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Edith van Dyne asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

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One

Miss Doyle Interferes

"Daddy," said Patricia Doyle at the breakfast table in her cosy New York apartment, "here is something that will make you sit up and take notice."

"My dear Patsy," was the reply, "it's already sitting up I am, an' taking waffles. If anything at all would make me take notice it's your own pretty phiz."

"Major," remarked Uncle John, helping himself to waffles from a fresh plate Nora brought in, "you Irish are such confirmed flatterers that you flatter your own daughters. Patsy isn't at all pretty this morning. She's too red and freckled."

Patsy laughed and her blue eyes danced.

"That comes from living on your old farm at Millville," she retorted. "We've only been back three days, and the sunburn sticks to me like a burr to a kitten."

"Pay no attention to the ould rascal, Patsy," advised the Major, composedly. "An' stop wavin' that letter like a white flag of surrender. Who's it from?"

"Kenneth."

"Aha! An' how is our lad?"

“Why, he’s got himself into a peck of trouble. That’s what I want to talk to you and Uncle John about,” she replied, her happy face growing as serious as it could ever become.

“Can’t he wiggle out?” asked Uncle John.

“Out of what?”

“His trouble.”

“It seems not. Listen—”

“Oh, tell us about it, lassie,” said the Major. “If I judge right there’s some sixty pages in that epistle. Don’t bother to read it again.”

“But every word is important,” declared Patsy, turning the letter over, “—except the last page,” with a swift flush.

Uncle John laughed. His shrewd old eyes saw everything.

“Then read us the last page, my dear.”

“I’ll tell you about it,” said Patsy, quickly. “It’s this way, you see. Kenneth has gone into politics!”

“More power to his elbow!” exclaimed the Major.

“I can’t imagine it in Kenneth,” said Uncle John, soberly. “What’s he in for?”

“For—for—let’s see. Oh, here it is. For member of the House of Representatives from the Eighth District.”

“He’s flying high, for a fledgling,” observed the Major. “But Kenneth’s a bright lad and a big gun in his county. He’ll win, hands down.”

Patsy shook her head.

“He’s afraid not,” she said, “and it’s worrying him to death. He doesn’t like to be beaten, and that’s what’s troubling him.”

Uncle John pushed back his chair.

“Poor boy!” he said. “What ever induced him to attempt such a thing?”

“He wanted to defeat a bad man who now represents Kenneth’s district,” explained Patsy, whose wise little head was full of her friend’s difficulties; “and —”

“And the bad man objects to the idea and won’t be defeated,” added the Major. “It’s a way these bad men have.”

Uncle John was looking very serious indeed, and Patsy regarded him gratefully. Her father never would be serious where Kenneth was concerned. Perhaps in his heart the grizzled old Major was a bit jealous of the boy.

“I think,” said the girl, “that Mr. Watson got Ken into politics, for he surely wouldn’t have undertaken such a thing himself. And, now he’s in, he finds he’s doomed to defeat; and it’s breaking his heart, Uncle John.”

The little man nodded silently. His chubby face was for once destitute of a smile. That meant a good deal with Uncle John, and Patsy knew she had interested him in Kenneth’s troubles.

“Once,” said the Major, from behind the morning paper, “I was in politics, meself. I ran for coroner an’ got two whole votes—me own an’ the undertaker’s. It’s because the public’s so indiscriminating that I’ve not run for anything since—except th’ street-car.”

“But it’s a big game,” said Uncle John, standing at the window with his hands deep in his pockets; “and an important game. Every good American should take an interest in politics; and Kenneth, especially, who has such large landed interests, ought to direct the political affairs of his district.”

“I’m much interested in politics, too, Uncle,” declared the girl. “If I were a man I’d—I’d—be President!”

“An’ I’d vote fer ye twenty times a day, mavourneen!” cried the Major. “But luckily ye’ll be no president—unless it’s of a woman’s club.”

"There's the bell!" cried Patsy. "It must be the girls. No one else would call so early."

"It's Beth's voice, talking to Nora," added her father, listening; and then the door flew open and in came two girls whose bright and eager faces might well warrant the warm welcome they received.

"Oh, Louise," cried Patsy, "however did you get up so early?"

"I've got a letter from Kenneth," was the answer, "and I'm so excited I couldn't wait a minute!"

"Imagine Louise being excited," said Beth, calmly, as she kissed Uncle John and sat down by Patsy's side. "She read her letter in bed and bounced out of bed like a cannon-ball. We dressed like the 'lightning change' artist at the vaudeville, and I'm sure our hats are not on straight."

"This bids fair to be a strenuous day," observed the Major. "Patsy's had a letter from the boy, herself."

"Oh, did you?" inquired Louise; "and do you know all about it, dear?"

"She knows sixty pages about it," replied Major Doyle.

"Well, then, what's to be done?"

The question was addressed to Patsy, who was not prepared to reply. The three cousins first exchanged inquiring glances and then turned their eager eyes upon the broad chubby back of Uncle John, who maintained his position at the window as if determined to shut out the morning sunlight.

Louise Merrick lived with her mother a few blocks away from Patsy's apartment, and her cousin Beth DeGraf was staying with her for a time. They had all spent the summer with Uncle John at Millville, and had only returned to New York a few days before. Beth's home was in Ohio, but there was so little sympathy between the girl and her parents that she was happy only when away from them. Her mother was Uncle John's sister, but as selfish and cold as

Uncle John was generous and genial. Beth's father was a "genius" and a professor of music—one of those geniuses who live only in their own atmosphere and forget there is a world around them. So Beth had a loveless and disappointed childhood, and only after Uncle John arrived from the far west and took his three nieces "under his wing," as he said, did her life assume any brightness or interest.

Her new surroundings, however, had developed Beth's character wonderfully, and although she still had her periods of sullen depression she was generally as gay and lovable as her two cousins, but in a quieter and more self-possessed way.

Louise was the eldest—a fair, dainty creature with that indescribable "air" which invariably wins the admiring regard of all beholders. Whatever gown the girl wore looked appropriate and becoming, and her manner was as delightful as her appearance. She was somewhat frivolous and designing in character, but warm-hearted and staunch in her friendships. Indeed, Louise was one of those girls who are so complex as to be a puzzle to everyone, including themselves.

Beth DeGraf was the beauty of the group of three, and she also possessed great depth of character. Beth did not like herself very well, and was always afraid others would fail to like her, so she did not win friends as easily as did Louise. But those who knew the beautiful girl intimately could read much to admire in the depth of her great dark eyes, and she was not the least interesting of the three nieces whose fortunes had been so greatly influenced by Aunt Jane and Uncle John Merrick.

But Patricia Doyle—usually called "Patsy" by her friends—was after all the general favorite with strangers and friends alike. There was a subtle magnetism about the girl's laughing, freckled face and dancing blue eyes that

could not well be resisted. Patsy was not beautiful; she was not accomplished; she had no especial air of distinction. But she was winning from the top of her red hair to the tips of her toes, and so absolutely unaffected that she won all hearts.

"And for wisdom she's got Solomon beat to a frazzle," declared the Major to Uncle John, in discussing his daughter's character. But it is possible that Major Doyle was prejudiced.

"Well, what's to be done?" demanded Louise, for the second time.

"We don't vote in Ken's district," remarked the Major, "or there would be six votes to his credit, and that would beat my own record by four!"

"Ken is so impressionable that I'm afraid this defeat will ruin his life," said Beth, softly. "I wish we could get him away. Couldn't we get him to withdraw?"

"He might be suddenly called to Europe," suggested Louise. "That would take him away from the place and give him a change of scene."

Patsy shook her head.

"Kenneth isn't a coward," she said. "He won't run away. He must accept his defeat like a man, and some time try again. Eh, Uncle John?"

Uncle John turned around and regarded his three nieces critically.

"What makes you think he will be defeated?" he asked.

"He says so himself," answered Patsy.

"He writes me he can see no hope, for the people are all against him," added Louise.

"Pah!" said Uncle John, contemptuously. "What else does the idiot say?"

"That he's lonely and discouraged, and had to pour out his heart to some one or go wild," said Patsy, the tears of sympathy filling her eyes.

"And you girls propose to sit down and allow all this?" inquired their uncle sternly.

“We?” answered Louise, lifting her brows and making a pretty gesture. “What can we do?”

“Go to work!” said Uncle John.

“How?” asked Patsy, eagerly.

“Politics is a game,” declared Mr. Merrick. “It’s never won until the last card is played. And success doesn’t lie so much in the cards as the way you play ‘em. Here are three girls with plenty of shrewdness and energy. Why don’t you take a hand in the game and win it?”

“Oh, Uncle John!”

The proposition was certainly disconcerting at first.

“Yes, yes!” laughed the Major, derisively. “Put on some blue stockings, read the history of woman’s suffrage, cultivate a liking for depraved eggs, and then face Kenneth’s enraged constituents!”

“I shouldn’t mind, daddy, if it would help Kenneth any,” declared Patsy, stoutly.

“Go on, Uncle John,” said Beth, encouragingly.

“Women in politics,” observed their uncle, “have often been a tremendous power. You won’t need to humiliate yourselves, my dears. All you’ll need to do is to exercise your wits and work earnestly for the cause. There are a hundred ways to do that.”

“Mention a few,” proposed the Major.

“I will when I get to Elmhurst and look over the ground,” answered Uncle John.

“You’re going on, then?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll go with you,” said Patsy promptly.

"So will I," said Beth. "Kenneth needs moral encouragement and support as much as anything else, just now."

"He's imagining all sorts of horrors and making himself miserable," said Louise. "Let's all go, Uncle, and try to cheer him up."

By this time Uncle John was smiling genially.

"Why, I was sure of you, my dears, from the first," he said. "The Major's an old croaker, but he'd go, too, if it were not necessary for him to stay in New York and attend to business. But we mustn't lose any time, if we're going to direct the politics of the Eighth District Election the eighth of November."

"I can go any time, and so can Beth," said Louise.

"All I need is the blue stockings," laughed Patsy.

"It won't be play. This means work," said Uncle John seriously.

"Well, I believe we're capable of a certain amount of work," replied Beth. "Aren't we, girls?"

"We are!"

"All right," said Mr. Merrick. "I'll go and look up the next train. Go home, Louise, and pack up. I'll telephone you."

"That bad man 'd better look out," chuckled the Major. "He doesn't suspect that an army of invasion is coming."

"Daddy," cried Patsy, "you hush up. We mean business."

"If you win," said the Major, "I'll run for alderman on a petticoat platform, and hire your services."

Two

The Artist

To most people the great rambling mansion at Elmhurst, with its ample grounds and profusion of flowers and shrubbery, would afford endless delight. But Kenneth Forbes, the youthful proprietor, was at times dreadfully bored by the loneliness of it all, though no one could better have appreciated the beauties of his fine estate.

The town, an insignificant village, was five miles distant, and surrounding the mansion were many broad acres which rather isolated it from its neighbors. Moreover, Elmhurst was the one important estate in the county, and the simple, hard-working farmers in its vicinity considered, justly enough, that the owner was wholly out of their class.

This was not the owner's fault, and Kenneth had brooded upon the matter until he had come to regard it as a distinct misfortune. For it isolated him and deprived him of any social intercourse with his neighbors.

The boy had come to live at Elmhurst when he was a mere child, but only as a dependent upon the charities of Aunt Jane, who had accepted the charge of the orphan because he was a nephew of her dead lover, who had bequeathed her his estate of Elmhurst. Aunt Jane was Kenneth's aunt merely in name, since

she had never even married the uncle to whom she had been betrothed, and who had been killed in an accident before the boy was born.

She was an irritable old woman, as Kenneth knew her, and had never shown him any love or consideration. He grew up in a secluded corner of the great house, tended merely by servants and suffered to play in those quarters of the ample grounds which Aunt Jane did not herself visit. The neglect which Kenneth had suffered and his lonely life had influenced the youth's temperament, and he was far from being an agreeable companion at the time Aunt Jane summoned her three nieces to Elmhurst in order to choose one of them as her heiress. These girls, bright, cheery and wholesome as they were, penetrated the boy's reserve and drew him out of his misanthropic moods. They discovered that he had remarkable talent as an artist, and encouraged him to draw and paint, something he had long loved to do in secret.

Then came the great surprise of the boy's life, which changed his condition from one of dependency into affluence. Aunt Jane died and it was discovered that she had no right to transfer the estate to one of her nieces, because by the terms of his uncle's deed to her the property reverted on her death to Kenneth himself. Louise Merrick, Beth DeGraf and Patsy Doyle, the three nieces, were really glad that the boy inherited Elmhurst, and returned to their eastern homes with the most cordial friendship existing between them all.

Kenneth was left the master of Elmhurst and possessor of considerable wealth besides, and at first he could scarcely realize his good fortune or decide how to take advantage of it. He had one good and helpful friend, an old lawyer named Watson, who had not only been a friend of his uncle, and the confidant of Aunt Jane for years, but had taken an interest in the lonely boy and had done his best to make his life brighter and happier.