



Patricia the Beautiful Shopper

A Tale of the Canadian Border

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PATRICIA had a genius for shopping. She shopped in season and out and did it as fervently and gracefully as she skated or played tennis. The values she always got in exchange for her dollars and dimes were marvels. Her friends called her "Patricia the Beautiful Shopper," accentuating the last word by reason of certain alleged, well developed tendencies peculiar to others, who, like Patricia, live in border towns. She knew naught of tariff regulations, but had a border etiquette that was all her own and so charming and all-conquering that never an officer of His Majesty's customs cast so much as a glance of suspicion upon her as she crossed and recrossed the line.

But the course of true shopping doesn't always run smooth any more than that of love. Mollie O'Byrn's wedding was but three days away and not a thread of Maltese lace could Patricia find with which to adorn a new gown for the happy occasion.

of Maltese laces? Wythe stores are sure to have plenty and the ice is safe all the way there and back. Do you understand? You're to go to Wythe and go at once."

Almost before she had finished her monologue, Patricia was covering the distance that lay between her and the little town of Wythe several miles up the river and across the channel.

The ice was peerless and groups of skaters were making the most of it for such a splendid area of ice was unusual.

Almost opposite Wythe, where the river runs wider, and an occasional island with its frosted hemlocks and mournful pines adds interest to the winter scenery, a bit of a village clustered around a willow fringed bay, and sent out a quartet of the merriest, happiest girls on skates that gladsome afternoon. For a couple of hours they glided along with all the rapture of enthusiasts then they, too,

"Teddy says she's a dream. Blue eyes, pink and white complexion, and masses of copper-colored tresses, guiltless of rats or store puffs."

"Fudge!" grunted the Practical One, "that's not my idea of a woman inspector. It's not at all business-like. Pink cheeks and red hair, ugh!"

"Copper-colored," corrected the Engaged Girl.

"It's all the same thing, only one's prose and the other's poetry," she insisted.

"You're altogether too critical, my dear. Teddy says she's one of the most energetic and business-like women he has ever met."

"Teddy's judgment forsooth! I'll reserve mine till I've met her face to face."

"From store to store they went, shedding adjectives and exclamation points at every counter, spending just fifty-three cents in all including twenty cents for marsh-mallows to be toasted later in the evening in honor of the Visiting Lady.



PATRICIA THE BEAUTIFUL SHOPPER

She tried to persuade herself that something else would do, but clouds of filmy Maltese kept arising to obscure that something else.

Meanwhile, the river was completely frozen over and the glistening ice was irresistible. For miles the frozen surface flashed back the sun glints. Small fleecy clouds were driven along by "the shepherd wind," and the frosted air was clear and crisp as an icicle. But the Beautiful Shopper was not thinking of these things as she practised a new figure the Oracle of the rink was teaching her. She was thinking of that impossible Maltese. Two or three false strokes and a sudden pause indicated an idea and possibly a decision on the part of the skater.

"Patricia, you're a *non compos*. You're worse. You're a dunderdolt in the superlative degree. Where does this shining pathway lead, save to the Mecca

forsook the ice for the lure of Wythe's bargain counters as women will.

On their way up town the Engaged Girl was making scathing comments upon the strange ways of governments and their border policy in particular. She was saying:

"In my humble opinion, smuggling, if it must be called by such a vulgar name, is woman's special proper sin and she ought to be indulged in it. It may be burdensome at times," and she laughed meaningly, "but it is never a grievous sin and it never be-smirches one's reputation."

"That's right," agreed the Practical One, "and she's absolved the instant she passes the line of inspection—successfully."

The Engaged Girl was very much interested in her subject and had more to tell for she continued:

As they came out of the Marsh-Mallow Fair, Patricia, with her skates hanging across her arm, passed them and entered an adjoining store. The Willow Bay girls looked interrogations at each other.

"The Woman Inspector," suggested the Engaged Girl.

"I really do believe it is," said the Romantic Girl.

"She's exactly like Teddy's description. She sure is a dream."

"Did you notice," quoth the Practical One, now almost persuaded, "that she followed us from store to store, and every place she asked to be shown Maltese lace, as if she couldn't get it at almost any store, instead of trying them all. It's a wonder we didn't recognize her before."

"Oh, I've heard that's the way they do it," ex-