

**POLLY**

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Polly by Douglas Goldring

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**DOUGLAS GOLDRING**

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BY

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AUTHOR OF "MARGOT'S PROGRESS"

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## POLLY

### CHAPTER I

LADY PRENDERGAST gave herself the full benefit of her five feet eleven inches and surveyed the porter with a majesty of aspect—derived partly from an episcopal father, and partly from ten years of official life in the Tropics—which never deserted her in moments of crisis.

Lady Prendergast's three little girls—Polly, Molly, and Jolly—grouped themselves behind her skirts and stared at the common enemy like little insects, with enormous eyes.

"Ally-vous-on," she commanded, in that French—ruthless and unfaltering—with which for generations the British matron has been wont to flatten her way across the continent of Europe.

The porter, however, declined to consider the interview at an end. "*Ça écrit!*" he shrieked, waving his hands above the voluminous baggage of the Prendergast family, and indicating the bad franc-piece with which he had been rewarded for bringing it from the railway station.

"*Ça écrit!*"

He made marks on the white walls of the second-floor corridor of the "*Splendid Hotel*," in proof of his assertion; he scrawled all over the labels on the portmanteaux.

"Ally-vous-on," Lady Prendergast ordered, a second time, stamping her foot. She was extremely angry. One of the little girls whimpered; another looked distressed and solemn; but Polly clapped her hands and gurgled with joy. Mummy was splendid! What would she do next? Ooray! she was certain Mummy would win, and send the nasty porter man away. As the hubbub increased and the presence of hotel servants in the background became audible to Lady Prendergast amid the din, she reached a final stage of exacerbation.

"Voleur!" she exclaimed. "Ally - vous - on, Vite!" Her eyes flashed, and she took two resolute steps forward. The porter's jaw dropped. "Get out at once," she continued, following up her advantage, "or je vous pousserai!"

Suiting her action to her words, she seized the man by the arm and hustled him gesticulating to the staircase, where she administered a final shove.

Polly could not contain her enthusiasm; she laughed and skipped behind her mother, in her pretty pink frock, her dark blue eyes glowing with excitement. "Ooray!" she cried. "Three cheers for Mumsy! Hip, hip!"

Lady Prendergast, flushed and a little breathless, allowed herself to unbend after the enemy's discomfiture. She patted her offspring on the shoulder and laughed almost girlishly. The boots now made a belated appearance, and with many apologies began to remove the baggage from the corridor into Lady Prendergast's bedroom. Louise, the Swiss *bonne*, also presented herself to take charge of the children and get them ready for dinner; and close upon her heels arrived the Guv'nor. The Guv'nor (who had just finished his *apéritif*) had a



white moustache, beautiful pink cheeks as smooth as a baby's, and a figure which his tailor admired so much that he could rarely bring himself to refuse to make clothes for it.

"What's all this about the porter, my dear?" the Guv'nor inquired. "Had to give him five francs before he would go away! Said he'd been assaulted and had a base coin passed off on him, and was going for the police."

"Blinkers, the man's an arrant thief," said Lady Prendergast, her voice rich with justifiable indignation. "We really ought to give him in charge, or else he'll be victimising other people. He's probably been doing the same sort of thing for years. I shall speak to the manager about it this evening."

"Coo, father, Mummy *was* splendid," exploded Polly, eluding Louise's grip and gazing up into Sir Laurence's candid blue eye. "Mummy said 'Get out, or je vous pousserai!' and simply *swished* him down the stairs. You ought to have seen her!"

Sir Laurence looked at his wife with all the pride and affection which she had never failed to evoke in him; then he sank into the nearest chair and roared with laughter. Lady Prendergast glanced at him almost shyly - his delight in her was a tribute of which she never tired. A look of softness came into her handsome face which made it beautiful. "Now run along, children," she said, "and mind you are ready for dinner in half an hour!"

The children ran along, and submitted themselves to Louise's brushings and combings, preparatory to that enormously impressive "entry" into the hotel dining-room, to which experience had accustomed them. In due course this "entry" was made, and the table d'hôte of the "Splendid Hotel" examined

and found to be almost indistinguishable from that of its predecessor (a "Beau-Séjour"). One by one, Neuville-Plage displayed its hackneyed charms. Polly remembered it in after years as the place where she won a cigarette-case in a golf tournament; where the chef d'orchestre at the Casino was stabbed in the back by a lady with over-gilded hair; where they first met the Morrisons; and also—most important of all—where Mummy let loose the historic phrase: "Get out, or je vous pousserai!"

## CHAPTER II

POLLY discovered early in life that the great fun of living with Mummy and the Guv'nor was that things were always happening. There was no stagnation ; life was one bewildering whirl, punctuated with thrilling train journeys from one country to another. Mummy was constantly having brilliant ideas for where to go and stay ; she was always " hearing " that such and such a place was " rather jolly." Usually it was France ; Belgium when they had gone bust a bit too lavishly ; sometimes Switzerland ; nearly always Florence for the winter ; Dresden on occasions. This round was varied by all-too-short visits to relatives in London.

The relatives almost always lived in the neighbourhood of the Cromwell Road ; they all called father " Blinkers," and referred to Mummy, with *empressement*, as a " splendid woman." The relatives' houses seemed to be perpetually full of old friends who had known papa in India " years ago," and claimed to have dandled Polly in her cradle when she was three months old. The old friends called the Guv'nor " Blinkers" too ; and Polly discovered that the origin of the nickname was the way in which Mummy always " kept everything " from him which might worry him. Some historic old friend had observed that " Janey takes good care to drive Laurence in blinkers " ; and the name