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Author: Carolyn Wells

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Patty's Social Season

BY
CAROLYN WELLS

Author of
The TWO LITTLE WOMEN *Series*
The MARJORIE *Books*
etc.

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CHAPTER I

FLOWERS!

“Patty, do come along and get your luncheon before everything grows cold!”

“‘And the stars are old, And the leaves of the judgment book unfold,’” chanted Patty, who had just learned this new song, and was apt to sing it at unexpected moments. She sat on the floor in the middle of the long drawing-room of her New York home. To say she was surrounded by flowers, faintly expresses it. She was hemmed in, barricaded, nearly smothered in flowers.

They were or had been in enormous florist’s boxes, and as fast as Patty opened the boxes and read the cards which accompanied the blossoms, Jane took the boxes away.

It was the great occasion of Patty’s début, and in accordance with the social custom, all her friends had sent her flowers as a message of congratulation.

“You certainly have heaps of friends,” said Elise, who was helping arrange the bouquets.

“Friends!” cried Patty; “nobody could have as many friends as this! These flowers must be also from my enemies, my casual acquaintances, and indeed from utter strangers! I think the whole hilarious populace of New York has gone mad on the subject of sending flowers!”

Even as she spoke, Jane came in with several more boxes, followed by Miller, fairly staggering under an enormous box that was almost too much for one man to carry. Behind him was Nan, who went straight to Patty and held out both hands to assist her to rise.

“Patty,” she said, “if you don’t come out this minute, you never *can* get out! A few more of these boxes, and the door will be completely blocked up.”

“That’s so, Nan,” and Patty scrambled to her feet. “Come on, girls, let’s gather our foodings while we may. These flowers will keep; but I shudder to think of the accumulation when we come back from luncheon!”

“I didn’t know there were so many flowers in the world,” said Mona Galbraith, who paused to look back into the drawing-room.

“There aren’t,” said Patty solemnly; “it’s an optical illusion. Don’t you know how the Indian jugglers make you see flowers growing, when there aren’t any flowers there? Well, this is like that.”

Following Nan, Patty’s pretty stepmother, the three girls, arm in arm, danced along to the dining-room, quite hungry enough to do justice to the tempting luncheon they found there.

All the morning they had been untying the flower boxes and making a list of the donors.

“Just think of the notes of thanks I have to write,” said Patty, groaning at the outlook.

“Wish we could help you,” said Elise, “but I suppose you have to do those yourself.”

“Yes; and I think it will take me the rest of my natural life! What’s the use of ‘coming out,’ if I have got to go right in again, and write all those notes? Why, there are hundreds!”

“Thousands!” corrected Elise. And Mona said, “Looks to me like millions!”

“Who sent that last big box, Patty?” asked Nan; “the one that just came.”

“Dunno, Nancy; probably the Czar of Russia or the King of the Cannibal Islands. But I mean to take time to eat my luncheon in peace, even if the flowers aren’t all in place by the time the company comes.” 12

“We can’t stay very long,” said Elise; “of course, Mona and I have to go home and dress and be back here at four o’clock, and it’s nearly two, now.”

“All right,” said Patty; “the boys are coming, and they’ll do the rest. We couldn’t hang the flowers on the wall, anyway.”

“We ought to have had a florist to attend to it,” said Nan, thoughtfully; “I had no idea there’d be so many.”

“Oh, it’ll be all right,” returned Patty. “Father’s coming home early, and Roger and Ken will be over, and Mr. Hepworth will direct proceedings.”

Even as she spoke the men’s voices were heard in the hall, and Patty jumped up from the table and ran to the drawing-room.

“Did you ever see anything like it?” she exclaimed, and her visitors agreed that they never had.

“It must be awful to be so popular, Patty,” said Roger. “If I ever come out, I shall ask my friends to send fruit instead of flowers.”

“Patty would have to start a canning factory, if she had done that,” said Kenneth, laughing. “Let’s open this big box, Patty. Who sent it?” 13

“I haven’t an idea, but there must be a card inside.”

They opened the immense box, and found it full to the brim with exquisite Killarney roses.

After some search, Roger discovered a small envelope, with a card inside. The card read, “Mr. William Farnsworth,” and written beneath the engraved name was the message, “With congratulations and best wishes.”

“From Big Bill!” exclaimed Mona. “For goodness’ sake, Patty, why didn’t he send you more? But these didn’t come all the way from Arizona, where he is.”

“No,” said Patty, looking at the label on the box; “he must have just sent an order to a New York florist.”

“To two or three florists, I should think,” said Mr. Hepworth. “What can we do with them all?”

But the crowd of merry young people set to work, and in an hour the floral chaos was reduced to a wonderful vision of symmetry and beauty. Under Mr. Hepworth’s directions, the flowers were banked on the mantels and window-seats, and hung in groups on the wall, and clustered on the door-frames in a profusion which had behind it a methodical and symmetrical intent. 14

“It’s perfectly beautiful!” declared Nan, who, with her husband, was taking her first view of the finished effect. “It’s a perfect shame to spoil this bower of beauty by cramming it with a crowd of people, who will jostle your bouquets all to bits.”

“Well, we can’t help it,” said Patty. “You see, we invited the people, as well as the flowers, so we must take the consequences. But they can’t reach those that are up high, and as soon as the party is over, I’m going to put them all in fresh water——”

“What! the party?” and Kenneth looked astounded.

“I mean the flowers,” said Patty, not deigning to laugh at his foolishness. “And then, to-morrow morning, I’m going to send them all to the hospital.”

“The people?” said Kenneth again. “That’s thoughtful of you, Patty! I have no doubt they’ll be in condition to go. I’m about ready, myself.”

“Well, you may go now,” and Patty smiled at him. “Your work is done here, and I’m going away to dress. Good-bye, Ken; this is the last time you’ll see me as a little girl. When next we meet, I shall be a young lady, a fully-fledged society lady, whose only thoughts will be for dancing and gaiety of all sorts.” 15

“Nonsense,” said Kenneth; “you can’t scare me. You’ll be the same old Patty, foolish and irresponsible,—but sunshiny and sweet as ever.”

“Thank you, Ken,” said Patty, for there was a note of earnestness in Kenneth’s voice that the girl was quick to catch. They had been friends since childhood, and while Patty did not take her “coming out” very seriously, yet she realised that it meant she was grown up and a child no longer.

“Don’t let it all spoil you, Patty.” It was Mr. Hepworth who said this, as he was about to follow Kenneth out. “I have a right to lecture you, you know, and I want to warn you——”

“Oh, don’t do it now, Mr. Hepworth,” said Patty, laughing; “the occasion is solemn enough, I’m sure, and if you lecture me, I shall burst into large weeps of tears! Do let me ‘come out’ without being lectured, and you can come round to-morrow and give me all the warnings you like.”

“You’re right, little Patty,” and Hepworth looked at her kindly. “I ought not to spoil one of the happiest days of your life with too serious thought. Yours is a butterfly nature——” 16

“But butterfly natures are nice; aren’t they, Mr. Hepworth?” and Patty looked up at him with the roguishness that she could never quite control.

“Yes,——” and the man hesitated a moment, as he looked into Patty’s blue eyes. Then, suddenly, “Yes, indeed, *very* nice.” And, turning abruptly, he left her.

“Now, you girls, skip,” ordered Patty.

“You haven’t more than time to fly home and get dressed, for I don’t want you to be late and delay the ceremony.”

“Gracious! it sounds like a wedding,” cried Mona, laughing.

“Well, it isn’t!” declared Patty. “I may have a wedding some day, but that’s in the far, far future; why, I’m only just entering society, and when I’m married, I suppose I shall leave it. I expect to have heaps of fun between this and then.”

The programme for the occasion was an afternoon reception, from four o’clock until seven. This was really Patty’s début. A dinner at eight was to follow, to which were invited about a dozen of her dearest friends, and after this would be a dance, to which a goodly number more were asked.

“You ought to have time for an hour’s rest, Patty,” said Nan, as she drew the girl away from a last look at the beautiful flowers, and took her up to her room.

“Well, I haven’t, little steppy-mother. It will be just about all Miss Patricia Fairfield can do to get into her purple and fine linen by four o’clock P.M., and methinks you’d better begin on your own glad toilette, or you’ll be late yourself.”

“Was I *ever* late?” asked Nan, scornfully, and as Patty responded, “never anything but,” she ran away to her own room.

However, four o’clock found all the members of the reception party in their places.

Patty looked adorable in soft white chiffon, untrimmed, save for some fine lace round the slightly low-cut neck. She wore a string of small but perfect pearls which her father had given her for the occasion, and she carried a beautiful bouquet of orchids, which was Nan’s gift.

Patty had never looked prettier. Her rose-leaf cheeks were slightly flushed with excitement, and her big violet eyes were bright and sparkling. Her golden hair, which was really unusual in texture and quantity, was dressed simply, yet in a manner very becoming to her small, prettily poised head. On her brow and temples it rippled in natural ringlets, which gave her piquant face a charming, childish effect. Patty was certainly a beauty, but she was of such a sweet, unspoiled nature, and of such simple, dainty manners, that everybody loved her.

Her father looked at her rather thoughtfully, half unable to realise that his little Patty had really grown up and was taking her place in society. He had no fears for her, he knew her sweet nature too well; but he was earnestly hoping that she was starting out on a life of happiness and well-being. Though healthy and moderately strong, Patty was not of a robust constitution, and there was danger that too much gaiety might result in a nervous breakdown. This, Mr. Fairfield determined to guard against; and resolved that, while Patty should be allowed generally to do as she chose, he should keep a strict eye against her overdoing.

Nan had much the same thoughts as she looked at the lovely débutante, so exquisite in her fresh young beauty. Nan’s gown of heavy white lace was very becoming, and though a secondary figure, she ably shared the honours of the afternoon with Patty.

Mona and Elise assisted in the capacity of “Floaters,” and in their pale pink frocks, they were quite in harmony with the floral setting of the picture.

And then the guests began to arrive, and Patty learned what it meant to stand and shake hands, and receive the same compliments and congratulations over and over again. It was interesting at first, but she grew very tired as the hours went by.

“Now, I say,” exclaimed a cheery voice, suddenly, “it can’t be that you have to stand here continuously from four to seven! Mrs. Fairfield, mayn’t I take Patty to get a cup of tea or an ice, and you stay here and ‘come out’ until she returns?”

It was Philip Van Reypen who made this request, and Nan consented readily. “Yes, indeed, Philip,” she said, “do take her off to rest a minute. I think most of the people have arrived; and, anyway, you must bring her back shortly.”

“I will,” and young Van Reypen led Patty through the crowd to the dining-room.

“I ought to find you a ‘quiet little corner,’” he said, smiling; “but I don’t see such a thing anywhere about. So I’ll just place you on one of these gimcrack gilt chairs, and I’ll ask you to keep this one next, for me, until I make a raid on the table. What will you have?”

“I don’t really want anything, Philip, but just to sit here a moment and rest. I had no idea coming out was so tiresome! I believe I’ve said, ‘oh, thank you!’ a billion times!”

“Yes, you said it to me,” and Philip laughed at the recollection, “and I can tell you, Patty, it had the real society ring! You said it like a conventionalised parrot.”

“Well, I don’t care if I did! It was the proper thing to say, and nobody could say it a million times in succession, without sounding parrotty! I know now how the President feels when he has to shake hands with the whole United States!”

Philip left her, and returned in a moment, followed by a waiter, who brought them hot bouillon and tiny sandwiches.

“My, but these are good!” exclaimed Patty, as she nibbled and sipped. “Why, Philip, I believe I was hungry and that’s what made me tired! Oh, hello, Mona! Did you get leave of absence, too?”

“Yes; the mad rush is pretty much over. Only a few late stragglers now, and Elise is floating them. Here’s Roger. He says you wouldn’t speak to him this afternoon, except to say, ‘oh, thank you!’ three times.”

“I couldn’t help it,” returned Patty, laughing. “That’s all I said to anybody. I felt like a rubber stamp—repeating myself. Well, thank goodness, I’m out!”

“But you’re not a bit more grown up than when you were in,” said Kenneth, joining the group around Patty.

“Oh, pshaw, I’m never going to be grown up. Now I’m rested, Philip; please take me back to Nan. She said we must return soon.”

So Patty went back to the drawing-room, and insisted that her stepmother should go for a little refreshment. “I can hold the fort alone now,” she said; “you’ve no idea how capable I am, now that I’m really out. Run along, Nan, and get some of those sandwiches; they’re awfully good.”

“It isn’t romantic, Patty, to think about eating when you’re celebrating an occasion like this,” reproved Philip.

“Well, I’m not romantic,” declared Patty, “and I never expect to be. Oh, how do you do, Mr. Galbraith? It’s so late, I feared you weren’t coming.” And Patty held out her hand to Mona’s father.

“How d‘y’do, Patty?” And Mr. Galbraith shook hands heartily. “I suppose I ought to say all sorts of pretty things to you, but you know, I’m not much up in social chat.”

“I’m glad of it,” said Patty, “and then I won’t have to say, ‘oh, thank you!’ to you. Mona is looking beautiful this afternoon, isn’t she?”

“She’s a fine girl—a fine girl.” Mr. Galbraith’s eyes rested on his daughter a little thoughtfully. He was a Chicago man, who had made his fortune suddenly, and was a little bewildered at his own success. His one interest in life, outside of business matters, was his daughter Mona, for whom he desired every possible good, and to whose wishes and whims he always willingly consented.

At her request, he had closed his Chicago home and come to spend the winter in New York, that Mona might be near Patty, whom she adored. The Galbraiths were living for the winter at the Plaza Hotel, and Patty, who had grown fond of Mona, was glad to have her friend so near her.

“She’s a fine girl,” Mr. Galbraith repeated, “and a good-looking girl.” He paused a moment, and then added in a sudden burst of confidence, “but, Patty, I wish she had a mother. You know how I idolise her, but I can’t do for her what a mother would do. I’ve urged her to have a chaperon or a companion of some sort, but she won’t do it. She says a father is chaperon enough for her, and so we live alone in that big hotel, and I’m afraid it isn’t right. Right for her, I mean. I don’t care a snap about conventions, but Mona is impulsive, even headstrong, and I wish she had an older woman to guide and advise her.”

“I wish she did, Mr. Galbraith,” said Patty, earnestly, for the two were chatting by themselves, and no one else was within hearing. “I’ve thought about it, and I’ve talked with my stepmother about it. Perhaps I could persuade Mona to do as you wish her to.”

“I hope you can, Patty; I do hope you can. You know, Mona is dignified and all that, and as proud as they make them. Nobody would dare to speak to her if she didn’t want them to; but, Patty, here’s the trouble. There’s a young man at the hotel named Lansing. He’s not especially attractive, and yet, somehow, he has gained Mona’s favour. I have told my girl that I do not like him, but she only laughs and says carelessly that he’s all right. Now, I mustn’t detain you longer, my child; there are people waiting to speak to you. But, some time, I want to have a little talk to you about this, and perhaps you can help me in some way. For I believe, Patty, that that Lansing man is trying to win my girl for the sake of her money. He has all the appearances of a fortune-hunter, and I can’t let Mona throw herself away on such.”

“I should think not!” exclaimed Patty, indignantly. And then Mr. Galbraith moved away to give his place to other guests who were arriving.

CHAPTER II

AT THE DANCE

At eight o’clock that same evening, Patty came down to her own dinner party. An hour’s rest

had freshened her up wonderfully, and she had changed her little white frock for a dinner gown of pale green chiffon, sparkling with silver embroidery. It trailed behind her in a most grown-up fashion, and she entered the drawing-room with an exaggerated air of dignity.

“Huh,” cried Roger; “look at grown-up Patty! Isn’t she the haughty lady? Patty, if you put on such airs, you’ll be old before your time!”

“Airs, nothing!” retorted Patty, and with a skipping little dance step, she crossed the room, picked up a sofa pillow, and aimed it deftly at Roger, who caught it on the wing.

“That’s better,” he said. “We can’t have any of these *grande dame* airs. Now, who is the lucky man who is to take you out to dinner? Me?”

“No, not you,” and Patty looked at him, critically; “you won’t do, and neither will Kenneth, nor Phil Van Reypen, nor Mr. Hepworth.” She looked at them each in turn, and smiled so merrily that they could take no offence. “I think,” she said, “I shall select the best-looking and best-natured gentleman, and walk out with him.” Whereupon she tucked her arm through her father’s, and led the way to the dining-room, followed by the rest of the merry crowd.

The dinner was a beautiful one, for Nan had spared no pains or thought to make it worthy of the occasion. At the girls’ places were beautiful souvenirs, in the shape of fans of carved ivory with lace mounts, while the men received attractive stick-pins.

“Shall you feel like dancing after all this gaiety, Patty?” asked Van Reypen.

“Well, rather!” declared Patty. “Why, I’d feel like dancing if I’d been through a—civil war! I could scarcely keep still when the orchestra was playing this afternoon, and I’m crazy for to-night’s dance to begin.”

“Frivolous young person, very,” murmured Philip. “Never saw such devotion to the vain follies of life! However, since you’re determined to dance, will you honour me with the first one to-night?”

“Why, I don’t mind, if you don’t,” said Patty, dimpling at him.

“And give me the second,” said Kenneth and Roger simultaneously.

“I can’t do these sums in my head,” said Patty; “I’ll get all mixed up. Let’s wait till we get our dance orders, and fill them up, hit or miss.”

“You be the miss and I’ll try to make a hit,” said Philip.

“What waggery!” exclaimed Patty, shaking her head. “If you’re too clever, Philip, I can’t dance with you. When I dance, I keep my mind on my feet, not on my head.”

“That explains your good dancing,” said Mr. Hepworth, laughing. “Perhaps, if I could keep my mind on my feet, I could dance better.”

“Oh, you’re too highminded for such low levels,” laughed Patty, while Mona, who was rather practical, said, seriously, “Do you really think about your feet all the time you’re dancing, Patty?”

“No,” returned Patty; “sometimes I have to think about my partner’s feet, to keep out of the way of them.”

When they returned to the drawing-room, they found it had been cleared for the dance, and soon the evening guests began to arrive.

Patty again stood by Nan to receive them, and after greeting many people she knew, she was surprised to find herself confronted by a stranger. He was a thick-set, stockily-built man, several years older than most of Patty’s friends. He had black hair and eyes and a short black moustache and a round, heavy type of face. His black eyes were of the audacious sort, and he flashed a glance of admiration at Patty. Before she could speak, or even offer her hand, Mona sprang forward, saying, “Patty, this is my friend Mr. Lansing. I took the liberty of inviting him to your dance. Mrs. Fairfield, may I present Mr. Lansing?”

Patty was angry. This, of course, must be the man of whom Mr. Galbraith had spoken, and, aside from the fact that he seemed undesirable, Patty felt that Mona had no right to invite him without asking permission from her hostess.

But Nan knew nothing of all this, and she cordially greeted the stranger because he was a friend of Mona’s. Patty recovered her equilibrium sufficiently to say, “How do you do, Mr. Lansing?” in a non-committal sort of way, but she couldn’t refrain from giving Mona a side glance of reproof, to which, however, that young woman paid no attention.

In another moment Mona had drifted away, and had taken Mr. Lansing with her. Patty turned to speak to Nan about him, but just then some more guests arrived; and then the dancing began, and Patty had no further opportunity.

As Patty had promised, she gave the first dance to Philip Van Reypen; and after that she was fairly besieged by would-be partners. The fact that she was hostess at her own coming-out ball, the fact that she danced beautifully, and the fact that she was so pretty and charming, all combined to make her, as was not unusual, the most popular girl present.

“Anything left for me?” asked Roger, gaily, as he threaded the crowds at Patty’s side.

“I saved one for you,” said Patty, smiling at him; “for I hoped you’d ask me, sooner or later.”

Roger gratefully accepted the dance Patty had saved for him, and soon after he came to claim

her for it.

“I say, Patty,” he began when they were whirling about the floor, “who is that stuff Mona has trailing after her?”

“Moderate your language, Roger,” said Patty, smiling up at him, and noticing that his expression was very wrathy indeed.

“He doesn’t deserve moderate language! He’s a bounder, if I ever saw one! What’s he doing here?”

“He seems to be dancing,” said Patty, demurely, “and he doesn’t dance half badly, either.”

“Oh, stop your fooling, Patty; I’m not in the mood for it. Tell me who he is.”

Patty had never known Roger to be so out of temper, and she resented his tone, which was almost rude. Now, for all her sweetness, Patty had a touch of perversity in her nature, and Roger had roused it. So she said: “I don’t know why you speak like that, Roger. He’s a friend of Mona’s, and lives at the Hotel Plaza, where she lives.”

“The fact that two people live in the same big hotel doesn’t give them the right to be friends,” growled Roger. “Who introduced them, anyhow?”

“I don’t know, I’m sure,” said Patty, her patience exhausted; “but Mr. Galbraith knows him, so it must be all right.”

Patty was not quite ingenuous in this speech, for she knew perfectly well, from what Mr. Galbraith had said to her, that it was not all right. But she was irritated by Roger’s demeanour, and perversely disagreed with him.

“Well, I don’t believe he’s all right; I don’t like his looks a bit, and, Patty, you know as well as I do, that the Galbraiths are not quite competent always to select the people best worth knowing.”

“Oh, what a fuss you are, Roger; and it’s hardly fair when you don’t know anything at all about Mr. Lansing.”

“Do you?”

“No,” and then Patty hesitated. She did know something,—she knew what Mr. Galbraith had told her. But she was not of a mind to tell this to Roger. “I only met him as I was introduced,” she said, “and Mona has never so much as even mentioned him to me.”

“Didn’t she ask you if she might bring him to-night?”

“No; I suppose, as an intimate friend, she didn’t think that necessary.”

“It *was* necessary, Patty, and you know it, if Mona doesn’t. Now, look here; you and I are Mona’s friends; and if there are any social matters that she isn’t quite familiar with, it’s up to us to help her out a little. And I, for one, don’t believe that man is the right sort for her to be acquainted with; and I’m going to find out about him.”

“Well, I’m sure I’m willing you should, Roger; but you needn’t make such a bluster about it.”

“I’m not making a bluster, Patty.”

“You are so!”

“I am not!”

And then they both realised that they were bickering like two children, and they laughed simultaneously as they swept on round the dancing-room. The music stopped just then, and as they were near a window-seat, Patty sat down for a moment. “You go on, Roger,” she said, “and hunt up your next partner, or fight a duel with Mr. Lansing, or do whatever amuses you. My partner will come to hunt me up, I’m sure, and I’ll just wait here.”

“Who is your next partner, Patty?”

“Haven’t looked at my card; but, never mind, he’ll come. You run along.”

As Roger’s next partner was Mona, and as he was anxious to talk to her about her new friend, Roger obeyed Patty’s bidding and strolled away.

Patty sat alone for a moment, knowing full well who was her next partner, and then Mr. Lansing appeared and made a low bow before her.

Now, Patty had not chosen to express to Roger her real opinion of this new man, but in reality she did not approve of him. Though fairly good-looking and correctly dressed, there was about him a certain something—or perhaps, rather, he lacked a certain something that invariably stamps the well-bred man. He stared at Patty a trifle too freely; he sat down beside her with a little too much informality; and he began conversation a little too familiarly. All of these things Patty saw and resented, but as hostess she could not, of course, be openly rude.

“Nice, jolly rooms you’ve got here for a party,” Mr. Lansing remarked, rolling his eyes about appreciatively, “and a jolly lot of people, too. Some class to ’em!”

Patty looked at him coldly. She was not accustomed to this style of expression. Her friends perhaps occasionally used a slang word or term, but it was done in a spirit of gaiety or as a jest, whereas this man used his expressions as formal conversation.

“Yes, I have many kind and delightful friends,” said Patty, a little stiffly.

“You sure have! Rich, too, most of ’em.”

Patty made no response to this, and Mr. Lansing turned suddenly to look at her. “I say, Miss Fairfield, do you know what I think? I think you are prejudiced against me, and I think somebody put you up to it, and I think I know who. Now, look here, won’t you give me a fair show? Do you think it’s just to judge a man by what other people say about him?”

“How do you know I’ve heard anything about you, Mr. Lansing?”

“Well, you give me the icy glare before I’ve said half a dozen words to you! So, take it from me, somebody’s been putting you wise to my defects.”

He wagged his head so sagaciously at this speech, that Patty was forced to smile. On a sudden impulse, she decided to speak frankly. “Suppose I tell you the truth, Mr. Lansing, that I’m not accustomed to being addressed in such—well, in such slangy terms.”

“Oh, is that it? Pooh, I’ll bet those chums of yours talk slang to you once in a while.” 35

“What my chums may do is no criterion for an absolute stranger,”—and now Patty spoke very haughtily indeed.

“That’s so, Miss Fairfield; you’re dead right,—and I apologise. But, truly, it’s a habit with me. I’m from Chicago, and I believe people use more slang out there.”

“The best Chicago people don’t,” said Patty, seriously.

Mr. Lansing smiled at her, a trifle whimsically.

“I’m afraid I don’t class up with the best people,” he confessed; “but if it will please you better, I’ll cut out the slang. Shall we have a turn at this two-step?”

Patty rose without a word, and in a moment they were circling the floor. Mr. Lansing was a good dancer, and especially skilful in guiding his partner. Patty, herself such an expert dancer, was peculiarly sensitive to the good points of a partner, and she enjoyed the dance with Mr. Lansing, even though she felt she did not like the man. And yet he had a certain fascination in his manner, and when the dance was over, Patty looked at him with kinder eyes than she had when they began. But all that he had won of her favour he lost by his final speech, for as the dance ended, he said, brusquely: “Now, I’ll tumble you into a seat, and chase my next victim.” 36

Patty stood looking after him, almost moved to laughter at what he had said, and yet indignant that a man, and a comparative stranger, should address her thus.

“What’s the matter, Lady Fair?” and Philip Van Reypen came up to her. “Methinks thou hast a ruffled brow.”

“No, it’s my frock that’s ruffled,” said Patty, demurely. “You men know so little of millinery!”

“That’s true enough, and if you will smile again, I’ll drop the subject of ruffles. And now for my errand; will you go out to supper with me?”

“Goodness, is it supper time? I thought the evening had scarcely begun!”

“Alas! look at the programme,” and Van Reypen showed her that it was, indeed, time for intermission.

“Intermission is French for supper,” he said, gravely, “and I’d like to know if you’d rather sit on the stairs in good old orthodox party fashion, or if you’d rather go to the dining-room in state?”

“Who are on the stairs?” 37

“I shall be, if you are. You don’t want to know more than that, do you?” The young man’s gaze was so reproachful that Patty giggled.

“You are a great factor in my happiness, Mr. Van Reypen,” she said, saucily; “but you are not all the world to me! So, if I flock on the stairs with you, I must know what other doves will be perching there.”

“Oh, doves!” in a tone of great relief. “I thought you wanted to know what men you would find there,—you inveterate coquette, you! Well, Elise is there waiting for you, and Miss Farley.”

“And Mona Galbraith?”

“I don’t know; I didn’t see Miss Galbraith. But if you will go with me, I will accumulate for you any young ladies you desire.”

“And any men?”

“The men I shall have to fight off, not invite!”

Laughing at each other’s chaff, they sauntered across to the hall and found the stairs already pretty well occupied.

“Why is it,” Mr. Hepworth was saying, “that you young people prefer the stairs to the nice, comfortable seats at little tables in the dining-room?” 38

“Habit,” said Patty, laughing, as she made her way up a few steps; “I’ve always eaten my party suppers on the stairs, and I dare say I always shall. When I build a house I shall have a great, broad staircase, like they have in palaces, and then everybody can eat on the stairs.”

“I’m going to give a party,” announced Van Reypen, “and it’s going to be in the new Pennsylvania Station. There are enormous staircases there.”

“All right, I’ll come to it,” said Patty, and then Mona and Mr. Lansing came strolling along the

hall, and demanded room on the stairs also.

“Seats all taken,” declared Roger, who had had a real tiff with Mona on the subject of her new friend. The others, too, did not seem to welcome Mr. Lansing, and though one or two moved slightly, they did not make room for the newcomers.

Patty was uncertain what she ought to do. She remembered what Mr. Galbraith had said, and she felt that to send Mona and Mr. Lansing away would be to throw them more exclusively in each other’s society; and she thought that Mr. Galbraith meant for her to keep Mona under her own eye as much as possible. But to call the pair upon the stairs and make room for them would annoy, she felt sure, the rest of the group.

She looked at Roger and at Philip Van Reypen, and both of them gave her an eloquent glance of appeal not to add to their party. Then she chanced to glance at Mr. Hepworth and found him smiling at her. She thought she knew what he meant, and immediately she said, “Come up here by me, Mona; and you come too, Mr. Lansing. We can make room easily if we move about a little.”

There was considerable moving about, and finally Patty found herself at the top of the group with Mona and Mr. Lansing. Christine and Mr. Hepworth were directly below them, and then Elise and Kenneth.

Mr. Van Reypen and Roger Farrington declared their intention of making a raid on the dining-room and kidnapping waiters with trays of supplies. On their return the supper plates were passed up to those on the stairs, and Van Reypen and Roger calmly walked away.

Patty knew perfectly well what they meant. They intended her to understand that if she and Mona persisted in cultivating the acquaintance of the man they considered objectionable, they did not care to be of the party.

“Which is perfectly ridiculous!” said Patty to herself, as she realised the state of things. “Those boys needn’t think they can dictate to me at my own party!”

Whereupon, perverse Patty began to make herself extremely and especially agreeable to Mr. Lansing, and Mona was greatly delighted at the turn things had taken.

Christine and Mr. Hepworth joined in the conversation, and perhaps because of what Patty had said earlier in the evening, Mr. Lansing avoided to a great extent the use of slang expressions, and made himself really interesting and entertaining.

“What a fascinating man he is,” said Christine later, to Patty, when Mona and her new friend had walked away to the “extra” supper dance.

“Do you think so?” said Patty, looking at Christine in astonishment. “He was rather nicer than I thought him at first, but, Christine, I never dreamed *you* would approve of him! But you never can tell when a quiet little mouse like you is going to break loose. Why did you like him, Christine?”

“I don’t know exactly; only he seemed so breezy and unusual.”

“Yes, he’s that,” and Patty wagged her head, knowingly; “but I don’t like him very much, Christine, and you mustn’t, either. Now run away and play.”

Patty’s last direction was because she saw a young man coming to ask Christine for this dance; while two others were rapidly coming toward herself.

The rest of the evening was danced gaily away, but neither Roger nor Philip Van Reypen came near Patty. To be sure, she had plenty of partners, but she felt a little offended at her two friends’ attitude, for she knew she hadn’t really deserved it.

But when the dance was over, Patty’s good-nights to Roger and Philip were quite as gentle and cordial as those she said to any one else. She smiled her best smiles at them, and though not as responsive as usual, they made polite adieux and departed with no further reference to the troublesome matter.

CHAPTER III

HAPPY SATURDAYS

As was not to be wondered at, Patty slept late the next morning. And when she awakened, she lay, cozily tucked in her coverlets, thinking over the occurrences of the night before.

Presently Jane came in with a dainty tray of chocolate and rolls, and then, with some big, fluffy pillows behind her, Patty sat up in bed, and thoughtfully nibbled away at a crust.

Then Nan came in, in her pretty morning gown, and, drawing up a little rocker, sat down by Patty’s bedside.

“Are you in mood for a gossip, Patty?” she asked, and Patty replied, “Yes, indeedy! I want to talk over the whole thing. In the first place, Nan, it was a howling, screaming success, wasn’t it?”

“Why, yes, of course; how could it be otherwise? with the nicest people and the nicest flowers and the nicest girl in New York City!” 43

“In the whole United States, you mean,” said Patty, complacently, as she took a spoonful of chocolate. “Yes, the party in all its parts was all right. There wasn’t a flaw. But, oh, Nan, I got into a scrap with the boys.”

“What boys? and what *is* a scrap? Patty, now that you’re out, you mustn’t use those slang words you’re so fond of.”

“Nan,” and Patty shook her spoon solemnly at her stepmother, “I’ve come to realise that there is slang and slang. Now, the few little innocent bits I use, don’t count at all, because I just say them for fun and to help make my meaning clear. But that man last night,—that Lansing man,—why, Nan, his slang is altogether a different matter.”

“Well, Patty, he, himself, seems to be an altogether different matter from the people we know.”

“Yes, doesn’t he? And yet, Nan, he isn’t so bad. Well, anyway, let me tell you what Mr. Galbraith says.”

“That’s just it!” declared Nan, after Patty had finished her story. “That man *is* a fortune-hunter, and he means to try to marry Mona for the sake of her father’s money!”

“Oh, my!” exclaimed Patty, laughing; “isn’t it grand to be grown up! I see I’m mixed up in a matrimonial tangle already!” 44

“Nothing of the sort, you foolish child! There won’t be any matrimonial tangle. Mr. Galbraith is quite right; this man must be discouraged, and Mona must be made to see him in his true light.”

“But, Nan, he isn’t so awful. You know, sometimes he was quite fascinating.”

“Yes, you think that, because he has big dark eyes and rolled them at you.”

“Goodness! it sounds like a game of bowls. No, I don’t mean that; but—well, I’ll tell you what I do mean. He said we weren’t fair to him, to judge him adversely, not knowing anything about him. And I think so, too, Nan; it doesn’t seem fair or right to say a man is a bounder,—that’s what Roger called him,—when we don’t know anything about him, really.”

“Patty, you’re a goose! Don’t you suppose we’ll find out about him? Of course, *we* can’t, but your father and Mr. Galbraith,—yes, and Roger Farrington, will soon find out his standing.”

“Well,” said Patty, with a relieved sigh, “then I needn’t bother about *him* any more. But, Nan, I 45
have troubles of my own. Philip and Roger are both mad at me!”

“Goodness! Patty, how awful! Do you suppose they’ll stay mad all day?”

“Oh, it isn’t just a momentary tiff; they are up and down angry! Why, neither of them danced with me or even spoke to me after supper last night!”

“Well, it was probably your own fault.”

“My own fault, indeed! It was all because of that horrid Lansing man. Well, if they want to stay mad, they may! *I* shan’t make any advances.”

“Don’t worry, my child. Into each life some little squabbles must fall,—and though you’re fairly good-natured, as a rule, you can’t expect it always to be smooth sailing.”

Seeing she could get no sympathy from her stepmother, Patty dropped the subject of her quarrels, and remarked, with a yawn, “Well, I suppose I may as well get up, and begin on those flower notes. What shall I say, Nan, something like this? ‘Miss Patricia Fairfield thanks you for your kind donation of expensive blossoms, but as it’s such a bother to write the notes of acknowledgment, she really wishes you hadn’t sent them.’” 46

“What base ingratitude! Patty, I’m ashamed of you! or I would be, if I thought you meant a word of it, but I know you don’t. What are you doing this afternoon?”

“Oh, I forgot to tell you. We’re going to have a club, just a little club,—only four of us girls. And, Nan, you know there are so many clubs that make an awful fuss and yet don’t really *do* anything. Well, this is going to be a *Doing* Club. We’re going to be real *doers*.”

“It sounds lovely, Patty. What are you going to do?”

“We don’t know yet, that’s what the meeting’s for this afternoon. But we’re going to do good, you know—some kind of good. You know, Nan, I always said I didn’t want to be just a social butterfly and nothing else. I want to accomplish something that will give some joy or comfort to somebody.”

Patty’s blue eyes looked very earnest and sincere as she said this, and Nan kissed her, saying, “I know you do, Patty, dearest, and I know you’ll succeed in your doing. If I can help you in any way, be sure to ask me; and now I’ll run away and let you dress.”

Patty made a leisurely toilette; and then, in a trailing blue silk négligée, she went into her 47
boudoir and began to write her notes.

It was not a difficult task, and she did not really mind it, though it was a long list. But Patty had a knack at writing graceful little notes, and although she jested about it, she was really grateful to the kind friends who had sent the flowers.

“I don’t know *why* I have so many friends,” she said to herself, as she scanned the rows of names. “To be sure, a great many are really friends of father’s and Nan’s, but there’s a lot of our crowd, too, and lots of out of town people. Perhaps it would be a good idea to do the farthest away first, and so work back to New York.”

Patty picked up Mr. Farnsworth’s card, and read again the message on it. “H’m,” she said to herself, “it sounds to me a trifle formal and conventional—considering all things. Now, Little Billee is a Western man,—but how different he is from that Lansing person! I wonder what makes the difference. Little Billee isn’t formal or conventional a bit, and yet his manners are as far removed from Horace Lansing’s as white is from black. Oh, well, I know the reason well enough. It’s because Little Billee is a thorough gentleman at heart; and the other one is,—well, I guess he’s what Roger called him. Now, what shall I say to Mr. William Farnsworth by way of thanks for his truly beautiful pink roses? I’d like to write a nice, every-day letter, and tell him all about the party and everything; but, as he just sent his visiting card, with a mere line on it, I suppose I must reply very formally.” 48

Patty began her formal note, but tore up half a dozen beginnings before she completed one to her satisfaction. This one read, “Miss Patricia Fairfield thanks Mr. William Farnsworth sincerely for his exquisite gift of roses, and for his kind congratulations.”

Patty gave a little sigh as she sealed this missive and addressed it to her friend in Arizona.

With the exception of the roses, Patty had never heard a word from Big Bill since they were at Spring Beach together. She had told her father and Nan of what Mr. Farnsworth had said to her down there, and as they had agreed that Patty was altogether too young even to think of such a thing as being engaged to anybody, it was wiser to hold no correspondence with him at all. 49

Apparently, this in no way disappointed the young man, for he had made no effort on his part to recall himself to Patty’s remembrance, until the occasion of sending the flowers.

Patty had liked Bill extremely, but as Arizona was far away, and she had no reason to think she would ever see him again, she gave him few thoughts. However, the thoughts, when she did allow them to come, were pleasant ones. Although she had sealed the note she intended to send, she began another one, and the opening words were “Little Billee.” This note she wrote in the first person, and thanked him simply and naturally for the flowers. Then, for a signature, she made a carefully and daintily drawn pen-and-ink sketch of an apple blossom. She was clever at flower-sketching, and she sat a moment admiring her own handiwork. Then a flush spread over her pretty face, and she spoke sternly to herself, as was her habit when she disapproved of her own actions.

“Patty Fairfield,” she said, reprovingly, “you ought to be ashamed to think of sending a personal, lettery sort of a note like that, to a man who sent you the formalest kind of a message! He only sent the flowers, because convention demanded it! He never gave you one single thought after that last time he saw you,—and that’s all there is about *that*!” 50

And then, to her great surprise, luncheon was announced, and she found that her whole morning was gone and only one name on her list crossed off!

The club that met that afternoon in Mona’s pretty sitting-room in the Plaza Hotel, consisted of only four girls—Patty, Mona, Elise, and Clementine Morse.

It was thought wiser to start with a few earnest members and then enlarge the number later if it seemed advisable.

“What a beautiful room!” said Clementine, as she tossed off her furs. “Don’t you like it, Mona, to live in a big hotel like this, and yet have your own rooms, like a home all to yourself?”

“Yes, I like it in some ways; but I’m alone a great deal. However, I would be that, if father and I lived in a house or an apartment.”

“You ought to have a companion of some sort, Mona,” said Patty, who thought this a good opportunity to urge Mr. Galbraith’s wishes.

“No, thank you,” and Mona tossed her head, disdainfully; “I know what companions are! Snoopy old maids who won’t let you do anything, or careless, easy-going old ladies who pay no attention to you. If I could have a companion of my own age and tastes, I’d like that,—but I suppose that wouldn’t do.” 51

“Hardly,” said Elise, laughing; “that would only mean your father would have two troublesome girls to look after instead of one. And I daresay, Mona, you are quite as much as he can handle.”

“I suppose I am. But he’s so good to me I’m afraid he spoils me. But come on, girls, let’s organise our club.”

“Don’t let’s have too much organisation,” said Clementine. “Do you know, I think lots of clubs, especially charity clubs, have so much organisation that they haven’t anything else. One club I joined fell to pieces before it was fairly started, because the two vice-presidents squabbled so.”

“If there’s anything I hate,” declared Patty, “it’s a squabble. Whatever else we girls do, let’s try not to have any friction. Now, I know perfectly well that none of us four is *very* meek or mild.”

“I am,” declared Elise, assuming an angelic expression, which made them all laugh, for Elise was really the one most likely to take offence at trifles, or to flare up impulsively if any one disagreed with her. 52

Patty knew this only too well, and was trying to forestall it by a preliminary treaty of peace.

“Well, then, let’s be an organisation that doesn’t organise,” said Mona, “but let’s be it *now*.”

“I think,” said Patty, “that our end and aim ought to be to do good to somebody who doesn’t expect it. Now, that isn’t quite what I mean,—I mean to people who wouldn’t accept it if it seemed like charity, but to whom we could give a pleasure that they would really like.”

“Patty, my child,” said Clementine, “I think your ideas are all right, but I must say you don’t express them very clearly. Let’s get down to something definite. Do you mean to give material things,—like presents or money?”

“That’s just exactly what I *don’t* mean, Clem! Don’t you remember that little club we used to have at school,—the Merry Grigs?”

“Indeed I do! All we had to do was to be merry and gay.” 53

“Well, that’s what I mean,—in a way,—if you know what I mean.”

“Oh, Patty,” cried Mona, “I never knew you to be so hopelessly vague. Now, for instance, how would it be if we gave a lovely motor ride to some poor shop girl, or somebody that never gets into a motor?”

“That’s it!” cried Clementine, approvingly; “I was thinking of sending flowers to hospitals, but that’s so general. Now, your suggestion, Mona, is definite, and just the right sort of thing.”

“But aren’t we going to have a president and treasurer, and things like that?” asked Elise.

“No,” said Patty; “my mind is clearing now, and I begin to see our club. Instead of a president, we’ll all four be presidents, and instead of a treasurer, we’ll all four be treasurers. We’ll give money when it’s necessary, or we’ll use our motor cars, or buy flowers, or whatever we like; but we won’t have dues and officers and things.”

“But the shop girls are always busy; how can we take them motoring?” asked Elise.

“That was only a suggestion,” said Mona; “it needn’t be exactly a shop girl; but anybody we know of, who would enjoy a little unexpected pleasure.” 54

“The principle is exactly right,” said Clementine; “now, let’s get it down to practicability. As Mona says, we needn’t necessarily choose a shop girl,—but suppose we do, many of them are free Saturday afternoon.”

“Only in the summer time,” objected Elise.

“Yes, perhaps, in the big shops; but there are lots of them, in offices,—or even school teachers, —who would be free Saturday afternoons. Well, anyway, here’s what I’m thinking of, and you can all say what you think of it. Suppose we try, every week, to give a happy Saturday afternoon to somebody who wouldn’t have it otherwise.”

“The Happy Saturday Afternoon Club!” cried Patty; “that’s a lovely name! let’s do it!”

“But,” said Elise, “that would mean giving up our Saturday afternoons. Do we want to do that? What about matinées?”

“I think we ought to be willing to sacrifice something,” said Patty, thoughtfully; “but I do love Saturday matinées.”

“Oh, if there’s anything especial, we needn’t consider ourselves bound to give up the afternoon,” said Clementine. “For that matter, we could send a couple of girls for a motor ride without going ourselves.” 55

“But that’s more like charity,” objected Patty: “I meant to go with them, and be real nice and pleasant with them, and make a bright spot in their lives that they would always remember.”

“They’d always remember you, Patty, if you were the bright spot,” declared Mona, who idolised her friend. “But I must confess I do like to be definite about this thing. Now, how’s this for a plan? To-day’s Thursday. Suppose we begin on Saturday and make a start at something. Suppose we each of us pick out a girl,—or a boy, for that matter,—or a child or anybody, and think what we can do to make them happy on Saturday afternoon.”

“Now we’re getting somewhere,” said Elise, approvingly. “I’ve picked mine already. She’s a girl who comes to our house quite often to sew for the children. She’s a sweet little thing, but she looks as if she never had a real good time in all her life. Now, can the rest of you think of anybody like that?”

“Yes, I have one,” said Mona. “Your suggestion made me think of her. She’s my manicure girl. She comes here, and sometimes she’s so tired she’s ready to drop! She works awfully hard, and never takes a day off, because she has to support two little sisters. But I’ll make her take a holiday Saturday afternoon, somehow.” 56

“There’s a girl I’d like to have,” said Clementine, thoughtfully; “she’s at the ribbon counter in Walker’s. She always waits on me there; and she has such a wistful air, I’d like to do her a kindness. I don’t suppose she could get off,—but I could go and ask the head of the department, and perhaps he’d let her.”

“I can’t think of anybody,” said Patty, “except one person, that I would simply *love* to have. And that’s a very tired and cross-looking lady who gives out embroidery patterns in a dreadful place, way down town. I believe it would sweeten her up for a year to have a little spree with us.”

“All right,” said Mona. “Now we have selected our guests, what shall we do with them? Say, a motor ride and a cup of tea afterward in some pretty tea room?”

“I think,” said Elise, “that we’d better give them luncheon first. They can’t enjoy a motor ride if they’re hungry, and they probably will be.”

“Luncheon where?” said Patty, looking puzzled; “at one of our houses?” 57

“I could have them here, easily enough,” said Mona. “Our dining-room here, would really be better than any of the homes of you girls. Because you all have people, and I haven’t. Father would just as lieve lunch downstairs, in the main dining-room.”

“That’s lovely of you, Mona,” said Patty. “I was going to suggest some small, quiet restaurant, but a luncheon here in your pretty dining-room would indeed be a bright spot for them to remember. But suppose they won’t come?”

“Then we must ask someone instead,” said Clementine; “let’s promise each to bring someone with us on Saturday, and if the first one we ask declines, keep on asking till we get somebody. Of course, Mona, we’ll share the expense of the luncheon equally.”

“Nonsense,” returned Mona; “I’ll be glad to give that.”

“No,” said Patty, firmly; “we’ll each pay a quarter of whatever the luncheon costs. And let’s have it good and substantial, and yet have some pretty, fancy things too. For, you know, this isn’t a charity or a soup kitchen,—it’s to give those girls a bright and beautiful scene to look back on.” 58

“Oh, it will be lovely!” cried Mona. “I’ll have pretty place cards, and favours, and everything.”

“But we mustn’t overdo it,” said Clementine.

“You know, to the unaccustomed, an elaborate table may prove embarrassing.”

“That will be all right,” said Patty, smiling. “Mona can fix her table, and I’ll come over before the luncheon, and if she has too many or too grand flumadiddles, I’ll take some of them off. I don’t want our guests struck dumb by too much grandeur, but I do want things pretty and nice. Suppose we each bring a favor for our own guest.”

“Something useful?” said Elise.

“No; *not* a suit of flannel underwear or a pair of shoes! But a pretty necktie or handkerchief, if you like, or even a little gold pin, or a silver one.”

“Or a picture or cast,” said Clementine.

“Yes,” and Patty nodded approval; “but it ought to be a little thing that would look like a luncheon souvenir and not like a Christmas present. I think they ought to be all alike.”

“So do I,” said Mona, “and I think a little pin in a jeweler’s box will be the prettiest; and then a lovely bunch of flowers at each plate, and an awfully pretty place-card.” 59

“Oh, it will be beautiful!” cried Patty, jumping up and dancing about the room; “but I must flit, girls,—I have an engagement at five. Wait, what about motors? I’m sure we can use our big car.”

“And ours,” said all the rest together.

“Well, we’ll need two,” said Clementine, “and two of us girls and two guests can go in each. We’ll see which cars can be used most conveniently; perhaps our fathers may have something to say on that subject. But we can arrange all such things by telephone to-morrow. The main thing is to get our guests.”

“Oh, we’ll do that,” said Patty, “if we have to go out into the highways and hedges after them.”

60

CHAPTER IV

AN INVITATION

The next morning Patty started off in her own little electric runabout with Miller, the chauffeur.

She let him drive, and gave the address, as she stepped in, “The Monongahela Art Embroidery Company,” adding a number in lower Broadway.

The correct Miller could not suppress a slight smile as he said, “Where I took you once before, Miss Patty?” And Patty smiled, as she said, “Yes, Miller.”

But it was with a different feeling that she entered the big building this time, and she went straight to department B. On her way she met the red-headed boy who had so amused her when she was there a year ago.

He greeted her with the same lack of formality that had previously characterised him.

“Is youse up against it again?” he inquired, grinning broadly. “I t’ought youse didn’t get no cinch, and had to can de whole projick.” 61

“I’m not on the same ‘projick’ now,” said Patty, smiling at him. “Is department B in the same place?”

“Sure it is,” and for some reason the boy added, “miss,” after a momentary pause, which made Patty realise his different attitude toward her, now that she wore a more elaborate costume, than when he had seen her in a purposely plain little suit.

“And is the same lady still in charge of it?”

“Yep; dey ain’t nuttin’ lessen dynnimite goin’ to boost Mis’ Greene outen o’ here!”

“Then Mrs. Greene is the lady I want to see,” and Patty threaded her way through the narrow passages between the piled up boxes.

“No pass needed; she’s a free show,” the boy called after her, and in a moment Patty found herself again in the presence of the sharp-faced, tired-looking woman whom she had once interviewed regarding her embroidery work.

“This is Mrs. Greene, isn’t it?” said Patty, pleasantly.

“Yes, I am,” snapped the woman. “You don’t want work again, do you?” 62

“No,” said Patty, smiling, “I come this time on quite a different errand.”

“Then you don’t want to see *me*. I’m here only to give out work. Did Mr. Myers send you?”

“No, I came of my own accord. Now, Mrs. Greene, forget the work for a moment, and let me tell you what I want.”

“If it’s subscribin’ to any fund, or belongin’ to any working woman’s club run by you swell ladies, you can count me out. I ain’t got time for foolishness.”

“It isn’t anything like that,” and Patty laughed so merrily that Mrs. Greene’s hard face softened in spite of herself. “Well, what is it?” she asked, in a less belligerent tone.

“It’s only this,” and though Patty’s errand had seemed to her simple enough before she came in, she now began to wonder how Mrs. Greene would take it. “Some friends of mine and I are asking three or four people to lunch with us and take a little motor ride on Saturday, and I want you to come as my guest?”

“What!” and Mrs. Greene’s face was blank with amazement, but her manner betokened an impending burst of wrath.

Patty realised that the woman’s pride was up in arms at the idea of patronage, and she was at her wit’s end how to make the real spirit of her invitation understood. 63

As it chanced, she unwittingly took the right tack. So earnest was she that her lips quivered a little, and her eyes showed a pleading, pathetic expression, as she said, “*Please* don’t misunderstand me, Mrs. Greene. If you would enjoy it, I want you to come to our party on Saturday as our welcome guest. If you wouldn’t enjoy it,—just say so,—but—but *don’t* scold me!”

Mrs. Greene looked puzzled, and then the hard, stern mouth broke into an actual smile.

“Well, I declare,” she said, “I do believe you’ve got a real heart!”

“And I do believe that *you* have!” exclaimed Patty. “And, now that we know the truth about each other, you’ll come, won’t you?”

“Tell me about it,” and the speaker seemed still uncertain, though wavering.

So Patty told her, honestly and straightforwardly, the circumstances of the party, and wound up by saying, “I truly want you, Mrs. Greene, for the simple reason that I want you to enjoy the afternoon,—and for no other reason.”

“And I’ll come, and be awful glad of the chance! Why, I’ve never had a ride in a motor car in my life, and I’ve never eaten in one of those fandangle hotels; and the way you put it, I’m just crazy to go!” 64

“Do you have holiday Saturday afternoon?”

“Yes, all these downtown places do.”

“Very well, then, I shall expect you at the Plaza at one o’clock. Ask for Miss Galbraith, and they will show you right up to her rooms.”

“Land! it does seem too good to be true! Say, Miss Fairfield, I’ve only got a black mohair to wear,—will that do?”

“Of course it will. Maybe you’ve a pretty bit of embroidery or something to lighten it up a little.”

“Yes, I’ve got a linjerry collar and cuffs that I’ve just been achin’ to wear ever since my sister gave them to me last Christmas.”

“Then I shall expect you on Saturday, and I’m so glad.”

With a smiling bow, Patty started away, but she saw by Mrs. Greene’s face, there was something left unsaid.

“What is it?” she asked, kindly, stepping back again to the counter.

“Say, Miss Fairfield,” and Mrs. Greene twisted her fingers a little nervously, “don’t think this is queer,—but won’t you wear one of your real pretty dresses? I do like to see a pretty, stylish dress,—and I never get a chance.” 65

“Of course I will,” said Patty, heartily; “I’ve a brand-new one that I’ve never worn, and I’ll honour the occasion with it, on Saturday.”

And then Patty went away, greatly pleased at her success.

“Had quite a buzz, didn’t yer?” observed the red-headed boy, looking at Patty with curiosity, as she passed him.

“Yes, I did. By the way, young man, what is your name?”

“Rosy; should think you’d know without askin’,” and he grabbed a bunch of his red hair with a comical grin.

“Well, I didn’t know whether it was that or Freckles,” said Patty, who was moved to chaff him, by reason of his good-natured *camaraderie*.

“Might just as well ‘a’ been,” and Rosy grinned wider than ever.

Patty nodded a good-bye, and went on, rapidly turning over in her mind a new plan that would include Rosy in some future happy Saturday afternoon. But this plan must wait for development, as the coming Saturday was enough to occupy her thoughts for the present.

“Home, Miller,” she said, as she took her seat. Miller gave a relieved sigh, for he was always more or less afraid of Patty’s escapades; and he didn’t like to have her go alone into these strange buildings. 66

They whizzed homeward, and at luncheon time Patty gave Nan a graphic account of her interview with Mrs. Greene.

“I think that’s the funniest of all,” said Nan, “that she should want you to wear your elaborate clothes.”

“So do I,” said Patty. “We girls had planned to wear our plainest dresses, thinking to make our guests feel more at ease. And when Madame Greene spoke of her black mohair, I thought I’d even rip the trimming off my brown waist! But not so,—far otherwise. So I shall get me into that new American Beauty satin, and I hope to goodness it will suit her taste. I expect she’s fearfully critical.”

“Perhaps the other girls’ guests won’t feel as Mrs. Greene does about this matter. What then?”

“Now, Nan, don’t stir up trouble! I have only my own guest to look after, and I shall dress my part. The others will have to do as seemeth unto them best. Oh, Nan, it’s going to be heaps of fun!” 67

“Yes, if it turns out right,—without any awkwardness or embarrassment.”

“Oh, you old wet blanket! Now, you know perfectly well, we’re doing our best. And if we’re awkward, we can’t help it. We’re going this afternoon to get the favours. What do you think of little pins,—silver gilt, or enamel?”

“They’d be all right, or hatpins, either.”

“No, hatpins everybody has. And they don’t show, anyhow. That amethyst one of mine always hides itself behind a bow or a feather. No; I’m sure a nice little round brooch is the best thing.”

“How about gloves?”

“Or overshoes? or knitted wash-cloths? Nan, can’t I bang it into your head that this affair is for pleasure, not profit? Would you give *your* luncheon guests gloves as souvenirs?”

“I suppose you’re right, Patty. But it *is* an experiment.”

“Of course it is! And it’s going to be a successful one, and the forerunner of many others!”

Half an hour before luncheon time, Patty walked into Mona’s dining-room. She wore her new gown of American Beauty satin, softly draped with a thin black marquisette, and a soft sash of black satin. Her hat was all black, with a Beauty rose tucked under the brim, and resting against her fair hair. 68

Mona surveyed her with delight. “You look unusually well, Patty,—but that’s not saying anything unusual, for you always look unusually well.”

“Good gracious, Mona, what kind of English is that? And a doubtful compliment beside! But I see you’re preoccupied, so I shan’t expect much appreciation of my new costume. Simple but tasty, isn’t it?”

As she spoke, Patty was looking at herself in a long mirror and craning her neck to get a view of her back. She was fond of pretty clothes, and her new gown, though rich, was really simple in line and colouring.

“Your table is beautiful, Mona,” she said, suddenly bringing her attention from her own raiment to the festal preparation.

The girls had decided that, since Christmas was only about a fortnight away, it would be attractive to use Christmas decorations for their party. And so the round table showed crossed strips of broad red ribbon, under bands of lace, and a central decoration of a real Christmas tree, with beautiful fancy ornaments and colored electric lights. At each place was an elaborate bonbonnière of Christmas red, decked with sprays of holly. The place cards were Christmassy; and the little brooches they had bought, were in dainty boxes tied with holly ribbon. 69

“It’s perfectly lovely, Mona,” said Patty, enthusiastically. “There isn’t a bit too much of anything, and it’s just as cheery and jolly as it can be.”

“I thought I wouldn’t have any flowers on the table,” Mona explained, “for they didn’t go with the other things. So, you see, I’ve these four big bunches of red carnations around the room, and I shall give them each one to take home. Of course, I have boxes ready for them,—and then, Patty, I thought we’d distribute the Christmas tree decorations among them,—and I have the boxes big, so we can put those and the place-cards and candy-boxes and souvenirs all in them. And then, you know, it won’t seem like *giving* them things; for you know yourself how keen people are to take away their place cards and such things.”

“They are, indeed! I’ve been *surprised* the people who have *everything* will gather up their cards and trumpery boxes after a luncheon! And your thoughtfulness is lovely, Mona. We’ll each give them our own place-card and box, too.” 70

“Yes; and then, you see, they’ll have quite a few little things for their own Christmas, and that will make them remember the ‘bright spot’ all the more.”

“Of course it will! Mona, you’re a perfect *darling*!” And Patty grasped Mona’s shoulders and swung her about in a mad dance of jubilation.

“And, Patty,” Mona went on, “Mr. Lansing wants to help us with our Happy Saturdays Club. He says he could go with us some afternoon, to take a lot of newsboys to the circus.”

“Why, Mona Galbraith!” and Patty stared at her friend in astonishment. “Have you been telling *him* about our club?”

“Yes; of course, I have. It’s no secret society, is it?”

“No; but we don’t want men for members.”

“But, Patty, he would be a help. I’d love to give some of those poor little newsboys a good time, and we couldn’t do it, just by ourselves.” 71

Suddenly, Patty thought of “Rosy,” and her idea of including him in some of their plans. To be sure, it would be better to have a man to help manage such a project. But not Mr. Lansing!

“No, Mona,” she said; “our club is made up of just us four girls, and we can find plenty to do among girls or women. At least, for this winter. If it’s all a success, we can do more next winter, and perhaps get some men to help us then. If we want to take newsboys to the circus, father will go with us. Don’t be everlastingly dragging in that Mr. Lansing.”

“I’m *not* dragging him in! He kindly offered to help. But of course,—if you don’t want him——”

“Well, I don’t! And, look here, Mona, I wish you’d let him alone, yourself. He’s not like the men of our set, and I want you to realise that. Roger says he’s a bounder,—if you know what that is.”

“Pooh! Roger is jealous.”

“Yes, I think he is. But, aside from that, he’s right about Mr. Lansing not being the right kind of a friend for you. Philip Van Reypen says the same thing.”

“Oh, pshaw! Mr. Van Reypen is an old stuck-up! He thinks nobody is any good if they don’t begin their names with a Van.” 72

“Now, Mona, don’t be silly. I’m sure I don’t know what you see so admirable in Mr. Lansing, but I do think you ought to be advised by others who know better than you. Why, your own father doesn’t like him.”

“I know dad doesn’t; but—well, all the same, I *do*! Why, Patty, he’s awfully interesting, and he brings me flowers and candy and books——”

“Now, stop, Mona. You know you don’t care for those things! You can have all you want, without Mr. Lansing’s gifts. You like him, because he flatters you, and—well, I must admit that he has a way with him.”

“Oh, yes, Patty, he has! Why, when you know him, he’s really fascinating!”

“Well, don’t let him fascinate you. He’s loud, Mona. He’s not our sort. Now, do promise me to see less of him, won’t you? He seems to be calling on you very often.”

“Yes, he does. But how can I stop that? I can’t be rude to him.”

“Well, you can be cool. Every girl can discourage a man’s attentions, if she wants to.” 73

“H’m; you seem to know a great deal about it.”

“I only know what my common sense tells me. Mona, dear, *do* drop that man! Why, Roger is worth a dozen of him!”

“Roger’s all right,—but Mr. Lansing is so,—so,—well, he’s different.”

“He is, indeed! And that’s the trouble. The difference is all in Roger’s favour, if you only could see it.”

“Well, I can’t! Now, look here, Patty. You know how much I care for you, but I won’t have you talking to me like a Dutch Aunt. I made father bring me to New York this winter, so I could be near you, and we could have fun together. But, if you’re going to scold me all the time, we won’t have any fun at all.”

Patty began to realise that, though Mona might be coaxed, she could never be driven. So she

concluded to drop the subject, and use more thought and tact in her endeavours to break up Mona's new friendship.

And then Clementine Morse came, so the matter had to be laid aside.

"Is Jenny here?" asked Clementine, as she tossed off her furs.

"Jenny who?"

"My guest, Jenny Bisbee. She's the ribbon girl I told you about. I had the greatest time to get her off for the afternoon. I had to go to Walker's, you know, and see all sorts of Heads of Departments. My! they acted like Crowned Heads! They said it wouldn't do at all,—it would establish a precedent,—and all sorts of things like that. But, somehow or other, I wheedled them into it, and at last they said Jenny might come. She was just crazy about it. She said, she never has any fun in her life, except looking at the new ribbons when they come in! Oh, girls, isn't it awful *never* to have any fun? I expect Jenny will be embarrassed, but I'm sure she'll enjoy it all. Oh, how lovely the table looks! Mona, you are a wonder! I never should have thought of all those Christmas fixings."

"I'm glad you like them. Say, Clementine, don't you think it would be nice to have men members in our club?"

"Why, I don't know. No, I guess not, though my brother Clifford says it's a great game, and he'd like to help us."

"Yes, and I know another man who wants to help," said Mona, eagerly, when Clementine interrupted her.

"I hope it isn't that strange being you brought to Patty's party! Wherever *did* you pick up that freak, Mona?"

"He *isn't* a freak! Mr. Lansing is not a rich man, but he's very exclusive. He told me so himself."

"Don't you believe it!" and Clementine laughed merrily. "As a rule, people who say themselves that they're exclusive, are *not*. And one glance at that man is enough to show his standing."

"What *is* his standing, then?" said Mona, sulkily.

"Outside the pale of society, if not outside the pale of civilisation," retorted Clementine, who was plain-spoken.

"Don't let's talk about Mr. Lansing now," broke in Patty, who feared an unpleasant element in their pleasant occasion. "And, anyway, here comes Elise."

CHAPTER V

HAPPY GUESTS

Elise came in, bringing her guest with her. The three girls waiting in the sitting-room were surprised to see the small, dainty person whom Elise introduced as Miss Anna Gorman. She had a sweet, sad little face, and wore a simple one-piece gown of dove-grey voile. Her hat was grey, also; a turban shape, with a small knot of pink roses at one side. Anna was not pretty, but she had a refined air, and a gentle manner. Though embarrassed, she strove not to show it, and tried to appear at ease.

Mona greeted her cordially: "How do you do, Anna?" she said, for they had agreed to call the girls informally, by their Christian names. "I am glad to see you. Come with me into the boudoir, and lay off your coat." Mona herself assisted, for she thought it better not to have her maid about.

"I'm well, thank you," said Anna, in response to Mona's inquiry, and then she broke out, impulsively: "Oh, I'm so happy to be here! It was so heavenly kind of you young ladies to ask me. You don't *know* what it means to me!"

"Why, I'm very glad," said Mona, touched at the girl's gratitude. "Now, I hope you'll just have the time of your life!"

"Oh, I shall, indeed! I know it. I'm enjoying every minute, just being in these lovely rooms, and seeing you kind ladies."

Then Mona's manicure girl came. Her name was Celeste Arleson, and she was a tall, slender young woman, garbed all in black. It was the gown she always wore at her work, and, being of French descent, she had an air of charm that made her attractive.

"Good-morning, Celeste; come right in," said Mona, and then she introduced her to Anna.

The two looked at each other a little shyly, and then Anna said, "Good-morning," in a timid way.

Mona felt embarrassed, too, and began to wonder if their party would be a failure, after all.

But Patty came in then and, with her ever-ready tact, took the two visitors to the drawing-room, and began to show them some pictures and curios.

Then Jenny Bisbee came, the girl from the ribbon counter, whom Clementine had invited.

“My, isn’t this fine!” she exclaimed, as she met the others. “I just do think it’s fine!”

“I’m glad we could arrange for you to come,” said Clementine, cordially.

“Glad! My gracious, I guess I’m glad! Well! if you measured ribbon from morning till night, I guess you’d be glad to get away from it for once. Why, I measure ribbon in my dreams, from night till morning. I can’t seem to get away from that everlasting stretching out of thirty-six inches, over and over again.”

“But the ribbons are so pretty,” said Clementine, by way of being agreeable.

“Yes; when they first come in. But after a few weeks you get so tired of the patterns. My, I feel as if I could throw that Dresden sash ribbon on the floor and stamp on it, I’m so tired of seeing it! And there’s one piece of gay brocade that hits me in the eye every morning. I can’t stand that piece much longer.”

“I’ll come round some day, and buy it,” said Patty, laughing good-naturedly. “I didn’t know the ribbons were so individual to you.”

“Yes, they are. There’s one piece of light blue satin ribbon, plain and wide, that I just love. It’s a real comfort to me.”

Jenny gave a little sigh, as she thought of her favourite ribbon, and Patty looked at her in wonderment, that she should be so sensitive to colour and texture. But her taste in colours did not seem to extend to her clothes. Jenny was a pale little thing, with ashy blonde hair, and large, light blue eyes. She wore a nondescript tan-coloured dress, without tone or shape; and she had a weary, exhausted air, as if chronically tired.

Conversation was a little difficult. The four hostesses tried their best to be entertaining without being patronising, but it was not an easy task. At least, their advances were not easily received, and the guests seemed to be on the alert to resent anything that savoured of patronage. But help came from an unexpected quarter. Just at one o’clock Mrs. Greene arrived.

“My land!” she exclaimed, as she entered the room, “if this isn’t grand! I wouldn’t of missed it for a farm! You see, I waited out on the corner, till it was just one o’clock. I know enough to get to a party just on the minute. My bringin’ up was good, if I have fell off a little since. But my folks was always awful particular people,—wouldn’t even take their pie in their hands. My husband, now, he was different. He wasn’t a fool, nor he wasn’t much else. But I only had him a year, and then he up and got killed in a rolling mill. Nice man, John, but not very forth-putting. So I’ve shifted for myself ever since. Not that I’ve done so awful well. I’m slow, I am. I never was one o’ those to sew with a hot needle and a scorching thread, but I do my stent right along. But, my! how I do rattle on! You might think I don’t often go in good society. Well, I don’t! So I must make the most of this chance.”

Mrs. Greene’s chatter had been broken in upon by introductions and greetings, but that bothered her not at all. She nodded her head affably at the different ones, but kept right on talking.

So Mona was fairly obliged to interrupt her.

“Now, let us go out to luncheon,” she said, after the maid had announced it twice.

“Glad to,” said Mrs. Greene. “Oh, my land! what a pretty sight!”

She stood stock still in the doorway, and had to be urged forward, in order that the others might follow.

“Well, I didn’t know a table *could* look so handsome!” she went on. “My land! I s’pose it’s been thirty years since I’ve went to a real party feast, and then, I can tell you, it wasn’t much like this!”

Probably not, for Mona’s table, with the coloured electric lights blazing from the pretty Christmas tree, the soft radiance of the room, the fragrance of flowers, the exquisite table appointments, and the pretty, kindly hostesses, was a scene well worthy of praise.

Anna Gorman trembled a little as she took her seat, and sat, wide-eyed, looking almost as if in a trance of delight. Celeste Arleson was less embarrassed, as her profession took her into fine mansions and in presence of fashionable people every day.

Jenny Bisbee looked rapturous. “Oh,” she said, “Oh! I am *so* happy!”

The guests all looked a trifle awestruck when the first course appeared, of grapefruit, served in tall, slender ice-glasses, each with a red ribbon tied round its stem, and a sprig of holly in the bow.

“Well, did you ever!” exclaimed Mrs. Greene. “And is this the way they do things now? Well, well! It does look ’most too good to eat, but I’m ready to tackle it.”

Anna Gorman looked a little pained, as if this homely enthusiasm jarred upon her sense of fitness. But Mona said hospitably, “Yes, indeed, Mrs. Greene,—it’s here to be eaten.”

“Now, I’m free to confess, I don’t know what spoon to take,” Mrs. Greene acknowledged, looking blankly at the row of flat silver before her.

“I know,” spoke up Jenny Bisbee, eagerly; “I read it in a Sunday paper. You begin at the outside of the row, and eat in!”

“Land! are you sure to come out right, that way? S’pose you had a fork left for your ice cream!”

“We’ll risk it,” said Mona, smiling. “Let’s use this spoon at the outside, as Jenny suggests.”

The second course was clam bouillon, and after it was served, a maid passed a dish of whipped cream.

Mrs. Greene watched carefully as Mona placed a spoonful on the top of her soup, and then she exclaimed:

“Well, if that don’t beat all! What is that, might I ask?” 83

“Whipped cream,” said Mona. “Won’t you have some?”

“Well, I will,—as you took some. But if that ain’t the greatest! Now, just let me tell you. A friend of mine,—she has seen some high society,—she was telling me a little how to behave. And she told me of a country person she knew, who had some soup in a cup once. And he thought it was tea, and he ca’mly puts in milk and sugar! Well, he was just kerflum-mixed, that poor man, when he found it was soup! So, my friend says, says she: ‘Now, Almira, whatever you do, *don’t* put milk in your soup!’ And, I declare to goodness, here you’re doin’ just that very thing!”

“Well, we won’t put any sugar in,” said Mona, pleasantly; “but I think the cream improves it. You like it, don’t you, Jenny?”

“Heavenly!” said Jenny, rolling her eyes up with such a comically blissful expression that Elise nearly choked.

As Patty had agreed, the luncheon was good and substantial, rather than elaborate. The broiled chicken, dainty vegetables, and pretty salad all met the guests’ hearty approval and appreciation; and when the ice cream was served, Mrs. Greene discovered she had both a fork and a spoon at her disposal. 84

“Well, I never!” she observed. “Ain’t that handy, now? I s’pose you take whichever one you like.”

“Yes,” said Mona. “You see, there is strawberry sauce for the ice cream, and that makes it seem more like a pudding.”

“So it does, so it does,” agreed Mrs. Greene, “though, land knows, it ain’t much like the puddin’s I’m accustomed to. Cottage, rice, and bread is about the variety we get, in the puddin’ line. Not but what I’m mighty grateful to get those.”

“I like chocolate pudding,” said Jenny, in a low voice, and apparently with great effort. Patty knew she made the remark because she thought it her duty to join in the conversation; and she felt such heroism deserved recognition.

“So do I,” she said, smiling kindly at Jenny. “In fact, I like anything with chocolate in it.”

“So do I,” returned Jenny, a little bolder under this expressed sympathy of tastes. “Once I had a whole box of chocolate candies,—a pound box it was. I’ve got the box yet. I’m awful careful of the lace paper.”

“I often get boxes of candy,” said Celeste, unable to repress this bit of vanity. “My customers give them to me.” 85

“My,” said Jenny, “that must be fine. Is it grand to be a manicure?”

“I like it,” said Celeste, “because it takes me among nice people. They’re mostly good to me.”

“My ladies are nice to me, too,” observed Anna. “I only sew in nice houses. But I don’t see the ladies much. It’s different with you, Miss Arleson.”

“Well, I don’t see nice ladies,” broke in Jenny. “My, how those queens of society can snap at you! Seems ’if they blame me for everything: the stock, the price, the slow cash boys,—whatever bothers ’em, it’s all my fault.”

“That is unkind,” said Clementine. “But shopping does make some people cross.”

“Indeed it does!” returned Jenny. “But I’m going to forget it just for to-day. When I sit here and see these things, all so beautiful and sparkly and bright, I pretend there isn’t any shop or shopping in all the world.”

Jenny’s smile was almost roguish, and lighted up her pale face till she looked almost pretty.

Then they had coffee, and snapping crackers with caps inside, and they put on the caps and laughed at each other’s grotesque appearance. 86

Mrs. Greene’s cap was a tri-corne, with a gay cockade, which gave her a militant air, quite in keeping with her strong face. Patty had a ruffled night-cap, which made her look grotesque, and Anna Gorman had a frilled sunbonnet.

Celeste had a Tam o’ Shanter, which just suited her piquant face, and Jenny had a Scotch cap, which became her well.

“Now,” said Mona, as she rose from the table, “I’m going to give you each a bunch of these carnations——”

“To take home?” broke in Jenny, unable to repress her eagerness.

“Yes; and I’ll have them put in boxes for you, along with your cards and souvenirs, which, of

course, you must take home also. And, if there's room, I'll put in some of these Christmas tree thingamajigs, and you can use them for something at Christmas time."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jenny; "maybe my two kid brothers won't just about go crazy over 'em! Says I to myself, just the other day, 'What's going in them kids' stockings is more'n I know; but something there must be.' And,—here you are!" 87

"Here you are!" said Mona, tucking an extra snapping cracker or two in Jenny's box.

"We plan to go for a motor ride, now," said Mona. "I wonder if you girls are dressed warmly enough."

All declared that they were, but Mona provided several extra cloaks and wraps, lest any one should take cold.

"We have two cars for our trip," she explained; "Miss Farrington's limousine and my own. Has any one any preference which way we shall go?"

"Well," said Mrs. Greene, "if you ask me, I'd like best to ride up Fifth Avenue. There ought to be some fine show of dress, a bright afternoon like this. And there ain't anything I admire like stylish clothes. That's a real handsome gown you got on, Miss Fairfield."

"Do you like it?" said Patty, smiling.

"Yes, I do. It's fashionable of cut, and yet it ain't drawed so tight as some. And a becomin' colour, too."

"It's a dandy," observed Jenny. "I see lots of good clothes on my customers, but they don't all have such taste as Miss Fairfield's. And all you other ladies here," she added, politely, glancing round. 88

"Now, are we all ready?" asked Mona, looking over the group. "Mrs. Greene, I fear you won't be warm enough, though your jacket *is* thick, isn't it? But I'm going to throw this boa round your neck, by way of precaution. Please wear it; I have another."

"My land! if this ain't luxuriant," and Mrs. Greene smoothed the neckpiece and muff that Mona put on her. "What is this fur, Miss Galbraith?"

"That is caracul. Do you like it?"

"Like it? Well, I think it's just too scrumptious for anything. I'll remember the feel of it for a year. And so genteel looking, too."

"Yes, it's a good fur," said Mona, carelessly throwing a sable scarf round her own throat. "Now, let us start."

Down went the eight in an elevator, and Mrs. Greene was overjoyed to find that she was attended with quite as much deference as Mona herself. Elise and Clementine took their guests in the Farrington car, leaving Patty and Mona, with their guests, for the Galbraith car.

Celeste Arleson enjoyed the ride, but she was not so openly enthusiastic as Mrs. Greene.

"My!" exclaimed that worthy, as she bobbed up and down on the springy cushions; "to think it's come at last! Why, I *never* expected to ride in one of these. I saved up once for a taxicab ride, but I had to use my savings for a case of grippe, so I never felt to try it again." 89

"Did you have grippe?" said Patty, sympathetically; "that was too bad."

"Well, no; it wasn't *my* grippe. Leastways, I didn't have it. It was a lady that lived in the same boardin' house, along with me. But she'd had misfortune, and lost her money, so I couldn't do no less than to help her. Poor thing! she was crossed in love and it made her queer. But that Rosy,—you know, that redhead boy, Miss Fairfield?"

"Yes, I do," returned Patty, smiling.

"Well, he says she was queered in love, and it made her cross! She works in our place, you know. Well, cross she is; and, my land! if she wasn't cross when she had the grippe! You know, it ain't soothin' on folks' nerves."

"No," said Patty; "so I've understood. Well, Mrs. Greene, now you can see plenty of fashionable costumes. Do you enjoy it?"

"My! I'm just drinkin' 'em in! Furs is worn a lot this year, ain't they? Well, I don't wonder. Why, I feel real regal in this fur of yours, Miss Galbraith. I don't know when I've had such a pleasure as the wearin' of this fur." 90

"Now, we'll go through the park and up Riverside Drive," said Mona, as they neared Eighty-sixth Street. It was pleasant in the Park, and the fine motors, with their smartly-apparelled occupants, delighted Mrs. Greene's very soul.

"Where would you like to go, Celeste?" asked Mona; "or do you like the Park and the River drive?"

"If I might, Miss Galbraith, I'd like to go to Grant's Tomb. I've always wanted to go there, but I never can get a spare hour,—or if I do, I'm too tired for the trip."

"Certainly, you shall. Would you like that, Mrs. Greene?"

"Oh, land, yes! I've never been there, either. Quite some few times I've thought to go, but something always interferes."

So to Grant's Tomb they went. The other car followed, and all went in to look at the impressive mausoleum.

"Makes you feel kind o' solemn," said Mrs. Greene, as they came out. "Think of lyin' there in that eternal rock, as you might say, and the whole nation comin' to weep over your bier."

"They don't all weep," observed Celeste.

"Well, in a manner o' speakin', they do," said Mrs. Greene, gently. "Not real tears, maybe; but, you know, to weep over a bier, is a figger of speech; and so far as its meanin' goes, Grant's got it. And, after all, it's the meanin' that counts."

It was nearing sundown as they started down the Drive, and Mona proposed that they go to a tea room, and then take their guests to their several homes.

"Oh, how pretty!" said Mrs. Greene, as they all went into the Marie Jeannette Tea Room.

The younger girls chose chocolate, but Mrs. Greene said, "Give me a cup of tea. There's nothing like it, to my mind. And to think of having tea in this beautiful place, all decked with posies. I'll just throw this fur a little open, but keep it over my shoulders. It looks so luxuriant that way."

Mona ordered dainty sandwiches and little fancy cakes—and after a pleasant half-hour they started homeward. They left Celeste at her home first, and then took Mrs. Greene to hers.

"I live way down on East Eleventh Street," she said, apologetically; "and I oughtn't to let you go clear down there with me. But,—oh, well, I might as well own up,—I'd just love to roll up to our door in this car!"

"And so you shall," said Mona, appreciating this bit of feminine vanity. "And, Mrs. Greene, if you'll accept them, I'd like to make you a present of those furs. I don't need them, for I have several other sets, and you're very welcome to them."

"My land!" said Mrs. Greene, and then could say no more, for her voice choked, and two tears rolled down her cheeks.

"And to think I thought you ladies were stuck up!" she said, in a voice of contrition. "Why, two angels straight from Heaven couldn't be more kind or whole-soulder than you two are. But, Miss Galbraith, I can't accept such a gift,—I—I ought not to."

Mrs. Greene was caressing the fur as she spoke, and Mona patted her hand, saying laughingly:

"I couldn't take it away from anybody who loves it as you do. Please keep it. I'm more glad to give it to you than you can possibly be to have it."

So Mrs. Greene kept the furs,—and her beaming face proved the depth of thankfulness which she tried, all inadequately, to express.

CHAPTER VI

CONFIDENCES

Mona went home with Patty to dinner, as she often did when the girls had been together during the afternoon.

At the dinner table the elder Fairfields were greatly entertained by the account of the first Happy Saturday Afternoon.

"But aren't you afraid," Mr. Fairfield asked, "that such unaccustomed luxuries will make those people discontented with their own conditions?"

"Now, father Fairfield," exclaimed Patty, "you ought to know better than that! you might as well say that a man in a prison ought never to see a ray of sunlight, because it would make him more discontented with his dark jail."

"That's true," agreed Nan; "I think it's lovely to give these people such a pleasure, and if I can help in any way, Patty, I'll be glad to."

"And then it's the memory of it," said Mona.

"You know yourself how pleasant it is to look back and remember any pleasure you may have had; and when it's only one, and such a big one, the pleasure of remembrance is even greater."

"That's good philosophy, Mona," said Mr. Fairfield, approvingly, "and I take back what I said. I think the plans you girls have made are excellent; and I, too, will be glad to help if I can."

"Other people have offered to help us," began Mona, but Patty interrupted her, saying: "We don't want any help from people individually. I mean, father, if you will lend us the car, and things like that, we'll be glad, of course. But we don't want any personal assistance in our plans."

“All right, chickadee; far be it from me to intrude. But I thought perhaps if you wanted to make a little excursion, say, to see the Statue of Liberty, or even to go to the circus, you might like a man along with you as a Courier General.”

“That’s just what Mr. Lansing said!” exclaimed Mona, which was the very remark Patty had been fearing.

“That’s just what we’re *not* going to do!” she declared. “We’re only going to places where we can go by ourselves, or if we need a chaperon, we’ll take Nan. But we don’t want any men in on this deal.” 96

“I don’t see why,” began Mona, but Patty promptly silenced her by saying, “You *do* see why. Now, Mona, don’t say anything more about it. There isn’t any circus now, and it’s time enough when it comes, to decide about going to it; and I don’t want to go, anyway. There are lots of things nicer than a circus.”

“Mr. Lansing said he’d send us a box for the Hippodrome, some Saturday afternoon,” said Mona, a little diffidently.

“That’s awfully kind of him,” said Nan. “I should think you girls would be delighted with that.”

“A box,” and Patty looked scornful. “Why, a box only holds six, so with us four, we could only invite two guests. I don’t think much of that scheme!”

“I’ll donate a box also,” said Mr. Fairfield. “You can get them adjoining, and with two of you girls in one and two in the other, you can invite eight guests.”

Patty hesitated. The plan sounded attractive, and she quickly thought that she could invite Rosy for one of the guests and give the boy a Happy Saturday Afternoon. But she didn’t want to accept anything from Mr. Lansing, though she couldn’t quite bring herself to say so, frankly. 97

“What’s the matter, Patty?” asked Nan. “You don’t like the idea of the Hippodrome, though I don’t see why.”

“I *do* like it,” said Patty, “but we can’t decide these things in a minute. We ought to have a meeting of the club and talk it over.”

“Nonsense,” said Mona. “You know very well, Patty, it isn’t a formal club. I’m going to accept these two Hippodrome boxes, and tell the girls that we can each invite two guests. The Hippodrome show is lovely this year, and anybody would like it, whether children or grown-ups. And we’re much obliged to you, Mr. Fairfield.”

“You’re taking a great deal upon yourself, Mona,” said Patty. “You’re not president of the club.”

“Neither are you.”

“Well, *I’m* not dictating how things shall be run.”

“Well, I *am*! So all you’ll have to do, is to run along with me.” 98

Mona was so laughingly good-natured that Patty’s serious face broke into a smile, too. She was annoyed at the idea of being under obligation to Mr. Lansing, but, after all, it was hardly fair to stand in the way of eight people’s pleasure. So she surrendered gracefully.

“All right, Mona,” she said; “we’ll have the Hippodrome party. I know one guest I shall invite, who’s sure to enjoy it. He’s a boy about fourteen, and the funniest thing you ever saw.”

“I’d like to take children, too,” said Mona; “but I don’t know many. I think I’ll ask Celeste’s two little sisters.”

It was characteristic of Patty not to dwell on anything unpleasant, so having made up her mind to accept Mr. Lansing’s favour, she entered heartily into the plan for the next party.

But after dinner, when the girls were alone in Patty’s boudoir, she said to Mona, seriously, “You know I didn’t want to take that box from Mr. Lansing.”

“Of course I know it, Patty,” and Mona smiled, complacently. “But I made you do it, didn’t I? I knew I should in the end, but your father helped me unexpectedly, by offering a second box. Now, Pattikins, you may as well stop disliking Mr. Lansing. He’s my friend, and he’s going to stay my friend. He may have some faults, but everybody has.” 99

“But, Mona, he isn’t our sort at all. I don’t see *why* you like him.”

“He mayn’t be your sort, but he’s mine; and I like him because I like him! That’s the only reason that anybody likes anybody. You think nobody’s any good unless they have all sorts of aristocratic ancestry! Like that Van Reypen man who’s always dangling after you.”

“He isn’t dangling now,” said Patty. “I haven’t seen him since my party.”

“You haven’t! Is he mad at you?”

“Yes; he and Roger are both mad at me; and all on account of your old Mr. Lansing!”

“Yes, Roger’s mad at me, too, on account of that same poor, misunderstood young gentleman. But they’ll get over it. Don’t worry, Patty.”

“Mona, I’d like to shake you! I might just as well reason with the Rock of Gibraltar as to try to influence *you*. Don’t you know that your father asked me to try to persuade you to drop that Lansing man?”

Patty had not intended to divulge this confidence of Mr. Galbraith, but she was at her wit’s end 100

to find some argument that would carry any weight with her headstrong friend.

“Oh, daddy!” said Mona, carelessly. “He talks to me by the hour, and I just laugh at him and drum tunes on his dear old bald head. He hasn’t anything, really, against Mr. Lansing, you know; it’s nothing but prejudice.”

“A very well-founded prejudice, then! Why, Mona, that man isn’t fit to—to——”

“To worship the ground I walk on,” suggested Mona, calmly. “Well, he does, Patty, so you may as well stop interfering.”

“Oh, if you look upon it as interfering!”

“Well, I don’t know what you call it, if not that. But I don’t mind. Go ahead, if it amuses you. But I’m sorry if my affairs make trouble between you and your friends. However, I don’t believe Mr. Van Reypen will stay angry at you very long. And as for Roger,—well, I wouldn’t worry about him. Of course, you’re going to Elise’s dance on Tuesday night?”

“Yes, of course. And I’ve no doubt I’ll make up with Roger, then; but I don’t know about Philip. I doubt if he’ll be there.”

“I haven’t the least doubt. Where you are, there will Mr. Van Reypen be, also,—if he can possibly get an invitation.” 101

Mona was right in her opinion. At Elise’s dance on Tuesday night, almost the first man Patty saw, as she entered the drawing-room, was Philip Van Reypen. He greeted her pleasantly, but with a certain reserve quite different from his usual eager cordiality.

“May I have a dance, Miss Fairfield?” he said, holding out his hand for her card.

Quick-witted Patty chose just the tone that she knew would irritate him. “Certainly, Mr. Van Reypen,” she said, carelessly, and as she handed him her card, she turned to smile at another man who was just coming to speak to her. When Philip handed back her card, she took it without looking at it, or at him, and handed it to Mr. Drayton, seemingly greatly interested in what dances he might select.

Van Reypen looked at her a moment in amazement. He had intended to be cool toward her, but the tables were turned, and she was decidedly cool toward him.

However, his look of surprise was not lost upon Miss Patricia Fairfield, who saw him out of the corner of her eye, even though she was apparently engrossed with Mr. Drayton. 102

And then, as usual, Patty was besieged by several men at once, all begging for dances, and her card was quickly filled.

“What *can* I do with so many suitors?” she cried, raising her hands in pretty bewilderment, as her card was passed from one to another. “Don’t take all the dances, please; I want to save some for my special favourites.”

“Meaning me?” said Kenneth Harper, who had just joined the group in time to hear Patty’s remark.

“You, for one,” said Patty, smiling on him, “but there are seventeen others.”

“I’m two or three of the seventeen,” said Roger, gaining possession of the card. “May I have three, Patty?”

One look flashed from Roger’s dark eyes to Patty’s blue ones, and in that glance their foolish little quarrel was forgiven and forgotten.

Roger had a big, generous nature, and so had Patty, and with a smile they were good friends again.

Patty’s mind worked quickly. She had no intention of giving Roger three dances, but she saw that he and Mona were not yet on speaking terms. So she nodded assent, as he scribbled his initials in three places, thinking to herself that before the evening was over, two of them should be transferred to Mona’s card. 103

Patty was looking lovely in pale blue chiffon with tiny French rosebuds of pink satin adorning it here and there. Her golden hair was clustered in becoming puffs and curls, tucked into a little net of gold mesh, with coquettish bunches of rosebuds above each ear.

But, though Patty was pretty and wore lovely clothes, her chief charm was her happy, smiling face and her gay, good-natured friendliness. She smiled on everybody, not with a set smile of society, but in a frank, happy enjoyment of the good time she was having, and appreciation of the good time that everybody else helped her to have.

“You are all so kind to me,” she was saying to Robert Kenton, who had just come in; “and I want to thank you, Mr. Kenton, for the beautiful flowers you sent. I do love valley lilies, they’re so—so ——”

“They’re so sentimental,” suggested Rob Kenton, smiling.

“Well, yes,—if you mean them to be,” said Patty, dimpling at him. “Any flower is sentimental, if the sender means it so.” 104

“Or if the receiver wants it to be. Did you?” and Kenton smiled back at her.

“Oh, yes, of *course* I do!” And Patty put on an exaggeratedly soulful look. “I’m *that* sentimental you wouldn’t believe! But I forget the language of flowers. What do lilies of the valley mean,—

especially with orchids in the middle of the bunch?”

“Undying affection,” responded Kenton, promptly. “Do you accept it?”

“I’d be glad to, but I suppose that means it lasts for ever and ever,—so you needn’t ever send me any more flowers!”

“Oh, it isn’t as undying as all that! It needs to be revived sometimes with fresh flowers.”

“It’s a little too complicated for me to think it out now,” and Patty smiled at him, roguishly. “Besides, here are more suitors approaching; so if you’ll please give me back my card, Mr. Kenton,—though I don’t believe there’s room for another one.”

“Not one?” said the man who took it, disappointedly; for sure enough, every space was filled. “But there’ll be an extra or two. May I have one of those?”

“Oh, I never arrange those in advance,” said Patty. “My partners take their chances on those. But I’ll give you half of this dance,” and she calmly cut in two the one dance against which Philip Van Reypen had set his aristocratic initials.

Then the dancing began, and what with the fine music, the perfect floor, and usually good partners, Patty enjoyed herself thoroughly. She loved dancing, and being accomplished in all sorts of fancy dances, could learn any new or intricate steps in a moment.

After a few dances she found herself whirling about the room with Roger, and she determined to carry out her plan of reconciling him and Mona. Mr. Lansing was not at the dance, for Elise had positively declined to invite him; and so, though Mona was there, she was rather cool to Elise, and favoured Roger only with a distant bow as a greeting.

“You and Mona are acting like two silly idiots,” was Patty’s somewhat definite manner of beginning her conversation.

“You think so?” said Roger, as he guided her skilfully round another couple who were madly dashing toward them.

“Yes, I do. And, Roger, I want you to take my advice and make up with her.”

“I’ve nothing to make up.”

“Yes, you have, too. You and Mona are good friends, or have been, and there’s no reason why you should act as you do.”

“There’s a very good reason; and he has most objectionable manners,” declared Roger, looking sulky.

“I don’t like his manners, either; but I tell you honestly, Roger, you’re going about it the wrong way. I know Mona awfully well,—better than you do. And she’s proud-spirited, and even a little contrary, and if you act as you do toward her, you simply throw her into the arms of that objectionable-mannered man!”

“Good Heavens, Patty, what a speech!”

“Well, of course, I don’t mean literally, but if you won’t speak to her at all, on account of Mr. Lansing, why of course she’s going to feel just piqued enough to smile on him all the more. Can’t you understand that?”

“Let her!” growled Roger.

“No, we won’t let her,—any such thing! I don’t like that man a bit better than you do, but do you suppose I’m going to show it by being unkind and mean to Mona? That’s not tactful.”

“I don’t want to be tactful. I want him to let her alone.”

“Well, you can’t make him do that, unless you shoot him; and that means a lot of bother all round.”

“It might be worth the bother.”

“Don’t talk nonsense, I’m in earnest. You’re seriously fond of Mona, aren’t you, Roger?”

“Yes, I am; or rather, I was until that cad came between us.”

“He isn’t exactly a cad,” said Patty, judicially. “I do believe in being fair, and while the man hasn’t all the culture in the world, he is kind-hearted and——”

“And awfully good to his mother, let us hope,” and Roger smiled, a little sourly. “Now, Patty girl, you’d better keep your pretty little fingers out of this pie. It isn’t like you to interfere in other people’s affairs, and I’d rather you wouldn’t.”

“Oh, fiddle-de-fudge, Roger! I’m not interfering, and it *is* my affair. Mona is my affair, and so are you; and now your Aunt Patty is going to bring about a reconciliation.”

“Not on my part,” declared Roger, stoutly;

CHAPTER VII

After the sixth dance was over, Patty asked her partner to bring Mr. Everson to her, and then she awaited his coming on a little sofa in an alcove.

If Eugene Everson was surprised at the summons, he did not show it, but advanced courteously, and took a seat by Patty's side. He had a dance engaged with her much later in the evening, so Patty said, pleasantly:

"Mr. Everson, don't think my request strange, but won't you exchange our later dance for this number seven?"

"I would gladly, Miss Fairfield, but I'm engaged for this."

"Yes, I know," and Patty favoured him with one of her most bewitching smiles; "but the lady is Miss Galbraith, as I happen to know, and Miss Galbraith is a very dear friend of mine, and,—oh, well, it's a matter of 'first aid to the injured.' I don't want to tell you all about it, Mr. Everson, 109
but the truth is, I want Miss Galbraith to dance this number with another man,—because,—because——"

It was not quite so easy as Patty had anticipated. She didn't want to go so far as to explain the real situation, and she became suddenly aware that she was somewhat embarrassed. Her face flushed rosy pink, and she cast an appealing glance from her violet-blue eyes into the amused face of the man beside her.

"I haven't an idea of what it is all about, Miss Fairfield, but please consider me entirely at the orders of yourself and Miss Galbraith. A man at a party is at best but a puppet to dance at the bidding of any fair lady. And what better fortune could I ask than to be allowed to obey your decree?"

Patty was greatly relieved when he took the matter thus lightly. In whimsical conversation she was on her own ground, and she responded gaily: "Let it remain a mystery, then; and obey as a noble knight a lady's decree. Dance with me, and trust it to me that Miss Galbraith is also obeying a decree of mine."

"For a small person, you seem to issue decrees of surprising number and rapidity," and Everson, 110
who was a large man, looked down at Patty with an air of amusement.

"Yes, sir," said Patty, demurely, "I'm accustomed to it. Decrees are my strong point. I issue them 'most all the time."

"And are they always obeyed?"

"Alas, noble sir, not always. Though I'm not sure that your question is as flattering as the remarks most young men make to me."

"Perhaps not. But when you know me better, Miss Fairfield, you'll find out that I'm very different from the common herd."

"Really? How interesting! I hope I shall know you better very soon, for I adore unusual people."

"And do unusual people adore you?"

"I can't tell; I've never met one before," and after the briefest of saucy glances, Patty dropped her eyes demurely.

"Aren't you one yourself?"

"Oh, no!" And Patty looked up with an air of greatest surprise; "I'm just a plain little every-day girl."

"You're a plain little coquette, that's what you are!"

"You are indeed unusual, sir, to call me plain!" and Patty looked about as indignant as an angry 111
kitten.

"Perhaps, when I know you better, I may change my opinion of your plainness. Will you dance now?"

The music had been playing for some moments, and signifying her assent, Patty rose, and they joined the dancers who were circling the floor. Mr. Everson was a fine dancer, but he was all unprepared for Patty's exquisite perfection in the art.

"Why, Miss Fairfield," he said, unable to suppress his admiration, "I didn't know anybody danced like you, except professionals."

"Oh, yes, I'm a good dancer," said Patty, carelessly; "and so are you, for that matter. Do you think they've made up?"

"Who?"

"Miss Galbraith and Mr. Farrington. See, we're just passing them. Oh, I'm afraid they haven't!"

It was difficult to judge by the glance they obtained in passing, but Patty declared that both Mona's and Roger's faces looked like thunder clouds.

"Give them a little longer," said Mr. Everson, who began to see how matters stood. 112

"Perhaps another round, and we will find them smiling into each other's eyes."

But when they next circled the long room, Mona and Roger were nowhere to be seen.

“Aha,” said Everson, “the conservatory for theirs! It must be all right! Shall we trail ’em?”

“Yes,” said Patty. “I don’t care if they see us. Let’s walk through the conservatory.”

They did so, and spied Mona and Roger sitting under a group of palms, engaged in earnest conversation. They were not smiling, but they were talking very seriously, with no indication of quarrelling.

“I guess it’s all right,” said Patty, with a little sigh. “It’s awfully nice to have friends, Mr. Everson, but sometimes they’re a great care; aren’t they?”

“If you’ll let me be your friend, Miss Fairfield, I’ll promise never to be a care, and I’ll help you to care for your other cares.”

“Goodness, what a complicated offer! If I could straighten all those cares you speak of, I might decide to take you as a friend. I think I will, anyway,—you were so nice about giving me this dance.” 113

“I was only too delighted to do so, Miss Fairfield.”

“Thank you. You know it is in place of our other one, number sixteen.”

“Oh, we must have that also.”

“No, it was a fair exchange. You can get another partner for sixteen.”

“But I don’t want to. If you throw me over, I shall sit in a corner and mope.”

“Oh, don’t do that! Well, I’ll tell you what, I’ll give you half of sixteen, and you can mope the other half.”

And then Patty’s next partner claimed her, and Mr. Everson went away.

Having done all she could in the matter of conciliating Mona and Roger, Patty bethought herself of her own little tiff with Philip Van Reypen. It did not bother her much, for she had little doubt that she could soon cajole him back to friendship, and she assured herself that if she couldn’t, she didn’t care.

And so, when he came to claim his dance, which was the last before supper, Patty met him with an air of cool politeness, which greatly irritated the Van Reypen pride.

He had thought, had even hoped, Patty would be humble and repentant, but she showed no such attitude, and the young man was slightly at a loss as to what manner to assume, himself. 114

But he followed her lead, and with punctilious courtesy asked her to dance, and they stepped out on to the floor.

For a few rounds they danced in silence, and then Philip said, in a perfunctory way: “You’re enjoying this party?”

“I have been, up to this dance,” and Patty smiled pleasantly, as she spoke.

“And you’re not enjoying yourself now?” Philip said, suppressing his desire to shake her.

“Oh, *no*, sir!” and Patty looked at him with big, round eyes.

“Why not?”

“I don’t like to dance with a man who doesn’t like me.”

“I *do* like you, you silly child.”

“Oh, no, you don’t, either! and I’m *not* a silly child.”

“And you’re not enjoying this dance with me?”

“Not a bit!”

“Then there’s no use going on with it,” and releasing her, Philip tucked one of her hands through his arm, and calmly marched her into the conservatory. The seat under the palms was vacant, and as she took her place in one corner of it, he poked one or two cushions deftly behind her back and made her entirely comfortable. Then he sat down beside her. 115

“Now,” he commanded, “say you’re sorry.”

“Sorry for what?”

“That you carried on with that horrid man and spoiled our friendship.”

“Didn’t carry on, and he isn’t a horrid man, and our friendship isn’t spoiled, and I’m not sorry.”

“Not sorry that our friendship isn’t spoiled?”

“No; ’course I’m not! You don’t s’pose I want it to be spoiled, do you?”

“Well, you certainly did all in your power to spoil it.”

“Now, look here, Philip Van Reypen, I’ve already exhausted myself this evening patching up one spoiled friendship, and it’s just about worn me out! Now if ours needs any patching up, you’ll have to do it yourself. I shan’t raise a finger toward it!”

Patty leaned back among her pillows, looking lovely and provoking. She tried to scowl at him, but her dimples broke through the scowl and turned it into a smile. Whereupon, she dropped her eyes, and tried to assume a look of bored indifference. 116

Van Reypen looked at her. “So she won’t raise a finger, won’t she? And I’ve got to do it myself, have I? Well, then, I suppose I’ll have to raise her finger for her.” Patty’s hand was lying idly in her lap, and he picked up her slender pink forefinger slowly, and with an abstracted air. “I don’t know how raising a finger helps to patch up a spoiled friendship,” he went on, as if to himself, “but she seems to think it does, and so, of course, it does! Well, now, mademoiselle, your finger is raised,—is our quarrel all patched up?”

Philip held her finger in one hand, and clasped her whole hand with the other, as he smiled into her eyes, awaiting an answer to his question.

Patty looked up suddenly, and quickly drew her hand away.

“Unhand me, villain!” she laughed, “and don’t bother about our friendship! I’m not worrying over it.”

“You needn’t, little girl,” and Philip’s voice rang true. “Nothing can *ever* shake it! And I apologise for my foolish anger. If you want to affect the society of men I don’t like,—of course I’ve no right to say a word, and I won’t. At any rate, not now, for I don’t want to spoil this blessed making-up with even a thought of anything unpleasant.” 117

“Now, that’s real nice of you, Philip,” and Patty fairly beamed at him. “It’s so nice to be friends again, after being near-not-friends!”

“Yes, milady, and you made up just in time. Aunty Van is having an opera party to-morrow night, and she wants you to go.”

“Are you going?” and Patty put her fingertip in her mouth, and looked babyishly at him.

“Oh, don’t let that influence you. Decide for yourself.”

“Well, since *you* don’t care whether I go or not, I believe I won’t go.”

“Foolish child! Of course you’ll go. And then, as you know very well, wild horses couldn’t keep me away.”

“How do wild horses keep people away? They must be trained to do it. And *then*, they’re not wild horses any more.”

“What foolishness you do talk! Well, will you go to the opera with us?”

“Yes, and thank you kindly, sir. Or, rather, I thank your august aunt for the invitation.” 118

“No, thank me. As a matter of fact, I made up the party. So it’s really mine, though I accept Aunty Van’s box for the occasion.”

“’Tis well, fair sir. I thank thee greatly. What may I do for thee in return?”

Patty clasped her hands and looked a pretty suppliant, begging a favour.

“Give me half a dozen more dances,” replied Philip, taking her card to look at.

“Not one left,” said Patty, calmly.

“And most of them halves!” exclaimed Philip. “What a belle you are, Patty!”

“All the girls are,” she returned, carelessly, which, however, was not quite true. “But I’ll tell you what I will do. I’ll give you half of number sixteen. That’s Mr. Everson’s, but I’ll divide it. I told him I should.”

“You little witch! Did you save it for me?”

“M—m——,” and Patty slowly wagged her head up and down.

“That was dear of you! But don’t you think for a minute that’s all I’m going to have! There’ll be an extra or two, and I claim them all!”

“Hear the man talk!” exclaimed Patty. “Why, I do believe they’re beginning an extra now! Mr. Van Reypen, won’t you dance it with me?” Patty jumped up and stood before him, lightly swaying in time to the music. 119

Philip sat looking at her, entranced by the pretty vision; and even before he could rise, Kenneth Harper came to Patty, and obeying a sudden coquettish impulse, she put her hand lightly on Kenneth’s shoulder and they danced away.

Philip Van Reypen sat looking after them, smiling.

“What a transparent child she is,” he thought to himself. “Her pretty little coquetries are like the gambols of a kitten. Now, she thinks I’m going to be annoyed at losing this dance with her. Well,—I am,—but I don’t propose to quarrel with her about it.”

And then Patty and Kenneth came dancing back again; and Patty calmly told Mr. Van Reypen it was his turn now.

Philip took her hand and they started off, and when that dance was finished it was supper-time.

As usual, Patty and her most especial friends grouped in some pleasant corner for supper. But, looking about, she missed a familiar face.

“Where is Christine Farley?” she said. “She always has supper with us. Do you know where she is, Mr. Hepworth?” 120

Gilbert Hepworth drew near Patty, and spoke in a low voice: “I think she has gone to the dressing-room,” he said. “I wish you’d go up and see her, Patty.”

A little startled at his serious face, Patty ran upstairs, to Elise's room, where she had taken off her wraps.

There was Christine, who had thrown herself on a couch, and buried her face in the pillows.

"Why, Christine, what is the matter, dear?" and Patty laid her hand gently on Christine's hair.

"Oh, Patty, don't speak to me! I am not fit to have you touch me!"

"Good gracious, Christine, what *do* you mean?" and Patty began to think her friend had suddenly lost her mind.

"I'm a bad, wicked girl! You were my friend, and now I've done an awful, dreadful thing! But, truly, *truly*, Patty, I didn't mean to!"

"Christine Farley, stop this foolishness! Sit up here this minute, and tell me what you're talking about! I believe you're crazy."

Christine sat up, her pale hair falling from its bands, and her eyes full of tears.

"I've—I've—stolen——" she began. 121

"Oh, you goose! *do* go on! What have you stolen? A pin from Elise's pin cushion,—or some powder from her puff-box? Another dab on your nose would greatly improve your appearance,—if you ask me! It's as red as a beet!"

"Patty, don't giggle! I'm serious. Oh, Patty, *Patty, do* forgive me!"

"I'll forgive you *anything*, if you'll tell me what's the matter, and convince me that you haven't lost your mind. Now, Christine, don't you *dare* ask me to forgive you again, until you tell me *what for*!"

"Well, you see, you were away all summer."

"Yes, so I was," agreed Patty, in bewilderment.

"And you have been so busy socially this fall and winter, I haven't seen much of you."

"No," agreed Patty, still more deeply mystified.

"And—and—Gil—Mr. Hepworth hasn't either——"

"Oh!" cried Patty, a great light breaking in upon her; "oh,—oh!—OH!! Christine, do you *mean* it? Oh, how perfectly *lovely*! I'm *so* glad!" 122

"You're glad?" and Christine opened her eyes in amazement.

"Why, of *course* I'm glad, you silly! Did you think *I* wanted him? Oh, you Blessed Goose!"

"Oh, Patty, I'm *so* relieved. You see, I thought you looked upon him as your especial property. I know he cared a lot for you,—he still does. But——"

"But he and I are about as well suited as chalk and cheese! Whereas, he's just the one for you! Oh, Christine, darling, I'm delighted! May I tell? Can we announce it to-night?"

"Oh, no! You see, he just told me to-night. And I felt guilty at once. I knew I had stolen him from you."

"Oh, Christine, *don't*! Don't say such things! He wasn't mine to steal. We've always been friends, but I never cared for him *that* way."

"That's what he said; but I felt guilty all the same."

"Well, stop it, right now! Mr. Hepworth is lovely; he's one of the best friends I ever had, and if I have any claim on his interest or affection, I'm only too glad to hand it over to you. Now, brace up, powder your nose, and come down to supper. And you needn't think you can keep this thing 123 secret! I won't tell,—but your two faces will give it away at once. Don't blame *me* if people guess it!"

"Don't let them, Patty; not to-night. Keep me by you, and right after supper I'll go home."

"All right, girlie; just as you like. But don't look at G. H. or you'll betray your own dear little heart."

However, they reckoned without the other interested party.

When the two girls came downstairs, smiling, and with their arms about each other, Mr. Hepworth went to meet them, and drew Christine's arm through his own with an unmistakable air of proprietorship. Christine's blushes, and Patty's smiles, confirmed Hepworth's attitude, and a shout of understanding went up from their group of intimates.

"Yes, it's so," said Patty; "but I promised Christine I wouldn't tell!"

And then there were congratulations and good wishes from everybody, and the pretty little Southern girl was quite overcome at being so suddenly the centre of attraction.

"It's perfectly lovely," said Patty, holding out her hand to Hepworth, "and I'm as glad for you as 124 I can be,—and for Christine, too."

"Thank you, Patty," he returned, and for a moment he held her eyes with his own. Then he said, "Thank you," again, and turned away.

CHAPTER VIII

A DELIGHTFUL INVITATION

Patty was singing softly to herself, as she fluttered around her boudoir at a rather late hour the next morning. Robed in a soft blue silk négligée, with her golden curls tucked into a little lace breakfast cap, she now paused to take a sip of chocolate or a bit of a roll from her breakfast tray, then danced over to the window to look out, or back to her desk to look up her calendar of engagements for the day.

"What a flutter-budget you are, Patty," said Nan, appearing at the doorway, and pausing to watch Patty's erratic movements.

Patty flew across the room and greeted her stepmother with an affectionate squeeze, and then flew back and dropped comfortably on the couch, tucking one foot under her, and thereby dropping off a little blue silk boudoir slipper as she did so.

"Oh, Nan!" she began, "it was the most exciting party ever! What *do* you think? Christine and Mr. Hepworth are engaged!"

"Christine! and Gilbert Hepworth!" and Nan was quite as surprised at the news as Patty could desire.

"Yes, isn't it great! and oh, Nan, what *do* you think? Christine was all broken up,—crying in fact,—because,—did you ever know anything so ridiculous?—because she thought she was taking him away from me!"

Nan looked at Patty a little curiously. "Well; you must know, Patty, he certainly thought a great deal of you."

"Of course he did! And of course he *does!*—You speak as if he were dead!—and I think a great deal of him, and I think a heap of Christine, and I think they are perfectly suited to each other, and I think it's all just lovely! Don't you?"

"Yes," said Nan, slowly. "Then, you didn't care for him especially, Patty?"

"Good gracious, Nan, if you mean was I in love with him, I sure was *not!* Little girls like me don't fall in love with elderly gentlemen; and this particular little girl isn't falling in love anyway. Why, Nan, I'm only just out, and I do perfectly adore being out! I want three or four years of good, solid outness before I even think of falling in love with anybody. Of course I shall marry eventually, and be a beautiful, lovely housekeeper, just exactly like you. But, if you remember, my lady, you were some few years older than nineteen when you married my revered father."

"That's true enough, Patty, and I can tell you I'm glad I didn't accept any of the young men who asked me before Fred did."

"I'm jolly glad, too; and father was in luck when he got you. But you're not going to be rid of me yet for a long time, I can tell you that much. Well, more things happened last night. Philip and I made up our quarrel,—which wasn't much of a quarrel anyway,—and Roger and Mona are pretty much at peace again; though, if Mona keeps on with that Lansing idiot, Roger won't stand it much longer. And I'm going to the opera to-night in the Van Reypen box, and I'm going skating to-morrow,—oh, there's the mail!"

Patty jumped up and ran to take the letters from Jane, who brought in a trayful.

"Quite a bunch for you, Nansome," and Patty tossed a lot of letters in Nan's lap. "And a whole lot of beautiful, fat envelopes for me. 'Most all invitations, as you can see at a glance. Two or three requests for charity,—they show on the outside, too. A few bills, a few circulars and advertisements, and all the rest invitations. Isn't it gorgeous, Nan, to be invited to such heaps of things?"

"Don't wear yourself out, Patty," returned Nan, a little absent-mindedly, being absorbed in a letter from her mother.

Having weeded out the more interesting looking letters, Patty returned to her sofa, and curled up there with both feet under her, looking like a very pretty and very civilised little Turk. With a slender paper cutter she slashed all the envelopes, and then went through them one by one, making running comments of delight or indifference as she read the various contents.

But suddenly a more excited exclamation broke from her. "Oh, my goodness, gracious, sakes alive!" she cried. "Nan, *will* you listen to this!"

"Wait a minute, honey, till I finish this letter," and Nan went on reading to herself.

Patty dashed through eight pages of sprawly penmanship, and as soon as she finished she read it all over again.

"Now, Miss Fairfield, what's it all about?" and Nan folded her own letter and returned it to its envelope.

“Well, in a nutshell, it’s a Christmas Country House Party! Could anything be more delightfuller?”

“Who, where, what, when?” And Nan patiently awaited further enlightenment.

“Oh, Nan, it’s *too* gorgeous!” And Patty’s eyes ran through the letter again. “You know Adèle Kenerley, who was down at Mona’s last summer,—well, she and Jim have bought a place at Fern Falls,—wherever that may be,—somewhere up in Connecticut,—in the Berkshires, you know. Heavenly in summer, dunno what it’ll be in winter. But all the same that’s where the house party is, Christmas,—stay two or three weeks,—all our crowd,—oh, Nan! isn’t it beatific!”

Patty bounded to her feet, and gathering up the sides of her accordion-pleated gown, she executed a triumphant dance about the room, winding up by kicking her little blue silk slipper straight over Nan’s head.

“Moderate your transports, my love,” Nan said, calmly. “I don’t want concussion of the brain, from being hit by a French heel.” 130

“Not much of a compliment to my skilful ballet dancing,” and Patty flung herself into the cushions again. “But, Nan, you don’t understand; everybody’s going! Elise and Mona and the boys, and oh, gracious, *do* show some enthusiasm!”

“Don’t have to,” said Nan, smiling, “when you show enough for a dozen.”

“Well, I’ll call up Mona, she’ll have something to say.”

Patty reached for the telephone, and in a few moments both girls were talking at once, and the conversation ran something like this:

“Yes, I did, and, Patty——”

“Of course I am! Oh, I don’t know about that! If I——”

“But of course if Daisy is there——”

“Well, we can’t help that, and anyway——”

“Tuesday, I suppose; but Adèle said——”

“No, Monday, Mona, for us, and the boys——”

“I’m not sure that I’ll go. You see——”

“Now, stop such nonsense! Of course he isn’t invited, but I’ll never speak to you again if——”

“Oh, of course I will, but I’ll only stay——” 131

“Yes, all our best frocks, and lots of presents and, oh, Mona, come on over here, do. There’s oceans of things to talk about!”

“All right, I will. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye.” And Patty hung up the receiver. “She’s coming over here, Nan; there’s so much to plan for, you know. Do help me, won’t you? A regular Christmas tree, and all that, you know; and presents for everybody, and a dance at the country club, and I don’t know what all.”

“Yes, you will have a lovely time.” And Nan smiled with sympathy at the excited girl, whose sparkling eyes and tumbled hair betokened her state of mind.

Mona came over and spent the rest of the day, and plans were made and unmade and remade with startling rapidity.

Mona began to voice regrets that Mr. Lansing was not invited to the house party, but Patty interrupted at once:

“Now, Mona Galbraith, you stop that! Adèle has a lovely party made up, and you’re not going to spoil it by even so much as a reference to that man! Roger will be there for Christmas, and if that isn’t enough for you, you can stay home!” 132

“Isn’t Elise going?”

“No, she can’t. She’s going South next week with her mother, and I doubt if Philip Van Reypen will go. His aunt won’t want him to leave her at the holidays. Do you know, I’m a little sorry Daisy Dow is up there.”

“You don’t like her, do you, Patty?”

“I would, if she’d like me. But she’s always snippy to me.”

“’Cause she’s jealous of you,” observed Mona, sapiently.

“Nonsense! She has no reason to be. I never interfere with her.”

“Well, never mind, don’t let her bother you. Hal Ferris will be there. You don’t know him, do you? He’s Adèle’s brother.”

“No, I never met him. She wrote that he’d be there.”

“He’s the dearest boy. Well, he’s older than Adèle, but he seems like a boy,—he’s so full of capers. Adèle says it’s a beautiful big house, just right for a jolly, old-fashioned Christmas party.”

The days simply flew by as Christmas drew nearer. There was so much to do socially, and then there were the Happy Saturday Afternoons to be planned and carried out, and the Christmas 133

shopping to be done.

This last was greatly added to because of the house party, for Patty knew the generosity of her hosts, and she wanted to do her share in the presentation festivities.

She undertook to dress a huge doll for baby May. Nan helped her with this or she never could have finished the elaborate wardrobe. She selected a beautiful doll, of goodly size, but not big enough to be cumbersome to little two-year-old arms. With her knack for dressmaking and her taste for colour, she made half a dozen dainty and beautiful frocks, and also little coats and hats, and all the various accessories of a doll's outfit.

She bought a doll's trunk and suit-case to contain these things, and added parasol, furs, jewelry, and all the marvellous little trinkets that the toy shop afforded.

"I spent so much time and thought on this doll," said Patty, one day, "that I shall have to buy things for the others. I can't sew any more, Nan; my fingers are all like nutmeg graters now."

"Poor child," sympathised Nan. "You have worked hard, I know, but Adèle will appreciate it more than if you had made something for herself. By all means buy the rest of your gifts." 134

So Patty bought a beautiful luncheon set of filet lace and embroidery for Mrs. Kenerley, and an Oriental antique paper cutter for her husband.

She bought a handsome opera bag for Mona and a similar one for Daisy Dow, that there might be no rivalry there. She bought a few handsome and worth-while books for the men who would be at the party, and attractive trinkets for the house servants.

Of course, in addition to these, she had to prepare a great many gifts for her New York friends, as well as for her own family and many of her relatives. But both Patty and Nan enjoyed shopping, and went about it with method and common sense.

"I can't see," said Patty, as they started off in the car one morning, "why people make such a bugbear of Christmas shopping. I think it's easy enough."

"Perhaps it's because you have plenty of money, Patty. You know, not every one has such a liberal father as you have." 135

Patty looked thoughtful. "I don't think it's that, Nan; at least, not entirely. I think it's more common sense, and not being fussy. Now, I give lots of presents that cost very little; and then, of course, I give a lot of expensive ones, too. But it's just as easy to buy the cheap ones, if not easier. You just make up your mind what you want to spend for a certain present, and then you buy the nicest thing you see for that amount. It's when people fuss and bother, and can't make up their minds among half a dozen different things, that they get worried and bothered about Christmas. I do believe most of their trouble comes from lack of decision, which is only another way of saying that they haven't common sense or even common gumption!"

"Well, Patty, whatever else you may lack, you certainly have common sense and gumption; I'll give you credit for them."

"Thank you, Nan; much obliged, I'm sure. I wish I could return the compliment, but sometimes I think you haven't much of those things yourself."

Nan flashed a smile at Patty, entirely unmoved by this criticism; for she knew that she was vacillating and sometimes undecided, as compared to Patty's quick-witted grasp of a subject and instantaneous decision. 136

"Have I told you," said Patty, "what we're going to do next Saturday afternoon? I do think it's going to be lovely. And I do hope it won't make the girls mad, but I don't think it will. You know, Nan, what an awful lot of things we all get every Christmas that we don't want and can't use, although they're awfully pretty and nice. We just lay them away in cupboards, and there they stay. Well, on Saturday, we're going to take a lot of these things and give them to people."

"For Christmas presents? Why, Christmas is two weeks off yet."

"That's just it! Not for presents to themselves, but presents for them to give to other people."

"Oh, I begin to see."

"Yes; it isn't the least bit *charity*, you see. Why, one of the people I'm going to give things to, is Christine. With her work, and being engaged and all, she hasn't any time to make things, or even to go shopping, and she can't afford to buy much, anyway. So I'm going to give her one or two beautiful silk bags that were given to me two or three years ago. They're perfectly fresh, never been out of their boxes. And I'm going to give her one or two beautiful, fine handkerchiefs in boxes, and two or three lovely books, and two or three pieces of bric-a-brac, and a Japanese ivory carving. Don't you see, Nan, she can give these to her friends for Christmas, and it will save her a lot of trouble and expense. And dear knows, *I* don't want them! My rooms are chock-a-block with just such things, now. And I know she won't feel offended, when I tell her about it straightforwardly." 137

"Of course she won't be offended with you, Patty; and I think the idea is lovely. I've a lot of things put away I'll give you. I never thought of such a thing before."

"The girls thought at first that maybe it might not work, but I talked them around and now they're all in for it. I'm going to take some things to Mrs. Greene. I've quite a lot for her, and I'll tell her she can give them all away, or keep some herself, just as she likes. And I've things for Rosy, that freckled-faced boy, you know. I have games and picture-puzzles and books that I used to have myself. Of course they're all perfectly new. I wouldn't give anything that had been used

at all. And we're going Saturday afternoon to take these things around. Mona has lovely things, and so has Elise. You see, we get so many Christmas and birthday presents, and card party prizes, and such things, and I do think it's sensible to make use of them for somebody's pleasure instead of sticking them away in dark cupboards. And, Nan, what do you think?—with each lot of things we're going to give a dozen sheets of white tissue paper and a bolt of holly ribbon and some little tags so they can fix up real Christmassy presents to give away."

"Patty, you're a wonder," said Nan, looking affectionately at the girl beside her. "How do you think of all these things?"

"Common sense and general gumption," returned Patty. "Very useful traits, *I* find 'em. And here we are at our first shopping place."

Assisted by Patty's common sense and expeditious judgment, they accomplished a great deal that morning, and returned home with their lists considerably shortened.

"It does seem funny," said Patty, that same afternoon, "to be tying up these things almost two weeks ahead of time. But with all the newspapers and magazines urging you to do your shopping early, and send off your parcels early, you can't really do otherwise."

Patty was surrounded by presents of all sorts, boxes of all sizes, pieces of ribbon, and all sorts of cards and tags.

"I'm sick and tired of holly ribbon and red ribbon," she said, as she deftly tied up her parcels. "So, this year, I'm using white satin ribbon and gilt cord. It's an awfully pretty combination, and these little green and gilt tags are lovely, don't you think?"

Her audience, which consisted of Elise and Mona, were watching her work with admiration. They had offered to help, but after an ineffectual attempt to meet Patty's idea of how a box should be tied up, they abandoned the effort, and sat watching her nimble fingers fly.

"You ought to get a position in some shop where they advertise, 'only experienced parcel wrappers need apply,'" said Elise. "I never saw such neat parcels."

"You're evidently going to be an old maid," said Mona, "you're so fussy and tidy."

"I do like things tidy," admitted Patty, "and if that interferes with my having a husband, why, of course I'll have to give him up. For I can't stand not having things neat about me."

"Do you call this room neat?" asked Elise, smiling as she looked about at the scattered boxes and papers, cut strings, and little piles of shredded tissue.

"Yes, I do," declared Patty, stoutly. "This kind of stuff can be picked up in a jiffy, and then the room is all in order. This is temporary, you see. By untidiness, I mean dirt and dust, and bureau drawers in a mess, and desks in disorder."

"That's me," confessed Mona, cheerfully. "Not the dirt and dust, perhaps,—the maids look after that. But I just *can't* keep my belongings in their places."

"Neither can I," said Elise. "I don't see how you do it, Patty."

"Oh, pshaw! it's no credit to me, I just can't help it. I'd have a fit if they weren't all nice and in order. And if that means I'm going to be an old maid, I can't help it,—and I don't care!"

"Hoo-hoo!" said Elise.

CHAPTER IX

FERN FALLS

Christmas would be on Wednesday, and it was arranged that Patty and Mona should go up to Fern Falls on Monday. Roger and Philip Van Reypen were to go up on Tuesday for the Christmas Eve celebration; and the rest of the house-party were already at the Kenerleys'.

The girls started off early in the afternoon, and a train ride of three hours brought them to the pretty little New England village of Fern Falls.

Jim Kenerley met them with a motor.

"We hoped for snow," he said, as he cordially greeted the befurred young women who stepped off the train at the little station. "So much more Christmassy, you know. But, at any rate, we have cold, clear weather, and that's something. Hop in, now. Adèle didn't come to meet you,—sent all kinds of excuses, which I've forgotten, but she can tell you herself, when we reach the house. Here, I'll sit between you, and keep you from shaking around and perhaps spilling out."

Cheery Jim Kenerley bustled them into the tonneau, looked after their luggage, and then, taking his own place, drew up the fur robes snugly, and the chauffeur started off. It was a four-mile spin to the house, for the village itself was distant from the station, and the Kenerleys' house a

mile or so beyond.

It was cold, but the girls were warmly wrapped up and didn't a bit mind the clear, frosty air, though in an open car. "Didn't bring the limousine," Mr. Kenerley rattled on. "Can't abide to be shut up in a stuffy glass house, and then, you know, people who ride in glass houses mustn't throw stones."

"But, you see, we girls couldn't hit anything if we did throw a stone," said Patty. "At least, women have that reputation."

"That's so," agreed Jim. "Can't even hit the side of a barn, so they say. But I expect you girls that grow up with athletics and basket ball, and such things, put the old proverbs to rout."

"How's Daisy?" asked Mona. "Same as ever?" 143

"Yep; same as ever. Daisy's all right, you know, if things go her way. But if not——"

"If not, she makes them go her way," said Mona, and Jim laughed and agreed, "She sure does!"

At last they reached the house, which Jim informed them they had dubbed the Kenerley Kennel, for no particular reason, except that it sounded well.

"But you have dogs?" asked Patty, as they rolled up the driveway.

"Yes, but we didn't exactly name it after them. Hello, here are the girls!"

Adèle and Daisy appeared in the doorway, and greeted the visitors in truly feminine fashion, which included much laughter and exclamation.

"Where do I come in?" said a laughing voice, and a big, laughing man left his seat by the fireplace and came toward them.

"This is my brother," said Adèle, "by name, Mr. Harold Ferris,—but commonly called Chub."

The name was not inapt, for Mr. Ferris showed a round, chubby face, with big, dancing black eyes and ringlets of dark hair clustered on his brow. Only his enormous size prevented his 144
appearance being positively infantile, and his round, dimpled face was as good-natured as that of a laughing baby.

"And so you're the two girls who are to spend Christmas with us," he said, beaming down on them from his great height. "Well, you'll do!"

He looked approvingly from Patty's flower face to Mona's glowing beauty, and truly it would have been hard to find two more attractive looking girls. The sudden transition from the cold out-of-doors to the warmth of the blazing fire had flushed their cheeks and brightened their eyes, and the hearty welcome they received brought smiles of delight to their faces.

"Now, come away with me," said Adèle, "and get off your furs and wraps, and make yourselves pretty for tea."

"Oh, I know what you'll do," said Chub, in an aggrieved tone. "You'll just go upstairs and hob-nob and talk and gossip and chatter and babble, and never get down here again! I know girls! Why, first thing I know, you'll be having your tea sent up there!"

"Great idea!" exclaimed Patty, twinkling her eyes at him. "Let's do that, Adèle; kimono party, 145
you know. We'll see you at dinner time, Mr. Ferris."

"Dinner time, nothing! If you're not back here in fifteen minutes, the whole crowd of you, I'll—I'll——"

"Well, what will you do?" laughed Mona.

"Never you mind,—you'll find out all too soon. Now, skip, and remember, tea will be served in just fifteen minutes."

The girls had really no intention of not returning, and it was not much more than the allotted time before Patty and Mona were arrayed in soft, pretty house-dresses and reappeared in the great hall, where tea was already being placed for them.

The big fireplace had cosy seats on either side, and the crackling logs and flickering blaze made all the light that was needed save for a pair of tall cathedral candles in their antique standards.

"What a duck of a house!" exclaimed Patty, as she came down the broad staircase, her soft, rose-coloured chiffon gown shimmering in the firelight. She cuddled up in a corner near the fire, and Hal Ferris brought a cushion to put behind her.

"It ought to be a rose-coloured one," he said, apologetically; "but I didn't see one handy to grab, 146
and really this old blue isn't half bad for a background."

"Much obliged for your kind colour-scheme," said Patty, smiling at him, "and I'll have one lump, please, and a bit of lemon."

Big Mr. Ferris proved himself tactful as well as kind, for he divided his attentions impartially among the four ladies.

"A little shy of men; aren't we, Adèle?" he said to his sister. "Even Jim seems to have disappeared. Not that I mind being the only pebble on the beach,—far from it,—but I'm afraid I can't prove entertaining enough for four."

"You're doing nobly so far," said Patty, cuddling into her cushion, for she loved luxurious warmth, like a kitten.

“Two more men are coming to dinner, girls,” said their hostess; “and to-morrow, you know, we’ll have two more house-party guests. Don’t worry, Chub, you shan’t be overworked, I promise you.”

After a pleasant tea hour, the girls went again to their rooms, ostensibly to rest before dinner, but really to have what Patty called a kimono party.

All in their pretty négligées, they gathered in Adèle’s room and talked as rapidly and 147
interruptingly as any four girls can.

“Do you hear from Bill Farnsworth often?” asked Daisy of Patty, *apropos* of nothing but her own curiosity.

“Not often, Daisy,” returned Patty, of no mind to pursue the subject.

“But don’t you ever hear from him?” persisted the other.

“Oh, sometimes,” said Patty, carelessly. “He sent me flowers for my coming-out party.”

“I hear from Bill sometimes,” said Adèle. “I asked him to come to this party, but he couldn’t possibly leave just now. He’s awfully busy.”

“What’s he doing?” asked Mona.

“I don’t know exactly,” answered Adèle. “Jim can tell you, but it has something to do with prospecting of mines. Say, girls, do you want to see the baby before she’s put to bed?”

Of course they did, and they all trooped into the nursery to admire the tiny mite of humanity, who looked a picture, with her tumbled curls and her laughing face, just ready for bed.

She remembered Patty and Mona, and greeted them without shyness, clinging to Patty’s neck and begging her to stay and sing her to sleep. 148

This Patty would have done, but Adèle wouldn’t allow it, and ordered the girls back to their rooms to dress for dinner.

“Eight o’clock sharp,” she warned them, “and don’t put on your prettiest gowns; save those for to-morrow night.”

Patty wandered around her room, singing softly, as she dressed. Looking over her dinner gowns, she decided upon her second best, a white marquisette with a garniture of pearl beads and knots of pale blue velvet. When the maid came to assist her she was nearly dressed, and ten minutes before the dinner hour she was quite ready to go downstairs. “I may as well go on down,” she thought to herself. “I can explore the house a little.”

She looked in at Mona’s door as she passed, but as that young woman was just having her gown put over her head, she didn’t see Patty, and so Patty went on downstairs.

There was no one about, so she strolled through the various rooms, admiring the big, pleasant living-room, the cosy library, and then drifted back to the great hall, which was very large, even for a modern country house. It was wainscoted in dark wood, and contained many antique bits of furniture and some fine specimens of old armour and other curios. Jim Kenerley’s father had 149
been rather a noted collector, and had left his treasures to his only son. They had chosen this house as being roomy and well-fitted for their belongings.

Patty came back to the great fireplace, and stood there, leaning her golden head against one of the massive uprights.

“Adèle told me you were a peach,” exclaimed a laughing voice, “but she didn’t half tell me how much of a one you are!”

Patty turned her head slowly, and looked at Mr. Hal Ferris.

“And I thought you were a mannerly boy!” she said, in a tone of grave reproach.

“I beg your pardon,” he exclaimed. “I do indeed! I’m almost a stranger to you, I know; I ought to have waited until I know you better to say anything of that sort to you! May I take it back, and then say it to you again after I do know you better?”

Patty couldn’t help smiling at his mock dismay.

“And how well shall I have to know you,” he went on, “before I can say it to you properly?”

“I can’t answer that question at once,” said Patty. “We’ll have to let our acquaintance proceed, 150
and see——”

“And see how the cat jumps,” he suggested.

“Yes,” agreed Patty. “And, by the way, what a jumper that cat must be.”

“Small wonder, with everybody waiting to see how she jumps! Oh, pshaw! here comes a horde of people, and our pleasant tête-à-tête is spoiled!”

“Never mind; we’ll have another some time,” and Patty gave him a dimpled smile that quite completed the undoing of Mr. Harold Ferris.

The “horde” proved to be two young men from nearby country houses, Mr. Collins and Mr. Hoyt. And then the other members of the household appeared, and soon dinner was announced.

“We haven’t any especial guest of honour,” said Mrs. Kenerley, “for you’re all so very honourable. So pair off just as you like.”

Hal Ferris jumped a low chair and two footstools to reach Patty before any one else could.

“Come in with me,” he said. “I know the way to the dining-room.”

“I’m glad to be shown,” said Patty. “You see, I’ve never been here before.”

“I know it; that’s why I’m being so kind to you. To-morrow I’ll take you up in the tower—it’s great.” 151

“Why, is this place a castle?”

“Not exactly, but it’s modelled after an old château. Really, it’s a most interesting house.”

“All right. To-morrow we’ll explore it thoroughly.”

And then they took their seats at the table, and as the party was small, conversation became general.

Suddenly Patty became aware that Mr. Collins, who sat on the other side of her, was trying to attract her attention. He was a mild-mannered young man, and he looked at her reproachfully.

“I’ve asked you a question three times, Miss Fairfield,” he said, “and you never even heard it.”

“Then you certainly can’t expect me to answer it, Mr. Collins,” and Patty laughed gaily. “Won’t you repeat it for me, please? I’ll promise to hear it this time.”

“I said, did you ever make a lemon pig?”

“A lemon pig! No, I never did. How do you make it?”

“Oh, they’re the maddest fun! I say, Mrs. Kenerley, mayn’t we have a lemon?” 152

“Certainly, Mr. Collins.”

“And, oh, I say, Mrs. Kenerley, if it isn’t too much trouble, mayn’t we have a box of matches, and two black pins, and a bit of paper?”

“And a colander and a tack hammer and a bar of soap?” asked Ferris, but Mr. Collins said, gravely: “No, we don’t want those.”

The articles he had asked for were soon provided, and in the slow, grave way in which he did everything, Mr. Collins began to make the strange animal of which he had spoken. The lemon formed the whole pig, with four matches for his legs, two black pins for his eyes, and a narrow strip of paper, first curled round a match, for his tail. It was neither artistic nor realistic, but it was an exceedingly comical pig, and soon it began to squeak in an astonishingly pig-like voice. Then a tap at the window was heard, and a farmer’s gruff voice shouted: “Have you my pig in there? My little Lemmy pig?”

“Yes,” responded Mr. Collins, “we have; and we mean to keep him, too.”

“I’ll have the law of ye,” shouted the farmer. “Me pig escaped from the sty, and I call upon ye to give him up!” 153

“We won’t do it!” shouted several of the men in chorus.

“Then, kape him!” returned the voice of the farmer, and they heard his heavy tramp as he strode away.

Patty looked puzzled. She couldn’t understand what it all meant, until Hal Ferris whispered, “It was only Collins; he’s a ventriloquist.”

“Oh,” said Patty, turning to Mr. Collins, delightedly, “was it really you? Oh, how do you do it? I’ve always wanted to hear a ventriloquist, and I never did before.”

“Oh, yes, you did!” said a voice from the other end of the table, and Patty looked up, saying earnestly, “No, I didn’t!” when she realised that the accusation had really come from Mr. Collins.

“Oh, what fun!” she cried, clapping her hands. “Do some more!”

“I’d rather he wouldn’t,” said Adèle, and Patty looked at her in surprise. “Why not, Adèle?” she asked.

Everybody laughed, and Adèle said: “You’re too easily fooled, Patty. That was Mr. Collins speaking like me. He knows my voice so well he can imitate it.” 154

“He’d better stop it!” came in a deep growl from Jim Kenerley’s end of the table, and Patty was surprised at such a speech from her urbane host. Then she realised that that, too, was Mr. Collins speaking.

“I just love it!” she exclaimed. “I’ve always wanted to know how to do it. Won’t you teach me?”

“You couldn’t learn,” said Mr. Collins, smiling at her.

And then Patty *heard herself* say: “I could so! I think you’re real mean!”

Her bewildered look changed to admiration at his wonderful imitation of her voice, and the natural, petulant tone of the remark.

“It’s too wonderful!” she said. “Some other time, Mr. Collins, after dinner, maybe, will you teach me just a little about it?”

“I’ll try,” he said, kindly; “but I warn you, Miss Fairfield, it isn’t easy to learn, unless one has a natural gift for it, and a peculiar throat formation.”

“Don’t teach her,” begged Daisy Dow. “She’ll be keeping us awake all night with her

practising.”

It was like Daisy to say something unpleasant; but Patty only smiled at her, and said, “I’ll practise being an angel, and sing you to sleep, Daisy.” 155

“You sing like an angel without any practice,” said Mona, who was always irritated when Daisy was what Patty called snippy.

“Oh, do you sing, Miss Fairfield?” said Mr. Hoyt, from across the table. “You must join our Christmas choir, then. We’re going to have a glorious old carolling time to-morrow night.”

“I’ll be glad to,” replied Patty, “if I know your music.”

But after dinner, when they tried some of the music, they discovered that Patty could sing readily at sight, and she was gladly welcomed to the musical circle of Fern Falls.

“How long are you staying here?” asked Mr. Hoyt.

“A month, at least,” Adèle answered for Patty.

“Oh, no, not so long as that,” Patty protested. “A fortnight, at most.”

But Adèle only smiled, and said, “We’ll see about that, my dear.”

After a time, Hal Ferris came to Patty, and tried to draw her away from the group around the piano. 156

“You’re neglecting me shamefully,” he said; “and I’m the brother of your hostess! Guests should always be especially kind to the Brother of a Hostess.”

“What can I do for you?” asked Patty, smiling, as she walked out to the hall with him.

“Quit talking to the other people, and devote yourself to me,” was the prompt response.

“Do all your sister’s guests do that?”

“I don’t want ’em all to; I only want you to.”

“And what about *my* wants?”

“Yes; *what* about them? You want to talk to me, *don’t* you?”

His tone and smile were so roguishly eager that Patty felt a strong liking for this big, boyish chap.

“I’ll talk for ten minutes,” she said, “and then we’re going to dance, I believe.”

“Oh, and then they’ll all be after you! I say,” and he drew her toward a window, from where the moonlight could be plainly seen, “Let’s go out and skate. The ice is fine!”

“Skate! You must be crazy!”

“Yes; I supposed you’d say so! But to-morrow more people are coming, and I’ll never see anything of you. Say, how about this? Are you game to get up and go for an early morning skate, just with me, and not let anybody else know?” 157

“I’d like that!” and Patty’s eyes sparkled, for she dearly loved early morning fresh air. “Of course, we’ll tell Adèle.”

“Yes; so she’ll have some breakfast made for us. But nobody else. How about eight o’clock? Regular breakfast will be at nine-thirty.”

“Good! I’ll be ready at eight.”

“Meet me in the breakfast-room at eight, then. Do you know where it is? Just off the big dining-room.”

“What are you two hob-nobbing about?” asked Daisy, curiously, as she strolled over toward them.

“I’m just telling Miss Fairfield about the plan of the house,” said Ferris, innocently. “It’s well planned, isn’t it?”

“Very,” said Patty.

158

CHAPTER X

CHRISTMAS EVE

As Patty stepped out of her room into the hall the next morning, at eight o’clock, she found Hal Ferris already tiptoeing down the stairs. He put his finger to his lip with a great show of secrecy, which made Patty laugh.

“Why must we be so careful?” she whispered. “We’re not doing anything wrong.”

“No; but it’s so much more fun to pretend we are. Let’s pretend we’re on a mysterious mission, and if we are discovered we’re lost!”

So they crept downstairs silently, and reached the breakfast-room, without seeing any one except one or two of the maids, who were dusting about.

Patty had on a trim, short skirt of white cloth and a blouse of soft white silk. Over this she wore a scarlet coat, and her golden curls were tucked into a little scarlet skating cap with a saucy, wagging tassel. 159

But in the warm, cheery breakfast-room she threw off her coat and sat down at the table.

“I didn’t intend to eat anything,” she said; “but the coffee smells so good, I think I’ll have a cup of it, with a roll.” She smiled at the waitress, who stood ready to attend to her wishes, and Hal took a seat beside her, saying he would have some coffee also.

“We won’t eat our breakfast now, you know,” he went on; “but we’ll come back with raging appetites and eat anything we can find. I say, this is jolly cosy, having coffee here together like this! I s’pose you won’t come down every morning?”

“No, indeed,” and Patty laughed. “I don’t mind admitting I hate to get up early. I usually breakfast in my room and dawdle around until all hours.”

“Just like a girl!” said Hal, sniffing a little.

“Well, I *am* a girl,” retorted Patty.

“You sure are! *Some* girl, I should say! Well, now, Girl, if you’re ready, let’s start.”

He held Patty’s scarlet coat for her while she slipped in her arms.

Then he disappeared for a moment, and returned wearing a dark red sweater, which was very becoming to his athletic figure and broad shoulders. 160

“Come on, Girl,” he said, gathering up their skates, and off they started.

“It’s nearly half a mile to the lake. Are you good for that much walk?” Ferris asked, as they swung along at a brisk pace.

“Oh, yes, indeed, I like to walk; and I like to skate, but I like best of all to dance.”

“I should think you would,—you’re a ripping dancer. You know, to-night we’ll have ‘Sir Roger de Coverley’ and old-fashioned dances like that. You like them?”

“Yes, for a change; but I like the new ones best. Are we going to have any dressing up to-night? I do love dressing up.”

“Glad rags, do you mean?”

“No; I mean fancy costumes.”

“Oh, that. Well, old Jim’s going to be Santa Claus. I don’t think anybody else will wear uncivilised clothes.”

“But I want to. Can’t you and I rig up in something, just for fun?”

“Oh, I say! that would be fun. What can we be? Romeo and Juliet, or Jack and Jill?”

“Oh, no, nothing like that. Something more like Christmas, you know. Well, I’ll think it over through the day, and we’ll fix it up.” 161

Skating on the lake so early in the morning proved to be glorious exercise. The ice was perfect, and the crisp, clear air filled them with exhilaration.

Both were good skaters, and though they did not attempt fancy figures, they spent nearly an hour skating around the lake.

“That’s the best skate I ever had!” declared Hal, when they concluded to return home.

“It certainly was fine,” declared Patty, “and by the time we’ve walked back to the house, I shall be quite ready for some eggs and bacon.”

“And toast and marmalade,” supplemented Ferris.

“I wonder if Daisy will be down. Does she come down to breakfast usually?”

“Sometimes and sometimes not,” answered Ferris, carelessly. “She’s a law unto herself, is Daisy Dow.”

“You’ve known her a long time, haven’t you?”

“Just about all our lives. Used to go to school together, and we were always scrapping. Daisy’s a nice girl, and a pretty girl, but she sure has got a temper.” 162

“And a good thing to have sometimes. I often wish I had more.”

“Nonsense! you’re perfect just as you are.”

“Oh, what a pretty speech! If you’re going to talk like that, I shall take the longest way home.”

“I’d willingly agree to that, but I don’t believe you’re in need of further exercise just now. Come, own up you’re a little bit tired.”

“Hardly enough to call it tired, but if there is a short cut home let’s take it.”

“And what about the pretty speeches I’m to make to you?”

“Leave those till after breakfast. Or leave them till this evening and give them to me for a Christmas gift.”

“Under the mistletoe?” and Ferris looked mischievous.

“Certainly not,” said Patty, with great dignity. “I’m too grown-up for such foolishness as that!”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Ferris.

The appearance of the two runaways in the breakfast-room was greeted with shouts of surprise.

Adèle knew they had gone skating, but no one else did, and it was supposed they hadn’t yet come downstairs. 163

Patty’s glowing cheeks were almost as scarlet as her coat and cap, while Ferris was grinning with boyish enthusiasm.

“Top o’ the morning to you all,” he cried. “Me and Miss Fairfield, we’ve been skating for an hour.”

“On the lake?” cried Daisy, in surprise. “Why, you must have started before sunrise.”

“Oh, no, not that,” declared Patty, as, throwing off her wraps, she took a seat next to Adèle; “but long enough to get up a ravenous appetite. I hope the Kenerley larder is well stocked.”

“Why didn’t you let us all in on this game?” asked the host. “I think a morning skating party would be just about right.”

“All right,” said Patty. “We’ll have one any morning you say. I shall be here for a fortnight, and I’ll go any morning you like.”

“I won’t go,” declared Mona. “I hate skating, and I hate getting up early, so count me out.”

“I doubt if any one goes very soon,” said Adèle, “for I think there’s a storm coming. It looks bright out of doors, but it feels like snow in the air.” 164

“It does,” agreed her brother; “and I hope it will snow. I’d like a real good, old-fashioned snowstorm for Christmas.”

“Well, I hope it won’t begin before night,” said Adèle. “We’ve a lot to do to-day. I want you all to help me decorate the tree and fix the presents.”

“Of course we will,” said Patty. “But, if I may, I want to skip over to the village on an errand. Can some one take me over, Adèle, or must I walk?”

“I’ll go with you,” said Daisy, who was of no mind to be left out of Patty’s escapades, if she could help it.

“All right, Daisy, but you mustn’t tell what I buy, because it’s a secret.”

“Everything’s a secret at Christmas time,” said Mr. Kenerley; “but, Patty, you can have the small motor, and go over to the village any time you like.”

As there was room for them all, Daisy and Mona both accompanied Patty on her trip to the village, and Hal Ferris volunteered to drive the car. But when they reached the country shop, Patty laughingly refused to let any of the party go inside with her, saying that her purchases would be a Christmas secret. 165

She bought a great many yards of the material known as Turkey red, and also a whole piece of white illusion. Some gilt paper completed her list, and she ran back to the car, the shopkeeper following with her bundles. They attended to some errands for Adèle, and then whizzed back to the house just in time to see the Christmas tree being put into place.

“We’re going to have the tree at five o’clock,” said Adèle, “on account of baby May. It’s really for her, you know, and so I have it before dinner.”

“Fine!” declared Patty. “And where do we put our presents?”

“On these tables,” and Adèle pointed to several small stands already well heaped with tissue-papered parcels.

“Very well, I’ll get mine,” and Patty went flying up to her room. Mona followed, and the two girls returned laden with their bundles.

“What fascinating looking parcels,” said Adèle, as she helped to place them where they belonged. “Now, Patty, about the tree; would you have bayberry candles on it, or only the electric lights?”

“Oh, have the candles. They’re so nice and traditional, you know. Unless you’re afraid of fire.” 166

“No; all the decorations are fireproof. Jim would have them so. See, we’ve lots of this Niagara Falls stuff.”

Adèle referred to a decoration of spun glass, which was thrown all over the tree in cascades, looking almost like the foam of a waterfall. This would not burn, even if the flame of a candle were held to it.

“It’s perfectly beautiful!” exclaimed Patty. “I never saw anything like it before.”

They scattered it all over the tree, the men going up on step-ladders to reach the top branches.

The tree was set in the great, high-vaulted hall, and was a noble specimen of an evergreen. Hundreds of electric lights were fastened to its branches; and the thick bayberry candles were

placed by means of holders that clasped the tree trunk, and so were held firmly and safe.

Adèle's prognostications had been correct. For, soon after luncheon, it began to snow. Fine flakes at first, but with a steadiness that betokened a real snowstorm.

"I'm so glad," exclaimed Patty, dancing about. "I do love a white Christmas. It won't interfere with your guests, will it, Adèle?" 167

"No; if Mr. Van Reypen and Mr. Farrington get up from New York without having their trains blocked by snowdrifts, I imagine our Fern Falls people will be able to get here for the dinner and the dance."

The two men arrived during the afternoon, and came in laden with parcels and looking almost like Santa Claus himself.

"Had to bring all this stuff with us," explained Roger, "for fear of delays with expresses and things. Presents for everybody,—and then some. Where shall we put them?"

Adèle superintended the placing of the parcels, and the men threw off their overcoats, and they all gathered round the blazing fire in the hall.

"This is right down jolly!" declared Philip Van Reypen. "I haven't had a real country Christmas since I was a boy. And this big fire and the tree and the snowstorm outside make it just perfect."

"I ordered the snowstorm," said Adèle. "I like to have any little thing that will give my guests pleasure."

"Awfully good of you, Mrs. Kenerley," said Philip. "I wanted to flatter myself that I brought it with me, but it seems not. Have you a hill anywhere near? Perhaps we can go coasting to-morrow." 168

"Plenty of hills; but I don't believe there's a sled about the place—is there, Jim?"

"We'll find some, somehow, if there's any coasting. We may have to put one of the motor cars on runners and try that."

"They had sleds at the country store. I saw them this morning," said Patty. "And that reminds me I have a little work to do on a Christmas secret, so if you'll excuse me, I'll run away."

Patty ran away to the nursery, where Fräulein, the baby's governess, was working away at the materials Patty had brought home that morning.

"Yes, that's right," said Patty, as she closed the door behind her. "You've caught my idea exactly, Fräulein. Now, I'll try on mine, and then, afterward, we'll call up Mr. Ferris to try on his."

At five o'clock the sounding of a Chinese gong called everybody to come to the Christmas tree.

The grown people arrived first, as the principal part of the fun was to see the surprise and delight of baby May when she should see the tree. 169

"Let me sit by you, Patty," said Philip Van Reypen, as they found a place on one of the fireside benches. "I've missed you awfully since you left New York."

"Huh," said Patty, "I've only been gone twenty-four hours."

"Twenty-four hours seems like a lifetime when *you're* not in New York."

"Hush your foolishness; here comes the baby."

The tree had been illuminated; the electric lights were shining and the candles twinkling, when little May came toddling into the hall. She was a dear baby, and her pretty hair lay in soft ringlets all over the little head. Her dainty white frock was short, and she wore little white socks and slippers. She came forward a few steps, and then spied the tree and stood stock still.

"What a booful!" she exclaimed, "oh, *what* a booful!"

Then she went up near the tree, sat down on the floor in front of it, clasped her little fat hands in her lap, and just stared at it.

"I yike to yook at it!" she said, turning to smile at Patty, in a friendly way. "It's so booful!" she further explained. 170

"Don't you want something off it?" asked Patty, who was now sitting on the floor beside the baby.

"Zes; all of ze fings. Zey is all for me! all for baby May!"

As a matter of fact, there were no gifts on the tree, only decorations and lights, but Patty took one or two little trinkets from the branches, and put them in the baby's lap. "There," she said. "How do you like those, baby May?"

"Booful, booful," said the child, whose vocabulary seemed limited by reason of her excited delight.

And then a jingle, as of tiny sleighbells, was heard outside. The door flew open, and in came a personage whom May recognised at once.

"Santa Claus!" she cried. "Oh, Santa Claus!" And jumping up from the floor, she ran to meet him as fast as her little fat legs could carry her.

"Down on the floor!" she cried, tugging at his red coat. "Baby May's Santa Claus! Sit down on

floor by baby May!”

Jim Kenerley, who was arrayed in the regulation garb of a St. Nicholas, sat down beside his little girl, and taking his pack from his back, placed it in front of her.

“All for baby May!” she said, appreciating the situation at once.

“Yes, all for baby May,” returned her mother, for in the pack were only the child’s presents.

One by one the little hands took the gifts from their wrappings, and soon the baby herself was almost lost sight of in a helter-skelter collection of dolls and teddy bears and woolly dogs and baa lambs and more dolls. To say nothing of kittens and candies, and balls, and every sort of a toy that was nice and soft and pleasant.

The doll Patty had brought, with its wonderful wardrobe, pleased the baby especially, and she declared at once that the doll’s name should be Patty.

Having undone all her treasures, the baby elected to have a general romp with Santa Claus, whom she well knew to be her father. Jim had made no attempt to disguise lest it should frighten the child, and so his own gay young face looked out from a voluminous snow-white wig and long white beard. His costume was the conventional red, belted coat, edged with white fur, and a fur-trimmed red cap with a bobbing tassel.

Among the toys was a pair of horse lines with bells on it, and soon May had her good-natured father transformed into a riding-horse and galloping madly round the hall.

Then all present must needs play games suited to the calibre of the little one, and Ring around a Rosy and London Bridge proved to be her favourites.

After these unwonted exertions, everybody was ready for tea, which was then brought in. As a special dispensation, May was allowed to have her bread and milk at the same time, with the added indulgence of a few little cakes.

“Isn’t she a perfect dear?” said Patty, as she stood with the baby in her arms, after tea was finished.

“She is,” declared Philip, who stood near. “I’m not much up on kiddies, but she’s about the best-natured little piece I ever saw. I thought they always cried after a big racket like this.”

“She must say good-night now,” said Adèle. “It’s quite time, and beside, I want her to go away while her reputation is good. Now, Maisie May, go to Fräulein and go beddy.”

“Patty take May beddy.”

“No, dear, Patty must stay here with mother.”

“Patty take May beddy! *Zes!*” The finality of this decision was unmistakable. The most casual observer could see that unless it were complied with the scene might lose something of its sunshine and merriment.

“I should say,” judicially observed Philip, “that unless Miss May has her way this time, there will be one large and elegant ruction.”

“But I *must* make her obey me,” said Adèle, a little uncertainly.

“Fiddlestrings, Adèle,” returned Patty; “this is no time for discipline. The poor baby is about worn out with fatigue and excitement. You know, it has been her busy day. Let’s humour her this time. I’ll take her away, and I’ll return anon.”

“Anon isn’t a very long time, is it?” said Adèle, laughing, and Hal remarked, “If it is, we’ll all come after you, Miss Fairfield.”

So Patty went away, carrying the now smiling baby, and Fräulein went along with her, knowing the little thing would soon drop to sleep, anyway, from sheer fatigue.

CHAPTER XI

THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

Patty soon returned, saying the country was saved, and now she was ready for her presents.

And then everybody began untying things, and soon the whole place was knee-deep in tissue papers and ribbons.

All exclaimed with delight at their own gifts, and then exclaimed with delight at the others’ gifts.

Mr. and Mrs. Kenerley gave Patty one of those Oriental garments known as a Mandarin coat. It was of pale blue silk, heavy with elaborate embroidery and gold braiding, and Patty was enchanted with it.

“Just what I wanted!” she exclaimed, “and I don’t care if that *is* what everybody always says, *I* mean it! I’ve wanted one a long time. They’re so heavenly for party wraps or opera cloaks. Mona has a beauty, but this is handsomer still.”

“Yes, it is,” admitted Mona; “and now open that box, Patty. It’s my gift to you, and I want to see if you like it.”

“Oh, I know I shall like it, of course. Why, Mona Galbraith, if it isn’t a lace scarf! Real Brussels point! You generous girl, it’s *too* beautiful!”

“Isn’t it lovely?” cried Daisy. “Now, this is mine to you, Patty. It isn’t nearly as handsome; it’s just a bag.”

“But what a grand one!” exclaimed Patty, as she unwrapped the beautiful French confection. “I simply adore bags. I can’t have too many of them. My goodness! I’m getting as many presents as baby May!”

Sure enough, Patty was surrounded with gifts and trinkets of all sorts. Philip’s present was a small but exquisite water-color in a gilded frame. Roger gave her a glass and silver flower-basket.

“I gave each of you girls exactly the same thing,” he said, “because I didn’t want you scrapping over me. Mrs. Kenerley, I included you, too, if you will accept one of them.”

They were beautiful ornaments, and the four together were so effective that Adèle declared she should use them that night for a dinner table decoration at their Christmas feast.

Hal Ferris gave each of the girls a beautiful book, and everybody had so many presents of all sorts that it was almost impossible to remember who gave anything.

“What I need is a card catalogue,” said Patty. “I never can remember which is which, I know.”

“And I know another thing,” said Adèle. “If you girls don’t scamper off and dress, you won’t be ready for dinner at eight o’clock. And there are lots of guests coming. And more this evening for the country dance. Now, disperse, all of you, and put on your prettiest frocks for Christmas Eve.”

Patty had a new gown for the occasion, of an exquisite shade of pink chiffon, which just matched her cheeks. She did up her hair simply, with a pink ribbon around it, and a pink rose tucked over one ear.

After she was all dressed, she flew to the nursery for a little confab with Fräulein, who was working away on the Turkey red.

“Will it be done?” asked Patty, anxiously.

“Oh, yes, indeed, Miss Patty; in ample time. And the crowns, too.”

“Everything all right?” inquired a voice in the doorway, and Hal Ferris stepped into the nursery.

“Yes,” said Patty, her eyes sparkling. “Fräulein will have them all ready by the time dinner’s over. Oh, I do *love* to dress up!”

“You can’t look any sweeter than you do this way,” said Ferris, glancing approvingly at the little pink dancing frock.

“You are so nice and complimentary,” said Patty, flashing a smile at him, and then they went downstairs together.

Dinner was a real Christmas feast. The table was properly decorated with red ribbons and red candles and holly, and everybody had souvenirs and Christmassy sort of trinkets, and everybody was very gay and festive, and an air of Christmas jollity pervaded the atmosphere.

After dinner they all returned to the great hall, where the Christmas tree was again lighted to add to the holiday effect.

Then Patty and Hal, who had let Adèle into their secret, slipped away from the crowd, and ran up to the nursery, where Fräulein was awaiting them.

The baby was asleep in the next room, so they must needs be careful not to awaken her, and they tiptoed about as Fräulein helped them to don the robes she had made.

The Turkey red she had fashioned into a full-draped cloak, which she adjusted around Hal’s broad shoulders. It was trimmed with white fur, and was caught up on one shoulder, toga fashion, with a spray of holly. A massive gilt pasteboard crown she put on his head, and gave him a long wand or sceptre covered with gilt paper and topped with a cap and bells.

“I wonder if they’ll know I’m Lord of Misrule,” whispered Hal, as he stalked up and down before the mirror, swishing his draperies about in regal fashion.

“If they don’t, I’ll tell ’em,” said Patty. “I wonder if they’ll know what I am.”

“You look like an angel,” said Hal, as he gazed at her.

The garment Fräulein had made for Patty was simply straight, flowing breadths of the white illusion, which fell straight from her shoulders, her pink gown beneath giving it a faint rosy tinge. From her head the illusion rippled in a long veil, floating down behind, and there were long angel sleeves of the same material.

On her head was a small crown of gilt paper, with a large gilt star in front, and she carried a gilt wand with a star on the end.

But the masterpiece of the costume, and one that did great credit to the ingenuity of Fräulein, was a pair of wings that were fastened to Patty's shoulders. They were made of fine net, covered with fringed tissue paper, which had the effect of soft white feathers.

Altogether Patty was a lovely vision, and it is doubtful if "The Christmas Spirit" was represented more beautifully anywhere on earth that Christmas Eve.

She floated about the room, delighted to be "dressed up."

Then, flying into the hall, she listened over the banister till she heard Adèle's signal from the piano.

Still listening, she heard Adèle begin to sing softly a carol called "The Christmas Spirit."

Slowly, in time to the music, Patty came down the great staircase. She paused on the landing, which was but a few steps from the bottom, and standing there, motionless as a picture, joined her voice to Adèle's.

She sang the beautiful carol, Adèle now singing alto, and the vision of the beautiful Christmas Spirit, and the tones of Patty's exquisite voice, gave the guests assembled in the hall a 180
Christmas memory that they could never forget.

As the last notes died away, there was a significant pause, and then a storm of applause broke out.

They insisted on another song, but Patty shook her head laughingly, and the next moment Adèle played a merry, rollicking march on the piano and the Lord of Misrule came bounding downstairs. He had a long trumpet in his hand, upon which he sounded a few notes, and then waved his sceptre majestically.

"I'm the Lord of Misrule," he announced, "and I have come to direct our Christmas revels. To-night my word is law; you are all my subjects, and must obey my decrees!"

A shout of applause greeted this gay banter, and then as Adèle played a lively strain, the Lord of Misrule gave a clever clog dance on the staircase landing.

Then he sprang down the steps, and clasping the Christmas Spirit, the two tripped away into a gay impromptu dance.

"Everybody dance!" shouted the Lord of Misrule, brandishing his sceptre aloft, and obedient to his orders, the others caught the gay spirit, and soon they were all dancing. 181

Later they had the country dances—Virginia reel, Sir Roger, and others which Patty had never heard of before, but which she had no difficulty in learning.

It was not long, however, before she laid aside her somewhat uncomfortable wings, and also the illusion draperies, which did not well survive the intricacies of the figure dances.

So, once again in her pretty pink frock, she entered into the dances with the zest she always felt for that amusement.

"I think it's my turn," said Roger, coming up to her at last.

"And I'm glad to be with a friend again, after all these strangers," she said, as they danced away. "Though they're awfully nice men, and some of them are very good dancers. You and Mona are all right, aren't you, Roger?"

Patty said this so suddenly that he was caught off his guard.

"Not all right," he said, "and never will be until she'll consent to cut the acquaintance of that Lansing!"

"She'll never do that!" and Patty wagged her head positively.

"Then she can get along without my friendship." 182

"Now, Roger, what's the use of acting like that? Mona has a right to choose her friends."

"Patty, I believe you like that man yourself!"

"I don't dislike him; at least, not as much as you do. But I don't see any reason for you to take the matter so seriously. At any rate, while you're up here, forget it, won't you, and be good to Mona."

"Oh, I'll be good to her fast enough, if she'll be good to me. I think a heap of that girl, Patty, and I don't want to see her in the clutches of a bad man like Lansing."

"You don't know that he's a bad man."

"Well, he's a fortune-hunter,—that's bad enough."

"Pooh, every man that looks at a girl doesn't want to marry her for her money."

"But that man does."

"Then cut him out! Why, Roger, you're worth a dozen Lansings, and if you want to marry Mona, why don't you tell her so?"

"Oh, Patty, do you think I'd have the ghost of a chance?"

"I certainly do. That is, if Mona has a grain of sense in that pretty head of hers."

"Well,—say, Patty,—this sounds queer, I know,—but you and I are such pals,—couldn't you just say a good word for——" 183

“Roger Farrington! the idea! I never supposed you were *bashful*!”

“I never was before,—but I’m a little afraid of Mona. She’s so,—so decided, you know.”

“Very well. Make her decide in your favour. But, mark my words, young man, you’ll never win her by getting grumpy and sour just because she smiles on another man. In fact, you’d better praise Mr. Lansing. That would be the best way to make her lose interest in him.”

“Patty Fairfield! I’m ashamed of you. I always knew you were a flirt, but anything like that would be downright deception.”

“Oh, fiddle-de-dee! All’s fair in love and war. You’re too matter-of-fact, Roger,—too staid and practical. Brace up and tease Mona. Get her guessing—and the game will be all in your own hands.”

“How do you know these things, Patty? You’re too young for such worldly wisdom.”

“Oh, women are born with a spirit of contrariness. And, anyway, it’s human nature. Now, you jolly Mona up, and stop looking as if you’d lost your last friend,—and then see how the cat jumps. Why, what is Hal Ferris doing?” 184

The Lord of Misrule had jumped up on a table, and was flourishing his sceptre, and announcing that he would now issue a few decrees, and they must immediately be obeyed.

He said the audience wished to see some well-acted plays, and he would ask some of the guests present to favour them.

“As these dramas are necessarily impromptu,” he said, “you will please come forward and do your parts as soon as your names are called. Any delay, hesitation, or tardiness will be punished to the full extent of the Law of Misrule. The first play, ladies and gentlemen, will be a realistic representation of the great tragedy of ‘Jack and Jill.’ It will be acted by Mr. Van Reypen and Miss Fairfield. Ready! Time!”

Philip and Patty went forward at once, for though they had had no intimation of this act, they were quite ready to take their part in the merriment.

Philip caught up one of the glass baskets which he had brought up for gifts, and declared that represented their pail.

“It isn’t mine!” cried Daisy. “I don’t want mine smashed!” 185

“No matter what happens,” returned Philip, “we must be realistic.”

“Here, take this instead,” said Jim Kenerley, offering an antique copper bucket, which was one of his pet pieces.

“All right, it *is* better. Now, the play begins. This is an illustrated ballad, you know. Will somebody with a sweet voice kindly recite the words?”

“I will,” volunteered Hal, himself. “My voice is as sweet as taffy.”

He began intoning the nursery rhyme, and Patty and Philip strolled through the hall, swinging the bucket between them, and acting like two country children going for water. They climbed the stairs, laboriously, as if clambering up a steep hill, and as they went up, Philip hastily whispered to Patty how they were to come down.

She understood quickly, and as the second line was drawled out they stood at the top of the stairs. Then when Hal said, “Jack fell down——” there was a terrific plunge and Philip tumbled, head over heels, all the way downstairs, with the big copper bucket rolling bumpety-bump down beside him. He was a trained athlete, and knew how to fall without hurting himself, but his mad pitching made it seem entirely an accidental fall. In the screams of laughter, the last line could scarcely be heard, but when Hal said, “And Jill came tumbling after,” Patty poised on the top step, leaning over so far that it seemed as if in a moment she must pitch headlong. Her fancy dance training enabled her to hold this precarious position, and as she stood, motionless, a beautiful tableau, everybody applauded. 186

“All over!” cried the Lord of Misrule, after a moment. “Curtain’s down!”

There was only an imaginary curtain, so considering herself dismissed, Patty came tripping downstairs, and the broken-crowned Jack stood waiting to receive her.

“Good work!” he commented. “How could you stand in that breakneck position?”

“How could you take that breakneck fall?” she queried back, and then they sought a nearby seat to witness the next “play.”

“Now,” said the Lord of Misrule, “we will have a thrilling drama by Miss Dow and—well, she may select her own company.”

“I choose Jim Kenerley,” said Daisy, suddenly remembering a little trick they used to do in school. A whispered word was enough to recall it to Jim’s mind, and in a twinkling he had snatched a gay silk lamp-shade from an electrolier and clapped it on his head, and draped around him a Bagdad couch cover. Then he caught up a big bronze dagger from a writing-table, and he and Daisy went to the staircase landing, which was almost like a stage. Seemingly, Jim was a fearful bandit, dragging a lady, who hung back with moans and cries. 187

On the landing, he brandished the dagger fearsomely, and Daisy knelt before him, begging for mercy. At least, her attitude denoted that, but all she said was: “A B C D,” in a low, pleading voice. “E F G!” shouted Jim, dancing about in a fierce fury.

Daisy threw out her arms and fairly grovelled at his feet, begging, “H I J K.” “L M!” shouted Jim; “N O!”

Then Daisy’s pretty hair became loosened from its pins, and fell, a shining mass, down her back.

Jim clutched it. “P Q R!” he yelled, as he waved the dagger aloft.

“S T!” moaned Daisy, swaying from side to side, as if in an agony of fear.

“U! V! W!” and the blade of the dagger rested against the fair neck, as the dreadful brigand, with a fierce shout, attacked his victim. 188

“X Y!” Daisy shrieked, and then toppled over, as if killed, while Jim, with a frenzied yell of “Z!” towered, triumphant, above his slain captive.

How they all laughed; for it was good acting, though of course greatly burlesqued. But both had a touch of dramatic genius, and they had often given this little exhibition in their old school days.

“Fine!” said Adèle, who was shaking with laughter. “You never did it better, Daisy. You ought to go on the stage.”

Daisy smiled and bowed at the applause, and began to twist up her hair.

“My beloved subjects,” said the Lord of Misrule, “you are sure some actors! I didn’t know I had so much talent concealed about my kingdom. I shall now aim for a higher touch of histrionic art. Let us stop at nothing! Let us give the balcony scene from Romeo and Juliet. I will command Miss Galbraith to play the part of Juliet, and if no one volunteers as Romeo, I’ll modestly remark that I’m a ripping good actor myself.”

“Too late,” said Roger, calmly; “I’ve already signed for the part,” and taking Mona’s hand, he led her toward the staircase. 189

“I can’t!” protested Mona. “I don’t know a word of it!”

“Can’t! Won’t!” cried the Lord of Misrule, in stentorian tones. “Those words are not allowed in this my Court. Ha, maiden, dost desire the dungeon for thine? Dost hanker after prison fare? Fie! Get to thy place and take thy cue.”

Mona flung her lace handkerchief on her head for a little Juliet cap, and accepting a large lace scarf which a lady offered her as she passed, and an enormous bunch of roses, which Jim hastily took from a vase and gave her, they all agreed she was perfectly costumed for Juliet.

Upstairs she went, and drawing a chair to the railing, looked over at Roger below. He had hastily opened a small cupboard, and caught up a broad black hat of Adèle’s, with a long, willowed ostrich plume. He put it on, so that the feather hung straight down his face, and he kept blowing it out of his eyes. Daisy had offered him a gay, flowered chiffon scarf as he passed her, and he tied it round his waist like a sash.

“‘Oh, Romeo! Romeo! Romeo!’” began Mona. 190

“‘Wherefore,’” prompted Roger in a stage whisper.

“‘Wherefore,’” said Mona, obediently, “whence, whither, why——”

“Never mind,” said Roger, calmly. “I’ll say the lines you forget. ‘Wherefore art thou Romeo?’ Now for the second act. I wish to goodness I could be a glove upon that paw of yours.”

“Why?” queried Mona.

“So you wouldn’t give me the mitten. Pardon, good friends, merely an interpolation. Back to work now. It was the nightingale and not a poll parrot that hit you in the ear.”

“Oh, Romeo, Romeo,” Mona broke in. “I’d like to cut you up into little bits of stars, and decorate the sky with you.”

“Call me but Star, and I’ll be baptised all over again. Friends, as we’re a little shy on lines, the rest of this will be pantomime.”

Roger then sneaked cautiously upstairs, motioned to Mona to make no sound, picked up various impedimenta, including books, vases, a statuette, and such things as he could find on the hall tables, added a good-sized rug, and then, also picking Mona up in his arms, he stealthily made his way downstairs again, and the elopement was successful. 191

“Roger, you strong giant!” cried Patty. “How *could* you carry all those things downstairs?”

“My warriors are all strong men!” said the Lord of Misrule. “They can carry off anything, and carry on like everything.”

And then, as Christmas Eve was well past, and Christmas Day had begun, the merry guests went away, and the house party congratulated itself all round, wished everybody Merry Christmas, and went away to rest.

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CHAPTER XII

COASTING

Christmas morning was as white as the most picturesque imagination could desire. A heavy snow had fallen in the night and lay, sparkling, all over the fields and hills, so that now, in the sunshine, the whole earth seemed powdered with diamonds.

Patty came dancing downstairs, in a dainty little white morning frock.

“Merry Christmas, everybody!” she cried, as she found the group gathered round the fireplace in the hall. “Did you ever see such a beautiful day? Not for skating,” and she smiled at Hal, “but for snow-balling or coasting or any old kind of fun with snow.”

“All right,” cried Roger. “Who’s for a snow frolic? We can build a fort——”

“And make a snow-man,” put in Daisy, “with a pipe in his mouth and an old hat on his head. Why do snow-men always have to have those two things?” 193

“They don’t,” said Jim Kenerley. “That’s an exploded theory. Let’s make one this morning of a modern type, and let him have anything he wants except a pipe and a battered stove-pipe hat.”

“We’ll give him a cigarette and a Derby,” said Patty. “Oh, here comes the mail! Let’s have that before we go after our snow-man.”

The chauffeur came in from a trip to the post-office, with his hands and arms full of mail,—parcels, papers, and letters,—which he deposited on a table, and Jim Kenerley sorted them over.

“Heaps of things for everybody,” he said. “Belated gifts, magazines, letters, and post cards. Patty, this big parcel is for you; Daisy, here are two for you.”

“May take letters! Let baby May be postman!” cried the infant Kenerley.

“Let her, Jim,—she loves to be postman,” and Adèle put the baby down from her arms, and she toddled to her father.

“Great scheme!” said Hal. “Wait a minute, midget; I’ll make you a cap.”

With a few folds, a newspaper was transformed into a three-cornered cap and placed on the baby’s head. 194

“Now you’re a postman,” said her uncle. “Go and get the letters from the post-office.”

“Letters, p’ease,” said the baby, holding out her fat little hands to her father.

“All right, kiddums; these parcels are too big for you; you’re no parcel-post carrier. But here’s a bunch of letters; pass them around and let every one pick out his own.”

Obediently, the baby postman started off, and passing Daisy first, dumped the whole lot in her lap.

“Wait a minute, Toddles,” said Daisy. “I’ll pick out mine, then you take the rest on.”

Daisy selected half a dozen or more, and gave the rest of the lot back to the little one, who went on round the circle, letting each pick out his own letters.

Patty had about a dozen letters, and cards and greetings of various sorts. Some she tore open and read aloud, some she read to herself, and some she kept to open when she might be alone.

“Have you opened all your letters, Patty?” asked Jim, looking at her, quizzically.

“No; I saved father’s and Nan’s to read by myself, you people are so distracting.”

“Oho! Father’s and Nan’s! Oho! aha! And are those the only ones you saved to read by yourself, young lady?” 195

“I saved Elise’s, also,” said Patty, looking at him, a little surprised. “Aren’t you the inquisitive gentleman, anyway!”

“Elise’s! Oh, yes, Elise’s! And how about that big blue one,—what have you done with that?”

“I don’t see any big blue one,” said Patty, innocently. “What do you mean, Jim?”

“Oho! *what* do I mean? What, *indeed*!”

“Now, stop, Jim,” said his wife. “I don’t know what you’re teasing Patty about, but she shan’t be teased. If she wants to keep her big blue letter to herself, she’s going to keep it, that’s all.”

“Of course I shall,” said Patty, saucily. “That is, I should, if I had any big blue letter, but I haven’t.”

“Never mind big blue letters,” said Roger, “let’s all go out and play in the snow.”

So everybody put on wraps and caps and furs and out they went like a parcel of children to frolic in the snow. Snow-balling was a matter of course, but nobody minded a lump of soft snow, and soon they began to build the snow-man. 196

He turned out to be a marvel of art and architecture, and as his heroic proportions were far too great for anybody’s hat or coat, they draped an Indian blanket around him and stuck a Japanese parasol on the top of his head to protect him from the sun.

Roger insisted on the cigarette, and as the snow gentleman had been provided with a fine set of orange-peel teeth, he held his cigarette jauntily and firmly.

“I want to go coasting,” said Patty.

“And so you shall,” said Jim. “I sent for a lot of sleds from the village, and I think they’ve arrived.”

Sure enough, there were half a dozen new sleds ready for them, and snatching the ropes, with glee, they dragged them to a nearby hill.

It was a long, easy slope, just right for coasting.

“Want to be pioneer?” asked Roger of Patty. And ever-ready Patty tucked herself on to a sled, grasped the rope, Roger gave her a push, and she was half-way down the hill before any one knew she had started. The rest followed, and soon the whole party stood laughing at the bottom of the long hill.

“The worst is walking up again,” said Patty, looking back up the hill.

“Do you say that because it’s what everybody says,—or because you’re lazy?” asked Philip.

“Because I’m lazy,” returned Patty, promptly.

“Then get on your sled, and I’ll pull you up.”

“No, I’m not lazy enough for that, I hope! But I’ll tell you what I’ll do; I’ll race you up.”

“Huh! as if I couldn’t beat you up, and not half try!”

“Oh, I don’t *know*! Come on, now, do your best! One, two, three, go!”

Each pulling a sled, they started to run uphill; at least, Philip started to run, and at a good rate; but Patty walked,—briskly and evenly, knowing full well that Philip could not keep up his gait.

And she was right. Half-way up the hill, Philip was forced to slow down, and panting and puffing,—for he was a big man,—he turned to look for Patty. She came along, and swung past him with an easy stride, flinging back over her shoulder, “Take another sprint, and you may catch me yet!”

“I’ll catch you, no matter how much I have to sprint,” Philip called after her, but he walked slowly for a few paces. Then, having regained his breath, he strode after her, and rapidly gained upon her progress. Patty looked over her shoulder, saw him coming, and began to run. But running uphill is not an easy task, and Patty’s strength began to give out. Philip saw this, and fell back a bit on purpose to give her an advantage. Then as they were very near the top, Patty broke into a desperate run. Philip ran swiftly, overtook her, picked her up in his arms as he passed, and plumped her down into a soft snowbank at the very top of the hill.

“There!” he cried; “that’s the goal, and you reached it first!”

“With your help,” and Patty pouted a little.

“My help is always at your disposal, when you can’t get up a hill.”

“That would be a fine help, if I ever had hills to climb. But I never do. This is a great exception.”

“But there are other hills than snow hills.”

“Oh, I suppose now you’re talking in allegories. I never *could* understand those.”

“Some day, when I get a real good chance, I’ll explain them to you. May I?”

Philip’s face was laughing, but there was a touch of seriousness in his tone that made Patty look up quickly. She found his dark eyes looking straight into her own. She jumped up from her snowbank, saying: “I want to go down again. Where’s a sled?”

“Come on this one with me,” said Hal, who had a long, toboggan sort of an affair.

“This is great!” said Patty. “Where did you get this double-rigged thing?”

“It’s been here all the time, but you’ve been so wrapped up in that Van Reypen chap that you had no eyes for anybody else, or anybody else’s sled! I’m downright jealous of that man, and I’ll be glad when he goes home.”

“Ah, now, Chub,” said Patty, coaxingly, “don’t talk to me scoldy! Don’t now; will you, Chubsy?”

“Yes, I will, if you like him better than you do me.”

“Why, goodness, gracious, sakes alive! I’ve known him for *years*, and I’ve only known you a few days!”

“That doesn’t matter. I’ve only known you a few days, and I’m head over heels in love with you!”

“Wow!” exclaimed Patty, “but this is sudden! Do you know, it’s so awful swift, I don’t believe it can be the real thing!”

“Do you know what the Real Thing is?”

“Haven’t a notion.”

“Mayn’t I tell you?”

“No, sir-ee. You see, I don’t want to know for years yet! *Why* can’t people let me alone?”

“Who else has been bothering you?” demanded Hal, jealously.

“I don’t call it a bother! I supposed it was part of the game. Don’t all girls have nice compliments, and flattery kind of speeches from the young men they know?”

“I don’t know whether they do or not,” growled Hal.

“Well, I know; they do, and they don’t mean a thing; it’s part of the game, you know. Now, I’ll tell you something. I’ve known Philip Van Reypen ever so much longer than I have you, and yet I like you both exactly the same! And Roger just the same,—and Jim just the same!”

“And Martin, the chauffeur, just the same, I suppose; and Mike, the gardener, just the same!”

“Yep,” agreed Patty. “*Everybody* just the same! I think that’s the way to do in this world, love your neighbour as yourself, and look upon all men as free and equal.”

“Well, I don’t think all girls are equal,—not by a long shot. To my mind they’re divided into two classes.” 201

“What two?” said Patty, with some curiosity.

“One class is Patty Fairfield, and the other class is everybody else.”

They had reached the bottom of the hill before this, and were sitting on the sled, talking. Patty jumped up and clapped her hands. “That’s about the prettiest speech I ever had made to me! It’s a beautiful speech! I’m going right straight up the hill and tell it to everybody!”

“Patty, *don’t*!” cried Hal, his honest, boyish face turning crimson.

“Oh, then you didn’t mean it!” and Patty was the picture of disappointment.

“I did! *Of course* I did! But girls don’t run and tell everything everybody says to them!”

“Don’t they? Well, then, *I* won’t. You see, I haven’t had as much experience in these matters as you have! Mustn’t I *ever* tell anything nice that *anybody* says to me?”

“Not what *I* say to you, anyhow! You see, they’re confidences.”

“Well, I don’t want any more of them just now. I came out here for coasting, not for confidences.” 202

“I fear, my dear little girl, you’re destined all through life to get confidences, whatever you may go for.”

“Oh, what a horrible outlook! Well, then, let me gather my coasting while I may! Come on, Chubsy, let’s go up the hill.” And putting her hand in Hal’s, Patty started the upward journey.

At the top she declared she was going for one more ride downhill, and this time with Jim. “For,” she said to herself, “I would like *one* ride without ‘confidences.’”

“Off we go!” said Jim, as he arranged her snugly on the toboggan sled, and took his place in front of her. They had a fine ride down, and Jim insisted on pulling Patty up again. She rode part way, and then decided it was too hard work for him, and jumped off.

“I guess I’m good for some walk,” she said, as she tucked her arm through his, and they climbed the hill slowly.

“I guess you are, Patty. You’re strong enough, only you’re not as hardy as Daisy and Adèle. I believe our Western girls are heartier than you New Yorkers. By the way, Patty, speaking of the West at large, what made you tell a naughty story this morning?” 203

“I didn’t!” and Patty looked at him with wide-open eyes. “I have a few faults, Jim, a *very* few, and *very* small ones! but truly, storytelling isn’t among them.”

“But you said you didn’t get a big blue letter,” pursued Jim.

“And neither I did,” protested Patty. “What do you mean, Jim, by that big blue letter? I didn’t see any.”

“Patty, it’s none of my business, but you seem to be in earnest in what you say, so I’ll tell you that there certainly was in the mail a big blue letter for you, addressed in Bill Farnsworth’s handwriting. I wasn’t curious, but I couldn’t help seeing it; and I know the dear old boy’s fist so well, that I was moved to tease you about it.”

“It didn’t tease me, Jim, for I didn’t get any such letter.”

“Well, then, where is it?”

“I don’t know, I’m sure. Perhaps baby May kept it.”

“Perhaps some of the boys got it and kept it to tease you.”

“I don’t believe they’d do that. Perhaps Adèle saved it for me. Well, we’ll look around when we get home, but don’t say anything about it.” 204

But when they reached the house, neither Jim nor Patty could find the blue letter. Adèle said she had not seen it, and Patty insisted that no one else should be questioned. Privately, she thought that Hal Ferris had received it by mistake from baby May, and had kept it, because he, too, knew Bill’s handwriting, and because,—well, of course, it *was* foolish, she knew,—but Hal had said he was jealous of any other man, and he might have suppressed or destroyed Bill’s card for that reason. She felt sure it was not a letter, but merely a Christmas card. However, she wanted it, but she wanted to ask Hal for it herself, instead of letting the Kenerleys ask him.

“Dinner will be at two o’clock,” Adèle made announcement. “It’s considered the proper thing to eat in the middle of the day on a holiday, though why, I never could quite understand.”

“Why, of course, the reason is, so the children can eat once in a while,” suggested her brother. 205

“Baby can’t come to the table. She’s too little, and her table manners are informal, to say the least. However, the tradition still holds, so dinner’s at two o’clock, and you may as well all go and get dressed, for it’s after one, now. There’ll be a few extra guests, so you girls will have somebody to dress up for.”

“I like that,” said Roger; “as if we boys weren’t enough for any girls to dress up for!”

“But you’ve seen all our pretty frocks,” laughed Patty. “It’s only strangers we can hope to impress with them now. I shall wear my most captivating gown, if Mr. Collins is coming. Is he, Adèle?”

“Yes, and Mr. Hoyt, too; and two more girls. Skip along, now, and don’t dawdle.”

But Patty dawdled on the staircase till Ferris came along, and then she spoke to him in a low tone. “Chub, you didn’t see a stray letter of mine this morning, did you?”

“’M—what kind of a letter?”

“Oh, a blue envelope, with probably a card inside. I hadn’t opened it, so I don’t know what was in it.”

“Who was it from?”

“Why, how could I tell, when I hadn’t opened it! In fact, that’s just what I want to know.” 206

“What makes you think I know anything about it?”

“Oh, Chub, don’t tease me! I haven’t time, now; and truly, I want that letter! Do you know anything about it?”

“No, Patty, I don’t. I didn’t see any letters addressed to you, except the bunch you had in your hand. Have you really lost one?”

“Yes,” said Patty, seeing that Hal was serious. “Jim told me there was one for me from Mr. Farnsworth, and I want it.”

“Bill Farnsworth! What’s he writing to you for? I didn’t know you knew him.”

“I don’t know him very well; I only met him last summer. And I don’t know that he did write to me; it was probably just a card. But I want it.”

“Yes, you seem to. Why, Patty, you’re blushing.”

“I am not any such thing!”

“You are, too! You’re as pink as a peach.”

“Well, I only blushed to make you call me a peach,—and now that I’ve succeeded, I’ll run away.”

So blushing and laughing both, Patty ran upstairs to her own room. Hal had been so frank that 207
she was convinced he knew nothing about the letter, and she began to fear it must have been tossed into the fire, with the many waste papers that were scattered about.

208

CHAPTER XIII

HIDE AND SEEK

All the time Patty was dressing she wondered about that letter; and when Mona, ready for dinner, stopped at her door, Patty drew her into the room.

“Mona,” she said, “did you get a Christmas card from Mr. Farnsworth?”

“Yes,” said Mona, “in a big blue envelope. Daisy had one, too. Didn’t you get one?”

“No; Jim said there was one for me, but it got lost somehow. Thrown in the fire, I shouldn’t wonder.”

“Well, don’t mind,” said Mona, cheerfully. “You can have mine. It isn’t very pretty, and Daisy’s isn’t either, but I suppose they’re the best Bill could find out there in Arizona. Do you want it now, Patty?”

“I don’t want it at all, Mona. What would I want with your card, or Daisy’s either? But if Little Billee sent one to me, I’d like to have it, that’s all.” 209

“Of course you would; but truly, they don’t amount to much.”

“Jim must have been mistaken about there being one for me,” said Patty, and then the two girls went downstairs.

The Christmas dinner was practically a repetition of the feast of the night before; but as Adèle said, how could that be helped if people would have two Christmas celebrations on successive days?

There were four extra guests, who proved to be merry and jolly young people, and after dinner Hal declared that his reign as Lord of Misrule was not yet over.

“Don’t let’s do any more stunts like we had last night,” said Mona. “They wear me out. Let’s play easy games, like blindman’s buff, or something.”

“Or Copenhagen,” said Hal, but Patty frowned at him.

“We’re too grown-up for such things,” she declared, with dignity. “What do you say to a nice, dignified game of hide and seek?”

“All over the house!” cried Roger. “May we, Mrs. Kenerley?”

“The house is yours,” said Adèle. “I reserve no portion of it. From cellar to attic, from drawing-room to kitchen, hide where you will and seek where you like,—if you’ll only promise not to wake the baby. She’s taking her afternoon nap.” 210

“She doesn’t seem to mind noise,” said Roger. “We do make an awful racket, you know.”

“Oh, no, I don’t mean that,” said Adèle. “I’ve trained her not to mind noise. But I mean if your hiding and seeking takes you into the nursery quarters, do go softly.”

“Of course we will,” said Philip. “I’m specially devoted to that baby, and I’ll see that her nap isn’t disturbed, even if I have to stand sentry at her door. But what larks to have the whole house! I’ve never played it before but what they wouldn’t let you hide in this room or that room. Who’ll be It?”

“Oh, that’s an old-fashioned way to play,” said Hal. “Here’s a better way. Either all the men hide and the girls find them, or else the other way around; and, anyway, don’t you know, whoever finds who, has to be her partner or something.”

“For life?” asked Jim, looking horrified.

“Mercy, no!” said his brother-in-law. “This is a civilised land, and we don’t select life partners that way!” 211

“You mean just partners for a dance,” said Patty, trying to help him out.

“Well, you see,” said Hal, “it ought to be more than just a dance; I mean more like a partner for a,—for a junketing of some kind.”

“I’ll tell you,” said Adèle. “There’s to be a masquerade ball at the Country Club on New Year’s Eve, and we’re all going.”

“Just the thing!” cried Hal. “Now, whichever seeker finds whichever hider, they’ll go in pairs to the ball, don’t you see? Romeo and Juliet, or anything they like, for costumes.”

“But we won’t be here,” and Philip Van Reypen looked ruefully at Roger. “We go back to town to-morrow.”

“But you can come up again,” said Adèle, hospitably. “I hereby invite you both to come back the day before New Year’s, and stay as long as you will.”

“Well, you are *some* hostess!” declared Roger, looking grateful. “I accept with pleasure, but I doubt if my friend Van Reypen can get away.”

“Can he!” cried Philip. “Well, I rather guess he can! Mrs. Kenerley, you’re all sorts of a darling, and you’ll see me back here on the first train after your invitation takes effect.” 212

“Then hurrah for our game of hide and seek,” Hal exclaimed. “Jim and Adèle, you must be in it, too. You needn’t think you can go as Darby and Joan,—you must take your chances with the rest. If you find each other, all right, but if you find anybody else, that’s your fate,—see?”

“I’m willing,” said Adèle, laughing. “I’m sure I’d be glad to go with any of you beautiful young men.”

“Now, will you listen to *that*!” cried her husband. “Well, I won’t be outdone in generosity. I’ll be proud to escort any one of this galaxy of beauty,” and he looked at the group of pretty girls.

“Now, we must do it all up proper,” said Hal. “In the first place, we must draw lots to see whether the girls shall hide or we shall. We must have it all very fair.”

He tore two strips of paper, one longer than the other, and holding them behind him, bade Adèle choose.

“Right!” she said, and Hal put forth his right hand and gave her a paper on which was written “Girls.” 213

“All right,” went on the master of ceremonies. “Now you girls must hide. We’ll give you fifteen minutes to tuck yourselves away, and then we’re all coming to look for you. As soon as any man finds any girl, he brings her back here to the hall to wait for the others. Now, there’s no stipulation, except that you must not go out of the house. Scoot! and remember, in fifteen minutes we’ll be after you!”

The six girls ran away and made for various parts of the house. The two Misses Crosby, who had come as dinner guests, looked a little surprised at this unusual game, and Patty said to them, kindly: “You don’t mind, do you? You know, you needn’t really go with the man who finds you, if you don’t want to.”

“Oh, we don’t mind,” said the elder Miss Crosby. “I think it’s fun,—only if I should draw that dignified Mr. Van Reypen I’d be scared to death!”

“Oh, he isn’t so awfully dignified,” laughed Patty. “That’s just his manner at first. When you know him better, he’s as jolly as anything. But hurry up, girls, the minutes are flying.”

The girls scampered away, some running to the attic, others going into wardrobes or behind sofas, and Patty ran to her own room. 214

Then she bethought herself that that was one of the most likely places they would look for her, and she was seized with an ambition to baffle the seekers. With a half-formed plan in her mind, she slipped out of a side door of her own room that opened on a small passage leading to the nursery. In the nursery, she found the baby asleep in her crib, and the Fräulein lying down on a couch with a slumber-robe thrown over her, though she was not asleep.

Like a flash, Patty’s plan formed itself. She whispered to the Fräulein, and with a quick understanding the good-natured German girl took off her rather voluminous frilled cap, with its long muslin streamers, and put it on Patty’s head. Then Patty lay down on the couch, with her face toward the wall, and deep buried in the pillows. Fräulein tucked the slumber-robe over her, and then herself disappeared down into the kitchen quarters.

The search was rather a long one, for the house was large, and the girls had chosen difficult hiding-places.

The two Crosby girls were found first, because not knowing the house well, they had simply gone into hall closets, and stood behind some hanging dresses. They were discovered by Jim Kenerley and Hal; and if the latter was disappointed in his quarry, he gave no sign of it. 215

The four returned to the hall, and after a while they were joined by Roger and Mona.

“Oho,” said Jim, who loved to tease, “what a coincidence that you two should find each other!”

“Easy enough,” said Roger. “I knew Mona would choose the very hardest place to find; so I went straight to the attic to the very farthest, darkest corner, and there she was, waiting for me!”

“There I was,” said Mona, “but I wasn’t waiting for *you*!”

“No, you were waiting for me, I know,” said Jim, ironically. “But never mind, Mona, we’ll be partners next time. Hello, Adèle, is that *your* terrible fate?” and they all laughed as Adèle and Mr. Hoyt came in together, with cobwebs on their hair and smudges of black on their faces.

“I thought I’d be so smart, Jim, and I hid in the coal-bin; but Mr. Hoyt found me! By the way, we must have that place cleaned; it’s a disgrace to the house!” 216

“But you know, my dear, we don’t often use it to receive our guests in.”

“Well, I don’t care, it must be cleaned. There’s no excuse for cobwebs. Now I must go and tidy up. I hope they haven’t wakened the baby. Oh, here’s Daisy.”

Daisy and Mr. Collins came in, laughing, and Mr. Collins declared he had found Miss Dow hanging out the third-story window by her finger-tips.

“Nothing of the sort,” said Daisy. “I was out on a kind of little balcony place, that’s on top of a bay-window or something,—but I put my hands over the sill inside, so that I could say I was still in the house. Wasn’t that fair?”

“Well, it’s fair enough, as long as I found you,” said Mr. Collins. “But when I saw your hands, I really thought you were hanging from the sill!”

“Where’s Patty?” asked Daisy, “and Mr. Van Reypen? Are they still finding each other?”

“I saw Phil,” said Roger, “standing guard at the nursery door, as he said he would. He let us each go in and look around, on condition that we wouldn’t wake the baby. And the baby’s nurse was also asleep on the sofa, so I looked around and sneaked out as fast as I could.” 217

Just then Van Reypen came downstairs. “I’ve been delayed,” he said, “because I held the fort for the baby, until every man-jack of you had been in the nursery. Now I’m going to begin *my search*. Who is there left to find?”

“Oh, who, *indeed*?” said Jim, looking wise. “Oh, *nobody* in particular! Nobody but that little Fairfield girl, and *of course* you wouldn’t want to find *her*!”

“Patty!” exclaimed Philip, as he looked around at the group. “Why, she isn’t here, is she? Where can that little rascal be? You fellows have been all over the house, I suppose?”

“Every nook and cranny,” declared Mr. Hoyt. “It was as a very last resort that I went to the coal-bin and captured Mrs. Kenerley.”

“Been through the kitchens?” asked Philip, looking puzzled.

“I have,” said Mr. Collins. “They’re full of startled-looking servants who seemed to think I was a lunatic, or a gentleman burglar,—I don’t know which.” 218

“Well, of course she’s got to be found,” said Philip. “There’s no use looking in the obvious places, for Patty’s just cute enough to pick out a most unexpected hiding-place. Come on, Roger; you found your girl,—help me with mine.”

“Oh, it isn’t fair to have help,” said Hal. “Alone upon your quest you go!”

“Here I go, then.” And Philip ran upstairs three at a time. He went first to the attics, and made a systematic search of every hall, room, and closet. He even peeped into the great tank, as if Patty might have been transformed into a mermaid. Then followed a thorough search of the second story, with all its rambling ells and side corridors; he tiptoed through the nursery, smiling at the

sleeping baby and casting a casual glance at the still figure on the couch with the long, white cap-strings falling to the floor.

On he went, through the various rooms, and at last, with slow step, came down into the hall again.

“I think she had one of those contraptions like the Peter Pan fairies,” he said, “and flew right out through the roof and up into the sky! But I haven’t searched this floor yet. May I go into the dining-room and kitchens, Mrs. Kenerley?” 219

“Everywhere,” said Adèle. “You know I made no reservations.”

Philip strode through the rooms, looked under the dining-room table and into the sideboard cupboards; on through the butler’s pantry, and into the kitchens. Needless to say, he found no Patty, and returned, looking more puzzled than ever.

“I’m not going down cellar,” he said. “Something tells me that Patty couldn’t possibly stay down there all this time! It’s more than an hour since she hid.”

“What are you going to do about it?” inquired Jim. “Give it up? I’ll ring the Chinese gong for her to come back to us. That was to be a signal in case of an emergency.”

“No,” said Philip. “I’m going to reason this thing out. Give me a few minutes to think, and I believe I can find her.”

“Don’t anybody disturb him, let him think!” said Mona, gaily, and going to the piano, she began to play “Alice, where art thou?” in wailing strains that made them all laugh.

All at once Philip jumped up. “I know where she is!” he exclaimed. “Sit still all of you, and I’ll bring her back with me!” 220

“Wait a minute,” said Adèle, curiously. “How did you find it out?”

“Do *you* know where she is?” and Philip looked at her intently.

“No, I haven’t the slightest idea,” said Adèle, honestly. “But I wondered how you could know, just from thinking about it.”

“It’s clairvoyance,” said Philip, with a mock air of mystery. “You see, I know all the places where she *isn’t*, so the one place I have in mind must be where she *is*. By the way, Mrs. Kenerley; baby always takes an afternoon nap, doesn’t she?”

“Yes, always.”

“And does the Fräulein, her nurse, always take a nap at the same time?”

“Oh, no! She never naps in the daytime.”

“She did to-day,” began Roger, but Philip was already flying upstairs again.

He went softly into the nursery. The baby was still asleep, the figure on the couch still lay quietly beneath the knitted afghan.

Philip went over and stood beside the couch. The face was buried in the pillow, but beneath the edge of the cap he saw some stray golden curls. 221

“H’m!” he mused, in a low voice, but entirely audible to Patty. “I thought baby May’s nurse had dark hair. She must have bleached it!”

Patty gave no sign that she heard, but cuddled her head more deeply in the soft pillows.

“Why, it isn’t the Fräulein at all!” said Philip, in tones of great surprise. “It’s the Sleeping Beauty!”

Still Patty gave no intimation of being awake, though, of course, she was.

Then Philip leaned down over her and murmured: “And I’m the Prince; and when the Prince finds the Sleeping Beauty, there’s only one course for him to pursue.”

At this, Patty opened her eyes and prepared to spring up, but she was not quite quick enough, and Philip lightly kissed the top of her little pink ear, before she could elude him.

“How dare you!” she cried, and her eyes flashed with indignation.

But Philip stood calmly smiling at her.

“It’s entirely permissible,” he said, “when any Prince finds a Sleeping Beauty, to kiss her awake.” 222

“But I wasn’t asleep!” stormed Patty, “and you knew it!”

“You gave such a successful imitation of it, that I consider myself justified,” he returned. “And, anyway, it was only a little bit of a butterfly kiss, and it doesn’t really count.”

“No,” agreed Patty, rather relieved, “it doesn’t count.”

“But it counts that I have found you,” went on Philip. “You know the rest of the story, after the Prince kissed the Sleeping Beauty?”

“She had to go to the Country Club ball with him,” said Patty, laughing, as she danced away from him. “Be careful, Philip; we’ll wake baby May. Come on downstairs.”

“I found her,” announced Philip, somewhat unnecessarily; “and I was a blooming idiot not to know she was there all the time!”

“You sure were!” said Roger, when he heard the story. “Did you get a good rest, Patty?”

“Yes; only it was interrupted so soon,” and Patty returned Philip’s meaning glance with a saucy smile.

“Well,” Roger went on, “now you two will have to go to the masquerade together. I suppose you’ll go as Jack and Jill?”

“No,” said Philip, “I think fairy tales are much prettier than Mother Goose rhymes. We’re going as the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood, and the Fairy Prince. Only, of course, the Sleeping Beauty will be awake for the occasion. Shall I bring up your costume when I return next week, Patty?” 223

“I might like to have a voice in deciding on the part I shall take,” said Patty, with a show of spirit.

“But you *did* decide it! I never should have thought of appearing as ‘Prince Charming,’ if you hadn’t——”

“That will do, Philip!” said Patty, turning very pink.

“Go on, Phil!” cried Roger. “If she hadn’t what?”

“If she hadn’t said I’d look so sweet in a light blue satin coat,” replied Philip, pretending to look confused.

“Oh, pshaw! She didn’t say that,” declared Roger. “And beside, you won’t!”

“Oh, yes, he will,” said Patty. “Those court suits are lovely,—all silver lace and cocked hats! Oh, Philip, do wear one of those! And I’ll write to Nan, to get me a costume. What are you going to wear, Mona?”

“But we mustn’t tell!” said Adèle, in dismay. “This is a masquerade, not merely a fancy dress ball.” 224

“Oh!” said Patty. “Then we’ll have to change our plans, Philip. The Sleeping Beauty game is all off!”

“Only for the moment!” And Philip threw her a challenging glance.

225

CHAPTER XIV

A PROPOSAL

It was after midnight when the Christmas guests went away, and Patty declared her intention of going to bed at once.

“I coasted and danced and played hide and seek till I’m utterly worn out,” she said, “and I think I shall sleep for a week!”

“But I’m going away to-morrow,” said Philip, detaining her a moment.

“But you’re coming back next week. I’ll promise to be awake by then. But now I’m going to hibernate, like a bear! Good-night, everybody!” and Patty ran upstairs without further ceremony.

But as, in her pretty blue négligée, she sat before the mirror brushing her long hair, Mona, Daisy, and Adèle all came into her room, quite evidently with a determination to chat.

“You’re an old sleepy-head, Patty,” declared Adèle. “You may sleep as late as you like in the morning, but we want to have a little confab now, about lots of things.” 226

“Nicht, nein, non, no!” cried Patty, jumping up and brandishing her hair-brush. “I know perfectly well what your confabs mean,—an hour or more of chattering and giggling! Come in the morning,—I’m going to have my chocolate upstairs to-morrow,—and I’ll give you all the information you want. But as for to-night, skip, scoot, scamper, and vamoose, every dear, sweet, pretty little one of you!”

Laughingly, Patty pushed the three out of her room, and closing the door after them, turned its key, unheeding their protests, and returned to her hair-brushing.

“It’s no use, Patricia,” she said, talking to herself in the mirror, as she often did, “letting those girls keep you up till all hours! You need your beauty sleep, to preserve what small pretence to good looks you have left.”

Patty was not really vain of her pretty face, but she well knew that her delicate type of beauty could not stand continuous late hours without showing it, and Patty was not mistaken when she claimed for herself a good share of common sense.

But as she brushed away at the golden tangle of curls, she heard a light tap at her door, which sounded insistent, rather than mischievous. 227

“Who is it?” she asked, as she rose and went toward the door.

“It’s Daisy,” said a low voice. “Let me in, Patty, just for a minute.”

So Patty opened the door, and Daisy Dow came in.

“I want to tell you something,” she said, as Patty stood waiting, brush in hand. “I don’t really want to tell you a bit,—but Jim says I must,” and Daisy looked decidedly cross and ill-tempered.

Patty realised that it was a bother of some kind, and she said, gently, “Leave it till morning, Daisy; we’ll both feel brighter then.”

“No; Jim said I must tell you to-night. Oh, pshaw, it’s nothing, anyway! Only there *was* a letter for you from Bill Farnsworth, and I took it from May, and kept it for a while, just to tease you. I was going to give it to you to-morrow, anyway; but Jim came and asked me about it, and made *such* a fuss! Men are so *silly*!”

“Why, no, Daisy, it isn’t anything much; only you know people *do* like to have letters that belong to them! But, as you say, it’s nothing to make a fuss about. Incidentally, I believe it’s a State’s prison offence,—or would be if you opened it. You didn’t, did you?” 228

“Of course not!” said Daisy; “but I knew it was only a card, like ours, and I just kept it back for fun.”

“It doesn’t seem to me an awfully good joke,—but never mind that. Give me the letter, and we’ll call it square, and I won’t have you arrested or anything.”

Patty spoke lightly, but really she was deeply annoyed at this foolish trick of Daisy’s. However, since Jim had found out the truth and made Daisy own up, there was no great harm done.

“I haven’t got the letter,” said Daisy. “I left it downstairs, but we can get it in the morning. I’m sure it’s only a card; it is just the same size and shape as ours.”

“Daisy, what did you do it for?” And Patty looked the girl in the eyes, in a real curiosity to know why she should descend to this petty meanness.

“Because you’re such a favourite,” said Daisy, truthfully. “Everybody likes you best, and everybody does everything for you, and you get everything, and I wanted to tease you!” 229

Patty grasped the girl by her shoulders, and shook her good-naturedly, while she laughed aloud. “Daisy, you *do* beat the dickens! You know that foolish little temper of yours is too silly for anything, and if you’d conquer it you’d be a whole lot nicer girl! You’re just as pretty as anybody else, and just as jolly and attractive, but you get a notion that you’re slighted when you’re *not*; and that makes you ill-tempered and you lose half your charm. Don’t you know that if you want people to love you and admire you, you must be sunshiny and pleasant?”

“Huh, that isn’t my nature, I s’pose. I can’t help my quick temper. But, anyway, Patty, you’re a dear not to get mad,—and I’ll give you the letter the first thing in the morning.”

“Where is it, Daisy?”

“Oh, I just stuck it between two volumes of a cyclopædia, on a shelf in the library. So, you see, we can’t get it till morning; but it will be safe there, don’t worry.”

“I’m not worrying,” and Patty smiled, as Daisy said a somewhat abrupt good-night, and went away.

There were still a few embers of a wood fire glowing on the hearth, and Patty sat down before it in a big arm-chair. 230

“I don’t know why I’m so glad,” she said to herself, her weariness all gone now. “But I did feel neglected to have Little Billee send the other girls cards, and leave me out. I’d like to see it; I hardly glanced at theirs,—though I remember, they weren’t very pretty. I’d like to see Little Billee again, but I don’t suppose I ever shall. Well, there are plenty of other nice boys in the world, so it doesn’t matter much. All the same, I’d like to see that card. I believe I’ll go down and get it. There’s always a low light in the hall, and I can feel it between the books.”

Patty hesitated for some time, but finally her impatience or curiosity got the better of her, and she softly opened her door and peeped out. There were low lights in the halls, and as she listened over the banister and heard no sounds, Patty began to creep softly down the stairs. Her trailing robe of light blue crêpe de chine was edged with swansdown, and she drew it about her, as she noiselessly tiptoed along in her slippered feet.

The hall light shone dimly into the library, through which Patty could see a brighter light in the smoking-room beyond. She listened a moment, but hearing no voices, concluded she could creep into the library, capture her card, and return undiscovered. 231

“And, anyway,” she thought to herself, “there can’t be anybody in the smoking-room, or I would hear them talking.”

It was easy to proceed without a sound by stepping softly along the thick rugs, and as Patty knew exactly where the cyclopædias were shelved, she made straight for that bookcase. It was next to the smoking-room doorway, and as Patty reached it, she peeped around the portière to make sure that the next room was unoccupied.

But to her surprise, she saw Philip Van Reypen stretched out in a big arm-chair in front of the fire. His eyes were closed, but Patty saw he was not asleep, as he was slowly smoking a cigar. Patty saw him sidewise, and she stood for a second contemplating the handsome profile and the

fine physique of the man, who looked especially graceful in his careless and unconscious position.

Almost holding her breath, lest he should hear her, Patty moved noiselessly to the shelves, being then out of sight behind a portière. 232

By slow, careful movements, it was easy enough to move the books silently, and at last she discovered the blue envelope, tucked between two of them. She drew it out without a sound,—careful lest the paper should crackle,—and started to retrace her stealthy steps upstairs again, when she saw the hem of the portière move the veriest trifle.

“A mouse!” she thought to herself, with a terrified spasm of fear, for Patty was foolishly afraid of mice.

Unable to control herself, she sprang up into a soft easy-chair and perched on the back of it.

The springs of the chair gave a tiny squeak, scarcely as loud as a mouse might make, yet sufficient to arouse Van Reypen from his reverie.

He sprang up, and pushing aside the portière, switched on the light, to see Patty sitting on the low, tufted back of the chair, her hair streaming about her shoulders, and her face expressing the utmost fear and horror.

“Well!” he observed, looking at her with a smile,—“*well*!”

“Oh, Philip,” whispered Patty, in a quaking voice, “it’s a mouse! an *awful* mouse!”

“Well, what are you going to do about it?” and Philip folded his arms, and stood gazing at the 233 pretty, frightened figure on the chair back.

His amused calm quieted Patty’s nerves, which had really been put on edge by her uncontrollable aversion to mice, and she returned, cheerfully, “I suppose I shall have to stay up here the rest of my life, unless you can attack and vanquish the fearsome brute.”

“I shall not even try,” said Philip, coolly, as he turned to throw away his cigar, “because I like to see you sitting up there. However, as there may be danger of another attack from the enemy, and as this chair is almost entirely unoccupied, I shall camp out here at your feet, and keep guard over your safety.”

He seated himself on the arm of the same chair, while Patty sat on its low, cushioned back. She drew her blue gown more closely about her, and cast wary glances toward the corner, where the enemy was presumably encamped.

“I think perhaps the danger is over,” she said. “And if you’ll go back to the smoking-room, I will make a brave effort to get away unharmed.”

“Watch me go,” said Philip, showing no signs of moving. “However, if it will set your mind at rest, I’ll tell you that it *wasn’t* a mouse. I don’t believe they have such things in this well- 234 regulated household.”

“But I *saw* it!” declared Patty, positively.

“Saw a mouse?”

“Well, not *exactly* that, but I saw that little tassel on the portière wiggle, so it *must* have been a mouse.”

“Patty, you are the most ridiculous little goose on the face of this earth! Your imagination is something marvellous! Now I’ll inform you that the reason that tassel moved, was because I threw a match at it. I aimed for a waste-basket and hit the curtain, but I had no idea that I should find myself so surprised at the result!”

Patty dimpled and giggled. “It *is* surprising, isn’t it?” she said, feeling much more light-hearted since her fears were relieved regarding the mouse. “And I’m not sure it’s altogether correct, that you and I should be down here alone after midnight.”

“Fiddlestrings!” exclaimed Philip. “Don’t be a silly! And besides, Jim is about somewhere, and Adèle has been bobbing in and out.”

“There was no one in the halls when I came down. And I think, Philip, I’d better go back.” 235

“What did you come down for, anyhow?”

For some unexplained reason, Patty suddenly felt unwilling to tell what she had come for. Bill’s letter was hidden in the folds of her voluminous blue gown, and she couldn’t quite bring herself to tell Philip that she came down for that.

“Oh, I was wakeful,” she said, “and I came down to get a—a book.”

“H’m; and you thought you’d take a volume of the Britannica back with you, to read yourself to sleep?”

Patty had to laugh at this, for in the corner where they were, the shelves contained nothing but cyclopædias and dictionaries.

“But they’re really very interesting reading,” she declared.

“And this is the little girl who was so sleepy she had to run off to bed as soon as the party was over! Patty, Patty, I’m afraid you’re not telling me the truth! Try again.”

“Well, then,—well, then, I came down because,—because I was hungry!”

“Ah, that’s better. Anybody has a right to be hungry, or even afraid of mice,—but no one has a right to lug a whole cyclopædia upstairs to read oneself to sleep.” 236

“I wasn’t going to take *all* the volumes,” said Patty, demurely, and then she jumped down from her perch. “I’ll just see which one I do want,” and pretending to read the labels, she deftly slipped her letter back between the volumes, unseen by Van Reypen.

“You little goose, you,” said Philip, laughing. “Stop your nonsense, and let’s go and forage in the dining-room for something to eat. We might as well have some good food while we’re about it.”

“But I’m not exactly in proper dinner garb,” said Patty, shaking out her blue folds, and trailing her long robe behind her.

“Nonsense! I don’t know much about millinery, but you never wore anything more becoming than all that fiddly-faddly conglomeration of blue silk and white fur.”

“It isn’t fur,—it’s down.”

“Well, I said you were a goose,—so it’s most appropriate.”

“But it’s swansdown.”

“Well, be a swan, then! Be anything you like. But come on, let’s make for the dining-room. We’ll probably find Jim there, but don’t make any noise, or everybody upstairs will think we’re burglars and shoot us.” 237

Philip switched off the library light, and taking Patty’s hand, led her through the dim hall and into the dining-room. At the end of this room was a wide bay window, which let in a perfect flood of moonlight.

“Oh,” exclaimed Patty, “what a picture! From my room you couldn’t tell it was moonlight at all.”

The picture from the window was a far sweep of hills, white with snow, and glistening in the moonlight. In the foreground, evergreen trees, laden with snow, stood about like sentinels,—and a big, yellow three-quarter moon was nearing the western horizon.

“Isn’t it wonderful, Philip?” whispered Patty, almost awed at the sight.

“Yes, dear,” he said, still holding her hand in both his own. “Patty, you have a wonderful appreciation of the beautiful.”

“Nobody could help loving such a sight as that.”

“And nobody could help loving such a girl as you!” exclaimed Philip, drawing her into his arms. “Patty, darling, you know I love you! Patty, *do* care for me a *little* bit, won’t you?”

“Don’t, Philip,” and Patty drew gently away from him. “*Please* don’t talk to me like that! Oh, I 238
oughtn’t to be here! Let me go, Philip,—I *know* this isn’t right.”

“It *is* right, Patty, darling; because I love you, and I want you for all my own. Say you love me, and that will make *everything* all right!”

“But I don’t, Philip.” And Patty’s voice carried a hint of tears.

“But you will, dear; you *must*, because I love you *so*. Patty, I have always loved you, I think, since I first saw you on the stairs at Aunty Van’s that evening. Do you remember?”

“Yes, I remember; but please, Philip, let me go now, and *don’t* talk to me this way. I don’t *want* you to!”

“You’re frightened, Patty, that’s all; and perhaps I ought not to have spoken just now; but you looked so sweet, in the moonlight, with that wonderful hair of yours curling about your shoulders, that I just couldn’t help it.”

“I’ll forgive you, Philip, if you’ll forget this whole occurrence.”

“Forget it? Why, Patty, what do you mean? I never forget it for a single moment! I was sitting there to-night, dreaming of *you*. I wasn’t asleep, you know, I was just thinking about you, and wondering how soon I might tell you my thoughts. You’re so young, dear,—I’m half a dozen 239
years older than you are,—but I want you, my little Patty. Mayn’t I hope?”

“You’re quite right, Philip. I *am* too young to think of such things. So cut it out for a couple of years, and then I’ll see about it!”

“Patty, you rogue, how *can* you speak like that? Don’t you love me a least little bit?”

“Not a teenty weenty speck! And if you don’t give me something to eat, I won’t even *like* you.”

“Well, here’s a bargain, then,—if I find something nice for you to eat, will you like me a whole lot?”

“I do like you a whole lot, anyway; but I don’t love you and I’m not going to love *anybody*, *ever*! I do think being grown-up is a regular nuisance, and I wish I was a little girl again, with my hair down my back!”

“Incidentally, your hair *is* down your back.”

“Well, I don’t care,” and Patty shook her curly mane. “I wear it that way in tableaux and things, so what’s the difference?”

“There *isn’t* any difference. We’ll pretend you’re a tableau.”

“All right, I’ll be Patience on a Monument, waiting for some supper.” 240

“That was Little Tommy Tucker.”

“No; *he* sang for his supper. I’m not going to sing.”

“For Heaven’s sake, *don’t*! Your top notes would bring the whole crowd down here! Patty, if you’ll promise to love me *some time*, I’ll stop teasing you *now*.”

“Oh, Philip, I’d do ’most anything to have you stop teasing me now! But how *can* I tell who I’m going to love when I get old enough to love anybody?”

“Well, you don’t love anybody yet, do you?”

“I do *not*!” and Patty shook her head with great emphasis.

“Then I have a fair show, anyway.” And Philip drew the curtain that shut out the moonlight, and switched on the electric light.

“Exit Romance!” he said, “and enter Comedy! Now, Patty, you’re my little playmate; we’re just two kiddies in the pantry, stealing jam,—that is, if we can find any jam.”

“The pantry’s the place,” said Patty; “there’s nothing in the sideboard but biscuit and raisins.”

“They don’t sound very good to me. To the pantry!”

Into the pantries they went, and there, in cupboards and iceboxes, found all sorts of good things. 241

Cold turkey, game pâté, jellies, custards, cakes, and all varieties of food.

“This is ever so much more fun than moonlight,” said Patty, as she perched herself on a table, there being no chair, and held a partridge wing in one hand and a macaroon in the other. “Could you find me a glass of milk, Philip?”

“Yes, indeed; anything you want, my Princess.”

“I thought you said Jim was about,” Patty remarked.

“He was,” returned Philip, calmly. “I saw him go upstairs as we came in the dining-room.”

“Did he see us?”

“Sure! He grinned at me and I grinned at him. I didn’t invite him to come with us,—so being a polite gentleman, he didn’t come. He doesn’t mind our eating up his food. He’s awful hospitable, Jim is.”

“Well, I’ve had enough of his food, and now I’m going back to my downy couch. If I don’t see you to-morrow before you leave,—good-bye, Philip.”

“That’s a nice, casual way to say good-bye to a man who has just proposed to you!” 242

“Good gracious! *Was* that a proposal?”

“Well, rather! What did you think it was? A sermon, or just a bit of oratory?”

“Do you know, Philip, truly I didn’t realise it at the time,” and Patty’s smile was very provoking, as she looked up into his face.

“Would your answer have been different if you had?” he asked, eagerly.

“Oh, no, not that! But I just want you to understand that I don’t consider it a real proposal,” and Patty laughed and ran away, leaving Philip to “clear up” the pantry.

She stopped a moment in the library, long enough to get her blue letter, and then scuttled up the stairs and into her own room.

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CHAPTER XV

A CHRISTMAS CARD

Once safely behind her locked door, Patty tore open her blue envelope. It was only a card,—but not an ordinary printed Christmas card.

In the upper corner was a spray of apple blossoms, exquisitely painted; and on the card were some verses, written in a hand that was small and fine, but unmistakably the same as the address on the outside of the envelope.

With a little sigh of pleasure, Patty cuddled up in her arm-chair to read the Christmas message.

But it proved to be not very Christmassy, after all; for this is what she read:

“MY LADY OF DELIGHT

“My Lady of Delight’s a dainty, winsome thing;
She’s Queen of Summertime, and Princess of the Spring.

Her lovely, smiling lips are roses set to rhyme,
She has a merry, lilting laugh, like Bluebells all a-chime.
The radiance of her smile, the sunshine in her eyes,
Is like the Dawn of breaking Day upon the summer skies.

"With roguish glances bright, all on a Summer Day,
My Lady of Delight she stole my heart away;
And though I humbly beg and plead with her, alack!
My Lady of Delight, she will not give it back.
I seem to see her now, with tangled golden curl,
With dancing eyes, and smiling lips,—My Apple Blossom Girl!

"Oh, Lady of Delight, I pray you, smile on me;
Oh, Lady of Delight, your Knight I fain would be;
Oh, Lady of Delight, you set my heart aglow.
I only know
I love you so,
Dear Lady of Delight!"

Patty read the verses over twice, with shining eyes.

"I wonder if he wrote them himself," she mused. "I don't believe he did; he must have copied them. He knows an awful lot of pretty poetry like that. And yet it doesn't sound like a real poet's poetry, either. And he used to call me Apple Blossom,—such a pretty name. Philip would never think of such a thing as that. I wonder if I like Little Billee better than I do Philip. I wonder if he likes me better. But of course he can't, or he would have written to me in all this time. I haven't seen him since August, and he never wrote a word, except the stiffest kind of a line with those flowers he sent me. I thought he'd forgotten all about me! But I can't think so now,—unless he just came across this poem, and it recalled me to his mind. Well, I came awfully near not getting it! I don't see how Daisy *could* have been so mean; I don't like that kind of a joke a bit. But of course she thought it was just a printed card, like hers and Mona's. Well, she'll never know it *isn't*,—that's one thing sure!"

And then Patty tucked her card of verses under her pillow and went to sleep.

The next morning, as Patty had prophesied, she slept late. Daisy peeped into her room two or three times before she finally found Patty's blue eyes open.

"At last!" she said, sitting down on the edge of the bed. "I thought you'd never wake up! Patty, what do you think? I've been down in the library, and I can't find that card! I'm awfully sorry, truly I am; I'll give you mine if you want it."

"Thank you, Daisy," and Patty smiled at the recollection of Mona's similar offer. "Bill's cards seem to be a drug in the market! But you may keep yours, and also set your mind at rest about mine; for I sneaked downstairs last night in the dark, and fished it out for myself."

"You did! Oh, Patty, weren't you frightened to prowl around like that, late at night?"

Patty shook with laughter. "I *was* frightened," she said, "when I thought I saw a mouse,—but it wasn't a mouse, after all."

"Oh, I wouldn't be afraid of a mouse! But you might have met a,—a burglar or something?"

"No," and Patty still grinned. "I didn't meet any *burglar*. But I got the card, Daisy, so that's all right."

"Was it like mine? Let me see it."

"It wasn't exactly like yours, and I won't let you see it. You kept it away from me, and now it's my turn to keep it away from you. And by the way, Daisy, that was a mean thing to do, and I don't want you to do anything like that to me again!" Patty's sweet face showed an unusually stern expression, and her blue eyes looked straight into Daisy's as she spoke.

"I won't, Patty; truly, I won't. I'm awfully sorry, but I did it on a sudden impulse."

"I know it; and, Daisy, I want you to try not to give way to those 'sudden impulses' when they're mean ones. You have enough good, generous impulses to keep you busy. Now, you mustn't mind if your Aunt Patty lectures you a little bit, because as the teachers always say, 'it's for your own good.' And if you'll please take a chair, instead of sitting all over my feet, I'd like to have my breakfast; for I hear my pretty little Swedish Hedwig bringing it in."

The smiling maid appeared with Patty's breakfast tray, followed by Mona and Adèle.

"Company already!" exclaimed Patty, sitting up in bed. "Hedwig, quick, my breakfast cap,—the pink one,—and the nightingale to match."

The maid threw the silken wrap around Patty's shoulders, and tucked her hair into the lace-frilled cap, which was of a Dutch shape, and made Patty look like the pictures of Holland's pretty queen.

"You don't seem hungry," said Mona, as Patty toyed with her chocolate. "Now, I ate a most astonishing breakfast, because I forgot to eat my supper last night."

"Well, you see," returned Patty, dropping her lashes to hide her twinkling eyes, "I didn't forget to eat my supper."

The recollection of that supper in the pantry was too much for her, and she burst into laughter.

“What *is* the matter with you, Patty?” said Adèle. “You’re acting like a harmless lunatic! However, I’m sent to tell you to hop up and get dressed, for one of your admirers below stairs wants you to go for a sleighride with him.”

“Jim?” asked Patty, looking up with a smile.

“No; Mr. Van Reypen.”

“Oh, good gracious! I don’t care about going riding with Philip; I can see *him* in New York. I hoped it was Hal,—that’s why I said Jim.”

“Patty,” said her hostess, “you’re a born coquette, and always will be! But your wiles are wasted on me. Save them for your suitors. But, truly, Mr. Van Reypen is going on an errand for me, and 249
he said that he wanted to show you *some* little attention while he was here, and he guessed he’d let you go along with him in the cutter.”

“Oh, a cutter ride,” and Patty began to scramble out of bed. “That sounds rather good fun. But I’d rather go with Hal.”

“Well, you’re candid, at any rate,” said Daisy. “But as it happens, Hal and I are going to practise some music this morning.”

“Oh, in that case, I’ve nothing more to say.” And Patty smiled good-naturedly at Daisy. “And I suppose Mona and Roger are going somewhere to play by themselves.”

“Nothing of the sort,” said Mona. “Roger’s going back to the city this morning, and I’m going to write letters.”

“But I thought Philip was going back to the city,” said Patty, looking at Adèle.

“He’s going on the afternoon train. Go on and get dressed, Patty, and don’t waste any more time.”

“All right,” and Patty made an expeditious toilette and in little more than half an hour went downstairs equipped for her ride.

She was enveloped from head to foot in a raccoon fur coat, with a jaunty hat of the same, 250
trimmed only with a bright quill feather.

“Why do we go?” she demanded, presenting herself before Philip, who was waiting in the hall.

“To get butter and eggs,” he returned, gravely. “The Kenerley larder is entirely empty of those two very necessary ingredients.”

“But why do *we* go for them? Are there no servants to send?”

“Little girls shouldn’t ask questions,” and without further ceremony Philip tucked her into the waiting sleigh, sprang in beside her, and took up the lines.

“My, this is great!” exclaimed Patty, as the pair of fine horses went dashing down the drive, and the clear, keen winter air blew against her face.

“Yes; I thought the sleighride would brace you up. And, really, there seemed to be nobody to send on this errand, so I said we’d go.”

“Is it far?”

“No; only about five miles; we’ll be back for luncheon. How did you sleep, after your late supper?”

“All right,” and Patty smiled back into Philip’s face. “But I wasn’t hungry for my breakfast.” 251

“I should say not! You ate enough last night for two little girls like you!”

“There aren’t two little girls like me!” said Patty, with twinkling eyes, and Philip exclaimed: “Indeed, there aren’t! I say, Patty, my Princess Patty, *do* be engaged to me, won’t you?”

“No, you ridiculous boy, I won’t! And if you say another word on the subject, I’ll be real downright mad at you!”

“Very well, I won’t. Now, see here, Princess, do you mean to go to this masquerade ball with me? For, if not, I’m not coming back here for New Year’s.”

“Why, of course, I’m going with you. Who else?”

“I don’t know, I’m sure. But there would be plenty glad to take you.”

“Pooh! I know that. But I want to go with you. What shall we wear?”

“I was thinking of some foolish thing, like Little Bo-Peep, you know.”

“Oh, I’d love to be that! A shepherdess costume, and a crook with ribbons on. But I want you to wear a satin coat and knee-breeches.” 252

“Well, I’ll be Old King Cole.”

“No, I don’t like that. I’ll tell you! You be Little Boy Blue.”

“The Gainsborough picture?”

“No, that won’t do either. Oh, you be Bobby Shafto! He wears ‘silver buckles on his knee,’ don’t you know?”

“Yes, I *do* know! And what’s the next line?”

“Never mind,” said Patty, turning pink. “I want you to wear a real Bobby Shafto costume. So you will, won’t you?”

“Of course, if my Princess commands. I’ll have it made at once. Can I help about yours?”

“Well, you might go to see Nan, and tell her what I want, and she’ll get it and send it up here. A shepherdess rig is easy enough, and there’s nothing prettier.”

“It will be lovely. I say, which way do we turn here?”

“To go to Hatton’s Corners? Oh, to the right.”

“I think it’s the left.”

“No, it isn’t. I remember distinctly, Jim said, be sure to take the right road.”

“He meant right, not wrong.” 253

“Nonsense! he didn’t. He meant right, not left. Turn right, Philip.”

They turned right, into a wide, straight road. The sleighing was fine, though not yet sufficiently packed. But, with the light cutter, and two good horses, they spun along in great shape.

“There’s something about sleighing that’s different from anything else,” remarked Patty, with the air of one expounding a great truth.

“It’s the exhilaration. Spinning along like this, with the snow crunching under us, beats motoring, I think.”

“Yes; for an occasional ride. But for all the year round, motoring is best.”

“That’s so. Sleighing isn’t much fun in July or August.”

“Huh! don’t be silly. But, I say, Philip, where are we? Jim said we’d pass Little Falls, and then we must follow the trolley line all the way to the butter and egg house. I don’t see any trolley.”

“Neither do I, yet. But we’ll soon strike it. Ah, here we are!”

“No; this is a railroad,—a steam railroad, I mean. Philip, we’re off the road.”

“I think we are. I’m sorry I insisted on turning to the right at that corner.” 254

“You *didn’t* insist. *I* did! But I thought it was right.”

“It *is* right, dear. Anything is right, where you are.”

“You’d better stop talking foolishness, and find the right road.”

“Oh, if you call that *foolishness*!”

“Well, I do! I’d rather you’d get to the egg house and back before it begins to storm. And by the looks of the sky, I’m sure it *is* going to storm.”

“Oh, no! nothing like that. But I say! Princess! it’s after one o’clock! Now, who would have thought it? And they expect us back to luncheon!”

“After one! Oh, Philip, it *can’t* be!”

“Yes, it is! Well, Patty Pink, the best thing to do, *I* think, is to go to that house I see in the dim distance, and ask our way. The last two or three signposts have shown names *I* never heard of.”

“I either,” said Patty, in a meek voice. “I noticed them, but I didn’t say anything, because it’s my fault we went astray.”

“Well, never mind. We’re in for a lark, that’s all. ‘Afar in the desert I love to ride’—what comes next, Patty?” 255

“‘With the silent Bushboy alone by my side——’”

“Yes, that’s it; but thank goodness, you’re not silent——”

“Nor a Bushboy, either. But I don’t like this, Philip. We’re——”

“We’re far frae our hame, and all that. But don’t you worry, my Princess. You’re with me, and so you’re not lost. You know, it’s better to be loved than lost.”

“Now, Philip, stop talking about love! It’s bad enough to be lost,—and we *are* lost,—without having somebody harping about love all the time.”

“Well, this isn’t much of a time or place, is it? So, suppose we invade this peaceful dwelling, and inquire our latitude and longitude.”

They drove up a winding road to a large, old-fashioned house, and Philip jumped out at the front door.

His summons on the big, brass knocker was answered by a prim little lady, with grey hair and bright, dark eyes.

“Pardon me, madame,” said Philip, in his best manner. “We have lost our way. Will you tell me how to reach Hatton’s Corners?” 256

“Hatton’s Corners! Why, that’s a good ten miles from here. Where’d you come from?”

“From Fern Falls.”

“Then you took the wrong road at the Big Tree Fork. You’d oughter ‘a’ gone to the left.”

“H’m; you may be right. But must we go back there, or is there a shorter cut?”

“No; there ain’t no shorter cut. But your young lady looks cold. Won’t you two come in and take a bite o’ dinner, and get warm before you go on?”

“Why, this is true hospitality, madame. What do you say, Patty?”

Patty looked uncertain. “I don’t know what to say,” she replied, hesitatingly. “I *am* cold; but I’m afraid it would delay us so long that Adèle will worry about us. I think we’d better jog along.”

But then another old lady appeared. She was rounder, rosier, plumper, and jollier than the first, and she cried out, heartily: “Jog along? Well, I reckon not! I jest waited to slip into my shoes,—my feet’s awful tender,—and then I come right out here to see what’s goin’ on. Now, you two young folks come right in, and set a spell. ’Tain’t often we get a chance to have comp’ny,—and on chicken pie day, too!” 257

“Whew, chicken pie!” exclaimed Philip. “How about it, Patty?”

“Have you a telephone?” asked Patty, with a sudden inspiration.

“Yes, miss. Now you jest come along. ’Kiah, the hired man, he’ll look after your horses, and I’m free to confess they need a rest and a feed, even if you don’t.”

“That’s so,” said Philip. “We must have come twelve or fifteen miles.”

“It’s all o’ that from Fern Falls. My, I’m right down glad to look after you two. You do seem to need it.”

The speaker’s twinkling dark eyes looked at her two visitors with such comprehension that Patty blushed and Philip smiled.

“We’re from Mr. Kenerley’s house,” he explained,—“guests there, you know. And we started for Hatton’s Corners to get some butter and eggs—and somehow, we took the wrong turn——”

“It was all my fault,” confessed Patty. “I insisted on coming this way, though Mr. Van Reypen thought the other was right.”

“Well, well, never mind! It’ll jest be a nice, smart trip back after dinner. I’m Mrs. Fay, and this is 258
my sister, Miss Wilhelmina Winthrop. She’s got a longer name than I have, but I’ve got a longer head.”

They were ushered into the old-fashioned sitting-room, with its Brussels carpet showing huge baskets of flowers; its heterogeneous furniture, some chairs haircloth and black walnut, and others cane-seated, with rep cushions tied on; marble tables, of course; and an old sofa, with well-worn pillows and rugs.

But the place had a hospitable air, and the two hostesses were fairly beaming with delight at this opportunity for entertainment. Miss Winthrop carried Patty off to her own bedroom.

“You’re jest all tuckered out, I can see,” she said, hovering around her like a clucking hen; “but a wash-up and a good dish o’ chicken pie will put you all to rights again.”

“But I must telephone before we eat dinner,” said Patty.

“So you shall,—so you shall. Now, don’t you worry the leastest mite about anything.”

“How kind you are!” exclaimed Patty, smiling on the happy little old lady. “I suppose you belong to the real old New England Winthrops?” 259

“Yes, and we’re mighty proud of our name. I was so much so that I never would change it,”—and she chuckled. “Sister, though, she thought Fay was prettier.”

“Fay *is* pretty,” said Patty, cordially, “and now, if I may, I’ll telephone, for I know our people will be wondering where we are.”

“All right, Miss Fairfield; come right along.” But in returning to the sitting-room, Patty found Philip was already at the telephone.

“Yep,” he was saying, “lost our way; took wrong turning at Big Tree Fork. Brought up, somehow, at Mrs. Fay’s. Accepted invitation to dinner,—chicken pie!—Start back immediately after the E in Pie! See? Expect us when we get there. Will accumulate a butter and a egg or two, on our way home. Love to all. Philip.” He concluded his harangue, and turned to Patty.

“All serene on the Potomac, Patty Pink! I told them all it was necessary for them to know; and if they desire further information, they can call us up. They know where we are. Me for the chicken pie!”

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CHAPTER XVI

STORMBOUND

The two old ladies were not of the quaint type, nor was their home picturesque. The place and the people were merely old-fashioned, and they were almost primitive in their ways. They were kind-hearted and hospitable, but they were of the rugged New England class that has lost the charm of its Colonial ancestry.

The dinner was wholesome and plentiful, but with no variety, and served in the plainest fashion. The chicken pie was delicious, but it had no accompaniments except home-made hot biscuit and coffee with thick, rich, country cream.

"I always say," said Miss Winthrop, as she settled herself at the table, "that chicken pie is a whole meal in itself, without any bothersome side-dishes. I say it's meat and drink both; but sister says she just can't enjoy it 'thout she has a cup of coffee alongside of it. Well, I've no 261
objections to the coffee, I'm sure, but I'm free to admit it does seem superfluous. Still, with company so, it ain't so much out of place."

"I'm sorry if we've made you any extra trouble," said Patty, giving Miss Winthrop one of her best smiles; "but *I'm* free to confess that this is the most wonderful coffee that I've ever tasted, and I think it goes specially well with the pie. And as for these light biscuit, they're just puffs of lusciousness! Aren't they, Philip?"

"They are, indeed! All you say is true, but both coffee and biscuit pale beside the glory of this chicken pie! There never *was* such another!"

Mrs. Fay beamed with delight at these generous compliments, and said, complacently, "Yes, they ain't many can make chicken pie like mine, if I do say it. My, ain't it lucky you young people happened along, to-day of all days! And land knows, I don't want you to go away right off. I'd like you to set a spell after dinner. But I feel it my bounden duty to tell you that 'Kiah says there's a storm a-brewin'. But I don't think you need start off before, say, three o'clock, anyway." 262

"Three o'clock will do nicely," returned Philip, gaily. "That will give us time to stop at Hatton's Corners and get home before dark. Personally, I'm not in a bit of a hurry."

"No?" And Mrs. Fay looked quizzically at her guests. "I just reckon, young man, that you ain't one mite sorry that you lost your way and had this little outing with your young lady?"

"Indeed I'm not sorry, Mrs. Fay; and beside our little outing, we're having a pleasant visit with you, and we're enjoying every minute of it."

"Indeed we are," said Patty, glancing out of the window as she spoke. "But it's beginning to snow already, and I don't think we'd better wait until three o'clock."

"Land's sake!" and Miss Winthrop turned to look out of the window behind her. "So it is snowing! And when it begins that way, with fine flakes, slanting crossways, it means business! I dunno as you can hardly dare venture on a twelve-mile ride in the face of this. 'Pears to me it's going to be a blizzard."

"Nonsense, Mina; you do always look on the dark side," expostulated her sister. "Now *I* think 'tain't nothing but a flurry, and by then dinner is over, it'll be bright sunshine again. Now, have 263
your plates filled up, friends, and try and make out a meal."

Mrs. Fay fairly beamed with hospitality as she urged more viands upon her guests. The table appointments were of the plainest, being thick white china and coarse table napery, with plated silverware. Patty had expected thin little old teaspoons of hall-marked silver, and old blue or perhaps copper-lustre teacups, but this household was not of that sort. Everything seemed to date from the early seventies, and Patty wondered why there were no old Winthrop heirlooms in the family.

She brought the conversation round to antiques, and Mrs. Fay remarked, decidedly: "I just can't bear old-fashioned things. I come into quite a lot of old mahogany furniture and pewter and dishes and things when my grandfather died. But when I got married, I had an auction and sold everything. Then I took the money and bought a whole new outfit. I believe in going right along with the times. 'Course those old things were all right for grandfather, but when I married, I'm free to confess, I wanted things that were in style then. So I bought a real tasty outfit, and I've kept it careful, and it's pretty near as good as new now." 264

She looked around with pride at her dining-room furnishings, which seemed to Patty about the worst she had ever seen.

But she smiled at her hostess, and said, cordially: "I *do* think it's nice to have just what you want; and I think we do get attached to our own things. Have you lived here long?"

"Land, yes! Nearly all my life. Mr. Fay, he's been dead twenty-five years; so sister and me we live here together, as contented as you please. We have a telephone and a rural delivery, so you see it's just the same as if we were right in town. Now, if you really won't eat any more pie, let's go into the sittin'-room a spell."

From the sitting-room windows the view of the storm seemed more serious. The sky was black, the wind was blowing a gale, and the snow-flurry had grown thicker. In fact, it was a hard snowstorm, and Miss Winthrop's fear of a blizzard did not seem entirely unfounded.

The young people took it lightly, however. "There's no use worrying," said Patty. "We ought to be thankful, Philip, that we're under shelter, and with such kind friends. You'll keep us till the 265
storm is over, won't you, Mrs. Fay?"

"Yes, and glad to. You just can't think of starting now, so you might as well settle down and

make the best of it. Want to telephone to your people again?”

“We will after a while; but there’s no use calling them up now. Let’s wait and see whether the storm grows worse or better. Why, if it’s a blizzard, we may have to stay here all night!”

“Don’t let that worry you none,” and Mrs. Fay swung back and forth complacently in her plush patent-rocker. “We got two spare bedrooms, and I’ll just be tickled to death to put you up over night. You’re just like a streak of sunshine in the house, Miss Fairfield, and I’m glad to have you as long as you’ll stay.”

“I wish you’d call me a streak of sunshine,” said Philip. “I’d love to be called that.”

“Well, you’re bright enough,” and Mrs. Fay looked at him, serenely. “But you’re a different kind of a streak.”

“A streak of lightning, I guess, if need be,” said Miss Winthrop, nodding her head at Philip, as if she appreciated his capabilities.

“I’m quick at some things,” said Philip, modestly. “But, jiminy crickets! I don’t believe we’re going to be very quick getting away from here! Just look at the storm, *now*!”

The fury of the elements had increased. The wind was a raging northern blast, and the snow was already piled in drifts. It was, in fact, a blizzard in a small way, and was rapidly growing.

“But never mind the weather, so long as we’re together,” sang Patty with a little trill, as she danced about the room. Then she seated herself at the old, square piano, and began to sing snatches of gay songs.

“My land! How pretty you do sing,” said Miss Winthrop, who was leaning on the end of the piano, listening delightedly. “Oh, sing more, won’t you? I don’t know when I’ve had such a treat.”

So Patty sang several of her prettiest songs, and the two old ladies were enchanted. Moreover, Eliza, the maid-of-all-work, and ’Kiah, the hired man, appeared in the doorway of the sitting-room and listened too.

“Come on, Philip; let’s give them a duet,” and Patty broke into some rollicking college songs, in which Philip joined.

Glad to be able to please their kind entertainers, they kept on singing for an hour or more.

“Well, that was great!” exclaimed Mrs. Fay, as Patty rose at last from the piano stool. “I used to sing some, and he used to sing bass. My, but we had nice times singing together there at that same piano. You two just made me think of it all over again. I think it’s awful nice for two to sing together.”

“Yes, we’re awfully fond of singing together,” said Philip, with a glance at Patty, half mischievous, half tender, whereat Patty blushed.

“You needn’t tell me,” said Mrs. Fay, nodding her head. “I see just how it is with you two. You can’t hide it, you know, so you needn’t to try.”

“Oh, I don’t want to hide anything, I’m sure,” said Philip. But Patty said, “Don’t be foolish, Philip; there’s nothing to hide! You’re mistaken, Mrs. Fay, if you think we’re anything more than friends.”

“Oh, land, child, I know what that means! Maybe you ain’t ready to say yes yet, but you will soon. Well, it ain’t none of my business, but I’m free to confess you are as proper-lookin’ a young couple as I’d want to meet; and mighty well suited to each other.”

“That’s what I think,” began Philip, but Patty turned the subject and went back to the weather, which was always a safe ground for conversation, if not safe to go out into.

“Well,” she said, going to the window for the fourteenth time; “it’s perfectly hopeless to think of starting. And it’s after four now, and it’s blowing great guns and snowing like all possessed! Mrs. Fay, we’ll simply have to accept your hospitality for the night. Now I think I’ll telephone Adèle that we’re stormbound.”

But though Patty called and called, she could get no answer from the telephone Central.

“Guess the wires must be down,” said Miss Winthrop. “They broke down last winter with a snow that came sudden, just like this, and ’twas a week before we got it fixed.”

“Let me try,” and Philip took the receiver from Patty’s hand. But it made no difference who tried, they could get no answer of any kind.

“Oh, well,” said Philip, as he hung up the receiver again, “it doesn’t matter much. They know we’re safe, and they know where we are, and they know we couldn’t start out in a storm like this.”

“Maybe they’ll come for us with a motor,” suggested Patty.

“They might if we were nearer. But a motor would get stalled before it could get over here and back again in these drifts. It’s an awful storm, Patty, and the sooner you make up your mind that we can’t go home to-night, the better for all concerned.”

“My mind’s made up, then,” and Patty danced about the room. “I don’t mind a bit! I think it’s a lark. Do you have feather beds, Mrs. Fay?—I mean the kind you climb up to with step-ladders.”

“Land no, child! We ain’t old-fashioned folks, you know. We have springs and mattresses just

like you do at home. Well, I'm sorry if your folks are worried, but I'm glad to have you young people stay the night. Maybe this evening, you'll sing for us some more."

"We will," said Philip. "We'll sing everything we know, and then make up some."

Once having made up her mind to the inevitable, Patty ceased bothering about it, and proceeded to enjoy herself and to entertain everybody else. She chatted pleasantly with the old lady, she coquetted with Philip, and finally wandered out into the kitchen to make friends with Eliza. 270

"Let me help you get supper," she said, for, to tell the truth, the novelty of the situation had passed, and Patty began to feel a little bored.

"Supper ain't nothin' to get, miss," returned Eliza, a rawboned, countrified girl who was shy in the presence of this city lady.

"Well, let me help you, anyway. Mayn't I set the table?"

"I'm afraid you wouldn't know where the things was. Here, take this dish and go down cellar for the butter, if so be's you have to do somethin'. It's in a kag, underneath the swing-shelf."

"Swing-shelf?" said Patty, interested—"what is a swing-shelf?"

"Why, a shelf hanging from the ceiling, to keep things on."

"But why does it hang from the ceiling? I never heard of such a thing."

"Why, so the rats or mice can't get at the things."

"Rats or mice!" and Patty gave a wild scream. "Here, take your plate, Eliza. I wouldn't go down there for a million billion dollars!" 271

Patty ran back to the sitting-room. "Oh, Philip," she cried, "they have rats and mice! Can't we go home? I don't mind the storm!"

"There, there, Patty," said Philip, meeting her half-way across the room, and taking her hand in his. "Don't be silly!"

"I'm *not* silly! But I *can't* stay where they keep rats and mice! Why, Philip, they *expect* them. They build high shelves on purpose for them."

"You must excuse this little girl, Mrs. Fay," said Philip. "She's really sensible in most ways, but she's an absolute idiot about mice, and she can't help it. Why, the other night——"

Patty drew her hand away from Philip's clasp, and put it over his mouth. "Stop!" she said, blushing furiously. "Don't you say another word! I'm *not* afraid of mice, Mrs. Fay."

"There, there, child; I know you are, and I don't blame you a mite. I am, too, or leastways, I used to be. I've kinder got over it of late years. But I know just how you feel. Now, let me tell you; *honest*, never a mouse dares show the tip of his nose outside the cellar! If you don't go down there, you're as safe as you would be up in a balloon. And I don't count none the less on you for acting skittish about 'em." 272

"I don't mind it, either," said Philip, who was still holding Patty's hand by way of reassurance. "I shouldn't mind if you acted skittisher yet."

But Patty drew her hand away, declaring that Mrs. Fay had quieted her fears entirely, and that if Eliza would promise to keep the cellar door shut, she wouldn't give another thought to the dreaded animals.

After supper, the four played a game of old-fashioned whist, which delighted the two old ladies, though it seemed strange to Patty and Philip, who were both good bridge players. Then there was more music, and at ten o'clock Miss Winthrop informed them that it was bedtime.

With considerable pride she took Patty up to the best spare room.

"Now, I hope you'll be comfortable," she said, "and I'm sure you will be. Here's my best night-gown for you, and a dressing-gown and slippers. I don't need 'em,—I can get along. And here's a brush and comb. And now, that's everything you want, isn't it?"

Patty was touched at the kindliness of the old lady, and though inwardly amused at the meagerness of her night appointments, she said, gratefully, "You're so kind to me, Miss Winthrop. Truly, I do appreciate it." 273

"You sweet little thing," returned the old lady. "Now let me unhook you,—I should admire to do so."

So Miss Winthrop assisted Patty to undress, and finally, after minute directions about the turning down and blowing out of the kerosene lamp, she went away.

When Patty surveyed herself in the mirror, she almost laughed aloud. The night-dress was of thick, unbleached muslin, made with tight bands to button around the neck and wrists. These bands were edged with a row of narrow tatting; and it was this trimming, Patty felt sure, that differentiated Miss Winthrop's best night-gown from her others. Then Patty tried on the dressing-gown, which was of dark grey flannel. This, too, was severely plain, though voluminous in shape; and the slippers were of black felt, and quite large enough for Patty to put both feet in one. She arrayed herself in these things and gave way to silent laughter as she pirouetted across the room. But her amusement at the unattractive garments in no way lessened her real appreciation of the gentle kindliness and hospitality that had been accorded to her. 274

At last she tucked herself into bed, and rolling over on the nubbly mattress and creaky springs, she almost wished that it had been a feather bed. But she was soon asleep, and thought no more about anything until morning.

Breakfast was at half-past seven, and after that, the long morning dragged. The fun and novelty had worn off, and Patty was anxious to get back to Fern Falls. She was bright and entertaining as ever, but the spontaneous enthusiasm of the day before had vanished.

But it was impossible to start that morning, Philip said. The roads were piled high with drifts, and almost impassable.

“But why can’t we break the roads?” asked Patty. “Somebody has to do it, and I’m sure Jim’s horses are as good as anybody’s.”

“Little girls mustn’t advise on matters which they know nothing about,” said Philip, unable to resist the temptation to tease her.

Patty pouted a little, and then, with a sudden resolution, was her own sunny self again. “All right, Philip,” she said, smiling at him. “I know you’ll start as soon as it’s possible. When will that be?” 275

“Perhaps we can go this afternoon, dear; right after dinner, maybe. The man thinks the roads will be broken by that time.”

The storm had ceased, and it was cloudy most of the morning, but about noon the sun came out, and by two o’clock they prepared to start.

The two kind old ladies were sorry to see them go, and begged them to come again some time to visit them.

Patty said good-bye with expressions of real and honestly meant gratitude, for surely Mrs. Fay and her sister had been kindness itself to their young guests.

“But goodness, gracious, Philip,” Patty exclaimed, as they went flying down the road, “if I had had to stay there another night, I should have died!”

“Why, Patty, it wasn’t so bad. Of course, they are primitive and old-fashioned people; but they are true ladies, even if not very highly educated. And their hospitality was simply unlimited.”

“Yes, I know all that,” said Patty, impatiently; “but I was bored to death.”

“Well, you didn’t show it; you were sweet as a peach to those two people, and they’ll always love you for it.” 276

“Oh, of course I wouldn’t be impolite; but I’m glad we’re started for home.”

“Well, I’m not. Patty, I just enjoyed every minute,—because I was there with you. Dear, you don’t *know* what it meant to me.”

“Now, Philip,” and Patty turned to flash a twinkling smile at him, “we have a twelve-mile drive ahead of us, besides gathering the eggs. Now, if you’re going to say things like that to me all that twelve miles, I’m going to jump right out into this snowbank and stay there till somebody comes along and picks me up.”

“But, Patty, I *must* say these things to you.”

“Then, I *must* jump.”

“But wait a minute, dear; before you jump, won’t you just tell me that I may have a little hope that some day you’ll promise to be my own little Patty forever?”

“Philip, I *can’t* say anything like that, and I *wish* you wouldn’t tease me. If those snowbanks didn’t look so dreadfully cold——”

“But they *are* cold. If you don’t believe it, I will wait while you try one. But, Patty, anyway, tell me this. If I stop teasing you now, will you give me an answer when I come back at New Year’s? You know, I must take that five-thirty train this afternoon, and I shan’t see you again till next week. Will you give me an answer then?” 277

“‘Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer, do!’” sang Patty, with a saucy smile at him.

“No, I don’t want Daisy’s answer, I want yours. Now, you think it over through the week, and when I come up next Tuesday, you be ready to say, ‘Yes, Philip, you may hope, and some day I’ll make your hope come true.’”

“That’s an awful long speech to learn by heart,” said Patty, musingly.

“But you needn’t learn it word for word; just say something from your own heart that means the same.”

“Well,” said Patty, “next Tuesday I’ll look into my heart and see what’s there; and if there’s anything for you, I’ll tell you.”

Philip was forced to be content with this, for Patty suddenly changed the subject, and began to chatter merry nonsense that afforded no opportunity for romance. The roads were only a little broken, and the going was hard, because of occasional big drifts, but along some wind-swept stretches they made fairly good time.

“But I say,” said Philip; “we’ll have to cut out the butter and egg chapter! I simply *must* get that five-thirty, and I can’t do it if we go around by Hatton’s Corners.” 278

“All right,” returned Patty. “I’ll put it up to Adèle that we just couldn’t do it; and I’ll tell you what, Philip, we’ll go right to the station, and you take the train there without going to the Kenerleys’ at all. They’ll send your things down to-morrow.”

“That would be the safer way. But how will you get home from the station?”

“Oh, I’ll telephone from the station office, and they’ll send Martin, or somebody, after me.”

“But you have to wait so long. Here’s a better plan. Let’s stop at the Barclay Inn, and telephone from there. Then when we reach the station, Martin or somebody will be there for you.”

Patty agreed, and when they reached the Barclay Inn, a few miles from Fern Falls, they went in to telephone.

“We’re on our way home,” said Patty, after she had succeeded in getting a connection.

“Well, I should think it was time!” exclaimed Adèle. “You don’t know what you’ve missed! Where are you?”

“At Barclay Inn; and we’re in an awful hurry. Philip is going to take the five-thirty from the station, and you send somebody there to meet me and drive the horses home, will you! And what did I miss? And *you’ll* miss the butter and eggs, because we didn’t get them.” 279

“But where have you been? We tried all yesterday to get you on the telephone, and all this morning, too.”

“Yes, I know; the wires broke down. But everything’s all right. We stayed at Mrs. Fay’s. I’ll tell you all about it when I see you. Be sure to have me met at the station. Good-bye.”

Patty hung up the receiver and hurried back to Philip. “We’ll have to hustle to catch that train,” he said, as he tucked her in the sleigh. “Did you get Adèle?”

“Yes; she’ll send some one to meet me. She says I missed something. Do you suppose they had a party last night in all that blizzard?”

“Well, it’s just as well for you to miss a party once in a while; you have plenty of them. And I like the party I was at better than any I ever went to.”

The roads were much better where they were travelling now, and they reached the station in time for Philip’s train. But it was a close connection, for the train was already in the station, and as Philip swung aboard, he saw Martin and Hal Ferris coming in another sleigh. 280

“There they are!” he called to Patty. “It’s all right, good-bye.”

“Good-bye,” she called back, and then the train pulled out.

“Well, you *did* cut up a pretty trick!” exclaimed Hal Ferris, as he came up to her. “Now, you jump in here with me, and I’ll drive you home, and let Martin look after your horses. They must be pretty well done up. I would have brought a motor, but the sleighing’s fine, and the motoring isn’t. Hop in.”

Patty hopped in, and in a moment they were flying along toward home.

“What did I miss?” she asked. “Did you have a party last night?”

“Party! in that storm! Rather not.”

“Well, what *did* I miss?”

“What makes you think you missed anything?”

“Adèle told me so, over the telephone.”

“Well, then, let Adèle tell you what it was. How could I possibly know?”

“But what did you do last night?”

“Nothing much; sat around, sang a little, and talked,—and I guess that’s all.” 281

“Who was there? Didn’t Roger go home?”

“Yes; Roger went down on the morning train, just after you started on your wild career.”

“Well, who *was* there? Chub, I know you’re keeping something from me. Now, tell me what it is!”

“Do you really want to know, Patty? Well, Bill Farnsworth was there.”

“What!” and Patty nearly fell out of the sleigh in astonishment. “Bill Farnsworth?”

“Yes; he came unexpectedly yesterday afternoon. Could only stay twenty-four hours, and went back to-day on the two o’clock train.”

Patty wondered to herself why she felt as if something awful had happened. She couldn’t realise that Bill had been there, and had gone away, and she hadn’t seen him! What a cruel coincidence that it should have been just at the time when she was away. But her pride came to her rescue. She had no intention of letting Hal Ferris or anybody else know that she cared.

So she said, lightly: “Well, of all things! Didn’t anybody expect him?”

“No; he thought he’d surprise us. He was awfully cut up that you weren’t there.”

“Oh, he was! Well, why didn’t you send for me?” 282

“Send for you! And you miles away, and a blizzard blizzing like fury! But we spent hours

hanging over the telephone, trying to get word to you."

"The wires were down," said Patty, thinking of the uninteresting evening she had spent, when she might have been talking to Little Billee.

"They sure were! We tried and tried, but we couldn't get a peep out of you. Daisy said it was because you were so wrapped up in Philip that you wouldn't answer the old telephone."

Patty's pretty face hardened a little as she thought how Daisy would delight in making such a speech as that before Farnsworth.

"I say, Patty, are you cut up about this? Did you want to see Big Bill, specially?"

"Oh, no, no," said Patty, smiling again. "I only thought it seemed funny that he happened to come when I happened to be away."

"Yes, I know; but of course nobody could help it. He came East on a flying business trip. Tried to get here for Christmas, but couldn't make it. He waited over a day, just to skip up here and back; said he wanted to see us all. But he had to take the two o'clock back to New York to-day, and I believe he starts to-night for Arizona. He's a great fellow, Bill is. You like him, don't you, Patty?" 283

"Yes, I like him," said Patty, simply.

"I've known him for years, you know. Giant Greatheart, we used to call him. So big and good, you know. Always doing something for somebody, and generous as he can be. Well, he's making good out in the mines. I don't know exactly what he's doing, but he's in a fair way to be a rich man. He's connected with some big company, and he's working with all his might. And when you say that about Big Bill Farnsworth, it means a good deal."

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CHAPTER XVII

THE COUNTRY CLUB BALL

Before her mirror, Patty was putting the last touches to her Bo-Peep costume, and it must be confessed she was viewing the effect with admiration.

The gilt-framed glass gave back a lovely picture. The costume was one of the prettiest Patty had ever worn, and was exceedingly becoming. There was a short, quilted skirt of white satin and a panniered overdress of gay, flowered silk, caught up with blue bows. A little laced bodice and white chemisette completed the dress. Then there was a broad-leafed shepherdess hat, trimmed with flowers, and under this Patty's gold curls were bunched up on either side and tied with blue ribbons. She wore high-heeled, buckled slippers, and carried a long, white crook, trimmed with blossoms and fluttering ribbons.

She pranced and turned in front of the mirror, decidedly satisfied with the whole effect. Then she caught up her basket of flowers, which she carried because it added a pretty touch, and went downstairs. 285

It was a gay-looking party that waited for her in the hall. The two Misses Crosby had been there to dinner, and also Mr. Hoyt and Mr. Collins, and these, with the house party, were now all arrayed in their fancy dress. As they had agreed on Christmas Day, they were all in pairs, and as of course there could be no secrecy among them, they had not yet put on their masks.

Mona and Roger were very magnificent as Queen Elizabeth and Sir Walter Raleigh. Though Mona was not at all the type of the red-haired queen, she looked very handsome in the regal robes and great, flaring collar, while Roger was a veritable courtier in his picturesque garb.

Daisy and Mr. Collins were Pierrette and Pierrot. Their costumes were black and white, Frenchy-looking affairs, with tossing pompons and peaked caps.

The elder Miss Crosby and Jim Kenerley were Indians; and the warlike brave and the young Indian maiden looked as if they might have stepped out of the earliest pages of our country's history. 286

The other Miss Crosby and Hal Ferris were Italian peasants in national costume.

Adèle and Mr. Hoyt were the most simply dressed of all, but in their plain Puritan garb they were effective and distinguished looking.

Perhaps, however, it was Philip Van Reypen whose costume received the greatest applause. He had copied a picture of Bobby Shafto that had been painted by a frivolous-minded artist, and his embroidered and belaced coat of light blue silk was remindful of the period of the gayest Louis. He wore white satin knee-breeches, white silk stockings, and black slippers with enormous buckles. In accordance with the song, there were large silver buckles at his knees; and his tri-corne hat was a very marvel of gold lace and feathers. Full lace ruffles flapped at his throat and

wrists, and altogether he was an absolute dandy.

“You look like a valentine,” said Patty, “or a birthday cake.”

“You do look good enough to eat,” declared Adèle, as she took in the gorgeous costume.

“Yes, I flatter myself it’s the very last touch of Shaftoism,” said Philip, strutting about with an affected gait. “I say, Patty, you’re all kinds of a peach yourself.” 287

“Yes, this frock is all right,” said Patty, “but you simply take my breath away, Phil. I didn’t know anybody could look so beautiful! I wish men dressed that way nowadays.”

And then everybody admired everybody else until it was time to start. Then each put on a little mask, which they were to wear at the ball until supper-time. Patty’s was of light blue silk with a short fall of lace, and Philip’s was of black satin.

“I can’t wear this thing all the way there,” declared Patty, taking hers off again.

“Well, put it on just before you get there,” enjoined Adèle. “I’ve taken great care that no one should know a word about our costumes, and now if we are well masked they won’t be able to guess who we are. Even though they know we all came from our house, there are so many of us, they can’t tell us apart.”

The Country Club was a handsome, spacious building, well away from the outskirts of the town. But the motors took them there swiftly, and soon they joined the large party of maskers in the Club ballroom. There were perhaps a hundred people there, and Patty felt there was little risk of being recognised. She did not know many of the Fern Falls people, anyway, and they would 288 scarcely know her in her disguise.

“Of course the first dance is mine,” said Philip, as the music began.

But after that dance was over, Patty was besieged by would-be partners. Historical characters, foreigners, clowns, monks, and knights in armour begged for dances with Little Bo-Peep. Patty was so engrossed in looking at these wonderful personages, that she scarcely noticed who put their names on her card. And in truth it made little difference, as none of the men put their real names, and she hadn’t the slightest idea who they were.

“Help yourselves,” she said, laughing, “to the dances before supper; but don’t touch the other side of the card. After the masks are off, I shall have some say, myself, as to my partners!”

So the first half of the dances were variously signed for by Columbus and Aladdin and Brother Sebastian and Jack Pudding and other such names.

During each dance Patty would try to discover the identity of her partner, but as she only succeeded in one or two cases, she gave it up.

“For it doesn’t make the slightest difference who you are,” she said, as she danced with Brother 289 Sebastian, who was garbed as a Friar of Orders Grey.

“No,” he returned, in a hollow, sepulchral voice, which he seemed to think suited to his monk’s attire.

“And you needn’t try to disguise your voice so desperately,” said Patty, laughing gaily, “for probably I don’t know you, anyhow. And you don’t know me, do you?”

“I don’t know your name,” said the monk, still in hollow tones, “but I know you’re a dancer from the professional stage, and not just a young woman in private life.”

“Good gracious!” cried Patty, horrified. “I’m nothing of the sort! I’m a simple-minded little country girl, and I dance because I can’t help it. I love to dance, but I must say that a monk’s robe on one’s partner is a little troublesome. I think all the time I’m going to trip on it.”

“Oh, all right; I’ll fix that,” said the monk, and he held up the skirts of his long robe until they cleared the floor.

“That’s better,” said Patty, “but it does spoil the picturesqueness of your costume. Let’s promenade for a while, and then you can let your robes drag in proper monkian fashion.” 290

“Much obliged to you for not saying monkey fashion! I certainly do feel foolish, dressed up in this rig.”

“Why, you ought not to, in that plain gown. Just look at the things some of the men have on!”

“I know it. Look at that court jester; he must feel a fool!”

“But that’s his part,” laughed Patty; “rather clever, I think, to dress as a fool, and then if you feel like a fool, you’re right in your part.”

“I say, Miss Bo-Peep, you’re clever, aren’t you?”

“Not so very; but when talking to a learned monk, I try to be as wise as I can. Oh, look at that stunning big man,—who is he?”

“Looks like one of the patriarchs; but I guess he’s meant for King Lear. See the wreath of flowers on his white hair.”

“Did Lear wear flowers? I thought he wore a crown.”

“Tut! tut! Little Bo-Peep, you must brush up your Shakespeare. Don’t you know King Lear became a little troubled in his head, and adorned himself with a garland?”

“Well, he’s awfully picturesque,” said Patty, quite undisturbed by her ignorance of the play, and 291

looking admiringly at Lear's magnificent court robes of velvet and ermine, and his long, flowing white hair and beard, and the garland of flowers that lay loosely on the glistening white wig and trailed down behind.

As they neared the picturesque figure, King Lear bowed low before Patty, and held out his hand for her dance card.

It was the rule of the ball not to speak, but to indicate invitations by gestures.

However, Patty had no reason to keep silent, as they were nearly all strangers, so she laughed, and spoke right out: "I'd gladly give you a dance, King Lear, but I haven't one left."

With another courtly bow, King Lear still seemed to insist on his wish, and he took up her card, which she had tied to her crook by a narrow ribbon. With surprise he saw the whole second page blank, and pointed to it with an accusing gesture.

"Ah, yes," returned Patty, smiling, "but those are for my friends after I know them. We unmask at supper-time, and then I shall use some discrimination in bestowing my dances. If you want one of those you must ask me for it after supper."

King Lear bowed submissively to Patty's decree, and was about to move away, when a sudden thought struck him. He picked up Patty's card again, and indicated a space between the last dance and the supper. 292

"Oh, I know what you mean," cried Patty. "You mean an 'extra.' But I don't think they'll have any. And, anyway, I never engage for extras. If they do have one, and you happen to be around, I'll give it to you;—that's all I can say." And then Patty's next partner came, and she danced away with him, leaving King Lear making his sweeping, impressive bows.

"Who is he?" asked Patty, of Roger, who chanced to be her partner this time.

"Don't know, I'm sure; but I know scarcely any of the people up here. They seem to be a fine crowd, though. Have you noticed the Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra? There she is now. Isn't she stunning?"

Patty looked round, to see a tall, majestic woman, dressed as Zenobia. Her tiny mask hid only her eyes, and her beautiful, classic face well accorded with the character she had chosen.

"She's beautiful!" declared Patty, with heartfelt admiration. "I wish I was big and stunning, Roger, instead of a little scrap of humanity." 293

"What a silly you are, Patty Pink! Now, I've no doubt that tall, majestic-looking creature wishes she could be a little fairy, like you."

"But a big woman is so much more graceful and dignified."

"Patty, I do believe you're fishing! And I *know* you're talking nonsense! Dignified isn't just the term I should apply to you,—but if there's anybody more graceful than you are, I've yet to see her."

"Oh, Roger, that's dear of you. You know very well, I hate flattery or compliments, but when a real friend says a nice thing it does me good. And, truly, it's the regret of my life, that I'm not about six inches taller. There, look at Zenobia now. She's walking with that King Lear. Aren't they a stunning couple?"

"Yes, they are. But if I were you, I wouldn't be envious of other women's attractions. You have quite enough of your own."

"Never mind about me," said Patty, suddenly realising that she was talking foolishly. "Let's talk about Mona. She's looking beautiful to-night, Roger."

"She always does," and Roger had a strange thrill in his voice, that struck a sympathetic chord in Patty's heart. 294

"What about her, Roger? Isn't she good to you?"

"Not very. She's capricious, Patty; sometimes awfully kind, and then again she says things that cut deep. Patty, do you think she really cares for that Lansing man?"

"I don't know, Roger. I can't make Mona out at all, lately. She used to be so frank and open with me, and now she never talks confidences at all."

"Well, I can't understand her, either. But here comes Mr. Collins, looking for you, Patty. Is only half of this dance mine?"

"Yes, Roger. I had to chop up every one, to-night. You may have one after supper, if you like."

Patty whirled through the various dances, and at the last one before supper she found herself again with Philip Van Reypen.

"Why, I didn't know this was yours!" she cried, looking at her card, where, sure enough, she saw the initials B. S.

"It sure is mine," returned Bobby Shafto; "but we're not going to dance it."

"Why not, and what are we going to do?"

"We're going to wander away into the conservatory." 295

"There isn't any conservatory. This is a club-house, you know."

"Well, they've fixed up the gymnasium, so it's almost a conservatory. It's full of palms and

flowers and things, and it makes a perfectly good imitation."

"But why do we go there?" asked Patty, as Philip led her away from the dancing-room.

"Oh, to settle affairs of state." He led her to the gymnasium, and sure enough, tall palms and flowering plants had been arranged to form little nooks and bowers, which were evidently intended for tête-à-tête conversations.

"You know," Philip began, as they found a pleasant seat, under some palms, "you know, Patty, you promised me something."

"Didn't, neither."

"Yes, you did, and I'm going to hold you to your promise. You promised——"

"'Rose, you promised!'" sang Patty, humming a foolish little song that was an old-fashioned favourite.

"Yes, you *did* promise, you exasperating little Rose, you! And I'm going to keep you prisoner here, until you make it good! Patty, you said you'd look into your heart, and tell me what you found there." 296

"Goodness me, Philip, did I really say that? Well, it will take me an awful long while to tell you all that's in it."

"Really, Patty? Did you find so much?"

"Yes, heaps of things."

"But I mean about me."

"Oh, about you! Why, I don't know that there's anything there at all about you."

"Oh, yes, there is; you can't fool me that way. Now, Patty, do be serious. Look in your heart, and see if there isn't a little love for me?"

Patty sat very still, and closed her eyes, as Philip could see through the holes in her blue mask.

Then she opened them, and said, with a smile: "I looked and hunted good, Philip, and I can't find a bit of love for you. But there's an awful big, nice, warm friendship, if you care about that."

"I do care about that, Patty. I care very much for it, but I want more."

Just at that moment King Lear and Zenobia strolled past them, and Patty almost forgot Philip as she gazed after the two majestic figures.

"Patty," he said, recalling her attention, "Patty, dear, I say I want more." 297

"Piggy-wig!" exclaimed Patty, with her blue eyes twinkling at him through the mask. "More what? I was looking at King Lear, and I lost the thread of your discourse, Philip."

"Patty Fairfield, I'd like to shake you! Don't you *know* what I'm asking of you?"

"Well, even if I do, I must say, Philip, that I can't carry on a serious conversation with a mask on. Now, you know, they take these things off pretty soon, and then——"

"And then may I ask you again, Patty, and will you listen to me and answer me?"

"Dunno. I make no promises. Philip, this dance is over. I expect they're going to unmask now. Come on, let's go back to our crowd."

But just as they rose to go, Jim Kenerley approached, and King Lear was with him.

"Little Bo-Peep," said the big Indian, "King Lear tells me that you half promised him an extra, if there should be one."

"As it was only half a promise, then it means only half a dance," said Patty, turning her laughing blue eyes to the majestic, flower-crowned King. "Is there going to be an extra, Jim,—I mean Chief Mudjokivis, or whatever your Indian name is?" 298

"I don't know, Bo-Peep. I'll go and see."

Jim went away, and as Philip had already gone, Patty was left alone with the white-haired King.

With a slow, majestic air, he touched her gently on the arm, and motioned for her to be seated. Then he sat down beside her, and through the eyeholes of his mask, he looked straight into her eyes.

At his intent gaze, Patty felt almost frightened, but as her eyes met his own, she became conscious of something familiar in the blue eyes that looked at her, and then she heard King Lear whisper, softly: "Apple Blossom!"

Patty fairly jumped; then, seeing the smile that came into his eyes, she put out both hands to King Lear, and said, gladly: "Bill! Little Billee! Oh, I *am* glad to see you!"

"Are you, really?" And Bill Farnsworth's voice had a slight tremor in it. "Are you sure of that, my girl?"

"Of course I am," and Patty had regained her gay demeanour, which she had lost in her moment of intense surprise. "Oh, of course I am! I was so sorry to have missed you last week. And Jim said you went back to Arizona."

"I did expect to, but I was detained in New York, and only this morning I found I could run up here and stay till to-morrow. I couldn't get here earlier, and when I reached the house, you had 299

all started. So I got into these togs, and came along."

"Your togs are wonderful, Little Billee. I never saw you look so stunning, not even as Father Neptune."

"That was a great show, wasn't it?" and Big Bill smiled at the recollection. "But I say, Little Girl, you're looking rather wonderful yourself to-night. Oh, Patty, it's good to see you again!"

"And it's good to see you; though it doesn't seem as if I had really seen you. That mask and beard completely cover up your noble countenance."

"And I wish you'd take off that dinky little scrap of blue, so I can see if you are still my Apple Blossom Girl."

"But I thought you wanted the extra dance."

"I don't believe there's going to be any extra, after all. I think the people are anxious to get their masks off, and if so we'll have our dance after supper."

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CHAPTER XVIII

BACK TO NEW YORK

Farnsworth was right. There was no extra before supper, and the guests were even now flocking to the supper-room.

Philip came toward them, looking for Patty, his mask already off.

"Oh, can we really take them off now?" cried Patty. "I'm so glad. They're horridly uncomfortable. I'll never wear one again. I love a fancy dress party, but I don't see any sense in a masquerade."

She took off her mask as she spoke, and her pretty face was flushed pink and her hair was curling in moist ringlets about her temples.

Farnsworth looked down on her as he removed his own mask. "Apple Blossom!" he exclaimed again, and the comparison was very apt, for the pink and white of Patty's face was just the color of the blossoms.

Then the two men looked at each other, and Patty suddenly realised that they had never met. 301

"Oh, you don't know each other, do you?" she exclaimed. "And you my two best friends! Mr. Farnsworth, this is Mr. Van Reypen. And now, which of you is going to take me to supper?"

As each offered an arm at once, Patty accepted both, and walked out demurely between the two big men. The men were exceedingly polite and courteous, but each was annoyed at the other's presence. As a matter of fact, Farnsworth had chanced to overhear a few words that Philip said to Patty a short time before. It was by merest chance that King Lear and Zenobia had walked by just as Philip was asking Patty to give him more than friendship. Zenobia, uninterested in the two under the palms, didn't even hear the words; but Farnsworth, who had found out from Jim Kenerley all the members of the house party, had scarcely taken his eyes from Little Bo-Peep since he arrived at the ball. With no intention of eavesdropping, he had followed her about, hoping to get a chance to see her first alone. He managed this only with Kenerley's help, and meantime he had discovered that Van Reypen was very seriously interested in Little Bo-Peep.

Philip himself knew little of Farnsworth, save for a few chance remarks he had heard at the Kenerleys', but he realised at once that Patty and the big Westerner were great friends, if nothing more. 302

However, the three went to supper together, and joined the group in which they were most interested.

Great was the surprise of Daisy and Mona when Patty appeared with Mr. Farnsworth.

Big Bill was in the merriest of spirits. He greeted everybody heartily, he joked and laughed, and was at his most entertaining best. Patty was very proud of him, for without his mask he looked very handsome as King Lear, and his stalwart figure seemed to dwarf the other men.

After supper he claimed Patty for the promised dance.

"Would you rather dance with King Lear?" he said, smiling, "with all these heavy velvet draperies bothering us, or shall I go and shed this robe, and just be plain Bill?"

Patty looked at him, thoughtfully. "We'd have a better dance if you took off that flapping robe. But then, of course, you'd have to take off your wigs and things, and you wouldn't be half so beautiful." 303

"Well, then, don't let's dance, but just stroll around and talk. And there's another reason why I'd rather keep on my wig and wreath."

“What’s that?”

“Because the wreath means that I am mad.”

“Mad at me?”

“Oh, not that kind of mad! I mean crazy, demented, loony,—what was the old King, anyway?”

“A little touched?”

“Yes, that’s it; and so, you see, he could say anything he wanted to. You know, people forgive crazy people, no matter what they say.”

“Are you going to say crazy things to me?”

“Very likely; you’ve completely turned my head.”

“Do you know, I didn’t even know King Lear ever went crazy,” said Patty in an endeavour to change the subject.

“Why, fie, fie, Little Girl, I thought you knew your Shakespeare; but I suppose you’re too busy socially to read much poetry.”

“I read one poem this winter that I liked,” said Patty, demurely.

“Did you? What was it?”

“It came to me in a blue envelope.” 304

“It did! Why, Patty, Jim told me you never got that.”

“Jim is mistaken; I did get it.”

“And did you like it?”

“Where did you get it, Bill?”

“Did you like it?”

“Yes, I liked it lots. Who wrote it?”

“I did.”

“Did you, really? You clever man! I thought possibly you might have done it, but it sounded so,—so finished.”

“Oh, no, it didn’t, Patty. It was crude and amateurish; but it was written to you and about you, so I did the best I could. Patty, are you in love with Van Reypen?”

“What!” and Patty stood still and looked at Farnsworth, indignantly. “You have no right to ask such a question!”

“I know I haven’t, Patty, and I apologise. I can’t seem to get over my Western bluntness. And, Little Girl, I don’t blame you a bit if you do care for him. He’s a good-looking chap, and an all-round good man.”

“You seem to have sized him up pretty quickly. Why, you’ve only just met him.”

“Yes, but you know I was at the Kenerleys’ last week, and Jim told me all about him.” 305

“Why did you want to know all about him?”

“Shall I tell you why?” And Farnsworth’s blue eyes looked straight into Patty’s own. “I inquired about him, because Daisy said you were just the same as engaged to him.”

“Daisy said that, did she?” Patty rarely lost her temper, but this unwarranted speech of Daisy Dow’s made her exceedingly angry. But what hurt her even more, was that Bill should believe Daisy’s assertion, and should take it so calmly. His attitude piqued Patty; and she said, coldly: “Well, if Daisy says so, it must be so.”

“I know it, Little Girl,” and Farnsworth’s voice was very tender. “He can give you everything that you ought to have,—wealth, social position, and a life of luxury and pleasure. Moreover, he is a thorough gentleman and a true man. I hope you will be very happy with him, Patty.”

For some reason this speech exasperated Patty beyond all measure. It seemed as if her friends were settling her affairs for her, without giving her any voice in the decision. “You are a little premature, Bill,” she said, without a smile. “I’m not engaged to Mr. Van Reypen, and I do not know that I shall be.” 306

“Oh, yes, you will, Patty; but don’t be hasty, dear child. Think it over before you decide, for you know there are other things in the world beside wealth and social position.”

“What, for instance?” said Patty, in a flippant tone.

“Love,” said Farnsworth, very seriously.

And then Patty was moved by a spirit of perversity. She thought that if Farnsworth really cared for her, he was handing her over to Philip very easily, and she resented this attitude.

“Are you implying that Mr. Van Reypen is not capable of giving me love, as well as the other advantages you enumerate?”

“No, Patty, I am not implying anything of the sort. I only know that you are too young yet to be engaged to anybody, and I wish for your own sake you would wait,—at least until you are perfectly sure of your own affections. But if they are given to Mr. Van Reypen, I shall be glad for

you that you have chosen so wisely."

Patty looked at Farnsworth in amazement. Remembering what he had said to her last summer, it was strange to hear him talk this way. She could not know that the honest, big-hearted fellow was breaking his own heart at the thought of losing her; but that he unselfishly felt that Van Reypen, as a man of the world, was more fitting for pretty Patty than himself. He knew he was Western, and different from Patty's friends and associates, and he was so lacking in egotism or in self-conceit that he couldn't recognise his own sterling merits. And, too, though he was interested in some mining projects, they had not yet materialised, and he did not yet know whether the near future would bring him great wealth, or exactly the reverse of fortune. 307

But Patty couldn't read his heart, and she was disappointed and piqued at his manner and words. Without even a glance into his earnest eyes, she said: "Thank you, Bill, for your advice; I know it is well meant, and I appreciate it. Please take me back to Philip now."

Farnsworth gave her a pained look, but without a word turned and led her back to the group they had left.

Philip was waiting there, and Patty, to hide the strange hurt she felt in her own heart, was exceedingly kind in her manner toward him.

"Our dance, Philip," she said, gaily, and though it hadn't been engaged, Philip was only too glad to get it.

Soon afterward, the ball was over, and they all went home. As Patty came from the cloak room, wrapped in her fur coat, Philip stepped up to her in such a possessive way, that Farnsworth, who had also been waiting for her, turned aside. 308

"That's a foregone conclusion," said Jim Kenerley to Farnsworth, as he glanced at Patty and Philip.

"Nonsense," said Adèle. "Patty isn't thinking of conclusions yet. But I must say it would be a very satisfactory match."

"Yes, Mr. Van Reypen seems to be a fine fellow," agreed Farnsworth.

When they reached home, Patty said good-night, declaring she was weary enough to go straight to bed at once.

"Will you come down again later, if you're hungry?" said Philip, smiling at the recollection of Christmas Eve.

"No," and Patty flashed her dimples at him; and knowing that Farnsworth was listening, she added, "There's no moonlight to-night!"

"Moonlight does help," said Philip. "Good-night, Little Bo-Peep."

"Good-night, Bobby Shafto," and Patty started upstairs, then turned, and holding out her hand to Farnsworth, said "Good-night, King Lear; shall I see you in the morning?" 309

"No; I leave on the early train," said Farnsworth, abruptly. "Good-night, Patty, and good-bye."

He turned away, toward Daisy, and Patty went on upstairs.

Farnsworth had spoken in a kind voice, but Patty knew that he had heard what she and Philip had said about coming down in the moonlight.

"I think he's a horrid, mean old thing!" said Patty to herself, when she reached her own room. "His manners are not half as good as Philip's, and he's rude and unkind, and I just hate him!"

Whereupon, as if to prove her words, she took from her portfolio the poem in the blue envelope, and read it all over again; and then put it under her pillow and went to sleep.

A few days later Patty was back in New York. She gave her father and Nan glowing accounts of the delightful times she had had at Fern Falls and the jollities of a country house party in the winter time. She told them all about the pleasant people she had met up there, about her experience at Mrs. Fay's, and about Farnsworth's flying visits. 310

"I'd like to meet that man," said Nan. "I think he sounds attractive, Patty."

"He is attractive," said Patty, frankly; "but he's queer. You never know what mood he's going to be in. Sometimes he's awfully friendly, and then again he gets huffy over nothing."

"I'm afraid you tease him, Patty," said her father, smiling at her. "You're getting to be such a popular young person that I fear you're getting spoiled."

"Not Patty," said Nan, kindly. "Go ahead, my child, and have all the fun you can. The young men all adore you, and I don't wonder."

"Why, Nancy Bell, how complimentary you are!" and Patty gave her stepmother an affectionate pat.

"But now," said Mr. Fairfield, "if I may have the floor for a minute, I'd like to make an announcement. We have a plan, Patty, which we made while you were away, and which I hope will meet with your approval."

"As if I ever disapproved of any of your plans, my dear daddy. Consider my approval granted before you begin."

"Well, it's this: I think Nan is looking a little bit pale, and I feel a trifle pale myself, so I think we 311

two will run away down South for a fortnight or so, and leave you here."

"Alone?" asked Patty, in surprise.

"Well, no; hardly that. But how would you like to have Mrs. Allen, Nan's mother, come and stay with you?"

"I think that will be lovely," exclaimed Patty. "I'm awfully fond of Mrs. Allen, and I haven't seen her for a long time."

"She's not a very sedate matron," said Nan, laughing. "I dare say she'll keep you on the go, Patty. She's fond of opera and concerts, and she likes gaiety. But father will come over for the week-ends, and look after you both."

Nan's parents lived in Philadelphia, and as they had just returned from a trip abroad, the Fairfields hadn't seen them lately. But it had seemed to them that the arrangement they had planned would be satisfactory all round, for Mrs. Allen liked to spend a few weeks in New York each winter.

About a week later the elder Fairfields departed, and Mrs. Allen arrived.

She was a fine-looking lady of a youthful middle age, and looked forward with pleasure to her visit with Patty. 312

"Now, you mustn't let me be a burden to you in any way, my dear," Mrs. Allen said, after the two were left alone. "Whenever I can help you, or whenever you want a chaperon, I'm entirely at your service; but when I'm not necessary to your plans, don't consider me at all,—and don't think about entertaining me, for I can look after myself. I'm never lonely or bored."

"Thank you, Mrs. Allen," said Patty. "I'm sure we shall get on most beautifully together, and anything you want or want to do, I want you to give your own orders, just as if you were in your own home."

And so the two had many pleasant times together. They went to matinées, teas, and concerts, to picture exhibitions, and to card parties. Mrs. Allen did not care for dances, but went gladly when it was a party where Patty required a chaperon.

All of the young people liked Mrs. Allen, and she became well acquainted with all of Patty's friends.

Bill Farnsworth was still in New York. His plans were uncertain, and often changed from day to day, owing to various details of his business. 313

He called on Patty occasionally, but not often, and his calls were short and formal.

"I like that big Western chap," Mrs. Allen said to Patty one day; "but he seems preoccupied. Sometimes he sits as if in a brown study, and says nothing for quite some minutes. And then, when you speak to him, he answers abruptly, as if bringing his mind back from faraway thoughts."

"I daresay he's very much wrapped up in his business, Mrs. Allen," said Patty. "They say he's trying to swing a big mining proposition,—whatever that means."

"It may mean a great many things," said Mrs. Allen, thoughtfully. "I hope he's all right, Patty."

"All right! Big Bill Farnsworth all right? Well, I rather guess he *is*!"

"There, there," and Mrs. Allen laughed. "You needn't take up the cudgels so desperately. I didn't mean to accuse him of anything."

"No, of course you didn't," and Patty laughed, too; "but whatever big Bill may lack in the way of polish or culture, he's absolutely honest and honourable, even to an absurd degree." 314

"I don't think he lacks culture, Patty. His manners are all right."

"Yes, they're all right, but he hasn't quite the correct ease of a man like Philip Van Reypen."

"I know what you mean, and I suppose it's the effect of the aristocratic Van Reypen ancestry. But Mr. Farnsworth has such a splendid big air of real nobility about him that I think a more formal and conventional demeanour would quite spoil him."

"Maybe it would," said Patty, simply.

That very afternoon Farnsworth came to call, and told Patty he had come to say good-bye.

"I know you think my farewells never mean anything," he said, smiling; "and I don't wonder, for I often say I am going, and then a telegram obliges me to change my plan. But I think it is positive this time that I shall leave to-night for Arizona."

"Have you been successful in your undertakings?" asked Patty, with a sympathetic interest.

"Yes, I believe I have. I don't want to be over sanguine, and matters are not yet entirely settled, but I think I have conquered the obstacles which I came to conquer, and I hope all will go well."

"I hope so, Little Billee," said Patty, looking at him with earnest good will. "I want you to succeed." 315

"Thank you for that," said Farnsworth, simply.

"And when are you coming East again?"

"I can't tell; I may have to come back in February; but if that is not necessary, I shall not come for a year or more. You will be married and settled by that time."

“Indeed, I shan’t! In fact, I’ve about made up my mind that I’ll never marry anybody.”

“Girls have said that before, and been known to change their minds. But whatever you do, I wish you all happiness and joy throughout your whole life,—Little Apple Blossom.”

Farnsworth had risen to go, and he held Patty’s hands in both his, as he looked straight into her eyes.

Patty’s own eyes fell beneath his gaze, and she said, “And I wish you happiness wherever you are, Little Billee.”

“Thank you, dear,” he said, and then with a final handclasp he went away.

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CHAPTER XIX

AN EXCITING CHASE

Farnsworth had left Patty about two o’clock, and it was only a few moments later that her telephone rang.

Her response was answered by a tearful, wailing voice, that said, “Oh, Miss Patty, oh, *can’t* you come here at once? Come right away!”

“Come where? Who are you?” said Patty, bewildered, for she did not recognise the voice, and it sounded like some one in deep distress.

“Oh, don’t wait a *minute*! Every moment is precious! Just come *at once*!”

“But how can I come, if I don’t know who you are? I can help you better, if you’ll control yourself and tell me something about yourself and your trouble. First of all, who are you?”

“I’m Anne, Miss Galbraith’s maid. You know me, Miss Patty. Oh, come quick; Miss Mona has gone!”

“Gone! Where? Now, listen to me, Anne! Stop your crying, and tell me what you mean, and then I will go to you at once. Where are you? And where has Miss Mona gone?” 317

“I’m in her apartment, and I don’t like to tell you over the telephone where she’s gone. But,—Miss Patty,—I think,—Oh, I fear,—she has eloped with Mr. Lansing!”

The last sentence came in an explosive burst, as if the girl could keep her secret no longer.

“What!” exclaimed Patty. And then, suddenly realising that it was a desperate situation, she said, “Don’t say another word, Anne! I will go right straight to you. Stay there till I come.”

She knew the excitable character of the girl, and feared she might get hysterical if she talked further over the telephone. Patty hung up the receiver, and sat still for a moment, thinking deeply.

“I won’t tell Mrs. Allen,” she finally decided, “but I must have some one to help me,—to go with me. I believe I’ll call up Roger.”

But she couldn’t bear to do that. It seemed too dreadful to tell Roger what had happened. She thought next of Kenneth, who was a standby as a loyal friend, but he was far downtown in his office, and might be busy with an important case. 318

“Philip, of course,” she said to herself; but even with her hand on the receiver, another thought flashed through her mind. “No one could help me to save Mona like Big Bill!” she thought, and on a sudden impulse she called up his hotel.

“Bill,—it’s Patty,” she said, her voice trembling.

“Yes, dear; what is it? What is the matter?”

The kind, quiet voice, with its deep tones of sympathy and capability, made Patty realise that she had appealed to the right one. “Oh, Bill,” she went on, “there’s awful trouble, and you must help me.”

“Of course I will, Little Girl! Steady now; tell me what it’s all about. Do you want me to come there?”

“But you’re just starting for the West,” cried Patty, as she remembered this for the first time.

“That doesn’t matter, if *you* want me. I’ll be right over.”

“And wait a minute; tell me what you think we ought to do. I’ve heard from Anne that Mona is eloping with that awful Lansing man!”

“Then there’s no time to be lost! Take your little car, and go to The Plaza as fast as you can spin! I’ll meet you there, in the Galbraiths’ apartment.” 319

Bill hung up the receiver, without even a good-bye, and Patty gave a little sigh of relief, for it seemed as if he had taken the responsibility from her shoulders, and would manage the matter himself. She ordered her car, flung on her hat and coat, and with a hasty word to Mrs. Allen that she was going out, she drove her little electric herself down to the hotel.

When she entered the Galbraiths' apartment, she found Farnsworth already there.

"It's true," he said, looking at her with a grave face. "That is, I think it must be. Mona went away half an hour ago, and took a suit case with her. She went in a motor with Mr. Lansing. Anne is worried, because this morning she overheard the two telephoning."

"I wasn't listening, Miss Patty," said the tearful maid. "That is, I didn't mean to, but Miss Mona was excited like, and her voice was so loud I couldn't help hearing."

"I'm glad you did, Anne," said Patty, "it may help us to save Miss Mona yet. What else can you tell us?" 320

"Nothing, except that Miss Mona left a note on her father's desk, and I thought maybe it might be to tell him she had gone."

Big Bill strode over to the desk, and there, under a paperweight, lay a note, addressed to Mr. Galbraith. He picked it up, and looked at it, thoughtfully.

"Patty," he said, "this isn't sealed. Considering all things, I think it is our duty to read it, but you know more about such matters than I do. What do you think?"

Patty hesitated. She had always thought it little less than a crime to read a note addressed to another, but the circumstances made this case seem an exception. "We might telephone to Mr. Galbraith and ask his permission," she suggested.

But Big Bill seemed suddenly to have made up his mind.

"No!" he declared, "*I'll* take the responsibility of this thing. To telephone would frighten Mr. Galbraith, and would delay matters too much, beside. I shall read this note, and if I can't square my action with Mr. Galbraith afterward, I'll accept the consequences."

The impressive manner of the big man, his stern, set face, and honest, determined blue eyes 321 convinced Patty that he was right, and together they read the note.

In it, as they had feared, Mona told her father that she was going away to marry Mr. Lansing, because her father would not allow her to marry him otherwise. She expressed regret at the sorrow she knew this would bring to her father, but she said she was old enough to decide for herself whom she wished to marry, and she felt sure that after it was over he would forgive her, and call his two children back to him.

"Mona never wrote that note of her own accord," exclaimed Patty, indignantly. "That man made her do it!"

"Of course he did!" agreed Bill, in a stern voice. "I know Lansing,—and, Patty, the man is a scoundrel."

"You know him? I didn't know you did."

"Yes, I do! And I ought to have warned Mona more against him. I did tell her what his real nature is, but she wouldn't listen, and I never dreamed she was so deeply infatuated with him. But we mustn't blame her, Patty. She was simply under the influence of that man, and he persuaded her to go with him against her better judgment. But we must go after them and bring 322 them back."

"But you're going West to-night."

"Not unless we rescue Mona first! Why, Patty, she *mustn't* be allowed to marry that man! I tell you he's a scoundrel, and I never say *that* about a man unless I *know* it to be true. But this is no time to discuss Lansing. We must simply fly after them."

"But how do you know where they've gone?"

"I don't know! But we must find out, somehow. Perhaps the men at the door can tell us. Perhaps Anne can."

"I only know this, sir," said Anne, who was wringing her hands and weeping; "when Miss Mona was telephoning, she said something about Greenwich."

"Of course!" cried Bill. "That's exactly where they'd go! But wait, they would have to go for a license first."

"Telephone the license man," said Patty, inspired by Bill's manner and tones.

"Right-O!" and after some rather troublesome telephoning, Bill announced, "They did! they got a license, and they started in a motor for Greenwich about half an hour ago! Come on, Patty! Anne, you stay right here, in case we telephone. If Mr. Galbraith comes home, don't tell him a 323 word about it. Leave it to me. I'll be responsible for this note." Bill put the note in his pocket, and almost pushing Patty out of the door, he had her in the elevator and downstairs almost before she knew it.

"Shall we take my little car?" she asked, as Bill strode through the lobby, and Patty hurried to keep up with him.

"Good Heavens, no! We want a racer. I'll drive it myself."

By the power of sheer determination, the big Western man procured a fast car in an incredibly short time, and in a few moments he and Patty were flying up Broadway.

"Now if you want to talk you may," said Bill, and his voice was quiet and composed, though he was alertly threading his swift way through the traffic. "I had to be a little short with you while we were hurrying off, because I didn't want to lose a minute. But now, all I have to do is to keep just inside the speed limit while we're in the city, and then I rather guess there'll be one big chase!"

"Oh, Bill, you are just splendid!" exclaimed Patty, with shining eyes, unable to repress her admiration of his capability and strength. 324

"But we haven't accomplished anything yet, Patty; we're only starting out to try. You know, it's a hundred to one shot that we miss them,—for we've very little idea where they've gone."

"But it's a straight road to Greenwich."

"Yes, but they may have turned off anywhere. They may change their minds a dozen times about their destination."

"No, they won't," said Patty, positively; "not unless they think they're pursued, and of course they've no idea of that. Speed her up, Bill; the way is clear now! I don't believe they're going at this pace."

"Patty, you're a good pal! I don't believe any other girl would be as plucky as you are in such a case."

"Why, I haven't done anything," and Patty opened her eyes wide, in surprise. "You've done it all —Little Billee."

"You've helped me more than you know. With you by my side, I'm bound to succeed." Big Bill bent to his wheel, and the swift machine flew along so fast that conversation became impossible.

As they neared Greenwich, Patty's sharp eyes descried a dark red car ahead of them. 325

"That's it!" she cried. "That's Mona's car! Chase 'em, Bill!"

"The nerve of him, to elope in her own car!" growled Bill, through his clenched teeth. "I told you he was a scoundrel, Patty!"

They were rapidly gaining on the red car, when, as it turned the corner, one of its occupants saw their pursuers, and Patty heard a shriek.

"That's Mona's yell," she cried, in dismay. "They've seen us, Bill, and now they'll get away from us!"

Sure enough, the pursuing car was swift, but the big Galbraith car was a speed wonder, and the elopers darted ahead with renewed determination to escape capture.

"Oh, what a shame!" wailed Patty. "They recognised us, and now they'll get away."

"Not if I know it!" and Farnsworth set his teeth hard. "Sit tight, Patty; we're going to go faster!"

It didn't seem as if they could go any faster, but they did, and if it had been anybody driving except Farnsworth, Patty would have felt frightened. But she knew his skill, and too, she knew that he never let excitement or enthusiasm run away with his judgment. So she sat as still as she could, striving to catch her breath in the face of the wind; and refraining from speech, lest she distract Bill's attention even for a second. 326

At last, when they had a long, clear view ahead, and they saw the red car ever increasing the distance between them, Bill gave up.

"It's no use, Patty; we can't catch them! I've done all I can, but that car they're in is a world-beater! They went through Greenwich like a streak. They would have been arrested, but no one could stop them. Oh, I say, My Little Girl,—I have an idea!"

"Is your idea faster than their car, Little Billee?"

"You bet it is! Just you wait and see; Patty, we've *got* 'em!"

Farnsworth turned around and drove rapidly back to Greenwich, which they had just passed through.

At a hotel there, he jumped out, told Patty to wait, and rushed into the office.

It was nearly ten minutes before he returned, and Patty could scarcely believe that whatever plan he had could be of any use after such delay.

He jumped in beside her, turned around, and in a minute they were again whizzing along, following the direction of the other car. 327

"I'll tell you what I did, Patty," he said, chuckling. "I telephoned to the Stamford Chief of Police, and asked him to arrest those people for speeding as they crossed the city limit!"

"Will they be speeding?"

"*Will* they be speeding? You *bet* they will! And even if they aren't, they'll be arrested, all the same, and held without bail until we get there! Oh, Patty, if the situation were not so serious, I could laugh at this joke on Lansing!"

On they went, at their highest speed, and reached Stamford not very much later than the red

car they were following.

At the city line, they found this car standing, with two or three policemen forbidding its further progress.

Horace Lansing was in a violent fit of temper, and was alternating bribes with threats of vengeance, but the policemen were imperturbable, having been told the facts of the case by Farnsworth over the telephone.

Mona was weeping bitterly, and though Patty went to her with affectionate words, she stormed back, “Go away, Patty Fairfield! You have no right to interfere in my affairs! It was your prying that found this out. Go away; I won’t speak to you!” 328

“By what right have you followed us, Miss Fairfield?” began Mr. Lansing, looking at Patty, angrily.

But Farnsworth strode over to the speaker, and spoke to him, sternly but quietly. “Lansing,” he said, “it’s all up, and you know it! Now, I don’t want to have a scene here and now, so you have my permission to go away wherever you like, on condition that you never enter the presence again, of Miss Galbraith or Miss Fairfield.”

“Ho!” said Lansing, with an attempt at bravado. “You give me your permission, do you? Let me tell you that Miss Galbraith is my promised wife. We have the license, and we’re about to be married. It will take more than you to stop us!”

“Indeed,” said Farnsworth, and putting his hands in his pockets, he gave Lansing a contemptuous glance. “Well, then, I shall have to request assistance. If I tell this constable a good reason why he should detain you long enough to prevent your marriage to Miss Galbraith, would such an argument have any weight with you?” 329

There was an instantaneous change in Horace Lansing’s demeanour. From a blustering braggart, he became a pale and cringing coward. But with a desperate attempt to bluff it out, he exclaimed, “What do you mean?” but even as he spoke, he shivered and staggered backward, as if dreading a blow.

“Since you ask me,” said Farnsworth, looking at him, sternly, “I’ll answer frankly, that unless you consent to go away and never again enter the presence of these ladies, I shall inform these policemen of a certain little bank trouble that happened in Chicago——”

It was unnecessary to go on. Lansing was abject, and begged in pleading tones that Farnsworth would say no more. “I am going,” Lansing stammered, and without a word of farewell to Mona or even a glance at Patty, he walked rapidly away.

“Let him go,” said Farnsworth. “I can’t tell you girls about it, but I’ll explain to Mr. Galbraith. Mona, that man is not fit for you to know! He is guilty of forgery and robbery.”

“I don’t believe it!” declared Mona, angrily. 330

“You *do* believe it,” and Farnsworth looked at her steadily, “because you know I would not tell you so unless I knew it to be true.”

Mona was silent at this, for she did know it. She knew Bill Farnsworth well enough to know that if he made an accusation of that sort, he knew it to be the truth.

“But I love him so,” she said, sobbing.

“No, Mona, you don’t love him.” Bill spoke very gently, and as he laid his hand on Mona’s shoulder, she raised her eyes to look into his kind, serious face. “You were not much to blame, Mona; the man fascinated you, and you thought the foolish infatuation you felt for him was love. But it wasn’t, and you’ll soon forget him. You don’t want to remember a man who was a wrong-doer, I’m sure; nor do you want to remember a man who goes away and deserts you because he has been found out. Mona, is not his going away as he did, enough proof of his guilt?”

But Mona was sobbing so that she could not speak. Not angry sobs now, but pathetic, repentant sorrow.

“Now, it’s up to you, Patty,” said Farnsworth, cheerily. “You and Mona get into the tonneau of this Galbraith car, and I’ll drive you home. You chirk her up, Patty, and tell her there’s no harm done, and that all her friends love her just the same. And tell her if she’ll stop her crying and calm herself before she gets home, nobody need ever know a thing about this whole affair.” 331

Mona looked up at this, and said, eagerly, “Not father?”

“No, Mona dear,” said Patty. “Sit here by me and I’ll tell you all about it. How we read the note and kept it, and everything. And, Mona, we won’t even let Roger know anything about all this, because it would hurt him very much.”

“But Anne,” said Mona, doubtfully. “You say she told you where I went.”

“I’ll attend to Anne,” said Farnsworth, decidedly. “Can’t you go home to dinner with Patty, Mona? I think that would do you good.”

“Yes, do,” said Patty. “And stay over night with me. We’ll telephone your father where you are, and then, to-morrow, you can go home as if nothing had ever happened.”

“It’s a justifiable deception, Mona,” said Bill, “for I know how it would grieve the poor man if he knew about your foolish little escapade,—which is all over now. It’s past history, and the incident is closed forever. Don’t you be afraid Lansing will ever appear against you. He’s too 332

thoroughly frightened ever to be seen in these parts again."

"You come to dinner, too, Bill," said Patty, as they took their places; "though I fear we'll all be rather late."

Farnsworth hesitated a moment, then he said, decidedly, "No, Patty, I can't do it. I was to take the seven o'clock train to-night, but though I'll miss that, I can take the nine o'clock, and I *must* go."

"But, Little Billee, I want to thank you for helping me as you did. I want to thank you, not only for Mona's sake, but my own."

"That would be worth staying for, Little Girl, but it is a case of duty, you see. Won't you write me your thanks,—Apple Blossom?"

"Yes," said Patty, softly, "I will."

CHAPTER XX

BRIDESMAID PATTY

Early in February Christine was to be married, and the Fairfields had persuaded her to accept the use of their house for the occasion.

Christine had demurred, for she wanted a simple ceremony with no reception at all. But the Fairfields finally made her see that Mr. Hepworth's position as an artist of high repute made it desirable that his many friends should be invited to his wedding.

So Christine agreed to the plan, and Patty was delighted at the thought of the festivities in her home.

The elder Fairfields had returned from their Southern trip, but Mrs. Allen was still with them, and there were other house guests from Christine's Southern home.

The day of the wedding, Patty, assisted by Elise and Mona, was superintending the decorations. Christine had insisted that these should be simple, and as Mr. Hepworth, too, was opposed to the conventional work of a florist, the girls had directed it all themselves.

"It does look perfectly sweet," said Patty, as she surveyed the drawing-room. "Personally, I should prefer all those dinky white telegraph poles stretched with ribbon and bunched up with flowers to make an aisle for the happy couple to walk through. But as it isn't my wedding, I suppose we must let the bride have her own way."

"I'm tired of those tied up poles," said Elise, decidedly. "I think this is a lot prettier, and all this Southern jasmine is beautiful, and just like Christine."

"She is the sweetest thing!" said Patty. "Every new present that comes in, she sits and looks at it helplessly, as if it were the very last straw!"

"Well, of course, most of the presents are from Mr. Hepworth's friends," said Mona, "and they are stunning! I don't wonder Christine is overcome."

"She has lots of friends of her own, too," said Patty. "All the girls gave her beautiful things, and you two quite outdid yourselves. That lamp of yours, Mona, is a perfect dream; and, Elise, I never saw such gems as your silver candlesticks. Christine's path through life will be well lighted! Well, everything's finished, and I think it's about time we went to dress. The ceremony's at four, and as I'm going to be a bridesmaid for the first time in my mad career, I don't want to be late at the party."

"How beautiful the drawing-room looks," said Mrs. Allen, coming along just then. "Patty dear, doesn't this all remind you of the day Nan was married?"

"Yes, Mrs. Allen; only the weddings are quite different. But Christine would keep this as simple as possible, so of course I let her have her own way."

"Yes, Patty, that's the privilege of a bride. But some day you can have your own way in the direction of your own wedding, and I rather fancy it will be an elaborate affair. I hope I'll be here to see."

"I hope you will, Mrs. Allen," laughed Patty; "but don't look for it very soon. My suitors are so bashful, you know; I have to urge them on."

"Nonsense!" cried Elise. "Patty's greatest trouble is to keep her suitors off! She tries to hold them at arm's length, but they are so insistent that it is difficult."

"I think you girls are all too young to have suitors," commented Mrs. Allen, smiling at the pretty trio.

"Oh, Mrs. Allen," said Patty; "suitors doesn't mean men who want to marry you. I suppose it's

sort of slang, but nowadays, girls call all their young men suitors, even the merest casual acquaintances."

"Oh, I see," said Mrs. Allen. "I suppose as in my younger days we used to call them beaux."

"Yes, just that," said Patty. "Why, Mr. Hepworth used to be one of our favourite suitors, until he persuaded Christine to marry him; but we have lots of them left."

"Is that big one coming to the wedding?" asked Mrs. Allen.

"She means Bill Farnsworth," said Patty to the others. "She always calls him 'that big one.' I don't know whether he's coming or not. He said if he possibly could get here, he would."

"He'll come," said Elise, wagging her head, sagely. "He'll manage it somehow. Why, Mrs. Allen, 337
he worships the ground Patty walks on!"

"So do all my suitors," said Patty, complacently. "They're awful ground worshippers, the whole lot of them! But so long as they don't worship me, they may adore the ground as much as they like. Now, you people must excuse me, for I'm going to get into that flummery bridesmaid's frock,—and I can tell you, though it looks so simple, it's fearfully and wonderfully made."

Patty ran away to her own room, but paused on the way to speak to Christine, who was already being dressed in her bridal robes.

"You *sweet* thing!" cried Patty, flinging her arms round her friend's neck. "Christine dear, you know I'm not much good at sentimental expressions, but I *do* want to wish you such a heap of joy that you'll just almost break down under it!"

Christine smiled back into Patty's honest eyes, and realised the loving friendship that prompted the words.

"Patty," she said, "I can't begin to thank you for all you've done for me this past year, but I thank you most,"—here she blushed, and whispered shyly,—"because you didn't want him, 338
yourself!"

"Oh, Christine!" said Patty, "I *do* want him, something dreadful! I shall just *pine* away the rest of my sad life because I can't have him! But you wrested him from me, and I give him to you with my blessing!" And then Patty went away, and Christine smiled, knowing that Patty's words were merely jesting, and knowing too, with a heart full of content, that Gilbert Hepworth really wanted *her*, and not the radiant, mischievous Patty.

Promptly at four o'clock, the old, well-known music sounded forth, and Patty came slowly downstairs. Her gown was of white chiffon, over pink chiffon, and fell in soft, shimmering draperies, that looked like classic simplicity, but were in reality rather complicated. Christine had designed both their gowns, and they were marvels of beauty. On Patty's head was perched a coquettish little cap of the style most approved for bridesmaids, and she carried a clustered spray of pink roses. As she entered the drawing-room, intent on walking correctly in time to the music, she chanced to glance up, and saw Bill Farnsworth's blue eyes fixed upon her. 339
Unthinkingly, she gave him a radiant smile, and then, with the pink in her cheeks deepened a little, she went on her way toward the group of palms, where the wedding party would stand.

Not even the bride herself looked prettier than Patty; though Christine was very sweet, in her soft white chiffon, her misty veil, and her shower bouquet of white flowers, which she had expressly requested should be without ribbons.

Only the more intimate friends had been invited to the ceremony, but immediately after, the house was filled with the reception guests. Patty was in gay spirits, which was not at all unusual for that young woman. She fluttered about everywhere, like a big pink butterfly, but ever and again hovering back to Christine, to caress her, and, as she expressed it, "To keep up her drooping spirits." Christine had never entirely overcome her natural shyness, and being the centre of attraction on this occasion greatly embarrassed her, and she was glad of Patty's gay nonsense to distract attention from herself.

Kenneth Harper was best man, and, as he told Patty, the responsibility of the whole affair rested 340
on himself and her. "We're really of far greater importance than the bride and groom," he said; "and they depend on us for everything. Have you the confetti all ready, Patty?"

"Yes, of course; do you have to go to the train with them, Ken?"

"No; my duties are ended when I once get them packed into a motor at the door. But Christine looks as if she couldn't survive much longer, and as for old Gilbert, he's as absent-minded as the conventional bridegroom."

"Christine's all right," said Patty. "I'm going to take her off, now, to get into her travelling clothes. Oh, Ken, she has the loveliest suit! Sort of a taupe colour, you know, and the dearest hat——"

"Patty! Do you suppose I care what she's going to wear away? But *do* see to it that she's ready on time! You girls will all get to weeping,—that's the way they always do,—and you'll spin out your farewells so that they'll lose their train! Run along with Christine, now; Hepworth is fidgeting like the dickens."

So the pretty bridesmaid took the pretty bride away, and Patty begged Christine to make haste with her dressing, lest she might lose the train. 341

"And Mr. Hepworth will go away without you," Patty threatened. "Now, you do always dawdle,

Christine; but this time you've got to hustle,—so be spry,—Mrs. Hepworth."

Christine smiled at Patty's use of the new name, and she tried to make the haste Patty demanded. But she was slow by nature, and Patty danced around her in terror, lest she should really be late.

"Here's your coat, Christine,—put your arms in, do! Now the other one. Now sit down, and I'll put your hat on for you. Oh, Mrs. Hepworth, *do* hold your head still! Here, stick this pin in yourself, or I may jab it through your brain,—though I must confess you act as if you hadn't any! or if you have, it's addled. And Ken says that husband of yours is acting just the same way. My! it's lucky you two infants had a capable and clever bridesmaid and best man to get you off! There! take your gloves,—no, don't hold them like that! put them on. Wake up, Christine; remember, the show isn't over yet. You've got to go downstairs, and be showered with confetti, and, oh, Christine, *don't* forget to throw your bouquet!"

"I won't do it!" and Christine Hepworth woke up suddenly from her dreaming, and clasped her 342
bridal bouquet to her heart.

"Nonsense! of course you will! You've simply *got* to! I'm not going to run this whole wedding, and then have the prima donna balk in the last act. Now, listen, Christine, you throw it over the banister just as you start downstairs! Will you?"

"Yes," was the meek response; "I will."

"And wait a minute; don't you throw it till I get down there myself, for I might catch it."

"Do catch it, Patty, and then you can give it back to me. I want to keep it all my life."

"Well, you can't, Christine; it isn't done! You'll have to direct your sentimentality in some other direction. Or, here, I'll give you a flower out of it, and that's plenty for you to keep for a souvenir of this happy occasion."

"Why do I have to throw it, anyway?" persisted Christine, as she tucked the flower away for safe keeping.

"First and foremost, because I tell you to! and, incidentally, because it's the custom. You know, whoever catches it will be married inside of a year. Now, I'm going on down, and then you come 343
along with Nan, and I expect you'll find Mr. Hepworth down there somewhere,—if Ken hasn't lost him."

Patty cast a final critical glance at Christine, and seeing that she was all right in every respect, she gave her one last kiss, and hurried downstairs. She found a group of laughing young people standing in the hall, all provided with confetti, and the girls all looking upward to watch for the descending bouquet.

"Here's a good place for you, Patty Pink and White," and Farnsworth guided her to a place directly under the banister.

At that moment Christine appeared at the head of the stairs. She stood a moment, her bouquet held at arm's length, and looked at it as if she couldn't quite bring herself to part with it.

"There, *now* she's going to toss it! *Quick*, Patty, catch it!" Big Bill whispered in her ear, and Patty looked upward. Then, seeing the direction in which the flowers fell,—for Christine really tossed them straight at her,—Patty whirled round and sprang aside, so that the bouquet was picked up by a girl who stood next to her.

"Oh, Patty! you muffed it!" cried Farnsworth; "and what's more, you did it on purpose!" 344

"'Course I did!" declared Patty. "I don't want to be married this year, thank you. But it was all I could do to dodge it!"

And then the confetti was showered on the departing couple, Kenneth tucked them into the motor car, Patty jumped in too, for a last rapturous hug of Christine, and Kenneth almost had to pull her out.

"Come, come, Patty," he cried. "Let them make their getaway! I think they've missed the train as it is. There, now, they're off! My, a best man's lot is not a happy one! But our trials are over now, Patty girl, and we can take a little rest! Let's go back and receive the congratulations of the audience on our good work."

They went back to the house, laughing, and Patty succeeded in obtaining a few more blossoms from the bridal bouquet to save for Christine until she came back.

"Why didn't you catch it, Patty?" said Kenneth. "Do you want to be an old maid?"

"'Nobody asked me, sir, she said,'" and Patty dropped her eyes, demurely.

"You mean there's nobody that hasn't asked you!" returned Kenneth. "I'm going to ask you, 345
myself, some day; but not to-night. I've had enough to do with matrimonial alliances for one day!"

"So have I," laughed Patty. "Let's put it off for a year, Ken."

"All right," was the laughing response, and then they rejoined the other young people.

After the reception was over, a few of Patty's more intimate friends were invited to remain to dinner with the Fairfields.

"Can you stay, Little Billee?" asked Patty, dancing up to him, as he seemed about to leave.

“I have to take a midnight train,” he said, “and I have some business matters that I must attend to first. So if I may, I’ll run away now, and come back this evening for a dance with you.”

“All right; be sure to come,” and Patty flashed him a smiling glance, and danced away again.

It was after eleven before Farnsworth returned, and Patty had begun to fear he would not come at all.

“What are you looking at?” asked Philip Van Reypen, as Patty continued to glance over her shoulder toward the hall, while they were dancing. 346

“Nothing,” was the non-committal answer.

“Well, then, you may as well look at me. At least, I’m better than nothing.”

“*Much* better!” said Patty, with exaggerated emphasis; “*ever* so much better! Oh, say, Philip, take me over to the hall, will you?”

“What for? This dance has just begun.”

“Never mind!” said Patty, impatiently. “Lead me over that way!”

Patty turned her own dancing steps in that direction, and when they reached the hall, there was Big Bill Farnsworth, smiling at her.

“This is what I was looking for!” said Patty, gaily. “Run away now, Philip. Little Billee can only stay a minute, and we’ll finish our dance afterward.”

Van Reypen was decidedly annoyed, but he didn’t show it, for he knew Patty’s caprices must be obeyed. So he bowed politely, and walked away.

“He’s mad as hops,” said Patty, calmly; “but I had to see you for a few minutes, if you’re really going on that midnight train. Are you, Little Billee?”

“Yes, Apple Blossom, I am. I’ve time for just one turn round the room. Will you dance?” 347

For answer, Patty put her hand in his, and they waltzed slowly round the room.

“You are the busiest business man I ever saw,” Patty said, pouting a little.

“Yes, I *am* very busy just now. Indeed, matters are rapidly coming to a crisis. It was only because I suddenly found that I must be in Boston to-morrow, that I could stop here to-day. And if matters turn out to-morrow as I hope they will, I must start back immediately to Arizona. But some day I hope to be less hurried, and then——”

“And then?” asked Patty.

“Then I hope to live in New York, and learn good manners and correct customs, and make myself fit to be a friend of yours.”

“Oh, Little Billee, you *are* a friend of mine.”

“Well, something more than a friend, then. Patty,—I *must* ask you,—are you engaged to Van Reypen?”

“Goodness, no!” and Patty flashed a glance of surprise.

“Then, Patty, mayn’t *I* hope?”

“That’s a question I *never* know how to answer,” said Patty, demurely; “if you mean that I’m to consider myself bound by any sort of a promise, I most certainly won’t!” 348

“No, I don’t mean that, dear, but,——well, Patty, won’t you wait?”

“Of course I’ll wait. That’s exactly what I mean to do for years and years.”

“You mean to,—but you’re so capricious.”

“Oh, no! not *that*, of all things! And, anyway, what does capricious mean?”

“Well, it means like a butterfly, hovering from one flower to another——”

“Oh, you think you’re like unto a flower?”

“I’ll be any kind of a flower you wish, if you’ll hover around me like a butterfly.”

“Well, be a timid little forget-me-not,—that will be lovely.”

“I’ll forget-you-not, all right; but I can’t be timid, it isn’t my nature.” And now they had stopped dancing, and stood in the hall, near the door, for it was almost time for Farnsworth to go.

“It isn’t because I’m timid,” and the six feet three of humanity towered above her, “that I don’t grab you up and run away with you, but because——”

“Well, because what?” said Patty, daringly.

“Because, Apple Blossom,” and Bill spoke slowly, “when I see you here in your rightful setting, and surrounded by your own sort of people, I realise that I’m only a great, big——” 349

“Bear,” interrupted Patty. “You *are* like a big bear, Bill! But such a nice, gruff, kind, woolly bear,—and the best friend a girl ever had. But I wish you’d be more of a chum, Little Billee. I like to be good chums with every one of my suitors! It’s all very well for Christine to marry; she doesn’t care for society, she just only loves Mr. Hepworth.”

“Some day you’ll forget your love for society, because you’ll get to love just only one man.”

“‘And it might as well be you,’” hummed Patty, to an old tune.

“Patty!” cried Farnsworth, his blue eyes lighting up with sudden joy; “do you mean that?”

“No, *I* never mean anything! Of *course*, I don’t mean it,—but if I *did*, I’d say I didn’t.”

“Patty Pink and White! you little scamp! if you tease me like this, how do you suppose I’m ever going to tear myself away to catch that midnight train to Boston?”

“Why, you can’t get that, Little Billee! it’s too late, now!”

“No, it isn’t; and beside, I *must* make it.” He looked at his watch. “I’ve just exactly two minutes longer to stay with you.”

“Two minutes is a long time,” said Patty, flippantly.

“Yes, it is! it’s just long enough for two things I have to do.”

“What have you to do?” asked Patty, wonderingly, looking up at him, as they stood alone in the hall.

Farnsworth’s strong face wore a determined look, but his blue eyes were full of a tender light, as he answered:

“Two very important things,—Apple Blossom,—this,—and this!”

He kissed her swiftly on one pink cheek and then on the other, and then, like a flash, he was gone.

“Oh!” said Patty, softly, to herself, “Oh!”

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