Melodrama with an intriguing twist. . .

Polly Pureheart Prevails

by Marilee Jackson

Characters
DEXTER DO-GOOD, hero
WESLEY WICKED, infamous landlord
POLLY PUREHEART, a girl of high moral standing
PATIENCE PUREHEART, Polly’s long-suffering mother
VALIANT PUREHEART, Polly’s forgetful father
MOLLY MISUNDERSTOOD
GERTRUDE GOSSIP
MANFRED MONEYBAGS, banker
STAGE MANAGER, narrator

SCENE 1
BEFORE RISE: STAGE MANAGER enters from between closed curtains. Lights up.
MANAGER: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Before we begin our show, I am pleased to present to you the cast. This is a melodrama, after all, and in a melodrama, it is helpful to know whom to applaud (Holds up sign which reads, CHEERS, APPLAUSE! and encourages audience to respond) and whom to boo (Holds up sign which reads, BOO, HISS! and waits for audience to respond).

Thank you. (During his or her introduction, each character enters from between closed curtains, recites, and exits across stage and behind curtains.) This is Polly Pureheart. (She enters.) She is the good and true heroine of the story. (Holds up card for cheering)

POLLY: I have never had an unkind thought in my whole life, that’s how pure I am! (Exits)

MANAGER: This is Mother Pureheart. (She enters.) She is Polly’s mother and is long-suffering, from years of poverty.
MOTHER: Oh, how I suffer. And suffer, and suffer, and . . .

MANAGER (Interrupting): Thank you, Mother Pureheart. (She exits.)

This is Father Pureheart. (He enters.) He’s a forgetful, poverty-stricken man who has waited 20 years to see his ship come in. Would you introduce yourself, sir?

FATHER (Scratching head): I’d like
to, laddie, but I can’t remember
who I am.
MANAGER: Pureheart, sir. Valiant
Pureheart. That’s your wife over
there. (Points to MOTHER)
FATHER: It is? Well, as I always
say, ignorance is bliss. (Exits)
MANAGER: And this is Gertrude
Gossip. (She enters.) I guess I don’t
have to explain much about her.
GERTRUDE: I like to think of
myself as the local newspaper,
since we don’t have a newspaper.
Bad news is my specialty. It is so
much more interesting. (Exits)
MANAGER: And this is the hero of
our story, Dexter Do-Good. (Waves
cheering sign wildly. DEXTER
enters.) Like most heroes in a
melodrama, he doesn’t really do
anything but make an appearance
in times of trouble and say,
DEXTER: Never fear! Dexter Do-
Good is here! (Exits)
MANAGER: Of course, for every
hero there has to be a villain, and
for our show, it is Wesley Wicked.
(Waves booing sign wildly. WESLEY
enters.)
WESLEY: Heh, heh, where there is
mischief to be made, I am your
man. The James Bond of the
villains. Nobody does it (With
emphasis) badder . . . Hiss . . .
(Exits)
MANAGER: Gives you chills just
listening to him, doesn’t it? There
are two more characters in our
show. We must not forget the
mystery woman of our play, Molly
Misunderstood. (She enters.)
MOLLY: Please forgive me! Can you
ever forgive me? I beg you, forgive
me!
MANAGER: Psst. Molly, they
haven’t seen the play yet.
MOLLY: Oh. I just don’t want to be
misunderstood. I mean, I am
misunderstood, that’s my name,
but—
MANAGER: Thank you, Molly. (She
enters.) Last, but not least, we have
the town banker, Manfred
Moneybags. He doesn’t have any
vices or virtues; he just runs his
effands throughout the play. (He
enters.)
MANFRED: Why, I deliver the news
that saves the day. I’d say that’s a
pretty important part! (Exits)
MANAGER: Well, there’s our cast.
Enjoy the show! (Lights out.)

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SETTING: Pureheart home. The
room is bare except for three
chairs and large pile of dirty
clothes on the floor.
AT RISE: POLLY paces, wringing
her hands. MOTHER and
FATHER sit in chairs. MOTHER
holds loaf of bread, FATHER has
his head in his hands. MANAGER
stands at the side of stage in
audience’s view with two
instructional signs.
POLLY: Oh, Mother. If only the
landlord would extend our credit
one more week!
MOTHER: Alas and alack. I won’t
complain.
POLLY: And poor father! His
memory is getting worse and
worse. It is the cold and the hunger.
He must eat.
MOTHER (Holding up bread): This
is our last loaf of bread. What will
we do tomorrow?

FATHER: Don’t worry, my dear. Tomorrow is still a week away. I will think of something.

POLLY: If only Father’s ship would find its way home.

GERTRUDE (Bursting in with a basket of dirty clothes): More laundry, Miss Polly. My, my, it looks like you will never catch up.

POLLY: Oh, woe is me, Gertrude. We have no more coal and without coal I cannot heat the water, and without hot water, how am I to do the laundry, and if I can’t take in laundry, how am I to pay rent?

MOTHER (Cupping hand to ear): Hark! Footsteps! Could it be . . . ? (Villain music is played.)

POLLY: The landlord! (MANAGER holds up booing sign as WESLEY sticks his head through door.)

WESLEY (Twisting mustache): I’ve come for the rent!

POLLY: I can’t pay the rent!

WESLEY: You must pay the rent!

MOTHER: We can’t pay the rent!

WESLEY: You won’t pay the rent?

FATHER: Does someone owe the rent?

POLLY (Pleading): Please, sir. May we have a little more time? Our ship will come soon.

WESLEY: I say noon tomorrow. No later.

MOTHER: How can you be so wicked?

WESLEY: Wesley Wicked is my name, and collecting rent is my game. Pay up! (MANAGER holds up booing sign.)

POLLY: How did you become so cruel?

GERTRUDE: How did you become so uncharitable?

FATHER: How did you become so ugly?

WESLEY: I don’t think that line is in the play.

FATHER: It is now.

GERTRUDE (To audience): And what will happen to Pure Polly and her long-suffering mother and forgetful father?

WESLEY (Gesturing with his thumb): Out in the cold. Heh, heh. FATHER: We are already cold, so you’ll have to do better than that!

POLLY (To audience): He may be forgetful, but he’s smart!

MOTHER: I feel sorry for you, Wesley Wicked. And if I were your mother, I’d be so ashamed of you.

WESLEY (Sarcastically): Injured! Wounded to the core. (Seriously) Madam, I am glad you brought up the subject. It gives me a chance to tell you my sad story. (MANAGER pretends to play a violin to sad music. WESLEY kneels on one knee.) I never had a mother.

MOTHER (Shocked): No mother?

WESLEY (Hand over heart): I never had a father!

FATHER (In disbelief): No father?

WESLEY (Clasping hands together dramatically): No one to tuck me into bed at night. No one to say, “There, there, little boy, I’m proud of you.”

POLLY (With feeling): How sad!

MOTHER: How awful!

GERTRUDE (Brightly): How newsworthy! Everyone loves the story of a poor, abandoned child. No wonder he went bad! (Knock at
door is heard.)
POLLY: Who’s there?
DEXTER (From outside door): Dexter Do-Good!
WESLEY (Waving fist in air): Curses! This is where I exit. I’ll be back tomorrow. Pay up or else!
(DEXTER enters. WESLEY hisses at him, pushes past him, and exits.)
POLLY (Wringing hands): Oh, woe is me! What is to become of us?
DEXTER (Striking a heroic pose): Never fear! Dexter Do-Good is here! (MANAGER holds up cheering sign. Curtain closes amid cheers, and MANAGER comes center.)
MANAGER: As we return to our sad little story, we find our heroine contemplating her fate. Will Wesley do the dastardly deed? Will Gertrude get the scoop? Will Polly Pureheart prevail? Let us cheer her on! (Holds up cheering sign, then moves to side of stage. Curtain opens.)

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SCENE 2
SETTING: Same as last scene.
AT RISE: POLLY and DEXTER are in a dramatic hand-holding pose.
POLLY: Poor Mother. Poor Father. We have locked the door, but Wesley Wicked will not be discouraged. And then—
DEXTER (Interrupting): I will find a way to save your family, or my name is not (Hand over heart, looking up to ceiling) Dexter Do-Good! (MANAGER holds up cheering card. Knock at door is heard.)
POLLY (Hands to her face in alarm): Who is it?

WESLEY (From outside door, faking a woman’s voice): It is I—Grandma Goodin. (WESLEY is dressed in a dark wig and wears a dress over his pants, which stick out from him. He carries a basket of food. He wobbles in on high heels and continues his falsetto.) I came to bring some food and drink to your forgetful father and your long-suffering mother. (MANAGER holds up booing sign. WESLEY raises his eyebrows and puts finger to lips, attempting to silence audience.)
POLLY (Oblivious to booing): Enter, dear lady. And thank you kindly for your generosity.
DEXTER (To audience): Grandma Goodin? I’ve not heard of this woman. (Knock at door. MANFRED enters.)
MANFRED: Good day, Miss Polly.
POLLY (To audience): It is Manfred Moneybags, the town banker.
MANFRED: I bring you (Dramatically) bad news. Your father’s ship capsized. The cargo of treasure is lost.
POLLY: Lost? Oh, what shall we do? Poor Father. Poor Mother. (WESLEY twirls mustache and wickedly raises eyebrows twice. MANAGER holds up booing sign.)
MANFRED: Who is that woman with the mustache?
POLLY: Grandma Goodin. She has come to offer charity. And now we shall need it, more than ever!
MANFRED: I must be going. (Leans over dramatically; in a stage whisper) Take care, Dexter.
Mistress Goodin may be a wolf in Grandma’s clothing.

DEXTER (In a stage whisper): Thank you for the warning, sir. Never fear! Dexter Do-Good is here! (MANAGER holds up cheering sign. MANFRED exits, and WESLEY curtsies to him.)

POLLY: Dexter, won’t you please help Mistress Goodin with her basket? It looks so heavy.

DEXTER: It would be my pleasure. (DEXTER approaches and deftly whips off WESLEY’s wig. Aha! Charlatan!)

WESLEY: Foiled! I should have worn the blond wig! (Chase ensues to fast music. DEXTER chases WESLEY, then the reverse. POLLY raises her hands in dismay, crying “Help! Help!” Finally, WESLEY grabs large pillowcase from laundry basket and slips it over DEXTER’s head.)

DEXTER (Muffled inside pillowcase): Help! Help!

POLLY (Pointing at WESLEY): Release him, you villain!

WESLEY: Why should I?

POLLY (Imploringly): What will you do with him?

WESLEY: Perhaps a little trip to the country would be nice. Some fresh air would do him good! Heh, heh.

DEXTER: Mmmfff, mmmmff.

POLLY: And then?

WESLEY: I give you until sunset tomorrow. If your rent has been paid by then, I will return him and you may keep the house. If not—(Twirls mustache menacingly) heh, heh. (MANAGER holds up booing sign. Curtain. MANAGER comes center.)

MANAGER: We’re about to begin Scene Three. It is almost sunset! Will Dexter escape from Wesley Wicked? Is it too late for Polly? Will Father remember what day it is? Let us join the Purehearts as they ponder their fate. (MANAGER goes to side of stage. Curtain opens.)

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SCENE 3

SETTING: Same as last scene.

AT RISE: MOTHER and FATHER are seated. POLLY is pacing.

POLLY: Alas, what will become of us? The rent is due today, and we are as poor as we were yesterday.

MOTHER: Oh, Polly, what will happen to us? If only your brother—(Covers mouth dramatically and looks at audience)

POLLY (Stunned): My brother?

MOTHER (To audience): What have I said?

POLLY (Urgently): I have a brother?

FATHER (Confused): She has a brother?

MOTHER: It is a sad story, dear child. Your father and I gave up looking for him years ago.

POLLY (Covering eyes and sobbing): Oh, poor, poor Brother! (Knock at door)

FATHER: A visitor? At this hour? What time is it, anyway?
MOLLY (Entering): It is Molly Misunderstood. I must see you.
POLLY: Come in, come in. We would offer you a cup of tea, but we have only the cup.
MOLLY: I’m not here for tea. I am here to—(Dramatic music is heard. MOLLY places the back of her palm against forehead.) confess.
FATHER: Molly Misunderstood? I feel my memory returning. Didn’t we have a nurse by that name once?
MOTHER: We did!
MOLLY: And that is where my story begins. On the day that dear Polly and little Ollie were born—
FATHER (Interrupting): We named our son Ollie?
MOTHER (Impatiently): Yes, yes, go on!
MOLLY: I was jealous, because you had two lovely babies and I had none. So I—(Dramatic music is heard.) took him.
MOTHER: You took him?
MOLLY: I told my husband that I found him outside our door, a poor little orphan.
POLLY (Urgently): And then?
MOLLY: My husband said we could not afford a child and that we could not keep him. What was I to do? I could not return him to you without explaining my terrible deed. So I left him outside the orphanage. (Knock at door)
MOTHER (Alert): Come in! (GERTRUDE enters.)
GERTRUDE: More laundry, Miss Polly. Any news? Bad news will do. (Knock at door)
FATHER: Now who? (WESLEY enters in original costume. MANAGER holds up booing sign.)
WESLEY: I have come for the rent!
POLLY: Where is Mr. Do-Good? What have you done with him? (DEXTER bursts through door. MANAGER holds up cheering sign.)
DEXTER: I am here, Polly. I escaped Wesley’s evil clutches last evening. It was I who retraced the news of your father’s sunken ship, only to find it was all a lie. (Points to WESLEY) He made it up to trick you.
WESLEY: Too bad. So sad. Pay up, Polly Pureheart!
MOLLY: But I tell you, I have news!
GERTRUDE: For heaven’s sake, let her tell the news. (Holds pencil to notepad. Knock at door)
MANFRED (Bursting in; importantly): I hope I am not too late! I have just received word, Mr. Pureheart. Your ship arrived safely, and your fortune is secure! (MANAGER holds up cheering sign.)
WESLEY: Curses! Doubly foiled!
MOTHER (Embracing POLLY): We will never be hungry again!
MOLLY: I have even more important news!
FATHER: What could be more important than food?
MANFRED: What could be more important than a chest full of riches? Unless it’s . . .
GERTRUDE and MANFRED (In unison): Little Ollie!
POLLY: You knew, too? Was I the only one who didn’t know the truth about my long-lost brother?
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MOLLY: No one knows the truth, except for me. Won’t anyone listen to me?

WESLEY: Truth and I have no business in the same room. Since I am a very bad loser, I will be leaving. I have other foreclosures to make. I have other lives to ruin. (Sighs) Life must go on.

MOLLY: Not so fast, Wesley Wicked—although that is not your true name.

WESLEY: Not my true name? How do you know that?

MOLLY: Because I was the nurse who delivered the cod liver oil to your bedside last winter when you ate too many tarts. And as I lifted your head to the spoon, I saw it.

WESLEY: Saw what?

MOLLY: The locket!

MOTHER (Suddenly): The lockets! I’d forgotten! I put one on each twin the day they were born. One gold locket and one silver.

POLLY: Why, yes, dear Mother. I have the gold one, right here. I have never taken it off. (She pulls it out from her shirt.)

WESLEY (Pulling out silver locket from his shirt): Great stars! Can it be? (Arms outspread) Momsie!

MOTHER (Arms extended): Son! (They embrace.)

WESLEY (To POLLY; tentatively): Sister?

POLLY (Embracing him): Dear Brother!

WESLEY (Kneeling, head on FATHER’s knee): Daddy!

MANFRED (To audience): A happy ending for all!

GERTRUDE (Looking disappointed): Too bad. Unhappy endings make much better news.

MANAGER (Coming center): And so, as the sun sinks into the west, the saga of Polly Pureheart comes to a close. Goodness has triumphed. What was lost has been found. One thing remains in our melodrama, however. We must have our story of boy gets girl . . . (POLLY bats eyelashes at DEXTER, who doesn’t notice. MANAGER clears throat loudly.)

Boy gets girl . . .

DEXTER (Raising finger in air as he finally gets hint): Never fear! Dexter Do-Good is here! (POLLY and DEXTER embrace. Curtain)

THE END

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Production Notes

POLLY PUREHEART PREVAILS

Characters: 4 female; 4 male; 1 male or female.

Playing Time: 20 minutes.

Costumes: Pureheart family dresses in rags. Polly wears gold locket around her neck. Wesley Wicked has handlebar mustache and dresses in shirt and pants appropriate for “wicked landlord,” except in Scene 2, when he dons dark wig and dress over his pants, which stick out from hem, and wears high heels. He also wears silver locket, concealed under his shirt. All others wear appropriate costumes.

Properties: Two signs, one reading, BOO, HISS!, the other, CHEERS, APPLAUSE! Loaf of bread. Basket of dirty clothes, with large pillowcase on top. Pencil and notepad. Basket of food.

Setting: Pureheart home. The room is bare.
except for three chairs and a large pile of dirty clothes on the floor.

*Lighting:* No special effects.

*Sound:* Villain music, sad music, knock on door in Scene 1. Fast music, Scene 2. Knock at door, dramatic music in Scene 3.