

The Quiet Little Woman


Patty stood at the window looking thoughtfully down at a group of girls playing in the yard below. All had cropped heads, all wore brown gowns with blue aprons, and all were orphans like herself. Some were pretty and some plain, some rosy and gay, some pale and feeble, but all seemed to be happy and having a good time in spite of many hardships.

More than once, one of the girls nodded and beckoned to Patty, but she shook her head decidedly and continued to stand listlessly watching and thinking to herself with a child's impatient spirit—

Oh, if someone would only come and take me away! I'm so tired of living here, and I don't think I can bear it much longer.

Poor Patty might well wish for a change; she had been in the orphanage ever since she could remember. And though everyone was very kind to her, she was heartily tired of the place and longed to find a home.

At the orphanage, the children were taught and cared for until they were old enough to help themselves, then they were adopted or went to work as servants. Now and then, some forlorn child was claimed by family. And once the relatives of a little girl named Katy proved to be rich and generous people who came for her in a fine carriage, treated all the other girls in



honor of the happy day, and from time to time, let Katy visit them with arms full of gifts for her former playmates and friends.

Katy's situation made a great stir in the orphanage, and the children never tired of talking about it and telling it to newcomers as a sort of modern-day fairy tale. For a time, each hoped to be claimed in the same way, and listening to stories of what they would do when their turn came was a favorite amusement.

By and by, Katy ceased to come, and gradually new girls took the places of those who had left. Eventually, Katy's good fortune was forgotten by all but Patty. To her, it remained a splendid possibility, and she comforted her loneliness by dreaming of the day her "folks" would come for her and bear her away to a future of luxury and pleasure, rest and love. But year after year, no one came for Patty, who worked and waited as others were chosen and she was left to the many duties and few pleasures of her dull life.

People who came for pets chose the pretty, little ones; and those who wanted servants took the tall, strong, merry-faced girls, who spoke up brightly and promised to learn to do anything required of them. Patty's pale face, short figure with one shoulder higher than the other, and shy ways limited her opportunities. She was not ill now, but looked so, and was a sober, quiet little woman at the age of thirteen.

The good matron often recommended Patty as a neat, capable, and gentle little person, but no one seemed to want her, and after every failure, her heart grew heavier and her face sadder, for the thought of spending the rest of her life there in the orphanage was unbearable.

No one guessed what a world of hopes and thoughts and feelings lay hidden beneath that blue pinafore, what dreams this

solitary child enjoyed, or what a hungry, aspiring young soul lived in her crooked little body.

But God knew, and when the time came, He remembered Patty and sent her the help she so desperately needed. Sometimes when we least expect it, a small cross proves a lovely crown, a seemingly unimportant event becomes a lifelong experience, or a stranger becomes a friend.

It happened so now, for as Patty said aloud with a great sigh, "I don't think I can bear it any longer!" a hand touched her shoulder and a voice said gently—

"Bear what, my child?"

The touch was so light and the voice so kind that Patty answered before she had time to feel shy.

"Living here, ma'am, and never being chosen as the other girls are."

"Tell me all about it, dear. I'm waiting for my sister, and I'd like to hear your troubles," the kindly woman said, sitting down in the window seat and drawing Patty beside her. She was not young or pretty or finely dressed. She was instead a gray-haired woman dressed in plain black, but her eyes were so cheerful and her voice so soothing that Patty felt at ease in a minute and nestled up to her as she shared her little woes in a few simple words.

"You don't know anything about your parents?" asked the lady.

"No, ma'am. I was left here as a baby without even a name pinned to me, and no one has come to find me. But I shouldn't wonder if they did come even now, so I keep ready all the time and work as hard as I can so they won't be ashamed of me, for I guess my folks is respectable," Patty replied, lifting her head with an air of pride that made the lady ask with a smile:

"What makes you think so?"

"Well, I heard the matron tell the lady who chose Nelly Brian that she always thought I came of high folks because I was so different from the others, and my ways was nice, and my feet so small—see if they ain't"—and slipping them out of the rough shoes she wore, Patty held up two slender, little feet with the arched insteps that tell of good birth.

Miss Murray—for that was her name—laughed right out loud at the innocent vanity of the poor child, and said heartily, "They are small, and so are your hands in spite of work. Your hair is fine, your eyes are soft and clear, and you are a good child I'm sure, which is best of all."

Pleased and touched by the praise that is so pleasant to us all, yet half ashamed of herself, Patty blushed and smiled, put on her shoes, and said with unusual animation—

"I'm pretty good, I believe, and I know I'd be much better if I could only get out. I do so long to see trees and grass, and sit in the sun, and listen to the birds. I'd work real hard and be happy if I could live in the country."

"What can you do?" asked Miss Murray, stroking Patty's smooth head and looking down into the wistful eyes fixed upon her.

Modestly, but with a flutter of hope in her heart, Patty recited her domestic accomplishments. It was a good list for a thirteen-year-old, for Patty had been working hard for so long that she had become unusually clever at all sorts of housework as well as needlework.

As she ended, she asked timidly, "Did you come for a girl, ma'am?"

"My sister-in-law, Mrs. Murray, did, but she found one she likes and is going to take her on trial." Her answer caused the light to fade from Patty's eyes and the hope to die in her heart.

"Who is it, please?" she asked.

"*Lizzie* Brown, a tall, nice-looking girl of fourteen."

"You won't like her, I know, for *Lizzie* is a real—" There Patty stopped short, turned red, and looked down as if ashamed to meet the keen, kind eyes fixed on her.

"A real what?"

"Please, ma'am, don't ask. It was mean of me to say that, and I mustn't go on. *Lizzie* can't help being good with you, and I am glad she has a chance to go away."

Aunt Jane Murray asked no more questions, but she noted the little glimpse of character, and tried to brighten Patty's mood by talking about something of interest to her.

"Suppose your 'folks,' as you say, never come for you, and you never find your fortune as some girls do, can't you make friends and fortune for yourself?"

"How can I?" questioned Patty, wonderingly.

"By cheerfully taking whatever comes, by being helpful and affectionate to all, and by wasting no time dreaming about what may happen, but bravely making each day a comfort and a pleasure to yourself and others. Can you do that?"

"I can try, ma'am," answered Patty, meekly.

"I wish you would, and when I come again, you can tell me how you are doing. I believe you will succeed, and when you do, you will have found for yourself a fine fortune and confident certainty of your friends. Now I must go. Cheer up, deary, your turn will come one day."

With a kiss that won Patty's heart, Miss Murray went away, casting more than one look of pity at the small figure sobbing in the window seat, with a blue pinafore over her face.

This disappointment was doubly hard for Patty because *Lizzie* was not a good girl and to her mind, did not deserve such good fortune. Besides, Patty had taken a great fancy to the lady who spoke so kindly to her.

For a week after this, she went about her work with a sad face, and all her daydreams were of living with Miss Jane Murray in the country.

Monday afternoon, as Patty stood sprinkling clothes for ironing, one of the girls burst in, saying all in a breath—

"Patty! Someone has come for you at last, and you are to go right up to the parlor. It's Mrs. Murray. She brought Liz back 'cause she told fibs and was lazy. Liz is as mad as hops, for it is a real nice place with cows and pigs and chickens and children, and the work ain't hard and she wanted to stay. Do hurry, and don't stand staring at me that way."

"It can't be me—no one ever wants me—it's some mistake—" stammered Patty, who was so startled and excited that she did not know what to say or do.

"It's no mistake," the girl insisted. "Mrs. Murray won't have anyone but you, and the matron says you are to come right up. Go along—I'll finish here. I'm so glad you have your chance at last!" And with a good-natured hug, the girl pushed Patty out of the kitchen.

In a few minutes, Patty came flying back in a twitter of delight to report that she was leaving at once and must say good-bye. Everyone was pleased, and when the flurry was over, the carriage drove away with the happiest little girl you have ever seen riding inside, for at last someone did want her. Patty had found a place.

During the first year Patty lived with the Murrays, they found her to be industrious, docile, and faithful—and yet she

was not happy and had not found with them all she expected. They were kind to her, providing plenty of food and not too much work. They clothed her comfortably, let her go to church, and did not scold her very often. But no one showed that they loved her, no one praised her efforts, no one seemed to think that she had any hope or wish beyond her daily work; and no one saw in the shy, quiet little maiden a lonely, tenderhearted girl longing for a crumb of the love so freely given to the children of the home.

The Murrays were busy people with a large farm to care for. The master and his oldest son were hard at it all summer. Mrs. Murray was a brisk, smart housewife who "flew 'round" herself and expected others to do the same. Pretty Ella, the daughter, was about Patty's age and busy with her school, her little pleasures, and all the bright plans young girls love and live for. Two or three small lads rioted about the house making much work and doing very little.

One of these boys was lame, and this fact seemed to establish a sort of friendly understanding between him and Patty. In truth, he was the only one who ever expressed any regard for her. She was very good to him, always ready to help, always patient with his fretfulness, and always quick to understand his sensitive nature.

"She's only a servant, a charity girl who works for her board and wears my old clothes. She's good enough in her place, but of course she can't expect to be like one of us," Ella once said to a young friend—and Patty heard her.

"Only a servant. . . ." That was the hard part, and it never occurred to anyone to make it softer, so Patty plodded on, still hoping and dreaming about friends and fortune.