

WELLS CAROLYN

PATTY AT
HOME

Carolyn Wells

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Carolyn Wells

Patty at Home

To My very good friend, Ruth Pilling

CHAPTER I

THE DEBATE

In Mrs. Elliott's library at Vernondale a great discussion was going on. It was an evening in early December, and the room was bright with firelight and electric light, and merry with the laughter and talk of people who were trying to decide a great and momentous question.

For the benefit of those who are not acquainted with Patty Fairfield and her relatives, it may be well to say that Mrs. Elliott was Patty's Aunt Alice, at whose home Patty and her father were now visiting. Of the other members of the Elliott family, Uncle Charley, grandma, Marian, and Frank were present, and these with Mr. Fairfield and Patty were debating a no less important subject than the location of Patty's future home.

"You know, papa," said Patty, "you said that if I wanted to live in Vernondale you'd buy a house here, and I do want to live here,—at least, I am almost sure I do."

"Oh, Patty," said Marian, "why aren't you quite sure? You're president of the club, and the girls are all so fond of you, and you're getting along so well in school. I don't see where else you could want to live."

"I know," said Frank. "Patty wants to live in New York. Her soul yearns for the gay and giddy throng, and the halls of dazzling lights. 'Ah, Patricia, beware! the rapids are below you!' as it says in that thrilling tale in the Third Reader."

"I think papa would rather live in New York," said Patty, looking very undecided.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," exclaimed Frank, "let's debate the question. A regular, honest debate, I mean, and we'll have all the arguments for and against clearly stated and ably discussed. Uncle Fred shall be the judge, and his decision must be final."

"No," said Mr. Fairfield, "we'll have the debate, but Patty must be the judge. She is the one most interested, and I am ready to give her a home wherever she wants it; in Greenland's icy mountains, or India's coral strand, if she chooses."

"You certainly are a disinterested member," said Uncle Charley, laughing, "but that won't do in debate. Here, I'll organise this thing, and for the present we won't consider either Greenland or India. The question, as I understand it, is between Vernondale and New York. Now, to bring this mighty matter properly before the house, I will put it in the form of a resolution, thus:

"RESOLVED, That Miss Patty Fairfield shall take up her permanent abode in New York City."

Patty gave a little cry of dismay, and Marian exclaimed, "Oh, father, that isn't fair!"

"Of course it's fair," said Mr. Elliott, with a twinkle in his eye. "It doesn't really mean she's going, but it's the only way to find out what she is going to do. Now, Fred shall be captain on the affirmative side, and I will take the negative. We will each choose our colleagues. Fred, you may begin."

"All right," said Mr. Fairfield "As a matter of social etiquette, I think it right to compliment my hostess, so I choose Mrs. Elliott on my side."

"Oh, you choose me, father," cried Marian, "do choose me."

"Owing to certain insidious wire-pulling I'm forced to choose Miss Marian Elliott," said Uncle Charley, pinching his daughter's ear.

"If one Mrs. Elliott is a good thing," said Mr. Fairfield, "I am sure two would be better, and so I choose Grandma Elliott to add to my collection of great minds."

"Frank, my son," said Uncle Charley, "don't think for a moment that I am choosing you merely because you are the Last of the Mohicans. Far from it. I have wanted you from the beginning, and I'm proud to impress your noble intellect in my cause."

"Thank you, sir," said Frank, "and if our side can't induce Patty to stay in Vernondale, it won't be for lack of good strong arguments forcibly presented."

"Modest boy!" said his mother, "You seem quite to forget your wise and clever opponents."

In great glee the debaters took their places on either side of the library table, while Patty, being judge, was escorted with much ceremony to a seat at the head. An old parlour-croquet mallet was found for her, with which she rapped on the table after the manner of a grave and dignified chairman.

"The meeting will please come to order," she said, "and the secretary will please read the minutes of the last meeting."

"The secretary regrets to report," said Frank, rising, "that the minutes of the last meeting fell down the well. Although rescued, they were afterward chewed up by the puppy, and are at present somewhat illegible. If the honourable judge will excuse the reading of the minutes, the secretary will be greatly obliged."

"The minutes are excused," said Patty, "and we will proceed at once to more important business. Mr. Frederick Fairfield, we shall be glad to hear from you."

Mr. Fairfield rose and said, "Your honour, ladies, and gentlemen: I would be glad to speak definitely on this burning question, but the truth is, I don't know myself which way I want it to be decided. For, you see, my only desire in the matter is that the wise and honourable judge, whom we see before us, should have a home of such a character and in such a place as best pleases her; but, before she makes her decision, I hope she will allow herself to be thoroughly convinced as to what will please her. And as, by force of circumstance, I am obliged to uphold the New York side of this argument, I will now set forth some of its advantages, feeling sure that my worthy opponents are quite able to uphold the Vernondale side."

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed Frank, but Patty rapped with her mallet and commanded silence.

Then Mr. Fairfield went on:

"For one thing, Patty has always lived in a city, and, like myself, is accustomed to city life. It is more congenial to both of us, and I sometimes fear we should miss certain city privileges which may not be found in a suburban town."

"But we have other things that you can't get in the city," broke in Marian.

"And I am very sure that they will be enthusiastically enumerated when it is your turn to speak," said Mr. Fairfield, smiling.

"The gentleman has the floor," remarked Patty, "the others will please keep their seats. Proceed, Mr. Fairfield."

So Mr. Fairfield proceeded:

"Other advantages, perhaps, will be found in the superior schools which the city is said to contain. I am making no allusion to the school that our honourable judge is at present attending, but I am speaking merely on general principles. And not only schools, but masters of the various arts. I have been led to believe by the assertions of some people, who, however, may be prejudiced, that Miss Fairfield has a voice which requires only training and practise to rival the voice of Adelina Patti, when that lady was Miss Fairfield's age."

"Quite true," said the judge, nodding gravely at the speaker.

"This phenomenal voice, then, might—mind; I say might—be cultivated to better purpose by metropolitan teachers."

"We have a fine singing-master here," exclaimed Frank, but Patty rapped him to silence.

"What's one singing-master among a voice like Miss Fairfield's?" demanded the speaker, "and another thing," he continued, "that ought to affect you Vernondale people very strongly, is the fact that you would have a delightful place to visit in New York City. Now, don't deny it. You know you'd be glad to come and visit Patty and me in our brown-stone mansion, and we would take you around to see all the sights, from Grant's tomb to the Aquarium."

"We've seen those," murmured Frank.

"They're still there," said Mr. Fairfield, "and there will probably be some other and newer entertainments that you haven't yet seen."

"It does sound nice," said Frank.

"And finally," went on Mr. Fairfield, "though I do not wish this argument to have undue weight, it certainly would be more convenient for me to live in the city. I am about to start in business there, and though I could go in and out every day, as the honourable gentleman on the other side of the table does, yet he is accustomed to it, and, as I am not, it seems to me an uninteresting performance. However, I dare say I could get used to a commutation ticket, and I am certainly willing to try. All of which is respectfully submitted," and with a bow the speaker resumed his seat.

"That was a very nice speech," said the judge approvingly, "and now we would be pleased to hear from the captain gentleman on the other side."

Uncle Charley rose.

"Without wishing to be discourteous," he said, "I must say that I think the arguments just set forth are exceedingly flimsy. There can be no question but that Vernondale would be a far better and more appropriate home for the young lady in question than any other spot on the globe. Here we have wide streets, green lawns, fresh air, and bright sunshine; all conducive to that blooming state of health which our honourable judge now, apparently, enjoys. City life would doubtless soon reduce her to a thin, pale, peaked specimen of humanity, unrecognisable by her friends. The rose-colour in her cheeks would turn to ashen grey; her starry eyes would become dim and lustreless. Her robust flesh would dwindle to skin and bone, and probably her hair would all fall out, and she'd have to wear a wig."

Even Patty's mallet was not able to check the burst of laughter caused by the horrible picture which Uncle Charley drew, but after it had subsided, he continued: "As to the wonderful masters and teachers in the city, far be it from me to deny their greatness and power. But the beautiful village of Vernondale is less than an hour from New York; no mosquitoes, no malaria; boating, bathing, and fishing. Miss Fairfield could, therefore, go to New York for her instructions in the various arts and sciences, and return again to her Vernondale home on a local train. Add to this the fact that here she has relatives, friends, and acquaintances, who already know and love her, while, in New York, she would have to acquire a whole new set, probably have to advertise for them. As to the commuting gentleman: before his first ticket was all punched up, he would be ready to vow that the commuter's life is the only ideal existence. Having thus offered unattackable arguments, I deem a decision in our favour a foregone conclusion, and I take pleasure in sitting down."

"A very successful speech," said Patty, smiling at her uncle. "We will now be pleased to hear from the next speaker on the affirmative side. Mrs. Charles Elliott, will you kindly speak what is on your mind?"

"I will," said Mrs. Elliott, with a nod of her head that betokened Fairfield decision of character. "I will say exactly what is on my mind without regard to which side I am on."

"Oh, that isn't fair!" cried Patty. "A debate is a debate, you know, and you must make up opinions for your own side, whether you think them or not."

"Very well," said Aunt Alice, smiling a little, "then it being thoroughly understood that I am not speaking the truth, I will say that I think it better for Patty to live in New York. As her father will be away all day at his business, she will enjoy the loneliness of a big brown-stone city house; she will enjoy the dark rooms and the entire absence of grass and flowers and trees, which she hates anyway; instead of picnics and boating parties, she can go to stiff and formal afternoon teas; and, instead of attending her young people's club here, she can become a member of the Society of Social Economics."

With an air of having accomplished her intention, Aunt Alice sat down amid great cheers and handclappings from the opposite side.

Patty looked a little sober as she began to think the Vernondale home would win; and, though for many reasons she wished it would be so, yet, at the same time, she realised very strongly the attractions of life in New York City.

However, she only said:

"The meeting will please come to order, in order to listen to the opinions of Miss Elliott."

Marian rose with great dignity, and addressed the chair and the ladies and gentlemen with true parliamentary punctiliousness.

"Though personally interested in this matter," she began, "it is not my intention to allow my own wishes or prejudices to blind me to the best interests of our young friend who is now under discussion. Far be it from me to blight her career for the benefit of my own unworthy self, but I will say that if Patty Fairfield goes to live in New York, or anywhere except Vernondale, I think she's just the horriddest, meanest old thing on the face of the earth! Why, I wouldn't *let* her go! I'd lock her in her room, and poke bread and water to her through the keyhole, if she dared to think of such a thing! Go to New York, indeed! A nice time she'd have, hanging on straps in the trolley-cars, and getting run over by automobiles! The whole thing is so perfectly absurd that there's no earthly chance of its ever coming to pass. Why, she *wouldn't* go, she couldn't be *hired* to go; she wouldn't be happy there a minute; but if she *does* go, I'll go, too!"

CHAPTER II

THE DECISION

"Hooray for our side!" cried Frank, as Marian dropped into a chair after her outburst of enthusiasm.

"Oh, I haven't finished yet," said Marian, jumping up again. "I want to remark further that not only is Patty going to live in Vernondale, but she's going to have a house very near this one. I've picked it out," and Marian wagged her head with the air of a mysterious sibyl. "I won't tell you where it is just yet, but it's a lovely house, and big enough to accommodate Uncle Fred and Patty, and a guest or two besides. I've selected the room that I prefer, and I hope you will furnish it in blue."

"The speaker is a bit hasty," said Patty as Marian sat down again; "we can't furnish any rooms before this debate is concluded; and, though we deeply regret it, Miss Elliott will be obliged to wait for her blue room until the other speakers have had their speak."

But Patty smiled at Marian understandingly, and began to have a very attractive mental picture of her cousin's blue room next her own.

"The next speaker," announced the judge, "will be Mrs. Elliott, Senior,—the Dowager Duchess. Your Grace, we would be pleased to hear from you."

"I don't know," said Grandma Elliott, looking rather seriously into the smiling faces before her, "that I am entirely in favour of the country home. I think our Patty would greatly enjoy the city atmosphere. She is a schoolgirl now, but in a year or two she will be a young woman, and one well deserving of the best that can be given to her. I am city-bred myself, and though at my age I prefer the quiet of the country, yet for a young girl I well know the charm of a city life. Of course, we would all regret the loss of our Patty, who has grown to be a part of our daily life, but, nevertheless, were I to vote on this matter, I should unhesitatingly cast my ballot in favour of New York."

"Bravo for grandma!" cried Frank. "Give me a lady who fearlessly speaks her mind even in the face of overwhelming opposition. All the same, I haven't spoken my piece yet, and I believe it is now my turn."

"It is," said Patty, "and we eagerly await your sapient and authoritative remarks."

"Ahem!" said Frank pompously, as he arose. "My remarks shall be brief, but very much to the point. Patty's home must be in Vernondale because we live here. If ever we go to live in New York, or Oshkosh, or Kalamazoo, Patty can pick up her things and go along. Just get that idea firmly fixed in your heads, my friends. Where we live, Patty lives; whither she goeth, we goeth. Therefore, if Patty should go to New York, the Elliotts will take up bag and baggage, sell the farm, and go likewise to New York. Now I'm sure our Patty, being of proper common-sense and sound judgment, wouldn't put the Elliott family to such inconvenience,—for moving is a large and fearsome proposition. Thus we see that as the Mountain insists on following Mahomet whithersoever she goeth, the only decently polite thing for Mahomet to do is to settle in Vernondale. I regret exceedingly that I am forced to express an opinion so diametrically opposed to the advices of Her Grace, the Dowager Duchess, but I'm quite sure she didn't realise what a bother it would be for the Elliotts to move. And now, having convinced you all to my way of thinking, I will leave the case in the hands of our wise and competent judge."

"Wait," said Uncle Charley; "I believe the captains are usually allowed a sort of summing-up speech, are they not?"

"They are in this case, anyway," said Patty. "Mr. Elliott will please go ahead with his summing-up."

"Well," said Uncle Charley, "the sum of the whole matter seems to be that we all want Fred and Patty to live here because we want them to; but, of course, it's only fair that they consult their

own wishes in the matter, and if they conclude that they prefer New York, why,—we'll have another debate, that's all."

Uncle Charley sat down, and Mr. Fairfield rose. "I have listened with great interest to the somewhat flattering remarks of my esteemed fellow members, and have come to the conclusion that, if agreeable to Her Judgeship, a compromise might be effected. It would seem to me that if a decision should be arrived at for the Vernondale home, the Fairfields could manage to reap some few of those mysterious advantages said to be found in city life, by going to New York and staying a few months every winter. This, too, would give them an opportunity to receive visits from the Elliott family, which would, I'm sure, be a pleasure and profit to all concerned. With this suggestion I am quite ready to hear a positive and final decision from Her Honour, the Judge."

"And it won't take her long to make up her mind, either," cried Patty. "I knew you'd fix it somehow, papa; you are the best and wisest man! Solomon wasn't in it with you, nor Solon, nor Socrates, nor anybody! That arrangement is exactly what I choose, and suits me perfectly, I do want to stay in New York sometimes, but I would much rather live in Vernondale; so the judge hereby announces that, on the merits of the case, the question is decided in the negative. The Fairfields will buy a house in Vernondale, and the judge hopes that they will buy it quick."

"Three cheers for Patty and Uncle Fred," cried Frank, and while they were being given with a will, Marian flew to the telephone, and, when the cheers subsided, she was engaged in a conversation of which the debating club heard only one side.

"Is this you, Elsie?"

"What do you think? Patty's going to stay in Vernondale!"

"Yes, indeed, perfectly gorgeous."

"Just this evening; just now."

"I guess I am! I'm so glad I don't know what to do!"

"Oh, yes, of course she'll keep on being president."

"No, they haven't decided yet, but I want them to take the Bigelow house."

"Yes; wouldn't it be fine!"

"Oh, it isn't very late."

"Well, come over early to-morrow morning, then."

"Good-by."

"Elsie Morris is delighted," said Marian, as she hung up the receiver, "and Polly Stevens will just dance jigs of joy when she hears about it. I'd call her up now, only I'm afraid she'd break the telephone trying to express her enthusiasm; she flutters so."

"You can tell her about it to-morrow," said Frank, "and now let's talk about where the house shall be. Would you rather buy or build, Uncle Fred?"

"Perhaps it would be better to rent," said Mr. Fairfield. "Suppose my fickle daughter should change her mind, and after a visit in the city decide that she prefers it for her home."

"I'm not fickle, papa," said Patty, "and it's all arranged all right just as it is; but I don't want a rented house, they won't let you drive tacks in the walls, or anything like that. Let's buy a house, and then, if you turn fickle and want to move away, we can sell it again."

"All right," said Mr. Fairfield obligingly, "what house shall we buy?"

"I know just the one," cried Marian; "guess where it is."

"Would you, by any chance, refer to the Bigelow house?" inquired Frank politely.

"How did you know?" exclaimed Marian. "I only heard to-day that it is for sale, and I wanted to surprise you."

"Well, next time you have a surprise in store for us," said Frank, "don't announce it to Elsie Morris over the telephone."

"Oh, did you hear that?"

"As a rule, sister dear, unless you are the matron of a deaf and dumb asylum, you must expect those present to hear your end of a telephone conversation."

"Of course," said Marian; "I didn't think. But, really, wouldn't the Bigelow house be fine? Only a few blocks away from here, and such a lovely house, with a barn and a conservatory, and a little arbour in the garden."

Patty began to look frightened.

"Goodness, gracious me!" she exclaimed; "I don't believe I realise what I'm coming to. I could take care of the little arbour in the garden; but I wonder if I could manage a house, and a barn, and a conservatory!"

"And go to school every day, besides," said her father, laughing. "I think, my child, that at least until your school days are over, we will engage the services of a responsible housekeeper."

"Oh, papa!" cried Patty, in dismay, "you said I could keep house for you; and Aunt Alice has taught me lots about it; and she'll teach me lots more; and you know I can make good pumpkin pies; and, of course, I can dust and fly 'round; and that's about all there is to housekeeping, anyway."

"Oh, Patty," said Aunt Alice, "my lessons must have fallen on stony ground if you think that's all there is to housekeeping."

"That's merely a figure of speech, Aunt Alice," replied Patty. "You well know I am a thoroughly capable and experienced housekeeper; honest, steady, good-tempered, and with a fine reference from my last place."

"You're certainly a clever little housekeeper for your age," said her aunt, "but I'm not sure you could keep house successfully, and go to school, and practice your music, and attend to your club all at the same time."

"But I wouldn't do them all at the same time, Aunt Alice. I'd have a time for everything, and everything in its place. I would go to school, and practise, and housekeep, and club; all in their proper proportions—" Here Patty glanced at her father. "You see, if I had the proportions right, all would go well."

"Well, perhaps," said Mr. Fairfield, "if we had a competent cook and a tidy little waitress, we could get along without a professional housekeeper. I admit I had hoped to have Patty keep house for me and preside at my table, and at any rate, it would do no harm to try it as an experiment; then, if it failed, we could make some other arrangement."

"I guess I do want to sit at the head of our table, papa," said Patty; "I'd just like to see a housekeeper there! A prim, sour-faced old lady with a black silk dress and dangling ear-rings! No, I thank you. If I have my way I will keep that house myself, and when I get into any trouble, I will fly to Aunt Alice for rest and refreshment."

"We'll all help," said Marian; "I'll make lovely sofa-pillows for you, and I'm sure grandma will knit you an afghan."

"That isn't much towards housekeeping," said Frank. "I'll come over next summer and swing your hammock for you, and put up your tennis-net."

"And meantime," said Uncle Charley, "until the house is bought and furnished, the Fairfield family will be the welcome guests of the Elliotts. It's almost the middle of December now, and I don't think, Miss Patty Fairfield, that you'll get your home settled in time to make a visit in New York *this* winter; and now, you rattle-pated youngsters, run to bed, while I discuss some plans sensibly with my brother-in-law and fellow townsman."

CHAPTER III

THE TEA CLUB

"Well I should think you'd better stay in Vernondale, Patty Fairfield, if you know what's good for yourself! Why, if you had attempted to leave this town, we would have mobbed you with tar and feathers, or whatever those dreadful things are that they do to the most awful criminals."

"Oh, if I had gone, Polly, I should have taken this club with me, of course. I'm so used to it now, I'm sure I couldn't live a day, and know that we should meet no more, as the Arab remarked to his beautiful horse."

"It would be rather fun to be transported bodily to New York as a club, but I'd want to be transported home again after the meeting," said Helen Preston.

"Why shouldn't we do that?" cried Florence Douglass. "It would be lots of fun for the whole club to go to New York some day together."

"I'm so glad Patty is going to stay with us, I don't care what we do," said Ethel Holmes, who was drawing pictures on Patty's white shirt-waist cuffs as a mark of affection.

"I'm glad, too," said Patty; "and, Ethel, your kittens are perfectly lovely, but this is my last clean shirt-waist, and those pencil-marks are awfully hard to wash out."

"I don't mean them to be washed out," said Ethel, calmly going on with her art work; "they're not wash drawings, they're permanent decorations for your cuffs, and are offered as a token of deep regard and esteem."

The Tea Club was holding a Saturday afternoon meeting at Polly Stevens's house, and the conversation, as yet, had not strayed far from the all-engrossing subject of Patty's future plans.

The Tea Club had begun its existence with lofty and noble aims in a literary direction, to be supplemented and assisted by an occasional social cup of tea. But if you have had any experience with merry, healthy young girls of about sixteen, you will not be surprised to learn that the literary element had softly and suddenly vanished away, much after the manner of a Boojum. Then, somehow, the social interest grew stronger, and the tea element held its own, and the result was a most satisfactory club, if not an instructive one.

"But," as Polly Stevens had said, "we are instructed all day long in school, and a good deal out of school, too, for that matter; and what we need most is absolutely foolish recreation; the foolisher the better."

And so the Saturday afternoon meetings had developed into merely merry frolics, with a cup of tea, which was often a figure of speech for chocolate or lemonade, at the close.

There were no rules, and the girls took pleasure in calling themselves unruly members. There were no dues, and consequently no occasion for a secretary or treasures. Patty continued to be called the president, but the title meant nothing more than the fact that she was really a chief favourite among the girls. No one was bound, or even expected to attend the meetings unless she chose; but, as a rule, a large majority of the club was present.

And so to-day, in the library at Polly Stevens's house, nine members of the Tea Club were chattering like nine large and enthusiastic magpies.

"Now we can go on with the entertainment," said Lillian Desmond, as she sat on the arm of Patty's chair, curling wisps of the presidential hair over her fingers. "If Patty had gone away, I should have resigned my part in the show and gone into a convent. Where are you going to live, Patty?"

"I don't know, I am sure; we haven't selected a house yet; and if we don't find one we like, papa may build one, though I believe Marian has one all picked out for us."

"Yes, I have," said Marian. "It's the Bigelow house on our street. I do want to keep Patty near us."

"The Bigelow house? Why, that's too large for two people. Patty and Mr. Fairfield would get lost in it. Now, I know a much nicer one. There's a little house next-door to us, a lovely, little cottage that would suit you a lot better. Tell your father about it, Patty. It's for sale or rent, and it's just the dearest place."

"Why, Laura Russell," cried Marian, "that little snip of a house! It wouldn't hold Patty, let alone Uncle Fred. You only proposed it because you want Patty to live next-door to you."

"Yes; that's it," said Laura, quite unabashed; "I know it's too little, but you could add ells and bay-windows and wings and things, and then it would be big enough."

"Would it hold the Tea Club?" said Patty. "I must have room for them, you know."

"Oh, won't it be fun to have the Tea Club at Patty's house!" cried Elsie. "I hadn't thought of that."

"What's a home without a Tea Club?" said Patty. "I shall select the house with an eye single to the glory and comfort of you girls."

"Then I know of a lovely house," said Christine Converse. "It's awfully big, and it's pretty old, but I guess it could be fixed up. I mean the old Warner place."

"Good gracious!" cried Ethel; "way out there! and it's nothing but a tumble-down old barn, anyhow."

"Oh, I think it's lovely; and it's Colonial, or Revolutionary, or something historic; and they're going to put the trolley out there this spring,—my father said so."

"It is a nice old house," said Patty; "and it could be made awfully pretty and quaint. I can see it, now, in my mind's eye, with dimity curtains at the windows, and roses growing over the porch."

"I hope you will never see those dimity curtains anywhere but in your mind's eye," said Marian. "It's a heathenish old place, and, anyway, it's too far away from our house."

"Papa says I can have a pony and cart," said Patty; "and I could drive over every day."

"A pony and cart!" exclaimed Helen Preston. "Won't that be perfectly lovely! I've always wanted one of my own. And shall you have man-servants, and maid-servants? Oh, Patty, you never could run a big establishment like that. You'll have to have a housekeeper."

"I'm going to try it," said Patty, laughing. "It will be an experiment, and, of course, I shall make lots of blunders at first; but I think it's a pity if a girl nearly sixteen years old can't keep house for her own father."

"So do I," said Laura. "And, anyhow, if you get into any dilemmas we'll all come over and help you out."

The girls laughed at this; for Laura Russell was a giddy little feather-head, and couldn't have kept house for ten minutes to save her life.

"Much good it would do Patty to have the Tea Club help her keep house," said Florence Douglass. "But we'll all make her lovely things to go to housekeeping with. I shall be real sensible, and make her sweeping-caps and ironing-holders."

"Oh, I can beat that for sensibleness," cried Ethel Holmes. "I read about it the other day, and it's a broom-bag. I haven't an idea what it's for; but I'll find out, and I'll make one."

"One's no good," said Marian sagely. "Make her a dozen while you're about it."

"Oh, do they come by dozens?" said Ethel, in an awestruck voice. "Well, I guess I won't make them then. I'll make her something pretty. A pincushion all over lace and pin ribbons, or something like that."

"That will be lovely," said Laura. "I shall embroider her a tablecloth."

"You'll never finish it," said Patty, who well knew how soon Laura's bursts of enthusiasm spent themselves. "You'd better decide on a doily. Better a doily done than a tablecloth but begun."

"Oh, I'll tell you-what we can do, girls," said Polly Stevens. "Let's make Patty a tea-cloth, and we'll each write our name on it, and then embroider it, you know."

"Lovely!" cried Christine. "Just the thing. Who'll hemstitch it? I won't. I'll embroider my name all right, but I hate to hemstitch."

"I'll hemstitch it," said Elsie Morris. "I do beautiful hemstitching."

"So do I," said Helen Preston. "Let me do half."

"Ethel and I hemstitch like birds," said Lillian Desmond. "Let's each do a side,—there'll be four sides, I suppose."

"Well, the tea-cloth seems in a fair way to get hemstitched," said Patty. "You can put a double row around it, if you like, and I'll be awfully glad to have it. I'll use it the first Saturday afternoon after I get settled."

"I wish I knew where you're going to live," said Ethel. "I'd like to have a correct mental picture of that first Saturday afternoon."

"It's a beautiful day for walking," said Polly Stevens. "Let's all go out, and take a look at the Warner place. Something tells me that you'll decide to live there."

"I hope something else will tell you differently, soon," said Marian, "for I'll never give my consent to that arrangement. However, I'd just as lieve walk out there, if only to convince you what a forlorn old place it is."

"Come on; let's go, then. We can be back in an hour, and have tea afterwards. I'll get the key from Mr. Martin, as we go by."

Like a bombarding army the Tea Club stormed the old Warner house, and once inside its Colonial portal, they made the old walls ring with their laughter. The wide hall was dark and gloomy until Elsie Morris flung open the door at the other end, and let in the December sunshine.

"Seek no farther," she cried dramatically. "We have crossed the Rubicon and found the Golden Fleece! This is the place of all others for our Tea Club meeting, and it doesn't matter what the rest of the house may be like. Patty, you will kindly consider the matter settled."

"I'll consider anything you like," said Patty; "and before breakfast, too, if you'll only hurry up and get out of this damp, musty old place. I'm shivering myself to pieces."

"Oh, it isn't cold," said Laura Russell; "and while we're here, let's go through the house."

"Yes," said Marian; "examine it carefully, lest some of its numerous advantages should escape your notice. Observe the hardwood floors, the magnificent mahogany stair-rail, and the lofty ceilings!"

The old floors were creaky, worm-eaten, and dusty; the stair-rail was in a most dilapidated condition, and the ceilings were low and smoky; so Marian scored her points.

"But it is antique," said Ethel Holmes, with the air of an auctioneer. "Ah, ladies, what would you have? It is a fine specimen of the Colonial Empire period, picked out here and there with Queen Anne. The mantels, ah,—the mantels are dreams in marble."

"Nightmares in painted wood, you mean," said Lillian.

"But so roomy and expansive," went on Ethel. "And the wall-papers! Note the fine stage of complete dilapidation left by the moving finger of Time."

"The wall-papers are all right," said Patty. "They look as if they'd peel off easily. Come on upstairs."

The chambers were large, low, and rambling; and the house, in its best days, must have been an interesting specimen of its type. But after a short investigation, Patty was as firmly convinced as Marian that its charms could not offset its drawbacks.

"I've seen enough of this moated grange," cried Patty. "Come on, girls, we're going back to tea, right, straight, smack off."

"There's no pleasing some folks," grumbled Ethel. "Here's an ancestral pile only waiting for somebody to ancestralise it. You could make it one of the Historic Homes of Vernondale, and you won't even consider it for a minute."

"I'll consider it for a minute," said Patty, "if that will do you any good, but not a bit longer; and as the minute is nearly up, I move we start."

CHAPTER IV

BOXLEY HALL

After consultation with various real estate agents, and after due consideration of the desirable houses they had to offer, Mr. Fairfield came to the conclusion that the Bigelow house, which Marian had suggested, was perhaps the most attractive of any.

And so, one afternoon, a party of very interested people went over to look at it.

The procession was headed by Patty and Marian, followed by Mr. Fairfield and Aunt Alice, while Frank and his father brought up the rear. But as they were going out of the Elliotts' front gate, Laura Russell came flying across the street.

"Where are all you people going?" she cried. "I know you're going to look at a house. Which one?"

"The Bigelow house," said Marian, "and I'm almost sure Uncle Fred will decide to take it. Come on with us; we're going all through it."

"No," said Laura, looking disappointed, "I don't want to go; and I don't want the Fairfields to live in that house anyway. If they would only look at that little cottage next-door to us, I know they'd like it ever so much better. Oh, please, Mr. Fairfield, won't you come over and look at it now? It's so pretty and cunning, and it has the loveliest garden and chicken-coop and everything."

"I don't want a chicken-coop," said Patty, laughing; "I've no chickens, and I don't want any."

"Our chickens are over there most of the time," said Laura.

"Then, of course, we ought to have a coop to keep our neighbours' chickens in," said Mr. Fairfield; "and if this cottage is as delightful as Miss Russell makes it out, I think it's our duty at least to go and look at it. If the rest of you are willing, suppose we go over there first, and then if we *should* decide not to take it, we'll have time to investigate the Bigelow afterward".

Marian looked so woe-begone that Patty laughed.

"Cheer up, girl," she said; "there isn't one chance in a million of our taking that doll's house, but Laura will never give us a minute's peace until we go and look at it; so we may as well go now, and get it over."

"All right," said Marian; and Patty, with her two girl friends on either side of her, started in the direction of the cottage.

But when they reached it, Mr. Fairfield exclaimed in amazement. "That little house?" he said. "Oh, I see; that's the chicken-coop you spoke of. Well, where is the house?"

"This is the house," said Laura; "but, somehow, it does look smaller than usual; still, it's a great deal bigger inside."

"No doubt," said Frank. "I've often noticed that the inside of a house is much larger than the outside. Of course, we can't all go in at once, but I'm willing to wait my turn. Who will go first?"

"Very well, you may stay outside," said Laura. "I think the rest of us can all squeeze in at once, if we try."

But Frank followed the rest of the party, and, passing through the narrow hall, they entered the tiny parlour.

"I never was in such a crowded room," said Marian. "I can scarcely get my breath. I had no idea there were so many of us."

"Well, you're not going to live here," said Laura. "There's room enough for just Patty and her father."

"There is, if we each take a room to ourself," said Mr. Fairfield. "You may have this parlour, my daughter, and I'll take the library. Where is the library, Miss Russell?"

"I think it has just stepped out," said Frank; "at any rate, it isn't on this floor; there's only this room, and the dining-room, and a kitchen cupboard."

"Very likely the library is on the third floor," said Marian; "that would be convenient."

"There isn't any third floor," explained Laura. "This is what they call a story-and-a-half house."

"It would have to be expanded into a serial story, then, before it would do for us," said Mr. Fairfield. "We may not be such big people, but Patty and I have a pretty large estimate of ourselves, and I am sure we never could live in such a short-story-and-a-half as this seems to be."

"Indeed, we couldn't, papa," said Patty. "Just look at this dining-room. I'm sure it's only big enough for one. We would have to have our meals alternately; you could have breakfast, and I would have dinner one day, and the next day we'd reverse the order."

"Come, look at the kitchen, Patty," called out Frank; "or at least stick your head in; there isn't room for all of you. See the stationary tubs. Two of them, you see; each just the size of a good comfortable coffee-cup."

"Just exactly," said Patty, laughing; "why, I never saw such a house. Laura Russell, what were you thinking of?"

"Oh, of course, you could add to it," said Laura. "You could build on as many more rooms as you wanted, and you could run it up another story and a half, and that would make three stories; and I do want you to live near me."

"We're sorry not to live near you, Miss Laura," said Mr. Fairfield; "but I can't see my way clear to do it unless you would move into this bandbox, and let us have your roomy and comfortable mansion next door."

"Oh, there wouldn't be room for our family here," said Laura.

"But you could build on a whole lot of rooms," said Frank, "and add enough stories to make it a sky-scraper; and put in an elevator, and it would be perfectly lovely."

Laura laughed with the rest, and then, at Mrs. Elliott's suggestion, they all started back to the Bigelow house.

"Now, this is something like," said Marian, as they went in at the gate and up the broad front walk.

"Like what?" said Frank.

"Like a home for the Fairfields. What shall you call it—Fairfield Hall, Fairfield Place, or what?"

"I don't know," cried Patty, dashing up the veranda steps. "But isn't it a dear house! I feel at home here already. This big piazza will be lovely in warm weather. There's room for hammocks, and big chairs, and little tables, and everything."

Inside, the house proved very attractive. The large square hall opened into a parlour on one side and a library on the other. Back of the library was a little conservatory, and beyond that a large, light dining-room with an open fireplace.

"Here's a kitchen worth having," said Aunt Alice, who was investigating ahead of the rest; "and such convenient pantries and cupboards."

"And this back veranda is great," said Frank, opening the door from a little hall.

"Oh, yes," said Patty; "see the dead vines. In the summer it must have honeysuckles all over it. And there's the little arbour at the foot of the garden. I'm going down to see it."

Marian started to follow her, but Laura called her back to show her some new attraction, and Patty ran alone down the veranda steps, and through the box-bordered paths to the little rustic arbour.

"Goodness!" she exclaimed, as she reached it. "Who in the world are you?"

For inside the arbour sat a strange-looking girl of about Patty's own age. She was a tall, thin child, with a pale face, large black eyes, and straight black hair, which hung in wisps about her ears.

"I'm Pansy," she said, clasping her hands in front of her, and looking straight into Patty's face.

"You're Pansy, are you?" said Patty, looking puzzled. "And what are you doing here, Pansy?"

"Well, miss, you see it's this way. I want to go out to service; and when I heard you was going to have a house of your own, I thought maybe you'd take me to work for you."

"Oh, you did! Well, why didn't you come and apply to me, then, in proper fashion, and not sit out here waiting for me to come to you? Suppose I hadn't come?"

"I was sure you'd come, miss. Everybody who looks at this house comes out to look at the harbour; but there hasn't been anybody before that I wanted to work for. Please take me, miss; I'll be faithful and true."

"What can you do?" asked Patty, half laughing, and half pitying the strange-looking girl. "Can you cook?"

"No, ma'am, I can't cook; but I might learn it. But I didn't mean that. I thought you'd have a cook, and you'd take me for a table girl, you know; and to tidy up after you."

"I do want a waitress; but have you had any experience?"

"No, ma'am," said the girl very earnestly, "I haven't, but I'm just sure I could learn. If you just tell me a thing once, you needn't ever tell it to me again. That's something, isn't it?"

"Indeed it is," said Patty, remembering a certain careless waitress at Mrs. Elliott's. "Have you any references?"

"No," said the girl, smiling; "you see, I've never lived anywhere except home, and I suppose mother's reference wouldn't count."

"It would with me," said Patty decidedly. "I think your mother ought to know more about you than anybody else. What would she say if I asked her?"

"She'd say I was careless and heedless and thoughtless, and didn't know anything," replied the girl cheerfully; "and I am that way at home, but I wouldn't be if I worked for you, because I want to be a waitress, and a good one; and you'd see how quick I'd learn. Oh, do take me, miss. You'll never be sorry, and that's sure!"

This statement was accompanied by such decided gestures of head and hands that Patty was very nearly convinced to the contrary, but she only said, "I'm sorry, Pansy,—you said your name was Pansy, didn't you?"

"Yes, miss,—Pansy Potts."

"What an extraordinary name!"

"Is it, miss? Well, you see, my father's name was Potts; and mother named me Pansy, because she's so fond of the flower. You don't think the name will interfere with my being a waitress, do you?"

"Not so far as I'm concerned," said Patty, laughing; "but, you see, I shall be a very inexperienced housekeeper, and if I have an inexperienced waitress also, I don't know what might happen."

"Why, now, miss; it seems to me that that would work out just right. You're a young housekeeper, but I expect you know just about what a waitress ought to do, and you could teach me; and I know a lot about housekeeping, and I could teach you."

The sincerity in Pansy's voice and manner impressed Patty, and she looked at her closely, as she said:

"It does seem good proportion."

"It is," said Pansy; "and you've no idea how quickly I can learn."

"Can you?" said Patty. "Well, then, learn first to call me Miss Patty. It would suit me much better than to hear you say 'miss' so often."

"Yes, Miss Patty."

"And don't wring your hands in that absurd fashion, and don't stand first on one foot and then on the other, as if you were scared out of your wits."

"No, Miss Patty."

Pansy ceased shuffling, dropped her hands naturally to her sides, and stood in the quiet, respectful attitude that Patty had unconsciously assumed while speaking.

Delighted at this quick-witted mimicry, Patty exclaimed:

"I believe you will do. I believe you are just the one; but I can't decide positively, now. You go home, Pansy, and come to-morrow afternoon to see me at Mrs. Elliott's. Do you know where I live?"

"Yes, Miss Patty," and, with a respectful little bob of her head, Pansy Potts disappeared, and Patty ran back to the house.

"Well, chickadee," said Mr. Fairfield, "I have about decided that you and I can make ourselves comfortable within these four walls, and, if it suits your ladyship, I think we'll consider that we have taken the house."

"It does suit me," said Patty. "I'm perfectly satisfied; and *I* have taken a house-maid."

"Where did you get her?" exclaimed Frank. "Do they grow on trees in the garden? I saw you out in the arbour with one."

"Yes," said Patty; "I picked her off a tree. She isn't quite ripe, but she's not so very green; and I think she'll do. Never mind about her now. I can't decide until I've had a talk with Aunt Alice. I'm so glad you decided on this house, papa. Oh, isn't it lovely to have a home! It looks rather bare, to be sure, but, be it ever so empty, there's no place like home. Now, what shall we name it? I do like a nice name for a place."

"It has so many of those little boxwood Hedges," said Aunt Alice, looking out of the window, "that you might call it The Boxwood House."

"Oh, don't call it a wood-house," said Uncle Charley.

"Call it the wood-box, and be done with it," Frank.

"I like 'Hall,'" said Patty. "How is Boxwood Hall?"

"Sounds like Locksley Hall," said Marian.

"More like Boxley Hall," said Frank.

"Boxley Hall!" cried Patty. "That's just the thing! I like that."

"Rather a pretentious name to live up to," said Mr. Fairfield.

"Never mind," said Patty. "With Pansy Potts for a waitress, we can live up to any name."

And so Patty's new home was chosen, and its name was Boxley Hall.

CHAPTER V

SHOPPING

As Boxley Hall was a sort of experiment, Mr. Fairfield concluded to rent the place for a year, with the privilege of buying.

By this time Patty was sure that she wished to remain in Vernondale all her life; but her father said that women, even very young ones, were fickle in their tastes, and he thought it wiser to be on the safe side.

"And it doesn't matter," as Patty said to Marian; "for, when the year is up, papa will just buy the house, and then it will be all right."

Having found a home, the next thing was to furnish it; and about this Mr.

Fairfield was very decided and methodical.

"To-morrow," he said, as they were talking it over at the Elliotts' one evening, "to-morrow I shall take Patty to New York to select the most important pieces of furniture. We shall go alone, because it is a very special occasion, and we can't allow ourselves to be hampered by outside advices. Another day we shall go to buy prosaic things like tablecloths and carpet-sweepers; and then, as we know little about such things, we shall be glad to take with us some experienced advisers."

And so the next day Patty and her father started for the city to buy furniture for Boxley Hall.

"You see, Patty," said her father after they were seated in the train, "there is a certain proportion to be observed in furnishing a house, about which, I imagine, you know very little."

"Very little, indeed," returned Patty; "but, then, how should I know such things when I've never furnished a house?"

"I understand that," said Mr. Fairfield; "and so, with my advantages of age and experience, and your own natural good taste, I think we shall accomplish this thing successfully. Now, first, as to what we have on hand."

"Why, we haven't anything on hand," said Patty; "at least, I have a few pictures and books, and the afghan grandma's knitting for me; but that's all."

"You reckon without your host," said her father, smiling. "I possess some few objects of value, and during the past year I have added to my collection in anticipation of the time when we should have our own home."

"Oh, papa!" cried Patty; "have you a whole lot of new furniture that I don't know about?"

"Yes," said Mr. Fairfield; "except, that, instead of being new, it is mostly old. I had opportunities in the South to pick up bits of fine old mahogany, and I have a number of really good pieces that will help to make Boxley Hall attractive."

"What are they, papa? Tell me all about them. I can't wait another minute!"

"To begin with, child, I have several heirlooms; the old sideboard that was your grandfather Fairfield's, and several old bureaus and tables that came from the Fairfield estate. Then I have, also, two or three beautiful book-cases, and an old desk for our library; and to-day we will hunt up some sort of a big roomy table that will do to go with them."

"Let's make the library the nicest room in the house, papa."

"It will make itself that, if you give it half a chance, though we'll do all we can to help. But I'm so prosaic I would like to have special attention paid to the comforts of the dining-room; and as to your own bedroom, Patty, I want you to see to it that it fulfills exactly your ideal of what a girl's room ought to be."

"Oh, I know just how I want that; almost exactly like my room at Aunt Alice's, but with a few more of the sort of things I had in my room at Aunt Isabel's. I do like pretty things, papa."

"That's right, my child, I'm glad you do; and I think your idea of pretty things is not merely a taste for highfalutin gimcracks."

"No, I don't think it is," said Patty slowly; "but, all the same, you'd better keep pretty close to me when I pick out the traps for my room. Do you know, papa, I think Aunt Isabel wants to help us furnish our house. She wrote that she would meet us in New York some time."

"That's kind of her," said Mr. Fairfield; "but, do *you* know, it just seems to me that we'll be able to manage it by ourselves. Our house is not of the era of Queen Isabella, but of the Princess Patricia."

"That sounds like Aunt Isabel. They always called me Patricia there. Don't you think, papa, now that I'm getting so grown up, I ought to be called Patricia? Patty is such a baby name."

"Patty is good enough for me," said Mr. Fairfield. "If you want to be called Patricia, you must get somebody else to do it. I dare say you could hire somebody for a small sum per week to call you Patricia for a given number of times every day."

"Now, you're making fun of me, papa; but I do want to grow up dignified, and not be a silly schoolgirl all my life."

"Take care of your common sense, and your dignity will take care of itself."

After they crossed the ferry, and reached the New York side, Mr. Fairfield took a cab, and they made a round of the various shops, buying such beautiful things that Patty grew fairly ecstatic with delight.

"I do think you're wonderful, papa," she exclaimed, after they had selected the dining-room furnishings. "You know exactly what you want, and when you describe it, it seems to be the only possible thing that anybody could want for that particular place."

"That is a result of decision of character, my child. It is a Fairfield trait, and I hope you possess it; though I cannot say I have seen any marked development of it, as yet. But you must have noticed it in your Aunt Alice."

"Yes, I have," said Patty; "she is so decided that, with all her sweetness, I have sometimes been tempted to call her stubborn."

"Stubbornness and decision of character are very closely allied; but now, we're going to select the furniture for your own bedroom, and if you have any decision of character, you will have ample opportunity to exercise it."

"Oh, I'll have plenty of decision of character when it comes to that," said Patty; "you will find me a true Fairfield."

Aided by her father's judgment and advice, Patty selected the furnishings for her own room. She had chosen green as the predominant colour, and the couch and easy-chairs were upholstered in a lovely design of green and white. The rug was green and white, and for the brass bedstead with its white fittings, a down comfortable with a pale green cover was found. The dainty dressing-table was of bird's-eye maple; and for this Mr. Fairfield ordered a bewildering array of fittings, all in ivory, with Patty's monogram on them.

"And I want a little book-case, papa," she said; "a little one, you know, just for my favouritest books; for, of course, the most of my books will be down in the library."

So a dear little book-case was bought, also of bird's-eye maple, and a pretty little work-table, with a low chair to match.

"That's very nice," said Patty, with an air of satisfaction, "for, though I hate to sew, yet sometimes it must be done; and with that little work-table, I think I could sew even in an Indian wigwam!"

Patty hadn't much to say regarding the furniture of her father's bedroom, for Mr. Fairfield attended to that himself, and selected the things with such rapidity and certainty that it was all done almost before Patty knew it.

"Now," said Mr. Fairfield, "there are two guest-chambers to be furnished; the one you call Marian's room, and the other for the general stranger within our gates."

Marian's room was done up in blue, as she had requested, and the other guest-room was furnished in yellow.

It was great fun to pick out the furniture, rugs, and curtains for these rooms; and Patty tried very hard to select such things as her father would approve of, for she dearly loved to have him commend her taste and judgment.

As they were sitting at luncheon, Mr. Fairfield said: "This afternoon, I think, we will devote to pictures. I'm not sure we will buy any, but we will look at them, and I will learn what is your taste in art, and you will leant what is mine."

"I haven't any," said Patty cheerfully. "I don't know anything about art and never did."

"You still have some time, I hope, in which to learn."

"I've time enough, but I don't believe I could learn. The only pictures I like are pretty ones."

"You *are* hopeless, and that's a fact," said Mr. Fairfield. "Of all discouraging people, the worst are those who like pretty pictures!"

"But I'm sure I can learn," said Patty, "if you will teach me."

"You are more flattering than convincing," said Mr. Fairfield, "but I will try."

And so after luncheon they visited several picture shops, and Mr. Fairfield imported to his daughter what was at least a foundation for an education in art.

Back in Vernondale, Patty confided to Marian that she had had a perfectly lovely time all the morning, but the afternoon wasn't so much fun. "In fact," she said, "it was very much like that little book we had to study in school called 'How to Judge a Picture.'"

The following Saturday another shopping tour was undertaken. This time Aunt Alice and Marian accompanied the Fairfields, and there was more fun and less responsibility for Patty.

Her father insisted upon her undivided attention while Mrs. Elliott selected table-linen, bed-linen, towels, and other household fittings; but, as these things were chosen with Fairfield promptness and decision, Patty had nothing to do but admire and acquiesce.

"And now," she remarked, after they had chosen two sets of china and a quantity of glass for the dining-room; "now, if you please, we will buy me some tea-things to entertain the Tea Club."

"We will, indeed," said Mr. Fairfield, and both he and Aunt Alice entered into the selection of the tea-table fittings with as much zest as they had shown in the other china.

Dainty Dresden cups were found, lovely plates, and a tea-pot, and cracker-jar, which made Marian and Patty fairly shriek with delight.

A three-storied wicker tea-table was found, to hold these treasures, and Mr. Fairfield added the most fascinating little silver tea-caddy and tea-ball and strainer.

"Oh," exclaimed Marian, made quite breathless by the glory of it all, "the Tea Club will never want to meet anywhere except at your house, Patty."

"They'll have to," said Patty. "I don't propose to have them every time."

"Well, you'll have to have them every other time, anyway," said Marian.

After the fun of picking out the tea-things, it was hard to come down to the plainer claims of the kitchen, but Aunt Alice grew so interested in the selection of granite saucepans and patent coffee-mills that Patty, too, became enthusiastic.

"And we must get a rolling-pin," she cried, "for I shall make pumpkin pies every day. Oh, and I want a farina-kettle and a colander, and a *bain-marie*, and a larding-needle, and a syllabub-churn."

"Why, Patty, child!" exclaimed her father; "what are all those things for? Are you going to have a French *chef*?"

"No, papa, but I expect to do a great deal of fancy cooking myself."

"Oh, you do! Well, then, buy all the contraptions that are necessary, but don't omit the plain gridirons and frying-pans."

Then Aunt Alice and Patty put their heads together in a most sensible fashion, and ordered a kitchen outfit that would have delighted the heart of any well-organised housekeeper. Not only kitchen

utensils, but laundry fittings, and household furnishings generally; including patent labour-saving devices, and newly invented contrivances which were supposed to be of great aid to any housewife.

"If I can only live up to it all," sighed Patty, as she looked at the enormous collection of iron, tin, wood, and granite.

"Or down to it," said Marian.

CHAPTER VI

SERVANTS

"I did think," said Patty, in a disgusted tone, "that we could get settled in the house in time to eat our Christmas dinner there, but it doesn't look a bit like it. I was over there this afternoon, and such a hopeless-looking mess of papering and painting and plumbing I never saw in my life. I don't believe it will *ever* be done!"

"I don't either," said Marian; "those men work as slow as mud-turtles."

The conversation was taking place at the Elliotts' dinner-table, and Uncle Charley looked up from his carving to say:

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good, and the slower the mud-turtles are, the longer we shall have our guests with us. For my part, I shall be very sorry to see pretty Patty go out of this house."

Patty smiled gaily at her uncle, for they were great friends, and said:

"Then I shall expect you to visit me very often in my new home,—that is, if I ever get there."

"I can't see our way clear to a Christmas dinner in Boxley Hall," said Mr. Fairfield; "but I think I can promise you, chick, that you can invite your revered uncle and his family to dine with you there on New Year's day."

There were general exclamations of delight at this from all except Patty, who looked a little bewildered.

"What's the matter, Patsie?" said her uncle. "Don't you want to entertain your admiring relatives?"

"Yes," said Patty, "of course I do; but it scares me to death to think of it! How can I have a dinner party, when I don't know anything about anything?"

"Aunt Alice will tell you something about something," said her father; "and I'll tell you the rest about the rest."

"Oh, I know it will be all right," said Patty, quickly regaining confidence, as she looked at her father. "If papa says the house will be ready, I know it will be, and if he says we'll have a dinner party on New Year's day, I know we will; and so I now invite you all, and I expect you all to accept; and I hope Aunt Alice will come early."

"I shall come the night before," said Marian, "so as to be sure to be there in time."

"I'm not sure that any of us will be there the night before," said Mr. Fairfield, laughing. "I've guaranteed the house for the dinner, but I didn't say we would be living there at the time."

"That's a good idea," said Aunt Alice; "let Patty entertain her first company there, and then come back here for the reaction."

"Well, we'll see," said Patty; "but I'd like to go there the first day of January, and stay there."

By some unknown methods, Mr. Fairfield managed to stir up the mud-turtle workmen to greater activity, and the work went rapidly on. The wall-papers seemed to get themselves into place, and the floors took on a beautiful polish; bustling men came out from the city and put up window-shades, and curtains, and draperies; and, under Mr. Fairfield's supervision, laid rugs and hung pictures.

The ladies of the Elliott household organised themselves into a most active sewing-society.

Grandma, Aunt Alice, Marian, and Patty hemmed tablecloths and napkins with great diligence, and even little Edith was allowed to help with the kitchen towels.

Everybody was so kind that Patty began to feel weighed down with gratitude. The girls of the Tea Club made the tea-cloth that they had proposed, and they also brought offerings of pin-cushions, and doilies and centre-pieces, until Patty's room began to look like a booth at a fancy bazaar.

One Saturday morning, as the sewing-circle was hard at work, little Gilbert came in carrying a paper bag, which evidently contained something valuable.

"It's for you, Patty," he said. "I brought it for you, to help keep house; and its name is Pudgy." Depositing the bag in his cousin's lap, little Gilbert knelt beside her. "You needn't open it," he cried; "it will open itself!"

And, sure enough, the mouth of the bag untwisted, and a little grey head came poking out.

"A kitten!" exclaimed Patty; "a Maltese kitten. Why, that's just the very thing I wanted! Where did you get it, Gilbert, dear?"

"From the milkman," said Gilbert proudly. "We always get kitties from him, and I told him to pick out a nice pretty one for you. Do you like it?"

"I love it," said Patty, cuddling the little bunch of grey fur; "and Pudgy is just the right name for it. It's the fattest little cat I ever saw."

"Yes," said Gilbert gravely; "don't let it get thin, will you?"

"No, indeed," said Patty; "I'll feed it on strawberries and cream all the year round!"

That same afternoon Patty and Aunt Alice started out on a cook-hunting expedition. A Cook's Tour, Frank called it; and the tourists took it very seriously.

"Much of the success of your home, Patty," said Aunt Alice, as they were going to the Intelligence Office, "depends upon your cook; for she will be not only a cook, but, in part, housekeeper, and overseer of the whole place. And while you must, of course, exercise your authority and demand respect, yet at the same time you will find it necessary to defer to her judgment and experience on many occasions."

"I know it, Aunt Alice," said Patty very earnestly; "and I do want to do what is right. I want to be the head of papa's home, and yet there are a great many things that my servants will know more about than I do. I shall have to be very careful about my proportion; but if you and papa will help me, I think I'll come out all right."

"I think you will," said Aunt Alice, but she smiled a little at the assured toss of her niece's head.

The Intelligence Office proved to be as much misnamed as those institutions usually are, and varying degrees of unintelligence were shown in the candidates offered for the position of cook at Boxley Hall; though, if the applicants seemed unsatisfactory to Patty, in many cases she was no less so to them.

One tall, rawboned Irishwoman seemed hopefully good-tempered and capable, but when she discovered that Patty was to be her mistress, instead of Mrs. Elliott, as she had supposed, she exclaimed:

"Go 'way wid yez! Wud I be workin' for the likes of a child like that? No, mum, I ain't no nurse; I'm a cook, and I want a mistress as has got past playing wid dolls."

"I hope you'll find one," said Patty politely; "and I'm afraid we wouldn't suit each other."

Another Irish girl, with a merry rosy face and frizzled blonde hair, was very anxious to go to work for Patty.

"Sure, it will be fun!" she said. "I'd like to work for such a pretty little lady; and, sure, we'd have the good times. Could I have all me afternoons out, miss?"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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