

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.

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.

Chapter VII—Polly recovers her health, but is saddened by the death of Toby. Jim sends the news and promises to keep in touch with her.

"Massa John? Mercy me! He nebber takes no notice ob dem t'ings. I done got a bran', spankin' new allapaca one time, an' do you think he ebber seed it? Lawdy, no! We might jes' well be goin' roun' like Mudder Eve for all dat man know." Polly looked disappointed. "But udder folks sees." Mandy continued comfortingly, "an' yo' certainly look mighty fine. Why, youse just as good now as yo' was afore yo' got hurted!"

"Yes, I'm well now and able to work again." There was no enthusiasm in her tone, for Hasty's news had made her realize how unwelcome the old life would be to her.

"Work! Yo' does work all de time. My stars, de help yo' is to Massa John!"

"Do you think so? Do I help him? Do I?"

"Of course yo' does. Yo' tells him t'ings to do in Sunday school what the chillun like, an' yo' learns him to laugh an' 'joy himself an' a lot of t'ings what nobody else could a-learned 'im."

"It's enough to make folks talk," put in Mrs. Willoughby, with a sly look at the deacons.

"An' me awaltin' to discuss the new church service," bellowed Strong.

"And me awaltin' to give him Mrs. Elverson's message," piped Elverson.

"The church bore all this in silence so long as that girl was sick," snapped Miss Perkins. "But now she's perfectly well and still a-hangin' on. No wonder folks are talking."

"Who's talkin'?" thundered Strong.

"Didn't you know?" stammered Mrs. Willoughby, not knowing herself nor caring so long as the suspicion grew.

"Know what?" yelled the excited deacon. Mrs. Willoughby floundered. Miss Perkins rushed into the breach.

"Well, if I was deacon of this church it seems to me I'd know something about what's goin' on in it."

"What is goin' on?" shrieked the now desperate deacon.

The women looked at him pityingly, exchanged knowing glances, then

shook their heads at his hopeless stupidity.

Strong was not accustomed to criticism. He prided himself upon his acuteness and was, above all, vain about his connection with the church. He looked from one woman to the other. He was seething with helpless rage. The little deacon at his side coughed nervously. Strong's pent-up wrath exploded. "Why didn't you tell me, Elverson, that people was a-talkin'?" he roared in the frightened man's ear.

Elverson sputtered and stammered, but nothing definite came of the sounds; so Strong again turned to Miss Perkins:

"What is goin' on?" he demanded. The spinster shrugged her shoulders and lifted her eyes heavenward, knowing that nothing could so madden the deacon as this mysterious inference of things too terrible to mention. She was right. Strong uttered a desperate "Bah!" and began pacing up and down the garden with reckless strides.

Mrs. Willoughby watched him with secret delight, and when he came to a halt she wriggled to his side with smirking sweetness.

"What could folks say?" she asked. "A minister and a young circus girl livin' here like this with no one to"— She found no words at this point, and Strong, now thoroughly roused, declared that the congregation should have no further cause for gossip and went out quickly in search of Douglas.

When Strong was gone Elverson looked at the set faces of the women and attempted a weak apology for the pastor. "I dare say the young man was very lonely—very—before she came."

"Lonely!" snapped Miss Perkins. "Well, if he was lonely I didn't know it."

The deacon excused himself nervously and went to join Strong. The women gathered up their buntings and retired with bland smiles to the Sunday school room, feeling that they had accomplished enough for the time being.

Strong and Elverson crossed the yard, still in search of the pastor. They turned at the sound of fluttering leaves and beheld Douglas, hatless, tearing down the path. Strong called to him, but Douglas darted quickly behind the hedge. The deacons looked at one another in speechless astonishment. Presently the silence was broken by the distant voice of Polly counting from one to a hundred. The secret was out! The pastor, a leader of the church, was playing hide and seek!

"Mr. Douglas!" shouted Strong when his breath had returned.

"Hush, hush!" whispered Douglas, looking over the hedge. He peeped cautiously about him, then came toward the men with a sigh of relief. "It's all right. She has gone the other way."

"It'll be a good thing for you if she never comes back," said Strong, and Douglas's quick ear caught an unpleasant meaning in his tone.

"What's that?" the pastor asked in a low, steady voice.

"We don't like some of the things that are goin' on here, and I want to talk to you about 'em."

"Very well, but see if you can't talk in a lower key."

"Never mind about the key?" shouted Strong angrily.

"But I do mind." Something in his eyes made the deacon lower his voice.

"We want to know how much longer that girl is goin' to stay here."

"Indeed! And why?" The color was leaving Douglas's face and his jaw was becoming very square.

"Because she's been here long enough."

"I don't agree with you there."

"Well, it don't make no difference whether you do or not. She's got to go."

"Go?" echoed Douglas.

small book from Mandy's awkward fingers and began to read "Hens set"—He frowned.

"Oh, dem's jes' Miss Polly's 'don'ts,'" interrupted Mandy disgustedly.

"I'r 'don'ts?"

"She done been set—sit—settin' up aights fryin' ter learn what yo' done tole her," stammered Mandy.

"Dear little Polly," he murmured, then closed the book and put it into his pocket.

(To be continued.)

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