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Patricia

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Imprint

This book is part of TREDITION CLASSICS

Author: Emilia [pseud.] Elliott
Cover design: Buchgut, Berlin - Germany

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg - Germany
ISBN: 978-3-8424-7445-1

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PATRICIA
BY EMILIA ELLIOTT

1910

It is a deep regret to the publishers that Miss Emilia Elliott, the creator of the charming character of Patricia, did not live to see this book in print, nor to enjoy the welcome that they are confident it will be accorded.

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CHAPTER I

PATRICIA'S FATIGUING DAY

Patricia sat on the back fence, almost hidden by the low-spreading branches of an old apple-tree. Below her, on the grass, lay a small, curly, black dog, his brown, trustful eyes fixed confidently on Patricia.

"Really, you know," the child said, gravely, "it's a very perplexing situation. Aunt Julia needn't have been so inhospitable. Why didn't I wait until Daddy got home! Daddy's so much more—convincible. But it's no use now; Daddy never goes back on Aunt Julia."

Patricia slipped from the fence. "I rather think you and I'd better go down to the back meadow to talk things over; it's getting pretty near sewing-time."

Out in the meadow, flat on her back in the long grass, Patricia set herself to the task of solving this perplexing situation.

Half an hour earlier she had appeared back from one of her desultory rambles, accompanied by this most forlorn of all forlorn dogs, explaining that she had met him on the road, and he had followed her home.

It was no unusual occurrence, but when Patricia added that he didn't seem to belong to anybody, and she thought she would keep him, Miss Kirby promptly and firmly protested.

To Patricia's pleading, that he was poor and lame and homeless, that Cæsar, the pointer, was the only dog they had now, and he was too old to play much, Miss Kirby had proved adamant. Patricia might give her foundling a good meal, but keep him she *could not*.

Whereupon, Patricia, having given the wanderer what was in reality several meals condensed into one, had retired with him to think things over.

"It really seems as if you'd been meant for me," she told him now; "I found you. I can't see why Aunt Julia won't look at things in a proper light. I'm afraid she hurt your feelings. Aunt Julia generally means pretty well, but she's apt to speak out sort of quick. We Kirbys mostly do. I wonder what your name is?"

The dog stretched comfortably out in the warm grass, quite as happy and contented as if he had been everything he wasn't, sat up suddenly, with a short little bark, as if trying to give the desired information.

Rolling over, Patricia, her chin in her hands, surveyed him carefully. "You aren't very handsome just now; but then, I know lots of people who aren't very good looking. I don't see why that saying Aunt Julia is so fond of—about 'Handsome is as handsome does'—shouldn't apply to dogs as well as people. All the same, you are a very mixed number sort of a dog: you've got one and three-quarters ears, three and one-half legs,—at least you don't use that front paw very much,—and half a tail; and your hair is rather—patchy. But inside, I'm sure you're all right. And you have *beautiful* eyes; *they're* all there, too."

The dog blinked back at her soberly, wagging his abbreviated tail in apologetic fashion.

"You've simply got to have a home," Patricia went on; "and it's up to me to find you one. But I think you'll have to have a bath first, and your paw bandaged."

Jumping up, Patricia darted back to the house, and around to the side door, leading to her father's office. Presently, she reappeared with a cake of antiseptic soap, a box of salve, a roll of bandage, a pair of scissors, and a bath-towel; with these gathered up in the skirt of her frock she led the way down to the brook, followed by a most unsuspecting small dog.

Ten minutes later that same small dog—decidedly sadder and wetter, if not wiser—lay shivering on the sunny bank, while Patricia rubbed him vigorously with one of her aunt's largest bath-towels.

Then the cut paw was salved and bandaged, and the most hopelessly tangled knots of curls cut away. After which, Patricia, sitting back on heels, studied her charge approvingly.

"If Aunt Julia could see you *now*! Why didn't I do all this first? But—well, Aunt Julia's made up her mind; and she isn't exactly the changey kind. I wonder if you'd like it at the Millers'? They've got a lot of children, but they're ever so nice children! They've three dogs now, so one more oughtn't to count—and you'd have plenty of company."

The dog, whose only present anxiety was to feel dry once more, merely rolled over on his back by way of answer.

"Oh, but you mustn't!" Patricia protested. "You'll get all dirty again. I know it's horrid to feel too clean, but, you see, it's so necessary to make a good first impression! I reckon it was the first impression that made all the trouble with Aunt Julia this morning. Come on, we'll start right off; it's a pretty long walk to the Millers'."

They went 'cross-lots, stopping for more than one romp by the way, one quite as light-hearted and irresponsible as the other; though behind Patricia lay more than one neglected task, and before her companion stretched a possibly homeless future.

It was a nearly perfect June day, the blue sky overhead just flecked with soft, fleecy white clouds, and with enough breeze stirring to lift Patricia's short brown curls and fan her sunburned cheeks.

Out on the highroad the wild roses were in bloom, and the air was full of soft summer sounds; the very birds hopping lightly about from fence to fence had a holiday air—and to Patricia there was something very friendly in the inquisitive cock of their pert little heads, as they stopped now and then to inspect her.

"Oh!" she cried, joyously, reaching up on tiptoe to gather a spray of wild roses just above her head, "aren't we having the loveliest time, Dog?"

Her companion wagged agreeingly; he was, at any rate. The hot sun on his back felt exceedingly good; he began to entertain hopes of actually feeling really and thoroughly dry again—some time.

"That's the Millers' house—the brown one, beyond the curve," Patricia told him. And as it was the only house in sight, he had no trouble in locating it.

"I'm sure you'll be happy there," Patricia added. "It's funny there aren't any children, or dogs, about. There's Mrs. Miller."

Mrs. Miller was hanging out a wash. "Patricia Kirby!" She pushed back her sunbonnet, the better to survey the child. "Where is your hat? You're redder'n one of my big pinies!"

Patricia put her hand up to her head. "Maybe I left it in the meadow; I'm not sure I've had it on at all this morning."

"Well!" Mrs. Miller's tone was emphatic. "The children and the dogs've all gone off picnicking," she added. "I suppose you've come to see them?"

"N-no," Patricia answered. "I came to bring you a—present, Mrs. Miller. The nicest—"

She stopped abruptly, as Mrs. Miller rushed by her, with a shriek, waving her apron frantically.

On the grass spread out to bleach, lay one of Mrs. Miller's best tablecloths; and in the middle of the cloth Mrs. Miller's present was rolling and twisting his damp, dusty little self, uttering all the while short, sharp little barks of satisfaction.

But he was on his feet before any one could reach him, and with one corner of the cloth caught in his mouth, had run gayly away.

"Head that dog off, Patricia!" Mrs. Miller screamed. "What dog is it, anyway—mischievous, good-for-nothing little scamp? He doesn't belong about here! Ten to one, he followed you in. I never knew such a child for taking up with stray dogs!"

After several strenuous moments the cloth was rescued. "Is it hurt very much?" Patricia asked, anxiously.

Mrs. Miller held it up; one of the corners was torn and frayed rather badly, and the whole cloth was covered with grass-stains and dirt. "You can see for yourself," she said wrathfully; "and it a *new* cloth—never used yet!"

"But it'll wash, won't it?" Patricia suggested. "And the torn part won't show when it's on the table; and it won't show when it's folded up in the drawer." She stooped to lay a restraining hand on the wrongdoer, who already had an eye on various other articles scat-

tered about the grass. "I wouldn't have thought he could run so, with a lame paw, would you, Mrs. Miller?"

"The sooner he runs out of my sight, the better for him," Mrs. Miller declared, warmly. "If he don't get started mighty quick I'll help him along a bit with a broom handle."

Patricia drew herself up. "I—I think I'll be going."

"But, Patricia," Mrs. Miller called after her, "what was that about a present? Something your aunt sent?"

"No, Aunt Julia didn't send him. I brought you a—a dog, Mrs. Miller."

"*That* little nuisance! Well, well, of all—"

Patricia waited to hear no more; not until she was some distance up the road did she turn to her charge, limping ostentatiously in the rear.

"That was another bad first impression, Dog! It wasn't my fault this time. Really, I'm very much ashamed of you."

Dog sat down, holding up a bandaged paw. His whole dejected little body expressed penitence of the deepest dye.

Patricia softened. "I'm not so sure whether, after all, you would have liked it at the Millers'. I'm a good deal disappointed in Mrs. Miller, myself."

She sat down on the grass beside the road to rearrange the loosened bandage. "Puppies will be puppies, I suppose. Daddy says you must always take the intention into consideration—and I don't suppose you *intended* to be bad. It's dreadfully easy to be bad, without intending to. I certainly hope it won't be washing-day at the next place. The idea of having Thursday for a wash-day, anyhow! Dear me, where is the next place?"

The dog crawled into her lap, trying to lick her face. He was not in the least anxious to decide upon any "next place." Sitting there in Patricia's lap, in the shade of a wide-spreading maple, seemed a very agreeable method of passing the time.

"I think," Patricia said, stroking the little black head, "we'll try Miss Jane. You don't know Miss Jane. She's awfully nice. She and

her sister haven't any dog but they've got a cat; you wouldn't mind that — she's a very intelligent cat; Miss Jane says so."

To reach Miss Jane's it was necessary to leave the highroad for a narrow, winding lane. A quarter of a mile further on they came to the little white house. Patricia thought it very lonely looking, but perhaps her companion might think otherwise. "And I do think," she said, gravely, "that it's very good of me to bring them such a nice dog — to keep the tramps off."

A large gray cat, sunning herself on one of the gate-posts, was the only sign of life about the house.

But not for long. The next moment an exceedingly astonished, irate cat was taking an unusual amount of exercise in the prim little garden, urged cheerily on by a small, curly dog, whose three legs seemed quite as effective as most dogs' four. While down the path from the house came Miss Jane and Miss Susan, also stout, elderly, and unaddicted to overmuch exercise, anxious for their cat, anxious for their garden, most of all anxious to get this strange intruder off the premises.

"Go away, little girl, and take that horrid dog with you," Miss Jane commanded, shaking a stick she had picked up.

Patricia's eyes flashed. "I'm not '*little girl*.' I'm *Patricia Kirby*!"

"Pa-tri-cia Kir-by! Upon my word!"

Patricia's bare curls were blown and tangled; her face, hot and dusty; her blue gingham frock, fresh that morning, between water and dust was a sight to behold. She bore very little resemblance to the Patricia Kirby Miss Jane was accustomed to see in church on Sunday, or sometimes driving about with Dr. Kirby.

"Whatever are you doing alone so far from home, Patricia?" Miss Susan asked, coming up. The cat had retired to the shelter of a tall tree, from a branch of which she glared down on her pursuer, who lay hot and panting on the ground below.

Patricia pointed to the dog. "Why, I came on purpose to bring you him — for a present, you know."

Miss Jane gasped.

"He's a very nice dog," Patricia went on. "I'd love to keep him for myself; only Aunt Julia—Aunt Julia seemed to think one dog was enough. I don't think Aunt Julia is particularly—enthusiastic, about dogs. You would like him, wouldn't you?"

Not dust, heat, nor weariness could hide the persuasive charm of Patricia's quick upward smile.

Before that smile Miss Jane, who was very soft-hearted, wavered; but Miss Susan shook her head resolutely. "Augusta would never hear of it for one moment!"

"Is Augusta your cook?" Patricia asked. Cooks were that way sometimes; even Sarah had her moments of revolt—so far as Patricia was concerned.

"Augusta is our cat," Miss Jane explained. She felt grateful to Susan, and sorry for Patricia.

Patricia sighed; she had recognized the finality in Miss Susan's tone. "Do you know of any one who would like a dog," she asked, "a very nice dog?"

"You might try the Millers'," Miss Jane suggested.

"I—I don't believe Mrs. Miller would care for him," Patricia answered, hurriedly. She turned to go. "Why, where is he?"

"Perhaps he's waiting outside in the road for you." Miss Susan was not ordinarily so inhospitable, but the minister was coming to supper that evening; and, like Martha of old, Miss Susan was burdened with many cares.

Patricia sighed again; the road outside the low white fence seemed suddenly very long and sunny. She was tired and discouraged; above all, she was hungry.

"Before you go, Patricia," Miss Jane said, kindly, "come round to the kitchen and have a glass of cool milk and a cookie."

The kitchen door had been left open in the excited rush of a few moments before. As the three neared it now, Miss Susan darted forward, with very much the same shriek of horrified dismay as Mrs. Miller had uttered not long since.

Mounted on a chair, his feet firmly planted on the kitchen-table was a small black dog, just finishing the contents of a large glass dish standing at the edge of the table.

"It's my custard," Miss Susan wailed, "and the minister coming to supper!"

The "very nice dog" turned round, licking his chops contentedly. It almost seemed as if he winked at Patricia.

The next instant, skilfully dodging Miss Susan, he had retired to the side yard, to finish licking his chops. Truly, it was a red-letter day for him. He wagged affably at the eloquent Miss Susan; surely he had paid her the highest compliment in his power.

"Oh, I am so sorry," Patricia declared. "He must have been very hungry—I couldn't have given him nearly enough breakfast." Then she brightened. "After all, Miss Susan, I don't suppose he's ever had custard before; and I know Dr. Vail has—lots of times."

Which view of the case did not in the least appeal to the indignant maker of the custard.

Seeing which, Patricia concluded that the best thing to do was to take her charge away as quickly as possible. And in the confusion milk and cookies were quite forgotten.

"Really, you know," Patricia admonished, once they were outside the gate, "you're not behaving at all well! Tearing table-cloths, chasing cats, and eating up custards aren't at all good dog manners."

The culprit, quick to detect the disapproval in Patricia's voice, thought it time to limp again.

"Is your paw very bad?" Patricia asked.

The dog assured her that it was.

"I don't know what we're going to do next," Patricia told him. And once back on the main road, she came to a standstill. She couldn't take her protégé home; even less could she desert him. She sat down by the roadside to consider the matter—to consider various other matters, as well. Even with Patricias there comes the moment of reckoning.

Aunt Julia had said that the next time she evaded sewing-lesson she must go to bed at five o'clock. Patricia stretched out her tired little legs; at the present moment that particular form of punishment did not appear very unendurable. Just now, however, it seemed doubtful if she would be at home by five o'clock.

Also, Daddy had said that the next time she broke bounds in this way he should be obliged to punish her. Patricia fanned herself with a decidedly dingy pocket-handkerchief; she wished Daddy had said—*how*.

"I'm not saying you're not a very nice dog," Patricia patted her companion, curled up on the folds of her short skirts; "still, if I hadn't met you this morning—"

The dog blinked sleepily, licking her hand. Perhaps he was thinking of a poor, forlorn little animal who had until that morning been hunted and driven, half starved, never caressed.

"I wonder," Patricia said, anxiously, "if Mr. Carr wouldn't like you? We'll go see, at any rate."

Up the hill they trudged, to where, in his little cabin, lived old Carr, the cobbler.

He was at his bench as usual, and he paused, needle in air, at sight of his visitors.

Patricia was growing desperate; she went straight to the heart of her errand.

She and Carr were great friends, and the latter was immensely interested. Over his spectacles he surveyed the pair. Patricia's gray eyes had lost their confidence; they were almost as unconsciously pathetic as the dog's brown ones.

"Well," Carr said, slowly, "there's no denying a dog's company; and since old Sampson died—"

Patricia beamed. "Then you will take him? And you won't mind if he's rather—lively? You see, he's so very young. Maybe, I'd better tell you everything." And sitting down on one end of the work-bench, Patricia made full confession of her charge's misdoings. "But I think he's sorry," she ended, hopefully.

"Sure, Miss," Carr assented; "especially as to the custard—that there wasn't more. What's his name, Miss?"

"I don't know. I've called him just Dog."

"I reckon he won't care what he's called, so long as you don't call him too late for dinner," Carr remarked. "How about Custard? It'd keep his sin afore him." He took a piece of rope from the floor. "I'd best tie him for a bit at first."

It was half-past four when Patricia reached home. Sarah was upstairs and Aunt Julia busy with callers.

Making a hasty raid on the pantry, Patricia slipped quietly up the back way to her own room. Aunt Julia had said it must be bed; and there was no particular use in waiting to be sent.

She was just getting into bed, after a hurried bath, when Miss Kirby, having learned from certain unmistakable evidence that Patricia had returned, came upstairs.

"Patricia!" she exclaimed, her voice expressing almost as much relief as displeasure, "where have you been?"

Patricia moved restlessly. "I've been—everywhere!"

"Sarah has ransacked the entire neighborhood." Displeasure was fast becoming the dominant note in Miss Kirby's voice now that Patricia was safe in bed before her. "Of course you understand," she began.

Patricia raised a small, flushed face. "Please, Aunt Julia, I'm in bed—and you didn't have to send me. I've had a most *fatiguing* day; and I'm dreadfully afraid that if you start in to talk to me the 'Kirby temper' ll make me say something back."

Miss Kirby sat down, surveying her niece in silence for a moment. Patricia had frankly stated a quite undeniable fact; and she had no desire to put the matter to the test. "Very well," she said, presently, "we will wait until to-morrow morning."

"But that would be ever so much worse," Patricia pleaded. "I do so hate waiting for things. I thought—maybe—if I went straight to bed—you'd skip the—talk part, this time. I'm very tired; finding a home for a dog takes it out of you a lot. People 'round here don't

seem very anxious to have dogs. And—I went considerably beyond bounds—so I've got Daddy to settle with yet. All the same, I did find him a home, Aunt Julia—I haven't got that on my mind."

Miss Kirby rose, and going over to the bed bent and kissed the tired, wistful face. Patricia had a fashion of exciting sympathy at the wrong time, in a way that was perilous to discipline. "For this time, then, Patricia," she said. "Now I must go downstairs."

Left to herself, Patricia suddenly remembered that there was to be strawberry shortcake for supper. Oh, dear, if only Custard had chosen any other day to drift across her path! A sent-to-bed bed-supper meant simply bread and milk. Patricia wondered if Dr. Vail would mind about not having custard as much as she did about not having strawberry shortcake. She decided that when she was grown up and had little girls of her own she'd never send them to bed early on strawberry shortcake night.

She heard her father drive into the yard, heralded by Cæsar's deep bark. Cæsar had gone with the doctor on his day's round. Patricia knew how he was running about now, looking for her. She hoped Sarah would forget and leave the screen door open. Cæsar would be sure to come upstairs then. She rather thought Daddy would delay his coming until after supper.

Sarah was taking in supper now; she could hear the dishes rattling. She was very hungry; that hasty raid on the pantry had not been very satisfactory. If Custard had felt that way she didn't much blame him for eating up Miss Susan's custard. Probably no one had ever taught him that it was wrong to take what didn't belong to him.

There! Sarah was bringing up her supper now!

Patricia sat up in bed; even bread and milk appeared highly desirable at that moment.

But there was more than bread and milk on the tray Sarah carried. Patricia stared at the generous square of strawberry shortcake, plentifully supplied with cream, in wondering silence.

Sarah brought a small table to the side of the bed. "Miss Julia, she done send some message 'bout this 'ere cake, Miss P'tricia; but, law

o' mercy, I'se clean forgot the most 'portant word. Hit were something 'bout you-uns having had a fat-fat-

"Fatiguing day?" Patricia suggested, taking little anticipatory pickings at the corners of the shortcake.

Sarah nodded her turbaned head. "Where's you-un been all day, Miss P'tricia?" she enquired, severely.

"If you don't mind, Sarah—I'm very hungry and tired—I won't go into that at present. I had something very important to see to."

"Humph!" Sarah grunted. "Nice doings, worrying your pore aunt near to 'straction—the doctor, he ain't come home to dinner—to hear 'bout your carryings-on. What you think he's goin' say—when Miss Julia tells him?"

Patricia was absorbed in eating bread and milk. "It must be dreadful to be really starved, Sarah," she observed.

"Where you get your dinner, Miss P'tricia?"

"I didn't have any," Patricia answered.

"My sakes!" Further speech failed Sarah. She turned away.

Patricia's next visitor was old Cæsar. Standing by the bed, he asked as plainly as dog may what in the world she was doing there at that time of day? He accepted solemnly his share of the good things going, then stretched himself out on the floor beside the bed, to mount guard—but not until he had told her as forcibly as he could that the summer evening was unusually fine, and that there were several little affairs in the garden requiring their joint supervision.

"But I can't go, Cæsar," Patricia told him. She was always sure that her dumb friends understood quite well all she said to them. "There comes Daddy now."

"It doesn't seem to be solitary confinement, Patricia," Dr. Kirby said, as he came in and seated himself on the side of the bed.

Patricia stretched out a welcoming hand. "It's hours and hours since I've seen you, Daddy."