

CAROLYN WELLS

PATTY—BRIDE

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Patty—Bride

CHAPTER I PHILIP'S CHANCE

"I can't *stand* it, Patty, I simply *can't* stand it!"

"But you'll have to, Phil, dear. I'm engaged to Little Billee, and some day I'm going to marry him. And that's all there is about it."

"Oh, no, Patty, that isn't all about it. I'm not going to give you up so easily. You don't *know* how I care for you. You've no idea what a determined chap I can be, –"

"Now, stop, Phil. You know you promised that we should be friends and nothing more. You promised not to ask for more than my friendship – didn't you, now?"

"I did but that was only so you'd stay friendly with me, and I thought, – forgive the egotism, – I thought I could yet win your love. Patty, you don't care such a lot for Farnsworth, do you, now?"

"Indeed I do, Phil. Why, do you suppose I'd be engaged to him if I didn't love him more than anybody in all the world? Of course I wouldn't!"

"I know you think so, Patty," Phil's handsome face was grave

and kind, "but you may be mistaken."

"I'm not mistaken, Philip, and unless you change your subject of conversation, I'll have to ask you to go away. I should think you'd scorn to talk like that to a girl who's engaged to another man!"

"I should think I would, too, Patty. But I can't help it. Oh, my girl, my little love, I can't give you up. I can't tamely stand aside and make no effort to win you back! I'm not asking anything wrong, Patty, only don't send me away; let me try once again for you, – "

"It's too late, Phil," and Patty looked a little frightened at his vehemence.

"It's never too late, until you're actually married to him. When will that be?"

"Oh, I don't know. We've only been engaged a fortnight, – "

"And I only learned of it today, – "

"I know, I tried to get you on the telephone, – "

"Yes, I've been down in Washington for a week or more. But, Patty, dearest, think how surprised and stunned I was to hear of it. I came right over, to learn from you, yourself, if it could be true."

"Yes, Philip, it is true, and I'm glad and happy about it. I'm sorry you've been disappointed, but – there are others – "

"Hush!" and Van Reyepen fairly glared at her, "never imply that there's any one else in the world for me! Oh, Patty, my little Patty, I can't bear it."

His great, dark eyes were full of despair, his face was drawn with sorrow, and Patty forgave him, even while she resented his attitude.

“You mustn’t, Philip,” she said, gently; “it isn’t right for you to talk to me like that. I feel disloyal, even to listen to it.”

“I don’t care!” Van Reypen burst out. “You’re mine! You promised Auntie Van you’d marry me! You *promised!*”

Philip grasped her hand in both his own, and gazed at her so wildly that Patty was tempted to run out of the room. But she realised the matter must be settled once for all, and she spoke with dignity.

“Philip,” she said, “I don’t think you’re quite fair to me, – or to Billee. Is it manly to talk like this to the girl who is promised to your friend?”

“No, it isn’t. You’re right, Patty.” Van Reypen dropped her hand and folding his arms, stood and looked at her. “But listen to me, girl. I shall not give up until you’re married to Farnsworth. If I can win you back from him, I’m going to do so. I shall do nothing wrong. But, dear, I’m so miserable, – so utterly heart-broken, – you won’t put me out of your life, – will you?”

Now one of Patty’s strongest traits of character was her dislike of giving pain to another. Philip could have put forth no more powerful argument than an avowal of his disappointment. Against her better judgment, even against her own wish, she smiled kindly on him.

“I don’t want to put you out of my life, Phil, but I can’t let you

talk to me like this, – ”

“I won’t, Patty. Just let me see you once in a while, let me keep on loving you, and then, if you really love Bill better than you do me, I’ll see it, – I’ll know it, and I’ll give you up.”

“All right, then, but you must promise not to tell me you care for me.”

Van Reyepen gave a short, hard laugh. “Not tell you! When I don’t tell you, I won’t be breathing! Why, Patty, I can’t any more help telling you, than I can help loving you. But I promise not to make your life a burden, – or myself a nuisance. Trust me, dear. I don’t mean to steal you away from Bill, – unless you *want* to be stolen.”

“I don’t!” and Patty’s smile and blush showed plainly where her heart had been given.

Phil winced, but he said, blithely, “Very good, my lady. There’s no use being too down-hearted about it all. Give me my chance, – that’s all I ask.”

“But, Phil, the time for your ‘chance’ as you call it, is past. I’m engaged to Little Billee; – to me that’s as sacred, as unbreakable a promise, as my marriage vows will be.”

“Oh, no, it isn’t! Lots of people break off an engagement.”

Philip’s lightness annoyed Patty, and her mood changed.

“Well, then,” she said, “if you can so bewitch me that I *want* to break my engagement to Bill Farnsworth, I’ll do it, but you’ve about as much chance as – as nothing at all!”

“I’ll *make* a chance! Oh, Patty, don’t forget you said that!

Don't forget you said if I can win you away from him, I may do so! Listen, dear. I'm not over conceited, or vain, but I do think that you don't quite know your own mind, and you're a little bit dazzled by Bill's big masterfulness and you don't realise that perhaps there are other things worth while."

"I don't know what you're talking about, but I'll stick to my word. And I'll add that I know you *never* can cut Bill out, because I love him too much. So, there now!"

"Maybe I can't, maybe you're right, but I'll have a go at it, all the same."

"Of course, you know, I'll tell him of this conversation."

"Of course you may. There's nothing underhanded about my determination. If I can win you from him, it'll be done fairly, and in that case, Bill's own sense of justice would make him willing to give you up."

"Little Billee give me up! Willingly? *Nevaire!*"

"He would, Patty, if you told him yourself that you loved me more."

"Oh, *that!* But I've no expectation of ever doing that."

"Who can say? You're a fickle little thing, you know –"

"Indeed I'm not!"

"Yes, you are, and always have been. You're fond of Bill just now, because he's been doing the caveman act, carrying you off from the Blaney party, and such things, but you'll soon tire of him, –"

"Stop, Philip! I won't listen to such talk."

Patty put her hands over her ears and pouted. It was nearing twilight of an afternoon in late January, and the two were in the library of the Fairfield home. Patty had become engaged to Farnsworth while on a visit to Adele Kenerley, and had but lately returned from there.

This was her first interview with Philip since her engagement, and she had dreaded it, for she knew Phil's stubborn and persistent nature would not tamely submit to an end of his hopes. Patty had firmly resolved that if Philip insisted on telling her of his love for her, she would refuse to see him at all; but her gentle heart could not let her summarily dismiss him. She temporised, not because she cared for him, or had the least thought of disloyalty to Farnsworth, but because she couldn't bear to hurt him by forbidding him to come to her home.

She tried to change the subject. She was sitting in the corner of a huge davenport, and her little house dress of pink Georgette was very becoming. She rather hoped that Farnsworth would come in while Phil was there, but it was uncertain whether he could arrive before dinner or not until evening.

"I won't listen," she repeated; "if you'll talk about something else, nod your head, and I'll stay; but if not, shake your head, and I'll run off to my own room."

Van Reypen nodded his head, and Patty took her hands away from her ears.

"All right," she said, smiling; "if you'll be just a casual friend, go ahead and be it. But I don't want to hear any more absurd talk

about people's breaking their engagements."

"Righto! What shall we talk about?"

"About Bill."

This might have proved a dangerous subject, but clever Philip would not allow it to be. He was honest and earnest in his love for Patty. He really believed that she had said yes to Farnsworth on the spur of the moment, and that further thought would make her willing to reconsider her decision. Moreover, he was quite willing his rival should know of his own intentions, and he had only feelings of good fellowship for him. Philip had a sportsman's nature, and his idea was to let the best man win. He did not attach quite so much importance to the fact of the engagement as most people do, and he truly hoped yet to win Patty's affection and make her both willing and anxious to dismiss Bill in his favour.

Patty had not given him any encouragement for these hopes. In fact, she was so truly in love with Farnsworth, that it never occurred to her that she could ever care less for him, or have any room in her heart for any other man. But she couldn't seem to say this bluntly to Philip. She found it easier to let matters drift, and now, as he began to speak in praise of Farnsworth, she listened eagerly and assented and agreed to all Philip said.

"Yes, he is splendid," she acquiesced. "I didn't know there was such a noble nature in the world. You see, I've learned a lot about him since we've been engaged."

"Oh, of course. Yes, old Bill is a corker for bigness in every way. I'm banking on his big nature and his broad outlook, to

understand my case.”

“Now, now, you’re not to talk of ‘your case’! You promised not to.”

“With thee conversing, I forget all – promises!” misquoted Philip.

“Well, you mustn’t, or I’ll send you packing! Thank goodness, here comes Nan; *now* will you behave yourself?”

Mrs. Fairfield came in from out-of-doors, and drew near the blazing log fire.

“Well, children, what are you discussing so seriously?” she began; “Philip, my friend, if you please, will you push that bell and let us have lights and some tea. I’ve been to three committee meetings and I’m just about exhausted. Where’s Billee-boy, Patty?”

“I’m afraid he won’t be here until after dinner. He said it was unlikely he could come before.”

“Well, try to bear it, Patty. Can’t Philip beguile you for a time?”

“Yes, he’s a great little old beguiler, Phil is!” and Patty smiled at her guest.

“Of course I am,” declared Van Reypen. “I can beguile the birds off the trees, – but *not* Miss Patricia Fairfield, when she is waiting for her big Little Billee. Howsumever, I’ll do my best. Do I gather that I’m asked to dinner in place of the absentee?”

“You are *not*!” replied Patty, promptly, but Nan said, “Why, yes, Phil, stay. I’ll entertain you, if Patty won’t.”

"Thank you, Ma'am. That would suit me all right."

"And how about your aviation training? When do you begin that?"

"It's uncertain. I did expect to start for Wilmington next week, but matters are delayed by a screw loose in some of the red tape, and it may be a couple of weeks before I start."

"What? I didn't know you thought of going," put in Patty, surprised.

"Yes, I've settled the preliminaries and I'm waiting further orders."

"Going to Wilmington? Why, we won't see you any more, then."

"You don't seem terribly upset over that! But, you will see me, I'm afraid. Wilmington is not so very far off, and the course is neither long nor strenuous. Why, it only takes about four months in all."

"And then will you really fly? Up in the air, in big machines?"

"Such is my firm belief, Mademoiselle."

"And will you fall and break your neck? They say they all do."

"I'll not promise to do that, unless you insist upon it. And it isn't done as much as formerly, I believe."

"Why are you two sparring so?" asked Nan, laughingly. "Aren't you good friends, at the moment?"

"As good as anybody can be, when the lady he admires has been and went and gone and engaged herself to somebody else," and Philip frowned darkly.

"Oho, so that's it! Well, our young friend here is certainly engaged to her big Western suitor. Now, shall I look out for a sweet little girl for you?"

"No, thank you, Ma'am, it's a case of Patty or nobody, where I'm concerned. But the game's never out till it's played out. Patty and Farnsworth may one or both of them yet change their minds."

"You wouldn't think so, if you saw them together," laughed Nan. "They're just about the most engagedest pair you ever saw!"

"Oh, come now," said Patty, "we don't show our affection in public, Nan!"

"Well, you have great difficulty not to do so. It's all you can do, to hide it successfully."

"And why should they?" asked Phil. "There's no law against that sort of thing, is there?"

"Tell me more about your aviating," said Patty, by way of changing the subject. "What do you do to learn?"

"Dunno myself, yet. They say the only way to learn to swim is to be thrown into the water. So I daresay the way to learn to fly, is to get in an aeroplane and start."

"Nonsense! You have to be taught."

"Then I will be taught. But I'm going to be a good aviator. I'm sure I'll like the stunt, and I want to begin as soon as possible."

"I wish I could do some war work," and Patty sighed.

"Good gracious!" said Nan, "I don't know any girl who does more of it than you do, Patty! When you're not down in that old office doing clerical work, you're knitting like a house afire. And

you are on two or three committees and you write slogans for the Food people and for the Liberty Loan Bonds, and oh, I don't know what all you do!"

"All of a sudden, isn't it?" asked Philip, interestedly. "Have you been doing these things long?"

"Some of them," said Patty. "But I have done more of late. I feel so useless unless I do."

"Yes," said Nan, "and then you work beyond your strength, and overtax yourself, and the first thing you know you will be useless indeed!"

"Why, Patty? Why these great works?" asked Van Reypen.

"Oh, because of Bill," Nan answered for her. "You see he's so mixed up in war work, that Patty must needs to do a lot also. And she's such an extremist, she's not satisfied with doing a *bit*, it must be a whole lot of bits."

"Don't believe her, Phil," said Patty, gaily. "I do what I can, and no more. Also, I'm going to put a stop to this idea that I'm a delicate plant, – for I'm not. I'm as healthy as – as a backwoodsman."

"Fine comparison. Your sturdiness is exactly that of a backwoodsman! You could haul logs, if you want to, I dare say."

"Don't be funny. But I am heaps stronger than I used to be. It's a whole lot better for me to *do* things than to sit around and be coddled."

"That's true, Patty. What are you doing, that I can help you with? Any sort of work where you could use a pair of willing

hands?”

“But you’re going off aviating – ”

“Haven’t gone yet! Dunno when I will go. In the mean time let me help you. What’s your newest plan?”

“Well, for one thing, I’m going to help entertain the boys in khaki. A committee has asked me to, and if Nan agrees, I mean to devote one evening a week to it. Say we ask a few to dinner, and some more to come in the evening, and have some music and games and make it pleasant for them.”

“Count me in. I’ll gladly help out with such a program. Even after I go to Wilmington, I can get up here once a fortnight at least, – maybe, oftener.”

“All right. Now, what I’m thinking out, is how to make it pleasant for the boys we invite. I’d like to give them some real pleasure, not only some music and silly chatter.”

“Such as what? I mean, what have you in mind?”

“Well, I thought of getting some interesting lecturer – ”

“Cut it out, Patty. They don’t want lectures, – of all things!”

“What do they want?”

“I think the most of them want just a home atmosphere, and a few hours of pleasant company, without much reference in the chat to war conditions.”

“Do you think so?”

“I’m sure of it. If you ask half a dozen soldiers and have your father and Mrs. Fairfield here, and a few girl friends of yours, if you like, I’ll guarantee your visitors will be better entertained

than if you had the finest lecturer that ever droned out a lot of platitudes.”

“All right, Philip, you help me to get up such a party, and try it, – will you?”

“I sure will, and that with much quickness. Shall we say a week from tonight?”

“Yes that will be fine. I’ll ask Elise and – ”

“Don’t go too fast. I’ll find the khaki boys first, and then you get the rest.”

“All right,” agreed Patty.

CHAPTER II

BUMBLE ARRIVES

“Hello! Patty Popinjay! Where are you?”

As a matter of fact, Patty was curled up in a big armchair near the library fire, waiting for that very voice.

“Here I am!” she cried in return and jumped up to be grabbed in the arms of a handsome, jolly-looking girl who came flying into the room. “Oh, Bumble, I’m so glad to see you!”

The newcomer laughed.

“Bumble!” she exclaimed; “I haven’t heard that name for years. Let me look at you, Patty. My! you’re prettier than ever! Well, I just *had* to come. I couldn’t resist, when I heard of your engagement. Where’s the man? Show him to me at once!”

“Oh, he isn’t here, for the moment. But you’ll see him soon. I’m only afraid you’ll cut me out. Why, Bumble, – Helen, I mean, you’re utterly changed from the little girl I remember.”

“Of course I am – in appearance, – but no other way.”

“Are you still the happy-go-lucky, hit-or-miss little rascal you used to be?”

“Of course I am. Oh, Patty, doesn’t it seem long ago that you spent that summer with us? And to think I’ve scarcely seen you since! Not since Nan’s wedding, anyway.”

“No; and you only in Philadelphia! It’s ridiculous. But, I’ve

tried to get you over here time and again.”

“I know it. But I went out West to Stanford, and I was there so long, I almost lost track of all my Eastern people. Your Best Beloved is Western, isn’t he? Oh, Patty, tell me all, – everything about him.”

“All in good time, Helen, honey. For now, I’ll just say that he’s the dearest and best man in the whole world, and that you’ll agree to that when you see him. Now, come up to your room, and fix yourself up. You look as if you’d been through a whirlwind!”

“I always look like that,” and Helen Barlow laughed.

She was Patty’s cousin, and had come to New York for a visit. She had often been invited and several times had planned to come, but something had prevented her, and as the Barlow family were of a most undependable sort in the matter of keeping engagements or appointments, it surprised nobody that Helen had not carried out her plans. Indeed the surprise was that she was really here at last, and Patty stared at her hard to reassure herself that her guest had positively appeared.

Helen Barlow was a pretty girl, about Patty’s own age. Her soft brown hair was curled round her ears, in the prevailing mode, but it showed various wisps out of place, and needed certain pats and adjustments before a mirror. Her hat, a brown velvet toque, was a little askew, – even more so than she meant it to be, – and the long fur stole, over her arm, dragged on the floor.

Without being positively unkempt, Helen was untidy, and Patty well remembered that as a child she had been far more so.

The two girls went up to the room prepared for Helen, and soon her outer garments went flying. The hat was tossed on the bed, upside down; the stole slipped to the floor as the long cloth coat was wrenched open and one button pulled off by an impatient twitch.

“Never mind,” Helen said, “that old button was loose, anyway. Oh, Patty, how trim and tidy *you* look!”

It was second nature to Patty to be well groomed, and she would have been sadly uncomfortable with a button missing or a ribbon awry, unless intentionally so. For Patty was no prim young person, but she was by no means untidy.

She laughed at her cousin’s impetuous ways, and picked up the scattered garments, as fast as Helen flung them down.

“Don’t you have a maid, Patty? I supposed of course you did.”

“Oh, we have Jane. She maids Nan and me both, when we want her. But she does a lot of other things, too. We don’t have as many servants as we used to. Patriotism has struck this house, you know, and we’ve cut out more or less of the luxuries.”

“Good for you! I’m patriotic, too. Do you knit?”

“Of course; who doesn’t? Now, Bumble, – oh, yes, I’m going to call you by the old name if I want to, – do try to make yourself look tidy! Take down your hair and do it over. Your hair is lovely, – if you’d take a little more pains with it.”

“To be sure! Anything to please!” and Helen shook down her short curly mop. “Let me see his picture,” she demanded as she brushed vigorously away. “Quick! quick! I can’t wait a minute!”

Patty ran out of the room, laughing, and returned with a photograph of Farnsworth.

“Stunning!” cried Helen, “he’s simply great! Wherever did you catch him? Are there any more at home like him? ’Deed I *will* steal him away from you, if I possibly can. Oh, Patty, do you remember Chester Wilde? Well, he wants me to marry him, but I can’t see it! That’s one reason I ran away from home, to escape his persistence.”

“I do believe you’re a belle, Bumble! You’re fascinating, I see. Mercy goodness, you’ll cut poor little me out with everybody!”

“As if you cared! Now that you’re wooed and won!”

“Of course I don’t care. You can have all the others, – and there are plenty, – only, so many of them are going or gone to war.”

“I know, all my best ones have, too. But you couldn’t like a man who doesn’t *want* to fight!”

“I should say *nixy*!”

“What’s your Bill do? Is he in camp?”

“Oh, no. You know, he’s an expert mining engineer, and he’s used, – I mean, his services are used by the government. I can’t tell you all about it, because I don’t know all myself; and what I do know, I’m not allowed to tell, in detail. So don’t ask, Helen; just know my little Billee is doing his full duty, – and then some!”

“Little! *Is* he little? He doesn’t look so, from this picture.”

The photograph showed only the head and shoulders of Farnsworth, but it hinted a large man. However, Patty said, just

for fun:

“You can’t tell from that. But I don’t mind how little he is, – he’s all the world to me!”

She looked a trifle embarrassed, so, thinking Farnsworth must be decidedly undersized, Helen dropped the subject.

Her trunk had arrived, and Jane appeared, to assist in unpacking.

“Get out a pretty frock,” Patty directed her guest, “and I’ll help you get into it, and then we’ll go down and see Nan, she’ll soon be home.”

“Where is she?”

“Chasing some committee, as usual. We’ve both lost our individuality now, and we’re merged in committees. I’m a member of quite a number, but Nan belongs to more than I do. Here, Helen, put on this bluet, Georgette, satinet thing.”

“Rather dressy?”

“Not too much so. It’s nearly tea time, and people often drop in and I want you to make a good impression. And for gracious’ sake, do your hair more carefully than that! Here, let me do it, – or Jane.”

“All right,” and Helen dropped into a chair before the toilette table, while the deft and willing Jane quickly twisted up the brown locks.

“Now you’ll do,” said Patty, after a final critical examination. “Oh, wait, this sash end is loose.”

“I know, the snapper’s off. Never mind.”

“But I do mind! Helen Barlow, you’re as bumbly as ever! We used to call you that because you were as heedless and careless as a bumblebee – ”

“There was another reason,” Helen laughed.

“Yes, because you were so fat! You’ve pretty nearly gotten over that.”

“Thank you, lady, for dem kind woids! A little guarded, aren’t you? Know then, that my sole end, aim and ambition is to get thin, really thin, – slim, slender, willowy, – merely a slip of a girl – ”

“You haven’t quite achieved all that!” and Patty laughed. “But if you’re trying to, I’ll help you. No sweets, you know.”

“Gracious, Patty, I haven’t tasted candy for two years! And as a sugar conserver, I’m right there! Not a lump of it comes *my* way!”

“Good for you! Then, with exercise, and not too much sleep, we’ll soon get you into condition!”

The girls went down stairs, and found Nan already there.

“My dear old Bumble!” she cried; “no, no Helen for me! I knew you too long by the old name to change.”

“But, Nan, I don’t like it! Please don’t. Such a horrid name!”

“All right, then. I’ll try to say Helen, but if the other slips out sometimes, you must forgive me. Now, how’s everybody? Bob all right?”

“Fine! In camp, of course, but he gets home occasionally, or we go to see him. Dad and Mother sent all sorts of messages and

greetings, – and hoped I won't make you too much trouble – as if I *could*!”

“Indeed you can't!” cried Nan, warmly. “We're just awfully glad to see you, and you must stay just as long as you possibly can. Has Patty been telling you of her latest escapade?”

“She wrote me of it, – that's mostly why I came. I thought the sight of the flirtatious, coquettish, altogether frivolous and fickle Patty Fairfield tied down to one man, would be worth seeing!”

“Huh!” remarked Patty, “when you see the man, you'll not wonder! Anybody would be glad to be tied to him.”

“I'm going to cut Patty out, you know, Nan,” Helen declared, “but it's more likely she'll throw him over and fly to some newer flame, – ”

“Oh, *very* likely,” Patty mocked, her eyes dancing, “oh, *very* like-ly! When I throw him over, Bumble, you have my full permission to pick him up. But until then, – hands off my property!”

The tea things appeared then, and Patty did the honours, remarking, “Yes, we do have tea, 'most every day, and we have sugar in it, – but we skimp it some and we don't have really rich cakes.”

“I'm glad to get it,” and Helen accepted her cup. “I forgot to get any luncheon, and I'll just make up for it now.”

Whereupon she proceeded to devour cakes and biscuits, until Patty silently despaired of ever helping her in a quest for slimness!

But Patty looked at her cousin affectionately. Helen was so jolly and gay-looking, so wholesome and smiling, and so sincerely glad to be with them, that she made herself thoroughly welcome. Her dark eyes were beaming with good nature, her round, plump face was alight with good will and her laughter bubbled forth like a child's.

She put her little fat hand up to her lips. "Honest, I'm trying not to giggle so much," she said, "but I just can't help it! When I'm happy, I have to chuckle, and that's all about it."

"Giggle all you like, my dear," said Nan, "I'm glad to hear it. There's so much sadness in the world, that a truly merry laugh like yours is infectious and does us all good. Now, make yourself at home, Helen, and don't mind it if I seem to neglect you. I'm not really going to do that, but I do have an awful lot to see to, –"

"Oh, I know, Nan. And Patty has, too. But I'll be a help, not a nuisance, – you see if I'm not. Why, Patty Fairfield! you said he was little!"

The original of the photograph she had seen, strode into the room and when Helen saw big Bill Farnsworth, she knew Patty had chaffed her.

Farnsworth went to Patty and grasped both her hands in his.

"All right?" he said, looking deep into her blue eyes.

"All right," Patty returned, with an answering gaze, and so true was the sympathy between them, that a sort of telepathic message was exchanged and further words were unnecessary.

Then Farnsworth turned to greet Nan, and to be presented to

Miss Helen Barlow.

"She told me you were little!" Helen exclaimed, looking at the broad-shouldered giant who faced her.

"Not quite that, I think," Bill smiled at her, "Patty probably called me Little Billee, which is her pet name for her lord and master!"

"Future lord and master!" corrected Patty, "not yet, not yet, my child!"

"Serene I fold my hands, and wait," Farnsworth quoted, with undisturbed equanimity. "I'm very glad you've come, Miss Barlow. Perhaps you can entertain Patty and keep her from getting *too* impatient at the time that must elapse before I can take her for keeps."

"Vanity Box!" exclaimed Patty. "Me impatient, indeed! Just for that, Little Billee, I'll put the date six months later."

"Later than what? I didn't know you'd decided on the date for the festal occasion. You told me last night you hadn't."

"I'm living up to the reputation for fickleness Helen has just wished on me," Patty laughed. "But I'll give you some tea, Billee mine, if you'd like it. Oh, what a lot of people! You make the tea, Nan!"

Patty left the table to welcome her new guests. Elise Farrington and Daisy Dow were followed by Chick Channing and Philip Van Reypen.

After introductions and greetings all round, Helen looked about her with an air of great satisfaction.

"This is as I thought it would be," she said, contentedly; "I do love afternoon tea, and we never have it at home. And I love people dropping in to it."

"Into the tea?" asked Channing.

"Yes, in to the tea, of course. And such lovely people! I want to know you all at once, but I suppose I'd make better headway by taking you one at a time."

"Take me first," begged Chick, who was much attracted by the sprightly newcomer.

"No, me," laughed Philip. "You can get acquainted with me in two minutes, – I'm the easiest of us all."

"Then I'll leave you till the last," smiled Helen. "After all, I believe I'll talk to the girls first. I want them to like me – "

"Oh, don't you care about the boys liking you?" said Patty.

"They will, anyhow," Helen retorted, and she sat down by Daisy and Elise, ignoring all the others.

"Tea, please," said Philip, sauntering over to Patty, who had returned to the tea-table.

"One lump or two?" she asked, holding the sugar tongs.

"One and a smile," he replied.

Gravely, Patty dropped one lump in his cup, equally gravely, she gave him an idiotic smile, that was merely a momentary widening of her mouth.

"Very pretty," commented Phil; "don't see how you manage such a sweet smile! The tea is 'most *too* sweet, I think. Give me another bit of lemon."

"Here you are," said Patty, spearing the lemon with a little fork. "Now, Philip, listen to me. I want you to do all you can to make it pleasant for Bumble, – I mean, Helen, while she's here."

"Of course I will. I'm always nice to your friends, you know that."

"I do know it, but I want you to be *specially* nice."

"All right. Say, flowers tonight, – candy tomorrow, – opera invitation as soon as I can manage it, – a theatre party, –"

"There, there, now don't overdo it! No; she doesn't eat candy, but you may send some flowers."

"Some to you too."

"No; not to me –"

"Then not to her."

"Oh, Phil, you said you'd be nice!"

"Well, I will; to both of you. But not to Bumble – I mean, Helen, alone."

"But you mustn't send flowers to me, now that I'm engaged. Come here a minute, please, Little Billee."

"Yours to command," said Farnsworth, approaching.

"Tell Philip he can't send me flowers."

"Philip, you can't send Patty flowers," Farnsworth said, obediently.

There was a smile on his face, but in his voice there rang a note of command that angered Van Reypen exceedingly.

"I can *send* them," he returned, defiantly, "she needn't accept them."

“Leave it that way, then,” Bill said, carelessly, as if the matter were of no moment. “Patty, come out to the dining-room a minute, will you, dear?”

Jumping up, Patty left the room without a glance at Philip. Farnsworth followed her, and they went into the dining-room. They were alone there, and he took her gently in his arms.

“What is it, Patty?” he asked. “Van Reyden been kicking over the traces?”

“Yes; he seems to think he – he likes me yet.”

“Of course he does. How can he help it? But, my darling, there’s to be no petty jealousy between us and him. I trust you, dear, too well, to think for a minute that you’d listen to him if he says things that you don’t want to hear. Now, never think it will bother me, for it won’t. You love me, don’t you, Patty?”

“Yes,” she returned, and the blue eyes that met his left no room for doubt.

“Then, that’s all right. Don’t give him a thought. Darling, I’ve brought your ring.”

With a smile of pleasure, Farnsworth produced a lovely ring. It was set with a single pearl, which he had told Patty suited her far better than a diamond.

“Do you like it?” he asked eagerly. “Oh, Patty Blossom, *do* you?”

“I think it the most beautiful ring I ever saw!” she replied, her eyes glistening, as he slipped it on her finger.

“My pearl,” he whispered, close to her ear, “my Patty Pearl.

This seals our betrothal, and makes you mine forever.”

“Am I any more yours than I was before I had it?”

“No, you little goose! But this is the bond, – the sign manual – ”

“Oh, Little Billee! *what* a joke! But I accept my bond, – I glory in it! Oh, Billee, what a beauty pearl it is!”

“The purest and best I could find, – for my own Patty Blossom. Now, I’ve bad news, darling.”

“Bad news soon told, Br’er Fox,” smiled Patty, quoting from her well-beloved Uncle Remus. “What is it?”

CHAPTER III

CAPTAIN BILL

“It’s this,” said Farnsworth, looking serious. “I have to go to Washington.”

“Good gracious!” exclaimed Patty, “one would think you were booked for Kamschatka or Siberia, the way you say it!”

“But I mean, I have to go there to stay.”

“How long?”

“Indefinitely. I’ve no idea how long; also – I may have to go further yet.”

“Over there?”

“Yes. But that’s not likely at present. However, it’s bad enough to go to Washington. How can I leave *you*?”

“I’ll go, too.”

“No, dear, that won’t be practicable. I shall be in the University Camp, drilling engineers, I suppose, but I want to do more and bigger things than that. I can’t tell you all about it, Posy Face, but as soon as I get further orders I’ll know better where I’m at.”

“Are you bothered and troubled, my Billee Boy?”

“I am, Patty. I don’t want to worry you with it, dearest, and you couldn’t understand it all, anyway, but there is a lot of backbiting and undermining and wire-pulling in Washington, and it even mixes into Army and Navy matters.”

"Then you'll have to be an undermining engineer, won't you?"

"Patty! You little rogue! You'd make a joke out of anything, I believe."

"Course I would! Now, Billee, you mustn't look so down-hearted. You've got me for a joy and a comfort, – not for a burden and a – a millstone about your neck!"

"I like to have you about my neck, all right, – but you're a featherweight, not a millstone."

"Where will you be? What's this camp?"

"The Engineering Corps, you mean? Oh, well, there are a lot of units, – Camouflage, Foresters, Gas and Flame, Wireless, Telephone, – "

"There, there, that'll do! I'm bewildered. Which are you to be in?"

"That's the trouble. It looks to me as if I'd be in the Searchlight gang – "

"What do you know about searchlights!"

"Nothing. To be sure I've invented one – "

"Oh, Billee, have you? And you never told me!"

"Hadn't time. There's only time enough, when I'm with you, to tell you what I think of you."

"What do you think of me?"

The lovely face was wistful and sweet, the blue eyes shone with affection and the scarlet mouth drew down a little at the corners, for Patty saw by Farnsworth's pained expression, that he was really disturbed at their coming separation and the uncertainties

of his future.

"I think," the big man spoke, slowly, "I think you're the loveliest thing God ever made. A thousand times too good for a big brute of a man like me – "

"You don't treat me like a brute," observed Patty.

"No; I treat you as I think of you, – a lovely rose petal of a girl, – who ought not to hear of wars or rumours of wars – "

"Nothing of the sort, William Farnsworth! If I were that, I'd deserve to be put under a glass bell, and left there to die of asphyxiation! I'm *not* a silly roseleaf, – I'm a willing, working patriot! Why, I'm as energetic as – as Molly Pitcher or Barbara Frietchie – or Joan of Arc!"

"That's right, dear, that's the right spirit! But you know, Pattibelle, you're not physically fitted to go on the rampage, as your flashing eyes indicate. You're the sort who must 'stay, stay at home my heart and rest; homekeeping hearts are happiest.'"

"Little Billee, you do quote the beautifullest poetry! Where *do* you pick it all up?"

"Oh, I've a store of it somewhere in the top of my head. And I mean no disparagement of your enthusiasm, Patty, but you can't do hard work, and so – "

"And so I must knit and knit and knit, I s'pose! Billee, dear, when you go to Washington why can't I go too, and work in the Canteen Department?"

Farnsworth smiled at her. "Do you know what the Canteen Department is?"

“Not exactly; but Louise Dempster has gone to it, – ”

“Oh, it’s the Commissariat Department, but it’s no place for you – ”

“Why?”

“There, there, don’t snap my head off! Only because you’re not robust enough for the work. If you’re going in for real help, there’s always the hospital or ambulance work.”

“I – I couldn’t, Billee! I – I’d faint, I know! Oh, dear, I’m no good, and never was and never will be!”

“Not so very much good to your Uncle Samuel I admit,” and Farnsworth grinned at her, “but a whole heap of good to one of his humble citizens.”

“Which one?”

“This one!” and Bill grabbed her in his arms.

“Drop me,” Patty murmured, half smothered in his shoulder, “somebody’s coming!”

“Let ’em!” But he set her down and began to speak seriously. “You do all you can for the Red Cross, dear, and that will be your share. Now, don’t worry over it, or think you ought to get into the game in any other way. You can’t do it, but you can and do accomplish a whole lot, – besides your knitting. Blossom Girl, remember *I’m* in this world, as well as the rest of the U. S. A. and you’ll give *me* of your love and fealty and – ,”

“Do you think I will, Sweet William?”

Patty’s very soul looked out of her earnest eyes, and Farnsworth kissed her reverently, “I know you will, darling. Now,

you've helped me a lot already by your cheery and pleasant attitude about my going away – ”

“But I don't know all about it yet.”

“I don't know much myself. I'll have further instructions soon – ”

“And a uniform?”

“Of course. I'll rank as a Captain, and – ”

“Oh, Captain Bill! How I will love you then! Come in the other room, I must tell of it! Nan, Billee's going to have a uniform!”

“Heavenly!” cried Helen Barlow. “Oh, I adore uniforms! And Mr. Farnsworth will be stunning in one!”

“You may call him Bill, if you like,” said Patty, in the generosity of her enthusiasm.

“All right,” said Helen, “but I don't think it suits him. William is much more dignified.”

“Make it William, then,” and Farnsworth smiled at the saucy-faced girl.

“Captain Farnsworth is the best,” said Elise. “The title becomes you, Bill, and I know the uniform will.”

“I'm going to have a uniform too,” said Van Reypen, “won't it become me?”

“Me, too,” chimed in Channing. “I'm expecting to be ordered to France any minute.”

“Why, Chickering Channing! I didn't know that,” cried Patty. “What are you?”

“I'm an *Officier de liaison*.”

“What in the world is that?”

“It’s really nothing but an interpreter. But the French term is so much more impressive.”

“Indeed it is. What do you interpret?”

“Words otherwise unintelligible.”

“But I don’t understand – ”

“Then I’ll be pleased to interpret for you. You see, if a French soldier wants to confide a state secret to an English-speaking comrade, and if he doesn’t know a word of English, nor the other chap any French, – what’s to be did?”

“Oh, I see!” cried Helen, “they call you in!”

“Exactly, Miss Barlow. And being conversant with and fluent in all known tongues, – I’m just a walking Tower of Babel.”

“A walking dictionary, you mean,” laughed Helen. “I think that’s a pretty fine position you hold. I never heard of it before. What’s your rank?”

“Lieutenant, – very much at your service, Mademoiselle. Shortly, I shall don my khaki, and then I hope, at last, I’ll be respected by my fellow men.”

“That’s so, Chick,” said Patty, mercilessly, “you’ve always been such a cutup – well, of course, you were respected, – but nobody really stood in awe of you. But a Lieutenant, – oh, I’m proud of my friends!”

“Isn’t it glorious!” cried Helen, and she flew to the piano and began playing patriotic airs. They all joined and a brave chorus of young voices rang out the avowal that the Yanks were coming

over there!

So enthusiastically did Helen pound the keys that her hair shook loose from its pins and came tumbling round her shoulders.

“Now, now, Bumble,” remonstrated Patty, “don’t do so, – it isn’t done! Here, I’ll fix it for you.”

But Helen only laughed, and nimbly twisted up her tousled locks, and thrust hairpins in to hold them in a hard and unbecoming knot at the back of her head.

“It doesn’t look a bit nice,” Elise warned her. “Better let Patty rearrange it.”

“Nope, I don’t care,” and the wilful girl kept on playing and laughed as she shook her head. The shaking sent her hair down again, and this time Patty determinedly went to her and dressed it for her.

“Sit still, you naughty!” she said, herself shaking with laughter. “Oh, Bumble, you haven’t grown up a bit!”

Patty did up her cousin’s hair prettily and skewered it firmly into place with many hairpins, and it didn’t come down again.

“And are you going down to Washington, too, Chick?” Daisy Dow asked.

“Sooner or later, yes. That’s the road to all war glory.”

“And you don’t know when?”

“You nor I nor nobody knows. You see, Daisy, in war affairs nobody knows anything and if they do they’re not allowed to tell it.”

“But just among us, – we wouldn’t tell anybody.”

“The walls have ears,” said Chick, mock-dramatically.

“And Rumour has a thousand tongues,” added Farnsworth, “it’s a dangerous combination.”

A week later the two went to Washington. Sent for nearly at the same time, Farnsworth and Channing were to go to Washington, though their work there was widely different.

The night before their departure, there was a gathering of the clan at Patty’s home.

Farnsworth begged her not to have others there on their last evening together, but Patty’s wise little head thought it better to have a party.

“You see,” she said to Nan, “if I spend the evening alone with my Billee Boy, he’ll be so sad and blue, and I’ll be so weepy and red, – we’ll have an awful time! It’s a whole lot better to have the crowd here and let him go off in a blaze of glory! Patriotism is good for homesickness.”

And, too, Patty was trying to entertain Helen pleasantly, and so she made many little parties for her.

The plan of entertaining the other soldiers was postponed until they could do no more for their own friends, and the little party to speed their parting, though small, was gay and festive.

“A dance,” Patty decided. “I don’t want just a sit-around, woeful, sighful time. A good, lively dance, and a nice supper, and then – ”

Patty choked, and Nan seeing the springing tears, quickly began to discuss details of the supper.

The evening came, and Patty dressed in white, went to Helen's room to make sure she was in proper order.

"Why, Helen Barlow!" she exclaimed; "if you're not an apple-pie pink of perfection! Not a bow coming off, and your hair positively looks as if it would stay put!"

"Don't tease me, Patty. Truly, I'm trying to do better, – "

"You dear old thing! I was a wretch to seem to tease you. Wait till this ball is over and you get off that very bewitching frock, and I'll give you a kiss of forgiveness!"

Helen looked very pretty in her evening dress of soft, thin pink, with touches of silver lace, and silver slippers.

"You're a fairy," said Patty. "How that frock becomes you. Now, be gay and festive, won't you, Helen, honey, for I feel as if I should burst into a flood of tears every minute!"

"Go on down, Patty," said Helen, drawing back, "I hear Billee's voice, and he'll want you alone."

"No; I can't. If I do, I'll cry. Come along."

So both girls ran down stairs, and shrieked with delight at the sight of Farnsworth in uniform.

"I knew you'd be stunning," said Helen, "but I didn't know you'd look like a Herculean statue!"

"He doesn't," cried Patty, "he looks like a – a General! He ought to be – oh, what do you call it when you have your statue taken?"

"Sculped," said Helen.

"Yes, that's it! He ought to be sculpted in marble or bronze or

whatever is most used for statues this year!"

"There, now, kiddies, run away and play," said Farnsworth, towering to his full height and looking every inch a soldier.

"No sir," declared Patty, "we want to look at you. Turn around."

Then Channing came, and he, too, was resplendent in his new khaki, and the girls praised his appearance.

"Drink it in, Bill," Chick said. "It'll be a long time before we get any more of this sort of thing! Somepin tells me the people we're going amongst won't pay any special attention to our uniforms."

"How can they help it?" cried Helen; "why, I don't believe any of the United States Army will look half as well as you two! You're – you're superb!"

A bit embarrassed, Channing tried to turn the subject, but Farnsworth laughed good-humouredly.

"Let 'em rave, Channing. They enjoy it, and I guess we can stand it –"

"Pooh," Patty said, "you're tickled to death to be so admired! Here comes Elise, now you'll get more flattery."

And then the other guests came and the party soon was in full swing.

Patty was among the gayest there. Her eyes shone and her smile was merry and sweet. But a flush showed on each pink cheek, and Farnsworth kept watch of her as she danced or engaged in light banter with the young people.

Helen Barlow was frankly delighted with the party. She was a belle, indeed, for she was a charming dancer and her never-failing fund of fun and laughter kept her partners enchanted.

"I like to dance with you," she said to Farnsworth, "cause you're so big. It's like dancing with one of the statues in the park."

"Why do you girls look on me as a statue?" he returned, laughing. "There's nothing statuesque about me."

"No; not that, it's your heroic size –"

"I hope that's not *all* my heroism!"

"I hope so, too. But are you going to need heroism? Bravery, I mean, and courage and all that. I thought you were only going to teach the young engineers how to shoot."

"That's part of my duty, but there may be other work cut out for me."

"That's what Patty thinks. She thinks, – because you can't tell her all about it, – that you're going to be called to some fearful danger –"

"Oh, come now, Helen, she doesn't think that, does she?"

"Yes she does. She didn't exactly tell me so, but she can't hide it from me. I can read that girl pretty well."

"So can I."

"Yes, but you don't see her off her guard."

"I know what you mean. Just now, she is trying her best to be gay; trying so hard, indeed, that she's overdoing it."

"Yes, that's what I mean. You can tell by the way she laughs. A little hysterical giggle, – that's not like Patty's own hearty

chuckle!”

“You’re right, Helen; and you’re a good friend to Patty. I’m so glad you’re here with her. Can you stay some time?”

“Yes, as long as she wants me.”

“Then look out for her, won’t you? She’s a frail little thing, and her heart and her energies are too big for her physique.”

“That’s so, Bill. But I’ll look after her, – all she’ll let me. She has a strong will, I can tell you.”

“You two are talking about me, I can sense it!” cried Patty herself, coming up to them.

“We are,” said Bill, “and I’m going to talk to you, instead. Helen, I see your next partner coming hot haste to claim you, so I’m going to take Pattibelle aside and treat her to a small lecture.”

Willingly Patty went with him, and he led her to the little room which was her father’s den.

There chanced to be no one there, so Farnsworth closed the door after them, and then gently took her in his arms.

“Dearest,” he said, “you must be careful of my own little Patty girl while I am away.”

“But I don’t want you to go,” she whispered, her lip trembling.

“I know it, dear, and I don’t want to leave you. But we’re always going to obey the call of duty, aren’t we, Patty mine?”

“Y-yes, – ”

“Then listen, sweetheart. You mustn’t exaggerate our parting. I’m only going to Washington – ”

“I know – but – you may be sent to France – ”

“Don’t cross that bridge until you come to it. Now, my own, – my blessed little girl, I’m going now.”

“Now?”

“Yes, if I stay here you’ll go all to pieces pretty soon. So I’m going now, and I’m going to say good-bye, cheerfully, even calmly, – because it’s better so. Then you go back to the party and be as gay as you like, and forget our case entirely. Trust me, dear little girl, – it’s better so.”

Patty realised the truth of Farnsworth’s words. She was under great nervous strain, and after his departure, she knew she could regain her poise and better conceal and control her feelings.

“You’re right, you dear old Billee. I’m a little fool, but I can’t help it. I oughtn’t to have planned this affair the way I did, but I didn’t realise, – ”

“Of course you didn’t, and you overestimated your own power of will. Now, my love, my little sweetheart, kiss me once, for soldier’s luck, and then I’ll go, – and you must bid me good-bye with a smile, – a smile that I’ll carry with me always.”

Silently, solemnly, Patty raised her face to his, and bending down, Farnsworth kissed the sweet lips that quivered beneath his touch.

It almost unnerved him, but, determinedly, he smiled at her, and said, cheerily, “I’ll write often and so must you, and, – why, my goodness, Patty, – I’ll be back soon on leave, and we’ll laugh at this tragic parting.”

“No; we won’t laugh at it my Little Billee, – no, not that, –

but, – we'll try to smile.”

“And succeed! Show me how, *now*.”

Patty smiled with real cheer, and clasping her quickly, Farnsworth gave her one big, farewell kiss, and rushed out of the door, closing it behind him.

CHAPTER IV

THE BOYS IN KHAKI

“Oh, it was the best plan, but I did hate to have him run off like that.”

“Of course you did, Pattykins, but you would have flown into forty conniption fits if he had stayed longer. I saw you, and you were getting all nervous and ‘stericky!’”

“I was not! You exaggerate so, Bumble, and I won’t stand it! I was upset, of course, at the thought of his going, but I had absolute control of my nerves. It was all my own fault, – having the party, I mean.”

“You had the party for me, my child. Don’t think you can fool your grandmother! But it’s all right, and I promised that Sweet William of yours that I’d chirk you up, and keep you so interested and amused that you’d forget his very existence, – let alone forgetting his absence. Besides, there’s a strong belief current in the best circles that absence makes the heart grow fonder.”

“It can’t ours, – we’re all the fond there is, now!”

“Turtle-doves! Well, give me a bit more chocolate, and we’ll call it square.”

The two girls, in boudoir gowns and caps, were having their morning chocolate in Patty’s room, and had eagerly been

rehearsing and discussing the party of the night before.

Helen's pretty hair was tousled and her cap askew, as, perched cross-legged on a couch, she nibbled toast and sipped chocolate contentedly.

Patty, fresh and tidy as a rose, sat near by and did the honours of the breakfast tray.

"You see," she said, absent-mindedly piling sugar into Helen's cup, "I've decided to be sensible about this thing. I'm not going to – "

"You're going to get a Food Controller after you if you are so lavish with that sugar! For Heaven's sake, Patty, stop! That's the third spoonful!"

"Is it? I wasn't looking. As I say, I'm going to be sensible about Little Billee's going away. He's got to go, and so I may as well make up my mind to it."

"Sensible, indeed! Yet it doesn't seem to me such a marvellous triumph of intellect or such a phenomenal force of will that brings about that resolve!"

"In one more minute I shall throw a pillow at you, Bumble! I guess if you were engaged to the biggest man in the world, you wouldn't let him walk off to war – "

"He's going with the whole
Of his patriotic soul,
At the call of his country's flag!"

sang Helen, trilling the refrain of a song they had all sung the

night before.

“Yes, that’s it. And what am *I* to stand out against Uncle Samuel?”

“That’s right, be patriotic and you will be happy, – you are a nice child, Patty.”

“*You* would be, if you weren’t so silly!”

“Me silly! Ah, well, better judges are better pleased!”

Helen rolled her eyes skyward, in mock resignation, and then began to finger over Patty’s engagement book.

“Tonight, Elise’s party,” she read; “will that be fun?”

“Oh, yes, she has lovely parties. And, write it in there for me, Bumble, we’ve decided on next Monday night for a party for the boys in khaki.”

“All right, I’ll put it down. Who did the deciding?”

“Phil and I, last night. He says he’ll make application to the Y. M. C. A. committee or something and have them send us the pick of the lot.”

“How funny! The best-looking ones? Do they have to pass an exam for it?”

“Don’t be idiotic! Let me tell you, the most desirable ones are merely the ones who most need a little pleasure or entertainment.”

“How can they tell?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Perhaps the ones who are farthest from home and mother, – or, who have been ill, – ”

“Or parted from their best girls?”

“Yes, those are the saddest cases, of course!”

“Well, go ahead, I’ll be best girl to ’em.”

“You see, Philip knows the – the – ”

“Chaplain?”

“Well, the somebody, who will pick out the boys, – soldiers and sailors both, and I’ve agreed to entertain a few every Monday night, for the present, anyway.”

“You’re a good girl, Patty; you’re all right!”

“Oh, *thank* you, dear, for your generous praise!”

“Yes; I foresee these parties will so interest and entertain you, that I’ll not have to work so hard to keep my agreement with your big man to divert your saddened and aching heart.”

“My heart’s outside your jurisdiction, – and beside, I’m doing this party to entertain you. You know, one can’t have a guest without making strenuous efforts to keep said guest merry and bright, please!”

“True, yes, true! But, give me half a chance, and I’ll entertain myself. Give me a pleasant home to visit, a lovely hostess, like – ”

“Oh, *thank* you!”

“Like Nan, and a few young men, and I’ll ask nothing further.”

“I seem to be left out of your scheme of things!”

“No, no! my angel child, not so, but far otherwise!”

The vivacious visitor flung aside her pillows and jumped up to embrace Patty in a whirlwind flash of affection. Greatly given to chaffing, Helen was truly fond of Patty, and the two were congenial and affectionate.

“Now, one more tiny pour of chocolate, and one more popover, and my matutinal meal is finished,” Helen said, resuming her seat.

“Oh, Bumble! You know you are welcome to all you want, and more too, but – but I thought you *did* want to – to – ”

“To help this too, too solid flesh to melt? Well, so I do, – but Patsy, poppet, your talented cook does make such delectable dainties that I can’t resist. Just a teenty-weenty drop of choclum, there’s a dear, sweet cousin-girl!”

Patty laughed and gave Helen another cup full of the delicious cocoa, and turned her glance aside, as a popover was lavishly buttered.

The morning mail came then, and as Jane brought the girls their letters, Helen took hers, and suddenly gave a deep and hollow groan.

“What’s the matter?” asked Patty, but half-heartedly, as her mail contained a letter from Little Billee, which she was eagerly devouring.

“Matter enough!” wailed Bumble, “that botheration, that pest of my existence, that everlasting nuisance, Chester Wilde, is coming here!”

“Here? When?”

“I dunno. Soon, he says. Today, most likely. I think I’ll telephone him not to come.”

“Why? Why don’t you let him?”

“Oh, he’s such a persistent – er, wooer.”

“Don’t you care for him, Helen?”

“Not enough to marry him, as he insists I must do.”

“Oh, well, let him come. I’ll talk to him, if you don’t want to.

When may he be expected?”

“Today, I suppose. Oh, of course, he’ll only come to call, – and I forbid you, Patty, to ask him to stay to dinner – or to come again.”

“Wowly-wow-wow! What a cruel fair she is! All right, Bumble, dear, just as you say. And now, scoot back to your own room, – unless you want more chocolate?”

“N-no,” and Bumble looked longingly at the tray. “No, —*no!* of *course* not!”

Patty laughed, and gently pushed her visitor out of the room, lest temptation again overcome her.

The Monday evenings planned for the enjoyment of the boys in uniform began to take shape and rapidly acquired considerable proportions.

Philip Van Reypen was a fine organiser and Helen Barlow ably seconded his efforts, while Patty agreed and helped in matters of detail.

Elise was interested and there were half a dozen more of their own crowd ready to help in any way available. Chester Wilde had put in an appearance and Patty liked him from the first. A quick-witted, pleasant-mannered young man, himself engaged in some clerical war work, he declared his willingness to come over from his home in Philadelphia and help with the Monday night parties.

Helen Barlow's pretended dislike of him was merely coquetry, Patty surmised, and then as the elder Fairfields approved of young Wilde, he soon became a frequent and welcome visitor.

Patty adhered to her plan of giving the enlisted men evenings of real pleasure, and entertainment that was enjoyable to educated and cultured minds. For the first evening, they planned a series of Living Pictures, for, said the sagacious Patty, "give 'em something to look at that's pretty and they're bound to like it!"

Elise Farrington and Daisy Dow were enthusiastic workers, and Mona and Roger Farrington promised any help asked for.

As Farnsworth and Chick Channing were both gone away, the circle of Patty's friends was depleted as to men, but Chester Wilde was a good help and two or three other men were invited to assist.

Philip Van Reypen was still in the city, and his great efficiency and good taste and judgment made him a valuable ally for the cause.

He and Patty planned the pictures, for Helen Barlow knew nothing of such matters and Chester Wilde was better at carrying out orders than originating plans.

"What do you think of this scheme," Van Reypen asked of Patty as they began on the actual selection of subjects. "Say, three pictures, – tableaux, you know, and have each of them introduce a bit of entertainment of itself."

"Sounds fine," she agreed, "if only I had the least idea of what you're driving at."

“You will have. Here’s the gist of it. Say, an Oriental scene. Ladies in rich Persian draperies and fallals posed about; men in the gorgeous Eastern robes affected by our heathen contemporaries; all the properties and effects in harmony, – you know I’ve oodles of that junk – and the whole scene glittering and radiant.”

“Beautiful! Great! But is that all?”

“Not so but far otherwise. Now, after the eager audience have feasted their eyes on the sight, and you know, it isn’t to be a motionless picture, – ”

“Then it must be a motion picture!”

“It is, in this sense. The ladies and the men walk about, or languidly wave their peacock feather fans, or sink gracefully on divans, but of course, no words are spoken.”

“Pantomime, then.”

“Yes; rather like a pantomime. Well, then, in comes an Oriental juggler, who does tricks, – ”

“I see! Oh, Phil, that’s splendid! Just what I wanted! And he does real tricks, – good tricks, – and they interest the audience of themselves, and at the same time there’s the beautiful scenic effect going on!”

“Yes, – a poor scheme, – but mine own.”

“A fine scheme! Oh, I see enormous possibilities in it!”

“Then perhaps on another occasion, a Sylvan scene, – a woodland effect, – and in it give a bit of ‘As You Like It,’ or something of that sort. Another time, a Venetian scene, and you

can sing with the gondoliers.”

“Yes, yes, I see it all!”

“Oh, you do! Then you’ve no further need of my services.”

“Don’t be a silly! Of course I want you. I couldn’t do any of it alone. How long before you go to Wilmington, or wherever you’re going?”

“Dunno! but it won’t matter. I can run up here often. An aviator’s life is not a busy one.”

“Really? Why isn’t it?”

“Oh, it is, of course, in a sense. But there’s not the same strenuous rush there is in other fields. You see we’re not fly-by-nights, for one thing.”

“Oh, yes, outside daylight hours you’re free to play by yourself?”

“Perhaps not all of that, but, don’t you worry, my lady, I’ll play hookey, if need be, to get up here to look after your interests.”

“All right. Now we can’t put a whole lot of time and trouble on rehearsals and all that, you know.”

“No; my idea was to have these things almost impromptu. Let us plan it all out pretty well beforehand, and then let the performers each time come early, and get posted as to their parts, and the star performer will do the rest.”

“Star performer?”

“Yes; I mean, each time have an entertainer, like the juggler —”

“A professional?”

"Not necessarily. I know a chap who does wonderful legerdemain, who'd be glad to come to entertain Our Boys."

"Oh, yes, I see. And I'll sing."

"Yes, you can sing, as special character in some tableau, don't you see? You could be a mermaid or a Lorelei, sitting on a rock."

"With a lute?"

"Yes, and your hair down, and a gold comb and a mirror, while you comb your shining goldilocks."

"Nixy! Not my hair down. All the rest, but now I'm engaged, I've put away childish things."

"Pshaw, don't be a silly! But never mind those details. And, too, if you don't fancy the mermaid rôle, have a bit of a scene about 'tenting tonight on the old camp ground,' and you can come on as a Red Cross nurse, and sing –"

"Oh, yes, and the boys in khaki can help make up the picture!"

"Course they can. And another time, we'll get up a ship scene, I don't know just how yet, but I'll plan it –"

"We could have the mermaid come to the side of the ship."

"Ah, coming around to the mermaid rôle, are you? Well, those schemes are all right. Now, what shall we choose for the first one?"

"Not soldiers or sailors. Let them see some stunning show first."

"Oriental?"

"Yes, I guess so. Your idea of the juggler is splendid. He can come on the stage like those Hindoo fakirs, you know, –"

“Yes, that’s what I meant.”

“You know, there’s not so very much room – ”

“Want to go over to Elise’s, and have it all in her casino?”

“N-no, – not at first, anyway. You see, Phil, I suppose it is nothing but pride and vain glory, – but *I* thought up this plan, – and I want to have it in my own home.”

“So you shall! I don’t blame you. If Elise wants to, let her get up something herself.”

“Probably she will. But I want mine here.”

“That’s all right, Patty-girl. Why, there’s plenty of room. We needn’t ask so very many guests, – say a dozen or so the first time, and see how it works out.”

“Oh, we could accommodate twenty or twenty-four, I think. You see we’d use these connecting rooms, and this room would hold about thirty chairs.”

“All right. Now, say we plan the scene. I’ve all that big chest full of Oriental costumes, you know, and we don’t want very much in the way of actual scenery. A couple of divans heaped with pillows, and some of those hookah pipes standing round – then, the people in costume, – there’s your setting, – see? Then, in comes your juggler, also in appropriate costume, and he does his tricks, and the people on the stage admire and applaud, and the people in the audience do likewise.”

“Fine! And afterward, we have a little feast, and a little dance, and maybe sing a song or two for a good-night chorus.”

“That’s the ticket! Now, for the list of those who take part,

and a few details of that sort, and our preliminary work is done!”

CHAPTER V

A FIRE-EATER

The Monday night party was in full swing. A stage had been erected and the spectacle that was seen as the curtain rose was of “more than Oriental splendour.”

Heavy draperies, potted palms, strange braziers and lanterns, pillowed divans, – all formed a brilliant and interesting picture of an Eastern interior.

Richly garbed ladies sat at ease while slaves waved peacock feather fans above their bejeweled heads. Stalwart men stood about, picturesque in their embroidered tunics and voluminous mantles.

The movement of the scene increased. Slaves entered with baskets of fruits, musicians came and made weird music, and dancing girls appeared and gave graceful exhibitions of their art.

Patty was one of these. In a charming costume of thin, fluttering silks and gauzy veils, she went through the slow swaying steps of a characteristic dance, and enthralled the appreciative audience.

She had indeed achieved her desire to give her guests something different from the average evening entertainment. The young men in khaki and in blue, who sat watching, were breathlessly attentive and applauded loudly and often.

The whole assemblage was gay and merry. The elder Fairfields were excellent hosts, and chatted with the uniformed guests until even the shy ones felt at ease. Roger and Mona Farrington, too, assisted in this work of getting acquainted, and the result was a pleasant, chatty atmosphere and not merely a silent audience.

“Good work!” said Roger, approvingly, to a khakied youth, as Patty executed a difficult pirouette.

“You bet!” was the earnest reply. “I’ve seen some dancing, but never anything to beat that! Is she on the regular stage?”

“Oh, no. She’s the daughter of the house. But she’s a born dancer and has always loved the art.”

“Don’t wonder! She puts it all over anybody I ever saw! And the whole colouring, – the scene, you know, – well, it’ll be something to remember when I’m back in camp. A thing like that stays in your mind, you know, and I’ll shut my eyes and see those furling pink veils as plain, ’most, as I do now. What a beautiful girl she is.”

His tone was almost reverential, and Roger instinctively liked the simple straightforwardness of his comment.

“Yes, and as lovely as she is beautiful. She’s engaged to a Captain, and it’s hard luck that he has to be away from her.”

“It’s all of that! Hullo, look who’s here!”

Among the people on the stage there appeared a strange figure. It was a man of swarthy countenance, garbed in pure white draperies, so full and flowing, that he resembled the

pictures of the prophets. He walked slowly to the centre of the stage, and made deep salaams to the characters there assembled, then turned and bowed low to the audience. His snow-white, coiled turban almost swept the floor as he gracefully bent in greeting. Then he rose, and began to chant a strange weird incantation.

An assistant brought a small tripod filled with various paraphernalia, and the juggler began his tricks.

They consisted of the most mystifying legerdemain and magical illusions, for the performer, as Philip had assured Patty, was an expert, though not a professional.

The soldier boys and sailor boys were delighted, and watched closely in their desire to see how the tricks were done.

And this paved the way to their still greater satisfaction, for the accommodating magician acceded to several urgent requests and explained his tricks.

To be sure, it detracted from the mystery, but it added to the interest.

One of his startling deeds was this.

An attendant brought to the magician a small iron dish filled with kerosene oil. With an eager smile, as of delighted anticipation, the juggler, who spoke no word, made motions for his aid to light the oil.

This was done, and the flames proved it to be real oil and really burning.

Then, taking an iron spoon, the magician dipped out a

spoonful of the blazing oil and putting it in his mouth swallowed it with great apparent relish and enjoyment.

He nodded his head and smacked his lips in praise of this strange food, and made a gesture of wanting more. Obliging, the attendant offered him the iron bowl again, and again a spoonful of blazing kerosene was gobbled up by the hungry feeder.

“My stars!” cried one of the audience, “I’ve heard of fire-eaters, but I never expected to see one! Have another dip, old chap!”

Smiling acquiescence, the juggler repeated his startling partaking of the oil, and seemed to like it quite as much as ever.

“Well, I’ll give up!” cried the interested observer, who had spoken before. “Do tell us how you do that! I’d rather know that than eat a square meal myself!”

Dropping for the moment his rôle of pantomimist, the juggler said, “I will tell you, for it is an interesting trick. For years, – ages, even, the Hindus mystified and deceived people by pretending to be fire-eaters. The ignorant on-lookers, of course, believed that the fakirs really ate fire, – hot coals, blazing oil, or burning tow.

“But as a matter of fact, it was all trickery, and deception of the simplest kind. You must know the ignorant people of the Far East are much more gullible and easily deceived than our own alert, up-to-date modern and civilised citizens. And, yet, even among ourselves, it is not easy to understand the fire-eating illusion. This is real kerosene, it is really lighted, you have seen my apparent

relish of it. Now can any one explain how it is that I take spoonful after spoonful, yet my mouth is not burnt?"

Nobody could guess, and one after another said so. The young men were losing their shyness and self-consciousness in their interest.

"Spill it, boss," urged one, "give us the right dope!"

"Yes, I'd be glad to be informed as to the *modus operandi*," said another, who was of a different mental type. Indeed, it was all sorts and conditions of brains that were striving to see through this absorbing problem.

Patty, still in her place on the stage, looked keenly into the upturned faces.

"Dear, brave boys!" she thought to herself; "sooner or later, going 'over there' to fight for us and our cause! I am glad to give them a little cheer and fun as occasion offers."

The elder Fairfields felt the same way, and all who were helping Patty in her plan were conscious of a thrill of gratification at the success of it, so far.

"I've seen it on the vaudeville stage in Paris," one different looking youth spoke up. "It was slightly different in effect, but I suppose the same principle obtained."

"Doubtless," agreed the juggler, whose name was Mr. Peckham. "Now, I'll show you. The whole secret is that when I apparently take up a spoonful of oil, in reality, I only dip the spoon in and out again. It comes out blazing, to be sure, but really empty. It is merely the slight film of oil adhering to the spoon

that blazes. However, this is quite enough to give the effect of a full spoon of kerosene on fire. Then, as I throw back my head, as if to swallow this flaming fluid, I really blow out the flame and I am careful not even to allow the hot spoon to touch my lips. But the audience, if the trick is quickly done, see what they expect to see. They are imbued with the idea that I am swallowing a spoonful of burning kerosene, and they therefore think I do so. It is over in a second, – I am swallowing, and smacking my lips, and it is taken for granted that I have done the impossible.”

“Huh!” said the youth who had “wanted to know.”

“Yes,” returned Mr. Peckham, laughing, “it’s ‘Huh!’ after the secret is told! No trick is as wonderful after it is explained as it is before.”

“It is to me,” said a more thoughtful man; “it’s interesting to see how a mere optical illusion is believed to be real by thinking and attentive minds.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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