

Pollyanna: The Glad Book

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By
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CHAPTER XXVIII—(Continued)

"YOU know nothing was ever right before—for mother, she was always wanting 'em different. And, really, I don't know as one could blame her much—under the circumstances. But now she lets me keep the shades up, and she takes interest in things—how she looks, and her nightdress, and all that. And she's actually begun to knit little things—reins and baby blankets for fairs and hospitals. And she's so interested, and so glad to think she can do it!—and that was all Miss Pollyanna's doing, you know, 'cause she told mother she could be glad she'd got her hands and arms, anyway; and that made mother wonder right away why she didn't do something with her hands and arms. And so she began to do something—to knit, you know. And you can't think what a different room it is now, what with the red and blue and yellow worsteds, and the prisms in the window that she gave her—why, it actually makes you feel better just to go in there now; and before I used to dread it awfully, it was so dark and gloomy, and mother was so—so unhappy, you know."

"And so we want you to please tell Miss Pollyanna that we understand it's all because of her. And please say we're so glad we know her and that we thought, maybe if she knew it, it would make her a little glad that she knew us. And—and that's all," sighed Milly, rising hurriedly to her feet. "You'll tell her?"

"Why, of course," murmured Miss Polly, wondering just how much of this remarkable discourse she could remember to tell.

These visits of John Pendleton and Milly Snow were only the first of many; and always there were the messages—the messages which were in some way so curious that they caused Miss Polly more and more to puzzle over them.

One day there was the little Widow Benton. Miss Polly knew her well, though they had never called upon each other. By reputation she knew her as the saddest little woman in town—one who was always in black. To-day, however, Mrs. Benton wore a knot of pale blue at the throat, though there were tears in her eyes. She spoke of her grief and horror at the accident; then she asked diffidently if she might see Pollyanna.

Miss Polly shook her head. "I am sorry, but she sees no one yet. A little later—perhaps."

Mrs. Benton wiped her eyes, rose, and turned to go. But after she had almost reached the hall door she came back hurriedly.

"Miss Harrington, perhaps you'd give her—a message," she stammered. "Certainly, Mrs. Benton; I shall be very glad to."

Still the little woman hesitated; then she spoke.

"Will you tell her, please, that—that I've put on this," she said, just touching the blue bow at her throat. Then, at Miss Polly's ill-concealed look of surprise, she added: "The little girl has been trying for so long to make me wear—some color, that I thought she'd be—glad to know I'd begun. She said that Freddy would be so glad to see it, if I would. You know Freddy's all I have now. The others have all—" Mrs. Benton shook her head and turned away. "If you'll just tell Pollyanna—she'll understand." And the door closed after her.

A little later, that same day, there was the other widow—at least the wore widow's garments. Miss Polly

did not know her at all. She wondered vaguely how Pollyanna could have known her. The lady gave her name as "Mrs. Tarbell."

"I'm a stranger to you of course," she began at once. "But I'm not a stranger to your little niece, Pollyanna. I've been at the hotel all summer, and every day I've had to take long walks for my health. It was on these walks that I've met your niece—she's such a dear little girl! I wish I could make you understand what she's been to me. I was very sad when I came up here; and her bright face and cheery ways reminded me of my own little girl that I lost years ago. I was so shocked to hear of the accident! and then when I learned that the poor child would never walk again, and that she was so unhappy because she couldn't be glad any longer—the dear child—I just had to come to you."

"You are very kind," murmured Miss Polly.

"But it is you who are to be kind," demurred the other. "I—I want you to give her a message from me. Will you?"

"Certainly."

"Will you just tell her, then, that Mrs. Tarbell is glad now. Yes, I know it sounds odd, and you don't understand. But—if you'll pardon me I'd rather not explain." Sad lines came to the lady's mouth, and the smile left her eyes. "Your niece will know just what I mean; and I felt that I must tell—her. Thank you; and pardon me, please, for any seeming rudeness in my call." she begged, as she took her leave.

Thoroughly mystified now, Miss Polly hurried up-stairs to Pollyanna's room.

"Pollyanna, do you know a Mrs. Tarbell?"

"Oh, yes. I love Mrs. Tarbell. She's sick, and awfully sad; and she's at the hotel, and takes long walks. We go together. I mean—we used to." Pollyanna's voice broke, and two big tears rolled down her cheeks.

Miss Polly cleared her throat hurriedly.

"Well, she's just been here, dear. She left a message for you—but she wouldn't tell me what it meant. She said to tell you that Mrs. Tarbell is glad now."

Pollyanna clapped her hands softly.

"Did she say that—really? Oh, I'm so glad!"

"But Pollyanna, what did she mean?"

"Why, it's the game, and—" Pollyanna stopped short, her fingers to her lips.

"What game?"

"N-nothing much, Aunt Polly; that is—I can't tell it unless I tell other things that—that I'm not to speak of."

It was on Miss Polly's tongue to question her niece further; but the obvious distress on the little girl's face stayed the words before they were uttered.

Not long after Mrs. Tarbell's visit, the climax came. It came in the shape of a call from a certain young woman with unnaturally pink cheeks and abnormally yellow hair; a young woman who wore high heels and cheap jewelry; a young woman whom Miss Polly knew very well by reputation—but whom she was angrily amazed to meet beneath the roof of the Harrington homestead.

Miss Polly did not offer her hand. She drew back, indeed, as she entered the room.

The woman rose at once. Her eyes were very red, as if she had been cry-

ing. Half defiantly she asked if she might, for a moment, see the little girl, Pollyanna.

Miss Polly said no. She began to say it very sternly; but something in the woman's pleading eyes made her add the civil explanation that no one was allowed yet to see Pollyanna.

The woman hesitated; then a little brusquely she spoke. Her chin was still at a slightly defiant tilt.

"My name is Mrs. Payson—Mrs. Tom Payson. I presume you've heard of me—most of the good people in the town have—and maybe some of the things you've heard ain't true. But never mind that. It's about the little girl I came. I heard about the accident, and—and it broke me all up. Last week I heard how she couldn't ever walk again, and—and I wished I could give up my uselessly well legs for hers. She'd do more good trotting around on 'em one hour than I could in a hundred years. But never mind that. Legs ain't always given to the one who can make the best use of 'em, I notice."

She paused and cleared her throat; but when she resumed her voice was still husky.

"Maybe, you don't know it, but I've seen a good deal of the little girl of yours. We live on the Pendleton Hill road, and she used to go by often—only she didn't always go by. She came in and played with the kids and talked to me—and my man, when he was home. She seemed to like it, and to like us. She didn't know, I suspect, that her kind of folks don't generally call on my kind. Maybe if they did call more, Miss Harrington, there wouldn't be so many—of my kind," she added, with sudden bitterness.

"Be that as it may, she came; and she didn't do herself no harm, and she did do us good—a lot o' good. How much she won't know—nor can't know, I hope; cause if she did, she'd know other things—that I don't want her to know."

"But it's just this. It's been hard times with us this year, in more ways than one. We've been blue and discouraged—my man and me, and ready for—most anything. We was reckonin' on getting a divorce about now, and letting the kids—well, we didn't know what we would do with the kids. Then came the accident, and what we heard about the little girl's never walking again. And we got to thinking how she used to come and sit on our doorstep and train with the kids, and laugh, and—and just be glad. She was always being glad about something; and then, one day, she told us why, and about the game, you know; and tried to coax us to play it."

"Well, we've heard now that she's fretting her poor little life out of her, because she can't play it no more—that there's nothing to be glad about. And that's what I came to tell her to-day—that maybe she can be a little glad for us, 'cause we've decided to stick to each other, and play the game ourselves. I knew she would be glad, because she used to feel kind of bad—at things we said, sometimes. Just how the game is going to help us, I can't say that I exactly see, yet; but maybe 'twill. Anyhow, we're going to try—'cause she wanted us to. Will you tell her?"

"Yes, I will tell her," promised Miss Polly a little faintly. Then, with sudden impulse, she stepped forward and held out her hand. "And thank you for coming, Mrs. Payson," she said simply.

The defiant chin fell. The lips above it trembled visibly. With an incoherently mumbled something, Mrs. Payson blindly clutched at the outstretched hand, turned, and fled.

The door had scarcely closed behind her before Miss Polly was confronting Nancy in the kitchen.

(Continued next week)

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