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Opening extract from
**Starmaker's Club:
Polly Plays Her Part**

Written by
Anne-Marie Conway

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Polly
Plays her
Part





Polly Plays & her Part

Anne-Marie Conway



USBORNE

For Callum and Freddy – my two brilliant boys!

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"My name is Polly and I'm here today, to say
my name in a rapping way!"

That's one of the games we play at Star
Makers – the drama club I go to on Saturdays.
It's called the rapping name-game and it's
really cool, but if I was playing it right now I'd
change the words and say:

"My name is Polly and I'm here tonight,
sleeping at my dad's and ready for a fight!"

I didn't want to sleep at Dad's. But I didn't
want to sleep at Mum's either. Maybe I could
sleep somewhere in the middle, like at number
19. I swear no one believes me when I tell them
that my mum and dad live only seven houses
away from each other – Dad and Diane at

number 11 and Mum at number 25. Seven houses – or fifteen giant strides – or forty-eight pigeon steps (where you put one foot down exactly in front of the other, heel touching toe).

So I was sleeping round at Dad's. Or *not* sleeping as the case may be. It was impossible to get to sleep because the stupid baby was crying. Dad's *new* baby. Except he wasn't crying any more, he was screaming. It was so loud, Mum could probably hear him down the road at hers.

"*Diane! I can't find his dummy!*" Dad hissed from their bedroom. "*You know I'll never settle him without his dummy.*"

I heard Diane get up and shuffle around the bed to the cot.

"*Hang on a sec, Simon, I'll find it.*"

The screaming got louder. I could imagine the baby's face screwed up like an old tissue.

"*Here it is, Jakey-boy,*" said Diane, in her

soppy *talking to the baby* voice. And the screaming stopped.

"It's like magic, you know," said Dad, yawning. "It's just like waving a magic wand."

I lay in bed for a bit longer, as the house grew quiet again, thinking about the magic wand *I'd* like to wave – the one that would get rid of Diane and *Jakey-boy* for good. After a bit, when I was sure Dad and Diane were asleep, I got up and turned on my new laptop. Dad bought me the laptop when he moved in here. It was supposed to make everything okay – leaving Mum, moving in with Diane, having a new baby. Like getting a new computer could make up for all of that!

The screen glowed in the dark as I pulled on an old sweatshirt and sat down ready to tap in my secret password. There were all sorts of sites Dad had forbidden me from going on, particularly social networking sites, but I wasn't that bothered about chatting to a bunch of

strangers anyway. I searched around for a bit until I found this game called **THWACKERS**, where you have to eliminate the bad guys before they eliminate you. I played for ages and by the time I logged off my score was so high I was third on the leader board.

"WELL DONE," the computer flashed. **"YOU HAVE SUCCESSFULLY ELIMINATED ALL YOUR ENEMIES!"**

Diane was making pancakes when I went down in the morning. Dad had told her once that I love pancakes and ever since then she makes them whenever I stay over.

"Morning, Polly," said Dad. "You look shattered. I hope Jakey didn't wake you. He couldn't find his dummy."

Jake was propped up in his highchair. As soon as he saw me he started to bang his plastic spoon on the tray and then he flung it on the floor and reached his arms out. He does that whenever anyone walks in, so it's not as if he

was especially happy to see *me* or anything.

"I'm going home to Mum's straight after breakfast," I said, sitting as far away from Jake and his sloppy breakfast as I could get. "She's taking me out to get new school shoes."

Dad glanced at Diane. "She didn't say anything about that," he said, frowning. "We were going to go down to the park later. Jakey's really looking forward to it, aren't you, Jakey?" He put his face right into Jake's and gave him a big slobbery kiss. Jake squealed in delight and banged his spoon even harder.

"He's only eight months old, Dad. I don't think he understands stuff like, *looking forward to things*. And anyway, I'm too old to *play* in the park."

"He looks forward to seeing *you*, Polly," said Diane, handing me a plate piled high with pancakes. "His eyes light up every time you walk in the room. You must've noticed. We *all* look forward to it," she added. "Don't we,

Simon?” Dad nodded but he didn’t take his eyes off Jake, not for a second.

Diane’s always saying nice things like that to try and get me to like her. Honestly, it’s desperate. She goes on and on about my green eyes as if they’re really special – and she says other stupid stuff like, “You’re lucky being so slim, Polly,” and, “Oh, I’d love to have black hair like yours, it’s so dramatic!” She’s really young – years younger than Mum – and she’s got this crazy idea that we’re going to end up best friends or something.

“I don’t actually like pancakes any more,” I said, pushing my plate away. “Can I have some cereal?”

Diane sighed and passed my pancakes across to Dad. I knew I was being stroppy but I didn’t care. I’m always stroppy round at Dad and Diane’s; *looking for a fight*, Dad says – but it’s not like I started it!

I walked back home very slowly. *Pigeon*

steps – heel to toe, heel to toe. I passed number 13, then 15, 17, 19, 21 and 23. All the odd numbers. Maybe if we lived on the other side of the road where all the numbers were even my *life* might be a bit more even. I mean, everyone knows how totally *odd* it is to fall in love with someone who lives in the same street as you.

“Have you heard about Polly Carter’s dad?” all the neighbours were saying when it happened. “He’s only gone and moved in with Diane at number 11!”

I hung about outside Mum’s for as long as I could. We weren’t really going to get new school shoes – I just couldn’t face spending the day with Dad and Diane. And I’m not too old to go to the park either; I’m only in Year Seven. It’s just that whenever we go anywhere together, me, Dad, Diane and the baby, I know people are staring at us and whispering behind their hands.

“Poor Polly,” they’re probably saying. “Pushed aside to make way for *The Great Baby Jake*.”

Suddenly the front door flew open and Mum came charging down the path.

“Hey, watch it!” I yelled, jumping out of the way just in time.

“Polly! What on earth are you doing here? You scared me half to death.”

She was dressed up really smart in a dark-grey suit and high heels and she’d blow-dried her hair.

“You’re supposed to be over at your dad’s, aren’t you? Oh never mind – listen, I can’t stop. Make yourself something for lunch and I’ll see you later.”

She swept past me, her hair flying out behind her. I watched her all the way to the top of the road to see if she’d look back and wave or something, but she shot round the corner and disappeared. It was totally weird to see her

all glammed up and rushing off so early in the morning. She’s hardly been out since Dad left. She spends most of the time cleaning the house; scrubbing away for hours on end. And I spend most of the time tiptoeing around her as quietly as I can – doing my best to keep out the way.

It was almost the end of the Easter holidays and I felt as if I’d spent the whole break going up and down the road from Mum’s to Dad’s and back again. I let myself in and a massive ball of brown fur came hurtling down the stairs to greet me.

“Hello, Cosmo,” I said, picking up my long-haired tabby cat. “At least *you’re* pleased to see me.” Cosmo snuggled into my arms and we walked down the hall towards the kitchen.

I stopped dead in the doorway, staring. The kitchen was a total mess. I’d only been gone for one night but it looked as if Mum hadn’t cleared up for a year. There were plates piled

up everywhere with bits of dried food and empty wine glasses all over the place. There was even a half-full bottle of champagne. I didn't remember her saying anything about a party, but it looked as if she'd had loads of people round. I'd never seen the kitchen in such a state.

I set about clearing up. Mum would only have a go if I left it. I spent ages sorting out the glasses and stacking all the dishes in the sink. I was just about to start washing up when the doorbell rang. I thought it might be Mum for a minute – that maybe she'd forgotten her keys – but it was the postman.

“Hello, love. Sign for this would you, pet?”

He thrust an important-looking letter at me addressed to Mum. I scribbled my name where he pointed and went back inside. I had a quick look through the rest of the mail and saw there was one letter for me – the letter I'd been waiting for *all* holiday! I left Mum's post by the

front door and sat down with Cosmo at the bottom of the stairs to open mine.

It was from Mandy Howell, my Year Seven form teacher, who runs Star Makers. She'd promised she was going to write to us while we were off school, but the days had trickled by with no sign of a letter. It was such a relief to see her funky handwriting on the envelope, full of twirls and curls. There were two sheets of paper inside; one addressed to Mum with all the boring details and one addressed to me. I read my one out loud to Cosmo.

Star Makers Drama Club

Dear Polly,

I hope you're having a fab holiday eating your way through a huge pile of Easter eggs! We've got a really exciting term coming up at Star Makers because it's time for a brand-new show!

Ever wondered what it would be like to be trapped inside your own computer with only a bunch of nasty viruses for company? Well you're about to find out when we start our new musical, CRASH!

There are loads of great parts, brilliant songs and dances, and we'll also be making some fantastic costumes and props.

Term starts next Saturday, 15th April. Same time – same place.

Look forward to seeing you there!

Mandy xxx

“You’d never get trapped inside a computer, would you?” I said to Cosmo, smiling for the first time in days. “You wouldn’t fit for a start.” I couldn’t wait to get back to Star Makers. Something to look forward to at last!

Cosmo leaped off my lap suddenly as my phone began to vibrate in my jeans pocket. It was my new friend, Phoebe. I say *new* friend

because Phoebe and I didn’t get on at all when we first joined Star Makers. I was really jealous of her for some reason and it made me act like a total idiot. We kind of sorted things out at the end of last term and since then we’ve chatted on the phone a few times.

“Hi, Polly. Have you had your Star Makers’ letter yet?”

“It’s literally arrived this minute. I can’t wait to get started.”

“Me neither. It sounds brilliant, doesn’t it? Hey, I wonder what colour Mandy’s hair will be?”

“Well last time we saw her it was bright purple, wasn’t it?”

“With yellow tips, don’t forget,” said Phoebe. “Listen, do you want to meet up later? My little sister’s trying to compose a song on her recorder and if I don’t get out soon I’ll end up strangling her or something!”

“I’m sure it’s not as bad as all that,” I said,

giggling. I couldn't believe she was being so friendly and that she actually wanted to see me.

We arranged to meet up after lunch and I carried on clearing up the kitchen, thinking about the new show and how great it was that Phoebe had rung and how I couldn't wait for next Saturday.

I'd just about finished when I heard Mum come in.

"We're starting a new show at drama," I called out, rushing from the kitchen to meet her at the door. "Look! I've had a letter from Mandy and it sounds brilliant; it's all about computers and..."

The second I saw Mum's face I stopped. She was flushed and she looked weird, like she was excited about something but it was too secret to tell. She was holding the letter I'd signed for; clutching it to her chest like it was incredibly precious.

"What's the matter, Mum? Where have you been?"

She stared at me for the longest time. "Come and sit down, Polly," she said, finally. "I've got something to tell you."