

## PASHA.

## THE STORY OF A PARROT.



hero's first home was in a Brazilian forest. His second home was a far different one, though it was as beautiful in its way. It was an old, red-brick house, somewhere in the flat county of Lincolnshire. A large and stately house it was, too, for it was built in those famous days when good Queen Bess did rule. On the sunny side of this house was a garden—such a garden!—enclosed by high red-brick walls, as mellow and rich in colouring as the plums and apricots which used to hang on them. This garden seemed fragrant at all seasons, as if the sweets of many past summers yet lingered there. In the centre of the garden was a grass plot, where stood an ancient sun-dial. A huge mulberry tree had, in its impudence, spread so far and wide that it had thrown the old timekeeper for ever into the shade. Near the dial was a square pond, flanked with a flight of slippery green steps. Its waters used to be full of goldfish, which would crowd round scattered bread-crumbs as eagerly as the chickens in the yard, when you call "Cluck, cluck."

Indoors, the house was almost as beautiful as the garden. The rooms were dark, it is true, for the oak furniture was black with old age and with much rubbing; but sunlight or firelight caught here and there, on brass, or silver, or china, making gleams of radiance in the gloom. But, always, the brightest, cosiest room in that house was Patty's parlour. Up the broad staircase you went, reaching the corridor, where hung the portraits of Lady Patty's ancestors. Straight in front of you was a curtained door, and if you had slipped inside the room into which that door opened, you would have been almost sure to find Lady Patty herself in her parlour.

And what was her ladyship like? Tall and stately, dressed in velvet train, with a bunch of housewife's keys hanging at her girdle. The keys of mysterious cabinets which hid all manner of family secrets? Ah, no! Our Lady Patty was far different! She was but a tiny, fragile girl, with a wee, pale face and a pair of soft grey eyes. Sad eyes, withal, and no wonder, for Lady Patty could not glide about in trailing, silken gown. When she walked—which was seldom enough—you might have heard stump, stump, on the polished floor; or bump, bump, on the carpet. When she did walk, it was but at best a hobble; for Lady Patty was a cripple. As the days went by she used her crutches less and less, and seemed content to sit in the deep bow-window of her parlour. This window looked across the park, where she could see the deer flitting amongst the trees; she could watch the birds in the old elms—rooks, and starlings, and crowds of fussy sparrows. Then from a smaller window, facing south, Patty could look down into the garden, where black-birds, and robins, and finches were busy amongst the fruit trees. But our Patty was like a caged bird all the while; she could never run along the mossy paths, or dive for warm strawberries, hiding under their green leaves. She would never make the old garden resound with childish laughter, as the children who had played there in the days gone by had done. But birds in their cages are sometimes happy enough, and so was Lady Patty. She was surrounded with dolls, and toys, and books, and, best of all, with many

kind friends. But what she longed for most of all was a living, laughing playmate, for Patty had neither brother nor sister; and there were others, besides the little girl, who longed for this too.

And now I am about to introduce you to the hero of my story. There came a day when Uncle Stephen, who was a sailor, and had just returned from one of his voyages, brought his little lame niece a playfellow—a live playfellow. It was Pasha, the parrot. Such a jolly fellow was he, all decked out in red, and blue, and crimson; and so full of his tricks and his whims!

What a change the bird brought into the life of Patty! How she learnt to tease and to coax him! How she would laugh when the Pasha squeaked out—"Hurry up, me boys," or, "Wo-ho, steady all," or, "Give us a drop of port," or, "I've got my weather eye on you!"

The sailors on board Uncle Stephen's ship had taught Mr. Poll all sorts of fun, and he was so clever and knowing that hardly a week passed without his picking up some new nonsense. He made the sombre old house quite lively once more with his screams. It must be confessed he was a noisy companion, as a rule; but if his little mistress said, "Pasha must be quiet, poor Patty's head aches!" the wise bird would arch his neck, click his beak, take several deliberate steps along his perch, and finally call out solemnly, "Poor Patty." After which he would be silent for a long time, as if he knew well what his mistress wished.

Ah, happy bird! It is not given to all of us to cheer sad hearts as you cheered Lady Patty! But at length there came a time when the Pasha missed his beloved mistress. There was no one now to tease him or to laugh at his tricks. Day after day passed, and the forlorn bird was left alone in Patty's parlour, where the summer sun, hot and bright, shot in on his gilded cage. But the world was a chilly place now to poor Polly, for the warmth of his little mistress's love was gone for ever. Lady Patty had been hushed to sleep from all her pain, and had awaked to find herself in a sunnier garden than even that one she had so often gazed at from her parlour window. The breezes that blew on her now were balmy from the fields of Paradise. But the little girl's thoughts had often been with her whimsical playfellow, even during her painful hours; and almost the last words she said here were, "Has anyone remembered to give Pasha his chillies to-day?"

The little coffin had been laid in the earth, strewed all around with flowers, and Lady Patty's father returned to a grand but solitary home. Then there came a day when his lordship decided to visit, once more, the sunny upstairs parlour, which was now so very empty. He drew back the curtain from the door, and just as he stepped across the threshold, poor perplexed Polly, who for a long while past had felt himself very neglected, put his head sagely on one side, clicked his beak, and then, in a very decided way, said, "Poor Patty!"

On hearing that harsh voice call the sweet name his lordship started across the room. Was his first impulse to ring the bird's neck? If it was he did not yield to it; he rang the bell violently and stood before the mantel, with his back to the cage.

"Poor Patty!" shrieked the bird persistently, and then after a little pause, "I've got my weather eye on you!"

Before many seconds the servant appeared. "Take that screeching brute away directly," said his lordship, pointing towards Pasha

"Take him down to the lodge. Tell Jenkins to see it fed and looked after."

The man departed with the gilded cage in his arms.

Ah! Patty, did you know, dear, that your old playmate was in disgrace? So Pasha took up his abode at the park gates, and as Jenkins was deaf, and his mother, the only other inmate of the lodge, was cross, who was there that cared to make a friend of poor Polly?

But there was one who, for the love she bore Patty, took pity on the Pasha before long, and carried him away to her own house, and loved and cared for the bird, for the lame child's sake. But in time she, too, would laugh at his funny ways and his consequential airs. Yet, strange to say, after that fatal day when he had called for Patty in his lordship's presence, this curious bird was never heard to speak that name again. He talked as much as ever; he was as funny, and whimsical, and fussy as ever, but from that day forward for many years he was never known to say that sweet name. Had the faithless bird left all remembrances of past happy days behind him in Patty's parlour?

The Pasha's mistress, who has grown an elderly lady too, has lately gone to live in Patty's old home; and so, by a strange coincidence, the parrot was taken back there; for though he was on his last legs, his mistress was still very fond of the old bird. She had never forgotten Patty, though she believed he had done so long ago.

Lady Patty's parlour looked less changed than any other part of the house on the day when this lady arrived there. It was a gusty October afternoon, but the sun was making its way, by fits and starts, through the branches of the remaining elm trees, and there were plenty of birds to fuss about amongst the half-withered leaves.

"I'll take my tea up here," said the new mistress to a servant; "and bring the parrot up; he will be company to me," she added.

Her thoughts were very much with Patty this afternoon; she almost fancied she could see the little girl's pale face, and hear her and the parrot chattering with each other.

Presently the maid returned, carrying the gaudy, gilded cage with the ancient bird inside it. She placed it on the wide window seat, and proceeded to prepare the tea.

"Ah! Pasha, old boy," said his mistress, opening the cage door, "you little think where you are! Patty's parlour has no sad memories for you!"

But the old bird apparently was deep in meditations of his own. He never noticed the open door, or attempted to make a slow tour of the room, as he usually did when permission was given. What he did do was to turn round and round excitedly on his perch and to click his beak sharply. Then all suddenly he screeched out: "Poor Patty! poor Patty!"

The next minute Pasha dropped from his perch on to the floor of his cage, and the old lady, starting forward, picked up—a dead bird.

So now there is only one heart left who treasures the memory of Lady Patty.

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From the top of an oak cabinet in Lady Patty's parlour the Pasha still surveys the room, though with a stony stare. His end was honourable, for he was stuffed by a London ornithologist and arranged in a glass case, with a wax chilli in his beak. Thus life is as whimsical as Pasha the parrot!

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