

"I didn't ask you," returned Nan, "but since you raise the question, I'll just remark, in passing, that it's part of the performance, and it's no more ridiculous than lots of the other flummery that goes along with a this year's model wedding. *I* didn't have any showers,—but that was then."

"Right you are, Lady Gay, and as Mona most especially desired this mark of esteem from her friends, I'm glad she's going to have it."

"But I thought showers were usually surprises,—I didn't know the bride-elect requested one, or even knew of it beforehand."

"Your think is correct. It's most unusual, but Mona is unusual, and any surprise in connection with her wedding would be impossible. She knows it all, and the arrangements are all under her direct supervision. It's going to be a pretty stunning affair, Nansome."

"So I gather from what I hear. While you were at Lakewood, I didn't get much of the news about it, but since your return I've heard of nothing else."

"And you won't until after the fifteenth. I declare, Nan, I've had no time for a real heart to heart talk with you since I got back. I haven't even told you about the Blaneys."

"Oh, the highbrow people? No; were they interesting?"

"Yes, indeed. You'll meet them at the wedding. Now, see here, I've asked half a dozen of the crowd to stay to dinner tonight after the shower, so look after the commissariat, won't you?"

"With pleasure. Who's staying?"

"Oh, Mona and Roger and Elise and Kit Cameron and Phil,—that's all."

"Elise and Kit are pretty good friends, aren't they?"

"Yes, there may be another wedding in the dim future."

"Be careful, Patty. They say 'Three times a bridesmaid, never a bride,' you know."

"Goodness! I must beware. I was bridesmaid for Christine,—and now for Mona,—then, if I'm bridesmaid for Elise, my last hope vanishes! I might be her maid of honor, though. Does that count?"

"Yes, counts just the same. But perhaps you'll be married before Elise. She isn't engaged yet."

"Neither am I."

"Same as."

"Indeed it *isn't* same as! Philip made me pretty mad down at Lakewood. He scorned my new friends, the Blaneys, and he was most disagreeable about it, too."

"All right. Far be it from me to hasten your matrimonial alliance. I'm only too glad to keep you here. It's lonesome enough, days when you're away."

"Nice old Nan!" and Patty gave her a whirlwind hug that nearly took her off her feet.

Twenty girls were invited to the shower, and Mona arrived first of all. She came bustling in enveloped in furs, which she unfastened and threw off as she talked.

"Everything's going fine!" she announced. "I've attended to the very smallest details myself, so there'll be no mistakes. There always are mistakes and oversights at a wedding and mine is going to be the great exception. My, but I'm tired! I've been chasing about since early this morning. Spent hours with the floral artist, and had a long interview with the caterer. But I confab with him every day. I've changed the menu four times already."

"You're a goose, Mona," observed Patty, smiling at her enthusiastic friend, "what do you care what people eat at your wedding, as long as it's good and proper?"

"My dear child, I only expect to get married once in my checkered career, and so I want everything connected with the occasion to be perfect. I don't want to look back and regret that I didn't have as much of a symphony in the supper as I did in the orchestra. You don't know the responsibility of a girl who has to get married and look after the wedding both. You'll have Mrs. Nan to run the arrangements, but I haven't anybody but little Mona."

The bride-elect looked so radiant and capable and generally happy, that Patty knew better than to waste any sympathy on her.

"You love it all, Mona," she said, "you're just in your element ordering decorations and deciding menus; and I suppose you've superintended the hat-check people and the elevator service."

"Of course I have. I practically run the whole hotel just at present. The management have to take a back seat where anything connected with the fifteenth is concerned."

"It doesn't seem like a wedding at all," laughed Patty. "It is more like a pageant."

"It's a wedding, all right. You'll realise it when you see me go off with Roger. Oh, Patty, don't think I don't realise and appreciate the importance and solemnity of the marriage tie, but I do want the appointments to be perfect and beautiful just *because* it is my wedding to Roger. We're very much in love, you know——"

"I do know it, Mona, and it's all beautiful, and I'm glad you're having everything just as you want it. You're an old dear, and nobody wishes you more happiness than I do."

"Don't talk in that strain, or I'll weep on your shoulder. I'm all keyed up, you know—honest, Patty, it's pretty awful to have no mother or aunt or anything. Only just a father, who's heavenly kind and generous, but no good for advice or consulting talks."

"All right, Mona girl, we won't indulge in real talk now, for the girls will begin to come in a minute. Go and primp a little, and then come down to the drawing-room."

Patty ran downstairs, Mona soon followed, and then the guests arrived.

In an effort to have a new sort of a shower, Patty had decreed a lace shower, and many and varied were the gifts. As Patty had wisely remarked, lace gave a wide scope. One could choose valuable specimens of real lace or trifling affairs that were pretty and inexpensive.

And so, when the time for their exhibition came the score of merry young people sat breathlessly awaiting the fun.

In the doorway appeared Elise, in the costume of a Brittany peasant. She carried a huge white basket ornamented with orange blossoms and fluttering white ribbons.

"Laces, lady?" she said, approaching Mona. "Nice, pretty laces.
Handiwork of the humble peasants for the grand lady. Accept,—please."

With bows and curtseys, Elise opened the basket and placed it at Mona's feet.

Delightedly, Mona examined the contents, and at each gift a chorus of exclamations went up from all the admiring throng.

Patty's offering was a tablecloth of Filet Antique and Venetian embroidery, and was among the most beautiful in the lot.

Elise gave a berthe of rose point, and Nan a Duchesse lace fan. But most of the gifts were of a simpler nature, and dainty boudoir pillows, table scarfs, bags, caps, and handkerchiefs made up the filmy shower and delighted the heart of the recipient.

Mona was radiant with joy. Although a pampered favourite of fortune, she was especially fond of receiving gifts, and she loved every individual lace confection and warmly thanked the donors.

"The things are heavenly, girls," she cried; "perfectly darling, every one of them! I can't thank you enough, but my heart is just overflowing with honest-to-goodness gratitude. Oh, I *do* love 'em so!" and gathering the whole lot in her arms, she rocked back and forth in ecstasy. "How did you ever come to think of a lace shower, Patty? I love lace more than anything on earth—except Roger,—and I shall furnish my house with these beauty things. Oh, you are all so good to me!"

Tea was served in the dining-room, and Mona graced the head of the table, with her bridal attendants on either side of her. The place cards and favours were all suggestive of the wedding occasion, and, for a centrepiece, two white doves perched on a basket of white roses.

Mona was in highest spirits and her eyes glistened with pleasure as the girls assured her of their friendship and love, and wished her all sorts of future joy and happiness.

Patty looked at her a little curiously, and then she realised that the girl had lived a loveless life, and that the sudden change to the atmosphere of love and friendship had well-nigh turned her head.

The guests departed, all but Mona and Elise, who were to stay for dinner, and the three chums went up to Patty's room to chat.

"I can't believe these things are really mine," said Mona, as she collected and arranged her laces, preparatory to having them sent home. "Why is everybody so good to me?"

"Oh, come now, Mona," said Elise, laughing, "it isn't such wonderful goodness. People always give things to brides. Patty, if you don't give me a shower like this, I won't get married at all."

"Didn't know you thought of it," returned Patty. "But I'll promise the shower all right. When shall I invite the girls, Elise?"

"Oh, I haven't picked out the bridegroom yet, so there's no hurry. I've got to get used to having my brother married, before I think of it myself. Mona, we'll soon be sisters. Think of that!"

"I've often thought of it, Elise. I've never had a sister, and I shan't know just how to act at first. But I hope——"

"There now, don't get sentimental! Not but what I feel that way, too, but you'll get weepy in a minute,—and then it's all up with you!"

"You're so emotional, Mona," said Patty, smiling at her, "and so capable, and so generally all-round efficient, you're just the one to get married. Now, when it comes my turn, I don't want all this hullabaloo,—I think I shall get a good old rope ladder and elope."

"What! and not have any showers and music and reception and everything?"

"Oh, well, I don't know. We'll see when the time comes. But just now, we must put this affair of yours through. I'm glad there are only a few more days. I couldn't stand this excitement very long. Come on, girls, get ready for dinner. The boys will come soon. There's the bell now. If it's Roger, let Mona go down and see him alone. I'm a fine gooseberry, don't you think so?"

"It is Roger," Patty announced, a moment later, as she leaned over the banister to see, "skip along,

Mona, we'll be down in ten minutes."

"Isn't she funny?" said Elise, as Patty returned to her room. "I never saw anybody so crazy."

"She's so excited, she doesn't know whether she's on her head or her heels," agreed Patty. "Her nature is volatile, and she has no sense of moderation. She wants everything and all there is of it. That's all."

"She's a good one for Roger. He's inclined to take things lazily.
Mona will be a sort of spur to him."

"They're all right," agreed Patty. "It's an ideal match. Come on,
Elise, we've given them enough time alone."

The girls went down, and then Van Reypen and Kit Cameron appeared.

Dinner was a gay feast, and the elder Fairfields were as much interested in the chatter as the young people.

"Assert yourself, Roger," said Mr. Fairfield. "Don't let these girls monopolize the conversation, with their feminine fripperies and millinery muddles."

"Models, Dad, not muddles," laughed Patty. "But we don't talk about those much now, they're all finished. Oh, Mona, Genevieve's skirt had to be all made over——"

"Oh, no," said her father, "you don't talk about them much! Only all the time, that's all!"

"Let 'em," said Roger, magnanimously; "I've learned in the last few days, that the hang of Genevieve's skirt is a matter of enormous magnitude."

"Good!" cried Patty, "Mona has begun training you already. When is your Bachelor dinner, Roger?"

"Not till Wednesday night. I put it off so Farnsworth could get here."

"Oh, is he coming? I didn't know he was East."

"He wasn't. He's coming on on purpose for the event. I wanted him especially. At least, Mona did."

"All the same," said Mona. "Oh, yes, of course I wanted Big Bill here.
We've been friends for years, and he must dance at my wedding."

It was the first time Patty had seen Van Reypen since her return from Lakewood, and, during the evening, he drew her away from the others and leading her to the semi-privacy of a big davenport in the library, he announced he was going to talk to her.

"Talk away," said Patty, "but I warn you, I've no time or attention for anything not connected with wedding bells."

"But this is connected with wedding bells," and Philip's dark eyes smiled into her own, "only, not Mona's chimes. Our own."

"Don't, Phil," said Patty, gently, noting his serious look and tone. "I've got four days yet till the fifteenth, and,—oh, pshaw, I might as well tell you now, that I'm not going to be engaged to you."

"Patty!" and Van Reypen's face went white. "You don't mean that."

"Yes, I do. I've had so much wedding doings for Mona, I'm sick and tired of it. I don't want to be engaged myself, or hear of anybody else being engaged, until I forget all about all this fuss and feathers."

"There does seem to be an awful lot of fussy feathers, or whatever you call it, about the affair, doesn't there?"

"Yes; and I'm glad to do all I can for Mona. I'm enjoying it, too, but
I don't want any wedding of my own for years and years and years."

"By that time you'll be a pretty old bird. You ticked off a goodly number of years just then. But, seriously, Patty, I don't want to bother you——"

"Well, you *do* bother me. Why, Phil, every single chance you get, you talk about——"

"About my love for you? I mean to, Patty, but you don't give me a chance. When I try to tell you of my love and devotion, you break loose about not wanting to be engaged——"

"Well, of course I do. A girl doesn't want to hear of love and devotion from a man she isn't engaged to, does she?"

"I don't know. I hope so, in this case. That is, I hope I'm the man you're going to be engaged to, and soon, so I can tell you of my love and devotion. They're deep, Patty, deep and true, and——"

"Then why did you treat me so horridly down at Lakewood, just because I enjoyed having to do with people who had some brains and weren't of the silly, addle-pated type we meet mostly in our own class of society?"

"But, Patty, dearest, those Blaneys aren't the real things. They haven't education and genius,—they only pretend they have."

"Phil, I think you're horrid. They have so. Why, Sam Blaney wrote a poem that's the most beautiful thing I ever read!"

"Let me see it."

"I can't. I promised I wouldn't. It's—it's sort of sacred——"

"A sacred poem! Blaney?"

"No, I don't mean religious. But it's sacred to me,—it's—it's a real poem, you see."

"Well, he isn't a real poet, by a long chalk! I did think, Patty, that when you came home from Lakewood you'd forget all that rubbish bunch."

"How you do love to call them names! I don't think it's nice of you, one bit. They're going to be at the wedding, and I hope you'll be decent to them then, as they're my friends."

"Oh, I'll be decent to them, but I shan't have any time to waste on them. I've a matter of my own on hand for that night. A girl I wot of has promised to give me her answer to a question I asked, and, when the time comes, I can't help thinking that that girl is going to be kind to me."

"I dunno," said Patty.

CHAPTER X

MONA'S WEDDING

It was the night of Mona's wedding. The ballroom of the big hotel where Mona and her father lived was the scene of the ceremony, and this was already filled with guests. A temporary altar had been erected at one end of the long room, and was banked with lilies and white hydrangeas against a background of tall palms. On either side were tall candles in cathedral candlesticks.

To the altar led a temporary aisle, formed by stanchions of old silver candelabra filled with ascension lilies, and joined by garlands of white blossoms.

Promptly on time, the bridal cortège appeared. First walked a vested choir singing a processional. Then the bridesmaids, in palest pink tulle frocks, each pair carrying between them a long garland of pink roses, and wearing wreaths of pink roses on their hair.

Patty and Daisy Dow were the first pair, and very lovely they looked as they traversed the flower-hung room. Garlands of pink roses were everywhere, on the walls, from the doorframes and windows, and gracefully drooping from the ceiling. Next came Elise, Maid of Honor, in a gown of slightly deeper pink, and then Mona, her father beside her.

The bride's gown was of point lace with a very long court train of embroidered satin. Her veil, of old lace, was an heirloom from her mother, and was held by a wreath of orange blossoms. Roger's gift of a diamond pendant was her only jewel.

After the ceremony, as the bridal party retraced their steps, the bridesmaids sang softly, "O Perfect

Love," and then they took their places for the reception, the orchestra's strains broke forth, and the festivities began. Having no mother or near feminine relative, Mona had asked Nan to receive with her, and very gracefully Nan did the honours.

"A beautiful wedding," everybody said, and then there arrived many more guests who had been asked to the reception only.

The room became crowded and people wandered into the adjoining rooms which were also for the use of the guests.

Patty stood in the line of the bridal party and smiled and chatted with the stream of people who drifted by, murmuring congratulatory phrases. Mona was supremely happy and she looked it. Not only was she married to the man she loved, but the wedding was just such a pageant of beauty and grandeur as she had wished it to be and no smallest item of the preparations had gone wrong. She stood by Roger's side, now and then glancing up into his face with a smile of happiness and contentment.

The bridegroom looked proud and happy. He hadn't cared for so much elaboration of entertainment, but Mona had wanted it, and so he acquiesced in all particulars.

"When will it be all over and we can get away?" he whispered in her ear.

"Oh, not for hours," returned his new wife. "There's the feast, and then the dancing,—I don't want to miss a bit of it! Why, Roger, this is our wedding party."

"Yes, I gathered as much! All right, dearest, stay as long as you like."

"It is a pretty wedding, isn't it, Roger? You like it, don't you?"
Mona looked suddenly troubled.

"Of course I do, darling. I like it better than any wedding I ever attended! I've only seen one thing, though,—that's you. Are there other people here?"

"Oh, a few! Three or four hundred, anyway. But where's Bill
Farnsworth? I haven't seen him yet."

"He came in late. I just caught sight of him a minute ago. Probably he's trying to get through the crowd to us."

Which was just what Farnsworth was doing. He had arrived during the ceremony, and had not yet made his way to the bridal party.

In fact, he was continually stopped in his progress by acquaintances who greeted him and held him in conversation.

But at last he reached the bride.

"My dear Mona," he cried, "don't look so happy! You dazzle me!"

Mona beamed more joyously than ever, and Roger warmly welcomed
Farnsworth.

"Splendid affair," Bill went on. "Looks like Fairyland or some enchanted garden. I was wafted in on the strains of the orchestra, and I can scarcely hold myself down on terra firma. But I mustn't monopolise the prince and princess of this magic realm. I'll try for a few words, later, but now I must make way for the crowd behind me. Oh, how do you do, Patty? How are you? You're looking splendid. And Daisy! Well, it's good to see you again. By the way, Daisy, I saw Lou Standish last week in Arizona. He sent greetings to you."

"Oh, did you, Bill? Did you see Lou? Tell me more about him."

Patty turned aside, her gaiety suddenly gone. What did Bill Farnsworth mean by treating her like that? A blank stare from him would have surprised her no more than those few careless words, flung at her hastily, as if she were the merest acquaintance. She felt as if a bucket of ice water had been splashed on her head and was still trickling down her shoulders.

"Come back, Miss Fairfield," she heard somebody saying gaily, and with a start she realised she had been staring blankly into vacancy so stunned was she by Farnsworth's manner.

It was Sam Blaney who spoke, and as he had taken her hand and still held it, Patty suddenly recovered her poise and spirits.

"Time's up, Mr. Blaney," she laughed. "You have had my hand fully three minutes, and that's the limit. Somebody else may want it."

"Possession is nine points of the law," said Blaney, still retaining her hand.

"But appropriation isn't possession," and Patty gently withdrew her hand from his detaining fingers.

"No, possession must be granted. Perhaps some time——"

"Some time——" Patty assented, smiling, and dismissing Blaney, as more and more people came along.

But at last the reception was over, and the bridal party went to their especial table in the supper room.

Mona, still resplendent in her heavy court train and bridal laces, cut her wedding cake. She had never looked more beautiful. The long reception had tired her a little, but though the animation in her face was not so vivid, there was a lovely radiant light in her eyes, and her smile was gentle and sweet.

"Roger on this side of me," she said, arranging her table, "Dad on this. The rest of you may sit where you like. I've stopped directing this party,—or any other. I've conducted the little affair of this evening to a successful conclusion, and now I resign all generalship and all planning and arranging to my husband. I'm glad to give up all responsibilities, and I'm going to lead a life of leisure while Roger looks after things for me."

"Good little wife!" said Patty. "I foresee happy days and clear sailing under such regulations."

"If you keep it up," laughed Kit Cameron. "You're pretty well tired out now, Mrs. Farrington, but I'm not sure you're going to stand aside always, when matters of importance arise."

"Yes, she will," declared Roger. "You see, I shall rule her with a rod of iron, and she'll be so terrified of me, that she won't dare cross my lightest whim."

They all laughed at this, for Roger had the most easy-going of natures and had never been known to insist upon his own way.

Patty sat between Van Reypen and Kit Cameron, and opposite her, across the table, was Bill Farnsworth, next to Daisy Dow.

His careless, impersonal greeting still rankled in Patty's mind, but, though it both hurt and angered her, she had no intention of showing her feelings. So, she went to the other extreme and was madly gay and merry, laughing and jesting with everybody and enjoying herself to the utmost.

She looked adorable. The pale pink of her bridesmaid costume was most becoming and her wreath of pink roses, which had slipped a little to one side, gave her the effect of a Queen Titania. Her eyes were like two blue stars, and a pink flush showed on her cheeks, while her scarlet lips smiled or pouted with her changing moods.

"Did you ever see such colouring as that girl has!" murmured Daisy Dow to Farnsworth. "I never saw such truly gold hair, or such *blue* blue eyes, or such a wonderful complexion."

Daisy spoke whole-heartedly and generously, for she loved Patty, and she thought her the prettiest girl she knew.

"She is pretty," agreed Farnsworth. "Tell me about her,—about all the crowd. I've been away a month and lots can happen in that time. Is Patty engaged to Van Reypen?"

"It isn't announced," said Daisy, "but I think she really is. I shouldn't be surprised if they announce it tonight, after Mona goes away."

"Fine chap, Van Reypen. How about the others? Kit and Elise?"

"Yes, I think so. Though that isn't announced either. Goodness, Bill, suppose they all get engaged and married and leave me to be the only old maid in our set!"

"No fear of that, Daisy. Unless you prefer it so,—and I hope you won't."

"You hope that! Why, Bill, if I thought you hoped it——"

Just then a commotion arose as Mona left the table.

"Ready, girls," she cried out. "I'm going to toss my bouquet. Hold out your hands, all of you."

Obediently, her bridesmaids stood in a row, with their hands held out. There was no question of catching the flowers, for Mona after deliberately looking over the lot, tossed it into Patty's hands. "For you," she said, and, laughing, ran away.

"Greatness thrust upon me!" Patty laughed, looking at the great bunch of white orchids and valley lilies, with its fluttering tendrils and ends of ribbon. "Must I really live up to this favour? Must I really be a bride myself before the year is up? Of course, if it is obligatory——"

She looked up, half shy, and caught Van Reypen's gaze upon her. She turned toward Farnsworth, but he was looking another way. Plucking one stem of lilies of the valley from the bunch she tossed it to Phil, who caught it, kissed it, and put it in his buttonhole. Farnsworth looked round just in time to see the act, and smiled at her.

"Didn't mean anything," said Patty, perversely, and then, pulling out half a dozen more sprays, she threw them indiscriminately around, to Cameron, and several of the other ushers who were grouped about. Farnsworth made a slight effort to catch one, but he didn't really try, and the flower fell to the floor just beyond his reach. He shrugged his shoulders slightly, but made no move to pick it up.

Just then Sam Blaney came along, and Patty offered him a flower, and herself adjusted it in his buttonhole.

"I'm crazy to talk to you," he said, "but I didn't belong at your supper table. Can't we go somewhere and have a bit of a chat?"

"Yes," agreed Patty, "only not too far away from the bride's crowd. Mona will be going away soon, and I must see her go, of course. Didn't she look beautiful?"

"Not in comparison with somebody else I know."

"I'm a mind reader, Mr. Blaney, and I perceive you mean me. But you're mistaken. I'm pretty, in a doll-faced way, but Mona is really beautiful."

"You know where beauty is, Miss Fairfield. In the eye of the beholder."

"Let me see. Yes," after she had looked straight into Blaney's eyes, "yes, you have beauty in your eyes."

"The reflection of your face," he replied, serenely. "You are a flower-face; I never saw any one who so well merited the term. I must write a sonnet to Flower Face."

"It can't be any better poetry than the verses you wrote to me at
Lakewood. They are exquisite. Mayn't I show them?"

"Please not. I fancied you would like to keep them just for yourself.
Stay, I have a better name for you. Flower Soul, that's what you are.
That shall be the theme of my sonnet. I think your soul is made of
white lilac."

"Why do you people always talk about souls?" asked Patty, gaily. "You don't mean souls really, you know; you mean—well, what do you mean?"

"No, we don't mean souls in the theological sense, we mean the higher understanding and finer sensations."

"Oh," said Patty, not much enlightened.

"And you are coming to see us soon, aren't you? Alla said you promised her you would."

"Yes, I did. And I will come. Do you have regular meetings, like a club,—or what?"

"Yes, like a club, but not on set dates. I'll let you know when the next one—or, stay, I know now. There will be a gathering at our place next Tuesday night. Will you attend? May I come and fetch you?"

"Yes, do, I'd love to be there. Gracious, here comes Mona. I must be with the others."

Patty hurried across the room to stand with the bridal attendants, and, looking very handsome in her travelling costume, Mona bade them good-bye. There was no mad scramble as the bride and groom departed, but flower petals and confetti were showered on them, which they good-naturedly allowed.

"Come along, my lady," said Roger, at last, as Mona delayed to talk to the girls.

And then they went away, and some of the guests stayed to dance a little longer.

"Come, Patty," said Van Reypen, as the orchestra struck up, "this is our dance."

Patty assented, and they went gliding over the perfect floor.

Philip said nothing while they danced, and Patty, too, was silent.
This was unusual, for Patty generally chattered as she danced.

"Tired, dear?" said Philip, at last.

"A little. It has been a long evening."

"And a strenuous one. I saw you were getting weary as you stood in that line of receiving so long. Come, let us sit down."

Philip guided her to a pleasant settee, screened by tall palms, and seated himself beside her.

"Poor little girl," he said, "you're all done up. You must go home soon, Patty. You can't dance any more tonight."

"Oh, yes, I can. I'm not really tired. It's more excitement and——"

"And nerves. I know,—Mona getting married means a lot to you. You're very intimate friends, aren't you?"

"Yes; and as she has no mother, Nan and I have tried to do all we could for her, but she is so capable, we couldn't do much, after all."

"No; I suppose not. Patty, why did she give you her bouquet? I thought brides threw them, and any one caught them that could."

"They do, usually."

"Well, then, why didn't Mona?"

"Oh, because,—oh, I don't know."

"You do know, Patty. Was it because she thinks you will be the next bride of your set? Because she thinks you will marry—me?"

Phil's eyes were radiant, and his voice trembled as he whispered, "And will you, dear? Will you, my little Patty? You promised, you know, to tell me tonight. So, tell me,—and tell me,—yes."

Patty sat up very straight and looked at him. "Philip," she said, and her voice was serious; "if I have to decide now, it will be No. I did say I'd tell you tonight, and I meant to, but I'm all tired and bothered, and if I'm not careful, I shall cry! So, if you hold me to my promise, I'll answer you now, but it will be No. I can't say Yes,—tonight."

"Then don't say anything. I'll wait, dearest. Oh, Patty, of course, I'll wait. You are exhausted and nervous and you want to rest. Don't answer me now, dear, for I don't want that answer you spoke of! Let's wait a week or so longer, and then make up our mind. Shall us?"

"Yes, Phil, and thank you for being so good to me."

CHAPTER XI

THE CITY STUDIO

"I'm quite anxious to see this paragon of a poet," said Nan, as she sat in Patty's room one evening.

Patty was dressing for the party at the Blaneys', and Sam was coming to take her.

"You'll like him, Nan, you can't help it. He is most interesting,—not a bit like other men. And they

have such delightful people at their parties. They do big things, you know,—really big."

"Such as what?"

"Oh, they sing, and play on unusual instruments,—zitherns and lutes——"

"That doesn't sound so awfully wonderful."

"No; I suppose not. But it's the *way* they do it,—and the—the atmosphere, you know, and the general exalted effect——"

"The what?"

"Oh, I don't know how to express it so you'll understand,—but I like it all. It's on a higher plane than the usual evening party."

"Don't they dance?"

"Yes, some. But more Solo dances, and Interpretative ones. I'm going to do a splendid dance for them, soon. Mr. Blaney is making it up for me."

"Can I see it?"

"I guess so. I think they mean to have a large audience for that occasion."

"What *are* you doing, Patty? Are you going to wear your hair like that?"

"Yes, Sam likes it so."

"But, my gracious goodness, you look like a crazy person!"

"Oh, not so bad as that."

Patty spoke carelessly, but her colour heightened a little. She was sitting at her toilet mirror, while Nan lounged in an easy chair, near by. Patty's golden hair was drawn smoothly down from a central part, and tightly confined at the back of her neck, where it was rolled and twisted into an immense knot, hard and round, that was exceedingly unbecoming.

"It's awful!" declared Nan, "I never saw you look really plain before."

"It's all right," and Patty tossed her head. "That fluffy, curly business is a sign of a light-weight brain,—this arrangement is far more intellectual."

"And is that your gown!" Nan fairly gasped, as Patty took from her wardrobe a strange-looking affair of mulberry-coloured woolen goods.

"Yes, it's really stunning, Nan. I had it made by Alla Blaney's dressmaker, and it's a triumph."

"Looks to me as if it had been made by a dressmaker in the house."

"Not much! It's a marvel of line and type. Wait till it's all on."

Patty adjusted the shapeless garment, which hung in loose folds from her shoulders, but which, with its muddy hue and clumsy drapery, was decidedly unattractive. Over it she put on a sort of tunic of green and orange damask, edged with glittering sequins.

"Oh," cried Nan, relieved, "I didn't know it was a fancy dress affair."

"It isn't," returned Patty. "They all wear this sort of clothes."

"They *do*? Are they supposed to be brainy?—Blaney, I mean!"

"Don't be unpleasant, Nancy, it doesn't suit you. And, honestly, I like these people, and I like to be with them. Now, it would be silly of me to wear my usual dance frocks where everybody dresses quite differently. So, don't criticise unkindly, will you?"

"Of course not, you goosie. But it seems a shame when you look so pretty in your own clothes, to wear these hideous duds."

"Thank you for the compliment on the side, but the Cosmic Centre people think I look rather well in these things. I haven't shown them this gown yet, but I know they'll love it."

"It's lucky for you your father isn't at home! He'd make you take it right straight off."

"Oh, no, he wouldn't, Nancy-lady. I'm not a little girl any more, to be scolded and sent to bed. There, I'm ready."

Patty had added a long string of queer-looking beads, terminating in a huge pendant of Oriental effect. It was composed of coloured stones set in dingy metalwork.

"Where did you get that horror? Gift from the Cosmickers?"

"Funny, aren't you? No, I bought it myself, out of my hard-saved income. It's great! I found it at Ossilovi's. He says there isn't another like it out of Asia."

"I should hope not! Though I doubt if it ever saw Asia."

"Nan, you're positively unbearable! One more speech of that sort, and
I'll be right down mad at you."

"Forgive me, Patty, I did let my feelings run away with me. It's all right for you to do these things if you want to, but it doesn't seem like you,—and it jars, somehow."

They went downstairs, and soon Sam Blaney came to take Patty away.

Nan greeted him very pleasantly, but inspected him very carefully. He was not in evening dress, their coterie did not approve of anything so conventional. This was against him in Nan's eyes, for she was a stickler for the formalities. But as he threw back his topcoat, and she saw his voluminous soft silk tie of magenta with vermilion dots, his low rolling collar, and his longish mane of hair, she felt an instinctive dislike to the man. Her sense of justice, however, made her reserve judgment until she knew more of him, and she invited him to tarry a few moments.

Blaney sat down, gracefully enough, and chatted casually, but Patty realised that Nan was looking him over and resented it. And, somehow, Blaney didn't appear to advantage in the Fairfield drawing-room, as he did in his own surroundings. His attitude, while polite, was the least bit careless, and his courtesy was indolent rather than alert. In fact, he conducted himself as an old friend might have done, but in a way which was not permissible in a stranger.

Nan led the conversation to the recent work of some comparatively new and very worthwhile poets. She asked Blaney his opinion of a certain poem.

"Oh, that," and the man hesitated, "well, you see,—I—ah,—that is, I'm reserving my opinion as to that man's work,—yes, reserving my opinion."

"And a good idea, too," agreed Nan. "One shouldn't judge, hastily. But you've doubtless made up your mind regarding this poet," and she picked up a book from the table, containing the poems of another modern and much discussed writer.

"Oh, yes," said Blaney, "oh, yes, of course. But, if you'll excuse me, Mrs. Fairfield, I'd rather not announce my views. You see, I—er—that is,—I might be quoted wrongly,—misquoted, you know, and it would militate against my influence,—yes,—militate against my standing. One must be so careful."

"Indeed you are right," Nan said, smiling at him; "a poet yourself, you must be careful of what you say about others."

"Yes, just that. How quickly you understand."

Patty and her escort went away, and after a short silence, Blaney said,
"You didn't show Mrs. Fairfield the verses I wrote for you, did you?"

"No," said Patty, "I promised you I wouldn't."

"And I didn't mean to doubt your word, but I thought you might think that your mother—or stepmother, didn't count."

"No, I haven't shown them to any one. But I wish you weren't so sensitive about your beautiful work."

"I wish so, too," and Blaney sighed. "But it's the penalty of——"

"Of genius, why not say it?"

"Yes, why not say it? I'm glad you recognise the beauty of truth spoken in defiance of conventional modesty."

"Oh, yes, I do think if one is talented, it is silly to deny it."

"It is. That is why our people are so frankly sane and honest about their own achievements——"

"And yet, you're so modest,—I mayn't show your verses!"

"That's a different matter. You know those were for your eyes alone."

"I know. I will keep them for myself."

The Studio of the Blaneys in the city was much like the one Patty had seen at Lakewood, only a little more elaborately bizarre. The Moorish lamps were bigger and dustier: the thick brocade draperies a little more faded and tattered; the furniture a little more gilded and wobbly.

Alla came gliding to greet Patty, and gave her an enthusiastic welcome.

"You darling!" she cried, "you *very* darling! Look at her, everybody! Look! Gloat over this bit of perfect perfection! Did you ever *see* anything so wonderful?"

Alla had led Patty to the middle of the room, and she now turned her round and round, like a dressmaker exhibiting a model.

Patty felt no embarrassment, for the people all about accepted the exhibition as a matter of course, and gazed at her in smiling approbation. Moreover, all the guests were dressed as unconventionally as Patty, and even more so. There were more queer costumes than she had seen at the Lakewood party, more weird effects of hairdressing and more eccentric posing and posturing. The New York branch of these Bohemians were evidently farther advanced in their cult than the others she had seen.

A little bewildered, Patty allowed herself to be ensconced on a crimson and gold Davenport, and listened to a rattle of conversation that was partly intelligible, and partly, it seemed to her, absolute nonsense.

"I am exploiting this gem," Alla announced, indicating Patty herself as the "gem." "She hasn't quite found herself yet,—but she will soon command the range of the whole emotional spectrum! She is a wonder! Her soul is stuffed to bursting with dynamic force! We must train her, educate her, show her, gently guide her dancing feet in the paths of beauty,—in the star-strewn paths of cosmic beauty."

"We will!" shouted a dozen voices. "What can she do?"

"Dance," replied Alla. "But such dancing! She is a will-o'-the-wisp, a pixie, a thistledown, a butterfly!"

"All those and more," said Sam Blaney. "She is a velvet angel, a rose-coloured leaf in the wind, a fluttering scarf end."

"What imagery!" murmured somebody, and some one else said,
"Inspiration!" in an awed tone.

"And now to work," urged Alla. "We must plan for our holiday party.
Shall we have it here?"

"Here, of course," she was answered.

"But others of you have larger homes, more pretentious dwellings——"

"But not the atmosphere. This Studio,—" it was a large-eyed young musician talking, "this hallowed room has more elevating tendency,—more inspiring atmosphere than any other. Let us meet here by all means, and let us have such a program—such a feast of glories as never before."

Then another man spoke. He was a tall young chap, with a good-natured smile, and Patty liked his face.

"I am an artist," he announced, "and a rattling good artist. I haven't yet achieved my ultimate recognition, but it will come,—it must come. I, therefore, I will undertake the task,—the ineffably joyous task of designing,—of inventing a dance for Miss Fairfield."

"Do, Grantham," cried Blaney. "No one could do it better. Dream out a scheme, a picture plan that will be worthy of our little Terpsichore. A dance that shall be a whirlwind of violets,—a tornado of lilting veils."

"Veils!" cried Grantham, "that's the keynote! A Dance of the Year,—a mad gyration of Time,—of Time,

himself, translated into thistledown,—into scented thistledown."

"Bravo!" "Glorious!"

Other praises were shouted, and the place was like a pandemonium. Patty began to realise the Bohemians were a boisterous lot. She clapped her hands over her ears in smiling dismay.

"Quiet!" said Blaney, in his low, exquisite tones, and in an instant the room was almost silent.

Committees were appointed to take charge of the Christmas celebration, and then the program began.

It was long, and, to Patty, a bit uninteresting. She tried hard to understand the queer things they read or recited, but it seemed to her a continuous repetition of sound without sense. She was willing to admit her own stupidity, and noting the rapt expressions on the faces round her, she concluded the lack was in herself. The music, too, though strange and eccentric, didn't seem to her as worth while as it had done before, though it was decidedly similar. Blaney read some of his poems, to a zithern accompaniment, but they weren't very impressive, and not nearly so poetic as the lines he had written for her. She wondered if she had really inspired him to greater heights of song than he could attain without her influence.

He had assured her of this, and she began to think it might be so.

The supper followed the program. This was not enjoyed by Patty. Usually, after a dance or concert, she was hungry for some light refreshment, but in this incense-laden, smoke-heavy atmosphere, she felt no desire to eat, and had she done so, she could not have relished the viands. For they were of highly-spiced and foreign-flavoured sorts, and their principal ingredients were smoked fish, pungent sauces, and strong cheese, all of which Patty detested. Moreover, the service was far from dainty. The heavy china, thick glass, and battered, unreal silver detracted still further from the appetising effects of the feast.

But everybody was so genuinely distressed at Patty's lack of appetite and made such to-do about it, that she forced herself to eat, and even essayed a cup of their muddy, syrupy coffee.

And she enjoyed herself. She absorbed much of their jargon and stored it up in her brain for future use. She unconsciously adapted herself to their mannerisms and whimsical enthusiasm, and when she went home everybody praised her and declared her one of them and the best of them.

"By far the best," said Blaney, as he tucked her into the Fairfield limousine which, with an accompanying maid, had been sent for her. "And may I call soon, and reiterate this,—in better and longer lines?"

"Yes, do," said Patty. "I'd love to have you."

Nan was waiting up for her.

"Well, I've seen your new friend?" she said, as Patty flung off her wrap and stood for a moment by the library table.

"Yep," said Patty, smiling, "and sumpum tells me, Nan, that you're going to be disagreeable or disapproving or disappointed or dis—something or other about him. And I beg of you to don't,—at least until I get a bite of supper. I couldn't eat their old delicatessen shop stuff, and I want a decent sandwich and a glass of milk,—so I do."

"Why, you poor child! I'll get it for you. Cook has gone to bed, but
I'll forage in the pantry."

"Do, that's a fairy stepmother. Bring some fruit, too, please."

Patty went up to her room, and when Nan appeared, shortly, with a most attractive supper tray, she was in kimono and cap, waiting for it.

"My, but this is good! I tell you, Nan, those Cosmickers know how to think, but they don't know a thing about foods."

"Your Blaney looks well nourished. But, he didn't strike me as very erudite. Why, Patty, he didn't know who those poets *were*, I asked him about!"

"Oh, yes, he did. He didn't want to discuss 'em, that's all."

"Nonsense! I saw his expression. He didn't know them, I tell you. He has never read a word of them."

"Well, he doesn't have to. He can write his own poems."

"Does he? Is he a poet, really?"

"Yes, Nan, he is. And he's all right, and Alla is, too. I don't like all their associate souls, but I like a lot of them, and you would too, if you saw them in their proper setting. Anyhow, their old symposium has tired my little brain all up, and with many thanks for your kind charity,—what there was of it—I'll let you go, if you really feel you must."

Nan laughed, for there was deep good feeling between these two, then she kissed Patty good night and went off with the empty tray.

CHAPTER XII

AN ODD DINNER PARTY

A few nights later, Patty invited the two Blaneys to dinner. Nan wanted to meet Alla, and Mr. Fairfield, too, expressed a desire to see these new friends of Patty's.

"Me and the two companies is three," said Patty, making up her party, "and you and Dad are five. Who'd make a good sixth?"

"Only six?" asked Nan. "Why not a big dinner?"

"No; I don't think so. You see, the Blaneys don't fit in with everybody, and I want them to have a good time."

"Oh, I mean ask their own sort of people."

Patty looked up, quickly. "Now, Nan, don't be unpleasant. You're implying that their kind of people are not as nice as our kind, and that hurts my feelinks, and you know it. I want you wid me on this,—not agin me."

"I am, Patty. I don't mean to be horrid. Well, have six, if you like.
Who else?"

"Chick Channing, I think. He's so adaptable and all-round nice with everybody. Phil hates the Blaneys, and——"

"Mr. Farnsworth?"

"I don't think he'd like them, either. And,—too,—Bill isn't very chummy with me lately."

"Why not?"

"Dunno."

"Did you quarrel?"

"Now, Nan, don't ask such leading questions. We didn't exactly quarrel, and yet again, I suppose we did quarrel,—at least, I did,—he didn't. I sort of snubbed him, and he took it more seriously than I meant, if you call that a quarrel. But anyway, he wouldn't stand for the Blaney crowd, I'm sure of that."

"All right, ask Chick. As you say, he'll chum with anybody. He's a splendid dinner guest."

Channing accepted the invitation with pleasure, and the party was made up.

"I don't want anything eccentric or foolish," Patty said to Nan, regarding the appointments, "but I do want it aesthetic and artistic."

"You can arrange it as you like, dear," Nan said, kindly, and Patty did.

The dining-room was dimly lighted, and the table decoration consisted of an enormous bronze placque, which Patty took down from the hall wall. This held a small amount of water, and on it floated

three pansies. The table candles wore deep purple shades, and Nan privately thought the whole effect dull and gloomy enough, but she said no word of criticism.

Patty appeared, in a flowing, robe-like costume of pale violet chiffon, and wore pansies in her hair over each ear.

"Well!" exclaimed her father, as he saw her, "I thought you could wear any colour, but take my advice, Kiddie, and never brave lavender again! It makes you look old and sallow."

"Nothing of the sort!" denied Patty. "You're unaccustomed to seeing me in it, that's all."

Then Channing came, and Patty had to bear his disapproving glances.

"You're an angel in anything," he said, "but you're least angelic in that mawkish mauve. You look like a member of the Art Students' Union."

Patty didn't mind their chaff, and only smiled good-naturedly, and then the Blaneys came.

Patty was used to their aesthetic effects, but the others weren't, and though the greetings were cordial and courteous, the elder Fairfields needed a moment to recover their poise. But Chick Channing was always to be depended upon, and he plunged into gay conversation that broke the ice and did away with all self-consciousness.

Nor was it surprising that the appearance of the brother and sister should strike an observer as startling. Alla was swathed in yellowish-brown stuff. Her gown seemed to have no shape or design, just draperies that wrapped her about in mummy fashion. Long sleeves came well down over her hands, a high collar rose over her ears, and the long skirt twined itself round her feet, till she could scarcely walk. The material was a woolly serge, and no bit of colour or trimming relieved the severity. She wore no ornament save a hideous necklace of great, ugly stones, that fell down as far as her knees, and carried a dilapidated old fan of peacock feathers. Patty had never seen her look so unattractive, for even in her eccentric garb, she was usually picturesque. But in this brown thing she was utterly without charm.

Sam Blaney, too, looked ill-dressed and out of place. He had bowed to convention to the extent of wearing evening clothes, but they were not of correct cut, and did not fit well, and he wore an absurd tie of soft silk, of his favourite light green hue, which gave him the appearance of a caricature.

However, the two were most affable and agreeable, and their soft, low voices murmured pleasantries suitable to the occasion.

At dinner the conversation turned on the approaching Christmas celebration of the Cosmic Centre.

"What a funny name," said Channing. "Sounds like a small village in
New England."

"So it does," returned Sam Blaney, taking the jest in good part. "But we call our club that modest little name because we think ourselves the centre of the Universe."

"I always admire self-respect," said Mr. Fairfield, smiling; "I hold that a man or a club with full appreciation of self-merit can't go far wrong."

"And Cosmic Centre is so very expressive," said Channing. "I don't see how you could have well found anything more inclusive."

"Mrs. Fairfield calls you the Cosmickers," put in Patty, smiling at Nan.

"And a very good name," agreed Alla. "Cosmickers sounds a bit like picknickers, and often that's what we are."

"What is your real end and aim?" asked Mr. Fairfield, seriously.

"Advancement of beauty and appreciation of art," replied Alla, looking thoughtful and a little affected.

"Interpretation of beauty," amended her brother. "We endeavour to imbue our souls with the highest and best emotions and to discard and disown all that is merely conventional and formal in life or in thought."

"Meaning the outward and ordinary signs of clothes and manners?" said
Chick.

Patty detected the chaffing note in his voice, but his tone was grave and respectful, and after a quick glance at him, Blaney replied, "Yes, and the inner graces of poesy and music of the soul."

"In fact, you use your soul instead of your mind or brain," Chick continued, and now Patty gave him an imploring glance, meant to beg him not to guy the Cosmic principles.

But Alla had no thought of Chick's insincerity. "That is it," she said. "We use our souls for everything, even physical processes. One of our geniuses is inventing a dance for Miss Fairfield. Appreciating her genius for dancing, he is making a masterpiece in which she can dance with her soul——"

"Put her whole sole in her dancing," said Chick, with enough emphasis to point his jest.

"Yes," went on Alla, unmoved, though Mr. Fairfield nearly choked as he watched her intent face, "just that. Unless one does use one's soul it becomes rusted and useless."

Her face was drawn with intensity, her lifted hand shook a long slender forefinger at Chick, and that urbane young man had just about all he could do to preserve his gravity.

But he went calmly on. "Do you know," he said, "I sometimes think my soul is a bit rusty."

"Very likely," said Sam Blaney, who didn't like to be long out of the conversation. "Suppose you join our coterie and get the rust removed. Nor am I joking, Mr. Channing. Many there be who laugh at our earnestness, but only because of their own ignorance."

"I dare say that is so," put in Fred Fairfield, in sincere tones; "that's why I'm specially interested in knowing just what you do to tinker up a rusty soul. Pardon my rude diction, but I am not aesthetic myself. However, I am deeply interested."

"I feel sure you are, Mr. Fairfield," and Alla gave him a soulful glance; "and though it is not easy I will try to give you a hint of our methods."

"Let me tell him, Alla," insisted Sam, and he waved her to silence with a gesture of his long, white hand. "You see, sir, it is not often we meet such a receptive nature as you kindly show, and I am but too glad to gratify your most justifiable curiosity and Interest."

"Me, too," cried Chick. "Pray don't leave me out. I truly want to know what will clean the rust off my soul."

Again Patty besought him by urgent glances to beware of offending her guests, but Chick shook his head, indicating there was no danger. Nor was there. Though Mr. Fairfield and Channing both were consumed with merriment at the idea of their rusty souls, the Blaneys were quite in earnest and proceeded to dilate on their favourite subjects.

"Once under the influence of our atmosphere and our beliefs," avowed Blaney, "your soul expands and flowers out like a star!"

"Oh, how beautiful!" breathed Chick, with such a rapt expression, that Patty had to put up her napkin quickly to hide her smile.

"Yes," said Alla, "my brother says wonderful things. His own soul is ineffably sweet."

"It must be!" and Chick looked at Blaney with an adoring gaze that nearly sent Nan into convulsions.

Patty was scared, for if Chick kept this up the Blaneys must realise his intent and would be mortally offended.

"How near Christmas is getting," she interrupted, blithely, determined to change the subject. "Have you all your gifts ready, Alla?"

"Patty," said Chick, reprovingly, "how can you introduce commonplace subjects just now? I'm learning to remove rust stains from my dingy old soul. By the way, how would it do to scour one's soul with the sands of time?"

"Beautiful!" cried Sam. "Wonderful! What imagery! I wish I had said that!"

"You may, as often as you like," granted Chick, politely. "I'll be proud if you'll accept it. Among unrusted souls, there should be no give and take. My thoughts are yours. I am honoured."

"You are a delight," said Alla, calmly, looking at Chick, who blushed at this unexpected compliment. "I have never met any one so quickly responsive, so immediately *simpatica*."

"Except me," cried Patty. "You said I was that. Simp—what—d'ye call it? Now there are two of us, Chick."

"We are all *simpatica*," said Nan, who, like Patty, began to fear Chick's chaff would yet offend the guests. And then, she determinedly led the conversation away from soulful matters and talked of current events and casual subjects that had no aesthetic significance.

But it was difficult to keep the Blaneys off their favourite themes and hard to quell the fun of the irrepressible Chick.

And so, Nan was rather relieved when at a surprisingly early hour the two aesthetes took their leave.

"Oh, Piccalilli blossoms!" cried Chick, when they were fairly out of hearing, "did you ever see anything like that! Where did you unearth them, Patty? The lady one, especially! Wow, but she's a five-reel scream!"

"Stop that, Chick; I think you're real mean! You made me enough trouble at the dinner table, and you needn't make fun of my friends behind their backs."

"But Patty, such backs! I mean, such friends! Oh, I didn't think I could restrain my laughter till they went away from here,—but I managed to do so. Souls! Rusty souls! Wowly-wow-wow!"

"Chick, stop it. I tell you, I won't have it!"

"I'll stop in a minute, Patty. Let me laugh a minute, or I'll explode.
I say, Mrs. Fairfield, did you ever see anything like the lady's robe!
I don't often notice costumes of the fair sex, but that was a hummer
from Humville."

"Don't, Chick," said Nan, noticing Patty's quivering lip; "they're
Patty's friends, and I'd rather you wouldn't ridicule them."

"I'd rather not myself, honest, Mrs. Fairfield, I'd rather not, but what can you do when they come running up, begging to be ridiculed?"

"They didn't," declared Patty. "Nobody would have thought of ridiculing them, Chick, if you hadn't. They talked a lot of wisdom that you couldn't assimilate, and you're envious of their superior minds, that's what ails you."

"Patty, Patty," said her father, laughing outright at this, "my dear child, are you really so infatuated with those people that you believe what you're saying?"

"Of course, I am. I don't expect you to understand them, Father, you're older, and belong to another generation."

"Good gracious, Patty," cried Nan, gasping, "do you think your father is too old to understand that drivel?"

"I do," said Patty, calmly, "and you are too, Nan. It takes the modern viewpoint, the young soulsight to apprehend the beauty of vision, the vast—vast——"

"Horizon," suggested Chick, kindly.

"Yes, horizon," said Patty; "how did you know, Chick?"

"Oh, horizons are always vast. Deeps are vasty. Nothing much else is vast, except once in a while a distance. So I felt safe in chancing the horizon."

"Oh, Chick, you are the funniest thing!" said Nan, who was shaking with laughter at Patty's chagrin. "But," and her voice suddenly became serious, "I won't stand for your nonsense. I range myself on Patty's side. These people were our guests. I forbid any slighting allusions to them. Their ways may not be our ways, but if they are Patty's friends they are my friends."

The warm, sincere ring of Nan's voice went to Patty's heart, and she smiled again.

"Good for you, you old trump!" she exclaimed, looking gratefully at
Nan. "Now, Dad, you come over, and I can manage Chick, myself."

Patty was in gay good humour again, and she perched on the arm of her father's chair, as she proceeded to win him over.

"You know I can't resist your blandishments, my angel child," he said, as Patty caressed his handsome iron-grey hair, "but I must admit your Cosmickers have no message for me."

"That's just it," cried Patty, triumphantly. "I knew it! They have no message for you, because you don't understand their language, you're—Dad, I hate to say it,—but, you're too old!"

And with a kiss on his frowning forehead, Patty ran to the piano, and began to play "Silver Threads Among the Gold," to a rag-time improvisation of her own.

"Oh, Pattibelle," cried Chick, "what would your vast-horizoned friends say if they could hear you playing ragtime! I'm sure a lemon-coloured nocturne or a flaming fugue would be nearer their idea of melody."

"Play us a fox-trot, Nan," said Patty, jumping up, and in another minute, as Nan obligingly acquiesced, Patty and Chick were dancing gaily up and down the room.

"Forgive me, Patty," said Chick, as they danced out into the hall, "I wouldn't offend you or your friends for worlds, but they—well, they struck me funny, you see."

"They're not funny, Chick. They're the real thing. You can't see it,
I know, and neither can Dad or Nan, but I do."

"All right, Patty. Go into it if you like. I don't believe it will hurt you. And like the measles, the harder you have it, the sooner you'll get over it, and you'll never have it but once. By the way, they invited me to their Christmas racket,—and I'm going!"

CHAPTER XIII

ELISE AND PATTY

"I think you're just as mean as you can be, Patty Fairfield! You won't come to my tree and you won't have the House Sale, and you won't do a thing anybody wants you to! I never saw such a disagreeable old thing as you are!"

"Why, Elise, you dear little, sweet, 'bused child! Am I as bad as all that? You do su'prise me! Well, well, I must mend my ways. I've always had a reputation for good nature, but it seems to be slipping awa' Jean, like snow in the thaw, Jean,—as the song book says. Now, my friend and pardner, here's my ultimatum. But smile on me, first, or I can't talk to you at all. You look like a thunder cloud,—a very pretty thunder cloud, to be sure,—but still, lowering and threatening. Brace up, idol of my heart,—shine out, little face, sunning over with raven black curls,—I seem to be poetically inclined, don't I?"

Elise laughed in spite of herself. The two girls had been discussing plans, and as Patty stuck to her determination to spend Christmas Eve at the Blaneys', Elise was angry, because she was to have her own Christmas tree that night, and, of course, wanted Patty with her.

They were in the Farringtons' library. It was nearly dusk, and Patty was just about to get her hat to go home, when they began the controversy afresh.

"I can't help laughing, because you're so silly, but I'm angry at you all the same," Elise averred, with a shake of her dark, curly head. "You're so wrapped up in the Blaneys and their idiotic old crowd, that you have no time or attention for your old friends."

"It does seem so," mused Patty; "of course, it might be, because the idiotic crowd are nice and pleasant to me, while my old friends, one of them, at least, is as cross as a bear with a bumped head."

"Well, you're enough to make me cross. Here I'm going to have a big
Christmas tree, and a lovely Christmas party, and you won't come to it.
That makes me cross, but to have you throw me over for those ridiculous
Blaneys makes me crosser yet."

"You can't get much crosser, you're about at the limit."

"No, I'm not, either. It makes me still crosser that you won't have the House Sale."

"Oh, Elise, it's such a nuisance! Turn the whole place upside down and inside out, for a few dollars! Let's get the money by subscription. Everybody would be glad to give something for the girls' library."

"No, they won't. Everybody has been asked for money for charity all winter, and they're tired of it. But a novel sale would bring in a lot."

Patty and Elise were greatly interested in getting a library for the working girls' club, which they helped support. Patty was usually most enthusiastic and energetic in furnishing any project for helping this work along, and Elise was greatly surprised at her present unwillingness to hold a sale they had been considering.

"And it's only because you're crazy over that Cosmic Club that you can't bother with the things that used to interest you. Phil Van Reypen thinks they're a horrid lot, and so does Chick Channing, and I do, too."

"You forget that it was down at your house in Lakewood that I first met them."

"No, I don't; but that's no reason you should go over to them so entirely, and forsake all of your old set. I never liked the Blaneys; I only wanted you to meet them, to see how queer and eccentric they were. But I never supposed you'd join their ranks, and become so infatuated with Sam Blaney——"

"I'm not infatuated with Sam Blaney!"

"You are so! You think he's a genius and a poet and a little tin god on wheels!"

"Well, all right, Elise, then I do think so. And I've got a right to think so, if I want to. Now, listen, and stop your foolishness. I said I'd give you my decision, and this is it. I'll come round here Christmas Eve after the party at the Blaneys'. I've got to go to that, for I'm going to dance, and I'm going to be in some 'Living Pictures,' but I can get away by eleven, or soon after, and that will be in time for your dance."

"Well, half a loaf is better than no bread,—I'll have the tree late, then. After you get here."

"Oh, no, don't put off your tree! I might not be able to get here much before midnight."

"Yes, you will. You've promised me for eleven, and you always keep a promise,—I know that. I'll send for you, and you must come."

"All right, I will. Truly, Elise, I want to be at the tree here,—but I couldn't help the two engagements clashing. Now, also, to show you that I haven't lost interest in the Girls' Club, I'll have the House Sale after the holidays are over."

"Oh, will you, Patty? You're a dear old thing!"

"And amn't I mean and horrid, and a deserter?"

"Well, you're a bit of a deserter, and I suppose you'll rush off to a Cosmic meeting the night of the Sale, and leave me to run it!"

"*You're* mean, now, Elise. You know I wouldn't do such a thing,—unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless it happened to be on a night of a special meeting of the Cosmic Centre. In that case, I'd have to go for a little while."

Just then Van Reypen came in.

"You here, Patty?" he said. "I've been looking you up. How are you, Elise? What are you girls confabbing about?"

"I'm scolding Patty for her desertion of us and her infatuation for those Blaney people."

"Confound those Blaney people! I wish they were in Timbuctoo!"

"Why, Philip, how unkind!" and Patty smiled at him in an exasperating way. "You *know* you admire Sam Blaney immensely,—only you're jealous of him."

"Admire him! Jealous of him!" Van Reypen fairly glowered with indignation. "That nincompoop! with long hair and a green neck-tie! He's a half-witted farmer!"

Patty's laugh rang out. "Oh, Phil," she cried, "don't be a silly, yourself! His worst enemy couldn't call Sam a farmer! And I can assure you, he's far from half-witted."

"Yes, far less than half," growled Van Reypen. "Oh, Patty, drop 'em, cut 'em out, give 'em the go-by, won't you?"

"Thank you, no. I still reserve the right to choose my friends, and I confess to a liking for those who are kindly disposed toward me."

"Oh, I'm kindly disposed toward *you*, very much so," declared Phil, "but your new friends are not included in my kindly disposition."

"So I gathered," and Patty laughed again. "But, do you know, they feel that they can struggle along without your admiration and affection."

"Don't be sarcastic, Patty," and Van Reypen smiled at the haughty little face turned toward his.

"No, I won't, Phil. I hate it. And I'm sorry I let myself go like that. But you do stir me up,—you and Elise."

"Glad of it," said Elise, "you ought to be stirred up once in a while. But don't go, Patty. Here comes Daisy,—and, well, if it isn't Bill Farnsworth with her! I didn't know he was in town. He's in and out so much, it's hard to keep track of him. Come in, Daisy, take off your furs. Glad to see you, Bill. Here's Patty Fairfield."

"So I see," laughed Farnsworth, as he held out his hand. "Going? Why go yet? Hello, Van Reypen."

"Hello, Bill. Thought you were on your way to or from Arizona. How do you know where to vote, anyhow?"

"Guess at it. But I'm not going to live on the road so much as formerly. I've cleaned things up a bit, and shall sort of settle in New York from now on."

"Good! Glad to give you the freedom of our city. And you, Daisy? Are you going to live East, also?"

"Haven't decided yet," and Daisy glanced coquettishly at Farnsworth.
"Maybe so."

"Don't you go yet, Patty," begged Elise. "Stay a while longer, and we'll have tea,—chocolate, too, which I know you like better."

"'Course I'll stay," said Patty; "your chocolate is always the best ever. Order it up. What beautiful violets, Daisy."

"Yes, Bill bought them for me as we passed a florist's shop. I adore violets."

"What girl doesn't?" laughed Patty. "At least she adores having them bought for her."

"I don't," said Elise. "I'd rather have one rose than all the violets that ever bloomed in the spring, tra-la."

"What's your favourite flower, Patty?" asked Farnsworth.

"Sunflowers, but nobody ever sends me any. I just get old orchids and things."

"Poor kiddy! I wish I could get a sunflower or two for you. But I fancy, at this season of the year, they're about as scarce as blue roses."

"'It is but an idle quest, Roses red and white are best,'"

sang Patty, with a smile at Big Bill.

"Do you know that?" he asked, interestedly. "I never heard you sing it."

"Oh, it's one of her best songs," cried Elise; "sing it now,
Patty,—you'll have time before the chocolate comes."

"Too much bother," said Patty; "we'd have to go in the music room and all. I'll sing it for you some other time, Little Billee."

"All right," he responded, carelessly, and again Patty felt a slight chagrin that he cared so little about

the matter.

Other people drifted in, as the young folks were apt to do at tea time, and then the chocolate arrived, and Patty found herself provided with a welcome cup of her favourite beverage.

It was Farnsworth who brought it to her, and he deliberately took a seat at her side, a seat that Van Reypen had just vacated.

"You can't sit there," said Patty, quickly; "Phil will be back in a minute."

"Will he?" said Big Bill, as he settled himself comfortably in the chair. "Do you think he can put me out?"

"Not unless you want him to," and Patty smiled at the big man, who looked so strong and powerful.

"Somehow, I don't. I like it here."

"Why?"

"Because I like to look at you. You're looking uncommonly well today. If I were to guess, I should say you have been having a rumpus with somebody."

"What is a rumpus?" inquired Patty, looking innocent.

"A rumpus, my child, is a tiff, a squabble, a set-to, a racket, a general scrimmage."

"I haven't exactly had those things, but, well, I may say I have been drawn into a somewhat spirited discussion."

"Ah, I thought so."

"How did you know? I mean, why did you think so?"

"By your heightened colour and your generally wrought-up condition.
Why, your heart isn't beating normally yet."

Patty looked up at him, indignantly, but his blue eyes were very kind and his smile gentle and even concerned.

"What was it about, Patty? Who has been tormenting you?"

"Nobody tormented me, exactly, but they criticise me and they say mean things about my friends——"

"Never let them do that! Your friends must be sacred to you,—I mean from adverse criticism of others."

"That's what I think, Little Billee. What shall I do, when everybody ridicules them and calls them names?"

"Just what I am sure you did do. Flare up like a wrathy kitten and helplessly paw the air."

"Of course that's what I did," and Patty laughed at the graphic description, "but it didn't seem to do much good."

"Of course it didn't. Standing up for one's friends rarely does much good, except to satisfy one's own sense of loyalty."

"Why, what do you mean? Why doesn't it do any good to defend our friends?"

"Because if they need our defence, they're probably at fault."

"But they weren't in this case. It was the Blaneys,—do you know them?"

"Those mercerised personages I met at Mona's wedding? I haven't the pleasure of their intimate acquaintance, and something tells me I never shall have."

"You mean you don't want it!"

"Mind reader! Patty, you're positively clairvoyant!"

"Now, Little Billee, don't you go back on me, too."

"Go back on you? Never! While this machine is to me! Why, Patty, I'd defend you to the last ditch, and

then fill in the ditch!"

"Be serious, Billee. You don't know those people, but can't you take my word for it that they're splendidly worth while? They're geniuses, and artists."

"Patty, I'd take your word for anything you know about. But, for instance, I couldn't take your word that there are blue roses."

"But there are! That's just what the Cosmic Centre people are,—they're blue roses! I never thought of it before, but they are."

"Then beware of them. Blue roses are freaks——"

"Yes, I know it. But there are worse things in this world than freaks.
I'd rather a man would be a freak than a—a mud turtle!"

"Are many of your friends mud turtles?"

"Yes, they are. They stick their heads in the sand——"

"Look out for your Natural History! You're thinking of ostriches."

"All the same. Now, Sam Blaney——"

"Patty! You don't mean to say that chap is *Sam* Blaney! I thought he looked a bit familiar! Sam! old Sam Blaney! Well!"

"What's the matter, Billee? Do you know him?"

"I used to, when we were boys. Fifteen or more years ago. I doubt if he'd even remember my name. We went to a public school together. Sam Blaney! Well!"

"You exasperating thing! Don't sit there saying 'Well!' and '*Sam*
Blaney!' but tell me what you know of him."

"Nothing, child, nothing. I haven't seen or heard of him for—since we were fourteen years old or so. Where did you pick him up?"

Patty told of her meeting the Blaneys at Lakewood, and of her continuing their acquaintance in New York. But suddenly Farnsworth seemed to lose interest in her story.

"Never mind the Blaneys," he said. "I want to talk to *you*. What do you think, my girl? I've won out in that matter of business I've been at so long."

"Have you? I'm very glad. I don't know what it was all about, Little Billee, but if you've succeeded in what you wanted to do, I'm very glad."

"Yes, I have. And it means,—it means, Patty, that I shall live in New
York now, all the time."

"Yes?"

"Yes. And it means, too, if this interests you, that I'm a rich man,—a very rich man."

"That's nice, Bill; I congratulate you."

"Oh, thank you." Farnsworth's voice had grown suddenly cold, and the eager light had faded from his blue eyes. He looked at Patty, and quickly looked away.

"I thought you might care," he said.

A strange thought came to Patty. Could he possibly mean that since he was a rich man, she would smile on his suit? Could he think that she would accept his attentions more gladly because of his newly acquired wealth? The idea made her furiously angry. If Farnsworth thought her that mercenary—if he deemed her so utterly sordid—well, her respect for him was decidedly lessened!

CHAPTER XIV

PATTY'S DANCE

The Christmas Eve party at the Blaneys' was in full swing. A man at the piano was performing a monologue that was partly spoken, partly sung. It was cleverly done, and the audience showed its appreciation by outspoken comments.

"A little lame on that top note, old chap. S'pose you try it over—ah, that's better!"

Patty sat next to Sam Blaney. Chick had expected to come, but Elise had persuaded him to attend her party instead. This rather pleased Patty, for she feared Chick's gay banter and she knew he didn't care for the Cosmic Centre Club and their ways.

"You are so wonderful!" Blaney was saying, as he looked at her. "I never cared for Christmas before."

Patty's gown was a long, sweeping robe of poinsettia red velvet. It would not have been becoming to most blondes, but Patty's fairness triumphed over all colour schemes. She wore a girdle of red velvet poinsettia blossoms and a wreath of small ones encircled her head.

"You are so beautiful——" Blaney's soft, purring voice went on.

"Don't make me blush," Patty laughed back. "Pink cheeks spoil the effect of this red gown. I must stay pale to suit it."

"Pink or pale, you are perfect! I adore you."

Embarrassed by the fervour of his tones, Patty turned to talk to the man at her other side. But he was engrossed in conversation with an aesthetic damsel, and so she gaily changed the subject.

"How splendid the rooms look," she said, glancing about. "That grove of green trees is wonderfully picturesque."

"That's where you're to dance," Blaney returned. "I looked after it myself. It's carpeted with pine needles, but they're soft, fresh ones, not dried ones. I'm sure they'll be comfy."

"I dunno about dancing on 'em barefoot. I believe I'll wear sandals, after all."

"Oh, no, you mustn't. Grantham has designed every detail so exquisitely, don't fail to follow his directions accurately. Your number will be the best of all. That's why we put it last. It will be an enormous hit,—a revelation!"

"I hope they will like it. I've never danced before these people before. I've pleased ordinary audiences, but the Cosmos are so critical—it would break my heart if they didn't approve."

"Of course they'll approve! They'll go crazy over you. But you must throw yourself utterly into the spirit of it. We know at once if you're afraid or over-reserved. Abandon must be your keynote. Real interpretation of Grantham's wonderful ideas."

"They are wonderful," agreed Patty. "Mr. Grantham is a true poet. He sees Nature at her best and with an intuition almost divine."

Her blue eyes shone with earnestness and Blaney gazed at her in adoration.

"You perfect thing!" he murmured; "you have found your right environment among us. You are wasted on the ordinary, unthinking masses of society. You are Nature's child. What a pity you must live a conventional life. Patty, can't you break loose? Can't you give up your present hampering existence and come and throw in your lot with ours? Live here. Alla would warmly welcome you as a sister——"

"And will you be my brother, Sam? I've never had a brother."

"No, I refuse to be your brother! I'll be—well, say, your guardian.
How'd you like to be my ward?"

"I didn't know girls ever were wards except in old-fashioned novels.
And there, they always marry their guardians."

"Well?"

"Oh, my gracious, is this a proposal!" Something in Blaney's tone had warned Patty that light banter was the best course, and she rattled on; "if so, postpone it, please. I really must go very soon and dress for my dance."

"I know it. I will wait for a more fitting time and place. You ought to be wooed in a sylvan glade——"

"Oh, I'd rather a bosky dell! I've always been crazy to be wooed in a bosky dell. A leafy bower is the nearest I've come to it."

"Who wooed you there?"

"Can't remember exactly. But it was the third from the last,—I think."

"You little witch! Do you know how fascinating you are?"

"No; tell me." Patty was in mischievous mood, and looked up demurely at Blaney.

"By Jove, I will! As soon as I can get you alone. Run away, now, and do your dance. And, listen; I command you to think of me at every step."

"Can't promise that. It's all I can do to remember Mr. Grantham's steps; they're fearfully complicated. So—you think of me,—instead."

With a saucy smile at Blaney, Patty slipped from her place, and went around to the dressing room.

"Oh, here you are," cried Alla, who was waiting to help her dress; "I was just going to send for you. Now, off with your frock."

Some fifteen or twenty minutes later, the audience sat in breathless anticipation of Patty's dance.

Howard Grantham was a great artist, and never before had he been known to devise a dance for any one. But he had recognised Patty's skill in the art, and had requested that he be allowed to design a picture dance for her. The result was to be a surprise to all present, except the Blaneys, for rehearsals had been jealously kept secret.

The lights in the room were low, and the stage, which was a small grove of evergreen trees, was dark. Then, through the trees, appeared slowly a faint, pink light, as of breaking dawn. Some unseen violins breathed almost inaudible strains of Spring-song music.

Two trees at the back were slowly drawn apart as two small, white hands appeared among their branches. In the opening showed Patty's lovely face, eyes upturned, scarlet lips parted in a smile that was a joyous expression of youth and gladness. Still further she drew apart the lissome trees, and stepped through, a vision of spring itself. Clouds of chiffon swirled about her, softest dawn-rose in colour, changing of tints of heliotrope and primrose, as she swayed in graceful, pliant rhythm. Her slim white arms waved slowly, as the hidden melodies came faintly from the depth of the grove. Her pretty bare feet shone whitely among the soft pine needles and the steps of her dance were the very essence of poetry itself.

The audience watched in silence, spellbound by the fair sight. Slowly she moved and swayed; then, as the music quickened, her steps grew more animated, her smile more bright, the lights were stronger, and the dance ended in a whirl of graceful pirouette and tossing, fluttering draperies. With no pause or intermission, Patty was changed to an impersonation of summer. It was done by the lights. Her robe was really of white chiffon, and as pink lights had made it appear in rosy tints, so now a deep yellow light gave the effect of sultry sunlight.

The music, and likewise the rhythm of the dance, were soft and languorous as a July noon. Limply hung the draperies, slowly waved the graceful arms, and at the end, Patty sank slowly, gently, down on a mound beneath the trees, and, her head pillowed on her arm, closed her eyes, while the violin notes faded to silence.

Knowing better than to applaud her, the spectators watched in silence. A moment, and then a clear bugle-like note sounded. Patty started up, passed her hand across her brow, opened her eyes, smiled slowly, and more and more merrily, then sprang up, and as the lights made her costume appear to be of the gold and russet red of autumn, she burst into a wild woodland dance such as a veritable Dryad might have performed. The music was rich, triumphant, and the whole atmosphere was filled with the glory of the crown of the year. By a clever contrivance, autumn leaves came fluttering down and Patty's bare feet nestled in them with childish enjoyment. Her smile was roguish, she was a witch, an eerie thing. The orange light glowed and shone, and at the height of a tumultuous burst of music, there was a sudden pause. Patty stopped still, her smile faded, and the colours changed from autumn glows to a cold wintry blue. Her gown became white, with blue shadows, the music was sharp and frosty. Patty danced with staccato steps, with little shivers of cold. The ground now appeared to be covered with frost, and her feet recoiled as they touched it. The music whistled like winter blasts. A fine snow seemed to fall, the blue shadows faded, all was white, and Patty, whirling, faster and faster, was like a

white fairy, white robes, white arms, white feet, and a sparkling white veil, that grew more and more voluminous as she shook out its hidden folds. Faster she went, whirling, twirling, swirling, like a leaf in the wind, until, completely swathed in the great white veil, she vanished between the parted trees at the back of the stage.

The music ceased, the lights blazed up, the dance was over. A moment passed as the audience came back to earth, and then the applause was tremendous. Hands clapped, sonorously, voices shouted "Bravo!" and other words of plaudit; and "Encore!" was repeatedly demanded.

But Mr. Grantham had forbidden Patty to return to the stage, even to acknowledge the laudation. He believed in the better effect of an unspoiled remembrance of her last tableau.

So, shaking with excitement and weariness, Patty sank into a chair in the dressing-room, and Alla began to draw on her stockings.

"You must rest quietly, dear Patricia, for a half hour at least," she said, solicitously. "You are quite exhausted. But it was wonderful! I have never seen anything so beautiful! You will be fêted and praised to death. I've sent for a cup of coffee, to brace you up."

"Oh, please not, Alla!" cried Patty, knowing the kind of coffee it would be. "I don't want it, truly. Just give me a glass of water, and let me sit still a minute without seeing anybody. It is exhausting to dance like that."

"Yes, dear, it is. Now rest quietly, and I'll keep everybody away, until you feel like seeing them."

But Patty was keyed up with the excitement of the occasion and unwilling to rest for very long. So, with Alla's help, she was soon rearrayed in her red velvet and ready to return to the Studio.

"I'm ashamed of myself," she said to Alla, "but I'm so vain, I really want to go out there and hear people tell me that I did well!"

"That isn't vanity," Alla returned. "That's proper pride. If any one can do a thing as well as you did that dance, it would be idiocy not to enjoy hearing appreciative praise."

"Do you think so?" and Patty looked relieved; "I don't want to be conceited, but I'm glad if I did well."

"Wait till you hear what Sam says! He's wild about you, anyway, and after that dance he'll be crazier over you than ever."

Patty smiled, happily, and with a final adjustment of her freshly done-up hair, she declared herself ready to return to the party.

As hers had been the last number on the program, she was not surprised to find the audience standing about in groups, or picturesquely posed on divans, and her appearance was the signal for a new hubbub of excitement.

But before she could hear a definite word from any one, a tall, powerful figure came striding up to her, and big Bill Farnsworth's unsmiling blue eyes looked straight into her own merry ones.

Her merriment died away before the sternness of his expression.

"Get your wraps, Patty," he said, in low but distinct tones. "At once."

"What for?" and Patty stared at him in amazement. "What has happened?"

But she had no fear that any untoward accident had befallen, for Farnsworth showed no sympathy or gentleness in his face, merely a determined authority.

"Go at once," Farnsworth repeated, "and get your cloak."

"I won't do it," she replied, giving him an angry glance. "I don't want to go home; why should I get my cloak?"

"Then I'll take you without it," and picking her up in his arms, Big Bill strode through the throng of people, with as little embarrassment as if he were walking along the street. Many turned to look at him with curiosity, some smiled, but the Cosmic souls rarely allowed themselves to be surprised at anything, however peculiar.

As they passed Sam Blaney, Patty noticed that he stood, leaning against the wall, his arms folded, and a strange expression on his face,—half defiant, half afraid.

Farnsworth carried Patty down the stairs and out of the house, and placed her with care, but a bit unceremoniously, in the tonneau of a waiting motor-car. He jumped in beside her, and pulled the lap robe over her. The car started at once, and was well under way by the time Patty found voice enough to express her indignation.

"You—perfectly—horrid—old—thing!" she gasped, almost crying from sheer surprise and anger.

"Yes?" he said, and she detected laughter in his tone, which made her angrier than ever.

"I hate you!" she burst forth.

"Do you, dear?" and Farnsworth rearranged the rug to protect her more fully.

There was such gentleness in his touch, such tenderness in his voice, that Patty's anger melted to plain curiosity.

"Why did you do that?" she demanded. "Why did you bring me away in such—such caveman fashion?"

Farnsworth smiled. "It was a caveman performance, wasn't it? But you wouldn't come willingly."

"Of course I wouldn't! Why should I?"

"For three very good reasons." Farnsworth spoke, gravely. "First, you were in a place where you didn't belong. I couldn't let you remain there."

"It is not your business to say where I belong!"

"I wouldn't want any one I care for to be in that place."

"Not even Daisy Dow?"

"Certainly not Daisy."

"Oh, not Daisy—of *all* people! Oh, certainly *not*!"

"Next, you were doing what you ought not to do."

"What!"

"Yes, you were. You danced barefoot before those—those unspeakable fools!"

Patty felt uncomfortable. She hadn't herself exactly liked the idea of that barefoot dance, and hadn't told any one she was going to do it. She had insisted to Mr. Grantham that she preferred to wear sandals. But he had talked so beautifully of the naturalness of the whole conception, the exquisite appropriateness of unshod feet, and the necessity of her carrying out his design as a whole, that she had yielded.

And now that Bill Farnsworth spoke of it in this rude way, it seemed to divest the dance of all its aesthetic beauty, and make of it a horrid, silly performance.

She tried to speak, tried to reply in indignant or angry vein, but she couldn't articulate at all. A lump came into her throat, big tears formed in her eyes, and a sob that she tried in vain to suppress shook her whole body.

She felt Farnsworth's arm go protectingly round her. Not caressingly, but with an assurance of care and assumption of responsibility.

Then, he pulled off the glove from his other hand with his teeth, and after a dive into a pocket, produced and shook out a big, white, comforting square of soft linen, and Patty gratefully buried her face in it.

CHAPTER XV

THE CHRISTMAS PARTY

"Much obliged, Billee," Patty said, at last, as she handed back a somewhat damp handkerchief, and

Farnsworth stuffed it in his pocket. "Where are you taking me?"

"Where do you want to go?"

"Back where you brought me from, please."

"Well, you can't go there. Will you go home, or to the Farringtons'?"

A quick side glance at the stern face beside her showed Patty that there was no chance of her going back to the Blaneys', so she said, with great dignity, "I'll go to Elise's, then. But I want you to understand that I resent your treatment, that I detest you for using your strength to interfere with my pleasure, and that I absolutely sever all friendship or acquaintance with you, now and forever!"

"Bad as that? Well, well, you *must* be annoyed."

"Annoyed! *annoyed*! why, I——"

"There now, Posy Face, quiet down a bit, we're almost at the house. You don't want to go in looking like a—a weeping willow! You'll spoil the effect of that red frock, if your eyes are red, too, and your cheeks all tear-stained. Here, have a fresh handkerchief."

Farnsworth produced another big white linen affair, and unfolding it with a flourish, held it up to Patty's face.

"I never saw anybody have so many clean handkerchiefs! Do you carry a dozen?"

"Always glad to help ladies in distress. Are you often so lachrymose?"

"Oh Little Billee, *don't* be so everlasting good-natured, when I feel so cross. *Why* did you bring me away from that place, when I was having such a good time? And the best part was just about to begin!"

"Now, Patty, listen—while the listening's good. Here we are at Elise's; I want you to go in, gay and smiling, and not cause any curious comment. So let the Blaney discussion wait, and I'll tell you all about it, first chance we get. You don't want everybody to know that you left the Cosmic Club a—er,—a bit unintentionally, do you? Then, forget it, for the moment, and put on a Merry Christmas manner. You'll be glad you did, afterward."

Farnsworth's talk was sound sense, and Patty knew it. She already felt a little relieved at getting away from Sam Blaney and back with her own crowd. So she shook off her petulance and her anger, and when she entered the Farringtons' drawing-room, no smile that greeted her was brighter than her own in response.

"Why, Pattibelle," cried Chick Channing, "welcome home! I feared we had lost you to the high-geared Highbrows. Merry Christmas and many of 'em! Come sit by my side, little darling——"

"No, come sit by us," insisted Elise, from the other side of the room.
"You're a dear, to come so early, Patty. How did it happen?"

"Oh, I just *couldn't* stay there any longer," said Patty, very truthfully. "Am I in time for the Christmas tree?"

"Indeed you are," returned Elise; "also for the feast and the dancing and the Mistletoe Bough."

"Good!" and Patty joined the laughing group, of which she immediately became the centre. Her red velvet gown, though unusual, was not so eccentric as to appear peculiar in this setting, and the girls began to express admiration.

Nor were the men unappreciative.

"A real Yuletide frock, Patty," said Phil Van Reypen, approvingly.
"Didn't know you could wear that colour."

"I couldn't," laughed Patty, "in daylight. But the electrics even things up, somehow, and my complexion takes on a harmonising tint of brick red."

"Because you are a brick," put in Channing. "Did you get many
Christmas gifts, Patty? Did you get my small votive offering?"

"Did I get many gifts! My boudoir looks like a World's Fair! Yes, Chick, I got your present. Let me see, it was the padded calf Emerson, wasn't it?"

"It was not! If you got that, it probably came from your Cosmetic friends. I sent you—oh, if you didn't even open it——"

"But I did, Chickadee. It was a heavenly jade hatpin, an exquisite bit of carving. I just adore it, and I shall never wear any other. So cheer up, life is still worth living!"

Patty was in high spirits. It was partly reaction from the artificial atmosphere of the Studio, and partly her real enjoyment of the festive occasion of Elise's Christmas party. The Farrington parties were always on an elaborate scale, and this was no exception.

"I wish Roger and Mona were here," Patty said, "I sort of miss them."

"So do I," chimed in Daisy Dow. "But the honeymoon shining on the sands at Palm Beach still holds them under its influence."

"They must be happy," observed Kit Cameron. "Think of it! Christmas and a bridal trip and the Sunny South,—all at once."

"It is a large order," laughed Patty. "But Mona likes a lot of things at once. That girl has no sense of moderation. When are they coming home, Elise?"

"Don't know. No signs of it yet. Come on, people, now we're going to have the tree!"

The orchestra played a march, and the crowd trooped into the great hall known as the Casino. There awaited them a resplendent Christmas tree, glittering with frosted decorations and glowing with electric lights.

Van Reypen had quietly taken possession of Patty as a partner, and he guided her to a pleasant seat where she could see all the entertainment. For great doings had been arranged to please the guests, and a short program was carried out.

Waits sang old English carols, mummers cut up queer antics, servitors brought in the Boar's Head and Wassail Bowl, and finally it was announced that all present would participate in the old-fashioned dance of Sir Roger de Coverley.

Patty enjoyed it all. She loved to see this sort of thing when it was well done, and in this instance every detail was faultless. Van Reypen quite shared her enthusiasm, and was vigorously clapping his hands over some jest of a mummer, when Big Bill Farnsworth came up to Patty, made a low bow, his hand on his breast, and whisked her off to the dance before she fairly realised what had happened.

"Why—I can't!" she exclaimed, as she found herself standing opposite her smiling partner. "I'm—I'm engaged to Philip!"

"I know you are," returned Farnsworth, gravely, "but you can give me one dance."

Patty blushed, furiously. "Oh, I didn't mean engaged *that* way," she said, "I meant engaged for this dance."

"No," corrected Farnsworth, still smiling, "you did mean you are engaged to him *that* way, but *not* for this dance."

"Well, he hadn't actually asked me," said Patty, doubtfully, "but I know he took it for granted——"

"It isn't wise to take too much for granted—there! see, he has just discovered your absence."

Sure enough, Van Reypen, who had been engrossed with the mummer's chaff, turned back to where Patty had sat, and his look of amazement at her absence was funny to see.

Glancing about, he saw her standing in line, opposite Farnsworth. At first, he looked wrathful, then accepting his position with a good grace, he smiled at them both.

"Little deserter!" he said to her, as he sauntered past her, in search of another partner.

"Deserter, yourself!" she returned. "You completely forgot my existence!"

"I didn't, but I am duly punished for seeming to do so. But I claim you for a supper partner, so make a memorandum of that!"

Patty smiled an assent, and the dance began.

"Don't you like this better than that smoky, incense-smelly atmosphere of the Studio?" Farnsworth

said to Patty, as they walked through the stately figures of the dance.

"This is a home of wealth and grandeur," said Patty, "but wealth and grandeur are not the most desirable things in the world."

"What are?"

"Brains and——"

"Yes, brains and breeding. But your high-browed, lowbred——"

"Billee, I've stood a lot from you tonight; now, I refuse to stand any more. You will please stop saying things that you know offend me."

"Forgive me, Patty, I forgot myself."

"Then it's forgive and forget between us. I'll do the forgiving because you did the forgetting. But I've forgiven you all I'm going to. So don't make any more necessary."

"I'll try not to," and then the subject of the earlier evening was not mentioned again.

The dance concluded, Farnsworth stood for a moment, still holding Patty's hand after their last sweeping curtsey, and he said, "Will you be my supper partner, too? Please do."

"I can't," and Patty laughed up at him. "I'm really engaged to Phil."

"Oh, are you, Patty?" cried Daisy, who was just passing, with Kit Cameron. "I said you'd announce it tonight! What fun! But why are you telling Big Bill all by himself first? You ought to tell all the crowd at once. I'll do it for you. Come on, Kit, let's spread the news! We've Patty's own word for it."

The two ran off, laughing, and Patty looked a bit dismayed. "Kit's such a scamp," she said, ruefully, "he'll tell that all over the room——"

"Isn't it true?"

"Would you care if it were?"

"I care for anything that concerns you or your happiness."

"Or any one else or any one else's happiness! Oh, I know you, Bill
Farnsworth, you want everybody to be happy."

"Of course I do!" and the big man laughed, heartily. "Is that a crime?
But most of all I care to have one little foolish, petulant
Blossom-girl happy."

"Well, then, why don't you make her so? Why aren't you kind and nice to her, instead of being horrid about her friends and her dancing, and acting like a great Lord of something-or-other, frowning on her innocent amusements!"

"Oh, Patty, what an arraignment! But never mind that. May I take you to the supper room?"

"Oh, here you are, Light of my eyes!" and Van Reypen came up and offered his arm.

With a smile of farewell to Farnsworth, Patty accepted Philip's escort and walked off.

"What's this report Cameron and Daisy Dow are spreading?" asked Van Reypen, looking at her, quizzically, but with a glance full of meaning. "They say you and I are to announce our engagement tonight. I'm so delighted to hear it, I can't see straight; but I want your corroboration of the rumour. Oh, Patty, darling girl, you *do* mean it, don't you?"

Philip had drawn her to one side, away from the crowd, and in a palm-screened alcove, he stood beside her, his handsome face glowing with eagerness, as he anticipated yet feared her reply.

"Nonsense, Phil. It happened that I told Bill Farnsworth I was engaged to you for supper, and Daisy overheard, and she and Kit tried to tease me, that's all."

"But since it happened that way,—since the report is current,—don't you think,—doesn't it seem as if this would be an awfully good chance to make it a true report?"

"No, sir! A girl can't get engaged all in a minute, and *en route* to a supper room, at that! Besides, I'm

hungry."

"You can't put me off that way! You may think to be hungry interferes with romance. Not a bit of it! You say you'll marry me, and I'll get you all the supper you want, and, incidentally, eat a good square meal myself. There!"

Van Reypen had great charm. His great dark eyes were fixed on Patty, and in their depths she could read his big, true love, unembarrassed by the place or the occasion. He knew only that he was pleading with the girl he loved, suing for his life's happiness, a happiness that lay in the little rosy palm of Patty Fairfield's hand.

"Darling," he whispered, taking the little hand in both his own, "Patty, darling, do say yes, at last. Don't keep me in suspense. Don't bother about learning to love me, and all that. Just come to me,—tell me you will,—and I know you'll love me. You can't help it, dear, when I love you so. Why, Patty, I've got to have you! You don't know how I want you. You've so twined yourself into my heart that you seem part of me already. Dear, *dear* little girl, my love, my sweetheart——"

Philip's arm went round Patty's shoulder, and he drew her to him.

"Phil!" cried Patty, starting back. "Don't, please don't."

"I won't, dear,—I won't call you mine until you say I may,—but, oh, Patty!"

His voice was so full of deep feeling, his eves pleaded so longingly for her consent, that Patty's heart went out to him. She was sorry for him, and she honestly longed to say the word that would give him joy and gladness forever. But that very feeling taught her the truth about herself. She knew, in one sudden, illuminating flash, that she didn't and couldn't love Philip Van Reypen in the way she was sure she wanted to love and would love the man she should marry.

Nor could she speak lightly or carelessly to him now. It was a crisis. A good, true man had offered her his love and his life. It was not a slight thing to be tossed aside as a trifle. If she accepted it, well; but if not, she must tell him so kindly, and must tell him why. And Patty didn't know why. In fact, she wasn't sure she didn't want Phil, after all. He was very big-hearted,—very splendid.

"What are you thinking of, girlie?" he asked, gently, as he watched the changing expressions on her face.

"I'm trying to be honest with myself, Phil. I'm trying to think out why it is that I don't say yes to you at once. I suppose you think me heartless and cold to think it out like this, but, I'm in earnest——"

"So am I, dear, very much in earnest. And, I think, my own Heart's Dearest, that you're nearer to loving me now than you've ever been. Nearer saying yes than ever before. And, so, I'm not going to let you answer now. This isn't the time or place. Somebody may come looking for us at any moment. You have given me hope, Patty—unconsciously, you've given me hope for the first time. I'll be satisfied with that, for now. And, I'll see you soon, in your own home, to hear the rest from your own lips. Oh, Patty, how *can* I wait? I can't! Say yes, *now*,—say it, Patty!"

"No, Phil," and Patty gave him a lovely smile, while her blue eyes shone like stars; "no, you were right, before. Not here—not now. Come, let us join the others,—and you come to see me at home—soon."

"Your own sweet way is mine, Patty," and Van Reypen kissed the trembling little hand he held. "Now, brace up, dear; remember, they'll all be watching us, even chaffing us. Can you meet them?"

"Yes," and Patty assumed her old mischievous smile. "Carry things off with a high hand, Phil. That's the way to meet them."

Together they sauntered to the supper room, and, as they had expected, were met by a storm of chaff.

"Where have you two been? 'Fess up, now!"

"Flirting," replied Van Reypen, coolly. "Haven't we, Patty?"

"Yes, if you call such a mild affair worthy of the name," and Patty's nonchalant air and unembarrassed manner gave no further inducement for teasing.

"Let's sit here," Phil went on, selecting seats at a small table, with some casual friends, and then his resources of conversation and Patty's gay chatter did away with all chance for personal allusions.

CHAPTER XVI

A STOLEN POEM

After supper there was dancing, and Patty was besieged by would-be partners. Good-naturedly she fractioned her dances, and even divided the short intermissions between them. Everybody wanted to dance with the smiling little person in red velvet, and her pretty gaiety salved the wounds of those whom she was obliged to refuse.

At last, Farnsworth came to her, and his determined expression told Patty he was about to lay down the law.

Sure enough, he took her hand in his, drew it through his arm, and led her out of the dancing room.

"Without even a 'by your leave?'" and Patty looked up at him, inquiringly.

"Without it or with it. But you can't dance any more tonight. You're so tired you can scarcely stand up now."

"That's so, now that you speak of it. But I hadn't realised it."

"Of course you hadn't. You're crazy, when it comes to dancing!"

"Well, you're not. You haven't danced with me once tonight, except that old country dance."

"Did you want me to? Were you lacking for partners?"

"*Me*! Lacking for partners! Am I, usually?"

"Oh, Patty, what a little Vanity Box you are! No, you never lack for partners or attention or flattery,—all you ever lack is a little common sense."

"Why-ee! Little Billee! I've always prided myself on my common sense. But where are you taking me?"

"Not very far. There's a comfy window-seat in this little reception room, where you can rest a bit, then I'm going to send you home."

"Oh, you are! And who constituted you my Major Domo, or Commanding Officer, or Father Superior, or whoever it is that orders people about?"

"I don't order; I persuade, or induce, by power of my irresistible charm." Farnsworth's blue eyes twinkled, and Patty laughed outright, as she said, "Yes, I noticed the irresistibility as I left the Blaneys' tonight!"

"And, that's the very subject I was about to discourse upon,—the Blaneys, I mean. But first, let me make you comfy."

Farnsworth led Patty to the spacious, cushioned window-seat, and piled soft pillows at her back, and tucked an ottoman beneath her feet, and then sat down beside her. The little room was deserted by the dancers, and though some of the guests strolled in and out, occasionally, there was ample opportunity for real conversation.

"It's this way, Patty," Farnsworth began. "I know Sam Blaney, and you don't. I knew him years ago, and though I've not seen him of late years, he's the same old two and sixpence."

"And a very attractive two and sixpence," declared Patty, an obstinate expression coming into her face. "You see, Little Billee, either you like wise, brainy people, or you don't. I do."

"I know you do, and so do I. But the Blaney crowd are neither wise nor brainy. They are frauds."

"Do you mean conscious frauds? Wilfully deceptive?"

"To a certain degree, yes. They do fool themselves, sometimes, into thinking they are sincere, but

they can't even fool themselves all the time,—let alone other people."

"Your observations do not interest me." Patty's air was lofty, she looked away into space, as if bored to death with her companion.

"Would it interest you to know that I know Sam Blaney to be a fraud and a dishonest man?"

"I have heard you say that one's friends should be sacred from disparaging remarks."

"True enough. But, in the first place, Blaney isn't my friend, and even if he were, I should sacrifice him or his friendship for you."

"Why?"

"Never mind why. Oh, Patty, rely on my judgment, rely on my word in this matter, and don't have anything more to do with that rubbish bunch!"

"Look here, Little Billee, if that's all the subject you can find to talk about, I believe I'd rather go back and dance. I'm rested now."

"Sit still, Lady Gay. While we're on this subject, we're going to fight it to a finish."

"You mean you're going to fight me to a finish. Go on, it won't take long."

"You poor little girl,—you are tired, I know. Well, to make a long story short, then, you must break with these Cosmic people, because, if you don't, it will harm your social standing and injure your reputation."

"Why? They're absolutely correct and high-minded. They're a little unconventional, maybe, but they're interesting and worth while."

"But they're frauds, Patty. And they've taken you up, because you're a social favourite, and you add lustre to their list."

"And they don't care for me, personally!"

"Now, don't flare up. Of course they like you, personally,—who doesn't? But they make you think you're brainy and soulful and a little old deep-thinker—and,—you're not, you know."

"Well! You *are* complimentary! What am I, pray? An ignoramus?"

"Hardly that. You're the sweetest, loveliest girl God ever made, but you're not a blue-stocking. You're not college bred, or even well-read."

"Do you know you're a very horrid person? Do you know I wouldn't stand such talk from many people?"

"I should hope not. Very few people know you well enough or love you well enough to tell you these truths."

"I know somebody who loves me too much to talk to me like that."

"Van Reypen, of course. But, Patty, he doesn't approve of the Blaney crowd, either, and you know it."

"That's because he doesn't understand them, and——"

"Wait a minute. Just what do you mean by understand them? They speak English, I suppose."

"How dense you are! There is much beside language of *words* to be understood by kindred——"

"Don't you dare say souls!"

"I will,—I *do* say *souls*! That's what has no meaning for you!"

"Go on, Posy Face! You're pretty stunning when you get really stirred up!"

Farnsworth's face broke into a broad smile, and Patty was so amazed at his sudden change of manner that it irritated her.

"Oh, I am, am I! Well, other people have thought so, too. To the extent of putting it into poetry—real poetry!"

"Such as what?"

Farnsworth was so cynical of tone, that Patty broke her pledge of secrecy to the small extent of quoting a few words from the poem Blaney had given her.

"Such as this," she cried:

"——perhaps because her limpid face
Was eddied with a restless tide, wherein
The dimples found no place to anchor and
Abide."

"That is poetry, indeed!" agreed Farnsworth, looking at her quizzically. "Did you say it was written to you?"

"Yes, Sam Blaney wrote it, to me. I didn't mean to tell you, it's a confidential matter,—but you were so horrid about him——"

"Wait a minute, Patty. Is that an original poem, that Blaney wrote for you alone?"

"Yes, it is. I promised not to tell it to anybody, so I'll ask you to say nothing about it."

"Tell me more of it."

"No, I won't. I promised not to."

"You needn't. *I'll* tell *you* what comes next:

'——perhaps because her tresses beat
A froth of gold about her throat, and poured
In splendour to the feet that ever seemed
Afloat.'

Isn't that it?"

"Yes! How did you know?" Patty's startled eyes were wide in amazement.

"You dear little goose. I hate to give you a shock, Posy-girl, but those lines were written by a not altogether obscure poet,—one James Whitcomb Riley."

"What! It's no such thing! Mr. Blaney wrote them about me! They begin——"

"Wait! Don't break your promise of confidence. They begin:

"'I loved her.—Why? I never knew.' Don't they?"

"Yes, that's the poem Sam Blaney wrote for me——

"But he chanced to write it after Riley did—not before. Strange they were so similarly inspired, wasn't it?"

"William Farnsworth, do you mean to tell me that that is a poem of
Riley's,—and Sam Blaney palmed it off on me as his own!"

"It looks that way, Patty. At any rate, those are Riley's lines. I've known the thing for years. It's a favourite of mine."

"But I've a book of Riley's,—it isn't in that."

"My child, you mustn't get annoyed with me, when I tell you you're not deeply versed in book-lore,—or deeply booked in verse-lore! For it's true. I admit that is not one of the poet's best known bits,—it's in 'Flying Islands of the Night,'—but it is so exquisite that it ought to be better known. And, by the way, Patty, if you thought Blaney did that gem, I don't wonder you admired him. But, dear little girl, do you see now that the man is capable of deception?"

Patty looked deeply troubled. "You're sure, Billee,—you're *positive* about this?"

"As sure as I am of my own name."

"Then I want nothing more to do with Sam Blaney or any of his crowd. I'll never forgive it. Why, he wrote the poem while I sat looking at him,—just as fast as he could scribble."

"Doesn't that seem to prove it? He knew Riley's lines, and wrote them down. I doubt if the greatest poet that ever lived scribbled lines like that, offhand."

"Of course they couldn't! You've done it, Little Billee. You've smashed my idols, blown up my air castles, knocked the pedestals from under my heroes——"

"I'm sorry, dear,—but when they are unworthy idols and heroes——"

"And they are! I see it all now. I banked on Mr. Blaney's genius mostly on account of that poem. But, as you say, the very fact that he made me promise not to show it to anybody—but I don't need to prove it. You tell me it's Riley's, and there's no further question about it."

"I'll send you the book, Patty. You'll enjoy it all."

Patty smiled. "I don't want it in corroboration of your assertion, but I'd love to have it. I'd like to know more poetry, Billee. As you so delicately hinted, my education on such matters is a little lacking."

"That's your own fault," said Farnsworth, bluntly. "Poetry isn't a thing to learn at school,—but alone, and at odd times and moments."

"It seems queer," and the earnest little face gazed into his, "for you to know such a lot about poetry. You're so——"

"Go on; don't mind hurting me. So uncouth, awkward, clumsy, lacking in—er—understanding, wasn't it?"

Farnsworth spoke bitterly, and his deep blue eyes were clouded.

"No," Patty returned, gently, "no, I didn't mean all those horrid things, and you know it! I meant, you're so busy with your mines and things, and so wrapped up in your business that it's surprising to know you have time for poetry."

"It's *my* theory that one can always find time for anything he really wants to do?"

"Can he? Do you suppose, then, you could find time to teach me a little bit about poetry, and how to study it,—or, don't you really want to do this?"

Farnsworth looked at her, and a great and tender light came into his eyes. Then, with a quick smile, he said, lightly, "Yes, indeed; I'll make out a list of books for you tomorrow. May I send them to you?"

Patty was aware of a sudden lack of enthusiasm in Farnsworth's manner, and with equal coolness, she said, "Thank you, that won't be necessary. Just send the list, and I can get them. And, now I think I must begin to commence to think about considering going home."

"Yes, it's late. Who's taking you?"

"I'm going with Mr. and Mrs. Morrison. They kindly asked me."

"Very well. Will you go now?"

"Yes, please. And, I—I want to thank you for setting me straight about the Blaneys."

"Don't include Alla. I doubt if she'd do a deceptive thing. But all the same, Patty, she's no friend for you. You don't care for her, do you?"

"No; I did at first, she interested me——"

"I know; 'interested you strangely,' as the novelists say."

"Yes, just that. She is so queer and unusual and——"

"Well, not to put too fine a point upon it, freakish."

"I suppose so. But I liked it all, at first. I don't mind owning up I was getting a little tired of it. It didn't ——"

"It didn't make good, did it? But you're through with it now. How will you break it all off, without unpleasantness—for you?"

"Oh, I can manage that by my tactful nature. I mean, with Alla. I shan't bother to be specially tactful with Sam. Need I be?"

"No. When a man has practised a fraud like that on you, he deserves no consideration whatever."

"And tell me, Little Billee, tell me quickly, for I must really be going, how did you walk in there and kidnap me so easily?"

"I had a sort of notion that you ought to be looked after. Channing was here, laughing over some of the details of the Blaney party that he had heard of, and when he told about your dance,—well, Patty, I'll be honest with you. I wanted to see that dance. You know how I love your dancing. Also, I wanted to know just what the dance was,—for I know Grantham."

"The dance was all right, Billee?"

"Yes, perfectly all right, only I'd rather you'd worn sandals. But it was a wonderful dance,—exquisite, poetic, all that is beautiful. I went in, reminded Sam of our old acquaintance, and he welcomed me decently, if not over-cordially. I saw one or two numbers on the program before yours, and I concluded I didn't want you mixed up with that bunch. They're right enough, but their unconventionality and ultra Bohemianism are not the element in which Patty Fairfield belongs. Then came your dance. Unspeakably lovely, all that it ought to be, but not for that herd of idiots! So, I made up my mind I'd persuade you to go home with me,—pretty much instanter! I told Blaney I intended to take you. He was mad all through, and denied my right to ask you to leave his party. But,—well, I reminded him of a few of our past memories—memories fraught with sadness!—to put it poetically,—and he made no further objections to my carrying out my own sweet will——"

"And so you carried out——"

"My own sweet girl! Exactly! Patty, you little rogue, you musn't bewitch me like that! If you do, I'll pick you up again, and carry you off—oh, here comes Mrs. Morrison. Have *you* come to carry Patty off?"

"Yes," and Mrs. Morrison looked regretful. "I'm sorry, Patty, dear, but really——"

"It's time! Yes, I know it, and I'm quite ready to go. Good night,
Little Billee."

"Good night, Patty. Get a good rest, for you really need it."

CHAPTER XVII

PATTY'S DECISION

"You see, Nan, it isn't fair. I don't feel honest to keep Phil in uncertainty, when I don't think—no, I really *don't* think I'm going to marry him."

"But good gracious, Patty, you ought to know by this time! Either you care for him or you don't."

"Nan, I've only learned of late that when people say 'care for' they mean love. I think it's a silly phrase,—why, I care for lots of things——"

"There are a good many things you've only learned of late, Patty, and a good many more you've still to learn. But I really think you ought to make up your mind about Phil Van Reypen."

"Well, amn't I making it up as fast as I can? I'm going right at it now, in dead earnest, and you've got to help me."

Nan smiled at the anxious face that looked into her own.

They were in Patty's boudoir, the morning after the Christmas party. A breakfast tray, with contents only partly demolished, was pushed away, as the importance of the discussion made food seem an intrusive factor.

Patty's cap was askew on her hastily knotted-up curls, and she gathered about her the voluminous folds of a billowy, blue silk affair, that was her latest acquisition in the way of négligées.

"My child," said Nan, "you have given yourself away. If you want any help in making up your mind, you are not in love with that young man. You don't 'care for' him, in the technical sense of the term."

"But he's very nice, Nancy. He's a big-hearted, fine-minded——"

"Upstanding, clean-cut American gentleman. Let me help you out. Yes, Patty, he's all those things and more. But if you don't love him you mustn't marry him. You're old enough to know your own mind."

"I'm not such an ancient!"

"Don't be silly! You're nearly twenty-one——"

"Just twenty and a half."

"Well, all right, twenty and a half. But that's not like seventeen. You're young for your years, I think. But anyway, you've seen enough of men to know if Phil Van Reypen is 'Lord of your life,—your King,—your Star!' Is he?"

"Not much he isn't! Why, Nan, he's an awfully nice chap, but no 'Philip, My King!' There, you see I can quote poetry as well as you. Oh, Nan, Bill Farnsworth knows an awful lot about poetry! Would you think he would?"

"Now, Patty, keep to the subject in hand. Fred and I both think you ought to be engaged to Philip, or else tell him you won't be. It isn't fair to him, to act as you do."

"I know it, you angel stepmother, and so, I'm going to decide, right now,—with much quickness. Heigho! Which shall it be? Patty Van Reypen,—or stay an old maid all my life."

"Oh, I dare say there are others. You may possibly have another chance at matrimony."

"Nan," and Patty turned suddenly grave, "I don't like that—a chance at matrimony. I mean, if one gets engaged, it ought to be to a man she loves so much that she doesn't think of it as a 'chance.' It ought to be the one and only."

"Why, that's just what I'm trying to say, dear. Now, is Phil the one and only?"

"No, ma'am. Not by no manner of means, he isn't. Nixie, he is not!"

"That mass of negatives sounds rather conclusive to me. So, with that as a premise, I'm going to advise you, even urge you to tell him so with unmistakable definiteness."

"But, Nan, it makes him feel so bad."

"That is the trouble, Patty. Every true woman hates to disappoint the man who truly loves her. And Phil adores you. His love is deep and sincere. He would make you very happy—if you loved him. If not, it would only mean unhappiness for you both. And, so, it is really kinder to him to tell him so frankly and let him give up any false hopes."

"I know it, and I'm going to do it. But I don't know just how. You see, Nan, he is so persistent,—and in such a nice, kind way. When I tell him that, he'll only say that he won't consider it final, and we'll wait and see. Then the argument begins all over again."

"And so, I tell you, at the risk of repeating myself, that you must make up your own mind positively first; then, if an adverse decision, you must tell him, so positively that he can't misunderstand. *Then*, if he refuses to give up all hope, it isn't your fault."

"That's good, sound talk, Nan, and I will try to do just as you say. But—well, here's the thing in a nutshell. I like Phil so much that I hate to tell him I can't love him."

"Then get that out of the nutshell, and put this in. If you like him so much, it's your duty to tell him you can't love him. Heavens, Patty, have you no idea of other people's rights?"

"I don't believe I have, Nan. I'm a spoiled child, I admit it. You and Dad spoil me, and all my friends do, too. I'm made to believe that the sun rises and sets in silly little Patty Fairfield, and it has made me a vain, conceited, selfish, insufferable *Pig*! That's what it has done!"

"Oh, Patty, you little idiot! Nothing of the sort. You're,—since you doubtless meant to be contradicted,—you're a dear thing, and there isn't a selfish bone in your body. If people adore you, it's because of your sunny, sweet nature, and your absolute thoughtfulness and kindness to others. Don't be foolish *that* way. But regarding this matter of Philip, I know you see it as I do. And it's really your kind heart and your dislike of hurting anybody's feelings that makes you hate so to tell him what you must tell

him."

"Yes, Nan, I must tell him. I know it myself. I know that I like him lots, and I'd be awfully sorry not to be friends with him, but I don't want to marry him."

"Do you want to marry anybody else?"

"I hardly know how to answer that. I suppose every girl would rather be married than not, if it's to just the right man. But one thing is certain, Philip isn't the right man."

Patty sighed, and the far-away look in her eyes made Nan wonder if there was a "right man" whose image was enshrined in the girl's heart. But she only said, "Then, dear, tell him so."

"I will," said Patty, but she looked very serious and troubled over it.

However, she did tell him so. When Van Reypen called that evening Patty answered his plea with a decisive No. She was very gentle and kindly, but she gave him no ray of hope, no suggestion of a change of decision.

Philip took it gravely, but was unwilling to admit it was final. He knew from Patty's demeanour that she meant it to be, but he hoped he could yet win her by further devotion and patience. She told him this was impossible, but he only smiled and expressed his determination to try it.

"I take your word for it, dear," he said. "I know you mean just what you say, that you don't love me enough to give yourself to me. And I won't urge you, or tease you. Just let me remain your friend, and let me see you, occasionally. I promise not to intrude when I'm not wanted. And though I expect nothing, there's no law against hoping, you know."

Phil's winsome smile was so cheery and yet so wistful, that Patty's heart was touched anew. But she said, "It must be just friends, Phil. I like you lots, you know that, but I can't be always fearful that——"

"That I'll break loose and become unmanageable! You needn't, dear. I promise to abide by your decision, unless I can make you want to change it. Now, forget it all, for the present, and let's be friends and chums and comrades and all those nice things, that don't bother curly-headed little girls and make them look troubled and sad. But, I want to thank you and bless you, dear, for your sweet kindliness to me. Why, you might have sent me flying about my business with nothing more than a curt No. I'm glad you didn't do that!"

"I don't treat my friends like that," and Patty smiled, relieved that the ordeal was practically over. "Now, will you help us with the House Sale?"

"In a *minute*! But tell me what house is to be sold?"

"Oh, no, we don't sell any house. It's really a sort of Bazaar, but instead of holding it in a hall or any big place, we have it in a house,—this house, in fact."

"Here?"

"Yes, next week. It's a horrid nuisance,—the getting ready and clearing up afterward, I mean,—but we want to make money for the library of our working girls' club."

"Let me give you the money you'd make, and then don't have the Bazaar thing."

"You're awfully good, Phil, and I'd like to do that. But it wouldn't work. The Club would just take your contribution and then go calmly on and have a Bazaar or something beside."

"But it would let *you* out. You needn't have it here."

"That would be selfish. I'm too selfish as it is. No, I'll have the sale here. Of course, the committee will help, and all that, but well, you know what committees are."

"Yes, they let the chairman do everything and then they criticise. And
I'll bet you're chairman, aren't you?"

"Yes," Patty laughed. "How you do catch on! But I'm not shifting responsibility. Indeed, I'd rather do it all, if I could do it my own way. But they all tell me what to do, and then whatever's wrong is my fault."

"I know. All committees are like that. Well, just do the best you can and let me help all I can. Is there much I can do?"

"Why, yes, I think so. At least there will be on the day of the Sale.
Come round then and we'll set you to work."

"Glad to. What is to be sold? Can't I buy some things?"

"Yes, indeed. It's a novel sale, in this way: There are wares all over the house. In the library we'll sell books, and in the dining-room, food, and, also, china and glass and fancy linens."

"And in the drawing-room here?"

"Oh, here we'll have the bric-à-brac and pictures and small pieces of furniture,—all these things have been donated, you know. And up in the bedrooms we're to have things to wear, and lace pillows and dresser scarfs and all such things; oh, and hats! And in my boudoir there'll be wonderful kimonos and breakfast caps, and work-baskets and bags and really lovely things."

"I believe you'll enjoy it all. You're enthusiastic already. Let me give you some things for it. Wouldn't you like a few curios and bronze bits from Aunty Van's collections?"

"Oh, we would! But you oughtn't to spare them."

"I've such quantities, a few will never be missed. Come over and pick them out yourself. Bring Elise or whoever is on the committee with you."

"Thank you, Phil, you're awfully good. It will be an immense help. It's easy enough to get fancy things, and even dining-room things; and we've oceans of books and desk fittings and such things. But it's hardest of all to get the very things you offer. And they'll sell, splendidly."

"And you girls dress appropriately, I suppose."

"Yes, of course we never lose a chance of dressing up. Elise will be in cap and gown, in the library. Marie Homer, in full evening regalia, in here. Several as waitresses in the dining-room; flower-girls in the halls; oh, yes, we even use the kitchen. We have cooks there, and they'll sell all sorts of aluminum cook dishes and laundry things. It's really very well planned and I s'pose it will be fun. In the little reception room we have all sorts of motor things,—robes, coats, lunch-baskets, cushions, all the best and newest motor accessories. General Sports goods, too, I believe. Daisy's running that."

"And where are you?"

"Up in my own boudoir. I'm to wear a gorgeous Chinese kimono and one fascinating cap after another, selling them off of my head to the eager throngs of purchasers!"

"Fine! You'll do a rushing business. I'll give you some wares to sell up there, too. Say, some Oriental couch cushions, and some Persian slippers, and things from Auntie's wardrobe."

"Do you think you ought to?"

"Why, of course. All her things are mine, and there are such quantities of really valuable stuffs and trinkets I don't know what to do with them. And as to Aunty Van's own wishes, I know she would have been glad to have them used in this way,—especially for you."

Patty looked up at him, quickly. She well remembered Mrs. Van Reypen's affection for her, and what form it took.

"Phil," she said, "I don't want you to give these things for my sake——"

"Now, don't you worry, Curlyhead, I give them solely and wholly for the good of the cause. Indeed, if you weren't connected with the affair, I'd give twice as many!"

Philip's smile contradicted this awful taradiddle, and Patty rejoiced at his nonsense. Much as she wanted his gifts for the Sale, she didn't want to feel that it placed her under special obligations to him.

Just then the doorbell sounded, and in a moment Daisy Dow and Bill Farnsworth appeared. They were in gay spirits, having been to see a new comic opera, which proved such a bore that they left before it was over.

"Such rubbish!" Daisy exclaimed. "Old jokes, old music, old dances.
So I proposed we leave it to its fate and run up here. Glad to see us,
Patty?"

"Yes, indeed! Just listen while I tell you of all the things I've wheedled out of Philip for our Sale."

"Gorgeous!" cried Daisy, after hearing the list. "Haven't you some for my room, Mr. Van Reypen?"

"I'm sure I have. You can use anything sporty?"

"Anything."

"Then I'll give you a first-class tennis set. I'll order it sent up from Ball and Bat's, or you can pick it out there yourself."

Daisy noticed that Van Reypen did not give her any of his aunt's heirlooms, but she gratefully accepted the offered gift.

"What shall I give you, Patty?" asked Bill. "What's your specialty?"

"Négligées and boudoir caps," said Patty, demurely; "have you any?"

"Something just as good. Want some Indian moccasins and Navajo blankets——"

"Now, Bill," said Daisy, "you promised me the Navajo, for a motor robe."

"All right. I'll give each good little girl one. Then Patty, how'd you like some real Hopi baskets?"

"Beautiful! You boys are awfully good to us. We'll have a wonderful sale."

"If only people come to buy," demurred Daisy.

"Oh, they'll come fast enough. We'll make oceans of money! I'm just beginning to get into the notion of the thing."

"Will those queer friends of yours be here?"

"What queer friends?"

"Those soully ones. I've never seen them, but I've heard a lot about them."

"From Chick Channing, I suppose," said Patty, coolly. "How that boy does love to exaggerate. I don't know, Daisy, whether they'll be here or not. If they are, use your wiles to sell them a lot of things out of your room, won't you?"

"Yes, I will, for I don't believe they'll care for your lace caps and pillows."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HOUSE SALE

The House Sale was in full swing. It had been well advertised, and the object was a popular one, and throngs of willing buyers crowded the Fairfield house.

The family belongings had, many of them, been carried to the upper floors, and the first and second stories given over to the Bazaar.

The beds had been removed and the bedrooms were veritable stores of all sorts of light and dainty apparel and feminine trinkets. The rooms downstairs were filled with fine wares and were crowded with purchasers. The girls, dressed to suit their calling, were brisk and busy salesladies, and everywhere was laughter and merry chat.

Daisy, in a stunning new sports suit, looked with satisfaction on her stacks of golf accoutrements, skates, tennis sets, and side lines of bright caps and sweaters for both sexes. And her wares simply melted away. She laughingly put up her prices, but so attractive were the goods that they sold quickly.

Elise, too, did a rushing business in the library. She had several assistants, and they were all kept at work by the kind patrons. Many worthwhile books had been given the girls, and there were beside, library furnishings, and a few autographed books and letters that commanded large prices. A set of Riley's works was on sale, and these Farnsworth bought, requesting that they remain in their place until his further directions.

"Whatever are you going to do with them, Bill?" asked Elise, who looked like a pretty Portia in her cap and gown.

"Why not peruse them myself?" he returned.

"But I chance to know that you have a set of Riley."

"Well, maybe, I'll give them to somebody as a gift. If I can't find anybody to accept them, I'll turn them over to your girls' library."

"Oh, I dare say you can give them away. A beautiful set like that!
Why, they're Russia bound!"

"Why, so they are!"

"As if he didn't know that!" exclaimed one of the girls to Elise, as
Farnsworth sauntered away. "Why, he gave that set to the sale!"

"He did! And then bought them back again!"

"Yes, that's just what he has done."

"Oh, well, then, he does mean to give them to somebody,—somebody in particular."

And Farnsworth certainly did mean to give them to somebody in particular. He designed them as a gift for Patty. He knew she would enjoy the poems, and he chose the edition with great care. Then, to enhance the value, he made it a present to the Club Sale, and promptly bought it back.

The big Westerner made his way through the crowds, stopping here and there to buy a flower or a trinket from the beguiling vendors. He looked in at the dining-room, and saw the long table set with marvelous confections, each to be sold with its dish of fine china or crystal. Also, on side tables were center-pieces, doilies, and napkins of all varieties of embroidery and decoration. A large back veranda had been arranged as a refreshment room, and here Farnsworth discovered Nan and Mr. Fairfield eating ice cream.

"Join us," they begged, but a smiling headshake was the negative reply.

"I'm on a still hunt for Patty. I'm told she's upstairs."

"Yes, in her own rooms," said Nan. "But you can't get in, the place is jammed. Wait till she has sold off a lot of stuff, then there'll be at least standing room. I've just come down from there and I never saw such a crowd."

"I'm fairly good at stemming crowds,—I think I'll go up."

Farnsworth squared his broad shoulders and started up the stairway.

By tactful manoeuvring, rather than by muscular strength, he gained his goal, and stood in the doorway of Patty's boudoir.

She was showing off a boudoir set to a prospective purchaser. It was of pale blue brocaded satin, edged with swansdown. There was a fetching lace cap with blue bows and little yellow rosebuds; also dainty blue slippers with rosebuds on them. Gaily, Patty donned the lovely garments, over her fluffy white frock, and pirouetted before her own cheval glass.

"You see," she said, in wheedling, saleslady tones, "it is a work of art! *Ma foi*! but it is *chic*! *n'est-ce pas*? Excuse my fearful French, but I can't sell this Parisian rig in English!"

"It is just darling!" declared the lady who was looking at it. "Of course I'll take it. I never saw one I liked so well."

Farnsworth stood watching the scene, thinking how much Patty's winning personality added to the charm of the robe, and wondering if she would accept the books he had bought for her.

The sale concluded, Patty thanked her patron, and in a moment was called upon to repeat the performance, as indeed she had been doing most of the evening. This time it was not so willing a buyer.

A gaunt, elderly spinster, with elaborately coiffed white hair and ostentatious costume, demanded a kimono that should be just her style and of embroidered crêpe de chine.

"Here is a lovely one in heliotrope," said Patty, smiling as she brought one of the prettiest ones she

had.

"Heliotrope!" the lady almost screamed. "Do I then look so old? Am I in the sere and yellow? Why do you offer me heliotrope?"

"Oh, don't you care for it?" said Patty, pleasantly; "it's one of my favourite colours. What colour do you like best?"

"I like amber, but, of course, you wouldn't have that. Green, now?"

"No, we don't seem to have those. We've mostly pink and blue."

"Old-fashioned! Why don't you have amber or russet?"

"I wish we had. I'd love to give you what you want. How about white?"

"Namby pamby! But show me what you have. I'm determined to get something."

"If you only cared for blue," and Patty sighed. "Here's a new box yet unopened, but it says on the end, 'Light Blue.' So that wouldn't do."

"Oh, well, let me see it."

Patty opened the Japanese looking box, and out from the tissue papers fell a dream of a kimono. Of palest blue silk, it was covered with embroidered apple blossoms, not in a set design, but powdered over it, as if wafted there by a summer breeze. The conventional Japanese flowers are cherry blooms, but these were true apple blossoms, softly pink and white, the very loveliest gown Patty had ever seen.

Farnsworth was looking on, and he, too, caught sight of the exquisite design. He looked quickly at Patty, and, in dumb show, begged her not to sell the garment. Nor had she any intention of doing so. The moment she saw it, she wanted it for herself, and began hastily to fold it back in its box.

"Wait! Stop!" cried the lady; "I think I want that."

"It's already sold," said Big Bill, stepping forward. "Isn't that the one I ordered, Miss Fairfield?"

"Is it?" said Patty, helplessly, wanting to laugh at the way the lady looked daggers at Bill, yet not knowing quite what to say.

"It is. Kindly lay it aside for me. Mark it Farnsworth."

"Do nothing of the sort!" snapped the lady. "You said that was an unopened box. It can't belong to any one then. I will take it. How much is it?"

Patty thought quickly. She had received a green kimono for Christmas, which she had not worn, and didn't care for. It had been sent her by a distant cousin, who would never know or care what she did with it.

"All right," she said, "take it if you like. You have the first right to it."

Farnsworth looked disturbed, but did not combat Patty's decision.

"But," Patty went on, "I think I have a green one, after all. I've just remembered it. You can take your choice."

Stepping aside to her own wardrobe, Patty brought out a box and shook out a very pretty green gown. She put it on, and, draping it gracefully, stood, with her head on one side, observing the effect. She then looked doubtfully at the lady, and said, "I dare say you like the blue one better, after all. This is a very pale green."

"It's a lovely green! Just the shade I like best. If you're willing,
I'll take the green one, by all means."

"Whichever you choose," and Patty swished the green folds around to catch the light. Very becoming it was, and on pretty Patty it looked a dream of loveliness.

"It's just bewitching," declared the gratified purchaser, and she paid for it and left her address to have it sent home.

"Good work!" said Farnsworth, laughing, as the lady passed on to look at other tempting wares. "You hypnotised her into taking the green one. I say, Patty, I want to make you a present of that apple-

blossom wrap; mayn't I?"

"It isn't a wrap," said Patty, disdainfully, "it's a kimono, and the very prettiest one I ever saw."

"All right. I don't care what the dinky thing's name is. It's the most exquisite colouring, and it suits you down to the ground."

"It fits me down to the ground, too," laughed Patty, flinging the robe on again, and gathering up its lustrous folds. It was too long for her, but that, of course, could be remedied.

"Yes, you'll have to take a reef in it. Will you accept it, Little
Apple Blossom?"

"It's very expensive," Patty demurred, looking over her shoulder at the graceful lines of the garment.

"That doesn't matter," and Farnsworth pulled out a roll of bills from his pocket.

Patty gave him a scornful look. "Don't be so ostentatious!" she flouted. "I didn't mean you couldn't afford it. I mean, I don't care to accept a gift of such value. I know,—we all know—you have the wealth of the Indies!"

Farnsworth looked at her in sheer amazement, a deep red flush stealing over his face. Then, for a moment, he held her eyes with his own, looking steadily at her.

"Very well," he said, gently, returning his money to his pocket. "I won't give it to you, if you don't want me to."

"Oh, gracious to goodness! what a kimono!" cried Daisy Dow, who came flying into the room, "I never saw such a beauty! I want it! Is it yours, Patty? No? Oh, you're just trying it on."

"I'm considering its purchase," said Farnsworth, "if I can find somebody to give it to. Do you like it, Daisy?"

"Do I *like* it! It's the loveliest thing in the whole Sale! By the way, just look at the presents I've had!"

Sure enough, Daisy was adorned with two or three gay-coloured sport sashes, over her arm were two silk sweaters, and she carried a basket, in which was a collection of gloves, ties, handkerchiefs, scarfs, and various odds and ends of sport apparel.

"What are you doing up here, anyway?" demanded Patty. "Who's looking after your room?"

"All sold out! Not a mite of anything left to sell. I came near disposing of your own pictures that still hang on the wall, and your tables and chairs. Are you really looking for somebody to buy that for, Bill? Well, it might as well be me!"

Daisy laughed gaily, and held out her hands for the kimono.

But Patty drew the blue folds around her and shook her yellow curls. "Possession is nine points of the law," she laughingly said. "I'm going to buy this thing myself."

"You can't," said Farnsworth, looking amused at the situation. "First come, first served. I asked for it before you thought of buying it. Now, I claim my purchase, and I shall give it to one or other of you two girls. I offered it to Patty first, so it is for her to say. If she refuses, I offer it to Daisy."

So gay was his manner, so light his tone, that Patty couldn't resent his words, but a twinkle in his eye made her realise that he knew he was cornering her. He knew how she admired the kimono. It would be difficult if not impossible to duplicate it. She must accept it from him or see Daisy triumphantly walk off with it.

The latter alternative was surely unthinkable! So Patty said, with exaggerated meekness, "Thank you, Little Billee, I accept it with pleasure. You are very kind."

Farnsworth burst out laughing at the mild tone and the shy, downcast eyes, whereupon Patty favoured him with an innocent stare, saying, "What is the matter?"

"A whole lot is the matter!" Daisy answered for him. "I wanted that robe, and now you've gone and got it, Patty Fairfield! You're the girl who gets everything! All right, Bill, just for that, you've got to give me the set of books you bought from Elise, and had saved for you. Will you?"

"If you say I've got to,—why ask me will I?" he returned, good-naturedly. "I am as wax in the hands of you two. Certainly, Daisy, I'll be honoured if you'll accept the books."

"What are they?" asked Patty, carelessly, as she still bent her attention to the embroideries of her new acquisition.

"Oh, it's a set of Riley. A wonderful set,—bound in Russia leather."

Patty looked up, quickly. She felt a conviction that Farnsworth had bought these books for her. To be sure she wouldn't want to accept two handsome presents from him, yet the idea of his so easily passing them over to Daisy annoyed her.

"Riley!" she exclaimed, involuntarily. "Why didn't you give those to me, instead of this gown?"

"The books are better suited to Daisy," he returned, "and the gown suits nobody but you."

"Oh, because Daisy is more intellectual, I suppose, and I'm——"

"Yes, and you're just a little piece of vanity, who cares only for dress and finery."

Farnsworth was having his innings now. Patty had hurt his feelings, and she knew it; and so, he was teasing her in return.

Daisy laughed at Patty's unmistakable chagrin, and ran away downstairs to claim her books.

It so chanced that there was no one else in Patty's boudoir at that moment. Everybody had flocked to the next room to see a new consignment of treasures displayed, and Farnsworth and Patty were alone.

"Yes," he said, looking straight at her, "I did buy the Riley set for you. But as you're so averse to accepting my ostentatious offerings, I thought better to give it to Daisy. And I had another reason, too."

"I'm glad you did," said Patty, coldly; "and I wish you had given her this also."

She began to draw off the kimono, but Farnsworth took a step toward her, and with one big swoop, gathered her into his arms.

"Apple Blossom!" he whispered, "my little Apple Blossom girl!"

So impulsive and all-embracing was the action, so swift the kiss that fell on Patty's pink cheek, and so quickly was she released, that she stood, gasping from breathlessness, and astonishment, as others began to return to the room.

Van Reypen was among them, and he called out to Patty:

"We've come for you. If your things aren't all sold, let somebody else look after them. We're going to supper now, and we want all our crowd together."

Gratefully, Patty turned to him, her head still in a whirl from Farnsworth's audacity, and with Philip she went downstairs.

CHAPTER XIX

PATTY RUNAWAY

The next day was Saturday, and Patty woke to a somewhat dismantled and disordered room. Her bed had been restored to its place, after the guests had departed the night before, but other appointments were a bit lacking. Nan had forbidden her to rise until noon, for the Bazaar had meant a large expenditure of strength and nerve force, and Patty was not robust.

Before she rang for her morning chocolate, she thought over the events of the previous evening. She was furiously angry at Farnsworth. So much so, that she could think of little else.

"How dared he?" she exclaimed to herself. "The idea of his thinking I am the sort of girl he can pick up and kiss like that!"

And then her face grew pink with blushes and she buried it in a pillow because she realised she was not nearly so indignant as she ought to be!

"Good heavens!" she thought, frantically. "Am I in love with Little Billee? With a Westerner? A self-made man? Why, he can't hold a candle to Phil for birth and name! And yet—oh, no, I'm not in love with him! He's too—too—he takes too much for granted. It's got to stop! Think how he carried me out of the Studio party! And last night! No wonder he walked off home without seeing me again! I wonder what he will offer by way of apology or explanation. I believe I'll ask him!"

Patty reached out her hand for the telephone, and suddenly stopped.

"I can't!" she whispered to herself, shame-facedly, "I—I don't want any apology from him. I—I—oh, fiddlesticks! I don't know *what* to do! Guess I'll have a talk with Nan—no, I won't. It was all very well to talk to her about Phil,—because I didn't care about him. But I do care about Billee. Oh! do I 'care for' him? I don't know—but I'm not going to think about it. It gets me all mixed up. I wonder—I wish I could go away. I will! I guess I can do as I've a mind to!"

After a little further thought, and a determined wag of the head, Patty rang her bell, and when the maid came she said, "Bring my chocolate, please, and then get out a suitcase, and pack it for me."

"Yes, Miss Patty," replied Jane, and until her breakfast came, Patty's mind worked rapidly.

"Jane, I'm going to elope," she announced, as the maid reappeared with a tray.

"Yes, Miss Patty," and though Jane's eyes flew wide open, she made no verbal comment.

"Don't look as if you had been shot!" said Patty, laughing; "I'm going alone, but you are to help me get off. Pack the things I tell you and then order the little car for me. I'm not going to tell you where I'm going, for I don't want any one to know. But after I'm gone, you may give Mrs. Fairfield a note I will leave with you. Understand?"

"Yes, Miss Patty," and Jane began at once to lay out the desired clothing.

"And," Patty went on, "if any one calls or telephones or asks for me in any way, just say that I've gone away for a few days to recuperate after the exertions of the House Sale."

She carried out her plan with no trouble at all. Jane took down the suitcase, Patty went down, too, by the back stairs, and got into the car unseen, and was driven to the Grand Central Station.

Admonishing the chauffeur to tell no one where he took her, Patty bought a ticket for Fern Falls, and in a few hours amazed Adele Kenerley by walking in at her front door.

"Patty Fairfield! You angel child! Where *did* you drop from? The blue skies?"

"Not quite. I flew up from New York to beg the hospitality of your roof for a few days."

"For as long as we can keep you. You dear old thing! How well you look!"

"Don't say that! I'm here to recuperate after a strenuous gay season and a particularly tiring Bazaar thing last night."

"Oh, yes, Bazaars are the most tiresome things in the world! You ought never to go to them."

"This one came to me. It was at our house. I'll tell you all about it later. But, honestly, Adele, I was just ready to perfectly fly this morning! My nerves gave out, my muscles are all lame and tired, and then, my brain gave way. So, sez I, why not flee away to that haven of rest what I wot of,—and here I am flewn!"

"Well, I'm jolly glad to see you. Jim will be overjoyed, too. Come right up to your own room, and take off your things, while I go and speak to Cook. Anything particular you want for lunch?"

"No, thank you. Any old thing, so long as it's good. As if you ever had anything that wasn't salt of the earth!"

"Oh, Patty! You don't eat salt of the earth! Unless you're a cannibal!"

"I'd like to know what kind of salt you do eat, then! Run along,
Adele, and order a dressy luncheon. I am pretty hungry."

Mrs. Kenerley went off, and Patty stood for a moment, looking out of the window. "I did just the right thing," she said to herself. "Up here, where it's so quiet and peaceful, I can think things out, and know just where I stand. Down home, I shouldn't have had a minute to myself. It is beautiful here. So peaceful and calm."

Patty turned, as some one entered her room, and saw a maid, ready to unpack for her.

"I've only a suitcase, Tessie," she smiled. "I'm here but for two or three days."

"Yes, Miss Fairfield. It's good to see you again. What will you put on?"

"The little rose Georgette, please. Why, here are two of my frocks in this wardrobe!"

"Yes, you left them last summer, and Mrs. Kenerley said to leave them there against your next visit."

"Good work! Here's a white crêpe de chine. Just the thing for tomorrow. No guests, are there, Tessie?"

"None, Miss Fairfield. Some ladies left this morning."

"Now, tell me all about it," said Adele, coming back. "You may go,
Tessie. I'll look after Miss Fairfield."

Tessie went away, and the two friends sat down for a chat.

"First of all, Adele," Patty said, "I don't want any one to know where I am. I want a few days of absolute freedom from interruption,—I've some things to think out."

"H'm," said Adele. "Who is he?"

Patty turned pink. "Nobody," she returned; "or, if it's anybody, it's Phil Van Reypen; he wants me to marry him, and I don't know whether to or not."

Adele looked at Patty's transparent face, and knew she was not telling the whole truth. "You won't," she said, astutely. "But never mind why you came, dear; tell me as much or as little as you wish. And nobody shall know of your whereabouts, I promise you that. We'll have a lovely, comfy time, just by ourselves."

"And I'll tell you this much, Adele; if Bill Farnsworth telephones, on no account tell him I'm here. Please tell him I'm *not*!"

"Oh, fie, fie, Patty; tell a naughty story?"

"Sometimes a naughty story is justifiable; or, well, if you can't conscientiously do it, let me know if he threatens to come up here and I'll scoot off somewhere else."

"I think I see you! I'll leave it to Jim. He'll manage it diplomatically. And perhaps Bill won't telephone."

"No, most likely not. But he may. He doesn't know I'm here,—nobody does,—but I suppose this will be the first place anybody would suspect me of being."

"I think very likely. Come on, now, I'll help you dress for lunch.
What a beautiful kimono! Where did you get that?"

"At the Sale last night. Oh, we had wonderful things. Everybody donated, you know, and then came and bought the things. Philip gave us some of Aunty Van Reypen's bronzes and ivory carvings. I think we'll make a lot of money."

"And you ran away the morning after! Didn't you want to know how the funds summed up?"

"Oh, yes; but the house was in such a fearful state! Furniture all moved and things every which way. I was glad to disappear until it gets into shape again."

"And doesn't Mrs. Fairfield or your father know where you are?"

"Well, I left a note for Nan, and I didn't tell her just where I was going, so she could tell people that I hadn't; but I gave her sufficient hints, so she can form a fairly correct notion of my destination."

"All right, Pattykins, I'll look after you, and no one shall learn from me where you are,—least of all, that terrible ogre, Bill Farnsworth!"

Patty smiled, and the two friends went downstairs. Jim Kenerley was beaming with welcomes, and declared that he, too, would keep the secret of Patty's presence under his roof, even at the point of the bayonet.

But, alas, for good intentions!

That afternoon, Kenerley sought his wife, consternation in every line of his good-looking countenance.

"Where's Patty?" he asked, abruptly.

"I sent her off for a nap. She's all tired out. Why?"

"Well, Farnsworth is on his way up here."

"What? Why did you let him come?"

"Couldn't help it. You see it was this way. The clerk, or somebody at his hotel telephoned, and said that Mr. Farnsworth had suddenly decided to run up here, and that he hadn't time to telephone and then get his train. So he instructed the clerk to get me and tell me Bill was on the way. He'll be here a little after seven. What shall we do?"

"Mercy! I don't know. Let me think. Patty is awfully angry with him about something, and I've promised her not to let him know where she is."

"Lovers' quarrel?"

"I don't know. I haven't had a real talk with Patty yet, she's so fagged out. I want her to rest up. But she says she's bothered about Philip Van Reypen."

"Then depend upon it, it's somebody else! Farnsworth, probably."

"She could do a lot worse than to marry Bill."

"Indeed she could! But, all the same, if Patty doesn't want him here, he mustn't come."

"That's all very well, but how will you prevent it?"

"I don't know. Meet him with a shotgun?"

"Now, be serious, Jim. We must protect Patty at any cost. Can't we telegraph him on the train?"

"Not a chance. Do you think he knows she's here?"

"He can't know it. He may suspect it. Well, he'll have to come, and he'll have to stay over night; we can't send him packing, with no decent excuse."

"Tell him Cook has the smallpox."

"Don't be silly! I can manage it, I think. Yes, with your help, it can be done."

"My dear Adele, I offer my help in its entirety, and then some."

"I'll need all that—maybe more. It's no easy job, but I'll try it, rather than have Patty disturbed."

"Might a mere man ask the nature of your plans?"

Adele Kenerley looked affectionately at her husband. "Yes, but you mustn't hoot at them. Yours not to question why, yours not to make objection."

"Mine only to do or die, like those other heroes, I suppose."

"Yes, but you're to do, not die. The die is cast! I've cast it. Now, stop fooling, Jim, and listen to me. Those two people shall be in this house at the same time, and neither will suspect that the other is here."

"Impossible!"

"There was a gentleman once, named Napoleon. He remarked, 'If it is possible, it must be done. If it is impossible, it *shall* be done!' That's my motto."

"Good for you, General! Go ahead. Command me, Madame!"

"Well, and now listen, Jim, and be serious. We'll have two dinners tonight——"

"Whew! I can't stand everything!"

"Silence, sir! We'll have dinner at six; and then I'll tuck Patty in bed early, to get her rest. Then, Bill will get here about seven, and we'll have another dinner for him. I can look after tomorrow morning,—— Patty will breakfast in her room. Then, about eleven o'clock or noon, you must take Bill for a long motor ride, lunch somewhere on the road. I'll have Patty lunch here with me. Then, I'll put her away for an afternoon nap, and we must then have dinner for Bill and,—make him go home. I couldn't keep it up any longer than that."

"I should say not! Regular Box and Cox game. But it may be we can put it over. I'll do all I can. But s'pose he won't go home tomorrow afternoon?"

"Make him. Even if you have to telephone to his hotel to send a hurry wire for him."

"Capital! I'll do that, if I have to. All right, little woman, you act as Patty's jailer, and I'll look after Farnsworth."

And so, at five o'clock, Adele went to Patty's room. She found that young woman, robed in her apple blossom gown, asleep, with her head on a much crumpled pillow. There were traces of tears on the pink cheeks, but the blue eyes were tightly closed.

"Wake up, Pattibelle," said Adele, gently patting her shoulder. "We're to have an early dinner, 'cause Jim has to go off to some meeting or other, and I thought you wouldn't mind."

"Mind? Of course not," and Patty sprang up, very wide-awake. "I won't dress much, Adele."

"No; wear the same frock you had on for lunch. Twist up that yellow mop of yours, and come along down, now. I want you to take a stroll around the domain while there's a scrap of daylight left."

The hour before dinner soon passed, and then, laughing with merriment, the hosts and guest went in to dinner.

The Kenerleys were in specially gay spirits, it seemed to Patty, and she held her own in fun and repartee.

"You must stay a long time, Patty," Jim declared. "You're more fun than a barrel of monkeys! I'm awfully glad you came."

"So'm I," assented Patty; "I wanted to get away from the giddy whirl, and lead the simple life for a few days."

"Sometimes the simple life is very complicated," observed Kenerley, and he glanced at the clock.

Adele took the hint. "You want to get away, don't you, dear?" she said. "And we've been dawdling over dessert! Patty, I shan't give you any coffee tonight. I'm afraid it will keep you awake, and you need sleep. My, but you're hollow-eyed! I suppose you've kept late hours all winter."

"Pretty much. But I sleep a good deal, too. And I feel all right, now. I'm not going to bed before you come back, Jim."

"Indeed you are!" cried Adele. "Now, not a word from you, Miss! I'm your nurse at present, and you will obey my orders!"

Kenerley started off to drive to the station for Farnsworth. He felt sure his wife would have Patty out of the way when they returned, but he didn't know just how she'd manage it.

Nor was it easy. But Adele wandered about the house with her guest, and finally declared the moonlight view was prettier from Patty's windows than anywhere else. She lured the girl upstairs, and then cleverly persuaded her to don a dressing-gown and lie down, while she, Adele, looked after some household matters, and she would then return for a confab.

CHAPTER XX

BLOSSOM GIRL

Such a clever and resourceful housekeeper as Adele Kenerley found no trouble in arranging a second

dinner for half-past seven, although one had been served at six. Patty safely out of the way, Adele presided at the board with a light-hearted gaiety that surprised even her husband.

Farnsworth, too, was in good spirits, though both the Kenerleys detected a roving eye and an alert ear that made them think he suspected, or at least hoped, that Patty was there. But he said nothing that indicated his thoughts except to ask on arrival if there were other guests.

"As you see," said Adele. "But I'm flattering myself that you came this time just to visit the Kenerleys."

"What more could one desire?" returned Farnsworth. And the conversation continued in a light and impersonal tone. Patty's name was mentioned, and innocently enough. Adele asked how she was.

"Well, I trust," said Farnsworth. "I was at her house at a Sale affair, last night, and she was all right then. Very much all right. But today, I called up the house, and they said she had gone away. I don't know where."

"And you thought she was up here! Oh, Big Bill, and I thought you came to see us!" Adele looked deeply chagrined.

"I'm jolly glad to see you, Adele, but to be honest, that little Patty person has turned my head."

"Truly, Bill?"

"Very truly, Adele. It's one thing or the other with me now. I must find her and if she says me nay, I go back to Arizona for good and all. No more East for me."

Jim Kenerley, catching the earnest note in Farnsworth's voice, had all he could do to keep from telling him then and there of Patty's presence under that same roof, but a decided head-shake from Adele restrained him.

For Adele felt in honour bound to keep Patty's secret, unless the girl herself released her from her promise.

As soon as she could, Adele excused herself and left the two men to smoke and chat together. She went to Patty's room, determined to find out the true state of affairs. But Patty was asleep, and so profoundly did she slumber that it seemed a shame to waken her.

So the game went on. Adele went back downstairs, and the three friends spent a pleasant evening together. At bedtime Farnsworth declared his intention of leaving in the morning, and sure that he would do so, Adele hospitably urged him to remain till after dinner. To her surprise, he acquiesced, and said he would go down to New York on a late afternoon train.

"Now, you have done it!" said Kenerley to his wife, after their guest had gone to his room.

"I know it, Jim. It was all my fault! But I never dreamed he'd stay over so easily! Oh, if I'd only let him go on the morning train!"

"We'll have to keep up the hide and seek."

"Yes, and we can do it. Only it would have been so much easier the other way."

"Perhaps Patty will relent."

"Not she! If you had seen her eyes flash, when she spoke of him. She's desperately angry with him, for some reason. But tomorrow morning will be all right. And I'll plan the day. There'll be no trouble."

Adele's clever managing made her words good. Patty had breakfast in her room, of course, and at nine o'clock, Farnsworth and the Kenerleys had their own morning meal. A pleasant affair it was in the sunny dining-room, and, without seeming to do so, Adele tactfully gave her guest an opportunity to depart, by saying that Jim had to go for a long trip in the motor.

But Farnsworth said, "Good! I'll go along. Unless I'm in the way, old chap?"

"Not at all," returned Kenerley, cordially, and that matter was settled.

The two men left about eleven, and Adele went to Patty's room.

"I'm all over my tired-outness," declared a very fresh-looking, rosy young person. "I've had my tub, and now I'm going to dress up and behave like a good citizen. You're a duck, Adele, to put up with a worn-out wreck, as I was yesterday, but now I'm myself again. I want to go for a motor ride, and for a

walk, and eat a big luncheon, and come back to life, generally."

"Good for you! And have you settled all the troublesome affairs that were bothering you?"

"How did you know I had any?"

"Now, don't confide in me unless you want to." Wily Adele knew the touch of perversity in Patty's make-up.

"Oh, there's nothing much to confide. I got fearfully mad at Bill Farnsworth, and I ran up here to get away from him. That's the story of my life."

"What was the bone of contention?"

"Well, I suppose I was. Also, he was very rude and unmannerly. Also,—and this is why I hate him so,—he's suddenly grown rich, Adele, and he's terribly ostentatious about it——"

"Bill Farnsworth ostentatious! I don't believe it!"

"Yes, he is. He showed off big rolls of money at the Sale——"

"But, Patty, he was buying things, wasn't he?"

"I don't care if he was. And, besides, Adele, he—well, he implied, if he didn't say it straight out, that now he was rich, maybe I'd marry him! As if I was a fortune-hunter!"

"Oh, Patty, you little goose! Bill has always been poor, or at least, he had only a moderate income. I can see how he would be glad if he had good fortune, to offer it to you. Poor Bill! You mistook his meaning, I'm sure."

"No, I didn't, and I hate him, and I never want to hear his name mentioned again!"

"Nor see him?"

"Mercy, no! And now, drop the subject. I tell you I came up here to get away from him! He's in love with Daisy Dow, anyway."

"What makes you think so?"

"Oh, he's always with her. And he gave her some lovely books that he had bought on purpose for me! And, Daisy says things all the time that prove it. I don't want anything to do with another girl's rustic swain. That I don't!"

"Just a minute, Patty. Do you really consider Bill a rustic,—uncultured, and all that, I mean?"

Patty looked serious. "No, Adele, I don't. He hasn't a certain polish, that some men have, but he is a thorough gentleman and a splendid man. I must say that, in all honesty. But he is a domineering, head-strong nature, and he couldn't make any girl happy!"

"Oh, couldn't he!" said Adele, but she said it to herself, not aloud.

The subject was really dropped then, and Patty began to dress for luncheon.

"I'm going to put on this white crêpe de chine," she said. "I found it hanging in the wardrobe, left from last summer. I'd almost forgotten I had it. It's a pretty frock, isn't it?"

"Yes. But, I grieve to state, Pattibelle, we'll be alone at lunch, you and I. Jim has gone miles off in the country, and won't be back before six or so."

"Whatever for?"

"Oh,—on some business."

"Business! On Sunday?"

"He's looking at a car he's thinking of buying. The man could only see him today."

"Oh, well, all right. But I'll dress up anyway, for my own self-respect. I like myself better in a pretty gown, and I'm not going to take naps all day today, I can tell you."

Patty flew around, making her toilette, and humming little snatches of song. Adele thought she had never seen her look so pretty. The white frock was soft and filmy; the round neck a trifle low, the frilled

sleeves showing her dimpled arms, and a soft sash made of a breadth of palest pink silk, round the waist.

"You're a dream!" declared Adele. "It's a shame to waste such a vision of beauty on me. I believe I'll telephone for Bob Peyton to come over to lunch."

"No, don't. I'd rather not have him. I like to be alone with you much better. Ask him over for dinner, if you like."

So the two lunched alone, and then came the difficult crisis.

Patty flatly rebelled against Adele's suggestion that she take an afternoon nap to be fresh for the evening.

"What's the matter with you, Adele?" she laughed. "Do you think I'm a dormouse? Or a bear who wants to hibernate? I'm as wide-awake as you are!"

"It isn't that, Patty," and poor Adele was at her wits' end, "but you're really run down—er—nerve exhaustion, you know——"

"Well, *your* nerve isn't exhausted! To make me go to bed by day,—all the whole time!"

"Now, Patsy, don't be stubborn. Give me my way, this once. If you'll go to your room, and stay there and rest quietly till five o'clock, I won't say another word about your resting, while you're here. But you're—really,—you're so improved since you came, that I want to complete the cure. Scoot off, now, and then at five o'clock Jim will be back, and we'll have lots of fun."

"It's nearly half-past two, now. Well, I don't see much else to do, so I'll go. But remember, it's the last of this foolishness."

"I'll remember. Run along now, and don't show your face below stairs till five. Cross your heart?"

"Yep. Cross my heart and hope to never! By-by."

Patty ran upstairs and closed her room door behind her. Never really at a loss to entertain herself, she read some magazines, wrote two or three letters that had been long owing, and then mooned around looking out of her windows at the distant hills, bright with winter sunshine. She opened the long French window to the balcony and stepped out. It was snappily cold, so she went back long enough to catch up a wrap. The apple blossom kimono was the first thing she saw, so she slipped into it, and went out on the balcony. The bracing air was delightful, and she walked up and down, drawing long deep breaths of ozone. There was a low railing round the little balcony and Patty sat down on it. The ground was only about eight feet below her, for the house was built on a side hill, and the slope was abrupt.

"I could almost lean down and pick violets," she mused, "if there were any to pick. But it's nowhere near spring, yet."

She drew her wrap more closely about her and rose to go in the house again.

"Well!" came in an explosive voice, just below her. Patty looked down and saw Farnsworth standing there, his face radiant with glad surprise.

"Little Billee!" she exclaimed, impulsively leaning over the rail. "What are you here for?"

"*You*! And I can't wait another minute! *Jump*!"

Not pausing to think, impelled by his quick command, Patty stepped over the rail and jumped.

Farnsworth caught her deftly in his arms just as her feet touched the ground, and held her there.

"Look at me," he said, and his always musical voice had a ring in it Patty had never heard before.

The golden head, bowed against his broad chest, lifted a little, and Patty's blue eyes shone into his own. Steadily he looked for a moment, and then said, quietly, but exultantly, "You love me! Oh, my Patty Blossom!"

Patty stood very still. It seemed to her that the end of the world had come—or the beginning,—she

wasn't sure which.

"Come," said Farnsworth, still with that glad, exultant note of triumph in his voice. He led her to the house, walking quickly and with springing step.

Adele was in the hall as they entered.

"Good heavens!" she said, helplessly, as she stared at them.

"Adele," Farnsworth's words fairly rang out, "don't stop us. We're just getting engaged, and we want a few minutes alone."

"I should say so!" and half dazed at the suddenness of the news, Adele opened the door of a little reception room, and let them in. Then she closed it, and ran hot haste to find Jim.

A wood fire was blazing and Patty threw off the silk wrap.

"Apple Blossom," said Farnsworth, as he took it from her, and tossed it over a sofa, "my Blossom girl!"

He took the soft, trembling little figure in his arms, the pretty white frock sadly crushed in his strong embrace.

"My Love, my Patty Blossom!" he murmured, and then, with his first kiss on her quivering, scarlet lips, Patty knew that she "cared for" this big, tender giant, with her whole heart, and she began to realise how he loved her.

"Patty! darling! I have loved you so long, but I had no idea what it would mean to know you love me!"

"What does it mean?" she said, softly.

"It means heaven! Great, blue, sunshiny, cloudless heaven! Oh, my little girl, I can't tell you all it means, there aren't any words big enough. You do love me, don't you? How do you know you do?"

"Because I jumped," and the blue eyes smiled at him. "I jumped because
I couldn't help it."

"You jumped because you loved me! I oughtn't to have let you do it; good gracious, Patty, you might have broken yourself to bits! I spoke from impulse."

"And I jumped from impulse. And,—I'm glad I did!"

"You little Love! Are you? Patty, how can you love a great, uncouth man like me?"

"You're not uncouth, Little Billee, and you only said that to be contradicted! But I do contradict it. You're not big and uncouth at all. Well, I s'pose you *are* big,—but it's a nice, cunning little bigness——"

"There, there, that'll be about all of that! Now, tell me why you ran away from me."

"I didn't know at the time. But I know now."

"You do? Why, then?

"Because I was in love with you, and I was afraid you'd find it out."

"But you didn't know it yourself?"

"N—no; that is, I wouldn't own up to it to myself, and I was awfully afraid myself would find it out."

"You little goose——"

"Blossom goose?"

"Yes. Blossom goose,—Blossom girl,—Oh, Patty Blossom, how *can* I make you have a glimmer of a gleam of an idea how I love you!"

"Little Billee! if you give me all your kisses now, what shall we do all the rest of our lives?"

"Poor little Apple Blossom! Am I a big bear? Well, sit beside me here on this cosy sofa place, and I'll tell you what we'll do all the rest of our lives."

And so enchanted was Patty with the plans unfolded for her, that it was more than an hour later that

she remembered to ask, "Why did you give Daisy the books you bought for me?"

"Shall I tell you, dear? I told you at the time I had a reason. Because, just then, something in your eyes gave me hope, gave me a tiny hint of hope that you would take *my* set of Riley books and me along with it!"

"Oh, Little Billee! Did I really throw myself at your head?"

"No, Patty; no, my child, never think for a minute you did that! But you gave me a look that made me feel emboldened to throw myself at your feet. Then you ran away before I could do so."

"Yes, I was afraid you would. How did you know I was here?"

"Didn't know it; but I thought it the most likely place. How the Kenerleys fooled me! I owe Jim one for that!"

"No, you don't! They only did what I made them do. I vowed I wouldn't see you, and they must not let you know I was here."

"Did you think you could elude me long, Sweetheart?"

"I don't know what I thought——"

"You were afraid to look in your own heart, weren't you?"

"Yes, I was. But I'm not now."

"No, you don't seem to be! For a newly engaged young person you take to it like a duck to water."

"Only because it's *you*. I wouldn't with anybody else."

"I should hope not! And you're not afraid of me any more?"

"'Perfect love casteth out fear.'"

"Oh, Blossom, you do say the sweetest things! And do you forgive me my horrid ostentation?"

"You must forgive *me* for that, Little Billee. I had no business to act so."

"You were all right, dear. I'm not to the money born, you know. And when I was successful, financially, I had *no* thought but of pleasure it might give you. But I expressed myself unfortunately. I'm not a 'society man,' Patty."

"You're the dearest man in all the world. My big, beautiful Sir Galahad. My own Little Billee."

"Haven't you two got engaged yet?" called Adele, plaintively, through the keyhole. "You've been two hours at it! Come on out, and let us help."

"Run away and play," called back Farnsworth, but Patty released herself from his clasping arms, and said, "It hasn't been two hours, any such thing, Adele; but we will come out now. We've been engaged a long time."

Big Bill rose, towering above his little fiancée.

"You little scrap of loveliness!" he exclaimed, "what have you done to me, to bewitch me so? You were always beautiful, but now you're—you're——"

"Well, what?" and Patty's radiant face looked up lovingly into his own.

"There are no words dear enough," and Farnsworth's voice thrilled with love and reverence, "no terms sweet enough, but just,—my Patty Blossom."

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