

WELLS

CAROLYN

PATTY AND

AZALEA

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Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	10
CHAPTER III	15
CHAPTER IV	20
CHAPTER V	25
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	28

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CHAPTER I

WISTARIA PORCH

"Oh, Little Billee! Come quick, for goodness' sake! The baby's choking!"

Patty was in the sun parlour, her arms full of a fluttering bundle of lace and linen, and her blue eyes wide with dismay at her small daughter's facial contortions.

"Only with laughter," Bill reassured her after a quick glance at the restless infant. "Give her to me."

The baby nestled comfortably in his big, powerful arms, and Patty sat back in her chair and watched them both.

"What a pleasure," she said, complacently, "to be wife and mother to two such fine specimens of humanity! She grows more and more like you every day, Little Billee."

"Well, if this yellow fuzz of a head and this pinky peach of a face is like anybody in the world except Patty Farnsworth, I'll give up! Why, she's the image of you,—except when she makes these grotesque grimaces,—like a Chinese Joss."

"Stop it! You shan't call my baby names! She's a booful-poofle! She's a hunny-bunny! She's her mudder's pressus girly-wirly,—so she wuz!"

"Oh, Patty, that I should live to hear you talk such lingo! I thought you were going to be sensible."

"How can anybody be sensible with a baby like that! Isn't she the very wonderfulest ever! Oh, Billee, look at her angel smile!"

"Angel smile? More like a mountebank's grin! But I'm sure she means well.

And I'll agree she is the most wonderful thing in the world."

Bill tossed the child up and down, and chuckled at her evident appreciation of his efforts for her amusement.

"Be careful of my baby, if you please," and Patty eyed the performance dubiously. "Suppose you drop my child?"

"I hardly think I shall, ma'am. And, incidentally, I suppose she is my child?"

"No; a girl baby is always her mudder's own—only just her very own mudder's own. Give her to me! Let me has my baby,—my ownty-donty baby!"

Farnsworth obediently handed Patty her property, and put another pillow behind her as she sat in the low willow chair. Then he seated himself near, and adoringly watched his two treasures.

It was mid-April and the Farnsworths had been married more than a year. On their return from France, they had looked about for a home, and had at last found a fortunate chance to buy at a bargain a beautiful place up in Westchester County. It was near enough to New York for a quick trip and yet it was almost country.

The small settlement of Arden was largely composed of fine estates and attractive homes. This one which they had taken was broad and extensive, with hundreds of acres in lawns, gardens and woodland. It was called Wistaria Porch, because of an old wistaria vine which had achieved astounding dimensions and whose blooms in the spring and foliage later were the admiration of the whole countryside.

The house itself was modern and of the best Colonial design. Indeed, it was copied in nearly every detail from the finest type of Colonial mansion. Though really too large for such a small family,

both Patty and Bill liked spacious rooms and lots of them, so they decided to take it, and shut off such parts as they didn't need. But no rooms were shut off, and they revelled in a great library beside their living-room and drawing-room. They had a cosy breakfast room beside the big dining-room and there were a music room and a billiard room and a den and great hall with a spreading staircase; and the second story was a maze of bedrooms, guest rooms and bathrooms.

It took Patty some days even to learn her way round, and she loved every room, hall and passage. There were fascinating windows, great wide and deep ones, and little oriels and dormers. There were unexpected turns and nooks, and there was,—which brought joy to Patty's heart,—plenty of closet space.

The whole place was of noble proportions and magnificent size, but Patty's home-making talents brought cosiness to the rooms they themselves used and stateliness and beauty to the more formal apartments.

"We must look ahead," she told Billee, "for I expect to spend my whole life here. I don't want to fix a place up just as I like it, and then scoot off and leave it and live somewhere else. And when our daughter begins to have beaux and entertain house parties, we'll need all the room there is."

"You have what Mr. Lucas calls a 'leaping mind,'" Bill remarked. "But I'm ready to confess I like room enough to swing a cat in,—even if I've no intention of swinging poor puss."

And so they set blithely to work to furnish their ancestral halls, as Patty called them, claiming that an ancestral hall had to have a beginning some time, and she was beginning hers now.

Such fun as it was selecting rugs and hangings, furniture and ornaments, books and pictures.

Lots of things they had bought abroad, for Captain Bill had been fortunate in his affairs and had had some leisure time in France and England after the war was over to collect some art treasures.

Also, they didn't try or want to complete the whole house at once. Part of the fun would be in adding bits later on, and if there were no place to put them, there would be no fun in buying things.

Patty was a wise and careful buyer. Only worth-while things were selected, not a miscellaneous collection of trumpery junk. So the result to date was charming furniture and appointments, but space for more when desired.

Little Billee's taste, too, was excellent, and he and Patty nearly always agreed on their choice. But it was a rule that if either disapproved, the thing in question was not bought. Only such as both sanctioned could come into their home.

The house had a wide and hospitable Colonial doorway, with broad fanlight above and columns at either side. Seats, too, flanked the porch, and the carefully trimmed wistaria vine hung gracefully over all. Across both ends of the house ran wide verandahs, with *porte cochère*, sun parlour, conservatory and tea-porch breaking the monotony.

Patty's own bedroom was an exquisite nest, done up in blue and silver, and her boudoir, opening from it, was a dream of pink and white. Then came the baby's quarters; the day nursery, gay with pictured walls and the sun porch, bright and airy.

For the all-important baby was now two months old, and entitled to consideration as a real member of the family.

Fleurette was her name, only selected after long thought and much discussion. Bill had stood out for Patricia Fairfield Farnsworth, but Patty declared no child of hers should be saddled with such a burden for life! Then Bill declared it must be a diminutive, in some way, of the mother's name, and as he always called Patty his Blossom Girl, the only suggestion worth considering was something that meant Little Flower. And as their stay in France had made the French language seem less foreign than of yore, they finally chose Fleurette,—the Baby Blossom.

Farnsworth was a man of affairs, and had sometimes to go to Washington or other distant cities on business, but not often or for a long stay. And as Patty expressed it, that was a lot better than for him to have to go to New York every day,—as so many men of their acquaintance did.

"I never thought I'd be as happy as this," Patty said, as, still holding her baby, she sat rocking slowly, and gazing alternately at her husband and her child.

"Why not?" Farnsworth inquired, as he lighted a fresh cigar.

"Oh, it's too much for any one mortal! Here I've the biggest husband in the world, and the littlest baby—"

"Oh, come now,—that's no incubator chick!"

"No, she's fully normal size, Nurse says, but she's a tiny mite as yet," and Patty cuddled the mite in an ecstasy of maternal joy.

"I thought friend Nurse wouldn't let you snuggle the kiddy like that."

"She doesn't approve,—but she's still at her lunch and when the cat's away—"

And then the white uniformed nurse appeared, and smiled at pretty Patty as she took the baby from her cuddling arms.

"Come for a ride, Patty *Maman*?" asked her husband, as they left the little Fleurette's presence.

"No; let's go for a walk. I want to look over the west glade, and see if it will stand a Japanese tea-house there."

"All right, come ahead. You've not forgotten your dinky tea-porch?"

"No; but this is different. A tea-house is lovely, and—"

"All right, Madame Butterfly, have one if you like. Come down this way."

They went along a picturesque path, between two rocky ravines,—a bit of real scenic effect that made, indeed, a fine setting for a little structure for a pleasure house of any kind.

"Lovely spot!" and Patty stood still and gazed about over her domain.

"Seems to me I've heard you remark that before."

"And will again,—so long as we both shall live! Oh, Little Billee, I'm so glad I picked you out for my mate—"

"I picked *you* out, you mean. Why, the first moment I saw you, I—"

"You kissed me! Yes, you did,—you bad man! I wonder I ever spoke to you again!"

"But I kissed you by mistake that time. I'd no idea who you were."

"I know it. And you've no idea who I am, now!"

"That's true, sweetheart. For you've as many moods and personalities as a chameleon,—and each more dear and sweet than the last."

"Look here, my friend, haven't we been married long enough for you to cease to feel the necessity for those pretty speeches?"

"Tired of 'em?"

"No; but I don't want you to think you must—"

"Now, now, don't be Patty Simpleton! When I make forced or perfunctory speeches, you'll know it! Don't you think so, Patty Mine?"

"Yep. Oh, Billee, look, there's the place for the tea-house!"

Patty pointed to a shady nook, halfway up the side of the ravine.

"Great!" agreed Bill. "Wait a minute,—I'll sketch it in."

He pulled an old envelope and a pencil from his pockets, and rapidly drew the location with a few hasty strokes, and added a suggestion of an Oriental looking building that was meant for the proposed tea-house.

"Just right!" cried Patty; "you *are* clever, dear! Now draw Baby and me drinking tea there."

A few more marks did for the tea drinkers and a queer looking figure hurrying along the path was doubtless the father coming home.

Patty declared herself satisfied and folded the paper and put it safely away in her pocket.

"We'll get at that as soon as the landscape gardener finishes the sunken garden," she said.

"Oh, I'm *glad* I'm alive! I never expected to have everything I wanted in the way of gardens! Don't you love them, too?"

"Of course,—and yet, not as you do, Patty. I was brought up in the great West, you know,—and sometimes I long for the big spaces."

"Why, this is a big space, isn't it?"

"I mean the prairies,—yes, even the desert,—the limitless expanse of—"

"Limitless fiddlesticks! You can't have the earth!"

"I don't want it. You're all the world to me, then why crave the earth?"

"Nice boy! Well, as I was about to say, do you know, I think it's time we had some guests up here, just for to see and to admire this paradise of ours."

"Have them, by all means. Are you settled enough?"

"Oh, yes. And I shan't have anything much to do. Mrs. Chase is a host in herself, and Nurse Winnie takes full charge of my child,—with Susie's help."

"Do you own that infant exclusively, ma'am? I notice you always say *my* child!"

"As I've told you, you don't count. Why, you won't really count until the day when some nice young man comes to ask you for the hand of Mademoiselle Fleurette."

"Heaven forbid the day! I'll send him packing!"

"Indeed you won't! I want my daughter to marry and live happy ever after,—as *I'm* doing."

"Are you, Patty? Are you happy?"

As Billee asked this question a dozen times a day for the sheer joy of watching Patty's lovely face smile an affirmative, she didn't think it necessary to enlarge on the subject.

"I do be," she said, succinctly, and Farnsworth believed her.

"Now, I propose," she went on, "that we have a week-end house-party.

That's the nicest way to show off the place—"

"Patty! Are you growing proud and ostentatious?"

"I'm proud—very much so, of my home and my family,—but nobody ever called me ostentatious! What *do* you mean?"

"Nothing. I spoke thoughtlessly. But you are puffed up with pride and vanity,—*I* think."

"Who wouldn't be—with all this?"

Patty swept an arm off toward the acres of their domain, and smiled happily in her delight of ownership.

"Well, anyway," she went on, "we'll ask Elise and Bumble and Phil and Kenneth and Chick and—"

"Don't get too many,—you'll wear yourself all out just talking to them."

"No: a big party entertain themselves better than a few. Well, I'll fix up the list. Anybody you want specially?"

"No, not now. Some time we'll have Mona and Roger, of course; and some time Daisy—"

"Yes, when we have Adèle and Jim. Oh, won't we have lots of jolly parties! Thank goodness we've plenty of guest rooms."

"Are they all in order?"

"Not quite. I have to make lace things and fiddle-de-fads for some of them."

"Can't you buy those?"

"Some I do, but some I like to make. It's no trouble, and they're prettier."

"Let's go back around by the garage, I want to see Larry."

They strolled around through the well-kept vegetable gardens and chicken yards, and came to the garage. Here were the big cars and Patty's own little runabout. Larry, the chauffeur, touched his cap with a respectful smile at Patty, and as Farnsworth talked to the man, Patty stood looking off across the grounds and wondering if any one in the whole world loved a home as she did.

Then they went on, strolling by the flower beds and formal gardens.

"And through the land at eve they went," quoted Bill, softly.

"And on her lover's arm she leant," Patty took up the verse.

"And round her waist she felt it fold," continued he:

"And far across the hills they went
To that new world which is the old.
And far across the dying day,
Beyond its utmost purple rim:
Beyond the night, across the day
The happy Princess followed him."

"Through all the world she followed him," added Patty; "I think our quotations are a bit inaccurate, but we have the gist of Tennyson's ideas."

"And the gist is—?"

"That I'm a happy Princess," she smiled.

"Well, you're in your element, that's certain. I never saw anybody enjoy fixing up a house as you do!"

"Did you ever see anybody fix up a house, anyway?"

"I'm not sure I ever did. I had very little home life, dear."

"Well, you're going to make up for that now. You're going to have so much home life from now on, that you can hardly stagger under it. And I'm going to make it!"

"Then it will be a real true home-made home! Sometimes, Patty, I fear that with all your tea-houses and formal gardens you'll lose the real homey effect—"

"Lose your grandmother! Why, in the right hands, all those faddy things melt into one big bundle of hominess, and you feel as if you'd always had 'em. Soon you'll declare you've never lived without a Japanese tea-garden in your back yard!"

"I believe you! You'd make a home feeling in the Parthenon,—if you chose to live there!"

"Of course I should! Or in the Coliseum, or in the Taj Mahal."

"There, there, that will do! Don't carry your vaunts further! Now come around the house, and let's go in under the wistaria. It's a purple glory now!"

"So it is! What a stunning old vine it is. I did think I'd change the name of the place, but that wistaria over that porch is too fine to be discarded. Let's get Mr. Hepworth up here to paint it."

"It must be painted, and soon, while it's in its prime. If Hepworth can't come, I'll get somebody else. I want that picture."

"And let's have some photographs of it. It's so perfect."

"All right, I'll take those myself,—to-morrow,—it's too late now."

"And me and Baby will sit in the middle of the composition! Won't that be touching!"

Patty laughed merrily, but Farnsworth said, "You bet you will! Be ready in the morning, for I'll want a lot of poses."

CHAPTER II

GUESTS ARRIVE

"I refuse to go a step further! This porch of wistaria is the most wonderful thing I ever saw in all my life! When I heard the name of the place, I thought it was crazy,—but of course I see now it's the only possible name! I don't care what's inside the house,—here I am,—and here I stay!"

Elise Farrington threw off her motor coat, and settling herself on the side seat of the porch, under the drooping bunches of purple bloom, looked quite as if she meant what she said.

Patty stepped out from the doorway and smiled at her visitor.

"All right, Elise," she said, "you may. I'll send out your dinner, and you can sleep here, too, if you like."

"No, I'll come in for my board and lodging, but all the rest of the time look for me here! I'm going to have some lavender frocks made,—dimities and organdies, and then I'll be part of the picture."

"Oh, do! I can't wear lavender or purple," Patty sighed.

"Nonsense! Of course you can. You only mean you've never tried. That bisque doll complexion of yours will stand any color. Let's both get wisteria-coloured frocks, and—"

Elise's plans were interrupted by the appearance of Farnsworth and two men who had arrived for the house party. These were our old friends, Philip Van Reypen and Chickering Channing.

Still a devoted admirer of pretty Patty, Van Reypen had become reconciled to his fate, and moreover had discovered his ability to take pleasure in the society of other charming young women.

Channing was the same old merry Chick, and he was exuberant in his praise of the beautiful home of the Farnsworths which he now saw for the first time.

"Great little old place!" he exclaimed, enthusiastically. "But why such an enormousness? Are you going to keep boarders?"

"Yes, if you'll stay," laughed Patty. "But, you see it was a bargain,—so we snapped it up."

"The old story," put in Bill. "Man built it,—went bankrupt,—had to sell at sacrifice. Along came we,—bought it,—everybody happy!"

"I am," declared Elise; "this is the sort of place I've dreamed of. Beautiful nearby effects, and a long distance view beside. This porch for mine,—all the time I'm here."

"But you haven't seen the other places yet," Patty demurred. "There's a tea-porch—"

"Wistaria, too?"

"Yes, of course."

"Lead me to it!" and Elise jumped up, and made for the house.

Then they all strolled through the wide hall and out at the back door on to the tea-porch. This was furnished with white wicker tables and chairs, and indeed, was prepared for immediate use, for a maid was just bringing the cakes and crumpets as the party arrived.

"Goody!" cried Elise, "can we have tea now, Patty? I'm famished."

"Yes, indeed," and Patty took her place at the tea table with a matronly air, and began to pour for her guests.

"It's just as pretty as the other porch," Elise decided, looking critically at the festoons of wistaria, which was on three sides of the house. "But I'll adopt the first one. Anybody looking for me will find me there—'most always."

"We're always looking for you," said Channing, gallantly, as he took up his teacup, "and it is a comfort to know where to find you. Of late you've been inaccessible."

"Not to you," and Elise glanced coquettishly from under her eyelashes.

"To me, then," put in Van Reyepen. "I've not seen you, Elise, since I came back from Over There. You've grown a lot, haven't you?"

"Taller?"

"Mercy no! I mean mentally. You seem more—more grown up like."

"Everybody is, since the war work. Yes, Phil, I have grown,—I hope."

"There, there," warned Patty; "no serious talk just now, please,—and no war talk. For the moment, I claim your attention to my new house and its surroundings."

"Some claim you've staked out," and Chick grinned. "I want to see it all.

And,—moreover,—I want to see the rest of the family!"

Patty beamed. "You dear!" she cried; "do you really want to see my daughter?"

"My daughter," Farnsworth added; "but I didn't know you chaps would be interested in our infant prodigy. I never cared about seeing other people's babies."

"I do," stoutly insisted Channing. "I'm a connoisseur on kiddies. Let me see him."

"He isn't him," laughed Patty, "he's a she."

"So much the better," Chick avowed. "I love girl babies. Where is she?"

"You can't see her now, she's probably asleep. To-morrow she'll be on exhibition. I hear a car! It must be Mona!"

"I'll go and fetch her," said Farnsworth, springing up, and after a short time he returned with two newcomers, Mona Farrington and her husband, Roger.

Then there was more greeting and exclamation and laughter, as the latest guests admired the new home, and accepted Patty in her becoming role of hostess.

"To think of little Patty as the chatelaine of this palatial ménage!" said Roger, "and actually acting as if it belonged to her!"

"It isn't palatial," corrected Patty, "but it *does* belong to me,—that is, to me and my friend William. He vows I claim the baby for all my own property,—but I'll accord him a share in the place."

"It *all* belongs to me," said Farnsworth, with a careless sweep of a big arm. "The wistaria, Patty, the baby, and all!"

"That's right," agreed Roger, "keep up your air of authority as long as you can! I tried it,—but Mona soon usurped the position!"

"Nonsense!" and Mona smiled at her husband. "Don't you believe him, Patty. We go fifty-fifty on everything,—as to decisions, I mean. He gives in to my superior judgment half the time, and I let him have his own foolish way the other half. Follow my plan and you'll live happily, my dear."

"Are we your first company?" asked Elise.

"Yes,—except Father and Nan,—and a few calls from the neighbours. This is my first house-party. And I do want it to be a success, so I'm going to depend on you all to help me. If I do what I ought not to do,—or leave undone the things which I should ought to do,—check me up,—won't you, please?"

"We sure will," agreed Channing, "but something tells me you're going to prove an ideal hostess."

"She will," nodded Farnsworth, "she takes to hostessing like a duck to water. She even asked me what sort of smokes you chaps prefer."

"I hope you remembered," said Roger. "And when are they to be passed around?"

"Right now," said Patty, smiling and nodding to the maid who hovered near.

In truth, Patty was a born hostess, and without fuss or ostentation always had the comfort of her guests in mind. While not overburdened with a retinue of servants, she had enough to attend to everything she required of them; and her own knowledge and efficiency combined with her tact and real kindness brought about a state of harmony in her household that might well have been envied by an older and more experienced matron.

Mrs. Chase, who had the nominal position of housekeeper, found herself strictly accountable to Patty for all she did, and as she was sensible enough to appreciate Patty's attitude, she successfully fulfilled the requirements of a butler or steward, and had general charge and oversight of all the housekeeping details.

"The way to keep house," said Patty to Mona and Elise, as she took them away with her, leaving the men to their "smokes," "is not so much to work yourself as to be able to make others work in the way you want them to."

"That's just it," agreed Mona, "and that's just what I can't do! Why, my servants rode over me so, and were so impudent and lazy, I just gave up housekeeping and went to a hotel to live. We had to,—there was no other way out."

"And how Roger hates it!" said Elise, who, as Roger's sister, thought herself privileged to comment.

A cloud passed over Mona's face. "He does," she admitted, "but what can I do? He hated worse the scenes we had when we were housekeeping."

"Perhaps conditions will get better now," said Patty, hopefully, "and you can try again, Mona, with better results."

"Maybe; and perhaps you can teach me. You used to teach me lots of things, Patty."

"All right,—I'll willingly do anything I can. Now, who wants to see my angel child? Or would you rather go to your rooms first?"

"No, indeed," cried Elise, "let me see her right now. If she's as pretty as the wistaria vine—oh, Patty, why don't you name her Wistaria?"

"Gracious, what a name! No, she's Fleurette,—or so Little Billee says. Anyway, here she is."

Patty led them to the nursery, and from the lacy draperies of the bassinette a smiling baby face looked up at them.

"What a heavenly kiddy!" Elise exclaimed, "Oh, Patty, what a daffodil head! Just a blur of yellow fuzz! And such blue eyes! She looks exactly like you! And exactly like Bill, too. Oh, I never saw such a darling baby. Let me take her,—mayn't I?"

"Yes, indeed. She's no glass-case baby."

Elise picked up the dear little bundle, and cooed and crooned in most approved fashion.

Apparently Fleurette understood, for she smiled and gurgled, and seemed to look upon Elise as an old friend.

Mona admired the baby but was more interested in the house.

"Show me everything," she begged Patty. "I want to see it all. Where's your linen closet?"

"My linen closet is a room," and Patty led them thither. "You see, we have such a lot of rooms and,—such a lot of linen,—that I took this little bedroom for a linen press. I had a carpenter put in the shelves and cupboards just as I wanted them,—and here's the result."

With justifiable pride, Patty showed her linen collection. Sheets, towels, tablecloths,—each sort in its place, each dozen held by blue ribbon bands, that fastened with little pearl buckles.

Other shelves held lace pieces, luncheon sets, boudoir pillow-cases, table scarfs, and all the exquisite embroidered bits that are the delight of the home lover.

"Perfectly wonderful!" Elise declared; "looks just like a shop in Venice or Nice. How do you keep them so tidy? and where did you ever get so many?"

"Oh, I've done quite some shopping to get our Lares and Penates together, and Bill let me get whatever I wanted in the house furnishing line. Yes, this linen room is my joy and my pride. See, *this* cupboard is all curtains. I do love to have fresh curtains as often as I want them."

"Well, it's all like Fairyland," Mona said. "I have beautiful things, too, but they don't look like this. They're all in a jumble on the shelves, and everything is hodge-podge."

"Oh, well, you're just as happy," laughed Patty. "I chance to be naturally tidy, and I just love to potter over my things, and keep them in place. Some time I'll show you Baby's wardrobe. Her little things are too dear for anything. But now I'll take you to your rooms. This is yours, Elise. I picked out this one for you, because it's lavender,—and I know that's your favorite colour."

"And the wistaria vine is looking in at the windows!" Elise noted, with joy. "Oh, Patty, I won't live on the porch, either, I'll live up here."

It *was* a beautiful room. A deep seated bay-window, with latticed panes, opened into a profusion of wistaria blooms, and the fragrance filled the whole place. The furniture was of ivory enamel and the appointments were of various harmonious shades of lavender. A *chaise-longue* was well supplied with lace pillows and a nearby stand and reading-lamp hinted at the comfortable enjoyment of a tempting array of new books.

Pansies and violets were in small bowls, and on a table stood an enormous vase full of trailing branches of wistaria.

"What a picture!" and Elise stood in the middle of the floor, looking about her. "Patty, you're a wonder! I don't care if you have shoals of servants, you fixed up this room,—I know you did."

"Of course I did,—with Mrs. Chase to help me. She's a treasure,—she catches on to my ways so quickly. Glad you like it, Elise, honey. Now settle yourself here,—your bags will be up in a minute,—and I'll put Mona in her niche."

"I'm coming too," and Elise went with the others to the rooms designed for Mona and Roger.

"This is my Royal Suite," laughed Patty, as she ushered them into a charming apartment done up in handsome English chintz.

"It suits me," and Mona nodded approval. "You had this done by a professional, Patty."

"It was here when we bought the house. You see, some rooms were already furnished, when the man decided to sell it. And of these, such as we liked we kept as they were. This is especially fine chintz and also good workmanship, so as it is so imposing in effect, we call it the Royal Suite. Father and Nan adored it, and you and Roger are the next Royal guests."

"It's great," said Elise, "not half as pretty as mine, but more dignified and gorgeous."

The chintz was patterned with tropical birds and foliage and as the hangings were many and elaborate the effect *was* gorgeous. The bathroom was spacious and fully equipped, and as Mona's things had arrived she turned to instruct the maid who was already unpacking them.

"Come back with me to my room," said Elise, as she and Patty went down the hall.

"Just for a minute, then, for I must go and sort out the rest of my visitors. I am putting Philip and Chick over in the west wing, far removed from the nursery, for I don't want them imagining they are kept awake by the night thoughts of my child. And, I must confess, Fleurette has a way of tuning up in the wee, small hours! However, we had the nursery walls muffled, so I don't think you'll be disturbed. Isn't this outlook fine, Elise?"

"Beautiful," and Elise joined Patty at the bay-window. "This is the most effective room I ever saw, and so comfy."

"And here's your bath," Patty opened the door to a bathroom of white-tiled and silver daintiness. "Now you've time for a tub and a rest before dinner. So I'm going to leave you. Come down at eight,—or sooner, if you like."

Housewifely Patty ran away, happy in her new role of hostess to a house party.

The men still sat on the tea-porch, smoking, and talking over the political situation.

"Here you are again," Chick greeted her; "but where's the che-ild? I must see that youngster to-night. I've—I've brought her a present."

"Oh, well, come along, then," said Patty; "if you're really so anxious to meet the young lady,—why wait?"

The two went up to the nursery, and though a little surprised at the unexpected call, Nurse Winnie made no objection.

"Here's your new friend," and Patty lifted Fleurette out of her pillows and presented her to Chick.

"What a beauty!" he cried, as he saw the golden curls and the big blue eyes. "And so intelligent!"

"Of course! Did you think she'd look vacant?"

"They often do," said Chick, sagely. "Why, my cousin's baby looks positively idiotic at times,—but this mite,—she knows it all!"

And Fleurette did look wise. Being in benign mood, she smiled at the big man who held her so gently, and put out a tentative fist toward his face.

"Born flirt," he declared, "just like her mother! Well, Patty, she's a wonder-child,—oh, I know 'em!—and I hereby constitute myself her godfather, without waiting to be asked."

"Good! We accept the honour. Make a bow, Fleurette."

"No, the honour is mine. She doesn't quite take it all in, yet,—but in days to come, she may feel real need of a godfather and I'll be there!"

"What do godfathers do? I never had any."

"I'm not quite sure, myself. I'm going to get a field-book,—or First

Lessons in Godfathering, or something like that. But, anyway, I'm hers!

Oh, Patty, she's going to grow up a beauty! Did you ever see such eyes!"

Patty laughed at Chick's enthusiasm, which was too patently genuine to be mere polite flattery, and entirely agreed in his opinion as to the good looks of the small Fleurette.

"What did you bring her?" she asked, and Chick drew from his pocket a set of small gold pins.

"For her bibs and tuckers," he explained. "At least that's what they told me at the shop. I don't know much about such things."

"They're just right," Patty said, "and they're her very first present,—outside the family. Thank you a thousand times,—you're very thoughtful, Chick."

"I hoped you'd like 'em," and the big, warm-hearted chap smiled with gratification. "Dress her up in them to-morrow, will you?"

And Patty promised she would.

CHAPTER III

BETTY GALE

Seated at the head of her own dinner table that evening, Patty felt decidedly in her element. Always of a hospitable nature, always efficient in household matters, she played her rôle of hostess with a sweet simplicity and a winning grace that charmed all her guests.

Farnsworth, opposite her at the big, round table, was a quiet, dignified and well-mannered host. He had not Patty's native ability to entertain, but he was honestly anxious that his guests should be pleased and he did all in his power to help along. Patty had coached him on many minor points, for Little Billee had been brought up in simple surroundings and unaccustomed to what he at first called Patty's frills and fal-lals.

But she had convinced him that dainty laces and shining silver were to be used for his daily fare and not merely as "company fixings," and being adaptable, the good-natured man obediently fell in with her wishes.

And now he was as deft and handy with his table appointments as Patty herself, and quite free from self-consciousness or awkwardness.

"You've made me all over, Patty," he would sometimes say; "now, I really like these dinky doo-daddles better than the 'old oaken bucket' effects on which I was brought up!"

And then Patty would beg him to tell her more about his early days and his wild Western life in the years before she knew him.

It was her great regret that Bill had no parents, nor indeed any near relatives. An only child, and early orphaned, he had lived a few years with a cousin and then had shifted for himself. A self-made man,—as they are styled,—he had developed fine business ability, and had also managed to acquire a familiarity with the best in literature. Patty was continually astonished by his ready references and his quotations from the works of the best authors.

Indeed, the room he took the deepest interest in furnishing in their new home was the library.

For the purpose he selected the largest room in the house. It had been designed as a drawing-room or ballroom; but Farnsworth said that its location and outlook made it an ideal library. He had an enormous window cut, that filled almost the whole of one side of the room, and which looked out upon a beautiful view, especially at sunset.

Then the furnishings were chosen for comfort and ease as well as preserving the dignified effect that should belong to a library. The book cases were filled with the books already owned by the two and new ones were chosen and bought by degrees as they were desired or needed.

The reference portion was complete and the cases devoted to poetry and essays well filled. Fiction, too, of the lasting kind, and delightful books of travel, biography and humour.

There were reading chairs, arranged near windows and with handy tables; there were desks, perfectly appointed; racks of new books and magazines; portfolios of pictures, and cosy window seats and *tête-à-têtes*.

There were a few fine pictures, and many little intimate sketches by worth-while pencils or brushes. And there were treasured books, valuable intrinsically or because of their inscriptions, that Farnsworth had collected here and there.

Small wonder, then, that the library was the favourite room in the house and that after dinner Patty proposed they go there for their coffee.

"Some room!" ejaculated Chick Channing, as they sauntered in and stood about, gazing at the wealth of books.

"Glorious!" agreed Mona, who had a mere pretence of a library in her own home. "I didn't know you were so literary, Patty."

"Oh, I'm not. It's Little Billee's gigantic intellect that planned this room, and he's the power that keeps it going. Every week he sends up a cartload of new books—"

"Oh, come, now, Patty,—I haven't bought a book for a fortnight!" laughed Farnsworth. "But I've just heard of a fine old edition of Ike Walton that I can get at—"

"There, there, my son, don't get started on your hobby," implored Channing. "We're ignoramuses, Mona and I, and we want to talk about less highbrow subjects."

"Count me on your side," said a smiling girl, whose big gray eyes took on a look of awe at the turn the conversation had taken. "I don't know if Ike Walton is a book or a steamboat!"

The speaker was Beatrice Gale, a neighbour of the Farnsworths. She was pretty and saucy looking,—a graceful sprite, with a dimpled chin, and soft brown hair, worn in mopsy bunches over her ears. She was called Betty by her friends, and Patty and Bill had already acquired that privilege.

"Now, Betty," and Patty shook her head at her, "you are a college graduate as well as a débutante,—you *must* know old Ike!"

"But I don't! You see, my début meant so much more to me than my commencement, that all I ever learned at college flew out of my head to make room for all I'm going to learn in society."

"Have you much left to learn?" asked Elise, looking at the piquant face that seemed to show its owner decidedly conversant with the ways of the world,—at least, her own part in it.

"Oh, indeed, yes! I only know how to smile and dance. I'm going to learn flirting, coquetry and getting engaged!"

"You're ambitious, little one," remarked Van Reypen. "Have you chosen your instructors?"

"I'm sure you won't need any," put in Elise, who was already jealous of Philip's interested looks at the new girl. "I think you could pass an efficiency examination already!"

"You ought to know," said Betty, with such an innocent and demure look at Elise, that it was difficult to determine whether she meant to be impertinent or not.

"Let me conduct the examination," said Philip; "shall it be public,—or will you go with me into a—*a* classroom?" and he looked toward the small "den" that opened from the library.

"Oh, have it public!" exclaimed Mona. "Let us all hear it"

"All right," and pretty Betty smiled, non-chalantly. "Go ahead, Professor."

"I will. You know these examinations begin by matching words. I say one word, and you say whatever word pops into your head first."

"That's easy enough. Proceed."

"Arden."

"Forest. I always thought this place ought to have been named the Forest of Arden, because—"

"Don't talk so much. You must say one word only. Concentrate."

"Silence."

"Oh, concentrate wasn't the *word*! I said that to you—"

"I thought you were talking to me *all* the time!"

"I am. Now be still! Horse."

"How can I pass my examination if I'm to be still? Wagon."

"Aeroplane."

"You."

"How did you know that I was an aviator?"

"Never mind; go on with the game."

"All right. Beaux."

"Flattery."

"Chaperon."

"Hoodwink."

"Oh, you rascal! Mother."

"Father."

"Father."

"Money."

"Soft-boiled egg."

"Messy."

"American Beauties."

"Mr. Grant,—he often sends them to me."

"Music."

"Dancing."

"You pass. Now for to see if you're thoroughly grounded in the common branches. Grammar, first. What's a noun, and give examples."

"A noun's a name. As, candy, heart, slipper."

"What's a compound noun?"

"Two names,—as chicken salad,—Philip Van Reypen,—moonlight."

"What's a mood?"

"Something you fall into,—as a ditch,—or love."

"What is an article?"

"A piece of fancy work for sale at a fair."

"What's a conjunction?"

"Anything that joins,—as the marriage ceremony, or hooks and eyes."

"Good. Now for arithmetic. If you are at home of an evening, and a chap calls on you, and then I come to call, and take half your attention from him, what is left?"

"The chap!"

"Right! Now, definitions. What do you mean by forever?"

"Until to-morrow!" returned Betty, laughing.

"Never?"

"Not until to-morrow!"

"How do you spell No?"

"Y-e-s."

"Oh, Betty," exclaimed Patty, laughing, "I didn't know you were so witty!"

"Good gracious! don't call me *that!* Here, stop this examination right now! I *won't* be called witty. Why, don't you know—

"Though you're sweet and though you're pretty,

Men won't love you if you're witty!"

"I'm *always* afraid of not being loved!"

Miss Gale looked so frightened at this very idea, that they all broke into laughter.

"You should worry!" declared Bill. "You haven't enough wit to do any great harm. Or, at least, if you have, you've compensating foolishness—I mean—that is—"

"There, there, Billee," counselled Patty, "you'd better stop,—you're just getting in deeper with every word."

"Oh, it's all right," and Beatrice shrugged her shoulders, "I need to be brought up with a round turn now and then. I'm too intellectual,—I know."

She purposely assumed a vacant, stupid expression and folded her hands helplessly in her lap.

"She's a hummer," Channing remarked in an aside to Patty, as further hilarity followed Betty's fooling.

"I like her lots," Patty returned. "She's a frivolous little thing, but thoroughly sweet and dear. She adores Fleurette."

"Aha, little mother! So that's the way to your good graces, is it? I too adore Fleurette."

"But you're already in my good graces,—and have been for years."

"So? Then,"—Chick's tone grew wheedlesome,— "invite me up here often,—won't you?"

"Now I *should* have thought you meant because of my daughter's charms, if your glance hadn't wandered toward Miss Gale, even as you spoke!"

"Both, fair lady,—both. I adore Fleurette as the delightful daughter of a delightful mother. May I not also admire the delightful neighbour?"

"Indeed, you may. And you have a standing invitation to come up here as often as you like. I'm going to entertain a lot this spring and summer,—and you're a really useful house guest"

"Thanks, indeed! How do I qualify?"

"By your nice, kind, entertaining qualities. You're an all-round nice man, Chick,—and I don't care who knows my opinion. And now, do you go and make up to Elise."

"Yes, ma'am. Between you and me, ma'am,—she's a bit miffed—not?"

"Hush! Run along and make yourself so agreeable that she'll forget everybody else."

Of a truth Elise was a little disturbed. For she was of a jealous and self-seeking disposition, and resented any attentions that were not given to her. The advent of this bright and sparkling young girl,—probably three or four years younger than herself, made her suddenly feel neglected, and it displeased her.

Mona noticed it, and smiled to herself. But Patty truly regretted it, for she had taken a decided fancy to Beatrice Gale, and as they were neighbours, she knew the girl would be often at Wistaria Porch. And as she had planned to have Elise with her often, also, she saw breakers ahead, unless the two could be reconciled.

Patty was a born peacemaker, but she also knew that a jealous nature is not easily placated. And she foresaw that Philip Van Reypen would be the "bone of contention."

After Patty's marriage, Philip, a disappointed suitor, had declared himself a confirmed bachelor. And though Elise would have looked with satisfaction on his change of heart, it had not yet occurred.

Patty had hoped,—and thought,—that Philip would marry her cousin, Helen Barlow; but neither of the parties had seen it in that light, and Helen had since married her long persistent wooer, Chester Wilde.

This left Van Reypen entirely unattached, and Elise,—it could be seen by any onlooker,—was not at all averse to his company.

And Van Reypen liked her, for Elise was pretty and charming. But when things didn't go as she wished them to, she had a habit of sulking which was far from attractive.

So, the very apparent interest that Philip showed in this new chit of a girl,—as Elise dubbed Betty to herself,—was as iron entering her soul.

However, she was clever enough to hide her real feelings, and she welcomed Chick Channing with a cordial smile.

"Let's go for a stroll round the verandahs," he proposed, and Elise consented.

"Want a wrap? though it's warm for April," he said, as they went out the door.

"No, thank you, I love the fresh air," and Elise waved her white arm upward, and entwined it in the wistaria blossoms. "I've adopted this porch,—I shall probably be with Patty a lot this summer. You'll come up—now and then?"

"Oh, yes; it's the most charming house to visit, don't you think?"

"Great! Patty is an ideal hostess, and Bill's a dear!"

"And the kiddy,—don't leave her out"

"Oh, she's an angel. But a bit unfledged, as yet."

"Of course. But such a darling! By the way, I'm her godfather."

"Oh, are you? Then I'll be her godmother! She ought to have both."

"Certainly. Though I think I heard that Miss Gale has the position."

"Of course she has! That girl appropriates everything! I think she's too fresh!"

"You mean that for a compliment, I'm sure. Yes, she is,—she's like a dewy daisy—"

"Dewy daisy, nothing! She isn't so childlike as she wants to appear!"

"There now, Elise, don't talk like that! It doesn't sound pretty,—and goodness knows *you've* no reason to be jealous."

"What?" asked Elise, already mollified.

"Why, you, with your established place in this household, and in our set,—mustn't stoop to be —jealous—of a little schoolgirl!"

"Oh, I'm *not*! How dare you hint it?"

"Then don't act so. Take my advice, Lisa, and don't show even the appearance of that sort of thing. It reacts,—you know."

Elise did know,—she knew Chick was telling her the truth, and telling it, too, only in the kindest spirit of real friendship.

She bit her lip in annoyance, and said, sharply, "Don't abuse the privilege of an old friend, Chick."

"I don't mean to,—honest I don't, Elise. Forgive me if I've offended you."

"Oh, you haven't. That's all right. Have you ever met this Gale girl before?"

"No; but she sat next me at dinner, and she told me about herself. It seems she has a wonderful brother—"

"She has!" It was amazing how Elise brightened up. "Why wasn't he invited this evening?"

"He's away from home just now,—will return next week,—I think she said.

Get on your warpaint and feathers! See, the conquering heroine comes!"

"Stop teasing, Chick. I do like to meet strangers, and if Patty's neighbour is attractive—"

"Patty's neighbour's brother,—you mean?"

"I do! If he's attractive, it'll add to my pleasure when visiting Patty,—won't it?"

"It sure will,—and, may I say it? You'll add to his pleasure, I've no doubt."

"Very pretty, Chick. You *are* a nice boy."

"Thank you, ma'am. But I won't be in it, when the brother appears on the scene, I fear! So, to make hay while the sun shines, won't you go in and dance with me? I hear the light fantastics tripping in the hall."

They went in and found all of the party keeping time to the gay music of the big victrola, and they joined the swaying couples.

As they passed Betty Gale and Van Reypen, Elise overheard her saying,

"You're awfully good to me,—and you've only just met me to-night!"

Phil's reply was lost as they danced away, but Elise realised that it was an eager expression of his desire that they should meet again, and soon, and her demon of jealousy once more up-reared his ugly head.

But she concealed it,—outwardly, at least,—and when the time came, she was so cordial and sweet to Miss Gale that a friendship pact was sealed between them.

CHAPTER IV

A NEW RELATIVE

May came in with the sunshine and balmy days that are popularly supposed to belong to that month, but which do not always materialise.

Wistaria Porch was fairly basking in the sunshine, and the flower gardens were already showing their early blooms. The tulip beds were a blaze of bright glory and hyacinths and daffodils added their sweetness and beauty.

"Such a heavenly place!" Patty exclaimed as she and Little Billee strolled along the garden paths in the late afternoon. "I'm glad we have this week-end to ourselves,—I love to have guests, but once in a while,—you know—"

"I do know!" declared Farnsworth, "and I'd be willing to have 'em twice in a while—"

"Have what?"

"Week-ends alone with you! Oh, I like company, too,—have all you want, but now and then—just now and then, a family party looks good to me! Where's our blessed child at the moment?"

"She ought to be here,—it's time. Winnie usually brings her for her afternoon visit to her proud parents. And here she comes! Here's mudder's own Poggly-woggly Pom-pom head!"

"What delightful names you invent! Let me have a try at it! Here's

Fodder's own Piggly-winktum! There, how's that?"

"Perfectly horrid! Sounds like a pig!"

"All right, let's try again. Who's the airiest, fairiest, tiny mite? Who's the pinky-goldiest Smiley-eyes in the whole world? Here she is!" and big Bill took the baby, from nurse's arms, and flung her high in the air, catching her deftly on her descent, while Patty held her breath in apprehension. She knew perfectly well Bill wouldn't let the child fall,—and yet, accidents had occurred,—and the crowing baby might squirm out of the watchful father's arms.

But no accident happened and the two had their usual afternoon romp.

Little Fleurette knew her father and adored the big, comfortable man who held her so firmly and tossed her up so delightfully.

"Now, it's my turn,—give her to me," said Patty, at last. Then Bill deposited the child in her mother's arms, and the little one nestled there contentedly. She was a good baby, and rarely cried or fretted. Healthy and strong, she bade fair to become a fine big woman some day, and Patty's leaping mind had already planned out her whole lifetime!

"I think I'll send her to the Mortimer School," she said, musingly.

"Why, that's a finishing school!" exclaimed Bill, knowing of the fashionable establishment.

"Yes; I mean when she's ready to be 'finished,'" said Patty, calmly. "Before that, she'll go to Kindergarten,—and some other school, I suppose."

"I suppose she will; but we'll have a few years of her company here, at home, won't we, before her schooldays begin?"

"Yes, of course, we're having them now. But they go so fast! Oh, Little Billee, *all* the days fly so fast,—I can't realise we've been married nearly two years—"

"Nonsense! A year and nearly two months—"

"Well, it soon *will* be two years! I never saw the time fly so! It goes like a Bandersnatch!"

"Does that mean you're so happy, Patty?"

"It means exactly that! Oh, I want to live forever! I am so happy! I didn't know life with you and Fleurette would be so beautiful as it is!"

"Is it, dearest? I'm so glad," and the big man looked at his dainty, sweet little wife with his whole soul in his fine clear blue eyes.

"Your eyes are wonderful, Billee, dear," said Patty, meeting his glance lovingly; "did your mother have blue eyes,—or your father?"

"Both of them did. I was thought to look more like mother, as a kiddy,—but they were both fair haired and blue eyed."

"You never knew your mother much, did you?"

"No, she died when I was very small. And father, when I was about ten.

Then, as I've told you, I lived four years with Aunt Amanda—"

"In Arizona?"

"Yes; in a small settlement,—hardly even a village,—called Horner's Corners."

Patty laughed. "What a darling name! How could anybody call a place that! Suppose it had grown to be a large city."

"Then they would probably have changed the name. Perhaps they have already done so,—I haven't heard from there for years."

"Why didn't you keep up your relatives' acquaintance?"

"Well, Aunt Amanda died, later, and her husband never cared much for me, anyhow. So we drifted apart, and never drifted together again."

"Wasn't your aunt your mother's sister?"

"Oh, Lord, no! She was not really my aunt, at all. She was a cousin of my father's and when she took me in, I called her auntie. But they only took me because they wanted my help on the place, and I worked hard for them four years. They gave me no affection, nor even thanks for my services, and as I couldn't learn anything or make any sort of progress in that God-forsaken valley, I left them and shifted for myself."

"And made a great success of the shifting!" Patty's eyes glowed as she looked at her big handsome husband.

"Yes, I found you! And, incidentally that little flower of loveliness that's going to sleep against your breast."

"So she is! Pretty thing!" Patty gazed adoringly at the baby and then handed her over to the nurse, who returned for her charge.

"Tell me more about Horner's Corners," Patty resumed, as they remained seated on the porch, after Fleurette's departure.

"Not much to tell. It consisted of a store and post-office,—a church and school,—and forty or fifty small houses. Uncle Thorpe's place was a mile out from the Corners, proper, and I used to trudge back and forth every day for the mail, and for provisions. And part of the time I went to school. The teacher was a nice young girl, but we boys led her a dance! How we *did* plague her!" and Bill laughed at the recollection.

"Any children in your aunt's family?"

"One; a little baby girl, named Azalea."

"What a pretty name! Where is she now?"

"I don't know. Right there, probably. Let me see. I was ten when I went there. But she wasn't born then. When I left, that child was about a year old, I guess. She must be about seventeen or so, now."

"And she's your only living relative?"

"The only one I know anything about. Mother's people were English,—none of them over here. No near relatives, anyhow, for she was an only child. Dad was, too, for that matter. Little Zaly,—that's what they called her, is about the last leaf on the tree."

"Let's ask her to visit us, can't we? I do want to know your people; and if she's all the people there are, I want to know her."

"Why, child, I don't know anything about her,—I don't even know if she's still in the land of the living."

"Can't you write and find out?"

"Why, I suppose so. But *why* do you want her? She's probably an awkward, countrified little thing—"

"I don't care for that! She's your kin, and I'm prepared to love her for that reason."

"That's a dear thing for you to say, Patty mine, but you may get more than you bargain for. Suppose you invite Azalea and Uncle Thorpe himself comes trotting along, too!"

"Well, I could even live through that! I don't suppose he'd bite me!"

"But I'm quite sure he wouldn't fit into your scheme of things entire! Oh, let sleeping dogs lie, Pattibelle. Take me for my whole family,—I'm a host in myself."

"You are,—my lord and master,—you sure are! But, all the same, I must hunt up your little cousin. Of course her father can't come, if he isn't invited. And I'd like to know the child. I might do something for her,—be of some real help to her, I mean. Maybe she's longing to get East and have the advantages I could give her."

"Maybe she's longing to stay put in her native desert."

"In that case, she can say so. I shan't compel her to come! Let me write her, anyway, mayn't I, Little Billee?"

"Of course you may. You may write to anybody you wish; to the Sultan of Kasharabad, if you like."

"Is he your relative?"

"He may be,—for all I know. Some family trees branch widely."

"Well, give me Azalea's address,—I'm going to open a correspondence, at least."

"No address, that I know of, except Miss Azalea Thorpe, Horner's Corners, Arizona."

"I'll write, if only for the fun of addressing a letter there. I never heard such a funny name for a place!"

Patty tore up two or three letters before she finally composed one that suited her. It was not easy to know what attitude to take toward such a complete stranger, and with no knowledge of what sort of a girl she was writing to. But she at last sent off this:

MY DEAR AZALEA:

I am the wife of your cousin, William Farnsworth. Though you do not remember him, your father will tell you about him. At any rate, as you are of his kin, I want you to come and make us a visit—that is, if you care to. We have a lovely home, not far from New York City, and I would do my best to make you happy and give you a good time. You may not want to come,—indeed, you may have moved away from your native town, and may never even get this letter. But if you do get it, write me, at any rate, and tell me what you think about a trip East. We both send love and hope to hear from you soon.

Affectionately yours,

PATTY FARNSWORTH.

"You see," Patty explained to Bill, as she read the letter to him, "it may be she can't afford such a trip. But I didn't like to hint at that, so I asked her to write me what she thinks about it. If she thinks she can't spend so much money, then we can offer to get her ticket."

"Very thoughtful and very delicately done, my dearest. You have the kindest heart a little blue-eyed girl ever possessed."

"Not entirely disinterested, though. I do want to have some of your people under our roof,—and this is my first attempt. If it fails, I shall look up some of your English relatives."

"Yes, we will do that some day. I'd like to round them up myself. Mother's tales of her childhood home,—as retold me by my father,—sounded delightful. They had old country estates, and—"

"And ancestral halls! Hung with old armour! Oh, Little Billee, what fun to take Fleurette there! Portraits of her ancestors smiling down at her from the oaken walls of the long picture gallery—"

"Patty, Patty! how you *do* run on! I don't know that there are any picture galleries at all."

"Oh, of course there are. They're bound to be there. And maybe a family ghost! A spectre, that stalks the corridors when one of the family is about to die—"

"Hush! You bad child! What awful ideas!"

"I've just been reading a story about a family spectre. I think they're *most* interesting."

"Well, we'll cut out the spook show. *I've* no liking for clanking chains and hollow groans!"

* * * * *

Impatiently Patty waited for the answer to her letter, and one day it came.

Farnsworth was in New York on business, and so she put it away unopened until his return.

"Goody girl!" he cried, when she told him. "Nice of you, dear, to let us have the first reading together."

"Oh, I couldn't gobble it up alone,—I like everything better if I have it with you."

And so they sat side by side on the porch, and read the long looked for missive.

* * * * *

"DEAR COUSIN PATTY;" it began.

I was so surprised and pleased to get your letter I hardly knew what to do. It seemed as if the dream of my life had at last come true. I've always wanted to go East,—to see New York,—oh, I'm so excited I can hardly write! And dear Cousin William! How kind of him to tell you about me,—for I was a very small baby when he was here. My father has told me all about it. When shall I start? I accept your invitation with joy. I have saved up my money and I have enough, I think, for the ticket. How much does it cost? But I can find out somehow. Father sends his respects and he says I may go. I am all ready. Can't you telegraph me, so I can go soon?

With grateful thanks,

I am yours very sincerely,

AZALEA THORPE.

"Well," said Bill, "what do you think of that for a letter?"

He looked thoughtfully at Patty, as he spoke.

"Why," she hesitated,— "I think it's a very nice letter—"

"Wait, now,—be honest!"

"Well, I—oh, I don't know,—but I looked for a little more—simplicity, I guess. This sounds as if she had resorted to a 'Complete Letter-Writer' for help."

"Just what I thought, exactly! But I don't know as we can blame her if she did. The poor child is doubtless unversed in polite correspondence, and she did her best,—but she felt she needed a little more elegance of construction and so forth, and she picked out some dressy phrases from the book."

"It doesn't matter, anyway," said Patty, generously, "she's glad to come, and so I'm glad to have her. Let's telegraph at once,—shall us?"

"Yes; but I don't like that haste of hers. It strikes me queer."

"Queer, how? She's impatient to start,—that's all. What else could it mean?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. But the whole letter's queer,—if you ask me!"

"I *do* ask you,—and I ask you *how* it's queer."

"It's so,—so jumbly,—incoherent,—choppy."

"Pooh! don't criticise the lack of style in that poor country child. I'll teach her to write letters,—and I won't let her know I'm teaching her, either."

"You'll teach her lots of things,—I know,—and in that dear, gentle way of yours, that couldn't hurt or offend anybody. Well, I'll telegraph, then, for her to come ahead. What else shall I say?"

"Tell her what road to take, and all directions you can think of. Though it sounds to me, as if she thought she would have no difficulty as to travel."

"Sounds that way to me, too; but I suppose her father can look after such details. Queer message from her father."

"Not at all. You said he wasn't overfond of you, so as he sends his respects to you, I don't think you need ask for more."

"If she does start right off,—and I'm pretty sure she will,—she'll be here in a week or so."

"Of course; but I'll be ready for her. I'll give her the yellow room. It's big and sunny and has a lovely bath and dressing-room. It's all in order, too, I'll just make some soft lacy pillows and give it some little personal touches and it will be all ready for her. Oh, Billee,—think what a lot we can do for her!"

Patty's eyes glowed with the anticipation of aiding the little country girl, but Farnsworth was not so sanguine.

"You're running a risk, girlie," he said. "Suppose she turns out impossible. The fact of her being my relative doesn't quite canonise her, you know. Perhaps she *isn't* a saint."

"Now, now, old calamity howler,—I don't want her to be a saint! I hope and expect she'll be a sweet, docile nature, and her lack of culture, if any, I shall try to remedy. Her lack of familiarity with social customs and all that, I *know* I can remedy. Oh, I expect a busy time with her,—and I know I shall have to be tactful and kind,—but don't you think I can be?"

Farnsworth kissed the wistful, questioning face upturned to his and assured her that she most certainly could!

So Patty gaily set about her preparations of the pretty guest chamber. She hoped Azalea liked yellow,—most girls did,—but if not, she could easily be moved to the pink guest room.

This yellow room, however, was so well adapted for a young girl. There was a long French window that opened on the dearest little balcony, where the wistaria clambered and made a delightful shade. There was an alcove, where stood a Chippendale writing desk, and a revolving book rack. There was a sewing corner, with a fully furnished work-stand; and there was a soft puffy couch, with a pile of down pillows and a fluffy yellow afghan. And yet there was ample room for the bed, with its dimity draperies, and the fascinating toilet table, with its bewildering array of ivory fittings.

Uncertain of her guest's tastes, Patty put out few books, only a story or two of general interest and a couple of new magazines. All such matters could be attended to after she had sized up the newcomer.

On the day she was expected, Patty arranged the flowers in the yellow room herself.

Naturally, she chose azaleas, and some of a lovely soft tint of buff harmonised with pale pink ones. White ones too, with a bit of green foliage, until the room was a bower of beauty. Not overdone, though. Patty never made the mistake of too many flowers,—fond as she was of them.

A last affectionate survey of the room convinced her that all was exactly as it should be, and with a happy little sigh of contentment she went down to the porch to await the arrival of the guest, for Farnsworth had gone to the station to meet her, and they were due now at any minute.

CHAPTER V

THAT AWFUL AZALEA

The car came along the driveway and stopped in front of the porch where Patty sat.

Farnsworth stepped out, with a cheery "Here we are!" and Patty rose to greet the visitor.

Up the steps toward her flew a figure which, as Patty afterward described it, seemed like a wild Indian! A slight, wiry figure, rather tall and very awkward, and possessed of a nervous force that expressed itself in muscular activity.

"Oh, how do you do?" the girl cried, explosively. "You're Cousin Patty,—aren't you?" But even as she spoke, she stumbled on the steps, pitched forward, falling on Patty, and but for Farnsworth's quick action would have knocked her down.

"Jiminy crickets! Ain't I the tangle-foot! Guess I'm getting in bad at the very start. Hope I didn't hurt you."

"Not at all," said Patty, recovering her poise, both mental and physical. "You are very welcome, Azalea. Will you sit here a few minutes before we go in the house?"

"Sure! I'll spill myself right into this double-decker!"

She threw herself into a long wicker lounging-seat, of the steamer-chair type, and stretched out her feet in evident enjoyment of the relaxation.

"Well, this is comfort, after travelling cross country for days and days!

I say, Cousin, it was awful good of you to ask me."

"Think so?" and Patty tried to smile pleasantly. She avoided catching Bill's eye, for the poor man was overcome with shame and consternation that his relative should be so impossible.

"Yep,—I do. My! this place of yours is swell. I never saw such a grand house—close to. You're rich, ain't you, Cousin William?"

"So, so," Farnsworth replied, gazing at the girl in a sort of horrified fascination. "You've changed since last we met," he went on, in an endeavour to make casual conversation.

"Well, yes, I s'pose so. They tell me I was a squalling young one when you were at the Corners. Was I a terror?"

"Not then!" Bill wanted to answer, but of course he didn't.

"Not at all," he said, pleasantly. "You were a pretty baby—"

"But greatly changed,—hey?"

The girl gave him a quick glance. She was not ill-looking, as to features and colouring, but her whole effect was unattractive,—even repelling.

She had flashing black eyes, which darted from one object to another in a jerky, inquisitive way. Her scarlet lips parted over white, even teeth, but her lower lip hung, and her half-open mouth gave her an air of ignorance, often accompanied by rude staring.

Her black hair was concealed by a coarse straw hat, untrimmed save for some gaudy flowers embroidered on the straw with crude coloured wools.

"How do you like my hat?" Azalea asked suddenly. "Just the shape of a horse's hat, isn't it? But it's all the go. This dress is, too,—hope you like it,—I do."

The dress in question was a "sport suit" of a large-sized green and black check. It was cheap material, and badly cut, and its ill-fitting coat hung on Azalea's slim shoulders in baggy wrinkles. Her blouse was bright pink Georgette, beaded with scarlet beads, and altogether, perhaps her costume could not have been worse chosen or made up,—at least, from Patty's point of view.

She ignored the question about the hat, and asked the girl as to her journey.

"O.K.," Azalea returned. "Had a bang-up time. Made friends all along the line. Some of 'em coming to see me. Hope you'll like 'em."

She stretched out luxuriously in the long chair, throwing her arms above her head, and crossing her feet, which were dressed with "gun metal" stockings and shoes. Her hat was pushed awry, and wisps of hair fell at either side of her face.

"Now, perhaps you'd like to go to your room," suggested Patty, at her wits' end what to do with such an unconventional person.

"Nixy; I'm too comfortable here! I'll chuck my hat, and just enjoy myself."

Off came the hat, and was pitched on the floor. Azalea ran her fingers through her hair, making it a little more disordered than before. It was pretty hair,—or, rather would have been, if it were better cared for. Dark, almost black, with a slight inclination to curl, it was bunched into a tousled knot that was far from picturesque.

"Oh, come," said Patty, jumping up, for she couldn't stand the girl's uncouth actions another minute. "Come along with me, Azalea. You must dress for dinner soon,—and some one might come to call now. We'll have tea in your room, if you like."

"Tea! I never drink it. I like coffee,—for breakfast,—or cocoa. But see here, Cousin, don't you make any difference for me. I ain't company, you know,—just let me be one of the family, won't you?"

Many retorts flashed through Patty's mind, but she only said, "Certainly, Azalea. We want you to be one of us."

Farnsworth was silent. The man was really aghast. What had he brought on poor little Patty! He didn't excuse himself with the thought that it was Patty's doing, not his, that Azalea was there at all, but he felt personally to blame for having such a relative and for having her there in their home. He looked helplessly at Patty, with such despair in his kind eyes, that she ran over and kissed him, in spite of the fact that they were not alone.

Azalea giggled. "That's right," she said, affably; "don't mind me! Just go right on spoonin' even when I'm around. I don't mind. And I don't wonder you took to her, Cousin William. She's a peach, for fair,—ain't she?"

"She certainly is," said Farnsworth, forcing a polite smile, but conscious of a strong desire to choke his new-found relative.

His utterly discouraged face roused Patty to fresh efforts at hospitality, and taking Azalea's arm, she persuaded her to get up from the lounging chair.

On her feet, the girl shook herself with a careless abandon of manner, unheeding the fact that a hairpin flew from her loosened hair, and she dropped the handkerchief, gloves and small bag that she had had in her lap.

"Oh, pshaw," she said, as Bill restored them, "ain't I awful! That's me—dropping things all the time! But I can pick them up myself—don't you be bothering."

She stuffed gloves and handkerchief in the bag, slinging it on her arm. "My, what a vine!" she said, pulling down a branch of the wistaria,—and, incidentally, breaking it off.

"Oh, golly! Look what I done! Just like me! But you've got plenty left."

She tossed the broken branch out on the lawn, and then turned to follow Patty, already in the doorway.

"I'm coming!" she said, "lead the way, Cousin, I'll trail you. What a big house! Don't you ever get lost in it?"

"No," smiled Patty, "and you won't as soon as you're used to it. This way, Azalea."

"Hello! *Hello!* This my room?" The Western girl looked at the pretty yellow room as Patty ushered her in.

"Yes, if you like yellow,—if not—"

"Oh, yes, I like yellow good enough. Don't make any diff to me what colour a room is. Nice and big, ain't it? Say, do you care if I chuck some of the lace props into the discard?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, these here, now, faddy-duds." And Azalea whisked off a little lace stand-cover, swept up an armful of lace pillows, and was about to jerk off the lace bedspread, when Patty protested.

"Oh, wait a minute,—of course you needn't have anything you don't want,—but Janet will take off the spread."

"'Fraid I'll muss it up, hey?" Azalea laughed, "Well. I s'pose I *am* a terror! But honest to goodness I can't stand for those ticklers. They get in my ears!"

Patty sighed. She had grasped the situation the instant she first laid eyes on the girl, but somehow it seemed to be developing further difficulties all the time.

"Now, Azalea," she began, "let me help you get your travelling dress off and put you into your kimono, and we'll chat over a cup of tea. Oh, you don't like tea,—will you have lemonade?"

"Yep. Love it! Plenty of sugar, though."

Patty gave the order to Janet, who had appeared to look after the visitor, and turned back at the sound of Azalea's loud, strident laughter.

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