

Polly of the Circus

BY MARGARET MAYO
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[Continued from last week.]
"I thought you'd want to know," said Hasty, a little surprised at her lack of enthusiasm.
"Yes, of course," she turned away and pretended to look at the flowers.
"Don't you tell Mandy I been talkin' 'bout dat circus," said Hasty unhesitatingly.
He was beginning to fear that he had made a mistake, but before Polly could answer baskets of food, which Hasty was to take to the Sunday school room. She looked at the girl's troubled face and drooping shoulders in surprise.
"What make yo' look so serious, honey?"
"Just thinking," said Polly absently.
"My! Don't yo' look fine in your new dress!" She was anxious to draw the girl out of her reverie.
"Do you like it?" Polly asked eagerly, forgetting her depression of a moment before. "Do you think Mr. John will like it?"
"Massa John? Mercy me! He neber takes no notice ob dem t'ings. I done got a bran', spankin' new all-paca one time, an' do you think he ebber seed it? Lawdy, no! We might jes' well be goin' round 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 hurried!"
"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."

think ob all dat 'ere foolishness ebber-time I open my mouth, I'd done been tongue tied afore I was born."
"I could teach you in no time," volunteered Polly eagerly.
"I don't want ter be teached," protested Mandy doggedly. "Hasty Jones says I's too smart anyhow. Men don't like women knowin' too much; if skeers 'em. I's good enough for my old man, an' I ain't a-tryin' ter get nobody else's." Mandy wound up flatly.
"But he'd like you all the better," persisted Polly, laughing.
"I don't want to be liked no better by no nigger," snapped Mandy. "I's a busy woman, I is." She made for the house; then curiosity conquered her, and she came back to Polly's side.
"See here, honey, whose been I arnin' yo' all dem nonsense?"
"I learn from Mr. Douglas. I remember all the things he tells me, and at night I write them down and say them over. Do you see this, Mandy?" She took a small red book from her belt and put it into Mandy's black, chubby fists.
"I see some writin', if dat's what yo' mean," Mandy answered helplessly.
"These are my don'ts," Polly confided as she pointed enthusiastically to worn pages of finely written notes.
"Youse what, chile?"
"The things I musn't do or say."
"An' youse been losin' yoah beauty sleep for dem t'ings?" Mandy looked incredulous.
"I don't want Mr. John to feel ashamed of me," she said, with growing pride.
"Well, yo'd catch Mandy a-settin' up for!"
"Oh, oh! What did I tell you, Mandy?" Polly pointed reproachfully to the reminder in the little red book. It was a fortunate thing that Willie interrupted the lesson at this point, for Mandy's temper was becoming very uncertain. The children had grown weary waiting for Polly, and Willie had been sent to fetch her. Polly offered to help Mandy with the decorations.



"LORDY SAKES! I DIDN'T KNOW DAT."

"You musn't say 'learned him,'" Polly corrected. "You must say 'taught him.' You can't 'learn' anybody any thing. You can only 'teach' them."
"Lordy sakes! I didn't know dat." She rolled her large eyes at her young instructress and saw that Polly looked very serious. "She's gwine ter have anudder one a dem 'fictlar spells,' thought Mandy, and she made ready to protest.
"See here, ain't you neber!"— She was interrupted by a quick "Have you neber?" from Polly.
"It done make no difference what yo' say," Mandy snapped, "so long as folks understands yo'." She always grew restive under these ordeals, but Polly's firm controlled manner generally conquered.
"Oh, yes, it does," answered Polly. "I used to think it didn't, but it does. You have to say things in a certain way or folks look down on you."
"I's satisfied de way I be," declared Mandy as she plumped herself down on the garden bench and began to fidget with resentment.
"The way I am," Polly persisted sweetly.
"See here, chile, is dat why yo' been a-settin' up nights an' keepin' de light burnin'?"
"You musn't say 'settin' up.' You must say 'sittin' up.' Hens set!"— "So do I," interrupted Mandy. "I's doin' it now." For a time she preserved an injured silence, then turned upon Polly vehemently. "If I had to

but Willie won the day, and she was running away hand in hand with him when Douglas came out of the house.
"Wait a minute!" he called. "My, how fine you look!" He turned Polly about and surveyed the new gown admiringly.
"He did see it! He did see it!" cried Polly gleefully.
"Of course I did. I always notice everything, don't I, Mandy?"
"Yo' suah am improv'ed since Miss Polly come," Mandy grunted.
"Come, Willie!" called the girl and ran out laughing through the trees.
"What's this?" Douglas took the 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.
"Her don'ts?"
"She done been set—sit—settin' up nights tryin' ter learn what yo' done tole her," stammered Mandy.
"Dear little Polly," he murmured, then closed the book and put it into his pocket.

CHAPTER IX.
DOUGLAS was turning toward the house when the Widow Willoughby came through the wicker gate to the left of the parsonage, carrying a basket for the social. She was followed by Miss Perkins with a bucket of pickles, which Mandy promptly placed on top of Mrs.

Elverson's ice cream. The women explained that they had come to put the finishing touches to the decorations. If anything was needed to increase Mandy's dislike of the widow it was this announcement.
Mrs. Willoughby was greatly worried because her children had not been home since the afternoon school session. Upon hearing that they were with Polly she plainly showed her displeasure, and Douglas dispatched Mandy for them. She saw that her implied distrust of Polly had annoyed him, and she was about to apologize when two of the deacons arrived on the scene, also carrying baskets and parcels for the social.
Strong led the way. He always led the way and always told Elverson what to think. They had been talking excitedly as they neared the parsonage, for Strong disapproved of the recent changes which the pastor had made in the church service. He and Douglas had clashed more than once since the baseball argument, and the deacon had realized more and more that he had met a will quite as strong as his own. His failure to bend the parson to his way of thinking was making him irritable and taking his mind from his business.
"Can you beat that!" he would exclaim as he turned away from some disagreement with Douglas, his temper ruffled for the day.
Polly was utterly unconscious of the unfriendly glances cast in her direction as she came running into the garden leading the widow's two children.
She nodded gayly to Julia Strong, who was coming through the gate, then hurried to Mrs. Willoughby, begging that the children be allowed to remain a little longer. She was making up a new game, she said, and needed Willie and Jennie for the set.
"My children do not play in promiscuous games," said the widow icily.
"Oh, but this isn't pro-pro—" Polly stammered. "It's a new game. You put two here, and two here, and—"
"I don't care to know." The widow turned away and pretended to talk to Julia.
"Oh!" gasped Polly, stunned by the widow's rebuff.
She stood with bowed head in the center of the circle. The blood flow from her cheeks; then she turned to go. Douglas stepped quickly to her side.
"Wait a minute," he said. She paused. All eyes were turned upon them. "Is this a game that grownups can play?"
"Why, yes, of course."
"Good! Then I'll make up your set. I need a little amusement just now. Excuse me," he added, turning to the deacons. Then he ran with her out through the trees.
The deacons and the women stared at each other, aghast.
"Well, what do you think of that?" said Mrs. Willoughby as the flying skirts of the girl and the black figure of the man disappeared up the path.
"I think it's scandalous. If you are talking to me," said Miss Perkins. "The idea of a full grown parson a-runnin' off to play children's games with a circus ridin' girl!"
"She isn't such a child," sneered Julia.
"It's enough to make folks talk," put in Mrs. Willoughby, with a sly look at the deacons.
"At the awatin' to discuss the new church service," bellowed Strong.
"And me awaiting 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?" simpered 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 autocracy 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 living 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 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 neber 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.
"Yes, sir—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, sir—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."
[To be Continued.]

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