

Peddler Polly and the Story Stealer

By Aaron Shepard

Reader's Theater Edition #8

Adapted for reader's theater (or readers theatre) by the author

NARRATOR 1:

PEDDLER POLLY
Goods Bought Here
and Sold There

NARRATOR 4: That was the sign on Peddler Polly's cart as her horse pulled her up Main Street. Peddler Polly looked around and smiled.

PEDDLER POLLY: I'm sure glad to be back in Taletown. Imagine—a town where everyone tells stories!

NARRATOR 2: Peddler Polly parked at the town square. Over on Town Hall she saw a notice:

NARRATOR 3:

STORY SWAP TODAY
Bring a story
(if you still know one)

PEDDLER POLLY: (*puzzled*) If you still know one?

PENNY: (*sadly*) Hello, Peddler Polly.

NARRATOR 1: . . . came a sad little girl's voice.

PEDDLER POLLY: Well, it's my old friend Penny! Do you have a good story for me? I'll gladly trade for something from my cart.

NARRATOR 4: Penny sobbed and sniffed.

PENNY: I don't have any stories at all! Hardly anyone in Taletown does. We're all losing our stories!

PEDDLER POLLY: Losing your stories? Whatever do you mean?

PENNY: We start to tell a story, and then it's gone! We can't remember it anymore. Come to the Story Swap this afternoon and see.

SPELLBINDER: (*loudly*) Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls . . .

NARRATOR 2: Another cart had parked on the square. Its sign said,

NARRATOR 3:

DR. SEBASTIAN SPELLBINDER
Entertainment Paraphernalia

NARRATOR 1: In the cart stood a man with a topcoat, top hat, and goatee, surrounded by piles of wooden boxes.

NARRATOR 4: A crowd was gathering before him.

SPELLBINDER: You've heard of a *storyteller*. And you've heard of a *storybook*. Well, I'm here to show you something finer still: The brand-new, patented Spellbinder Storybox!

PENNY: (*delighted*) Oh, Peddler Polly! He's selling *stories*!

NARRATOR 2: Dr. Spellbinder held up one of the wooden boxes, showing a pane of glass on one side.

NARRATOR 3: He flipped a switch and the glass came to life. Tiny characters moved across the pane, and tiny voices came out.

NARRATOR 1: Someone in the crowd yelled,

CROWD 1: It's "Cinderella"!

NARRATOR 4: Dr. Spellbinder turned a knob, and a different moving picture appeared.

CROWD 2: That's "Puss in Boots"!

NARRATOR 2: He turned the knob again.

CROWD 3: And that's "Sleeping Beauty"!

SPELLBINDER: Never again will you have to ask for a story. And never again will you have to imagine the pictures! Who'll be the first to buy a Spellbinder Storybox?

CROWD 1: I'll take one!

CROWD 2: So will I!

CROWD 3: I'll take two!

NARRATOR 3: Before long, Dr. Spellbinder's cart was empty. The town square was covered with children and grownups, all staring blankly at the little boxes.

PEDDLER POLLY: (*to herself*) I don't like the looks of this.

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NARRATOR 1: When Peddler Polly arrived at the Story Swap that afternoon, Town Hall was packed. The room was buzzing with talk about lost stories and Spellbinder Storyboxes.

NARRATOR 4: Finally, Mayor Bertha Bigwig took the stage. She glanced nervously around her.

BERTHA BIGWIG: Welcome to the Story Swap. It is my honor to tell the first story: "The Pied Piper of Hamlin."

NARRATOR 2: From her seat by an open window, Peddler Polly heard a soft *whirr* and a sucking noise.

BERTHA BIGWIG: Life in the town of Hamlin was pleasant. Or it *would* have been, if not for the . . . the . . .

NARRATOR 3: The mayor turned pale.

BERTHA BIGWIG: I've lost my story!

NARRATOR 1: . . . and she ran from the stage. A horrified murmur rose in the room.

NARRATOR 4: Milton Marbles, the schoolteacher, tried next.

MILTON MARBLES: My story is "Jack and the Beanstalk."

NARRATOR 2: Again Peddler Polly heard the *whirr* and the sucking.

MILTON MARBLES: There was once a poor widow who had an only son named . . . named Oh no!

NARRATOR 3: He fled the stage in tears.

NARRATOR 1: Next came Penny.

PENNY: This is the myth of "Pegasus."

NARRATOR 4: Peddler Polly heard the noises once more.

PENNY: A long time ago in Greece, there was a horse called Pegasus. This horse was special because . . . because . . . because . . .

BERTHA BIGWIG: Stop the Swap! We can't afford to lose any more stories. It's the end of storytelling in Taletown!

NARRATOR 2: As excited talk filled the room, Peddler Polly thought she heard a cackle out the window.

NARRATOR 3: She looked and saw a man with a topcoat and top hat hurry away from the building. He carried a large wooden box covered with switches, knobs, and dials, with a long hose attached to it.

PEDDLER POLLY: It's Dr. Spellbinder! I'd better look into this.

NARRATOR 1: Peddler Polly hastened from the hall. She followed Dr. Spellbinder from a distance as he left the town and made his way into the hills.

NARRATOR 4: At last Dr. Spellbinder disappeared through the mouth of a cave. Peddler Polly followed him in and stopped in astonishment. The huge cave was filled with mechanisms and contraptions, all of them noisily pulling or pushing or pulsing or pounding.

NARRATOR 2: Dr. Spellbinder stood at a workbench covered with Storyboxes and other strange devices. He set down the big box he was carrying and patted it fondly.

SPELLBINDER: Three more stories to put in my Storyboxes! And all thanks to my brilliant invention, the Spellbinder Story Sucker. Soon I'll steal all the stories in the world! Then *everyone* will need a Storybox, and I'll be rich, *rich*, RICH.

PEDDLER POLLY: Not if *I* can help it!

SPELLBINDER: (*gasps*) Peddler Polly! What are *you* doing here?

PEDDLER POLLY: Putting an end to your evil plans, Spellbinder!

SPELLBINDER: You'll never stop me, Peddler Polly!

NARRATOR 3: Then Dr. Spellbinder grabbed the Story Sucker and sprinted from the cave.

NARRATOR 1: Down the hill sped Dr. Spellbinder, while Peddler Polly puffed in pursuit. Without the Story Sucker, Peddler Polly was faster.

SPELLBINDER: (*yelling back*) You won't catch me so easily.

NARRATOR 4: He lifted the lid on the Story Sucker and reached in.

SPELLBINDER: See how you like *this* story, Peddler Polly.

NARRATOR 2: He threw something behind him. There was a flash of light, and out of nowhere a huge crowd of children appeared, coming uphill toward Peddler Polly. They were led by a man in a many-colored costume, playing on a pipe.

PEDDLER POLLY: Well, I'll be!

NARRATOR 3: Peddler Polly pushed past the startled man and pressed through the crowd of mesmerized children.

PEDDLER POLLY: It's a catchy tune, kids, but I wouldn't follow a piper!

NARRATOR 1: Dr. Spellbinder was far ahead, but Peddler Polly ran hard and gained on him.

SPELLBINDER: (*calling back*) One good story deserves another!

NARRATOR 4: . . . and he reached into the Story Sucker. Another flash, and Peddler Polly saw a boy chopping down a gigantic beanstalk. But just then the boy took to his heels, calling,

JACK: Heads up!

NARRATOR 2: Peddler Polly looked up and stopped just in time. A huge man tumbled from the sky and landed with an earth-shaking crash just before her.

PEDDLER POLLY: Didn't know stories could be so dangerous.

NARRATOR 3: Peddler Polly ran around the giant while she waved to the boy and called,

PEDDLER POLLY: Thank you, Jack!

NARRATOR 1: Dr. Spellbinder had vanished behind a hill, and Peddler Polly panted after him. As she rounded the bend, she gasped.

NARRATOR 4: Tied to a landing platform was a lighter-than-air balloon, and Dr. Spellbinder was climbing into the basket.

PEDDLER POLLY: Oh, no! Now he'll get away for sure! Unless . . . unless . . .

SPELLBINDER: It's all over now, Peddler Polly!

NARRATOR 2: Dr. Spellbinder untied the rope and the balloon floated into the air.

SPELLBINDER: But I still have one more story, and it might as well keep you busy.

PEDDLER POLLY: (*to herself*) If it's the one I *think* it is

NARRATOR 3: Dr. Spellbinder threw it to the ground. Another flash, and there stood a horse with long and graceful wings.

PEDDLER POLLY: Pegasus!

NARRATOR 1: Peddler Polly ran and leaped onto the horse, and dug in her heels.

NARRATOR 4: The horse flapped its wings smoothly and rose in the air. Up and up it spiraled, until it was flying circles around the dismayed Dr. Spellbinder.

PEDDLER POLLY: Guess you forgot your mythology, Spellbinder. Didn't you know Pegasus was a *flying horse*?

NARRATOR 2: Peddler Polly rode in close, grabbed Dr. Spellbinder, and flung him across the horse's back.

SPELLBINDER: My Story Sucker!

NARRATOR 3: . . . cried Dr. Spellbinder as the balloon floated away with his invention.

PEDDLER POLLY: I don't guess you'll need it where *you're* going. For a crime like shutting up stories, a judge is sure to shut *you* up—unhappily ever after.

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NARRATOR 1: A few weeks later, when all of Dr. Spellbinder's Storyboxes had been opened and the stories returned to their tellers, the people of Taletown held a big storytelling festival on the town square.

Mayor Bigwig announced,

BERTHA BIGWIG: And our special guest for today is Peddler Polly!

ALL (except PEDDLER POLLY and SPELLBINDER): (*not in unison*) Hooray!

PEDDLER POLLY: Well, thanks. And now I'll tell a story called "Peddler Polly and the Story Stealer."

NARRATOR 4: And that's a tale

NARRATOR 2: they'll always tell

NARRATOR 3: in Taletown.