

**WELLS
CAROLYN**

PATTY'S
SUITORS

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Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	10
CHAPTER III	15
CHAPTER IV	20
CHAPTER V	25
CHAPTER VI	30
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	31

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CHAPTER I

A VALENTINE PARTY

"It IS a boofy frock, isn't it, Nansome?"

Patty craned her head over her shoulder, as she waited for her stepmother's response, which was only, "Yes."

"Oh, my gracious, Nan! Enthuse! Don't you know half the fun in life is enthusiasm?"

"What shall I say?" asked Nan, laughing.

"Oh, say it's a peach! a hummer! a lallapaloosa!"

"Patty, Patty! what language!"

"Oh, yes; I forgot I meant to stop using slang. But when any one is so lukewarm in her admiration as you are, forcible language is called for."

"Well, it certainly is a lovely gown, and you never looked prettier.

There! since you are fishing for compliments, are you pleased now?"

Patty was far from being conceited over her pretty face, but she honestly liked admiration, and, indeed, she was accustomed to receive it from all who knew her. At the present moment, she was standing before a long mirror in her boudoir, putting the last touches to her new party toilette. Louise, the maid, stood by, with a fur-trimmed wrap, and Patty drew on her long gloves with a happy smile of anticipation.

"I just feel sure I'm going to have a good time to-night," she said; "it's a presentiment or premonition, or whatever you call it."

"Don't flirt too desperately," said Nan, not without cause, for pretty Petty was by nature a coquette, and as she had many admirers she merrily led them a dance.

"But it's so interesting to flirt, Nancy. And the boys like it,—so why not?"

Why not, indeed? thought Nan. Patty's flirtations were harmless, roguish affairs, and prompted by mischief and good nature. Patty was a sweet, true character, and if she teased the young men a bit, it was because of her irrepressible love of fun.

"And this is St. Valentine's night," went on Nan, "so I suppose you think yourself privileged to break all the hearts you can."

"Some hearts are so brittle, it's no fun to break them," returned

Patty, carelessly, as she adjusted her headdress.

She was going to a Valentine party, where the guests were requested to come in appropriate costume.

So Patty's gown was of white lace, softly draped with white chiffon. On the modish tunic were love-knots of pale blue velvet, and a border of tiny pink rosebuds. The head-dress, of gold filigree, was a heart pierced by a dart; and on Patty's left shoulder, a dainty little figure of Cupid was wobbling rather uncertainly.

"You'll lose that little God of War," said Nan.

"I don't care if I do," Patty answered; "he's a nuisance, anyway, but I wanted something Valentinish, so I perched him up there. Now, good-bye, Nancy Dancy, and I expect I'll be out pretty late."

"I shall send Louise for you at twelve, and you must be ready then."

"Oh, make it one. You know a Valentine party is lots of fun."

"Well, half-past twelve," agreed Nan, "and not a minute later!"

Then Louise wrapped Patty in a light blue evening cloak, edged with white fur, and the happy maiden danced downstairs.

"Good-bye, Popsy-Poppet," she cried, looking in at the library door.

"Bless my soul! what a vision of beauty!" and Mr. Fairfield laid down his paper to look at his pretty daughter.

"Yes," she said, demurely, "everybody tells me I look exactly like my father."

"You flatter yourself!" said Nan, who had followed, and who now tucked her hand through her husband's arm. "My Valentine is the handsomest man in the world!"

"Oh, you turtle-doves!" said Patty, laughing, as she ran down the steps to the waiting motor.

Unless going with a chaperon, Patty was always accompanied by the maid, Louise, who either waited for her young mistress in the dressing-room or returned for her when the party was over.

"Shall you be late, Miss Patty?" she asked, as they reached their destination.

"Yes; don't wait for me, Louise. Come back about half-past twelve; I'll be ready soon after that."

Louise adored Patty, for she was always kind and considerate of the servants; and she thought Louise might as well have the evening to herself, as to be cooped up in a dressing-room.

The party was at Marie Homer's, a new friend, with whom Patty had but recently become acquainted.

The Homers lived in a large apartment house, called The Wimbledon, and it was Patty's first visit there. Miss Homer and her mother were receiving their guests in a ballroom, and when Patty greeted them, a large crowd had already assembled.

"You are a true valentine, my dear," said Mrs. Homer, looking admiringly at Patty's garlanded gown.

"And this is a true Valentine party," said Patty, as she noted the decorations of red hearts and gold darts, with Cupids of wax or bisque, here and there among the floral ornaments.

Marie Homer, who was a pretty brunette, wore a dress of scarlet and gold, trimmed with hearts and arrows.

"I'm so glad to have you here," she said to Patty; "for now I know my party will be a success."

"I'm sure your parties always are," returned Patty, kindly, for Marie was a shy sort of girl, and Patty was glad to encourage her.

As soon as the guests had all arrived St. Valentine appeared in the doorway.

It was Mr. Homer, but he was scarcely recognisable in his garb of the good old Saint.

He wore a red gown, trimmed with ermine, and a long white beard and wig.

He carried an enormous letter-bag, from which he distributed valentines to all. They were of the old-fashioned lace paper variety, and beautiful of their kind.

Mrs. Homer explained that on the valentine of every young man was a question, and the girl whose valentine had an answer to rhyme with it, was his partner for the first dance.

The young men were requested to read their valentines aloud in turn, and the girls to read their responsive answers.

This proceeding caused much hilarity, for the lines were exceedingly sentimental, and often affectionate.

When it was Roger Farrington's turn, he read out boldly:

"Where's the girl I love the best?"

and Marie Homer, who chanced to hold the rhyming valentine, whispered, shyly:

"I am sweeter than the rest!"

"You are, indeed!" said Roger, as he offered his arm with his courtliest bow.

Then Kenneth Harper read:

"Who's the fairest girl of all?"

and Mona Galbraith read, with twinkling eyes:

"I'll respond to that sweet call!"

Then it was Philip Van Reypen's turn. He glanced at his valentine, and asked:

"Who's a roguish little elf?"

Everybody laughed when a tall, serious-faced girl responded:

"I guess I am that, myself!"

It was toward the last that Clifford Morse asked:

"Who's the dearest girl I know?"

and as Patty's line rhymed, she said, demurely:

"Guess I am,—if YOU think so!"

"I'm in luck," said Clifford, as he led her to the dance. "You're such a belle, Patty Fairfield, that I seldom get a whole dance with you."

"Faint heart never won fair lady," laughed Patty, shaking her fan at him. "I always accept invitations."

"Accept mine, then, for the next dance," said Philip Van Reypen, who overheard her words as he was passing.

"No programmes to-night," returned Patty, smiling at him. "Ask me at dance time."

As no dances could be engaged ahead, except verbally, Patty was besieged by partners for every dance.

"Oh, dear," she cried, as, at the fourth dance, five or six eager young men were bowing before her; "what shall I do? I'd have to be a centipede to dance with you all! And I can't divide one dance into six parts. And I can't CHOOSE,—that would be TOO embarrassing! Let's draw lots. Lend me a coin, somebody."

"Here you are," said Van Reypen, handing her a bright quarter.

Patty took it, and put both hands behind her.

"You may try first, Phil, because you put up the capital. Right or left?"

"Right," said Philip, promptly.

Patty gaily brought her hands into view, and the quarter lay in her left palm.

"Next!" she said; "Mr. Downing."

"Left," chose that young man, as Patty again concealed her hands.

But that time she showed the coin in her right hand.

"My turn now," said Ken Harper, "AND, you'll please keep your hands in front of you! You don't do it right."

"Do you mean that I cheat?" cried Patty, in pretended rage.

"Oh, no, no! nothing like that! Only, this game is always played with the fists in view."

So Patty held her little gloved fists in front of her, while Kenneth chose.

"Right!" he said, and her right hand slowly opened and showed the shining coin.

"Were you going to take me, anyway?" asked Kenneth, as they walked off together. "And why did you turn down poor Van Reypen? He was awfully cut up."

"Ken Harper, do you mean to insinuate that I didn't play fair?"

"Yes, my lady, just that. Oh, cheating never prospers. You have to put up with me, you see!"

"I might do worse," and Patty flashed him a saucy glance.

"I wish you meant that."

"Oh, I do! I DO, Ken. Truly, there are lots of worse people than you in the world."

"Who?"

"Well,—there's Eddie Perkins."

"Oh, Patty! that fop! Well, I'll bet you can't think of another."

"No; I can't."

"Patty, how dare you! Then you'll sit right here until you can."

Laughingly Kenneth stopped dancing, and led Patty to an alcove where there were a few chairs. As they sat down, Philip Van Reypen came toward them.

"Oh, Ken," Patty cried, "I've thought of a man worse than you are! Oh, EVER so much worse! Here he is! And I simply adore bad men, so I'm going to dance with him."

Naughty Patty went dancing off with Van Reypen, and Ken looked after them, a little crestfallen.

"But," he thought, "there's no use being angry or even annoyed at that butterfly of a girl. She doesn't mean anything anyway. Some day, she'll wake up and be serious, but now she's only a little bundle of frivolity."

Kenneth had been friends with Patty for many years; far longer than any of her other young men acquaintances. He was honestly fond of her, and had a dawning hope that some time they might be more than friends. But he was a slow-going chap, and he was inclined to wait until he had a little more to offer, before he should woo the pretty butterfly.

And, too, Patty would never listen to a word of that sort of thing. She had often proclaimed in his hearing, that she intended to enjoy several years of gay society pleasures, before she would be engaged to any one.

So Kenneth idly watched her, as she circled the room with Van Reypen, and took himself off to find another partner.

"Oh, Valentine, fair Valentine," said Van Reypen to Patty, as they danced.

"Wilt thou be mine, and I'll be thine," returned Patty, in mocking sing-song tones.

"Forever may our hearts entwine," improvised Philip, in tune to the music.

"Like chickwood round a punkin-vine," Patty finished.

"Pshaw, that's not sentimental. You should have said, Like sturdy oak and clinging vine."

"But I'm not sentimental. Who could be in a crowded ballroom, in a glare of light, and in a mad dance?"

"What conditions would make you feel sentimental?"

"Why,—let me see. Moonlight,—on a balcony,—with the right man."

"I'm the right man, all right,—and you know it. And if I'm not greatly mistaken, here's moonlight and a balcony!"

Sure enough, a long French window had been set slightly ajar to cool the overheated room, and almost before she knew it, Patty was whisked outside.

"Oh, Philip! Don't! you mustn't! I'll take cold. I ought to have something around me."

"You have," said Van Reypen, calmly, and as he had not yet released her from the dance he held his arms lightly round her shoulders.

Patty was angry. She knew Philip loved her,—several times he had asked her to marry him,—but this was taking an unfair advantage.

The February wind itself was not colder than the manner with which she drew away from him, and stepped back into the ballroom.

"My dear, my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Homer, who chanced to be near, "how imprudent! You should not go out without a wrap."

"I know it, Mrs. Homer," and Patty looked so sweetly penitent that her hostess could but smile at her. "But, truly, I just stepped out a single second to get a tiny breath of air. The room IS warm, isn't it? May I stay here by you a few moments?"

"Yes, indeed," and Mrs. Homer drew the girl down beside her on the sofa. "You're not robust, my child, and you mustn't run foolish risks."

"You're quite right, and I won't do it again. But on a night not quite so cold, that balcony, flooded with moonlight, must be a romantic spot."

"It is, indeed," said Mrs. Homer, smiling. "My young people think so; and I hope you will have many opportunities in the future to see it for yourself."

"Your young people? Have you other children besides Marie?"

"Yes; I have a daughter who is away at boarding-school. And, also, I have a nephew, whose home is in this same building."

"Is he here to-night?"

"No; Kit hates dances. Of course, that's because he doesn't dance himself. He's a musician."

"Kit? What a funny name."

"It's Christopher, really, Christopher Cameron; but he's such a happy-go-lucky sort of chap, we naturally call him Kit."

"I think I should like him," said Patty. "Would he like me?"

"No," said Mrs. Homer, her eyes twinkling at Patty's look of amazement. "He detests girls. Even my daughters, his cousins, are nuisances, he says. Still he likes to come down here and sit on my balcony, and tease them. He lives with his parents in the apartment just above us."

"He sounds an interesting youth," said Patty, and then, as Roger came up and asked her for a dance, she promptly forgot the musical nephew.

At supper-time, Patty's crowd of intimates gathered around her, and they occupied a pleasant corner of the dining-room.

"What'll you have, Patsums?" asked Roger, as a waiter brought a tray full of dainty viands.

"Sandwiches and bouillon," said Patty, promptly; "I'm honestly hungry."

"The result of exercise in the open air," murmured Philip Van Reypen, as he took a seat directly behind her.

Patty gave an involuntary giggle, and then turned upon Philip what she meant to be an icy glare. He grinned back at her, which made her furious, and she deliberately and ostentatiously ignored him.

"Hello, you two on the outs?" inquired Kenneth, casually.

"Oh, no!" said Philip, with emphasis; "far from it!"

So, as Patty found it impossible to snub such cheerfulness, she concluded to forgive and forget.

"There's something doing after supper," remarked Roger. "Miss Homer dropped a hint, and even now they're fixing something in the ballroom."

"What can it be?" said Elise, craning her neck to see through a doorway.

"It's a game," said Marie Homer, who had just joined the group. "I told mother, you all considered yourselves too grown-up for games, but she said she didn't want to have the whole evening given over to dancing. So you will play it, won't you?"

"Sure we will!" declared Kenneth, who admired the shy little girl.

Marie was new in their set, but they all liked her. She was timid only because she felt unacquainted, and the good-natured crowd did all they could to put her at ease.

"Games!" exclaimed Philip; "why, I just love 'em! I'll play it, whatever it is."

"I too," said Patty. "It will be a jolly change from dancing."

CHAPTER II

ON THE TELEPHONE

When the young people returned to the ballroom, it presented a decidedly changed appearance. Instead of an interior scene, it was a winter landscape.

The floor was covered with snow-white canvas, not laid on smoothly, but rumpled over bumps and hillocks, like a real snow field. The numerous palms and evergreens that had decorated the room, were powdered with flour and strewn with tufts of cotton, like snow. Also diamond dust had been lightly sprinkled on them, and glittering crystal icicles hung from the branches.

At each end of the room, on the wall, hung a beautiful bear-skin rug.

These rugs were for prizes, one for the girls and one for the boys. And this was the game.

The girls were gathered at one end of the room and the boys at the other, and one end was called the North Pole, and the other the South Pole. Each player was given a small flag which they were to plant on reaching the Pole.

This would have been an easy matter, but each traveller was obliged to wear snowshoes. These were not the real thing, but smaller affairs made of pasteboard. But when they were tied on, the wearer felt clumsy indeed, and many of the girls declared they could not walk in them at all. And in addition each one was blindfolded.

However, everybody made an attempt, and at a given signal the young people started from their opposite ends of the room and endeavoured to make progress toward the goal as they blindly stumbled along.

Patty concluded to move very slowly, thinking this the surest way to make a successful trip. So she scuffled along among the other laughing girls, now and then stumbling over a hillock, which was really a hassock or a sofa cushion under the white floor covering. It was great fun, and the girls cheered each other on as they pursued their blinded way. And then about midway of the room they met the boys coming toward them. Then there was scrambling, indeed, as the explorers tried to get out of each other's way and follow their own routes.

It was a very long room, and Patty hadn't gone much more than halfway, when she concluded to give up the race as being too tiresome. She made her way to the side of the room, and reaching the wall she took off her blinding handkerchief and kicked off the snowshoes. To her great surprise she found that many of the other girls and some of the boys had done the same thing, and not half of the original contestants were still in the race. And, indeed, it proved to be much greater fun to watch those who were still blindly groping along, than to stay in the game.

At last the game was concluded, as Roger Farrington proudly planted his flag at the very spot that designated the North Pole, and not long after, Clementine Morse succeeded in safely reaching the South Pole. So the beautiful rugs were given to these two as prizes, and every one agreed that they had earned them.

Then, amid much laughter, everybody was unblindfolded, and they all sat around on the snow mounds waiting for the next game.

A big snow man was brought in and set in the centre of the room. Of course it was not real snow, but made of white plaster, gleaming all over with diamond dust. But it was the traditional type of snow man, with a top hat on, and grotesque features.

In the mouth of the figure was a cigarette, and each guest was presented with a few snowballs, made of cotton wool. The game was to knock the cigarette from the snow man's mouth with one of the snowballs.

Of course the cigarette was so arranged that the lightest touch of a ball would dislodge it, and as one cigarette was displaced, Mr. Homer supplied another.

The guests had been divided into two parties, and each side strove to collect the greater number of cigarettes.

Some balls flew very wide of the mark, while others with unerring aim would hit a cigarette squarely.

The game caused great hilarity, and everybody was anxious to throw balls. They threw in turn, each having three balls at a time.

Patty was especially deft at this, and with true aim succeeded several times.

Then when they tired of this play, a few more dances followed before it was time to go home.

Some attendants came in and whisked away the snow hillocks and floor covering, leaving the ballroom once again in order for dancing.

"Makes me feel young again, to play those kiddy games," said Kenneth, as he was dancing with Patty.

"I like them," returned Patty; "I hate to think that my childhood is over, and I love games of any kind."

"Your childhood will never be over," returned Kenneth; "I think you are the incarnation of youth, and always will be."

"I'm not so much younger than you."

"Five years,—that's a long time at our age. By the way, when are the Hepworths coming home?"

"Next week; and we're planning the loveliest reception for them. You know their apartment is all ready, and we're going to have just a few people to supper there, the night they return."

"Shall I be one of the few?"

"Well, rather! The best man at the wedding must surely be at the home-coming. Doesn't it seem funny to think of Christine as mistress of her own home? She'll be perfectly lovely, I know. My goodness gracious! Ken, what time is it? I'm afraid I'm staying too late. I promised Nan I'd leave at half-past twelve."

"It's not much more than that. Can't you stay for another dance?"

"No, I can't possibly. I must run right away, or my motor car will turn into a pumpkin, and Louise into a white mouse. Take me to Mrs. Homer, please, and I will say good-night to her."

But as they crossed the room, they met Van Reypen coming toward them.

"Our dance, I think," he said, coolly, as he took Patty's hand.

The music had just started, and its beautiful rhythm was too tempting for Patty to resist.

"I'm just on my way home," she said, "but we'll go around the room once, and then I must go."

"Once indeed!" said Philip, gaily; "we won't stop until the music does."

"Yes, we will; I must go now," but somehow or other they circled the room several times. Patty loved dancing, and Philip was one of the best of partners.

But at last she laughingly protested that she really must go home, and they went together to say good-night to their hostess. And then Patty said good-night to Philip, and ran away to the dressing-room, where Louise was patiently waiting for her.

And soon, muffled up in her furs, they were rapidly spinning along toward home.

"I didn't keep you waiting very long, did I, Louise?" said Patty, kindly.

"No, Miss Patty, you're right on time. I expect you would have liked to stay longer."

"Yes, I should, but I promised Mrs. Fairfield not to."

When at last Patty reached her own little boudoir, she declared she was more tired than she had realised. So Louise took off her pretty frock, and Patty sat in her blue silk dressing gown while the maid brushed her hair. Then she brought her a cup of hot milk, and left her for the night.

Patty wasn't sleepy, and she dawdled around her room, now and then sipping the milk, and then looking over her engagements for the next day.

"Oh," she thought, suddenly, "I've left my fan at the party. I'm sorry, for it's my pet fan. Of course it will be safe there, but I think I'll telephone Marie to look it up and put it away."

Knowing that the Homers would not yet have retired, Patty picked up her telephone and called the number.

A masculine voice gave back a cheery "Hello!"

"Is this Mr. Homer?" said Patty.

"No, indeed. I'm Kit Cameron. Who are you, please?"

"Isn't this The Wimbledon apartment house?"

"It sure is."

"Isn't this 6483?"

"No, it's 6843. Please tell me who you are?"

A spirit of mischief entered into Patty. She knew this must be Marie Homer's cousin, who lived on the floor above the Homers, and who, Mrs. Homer had said, detested girls.

"But I have the wrong number," she said. "I didn't mean to call you."

"But since you did call me, you must tell me who you are."

"I'm a captive princess," said Patty, in rather a melancholy tone. "I'm imprisoned in the dungeon of a castle."

"How awful! May I get a squad of soldiers and come to your rescue, oh, fair lady?"

"Nay, nay, Sir Knight; and anyway you do not know that I am a fair lady."

"Your voice tells me that. Surely such musical tones could belong only to the most beautiful princess in the world."

"Oh, yes, I am THAT," and Patty laughed, roguishly; "but a well-behaved princess would not be talking to a strange man. So I must say good-bye."

"Oh, no, no! wait a minute; you haven't told me your name yet."

"And I don't intend to. You detest girls, anyway."

"Yes, I always have, but you see I never met a princess before."

"You haven't met me yet."

"But I shall! Don't make any mistake about that."

"How can you? I'm going to ring off now, and you have no way of tracing me."

"I can find out from Central."

"No, you can't."

"Why can't I?"

"Because I forbid you to do so."

"All right; then I can't find out that way, but I'll find out some other way. I'll go on a quest."

"Goodness, what is a quest?"

"Oh, it just means that I henceforth devote my whole life to finding you."

"But you can't find me, when you don't know my name."

"I'll make up a name for you. I'll call you Princess Poppycheek."

"How could you guess I'm a brunette?"

"I can tell it from your voice. You have snapping black eyes and dark curly hair, and the reddest of red cheeks."

"Exactly right!" exclaimed Patty, giggling to think how far this description was from her blonde pink-and-white type.

"I knew it was right!" exclaimed the voice, exultantly; "and I shall find you very soon."

"Then I shall await your coming with interest. You prefer brunettes, do you?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I have always admired blondes more, but I'm quite willing to change my tastes for you. Do you sing?"

For answer, Patty sang softly into the telephone, the little song of

"Beware, take care, she is fooling thee."

Although she did little more than hum it, Mr. Cameron was greatly impressed with her voice.

"By jove!" he exclaimed. "You CAN sing! Now, I can find you easily."

There are not many voices like that in this wicked world."

"Do you sing yourself? But I don't want to know, I haven't the least interest in a stranger, and besides, I'm going to ring off now."

"Oh, wait a minute! I don't sing, but I do something better. Don't ring off, just listen a minute."

Patty listened, and in a moment she heard a violin played softly. It was played by a master hand, and she heard an exquisite rendition of the "Spring Song."

"Beautiful!" she exclaimed, as the last notes died away, and then suddenly realising that she herself was acting in a most unconventional manner, she said abruptly, "Thank you; good-bye," and quickly hung up her receiver.

For some time she sat thinking about it. Curled up in a big easy chair, her blue silk boudoir gown trailing around her, she sat giggling over her escapade.

"It's all right," she assured herself, "for of course I know who he is, though he doesn't know me. He is Mrs. Homer's nephew, so it's just the same as if I had met him properly. And, anyhow, he hasn't an idea who I am, and he never can find out from the description he has of me!"

Still giggling over the episode, Patty went to bed and to sleep.

The next morning, as she thought it over, she realised that she hadn't succeeded in securing her fan, and she determined to go around and see Marie that afternoon, and get it.

So that afternoon she went to make her call.

"It was a beautiful party," she said to Marie, as the two girls chatted together. "I love games for a change from dancing, and the games you had were so novel."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," said Marie, "for I was afraid they would seem too childish."

"No, indeed," returned Patty; "and now put on your hat and come out with me for a little while. I'm going to a picture exhibition, and I'd love to have you go too. But first, did I leave my fan here last evening?"

"There was a beautiful fan left here,—an Empire fan. Is this yours?"

Marie produced the fan and Patty recognised it as her own.

"But I can't go this afternoon," said Marie, "because Cousin Kit is coming down to practise some new music. Won't you stay and hear him play? He is really a very good violinist."

Patty considered. She rather wanted to meet this young man, but she was afraid he would think her forward. So after a little further chat, she rose, saying she must go. And it was just as she was going out that Mr. Cameron came in, with his violin under his arm.

Patty was obliged to pause a moment, as Marie presented her cousin, but the young man, though courteous, showed no interest whatever in Miss Fairfield. Patty's pretty face was almost invisible through her motor veil, and as Mr. Cameron had no idea that she was the girl who had talked to him the night before, and as he really had no interest in girls in general, he merely made a very polite bow and went directly toward the piano.

"I wish you'd stay and hear some music," said Marie, but Patty only murmured a refusal, not wanting Mr. Cameron to hear her voice, lest he recognise it.

He was an attractive looking man of fine physique and handsome face, but he looked extremely dignified and not very good-natured.

"All musicians are cross," Patty thought to herself as she went down in the elevator, "and I wasn't going to have that man think that I went around to Marie's to see him!"

She decided to call for Elise to go to the art gallery with her, and she found that young woman ready and glad to go.

"I hadn't a thing to do this afternoon," said Elise, as they started off, "and I love to go anywhere with you, Patty. Shall we have a cup of tea afterwards?"

And so it was after they had seen the pictures, and as they were sitting in a cosy little tea-room, that Elise said suddenly:

"Do you know Mr. Cameron? He's a cousin of Marie Homer's."

"I don't know him," said Patty, smiling, "but I've been introduced to him. Just as I was leaving Marie's to-day, he came in. But he was very abstracted in his manner. He merely bowed, and without a word he went straight on to the piano and began fussing with his music."

"You were just leaving, anyway?"

"Yes; but I would have remained a few moments, if he had been more sociable. But, of course, I couldn't insist on his talking to me, if he didn't want to."

"He doesn't like girls," said Elise, but as she spoke she smiled in a self-conscious way.

"So I've heard," said Patty, smiling herself. "He seems young to be what they call a woman-hater. I thought only old bachelors were that. Well, he has no interest for me. There are plenty of boys in our own set."

"Don't you tell, if I tell you something," and now Elise looked decidedly important.

"What is it? I won't tell."

"Well, it's the funniest thing! That Mr. Cameron wants to meet me, though he never has seen me."

"What!" exclaimed Patty, in astonishment. "Why does he want to meet you?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. But he was at Marie's this morning, and asked her if she knew any girl who was gay and merry and had a sweet voice, and had dark hair and eyes and rosy cheeks. And Marie says she knows he means me, and I think he does too! Isn't it exciting?"

"Yes," said Patty, drily. "But you don't sing much, Elise."

"Oh, of course I don't sing like you do, but I have a fairly decent voice."

"But how mysterious it is. What does he know about you?"

"I don't know. It IS mysterious. He wouldn't tell Marie anything except that he wanted to know the name of the girl he described; and he said she must be friendly enough with Marie to call her up on the telephone in the middle of the night."

"But did you do that?" asked Patty, who was really shaking with laughter.

"Yes; I called her up last night after I got home from the party, because I'd left my spangled scarf there, and I wanted her to put it away safely for me."

"I always leave things at a party, too," said Patty, looking innocent. "I left my fan at Marie's last night. So I went there to-day and got it."

"Well, I thought I'd better telephone, for so many girls leave things and they get scattered or lost."

"Well, what did your telephoning have to do with Mr. Cameron?"

"I don't know; that's the queer part of it. Perhaps the wires were crossed and he heard me talking."

"H'm," said Patty, "perhaps he did. When are you going to meet him, Elise?"

"I don't know; but Marie says she'll have a few friends to tea some day soon, and she'll ask him. She says it'll have to be a very small tea, because he hates to meet people."

"Why doesn't she have just you two? I think it would be more romantic."

"Oh, nonsense. This isn't romance. I think Mr. Cameron is a freak, anyway. But it's all amusing, and I hope you'll be at the tea, yourself, Patty."

"I will if I'm asked," said Patty.

CHAPTER III

THE HEPWORTHS AT HOME

It was the day of Christine's home-coming, and Patty was busy as a bee preparing for the great event. The pretty apartment where the Hepworths were to live was all furnished and equipped, but Patty was looking after the dainty appointments of a party.

Not a large party, only about a dozen of their own set. Nan was there, too, and Elise Farrington, and they were arranging flowers in bowls and jars and vases, till the rooms were a bower of blossoms.

"What time will they arrive?" said Elise.

"We expected them about six o'clock," returned Patty; "but I had a telegram, and their train is delayed, so they can't get here until nine. So I want the party all assembled when they come. It's five now, and everything's about done, so we can scoot home and get some dinner and get dressed, and be back here before they arrive. I'll be here by half-past eight, for the caterers are coming then, and I want to see about the table."

So they all went home to dress, and before half-past eight Patty was back again.

There were two maids already installed, but Patty found plenty to do in superintending matters, and she hadn't much more than completed the decorations of the table, when the guests began to come.

"Isn't the apartment lovely?" exclaimed Mona Galbraith, as she went through the rooms. "This music-room, or living-room, or whatever you call it, is just dear! Who selected the furnishings?"

"Oh, Mr. Hepworth and Christine," said Patty; "two artists, you know; of course the rooms ought to be beautiful. It is a lovely place, and just the right setting for that darling of a Christine."

The whole merry crowd were assembled in the living-room, when the bride and groom arrived. A shout of welcome went up from the young people, and Christine was smothered in girlish embraces, while the men vigorously shook Mr. Hepworth's hand, or clapped him on the shoulder, in their masculine way of congratulation.

Christine looked very sweet and smiling, in a pretty travelling gown, but Patty carried her off at once and insisted that she get into a house gown.

"The idea," said Patty, "of a hostess in a high-collared frock and all her guests in evening dress!"

So Christine quickly changed to a little chiffon gown of pale green and

Patty tucked a pink rose in her hair and some more in her belt.

"Now you look like a bride," said Patty, nodding approval at her, and leading her to a mirror; "look at that vision of beauty! Aren't you glad I made you change?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Christine, in mock humility; "it's much better so."

The evening was a merry one. They danced and they sang and they chatted and finally they had the delightful supper that Patty had ordered.

Christine, blushing prettily, took the head of the table, while Gilbert

Hepworth, with a proud air of proprietorship, sat at the other end.

Patty, as guest of honour, sat at the right hand of her host.

"It has always been my aspiration," she said, with a beaming smile at Christine, "to have a married friend to visit. I warn you, Christine, I shall spend most of my time here. There's one little nook of a bedroom I claim as my own and I expect to occupy it very frequently. And, besides, I have to give you lessons in housekeeping. You're a great artist, I know, but you must learn to do lots of other things beside paint."

"I wish you would, Patty," and the little bride looked very much in earnest; "I truly want to keep house, but being an artist and a Southern girl both, I don't believe I'm very capable."

"You're a blessed dear, that's what YOU are"; and Patty turned to

Hepworth, saying, "Isn't she?"

"Yes, indeed," he returned; "I've only just begun to realise the beautiful qualities in her nature. And it is to you, Patty, that I owe my happiness. I shall never forget what you did in order that Christine might come to New York."

"And now we are surprised at the result," said Patty, who never could be serious for long at a time. "Come on, people, you've had enough supper, let's have one more dance and then we must go home and leave these turtledoves to their own nest."

But the one dance proved to mean several, until at last Patty said, "This will never do! Christine is all tired out, and as the superintendent of this party I order you all to go home at once."

The others laughingly agreed, except Philip Van Reypen, who came near Patty and murmured, "You haven't danced with me once to-night, and you've been awful cruel to me lately, anyway. Now let us have one more dance in honour of the bride's home-coming."

"No," said Patty, firmly, "not another dance to-night."

"Just a part of one, then," begged Philip; but Patty was inexorable.

And so the merry crowd dispersed, Patty lingering a moment to give Christine a good-night kiss and wish her every blessing and happiness in her new home.

"And I have you to thank for it all, Patty dear," said Christine, her blue eyes looking lovingly into Patty's own.

"Nonsense, thank your own sweet self. You well deserve the happiness that has come to you. And now good-night, dear; I'll be over some time to-morrow."

The laughing group went away, and as it had been planned, Mona took Patty home in her car.

"I wish you'd go on home with me, Patsy," said Mona, as they rolled along toward Patty's house.

"Can't possibly do it. I've a thousand and one things to look after to-morrow morning."

"But it isn't late; really it's awfully early. And I'll send you home early to-morrow morning."

"No, I mustn't, really, Mona. I have to look after some things for the Happy Saturday Club, which it won't do to neglect. And I want to run over to Christine's to-morrow morning, too. I have some things to take to her."

"Do you know, Patty, I think they're an awfully humdrum couple."

"Who? The Hepworths? Oh, I don't think humdrum is the right word,—they're just serious-minded."

"But Mr. Hepworth is so old and prosy, and Christine seems to me just a little nonentity."

"Now, Mona, that isn't fair. Just because you are a frivolous-headed butterfly of fashion, you oughtn't to disdain people who happen to have one or two ideas in their heads."

"Well, the only ideas they have are about pictures."

"Pictures are good ideas."

"Yes, good enough, of course. But there's no fun in them."

"That's the whole trouble with the Hepworths. They haven't any fun in them. Neither of them has a sense of humour. But that's good, too; for if one had and the other hadn't, they'd be miserable for life. But as it is they don't know what they miss."

"No, they don't. Patty, don't ever marry a man without a sense of humour."

"Trust your Aunt Patty for that. But I don't propose to marry anybody."

"Of course not; he'd propose to you."

"Funny Mona! Don't let your sense of humour run away with you. Well, this facetious 'he' that you conjured up in your imagination may propose all he likes; I sha'n't accept him,—at least not for many years. I mean to have a lot of fun before I get engaged. Can you imagine me settled down in a little apartment like Christine's, devoting myself to domestic duties?"

"No; but I can fancy you married to a millionaire with two or three country houses and yachts and all sorts of things."

"Good gracious, Mona. I don't aspire to all that! Just because YOU're a millionairess, yourself, you needn't think everybody else longs for untold wealth. After I get pretty well along in years,—I think I shall marry a college professor, or a great scientist. I do love brainy men."

"Well, there are no brainy men in our set."

"Oh, Mona, what a libel! Our boys,—somehow I never can think of them as men,—are quite brainy enough for their age. And at the present day, I'd rather have fun with Ken or Roger, just talking foolishness, than to discourse with this wise professor I'm talking about. But of course, I wouldn't marry Ken or Roger even if they wanted me to, which they don't."

"Oh, yes, they do, Patty; everybody wants to marry you."

"Don't be a goose, Mona; you know perfectly well that Roger is over head and ears in love with you. Of course, I'm mortally jealous, for he was my friend first, and you stole him away from me. But I'll forgive you if you'll let up on this foolish subject and talk about something interesting."

"I will, Patty, if you'll tell me one thing. Don't you like Mr. Van Reyphen very much?"

"Phil Van Reyphen? Of course I do! I adore him,—I worship the ground he walks on! I think he's the dearest, sweetest chap I ever knew!"

"Would you marry him?"

"Not on your life! Excuse my French, Mona, but you do make me tired! NOW will you be good? We're nearly home and I had a lot of things I wanted to ask you, and here you've been and went and gone and wasted all our time! Foolish girl! Here we are at my house, and I thank you, kind lady, for bringing me safely home. If you'll let your statuesque footman see me in at my own door, I'll promise to dream of you all night."

The girls exchanged affectionate good-nights, and Patty ran up the steps and Louise let her in.

"Nobody home?" asked Patty, noting the dim lights in the rooms.

"No, Miss Patty," answered Louise, "Mr. and Mrs. Fairfield are not in yet."

"Well, I'm not a bit sleepy, Louise, and I'm not going to bed now. I shall stay in the library for awhile,—perhaps until they come home."

Louise took Patty's wraps and went away, and Patty wandered around the library selecting a book to read. The girl was a light sleeper, and she often liked to read a while before retiring.

But after she had selected a book and arranged a cosy corner in a big easy-chair by a reading light, she still sat idle, with her book unopened.

"I don't feel a bit like reading," she thought to herself; "I do hate to come home from a party so early. Of course I could write some letters, but I don't feel like that, either. I feel like doing something frisky."

She jumped up and turned on more lights. Then, chancing to see herself in the long mirror, she bowed profoundly to the pretty reflected figure, saying: "Good-evening, Miss Fairfield, how well you're looking this evening. Won't you sing a little for us?"

Then she danced into the music-room, and sitting down at the piano, sang a gay little song.

Then she sang another, and then looking over some old music she came across the little song, "Beware," that she had sung over the telephone to Kit Cameron. Naturally her thoughts turned to that young man, whom she had almost forgotten, and she wondered if he had met Elise yet.

"That was quite a jolly little escapade," she said to herself; "that young man certainly thought I was a little black-eyed beauty, and when he does see Elise, of course he'll think she's the one. I believe I'll call him up and mystify him a little more. It's all right, because I've really been introduced to him, and if he doesn't remember me, I can't help it! Probably he'll be out anyway; but I'll have a try at it."

Returning to the library, Patty sat down at the telephone and called up

Mr. Cameron's number.

His own gay, cheery self answered "Hello," and Patty said in a shy little voice, "Is this you, Mr. Cameron?"

"Bless my soul! if it isn't my fair Unknown, again!"

"Why do you call me, fair, when you know I'm dark?"

"Oh, fair in this case means bewitching and lovely. It doesn't stand for tow hair and light blue eyes! and neither do I!"

"But you said you liked blondes."

"I used to, before I knew you."

"But you don't know me."

"Oh, but I do! I know you a whole heap better than lots of people who have seen you. There's something in a telephone conversation that discloses the real inner nature. It was dear of you to call me up to-night. You don't know how it pleases me!"

"Oh, I didn't do it to please you. But I'm all alone in my dungeon tower—"

"Wait a minute; what IS a dungeon tower?"

"Oh, don't quibble. Anyway, I'm all alone, and I simply had to have some one to speak to."

"How did you know I'd be here?"

"Be there! Why, I assumed that you sat at your telephone every evening, waiting to see if I would call you!"

"You little rascal! That's exactly what I have done, but I don't see how you knew it. Are you still a captive princess?"

"Yes; they keep me on bread and water, and not very much of that."

"Couldn't I come and try to liberate you?"

"No, Sir Knight. Alas, you would but be captured yourself."

"But to be captured in such a cause, would be a glorious fate!"

"Oh, aren't you romantic! I really wish it were the Fifteenth Century, and you could come on a dashing charger, and rescue me with a rope ladder! I'm simply dying for an escapade!"

"All right; I'll be there in a few minutes!"

"No, no! it's just five centuries too late. Now, one can only meet people in humdrum drawing-rooms."

"And do you think there's no romance left in the world?"

"I can't find any." Naughty Patty put a most pathetic inflection in her voice, which touched Mr. Cameron's heart.

"Look here, my lady," he said, "there IS romance left in this old world, and we're IT! Now, this telephoning is all very well, but I'm determined to meet you face to face. And that before long, too."

"Oh, you've been making inquiries about me. You know I forbade that."

"No, you didn't; you only said I mustn't ask Central who telephoned. There was surely no harm in asking my cousin who called her up the other night. And very naturally she told me. So she's going to be the Fairy Godmother who will bring us together by the touch of her magic wand."

"Oh, if you know who I am, the fun is all gone out of our escapade!"

"Not at all; the fun is only about to begin."

"Then Marie did tell you all about me?" And Patty's tones betokened disappointment.

"She didn't need to tell me much about you. She told me your name, and the rest I want to know about you, I either know already or I shall learn for myself."

"If you know my name, why don't you call me by it?" And Patty had great difficulty to stifle her laughter.

"May I call you by your first name?"

"Not as a regular thing, of course. But if you know it, you may use it just once. But you can only use it to say good-night. For this session is over now."

"But I don't WANT to say good-night. I want to talk to you a long time yet."

"Alas, that may not be. It is even now time for my jailers to visit my dungeon, and if they catch me at this foolish trick, they will probably reduce my allowance of bread and water. And so,

if you're going to call me by name, you must do it quickly, for I'm going to hang up this receiver, as soon as I say good-night!"

Patty's positive tones apparently carried conviction that she would do just as she said, for Mr. Cameron sighed deeply and responded, "It is such a beautiful name it seems a pity to use it only once. But I know you mean what you say, so as your liege knight, fair lady, I obey. Good-night—Elise—"

The name came slowly, as if the speaker wished to make the most of it, and Patty fairly thrust the receiver back on its hook as she burst into laughter. It surely was a joke on the young man! He had asked Marie who was her pretty brunette friend, and Marie had honestly thought he must mean Elise Farrington.

Patty was still giggling when her parents came in from a concert they had been attending.

"What IS the matter, Patty?" asked Nan. "Why do you sit up here alone, grinning like a Chessy cat, and giggling like a school-girl? Were the Hepworths so funny that you can't get over it?"

And then Patty told Nan and her father the whole story of Kit Cameron and the telephone.

Nan laughed in sympathy, but Mr. Fairfield looked a little dubious.

"And I thought you a well-brought up young woman," he said,—half in earnest and half in jest. "Do you think it's correct to telephone to strange young men? I'm shocked! that's what I am, —SHOCKED."

"Fiddlesticks, Fred," said Nan; "it's perfectly all right. In the first place, the man HAS been introduced to Patty. She met him at Miss Homer's."

"But she telephoned BEFORE she met him," stormed Mr. Fairfield, for

Patty had told the whole story.

"But she didn't do it purposely," said Nan, impatiently. "She got him on the wire by mistake. She couldn't help THAT. And, anyway, when he said he was Miss Homer's cousin, that made it all right. I think it's a gay little joke, and I'd like to see that young man's face when he meets Patty!"

"I shan't meet him," said Patty, pretending to look doleful; "he hates tow-headed girls."

"Well, you're certainly that," said her father, looking at her with pretended disapproval. "I have to tell you the truth once in awhile, because everybody else flatters you until you're a spoiled baby."

"Tow-headed, am I?" and Patty ran to her father, and rubbed her golden curls against his own blond head. "And, if you please, where did I inherit my tow? If I hadn't had a tow-headed father I might have been the poppy-cheeked brunette that everybody admires. It isn't fair for YOU to comment on MY tow-head!"

"That's so, Pattikins; and I take it all back," for Mr. Fairfield could never resist his pretty daughter's cajolery. "You are a pretty little doll-faced thing, and I expect I'll have to forgive your very reprehensible behaviour."

"I'm NOT a doll-face," said Patty, pouting; "I shan't let you go until you take THAT back."

As Patty had her arms tightly round her father's neck, he considered it the better part of valour to take back his words. "All right," he said, "rather than be garroted,—I retract! You're a beautiful and dignified lady, and your notions of convention and etiquette are above reproach."

"They're above YOUR reproaches, anyhow," returned Patty, saucily, and then she ran away to her own room.

CHAPTER IV

A PERFECTLY GOOD JOKE

Patty decided to do nothing in the matter of meeting Kit Cameron. She dearly loved a joke, and this seemed to her a good one. But she thought it would spoil it, if she made any move in the game herself. So she bided her time, and it was perhaps a week later that Marie Homer came to call on her.

As Marie hadn't the slightest notion that Patty was the girl her cousin had in mind, the subject was not mentioned until just before Marie left, when she asked Patty if she would come to her home the next week to a little musicale.

"Not a big party," said Miss Homer, "just a dozen or so really musical people to spend the evening. And I want you to sing, if you will. My cousin will be there,—the one who plays the violin."

"I thought he detested society," said Patty, her eyes twinkling a little.

"I don't know what's come over Kit," returned Marie, looking perplexed.

"He's been the funniest thing of late. He has some girl in his mind—"

"A girl!" exclaimed Patty; "I thought he scorned them."

"Well, I can't make this out. It's awfully mysterious. I think I'll tell you about it."

"Do," said Patty, demurely.

"Two or three weeks ago,—in fact, it was the day after my valentine party,—Kit asked me which of my friends had telephoned me late the night before. You know he lives in the apartment just above ours, and it seems the wires were crossed or something, but he heard this girl's voice, and now he insists he wants to meet her. I don't think Elise Farrington has such a fascinating voice, do you?" "Elise!" exclaimed Patty, in pretended surprise; "what has SHE to do with it?"

"Why," explained Marie, "Elise did call me up that night, to say she had left her scarf. But how Kit discovered that she was a red-cheeked brunette, is more than *I* can understand. You can't know that from a voice, now, can you?"

"No," said Patty, decidedly, "you CAN'T!"

"Well, then, a week or two went by, and I told Elise about this, but somehow I couldn't manage to get them together. Every time Elise came to our house, Kit would be away somewhere. But a few days ago I did manage to have them meet."

"Did you?" exclaimed Patty; "for gracious sake, WHAT happened?"

Marie looked a little surprised at Patty's excited interest, but she went on: "Oh, it was AWFULLY funny. Elise looked lovely that day. She had just come in from skating, and her cheeks were red and her eyes sparkled, and her furs were SO becoming! I introduced Kit, and I could see he admired her immensely. There were several people there, so I left these two together. They were getting on famously, when Kit said to her, 'Are you still a Captive Princess?'

"I didn't know what he meant, and Elise didn't either, for she looked perfectly blank, and asked him why he said that. And Kit told her she knew well enough why he said it, and Elise thought he must be crazy. However, they got along all right until Kit asked me to get Elise to sing. Now, you know Elise doesn't sing much; she has a nice little contralto voice, but she never sings for people. But do you know, she was perfectly willing, and she sang a little lullaby or something like that, rather sweetly, *I* thought. But such a change came over Kit's manner! I don't know how to express it. He was polite and courteous, of course; but he seemed to have lost all interest in Elise."

"But your cousin *IS* a sort of a freak, isn't he?" said Patty, who was deeply interested in Marie's story.

"Why, no, he isn't a freak. He's a musician, but he's an awfully nice chap, and real sensible. He hates society as a bunch, but he often likes an individual here and there, and when he does he can be awfully nice and friendly. But this whole performance was so QUEER. He wanted to meet Elise,

and when he did, he admired her, I could see that; but when she sang, the light all went out of his face, and he looked terribly disappointed. The girl isn't a great singer, but why in the world should he expect her to be, or care so much because she isn't?"

"It IS strange!" murmured Patty; "how did Elise take it?"

"Oh, I don't think she minded much; she thinks the boy half crazy, anyway; asking her if she was a captive princess! And, of course, he didn't let HER see that he was disappointed in her voice. But I know Kit so well, that I can tell the moment he loses interest in anybody. I'm awfully fond of Kit,—we've grown up more like brother and sister than cousins."

"What's he like? Has he any fun in him?"

"Well, he loves practical jokes,—that is, if they're not mean. He couldn't do a mean or unkind thing to anybody. But he likes anything out of the ordinary. Escapades or cutting up jinks. He and Beatrice,—that's my younger sister,—are always playing tricks on us, when she's at home. But it's always good-natured fun, so we don't mind. Oh, Kit's a dear; but you never can tell whether he's going to like people or not. He likes so very few."

"But he liked Elise?"

"Oh, yes; in a general way. But, for some reason I can't make out, he was terribly disappointed in her."

"And he's going to play at your musicale?"

"Yes; and I want you to sing. We have two or three other musicians, and it will really be rather worth while."

Patty hesitated. If she went to this party, and met Kit, all the mystery of her little romance with him would be ended. He would be more disappointed in her than he had been in Elise, for at least she conformed to his favourite type of beauty, and Patty was quite the reverse. She could sing, to be sure, but probably her voice would not charm him, when robbed of the glamour lent by the telephone.

"Oh, DO say yes," Marie urged; "it will be a nice party, and if I've left out any people you specially want, I'll invite them."

But Marie's list included all of Patty's set, and as she rather wanted to go, she finally decided to say yes.

"Good for you!" exclaimed Marie; "now I know the party will be a success!"

"You always say that to me," said Patty, laughing. "I don't make parties a success."

"Yes, you do," said Marie, in a tone of firm conviction; "you're so nice, and pretty, and smiling, and always seem to have such a good time, that it makes everybody else have a good time."

"What do you want me to sing?"

"I don't care at all. Make your own selections. I like you best, I think, in some of those sweet, simple ballads."

"I rarely sing anything but ballads or simple music," said Patty, "my voice isn't strong enough for operatic soaring."

"Well, sing what you like, Patty, if you only come," and Marie went away, greatly elated at having secured Patty's consent to sing at her musicale.

Patty at once went to the piano, and began to look over her music. She smiled as she came across "Beware," but she concluded that would not do for a regular program, though she might use it as an encore.

She made her selections with care, as she honestly wanted to do credit to Marie's musicale, and then, taking several pieces of music, she ran up to Nan's room to ask her final judgment in the matter.

"You'll have a lot of fun out of this, Patty," said Nan, laughing, as she heard the whole story. "When is it to be?"

"Friday night. Do you know, Nan, I'd like to play a joke on that boy, between now and then."

"I think you are playing a joke on him,—and, besides, he isn't a boy."

"No; Marie says he's about twenty-four. He's a civil engineer, besides being a musician. But, anyway, I've got him guessing. I'm glad Elise didn't take it to heart, that she wasn't the right girl,—but Marie says Elise thinks he's a freak, anyway. And, too, I believe he's not very nice to girls as a rule, so of course Elise won't want him. Oh, I'M the only girl in the world for him!"

Patty pirouetted about the room on the tips of her toes, waving a sheet of music in either hand. "What a silly you are, Patty, with your foolishness!"

Patty dropped on one knee at her stepmother's side, and clasping her hands, looked up beseechingly into the smiling face over her.

"But you love silly, foolish little girls, don't you, Nancy Nan?"

"Yes, when they're you," and Nan patted the shining head at her knee.

"Well, very few of them ARE me!"

"Thank goodness for that! I don't know what I'd do if you were a half a dozen!"

"You'd have just six times as much fun in your life!" and Patty jumped up and began to sing the songs she had brought.

Then together they decided on the ones she should sing at the musicale.

Although Patty's voice was not very strong, it was sweet and true and had been carefully cultivated. She sang with much charm, and her music always gave pleasure. She never attempted anything beyond her powers, and so her songs, while selected with good taste, were not pretentious.

That evening, while Patty was fluttering around her room, pretending to get ready for bed, but really dawdling, she was moved to telephone once again to the young man who was fond of jokes.

"It's you, is it?" he almost growled, in response to her call.

"Yes," said Patty, in a meek little voice; "shall I go away?"

"Great jumping cows! NO! Don't go away, stay right where you are!"

"But I'm going away for ever," said Patty, moved by a dramatic impulse; "my captors have found out that I'm holding communication with you, and they're going to take me away to another castle, and imprison me there."

"Stop your fooling; I want to know who you are, and I want to know it quick! Do you hear THAT?"

"Yes, I hear," returned Patty, saucily, "but I don't have to answer!"

And if you talk to me like that, I shall hang up this receiver."

"I won't talk like that any more. But, do you know, I thought I had found you, and you turned out to be somebody else."

"But I can't be anybody else. I'm only myself."

"Be serious a minute, won't you? I went to my cousin's and met a beautiful, poppy-cheeked princess; but she wasn't you."

"How do you know she wasn't?"

"Because she couldn't sing a LITTLE bit! And you can."

"I can sing a LITTLE bit! Oh, thank you!"

"Now, I want to ask you something. You know my cousin, don't you?"

"Have you sisters and cousins, whom you reckon up by dozens?"

"It doesn't matter if I have. I mean my cousin, Marie Homer, to whom you telephoned, or tried to, on the fourteenth of February. But you got me, instead, and that means we're each other's valentine. See?"

"No, I don't see at all. I only like pretty valentines."

"Oh, I'm as pretty as a picture! That part is all right. Now, I've tried my best to find out who you are, from Marie. But either she can't or won't tell. But I've found out one thing, for certain. You're NOT Miss Farrington."

"No, I'm not; but I never said I was."

"I know you didn't, but you told me you were a pretty brunette, with poppy cheeks,—and Miss Farrington is that."

"Did I tell you I was PRETTY? Oh, I'm SURE I didn't!"

"You didn't have to. I know that myself. Now, if you'll keep still a minute, I'D like to speak."

"If I can't talk, I may as well hang up this receiver, for I'm sure I don't want to sit here and listen to you."

"Chatterbox! Now, listen; Marie is having a musicale next Friday night, and I want you to come."

"Without an invitation!" Patty's voice sounded horrified.

"Yes;" impatiently. "Marie would invite you fast enough if she knew who you were."

"Perhaps she HAS invited me."

"No, she hasn't; I saw her list. It's a small party, not more than twenty. And I asked her about each one, and not one of the ladies seemed to correspond to your description."

"Who's going to sing?" asked Patty, calmly.

"Only two ladies; a Miss Curtiss and a Miss Fairfield."

"Perhaps I'm one of those."

"No; I asked Marie, and she says Miss Fairfield is a pretty little blonde, and Miss Curtiss is a tall, brown-haired young woman."

"Don't you know either of these ladies?"

"No; that is, I've never seen Miss Curtiss, but Marie says I met Miss Fairfield one day, for a moment."

"Don't you remember her?"

"Hardly; she seemed an insignificant little thing."

"Pretty?"

"How do I know! She was all wrapped up in motor togs, and acted like a gawky schoolgirl."

"She did! Why, I know that Fairfield girl, and she isn't gawky a bit!

She's a fascinating blonde."

"No blonde can fascinate ME! MY girl is a poppy-cheeked brunette, and I'm going to catch her before long. Ah, DO come to Marie's party,—won't you?"

"I've never yet gone where I wasn't invited, and I don't propose to begin now. But if you can get Marie to invite me, I'll go."

"Don't be so cruel! I can't do more than I have in the matter. I've teased Marie to death over this thing, and she can't think who you can be, unless you're a Miss Galbraith. You're not, are you?"

"Gracious, no! I'm not Mona Galbraith!"

"I knew you weren't; Marie says SHE can't sing. Oh, dear, you're a perfect torment! Pretty princess,—pretty Princess Poppy-cheek, WON'T you take pity on your humble slave and adorer, and tell me your name?"

"No; but I'll tell you what I will do. I'll send you my photograph."

"Oh, you heavenly angel! You dear, beautiful princess! When will you send it? Don't wait for the morning; call a messenger, and send it to-night!"

"I'll do nothing of the sort. I'll send it to-morrow morning,—by messenger, if you like,—and if you'll promise not to ask the messenger who sent it."

"I'll promise that if you so ordain. I guess I can play cricket!"

"All right then; now listen, yourself. I shall send you three pictures. You pick out the one you think I am, and take it to Marie, and if you are right, she'll invite me. She knows me well enough, but she can't recognise me from your description."

"I don't think it's fair for you to play that way; but I'm dead sure I can pick out your picture from the three."

"All right then; good-night!" And Patty hung up the receiver with a snap.

Then she lay back in her big chair and indulged in a series of giggles.

"Sam Weller says," she said, to herself, "that the great art of letter writing is to break off suddenly and make 'em wish they was more,—and I expect that applies equally well to telephoning."

And she was quite right, for the impatient young man at the other end of the wire was chagrined indeed when the connection was cut off. He was too honourable to use any forbidden means of discovering Patty's identity, and so would not ask to see any telephone records, and was quite willing to promise not to quiz a messenger boy. And so, he could do nothing but wait impatiently for the promised photograph.

Meanwhile Miss Patricia Fairfield was looking over her portrait collection to see what ones to send. She had a box full of old photographs, but she wanted to select just the right ones.

But at last she tumbled them all on the table in a heap, and wisely decided to leave the decision till morning.

And so it happened, that when Nan came to Patty's room next morning, as she often did, she found that coquettish damsel, sitting up in bed, wrapped in a blue silk nightingale, and with a flower-decked lace cap somewhat askew on her tumbled curls.

Her breakfast tray sat untouched on its little stand, while on the counterpane were spread out some twoscore portraits of more or less beautiful maidens.

"What ARE you doing?" said Nan; "playing photograph solitaire?"

"I'm playing a game of photographs," said Patty, raising a pair of solemn blue eyes to Nan, "but it isn't exactly solitaire."

"You needn't tell ME! You're cutting up some trick with that new man of yours." And Nan deliberately brushed away some pictures, and sat down on the side of the bed.

"You're a wizard!" and Patty gazed at her stepmother. "You could have made your fortune, Nan, as a clairvoyant, telling people what they knew already! But since you're here, DO help me out." And Patty told Nan the scheme of the three photographs.

Now, Nan was only six years older than Patty herself, and she entered into the joke with almost as much enthusiasm as the younger girl.

"Shall you send one of your own, really?" she inquired.

"No; I think not. But I want to get three different types, just to fool him."

After much consideration the two conspirators selected a picture of a dark-eyed actress, who was pretty, but of rather flashy effects. Next they chose a picture of an intellectual young woman, with no pretension to beauty or style, and whose tightly drawn black hair and stiff white collar proclaimed a high brow. It was a picture of one of the girls in Patty's class, who had been noted for her intellect and her lack of a sense of humour.

"He'll know that isn't you, Patty," said Nan, objecting.

"No," said Patty, sapiently; "he's pretty clever, that young man, and probably he'll think I'm just that sort. Now for the third, Nancy."

It took a long time to select a third one, for Nan was in favour of a pretty girl, while Patty thought it would be more fun to send a plain one.

At last they agreed on a picture of another of Patty's school friends, who was of the willowy, die-away kind. She was a blonde, but of a pale, ashen-haired variety, not at all like Patty's Dresden china type. The pose was aesthetic, and the girl looked soulful and languishing.

"Just the thing!" cried Patty. "If he thinks I look like THAT, I'll never speak to him again!"

And so, amid great glee, the three pictures were made into a neat parcel, and addressed to Mr. Christopher Cameron.

"Now, for goodness' sake, Patty, eat your breakfast! Your chocolate is stone cold. I'll go down and call a messenger and despatch this precious bundle of beauty to its destination."

"All right," returned Patty, and, with a feeling of having successfully accomplished her task, she turned her attention to her breakfast tray.

CHAPTER V

THREE PICTURES

It was Tuesday morning that Patty had sent the pictures, and that same evening she was invited to dine and go to the opera with Mrs. Van Reypen.

Patty was a great favourite with the aristocratic old lady, and was frequently asked to the Van Reypen home. It is needless to say that Mrs. Van Reypen's nephew, Philip, usually managed to be present at any of his aunt's affairs that were graced by Patty's presence. And, indeed, it was an open secret that Mrs. Van Reypen would be greatly pleased if Patty would smile on the suit of her favourite and beloved nephew.

But Patty's smiles were uncertain. Sometimes it would suit her caprice to smile on Philip, and again she would positively snub him to such an extent that the young man was disgruntled for days at a time.

"But," as Patty remarked to herself, "if I'm nice to him, he takes too much for granted. So I have to discipline him to keep him where he belongs."

The dinner at the Van Reypen mansion was, as always, long and elaborate, and perhaps a trifle dull.

Mrs. Van Reypen's affection for Patty was of a selfish sort, and it never occurred to her to invite guests of Patty's age, or who could be entertaining to the girl.

And so to-night the other guests were an elderly couple by the name of Bellamy and a rather stupid, middle-aged bachelor,—Mr. Crosby. These with the two Van Reypens and Patty made up the whole party.

Patty found herself assigned to walk out to dinner with Mr. Crosby, but, as Philip sat on her other side, she had no fear of being too greatly bored.

But to her surprise the elderly bachelor turned out to be exceedingly interesting. He had travelled a great deal, and talked well about his experiences, and it was soon discovered that he and Patty had mutual friends in Paris, where Patty had spent the winter several years before.

"I do love to hear you talk," Patty declared, ingenuously, after Mr. Crosby had given her a thrilling and picturesque description of an incident in his trip to the Orient.

"Oh, thank you," Mr. Crosby returned, a little bewildered by this outright compliment, for he was unaccustomed to talking to young girls.

"But, you see," Patty went on, "I mustn't monopolise you. You know, it's etiquette to talk fifteen minutes to your neighbour on one side and then turn to your neighbour on the other."

"Bless my soul! you're quite right,—quite right!" and Mr. Crosby stared at Patty over his glasses. "How do you know so much, and you such a young thing?"

"Oh, I'm out," returned Patty, smiling, "and of course, when a girl comes out, she has to learn the rules of the game."

So Mr. Crosby turned to talk to the lady on his other side, and Patty turned to Philip, who looked a trifle sulky.

"Thought you were going to talk to that chap all evening," he growled, under his breath.

"I should like to," said Patty, sweetly, "he's SO interesting. But I can't monopolise him, you know. As I don't want to talk to a growly bear, I think, if you'll excuse me from polite conversation, I'll meditate for awhile."

"Meditate on your sins; it'll do you good!"

Patty opened her blue eyes wide and stared at the speaker. "Why," she said, "to meditate, one must have something to meditate on!"

"And you think you haven't any sins! Oh, would some power the giftie gi'e us!"

"To see ourselves as others see us," Patty completed the rhyme. "But you see, Philip, as I don't see any sins in myself, I can't meditate on the sins that others see in me, if I don't know what they are."

"Well, I'll tell you a big, black one! You simply ignored me for half an hour, while you jabbered to that duffer on the other side! Now meditate on THAT!"

Patty obediently cast down her eyes, and assumed a mournful expression.

She continued to sit thus without speaking; until Philip exclaimed:

"Patty, you little goose, stop your nonsense! What's the matter with you to-night, anyway?"

"Honestly, Philip," said Patty, very low, "your aunt's parties always make me want to giggle. They're heavenly parties, and I simply ADORE to be at them, but her friends are so—well, so aged, you know, and they seem to—well, to be so interested in their dinner."

"I'm my aunt's guest, and I'm not a bit interested in my dinner."

"Well, you may as well be, for I'm going to talk to Mr. Crosby now."

Seeing that Mr. Crosby's attention was unclaimed for the moment, Patty turned to him, saying, with great animation: "Oh, Mr. Crosby, MAY I ask you something? I'm AWFULLY ignorant, you know, and you're so wise."

"Yes, yes, what is it?" And the great Oriental scholar looked benignly at her over his glasses.

Now naughty Patty hadn't any question to ask, and she had only turned to her neighbour to tease Philip, so she floundered a little as she tried to think of some intelligent enquiry.

"What is it. Miss Fairfield?" prompted Mr. Crosby.

Patty cast a fleeting glance toward Philip, as if appealing for help, and that young man, though engaged in a desultory conversation, whispered under his breath, "Ask him about the Aztecs."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Crosby," said Patty, "it's about the—the Aztecs,—you know."

"Ah, yes, the Aztecs,—a most interesting race, MOST interesting, indeed. And what do you want to know about them, Miss Fairfield?"

Patty was tempted to say ALL about them, for her knowledge of the ancient people was practically nothing.

"Did they—did they—"

"Eat snails," said Philip, in a whisper.

"Did they eat snails, Mr. Crosby?" And Patty's big blue eyes were innocent of anything, save an intense desire to know about the Aztec diet.

"Snails?—snails?—well, bless my soul! I don't believe I know.

Important, too,—most important. I'll look it up, and let you know.

Snails—queer I DON'T know. I made a study of the Aztecs, and they are most interesting,—but as to snails—"

Apparently Mr. Crosby's mind was wrestling with the question.

"He's gone 'way back and sat down with the Aztecs," Philip murmured to

Patty, "so you ask questions of me."

"You don't know anything that I want to know."

"Then I'll ask a question of YOU."

Philip's voice was full of meaning, so Patty said hastily: "No, no; it isn't polite to ask questions in society; one should make observations."

"All right, observe me. That's what I'm here for. Observe me early and often, and I'll be only too well pleased."

"But that isn't what I'm here for. Your aunt invited me to be a pleasant dinner guest and so I have to make myself entertaining to my Aztec friend."

And then Patty turned again to Mr. Crosby, and by a few skilful hints she soon had him started on another description of his travelling experiences, and this time it proved so thrilling that all at the table were glad to listen to it.

After dinner the whole party went to the opera and occupied Mrs. Van

Reypen's box.

Patty was passionately fond of music, and never talked during a performance. Between the acts, she was a smiling chatterbox, but while the curtain was up, she behaved in most exemplary fashion. Mrs. Van Reypen knew this, or she would not have asked her, for that lady was old-fashioned in her ways, and had no patience with people who chattered while the great singers were pouring forth their marvellous notes.

[Illustration: After dinner the whole party went to the opera]

When the final curtain fell, Mrs. Van Reypen invited her guests to return to her house for supper, but Patty declined.

"Very well, my dear," said her hostess, "I think, myself, you're too young to be out any later than this. We will set you down at your own door, and you must hop right into bed and get your beauty sleep. Young things like you can't stay young unless you take good care of your pinky cheeks."

"But I don't want Patty to go home," Philip grumbled, to his aunt.

"Your wishes are not consulted, my boy; this is my party. You're merely my guest, and, if you don't behave yourself, you won't get invited again."

"That scares me dreadfully," and Philip lightly pinched his aunt's cheek. "I will be good, so I'll be asked again."

The big limousine stopped at Patty's door, and Philip escorted her up the steps.

"I think you might have come to supper," he said, reproachfully, as he touched the bell.

"It's too late," said Patty, decidedly; "and, besides, I have other plans for the rest of the evening."

And with this enigmatical announcement Philip was forced to be content, for Patty said good-night and vanished through the doorway.

"And, indeed, I HAVE other plans," Patty said, to herself. "I'm simply consumed with curiosity to know which of those three beauties that ridiculous Kit man likes the best. I'm going to call him up and see. I wish he could call me up,—it would suit me far better. But I suppose nobody can call anybody else up if nobody knows anybody else's name."

"Do you want any supper, Miss Patty?" asked Louise, as she unhooked Patty's frock.

"No, thank you, I'm not a bit hungry. You might bring me a cup of milk and a biscuit, and then give me a kimono. I'm not going to bed just yet."

So Louise arranged everything just as Patty wanted it, and finally went away.

"May as well be comfortable," said Patty, as she tucked herself into a favourite big chair, with the telephone on a little stand beside her. "I suppose I'll run up a fine bill for extra time, but, after all, it's less extravagant than a good many other things. Wonder how much they charge for overtime. I must ask Daddy."

With a smile of anticipation Patty picked up the telephone.

"Hello!" said Mr. Cameron's eager voice. "I thought you'd never come. I've been waiting since ten."

"I've been to the opera," said Patty, nonchalantly. "And you've NO reason to sit and wait for me! I'm not a dead certainty, like the sunrise or the postman."

"You're more welcome than either."

"Now that's a real pretty speech. Are you a poet?"

"Only to you."

"Did you get the pictures?" Patty was unable longer to restrain her impatience.

"Of course I got the pictures. I knew yours at once! You needn't think you can fool ME."

"Which was mine? The girl with the black curls?"

"Mercy, no! I know you're not THAT type. She looks like an actress, and hasn't a brain in her silly head. And you're not that lackadaisical lily-like one, either. Oh, I know YOU! You're that delightful, sensible, really brainy girl with the smooth black hair."

"Oh, I AM, am I?"

"Yes; and I'm SO glad you're not a rattle-pated beauty! What's a pretty face compared to real mind and intellect!"

Patty was furious. She didn't aspire to nor desire this great mind and intellect, and she was quite satisfied with the amount of brains in her pretty, curly head.

"I don't think much of your taste!" she exclaimed.

"Why! you don't want me to be disappointed because you're not pretty, do you?"

"But I AM pretty."

"Yes; as I said, the beauty of deep thought and education shines from your clear eyes. That is far better than dimples and curls."

Patty shook her curls at the telephone and her dimples came and went with her varying emotions.

"Why, I shouldn't like you half as well if you were pretty," Mr. Cameron went on. "The only things I consider worth while are seriousness and scholarship. These you have in abundance, as I can see at once from your picture."

"And how do you like the way I dress?"

"It suits your type exactly. That large black-and-white check denotes a mind far above the frivolities of fashion, and that stiff white collar, to my mind, indicates a high order of mentality."

"I think you're perfectly horrid!" And this exclamation seemed wrung from the depths of Patty's soul.

A ringing laugh answered her—a laugh so hearty and so full of absolute enjoyment that Patty listened in astonishment.

"Poor little Princess Poppycheek! It's a shame to tease her! WAS she maligned by a bad, horrid man that she doesn't even know? There, Little Girl, don't cry! I know perfectly well that stiff old schoolmarm isn't you! Now, will you tell me who you are, and what you really look like?"

Patty had to think quickly. She had supposed that Cameron meant what he said, but after all he was fooling her. And she had thought she fooled him!

"Which is me, then?" she said, in a small, low voice.

"None of 'ern! You goosie! To think you could fool ME. In the first place, I knew you wouldn't send your own photograph; and when I saw those three charming specimens, in out-of-date clothes, I knew you had ransacked your album to find them. However, I took the whole bunch down to Marie, and she vowed she had never laid eyes on one of them before. So there, now!"

"Then we're just back where we started from," said Patty, cheerfully.

"Yes; but, if you'll come to the musicale on Friday night, we can make great progress in a short time."

"I told you I'd go, if you would persuade Marie to invite me."

"Nonsense! I believe she HAS invited you. I believe you're Miss Curtiss. SHE has dark hair."

"Why not that other singer, Miss Fairfield?"

"Oh, Marie says she's a blonde. The 'raving beauty' sort. I detest that kind. I know she's vain."

"Yes, she is. I hate to speak against another girl, but I know that Patty Fairfield, and she IS vain."

"Well, never mind about Patty Fairfield She doesn't interest me a bit.

But what about you? Will you come to the party? Oh, DO-ee, DO-ee,—now,—as my old Scotch nurse used to say. Come to your waiting knight!"

Kit's voice was very wheedlesome, and Patty was moved to encourage him a little.

"Do you know,—I almost think—that maybe—possibly—perhaps, I WILL go."

"Really? Oh, Poppycheek, I'm SO glad! I do want to see My Girl!"

"YOUR girl, indeed!"

"Yes; mine by right of discovery."

"But you haven't discovered me yet."

"But I will,—on Friday night. You'll TRULY come, WON'T you?"

"Honest, I've never been where I wasn't invited—"

"But this is different—"

"Yes,—it IS different—"

"Oh, then you will come! Goody, GOODY! I'm so glad!"

"Don't break the telephone with your gladness! Suppose I DO come, how will you know me? How will you know that it is I?"

"Oh, I'll know! 'I shall know it, I shall feel it, something subtle will reveal it, for a glory round thee hovers that will lighten up the gloom.'"

"Oh, you ARE a poet."

"I am a poet, but I didn't write that. However, it was only because the other fellow got ahead of me."

"Who was he? Who wrote it?"

"I'll tell you Friday night. Come early, won't you?" "No; I always get to a party late."

"Don't be too late. I want to play to you. And will you sing?"

"Mercy, gracious! I might go to a party without being invited, but I can't SING without being asked. You tell Marie I'm coming, will you?"

"You bet I will. What shall you wear?"

"What's your favourite colour?"

"Red."

"Red is becoming to brunettes; but I haven't any red evening gown. How about yellow?"

"All right, wear yellow. I shall adore you in any colour."

"Well; perhaps I'll come, and perhaps I won't. Good-night."

Patty hung up the receiver with a sudden click, and Mr. Kit Cameron was left very much in doubt as to whether the whole thing was a joke or not.

CHAPTER VI

PRINCESS POPPYCHEEK

On the night of the musicale at Marie Homer's, her talented cousin arrived long before any guests were expected.

"I couldn't wait, Aunt Frances," he said, as Mrs. Homer greeted him.

"I'm so impatient to see My Girl."

Kit had told the Homers of the telephone conversations, because he was so anxious to find out his lady's name. Of course, he had not told all they said, and from his incoherent ravings about a black-haired beauty Marie never guessed he could mean Patty.

"You're a foolish boy, Kit," said his Aunt.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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