

WELLS CAROLYN

PATTY'S
SUCCESS

Carolyn Wells

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CHAPTER I

WELCOME HOME

"I do think waiting for a steamer is the horriddest, pokiest performance in the world! You never know when they're coming, no matter how much they sight them and signal them and wireless them!"

Mrs. Allen was not pettish, and she spoke half laughingly, but she was wearied with her long wait for the *Mauretania*, in which she expected her daughter, Nan, and, incidentally, Mr. Fairfield and Patty.

"There, there, my dear," said her husband, soothingly, "I think it will soon arrive now."

"I think so, too," declared Kenneth Harper, who was looking down the river through field-glasses. "I'm just sure I see that whale of a boat in the dim distance, and I think I see Patty's yellow head sticking over the bow."

"Do you?" cried Mrs. Allen eagerly; "do you see Nan?"

"I'm not positive that I do, but we soon shall know, for that's surely the *Mauretania*."

It surely was, and though the last quarter hour of waiting seemed longer than all the rest, at last the big ship was in front of them, and swinging around in midstream. They could see the Fairfields clearly now, but not being within hearing distance, they could only express their welcome by frantic wavings of hands, handkerchiefs, and flags. But at last the gangplank was put in place, and at last the Fairfields crossed it, and then an enthusiastic and somewhat incoherent scene of reunion followed.

Beside Mr. and Mrs. Allen and Kenneth Harper, Roger and Elise Farrington were there to meet the home-comers, and the young people seized on Patty as if they would never let her go again.

"My! but you've grown!" said Kenneth, looking at her admiringly; "I mean you're grown-up looking, older, you know."

"I'm only a year older," returned Patty, laughing, "and you're that, yourself!"

"Why, so I am. But you've changed somehow,—I don't know just how."

Honest Kenneth looked so puzzled that Elise laughed at him and said:

"Nonsense, Ken, it's her clothes. She has a foreign effect, but it will soon wear off in New York. I *am* glad to see you again, Patty; we didn't think it would be so long when we parted in Paris last Spring."

"No, indeed; and I'm glad to be home again, though I have had a terribly good time. Now, I suppose we must see about our luggage."

"Yes," said Roger, "you'll be sorry you brought so many fine clothes when you have to pay duty on them."

"Well, duty first, and pleasure afterward," said Kenneth. "Come on, Patty, I'll help you."

"Oh, dear," said Mrs. Allen, "must we wait for all this custom-house botheration? I'm so tired of waiting."

"No, you needn't," said Mr. Fairfield, kindly. "You and Nan and Mr. Allen jump in a taxicab and go home. I'll keep Patty with me, and any other of the young people who care to stay, and we'll settle matters here in short order."

The young people all cared to stay, and though they had to wait some time, when at last they did get a customs inspector he proved to be both courteous and expeditious.

"Oh, don't spoil my best hat!" cried Patty, in dismay, as he laid thoughtless hands on a befeathered creation.

"That I won't, ma'am," was the hearty response, and the hat was laid back in its box as carefully as an infant in its cradle. "I have ladies in my own family, ma'am, and I know just how you feel about it."

"I'm perfectly willing to declare all my dutiable goods," went on Patty, "but I do hate to have my nice things all tumbled up."

"Quite right, ma'am, quite right," amiably agreed the inspector, who had fallen a victim to Patty's pretty face and bright smiles.

"Well, you did get through easily, Patty," said Elise, after it was over and the trunks despatched by express. "When we came home, mother was half a day fussing over customs."

"It's Patty's winning ways as does it," said Kenneth. "She hypnotised that fat inspector with a mere glance of her eye."

"Nonsense!" said Patty, laughing; "it's an easy trick. They're always nice and kind if you jolly them a little bit."

"Jolly me," said Kenneth, "and see how nice and kind I'll be."

"You're kind enough as you are," returned Patty. "If you were any kinder, I'd be overwhelmed with obligations. But how are we all going to get into this taxicab? Five into one won't go."

"That's easy," said Roger. "I'll perch outside with the chauffeur."

"No, let me," said Kenneth.

But after a good-natured controversy, Roger won the day, and climbed into the front seat. Mr. Fairfield, Kenneth, and the two girls settled themselves inside, and off they started for the Fairfield's home in Seventy-second street.

"I don't see much change in the old town," remarked Patty, as they neared the Flatiron.

"You don't, eh?" observed Kenneth. "Well, there's the Metropolitan tower,—I guess you'll say that's pretty fine, if you have seen the Campanile in Venice."

"But I didn't," returned Patty. "I was too late for the old one and too soon for the new. But is this a Campanile, father? What *is* a Campanile, pure and simple?"

"A Campanile ought always to be pure and simple, of line," said Mr. Fairfield; "but if you mean what is it specifically, it's a bell tower. Listen, you'll hear the quarter-hour now."

"Oh, what lovely chimes!" cried Patty. "Let's move, father, and take a house beneath the shadow of a great clock."

"I've moved enough for a while, my child; if I once get seated at my own fireside, I shall stay there."

"How Christmassy things look," went on Patty, gazing out of the cab window. "It's only the middle of December, but the streets are crowded and there are holly wreaths in some of the windows."

"You won't have to buy many Christmas presents, will you, Patty?" said Elise. "I suppose you brought home enough Italian trinkets to supply all your friends."

"Yes, we did," laughed Patty. "I daresay my friends will get tired of busts of Dante, and models of the Forum."

"Don't give those to me. If you have a Roman scarf nobody else wants, I'll thank you kindly."

"All right, Elise; I'll remember that. And if I haven't, I daresay I can buy one in the New York shops."

"Wicked girl! Don't attempt any such deception on your tried and true friend. Oh, Patty, do you remember the day we got lost in Paris?"

And then the two girls plunged into a flood of reminiscences that lasted all the way home.

"Come in? of course we'll come in!" said Roger, as he assisted them from the cab, and Patty graciously invited him. "That's what we're here for! We're all coming in, and if we're heartily urged, we may stay to dinner."

In reality, Mrs. Allen, who was temporarily hostess in her daughter's house, had invited Kenneth and the two Farringtons to dine, in order to make a gay home-coming for Patty.

Very cosy and attractive the house looked, as, after more than a year's absence, Patty once again stepped inside. It had been closed while Mr. and Mrs. Fairfield were away, but a few days before their return, Mrs. Allen, Nan's mother, had come over from Philadelphia and opened the house and made it cheery and livable. A bright fire glowed in the library, flowers were all about, and holly-wreaths hung in the windows.

"It's good to be home again," said Patty, as she sank into an easy-chair and threw aside her furs.

"It's good to have you here," responded Elise. "I've missed you terribly."

"Me, too," said Roger, while Kenneth added, "So say we all of us."

Always a favourite, wherever she went, Patty was specially beloved by her young friends in New York, and so the reunion was a happy one to all concerned.

Before dinner was announced, Patty flew up to her own room to change her travelling costume for a pretty little house-dress.

"Come on, Elise," she said, and soon the two girls were cosily chatting in Patty's dressing-room.

"You look so different with your hair done up," said Elise. "Weren't you sorry to give up hair-ribbons?"

"Yes, I was; I hate to feel grown-up. Just think, I'll be nineteen next May."

"Well, May's a long way off yet. It's only December now. What are you going to do on Christmas, Patty?"

"I don't know. Nan hasn't planned yet. She waited to see her mother first. But I know Mrs. Allen will invite us to Philadelphia to spend Christmas with her."

"You don't want to go, do you? Can't you spend Christmas with me, instead?"

"Oh, I'd love to, Elise! It would be lots more fun. We'll ask father to-night. How are all the girls?"

"They're all well, and crazy to see you. Hilda is making you the loveliest Christmas present you ever saw. But, of course, I promised not to tell you about it."

"No, don't tell me; I'd rather be surprised. Come on, I'm ready; let's go down and talk to the boys."

Patty had done up her pretty hair in the prevailing fashion of the day; but though the soft braids encircled her head, many little golden curls escaped and made a soft outline round her face. Her frock, of pale rose colour, had a collarless lace yoke, and was very becoming.

"You can wear any colour, Patty," declared Elise. "Of course, blue is yours, by right, but you're dear in that pinky thing."

"Ah, sweet chub, I hoped I should be dear to thee in any old thing," remarked Patty, as, slipping her arm through that of Elise, the two girls went downstairs.

"Ha, Patty resplendent!" exclaimed Roger, as they entered the library. "Don't you dare to be a grown-up young lady, Patty Fairfield, or I shall cut your acquaintance."

"Not I! Don't be alarmed, Roger. I am still childlike and bland."

"Your cousin Ethelyn is going to make her début next week. I have a bid to the ceremonies."

"Yes, so have I. Well, let her 'come out,' if she likes. I prefer to 'stay in' for another year, anyway."

"So do I," said Elise. "Mother says I ought to come out next winter, but I'm not bothering about it yet."

"Let's have a good time this winter, then," said Kenneth, "while we're all children. If you girls come out next winter, you'll be so gay with dances and parties, I can't play with you at all."

"All right," agreed Patty. "But have you time to play, yourself, Ken? I thought you were fearfully busy absorbing the laws of the United States."

"Oh, I do have to hammer at that all day, and some evenings, too. But it's an unwritten law that a fellow must have some fun; so I'll take an afternoon off now and then, to come round and tease you girls."

Then dinner was announced and, following their elders, the young people went out to the dining-room.

“Oh, how pretty!” cried Patty, as she saw the table, for the decoration, though simple, was most effective.

Along the centre of the white cloth, lay a long bed of holly leaves, on which the word “Welcome” was outlined in holly berries.

There were no other flowers, and the glossy green and vivid scarlet made a charming centrepiece, surrounded, as it was, by dainty silver, glass, and china.

“It’s good to be here once more,” said Nan, as she took her place at the head of her own table.

“Right you are,” said Mr. Fairfield, as he sat opposite her. “Mother Allen, it was kind of you to arrange this hearty Welcome Home for us.”

“It doesn’t half express my joy at having you here again,” said Mrs. Allen, as she looked affectionately at her daughter.

Then the conversation turned upon Christmas and Christmas plans.

“I must have Nan with me at Christmas,” said Mrs. Allen. “And I shall count on Fred, also, of course. Patty, dear, I want you, too, if you care to come; but—”

“Oh, Mrs. Allen,” broke in Elise, “divide the family with me, won’t you? If you have Mr. and Mrs. Fairfield, won’t you let me take Patty?”

As Elise had hinted this to Mrs. Allen while they were at the steamer dock waiting for Patty, the good lady was not greatly surprised. And she knew that Patty would prefer to be in New York with her young friends, rather than in Philadelphia.

So it was settled that Patty should spend Christmas with Elise, much to the joy of both girls, and also to the satisfaction of the two boys.

“We’ll have a gay old time,” said Roger. “We’ll have a tree and a dance and a boar’s head,—whatever that thing is,—I never did know.”

“I don’t know either,” confessed Patty; “but we’ll find out. For we must have all the modern improvements.”

“I shouldn’t call a boar’s head a modern improvement,” said Mr. Fairfield, smiling.

“But ours will be,” said saucy Patty, “for it will be such an improvement on the sort they used to have. And we’ll have carols and waits—”

“What are waits?” said Elise.

“Why, waits,” said Patty, “don’t you know what waits are? Why, they’re just *waits*.”

“Oh, yes,” said Elise, “*now* I understand *perfectly*! You explain things so clearly, Patty!”

“Yes, doesn’t she!” agreed Kenneth. “Never mind, Elise, I’ll be a wait and show you.”

“Do,” said Elise, “I’d much rather see than be one. Just think, Patty, Christmas is only ten days off! Can you be ready?”

“Oh, yes,” said Patty, smiling. “Why, I could get ready for two Christmases in ten days.”

“Wonderful girl!” commented Roger. “I thought ladies were always behind time with their Christmas preparations. I thought they always said, ‘It doesn’t seem *possible* Christmas is so near!’ and things like that.”

“I haven’t half my presents ready,” said Kenneth, in an exaggerated feminine voice. “I haven’t finished that pink pincushion for Sadie, nor the blue bedroom slippers for Bella.”

Roger took the cue.

“Nor I,” he said, also mimicking a fussy, womanish manner. “But I never get into the spirit of the thing until near Christmas Day. Then I run round and try to do everything at once.”

“Do you tie up your presents in tissue paper and holly-ribbon?” asked Kenneth, turning to Roger as if in earnest.

“Oh, yes; and I stick on those foolish little seals, and holly tags. Anything to make it fussy and fluttery.”

“Gracious,” said Patty, “that reminds me. I suppose I must get that holly ribbon and tissue paper flummery. I forgot all about it. What do they use this year, Elise? White tissue paper?”

“No, red. It’s so nice and cheery.”

“Yes,” said Roger. “Most Christmas presents need a cheery paper. It counteracts the depressing effect of an unwelcome gift.”

“Don’t pay any attention to him,” said Elise, “he’s putting on airs. He thinks it’s funny to talk like that, but you just ought to see him on Christmas! He simply adores his presents, and fairly gloats over every one!”

“Sure I do!” said Roger, heartily. “But when you get a purple necktie, or a hand-crocheted watch-chain, it’s nice to have a cheery red paper round it.”

“Well, I have a lovely present for you,” said Patty, “but I shall take the precaution of wrapping it in red paper.”

CHAPTER II

AN ADVANCE CHRISTMAS GIFT

The ten days before Christmas flew by like Bandersnatches. Patty had a long list of friends to whom she wanted to give presents, and though she had brought home a lot of what Kenneth called “foreign junk,” she had no notion of giving it all away.

Of course, the lovely fans, beads, and scarves she brought made lovely gifts for the girls, and the little curios and souvenirs were all right for the boys, but there were so many friends, and her relatives beside, that she soon realised she would have little left for herself. And, though unselfish, she did want to retain some mementos of her foreign trip.

So shopping was necessary, and nearly every day she went with Nan or Elise to buy the Christmas wares that the city shops displayed.

“And I do think,” she said, “that things are just as pretty and just as cheap here as over there.”

“Some things,” agreed Nan.

“Yes; I mean just the regular wares. Of course, for Roman silks and Florentine mosaics it’s better to shop where they grow. What’s father going to give me, Nan?”

“Inquisitive creature! I shouldn’t tell you if I knew, but as I don’t know, and he doesn’t either, I may as well tell you that he’d be glad of a hint. What would you like?”

“Honestly, I don’t know of a thing! Isn’t it awful to have everything you want?”

“You’re a contented little girl, Patty. And that’s a noble trait, I admit. But just at Christmas time it’s trying. Now, if you only wanted a watch, or a diamond ring, or some trifle like that, I’d be glad to give your father a hint.”

“Thank you, stepmamma,” said Patty, smiling; “but I have a watch, and I’m too young for diamonds. I can’t help it if I’m amply supplied with this world’s goods. And think of the lots of gifts I’ll get, anyway! Perhaps father’d better just give me the money and let me put it in the bank against a rainy day.”

“Why, Patty, you’re not getting mercenary, I hope! What do you want of money in the bank?”

Patty looked earnest.

“No, I don’t think I’m mercenary,” she said, slowly, “but, Nan, you never know what may happen. Suppose father should lose all his money.”

“Nonsense! he can’t do that. It’s most carefully invested, and you know, Patty, he thinks of retiring from business in a year or two more.”

“I know it,” said Patty, with a little sigh. “I know we’re rich. Not wealthy, like the Farringtons, but plenty rich enough. Only, you often hear of rich men losing their money, and sometimes I think I ought to save up some.”

“Goosie!” said Nan, smiling fondly at her; “don’t bother your curly head about such things before it’s necessary.”

“All right, then, I won’t,” said Patty, shaking the curly head and smiling back.

That afternoon she went to see Clementine Morse. Clementine had called one day when Patty was not at home, so this was the first time the girls had met since Patty’s return.

The maid asked Patty to go right up to Clementine’s own room, and there Patty found her friend surrounded by what looked like a whirlwind of rainbow-coloured rags.

On tables, chairs, and even on the floor, were scraps and bits of silks, satins, ribbons, and laces, and in a low chair sat Clementine, sewing rapidly, as if for dear life.

But at sight of Patty, she jumped up, upsetting her work-basket, and flew to greet her guest.

“You dear thing!” she cried, as she embraced her; “I was so sorry not to see you when I called. I should have come again, but I’m so rushed with Christmas work, that I can’t go anywhere until

Christmas is over. Do take off your things and sit down, and don't mind if I go on sewing, will you? I can talk just as well, you know."

"Apparently you can!" said Patty, laughing, for as she chatted, Clementine had already resumed her work, and her fingers flew nimbly along the satin seams. "What *are* you doing?"

"Dressing dolls," said Clementine, as she threaded her needle; "and I've forty-five still to do, —but their underclothing is done, so it's only a matter of frocks, and some hats. Did you have a good time in Europe?"

Clementine talked very fast, apparently to keep time with her flying fingers, and as Patty picked up a lot of dry goods in order that she might occupy the chair they were in, her hostess rattled on.

"How did you like Venice? Was it lovely by moonlight? Oh, would you put this scarlet velvet on the spangled lace,—or save it for this white chiffon?"

"Clementine! do keep still a minute!" cried Patty; "you'll drive me frantic! What *are* you doing with all these dolls?"

"Dressing them. How did you like Paris? Was it very gay? And was London smoky,—foggy, I mean?"

"Yes; everything was gay or smoky or lovely by moonlight, or just what it ought to be. Now tell me *why* you dress four hundred million dolls all at once."

"Oh, they're for the Sunshine Babies. Was Naples very dirty? How did you like—"

"Clementine, you leave the map of Europe alone. I'm talking now! What are Sunshine Babies?"

"Why, the babies that the Sunshine Society gives a Christmas to. And there's oceans of babies, and they all want dolls,—I guess the boys must like dolls, too, they want so many. And, oh, Patty, they're the dearest little things,—the babies, I mean,—and I just *love* to dress dolls for them. I'd rather do it than to make presents for my rich friends."

Suddenly Patty felt a great wave of self-compunction. She had planned and prepared gifts for all her friends, and for most of her relatives, but for the poor she had done nothing! To charity she had given no thought! And at Christmas, when all the world should feel the spirit of good will to men, she had utterly neglected to remember those less fortunate than herself.

"What's the matter?" said Clementine, dismayed by Patty's expression of remorse.

"I'm a pig!" said Patty; "there's no other word for such a horrid thing as I am! Why, Clementine, I've made presents for nearly everybody I know, and I haven't done a thing for charity! Did you ever know such an ungrateful wretch?"

"Oh, it isn't too late, yet," said Clementine, not quite understanding why Patty was so serious about it; "here, help me sew these."

She tossed her some tiny satin sleeves, already cut and basted, and offered a furnished work-basket.

"Deed I will!" said Patty, and in a few moments she too was sewing, as deftly, if not quite so rapidly, as Clementine.

"You see, Clem," she went on, "I've been so busy ever since I came home, that I simply forgot the poor people. And now it's too late."

"It's too late to make things," agreed Clementine, "but not too late to buy them."

"But I've spent all my Christmas money," said Patty, contritely. "Father gives me a liberal allowance, and then extra, for Christmas money. And it's just about all gone, and I hate to ask him for more."

"Well, never mind, Patsy, you can make up for it next year. And if you help me dress these dolls, that will square up your conscience."

"No, it won't. But I'll find a way to do something, somehow. Are these Sunshine people all babies?"

"Oh, no; the society helps all sorts of poor people, children and grown-ups too. Mother is one of the directors, and we do a lot of this doll-dressing every year."

“Well, I’ll help you a while this afternoon, but I won’t have another chance. You see just about every moment is taken up from now till Christmas.”

“You’re going to the Farringtons’, aren’t you?”

“Yes, for three or four days, while Nan and father are in Philadelphia at Nan’s mother’s. You’re coming to the Christmas Eve dance, of course?”

“Yes, indeed. It’s to be a lovely party. The Farringtons always have such beautiful entertainments. Now, Patty, do tell me about your trip.”

So Patty told many tales of her stay in Paris and in England, and of her pleasure trip through Italy, and as she talked, her fingers flew, and she had soon completed three doll dresses, that were quite as pretty and well-made as Clementine’s.

“Now, I must go,” she said, at last. “I’m glad to have been of a little help, and next year I’ll help you a lot. Though, I suppose your Sunshine Babies *could* have dolls when it isn’t Christmas.”

“Oh, yes; these are for their Tree, you know.”

“Well, Clem, if I should have some money left me unexpectedly, is it too late to buy some toys for the Tree?”

“I don’t know,” said Clementine, “but we can ask mother. She’ll know.”

They found Mrs. Morse in her sitting-room, tying up parcels and addressing them.

Patty soon discovered that these were all charitable gifts, and not presents to Mrs. Morse’s own friends.

“I’m so glad I came here to-day,” she said, after the welcoming greetings were over, “for it has roused my charitable instincts. I am quite sure, Mrs. Morse, I can send some toys for your society’s tree, if you want them.”

“Want them? Indeed we do! Why, Patty, there are forty little boys who want drums or trumpets and we can only give them candy and an orange. It’s harder than you’d think to get subscriptions to our funds at Christmas time, and though we’ve dolls enough, we do so want toys for the boys.”

“Well, I’ll send you some, Mrs. Morse. I’ll send them to-morrow. Do you care what they are?”

“No, indeed. Drums, or balls, or tin carts,—anything that a boy-child can play with.”

“Well, you may depend on me for the forty,” said Patty, smiling, for she had formed a sudden, secret resolve.

“Why, Patty, dear, how kind of you! I am so glad, for those children were on my mind, and I’ve already asked every one I know to give to our fund. You are a generous little girl, and I know it will gladden your own heart as well as the children’s.”

Patty ran away, and all the way home her heart was full of her project.

“If he will only consent,” she thought. “If not, I don’t know how I shall keep my promise. Oh, well, I know I can coax him to say yes.”

After dinner that evening, Patty put her plan into action.

“Father Fairfield,” she said, “what are you going to give me for a Christmas gift?”

“Well, Pattykins, that’s not considered a correct question in polite society.”

“Then let’s be impolite, just for this once. Do tell me, daddy.”

“You embarrass me exceedingly, young lady,” said Mr. Fairfield, smiling at her, “for, to tell you the truth, I haven’t bought you anything.”

“Oh, I’m so glad!” exclaimed Patty, “for, father, I want to ask you a great favour. Won’t you give me the money instead, and let me spend it as I like?”

“That would be a funny Christmas gift. I thought you liked some pretty trinket, tied up in holly paper and red ribbons and Santa Claus seals, and served to you on a silver salver.”

“Well, I do, from other people. But from you, I just want the money that my present would cost, and—I want it now!”

“Bless my soul! She wants it now! Why, Patsy, what are you going to do? Buy stock?”

"No, but I do want it, father. Won't you give it to me, and I'll tell you afterward what I'm going to do with it."

"I'll tell you now," said Nan, smiling at the pair. "She's going to put it in the bank, because she's afraid she'll be poor some day."

"I don't wonder you think that, stepmotherly," said Patty, her eyes twinkling at Nan, "for I did tell you so. But since then I've changed my mind, and though I want my present from father in cash, I'm going to spend it before Christmas, and not put it in the bank at all."

"Well, you are a weathercock, Patty. But before morning you will have changed your mind again!"

"No, indeedy! It's made up to stay this time. So give me the money like a duck of a daddy, won't you?"

Patty was very wheedlesome, as she caressed her father's cheek, and smiled into his eyes.

"Well, as you don't often make a serious request, and as you seem to be in dead earnest this time, I rather think I shall have to say yes."

"Oh, you dear, good, lovely father!" cried Patty, embracing him. "Will you give it to me now, and how much will it be?"

"Patty," said Nan, laughing, "you're positively sordid! I never saw you so greedy for money before."

Patty laughed outright. Now that she had gained her point she felt in gay spirits.

"Friends," she said, "you see before you a pauper,—a penniless pauper! Therefore, and because of which, and by reason of the fact that I am in immediate need of money, I stoop to this means of obtaining it, and, as aforesaid, I'd like it now!"

She held out her rosy palm to her father, and stood waiting expectantly.

"Only one hand!" exclaimed Mr. Fairfield, in surprise. "I thought such a grasping young woman would expect both hands filled."

"All right," said Patty, and she promptly extended her other palm, too.

Putting both his hands in his pockets, Mr. Fairfield drew them out again, and then laid a ten-dollar goldpiece on each of Patty's outstretched palms.

"Oh, you dear daddy!" she cried, as she clasped the gold in her fingers; "you lovely parent! This is the nicest Christmas gift I ever had, and now I'll tell you all about it."

So she told them, quite seriously, how she had really forgotten to give the poor and the suffering any share of her own Christmas cheer, and how this was the only way she could think of to remedy her neglect.

"And it's so lovely," she concluded; "for there are forty little boy-children. And with this money I can get them each a fifty-cent present."

"So you can," said Nan. "I'll go with you to-morrow to select them. And if we can get some cheaper than fifty cents, and I think we can, you'll have a little left for extras."

"That's so," agreed Patty. "They often have lovely toys for about thirty-nine cents, and I could get some marbles or something to fill up."

"To fill up what?" asked her father.

"Oh, to fill up the tree. Or I'll get some ornaments, or some tinsel to decorate it. Oh, father, you are so good to me! This is a lovely Christmas present."

CHAPTER III

THE DAY BEFORE CHRISTMAS

Mr. Fairfield's gift to his wife was a beautiful motor-car, and as they were going away for the holiday, he presented it to her the day before Christmas.

It was practically a gift to Patty as well, for the whole family could enjoy it.

"It's perfectly lovely," said Nan, as they all started out for a little spin, to try it. "I've had so much trouble of late with taxicabs, that it's a genuine comfort to have my own car at my beck and call. It's a lovely car, Fred, and Patty and I shall just about live in it."

"I want you to enjoy it," returned Mr. Fairfield, "and you may have every confidence in the chauffeur. He's most highly recommended by a man I know well, and he's both careful and skilful."

"A nice-mannered man, too," observed Patty. "I like his looks, and his mode of address. But if this car is partly my present, then I ought not to have had that gold money to buy drums with."

"Oh, yes, you ought," said her father. "That was your individual gift. In this car you and Nan are partners. By the way, Puss, did you ever get your forty drums? I didn't hear about them."

"You're lucky that you didn't hear them," laughed Patty. "Yes, I did get them,—not all drums, some other toys,—and I took them down to the Sunshine place yesterday. I went with Mrs. Morse and Clementine. You know the kiddywids had their Christmas tree, the little poor children, and such a noise you never heard! They yelled and shouted for glee, and they banged drums and tooted horns, and then they sang songs, and I think I never knew such a noisy celebration, even on the fourth of July."

"And were they glad to get your gifts?"

"Oh, yes, indeed! Why, just think, father, the little girls all had dolls, but if I hadn't taken the gifts for the boys, they would only have had candy or an orange. Next Christmas I'm going to do more for them."

"I'm glad to see your charitable spirit waking up, Patty-girl. I don't want you to be a mere social butterfly. But, you know, you needn't wait for Christmas to make the poor babies happy."

"No; I know it, daddy, dear; and after Christmas is over, I'm going to try to do some good in the world."

"Now, Patty," said Nan, "don't you go in for settlement work, and that sort of thing. I won't let you. You're not strong enough for it."

"I don't know exactly what settlement work is," said Patty, "but I do know I'm not going to be a mere butterfly. I'm going to accomplish something worth while."

"Well, wait till the holiday season is over," advised Mr. Fairfield. "You've made forty boys happy, now turn your attention to making your family and friends happy. What are you going to give your poor old father for a Christmas gift, I should like to know."

"I haven't any such relative as you describe," returned Patty, smiling at him affectionately. "I have a young and handsome father, and I think he seems to be rather a rich gentleman. Also I have a gift awaiting him at home, and I think we'd better be going there."

"I do, too," said Nan. "We've none too much time to get our luncheon and go to the train. Oh! what a comfort it will be to go to the train in our own motor-car."

"Yes," said Patty, "and then Miller can come back and take me over to Elise's."

So home they went, and had their own little Christmas celebration, before they went their separate ways.

"This is a make-believe Christmas feast," said Patty, as they sat at their own luncheon table.

She had placed a sprig of holly at each plate, and a vase of poinsettia blossoms graced the centre of the table.

"This ox-tail soup is in place of the boar's head," she went on, gaily; "and I know we are going to have chicken croquettes, which we will pretend are the roast turkey. And then we'll have our presents, as I know you two will fly for your train as soon as you leave the table."

So Patty gave Nan her present, which was a lovely white couch pillow of lace and embroidery. And Nan gave Patty a picture to hang in her own room. It was a beautiful water-colour, a Venetian scene, and Patty was delighted with it.

Then Patty gave her father a gold penholder, which she had had made expressly for him, and engraved with his name.

"Why, that's fine, Pattykins!" he exclaimed. "I can only write poems with a pen like that. It's not made for business letters, I'm sure."

"Of course it isn't," said Patty, gaily; "it's to keep on your desk in the library here at home. And you must use it just for social correspondence or—"

"Or to sign checks for us," suggested Nan, smiling.

"That's just what I'll do with it," declared Mr. Fairfield. "It's a gem of a pen; Patty, you know my weakness for fine desk appointments, don't you?"

Nan gave her husband a watch fob, on which hung a locket containing a miniature of her own sweet face. Neither Patty nor her father had seen this before, as Nan had been careful to keep the matter secret in order to surprise them.

It was a real work of art, and so winsome was the pictured face that Patty cried out in admiration: "What a stunner you are, Nan! I didn't realise you were so good-looking,—but it's exactly like you."

"That's a mixed-up compliment, Patty," laughed Nan, "but I'll surmise that you mean well."

"I do so! I think it's a lovely picture of a lovely lady! There, how's that?"

"Much better," said Nan, as Patty caught her round the shoulders and kissed her affectionately.

"Give me the lady," said Mr. Fairfield, taking Nan into his own arms. "As the portrait is a gift to me, I will kiss her for it, myself."

"Do," said Patty, "but if you give her more than three kisses, you'll lose your train; it's getting pretty late."

"Is it?" cried Mr. Fairfield. "Then, Jane, bring in those two boxes I left in your charge, will you?"

"Yes, sir," cried the waitress, and, leaving the room, she returned in a moment with two large white boxes.

"These are Christmas gifts to the two loveliest ladies I know," said Mr. Fairfield, gallantly tendering a box to each.

"But I've had my Christmas gift from you!" exclaimed Patty, and "So have I!" cried Nan.

"Nevertheless these are laid at your feet," said Mr. Fairfield, calmly depositing the boxes on the floor in front of them.

"Oh, well, we may as well see what they are," said Patty, untying the white ribbons that fastened her box.

Nan did likewise, and in a moment they were both rapturously exclaiming over two sets of white furs that nestled in billows of white tissue paper.

Nan's furs were ermine, and Patty's were soft, fluffy, white fox, and so beautiful were they that the two recipients donned them at once, and posed side by side before the mirror, admiring themselves and each other. Then, with a simultaneous impulse they turned to thank the donor, and Mr. Fairfield found himself suddenly entangled in four arms and two boas, while two immense muffs met at the back of his neck and enveloped his head and ears.

"Have mercy!" he cried; "come one at a time, can't you? Yes, yes, I'm glad you're pleased, but do get this fur out of my mouth! I feel as if I were attacked by polar bears!"

"Oh, Fathery Fairfield," Patty cried, "you are the dearest thing in the world! How *did* you know I wanted furs? And white fox, of all things! And ermine for Nan! Oh, but you *are* a good gentleman! Isn't he, stepmother?"

“He’ll do,” said Nan, smiling roguishly at her husband, who, somehow, seemed satisfied with this faint praise.

“Now, scamper, Nan-girl,” he cried, “if you would see your mother to-day, you must leave here in less than an hour. Can you be ready?”

“I can’t, but I will,” replied Nan, gaily, as she ran away to prepare for her journey.

Patty, too, went to her room to get ready for her visit at the Farringtons’. She was to stay three days, and as there were several parties planned for her entertainment, she packed a small trunk with several of her prettiest gowns. Also, she had a suitcase full of gifts for the Christmas tree, which was to be part of the festivities.

She bade her parents good-by when they started, and watched the new motor-car disappear round the corner, then returned to her own preparations.

“I do have lovely things,” she thought to herself, as she folded her dainty garments and laid them in their places.

Then she glanced again at her new furs.

“I have too much,” she thought; “it isn’t fair for one girl to have so much, when so many poor people have nothing. I wonder what I ought to do about it.”

Poor Patty was confronting the problem that has troubled and baffled so many honest hearts, but the more she thought about it, the more it seemed insoluble.

“At any rate, it would be absurd to give my white furs, or my chiffon frocks to poor people,” she concluded, “for they couldn’t use them. Well, after the holidays, I’m going to see what I can do. But now, I must hurry, or I’ll be late.”

An hour or two later, she found herself in the Farringtons’ home.

“What lovely furs, Patty,” exclaimed Mrs. Farrington, “and how well they suit you!”

They were extremely becoming, and Patty’s pretty face, with its soft colour and smiling eyes, rose like a flower from the white fur at her throat.

“Yes, aren’t they beautiful?” Patty responded. “Father just gave them to me, and I’m so pleased with them.”

“And well you may be. Now, you girls run away and play, for I’ve a thousand things to do.”

Indeed, Mrs. Farrington was in a whirlpool of presents that she was both sending and receiving. Maids and footmen were running hither and thither, bringing messages or carrying out orders, and as the whole house was full of warmth and light, and the spicy fragrance of Christmas greens, Patty fairly revelled in the pleasant atmosphere.

She was of a nature very susceptible to surroundings. Like a cat, she loved to bask in warm sunshine, or in a luxurious, softly-furnished place. Moreover, she was fond of Elise, and so looked forward to her three days’ visit with glad anticipation.

After Patty had laid aside her things, the two girls sat down to chat in the big hall on the second floor of the mansion. A wood-fire was blazing, and soft, red-shaded lights cast a delightful glow.

“Elise,” said Patty, somewhat suddenly, “don’t you think we have too much riches and things?” Elise stared at her.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

Patty laughed at her friend’s blank expression, but she went on.

“I mean just what I say. Of course, you have lots more riches and things than I have; but I think we all have too much when we think of the poor people who haven’t any.”

“Oh, you mean Socialism,” exclaimed Elise, suddenly enlightened.

“No, I don’t mean Socialism. I mean plain, every-day charity. Don’t you think we ought to give away more?”

“Why, yes, if you like,” said Elise, who was greatly puzzled. “Do you want me to subscribe to some charity? I will.”

“Well, perhaps I’ll hold you to that,” said Patty, slowly; “for after the holidays I’m going to try to do something in the matter. I don’t know just what; I haven’t thought it out yet. But I’m not going to be what my father calls a ‘mere social butterfly,’ and I don’t believe you want to, either.”

“No, I don’t; but do leave it all till after the holidays, Patty, for now I want you to help me with some Christmas presents.”

Elise looked so worried and so beseeching that Patty laughed. Then she kissed her, and said: “All right, Lisa mine. Command me. My services are at your disposal.”

So the girls went up to the Sun Parlour, where Elise had all her choicest belongings, and where she now had her array of Christmas gifts.

The room was entirely of glass, and by a careful arrangement of double panes and concealed heat-pipes, was made comfortable even in the coldest weather. Flowers and plants were round the sides; birds in gilt cages sang and twittered; and gilt wicker furniture gave the place a dainty French effect that was charming. On the tables were strewn Christmas gifts of all sorts.

“I’m just tying up the last ones,” said Elise. “Don’t be afraid to look; yours is safely hidden away. Now, here’s what I want to know.”

She picked up a gold seal ring, which, however, had no crest or monogram cut on it,—and a bronze paper cutter.

“They’re lovely,” said Patty, as she looked at them. “Who catches these?”

“That’s just what I don’t know. I bought the ring for Roger and the paper cutter for Kenneth Harper; he’s coming to-night. But I’d like to change them about and give the ring to Ken, and the paper knife to Roger. Would you?”

“No, I wouldn’t,” said Patty, bluntly. “Why do you want to do such a thing?”

“The ring is much the handsomer gift,” said Elise, who had turned a trifle pink.

“Of course it is,” said Patty, “and that’s why you should give it to your brother. It’s too personal a gift to give to a boy friend.”

“That’s what I was afraid of,” said Elise, with a little sigh. “But Roger won’t care for it at all, and Kenneth would like it heaps.”

“*Because* you gave it to him?” asked Patty, quickly.

“Oh, I don’t know. Yes, perhaps so.”

“Nonsense, Elise! You’re too young to give rings to young men.”

“Ken isn’t a young man, he’s only a boy.”

“Well, he’s over twenty-one; and anyway, I know it wouldn’t be right for you to give him a ring. Your mother wouldn’t like it at all.”

“Oh, she wouldn’t care.”

“Well, she ought to, and I think she would. Now, don’t be silly; give the ring to Roger, and if you want something grander than this bronze jig for Ken, get him a book. As handsome a book as you choose; but a book. Or something that’s impersonal. Not a ring or a watch-fob, or anything like that.”

“But he gave you a necklace,—the day we sailed for Paris.”

“Fiddle-de-dee! It was only a locket, with the merest thread of a gold chain; and anyway, I never wore it but once or twice.”

“Well, you oughtn’t to have accepted it, if a personal gift is so reprehensible.”

“Elise, you’re a goose!” said Patty, losing her patience at last. “A gift like that is not in very good taste from a boy to a girl; but from a girl to a boy, it’s very much worse. And, anyway, it was different in my case; for Ken and I are old friends, which you and he are not. And, beside, father knew about it, and he said as a parting keepsake it was all right. But at a Christmas tree, in your own house,—Elise, you’ll make a great mistake if you give Kenneth Harper a seal ring.”

“All right, Patty, you know I always do just as you say, so I’ll give it to Roger.”

Patty knew she had judged rightly in the matter, but she also knew that Elise was greatly disappointed at her decision.

She had already noticed that Elise liked handsome Kenneth, but if she did, that was only an added reason why she should not make him a present of a ring.

“She ought to have had more sense!” Patty said to herself, indignantly. “And I’m sorry if she’s sorry; but I couldn’t let her do such a foolish thing!”

CHAPTER IV

A SPLENDID TREE

The Christmas Eve dinner was set for an early hour, that the younger Farrington children might take part in the festivities.

Beside Elise and Roger, there were two younger girls, Louise and Hester, and Bobby, aged ten.

When Patty went down to the drawing-room, she found these three eager with anticipation of the Christmas frolic about to begin.

Kenneth Harper was there too, but there were no other guests, as this evening was to be a family celebration. Soon the other members of the household appeared, and then dinner was announced, and they all went to the dining-room.

Mr. Farrington offered his arm to Patty, and escorted her out first, as guest of honour. Mrs. Farrington followed with Kenneth, and then the five Farrington children came out less formally.

A burst of applause greeted their first sight of the dinner table. It was indeed a Christmas feast to the eye as well as to the palate.

In the centre of the table was a Christmas tree, decorated with tinsel and gay ornaments, and lighted by tiny electric bulbs.

At each plate also, was a tiny Christmas tree, whose box-shaped standards bore the names of the diners.

"Here's mine!" cried Bobby, as he slid into his chair. "Oh, what a jolly dinner!"

On the little place trees hung nuts and bonbons which were to be eaten, "at the pleasure of the performer," as Roger expressed it.

The table was also decked with holly and red ribbons, and the various viands, as they were served, were shaped or decorated in keeping with the occasion.

The Farrington household was conducted on a most elaborate plan, and their dinners were usually very formal and conventional. But to-night was an exception, and, save for the solemn butler and grave footmen, everybody in the room was bubbling over with laughter and merriment.

"I'm not hungry any more," declared Bobby, after he had done full justice to several courses; "let's hurry up, and have the tree."

"Wait, Bobs," advised Hester; "we haven't had the ice cream yet."

"Oh, that's so," said Bobby; "can't we have it now, mother, and skip these flummerydiddles?"

He looked scornfully at the dainty salad that had just been placed before him, but Mrs. Farrington only smiled, not caring to remind him of the laws of table etiquette on a festive occasion.

"Have patience, Bobby, dear," she said; "the ice cream will come next; and, too, you know the longer the dinner, the later you can sit up."

"That's so!" agreed Bobby. "My, but Christmas Eve is fun! Wish I could sit up late every night."

"But it wouldn't be Christmas Eve every night," said Patty, smiling at the chubby-faced boy.

"That's so! Neither no more it wouldn't! Well, I wish it was Christmas Eve every night, then!"

"That's right," laughed Patty. "Make a good big wish while you're about it."

Then the ice cream was served and of course it was in shapes of Christmas trees, and Santa Clauses, and sprigs of holly, and Christmas bells, and Patty's portion was a lovely spray of mistletoe bough.

"Ho, ho!" laughed Kenneth, seeing it across the table; "another good chance lost! You know the penalty, Patty, if you're caught under the mistletoe. But of course if you eat mistletoe, the charm fails."

"I'm willing it should," said Patty, as she took up her spoon. "I'm not pining for a rustic swain to kiss me 'neath the mistletoe bough."

Patty looked very roguish and provoking as she said this, and Mr. Farrington said, gallantly: "Ah, no, perhaps not. But the swains are doing the pining, without doubt."

Now Roger sat on the other side of Patty, and as his father finished speaking, he said, apparently apropos of nothing:

"Mother, are these your Spode plates, or are they Cauldon ware?"

"They're Spode, Roger; why do you want to know? Are you suddenly becoming interested in China?"

"Yes," he replied; "are you sure, mother, these are Spode?"

He lifted the handsome plate in front of him, and gazed intently at the mark on its under side, as he held it just above the level of his eyes.

"Be careful, Roger, you'll spill your ice cream," admonished his father.

"No, I won't, sir," he said, as he replaced his plate. "But I never saw Spode with this decoration before. Let me look at yours, Patty."

He took up Patty's plate of ice cream, and lifting it quite high studied the stamp on that.

Suddenly he moved it, until the dish of mistletoe ice cream was directly over Patty's head.

"Fairly caught!" he cried; "under the mistletoe!" And before Patty caught the jest, Roger had kissed her pretty pink cheek, and then calmly restored her plate of ice cream to its place in front of her.

"You villain!" she cried, glaring at him, and pretending to be greatly offended, but smiling in spite of herself at his clever ruse.

"Good for you, my boy!" cried Mr. Farrington, clapping his hands. "I wish I had thought of that myself. But it's a game that won't work twice."

"Indeed it won't!" said Patty, "I'll take care of that!" and she began to eat her mistletoe ice cream in proof of her words.

"It never can happen again," said Kenneth, in sad tones, as he watched the "mistletoe" disappear. "But I'll not give up all hope. It's still Christmas Eve, and there are other mistletoes and other manners."

"And other girls," said Patty, glancing mischievously at Elise.

"Yes, there are four of us," said Louise, so innocently that they all laughed.

"All right, Louise," said Kenneth, "you find a nice, big spray of mistletoe, after dinner, and wear it in that big topknot bow of yours, and I'll promise to kiss you on both cheeks."

But Louise was too shy to respond to this repartee, and she dropped her eyes in confusion.

"Now," said Mrs. Farrington, as she rose from the table, "we'll have our Christmas Waits sing carols, and then we'll have our tree."

The children understood this, and Hester and Bobby at once ran out of the room. A few moments later they returned, dressed in trailing white robes, like surplices, and before they reached the drawing-room, their childish voices could be heard singing old-fashioned carols.

They had been well trained, and sang very prettily, and as they appeared in the doorway, Patty could scarcely believe that these demure little white-robed figures were the two merry children.

After two or three carols by the "Waits," the whole party joined in a Christmas chorus, and Patty's clear soprano rang out sweetly in the harmony.

"What a lovely voice you have, Patty, dear," said Mrs. Farrington, as the song was done; "it has improved greatly since I heard you last. Are you taking lessons?"

"I shall, Mrs. Farrington, after we get fairly settled. Father wants me to begin as soon as he can find the right teacher."

"Yes, indeed; you must do so. It would be a shame not to cultivate such a talent as that."

"You *have* improved, Patty!" declared Kenneth. "My! but your voice is stunning. I expect we'll see you on the concert stage yet."

"More likely on a Fifth Avenue stage," said Patty, laughing.

“Now for the tree!” exclaimed Bobby, who had thrown aside his white robe, and was ready for the fun to begin.

The tree had been set up in the indoor tennis-court, which was in the Casino.

This Casino, practically another house, opened from the great hall of the Farrington mansion, and its various apartments were devoted to different sorts of amusements.

The tennis court made a fine setting for the Christmas celebration, and had been carefully prepared for the great event.

The floor was covered with white canton flannel, so arranged over slight ridges and hummocks that it looked exactly like a field of drifted snow.

The tree, at the end of the room, was the largest that could be obtained, and was loaded with beautiful ornaments and decorations, and glittering with electric lights of all colours.

Patty had seen many Christmas trees, but never such a large or splendid one, and it almost took her breath away.

“I didn’t know trees ever grew so big,” she said. “How *did* you get it into the house?”

“It *was* difficult,” said Mr. Farrington. “I had to engineer the job myself. But Bobby asked for a big tree, and as the children are growing up so fast, I wanted to humour him.”

As Patty had often said, “for a millionaire, Mr. Farrington was the kindest man she ever knew.”

Though wealthy, he had no desire for display or ostentatious extravagance, but he loved to please his children, and was sufficiently rewarded by their enjoyment of the pleasures he provided.

Now, he was as frankly delighted with Bobby’s enthusiasm as Bobby was with his tree.

“Come on, old chappie,” he cried; “you shall be Santa Claus, and distribute the gifts.”

Meantime, the older ones were admiring the decorations of the room. Round the walls were smaller evergreen trees of varying heights, giving the effect of a clearing in a grove of evergreens. The ceiling had been draped across with dark blue material, and was studded with stars, made of tiny electric lights.

Bunches and wreaths of holly, tied with red ribbons, gave a touch of colour to the general effect, and in one corner beneath a green arched bower, a chime of bells pealed softly at intervals.

Altogether, the whole place breathed the very spirit of Christmas, and so perfect were the appointments, that no false note marred the harmony of it all.

“Now for the presents!” cried Bobby. “Oh, daddy, there’s my ’lectric railroad! Won’t you other people wait till I see how it works?”

The others all laughed at the eager, apologetic little face, as Bobby found it impossible to curb his impatience to see his new toy.

It was indeed a fine electric railway, and every one became interested as Mr. Farrington began to take it from its box and put the parts together.

“This is the way it goes, dad,” said Roger, kneeling on the floor beside his father.

“No, this way,” said Kenneth, as he adjusted some of the parts.

Quite content to wait for their gifts, Mrs. Farrington and the girls stood round watching the proceedings with interest, and soon Patty and Elise were down on the floor, too, breathlessly waiting the completion of the structure, and cheering gaily as the first train went successfully round the long track. Other trains followed, switches were set, signals opened or closed, bridges crossed, and all the manœuvres of a real railroad repeated in miniature.

“I haven’t had so much fun since I was a kid,” said Kenneth, rising from the floor and mopping his heated brow with his handkerchief.

“Nor I!” declared Mr. Farrington. “I’d rather rig up that toy for that boy of mine than—than to own a real railroad!”

“I believe you would!” said his wife, laughing. “And now, suppose you see what Santa Claus has for the rest of us.”

"Father's all in," said Roger. "You sit on that heap of snow, dad, and Kenneth and I will unload these groaning branches."

Bobby was too absorbed in his cars to think of anything else, so the little girls acted as messengers to distribute the gifts from the tree.

And this performance was a lengthy one.

Parcel after parcel, daintily wrapped and tied, was given to Patty, and, of course, the Farringtons had many more.

But Patty had a great quantity, for knowing where she was to spend her Christmas, all her young friends had sent gifts to her at the Farringtons', and the accumulation was almost as great as Elise's.

"I'm helpless," said Patty, as she sat with her lap full of gifts, boxes and papers strewn all about her on the floor, and Louise or Hester still bringing her more parcels.

"Let me help you," said Kenneth, as he picked up a lot of her belongings.

As he was only a dinner guest, of course Kenneth had no such array of gifts, though the Farringtons had given him some pretty trifles, and Patty gave him a charming little Tanagra statuette she had brought from Florence.

"See what Elise gave me," he remarked, as he showed the bronze paper-knife. "Jolly, isn't it?"

"Yes, indeed," returned Patty, relieved to see that Elise had not given him the ring after all. "It'll be fine to cut your briefs when you're a real out-and-out lawyer. What are briefs, anyway?"

"Little girls shouldn't use words of which they don't know the meaning," said Kenneth, reprovingly.

"Well, anyway, if they're brief enough, they won't need cutting," returned Patty, saucily, and then returned to the opening of her own presents.

She had pretty little gifts from Hilda Henderson, Lorraine Hamilton, Clementine Morse, and many of the other girls, some of whom she had not seen since her return to New York.

"Isn't it lovely to have so many friends?" said she, looking over her pile of gifts at Kenneth.

"Do you love them all?" he asked, smiling back at her happy face.

"Oh, indeed I do. Not exactly because they've given me all these pretty things, for I love the girls just as much in the summer time as at Christmas. But because they're my friends, and so,—I love them."

"Boys are your friends, too," suggested Kenneth.

"Of course they are!" Patty agreed; "and I love them, too. I guess I love everybody."

"Rather a big order," said Roger, coming up just then. "Loving everybody, you can't give a very large portion to each one."

"No," said Patty, pretending to look downcast. "Now, isn't that *too* bad! Well, never mind, I've plenty of gratitude to go round, anyway. And I offer you a big share of that, Roger, for this silver box."

"Do you like it? Oh, please like it, Patty."

"Of course I do; it's exquisite workmanship, and I shall use it for,—well, it seems most too prosaic,—but it's exactly the right shape and size for hairpins!"

"Then use it for 'em! Why not?" cried Roger, evidently pleased that Patty could find a use for his gift.

"And see what Ken gave me," went on Patty, as she held up a small crystal ball. "I've long wanted a crystal, and this is a beauty."

"What's it for?" asked Roger, curiously; "it looks like a marble."

"Marble, indeed! Why, Roger, it's a crystal, a Japanese rock crystal."

"Isn't it glass?"

"No, ignorant one! 'Tis not glass, but a curio of rare and occult value. In it I read the future, the past, and the present."

“Yes, it is a present, I know,” said Roger, and in the laugh at this sally the subject was dropped, but Roger secretly vowed to look up the subject of crystals and find out why Patty was so pleased with a marble.

“Elise is simply snowed under,” said Kenneth, as they heard rapturous exclamations from the other side of the room, where Elise was examining her gifts.

“Think of it!” cried Patty; “she had everything a girl could possibly want yesterday, and now to-day she has a few bushels more!”

It was literally true. Getting free, somehow, of her own impedimenta, Patty ran over to see Elise’s things.

“You look like a fancy bazaar gone to smash,” she declared, as she saw Elise in the midst of her Christmas portion.

“I feel like an International Exhibition,” returned Elise. “I’ve gifts from all parts of the known world!”

“And unknown!” said Kenneth, picking up various gimcracks of whose name or use he had no idea.

“But this is what I like best,” she went on, smiling at Kenneth, as she held up the dainty little card-case he had given her. “I shall use this only when calling on my dearest friends.”

“Good for you!” he returned. “Glad you like it. And as I know you’ve lots of dearest friends, I’ll promise, when it’s worn out, to give you another.”

Elise looked a trifle disappointed at this offhand response to her more earnest speech, but she only smiled gaily, and turned the subject.

CHAPTER V

SKATING AND DANCING

“Kenneth thinks an awful lot of you, Patty,” said Elise, as, after the Christmas party was all over, the girls were indulging in a good-night chat.

“Pooh,” said Patty, who, in kimono and bedroom slippers, nestled in a big easy-chair in front of the wood-fire in Elise’s dressing-room. “I’ve known Ken for years, and we do think a lot of each other. But you needn’t take that tone, Elise. It’s a boy and girl chumminess, and you know it. Why, Ken doesn’t think any more of me than Roger does.”

“Oh, Roger! Why, he’s perfectly gone on you. He worships the ground you walk on. Surely, Patty, you’ve noticed Roger’s devotion.”

“What’s the matter with you, Elise? Where’d you get these crazy notions about devotion and worship? If you’ll excuse my French,—you make me tired!”

“Don’t you like to have the boys devoted to you, Patty?”

“No, I don’t! I like their jolly friendship, of course. I like to talk to Ken and Roger, or to Clifford Morse, or any of the boys of our set; but as for *devotion*, I don’t see any.”

“None so blind as those who won’t see,” said Elise, who had finished brushing her hair, and now sank down on an ottoman by Patty’s side.

“Well, then, I’ll stay blind, for I don’t want to see devoted swains worshipping the Persian rugs I walk on! Though if you mean these beautiful rugs that are on all the floors of your house, Elise, I don’t know that I blame the swains so much. By the way, I suppose some of them are ‘prayer rugs’ anyway, so that makes it all the more appropriate.”

“Oh, Patty, you’re such a silly! You’re not like other girls.”

“You surprise me, Elise! Also you flatter me! I had an idea I belonged to the common herd.”

“Patty, *will* you be serious? Roger is terribly in love with you.”

“Really, Elise? How interesting! Now, what would you do in a case like that?”

“I’d consider it seriously, at any rate.”

Patty put one finger to her forehead, frowned deeply, and gazed into the fire for fully half a minute. Then she said:

“I’ve considered, Elise, and all I can think of is the ‘Cow who considered very well and gave the piper a penny.’ Do you suppose Roger would care for a penny?”

“He would, if you gave it to him,” returned Elise, who was almost petulant at Patty’s continued raillery.

“Then he shall have it! Rich as the Farringtons are, if the son of the house wants a penny of my fortune, it shall not be denied him!”

Patty had risen, and was stalking up and down the room with jerky strides, and dramatic waving of her arms. Her golden hair hung in a curly cloud over her blue silk kimono, and her voice thrilled with a tragic intensity, though, of course, exaggerated to a ludicrous degree.

Having finished her speech, Patty retained her dramatic pose, and glared at Elise like a very young and pretty Lady Macbeth.

“Oh, Patty,” cried Elise, forgetting the subject in hand, “you ought to be an actress! Do you know, you were quite stunning when you flung yourself round so. And, Patty, with your voice,—your singing voice, I mean,—you ought to go on the stage! *Do*, will you, Patty? I’d love to see you an opera singer!”

“Elise, you’re crazy to-night! Suppose I should go on the stage, what would become of all these devoted swains who are worshipping my footsteps?”

“Bother the swains! Patty, my heart is set upon it. You must be an actress. I mean a really nice, gentle, refined one, like Maude Adams, or Eleanor Robson. Oh, they are so sweet! and such noble, grand women.”

“Elise, you have lovely ambitions for your friends. What about yourself? Won’t you be a circus-rider, dear? I want you to be as ambitious for you as you are for me.”

“Patty, stop your fooling. I was quite in earnest.”

“Then you’d better begin fooling. It’s more sensible than your earnestness. Now, I’m going to run away to bed and leave you to dream that you’re a circus-rider, whizzing round a ring on a snow-white Arab steed. Good-night, girlie.”

Alone in her room, Patty smiled to herself at Elise’s foolishness. And yet, though she had no desire to be an actress, Patty had sometimes dreamed of herself as a concert singer, enchanting her audiences with her clear, sweet voice, which was fine and true, if not great. She was ambitious, though as yet not definitely so, and Elise’s words had roused a dormant desire to be or to do something worth while, and not, as she thought to herself, be a mere social butterfly.

Then she smiled again as she thought of Elise’s talk about Ken and Roger.

But here no answering chord was touched. As chums, she thoroughly liked both boys, but the thought of any more serious liking only roused a feeling of amusement in her mind.

“Perhaps I may be glad to have somebody in love with me some day,” she thought; “but it will be many years from now, and meantime I want to do a whole lot of things that are really worth doing.”

Then, with a whimsical thought that to sleep was the thing most worth doing at the present moment, Patty tumbled into the soft, white nest prepared for her and was soon sound asleep.

Christmas Day was one of the finest. No snow, but a clear, cold, bracing air, that was exhilarating to breathe.

“Skating this afternoon?” said Roger, after the Merry Christmas greetings had been exchanged.

“Yes, indeed,” cried Patty and Elise in one breath.

“Let’s get up a party, shall us?” went on Roger, “and skate till dusk, and then all come back here and have tea under the Christmas tree?”

“Lovely!” cried Elise, but Patty hesitated.

“You know we have the dance on for to-night,” she said.

Patty was not robust, and continuous exertions often tired her. Nan had cautioned her not to attempt too much gaiety during this visit, and she wanted to rest before the evening’s dance.

“Oh, pshaw!” said Elise, “there’ll be lots of time. The dance won’t begin till nine, anyway.”

So Patty agreed, and Roger went off to invite his skating party by telephone.

He secured Kenneth, and the two Morses, and then he hung up the receiver.

“That’s enough,” he declared. “I don’t like a big skating party. Slip away, girls, and get your bonnets and shawls; the car’ll be here in half an hour.”

The girls went off to dress, and Patty viewed her new skating costume with decided approval.

It was all of white. A white cloth frock, with short skirt; white broadcloth coat and a Russian turban of white cloth and fur; long white leather leggings, and her Christmas furs, which added a charming touch to the costume.

As being more comfortable for skating, she had returned to her former mode of hair-dressing, and so two big white ribbon bows bloomed at the back of her head. These, and the short skirt, quite took away Patty’s grown-up air, and made her seem a little girl again.

“Hello, Baby,” said Roger, as he saw her come downstairs, with rosy cheeks and eyes sparkling with pleasurable anticipation, for Patty loved to skate.

“Mam-ma!” said Patty, putting her finger in her mouth, and assuming a vacant, babyish stare.

Roger laughed at her foolishness, and then Elise came along and they all went out to the car.

Elise’s suit was of crimson cloth, bordered with dark fur, and as a consequence the two girls together made a pretty picture.

"You're such a comfort, Patty," Elise said, as they climbed into the big car. "You always dress just right to harmonise with my clothes."

"Sure you do!" said Roger, looking at the two girls admiringly. "No fellow on the ice will escort such beautiful ladies as I have in my charge. Now, we'll pick up Ken and the Morses, and then make a dash for the Pole."

They reached the Park by three o'clock, so had nearly two hours of skating before the dusk fell.

Patty was a superior skater, and so were most of the others, for Roger had chosen his party with care.

"Skate with me, Patty, will you?" said Roger, just at the same moment that Kenneth said, "Of course you'll skate with me, Patty."

Patty looked at both boys with a comical smile. "Thank you," she said; "but I always like to pick out my own escort." Then, turning to Clifford Morse, she said:

"Skate with me, won't you, Cliff? We're a good team."

"We are that!" he replied, greatly pleased, if a little surprised at Patty's invitation.

Kenneth and Roger grinned at each other, and then turned quickly to the other girls, who had not heard the little parley.

Of course Roger skated with Clementine Morse, and Kenneth with Elise, which arrangement quite satisfied the dark-eyed beauty.

"You look like Little Red Riding-hood," said Kenneth, as they started off, with long, gliding strokes.

"Don't be a wolf, and eat me up," laughed Elise, for Kenneth had fur on his cap and overcoat, and with his big fur gloves, seemed almost like some big, good-natured animal.

"You skate beautifully, Elise," said Kenneth, "and all you girls do. Look at Clementine; isn't she graceful?"

"Yes," agreed Elise, "and so is Patty."

"Patty," echoed Kenneth. "She is a poem on ice!"

She was, and Elise knew it, but a naughty little jealousy burned in her heart at Ken's words.

She bravely tried to down it, however, and said: "Yes, she is. She's a poem in every way."

"Well, I don't know about that. In some ways she's more of a jolly, merry jingle."

"A nonsense rhyme," suggested Elise, falling in with his metaphor.

"Yes; how quick you are to see what I mean. Now, Clementine is a lyric,—she glides so gracefully along."

"And I?" asked Elise, laughing at his witty characterisation.

"You? Well, I can't judge unless I see you. Skate off by yourself."

Elise did so, and Kenneth watched the scarlet-clad figure gracefully pirouetting and skilfully executing difficult steps.

"Well?" she said, as she returned to him, and again they joined hands and glided along in unison.

"Well, you're delightful on ice. You're a will o' the wisp."

"But I want to be a poem of some sort. The other girls are."

Kenneth smiled at the pretty, anxious face.

"You are a poem. You're one of those little French forms. A virelay or a triolet."

Elise was a little uncertain as to what these were, exactly, but she resolved to look them up as soon as she reached home. At any rate, she knew Kenneth meant to be complimentary, and she smiled with pleasure.

Then the others joined them and they all skated together for a time, and then the sun set, and Roger said they must go home.

He was a most reliable boy, and always took charge of their little expeditions or outings. Elise never thought of questioning his authority, so again they all bundled into the car, and started homeward.

“I ought to go right home,” said Clementine.

“Oh, come round for a cup of Christmas tea,” said Roger, “and I’ll take you home in half an hour.”

So the Morses consented, and the six merry young people had tea under the Christmas tree, and told stories by the firelight, and laughed and chatted until Clementine declared she must go, or she’d never get back in time for the dance.

“What are you going to wear, Patsy?” asked Elise, as they went upstairs, arm in arm.

“I’ve a new frock, of course. Did you think I’d come to your dance in one I’d worn before? Nay, I hold Miss Farrington in too high esteem for that!”

“Well, scurry into it, for I’m crazy to see it. If it’s prettier than mine, I won’t let you go down to the ballroom!”

“It won’t be,” returned Patty; “don’t worry about that!”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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