

# PATTY'S COUSIN.

A STORY OF KENTUCKY LIFE.  
(Continued.)

There came messages to Patty from one and another of her cousins, but the general word from Tom, surely, she thought sometimes, he would have written to her if he were right in interpreting that deep thrill in his voice. Even though he did know she was engaged to Walker, she must have been mistaken. But she tried to be her old, bright self. She would not have it thought that she was pining for her lover. Was it Walker's face she longed to see?

But the war was over at last, and when the news reached home of its triumphant close, then began the preparations to welcome home "the boys," as they were so proudly, fondly called. Alas! not all of them would return. There were names on graves at Buena Vista, Palo Alto, Monterey, Resaca de la Palma, where the light of many a life was quenched; where slept the sons of many a grand Kentucky name, and among those who greeted the home-comers were many a black robed mother or sister, welcoming with tender, aching hearts those who had fought side by side with their gallant dead.

Oh, but the boys were received with open arms! What domestic glories there, with the uncle "on Mulberry," and the aunt "on Fox Run," and the cousins "out the Mount Eden road!" The turkeys that were roasted! The chickens that were fried! The savory hams that were yielded up by the well-filled smoke-house! The wonderfully delicious company of liver and ginger and butter and eggs that were manufactured by the able "aunties" in the kitchen! How the little darlings groaned and nodded over the manipulation of the ice cream freezer!

For the first few weeks after the home-coming Patty had little to think of herself. Cousin Tom had come back with his arm in a sling, and Cousin Lynn still had to use his crutches. Patty felt rather indignant that her own, knight had no honorable scars, but she knew full well that Walker was not one to shrink his share of fighting.

Of course there was many a tale to tell of their campaigns, and one day, when a dozen or so of the young folks were gathered in Uncle Henry's parlor Henrietta exclaimed:

"Now, Cousin Tom, it's your turn next! We shall not let you off this evening!"

"But I've nothing new to tell, Cousin Henrietta," said Tom, embarrassed at being singled out for the post of narrator.

"Tell us how you had your arm hurt," persisted Henrietta.

"It was about," he answered lightly, but suddenly turning crimson.

"Of course, but how? Cousin Tom, you are so provoking."

"I'll tell you about that," spoke up Alex. from across the hearth.

"No, you won't," said Tom, shortly.

"There's nothing to tell, except that we were unaccountably close to a lot of rascally Mexicans, and one of them happened to wing me. That's all."

"But 'thereby hangs a tale,'" said the irrepressible Alex, half catching Tom's glance, half angry, half imploring, he dropped the subject, and presently suggested music, and the children here and there refused to tell a story, was called on to bring out his violin. He was a perfect master of that instrument, and his touch seemed to endow it with a soul, vowing forth the deepest emotions of the human heart. He did not look at Patty as he played today, but he played for her alone, and she, hardly daring to think of it, felt once again that same tightness in her throat that had held her dumb on that miserable evening so long ago! Was it true? Did he love her as she had dared to think in that parting moment years ago by?

She felt unaccountably fidgety with Cousin Walker when he came to see her sister awhile, and that dainty young man, remembering his marked attention to Cousin Henrietta on several occasions, fancied that Cousin Patty was, perhaps, a little jealous. He felt alarmed, lest after all he might lose the coveted prize, and for the remainder of the day endeavored to atone for his rudeness. But Patty was not inclined to be mollified. Indeed, she almost snubbed Cousin Walker, and Cousin Lynn, whose sharp eyes missed nothing that was going on, rejoiced unfeelingly.

"It's a shame," he said, in a confidential aside to his sister Anna, "to think that Cousin Patty should prefer him to Tom."

Cousin Anna did not think it prudent to reply in words, but nodded mysteriously, and purred up her rosy mouth with the air of one who could reveal weighty secrets. And Cousin Lynn took the hint, and straightway set himself to decide whether Cousin Patty did really prefer Cousin Walker.

In the course of a week he had made a shrewd guess at the truth of the matter, and forthwith consulted his chum, Cousin Alex.

"I'd like to punch Tom's head," said Alex, wrathfully, "for letting Walker get the inside track."

"Then you think as I do, that Tom's chance was better than he thought?" said Lynn.

"Yes. But what business had he to give up a girl like that because he thought she wouldn't have him? Why didn't he ask her?"

"That's for him to say," rejoined Lynn, "but Cousin Patty does not care for Tom. Walker shall have her. I'll forbid the ban!" and he laughed as he spoke. But he meant the spirit of his jesting words, though not the letter.

It was through some words of his that Patty one day asked Walker to tell her how Cousin Tom was wounded.

"It happened in a little affair just before the war ended," Walker said, not looking at her as he spoke. "There were a lot of us captured and afterwards released, and in the scrimmage Tom got a couple of musket balls in his arm and shoulder."

"I don't see why he objects to talking about the affair," remarked Patty.

"Oh, well," said Walker, carelessly, "he's a modest fellow, you know, and doesn't talk much about himself."

Afterwards Patty remarked to Cousin Lynn that she didn't see anything particularly interesting in this story he had told her.

"Maybe Walker forgot part of it," said Lynn, with twinkling eyes. "Suppose you ask Tom himself."

"I will not," said Patty, impatiently. "If there's anything of it, I wish you would tell it yourself."

"All right," said Lynn; "you won't interrupt me? Well, here goes. Walker told you that a lot of us were captured, didn't he? But he didn't tell you of the order that every fifth man of us was to be shot, did he? The victims were to be chosen by lot, in this way. A number of beans, equal to the number of prisoners, were counted into a bag, and every fifth bean was black, and the rest white. Then we were drawn up in line, and one by one, stepped forward and drew a bean from the bag. If he drew a black bean, the poor fellow marched to one side to wait until the drawing was over. If he drew a white one, he went back to his place in the line. Well, the first man drew a black bean. The next two drew white ones. Then another poor fellow drew a black one, and was marched over to the space for the condemned. Tom drew a white bean, and he drew a white one. Walker stood third below him in the line, and Tom, instead of going to his own place, exchanged with Walker, giving him the white bean, and he drew a white one, you see, so I heard it said. 'Take my place, Walker, and let me

take your chance. You belong to Cousin Patty, you know, and I promised her I'd look after you.' By the time they had exchanged places, Tom had drawn again, and this time—the bean was black. And so it went on, till the last bean was drawn. Then the condemned (there were fifteen of them) were formed in line, and the firing party took their places. They fired one round, and just then there came a rattle of musketry from above. We were in a little ravine, and our troops had come up without their approach being discovered. The bullets were turned pretty quickly, I can tell you, but for all that the firing party in that first round had done some deadly work. Ten out of the fifteen men were killed or badly wounded. And that is how Tom was shot."

Lynn gave one of his keen glances at Patty's face as he ended his blunt story, and what he read there made him more than ever sure that if Tom's life had indeed been given for Walker's, she would have thought her lover's safety far too dearly bought.

"I did not think Cousin Walker was a coward," she said slowly.

"Nor is he," said Lynn, quickly. "He never flinched in a battle, and besides all this happened so early that he was no time for argument, even if Tom hadn't been as resolute as he was."

"Walker should have told me how it happened," said Patty, still speaking very slowly, as if she felt it not quite right to blame her lover to another. She made no further allusion to the story, but up her mind that she could not and would not keep her engagement with Walker.

She wrote to him that afternoon, telling him she had something to say which must be said at once. He came out after tea, evidently disturbed by her message, and the two sat down to talk over the matter. The important communication, Fatty waited no time in irrelevant talk, but came straight to the point.

"I wish to tell you," she said, "that I find it impossible for me to fulfill our engagement, therefore I ask you to release me from it."

As she spoke she drew her ring from her finger and laid it before him. Walker did not touch it. He said slowly:

"I am at a loss to account for this decision, Patty. You will not refuse me an explanation?"

"At this very natural question Patty showed herself embarrassed and remained silent."

"What have I done or not done?" pursued Walker, in an injured tone. "I have seemed remiss in my duties as a lover, did you not particularly desire that I should not be too devoted?"

"I have no fault to find with your performance of your duties as a lover," said Patty, serenely, "but I think as a man you should be above prevarication. Have you always been truthful with me, Cousin Walker?"

TO BE CONTINUED.

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