

## Polly's Dilemma

by

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Polly enters her apartment with handbag and mail in hand and the phone ringing. "Hello! Oh, hello mother, I'm just coming in from another job interview. No, no luck." Polly sighs impatiently. "Mother, we've been all over this. I refuse to work for someone that destroyed a friend's life and caused my sister to lose the love of her life." Polly drops her handbag and kicks off her shoes, falling into her chair. Polly's voice begins to show signs of stress as she continues. "I know, I know! You've never agreed with my opinion of Jimmy. His long hair is why you don't like him. Jimmy really has talent. You don't give Amy enough support, your own daughter." Polly sighs again. "Ah right mother, I will get another job, don't worry. Good bye!"

Polly's dark brown eyes looked tired, the usual twinkle was gone. Her brown hair was pulled back in a pony tail, no curls, nor highlights. Polly's shoulders had a slouch giving her 5'; 5" frame a smaller, older appearance. Polly drops the phone onto the table sinking farther into the chair cushion and shuts her eyes. After a few minutes, Polly sets up and starts sorting through the mail. Polly doesn't like what she sees. "Bill, bill, bill, junk, junk, oh, what's this?" Polly stops at a long envelope. Polly puts the other mail down and opens the long envelope.

*Dear Miss Radcliffe,*

*This is not a letter of apology, but one to address some facts you have been unwilling to accept and some you are unaware. Yes, I was against my friend, Phil, getting closer with your sister Amy. I did not wish him to be hurt. It was clear he cared for your sister, but she was very reserved. There were times she appeared even cold towards him. Amy showed no signs of caring for Phil. Then there was the problem with some of your family members. Your uncle Jeff wears a necklace with a medallion of a German Swastika, waiting for the day that the super race rises again. At each gathering I have attended with you and your family, one or both of your sisters got drunk. Your mother made it very clear she would stop work after Amy and Phil were married. Phil will one day be the head of his father's company but first he needs a wife that loves and respects him, not a family that causes scandal and gets his name in the newspapers every other day. Your father appears to be a decent man, who has been beaten down by your mother. Your father also seems to have given up on being a disciplinarian to your younger sisters.*

Polly throws the letter across the room. "The heel! Not only is he a heel, but an arrogant heel! My dear Amy, the sweetest, kindest person! He dares to call her cold!" Polly stomps her feet. "What's wrong with people?" Polly puts her hands over her eyes. "I am not going to cry!" Polly remembers back over several conversations with family and friends. Polly says loudly, "Amy must stop being so shy. Other people do not know her like we know her. Others think she is indifferent and cold. Polly, you need to help her. She is too sweet to give people the wrong impression."

Polly walked about the apartment finally sitting down to try and read, watch television, but she could not set still. Polly went to her computer and made an effort to send some emails. Polly was so angry she nervously pulled at her hair. After calming down she remembered how several times Amy had pleaded with her to go with her and Phil and each time Polly chose to go to hear Jimmy play. Amy had always been so shy. She knew this; she should have done more to help her. Phil had wanted Polly to go too. How could she have been so tied up in her mind with Jimmy that she turned her back on her sister? Another attempt of trying to read, television, staring out of the window, she even picked up the clothes off of her bedroom floor. Try as she could, the letter drew her back.

*Now for your dear friend James; James and I were raised together. I thought of him as a brother and my father felt of him as a son. James' father died when he was only seven. He came to live with my family and was raised as a beloved family member. We both attended DePaul, then I left for Harvard, and James attended a musical institute instead. I did not see much of James during this time. After my father's death, I offered James the position in our company that my father had requested in his will. James did not want the position. I tried to offer James another position, and this too he refused. All James wanted was the money, which he received with my blessing. James soon after left and we heard nothing from him for the next five years. During this time, word got back to us of his wild life, some arrests, fights, and loathsome affairs. The most disturbing news was his propensity for younger women in the tender age group of 16 to 19.*

“No, oh no”, Polly cried. Polly clasps the letter tightly to her chest. “He must be lying? Or, maybe he was just listening to this gossip because he was mad at James for leaving?” Feeling relieved, “Yes, that’s it, gossip.” Polly uncouples the letter and continues to read.

*My next contact with James was last year. My aunt called me with the alarming news that her youngest granddaughter was expecting. Her granddaughter had gone to New York with a school group, during which time she again met James. Yes, James was the father. My niece was only sixteen. James knew my aunt would not want a family scandal, so he told my aunt that he would marry my niece for one-half of a million dollars. Unfortunately, before my aunt could make arrangements, my niece killed herself. This can all be proven Miss Radcliffe, by asking my aunt, Reverend McKenzie, or Mrs. Poole. I know you respect these people and will believe them. I take no blame for James’ life or in your sisters hurt feelings or lack of feelings.*

*Good day,*

*Nick Graham*

Polly holds the letter until it slowly falls from her hand. “I was so wrong. How could I have been so wrong? I don’t believe it. Something is missing, some missing explanation?” Polly cries, “There must be some explanation? I’m not that vain to misjudge someone so badly.” Polly cries a little louder, “I’m not a bad

person! I didn't listen. I should have listened!" Polly falls on to the couch and cries. "I was wrong, so wrong, all because someone said I wasn't pretty."

It is dark when Polly finally awakens from the sofa. She gets up slowly, like someone with a heavy load on their shoulders. Polly slowly walks and turns on a light. She goes into the bathroom and turns on the water. Polly comes out drying her face. Polly stares at the pages on the floor but makes no move to pick them up. She walks to the chair the farthest from the letter. So much of this has been her fault. She can admit to herself alone that she believed him to be the most handsome man she had ever laid eyes on, but he was a little too proud. Then later on, Polly laughed about overhearing him say she wasn't pretty enough. She laughs about this with her friends, she hadn't cared, or had she? How could have things gone so badly in a month's time?

He was the proud new owner of the business she worked for. Nick Graham's larger company had bought out the smaller company she had worked for. Nick had given a promise that he would keep 90% of the current employees, and he kept that promise. But, for some reason, Polly could not get past how proud he was and overhearing that statement. Then, there was Amy and his friend Phil, and she met Jimmy, who showed her who Nick really was. Polly's mother had always said things happen for a reason and after this past week, Polly was wondering why. First, Nick offered her the promotion of her dreams. This was a job her old company had not been able to offer. The chance to work with the "big boys", able to deal directly with the big publishing houses, work with real authors

not the “I was raised by Aliens”, writers she’d been working with. Polly had been on her way to accept the position when she accidentally overheard Nick talking to his sister about sending Phil away and how he was against Amy and Phil getting closer. Her dear Amy’s life crushed by this man, and there was Jimmy, she remembered what Nick had done to Jimmy. Polly felt as if she’d been kicked, kicked hard. Polly stood out of sight until she could think clearly. How could she accept the job? Polly was about to go in and tell Nick how she felt as several members began filling in for a meeting. The remainder of the day had been busy and Nick was out of the office the remainder of the week. He did send her an email about the position. When her reply stated she declined the job, Nick had been puzzled. Amy did not share Polly’s opinion of Nick. In fact, Amy made Polly agree to not say anything to Nick or at least not until the week was over. Everyone was so happy about the big office party that was to happen later in the week to celebrate the buyout. Polly had promised to not say anything.

At the office party, everyone was happy about the direction the company was going. Nick had been what the company needed. Afterwards, when they were walking to their cars, Nick had asked to speak with Polly alone. Polly believed he was about to ask about her not accepting the job position, then out of the blue Nick had proposed marriage, right there in the parking lot. Polly was shocked by this but could not help venting on Nick about what she had overheard. Nick had the nerve to tell her maybe she shouldn’t listen to other people’s conversations. No apology, just to stop listening to other people’s conversations. Now this letter, she

held the truth in her hands, eyeing the pages of the letter lying on the floor like parts of her life broken apart, lost because of her own pride and prejudice.

After receiving this letter, it was several weeks before she could really start thinking clearly. Her voicemail was full of her family and friends calling to check on her. Polly's mother, grandmother, her grandmothers fourth or fifth husband Frank, and so on. Polly only called her mother back when one of her mother's voicemails threatened to bring the police in the picture if Polly did not return her calls.

Polly had to get up and find a job. Polly's savings were getting low, lower than low. Plus, Polly was tired of how every time she saw a tall, dark well-dressed man heading in the direction of her apartment, her heart would jump as the man drew closer and it would not end up being him.

Polly had to get out, had to get out of this room soon, because her mother would call the police anyway. Two days after Polly decided to start job hunting again, she heard a dreaded knock at the door. "It has to be mother; maybe she did call the police?"

When the door opened, Polly wished for the police. There stood Bruce Hearne. Bruce was grandmothers husband Frank's ex-wife's youngest son. After Frank married my grandmother, Bruce was kind of always there. Some of the family said Frank was the only person who'd ever paid any attention to him. So Bruce just hung around Frank whenever he could.

Bruce was really 6' tall, if he stood up straight. Bruce stood with a slouch making him appear to be only about 5', 10". There Bruce stood with that stupid umbrella. Bruce never went anywhere without that stupid umbrella. Bruce's pale brown hair, light brown eyes, and his thick light brown glasses made his face appear to be one pale colorless mask. "My dear, dear Polly, I am so, so sorry to hear about your state of affairs", Bruce said with that irritating nasal sounding voice Polly always hated. "I would have come sooner, but this is the busy time of the year at the lab, germinal you know, with this hot weather. Germs grow all over", he leaned closer talking in a whisper as if what he said was top secret.

Bruce took Polly by the arm and led her to a nearby chair. She felt her mouth was still open but no sound was coming out. Bruce rattled on, "Here set down, you look awful. All of this stress, you poor dear, all alone, please don't worry, your Bruce is here to take care of you". "YOUR BRUCE?" What did he mean? This thought raced through Polly's mind. "Your Bruce".

Polly tried to say something, but "Her Bruce" kept her from talking. "Do not be ashamed about your trivial savings, of your parent's lack of funds to provide to your dowry," Bruce said. "Dowry, what dowry, I don't need a dowry?" Polly shouted. "And as for my savings, my savings are fine", Polly yelled. Polly jumped up; Bruce stepped back in shock, pushing up his glasses.

"Now don't get upset", Bruce said. Bruce tried to get Polly seated again, but she side-stepped him. "Dowry, what about this dowry, what have you heard about me Bruce?" Polly asked. "Well, I was visiting Frank and the house was full of



family. I asked where you were, and you know how much I have always cared about you?" Bruce said. Bruce's nasal voice was making Polly feel creepy, again. Bruce went on, "Someone said how you had lost your job and had been left at church, so to speak". "What?" Polly shouted. "Lost my job and been left at the altar?" I quit my job and I said "no" to his proposal".

How things could get so out of hand? Polly thought. Polly said, "And I will get another job, probably a better one". Polly almost yelled, "Please go Bruce, I was busy when you came in." Bruce replied, "My dear, do not be stressed." Bruce sat down instead of going towards the door. "As I said on my arrival, I came to help you, save you so to speak. I have just received a promotion of my own, chief laboratory technician, over the airborne lab. My salary will have a nice increase and I will have to attend the different functions given for the division. Appearance is very important you know."

"Oh, well, I am happy for you Bruce, but as I said, I am very busy. Maybe at a later date we can go out to dinner and celebrate your promotion". Polly tried to step towards the door but this time Bruce side-stepped her. Bruce said, "Polly, you are all over the place. Your head is not working right. You have too many worries. I've been trying to tell you that's why I am here, to marry you and to put your worries on my shoulders. Your daydreaming about being the head of some writing department must stop. It would not appear proper for a lab chief's wife to be running around with a bunch of these people. Why, you know some of them are rather wild? It's just not right for you". Polly had to count to fifty before she would

allow herself to speak. "Bruce, you are not listening. I said I was busy and you MUST GO. You must go, NOW". Polly handed Bruce his umbrella. "There is no need to return for my answer. The answer is no. I could never marry a man with your new position. It wouldn't work out. Who knows what my psychiatrist might prescribe? I may end up heavily drugged for weeks just to get my mind straight again". Polly almost laughed out loud, but she held firm, anything to get rid of Bruce.

"A psychiatrist, this is the first I have heard of this?" Bruce asked. Bruce stammered, "Why, this is not good, not good at all. A man of MY position, this will never do". Bruce held on to his umbrella tightly, his eyes blinking out Morse code- HELP- his voice becoming weak with fear. Polly kept Bruce heading towards the door. "Now, now Bruce, no need to worry about this-You and I are the only ones that know about the psychiatrist and the marriage proposal. We are the only ones that know of the marriage proposal, aren't we? We'll just keep this between the two of us".

"Yes, yes my dear Polly, this is the right thing to do in this grave situation." At last, Bruce was out the door with that frightful umbrella. Polly found herself once again alone, looking around her apartment. Two weeks ago that letter had turned her life upside down, now this. "Has my life hit rock-bottom?" Polly asked herself. "So far down that Bruce Hearne would think he was doing her a favor by marrying her?" "Oh no, this is my entire fault. I have lain around too long feeling sorry for myself." She had to get out. She had to get out now, Bruce may return. Within the

hour, Polly was outside setting in her car with at least two dozen resumes, a little too much she knew, but Bruce had shocked her into action. In fact, she may go to Amy's apartment tonight. Polly did not want to get stuck in that apartment again.

Polly had gone to six places before she found herself in front of "his office building". She shouldn't go in but she found herself going into the coffee shop in the lobby. "What's the harm", she asked herself. It was open to the public. She'd just sat down when she heard her name called. It was Thomas Osei, the general manager. "Polly, this is a surprise. I just called your house about an hour ago." Polly hardly able to speak replied, "What, you called me?" "Yes, Polly I need you to come back, but not to the job Nick had offered you. We had to fill that position. This is something higher than your job at the old company. Say you will and the sky's the limit" Thomas said.

Polly asked, "Thomas is this coming from you alone?" Thomas replied, "No, I couldn't offer this type of position without Nick's approval." "Why didn't this offer come from him?" Polly asked. Thomas says, "Nick is gone to run the European office for at least a year. His uncle is ill and he should be able to return to his duties in about one year."

Polly couldn't believe her luck. Thinking over the past few weeks, and just to this morning with Bruce, and now this second chance at her job, Polly would wait for Nick's return. She would wait a year, two years to prove to him she had changed, she was no longer the girl filled with pride, overly opinionated. Now, she was filled with love, and she would wait for her second chance to win his heart.

Polly Radcliffe was back! No need for her mother to call the police to check on her. No need for any family to worry about her, and she knew her little lie about the psychiatrist would keep Bruce away from her door.