

ДЖИН УЭБСТЕР

WHEN PATTY
WENT TO
COLLEGE

Джин Уэбстер
When Patty Went to College

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=34838998

When Patty Went to College:

Содержание

I	4
II	16
III	27
IV	37
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	44

Jean Webster

When Patty Went to College

I

Peters the Susceptible

"GAPER-WEIGHTS," observed Patty, sucking an injured thumb, "were evidently not made for driving in tacks. I wish I had a hammer."

This remark called forth no response, and Patty peered down from the top of the step-ladder at her room-mate, who was sitting on the floor dragging sofa-pillows and curtains from a dry-goods box.

"Priscilla," she begged, "you aren't doing anything useful. Go down and ask Peters for a hammer."

Priscilla rose reluctantly. "I dare say fifty girls have already been after a hammer."

"Oh, he has a private one in his back pocket. Borrow that. And, Pris,"—Patty called after her over the transom,— "just tell him to send up a man to take that closet door off its hinges."

Patty, in the interval, sat down on the top step and surveyed the chaos beneath her. An Oriental rush chair, very much out at the elbows, several miscellaneous chairs, two desks, a divan, a table,

and two dry-goods boxes radiated from the center of the room. The floor, as it showed through the interstices, was covered with a grass-green carpet, while the curtains and hangings were of a not very subdued crimson.

"One would scarcely," Patty remarked to the furniture in general, "call it a symphony in color."

A knock sounded on the door.

"Come in," she called.

A girl in a blue linen sailor-suit reaching to her ankles, and with a braid of hair hanging down her back, appeared in the doorway. Patty examined her in silence. The girl's eyes traveled around the room in some surprise, and finally reached the top of the ladder.

"I—I'm a freshman," she began.

"My dear," murmured Patty, in a deprecatory tone, "I should have taken you for a senior; but"—with a wave of her hand toward the nearest dry-goods box—"come in and sit down. I need your advice. Now, there are shades of green," she went on, as if continuing a conversation, "which are not so bad with red; but I ask you frankly if *that* shade of green would go with anything?"

The freshman looked at Patty, and looked at the carpet, and smiled dubiously. "No," she admitted; "I don't believe it would."

"I knew you would say that!" exclaimed Patty, in a tone of relief. "Now what would you advise us to do with the carpet?"

The freshman looked blank. "I—I don't know, unless you take it up," she stammered.

"The very thing!" said Patty. "I wonder we hadn't thought of it before."

Priscilla reappeared at this point with the announcement, "Peters is the most suspicious man I ever knew!" But she stopped uncertainly as she caught sight of the freshman.

"Priscilla," said Patty, severely, "I *hope* you didn't divulge the fact that we are hanging the walls with tapestry"—this with a wave of her hand toward the printed cotton cloth dangling from the molding.

"I tried not to," said Priscilla, guiltily, "but he read 'tapestry' in my eyes. He had no sooner looked at me than he said, 'See here, miss; you know it's against the rules to hang curtains on the walls, and you mustn't put nails in the plastering, and I don't believe you need a hammer anyway.'"

"Disgusting creature!" said Patty.

"But," continued Priscilla, hastily, "I stopped and borrowed Georgie Merriles's hammer on my way back. Oh, I forgot," she added; "he says we can't take the closet door off its hinges—that as soon as we get ours off five hundred other young ladies will be wanting theirs off, and that it would take half a dozen men all summer to put them back again."

A portentous frown was gathering on Patty's brow, and the freshman, wishing to avert a possible domestic tragedy, inquired timidly, "Who is Peters?"

"Peters," said Priscilla, "is a short, bow-legged gentleman with a red Vandyke beard, whose technical title is janitor, but who is

really dictator. Every one is afraid of him—even Prexy."

"I'm not," said Patty; "and," she added firmly, "that door is coming down whether he says so or not, so I suppose we shall have to do it ourselves." Her eyes wandered back to the carpet and her face brightened. "Oh, Pris, we've got a beautiful new scheme. My friend here says she doesn't like the carpet at all, and suggests that we take it up, get some black paint, and put it on the floor ourselves. I agree," she added, "that a Flemish oak floor covered with rugs would be a great improvement."

Priscilla glanced uncertainly from the freshman to the floor. "Do you think they'd let us do it?"

"It would never do to ask them," said Patty.

The freshman rose uneasily. "I came," she said hesitatingly, "to find out—that is, I understand that the girls rent their old books, and I thought, if you wouldn't mind—"

"Mind!" said Patty, reassuringly. "We'd rent our souls for fifty cents a semester."

"It—it was a Latin dictionary I wanted," said the freshman, "and the girls next door said perhaps you had one."

"A beautiful one," said Patty.

"No," interrupted Priscilla; "hers is lost from O to R, and it's all torn; but mine,"—she dived down into one of the boxes and hauled out a chunky volume without any covers,— "while it is not so beautiful as it was once, it is still as useful."

"Mine's annotated," said Patty, "and illustrated. I'll show you what a superior book it is," and she began descending the ladder;

but Priscilla charged upon her and she retreated to the top again. "Why," she wailed to the terrified freshman, "did you not say you wanted a dictionary before she came back? Let me give you some advice at the beginning of your college career," she added warningly. "Never choose a room-mate bigger than yourself. They're dangerous."

The freshman was backing precipitously toward the door, when it opened and revealed an attractive-looking girl with fluffy reddish hair.

"Pris, you wretch, you walked off with my hammer!"

"Oh, Georgie, we need it worse than you do! Come in and help tack."

"Hello, Georgie," called Patty, from the ladder. "Isn't this room going to be beautiful when it's finished?"

Georgie looked about. "You are more sanguine than I should be," she laughed.

"You can't tell yet," Patty returned. "We're going to cover the wall-paper with this red stuff, and paint the floor black, and have dark furniture, and red hangings, and soft lights. It will look just like the Oriental Room in the Waldorf."

"How in the world," Georgie demanded, "do you ever make them let you do all these things? I stuck in three innocent little thumb-tacks to-day, and Peters descended upon me bristling with wrath, and said he'd report me if I didn't pull them out."

"We never ask," explained Patty. "It's the only way."

"You've got enough to do if you expect to get settled by

Monday," Georgie remarked.

"*C'est vrai*," agreed Patty, descending the ladder with a sudden access of energy; "and you've got to stay and help us. We have to get all this furniture moved into the bedrooms and the carpet up before we even *begin* to paint." She regarded the freshman tentatively. "Are you awfully busy?"

"Not very. My room-mate hasn't come yet, so I can't settle."

"That's nice; then you can help us move furniture."

"Patty!" said Priscilla, "I think you are too bad."

"I should really love to stay and help, if you'll let me."

"Certainly," said Patty, obligingly. "I forgot to ask your name," she continued, "and I don't suppose you like to be called 'Freshman'; it's not specific enough."

"My name is Genevieve Ainslee Randolph."

"Genevieve Ains—dear me! I can't remember anything like that. Do you mind if I call you Lady Clara Vere de Vere for short?"

The freshman looked doubtful, and Patty proceeded: "Lady Clara, allow me to present my room-mate Miss Priscilla Pond—no relation to the extract. She's athletic and wins hundred-yard dashes and hurdle races, and gets her name in the paper to a really gratifying extent. And my dear friend Miss Georgie Merriles, one of the oldest families in Dakota. Miss Merriles is very talented—sings in the glee club, plays on the comb—"

"And," interrupted Georgie, "let me present Miss Patty Wyatt, who—"

"Has no specialty," said Patty, modestly, "but is merely good and beautiful and bright."

A knock sounded on the door, which opened without waiting for a response. "Miss Theodora Bartlet," continued Patty, "commonly known as the Twin, Miss Vere de Vere."

The Twin looked dazed, murmured, "Miss Vere de Vere," and dropped down on a dry-goods box.

"The term 'Twin,'" explained Patty, "is used in a merely allegorical sense. There is really only one of her. The title was conferred in her freshman year, and the reason has been lost in the dim dawn of antiquity."

The freshman looked at the Twin and opened her mouth, but shut it again without saying anything.

"My favorite maxim," said Patty, "has always been, 'Silence is golden.' I observe that we are kindred spirits."

"Patty," said Priscilla, "do stop bothering that poor child and get to work."

"Bothering?" said Patty. "I am not bothering her; we are just getting acquainted. However, I dare say it is not the time for hollow civilities. Do you want to borrow anything?" she added, turning to the Twin, "or did you just drop in to pay a social call?"

"Just a social call; but I think I'll come in again when there's no furniture to move."

"You don't happen to be going into town this afternoon?"

"Yes," said the Twin. "But," she added guardedly, "if it's a curtain-pole, I refuse to bring it out. I offered to bring one out

for Lucille Carter last night, because she was in a hurry to give a house-warming, and I speared the conductor with it getting into the car; and while I was apologizing to him I knocked Mrs. Prexy's hat off with the other end."

"We have all the curtain-poles we need," said Patty. "It's just some paint—five cans of black paint, and three brushes at the ten-cent store, and thank you very much. Good-by. Now," she continued, "the first thing is to get that door down, and I will wrest a screw-driver from the unwilling Peters while you remove tacks from the carpet."

"He won't give you one," said Priscilla.

"You'll see," said Patty.

Five minutes later she returned waving above her head an unmistakable screw-driver. "*Voilà, mes amies!* Peters's own private screw-driver, for which I am to be personally responsible."

"How did you get it?" inquired Priscilla, suspiciously.

"You act," said Patty, "as if you thought I knocked him down in some dark corner and robbed him. I merely asked him for it politely, and he asked me what I wanted to do with it. I told him I wanted to take out screws, and the reason impressed him so that he handed it over without a word. Peters," she added, "is a dear; only he's like every other man—you have to use diplomacy."

By ten o'clock that night the study carpet of 399 was neatly folded and deposited at the end of the corridor above, whence its origin would be difficult to trace. The entire region was steeped

in an odor of turpentine, and the study floor of 399 was a shining black, except for four or five unpainted spots which Patty designated as "stepping-stones," and which were to be treated later. Every caller that had dropped in during the afternoon or evening had had a brush thrust into her hand and had been made to go down upon her knees and paint. Besides the floor, three bookcases and a chair had been transferred from mahogany to Flemish oak, and there was still half a can of paint left which Patty was anxiously trying to dispose of.

The next morning, in spite of the difficulty of getting about, the step-ladder had been reërected, and the business of tapestry-hanging was going forward with enthusiasm, when a knock suddenly interrupted the work.

Patty, all unconscious of impending doom, cheerily called, "Come in!"

The door opened, and the figure of Peters appeared on the threshold; and Priscilla basely fled, leaving her room-mate stranded on the ladder.

"Are you the young lady who borrowed my screw—" Peters stopped and looked at the floor, and his jaw dropped in astonishment. "Where is that there carpet?" he demanded, in a tone which seemed to imply that he thought it was under the paint.

"It's out in the hall," said Patty, pleasantly. "Please be careful and don't step on the paint. It's a great improvement, don't you think?"

"You oughter got permission—" he began, but his eye fell on the tapestry and he stopped again.

"Yes," said Patty; "but we knew you couldn't spare a man just now to paint it for us, so we didn't like to trouble you."

"It's against the rules to hang curtains on the walls."

"I have heard that it was," said Patty, affably, "and I think ordinarily it's a very good rule. But just look at the color of that wall-paper. It's pea-green. You have had enough experience with wall-paper, Mr. Peters, to know that *that* is impossible, especially when our window-curtains and portières are red."

Peters's eyes had traveled to the closet, bereft of its door. "Are you the young lady," he demanded gruffly, "who asked me to have that door taken off its hinges?"

"No," said Patty; "I think that must have been my room-mate. It was *very* heavy," she continued plaintively, "and we had a great deal of trouble getting it down, but of course we realized that you were awfully busy, and that it really wasn't your fault. That's what I wanted the screw-driver for," she added. "I'm sorry that I didn't get it back last night, but I was very tired, and I forgot."

Peters merely grunted. He was examining a corner cabinet hanging on the wall. "Didn't you know," he asked severely, "that it's against the rules to put nails in the plaster?"

"Those aren't nails," expostulated Patty. "They're hooks. I remembered that you didn't like holes, so I only put in two, though I am really afraid that three are necessary. What do you think, Mr. Peters? Does it seem solid?"

Peters shook it. "It's solid enough," he said sulkily. As he turned, his eye fell on the table in Priscilla's bedroom. "Is that a gas-stove in there?" he demanded.

Patty shrugged her shoulders. "An apology for one—be *careful*, Mr. Peters! *Don't* get against that bookcase. It's just painted."

Peters jumped aside, and stood like the Colossus of Rhodes, with one foot on one stepping-stone, and the other on another three feet away. It is hard for even a janitor to be dignified in such a position, and while he was gathering his scattered impressions Patty looked longingly around the room for some one to enjoy the spectacle with her. She felt that the silence was becoming ominous, however, and she hastened to interrupt it.

"There's something wrong with that stove; it won't burn a bit. I am afraid we didn't put it together just right. I shouldn't be surprised if *you* might be able to tell what's the matter with it, Mr. Peters." She smiled sweetly. "Men know such a lot about such things! Would you mind looking at it?"

Peters grunted again; but he approached the stove.

Five minutes later, when Priscilla stuck her head in to find out if, by chance, anything remained of Patty, she saw Peters on his knees on the floor of her bedroom, with the dismembered stove scattered about him, and heard him saying, "I don't know as I have any call to report you, for I s'pose, since they're up, they might as well stay"; and Patty's voice returning: "You're very kind, Mr. Peters. Of course if we'd *known*—" Priscilla shut

the door softly, and retired around the corner to await Peters's departure.

"How in the world did you manage him?" she asked, bursting in as soon as the sound of his footsteps had died away down the corridor. "I expected to sing a requiem over your remains, and I found Peters on his knees, engaged in amicable conversation."

Patty smiled inscrutably. "You must remember," she said, "that Peters is not only a janitor: he is also a man."

II

An Early Fright

"I'LL make the tea to-day," said Patty, graciously.

"As you please," said Priscilla, with a skeptical shrug.

Patty bustled about amid a rattle of china. "The cups are rather dusty," she observed dubiously.

"You'd better wash them," Priscilla returned.

"No," said Patty; "it's too much trouble. Just close the blinds, please, and we'll light the candles, and that will do as well. Come in," she called in answer to a knock.

Georgie Merriles, Lucille Carter, and the Bartlet Twin appeared in the doorway.

"Did I hear the two P's were going to serve tea this afternoon?" inquired the Twin.

"Yes; come in. I'm going to make it myself," answered Patty, "and you'll see how much more attentive a hostess I am than Priscilla. Here, Twin," she added, "you take the kettle out and fill it with water; and, Lucille, please go and borrow some alcohol from the freshmen at the end of the corridor; our bottle's empty. I'd do it myself, only I've borrowed such a lot lately, and they don't know you, you see. And—oh, Georgie, you're an obliging dear; just run down-stairs to the store and get some sugar. I think I saw some money in that silver inkstand on Priscilla's desk."

"We've got some sugar," objected Priscilla. "I bought a whole pound yesterday."

"No, my lamb; we haven't got it any more. I lent it to Bonnie Connaught last night. Just hunt around for the spoons," she added. "I think I saw them on the bottom shelf of the bookcase, behind Kipling."

"And what, may I ask, are *you* going to do?" inquired Priscilla.

"I?" said Patty. "Oh, I am going to sit in the arm-chair and preside."

Ten minutes later, the company being disposed about the room on cushions, and the party well under way, it was discovered that there were no lemons.

"Are you sure?" asked Patty, anxiously.

"Not one," said Priscilla, peering into the stein where the lemons were kept.

"I," said Georgie, "refuse to go to the store again."

"No matter," said Patty, graciously; "we can do very well without them." (She did not take lemon herself.) "The object of tea is not for the sake of the tea, but for the conversation which accompanies it, and one must not let accidents annoy him. You see, young ladies," she went on, in the tone of an instructor giving a lecture, "though I have just spilled the alcohol over the sugar, I appear not to notice it, but keep up an easy flow of conversation to divert my guests. A repose of manner is above all things to be cultivated." Patty leaned languidly back in her chair. "Tomorrow is Founder's Day," she resumed in a conversational tone.

"I wonder if many—"

"That reminds me," interrupted the Twin. "You girls needn't save any dances for my brother. I got a letter from him this morning saying he couldn't come."

"He hasn't broken anything, has he?" Patty asked sympathetically.

"Broken anything?"

"Ah—an arm, or a leg, or a neck. Accidents are so prevalent about Founder's time."

"No; he was called out of town on important business."

"Important business!" Patty laughed. "Dear man! why couldn't he have thought of something new?"

"I think myself it was just an excuse," the Twin acknowledged. "He seemed to have an idea that he would be the only man here, and that, alone and unaided, he would have to dance with all six hundred girls."

Patty shook her head sadly. "They're all alike. Founder's wouldn't be Founder's if half the guests didn't develop serious illness or important business or dead relations the last minute. The only safe way is to invite three men and make out one program."

"I simply can't realize that to-morrow is Founder's," said Priscilla. "It doesn't seem a week since we unpacked our trunks after vacation, and before we know it we shall be packing them again for Christmas."

"Yes; and before we know it we'll be unpacking them

again, with examinations three weeks ahead," said Georgie the pessimist.

"Oh, for the matter of that," returned Patty the optimist, "before we know it we'll be walking up one side of the platform for our diplomas and coming down the other side blooming alumnæ."

"And then," sighed Georgie, "before we even have time to decide on a career, we'll be old ladies, telling our grandchildren to stand up straight and remember their rubbers."

"And," said Priscilla, "before any of us get any tea we'll be in our graves, if you don't stop talking and watch that kettle."

"It's boiling," said Patty.

"Yes," said Priscilla; "it's been boiling for ten minutes."

"It's hot," said Patty.

"I should think it might be," said Priscilla.

"And now the problem is, how to get it off without burning one's self."

"You're presiding to-day; you must solve your own problems."

"Tis an easy matter," and Patty hooked it off on the end of a golf-club. "Young ladies," she said, with a wave of the kettle, "there is nothing like a college education to teach you a way out of every difficulty. If, when you are out in the wide, wide world —"

"Where, oh, where are the grave old seniors?"

chanted the Twin.

"Where, oh, where are they?"

The rest took it up, and Patty waited patiently.

"They've gone out of Cairnsley's ethics,
They've gone out of Cairnsley's ethics,
They've gone out of Cairnsley's ethics,
Into the wide, wide w-o-r-l-d."

"If you have finished your ovation, young ladies, I will proceed with my lecture. When, as I say, you are out in the wide, wide world, making five-o'clock tea some afternoon for one of the young men popularly supposed to be there, who have dropped in to make an afternoon call—Do you follow me, young ladies, or do I speak too fast? If, while you are engaged in conversation, the kettle should become too hot, do not put your finger in your mouth and shriek 'Ouch!' and coquettishly say to the young man, '*You* take it off,' as might a young woman who has not enjoyed your advantages; but, rather, rise to the emergency; say to him calmly, 'This kettle has become over-heated; may I trouble you to go into the hall and bring an umbrella?' and when he returns you can hook it off gracefully and expeditiously as you have seen me do, young ladies, and the young—"

"Patty, take care!" This from Priscilla.

"O-u-c-h!" in a long-drawn wail. This from Georgie.

Patty hastily set the kettle down on the floor. "I'm awfully sorry, Georgie. Does it hurt?"

"Not in the least. It's really a pleasant sensation to have boiling water poured over you."

The Bartlet Twin sniffed. "I smell burning rug."

Patty groaned. "I resign, Pris; I resign. Here, you preside. I'll never ask to make it again."

"I should like," observed the Twin, "to see Patty entertaining a young man."

"It's not such an unprecedented event," said Patty, with some warmth. "You can watch me to-morrow night if it will give you so much pleasure."

"To-morrow night? Are you going to have a man for the Prom?"

"That," said Patty, "is my intention."

"And you haven't asked me for a dance!" This in an aggrieved chorus from the entire room.

"I haven't asked any one," said Patty, with dignity.

"Do you mean you're going to have all of the twenty dances with him yourself?"

"Oh, no; I don't expect to dance more than ten with him myself—I haven't made out his card yet," she added.

"Why not?"

"I never do."

"Has he been here before, then?"

"No; that's the reason."

"The reason for what?"

"Well," Patty deigned to explain, "I've invited him for every party since freshman year."

"And did he decline?"

"No; he accepted, but he never came."

"Why not?"

"He was scared."

"Scared? Of the girls?"

"Yes," said Patty, "partly—but mostly of the faculty."

"The *faculty* wouldn't hurt him."

"Of course not; but he couldn't understand that. You see, he had a fright when he was young."

"A fright? What was it?"

"Well," said Patty, "it happened this way: It was while I was at boarding-school. He was at Andover then, and his home was in the South; and one time when he went through Washington he stopped off to call on me. As it happened, the butler had left two days before, and had taken with him all the knives and forks, and all the money he could find, and Nancy Lee's gold watch and two hat-pins, and my silver hair-brush, and a bottle of brandy, and a pie," she enumerated with a conscientious regard for details; "and Mrs. Trent—that's the principal—had advertised for a new butler."

"I should have thought the old one would have discouraged her from keeping butlers," said Georgie.

"You *would* think so," said Patty; "but she was a very

persevering woman. On the day that Raoul—that's his name—came to call, nineteen people had applied for the place, and Mrs. Trent was worn out from interviewing them. So she told Miss Sarah—that's her daughter—to attend to those who came in the evening. Miss Sarah was tall and wore spectacles, and was—was —"

"A good disciplinarian," suggested the Twin.

"Yes," said Patty, feelingly, "an *awfully* good disciplinarian. Well, when Raoul got there he gave his card to Ellen and asked for me; but Ellen didn't understand, and she called Miss Sarah, and when Miss Sarah saw him in his evening clothes she—"

"Took him for a butler," put in Georgie.

"Yes, she took him for a butler; and she looked at the card he'd given Ellen, and said icily, 'What does this mean?'

"It's—it's my name,' he stammered.

"'I see,' said Miss Sarah; 'but where is your recommendation?'

"'I didn't know it was necessary,' he said, terribly scared.

"'Of course it's necessary,' Miss Sarah returned. 'I can't allow you to come into the house unless I have letters from the places where you've been before.'

"'I didn't suppose you were so strict,' he said.

"'We have to be strict,' Miss Sarah answered firmly. 'Have you had much experience?'

"He didn't know what she meant, but he thought it would be safest to say he hadn't.

"'Then of course you won't do,' she replied. 'How old are you?'

"He was so frightened by this time that he couldn't remember. 'Nineteen,' he gasped—'I mean twenty.'

"Miss Sarah saw his confusion, and thought he had designs on some of the heiresses intrusted to her care. 'I don't see how you *dared* to come here,' she said severely. 'I should not think of having you in the house for a moment. You're altogether too young and too good-looking.' And with that Raoul got up and bolted.

"When Ellen told Miss Sarah the next day that he'd asked for me, she was terribly mortified, and she made me write and explain, and invite him to dinner; but wild horses couldn't have dragged him into the house again. He's been afraid to stop off in Washington ever since. He always goes straight through on a sleeper, and says he has nightmares even then."

"And is that why he won't come to the college?"

"Yes," said Patty; "that's the reason. I told him we didn't have any butlers here; but he said we had lady faculty, and that's as bad."

"But I thought you said he *was* coming to the Prom."

"He is this time."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes," said Patty, with ominous emphasis, "I'm sure. He knows," she added, "what will happen if he doesn't."

"What will happen?" asked the Twin.

"Nothing."

The Twin shook her head, and Georgie inquired, "Then why

don't you make out his program?"

"I suppose I might as well. I didn't do it before because it sort of seemed like tempting Providence. I didn't want to be the cause of any really *serious* accident happening to him," she explained a trifle ambiguously as she got out pencil and paper. "What dances can you give me, Lucille? And you, Georgie, have you got the third taken?"

While this business was being settled, a knock unheeded had sounded on the door. It came again.

"What's that?" asked Priscilla. "Did some one knock? Come in."

The door opened, and a maid stood upon the threshold with a yellow envelope in her hand. She peered uncertainly around the darkened room from one face to another. "Miss Patty Wyatt?" she asked.

Patty stretched out her hand in silence for the envelop, and, propping it up on her desk, looked at it with a grim smile.

"What is it, Patty? Aren't you going to read it?"

"There's no need. I know what it says."

"Then I'll read it," said Priscilla, ripping it open.

"Is it a leg or an arm?" Patty inquired with mild curiosity.

"Neither," said Priscilla; "it's a collar-bone."

"Oh," murmured Patty.

"What is it?" demanded Georgie the curious. "Read it out loud."

"New Haven, November 29.

"Broke collar-bone playing foot-ball. Honest Injun.
Terribly sorry. Better luck next time."

"Raoul."

"There will not," observed Patty, "*be* a next time."

III

The Impressionable Mr. Todhunter

"HAS the mail been around yet?" called Priscilla to a girl at the other end of the corridor.

"Don't believe so. It hasn't been in our room."

"There she comes now!" and Priscilla swooped down upon the mail-girl. "Got anything for 399?"

"Do you want Miss Wyatt's mail too?"

"Yes; I'll take everything. What a lot! Is that all for us?" And Priscilla walked down the corridor swinging her note-book by its shoe-string, and opening envelops as she went. She was presently joined by Georgie Merriles, likewise swinging a note-book by a shoe-string.

"Hello, Pris; going to English? Want me to help carry your mail?"

"Thank you," said Priscilla; "you may keep the most of it. Now, that," she added, holding out a blue envelop, "is an advertisement for cold cream which no lady should be without; and that"—holding out a yellow envelop—"is an advertisement for beef extract which no brain-worker should be without; and that"—holding out a white envelop—"is the worst of all, because it looks like a legitimate letter, and it's nothing but a 'Dear Madam' thing, telling me my tailor has moved from Twenty-

second to Forty-third Street, and hopes I'll continue to favor him with my patronage.

"And here," she went on, turning to her room-mate's correspondence, "is a cold-cream and a beef-extract letter for Patty, and one from Yale; that's probably Raoul explaining why he couldn't come to the Prom. It won't do any good, though. No mortal man can ever make her believe he didn't have his collar-bone broken on purpose. And I don't know whom that's from," Priscilla continued, examining the last letter. "It's marked 'Hotel A-, New York.' Never heard of it, did you? Never saw the writing before, either."

Georgie laughed. "Do you keep tab on all of Patty's correspondents?"

"Oh, I know the most of them by this time. She usually reads the interesting ones out loud, and the ones that aren't interesting she never answers, so they stop writing. Hurry up; the bell's going to ring"; and they pushed in among the crowd of girls on the steps of the recitation-hall.

The bell did ring just as they reached the class-room, and Priscilla dropped the letters, without comment, into Patty's lap as she went past. Patty was reading poetry and did not look up. She had assimilated some ten pages of Shelley since the first bell rang, and as she was not sure which would be taken up in class, she was now swallowing Wordsworth in the same voracious manner. Patty's method in Romantic Poetry was to be very fresh on the first part of the lesson, catch the instructor's eye early in

the hour, make a brilliant recitation, and pass the remainder of the time in gentle meditation.

To-day, however, the unwonted bulk of her correspondence diverted her mind from its immediate duty. She failed to catch the instructor's eye, and the recitation proceeded without her assistance. Priscilla watched her from the back seat as she read the Yale letter with a skeptical frown, and made a grimace over the blue and the yellow; but before she had reached the Hotel A—, Priscilla was paying attention to the recitation again. It was coming her way, and she was anxiously forming an opinion on the essential characteristics of Wordsworth's view of immortality.

Suddenly the room was startled by an audible titter from Patty, who hastily composed her face and assumed a look of vacuous innocence—but too late. She had caught the instructor's eye at last.

"Miss Wyatt, what do you consider the most serious limitations of our author?"

Miss Wyatt blinked once or twice. This question out of its context was not illuminating. It was a part of her philosophy, however, never to flunk flat; she always crawled.

"Well," she began with an air of profound deliberation, "that question might be considered in two ways, either from an artistic or a philosophic standpoint."

This sounded promising, and the instructor smiled encouragingly. "Yes?" she said.

"And yet," continued Patty, after still profounder deliberation,

"I think the same reason will be found to be the ultimate explanation of both."

The instructor might have inquired, "Both what?" but she refrained and merely waited.

Patty thought she had done enough, but she plunged on desperately: "In spite of his really deep philosophy we notice a certain—one might almost say *dash* about his poetry, and a lack of—er—meditation which I should attribute to his immaturity and his a—rather wild life. If he had lived longer I think he might have overcome it in time."

The class looked dazed, and the corners of the instructor's mouth twitched. "It is certainly an interesting point of view, Miss Wyatt, and, as far as I know, entirely original."

As they were crowding out at the end of the recitation Priscilla pounced upon Patty. "What on earth were you saying about Wordsworth's youth and immaturity?" she demanded. "The man lived to be over eighty, and composed a poem with his last gasp."

"Wordsworth? I was talking about Shelley."

"Well, the class wasn't."

"How should I know?" Patty demanded indignantly. "She said 'our author,' and I avoided specific details as long as I could."

"Oh, Patty, Patty! and you said he was wild—the lamblike Wordsworth!"

"What were you laughing at, anyway?" demanded Georgie.

Patty smiled again. "Why, *this*" she said, unfolding the Hotel A— letter. "It's from an Englishman, Mr. Todhunter, some one

my father discovered last summer and invited out to stay with us for a few days. I'd forgotten all about him, and here he writes to know whether and when he may call, and, if so, will it be convenient for him to come to-night. That's a comprehensive sentence, isn't it? His train gets in at half-past five and he'll be out about six."

"He isn't going to take any chances," said Priscilla.

"No," said Patty; "but I don't mind. I invited him to come out to dinner some night, though I'd forgotten it. He's really very nice, and, in spite of what the funny papers say about Englishmen, quite entertaining."

"Intentionally or unintentionally?" inquired Georgie.

"Both," said Patty.

"What's he doing in America?" asked Priscilla. "Not writing a book on the American Girl, I hope."

"Not quite as bad as that," said Patty. "He's corresponding for a newspaper, though." She smiled dreamily. "He's very curious about college."

"Patty, I *hope* you were not guilty of trying to make an Englishman, a guest in your father's house, believe any of your absurd fabrications!"

"Of course not," said Patty; "I was most careful in everything I told him. But," she acknowledged, "he—he gets impressions easily."

"It is easy to get impressions when one is talking with you," observed Georgie.

"He asked me," Patty continued, ignoring this remark, "what we studied in college! But I remembered that he was an alien in a foreign land, and I curbed my natural instincts, and outlined the courses in the catalogue verbatim, and I explained the different methods of instruction, and described the library and laboratories and lecture-rooms."

"Was he impressed?" asked Priscilla.

"Yes," said Patty; "I think you might almost say dazed. He asked me apologetically if we ever did anything to relieve the strain,—had any amusements, you know,—and I said, oh, yes; we had a Browning and an Ibsen club, and we sometimes gave Greek tragedies in the original. He was positively afraid to come near me again, for fear I'd forget and talk to him in Greek instead of English."

In view of the facts, Patty's friends considered this last remark distinctly humorous, for she had flunked her freshman Greek three times, and had been advised by the faculty to take it over sophomore year.

"I hope, since he's a newspaper writer," said Priscilla, "that you'll do something to lighten his impression, or he'll never favor women's colleges in England."

"I hadn't thought of that," said Patty; "perhaps I ought."

They had reached the steps of the dormitory. "Let's not go in," said Georgie; "let's go down to Mrs. Muldoon's and get some chocolate cake."

"Thank you," said Priscilla; "I'm in training."

"Soup, then."

"Can't eat between meals."

"You come, then, Patty."

"Sorry, but I've got to take my white dress down to the laundry and have it pressed."

"Are you going to dress up for him to the extent of evening clothes?"

"Yes," said Patty; "I think I owe it to the American Girl."

"Well," sighed Georgie, "I'm hungry, but I suppose I might as well go in and dress that doll for the College Settlement Association. The show's to-night."

"Mine's done," said Priscilla; "and Patty wouldn't take one. Did you see Bonnie Connaught sitting on the back seat in biology this morning, hemming her doll's petticoat straight through the lecture?"

"Really?" laughed Patty. "It's a good thing Professor Hitchcock's near-sighted."

The College Settlement Association, by way of parenthesis, was in the habit of distributing three hundred dolls among the students every year before Christmas, to be dressed and sent to the settlement in New York. The dolls were supposed to be so well dressed that the East Side mothers could use them as models for the clothing of their own children, though it must be confessed that the tendency among the girls was to strive for effect and not for detail. On the evening before the dolls were to be shipped a doll show was regularly held, at which two cents

admittance was charged (stamps accepted) to pay the expressage.

It was ten minutes past six, and Phillips Hall (such of it as was not late) was dining, when the maid arrived with Mr. Algernon Vivian Todhunter's card. Patty, radiant in a white evening gown, was trying, with much squirming, to fasten it in the middle of the back.

"Oh, Sadie," she called to the maid, "would you mind coming in here and buttoning my dress? I can't reach it from above or below."

"You look just beautiful, Miss Wyatt," said Sadie, admiringly.

Patty laughed. "Do you think I can uphold the honor of the nation?"

"To be sure, miss," said Sadie, politely.

Patty ran down the corridor to the door of the reception-room, and then swept slowly in with what she called an air of continental repose. The room was empty. She glanced about in some surprise, for she knew that the two reception-rooms on the other side of the hall were being used for the doll show. She tiptoed over and peered in through the half-open door. The room was filled with dolls in rows and tiers; every piece of furniture was covered with them; and in a far corner, at the end of a long vista of dolls, appeared Mr. Algernon Vivian Todhunter, gingerly sitting on the edge of a sofa, surrounded by flax-haired baby dolls, and awkwardly holding in his lap the three he had displaced.

Patty drew back behind the door, and spent fully three minutes

in regaining her continental repose; then she entered the room and greeted Mr. Todhunter effusively. He carefully transferred the dolls to his left arm and stood up and shook hands.

"Let me take the little dears," said Patty, kindly; "I'm afraid they're in your way."

Mr. Todhunter murmured something about its being a pleasure and a privilege to hold them.

Patty plumped up their clothes and rearranged them on the sofa with motherly solicitude, while Mr. Todhunter watched her gravely, his national politeness and his reportorial instinct each struggling for the mastery. Finally he began tentatively: "I say, Miss Wyatt, do—er—the young ladies spend much time playing with dolls?"

"No," said Patty, candidly; "I don't think you could say they spend *too* much. I have never heard of but one girl actually neglecting her work for it. You mustn't think that we have as many dolls as this here *every* night," she went on. "It is rather an unusual occurrence. Once a year the girls hold what they call a doll show to see who has dressed her doll the best."

"Ah, I see," said Mr. Todhunter; "a little friendly rivalry."

"Purely friendly," said Patty.

As they started for the dining-room Mr. Todhunter adjusted his monocle and took a parting look at the doll show.

"I'm afraid you think us childish, Mr. Todhunter," said Patty.

"Not at all, Miss Wyatt," he assured her hastily. "I think it quite charming, you know, and so—er—unexpected. I had

always been told that they played somewhat peculiar games at these women's colleges, but I never supposed they did anything so feminine as to play with dolls."

When Patty returned to her room that night, she found Georgie and Priscilla surrounded by grammars and dictionaries, doing German prose. Her appearance was hailed with a cry of indignant protest.

"When *I* have a man," said Priscilla, "I divide him up among my friends."

"*Epecially* when he's a curiosity," added Georgie.

"And we dressed up in grand clothes, and stood in your way coming out of chapel," went on Priscilla, "and you never even looked at us."

"Englishmen are so bashful," apologized Patty; "I didn't want to frighten him."

Priscilla looked at her suspiciously. "Patty, I hope you didn't impose on the poor man's credulity."

"Certainly not!" said Patty, with dignity. "I explained everything he asked me, and was most careful not to exaggerate. But," she added with engaging frankness, "I cannot be responsible for any *impressions* he may have obtained. When an Englishman once gets an idea, you know, it's almost impossible to change it."

IV

A Question of Ethics

PATTY'S class-room methods were the result of a wide experience in the professorial type of mind. By her senior year she had reduced the matter of recitation to a system, and could foretell with unvarying precision the day she would be called on and the question she would be asked. Her tactics varied with the subject and the instructor, and were the result of a penetration and knowledge of human nature that might have accomplished something in a worthier cause.

In chemistry, for example, her instructor was a man who had outlived any early illusions in regard to the superior conscientiousness of girls over boys. He was not by nature a suspicious person, but a long experience in teaching had inculcated an inordinate wariness which was sometimes out of season. He allowed no napping in his classes, and those who did not pay attention suffered. Patty discovered his weakness early in the year, and planned her campaign accordingly. As long as she did not understand the experiment in hand, she would watch him with a face beaming with intelligence; but when she did understand, and wished to recite, she would let her eyes wander to the window with a dreamy, far-away smile, and, being asked a question, would come back to the realities of chemistry with

a start, and, after a moment of ostentatious pondering, make a brilliant recitation. It must be confessed that her moments of abstraction were rare; she was far too often radiantly interested.

In French her tactics were exactly opposite. The instructor, with all the native politeness of his race, called on those only who caught his eye and appeared willing and anxious to recite. This made the matter comparatively simple, but still required considerable finesse. Patty dropped her pen, spilled the pages from her note-book, tied her shoe-string, and even sneezed opportunely in order not to catch his eye at inconvenient moments. The rest of the class, who were not artists, contented themselves with merely lowering their eyes as he looked along the line—a method which in Patty's scornful estimation said as plainly as words, "Please don't call on me; I don't know."

But with Professor Cairnsley, who taught philosophy, it was more difficult to form a working hypothesis. He had grown old in the service of the college, and after thirty years' experience of girl-nature he was still as unsuspectingly trustful as he had been in the beginning. Taking it for granted that his pupils were as interested in the contemplation of philosophic truths as he himself, the professor conducted his recitations without a suspicion of guile, and based his procedure entirely upon the inspiration of the moment. The key to his method had always remained a mystery, and several generations of classes had searched for it in vain. Some averred that he called on every seventh girl; others, that he drew lots. Patty triumphantly

announced early in the course that she had discovered the secret at last—that on Monday he called on the red-haired girls; on Tuesday, those with yellow hair; on Wednesday and Thursday, those with brown; and on Friday, those with black. But this solution, like the others, was found to break down in actual practice; and Patty, for one, discovered that it required all her ingenuity, and even a good deal of studying, to maintain her reputation for brilliancy in Professor Cairnsley's classes. And she cared about maintaining it, for she liked the professor and was one of his favorite pupils. She had known his wife before she entered college, and she often called upon them in their home, and, in short, exemplified the ideal relations between faculty and students.

Owing to the pressure of many interests, Patty's researches into philosophy were not as deep as the intentions of the course, but she had a very good working knowledge, which, in its details, would have astonished Professor Cairnsley could he have got behind the scenes. Though her knowledge was not based strictly on the text-book, her reputation in the class was good, and, as Patty admitted with a sigh, "It's a great strain on the imagination to keep up a reputation in philosophy."

It had been established, indeed, as far back as her sophomore year, when the psychology class was awed into silence by its first introduction to the abstractions of science, and Patty alone had dared to lift her voice. The professor, one morning, had been placidly lecturing along on the subject of sensation, and in

the course of the lecture had remarked: "It is probable that the individual experiences all the primary sensations during the first few months of infancy, and that in after life there is no such thing as a new sensation."

"Professor Cairnsley," Patty piped up, "did you ever shoot the chutes?"

The ice was broken at last, and the class felt at home, even in the somewhat deep waters of philosophy; and Patty, however undeservedly, had gained the credit of having a deeper insight than most into matters psychical.

And so into her senior year, when she entered upon the study of ethics, she carried along an unearned and fragile reputation, built upon subterfuges and likely to crumble at the slightest touch. She had maintained it very creditably up to the Christmas vacation, and had argued upon the ultimate ground of moral obligation and the origin of conscience quite as intelligently as though she had previously read what the text-book had to say on the subject. But when they had commenced the study of specific theologies, based upon definite historical facts, Patty found her imagination of little use, and on several occasions it had been purely good luck that had saved her from exposure. Once the bell had rung at an opportune moment, and twice she had been able to avert a direct answer by leading the discussion into side issues. She realized, however, that fortune would not always favor her, and as the professor usually forgot to call the roll, she formed the nefarious practice of cutting class when she did not have her

lesson.

For a week or so in particular, her pressure of work in other directions (not all of them scholastic) had prevented her from devoting her usual amount of energy to the task of maintaining her philosophy reputation, and she had, without conscience, cut ethics several days in succession, and had failed to comment upon the fact to the professor.

"What did he lecture about in ethics—those recitations I missed?" she inquired of Priscilla, one afternoon.

"Swedenborg."

"Swedenborg," repeated Patty, dreamily. "He got up a new religion, didn't he? Or was it a new system of gymnastics? I've heard about him, but I don't seem to remember any details."

"You'd better make him up; he's important."

"I dare say; but I've lived twenty-one years without knowing about him, and I can wait a month longer. I'm saving up Confucius and the Jesuits for examination-time, and I'll add Swedenborg to the list."

"You'd better not. Professor Cairnsley's fond of him, and is likely to pop a special examination at any moment."

"Not Professor Cairnsley," laughed Patty. "He doesn't want to waste the time. He's going to lecture straight on for two weeks—nice man; I see it in his eye. What I admire in a professor is a good, steady, plodding disposition that doesn't go in for sensational surprises."

"You'll find yourself mistaken some day," warned Priscilla.

"No danger, my dear Cassandra. I know Professor Cairnsley, and Professor Cairnsley thinks he knows me; and we just get along together beautifully. I wish there were more like him," Patty added with a sigh.

Professor Cairnsley began a lecture the next morning which was evidently calculated to extend through the hour, and Patty cast a triumphant glance at Priscilla as she unscrewed the top of her fountain-pen and settled down to work. In the course of the lecture, however, he had occasion to refer to Swedenborg, and, pausing a moment, he casually asked a girl on the front seat for a résumé of Swedenborg's philosophy. She, unfortunately confusing him with Schopenhauer, glibly attributed to him doctrines which would have outraged his soul could he have heard them. It is written that the worm will turn, and the professor's bland smile deserted him as he passed the question to a second girl without much better result. The class in general had evidently been laboring under Patty's delusion that the time had not come in which to learn back notes. Amazed and indignant, he pursued the matter with a persistency and a rancor he seldom showed. He began going straight through the class, growing more and more sarcastic with each recitation.

As she saw him finish with the row in front and begin on her row, Patty knew that she was doomed. She racked her brain for some memory of Swedenborg. He was a name to her and nothing more. He might have been an ancient Greek or a modern American, for all she knew. As Professor Cairnsley came

along the line he was gradually eliciting from the terrified class the superficial points which were more or less common to all philosophers. Patty perceived that her imagination could not help her out, that for once the placid professor was on the war-path, and that Swedenborg, and nothing but Swedenborg, would serve. She cast an agonized glance up at Priscilla, and Priscilla grinned back with "I told you so" written on every feature.

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.