

**CAROLYN
WELLS**

PATTY'S
FORTUNE

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CHAPTER I

AN INVITATION

"I think Labour Day is an awfully funny holiday," remarked Patty. "It doesn't seem to mean anything. It doesn't commemorate anybody's birth or death or heroism."

"It's like Bank Holiday in England," said her father. "Merely to give the poor, tired business man a rest."

"Well, you don't specially need one, Daddy; you've recreated a lot this summer; and it's done you good, – you're looking fine."

"Isn't he?" said Nan, smiling at the finely tanned face of her husband.

The Fairfields were down at "The Pebbles," their summer home at the seashore, and Patty, who had spent much of the season in New England, had come down for a fortnight with her parents. Labour Day was early this year and the warm September sun was more like that of midsummer.

The place was looking lovely, and Patty herself made a pretty picture, as she lounged in a big couch hammock on the wide veranda. She had on a white summer frock and a silk sweater of an exquisite shade of salmon pink. Her silk stockings were of the same shade, and her white pumps were immaculate.

Mr. Fairfield looked at the dainty feet, hanging over the edge of the hammock, and said, teasingly, "I've heard, Patty, that there are only two kinds of women: those who have small feet, and those who wear white shoes."

Patty surveyed the feet in question. "You can't start anything, Dad," she said; "as a matter of fact, there's only one kind of women today for they all wear white shoes. And my feet are small for my age. I wear fours and that's not much for a great, big girl like me."

"Deed it isn't, Patty," said Nan; "your feet are very slender and pretty; and your white shoes are always white, which is not a universal condition, by any means."

"You're a great comfort, Nan," and Patty smiled at her stepmother. "Dunno what I'd do without you, when the Governor tries to take a rise out of me."

"Oh, I'll buy your flowers, little girl," and Nan smiled back, for there was great friendship and chumminess between these two. "Are you tired, Pats? You look – well, – interestingly pale."

"Washed out, you mean," and Patty grinned. "No, I'm not exactly tired, but I've been thinking –"

"Oh, then of course you're exhausted! You oughtn't to think, Patty!"

"Huh! But listen here. This is Monday, and between now and Saturday night I've got to go to fourteen different functions, of more or less grandeur and gaiety. Fourteen! And not one can I escape without making the other thirteen mad at me!"

"But, Patty," said Mr. Fairfield, "that's ridiculous. Of course, you can refuse such invitations as you choose."

"Of course I can't, Lord Chesterfield. I've got to show up at every blessed one, – or not at any. I'd like to cut the whole caboodle!"

"Why don't you?" asked Nan. "Just retire into solitude, and I'll say you're suffering from – from –"

"Temporary mental aberration!" laughed Patty. "No, that wouldn't suit me at all. Why, this afternoon, I'm going to a Garden Tea that I wouldn't miss for a farm. There's to be a new man there!"

"Well, just about the last thing you need on this earth is a new man!" declared her father. "You've a man for every day in the week now, with two thrown in for Sunday."

Patty looked demure. "I can't help it," she said. "I'm that entertaining, you know. But this new man is a corker!"

"My child, what langwich, what langwich!"

"Tisn't mine. That the way he was described to me. So, of course, I want to see if he *is* any good. And, you won't believe it, but his name is Chick Channing!"

"What!"

"Yes, it is. Chickering Channing, for long, Chick for short."

"What *was* his mother thinking of?"

"Dunno. Prob'ly he was named for a rich uncle, and she couldn't help the combination."

"Who is he?"

"One of Mona's Western friends. Arrives today for a week or so. Mona's Tea is in his honour, though she was going to have it anyway."

"Well," said Mr. Fairfield, judicially, "of course you must go to that Tea, and subjugate that young man. Then have him over here and I'll size him up. If you want him, I'll buy him for you."

"Thank you, dear Father, but I have toys enough. Well, then, tonight is the Country Club Ball. And I do hate that, for there are so many uninteresting people at it, and you have to dance with most of them. And tomorrow there's a poky old luncheon at Miss Gardiner's. I *don't* want to go to that. I wish I could elope!"

"Why don't you, Patty?" said Nan, sympathetically; "cut it all, and run up to Adele's, or some nice, quiet place."

"Adele's a quiet place! Not much! Even gayer than Spring Beach. And, anyway, it isn't eloping if you go alone. I want to elope with a Romeo, or something exciting like that. Well! for goodness gracious sakes' alive! Will you *kindly* look who's coming up the walk!"

They followed the direction of Patty's dancing blue eyes and saw a big man, very big and very smiling, walking up the gravel path, with a long, swinging stride.

"Little Billee!" Patty cried, jumping up and holding out both hands. "Wherever did you descend from?"

"Didn't descend; came up. Up from the South, at break of day, – Barnegat, to be exact. How do you do, Mrs. Fairfield? How are you, sir?"

Farnsworth's kindly, breezy manner, condoned his lack of conventional formality, and with an easy grace, he disposed his big bulk in a deep and roomy wicker porch chair.

"And how's the Giddy Butterfly?" he said, turning to Patty. "Still making two smiles grow where one was before? Still breaking hearts and binding them up again?"

"Yes," and she dimpled at him. "And I have a brand-new one to break this afternoon. Isn't that fine?"

"Fine for the fortunate owner of the heart, yes. Any man worthy of the name would rather have his heart broken by Patty Fairfield than – than – to die in a better land!"

"Hobson's choice," said Mr. Fairfield, drily. "Are you here for a time, Farnsworth? Glad to have you stay with us."

"Thank you, sir, but I'm on the wing. I expected to spend the holiday properly, fishing at Barnegat. But a hurry-up telegram calls me up to Maine, instant. I just dropped off here over one train, to catch a glimpse of Little Sunshine, and make sure she's behaving herself."

"I'm a Angel," declared Patty, with a heavenward gaze. "And, Bill, what do you think! I was just saying I wanted to elope. Now, here you are! Why don't I elope with you?"

"If it must be some one, it might as well be me," returned Farnsworth, gravely; "have you a rope ladder handy?"

"Always keep one on hand," returned Patty, gaily. "When do we start?"

“Right away, now, if you’re going with me,” and Bill laughed as Patty sat up straight and tied her sweater sash and pretended to get ready to go.

“But this is the strange part,” he went on; “you all think I’m fooling, but I’m not! I do want to carry Patty off with me, on this very next train.”

“This is so sudden!” said Patty, still taking it as a joke.

“You keep still a minute, Milady, and let me explain to your elders and betters.” Patty pouted at this, but Bill went on. “You see, Mr. Fairfield, I’m involved in some big business transactions, which, not to go into details, have made it necessary for me to become the owner of a large hotel up in Maine, – in the lake region.”

“I thought all Maine was lakey,” put in Patty.

“Well, this is a smallish lake, not far from Poland Spring. And it’s a big hotel, and it’s to close tomorrow, and all the guests will leave then. And I’ve got to go up there and look after it.”

“How did you happen to acquire this white elephant?” asked Fred Fairfield, greatly interested.

“Had to take it for a debt. Man couldn’t pay, – lost his money in war stocks. – I’ll tell you all about it while Patty’s getting her bag packed.”

“What do you mean?” cried Nan, seeing Farnsworth’s apparent sincerity.

“Oh, Lord, I forgot I haven’t told you yet! Well, as I have to go up there for a week or two, and as the hotel is all in running order, and as all the guests are going off in a hurry, and the servants are still there, I thought it would be fun to have a sort of a house party up there – ”

“Gorgeous!” cried Patty, clapping her hands, “Who’s going, Bill?”

“That’s the rub! I haven’t asked anybody yet, and I doubt if I can get many at this time of year.”

“Haven’t asked anybody! I thought you had planned this house party!”

“Well, you see, I just got the telegram last night, and it was on the train coming up here this morning that I planned it – so the plans aren’t – aren’t entirely completed as yet.”

“Oh, you fraud! You made it all up on the spur of the moment – ”

“Yes’m, I did. But what a spur the moment is! Now, see here, it’s clear sailing. We can get the Kenerleys and they’ll be the chaperons. Now, all we have to do, is to corral a few guests. You and I are two. How about Mona Galbraith?”

“She’d go if she could,” said Patty, “but she’s having a party this afternoon. Chick Channing is over there.”

“Chick Channing! Is he really? Well! Well! I haven’t seen that boy for years. We must make them come. And Daisy? Is she there?”

“Yet, but don’t get too many girls – ”

“Don’t be alarmed, you little man-eater, you! The Farringtons will go, maybe; and Kit Cameron and his pretty cousin. Oh, I’ve a list of possibles, and we’ll get enough for a jolly little crowd. You’ve no objections, have you?” and Farnsworth looked anxiously at the elder Fairfields.

“N-no,” began Nan, “but it isn’t all clear to me yet. Suppose the Kenerleys can’t go?”

“That puts the whole plant out of commission. Unless, – oh, by Jove! wouldn’t you two go? That would be fine!”

But Mr. Fairfield and Nan refused to be drawn into any such crazy scheme. It was all right for young people, they said, but not for a comfort-loving, middle-aged pair.

“Well, I’ll tell you,” said Farnsworth, after a moment’s thought. “I’ll get the Kens on the long distance, and find out for sure. Meantime, Butterfly, you be packing a few feathers, for sumpum tells me Adele will go, anyway, whether old Jim does or not.”

“Might as well throw some things in a suitcase I s’pose,” said Patty; “it’s better to be ready and not go than to go and not be ready.”

After a long session at the telephone, Bill announced a triumphant success. The Kenerleys would be glad to go. Moreover, Adele would meet Patty and Bill in New York that very day in time

for a late luncheon. Then they would get the Farringtons and the others by telephone. Then Patty would go home with Adele for the night, and they would all go to Maine the next day.

"You see it's very simple," said Bill, with such an ingenuous smile that Nan went over to his side at once.

"Of course it is," she agreed. "It's simply lovely! And Patty wanted to get away from the giddy whirl down here. She'll have the time of her life!"

But Mr. Fairfield was not so sure. "I think it's a wild goose chase," he said. "What sort of a place are you going to? You don't know! What sort of service and creature comforts? You don't know! What will you get to eat? You don't know! That's a nice sort of outlook, I must say!"

"Oh, easy now, sir. It isn't as bad as all that. I've had rather definite and detailed reports, and if it weren't all comfy and certain, I wouldn't take Patty up there. It's a Lark, you see, a Lark, – and I'm sure we'll get a lot of fun out of it. And, incidentally, I know it's a fine section of country, – healthful, invigourating, and all that. And the house is a modern up-to-date hotel. They always close soon after Labour Day, but this year, owing to circumstances, it's the very day after. That's where the fun comes in, having a whole hotel all to ourselves. But we must be getting on. The train leaves in twenty minutes."

"I'm all ready," said Patty, as she re-appeared, miraculously transformed into a lady garbed for travelling. A silk pongee coat protected her gown and a small hat and veil completed a smart costume.

"I don't altogether like it –" began Mr. Fairfield, as they got into the motor to go to the train.

"Run along, Patty," said Nan. "I'll see to it that he does like it, before you leave the station. Going to Mona's?"

"Yes, just for a minute. You see her as soon as we're gone, and tell her all about it. We can only say the barest facts."

They flew off, Patty's veil streaming behind, until she drew it in and tied it round her neck.

At Red Chimneys, several young people were playing tennis, but Patty called Mona to her and told her briefly of the plan.

"Glorious!" cried Mona. "If it were not for that old Tea, we could go right along now. But we'll come tomorrow. Where shall we meet you?"

Quickly Farnsworth told her, and then turned to see his old friend, Channing.

"Chick, old boy!" he cried. "My, but it's good to see you again!"

Channing was presented to Patty, who looked at him in amazement. He was the biggest man she had ever seen, even taller than Bill Farnsworth. He looked enormously strong, and when he smiled, his large mouth parted to show two rows of big, white, even teeth, that somehow made Patty feel like Red Ridinghood before the wolf. But there was little time for getting acquainted, for it was almost train time.

A few words between the two men as to meeting next day, and then the motor flew to the station.

And only just in time, for though Bill handed Patty on to the steps with care, he had to scramble up himself as the train was about to start.

"How do you like eloping?" he said, smilingly, as they rolled away.

"Fine," said Patty, dimpling, "but must it always be done in quite such a hurry?"

"Not always; next time we'll take it easier. Now, let's make a list of our house guests."

Farnsworth took out a notebook and pencil, and they suggested various names, some of which they decided for and some against.

At last Patty said, in an assured tone, "And Phil Van Reypen."

"Not on your life!" exclaimed Bill. "If he goes *I* don't!"

"Why, Little Billee, we couldn't have the party at all without *you*!"

"Then you'll have it without *him*! See?"

Patty pouted. "I don't see why. He's an awfully nice man, I think."

“Oh, you do, do you? Why don’t you stay home, then, and have him down at the seashore to visit you?”

“Oh, that wouldn’t be half as much fun. But up there is that lovely place, all woodsy and lakey and sunsetty, I could have a splendid time, if I had all my friends around me.” Patty’s sweet face looked very wistful, and Farnsworth scanned it closely.

“Does it mean so much as that to you, Patty? If it does, you shall have him invited.”

“Oh, I don’t care. It’s your party, do just as you like.”

“Because it’s my party, I want to do just as *you* like.” Bill spoke very kindly, and Patty rewarded him with a flash of her blue eyes, and the subject was dropped.

CHAPTER II

THE HOTEL

"This is a little like a real eloping, isn't it?" and Bill gave Patty's suitcase to a porter, whom they followed across the big Pennsylvania station in New York.

"A *very* little," said Patty, shaking her head. "You see it lacks the thrill of a real out-and-out elopement, because people know about it. An elopement, to be any good, must be a secret. If ever I get married, I'm going to elope, that's one thing certain!"

"Why, Patty, how unlike you! I thought you'd want a flubdub wedding with forty-'leven bridesmaids and all the rest of it."

"Oh, I s'pect I shall when the time comes. I often change my mind, you know."

"You bet you do! You change it oftener than you make it up!"

"Why, I couldn't – " began Patty, and just then they reached the taxicab rank, and Bill put Patty into a car.

They went to the Waldorf, where they were to meet the Kenerleys, and found that Jim and Adele had just arrived.

"What a perfect scheme!" exclaimed Adele, as soon as greetings had been exchanged. "Who all are going?"

"Let us go to luncheon," said Bill, "and then we can thrash out things. I reserved a table – ah, here we are," as the head waiter recognised the big Westerner.

"I love to go round with Bill," said Patty, "he always has everything ready, and no fuss about it."

"He sure does," said Jim Kenerley, in hearty appreciation. "But the way he scoots across the country and back, every other day or two, keeps him in trim. He lives on the jump."

"I do," agreed Farnsworth. "But some day I hope to arrange matters so I can stay in the same place twice running."

Laughing at this sally, they took their places at the table, which Bill's foresight had caused to be decorated with a low mound of white asters and maidenhair fern.

"How pretty!" cried Patty. "I hate a tall decoration, – this is just right to talk over. Now, let's talk."

And talk they did.

"I just flew off," Patty declared, as she told Adele about it. "Nan's going to pack a trunk and send it, when she knows we're truly there. I think she feared the plan would fizzle out."

"Indeed it won't," Bill assured them. "We've got the nucleus of our party here, and if we can't get any more, we can go it alone."

But it was by no means difficult to get the others. Some few whom they asked were out of town, but they responded to long distance calls, and most of them accepted the unusual invitation.

Farnsworth had a table telephone brought, and as fast as they could ring them up, they asked their guests.

The two Farringtons were glad to go; Marie Homer and Kit Cameron jumped at the chance. Mona and Daisy, with Chick Channing, would come up from the shore the next day, and that made eleven.

"Van Reypen?" asked Kenerley, as they sought for some one to fill out the dozen.

"Up to Patty," said Bill, glancing at her.

"No," and Patty shook her golden head, slowly; "no, don't let's ask Phil this time."

"Why not?" said Adele in astonishment. "I thought you liked him."

"I do; Phil's a dear. But I just don't want him on this picnic. Besides, he's probably out of town. And likely he wouldn't care to go."

"Reasons enough," said Farnsworth, briefly. "Cross off Van Reyepen. Now, who for our last man?"

"Peyton," said Jim. "Bob Peyton would love to go, and he's a good all-'round chap. How's that, Bill?"

"All right, Patty?" and Bill looked inquiringly at her.

"Yes, indeed. Mr. Peyton's a jolly man. Do you think he'd go, Adele?"

"Like a shot!" Kenerley replied, for his wife. "Bob's rather gone on Patty, if you know what I mean."

"Who *isn't* gone on Patty?" returned Farnsworth. "Well, that's a round dozen. Enough!"

"Plenty," Patty decreed. And then the talk turned to matters of trains and meetings and luggage.

"I'll arrange everything for the picnic," said Bill. "You girls see about your clothes and that's all you need bother about. You'll want warmish togs, it gets cool up there after sundown. Remember, it's Maine!"

Patty and Adele at once began to discuss what to take, and Patty made a list to send to Nan for immediate shipment.

"What an enormous piece of humanity that Chicky is!" said Patty, suddenly remembering the stranger. "Do you know him, Jim?"

"Yes; known him for years. He's true blue, every inch of him. Don't you like him, Patty?"

"Can't say yet. I only saw him half a jiffy. But, yes, I'm sure I shall like him. Bill says he's salt of the earth."

"He's all of that. And maybe a little pepper, as well. But you and old Chick will be chums, I promise you. Now we'll pack you two girls off to Fern Falls, and I'll do a few man's size errands, and Bill, here, will make his will and dispose of his estate, before going off into the wilderness with a horde of wild Indians. Then tomorrow, he'll pick us up at Fern Falls, and we'll all go on our way rejoicing."

"Not so fast," said Adele, after Jim finished his speech. "You two men can go where you like, Patty and I will take a taxi, and do some last fond lingering bits of shopping, before we go home. Don't you s'pose we want some shoes and veils and –"

"Sealing-wax?" asked Farnsworth, laughing. "All right, you ladies go and buy your millinery, and I'll see you again tomorrow on the train."

As might have been expected, with such capable management, everything went on smoothly, and it was a clear, bright afternoon when they completed the last stage of their journey, and the train from Portland set them down at their destination.

Not quite at their destination, however, for motorbuses were in waiting to take them to the hotel itself.

For more than an hour they bumped or glided over the varying roads, now through woods, and now through clearing.

At last, a vista suddenly opened before them, and they saw a most picturesque lake, its dark waters touched here and there by the setting sun. It was bordered by towering pines and spruces, and purple hills rose in the distance.

"Stunning!" cried Patty, standing up in the car to see better. "I never saw such a theatrical lake. It's like grand opera! Or like the castled crag of Drachenfels, whatever that is."

"I used to recite that at school," observed Chick Channing; "so it must be all right, whatever it is."

And then, as they turned a corner, the hotel itself appeared in sight. An enormous structure, not far from the lake, and set in a mass of brilliant salvias and other autumn flowers and surrounded by well-kept velvety greensward.

"What a peach of a hotel!" and Patty's eyes danced with enthusiasm and admiration. "All for us, Little Billee?"

"All for we! Room enough?"

"I should say so! I'm going to have a suite, – maybe two suites."

"Everybody can have all the rooms he wants, and then some. I believe there are about five hundred –"

"What?" cried Daisy Dow, "five hundred! I shall have a dozen at least. What fun!"

The cars rolled up to the main entrance. Doormen, porters, and hallboys appeared, and the laughing crowd trooped merrily up the steps.

"I never had such a lark!" declared Mona. "Oh, I've seen hotels as big, – even bigger, – but never had one all to myself, so to speak. Isn't it just like Big Bill to get up this picnic!"

Marie Homer looked a little scared. The vastness of the place seemed to awe her.

"Chr'up, Marie," laughed her cousin, Kit Cameron. "You don't have to use any more rooms than you want. How shall we pick our quarters, Farnsworth?"

"Well, let me see. Mr. and Mrs. Kenerley must select their rooms first. Then the ladies of the party; and, if there are any rooms left after that, we fellows will bunk in 'em."

So, followed by the whole laughing troop, Adele and Jim chose their apartments. They selected two elaborate suites on the second floor, for Bill told them that there were scores of servants, and they were better off if they had work to do.

"Isn't it heavenly?" sighed Elise Farrington, dropping for a moment on a cushioned window-seat, in Adele's sitting-room, and gazing at the beautiful view. "I want my rooms on this side of the house, too."

"All the girls on this side," decreed Adele, "and all the men on the other. Or, if the men want a lake view, they can go up on the next floor. If I have to comfort you girls, when you're weeping with homesickness, I want you near by. Marie, you're most addicted to nostalgia, I recommend you take this suite next to mine."

So Marie was installed in a lovely apartment, next Adele's and with practically the same view of the lake and hills.

Daisy's came next, then Mona's, and Patty's last. This brought Patty at the other end of the long house, and just suited her. "For," she said, "there's a balcony to this suite, and if I feel romantic, I can come out here and bay the moon."

"You'll do nothing of the sort, young woman," said Adele, severely. "You do that moon-baying act, and you'll be kidnapped again."

"No, thank you," and Patty shuddered, "I've had quite enough of that!"

The rooms were beautifully furnished, in good taste and harmonious colourings. The hotel had been planned on an elaborate scale, but for some reason, probably connected with the management, had not been successful in this, its first season; and in swinging a business deal of some big lumber tracts in that vicinity, it had fallen into Farnsworth's hands. He had no intention of keeping it, but intended to sell it to advantage. But at present, it was his own property and he had conceived the whim of this large-sized picnic.

"Boom! Boom!" sounded Channing's deep bass voice in the hall. "That's the dressing-gong, people. Dinner in half an hour. No full dress tonight. Just a fresh blouse and a flower in your hair, girls."

"Isn't he great?" said Patty to Mona, as they responded through their closed doors.

But the girls' suites of rooms could all be made to communicate, and they ran back and forth without using the main hall.

"He is," agreed Mona, who was brushing her hair at Patty's dressing-table. "And the more you see of him, the better you'll like him. He's shy at first."

"Shy! That great, big thing shy?"

"Yes; he tries to conceal it, but he is. Not with men, you know, – but afraid of girls. Don't tease him, Patty."

“Me tease him!” and Patty looked like an injured saint. “I’m going to be a Fairy Godmother to him. I’ll take care of him and shield him from you hoydens, with your wiles. Now, go to your own rooms, Mona. I should think, with half a dozen perfectly good rooms of your own, you might let me have mine.”

“I can’t bear to leave you, Patty. You’re not much to look at, – I know, – but somehow I forget your plainness, when – ”

Mona dodged a powder-puff that Patty threw at her, and ran away to her own rooms.

Half an hour later, Patty went slowly down the grand staircase.

Adele had decreed no evening dress that first night, so Patty wore a little afternoon frock of flowered Dresden silk. It was simply made, with a full skirt and many little flounces, and yellowed lace ruffles fell away from her pretty throat and soft dimpled arms. Its pale colouring and crisp frilliness suited well her dainty type, and she looked a picture as she stood for a moment halfway down the stairs.

“Well, if you aren’t a sight for gods and little fishes!” exclaimed a deep voice, and Patty saw Chickering Channing gazing at her from the hall below. “Come on down, – let me eat you.”

As Patty reached the last step, he grasped her lightly with his two hands and swung her to the floor beside him.

“Well!” exclaimed Patty, decidedly taken aback at this performance. “Will you wait a minute while I revise my estimate of you?”

“For better or worse?”

“That sounds like something – I can’t think what – Declaration of Independence, I guess.”

“Wrong! It’s from the Declaration of Dependence. But why revise?”

“Oh, I’ve ticketed you all wrong! Mona said you were shy! *Shy!*”

“Methinks the roguish Mona was guying you! Shyness is *not* my strong point. But, if you prefer it should be, I’ll cultivate it till I can shy with the best of them. Would you like me better shy?”

“Indeed I should, if only to save me the trouble of that revision.”

“Shy it is, then.” Whereupon Mr. Channing began to fidget and stand on one foot, then the other, and even managed to blush, as he stammered out, “I s-say, Miss F-Fairfield, – ”

It was such a perfect, yet not overdone burlesque of an embarrassed youth, that Patty broke into peals of laughter.

“Don’t!” she cried. “Be yourself, whatever it is. I can’t revise back and forth every two minutes! I say, Mr. Chickering Channing, you’re going to be great fun, aren’t you?”

“Bid me to live and I will live, your Funnyman to be. Whatever you desire, I’m it. So you see, I am a nice, handy man to have in the house.”

“Indeed you are. I foresee we shall be friends. But what can I call you? That whole title, as I just used it, is too long, – even for this big house.”

“You know what the rest call me.”

Patty pouted a little. “I never call people what other people call them.”

“Oh, Lord, more trouble!” and Chick rolled his eyes as if in despair. “Well, choose a name for yourself – ”

“No, I want one for you!”

“Oh, what a *funny* young miss! Well, choose, but don’t be all night about it. And I warn you if I don’t like it, I won’t let you use it.”

“*Shy!* Oh, my!” murmured Patty. “Well, I shall call you Chickadee, whether you like it or not.”

“Oh, I like it, – I *love* it! But, nearly as many people call me that as Chick!”

“And I thought it was original with me! All right, I’ll think up another, and I shan’t speak to you again until I’ve thought of it.”

Nonchalantly turning aside, Patty walked across the great hall to where a few of the others had already gathered.

“Pretty Patty,” said Kit Cameron, in his wheedling way; “wilt thou stroll with me, after dinner, through the moonlight?”

“She wilt not,” answered Adele, for her. “Look here, young folks, if I’m to chaperon you, I’m going to be pretty strict about it. No strollings in moonlights for yours! If you want gaiety, you may have a dance in the ballroom. The strolling can wait till tomorrow, and then we’ll all go for a nice walk round the lake.”

“A dance!” cried Patty, “better yet! Who would go mooning if there’s a dance on? I’ll give you the first one, Kit. Oh, you haven’t asked for it, have you?”

“But *I* have, Patty,” said Farnsworth’s voice over her shoulder, “will you give it to me?”

“I promised Kit,” said Patty, shortly, and then she turned to speak to Bob Peyton about a golf game next day.

CHAPTER III

A MIDNIGHT MESSAGE

Dinner in the big dining-room was great fun. A large, round table had been prepared for the party, and the smaller, unoccupied tables all about, were also decorated with flowers to give a festive atmosphere.

As there were scores of idle waiters, each of the party could have one, or more, if desired.

Farnsworth seated his guests.

"I'll sit here," he announced, "and I'll ask Mrs. Kenerley to sit at my right. The rest of you may sit where you choose, alternating, of course, the girls and the men. Now, here's my plan. At every meal, the men sit as we do tonight, and the ladies move one seat to the right. This gives us new companions each time, and prevents monotony."

"Here's me," said Patty, dropping into the chair at Bill's left hand, while Channing sat the other side of Patty. Laughingly, they all found places, and dinner was served.

It was an unusual experience. The hotel dining-room was ornate in design and appointments, and its green and gold colouring and soft glow of silk-shaded lights made a charming setting for the merry party round the big table. The other tables, and there were many of them, looked as if they might be occupied by the ghosts of the departed guests.

"It's like being castaways on a beautiful and very comfortable desert island," said Patty, as she looked appreciatively at a huge tray of hors d'œuvre offered her by a smiling waiter. "I do love these pickly-wicky things, and never before have I felt that I might take my time in choosing. But, here at – what's the name of the hotel, Bill?"

"Never mind the name on its letter-heads," he returned, "we'll call it Freedom Castle. Everybody is to follow his or her own sweet will, – or somebody else's if that seems pleasanter."

"Who has the pleasantest will?" asked Patty, looking around; "I want to follow it."

"I have," said Chick, promptly. "My will is something fierce in the way of pleasantness. I daresay every one here will fall all over themselves in their haste to follow it. Ha, do I hear a familiar strain? I do!"

He did, for just then the hotel orchestra, a fine one, struck up a popular air.

"Music, too!" exclaimed Mona. "All the comforts of home, and none of the cares. This is just too perfect! Billy Boy, you're a wonder!"

"To think of it being Bill's hotel!" said Daisy, in an awed voice.

"To think of our being here without any bills," put in Roger Farrington. "That's the best part of it. It's like being given the freedom of the city!"

"The freedom of the country," Adele corrected; "that's much better."

The orchestra, on a platform, gorgeous in scarlet, gold-braided coats, began a fascinating fox-trot.

Kit Cameron looked across the table at Patty, with a nod of invitation.

Smiling assent, Patty rose, flinging her napkin on the table. Kit came round to her, and in a moment they were dancing to the music that had called them. Skilfully, Kit guided her among the maze of tables and chairs, for they were the two best dancers in the crowd, and they had no difficulty in avoiding obstacles.

"Have a turn, Adele?" asked Bill, laying down his fork.

"No, thank you; it's all very well for the girls, but your chaperon is too nearly middle-aged for such capers."

"Nonsense; but maybe you're wise to save your energies for an evening dance."

Several of the young people did dance a few turns, but Chick Channing speedily caused them to halt by announcing the arrival of mushrooms under glass.

“Whoosh!” cried Kit, “back to nature! We can dance at any old time, but mushrooms under glass are an event! I say, Bill, I’m glad the cook didn’t leave with the guests.”

“The whole serving force is under contract for a fortnight longer,” explained Farnsworth. “You can live on mushrooms, if you like.”

“It’s Paradise,” said Marie Homer, ecstatically; “I don’t ever want to go home. Does the mail come regularly?”

Everybody laughed at Marie’s look of anxiety, and Bill replied, “Yes, my child, you can get your daily letter from him up here.”

“He doesn’t write *every* day,” said Marie, so innocently that they all roared again.

“I wish *I* had somebody to write love-letters to me,” sighed Patty. “It must make life very interesting.”

“I’ll write them to you,” offered Chick. “It’s no trouble at all, and I’m the little old complete love-letter writer.”

“You’re right here in the spot, though, so that’s no fun. I mean somebody who isn’t here, – like Marie’s somebody.”

“Well, you must have plenty of absent adorers. Can’t you encourage their correspondence?”

“But then I’d have to write first, and I hate to do that, it’s so – so sort of forward.”

“That, to be sure. But it’s better to be forward than forlorn.”

“Oh, I’m not exactly forlorn!” said Patty, indignantly. “I can be happy with all these others, if t’other dear charmer *is* away.”

“Can you, Patty?” whispered Bill. “Are you happy here?”

“Oho, Little Billee, I am beatifically happy! Just see that confection Louis is bringing in! Could I be anything but happy with that ahead of me?”

The dessert that had just appeared was indeed a triumph of the confectioner’s art. Composed of ice cream, meringue and spun sugar, it was built into an airy structure that delighted the sight as well as the palate. Everybody applauded, and Adele declared it was really a shame to demolish it.

“It would be a shame not to,” said Patty, her blue eyes dancing in anticipation of the delicious sweet.

“What a little gourmande you are,” said Chick, watching Patty help herself bountifully to the dessert.

“Deed I am. I love sweet things, they always make me feel at peace with the world. I eat them mostly for their mental and moral effect on me, for my disposition is not naturally sweet, and so I do all I can to improve it.”

“And yet you give the effect of a sweet dispositioned person.”

“She is,” spoke up Daisy, overhearing. “Why, Chick, Patty is the sweetest nature ever was. Don’t you believe her taradiddles.”

“I know the lady so slightly, I’m not much of a judge. But I feel sure she’ll improve on acquaintance,” and Chick looked hopeful.

“I hope so, I’m sure,” and Patty’s humble expression of face was belied by the twinkle in her eye. Then dinner was over, and Adele rose and led the way to the great salon or drawing-room.

“Come for a little walk on the veranda,” said Chick to Patty. “Let’s get more acquainted.”

Patty caught up a rose-coloured wrap from the hall rack, and they went out and strolled the length of the long veranda that went round three sides of the house.

“Splendid crowd,” said Chick, enthusiastically; “and right down fine of old Bill to do this thing.”

“He *is* fine,” said Patty, impulsively; “whatever he does is on a big scale.”

“His friendships are, I have reason to know that. He’s done heaps for me, dear old chap.”

“Have you known him long?”

"Three or four years. Met him through Mona. Good sort, Mona."

"Yes, Mona's a dear. She's the sort that wears well. Where is your home, Mr. Chick?"

"Nowhere, at present. I've lived in Arizona, but I've come East to grow down with the country. I'm a mining engineer, at your service."

"I'd love to employ you, but, do you know, I seldom have need of the services of a first-class mining engineer."

"Oh, I'm not so awfully first-class. Bill thinks he can use me in his manoeuvres. We talked it over a bit on the way up, and I hope so, I'm sure."

"Then I hope so, too."

"Thank you. You're a kind lady. Shall we sit in this glassy nook and flirt a bit?"

They had reached a portion of the veranda, glass-enclosed, and arranged with seats among tall palms and jars of flowers. There were shaded lights and a little illuminated fountain in the centre.

"I'll stop here a moment, but I can't flirt," said Patty, demurely; "my chaperon won't allow it."

"Allowed flirting is no fun, anyway. Forbidden fruit is sweetest."

"But sour grapes are forbidden fruit. How can sour be sweet?"

"Oh, it's all according to your nature. If you have a sour nature, the grapes are sour. If a sweet disposition, then all fruits are sweet."

"Even a lemon?"

"Nobody hands a lemon to sweet people."

"Then they can't have any lemonade, and I love it! I guess I'll stop being so sweet –"

"Good gracious, Patty, you couldn't do *that* if you tried!"

This remark was made by Kit Cameron, who just then put his head in at the doorway and overheard Patty's laughing decision.

"Hello, you two," he went on; "you'll have to stop your introspective conversation, and come and join the dance. Will you, won't you come and join the dance? We're only to have one, our dragon chaperon declares, and then we must all go by-by. So come and trip it, Patty of the fairy toes!"

The trio returned to the drawing-room, and after the one dance had been extended to half a dozen, Adele collected her headstrong charges and carried them off to bed.

"And you're not to have kimono confabs all night, either," she ordered. "Patty, you'll be good for nothing tomorrow, if you don't get some rest. And the others, too."

But there was more or less chattering and giggling before the girls separated for the night. It seemed natural for them to drift into Patty's boudoir and in their pretty negligées they dawdled about while Patty brushed her hair.

"What goldilocks!" exclaimed Marie, in admiration. And truly, Patty's hair was a thing to admire. Thick and curling, it hung well below her waist, and shone with a golden glimmer as the light touched its rippling lengths.

"It's an awful nuisance," Patty declared; "there's such a lot of it, and it does snarl so."

"Let me help you," cried Daisy, springing up and taking the brush from Patty's hand. "Mona, do the other side."

Mona seized another brush and obeyed, and as the two brushed most vigorously, Patty's little head was well pulled about.

"Thank you, girls, oh, *thank* you *ever* so much, but truly, I *don't* mind doing it myself! Oh, *honestly*, I don't!"

Patty rescued her brushes, and soon had the rebellious locks in two long pigtails for the night.

"Now, scoot, all of you," she said, "this is the time I seek repose for my weary limbs, on beds of asphodel – or – whatever I mean."

"Beds of nothing," said Mona, "I'm not a bit sleepy. Let us stay a little longer, Patty, dear, – sweet Patty, ah, *do* now."

"*I* can't," and Marie started toward the door. "I'm awfully sleepy."

"You don't fool me, my infant," said Patty, wisely. "Your eyes are like stars burned in a blanket! I know what you're going to do! But don't be alarmed, I won't tell."

Marie blushed and with murmured good-nights, ran away.

"Going to write a letter, of course." And Daisy wagged her sapient head. "Who is the man, Pat?"

"Fie, Daisy! You heard me say I wouldn't tell!"

"You only said you wouldn't tell what she's going to do. And we know that. Do tell us who he is!"

"I won't do it. If Marie chooses, she will tell you herself. And anyway, Daisy, it's no one you know. I don't think you ever saw him and I doubt if you ever even heard of him."

"Is he nice?"

"Charming. Full of capers, though. And Marie is so serious. But he's very attractive."

"Are they engaged? Oh, Patty, *do* tell us about it!"

"I can't. I don't know so very much about it myself; but what I do know is a sacred trust, and not to be divulged to a horde of rattle-pates. Now, will you make yourselves scarce? Go and write letters, go and darn stockings, – anything, but let me go to bed."

Finally, Patty shooed the girls away, and locking her door against their possible return, she began to make ready for bed.

She glanced at her watch as she sat at her toilette-table. It was exactly midnight.

And at that moment her telephone rang.

"Those girls!" she thought to herself. "I'll not answer it!"

But the bell kept ringing, and Patty took down the receiver with a soft "Hello."

"That you, Patty?" and her astonished ears recognised Philip Van Reypen's voice.

"For mercy's sake! Where are you, Phil?"

"Home. In New York. Can you hear me all right?"

"Yes, plainly. How did you know I was here?"

"Learned it from your father. Say, girlie, why didn't you get me a bid up there, too?"

"Do you want to come?"

"*Do* I! Aren't *you* there!"

"Is that a reason?"

"The best in the world. Do get Farnsworth to invite me."

"I can't, Phil. He doesn't want any – any more than we have here now."

"You mean he doesn't want *me*."

"Why, doesn't he like you?" Patty's voice was full of innocent surprise.

"It isn't that, but he wants you all to himself."

"Nonsense! There are a dozen of us up here."

"Well, I mean he's afraid to have *me* there. By Jove, Patty, that's a sort of a compliment. He's afraid of me."

"Don't be silly, Philip. How's Lady Van?"

"She's all right. She's at Newport, just now. I'm in town for a day or two, so thought I'd call up Spring Beach and maybe run down there to see you. And this is the immediate result. Well, look here, Patty, if I can't get invited to Farnsworth's Palace Hotel, for I hear it's that, I'm going to Poland Spring, and then I can run over and see you anyway."

"Oh, Philip, *don't* do that!"

"Why not? Haven't I a right to go to Poland Spring, if I like?"

"Yes, but don't come over here."

"Why not?"

"I can't exactly explain it, myself; at least not over the telephone, but I don't think it would be nice for you to come here when you were not invited."

"Oh, I was spoken of, then?"

"Well, – yes, – since you will have it."

“And Farnsworth wouldn’t have me?”

“Well, – I said not to have you.”

“Oh, you *did*! What a nice friend you are!”

“Now, Phil, don’t talk like that. I said – I said – ”

“Bless your heart, I know just how it was. Or nearly. But you could have had me asked – and you didn’t! Now, my lady, just for that, I *am* going to Poland Spring – start tomorrow. And, – listen, now, – if you really don’t want me to come over to the Farnsworth House, then you must come over to the Poland Spring House to see me! Get that?”

“Why, Phil, absurd! How could I go alone?”

“You needn’t come alone. Bring a chaperon, or another girl or a crowd of people if you like, or even a servant, but *come*! That’s all, so good-night, little girl. Pleasant dreams!”

The telephone clicked as Phil hung up, and with a little gasp, Patty hung up her receiver and threw herself on a couch to think it over. She couldn’t help laughing at the coil she was in, for she well knew she couldn’t go to Poland Spring House, unless with the whole crowd, – or nearly all of them. She pictured Bill reaching there to be greeted by Philip Van Reypen! Dear old Bill; after all he had done to make it pleasant for them, to hurt his feelings or to annoy him in any way, would be mean. She wished Phil had kept out of it. She wished there wasn’t any Phil nor any Little Billee, nor – nor – anybody, – and somehow Patty’s long, brown lashes drooped over her pansy blue eyes, – and, still robed in her chiffon and lace peignoir, and all curled up on the soft, spacious couch, – she fell sound asleep.

CHAPTER IV

BLUE ROCK LAKE

In a blaze of September glory, the sun shone across the lake. The leaves had not yet begun to turn, and the summer trees were as green as the stalwart evergreens, but of varying shades. From deep, almost black, shadowy forests, the range ran to brilliant, light green foliage, in a gamut of colour. Some of the younger and more daring trees crept down to the water's edge, but much of the lake shore was rocky and more or less steep. Here and there a picturesque inlet had a bit of sandy coast, but the main effect was rugged and wild.

But even the intrusive sun could only peep into Patty's boudoir through a chink or two between the drawn shades and the window frames. And so his light was not enough to wake the sleeper, still cuddled among the couch pillows.

But she was awakened by a bombardment of raps on the door.

"Patty!" called Daisy's impatient voice; "whatever *are* you doing? Open this door!"

The blue eyes flew open. But Patty was the sort of person who never wakes all at once. Nan always said Patty woke on the instalment plan. Slowly, and rubbing her eyes, she rose and unlocked the door.

"Why, Patty Fairfield!" Daisy exclaimed, "your lights are still burning! You – why, *look* at you! You didn't undress at all! You have on your evening petticoat and slippers! and the very same boudoir robe I left you in last night. And" – Daisy looked in at the bedroom door, – "your bed hasn't been slept in! What *is* the matter?"

Daisy rattled on so, that Patty, still half asleep, was bewildered. "I don't know – " she began, "Philip called – "

"Philip called! Patty, are you crazy? Wake up!" Daisy shook her a little and under this compulsion Patty finished waking up.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed, laughing, "did I sleep there all night? No wonder I feel like a boiled owl."

"But why, — *why* did you do it?"

"Fiddlesticks, I don't know. It's no crime, I suppose. I lay down there for a few minutes, after you hoodlums cleared out, and I suppose I fell asleep and forgot to wake up. That's all. Lemme alone, and a bath and a cup of hot chocolate will restore my senses."

"You dear little goose! I'll run your tub for you. Though I suppose there are a string of maids waiting outside your door. Want 'em?"

"No, rather have you. But send half a dozen of them for some choclit, please."

Still yawning, Patty began to take off her slippers and stockings. "Thank you, Daisykins," she said, as Daisy returned from the bathroom. "Now, you light out, and I'll make a respectable toilette. My, how I did sleep. I was worn out. But I feel fine now. Good-bye, Daisy."

But Daisy was slow to take the hint.

"I say, Patsy, what did you mean by saying Philip called?"

Patty hesitated for the fraction of a second, and then decided it were wiser to keep her own counsel regarding that matter.

"Dreaming, I s'pose. Certainly, there was no Philip here in reality."

"But you said distinctly that Philip called," Daisy persisted.

"Well, s'pose I did? What could it have been but a dream? Do you imagine I had a real, live caller?"

"No; but it must have been a vivid dream!"

"It was," said Patty. "Now scoot!"

Daisy scooted, and Patty locked her door again.

"Well, you're a pretty one!" she said to herself; "the idea of sleeping all night without going to bed. Adele will be terribly exercised over it. But I have other things to worry about. I wonder if Philip will really come up here, and if he does, what Bill will do. Would I better tell Bill about it? Or, just let the situation develop itself? Oh, what troubles some poor little Pattys do have! Come in!"

This last in response to a gentle tap at the hall door.

A trim maid entered with a tray.

"Oh, joy!" cried Patty; "I'm simply starving, – Mary, is it?"

"Sarah, ma'am," returned the girl, gazing admiringly at pretty Patty, who was now in a kimono of light blue silk, edged with swans-down.

"Well, Sarah, stay a few moments, and you can help me dress. Sit down there."

Sarah obediently took the small chair Patty designated, and folded her hands on her immaculate frilled apron.

"Tell me about the hotel, Sarah," said Patty, as she crunched the crisp toast between her white teeth, and smiled at the maid.

"What about it, ma'am?"

"Well, let me see; how did you maids feel when you found the guests were leaving?"

"At first we feared we'd lose our money, miss; then we were told that our contracts held till the end of this month, and if we would stay as long as we were asked to, we'd get paid in full."

"Wasn't that nice?"

"Fine, ma'am. I'm using mine for my little sister's schooling, and I'd sore miss it."

"So all the servants were willing to stay?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am. You see, none could get good places up here. The hotels all have their own, and many of them will close the first of October."

"I see. Isn't it funny to have a dozen guests, and the rest of this big place empty?"

"It is, indeed, miss. Shall I get you some hotter chocolate?"

"No, I've finished, thank you. Now, you call somebody else to take the tray, and you stay to help me. I've taken a fancy to you, Sarah, and I want you for my personal maid while I'm here. Is that all right?"

"Yes, indeed, miss. I'm proud to do for you. But I'm not a trained lady's maid."

"Never mind, I'll train you."

Patty had a nice way with servants. She was always kind, and treated them as human beings, yet never was she so familiar that they presumed on her kindness. She soon discovered that Sarah, though untrained, was deft and quick to learn, and she instructed the maid in the duties required.

And so, when Adele came tapping at the door, she found Patty seated before the mirror, while Sarah was coiling the golden hair according to directions.

"Well, girlie, what's this I hear about your sleeping on a couch, when a perfectly good bed was all turned down for you?"

"Oh, just one of my whimsies," returned Patty, airily. "Don't bother about it, Adele."

And Adele was wise and kind enough not to bother.

Soon, arrayed in a most becoming white serge, with emerald green velvet collar and cuffs and a pale green silk blouse, Patty descended the great staircase to find most of the party grouped there, about to start for a ramble round the lake.

"Course I'll go," she said in answer to eager inquiries. "My hat and gloves, Sarah, please."

"Yes, Miss Patty," and the maid, who had been following her, returned upstairs.

"I've adopted Sarah as my personal bodyguard," Patty said. "You don't mind, Bill, do you?"

"Not a bit!" he replied heartily. "The house is yours and the fulness thereof. I hope all of you ladies who want maids, or keepers of any sort, will call on the service force for them."

Sarah came down then, bringing Patty's hat, a soft felt, green, and turned up on one side with a Robin Hood feather. It was most becoming, as Patty tilted it sideways on her head, adjusting it before a large mantel mirror.

"Now we're off," she said, gaily; "but we ought to have Alpenstocks, or swagger-sticks."

"Here are some," said Bill, opening a cupboard door, and disclosing a lot of long sticks. Everybody selected one, and they set forth.

"Such a wonder-place!" exclaimed Marie, as at every fresh turn they found some new bit of scenery or different view. "I could stay here forever!"

"Me too!" agreed Mona. "What's the name of the lake?"

"Something like Skoodoowabskooskis," said Bill, laughing; "but for short, everybody calls it Blue Rock Lake."

"Because the rocks on the other side look so blue, I suppose," suggested Daisy.

"I believe you're right!" cried Chick, in mock amazement at her quick perception. Whereupon Daisy made a face at him.

"Don't mind him, Daisy," said Patty; adding, teasingly, "it's perfectly true, the distant rocks do look blue, hence the term, Blue Rock Lake, – blue rocks and the lake, see?"

"Oh, you smarty!" and Daisy lost her temper a little, for she hated to be made fun of; "if you tease me, I'll tease you. What about a girl who wakes up, babbling of some 'Philip' or other!"

"Babbling nothing!" cried Patty. "And anyway, I'm always babbling, asleep or awake. Oh, see that bird! What a beauty!" As a matter of fact there was no bird in sight, but canny Patty knew it would divert attention from Daisy's remark, and it did. After vainly looking for the beautiful bird, other distractions arose, and Patty breathed more freely that nobody had noticed Daisy's fling.

But after they had walked all round the lake, and were nearing the hotel again, Bill stepped to Patty's side and falling in step with her, put his strong, firm hand under her elbow, saying: "Want some help, little girl, over the hard places?"

Channing, who had been at her other side, took the hint and fell behind with some of the others.

"What's this about your waking up with Philip's name on your lips?" he said; "do you want to see him so badly? If so, I'll ask him up here?"

Patty hesitated; here was her chance to get the invitation that Phil so coveted, and yet, she knew Bill Farnsworth didn't want him. Nor was she sure that she wanted him, herself, if he and Little Billee weren't going to be friendly. A nice time she would have, if the two men were cool or curt to each other.

So she said, "No, I don't want him, especially. I daresay I was dreaming of him. I dream a lot anyway, of everything and everybody."

"Dreaming?" said Farnsworth, in a curious voice; "is that all, Patty?"

"All? What do you mean?"

"Is that all the communication you had with Van Reypen last night? In dreams?"

Patty looked up, startled. Did Bill know of the telephone message? Would he care? Patty felt a certain sense of guilt, though, as she told herself, she had done nothing wrong. Moreover, the only reason she had for not telling Farnsworth frankly of Phil's message, was merely to spare him annoyance. She knew he would be annoyed to learn that Phil had called her at midnight on the long distance, and if he didn't already know it, she would rather he shouldn't. But did he, or not?

"Pray, how else could I talk to him?" she said, laughingly. "Do you suppose I am a medium and had spirit rappings?"

"I suppose nothing. And I know only what you choose to tell me."

"Which is nothing, also. Why, Little Billee, you're in a mood this morning, aren't you?"

She glanced up into the face of the man who strode beside her. It was a fine face. Strong, well-cut features made it interesting rather than handsome. It was also a determined face, and full of earnestness of purpose. But in the blue eyes usually lurked a glint of humour. For the moment,

however, this was not noticeable, and Farnsworth's lips were closed rather tightly, – a sure sign with him, of seriousness.

“Since you choose to tell me nothing, I accept your decision. But once more I ask you, for the last time, do you wish me to invite Van Reypen up here?”

A moment Patty thought. Then she said, “No, thank you, Billee, I don't.”

Farnsworth's brow cleared, and with a sunny smile down at her, he said: “Then the incident is closed. Forget it.”

“All right,” and Patty smiled back, well pleased that she had decided as she did.

“You little goose!” said he, “I know perfectly well that you called up Van Reypen on the telephone last night.”

“I did not!” declared Patty, indignantly.

“Now, Apple Blossom, don't tell naughty stories. I say, I *know* you did.”

“All right, Mr. Farnsworth, if you doubt my word, there's nothing more to be said.”

Patty was thoroughly angry, and when she was angry she looked about as fierce as a wrathful kitten. But, also, when Patty was angry, a few foolish tears *would* crowd themselves into her eyes, and this only served to make her madder yet. She turned from him, wanting to leave him and join some of the others, but she couldn't, with those silly drops trembling on her eyelashes.

“Look up, Apple Blossom,” said a gentle voice in her ear. Farnsworth's voice was one of his chief charms, and when he modulated it to a caressing tone, it would cajole the birds off the trees.

Patty looked up, and something in her blue eyes glistened through the tears, that somehow made her look incapable of “telling a naughty story.”

“Forgive me, Posy-Face,” Farnsworth murmured, “I *will* believe you, whatever you tell me. I will believe you, whether I think you're telling the truth or not!”

At this rather ambiguous statement, Patty looked a little blank. But before she could ask further explanation, they had reached the hotel and they all went in.

CHAPTER V

M'LE FARINI!

According to Farnsworth's plan, at luncheon, each girl moved her seat one place to the left. This put Adele at the host's left, and moved Patty on farther, so that she was between Jim Kenerley and Chick Channing.

"Welcome, little stranger," said Chick, as they sat down. "I'll have you now, and again tonight at dinner, sitting by me side, and then life will be a dreary blank, while you slowly jog all round the table, getting back to me, two days after tomorrow. How the time will drag!"

"You're so flattering!" and Patty pretended to be terribly pleased. But, as a matter of fact, she was wishing she could sit next Little Billee, and find out whether he was really angry at her. Also, she decided she would tell him all about the telephone message, for he apparently believed she had told him a falsehood. And, too, it occurred to her, that he might not make any great distinction between calling and being called on the telephone.

"What do you think about it? Shall us go?" said Chick, and Patty realised, with a start, that she had been so lost in her thoughts, that she hadn't heard the talk at table.

"Go where?" she asked, looking blank.

"Oh, come back from dreamland, and learn what's going on. Cameron knows of a wonderful hermit, who lives in a shack in the woods and tells fortunes. Do you want to snatch the veil from the hidden future, and learn your fate?"

"Yes, indeed; I just love fortune tellers! Where is he, Kit?"

"Off in the woods, in a tumble-down old shanty. But he's the real thing in seers! I was out for an early morning prowl, and I discovered him. Bobbink, that's my pet bellhop, says he's greatly patronised by the populace, but though he gets lots of coin, he won't move into better quarters or disport himself more as a man of means."

"Well, I want to go to see him," Patty declared. "Will you go, Billee?"

"Can't go this afternoon, Patty; I'm sorry, but I have another engagement."

"So have I," said Daisy, looking a little conscious. "Let's leave Mr. Fortune Teller till tomorrow morning."

All agreed to this, and after luncheon was over, they proceeded to plan various sports.

"Tennis, Patty?" asked Chick.

"No; too poky." And Patty gave a restless gesture, most unusual with her, and only indulged in when she was bothered about some trifle. She wanted to get a moment alone with Farnsworth and tell him about Phil. She knew from the way Little Billee looked at her, or, rather, didn't look at her, that he was hurt or offended, or both.

"Golf then?" Chick went on.

"No, too slow."

"Well, how 'bout lawn bowls?"

"What are they?"

"Never tried lawn bowls! Oh, they're lots of fun. Come on."

In a short time they had collected half a dozen people and were in the midst of a gay game, when Farnsworth suddenly appeared, riding a big, black horse. Very stunning he looked, for his riding togs were most becoming and he sat his horse with all the grace and easy carelessness of the Western rider.

"Oh, Billee," cried Patty, dropping the bowling ball she was about to roll, "I want to go riding!"

And then she was covered with chagrin, for Daisy came out of the hotel, also garbed in the trimmest of riding costumes, and a groom led a horse for her to mount.

"Do you, Patty?" said Bill, not unkindly, but with a disinterested air. "You may. There are lots of horses in the stables."

Patty quickly recovered her poise. "Thank you," she cried, gaily; "a little later, then. Will you go, Chick?"

"Will I! Just try me!"

"Well, we'll finish this game, and then there will be time enough."

The game over, they went for a ride. Patty's riding habit was dark green, of modish cut and style. She was a good horsewoman, though she seldom rode. Channing, likewise, was a good rider, but he made no such picturesque effect in the saddle as Big Bill.

"Whither away?" he said, as they started.

"Is it too far to go over to Poland Spring House?"

"Not a bit. It's a goodish distance, but the road is splendid, and it isn't four yet."

So they set off briskly for that destination. The exhilarating air and exercise quite restored Patty's good humour, and she cast off all thought of petty botherations and enjoyed herself thoroughly.

"Great!" she exclaimed, smiling at Chick, as they flew along.

"Yes, isn't it? And it's not so very far, we're nearing the approach to the place now. We'll have time for tea, and get back well before dark."

"Lovely! Oh, what a big hotel! And *will* you look at the squirrels!"

Sure enough, the lawn and verandas were dotted with fat gray squirrels. They were very tame and had no fear of people or horses. They welcomed Patty and Chick, by sitting up and blinking at them as they dismounted and grooms took their horses away.

Asking for the tea room, they were shown the way, and ushered to a pleasant table.

"Chocolate for me, please," said Patty, as the waiter stood with poised pencil. "I hate tea. So chocolate, and dear little fussy cakes."

"Chocolate is mine, too, then. Whatsoever thou eatest that will I eat also. Well, by Jove, will you look over there!"

Patty looked in the direction that Chick's eyes indicated, and there, at a small table, busily eating cakes and tea, sat Farnsworth and Daisy Dow.

"Shall we join them?" asked Chick.

"Join them! Oh, no, they don't want joiners. They're absorbed in each other."

They did look so. Bill was earnestly talking and Daisy was listening with equal intentness. Her face was bright and animated, while Farnsworth's was serious and thoughtful.

Patty was angry at herself for being one whit disturbed at sight of them, thus chummily having their tea, and she tossed it off with a gay laugh. "Besides, I'd rather chat with you alone than to have a foursome."

"Good girl, Patty," and Chick nodded approvingly. "Do you know I think you're about as nice as anybody, after all."

"So do I you," and Patty sipped her chocolate with an air of contentment. "This is a much bigger hotel than ours, isn't it?"

"Yes, but ours is more beautiful, I think, and quite big enough for our party."

"Of course. Oh, what a stunning-looking woman! See, Chick, over toward your left."

Channing turned slightly to see a very handsome dark-eyed woman, who smiled at him as their glances met.

"Why, bless my soul!" he exclaimed; "if it isn't Maudie Kent. I say, Patty, don't you want to meet her? She's an actress, or was, and she's a dear. Awfully good form and all that, and really worth while."

"Yes, I'd love to know her," said Patty, looking with interest at the stunning gown the lady wore. It was of flame-coloured silk, veiled with black net, and was matched by a wide hat of black with flame-coloured plumes.

"Excuse me a moment, then," and Channing rose and went over to where the lady stood. She was alone, and he had no difficulty in persuading her to come to their table.

"You dear child," said Miss Kent, as Channing introduced them; "how pretty you are! I'm so glad to know you. But what are you doing here with Chick Channing?"

"Just having tea," said Patty, smiling back into the big dark eyes that looked at her so kindly.

"But are you staying here? Where are your people?"

"We are staying over at Freedom Hall," she began, and then paused, for with those eyes upon her, she couldn't quite make it seem a rational thing to do.

"Oh, it's quite all right, Maudie," Channing put in, "there's a crowd of us, with chaperons and things, and our good host, by the way, is right across the room, at a tea-table."

"That good-looking chap with the pretty girl? Oh, it's Mr. Farnsworth! Mayn't I know her, too?"

"Now, see here, Maudie, you can't know everybody that I do. Be content with Miss Fairfield, at least for the present."

"Oh, I am, more than content. No, I'll have coffee, please. Chocolate is only for the very slim."

"Surely you are that," ventured Patty, glancing at the graceful form of the new acquaintance.

"But I wouldn't be, if I indulged in sweet things. Enjoy them while you may, my dear, in after years you'll be glad you did."

"What are you doing here, Maudie?" asked Channing. "Are you alone?"

"Yes; I'm having a concert tonight, and I'm in such trouble. You see," she turned to Patty, "I'm a sort of professional entertainer. I give concerts or recitals, and I get performers of the very best and usually they are most dependable and reliable. But tonight I have a concert scheduled, and my prima donna is lacking. If she doesn't come on this next train, I don't know what I shall do. I suppose I shall have to give back the ticket money, and call the affair off, and that means a great loss to me. For I have to pay the other performers their price just the same."

"That's a shame," said Channing, sympathetically. "But she'll surely come."

"I'm afraid not. I've telegraphed and I can't get her anywhere. I can't help thinking she deliberately threw me down because she received a better offer, or something of the sort. But I mustn't bore you with my troubles. Forget it, Miss Fairfield, and don't look so concerned."

"I'm so sorry for you," said Patty, "to go to all that trouble and expense, and have it all for nothing."

"Less than nothing," said Chick, "for you stand to lose considerable, I suppose."

"Yes, well over five hundred dollars. Oh, here are the motorbuses from the train. Now we'll see."

But though many guests arrived at the hotel the singer was not amongst them.

"No," said Miss Kent, scanning them sadly, "she isn't here. Oh, what shall I do?"

Patty's mind was working fast. She knit her brows as she tried to think calmly of a wild project that had come into her mind.

"Miss Kent," she began, and stopped; "I wonder – that is –"

"Well, my dear, what is it? Do you want to ask something of me? Don't hesitate, I'm not very terrifying, am I, Chick?"

"No, indeed. What is it, Patty?"

"Oh, of course, it wouldn't do, – I hate to suggest it, even, – but you see, Miss Kent, I can sing –"

"And Patty can impersonate the absent singer! And nobody would ever know the difference! Great!" cried Channing. "Oh, Maudie, your trouble is at an end!"

"Now wait," said Patty, blushing. "I am not a professional singer, but I have studied with good masters, and I have a voice, not so very big, but true. Forgive this plain speaking, but if I could help you out, Miss Kent, I should be so glad."

"You're a little darling!" exclaimed Maud Kent; "I wonder if we *could* carry off such a thing. You see, your coming here, as you just did, a stranger, and talking to me only, looks quite as if you

were the arriving singer. That part's all right. As to your voice, I have no doubts about that, for you *didn't* say you sang 'a little.' And any way, even a fair singer would do, in addition to the talent I have. But Miss Fairfield, I can't accept this from you. Will you take just the price I expected to give M'lle Farini?"

"I couldn't accept money, Miss Kent. That would be impossible. I'm glad to do this to help you out, for it's no trouble for me to sing, I love to do it. And don't bother about the payment. Give it to some charity, if you like."

"Oh, I can't accept your services without pay! But if you knew what a temptation it is!"

"Yield to it, then," and Patty smiled at the troubled face. "But first, you must hear my voice. You can't decide before that. Where can we go?"

"Come up to my apartment, no one will hear us there, and if they should, it's no great harm. One may practise, I suppose. You may come too, Chick, if you like."

The three left the tea-room, and as they disappeared through the door, Farnsworth caught sight of Patty's face.

"What does that mean?" he cried, so angrily that Daisy was startled.

"What does what mean?"

"Did you see who went out that door?"

"No; who?"

"Patty and Chick Channing and Maudie Kent."

"I know the first two, but who is Maudie Kent?"

"An actress! A woman Channing and I knew in San Francisco a good while ago. What can she be doing here? And how did she get hold of Patty? Though of course, Chick is responsible for that. But what are they up to? I'm going after them."

"Bill, don't do anything so foolish! Patty has a right to visit the lady if she wants to. It isn't your business."

"But Patty – with that woman!"

"Why, isn't she a nice woman?"

"She's an actress, I tell you."

"Well, lots of actresses are lovely ladies. Isn't this one?"

"Yes, of course, she's a lovely lady. But Patty oughtn't to be racing round with her."

"Patty wasn't racing! She wouldn't do such a thing in Poland Spring House. Now, Bill, put it out of your mind. There's no occasion for you to get stirred up because Patty has made a new acquaintance. And I guess Chick Channing can take care of her, he wouldn't let her know anybody who wasn't all right."

"Chick is thoughtless. He likes Maudie, and so do I. But she's no fit companion for Patty."

"Why? Is Patty Fairfield better than us common people? Is she made of finer clay? Wouldn't you want *me* to meet the Maudie lady?"

"Oh, you. Why, that wouldn't matter so much."

"Bill Farnsworth! What a speech! I guess I'm every bit as good as Patty Fairfield."

"Of course you are, Daisy. Don't be silly. But you're more – more experienced, you know, and a little less – less conventional. Patty has never had half the experience of the world that you have. I don't want her mixed up with that sort of people, and I won't have it!"

"Well," and Daisy spoke coldly, "I don't see how you can help it. They've gone off, and you can't very well follow them, or have them arrested. Probably Chick and Patty are starting for home. And I'm sure it's time we did."

"But I can't go off and leave Patty here!"

"You can't do anything else. You're not Patty's keeper, Bill, and it's silly to act as if you were."

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