

# Rally of the Circus

BY MARGARET MAYO

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Here is a circus romance rich with the fresh sandal 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 "Muvver Jim," the boss circusman, and Toby, the clown, who loved the circus orphan and cared for her like a 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 re-annunciation and of Polly's first and last ride on Barbarian, the circus horse.

**CHAPTER I.**

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

Beside a slabby 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 display of the surrounding objects. Her eyes had been so long accustomed to the glitter and blare of circus festivities that she saw nothing unusual in a picture that might have held a palatial splendour.

Circling the inside of the tent and forming a double line down the center were partially unpacked trunks belching forth haphazard masses of satins, laces, artificial hair, paper flowers and paste jewels. The scent of moist earth mingled oddly with the perfumed odors of the garments heaped on the grass. Here and there high circles of lights threw a strong, steady glare upon the half clad figure of a robust acrobat or the thin, drooping shoulders of a less stalwart strop. Temporary ropes stretched from one pole to another were laden with bright colored stockings, gaudy, spangled gowns or fluff street clothes discarded by the performers before slipping into their circus attire. There were no nails or hooks, so hats and veils were pinned to the canvas walls.

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

A full of water stood by the side of each chair, so that the performers



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

might wash the delicately shaded tickets, handkerchiefs and other small articles not to be entrusted to the slow, careless process of the village laundry. Some of these had been washed and hung to dry on the lines between the dusty street corners.

Women whose "turn" came late sat about, half clothed, reading, crocheting or sewing, while others added pencilled eyebrows, powder or rouge to their already exaggerated makeups. Here and there a child was putting her sawdust baby to sleep in the till of her trunk before beginning her part in the evening's entertainment. Young and old went about their duties with a systematic, businesslike air, and even the little knot of excited women near Polly—it seemed that one of the men had upset a circus tradition—kept a sharp lookout for their turns.

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

"About what?" asked Polly vacantly. "Leave Polly alone," she said 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 a slender shoulders, both in- uratively and liberally.

"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." She tossed her head, the pride of a circus distinction welling high in her ample bosom.

"He ain't asked us to warm up to her," contradicted Miss Eloise, a pale, light haired spirit, who had arrived late and was making unadvised efforts to get out of her clothes by way of her hands. "She was Polly's under study and next in line for the star place in the bill."

"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, "and so far she's had to dress with the freaks, but the next thing we know she'll be riding in on a member's stand and to put her in to dress with us."

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

Polly had seen Barker, the thread of the conversation. She had gone looking to the night when the frightened girl asked when 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. Her eyes had not Polly's, with a look of appeal that had come straight to the child's simple heart.

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 free mouth to break the neck of any unskilled rider. Courage and steady nerve were the requisites for the job, so the manager had said, but any physician would have told him that only a trained acrobat could long endure the nervous strain, the muscular tension and the physical rack of such an ordeal.

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

Polly had looked on hungrily the night that the manager had taken the daughter in her arms to say farewell in the little country town where the circus had played before her marriage. She could remember no woman's arms about her, for it was fourteen years since tender hands had carried her mother from the performers' tent into the moonlit lot to die. The lady was so used to seeing "muvver" throw herself wearily on the ground after coming out of the "big top" exhausted that she crept to the woman's side, as usual, that night and gazed at laughingly into the slightest eyes, gurgling and prattling and stroking the unresponsive face. There were tears from those who watched, but no word was spoken.

Clown Toby and the big "boss circusman" Jim had always taken turns amusing and guiding 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's allus like this in the end," he murmured as he drew a piece of canvas over the white face and turned away to give orders to the men who were beginning to load the "props" used earlier in the performance.

When the show moved on that night it was Jim's strong arms that lifted the wife of a Polly close to his stalwart heart and climbed with her to the high seat on the head wagon. Uncle Toby was entrusted with the brown satchel in which the mother had always carried Polly's scanty wardrobe. It seemed to these two men that the eyes of the woman were fixed steadily upon them.

Barker, the manager, a large, noisy, good natured fellow, at first mumbled something about the lid being "excess baggage," but his objections were only half hearted, for, like the others, he was already under the hypnotic spell of the baby's round, confiding eyes, and he eventually contented himself with an occasional rapinment to Toby, who was now sometimes late on his cues. Polly wondered at these times why the old man's stories were so suddenly cut short just as she was so "comfy" in the soft grass as his feet.

The boss who used to look sharp because of their loss at loading time now learned that they might loiter so long at "Muvver Jim" was "hikin' it round for the kid." It was Polly who had dubbed big Jim "Muvver," and the sobriquet had stuck to him in spite

of his six feet two and shoulders that an athlete might have envied. Little by little Toby grew more stooped, and small lines of anxiety crept into the brownish circles beneath Jim's eyes. The lips that had once shut so firmly because tender and tremulous, but neither of the men would willingly have gone back to the old campfires.

It was a red letter day in the circus when Polly first managed to climb up on the pole of an unskilled wagon and from there to the back of a friend-



Polly danced serenely on Bingo's back.

the peanut "butchers," the popcorn boys, the lemonade vendors and the exhortations of the sideshow speller, whose flying banners bore the painted reproductions of his freaks. Here and there stood untraced chariots, half filled trunks, tackle, paper filled hoops, stake pullers or other property necessary to the show.

Torches flamed at the tent entrances, white oil lamps and lanterns gave light for the loading of the wagons. There was a constant stream of life

coming 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 mane, pecked at the green grass or turned his head from side to side, watching the singing clown, who rolled up the painted carcass and long neck of the imitation stags from which two property men had just slipped, their legs still in the stipes.

Ambitious canvasmen and grooms were exercising, feet in air, in the hope of some day getting into the performers' ring. Properly men stole 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 heavens 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, moody 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 been in the last few months, to inspire wonder in the heart of a 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 saleswoman 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 measures 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 box which held a little tan coat that was to be Polly's contribution to the birthday surprise. He was big hearted enough to be glad that Toby's gift seemed fine and more useful than his.

It was only when the "leap of death" act preceding Polly's turn was announced that the big fellow gave up feasting his eyes on the satchel and soon came from her delicately formed property trunk. She would be out in a minute, and these wonders were not to be revealed to her until the close of the night's performance.

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 extravagances for her sake, and how she had been nearly angry that 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 steeple 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 buttoned wouldn't 'a' give Sells Bros. no cause for worry with that show 'a' them, 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? Well, that bunch we buttoned wouldn't 'a' give Sells Bros. no cause for worry with that show 'a' them, 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? Well, that bunch we buttoned wouldn't 'a' give Sells Bros. no cause for worry with that show 'a' them, would they, Jim?"

Jim "fished" some church shoes 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 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 Rules in the circus, ain't it, Bingo?" She added, placing one arm affectionately about the neck of the big white horse that stood waiting near the entrance.

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 funniest 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 clowns 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.

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 sandal (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, starched holes so 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.

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 the 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 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, though the opening a glimpse of the audience might be had, the upon tier, fanning and shifting uneasily. Near the main tent stood the long, low dressing top, with the women performers stowed 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 dead mother had got into her, but it must have been an unsatisfied spirit, unable to fulfill its ambition in the body that once held it, for it sometimes played strange pranks with Polly. Tonight her eyes shone and her lips were parted in anticipation as she looked lightly over the many colored streamers of the wheel of silken ribbons held by Barker in the center of the ring and by Toby and the tumbler on the edge of the bank.

With each change of her act the audience cheered and frantically applauded. The band played faster; Bingo's pace increased; the end of her turn was coming. The tumbler arranged himself around the ring with paper hoops. Bingo was fairly racing. She went through the first hoop with a crash of tearing paper.

"Heigh, Bingo!" she shouted as she bent her knees to make ready for the leap.

Bingo's neck was stretched. He had never gone so fast before. Barker looked uneasy. Toby forgot to go on with his accustomed tricks. Jim watched anxiously from the entrance. The paper of one hoop was still left unbroken. The attendant turned his eyes to glance at the incoming girl. The hoop shifted slightly in his clumsy hand as Polly leaped straight up from Bingo's back, trusting to her first calculation. Her forehead struck the edge of the hoop. She clutched wildly at the air. Bingo galloped on, and she fell to the ground, striking her

head against the iron-bound stake at the edge of the ring.

Everything stopped. There was a gasp of horror. The musicians dropped their instruments. Bingo halted and looked back uneasily. She lay motionless and seemingly lifeless.

A great cry went up in the tent. Pale stricken men, women and children attempted to clamber down from their seats, while others nearest the ground attempted to jump into the ring. Barker, still grasping his long whip, rushed to the girl's side and shouted wildly to Toby.

"Say something, you. Get 'em back!" Old Toby turned his white face to the crowd. His features worked convulsively, but he could not speak. His grief was so grotesque that the few who saw him laughed hysterically. He could not even go to Polly. His feet seemed pinned to the earth.

Jim rushed into the tent at the first cry of the audience. He lifted the limp form tenderly and, kneeling in

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.

**CHAPTER III.**

POLLY and Bingo always made the audience "sit up" when they swept into the ring. She was so young, so gayly clad, so light and joyous in all her poses. She seemed scarcely to touch the back of the white horse as they dashed round the ring in the glare of the tent lights. The other performers went through their work mechanically while Polly rode.

As for Polly, her work had never lost its first interest. Jim may have been right when he said that the spirit

of the dead mother had got into her, but it must have been an unsatisfied spirit, unable to fulfill its ambition in the body that once held it, for it sometimes played strange pranks with Polly. Tonight her eyes shone and her lips were parted in anticipation as she looked lightly over the many colored streamers of the wheel of silken ribbons held by Barker in the center of the ring and by Toby and the tumbler on the edge of the bank.

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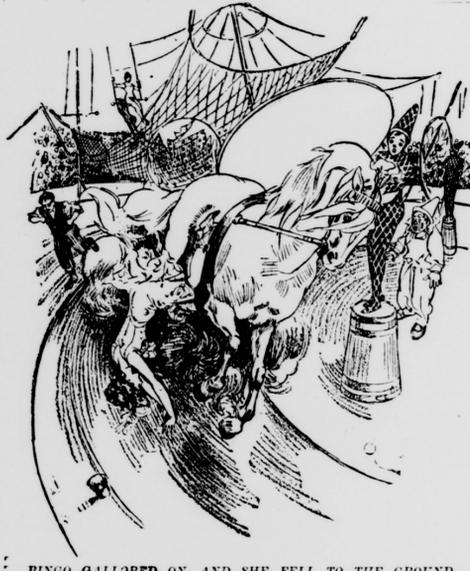
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