Send Me Orchids

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THE Sugar Bowl was unusually quiet. Most of the stragglers were sitting in the back in little groups of twos and threes, their heads bent over books.

Patsy stood in the front door surveying the scene. “No one here,” she thought. She marched up to the counter and perched on one of the stools.

“Bottle coke with lots of ice, Pinky,” she called.

She glanced at her reflection in the mirror behind the counter. She wasn’t awfully bad looking. Her hair was pretty and thick and her eyes a nice brown. After that—well, her mouth wasn’t bad either—when it was closed.

“Did you hear the one about the little boy in church?” she asked Pinky.

“Yah, ages ago, he said.

“How about the one about Little Audrey and the mountain lion?”

Pinky shook his head and set Patsy’s coke in front of her.

“Well, it’s the cutest story I’ve heard for simply ages. In fact it’s my prize.”

She broke into a gust of too-loud laughter at the prospect of telling it.

The groups in the booths looked up quickly. Two boys sauntered up from the back and leaned against the counter. “Two chocolate sundaes with.”

Patsy turned to them gradly.

“Hello, Jim! Hi, Bob! I didn’t see you kids back there.”

“We’ve been sort of quiet—studying for a test,” Bob explained, ducking his head slightly.

“I was just telling Pinky my prize.”

Patsy laughed loudly, and plunged again into the story, punctuating it with anticipatory giggles. Pinky went to wait on the customers in the back booths. Bob and Jim fidgetted uneasily
and laughed politely. Patsy was encouraged. She pursued her tale to the bitter end.

"But what could little Audrey do?" she almost screamed, reaching the climax. "After all, he was a great big mountain lion and she was just a teeny, weeny girl."

Pinky came back. "You make more noise than the cash customers," he said.

Patsy pulled out a wooden cigarette case, and, after toying with it, offered its contents to the boys. They shook their heads. Bob mumbled something about a big test. They hurried to their booth.

Patsy subsided, but brightened again immediately as four girls came in and seated themselves in a row around the counter. Patsy welcomed them warmly.

"Ellen, are you going to the Old Maid's Party Friday?" she asked. She liked conversation to flow.

"Of course! I asked Joe last week. He was thrilled to death. He's going to send me orchids."

"Is he!" Patsy marvelled. "I was talking to him last week and he said he had a date."

Two of the girls glanced at each other and quickly exchanged lights for their cigarettes.

In the long silence that followed Patsy tried to blow smoke rings. Ellen looked up.

"Who are you going to take then, Patsy?"

"Oh, I don't know. Maybe I'll ask Bill Railey or Paul Mallory, or maybe Pete Fields."

"I'm taking Pete," Lucile said quietly. "I've asked him already."

Patsy dropped her eyes. Then she looked up, undaunted. "I got the most wonderful letter from Father today," she said. "He writes the nicest letters I receive. You now he has such a wonderful job now. We're all so proud of him. He says he's making such wonderful plans for us for next year. I think he and Mother should take a trip to Bermuda this winter. He really needs a rest. I wish Father would go into politics. He'd be such a success in it. Father says—"

The four girls were paying their checks now and didn't hear what Father said. But it was all right. Patsy had spotted someone more to her liking.
Elinor Beach and Tom Andrews were coming, hand-in-hand, through the door. Patsy waited until they were seated in a booth. She picked up her cocoa-cola glass and hurried back to them.

Elinor had placed her books beside her in the seat.

“Oh, goody,” cried Patsy delightedly, “Now I get to sit by Tom.”

Tom moved over in the corner to make more room, but Patsy snuggled up to him. He hoped she wouldn’t talk baby-talk as she often did. He remembered that when she did it, she showed her gold fillings. But she was Elinor’s friend—

“Are you going to the Old Maid’s Party?” Elinor asked Patsy.

“I don’t know, yet. I’ve asked two or three, but they have dates. The way some girls just rush out and snap up the men! Elinor, why don’t you ask someone else so I can take Tom?” Patsy looked up coyly. “Or else maybe both of us can take him. He’s so big.”

Elinor giggled a little and Tom shifted his weight in embarrassment.

“I’m afraid not. Tom’s already ordered me roses.”

“I want orchids,” Patsy said slowly.

There was a silence in which Elinor and Tom seemed to lapse into their own little world, leaving Patsy an alienated onlooker.

“Jamie Pine, the fellow I’m in love with, is so far away I really don’t care whether I go or not.” Patsy stole a quick glance upward to see if she were impressing Tom properly.

“He’s in Annapolis, you know.”

They nodded. They did know.

“This is his second year,” Patsy went on. “I think so much about him I haven’t time to spend looking around this campus for good dates. And, anyhow, there aren’t any—besides you, Tommy. He writes to me all the time. I just live for his letters, they’re so wonderful.”

“Whom do you think you’ll take, then?” Elinor asked.

“I thought maybe I’d ask Paul Mallory or Ray Pamperien. Ray has a swell big car.”

“Patsy Burge is taking Ray. And Jeannie Busch—, I suppose she and Paul will patch it up and go together.

“Oh, did they have a fight?”
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“I don’t know—just a spat—so they say.”
Elinor looked at Tom, and then back at Patsy.
“Look,” she said. “Why don’t you ask Harvey Lynch? You know him well—and he isn’t dated.”
“Oh, he’s from home and he can’t dance besides. I want someone exciting.”
The crowd was increasing. Three o’clock classes were out. The Sugar Bowl was jammed and everyone was talking at once. Pinky yelled something about less noise, please, and spend more money.
A crowd of boys were at the counter. Patsy stood up. She saw Paul Mallory in the crowd.
“Excuse me, I see somebody I want—”

The boys saw her coming toward them. They knew what she wanted, for they had seen Lucille and Ellen a few minutes before. Paul Mallory watched her coming. What if Jeannie didn’t want to make up again? Then he really ought to be at that dance just to show her he didn’t care.
But then he saw Patsy coming through the crowd purposefully.
He got up suddenly and pushed to the door. He slacked his pace as soon as he reached the street. He heard Patsy after him—yet a fellow couldn’t run through the streets. And if he did—Patsy was the kind that would as soon race after a fellow as not. He heard her voice.
“Hi—Paul!”
“Why Pricella!”
He waited.
“How’t about draggin’ me to the brawl this Friday, Big Boy?” she asked.
He cleared his throat and then nodded.
“O. K.,” he said.
For a second Patsy stood in the sunshine without speaking. She swallowed twice, and her eyes almost shut in a grimace.
She blew her nose, and when she was through she looked up at him. Her face wore its usual impervious grin.
“O. K.,” she said. “Send me orchids.”