

CHAPTER XIX

PATSY INDULGES IN EAVESDROPPING

Miss Patricia Doyle awakened at daybreak next morning with a throbbing toothache. She wasn't accustomed to such pains and found it hard to bear. She tried the application of a hot-water bag, and the tooth ached harder; she tried a cold compress, and it jumped with renewed activity. So she dressed herself and walked the floor, with the persistent ache as an intimate companion.

She tried to find a cavity in the tooth, but it seemed perfectly sound. Evidently she had caught cold and the wicked molar was signaling the fact.

To be patient under the torture of a toothache was a virtue Patsy did not possess. Louise and Beth, to whom she appealed, were sorry for her, but could not relieve the pain. After breakfast Uncle John ordered her to drive to town and see a dentist.

"Have it pulled, or filled, or something," he said. "The dentist will know what to do."

So James drove Patsy to town, where they arrived about nine o'clock this Monday morning. The only dentist at Elmwood was Dr. Squiers, so the girl

ran up the flight of stairs to his office, which was located over the hardware store.

The pain had eased on the journey, and now the thought of having the offending tooth pulled was weighing heavily upon Patsy's mind. The door of Dr. Squiers's office stood ajar, and she hesitated whether to enter or not.

The dentist's reception room was divided from his operating room by a thin wooden partition, and as Patsy was deciding whether to employ Dr. Squiers's services or not she heard high words coming from behind the partition, and the voice was that of the Honorable Erastus Hopkins.

Softly she slid into the outer room and sank into a chair.

"But you're the clerk of the election, Squiers; you can't deny that," Hopkins was saying in a blustering, imperious voice.

"That's true enough," answered the dentist, more calmly.

"Then you've got the registration books in your possession."

"I admit that," was the reply. "But you're asking me to incriminate myself, 'Rast. If the thing was discovered it would mean prison for both of us."

"Fiddlesticks!" cried the irascible Hopkins. "These things are done every day, and no one's the wiser for it. It's merely a part of the political game."

"I'm afraid, 'Rast," said Dr. Squiers. "Honest Injun, I'm afraid."

"What are you 'fraid of? I've got the other clerks all fixed, and they'll stand by us. All you need do is to add these sixty-six names to the registration list, and then we'll vote 'em without opposition and win out."

Patsy gave a gasp, which she tried to stifle. The toothache was all forgotten.

"Where are these men?" inquired Dr. Squiers, thoughtfully.

"They're over at the mill. Marshall got 'em from all over the country, and they'll be set to work today, so everything will seem reg'lar."

"Where do they sleep and eat?" inquired the doctor.

"Forty sleep in Hayes's barn, and the other twenty-six in the stock loft over the planing mill. Marshall's got a commissary department and feeds 'em regular rations, like so many soldiers. Of course I'm paying for all this expense," acknowledged Mr. Hopkins, somewhat regretfully.

"And do you suppose these sixty-six votes will turn the scale?" asked Dr. Squiers.

"They're sure to. We finished the last canvass yesterday, and according to our figures Forbes has about eighteen votes the best of us. That's getting it down pretty close, but we may as well make up our minds we're beaten if we don't vote the men over at the mill. Marshall could have got me a hundred if necessary, but sixty-six is more than enough. Say Forbes has twice eighteen for his plurality, instead of eighteen; these sixty-six for me would wipe that out and let us win in a walk."

When Hopkins ceased there was a brief silence. Perhaps Dr. Squiers was thinking.

"I simply must have those votes, Doc," resumed the Representative.

"It's the only way I can win."

"You've made a bungle of the whole campaign," said Squiers, bitterly.

"That's a lie. I've done a lot of clever work. But these infernal city girls came down here and stirred up all the trouble."

"You made a mistake pushing that sign issue. The girls beat you on that."

"If it hadn't been signs it might have been something worse. But I ain't

beaten yet, Doc. Squiers. This deal is going to win. It's a trick the boarding-school misses won't understand until after they've cut their eye-teeth in politics."

"There's a pretty heavy penalty against false registration," observed the dentist, gloomily.

"There's no penalty unless we're found out, and there ain't the ghost of a chance of that. The books are in your hands; I got all the clerks fixed. Not a question will even be raised. I know it. Do you suppose I'd risk state's prison myself, if I wasn't sure?"

"Look here, 'Rast," said Squiers, doggedly, "you're making a tool of me in this campaign. Why should I be used and abused just to elect Erastus Hopkins, I'd like to know. You sacrificed me when I might have been Sheriff."

"You're well paid for that, Doc."

"And now you want me to put my neck in a noose for your advantage. I won't do it, 'Rast, and that's a fact."

Mr. Hopkins coughed.

"How much, Doc?" he inquired.

The dentist was silent.

"State the figure. But for mercy's sake don't bleed me any more than you can help. This fight has cost me a pretty penny already."

"I don't want your money," growled Squiers.

"Yes you do, Doc. I know you better than you know yourself. The trouble with you is, you'll want too much."

Squiers laughed bitterly.

"Is Marshall to be trusted?" he asked.

"Of course. If he said a word he'd lose his job as manager. Marshall's all right. There's nothing to worry about, Doc."

Patsy's tooth wasn't aching a bit. But her heart was throbbing as madly as the tooth ever did, and fortunately there was no pain connected with the throbbing--only joy.

"It ought to be worth two thousand dollars, 'Rast," said the dentist.

"What! In addition to all other expenses?"

"Why, man; it means the election. It means your whole future. If you're

defeated now, you're a back number in this district, and you know it."

"It's too much, Doc. On my word it is."

"It's too little, come to think of it. I'll make it three thousand."

"Doc!"

"If you don't close with me, 'Rast, by the jumping Jupiter, I'll make it four thousand," cried the dentist, with exasperation.

"Say twenty-five hundred, Doc."

"Right on the nail. Give me your check here--this minute."

"And you'll enter the names in the books?"

"Before you leave the office. Have you got the list?"

"Yes; in my pocket," said Mr. Hopkins.

"Then make out your check and I'll get the books."

There was a stir behind the partition and a sound of chairs scraping the floor. Patsy slid out the door and flew down the stairs at the imminent danger of breaking her neck. James was seated in the buggy outside,

engaged in rumination.

Patsy bounded in beside him and startled him.

"Drive for your life!" she cried. "Drive for home!"

He whipped up the spirited horse and they dashed away. Presently the man asked, with a grin:

"Did it hurt much, Miss Patsy?"

"Did what hurt, James?"

"The tooth pullin', Miss Patsy."

"The tooth wasn't pulled," answered the girl, sweetly. "It didn't need it, James. The only thing that was pulled was the Honorable Erastus's leg."