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[Continued from last week.]

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 sarmons conscien tiously, 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 after-

"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 nebber spec' Massa Douglas till I sees him."

Strong grunted uncivilly and went window that he met Elverson in front of the church.

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

The band had stopped playing; the 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 knews.

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

"See heah, Hasty Jones, is dat ere

chile sick?" "I don' rightly know," said Hasty. "A great big man, what wored clothes like a gemmen, comed out wid a whip in his hand an' says as how he's bliged 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 hoss

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

an' do tricks, an' I ain't heard no more

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

"Go 'long out an' fix up dat 'ere 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



"She's sick, dat's what I says." lamp, rearranged the cushions and tried to make the room look cheery

for his entrance. "I's 'fraid yo's mighty tired," she

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

cheerfuler.' He crossed to the window and looked out upon the circus lot. The flare of the torches and the red fire came up to meet his pale, tense face. "How like the picture of thirteen months ago!" he thought, and old Toby's words me 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 burriedly 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

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

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

"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 urged him to eat before disturbing him with her own anxieties. It was no use. He only toyed with his food; he was clearly ill at ease and eager to be alone. 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.

"Dar'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 quizdown the steps. She saw from the | zically, while Hasty, convinced that for reasons of her own she was going get him into tro frantic motions. "He done gone ter de circus," she blurted out. Douglas' face became suddenly grave. Mandy saw that she had touched an open wound.

"I jes' couldn't stan' it, Massa John. I had ter find out 'bout dat angel chile." 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 looked at him blankly. "If she would

why-jes' speaked 'bout de udder gal takin' her place." "Why didn't she ride?" cried Doug-

las, in an agony of suspense. "Dat's what I don' know, sah." Mandy began to cry. It was the first could talk so much about her work time in his experience that Douglas but before she could answer the ques-

any such weakness. Hasty came down from the window stole away unmissed and left her with and tried to put one arm about Manfolded hand and wide, staring eyes. dy's shoulders.

"Leab me alone, yo' nigger!" she exclaimed, trying to cover her tears with Jim helpless tonight. He had gone on a show of anger that she did not feel; hoping from day to day that Barker then she rushed from the room, followed by Hasty.

The band was playing loudly. The How could he tell her? din of the night performance was increasing. Douglas' nerves were of the main tent. There was a mostrained to the point of breaking. He ment's confusion as clowns, acrobats would not let himself go near the win- and animals passed each other on their dow. He stood by the side of the ta- way to and from the ring; then the lot ble, his fists clinched, and tried to cleared again, and Polly came slowly beat back the impulse that was pulling from the dressing tent. She looked him toward the door. Again and again very different from the little girl

he set his teeth. him so. Was she ill? Could she need one month before. Her thin, pensive him? Was she sorry for having left face contrasted oddly with her glitterhim? Would she be glad if he went ing attire. Her hair was knotted high for her and brought her back with on her head and intertwined with him? He recalled the hysterical note flowers and jewels. Her slender neck in her behavior the day that she went seemed scarcely able to support its away-how she had pleaded, only a burden. Her short, full skirt and low few moments before Jim came, never cut bodice were ablaze with white to be separated from him. Had she and colored stones 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.

CHAPTER XIII.

IM was slow tonight. The big show was nearly over, yet many of the props used in the early part of the bill were still

He was tinkering absentmindedly with one of the wagons in the back lot, waiting for orders when Barker came

sharply: "Hey, there, Jim! What's your excuse tonight?" "Excuse for what?" Jim crossed

slowly to Barker. "The cook tent was started half an face was turned from him. She had hour late, and the sideshow top ain't forgotten his presence. loaded yet."

"Your wagons is on the bum; that's what! No. 38 carries the cook tent. an' the blacksmith has been tinkerin' with it all day. Ask him what shape it's in."

"You're always stallin'," was Barker's sullen complaint. "It's the wagons or the blacksmiths or anything but the truth. I know what's the matter, all right."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Jim sharply.

"I mean that all your time's took up a-carryin' and a-fetchin' for that girl what calls you 'Muyver Jim.' " "What have you got to say about her?" Jim eyed him with a threaten-

ing look. "I got a-plenty," said Barker as he turned to snap his whip at the small boys who had stolen into the back lot to peek under the rear edge of the big top. "She's been about as much good as a sick cat since she come back. You saw her act last night."

"Yes," answered Jim doggedly. "Wasn't it punk? She didn't show at all this afternoon; said she was sick. and me with all them people inside what knowed her waitin' to see her!" "Give her a little time." Jim pleaded. "She ain't rode for a year."

"Time!" shouted Barker. "How much does she want? She's been back a month, and instead of bracin' up she's -gettin' worse. There's only one thing

for me to do." "What's that?" asked Jim uneasily. "I'm goin' to call her, and call her

"Look here, Barker," and Jim squared his shoulders as he looked steadily at the other man, "you're boss here, and I takes orders from you, but if I eatches you abusin' Poll your bein' boss won't make no difference.' "You can't bluff me!" shouted Barker.

"I ain't bluffin'. I'm only tellin' you," said Jim very quietly.

"Well, you tell her to get on to her job. If she don't, she quits; that's all." He hurried into the ring.

Jim took one step to follow him, then stopped and gazed at the ground with thoughtful eyes. He, too, had seen the change in Polly. He had tried to rouse her. It was no use. She had



gemmen in de show didn't tell nobody only complain," he said to himself; "if she would only get mad, anything. anything to wake her." But she did not complain. She went through her daily routine very humbly and quietly. She sometimes wondered how Jim had ever known her to give way to tion her mind drifted back to other days, to a garden and flowers, and Jim gazing into the distance.

The memory of these times made might not notice the "let down" in her work, and now the blow had fallen. One of the acts came tumbling out

whom Jim had led away from the par-It was uncertainty that gnawed at son's garden in a simple white frock

"What's on, Jim?" she asked. "The 'leap o' death.' You got plenty

of time.' Polly's mind went back to the girl who answered that call a year ago. Her spirit seemed very near tonight. The band stopped playing. Barker made his grandiloquent announcement about the wonderful act about to be seen, and her eyes wandered to the distant church steeple. The moonlight seemed to shun it tonight. It looked cold and grim and dark. She wondered whether the solemn bell that once called its flock to worship had become as mute as her own dead heart. and the men were standing about idly | She did not hear the whir of the great machine inside the tent as it plunged out of the main tent and called to him through space with its girl occupant. These things were a part of the daily routine, part of the strange, vague dream through which she must stum-

ble for the rest of her life. Jim watched her in silence. Her "Star gazin', Poll?" he asked at

"I guess I was, Jim." She turned to him with a little, forced smile. He longed to save her from Barker's threatened rebuke.

"How you feelin' tonight?" "I'm all right," she answered cheer-

"Anything you want?" "Want?" She turned upon him with startled eyes. There was so much that she wanted that the mere men-

tion of the word had opened a well of pain in her heart. "I mean can I do anything for you?"

"Oh, of course not." She remembered how little any one could do. "What is it, Poll?" he begged, but she only turned away and shook her head with a sigh. He followed her with anxious eyes. "What made you cut out the show today? Was it because you didn't want to ride afore folks what knowed you-ride afore

"Him?" Her face was white. Jim feared she might swoon. "You don't mean that he was"-

"Oh, no," he answered quickly, "of course not. Parsons don't come to places like this one. I was only figurin' that you didn't want other folks to see an' to tell him how you was ridin'." She did not answer.

"Was that it, Poll?" he urged. "I don't know." She stared into space. "Was it?"

"I guess it was," she said after a "I knowed it!" he cried. "I was a

fool to 'a' brung you back! You don't belong with us no more." "Oh, don't, Jim! Don't! Don't make

me feel I'm in the way here too!" "Here too?" He looked at her in astonishment, "You wasn't in his way. was you, Poll?" "Yes, Jim." She saw his look of un-

belief and continued hurriedly: "Oh, I tried not to be! I tried so hard. He used to read me verses out of a Bible about my way being his way and my people his people, but it isn't so, Jim. Your way is the way you are born, and your people are the people you are born with, and you can't change it, Jim, no matter how hard you try."

"You was changin' it," he answered savagely. "You was gettin' jes' like them people. It was me what took you away an' spoiled it all. You oughtn't to 'a' come. What made you after you said you wouldn't?"

She did not answer. Strange things were going through the mind of the slow witted Jim. He braced himself for a difficult question.

"Will you answer me straight?" he asked.

"Why, of course," she said as she met his gaze. "Do you love the parson, Poll?"

She started. "Is that it?" Her lids fluttered and closed; she caught her breath quickly, her lips

apart, then looked far into the dis-"Yes, Jim, I'm afraid that's it." The little figure drooped, and she stood before him with lowered eyes, unarmed

Jim looked at her helplessly, then

shook his big, stupid head. "Ain't that h-1?" It seemed such a short time to Jim since he had picked her up, a cooing babe, at her dead mother's side. He watched the tender, averted face.

Things had turned out so differently from what he had planned "An' he don't care about you-like that?" he asked after a pause.

"No, not in that way." She was anxlous to defend the pastor from even the thought of such a thing. "He was good and kind always, but he didn't care that way. He's not like that." "I guess I'll have a talk with him, said Jim, and he turned to go.

"Talk!" she cried. He stopped and looked at her in astonishment. It was the first time that he had ever heard that sharp note in her voice. Her tiny figure was stiffened with decision. Her eyes were blazing.

"If you ever dare to speak to himabout me, you'll never see me again." Jim was perplexed. "I mean it, Jim. I've made my choice, and I've come back to you. If

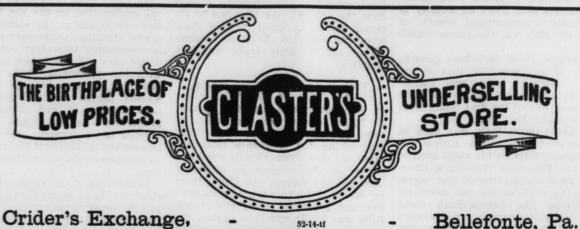
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length, dreading to disturb her reverie. you ever try to fix up things between him and me. I'll run away-really and truly away-and you'll never, never get

me back." He shuffled awkwardly to her side and reached apologetically for the little clinched fist. He held it in his big rough hand, toying nervously with the

tiny fingers. "I wouldn't do nothin' that you wasn't a-wantin', Poll. I was just a-tryin' to help you, only I-I never seem to know how."

She turned to him with tear dimmed eyes and rested her hands on his great, broad shoulders, and he saw the place where he dwelt in her heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

HE "leap of death" implements were being carried from the ring, and Jim turned away to superintend their loading. Performers again rushed by each other on their way to and from the main tent.

Polly stood in the center of the lot, frowning and anxious. The mere mention of the pastor's name had made it seem impossible for her to ride tonight. For hours she had been whip ping herself up to the point of doing it, and now her courage failed her. She followed Barker as he came from

"Mr. Barker, please!" He turned upon her sharply.

"Well, what is it now?" "I want to ask you to let me off again tonight." She spoke in a short,

jerky, desperate way. "What!" he shrieked. "Not go into the ring, with all them people inside what's paid their money because they knowed you?"

"That's it!" she cried. "I can't! I

can't!" "You're gettin' too tony!" Barker sneered. "That's the trouble with you. You ain't been good for nothin' since you was at that parson's house. You didn't stay there, and you're no use here. First thing you know you'll be out all round."

"Sure. You don't think I'm goin' to head my bill with a 'dead one,' do

you?" "I am not a 'dead one,' " she answered excitedly. "I'm the best rider you've had since mother died. You've said so vourself."

[To be Continued.]

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