



SATURDAY, DEC. 22ND, 1906

Polly and the Mistletoe

By OLIVE HARPER.

ELL, Mrs. Li Hung Chang, I believe I will," said Polly Adams to a ridiculous china doll that sat on the chimney staring fixedly before her.

It was nearly midnight, and the house was still. The Christmas tree stood all decorated and with the gifts hung upon it in the library, back of the parlor, and Polly had been sitting beside the fire in her pretty yellow elderdown pajamas.

Polly was tired, for she had been busy all that day. They were not rich, and so much of the running devolved upon Polly, and the three boys were home from school, and they had two visitors to remain till New Year's.

One of them was Archie, it is enough to call him just "Archie." So, while Polly braided the heavy mass of rich brown hair into one long loose plait, she glanced at the mistletoe and then at the sphinxlike face of the Chinese doll as she said:

"Now, Mrs. Li Hung Chang, what shall I do? Archie loves me. I know it from a dozen—yes, a thousand—things, but he is so shy and timid. Minnie Blake is engaged, and so would I be if only Archie had the courage of a—

"Now, if I could hang this mistletoe to the chandelier tonight in the excitement of seeing our gifts I could manage—I know I could—to get him under it, and then—well, the ice would be broken, I will if you say so. Why don't you speak?"

Saying this, the dainty little beauty stamped her foot, now in its slipper, which jarred the room ever so slightly, and the doll did nod its head. Polly laughed, half startled, but with new courage. She took the night light in one hand and the bunch of mistletoe in the other, with its grapping wires, and stole downstairs to the library door and on into the parlor, not noticing that the library door had shut to with the spring lock.

Polly did not wish to awaken any member of the family, so she did not switch on the lights. Her own tiny light but made the darkness visible. It was fearsome down here all alone in the dark, so she hurried and pushed the side table over into the middle of the room under the chandelier, with the mistletoe on it, and then brought a delicate, long-legged, gold-painted chair, on which she climbed timidly, listening all the while for a sound.

With his cane swinging like an Indian club, Fred sprang into the library, while Archie, with his umbrella, followed, and both advanced upon the burglars. They could hear the rattling of the doorknob, and Fred shouted: "You may as well give up. You're caught!"

And then the library was also flooded with light, which was reflected from a thousand gilded ornaments on the tree, and by the illumination Fred and Archie saw a miserable little figure in yellow pajamas, huddled up like a cold duckling, with one bare foot and with its head down, in the corner of the door frame as though trying to hide.

From her baby days Polly had had a queer habit of hopping from one foot to the other without moving from her place when frightened or angry. Now one slipped little foot and one pink bare one kept up the familiar hopping movement. Fred looked at the culprit a moment and then sprang forward and, seizing one shoulder and the long braid of hair, turned her around to the light, while the miserable girl covered her face with her hands. Fred laughed loud and long, saying:

"Well, I'll be jigged if it isn't Polly!" Archie said nothing and was trying to pretend that he did not know anything at all until he saw the tears streaming through the fingers, and then he said hotly:

"Fred, I am ashamed of you. You are not treating your sister right at all here. Pol—I mean Miss Adams," continued he, at the same time jerking the full napoon cover from the old-fashioned square piano, to the instant destruction of two plaster ornaments. "Here, Miss Pol—Adams."

Saying this with a lordly air, he wrapped the shrieking little figure in its beneficent folds, while her heartless brother lay on the carpet in convulsions of laughter. She sobbed out: "I—I forgot—something—and that is why—"

"Ah, hosh! You just wanted to see if Archie had put a present on the tree for you." "Oh, Fred; don't!" she cried, while tears trickled down her hands.

"Mr. Adams, I consider your treatment of your sister very harsh—very cruel." "Well, I suppose she can't help being a little fool," continued Fred, laughing still.

"Sir, another such remark concerning this—ah, your sister—under the circumstances will sever our friendship. Pol—Miss Polly, I have your present here. I was going to give it to you tomorrow, but under the present circumstances I shall ask if you will accept it now and here, as with it you will have a protector."

With a valiant look at Fred, Archie fumbled in all his pockets until he found a small box. Then he reached for one of Polly's wet little hands. Archie looked very imposing to Polly, and little by little her sobs ceased, and by the time he had opened the box she could see through her dimmed eyes that he had a superb solitaire ring for her—one to make the heart of any girl proud, and one in keeping with his wealth. So she even smiled a little as Archie, with one last look of defiance at Fred, placed the sparkling ring on the proper finger and then folded her in his arms proudly and with a look of ineffable happiness, though Polly did look something like a noble swan.

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