WELLS CAROLYN

PATTY'S BUTTERFLY DAYS

Carolyn Wells

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Wells C.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
DIFFERENT OPINIONS

"Different men are of different opinions; some like apples, some like inions," sang Patty, as she swayed herself idly back and forth in the veranda swing; "but, truly-ooly, Nan," she went on, "I don't care a snipjack. I'm quite ready and willing to go to the White Mountains,—or the Blue or Pink or even Lavender Mountains, if you like."

"You're willing, Patty, only because you're so good-natured and unselfish; but, really, you don't want to go one bit."

"Now, Nan, I'm no poor, pale martyr, with a halo roundy-bout me noble brow. When we came down here to Spring Beach, it was understood that we were to stay here part of the summer, and then go to the mountains. And now it's the first of August and I've had my innings, so it's only fair you should have your outing."

Though Patty's air was gay and careless, and Patty's tones were sincere, she was in reality making an heroic self-sacrifice, and Nan knew it. Patty loved the seashore; she had been there three months, and loved it better every day.

But Nan cared more for the mountains, and longed to get away from the sunny glare of the sea, and enjoy the shaded walks and drives of higher altitudes. However, these two were of unselfish nature, and each wanted to please the other. But as Patty had had her wish for three months, it was certainly fair that Nan should be humoured for the rest of the summer.

The season had done wonders for Patty, physically. Because of her outdoor life, she had grown plumper and browner, her muscles had strengthened, and her rosy cheeks betokened a perfect state of health. She was still slender, and her willowy figure had gained soft curves without losing its dainty gracefulness.

And Patty was still enthusiastically devoted to her motor-car. Indeed, it was the realisation that she must leave that behind that made her so opposed to a trip to the mountains.

Mr. Fairfield and Nan had both dilated on the charms and beauties of mountain scenery, on the joys and delights of the gay mountain hotels, but though Patty listened amiably, she failed to look upon the matter as they did. At first, she had declared her unwillingness to go, and had tried to devise a way by which she might remain at Spring Beach, while her parents went to the mountains. But no plan of chaperons or visiting relatives seemed to satisfy Mr. Fairfield of its availability.

"I can't see it, Patty," he would say; "there is no chaperon for you that we know of, and I wouldn't leave you here with some stranger obtained by advertisement. Nor have we any relatives who could come to look after you. If Nan's mother could come, that would do beautifully. But Mrs. Allen is in Europe and none of your aunts could leave her own family. No, girlie, I can't see any way to separate our family."

So Patty, with her unfailing good nature, had agreed to go to the White Mountains with the others. She admitted, herself, that she'd probably have a good time, as she always did everywhere, but still her heart clung to "The Pebbles," as they called their seashore home, and she silently rebelled when she thought of "Camilla," her swift little electric runabout.

Patty drove her own car, and she never tired of spinning along the shore roads, or inland through the pine groves and laurel jungles. She had become acquainted with many young people, both cottagers and hotel guests, and the outlook for a pleasant summer and fall at Spring Beach was

all that could be desired from her point of view. But before they left the city in the spring, Patty had known that Nan preferred mountain localities and had agreed to the seashore house for her sake; so, now, it was Patty's turn to give up her preference for Nan's.

And she was going to do it,—oh, yes,—she was going to do it cheerfully and even gaily. But, though she tried to pretend she didn't care, Nan knew she did care, and she had tried hard to think of some way that Patty might be left behind. Nan would willingly have given up her own desires, and stayed at Spring Beach all summer, but her husband wouldn't hear of it. Mr. Fairfield said that justice demanded a fair division of the season, and already three months had been spent at the seashore, so August and September must be spent in the mountains.

His word was law, and, too, Patty realised the fairness of the plan, and gracefully submitted to Fate. So, as the first of August was in the very near future, Patty and Nan were discussing details of the trip.

"It almost seems as if you might take your motor-car, Patty," said Nan, reflectively.

"I thought so, too, at first; but father says not. You see, not all mountain roads are modern and well-kept, and, of course, we'll be moving on, now and then, and Camilla IS a nuisance as luggage. Now, Nan, no more suggestions, or regrets, or backward glances. I'm going to the mountains, NOT like the quarry-slave at night, but like a conquering hero; and I shall have all the mountaineers at my feet, overwhelming me with their devoted attentions."

"You probably will, Patty; you're easily the most popular girl at Spring Beach, and if the 'mountaineers' have any taste in such matters—"

"There, there, Nan, don't make me blush. I'm 'popular,' as you call it, because I have such a delightful home, and such an attractive stepmother to make it pleasant for my callers! And, by the same token, here are a few of them coming now."

Two laughing girls, and a good-looking young man came in at the gate, and strolled along the drive to the veranda, where Patty and Nan sat.

Lora and Beatrice Sayre were of the "butterfly" type, and their pale-coloured muslin gowns, broad hats, and fluttering scarfs made the description appropriate. Jack Pennington was just what he looked like, a college youth on his vacation; and his earnest face seemed to betoken a determination to have the most fun possible before he went back to grind at his books.

"Hello," cried Patty, who was not given to dignified forms of salutation.

The trio responded gaily, and coming up on the veranda, selected seats on the wicker chairs, or couches, or the porch railing, as suited their fancy.

"I say," began young Pennington, conversationally, "we can't let you go away, Patty. Why, week after next we're going to have the Pageant, and there are forty-'leven other pleasant doings before that comes off."

"Yes," chimed in Lora Sayre, "we can't get along without our Pitty-Pat.

DO don't go away, Sunshine!"

"But suppose I want to go," said Patty, bravely trying to treat the subject lightly; "suppose I'm just crazy to go to that stunning big hotel up in the White Mountains, and have the time of my life!"

"Suppose the moon is made of green pumpkins!" scoffed Jack. "You don't want to go at all, and you know it! And then, think of the girls,—and boys,—you leave behind you! Your departure is a national calamity. We mourn our loss!"

"We do so!" agreed Beatrice. "Why, Patty, I'm going to have a house party next week, and we'll have lots of fun going on. Can't you wait over for that?"

"No, I can't," and Patty spoke a little shortly, for these gay plans made her long more than ever to stay at Spring Beach. "So don't let's talk any more about me. Tell me about the Pageant,—will it be fine?"

"Oh, yes," said Jack, "the biggest thing ever. Sort of like a Durbar, you know, with elephants and—"

"No, it isn't going to be like that," said Lora. "They've given up that plan. It's going to be ever so much nicer than that! They're going to have—"

"Don't tell me!" cried Patty, laughing, as she clapped her hands over her ears. "I'd rather not hear about it! I suppose you'll be queen of it, whatever it is, Lora?"

"I'll have a chance at it, if you're not here! That's the only comfort about your going away. Somebody else can be the Belle of Spring Beach for a time."

The good-natured laughter in Lora's eyes took all sting from her words, and, indeed, it was an acknowledged fact that Pretty Patty was the belle of the little seashore colony.

"I'm awfully sorry about it," began Nan, but Patty stopped her at once.

"There's nothing to be sorry about, Madame Nan," she cried, gaily; "these provincial young people don't appreciate the advantages of travel. They'd rather stay here in one place than jog about the country, seeing all sorts of grand scenery and sights! Once I'm away from this place I shall forget all about its petty frolics and its foolish parties."

"Yes, you WILL!" exclaimed Jack, not at all impressed by Patty's statements, for he knew how untrue they were.

"And the Country Club summer dance!" said Beatrice, regretfully. "Patty, how can you be reconciled to missing that? It's the event of the season! A fancy dance, you know. A sort of Kirmess. Oh, DON'T go away!"

"Don't go away!" echoed Lora, and Jack broke into one of the improvised songs for which he was famous:

"Don't go away from us, Patty, Patty,
We can't part with the likes of you!
Stay, and be Queen of the Pageant, Patty,
Patty, Patty, tender and true.
Though you are not very pretty, Patty,
Though you are liked by a very few;
We will put up with you, Patty, Patty,—
Patty, Patty, stay with us, do!"

The rollicking voice and twinkling eyes, which were Jack's chief charms, made Patty laugh outright at his song. But, not to be outdone in fun, and also, to keep herself from growing serious, she sang back at him:

"I don't want to stay at this place,
I don't like it any more!
I am going to the mountains,
Where I've never been before.
I shall tramp the mountain pathways,
I shall climb the mountain's peak;
I don't want to stay in this place,
So I'll go away next week!"

"All right for you!" declared Jack. "Go on, and joy go with you! But don't you send me any picture postcards of yourself lost in a perilous mountain fastness,—'cause I won't come and rescue you. So there!"

"What is a mountain fastness?" demanded Patty. "It sounds frisky."

"It isn't," replied Jack; "it's a deep gorge, with ice-covered walls and no way out; and as the darkness falls, dreadful growls are heard on all sides, and wild animals prowl—and prowl—and prow-ow-owl!"

Jack's voice grew deep and terrible, as he suggested the awful situation, but Patty laughed gaily as she said:

"Well, as long as they keep on prowling, they certainly can't harm me. It all sounds rather interesting. At any rate, the ice-covered walls sound cool. You must admit Spring Beach is a hot place."

"All places are hot in hot weather," observed Beatrice, sapiently; "when there's an ocean breeze, it's lovely and cool here."

"Yes," agreed Lora, "when there IS. But there 'most generally ISN'T.

To-day, I'm sure the thermometer must be about two hundred."

"That's your heated imagination," said Jack. "It's really about eighty-four in the shade."

"Let's move around into the shade, then," said Patty. "This side of the veranda is getting sunny."

So the young people went round the corner of the house to a cooler spot, and Nan expressed her intention of going down to the train to meet Mr. Fairfield.

"You people," began Patty, after Nan had left them, "mustn't talk as you do about my going away, before my stepmother. You see, we're going because she wants to go, but it isn't polite to rub it in!"

"I know it," said Beatrice, "but I forgot it. But, I say, Patty, I think it's too bad for you to be trailed off there just to please her."

"Not at all, Bee. She has stayed here three months to please me, and turn about is fair play."

"It's Fairfield play, at any rate," put in Jack. "You're a trump, Patty, to take it so sweetly. I wish you didn't have to go, though."

"So say we all of us," declared Lora, but Patty ordered them, rather earnestly, to drop the subject and not refer to it again.

"You must write me all about the Pageant, girls," she went on.

"Can't I write too, though I'm not a girl?" asked Jack.

"No!" cried Patty, holding up her hands in pretended horror. "I couldn't receive a letter from a young man!"

"Oh, try it," said Jack, laughing. "I'll help you. You've no idea how easy it is! Have you never had a letter from a man?"

"From papa," said Patty, putting the tip of her finger in her mouth, and speaking babyishly.

"Papa, nothing! You get letters from those New York chaps, don't you, now?"

"Who New York chaps?" asked Patty, opening her eyes wide, with an over-innocent stare.

"Oh, that Harper kid and that Farrington cub and that Hepworth old gentleman!"

"What pretty pet names you call them! Yes, I get letters from them, but they're my lifelong friends."

"That's the position I'm applying for. Don't you need one more L. L. F.?" But Patty had turned to the girls, and they were counting up what few parties were to take place before Patty went away.

"I'd have a farewell party myself," said Patty, thoughtfully, "but there's so little time now, and Nan's pretty busy. I hate to bother her with it. You see, we leave next week,—Thursday."

"And our house party comes that very day!" said Beatrice, regretfully.

"And Captain Sayre is coming. He's the most stunning man! He's our second cousin, and older than we are, but he's just grand, isn't he, Lora?"

"Yes; and he'd adore Patty. Oh, girlie, DON'T go!"

"I think I'll kidnap Patty," said Jack. "The day they start, I'll waylay the party as they board the train, and carry Patty off by force."

"You'd have to get out a force of militia," laughed Patty. "My father Fairfield is of a sharp-eyed disposition. You couldn't carry off his daughter under his nose."

"Strategy!" whispered Jack, in a deep, mysterious voice. "I could manage it, somehow, I'm sure."

"Well, it wouldn't do any good. He'd just come back after me, and we'd take the next train. But, oh, girls, I do wish I could stay here! I never had such a disappointment before. I've grown to love this place; and all you people; and my dear Camilla!" Patty's blue eyes filled with real tears, as she dropped her light and bantering manner, and spoke earnestly.

"It's a shame!" declared Jack, as he noted the drops trembling on the long, curled lashes. "Come on, girls, I'm going home before I express myself too strongly."

So Jack and the Sayre girls went away, and Patty went up to her own room.

CHAPTER II
MONA'S PLAN

That night, when Patty was alone in her own room, she threw herself into a rocking chair, and rocked violently, as was her habit, when she had anything to bother her. She looked about at the pretty room, furnished with all her dear and cherished belongings.

"To go away from all this," she thought, "and be mewed up in a little bare room, with a few sticks of horrid old furniture, and nowhere to put things away decently!"

She glanced at her room wardrobes and numerous chiffoniers and dressing-tables.

"Live in a trunk, I s'pose," she went on to herself; "all my best frocks in a mess of wrinkles, all my best hats smashed to windmills! No broad ocean to look at! Nothing but mountains with trees all over their sides! Nothing to do but walk up rocky, steep paths to a spring, take a drink of water, and come stumbling down again! In the evenings, dress up, and promenade eighty thousand feet of veranda, AS ADVERTISED!"

Roused to a frenzy by her own self-pity and indignation, Patty got up and stalked about the room. She flung off her pretty summer frock, and slipped on a blue silk kimono. Then she sat down in front of her dressing-table to brush her hair for the night.

She drew out the pins, and great curly masses came tumbling down around her shoulders. Patty's hair was truly golden, and did not turn darker as she grew older.

She brushed away slowly, and looked at herself in the mirror. What she saw must have surprised her, for she dropped her brush in astonishment.

"Well, Patricia Fairfield!" she exclaimed to her own reflection. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself! YOU, who are supposed to be of amiable disposition, YOU whom people call 'Sunshine,' because of your good nature, YOU who have every joy and every blessing that heart can wish, you look like a sour-faced, cross-grained, disgruntled old maid! So there now! And, Miss, do you want to know what *I* think of you?" She picked up her hair brush, and shook it at the flushed, angry face in the mirror. "Well, *I* think you're a monster of selfishness! You're a dragon of ingratitude! And a griffin of cross-patchedness! Now, Miss, WILL you drop this attitude of injured innocence, and act like a civilised human being?"

Patty was a little over hard on herself. She hadn't at all exhibited such traits as she charged herself with, but she was not a girl to do things by halves. She sat, calmly looking at her own face, until the lines smoothed themselves out of her forehead, the dimples came back to her cheeks, and the laughter to her blue eyes.

"That's better!" she said, wagging her head at the pretty, smiling face. "Now, never again, Patty Fairfield, let me see you looking mopy or peevish about anything! Mind, not about anything at all! You have enough blessings and pleasures to make up for any disappointments that may come to you. So, now that you've braced up, just STAY braced up! See?"

The scolding, though self-inflicted, did Patty good, and humming a lively tune, she busied herself with arranging some fans and frills in boxes to take away with her.

If stray thoughts of the Pageant or the Fancy Dance crept into her mind, she determinedly thrust them out, and forced her anticipations to the unknown fun and gaiety she would enjoy at the big Mountain Houses.

And when at last, ready for bed, she stood in front of her long cheval glass, the folds of her blue dressing gown trailing away from her pretty, lace-frilled nightgown, she shook her forefinger warningly at the smiling reflection.

"Now, mind you, Patricia, not a whimper out of you to-morrow! Not a shadow of a shade of disappointment on your fair young brow? Only happy smiles and pleasant words, and just MAKE yourself enjoy the prospect of those poky, gloomy, horrid old mountains!"

It will be easily seen that Patty was amenable to discipline, for next morning she went dancing downstairs, looking like amiability personified. Even Nan came to the conclusion that Patty was reconciled to the mountain trip, and had begun to see the pleasanter side of it.

Mr. Fairfield regarded his daughter approvingly. Though Patty had not been cross or glum the day before, she had been silent, and now she treated her hearers to a flood of gay and merry chatter.

Only a fleeting shadow across her face, or a sudden, pained look in her eyes when Spring Beach matters were mentioned, revealed to her watchful father the fact that Patty's gaiety was the result of brave and honest will-power. But such shadows passed as quickly as they came, and the girl's pleasant and sweet demeanour was not unappreciated by her elders.

She joined heartily in the plans for the mountain trip; discussed itineraries with her father, and costumes with Nan.

As the three sat on the veranda, thus engaged, a flying figure came through the gate like a whirlwind, and Mona Galbraith precipitated herself into the family group.

"Why, Mona, you look a little,—er,—hasty!" exclaimed Patty as, out of breath, their visitor plumped herself into a swing and twirled its tasselled ropes, while she regained her breath.

"Yes,—yes,—and well I may!" she panted. "What DO you think, Patty? Oh, Mr. Fairfield, DO say yes! Coax him to, won't you, Mrs. Fairfield! Oh, I can't tell you,—I daren't! I just KNOW you won't do it! Oh, Patty, do,—DO!"

Impetuous Mona had swayed out of the swing in her eagerness, and was now kneeling by Patty's side, stroking her hand, and gazing into her face with imploring eyes.

"Mona Galbraith," said Patty, laughing, "are you rehearsing for melodrama, or what? For, if so, you don't know your lines, and you're 'way off on your gestures, and—and, as a whole, your act is not convincing."

"Oh, don't say that, Patty!" exclaimed Mona, laughing herself. "ANYTHING but that! It must be convincing,—it must,—it MUST!"

"Is it meant for a roaring farce?" asked Mr. Fairfield, politely, "or merely high comedy?"

"I think it's a problem play," said Nan, laughing anew at the excited visitor, who had returned to the swing, and was vigorously pushing herself back and forth with her slippered toe.

"Let me help you, Mona," said Mr. Fairfield, kindly. "Is it something you have to tell us,—or ask us?"

"Yes, sir, yes! That's it!"

"Well, tell us, then. But take your time and tell us quietly. Then you won't get incoherent."

The quiet friendliness of his tones seemed to reassure the girl, and letting the swing stand still, Mona began:

"You see, Mr. Fairfield,—and Mrs. Fairfield, my father is going to Europe next week. It's on a business trip, and he only just found out that he had to go. He will take me with him if I want to go, but I don't! So I proposed a plan to him instead of that, which he thinks is fine. And,—and, I want to know what you think about it."

"We will probably approve of it, if your father does," said Nan, helpfully.

"Well—it's just this. For me to stay at home, and keep our house open, and have Patty stay there with me, instead of her going to the mountains with you."

"You and Patty stay there alone!" exclaimed Mr. Fairfield.

"No, sir; not alone. Father would ask his sister, my Aunt Adelaide, to stay with us, as chaperon. She's a lovely lady, and she'd be glad to come."

"Well, I don't know,—I don't know," said Mr. Fairfield. "I'm not sure I could go off and leave Patty with strangers."

"But I'm not a stranger," said Mona, "and Aunt Adelaide won't be, as soon as you know her. I haven't seen her myself for some years, but she's a lovely, sweet character,—everybody says so. And then, you see, we wouldn't have to close up our house, and Patty wouldn't have to leave Spring Beach,—and, oh, we could have lovely times!"

"How long will your father be gone?"

"Two months. August and September. He would rather take me with him, but he said if you all agreed to my plan, he would do so, too."

"Well, it's a surprise," said Mr. Fairfield, "and we'll have to think it over, and talk it over. How does it strike you, Patty?"

Patty considered. It was her habit to decide quickly, but this was a case with several sides to be looked at. Yet, of course, it must be decided at once, for Mr. Galbraith must have time to make his preparations.

Patty's heart jumped with joy at the thought of staying at Spring Beach instead of going to the mountains. But—the joy was a little dampened at the idea of staying with Mona, and not at "The Pebbles."

"Why can't we both stay here?" she said at last. "Let Mona visit me here, and let her aunt chaperon us just the same."

"Oh, no," Mona said. "I know father wouldn't consent to that. You see, it's a great undertaking to close up our big place, and find homes for the servants, and look after the horses and gardens and all that, just for two months. Father was relieved at the thought of just walking off and leaving it all in charge of Aunt Adelaide. And then, we could have so much more room there, you know—" Mona paused, blushing. She did not want to imply that "Red Chimneys" was a grandly appointed mansion, while "The Pebbles" was only a pretty cottage, but that was what she meant.

"Yes, I know," said Nan, kindly helping her out. "You have such immense grounds, and luxuries of all sorts. Why, your place is a Pleasure Park of itself, with the pond and tennis court, and fountains and grottoes and all such things."

"Yes, it is a lovely summer place," said Mona, earnestly, "and I should do everything I could to make Patty happy there. I know how much she wants to stay at Spring Beach, and it seemed such a satisfactory plan all round."

Patty was still thinking. But, by this time, she was wondering if she were really a selfish, disagreeable snob or not. For, the truth was, Patty did not entirely like Mona, though she had grown to like her much better than at first. Nor did she like Mona's home, with its ostentatiously expensive appointments, both indoors and out. And yet, it was exceedingly comfortable and luxurious, and Patty knew she could do exactly as she chose in every respect.

But, again, Patty was a favourite in Spring Beach society, and Mona was not. This might cause complications in the matter of invitations to entertainments. But Patty knew this would mostly redound to Mona's benefit. She would be asked on Patty's account to places where otherwise she would not have been invited. And Patty well knew SHE would be left out of nothing just because she was visiting Mona.

And yet, to accept her hospitality for two months meant to acknowledge her as an intimate friend,—a chosen companion. Was it quite honest to do this when, privately, Patty disapproved of many of Mona's ways and tastes? Then, it occurred to Patty that Mr. Hepworth had urged her to do what she could to help Mona,—to improve her manners, her dress, her tastes. Patty jumped at this idea, and then as suddenly paused to scrutinise her own motives, and make sure she was not pretending to herself that she did for Mona's sake what she was really doing for her own. But being quick at decisions, she saw at once that it was about evenly divided. She was willing, if she could, to help Mona in any way, and she felt that this justified her in accepting the offered hospitality of one whom she couldn't emulate.

Mr. Fairfield watched Patty's face closely, and knew pretty well what sort of a mental controversy she was holding with herself. He was not surprised when she said at last:

"Well, so far as I have a voice in this matter, I'd like to go. I think it's very kind of Mona to ask me, and I'd try not to be a troublesome visitor. You know, Father Fairfield, how much I would rather stay in Spring Beach than go to the mountains. And I suppose I could take my motor-car to Mona's with me."

"Yes, of course," Mona said. "And father says if I don't go to Europe, he'll buy me a runabout just like yours, and we can have lovely times going out together."

"Would your aunt come at once?" asked Nan, who wanted to know more about the chaperon who would have Patty in charge.

"Yes, father will send for her as soon as we decide. But you know, Mrs. Fairfield, I should keep house, as I always do, and Aunt Adelaide would only be with us in the cause of propriety."

Nan smiled at the thought of Mona's housekeeping, for "Red Chimneys" was so liberally provided with servants that Mona's duties consisted mainly in mentioning her favourite dishes to the cook.

"Are you sure you could behave yourself, Patty?" asked her father, teasingly, "without either Nan or myself to keep you in order?"

"Oh, yes," said Patty, drawing down the corners of her mouth demurely. "In fact, as I should be on my own responsibility, I'd have to be even more careful of my manners than I am at home."

Mr. Fairfield sighed a little. "Well, Puss," he said, "I really wanted you with us on our trip, but as you'd rather stay here, and as this way seems providentially opened for you, I can only say you may accept Mona's invitation if you choose."

"Then I DO choose, you dear old Daddy!" cried Patty, making a rush for her father, and, seating herself on the arm of his chair, she patted his head, while she told him how glad she was of his consent. "For," she said, "I made up my mind not to coax. If you didn't agree readily, I was going to abide by your wishes, without a murmur."

"Oh, what a goody-girl!" said Mr. Fairfield, laughing. "Now, you see, Virtue is its own reward."

"And I'm SO glad!" Mona declared, fervently. "Oh, Patty, we'll have perfectly elegant times! I was so afraid you wouldn't WANT to come to stay with me."

"Oh, yes, I do," said Patty, "but I warn you I'm a self-willed young person, and if I insist on having my own way, what are you going to do?"

"Let you have it," said Mona, promptly. "Your way is always better than mine."

"But suppose you two quarrel," said Mr. Fairfield, "what can you do then? Patty will have nowhere to go."

"Oh, we won't quarrel," said Mona, confidently. "Patty's too sweet-tempered,—"

"And you're too amiable," supplemented Nan, who was fond of Mona in some ways, though not in others. But she, too, thought that Patty would have a good influence over the motherless girl, and she was honestly glad that Patty could stay at her beloved seashore for the rest of the summer.

So it was settled, and Mona went flying home to carry the glad news to her father, and to begin at once to arrange Patty's rooms.

CHAPTER III
SUSAN TO THE RESCUE

The day that Mr. and Mrs. Fairfield were to start on their trip to the mountains came during what is known as "a hot spell." It was one of those days when life seems almost unbearable,—when the slightest exertion seems impossible.

There was no breeze from the ocean, and the faint, languid land breeze that now and then gave an uncertain puff, was about as refreshing as a heat-wave from an opened furnace door.

At the breakfast table, Patty tried to persuade them not to go that day. "You'll faint in the train, Nan, on a day like this," she said. "Do wait until to-morrow."

"There's no prospect of its being any better to-morrow," said Mr. Fairfield, looking anxious; "and I think the sooner Nan gets away, the better. She needs cool, bracing mountain air. The seashore doesn't agree with her as it does with you, Patty."

"I know it," said Patty, who loved hot weather. "Well, perhaps you'd better go, then; but it will be just BOILING on the train."

"No more so than here," said Nan, smiling. She wore a light pongee silk travelling gown, which was the coolest garb she could think of. "But what's bothering me is that Mrs. Parsons hasn't arrived yet."

"Oh, she'll come to-day," said Patty. "Mona says she telegraphed yesterday that it was too hot to travel, but she'd surely come to-day."

Mrs. Parsons was the aunt who was to chaperon the two girls at "Red Chimneys," and Nan wanted to see the lady before she gave Patty into her charge.

"But it's going to be just as warm to-day," went on Nan. "Suppose she can't travel to-day, either?"

"Oh, she'll have to," said Patty, lightly. "If you can travel, I guess she can. Now, Nan, don't bother about her. You've enough to do to think of yourself and try to keep cool. I'm glad Louise is going with you. She's a good nurse, and you must let her take care of you."

Louise was the lady's maid who looked after the welfare of both Nan and Patty. But as Patty was going to a house where servants were more than plentiful, it had been arranged that Louise should accompany Nan.

"Don't talk as if I were an invalid, Patty. I'm sensitive to the heat, I admit, and this weather is excessive. But I'm not ill, and once I get a whiff of mountain air I'll be all right."

"I know it, Nancy; and so fly away and get it. And don't waste a thought on poor, worthless me, for I shall be as happy as a clam. I just love broiling, sizzling weather, and I'm sure my experiences at Mona's will be novel—if nothing else,—and novelty is always interesting."

"I hope you will have a good time, Patty, but it all seems so queer. To go off and leave you with that girl, and an aunt whom we have never even seen!"

"Well, I'll see her this afternoon, and if she won't give me a photograph of herself for you, I'll draw you a pen portrait of the Dragon Lady."

"I hope she will be a Dragon, for you need some one to keep you steady. You mean to do right, but you're so thoughtless and impulsive of late. I'm afraid it's growing on you, Patty."

"And I'm afraid you're a dear old goose! The heat has gone to your head. Now, forget me and my vagaries, and devote all your time and attention to the consideration of Mrs. Frederick Fairfield."

"Ready, Nan?" called her husband from the doorway, and then there was a flurry of leave-takings, and final advices, and last words, and good-bye embraces; and then the motor-car rolled down the drive carrying the travellers away, and Patty dropped into a veranda chair to realise that she was her own mistress.

Not that her father or Nan were over strict with her; they merely exercised the kind and gentle supervision that every young girl ought to have. But sometimes, of late, Patty had chafed a little at their restrictions, and though she had no desire to do anything they would disapprove of, she enjoyed the novel sense of entire freedom of action. However, to be responsible to nobody at all seemed to make Patty feel an added responsibility of her own behaviour, so she went into the house, determined to do all she ought to do as mistress there. Though her time for such duties was short. The Fairfields had been obliged to leave on an early morning train, and Patty was not to go to Mona's until late in the afternoon. She had, therefore, several hours, and she went systematically to work, looking through each room to make sure all was in order for closing the house. She put away some books and some bits of choice bric-a-brac, and then went out to interview the cook.

"Yes, Miss Patty," said that worthy, in answer to her enquiries, "I've enough av food for yer luncheon, an' thin I'll dispose av the schraps, and lave the refrigerators clane an' empty."

"That's right, Susan," said Patty, in most housekeeperly tones; "and will you go away in time for me to lock up the house after you?"

"Yes, Miss; Mrs. Fairfield said we was all to go at five o'clock. Thin Miller will lock up, and give yersilf the keys."

Patty knew these matters had all been arranged by her parents, but it pleased her to assume an authority.

"Very well, Susan," she said. "And where are you all going?" "Jane, she's going to take another place, Miss; but I'm going to me sister's for a time. It's a rest I'm nadin'."

Patty looked kindly at the cook. She had never really talked with her before, as Nan a capable and sufficient housewife, and Patty was a little surprised to see what a fine-looking woman Susan was. She was Irish, but of the best type. A large, well-built figure, and a sensible, intelligent face. Her abundant hair was slightly grey, and her still rosy cheeks and dark blue eyes indicated her nationality. Though she spoke with a soft burr, her brogue was not very noticeable, and Patty felt irresistibly drawn to her.

"If you want anything, Susan," she said, "or if I can help you in any way, come to me at once. I shall be at 'Red Chimneys' for two months, you know."

"Thank you, Miss Patty. I'm thinkin' I'll be fair comfortable at my sister's. But if you do be goin' by in yer autymobile, wave yer hand, just. It'd please us all. You know the house,—down on the Scudder Road."

"Yes, I know, Susan. I often pass there, and I'll wave my hand at you every time."

Patty went back to her own room, and continued her preparations for her visit to Mona. Although "Red Chimneys" was but two blocks away, the packing to be done was the same as if for a more distant destination. Many of Patty's things had already been sent over, and now she was looking up some favourite books and music to take with her. Though, of course, she would have the keys of her own home, and could return for anything she might want.

Patty expected to go over to Mona's at five o'clock, but at about four Mona herself came flying over to "The Pebbles." She waved a yellow telegram, and before Patty heard what was in it, she divined that Mrs. Parsons had again postponed her arrival.

And this was the truth.

"Doctor fears sunstroke. Advises me to wait until to-morrow," the message read, and Patty and Mona looked at each other in blank dismay.

"Father doesn't know this," said Mona. "You see, he left this morning for New York. His steamer sails this afternoon. Of course, he was sure Aunt Adelaide would come to-day. What shall we do, Patty?"

"Well, of course it's too bad. But I'm not afraid to stay alone one night without your aunt. You've so many servants, I'm sure there's no danger of fire or burglars."

"Oh, it isn't that, Patty! I'm not afraid of such things. But, you see, we've no chaperon,—just us two girls there alone,—it isn't proper."

"Well," Patty laughed, "we can't help it. And if we have no callers, and go to bed early, no one will be the wiser, and surely, your aunt will come to-morrow."

"Oh, I hope she will! I'll telegraph her she MUST! But,—Patty,—you see—well, I shall have to tell you!"

"Tell me what?"

"Why, just this: I have invited a little party to welcome you this evening. Not many,—just about a dozen of the boys and girls. And how can we receive them without Aunt Adelaide there?"

"For mercy's sake, Mona! Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"I wanted it to be a surprise,—to welcome you to 'Red Chimneys.'"

"Yes, I know. Well, what CAN we do? We must do something! Shall I telephone to Mrs. Sayre to come and chaperon us?"

"She can't come. She has a house party coming to-day. The Sayre girls are coming to us to-night, but Mrs. Sayre has some older guests, and she couldn't come."

"Well, let's ask Mrs. Dennison. No, she's away, I know. How about Mrs. Lockwood?"

"She's ill; Lena told me so this morning. Oh, Patty, shall I have to send them all word not to come?"

"Looks that way to me. And I'm sorry to do that, too. How many are asked, Mona?"

"About twelve, counting you and me. I thought it would be such a nice welcome for you."

"And so it would! You're a dear to think of it. I suppose your things are all ordered?"

"Yes; a caterer will bring the supper. I don't know what it will be,—cook looked after it."

"Cook! Cook! Mona—I have an idea! No, I haven't, either! It's too crazy! Oh, DO you suppose we could? LET'S!"

"Patty, are YOU crazy? What ARE you talking about? And it's almost five o'clock. I suppose I must telephone them not to come! Well, I'll go home and do it, and you come on over as soon as you're ready. We'll spend the evening alone in my boudoir, and we'll amuse ourselves somehow."

"Wait a minute, Mona. Let me think. Yes, I do believe I'll do it! Mona, suppose I provide a chaperon. Will it be all right to have the party then?"

"Why, yes, if it's a proper kind of a lady,—of course it will."

Patty's eyes twinkled. "I don't know whether you'll think her a proper lady or not," she said, "but I do."

She rang a nearby bell, and when Jane answered, she asked her to send Susan, the cook, in.

Susan came, and stood respectfully awaiting Patty's orders.

"Susan," Patty began, "you're married, aren't you?"

"Yes, Miss Patty; me name is Hastings. Me husband is dead this four years, rist his sowl."

"Well, Susan, I want you to do something for me, and you may think it's very queer, but you'll do it, won't you?"

"Nothin's quare, Miss Patty, if you bid me do it. What is it, ma'am?"

Mona began to look a little scared, but Patty seemed now quite sure of her own mind, and she began, in a kind but firm voice:

"Susan, Miss Mona and I expected to have a party at her house to-night, but her aunt, who was to chaperon us, hasn't arrived. So I want you, Susan, to let me fix you up, and dress you in a proper gown, and then I want you to act as a lady who is visiting at 'Red Chimneys.' Can you do this?"

It was funny to see the varying expressions on Susan's face. Wonder, amusement, and docility followed each other in quick succession, and then she said:

"Is it a masqueradin', belike, you want, Miss Patty?"

"Yes; just that, Susan. Could you do it?"

"Av coorse I cud do it, if you be wantin' me to; but wud I look good enough, Miss?"

"You'd look all right, after I dressed you; but, Susan, could you talk with less,—less accent?"

"Me brogue, is it, Miss? Faith, an' I fear I can't be after conquerin' that! It's born in me."

"Patty," said Mona, "I think your scheme is crazy,—perfectly CRAZY! But—if you really mean it, I'll tell you that I HAVE an Irish aunt,—at least, sort of Scotch-Irish,—and if we pass Susan off for her, the—the ACCENT won't matter."

"Just the thing!" cried Patty, gleefully. "I see my way clear now! It IS a crazy plan, Mona, I admit that,—but do you know of any better?"

"No; but, Patty, think a minute. Of course, the truth will leak out, and what will people say?"

"No, it won't leak out,—and, if it did, what harm? Susan is a nice, respectable woman, and as a member of my family is capable of chaperoning me in her own personality. But I choose this other game because it's more fun. I shall dress her up in,—in,—Susan, you couldn't wear a gown of Mrs. Fairfield's, could you?"

"The saints presarve us, Miss Patty, it wuddent go halfway round me!"

"No; so it wouldn't. Well, I'll find something. Oh, there's a gown in the attic that Mrs. Allen left here—she's Nan's mother, Mona,—that will be just right. It's grey satin and silver lace. Oh, Susan, you'll look GREAT!"

Mona still seemed a trifle unconvinced.

"Patty," she said, "you know I usually think what you do is all right,—but this,—well, this seems so very crazy."

"Mona, my child," said Patty, serenely, "I warned you that our ways might clash, and you said I might do exactly as I chose while at 'Red Chimneys.'"

"So I did, Patty,—and so I do. I'll go home now, and leave the rest of this performance to you. Come over soon, won't you?"

"Yes," said Patty, "I'll be there for dinner. Good-bye, Mona."

After Mona had gone, Patty turned to Susan.

"You know, Susan, this is to be a dead secret. Don't ever tell anybody. And you must obey my orders implicitly. I'll pay you something extra for your trouble."

"Sure, it's no trouble at all, Miss Patty. I'd do anything for ye, whativer. But you must be afther tellin' me just what to do."

"Of course I will. And, first of all, Susan, you must go home,—I mean, to your sister's,—get your dinner there, and then come to 'Red Chimneys' about half-past seven and ask for me. They'll bring you right up to my room, and I'll dress you up as I think best. Then we'll take you down to the drawing-room, and all you'll have to do, Susan, is to sit there all the evening in a big easy chair. Can you knit, Susan?"

"Yes, Miss Patty."

"Well, bring a piece of knitting work, not an old grey thing,—a piece of nice, fleecy white wool work. Have you any?"

"I've not, Miss, but I'll get some white yarn from my sister, and start a shawl or a tippet."

"Yes; do that. Then you just sit there, you know, and knit and glance around the room now and then, and smile benignly. Can you smile benignly, Susan?"

Susan tried, and after one or two lessons from Patty, was pronounced proficient in that art.

"Then, Susan, if there's music, you must listen, and wag your head in appreciation, so! When we dance, you must look on with interest and again smile benignly. Not many of the young people will talk to you, except to be introduced at first, but if they do, answer them pleasantly, and use your brogue as little as possible. Do you understand, Susan?"

And as Susan possessed the quick wit and ready adaptability of her race, she did see; and as she adored her young mistress above any one on earth, she was only too willing to please her; and, too, the occasion had its charms for a good-hearted, hard-working Irishwoman.

She declared her willingness to obey Patty's orders, promised to keep it all a profound secret, and then went away to her sister's house until the appointed time.

CHAPTER IV
A PERFECTLY GOOD CHAPERON

It was nearly six o'clock when Patty reached "Red Chimneys." She carried a bandbox, and Miller, who followed her, carried a large suitcase, and various other parcels.

Mona met them at the door, and, directing that the luggage be sent to Patty's rooms, she carried her visitor off to her own boudoir.

"Patty," she began, "I can't let you carry out that ridiculous scheme! I'm going to telephone to the young people not to come."

"Haven't telephoned yet, have you?" enquired Patty, carelessly, as she flung herself into an easy-chair, and made vigorous use of a large fan.

"No; I waited to tell you. But I'm going to begin now," and Mona lifted a telephone receiver from its hook.

"Oh, I wouldn't," said Patty, smiling at her hostess. "You see, I've set my heart on having this party, and I'd hate to have you upset it."

"But, Patty, consider how—"

"Consider,—cow—consider! Well, my fair lady, I have considered, and I must request you to hang up that telephone, and trust all to me."

When Patty adopted this tone, playful but decided, Mona knew she could do nothing with her. So she hung up the receiver, but she still showed a troubled expression as she looked questioningly at pretty Patty.

But that provoking young person only smiled at her, and slowly waved her big fan.

"Awfully warm, even yet, isn't it?" she said. "What time is dinner, Mona? I've a lot to do before that party of yours comes off."

"I ordered dinner early, so we'd have time to dress afterward. Come, Patty, I'll show you your rooms."

The two girls rose, and standing in front of Mona, Patty began to smooth the lines from the other's brow, with her own finger tips.

"There there," she said; "don't worry. Trust all to Smarty-Patty! She'll do the trick. And just turn up the corners of your mouth a little, so!"

Patty poked her forefingers into Mona's cheeks till she made her smile, and then Mona gave up.

"All right, Patty," she said. "I said you should have your own way, and so you shall! Get Miller to chaperon us, if you want to,—I won't say a word! Now, come on with me."

She led Patty across the hall to the suite of rooms prepared for her. Like everything else at "Red Chimneys," it was on a far grander scale than Patty's own home.

There was a boudoir, bedroom, dressing-room, and bath, all fitted up in the prettiest, daintiest manner.

The ivory-tinted walls showed panels of rose-coloured brocade, ornate with gilded decorations in Empire style. The marquetry furniture and bisque ornaments carried out the scheme, and though elaborate, the rooms were most attractive and comfortable.

Patty herself preferred simpler furnishings, but she knew that Mona didn't, and she exclaimed with delight at the beauty of appointments.

"It's out best suite," said Mona, complacently, "and I've had it fixed up freshly for you."

"It's charming," declared Patty, "and I know I shall be very happy here,—IF I can have my own way!" She smiled as she spoke, but she was in earnest, too, for Mona was dictatorial by nature, and Patty by no means proposed to be tyrannised over.

"You shall, Patty! All the time you are here, your word shall be law in this house, both over the servants and myself."

"Oh, I can manage the servants," cried Patty, gaily. "I'm rather good at that. Now, if I can only manage you!"

"You can! I'll prove so manageable and docile, you'll scarcely know me!"

So, having flown her colours, Patty wagged her head sagaciously as Mona went away. "I think, Miss Fairfield," she observed to her reflection in a gold-garlanded mirror, "that you're in for a pleasant summer. Firmness tempered with kindness must be your plan; and I'm pretty sure you can, in that way, manage Mona without friction."

Humming snatches of song to herself, Patty continued to explore her new domain. The rose-coloured boudoir opened into a dainty bedroom done in white and gold. Everywhere white silk or lace curtains were looped back with Frenchy pink satin rosebuds, and the gilded furniture, with its embroidered satin cushions, made the room look fit for a princess. Patty laughed with glee, for she loved dainty prettiness and this was a novel change from her own simpler belongings.

From the bedroom she went on to the dressing-room and bathroom; the former replete with all known appurtenances to Milady's toilette, and the latter a bewildering vista of marble, silver, and glass.

Dinner was a gay little feast. Although Patty had dined once or twice before at "Red Chimneys," it had been with her parents at formal dinners, and they had been examples of the unrestrained elegance which Mr. Galbraith deemed the correct way of displaying his wealth.

The Fairfields had assumed that the overelaborateness was due to the festive occasion, but Patty now perceived that the same formality of service was observed with only the two girls at the table. And the menu was long and varied enough to have served a dinner party.

Of course, it all appealed to Patty's sense of humour, but as it was Mona's habit to dine under the supervision of three or four serving-men, Patty was quite willing to accept the situation placidly. The servants, however, were no bar to their gay chatter. Except that they did not refer to the expected temporary chaperon, they discussed all the details of the evening's party.

Many of the courses of the dinner they dismissed without tasting, and so, by half-past seven, Patty was back in her own rooms, and Mrs. Hastings appeared promptly at the hour. A maid named Janet had been appointed to look after Patty personally, but she was dismissed, with instructions to return at eight, and then Patty began her transformation scene.

It was not accomplished without some few difficulties, and much giggling, but by eight o'clock, Patty and Mona surveyed a most acceptable looking chaperon, due to their own handiwork. Susan, or Mrs. Hastings, as they called her, looked the picture of a kindly, dignified matron. Her grey hair was done in a simple, becoming fashion, and ornamented with a spray of silver tinsel leaves. The grey satin gown of Mrs. Allen's, which Patty had appropriated without compunction, fitted fairly well, and a fichu of old lace, prettily draped, concealed any deficiencies. Though possessing no elegance of manner, Susan had quiet ways, and being observant by nature, she remembered the demeanour of ladies she had worked for, and carried herself so well that Patty and Mona were satisfied as to her ability to carry out their purpose.

Patty provided Mrs. Hastings with a black feather fan, and gave her a quick lesson in the art of using it. The piece of white knitting work proved satisfactory on inspection, and after a few final injunctions, Patty pronounced the "chaperon" complete.

Then she called for Janet, and hastily proceeded to make her own toilette. She chose a white silk muslin, dotted with tiny pink rosebuds, and further ornamented with fluttering ends of pale pink ribbon. The frock was cut a little low at the throat, and had short sleeves, and very cool and sweet Patty looked in it. Her gold curls were piled high on her head, and kept there by a twist of pink ribbon. She wore no jewelry, and the simple attire was very becoming to the soft, babyish curves of her neck and dimpled arms.

Mona appeared in rose-coloured chiffon, richly embroidered. The gown, though beautiful of itself, was not appropriate for such a warm night; but Mona had not Patty's sense of harmony, and had added a heavy necklace and bracelets of wrought Roman gold.

"You'll melt in all that toggery!" said Patty, bluntly, and Mona sighed as she saw Patty's diaphanous frock. Then, led by Mrs. Hastings, they went down to the drawing-room. They put Susan through a few lessons in introductions, practised calling her "Aunt Rachel," and bolstered up her failing courage by telling her how well she looked.

The first guest to arrive was Jack Pennington. Being a graceful mannered boy he acknowledged his introduction to Mrs. Hastings with just the correct blending of deference and cordiality. "Isn't it warm?" he said, and as this required no answer save, "It is, indeed," Susan acquitted herself creditably, and even refrained from saying "indade." Then the others came, and being a merry crowd of young people, they merely paused for a word or two with the elderly stranger, before turning away to their own interests. And, if by chance, one or two showed a tendency to linger and converse with her, Patty and Mona were at hand to take up the burden of the conversation.

After all had arrived, Patty conducted Susan to a pleasant seat near an open window, provided her with her knitting and a book, and gave her a whispered permission to doze a little if she wished to.

So far as the girls could see, not one of the guests had suspected that Mrs. Hastings was other than an aunt of Mona's, nor had they given her a second thought. To their minds a chaperon was a necessary piece of furniture, but of only a momentary interest. She must be greeted, and later, she must be bidden farewell, but no conversation with her between times was necessary.

The party was a pretty one. Usually, the Spring Beach people didn't care much to go to "Red Chimneys," for Mona was not a favourite. But Patty was, and, invited to meet her, every one accepted. And the large rooms, cooled by electric fans, and decorated with lovely flowers and softly shaded lights, looked somehow more attractive, now that Patty Fairfield's graceful figure was flitting through them.

After one of the dances, Patty drifted across the room and stood near Susan. That worthy was dutifully looking over her book, and occasionally glancing thoughtfully round the room.

"Keep it up, Susan!" whispered Patty. "You're a howling success! Everything's all right."

"Come for a stroll on the veranda, Patty," said Jack Pennington, coming up to her. "Mayn't I take her, Mrs. Hastings, if I'll be very careful of her?"

"Shure an' ye may, sir," said Susan, heartily, caught off her guard by this sudden request.

Jack Pennington stared at her, and Susan's eyes fell and her face turned red in deepest dismay lest she had disgraced her beloved Miss Patty. In a despairing effort to remedy her indiscretion she assumed a haughty tone and said, "You have my permission. Go with the young gentleman, Miss Patty." And with an air of having accomplished her duty successfully, Susan picked up her knitting.

Patty's twitching lips and flushed cheeks made quick-witted Jack Pennington suspect a joke somewhere, but he gravely offered his arm, and as they reached the broad veranda and walked toward a moonlighted corner of it, he said, "Interesting lady, that new aunt of Mona's, isn't she?"

"Very," said Patty, trying not to laugh.

"I always like that foreign accent," went on Jack; "is it,—er—French?"

"Well, no," opined Patty. "I don't think Mrs. Hastings IS French."

"Ah, German, then, perhaps. I've heard that particular accent before, but I can't just place it."

"I think it's sort of,—of Scotch, don't you?"

"Faith, an' I don't, thin! I'm afther thinkin' she's a daughter av ould Ireland, arrah."

Jack's imitation of Susan's brogue was so funny that Patty laughed outright.

"Perhaps the lady IS Irish," she said; "but she looks charming, and so well-dressed."

"That's so. She IS much better dressed than when I saw her last."

"Saw her last! What do you mean?"

"Well, of course I MAY be mistaken, but do you know, she looks like a—like a lady I saw once in the kitchen garden at 'The Pebbles.'"

"And pray what were you doing in that kitchen garden?"

"Well, I was helping Miller look after your motor one day, and I strolled around the house, back to the front veranda that way. And,"—Jack's voice sank to an impressive whisper,—"there in the midst of the cabbages and eggplants,—there stood Mrs. Hastings,—I'm SURE it was she,—in a calico gown and checked apron!"

"Oh, Jack!" and Patty burst into laughter. "She IS our cook! Don't give it away, will you?"

"Never! Never! But WHAT a joke! Does no one know it?"

"No one at all but Mona and myself. You see—" And then Patty told the whole story.

"Well, that's the best ever!" declared Jack as she finished. "Patty, you do beat all! No one else will guess, I'm sure,—and I'LL never tell. But it's most too good a joke to keep, now, isn't it?"

"But it's going to BE kept! Why, if some people knew of it, they'd drum me out of Spring Beach. And anyway, Jack, I wouldn't have done it, if Susan hadn't been such a dear respectable person herself."

"I'm sure she is, and to show I believe it, I'll take her out to supper."

"Gracious, goodness, Jack! I never thought of supper! Will she have to eat with us?"

"Of course she will! And, as I say, I'll take her out, so there'll be no danger of further discovery."

Patty giggled again. The idea of SUSAN being escorted out to the dining-room of "Red Chimneys"! And by Jack Pennington, the most aristocratic young man in their set!

"All right," she said. "But I must sit the other side of you. I want to keep my eye on her."

And so it came to pass that when supper was announced, Jack went up gallantly and offered his arm to the chaperon.

This seemed quite natural and proper to the other guests, and they paid little attention as Mrs. Hastings rose with dignity, and, with her escort, led the procession.

Susan was resolved to make up for her blunder, and she carried herself with an air of hauteur, and trailed the grey satin gown after her quite as if she were used to such.

"It is a beautiful home, is it not, Mrs. Hastings?" said Jack, by way of making conversation.

"It is, sir," returned Susan, careful of speech and accent, but unable to forget her deference. "Such airy rooms and fine, high ceilings."

Jack couldn't help admiring her aplomb, and he chatted away easily in an endeavour to put her at her ease.

"Will you sit here, Mrs. Hastings?" he said, offering her the seat at the head of the table, as became the chaperon of the party.

Susan hesitated, but catching Mona's nod of acquiescence, she sank gracefully into the armchair Jack held for her.

CHAPTER V
A DINNER PARTY

As Patty expressed it afterward, she felt as limp as a jelly-fish with the grippe when she saw Susan at the head of Mona's table! Mrs. Hastings herself seemed in no way appalled at the sparkling array of glass and silver, of lights and flowers, but she was secretly alarmed lest her ignorance of etiquette should lead her into blunders that might shame Miss Patty.

But Jack Pennington proved himself a trump. Without attracting attention, he touched or indicated which spoon or fork Mrs. Hastings should use. Or he gave her valuable advice regarding the viands.

"I say," he whispered, "you'd better duck the artichoke Hollandaise. You mightn't manage it just right. Or—well—take it, but don't attempt to eat it. You'd sure get into trouble."

Irish Susan had both quick wit and a warm heart, and she appreciated gratefully the young man's good-natured assistance, and adroitly followed his instructions. But Jack was a daring rogue, and the temptation to have a little fun was too strong to resist.

"Are you fond of motoring, Mrs. Hastings?" he asked, innocently, while Patty, on his other side, felt her heart beat madly and her cheeks grow red.

But Susan wasn't caught napping this time.

"Oh, I like it," she said, "but I'm not fair crazy about it, like some." She smiled benignly at Patty, and the few guests who overheard the remarks thought nothing of it.

But naughty Jack went on.

"Oh, then you know of Miss Fairfield's fad. I didn't know you knew her so well. I thought you had just arrived here. Have you been to Spring Beach before?"

Susan looked at Jack with twinkling eyes. She well knew he was saying these things to tease Patty, and she looked kindly at the embarrassed girl as she replied:

"Oh, my niece, Mona, has told me so much about her friend, Miss Fairfield, that I feel as if I had known her a long time."

Patty gasped. Surely Susan could take care of herself, after that astounding speech!

Jack chuckled silently, and as the game promised rare sport, he kept on.

"Are you fond of bridge, Mrs. Hastings?"

Susan looked at him. So far all had gone well, but she didn't know how long she could match his banter. So she favoured him with a deliberate gaze, and said, "Bridge, is it? I'm fond of the game, but I play only with expayrienced players,—so don't ask me."

"Ho! ho! Jack, that's a good one on you!" said Guy Martin, who sat within hearing. "You're right, Mrs. Hastings; he's no sort of a player, but I'm an expert. May I hope for a game with you some time?"

"We'll see about it, young sir," said Susan, with cold dignity, and then turned her attention to her plate.

In response to a desperate appeal from Patty, Jack stopped teasing, and made general conversation, which interested the young people, to the exclusion of Susan.

Then, supper over, he escorted the chaperon from the table, talking to her in low tones.

"I hope I didn't bother you," he said. "You see, I know all about it, and I think it's fine of you to help the girls out in this way."

"You helped me far more than you bothered me, sir," Susan replied with a grateful glance. "Will it soon be over now, sir?"

"Well, they'll have a few more dances, and probably they'll sing a little. They'll go home before midnight. But, I say, Mrs. Hastings, I won't let 'em trouble you. You sit in this cosy corner, and if

you'll take my advice, you'll nod a bit now and then,—but don't go really to sleep. Then they'll let you alone."

Susan followed this good counsel, and holding her knitting carelessly in her lap, she sat quietly, now and then nodding, and opening her eyes with a slight start. The poor woman was really most uncomfortable, but Patty had ordered this performance and she would have done her best had the task been twice as hard.

"You were a villain to tease poor Susan so at the table," said Patty to Jack, as they sauntered on the veranda between dances.

"She came through with flying colours," he replied, laughing at the recollection.

"Yes, but it was mean of you to fluster the poor thing."

"Don't you know why I did it?"

"To tease me, I suppose," and Patty drew down the corners of her mouth and looked like a much injured damsel.

"Yes; but, incidentally, to see that pinky colour spread all over your cheeks. It makes you look like a wild rose."

"Does it?" said Patty, lightly. "And what do I look like at other times? A tame rose?"

"No; a primrose. Very prim, sometimes."

"I have to be very prim when I'm with you," and Patty glanced saucily from beneath her long lashes; "you're so inclined to—"

"To what?"

"To friskiness. I NEVER know what you're going to do next."

"Isn't it nicer to be surprised?"

"Well,—that depends. It is if they're nice surprises."

"Oh, mine always are! I'm going to surprise you a lot of times this summer. Are you to be here, at Mona's, all the rest of the season?"

"I shall be here two months, anyway."

"That's time enough for a heap of surprises. Just you wait! But,—I say,—I suppose—oh, pshaw, I know this sounds horrid, but I've got to say it. I suppose everything you're invited to, Mona must be also?"

Patty's eyes blazed at what she considered a very rude implication.

"Not necessarily," she said, coldly. "You are quite at liberty to invite whom you choose. Of course, I shall accept no invitations that do not include Mona."

"Quite right, my child, quite right! Just what I was thinking myself."

Patty knew he was only trying to make up for his rudeness, and she looked at him severely. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself," she said.

"I am! Oh, I AM! deeply, darkly, desperately ashamed. But I've succeeded in making your cheeks turn that peculiar shade of brick-red again!"

"They aren't brick-red!"

"No? Well, a sort of crushed strawberry shading to magenta, then!"

Patty laughed, in spite of herself, and Jack smiled back at her.

"Am I forguv?" he asked, in a wheedling voice.

"On condition that you'll be particularly nice to Mona all summer. And it's not much to your credit that I have to ASK such a thing of you!"

"You're right, Patty," and Jack looked honestly penitent. "I'm a good-for-nothing brute! A boor without any manners at all! Not a manner to my name! But if you'll smile upon me, and let me,—er—surprise you once in a while, I'll,—oh, I'll just tie myself to Mona's apron strings!"

"Mona doesn't wear aprons!"

"No, I know it," returned Jack, coolly, and they both laughed.

But Patty knew she had already gained one friend for Mona, for heretofore, Jack Pennington had ignored the girl's existence.

"What are you doing to-morrow, Patty?" asked Dorothy Dennison, as she and Guy Martin came up to the corner where Patty and Jack were sitting. It was a pleasant nook, a sort of balcony built out from the main veranda, and draped with a few clustering vines. The veranda was lighted with Japanese lanterns, whose gayer glow was looked down upon by the silvery full moon.

"We're going to the Sayres' garden party,—Mona and I," said Patty.

"Oh, good gracious!" rejoined Dorothy. "I suppose Mona will have to be asked everywhere, now you're staying with her!"

"Not to YOUR parties, Dorothy, for I'm sure neither of us would care to come!"

It was rarely that Patty spoke crossly to any one, and still more rarely that she flung out such a bitter speech as that; but she was getting tired of combating the prevalent attitude of the young people toward Mona, and though she had determined to overcome it, she began to think it meant real warfare. Dorothy looked perfectly amazed. She had never heard gentle, merry Patty speak like that before.

Guy Martin looked uncomfortable, and Jack Pennington shook with laughter.

"Them cheeks is now a deep solferino colour," he observed, and Patty's flushed face had to break into smiles.

"Forgive me, Dorothy," she said; "I didn't mean what I said, and neither did you. Let's forget it."

Glad of this easy escape from a difficult situation, Dorothy broke into a merry stream of chatter about other things, and the quartette were soon laughing gaily.

"You managed that beautifully, Patty," said Jack, as a little later, they returned to the house for the last dance. "You showed fine tact."

"What! In speaking so rudely to Dorothy?"

"Well, in getting out of it so adroitly afterward. And she had her lesson. She won't slight Mona, I fancy. Look here, Patty. You're a brick, to stand up for that girl the way you do, and I want to tell you that I'll help you all I can."

"Oh, Jack, that's awfully good of you. Not but what I think you OUGHT to be kind and polite to her, but of course you haven't the same reason that I have. I'm her guest, and so I can't stand for any slight or unkindness to her."

"No, of course not. And there are lots of ways that I can—"

"That you can surprise Mona," interrupted Patty, laughing.

Jack smiled appreciation, and to prove it went straight to Mona and asked for the favour of the final dance. Mona was greatly elated, for handsome Jack Pennington had never asked her to dance before. She was not a good dancer, for she was heavy, physically, and self-conscious, mentally; but Jack was skilful, and guided her lightly across the shining floors.

"I'll see you to-morrow at the Sayres'," he said, as the dance ended.

"Yes," said Mona, smiling. "We're going to the garden fete. The Sayres have a house party, you know. I've always longed to have a house party."

"This would be a fine place for one," said Jack, glancing at the large and numerous rooms.

"Yes, it would. Do you suppose I COULD have one?"

"Easy as pie!" declared Jack. "Why don't you?"

"Perhaps I will, after Aunt Adelaide comes. This,—this chaperon to-night is only temporary, you know."

"Yes, I know," said Jack, but he said no more. The discovery of Susan was his secret with Patty, not with Mona. Then the young people prepared to depart, and Patty and Mona stood either side of Mrs. Hastings to assist her, if necessary, in receiving their good-nights.

Jack stood near, too, for he thought he might be of some slight help.

"Good-night, Mrs. Hastings," said Beatrice Sayre. "The girls are coming to my garden party to-morrow, and as my mother also expects guests, I'm sure she'd be glad if you would come."

Susan, much bewildered at being thus addressed, looked about her helplessly, and murmured uncertainly, "Thank you, Miss," when Jack interrupted by saying, "Such a pity, Bee, but Mrs. Hastings goes away to-morrow. Another aunt of Mona's is coming to play chaperon at 'Red Chimneys.'"

"Oh," said Beatrice, carelessly; "then this is good-bye as well as good-night, Mrs. Hastings. I've SO enjoyed meeting you."

These conventional phrases meant nothing on Beatrice's part, but it almost convulsed Patty to hear Susan thus addressed. However, she knew she must play the game a few moments longer, and she did so, watching the thoughtless young guests as they shook hands with the masquerading COOK!

Jack Pennington was the last to go. "I say," he whispered to Patty, "it's been a great success! I don't see how you ever had the nerve to try it, but it worked all right!" Then he went away, and Patty and Mona sank limply into chairs and shook with laughter. Susan instantly returned to her role of servant, and stood before Patty, as if waiting for further orders.

"You were fine, Susan, just fine," Patty said, still giggling as she looked at the satin clad figure.

"I did me best, Miss Patty. I made some shlips, sure, but I thried that hard, ye wuddent belave!" In her earnestness, Susan lapsed into her broadest brogue, and the girls laughed afresh to see the silver headdress wag above Susan's nodding head.

"You were all right, Susan," declared Mona. "Now you can trot off home as fast as you like, or you can stay here over night, as you prefer."

But Susan wanted to go, as her duty was done, so, changing back to her own costume, she went away, gladdened by Mona's generous douceur.

"And now for bed," said Patty, and the two girls started upstairs. But after getting into a kimono, Mona came tapping at Patty's door. She found that young person in a white negligee, luxuriously curled up among the cushions of a wide window seat, gazing idly out at the black ocean.

"Patty, you're a wonder!" her hostess remarked, with conviction. "Can you ALWAYS do EVERYTHING you undertake? But I know you can. I never saw any one like you!"

"No," said Patty, complacently. "They don't catch 'em like me very often. But, I say, Mona, wasn't Susan just a peach? Though if Jack Pennington hadn't helped, I don't know how she would have behaved at the supper table."

"Isn't he a nice young man, Patty?"

"Lovely. The flower of chivalry, and the glass of form, or whatever it is. But he's a waggish youth."

"Well, he's kind. Patty, I'm going to have a house party, and he's going to help me!"

"You DON'T say! My dear Mona, you ARE blossoming out! But you haven't asked MY permission yet."

"Oh, I know you'll agree to anything Jack Pennington favours."

"Sure, I will! But he seems to favour you, and I don't always agree with you!"

"Well, anyway, Patty, it will be perfectly lovely,—and we'll have a gorgeous time!"

"Where do I come in? Providing cooks for chaperons?"

"Nonsense! Aunt Adelaide will come to-morrow, and she'll do the chaperon act. Now, I'll tell you about the house party."

"Not to-night, Lady Gay. It's time for you to go beddy, and I, too, need my beauty sleep."

"You need nothing of the sort,—you're too beautiful as it is!"

"Oh, Mona,—Monissima! DON'T say those things to me! I'm but a weak-minded simpleton, and I MIGHT think you meant them, and grow conceited! Hie thee away, fair maiden, and hie pretty swiftly, too. And call me not to breakfast foods until that the sun is well toward the zenith."

"You needn't get up till you choose, Patty. You know you are mistress here."

"No, you're that. I'm merely the adviser-in-chief. And what I say goes!"

"Indeed it does! Good-night, Patty."

"Good-night, Mona. Scoot!"

CHAPTER VI
AUNT ADELAIDE

The next morning Patty was making one of her "peregrinating toilettes." She could dress as quickly as any one, if occasion required; but, if not, she loved to walk slowly about as she dressed, pausing now and then to look out of a window or into a book. So she dawdled through her pretty rooms, brushing her curly golden mop, and singing softly to herself.

"Come in," she said, in answer to a tap at her door, and Mona burst in, in a wild state of excitement.

"Aunt Adelaide has arrived!" she exclaimed.

"Well, that isn't a national calamity, is it?" returned Patty. "Why this look of dismay?"

"Wait till you see her! SHE'S a National Calamity!"

"Well, then, we must get Susan back again! But what's wrong with your noble aunt?"

"Oh, Patty, she's so queer! I haven't seen her for some years, but she's not a bit as I remembered her."

"Oh, don't take it too seriously. Perhaps we can make her over to suit ourselves. Did you expect her so early?"

"No; but she said she came early to avoid the midday heat. It's almost eleven. Do finish dressing, Patty, and come down to see her."

"Hasten me not, my child. Aunt Adelaide will keep, and I'm not in rapid mood this morning."

"Oh, bother; come on down as you are, then. That negligee thing is all right."

"No; Aunt Adelaide might think me a careless young person. I shall get into a tidy frock, and appear before her properly."

"Well, go on and do it, then. I'll wait for you." Mona sat down to wait, and Patty dropped into a chair before her dressing-table, and soon twisted up her curls into presentable shape.

"I declare, Patty," Mona said, "the quicker you twist up that yellow mop of yours, the more it looks like a coiffure in a fashion paper."

"And, as a rule, THEY look like the dickens. But describe the visitor to me, Mona."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.