

DOLLY of the CIRCUS BY MARGARET MAYO

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Here is a circus romance redolent of the fresh savdust 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.

CHAPTER I

The band of the "Great American Circus" was playing noisily. The performance was in full swing.

Beside a shabby trunk in the women's dressing tent sat a young, wistful faced girl, chin in hand, unheeding the chatter of the women about her or the picturesque disarray of the surrounding objects.

Clanking the inside of the tent and forming a double line down the center were partially unpacked trunks belonging to rich impudent masses of satins, laces, artificial hair, paper flowers and paste jewels.

The furniture was limited to one camp chair in front of each trunk, the till of which served as a tray for the paints, powders and other essentials of makeup.



In the women's dressing tent sat a young, wistful faced girl.

might wash the delicately shaded tights, handkerchiefs and other small articles not to be entrusted to the slow, careless process of the village laundry.

Women whose "turns" came late sat about, half clothed, reading, crocheting or sewing, while others added penciled eyebrows, powder or rouge to their already exaggerated makeups.

"What do you think about it, Polly?" asked a handsome brunette as she surveyed herself in the costume of a Roman charioteer.

"About what?" asked Polly vacantly. "Leave Polly alone! She's in one of her trances!" called a motherly, good natured woman whose trunk stood next to Polly's and whose business was to support a son and three daughters upon stalwart shoulders, both figuratively and literally.

"Well, I ain't in any trance," answered the dark girl, "and I think it's pretty tough for him to take up with a rank outsider and expect us to warm up to her as though he'd married one of our own folks."

"He ain't askin' us to warm up to her," contradicted Mlle. Eloise, a pale, light haired sprite, who had arrived late and was making undignified efforts to get out of her clothes by way of her head.

"Well, Barker has put her into the 'leap of death' stunt, ain't he?" continued the brunette. "Course that ain't a regular circus act," she added, somewhat mollified.

"No danger of that," sneered the blond. "Barker is too old a stinger to mix up his sheep and his goats."

Polly had again lost the thread of the conversation. Her mind had gone roving to the night when the frightened girl about whom they were talking had made her first appearance in the circus lot, clinging timidly to the hand of the man who had just made her his wife.

A few nights later the newcomer had allowed herself to be strapped into the cumbersome "leap of death" machine which hurled itself through space at each performance and flung itself down with force enough to break the neck of any unskilled rider.

What matter? The few dollars earned in this way would mean a great deal to the mother, whom the girl's marriage had left destitute.

Polly had looked on hungrily the night that the mother had taken the daughter in her arms to say farewell in the little country town where the circus had played before her marriage.

Clown Toby and the big "boss canvasser" Jim had always taken turns amusing and guarding little Polly while her mother rode in the ring. So Toby now carried the babe to another side of the lot, and Jim bore the lifeless body of the mother to the distant ticket wagon, now closed for the night, and laid it upon the seller's cot.

"It was a red letter day in the circus when Polly first managed to climb up on the pole of an unhitched wagon and from there to the back of a friendly Shetland pony. Jim and Toby had been 'neglectin' her education," they declared, and from that time on the blood of Polly's ancestors was given full encouragement.

Barker was quick to grasp the advantage of adding the kid to the daily parade. She made her first appearance in the streets upon something very like a Newfoundland dog, guarded from the rear by Jim and from the fore by a white faced clown who was thought to be all the funnier because he twisted his neck so much.

From the street parade to Polly's first appearance in the big top had seemed a short while to Jim and Toby. They were proud to see her circling the ring in bright colors and to hear the cheers of the people, but a sense of loss was upon them.

"I always said she'd do it!" cried Barker, who now took upon himself the credit of Polly's triumph. "And what a triumph it was!"

Polly danced as serenely on Bingo's back as she might have done on the concert boards. She swayed gracefully with the music. Her tiny sandals twinkled as she stood first upon one foot and then upon the other.

Uncle Toby forgot to use many of his tricks that night, and Jim left the loading of the wagons to take care of itself while he hovered near the entrance, anxious and breathless. The performers crowded around the girl with outstretched hands and congratulations as she came out of the ring to cheers and applause.

But "Big Jim" stood apart. He was thinking of the buttons that his clumsy fingers used to force into the stiff, starch holes too small for them and of the pigtail's too stubborn at the ends, and Toby was remembering the little shoes that had once needed to be laced in the cold, dark mornings and the strings that were always snapping.

Something had gone wrong. They were not philosophers to reason, like Emerson, that for everything we lose we gain something. They were simple souls, these two; they could only feel.

CHAPTER II

While Polly sat in the dressing tent listening indifferently to the chatter about the "leap of death" girl Jim waited in the lot outside, opening and shutting a small leather bag which he had bought for her that day. He was as blind to the picturesque outdoor life as she to her indoor surroundings, for he, too, had been with the circus since his earliest recollection.

The grass inclosure where he waited was shut in by a circle of tents and wagons. The great red property vans



POLLY DANCED SERENELY ON BINGO'S BACK.

were waiting to be loaded with the costumes and tackle which were constantly being brought from the big top, where the evening performance was now going on. The gay striped curtains at the rear of the tent were looped back to give air to the painting musicians, who sat just inside. Through the opening a glimpse of the audience might be had, tier upon tier, fanning and shifting uneasily. Near the main tent stood the long, low dressing box which held a little tan coat that was to be Toby's contribution to the birthday surprise.

away in one end, the ring horses in the center and the men performers in the other end.

A temporary curtain was hung between the main and the dressing tent to shut out the curious mob that tried to peep in at the back lot for a glimpse of things not to be seen in the ring.

Colored streamers fastened to the roofs of the tents waved and floated in the night air and beckoned to the townspeople on the other side to make haste to get their places, forget their cares and be children again.

Over the tops of the tents the lurid light of the distant red fire shot into the sky, accompanied by the cries of the peanut "butchers," the popcorn boys, the lemonade vendors and the exhortations of the sidewalk applier, whose flying banners bore the painted reproductions of his freaks. Here and there stood unhitched chariots, half filled trunks, trapeze tackle, paper hoops, stake pullers or other properties necessary to the show.

Torches flamed at the tent entrances while oil lamps and lanterns gave light for the loading of the wagons. There was a constant stream of life shooting in and out from the dressing tent to the big top as gayly decked men, women and animals came or went.

Drowsy dogs were stretched under the wagons, waiting their turn to be dressed as lions or bears. The wise old goose, with his modest gray mate, pecked at the green grass or turned his head from side to side, watching the slinging clown, who rolled up the painted carcass and long neck of the imitation giraffe from which two property men had just slipped, their legs still increased in stripes.

Ambitious canvassers and grooms were exercising, feet in air, in the hope of some day getting into the performers' ring. Property men stood 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 band. And 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 lurid picture.

Jim's eyes turned absently 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 miss newly arrived 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 salesman in the little country store had suggested the addition of ribbons and laces, 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.

He opened the large property trunk by his side and took from it a laundry

of the kind. 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 extravagance 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 stopped 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 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 out 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 at their, 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 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 ring in her voice. The music was swelling for her entrance. "You ain't my mother, Jim; you're my grandmother," she taunted, and



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

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.

To be Continued.

THE MARRYING AGE.

Girls are told frequently of the ideal age at which to marry, the counsel being lost upon them. Perhaps this is partly due to the fact that there is no ideal age, the time for life's important event being gauged largely by opportunity. Doubtless some girls at eighteen are mature enough mentally and physically to make a wise choice and be ready for the responsibilities it involves.

Other girls at eighteen are children, in no wise fitted either to make a selection or to fulfil the duties that follow. The child-wife business has gone of favor since the days when Dickens made David Copperfield marry an amiable and brainless child. On the other hand the woman who sets an arbitrary age as the proper one for marriage may have difficulty in finding a man whose views coincide with her own, and who is available otherwise. However, the graver mistake is made by the girl who weds so young as to cheat herself out of girlhood. Not only does she lose one of the most pleasing chapters of her life, but she enters, generally, into a realm for which she is unprepared. Every way unit-

City Union Directory

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