

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 Toby to unprecedented speed and falls. Bingo 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.

Chapter VIII—Polly recovers from the blow dealt her by Toby's death. She has ceased using slang and is educating herself under Douglas' guidance. She endeavors to improve Mandy's grammar.

The deacon excused himself nervously and went to join Strong.

The women gathered up their bunnings 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' 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' 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.

"Yes, sir-ee-bob. We've made up our minds to that."

"And who do you mean by 'we'?"

"The members of this congregation," replied Strong impatiently.

"Am I to understand that you are speaking for them?" There was a deep frown between the young pastor's eyes. He was beginning to be perplexed.

"Yes, and as deacon of this church."

"Then as deacon of this church you tell the congregation for me that that is my affair."

"Your affair," shouted Strong, "when

that girl is livin' under the church's roof, eatin' the church's bread?"

"Just one moment! You don't quite understand. I am minister of this church, and for that position I receive or am supposed to receive a salary to live on and this parsonage, rent free, to live in. Any guests that I may have here are my guests and not guests of the church. Remember that, please."

There was an embarrassing silence. The deacons recalled that the pastor's salary was slightly in arrears. Elverson coughed meekly. Strong started.

"You keep out of this, Elverson!" he cried. "I'm runnin' this affair, and I ain't forgettin' my duty nor the parson's."

"I shall endeavor to do my duty as I see it," answered Douglas, turning away and dismissing the matter.

"Your duty is to your church," thundered Strong.

"You're right about that, Deacon Strong," answered Douglas, wheeling about sharply, "and my duty to the church is reason enough for my acting exactly as I am doing in this case."

"Is your duty to the church the only reason you keep that girl here?"

"No; there are other reasons."

"I thought so."

"You've heard her story—you must have heard. She was left with me by an old clown who belonged in the circus where she worked. Before he died he asked me to look after her. She has no one else. I shall certainly do so."

"That was when she was hurt. She's well now and able to go back where she came from. Do you expect us to have our young folks associatin' with a circus ridin' girl?"

"So, that's it!" cried the pastor, with a pitying look. "You think this child is unfit for your homes because she was once in a circus. For some reason circus to you spells crime. You call yourself a Christian, Deacon Strong, and yet you insist that I send a good, innocent girl back to a life which you say is sinful. I'm ashamed of you, Strong—I'm ashamed of you!"

"That talk don't do no good with me!" roared Strong. He was desperate at being accused of an un-Christian attitude.

"I ain't askin' you to send her back to the circus. I don't care where you send her. Get her away from here; that's all."

"Not so long as she wishes to stay."

"You won't?" Strong saw that he must try a new attack. He came close to Douglas and spoke with a marked insinuation. "If you was a friend to the girl, you wouldn't want the whole congregation a-pointin' fingers at her."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you're livin' here alone with her and it looks bad—bad for the girl and bad for you—and folks is talkin'."

"Are you trying to tell me that my people are evil minded enough to think that I— Douglas stopped. He could not frame the question. "I don't believe it," he concluded shortly.

"You'll be made to believe it if you don't get rid of that girl."

"Do you believe it?" He turned upon the little man at his side. "Do you believe it, Elverson?"

Elverson had been so accustomed to Strong monopolizing the conversation that he had become hopelessly lost as the discussion went on, and the sudden appeal to him all but paralyzed his power of speech. He was still gur-

tered impatiently. "It makes no difference whether we believe it or not. We're goin' to do our duty by the church, and that girl must leave or"—

"Or I must!" Douglas pieced out Strong's phrase for himself. "That threat doesn't frighten me at all, deacon. After what you have said I should refuse to remain in this church—the deacon stepped forward eagerly—"were it not that I realize more than ever before how much you need me, how much you ignorant, narrow minded creatures need to be taught the meaning of true Christianity." The deacon was plainly disappointed.

"Is it possible?" gasped Elverson weakly.

"Well, what are you goin' to do about it?" asked Strong when he could trust himself to speak again.

"I shall do what is best for Miss Polly," said the pastor quietly, but firmly.

He turned away to show that the interview was at an end. Strong followed him. Douglas pointed to the gate with a meaning not to be mistaken. "Good afternoon, deacon."

Strong hesitated. He looked at the pastor, then at the gate, then at the pastor again. "I'll go," he shouted, "but it ain't the end!" He slammed the gate behind him.

"Quite so, quite so," chirped Elverson, not having the slightest idea of what he was saying. He saw the frigid expression on the pastor's face; he coughed behind his hat and followed Strong.

(To be continued.)

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