



Polly of the Circus

BY MARGARET MAYO

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(Continued.)

Synopsis Chapter I—Polly, a child of the circus, is brought up by Toby, a clown, and by a boss canvasser called "Muvver Jim." She learns to ride Bingo, a circus horse, and grows to womanhood knowing no life except that of the circus.

CHAPTER II.

WHILE Polly sat in the dressing tent listening indifferently to the chatter about the "leap of death" girl Jim waited in the lot outside, opening and shutting a small leather bag which he had bought for her that day. He was as blind to the picturesque outdoor life as she to her indoor surroundings, for he, too, had been with the circus since his earliest recollection.

The grass inclosure where he waited was shut in by a circle of tents and wagons. The great red property vans

shooting in and out from the dressing tent to the big top as gayly decked men, women and animals came or went.

Drowsy dogs were stretched under the wagons, waiting their turn to be dressed as lions or bears. The wise old goose, with his modest gray mate, pecked at the green grass or turned his head from side to side, watching the stinging clown, who rolled up the painted carcass and long neck of the imitation giraffe from which two property men had just slipped, their legs still incased in stripes.

Ambitious canvassers and grooms were exercising, feet in air, in the hope of some day getting into the performers' ring. Property men stole a minute's sleep in the soft warm grass while they waited for more tackle to load in the wagons. Children of the performers were swinging on the tent ropes. Chattering monkeys sat astride the Shetland ponies, awaiting their entrance to the ring. The shrieks of the hyenas in the distant animal tent, the roaring of the lions and the trumpet-

to be revealed to her until the close of the night's performance.

Jim put down the lid of the trunk and sat upon it, feeling like a criminal because he was hiding something from Polly.

His consciousness of guilt was increased as he recalled how often she had forbidden Toby and himself to rush into reckless extravagances for her sake and how she had been more nearly angry than he had ever seen her when they had put their month's salaries together to buy her the spangled dress for her first appearance. It had taken a great many apologies and promises as to their future behavior to calm her, and now they had again disobeyed her. It would be a great relief when tonight's ordeal was over.

Jim watched Polly uneasily as she came from the dressing tent and stepped to gaze at the nearby church steeple. The incongruity of the slang that soon came from her delicately formed lips was lost upon him as she turned her eyes toward him.

"Say, Jim," she said, with a western drawl, "them's a funny lot of guys that goes to them church places, ain't they?"

"Most everybody has got some kind of a bug," Jim assented. "I guess they don't do much harm."

"Member the time you took me into one of them places to get me outa the rain, the Sunday our wagon broke down? Well, that bunch we butted into wouldn't 'a' give Sells Bros. no cause for worry with that show 'a' theirs, would they, Jim?" She looked at him with withering disgust. "Say, wasn't that the punkiest stunt that fellow in black was doin' on the platform? You said Joe was only ten minutes gettin' the tire on to our wheel; but, say, you take it from me, Jim, if I had to wait another ten minutes as long as that one I'd be too old to go on a-ridin'."

Jim "lowed" some church shows might be better than "that un," but Polly said he could have her end of the bet and summed up by declaring it no wonder that "the yaps in these towns is daffy about circuses if they don't have nothin' better 'an church shows to go to."

One of the grooms was entering the lot with Polly's horse. She stooped to tighten one of her sandals, and as she rose Jim saw her sway slightly and put one hand to her head. He looked at her sharply, remembering her faintness in the parade that morning.

"You ain't feelin' right," he said uneasily.

"You just bet I am," Polly answered, with an independent toss of her head. "This is the night we're goin' to make them Rubes in there sit up, ain't it, Bingo?" she added, placing one arm affectionately about the neck of the big white horse that stood waiting near the entrance.

"You bin ridin' too reckless lately," said Jim sternly as he followed her. "I don't like it. There ain't no need of your puttin' in all them extra stunts. Your act is good enough without 'em. Nobody else ever done 'em, an' no-

body 'd miss 'em if you left 'em out." Polly turned with a triumphant ring in her voice. The music was swelling for her entrance.

"You ain't my mother, Jim; you're my grandmother," she taunted, and



"Most everybody has got some kind of a bug," Jim assented.

with a crack of her whip she was away on Bingo's back.

"It's the spirit of the dead one that's got into her," Jim mumbled as he turned away, still seeing the flash in the departing girl's eyes.

(To be continued.)

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POLLY DANCED SERENELY ON BINGO'S BACK.

were waiting to be loaded with the costumes and tackle which were constantly being brought from the big top, where the evening performance was now going on. The gay striped curtains at the rear of the tent were looped back to give air to the panting musicians, who sat just inside. Through the opening a glimpse of the audience might be had, tier upon tier, fanning and shifting uneasily. Near the main tent stood the long, low dressing top, with the women performers stowed away in one end, the ring horses in the center and the men performers in the other end.

A temporary curtain was hung between the main and the dressing tent to shut out the curious mob that tried to peep in at the back lot for a glimpse of things not to be seen in the ring.

Colored streamers fastened to the roofs of the tents waved and floated in the night air and beckoned to the townspeople on the other side to make haste to get their places, forget their cares and be children again.

Over the tops of the tents the lurid light of the distant red fire shot into the sky, accompanied by the cries of the peanut "butchers," the popcorn boys, the lemonade venders and the exhortations of the sideshow spieler, whose flying banners bore the painted reproductions of his freaks. Here and there stood unhitched chariots, half filled trunks, trapeze tackle, paper hoops, stake pullers or other properties necessary to the show.

Torches flamed at the tent entrances, while oil lamps and lanterns gave light for the loading of the wagons. There was a constant stream of life

ing of the elephants mingled with the incessant clamor of the band. And back of all this, pointing upward in mute protest, rose a solemn church spire, white and majestic against a vast panorama of blue, moonlit hills that encircled the whole lurid picture. Jim's eyes turned absently toward the church as he sat fumbling with the lock of the little brown satchel.

He had gone from store to store in the various towns where they had played looking for something to inspire wonder in the heart of a miss newly arrived at her sixteenth year. Only the desperation of a last moment had forced him to decide upon the imitation alligator bag, which he now held in his hand.

It looked small and mean to him as the moment of presentation approached, and he was glad that the saleswoman in the little country store had suggested the addition of ribbons and laces, which he now drew from the pocket of his corduroys. He placed his red and blue treasures very carefully in the bottom of the satchel and remembered with regret the strand of coral beads which he had so nearly bought to go with them.

He opened the large property trunk by his side and took from it a laundry box which held a little tan coat that was to be Toby's contribution to the birthday surprise. He was big hearted enough to be glad that Toby's gift seemed fine and more useful than his.

It was only when the "leap of death" act preceding Polly's turn was announced that the big fellow gave up feasting his eyes on the satchel and coat and hid them away in the big property trunk. She would be out in a minute, and these wonders were not



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