

**ДЖИН
УЭБСТЕР**

JUST PATTY

Джин Уэбстер

Just Patty

«Public Domain»

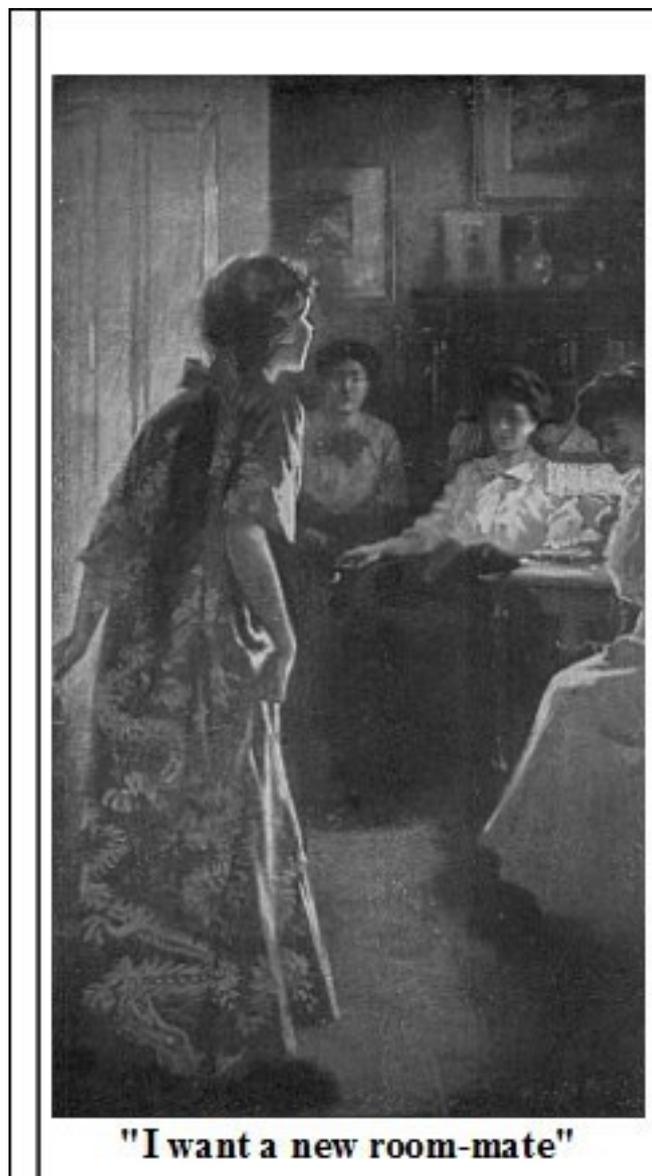
Уэбстер Д.

Just Patty / Д. Уэбстер — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

I	6
II	14
III	22
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	27

Jean Webster Just Patty



Just Patty

I Reform

"IT'S a shame!" said Priscilla.

"It's an outrage!" said Conny.

"It's an insult!" said Patty.

"To separate us now after we've been together three years—"

"And it isn't as though we were *awfully* bad last year. Lots of girls had more demerits."

"Only our badness was sort of conspicuous," Patty admitted.

"But we were *very* good the last three weeks," reminded Conny.

"And you should see my new room-mate!" wailed Priscilla.

"She can't be any worse than Irene McCullough."

"She is!—Her father's a missionary, and she was brought up in China. Her name is Keren-happuch Hersey, after Job's youngest daughter. And she doesn't think it's funny!"

"Irene," said Conny gloomily, "gained twenty pounds through the summer. She weighs—"

"But you should see mine!" cried Patty, in exasperation. "Her name is Mae Mertelle Van Arsdale."

"Keren studies every second; and expects me to walk on tiptoe so she can concentrate."

"You should hear Mae Mertelle talk! She said her father was a financier, and wanted to know what mine was. I told her he was a reform judge, and that he spent his time putting financiers in prison. She says I'm an impertinent child," Patty grinned feebly.

"How old is she?"

"She's nineteen, and has been proposed to twice."

"Mercy! Whatever made her choose St. Ursula's?"

"Her father and mother ran away and got married when they were nineteen, and they're afraid she inherited the tendency. So they picked out a good, strict, church school. Mae doesn't know how she's ever going to fix her hair without a maid. She's awfully superstitious about moonstones. She never wears anything but silk stockings and she can't stand hash. I'll have to teach her how to make a bed. She always crosses on the White Star Line."

Patty scattered these details at random. The others listened sympathetically, and added a few of their own troubles.

"Irene weighs a hundred and fifty-nine pounds and six ounces, not counting her clothes," said Conny. "She brought two trunks *loaded* with candy. She has it hidden all over the room. The last sound I hear at night, is Irene crunching chocolates—and the first sound in the morning. She never says anything; she simply chews. It's like rooming with a cow. And I have a sweet collection of neighbors! Kid McCoy's across the hall, and she makes more noise than half-a-dozen cowboys. There's a new French girl next door—you know, the pretty little one with the two black braids."

"She looks rather desirable," said Patty.

"She might be if she could talk, but she only knows about fifty words. Harriet Gladden's rooming with her, as limp and mournful as an oyster, and Evalina Smith's at the end of the corridor. You know what a *perfect* idiot Evalina is."

"Oh, it's beastly!" they agreed.

"Lordy's to blame," said Conny. "The Dowager never would have separated us if she hadn't interfered."

"And I've got her!" wailed Patty. "You two have Mam'selle and Waddams, and they're nice, sweet, unsuspecting lambs; but the girls in the East Wing simply can't sneeze but Lordy—"

"Sh!" Conny warned. "Here she comes."

The Latin teacher, in passing, paused on the threshold. Conny disentangled herself from the mixture of clothes and books and sofa cushions that littered the bed, and politely rose to her feet. Patty slid down from the white iron foot-rail, and Priscilla descended from the top of the trunk.

"Ladies don't perch about on the furniture."

"No, Miss Lord," they murmured in unison, gazing back from three pairs of wide, uplifted eyes. They knew, from gleeful past experience, that nothing so annoyed her as smiling acquiescence. Miss Lord's eyes critically studied the room. Patty was still in traveling dress.

"Put on your uniform, Patty, and finish unpacking. The trunks go down to-morrow morning."

"Yes, Miss Lord."

"Priscilla and Constance, why aren't you out of doors with the other girls, enjoying this beautiful autumn weather?"

"But we haven't seen Patty for such a long time, and now that we are separated—" commenced Conny, with a pathetic droop of her mouth.

"I trust that your lessons will benefit by the change. You, Patty and Priscilla, are going to college, and should realize the necessity of being prepared. Upon the thorough foundation that you lay here depends your success for the next four years—for your whole lives, one might say. Patty is weak in mathematics and Priscilla in Latin. Constance *could* improve her French. Let us see what you can do when you really try."

She divided a curt nod between the three and withdrew.

"We are happy in our work and we dearly love our teachers," chanted Patty, with ironical emphasis, as she rummaged out a blue skirt and middy blouse with "St. U." in gold upon the sleeve.

While she was dressing, Priscilla and Conny set about transferring the contents of her trunk to her bureau, in whatever order the articles presented themselves—but with a carefully folded top layer. The overworked young teacher, who performed the ungrateful task of inspecting sixty-four bureaus and sixty-four closets every Saturday morning, was happily of an unsuspecting nature. She did not penetrate below the crust.

"Lordy needn't make such a fuss over my standing," said Priscilla, frowning over an armful of clothes. "I passed everything except Latin."

"Take care, Pris! You're walking on my new dancing dress," cried Patty, as her head emerged from the neck of the blouse.

Priscilla automatically stepped off a mass of blue chiffon, and resumed her plaint.

"If they think sticking me in with Job's youngest daughter is going to improve my prose composition—"

"I simply *can't* study till they take Irene McCullough out of my room," Conny echoed. "She's just like a lump of sticky dough."

"Wait till you get acquainted with Mae Mertelle!" Patty sat on the floor in the midst of the chaos, and gazed up at the other two with wide, solemn eyes. "She brought five evening gowns cut low, and all her shoes have French heels. And she *laces*—my dears! She just holds in her breath and pulls. But that isn't the worst." She lowered her voice to a confidential whisper. "She's got some red stuff in a bottle. She says it's for her finger nails, but I *saw* her putting it on her face."

"Oh!—not really?" in a horrified whisper from Conny and Priscilla.

Patty shut her lips and nodded.

"Isn't it dreadful?"

"Awful!" Conny shuddered.

"I say, let's mutiny!" cried Priscilla. "Let's *make* the Dowager give us back our old rooms in Paradise Alley."

"But how?" inquired Patty, two parallel wrinkles appearing on her forehead.

"Tell her that unless she does, we won't stay."

"That would be sensible!" Patty jeered. "She'd ring the bell and order Martin to hitch up the hearse and drive us to the station for the six-thirty train. I should think you'd know by this time that you can't bluff the Dowager."

"There's no use threatening," Conny agreed. "We must appeal to her feeling of—of—"

"Affection," said Patty.

Conny stretched out a hand and brought her up standing.

"Come on, Patty, you're good at talking. We'll go down now while our courage is up.—Are your hands clean?"

The three staunchly approached the door of Mrs. Trent's private study.

"I'll use diplomacy," Patty whispered, as she turned the knob in response to the summons from within. "You people nod your heads at everything I say."

Patty did use all the diplomacy at her command. Having dwelt touchingly upon their long friendship, and their sorrow at being separated, she passed lightly to the matter of their new room-mates.

"They are doubtless very nice girls," she ended politely, "only, you see, Mrs. Trent, they don't match us; and it is extremely hard to concentrate one's mind upon lessons, unless one has a congenial room-mate."

Patty's steady, serious gaze suggested that lessons were the end of her existence. A brief smile flitted over the Dowager's face, but the next instant she was grave again.

"It is very necessary that we study this year," Patty added. "Priscilla and I are going to college, and we realize the necessity of being prepared. Upon the thorough foundation that we lay here, depends our success for the next four years—for our whole lives you might say."

Conny jogged her elbow warningly. It was too patently a crib from Miss Lord.

"And besides," Patty added hastily, "all my things are blue, and Mae has a purple screen and a yellow sofa cushion."

"That is awkward," the Dowager admitted.

"We are used to living in Paradise A1—I mean, the West Wing—and we shall—er—miss the sunsets."

The Dowager allowed an anxious silence to follow, while she thoughtfully tapped the desk with her lorgnette. The three studied her face with speculative eyes. It was a mask they could not penetrate.

"The present arrangement is more or less temporary," she commenced in equable tones. "I may find it expedient to make some changes, and I may not. We have an unusual number of new girls this year; and instead of putting them together, it has seemed wisest to mix them with the old girls. You three have been with us a long time. You know the traditions of the school. Therefore—" The Dowager smiled, a smile partially tinged with amusement—"I am sending you as missionaries among the newcomers. I wish you to make your influence felt."

Patty straightened her back and stared.

"Our influence?"

"Your new room-mate," Mrs. Trent continued imperturbably, "is too grown-up for her years. She has lived in fashionable hotels, and under such conditions, it is inevitable that a girl should become somewhat affected. See if you cannot arouse in Mae an interest in girlish sports."

"And you, Constance, are rooming with Irene McCullough. She is, as you know, an only child, and I fear has been a trifle spoiled. It would please me if you could waken her to a higher regard for the spiritual side of life, and less care for material things."

"I—I'll try," Conny stammered, dazed at so suddenly finding herself cast in the unfamiliar rôle of moral reformer.

"And you have next to you the little French girl, Aurelie Deraismes. I should be pleased, Constance, if you would assume an oversight of her school career. She can help you to a more idiomatic knowledge of French—and you can do the same for her in English."

"You, Priscilla, are rooming with—" She adjusted her lorgnette and consulted a large chart. —"Ah, yes, Keren Hersey, a very unusual girl. You two will find many subjects of mutual interest. The daughter of a naval officer should have much in common with the daughter of a missionary. Keren bids fair to become an earnest student—almost, if such a thing were possible, too earnest. She has never had any girl companions, and knows nothing of the give and take of school life. She can teach you, Priscilla, to be more studious, and you can teach her to be more, shall I say, flexible?"

"Yes, Mrs. Trent," Priscilla murmured.

"And so," the Dowager finished, "I am sending you out in my place, as moral reformers. I want the older girls to set an example to the newcomers. I wish to have the real government of the school a strong, healthy Public Opinion. You three exert a great deal of influence. See what you can do in the directions I have indicated—and in others that may occur to you as you mix with your companions. I have watched you carefully for three years, and in your fundamental good sense, I have the greatest confidence."

She nodded dismissal, and the three found themselves in the hall again. They looked at one another for a moment of blank silence.

"Moral reformers!" Conny gasped.

"I see through the Dowager," said Patty, "She thinks she's found a new method of managing us."

"But I don't see that we're getting back to Paradise Alley," Priscilla complained.

Patty's eyes suddenly brightened. She seized them each by an elbow and shoved them into the empty schoolroom.

"We'll do it!"

"Do what?" asked Conny.

"Pitch right in and reform the school. If we just keep at it—steady—you'll see! We'll be back in Paradise Alley at the end of two weeks."

"Um," said Priscilla, thoughtfully. "I believe we might."

"We'll commence with Irene," said Conny, her mind eagerly jumping to details, "and make her lose that twenty pounds. That's what the Dowager meant when she said she wanted her less material."

"We'll have her thin in no time," Patty nodded energetically. "And we'll give Mae Mertelle a dose of bubbling girliness."

"And Keren," interposed Priscilla, "we'll teach her to become frivolous and neglect her lessons."

"But we won't just confine ourselves to those three," said Conny. "The Dowager said to make our influence felt over the whole school."

"Oh, yes!" Patty agreed, rising to enthusiasm as she called the school roll. "Kid McCoy uses too much slang. We'll teach her manners. Rosalie doesn't like to study. We'll pour her *full* of algebra and Latin. Harriet Gladden's a jelly fish, Mary Deskam's an awful little liar, Evalina Smith's a silly goose, Nancy Lee's a telltale—"

"When you stop to think about it, there's something the matter with everybody," said Conny.

"Except us," amended Priscilla.

"Y—yes," Patty agreed in thoughtful retrospection, "I can't think of a thing the matter with us—I don't wonder they chose us to head the reform!"

Conny slid to her feet, a bundle of energy.

"Come on! We'll join our little playmates and begin the good work—Hooray for the great Reform Party!"

They scrambled out of the open window, in a fashion foreign to the dictates of Thursday evening manner class. Crowds of girls in blue middie blouses were gathered in groups about the recreation ground. The three paused to reconnoiter.

"There's Irene, still chewing." Conny nodded toward a comfortable bench set in the shade by the tennis courts.

"Let's have a circus," Patty proposed. "We'll make Irene and Mae Mertelle roll hoops around the oval. That will kill 'em both with one stone—Irene will get thin, and Mae Mertelle girlish."

Hoop-rolling was a speciality of St. Ursula's. The gymnasium instructor believed in teaching girls to run. Eleven times around the oval constituted a mile, and a mile of hoop-rolling freed one for the day from dumb-bells and Indian clubs. The three dived into the cellar, and returned with hoops as tall as themselves. Patty assumed command of the campaign and issued her orders.

"Conny, you take a walk with Keren and shock her as much as possible; we must break her of being precise. And Pris, you take charge of Mae Mertelle. Don't let her put on any grown-up airs. If she tells you she's been proposed to twice, tell her you've been proposed to so many times that you've lost count. Keep her snubbed all the time. I'll be elephant trainer and start Irene running; she'll be a graceful gazelle by the time I finish."

They parted on their several missions. St. Ursula's peace had ended. She was in the throes of reform.

On Friday evening two weeks later, an unofficial faculty meeting was convened in the Dowager's study. "Lights-out" had rung five minutes before, and three harried teachers, relieved of duty for nine blessed hours while their little charges slept, were discussing their troubles with their chief.

"But just what have they done?" inquired Mrs. Trent, in tones of judicial calm, as she vainly tried to stop the flood of interjections.

"It is difficult to put one's finger on the precise facts," Miss Wadsworth quavered. "They have not broken any rules so far as I can discover, but they have—er—created an atmosphere—"

"Every girl in my corridor," said Miss Lord, with compressed lips, "has come to me separately, and begged to have Patty moved back to the West Wing with Constance and Priscilla."

"Patty! *Mon Dieu!*" Mademoiselle rolled a pair of speaking eyes to heaven. "The things that child thinks of! She is one little imp."

"You remember," the Dowager addressed Miss Lord, "I said when you suggested separating them, that it was a very doubtful experiment. Together, they exhaust their effervescence on each other; separated—"

"They exhaust the whole school!" cried Miss Wadsworth, on the verge of tears. "Of course they don't mean it, but their unfortunate dispositions—"

"Don't mean it!" Miss Lord's eyes snapped. "Their heads are together planning fresh escapades every moment they are not in class."

"But what have they done?" persisted Mrs. Trent.

Miss Wadsworth hesitated a moment in an endeavor to choose examples from the wealth of material that presented itself.

"I found Priscilla deliberately stirring up the contents of Keren's bureau drawers with a shinny stick, and when I asked what she was doing, she replied without the least embarrassment, that she was trying to teach Keren to be less exact; that Mrs. Trent had asked her to do it."

"Um," mused the Dowager, "that was not my precise request, but no matter."

"But the thing that has really troubled me the most," Miss Wadsworth spoke diffidently, "is a matter almost a blasphemy. Keren has a very religious turn of mind, but an unfortunate habit of saying her prayers out loud. One night, after a peculiarly trying day, she prayed that Priscilla might be forgiven for being so aggravating. Whereupon Priscilla knelt before her bed, and prayed that Keren might become less self-righteous and stubborn, and more ready to join in the sports of her playmates with generosity and openness of spirit. They carried on—well, really, one might almost call it a praying match."

"Shocking!" cried Miss Lord.

"And little Aurelie Deraismes—they have been drilling the child in—er—idiomatic English. The phrase that I overheard her repeating, seemed scarcely the expression that a lady would use."

"What was it?" inquired the Dowager, with a slightly expectant note.

"I'll be *gum-swizzled!*"

Miss Wadsworth colored a deep pink. It was foreign to her nature even to repeat so doubtful an expression.

The Dowager's lips twitched. It was a fact, deplored by her assistants, that her sense of humor frequently ran away with her sense of justice. A very naughty little girl, if she managed to be funny, might hope to escape; whereas an equally naughty little girl, who was not funny, paid the full penalty of her crime. Fortunately, however, the school at large had not discovered this vulnerable spot in the Dowager's armor.

"Their influence," it was Miss Lord who spoke, "is demoralizing the school. Mae Van Arsdale says that she will go home if she has to room any longer with Patty Wyatt. I do not know what the trouble is, but—"

"I know it!" said Mademoiselle. "The whole school laughs. It is touching the question of a *sweetch*."

"Of what?" The Dowager cocked her head. Mademoiselle's English was at times difficult. She mixed her languages impartially.

"A sweetch—some hair—to make pompadour. Last week when they have tableaux, Patty has borrowed it and has dyed it with blueing to make a beard for Bluebeard. But being yellow to start, it has become green, and the color will not wash out. The sweetch is ruin—entirely ruin—and Patty is desolate. She has apologize. She thought it would wash, but since it will not wash, she has suggest to Mae that she color her own hair to match the sweetch, and Mae lose her temper and call names. Then Patty has pretend to cry, and she put the green hair on Mae's bed with a wreath of flowers around, and she hang a stocking on the door for crape, and invite the girls to come to the funeral, and everybody laugh at Mae."

"It's just as well," said the Dowager, unmoved. "I do not wish to favor the wearing of false hair."

"It's the principle of the thing," said Miss Lord.

"And that poor Irene McCullough," Mademoiselle continued the tale, "she dissolves herself in tears. Those three insist that she make herself thin, and she has no wish to become thin."

"They take away her butter-ball," corroborated Miss Wadsworth, "before she comes to the table; they make her go without dessert, and they do not allow her to eat sugar on her oatmeal. They keep her exercising every moment, and when she complains to me, they punish her."

"I should think," the Dowager spoke with a touch of sarcasm, "that Irene were big enough to take care of herself."

"She has three against her," reminded Miss Lord.

"I called Patty to my room," said Miss Wadsworth, "and demanded an explanation. She told me that Mrs. Trent thought that Irene was too fat, and wished them to reduce her twenty pounds! Patty said that it was hard work, they were getting thin themselves, but they realized that they were seniors and must exert an influence over the school. I really think she was sincere. She talked very sweetly about moral responsibility, and the necessity of the older girls setting an example."

"It is her impudence," said Miss Lord, "that is so exasperating."

"That's—just Patty!" the Dowager laughed. "I must confess that I find all three of them amusing. It's good, healthy mischief and I wish there were more of it. They don't bribe the maids to mail letters, or smuggle in candy, or flirt with the soda-water clerk. They at least can be trusted."

"Trusted!" gasped Miss Lord.

"To break every minor rule with cheerful unconcern," nodded the Dowager, "but never to do the slightest thing dishonorable. They have kind hearts and the girls all love them—"

A knock sounded on the door with startling suddenness, and before anyone could reply, the door burst open and Keren-happuch appeared on the threshold. She was clutching with one hand the folds of a brilliant Japanese kimono, the other she reserved for gestures. The kimono was sprinkled

with fire-eating dragons as large as cats; and to the astonished spectators, Keren's flushed face and disheveled hair seemed to carry out the decorative scheme. The Dowager's private study was a sacred spot, reserved for interviews of formality; never had a pupil presented herself in such unceremonious garb.

"Keren!" cried Miss Wadsworth. "What has happened?"

"I want a new room-mate! I can't stand Priscilla any longer. She's been having a birthday party in my room—"

"A birthday party?" Mrs. Trent turned questioningly to Miss Wadsworth.

She nodded unhappily.

"Yesterday was Priscilla's birthday, and she received a box from her aunt. This being Friday night, I gave her permission—"

"Certainly." The Dowager turned to the tragic figure in the center of the floor. "It is Priscilla's room as much as yours and—"

Keren plunged into a sea of words. The four leaned forward in a strained endeavor to pluck some sense from the torrent.

"They used my bed for a table because it wasn't against the wall, and Patty tipped a pot of chocolate over in the middle of it. She said it was an accident—but she did it on purpose—I know she did! And because I objected, Priscilla said it wasn't polite to notice when a guest spilled anything, and she tipped a glass of current jelly on my pillow, to make Patty feel comfortable. That was the polite thing for a hostess to do, she said; they learned it last year in manner class. And the chocolate soaked right through, and Conny Wilder said it was fortunate I was thin, because I could sleep in a curve around it; if it had happened to Irene McCullough, she would have had to sleep in it, because she's so big she takes up the whole bed. And Priscilla said I could be thankful to-morrow's Saturday when we get clean sheets; it might have happened so that I would have had to sleep in that puddle of chocolate a whole week. And then the "Lights-out" rang, and they left me to clean up, and the housekeeper's gone to bed, and I can't get any fresh bed clothes, and I *won't* sleep that way! I'm not used to sleeping in chocolaty sheets. I don't like America and I *hate* girls."

Tears were dripping from Keren's cheeks onto the fire-breathing dragons below. The Dowager, without comment, rose and rang the bell.

"Katie," she said, as the maid on duty appeared at the door, "some fresh sheets for Miss Keren, please, and remake her bed. That will do for to-night, Keren. Get to sleep as quickly as possible, and don't talk. You mustn't disturb the other girls. We can see about changing room-mates to-morrow."

Katie and the outraged dragons withdrew.

A silence followed, while Miss Wadsworth and Mademoiselle exchanged glances of despair, and Miss Lord buckled on her war armor.

"You see!" she said, with a suggestion of triumph, "when they get to the point of persecuting a poor little—"

"In my experience of school life," said Mrs. Trent judicially, "it is a girl's own fault when she is persecuted. Their methods are crude, but to the point. Keren is a hopeless little prig—"

"But at least you can't allow her to suffer—"

"Oh, no, I shall do what I can toward peace. To-morrow morning, Keren can move in with Irene McCullough, and Patty and Conny and Priscilla go back to their old rooms in the West Wing. You, Mademoiselle, are somewhat injured—"

"I do not mind them together. They are just—what you say?—exhilarating. It is when they are spread out that it is difficult."

"You mean," Miss Lord stared—"that you are going to *reward* their disgraceful conduct? It is exactly what they have been working for."

"You must acknowledge," smiled the Dowager, "that they have worked hard. Perseverance deserves success."

The next morning, Patty and Conny and Priscilla, their arms running over with dresses and hats and sofa cushions, gaily two-stepped down the length of "Paradise Alley" while a relieved school assisted at the flitting. As they caught sight of Miss Lord hovering in the offing, they broke into the chorus of a popular school song:

"We like to go to chapel
And listen to the preachers,
We are happy in our work,
And we dearly love our teachers.
Daughters of Saint Ur-su-la!"

II

The Romantic History of Cuthbert St. John

THE DOWAGER" had a very sensible theory that boarding-school girls should be kept little girls, until their school life was over, and they stepped out, fresh and eager and spontaneous, to greet the grown-up world. Saint Ursula's was a cloister, in fact, as in name. The masculine half of the human species was not supposed to count.

Sometimes a new girl was inclined to turn up her nose at the youthful pastimes that contented her companions. But in the end she would be drawn irresistibly into the current. She would learn to jump rope and roll hoops; to participate in paper chases 'cross country; to skate and coast and play hockey on winter afternoons, to enjoy molasses-candy pulls and popcorn around the big open fire on Saturday nights, or impromptu masquerades, when the school raided the trunks in the attic for costumes. After a few weeks' time, the most spoiled little worldling lost her consciousness of calls outside of "bounds," and surrendered to the spirit of the youthful sisterhood.

But the girls in their teens answer readily to the call of romance. And occasionally, in the twilight hour between afternoon study and the dressing bell, as they gathered in the window-seat with faces to the western sky, the talk would turn to the future—particularly when Rosalie Patton was of the group. Pretty, dainty, inconsequential little Rosalie was preëminently fashioned for romance; it clung to her golden hair and looked from her eyes. She might be extremely hazy as to the difference between participles and supines, she might hesitate on her definition of a parallelopiped, but when the subject under discussion was one of sentiment, she spoke with conviction. For hers was no mere theoretical knowledge; it was gained by personal experience. Rosalie had been proposed to!

She confided the details to her most intimate friends, and they confided them to their most intimate friends, until finally, the whole school knew the entire romantic history.

Rosalie's preëminence in the field of sentiment was held entirely fitting. Priscilla might excel in basket-ball, Conny Wilder in dramatics, Keren Hersey in geometry and Patty Wyatt in—well, in impudence and audacity—but Rosalie was the recognized authority in matters of the heart; and until Mae Mertelle Van Arsdale came, nobody thought of questioning her position.

Mae Mertelle spent an uncomfortable month shaking into place in the school life. The point in which she was accustomed to excel was *clothes*, but when she and her four trunks arrived, she found to her disgust that clothes were not useful at St. Ursula's. The school uniform reduced all to a dead level in the matter of fashion. There was another field, however, in which she might hope for supremacy. Her own sentimental history was vivid, compared to the colorless lives of most, and she proceeded to assert her claims.

One Saturday evening in October, half-a-dozen girls were gathered in Rosalie's room, on piled-up sofa cushions, with the gas turned low and the light of the hunter's moon streaming through the window. They had been singing softly in a minor key, but gradually the singing turned to talk. The talk, in accordance with the moonlight and flying clouds, was in a sentimental vein; and it ended, naturally, with Rosalie's Great Experience. Between maidenly hesitations and many promptings she retold the story—the new girls had never heard it, and to the old girls it was always new.

The stage setting had been perfect—a moonlit beach, and lapping waves and rustling pine trees. When Rosalie chanced to omit any detail, her hearers, already familiar with the story, eagerly supplied it.

"And he held your hand all the time he was talking," Priscilla prompted.

"Oh, Rosalie! Did he?" in a shocked chorus from the newcomers.

"Y—yes. He just sort of took hold of it and forgot to let go, and I didn't like to remind him."

"What did he say?"

"He said he couldn't live without me."

"And what did you say?"

"I said I was awfully sorry, but he'd have to."

"And then what happened?"

"Nothing happened," she was obliged to confess. "I s'pose something might have happened if I'd accepted him, but you see, I didn't."

"But you were very young at the time," suggested Evalina Smith. "Are you sure you knew your own mind?"

Rosalie nodded with an air of melancholy regret.

"Yes. I knew I couldn't ever love him, because, he—well, he had an awfully funny nose. It started to point in one direction, and then changed its mind and pointed in the other."

Her hearers would have preferred that she had omitted this detail; but Rosalie was literal-minded and lacked the story-teller's instinct for suppression.

"He asked if there wasn't any hope that I would change," she added pensively. "I told him that I could never love him enough to marry him, but that I would always respect him."

"And then what did he say?"

"He said he wouldn't commit suicide."

A profound hush followed, while Rosalie gazed at the moon and the others gazed at Rosalie. With her gleaming hair and violet eyes, she was entirely their ideal of a storybook heroine. They did not think of envying her; they merely wondered and admired. She was crowned by natural right, Queen of Romance.

Mae Van Arsdale, who had listened in silence to the recital, was the first to break the spell. She rose, fluffed up her hair, straightened her blouse, and politely suppressed a yawn.

"Nonsense, Rosalie! You're a silly little goose to make such a fuss over nothing.—Good-night, children. I'm going to bed now."

She sauntered toward the door, but paused on the threshold to drop the casual statement. "I've been proposed to three times."

A shocked gasp arose from the circle at this *lèse-majesté*. The disdainful condescension of a new girl was more than they could brook.

"She's a horrid old thing, and I don't believe a word she says!" Priscilla declared stoutly, as she kissed poor crushed little Rosalie goodnight.

This slight *contretemps* marked the beginning of strained relations. Mae Mertelle gathered her own adherents, and Rosalie's special coterie of friends rallied to the standard of their queen. They intimated to Mae's followers that the quality of the romance was quite different in the two cases. Mae might be the heroine of any number of commonplace flirtations, but Rosalie was the victim of a *grande passion*. She was marked with an indelible scar that she would carry to the grave. In the heat of their allegiance, they overlooked the crookedness of the hero's nose and the avowed fact that Rosalie's own affections had not been engaged.

But Mae's trump card had been withheld. Whispers presently spread about under the seal of confidence. She was hopelessly in love. It was not a matter of the past vacation, but of the burning present. Her room-mate wakened in the night to hear her sobbing to herself. She had no appetite—her whole table could testify to that. In the middle of dessert, even on ice-cream nights, she would forget to eat, and with her spoon half-raised, would sit staring into space. When reminded that she was at the table, she would start guiltily and hastily bolt the rest of the meal. Her enemies unkindly commented upon the fact that she always came to before the end, so she got as much as anybody else.

The English classes at St. Ursula's were weekly drilled in the old-fashioned art of letter writing. The girls wrote letters home, minutely descriptive of school life. They addressed imaginary girl friends, and grandmothers and college brothers and baby sisters. They were learning the great secret of literary forcefulness—to suit their style to their audience. Ultimately, they arrived at the point

of thanking imaginary young men for imaginary flowers. Mae listened to the somewhat stilted phraseology of these polite and proper notes with a supercilious smile. The class, covertly regarding her, thrilled anew.

Gradually, the details of the romance spread abroad. The man was English—Mae had met him on the steamer—and some day when his elder brother died (the brother was suffering from an incurable malady that would carry him off in a few years) he would come into the title; though just what the title was, Mae had not specifically stated. But in any case, her father was a staunch American; he hated the English and he hated titles. No daughter of his should ever marry a foreigner. If she did, she would never receive a dollar from him. However, neither Mae nor Cuthbert cared about the money. Cuthbert had plenty of his own. His name was Cuthbert St. John. (Pronounced Sinjun.) He had four names in all, but those were the two he used the most. He was in England now, having been summoned by cable, owing to the critical condition of his brother's health, but the crisis was past, and Cuthbert would soon be returning. Then—Mae closed her lips in a straight line and stared defiantly into space. Her father should see!

Before the throbbing reality of this romance, Rosalie's poor little history paled into nothing.

Then the plot began to thicken. Studying the lists of incoming steamers, Mae announced to her room-mate that he had landed. He had given his word to her father not to write; but she knew that in some way she should hear. And sure enough! The following morning brought a nameless bunch of violets. There had been doubters before—but at this tangible proof of devotion, skepticism crumbled.

Mae wore her violets to church on Sunday. The school mixed its responses in a shocking fashion—nobody pretended to follow the service; all eyes were fixed on Mae's upturned face and far-off smile. Patty Wyatt pointed out that Mae had taken special pains to seat herself in the light of a stained-glass window, and that occasionally the rapt eyes scanned the faces of her companions, to make sure that the effect was reaching across the footlights. But Patty's insinuation was indignantly repudiated by the school.

Mae was at last triumphantly secure in the rôle of leading lady. Poor insipid Rosalie no longer had a speaking part.

The affair ran on for several weeks, gathering momentum as it moved. In the European Travel Class that met on Monday nights, "English Country Seats" was the subject of one of the talks, illustrated by the stereopticon. As a stately, terraced mansion, with deer cropping grass in the foreground, was thrown upon the screen, Mae Mertelle suddenly grew faint. She vouchsafed no reason to the housekeeper who came with hot-water bottles and cologne; but later, she whispered to her room-mate that that was the house where he was born.

Violets continued to arrive each Saturday, and Mae became more and more *distract*. The annual basket-ball game with Highland Hall, a near-by school for girls, was imminent. St. Ursula's had been beaten the year before; it would mean everlasting disgrace if defeat met them a second time, for Highland Hall was a third their size. The captain harangued and scolded an apathetic team.

"It's Mae Mertelle and her beastly violets!" she disgustedly grumbled to Patty. "She's taken all the fight out of them."

The teachers, meanwhile, were uneasily aware that the atmosphere was overcharged. The girls stood about in groups, thrilling visibly when Mae Mertelle passed by. There was a moonlight atmosphere about the school that was not conducive to high marks in Latin prose composition. The matter finally became the subject of an anxious faculty meeting. There was no actual data at hand; it was all surmise, but the source of the trouble was evident. The school had been swept before by a wave of sentiment; it was as catching as the measles. The Dowager was inclined to think that the simplest method of clearing the atmosphere would be to pack Mae Mertelle and her four trunks back to the paternal fireside, and let her foolish mother deal with the case. Miss Lord was characteristically bent upon fighting it out. She would stop the nonsense by force. Mademoiselle, who was inclined to sentiment, feared that the poor child was really suffering. She thought sympathy and tact—But Miss

Sallie's bluff common-sense won the day. If the sanity of Saint Ursula's demanded it, Mae Mertelle must go; but she thought, by the use of a little diplomacy, both St. Ursula's sanity and Mae Mertelle might be preserved. Leave the matter to her. She would use her own methods.

Miss Sallie was the Dowager's daughter. She managed the practical end of the establishment—provided for the table, ruled the servants, and ran off, with the utmost ease, the two hundred acres of the school farm. Between the details of horseshoeing and haying and butter-making, she lent her abilities wherever they were needed. She never taught; but she disciplined. The school was noted for unusual punishments, and most of them originated in Miss Sallie's brain. Her title of "Dragonette" was bestowed in respectful admiration of her mental qualities.

The next day was Tuesday, Miss Sallie's regular time for inspecting the farm. As she came downstairs after luncheon drawing on her driving gloves, she just escaped stepping on Conny Wilder and Patty Wyatt who, flat on their stomachs, were trying to poke out a golf ball from under the hat-rack.

"Hello, girls!" was her cheerful greeting. "Wouldn't you like a little drive to the farm? Run and tell Miss Wadsworth that you are excused from afternoon study. You may stay away from Current Events this evening, and make it up."

The two scrambled into hats and coats in excited delight. A visit to Round Hill Farm with Miss Sallie, was the greatest good that St. Ursula's had to offer. For Miss Sallie—out of bounds—was the funniest, most companionable person in the world. After an exhilarating five-mile drive through a brown and yellow October landscape, they spent a couple of hours romping over the farm, had milk and ginger cookies in Mrs. Spence's kitchen; and started back, wedged in between cabbages and eggs and butter. They chatted gaily on a dozen different themes—the Thanksgiving masquerade, a possible play, the coming game with Highland Hall, and the lamentable new rule that made them read the editorials in the daily papers. Finally, when conversation flagged for a moment, Miss Sallie dropped the casual inquiry:

"By the way, girls, what *has* got into Mae Van Arsdale? She droops about in corners and looks as dismal as a molting chicken."

Patty and Conny exchanged a glance.

"Of course," Miss Sallie continued cheerfully, "it's perfectly evident what the trouble is. I haven't been connected with a boarding-school for ten years for nothing. The little idiot is posing as the object of an unhappy affection. You know that I never favor talebearing, but, just as a matter of curiosity, is it the young man who passes the plate in church, or the one who sells ribbon in Marsh and Elkins's?"

"Neither." Patty grinned. "It's an English nobleman."

"What?" Miss Sallie stared.

"And Mae's father hates English noblemen," Conny explained, "and has forbidden him ever to see her again."

"Her heart is broken," said Patty sadly. "She's going into a decline."

"And the violets?" inquired Miss Sallie.

"He promised not to send her any letters, but violets weren't mentioned."

"H'm, I see!" said Miss Sallie; and, after a moment of thought, "Girls, I am going to leave this matter in your hands. I want it stopped."

"In our hands?"

"The school can't be stirred up any longer; but the matter's too silly to warrant the teachers taking any notice of it. This is a thing that ought to be regulated by public opinion. Suppose you see what you can do—I will appoint you a committee to bring the school back to a solid basis of common sense. I know that I can trust you not to talk."

"I don't exactly see what we can do," said Patty, dubiously.

"You are usually not without resourcefulness," Miss Sallie returned with a flickering smile. "You may have a *carte blanche* to choose your own methods."

"And may we tell Priscilla?" Conny asked. "We must tell her because we three—"

"Hunt together?" Miss Sallie nodded. "Tell Priscilla, and let it stop at that."

The next afternoon, when Martin drove into the village to accomplish the daily errands, he dropped Patty and Priscilla at the florists, empowered by the school to purchase flowers for the rector's wife and new baby. They turned inside, their minds entirely occupied with the rival merits of red and white roses. They ordered their flowers, inscribed the card, and then waited aimlessly till Martin should return to pick them up. Passing down the counter, they came upon a bill-sticker, the topmost item being, "Violets every Saturday to Miss Mae Van Arsdale, St. Ursula's School."

They stopped and stared for a thoughtful moment. The florist followed their gaze.

"Do you happen to know the young lady who ordered them vi'lets?" he inquired. "She didn't leave any name, and I'd like to know if she wants me to keep on sending 'em. She only paid up to the first, and the price is going up."

"No, I don't know who it was," said Patty, with well-assumed indifference. "What did she look like?"

"She—she had on a blue coat," he suggested. As all sixty-four of the St. Ursula girls wore blue coats, his description was not helpful.

"Oh," Patty prompted, "was she quite tall with a lot of yellow hair and—"

"That's her!"

He recognized the type with some assurance.

"It's Mae herself!" Priscilla whispered excitedly.

Patty nodded and commanded silence.

"We'll tell her," she promised. "And by the way," she added to Priscilla, "I think it would be nice for us to send some flowers to Mae, from our—er—secret society. But I'm afraid the treasury is pretty low just now. They'll have to be cheaper than violets. What are your cheapest flowers?" she inquired of the man.

"There's a kind of small sunflower that some people likes for decoration. 'Cut-and-come-again' they're called. I can give you a good-sized bunch for fifty cents. They make quite a show."

"Just the thing! Send a bunch of sunflowers to Miss Van Arsdale with this card." Patty drew a blank card toward her, and in an upright back hand traced the inscription, "Your disconsolate C. St. J."

She sealed it in an envelope, then regarded the florist sternly.

"Are you a Mason?" she asked, her eye on the crescent in his buttonhole.

"Y—yes," he acknowledged.

"Then you understand the nature of an oath of secrecy? You are not to divulge to anyone the sender of these flowers. The tall young lady with the yellow hair will come in here and try to make you tell who sent them. You are not to remember. It may even have been a man. You don't know anything about it. This secret society at Saint Ursula's is so very much more secret than the Masonic Society, that it is even a secret that it exists. Do you understand?"

"I—yes, ma'am," he grinned.

"If it becomes known," she added darkly, "I shall not be responsible for your life."

She and Priscilla each contributed a quarter for the flowers.

"It's going to be expensive," Patty sighed. "I think we'll have to ask Miss Sallie for an extra allowance while this committee is in session."

Mae was in her room, surrounded by an assemblage of her special followers, when the flowers arrived. She received the box in some bewilderment.

"He's sending flowers on Wednesdays as well as Saturdays!" her room-mate cried. "He must be getting desperate."

Mae opened the box amid an excited hush.

"How perfectly lovely!" they cried in chorus, though with a slightly perfunctory undertone. They would have preferred crimson roses.

Mae regarded the offering for a moment of stupefied amazement. She had been pretending so long, that by now she almost believed in Cuthbert herself. The circle was waiting, and she rallied her powers to meet this unexpected crisis.

"I wonder what sunflowers mean?" she asked softly. "They must convey some message. Does anybody know the language of flowers?"

Nobody did know the language of flowers; but they were relieved at the suggestion.

"Here's a card!" Evalina Smith plucked it from among the bristling leaves.

Mae made a motion to examine it in private, but she had been so generous with her confidences heretofore, that she was not allowed to withdraw them at this interesting point. They leaned over her shoulder and read it aloud.

"Your disconsolate C. St. J.'—Oh, Mae, think how he must be suffering!"

"Poor man!"

"He simply couldn't remain silent any longer."

"He's the soul of honor," said Mae. "He wouldn't write a real letter because he promised not to, but I suppose—a little message like this—"

Patty Wyatt passing the door, sauntered in. The card was exhibited in spite of a feeble protest from Mae.

"That handwriting shows a lot of character," Patty commented.

This was considered a concession; for Patty, from the first, had held aloof from the cult of Cuthbert St. John. She was Rosalie's friend.

The days that followed, were filled with bewildering experiences for Mae Mertelle. Having accepted the first installment of sunflowers, she could not well refuse the second. Once having committed herself, she was lost. Candy and books followed the flowers in horrifying profusion. The candy was of an inexpensive variety—Patty had discovered the ten-cent store—but the boxes that contained it made up in decorativeness what the candy lacked; they were sprinkled with Cupids and roses in vivid profusion. A message in the same back hand accompanied each gift, signed sometimes with initials, and sometimes with a simple "Bertie." Parcels had never before been delivered with such unsuspecting promptitude. Miss Sallie was the one through whose hands they went. She glanced at the outside, scrawled a "deliver," and the maid would choose the most embarrassing moments to comply—always when Mae Mertelle was surrounded by an audience.

Mae's Englishman, from an object of sentiment, in a few days' time became the joke of the school. His taste in literature was as impossible as his taste in candy. He ran to titles which are supposed to be the special prerogative of the kitchen. "Loved and Lost," "A Born Coquette," "Thorns among the Orange Blossoms." Poor Mae repudiated them, but to no avail; the school had accepted Cuthbert—and was bent upon eliciting all the entertainment possible from his British vagaries. Mae's life became one long dread of seeing the maid appear with a parcel. The last straw was the arrival of a complete edition—in paper—of Marie Corelli.

"He—he never sent them!" she sobbed. "Somebody's just trying to be funny."

"You mustn't mind, Mae, because they aren't just the sort that an American man would choose," Patty offered comfort. "You know that Englishmen have queer tastes, particularly in books. *Everybody* reads Marie Corelli over there."

The next Saturday, a party of girls was taken to the city for shopping and the matinée. Among other errands, the art class visited a photograph dealer's, to purchase some early Italian masters. Patty's interest in Giotto and his kind was not very keen, and she sauntered off on a tour of inspection. She happened upon a pile of actors and actresses, and her eye brightened as she singled out a large photograph of an unfamiliar leading man, with curling mustache and dimpled chin and large appealing

eyes. He was dressed in hunting costume and conspicuously displayed a crop. The picture was the last word in Twentieth Century Romance. And, most perfect touch of all, it bore a London mark!

Patty unobtrusively deflected the rest of the committee from a consideration of Fra Angelico, and the three heads bent delightedly over the find.

"It's perfect!" Conny sighed. "But it costs a dollar and fifty cents."

"We'll have to go without soda water *forever!*" said Priscilla.

"It is expensive," Patty agreed, "but—" as she restudied the liquid, appealing eyes—"I really think it's worth it."

They each contributed fifty cents, and the picture was theirs.

Patty wrote across the front, in the bold back hand that Mae had come to hate, a tender message in French, and signed the full name, "Cuthbert St. John." She had it wrapped in a plain envelope and requested the somewhat wondering clerk to mail it the following Wednesday morning, as it was an anniversary present and must not arrive before the day.

The picture came on the five-o'clock delivery, and was handed to Mae as the girls trooped out from afternoon study. She received it in sulky silence and retired to her room. Half a dozen of her dearest friends followed at her heels; Mae had worked hard to gain a following, and now it couldn't be shaken off.

"Open it, Mae quick!"

"What do you s'pose it is?"

"It can't be flowers or candy. He must be starting something new."

"I don't care what it is!" Mae viciously tossed the parcel into the wastebasket.

Irene McCullough fished it out and cut the string.

"Oh, Mae, it's his photograph!" she squealed. "And he's per-fect-ly beau-ti-ful!"

"Did you ever see such eyes!"

"Does he curl his mustache, or it is natural?"

"Why didn't you tell us he had a dimple in his chin?"

"Does he always wear those clothes?"

Mae was divided between curiosity and anger. She snatched the photograph away, cast one glance at the languishing brown eyes, and tumbled it, face downward, into a bureau drawer.

"Don't ever mention his name to me again!" she commanded, as, with compressed lips, she commenced brushing her hair for dinner.

On the next Friday afternoon—shopping day in the village—Patty and Conny and Priscilla dropped in at the florist's to pay a bill.

"Two bunches of sunflowers, one dollar," the man had just announced in ringing tones from the rear of the store, when a step sounded behind them, and they faced about to find Mae Mertelle Van Arsdale, bent on a similar errand.

"Oh!" said Mae, fiercely, "I might have known it was you three."

She stared for a moment in silence, then she dropped into a rustic seat and buried her head on the counter. She had shed so many tears of late that they flowed automatically.

"I suppose," she sobbed, "you'll tell the whole school, and everybody will laugh and—and—"

The three regarded her with unbending mien. They were not to be moved by a few tears.

"You said that Rosalie was a silly little goose to make such a fuss over nothing," Priscilla reminded her.

"And at least he was a live man," said Patty, "even if he did have a crooked nose."

"Do you still think she was a silly goose?" Conny inquired.

"N—no!"

"Don't you think you've been a great deal more silly?"

"Y—yes."

"And will you apologize to Rosalie?"

"No!"

"It will make quite a funny story," Patty ruminated, "the way we'll tell it."

"I think you're perfectly horrid!"

"Will you apologize to Rosalie?" Priscilla asked again.

"Yes—if you'll promise not to tell."

"We'll promise on one condition—you're to break your engagement to Cuthbert St. John, and never refer to it again."

Cuthbert sailed for England on the *Oceanic* the following Thursday; St. Ursula's plunged into a fever of basket-ball, and the atmosphere became bracingly free of Romance.

III

The Virgil Strike

"I'M tired of Woman's Rights on Friday afternoons," said Patty disgustedly. "I prefer soda water!"

"This makes the third time they've taken away our holiday for the sake of a beastly lecture," Priscilla grumbled, as she peered over Patty's shoulder to read the notice on the bulletin board, in Miss Lord's perpendicular library hand.

It informed the school that instead of the usual shopping expedition to the village, they would have the pleasure that afternoon of listening to a talk by Professor McVey of Columbia University. The subject would be the strike of the women laundry workers. Tea would be served in the drawing-room afterwards, with Mae Van Arsdale, Harriet Gladden, and Patty Wyatt as hostesses.

"It's not my turn!" objected Patty, as she noted the latter item. "I was hostess two weeks ago."

"That's because you wrote an essay on the 'Eight Hour Day.' Lordie thinks you will ask the professor-man intelligent questions; and show him that St. Ursula's is not a common boarding-school where only superficial accomplishments are taught, but one in which the actual problems of—"

"And I did want to go shopping!" Patty mourned. "I need some new shoe-strings. I've been tying a knot in my old ones every day for a week."

"Here she comes," whispered Priscilla. "Look happy or she'll make you translate the whole— Good morning, Miss Lord! We were just noticing about the lecture. It sounds extremely interesting."

The two smiled a perfunctory greeting, and followed their teacher to the morning's Latin.

Miss Lord was the one who struck the modern note at St. Ursula's. She believed in militant suffragism and unions and boycotts and strikes; and she labored hard to bring her little charges to her own advanced position. But it was against a heavy inertia that she worked. Her little charges didn't care a rap about receiving their rights, in the dim future of twenty-one; but they were very much concerned about losing a present half-holiday. On Friday afternoons, they were ordinarily allowed to draw checks on the school bank for their allowances, and march in a procession—a teacher forming the head and tail—to the village stores, where they laid in their weekly supply of hair ribbons and soda water and kodak films. Even had one acquired so many demerits that her weekly stipend was entirely eaten up by fines, still she marched to the village and watched the lucky ones disburse. It made a break in the monotony of six days of bounds.

But every cloud has its silver lining.

Miss Lord preceded the Virgil recitation that morning by a discussion of the lecture to come. The laundry strike, she told them, marked an epoch in industrial history. It proved that women, as well as men, were capable of standing by each other. The solidarity of labor was a point she wished her girls to grasp. Her girls listened with grave attention; and by eagerly putting a question, whenever she showed signs of running down, they managed to stave off the Latin recitation for three quarters of an hour.

The professor, a mild man with a Van Dyke beard, came and lectured exhaustively upon the relations of employer and employed. His audience listened with politely intelligent smiles, but with minds serenely occupied elsewhere. The great questions of Capital and Labor, were not half so important to them, as the fact of the lost afternoon, or the essays that must be written for to-morrow's English, or even that this was ice-cream night with dancing class to follow. But Patty, on the front seat, sat with wide, serious eyes fixed on the lecturer's face. She was absorbing his arguments—and storing them for use.

Tea followed according to schedule. The three chosen ones received their guests with the facility of long-tried hostesses. The fact that their bearing was under inspection, with marks to follow, did

not appreciably diminish their case. They were learning by the laboratory method, the social graces that would be needed later in the larger world. Harriet and Mae presided at the tea table, while Patty engaged the personage in conversation. He commented later, to Miss Lord, upon the students' rare understanding in economic subjects.

Miss Lord replied with some complaisance that she endeavored to have her girls think for themselves. Sociology was a field in which lessons could not be taught by rote. Each must work out her own conclusions, and act upon them.

Ice-cream and dancing restored the balance of St. Ursula's, after the mental exertions of the afternoon. At half-past nine—the school did not retire until ten on dancing nights—Patty and Priscilla dropped their goodnight courtesy, murmured a polite "*Bon soir, Mam'selle,*" and scampered upstairs, still very wide awake. Instead of preparing for bed with all dispatch, as well-conducted school girls should, they engaged themselves in practising the steps of their new Spanish dance down the length of the South Corridor. They brought up with a pirouette at Rosalie Patton's door.

Rosalie, still in the pale blue fluffiness of her dancing frock, was sitting cross-legged on the couch, her yellow curls bent over the open pages of a Virgil, tears spattering with dreary regularity on the lines she was conning.

The course of Rosalie's progress through senior Latin might be marked by blistered pages. She was a pretty, cuddling, helpless little thing, deplorably babyish for a senior; but irresistibly appealing. Everyone teased her, and protected her, and loved her. She was irrevocably predestined to bowl over the first man who came along, with her ultra feminine irresponsibility. Rosalie very often dreamed—when she ought to have been concentrating upon Latin grammar—of that happy future state in which smiles and kisses would take the place of gerunds and gerundives.

"You silly little muff!" cried Patty. "Why on earth are you bothering with Latin on a Friday night?"

She landed herself with a plump on Rosalie's right, and took away the book.

"I have to," Rosalie sobbed. "I'd never finish if I didn't begin. I don't see any sense to it. I can't do eighty lines in two hours. Miss Lord always calls on me for the end, because she knows I won't know that."

"Why don't you begin at the end and read backwards?" Patty practically suggested.

"But that wouldn't be fair, and I can't do it so fast as the others. I work more than two hours every day, but I simply never get through. I know I shan't pass."

"Eighty lines is a good deal," Patty agreed.

"It's easy for you, because you know all the words, but—"

"I worked more than two hours on mine yesterday," said Priscilla, "and I can't afford it either. I have to save some time for geometry."

"*I just simply can't do it,*" Rosalie wailed. "And she thinks I'm stupid because I don't keep up with Patty."

Conny Wilder drifted in.

"What's the matter?" she asked, viewing Rosalie's tear-streaked face. "Cry on the pillow, child. Don't spoil your dress."

The Latin situation was explained.

"Oh, it's awful the way Lordie works us! She would like to have us spend every moment grubbing over Latin and sociology. She—"

"Doesn't think dancing and French and manners are any good at all," sobbed Rosalie, mentioning the three branches in which she excelled, "and I think they're a lot more sensible than subjunctives. You can put them to practical use, and you can't sociology and Latin."

Patty emerged from a moment of reverie.

"There's not much use in Latin," she agreed, "but I should think that something might be done with sociology. Miss Lord told us to apply it to our everyday problems."

Rosalie swept the idea aside with a gesture of disdain.

"Listen!" Patty commanded, springing to her feet and pacing the floor in an ecstasy of enthusiasm. "I've got an idea! It's perfectly true. Eighty lines of Virgil is too much for anybody to learn—particularly Rosalie. And you heard what the man said: it isn't fair to gage the working day by the capacity of the strongest. The weakest has to set the pace, or else he's left behind. That's what Lordy means when she talks about the solidarity of labor. In any trade, the workers have got to stand by each other. The strong must protect the weak. It's the duty of the rest of the class to stand by Rosalie."

"Yes, but how?" inquired Priscilla, breaking into the tirade.

"We'll form a Virgil Union, and strike for sixty lines a day."

"Oh!" gasped Rosalie, horrified at the audacity of the suggestion.

"Let's!" cried Conny, rising to the call.

"Do you think we can?" asked Priscilla, dubiously.

"What will Miss Lord say?" Rosalie quavered.

"She can't say anything. Didn't she tell us to listen to the lecture and apply its teaching?" Patty reminded.

"She'll be delighted to find we have," said Conny.

"But what if she doesn't give in?"

"We'll call out the Cicero and Cæsar classes in a sympathetic strike."

"Hooray!" cried Conny.

"Lordy does believe in Unions," Priscilla conceded. "She ought to see the justice of it."

"Of course she'll see the justice of it," Patty insisted. "We're exactly like the laundry workers—in the position of dependents, and the only way we can match strength with our employer, is by standing together. If Rosalie alone drops back to sixty lines, she'll be flunked; but if the whole class does, Lordie will *have* to give in."

"Maybe the whole class won't want to join the union," said Priscilla.

"We'll make 'em!" said Patty. In accordance with Miss Lord's desire, she had grasped some basic principles.

"We'll have to hurry," she added, glancing at the clock. "Pris, you run and find Irene and Harriet and Florence Hissop; and Conny, you route out Nancy Lee—she's up in Evalina Smith's room telling ghost stories. Here, Rosalie, stop crying and dump the things off those chairs so somebody can sit down."

Priscilla started obediently, but paused on the threshold.

"And what will you do?" she inquired with meaning.

"I," said Patty, "will be labor leader."

The meeting was convened, and Patty, a self-constituted chairman, outlined the tenets of the Virgil Union. Sixty lines was to constitute a working day. The class was to explain the case to Miss Lord at the regular session on Monday morning, and politely but positively refuse to read the last twenty lines that had been assigned. If Miss Lord proved insistent, the girls were to close their books and go out on strike.

The majority of the class, hypnotized by Patty's eloquence, dazedly accepted the program; but Rosalie, for whose special benefit the union had been formed, had to be coerced into signing the constitution. Finally, after a wealth of argument had been expended, she wrote her name in a very wobbly hand, and sealed it with a tear. By nature, Rosalie was not a fighter; she preferred gaining her rights by more feminine methods.

Irene McCullough had also to be forced. She was a cautious soul who looked forward to consequences. One of the most frequently applied of St. Ursula's punishments was to make the culprit miss desserts. Irene suffered keenly under this form of chastisement; and she carefully refrained from misdemeanors which might bring it upon her. But Conny produced a convincing argument. She threatened to tell that the chambermaid was in the habit of smuggling in chocolates—and

poor harassed Irene, threatened with the two-fold loss of chocolates and dessert, sullenly added her signature.

"Lights-out" rang. The Virgil Union adjourned its first meeting and went to bed.

Senior Latin came the last hour of the morning, when everyone was tired and hungry. On the Monday following the founding of the Union, the Virgil class gathered outside the door, in growing perturbation as the actual time for the battle approached. Patty rallied them in a brief address.

"Brace up, Rosalie! Don't be a cry-baby. We'll help you out if the last lines come to you. And for goodness' sake, girls, *don't* look so scared. Remember you're suffering, not only for yourselves, but for all the generations of Virgil classes that come after you. Anyone who backs down now is a coward!"

Patty established herself on the front seat, directly in the line of the fire, and a slight skirmish occurred at the outset. Her heavy walking boots were conspicuously laced with pale blue baby ribbon, which caught the enemy's eye.

"That is scarcely the kind of shoe laces that a lady adopts. May I ask, Patty—?"

"I broke my other laces," Patty affably explained, "and since we didn't go shopping on Friday, I couldn't get any more. I don't quite like the effect myself," she conceded, as she stuck out a foot and critically surveyed it.

"See that you find some black ones immediately after class," Miss Lord acidly suggested. "Priscilla, you may read the first ten lines."

The lesson progressed in the usual manner, except that there was a visible tightening of nerves as each recitation was finished, and they waited to hear the next name called. Conny's turn ended with the sixtieth line. No one had gone beyond that; all ahead was virgin jungle. This was the point for the Union to declare itself; and the burden, true to her forebodings, fell upon poor trembling little Rosalie.

She cast an imploring glance toward Patty's sternly waiting countenance, stammered, hesitated, and miserably plunged into a sight translation. Rosalie never had the slightest luck at sight translations; even after two hours of patient work with a dictionary, she was still extremely hesitant as to meanings. Now, she blindly forged ahead,—amid a profound hush—attributing to the Pious Æneas a most amazing set of actions. She finished; and the slaughter commenced. Miss Lord spent three minutes in obliterating Rosalie; then passed the lines to Irene McCullough.

Irene drew a deep breath—she felt Conny encouragingly patting her on the back, while Patty and Priscilla, at either hand, jogged her elbow with insistent touch. She opened her mouth to declare the principles that had been foisted upon her over night; then she caught the cold gleam of Miss Lord's eye. Rosalie's sobs filled the room. And she fell. Irene was fairly good at Latin—her sight translation was at least intelligible. Miss Lord's comment was merely sarcastic, as she passed to Florence Hissop. By this time the panic had swept through the ranks. Florence would like to have been true to her pledged troth, but the instinct of self-preservation is strong. She improved on Irene's performance.

"Take the next ten lines, Patty, and endeavor to extract a glimmering of sense. Please bear in mind that we are reading poetry."

Patty raised her head and faced her superior in the manner of a Christian martyr.

"I only prepared the first sixty lines, Miss Lord."

"Why did you not finish the lesson that I gave out?" Miss Lord inquired sharply.

"We have decided that eighty lines are more than we can do in a day. It takes too much time away from our other lessons. We are perfectly willing to do sixty lines, and do them thoroughly, but we can't consider any more."

Miss Lord for a moment simply stared. Never had she known such a flagrant case of insubordination. And it was purely insubordination, for Patty was the most capable person in the class.

"What do you mean?" she gasped at last.

"We have formed a Virgil Union," Patty gravely explained. "You, Miss Lord, will appreciate the fairness of our demands better than any of the other teachers, because you believe in unions."

Now, the girls in this class feel that they are overworked and underpa—er—that is, I mean the lessons are too long."

Patty fetched a deep breath and started again.

"Eighty lines a day doesn't leave us any time for recreation, so we have determined to join together and demand our rights. We occupy the position of skilled laborers. You can get all the girls you want for Cæsar and beginning Latin, but you can't find anybody but us to read Virgil. It's like the laundry trade. We are not just plain boilers and starchers; we are fancy ironers. If you want to have a Virgil class, you have *got* to have us. You can't call in scab labor. Now, we aren't trying to take advantage because of our superior strength. We are perfectly willing to do an honest day's work, but we can't allow ourselves to be—er—to be—"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.