

# 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 canvasman 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—A church near the circus lot interests Polly. Jim reproves her for her reckless riding.

Chapter III—Polly urges Bingo to unprecedented speed and falls. Toby and Jim carry the injured girl to the parsonage nearby.

Chapter IV—The Rev. John Douglas, much to Deacon Elverson's disgust, takes Polly into the parsonage. Toby and "Muvver Jim" are received kindly by Douglas, who has placed Polly in charge of his colored servant, Mandy. Douglas promises to care for the girl until she is well.

"You ought to have heard him," continued Mandy, made eloquent by Polly's show of interest. "What will those poor folks do? he kept a-sayin', 'Jes' yo' lay where yo' is,' I told him, 'Dem poor folks will be better off dan dey would be a-comin' to yoah funeral.'"

"Poor folks?" Polly questioned. "Do you give money to folks? We are always itchin' to get it away from 'em." Before Douglas could think of words with which to defend his disapproved methods Mandy had continued eagerly:

"An' den on Sunday, when he can't go to church an' preach"—She got no further. A sharp exclamation brought both Mandy and Douglas to attention. "Preach!" Polly almost shouted. She looked at him with genuine alarm this time.

"That will do, Mandy," Douglas commanded, feeling an unwelcome drama gathering about his head.

"Great Barnum and Bailey!" Polly exclaimed, looking at him as though he were the very last thing in the world she had ever expected to see. "Are you a sky pilot?"

"That's what he am, chile," Mandy slipped the words in slyly, for she knew that they were against the pastor's wishes, but she was unable to restrain her mischievous impulse to sow the seeds of curiosity that would soon bear fruit in the inquisitive mind of the little invalid.

"Will you get on to me a-landin' into a mixup like this?" She continued to study the uncomfortable man at her side. "I never thought I'd be a-talkin' to one of you guys. What's your name?"

"Douglas." He spoke shortly. "Ain't you got no handle to it?" "If you mean my Christian name, it's John."

"Well, that sounds like a sky pilot all right. But you don't look like I s'posed they did."

"Why not?" "I always s'posed sky pilots was old an' grouchy-like. You're a'most as good lookin' as our strong man."

"I done told him he was too good lookin' to be an unmarried parson," Mandy chuckled, more and more amused at the pastor's discomfort.

"Looks don't play a very important part in my work," Douglas answered curtly. Mandy's confidential sneekers made him doubly anxious to get to a less personal topic.

"Well, they count for a whole lot with us," She nodded her head decidedly. "How long you been showin' in this town, anyhow?"

"About a year," Douglas answered, with something of a sigh.

"A year?" she gasped. "In a burg like this! You must have an awful lot of laughs in your act to keep 'em a-comin' that long." She was wise in the ways of professional success.

"Not many, I'm afraid." He wondered for the first time if this might be the reason for his rather indifferent success.

"Do you give them the same stuff, or have you got a rep?"

"A rep?" he repeated in surprise.

"Sure, repertory, different acts—entries, some calls 'em. Uncle Toby's got twenty-seven entries. It makes a heap of difference in the big towns where you have a run."

"Oh, I understand!" Douglas answered in a tone of relief. "Well, I try to say something new each Sunday."

"What kind of speils do you give 'em?" she inquired, with growing interest.

"I try to help my people to get on better terms with themselves and to forget their week day troubles." He had never had occasion to define his ef-

forts so minutely. "Well, that's jes' the same as us," Polly told him, with an air of condescension, "only circuses draws more people 'an churches."

"Yours does seem to be a more popular form of entertainment," Douglas answered dryly. He was beginning to feel that there were many tricks in the entertainment trade which he had not mastered. And, after all, what was his preaching but an effort at entertainment? If he failed to hold his congregation by what he was saying, his listeners grew drowsy and his sermon fell short of its desired effect. It was true that his position and hers had points of similarity. She was apparently successful. As for himself he could not be sure. He knew he tried very hard and that sometimes a tired mother or a sad faced child looked up at him with a smile that made the service seem worth while.

Polly mistook the pastor's reverie for envy, and her tender heart was quick to find consolation for him.

"You ain't got all the worst of it," she said. "If we tried to play a dump like this for six months, we'd starve to death. You certainly must give 'em a great show," she added, surveying him with growing interest.

"It doesn't make much difference about the show," Douglas began, but he was quickly interrupted.

"That's right; it's jes' the same with a circus. One year you give 'em the rottenest kind of a thing, an' they eat it up; the next year you hand 'em a knockout, an' it's a frost. Is that the way it is with a church show?"

"Much the same," Douglas admitted, half amusedly, half regretfully. "Very often when I work the hardest I seem to do the least good."

"I guess our troubles is pretty much alike," Polly nodded, with a motherly

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air of condescension, "only there ain't so much danger in your act."

"I'm not so sure about that," he laughed.

"Well, you take my tip." She leaned forward as though about to impart a very valuable bit of information.

"Don't you never go in for ridin'! There ain't no act on earth so hard as a ridin' act. The rest of the bunch has got it easy alongside of us. Take the fellows on the trapeze. They always get their tackle up in jes' the same place. Take the balancin' acts. There ain't no difference in their layouts. Take any of 'em as depends on regular props, and they ain't got much chance a-goin' wrong. But, say, when you have to do a ridin' act there ain't never no two times alike. If your horse is feelin' good, the ground is stumby; if the ground ain't on the blink, the horse is wobbly. There's always somethin' wrong somewheres, and you ain't never knowin' how it's goin' to end, especially when you got to do a careful act like mine. There's a girl, Eloise, in our bunch what does a showy act on a horse what Barker calls Barbarian. She goes on in my place sometimes, and, say, them Rubes applauds her as much as me, an' her stunts is baby tricks alongside of mine. It's enough to make you sick of art!" She shook her head dolefully, then sat up with renewed interest.

"You see, mine is careful balancin' an' all that, an' you got to know your horse an' your ground for that. Now, you get wise to what I'm a-tellin' you and don't you never go into anything which depends on anything else."

"Thank you, Polly, I won't." Douglas somehow felt that he was very much indebted to her.

"I seen a church show once," Polly said suddenly.

"You did?" Douglas asked, with new interest.

"Yes," she answered, closing her lips and venturing no further comment.

"Did you like it?" he questioned after a pause.

"Couldn't make nothin' out of it. I don't care much for readin'."

"Oh, it isn't all readin'," he corrected.

"Well, the guy I saw read all of his'n. He got the whole thing right out of a book."

"Oh, that was only his text," laughed Douglas.

"Text?" "Yes. And later he tried to interpret to his congrega—"

"Easy! Easy!" she interrupted. "Come again with that, will you?"

"He told them the meaning of what he read."

"Well, I don't know what he told 'em, but it didn't mean anything to me. But your show is better'n his was," she added, trying to pacify him.

Douglas was undecided whether to feel amused or grateful for Polly's ever increasing sympathy. Before he could trust his twitching lips to answer she had put another question to him.

"Are you goin' to do a stunt while I am here?"

"I preach every Sunday. If that's what you mean. I preach this mornin'."

"Is this Sunday?" she asked, sitting up with renewed energy and looking about the room as though everything had changed color.

"Yes." "And you got a matinee?" she exclaimed incredulously.

"We have services," he corrected, gently.

"We rest up on Sundays," she said in a tone of deep commiseration.

"Oh, I see," he answered, feeling it no time to enter upon another discussion as to the comparative advantages of their two professions.

"What are you goin' to spiel about today?"

"About Ruth and Naomi."

"Ruth and who?" "Naomi," he repeated.

"Naomi," she echoed, tilting her head from side to side as she listened to the soft cadences of the word. "I never heard that name before. It 'ud look awful swell on a billboard, wouldn't it?"

"It's a Bible name, honey," Mandy said, eager to get into the conversation. "Dar's a buful picture bout her. I seed it."

"I like to look at pictures," Polly answered tentatively. Mandy crossed the room to fetch the large Bible with its steel engravings.

"We got a girl named Ruth in our 'eap of death' stunt. Some of the folks is kinder down on 'er, but I ain't."

She might have told Douglas more of her forlorn little friend, but just then Mandy came to the bed hugging a large, old-fashioned Bible, and Douglas helped to place the ponderous book before the invalid.

"See, honey, dar dey is," the old woman said, pointing to the picture of Ruth and Naomi.

"Them's crackerjacks, ain't they?" Polly gasped, and her eyes shone with wonder. "Which one's Ruth?"

"Dis one," said Mandy, pointing with her thumb.

"Why, they're dressed just like our chariot drivers. What does it say about 'em?"

"You can read it for yourself," Douglas answered gently. There was something pathetic in the eagerness of the starved little mind.

"Well, I ain't much on readin'—out loud," she faltered, growing suddenly conscious of her deficiencies. "Read it for me, will you?"

"Certainly." And he drew his chair nearer to the bed. One strong hand supported the other half of the Bible and his head was very near to hers as his deep, full voice pronounced the solemn words, in which Ruth pleaded so many years before.

"Yes, indeed," he replied, pitying more and more the starvation of mind and longing to bring to it floods of light and enrichment.

"I guess I'd like to hear you spiel," and she fell to studying him solemnly. "You would?" he asked eagerly.

"Is there any more to that story?" she asked, ignoring his question.

"Yes, indeed." "Would you read me a little more?" She was very humble now.

"Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part me and thee."

Their eyes met. There was a long pause. Suddenly the sharp, sweet notes of the church bell brought John Douglas to his feet with a start of surprise.

"Have you got to go?" Polly asked regretfully.

"Yes, I must, but I'll read the rest from the church. Open the window, Mandy!" And he passed out of the door and quietly down the stairs.

(To be continued.)

### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

Notice is hereby given that Maud Samuels, the wife of the undersigned, has left his home, and that he will not be responsible for any debts or obligations contracted or incurred by her after this date.

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