

# POLLY of the CIRCUS

By MARGARET MAYO

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[Continued from last week.]

"I guess he ain't gone far," sneered Strong. "He come over to this lot to see her, and he ain't goin' to give up till he does it. You wait here. I'll take a look round." He went quickly in the direction of the wagons.

Elverson needed no second invitation to wait. He was congratulating himself upon his good fortune when he all but collided with a flying apparition, vanishing in the direction of the main tent. Sophisticated eyes would have seen only a rather stout acrobat clad in pink tights, but Elverson was not sophisticated, and he teetered after the flitting angel, even unto the forbidden portals of the big top.

He was peeping through the curtains which had fallen behind her and was getting his first glimpse of the great sawdust world beyond when one of the clowns dashed from the dressing tent on his way to the ring.

The clown was late. He saw the limp coattails of the deacon, who was three-quarters in the tent. Here was a chance to make a funny entrance. He grabbed the unsuspecting little man from the rear. The terrified deacon struck out blindly in all directions, his black arms and legs moving like a centipede's, but the clown held him firmly by the back and thrust him head foremost into the tent.

Strong returned almost immediately from his unsuccessful search for the pastor. He looked about the lot for Elverson.

"Hey, there, Elverson!" he called lustily. There was no response.

"Now, where's he got to?" grumbled Strong. He disappeared quickly around the corner of the dressing tent, resolved to keep a sharp lookout for Douglas.

Elverson was thrust from the tent soon after, spitting sawdust and much discomfited, by the laughing performers who followed him. His knees almost gave way beneath him when Barker came out of the ring, snapping his long black whip.

"Get out of here, you bloke!" roared Barker, and Elverson "got."

No one had remembered to tell the groom that Polly was not to ride tonight, so Bingo was brought out as usual when their "turn" approached.

"Take him back, Tom," Polly called from the entrance when she learned Bingo was waiting, "and bring Barbarian." "I'm not going on tonight. Eloise is going to ride in my place."

This was the second time to-day that Bingo had been led away without going into the ring. Something in his big, wondering eyes made Polly follow him and apologize. He was very proud, was Bingo, and very conscientious. He felt uneasy when he saw the other horses going to their work without him.

"Never mind, Bingo," she said, patting his great, arched neck; "we'll show 'em tomorrow." He rubbed his satiny nose against her cheek. "We'll make them sit up again. Barker says our act's no good—that I've let down. But it's not your fault, Bingo. I've not been fair to you. I'll give you a chance tomorrow. You wait. He'll never say it again, Bingo, never again!"

Polly had nothing more to do tonight except to get into her street clothes. The wagons would soon be moving away. For a moment she glanced at the dark church steeple; then she turned to go inside the tent. A deep, familiar voice stopped her.

"Polly!"

She turned quickly. She could not answer. Douglas came toward her. He gazed at her in amazement. She drew her cape about her slightly clad figure. She seemed older to him, more unapproachable with her hair heaped high and sparkling with jewels.

She found strength at last to open her lips, but still no sound came from them. She and the pastor looked at each other strangely, like spirits newly met from far apart worlds. She, too, thought her companion changed. He was older; the circles beneath his eyes were deeper, the look in their depths more grave.

"We were such close neighbors to-day I—I rather thought you'd call," he stammered. He was uncertain what he was saying. It did not matter—he was there with her.

"When you're in a circus there isn't much time for calling."

"That's why I've come to call on you." They might have been shepherd and shepherdess on a May day wooing for the halting way in which their words came.

"You're all right?" he went on.

"You're happy?"

"Yes, very," she said. Her eyes were downcast.

He did not believe her. The effort in her voice, her drawn, white face, belied her words. How could he get the truth from her?

"Jim said you might not want to see me."

She started.

"Has Jim been talking to you?"

"Yes, but I didn't let him stop me.

for you told me the day you left that you'd never change—toward me. Have you, Polly?" He studied her anxiously.

"Why, no, of course not," she said evasively.

"And you'll be quite frank when I ask you something?"

"Yes, of course." She was growing more and more uneasy. She glanced about for a way of escape.

"Why did you leave me as you did?"

"I told you then." She tried to cross toward the dressing tent.

He seized her small wrists and forced her to look at him.

"And I am not happy without you, and I never, never can be." The flood-gates were open. His eyes were aglow.

He bent toward her eagerly.

"Oh, you mustn't!" she begged.

"You've grown so close," he cried. "So close!" She struggled to be free.

He did not heed her. "You know, you must know, what I mean." He drew her toward him and forced her into his arms.

"You're more precious to me than all else on this earth."

For the first time he saw the extreme pallor on her face. He felt her growing limp and lifeless in his arms.

A doubt crossed his mind. "If I am wrong in thinking you feel as I do, if you honestly care for all this, he glanced about at the tents, "more than for any life that I can give you, I

him. "God is greater than any church or creed. There's work to be done everywhere—his work."

"You'll soon find out about that," thundered Strong.

"So I will," answered Douglas, with his head thrown high. "This child has opened a new world to me. She has shown me a broader, deeper humanity. She and I will find the way together."

"It won't be an easy one, I'll promise you that." Strong turned to go.

"I'm not looking for the easy way," Douglas called after him; then he turned to draw Polly's arm within his, but Polly had slipped from his side to follow the deacon.

"Oh, please, Deacon Strong, please!" she pleaded. "You won't go away like that. He'll be all right if you'll only wait. I'm not coming back. I'm not—honestly, I'm going on with the show tonight, and I'm going this time forever."

"You are going to stay here with me!" cried Douglas.

"No, no, Mr. John! I've made up my mind, and I won't be to blame for your unhappiness." She faced him firmly now. "I don't belong to your world, and I don't want to try any more. I'm what he called me—I'm a circus riding girl. I was born in the circus, and I'll never change. That's my work—riding—and it's yours to preach. You must do your work, and I'll do mine."

She started toward the ring. Eloise and Barbarian were already waiting at the entrance.

"Eloise!" She took one step toward her, then stopped at the sound of Barker's voice.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he called. "Although we are obliged to announce that our star rider, Miss Polly, will not appear tonight, we offer you in her place an able substitute, Miss. Eloise, on her black, untamed horse Barbarian."

Eloise put her hands on the horse's back to mount.

"No, no!" cried Polly.

The other girl turned in astonishment at the agony in her voice.

"Polly!"

"Wait, Eloise! I'm going to ride!"

"You can't, not Barbarian! He don't know your turn."

"So much the better!" She seized the bridle from the frightened girl's hand.

"Polly!" shouted Douglas. He had followed her to the entrance.

"I must! I will!"

[To be Continued.]

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shan't interfere. You'll be going on your way in an hour. I'll say good-by and God bless you, but if you do care for me, Polly," he was pleading now, "if you're not happy here, won't you come back to me? Won't you, Polly?"

She dared not meet his eyes nor yet to send him away. She stood irresolute. The voice of Deacon Strong answered for her.

"So you're here, are you?"

"Yes, Deacon Strong, I'm here," answered the pastor as he turned to meet the accusing eyes of the deacon.

"As for you, miss," continued Strong, with an insolent nod toward Polly, "I might have known how you'd keep your part of the bargain."

"Bargain!" echoed Douglas. "What bargain?"

"Oh, please, Deacon Strong, please. I didn't mean to see him—I didn't, truly." She hardly knew what she was saying.

"What bargain?" demanded Douglas.

"She told me that you and her wasn't ever goin' to see each other ag'in!" roared Strong. "If I'd known she was goin' to keep on with this kind of thing you wouldn't have got off so easy."

"So that's it!" cried Douglas. It was all clear to him now. He recalled everything—her hysterical behavior, her laughter, her tears. "It was you who drove that child back to this." He glanced at Polly. The narrow shoulders were bent forward. The nervous little fingers were clasping and unclasping each other. Never before had she seemed so small and helpless.

"Oh, please, Mr. John, please don't make him any worse!"

"Why didn't you tell me?" he demanded.

"It would have done no good," she sobbed. "Oh, why—why won't you leave me alone?"

"It would have done all the good in the world. What right had he to send you back to this?"

"I had every right," said Strong stubbornly.

"What?" cried Douglas.

"It was my duty."

"Your duty? Your narrow minded bigotry?"

"I don't allow no man to talk to me like that, not even my parson."

"I'm not your parson any longer," declared Douglas. He faced Strong squarely. He was master of his own affairs at last. Polly clung to him, begging and beseeching.

"Oh, Mr. John, Mr. John!"

"What do you mean by that?" shouted Strong.

"I mean that I stayed with you and your narrow minded congregation before because I believed you needed me. But now this girl needs me more. She needs me to protect her from just such injustice as yours."

"You'd better be protectin' yourself! That's my advice to you."

"I can do that without your advice."

"Maybe you can find another church with that circus ridin' girl a-hangin' round your neck."

"He's right," cried Polly. "You couldn't." She clung to the pastor in terrified entreaty. "You couldn't get another church. They'd never, never forgive you. It's no use. You've got to let me go! You've got to!"

"Listen, Polly." He drew her toward

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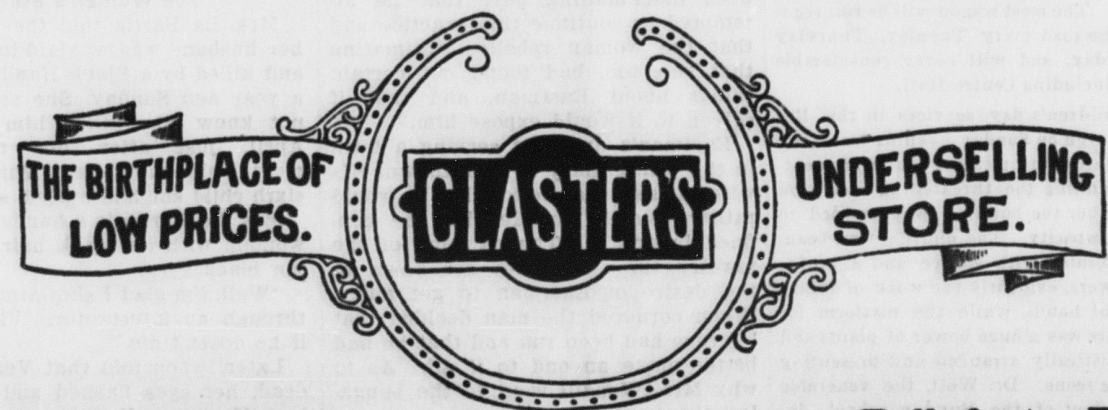
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