

LADY PATTY. A SKETCH

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Lady Patty. A Sketch by Mrs. M. Hungerford

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MRS. M. HUNGERFORD

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LADY PATTY.

A SKETCH.

BY

THE DUCHESS,

AUTHOR OF "MOLLY BAWN," "PHYLLIS," ETC.

[Mrs. M. Hungerford.]

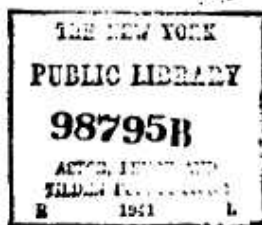


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1892.

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LADY PATTY.

CHAPTER I.

“PARK LANE, Sept. 9, 1888.

“DEAREST CAROLINE,—

“I am sending ma belle Héléne abroad, as you know,—to Florence, that sweetest of all places,—and am not sure how I shall exist without her. It has been such an amusement to me getting her clothes,—her first *long* frocks, you know. It was just like dressing a doll, only that Helen is such a tall creature,—like all your family,—a little lanky as yet, you know, but I dare say she will cure of that. Really her things are charming, a sort of rehearsal for the trousseau that will, I suppose, be wanted some time or other, later on; though it seems absurd to think of that. It seems absurd altogether that *I* should have a grown-up daughter, and so very *much* grown, too, considering my own tiny dimensions. I hope to heaven she

won't grow *big* in proportion to her height, because if so I don't quite see how I am to take her about with me when she returns. The giant and the dwarf! It would be quite *too* horrid!

"I'm so sorry you can't see her dresses; but I can describe them to you. Really that Madame Amade is a treasure; she has given Helen an ivory Indian silk in which she looks like an angel, and there is a black surah, entirely covered with her grandmother's old black lace,—you remember it? *priceless!*—which on a *quite* young girl like Helen—only seventeen, you know—will, I think, look decidedly *chic*. Then she has sent her a thick white serge with a little gold—about it to wear when she runs down to Rome for the Carnival. I hope, considering the really good foreign society she is going into, so entirely different from her home set, that the dear child will come back to me next year very decidedly improved both in mind and body. I trust to the people out there, and the various excitements, to knock the rusticity out of her. You have understood from my letters hitherto that she is not altogether up to the smart society mark of the day,—that she is somewhat *difficult*, dreamy, a state very undesirable in a girl without a fortune,

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who *must* push her way if she doesn't want to be elbowed into a corner and left there. That dear Mrs. Eyre—you have met her, I think,—small woman with big eyes, and a temper, but *such* a dear creature, daughter of Sir John Scott—has given Helen such a delicious fan as a pretty addition to her wardrobe, all black gauze with delicate Cupids painted on it. It is a little—well, just a *little*, you know,—a *very* little, mind; but I've told Helen she is to shut her eyes and turn her head the other way whenever she opens it, and she's *such* a dear child that one can always quite depend upon her.

“So sweet of Lady Western to take darling Helen off my hands for so many months. She will return to me in May. I shall then bring her up here to town and introduce her. Just now I am passing through on my way to the Westerns with her. They start for Italy on Tuesday. I shall then be free to pay a few visits long promised; to the Greylys among others. Sir Rufus, the present baronet (you have met him, I dare say), is not lovely to look at, but a very desirable *parti* for all that; and really a feature here and there isn't of the least consequence. If Helen

comes home without having met any one very special out there, I always think Sir Rufus would suit her. Thirty thousand a year, if a penny.

"Good-by now, dearest. So *glad* to hear you are *really* returning for good in April. I always think poor dear Ireland such a ghastly place to live in. Sort of premature burial. Give my love to Tom. Ah! if *I* had only had a son! Such a blessing his regiment has been sent at last to so decent a place as Aldershot. You must take a house in town for the season. He can run up, or get leave, for a month or two.

"*Fondest* love, and a kiss from Helen, who is always so *longing* to meet you, her one aunt!

"*Ever* so affectionately yours,

"PATTY GIFFORD."

CHAPTER II.

Women, with tongues

Like polar needles, ever on the jar.

A BRILLIANT May sun is pouring through the rose-colored blinds, lighting up the tiny drawing-room within,—a very perfect apartment in its way, if a little overdone in bijouterie to the more critical eye; charming, however, as a whole. Soft masses of late daffodils gleam out of unsuspected corners; tall Japanese screens grow picturesque in dusky recesses; silken curtains hide away anterooms beyond; a little, *little* fire of scented wood burns upon the lovely hearth; Persian prayer-rugs fill up empty places; a subtle perfume, mingled of sweets coming from East and West, catches the senses; of bric-à-brac of all sorts there is perhaps a superabundance, but the room, taken as a modern achievement, is an entire success.

The owner of it, Lady Patricia Gifford, gowned in a marvellous garment of lace and maize-colored pongee silk, is sitting in as easy a chair as the room contains,—easy chairs are an offence to the