

## CHAPTER III

### AN ATTRACTIVE GIRL

On Saturday they were treated to a genuine surprise, for when the omnibus drew up before the hotel entrance it brought Arthur Weldon and his girl-wife, Louise, who was Uncle John's eldest niece. It also brought "the Cherub," a wee dimpled baby hugged closely in the arms of Inez, its Mexican nurse.

Patsy and Beth shrieked in ecstasy as they rushed forward to smother "Toodlums," as they irreverently called the Cherub, with kisses. Inez, a handsome, dark-eyed girl, relinquished her burden cheerfully to the two adoring "aunties," while Uncle John kissed Louise and warmly shook the hand of her youthful husband.

"What in the world induced you to abandon your beloved ranch?" inquired Mr. Merrick.

"Don't ask me, sir!" replied Arthur, laughing at the elder gentleman's astonishment. He was a trim young fellow, with a clean-cut, manly face and frank, winning manners.

"It's sort of between hay and grass with us, you know," he explained.

"Walnuts all marketed and oranges not ready for the pickers. All our

neighbors have migrated, this way or that, for their regular winter vacations, and after you all left, Louise and I began to feel lonely. So at breakfast this morning we decided to flit. At ten o'clock we caught the express, and here we are--in time for lunch. I hope it's ready, Uncle John."

It was; but they must get their rooms and settle the baby in her new quarters before venturing to enter the dining room. So they were late for the midday meal and found themselves almost the only guests in the great dining hall.

As they sat at table, chatting merrily together, Arthur asked:

"What are you staring at, Patsy?"

"A lovely girl," said she. "One of the loveliest girls I have ever seen. Don't look around, Arthur; it might attract their attention."

"How many girls are there?"

"Two; and a lady who seems to be their mother. The other girl is pretty, too, but much younger than her sister--or friend, for they do not resemble one another much. They came in a few minutes ago and are seated at the table in the opposite corner."

"New arrivals, I suppose," remarked Uncle John, who from his position

could observe the group.

"No," said Patsy; "their waitress seems to know them well. But I've never before seen them in the hotel."

"We are always early at meal time," explained Beth, "and to-day these people are certainly late. But they are pretty girls, Patsy. For once I concur in your judgment."

"You arouse my curiosity," said Arthur, speaking quietly, so as not to be overheard in the far corner. "If I hear more ecstatic praises of these girls I shall turn around and stare them out of countenance."

"Don't," said Louise. "I'm glad your back is toward them, Arthur, for it preserves you from the temptation to flirt."

"Oh, as for that, I do not need to turn around in order to see pretty girls," he replied.

"Thank you, Arthur," said Patsy, making a face at him. "Look me over all you like, and flirt if you want to. I'm sure Louise won't object."

"Really, Patsy, you're not bad to look at," he retorted, eyeing her critically. "Aside from your red hair, the pug nose and the freckles, you have many excellent qualities. If you didn't squint--"

"Squint!"

"What do you call that affection of your eyes?"

"That," she said, calmly eating her dessert, "was a glance of scorn--burning, bitter scorn!"

"I maintain it was a squint," declared Arthur.

"That isn't her only expression," announced Uncle John, who loved these little exchanges of good-humored banter. "On Monday I will show you Patsy as a terror-stricken damsel in distress."

"Also Beth, still more distressful," added Patsy; and then they told Louise and Arthur about the picture.

"Fine!" he cried. "I'm deeply gratified that my own relatives--"

"By marriage."

"I am gratified that my secondhand cousins have been so highly honored. I'd rather see a good moving picture than the best play ever produced."

"You'll see a good one this time," asserted Patsy, "for we are the stars."

"I think that unscrupulous Mr. Werner deserves a reprimand," said Louise.

"Oh, he apologized," explained Beth. "But I'm sure he'd take the same liberty again if he had the chance."

"He admits that his love of art destroys his sense of propriety," said Patsy.

As they rose from the table Arthur deliberately turned to view the party in the other corner, and then to the amazement of his friends he coolly walked over and shook the elder lady's hand with evident pleasure. Next moment he was being introduced to the two girls. The three cousins and their Uncle John walked out of the dining hall and awaited Arthur Weldon in the lobby.

"It is some old acquaintance, of course," said Louise. "Arthur knows a tremendous lot of people and remembers everyone he ever has met."

When he rejoined them he brought the lady and the two beautiful girls with him, introducing Mrs. Montrose as one of his former acquaintances in New York, where she had been a near neighbor to the Weldons. The girls, who proved to be her nieces instead of her daughters, were named Maud and Florence Stanton, Maud being about eighteen years of age and Florence perhaps fifteen. Maud's beauty was striking, as proved by Patsy's admiration at first sight; Florence was smaller and darker, yet very dainty and witching, like a Dresden shepherdess.

The sisters proved rather shy at this first meeting, being content to exchange smiles with the other girls, but their aunt was an easy conversationalist and rambled on about the delights of Hollywood and southern California until they were all in a friendly mood. Among other things Mrs. Montrose volunteered the statement that they had been at the hotel for several weeks, but aside from that remark disclosed little of their personal affairs. Presently the three left the hotel and drove away in an automobile, having expressed a wish to meet their new friends again and become better acquainted with them.

"I was almost startled at running across Mrs. Montrose out here," said Arthur. "After father's death, when I gave up the old home, I lost track of the Montroses; but I seem to remember that old Montrose went to the happy hunting grounds and left a widow, but no children. I imagine these people are wealthy, as Montrose was considered a successful banker. I'll write to Duggins and inquire about them."

"Duggins seems to know everything," remarked Louise.

"He keeps pretty good track of New York people, especially of the old families," replied her husband.

"I can't see what their history matters to us," observed Patsy. "I like to take folks as I find them, without regard to their antecedents or finances. Certainly those Stanton girls are wonderfully attractive and

ladylike."

But now the baby claimed their attention and the rest of that day was passed in "visiting" and cuddling the wee Toodlums, who seemed to know her girl aunties and greeted them with friendly coos and dimpled smiles.

On Sunday they took a motor trip through the mountain boulevards and on their way home passed the extensive enclosure of the Continental Film Company. A thriving village has been built up at this place, known as Film City, for many of those employed by the firm prefer to live close to their work. Another large "plant" of the same concern is located in the heart of Hollywood.

As they passed through Film City Uncle John remarked:

"We are invited to visit this place and witness the making of a motion picture. I believe it would prove an interesting sight."

"Let us go, by all means," replied Arthur. "I am greatly interested in this new industry, which seems to me to be still in its infancy. The development of the moving picture is bound to lead to some remarkable things in the future, I firmly believe."

"So do I," said Uncle John. "They'll combine the phonograph with the pictures, for one thing, so that the players, instead of being silent, will speak as clearly as in real life. Then we'll have the grand operas,

by all the most famous singers, elaborately staged; and we'll be able to see and hear them for ten cents, instead of ten dollars. It will be the same with the plays of the greatest actors."

"That would open up a curious complication," asserted Louise. "The operas would only be given once, before the camera and the recorder. Then what would happen to all the high-priced opera singers?"

"They would draw royalties on all their productions, instead of salaries," replied Arthur.

"Rather easy for the great artists!" observed Patsy. "One performance--and the money rolling in for all time to come."

"Well, they deserve it," declared Beth. "And think of what the public would gain! Instead of having to suffer during the performances of incompetent actors and singers, as we do to-day, the whole world would be able to see and hear the best talent of the ages for an insignificant fee. I hope your prediction will come true, Uncle John."

"It's bound to," he replied, with confidence. "I've read somewhere that Edison and others have been working on these lines for years, and although they haven't succeeded yet, anything possible in mechanics is bound to be produced in time."