

# 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—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.

Chapter V—When Polly becomes conscious she declares that she must rejoin the circus at once. "Are you a sky pilot?" she asks the minister. Her mother was killed riding a circus horse, and her father "got his'n in a lion's cage." The minister reads to her about Ruth and Naomi, and Polly says "I guess I'd like to hear you spiel."

Chapter VI—Douglas offends Deacon Strong by defending boys who play baseball on Sunday.

"We think we've done pretty well by this church," said Deacon Strong, who was the business head, the political boss and the moral mentor of the small town's affairs. "Just you worry along with the preachin', young man, and we'll attend to the buyin' and buildin' operations."

Douglas' mind was too active to content itself wholly with the writing of sermons and the routine of formal pastoral calls. He was a keen humanitarian, so little by little he came to be interested in the heart stories and disappointments of many of the village unfortunates, some of whom were outside his congregation. The mentally sick, the despondent, who needed words of hope and courage more than dry talks on theology, found in him an ever ready friend and adviser, and these came to love and depend on him. But he was never popular with the creed bound element of the church.

Mandy had her wish about being on the spot the first time that the parson's jaw squared itself at Deacon Strong. The deacon had called at the parsonage to demand that Douglas put a stop to the boys playing baseball in the adjoining lot on Sunday. Douglas had been unable to see the deacon's point of view. He declared that baseball was a healthy and harmless form of exercise, that the air was meant to be breathed and that the boys who enjoyed the game on Sunday were principally those who were kept indoors by work on other days. The close of the interview was unsatisfactory both to Douglas and the deacon.

"Dey kinder made me cold an' prickly all up an' down de back," Mandy said later when she described their talk to Hasty. "Dat 'ere deacon don' know nuffin' 'bout gittin' roun' de parson." She tossed her head with a feeling of superiority. She knew the way. Make him forget himself with a laugh. Excite his sympathy with some village underdog.

CHAPTER VII.

M ANDY had secretly enjoyed the commotion caused by the little circus rider being left in the parsonage, at first because of her inborn love of mischief and later because Polly had become second in her heart only to the pastor. She went about her work, crooning softly during the days of Polly's convalescence. The deep, steady voice of the pastor reading aloud in the pretty window overhead was company. She would often climb the stairs to tell them some bit of village gossip and leave them laughing at a quaint comment about some inquisitive sister of the church who had happened to incur her displeasure.

As spring came on Douglas carried Polly down to the sunlit garden beneath the window, and Mandy fluttered about arranging the cushions with motherly solicitude.

More days slipped by and Polly began to creep through the little, soft leaved trees at the back of the church and to look for the deep, blue, sweet scented

violets. When she was able Douglas took her with him to visit some of the outlying houses of the poor. Her woman's instinct was quick to perceive many small needs in their lives that he had overlooked and to suggest simple, inexpensive joys that made them her devoted friends.

Their evenings were divided between making plans for these unfortunates and reading aloud from the Bible or other books.

When Polly gained courage, Douglas sometimes persuaded her to read to him, and the little corrections that he made at these times soon became noticeable in her manner of speech. She was so eager, so starved for knowledge that she drank it as fast as he could give it. It was during their talks about grammar that Mandy generally fell asleep in her rocker, her unfinished sewing still in her lap.

When a letter came from Jim and Toby it was always shared equally by Mandy and Hasty, Polly and the pastor. But at last a letter came from Jim only, and Douglas, who was asked to read it, faltered and stopped after the first few words.

"It's no use my tryin' to keep 't from you any longer, Poll," the letter began. "We ain't got Toby with us no more. He didn't have no accident; it wasn't that. He just seemed kinder sick an' allin' like ever since the night we had to leave you behind. I used to get him warm drinks an' things an' try to pull him through, but he was always a-chillin' and a-achin'. If it wasn't one thing it was another. I done all I knowed you'd 'a' wanted me to, an' the rest of the folks was mighty white to him too. I guess they kinder felt how lonesome he was. He couldn't get no more laughs in the show, so Barker had to put on another man with him. That kinder hurt him, too, I s'pose, an' showed him the way that things was a-goin'. It was just after that he wrote the parson a-tellin' him to never let you come back. He seemed to 'a' got an idee in his head that you was happier where you was. He wouldn't let me tell you 'bout his feelin' rocky, 'cause he thought it might mebber

then. It was you what made me think o' that, Poll, 'cause it seemed to me what you would 'a' done. You was allus so daffy about flowers, you an' him.

"I guess this letter's too long for me to be a-sayin' much about the show, but the 'leap-a-death' girl got her'n last week. She wasn't strong enough for the job nohow. I done what I could for her outside the show, 'cause

I knowed how you was allus a-feelin' 'bout her. I guess the 'leap-a-death's' husband is goin' to jump his job soon, if he gets enough saved up, 'cause him an' Barker can't hit it off no more. We got a good deal o' trouble among the animals too. None o' the snakes is sheddin' like they ought to, an' Jumbo's a-carryin' a sixteen foot bandage around that trunk o' his'n 'cause he got too fresh with Trixy's grub the other night, an' the new giraffe's got the croup in that seven foot neck o' his'n. I guess you'll think I got the pip for fair this time, so I'll just get on to myself now an' cut this short. I'll be writin' you ag'in when we hit Morgan-town.

"YOUR OLD MUVVER JIM."  
Douglas laid the letter gently on the table, his hand still resting upon it. He looked helplessly at the little, shrunken figure in the opposite chair. Polly had made no sound, but her head had slipped lower and lower, and she now sat very quietly with her face in her hands. She had been taught by Toby and Jim never to whimper.

"What a plucky lot they are!" thought Douglas as he considered these three lonely souls, each accepting whatever fate brought with no rebellion or even surprise. It was a strange world of stoics in which these children of the amusement arena fought and lost. They came and went like phantoms, with as little consciousness of their own best interests as of the great, moving powers of the world about them. They felt no throes of envy, no bitterness. They loved and worked and "went their way."

For once the pastor was powerless in the presence of grief. Both he and Mandy left the room quietly, feeling that Polly wished to be spared the outburst of tears that a sympathetic word might bring upon her. They allowed her to remain alone for a time; then Mandy entered softly with a tender good night, and Douglas followed her cheerily as though nothing at all had happened.

It was many weeks before Polly again became a companion to Douglas and Mandy, but they did not intrude upon her grief. They waited patiently for the time when youth should again assert itself and bring back their laughing mate to them.

(To be continued.)



As spring came on Douglas carried Polly down to the sunlit garden.

make you come back. 'She's diff'runt from us,' he was allus a-sayin'. 'I never spected to keep 'er.'"

Douglas stopped. Polly was waiting, her face white and drawn. He had not told her of Toby's letter because with it had come a request to "say nothin' ter the kid."

He felt that Polly was controlling herself with an effort until he should reach the end of Jim's letter, so he hurried on.

"The parson's promise didn't get to him none too quick," he read. "That seemed to be what he was waitin' for. He give up the night it come, an' I got him a little room in a hotel after the show an' let one of the other fellers get the stuff out o' town, so's I could stay with him up to the finish. It come round mornin'. There wasn't much to it—he just seemed tired an' peaceful-like. I'm glad he wrote what he did, he said, meanin' the parson. 'She knows, she allus knows,' he whispered, meanin' you, Poll, an' then he was on his way. He'd already give me what was saved up for you, an' I'm sendin' it along with this.—A blue money order for \$250 had fluttered from the envelope when Douglas opened it.

"I got everything ready afore I went on the next day, an' I went up an' saw the little spot on the hill where they was goin' to stow him. It looked kinder nice, an' the digger's wife said she'd put some flowers on it now an'

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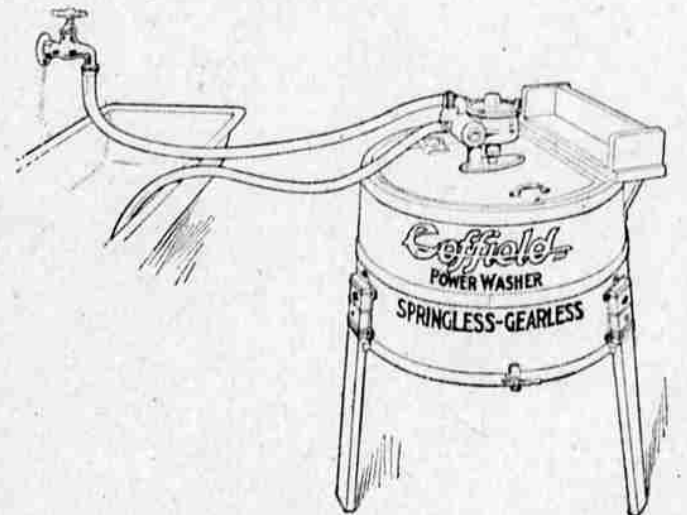
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