

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.

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.

Chapter IX—Deacons Strong and Elverson reprove the pastor for harboring the circus girl. Douglas declares that he is merely doing his duty. Strong declares that the girl must go. Douglas defies him.

Chapter X—Douglas suggests to Polly that she go to a seminary. Her quotation "And Ruth said, 'Entreat me not to leave thee,'" reveals to both the fact that they love each other. Douglas takes her in his arms and tells her that she is never to leave him.

Chapter XI—"Muvver Jim" calls and notes the change in Polly's speech. Polly tells him she has abandoned the circus business. Deacons Strong and Elverson inform Polly that she can save the minister trouble by returning to the circus. Learning that the deacons contemplate discharging Douglas, she rebuffs Douglas, declares that she yearns for the circus and rushes away sobbing.

CHAPTER XII.

Lonely days followed Polly's desertion of the parsonage. Mandy went about her duties very quietly, feeling that the little comments which once amused the pastor had now become an interruption to thoughts in which she had no part. He would sit for hours with his head in his hands, taking no notice of what passed before him. She tried to think of new dishes to tempt his appetite and shook her head sadly as she bore the untasted food back to the kitchen.

She sometimes found a portfolio of drawings lying open upon his study table. She remembered the zeal with which he had planned to remodel the church and parsonage when he first came to them, how his enthusiasm had gradually died for lack of encouragement and how he had at last put his books in a cupboard, where they grew dusty from long neglect. She marveled at their reappearance now, but something in his set, faraway look made her afraid to inquire. Thus she went on from day to day, growing more impatient with Hasty and more silent with the pastor.

Mandy needed humor and companionship to oil the wheels of her humdrum life. There was no more laughter in the house, and she began to droop.

Polly had been away from the parsonage a month when the complacency of the village was again upset by the arrival of the "Great American Circus." There were many callers at the parsonage that day, for speculation was

now at fever heat about the pastor. "Will he try to see her?" "Has he forgotten her?" and "What did he ever find in her?" were a few of the many questions that the women were asking each other. Now that the cause of their envy was removed they would gladly have reinstated the pastor as their idol, for, like all truly feminine souls, they could not bear to see a man unhappy without wishing to comfort him, nor happy unless they were the direct cause of his state. "How dare any man be happy without me?" has been the cry of each woman since Eve was created to mate with Adam.

Douglas had held himself more and more aloof from the day of Polly's disappearance. He expressed no opinion about the deacons or their recent disapproval of him. He avoided meeting them oftener than duty required, and Strong felt so uncomfortable and tongue-tied in his presence that he, too, was glad to make their talks as few as possible.

Nothing was said about the pastor's plans for the future or about his continued connection with the church, and the inquisitive sisterhood was on the point of exploding from an overaccumulation of unanswered questions.

He delivered his sermons conscientiously, called upon his poor, listened to the sorrows, real and fancied, of his parishioners and shut himself up with his books or walked alone on the hill behind the church.

He had been absent all day when Mandy looked out on the circus lot for the dozenth time and saw that the afternoon performance was closing. It had driven her to desperation to learn that Miss Polly was not in the parade that morning and to know that the pastor had made no effort to find out about her. For weeks both she and Hasty had hoped that the return of the circus might bring Polly back to them, but now it was nearly night and there had been no word from her. Why didn't she come running in to see them, as Mandy had felt so sure she would? Why had the pastor stayed away on the hills all day?

Unanswered questions were always an abomination to Mandy, so finally she drew a quarter from the knotted gingham rag that held her small wad of savings and told Hasty to "go 'long to de show an' find out 'bout Miss Polly."

She was anxiously waiting for him when Deacon Strong knocked at the door for the second time that afternoon.

"Is Mr. Douglas back yet?" he asked. "No, sah, he ain't," said Mandy very shortly. She felt that Strong and Elverson had been "a-tryin'" to spy on de parson all day, and she resented their visits more than she usually did.

"What time are you expectin' him?" "I don't neber see 'em Massa Douglas 'til I sees him."

Strong grunted unconvincingly and went down the steps. She saw from the window that he met Elverson in front of the church.

"Dey sure am a-meantin' trouble," she mumbled.

The band had stopped playing; the last of the audience had straggled down the street. She opened the door and stood on the porch; the house seemed to suffocate her. What was keeping Hasty?

He came at last, but Mandy could tell from his gait that he brought unwelcome news.

"Ain't she dar?"

"She's a-trabbelin' wid 'em, Mandy, but she didn't done ride."

"See heah, Hasty Jones, is dat ere chille sick?"

"I don't rightly know," said Hasty. "A great big man, what wore clothes like a gemmen, comed out wid a whip in his hand an' says as how he's 'bilged to 'nounce anudder gal in Miss Polly's place. An' den he says as how de udder gal was jes' as good, an' den ever'body look disappointed like, an' den out comes de udder gal on a boss an' do tricks, an' I ain't heard no more 'bout Miss Polly."

"She's sick, dat's what I says," Mandy declared excitedly, "an' somebody's got to do somethin'!"

"I done all I knowed," drawled Hasty, fearing that Mandy was regretting her twenty-five cent investment.

"Go 'long out an' fix up dat 'ero kitchen fire," was Mandy's impatient reply. "I got to keep dem vittels warm for Massa John."

She wished to be alone, so that she could think of some way to get hold of Polly. "Dat baby faced mornin' glory done got Mandy all wobbly 'bout de heart," she declared to herself as she crossed to the window for a sight of the pastor.

It was nearly dark when she saw him coming slowly down the path from the hill. She lighted the study



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lantern, rearranged the cushions and tried to make the room look cheery for his entrance.

"I's 'traid yo's mighty tired," she said.

"Oh, no," answered Douglas absently. "Ibbe yo'd like Mandy to be sarvin' your supper in here tonight. It's more cheeryful."

He crossed to the window and looked out upon the circus lot. The flare of the torches and the red fire came up to light his pale, tense face. "How like the picture of thirteen months ago!" he thought, and old Toby's words came back to him—"The show has got to go on."

He longed to have done with dreams and speculation, to feel something tangible, warm and real within his grasp. "I can't go on like this!" he cried. "I can't!" He turned from the window and walked hurriedly up and down the room. Indoors or out, he found no rest. He threw himself in the armchair near the table and sat buried in thought.

Mandy came softly into the room. She was followed by Hasty, who carried a tray laden with things that ought to have tempted any man. She motioned for Hasty to put the tray on the table and then began arranging the dishes. Hasty stole to the window and peeped out at the tempting flare of red fire.

When Douglas discovered the presence of his two "faithfuls" he was touched with momentary contrition.

"Have you had a hard day with the new gravel walk?" he asked Hasty, remembering that he had been laying a fresh path to the Sunday school room.

"Jes' yo' come eat yo' supper," Mandy called to Douglas. "Don' yo' worry your head 'bout dat lazy husban' ob mine. He ain't goin' ter work 'nuff to hurt hisself." For an instant she had been tempted to let the pastor know how Hasty had gone to the circus and seen nothing of Polly, but her motherly instinct won the day, and she begged him to eat before disturbing himself with her own anxieties. It was no use. He only toyed with his food; he was clearly ill at ease and eager to be gone. She gave up trying to tempt his appetite and began to lead up in a roundabout way to the things which she wished to ask.

"It's quite some racket out dar in de lot tonight," she said. Douglas did not answer. After a moment she went on, "Hasty didn't work on no walk today." Douglas looked at her quizzically, while Hasty, convinced that for reasons of her own she was going to get him into trouble, was making frantic motions. "He done gone ter de circus," she blurted out. Douglas's face became suddenly grave. Mandy saw that she had touched an open wound.

"I's 'traid yo' couldn't stan' it, Massa John. I had ter find out 'bout dat angel chille."

There was a pause. She felt that he was waiting for her to go on.

"She didn't done ride today."

He looked up with the eyes of a dumb, persecuted animal. "And de gemmen in de show didn't tell nobody why jes' spoke 'bout de udder gal takin' her place."

"Why didn't she ride?" cried Douglas, in an agony of suspense.

"I's what I don't know, sah."

Mandy began to cry. It was the first time in his experience that Douglas had ever known her to give way to any such weakness.

Hasty came down from the window and tried to put one arm about Mandy's shoulders.

"I 'b me alone, yo' nigger!" she exclaimed, trying to cover her tears with a show of anger that she did not feel; then she rushed from the room, followed by Hasty.

The band was playing loudly. The din of the night performance was increasing. Douglas's nerves were straining to the point of breaking. He

would not let himself go near the window. He stood by the side of the table, his fists clinched, and tried to beat back the impulse that was pulling him toward the door. Again and again he set his teeth.

It was uncertainty that gnawed at him so. Was she ill? Could she need him? Was she sorry for having left him? Would she be glad if he went for her and brought her back with him? He recalled the hysterical note in her behavior the day that she went away—how she had pleaded, only a few moments before Jim came, never to be separated from him. Had she really cared for Jim and for the old life? Why had she never written? Was she ashamed? Was she sorry for what she had done? What could it mean? He threw his hands above his head with a gesture of despair. A moment later he passed out into the night.

(To be continued.)

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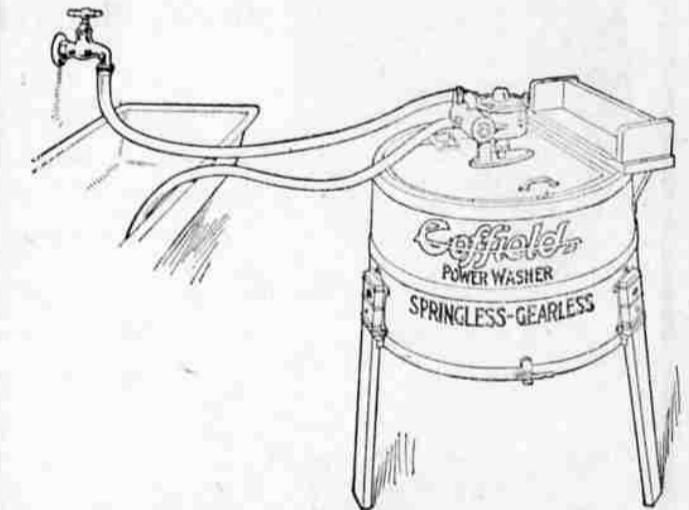
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