

MYSTERY OF POLLY LOPP.

(Continued from Page Six.)

"I'll take the bet," she replied. "Hah, what's that? You don't want to see me jumpin' round in the garden path at night like a 'toad, do you? Wouldn't like to have it said that you married a man simply because he could jump over a pole, would you? Look, don't you see I have got this here horseshoe nail just to please you? Look how I am putting myself out."



"I WANT TO MARRY YOU, DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND?"

"But you haven't told me that you love me," she said, and in the gathering darkness he could see her looking down.

"Haven't I? Well I do. Love you well enough to let you go to the store and trade out ten dollars' worth at a snort, and if that ain't love, hanged if I know what is. Yes, I even love you more than that—I'll let you trade out fifteen. Now what do you say?"

"Mr. Aimes," she said, and her voice was low and sympathetic, "your earnest pleading warms my heart toward you, and it therefore grieves me to tell you that I am engaged."

"The horn spoon you say! But who to? But not to one of them men, I hope."

"No; not one particularly, but to all three."

"The off ox you say! But you can't marry all three of 'em."

"No, I can't; but I can wait and see which one I really want."

"Miss," said the old man, catching up his hat and arising, "you are mighty near being the blamest creeter I ever saw."

He stood there fumbling with his collar; he took the nail, held it a moment in his hand, and then, throwing it away, said: "Thar, I have flung my love and your honor out into the bushes. Good night."

There was a great deal of talk in the village, and at one time it appeared that the mite society, for whose benefit Polly had so ardently begged a nickel here and there, would issue an edict against her; but the tide was finally turned by the president of the association, a widow with a business eye. She saw that to cut off the newspaper was to throw away a valuable adjunct, and so it was agreed that Polly might remain in the society and rest simply under a mild degree of suspicion. The question was discussed in the church, but the preacher, strong in his belief that church notices and abstracts of sermons should be printed, called a determined halt.

How much longer the affair might have been discussed, and into what remote and executive corners of affrighted virtue it might have been dragged, it would be difficult to say; but the arising of a new topic put it all aside. And this new topic was one of real excitement. Not far away in the hills lived a gang of desperate men, the Abe Peters boys, they were called. It was known, or at least it was strongly suspected, that they had robbed railway trains. Determined efforts on the part of the law had failed to bring them to justice. It was believed that they had formed an alliance with the Dalton gang, but this their leader denied, and offered, on condition of a pardon for himself and friends, to help the officers bring the Daltons into court or to kill them. This offer was accepted. The Daltons were killed or so badly crippled that nothing was to be feared from them. Well, after this the Peters gang fought off the temptation to rob trains, but could not forego the pleasurable recreation of riding into a village now and then and shooting out the lights. So, just about the time the talk concerning Polly and the three men was sinking into a mere whisper of dying scandal, the Peters brothers rode into Broomville, shot the town cow, wounded the prowling hog and shattered a lump in the meeting house. This was the greatest outrage that had ever been put upon that part of the country, and old man Aimes, with his shirt unbuttoned, puffed up and down the street and swore that if anyone would go with him he would ride after the scoundrels. But everybody was busy. The sheriff was behind with his tax list, the constable wasn't feeling well, and while the citizens were discussing their inability to avenge themselves, Polly came up and said that she would go with Mr. Aimes.

"I said," said the old fellow, looking up on her with admiration, "you'll drive me to the shop to get another horseshoe nail, but I think too much of you to see you put yourself in such danger. Let's wait a while."

In the next number of her paper Polly scored the rascals, and this produced a scare. The people said that the Peters brothers would surely come back and riddle the town. And within a week afterward they did come back, shouting, galloping through the streets. In fright the people sought their homes. The marauders dashed about, firing. They galloped up to the printing office and fired at the windows. And then from the inside came a puff of smoke and one of the Peters fell out of his saddle. Then there arose a furious melee, firing right and left, but the steady hand within the office fired again and out of a saddle dropped another man. Suddenly there was a new excitement among the marauders, and from behind a goods box came the double roar of a shotgun. The Peters brothers, those not on the ground, ducked their heads and dashed away, and when Polly stepped out, Nell, with a gun in her hand, came from behind the box. "I was watching," she said, "and I thought you needed me."

CHAPTER III.

Three men had been dangerously wounded, and the law, now brave enough, took charge of them. Polly and Nell were heroines. The president of the mite society called a special meeting in their honor, and old man Aimes made a speech, with his shirt collar buttoned almost tight enough to choke him. Now it was declared that Polly should never leave the village; and it was also avowed that if she wanted to be acquainted with three men from away off somewhere it was her right, and that it was nobody's business if she had chosen to engage herself to them.

One afternoon she called at the office and told Nell to go home. "Go right on now and wait there till I come," he said, thinking to whisper to her, but speaking loud enough to be heard out in the street. "Yes, right now, and when I do

come I may have a mighty interesting piece of news for you."

"Nell went out and Polly knew what was coming. The old man sat down. "Little cooler than it was yesterday," he said.

"Yes," she replied. "Cooler than it was day before yesterday."

"Gad, I reckon you are right. Say, do you recollect that some time ago I told you about my field of corn down the creek? Well, you ought to see it now. Seventy-five or a hundred bushels to the acre. And you know that I told you that you might even spend fifteen dollars. Of course you recollect it, for how could a woman and a beave a woman as you ever forget it. Well, I have been thinkin' the matter over since then and I have come to the conclusion that you may spend twenty dollars at a snort. Now what do you think of it?"

"But you don't owe me anything," she replied.

"No, but I want to give it to you, don't you see—give it to you to spend at a snort, hah? I want to marry you, don't you, understand?"

"Mr. Aimes, you are too brave a man to throw yourself away."

"Now look here, don't come a twittin' of me," he said. "I was goin' to help you shoot them fellers, but, hah, it. Nell took the gun and slipped away with it before I could get to the house. I can't run as fast as I could at one time."

"But I saw you running through the street and a deer couldn't have been faster."

"You are right, and I was runnin' for the gun."

"But you were not running toward your house."

"No, of course not, for I knew that Nell had tuck my gun and I was goin' after another one. And it's a good thing for them that I didn't get it. But let us get down to business. I have been thinkin' the matter over and I have come to the conclusion that I can't git along very well without you and I know Nell can't. Why, look here, you ought to be a mother to that girl, hah? Didn't she risk her life to help you? And ain't such courage as that deservin' of a mother? It's easy enough to be a mother to her."

"Yes, but I can't very well be a mother to both of you."

"The horn spoon! I don't want you to be a mother to me; want you to be a wife to me."

"I think a great deal of you, Mr. Aimes."

"Bleeged to you, I gad."

"And I will break my engagement to those three men and engage myself to you for one year."

"Cut it down and I'm with you."

"All right, we'll say three months."

"And will you swear you won't fool me?"

"I'll swear that I will not break the engagement unless you are willing."

"But here, you won't cut up no caper in the meantime that will cause me to draw off, hah? All right now, it's a go, and I'll tell that old woman to weave another rag carpet." He stopped at the door, turned about and remarked: "Ain't quite as chilly as it was yistidy."

And before she could reply he had lunged out into the street and was hastening to tell his daughter of his happiness. When Polly reached home, just as twilight was tangling itself amid the dead vines in the garden, she found Nell standing at the gate, waiting for her. The girl was nervous, and she opened the gate with a jerk.

"What have you told father?" she asked, when Polly passed through the gate.

"I did not say that I was a circus woman, but suppose I were one; and suppose those three men came to persuade me to go back into the ring."

"Oh, you are clearing up one mystery. Go on and you may clear up another."

"But is there any other mystery to clear up?"

"Oh, not exactly a mystery, but how are you going to satisfy father that you should not marry him?"

"Oh, probably he will laugh at the idea to-morrow."

"But why should he when his mind is now set upon it? Do you think that he will decline to marry you because you have been a circus woman?"

"No, not particularly."

"Oh, you are becoming mysterious again, Polly. Why don't you be absolutely frank with me?"

"I will be, but not until after twelve o'clock to-day."

"There you go again, leading me out into deeper and darker water, but I suppose I must accept your terms. Who is that out there that keeps gazing in here?"

"Some fellow desperately gone on you. Shall I go out and knock him down?"

"Goodness, no; he is doing no particular harm. But I wish he would go away."

"You don't like admirers, do you?"

"The right sort of admirers, yes; but to be admired by ignorance is a cheap victory."

In Polly's eyes was the light of strong admiration as she looked at the girl. "You surprise me nearly every day," she said. "I did not expect to find so bright a creature in this dingy place."

"Oh," Nell laughed, "you think I am bright just because the place is dingy. It doesn't take much of a butterfly to look pretty when it settles in the mud."

Polly was silent, meditative; and when she spoke again there was in her voice a new tone, a tremulous sadness. "I am one of the shrewd children of the world," she said, "and you are a clover-scented child of the meadow, but, simple as you are, yours is a wisdom that I could never reach. There's that old fellow leaning on the fence. Shall I drive him away?"

"I wish you would tell him that he is annoying me. No, it might hurt his feelings."

This made Polly laugh so loudly that the fellow, thinking that the women were making fun of him, strode away. "One to contemplate your tenderness," said the woman of the world, "would scarcely think that you had ever turned loose a double-barrel shotgun amid a lot of men."

"Oh, I did that for you, and if I had thought that the fellow out there was annoying you, I should have driven him away long ago."

"My dear, I might take that as a re-luke," Polly replied, "but I won't," she quickly added.

Nell got up, brushing the snubbeams out of her eyes, and walked about the room. "I feel so strange to-day," she said. "Something must surely be going to happen. I wish that editor would come over here and beg you to take his paper for another year."

"Perhaps he couldn't induce me to take it."

"Oh, but you are not thinking of going with the circus again, are you?"

"You shall soon see what I intend to do."

"But don't do anything to separate us," Polly had begun to read a newspaper. "Did you hear what I said? Now what

when the marriage was to take place. "It seems of deep concern to you," Polly replied.

"Oh, not at all, I'm sure. I just merely happened to think of it. I don't care if you marry him to-day, I'm sure. He's nothing to me, goodness knows. And so far as that's concerned, I could have married him long ago. I suppose the match will be very suitable. He's getting old and you're not so very young yourself. Those city women have a knack of hiding their age, too. Oh, yes, I should think that you are very well suited. It's nothing to me, I'm sure."

"Good, and I hope that you will accept an invitation to my wedding."

"Oh, I am the last person in the world to go to weddings. Of course, if it's a romantic affair I don't mind going, but a cut and dried marriage never did catch me. Oh, by the way, what will those three strange men think?"

"I don't know, but I have invited them to the wedding."

"Miss, I must say that you are about the curiousest critter I ever saw, and it strikes me that the less a body has to do with you the better it will be for 'em."

Several months passed, and the expiration of the lease was approaching. And so was the time set for Polly's marriage. The bottom field had yielded lavishly and the old man wore a new homespun suit. "You know we had a sort of a contract," he said to Polly one evening.

"Yes, but if you speak of the engagement I'll break it."

"I gad, you've got me wound up in a close place. I'd like to ask you if it ain't about time you was gettin' your dress ready, and all that sort of thing."

"Look out now, Mr. Aimes."

The old man ducked his head as though a stone had been thrown at him. "All right, miss, but don't forget to blow the horn when you are ready."

It was morning, and Polly and Nell were sitting in the parlor at home. Polly had said that as the lease was about to expire there was no need of going to the office. "We will wait," she said, "and let the owner of the paper come here if he wants to see us."

"Do you think of taking it again?" Nell asked, with a touch of sadness in her voice.

"No, I think not."

"So then you are in earnest about marrying father?"

"No, I think not."

"You think not? Don't you know?"

"Yes, I think I do."

"Polly, you have one of your mysterious fits to-day. What's the use in keeping up this foolishness? Tell him that you can't marry him. You have let it run on so long already that he has gone to the expense of getting a new suit of clothes."

"Yes, but he hasn't any more clothes now than he needs."

Nell sighed and Polly looked drearily out into the garden. "Your coming and your stay has been a romance to me, Polly, and now it must end." She sat with her elbow on a table and meditatively and deftly was touching her hair. The sunlight, streaming through the high window, fell upon her, illumined her, and the sad glow of a wish-dream was in her eyes. Out in the road, dodging about, stalked a young man, a smitten clown, dying to catch a glimpse of her. "Yes, your coming was so strange a romance, bringing to me a mind that I could admire, and now the music must end in a dry crackle."

Polly went to her, leaned over her, kissed her. "Your romance may not end," she said. "But suppose that I should tell you that your romance had been brought by a circus woman?"

"You a circus woman? I didn't know that they were so noble and brave."

"I did not say that I was a circus woman, but suppose I were one; and suppose those three men came to persuade me to go back into the ring."

"Oh, you are clearing up one mystery. Go on and you may clear up another."

"But is there any other mystery to clear up?"

"Oh, not exactly a mystery, but how are you going to satisfy father that you should not marry him?"

"Oh, probably he will laugh at the idea to-morrow."

"But why should he when his mind is now set upon it? Do you think that he will decline to marry you because you have been a circus woman?"

"No, not particularly."

"Oh, you are becoming mysterious again, Polly. Why don't you be absolutely frank with me?"

"I will be, but not until after twelve o'clock to-day."

"There you go again, leading me out into deeper and darker water, but I suppose I must accept your terms. Who is that out there that keeps gazing in here?"

"Some fellow desperately gone on you. Shall I go out and knock him down?"

"Goodness, no; he is doing no particular harm. But I wish he would go away."

"You don't like admirers, do you?"

"The right sort of admirers, yes; but to be admired by ignorance is a cheap victory."

In Polly's eyes was the light of strong admiration as she looked at the girl. "You surprise me nearly every day," she said. "I did not expect to find so bright a creature in this dingy place."

"Oh," Nell laughed, "you think I am bright just because the place is dingy. It doesn't take much of a butterfly to look pretty when it settles in the mud."

Polly was silent, meditative; and when she spoke again there was in her voice a new tone, a tremulous sadness. "I am one of the shrewd children of the world," she said, "and you are a clover-scented child of the meadow, but, simple as you are, yours is a wisdom that I could never reach. There's that old fellow leaning on the fence. Shall I drive him away?"

"I wish you would tell him that he is annoying me. No, it might hurt his feelings."

This made Polly laugh so loudly that the fellow, thinking that the women were making fun of him, strode away. "One to contemplate your tenderness," said the woman of the world, "would scarcely think that you had ever turned loose a double-barrel shotgun amid a lot of men."

"Oh, I did that for you, and if I had thought that the fellow out there was annoying you, I should have driven him away long ago."

"My dear, I might take that as a re-luke," Polly replied, "but I won't," she quickly added.

Nell got up, brushing the snubbeams out of her eyes, and walked about the room. "I feel so strange to-day," she said. "Something must surely be going to happen. I wish that editor would come over here and beg you to take his paper for another year."

"Perhaps he couldn't induce me to take it."

"Oh, but you are not thinking of going with the circus again, are you?"

"You shall soon see what I intend to do."

"But don't do anything to separate us," Polly had begun to read a newspaper. "Did you hear what I said? Now what

can be in that paper to interest you?"

I was just reading about a peculiar organization that I happen to know something about. Some time ago an old man, a crank, died in Chicago, having willed his money to a club, or rather to several trustees who were to form such a club as he should name. It was to be called the Test Club and was to have but thirty members. When a candidate should apply for membership, a test was to be imposed upon him, and, if he carried it out faithfully, he was to be admitted as a member and thereafter share in the dividends arising from certain investments; and as the dividends were large there was a rush for membership. And I see by this article that a woman demands the right to apply for membership, vowing that she is willing to undergo any test that may be imposed upon her."

"What nonsense," was the girl's comment. "A woman ought to know that so soon as she gets out of her real sphere she is robbed of her force, the power that she should wield over men."

"I don't know much about the power that women wield," Polly replied, "but I don't think that a woman would make a good ringmaster."

"A ringmaster, Polly? What do you mean?"

"Why, a ringmaster in a circus."

"Oh. But why should you so frequently refer to the circus? I just believe that you intend to run away and leave us."

"I think not. By the way, what time does the stage come in?"

"The first one comes at a little after eleven. Why do you want to know?"

"Oh, I just happened to think about it."

"But why didn't you happen to think about it before?"

"And for that matter," Polly quickly replied, "why don't we happen to think about everything before?"

They laughed at each other, and Nell, seizing her friend, pretended that she was going to put her out of the house, but Polly, taking hold of her arms, gave her an easy upward swing and stood her on a chair. "Gracious alive," Nell cried, springing down; "how strong you are. Did riding a horse in a circus make you so muscular?"

"Perhaps riding a horse was not all I did. I might have handled cannon balls."

"I should think you did. Oh," she suddenly exclaimed, looking through the window; "yonder come those three strange men."

THE DOOR OPENED AND OUT STEPPED A MAN.

Polly arose and glancing at the clock said: "I am going to my room, and you must entertain them until I come down. I won't be long."

"But let me tell them that you don't wish to see them. They will persuade you to go away with them."

"No; tell them that I shall be down in a few moments."

She hastened upstairs. The men came to the door. "May we come in?" one of them asked.

She invited them in with a certain stiffness of manner, and when they had sat down one of them asked: "Where's Polly?"

"Miss Lopp has gone to her room. She will be down soon. Do you wish to see her on very important business?"

"Well, rather."

"But if you have any word for her why can't I take it?"

"Oh, I guess we'd better see her."

"I hope you won't persuade her to go away."

"Ah, you have become friends, I take it."

"Yes, devoted friends."

"Nice girl," said the man. "A little coarse, but—"

"She is not coarse, sir."

"No! All right, then. I thought she was. Don't know very much about women myself, but I thought she was a little coarse."

"I should think, sir, that you would strive to be more of a gentleman than to call her coarse. She is the noblest and bravest creature in the world."

"That so? Never saw her tried. Is that her stamping around upstairs?"

Nell made no answer, and they sat in silence. After awhile they heard Polly coming down the stairs. The stair door opened and out stepped a man. Nell uttered a sharp cry and covered her face with her hands. The man approached her, and bending over her said: "I was a candidate for admission into that club and the test was that I should be a woman for one year."

"Oh!" she sobbed, "and I have told you things that I should not have told anyone."

"Yes," he replied, still bending over her; "and you have shown me the purest mind and the noblest heart that man has ever found." He leaned further over and whispered to her, and the face that she turned up to his was radiant with a confused happiness. Just at this moment old Aimes stalked in. "Where's Polly?" he asked. "Why, what's the meaning of all this? Hah? You don't mean—"

"I have been Polly," a man said, bowing to him; "but now I am George Hadley, and this daughter of yours, the sweetest woman that lives, is to be my wife."

"A man, hah? A man just to last? Well, say, now young feller, I knowed it all the time, and I was just waitin' to see how long you could keep it up. I've been mayor of this town too long to be fooled. I tell you, hah!"

[THE END.]

A Big Calculation in Water.

The ocean, sea and lake surface of our planet is estimated at something like 145,000,000 square miles with an average depth of 12,000 feet, and is calculated to contain not less than 3,270,000 billion tons of water. The rivers of the earth are estimated to have a flow sufficient to cover thirty-six cubic miles of the above area each day. Now, if all the oceans were suddenly dried, and the rivers could keep up their present rate of flow which, of course, they could not without ocean evaporation, it would take 35,000 years to refill the basin.

New Use For Pet Dogs.

A lady in England has found a new use for dogs. One muddy day lately she was seen in the street with a parcel in one hand, an umbrella in the other, and an Irish terrier holding the trail of her dress in his teeth. He never let the dress touch the ground.

WAR IN MADAGASCAR.

FRANCE MUST SEND TROOPS TO THE ISLAND AT ONCE.

Some Interesting Chat About Queen Ranavalona and Her Prime Minister—Once a Year the Dusky Monarch Takes a Public Bath.

The mission of M. Myre de Vilers to Madagascar having failed, nothing remains for France but to vote a war budget and send soldiers and sailors to bring the queen and her advisers at Tananarive to terms. A modest estimate places the cost of this enterprise at fully one hundred and fifty million francs, and a number of lives dependent in part upon the accuracy of the Madagascan warriors, but chiefly on the terrible roads and the deadly climate of the island.

As a starter France will send a main body of 12,000 troops under Lieut. Gen. Borel de Ladurantie—a campaigner fanned by the sun and sands of the Soudan—and a supplementary corps of about 5,000 marines, most of whom have had plenty of previous foreign service. There is no reason to doubt, of course, that in the end France will win the fight. In that event the republic will be richer by an island greater in area than France itself, and by

about five million subjects. From all accounts, however, these latter will not prove a very valuable possession. They are lazy, no more honest than the people of more civilized communities and atrociously poor.

The Hovas, the strongest, most enterprising and best-equipped of the tribes with whom the French soldiers will have to try conclusions, have their capital at Tananarive, where the prime minister, Rainilariavony—rules supreme. There is a queen of Madagascar; but apparently she does not count for much. The gentleman with the elaborate surname is the real ruler of the island. He chooses and decides everything for her majesty. Indeed, by a peculiar law of that country the prime minister is also obliged to serve as husband to the sovereign. He has already occupied this complicated position for three queens. In point of fact the throne, the only limitation to his authority being that his choice should belong to the line of Andrianampoinie, the founder of the Malgache monarchy. He generally selects some one whom he will have no difficulty in controlling.

Ranavalona III, the present queen, came to her royal dignities rather unexpectedly. Although of noble origin she lived at the time of her accession to the throne in very modest circumstances, one of her uncles, her guardian, keeping a butcher shop in the Hova capital. Now, however, she surrounds herself with much outer show of majesty; no one dares approach her. She lives like a recluse in her palace at Tananarive, occasionally going abroad with her prime minister in a sedan chair, but showing herself to the populace only on very rare occasions.

Such an occasion presents itself regularly once a year, in the last days of November, on the celebration of the national feast of the bath. On this day the queen receives at her palace, extended upon a couch of red velvet. She then suddenly disappears behind a curtain where for some minutes she refreshes herself in a perfumed bath. When this has been completed a salvo of artillery announces to the people that the royal purification has been effected. After that she makes a tour of the palace and from a silver ewer, carried by a gorgeously-appeared servant, she sprinkles water upon all the troops who stand in line in the courtyard with presented arms. The official account of the French envoy, M. de Vilers, would indicate that the queen is not a beauty; but with characteristic gallantry he adds that she has certain feminine coquetties and loves handsome gowns rather for the pleasure of possessing them than of wearing them. The climate of Madagascar is not conducive to elaborate toilettes or needless clothing of any description.

About two years ago her majesty tired of the idleness and frivolity of her mode of existence and undertook to emancipate herself from the dominance of the prime minister. With the assistance of one of the sons of this official by a former wife, the queen plotted to secure real as well as nominal control of the government. But Rainilariavony nipped the project in the bud by beheading the queen's chief advisers.

Trouble in an Opera Troupe.