

Why Patty Hildreth Powdered Her Hair

By Virginia Woodward Cloud

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IN A MAY twilight, on the eve of her wedding, of which none knew save herself and that other, Mistress Patty Hildreth, slim and young, passed down a garden path, holding her muslin gown away from the valley-lilies. There was one star above the tallest locust tree, and a thrush singing high over Barren Hill where a red breath of day remained. In a copse was a summer-house, and Patty Hildreth went thither and peered within, then slipped back into the cedar copse, and stood waiting. Presently there came the click of a spur, and a man in American uniform leaped the hedge and strode to the summer-house and entered. Then Mistress Hildreth stole forward and stood at the entrance. He held his hand out, and she laid hers in it.

"Why did you compel me to wait?"

"You saw me?" she said, flushing rosilily.

"Do you not know that I see everything?"

"Aye, indeed! But—I only wished that you should wait rather than I, Elva."

"Ah!" he laughed softly, "so even you, whom I deemed so innocent, are not free of coquetry!"

"It was not coquetry," said the girl. "I would not come at your summoning—I have never done such before. My aunt does not dream that I meet you here."

"Look at me!" said he, and she raised her eyes.

He laid her arms around his neck, and, gathering her to him, kissed her passionately. "Tell me again that you will not come at my summoning." But she was silent.

"You will come, Patty?"

"Yes!" said she.

"And why?"

"I would hear you say it first."

"Because you love me, and are to be made my wife on this very spot to-morrow night?"

"Yes."

"And that for a short time our marriage shall be a secret between us—save for the chaplain and the witnesses—"

"The witnesses!" exclaimed the girl fearfully. "Ah, if there must be another I would have only Judy Wicks, my maid, who is ever faithful concerning me."

"Judy Wicks be it," said he, "and Cartwright, your aunt's serving-man, whom I rescued from being beaten for drunkenness. He is bound to me; I shall hold him to it, never fear."

"I would not have it so!" she broke out suddenly.

"I have never approved such marriages, and would have ours wait until it could be solemnized in a fitting manner."

"And certainly so should I were not the reason a just one, and so closely concerning the movements of the Army that I cannot divulge it. Your aunt, Mistress Quipley, will thank me afterward. Knowing me to be more experienced in worldly matters she would but bid me do as I see best. At any time I may be sent away, and should aught happen to me then you could come to me as my wedded wife. Do you not agree?"

"Yes; oh, yes!" she murmured.

"Then let no such foolish doubts trouble you. I shall take Mistress Quipley into our confidence before long. Ah, Patty, Patty, do you not know that I cannot leave you without the certainty that you are my own?"

She leaned forward suddenly, and laid her hands upon his shoulders, scanning his face through the dusk.

"Elva, it seems so strange that you, so much older and wiser, should love me—for you do love me?"

He drew her to him, and in silence she read his answer, as in silence love hears the answer of the infinite.

Presently he leaped the hedge again; and Patty Hildreth heard the sound of his horse's hoofs grow fainter in the direction of the American camp.

That night Mistress Quipley and her niece retired early, for there was much preparation afoot for the next day, making ready for a dance to be given to the officers who should accompany Lafayette to Barren Hill.

"You are mainly like Sebastian, your father, Patty," said she, preceding her niece upstairs; "he was a dreamer, too, and soft-spoken, but a lion when roused. You have his quiet, but I fear you lack his spirit, Patty."

"It may be so, Aunt," said the girl; "I have never been wronged. It seems easy to forgive that which does but concern one's self"—she stopped short at the thought of wrong being worked to him she loved better than herself; and Mistress Quipley exclaimed:

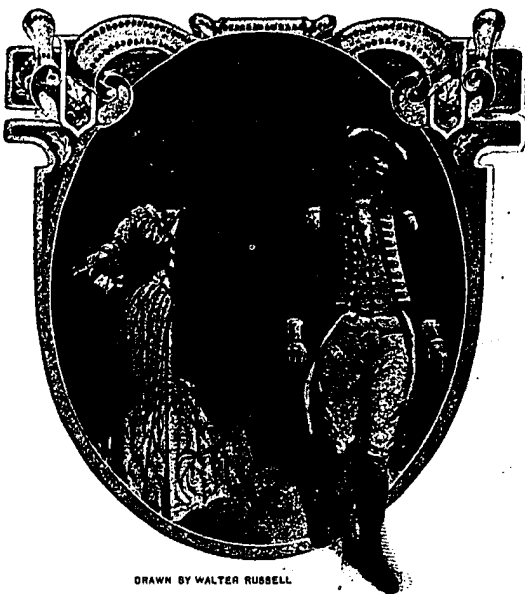
"La, Patty! what are you staring at now? You are the born image of Sebastian. I think the hall will be in fine trim to dance upon if 'tis gone over once. I'll set Cartwright to it early. Now, I'm glad of giving the poor fellows a dance. But you are over-grave for a girl, Patty. I would not have you so much set on that Captain Hasting. If a girl has but one string to her bow 'tis apt to snap. I'm saying naught against him: he is very masterful. But he seems a solitary sort. I like a body to mix with his fellowmen. Besides, he is not known here, and 'tis mainly as important to know whence a man comes as whither he is going."

"Captain Hasting is a gentleman, and one of General Lafayette's light-horse, Aunt," said Patty.

"Yes, yes," agreed Mistress Quipley, panting as she stopped to lock the linen-press; "his bow might have been learned at court. Of course I'll let you be about your suitors, child; but I see no reason why he should stop to talk with Cartwright in the cedar copse."

"Cartwright!" began Patty, then smiled to herself, remembering why Hasting talked with the serving-man.

"Aye, Judy saw them this very day. I do not like Cartwright, nor does Judy. I cannot tell if he be stupid or only feigning. I shall let Mr. Willis take him back



“Hasten! Lest I Yet Remember Naught Save That I Am an American”

and sell him at the shipping-wharf." Grumbling still, Mistress Quipley closed her door, and Patty went to her room, where Judy Wicks, who was dumb from a paralytic stroke suffered years before, awaited her.

Long after Patty Hildreth fell asleep, thinking of him whose wife she would be ere a second day should dawn, she was awakened by the odor of sandalwood.

She marked the casement shadow upon the low ceiling with a trail of locust breaking it, like moonlight on the water, and knew that the night without was saturated with the odor of locust bloom, and that within there was no sandalwood save that which was shut in the cedar chest of her Great-Aunt Hilary, which stood in the attic over her head. Suddenly awake with this strange odor assailing her, Patty remembered the old chest, and how, long before she had tucked her curls up, she once followed her aunt to the attic and was shown the contents of the chest, and told that one day all would be her own. She remembered a lavender taffeta and a yellow brocade petticoat, a court train with pink roses climbing upon it, and a gown of satin, so stiff that Patty peered within its blue cover and said:

"I'd keep this one, Aunt, against my wedding-day."

"Fy!" said her aunt, closing the chest with a click, "it is not seemly for a chit to chatter of such things."

"But surely these fine clothes may be made good use of, seeing Aunt Hilary is dead and gone to Heaven," said Patty, wondering.

"I said not so," exclaimed her aunt. "Tut, tut, Patty! What ails your tongue? It bodes no good to talk of treading in the shoes of those who are dead."

"And gone to Heaven," said the little girl softly. But her aunt said nothing, and her face was white as they came down the stairs that led from the loft together.

Long afterward Patty learned, through the chatter of a servant, that her great-aunt's affianced husband, Percival Craven, had eloped with a town beauty on the eve of their wedding-day and that Mistress Hildreth, rather than face the disgrace which she deemed her desertion to be, had taken her own life on the very night on which she was to have danced at her wedding.

At this time women were accustomed to awakening easily, perhaps at the sudden rush of hoofs upon the turf, or at the sharp rap of a musket, and now, on the eve of her wedding, Patty Hildreth was awakened by that strange odor of sandalwood.

She arose and went to the window. Looking out, she suddenly saw a figure appear in the moonlight under her window. It was the old dumb woman, who laid a finger upon her lips, signaling for both haste and silence. Wondering greatly, Patty hurried her clothes on and, wrapping a cloak around her, stole downstairs and out to where Judy Wicks stood waiting. Seizing the girl's arm, Judy drew her down the path toward the copse so quietly that their footsteps were noiseless upon the soft turf. In the copse Judy stopped and pointed to the summer-house, whence came the low murmur of voices and a faint gleam of light.

Now, Patty Hildreth had lived too near the neutral ground of both armies not to be alert and silent when necessary. She knew that Sir Henry Clinton held the city of Philadelphia, and that Washington was on the eve of dispatching Lafayette to take command of Barren Hill and to circumvent any probable move of the British. Everything that happened held significance for those who were in touch with the movements of the armies, and now Patty's heart beat wildly.

With the May wind rising about her she stole through the blackness of the cedars and peered between the vines into the summer-house.

Cartwright, the serving-man, stood with his back to the entrance, scrutinizing a paper by the light of a lantern. Opposite, with his gaze bent upon Cartwright, sat Elva Hasting, Patty Hildreth's affianced husband.

In her first joyful start of surprise the girl nearly exclaimed outright; but Judy Wicks grasped her arm and forced her to hear Cartwright say vehemently:

"I shall not risk my skin by going a moment before midnight. The last time was too close a shave."

"It must be done before dawn or 'tis too late; Clinton is holding back to hear," said Hasting.

"How can I go with the dance on, and my cursed waiting to be got through with? Dancing attendance on these rebels!" exclaimed Cartwright angrily.

"Did you undertake it for child's play?" retorted the other. "The time is now. Everything plays into our hands. You must feign intoxication as before, and then make off. This will take you past the American sentry"—he handed the man a folded paper and Cartwright examined it.

"Lafayette!" he exclaimed. "Forged! By Jove, you're too clever, my lord!"

"Take to the river as you did before," said Hasting, "by the boat in the stream here, then swim. There will be pickets toward Philadelphia, so have a care."

"He talks as though 'twere easy as patrolling!" said the other. "Try it once, my lord, and get off with your neck, and you'll not say 'Go' so easy!"

"If you wish to draw back there is time."

"And you get the glory and the pay, too? Humph, we've had enough of that!" said Cartwright.

"Then harken! The attack is to be made early the coming morning. If you fail you know what awaits you. You made it plain before that Lafayette will have but twenty-one hundred men on Barren Hill?"

"Yes."

"Then write!"

Hasting took a small inkstand and a quill from his pocket, and, after studying some lines marked upon a paper, handed the pen to the other and dictated:

"Left wing flanked by fifty Indians, . . . pickets in the woods towards Philadelphia. . . . Six hundred militia *via* White Marsh. . . . Make march circuitous and attack with five thousand from rear. . . . Send second division to left bank of river."

"Now"—he looked sternly at the man—"don't trust to memory. This paper must go."

"Aye, as it's not in your writing," said Cartwright. He folded the paper into a wad and forced it into the bowl of his pipe and covered it with tobacco. "If there's a slip I'll light my pipe," he said grimly, "or we'll both —" he made a gesture toward his throat, but the eye of the other did not waver.

"There can be none unless one turns King's evidence," said Hasting, "and I could have given you to the galleys long since had I not had better use for you."

"Mayhap one's as safe there as in your pay, sir. Oh, you've been clever, my lord, but Mistress Patty's the cleverest trick yet. You've got more information in coming and going around this place than in any other way. But I'll take an oath on't, you're caught this time. You're in love with Mistress Patty, sir, or I'm blind. Well, it's a good enough move. She's heiress here, and you'll need funds to back you soon!"

"Quite right," said Hasting immovably. "I intend to marry Mistress Hildreth this coming midnight on this very spot, with yourself as witness."

"Whew!" breathed the other, staring.

"Exactly. There is no need for secrecy after 'tis done. But 'twas the only way to clinch matters, or Mistress Quipley would have protested. Besides—"

"Besides," said Cartwright with a chuckle, "if the slip comes she won't inform on her husband. Oh, you're clever, my lord! You always touch the top notch! But have a care, sir! Who'll marry you?"

"The chaplain. He will be silent as long as 'tis necessary, which is only till after 'tis done." Suddenly Hasting stretched out his arm: "Hark you, Martin; I shall be great one day!"

"And where'll I be, sir?"

"Oh, you'll reap your pay, never fear," said Hasting. Then he arose and blew the light out.

There was not a sound in the cedar copse as the two men disappeared—one in the direction of the servants' quarters and the other toward the American camp.

All that night Patty lay upon her bed with the odor of sandalwood stealing upon her, together with the memory of her Great-Aunt Hilary's fate; with Judy kneeling beside her, yet finding no comfort to give.

There was stir and bustle at Mistress Quipley's place the next night. The candles were lighted, and servants flew hither and thither.

It had seemed that day that Patty Hildreth could not find enough for Cartwright to do. He was under her eye every moment, waxing floors, polishing brass, wiping glasses until even Mistress Quipley cried:

"La, Patty, are you afraid the creature's legs will rust that you keep them moving so?"

At night, when the fiddlers were tuning to the harpsichord, Patty came down the stairs with folds of shining brocade sweeping behind her. Her arms and neck were bare, and her hair was piled high. Patty's eyes rested upon Elva Hasting; then she smiled upon the officers who stood bowing at the foot of the stairs, and took the arm of a young cousin, one of Washington's aids, and passed to the head of the hall, where the first cotillon was forming.

"Now, what might this mean?" spoke Mistress Quipley. "Patty Hildreth has put on her Great-Aunt Hilary's wedding frock! Albeit she has vowed over and again never would she touch it! Well, well, youth will be perverse, and I own 'tis vastly becoming, though better suited to a court dame than a young girl."

Long afterward tales were told of the beauty and gayety of Mistress Patty Hildreth on that eventful night, and of how she danced. But no word passed between herself and Captain Hasting, save that, when once they met in a dance, bending he whispered, "At twelve, remember!" and she murmured, "At twelve!"

WHY PATTY HILDRETH POWDERED HER HAIR

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8)

Shortly before the midnight dance Patty slipped out, and, wrapping a cloak about her, walked rapidly toward the cedar copse. At the entrance of the summerhouse a hand reached for hers, and Hasting's voice said: "Are you ready?"

And she answered: "I am ready."

Then the Captain struck a light and set a bit of candle aflame. Near him was Cartwright, and between them was Patty Hildreth, with the cloak falling from her arms. But so white did she look that Hasting said: "Are you afraid?"

And she answered: "I am not afraid."

"Where is your woman?" said he. "The chaplain will come in a moment."

"She is on the way," said Patty Hildreth. But even as she spoke there came a sound which caused Hasting to clap his hand to his side. Silently, as if she had risen through the darkness around her, Judy Wicks, the dumb woman, stood in the entrance.

Behind her was a company of American soldiers, with every musket pointing forward.



The candle-light showed the ashen, shaking form of Cartwright, who flung his hands blindly outward at the sight; the motionless attitude of Mistress Hildreth; and Elva Hasting standing as though turned to stone with his eyes upon her.

The officer in command saluted Hasting.

"Captain," he said, "Mistress Hildreth's note reached us just in time. She avers that you have discovered the man who has been serving as British spy. I have an order for his arrest. Is this the man?"

"It is the man," said Hasting.

The order for arrest was given and Cartwright was instantly bound.

"It was clever, Captain," said the officer. "No one dreamed that the leak was here."

Hasting bowed silently; but Patty spoke:

"Gentlemen, the man was to have made his way by the river. His directions, we believe, are in the bowl of his pipe. He also carries a forged passport, the work of a hand evidently accustomed to forgery and crime." Then she added in a murmur to Hasting alone: "The chaplain was also notified that 'twas but a ruse and his services were not required."

Cartwright was marched out between the soldiers, and as he passed Hasting he attempted to speak, but a musket forced him into the darkness. Hasting turned toward Patty Hildreth; but she pointed toward the river, saying:

"Hasten! lest I yet remember naught save that I am an American."

A moment later Mistress Hildreth stood in the moonlight harkening to a dual sound: the tramping of the soldiers with their prisoner, and the soft splash of oars, which told that Hasting was making away by means of the river.

At midnight Patty Hildreth danced the "Sir Roger de Coverley," flying down the middle with her dark eyes shining, and Mistress Quipley was delighted by the liveliness evinced by her niece.

But only Judy Wicks knew that for the remainder of that night Patty crouched in her window, watching the lights on Barren Hill, and praying beneath her breath for God's mercy.



Early the next morning, to Mistress Quipley's astonishment, her niece, accompanied by Judy Wicks, went across to Barren Hill and craved an audience of General Lafayette. Of what took place no one ever knew. Judy Wicks waited outside the tent until her mistress appeared, and then the Marquis de Lafayette bowed and kissed her hand, and said, albeit in his broken English:

"Because of the information you have brought, mademoiselle, I can avert the attack. The prisoner is in solitary confinement, and will be given no opportunity of implicating that other, who is safe ere this. For your sake his dishonor shall remain unknown. I comprehend your heroic courage, and that you could not have acted otherwise."

On that morning Sir Henry Clinton made his attack upon Barren Hill which was so skillfully averted by Lafayette's rapid manœuvre. At the same time it was rumored that Captain Hasting was missing from camp; but, as a boat was found overturned in the river and an American uniform entangled in the willow roots, it was believed that he met his death from drowning the night before Clinton's attack.

Judy Wicks knew that shortly afterward her mistress received a sealed packet from a British war-vessel then at Philadelphia, and that it contained a gold chain which had belonged to Patty Hildreth.

The British spy who had served as workman on Mistress Quipley's place was shot on the twentieth of May, when Lafayette retreated to Valley Forge.

It was soon after this that Mistress Quipley found fault with her niece—first, for giving away her Great-Aunt Hilary's cedar chest, together with its fine contents, and all because she could not endure the odor of sandalwood; and second, because Patty Hildreth took to powdering her hair.

"She was ever close-mouthed and perverse," said Mistress Quipley, "and Judy Wicks makes her more so. 'Tis too great vanity for a girl to powder her hair, albeit becoming to the complexion."

But although they wondered that Patty Hildreth should in her youth powder her pretty hair, none knew why she did so until soon afterward, when she fell ill and died suddenly—of a weak heart, so the doctors said, although declaring it was an odd malady for so young a girl.

Then the old dumb woman, weeping beside her with strange, inarticulate noises, lifted the beautiful hair, and showed how the powder had been used but to conceal its sudden whiteness, which was even like that of age.