

POLLY of the CIRCUS

BY MARGARET MAYO
 COP. RIGHT, 1935, BY DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY



Ambitious canvassers and grooms were exercising feet in air, in the hope of some day getting into the performers' ring. Property men stole a minute's sleep in the soft warm grass while they waited for more tackle to load in the wagons. Children of the performers were swinging on the tent ropes. Chattering monkeys sat astride the Shetland ponies, awaiting their entrance to the ring. The shrieks of the hyenas in the distant animal tent, the roaring of the lions and the trumpeting of the elephants mingled with the incessant clamor of the brass band. A back of all this, pointing upward in mute protest, rose a solemn church spire, white and majestic against a vast panorama of blue, moonlit hills that encircled the whole wide picture. Jim's eyes turned absentmindedly toward the church as he sat fumbling with the lock of the little brown satchel.

He had gone from store to store in the various towns where they had played looking for something to inspire wonder in the heart of a miserably new arrival at her sixteenth year. Only the desperation of a last moment had forced him to decide upon the imitation alligator bag, which he now held in his hand.

It looked small and mean to him as the moment of presentation approached, and he was glad that the saleswoman in the little country store had suggested the addition of ribbons and lace, which he now drew from the pocket of his corduroys. He placed his red and blue treasures very carefully in the bottom of the satchel and remembered with regret the strand of coral beads which he had so nearly bought to go with them.

drawl, "them's a funny lot of guys what goes to them church places, ain't they?"

"Most everybody has got some kind of a bug," Jim assented. "I guess they don't do much harm."

"Member the time you took me into one of them places to get me outa the rain, the Sunday our wagon broke down? Well, that bunch we butted into wouldn't 'a' give Sells Bros. no cause for worry with that show 'a' theirs, would they, Jim?" She looked at him with withering disgust. "Say, wasn't that the punkiest stunt that fellow in black was doin' on the platform? You said Joe was only ten minutes gettin' the tire on to our wheel; but, say, you take it from me, Jim, if I had to wait another ten minutes as long as that one I'd be too old to go on a-ridin'!"

Jim "lowed" some church shows might be better than "that un," but Polly said he could have her end of the bet and summed up by declaring it no wonder that "the yaps in these towns is daffy about circuses if they don't have nothin' better 'an church shows to go to."

One of the grooms was entering the lot with Polly's horse. She stooped to tighten one of her sandals, and as she rose Jim saw her sway slightly and put one hand to her head. He looked at her sharply, remembering her faintness in the parade that morning.

"You ain't feelin' right," he said uneasily.

"You just bet I am," Polly answered, with an independent toss of her head. "This is the night we're goin' to make them Rubes in there sit up, ain't it, Bingo?" she added, placing one arm

times played strange pranks with Polly. Tonight her eyes shone and her lips were parted in anticipation as she leaped lightly over the many colored streamers of the wheel of silken ribbons held by Barker in the center of the ring and by Toby and the tumblers on the edge of the bank.

With each change of her act the audience cheered and frantically applauded. The band played faster; Bingo's pace increased; the end of her turn was coming. The tumblers arranged themselves around the ring with paper hoops. Bingo was fairly racing. She went through the first hoop with a crash of tearing paper.

"Heigh, Bingo!" she shouted as she bent her knees to make ready for the final leap.

Bingo's neck was stretched. He had never gone so fast before. Barker looked uneasy. Toby forgot to go on with his accustomed tricks. Jim watched anxiously from the entrance.

The paper of one hoop was still left unbroken. The attendant turned his eyes to glance at the oncoming girl. The hoop shifted slightly in his clumsy hand as Polly leaped straight up from Bingo's back, trusting to her first calculation. Her forehead struck the edge of the hoop. She clutched wildly at the air. Bingo galloped on, and she fell to the ground, striking her head against the ironbound stake at the edge of the ring.

Everything stopped. There was a gasp of horror. The musicians dropped their instruments. Bingo halted and looked back uneasily. She lay unconscious and seemingly lifeless.

A great cry went up in the tent. Panic stricken men, women and children began to clamber down from their seats, while others nearest the ground attempted to jump into the ring. Barker, still grasping his long whip, rushed to the girl's side and shouted wildly to Toby:

"Say something, you. Get 'em back!"

Old Toby turned his white face to the crowd. His features worked convulsively, but he could not speak. His grief was so grotesque that the few who saw him laughed hysterically. He could not even go to Polly. His feet seemed pinned to the earth.

Jim rushed into the tent at the first cry of the audience. He lifted the limp form tenderly and, kneeling in the ring, held her bruised head in his hands.

"Can't you get a doctor?" he shouted desperately to Barker.

"Here's the doctor!" some one called, and a stranger came toward them. He bent over the seemingly lifeless form, his fingers on the tiny wrist, his ear to the heart.

"Well, sir?" Jim faltered, for he had caught the puzzled look in the doctor's eyes as his deft hand pressed the cruelly wounded head.

"I can't tell just yet," said the doctor. "She must be taken away."

"Where can we take her?" asked Jim, a look of terror in his great, troubled eyes.

"The parsonage is the nearest house," said the doctor. "I am sure the pastor will be glad to have her there until we can find out how badly she is hurt."

In an instant Barker was back in the center of the ring. He announced that Polly's injuries were slight, called the attention of the audience to the wonderful concert to take place and bade them make ready for the thrilling chariot race.

Jim, blind with despair, lifted the light burden and staggered out of the tent, while the band played furiously and the people fell back into their seats. The Roman chariots thundered and clattered around the outside of the ring, the audience cheered the winner of the race, and for the moment Polly was forgotten.



POLLY DANCED SERENELY ON BINGO'S BACK.

He opened the large property trunk by his side and took from it a laundry box which held a little tan coat that was to be Toby's contribution to the birthday surprise. He was big hearted enough to be glad that Toby's gift seemed fine and more useful than his. It was only when the "leap of death" act preceding Polly's turn was announced that the big fellow gave up feasting his eyes on the satchel and coat and hid them away in the big property trunk. She would be out in a minute, and these wonders were not to be revealed to her until the close of the night's performance.

Jim put down the lid of the trunk and sat upon it, feeling like a criminal because he was hiding something from Polly.

His consciousness of guilt was increased as he recalled how often she had forbidden Toby and himself to rush into reckless extravagances for her sake and how she had been more nearly angry than he had ever seen her when they had put their month's salaries together to buy her the spangled dress for her first appearance. It had taken a great many apologies and promises as to their future behavior to calm her, and now they had again disobeyed her. It would be a great relief when tonight's ordeal was over.

Jim watched Polly uneasily as she came from the dressing tent and stepped to gaze at the nearby church steeple. The incongruity of the slant that soon came from her delicately formed lips was lost upon him as she turned her eyes toward him.

"Say, Jim," she said, with a western

affectionately about the neck of the big white horse that stood waiting near the entrance.

"You bin ridin' too reckless lately," said Jim sternly as he followed her. "I don't like it. There ain't no need of your puttin' in all them extra stunts. Your act is good enough without 'em. Nobody else ever done 'em, an' nobody 'd miss 'em if you left 'em out."

Polly turned with a triumphant grin in her voice. The music was swelling for her entrance.

"You ain't my mother, Jim; you're my grandmother," she taunted, and with a crack of her whip she was away on Bingo's back.

"It's the spirit of the dead one that's got into her," Jim mumbled as he turned away, still seeing the flash in the departing girl's eyes.

CHAPTER IV.

THE glare of the circus band had been a sore temptation to Mandy Jones all afternoon and evening. Again and again it had dragged her from her work to the study window, from which she could see the wonders so tantalizingly near.

Mandy was housekeeper for the Rev. John Douglas, but the unwashed supper dishes did not trouble her as she watched the lumbering elephants, the restless lions, the long necked giraffes and the striped zebras that came and went in the nearby circus lot. And yet, in spite of her own curiosity, she could not forgive her vagrant "worse half," Hasty, who had been lured from duty early in the day. She had once dubbed him Hasty in a spirit of derision, and the name had clung to him. The sarcasm seemed doubly appropriate tonight, for he had been away since 10 that morning, and it was now past 9.

The young pastor for a time had enjoyed Mandy's tirades against her husband, but when she began calling shrill out of the window to chance acquaintances for news of him he slipped quietly into the next room to finish tomorrow's sermon. Mandy renewed her operations at the window with increased vigor when the pastor had gone. She was barely saved from pitching headforemost into the lot by the timely arrival of Deacon Strong's daughter, who managed with difficulty to connect the excited woman's feet with the floor.

"Foh de Lor' sake!" Mandy gasped as she stood panting for breath and blinking at the pretty, young, apple faced Julia. "I was suah most gone dat time." Then followed another outburst against the delinquent Hasty.

But the deacon's daughter did not hear. Her eyes were already wandering anxiously to the lights and the tinsel of the little world beyond the window.

This was not the first time today that Mandy had found herself talking to space. There had been a steady stream of callers at the parsonage

Claster's Clothing Store. Claster's Clothing Store.

\$18 AND \$20 MEN'S SPRING SUITS \$11.75

The Cleverest Styles, the Slickest Fabrics, the Best Workmanship, and the Greatest Values.

Get one of these fine 18 and \$20 Mens Suits \$11.75 in the latest cut for... Fine Pure Worsted Suits in gray, tan, olive, mode, smoke and black. Positively the finest suit you ever bought at the price. Come in and look them over. You'll be delighted.

W. L. DOUGLAS SHOES. \$4.00 ones at \$3.38 3.50 " " 2.98 3.00 " " 2.68 These shoes are strictly Douglas from the word go, and are priced in the factory for the trade of the country, but we were not included.

The greatest ideas in Men's and Young Men's Clothes for everyday uses can be found here in abundance. Prices ranging from \$2.98 up to \$9.95

MEN'S TROUSERS. Men's Trousers in fancy peg stripes, best of cloth and trimmings. Never sold by anyone for less than \$5.00 or \$6.00. But you can get them here for \$3.19.

We are the sole agents in Bellefonte for the Michael-Sterns and David Adler's Son's Clothing. "That's enough for this trip."

THE BIRTHPLACE OF LOW PRICES. CLASTER'S UNDERSELLING STORE. Crider's Exchange Bellefonte, Pa.



"Most everybody has got some kind of a bug," Jim assented.

since 11 that morning, but she no long ago confided to the pastor that she suspected their reasons.

"Dey comes in here a-trackin' up my floors," she said, "an' a-askin' why you don't stop de church an a-showin' nex' to de church an a-carranin' dar necks out de winder till I can't get no housework done."

"That's only human nature," Douglas had answered, with a laugh, but Mandy had declared that she knew another name for it and had mumbled something about "hypocrites" as she seized her broom and began to sweep imaginary tracks from in front of the door.

Many times she had made up her mind to let the next caller know just what she thought of "hypocrites," but her determination was usually weakened by her still greater desire to excite increased wonder in the faces of her visitors.

Divided between these two inclinations, she gazed at Julia now. The shining eyes of the deacon's daughter conquered, and she launched forth into an eager description of how she had just seen a "wonderful striped anamule" with a "pow'ful long neck walk right out of the tent" and how he had "come apart afore her very eyes" and two men had slipped "right out of his insides." Mandy was so carried away by her own eloquence and so busy showing Julia the sights beyond the window that she did not hear Miss Perkins, the thin lipped spinster, who entered, followed by the Widow Willoughby, dragging her seven-year-old son Willie by the hand.

The women were protesting because their choir practice of "What Shall the Harvest Be?" had been interrupted by

the unrequested accompaniment of the "hoochee coochee" from the nearby circus band.

"It's scandalous!" Miss Perkins snapped. "Scandalous! And somebody ought to stop it." She glanced about with an unmistakable air of grievance at the closed doors, feeling that the pastor was undoubtedly behind one of them when he ought to be out taking action against the things that her soul abominated.

"Well, I'm sure I've done all that I could," piped the widow, with a meek, martyred air. She was always martyred. She considered it an appropriate attitude for a widow. "He can't blame me if the choir is out of key to-morrow."

"Mercy me!" interrupted the spinster. "If there isn't Julia Strong a-leanin' right out of that window a-lookin' at the circus, and her pa a deacon of the church, and this the house of the pastor! It's shocking! I must go to her."

"Ma, let me see, too," begged Willie as he tugged at his mother's skirts.

Mrs. Willoughby hesitated. Miss Perkins was certainly taking a long while for her argument with Julia. The glow from the red powder outside the window was positively alarming.

"Dear me!" she said. "I wonder if there can be a fire." And with this pretext for investigation she, too, joined the little group at the window.

A few moments later, when Douglas entered for a fresh supply of paper, the backs of the company were toward him. He crossed to the study table without disturbing his visitors and smiled to himself at the eager way in which they were hanging out of the window.

Douglas was a sturdy young man of eight and twenty, frank and boyish in manner, confident and light hearted in spirit. He had seemed too young to the deacons when he was appointed to their church, and his keen enjoyment of outdoor games and other healthful sports robbed him of a certain dignity in their eyes. Some of the women of the congregation had been inclined to side with the deacons, for it hurt their vanity that the pastor found so many other interests when he might have been sitting in dark, stuffy rooms discussing theology with them, but Douglas had been either unconscious or indifferent to their resentment and had gone on his way with a cheery nod and an unconquerable conviction of right that had only left them floundering. He intended to quit the room now unnoticed, but was unfortunately enough to upset a chair as he turned from the table. This brought a chorus of exclamations from the women, who, chattering, rushed quickly toward him.

"What do you think of my naughty boy, Willie?" simpered the widow. "He dragged me quite to the window."

Douglas glanced amusedly first at the five foot six widow and then at the helpless red haired urchin by her side, but he made no comment beyond offering a chair to each of the women.

"Our choir practice had to be entirely discontinued," declared Miss Perkins sourly as she accepted the proffered chair, adjusted her skirts for a stay and glanced defiantly at the parson, who had dutifully seated himself near the table.

"I am sure I have as true an ear as anybody," whimpered the widow, with an injured air. "But I defy any one to lead 'What Shall the Harvest Be?' to an accompaniment like that." She jerked her hand in the direction of the window. The band was again playing the "hoochee coochee."

"Never mind about the choir practice," said Douglas, with a smile. "It is soul, not skill, that our congregation needs in its music. As for that music out there, it is not without its compensations. Why, the small boys would rather hear that band than the finest church organ in the world."

"And the small boys would rather see the circus than to hear you preach, most likely," snapped Miss Perkins. It was adding insult to injury for him to try to console her.

"Of course they would, and so would some of the grownups if they'd only tell the truth about it," said Douglas, laughing.

"What?" exclaimed Miss Perkins. "Why not?" asked Douglas. "I am sure I don't know what they do inside the tents, but the parade looked very promising."

"The parade!" the two women echoed in one breath. "Did you see the parade?"

"Yes, indeed," said Douglas enthusiastically. "But it didn't compare with the one I saw at the age of eight." He turned his head to one side and looked into space with a reminiscent smile. The widow's red haired boy crept close to him.

"The Shetland ponies seemed as small as mice," he continued dreamily, "the elephants huffed as mountains, the great callope wuffed my soul to the very skies, and I followed that parade right into the circus lot."

"Did you see inside de tent?" Willie asked eagerly.

"I didn't have enough money for that," Douglas answered frankly. He turned to the small boy and pinched his ear. There was sad disappointment in the youngster's face, but he brightened again when the parson confessed that he "peeped."

"A parson peepin'!" cried the thin lipped Miss Perkins.

"I was not a parson then," corrected Douglas good naturedly.

"You were going to be," persisted the spinster.

"I had to be a boy first in spite of that fact."

The sudden appearance of Hasty proved a diversion. He was looking very sheepish.

"Hyar he is, Mars John; look at him!" said Mandy.

"Hasty, where have you been all day?" demanded Douglas severely.

[To be Continued.]