



POLLY of the CIRCUS BY MARGARET MAYO

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Here is a circus romance redolent of the fresh sawdust of the ring, vibrant with the incessant clamor of the band, panoramic in its ever moving display of clowns, acrobats, horses and captive wild animals. You will read of Polly, the daughter of the circus, and of Bingo, on whose broad back she rode; of the "leap of death" girl; of "Maver Jim," the boss canvasman, and Toby, the clown, who loved the circus orphan and cared for her like father and mother; of Deacon Strong, who hated a circus, and of Rev. John Douglas, who grew to love a circus girl. You will read of gossip that threatened to divide a pastor and his flock, of Ruth and Naomi, of a show girl's renunciation and of Polly's first and last ride on Barbarian, the circus horse.

added more slowly, "I suppose everything's different now that Toby is gone." "He'd 'a' liked to see you afore he was cashed in," Jim answered, "but maybe you got sense enough to see how it looks. He'd see it, too, if he wasn't just plain bullheaded. Well, he'd better get over his stubbornness right now. If he don't we'll get another minister; that's all."

"You'll save a heap of trouble for the parson by doin' it quick." "The parson?" "You can't blame the congregation for not wantin' him to keep you here."

CHAPTER XI. "I's goin' into de Sunday school room to take off dat 'ere wild wavin' finikin' touches," said Mandy as she came down the steps.

"All right!" called Douglas. "Take these with you. Perhaps they may help." He gathered up the garlands which Polly had left on the ground. His eyes were shining. He looked younger than Mandy had ever seen him.

Polly had turned her back at the sound of Mandy's voice and crossed to the elm tree, drying her tears of happiness and trying to control her newly awakened emotions. Douglas felt intuitively that she needed this moment for recovery, so he piled the leaves and garlands high in Mandy's arms, then ran into the house with the light step of a boy.

"I got the set—set—settin' room all tidled up," said Mandy as she shot a sly glance at Polly. "That's good!" Polly answered, facing Mandy at last and dimpling and blushing guiltily.

"Mos' de sociable folks will mos' likely be hangin' round de parsonage to-night, 'stead ob stayin' in de Sunday school room, whar dey belongs. Last time dat 'ere Widow Willyoughby done set round all elegant 'a' tellin' parson as how folks could jes' eat off'n her kitchen floor, an' I ups 'n' tells her as how folks could pick up a good squar' meal off'n Mandy's floor too. Guess she'll be mighty careful what she says afore Mandy to-night. She chuckles as she disappeared down the walk to the Sunday school room.

Polly stood motionless where Mandy had left her. She hardly knew which way to turn. She was lapped, yet afraid. She felt like sinking upon her knees and begging God to be good to her, to help her. She who had once been so independent, so self-reliant, now felt the need of direction from above. She was no longer master of her own soul. Something had gone from her, something that would never, never come again. While she hesitated Hasty came through the gate, chuckling and with his shoulder to the wall, seeing the blank desolation that had come into his face. "It ain't because I don't love you just the same, and it was good of Barker to keep my place for me, but I can't go back."

"No, Jim," she replied in a tone so low that he could scarcely hear her. "You mean the man, the minister, the comin' back?" He tried to realize what such a decision might mean to him.

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firm, clear voice, "I am going to run away." Douglas stepped before her and studied her keenly. "Then away?" he exclaimed incredulously.

"Yes—to the circus with Jim." "You couldn't do such a thing," he answered excitedly. "Why, only a moment ago you told me you would never leave me."

"Oh, but that was a moment ago," she cried in a strained high voice. "That was before Jim came. You see, I didn't know how I felt until I saw Jim and heard all about my old friends—how Barker is keeping my place for me and how they all want to see me. And I want to see them and to hear the music and the laughter and the clown songs— Oh, the clown songs!" She waltzed about, humming the snatch of melody that Mandy had heard the morning that Polly first woke in the parsonage.

"You don't know what you're doing!" said Douglas. He seized her roughly by the arm. Pain was making him brutal. "I won't let you go! Do you hear me? I won't—not until you've thought it over." "I have thought it over," Polly answered, meeting his eyes and trying to speak lightly. Her lips trembled. She could not help for a moment to think her so ungrateful. She remembered his great kindness, the many thoughtful acts that had made the past year so precious to her.

"You've been awfully good to me, Mr. John," she tried to choke back a sob. "I'll never forget it—never! I'll always feel the same toward you. But you mustn't ask me to stay. I want to get back to them that knew me first—to my own. Circus folks aren't cut for parsons' homes, and I was born in the circus. I love it—I love it!" She felt her strength go and cried out wildly: "I want Bingo! I want to go round and round the circus! I want the lights and the music and the hoops! I want the shrieks of the animals and the rumble of the wheels in the plains at night! I want to ride in the big parade—I want to live and die—just die—as circus folks did. I want to go back! I want to go back!"

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Strong, thank you. I'll get my things. It won't take a minute." She was running up the steps when a sudden thought stopped her. She returned quickly to Strong. "We'd better not let him know just yet. You can tell him afterward. Tell him that I ran away. Tell him that!"

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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 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.

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

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

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

"Yes yo' come eat yo' supper," Mandy called to Douglas. "Don't yo' worry your head 'bout dat lazy husband' ob red fire."

"She's sick, dat's what I says," Mandy called to Douglas. "He ain't got ter work 'a'nt to hurt himself." 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 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 burst out. Douglas's face became suddenly grave. Mandy said 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 gemmen in de show didn't tell nobody why—jes' speake 'bout de udder gal takin' her place."

"Why didn't she ride?" cried Douglas, feeling 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."

During the Revolutionary War when Lafayette presented himself to Washington for a commission in our Army, Washington in his usual dignified manner asked "WHAT CAN YOU DO?" to which Lafayette made the laconic reply "TRY ME."

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CHAPTER XII.

ONLY 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.

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"OH, SEE HOW SERIOUS HE LOOKS" SHE TEASED.

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.

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"You mean that you ain't never comin' back?"

GROUP ManZan