



Polly's Biscuit.



OLLY, don't buy your pearls to-day."

Polly Rutherford looked up quickly from the jeweller's case she was bending over, and saw Mr. McIlwaine standing at her side.

"Why shouldn't I buy to-day?" she cried. "I have had this hundred dollars in gold for almost a year, Mr. McIlwaine, trying to make up my mind what I wanted most; now my birthday is almost here again, and I am afraid grandpa will make this do for two birthdays, if I don't hurry and spend it."

But Polly's gay little laugh was checked by a look of unmistakable compassion in the gentleman's eyes. The color faded a little from her bright young face, but she would not ask any questions here in the crowded store.

"You may put them back to-day, Mr. West," she said to the jeweller. "I'll come again to-morrow."

"Very well, Miss Rutherford," said the vexed salesman, concealing his disappointment, "I shall reserve them for you."

Polly left the tempting store with Mr. McIlwaine, and once on the street turned upon him a pair of frank questioning eyes which he found hard to answer.

Paul McIlwaine was a friend of the Rutherford family; but not especially of little Polly; she was only sixteen, a mere child to the hard-working lawyer of thirty, and one whom he considered altogether frivolous and empty. Polly was an only daughter, living with her widowed mother in her grandfather's elegant house, and if she was not a spoiled girl it was not the fault of a doting old grandfather, whose idol she had been from her babyhood.

"What did you mean, Mr. McIlwaine?" she asked, presently, finding that the questioning look brought no reply. And, then seeing how embarrassed he seemed about answering, she said with a sudden fear. "Have you been at grandpa's since I left? Is anything the matter?"

"They are all well," he said, answering the thought which he knew was in her mind, "but something has happened, Polly, of course, or I would not have interfered with your purchase."

"Oh! tell me, tell me," said the girl in an agitated voice. "Why do you keep me in suspense?"

"What a blunderer I am," thought her companion. "If I tell her out here on the street, there will be a scene; but I am in for it now, and if I don't tell her I suppose there will be a scene; that's the way with these fine young ladies."

"It is a hard thing to say to you, Polly, but your grandfather has failed."

"Failed," repeated Polly, vaguely, "you mean he has lost money? Is that all? Is that what you were afraid to tell me?"

"That 'all' means a good deal more than you seem to understand," said Paul McIlwaine, impatiently; "it means loss and grief and disappointment and poverty to one of the best gentlemen in the world; it means hard work to your mother who has no strength for work; to you—"

He stopped, and Polly said quickly, feeling the tinge of contempt in his tone: "Never mind about me, but I see now how bad it will be; poor Grandpa! Mr. McIlwaine does—must—will anybody else lose by Grandpa's failure?"

"It is too soon to say positively," he replied, "but I think not. I think he has quit business in time to save his creditors any appreciable loss."

Polly's head was up now, and her eyes shining. "Dear old Grandpa," she said, "bless his heart; I am ashamed that I asked this question; I might have known. But, oh! I'm so much obliged to you for keeping me from spending my hundred dollars; it was very kind of you, very; I don't know how you came to find me. How long have you known about Grandpa?"

"It only came out this morning, and took us all entirely by surprise. But here we are at your door; good-bye, my dear; if I can be of any service to you in any way (he had meant to offer her money, but he was suddenly afraid to speak of such a thing to the spirited looking girl before him) remember the long intimacy between our families gives me a right to help you."

"Thank you," she said simply; it was all she had voice for, and using her latch-key she let herself into the house.

"Bless me," said the young lawyer, as he walked off, "but the girl had pluck! It was very pretty, and entirely womanly too, the way she thought of others, her grandfather and the creditors. I didn't think little Polly had it in her."

If he had seen little Polly at this minute, he might not have thought she had so much in her; she had slipped noiselessly into the great handsome front parlor and dropped down on one of the low-cushioned divans, "all in a heap," as the girls say. For two whole hours she kept herself hid in the parlor, nobody knowing she was in the house, and in that long, silent time, when she heard only the tinkling little bronze clock, and her own irregular breathing, something happened to Polly, almost like what happens to the moth when it comes out of the cocoon. It happened to the Polly that was hid away inside of the Polly that everybody knew; and who shall say but that this great startling change of fortune was not sent to keep that inside Polly from being smothered and dwarfed by the outside Polly?

When she went to find her mother and grandfather it was with a bright face and steady voice.

A few days after this Polly brought up a dainty little breakfast to her mother, who was quite overcome by their disaster, as was the poor old grandfather.

"Come mother," Polly said blithely, "I made these biscuits and you've got to eat two. What a good thing it was that you had that hobby about teaching me to do things; don't it fit in nicely now?"

"It was a theory of your father's," answered her mother, in a depressed tone; "I promised him when you were a wee baby in long clothes that I would have you taught to do everything that woman can do, and of course, after his death, I felt the more bound to do it. But I don't know why you should make so much of it now; you can't support yourself by making biscuits."

"I don't know," said Polly, carelessly. "I don't know," she repeated more earnestly, springing up and walking about the room as if her mind were not following her footsteps.

In a few weeks the Rutherfords had moved into a small down-town house, with all the available rooms "let" and poor old Mr. Rutherford was trying feebly to discharge the duties of a small salaried office into which his friends had put him.

Polly's mother seemed quite crushed at first, but the girl herself was buoyant with hope, as every young girl has a right to be, no matter what her style of living is.

Thanks to Mr. McIlwaine, she had her hundred dollars now to invest in an enterprise on which she had set her heart far more than it had ever been set on the pearls. And along with the hundred dollars she had also to invest in it youth, health, good sense, a brave spirit, and a proud independence. What else needed she for a happy and successful life?

Her enterprise began with a visit, basket in hand, to seven or eight of the best city hotels, and as many of the restaurants, to all of them she offered a daily, weekly, or tri-weekly supply of her dainty little beaten biscuit, such as she had learned to make in eastern Virginia, from a famous old cook, who had in slave days belonged to her father's family. She was successful almost up to her own expectations, and far beyond her mother's; and her elation could not but infuse some hope into that lady's weak spirit.

"We must have a new name for your biscuit, miss," said one wise old restaurant keeper; "what shall we call them?"

"Call them," said Polly, hesitating and laughing, "call them the Polly-wolly-winkum biscuit."

The Polly-wolly-winkum biscuit got to be the fashion that winter; after hiring one good cook at what seemed ruinous wages, a second and a third had to be engaged; but Polly put on her great kitchen apron, tied up her abundant hair into a high knot, and spent four hours of every day in her kitchen herself; no plea of other engagements, no pretence that the cooks would do as well without her, no tempting offer of sleigh rides, no flattering invitations of any sort could make the little mistress of the bakery break her rule, or neglect her work. Naturally the biscuit grew in favor.

The last time I visited the Polly-wolly-winkum bakery, it had moved its quarters to a large, well-lighted kitchen, with a class-room attached. Yes, a class-room; for Polly had agreed to teach cooking to a number of rich men's daughters at a good round price per girl, and, not to lose the chance of doing good because she was poor, selected a dozen of poor girls, to whom she gave another hour a week, without pay.

Mr. Paul McIlwaine was my cicerone on the occasion of my visit and when I had admired and praised until the English language was exhausted he said, gravely:

"Nevertheless a suit is pending in court against the Polly-wolly-winkum bakery; it is charged that Miss Rutherford is dishonestly withholding from all the young gentlemen of her acquaintance the time and thought and interest they believe to be their due."

"That is a dreadful charge, Polly-winkum," said I. "What are you going to do about it?"

"I'll engage Mr. McIlwaine to defend me," replied the little bakeress, running to look in an oven. But somehow her face was red before she opened the oven door!—*Good Cheer.*

A Dumb Hero.

It was not an hour after dawn, yet the great waiting-room of the Central Station at Manassas Junction was full. The soft morning air blew freshly through the long line of cars and puffing engines. A faint hum comes from without. It was the great city awakening for the day. A Scotch collie belonging to one of the emigrant groups, went from one to another wagging his tail and looking up with mild and expressive eyes full of good-natured friendly feeling. Children called to him, some students romped with him, the ladies patted his head, a poor negro in the corner shared his meal with him, and then he seemed to unite all these different groups in a common tie of good feeling. While all this was going on, a woman was washing the windows of some empty cars drawn on to the siding, singing as she rubbed the glass. While her back was turned, her child, a little fellow about three years old, ran to the door of the car and jumped down on the next track. Upon this track the Eastern Express was coming. Directly in its path was the babe; a hush of horror fell upon the crowd. Every eye turned in the direction, and then a low sob of anguish went up from the paralyzed people. The dog, with head erect and fixed eye, saw the danger, and with a bound and a fierce bark darted towards the child. The baby, frightened, started back. The mother went on washing windows and singing, as the huge engine rushed up abreast of her car. There was a crunching noise and a faint little cry of agony. Even strong men grew sick at the sound, and turned away.

When they looked again the babe was toddling across the platform, cowering and laughing, and the crushed dead body of a dog lay on the track. "Passengers for Pittsburg, Chicago and the West. Passengers for Baltimore, Richmond and the South," so the cry went on, and the surging crowd passed out, never to all meet again in this world. But the faces of men and women were pale, and there were tears in the eyes of some. The poor negro and the millionaire, tottering old men and frolicking boys had been helped onward, upward, by the friendly, cheerful life and heroic death of a dumb dog.—*Her. F. M. Todd.*

The Promise.

'Mid the hopings and the fears,
And the restlessness of years,
We repent this promise o'er—
We believe it more and more—
"Bread upon the waters cast
Shall be gathered at the last."

Soon, like dust, to you and me,
Will our earthly treasures be;
But the loving word and deed
To another in his need,
They will unforgotten be!
They will live eternally—
"Bread upon the waters cast
Shall be gathered at the last."

Fast the moments slip away,
Soon our mortal powers decay,
Low and lower sinks the sun,
What we do must soon be done!
Then what rapture if we hear
Thousands of voices ringing clear—
"Bread upon the waters cast
Shall be gathered at the last."

—*Anon.*

The Key to Others' Hearts.

Dialects of love are many
Though the language be but one;
Study all you can, or any,
While life's precious hours run on.

Closed the heart-door of thy brother,
All its treasure long concealed!
One key fails, then try another,
Soon the rusty lock will yield.

Silence is no certain token
That no secret grief is there;
Sorrow, which is never spoken,
Is the heaviest load to bear!

—*Miss Havergal.*

Worship God by doing good;
Help the suffering in their needs.
He who loves God as he should
Makes his heart's love understood
By his deeds.