

WELLS
CAROLYN

PATTY

BLOSSOM

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Carolyn Wells Patty Blossom

CHAPTER I

SAM BLANEY

"Patty, Patty, pit-a-pat,
Grinning like a Chessy Cat,

if you don't stop looking so everlasting cheerful, I'll throw something at you!"

"Throw," returned Patty, as her grin perceptibly and purposely widened to the full extent of her scarlet lips.

"All right!" and Elise threw a sofa cushion and another and another, following them up with a knitted afghan, a silk slumber robe, and then beginning on a pile of newspapers.

Patty, who was lounging on a broad divan, protected her face with a down pillow, and contentedly endured the avalanche.

Then, as the enemy's stock of missiles gave out, she sat up, flinging the impedimenta right and left, and her smiling face and tumbled curls triumphantly braved further assault.

"It's snowing like the very dickens," Elise declared, disconsolately.

"I don't see any snow," and Patty shut her blue eyes tight.

"Of course you don't, you old goose! If a roaring Bengal tiger stood in front of you, with full intent of eating you at once, you'd shut your eyes and say, 'There isn't any tiger there.' That is, if you had time to get the words out before you slipped down his throat."

Leisurely, Patty got up, shook her rumpled skirts, and walked to the window.

"It does look like snow," she observed, critically eyeing the landscape.

"Look like snow!" cried Elise; "it's a blizzard, that's what it is!"

"Well, doesn't a blizzard look like snow? It does to me. And I don't know anything nicer than a whole long day in the house. I'm having the time of my life."

Patty threw herself into a big armchair, in front of the blazing log fire, and contentedly held out her slippered feet to the glowing warmth.

"But we were going to play tennis, and—"

"My dear child, tennis will keep. And what's the use of growling? As you remark, it is a young blizzard, and we can't possibly stop it, so let's make the best of it, and have what is known in the kiddy-books as Indoor Pastimes."

"Patty, you're enough to exasperate a saint! You and your eternal cheerfulness!"

"All right, anything to please," and Patty assumed a doleful expression, drew down the corners of her mouth, and wrung her hands in mock despair.

"Isn't it mean," she wailed; "here's this horrid, hateful old snowstorm, and we can't go outdoors or anything! I'm mad as a hornet, as a hatter, as a wet hen, as a March hare, as a—as hops, as—what else gets awful mad, Elise?"

"I shall, if you continue to act like an idiot!"

"My good heavens!" and Patty rolled her eyes toward the ceiling, "there's no pleasing her—positively *no* pleasing her! What to do! What to do!"

But Elise's face had cleared up, and as she looked from the window, she smiled gaily.

"He's coming!" she cried, "Sam's coming!"

Patty hastily adjusted her dignity and sat up with a formal air to greet the visitor, while Elise scabbled up the sofa cushions and newspapers.

The girls were down at Lakewood. Patty was the guest of Elise, whose family had taken a cottage there for the season. That is, it was called a cottage, but was in reality an immense house, most comfortably and delightfully appointed. Patty was still supposed to be convalescing from her recent illness, but, as a matter of fact, she had regained her health and strength, and, though never robust, was entirely well.

The invitation to Pine Laurel, as the house was called, was a welcome one, and the elder Fairfields were glad to have Patty go there for a fortnight or so. She had arrived but the day before, and now the unexpected snowstorm had spoiled the plans for tennis and other outdoor affairs. Though it was late November, it was early for such a tempestuous snowstorm, and the weather-wise ones opined that it was a mere swift and sudden flurry.

Patty, with her usual adaptability to circumstances, didn't care much, and felt pretty sure the storm would depart as quickly as it had gathered. She was quite willing to stay indoors a day or two if need be, and could easily amuse herself in many ways. Not so Elise. She was impatient and impetuous, and was always greatly put out if her plans went awry. But the diversion of an unexpected guest roused her to animation and she poked the logs to a brighter blaze by way of welcome.

After the sound of stamping and whisking off snow in the hall, a young man came into the pleasant sun-parlour where the girls were.

It was with difficulty that Patty concealed her amazement as she looked at him. He was of a type that she had heard of, but had never before chanced to meet.

Mechanically, she went through the formalities of the introduction, and sat staring at him, without realising that she was doing so.

"Well," said Sam Blaney, at last, "what about it? Do I get a blue ribbon?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" and Patty blushed at her rudeness. "You see, you er—you reminded me of somebody I have met—"

"No, you mean I remind you of somebody you never have met, but are glad to discover at last."

Patty laughed outright, for the words so definitely expressed her state of mind. Thus encouraged, she continued to look at him.

Blaney was not so extraordinary of appearance, but he presented the effects of the class known as artistic. His thick, fair hair, while it could scarcely be called long, was a trifle longer than the conventional cut. His collar, while not Byronic, was low, and he wore a Windsor tie, of a sickly, pale green. He was a big man, but loose-jointed and ungainly of build. His manners were careless, and his voice was low and soft. He had big grey eyes, which seemed especially noticeable by reason of enormous tortoise-rimmed glasses, whose long, thick bows hooked over his ears.

"You are a poet," Patty said, decisively, after a smiling survey; "and you are right, I have always wanted to know a live poet."

"I hope," said Blaney, in a mournful way, "that you don't agree with those wiseacres who think the only good poet is a dead poet."

"Oh, goodness, no!" said Patty, quickly. "But most of the poetry with which I am familiar was written by dead men—that is, they weren't dead when they wrote it, you know—"

"But died from the shock?"

"Now you're making fun of me," and Patty pouted, but as Patty's pout was only a shade less charming than her smile, the live poet didn't seem to resent it.

"Doubtless," he went on, "my work will not be really famous until after I am dead, but some day I shall read them to you, and get your opinion as to their hopes for a future."

"Oh, do read them to Patty," exclaimed Elise; "read them now. That's the very thing for a stormy day!"

"Yes," Patty agreed; "if you have an Ode to Spring, or Lines on a Blooming Daffodil, it would be fine to fling them in the teeth of this storm."

"I see you're by way of being a wag, Miss Fairfield," Blaney returned, good-naturedly. "But you've misapprehended my vein. I write poems, not jingles."

"He does," averred Elise, earnestly. "Oh, Sam, do recite some—won't you?"

"Not now, Lady fair. The setting isn't right, and the flowers are too vivid."

Patty looked at the two large vases of scarlet carnations that stood on the long, massive table in the middle of the room. She had thought them a very pleasant and appropriate decoration for the snowy day, but Blaney's glance at them was disdainful.

"He's an affected idiot!" she exclaimed to herself. "I don't like him one bit!"

"Please like me," said the poet's soft voice, and Patty fairly jumped to realise that he had read her thought in her face.

"Oh, I do!" she said, with mock fervour, and a slight flush of embarrassment at her carelessness. "I like you heaps!"

"Don't be too set up over that," laughed Elise, "for Patty likes everybody. She's the greatest little old liker you ever saw! Why, she even likes people who don't like her."

"Are there such?" asked Blaney, properly.

"Yes, indeed," Patty declared; "and I can't help admiring their good taste."

"I can't either," and Blaney spoke so seriously, that Patty almost gasped.

"That isn't the answer," she smiled; "you should have contradicted me."

"No," the poet went on; "people who don't like you show real discrimination. It is because you are so crude and unformed of soul."

But Patty was too wise to be caught with such chaff.

"Yes, that's it," she said, and nodded her curly head in assent.

"You say yes, because you don't know what I'm talking about. But it's true. If you had your soul scraped and cleaned and properly polished, you would be well worth liking."

"Go on! go on!" cried Patty, clapping her hands. "Now I know you're the real thing in poets! That's the way I thought they would talk! Say more."

But Blaney turned sulky. He scowled at Patty, he threw a reproachful glance at Elise, and the atmosphere suddenly charged with gloom.

Patty felt that it was her fault and that she had perhaps gone too far. The man was Elise's guest and it wasn't right to make fun of him, if he did sound foolish. So, ignoring the past conversation, Patty smiled, and said, "It is too bad about the storm, isn't it? We had expected to have such a fine tennis game today. You play, of course?"

It was a chance shot, but Patty felt pretty sure that such a big, muscular chap would be fond of outdoor sports and, as it turned out, he was. Moreover, it would be a grumpy poet, indeed, who wouldn't relent under the magic of Patty's smile.

"Yes, I do," he replied, animatedly, and then the talk turned to the game, and the chances of the storm abating and play being possible in a day or two.

"Hello, Blaney," said Roger Farrington, coming into the room. "How's everything?"

"All right, Farry. How goes it with you?"

"Fine. I say, girls, are you game for a little two-cent sleigh ride in the storm? As soon as it stops snowing, the flakes will melt like morning dew, and, if we catch a ride at all, it must be immejit. How about it?"

"I'd love to go!" cried Patty, her eyes sparkling. "I haven't had a sleigh ride in ages—"

"And no telling when you will again," said Roger. "But it's blowing great guns, and snowing fast. You're sure you want to go?"

"Course we do," insisted Elise. "Shall we get our things now?"

"Not quite yet. I'll have to telephone Mr. Livery Man for a rig. This otherwise well-stocked outfit that we're inhabiting doesn't have such a thing on the premises as a sleigh. I'll go and see about it."

"Can't we stop and pick up Alla?" suggested Elise.

"No," and Sam Blaney shook his head decidedly. "My sister wouldn't think of putting her nose out-of-doors on a day like this. I'm surprised that you will, Miss Fairfield."

"Oh, I'm a tough pine knot. I may not look the part, but I assure you wind and weather have no terrors for me."

"That's so," put in Elise. "Patty looks like a chaff which the wind driveth away, but it would be a pretty strong old wind that could do it."

"You can't tell by looks; my sister looks like a strong, hearty girl, but she's as fragile as a spring crocus."

"There's nothing fragiler than that," Patty remarked; "I've often tried to keep the flimsy little things for a few hours, and even in water they droop and peak and pine all to pieces."

"That's just like Alla," said Blaney. "She's psychic, you see—"

"Oh, is she!" cried Patty. "I've always wanted to know a real psychic."

Mayn't I meet her?"

"Indeed you may, she'll be pleased. Will you come round to the studio today, while we're out sleighing?"

"No, not today," said Elise, positively. "Roger wouldn't stand for it. He'll want to put in all the time there is on the road. And he's going to New York tonight, I think."

"Oh, yes," and Blaney remembered. "Let's see, his wedding day is—when is it?"

"Not till the fifteenth of December. But he and Mona have so much to look after and attend to, that he spends most of his time on the road between here and New York."

"Isn't Mona coming down here while I'm here?" asked Patty.

"She promised to," Elise replied, "but Mona's promises are not to be implicitly depended on just now. She's getting married with all her time and attention."

"Well, a wedding like hers is to be does take a lot of planning. And Mona's looking after everything herself. She's a genius at that sort of thing, but it seems as if she ought to have some one to help her,—some relative, I mean."

"Her father's a big help," said Roger, who had returned just in time to hear Patty's remark.

"Yes, I know it, but I mean a woman relative."

"I know," agreed Roger. "You're right, in a way. But Mona is so accustomed to managing for herself that I'm pretty sure a meddling relative would bother her to death."

"Probably would," agreed Patty. "Do we go sleigh-ridy, Roger?"

"We do. The fiery steeds will be here in fifteen minutes. Get warm wraps, for it's blowing like blazes. Shall we go 'round by your studio, Sam, and drop in on Alla?"

"No, please. I don't want to seem inhospitable, but I've decided I want Miss Fairfield to see the studio first under proper conditions. I want Alla to know when she's coming and—"

"And have her hair frizzed. I get you. All right. We'll drive 'round the lake, and see how the going is, and then decide whether to keep on, or go to some friend's for a cup of tea."

"You mustn't think my sister is a fuss," said Blaney to Patty, as she started to leave the room. "But you know the artist soul likes to have the stage rightly set for an important scene."

"Yes," said Patty, a little puzzled.

"Yes. And your advent at my studio is a most important scene—"

"Why?" asked Patty, bluntly.

"Because you're important. In fact, I may say you're the most important person I have ever seen."

"Really? But if you say things like that, you'll make me vain."

"You can't well be vainer than you are."

Patty looked up in sudden anger at this speech, but Blaney's eyes were quietly amused, and his soft voice was so innocent of offence, that Patty was uncertain what attitude to assume, and to save the necessity of a reply she ran from the room and upstairs to get ready for the ride.

CHAPTER II

A STUDIO PARTY

As Roger had predicted, the snow departed as quickly as it came, and two days after their sleigh ride there was scarcely a vestige of white on the ground. Tennis was again possible and a great game was in progress on the court at Pine Laurel. Patty and Roger were playing against Elise and Sam Blaney, and the pairs were well matched.

But the long-contested victory finally went against Patty, and she laughingly accepted defeat.

"Only because Patty's not quite back on her game yet," Roger defended; "this child has been on the sick list, you know, Sam, and she isn't up to her own mark."

"Well, I like that!" cried Patty; "suppose you bear half the blame, Roger. You see, Mr. Blaney, he is so absorbed in his own Love Game, he can't play with his old-time skill."

"All right, Patsy, let it go at that. And it's so, too. I suddenly remembered something Mona told me to tell you, and it affected my service."

"What is it?" asked Elise. "Anything of importance?"

"Yes; it's this: Mona has decided to sell Red Chimneys, and Philip Van Reypen thinks it a good plan to buy it for the Children's Home."

"For gracious' sake!" exclaimed Patty. "That *is* news! Why doesn't Phil tell me about it?"

"That's just it. He's coming down here tomorrow to talk it over with you. Mona's coming too, you know, and you can all have a powwow."

"All right," and Patty wagged her head, sagaciously. "It's not a bad idea at all. I knew Mr. Galbraith was thinking of selling the Spring Beach place, and it would be a fine house for the kiddies."

"And are you running a Children's Home?" asked Sam Blaney, as they all strolled back to the house, and paused on the wide veranda.

"Too cool for you out here, Patty?" asked Elise.

"Not a bit of it. I love the outdoors. Somebody find me a sweater and a rug, and I'll be as happy as a clam."

Roger brought a red silk sweater from the hall, and a big, soft steamer rug, and proceeded to tuck Patty up, snugly.

"Yes," she said, turning to Blaney, and answering his inquiry, "I am supposed to be organising a Children's Home, but all the hard work is done for me, and I only say yes or no, to easy questions. You see, a dear old friend of mine left me a sum of money for the purpose, and I want to prove a trustworthy steward. But we're not going to do anything definite until Spring, unless, as Red Chimneys is in the market, it seems advisable to secure it while we can."

"Goodness, Patty," said Elise; "you talk like a Board of Managers!"

"That's what I am; or, rather, I'm Manager of the Board. Is Philip coming tonight, Roger?"

"Yes, he'll be here for dinner. And Mona, too. I say, Blaney, we'll bring 'em along to your party, eh?"

"Of course. Alla will be delighted to have them. No matter if we're crowded. You see, Miss Fairfield, our place is small, but our welcome is vurry, vurry large—" Blaney waved his long arms, as if including the whole world in his capacious welcome.

"You're vurry, vurry kind," returned Patty, unconsciously imitating his peculiar pronunciation. "I'm just crazy to see your studio. It seemed as if the time would never come. And I want to meet your sister, too. I know it will be a lovely party. I've never been to a real Bohemian Studio party."

"Oh, we don't call it Bohemian, because, you see, it *is* Bohemian. Only make-believe Bohemians call themselves so. You'll learn to distinguish the difference."

"I hope so. I've always wanted to know what Bohemianism really is."

"We'll show you tonight. What are you going to wear?"

"My goodness, I don't know. I hadn't thought about it. Also, I've never been asked a question like that before."

"Ah, but it means so much! If your gown should be out of key—" Blaney rolled up his eyes and spread his hands, as if the thought were too appalling for words.

Patty giggled. "I hope it won't be," she said. "But, tell me, what is the key? Maybe I can strike it."

"The key," and the poet looked thoughtful, "ah, yes, I have it! The key will be saffron and ultramarine."

Patty gasped. "Oh, I haven't a frock to my name in those colours!"

"But you can harmonise,—yes, harmonise. You will, won't you? If you didn't, I couldn't bear it."

"Oh, then I'll harmonise, yes, I promise you I will. I'll find something that won't make a discord. But can you dictate to all your guests like this?"

"Alas, no! Would that I might! And now I must go. Alla will be wanting me."

"What is he, anyway?" said Patty, as after his adieux, the poet swung away, with his queer, loping gait.

"Bats in his belfry," returned Roger, laughing. "He's the real thing in high-art souls,—if you get what I mean."

"Oh, I don't know," demurred Patty; "I think he's sincere."

"You do! Well, he may be, for all of me. But if he is, give me base deception, every time! Don't you fall in love with him, Patty, Van Reypen wouldn't stand for it."

"I don't know what Mr. Van Reypen has to say about it," returned Patty, with a heightened colour. "And remember, Roger, not everybody is so absorbed in loving and being loved as you are!"

Patty's roguish smile was affectionate as well, for she was fond of Roger, and also of Mona, and she was deeply interested in their love affair. Their engagement had been a short one, and now that the wedding day was so near, the whole Farrington family could think or talk of little else. And as a house guest and a dear friend, Patty, too, was enthusiastic and excited about the preparations.

And then Roger went off to the train to meet Mona, and Philip, who came down at the same time, and Elise disappeared and Patty sat alone, in the falling dusk, snugly tucked in her rugs, and feeling very lazy and comfortable and happy.

Her thoughts drifted idly from one subject to another, and presently she heard a step beside her, and felt her hand taken in somebody's warm clasp.

"Philip!" she cried, starting up.

"Yes, my girl, and so glad to see you again. How are you?"

"Fine. This splendid air and luxurious living has made me all well again."

"That's good. But it's too late for you to be out here. Come on in the house."

"Yes, I will. Did Mona come?"

"Yes, we came down together. How that girl is improving!"

"What do you mean? She always was a fine character."

"Yes, but she has so much more—er—sweetness and light."

"That's so. I've noticed it ever since she's been engaged."

"Well, don't you put on any more sweetness and light when you get engaged. I simply couldn't stand it! You're chock-a-block full of it now!"

"Don't worry. Besides, I've no intention of being engaged. What's the use, if I'm sweet and light enough now?"

"You're going to announce your engagement in just fifteen days from now, my lady. Why, that will be Farrington's wedding day! By Jove, what an idea! We'll announce it at their wedding!"

"We'll do nothing of the sort. You take too much for granted."

"Well, you promised—"

"I know what I promised. But the fifteenth is a long way off yet."

"That may be, but it's bound to get here. Come in the house now. It's too damp for you out here."

They went in, and found Mona and Elise chattering like two magpies, with Roger trying to get in a word edgewise.

"Hello, Patty," cried Mona, springing up to greet her. "My, how fine you're looking! Lakewood agrees with you all right. And Patty, the bridesmaids *are* going to sing, after all. Will you be home in time for one or two rehearsals?"

"Yes, indeed. I'll come up whenever you want me, Mona."

"Good girl. Now I must go and dress for dinner. I'd no idea we'd get here so late; and Roger says there's a party on for tonight."

"Yes," laughed Patty; "and it's a party you have to get keyed up to,—I mean your gown."

"What are you talking about?"

"Come along and I'll tell you."

The two girls went off together, and half an hour later Elise found them in Patty's room, still talking and no beginning made in the matter of dressing.

But later, when the young people left the house to go to the Studio party, they were resplendent of costume. Patty had told the other girls what Mr. Blaney had said, and though they scoffed at it, they agreed not to wear anything that might be too desperately inharmonious.

Mona was in white, declaring that that could offend nobody. Elise wore pale yellow, for the same logical reason. Patty had on a gown of soft chiffon, of old-gold colour, which, she said, was the nearest to saffron she had ever had or ever hoped to have.

"I don't like the word saffron," she declared; "somehow it makes me think of camomile tea."

"Naturally," said Roger; "I believe they're both yarbs. Blaney might call this affair a Saffron Tea, and have done with it."

But the gown was most becoming to Patty. The dull old-gold tints sets off her fair skin, and her bright gold hair, piled high, was topped with a gold and amber comb. Round her throat was an old-fashioned necklace of topazes, lent her by Mrs. Farrington. Altogether, she looked, Philip declared, positively Burne-Jonesey, and he called her the Blessed Damosel.

When at last they entered the Studio of the Blaney brother and sister, Patty blinked several times, before she could collect her senses. It was very dimly lighted, and a strange, almost stifling sense of oppression came over her. This was caused by the burning of various incense sticks and pastilles which gave out a sweet, spicy odour, and which made a slight haze of smoke. Becoming a little accustomed to the gloom, Patty discerned her host, amazingly garbed in an Oriental burnoose and a voluminous silk turban. He took her hand, made a deep salaam, and kissed her finger-tips with exaggerated ceremony.

"My sister, Alla," he said, "Miss Fairfield."

Patty looked up to see a tall, gaunt woman smiling at her. Miss Blaney, like her brother, was long, lanky and loose-jointed, and seemed to desire to accentuate these effects. Her ash-coloured hair was parted and drawn loosely down to a huge knot at the back of her neck. A band of gilt filigree was round her head at the temples, and was set with a huge green stone which rested in the middle of her forehead. Long barbaric earrings dangled and shook with every movement of her head, and round her somewhat scrawny neck was coiled an ugly greenish serpent of some flexible metal formation. For the rest, Miss Blaney wore a flowing robe of saffron yellow, a most sickly shade, and the material was frayed and worn as if it had been many times made over. It hung from her shoulders in billowy folds, and the wearer was evidently proud of it, for she continually switched its draperies about and gazed admiringly at them.

"Frightfully glad to see you," this weird creature was saying, and Patty caught her breath, and murmured, "Oh, thank you. So kind of you to ask me."

"I feel sure I shall adore you," Miss Blaney went on; "you are *simpatica*,—yes, absolutely *simpatica*."

"Am I?" and Patty smiled. "And is it nice to be *simpatica*? It doesn't mean a simpleton, does it?"

"Oh, how droll! My dear, how droll!" and Miss Blaney went off in contortions of silent laughter. "Just for that, you must call me Alla. I always want droll people to call me by my first name. And your name is—"

"Patty."

"Impossible! You can't be named that! Incredible! *Ooh!*"

Alla ended with a half-breathed shriek.

"Oh, well," said Patty, hastily, "my name is really Patricia, though no one ever calls me that."

"I shall call you that. Patricia! Perfect! You couldn't have been better dubbed. No, not possibly better dubbed. Patricia, ah, Patricia!"

Patty edged away a little. She began to think her hostess was crazy.

But Alla went on:

"And my brother, Patricia, do you not adore him?"

"Well, you see, I've only seen him a few times. I can't quite agree that I adore him, yet."

"But you will. As soon as you have heard his poems, you will put him on a pedestal, yes, on a high pedestal. And tonight you will hear him read his wonderful lines. What a treat you have in store!"

And then new arrivals claimed Miss Blaney's attention, and Patty turned aside. She found Philip waiting for her, his eyes dancing with amusement.

"What is it all?" he whispered; "a bear garden?"

"Hush, Phil, don't make me laugh. Did you ever see anything like it?"

"Well, I've been to Studio jinks, but they were to this as moonlight unto sunlight and as water unto wine! Shall I take you home?"

"No, indeed! I want to see the fun. I've never been to a Studio jinks,—or whatever you call it, and I want to live and learn."

"All right, Patty. You shall stay as long as you like, but I'll wager that inside of an hour you'll be begging me to get you out of it."

"All right, if I do, I shall expect you to take me away. Let's look at the room."

They sauntered about, and finally sat down on a Turkish divan, which proved much lower than they had anticipated.

"What an uncomfortable thing!" said Patty, "but sit here a minute, while I look round."

From the ceiling hung Moorish-looking lamps, which gave almost no light, and, were of rather dilapidated appearance. The furniture, too, was not only antique, but wobbly-legged and here and there tied up with strings or leather thongs. Statuettes were about, broken and dusty; jugs and bowls of dull brass and copper; rickety screens; enormous unframed photographs, warped and faded, but bearing splashing and unintelligible autographs; and draperies of all sorts, from old shawls to tattered ecclesiastical robes.

"I see what Mr. Blaney meant by the key of saffron," said Patty, sagely. "Everything is that colour because of the accumulation of dust and dirt! I don't believe this place has ever had a good house-cleaning!"

"Oh, Patty, my dear child! Don't thus expose your ignorance! Bohemia never cleans house! The very thought is sacrilege!"

"Why is it? Some of this old brass stuff would be lovely if it were cleaned up. And look at that copper kettle! It's positively blue!"

"But that's what they want, dear," said Van Reypen, smiling at her.

"Howsumever, I'm glad you don't like it. We won't model our home on a Bohemian plan."

"And look at the people," went on Patty, in an awe-struck whisper. "Some of them are decent, like our crowd,—but look at that girl in orange!"

The girl in question wore a costume of flame-coloured woolen material that was indeed striking. Her black hair was in two long braids, and she was carrying a small musical instrument that Philip said was a zithern.

"I don't know," he went on, "but I fancy she will play a sort of accompaniment to our host's poems. They generally work it that way."

"Stop making fun, Phil," reproved Patty; "perhaps the poems will be lovely,—with musical setting."

"Perhaps," said Philip.

CHAPTER III

PHILIP OBJECTS

The place became crowded. The two rooms occupied by the guests were small, and the party was a large one. Though not greatly attracted by the unusual sights and strange people, Patty was interested and curious. She wanted to see the affair in its entirety, and was glad when Sam Blaney came over to where she sat by Philip on the divan.

"I've come to carry you off," Blaney said to her; "you must mingle with the crowd, if you want to become one of us."

"I'd like to mingle a little," Patty replied, "but I can't hope to become one of such a talented bunch as this."

"They're not all so talented," Blaney assured her, as he led her away, leaving Philip a bit moody and disapproving.

"It's their clothes that astound me," said Patty. "Why do they wear such queer rigs? Almost like a masquerade or fancy-dress ball. You, for instance; why do you wear this Oriental robe and turban?"

"Now that you ask me, I don't believe I know! But it's habit, I think. Yes, that's it, it's just habit. We who possess higher intellect than our fellows must differentiate ourselves in some way from them, and how else but by a difference of raiment?"

"Well, that does explain it, but why such queer raiment? Why not beautiful garments instead of eccentric ones?"

"Ah, that's just it! They are beautiful, only you're not of sufficient intelligence to appreciate their beauty."

"What!" cried Patty, scarcely able to believe she had heard aright,

"I'm not intelligent enough—"

"Oh, don't get miffed. Your natural intelligence is all right, you've plenty of it. But it needs education,—bending in the right direction, you know. And I'm going to educate you. You're the most promising subject I've ever seen. I'll make a priestess of you,—a shining light,—a prophetess—"

Patty giggled. "If I'm a priestess I may as well be a prophetess, I suppose. When do these lessons begin?"

"Now. They have begun. You are unconsciously absorbing this atmosphere. You are involuntarily becoming more and more of our cult,—of our inspirations. You are evolving,—you don't realise it, but you are evolving—"

"I shall be revolving, if I don't get some fresh air! Why must you have these incense things smoking, not to mention some of the guests smoking also, and, incidentally, that Moorish lamp is smoking badly! I *am* absorbing your atmosphere, and it is choking me!"

Patty was in earnest, though she spoke lightly. The unpleasant air filled her lungs, and she wanted pure oxygen.

"Oh, all right," and Blaney laughed, indulgently. "You can't expect to achieve all at once. Come, we'll step out on the veranda for a whiff of outdoors, and then come back for the program."

"There's to be a program?"

"Oh, yes. Most wonderful work, by genius itself. Now, please, Miss Fairfield, don't resist the influence."

They were out on the tiny veranda that graced the Blaney's dwelling. The stars shone down through the pure winter air, and Patty felt as if she had been rescued from a malarial swamp. But Blaney was impressive. His deep, soft voice persuaded her against her will that she was pettish and

crude to rebel at the unwholesome atmosphere inside. "You don't understand," he said gently. "Give us a fair trial. That's all I ask. I know your inner nature will respond, if you give it its freedom. Ah, freedom! That's all we aim for,—all we desire."

Through the window, Patty heard the sound of weird strains of music.

"Come on," she cried, "I do want to see this thing through. If that's the program beginning, take me in. I want to hear it."

They returned to the Studio, and Blaney found two seats which commanded a view of the platform. The seats were uncomfortable, being small wooden stools, and the air was still clouded with smoke of various sorts. But, determinedly, Patty prepared to listen to the revelations that awaited her. She had long had a curiosity to know what "Bohemia" meant, and now she expected to find out. They were nowhere near their own crowd. In fact, she couldn't see Elise or Mona, though Philip was visible between some rickety armour and a tattered curtain. Very handsome he looked, too, his dark, and just now gloomy, face thrown into relief by the "artistic" background.

"Apparently, Mr. Van Reypen is not enjoying himself," Blaney commented, with a quiet chuckle. "He's not our sort."

This remark jarred upon Patty, and she was about to make a spirited retort, when the music began.

A girl was at the piano. Her gown, of burlaps, made Patty think it had been made from an old coffee sack. But it had a marvelous sash of flaming vermilion velvet, edged with gold fringe, and in her black hair was stuck a long, bright red quill feather, that gave her an Indian effect.

"I think her gown is out of key," Patty whispered, "and I am sure her music is!"

Blaney smiled. "She is a law unto herself," he replied, "that is an arbitrary minor scale, played in sixths and with a contrary motion."

Patty stared. This was a new departure in music and was interesting.

"Note the cynicism in the discords," Blaney urged, and Patty began to wonder if she could be losing her mind or just finding it.

The performance concluded and a rapt silence followed. It seemed applause was undesired by these geniuses.

Philip stirred, restlessly, and looked over at Patty. She looked away, fearing he would silently express to her his desire to go home, and she wanted to stay to see more.

The girl who had played glided to a side seat, and her place was taken by another young woman, who presented an even more astonishing appearance. This time, the costume was of a sort of tapestry, heavily embroidered in brilliant hued silks. It was not unbeautiful, but it seemed to Patty more appropriate for upholstery purposes than for a dress.

The lady recited what may have been poems, and were, according to Blaney's whispered information, but as they were in some queer foreign language, they were utterly unintelligible.

"What was it all about?" Patty asked, as the recitations were at last over.

"My dear child, couldn't you gather it all,—all, from the marvellous attitudinising,—the wonderful intoning—"

"Deed I couldn't! I've no idea what she was getting at, and I don't believe you have, either."

"Oh, yes, it was the glory of a soul on fire,—an immolation of genius on the altar of victory—"

"That sounds to me like rubbish," and Patty smiled frankly into the eyes of the man addressing her.

"Not rubbish, Miss Fairfield. Oh, what a pleasure it will be to enlighten your ignorance! To teach the eyes of your soul to see, the heart of your soul to beat—"

Again, it was the voice of the man that commanded her attention. The tones of Sam Blaney's speaking voice were of such a luring, persuasive quality that Patty felt herself agreeing and assenting to what she knew was nonsense.

But now Van Reyepen was striding toward them. Patty saw at a glance that Phil was at the end of his rope. No more of this nonsense for him.

She was right. As Blaney's attention was diverted for a moment, Phil said, "Patty, you're going right straight out of this. It's no place for you! I'm ashamed to have you here. Get your wraps, and we'll go, whether the Farringtons are ready or not. We can walk over to Pine Laurel,—it isn't far. Come."

"I won't do it!" Patty returned, crisply. "The idea, Phil, of your ordering me around like that! I want to stay, and I'm going to stay. You can go, if you like; I'll come home with Roger and the girls."

"But I don't like it, Patty, and I don't like to have you here.

It's—it's—"

"Well, what is it? I think it's great fun, and I'm going to see it out."

"Even if I ask you not to? Even if I beg you to go—"

"Even if you beg me on your bended knees! You're silly, Phil. It can't be wrong if the Farringtons stand for it."

"It isn't exactly wrong,—not *wrong*, you know,—but, well,—it's cheap."

"Oh, fiddlesticks! I like it. I don't mind it's being cheap, I'm tired of expensive things and glad of a change."

"Oh, I don't mean that way," and Van Reyepen looked genuinely distressed. "I wouldn't care how poor people were, if they were—"

"Respectable?"

"No, not that, these people are respectable, of course. But,—sincere, that's what I mean. This bunch are fakirs, they pretend to brains and knowledge and wisdom that they don't possess."

"And I suppose you do! Have you got all the knowledge and wisdom in the world?"

"At least I don't pretend to have the knowledge that I haven't!"

"But you pretend to have a whole lot of authority over me that you haven't! I tell you, Phil, I'm not going to be ordered about by you! I came to this party because I wanted to see it, and I'm going to stay till it's over, and you can do what you like."

"All right, then," and Phil looked grave. "I'll go away for a time, and I'll return and escort you home. What time shall I come back?"

"You needn't come back at all. I'll go home with Elise, or if not, I daresay Mr. Blaney will see that I get home safely. Won't you?" she added, turning to the resplendent figure nearby.

"Won't I what?" he asked gaily. "But the answer is yes, to anything you may ask. Even to the half of my kingdom, and then the other half. To be sure, my kingdom is small, and half of it is my sister's, but you can command it all."

"Oh, no, nothing so great as that! Merely to see me back to my rooftree in safety, if I outstay my escort."

"You're going to outstay everybody. Why, the fun hasn't begun yet.

Don't dream of going home now!"

"I won't," and Patty turned deliberately away from Philip and began to chat with a group of guests to whom she had previously been introduced.

"Join our ranks," said one vivacious young girl. "We're the intelligent idiots, perhaps the wisest sages of our time. We're having a symposium of souls—"

"Miss Fairfield isn't interested in souls yet," interrupted Blaney, "she's not unnaturally starving to death. The feast is unusually delayed tonight."

"It's coming now," announced Alla. "To the food, all!"

Philip was nowhere to be seen, nor did Patty see the Farringtons near her, but feeling glad of the hint of refreshments, she followed where Blaney led. Soon, she found herself ensconced on a divan, heaped with pillows, and many people were offering her strange-looking dishes.

"*Chili con carne*?" said one, "or common or garden Welsh Rabbit?"

"I never tasted the Chili stuff," laughed Patty, "but I love Welsh Rabbit. I'll take that, please."

But, alas, the Welsh Rabbit Patty had in mind was a golden, delectable confection, light and dainty of character. She was served with a goodly portion of a darkish, tough substance, of rubbery tendencies and strong cohesive powers.

In vain she essayed to eat it; it was unmanageable, and, to her taste, positively inedible. Yet the others were apparently enjoying it, so she made valiant efforts to consume her own.

"Fine, isn't it?" said Alla, with enthusiasm, "why, you're not eating any! You don't like it! Take this away, Sam, and bring Miss Fairfield some of the Tamale stuff."

And then, the Rabbit was succeeded by a concoction so much worse, that Patty was appalled at the mere sight and odour of it.

"Oh, please," she said, hastily, "if I might be excused from eating anything tonight. You see, the perfume of the incense burning is so unusual for me, that it makes me a little—er, headachy. Don't think me a silly, will you?"

Patty's wheedlesome air won them all, and they took away the highly-spiced, and strongly-flavoured dish. Then Blaney came with a small cup of thick, muddy-looking coffee.

"Just the thing for you," he declared, "set you up in a jiffy! Real Egyptian, no Turkish business. Just the thing for you!"

Patty gratefully accepted the coffee, but one taste was enough! It was thick with pulverized coffee grounds, it was sickishly sweet, and it was strong and black enough to please the blackest Egyptian who ever desired that brand.

"Thank you," she said, hastily handing the cup back. "It is so—so powerful, a little is quite enough. I'm sure that is all I want."

The others sipped the muddy fluid with apparent relish, and Patty began to wonder if she wished she had gone home with Philip. At any rate she was glad he would return for her, and she hoped it would be soon.

She asked where the Farringtons were.

"In the other room, I think," said Alla. "We'll find them after supper. Here are the sweetmeats now. You must try these."

The sweetmeats were Oriental, of course. There was Turkish Delight and other sticky, fruity, queer-looking bits, that seemed to Patty just about the most unappetising candies she had ever seen.

She refused them, a little positively, for she dreaded being persuaded to taste them, and it was hard to refuse the insistence of the guests who offered them.

"You'll learn," said Miss Norton, the pianist of the program. "It took me a long time to acquire the taste. But I've got it now," she added, as she helped herself bountifully to the saccharine bits.

Supper over, it was rumoured about that now Blaney would himself read from his own poems. A rustle of enthusiasm spread through the rooms, and Patty could easily see that this was the great event of the evening. She was glad now that she had stayed, for surely these poems would be a revelation of beauty and genius.

There was a zithern accompaniment by the girl in orange, but it was soft and unobtrusive, that the lines themselves might not be obscured.

Standing on the little platform, Blaney, in robes and turban, made a profound salaam, and then in his melodious voice breathed softly the following "Love Song ":

"Thy beauty is a star—
A star
Afar—
Ay,—far and far,
Ay, far.
And yet, a bar,—
A bar

Is between thee and me!
Thee and me—
Thee and me!"

The voice was so lovely that Patty scarcely sensed the words. With the haunting accompaniment, the whole was like a bit of music, and the words were negligible.

But in the hush which followed, Patty began to think that after all the words didn't amount to much. However, everybody was raving over the performance, and begging for more.

"Did you care for it?" Blaney asked of Patty, with what seemed to be a great longing in his eyes.

Unwilling to seem disappointed, she replied, "Oh, yes, it was most significant."

"I thank you," he said, his eyes alight with pleasure, "you have used the right word!"

As Patty had spoken the first noncommittal word that came into her head, she was thankful it proved acceptable!

CHAPTER IV

PATTY STAYS LATE

"It is so delightful to have you one of us, Patricia," said Alla, waving her long arms about. "This place is a Cosmic Centre, you know, and now that you belong to us, you must be here much of the time."

"But I'm only in Lakewood for a fortnight," said Patty, smiling at her;

"I go back to New York soon."

"So do we. That is, we go in a few months. But we claim you. You shall return and visit us here, and we shall be much together in the city. Oh, we have adopted you, and now you are ours, isn't she, Sam?"

"Indeed, yes," returned Blaney, enthusiastically; "never was such a rare soul added to our circle. Priestess Patricia, our star soul!"

Patty was flattered at the attention she was receiving. She didn't quite understand what a star soul meant, but she knew she held an elevated position among these highly intellectual people, and it dazzled her.

"I have always had an ambition," she admitted, "for something bigger and better than my social butterfly life, and with you I hope to achieve it. But I am ignorant,—you must teach me."

"We will," promised Miss Norton, "I shall take you in hand as my special charge. May I call on you tomorrow, and bring you some books to study?"

Patty hesitated. When she was a house guest she never made engagements without consulting her hostess. But she wanted to see and know more of this new venture, so she said, "I can't promise. But if I find I can receive you, may I not telephone or send you some message?"

"Yes, indeed," acquiesced Miss Norton, gladly.

Then the conversation drifted to the tendencies of modern art, and the expression of one's ego, and the influence of the aura, and a lot of subjects that were to Patty as so much Greek. But she was fascinated by the discourse, and resolved to read and study the books that should be given her, until she, too, could discuss intelligently these great subjects.

The talk was deliberate. Each wise and weighty opinion advanced was thoughtfully considered and argued, and Patty listened, striving to comprehend the jargon. Time passed rapidly, and, at last, she realised that most of the guests had gone, and there remained only about a half dozen of the most talkative ones.

Sam Blaney himself was the conversational leader. He went off on long tirades, and though Patty strove to follow his theories, they seemed to her vague and incomprehensible. She found herself getting sleepy, though she would have indignantly repudiated such an idea.

Another man, Mr. Griscom, slightly differed in opinions with Blaney and the debates between the two were raptly listened to by the others.

A chiming clock struck two.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Patty, "it can't be two o'clock! Where are the others? Where is Elise?"

"They've gone, long ago," said Blaney, smiling. "You know you said I might take you home, and so I told the Farringtons I would do so."

"But I didn't mean to stay as late as this! Why, I had no idea it was after twelve! Oh, please, Mr. Blaney, take me home at once. What will Mrs. Farrington think? I've never stayed anywhere so late before,—alone,—I mean."

"You're not alone, Patricia, dear," said Alla, surprised at Patty's evident alarm. "You're ours now, you know, and we will care for you and protect you. Sam will take you home, and if you fear Mrs. Farrington's reproaches, I will go with you and explain."

"Oh, not that," and Patty smiled. "I don't fear her, you know. I'm not a child, and I can do as I like. But it is not my custom to stay later than the people I came with."

"But all your customs will change now. We are a law unto ourselves. Bohemians are free of conventions and rules. Simply tell Mrs. Farrington that you have joined our circle and you will henceforth be governed by our ideas and customs. As you say, you are not a child, you can do as you like."

"Of course you can," said Mr. Griscom. "I'm going that way, I'll take you home, if you like."

"Thank you," said Patty, "but I have accepted Mr. Blaney's escort."

"That's right," said Blaney, heartily. "Oh, there'll be no trouble,—no trouble at all. I'll take Miss Fairfield home, and if any comments are made, they'll be made to me."

Patty felt uneasy. She didn't know exactly why, for she had done nothing wrong, but it was so very late, and she wondered what the Farringtons would think of her.

She got her wraps and Alla kissed her good-bye.

"Dear little Patricia," she said, affectionately. "It is all right. It seems unaccustomed, I know, but you are ours now, and your friends must get used to it."

It was only a few blocks to walk over to Pine Laurel, and Patty started off with Sam Blaney.

"You're anxious, Miss Fairfield," he said, kindly, "and I'm sorry. Can I help at all? I assure you I had no thought of your staying with us longer than you wished. Shall I go in and explain to your friends?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Blaney," Patty said, after an instant's thought. "I think, if you please, I would rather you would not come in. If I am 'scolded,' I'd rather stand it alone."

There were lights in the Farrington house when they arrived. At sound of their steps on the veranda, the door opened, and Roger appeared. "That you, Patty?" he said, pleasantly; "Hello, Blaney, will you come in?"

"No, thanks; just brought Miss Fairfield home. She seemed to enjoy her evening."

"That's good," returned Roger. "Good night, then, if you won't come in."

Roger closed the door, and with his hand still on the knob, whispered to Patty: "You're going to catch it from Phil! But I'll stand by you."

Patty's eyes flashed. She resented the idea of Van Reypen's authority, and she was tired and bothered. But Roger's kindly attitude comforted her, and she smiled at him.

"Good night, Roger," she said, aloud. "Thank you for waiting up for me. I'm tired, and I'll go straight to my room. The girls have gone up, I suppose."

"Wait a moment, Patty," and Van Reypen appeared in the doorway from the sun-parlour, where the two men had been sitting, "wait a moment, I want to speak to you."

"Not tonight, Phil, please. I'm very tired."

"You ought to be tired! Staying till all hours with that bunch of trash! I'm ashamed of you!"

Patty was thoroughly angry. It took a good deal to make good-natured Patty angry, but when her temper was roused, it meant a tempest. Also, she was worn out mentally and physically and, more than all, she resented Philip's assumption of authority.

Her blue eyes flashed, and a spot of pink came into each cheek, as she replied: "It is not of the slightest interest to me whether you are ashamed of me or not! You are in no way responsible for my actions and you have no right to reprove or criticise me. I may have broken the conventions of hospitality, but that is between me and Mrs. Farrington. Your opinion of me means nothing to me whatever! Good night, Roger."

Patty held out her hand to Roger, who took it for a moment, with a smiling good night, and then, with the air of an offended queen, Patty swept upstairs and entered her own room.

There she found Mona and Elise, one asleep on the couch, the other rubbing her eyes as she sat up in a big easy-chair.

"Goodness, Patty!" said Mona, looking at the clock, "what *have* you been up to?"

Elise blinked and shook herself awake. "We had to wait up to see you," she said, "so we waited here."

"I see you did," returned Patty, lightly. "And now your wait is over, and you've seen me, shall us say good night?"

"Not much we won't!" declared Elise, now broad awake. "Tell us everything about it! What did you do there all this time? What did Phil say? Who brought you home? Do you like that crowd? How can you?"

They bore me to death! Oh, Patty, you're going to cry!"

"I am," declared Patty, and the tears gathered thickly in her eyes. "I'm all in, and I'm down and out, and I'm mad as hops, and I'm tired, and I *am* going to cry. Now, if you've any sense of common humanity, you'll know enough to go away and let me alone!"

"Can I help?" asked Mona, looking commiseratingly at Patty.

"No," and Patty smiled through the fast-flooding tears. "I never need help to cry!"

"Come on, then," and Mona took Elise by the arm and led her away, as they heard Patty's door locked behind them.

Now, most girls would have thrown themselves down on the pillows to have their cry out, but Patty was too methodical for that. "I can't cry comfortably in this rig," she said to herself, beginning to take off the chiffon gown.

And it was with tears still unshed that she finally sat at her dressing-table plaiting her hair for the night.

"And after all," she remarked to her reflection in the mirror, "I only want to cry 'cause I'm tired and worn out and—yes, and mad! I'm mad at Philip, and I'm going to stay mad! He has no right to talk to me like a Dutch uncle! My own father never spoke to me like that! The idea! I just simply, plain won't stand it, and that's all there is about that!"

And so, after Patty was snugly in bed, cuddled beneath the comforting down coverlet, she let herself go, and cried to her heart's content; great, soul-satisfying sobs that quieted her throbbing pulses and exhausted her strained nerves, until she fell asleep from sheer weariness.

And next morning she awoke, smiling. Everything looked bright and cheery. The sun shone in at her windows, and as she felt somebody pinching her toes through the blankets, she opened her eyes to see Mona sitting on the edge of the bed and Elise just coming in at the door. Mrs. Farrington followed, and Patty sat up in bed with a smiling welcome for all.

"Hello, you dear things!" she cried. "You first, Mrs. Farrington. I want to 'fess up to you. I was baddy girl last night, and I stayed at the party much later than I meant to, or than I knew, until I suddenly realised the time. Am I forguv? Oh, do say yes, and *don't* scold me!"

Pretty Patty possessed herself of the lady's hand and looked so penitent and so wheedlesome that Mrs. Farrington was disarmed.

"Why, of course, dear; it was not really wrong, but young girls ought to be home by midnight at latest, I think,—and too, ought to come home with their own people."

"I know it, Mrs. Farrington, I do know it. I have been brought up right—honest, I have. But it was a special occasion, you see, and, too, my own people ran off and left me."

"Oh, now, Patty," began Elise, "Sam said you sent word for us to do so."

"Well, I didn't exactly do that, but I did want to stay longer. Oh, Mrs. Farrington, you've no idea how interesting those psychic souls are—"

"What!"

"Yes, they're psychic, you know—"

"And what are psychics,—clearly, now, Patty, what *are* psychics?"

"Why, they're—they're—"

"Yes, go on."

"Well, they're—why, they're *psychics*! That's what they are."

"Patty, you're an irresistible little goose!" and Mrs. Farrington bent down to kiss the pretty, flushed face, and then laughingly declared she had no more time to waste on psychics, and trailed away.

"Now, tell us all about it, Patsy," said Elise. "I shan't let you get up till you do."

"There's not much to tell, Elise; but I liked to learn about the things they were talking about and so I stayed later than I should have. But since your mother is so lovely about it, I don't care what any one else says."

"Oh, pshaw,—your staying late,—that was nothing. But what did they do over there so interesting? I can't see any sense in their talk."

"I can't see much myself, and that's why I want to learn. I'm awfully ignorant of higher ethics,—and—things like that."

"Higher ethics? H—m. Is it sort of Uplift ideas?"

"No, not that exactly."

"Fudge, you don't know what it is, 'exactly,' and between you and me, I don't think you have the glimmer of a ghost of an idea what it is all about! Now, have you?"

"If I had, I couldn't make you understand! You're antagonistic. You have to be receptive and responsive and—"

"Patty, you're a goose! A silly idiot of a goose! But such a dear, pretty little goose, that with all your faults we love you still! Now, I'll scoot, and you get dressed, for we're going somewhere today."

"Where?"

"Never you mind, Miss Curiosity. Just put on a house dress and come down to breakfast, and you'll find out."

Elise ran away, but Mona lingered.

"Patty," she said, a little gravely, "Philip is terribly upset about last night."

"I don't care if he is, Mona. He has no right to be. He has no authority over me."

"What! When you've become engaged to him?"

"I'm not engaged to him at all."

"He says you are."

"Did he really say that, Mona?"

"Not in so many words, but he implied that there was an understanding between you."

"Understanding! I hate that word,—used that way! There's a misunderstanding between us, if there's anything!"

"But you're going to be engaged to him, aren't you, Patty?"

"No, I don't think so. Not after last night. Why, he was horrid, Mona, after I came home. He scolded me, and I wouldn't stay to listen.

I ran upstairs."

"Oh, Patty, I wish you'd make up with him, and be friends again, and be engaged to him, and announce it at my wedding."

"Did he say all that to you last night? Did he make those delightful plans, and talk them over with you and Roger?"

"Don't look so furious. It just came about, you see. We were sitting there, waiting for you to come home, and Phil was saying how he adores you, and how he wanted your promise, but he had to wait a certain time before you would say positively. And, of course, we were talking about my wedding, and I said it would be nice to announce your engagement then, it's always so picturesque to announce one wedding at another—"

"I'm sorry I can't oblige you, Mona, but if you want an engagement announced at your wedding I'm afraid you'll have to get some other girl. You can keep the same man, if you like!"

"Oh, Patty, don't be cross with me! It wasn't my fault!"

"That's so, Mona,—I'm a pig! Forgive me, dear. Now, to make up, I'll tell you just how it is. I have told Philip that I'd give him my answer in about two weeks. And that will be your wedding day. But my answer is to be yes, only if he succeeds in teaching me to love him by that time. And I don't mind telling you, that the way he talked to me last night doesn't exactly further his cause!"

"But, Patty, he was angry, you know, and jealous of those foolish Blaney people."

"They're not foolish,—and I can't bear men who are jealous. Now, Mona, girlie, you 'tend to your own suitor. You've quite enough to do in the next two weeks, without dipping your pretty little fingers in my pie."

"Yes," sighed Mona, "I have."

CHAPTER V

AT RED CHIMNEYS

When Patty entered the dining-room, she found the rest already at breakfast.

"Scuse me for being late," she said, as she took her place, "but I was up late last night."

She smiled gaily at Philip, whose somewhat frowning face relaxed into an answering smile.

"Never mind that, Patty," said Mona, "listen to what we're planning.

Philip thinks it would be a good idea to buy Red Chimneys for the Kiddies' Home, and we're going to motor over to Spring Beach today to look at it."

"Fine! but why go to look at it? We all know exactly what it looks like—"

"Yes, Patty," said Philip, "but there are several matters to see about. I know the house, generally speaking, but I want to look it over with the idea of a Home in mind. Count up the rooms, get measurements and so forth, to present in my report to the Board of Managers."

"All right, I'd like to go. I think it would be fun. Lunch at the hotel, I suppose."

"Yes, or take something with us and picnic at the house."

"Oh, that's lots nicer, don't you think so, Elise?"

"Well, you see, Patty, it doesn't matter to me which you do, as I'm not going. I'm sorry, but I've some engagements today that I must keep, so, if you don't mind, I'm going to ask to be left at home."

"All right, then it's up to us. What say, Mona? Picnic sandwiches?"

"Yes, and some Thermos stuff,—soup and chocolate. That will give us more time to look over the house. There are some things I want to see about, if it's to leave my possession forever."

"Why don't you keep it, Mona? Why wouldn't you and Roger like it for a summer home?"

"We talked it over, and I'm rather tired of the place. And Roger prefers going to different places each year. Father told me I could have the house, and do what I liked with it, sell it or keep it. But if they want it for this Home arrangement, I think I'll be rather glad to let it go."

The quartet started off in high spirits at the prospect of a jolly day. The big limousine was most comfortable and well equipped. An ample luncheon was stowed away in hampers, and a skilful and careful chauffeur drove them at a speedy gait. It was a glorious, clear, cold, sunshiny day, and the open windows gave them plenty of fresh air.

Patty, enveloped in furs, nestled in one corner of the wide back seat, and Mona was in the other. The two men faced them. Not a word had passed between Patty and Philip about the night before, and Patty wondered if he intended to let the matter go by without further reference.

"You see it's this way," Philip began, addressing Patty; "I haven't really had an opportunity of telling you about it yet. We don't want to do anything much in the matter of the Home before Spring. But as Mona's house is in the market, and as it seems like an ideal place to have for the children, I thought we'd better look into it, and, if advisable, buy it and then wait a few months before doing anything further."

"I think so, too, Phil," Patty agreed. "I counted up the rooms and it will easily accommodate twenty or twenty-five kiddies, and that's as many as we can take care of, isn't it?"

"I think so; for the present, anyway. And you know, Patty, all you have to do is to approve or disapprove of the purchase, and what you say, goes."

"What an important personage you are, Patty," said Roger. "Your lightest word is law."

"It won't be a light word," and Patty looked serious. "I shall consider the matter carefully, and with all the wisdom and forethought I can find in my brain. This matter was left to me as a trust, and I'm not taking it lightly, I can tell you. This purchase of a house is a permanent move, not a trifling,

temporary question. And unless the place is the very right place,—righter than any other place,—why, we don't want it, that's all."

"Bravo, Patty!" and Philip looked at her, admiringly. "You've got a lot of good sense and judgment under that fur headpiece of yours."

"Fur headpiece!" cried Patty; "my new chinchilla toque! This is my dearest possession, if you please."

"It looks dear," observed Roger. "I believe that chinchilla animal is quite expensive."

"It is indeed," declared Mona, "my travelling suit is trimmed with it."

"Travelling suit?" asked Patty, innocently, "are you going away?"

"She says so," Roger answered for her. "She says she's going to—"

"Hush!" cried Mona, "isn't that just like a man! Why, you mustn't tell where you're going on your wedding trip! It isn't done."

"No, of course not," chimed in Patty; "but, all the same, after you reach Palm Beach, let us know, won't you?"

"I will," declared Roger, "but, do you know, it seems as if the time would never come!"

"Nice boy," said Mona, approvingly; "doesn't he make pretty speeches, Patty?"

"Lovely. You'll have a beautiful time on your trip. I 'most wish I was going with you?"

"Come on, Patty," said Philip, "let's make it a double affair. How about it?"

"No, thank you. I haven't any suit trimmed with chinchilla."

"You've a whole chinchilla coat on now," said Mona. "You could wear that."

"What! get married in old clothes! No-sir-ee! The best part of a wedding is the trousseau. That's the only thing that would ever persuade *me* to take the fatal step."

"It is fun," agreed Mona. "Oh, Patty, my green velvet came home yesterday! It's simply wonderful! The tunic, you know—"

"Help! help!" cried Roger. "You girls have got us penned in here where we can't get away, but if you're going to talk about bias ruffling and side gores, I shall jump out the window! I warn you."

"You can't stop 'em, old man," said Van Reypen, gravely, "they've got to go through with that green velvet, now they've begun on it. Proceed, Mona. The tunic was trimmed with peplum, wasn't it? and the bodice was cut *en train*——"

"You don't deserve to know," Mona told him, "and as for Roger, he'll see enough of that green velvet, poor man! It's so beautiful, I expect to wear it on every possible occasion."

"All right, dear," said Roger, rolling his eyes in mock devotion.

"Whatever you say, goes, my queen, my—y que—ee—n!"

"Even if I wear a rig like Alla Blaney wore last night?" asked Mona, laughing.

"Well, I must draw the line somewhere, and I should say that was the very place! If you elect to appear in a scarecrow costume of that type, I shall send you back to your father."

"No danger," and Mona shook her head. "Why do people want to make themselves such frights?"

"Their dress interprets their souls," said Van Reypen, sarcastically, "and their souls are frights."

"Nothing of the sort, Phil," flared out Patty; "I'd like you to remember those people are my friends."

"Well, my dear, if you choose to have friends with souls like frights, it is, of course, your privilege; but you must allow me to express my opinion of them."

"And so you may,—but not to me."

"Very well; consider I was talking to Mona,—which I really was."

"Then continue to talk to her, for I don't want to talk to you."

"All right, pretty Patty,—pretty little sunny-faced Patty,—all right."

Philip's voice was teasing and his smile was irritating, and Patty was angry at him anyway, yet she couldn't help laughing at his speech, for she looked as cross as a thunder cloud, and she knew

it. That is, as near to the crossness of a thunder cloud as Patty Fairfield could manage. Her cheeks were reddened by the cold wind and her blue eyes always looked bluer in a frosty atmosphere. And now, as an uncontrollable smile parted her scarlet lips, and her white teeth gleamed, and her dimples came into view, Patty justified Philip's term of "pretty Patty," but she quickly concealed her smile by sinking her chin deep into the great fur collar of her coat.

"Wasn't it a crazy party?" Mona went on, not realising she was on a dangerous subject. "They all took themselves so seriously."

"Why shouldn't they?" said Patty, coming up out of her fur cave; "it might be better if we all took ourselves more seriously,—such a lot of triflers and sillyheads as we are!"

"And such a lot of piffle-peddlers and hard-boiled eggs as they are!" said Philip, fairly snorting in disgust.

"Oh, very well!" and Patty sank again into the chinchilla cavern.

Roger touched Mona's foot with his own, and gave her an urgent, significant glance, as he said, with a determination to change the subject, "We'll just about get to Red Chimneys in time for luncheon. Shall we have our picnic before we explore the house? I'm as hungry as three bears and a hunter."

"So'm I," agreed Van Reypen, taking the cue. "What's in the hampers?"

Unless something pretty substantial, I vote we go to a hotel to feast."

"No," said Mona, "that wouldn't be half as much fun. It's the picnicking that's so jolly. If you agree, Patty," she added, for if Patty had any intention of sulking, there would be little fun in a picnic.

But Patty Fairfield was no spoilsport. She was annoyed at Philip, but that was no reason for her to make the others uncomfortable, and she responded gaily, "Oh, yes, the picnic is lots more fun. But will the house be warm enough?"

"Yes," Mona answered, "we telephoned down last night for Mr. Bates, the caretaker, to make some fires, and we can pile logs in the big hall fireplace till we roast alive. We can have the feast in the hall, if the dining-room is chilly."

But they found the whole house fairly warm and distinctly cheery and homey-looking. Bates had aired and dusted it, and had built fires and altogether the beautiful rooms looked so attractive, that Mona declared she was half inclined not to give it up, after all.

"We could rent it some years, Roger," she said, "and live in it some years, if we wanted to."

"Just as you say, Mona," he replied; "it's your house. Wait until spring to decide, if you prefer."

"All right," said Van Reypen, "but I fear we must decide on the house we buy before that. For we want to get the place we're to have in order as soon as Spring pokes her nose in."

"We'll have luncheon first," Mona decided, "and then discuss the matter."

The men opened the hampers, and the girls set the table in the great hall, near the roaring wood fire that filled the enormous fireplace. Salads and sandwiches, carefully packed, were in faultless condition, and the numerous Thermos bottles held hot soup, coffee, and chocolate. A small freezer of ice cream appeared from somewhere, and a box of confectionery contented the girls while the men smoked after the repast.

"It's this way," said Roger, at last, when they had talked over the whole thing thoroughly, "Mona and I are considering our future,—yes, even our old age! And, so, there are some points that we want to discuss alone. Therefore, and wherefore, my friends,—my future wife and I will, if you please, go apart by ourselves for a bit of confidential chat."

"Good gracious, Roger," said Patty, "anybody would think you two were married already!"

"Same as," Roger retorted; "especially in matters of real estate, and future dwelling-houses and such things. But, really, what I'm going to do, is, to try to persuade, cajole, or coerce Mona into selling the place; for I know she doesn't really want it, only today, in the glamour of this firelight glow, it seems attractive to her. So, I must needs convince her of my superior judgment."

The two went off, laughing, and Philip sat down again beside Patty.

"How happy they are together," he said, musingly.

"Yes; I'm thoroughly glad for them. I never saw a pair better suited to one another. Roger adores the ground Mona walks on, yet he knows just how to manage her—"

"Do you think a man ought to 'manage' the woman he loves?"

"If necessary, yes. At least he should know how to."

"And do you think I know how to manage you?"

"I don't want to be managed,—I can manage myself," Patty smiled, roguishly. "But since you ask me, Phil, no, I don't think you do know how to manage me,—not the least little mite!"

"Teach me then, dear. I'll do just what you say."

"All right. First, you must not scold me if I like people whom you don't like."

"Oh, hang! I had forgotten all about those bumptious lumps! Why remind me?"

"Because it's a case in point. If you care for me, you must care for the things or people that I care for."

"But, Patty,—since you've brought up the subject, let's have it out. You *can't* like those humbugs, —those fake brainsters,—those sap-head pharisees—"

"Phil, suppose you stop calling them names, which mean nothing, and tell me just what it is you have against them."

"There's everything against them, Patty, and nothing for them. They pretend to wisdom, knowledge, and genius that they don't possess. They fake up a lot of patter talk and pass it off for philosophy, or psychology, or lord knows what! And there isn't an ounce of brains in the whole fool bunch of them! That's what makes me mad! They fool you into believing their drivel is wisdom, and it isn't!"

"How do you know? You haven't such a lot of that sort of knowledge yourself."

"What sort of knowledge?"

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